

TOM FEARS

Mr Tom Fears, former standout receiver for UCLA and the Los Angeles Rams, passed away on January 4, 2000 at Palm Desert, California. Mr Fears was 77 years of age.

A member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame since his induction in 1970, Mr Fears is remembered much more for his days with the Rams than as a collegiate player; yet he was named a First Team All-Pacific Coast Conference end in 1947, along with lessor mention in 1946, two seasons which are commonly regarded as among the best in college football history.

After graduation from UCLA, Mr Fears went on to his greatest days on the gridiron, as he began a standout career with the Los Angeles Rams that stretched from 1948 through 1956. While with the Rams he led the National Football League in pass receiving on three occasions (1948, 1949, and 1950), with high figures of 84 receptions for 1,116 yards in 1950. Fears was also named a First Team end on the All-NFL teams of 1949 and 1950. With big hands that allowed him to make many a great catch, Fears was also one of the best and most rugged blockers in the league.

One of the highlights of his pro football career came on December 3, 1950, when he caught 18 passes against the Green Bay Packers for a league single-game record. Playing with the high-powered offensive machines the Rams usually fielded, Fears hauled in pass receptions from the great duo of Bob Waterfield and Norm Van Brocklin throughout most of his career. Fears also played in the NFL championship games of 1949, 1950, 1951, and 1955. He closed his NFL playing

days with career totals of 400 pass receptions for 5,397 yards and 38 touchdowns.

While at UCLA, Fears played on the outstanding 1946 team that met Illinois in the Rose Bowl. That Bruin outfit, coached by Bert LaBrucherie, included such other capable players as quarterback Ernie Case and All-America end Burr Baldwin; and averaged 378 yards per game in total offense. The 1947 preseason Street and Smith magazine said that “many thought Fears was better than Baldwin last year”, while also commenting that Fears had “lots and lots of size, speed and talent”, and in fact he did receive some All-America mention for the 1947 season.

Mr Fears was born on December 3, 1923 in Guadalajara, Mexico, the son of a mining engineer from the United States and a Mexican mother. While still a young child, the family moved to Los Angeles, where Fears grew up during the Depression in the tough South Central area of the city. Living in the largely Japanese-American neighborhood around 38th and Western Avenue, as a teenager Fears worked at a job unloading trucks in the wholesale flower market in downtown LA, while also attending Manual Arts High School near his home. A pass-catching prep standout at end, Fears attracted attention from colleges around the country, before he finally decided to attend Santa Clara University where he played for Coach Buck Shaw in 1941 and 1942.

Mr Fears was inducted into the Army Air Corps in 1943 and served as a flight instructor while stationed at Colorado Springs. After the war, Fears transferred to UCLA for the balance of his collegiate career. While attending UCLA between 1946 and the spring of 1948, Fears had quite a few of the very best on-campus jobs available, while he was also given frequent bit parts in the movies; including six seconds on screen as a fighter pilot in the Humphrey Bogart film, “Action in the North Atlantic”. Talking about signing his first pro contract with the Rams in 1947 for a \$500 bonus and a \$6,000 salary, Fears would later say: “I took a cut in pay.” His highest salary as a pro player was in 1956 when he was making \$13,000.

Among his most notable achievements with the Los Angeles Rams was his 73-yard pass reception for the winning touchdown against the Cleveland Browns in the 1951 NFL title game; along with his three touchdown catches in the 24-14 win over the Chicago Bears in a playoff for the 1950 Western Division title. In his four NFL title game appearances Fears had a total of 16 pass receptions, with nine alone in the 1950 game against Cleveland.

After his playing days, Mr Fears would serve as an assistant coach with several NFL teams, including five seasons at Green Bay with Vince Lombardi. Fears was also head coach of the New Orleans Saints from 1967-1970, and the Southern California Sun of the World Football League in 1974-1975. In later years Fears became a successful businessman; owning restaurants, rental condominiums and avocado ranches. He is survived by his wife, LuElla, and their six children.

(The Editor would like to thank Society members Dick Russell of Glendale, California and Bob Carroll of North Huntingdon, Pennsylvania for their help in providing information for the above)