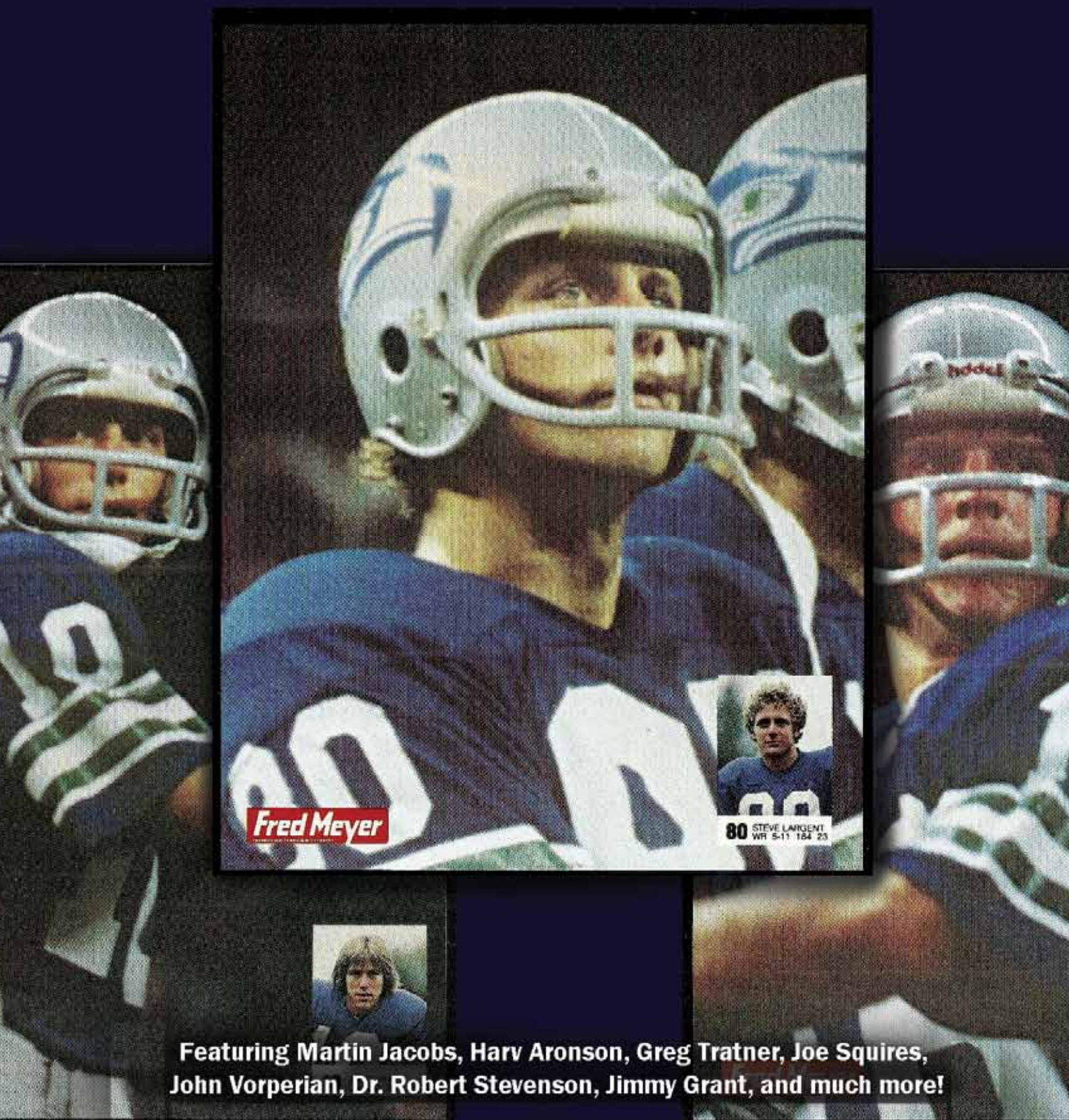


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Gridiron Greats

The Digest Of North American Football And Its Memorabilia

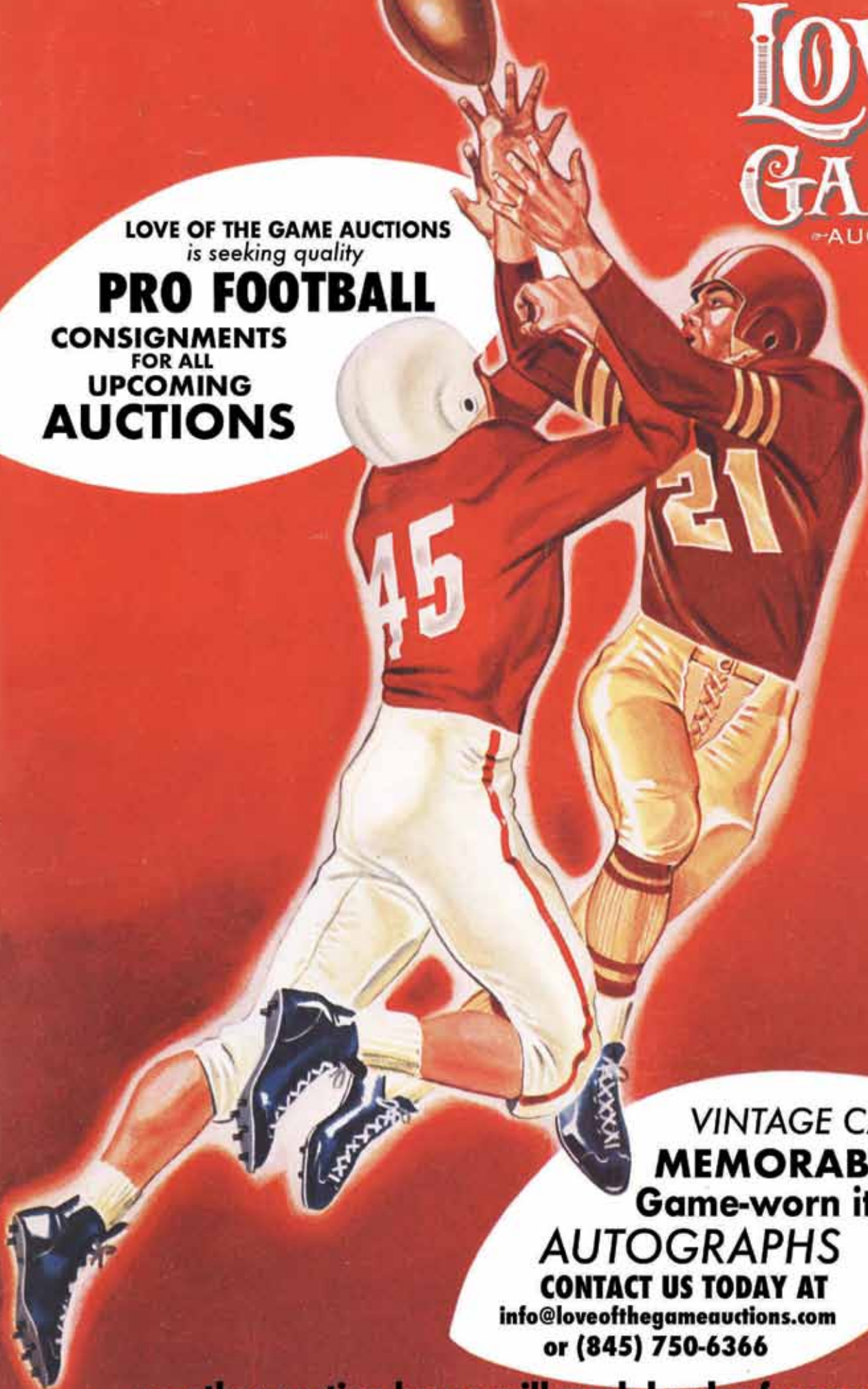


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CONTENTS

Volume 21 Issue 76

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ON THE COVER

1977 Fred Meyer Largent Card

Cover Design by Jared Kraus

3 **JOHN MADDEN- A PURE FOOTBALL ICON**
By Martin Jacobs

9 **BIG BEN**
By Harv Aronson

11 **THE AFL AND NFL CHAMPIONS OF '64 AND '65 MET ON THE BASKETBALL COURT**
By Greg Tranter

14 **FROM BEHIND THE TABLE**
By John Spano

16 **BELOIT COLLEGE FOOTBALL – ALTERS THE BIG 10 AND PERHAPS SAVES THE FREE WORLD**
By Jimmy Grant

19 **REGIONAL FOOTBALL SETS - THE 1977 FRED MEYER SEATTLE SEAHAWKS SET**
By Joe Squires

21 **GARO YEPREMIAN'S FAMOUS FOOTWORK**
By Dr. Robert Stevenson

25 **TORONTO PHANTOMS**
By Gary Cobb

28 **WFLER, NFLER, CFLER, JOHN 'NEVER GIVE UP' TAYLOR**
by John Vorperian

#75
31 **I'M LEFT RIGHTING A WRONG**
By Jared Kraus

33 **ALL HEROES BUT NOT CHAMPIONS PART III**
By Martin Jacobs

48 **THE CLASSIFIEDS**



Editor's Page

Welcome to our 76th issue.

I want to congratulate Jeffery Morley on his final issue of "The Autograph Review" (Vol. 45, #2, #3 a special double issue) that announced his retiring from the active publishing of his unique publication on all things relating to the hobby of autographs for the past 45 years. I first read his fine publication back in the early 1990's when I was publishing my old "Bob Swick's Football Times". He has been a loyal advertiser to Gridiron Greats magazine over the years and I want to wish Jeffery and his wife Betty all the best in their future endeavors whatever and wherever they may be with much good health and happiness. It is an amazing accomplishment in my opinion to be as active in their hobby as they were along with the incredible longevity and enthusiasm they had for publishing their publication for 45 years. TAR was an informative and well-written periodical that myself and many other readers will miss reading in the future. It will be missed.

Speaking of publications my co-host Joe Squires and I discussed publications on a recent podcast as to why they are not collected more. As paper related items in our hobby become more

and more electronic such as tickets, pocket schedules, programs and media guides and as sports magazines as we once knew them no longer are printed what happens to the actual vintage physical ephemera that can still be found and collected? In my collecting opinion football ephemera such as ticket stubs, pocket schedules, programs, yearbooks, media guides, annual publications like Street and Smith's Football Annals, along with the somewhat forgotten old Sport and Sports Illustrated magazines, Football Digest and The Sporting News will be in demand in the future and become very collectible. Some vintage football memorabilia collectors have always felt that football publications are an essential and welcomed addition to their collections. To me they are a great addition to your collection especially if you are a team or individual player collector. I really think the time is now to start adding these to your collections. They are reasonably priced and you are reading and viewing the history of the game as well as preserving them.

Senior Contributing Writer and Football memorabilia and card historian John Spano has his new column premiering in this issue, "From Behind The Table". His new column will share some hobby stories that he has experienced over the past 30 plus years of collecting and offer his perspectives and opinions as a dealer/auction

house owner "from behind the table". I know you will enjoy this new feature.

Many football legends continue to pass and it is has become difficult to keep up with this news. We have always tried to mention both stars and lesser-known players who played football and have passed in our online media and with articles in the magazine. This issue Senior Contributing Writer Martin Jacobs takes a look back at the amazing career of John Madden both on the field and in the broadcasting booth. He was truly an amazing individual both on and off the gridiron.

My good friend John Vorperian has written an informative piece on the career of John Taylor. He was a football player who played in the World Football league for the Portland Storm, in the NFL for the New York Jets and finally in the Canadian Football league for Winnipeg, Montreal and Saskatchewan.

We will be back next issue with our "Super Collector" feature and hopefully I will be visiting many of you at the upcoming National Sports Collectors Convention at the end of July in Atlantic City. I am looking forward to the show.

Enjoy our current issue.

Bob Swick

John Madden - A Pure Football Icon

BY MARTIN JACOBS

Few individuals meant as much to the growth and popularity of professional football as John Madden, whose impact on the game both on and off the field was immeasurable.

Playing Career

Madden was born in Austin, Minnesota in 1936. His football career was short lived, as injuries played a big part. He was a football star in high school then played one season at the College of San Mateo in California in 1954, before he was given a football scholarship to the University of Florida.

He was redshirted, because of a knee injury, and he had a knee operation. In 1955, he transferred to Gray's Harbor College playing in the fall of 1956, before transferring to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, where he played both offense and defense for the Mustangs in 1957. He won all-conference honors at offensive tackle, and he was drafted in the 21st round (244th overall) by the Philadelphia Eagles in 1958. Unfortunately, he suffered an injury to his other knee in his first training camp, ending his playing career without having had an opportunity to play professionally.

Coaching Career

When you mention John Madden's name, you usually think of him as that super-enthusiastic TV commentator on the NFL games who could explain the intricacies of football in a clear and concise manner without talking down to viewers. But many in the Bay Area remember Madden, just as much for his brilliant 10-year run as head coach of the Raiders. Much of the Raiders' legend was built around the teams that Madden coached.

Madden landed his first coaching job in 1960 at Hancock College in Santa Maria, California, staying for four seasons (including two as head coach) before becoming defensive coordinator for San Diego State. He spent three seasons there before leaving for Oakland.

In 1967, Oakland Raiders general manager Al Davis hired Madden as a Linebackers coach. He helped the Raiders reach what would be known as Super Bowl II, where he lost to Vince Lombardi's Green Bay Packers.



#77 Tackle John Madden for Cal Poly

After the 1968 season, Raiders head coach John Rauch left the Raiders for Buffalo, leaving a vacancy in Oakland. General Manager Al Davis did something unusual that off-season. He handed the reins of his team to the young, obscure Raider assistant coach - thirty-two year old Madden - who looked as a big, affable puppy dog of a man who would be the new head coach of the Raiders, who was younger than some of his players. That dynamic, combined with Madden's passionate coaching style and how he treated players endeared him to members of the Raiders roster.

"It was like playing for your big brother," said former quarterback Ken Stabler. "I think his age helped a lot, and that he had so much confidence in us. He let us



On the sidelines for the Raiders

be the people we wanted to be off the field, and he let us be the players we wanted to be on the field.”

As a young head coach of the Raiders, he was quickly known for his sideline out bursts and unruly hair. He led his team to the playoffs eight times in 10 seasons and compiled a .759 winning percentage (103-32-7) which still ranks as the highest of any coach with at least 100 victories.

Former Raiders linebacker Phil Villapiano working for a radio network in New York during an interview with Madden many years ago said, “He loved outrageousness and he appreciated it when you worked your ass off. It was the job you always wanted, because you just had to do the job. NO BS. No politics. No backstabbing. That’s why I loved playing for him. He just let me play football.”

Madden explained, “I had the best players and the best owner a coach could hope to get. But the thing that made it easiest for me was working for one man — Al Davis. Most coaches have to deal with general managers, club administrators, owners. But I only

had to deal with Davis. And that guy lived and breathed football.”

The Raiders won over 90% of their home games at the Oakland Coliseum under Madden’s tenure, while the club had 11 players who later made it to the NFL Hall of Fame. As a matter of fact, Madden had all 11 of those guys together on one Raider team in 1975, so it shouldn’t be a surprise that the Silver and Black won Super Bowl XI the next season in a crushing win over the Vikings.

But along the way, the Raiders earned a reputation of being a “dirty team” featuring “outlaw players who would hit below the belt and break the rules any time they could get away with it,” according to then-Pittsburgh Head Coach Chuck Noll, who once referred to Madden’s Raiders as having a “criminal element.”

Replied Madden, “People always liked to say we were this and we were that. Yeah, we had some dirty players. But so did a lot of other teams. My response to that was always, ‘Yeah, our guys can be dirty. So what are you gonna do about it?’”

Madden gave his players a long leash. He could bark at players and gesticulate and yell on the sidelines. If anything, he was the antithesis of such characters. He usually wore a rumpled short-sleeve shirt with a dark tie that was already loosened by kickoff. And he’d prowl the sidelines during the game, his hair blowing askew



Victory Super Bowl XI

while his big hands gesticulated to his players and to officials when they couldn’t hear him over the din of a noisy crowd.

An example of Madden’s furor at the refs, “Hey, what the heck kind of a call was that? How could you call that an incomplete pass? My guy had two feet in bounds! That was a bad call!”

Television cameramen working the sidelines often were warned to turn off their camera microphones during games, because every other word out of Madden’s mouth was sometimes not exactly PG.

But Madden’s teams always seemed to have a knack for winning close games, whether it was 43-year-old George Blanda kicking field goals, or tight end Dave Casper catching Kenny Stabler passes, or scoring winning touchdowns in unforgettable games like



Madden with his Quarterback on the sidelines

the “Ghost to the Post” double overtime playoff win at Baltimore, or the “Holy Roller” game in San Diego.

But Madden’s booming voice was rarely missed. But, he also allowed his players latitude at a time when many successful coaches were more straight-laced. Guys wore wild clothes and they partied hard, but they were always ready to go by Sunday.

“I only had three rules,” said Madden. “First, be on time for the meetings, and then pay attention when I’m talking. And finally, play like heck on Sunday. And I think all our guys followed those rules pretty well.”

From the media’s standpoint, Madden was a dream. He was rarely offended or upset by a leading question, or what some coaches would call “a stupid question,” and he was anything but the button-down, uptight, cliché-spouting men of that era.

“When you have a good team as we did, a good coach gives the

players a little freedom,” said the late Willie Brown, a former Raiders cornerback. “John liked for us to be in before curfew, but he also knew certain players probably be out after curfew. He didn’t want to know about it; he’d say, ‘Just don’t tell me.’ “

Madden’s first Raiders team finished 12-1-1, but lost to the chiefs in the AFL title game. It was the start of a frustrating trend: In his first seven seasons, the Raiders reached the conference title game five times and lost. They also lost in the divisional round of the 1972 playoffs to the Steelers on one of the most memorable plays in NFL history.

Late in a game the Raiders led 7-6, when Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Terry Bradshaw threw a pass intended for John Fuqua that was broken up by Jack Tatum and deflected to Franco Harris, who ran it in for the winning touchdown in what became known as the “Immaculate Reception.”

During a 2002 broadcast, on the 30th anniversary of the play, Madden recalled: “That was the night before Christmas Eve, and that was a big old lump of coal. And

that big lump of coal has been sitting down there for 30 years.”

It was one of several renowned games that occurred with Madden on the sidelines. In 1974 divisional playoffs, Ken Stabler’s last-minute touchdown to Clarence Davis in a “Sea of Hands” beat the defending champion Miami Dolphins. Madden presided over the “Ghost to the Post”, a two-over-time win over the Colts in the 1977 divisional round, and the “Holy Roller”, Dave Casper’s controversial fumble recovery for a touchdown against the Chargers in the 1978 regular season.

“John always had our backs,” said longtime Raider defensive back George Atkinson, who knocked Pittsburgh receiving star Lynn Swann out of several games with questionable hits. “We played our butts off for that guy. We loved playing for John because he was kind of like a big brother.”

In 1976, the Raiders finished the regular season 13-1, edged the Patriots in the divisional round and beat the Steelers 24-7, in the AFC Championship game. In Super Bowl XI at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, the Raiders defeated the Vikings, 32-14, to capture the team’s first Super Bowl title. In the wake of victory, Madden’s players began to carry him off the field on their shoulders - only to trip over the cameraman.

“I don’t care if I would’ve fell on my head,” Madden said for his “A Football Life” special by NFL

Films in 2017. “You’re so happy that erases anything else.”

Former Raider cornerback Lester Hayes said in 2006. “There are men who can speak to you on Sunday mornings and your pulse rises. That’s a very unique gift coach Madden had. He would speak about war, and it would sound so good, I thought I was listening to the second coming of General S. Patton. It was like that every week.”

When Madden secured his 100th win in 1978, he became the third-youngest coach to do so behind George Halas and Curley Lambeau. Although, after the Raiders missed the playoffs in 1978, he formally retired from coaching.

As he later told NFL Films, “We won every game that there is. Regular-season game, playoff game, championship game, Super Bowl game. All we could do was do it again. And that didn’t excite me anymore.”

Broadcasting Career

Madden’s knowledge of X’s and O’s and unpretentious unrestrained enthusiasm and inventive phrasing found an ideal home in the broadcast booth. He debuted as a color commentator with CBS in 1979, blossoming quickly where he won 16 Emmy awards and revolutionized the craft with his use of the telestrator and array of comic book exclamations such as “boom,” “wham,” and “doink.”



With Legend Pat Summerall in the booth

But his first game, a preseason match-up between the San Francisco 49ers and the Los Angeles Rams, when he was paired in the booth with Bob Costas, was a mess. Luckily, it was only for practice.

“We did the game into the tape. I got the tape, I watched it and it was terrible,” Madden recalled for the New York Daily News. “I thought, ‘Shoot, this isn’t for me.’”

But Madden soon learned to lean on his coaching insight to draw up what was happening in the trenches, popularizing the telestrator device that has become a staple of football broadcasts.

As New York Magazine critic John Leonard wrote of the broadcaster in 1984: “We need him because we are otherwise in danger of confusing fun and games with serious news.”

He worked with a few partners before CBS paired him with play-by-play man Pat Summerall. The two would call games together for

22 years, including eight Super Bowls, with Summerall’s low-key steadiness balancing Madden’s energy.

“We were like John Wayne and Walter Cronkite,” Madden told NFL Films. “I could keep everything on an even keel. I’d be wandering off and the Pat would summarize it in three words. And I’d think, ‘That’s what I was trying to say.’”

Hardly a polished orator, Madden spoke from his heart and fans learned to come along with him. Among the wackier phrases attributed to him:

“Hey, the offensive linemen are the biggest guys on the field. They’re bigger than everybody else, and that’s what makes them the biggest guys on the field.”

“He was standing in the hole waiting for something to develop and WHAP! He got developed!”

“Don’t worry about the horse being blind, just load the wagon.”

While working the NFL’s annual Thanksgiving Day games, Madden would award turkey legs to the game’s top players and along the way introduced fans to the “turducken,” a dish that combined a turkey, duck in chicken in ways unintended by nature. When there were multiple players worthy of rewarding, Madden would bring out a bird with eight drumsticks. He called it his “nuclear turkey.”

His down-to-earth, sometimes rambling style belied a dedication to the craft. Al Michaels, who called games with Madden on “Monday Night Football” told the New York Times in 2009: “He spoiled you. I never had to wonder if John Madden was informed or prepared. John can run with you on anything and engage you on any subject.”

Over his career, Madden worked for all four major networks: CBS (1979-93), Fox (1994-2001) ABC (2002-05) and NBC (2006-08). He was so popular at his peak that when he signed a four-year broadcast contract in 1994 for \$32 million, TV Guide noted that he was making more than any NFL player was making at the time.

Traveling by bus

Some called Madden a modern-day Huckleberry Finn. His life, in many ways, and his “Madden Cruiser” embodied that. He zig-zagged across the country in his cruiser, a custom-made 45-foot, luxury bus complete with a queen-sized mattress, a sauna/shower and up to three plasma TVs.

His cruiser,” like a mullet, was the perfect combination of fun and business. It was the outward expression of Madden’s heart. Often, he would have his driver meander off the main highway so he could check out a mule festival, or look for a pig’s ear sandwich joint Madden had heard about.

Broadcasting games from around the country presented an

extra hurdle for Madden, who swore off airplanes in 1979. Madden insisted it wasn’t fear of flying (aviophobia) but rather claustrophobia, which was inspired by his favorite book, John Steinbeck’s “Travels With Charley: In Search of America.”

When Madden did fly, as soon as the plane’s doors closed, he would feel compelled to get out. In the midst of his third serious panic attack, he told himself: “This is it. If I get down from this one, I’m never going to get on another airplane the rest of my life.” And he didn’t.

Peter King, a writer for Sports Illustrated, hopped aboard for an epic 1990 journey and reported that Madden would awaken, pick up the intercom phone, and ask the driver, “Where are we?”

“This is seeing our country,” Madden once said of his cross-country commutes. “I’ve always said a congressman should ride across country. Not drive, because you can’t see when you drive, you have to ride. You have to be a witness to America.”

While on the bus, Madden selected NFL players for his yearly “All Madden Team” based on hard-nosed, gritty play as much as performance. “My annual pickings for my team were a celebration of the overlooked and underappreciated players. It’s about a guy who’s got a dirty uniform, mud on his face and grass in the ear hole of his helmet,” said Madden.

Video Game King

To younger generations, Madden is perhaps best known as the face of “Madden NFL,” the most popular sports video game franchise of all time.

Harvard graduate Trip Hawkins, the founder of Electronic Arts and a man who played Strat-O-Matic football as a kid, approached Madden in 1984 to ask for his expertise in a new video game venture.

Hawkins wanted a sophisticated new game that allowed users to advanced game-calling. Madden saw a chance to build a coaching tool. The resulting collaboration — “Madden Football” — was released for Apple II in 1988, only for Apple II computers — and evolved into a sensation that has yet to abet.

Madden envisioned the game as a teaching tool for anyone who played it “The game created whatever plays you wanted,” said Madden. “If you’re going to play it, you have to have 11 players and we have to have linemen. Because if you know real, then you also know when it’s not real And I didn’t want anyone to ever think it wasn’t real.”

The game became a staple of football culture. One industry analyst estimated in 2015 that the “Madden NFL” franchise had generated \$4.2 billion in venue over its lifetime. It annually ranks among the top video-selling video game franchises.

Madden, though, missed a chance to parlay his involvement into a grand fortune. Patrick Hruby, who documented the birth of Madden game dynasty, for an ESPN "Outside the Lines" piece, wrote that Hawkins offered Madden a chance to buy as much stock as he wanted at the IPO price. Instead, Madden pointed sternly at Hawkins and said: "I gave you my time. I'm not giving you my money."

From 1989 to 1999, EA's share price went from \$7.50 to \$70. "That was the dumbest thing I ever did in my life," Madden told Hruby with a laugh.

A Hall of Famer

Madden was selected into the Hall of Fame with the Class of 2006. He went on the basis of his coaching mark, but voters have since said that Madden was worthy of enshrinement based on his post-career impact alone.

"If you think about it, I've never held a job in my life. I went from being an NFL player to a coach to a broadcaster. I haven't worked a day in my life," said Madden.

Former Raiders owner Al Davis was the presenter at his induction.

"Time never really stops for the great ones," Davis said. "We wrap them in a cloak of immortality and remember what great people they were. Madden loved the game. He loved this league. He loved the AFL and the NFL, and especially his players. He was football."

"When I think of a person of sports who is worthy of the term, 'larger than life,' I have always thought of John. And I always will," said Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

Sidebar:

For the Record:

Madden was a man of many talents. But, what he wanted most was that he wanted to be best known as a "coach". He insisted that the Hall of Fame voters evaluate him as a coach rather than his years as a pioneering broadcaster, product pitchman, book author, and the face of EA Sports video-game juggernaut.

"Just win, baby!" was his signature motto. But, when it came to Canton, he was a coach and teacher, period. His 75.9 win percentage was the highest of any coach with at least 100 victories. Still, Madden waited 22 years before he got the

phone call that he was selected to the Hall of Fame in 2006. Some of his enshrinement comments were memorable.

Said Madden during his speech, "I was lucky enough to be carried off the field after we won Super Bowl XI. Today feels like the second time in my life that I'm being carried off the shoulders of others. Yet instead of off the field, it's into the Hall of Fame. Instead of five or six guys today, I ride on the shoulders of hundreds of friends, coaches, players, colleagues, family."

Commented former colleague Chris Collinsworth. "If you love football, John Madden was probably part of a reason why. He was a coach first and foremost. He was always fired up! He was an emotional guy, and he was not afraid to show that - A football icon for sure."

Martin Jacobs is a senior contributor to Gridiron Greats. He welcomes your comments and he can be reached by email at Mjacobs784@aol.com or by writing P.O. Box 223026, San Francisco, CA. 94122

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BIG Ben

BY HARV ARONSON

This year marked the end of an era in the city of Pittsburgh that saw the 18-year career of Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger come to an end with his announcement of retirement. “Big Ben” had an interesting start to his career as a rookie in 2004 as a backup to Tommy Maddox. But when Maddox went down with an injury in just the second game of the season, Roethlisberger entered the game and remained the starter the following week and for the rest of his career as Pittsburgh won its next 14 games in a row advancing to the AFC championship game only to lose to the New England Patriots. That loss prevented Big Ben the opportunity to become the only rookie quarterback in history to win a Super Bowl.

Roethlisberger and the Steelers would eventually get to the Super Bowl three times in the next 18 seasons and win the Lombardi Trophy twice. In concluding his career playing only for the Steelers, Roethlisberger retires holding nearly every Steelers passing record. The consensus is that in five years he will be a first-ballot Hall of Fame inductee.

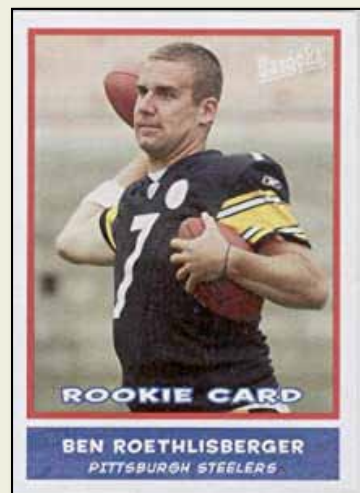
If you hold one of several Ben Roethlisberger rookie trading cards then you possess a special

card as one day Roethlisberger will be wearing the gold jacket handed out to every man that is inducted into the Professional Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

When he was drafted by the Steelers in 2004, he was a bit miffed by the fact that 10 teams had passed him by before Pittsburgh called his name with the 11th overall pick. At this point, I’m sure Big Ben was happy to have landed in the ‘Burgh given the success he experienced as a Steeler. However, in 2004, there are a handful of teams that picked before Pittsburgh that may have kicked themselves over the years for making the mistake of not drafting Ben Roethlisberger.

The Cleveland Browns who seem to have settled in with Baker Mayfield the last few seasons have never really had a franchise-type signal-caller for a very long time. They had the sixth overall pick in 2004’s draft but instead chose Kelvin Winslow who had a sub-par career and ended up with serious legal issues off the field.

The hapless Detroit Lions also could have taken Big Ben...they passed and drafted Roy Williams who while experienced some success did not put together the career that Roethlisberger did. The same



can be said for the Oakland Raiders, Washington Commanders, Atlanta Falcons, Jacksonville Jaguars, and Houston Texans who in that order drafted Robert Gallery, Sean Taylor, DeAngelo Hall, Reggie Williams, and Dunta Robinson. Some of those men had solid careers but those teams have had question marks centered around their starting quarterbacks.

Some call that 2004 draft class the “quarterback class” because not only was Ben Roethlisberger chosen among the top 10 picks so were Eli Manning and Philip Rivers both of who may very well end up in Canton, Ohio as Hall of Fame inductees. Overall, 17 quarterbacks were drafted in 2004 with notable names like Matt Schaub, J.P. Losman, Luke McCown, and Craig Krenzel among them.

It was Roethlisberger, Rivers, and Manning though that had the biggest impact on their respective teams. Rivers was the NFL’s number one overall pick but declined to play with the team that selected him, the San Diego Chargers so he was traded to the New York Giants who had taken Philip Rivers.

ers. The rest is history as between those two quarterbacks and Roethlisberger, four Super Bowl titles have been won (two by Manning two by Big Ben).

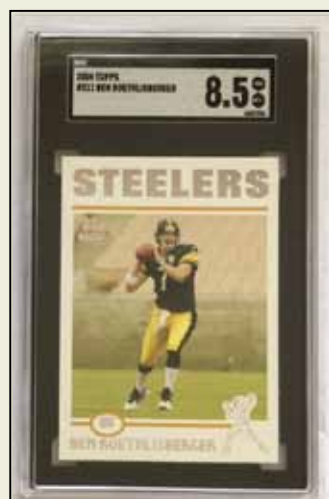
Having played such a long career, Ben Roethlisberger has faced every team in the National Football League and has beaten them all as the starting quarterback. The Cleveland Browns and Cincinnati Bengals are two teams that will be happy to go into next season knowing they will not have to defend against Big Ben ever again. For his career, Roethlisberger engineered 26 victories in 29 games when facing the Browns. As for that other Ohio team, the Bengals have lost 24 of 24 games with Roethlisberger calling the signals.

Ben Roethlisberger also has a winning record against the Baltimore Ravens with a final mark of 17-10. Big Ben does have losing records when facing some teams such as a 2-3 mark versus the Chicago Bears. The L.A. Chargers own a 4-3 mark against Big Ben. The Raiders are 6-2. Then there are those pesky Patriots who won seven of 11 contests with Roethlisberger on the other side.

It will be a very long time before Ben Roethlisberger's Steelers team passing records are broken. For his career, Ben Roethlisberger has set the bar high for games played with 249, 81 more than Terry Bradshaw played. His won/loss record of 165-81-1 surpasses that of Bradshaw's 107-51-0. For career completions, Big Ben is far



Score Rookie Card



Big Ben Topps Rookie Card

ahead of "The Blonde Bomber" having successfully connected on 5,440 passes whereas Bradshaw had only 2025.

Roethlisberger finished his career with 64,088 passing yards setting a mark that will take years for a new starter to surpass. That can be said for his touchdown total as well (418). Big Ben also has the highest quarterback rating (93.5) and the most fourth-quarter comebacks (41) as well as game-winning drives with 53.

Known as an aggressive runner for most of his career that has often resulted in many sacks a cat-

egory Roethlisberger also leads the team for a career with 554. His 211 interceptions are one more than Terry Bradshaw's total. As for his running totals, Roethlisberger trails in most categories behind Kordell Stewart and Terry Bradshaw. "Slash" is the leader in rushing yards for quarterbacks for the Steelers with 2,561 yards ahead of Bradshaw's 2,257 and Big Ben's final total of 1,373. The only running category Roethlisberger leads in is fumbles which he had the unfortunate instance of losing the ball 115 times, far more than any quarterback that played in Pittsburgh.

Heading into the 2022 season, the word out of Pittsburgh is that Mason Rudolph will go into the new campaign as the Steelers' starting quarterback. Most fans are not happy about that and most experts agree he is not the franchise-type quarterback and not a worthy replacement for Ben Roethlisberger. There will be veteran signal-callers available via free agency or through a trade but it remains to be seen if that is the direction Pittsburgh wants to take.

What has been left behind however is a legacy built by Ben Roethlisberger that will land him in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in five years at a minimum but one day at some point. When it comes to determining the best quarterbacks in Pittsburgh Steelers history, it only boils down to two men, Terry Bradshaw and Ben Roethlisberger.

****GG****

The AFL and NFL Champions of '64 and '65 met on the Basketball Court

BY GREG TRANTER

American Football League commissioner Joe Foss sent a letter to NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle on December 16, 1963, challenging the senior league to have its champion play the AFL champion. Foss's letter said, "On behalf of the AFL, I reissue an official challenge to the NFL for the first game to be played at the conclusion of the 1964 season. The overriding fact is the establishment of a World Series of professional football is necessary to the continued progress of our game if we're to be true sportsmen and not merely businessmen in sports." His letter concluded with, "I think now is the time for action, rather than talk, Pete, and if you concur, I'll be available to commence arrangements for the game at your earliest convenience." Rozelle's response was succinct, "As I have said on a number of occasions, we have no plans for such a game." Foss and the AFL owners were discouraged in the NFL's unwillingness for the two league champions to strap it up and find out which team was the undisputed champion of professional football.

It would be more than three years before such a game would take place on the gridiron. The AFL/NFL merger was agreed upon and announced on June



Joe Foss in center with Lamar Hunt on his right

8, 1966 and the first AFL/NFL championship game occurred on January 15, 1967 when the Green Bay Packers defeated the Kansas City Chiefs 35-10. Today, the pro football championship game, the Super Bowl, is the most popular sports event in America.

A little known fact is that the pro football champions of the two leagues in 1964 and 1965 did compete in a game, however, it was in the sport of basketball instead of football. Many pro football teams, throughout the 1960's, had groups of its players play competitive basketball in the offseason to raise money for charity and connect with the teams' fans while also helping to keep the players in shape.

The Buffalo Bills were one of those teams. Some Bills players, from the 1964 AFL championship team, and the Bills Booster club, came up with the bright idea

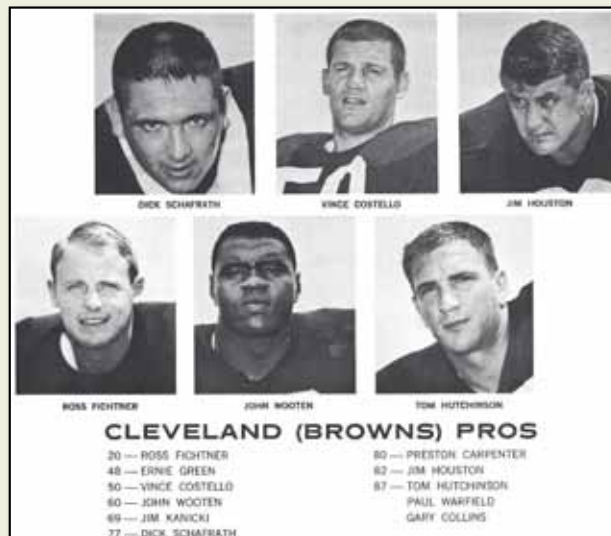
to challenge the NFL champion Cleveland Browns to play a basketball game. The Browns players were more than willing. The game was sponsored by Iroquois Brewery on its 123rd birthday. The brewery was founded in 1842 and following prohibition it was the largest brewery in Buffalo for many years, until its demise and ultimate closure in 1971. The basketball game, between the two football champions, was held at Memorial Auditorium in Buffalo on March 17, 1965.

The NFL champion Browns had won the Eastern Division title with a 10-3-1 record and routed the Baltimore Colts 27-0 to win the NFL championship on December 27, 1964. The Browns basketball team, known as Vince Costello's Pros, featured 11 Cleveland players including middle linebacker Costello, who organized and coached the team. Some of the other star football players on the hoop squad were: halfback Ernie Green, linebacker Mike Lucci, tackle Dick Schafrath, wide receiver Paul Warfield and guard John Wooten. Costello went to Ohio University on a basketball scholarship, though he played only one season before concentrating on football and Wooten was an All-State high school round baller.



Game Poster

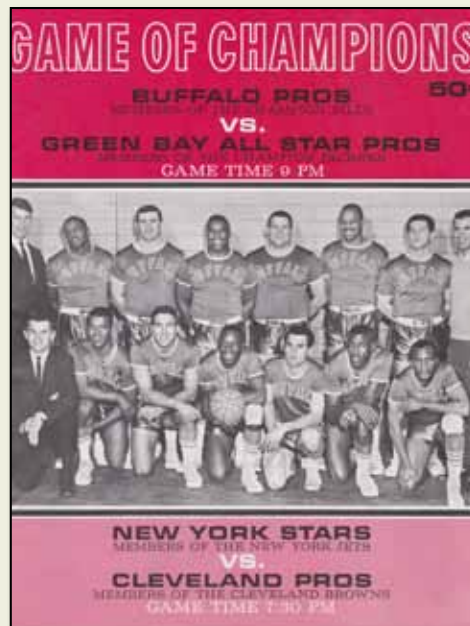
The AFL champion Bills won the 1964 Eastern Division championship with a victory over the Boston Patriots on December 20, in the snow at Fenway Park, by a 24-14 score. The Bills finished the regular season with a 12-2 record. The following week Buffalo upset the San Diego Chargers 20-7 at War Memorial Stadium to claim the AFL championship. The Bills hoop squad, known as the Tomahawk Braves, were organized and coached by All-Pro defensive tackle Tom Sestak. The Bills had a full compliment of 15 players led by tackle Al Bemiller, safety Butch Byrd, tackle Stew Barber, wide receiver Elbert Dubenion, quarterback Daryle Lamonica, defensive end Ron McDole and tight end Ernie Warlick, among others. Warlick played college basketball at North Carolina Central



Browns Lineup

and could have pursued an NBA career.

In front of over 4,000 partisan fans at Memorial Auditorium the green clad Bills, in honor of St. Patrick's Day, could not keep up with the Browns and lost the first AFL/NFL championship game, on a basketball court, by a score of 61-52. Lucci led the victorious Vince Costello Pros with 19 points



Bills 1966 Basketball Program, Bills vs Packers

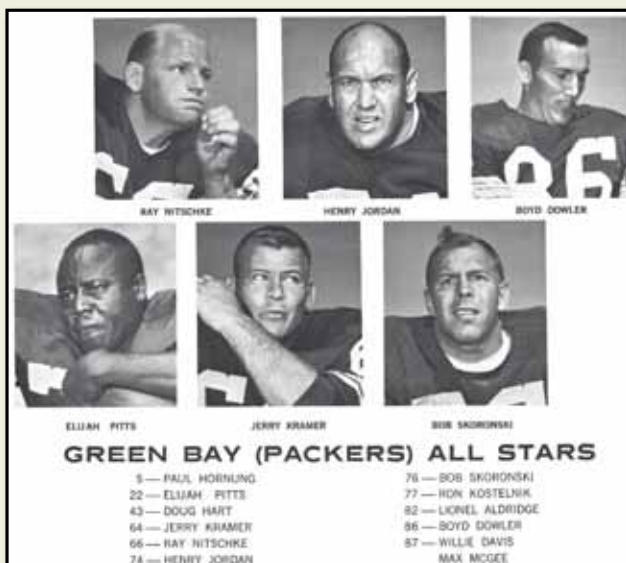
and Costello chipped in with 16. Warlick led the Tomahawk Braves with 20 points and Bemiller added 16 for the AFL kings.

There was no word out of New York, home of the NFL Executive offices, whether Rozelle claimed the overall championship for the NFL.

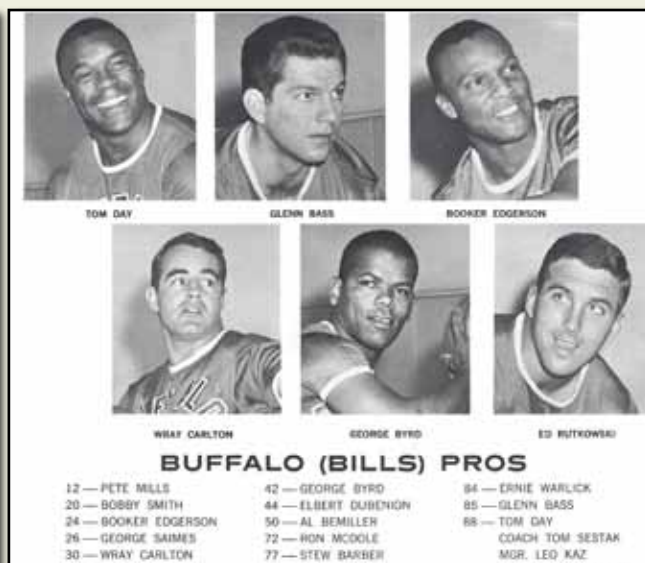
With the merger and an AFL/NFL championship game still a year away, the 1965 AFL champion Bills players again challenged the NFL champions. This time it was the vaunted Green Bay Packers and they gladly accepted. Del Pro Sports, Inc. promoted what was dubbed the "1966 Game of Champions" at Memorial Auditorium in Buffalo. The main event was the Buffalo (Bills) Pros against the Green Bay (Packers) All-Star Pros. A preliminary game pitted the Cleveland (Browns) Pros against the New York (Jets) Stars.



Bills vs Packers Basketball Ticket 041666



Packers lineup



Bills Roster and Player photos from 041666

The 11-3 Browns won the NFL's Eastern Division title but lost to the Packers in the championship game, 23-12. The Jets finished in second place in the AFL East Division with a disappointing 5-8-1 record.

The NFL champion Packers won the Western Division championship with a 10-3-1 record and then went on to defeat the Browns in the championship game. The Green Bay All-Star Pros basketball team had a stellar cast of football Pro Bowl players including defensive end Willie Davis, wide receiver Boyd Dowler, running back Paul Hornung, defensive tackle Henry Jordan, guard Jerry Kramer, linebacker Ray Nitschke and tackle Bob Skoronski.

The 1965 AFL champion Bills repeated as league champions, winning the Eastern Division title with a 10-3-1 record and defeated the Chargers, this time in San Diego, 23-0 to secure the 1965 AFL

crown. The Buffalo Pros basketballers brought back a similar cast of players to the 1964 squad with the addition of Glenn Bass, Wray Carlton and Tom Day.

The doubleheader basketball "1966 Game of Champions" brought 2,921 fans to Memorial Auditorium on April 16. In the preliminary game the Cleveland Pros dominated the New York Stars 53-36. Lucci led the Browns with 14 points and Clyde Washington was the Jets top point producer with 15 in a losing cause.

In the true "Game of Champions" as the Buffalo News reported, "The Bills and Packers huffed and puffed their way to a 51-51 tie." The game was not an artistic success from a basketball perspective, but each team put forth their best efforts in the tie game. Both squads had a lot of beef upfront, but lacked some finesse from the outside. Despite that, Dowler led the All-Star Pros in scoring

with 23 points. The Buffalo Pros were led by Bass and Bemiller as each contributed 20 markers. The Buffalo News also reported that "Ray Nitschke of the Packers led both squads in laughs." The fans truly enjoyed the entertainment and up close interaction with the players.

This "Game of Champions" would be replaced at the conclusion of the 1966 season with the two league champions playing for the real pro football championship on the gridiron. Though many of these basketball teams would continue playing roundball in the off-season for several more years, the NFL began to discourage these activities as pro football became more of a year around endeavor regarding training and preparation and slowly the basketball teams faded away.

****GG****

From Behind the Table

by John Spano

I have spent countless hours over the last forty years discussing the hobby with friends, customers, and fellow collectors. These anecdotes could fill a book; and some of the stories would evoke smiles, frowns and possibly anger. It is just a hobby after all; but one most of us are extremely passionate about...and hopefully the hobby has added some joy and positive human experiences to our lives. These articles will share some of those stories and offer my perspectives and opinions as a dealer/auction house owner “from behind the table”.

“What’s it Worth?”

Larry Olonski.

I had just returned from a show (sometime in the early 1980’s) and was sharing my newly purchased 1948 Bowman Larry Olonski card with my Grandpa. I looked up the price in my 1982 Beckett price guide. After reading the value to him, his comment to me was “it’s worth what someone will pay for it”. Grandpa kind of stole my thunder with his response, but as a collector of vintage watches and clocks he understood perfectly well how easy it could be to miscalculate the monetary value of our personal items.



What’s It Worth?

Fast forward about 35 years... summer of 2016. We had just taken the lid off of possibly the finest and most comprehensive football collection in existence; and we would use the auction house, private sales and our website to get the material into collectors’ hands. I’m in my office with a friend who is looking at a Bowman advertising piece and some proof cards; and the question arises...what’s it worth? They are not a Terry Bradshaw rookie or my Larry Olonski with thousands of recorded sales; in fact the ad piece and proofs had been in our consignor’s collection

for almost 30 years, so the last sale price was not relevant.

Or was it?

For an item like the Bowman advertising piece and other extremely rare or one of a kind items, previous sale prices have little impact on potential value. Value in this case is more of a function, as Grandpa would say, of what someone is willing to pay for the item. In the mid 1990’s our consignor conceivably could have purchased the Bowman piece for \$XXX and sold it the next day for twice that amount.

I have had many interesting conversations with potential buyers over the years who track prices of specific items. Comments during negotiations can range from “I know what you paid for that” or “a card in the same grade sold for X dollars and yours is priced at X plus 10%” to which I have been tempted to respond “then you should have bought it instead of me” and “you should find one at a better price” or “what price guide are you referencing?”. It can be difficult to resist the temptation to be snarky when a potential customer has convinced themselves that an item is worth X amount based on some fancy contrived calculus-based extrapolation (or just an outdated price guide). I also feel that little relevance can be attached to “what I paid for it”, regardless of price history available for that piece or similar pieces. I have sold items that were given to me, purchased by me at far below the level at which I am selling, and for less than I paid for them.

Some things that I have learned from others and through experience are that as a seller, be willing to negotiate; and as a buyer attempt to take on the perspective of a seller. If you get the feeling that a seller is trying to take advantage of you then exit negotiations; but don't use that angle as an actual negotiating tactic. I have had potential buyers accuse me of price gouging, inflating prices and lack of knowledge of my material as they attempt to get a lower price. I have asked these people if they truly feel that I am trying to take advantage of them why are they still attempting to negotiate a sale? I have pulled cards following such discussions. Consider your motives (as both a seller and a buyer) and remember that we are a relatively small group of collectors; reputations spread quickly.

As a seller be consistent and fair and don't feel the need to justify the asking price. As a buyer asking for a better price is always acceptable; but don't attempt to outwardly analyze the seller's motives if you aren't happy with the price to leverage a better deal. At the end of the day both parties should be satisfied with the transaction following interactions where they demonstrated courtesy to each other. “What's it worth?” should be a factor of more than just dollars and cents.

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Beloit College Football – Alters the Big 10 and Perhaps Saves the Free World

BY JIMMY GRANT

Beloit College is a tiny liberal-arts college and though it is the oldest continuously operated college in Wisconsin, it is basically situated right on the Illinois-Wisconsin border. The Buccaneers as the football team is known, are not exactly known for their football prowess. They are an NCAA Division III program (0-10 in 2021) yet, they have been at the center of some interesting moments in the landscape of college football. Nevertheless, the college itself is much better known for its annual “Mind-Set List” and being the home of the “Real” Indiana Jones. The film version being based on former Beloit College naturalist, explorer, and adventurer Roy Chapman Andrews. We can also brag that Michael Jordan presided over the coin-toss of the 1984 Midwest Conference Championship Football Game (We lost), Derek Carrier a former Buc is an active member of nine NFL seasons, one of the best young sportscasters around Joe Davis played football for the Bucs, and our long-time former Head Coach Ed DeGeorge was a teammate of Steve Sabol during this playing days at Colorado College.

As a former Beloit football player and historian, I take some

delight in these moments, but nothing is more satisfying than the impact Beloit had on the Big 10 and perhaps beyond. One of the things I love about looking back at the college football of yesteryear are the matchups that took place at the time. Despite being small in stature many of the smaller colleges opened their season by playing the bigger programs that were located close to them. This was largely due to the travel at the time, and it was an opportunity for the bigger name schools to essentially practice against a couple of creampuffs before they hit the real tests that were often found in their conference schedules. This hasn't really changed all that much today, except there is much more money in play when these “games” are played. For example, a Power 5 school like Alabama and other major schools will often pay upwards of one million dollars to host and often blow-out



Game play from Strong Stadium 1994.

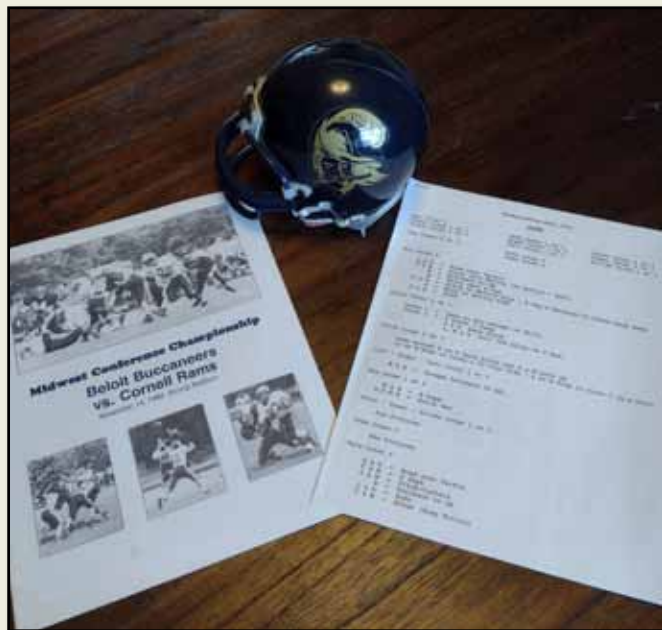
a smaller mid-major or even FCS school. Though the payouts were not the same in the early days of college football the results of the games often were.

In 1903 Beloit dropped an early season contest against University of Wisconsin their neighbors to the north, as Beloit came out on the short end of an 86-0 score. Perhaps Beloit's 10-5 victory in their opener versus Beloit High School did not adequately prepare them for the Badgers. In 1925 a very good Beloit team (they finished 6-2) traveled to South Bend and led Notre Dame 3-0 at halftime



Game Jersey Circa 1994 (125th year of CFB).

before finally succumbing 19-3. The Irish exacted revenge the following fall by trouncing Beloit 77-0 in the opener for both teams. Another frequent early season appearance on the Beloit schedule was the University of Chicago. At the time University of Chicago was a football power as the Ma-



Program and Defensive Game Plan for 1992 Championship game.

roons won National Championships in 1905 and 1913. They also won the Big 10 Championship seven times between 1899 and 1924 and even claimed the first Heisman Trophy Winner in Jay Berwanger who won the award in 1935.

However, after Berwanger's Heisman victory football began to lose emphasis at Chicago. College President Robert Maynard Hutchins hated football and did whatever he could to deemphasize it. This included forcing legendary coach Amos Alonzo Stagg out in

1932, discouraging alumni from subsidizing players (this was common at other Big 10 schools), and even suggested not charging gates at sports events so that sports would then fall under the general budget for the college and could be held to tighter purse strings.¹

When pressed by

a trustee about the importance of football the trustee said, "Football is what unifies a university –what will take its place?" Hutchins answered, "Education."² Despite being led by College Football Hall of Fame Coach and the "father of the T-Formation" Clark Shaughnessy the Maroons did not win a game in the Big 10 in 1937 or 1938.

The Maroons perhaps looking for a familiar opponent and a sure win scheduled Beloit to open their 1939 campaign. Chicago had defeated Beloit in their previous twelve matchups and expected an easy victory before a crowd of 5,000. Led by Eddie May one of the first African American student-athletes in Beloit College history the Beloit Blue Devils (as they were called at the time) stunned University of Chicago on a scoring run by May and held on to defeat the Maroons 6-0. May who lettered in football, basketball, and track at Beloit also served his country with distinction during World War II and died in France in May of 1945. Chicago staggered through a 2-6 campaign ultimately prompting President Hutchins to pull the plug on football for good at the close of the season. To many particularly in the Beloit community, they believe that the loss to Beloit was the final straw that ended football at University of Chicago.

In the aftermath of Beloit's victory not only was the landscape of the Big 10 altered but also perhaps the course of history. As Chicago



Programs and Copy of ND article from the 20s.

decided to deemphasize athletics, they turned their attention to academics and in particular the sciences. As this was taking place there was also a race to develop the first atomic weapons. The Manhattan Project as it was called was a top-secret program charged with researching and perhaps harnessing the power of atomic energy for the war effort.³ The government ultimately chose The University of Chicago as the place to conduct this research largely due to its location in the center of the U.S., its abundance of available top physicists and chemists, and the availability of a large space to house the project.⁴

On December 2, 1942, scientists at the University of Chicago pro-

duced the world's first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction beneath the abandoned West Stands of Amos Alonzo Stagg Field, the University's athletic stadium. This experiment, crucial to the control of nuclear fission, ultimately led to the research needed to develop the atomic weapons that brought about the end of World War II.⁵

The University of Chicago would return to the Grid-

iron in 1969 but now compete along with Beloit at the Division III level where many small schools have been able to strike a nice balance between academics and athletics. In fact, the Bucs and Maroons met just this last fall with Chicago winning a narrow contest 66-0. However, when I think of these schools and football, I don't think about 66-0 or the 1993 College Football Play of the Year won by Mike Brechler of you guessed it – Beloit College. Rather, I think about a football contest that not only decided the fates of the Big Ten but perhaps even the fate of World War II. As I jokingly tell my high school students, from Beloit

College Football alumni everywhere – “you’re welcome”.

Notes:

¹Taylor, Timothy. “When the University of Chicago Dropped Football.” *Conversable Economist* (blog), September 16, 2019, CONVERSABLE ECONOMIST: When the University of Chicago Dropped Football.

²Ibid.

³”The First Nuclear Reactor, explained. *Uchicago News*.

The first nuclear reactor, explained | University of Chicago News (uchicago.edu)

⁴Ibid.

⁵Gosslear, Ashley, “Science and Conscience: Chicago’s Met Lab and the Manhattan Project,” last modified, February 6, 2018, *Science and Conscience: Chicago’s Met Lab and the Manhattan Project - The University of Chicago Library News - The University of Chicago Library* (uchicago.edu).

****GG****

Regional Football Sets - The 1977 Fred Meyer Seattle Seahawks Set

by Joe Squires

Regional sets, the best kept secret of your favorite local football team.

From the 1946 Browns Sears, to 1926 Pottsville Maroons RPPC's, to the "1930" Rogers Peet. Also a quick shoutout to the 1949 Colts Silbers Bakery, and a tip of the hat to the 1967 Royal Castle Dolphins. Then add a 1932 Walkers Packer Cleaner as a nod to Gridiron Greats Publisher and dear friend, Bob Swick. Regional sets as you can see span both time and expanse.

Whatever set, wherever it came from, whoever paid for the advertising, Regional sets are our areas contribution to the collecting world.

With all of those amazing sets mentioned above, one regional set clearly rises above them all to take the reigns as the best of the best regional sets. That title easily belongs to the 1977 Fred Meyer Seattle Seahawk set for one reason that I will enumerate later.

Fred Meyer stores are super stores founded in 1931 in Portland, Oregon by Fred G. Meyer. Selling everything from clothing, groceries, greeting cards and lawnmowers, all under one roof. Freddy's, as they are affectionately

known, eventually branched out to Washington, Idaho and later California before being purchased by Kroger in 1998.

In the late 70's as sports finally caught up in the Pacific NW, Freddy's were a major sponsor of the local teams, issuing a number of different promotional items such as schedules, posters and team photos for the Portland Trail Blazers, Seattle Supersonics, Seattle Mariners and the Seattle Seahawks.

In 1977 Fred Meyers would issue the coveted regional set for the Seattle Seahawks. The approximately 6" x 8" color photos were printed on thin paper and were given out each week during the sports season in Seattle.

The set consists of 14 un-numbered 'cards' of the fledgling Seattle Seahawks. They are broken into 2 basic categories that included player shots that had a closeup of the player with a red Fred Meyer logo on the bottom and action shots with the player in action on the gridiron with the same red Fred Meyer logo and a small headshot of the player on the bottom.

Here is a checklist of the set of 14:

Player Shots (in alphabetical order)

1. Steve August (Seahawks first ever draft choice)
2. Terry Beeson
3. Norm Evans
4. Don Testerman
5. Jim Zorn

Action Shots (in order of importance)

1. Steve Largent
2. Jim Zorn
3. Sherman Smith
4. Ron Howard
5. Steve Niehaus
6. Sammy Green
7. Steve Myer
8. Dennis Boyd
9. Autry Beamon

Jim Zorn is unique in the set in that he appears twice, once as a player shot and again as an action shot. Not hard to understand why, as Zorn was the new face of the franchise since he was the exciting left-handed quarterback of the Seahawks.



1977 Fred Meyer Card of Jim Zorn



1977 Fred Meyer Card of Steve Largent



1977 Fred Meyer Card of Sherman Smith

Of all the Fred Meyers regional sports set, the Seahawk football set is the only one to contain the red Fred Meyer logo, but also the only one without a numbered checklist.

The 77 Freddy's set is very scarce and rarely found in the wild outside of the Seattle / Portland area. These are contributing factors to the rarity of the set according to



Steve Largent 1977 Fred Meyer graded card



1977 Fred Meyer Ron Howard action card



1977 Fred Meyer Card of Steve August

Hall of Fame football collector Mike Blaisdell.

One, he didn't remember seeing much advertising for the promotion in 1977. Neither did I, but I was also in first grade at the time. Perhaps they were advertised in game programs?

Second, the set was issued 1-2 cards at a time over a number of weeks and seemed to drop off in issuance towards the end of the promotion, perhaps due to lack-luster popularity. This would be the reason certain cards are more scarce than other which is what makes it so difficult to assemble the entire set.

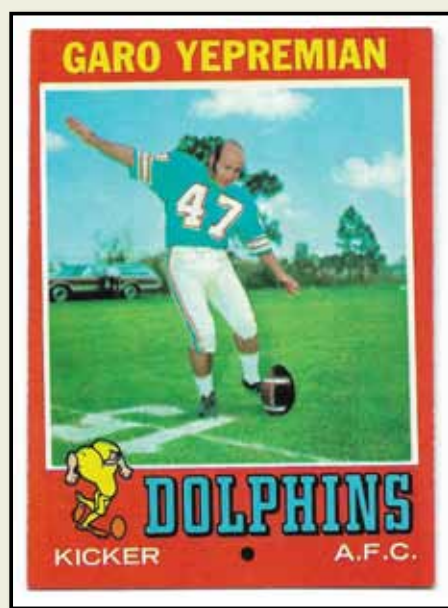
The actual population of the set is unknown. SGC is the only TPG that will grade the set. Since there is no PSA population, and SGC's registry is less than robust, we will never know how many of each card exists.

Why is the 1977 Fred Meyer Seattle Seahawk set to me the best regional football set ever made? In 2010 I was able to finally complete the 14- card set that I had been chasing for a decade when I stumbled across Mike Blaisdell set up at a card show in Seattle, selling it. We talked hobby, name dropped and became fast friends. To me this set is forever tied to my friend Mike, which makes it the best regional set to me. Well that, and Steve Largent.

****GG****

Garro Yepremian's Famous Footwork

BY DR. ROBERT STEVENSON



Miami's 1971 first-ever playoff win over Kansas City relied on Garro Yepremian, the "little old tie-maker and tie-breaker," to end the longest game in NFL history up until then. Dolphins won three consecutive American Football Conference Championships and Super Bowls VII and VIII. Yepremian led the NFL in scoring all three seasons and was later named first-team kicker on the Pro Football Hall of Fame All-Decade Team.

Early Days

A war baby, Garro was born in June, 1944 on Cyprus, a Mediterranean island seven time zones east of Miami. Yepremian played soccer at Malkonian Institute in Larnaca, Cyprus and for a semi-pro team in London. His brother Krikor received a soccer schol-

arship to Indiana University in 1966, and Garro immigrated to the United States with him. He tried to walk-on at IU but previous professional play cost him his eligibility.

Watching games on television got him interested in football, and Krikor arranged for a tryout with the Detroit Lions. The 5' 8", 170-pound 22-year-old signed a contract on October 13, 1966, and shared kicking duties with the Lions Wayne Walker.

Yepremian's first NFL points came on October 23rd, a second-quarter field goal at San Francisco. He was so completely thrilled coming off the field that teammate Alex Karras asked, "What are you so happy about?" Garro replied, "I keek a touchdown!"

Three weeks later, November 13th, the Lions visited Minnesota. Garro kicked field goals of 33, 26, 15, 20, 28 and 32 yards, setting a new NFL single game record, six. He also kicked two extra points in the Lions 32-31 victory.

Garro began the season wearing a helmet with no facemask. In his fourth NFL game, Green Bay Packer Ray Nitschke welcomed

him to the League rather rudely, inspiring a single-bar mask. Garro was among the last NFL players to play without a facemask.

Detroit again used both kickers in 1967, each appearing in eight games. After the season, Garro enlisted in US Army Reserve and National Guard, during the Viet Nam era. Detroit did not rehire him in 1968. Two-year total of 78 points.

Garro was a kicker/punter with the Michigan Arrows in 1968, \$100 per game, in the Continental Football League. While the Arrows folded, he was in Paper Lion, a 1968 movie based on the George Plimpton book, appearing as 'Wayne' Yepremian.

He sat out 1969, earning money selling hand painted neckties, a sideline he continued for years. "The little old tie-maker and tie-breaker," nickname came from television sports announcer Howard Cosell. The ties recently appeared on eBay at \$125.

Miami Years

Meanwhile, emerging Dolphins, coached by George Wilson, entered 1969 riding a wobbly three-year record of 12-29-1.

below left... London, 1962, Garo in soccer uniform
below right... 1968, Private 1st Class Yepremian,
Ft. Leonard, Wood, MO



Garo played professional soccer beginning at age 18. He enlisted in the US Army during the VietNam era before joining the Dolphins.

A bottlenose dolphin attended early Miami games, television star Flipper. The popular show began in 1964, before owner Joe Robbie picked a team name, and ran until 1967.

From 1966 to 1968, a large swimming pool was on the south part of the Orange Bowl behind the endzone. Flipper was transported from the Miami Seaquarium to the stadium on Sundays, and would dance and splash around after touchdowns and field goals. After two years the City and Robbie agreed it was too expensive and removed the pool.

In 1969, Miami's 5th round draft pick was German-born kicker Karl Kremser. He was so-so that year, missing all five kicks beyond 39-yards in coach Wilson's last season.

In 1970, new coach Don Shula made Garo one of his first recruits while keeping Kremser. Topps sent photographers to preseason practice, which resulted in many timeless football card photos. Pic-

tures appeared on Topps' Miami cards in 1970, 1971, and 1972. A 1970 Bob Griese card, T#10, includes a black sedan parked in the background. Garo's rookie card shows a station wagon.

Garo replaced Kremser after two games. He shared an apartment with linebacker Doug Swift near the airport and they roomed together on road trips. Both were into nutrition and used this recipe for yogurt; instant dry milk, yogurt culture, incubate 18 hours. Low fat, and it's easy to digest. Swift might add raspberries or drink it straight. Garo adds garlic and cucumber with a touch of mint, like a middle eastern spread called 'tzatziki' (onion breath), but without onion.

In October 1970 the pair did an autograph session at a local restaurant opening, Chicken Unlimited, with teammates Larry Little and Mercury Morris. There Garo met Maritza Javian, a student at the University of Miami from Philadelphia and big soccer fan. They wed the next summer.

The Seaquarium pool returned to the Orange Bowl in 1970. When footballs splashed into the water, Flipper would 'flip' the ball up out of the tank, to cheering delight of spectators. Fans arrived early to watch Yepremian's pregame warm-up and his monster practice kicks, often reaching the water and pleasing the crowds.

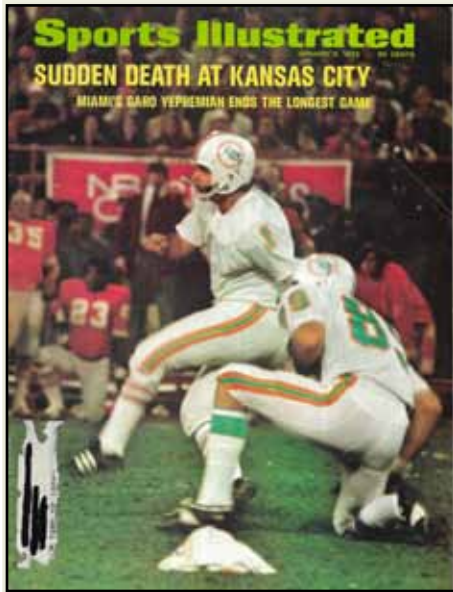
The pool again was removed after a brief stay. Animal welfare

groups worried about the stress to Flipper moving back and forth. Also, the pool was an attractive nuisance. In November 1971, archrivals Florida and Miami met in the Orange Bowl for the season finale. Gators led 45-8 in the final minute and Miami had the ball. Florida quarterback John Reaves needed 10 yards to break Jim Plunkett's NCAA career passing record of 7,544 yards.

Using their last timeout, the Gators agreed to just fall on the ground at the next snap, to let Miami score. Florida got the ball back with enough time for Reaves to complete a pass, breaking the record. The play became known as the 'Gator Flop. Leaving the field after the game, rowdy Gators took another flop into Flipper's pool, who was not in there at the time. The giant tank later sprang a leak too expensive for repair, so Flipper remained fulltime at the Miami Seaquarium oceanarium in Biscayne Bay.

The 1970 Dolphins won 10 games and missed the playoffs. The 1971 AFC division playoff game on Christmas Day was a thrilling overtime sudden-death victory decided by Yepremian's 37-yard field goal after 22:40 of overtime. Dallas won Super Bowl VI, 24-3, over Miami.

Exactly fifty years ago, the 1972 Miami Dolphins accomplished the first and only perfect NFL season, 17-0. Miami won nine games by at least ten points, while



These size 7 1/2 soccer boots are already in Canton - Garo can't be far behind

Yepremian made important kicks in many.

*Dolphins trailed in the fourth quarter against Minnesota, field goals kept them alive until a Bob Griese touchdown pass to win.

*Career-long 54-yard field goal helped seal a 24-23 win over Buffalo.

*Against St. Louis, thinking fast, he picked up a blocked field goal attempt and ran it out of bounds, preventing Cardinals from scoring on the loose ball.

*Two field goals and two extra points in the fourth quarter at Yankee Stadium against the Giants on a slippery wet field.

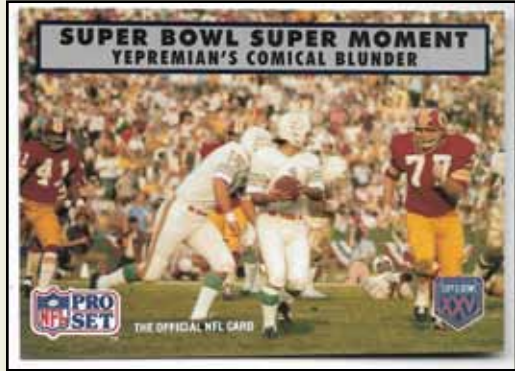
*Dolphins trailed in the fourth-quarter at Cleveland in the playoff, where Garo's two field goals made it close enough for a late Jim Kiick touchdown to win.

Miami's kicker made a big play against Pittsburgh in the AFC Championship game. Punter Larry Seiple faked and ran to the Steeler twelve for a first down. Dolphins became the first AFC team to win Conference titles twice in one year, January 2nd against Baltimore and December 31st against Pittsburgh.

Washington was a slight favorite in Super Bowl VII, but it turned into a yawner after two Dolphin touchdowns and famous 'No-Name' defense led by MVP safety Jake Scott with two interceptions. Miami led 14-0 with 2:07 left in the game when Garo attempted a 42-yard field goal.

What happened next is football legend, fun to watch on YouTube videos. The play is described in *Gridiron Greats*, a 2012 story about Miami's perfect season 40th anniversary. Also, in a 2021 story about Garo in *The Coffin Corner*. During Super Bowl XLII, the 35th anniversary of Super Bowl VII, Reebok aired a commercial featuring Garo and his 1972 Dolphin teammates.

Some think the 1973 Dolphins was a better team, despite two regular season losses. The first, missed field goals from 45 and 26 yards allowed Oakland a 12-10 victory and snapped Miami's winning streak at 18. Dolphins won the next ten, clinching the playoffs, before losing to Baltimore on the way to another Super Bowl victory. Yepremian was MVP of



1990 Pro Set #141 Super Bowl Blunder by common consent among the most memorable plays in sports history

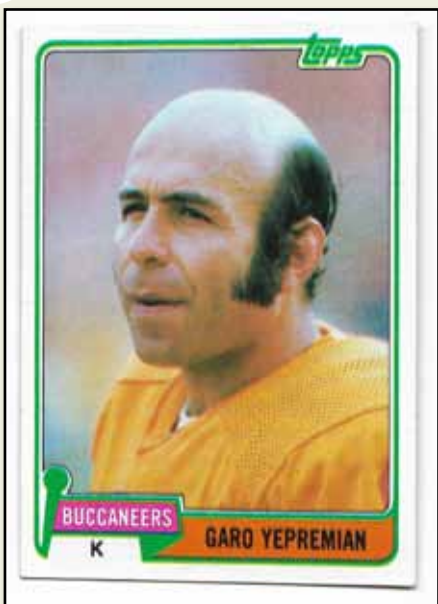
the Pro Bowl in the AFC's win, 15-13, kicking five field goals while playing hurt, and given the game ball.

In 1974, Miami went to the playoffs despite Yepremian converting only 8 of 15 field goals and missing six extra point attempts. In the other 13 years Garo missed only 14 attempts, career totals 444/464.

Off-season, Miami stars Larry Czonka, Jim Kick and Paul Warfield all switched to the erstwhile World Football League. The 1975 Dolphins missed the playoff for the first time in five years and again the next two.

In 1978 Yepremian scored 79 points with a career-best 19 of 23 field goal attempts (.826). He finished the season with 16 consecutive field goals, tying the NFL record, and was selected to his second Pro Bowl. Dolphins made the playoffs, losing to the Houston Oilers 17-9.

Coach Shula decided to waive Yepremian and draft Uwe von Schamann, University of Okla-



Whenever reporters asked Garo where he played football in college he always replied Bald State as seen here on 1981 Topps card #383

homa, in the seventh round. Garo landed with New Orleans in 1979 and started with four straight field goals, extending his record to 20. He spent the next two years at Tampa Bay, retiring in 1981. Yepremian had scored 1,074 career points, ninth-most in NFL history at that time.

He spent the next 35 years as a motivational speaker, reaching thousands, and established The Garo Yepremian Foundation for Brain Cancer Research in 2001. He died in 2015 at age 70, (cancer). Garo and Maritza had two sons, Garo Jr., and Azad, and four grandchildren.

Fourteen seasons is the longest NFL career of anyone who did not play football in college. As of 2020, 326 members are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Three

are kicking specialists: placekicker Jan Stenerud (1991), placekicker Morton Anderson (2017), and punter Ray Guy (2014). Kickers make up less than one percent.

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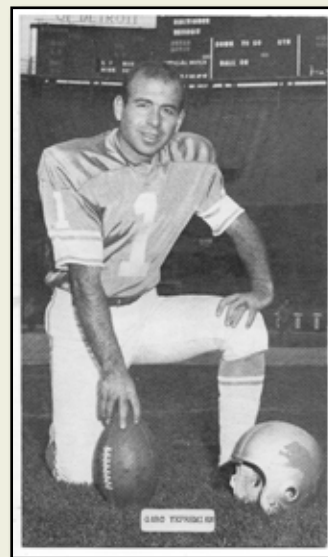
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Garo playing for the Lions in 1966 wearing his signature jersey number 1. Garo's helmet does not have a face mask yet.

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Toronto Phantoms

BY GARY COBB

On April 14, 2001 history was being made in Toronto, Canada as the first "Official International" Arena football game was played in Toronto's Air Canada Centre.

Buffalo would defeat Toronto 61-54 in front of 10,023 fans. (for more on this game see *Gridiron Greats* issue #72). Before this historic game could be played, a lot of other events had to take place

in order to reach this point.

The Phantoms were an Arena Football team playing out of Toronto, Canada, and were a third generation franchise who started as the New York Cityhawks in 1997.

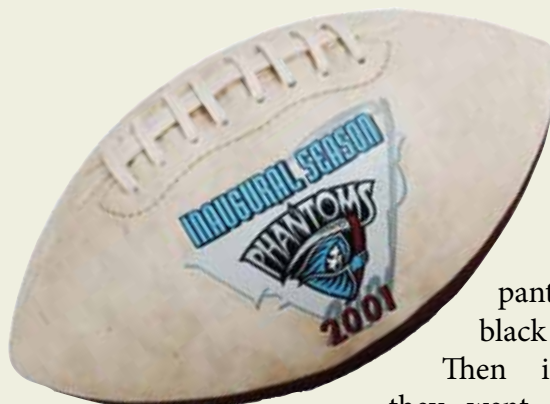
As the Cityhawks the team played two seasons with disappointing results, winning only five of their 28 games and finishing in last place both seasons. The Cityhawks were coached by Larry Kuharich in their first season (Kuharich had led the Tampa Bay Storm to a Arena Bowl title in 1993). After their 2-12-0 season Kuharich stepped down. Their second season the Cityhawks chose Chuck Sheldon who was in his first head coaching job, which proved to be his only head coaching job as the team finished 3-11-0 in last place again. The Cityhawks played their home games in Madison Square Garden.

The one odd thing about the Cityhawks uniforms were that while playing at home they had gold helmets with black jerseys and gold pants while on the road they wore gold jerseys with black

pants and black helmets.

Then in 1998 they went with all black uniforms while playing at home (one of the first color rush uniforms.)

So after two very disappointing seasons in New York the team moved to Hartford, Connecticut and would play in the Hartford Civic Center which was managed by the same group which ran the Garden. The team would change their name to the New England Sea Wolves, naming Mike Hosensee as their Head Coach. Hosensee was with the league since the start, first as a player then as both a head coach and a assistant.



Phantoms ticket stub



Phantoms ball cap



#9 Game Jersey

Under coach Hohensee the Sea Wolves improved to 5-9-0 in their first season finishing in third place.

Then in 2000 the Wolves made the playoffs with a 8-6-0 record and the best defense in their division allowing just 696 points. In the first round of the playoffs the Sea Wolves would face the Wranglers in Hartford. In what would be New England's final game as the Sea Wolves, the hometeam would score first on a 42 yard field goal, only to trail 21-10 at the half.

It would be 38-10 in the final quarter before New England would score again. The Sea Wolves would score four touchdowns in the last quarter, including a 17 yard interception return by Michael Hicks, and a 56 yard kickoff return by Anthony Hicks. It was too little too late as New England went on to lose 52-38. Both New



Mini Helmet signed by David White



Phantoms logo patches

England's passers Tim Carey and Stewart Partridge both had a bad game as they had combined for only nine completions on 30 attempts with just 128 passing yards, throwing three touchdowns with two interceptions.

The Sea Wolves had two different logos for their two seasons both on a black helmet.

Not only did the city lose the playoff game they also lost the team as they were sold to a group of investors from Toronto with Rogers Communications as the majority share holder having paid between six to eight million for the team with the team

sheet being signed/sold in Buffalo, N.Y. during a Destroyers game against Los Angeles on July 14, 2000 (the Destroyers won 60-52).

Toronto would call their team the Phantoms getting the name from the long running musical the "Phantom of the Opera". Their logo was one of the best logos ever seen in the league. The Phantoms have played their home games inside the Air Canada Centre, which was also the home to Toronto's other pro teams, the NBA Raptors, the NHL Maple Leafs, and the NLL Rock, all of which were winning. Having to share their home, adding to their problem, was that Toronto's other two pro teams were winning as well, the CFL Argos and the MLB Blue Jays.

The Phantoms closest rival was the Destroyers being 80 miles away in Buffalo, but I think their biggest rival was the newly formed Dragons playing in Long Island, New York. The Dragons were formerly the Iowa Barnstormers moving to New York City in the offseason and being placed in the Eastern Division along with Toronto, Buffalo, New Jersey, and Carolina. This is significant because the Phantoms started in New York as the Cityhawks. Toronto would be the first and only international or cross border team in the Arena Football League. The team hired



Seawolves Pocket Schedules from 1999/2000

Mark Stoute as their first and only head coach and after losing their first preseason game in San Jose to the Sabercats 56-33 they returned home to face the Dragons as a crowd of 9,397 fans (a good crowd by league standards) watched as their team won 67-35. Their season opener was the above mentioned game with the Destroyers.

Toronto would win their next two games both on the road, with a 68-58 win in New York over the Dragons, then a close low scoring 28-25 win over the Gladiators in New Jersey. Then disaster would strike as the Phantoms lost five of their next six games entering their bye week at 3-6-0 with the post season a long shot. Their losses were a 62-45 defeat to Grand Rapids, then a 70-37 loss to the Storm followed by their 72-38 win over Oklahoma with losses to Florida 51-44, Orlando 70-22 and a 45-34 loss to Indiana. After their bye week Toronto had to play five straight divisional games and surprisingly winning all of them to not only make the playoffs but winning the division with a 8-6-0 record.

In the first round of the playoffs Toronto would host the New

York Dragons. In a close game the 7,377 fans watched their team defeat the Dragons 64-57. The following week Toronto would play in Nashville losing 45-38 to the Kats. The Phantoms five game win streak to end the season would be their longest win streak of their existence also their division record was 7-1-0 with their only loss coming on opening night against Buffalo. They finished with a 4-3-0 record at home and on the road, with home attendance at 48,448 fans with an average of 6,921 fans. With the 72-38 over Oklahoma being the lowest attended game as just 5,183 fans witnessed this victory.

Heading into the 2002 season the team had high hopes to build upon the success of 2001. Sadly that never happened as the Phantoms started strong winning their first two games 51-37 over the Storm and a 50-30 victory over Detroit at home. They were 4-3-0 before dropping six of their last games to finish at 5-9-0 a three game difference from the last season and having a sad 1-5-0 division record winning only two of their games at home while going 3-4-0 on the road. Yet the average home attendance was up

to 8,077 fans with the season total up as well being recorded at 56,541, yet the highest attended game was just over 7,900 against Indiana. The Phantoms had two great quarterbacks in Pat O'Hara and Chad Salisbury with Reggie Foggey helping out in the 2001 season. The franchise would play 87 total games winning only 32 of them, one of which was the Phantoms win over New York. Toronto won the franchise's only division title, and their only playoff game both in 2001.

The Phantoms regular season record was 13-15-0 in two seasons, losing both their overtime games, 57-55 loss first in New Jersey to the Gladiators, then a 66-65 home loss to the New York Dragons. Toronto had an overall division record of 8-6-0, with a 6-8-0 home record, and a 7-7-0 record on the road. As a franchise their record was 32-55-0 counting both the regular season and the post-season.

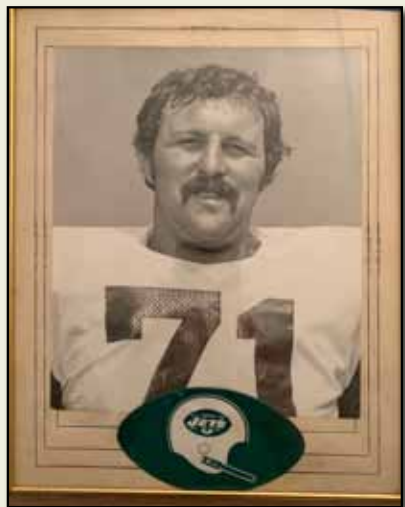
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WFLer, NFLer, CFLer, JOHN 'NEVER GIVE UP' TAYLOR



New York Jets John Taylor

"Day by day life can be better, just don't ever give up." —John Allen Taylor

Five years playing football in three different professional leagues with five different teams and being released four times can try an athlete's mettle or very well further strengthen one's resolve.

The record books show offensive lineman John Allen Taylor as one of few athletes in that rare category of pros that have competed in multiple major circuits. Perhaps that innate resolute determination seeking the dream of a gridiron career is what made all the difference for Taylor on August 21, 2015.

On that fateful date, the retired gridder turned successful Sonoma, CA businessman was

involved in a catastrophic head-on collision while driving from a meeting in Santa Rosa, CA. Doctors gave Taylor a 1% chance of survival. They further forecasted if he did survive he would never walk or talk again.

1975 was Taylor's professional debut year with the renegade World Football League's Portland franchise. Inaugurated in 1974, the WFL set out as a bold challenger to the established NFL. Both NFC and AFC players became fair game to sign with the WFL. At '75's outset, Dallas Cowboy running back Calvin Hill and San Francisco 49er Tight End Ted Kwalick jumped to join former NFL stars Paul Warfield, Larry Csonka, Jim Kiick, Daryle Lamonica in the upstart loop.

Portland headed by General Manager and Team President, Bob Brodhead, a Duke alumnus and Blue Devil back-up quarterback to Sonny Jurgensen, Brodhead opted

in Portland's sophomore season to change the team's name from the Storm to the Thunder.

The Thunder's coach was its 1974 starting QB Greg Barton. Barton went 1-5 and released mid-season. Brodhead piloted 2 games (1-1) and then tagged Joe Gardi as Head Coach who finished 2-1. The 4-7 record placed Portland in fourth place in the WFL's Western Division.

The 20-year-old, 6'4" 255 lbs Taylor was the youngest player on the squad. The University of Pacific Tiger product garnered \$500 per contest with a percentage of the gate's net receipts.



Taylor played in the WFL, NFL and CFL in his career



With Former University of the Pacific teammate Pete Carroll

The Southern California native noted the small game day crowds resulted in an absolute percentage of zero additional dollars. When the entire veteran O-line became injured, Taylor got his opportunity to compete. He played in ten games either at Right Guard or Left Tackle. Although if Offensive line coach Bob Fry had his druthers Taylor would have exclusively played tackle.

In scrimmage, Taylor regularly lined up against veteran Dave “the Count” Costa a four-time AFL All-Star. Taylor recalled the 33-



Ray and John with Coach Carroll

year old defensive tackle as the most competitive Thunder pro on the team; but clearly “the toughest meanest headhunter I ever faced”.

One of Costa’s signature licks happened on September 21, 1969, in a NBC nationally televised contest. Viewers saw the 260lbs Denver Bronco execute a full speed helmet hit to the gut of Jet signal caller Joe Namath. The shot put Namath on the ground writhing in pain for several minutes. Taylor believes in today’s NFL, Costa would be ejected and suspended.

As for the Thunder’s quarterback, Don Horn, Taylor assessed the former Green Bay Packer as a good team leader, had a strong arm and calm under pressure. When asked about the strangest pregame ritual he saw inside the Portland clubhouse, Taylor recalled, “...when our rookie running back would munch on light bulbs.”

In 1976 the WFL closed shop. Taylor still pursued his goal. He reported to New York Jets camp. John’s favorite coach, Joe Gardi was now on staff with New York. Well aware of Taylor’s experience with the positions of tackle, guard, tight end, and long snapper, Gardi was a big plus in getting Taylor into the Jets fold.

In that bicentennial year all three Gang Green Pre-Season home games would be at a Bronx



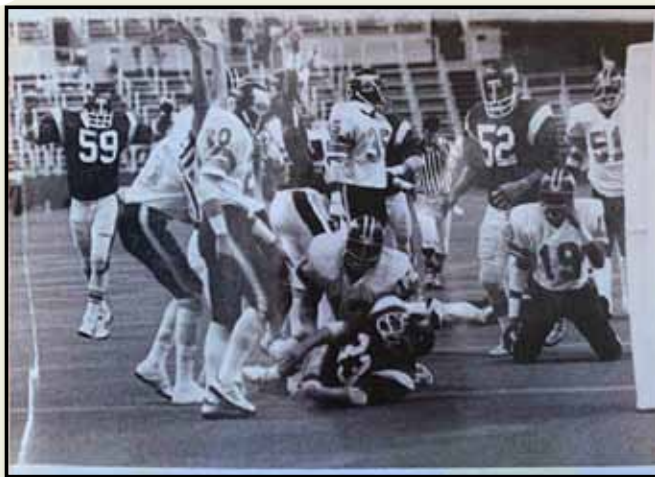
Taylor never gave up no matter what

sandlot known as Yankee Stadium. In game two, August 13, 1976 before 10,726 fans, Taylor started at left tackle opposite Oakland Raider All-Pro Otis Sistrunk. How did the Jet LT do against as he described a fast, strong, tough pass rusher?

“I was scrambling, holding, and diving at his legs to keep him from hitting Namath and Richard Todd. I am sure I got a few holding calls.” Taylor successfully contained the Man from Mars. Sistrunk had no sacks that day. The Jets lost 42-



Taylor held off Otis Sistrunk back on 8/13/76 in a preseason game



#59 Taylor playing in the CFL with Montreal

17; but then again those Oakland Raiders went on to win Super Bowl XI.

Looking back at his time with the AFC East club, Taylor spoke highly of Winston Hill and Rich Caster. Hill, the offensive line's leader commanded the respect of those players as well as the entire team. At 6'5" 230lbs, Rich Caster was, in John's entire football journey, the best Tight End he ever played with.

Morrison England, another University of Pacific graduate, was John's Jet roommate. England, like Taylor did not become a regular season Jet. Instead he went onto law school. As of this writing, Hon. Morrison England is the Chief Judge U.S. District Court Eastern District of California.

It was Head coach Lou Holtz judgment but Taylor felt, "If Joe (Gardi) would have made the decisions, I could have been a Jet for a longer time."

Never one to give up John headed North. The Canadian Football League roster allowed for 33 players per club and only twelve could be Americans, all others were Canadians. Taylor stated, "...usually offensive lineman were mainly Canadians." Nevertheless, he became a Winnipeg Blue Bomber.

In 1977, Taylor was positioned at offensive tackle. He faithfully protected, "The Birmingham Rifle", Dieter Brock. The once Auburn signal caller did become a Canadian Football Hall of Fame member. That season Brock passed for 3,063 yards. Winnipeg finished third (10-6) in the CFL's Western Conference and lost in the West's Semi-final playoff game.

The next season John moved to the CFL's Eastern Conference. In the Paris of North America, Taylor started games as an offensive tackle and long snapper for the Montreal Alouettes. Also on the team from the USA was former Buffalo Bills Defensive lineman Al Cowlings. What's interesting is how teammates and their careers intersect. Taylor did a stint with the San Francisco 49ers before Cowlings ever donned the Red and Gold unis of the NFL's Bay Area outpost.

Coached by Joe Scannella, a former special teams coordinator for John Madden's Raiders, the Alouettes racked up 331 points in 1978. The Als finished 8-7-1 for a trip as the East's representative in the Grey Cup. Unfortunately, before 54,695 fans at Toronto's Exhibition Stadium, Taylor and his Montreal mates lost to Edmonton in a close Title game 20-13.

Taylor's final CFL stop was with the Saskatchewan Roughriders. A severe damaged knee placed him on the injured reserve list for the entire 1979 season. After which he profitably moved into the field of business. He originated his own company, Valley of the Moon Fundraising.

Now, six years after the near-fatal accident and with extensive physical and speech therapy Taylor has far outgained the doctors' predictions. He's back at work in Sonoma. And in addition directs his key project, the JT-NEVER GIVE UP FOUNDATION. The Foundation's mission is to help, support and encourage trauma victims and their families to Never Give Up.

Big thanks to John Taylor and Laurie Raye Souza. The above interview was conducted via texts and e-mails February to May 2021. John Vorperian hosts BEYOND THE GAME cablecast in NY. Past episodes are posted at: www.wpcommunity-media.org.

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#75

I'm Left Righting A Wrong

BY JARED KRAUS

This is the 76th issue of Gridiron Greats Magazine. We previously celebrated our Diamond Issue and its theme, from the cover through the articles, was the number seventy-five. Martin Jacobs wrote an article about NFL players who've worn the number over the years, and while there are some very worthy players, Howie Long, Winston Hill, Deacon Jones, Mean Joe Greene, among many others, when I finished the article, however, I was disappointed. Someone was missing.

My football education began in the early 80's. It was a time before around the clock sports, the internet, and all the information you could want at your fingertips. I bought football magazines, and Bill Gutman books. I spent hours studying the backs of my football cards. I was so impressed and inspired at seven when my dad's friend Bernie knew all the Steelers by number, that I studied, I memorized, and just a few years later I knew most of the NFL that way. Numbers were important, and those who wore them have etched a mark in my mind. #12 was Roger Staubach, #14 was Dan Fouts, 40 years later, I still remember #33 is Tony Dorsett.



I was watching the Dallas Cowboys' playoff game today; Jake McCauley wears #44 for Dallas, that number used to belong to Robert Newhouse. Brain Bosworth wore #44 at Oklahoma and was great, but nobody wore #44 better than John Riggins. The #34 was Walter Payton, but Earl Campbell, and Bo Jackson wore it too. (Some of you might remember Franco Harris wearing #34 with the Seahawks.)

Growing up in Wyoming and Colorado, my exposure to the NFL was primarily Dallas and Denver because they were our "local" broadcasts. I knew them, but also got to know their division opponents pretty well. Additionally, Pittsburgh played on National TV enough that I became familiar with their players too. #58 was Jack Lambert, #59 was Jack Ham. Long before #82 belonged to Vance Johnson it was John Stallworth,

and #88, take your pick, was Drew Pearson or Lynn Swann.

It's hard to displace a guy. Future generations will remember #12 as Tom Brady, but my head will always default to Staubach. #80 should be Jerry Rice, but I wore #80 for several seasons in High School and while playing semi-pro ball, and #80 for me was, is, and always will be Steve Largent.

There have been times that I actually used football numbers as a mnemonic device. If I had to remember a girl's phone number, I pictured players standing side by side. 520-1653 was Joe DiMaggio (Baseball, I know! But find a better #5) next to Barry Sanders, next to Joe Montana, next to Randy Gradishar. And even as late as 2002 I did the same thing. As my then wife was pregnant and we began the countdown over the last couple of months, I had players associated with each day from 100 down. #99 is Wayne Gretzky, (Hockey, again, I get it, but JJ Watt who currently wears #99 was in high school, so who? Mark Gastineau? Over Gretzky? Come on!!), #98 Ricky Hundley (Denver), #97 Trevor Price (Denver) etc., etc. all the way down.

That brings me back to the number 75. #75 was Phil Poz-

derac (Dallas), “Mean” Joe Greene (Pittsburgh), Rulon Jones (Denver), but in my head Howie Long (Los Angeles) embodied the number.

Then I got to know the finest player to ever pull that number over his shoulder pads. What I didn’t know as a kid, was that the greatest #75 ever, played his last game before I was born, and he and I would be friends in the future. During my introduction to football however, Forrest Gregg was the Cincinnati Bengals’ Head Coach, not a legendary Tackle for the Green Bay Packers, and not #75.

I first interviewed Coach Gregg by phone. It was a thrill, and we were able to discuss various aspects of his playing and coaching career. I met him and his wife, Barbara at their Colorado home a few months later. The article I wrote detailing that visit was called “The Fire”. (*Gridiron Greats* Vol 14, No 50- Fall 2015) I remember distinctly describing the look, the life, the intensity, in his eyes. For a man who hadn’t played professional football in almost half a century, if he’d have told me that day that he could give it a go, I’d have believed him. The fire in his eyes would’ve affirmed it.

After moving to Colorado in 2017, I spent as much time as I could with Barbara and Coach Gregg. I just wanted to absorb all he would share. I was incredibly lucky and have often compared my fortune to that of an artist who

was able to spend time in the presence of Rembrandt, or a musician being around Beethoven. I wanted to soak up all I could. It was always a thrill to ask him a good question, not because I was going to write about it, but because I wanted to know.

“Who was the fastest man you ever saw? Deion? Bo Jackson?”

“Deion was fast, but I don’t think anyone ever beat “Bullet” Bob Hayes. Did you know that the zone defense was invented to attempt to cover him? Nobody could run with him so you couldn’t play him man-to-man. So, the corner would cover him initially (through his zone), then would release him to the safety.”

When I asked Coach about the Packers’ sweep, he went into detail. Now remember that Coach Lombardi could give an eight-hour lecture and talk solely about the workings of the sweep. Eight hours on one play, and he drilled it into his men, as they chased perfection, day after day. The basics of the sweep are that the play side Defensive End gets hooked, the onside Guard (left Fuzzy Thurston or right Jerry Kramer) pulls and blocks the first man, typically the Linebacker, who shows outside the End. The Split-End/ Flanker was responsible for the corner-back, and the Full Back led the runner through what Coach Lombardi called the “alley”.

As the Right Tackle, Forrest Gregg pulled on the left sweep.

He explained, “I was the Last of the Mohicans; my job was clean up. I had to get the first opposing jersey, as we couldn’t let him bring down the runner from the back-side.”

He played 188 consecutive games and was a part of 6 championships. He was voted to the Pro-Bowl nine times and selected First Team All-Pro seven. In 1977, he was Inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, he was also named to the 75th and 100th All-Time Teams. Coach Vince Lombardi said, “Forrest Gregg is the finest player I ever coached.” Since his name is on the coveted championship trophy, I never doubted his judgement. But what was it? Lombardi had nine Hall of Fame players on those Packers teams, but I wondered, what was the difference? What did he see in Forrest Gregg?

In my article I described “The Fire”; the burning desire that makes men great, I saw it in his eyes when I first met Coach Gregg. But then I saw it in action one day, too.

Coach was checked into a rehab center for Parkinson’s testing. He, Barbara, and I had visited for a little while when the Physical Therapist entered his room. He knew when he saw her that it was time to get up, and get some exercise. I could not have foreseen what was about to happen.

He looked at me and said, “Come for a walk with me, Jared”.

The PT asked me to push a wheelchair behind him in case he got tired or needed to stop and rest. The door to the room was on our left, he led and I followed. As we approached, I said, "This is like running the sweep, Coach! You can be Fuzzy, and I'll be Jim Taylor!"

It amused him a little because he shook his head and laughed.

Coach had a walker, which made a kind of "click" on the floor as he moved it, he'd then follow behind it.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

We got to the door and turned right. The PT asked, "Forrest, can you make it to the desk?"

Outside the door and about 30 feet down the hallway was the nurse's station, just a desk in the hallway, and she had asked if he thought he could make it that far.

He answered as he began.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

I was behind him with the wheelchair. "You're doing great, Coach!"

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

It was slow and go, but he was determined. I was encouraging him the whole way. "C'mon Coach! You've got this!"

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

"You're doing great! C'mon, Coach!"

By the time we got to the desk, he was exhausted. Sweat poured from his forehead, he was out of breath, and he sat down.

But here's the thing, the "fire" that I talked about, the drive, the extra effort that makes ordinary men extraordinary, I saw it when we got to the desk, because he didn't even pause.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Go Coach!"

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

Past the desk the hallway extended for another 60 feet. It ended in a small waiting room and the elevators were on the far wall.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

He kept going.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

Slow, deliberate, determined, he continued.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

Like Taylor following Thurston, I was there, just behind him, ready if I was needed. "Great Job, Coach!" I cheered.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

When we got to the elevator bank he paused, but only because he needed to turn around. He did, then repositioned the walker.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

He kept going, headed back in the direction of the room.

"Click", Step, Step.

"Click", Step, Step.

The last few steps were a struggle, but he would not be denied. *THIS* is the warrior's code, and he would not surrender. He made it to the nurse's desk just like the PT had asked. People talk about going the extra mile, well, *THIS* is what it looks like! She asked him to go 30 feet and he did, then he went 120 more.

He gave all he had. Exhausted, he sat down.

He never lost his competitive drive. His body may have betrayed his spirit, but he never lost his fire.

With all due respect to Winston Hill, Mean Joe Greene, Howie Long, Deacon Jones and all the others who've worn #75: you are fine ball players, you're just not the finest!

It might have taken him ten minutes, but it was the synopsis of his life. Coach Lombardi knew that Forrest Gregg was made of *THIS*. He saw *THIS* every day. He knew that #75 would dig deep and give *THIS*. *THIS* is essential for greatness. *THIS* is what championships require. *THIS* forged a legendary career.

So, on behalf of Gridiron Greats Magazine, and football fans everywhere, I would like to salute Forrest Gregg, Tackle, Green Bay Packers, the finest player to ever wear #75.

GG

All Heroes but not Champions

Part III

BY MARTIN JACOBS

This is the last of a three part series featuring some of the NFL's most notable players who earned NFL honors, but failed to win a championship or Super Bowl ring.

Dick "Night Train" Lane

The 6-foot-2, 210 pounder was a



ferocious tackler and played cornerback for 14 years in the NFL. He had the stuff of legends; great speed, phenomenal leaping ability and great hands, although, had a reputation as a gambler.

As legend has it, in training camp Lane would dance to the

song "Night Train" by Jimmy Forrest after practice. His quarterback, Norm Van Brocklin, who gave almost every player a nickname, called him Dick "Night Train." Lane.

In his rookie season with the Los Angeles Rams in 1952, he had 14 interceptions, a mark that remains an NFL record more than 69 years. He also led the league with 298 interception return yards and two interceptions returned for touchdowns. His style of play led to changes in the rules of the game.

Lane's practice of tackling opponents about the head and neck, which was then a legal technique, was sometimes called a "Night Train Necktie". It later became known as a clothesline tackle and prohibited.

Lane explained the rationale for his practice of necktie tackling: "My object was to stop the guy before he gains another inch. If I hit them in the legs he may fall forward for a first down, so I would grab them around the neck, so I can go back to the bench and sit down, he said jokingly."

In his first NFL game against the Cleveland Browns, he was credited with making 50% of the tackles. Against the Green Bay Packers he intercepted three passes, including an 80-yard interception. The following week, he intercepted three more passes against the Pittsburgh Steelers, including one that he returned 42 yards for a touchdown.

Rams coach Hampton Pool said, "Night Train has the reflexes of a cat! It just doesn't seem possible that a man can come in from so far out and get in front of the ball in a matter of a couple of seconds."

In 1954, the Rams traded Lane to the Chicago Cardinals in a three-team deal. He again led the NFL in both interceptions (10) and interception return yards, and was occasionally used as a receiver by the Cardinals, and in 1955, he caught a pass that covered 98-yards, the second longest pass in NFL history up to that time.

Lane remained with the Cardinals for six seasons, appearing in 68 games and intercepting 30 passes. During his years with the Cardinals, he received All-NFL honors in 1954 (AP and UPI second team), 1955 (UPI second team),

1956 (AP and UPI first team), 1957 (*Sporting News* first team), 1959 (NEA first team). He was also invited to play in the Pro Bowl in 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1958.

In 1960, Lane was dealt to Detroit. Lions great Joe Schmidt later called it “one of the greatest trades that will ever be made in any sport.”

In the Lions’ first win of the 1960 season against Baltimore, Lane intercepted a Johnny Unitas pass and returned it 80-yards for a touchdown, quickly becoming a fan favorite in Detroit.

In all, Lane played six seasons with the Lions, appearing in 66 games with 21 interceptions for 272 yards. He received All-NFL honors in 1960 (UPI, NEA, and *Sporting News* first team), 1961 (AP, NEA, and *Sporting News* first team), 1962 (AP, UPI, *Sporting News*, and NEA first team), 1963 (UPI and *Sporting News* first team). He was also invited to play in the Pro Bowl in 1960, 1961, and 1962.

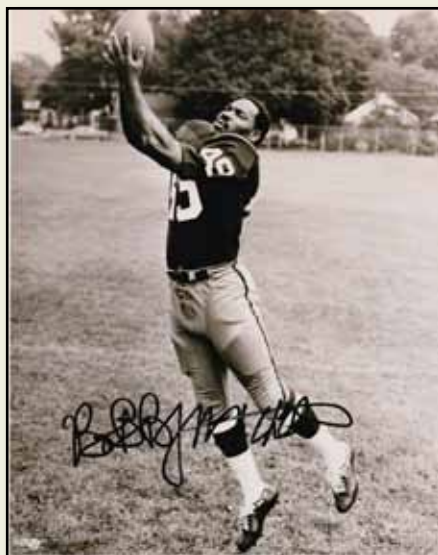
In 1965, at age 37, and after undergoing off-season knee surgery, he was released by the Lions. When no other team claimed him, Lane returned to the Lions as a taxi-squad player, before retiring.

Lane’s 68 career interceptions ranked second in NFL history at the time of his retirement and still ranks fourth in NFL history. He was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1974. He was named unanimously named to the

NFL 100th Anniversary Team in 2019.

Bobby Mitchell

Mitchell was a seventh-round draft pick in 1958, and was the first African American player to sign



with the Washington Redskins. He began his pro career as a halfback for the Cleveland in 1958.

A running and receiving threat, he shared the backfield with Jim Brown, giving Cleveland one of the strongest offensive attacks in the league. As a rookie, Mitchell had a 98-yard kickoff return. A year later against Washington, he rushed for 232-yards, including a 90-yard scoring scamper. The same year, he returned a punt 78-yards against the New York Giants. He was selected to the first of three consecutive Pro Bowls.

As a Brown, Mitchell accumulated 2,297-yards rushing, 1,463 yards receiving, 607-yards on punt returns, 1,550 yards on kickoff re-

turns, and scored 38 touchdowns. He once held the Browns’ career record for kickoff returns for touchdowns, and he also currently holds the team’s best rookie rushing average (6.3 in 1958).

In 1962, the Browns traded Mitchell to the Redskins, who moved him from halfback to flanker.

In his first game with the Redskins, Mitchell caught six passes for 135-yards and two touchdowns, and had a 92-yard kick return for a touchdown, in a 35-35 tie with the Dallas Cowboys. In his first home game at D.C. Stadium, Mitchell recorded seven catches for 147-yards and two scores against the St. Louis Cardinals.

“Bobby was an individual that was thrown into the arena of being a victim for no reason,” said Jim Brown, Mitchell’s former teammate. “He had to suffer for being black more than any person I know that played football at the time I played. With that kind of ability, if he were white, everybody on this earth would know who he was.”

Still, Mitchell became a first-team All-Pro selection in his debut season in Washington. He led the NFL in receiving yards, with 1,384. That season, he led the league in 72 receptions, and led the league again in 1963 with 1,436-yards. He also tied an NFL record with a 99-yard touchdown reception against his former team, the Browns.

In 1964, alongside new Redskins quarterback Sonny Jurgensen, Mitchell had an NFL-best 10 receiving touchdowns.

“He was a go-to guy receiver,” Jurgensen said, who spent 11 seasons in Washington. “He was exceptional because you just had to get the ball in his hands, and he was capable of going all the way.”

By the mid-1960s, the Redskins were one of the highest-scoring teams in the league. “The whole tenor changed,” Mitchell told the Times. “As we got more black guys on the team and we began to split out around communities, treatments began to change.”

In 1967, new head coach Otto Graham chose to move Mitchell back to halfback. He enjoyed only moderate success running the ball but he did catch 60 passes for 866-yards and six touchdowns. In 1969, Vince Lombardi became head coach and promised Mitchell that he would return him to flanker.

During his first six seasons with the Redskins, he never caught fewer than 58 passes. He was a four-time Pro Bowl selection -- once as a running back and three times as a wide receiver.

Mitchell retired in 1969, finishing his 11-year NFL career with 14,078 total yards, the second-highest total in NFL history. He had also scored 91 touchdowns (18 by rushing, 65 on receptions, 3 on punt returns, and 5 on kickoff

returns). He amassed 7,954 yards on receptions and 2,735 yards on rushes. He was elected to the NFL Hall of Fame in 1983.

Tommy Nobis

Tommy Nobis, 6 foot 2, 240, was one of college football's all-time



greatest linebackers. “The best defender ever in college football,” declared *Sports Illustrated*.

In his tenure with the Texas Longhorns (1963-65), he averaged nearly 20 tackles a game and, as the only sophomore starter, was an important participant on the Longhorns' 1963 National College Football Championship team, which defeated No. 2 Navy led by Heisman Trophy winner Roger Staubach in the 1964 Cotton Bowl Classic.

Nobis performed at a high level and won a number of major individual awards including the Knute Rockne Award, best lineman, the Outland Trophy, best interior lineman, and the Maxwell

Award for college football's best player.

In 1965, Nobis became the first player drafted by the expansion Atlanta Falcons, as well as the second linebacker to be chosen first overall when he was taken with the No 1 pick in the NFL draft, gaining the nickname “Mr. Falcon” for their inaugural season in 1966.

That season, he won the league's NFL Rookie of the Year was voted to the Pro Bowl and amassed a season 296 solo and assisted combined tackles – an average of more than 21 per game, which still stands today as the team's all-time single-season record, and is unofficially the most tackles ever credited to one player in an NFL season.

In eleven professional seasons he led the Falcons in tackles nine times, went to five Pro Bowls (one in 1972 after two knee surgeries), was named All-Pro twice and was chosen for the NFL's All-Time Team for the 1960s.

Miami Dolphins great, running back Larry Csonka commented, “I'd rather play against Dick Butkus than Nobis,” and Falcons coach Norm Van Brocklin once pointed to Nobis' locker and proclaimed, “There's where our football team dresses.”

Former NFL player and coach Dan Reeves, while head coach of the Falcons, remarked, “As a running back for eight sea-

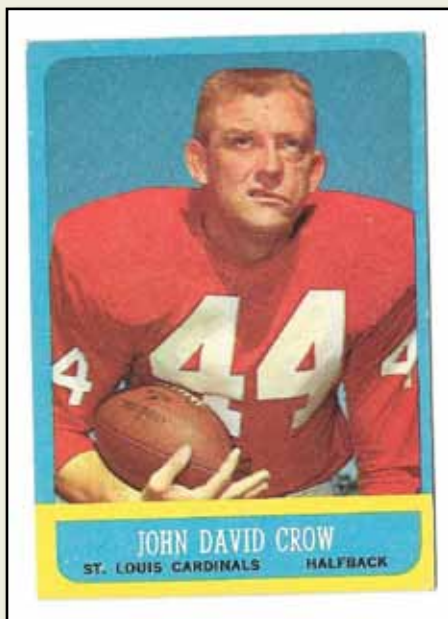
sons in the NFL, I certainly took my share of hits. Unfortunately I remember some of them, particularly the ones from Falcons linebacker Tommy Nobis. 'Mr. Falcon,' as he is known in this part of the country."

He further stated, "I played and coached on some great teams while I was with Dallas. Those teams consisted of Hall of Fame members like Bob Lilly, Roger Staubach and Tom Landry I feel that Nobis' contributions on the field merit those of the Cowboys Hall of Fame players."

Atlanta Journal columnist and Hall of Fame voter Furman Bisher wrote, "There isn't much more one can say about Tommy Nobis. In the glow of a winning team, where he would have been a star on the isolated camera, he would already have been residing in Canton."

In his career, Nobis had 12 interceptions, returning two of them for touchdowns. He is a member of the College Hall of Fame; his No.60 was the first number retired by the Falcons and he was among the initial inductees into the Falcons "Ring of Honor" in 2004. He was also named to *Sports Illustrated's* All-Century Team (1869–1969).

John David Crow



Crow was the 1957 Heisman Trophy winner at Texas A&M. He was chosen as the second pick in the 1958 NFL draft by the Chicago Cardinals, and he went on to play 11 distinguished seasons with the Cardinals and San Francisco 49ers, serving as team captains with both clubs.

John David Crow was the finest player I ever coached," said Bear Bryant. "Watching film on him was like watching a grown man play with boys. He was a complete football player. He could run. He could catch. He could throw. He could block. And he could tackle. In fact, he never missed a tackle in his three years as a safety at Texas A&M, where he intercepted five passes his senior season."

A bruising running back, Crow in 1960 ran for 1,071 yards, averaged 5.9 yards a carry and amassed a league-best 1,533 yards

from scrimmage when the league played a 12-game season. Two years later, he produced a personal-best 17 TDs – and that was after a broken leg in 1961 limited him to eight games. Five times he was in the NFL's top 10 in yards per carry, and twice (1960 and 1965) he was in the top three. He was also in the league's top 10 in yards per catch (18.5 in 1960 and 17.6 in 1965), which is rare for a running back.

He was a halfback. He was a fullback. He was a tight end. And when he retired following the 1968 season, he was just about everything. He'd run for 4,963 yards in his career, caught 258 passes for another 3,699 yards and scored 73 times. He also threw five TD passes and averaged 23 yards on his 33 career completions.

Crow was so accomplished the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* once reported that the Cleveland Browns twice tried to acquire the running back in a straight-player deal. The player the Browns reportedly offered? Hall-of-Famer Jim Brown..

No, he wasn't Jim Brown. But he was good enough to be named to four Pro Bowls, three All-Pro teams and the league's 1960s' All-Decade team."

Hall-of-Famer Chuck Bednarik didn't flinch when told of the reported Brown-for-Crow offer. "They're almost equally hard to tackle," he told the *Wilmington (Del.) News Journal*. "Crow can run almost ... and I say, 'almost'

... as hard as Brown. He's a terrific passer and a better blocker. I like Crow more because of his versatility."

However, Crow struggled with injuries during his time in St. Louis. In 1961 he suffered a broken leg. In 1963 a knee operation limited him to just nine carries. Hoping to keep Crow healthy, the Cardinals reduced his workload in 1964. But Crow still led the team in rushing with 554-yards and scored eight touchdowns as the Big Red finished a half game from playing in the NFL Championship game.

After the season, a disappointed Crow claimed that he wasn't used "as much as I deserved" and requested to be traded. In 1965 the Cardinals fulfilled Crow's request and traded him to the San Francisco 49ers for veteran cornerback Abe Woodson, who also was the top kick returner in the league.

49ers general manager Lou Spadia said, "We feel that Crow will give our offense a real lift. We didn't want to lose Abe, but in order to get a player of Crow's ability, you have to give something comparable."

Crow played four seasons with the 49ers and played well. He was named to his fourth Pro Bowl in 1965 when he combined for over 1,000 total yards and scored nine touchdowns. He would retire after the 1968 season and ended his 11-year career with 4,963 yards rushing, 3,699 yards receiving and 759 passing yards.

Crow still has the longest run in Cardinals history, dashing 83-yards for a score against Washington on Oct. 4, 1958. He holds the franchise record with 14 rushing touchdowns in a season, and is third in single-game rushing performances with a 203-yard effort against Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1960 season finale. Crow is tied for fourth in team history with 51 career touchdowns.

Jimmy Johnson

As an unsung hero, Jimmy Johnson was the consummate cornerback. During the 1960s when I hawked souvenirs at old Kezar Stadium, I noticed, as it never seemed to fail, that each time an opposing quarterback threw in his direction of No. 37, the pass was either deflected away or intercepted by the 6-foot-2, 187 pound San Francisco 49ers cornerback.

Johnson spent his entire 16 year (1962-76) career with the 49ers and never received a champion-



ship ring, although he was selected into the NFL Hall of Fame in 1994.

He was a gifted athlete in many sports. One of his brothers, Rafer, was the 1980 Olympic decathlon champion. In 1961, the 49ers used one of their three first round picks and took Johnson with the first pick. The 49ers had planned on having Johnson add depth to their receiving corps when Billy Wilson retired, but fate had different plans for him.

At UCLA, Johnson excelled wingback, wide receiver and defensive back and was named the team's best blocker and tackler. But, while preparing for the College All-Star game in Chicago, he dislocated his wrist and applied a cast. When he arrived in San Francisco, he was unable to play offense for the 49ers, but did play some defense and made five interceptions his rookie season.

In 1962, the 49ers offense was hit hard by injuries and Johnson spent most of the time at wide receiver and less time playing cornerback. Still, he led the team in 46 receptions with an average of 18.4 yards per catch.

After playing both offense and defense for the next four years, the versatile Johnson never complained, but for the 12 remaining years of his career, he would play exclusively the left cornerback position.

"Jim was the best cornerback I ever faced," said tight end Mike Ditka of the Chicago Bears. "When

I faced him, I always hoped he would make a mistake in some way, so I could get an advantage on him. He was at his best in man-to-man coverage.”

During Johnson’s career, he intercepted 47 passes and returned them for 615 yards - both were 49ers records which lasted two decades - which since have been broken only by 49ers Hall of Famer, Ronnie Lott.

In hindsight, if Johnson had spent more time on defense in 1962 and 1963, he most likely would have held the record by himself. The inclination of opposing quarterbacks to throw away from Johnson, undoubtedly kept his interception totals from soaring even higher.

“I did my job incredibly well. I can name only a few select quarterbacks that tried throwing my way,” said Johnson. “In actuality, only Sonny Jorgensen (Redskins), Bart Starr (Packers), Johnny Unitas (Colts) and Roman Gabriel (Rams) would have the guts to challenge me.

“I seldom got baited by opponents who ran certain routes with the idea of setting me up for a long pass. Guys like Del Shoftner (Giants), Tim McDonald (Eagles), Charley Taylor (Redskins), were exceptional at battling defenders, but not successful with me.”

When the 49ers advanced to the 1970 and 1971 NFC championship games against the Dallas

Cowboys, it was Johnson’s exceptional play in both games that earned him unanimous All-NFC pick by the Pro Football Writers of America.

He was also awarded the coveted Len Eshmont Award for his courageous play in both 1969 and again in 1975. In 1976, at age 38, he would become the oldest starting cornerback in NFL history.

During Johnson’s lengthy career, he appeared in five pro Bowls (1969-72, and 1974); First team All-Pro (1969-72); Second team All-Pro (1964-66, 1968); Chosen to the 1970s All-Decade team; and his No. 37 was retired by the 49ers.

Merlin Olsen



The 6-foot-5, 270 pound defensive tackle was a mainstay of the Los Angeles Rams celebrated “Fearsome Foursome” of Deacon Jones, Lamar Lundy and Rosey Grier, during the 1960s and 1970s.

He played professionally from 1962 to 1976.

He was selected to the Pro Bowl 14 consecutive seasons. And despite the punishment visited on his position, he was sidelined by injury for a total of only two games. He had played in 198 consecutive games when he announced his retirement in 1976.

Olsen had natural talent. He never lifted weights. His size and strength, he said, were due to the chores he did as a youngster. He said jokingly, “I worked as a ranger in Yellowstone Park until visitors began mistaking him for a bear.”

in 1962, Olsen was a first-round draft choice of the Rams and the Denver Broncos of the fledgling AFL, but signed with the established league. He almost ended up on offense, but was later moved to the defensive line after a few experiments in practice. And by the team’s third preseason game he was in the lineup along side Deacon Jones.

For the next decade, they would form one of the most dominant duos in NFL history. And he lived up to that responsibility. Olsen helped the Rams win six division titles and was voted into the Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility in 1982, following the footsteps of Deacon Jones.

The Rams won the NFC West crown in 1973 through 1976 thanks in part to the play of Olsen. The Rams ranked first in the NFL

in run defense in 1973 and 1974 and finished second in sacking opposing passers both years thanks to Olsen.

In 1973 Olsen was voted the NFLPA NFC Defensive Lineman of the Year and the next season, 1974, he was the recipient of the Bert Bell award as the NFL MVP. Olsen accepted the award “on behalf of all who toiled in the NFL trenches.”

As much as his ability, it was Olsen’s approach to his position that raised him above his peers. “He was calculating and collected, one of the most intelligent men ever to play the game,” said George Allen, his former coach. “He knew what was going on at all times and took advantage of every weakness the opposition had and every mistake that was made.”

Despite his cerebral nature, Olsen was no reluctant warrior. Agile for his size, he threw himself into the action. “They didn’t call the middle of the line ‘the pit’ for nothing,” Olsen noted. “We really were like animals, trying to claw one another apart in there. We got so bruised and battered and tired, we sometimes wound up playing in a sort of a coma. By the end of the first half our instincts had taken over. By the end of the game we’re an animal.”

“It was Olsen’s hard luck to perform for many mediocre teams playing in Los Angeles. He never won a Super Bowl, but he had as much to do as any other indi-

vidual with glamorizing defensive football in the NFL,” says the NFL Hall of Fame website.

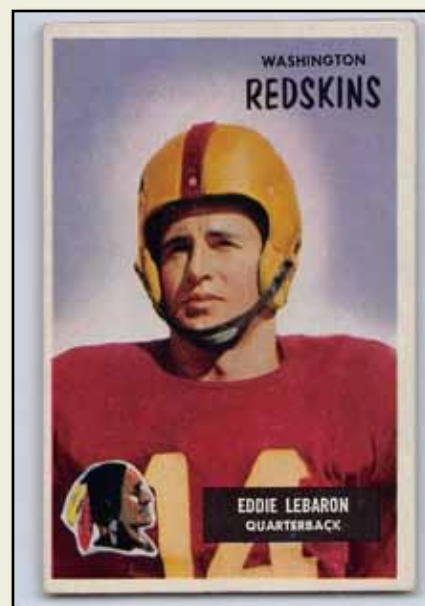
Olsen was also named the NFL’s Rookie of the Year in 1962, and was First-team All-Pro in 1964, and 1966 through 1970. He was voted Second-team All-Pro in 1965, 1973 and 1974. His play helped the Rams to the playoffs in 1967 and 1969.

He was voted the club’s Outstanding Defensive Lineman from 1967–70 by the Rams Alumni Association. In week 14, 1967, Olsen and the rest of the “Fear-some Foursome” were named the AP NFL Defensive Player’s of the Week for their performance against the Baltimore Colts.

In the 1970s, Olsen continued his dominant play at defensive tackle and his 11 sacks in 1972 were second on the team. After week 8 in 1972, Olsen was named the Associated Press NFL Defensive Player of the Week for the third time in his career. Olsen is ranked 25th on *The Sporting News* list of the 100 Greatest Football Players. He was voted to the All-Academic All-America Hall of Fame in 1988, and in 2000, Olsen was selected to the NFL’s 100th Anniversary All-Time team.

Eddie LeBaron

Despite his diminutive size, the 5-foot-7, 160 pound quarterback LeBaron was a three time first-team “Little All American” — a designation for small colleges, not a player’s size. He led his team to



a perfect 11-0 season as a senior. He was also known as an elusive scrambler and great ball-handler.

With LeBaron playing both offense and defense, for the College of Pacific, he scored a then NCAA record 575 points in 1950. Not only was he the quarterback, he also played safety on a defense that gave up just 66 points, and he was the punter. In 1950 LeBaron was drafted by the Washington Redskins in the tenth round (123rd overall) of the NFL draft.

Nicknamed the “Little General,” he won over the skeptics and fans and became one of the top quarterbacks in the NFL. In his 11 years in the NFL, LeBaron never won a championship - in fact, he played on only two winning teams - but he remains one of the most remarkable players in football history. He was considered tiny for a quarterback even in 1950, when he was drafted by the Redskins. In the College All-Star game, LeBaron led a college all-star team to a

17-7 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles, the defending NFL champions.

Before he stepped on the field for a regular-NFL season game, he was called up for active duty in the Marines in 1950. In 1951, as a combat officer in the Korean War, he was wounded twice in battle, and received two Purple Hearts, the Bronze Star, and the Combat "V" for heroism, before returning to Washington to put on his uniform for the Redskins.

The team's owner, George Preston Marshall, insisted on exaggerating his height at first, but one look at the 160-pound quarterback wearing No. 14 told the story. "Oh, I was 5-foot-7," LeBaron told ESPN in 2009. "When I got to the NFL, Marshall thought 5-7 sounded too small, so they listed me at 5-9."

LeBaron took over the starting job in 1952 from the Redskins' aging Hall of Famer, Sammy Baugh. Facing players who outweighed him by more than 100 pounds, and who were sometimes a foot taller, he became one of football's most unlikely stars. He was chosen Rookie of the Year.

After a disappointing season in 1953, LeBaron headed to the Canadian Football League for a year. He returned to the Redskins and staked his claim to the quarterback job in the season's first game, against the defending NFL champions, the Cleveland Browns. The Redskins had never beaten

the Browns, and Cleveland had won their previous encounter by a score of 62-3. In what LeBaron called the greatest game of his career, he threw for two touchdowns and set up another with a 70-yard pass.

"It was the little Baron," Washington Post sportswriter Jack Walsh wrote, "who scampered an unbelievable 13-yards for the clinching touchdown in the last six minutes. Eddie ran to the right, forward, backward and, finally, to the left before going into the end zone for upset win."

After the Redskins won, 27-17, Cleveland coach Paul Brown said, "The little man beat us personally."

LeBaron led the 1955 team to an 8-4 record, the Redskins' first winning season since 1948. In 1958, he led the league in passing efficiency and completed 79 of 149 passes for 1,365 yards and 11 touchdowns. "LeBaron was a magician with the ball," said Redskin teammate Jim Ricca.

LeBaron's final season with the Redskins was in 1959. In his seven seasons with Washington, he started 55 of a possible 72 games at quarterback (he played in 70 of those 72 games). He was also the primary punter for his first three seasons with Washington (punting 171 times for a total of 6,995 yards in five seasons) with a 41-yard average.

Opposing players marveled at his toughness and all-around skill. Chuck Bednarik, the Philadelphia

Eagles linebacker once told NFL Films "The greatest little football player that ever lived was Eddie LeBaron."

LeBaron planned to retire from football and take a job with a law firm in Texas. But when the NFL expanded, the coach of the newly formed Dallas Cowboys, Tom Landry, coaxed LeBaron back on the field. He was the Cowboys' first quarterback and played four more years and was chosen for the Pro Bowl for the fourth time in his career.

"When we'd practice, he'd always tell the wide receivers and tight ends he couldn't see over these tall linemen," said Ola Murchison, who played on the Dallas team in 1960. "LeBaron would designate where he was going to throw the ball and tell the players, 'Whatever you have to do, kick, scratch, claw or whatever, you have to make sure you are there when I throw the ball.'"

LeBaron last season was in 1963. All together he played 12 seasons in professional football (1952-1963, which includes one season in the CFL), throwing for 13,399 yards and 104 touchdowns. He was named to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1980; the Redskins Ring of Fame in 1963; the Bay Area Hall of Fame in 2004; and in 2008, he was inducted into the U.S. Marine Corps Sports Hall of Fame.

Alex Karras



Called “the Iron Man” by his teammates, Karras was one of the NFL’s most feared defensive tackles throughout the 1960s. He was a controversial player who hounded quarterbacks and bulled past opposing linemen. He was a rugged player, who anchored the Detroit Lion defense.

He was drafted by the Lions with the 10th overall pick in 1958 NFL Draft, spurning an offer from the Canadian Football League. He was the heart of the Lions’ defensive line, terrorizing quarterbacks for years before retiring in 1970 at age 35.

Before his NFL career got underway, Karras signed a contract as a professional wrestler in 1957, earning \$25,000 during the six-month off-season. He was the tenth selection of the 1958 NFL Draft taken by the Lions. He

signed with the Lions, and quickly became one of the dominant defensive tackles in the NFL, playing for 12 seasons (1958–1962, 1964–1970) all with the Lions.

Because of Karras’s constant harassment of quarterback Bart Starr, the Lions handed the powerful 1962 Green Bay Packers their only defeat that season, a 26-14 upset on Thanksgiving Day. Packers guard Jerry Kramer wrote in his diary about his trepidation over having to play Karras. “I was thinking about him every minute that game,” Kramer wrote.

Karras missed the 1963 season when he was suspended by then NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle in a gambling probe. During his exile, Karras returned to pro wrestling, taking on such memorable characters as “Dick the Bruiser.” In 1964 he was reinstated by NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle.

After another season of controversy, Karras was rumored to be playing out his option and sign with the expansion Miami Dolphins of the AFL. Instead, Karras signed a seven-year contract with the Lions in 1966. In 1967, Karras once again hinted he would retire to work in a new business venture; but once training camp began, though, Karras was back with the Lions.

Despite not allowing a touchdown in the divisional round of the 1970 NFL Playoffs, the (10-4) Lions lost to the Dallas Cowboys 5-0, his first playoff game and his final game. After the 1971 pre-

season, while rehabilitating a knee injury suffered the previous year, Karras was released, ending his playing career.

Aside from 1970, the team’s best years were 1962 (11-3) and 1969 (9-4-1), thanks in large part to a tough and rugged defensive line led by Karras. He was also called also nicknamed “Twinkletoes” by his fans, and missed only one game due to injury in his 12 NFL seasons and his 161 games played are the fifteenth-most in Lions history.

He was a first-team All-Pro in 1960, 1961 and 1965, 67-69, and he made the Pro Bowl four times. He was named to the the 1960s All-Decade team, and the Pro Football Researchers Association named Karras to the PRFA Hall of Very Good in 2006. In 2020, Karras was elected to the NFL Hall of Fame, as a Centennial Member.

For all of his prowess on the field, Karras may have gained more fame when he turned to acting in the movies and on television. “Perhaps no player in Lions history attained as much success and notoriety for what he did after his playing days as did Alex,” said Lions president Tom Lewand said.

Many others across the country came to know Alex as an accomplished actor and as an announcer during the early years of ‘Monday Night Football.’” He became a bit of a celebrity through George Plimpton’s behind-the-scenes book about what it was like to be an NFL player in the Motor

City, "Paper Lion, and also played a not-so-bright bruiser in Mel Brooks' "Blazing Saddles." Karras later wrote his own autobiography, "Even Big Guys Cry."

Other great NFL players who deserve mentioning: Dave Wilcox,

Jackie Smith, Gale Sayers, Bob St. Clair, Wayne Walker, Y.A. Tittle, Jon Arnett, George Blanda, Sonny Jurgenson, Chris Hanburger, LeRoy Kelly, Paul Krause, and Lem Barney.

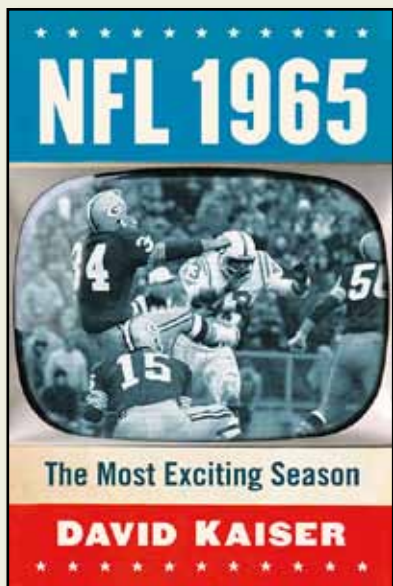
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Gridiron Greats Reviews



NFL 1965 The Most Exciting Season by David Kaiser, McFarland Publishing, 159 pages, 2022, ISBN 978-1-4766-8645-5

1965 was my beginning in the hobby, as many of you know, as it was the first year that I started buying wax packs of football cards. The 1965 NFL football season was exciting also and is the subject of a new book written by David Kaiser. That season was

my earliest memory of the Sunday game as seen on my parents old black and white television set while looking at the players on my color printed Philadelphia and Topps football cards.

Mr. Kaiser has written an interesting and informative book on the season in which he used interviews with living former players and executives from that season to recreate the action and drama from that year. 1965 was the beginnings of yet another run of Green Bay Packers Championships. The Packers beat the Colts 13-10 in a one game playoff in order to face the Cleveland Browns and Jim Brown in the Championship Game. And the Packers beat the Browns 23-12 to win the Championship.

Colts fans will also enjoy this book as the author has done a good job in developing and discussing the Colts strengths throughout

the season coupled with the short lived career of Tom Matte as Quarterback.

The book is a fast and interesting read with a chapter by chapter set-up of the chronological review of the season intertwined with player quotes and remembrances on the plays and games that made up the season. I especially enjoyed reading the final two chapters that included the Packers and Colts Playoff game and the Championship Game between the Browns and Packers.

Overall I recommend this book for your football library. It is yet another panorama of the 1965 season created through some fresh views of what happened on the NFL gridiron with 14 teams some 57 years ago in a season where every game counted.

****GG****

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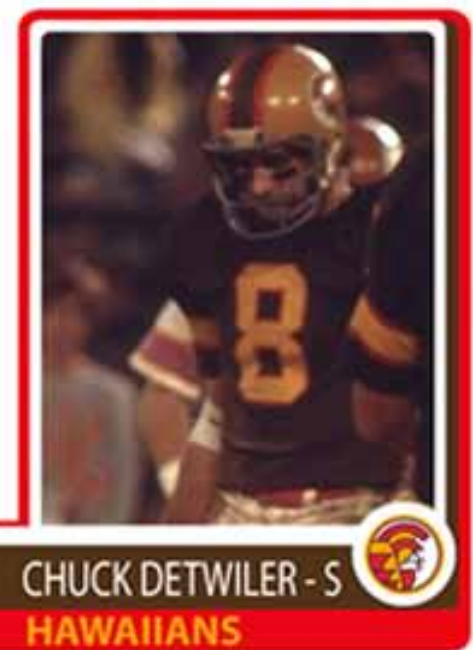
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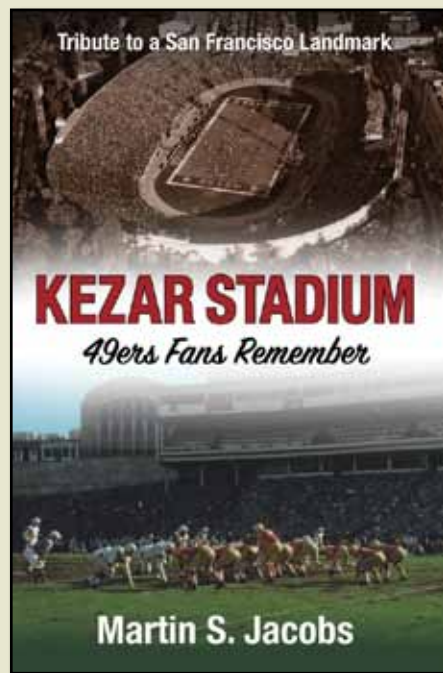
BLAZERS



A TRIBUTE TO KEZAR STADIUM

BY: MARTIN JACOBS

In “Kezar Stadium-49ers Fans Remember,” the San Francisco 49ers’ fans share their favorite memories of this beloved team. Kezar was known as the “House of Fanaticism” when the 49ers occupied the stadium from 1946-71, until it was demolished in 1989. The book is filled with first-hand stories, as told by 49ers fans, for the fans, in all it’s glory. Read about the stadium’s outlandish, brawling fans, who were so passionate about their team. There are stories and comments as told by the players and coaches, journalists, and the stadium employees, who gave the franchise its foundation. The book is a delightful journey back in time when the players who were epitomized by a franchise that never won a championship during in that era, but produced a multitude of heroes - Albert, Standlee, Tittle, Perry, McElhenny, Nomellini, St. Clair, Brodie, and so many others. The book is written by Martin Jacobs, the only man who lived it, worked at Kezar, and who has been a life-long 49ers fan for 68 years. The book is 6” x 9” softbound, 267 pages, filled 20 pages of photos.

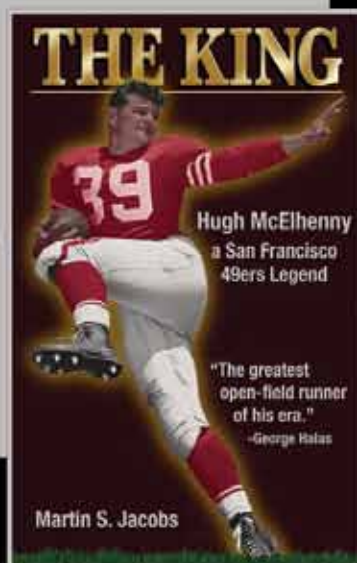


The book is available at Amazon.com, Ebay, or by emailing the author, Martin Jacobs, at MJacobs784@aol.com, or by writing P.O. Box 22026, San Francisco, CA. 94122. The author accepts Paypal, check or money-order. \$22.50 plus \$3.50 shipping. (Kindle version \$9.95).



THE KING

The most fascinating San Francisco 49ers book ever published! Hugh "The King" McElhenny, the 49ers Hall of Fame running back and member of the 49ers famous "Million Dollar Backfield" in the 1950's is portrayed by author Martin Jacobs in this 300 page, 6" x 9" softbound book, with 297 amazing photos of McElhenny in action with publicity photos. Today, McElhenny is considered one of the greatest NFL "thrill runner's" of all-time, including Barry Sanders, Gale Sayers, Bobby Mitchell, Willie Galimore, Adrian Peterson and others, and he was the 49ers most exciting running back - ever. Just check out his film clip on YouTube. You'll be amazed. His breakaway speed and unique ability to change direction at will left defenders dazed and confused. This book is a must read for every 49ers fan of all ages. There was only one "King" running back in the NFL and it is Hugh McElhenny. The book is available on Amazon.com for \$22.50, or Kindle version for \$9.95, and on eBay. Free shipping with Amazon Prime. For a signed copy, the author accepts Paypal at MJacobs784@aol.com, or check, or M.O. by writing P.O. Box 22026, San Francisco, CA. 94122.



Martin S. Jacobs

The Classifieds

Announcements: Wanted to Buy: Issue Nos. 1 and 2 of Gridiron Greats. They don't have to be mint cond. I'm interested in reading the articles. Contact Eric Erickson: imanorseman@yahoo.com.

Football Card Want lists filled collectors grade 1948 to 2015-all brands Football Publications Want lists filled Media Guides, Yearbooks, Programs, Street Smiths, Football Digests, Books, Annuals, Sport Magazine, Sports Illustrated 1940 to 2014.
Bob Swick email: bobswick@snet.net

SKED COLLECTING NEWSLETTER: Minnesota Sked Connection is a monthly sked collecting newsletter with an emphasis on skeds from Minnesota and the upper midwest. Please send \$18.00 for a one-year (12-issue) subscription. All subscriptions include one free classified ad (up to 50 words) and free skeds are included in every issue. Back issues or sample copies available for \$2.00/each. Please make checks/money orders payable to "Judy Bartoletti." Questions email theskeder@email.com. Judy Bartoletti, 2716 Virginia Ave., Roseville, MN 55113-2447

Wanted to buy: 1939, 1944 Green Bay Packers Championship Ticket Stubs and home programs from 1925 and 1926.
Jeff Brunner 13635 Sun Valley Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151

Announcements
WANTED --TOP \$\$\$ PAID
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WANTED - 1950 Bowman football set or near set in lesser condition, priced accordingly.
mfrankfsa@yahoo.com

WANTED: San Francisco 49ers pocket schedules and schedule match covers 1946-1975, Contact Bob at rz19@aol.com

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