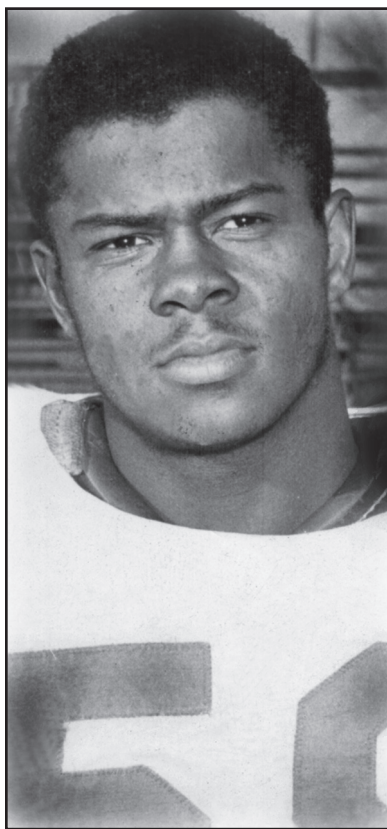


IVORY BENJAMIN

No one's life epitomizes the saga of the Massillon Tiger football hero better than

Ivory Benjamin's. Ivory has savored the highs that come with being Massillon's football idol; and he's experienced life's lows, crashing a few times along the way. Massillon's townspeople have known Ivory at his best *and* at his worst. And after he fought back from adversity—like a Tiger—to put his life back

together, he found that the town of Massillon had been with him all the way.



Ivory Benjamin.

Benjamin was the toast of the town during his two glorious years as Massillon's star running back in 1956 and '57. It was a role he relished. In fact, through 50 years of good times and bad times since his glory days, Benjamin remains secure in his place among Massillon's legendary

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running backs. He puts himself right up at the top.

It's a fact that whenever longtime Massillon fans discuss the greatest running backs in Massillon Tiger history—and the list is long and impressive—Ivory's name is prominent. "My name comes up all the time when they're talkin' about running backs," Benjamin said. "In my time, I was the best, I don't care," he said with a laugh, "I wouldn't put *nobody* in front of me. No no, no, no no. That don't work."

Benjamin's unabashed story telling might come across as egotism from someone else, but Ivory doesn't project the veneer of a braggadocio. It's just Ivory being himself, telling his story the way he sees it. Or, as pitching great Dizzy Dean said, "It ain't braggin' if you can back it up." And Benjamin certainly

"backed it up" during his career at Massillon.

Ivory was "The Show" for the Tigers in 1956 and '57. But Massillon fans almost missed seeing Benjamin perform in high school. He was given an alarming wake up call during his first spring practice against the high school players on the band field, adjacent to Tiger Stadium. The lesson was delivered by a teammate who would go on to be All-American at Ohio State and All-Pro with the Cleveland Browns.

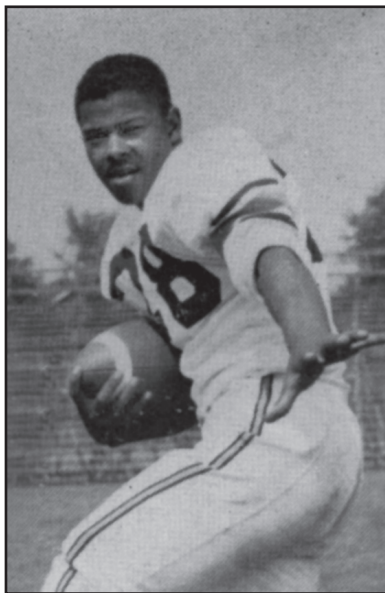
"They gave me a dummy," Benjamin said. "I don't know what the play was, all I know is I was a dummy, holdin' a dummy. I'm a freshman, so big Jim Houston—he's about as big as a door—he comes around and hits me. I went one way, the dummy went the other. When that day was over, I was through

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with football. I made my mind up—now I was a big star in junior high, right. I didn't want to be no big star no more. I'd done been hit by the big boys. Oh, nooooo..."

Benjamin quit going to practice. "Head Coach Tom Harp didn't see me for two days. He comes up to Lorin Andrews Junior High. I was in study hall. Harp comes up to talk to me, chewing that chewing gum of his, (imitating Harp). 'Ivory, I want you to be like Homer Floyd.'

"I told him, 'I don't want to



Ivory Benjamin won All-Ohio and Stark County Player of the Year awards in 1957.

be like Homer Floyd. You know, this ain't my thing. If I'm going to be like anybody, I'm going to be like my brother-in-law, Irvin Crable. But I'm not going to hold no dummy. Jim Houston isn't going to hit me no more.' He told me I didn't have to hold no dummy no more. This was fine. I didn't have to hold no dummy the rest of spring practice."

Harp left after Benjamin's sophomore season and Lee Tressel became Massillon's new head coach. Benjamin liked Tressel and his young son Jim, who grew up to be

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Ohio State's head coach.

"I tell people I knew Jim Tressel and they say, 'Get out.' I said, 'I know the kid, why wouldn't I know him, his dad was my coach.'

Benjamin respected the elder Tressel, but that doesn't mean he didn't have a few run-ins with his mentor. The biggest one came after one of his crowning achievements.

"I got cut the week before the McKinley game," Benjamin said. "That was the night I made high school All-American. I got a telegram from California telling me I'm a high school All-American and, well, I'm happy."

Benjamin celebrated by run-

ning wild against Barberton in a 30-0 Massillon win. He was so happy that he made a big mistake. "I wanted to hurry up and get home," he said. "I wanted to show off because I'd done something a lot of people haven't done. I came home with the

wrong people. Coach Tressel's worried. He's got a right to be. If something happens to me he's re-

sponsible."

Tressel laid down the law to Benjamin on Monday morning. "He called me into his office and told me I'm *done*."

Tressel's tough stance brought the world crashing down for Benjamin. "I was sick. I'm cryin'. I was a big shot, but I'm still cryin'. He

Tressel's tough stance brought the world crashing down for Benjamin.