

**HINKEY HAINES:
THE GIANTS' FIRST SUPERSTAR**

By C.C. Staph

Oh Hinkey Haines, oh Hinkey Haines!
The New York Giants' football brains.
He never loses, always gains.
Oh Hinkey Haines, oh Hinkey Haines!
-- anonymous New York sportswriter, 1926

Hinkey Haines was one of those running backs who blaze across the NFL sky for only a short time, yet burn so brightly that they are honored long after their last touchdown. Gale Sayers is a recent example; George McAfee was another. Haines completed his playing career before the league began keeping statistics. As a consequence, he is remembered not for huge yardage totals but for brilliant individual performances.

During his short but spectacular career, he put together enough outstanding plays to be ranked with Grange, Driscoll, and Nevers as one of the great runners of his time.

He was a phenomenal breakaway runner, famous for his speed. Bob Folwell, the New York Giants' first coach, insisted that in his twenty years of coaching he had never seen a faster man on the gridiron than Haines. If he were playing today, he would almost surely be turned into a wide receiver. Even in those rather pass-sparse days, Hinkey scored several of his most spectacular touchdowns on passes. On punt and kickoff returns, he was deadly.

He joined the Giants in 1925 at the comparatively ripe age of 26. For four years, he was the toast of New York. He put in one more season with the Staten Island Stapletons and then retired. He was lured back in 1931 as player-coach of the Stapes, but, at 32, he played only sparingly.

His career seems short in comparison with some modern runners, but that is somewhat misleading. In the first place, few running backs played long in the 1920's. The pay was only fair and the likelihood of injury high. In the second place, Haines started his NFL stint much later than most. Had he joined the league right out of college, he might be remembered today as the best runner of the period.

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Henry Luther Haines was born on December 23, 1898, at Red Lion, Pa. Red Lion High did not have a football team, but at Lebanon Valley College in 1916 and 1917 he showed himself a natural halfback.

1918 was a war year, and Haines did his bit as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. Upon his return to civilian life in 1919, he entered Penn State where his reputation soared. State had a remarkable string of runners right after World War I. Within three years, they unveiled Glenn Killinger, Harry Robb, Pie Way, Joe Lightner, "Light Horse Harry" Wilson, and Haines. Killinger and Way made Walter Camp All-American teams, and the others were all mentioned prominently by various selectors. Of all their feats, the most spectacular was by Haines. On October 30, 1920, Hinkey broke loose for two 90-yard touchdown runs against arch-rival Penn in a 28-7 State victory.

Despite his football heroics, Haines was considered an even better baseball prospect, twice making college All-American in that sport. He also lettered in basketball and could have lettered in track, but football coach Hugo Bezdek would not let him formally enter any events. He had beaten everybody on the track team in the sprints. Ralph Davis, a sports columnist of the day, wrote, "Haines is the logical collegiate successor of the famous Jim Thorpe ... he is certainly the Thorpe of the present day."

After college, he concentrated on baseball. In 1923, he joined the New York Yankees and even played in the World Series as a reserve outfielder while the Yanks won their first World Championship. However, with a .160 batting average, Hinkey was not likely to put Babe Ruth on the bench. That year was his first and last in the majors.

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He still played football, although not in the NFL. The records are sketchy, but we know that he played a half dozen games for the Philadelphia Quakers in late 1921, scoring two touchdowns against the visiting Canton Bulldogs in a December exhibition. In 1923, he helped the Frankford Yellow Jackets win several games, and in 1924 he played regularly with Shenandoah.

Many historians believe the quality of play in eastern Pennsylvania was superior to that of many NFL teams at this time. Certainly the coal region teams held their own in occasional exhibitions against NFL squads, and, when Frankford and Pottsville joined the league in 1924 and 1925 respectively, they quickly moved to the top of the standings.

1925 saw the New York Giants enter the NFL. Haines was in the starting backfield, but the lineup included many others who were past their primes. The New Yorkers lost their first three games. Finally, Coach Folwell revamped his team and released a couple of aging veterans. On November 1, the Giants won their first NFL game, a 19-0 triumph over Cleveland. Haines scored twice, once on a pass reception.

From there on, the Giants lost only once -- to Red Grange and the Chicago Bears -- as Hinkey Haines led the attack with his legs and his brain. Always a smart player, he preserved one New York win over Providence by deliberately taking a safety and setting up a free kick. Giant newspaper ads read: "Come see Hinkey Haines and his New York Football Giants."

The following season saw Haines at his best. Against Providence he passed for the winning touchdown in one game, was responsible for three TDs in another. Ernie Nevers of the Eskimos scored twice against the Giants, but Haines' 30-yard romp for a TD gave New York the game. Against the Cardinals, he went 75 yards from scrimmage and 40 yards with a pass for a pair of scores to lead a win. Only an early season slump kept the Giants from a championship.

In 1927 they won it all. The key game came late in November against the Bears. During a scoreless first half, Chicago dominated play, but shortly before the half ended, Haines turned the game around with a heady play.

Steve Owen described it thus: "Haines called one of the smartest plays I ever seen to win for us. He stage-managed it perfectly.

"The Bears had plodded downfield to our one-yard line, where we held 'em. Haines signaled for punt formation. The Bears dropped two men back to mid-field and jammed nine on the line.

"We called signals in the open in those days and Haines yelled to Mule Wilson, our punter, to be careful not to step beyond the end line for a safety. He asked that a towel be brought out to wipe the ball because there was a patch of mud here and there on the field.

Haines completely fooled the Bears. When the ball was snapped he had dropped back a few yards to receive it. He threw over the line to Chuck Corgan, end, who used to play second base for the Dodgers, and Chuck went to the Bears' 40-yard line."

In the second half, the Giants scored twice for a 13-7 victory. The next week Haines ran 80 yards for a touchdown to lead a wrap-up win over Red Grange and his Yankee team.

The Giants' NFL championship, coupled with Haines' appearances with the 1923 Yankees, makes Haines the only athlete ever to play on both major league baseball and football champions.

Haines wanted to retire before the 1928 season, but Giant owner Tim Mara talked him into another season, hoping for a second championship. Hinkey held up his end, registering five precious touchdowns, but the Giants were torn by discension and injuries. They finished sixth. In the last game of the season, Haines suffered a severe neck injury.

Hinkey joined the Stapletons for 1929. With Doug Wycoff, Ken Strong, and Haines all in the same backfield, the Stapes looked like a winner, but the team was weak in the line and lacked depth. Consequently, they lost as often as they won.

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The next year, Hinkey turned 31. Fewer than a dozen NFL players were that old, and most of them were part-timers. He called it a career.

But in 1931, the Stapes lured him back as a player-coach. Saddled with a weak team, Haines saw his club finish about as expected, in the middle of the pack.

From 1934 through 1954, Haines continued to serve the NFL as a referee. That gave him a front row seat from which to watch some of the great runners in NFL history. Yet, despite the onslaught of new stars each year, there were those who still fondly remembered Haines. He was proud that Steve Owen named him on his All-Time Giant team in 1952.

On January 9, 1979, at Penn Wynne, Pa., Hinkey Haines passed away.

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This article is the product of the combined efforts of SABR members Tom Frangicetto, Paul Zachar, and Kit Crissey (also a P.F.R.A. member) and the *Coffin Corner* staff.

HENRY LUTHER (Hinkey) HAINES Halfback

Born: Red Lion, Pa., December 23, 1898

Died: January 9, 1979

Height: 5-10 **Weight:** 168

College: Lebanon Valley & Penn State

Pro Teams: New York Giants, 1925-28; Staten Island Stapletons, 1929, 1931