



Professional Football Researchers Association
www.profootballresearchers.com

“Buckets” Goldenberg

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Carved from wrought iron and tenacity, Charles R. “Buckets” Goldenberg was an outstanding two-way player with the Green Bay Packers for 13 professional seasons (1933-1945). Though not tracked on the stat sheet, he was most known for his crushing blocks on opposing defenders and tantalizing tackles on defense.¹ Exemplifying his size of 5' 10” and 215 pounds, sportswriter Red Smith once called him, “a man of oak,” and former teammate Herm Rohrig labeled him, “The Rock of Gibraltar.”²



Goldenberg was extremely tough, despite playing both sides of the ball saying, “As for myself, I couldn't think of playing offense without playing on defense, too. I loved to block. I loved to knock down those fellows on the other side to give our ball carriers running room. And on defense, I liked to clobber somebody – anybody just as long as he wore a different jersey.”³ Buckets' play on the field translated to high profile accolades that included a first team all-pro selection in 1939 by the *Chicago Herald American* and a second team choice in 1942 by the Associated Press and the NFL.⁴ He was named to the NFL's All-Decade team of the 1930s and was inducted into the Green Bay Packers Hall-of-Fame in 1971.

The Professional Football Researchers Association (PFRA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and, in some cases, reconstructing professional football history. The PFRA is incorporated in the state of Connecticut and has 501(c)(3) status as an educational organization with the Internal Revenue Service.



Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

In the 1930s, Green Bay was among the league's most competitive franchises, routinely in contention for the NFL title. From 1930 to 1939, the Packers made five NFL championship game appearances, winning four.⁵ The Packers boasted the top ranked scoring offense four times, largely due to the presence of uncanny talent in the backfield. Buckets teamed with future Hall-of-Famers Clarke Hinkle, Arnie Herber, Johnny Blood, and Mike Michalske, as well as other stars in Cecil Isbell and Charlie Brock.⁶

Goldenberg made an immediate impact as a rookie, leading the team in scoring with five total touchdowns. He ran for 213 yards with a 4.1 yards per carry average, despite Green Bay's struggles as they finished with a 5-7-1 record. The Packers improved to 7-6 in 1934, a year that saw Buckets start to play more of a blocking role on offense. Green Bay acquired Don Hutson in 1935, causing Buckets to work blocking back full-time.⁷ The next season in 1936, the Packers won the NFL championship at 10-1-1, beating the Boston Redskins in the title game, 21-6. Buckets moved to offensive guard saying, "The reason I played guard starting in '36 was the team was short on guards...I have always said a guard is just a fullback getting his brains knocked out."⁸

Goldenberg remembers the Pack having solid lines, "We had some great lines. With fellows like Hubbard, Baby Ray, Bill Lee, Russ Letlow, Charlie Brock and others, not too many opposing backs got through us into the secondary."⁹ Rival Joe Kopcha of the Chicago Bears said of him, "In Buckets early days he was a terrific fullback...If Buckets and people like Hinkle, Hubbard, Hein, and Edwards would have only had to go one way,

- 1 "Buckets Goldenberg," ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/G/GoldBu20.htm>.
- 2 Borges, Ron. "State Your Case: Charles "Buckets" Goldenberg, a forgotten hero of early Packers title teams," SI.com, April 26, 2021, <https://www.si.com/nfl/talkoffame/state-your-case/-goldenberg-emptied-his-buckets-in-green-bay>.
- 3 Letwin, Bill. "Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman," packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.
- 4 "Buckets Goldenberg," ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/G/GoldBu20.htm>.
- 5 "Green Bay Packers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/gnb/>.
- 6 "Green Bay Packers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/gnb/>.
- 7 "Green Bay Packers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/gnb/>.
- 8 Letwin, Bill. "Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman," packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

The Professional Football Researchers Association (PFRA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and, in some cases, reconstructing professional football history. The PFRA is incorporated in the state of Connecticut and has 501(c)(3) status as an educational organization with the Internal Revenue Service.



Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

I am sure they would have been even greater than they were.”¹⁰ By 1938, Buckets was playing guard full-time.

Goldenberg's 13 seasons with the franchise is second longest by a non-quarterback to Forrest Gregg's 14. His tenure was quite uncommon for a player during this era, as many careers only spanned a few seasons. This was part of Buckets' uncanny loyalty to the franchise. In 1938, he was traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates, when Johnny Blood became their head coach.¹³ As a result, Goldenberg refused to play for Pittsburgh and immediately retired. Buckets recalled, “One night after he became coach of the Pittsburgh Pirates he called me at about 2 a.m. to tell me he had just traded for me. However, I was saved when the other player would not report to Green Bay and the deal was called off.”¹⁴ A period of time later, the trade was voided by the league, and he returned to Green Bay where he finished his career. He wanted to be a Packer for life.

Buckets was among the NFL's top guards in 1938.¹⁵ Green Bay finished at 8-3, tops in the West Division, however they fell to the New York Giants, 23-17, in the championship game. The following season, Green Bay exacted revenge on New York, defeating them soundly 27-0. It marked Buckets' second NFL championship. Green Bay fielded a few solid teams in the 1940s: 10-1 in 1941, 8-2-1 in 1942, and 7-2-1 in 1943, though they were second to the Chicago Bears each time.¹⁶

The Packers finally broke through in 1944, beating the Giants yet again, 14-7. The victory was Goldenberg's third NFL championship. Buckets retired following the 1945 season. He played in 120 games, making 69 starts during his career.¹⁷ He remained with the Packers' organization afterward, serving on the team's Board of Directors from 1953 to 1985. He also opened a restaurant in Milwaukee that he decorated wall-to-wall with Packers memorabilia and memories.¹⁸

9 Letwin, Bill. “Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman,” packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 14, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

1 0 Grosshandler, Stan. “Buckets,” *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1986, 1.

1 3 Christl, Cliff. “Charles 'Buckets' Goldenberg,” packers.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.packers.com/history/hof/charles-buckets-goldenberg>.

1 4 Grosshandler, Stan. “Buckets,” *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1986, 1.

1 5 Grosshandler, Stan. “Buckets,” *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1986, 1.

1 6 “Green Bay Packers Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/gnb/>.

1 7 “Buckets Goldenberg,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/G/GoldBu20.htm>.

1 8 Christl, Cliff. “Charles 'Buckets' Goldenberg,” packers.com, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.packers.com/history/hof/charles-buckets-goldenberg>.

The Professional Football Researchers Association (PFRA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and, in some cases, reconstructing professional football history. The PFRA is incorporated in the state of Connecticut and has 501(c)(3) status as an educational organization with the Internal Revenue Service.



Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Following his college days at the University of Wisconsin, he signed a contract with the Packers. Goldenberg also had offers from other clubs such as the New York Giants and the Chicago Cardinals. He recalls, “There wasn't a player draft when I was through with football at Wisconsin. Lambeau made me an offer and I had others from Steve Owen of the New York Giants and the Chicago Cardinals.”¹¹ Goldenberg continued, “But I had always dreamed of playing with the Packers and I didn't want to get lost on a pro team in a big city. Everybody likes recognition and I think that playing in Green Bay where most of the town got to know you was responsible for my success. A lot of other players have told me the same thing.”¹²

Goldenberg and his wife, Marian, had two sons, Gary and Don. Interestingly, the nickname 'Buckets' originated from his brother Dave while the two practiced football in high school.¹⁹ Dave was teaching him technique when he said, “Pull in those buckets,” referring to the posterior.²⁰ The name stuck with Charles for the entirety of his football career. Buckets was not only innovative with such an interesting nickname, but he often is associated with the draw play. Chicago's Bulldog Turner claimed he would often drop into coverage off his line position, but Buckets stated, “I could always tell when (Bears quarterback Sid) Luckman was going to pass as he would drop his left foot back, though to this day he denies it. When I saw this, I would yell to the other guard to cover my hole and I would take off after Sid and usually nail him. Eventually Bulldog realized what I was doing and suggested Sid hand off to (fullback Bill) Osmanski rather than pass. Sure enough, he did and Bill goes roaring through the hole I left for a big gain. Thus the draw play was born.”²¹

Charles Goldenberg was born in 1911 in Odessa, Russia. His family immigrated to Wisconsin in 1915 to escape persecution from World War I. He was extremely active in his youth, picking up football at North Division High School in the Milwaukee area.²² Goldenberg was an All-City halfback and also played tackle. At the University of

1 1 Letwin, Bill. “Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman,” packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

1 2 Letwin, Bill. “Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman,” packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

1 9 Letwin, Bill. “Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman,” packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

2 0 Letwin, Bill. “Buckets Goldenberg, Good Back, Better Lineman,” packerville.blogspot.com, August 25, 2012, 15, <https://packerville.blogspot.com/2012/08/from-past-buckets-goldenberg.html>.

2 1 Grosshandler, Stan. “Buckets,” *The Coffin Corner*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 1986, 1.

2 2 “Goldenberg, Charles 'Buckets',” jewsinsports.org, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.jewsinsports.org/>.



Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Wisconsin, he extended his athleticism to the basketball and wrestling teams. Buckets played on the football team for three seasons from 1930-1932.²³

In 1930, the Badgers hosted the University of Pennsylvania Quakers, who were one of the strongest teams in the East. That day, on October 18, the Badgers caught the Quakers looking ahead to their showdown against the Notre Dame Fighting Irish, remembered Goldenberg.²⁴ He said, “Penn came to Madison highly touted as one of the finest teams in the East in 1930. Perhaps they took us too lightly because Wisconsin won 27-0. I feel I had a great afternoon. I scored two touchdowns.”²⁵ Penn not only suffered their first defeat on the season, but they ended up getting walloped by Notre Dame a few weeks later, 60-20. The Badgers used the victory to improve their record to 4-0, en route to a 6-2-1 campaign. Buckets was an All-American honorable mention and an All-Western player.²⁶

His senior season in 1932, the Badgers posted a 6-1-1 mark, good enough for third place in the Big Ten Conference. Its only defeat was a narrow, 7-6 loss to fifth-ranked Purdue, who shared the Big Ten championship with Michigan.

During his NFL career, Buckets also wrestled in the off-season. In addition, to being enshrined in the Packers Hall of Fame he also was inducted into the Wisconsin Athletic Hall of Fame in 1973 and was named the “Outstanding Jewish Athlete of All-Time” by the Green Bay B’nai B’rith Lodge in 1969. Goldenberg is one of 10 players on the 1930’s NFL All-Decade team not enshrined in The Pro Football Hall of Fame.

2 3 “Goldenberg, Charles 'Buckets',” jewsinsports.org, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.jewsinsports.org/>.

2 4 “Goldenberg, Charles 'Buckets',” jewsinsports.org, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.jewsinsports.org/>.

2 5 “Goldenberg, Charles 'Buckets',” jewsinsports.org, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.jewsinsports.org/>.

2 6 “Goldenberg, Charles 'Buckets',” jewsinsports.org, accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.jewsinsports.org/>.