

Van Galder piles up awards in Ute career

by GARY LESSER
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Don Van Galder has won so many awards, broken so many records and had so many superlatives tossed his way it would be mind-boggling to figure out just how good he is. To begin to fantasize what kind of an individual Don is should not be the difficult part, but what might be tough is to fully comprehend how valuable he is to the team.

If you could take any player on any team in the country, and say he is the one person who by his mere presence makes the team go, and by his absence makes the team stop, Utah's Don "Brownie" Van Galder would have to be that

player. His value has been exemplified on numerous occasions this year, and both press and public have been quick to take notice.

"I'd have to say the very fact that we lost the two critical games when he was out speaks for itself," said head football coach Bill Meek. "Above and beyond his playing ability, his leadership is the most important thing we missed while he was gone."

His teammates voted him "most inspirational" player on the squad, and the coaches selected him the outstanding offensive back. Twice he was named Western Athletic Conference offensive player of the week (for the New Mexico and

Arizona games), and was also picked as the quarterback on the all-WAC team. In addition, Van Galder was named the league's most valuable player, quite an honor for someone who doesn't set his goals that high. "You don't really think about those kind of things; they're too far away to set as goals. I didn't think I'd get it, but it was a good pick," said the wispy 6-3, 175 pound star, who has been selected Chronicle player-of-the-year.

Just about everybody calls him "Brownie," but seemingly nobody knows why, even Don himself. "When I was little that's what they called me. My dad's nickname when he was little was Brownie and when I was young he was away getting his masters at 'SC, so my mom started calling me that because she knew my dad would like it when he came back," Van Galder related.

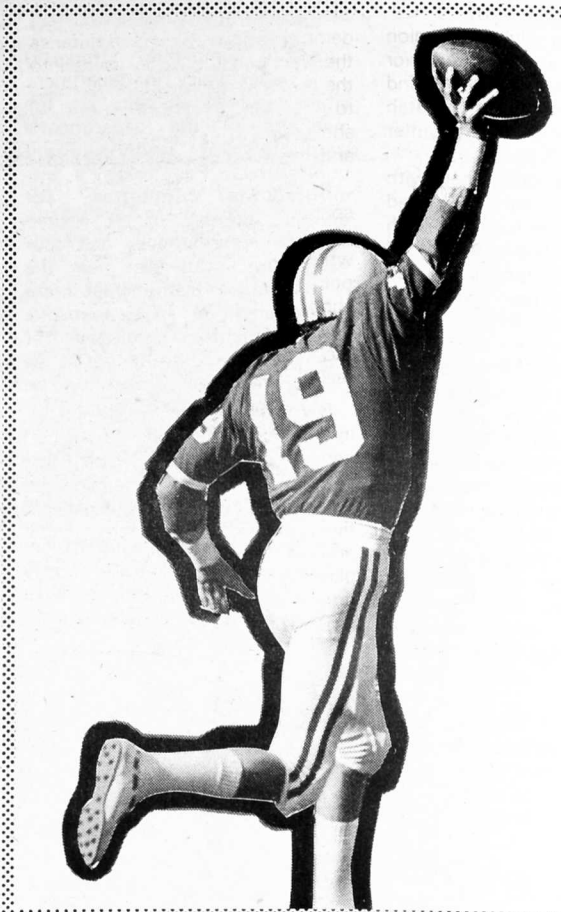
As is true with all ballplayers, Brownie's season was full of ups and downs. He said a low spot was when the team was 0-2 after the Iowa State game, but even lower into the dregs of discouragement was when he got hurt and had to miss several late season games. "And it was plenty disappointing not being able to go to the Fiesta Bowl," he said.

But it was a season of ups too, like the opening win against Washington state, beating Arizona, and making all-conference. The real highlight, however, was his touchdown in the Arizona game with ten seconds left and Utah trailing 27-21. "I knew it'd be close, but I knew I'd make it. Jackie Wallace (AU's all-WAC cornerback) was the guy who hit me low and flipped me into the end zone, and if he'd have jumped when I did, I might not have made it. But I did, so..."

The drive that set up that score was the high point of his career, with Van Galder moving the Utes 67 yards in less than two minutes with no time-outs remaining. Brownie says he gets his biggest thrills "on the field when 'Everything is riding on the line.' Calling plays is all a part of it, and Van Galder often calls a different one than the one Coach Meek

prescribed. Now and then, he runs a play that even the team isn't expecting.

A good case in point was in the New Mexico game when the Utes were on the Lobo one-yard line, and Van Galder had called a straight ahead-wedge play with the ball going to fullback Mike Conway (well, that's what Brownie told them). Brownie, however, had something different in mind. When the ball was snapped, he put the ball in Conway's belly, then pulled it out just before Mike headed into the line. Hiding the ball by his side on as good a fake as you'd ever want to see from a magician, Van Galder then waited for a Lobo lineman to brush by him not seeing the ball. All that was left to do was walk unmolested into the end zone for six points while holding the ball



high in triumph (see accompanying photo).

It seems natural that Van Galder would be a star; after all, he comes from a completely football oriented family. Starting with the oldest and working backwards, his brothers did the following: Gary played wide receiver at Stanford and participated in the East-West Shrine game; Bob played quarterback at Fresno State, Dick did the same, and Tim played QB at Iowa State and now plays for the St. Louis Cardinals of the National Football League.

Van Galder was born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, where his father was a high school coach. The Van Galders then moved to Fresno, California, where they lived for seven years while dad was head coach at Fresno State. The family moved back to Wisconsin when Mr. Van Galder became backfield coach at the University of Wisconsin. They moved back to Fresno when Mr. Van Galder died. Don played basketball and baseball at Fresno high in addition to football, but has always liked basketball best. "It's my favorite sport to play and watch," said Brownie.

Don decided on attending the University because he liked Coach Jim LaRue, the man who recruited him. "It came down to choosing between here and Wisconsin, and I almost didn't come here because Groth (Ray, then the Utah QB) was here and they didn't pass, so I thought twice about coming here."

As far as professional aspirations go, Brownie says he won't play ice hockey, but might consider offers in lacrosse. On the serious side though, he added, "We will have to wait till next year. You never know, a lot of things can happen." He brought up the possibility of playing in the Canadian Football League, where the game is more wide open.

In the off season, Brownie likes to play music, not with an instrument though. He says that is his only regret--that he never took up an instrument. "I also like to go up to the mountains--I've never seen mountains because I've always lived in the valley."

One of Van Galder's biggest complaints about Utah is that football players, unless they are married, must live in the dorms. "Geez," he says, "The groupies are practically hanging from the rafters. But there's no way to get out

(continued on page 1)



Chronicle player of the year--Don "Brownie" Van Galder

--Photo by Ron Kesler