Devoted Deacon Grid Fan Boasts 96-Game Streak

By Bob Cole
Staff Reporter

LUMBERTON—Wake Forest coaches and teams may come and go, but Don R. Jackson will always show.

Don, a state probation officer whose office is in Lumberton, holds a record of devotion to Wake Forest football that is probably unmatched. In fact, few colleges can boast of followers such as Don.

He has attended 96 consecutive Wake Forest football games, starting with the 1949 loss to Carolina. To accomplish this, Don had to hitch-hike over 20,000 miles during his undergraduate days. Since graduation, he rides by auto or train, and twice on the plane with the Demon Deacon team.

To fully appreciate Don's devotion, consider that Wake has won 37, lost 50 and tied nine during that streak. Hardly an appealing record.

Travels to Texas
"My longest trips were to Texas," Don recalled, "twice I went to Waco for Baylor games and once to Fort Worth for a Texas Christian game. I also made three trips for Boston College games."

Two of those long trips almost snapped Don's streak. A stubborn gatekeeper almost ended it another time.

"When I hitch-hiked to the TCU game," he said, "I was stuck in Houston—about 150 miles from Fort Worth—two hours before kickoff. But I caught a ride straight through to Fort Worth and arrived only five minutes late."

"That was a trip of contrast. It took me 42 hours to 'thumb' out there, but I flew back with the team in five hours and five minutes."

"A terrible snowstorm hit when I was hitch-hiking to one of the Boston College games. It came when I was on the Merritt Parkway in Connecticut, just outside of New York City. But I made the game."

"Almost Kept Out"

"Once I was almost kept out of a game. That was the George Washington game at Washington, D. C., in 1951. I had cut two classes to go to Washington, but I arrived there with less than $2, not enough for a ticket. When I got to Griffith Stadium, the team had already gone in, and the gatekeeper wouldn't let me go to them."

"So, I went around back and sneaked over the fence. Saw a good game, too. Wake was behind 13-0, but won 27-13."

That was the only game Don ever had to sneak into. He usually paid, and sometimes had a sidelines pass. It was also one of the most thrilling games he ever saw, along with the 1950 win over Carolina (13-7), which was decided in the last minute.

Don can't recall when he's missed a Homecoming game. "It's been at least 15 or 20 years," he said, "I don't keep record of those."

But he does keep record of his streak. He carried a card with him on which he records the games he has attended.

A bachelor at 31, Don mentioned only marriage as a possible threat to his streak. "A married man couldn't get around so easily," he said with a laugh, "but then, I'm not planning to get married soon."

Don is originally from Raleigh, and attended Mars Hill College two years before entering Wake Forest in 1948-49. He graduated with a B.A. in English in 1950 and later received a B.D. from Southeastern Seminary (then on Wake's campus) in 1955.

Short Grid Career
He played some halfback at Mars Hill, but not in high school or at Wake. "I was real skinny, only about 145 pounds," Don said.

Don usually hitch-hiked alone in college, and planned his class schedules so he would have few Saturday classes to cut. What cuts he did take were rationed out when he needed more time for long trips.

Don's interest in Wake Forest was inherited.
"My father attended Wake Forest, and got me interested when I was a boy," Don said, "when my streak built up, he wanted me to see at least 100 games in a row.

"He had a stroke before last year's opener at Maryland, and was in a pretty bad way. But he insisted I go to the game. Ironically, he died on Nov. 5—during the only week that Wake had an open date last season."