

Ted Marchibroda was a football player ahead of his time when he quarterbacked the Franklin Nurserymen from 1946-48.



Everybody knows he went on to star in college, first at St. Bonaventure before transferring to Detroit, where he led the nation in total offense, and was a one-time first-round draft pick of the Pittsburgh Steelers. He didn't last all that long with the Steelers, but stayed in the NFL, and was once Coach of the Year for the Baltimore Colts in 1975.

Because of all that, it's probably a good bet to assume that he was the quintessential high school quarterback – as we know quarterbacks today -- at Franklin.

But he wasn't.

That's because he was throwing passes *downfield*, which was not the norm for schoolboys in the late 1940s.

This is part of a story that appeared in the Sept. 25, 1947, edition of The News-Herald. "The following is an item from the Meadville Tribune-Republican under a big black heading reading 'Meadville Hi Must Stop Franklin's Marchibroda'" as the Bulldogs prepared to take on the Nursery.

"Quarterback Ted Marchibroda is the lad whom the Meadville team must keep an eagle eye on in this all-important...tussle," the story began. "This Marchibroda youngster connected for almost a third of his 19 passes against Grove City last Friday night and most of these aerial heaves were over-the-line tosses to end (Jim) Kockler, which helped Franklin move toward its only touchdown of the game. Marchibroda quit the airline play and on a brilliant 26-yard run crossed the pay line for a touchdown."

The Trib later reminded Meadville fans that Marchibroda was cold the season before against the Bulldogs until the fourth quarter of their 14-0 victory.

But then...

"It was Marchibroda in the signal chirping spot who started to toss the pigskin all over the North Street lot to halfback Johnny Boughner and several were good for 20-yard gains. But their aerial attack started too late."

What caught my eye was the Trib referring to Marchibroda's passes as "over-the-line." Say what? Then I looked at a few game stories, and passes were referred to as "over-the-line" or "behind-the-line." Apparently the "line" meant the line of scrimmage, and behind-the-line meant

they were laterals that would be fumbles if not caught. (But back then, I don't know how they were scored if they weren't caught.)

Anyhow, it apparently was a Very Big Deal that Marchibroda was throwing the ball *downfield*. Unheard of! Way ahead of his time.

When researching for this site 20 years ago, I found Marchibroda's passing yardage for his junior year in 1947 – 812, which includes his signature 272 against Warren. He completed 47 of 126 for eight touchdowns with 11 picks that year, but no season totals for the other two.

I do have yardage for eight of his other games during his sophomore and senior seasons, including his 237-yard effort against Punxsutawney in 1946. So, as with Red Law, I tried to go game-by-game and figure out some additional yards. I came up with 2,510 (and 22 TDs), but that is probably about 300 short for his career total. And it will have to do for now. I don't think he passed for 3,000.

Thing is, his passing appeared to *complement* his running. Marchibroda wasn't big – 5-10 or so – but the guy was a *magician* as an athlete: A skillful runner from scrimmage and a dangerous threat on returns. Once, he returned a kickoff 12 yards to the 30, saw many would-be tacklers, and rifled a lateral half the width of the field to Boughner who went the rest of the way for a touchdown against Titusville.

He has a three-interception game to his credit and he was first team all-state in basketball.

It sounds as if he laid the foundation for similar FHS quarterbacks of the future, including his nephew, Butch Conrad 10 years later to be followed by Dave Bierbach, Bay Lawrence and Rich Cerro.

Marchibroda passed for only 49 yards but ran for 66 in his high school finale on Nov. 12, 1948, against Oil City.

But he made his presence felt at Mitchell Avenue Field, scoring both touchdowns and passing for the extra points to Kockler and Dick Russell in a 14-13 victory. The TDs came on a 79-yard kickoff return and a 9-yard run. Jay Rhoads' block of one of Bob Porter's tries for the extra point turned out to be the difference, score-wise.

Marchibroda also chipped in with a punt to the coffin corner on the Oiler 2.

Said The News-Herald, "As in other recent games, Marchibroda's running outshone his passing. On a good many plays he moved out of his usual quarterback position and ran the ball repeatedly on a fake pass play."

Afterward, players and fans hoisted Marchibroda on their shoulders and carried him off the field as the FHS band marched up and down the field.

Marchbroda once said, "The (Thanksgiving) turkey tastes a lot better if you beat Oil City." It must have tasted good in 1948.