Guide to A Conversation with Ernie Nevers

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Overview

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Biographical/Historical note
Ernest Alonzo Nevers (June 11, 1902 - May 3, 1976) was an American professional athlete who played American football as a fullback for the Duluth Eskimos and the Chicago Cardinals of the National Football League, as well as baseball as a pitcher for the St. Louis Browns. Nevers was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1951 and the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1963.

Nevers attended Superior Central High School (Superior, Wisconsin) and Santa Rosa High School (Santa Rosa, California), where he excelled in football. In 1920, as a senior, he led the team to the NCS Championships. In 1925, the American football field at Santa Rosa High School was renamed Nevers Field in his honor.

Nevers went on to attend Stanford University, where he was All-American and played in the 1925 Rose Bowl against the University of Notre Dame and the famous Four Horsemen backfield. He played all 60 minutes in the game and rushed for 114 yards, more yardage than all the Four Horsemen combined. He was named the 1925 Rose Bowl Player of the Game. Former coach Glenn Scobey "Pop" Warner called Nevers "the football player without a fault". Nevers often was compared to Jim Thorpe. Nevers' #1 jersey is retired.

Nevers excelled in several sports, including basketball and baseball. In 1926 he went to Jacksonville, Florida, where he organized the Jacksonville All-Stars, the city's first attempt at a professional football team. The All-Stars played two exhibition games against NFL opponents: the Chicago Bears, led by Red Grange, on January 2, and the New York Giants on January 9. However, meager crowds forced the team to fold after only two games, and Nevers signed a contract with the St. Louis Browns baseball team. Nevers debuted as a pitcher with the Browns in the 1926 season, and thereafter spent parts of three seasons with the Browns, most notably giving up two home runs to Babe Ruth in his 60-homer season of 1927.
Nevers would have better fortune in football, though. Despite reports that Red Grange and the newly formed AFL had signed him, Nevers’s childhood friend and Duluth Eskimos owner Ole Haugrud had actually signed him. The Eskimos were unique, as they had no actual home and played all their games on the road. Many consider that if Nevers had signed with the AFL, the NFL may have been driven out of business. After two seasons for Duluth, during which he played almost every minute on offense and defense, he did not play in 1928.

However, he returned to the NFL to play fullback and coach the Chicago Cardinals from 1929 to 1931. In 1929, Nevers set a record for individual points in a single game, scoring all six of the Cardinals’ touchdowns and kicking four extra points, racking up 40 points against the crosstown rival Chicago Bears - a record that has never been broken. He was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame as part of its charter class in 1963.

Nevers served in the military during World War II. Although too old to be drafted, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. While serving in the Pacific, he and his battalion were reported missing for several months. They were finally found on a deserted island, where several of the men had died. During the ordeal, Nevers suffered from beri-beri and weighed only 110 pounds. While he was away in the service, his wife died of pneumonia.


Scope and Contents
The materials consist of a transcript of interview with Ernie Nevers conducted by Victor P. Obminsky.

Access Terms
Football--California.
Football.
Oral histories.
Stanford University--Athletics