

1958---THE GREATEST SEASON, PART 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of October 16, 2018)

Jack Bailey continues his series on Oak Ridge Football's "greatest season!"

Week 1 vs. Knoxville East @ Blankenship Field:

After spring practice, off-season conditioning and fall pre-season workouts in the August and early September heat, the season had arrived. Oak Ridge was as good as advertised on Opening Night at Blankenship Field, as they swamped the visiting Knox East Mountaineers, 54-0.

Seven different Wildcats scored touchdowns and Oak Ridge's combination of power and speed was too much for outmanned Knox East. An estimated crowd of 5000 enjoyed the performance. Fullback Howard Dunnebacke went 44 yards for a touchdown on the very first play from scrimmage.

Tailback Jackie Pope threw touchdown passes to wingback Bobby Mitchell and End Lewis Lanter and Oak Ridge led 21-0 at the end of the first quarter. Back-up tailback Larry Mason scored twice in the second quarter and Doug Martin scored on a wingback reverse. The 'Cats led comfortably, 41-0, at the half.

For our younger readers, Oak Ridge ran a single wing offense like The University of Tennessee did at that time. It consisted of a tailback, fullback, wingback and blocking back---no quarterback. The tailback ideally was a triple threat---run, pass and kick. Jackie Pope and Larry Mason could do it all!

Pope scored again in the third quarter and passed for another TD to Mitchell. Those were the only two plays the Wildcats ran from scrimmage in the second half and both were for scores. Oak Ridge quick-kicked on all the rest of their snaps in the second half in an obvious effort to hold down the score as much as possible.

The only injury of the night happened in the second quarter when reserve fullback and linebacker Paul Huray broke his arm and he will be lost for the balance of the season. Coach Armstrong bemoaned the loss of Huray, saying, "he was a very good player and especially strong on defense."

Linemen who played well were Captain Mike Brady, Skippy Brinkman, Larry Richards, Sam Owen and Eddie Alexander. Wilson Mills laid claim to the blocking back position with an outstanding game, resolving one of the pre-season concerns.

Going into the season, another concern was the end position and Lewis Lanter, Evans Weber and Woody Barwick performed well on defense. Barwick was singled out for making several jarring tackles. He later shifted to defensive halfback and became a valuable part of the defense with his stellar play and sure tackling.

Week 2 vs. Chattanooga City Dynamos in Chattanooga:

As a result of the strong performance vs. Knox East, the Wildcats were ranked # 1 in the state by two different polls in the first rankings of the season. Chattanooga Central was ranked # 2.

Oak Ridge travelled to Chattanooga for its second match of the young season and easily dispatched the Chattanooga City Dynamos, 46-6. Skippy Brinkman recovered his second fumble of the year and Howard

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Dunnebacke scored less than two minutes into the first quarter. Jackie Pope added two scores and the Wildcats led at the half, 20-0.

In the second half, Pope and Wilson Milson Mills added TD's, as well as Junior tailback Larry Mason, who electrified the crowd with an 80-yard punt return. Mason later scored again on a 20-yard run.

Chattanooga City scored with less than a minute left in the game when tailback Buddy Hicks ran 47 yards for a touchdown. Garret Asher, a former Oak Ridger, attempted the extra point, which was no good. Asher later moved back to Oak Ridge and became a well-known local realtor.

One of City's top players was fullback Ken Honea, who later starred the Tennessee Vols. Another interesting sidelight to the game was the fact that most of Chattanooga Central's football team, which had an open date, were in the stands scouting the Wildcats. Oak Ridge and Chattanooga Central, the defending State Champions, are scheduled to meet in the final game of the season.

Week 3 vs. Knoxville South at Blankenship Field:

Oak Ridge easily handled Knoxville South on Friday evening, September 26, by a score of 34-0. Jackie Pope led the way with 4 touchdowns. His 69-yard run on the second play of the game was called back because of a holding penalty.

On the very next play, Pope dashed 73 yards for the score. On the Wildcat's next possession, fullback Howard Dunnebacke went off tackle for a 64-yard TD.

In the second quarter, Pope again broke free for a 61-yard touchdown. In the second half, Pope scored on a 41-yard run and a 63-yard punt return. Defensive stalwarts for the Wildcats included Jim Culp, Mike Brady, Wilson Mills, Woody Barwick, Larry Richards, Skippy Brinkman, Eddie Jones and Richard Ulm.

Week 4 vs. Johnson City Science Hill at Blankenship Field:

The game vs. Johnson City was billed as a "revenge" game for Oak Ridge. The Hilltoppers thoroughly outplayed the 'Cats the previous year and defeated the then-ranked # 1 Ridgers by a score of 26-13.

The Wildcats recorded their second straight shutout, 27-0, over the visitors from Johnson City in a misty rain at Blankenship Field. Jackie Pope tallied 3 touchdowns, including a spectacular 86-yard scamper in the third quarter. On defense, tackle Skippy Brinkman led the way, at one point making six straight tackles! Other defensive standouts were Larry Richards, Mike Brady, Wilson Mills, Woody Barwick and Bobby Mitchell.

Week 5 vs. Erwin at Erwin:

Howard Dunnebacke missed the game due to illness. Co-captain Bobby Mitchell shifted to fullback and Junior Larry Mason started at wingback for the 'Cats.

Erwin was led by star tailback Buster Edwards, who some scouts labeled as the best high school prospect in the state of Tennessee. Edwards was held to 31 rushing yards in this game, but later signed scholarship papers with The University of Tennessee.

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The Wildcats completely dominated the Erwin Blue Devils, 52-0, recording their third shutout in a row. Tailback Jackie Pope again starred for Oak Ridge, passing for three touchdowns and scoring on a 77-yard run.

New wingback Larry Mason scored three TD's, with a 52-yard reception from Pope, an 85-yard punt return and a 60-yard run from scrimmage. Evans Weber and Lewis Lanter had receiving touchdowns. Mike Brady had a 64-yard fumble recovery for a score and Sophomore tailback Allen Crisp finished the scoring for the evening with his first touchdown of the year.

Erwin coach "Big Al" Rotella, another former Tennessee Volunteer player (1941-'42, '46, '47), who joined the coaching ranks and was a teammate of Coach Armstrong at UT said, "We were up against the best in the state and just didn't have enough." Wildcat coach Armstrong was quoted as saying, "The boys played their best game of the year---and this team hits harder on defense than any I've ever coached."

Next week, we will look at games 5-9 of the 1958 season.

Thanks Jack! We are looking forward to more of the great season story.

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Coaches Armstrong and Bordinger with captain Brady and co-captain Mitchell.

Coaches Jack Armstrong and Don Bordinger with Captain Mike Brady and Co-captain Bobby Mitchell