

LAY ALL OR NONE'

Triplett, PSU helped change history

By Lauren Boyer
for the CDT

Before "We Are ... Penn State," Wally Triplett remembers another slogan:

"We play all or none."

In 1946, the Penn State football team voted unanimously to cancel a scheduled game against then-segregated University of Miami, rather than play without its two black players, Triplett and Dennie Hoggard.

"I call it 'that team,'" said the former Penn State halfback, now 82. "That tradition of leaving your colored players at home was going to be tolerated no more."

Triplett appeared last week at Penn State's All-Sports Museum to offer his recollections of that

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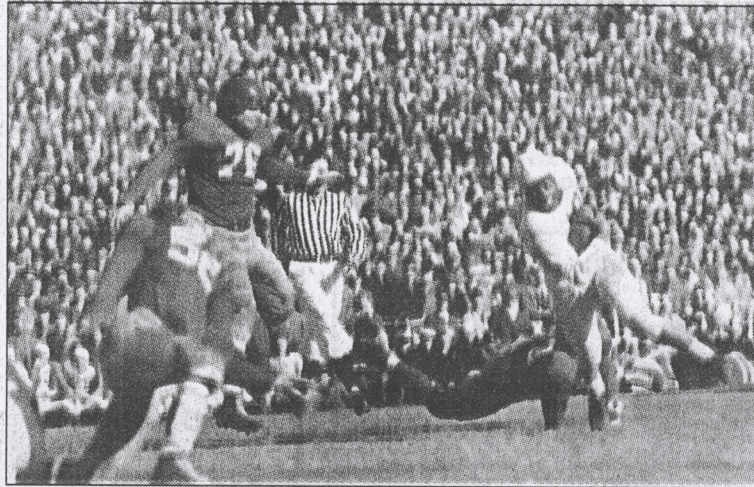


Photo provided/Penn State Archives

Wally Triplett — the first black person drafted in the NFL — also made history with the Nittany Lions. He was one of two black players in the 1948 Cotton Bowl against Southern Methodist University.

FACES OF CHANGE

A look at figures at Penn State who helped break race barriers, **C1**



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Partly sunny

High: **39°** Low: **22°** **A10**



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Triplett made history as a Nittany Lion

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time as part of a series of talks, "Breaking Barriers: The Story and Legacy of African-American Athletes at Penn State," being offered at the museum in honor of Black History Month.

It was 1945 when Triplett became the first black starter on what was then Penn State's varsity football team.

In 1948, Penn State was set to play Southern Methodist University in the Cotton Bowl. Triplett said he remembers that rumors circulated that SMU wanted to meet with Penn State to discuss the team not bringing its black players. During this time, Triplett credits guard Steve Suhey with coining the now-famous Penn State slogan.

"We are Penn State," Triplett recalled Suhey saying. "There will be no meetings."

Triplett traveled to Texas and scored the tying touchdown against SMU. The game ended with a score of 13-13.

Triplett recalls fewer than 20

campus during this time.

"It was sort of a lonely life — a life you had to live carefully," Triplett said. "People didn't think anything of not including you. That's what America was about."

When he wasn't eating broken pretzels at Graham's Cigar Store with "that team," Triplett found other places to be included in State College — such as Lincoln Hall, a five-bedroom boarding house, at 119 N. Barnard St. that became an unofficial dormitory for black men. Triplett said he couldn't afford to live on campus.

Operated by Harry and Rosa Gifford, two fraternity cooks, Lincoln Hall, named after President Abraham Lincoln, was one of a few homes downtown that boarded black students.

"You just expected to hear the answer 'no' when you went somewhere or wanted something," Triplett said.

Triplett couldn't, for example, get his hair cut at the barber shop next to the cigar store on Allen Street or go to a tea house downtown.



Photo provided/Penn State Archives

Wally Triplett paved the way for many black athletes, breaking college football and NFL race barriers.

that you wanted to give fault to, it was just a different world," he said. "The whole of America was that way."

But "that team," he said, wasn't like the rest of America, Triplett said. Many of its members, Triplett said, had just returned from military service, and had new views on segrega-

side of Happy Valley.

Following the spirit of this changing world, Triplett helped charter Penn State's Gamma Nu chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, the oldest black fraternity that has counted Martin Luther King Jr. and Paul Robeson as members.

"I always tell people that when they shake my hand, they are shaking the hand that shook the hand of Paul Robeson," he said, reveling in the achievements of the political activist and actor whom he met in middle school.

Triplett is no low achiever himself. He was recruited by the Detroit Lions in 1949 and was the first black person to be drafted and play in the NFL, which he says, stands for "Negroes Finally Listed."

Most of this success Triplett attributes to "that team" from Penn State — a school that he says doesn't get the credit it deserves for advancing civil rights.

The rest was just luck.

"That's what life's about," he said. "We're just lucky enough