

THE PACKER FULLBACKS

By Stan Grosshandler

To the long time NFL fan, the word fullback conjures up the picture of a powerfully built man crashing into the line head down and knees up. On defense he backed up the line like a stone wall. The name Bronko Nagurski immediately comes to mind as the prototype fullback.

The term fullback is about to go the way of the terms as end, blocking back, halfback, and wingback. The usual NFL fullback today is the up man in a two man backfield used as a blocker and occasional pass receiver.

The Green Bay Packers have had their share of "real fullbacks". Their first one of note was Bo Molenda, who played a total of 13 years in the NFL. He started with the Packers in 1928, and then was a member of the three straight championship teams of '29,'30, and '31.

In the Lambeau system the FB stood beside and to the right of the LH or tailback in the Notre Dame box. In a position to receive the ball directly from the center he had to be able to run wide, plunge, spin and hand off, plus pass and receive. Ideal for this job was Clarke Hinkle, who joined the team in 1932 out of Bucknell. Clarke did it all, run, pass, receive, kick both extra points and field goals, and backed up the line. He topped the league in scoring in 1938 (58 points) and led twice in field goals. Hinkle is now in both the Professional and College Halls of Fame.

From 1937 through '41 Hinkle was backed up by a pretty fair player, Ed Jankowski: and when Clarke and Ed left for the service, Ted Fritsch from little Stevens Point stepped in to carry on the Packer tradition, leading the league in scoring and field goals in 1946.

Jack Cloud was the FB in 1950 and '51, and then Fred Cone held the spot from 1951 through '57. True to the tradition, he kicked field goals and topped the NFL in three pointers for 1955.

The hard hitting Howie Ferguson, who had not played college football, handled the chores from 1953 through 1958.

Jim Taylor joined the club in 1958 and held the FB position through 1966. Jim, who preferred to run over the opposition, had five seasons in which he rushed over 1,000 yards.

Sam Huff, Hall of Fame linebacker, said of Taylor, "Jimmy brought out every fiber of meanness in you. He would do anything to gain an extra yard. Actually I really admired him."

Another Hall of Famer, teammate Henry Jordan, said "Jim liked you to believe he was a simple country boy, and preferred to have his teammates get all the credit for the Packers' success. He always acknowledged how much Paul Hornung's blocking had helped his career."

In 1962, when Taylor rushed for 1,474 yards, averaging 5.4 per carry, the Packers had 518 rushing attempts as Jim carried 52% of the time, sharing this function with Paul Hornung, destined for the Hall of Fame, and Tom Moore and Elijah Pitts, both of whom would have been starters on any other team in the league. He is now in the Hall of Fame.

In contrast, the 1997 Packers rushed 459 times in two more games. Dorsey Levens carried 70% of the time. Just think what Jim Taylor may have done if he had the running duties to himself.

Both Earl Gros and Jim Grabowski were brought in as Taylor's replacement but definitely failed to fill his shoes.

The closest the Packers came to another Hinkle or Taylor was John Brockington (1971-76), the first man to rush for over 1,000 yards in his first three seasons. John later developed the bad habit of dancing

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behind the line looking for an opening a la Gayle Sayers. He lost his effectiveness and each season his production declined. He was sent to Kansas City in 1977.

The last real fullback was Barty Smith, who played from 1974 through 1980. There were few effective fullbacks after him, and presently the Packer fullback is primarily a blocker with a few rushes and receptions.

It looks as if the rock 'em, sock 'em Packer fullback has disappeared along with the dinosaurs.