

= Horace Gillom =

Horace Albert " Big Horse " Gillom (March 3 , 1921 ? October 28 , 1985) was an American football punter and end in the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) and National Football League (NFL) . He played ten seasons for the Cleveland Browns between 1947 and 1956 . Cleveland head coach Paul Brown , who coached Gillom in high school , college and professionally , called him his best all @-@ around high school player and once said there " has never been a better punter than Horace " .

Growing up in Ohio , Gillom played for Brown on the football team at Massillon Washington High School , where he excelled as an end , linebacker and punter . In Gillom 's three seasons between 1938 and 1940 , Massillon won all of its games and captured two High School Football National Championships . Gillom followed Brown to Ohio State University in 1941 , playing on the school 's freshman football team before dropping out because of poor grades . He then entered the U.S. Army and served for three years in World War II . Upon his discharge , Gillom enrolled at the University of Nevada , Reno to finish his college career . He led the country in scoring in 1946 but left the school after the season , again because of poor grades .

Gillom signed with the Browns , an AAFC team coached by Brown , in 1947 . He handled all of the team 's punting chores and played as a utility end on both offense and defense . Gillom 's Cleveland teams won three straight AAFC championships before the league dissolved and the Browns were absorbed by the NFL . The Browns won the NFL championship in 1950 and repeated in 1954 and 1955 . Gillom was a consistent punter , never averaging below 41 @.@ 2 yards per kick in a season . His abilities declined in his later years , however , and he was released during the 1956 season . Gillom attempted a comeback in 1961 with the New York Titans of the American Football League , but failed to make the team . He moved to Los Angeles and worked as a security guard for the rest of his life . Gillom died of a heart attack in 1985 . He was named in 2007 as a Cleveland Browns Legend , a grouping of the team 's best @-@ ever players .

Gillom contributed to the evolution of punting by standing further back from the center than was usual at the time to give himself more room to make kicks . His kicks were also high , which gave the coverage team more time to get down the field and stop punt returns . Gillom 's distance from center and emphasis on hang time were followed by later generations of punters .

= = Early life and high school = =

Gillom grew up in Massillon , Ohio and attended Massillon Washington High School . He was a star end on the Massillon football team like his older brother Odell , but was also a linebacker and punter . Bud Houghton , who coached him when he was in junior high school , said Gillom needed a step and a half more than usual to get his punts off , but he was the best he had ever seen once he made the kick . Houghton moved Gillom 15 yards behind the snapper instead of the usual 10 , which gave him the room he needed . Gillom was a favorite of Massillon High football coach Paul Brown , who said in his autobiography that there " has never been a better punter than Horace . "

Gillom played for the Massillon Tigers between 1938 and 1940 , a period during which the team won all of its games and two High School Football National Championships . Gillom , who also played basketball and other sports , earned All @-@ Ohio honors at Massillon and was one of several black players on the team at a time when many northern high schools excluded them . Brown 's policy was to use his best players , regardless of race . Gillom set school records for points scored in a season and touchdown passes caught in a season . His record of 108 points in a season still stands .

= = College and military service = =

Brown became Ohio State 's head football coach in 1941 and recruited Gillom to the school . Gillom played on Ohio State 's freshman team that year as an end opposite Dante Lavelli . Gillom was expected to move up to the varsity team the following year as a blocking back , but was kicked out

of school in January for failing to maintain his grades . Brown later said Gillom did not fail any courses and was back at Ohio State doing " some extra reading in history that he can make up " , but his struggles with classwork ultimately kept him off the Ohio State team in 1942 . Gillom enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II before he played on the varsity team .

Gillom fought in the European Theatre of World War II and participated in the Battle of the Bulge near the end of the war . He was discharged after three years of service , having earned three Bronze Star Medals . By that time , Brown had become the head coach of the Cleveland Browns , a team in the new All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) . Brown wanted Gillom on the team , but changed his approach after signing fullback Marion Motley in 1946 . Motley , a black star who played in high school for Massillon rival Canton , joined the Browns from the University of Nevada , Reno , where former Canton coach Jim Aiken was head coach . As compensation for drawing Motley away , Brown arranged for Gillom to go to Nevada for the 1946 season . Gillom led the nation in punting at Nevada that year , but left the school in December because of poor grades .

= = Cleveland Browns = =

Gillom signed with the Browns in early 1947 , making him the third black player to join the team after Bill Willis and Motley . Before the season started , he played in the College All @-@ Star Game , a now @-@ defunct matchup between the National Football League (NFL) champion and a selection of the best college players from around the country . Gillom played well in the game as the All @-@ Stars beat the Chicago Bears , 16 ? 0 . With the Browns , Gillom was used mostly as a punter and a defensive end . He came in second in the AAFC in punting average in his rookie season at 44 @.@ 6 yards as Cleveland finished the regular season with a 12 ? 1 ? 1 record and beat the New York Yankees to win the AAFC championship . " Gillom had such a powerful leg and kicked the ball so far ; before that punters used to line up 10 , 12 yards behind the center , " running back Sherman Howard later said . " He started the 15 @-@ yard drop . And with Horace , he would kick it so high that by the time guys got down , the ball was coming down , so most guys had to fair catch . "

The following season , Gillom saw time as an offensive end when regular Dante Lavelli broke his leg and was sidelined for seven games . Cleveland won all of its games in 1948 , recording professional football 's first perfect season and beating the Buffalo Bills in the championship game . The Browns won the championship again in 1949 , but the AAFC dissolved after the season and the Browns were absorbed by the more established NFL . Gillom 's salary was \$ 6 @,@ 000 (\$ 59 @,@ 673 in 2016 dollars) in the Browns ' last AAFC year .

The 1950 season was another strong one for Cleveland . The team finished the regular season with a 10 ? 2 record , tied with the New York Giants for first place in the American Conference . This set up a playoff with the Giants to secure a spot in the championship game against the Los Angeles Rams . Cleveland won 8 ? 3 , thanks in part to Gillom 's punts . His kicks repeatedly gave the Giants poor field position and pinned them near their own end zone . The Browns went on to win the championship against the Rams on a last @-@ minute Lou Groza field goal . Gillom finished second in the league in punting average , with 43 @.@ 2 yards .

Cleveland reached the championship game in the following three seasons but lost each time , once to the Rams and twice to the Detroit Lions . Gillom led the NFL in punting in 1951 , with a 45 @.@ 5 @-@ yard average . He again led the league the following season , averaging 45 @.@ 7 yards per punt , and was selected for the Pro Bowl , football 's all @-@ star game . Gillom was second in the NFL in punting average in 1953 . During his years with the Browns , Gillom 's long , high punts and his habit of standing further back from center than was usual set a precedent followed by many of his successors at the position . His kicks had a long hang time , which allowed teammates to get further downfield to defend the punt return . " We didn 't just go back 40 yards , we went back 50 , 60 yards because he just kicked it so damn far and so high , " Otto Schnellbacher , who played against the Browns with the Yankees and Giants , later said . Gillom 's positioning behind the center gave him more space to kick but also put more distance between him and the opposing linemen , reducing the likelihood of a block .

The Browns reached the championship game in 1954 and beat the Lions for a second NFL title . Gillom had the league 's second @-@ longest punting average for the second year in a row . Another championship followed in 1955 . Despite his consistency , Gillom 's punting slipped in his last years , and by 1956 he had to compete with rookies for a spot on the roster . At 35 , he was Cleveland 's oldest player and suffered from a sore back . He made the team but was released toward the end of the season in November . When he left the game , his career punting average of 43 @.@ 8 yards was the second @-@ best in NFL history behind Sammy Baugh 's 45 @.@ 1 yards . He never averaged below 41 @.@ 2 yards per punt and was among the top three punters in his league in six of the eight years when he punted full @-@ time . Because his punts were so long and high , opponents ' punt returns were limited . He punted more than 400 times from the start of his career before one was returned for a touchdown . He was also a serviceable end , making 43 receptions when he played the position for periods in 1948 and 1949 . Brown lauded his diverse abilities , calling him " the best all around athlete I coached at Massillon " and saying he was " successful at everything he did " .

= = Later life and death = =

Gillom attempted a return to football in 1961 , trying out for a spot on the New York Titans of the American Football League , a circuit formed the previous year . He was released , however , before playing in a game . He moved to Los Angeles in the 1964 and worked at the city 's recreation department as a security guard . He was a " trouble chaser " who patrolled the city 's parks without a uniform or weapon . " Any playground having trouble they call on me , " he said in 1970 . " The last one was a gang fight two weeks ago at a pool in Highland Park . "

Gillom lived in Los Angeles for the rest of his life . He died in 1985 of a heart attack suffered while working as a security guard at a hospital . He had a son and a daughter with his wife , Mamie . Gillom was named a Browns Legend in 2007 , an honor given by the team to the best players in its history . He was inducted into Stark County , Ohio 's high school football hall of fame in 2009 . Gillom still holds the Browns record for longest punt , at 80 yards , and is second in career punting yards behind Don Cockroft .