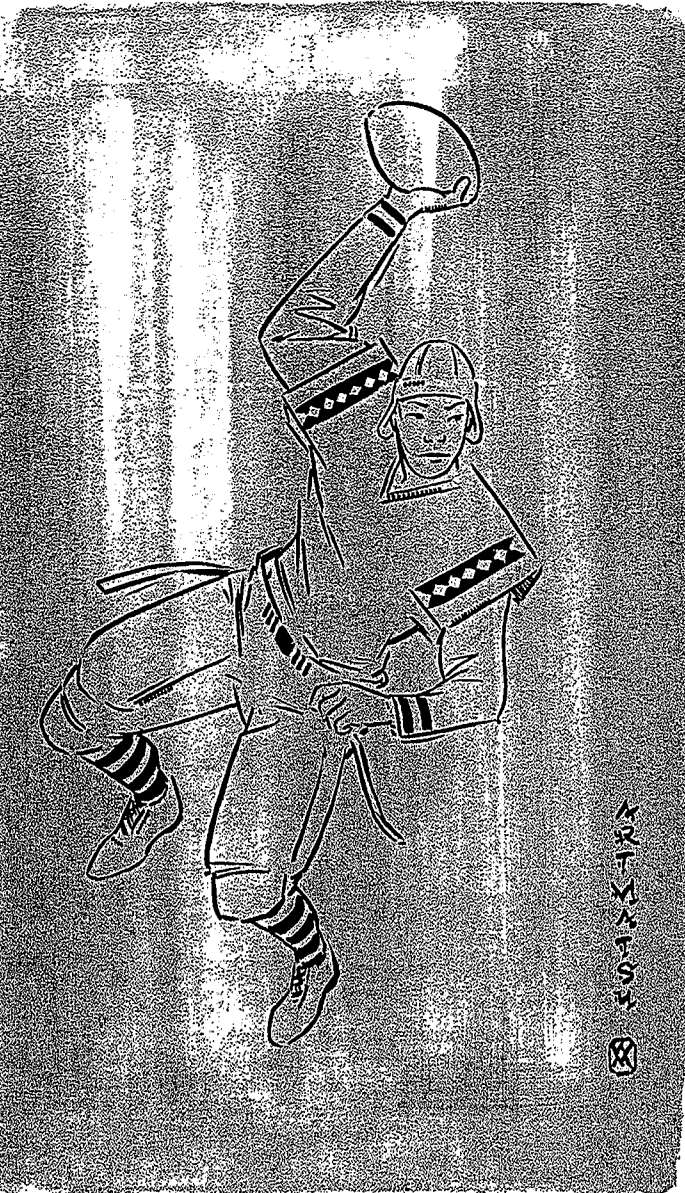


Matsu, Art
WM 1923/08

The Japanese
quarterback is still
fondly remembered
at his alma mater,
William & Mary.
MATT GOTTLIEB
goes in search of Art
Matsu.

It's easy to imagine the pressure Art Matsu faced during the afternoon of December 4, 1926. The William and Mary quarterback and team captain, playing his final game, found his Indians tied with undefeated University of Chattanooga 6-6 in a post-season duel, with the winner earning a strong claim as champions of the South. Matsu always shined in these events, with his throwing arm, speed and prodigious kicking—a big-game player in a career filled with big games—but that gleam always came with a tarnished finish. As a junior, he wowed the press in New York and Boston as W&M scared the daylights out of mighty Harvard, leading 7-0 at halftime, before falling 14-7; two games later, his missed extra point doomed the Tribe to a 14-13 loss to the powerful Haskell Indians; the year before that, the team went down gamely with a 14-7 loss at Navy, not to mention could've-should've-would've games against Syracuse and Columbia.

A four-year star on a quickly rising program, Matsu's career can certainly be judged a success. The Indians posted winning seasons and defeated archrival Richmond (and the Spiders held a 27-7-2 record before the quarterback arrived) every season he attended. Against the strong Northern schools, reporters respected William and Mary's tenacity so much they started calling the team "The Fighting Virginians." Certainly the Tribe always put up a fight, but it went down every time. Perhaps this day would be different. The usual pattern seemed reversed: Down 6-0 at halftime, the Indians tied the score after blocking a punt, recovering the ball and marshalling a touchdown drive. But these games always ended with heartbreak. Now Matsu lined up for a punt at his own 25-yard line. He received the ball—rounder, harder to handle and with much less loft—and booted it. The pigskin soared. And soared. And soared.



Nippon QB

If Matsu is remembered by anyone, it's largely because of one thing. And any reader of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* saw it in the caption beneath his picture November 23, 1923: "MATSU, Jap quarterback." Leaf through the 1970s scrapbook-history *The Great and the Near Great: A Century of Sports in Virginia*, and find that the authors begin the subtitle for William and Mary with "A Japanese quarterback." He's the "the Jap" here, or

even "the tricky Jap quarter back" there. Actually, he was born in Scotland to a Japanese father (usually referred to as an engineer) and a Scottish mother. In his infancy, the family moved to Canada, then to Cleveland, where the younger Matsu drew attention for his football skills but really stood out as a diver, winning a national high school title. The Indians, under ambitious new coach William Trasker, won a recruiting battle with Princeton for the quar-

terback. Trasker's victory earned him a 1920s version of Doug Flutie, a small (5-foot-7, 145-pound) athlete, who succeeded with very good ability and even better smarts.

In a larger sense, Matsu's time at William and Mary bumps against a few contradictions. The public saw his background as unusual, but the 1920s saw a small run of Asian athletes. Walter "Sneeze" Achiu, a Chinese-Hawaiian, starred at the University of Dayton and then became first Asian-American NFL player; Iaro Kishi, known as "The Terrible Jap," moved with his family to Texas when he was a toddler and stood out as a halfback for a Southwest Conference-winning Texas A&M squad; and even in the Commonwealth, Hong Kong's Cato Lee played tennis and ran hurdles for Virginia Tech. A smattering of Chinese students began attending Virginia colleges, especially VMI. But while Matsu attended classes in Williamsburg, Virginia adopted the one-drop Racial Integrity Law of 1924. "It would've been a felony for him to marry a white woman while he was there," said Virginia Tech history professor Peter Wallenstein, an expert on race and identity in the South. While Matsu attended W&M, the state declared the marriage that gave Matsu life illegal. Still, the quarterback earned a reputation as a sharp dresser, and in a picture of the football team atop Lookout Mountain he looks perfectly relaxed with his arm around another player. His smile sticks out in a sea of grim faces.

"Art, because of his ethnic background, believe it or not, was very well received on the campus," says Wilford Kale, author of *Hark Upon the Gale: An Illustrated History of the College of William and Mary* and one of three writers that created *Goal to Goal: 100 Seasons of William and Mary Football*, and the person to whom the school's sports information department refers calls about the program's history. Matsu's campus life matches Kale's assessment: He also played basketball, served as president of the Varsity Club his senior year, sat as a member of the

Senior Council, joined two honors fraternities, gained admittance to a secret society (the B Club) and even took part in a school drag act. Between his junior and senior years, he worked as a Virginia Beach lifeguard.

The punt finally landed in Chattanooga's end zone, a 75-yard boot and, according to later newspaper accounts, the longest in the South that year—possibly in the entire country. Heading into the 2004 season, it still sits two yards behind the program record.

As World War I ended, visitors to William and Mary saw a sleepy place with a small student body, a few buildings and a smattering of professors. Then Julian A.C. Chandler arrived in 1919. More students started attending the nation's second-oldest college, buildings started going up, satellite campuses sprouted in Richmond and Norfolk, the law school opened its doors for the first time since the Civil War and the endowment mushroomed. To further spread the old school's reputation, Chandler, like many ambitious academic minds before and since, figured a strong football team might do the trick. After the school failed to lure the famous John Heisman to Williamsburg as coach, Chandler reeled in J. Wilder Tasker for the 1923 season.

The Indians took a few steps towards better football before Tasker arrived, but when the new headman hit campus things changed dramatically. Tasker knew how to recruit, with contacts across the Northeast and into Ohio. William and Mary traditionally faced Virginia's second-tier football programs such as Richmond, Randolph-Macon and Roanoke. Tasker—armed with his freshman quarterback, a solid team and better recruits heading to Williamsburg—ambitiously upgraded the schedule. The state's best teams—Virginia, Virginia Tech, VMI and Washington and Lee—refused to play schools that used freshmen. So William and Mary headed north after bigger game and even bigger publicity.

The school reveled in its new role as the small Southern school that scored Northern foes. The linemen started getting bigger. Newer, better players such as E. Carlton "Five-Yard" Macon and "Meb" Davis, Matsu's primary target, started arriving on campus. The Indians created a marching band and switched its colors from orange and black to the familiar green, gold and silver in 1923. Some must have



Matsu
Quarterback

grumbled, though, because Goal to Goal used an old quote from Macon. "It's all right to play those games; it's a thrill for the players and it shows that William and Mary is on the map. Don't worry if we don't win them."

A few moments later, the Indians got the ball back, but Chattanooga stalled them at the Mocs' 47-yard line. Teams always punted from here, but with six minutes left, Matsu lined up for a field

goal. Miss it and the Moccasins would have the ball nearly at midfield. A gamble? Absolutely. Crazy? Probably. He dropped the ball into the air, then it started heading down. This was going to be close.

Against their traditional state rivals, the Indians seemed like a whirlwind. W&M nearly captured the state title in Matsu's first year, then snared it in his sophomore, junior and senior seasons. He was a sterling passer when such a thing still seemed a bit daring—people marveled at the Matsu-to-Davis combination—and the quarterback picked apart Virginia foes. Even when the team's line easily out-muscled the Spiders, Tigers and Maroons, the Tribe added a little flair. Robert Harper of *The Richmond Times Dispatch* wrote after William and Mary trounced Richmond by a deceptively close score of 14-0 in Matsu's final regular-season game, "There were double passes, triple passes, everything in football lore save the 'sleeping end.'" As time went on, Matsu became less "the Jap" and more "the little general."

In his final season, the Indians fell three times to Northern foes, but blanked every team south of the Mason-Dixon Line. W&M bounced back from a 10-7 Columbia loss and stopped Wake Forest 13-6. But now the program wanted more. Negotiations started with Washington and Lee for a postseason game, most likely in Richmond, but that fell apart. Then, two days before his last regular-season game, Matsu found out his career held one final act. The Tribe accepted a matchup at Chattanooga, which tied for first in the 26-team Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association.

A 47-yard field goal isn't an easy task for a college kicker now, and certainly not in the days of dead balls, but Matsu's boot cleared the bar. William and Mary 9, Chattanooga 6. Still, a kick doesn't eliminate the ghosts of games past. Mocs' ball.

Matsu, by all accounts, was a solid player, but how good was he? He threw the ball, but not at the rate modern quarterbacks take to the air. He certainly boasted leadership qualities, but that's an intangible factor. The *Times-Dispatch* named him the program's best quarterback of the first 50 years of the 20th century, and in the 1940s, the *New York Sun* put him on William and Mary's all-time team as a second stringer.

"I think Matsu for his era was a remarkable player. His record shows that," Kale says. "And Matsu was respected for his tough playing ability. He was just a tough kid. When you're talented and when you have that extra toughness about you, you get the respect of your peers and your opponents."

Certainly his kicking ability provides the biggest wow factor to his career. Today, a trio of 53-yard field goals tops the school's records. If he stood at today's customary seven yards behind the line of scrimmage, his measures out at 54 yards.

"His ability to dive certainly helped him with kicking. [You've got to] use your legs to get off the board," Kale says. "You can see the one picture we have of him here, he's got his leg above his waist. Hello. I can't get it above my knee."



Chattanooga received the ball and mounted a last drive that marched down the field and seemed poised to give the Mocs the win. Who knows how many Indians felt that "here we go again" feeling. Chattanooga took the ball down to the Indians' 20-yard line, but here William and Mary held firm. The hosts' last-ditch effort fell incomplete past the goal line. The Fighting Virginians returned home to a heroes' welcome.

Matsu graduated with a degree in Business Administration and Economics, and his career is simply a frenzy of activity. The next year he coached the freshmen football team, swimming and golf. He later worked for National Cash Register, then joined the Dayton Triangles for the 1928 season, becoming William and Mary's first pro. After one-year coaching stints at Asheville (N.C.) High School and Richmond's Benedictine, he joined Rutgers' coaching staff when Tasker took over the Scarlet Knights in 1931 and stayed on for 24 years. Frank Burns, a star Rutgers quarterback during the late 1940s and later the program's most successful head coach, said, "He was a master of offensive football, a true innovator."

Matsu moved to southern Arizona in 1960, worked in real estate, drafted a background study into the region's over-population and returned to football as a scout for Arizona State's brutal Frank Kush. When he died as an 83-year-old in 1987, he could look back on a full life with a wife, two children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Heaven knows what Matsu thought when he read his plaudits back in Williamsburg; he held a reputation for deflecting praise. "Captain Matsu literally finished in a blaze of glory," an anonymous columnist wrote in the school's Flat Hat newspaper, "and soared to meteoric heights in the fitting climax to such a career as he has experienced."

W&M dipped to a losing record the year after Matsu graduated, but rebounded to produce strong teams through the '20s and early '30s. The Indians fielded their best teams in the '40s and early '50s and today easily hold the claim to the strongest history among the state's I-AA programs. From coaches such as Lou Holtz and Marv Levy to players such as Lou Creekmur and Darren Sharper, Matsu serves as a fountainhead.

And in deference to a long-ago edition of Flat Hat, perhaps that's tribute enough.

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