

SQUIRMIN' HERMAN

By P.F.R.A. Research

Herman Wedemeyer was a popular cover-boy for the football mags in 1946. He hailed from Hawaii, not yet a state and still an exotic land of mystery to those Americans who hadn't passed through it on their way to lesser island edens like Saipan or Okinawa. He had that wavy black hair and blunt good looks the public expected for the second-lead in all those south sea island adventures that were so popular then – the brother whose sister is about to be thrown into the volcano. More to the point, he was a heckuva football player.

"Squirmin' Herman" was a unanimous All-American pick as a sophomore triple-threat tailback at little St. Mary's during the post-war season of 1945. He excelled in twisting, dodging runs – perfect for a public that thought everyone in Hawaii spent most of their time doing the hula. But he could pass, kick and play defense. Grantland Rice quoted an unnamed former football star: "Wedemeyer is the greatest back I have ever seen. He's a great passer, a superb runner. His kicking is excellent, and how that boy can use his head!" USC Coach Jeff Cravath called him "the best back the West Coast ever saw."

St. Mary's was a small school with fewer than a thousand men enrolled, but it had a great football tradition. Under Coach "Slip" Madigan in the '20s and '30s they'd gone undefeated twice and had a couple of All-Americans. The Gaels all but disappeared during the war, but in 1945, with Jimmy Phelan as coach, they came roaring back into national prominence.

Phelan liked a wide-open offense. In Wedemeyer, he had a guy who could run it. The Gaels caught the public's eye early in the season with a 20-12 opener over California. Wedemeyer went into high-gear and they rolled through six more opponents, scoring 242 points to 7. The big name on the card was Cravath's USC team, 26-0.

By then, fans across the country adored the little school with "that Hawaiiin kid" at tailback. St. Mary's dropped the last game of the season, 13-7, to U.C.L.A., but they'd earned a Sugar Bowl bid against Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State), a team with its own All-American – blond Bob Fenimore.

Wedemeyer surprised A & M early, completing a 47-yard pass to Dennis O'Connor for a touchdown. Oklahoma matched that, but Herman followed with a spectacular run, and – just as he was about to be tackled – flipped to a teammate for another touchdown. The Gaels trailed only 14-13 at the half. But Fenimore got rolling in the second half, and the Aggies won going away, 33-13. Wedemeyer finished fourth in voting for the Heisman Trophy.

His succeeding seasons were not up to that standard, although he was again picked on several All-American teams in 1946 when St. Mary's went 6-2 before losing to Georgia Tech, 41-19, in the Oil Bowl. His four-year record showed 4,061 total offense yards and 40 touchdowns.

Drafted on the first round by both the L.A. Rams of the NFL and the L.A. Dons of the AAFC in 1947 (when his college class graduated), he signed with the Dons in 1948 for \$12,000, a high salary at that time. In two seasons of pro football, he continued to star as a kick-returner, leading the AAFC in punt return yardage in 1948 and kickoff return yardage in 1949, but he found only limited success running from the T-formation.

He was later elected to the Hawaii House of Representatives and also followed an acting career, appearing as a regular on the popular TV show, "Hawaii Five-O."

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 9, No. 1 (1987)

HERMAN WEDEMEYER HB

Hgt: 5-10 Wgt: 173 Born: May 20, 1924 Hilo, HI

College: St. Mary's (CA) 1943,45-47.

All-American: 1945 (consensus), 1946.

College All-Star Game 1948.

Drafted #1-L.A.Rams, NFL & #1-L.A. Dons, AAFC 1947.

Pro: (2 years) L.A.Dons (AAFC) 1948; Baltimore (AAFC) 1949

#1 Punt Returns 1948; #1 Kickoff Returns 1949.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TEAM</u>	<u>LG</u>	<u>RUSHING-----</u>				<u>PASS RECEIVING</u>			
			<u>ATT</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>TD</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>TD</u>
1948	LA	AAC	79	249	3.2	0	36	330	9.2	2
1949	Bal	AAC	64	291	4.5	0	10	112	11.2	0
2 years			143	540	3.8	0	46	442	9.6	2

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TEAM</u>	<u>LG</u>	<u>KICKOFF RETURN</u>				<u>PUNT RETURNS--</u>			
			<u>NO</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>TD</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>TD</u>
1948	LA	AAC	11	240	21.8	0	23*	368	16.0	0
1949	Bal	AAC	*30*	602	20.1	0	16	221	13.8	0
2 years			41	842	20.5	0	39	589	15.1	0

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TEAM</u>	<u>LG</u>	<u>PASSING-----</u>					<u>PUNTING</u>		<u>SCOR</u>
			<u>ATT</u>	<u>COM</u>	<u>YDS</u>	<u>TD</u>	<u>IN</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>AVG</u>	<u>PTS</u>
1948	LA	AAC	30	9	79	0	3	1	10.0	12
1949	Bal	AAC	1	0	0	0	1	3	18.0	0
2 years			31	9	79	0	4	4	16.0	12