

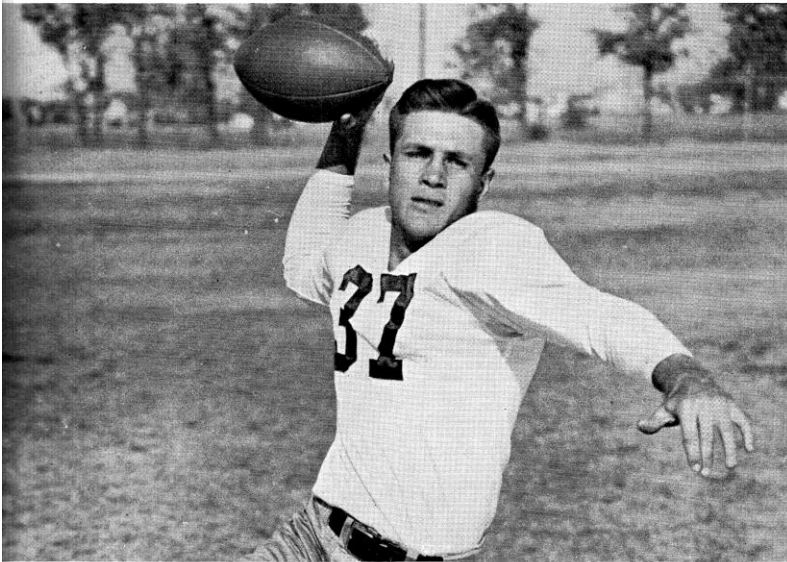
7-5-98

Doak Walker

Much of my football information came from Paul Minton, who has something like total recall about sports figures in the past and who is generous in sharing his memories with anyone who will listen. He says he appreciates the audience.

We've all heard a great deal in recent years about American heroes, rather the current lack of American heroes, especially heroes and role models for young people of today. I've always felt that a portion of the blame rested with the media in their insatiable quest for exciting news to satisfy the general public's voyeurism. In one of his newspaper columns last February, Bob Greene discussed his feeling of the reason for the hero vacuum today: the influential prevalence of television in the lives of all public figures, especially popular athletes. As evidence, he referred at some length to Doak Walker, a college and professional football hero in the late forties and early fifties and pointed to him as the last of the pre-television heroes.

DOAK WALKER, ALL-AMERICAN



INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

Heisman Award, 1948 Presented by the New York Athletic Club to the outstanding football player of the year.

Maxwell Award, 1947 Presented by the Maxwell Club, Philadelphia, for the outstanding player. Previous winners cannot repeat. No award was given in 1948.

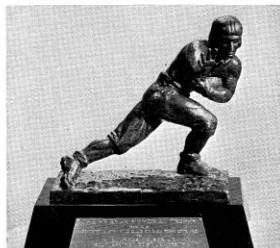
Sport Magazine Award Presented to the outstanding football player of the year.

Player of the Year, 1948 The All-American player receiving the most total votes, named by the "St. Louis Sporting News."

UNANIMOUS ALL-AMERICAN SELECTION, 1948 Associated Press, United Press, International News Service, National Editors Association, Collier's, Look (Grantland Rice), Sporting News, Players', Fans', New York Sun, Bill Stern, Saturday Evening Post.

CONSENSUS ALL-AMERICAN, 1947

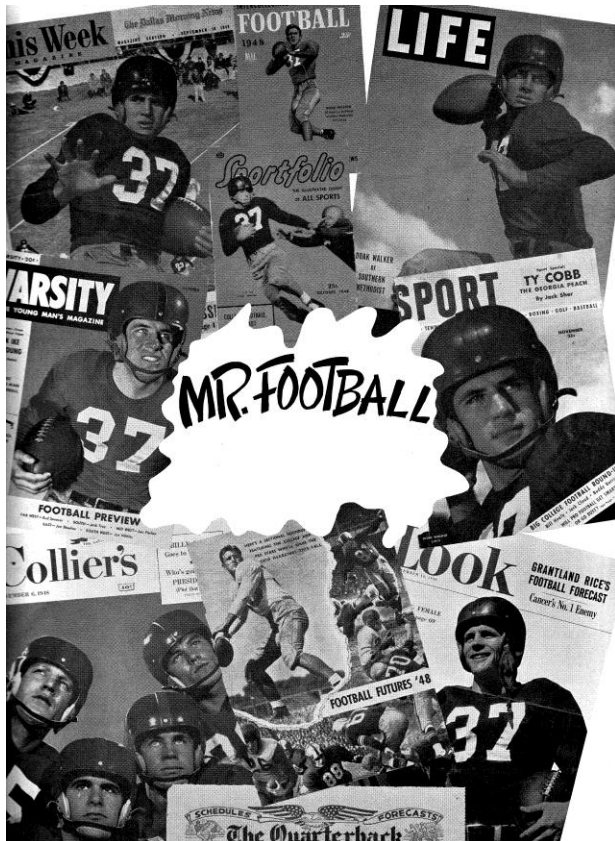
"Doak Walker is the most authentic all-around player in football history" . . . Grantland Rice in LOOK. "Before he's through with his college career, Doak will probably be one of football's all-time greats" . . . Bill Stern. "He consistently does something, anything, and enough to pull a game out of the fire" . . . Francis Wallace, POST. "Doak runs as if



he had eyes in the back of his head, and he's so shifty he'd be hard to catch in a phone booth!" . . . Abb Curtis, senior SWC official, in THIS WEEK. "All-American on anybody's team!" . . . Frank Leahy, head coach, Notre Dame. "Doak Walker is the best all-around back in the United States" . . . George Trevor in the New York SUN.

Greene's column had special meaning for me, for I was fortunate enough to have had personal contact with Doak when he first made big headlines in college football, and his life as an All-American hero was free of the gossip and scandal many such lives seem to have today. Paul and I were teaching at Southern Methodist University in 1946 when Doak returned to school after his stint with the armed services. He had been a high school phenomenon and obvious future college star in an abbreviated season as a freshman at SMU.

Greene remembered that he was a beginning reader when he first read the 1950 biography, *Doak Walker, Three-Time All-American*. For his article, he called Doak at his home in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, to ask about his period of fame and how his experience compared with that of the sports heroes of today. Without hesitation, Doak said that he felt the difference had to be the effect of television, not only in saturation coverage of athletic events but also in the intrusive nature of television and other media in the private lives of athletes. Unlike present athletes, he was able to live a normal life, not interviewed and speculated about, whatever he did. Despite his fame, relatively few had seen him play, relatively few recognized him on the street, and no one inquired about personal details of his life. His reputation was nation-wide and his picture appeared on the covers of seventeen national magazines, but otherwise his actual appearance was known only to SMU students, Dallas residents, and other football fans. This continued even after he became a professional player for the Detroit Lions and was chosen all-pro for several years.



The year Doak returned as a sophomore to the Southern Methodist University Mustangs, football fans around SMU and Dallas were excited about his potential. The first time Paul and I saw him play that fall we, like many other fans, were amazed at his uncanny running ability. He was immediately the big star on the football team, since he was the tailback in an era when tailbacks were "triple threat" players, doing most of the running, passing, and kicking as a sort of one-man offense. Doak was outstanding in all of these roles, including punting and field goal kicking. Paul says that because tailbacks were so central to the offense, any tailback was the natural star of a team, and Doak's unusual abilities made him even more so. As a runner, he was not fast, but he was extremely shifty, with a natural knack of faking a defender by simply leaning one way and accelerating past him in the other direction. He was a competent passer with exceptionally good accuracy and judgment about when not to throw so that he had few interceptions, although he did not have much "zip" on the ball. As a kicker, he was a better than average punter and rarely missed extra points or field goals; the points he amassed on kicks, added to his touchdowns, made him a runaway scoring leader both in college and the NFL.

His outstanding quality, however, was his extraordinary poise and coolness, a facet that cannot be taught, although he did grow up in a "cool judgment" atmosphere with a football coach dad. In Doak's era, the tailback called the plays, as well as making the plays. Here, Doak was easily the nation's best. It amounted to keeping one's mind clear, thinking way ahead to set up scoring plays to call much later, picking up ideas as if one were a relaxed outside observer, while at the same time putting on bursts of exertion physically. It is claimed, not unbelievably, that in a game against TCU for the Southwest Conference championship, SMU was behind by six points, with a minute to play. As he was loose in an open field running back a kickoff and was passing his coach on the sidelines, on the chance that he wouldn't score, he yelled, "Send in Johnson." Gil Johnson was an emerging star passer. Sure enough, Doak was stopped on the TCU twenty-yard line and called a play for Johnson to pass. It worked for a touchdown. We saw it; we were there!



Doak has a special meaning for me, for he was in my English 101 class that fall, right after World War II. The class met in one of the many temporary buildings that SMU had to build to accommodate the burgeoning mass of veteran students flocking in under the GI Bill. The school had formerly boasted some twelve hundred students but had reached the ten thousand mark that year.

Doak always sat quietly and modestly in the back row of the class, paying strict attention to the lessons in composition and politely ignoring his fellow students as long as class was in session. Out of class I noticed that he enjoyed his popularity on the campus. In class he always wore a starched dress shirt with its top button undone and his long sleeves neatly folded back twice to just below his elbows. When I made an assignment of a class essay, I was fascinated with his turtle-like appearance while he was writing, his head almost disappearing into his collar as he concentrated on his writing. Ballpoint pens had just become popular and frequently misfired, leaving messy blobs of ink scattered about the paper. Doak always wrote with a folded piece of paper under his writing hand to protect the paper from any wayward ink spots.

He was somewhat better than average in a class which he was obviously taking because it was required of him, but he was prompt in turning in his assignments and was, in many ways, an ideal student. We developed a cordial relationship in the office conferences necessary in a composition class.

Once after Christmas, Paul and I were in a sparse crowd at a basketball game. Doak joined us companionably in the bleachers, to the obvious delight of one of our companions who exclaimed in disbelief at his willingness to sit with a teacher. He replied matter-of-factly that he liked teachers; his parents were teachers. In fact, his father was then the principal of a large Dallas high school.

In class it had soon become apparent that the pretty girl who always sat next to him in class was a serious girl friend. Norma was the homecoming queen the next fall. When Doak wasn't involved in football, he was generally with her, and they later married. We were sad to hear that they divorced several years later.



Off-photographed Doak and Norma and new English Ford.



The game was almost forgotten when the Kilgore Rangerettes performed . . . Cotton Bowl Queen Norma Peterson received roses from Oregon officials . . . Dr. Lee acted as



Paul and I left Dallas before Doak finished his college football career, although we were able to see him play against Oregon in a Cotton Bowl game and to hear a radio broadcast of a classic game with Notre Dame. The excitement he generated continued as he garnered all the honors available then to college athletes, including the Heisman Trophy as well as being selected All-American for three years. We continued to follow his career as he went on to play professional football for the Detroit Lions, was named to all-pro teams of the time, and was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame.

Over the years I had other college athletes, football and basketball players, in my classes, but Doak always stood out in my affections as the ideal student athlete, conscientious and hard working in class and being a thoroughly likeable person. My next near-brush with fame came when we taught at the University of North Carolina. My first English 101 class roll bore the name of Charles Justice, Doak Walker's counterpart in fame at Carolina. Perhaps fortuitously, Charlie "Choo Choo" Justice never actually appeared in my class in Chapel Hill and I knew him only as an exciting football player.



Choo Choo and Doak

Bob Greene's article revived many memories of my own brush with a kind of fame for having Doak Walker in my class. It's been fun to relive some of those scenes, and to enjoy in retrospect my days of associating with an American hero, pre-television style.

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NAMES OF THE FIRST FACULTY OF NORTH DALLAS HIGH SCHOOL
FEBRUARY 1922

E. B. Comstock
Principal

Effa Bigbee	Clio Irish
Floy Agnew	D. K. Lansing
Roy M. Andrews	Neil Lawler
Mary Archibald	Essie Lipscomb
L. H. Baker	Lucretia Malugen
Grace Baldwin	Sarah Meriwether
Mabel Baldwin	Bess Myers
Fannie Bates	R. C. Pantermuehl
Lila Blake	Lavinia Rawlins
Myrtle Byrd	Ruth Robbins
R. J. Cantrell	Bessie Scott
Evelyn Carrington	M. B. Scott
Myrtle Clopton	Grace Smith
Aleen Coe	Mary Bell Smith
Lucile Davis	W. O. Smith
Elizabeth Dice	Flemma Snidow
Mauva Dishman	C. L. Syron
Lucia Douglas	W. T. Tardy
Adele Epperson	Agnes Taylor
Bess Ferguson	Eugenia Terry
C. L. Ford	E. D. Walker
Myrtle Foster	Hallie D. Walker
Corine Greenwall	J. B. White
A. W. Harris	Myrtle Whitely
Kate Hassell	Germaine Williamson
Myrtle Heimbrook	J. A. Wilson
Anna Belle Henry	Kathleen Witherspoon
Mort Herron	H. Witmeyer
Edna Hinde	E. M. Wyatt
Olga Huvelle	

From the 40th reunion of NDHS in 1962. E.D. Walker, who coached baseball, is Doak's father, Ewell Doak Walker, Sr. He later became assistant superintendent and personnel director of the Dallas school system.