

STAUBACH of the NAVY

By Jim Campbell

Since 1935, the Heisman Trophy has been a symbol of excellence. While each winner is a legend in his own right, certain Heisman winners have revolutionized the approach to the game of college football with his special skills. Roger Staubach of Navy, the winner of the 1963 Heisman Trophy, was one such player, as he provided the template for the modern, mobile quarterback.

Multidimensional skilled players were nothing new to the Heisman scene when Roger Staubach was presented with the coveted award in 1963. In fact, many early Heisman winners were triple threat, single-wing tailbacks who could run, pass, and kick. Jay Berwanger of Chicago (1935), Nile Kinnick of Iowa (1939), Tom Harmon of Michigan (1940), Bruce Smith of Minnesota (1941), Frank Sinkwich of Georgia (1942), and Doak Walker of Southern Methodist (1948) all fit that mold. But no one was quite like Staubach. He seldom kicked - only a couple of PATs as a junior, but could he run and pass. What made the 6-2, 190-pound junior from Cincinnati so revolutionary as a player was how he ran and passed.

It is doubtful that anyone in college football was ever more of a threat to run on a passing play than Roger the Dodger. He was almost as likely to pull up and pass on a play that began as a run. But once he started to run, the artful dodger did so with all the nimbleness, elusiveness, and flair of the shiftiest running back. Even when Staubach didn't run from the pocket, he had what is

now called “escapability.” He could dodge and dart around under pressure and pursuit until a receiver came open – and then rifle a bullet-like pass to him

So adept was the Navy quarterback in buying time before passing that he completed 67.3% of his forward pass attempts - 66 for 98 with only three interceptions - as a sophomore in 1962, once he got his chance to start. It was good enough to lead the nation’s passers. He repeated as national leader in his junior or Heisman year of 1963 – 66.5% on 107 completions in 161 attempts with six interceptions. When he scrambled past the line of scrimmage he had gained another 418 rushing yards for the Middies.

As a sophomore Staubach dismantled arch-rival Army in 1962, as he ran for two touchdowns and passed for two more as Navy won the intense service academy rivalry by a score of 34-14. This was against a good Army team - the 34 points Staubach and Navy scored was twice as many as any opponent had registered against the Cadets that season before the big finale. Then in 1963

Staubach and his mates held off Army’s comeback bid, to come away with a 21-15 win and complete a 9-1-0 regular season, but the game and the season were far from dreamlike for Staubach. Like the entire nation, he was shocked and saddened by the assassination of the young and dynamic President John F. Kennedy in late November 1963. Staubach and JFK had met the previous summer at the Midshipmen’s preseason football camp at Quonset Point, while President Kennedy had also tossed the coin before the opening kickoff at the Army-Navy game of 1962. Said Staubach, “Everyone in thermodynamics class just sat and stared when we heard the news. We couldn’t believe it.”

The annual Army-Navy game was still played in 1963, having been postponed a week at the request of the Kennedy family, and was dedicated to the fallen president’s memory. It was also at this time that Staubach received the news of his winning the Heisman Trophy. He garnered more than three times the votes

(1,860-504) of runner-up Billy Lothridge, Georgia Tech quarterback So great was Staubach’s fame at this time that he was scheduled to appear on Life magazine’s cover, and while a few issues were printed with the Navy quarterback’s photo on the cover (which have now become truly collector’s items), a picture of JFK replaced Staubach on all but those few issues of the then-weekly picture magazine. Staubach later reflected on college football’s highest honor coming at a time so close to the presidential assassination, “I was proud of the Heisman Trophy, but I felt no joy.”

By virtue of the delayed victory over Army in 1963, Navy, with a regular season record of 9-1-0, received an invitation to the Cotton Bowl to play number one-rated Texas. Only a midseason loss to Southern Methodist (32-28) marred number two-rated Navy’s season log. Staubach was

brilliant in the Cotton Bowl showdown, completing 21 passes in 31 attempts for 280 yards, but it wasn't enough to overcome the Longhorns as Texas finished off an 11-0-0 season with a 28-6 win over the Middies.

Staubach and Navy fell off somewhat in 1964, the Heisman quarterback's senior season. The team finished with a record of 3-6-1 and Staubach's total offense numbers dropped from 1,892 to 1,130. But the football world hadn't seen the last of Jolly Roger. With a five-year military obligation, all NFL teams passed on Staubach in the 1964 pro player draft; that is all but the Dallas Cowboys, who took him in the 10th round as an aptly named "future" selection. He used his navy leave-time to attend the Cowboys training camp each summer while he was in the service, but it wasn't until 1969 that he really began his rookie season. By 1971 he was the NFL Player of the Year and he would go on to set team and league passing records, but it was his leadership, on and off the field, and comeback ability that earned him the title of "Captain America" on "America's Team" Four times he led the star-spangled Cowboys to the Super Bowl; twice he passed and ran them to victory.

In 1985, five years after his stellar NFL career ended, and the first year he was eligible, Staubach was voted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He is also a member of the College Football Hall of Fame When all is said and done, Roger Staubach had established himself as the type of person and quarterback for which every football team was looking but few, if any, were fortunate enough to find