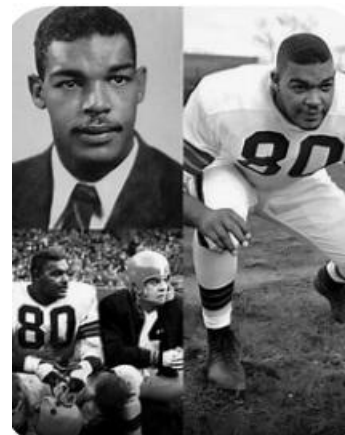


1949 AAFC Player Profile: Len Ford

Leonard Guy Ford Jr. (February 18, 1926 – March 14, 1972) was an American professional football player who was an offensive and defensive end from 1948 to 1958. He played college football for the University of Michigan and professional football for the Los Angeles Dons, Cleveland Browns and Green Bay Packers. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1976 and the University of Michigan Athletic Hall of Honor in 1996.

Ford was passed over in all 32 rounds of the 1948 NFL draft, but was selected by the Los Angeles Dons of the rival All-America Football Conference (AAFC), where he played for two seasons as an offensive and defensive end.

After the AAFC dissolved in 1949, Ford played eight seasons as a defensive end for the Cleveland Browns. During those eight seasons, the Browns advanced to the NFL championship game seven times, won three championships, and allowed the fewest points



in the NFL six times. Ford was one of the dominant defensive players of his era, having a rare combination of size and speed that helped him disrupt opposing offenses and force fumbles. He was selected as a first-team All-NFL player five times and played in four Pro Bowls. He was also one of two defensive ends named to the National Football League 1950s All-Decade Team.

Ford was traded to the Packers in 1958 but played there just one season before retiring. He worked for the Detroit recreation

department from 1963 to 1972. He suffered a heart attack and died in 1972 at age 46.

1949 AAFC.

Despite his accomplishments in college, Ford was passed over in all 32 rounds of the 1948 NFL draft during a time when most professional teams did not employ blacks. (The following year, George Taliaferro became the first black player to be selected in an NFL draft.) He was selected, however, by the Los Angeles Dons of the rival All-America Football Conference (AAFC) in the third round of the 1948 AAFC Draft. He signed with the Dons in April 1948.



Playing as a right end opposite Joe Aguirre, Ford had 31 catches for 598 yards and seven touchdowns in 1948. As was the case at Michigan, Ford also worked on defense and was one of the AAFC's most successful pass-rushers. The Dons, meanwhile, finished the regular season with a 7–7 record, good for third place in the AAFC West. Ford played basketball in the off-season for the New York Renaissance, an all-black professional team in the National Basketball League. He did not play basketball at Michigan, the Big Ten Conference having maintained racial segregation of basketball until 1950.

Ford had 36 catches for 577 yards and one touchdown in 1949, while the Dons fell to 4–8. The AAFC struggled financially during Ford's time with the Dons. Its teams competed with NFL franchises for fans' attention and player talent – the Dons shared a city with the NFL's Los Angeles Rams. By late 1949, team owners came to an agreement under which the Cleveland Browns, San Francisco 49ers and Baltimore Colts joined the NFL and the rest of the league's teams, including the Dons, folded.