

“Crazy Legs Hirsh”: 1923-2004

Elroy Hirsch was a Hall of Fame receiver who helped revolutionize the pro game. Later, he served as the athletic director at Wisconsin for nearly two decades, lifting the program from turmoil. "Hirsch ran like a demented duck. His crazy legs were gyrating in six different directions all at the same time during a 61-yard touchdown run that solidified the win." The description became a fitting moniker for one of the best athletes ever to come out of Wisconsin. Born June 17, 1923 in Wausau, he played only one season at the University of Wisconsin. In 1942, he rushed for 786 yards in helping the Badgers to an 8-1-1 mark. His Number 40 is one of only 4 numbers the Badgers have retired.

Hirsch then joined the marines in World War II and was sent to the University of Michigan for training. He showed his all-around athletic prowess at Ann Arbor, becoming the only Michigan athlete ever to letter in 4 different sports in one year: basketball, track, baseball and football. Football was his specialty, and after the war, he joined the Chicago Rockets of the All-America Football conference from 1946-1948. Hirsch then moved onto to the Los Angeles Rams of the NFL, where he became the game's first true Wide Receiver. Along with fellow receiver Tom Fears, Hirsch teamed with quarterbacks Bob Waterfield and Norm Van Brocklin for one of the league's great aerial shows. Hirsh was a key part of a revolutionary three-end offense that featured the forward pass. Hirsh went to three consecutive Pro Bowls as one of the NFL's most exciting players.

In 1951, he caught 66 passes for 1,495 yards and 17 touchdowns in helping lead the Rams to the title. Van Brocklin said of Hirsch: "Talk about the gent who zigged when he should have zagged. Roy also has a zog and a couple of varieties of zug when he's under full steam."

During a career that ran through 1957, he amassed 7,029 receiving yards and 60 touchdowns. He was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1968. "He used to swing underneath the pass and take it in over his head. It made it very difficult for anyone to defend him." Elroy Hirsch was one of the most popular players during his day, helping to establish football in Los Angeles. He had such a following that he played himself in a 1953 movie, "*Crazy Legs*." He also appeared in two other movies.

After his football career, Elroy Hirsch achieved notoriety for his 18-year tenure as Wisconsin's athletic director. Even after his retirement in 1987, Hirsch remained a fixture in Wisconsin. His annual Crazy Legs Run attracts more than 10,000 runners, serving as one of the Badgers' best fundraisers.

"There has never been a more loved and admired ambassador for Badgers sports than Elroy Hirsch," Wisconsin athletic director Pat Richter said. "His charismatic and charming personality brought smiles to so many Badger fans. He loved life, loved people, and loved the Badgers."

Hirsh later did the voice over work for the animated Jetsons character with the same name.

Hirsch was survived by his wife Ruth, son Winn and daughter Patty Malmquist.

[<http://www.sportsecyclopedia.com/memorial/rams/crazylegs.html>]

