

1955: THAT WONDERFUL YEAR

By P.F.R.A. Research

The 1955 season began on a topsy-turvy note when Western Division co-favorites Detroit and Chicago Bears each lost their first three games. The Bears, inspired by owner-coach George Halas' announcement that he planned retirement from the sideline at the close of the season, soon righted themselves and forged into the lead, but the Lions dropped three more in a row and never were a factor. An off-season shoulder separation took the zip out of Bobby Layne's passing arm, and the Detroit defense -- minus retired Les Bingaman, their 300-plus-pound middle guard -- couldn't make up the difference.

'54 champ Cleveland looked hopeless through the exhibition season, but Paul Brown lured Otto Graham out of his retirement and once more it was business as usual at Lakefront Stadium. The Browns took their sixth Eastern crown in as many years and tenth straight division title, counting their four All-America Football Conference years. Automatic Otto threw sparingly but with devastating effect, and two runners who had hitherto been considered pro disappointments -- Ed Modzelewski and Curly Morrison -- gave the Clevelanders a strong land attack.

Cleveland's title trip was made easier by the Giants' dreadful start. Like the Bears and Lions, the New Yorkers lost their opening three contests. Once coach Jim Lee Howell blended ex-Canadian star Alex Webster into the backfield with Frank Gifford and Charley Conerly, the Giants finished strong for third place.

The Browns' primary competition came from Washington. Bolstered by three stars who'd been sweet-talked into returning from the Canadian Football League -- Eddie LeBaron, Gene Brito, and Norb Hecker -- plus ex-baseballer Vic Janowicz, the Redskins finished a surprising second in the East.

The Cardinals, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had sad seasons, losing about twice as often as they won. Still Chicago Cardinal reserve quarterback Ogden Compton came within a yard of the NFL record when he completed a 98-yard TD pass to Dick "Night Train" Lane against Green Bay on November 13. Despite Compton's feat, the Packers won, 31-14.

In the West, Baltimore broke strong on the line-smashing of big Alan Ameche, but Weeb Ewbank's young Colts were still a couple of years away and faded badly.

The Bears were all set to proclaim a division title when they were ambushed by the otherwise hapless Cardinals, 53-14. As a result, the Los Angeles Rams, under rookie coach Sid Gillman, sneaked into the championship despite two regular season losses to the Halasmen.

Graham proved unbeatable in the championship game, as he threw for two touchdowns and ran for two more. The final score was 38-14.

Although crowds in Pittsburgh, Detroit and New York fell off a bit, overall attendance continued to grow for the NFL, topping two and a half million. The five-man line was the big tactical news on defense and the three-end attack was fast becoming the offensive norm.

One of the most important developments of the year was barely noted in the press. At the Steeler training camp, Coach Walt Kiesling settled on Ted Marchibroda and Vic Eaton as backups for QB Jim Finks and cut an unheralded rookie from Louisville U. named Johnny Unitas.

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NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE 1955

EASTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT.	PTS-OPP
Cleveland Browns	9	2	1	.818	349-218
Washington Redskins	8	4	0	.667	246-222
New York Giants	6	5	1	.545	267-223
Chicago Cardinals	4	7	1	.364	224-252
Philadelphia Eagles	4	7	1	.364	248-231
Pittsburgh Steelers	4	8	0	.333	195-285
WESTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT.	PTS-OPP
Los Angeles Rams	8	3	1	.727	260-231
Chicago Bears	8	4	0	.667	294-251
Green Bay Packers	6	6	0	.500	258-276
Baltimore Colts	5	6	1	.455	214-239
San Francisco 49ers	4	8	0	.455	216-298
Detroit Lions	3	9	0	.250	230-275

Championship: Cleveland 38, Los Angeles 14

ALL-NFL TEAMS 1955

OFFENSE	AP	UP	NEA	TSN	NYN
E - Harlon Hill, ChiB	1	1	1	1	1
Billy Wilson, SF	-	1	1	1	1
Pete Pihos, Phi	1	-	-	1	-
Kyle Rote, NY	-	-	-	1	-
T - Lou Groza, Cle	1	1	1	1	1
Bob St. Clair, SF	-	1	1	-	-
Mike McCormack, Cle	-	-	-	1	1
Bill Wightkin, ChiB	1	-	-	-	-
Jack Jennings, ChiC	-	-	-	1	-
G - Duane Putnam, LA	1	-	1	1	1
Abe Gibron, Cle	-	1	1	-	1
Stan Jones, ChiB	1	-	-	1	-
Bill Austin, NY	-	1	-	-	-
Herman Clark, ChiB	-	-	-	1	-
C - Frank Gatski, Cle	1	1	1	1	1
Q - Otto Graham, Cle	1	1	-	1	1
Tobin Rote, GB	-	-	1	-	-
Norm Van Brocklin, LA	-	-	-	1	-
B - Ollie Matson, ChiC	1	1	1	1	1
Alan Ameche, Bal	1	1	-	1	1
Frank Gifford, NY	1	-	1	1	-
Howie Ferguson, GB	-	-	1	1	-
Ron Waller, LA	-	1	-	-	-
Fred Morrison, Cle	-	-	-	1	-
Doak Walker, Det	-	-	-	1	-
Rick Casares, ChiB	-	-	-	-	1
DEFENSE	AP	UP	NEA	TSN	NYN
E - Gene Brito, Was	1	1	1	-	-
Andy Robustelli, NY	1	-	-	1	1
Len Ford, Cle	-	1	1	-	1
Tom Scott, Phi	-	-	-	1	-
T - Art Donovan, Bal	1	1	1	1	1
Bob Toneff, SF	1	-	-	1	1
Don Colo, Cle	-	1	1	-	-
Ernie Stautner, Pit	-	-	-	1	-

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MG-Dale Dodrill, Pit	-	1	1	1	1
Bill George, ChiB	1	-	-	-	-
LB- Geo. Connor, ChiB	-	1	1	-	1
Joe Schmidt, Det	1	-	1	-	-
Roger Zatkoff, GB	1	-	-	1	-
Chuck Bednarik, Phi	-	1	-	-	-
Les Richter, LA	-	-	-	-	1
Wayne Robinson, Phi	-	-	-	1	-
Lavern Torgeson, Was	-	-	-	1	-
DB-Jack Christiansen, Det	1	1	1	1	1
Bobby Dillon, GB	1	1	1	1	1
Will Sherman, LA	1	1	1	1	1
Em Tunnell, NY	1	-	-	1	-
Bert Rechichar, Bal	-	-	1	-	1
Don Paul, Cle	-	1	-	-	-
Dick Alban, Was	-	-	-	1	-

AP = Associated Press TSN = The Sporting News
 UP = United Press NYN = New York Daily News
 NEA = Newspaper Enterprises Association

1955 LEAGUE LEADERS

RUSHING	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Alan Ameche, Balt	* 213	* 961	4.5	* 9
Howie Ferguson, GB	192	859	4.5	4
Fred Morrison, Cle	156	824	5.3	3
Ron Waller, LA	151	716	4.7	7
Joe Perry, SF	156	701	4.5	2
Rick Casares, ChiB	125	672	* 5.4	4
Paul Younger, LA	138	644	4.7	5
Alex Webster, NY	128	634	5.0	5
Ed Modzelewski, Cle	185	619	3.3	6
Fran Rogel, Pit	168	588	3.5	2
Bobby Watkins, ChiB	110	553	5.0	8
Lew Carpenter, Det	137	543	4.0	6
Ollie Matson, ChiC	109	475	4.4	1
John Hoffman, ChiB	94	454	4.8	0
Vic Janowicz, Was	93	397	4.3	4
Bert Zagers, Was	89	395	4.4	2
S. Giancanelli, Phi	97	385	4.0	2
Bobby Epps, NY	95	375	3.9	2
Leo Elter, Was	97	361	3.7	3
Lynn Chandnois, Pit	105	353	3.4	5

PASSING	ATT	COM	YARD	TD	IN
Otto Graham, Cle	185	98	1721	15	8
Bob Thomason, Phi	171	88	1337	10	7
Bobby Layne, Det	270	143	1830	11	17
Ed Brown, ChiB	164	85	1307	9	10
Y.A. Tittle, SF	287	147	2185	* 17	* 28
Norm Van Brocklin, LA	272	144	1890	8	15
Tobin Rote, GB	342	157	1977	* 17	19
Chuck Conerly, NY	202	98	1310	13	13
George Shaw, Bal	237	119	1586	10	19
Jim Finks, Pit	* 344	* 165	* 2270	10	26
Adrian Burk, Phi	228	110	1359	9	17
Eddie LeBaron, Was	178	79	1270	9	15
Harry Gilmer, Det	122	58	633	2	4
Lamar McHan, ChiC	207	78	1085	11	19

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PASS RECEIVING	PC	YDS	AVG	TD
Pete Pihos, Phi	* 62	* 864	13.9	7
Billy Wilson, SF	53	831	15.7	7
Bill Howton, GB	44	697	15.8	5
Dave Middleton, Det	44	663	15.1	3
Tom Fears, LA	44	569	12.9	2
Lew Carpenter, Det	44	312	7.1	2
Harlon Hill, ChiB	42	789	18.8	*9
Ray Mathews, Pit	42	762	18.1	6
Gary Knafelc, GB	40	613	15.3	8
Bill Stribling, Phi	38	568	14.9	6
Jim Doran, Det	38	552	14.5	2
Elbie Nickel, Pit	36	488	13.6	2
Bill McColl, ChiB	35	502	14.3	4
Pete Brewster, Cle	34	622	18.3	6
Jim Mutscheller, Bal	33	518	15.7	7
Frank Gifford, NY	33	437	13.2	4
Kyle Rote, NY	31	580	18.7	8
Dante Lavelli, Cle	31	492	15.9	4
Ray Renfro, Cle	29	603	*20.8	8
Don Stonesifer, ChiC	28	330	11.8	5

SCORING	TD	XP	FG	PTS
Doak Walker, Det	7	27	9	* 96
Vic Janowicz, Was	7	28	6	88
George Blanda, ChiB	2	37	11	82
Fred Cone, GB	0	30	*16	78
Lou Groza, Cle	0	*44	11	77
Les Richter, LA	0	30	13	69
Ben Agajanian, NY	0	32	10	62
Dick Bielski, Phi	1	23	9	56
Bert Rechichar, Bal	0	25	10	55
Alan Ameche, Bal	*9	0	0	54
Harlon Hill, ChiB	*9	0	0	54
Pete Brewster, Cle	8	0	0	48
Lew Carpenter, Det	8	0	0	48
Gary Knafelc, GB	8	0	0	48
Ray Renfro, Cle	8	0	0	48
Kyle Rote, NY	8	0	0	48
Ron Waller, LA	8	0	0	48
Bobby Watkins, ChiB	8	0	0	48
Frank Gifford, NY	7	0	0	42
Ray Mathews, Pit	7	0	0	42
Jim Mutscheller, Bal	7	0	0	42
Pete Pihos, Phi	7	0	0	42
Gordy Soltau, SF	1	27	3	42
Billy Wilson, SF	7	0	0	42