

Marlin 'The Magician' Briscoe Is Happy Pro

by Herb Vermaas

Marlin "The Magician" Briscoe, who gave Omaha U. fans many thrills with his scrambling and pinpoint passing, says he once had doubts about his pro career; but is glad he stuck it out.

Briscoe, in a telephone interview from Miami, said he sought offers from pro clubs upon his graduation from then OU, wishing to tryout at quarterback, but was turned down.

Lot of Talent

"I was really frustrated," said Briscoe. "I know I had a lot of talent, but no one in the NFL or the old AFL knew much about me."

Briscoe continued to work out, hoping for an offer somewhere during the summer of 1968. "I felt like giving up at times, but I decided to keep trying. I figured if I kept at it long enough, someone would give me a call, and I was right.

"The Denver Broncos were hard up for a quarterback at the time. They had Steve Tensi, but they weren't sold on him.

Cellar-dweller

"They told me they were willing to give me a tryout at quarterback. And I gladly accepted it. I was really thrilled. It was like a dream come true."

According to the "Magician," life in Denver was not rosy. "The Broncos were a perennial cellar-dweller club when I ar-

rived. They were in sad shape, particularly at quarterback."

"Coach Lou Saban, (now with Buffalo,) had ten quarterbacks in training camp, including myself. It was like a big playpen."

Good Arm

Briscoe notes that Saban finally decided to make Tensi the starter. "He felt Tensi had a good arm, and the size to be a pro quarterback. Besides, the Broncos paid a lot of money to acquire him from San Diego."

Being a benchwarmer was frustrating for Briscoe, but he was glad for having made the team. "Considering all the frustrations I had gone through, it felt great just to be a part of a pro team."

It was not until the ninth game of the '68 season Briscoe saw any action. Steve Tensi got hurt, and Marlin got his chance.

"We played Buffalo and they were a so-so team at that time. I came in and started scrambling around. I hit some passes, and as the game went along I gained confidence."

"We won the game when I hit Floyd Little with a 66 yard scoring strike."

Not Convinced

Unfortunately for Briscoe, Tensi recovered and Saban wasn't convinced he had found a sure quarterback.

"He (Saban) told Tensi and I that both of us would be given an equal chance to win the job. But as it turned out, that was a lot of talk."

"He always talked to Tensi and left me out in the dark about things. So I played out my option during the 1969 season. I was thoroughly disgusted."

Wide Receiver

Briscoe then signed with Buf-

falo as a free agent. The Bills made him a wide receiver, despite his desire to be a quarterback.

"I was really disappointed that the Bills did not give me a shot at quarterback, but I was just glad to make the squad."

If Marlin was disappointed, he didn't show it. He led the American Football Conference in pass receiving in 1970 with 57 catches for 857 yards and six touchdowns.

"O. J. Simpson couldn't believe it when I told him I was not a receiver in college. He really thought I was kidding."

Laughing Stock

But the Bills, like the Broncos, were the laughing stock of the NFL when he was there. And he played out his option again.

Briscoe said it wasn't because Lou Saban came to Buffalo from Denver, but he made it no secret he has never been an admirer of Saban since his Denver days. "I was in dispute with my contract," said Briscoe, "and that was the main reason I left Buffalo."

Traded to Miami

"But adding Lou Saban certainly did not persuade me to stay. So the Bills traded me to Miami where I have been ever since."

"When I came to Miami I was faced with another battle. This time I knew I would never have a shot at quarterback. The Dolphins had Bob Greise, who then was emerging into a star and has been one since."

"They wanted me to be strictly a receiver. I knew the competition would be fierce, but I was determined to make the grade."

Twilley Ahead

"During my first season,

Howard Twilley was ahead of me most of the time. But I got a break, Twilley got hurt during the 1972 season, and I saw extensive action."

Marlin, who has played extensively since, says teaming with Paul Warfield, the Dolphins All-Pro receiver, has been a thrill. "He's so smooth and has made things so easy for our other receivers."

Hopeful

Briscoe, who has been injured lately, is hopeful of returning. "I'd like to get back into the lineup soon. Coach Shula still thinks I have a bright future in the NFL."

Shula isn't the only coach in the NFL who thinks Briscoe is a fine receiver. He certainly has given many defensive backs trouble.

Briscoe says besides playing for Miami, the biggest thrill for him is having played on two Super Bowl championship clubs.

"Believe me, when I left college I wondered whether I would ever play in the NFL, let alone play for a world championship squad."