

For Linebacker-Poets, Annual Award Ceremony a Jarring Hit

by Con Chapman

BEAVER FALLS, Pa. While the attention of the college football world was focused on the Heisman Trophy ceremony in New York last night, this quiet town was nonetheless stuffed like a short-yardage scrum with neckless men reciting deathless verse.

"Milk Train" Crane, number 50 left.

"The Dutton-Shapiro Award is the biggest night of the year for linebacker-poets," says Ed "Milk Train" Crane, middle linebacker on the 1965 Gator Bowl-winning Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets. "We're pretty much shut out of the other poetry competitions because of anti-jock prejudice."



Shapiro: "You think you can run on our goal-line defense, just try it."

First established in 1974 in honor of Tommy Dutton, a two-time small-college All American linebacker at the University of Texas-El Paso, and Karl Shapiro, the fifth poet laureate of the United States, the Dutton-Shapiro Award is the highest accolade available to NCAA poet-linebackers. Dutton felt thwarted in his literary career, producing only the classic "Here I sit all broken-hearted, paid a nickel to crap and only farted" in a locker room stall at halftime of the 1963 Weedwacker Bowl. Shapiro was at one time a professor of English at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and mistakenly wandered into a football game while looking for the entrance to the school's faculty lounge.



"Grrr!"

Linebackers are considered a transitional stage in the development of the human race from its hominid ancestors. "They walk upright like men, and have developed sufficient analytical capacity to call defensive 'stunts' during their playing days," according to Niles Haygood, a biologist. "They are ultimately an evolutionary dead-end because helmet-to-helmet tackles destroy what limited intellectual skills they master."



Johnson: "The over-under on the Patriots-Bears is 38? Take the over!"

As versifiers, their work often recalls the Metaphysical Poets, of whom Samuel Johnson once said "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together, as if blitzing on third down and long and becoming entangled with a left tackle who engages in illegal use of the hands."



"To sing, to soar, and not to let the other team score!"

This year's finalists for the award are J.T. Mack, a 240-pound junior from Georgia's Valdosta State University who broke his school's career tackle record this season, and Mike "Bull Dog" Adamick, a three-time All Conference outside linebacker at North Central Illinois State. Adamick wins the coin toss and decides to go last, and Mack steps to the podium, clears his throat and begins:

*You came through the 2 hole--I'd blitzed and expected you there.
A pulling guard cut down my legs, and all that I could do
Was take you down by might or main, by means foul or fair.
I stuck my helmet into your shoe, and saw stars of red and blue.*



Brooding linebacker-poet assumes three-point stance.

"That's the stuff," Milk Train Crane murmurs from his seat in the back row, "vivid imagery, you know he's been hit hard in the head a few times."

The applause from the assembled audience of retired linebackers is polite but still reserved, knowing they must hear the second half of the contest before rendering judgment.



Adamick removes his poem from the inner pocket of his sports jacket, fiddles nervously with his tie for a moment, then plunges ahead as if shooting the gap to disrupt an option quarterback in a wishbone-offense.

*It was a stunt, a shunt to the left, designed
to force a three-and-out, and make you punt.
We played to stuff the run, you passed from the shotgun,
and all our best-laid game plan was thwarted, undone.*

A hush descends on the crowd, then a few gasps of appreciation are heard, building into an ovation, the hobbled knees of the men slowly hoisting them out of their chairs and onto their feet.



"I believe we have a winner," says Earl "Bud" McAdam, a man credited with inventing the position of linebacker-poet with the Duluth Eskimos, an early professional team. "Rarely have I heard a

work that so deftly combines the poet's craft and the repeated blunt trauma to the head that is the linebacker's lot in life."

