

Contact: John Nash

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA PROPOSED NAMING

Action Requested: Recommend the Board approve naming the playing field of Kinnick Stadium “Duke Slater Field” in honor of Duke Slater.

Background: The University of Iowa is seeking approval from the Board of Regents, State of Iowa to name the playing field of Kinnick Stadium in honor of Duke Slater. Slater is one of the greatest players in Iowa football history and was a pioneer, breaking through racial barriers both as a football player and throughout his professional life.

Slater, a 6-foot-2, 210-pound tackle for the Hawkeyes from 1918-21, was the first Black student-athlete in school history to earn All-America honors. A three-time first-team All-Big Ten selection, Slater competed in football and track and field for the Hawkeyes. Iowa had a 7-0 Big Ten record in 1921 to claim the conference title and was named by more than one media outlet as national champion.

Slater was the first Black player inducted to the National Football Foundation College Hall of Fame in 1951 as a member of the inaugural class. He is also a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, being elected as a member of the Centennial Class in 2020. Slater was elected to the National Iowa Varsity Club Hall of Fame in the 1989 inaugural class and in 1951 was one of five members named to the inaugural class of the Iowa Sports Hall of Fame. As part of the 100-year celebration of Iowa football in 1989, he was named a member of Iowa’s all-time football team.

Slater joined the Iowa football program after a successful prep career at Clinton (Iowa) High School. He helped Iowa to an undefeated record in 1921, including a 10-7 victory over Knute Rockne’s Notre Dame team, which ended a 20-game Irish winning streak. In four seasons, Slater helped Iowa post a 23-6-1 record.

Slater turned pro in 1922, joining the Milwaukee Badgers. After two games, he signed with the Rock Island Independents, where he played from 1922-25. Slater completed his career with the Chicago Cardinals (1926-31). Slater starred as a two-way tackle in the NFL for 10 seasons and was the longest tenured Black player during that era. Slater played the full 60 minutes during the historic Thanksgiving Day game in 1929 when Ernie Nevers scored a single-game record 40 points, an NFL record that still stands. Racial bias presumably kept Slater from being named to the official NFL All-Decade Team of the 1920s. However, he was recognized as an All-Decade player of the 1920s in the book “The Pro Football Chronicle.” In total, Slater was named All-BNFL four times (1923, 1925, 1926, 1929), and second-team All-NFL by various outlets in seven of his 10 pro seasons (1923-27, 1929-30).

Slater graduated from law school at Iowa in 1928 and passed the bar that same year while still playing in the NFL. He started a practice in Chicago and became an assistant district attorney and assistant Illinois commerce commissioner. Slater was elected Chicago’s second Black judge in 1948, and in 1960 became the first Black judge to serve on the Superior Court of Chicago. He moved to the Circuit Court of Cook County in 1964.

Slater Residence Hall, a dormitory located on the west side of the UI campus, is named after Slater. A relief of Slater throwing a key block in Iowa’s 1921 win over Notre Dame is featured outside the north end zone of Kinnick Stadium. Slater was born December 9, 1898, in Normal, Illinois. He attended high school in Clinton, Iowa, where he earned all-state honors at left tackle. Slater died Aug. 14, 1966, at the age of 67.