

# Oregon's All-Time Walk Ons

by Jerry Thompson

## George Dames: A Walk-On Legend

The story of George Dames' transformation from being a third string split end at the beginning of his senior year in high school, to becoming a three-year starter and second team All-American nose guard reminds one of the old Charles Atlas stories, "Rocky", and "Rudy" wrapped up in one. After graduating from Medford High School in 1964 George said "there was absolutely no interest in him by anybody. I was a nothing." His older brother Bill was on the U of O swim team, a member of a fraternity and a leader in student government. George liked what he saw of the University, enrolled, and decided to try out for the frosh football team. "The frosh coach, Eddie Johns, gave me no hope and in that way made me become a tougher guy, Dames related. Frosh assistant Ron Stratten did offer him some encouragement and Dames said that Larry Horyna was a phenomenal teacher of the fundamentals of blocking and tackling. Dames' goal was to play linebacker so he lifted weights, ate

a lot and got up to 190 pounds. He did well in practice, but didn't even make the frosh travel list for away games! He only got in on a few plays in the last game. Things looked bleak for any type of football future and to make matters worse, Dames was put on academic probation after his first term. He brought his grades up during winter term and then an event happened that changed his life and football future.

"Somebody invited me to a Christian camp and it was there that I committed my life to Christ and it was also there where I said: 'If I make it I make it and if I don't, I don't'; and if I do make it I want to give the glory to the Lord." He was invited back to fall camp with 15 others but only as a redshirt, which then was basically a sign of humiliation. All the other redshirts were dejected about having to be "scout" players. George took the opposite approach and in his words "went wild." He worked so hard playing defensive line he created mayhem for the first team offense. His level of effort was so way beyond the call of duty that even the varsity coaches complimented him on his effort. This writer was a first hand witness of how Dames practiced, and I can say that in over thirty years of



As a middle guard, Dames earned All-Conference and second team All-American in 1968, and has been inducted into Oregon's Sports Hall of Fame.

watching Oregon practices, I've never seen anyone come even close in terms of all out 100% hustle as Dames. He made me tired just watching him. In one practice two of his gold crowns were knocked out and he handed them to coach Johns.

Dames' big break was when assistant coach Phil McHugh visited Paul Bear Bryant's Alabama team and the Ducks switched their defensive line philosophy to a smaller, quick unit. Dames still wanted to be a linebacker but McHugh switched him to nose guard. At 6-1, 195, Dames had to play against varsity center Bill Smith, who was 6-2, 240, and later had a good pro career. Dames says that he was the best center he ever played against in his collegiate career, which included an Ohio State All-American.

Dames received his "baptism by fire" in 1966 against national power Oklahoma in Norman when Oregon's starting nose guard was pulled. It was Dames' first real game action since playing Roseburg in high school! Having been taught

so well by McHugh and playing against Smith, Dames felt like "a kid at Disneyland" against Oklahoma's center. Dames was constantly in the Sooner backfield and made about 20 tackles. From that point and for the next three years, Dames was Oregon's nose guard. He was so good he was selected as a First-Team Preseason All-American in 1968, and was a unanimous choice as All-Coast middle guard. Head coach Jerry Frei said, "His ability to get to the football-somehow-is amazing." The California Bear team was so impressed they gave him more votes on their all-opponent team than UCLA's Heisman winner, Gary Beban.

Dames is a vice-president with Merrill Lynch in Bend and he and his wife Leslie are blessed with three children, Bumper who has a Master's in Language Studies, Amy who is a teacher, and Phil who is at Pt. Loma Nazarene on a tennis scholarship. Three years ago, George was inducted into the University of Oregon Athletic Hall of Fame, a fitting tribute to one who went so far beyond anyone's expectations. **O**

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