

OBITUARIES



Family photo

After a career at Atlanta's Tech High School and two years in the Navy, **Gene Chandler** led the Georgia Bulldogs to the Sugar Bowl in 1947, Gator Bowl in '48 and Orange Bowl in '49.

STOCKBRIDGE

Gene Chandler, 80, football star at UGA in 1940s

As a defensive star for Atlanta's Tech High School and the University of Georgia's football squads, Gene Chandler terrorized opponents with his speed, tenacity and bone-crushing tackles. There's more.

"Gene was the Hollywood version of what a football player was supposed to look like: tall, blond, nice-looking in a rugged sort of way, very fit, very muscular and on top of it all a nice guy," said Dick Yelvington of Lake Charles, La., who played with Mr. Chandler at the university in the 1940s. "He had unusual speed. He could overhaul a guy who thought Gene was out of the play and knock him into the nickel seats."

At Tech High, where he played center and linebacker, Mr. Chandler was chosen All-Atlanta, All-State and All-Southern. In 1943 the Atlanta Touchdown Club named him lineman of the year.

"I have been watching high school football for 60 years, and without a doubt he was the finest high school lineman I ever saw," said sports columnist Gene Asher, who covered prep sports for The Atlanta Journal 1957-62. "He was fast, quick, agile and a devastating tackler," Mr. Asher wrote in a Georgia Trend column in 2003 that is reprinted in his book "Legends."

"He was so fast that when he snapped the ball on punts, he would beat the ball down the field and patiently wait for the safety man to catch it. Then he would crash into him with such force that he would often cause a fumble."

Thanks to Mr. Chandler's formidable presence, Tech High was not even scored upon until its seventh game in 1943, said his teammate D.L. Claborn of Sandy Springs. "Gene was the best high school lineman probably that ever lived," Mr.

Claborn added.

Ernest Eugene Chandler Jr., 80, of Stockbridge died at Henry Medical Center on Tuesday of problems with his small intestines. The body was cremated. Visitation is 5 p.m. today at Horis A. Ward Funeral Home, Fairview Chapel.

After two years in the Navy during World War II, Mr. Chandler came to UGA in 1946. He played linebacker his first two years, then switched to defensive end.

He was such a force that during his freshman year coach Wally Butts would tell his squad: "You better not be standing around when Gene

Chandler is on the field. He will make you wish you played your football somewhere else," Mr. Asher said.

He helped lead the Bulldogs to the Sugar Bowl in 1947, the Gator Bowl in 1948 and the Orange Bowl in 1949.

"Down low, head up, he was like a snake, coiled and ready to strike. He fought off or evaded the best blockers in the SEC and was named the most valuable lineman on the 1949 Bulldog team," Mr. Asher said.

Upon graduating from UGA, he briefly played professionally in the All-America Football Conference before it disbanded. He coached high school football in South Georgia, then played semipro ball several years with the Atlanta Spartans.

In the late 1950s, Mr. Chandler joined his brother Ed in the insurance business, soon branching off to run his own State Farm agency in Decatur until he retired in 1988.

He worked out religiously at his home gym. He spent about an hour and a half a day on a routine that focused on weight training, aerobics, and body building.

As a result, decades after he quit playing football, he still maintained his playing size and weight of 6 foot 2, 195 pounds.

"He was quite a looker," said his daughter, Sandra Key of Pine Mountain. "Women said his body was like that of a Greek god."

Other survivors include three grandchildren; and a great-grandson.