

1949 AAFC Player Profile: Lou “The Toe” Groza

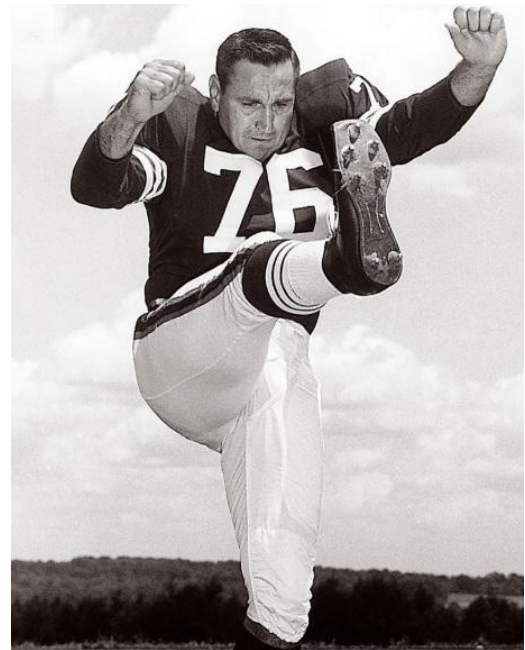
Louis Roy Groza (January 25, 1924 – November 29, 2000), nicknamed "the Toe", was an American professional football player. An offensive tackle and placekicker, he spent his entire career for the Cleveland Browns in the All-America Football Conference (AAFC) and National Football League (NFL). Groza was professional football's career kicking and points leader when he retired after the 1967 season. He played in 21 seasons for the Browns, helping the team to win eight league championships in that span. Groza's accuracy and strength as a kicker influenced the development of place-kicking as a specialty; he could kick field goals from beyond 50 yards (46 m) at a time when attempts from that distance were a rarity. He set numerous records for distance and number of field goals kicked during his career.

Groza retired briefly after the 1959 season due to a back injury but returned in 1961. He was part of a 1964 team that won another NFL championship. Groza retired for good after the 1967 season. Later in life, he ran an insurance business and served as a team ambassador for the Browns. He was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1974. In 1992, the Palm Beach County Sports Commission named the Lou Groza Award after him. The award is given annually to the country's best college placekicker. Groza died in 2000 of a heart attack.



1946 - 1949 AAFC.

Following his discharge from military service, Groza reported to the Browns' training camp in Bowling Green, Ohio. He showed up in army fatigues carrying all his clothes in a duffel bag. There, he joined quarterback Otto Graham, fullback Marion Motley and receivers Dante Lavelli and Mac Speedie to form the core of the new team's offense. Groza was mainly a placekicker in his first two years with the Browns, but he played a big part in the team's early success. In his first season, he set a professional football record for both field goals and extra points. The Browns, meanwhile, advanced to the AAFC championship against the New York Yankees. Groza sprained his ankle in the game and missed three field goals, but Cleveland won 14–9. Behind a powerful offense led by Graham, Motley and Lavelli, the Browns finished the 1947 season with a 12–1–1 record and made it back to the championship game. Groza, however, was injured and could only watch as the team won its second championship in a row.



Further success followed for the Browns and Groza, who was nicknamed "the Toe" by a sportswriter for his kicking abilities. Groza led the league in field goals, and the team won all of its games in 1948, recording professional football's first perfect season. As he grew into a star placekicker, Groza began playing regularly at offensive tackle beginning in 1948. One highlight of that year for

Groza was a 53-yard field goal against the AAFC's Brooklyn Dodgers that was then the longest kick in pro football history. With Groza, the Browns could attempt field goals at a range many other teams could not. "Anywhere from 40 to 50 yards (37 to 46 m), he was a weapon", Tommy James, Groza's holder for eight years, later said. Another championship win followed in 1949, but the AAFC dissolved after the season, and the Browns were among three teams absorbed by the more established National Football League (NFL).