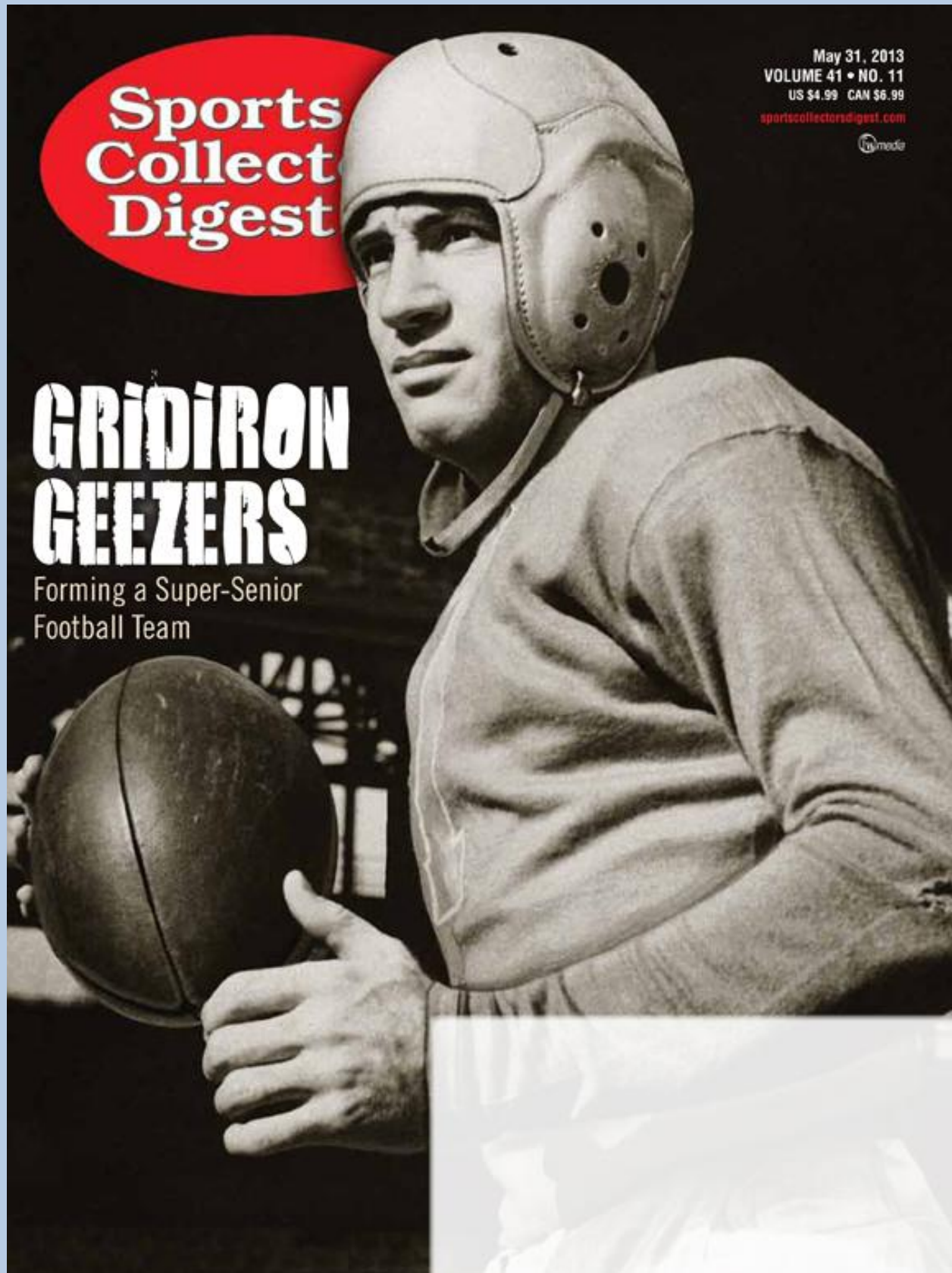


Ace Parker (1912-2013)



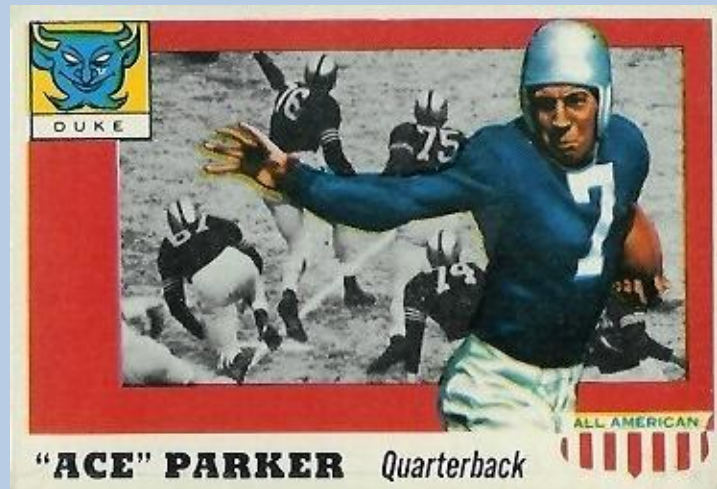
Parker played every minute but four during one football season at Duke, played against Lou Gehrig, outdrove Sam Snead, and was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame

By George Vrechek



Pro Football Hall of Famer Clarence “Ace” Parker was the oldest former NFL player and the second oldest former major league baseball player when he died November 6, 2013. Parker was featured on the cover of *Sports Collectors Digest* on May 31, 2013, and he was the starting quarterback for the fantasy football East squad described in that issue. He was the most experienced quarterback we could find at age 101 to play in a game against other players who had appeared on football cards. He was also featured in February 2013 *SCD* articles about the oldest living former major league baseball players. Parker appeared in the 1955 Topps All-American football set. He also appeared in the 1975 Fleer Immortal Roll set and several other recent sets featuring Hall of Fame members. His autograph is not difficult to find.

His smiling face in a recent photo in front of his home made me feel that I would have enjoyed meeting Parker, if I had the chance. After the article featuring Parker appeared in *SCD*, I sent him a few copies of the issue along with a note in admiration of his achievements. *SCD* readers asked about contacting Parker and I forwarded information. Various national newspapers ran stories on Parker following his death. His hometown paper, *The Virginian-Pilot*, provided the most informative obituary. They mentioned his humor and humility which seemed consistent with anything I had read about Parker.

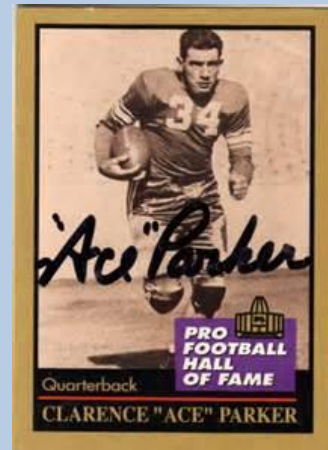


According to *The Virginian-Pilot*, Eddie Webb, president of the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame, knew Parker and commented that, “Ace never kept anything (unfortunately for collectors). He gave it all away.” Parker is survived by a sister, Marion Miller. Parker’s wife of 67 years, Thelma Parker, died in 2009. Suffering pulmonary problems, Parker was admitted to a hospital a month prior to his death. He had lived just off the 15th fairway at Elizabeth Manor Golf and Country Club located at 1 Ace Parker Drive, Portsmouth, Virginia, where he had become a celebrity as “Father Time” playing golf quite decently well into his 90s. Assistant pro Dave Martin said that everyone at the club knew Parker. He had played golf up until about two years ago. Members gathered at the club to honor Parker prior to his funeral.

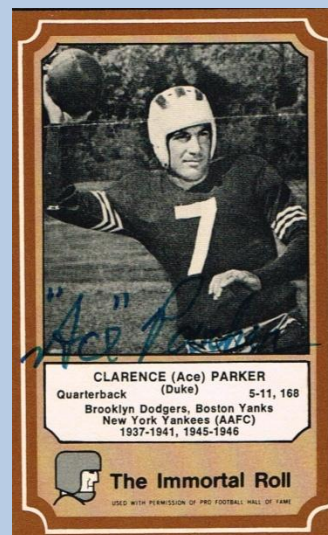
Parker was one of the few surviving links to an earlier era in pro sports. His accomplishments become hard to imagine in today’s climate of total immersion in one sport. When his Churchland High School dropped football, Parker left school during the Depression and went to work for the Belt Line Railroad. He caught the eye of coaches at Wilson High School in Portsmouth. They waived the modest fees

involved in getting Parker back in school where he became a five sport superstar (baseball, football, basketball, track, and golf). When he was 20 years-old he beat Sam Snead in a long-drive contest averaging 303.5 yards per drive. He wasn't hitting ProVIs with Big Berthas either.

Due to his time working, Parker was a 21 year-old high school graduate, which didn't seem to hamper his eligibility in those days. He cut down to playing just baseball, football, and basketball at Duke, starring on each team. He played everywhere without losing a step. As a 5'10", 179-pound football player he set records passing, running, punting, intercepting, kicking, and returning kicks. In one 11-game season he was on the field for all but 4 minutes all year; he was probably selling programs at the time. In a 2008 interview Parker mentioned, "For some reason, I don't know how to tell you, it came natural." "Ace" originated from a college sportswriter calling him "Duke's ace in the hole."



After Duke he wanted to play major league baseball in the worst way and unfortunately he succeeded, playing two years for the Philadelphia Athletics in 1937 and 1938 and hitting .179 in games against Lou Gehrig, Rogers Hornsby, and Bobby Doerr. He did homer in his first at bat, however, on April 30, 1937. Late in the 1937 baseball season, the football Brooklyn Dodgers grabbed him and within a few days installed him as their starting single-wing tailback. He took the Dodgers out of the cellar and made them a contender with his running, passing, and kicking. He was named the MVP of the NFL for his exploits in 1940. He played the first three games of the season with a cumbersome 10-pound brace around his left ankle, an ankle he had broken playing baseball that summer.



He joined the Navy as a lieutenant starting in 1942 through 1945. He returned for a few more years of pro football after the war, played minor league baseball until he was 40, coached baseball and football at Duke University until 1966, and became a pro football scout for the Cardinals and 49ers in his later years. He was inducted into the National Football League Hall of Fame in 1972. He is buried at the Olive Branch Cemetery in Portsmouth, Virginia, (born 5-17-12, died 11-6-13)

The oldest living former NFL player is now Bill Glassford (born 3-8-14) who played for the 1937 Cincinnati Bengals. Connie Marrero (4-25-11) remains the oldest living former major leaguer now followed by Mike Sandlock (10-17-15). The oldest NFL Hall of Fame member is now Charlie Trippi (12-14-22). Parker was the first and only NFL HOFer to make it to 100.

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This article appeared in a December, 2013, SCD; a big OBC thank you to [Sports Collectors Digest \(SCD\)](http://SportsCollectorsDigest.com) for allowing us to reprint George's article here on the OBC site.