

## **AAFC Player Profile: Mac Speedie**

Mac Curtis Speedie (January 12, 1920 – March 5, 1993) was an American professional football end who played for the Cleveland Browns in the All-America Football Conference (AAFC) and the National Football League (NFL) for seven years before joining the Saskatchewan

Roughriders in Canada.

He later served for two years as head coach of the American Football League's Denver

Broncos. A tall and quick runner whose awkward gait helped him deceive defenders

and get open, Speedie led his league in receptions four times during his career and was selected as a first-team All-Pro six times. His career average of 800 yards per season was not surpassed until two decades after his retirement, and his per-game average of 50 yards went unequalled for 20 years after he left the game.

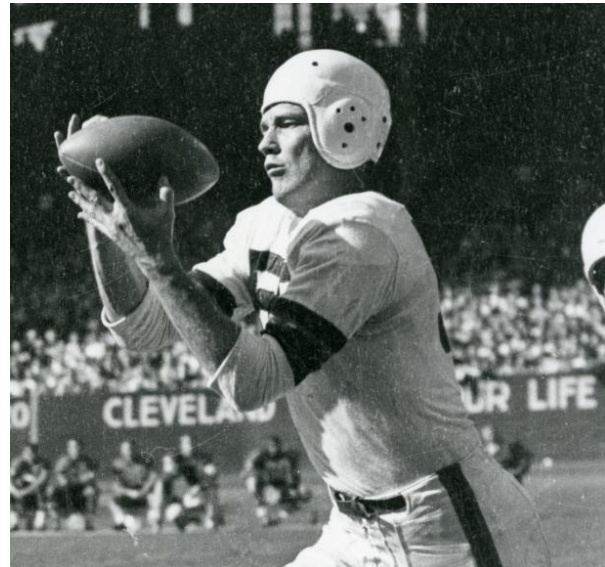
Speedie grew up in Utah, where he overcame Perthes Disease to become a standout as a hurdler on his high school track team and a halfback on the football team. He attended the University of Utah, where he continued to excel at track and football before entering the military in 1942 during World War II. He spent four years in the service before joining the Browns in 1946, where he played as an end opposite quarterback Otto Graham, fullback Marion Motley and fellow receiver Dante Lavelli. The Browns, a new team in the AAFC,



won the league championship every year between 1946 and 1949. The Browns merged into the NFL in 1950 after the AAFC disbanded, and Speedie continued to succeed as the team won another league championship. After two more years with the Browns, however, Speedie left the team for the Western Interprovincial Football Union (WIFU) amid a conflict with Paul Brown, Cleveland's head coach. He played two full seasons in the WIFU and one game in the third season before leaving professional football.

### **1946 -1948 AAFC.**

Speedie was drafted by the National Football League's Detroit Lions in the 15th round of the 1942 draft. Fred Mandel, the owner of the Lions, visited him at Fort Warren and offered a contract worth \$2,800 a year. Speedie wanted to sign immediately, but Mandel preferred to wait until after the war. By the time the war drew to a close in 1945, however, Speedie was considering signing with the Chicago Rockets, a team in the new All-America



Football Conference (AAFC). He was pursued by the Rockets after playing well against a team at Marine Corps Air Station El Toro from which many of the Rockets' players were drawn. Speedie was also spotted by Paul Brown, who had been the head coach of a military team at Great Lakes Naval Station that played against the Broncos. Brown, who was starting a new AAFC team called the Cleveland

Browns, sent a friend named Jackie Ranen to sign Speedie for \$7,000 in 1946.

With the Browns, Speedie quickly became an important part of an offensive attack that featured quarterback Otto Graham, fullback Marion Motley and fellow receiver Dante Lavelli. He was enthusiastic, energetic and fast, posing a challenge for defenders assigned to cover him. He had an unusual running style because of his bout with Perthes Disease, which Lavelli said, "gave him an odd gait in which he could fake plays without even trying". Speedie caught the first touchdown in the AAFC's existence in the Browns' opening game against the Miami Seahawks, a 44–0 win. The Browns ended the regular season with a 12–2 record, winning the AAFC West division and earning a spot in the league championship. During the week before the championship game against the New York Yankees, Speedie and two teammates, Lou Rymkus and team captain Jim Daniell were arrested after an argument with Cleveland police. Daniell was driving a car with Rymkus and Speedie as passengers as they waited for Speedie's wife to return on a flight from Utah. A police car was blocking Daniell's way, and he honked the horn, leading to the confrontation and arrests. Brown kicked Daniell off of the team, but Speedie and Rymkus were not punished by the team; they were, however, held in custody for several hours and charged with creating a disturbance.

The Browns went on to win the championship game in 1946, helped by Speedie's six catches for 71 yards. Speedie led the league in yards per catch, with 23.5, and scored seven touchdowns. After the season, he was named along with several teammates to the AAFC's all-league team.

The 1947 season was another strong one for Speedie. In a game against the Buffalo Bills, he tied a professional football record by catching a throw from Graham and running 99 yards for a touchdown. He finished the season as the league leader in receptions and receiving yards as the Browns won another championship. His 67 catches and 1,146 receiving yards, in fact, were the second-best in pro football history after Don Hutson of the Green Bay Packers, who caught 1,211 yards in 1940. Speedie was named by news outlets as a first-team All-Pro. Speedie's success in 1947 came as he, Graham and Lavelli gelled as a passing and receiving unit, having studied hours of tape and worked on their technique and coordination. Speedie studied how defensive backs moved their feet and tried to break into the open by exploiting missteps. They experimented with screen passes and made modifications to common receiving routes to exploit the weaknesses of defenses.

The Browns had a perfect season the following year, winning the championship for a third straight time. Speedie led the league in receiving and was named an All-Pro again. The 1949 season brought another championship and another All-Pro season for Speedie, who led the league in receptions for the third year in a row. He had 228 receiving yards in a game against the Yankees, which remains a Browns record. Tom Landry, a Yankees cornerback who went on to coach the Dallas Cowboys, was assigned to cover Speedie and called it "the most embarrassing athletic performance of my entire life". The AAFC dissolved after the 1949 season and the Browns, along with two other teams, were absorbed by the more established

NFL. Speedie was the AAFC's all-time leader in receptions and receiving yards, with 3,554.