

TOM "SHORTY" McWILLIAMS

Tom (Shorty) McWilliams, who played right halfback in the great 1945 backfield for Army, along with legendary college greats Doc Blanchard and Glenn Davis, passed away on January 9, 1997 in his hometown of Meridian, Mississippi. McWilliams, who had already picked up his nickname by high school, was a prep football sensation in Mississippi and set the state scoring record in 1943. A tall and speedy running back at 6 feet 3 inches and 172 pounds as a freshman at Mississippi State in 1944, he had been named as a Third Team All-American back by both Central Press and the Football Digest.

In 1945 he appeared at West Point, where he took a spot at wingback in the backfield of Coach Red Blaik, on what must still be considered as one of the great teams of all-time in the annals of college football. The other member of the 1945 backfield for Army was quarterback Arnold Tucker. During the 1945 season Army cruised to a 9-0 record and was named National Champion. Notable moments that year for McWilliams included a six-yard sweep around end for the first touchdown of the game in a 28-7 win over Michigan; along with a dazzling 54-yard touchdown gallop against Duke on another play that had started as a sweep around right end. Earl Blaik called McWilliams "a strong blocker as well as a sharp runner", while also tabbing the 1945 Army backfield as the best in the history of the school.

With the war over, in the summer of 1946 McWilliams applied for a resignation from the Army so that he might return to school at Mississippi State. His request was initially turned down by Major General Maxwell Taylor, Superintendent of the Academy at the time, who claimed that McWilliams had been offered "a particularly lucrative financial offer from a certain quarter" to leave West Point. This charge was immediately challenged by Coach Allyn McKeen of Mississippi State, along with other university officials and government personnel. By early September McWilliams was granted permission to leave West Point.

Returning to Mississippi State, McWilliams took over at the tailback position in what was described as the "Tennessee single wing" offensive style of attack McWilliams played the seasons of 1946-48 for the Bulldogs, during which time MSU posted records of 8-2-0, 7-3-0, and 4-4-1, and he was considered a bona-fide triple-threat player. Despite an injury-plagued 1946 season, McWilliams received All-Conference recognition all three years from the Southeastern Conference. Before the 1948 season, Street and Smith Magazine mentioned that McWilliams had become a "vastly improved" passer, and then went on to say that the Bulldogs "may start the best backfield in America - certainly the best in the Southeastern Conference"; with a pairing of McWilliams and Harper Davis, another speedy all-league running back.

After graduating from Mississippi State, McWilliams gave pro football a try with the Los Angeles Dons of the AAFC in 1949, before moving to the Pittsburgh Steelers for the 1950 season. However, a knee injury brought his playing career to an early ending after 1950. He eventually returned to Meridian, Mississippi, where he went into the restaurant business which the family still owns.

(Editor's Note We would like to thank CFHS members Tom Pyburn of Los Angeles and Paul Leugers of Cincinnati, for providing us with a copy of the obituary for Mr McWilliams, which served as the foundation for the above short piece. We NEED assistance in obtaining copies of the obituary notices of former college players, since the Chicago newspapers rarely print such items.)

EARL "JUG" GIRARD

Earl "Jug" Girard, an All-American halfback at the University of Wisconsin and a former member of the Green Bay Packers, Detroit Lions and Pittsburgh Steelers; passed away at his home in Rochester Hills, Michigan on January 17, 1997 at the age of 69. A native of Marinette, Wisconsin, Girard enrolled at Wisconsin in 1944 as a 17 year old freshman.

As a member of the Badgers varsity that season, Girard averaged four yards per carry in the 20-7 loss to the nation's eventual #2 ranked team from Ohio State. Against the Buckeyes, Girard also threw four pass completions for 68 yards, and scored the only Wisconsin touchdown of the day while also playing defensive safety. Years later Girard would recall that 1944 game as the best of his career. Largely because of that performance, he was named a First Team All-America back on the Look Magazine team selected by sportscaster Bill Stern Girard his one of only 31 All-Americans in Wisconsin history.

Drafted into the Army after his freshman year, Girard served in World War II. He returned to Wisconsin in 1947 and established two school records that still stand: most punt return yards (158) and punt return touchdowns (two) in a game. Those came in the 46-14 win over Iowa, and the runbacks covered 65 and 85 yards. Drafted in the first round by the Packers and the Cleveland Indians, Girard left school after 1947 to pursue a pro football career of ten seasons.