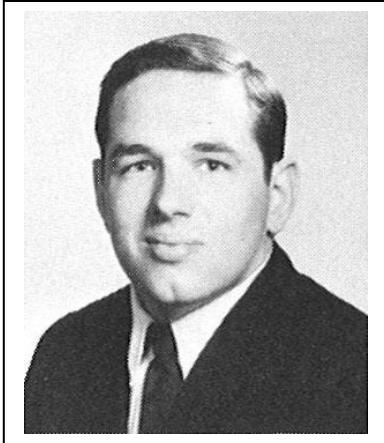


MELVIN (HANK) AUTRY

Football:

Inducted: April 25, 1986



Melvin (Hank) Autry was an outstanding center for Southern Miss during the 1966 through 1968 seasons and his success at that position has been the watermark that players that have followed him have tried to reach.

Offensive linemen in general and centers in particular are difficult to evaluate sometimes by Autry's father Pel, himself a center and a charter member of the Southern Miss Hall of Fame may have explained it best when he put it this way, "There isn't anything you can say about centers. Statistics are not kept on them, and nobody watches them except their coaches, their parents, their girl friends, and the quarterbacks with their hands behind their backsides."

Long time sports information director and Hall of Famer Ace Cleveland use to tell the story about Autry as a center while he was practicing to play in the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Alabama. One of the coaches for Autry's South team was asked if Autry would be making the long snaps in the game—the long snaps being those to the punters and those to the holders for extra point and field goal attempts. The coached reported said no that they wouldn't be able to use him on the long snaps because he's left-handed and he puts the wrong English and wrong spin on the ball.

But as it turned out Autry would make every long snap his South team needed, and made them perfectly, with outstanding left-handed English.

That story perfectly illustrates the type of player that Autry was. There wasn't any doubt that he had the talent to excel and he was coachable. Just show him a technique or something that your team needed to have done, or challenge him in some way and more times than not he would find a way to make it work.

Prior to coming to Southern Miss and following in the footsteps of his father, Autry played football at Hattiesburg (Miss.) High School for another Southern Miss Hall of Famer Reese Snell, and Hank followed his dad and uncle as members of the all-Big Eight Conference team.

During his three-year career at Southern Miss he was a three-year letterman at center and also saw some action at guard. After sharing time in 1966 and 1967 with Bobby Webb, Autry took virtually every snap at center in 1968 and earned a first team spot on the all-South Independent team and was an honorable mention All-American pick. In addition to playing in the Senior Bowl he also was selected to play following his senior season in the North-South Shrine game in Miami, Florida.

He was a 17th round draft pick of the Houston Oilers in the 1969 NFL draft and spent a couple of seasons playing with the team.

Hank and his father, Pel, are unique in the fact that there are few father-son combinations in the Southern Miss Hall of Fame. But like his father, Hank, earned his spot with the talent and skill and hard work throughout his career.