

CLYDE SHUGART

By Michael Richman, Redskins Insider Correspondent

In December 1999, Clyde Shugart was hunting in the countryside in southern Pennsylvania when he met an unexpected impediment. His foot got caught in the ground, and he tripped. While trying to prevent damage to a rifle in one hand and a telescope in the other, he lost his balance and fell, slamming his mouth into a large rock.

The collision jarred four teeth from him. Bleeding profusely, he was taken by a friend to a hospital in Cumberland, Md., where he underwent surgery. Another two teeth beyond repair were removed.

It's ironic that Shugart never lost any teeth in the NFL, an injury so prevalent in the days when he competed. The lineman played for the Redskins from 1939 to 1944, an era when almost everyone played without facemasks on their leather helmets.

Several of Shugart's teeth were chipped. But that didn't stop him from using a facemask.

"You didn't know any different," Shugart, 84, told *Redskins Insider*. "Even so, I worried about my teeth when I played pro ball. I didn't worry about breaking an arm or a leg, because I thought it would heal. But you don't grow new teeth, and that always bothered me."

Players then were less inclined to make helmet-to-helmet hits, Shugart noted, because they weren't protected by facemasks.

"You just didn't do that," he said. "They now use the head like a mallet sometimes. I don't understand it."

Shugart wore the burgundy and gold at a time when the franchise was one of the league's perennial powers. He played on teams that went to the championship game in the 1940, 1942 and 1943 seasons, each time playing the Chicago Bears, the NFL's other dominant team of that period. The Redskins 14-6 victory over the Bears in 1942 was sandwiched between a humiliating 73-0 loss to the Bears in 1940 and a 41-21 loss in 1943.

Shugart, who lives in Joppatown, Md., and Sammy Baugh, perhaps the greatest all-around player in NFL history, are the only two Redskins from the 1942 championship team known to be alive. The 87-year-old Baugh lives on a ranch between Rotan and Aspermont, Texas.

Shugart is originally from Ames, Iowa. He played football at Iowa State, where the 6-1, 230-pounder, speedy for his size, was an all-Big Six tackle in his senior year in 1938. The Redskins drafted him in the 15th round in 1939.

At the time, the Redskins were one of the NFL's most formidable squads. They won the league championship with a 28-21 win over the Bears in 1937, their first season in the nation's capitol, and just missed winning the Eastern Division title in 1938. With Shugart playing mostly guard but some tackle in the days of single-platoon football, the Redskins finished 8-2-1 in 1939, again falling just short of the Eastern Division championship.

But Shugart and other Redskins thought the team deserved to go farther. When the Redskins and Giants met in the 1939 regular-season finale, the winner was guaranteed to claim the division and earn a trip to the championship game. The Giants led, 9-7, with less than a minute left, when Redskins kicker Bo Russell, who was perfect all season, tried a 15-yard field goal.

The kick appeared good, and the Redskins began celebrating with the ball in the air. Giants players even appeared dejected. But when the ball landed on the ground, referee Bill Halloran called the kick wide right. The Giants ran out the clock.

"I was in the game, and I thought it was good," Shugart said. "In fact, we were all cheering and some of the Giants had even taken off their helmets and thrown them down. All of a sudden, people realized that the official had called the kick no good. Pictures later shown in the newspaper proved it to be good."

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Next came the 1940 campaign, when the Redskins posted a franchise-record nine wins against two losses. But the team's horrific championship-game performance against the Bears tainted the season – and left the Redskins seething.

"We really wanted to get even with the Bears," Shugart said. "We hated them because of that tremendous score they ran up. Of course, we never liked them anyhow."

Washington's chance for revenge came in the 1942 championship game before a sellout crowd of 36,000 at Griffith Stadium. In town was a Bears team riding an 18-game winning streak – and one dubbed the "Monsters of the Midway" for its fierce and unrelenting style of play.

One Bears intimidator was lineman George Musso, a future Hall of Famer. For a while, Musso was overwhelming Redskins center George Smith, so Shugart switched with Smith and ended up going face-to-face with Musso, one of several Bears who skimmed the borderline of dirty play, Shugart said.

"Musso wasn't expecting me to block him, and I had a golden opportunity to let him have it," Shugart recalled. "Then he threatened to slug me, and we got into a discussion during a timeout. He said, 'You know what's going to happen?' I said, 'Yea, we'll both get thrown out of the game.' So we settled down and played football instead of throwing punches at each other."

Shugart was a second-team All-Pro in 1943, when the Redskins went 6-3-1 before losing to the Bears in the title game. He quit after the 1944 season when making a salary of \$4,400. A dairy industry student at Iowa State, he'd already worked for the High's company a bit during his playing days and decided to return to High's after the 1944 season. He eventually became part-owner of a High's plant in Baltimore.

Shugart worked at High's for 47 years before retiring in 1986. Along the way, he bought season tickets to Baltimore Colts games starting in 1953. He held onto them until the Colts moved to Indianapolis before the 1984 season. He also owned season tickets to Redskins games for about five years when they played at RFK Stadium. He now holds four Redskins season tickets in the Joe Gibbs section at FedEx Field.

At Shugart's get-away home in the Pocono Mountains in northeastern Pennsylvania, he keeps three footballs in his trophy room, one with Colts signatures from the team that beat the Giants, 23-17, in the famous 1958 championship game; one from the Redskins 1942 team; and one from a 1938 game when Iowa State beat Missouri.

These days, Shugart keeps himself in excellent physical condition. He exercises repeatedly, completing 200 situps each morning, while jogging on the treadmill and lifting weights. He wears a plate in his mouth in light of the hunting accident, an outdoor activity he still pursues with a passion. His house in Joppatown is decorated with heads of wild game – deer, antelope, caribou and bull-elk, among others.

He also stays active with regard to football fraternal organizations. He belongs to the NFL Players Association and the NFL Alumni Association, and wears a ring representing the latter organization. He attends meetings for both groups in Baltimore.

If Shugart were in his prime, could he see himself playing in today's game?

"The only place I'd have a chance would be at linebacker because I had some speed," he said.

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Shugart, Clyde Earl

Iowa State

B: 12/7/1916, Elberon, IA

G-LB-T

6-1, 221

HS: Ames [IA]

Drafted: 1939 Round 15 Was

1939 Was 11

1940 Was 9

1941 Was 11

1942 Was 11

1943 Was 10

1944 Was 4