

STAGG AT PACIFIC

PART II - 1937-1939

By Joe Marvin

On September 25, 1937, the College of Pacific football team opened its fifth season under the direction of legendary coach, Amos Alonzo Stagg. The Tigers were taking on Howard Jones and his powerful Southern California Trojans in the Los Angeles Coliseum, and the game turned into a complete rout. Amby Schindler of USC, who later coached and played for Pacific during the World War II years, broke loose for a 64-yard touchdown sprint in the first 90 seconds of play. The Tigers gave up three touchdown passes during the contest and the score ended 40-0. "Iron Mike" Martinovich was the top rusher for COP, which could gain just four first downs.

San Jose State came into Stockton with the first of Coach Dud DeGroot's really outstanding teams (11-2-1 record). Al George's brilliant 83-yard punt return put Pacific on top until the fourth quarter, when Leroy Zimmerman passed for two late scores and a 12-7 San Jose win. Then in a Baxter Stadium night game, the Tigers got their first win of the 1937 season with a 13-0 shutout of the Chico State Wildcats. Quarterback Joe Siegfried and Martinovich averaged four yards per carry, and George ran 12 yards for one score and passed for another. Doug Silva was the key man in the forward wall, along with Avery and Hedges.

During the late 1930s, the Golden Bears from the University of California annually played an early-season doubleheader at Memorial Stadium in Berkeley against COP and the Cal Aggies (U.C. Davis). These matchups were considered tuneups or "breathers" before the Bears faced their major opponents, while it was also a chance to play and evaluate both the varsity and the Rambler (Cal reserves) teams. After defeating the Aggies 14-0 in the early game, the famed "Thunder Team" from Cal beat Pacific 20-0. Showing fine spirit and determination, the Stagg men - led by Martinovich, Swagerty and O'Hare - played a solid game against the eventual Rose Bowl champions. Al Soper matched the redoubtable Sam Chapman punt for punt, a big factor in holding down the powerhouse Cal machine.

Pacific bounced back with a 7-3 win over Nevada in Reno, when a fourth quarter march of 65 yards, behind the running of George Siegfried and Martinovich, spelled defeat for the Wolfpack. Then on October 30, an impressive Bengal team battled a big, tough St Mary's eleven to a standstill for three periods before almost winning in the fourth quarter. St Mary's never got closer than the Pacific 11 yard line, while in the fourth period the Tigers marched to the Moragan's four yard line mainly on the passing of George and Ben Alexander. But four straight running plays were stopped by St Mary's, and the final score read: Pacific 0 St Mary's 0. Martinovich's linebacking was again the keystone of the rugged defense, and this was easily the best performance of the season.

The next week brought a big letdown for the Tigers, when the Cal Ramblers came to Stockton and won a strange 7-4 victory. Both COP safeties came in the fourth quarter. Then the championship game of the Far Western Conference was played on Thanksgiving Day in Fresno, and the host Bulldogs took command after the first quarter. Fresno's big gun was Kenny Gleason, whose passing was responsible for all three scores in a 20-0 triumph over COP. After closing the 1937 season with a 14-14 tie against the San Diego Marines in San Diego, Pacific's overall record was a disappointing 3-5-2 (3-1 in conference). Better seasons were ahead in the late 1930s.

The 1938 season proved to be Stagg's best year at COP, until the famous 1943 squad of World War II marine and navy trainees. Opening in Los Angeles against Loyola, Pacific held the Lions scoreless for the first thirty minutes only to have an intercepted pass return in the third quarter give the host team a 7-0 victory. Outstanding in the Bengal backfield was Al Soper and his

excellent punting. On October 8 the Tigers traveled to Berkeley, and Coach "Stub" Allison's Cal Bears had a field day in a 39-0 rout. Unable to stop the Bears powerful running and air attacks, Pacific trailed by five touchdowns by halftime. Playing their first home game of the year under the lights at Baxter Stadium, Stagg's troops romped to a 28-0 win over the California Ramblers. Bobby Kienz hit his stride for the first time during the 1938 season and was the sparkplug of Pacific's offense.

The undefeated San Jose State Spartans, enjoying another terrific season under Dud DeGroot, again proved too strong for COP in a 19-6 triumph at San Jose. For the second straight year, Leroy Zimmerman led the Spartans with his all-around ability and leadership. Statistics showed that the Tigers made only five first downs to the Spartans 14, along with just 77 yards rushing to the 222 piled up by San Jose. The Spartans would go on to win 11 games before dropping a 13-12 decision to Hawaii.

Returning home against Nevada, COP clawed a bewildered Wolfpack team for eight touchdowns and a 51-0 win - the highest margin ever compiled in the school's history. Butch Lloyd broke loose on a 60-yard scoring jaunt in the opening period, while Joe Siegfried, Doug Vierra, Soper, Dick Loomis and Clem Swagerty all tallied for the Stagmen. Fresno State fell to COP the following week by a score of 18-13 in an exciting battle at Baxter Stadium. Kienz rambled 61 yards just before halftime to give the hornetowners an 18-6 lead. Fresno State threatened a number of times in the second half, and finally scored once more in the fourth quarter. With two later victories over U.C. Davis, 34-6, and Chico State, 20-13, COP would gain the Far Western Conference championship for 1938.

In the second week of November, Stagg led his 27-man squad east to meet the University of Chicago. The "Grand Old Man" had proved to

everyone that he could still produce a winning football club. While in Chicago with his Pacific team, Stagg received the honor of being named the "All-Time All-American Coach", at the age of 77 years. Meanwhile, the University of Chicago, home of so many great teams in the past, was just one year from losing its football program

The dramatic game that marked the return of the legendary coach to the Midway was played on Chicago's Stagg Field, and the old gridiron witnessed the pounding, churning cleats of the visiting Tigers as they hammered over 32 points to the Maroon's 0. The 15,000 fans went wild in the fourth quarter when Bobby Kienz, Pacific's ace and "Little All-American", intercepted a Sollie Sherman pass on the one yard line, and then raced 99 yards for a touchdown. Other scores for COP were registered by Roy Cooper, Siegfried, Dick Bentley, and tackle Irving Grubbs, who picked off a pass and galloped 44 yards to the end zone.

Pacific ran and passed for 14 first downs against Chicago and gained 300 yards of total offense, while the Maroons totaled 11 first downs and 234 yards. Chicago would end its next-to-last Big 10 football season with a 1-6-1 record under the innovative Clark Shaughnessy, while Stagg's Tigers closed 1938 with a mark of 6-3-0. With a strong nucleus returning from the 1938 team, the Tigers then faced a formidable 13-game schedule for 1939, including two post-season games in Hawaii. But the 1939 campaign would see COP reach its pinnacle of success under Stagg, with a tremendous 6-0 upset win over California at Memorial Stadium in Berkeley on September 30.

A week after beating South Dakota 6-0 at Sacramento to open the 1939 season, the Orange and Black astounded the football world with the big win over Cal at Berkeley. After an exchange of punts in the third quarter, the Staggmens started at the Bears' 47 yard line. Runs by Kientz and Tommy Oloeta pounded the ball down to the 16. Then Bob "Ajax" Adamina lofted a pass to end Doug Smallwood, who slipped past Tony Firpo, Cal's safety man, and scored standing up. The win by COP was not a "fluke", as the Bengals had gained twice the yardage of Cal's offense and completely dominated the game. One national columnist would later comment that, in picking the year's biggest upset the sportswriters had forgotten this great victory for COP.

The third game of 1939 was with the Loyola Lions and featured the vaunted passing arm of Bob Adamina, who threw two touchdown passes as COP came from behind and tied the game 13-13 at Gilmore Stadium in Hollywood. Fifteen thousand spectators then witnessed San Jose State's 13-3 win over the Bengals, in the game which Bill Leiser, sports editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, had said "might be for the Coast championship." Perhaps he had forgotten Howard Jones' great 1939 U.S.C. Rose Bowl team, or "Bunker Bill" Spaulding's fine U.C.L.A. outfit with Kenny Washington and Jackie Robinson.

The San Jose State game marked the renewal of Stagg's rivalry with Glenn "Pop" Warner, who was acting as advisory coach to Dud DeGroot, the two legendary coaches having first met back in 1907 when Carlisle beat Chicago 18-4. On their way to a 13-0-0 season, the Spartans of San Jose bottled up Pacific all day and uncorked a tricky running attack with double and triple reverses. After a 32-7 win over the California Ramblers, Pacific faced another big rival in Fresno State at Fresno, and lost 7-0. The game was very even, with the Tigers in Fresno territory during most of the contest but unable to score. The lone Bulldog touchdown came on a 55-yard run, the culmination of a sustained drive of 88 yards.

On November 18, COP traveled down to Tucson and dropped a close 12-7 game to the University of Arizona. Two more losses late in the season, to the Nevada Wolfpack, 8-0, and the San Diego Marines, 14-0, evened the Tigers' record for the season at 5-5-1. Pacific then broke back into the win column in Honolulu defeating the University of Hawaii 19-6 on December 16. Four days later, the semi-pro Healanis Club beat COP 18-7 in the last game of the 1930s for Stagg's COP Tigers.

Tom Harmon closed out his collegiate career on Nov. 23, 1940 with yet another dazzling performance, as he scored three touchdowns, passed for two others, and kicked four extra points in a 40-0 win over Ohio State. Harmon passed Red Grange in a couple of statistical categories, but both were amazing, each receiving All-America recognition in three seasons.

For his career, Harmon (1938-40) scored 33 TD's while rushing for 2134 yards on 398 tries, and he also completed 101 passes for 1399 yards, and a career total offense mark of 3533 yards. Grange (1923-25) rushed for 3637 yards and scored 31 TD's, while also completing 42 passes for 643 yards and a total offense mark of 4280 yards.

"The days boys play with one eye on the university and the other on professional futures, the sport will become a moral liability to the colleges." Amos Alonzo Stagg in Touchdown.