



## Harry Van Surdam

Harry Van Surdam was born on September 28, 1881, the son of Henderson S. Van Surdam and the former Frances Leonard. His father worked at the Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Machine Company as a traffic clerk in the main office and was also a musician. He started the summer band concerts in Wood Park and the present bandstand is named for Harry's father.

Harry learned to play the clarinet and piano and was in his father's band at age 12. He graduated from Hoosick Falls High School in 1898 and continued playing music for the next two years. He decided to attend Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut in September 1901. Harry started playing football and became captain of the freshman team. He played varsity football for the next three years as quarterback at 138 pounds. In

1904, he was named to the sub All-American team and in 1905 was named the Walter Camp All-American Quarterback.

Upon graduation, Harry became coach of the football team at Marietta College in Ohio where he devised "one of the first legal forward pass plays ever used by a college team," according to a 1966 *Oklahoma Daily* article.

Harry went on to become coach of the University of the South and then El Paso Military Institute. The institute was forced to close in 1910, and Harry spearheaded a campaign to save the school and turn it over to the state of Texas. It later became the University of Texas at El Paso.

When World War I broke out, Harry was past draft age but became a balloon observer. In 1923, he took an orchestra around the world playing on boats and at famous hotels. In 1926, he married Beulah, a daughter of the owners of the Munson Ocean Lines.

Harry officiated football for more than 40 years, and he was a regular at the Cotton Bowl and Sugar Bowl. He was a 52-year member of the Football Coaches Association.

Among Harry's many honors was the Helms award for completing 70 years of activity in football. He helped organize the Touchdown Clubs of New York and Washington. In 1972, he was placed in the National Football Hall of Fame. For 30 years he wrote a sports column for the Hoosick Falls *Standard Press* called "Traveling Sports Reporter." On September 28, 1981, the community honored Harry with a parade and concert in Wood Park. On May 20, 1982, a plaque was mounted on the band stand in Wood's Park to celebrate his 100th birthday. Harry Van Surdam died eight days later.