

= Les Horvath =

Leslie " Les " Horvath (October 12 , 1921 ? November 14 , 1995) was an American football quarterback and halfback who won the Heisman Trophy while playing for Ohio State University in 1944 . Horvath was the first Ohio State player to win the Heisman , an award given to the best college football player in the United States . The school retired his jersey number 22 in 2001 .

Horvath grew up in a suburb of Cleveland , Ohio and became a standout high school athlete despite his small stature . He entered Ohio State in 1939 on a work scholarship , but tried out for and made the football team the following year . He played as a reserve halfback on a 1942 team coached by Paul Brown that won Ohio State 's first @-@ ever national championship . Horvath graduated that year and moved to Ohio State 's dental school . In 1944 , however , acting Ohio State football coach Carroll Widdoes asked Horvath to rejoin the team , taking advantage of a World War II @-@ era rule allowing graduate students with remaining eligibility to play . Horvath agreed , and helped lead the Buckeyes to a 9 ? 0 record and a second @-@ place showing in the AP Poll . He won the Heisman and was named an All @-@ American after the season .

Horvath graduated from dental school in 1945 and served as a dental officer in the U.S. Navy for two years . Following his discharge , he played professionally for the Los Angeles Rams in 1947 and 1948 before being released and signing with the Cleveland Browns in 1949 . The Browns won the All @-@ America Football Conference championship that year . Horvath retired from playing in 1950 and moved to Los Angeles to practice dentistry . He lived there for the rest of his life . Horvath was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1966 and the Ohio State athletics hall of fame in 1977 .

= = Early life = =

Horvath was born to Croatian immigrants in South Bend , Indiana in 1921 ; his family soon moved to Parma , Ohio , a suburb of Cleveland , Ohio . He attended Parma Senior High School starting in 1936 and played on the track , basketball and football teams until the 11th grade . He decided to switch schools because he felt his basketball teammates were not taking the sport seriously . Horvath 's family relocated , and in 1938 he enrolled at James Ford Rhodes High School in Cleveland , one of Parma 's rivals . Playing as a quarterback for the Rhodes Rams , Horvath guided the team to seven straight wins in 1938 , but the team lost to West Technical High School for a chance to be the Cleveland Senate League 's nomination to play in the city championship . He graduated in 1939 .

= = College career = =

After graduating , Horvath attended Ohio State University on a work scholarship , but managed to make the school 's football team in 1940 . Horvath was small for a football player ? he weighed just 160 pounds ? but was a quick runner and had a strong arm . Ohio State 's football team was a disappointment in 1940 , however , finishing the season with a 4 ? 4 win ? loss record under head coach Francis Schmidt . Schmidt was fired after the season and replaced by Paul Brown , an Ohio high school coach who had guided Massillon Washington to a series of undefeated records and state championships . Brown simplified Ohio State 's offense , but imposed a level of discipline and organization that had been absent under Schmidt . Horvath was a reserve halfback in the Buckeyes ' single @-@ wing offense in 1941 , when the team posted a 6 ? 1 ? 1 win ? loss ? tie record and finished second in the Big Ten Conference standings . He played in many games , but senior fullback Jack Graf and senior halfback Tom Kinkade got most of the carries for Ohio State .

Despite his small frame , Brown recognized Horvath 's potential as a senior in 1942 and made him a regular starter at halfback beside Paul Sarringhaus and fullback Gene Fekete . While Sarringhaus and Fekete were Ohio State 's main offensive weapons , Horvath averaged eight yards per carry in a victory over Pittsburgh and scored two touchdowns and passed for 109 yards in a win over Illinois in Cleveland . Ohio State was ranked first in the country in the AP Poll early in the season , but fell

in the rankings after a loss to Wisconsin in October . The team won the rest of its games , however , including a 21 ? 7 victory over arch @-@ rival Michigan at the end of the season . Horvath passed to Sarringhaus for a 35 @-@ yard touchdown and caught another 32 @-@ yard touchdown pass from Sarringhaus in the Michigan game . Ohio State 's 9 ? 1 record put it on top of the Big Ten standings and in the final AP Poll , giving the school its first @-@ ever national championship .

Horvath expected his college football career to be over in 1942 . He finished his undergraduate degree that year and enrolled in a graduate program at The Ohio State University College of Dentistry . Ohio State 's football program , meanwhile , struggled in 1943 after Brown and many of its best players entered the military during World War II . Carroll Widdoes , an assistant under Brown , was appointed the acting head coach and led the team to a 3 ? 6 record .

The following year , Widdoes asked Horvath to return to the team , taking advantage of a wartime rule that allowed college programs to use graduate students if they had not exhausted their four years of college eligibility . Widdoes promised Horvath a leading role as the team 's left halfback , a level of prominence he had been denied under Brown . Horvath agreed to come back and be a veteran leader for a team that was composed mostly of freshmen because of older players ' service in the war . Horvath had a breakout season in 1944 , gaining 669 rushing yards and 1 @, @ 200 all @-@ purpose yards as the Buckeyes turned in a 9 ? 0 record and finished second in the national polls . The highlights of Horvath 's season included scoring the winning touchdown in Ohio State 's annual matchup against Michigan . Calling all of Ohio State 's offensive plays , he was nicknamed the " playing coach " .

Horvath was named a first @-@ team All @-@ American by sportswriters and the Most Valuable Player in the Big Ten after the season . He was voted by his teammates as Ohio State 's Most Valuable Player . He also won the Heisman Trophy , an award given each year to the best college football player in the country . Horvath was the first Ohio State player to win the Heisman , and he remains the only Heisman winner not to have played football the previous season . In early 1945 , Horvath played in the annual East ? West Shrine Game , a college all @-@ star game . While at Ohio State , he was a member of Delta Tau Delta fraternity .

= = Military and professional career = =

After graduating from Ohio State 's dental school in 1945 , Horvath signed to play for the Cleveland Rams of the National Football League . Horvath , however , applied for a commission to join the U.S. Navy and was sworn in as a junior lieutenant that August . He was sent at first to Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois for training , where he practiced dentistry and acted as an assistant to Brown , who had entered the Navy and was coaching the base 's football team . Horvath served in Hawaii and coached a football team there that won a service national championship . He later traveled on assignment as far as China as a naval dental officer .

Before his discharge from the Navy in 1947 , there was speculation that Horvath may join the Cleveland Browns , a new team coached by Brown in the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) . Horvath was still under contract with the Rams , however , and joined the team , which by then had moved from Cleveland to Los Angeles . Led by quarterback Bob Waterfield , Los Angeles finished the season with a 6 ? 6 record in 1947 . Horvath rushed for 68 yards and had three receptions . Horvath had 118 yards of rushing the next season , when the Rams finished with a 6 ? 5 ? 1 record and took third place in the NFL West division .

Horvath , who worked as a dentist in the offseason in Los Angeles , was released by the Rams in 1949 . He signed with the Browns a week later , closing his dental office and moving to Cleveland to reunite with Brown . Horvath , who was used primarily on defense early in the season , had an 84 @-@ yard fumble return for a touchdown in a game against the New York Yankees , and ran for two touchdowns in a November game against the Chicago Hornets . Cleveland finished the season with a 9 ? 1 ? 2 record and won a fourth straight AAFC championship . The AAFC disbanded after the season and the Browns were absorbed by the NFL , but Horvath decided to quit football to practice dentistry back in California .

= = Later life and death = =

Horvath got married after the 1949 season to Shirley Phillips , an airline hostess , and moved back to Los Angeles . He coached little league football and practiced dentistry in Glendale , California , a major Los Angeles suburb , for the rest of his life . His wife died in 1973 , and he got remarried two years later to Ruby Aylor , whom he met in Hawaii while on vacation in 1974 . They were married for 20 years , until Horvath 's death in 1995 of heart failure .

Horvath was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1966 and became a member of Ohio State 's athletics hall of fame in 1977 . Ohio State retired his number 22 uniform in 2001 , six years after his death . He was inducted into the Parma Senior High School athletics hall of fame in 2007 .

= = Awards and honors = =

1942 AP National Championship (with the Ohio State Buckeyes)

1944 Heisman Trophy winner

1944 First Team All @-@ American

1949 AAFC Champion (with the Cleveland Browns)

College Football Hall of Fame inductee (class of 1966)

Ohio State " Block O " Varsity Hall of Fame inductee (class of 1977)

Parma Senior High School Hall of Fame inductee (class of 2007)

Number retired by Ohio State (# 22)