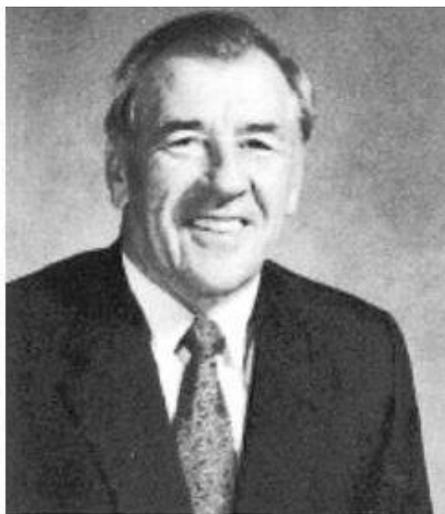




JOHN “POP” POPSON SMA '52



John Popson, son of the late Joseph and Elizabeth Stefanko Popson, entered Staunton Military Academy (SMA) in the fall of 1951 as a post graduate from Swoyersville, PA, where he had been named to the Wyoming Valley (PA) All-Scholastic team in 1950. At SMA he continued his athletic prowess as offense/defense halfback on the Blue-and-Gold championship football team and as catcher on the league-champion baseball team. In May of 1952, John was named *Kablegram* Athlete of the Year. Other competitors for this honor were future NFL players John Morrow and Bill Quinlan (deceased); a future all-conference football great at Wake Forest, Robert Bartholomew (deceased); and quarterback Grover “Bucky” Vest (deceased), from the city of Staunton, who was not only a spirited runner and accurate passer but was also the team’s primary punter – just to name a few of the outstanding athletes at SMA during the 1951-52 school year.

After John completed his year at SMA, he attended Furman College (now Furman University) where he graduated in 1956 as the school’s all-time leading rusher. In 1954 he was the Southern Conference scoring leader with 9 touchdowns in 10 games for 54 points. Also, in 1954 John made the longest kick-off return for Furman – 103 yards and a touchdown. Further, in 1954, John was the kick-off return leader for the year with 10 for 374 yards, and he was named to the All-Southern Conference Team. He was selected in the 1956 NFL draft by the Green Bay Packers, but, while at training camp, he was picked in a different draft – this time by the U.S. Army.

After serving in the military for four years, John was picked up by the Washington Redskins in 1960. Popson had a successful training camp, but he was injured that year during a pre-season game resulting in the termination of his NFL career.

In 1963, however, John began a new career as head of athletics and physical education at the newly-opened Jordan High School in Durham, NC. Popson was charged with creating from scratch an athletics program at the school that did not have a senior class that first year. He remained in that position for three decades and, at various times during his tenure he also coached basketball, baseball, football, and swimming teams. According to the biography written for his induction into that school's Hall of Fame in 2013, "One simply cannot think about Jordan athletics without John Popson coming to mind. The story of Jordan athletics is the story of Coach Popson."

As of 2016, "Pop" Popson is still with Jordan High School after 50 years. Currently he is a driving instructor.

1952 SMA Kablegram (Vol. 35); catalog.e-digitaleditions.com/i/79115-2012-furman-football.../130; issuu.com/soconsports/docs/2013_fb_media_guide/147; Jordon High School (Durham, NC) Hall of Fame Biography of John "Pop" Popson (2013). Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA 59.