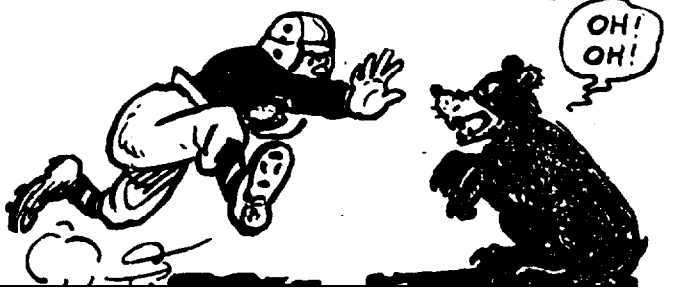

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Gentleman Bill Murray

By Jim Sumner

Virtually any knowledgeable student of college football knows that Duke's greatest football coach was Wallace Wade, who led the Blue Devils from 1931 through 1941 and 1946 through 1950. Wade's fame is understandable. A larger than life figure during the Golden Age of Coaches, Wade was largely responsible for putting Duke football on the map. Yet Wade is not the only Hall of Famer in the Duke coaching pantheon. He was succeeded at Duke by Bill Murray, a soft-spoken Duke alumnus, whose fifteen year tenure was marked by the last extended period of Duke football success.

Bill Murray was born in 1908 in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. At Rocky Mount High School he starred under the tutelage of former Trinity/Duke center Jimmy Simpson. Murray then attended Duke from 1927-1931, where he was coached by Jimmy DeHart. The highlight of Murray's playing career was a spectacular senior season, when he led Duke to an 8-1-2 season. A speedy halfback (he ran sprints for the Duke track team), Murray rushed for an unofficial 1,030 yards, a total since surpassed only by Steve Jones in 1972. Murray was named to the all-Southern team and was voted the team MVP.

In fact Bill Murray was the prototypical Big Man on Campus, seemingly more a character from a youth football novel than an actual person. In 1928 Murray was voted the outstanding member of the freshman class. As a senior he won the Robert E. Lee award as the outstanding member of the graduating class. He was a member of Omnicron Delta Kappa, a prestigious national leadership fraternity, and a member of the Red Friars, a Duke honorary society. So overwhelming was his campus presence that he was elected president of the men's Student Government Association as a senior without opposition. Murray even helped coach the freshman basketball team during his final year. To top it off, Murray married his campus sweetheart, Carolyn Kirby, a coed from Decatur, Georgia. They would have three daughters.

Murray's versatility was put to test shortly after graduation. After all, Big Man on Campus or not, it was the middle of the Great Depression. Therefore, when he was offered the position of head football coach at the Methodist Children's Home in Winston-Salem, Murray didn't object that the job entailed a few extra responsibilities; such as coach of all athletic teams, duties as a history and geography teacher, and the position of dean of men. Last but not least, Murray was to be the school's principal. His football teams at Methodist Children's compiled an outstanding record of 69 wins, 9 losses, and 3 ties, almost all against larger high schools.

Murray's success caught the eye of the University of Delaware, where he

became coach in 1940. Prior to Murray's arrival Delaware had suffered through five consecutive losing seasons, including a dismal 1-7 record in 1939. Yet Murray turned the program around immediately. The Blue Hens went 5-3 in 1940 before beginning a phenomenal three season run. They went 7-0-1 in 1941 and 8-0 in 1942. After a three year suspension because of the war, Delaware resumed its program in 1946 with a 10-0 record. During his time at Delaware Murray also spent time as Athletic Director, and President of the Middle Atlantic States Collegiate Athletic Conference. He finished at Delaware in 1950 with a record of 49-16-2.

Meanwhile, back at Duke, Wallace Wade's Blue Devils were struggling, at least by their pre-war standards, and some critics maintained the game had passed Wade by. After going an uncharacteristic 25-17-4 from 1946 through 1950, Wade retired from coaching in December of 1950 to become commissioner of the Southern Conference. After a month long search Duke named Murray to replace Wade on January 31, 1951. The new Duke coach admitted that his life-long dream had been fulfilled. After a mediocre 5-4-1 season in 1951, Murray got his program in gear. Led by All-American lineman Ed Meadows, the Blue Devils won their first six games of 1952, rising to number six in the AP poll. After consecutive losses to Bobby Dodd's Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets and Navy, Duke won their last two games to finish 8-2 and win the Southern Conference championship. Murray was duly honored as coach of the year.

The next season Duke was a charter member of the new Atlantic Coast Conference. They went 7-2-1 and shared the inaugural ACC championship with mythical national champion Maryland. The two teams did not meet that season. The tie game was a scoreless draw with Navy, while the two losses were 14-13 to Army and 13-10 to Georgia Tech. Thus only a handful of points kept Duke from a perfect season. Duke won the ACC crown outright in 1954, again going 7-2-1. In the season's most exciting game Duke overcame a 20-0 second half deficit to edge nemesis Georgia Tech 21-20. The championship earned Duke an automatic bid to the Orange Bowl where they thrashed overmatched Nebraska 34-7. Not surprisingly, Murray was named ACC coach of the year.

Although this emphatic Orange Bowl victory may have been Murray's high water mark, he continued to keep the program at a high level. In 1955 Duke went 7-2-1 for the third consecutive regular season and again shared the ACC title with Jim Tatum's Maryland Terrapins. In 1956 a brutal schedule was largely responsible for a 5-4-1 season. Three of Duke's losses that season were to nationally ranked teams, including a 33-20 setback to second ranked Tennessee. In 1957 Duke went 6-2-2, led by fullback Wray Carlton (a future AFL star), who rushed for 833 yards. Despite finishing a half-game behind North Carolina State, Duke was given the nod for the Orange Bowl, (State was on NCAA probation), where they squared off against a powerhouse Oklahoma team. Duke kept the game close for three quarters before falling 48-21.

Murray was a firm believer in conservative, fundamental football, and his offensive conservatism is readily apparent from Duke statistics. The most eye-catching stats concern quarterback Sonny Jurgenson. In the National Football League during the 1960's and 1970's, Jurgenson was the definitive strong-armed quarterback, but by contrast, at Duke he was best known as the man who handed the ball off. In 1955 Jurgenson was Duke's leading passer with 37 completions in 69 attempts. The next season Jurgenson was 28 for 59 for 371 yards. From 1951 through 1959 no Duke receiver caught more than 20 passes in a single season.

This increasing predictability began to catch up with Duke by the late 1950's. The lopsided Orange Bowl loss to Oklahoma evidently carried over

into a 5-5 season in 1958, which included a 50-18 loss to eventual national champion Louisiana State. For the first time since 1947 and only the second time since 1929 Duke was outscored for a season, in this case by a 131-128 margin. Things got even worse the next year. Although lineman Mike McGee, later the Duke head coach and now the athletic director at Southern California, won the Outland Trophy as the nation's best lineman, the Blue Devils fell to 4-6. No Duke team had ever lost more games in a season. Even more embarrassing than the sixth place finish in the ACC was the season finale, a 50-0 loss to archrival North Carolina in a nationally televised humiliation. It was also the third time Duke had been shut-out that season. Duke managed only 104 points for the ten game campaign.

From the ashes of the UNC debacle, however, rose a revitalized program. Murray opened up the attack and coached the Blue Devils to three consecutive ACC titles. He moved Tee Moorman outside as a "lonesome end", a formation borrowed from Army, and Moorman caught 54 passes, made All-American, and led Duke into the Cotton Bowl after the 1960 season. Murray's team entered the game on a down note, however. After winning seven of their first eight games Duke suffered season ending losses to UNC and UCLA. The UCLA loss was another one-sided (27-6) loss on national television. Coming after Duke's selection to the Cotton Bowl, this loss subjected their selection committee to some severe criticism. Few experts gave Duke much of a chance against Arkansas and their superstar Lance Alworth. A 49 yard punt return late in the third quarter by Alworth gave Arkansas a 6-0 lead. The extra point was blocked, however. Duke tied the game late in the final period on a Moorman touchdown reception, capping an eighteen play drive. The PAT gave Duke a 7-6 lead and a fumble by Alworth on the subsequent kickoff return sewed up Duke's win.

Duke repeated as ACC champs with a 7-3 record in 1961, which included a season-ending 37-13 shellacking of Notre Dame. The next season, 1962, saw arguably the best Duke team of the post-World War II period. Led by All-American lineman Jean Berry, halfback Jay Wilkinson (son of Bud) and young fullback Mike Curtis, the Blue Devils started the season with a nationally televised match in the Los Angeles Coliseum against unranked but dangerous Southern Cal. The Trojans edged the Blue Devils 14-7 in a hard-fought match, and went on to an undefeated season and the mythical national championship. Duke followed with victories over South Carolina, Florida, and California, a 20-9 loss to Georgia Tech, and an undefeated ACC season, while Murray added another conference coach of the year award. With an 8-2 record, they were invited to the Gator Bowl, but citing fatigue, the Duke seniors voted to decline the invitation.

Duke was again unable to sustain this success. Murray's last three seasons (1963-65) were 5-4-1, 4-5-1, and 6-4. Several factors were making it increasingly difficult for Duke to compete at their accustomed level. Like other Southern programs during this period, including all ACC teams, Duke was racially segregated. The absence of black players clearly placed Duke at a competitive disadvantage against programs like Southern Cal. Further limiting the recruiting pool were conference policies that mandated higher academic standards for recruits, especially a SAT minimum of 800 for incoming recruits. Thus, the ACC suffered a general decline relative to other conferences, as seen by the general lack of conference participation in post-season bowl games during the middle 1960's.

Also, as Duke's academic stature increased through the 1960's, so did the academic community's ambivalence towards big-time college football. This sentiment reached a peak in 1969 when the Duke Academic Council recommended that the school withdraw from the ACC and award scholarships only on a need basis. Although the university never acted on this recommendation, it is easy to see how this discussion could have adverse consequences for the football program. Indeed, Duke's peculiar decision to follow Murray with Tom Harp, who had compiled a mediocre record at Cornell, can best be understood in this context. Harp's Ivy League credentials were apparently more important than his football credentials.

Murray's last game at Duke was a 34-7 victory over North Carolina. After the game he told a stunned Blue Devil squad that he was leaving coaching to become executive secretary of the 5,000 member American Football Coaches Association. Murray had long been an active member of the AFCA and had served as its president in 1962. He held the position of executive secretary until his retirement in 1982. The AFCA's most visible activity was its annual summer College All-Star Game, since discontinued. The association had other responsibilities, however, including clinics, guidebooks, and yearbooks. Murray was also chairman of the AFCA's Ethics Committee. In addition during this period he was also a member of the Board of Directors of the National Football Hall of Fame and the national president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. In all of these roles Murray was best known as a positive force for ethics in college football. In fact his concern for ethics and morality in college football led to his nickname of "Gentleman Bill".

Some indication of Murray's stature can be seen in the awards he received. The Touchdown Club of New York honored him in 1968 for his numerous contributions to college football. Four years later the AFCA presented him its prestigious Amos Alonzo Stagg award, given for lifetime contributions. Murray was elected a member of the National Football Hall of Fame, the Duke Hall of Fame, the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame, the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame, and the University of Delaware Hall of Fame. In 1985 the AFCA dedicated its "Guidebook to Championship Football Drills" to Murray, while in 1988 Duke University named its new football office building the Murray Building.

Bill Murray died in Durham in 1986, having witnessed two decades of declining on-field Duke football fortunes. Perhaps Murray's record comes up short compared to that of Wallace Wade. However, no other Duke coach has been able to achieve the success that Murray achieved. His final Duke totals included five outright conference championships, two co-champions, eight top twenty teams, four conference coach of the year awards, three bowl games, and thirteen All-Americans. His Duke record was 93-51-9, his combined Delaware-Duke college record was 142-67-11, and his career record including high school, an exceptional 211-76-14. The fact he compiled this record without a hint of scandal and, always a touch of class further enhances Murray's considerable stature.

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** On Sept 26, 1906 the Carlisle Indians hosted Villanova in one of the first games played between major teams that had prepared to use the new forward passing rules. An immense crowd of "football authorities" were in attendance. The game was particularly wide open and there was a fair amount of passing done as Carlisle prevailed 6-0 on Littleboy's TD. But the over 100 experts in attendance "were unfavorably impressed inasmuch as they believe the new rules tend to effeminate the game."