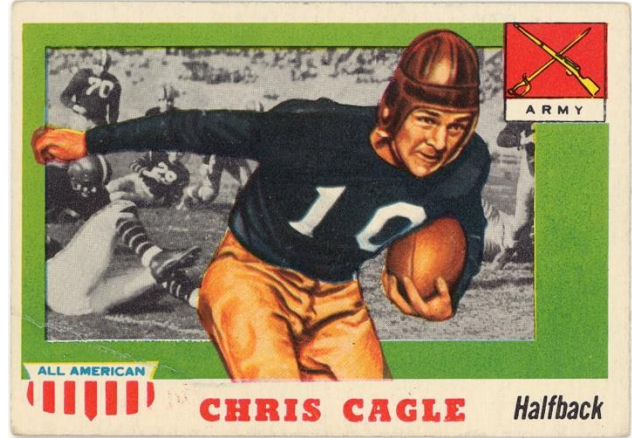


Christian Keener Cagle

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Chris Cagle was born in DeRidder, Louisiana on May 1, 1905. He first appeared in the pages of the New York Times in September of 1926 when he joined the Army football team at West Point. At this time he had already played four years of college football at Southwestern Louisiana, scoring 235 points on touchdowns, extra points and field goals. He was frequently in the headlines during his four years playing for Army, being named an All-American half back the last three of those years. One headline that must have been especially gratifying came in 1928 –



Warner Says Cagle is Greatest Back.

The article went on: “Glenn “Pop” Warner’s mighty Stanford football eleven had a field day with the Army, but the coach of the Californians acquired a healthy respect for Christian Keener Cagle, halfback ace and captain-elect of the Cadets. In fact, Warner rates the Army red-head as the best backfield player he has seen on either side of the continent.”

Chris Cagle’s last headlines in the New York Times came just after Christmas in 1942 when he died of injuries from a fall down a flight of stairs in a New York City subway:

“Red” Cagle Mourned by Sports Leaders

150 Persons Attend Rites for Ex-Football Star of Army

The article noted that among the mourners were Colonel Lawrence (Biff) Jones, who was Cagle’s coach at West Point; John Sims (Shipwreck) Kelly, professional football player who was partner with Cagle at one time in the ownership of the Brooklyn Dodgers professional football team, and Steve Owen, coach of the New York Giants.

In between those stories, from 1926 to 1942, Chris Cagle lived his life largely in the public eye, his ups and downs chronicled in the news of big city papers across America.



His play with Army got his picture on the cover of Time magazine and put him at the center on one of the most iconic moments in football history – the Army v. Notre Dame game of 1928. As Grantland Rice wrote in his book, *The Tumult and the Shouting*:

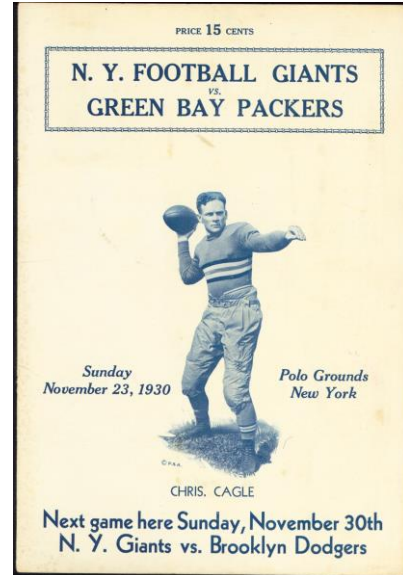
“Army was loaded with talent, and most of all, a red-headed back named Christian Keener (Red) Cagle, who could handle the halfback slot on anybody’s all time eleven.”

The night before the game Rockne and Rice were together and Rice heard the story of George Gipp’s deathbed conversation with the coach: “someday when the odds are against us, ask a Notre Dame team to win one for the Gipper.” The rest is legend – a 0-0 score at half time, the famous speech, Cagle’s brilliant play in the second half, and one last ditch effort when Notre Dame was up 12-6. Rice wrote, *“Cagle covered 65 yards to the Notre Dame 35; he swept 21 yards to the 14, but that was his last shot. He’d played himself off his feet and had to be helped from the field... before the Cadets could fire again the game was over.”*

If one of the highpoints of his college career was the admiration of Pop Warner, one of the low points was certainly his forced resignation on May 13, 1930 from West Point when his marriage to Marion Mumford in 1928 became known to school officials. The news broke on West Point “like a bomb,” according to the Times, and prompted a call for a Congressional investigation four days later to determine if some military officials had helped him conceal his marriage so he could stay on the football team. Interest in these events was so great that when it was rumored Cagle was staying in seclusion at the Astor Hotel in New York, the hotel was forced to hire three extra telephone operators to handle the volume of calls.

When Cagle finally did make a statement, he expressed his regret for leaving West Point and his intentions to head south and take up his duties as football coach at the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College. He remained out of sight to the football fan for only six months before bursting back into the national scene when he signed with the New York Giants for \$7,500 and made his professional debut against the Green Bay Packers on November 23, 1930.

Cagle made the cover that day on the Giants' home program, but he didn't make it to the end of the game. Sportswriter Jack Kofoed explained, "*the Packers were out to stop Cagle – Tom Nash, the 200 pound Green Bay end, went after Mr. Cagle and let go his bulk in much the manner of a diver going off a springboard – the idea was not merely to tackle Cagle, but to flatten him – the maneuver was 40% successful – they did carry Cagle off, but they carried Nash off, too.*"



When the Giants traveled to Philadelphia on December 6, Cagle was again the lead story of the game. After listing all his athletic accomplishments in football, baseball, basketball and track at Southwestern Louisiana and his All-American career at West Point, this personal note is added: "*Cagle is at present 25 years of age. He was born on his father's big cattle farm at Merryville, Louisiana, and there went to school as a youngster. He is the oldest of eight children and was named after Christian Keener, who some 40 years ago was a Methodist Bishop known from one end of Louisiana to the other.*"

Another article in the Frankford program looks forward to the upcoming game on December 13, 1930, between the Giants and the Notre Dame All Stars to aid the unemployed in New York City. It would be the Four Horsemen riding again, this time facing Benny Friedman and Chris Cagle. As it turned out, the game was mostly

Friedman as he rushed for two touchdowns and kicked an extra point in the Giants 22 – 0 victory. Cagle got into the game in the third quarter and made a nice run to set up a touchdown pass from Hap Moran to Glenn Campbell for the final score.



In 1931 and 1932 Cagle returned to play with the Giants, but in August on 1933 he joined in a partnership with Shipwreck Kelly to purchase the Brooklyn Dodgers franchise from William Dwyer for \$25,000 and became an owner/player with that team. They had Benny Friedman as their quarterback, and they hired former Army coach John "Cap" McEwan to bring success to the franchise. McEwan was famous for advice to players like, "*Son, dispatch yourself with the utmost precision and proceed as far as your individual excellence will permit.*"

The story of the Dodgers is well told in the book, *The Brooklyn Dodgers, The Other Bums*, by Roger Godin. But it was not a very successful story in 1933 and 1934. A year after buying in, Cagle sold his interest in the team to Dan Topping, who a decade later bought the Yankees baseball team for \$2.8 million in partnership with Del Webb and Larry MacPhail. Cagle remained as a player with Brooklyn in 1934 and after that became somewhat of a football vagabond playing with the Passaic Red Jackets in 1935 and putting together an All-Star team in 1937.

Nonetheless, he remained an important figure in the New York City sports scene, and along with the likes of John Heisman and Pudge Heffelfinger founded the New York Touchdown Club. It was this club that gave the annual award eventually called the Heisman Trophy.

In Heffelfinger's book, *This Was Football*, he gives a very personal assessment of Cagle's career: *"Until Glen Davis came along later, Cagle ranked in a class all by himself as far as great Army backs were concerned... (but) a jinx seemed to pursue Cagle. He was expelled from the Military Academy in his senior year for marrying without obtaining official permission. Somehow Red could never put his soul into pro football. A disillusioned hero, he tried his hand at selling life insurance, but that didn't work either. Chris was finally killed falling down a subway stairs. It seemed such an incongruous way for a great athlete to die."*

In 1954 Chris Cagle was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame, part of the second class of players so honored. For most collectors he is best known as card 95 in the Topps 1955 All American set, but his "rookie" card was really the 1928 W560 playing card set and he was also in the scarce Rogers Peet multi-sport set in 1929, the Diamond matchbook sets of 1933 and 1934 and the Wheaties Fancy Frames box pictures in 1935.

Other highly collectible items would be his Time magazine cover from September 23, 1929 and programs from his Army career, especially the Notre Dame games at Yankee Stadium.



Rogers Peet Card courtesy of Jeffrey Payne

There were also promotional items produced by the Albert Richard Coat Company of Milwaukee that featured the All-American players from 1930 including Cagle and Nagurski. The hardest to find of these items is a set of 8 x 10 photos of the players in their Albert Richard coats; easier to acquire are booklets like "10 Squad Talks to Boys



by 10 Famous Football Coaches," with articles by Robert Zuppke, Lou Little, and Pop Warner and a centerfold with headshots of the All American team.

During his pro career Cagle was on the cover of a number of New York Giants home programs and had a large photograph in the game program against the Notre Dame All Stars – but those items can be hard to locate for sale and expensive. His autograph rarely comes up for sale, so any correspondence signed by him, especially on official Dodgers letterhead, would be a great find. Occasionally an original wire photo comes up for sale, and they can be

reasonably priced. Any of these items would be a fine addition to a football collection and good remembrance of a player who, according to his Topps All American card, was "faster than a bolt of lightning and just as dangerous to stop."



[Home](#)