

= Otto Graham =

Otto Everett Graham , Jr . (December 6 , 1921 ? December 17 , 2003) was an American football quarterback who played for the Cleveland Browns in the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) and National Football League (NFL) . Graham is regarded by critics as one of the most dominant players of his era , having taken the Browns to league championship games every year between 1946 and 1955 , winning seven of them . With Graham at quarterback , the Browns posted a record of 114 wins , 20 losses and four ties , including a 9 ? 3 win ? loss record in the playoffs . While most of Graham 's statistical records have been surpassed in the modern era , he still holds the NFL record for career average yards gained per pass attempt , with 8 @.@ 98 . He also holds the record for the highest career winning percentage for an NFL starting quarterback , at 0 @.@ 814 . Long @-@ time New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner , a friend of Graham 's , once called him " as great of a quarterback as there ever was . " He is also known for being one of only two people (the other being Gene Conley ? Milwaukee Braves in the 1957 World Series and three Boston Celtics championships from 1959 ? 61) to win championships in two of the four major American sports ? 1946 NBL (became NBA) and AAFC Championship , plus 3 more AAFC and 3 NFL championships .

Graham grew up in Waukegan , Illinois , the son of music teachers . He entered Northwestern University in 1940 on a basketball scholarship , but football soon became his main sport . After a brief stint in the military at the end of World War II , Graham played during the 1946 season for the National Basketball League 's Rochester Royals , who won the league championship that year . Paul Brown , Cleveland 's coach , signed Graham to play for the Browns , where he thrived . After he retired from playing football in 1955 , Graham coached college teams in the College All @-@ Star Game and became head football coach at the Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut . After seven years at the academy , he spent three unsuccessful seasons as head coach of the Washington Redskins . Following his resignation , he returned to the Coast Guard Academy , where he served as athletic director until his retirement in 1984 . He was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1965 .

= = Early life and college career = =

Born in Waukegan , Illinois , Graham 's first interest growing up was music . Encouraged by his parents , both of whom were music teachers , he took up several instruments : the piano , violin , cornet and French horn . Graham also excelled in athletics , and attended Northwestern University on a basketball scholarship in 1940 . There he played on the varsity basketball team as a freshman and continued to study music . Graham did not take up football until his sophomore year , when Northwestern coach Pappy Waldorf saw him throwing in an intramural game and invited him to practice with the team . Northwestern 's coaches were impressed with his running and passing , and Waldorf convinced him to sign up . Although football became Graham 's primary sport , he also played baseball and continued on the basketball team . As a senior , he was named a first @-@ team basketball All @-@ American , part of a squad selected by news outlets comprising the best players at each position .

Graham 's first game for the Northwestern Wildcats football team was on October 4 , 1941 , when he caught a Kansas State punt and returned it 90 yards for a touchdown . He ran and passed for two more touchdowns in the 51 ? 3 victory . After scoring another pair of touchdowns in a win against Wisconsin , Graham passed to his wide receivers for two touchdowns in a victory over the Ohio State , coached by Paul Brown , the team 's only loss of the 1941 season . Northwestern ended the year with an 11th @-@ place showing in the AP Poll of the best college teams in the country .

As America 's involvement in World War II intensified after the December 7 , 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor , Graham signed up for service alongside many fellow student @-@ athletes , entering the U.S. Navy Air Corps . He was able to stay at Northwestern as he waited to be called for active duty . The Wildcats struggled in 1942 as their players joined the war effort , winning only one game .

Graham still had 89 completions , setting a single @-@ season passing record in the Big Ten Conference , a division of major college teams from the Midwestern United States .

The following year , Graham and some of his teammates enlisted in the military but continued to play for Northwestern . Enlistees from other schools also enrolled at Northwestern , where the U.S. Navy had a training station . The 1943 season was a strong one for Northwestern . The team beat the Ohio State , the defending national champions , and a good military team at Great Lakes Naval Station . The Wildcats lost to Notre Dame and Michigan , however , and finished the season with an 8 ? 2 record and a ninth @-@ place ranking in the AP Poll . Graham set another Big Ten passing record , was named the conference 's Most Valuable Player , received All @-@ American honors and finished third in Heisman Trophy voting . By the end of his college career , he held a Big Ten Conference record for passing yards with 2 @,@ 132 .

Graham 's career at Northwestern officially ended in February 1944 , when he moved to Colgate University in Hamilton , New York , in the Navy 's V @-@ 5 cadet program , a pilot training course . He played basketball for Colgate before moving to North Carolina Pre @-@ Flight later in 1944 , where he played on the Cloudbusters football team under coaches Glenn Killinger and Bear Bryant .

Impressed by Graham 's performances in Northwestern 's wins over the Ohio State in 1941 and 1943 , Paul Brown came and offered him a contract worth \$ 7 @,@ 500 per year (\$ 98 @,@ 581 in 2016 dollars) in 1945 to play for a professional team he was coaching in Cleveland in the new All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) . Graham would not receive his salary until he started playing , however , and Brown added a monthly stipend of \$ 250 (\$ 3 @,@ 286 in 2016) until the end of the war . It was a large amount of money at the time . " All I asked was , where do I sign ? " Graham said later . " Some of the other navy men said I was rooting for the war to last forever . " Graham was also drafted by the National Football League 's Detroit Lions , but he did not sign a contract or play a game with the team as the war wore on .

Large numbers of athletes came home as the conflict wound down in Europe following Germany 's surrender in mid @-@ 1945 . The AAFC 's first season was not set to start until the fall of 1946 , and Graham occupied the intervening months by joining the Rochester Royals of the National Basketball League (NBL) , a forerunner of the National Basketball Association . In March 1946 , the Royals swept a best @-@ of @-@ five series against the Sheboygan Redskins to win the NBL title .

= = Professional career = =

= = = Cleveland Browns in the AAFC (1946 ? 1949) = = =

By the time Graham was discharged from the Navy late in the summer of 1946 , training camp for Brown 's new team , the Cleveland Browns , had already begun . Concerned that Graham was not ready to start , Brown put in Cliff Lewis at quarterback in the first game of the season . Graham , however , soon replaced Lewis in Brown 's T formation offense . Handing the ball to fullback Marion Motley and throwing to ends Dante Lavelli and Mac Speedie , Graham led the team to a 12 ? 2 regular @-@ season record and a spot in the championship game against the AAFC 's New York Yankees . The Browns won that game , touching off a period of dominance . The team won each of the AAFC 's four championships between 1946 and 1949 , and had professional football 's second perfect season in 1948 by finishing undefeated and untied .

Graham 's play was crucial to Cleveland 's success . He averaged 10 @.@ 5 yards per pass and had a quarterback rating of 112 @.@ 1 in 1946 , a professional football record until Joe Montana surpassed it in 1989 . Graham was named the AAFC 's Most Valuable Player in 1947 and shared the Most Valuable Player award with Frankie Albert of the San Francisco 49ers in 1948 . He led the league in passing yards between 1947 and 1949 . The AAFC dissolved after the 1949 season , and three of its teams , including the Browns , merged into the more established National Football League . Graham was the AAFC 's all @-@ time leading passer , throwing for 10 @,@ 085 yards and 86 touchdowns .

Graham became the Browns ' uncontested leader , but he was also " just one of the guys , " tackle Mike McCormack said in 1999 . " He was not aloof , which you see a lot of times today . " He was good at spinning and moving in the pocket , skills he learned playing basketball . In his autobiography , Paul Brown praised Graham 's ability to anticipate his receivers ' route @-@ running by watching their shoulders . " I remember his tremendous peripheral vision and his great athletic skill , as well as his ability to throw a football far and accurately with just a flick of his arm , " Brown said . His short passes were hard and accurate , teammates later said , and his long balls were soft . " I used to catch a lot of them one @-@ handed , " Lavelli said . " He had great touch in his hands . " He was nicknamed " Automatic Otto " for his consistency and toughness .

= = = Cleveland Browns in the NFL (1950 ? 1955) = = =

With Graham at the helm , the Browns continued to succeed when they joined the NFL in 1950 . Graham led the Browns to a 10 ? 2 record , which set up a playoff against the New York Giants for a spot in the championship game . The Browns ' only two losses of the season had come against the Giants , but in a frozen Cleveland Stadium on December 17 , Cleveland beat New York . With the game tied 3 ? 3 in the fourth quarter , Graham gained 45 yards by running with the ball on a long drive to set up a 28 @-@ yard Lou Groza field goal that put the Browns ahead 6 ? 3 . A safety after the ensuing kickoff made the final score 8 ? 3 .

The win put Cleveland in the NFL championship game against the Los Angeles Rams . Graham 's rushing and passing were again key to the Browns ' 30 ? 28 victory . He drove the offense downfield as time expired to set up a last @-@ minute Groza field goal that sealed the win . Graham had 99 yards rushing in the game , adding 298 yards of passing and four touchdowns .

Cleveland posted an 11 ? 1 record in 1951 , losing their only game to the San Francisco 49ers in the season opener . That gave the Browns another spot in the championship game , again against the Rams . This time , however , the Rams won 27 ? 17 . Graham fumbled the ball in the third quarter , setting up a touchdown that put the Rams ahead 14 ? 10 . Three of his throws were intercepted , but he put up 280 yards of passing and a touchdown . After the season , Graham was named the league 's Most Valuable Player .

With Graham at quarterback , Cleveland finished the 1952 season with a 9 ? 3 record and faced the Detroit Lions in the NFL championship game . Despite gaining 384 total yards to Detroit 's 258 , Graham and the Browns lost their second straight championship , 17 ? 7 . Cleveland had several long drives that ended with missed field goals , and a fourth @-@ quarter touchdown was negated because Graham 's throw to Pete Brewster was first tipped by receiver Ray Renfro ; under rules in place at the time , balls deflected by offensive teammates were automatic incompletions . After the season , as Graham was practicing for the Pro Bowl in Los Angeles on January 2 , 1953 , his six @-@ week @-@ old son Stephen died from a severe cold .

The 1953 season began with a 27 ? 0 win over the Green Bay Packers in which Graham passed for 292 yards and ran for two touchdowns . It was the first of 11 straight victories for the Browns , whose only loss came in the final game of the season to the Philadelphia Eagles . Near the end of the season in a game against the 49ers , Graham took a forearm to the face from Art Michalik that opened a gash on his chin requiring 15 stitches . Graham 's helmet was fitted with a clear plastic face mask , and he came back into the game ; the injury helped inspire the development of the modern face mask . Despite an 11 ? 1 record , Cleveland lost in the championship game for the third year in a row , falling to the Detroit Lions 17 ? 16 . Two of Graham 's passes were intercepted . He said after the game that he wanted to " jump off a building " for letting his teammates down . " I was the main factor in losing , " he said . " If I had played my usual game , we would have won . " Still , Graham finished the season as the NFL 's leading passer and again won the Most Valuable Player award .

Before the start of the Browns ' 1954 training camp , Graham was questioned as part of the Sam Sheppard murder case . Sheppard , an osteopath , was accused of bludgeoning his pregnant wife to death , and Graham and his wife , Beverly , were friends with the couple . Graham told police that while he and Beverly liked the Sheppards , they did not know much about their relationship .

The 1954 season was a transitional one for the Browns . Many of the players who joined the 1946 team had retired or were nearing the end of their careers . Graham , meanwhile , told Brown that he would retire after the season . After losing the first three games , Cleveland won eight in a row and earned another shot at the championship , again against the Lions . This time , the Browns won 56 ? 10 as Graham ran for three touchdowns and passed for three more . He announced his retirement after the game .

After Graham 's potential replacements struggled during the 1955 training camp and preseason , Brown convinced Graham to come back and play one more year . He was offered a salary of \$ 25 @, @ 000 (\$ 220 @, @ 839 today) , making him the highest @- @ paid player in the NFL . The Browns lost the opener against the Washington Redskins , but went on to a 9 ? 2 ? 1 regular @- @ season record and another chance at a championship . Graham threw two touchdowns and ran for two more as the Browns beat the Rams 38 ? 14 . When Brown took Graham out of the game in the fourth quarter , the crowd in the Los Angeles Coliseum gave him a standing ovation . It was the final performance of a 10 @- @ year career in which Graham 's team reached the championship each year and won seven . " Nothing would induce me to come back , " he said later . He was the NFL 's passing leader and Most Valuable Player in 1955 . He also won the Hickok Belt , awarded to the best professional athlete of the year . Without Graham , the Browns floundered the following year and posted a 5 ? 7 record , their first @- @ ever losing season .

The Browns ' record with Graham as starting quarterback was 114 ? 20 ? 4 , including a 9 ? 3 record in the playoffs . He still holds the NFL career record for yards per pass attempt , averaging nine . He also holds the record for the highest career winning percentage for an NFL starting quarterback , with 0 @. @ 814 . Graham was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1965 . Having won seven championships in 10 seasons and reached the championship game in every year he played , Graham is regarded by sportswriters as one of the greatest winners of all time and one of the best professional quarterbacks ever to play the game . He never missed a game in his career .

Graham wore number 60 for much of his career , but he was forced to change it to 14 in 1952 after the NFL passed a rule requiring offensive linemen to wear jersey numbers 50 ? 79 so referees could more easily identify ineligible receivers . The Browns retired his number 14 , while 60 remains in circulation . While at Northwestern , Graham wore number 48 .

= = Coaching career = =

When Graham retired from football , he planned to focus on managing the insurance and appliance businesses he owned . In 1957 , however , Graham signed on as an assistant coach for the college squad in the annual College All @- @ Star Game , a now @- @ defunct exhibition contest between the NFL champion and a selection of the best collegiate players from around the country . The next year , he was named head coach of the team . With Graham coaching the all @- @ stars in 1958 , the team beat the Detroit Lions 35 ? 19 .

= = = Coast Guard Academy = = =

Following his convincing win in the all @- @ star game , Graham 's friend George Steinbrenner helped get him a job as the head football coach for the Coast Guard Academy in New London , Connecticut . Graham , by then 37 years old , was also named athletic director and given a salary " in five figures " . School officials said the hiring did not mean Coast Guard would " go big time " ; the Division III school played a relatively short schedule at the time against smaller schools in New England . The Coast Guard team had a 3 ? 5 record in Graham 's first year as coach in 1959 , but improved steadily over the ensuing three years . The team went undefeated in 1963 , earning the academy its first @- @ ever post @- @ season bowl appearance . Coast Guard lost to Western Kentucky 27 ? 0 in the Tangerine Bowl . Graham continued to coach in the College All @- @ Star Game while at Coast Guard , and his college team beat Vince Lombardi 's Green Bay Packers in a 20 ? 17 upset in 1963 . Graham was offered coaching jobs in the NFL numerous times during his

tenure at Coast Guard , but he said in 1964 that he was content to stay at the small school on a \$ 9 @, @ 000 salary . He said he deplored the " win at all costs philosophy " that was necessary to be successful in the professional ranks .

= = = Washington Redskins = = =

Despite his reservations about the professional game , Graham , who moonlighted as a television and radio commentator for the American Football League 's New York Jets in 1964 and 1965 , left Coast Guard after seven years in 1966 to become head coach of the NFL 's Washington Redskins . Graham 's tenure as the Redskins ' coach between 1966 and 1968 was unsuccessful ; the team 's record during that span was 17 ? 22 ? 3 . In his last season as the coach of the Redskins , calls for his firing had intensified as the team 's performance worsened from a 7 ? 7 record to a 5 ? 9 record in his third year . The Washington Daily News called for his firing in a front @-@ page editorial in November 1968 . Lombardi took over as the Redskins ' coach in 1969 .

= = = Return to Coast Guard Academy = = =

After being dismissed as the Redskins ' coach , Graham returned to the Coast Guard Academy as athletic director and said he planned to stay there until he retired . He coached the college team in the College All @-@ Star Game in 1970 for his tenth and final time . The college stars lost for the seventh time in a row that year , falling 24 ? 3 to the Kansas City Chiefs . He was replaced in 1971 by Blanton Collier , who had retired after succeeding Brown as Cleveland 's head coach .

In 1974 , Graham was named Coast Guard 's football coach once again , although he resigned two years later to focus on his duties as athletic director . In nine years of coaching , Graham 's Coast Guard teams had a combined record of 44 ? 32 ? 1 . After eight more years as the school 's athletic director , Graham retired in 1984 .

= = Later life and death = =

An avid golfer and tennis player , Graham partnered with New York Yankees great Joe DiMaggio in numerous golf tournaments later in life . He retired to a house on a golf course in Florida . Graham overcame colon cancer in 1977 , but was later plagued by heart ailments and other health problems . He was diagnosed as being in the early stages of Alzheimer 's disease in 2001 , and died of a heart aneurysm in Sarasota , Florida , on December 17 , 2003 . He had two sons and a daughter with his wife Beverly . In 2013 , Northwestern 's fundraising department created The Otto Graham Society to honor his achievements at the school and support its athletics programs . In 2014 a new gymnasium at Waterford Country School was dedicated to Otto Graham 's memory .

= = Career statistics = =

= = Coaching record = =

= = = College = = =

= = = NFL = = =