

Our Athletes

Mister Hollywood

Jack Zilly was the first to reach the pros

By JOHN GORALSKI
SPORTS WRITER

Fans must have leaned forward in their seats as hall of fame sportscaster Bill Stern's radio voice began to crackle and hiss with excitement. It was 1947. There were no television broadcasts of the Los Angeles Rams football game, so fans had to picture the scene in their minds as Southington native Jack Zilly sprinted 80 yards across the field.

Stern spoke of the catch and Zilly's move to shake a defender. He talked about Zilly's pace and increased strides as he raced toward the end zone. There was nobody ahead of him. It was a certain score. Then, the incredible happened.

"Zilly's just thrown a lateral to Sitko," Stern screamed into his microphone. Unbelievable. What humility to give up his first career touchdown in the NFL.

Posthumous

It wasn't until the morning papers that most fans finally learned the truth. The play never happened. Stern had misidentified the player with the ball and manufactured the ending to cover his mistake. Zilly was there, but he never set foot in the end-zone.

Two seasons later Zilly finally scored, catching a touchdown pass from Bob Waterfield in the last seconds of the game to push the Rams tie the Eagles, 28-28. The next day's headlines read, "Zilly Dilly Against Philly."

John Jynus "Jack" Zilly was born in 1921, and he was the first Southington boy to find his way to Notre Dame's famous field. He was the first to make an NFL roster, and the first to



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Jack Zilly was the first Southington athlete to reach the professional ranks. Above is a press photos from the early 1950s.

win a professional title. Yet few in town have even heard of his name. Zilly played professional football long before it was polluted by money and spectacle. Still, his rugged good looks and Lost Angeles home earned him more than just 15 minutes of fame.

In the 1949 film War Bride, he earned 14 lines as a sailor in the film, including "I Was a Male War Bride," and "Ship ahoy!" He had an uncredited speaking role in the movie "Twelve O'Clock High" and "Yes Sir, That's My Baby."

"The reason he did that

was because the pay was so low. He used the movies to supplement his income," Pat Zilly said about his dad. "There really wasn't a lot of money in football at the time."

For players like Zilly, the pre-Super Bowl era was about playing a game that they loved, and Zilly was one of the best at the time. He had accumulated two

championship titles as a tight end for the Fighting Irish—the first in 1943 and the second in 1946 when he returned from World War II.

Zilly was drafted in the fourth round of the 1945 NFL draft by San Francisco but settled with the Rams once his college days came to an end. His professional career spanned six seasons, beginning on the West

Southington Sports
Hall of Fame



Inside the Numbers

Jack Zilly

(Nov. 11, 1921—Dec. 18, 2009)

Notre Dame University

- Was tight end on 1943 NCAA championship and 1946 NCAA championship team. (Served in the Pacific for World War II)

National Football League (NFL)

- Drafted by NFL in 4th round (1945)
- Played for Los Angeles Rams (1947-51)
- Played for Philadelphia Eagles (1952)
- Won NFL Championship Game (Rams, 1951)

Coaching

- Asst. Coach at Montana State (1955)
- Asst. Coach at Notre Dame (1956-58)

Career Statistics (NFL)

RECEIVING STATS							
Year	Team	G	Rec	Yds	Avg	Yds/G	TD
1952	Eagles	12	--	--	--	0.0	--
1951	Rams	4	--	--	--	0.0	--
1950	Rams	12	--	--	--	0.0	--
1949	Rams	12	3	35	11.7	2.9	0
1948	Rams	12	13	169	13.0	14.1	4
1947	Rams	12	7	75	10.7	6.2	0
CAREER TOTALS		64	23	279	12.1	4.4	4

KICK RETURN STATS						
Year	Team	G	Ret	Yds	Avg	TD
1952	Eagles	12	--	--	--	--
1951	Rams	4	--	--	--	--
1950	Rams	12	--	--	--	--
1949	Rams	12	1	0	0.0	--
1948	Rams	12	--	--	--	--
1947	Rams	12	1	10	10.0	--
CAREER TOTALS		64	2	10	5.0	0

Coast and ending in Philadelphia. Zilly caught 23 passes for 279 career yards with four touchdowns in 1948. Zilly's Rams captured the NFL championship in 1951.

"When they won the national championship in

the 1950s, the players got a gold watch, but I don't think it was even real gold," said his son. "It was really about football and two teams going out there to play the best game of their

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