

HUTSON, Don(ald) Montgomery (b. 31 January 1914 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas; d. 26 June 1997 in Rancho Mirage, California), offensive end whose speed, agility, and pass-catching skills revolutionized the National Football League (NFL) passing game in the 1930s.

Hutson was one of four children born to Roy Basil Hutson, a Cotton Belt railroad conductor, and Mabel Agnes Clark, a homemaker. As a youngster, Hutson showed no remarkable athletic prowess; he was often overshadowed by his younger twin brothers, Ray and Robert (Robert was later a casualty of World War II). Hutson received more attention for his rattlesnake collection, which he put together to qualify for a Boy Scout merit badge, than for anything he did athletically; he eventually attained the Scout's highest rank as an Eagle Scout. Hutson also had a sister who died in infancy.

Hutson went out for the Pine Bluff High School football team after learning from neighbor and future teammate Bob Seawall that the team was going to a preseason camp in the Ozarks. Hutson was primarily interested in qualifying for the out-of-town trip. However, he proved to be more than just a happy camper. He developed into a fine player, though not good enough for a depression-era college to commit to a scholarship. Seawall, who was an outstanding player coveted by several colleges, including the University of Alabama, insisted that Hutson become part of a "package deal" to play for Alabama's Crimson Tide.

At Alabama, Hutson developed into the South's leading receiver. He was also fast, running the 100-yard dash in 9.7 seconds and the 200 in 21.3, speeds only tenths-of-a-second greater than the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) records for these distances. However, football was Hutson's ticket to future fame. By his junior year at Alabama, he was a touchdown threat as a pass-grabbing end. Passer Millard "Dixie" Howell was able to connect often enough with Hutson that, as seniors in 1934, they both were consensus All-America choices. (Future coaching legend Paul "Bear" Bryant played opposite Hutson on those Crimson Tide teams.) In the 1935 Rose Bowl game, which at the time was arguably the most important college post-season game, Hutson, increased his stock as a future professional player. Underdog Alabama upset heavily favored Stanford, 29-13, Hutson caught six passes thrown to him for 164 yards and two touchdowns.

Before the NFL draft of college players, each professional team was free to sign any collegian. Earl "Curly" Lambeau, coach of the Green Bay packers, coveted Hutson. The Packers were about the only professional team that used the forward pass as something more than a desperation tactic. Lambeau said of Hutson that "He [Hutson] would glide downfield, leaning forward as if to steady himself close to the ground. Then, as suddenly as you gulp or blink an eye, he'd feint one way and go the other, reach up like a dancer, gracefully squeeze the ball, and leave the scene of the accident – the accident being the defensive backs who tangled their feet up and fell trying to cover him." Later, when Hutson got to the NFL, eagles coach Earle "Greasy" Neale echoed

Lambeau, saying, "Hutson is the only man I ever saw who could faint in three different directions at the same time."

Hutson who was six feet, one inch and 175 pounds, agreed to sign with the persuasive Lambeau for \$175 a game, but said that he wanted to notify NFL Brooklyn Dodgers player and part-owner John Sims "Shipwreck" Kelly, who was also courting Hutson, of his decision. When told, Kelly took a plane to Alabama and also got Hutson's signature on an NFL contract. Contracts were not valid until received and countersigned by league president Joe F. Carr. Both of Hutson's signed contracts arrived the same day at Carl's office in Columbus, Ohio. Carr used Solomon-like wisdom and declared the contract with the earliest postmark valid. The Packers' postmark read 8:30 A.M.; the Dodgers' 8:47 A.M. By a mere seventeen minutes, "The Alabama Antelope" became a Packer and professional football would undergo a change for the better.

Before reporting to the Green Bay training camp, Hutson was the starting left end for the College All-Stars in the *Chicago Tribune* Charities game versus the 1834 NFL champion Chicago Bears. The All-Stars (including future President Gerald R. Ford, then a fine center at the University of Michigan) lost to the Bears, 5-0, but Hutson almost led his team to a victory when his brilliant end-around play put the All-Stars in scoring position. Unfortunately, the drive stalled out at the Bears' five-yard line. Hutson married Julia Kathleen Richards on 14 December 1935; the couple had a daughter.

A pervasive myth sprang up, one still perpetuated by some unknowing reporters, that on Hutson's very first play from scrimmage as a Packer he scored on an eighty-three-year touchdown reception against the Bears. This spectacular pass-and-run play did indeed occur against the Bears, and Hutson's touchdown was the margin of victory and the game's only score. However, Hutson actually made his NFL debut the previous week in a 7-6 loss to the Chicago Cardinals.

Hutson led the NFL in receiving in eight of the eleven years he played. His ninety-nine touchdown receptions stood as a record for decades, as did his 488 career receptions, and his 7,991 receiving yards. He also held a long-standing record for at least one catch in ninety-five consecutive games between 1937 and 1945. An accomplished kicker, he scored 193 of his records 823 points on field goals and extra points. So dominant was Hutson that it was not unusual for him to have twice as many catches in a season as the next best receiver in the league.

From about midway through his career, the slightly built Hutson regularly threatened to play "just one more season." Required to play defensive end when the opposition had the ball, he often took a physical beating. In 1939 Lambeau, breaking from tradition, had rugged blocking quarterback Larry Craig play end on defense while Hutson played Craig's rather benign safety position. Hutson responded by leading the NFL in interceptions (six) in 1940. Consistent to the end, Hutson led the league in receptions (forty-seven) in his season, 1945.

During and after his football career, Hutson, a wise businessman, owned a bowling alley and a Chevrolet-Cadillac agency in Racine, Wisconsin. He operated the agency until he sold it in 1984 and moved to Southern California. Hutson died at age eighty-four of natural causes and was cremated.

Voted to the NFL's All-50-Year and All-75-Year teams, Hutson, is one player from the sport's early days that football observers and historians agree could star in a modern, fast-paced game. Historian Bob Carroll said, "If you rated every pass catcher

when Hutson was playing on a scale of 100, and you gave Hutson 100, the next highest guy would be about a 40. Jerry Rice [of the 49ers and Raiders] might, *might*, be a better receiver, but if you give Rice a 100, there are a lot of guys in the 90s.” *Sports Illustrated’s* Paul “Dr. Z” Zimmerman said, “ Hutson came to the game in 1935 like an emissary from another planet.”

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There is no biography of Hutson, but his life and career are discussed in Alexander Weyand, *Football Immortals* (1962); Chuck Johnson, *The Greatest Packers of Them All* (1968); Myron Cope, *The Game That Was: The Early Days of Pro Football* (1970); George Allen with Ben Olan, *Pro Football’s 100 Greatest Players: Rating the Stars of Pass and Present* (1982); Richard Whittingham, *What a Game They Played: Stories of the earlyDays of Pro Football by Those Who Were There* (1984); and Brad Herzog, *The Sports 100: The One Hundred Most Important People in American Sports History* (1995). An obituary in the *New York Times* (28 June 1997).
Jim Campbell