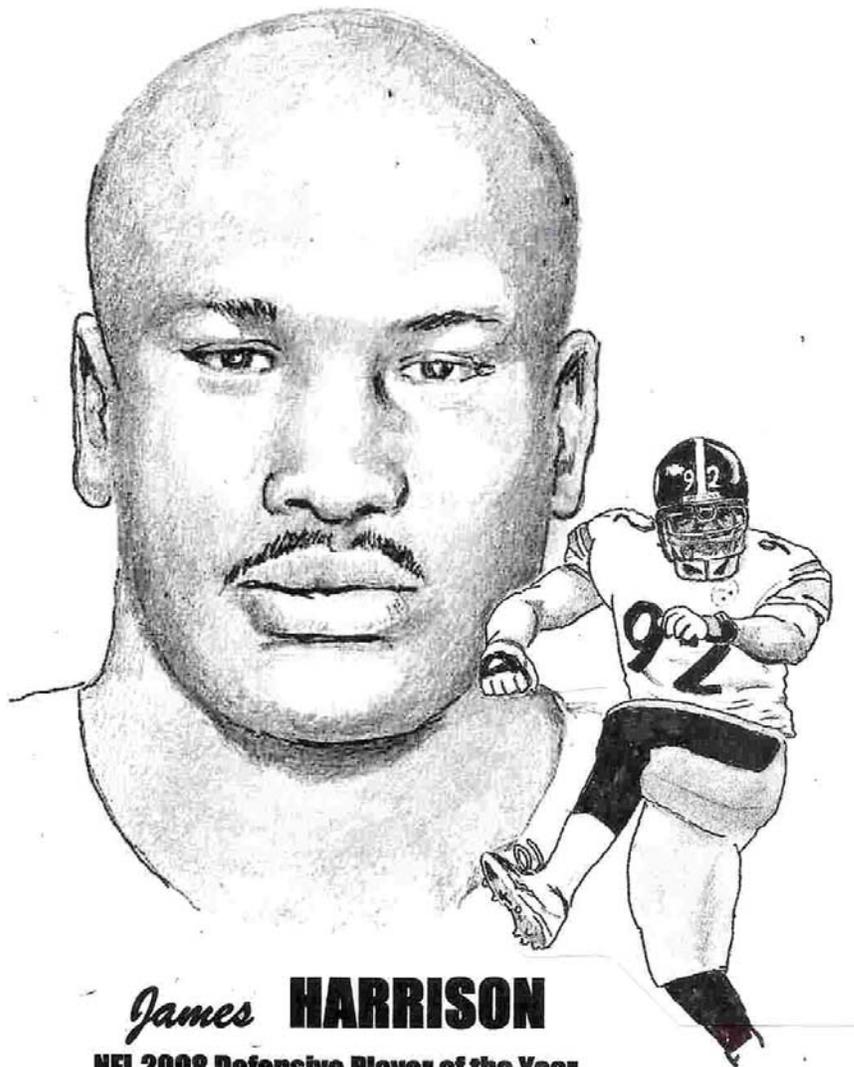


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James **HARRISON**
NFL 2008 Defensive Player of the Year

PFRA-ternizing

PLAYER DEATHS

News of the following player deaths arrived after the previous Coffin Corner had gone to press.

George Karamatic (90) Was 1940 died 12/5/2008, in Santa Maria, CA.

Steve Slivinski (91) Was 1939-43 died 11/15/2008, in Burien, WA

Bill Thornton (69) StL 1963-67 died 12/18/2008. in Columbus, GA

Vic Washington (62) 1971-76 SF, Hou, Buf died 12/31/2008, in Allentown, PA.

NEW ADDRESS

It appears the post office has decided things were going too smooth for PFRA. They've decided to change our address (see below). This also applies to the editor's address. The PO will continue delivering to the old address for a while, but you should make the change in your address book.

THE CARDINALS' LAST CHAMPIONSHIP

1947 NFL CHAMPIONSHIP

Sunday, December 28, 1947, at Chicago

Comiskey Park. Attendance: 30,759

The Cardinals went into the game at Comiskey Park convinced they could run up the middle on the Eagles, who played a 5-2-4 defense, with no middle linebacker. They proved their point and won the NFL title 28-21.

A frozen field did not seem to hamper either team, and, midway through the first quarter, the Cardinals double-teamed the Eagles' middle guard as Charley Trippi roared right up the middle for 44 yards and a score. Early in the second period, the Cardinals ran a similar play, and Elmer Angsman blew through the line for a 70-yard scoring jaunt. Meanwhile, the Cardinals were stopping the Eagles' ground game cold, and the visitors did not score until the final minute of the first half, when Tommy Thompson found Pat McHugh on a 53-yard scoring pass.

Big plays by the Cardinals did not let the determined Eagles catch up in the second half. First, Trippi went 75 yards for a score on a punt return on which he slipped down twice but managed to get to his feet both times. And then, after Steve Van Buren had scored from a yard out, Angsman again went 70 yards straight up the middle for a score.

Philadelphia Eagles	0	7	7	7	-	21
Chicago Cardinals	7	7	7	7	-	28

- ChiC - Trippi 44 run (Harder kick)
- ChiC - Angsman 70 run (Harder kick)
- Phi - McHugh 53 pass from Thompson (Patton kick)
- ChiC - Trippi 75 punt return (Harder kick)
- Phi - Van Buren 1 run (Patton kick)
- ChiC - Angsman 70 run (Harder kick)
- Phi - Craft 1 run (Patton kick)

Team Statistics	Phil	ChiC
First Downs	22	11
Rushing	10	8
Passing	11	2
By Penalty	1	1
Total Yardage	357	336
Net Rushing Yardage	60	282
Net Passing Yardage	297	54
Passes att.-comp.-had int. .	44-27-3	14-3-2

RUSHING

Philadelphia - Muha 8 for 31; Van Buren 18 for 26, 1 TD; Craft 6 for 8, 1 TD; Steele 1 for 0; Thompson 3 for 0; McHugh 1 for -5.

Chi. Cardinals - Angsman 10 for 159, 2 TDs; Trippi 11 for 84 1 TD; Harder 10 for 37; Christman 8 for 2.

PASSING

Philadelphia - Thompson 27 of 44 for 297, 1 TD, 3 int.

Chi. Cardinals - Christman 3 of 14 for 54, 2 int.

RECEIVING

Philadelphia - Ferrante 8 for 73; Pritchard 3 for 37; Pihos 3 for 27; Craft 3 for 27; McHugh 2 for 55, 1 TD; Humbert 2 for 30; Muha 2 for 18; Armstrong 2 for 16; Van Buren 2 for 14.

Chi. Cardinals - Dewell 1 for 38; Trippi 1 for 20; Angsman 1 for -4.

Source: *Total Football*

THE COFFIN CORNER

Vol. 31, No. 2 (2009)

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Website: www.profootballresearchers.org

PFRA MEMBERSHIP \$25 per year

Bob Carroll, Editor

Melissa Thomas, Assistant

Ken Crippen, Assistant Editor & Website Editor

Don't forget to renew your PFRA membership.

PFRA Corporate Bylaws Revisions Reminder

By Ken Crippen

Editor's Note: This is a reminder that voting ends May 1, 2009 for the Bylaws revisions. Please have your ballots to Ken Crippen before that date.

The last change to the PFRA corporate bylaws occurred in 2003. Since then, the organization has made several changes. The bylaws need to reflect those changes, which is why we are asking you to vote on the revisions. These revisions are to put the bylaws more in line with the way the organization currently operates. The major items of note include refined responsibilities for officers and the addition of new officers to replace the at-large directors.

I would like to thank John Hogrogian, Andy Piascik and Mark Ford for serving with me on the Bylaws Committee, tasked with making these changes.

Additions to the bylaws are in bold-italics. Items removed are in bold-italics with strikethrough font. At the end of the bylaws, you will see a form for voting on these changes. ***Voting ends May 1, 2009.*** Please submit your votes through email, USPS or by phone to:

Ken Crippen
740 Deerfield Road
Warminster, PA 18974
(215) 421-6994
Ken_Crippen@profootballresearchers.org

ARTICLE I – NAME

This organization shall be known as the Professional Football Researchers Association, Inc., and shall hereinafter be referred to as the Association.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSES AND OBJECTIVES

The purposes and objectives of the Association are:

- 1) to foster the study of professional football as a significant social and athletic institution;
- 2) to establish an accurate historical account of professional football; and
- 3) to facilitate the dissemination of professional football research information through publications and presentations.

ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP

- 1) Membership shall be open to those who have a sincere interest in the history of professional football or related subjects.
- 2) One may become a member of the Association by the payment of dues and the submission of a completed application form.
- 3) Members shall be accorded all privileges to which membership shall normally entitle them.
- 4) Any member who fails to abide by the objectives or any other provision of the By-Laws or Code of Behavior of the Association shall be subject to disciplinary action by the Association, up to and including expulsion from the Association. Disciplinary action may be imposed by majority vote of the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE IV – FINANCES

- 1) Dues shall be set by the Board of Directors.
- 2) All moneys received by the Association shall go directly into the Association's treasury and shall be used to defray expenses incurred by the Association.

~~ARTICLE V – AT-LARGE DIRECTORS~~

- ~~1) There shall be four (4) at large directors of the Association, elected by majority vote of the members eligible to vote. The at large directors shall serve four year terms.~~
- ~~2) The at large directors shall serve as members of the Board of Directors of the Association.~~
- ~~3) In the event of the death, incapacitation, or resignation of an at large director, the Board of Directors shall designate a successor to complete the unexpired term.~~

ARTICLE ~~IV~~ V – OFFICERS

- 1) The officers of the Association shall be a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer elected by majority vote of the members ~~eligible to vote~~ ***who participate in an election***, the officers shall serve ~~one~~ two year terms.

(Amended 1987) *In addition to the four elected positions, there shall be three appointed officers: the executive director, assistant executive director and editor-in-chief of Coffin Corner.*

2) The officers shall serve as members of the Board of Directors of the Association.

3) In the event of the death, incapacitation, or resignation of the president, the vice-president shall assume the office of president. In the event of a vacancy in any other office, the Board of Directors shall designate a successor to complete the unexpired term.

4) The president shall preside over meetings of the Board of Directors and any meetings of members, ~~appoint all committees and their chairmen with the advise and consent of the Board of Directors, receive reports from all committees,~~ carry out directives of the membership and the Board of Directors, submit an annual budget to the Board of Directors, and ensure that the corporate and tax responsibilities of the Association are fulfilled.

5) The vice-president shall assume all duties of the president in the absence of the president. *The vice-president shall also chair the membership committee.*

6) The secretary shall keep the minutes of the Association, ~~assume responsibility for correspondence directed to the Association, and maintain a register of members and their interests and expertise.~~ *The secretary shall also be the chair of the fundraising committee.*

7) The treasurer shall assume responsibility for finances, prepare and maintain books suitable for audit, and, under the direction of the president, file any necessary tax returns, financial reports, and corporate reports.

8) The executive director is appointed by the president and shall be responsible for the daily activities of the association. The executive director shall appoint the assistant executive director.

9) The assistant executive director serves at the discretion of the executive director. The assistant executive director shall oversee all committees.

10) The editor-in-chief of Coffin Corner is appointed by the president and shall be responsible for all aspects of the publication of Coffin Corner.

ARTICLE ~~VII~~ VI – BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1) The Board of Directors shall consist of the ~~four at-large directors and the four~~ seven officers. The Board shall

determine the broad policies of the Association and issue directives to the president to implement those policies.

2) The Board of Directors shall conduct a meeting at *the request of any member of the Board of Directors least every other year. It shall also meet at any other times and places determined by the president.* Except when the president declares an emergency, meetings shall be announced two months in advance through publication in the Coffin Corner, and they shall be open to all members of the Association. *Meetings shall be conducted in person or by a method determined by the Board of Directors.*

~~Other meetings must be by first class mail to each member of the Board at least two weeks in advance.~~ (Amended 12/03)

3) The president shall preside over all meetings of the Board of Directors.

4) A quorum for a meeting of the Board of Directors shall be a majority of the members of the Board. Proxy voting is not allowed.

5) The Board of Directors ~~may, in its discretion,~~ shall schedule ~~any~~ a general meeting of members of the Association *every two years. At least one member of the Board of Directors must be in attendance for the meeting to become official.*

ARTICLE ~~VIII~~ VII – COMMITTEES

1) The ~~president assistant executive director, with the approval of the president,~~ shall appoint all committees and their chairmen ~~with the advice and consent of the Board of Directors.~~

2) Each committee shall consist of a chairman and of any other members appointed.

~~3) The Nominating Committee shall submit to the president the names of nominees for offices and at-large directorships. Said committee shall receive nominations from any member and shall determine whether the nominated person is eligible for election and willing to serve. The membership committee shall be responsible for formulating and implementing initiatives to increase membership in the Association.~~

~~4) The Publication Committee shall be responsible for all the Association's publications except the Coffin Corner. The fundraising committee shall be responsible for formulating and implementing initiatives to raise funds for the Association.~~

~~5) The editorial staff of the Coffin Corner shall be considered a committee of the Association, with the editor in chief serving as chairman.~~

~~6) The president shall appoint, with the advice and consent of the Board of Directors, any other committees that may be desirable and useful.~~

~~7) Each committee chairman shall submit an annual report to the president and to the Board of Directors.~~

ARTICLE ~~IX~~ VIII – TAX-EXEMPT STATUS

The Association is organized exclusively for charitable, literary, and educational purposes, as specified in section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, and it shall not carry on any activities not permitted to be carried on by a corporation exempt from federal income taxation under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.

No part of the net earnings of the Association shall inure to the benefit of any member, trustee, director, officer, or any private individual (except that reasonable compensation may be paid for services rendered to or for the Association), and no member, trustee, director, officer, or any private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any of the corporate assets of the Association upon its dissolution.

No substantial part of the activities of the Association shall be carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation (except as otherwise provided by section 501 (h) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954), or participating in or intervening in (including the publication or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.

In the event of dissolution, all the remaining assets and property of the Association shall after necessary expenses thereof by distributed to such organizations as shall qualify under section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.

ARTICLE ~~XIX~~ X – AMENDMENTS

1) These by-laws may be amended by majority vote of the members of the Association who participate in an election on the proposed amendment. Any proposed amendment must be submitted to the membership in writing, either by personal mail or by publication in the Coffin Corner, ~~at least one month prior to the date of the beginning of the annual meeting of members.~~ with a voting period of at least one month. (Amended 12/03)

2) The Articles of Incorporation of the Association may be amended as provided by the law of the State of Connecticut.

ARTICLE ~~XI~~ X – CODE OF BEHAVIOR

The Board of Directors is empowered to adopt a Code of Behavior outlining rights and responsibilities of membership in the Association.

ARTICLE ~~XII~~ XI – PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

The proceedings of any meetings of the Association shall be governed and conducted according to the latest edition of Robert's Rules of Order.

ARTICLE ~~XIII~~ XII – GENDER

For the purposes of these by-laws, use of words of a certain gender includes reference to both genders.

PFRA Corporate Bylaws Revisions

_____ I approve of the revisions as written

_____ I disapprove of the revisions as written

Please provide your:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Please return this form to:

Ken Crippen
740 Deerfield Road
Warminster, PA 18974
(215) 421-6994
Ken_Crippen@profootballresearchers.org

VOTING ENDS May 1, 2009

ONE in 12,837

It was the kind of ending Hitchcock would have loved.

With third and goal at the San Diego 14 and only 15 seconds left on the clock, Pittsburgh's Jeff Reed booted the football squarely betwixt the uprights for a 32-yard field goal to give his team an historic 11-10 lead. Admittedly, 32-yards was no big deal for Reed who has proved remarkably accurate with his kicks at Heinz Field, a piece of real estate notoriously hostile to placekickers. What made the kick historic was that it brought the potential final score to a number that had never been accomplished as a final score in any NFL game ever. Not once in 12,837 games.

If the Chargers could refrain from scoring in the final 15 seconds, history would be made.

San Diego seemed on board for a record. They managed to lose two yards on the kickoff. When they lined up for the last play, there were only five seconds left and 79 yards to go. A Hail Mary pass seemed unlikely; Pittsburgh practically had their nose tackle backed up to the San Diego goal line.

Instead, Charger quarterback Philip Rivers threw a short pass over the middle to Ladainian Tomlinson at the 24. Tomlinson took a couple steps and then passed the ball to wide receiver Chris Chambers. Pittsburgh's Troy Polamalu swooped in as Chambers tried to lateral to another Charger. The ball skittered down to the 12, where Polamalu scarfed it and scooted into the end zone.

In one swell foop, the historic 11-10 became 17-10. Or did it?

After huddling, the officials lined up the teams for the extra point. But instead, they had the extra huddle, and after a very pregnant pause, announced the game was over with the score still 11-10. The ref said that San Diego had thrown an illegal forward pass on the final play.

The weird ending to the Pittsburgh game Sunday reminded some old timers of the 1940 Cornell-Dartmouth game of 1940. Cornell came into the

game riding a ten-game winning streak and apparently scored the only touchdown in the 7-3 game on the final play. Only later was it discovered the winning TD came on a "fifth down." The officials had miscounted. Cornell ceded the 3-0 win to Dartmouth.

Although that game has been called the only game in football history to have its result reached off the field, that isn't quite true. The Canton-Massillon game, the most important pro contest of the 1915 season, ended with Massillon perhaps scoring a touchdown to tie the game 6-6. Unfortunately, as the game was coming down to its final minute, the crowd spilled into the end zone. The refs didn't actually see the Massillon player score, and a Canton player emerged from the crowd with the football. The Massillon player said a Canton policeman with shiny buttons on his uniform had kicked the ball out of his hands. The Canton fans said he was lying because Canton did not have police with shiny buttons on their uniforms.

Knowing his life was in danger no matter which way he decided, the referee put his ruling in an envelope that was not to be opened until half-past midnight at Canton's biggest hotel. Then he caught a train out of town.

The buttons thing convinced the ref; Canton won 6-0. Only years later did someone point out that Canton trolley car drivers wore uniforms with shiny buttons.



Troy Polamalu

STEAMROLLED: 1928

By Bob Carroll and John Hogrogian

According to the report read by President Joe Carr at the annual league meeting, held at Cleveland's Statler Hotel on February 11 and 12, 1928, the previous season had been the greatest in attendance in league history, but you couldn't prove it in Cleveland, Buffalo or Pottsville.

Not even the magic name of hometown hero Benny Friedman had been able to make a Cleveland franchise profitable. Friedman was a big draw on the road, but the home fans stayed home. Herbert Brandt, the Cleveland owner, waited until the summer and then pulled the plug. He was allowed to sit out the 1928 season without penalty, but Cleveland wouldn't come back into the league for yet another try until 1931. By the time Brandt withdrew, Benny Friedman was deep in negotiations with a group of Detroit businessmen to reopen the Detroit franchise. When arrangements were made to play at the University of Detroit Stadium, the Detroit Wolverines replaced the Cleveland Bulldogs in the NFL.

Although details were never made public, it is possible Jim Conzelman, by now the Providence player-coach, realized a nice profit from selling a Detroit franchise that he'd probably never had to pay for back in 1925.

The Buffalo franchise, by now under the auspices of two gentlemen named Ray Weil and A.J. Lowe, had quit playing midway through the 1927 season, leaving a number of other league teams scrambling to fill an open date on their schedule. At the February meeting, Weil and Lowe asked that the \$2,500 they'd deposited in the guarantee fund be returned to them. The rest of the league had enough claims against Buffalo for its skip-out to eat up the \$2,500 and then some. With the wisdom of Solomon, the NFL Executive Committee tabled both the Buffalo request and the claims, deciding to wait-and-see just what Weil and Lowe were going to do.

At first they said they'd operate in 1928. Then they began dickering with Ole Haugsrud and Dewey Scanlon to operate the Eskimos out of Buffalo. And finally, they just sat tight in 1928,

hoping 1929 would be more auspicious. Meanwhile, their money remained in the league treasury. Haugsrud and Scanlon also went on hiatus for the year. Ernie Nevers planned to help his old coach "Pop" Warner at Stanford and no NFL teams saw any reason to schedule the Nevers-less Eskimos. With Buffalo and the Eskimos out, the league was down to ten active teams in 1928. The Los Angeles Buccaneers, the road team that had played in 1926, made a try at arranging a schedule for '28 but found they were not enough in demand to put together a full schedule. In August, Jerry Corcoran, speaking for the owners, withdrew them from the league.

The old franchises from Akron, Columbus, Hammond, Hartford, Louisville, Milwaukee, and Rochester were officially cancelled. None had been able to find a buyer. There was no mention of a reprieve for the Minneapolis franchise either, but John Dunn's team returned in 1929 as the "Redjackets." Perhaps the league's vice president was accorded some special consideration.

Pottsville was another franchise in trouble. Coach Dick Rauch had to petition the league to get his salary -- \$1,625. With the retirement of Charley Berry, Russ Hathaway, and Russ Stein in 1927, the Maroons had slipped to a losing record, and the miners stopped filling tiny Minersville Park. In what turned out to be a next-to-last resort, Doctor Striegel let Wilbur Henry and the remaining players operate the franchise in '28.

Things didn't look so good for C.C. Pyle and his Yankees either. "Red" Grange, who'd completed his agreement with "Cash-and-Carry," would be out all season nursing his torn up knee. At the time, it wasn't clear that he'd ever play football again. Nevertheless, Pyle decided to have another go again in 1928. However, he had to get an extension to October before he could come up with the \$2,500 for the guarantee fund.

If half the NFL's active franchises were sick, at least half were in reasonably good health. That, in itself, was a phenomenon never known before.

Divine Providence

In 1928, the NFL's New England outpost was the Providence Steam Roller. Organized as a professional team in 1916, the Steam Roller played a schedule of games mostly against New England independent teams before joining the NFL in 1925. In three league seasons the team had a 19-17-3 NFL record, while continuing to play several non-league New England rivals each year. Team ownership and management was shared by sportswriter-lawyer Charles Coppen, former judge James E. Dooley, and realtor-promotor Peter Laudati.

The Steam Roller's home was the Cycledrome, located near the Providence-Pawtucket city line. The stadium sat approximately 10,000 spectators in an oval of bleachers surrounding a wooden banked cycle track. This wooden track, steeply banked around the turns and flatter on the straight-aways, enclosed just enough ground to fit a football field, with some slight problems. The track, equipped with seats and a bench for the players on each side, ran so close to the sidelines that players tacked near the boundary line frequently caromed into the front row of seats. One end zone extended a regulation ten yards, but the other end zone went only five yards before the banked track cut across it. The Cycledrome had an intimate ambiance, so that all the seats, priced at \$2, \$1.50, and \$1, were actually good seats from which to view a football game. The dressing quarters for the players were less agreeable. The dressing room used by the Steam Roller players had been built with a couple of bicycle racers in mind, so that a football team of 18 men found the room cramped, with only two showers at their disposal. But even that beat the accommodations for visiting teams, who had no dressing room at all. Players for the guest team had to dress at their hotel, come to the stadium, then return in uniform to the hotel to shower and change.

The place had a simple scoreboard, a no-frills press box, and a small area for parking, which was more than adequate for the number of cars on the road in 1928.

The Steam Roller players assembled at the Cycledrome for their first 1928 practice on Monday, September 17, under the direction of player-coach Jimmy Conzelman. For his per game salary of \$292, Conzelman not only coached the team but also played quarterback in

the single-wing formation, calling the plays, blocking, and receiving passes, but infrequently passing or running with the ball.

The star and glamour player of the squad was tailback George "Wildcat" Wilson, who had earned a national reputation as an All-American in 1925 at the University of Washington and had joined the Steam Roller in 1927. He ran powerfully and passed well, but he earned his nickname with his spirited play on defense. His only fault was moodiness, but that was not enough to prevent the Steam Roller from paying \$375 per game, an exorbitant sum in an era when most players received \$100 to \$150 per game.

The leaders in the line were center Clyde Smith, an All-Leaguer from Cleveland despite his modest weight of 180, and stocky tackle "Gus" Sonnenberg, who'd come from Detroit with Conzelman. Sonnenberg was a famous professional wrestler in the days when grappling was a legitimate, albeit slow and often boring, sport.

The Steam Roller led off its season with a strong 20-7 win over the Yankees before a crowd of 5,000 at the Cycledrome, but the next week lost to the Frankford Yellow Jackets, 10-6. Three more wins followed against less than top competition: the Triangles, Yankees, and Pottsville Maroons. Unfortunately, Conzelman tore up his knee at Yankee Stadium and was sidelined for the rest of the season.

The Other Contenders

Meanwhile, the 1927 champion Giants struggled through October to a 3-2 record. They got as far as 4-1-2 in early November, then nosedived to five straight losses. The Giants' problems were many. "Hinkey" Haines retired and his replacement, former Yale star Bruce Campbell fell flat. Although Haines returned after a few games, he didn't play up to his 1927 level. Neither did Jack McBride, who was injured much of the time. The impregnable defense of the championship year, became suddenly porous. Chuck Corgan had died, Al Nesser was let go after four games, and others were injured or over-the-hill. There were reports of discension, but whether that was a cause or an effect of the decline is unclear.

The Bears also slipped in 1927, as age began to encroach on skills. The Packers, with a strong, young lineup, got off to a slow start with two

losses and a tie in their first three games and were never able to make up the ground.

With the pre-season favorites out of the picture, the championship race entered November as a three-way duel among Providence, the resurgent Frankford Yellow Jackets, and Benny Friedman's Detroit Wolverines.

The Wolverines' players were essentially those who'd led the league in scoring in 1927 as the Cleveland Bulldogs. Their 1928 incarnation was still the NFL's top scoring machine, but it suddenly misfired on a long weekend in early November. On Saturday, the 3rd, the Yellow Jackets held Friedman in check while blitzing the Wolverine defense for a 25-7 Frankford win. After the game, Detroit headed for Providence.

Interest in the upcoming visit of Friedman led Charlie Coppen to install 500 extra temporary seats in the Cycledrome to accommodate an expected overflow crowd that never materialized. A threat of rain held the audience to 8,500. The Wolverines arrived in town weary from their effort against Frankford the day before. The Steam Roller, on the other hand, was boosted by the presence of Conzelman, who came out of the hospital on Thursday to coach the team from the sideline on crutches.

A good Providence pass rush, led by stubby guard Jack Fleischman, kept Friedman off-balance, and the first half boiled down to a punting duel between "Wildcat" Wilson and Detroit's Ossie Wiberg. Providence drew first blood in the third quarter when Wilson hit rookie halfback "Pop" Williams on the run for a 45-yard touchdown pass. "Curly" Oden, a local favorite and brilliant kick returner, scored the extra-point on a drop-kick. The Steam Roller continued its pressure and choked off the only Detroit drive in the final quarter on the 13-yard line. The game ended with the score 7-0.

The win left Providence tied for the league lead with a 5-1 record. Frankford stood 5-1-1, and the Wolverines slipped behind at 3-2. Although Detroit went 4-0-1 the rest of the way, they had been knocked out of the race.

As usual, Frankford had scheduled more games than anyone else, taking advantage of the law against Sunday games in Philadelphia to play Saturdays at home and Sundays on the road. The Jackets had a strong line led by a trio of

tackles: longtime favorite "Bull" Behman, veteran "Bub" Weller, and player-coach Ed Weir, one of the greatest linemen ever turned out by the University of Nebraska. Fullback Wally Diehl and tailback Charley Rogers handled the majority of the running, with the passing done mostly by quarterback Ken Mercer and sub-fullback "Hust" Stockton.

On the weekend of November 10 and 11, Frankford moved in front in the league race with back-to-back wins over Pottsville. The first game was a strange affair that saw the Maroons intercept eight Yellow Jackets passes, seven tossed by Stockton, yet lose 19-0. The Jackets picked off four Pottsville passes for a game total of 12. On the same weekend Providence also put up back-to-back wins, but their opponent was Pere Marquette, a Boston independent team, so the wins didn't count in the standings.

The Big Weekend

The key to the season came the next weekend, when Frankford and Providence squared off home-and-home. Coach Conzelman and his squad took a Friday afternoon train to Philadelphia, stayed overnight at the Hotel Adelphia, and traveled by train Saturday morning to Frankford Stadium in a Philadelphia suburb. A good crowd estimated at better than 8,000 turned out to watch the confrontation between the seasoned Yellowjackets and the up-and-coming Steam Roller. Both clubs prided themselves on tough forward lines and stubborn defenses, and the first half of the game turned into a bitterly-fought scoreless duel.

The first break of the game came in the third period. With the ball on its own 20 yard line, Providence decided to punt. The Frankford line broke through and blocked Wilson's kick. Weir recovered it behind the goal line for a touchdown. Although the extra point failed, the 6-0 lead appeared impregnable against the Frankford defense.

But late in the fourth period, the Steam Roller benefited from a Frankford mistake. A poor punt gave Providence the ball on the Frankford 25-yard line. With the front line blocking effectively, the Steam Roller charged to the end zone on seven straight running plays, with Wildcat Wilson carrying for all but two of the yards. With time very short, "Curly" Oden attempted a drop-kick for the extra point, but drove the ball just under the

crossbar. The clock ran out shortly thereafter, and the two teams had a 6-6 tie and many bruises to show for their troubles.

After relaxing for a few hours, both teams boarded sleeping cars on a midnight train back to Providence. The Yellowjackets played weekend doubleheaders as a rule, but the Steam Roller players most likely felt the wear-and-tear of extended action. They'd played two games the weekend before, battled the first-place club to a tie on Saturday, and spent the night in a sleeping car on a speeding railroad. To make matters worse, fullback Al Hadden's knee, injured in Frankford, stiffened up overnight. With Conzelman and "Pop" Williams sidelined altogether and Jim Simmons and Hadden able to play only sparingly, the backfield of Wilson, Oden, and two brothers, Jack and Bill Cronin, had to play almost the entire game.

Rain threatened to drench the Cycledrome, but an overflow crowd of approximately 11,000 showed up at the new starting time of 2:15 (the days were growing shorter, and there were no lights) to root for the local favorites. Early in the game, the Steam Roller had the ball on the Frankford 46-yard line. Wilson took the hike, dropped back, and shot a short pass to Oden on the 40-yard line. The slippery quarterback dodged a few tacklers and sprinted to the end zone for a touchdown. His drop-kick for the extra point was low, so the Steam Roller had to settle for an early 6-0 lead. For the rest of the afternoon, the Frankford defense stifled the Steam Roller attack, but the Providence defense allowed the Yellowjackets only three first downs for the entire contest. When the final gun sounded, the scoreboard still read 6-0, and the Steam Roller had rolled into first place in the NFL.

The Stretch

The Steam Roller held its lead the next weekend with a 16-0 win over the fading Giants. They spent Thanksgiving in Pottsville, grinding out a 7-0 win over the Maroons.

Tragedy struck the next day when the Steam Roller lost one of its most loyal fans. Players who came from the New England area generally had living quarters, but those from the midwest had to find places to stay during the season. Conzelman, center Clyde Smith, guard Milt Rehnquist, and a few others rented rooms in the home of Pearce Johnson, one of the original

founders of the team. Johnson's mother boarded the players under her roof, kept them well-fed until, and did their laundry all for \$15 a week. The day after Thanksgiving, while out shopping for groceries for "her boys," Mrs. Johnson was struck and killed by a streetcar.

The team had only one game left. On Sunday, December 2, they hosted the Green Bay Packers, a disappointment on the season but still dangerous. Regardless of the strengths of the Packers, the crowd of 10,500 at the Cycledrome had every reason to expect their local powerhouse to clinch the NFL title. All they had to do was keep from losing. Both teams blew scoring opportunities in the opening quarter. After "Curly" Oden shook loose on a punt return and brought the ball all the way down to the five-yard line, Wildcat Wilson tried a pass which was intercepted in the end zone. Later in the period, the Packers drove down to the Providence five-yard line but lost the ball on a fumble. The remainder of the first half boiled down to a punting match between Green Bay's Verne Lewellen and Wildcat Wilson. With the score still 0-0, the Packers broke the ice in the third quarter on a 30-yard touchdown pass from Lewellen to Larry Marks. The extra point made the score 7-0.

Facing possible defeat, the Steam Roller took the kickoff and drove 72 yards in 11 plays, with a 23-yard pass play from Wilson to Oden scoring the touchdown. "Gus" Sonnenberg added the extra point with a place kick, and Wilson's well-placed punts kept the Packers in poor field position for the rest of the afternoon.

The game ended at 7-7, making the Steam Roller the champion of the NFL. Later that day, the Yellowjackets lost 28-6 to the Chicago Bears.

Unlike today's Super Bowl winners, however, the Steam Roller players picked up no huge bonus checks for their championship. Team members simply received their normal pay for the final game. But there was one reward for the team, a "victory banquet" at the Hotel Biltmore on the following Tuesday evening at 6:30.

The entire team, a delegation of city and state officials, and approximately 200 paying fans celebrated the successful football season with food and talk. Each member of the team received a gold watch as a memento of the season, and a loving cup for the Most Valuable Player of the team was presented to Conzelman. The players

themselves voted to decide the MVP, settling upon their popular, good-natured coach despite the knee injury which sidelined him for the bulk of the schedule. In a short speech, Conzelman praised the morale of the team, saying that "there had not been a cross word between any two of the players in three months, on or off the field."

Into the Mist

In Chicago, Chris O'Brien's Cardinals barely survived the season with an odd schedule. They opened in September with a 15-0 loss to the Bears before a crowd of only 4,000 at Normal Park, skipped a week, and then edged weak Dayton, 7-0, on October 7. A week later, they were pummeled at Green Bay, 20-0. They didn't play again for five weeks, apparently because O'Brien hadn't been able to arrange any games. With his team out of Comiskey and back in Normal Park, the only likely visitors had already been there: the Bears in "pity" warm-up and the Triangles, who'd go anywhere for the guarantee.

The Cardinals weren't much of an attraction on the road either, but O'Brien could cut expenses to the bone by playing two of his meager six games back-to-back. The weekend before Thanksgiving, O'Brien's team launched its "second season" when they showed up in Philadelphia to lose to the Yellow Jackets, 19-0. They overnighted to New York, where the Yankees also beat them 19-0. Four days later, they ended their endeavors for 1928 with a 34-0 Thanksgiving Day loss to the Bears at Wrigley Field. The only thing memorable about the game was that it saw Jim Thorpe's last NFL appearance. The 41-year-old Indian, overweight and out of shape, went in briefly at end for the Cardinals in a cameo that brought only sadness to those who had seen him in his prime.

In Providence, the winter of 1928-9 was a time of relishing the achievements of the past football season. Charlie Coppen, Pete Laudati, and Judge Dooley had sizable profits to reflect upon, products of the unprecedented enthusiasm which Providence fans showed as the team picked up momentum with important victories in November.

Sonnenberg reached the top of the professional wrestling ladder when, on January 4, 1929, before 20,000 fans in the new Boston Garden, he beat Ed "Strangler" Lewis in two straight falls to capture the world heavyweight championship.

Despite that good beginning, 1929 proved to be a bad year for the Steam Roller. Sonnenberg stayed out of football to make better money defending his title, Oden quit to take a job with an insurance company in Boston, and Clyde Smith decided to stay back in his native Missouri as a coach. Conzelman didn't fully recover from his knee injury, Milt Rehnquist missed the first portion of the schedule because of illness, and "Wildcat" Wilson played with a complacency that turned him into a tabby. The 1929 Steam Roller turned in a limp 4-6-2 record, and the fans who kept the turnstiles spinning during the championship season stayed away in droves.

When the Depression gripped the nation, not even a title contender could have cured the sick gate. At the conclusion of the 1931 season, the three partners in the team gave up and turned the franchise back to the NFL.

Providence no longer had a place on the NFL circuit, but it continued to have post-collegiate football. Pearce Johnson organized a semi-pro version of the Steam Roller to play small-scale local teams in 1932. Off and on through 1964, the Providence Steam Roller played independent and minor-league pro football. Its most recent incarnation was as an arena football team.

The Cycledrome continued to host cycling and football until the city closed it down on November 8, 1934, citing the decrepit and dangerous condition of the bleachers. Owner Pete Laudati turned this his advantage by leveling the Cycledrome and building on the site an E.M. Lowe drive-in movie theater. When it opened in 1937, it was only the second drive-in theater in the nation, the first being in Jersey City, N.J.

FINAL STANDINGS: NFL 1928

<u>Team</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	<u>PTS-OPP</u>
Providence Steam Roller	8	1	2	.889	128- 42
Frankford Yellow Jackets	11	3	2	.786	175- 84
Detroit Wolverines	7	2	1	.778	189- 76
Green Bay Packers	6	4	3	.600	120- 92
Chicago Bears	7	5	1	.583	182- 85
New York Giants	4	7	2	.364	79-136
New York Yankees	4	8	1	.333	103-179
Pottsville Maroons	2	8	0	.200	74-134
Chicago Cardinals	1	5	0	.167	7-107
Dayton Triangles	0	7	0	.000	9-131

A True Football Classic

By Rick Gonsalves

In 1958, major league baseball was the national past time followed by horse racing and college football. Professional football fell in a distant fourth place. But by the end of that year, this was about to change.

On the afternoon of December 28, 64,185 fans filed into Yankee Stadium to watch the New York Giants play the Baltimore Colts for the National Football League Championship. Also, over 43 million TV viewers would tune in to watch the game on their black and white sets. I was one of those TV spectators, a thirteen year-old eighth grade student and die-hard New York Giants' fan. Yet, never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that some day I would be in the company of some of these great players who took part in that classic game.

This dream would eventually come true because on the weekend of December 28, 2008, the 50th reunion was held for these players from both teams at M & T Bank Stadium in Baltimore and as a pro football historian and statistician, I got an invitation to attend. I now had the golden opportunity to meet and talk to these players about key plays in that classic game.

The match up of teams was enough to draw great interest in this game. It pitted a high scoring team, the Baltimore Colts led by a young brash quarterback, John Unitas against a club known for its stubborn defense, the New York Giants, but whose efficient offense fell under the direction of the cagey old veteran, Charlie Conerly. Because of his rugged looks, Conerly had been selected as the Marlboro Man for an advertisement to push cigarettes for this company.

It didn't take Unitas long to show everyone why he was such an accurate passer. In the first period, he hit Lenny Moore on a 60-yard pass play which set up a field goal attempt. But the Giants' linebacker Sam Huff broke through the Colts line and blocked the kick.

The Giants took over after they recovered the ball and with the help from a 38-yard run by Frank Gifford, the Giants were now in field goal territory. Pat Summerall converted the kick and New York led 3 to 0.

In the second quarter from deep in their own territory, Gifford tried to break free on an end run but was hit hard by the Colt defenders who were in hot pursuit. Frank fumbled the ball and Baltimore recovered it. The Colts took just six plays to score on an Alan Ameche two-yard touchdown plunge.

Later in that period, The Giants were on the move when Gifford again fumbled the ball which was picked up by the Colts on their own 14. Unitas then marched to Colts down field on 15 plays, highlighted by his 16-yard run and a key 13-yard pass to Raymond Berry. Again, Unitas went to Berry for the touchdown pass to put Baltimore ahead 14 to 3 just as the first half ended.

Near the end of the third period, Unitas moved the Colts to the Giants' two-yard line through three passes, to Jim Mutscheller for 32 yards, Raymond Berry for 11 yards and to Lenny Moore, who had not done much so far in the game for 12 yards.

"I got injured in the first quarter, but the Giants did not know this." Moore later explained. "So Unitas used me as a decoy for most of the game and I drew double coverage. That put Raymond and Jim in a one-on-one situation with the other Giants safeties who they could beat for pass receptions."

With the ball on the Giants' two-yard line, first and goal to go, the Colts were in a position to put the game away. But four times the Colts tried to break the Giants' defense and four times it held.

"On fourth and one, Unitas called flow 288, a pitchout to Alan Ameche, who would then throw the option pass to me," Jim Mutscheller said. "Alan failed to hear the other eight. Instead, he ran flow 28, kept the ball, and swept to his right trying to score. But, he was thrown for a loss back to the five. Meanwhile, I was open in the end zone."

"We could have used our 6-6, 290 defensive tackle, Rosey Grier badly for that goal line stand but he had injured his knee in the Cleveland game a week earlier and could not move all that well," New York's big offensive tackle Frank Youso added. "I played offense for the whole game but in the third quarter, they put me Rosey's spot. It turned out that I was the only one to play both offense and defense in this game."

As we historians agree, had the Colts scored, it would have given them an 18 point lead, 21 to 3, and millions of television viewers would have switched their sets off. Since the previous four NFL Championship games were won by lopsided

scores, 59 to 14 in 1957, 47 to 7 in 1956, 38 to 14 in 1955 and 56 to 10 in 1954, these spectators would have then lost interest in watching this game.

After taking over on downs, and facing a third and ten from their own 16, Conerly reared back and hit Kyle Rote with a pass at the Baltimore 40. He carried it to the 25 where he was tackled by two defenders who caused him to fumble the ball. Alex Webster, trailing the play, scooped it up and took it to the one. Mel Tripplett then punched it in for the Giants first touchdown of the game to cut the deficit to 14 to 10.

Now with new life, Conerly led the offense to another score in the fourth quarter when Bob Schnelker hauled in a 46-yard pass to set up Frank Gifford's five-yard touchdown reception to put New York ahead 17 to 14. On the Colts next possession, they sent Burt Rechichar in to attempt a 46-yard field goal which would tie the game, but the ball fell far short of the goal posts.

In the final minutes of the game, the Giants were in a third and four situation from their own 40. If they make the first down, they can run out the clock and win the game. Gifford took a handoff and turned inside of his right tackle. There, he was hit by Gino Marchetti and Big Daddy Lipscomb. After the players unplied, the referee marked the ball a half foot short of the vital first down. Gifford screamed that he had made it and that the ball was spotted poorly. Art Donovan, the other Colts defensive tackle yelled, "Why don't you just shut up and go back to your huddle. You didn't make it!"

Among the other screams were those of Marchetti's. Big Daddy, Baltimore's 6-6, 290 pound defensive tackle, fell on Gino breaking his ankle.

The Giants elected to punt instead of going for the first down. Unitas then pulled off one of the greatest two-minute drills ever. He completed three straight passes to Ray Berry for a total of 52 yards. This set up Steve Myhra's 20-yard field goal which tied the game before time expired.

"We weren't quite sure if Steve would be able to kick since he came in to play linebacker for me early in the game when I got hurt." Leo Sanford said. "He took quite a beating making tackles throughout the game but he did it for us."

Concerning overtime, no one knew what to do until NFL Commissioner Bert Bell, who was at the game, gave the word to play an extra period, called sudden death. The Giants won the coin toss, got the ball but could not move it. They punted to the Colts and again Unitas drove the

team 80 yards downfield, with 30 timely yards coming from the running game.

"We had to move our middle linebacker Sam Huff back to help Carl Karilivacz cover Raymond Berry. This left the middle open for the Colts running backs," defensive back Lindon Crow offered.

This did not matter as Alan Ameche drove over right tackle to scoring the winning touchdown.

It was called the greatest game ever played but this is not quite a correct title. It did have long runs, long passes and great defense. But it was a sloppily played game with six fumbles, one interception and two missed field goals.

"The celebration in the locker room was a let-down because here we were grown men who just won the NFL title and they served us orange soda instead of champagne or beer," Colts' defensive tackle Art Donovan said disgustedly.

"We did not know that we made pro football history after the game," Colts offensive guard Alex Sandusky added. "We were so exhausted, we just dressed and went home."

Each player on the Colts received \$4,718 and each player on the Giants collected \$3,111.

This was the only time in NFL history too, that there were so many future hall of famers, 17, on one field at the same time.

Today, out of the 48 starters from both teams counting kickers, just 28 are still living. And as many of them realize, this too will probably be their last time together.

Also, other major cities in the country were so impressed by this game that they pushed for pro football franchises. A few years later, they would get them but in the form of the American Football League.



Johnny Unitas

BEFORE BAUGH

By Bob Gill

The recent death of Sammy Baugh prompted a flurry of much-deserved tributes to his greatness as a player and his pivotal role in the development of the modern passing offense. Unfortunately, they all included some variation of the following quote:

"When Baugh entered the NFL, the forward pass was so rare that it was unveiled mostly in desperate situations. But Baugh passed any time."

Just before Baugh's death, I had read Murray Greenberg's fine new biography of Benny Friedman, which contains several variations of the same statement, with Friedman's name in place of Baugh's.

In fact, though, it's not true in either case.

The first to discover this was prolific researcher David Neft. Back in the early 1980s, when Neft was scouring old newspaper accounts to compile his groundbreaking statistics from the early years of the NFL, one thing that surprised him was the number of passes the teams threw.

Let's start even earlier, though, with the years just before the NFL – the Jim Thorpe era, if you will. Back around 1990, I tabulated stats from 14 of the Canton Bulldogs' games from 1915-19, using play-by-play accounts in the *Canton Repository*. Having grown up hearing the myth of "desperate situation" passing, I wouldn't have been shocked to find teams throwing five passes per game. Instead – well, let's start with the climactic games of 1915, the home-and-home series pitting Canton against the Massillon Tigers.

These games marked Thorpe's first appearance in the Ohio League, the unofficial circuit that spawned the NFL five years later. But even with Thorpe, Canton managed only a split in the two games, thanks to the fine passing of Massillon's Gus Dorais.

As a Notre Dame star in 1913, Dorais had turned in college football's first great passing performance in a 35-13 rout of Army. Against

Canton two years later, he demonstrated that he hadn't lost his touch: His combined totals for the season's two biggest games: 34 attempts, 17 completions, 282 yards.

That would be a good game for a quarterback today. Granted, it took Dorais two games to compile those stats, but saying a passer from more than 90 years ago threw half as much as a modern quarterback is a far, far cry from saying he threw only in desperation, isn't it?

Those weren't the only good performances by passers in the Ohio League, either:

- In 1916 a back named Bud Goodwin, from Washington & Jefferson, joined Massillon just in time for a Thanksgiving Day game against the Youngstown Patricians. Goodwin broke in with a bang, completing 15 of 28 passes for 204 yards and a touchdown as the Tigers routed Youngstown 27-0.

- In a 1917 game, Canton's Milt Ghee embarrassed the Columbus Panhandles by hitting on 12 of 19 passes for 201 yards and five TDs.

- Also in 1917, Al Mahrt of the Dayton Triangles threw for nine scores in six games against second-line Ohio teams, accounting for all but four of his team's touchdowns.

Those, again, were the outstanding cases. For a more general idea of how much passing went on in that era, let's take the totals from those 14 Canton games. The Bulldogs hit on 57 of 187 passes for 981 yards, while their opponents completed 60 of 145 for 752 yards. Altogether, that's 332 passes, or just about 24 per game – 12 per team. The percentages weren't good, the yardage wasn't great, but they were throwing the ball.

It's not exactly the West Coast offense, but remember, when the Miami Dolphins won back-to-back Super Bowls after the 1972 and '73 seasons, they threw a total of 18 passes in those two games, plus 22 passes combined in two AFC

championship games. And nobody ever implied that they were playing in the Dark Ages.

Nothing changed terribly with the birth of the NFL in 1920. Team passing stats are available in Neft's *Football Encyclopedia* for seven of Canton's eight games that year, and the Bulldogs and their opponents combined to throw 130 passes – about 19 per game, below the figures for 1915-19, but not by much. Those seem to have been pretty typical numbers for teams around the league.

The major exception was Dayton, which had the league's most pass-oriented offense. Play-by-plays exist for six of the Triangles' games in 1920 and '21 (three each year), and in those games they threw 110 passes, or 18 per game, completing 47 for 752 yards. Al Mahrt, probably the best passer in pro football in the late teens and early '20s, accounted for 630 of those yards – that is, more than 100 a game for a random sample covering two seasons.

By 1923 the aerial game's popularity had increased to the extent that Neft can document at least three backs who threw more than 100 passes: Lou Smyth of Canton, Curly Lambeau of Green Bay and Johnny Armstrong of Rock Island. Armstrong, in fact, threw the extraordinary total of 171 passes in a mere eight games – more than 21 per game.

Not too coincidentally, play-by-plays exist for almost all games of those three teams; if that were the case for everyone, there's a strong possibility that a few more backs would top the 100-pass mark. Jimmy Conzelman of the Milwaukee Badgers, for instance, threw 64 passes in the only four games for which Neft found play-by-play accounts or stats mentioned in a newspaper; and since his team played nine other games, it's a pretty good bet that he actually threw even more passes than Armstrong that year.

The 1,000-yard mark fell a year later, when Lambeau completed 75 of 179 passes for 1,094 yards. In eleven games, the Packers and their opponents combined to throw 383 passes, or 35 per game. If they were passing only in desperation, those must have been desperate times indeed.

It's very likely that Lambeau had company in the 1,000-yard club. Milwaukee played thirteen games in 1924, and though passing stats exist for only five of them, in those five rookie Red Dunn, taking over the tossing from Conzelman, threw 73 passes good for 565 yards. That's 113 yards per game, and he would've had to average only 55 in the remaining eight games to hit 1,000, so it's a good bet that he did so.

A year later, Hust Stockton of the Frankford Yellowjackets passed for 632 yards in the seven games for which complete records exist, and since the Jackets played seven other games, he seems just about as likely as Dunn to have reached 1,000 yards.

Note also that of all the passers I've just mentioned – Smyth, Lambeau, Armstrong and Conzelman in 1923; Lambeau and Dunn in 1924; Stockton in 1925 – only two of them (Armstrong and Dunn) played for teams with losing records. And passing in desperation, of course, is a strategy that applies only to a team that's trailing.

All these accomplishments aside, though, the landmark season for the passing game in the 1920s was 1927, when Benny Friedman made his NFL debut. Friedman was head and shoulders above everybody else as a passer, as the stats for his first five years in the league (1927-31) demonstrate:

In 42 games for which stats are available, he connected on 291 of 610 passes for 5,038 yards and 40 touchdowns. In his other 19 games in that period, for which Neft retrieved partial stats from game stories that detail touchdown drives and other key plays, Friedman completed at least another 79 passes for 1,683 yards and 18 more TDs. Thus in those five seasons he completed an absolute minimum of 370 passes for 6,719 yards – an average of 74 completions and 1,340 yards a year.

And in the first four of those seasons his teams compiled a record of 41-11-3, so he had very few occasions for "desperation passing." Friedman's passing was a major weapon, not a last resort.

It's important to note, though, that in those 42 "complete" games he threw an average of 15 passes per game. That's a lot for the time, but others had thrown more before him – and Ernie Nevers, a contemporary, threw 22 passes a game

in 1927, Friedman's rookie season. So the claim that nobody passed much before Friedman is clearly false; while he threw more than most others, his real distinction was that he threw far more effectively than anybody.

Still, despite his great success, he did not have a major impact on offensive strategy in the NFL. In 1932, five years after Friedman's emergence, Arnie Herber was able to lead the league with a mere 639 passing yards – a total that wouldn't have led in any previous season since 1922. In fact, after Friedman smashed the 1,000-yard mark four years in a row, from 1927-30, no one reached it again until Herber in 1936. In essence, if you forget about Friedman, passing levels from 1927 to '36 were pretty much the same as they'd been since 1923.

The reason, I think, is that Friedman was just too far above the competition. Since nobody else could throw with anything like his accuracy, it didn't make sense for anyone else to make the passing game such an integral part of the offense.

And that brings us to Baugh.

In 1937, his rookie year, Baugh led the league in passing, completing 81 of 171 passes for 1,127 yards and 8 touchdowns. A year earlier, though, the passing leader was Herber, who completed 77 of 173 passes for 1,239 yards and 11 touchdowns. Baugh's completion percentage was slightly higher, but Herber has a slight edge in the other categories.

We've already established that passing in the days before Baugh was certainly not "unveiled mostly in desperate situations," but here's evidence to indicate that Baugh, though a league leader, wasn't even a notable improvement over his predecessor. How can that be?

Well, it's a misleading comparison. Herber was a Hall of Famer himself, having the best year of his career in 1936. Baugh was a rookie in 1937, and already he was a match for Herber at his best. It was reasonable for contemporary observers to assume – correctly, as it turns out – that with time he might obliterate all of Herber's records. (Records, I should note, that Herber held only because official stats hadn't been compiled until 1932; otherwise it would've been Friedman's records that Baugh eventually broke, and it would've taken him a bit longer to do so.)

What this comparison does indicate, though, is that Baugh was not as far above his contemporaries as Friedman was. Added to Herber and Ed Danowski, who were the NFL's best passers just before Baugh arrived, the league added quite a crop of strong-armed college stars in Baugh's rookie year and the two following: Ace Parker and Pat Coffee in 1937; Cecil Isbell, Frank Filchock and Jack Robbins in 1938; Sid Luckman, Parker Hall and Davey O'Brien in 1939.

With the possible exception of Luckman, none of them was Baugh's equal, but they were near enough that opposing coaches could imagine them succeeding with something like the high-powered aerial attack the Redskins used – whereas in Friedman's heyday other coaches' reaction was probably more along these lines: "Well, he's great, so he can get away with that kind of stuff, but how can our guys expect to do that?"

Anyway, the passing game took off in the NFL after Baugh's arrival. Though in 1938 no one passed for as much as 1,000 yards, four passers – Baugh, Danowski, Parker and the Bears' Bernie Masterson – were clustered very closely around 850, still a pretty good total. In 1939 Masterson increased his yardage to 914, but that ranked him sixth, behind O'Brien, Hall, Herber and Filchock, all of whom topped 1,000, and Parker at 977.

Baugh, plagued by injuries in 1938 and '39, got healthy again in 1940 and returned to the 1,000-yard club himself. In 1942 Isbell became the first to reach 2,000 yards in a season, and by 1947 Baugh had pushed the record to 2,938 yards, where it remained until 1960, when Johnny Unitas finally hit 3,000.

To sum up: Though Friedman and Baugh were the greatest passers of their respective eras, Baugh, arriving at the forefront of a wave of talented tossers, was the one who sparked a major change in NFL offenses, and Friedman was more of an isolated though amazing talent.

But neither one of them was the first to throw a pass on first down, or in his own territory, or whatever the latest claim is. They weren't the first – just the best.

BOOK REVIEW by Andy Piascik

McKay's Men:

1979 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, the Story of Worst to First

By Denis Crawford (Furious Who Publishing, 2006) 208 pages. \$14.95. To order, e-mail dmccrawford79@yahoo.com.



Each of the books mentioned here reads very much like labors of love, but that is perhaps most true of McKay's Men. One can certainly understand a book about the Raiders or one about a great player from a colorful team, but the Tampa Bay Bucs, the franchise that in 1976-77 reached levels of futility unmatched in NFL history? A team that for 25 years had uniforms that were among the most maligned in football (I have to admit I always liked them) and then when they changed them went with ones that are truly awful? Well, okay, maybe, but certainly such a book would be about the Bucs' 2002 Super Bowl champions, wouldn't it?

Not so fast. Crawford has fashioned a highly-readable account of the 1979 Bucs, a team that came within one win of making it to the Super Bowl. Tampa Bay's 1979 season was a remarkable enough story; what makes it all the more noteworthy is that it came on the heels of the team's woeful beginnings. Two years after setting a record with 26 consecutive losses, a record that still stands,

the Bucs made it to the NFC Championship Game.

Titling the book McKay's Men is entirely fitting. Head coach John McKay was at the center of the Bucs' story in their early years and it was he who fashioned the team into a title contender in 1979. Crawford interviewed some of the Bucs' players and they're virtually unanimous in their fond remembrances of McKay. Coming off a phenomenally successful tenure at USC, McKay must have wondered many times what he had gotten himself into during the losing streak that consumed almost two entire seasons. McKay was a reporter's delight, though, always ready with funny quips and great quotes. Virtually unnoticed, he was also building a solid team. Crawford captures both his media savviness and his football acumen.

The core of the book is a detailed, game by game account of the 1979 season. Adding greatly to the story are the recollections of a half dozen players Crawford interviewed, Lee Roy Selmon and Doug Williams among them. The book revels in the team's entirely unexpected success and also captures the heartache of such a near near-miss.

McKay's Men is not only about 1979; the drama is greatly enhanced by the background of 1976-77 and Crawford does a good job documenting that part of the story as well. Of note, too, is the team's fairly rapid fall after 1979 which is at least partly attributed to the incompetence of a meddling owner. It would be almost two decades before the Bucs regained respectability under Tony Dungy.

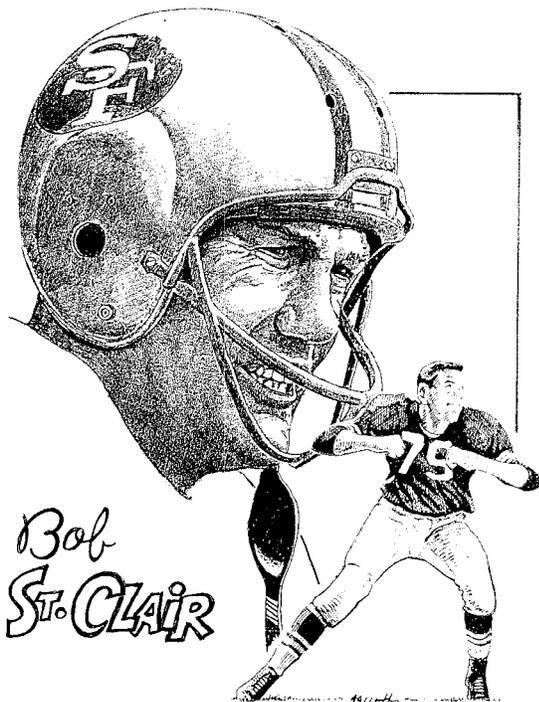
A regular writer for www.bucpower.com, Crawford is also a contributing commentator to Public Radio. His article *Buccaneer Flop* appeared in The Coffin Corner Volume 30, Number 4.

BOOK REVIEW by Andy Piascik

St. Clair: I'll Take It Raw!

San Francisco 49er Great and Pro Football Hall of Fame Member Bob St. Clair

By Kristine Setting Clark (BookSurge, 2005) 188 pages. \$20.00. To order e-mail khrystyne9@aol.com.



Clark takes an in-depth look at the life of one of pro football's all-time great players and colorful characters. As Clark tells it, St. Clair's story is one of a wayward youth finding focus in football. St. Clair's youth was full of petty crime and a good number of his friends ended up in the penitentiary (as he discovered after he'd become an NFL player when he went to San Quentin to speak).

St. Clair's story is also that of a more primitive NFL, of an era that Mickey Herskowitz has called football's golden age. Everything from field conditions to equipment and salaries were a whole lot less than in the years since and St. Clair is one of many who feel that his

era featured tougher players and better football. Whether you agree or disagree, there's a definite sense from the stories that fill I'll Take It Raw that football was a more enjoyable experience in the days of the pre-corporatized NFL.

Sunday autumn afternoons at Kezar Stadium in the 1950's were an integral part of Clark's childhood, and it was then and there that her love of the 49ers began. She certainly picked a worthy object of affection. Talent-laden, colorful, exciting, heartbreaking - the 49ers of St. Clair's time were all of those and more. Although her focus is on one player in particular, Clark paints broadly and richly enough so as to add to the lore of a special time.

Overall, this is a good book and a good read but there are a few quibbles. The layout isn't the best and there are misspelled names and factual errors. All in all these are not a big deal, though, and they don't detract from the book's readability. And the large number of photos is a definite plus.

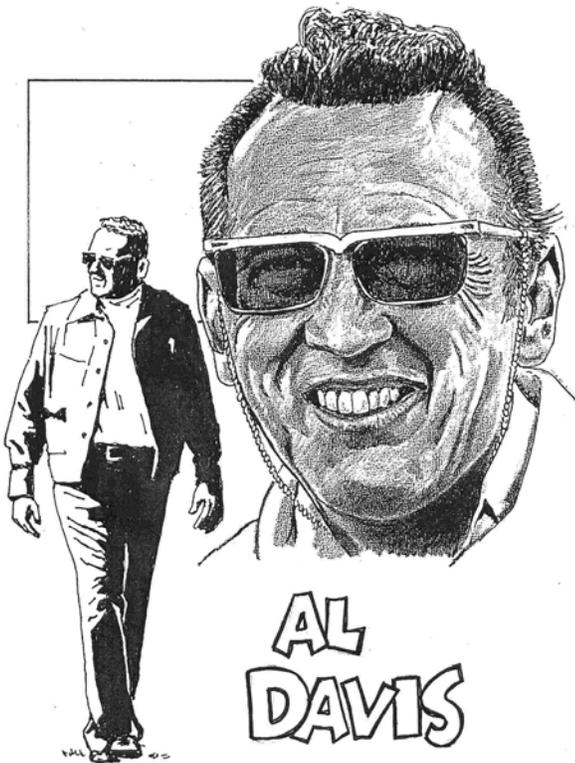
Clark previously authored *Undefeated, Untied and Uninvited: A Documentary of the 1951 University of San Francisco Dons Football Team*, which can also be purchased at the e-mail address above. In addition to the common San Francisco theme, the two books are joined in the person of St. Clair, who played for that great USF team. Clark is currently working on biographies of Y.A. Tittle and Jim Taylor.

BOOK REVIEW by Andy Piascik

Pride & Poise:

The Oakland Raiders of the American Football League

By Jim McCullough (AuthorHouse, 2006). To order call (800) 839-8640.



This is a comprehensive, extremely well-researched account of the Raiders of the 1960's. From details like the original name (Senors) and original colors (black and gold) to the personnel moves that led to the team's great run from 1967 on, McCullough covers it all. It's an exciting story. We see a franchise picked as a last minute replacement that had to scrounge for a place to play, among other things, grow until by decade's end it was a football Colossus.

The key figure in all of this, of course, is Al Davis, but unlike so many who have written about the Raiders, McCullough is not a member of the Davis cult. He gives Davis his significant due, but he also tells the story of

the many others who played a role in the formation of one of the game's most popular and successful franchises: Wayne Valley and the other original Raider owners who persevered through very lean times, the one-for-all-all-for-one sensibility of Lamar Hunt and the AFL's other founders, and the team's many great players.

The legal battles within Raiders ownership and between the AFL and NFL are a part of McCullough's story, but happily he does not dwell on them at great length. He does include - also to his credit - some of the social conflicts that defined the decade and spilled over into the world of sport. Thus we learn, for example, that the Raiders both crossed an NAACP picket line in Houston in 1960 and brought about the demise of a preseason game in Mobile just three years later by organizing a boycott in protest of segregated stadium seating.

Mostly, though, there are accounts of ten year's worth of games, rivalries, and the accomplishments of Jim Otto, Willie Brown, Warren Wells, and so many other players. There's the bitter disappointment of postseason defeats, especially in 1968 and 1969, seasons in which the Raiders had the best record in the AFL but other teams from the upstart league gained Super Bowl immortality. And although the book does not extend beyond the 1969 season, the team's glory years in the 1970's and 1980's loom over the story and give it an added dimension. It all began in the 1960's, however, and Pride and Poise tells us how.

TEXANS 27 – BEARS 23

By Tracy Thibeau



Frank Tripucka

In 1952, the first Dallas Texans franchise was turned back over to the league. NFL Commissioner Bert Bell assumed control of the team seven games into the twelve game season. Giles Miller stood weepy-eyed as he watched his former football team board the airplane out of town. The textile business millionaire had gambled and lost. But it sure seemed to be a safe bet. Texas and football go together like ham and eggs or cheese and crackers.

Giles and his brother, Connell, had purchased the New York Yanks NFL franchise for \$100,000 after the Yanks' dismal 1951 season. They also had assumed the \$25,000 lease the Yanks had at Yankee Stadium. Neither of these debts was ever paid.

Bert Bell and the league owners, with the exception of Art Rooney, also thought it was a sure thing. The preseason NFL games that had been played in Dallas the previous two years had attracted crowds of fifty and fifty-six thousand people.

"I was convinced the Texans couldn't miss," said Tex Maule, the teams' publicity man.

It is still a matter of speculation as to why this happened. The 1952 preseason had no indication of any trouble ahead. The first game was held in Kerrville, Texas, where the team practiced.

The small town, with a population of 8000, drew 5000 fans to see a contest between the pros and a local athletic club. But Kerrville is over 300 miles from Dallas. The town is only 60 miles from San Antonio where the team drew over 19,000 preseason spectators. The Texans also drew 17,000 in Odessa and 12,500 in Houston. At the only preseason game in Dallas, 32,000 showed.

But when the regular season began, things began to go south (no pun intended). In 1952, an NFL visiting team's guarantee was \$20,000. A hometown crowd of 24,000 was needed just to break even. But at the home opener, only 17,500 paid to get in.

So how did this happen?

Hall of Famer Raymond Berry, a sophomore at SMU at the time, said: "The main reason pro football didn't go over was because of the super saturation of high school, junior college and college teams in the area."

Also, the Miller brothers didn't know how to run or advertise a team. They only sold 5200 season seats. They did send the players to the Texas State Fair to promote the team, but when the boys asked the locals if they were coming out to the game the reply was usually, "What game? We ain't never heard of any team down here except SMU, TCU and Texas."

In 1952, pro football was still trying to establish a fan base. Art Donovan, one of the twelve veterans that went with the franchise from New York to Dallas, said: "We were literally a dog and pony show, following geek shows and carnivals and playing exhibitions in out of the way hamlets all over the country just to pick up a fan or two."

The Millers gave the boys ten-gallon cowboy hats to wear for promotion. Donovan, a native New Yorker, didn't like wearing his and gave his hat to a truck driver.

"That's O.K.," drawled team investor Colonel "Dry Hole" Byrd. "If he doesn't like Texas, we'll just trade him to the Green Bay Packers!" Green Bay was a local source of amusement because of the Wisconsin city's small size.

"When I played football," recalled Donovan, "there were wild teams, stocked with wild guys, playing during wild times."

Some have speculated that the presence of the team's two black players, Buddy Young and George Tallaferro may have contributed to the poor attendance. Racism in the south was an ugly reality. But local sportswriter Mickey Herskowitz reported that Young was "fan favorite."

One of the Texan's assistant coaches, Cecil Isbell, said: "This is one of the finest citizens I have ever known. If you don't like Buddy Young then you just don't like people. The little guy (5'4", 175 lbs.) is quite a man." Young had set records at the University of Illinois that rivaled those of Red Grange.

The Cotton Bowl, where the team played their home games, was a segregated stadium at the time. When the owners noticed that the black players' wives were sitting in the Jim Crow section, they told them that they could sit down in front with the rest of the wives. But the girls refused and chose to sit with the black patrons instead.

Some of the other notable members of the team were:

Head Coach Jimmy Phelan: Knute Rockne called him the smartest quarterback he ever had. Phelan was a recovering alcoholic. One early morning, most of the team came back to the facility after an all night bender. Phelan was waiting for them in dump truck. He loaded them aboard and drove them all to Catholic Mass. His best friend was baseball's Casey Stengel. When the team was in Los Angeles, Casey showed up at practice. So Phelan loaded the team on the bus and they went to the racetrack instead.

Trainer Chief Ray West: This full-blooded Indian would get drunk and disappear for days at a time. Chubby Grigg: Buddy Young said he was "mean as a snake, fat as a hog, and on the downside of his pro career. His whole disposition was mean."

Don Colo: When Giants' tackle Rosey Brown was a rookie in 1953, he was lined up against Colo, who was with Cleveland then. Brown said Colo would spit tobacco juice in his face just before the snap. Brown recalled: "O.K., I'm gonna fix him – by the time they come to New York I'm gonna learn to chew tobacco myself. And I learned how. When he lined up against me that day he spit, and I spit a hunk of tobacco right

back at him. The ball was snapped and we didn't even pay any attention to it. Everybody else was running around out there and we were still in our stances spitting tobacco at each other."

Frank Tripucka: The Texans lost their regular quarterback, George Ratterman, when the franchise shifted. Art Donovan said: "We never did have a quarterback until Frank Tripucka came over from the Cards." Tripucka didn't become a Texan until mid-season. He had his shoulder separated in week five. He was out of the NFL the following year. In 1960, at age 33, he became the starting quarterback for the Denver Broncos and lasted three full seasons at that position.

Art Donovan: "I hurt my leg against the Rams in the Coliseum," recalled the Hall of Famer. "A guy fell into the back of it. It was killing me but I stayed on the sideline and watched the rest of the game. When it was over, everybody runs off and leaves me on the bench. I can't walk! I have to crawl all the way off the field, up the ramp and into the dressing room. The team doctor checks me over and starts looking for some crutches.

"Phelan stops him. He screams 'That son of a bitch is an *Irishman!* He don't need no crutches!' It turns out I got a broken knee. I was back playing three weeks later. I told him (Phelan) that I couldn't run and he said 'That's O.K. If they run in your direction just fall down and get in the way.'"

The team also fielded rookie and future Hall of Famer Gino Marchetti.

Whatever the reason was for the poor attendance at the beginning of the season, by week seven, the team had lost every one of their games and by a big margin too. They had been outscored 213-95 and attendance at the Cotton Bowl had dwindled to only 10,000.

The Millers found themselves \$250,000 in the hole. The bank refused to loan them an additional \$125,000. They informed Bert Bell that unless additional funds were made immediately, the team could not play its next game. So the hometown bankrollers returned the franchise with five games remaining on their schedule.

Bell took over the business matters of the team such as player contracts. He moved the team's practice facility to Hershey, Pennsylvania. Bell intended to maintain the league's agenda and complete all of the games on the schedule. He also would not allow the team to use the name of the city (Dallas) where they came from so the boys jokingly called themselves "Bert Bell's Bombers."

"We had no talent to begin with," recalled Art Donovan, "and whatever enthusiasm we may have mustered was spent by the time the league took over our operation. We had no morale problem when we went to Hershey, in fact we had a heck of a lot of fun." The team played more volleyball than football.

For some reason, perhaps superstition, the team took their equipment manager Willie Garcia along with them. Garcia was a cook at a Dallas Mexican restaurant that the Miller Brothers owned. He had never seen a football in his life when he was given the job. Willie also had a wooden leg. During practice in Kerrville, if one of the boys kicked the ball into the tall grass, Willie was sent out to fetch it. The boys figured he had only half the chance a getting bit by a rattlesnake.

Another time, when the team was boarding an airplane for a road trip, Willie told head coach Jimmy Phelan that he couldn't make the trip because his wife was afraid that he would never come back. Phelan told Willie that he could remain behind but would he please go to the rear of the plane and double check if all of the equipment was on board. When Willie did so, Phelan ordered the pilot to close the hatch and Shanghaied the gullible hombre.

Once in Hershey, Don Colo gave Willie a Homburg hat, the kind Marlon Brando wore in the Godfather. The hat never left his head. He wore it in hotel lobbies, dining cars and even in the locker room.

Bell had only two home games to reschedule for his orphans. The Detroit game would be played in Detroit.

The one remaining with the Chicago Bears was tentatively scheduled in Chicago on the last Sunday in November. Bell had wanted to play the game in Baltimore, the city that eventually inherited the Dallas franchise, but Memorial Stadium was booked.

Bill Griffith, an Akron sports promoter, spoke to both George Halas and Bert Bell. He proposed that the game be rescheduled on Thanksgiving Day at the Rubber Bowl in Akron.

Griffith suggested that they televise the game as part of a double-header. The annual Detroit Lions Thanksgiving Day game was also being televised and the kickoff was scheduled for 11 A.M. All agreed to the plan and the game was rescheduled to begin at 1:45 P.M. Because the Chicago Cardinals didn't have a scheduled game that day, it became the only televised game in Chicago that year. Red Grange was the sportscaster.

On that frigid Thanksgiving Day, the Rubber Bowl, capacity 35,000, hosted a double header too. The morning game was between two high school teams. Almost 15,000 spectators attended that game. But by the time the NFL game started only 2,500 remained.

With the exception of this date, the Bears averaged more than 40,000 spectators per game in 1952. Five years earlier, Halas was only getting \$900 per game for the television rights. That figure couldn't have been that much higher in 1952. So the league had to pay the Bears \$20,000 guarantee.

Bears' defensive back, Don Kindt, said that Coach Halas didn't take the game seriously and didn't put in the starting team until the fourth quarter. The box score tells a different story. George Blanda wasn't the first string quarterback in 1952, but the Hall of Famer played the entire game. Three other Canton enshrinees, Bill George, George Connor and Bulldog Turner also started.

The game was a scoreless tie in the second quarter when the Bears coughed up the ball on a fumble deep in the Texans territory. A few plays later, Buddy Young got smeared in the end zone for a safety. Bears 2 - Texans 0.

The Bears fumbled the following kick and five plays later the Texans got on the scoreboard when running back Zollie Toth plunged in for a TD. Incidentally, Buddy Young named one of his kids "Zollie" in honor of his teammate. Keith Flowers extra point was low. Texans 6 - Bears 2.

In the first quarter, the Bears faked a punt and gained 57 yards. When they tried it again in the second, Tom Keane forced a fumble and the Texans recovered on the Bears 14. Tripucka was intercepted but the Bears fumbled it again.

On third and ten, from the Bears twenty, Taliaferro took the handoff, ran right, and threw a pass into the end zone. Don Kindt went up with Texan Dick Wilkins but Wilkins came down with the ball. Cannamela's kick was good and the Texans were leading at the half, 13-2.

In the locker room, Coach Phelan told the boys, "We got 'em today. This one we can't lose."

For the first six minutes of the third quarter, the Texans controlled the ball. Cannamela attempted a field goal from the 28. The Texans had only attempted four field goals all season and this one, just like the others, was no good.

After another series of turnovers, the Texans found themselves with a first down at the Bears thirty. Suddenly,

the small crowd of 2,500 Akron football fans started chanting "go-go-go-go." On the next play, end Ray Pelfrey got in the open and Tripucka found him. Pelfrey battled up to the six-yard line.

Fullback Dick Hoerner ran around the left side to the one. An offside was called against the Bears and the ball was placed at the foot-and-a-half yard line.

The Chicago *Tribune* told the tale: "Tripucka climbed over a couple of Bears to score and Cannamela kicked the goal which sent the Texans into the violent final period with their 20-2 lead."

The Tribune went on to say that during the first three periods, George Blanda was just "ordinary." He had already missed two field goals and had thrown three interceptions.

The Bears Ed Sprinkle returned a Tripucka fumble to the Texans one-yard line. Billy Stone then catapulted over the pile and landed on his helmet. Blanda's kick was good. Texans 20 – Bears 9.

Taliaferro fumbled the following kickoff but the Texans intercepted Blanda again. The Texans punted and Eddie Macon returned the ball to the Texans 41. On the next play, Blanda connected with Dimancheff and Babe took it to the house. Blanda's kick was good. The score was the Texans 20 – Bears 16 with 7:17 remaining in the game.

The game was getting rough. George Connor riled Ray Pelfrey enough for him to challenge Connor to a fight. When Connor squared off, Pelfrey smirked at him and said, "You would, wouldn't you?"

With five minutes left to play, Tripucka was picked off by Frank Dempsey who ran it back twelve yards to the Texans 35. On the next play, Blanda completed his second touchdown pass to Gene Schroeder. Blanda's kick put the Bears out in front 23-20.

Everyone in attendance was rooting loudly for the Texans now. The Texans controlled the ball until the two-minute warning. From his own 40, Tripucka's pass to Pelfrey brought the ball to the 34.

The Bears had been double-teaming Buddy Young. On the next play, he broke into the open. It would have been a touchdown but Buddy dropped the pass at the 4-yard line. A collective groan echoed through the vacuous stadium.

But Pelfrey snagged Tripucka's next offering and took it to the 20. Only 63 seconds remained.

The Texans Tom Keane, who normally played defense, came off the bench and into the game. Bears safety, Don Kindt noticed the change of personnel and asked Halas if they could double-team Keane instead of Young.

Kindt recalled: "I usually ran the defense on the field and I was surprised when George said no."

On the next play, Tripucka threw it to Keane. Keane and Kindt went up for the ball together.

"I swore I took it away from him," Kindt recalled, "but the officials gave it to the Texans on our one. Now big Dick Hoerner (the newspaper said it was Zollie Toth) slams into the line. We stop him and I steal the ball. But no, again the officials give them the ball. Finally, with 34 seconds left, Tripucka sneaks it over. Halas is so mad he rushes out on the field and kicks me."

Cannamela's successful conversion forced the Bears to go for the touchdown. The Bears threw some desperation passes but fumbled again and the Texans iced the ball. The Final score was the Homeless Texans 27- Chicago Bears 23.

The Tribune wrote: "The statistics testified that this was no fluke victory."

Both quarterbacks threw 27 passes. Tripucka connected 17 times to Blanda's 15. Tripucka passed for 204 yards to Blanda's 145. Both quarterbacks threw 4 interceptions, but the Texans returns were for 51 yards to the Bears 20.

The Texans gained 130 yards on the ground to the Bears 122. The Texans led in first downs 22-15. The Texans fumbled 4 times and lost 2. The Bears fumbled 6 times and lost 4. The Bears were penalized twice. The Texans committed no infractions.

George Halas had promised his team a bonus if they beat the world champion Detroit Lions on the previous Sunday. The Bears won that game 24-23 with a trick play touchdown pass on the final play of the game. But now, because of losing to the wretched Texans, Halas was renegeing on his promise.

The *Tribune* reported that the people in the grandstand at the Rubber Bowl that day renamed the Dallas Texans the "Akron A.C."

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