

= Tommy James (American football) =

Thomas Laverne " Tommy " James , Jr . (September 16 , 1923 ? February 7 , 2007) was an American football defensive halfback who played for Ohio State University and the Cleveland Browns in the 1940s and 1950s . He was born near Massillon , Ohio and attended Massillon Washington High School , where he played as a back on the football team under head coach Paul Brown . James was a key part of a Massillon team that went undefeated in 1940 . After graduating , he followed Brown to Ohio State and played there as a halfback . Ohio State won its first national championship in 1942 when James was on the team .

After a three @-@ year stint in the U.S. Army during World War II , James returned to play a final season at Ohio State in 1946 . He then signed with the Detroit Lions of the National Football League (NFL) , where he stayed for a year before rejoining Brown , who had become head coach of the Cleveland Browns in the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) . James spent eight seasons in Cleveland , playing as a defensive halfback on five championship teams , including two in the AAFC in the late 1940s and three in the NFL in the 1950s . He left football after playing briefly for the Baltimore Colts in 1956 . Later in life , he worked as a salesman at a trucking company . He died in 2007 .

= = High school and college = =

James grew up in Genoa , a small community in between Canton , Ohio and Massillon , Ohio . The oldest of five children , one of his younger brothers included Don James , a Hall of Fame coach for Kent State and the University of Washington . He attended grammar school there through the eighth grade , but the town did not have a high school and students could choose to attend either Massillon Washington High School or the rival Canton McKinley High School . James at first decided to attend Canton , but Bud Houghton , an assistant coach of Massillon 's football team , saw him playing in an informal scrimmage on a street corner and convinced him to come to Massillon . He played football there for three years under head coach Paul Brown . Playing as a back , James was part of a Massillon team that went undefeated in 1940 . He scored a touchdown in a 28 ? 0 victory over Toledo 's Waite High School , the biggest game of the year ; Massillon came into the matchup having won 30 games in a row , while Waite had won 18 straight .

James attended Ohio State University starting in 1941 , the same year Brown was hired as the school 's head football coach . He played on the freshman team in his first year , moving to the varsity team in 1942 . Ohio State finished the season with a 9 ? 1 win ? loss record and won its first @-@ ever college football national championship . James , who played as a halfback , was injured in a late @-@ season game against the University of Illinois . This caused him to miss Ohio State 's annual game against arch @-@ rival Michigan , but he returned for the final game of the season against Iowa Pre @-@ Flight , a military squad . James ran for a 54 @-@ yard touchdown on that game 's first play and later added a punt return for a touchdown as Ohio State won 41 ? 12 .

James enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943 and served for three years during World War II . He returned to Ohio State in 1946 and played on the varsity team again . The Buckeyes finished with a 4 ? 3 ? 2 record under coach Paul Bixler .

= = Professional career = =

James signed with the National Football League 's (NFL) Detroit Lions in 1947 . He was still eligible to play in college at the time , but wartime rules allowed him to skip to the professional ranks and play for the Lions , who had selected him in the 1947 NFL Draft . James broke his arm in the second game of the season , and he sat on the sidelines for the rest of the year . Detroit did not renew his contract , and the Cleveland Browns of the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) , a team coached by Paul Brown , picked him up . He started at right defensive halfback in 1948 opposite Tommy Colella and intercepted four passes as the Browns went 15 ? 0 and won the All @-@ America Football Conference championship . Brown was pleasantly surprised by his abilities

on defense . " Tommy always was a pretty good man on defense at Massillon and Ohio State , " he said in 1948 . " But his play this year has even surprised those of us who knew him in high school and college . I think we 're definitely improved at defensive right half over last year . "

James continued to be a key defensive player for the Browns in 1949 , when the team won another AAFC championship behind a staunch defense and an offense led by quarterback Otto Graham and fullback Marion Motley . The AAFC dissolved after the season , however , and the Browns moved to the NFL . Cleveland 's first year in the NFL was the best of James 's career : he intercepted nine passes , setting a club record that stood until 1978 . The team finished the season with a 10 ? 2 record and beat the Los Angeles Rams to win the NFL championship . James made an interception in the game . He also held the ball for placekicker Lou Groza on the game @-@ winning field goal with under a minute to play .

Cleveland reached the championship in each of the ensuing three years , but lost each time , once to the Rams and twice to the Detroit Lions . James intercepted five passes and recovered two fumbles in 1953 and was selected for the Pro Bowl , the NFL 's annual all @-@ star game . The Browns went on to win the NFL championship again in 1954 and 1955 . James was moved from defensive halfback to safety in 1955 later in his career and was hampered by injuries .

Brown released the 33 @-@ year @-@ old James on waivers before the 1956 season , which allowed other teams to pick up his contract . Brown said it was " one of the toughest things I 've had to do in football " because of the effort James put out . James had worked in the offseason as a sporting goods salesman and had an offer to join a trucking firm , but said he wanted to continue his football career for one more year . He was picked up by the Baltimore Colts but left the team in October after injuring his shoulder . He ended his NFL career with 26 interceptions , all with the Browns , tying him for eighth place in team history .

= = Later life and death = =

After his football career , James worked in the trucking business as a salesman , retiring at age 69 . He had three sons , one of whom became the head track coach at Massillon Washington . James died in 2007 of congestive heart failure .