

Leland "Bunky" Morris, '37



"Bunky" Morris was born in Norwich, on October 30, 1919, the eldest son of Emma and John Morris. They resided on the corner of Sheldon and Adelaide Streets—near to where Dad worked as a conductor for the O. & W. railroad. Norwich was a busy little 'berg' during Bunky's early

years, but the ensuing market crash and Depression made life difficult. Money was scarce and boys turned into men at an early age. Bunky and his mates were no exception. They congregated as a group on Park St. as the 'River Rats' and Bunky was often observed alone booting a football back and forth at the East Main St. School.

In high school the personable Bunky was voted 'class clown' and displayed a variety of interests from 'Chi Alpha' and 'Prom Committee' to tickets and magazine sales. Young Morris's interest in sports belied his small stature. His athletic endeavors included football, baseball, basketball, boxing and tumbling. He even had time to participate in intramural sports. Despite his diminutive size (115 lbs.) he was excellent in all, surely not a "one trick Pony". However, his most noted accomplishments came between the goal posts.

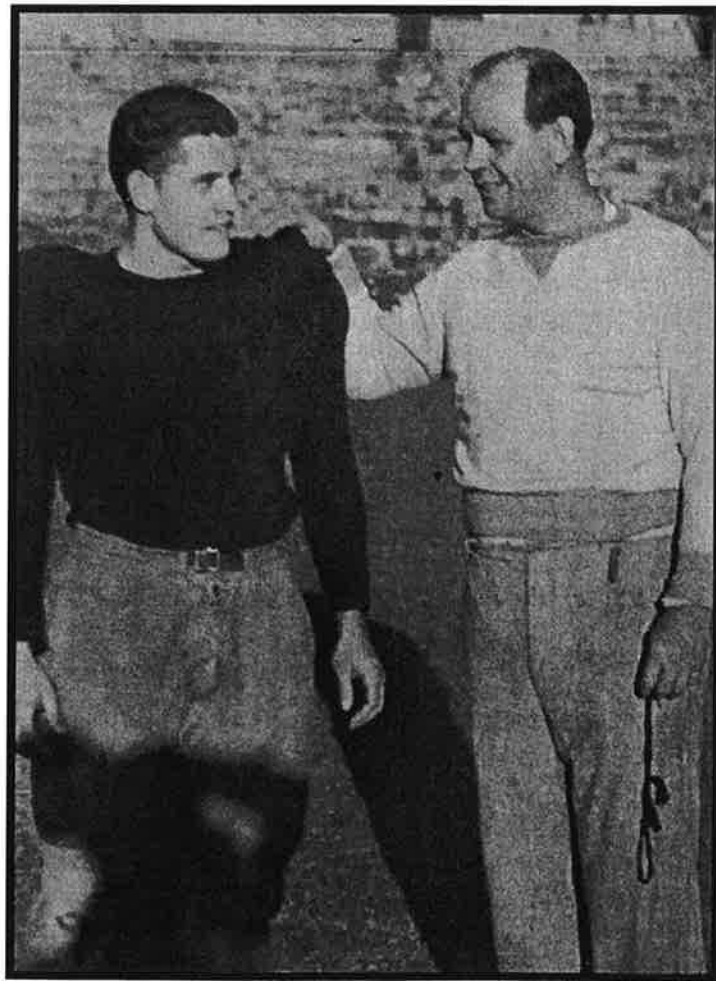
Bunky was an integral part of the unblemished 1937 campaign. Their undefeated, untied and unscored upon season ranks with the film *Hoosiers* as a classic. Bunky was the 2nd leading scorer behind his big buddy and running mate Toots, despite not kicking the extra points for the Purple. That duty was assigned to Jim Rotundo, even though Bunky did the punting; his long punts (whenever needed) gave the Tornado good field position all season.

The team was loaded with experienced veterans (some post grads), excellent athletes, and the depth of three solid teams. A cautious optimism was in the air. Some of the rules were different (limited substitution, shifting of positions, post grad eligibility, etc.), but all teams played by the same. In a time when men worked all day for a dollar, Bunky and mates had to scramble to find the \$1.50 required for injury insurance. With Coach Beyer at the helm and Perry Browne punching the keys for the local paper, the dream season was ready. Coach B. even suggested that the team might want to make their own training rules.

The season unfolded with Q. B. supreme Bert Palmatier barking the signals (coaches had to abstain). The Tornado was not big, but they were tough and deep. Bunky's

quickness and shiftiness was the perfect complement to teammate Toots's battering-ram gallops in an opening 24-0 rout of Kingston.

Perry Browne's article stated, "Morris provides game's biggest thrill . . . the speedy and elusive Morris ripped off a 53-yard T. D. run" which outdid his previous 43-yard run in a loss the previous year. Strong team efforts were displayed in convincing shutouts at Cortland and J. C. the next two weeks. Morris's versatility enabled him to make valuable contributions. He was more than a 'triple threat' (running, passing, kicking and receiving). The fourth game (Bingo) was the big test to keep the unblemished season alive. The Tornado's goal line stand was amazing; just as amazing was the subsequent series with Toots ripping off an 87-yard T. D., using Bunky as a decoy. (NHS 25, Bingo 0). The routs continued over Little Falls and Binghamton North. The next victim, Johnstown, 'featured the red-haired mighty mite.' As Perry Browne recorded, "Morris put the Purple in scoring position skirting the right end for 40 yards and the left end for 30 more the next play."



Bunky with Head Syracuse Coach Ossie Solem

The downing of Oneonta the next game (26-0) completed the dream season. In reflection, Beyer stated of Bunky, "He is as fine an athlete that has competed in any sport." Teammate Tom Mirabito recalled Bunky's punting, saying, "For a guy his size, I've never seen anyone kick the ball as far as he did." Probably the toughest competition the Tornado faced all season was from the "2nd team". A mid-season scrimmage bore this out. Season completed, Bunky and Toots were headed to Syracuse University (with a stop at Manlius Prep).

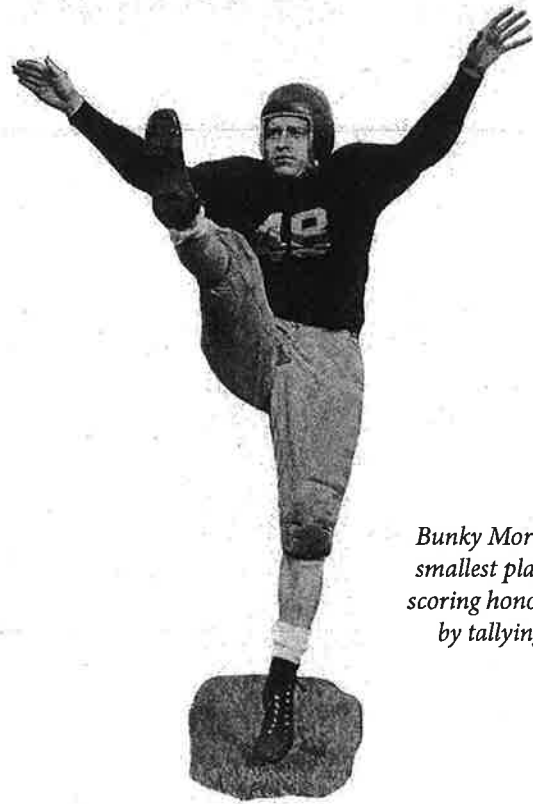
At NHS, Bunky traded his cleats for spikes. Captain and 2nd baseman, Bunky led Coach Giltner's purple pastimers to a 10-1 record, the best in 13 years. Bunk continued baseball after high school, pitching 3 spring games for Syracuse. A good stick with a sure-handed glove, he continued in the Armed Forces, pitching vs. established professional teams and even batting cleanup. Baseball aside, Bunky's calling was football.

At Manlius he excelled. Perry Browne reported, "Mirabito and Morris star for Manlius in 20-0 triumph over local all-stars." S. U. was the next stop for Bunky. His speed and educated toe thrilled many an Orange fan as a Syracuse reporter noted, "Bunky amazes 34,000 with brilliant runback." Some other notable accomplishments of the Norwich ace include:

1. With 30 seconds, he drop-kicked a 23-yard field goal to beat Columbia 3-0. The N.Y. Times reported as follows: "A little fellow named Bunky Morris, his red hair gleaming in the sunlight as he was raised on the shoulders of his S. U. teammates, sent Columbia down to its first defeat...no sports narrative of fiction could have sketched a more typical hero!"
2. With 40 seconds to go, he rescued S. U. by returning a punt 76 yards vs. Colgate for a TD to tie the game at 19. In the same game he punted 14 times for a 56-yd. average.
3. A 76-yd. punt measured from the line of scrimmage.

The list of highlights are many and varied, but all was interrupted by Bunky's call to duty for Uncle Sam. He returned to S. U. and finished. His football merits there had three pro teams calling. Bunky signed with the Redskins, but his pro career was short-lived due to a severe knee injury. Of all the accomplishments and accolades of a stellar career, Bunky valued and treasured "family" above everything else. He left us in 2015, but will be remembered forever in Norwich in the Hall of Fame.

—Tom Dixon



Bunky Morris, Syracuse's smallest player, won high scoring honors for the year by tallying 39 points.