

## Lineman, Coach, Golf Pro—Jim Duncan Did It All

BY DORI COSGROVE GURGANUS  
Football players haven't always been equipped with face masks and protective padding, nor have they always been paid millions of dollars to play the game.

"We were really just a bunch of bums," said James (Jim) Duncan Sr. of Calabash about his years in the National Football League.

From 1950 to 1955, Duncan played professional football for the New York Giants, making about \$4,250 per season. "And that was somewhere in the middle," he said, remembering that some players only earned about \$2,000.

Duncan began his football career during high school in his hometown of Reidsville. He joined the Navy, serving from 1943-46, and then enrolled at Wake Forest University.

He played college football for Wake Forest from 1943 through 1949, participating in the North/South Shrine Bowl Game in Miami, Fla., and the 1950 Senior Bowl, then held in Jacksonville, Fla. He also was an All-Conference player three times in his college career, for which he was inducted into the Wake Forest Hall of Fame in 1985.

In 1950 Duncan was drafted by the Cleveland Browns, then traded to the Detroit Lions for training. Finally, he was hired by the Giants to play linebacker and end for Coach Steve Owen.

"The more positions you played, the better," said Duncan of that era of football. Players were able to play offense as well as defense, and were used in games more often.

That might have something to do with having only 32 members on a team, and only 12 teams in the NFL at that time.

"Now players are strictly offense or defense," Duncan said, adding that teams boast 47 to 50 players these days.

And with fewer teams, he said, "You were real fortunate if you made it."

Duncan lived in New York City during the training/playing seasons, then would return to Reidsville for the summer to work at painting houses, installing cabinets and working at golf courses to bring in extra money.

He married his wife, Lib, in 1951 and they rented an apartment in Manhattan for \$115 a month, an unheard-of price these days.

The team would travel to out-of-town games by train instead of airplane, leaving the wives behind to shop and "enjoy themselves for the weekend," Duncan said.

After home games, he recalled, all the players and wives would "hit the restaurants on 57th Street," behaving more as a club or group of friends than just people who worked together.

"Now, the players scatter to different areas of the country," Duncan said, "But we had a nice time, we were all close."

He recalled hob-knobbing with show business celebrities such as Jackie Gleason, Forrest Tucker and Ray McKinley, bandleader of the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Other Giants who played alongside Duncan and went on to achieve celebrity status were future Dallas Cowboys coach Tom Landry and future television sports reporter Frank Gifford.

At the Anchor and P.J. Clark's, Duncan said, "Sunday nights were dead, and we just really had a good time. But we were really just a bunch of bums hanging out."

*"Players probably deserve the money they make, but they didn't have anymore fun than I did."*

—Jim Duncan,  
On his NFL years

"Players probably deserve the money they make today, but they didn't have anymore fun than I did," he remembered.

Opposing teams also fraternized after games, and rarely fought on the field under fear of \$100 fines. "Nobody was making enough money to get maimed over it," he said, laughing.

Duncan went on to do well at football, being named co-captain of the team along with Kyle Rote. He still has newspaper clippings in a scrapbook made by Lib, several that report Duncan's outstanding plays in particular games.

One article quotes Coach Owen stating, "If every man on this team was as good and played as hard as Duncan, we would never lose a game."

He was also one of the original linebackers used to introduce the 4-3 defense, now commonly practiced by the NFL.

By Duncan's final year, 1955, protective face bars



NOW A RETIRED GOLF PRO, Jim Duncan poses with his wife of 40 years, Lib, at their home in Calabash.



DUNCAN, DURING EARLIER days with the NFL, in this publicity shot for the New York Giants.

were installed on football helmets, and Jimmy Howell was coaching the Giants.

"The game is still the same, just the players are bigger and faster now," Duncan said, discussing changes in the popular sport.

He decided to quit playing due to knee injuries and went to work at Wake Forest as executive director of

the Deacon Club for three years.

Appalachian State University in Boone hired Duncan as assistant coach, then promoted him to coach until 1965.

Of his players at Appalachian, he boasts that five graduated with doctorate degrees and only two never graduated at all.



DUNCAN COACHED the Calgary Stampeders to win in the 1971 Gray Cup, a feat the team had not accomplished in 25 years.

"I'm proud of them, Duncan said, "I'll put my coaching graduation record up against any coach."

In 1960 or 1961 (Duncan isn't sure which), he was voted Coach of the Year at Appalachian for helping the Mountaineers finish at second place in the Northern State Conference.

One of the players he coached was Bill Bradley, brother of the late Fred Bradley, previous defensive coordinator for the West Brunswick High School Trojans football team.

Then Duncan moved on from American to Canadian League football.

He was hired as assistant coach for the Regina Roughriders in Saskatchewan, Canada, until 1969, helping that team win two Gray Cups, the equivalent of our Super Bowl Championship.

Duncan then was picked up as head coach of the Calgary Stampeders for five years, leading them to win the Gray Cup in 1971. Until then, he recalled, the Alberta team hadn't won a Gray Cup in 25 years.

The former player and coach then left football, selling sporting goods for a few years, and then giving golf a try.

He attained PGA status and became a golf pro in Morehead City, working there until he retired in 1988.

He and Lib have lived in Calabash for two and a half years, and have three grown children, two grandsons and a granddaughter.

Their daughter Suzanne, 36, still lives in Calgary; oldest son Jim Jr., 31, is tournament director of the Carolina PGA; and son Lee, 29, is a golf pro at the Florence (S.C.) Country Club.

As for coaching football, Duncan said he wouldn't want to do it ever again.

Offers from local schools to coach high school level have been turned down by the former big leaguer, but he still insists that coaching was one of the "most gratifying parts" of his career.

He is happy these days, however, playing golf on an average of "every day," according to Lib. Fortunately, their backyard faces one of Brunswick County's large golf greens.

The irony of the Duncans' story is that Jim didn't make the cover of *Sports Illustrated* during his football career, but his wife did.

In an early 1950s photograph of the New York Giants' wives, Lib hammed it up with the rest of the ladies in a good-natured football pose.

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