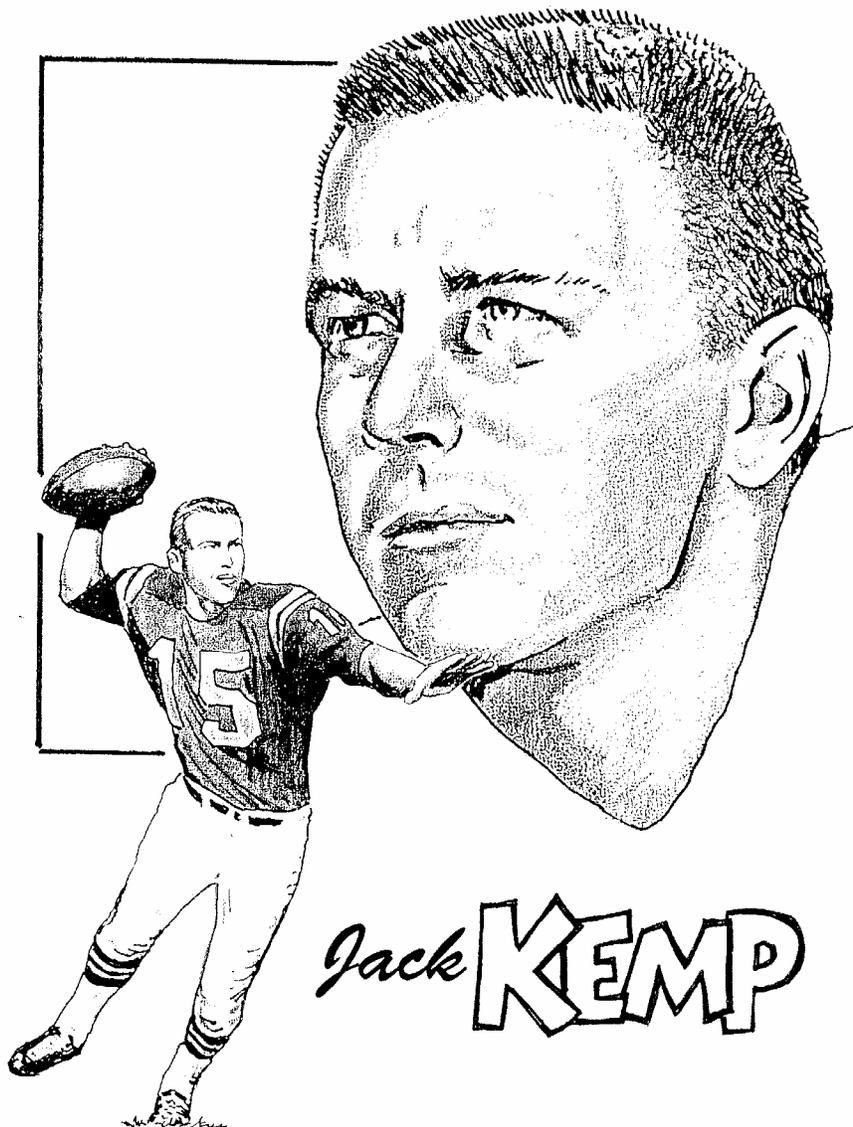


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2009**

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PFRA-ternizing

Seems like we're always nagging at you. If you don't read the whole Committees article, you'll miss an urgent request for people to write short summaries for the Linescore Committee. We have linescores for every NFL and AAFC game, but numbers don't tell the whole story. Often, the main importance of a game can be summed up in three or four sentences. A really important game may not be explained in four or five sentences, but the reader can be shown why that game is worthy of a longer study.

You probably have some old news clips of games lining the bottom of a drawer. Why not take a look and give a try to summing up the games in a few short sentences? When you have a couple done, send them to Ken Crippen and he'll take it from there.

And if you're looking for another writing project, you might read a couple of articles from past Coffin Corners that are available on our website. Too often, the title doesn't tell what the article is about or doesn't encourage the reader to read the article. Just a sentence or two could make all the difference.

Again, send the fruit of your labors to Ken Crippen.

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THE COFFIN CORNER

Vol. 31, No. 4 (2009)

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PFRA Committees

By Ken Crippen

Several committees have ramped up activities recently. The AAFC, Hall of Very Good, USFL and TV Commentators committees have all submitted information to the Website committee for publication and the website is being updated with new information almost weekly.

Bylaws Committee:

The Bylaws Committee is happy to report that all of the revisions passed with flying colors. Thank you to all that participated in the voting.

Oral History Committee:

This a new committee, dedicated to archiving interviews with players from the NFL, AFL and AAFC. The committee has generated a list of contact information for players from the 1940s. Obviously, the older players are the highest priority, but eventually all players will be included. The committee is looking for several things:

- 1) A committee chair. Currently, I am organizing things, but with all of my other responsibilities within the PFRA, I cannot take full control of the committee. If you are interested, let me know.
- 2) Any recorded interviews that have been performed. If you have an interview where you would be willing to send an audio copy, let me know. If you no longer have the audio recording, but have a transcript, a copy of the transcript would be acceptable.
- 3) The committee desperately needs people to perform interviews. Any help would be greatly appreciated. No experience necessary. We are willing to provide contact information and interview tips to anyone.
- 4) If you are uncomfortable with performing interviews, but are interested in helping the committee, we could always use people to transcribe the interviews. This is a slow and sometimes painful process, but it is essential.
- 5) Obits and biographical articles on players. These will be used to write biographies of players and to be used as research materials for players that are still alive.

The committee has already interviewed the following players:

Ben Agajanian	Chick Maggioli
Jim Ailinger	Hap Moran
Bruce Alford	Fred Negus
Charlie Ane	Zeke O'Connor
Bill Boedeker	Derrell Palmer
George Buksar	Ara Parseghian
Bob Callahan	Ben Pucci
Ken Carpenter	Lester Rodney
Clarence Childs	Mike Scarry
Ken Coleman	Don Schneider
Ray Ebli	Otto Schnellbacher
Dick Erdlitz	Joe Signiago
Gene Fekete	Jim Ray Smith
Jesse Freitas	Lou Sossamon
Bill Gompers	Bill Stanton
Billy Joe Grimes	Art Statuto
George Groves	Roy Stuart
Ed Gustafson	Joe Sutton
Chet Hanulak	George Terlep
George Hekkers	Lou Tomasetti
Jerry Helluin	Al Vandeweghe
Hal Herring	Wilbur Volz
Duke Iverson	Alex Wizbicki
Verl Lillywhite	

As mentioned previously, if you have any recorded interviews or transcripts, which you are willing to copy and donate to the committee, it would be greatly appreciated.

At the time of the writing of this article, the following players are being contacted to set up interviews:

Ezzrett Anderson	Paul Mitchell
Eddie Carr	Don Panciera
Ken Casanega	Ace Parker
Jim Cason	Dom Principe
Sam Cathcart	Dewey Proctor
Walt Clay	Ben Raimondi
Bob Dobelstein	Linwood Sexton
Brad Eklund	Ed Sharkey
Bob Heck	Bob Titchenal
Ed Henke	Pete Wismann
Bill Johnson	Wally Yonamine
Walt McDonald	

These players have refused all attempts at interviews:

Bob Livingstone
Bud Tinsley

Y.A. Tittle

the first items added. A player register followed and draft information will be added soon. This draft information will include the complete dispersal draft of 1950.

Below, you will see a list of players for which we have contact information. If you are willing to help perform interviews, please let me know. In parentheses, you will see the state in which they reside.

Frank Aschenbrenner (AZ)	John Kuzman (NJ)
John Billman (MN)	Pat Lahey (IL)
George Brown (CA)	Francis Laurinaitis (PA)
John Brown (LA)	Ned Maloney (IN)
Bob Chappuis (MI)	Lew Mayne (TX)
James Cooper (TX)	Len McCormick (TX)
Jim Cox (CA)	Tim Mikula (VA)
Bill Daley (MN)	John North (LA)
Dick Danahe (CA)	Homer Paine (OK)
Harper Davis (MS)	Earl Parsons (CA)
Lamar Davis (MS)	Mike Patanelli (MI)
John Donaldson (GA)	Joe Perry (AZ)
Jeff Durkota (PA)	Joyce Pipkin (ME)
Dan Dworsky (CA)	Bill Reinhard (CA)
Bill Erikson (CO)	Tino Sabuco (AZ)
Fred Gloden (PA)	Paul Salata (CA)
Garland Gregory (LA)	Vic Schleich (PA)
Dick Handley (CA)	Bill Smith (NC)
Lew Holder (TX)	Bob Sneddon (UT)
Sherman Howard (IL)	Joe Soboleski (CA)
Dub Jones (LA)	Ralph Stewart (MO)
Bob Kelly (IL)	Herb St. John (GA)
Wayne Kingery (LA)	Tony Sumpter (OK)
John Klasnic (PA)	Martin Wendell (IL)
John Krivonak (PA)	Dick Woodard (IA)

We have indirect contact through their colleges for the following players:

Paul Duke	Ray Ramsey
Bob Kennedy	John Sylvester
Howie Parker	Jimmy Tarrant
Charlie Quilter	

All-America Football Conference Committee:

The AAFC Committee has been working closely with the Oral History Committee to interview all remaining players from the AAFC. The list is approximately 100 players long, but is diminishing at a rapid pace. If anyone willing to help, please contact me.

The committee has also started to publish information on the PFRA website. Linescores and *Coffin Corner* articles were

Hall of Very Good Committee:

Due to a technical glitch, Hall of Very Good Committee chair Andy Piascik is no longer able to receive e-mails at his andy@nflhistory.net e-mail address and has not been able to since mid-March. Any HOVG nominations that were sent there are forever lost in cyberspace. Please accept our apologies and re-send them to andypiascik@yahoo.com or by mail to 25 Cartright Street, Bridgeport CT 06604. The new deadline for receipt of nominations is July 31, 2009.

Linescore Committee:

The Linescore Committee is looking for help in finishing game summaries. Below, you will see the current status of game summaries for the linescores:

NFL
1920-1934: Summaries Complete
1935: No Summaries
1936: Summaries Complete, but brief
1937: Summaries Complete
1938: No Summaries
1939: Summaries Complete
1940-1949: No Summaries
1950-1959: Summaries Complete
1960-1962: No Summaries
1963-1966: Summaries Complete, but brief
1967-1995: Summaries Complete
1996-2008: No Summaries

AFL 1926: Summaries Complete

AFL
1960-1966: No Summaries
1967-1969: Summaries Complete

AAFC
1946-1947: Summaries Complete
1948-1949: No Summaries

If you would like to help the committee, please let me know.

Team TV and Radio Commentators Committee:

Tim Brulia has sent a steady stream of commentator lists for the PFRA website. At the time of the writing of this article, 1998 through 2008 are online.

USFL Committee:

Committee chair Paul Reeths has added substantial information on the defunct United States Football League on his website. The link to his website can be found on the PFRA website under USFL Committee.

Uniforms of Past Teams Committee:

Tim Brulia has been busy of late. He has sent a list of team uniform descriptions for the PFRA website. At the time of the writing of this article, 1933 through 1958 are online, including the four years of the AAFC. In the future, graphics will be added to depict the uniforms.

If anyone can help with any of the aforementioned requests, feel free to contact me at:

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Ken_Crippen@profootballresearchers.org

Do you want to help support the PFRA?

You have two options:

- 1) Use <http://www.goodsearch.com> as your search engine. Just choose the PFRA as your favorite charity and every web search sends money to the PFRA. You can also use them for your shopping needs. Just follow the GoodShop link and the PFRA will receive a portion of the sales at stores like Amazon, Staples, Best Buy and Macy's. If you are already shopping at these stores online, why not have a portion of the sales help support the PFRA?
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PFRA Elections

By Ken Crippen

It is time once again for PFRA elections. Since Bob Carroll and my jobs are influenced by the outcome of the elections, we are removing ourselves from the entire process. The Executive Director is appointed by the President and the Assistant Executive Director is appointed by the Executive Director. Therefore, Jeffrey Miller was appointed and accepted the responsibility for running the elections. All comments, questions, complaints, nominations and ballots are to go through him and not Bob or myself.

Now, let's get to the details. Send nominations to Jeffrey Miller for the following offices:

President: Presides over meetings of the Board of Directors, appoints the Executive Director, appoints the Editor-in-Chief of *Coffin Corner*, and makes sure that all corporate and tax responsibilities are fulfilled.

Vice-President: Chair of the Membership Committee. Responsibilities of the Membership Committee are determined by the Assistant Executive Director (appointed position).

Secretary: Responsible for the minutes of the Association and is the Chair of the Fundraising Committee. Responsibilities of the Fundraising Committee are determined by the Assistant Executive Director (appointed position).

Treasurer: Responsible for the finances of the Association, maintains books suitable for audit and under the discretion of the President, files any necessary reports or tax documents.

Each of these positions are for two-year terms, which will start January 1, 2010 and end December 31, 2012.

Whether you are nominating yourself or nominating another person for a specific office, please make sure they you/they are willing to fulfill all responsibilities of that office. If you are nominating someone else, Jeffrey Miller will contact that person to make sure they are willing to run for that office and are willing to accept all responsibilities of that office. ***Please note: All current officers need to contact Jeffrey Miller if you intend to run for re-election. You will not be automatically placed on the ballot.***

Jeffrey Miller
300 W. Main St.
Springville, NY 14141
Phone: (716) 592-5710 (Please, no calls after 9PM Eastern)
E-mail: ODOSAGIH@aol.com

***ALL NOMINATIONS NEED TO BE TO JEFFREY MILLER
NO LATER THAN AUGUST 1, 2009.***

THE PACKERS CRASH THROUGH: 1929

By Bob Carroll and PFRA Research

The National Football League sailed blithely into the 1929 season, but events off the field that fall would have a far greater bearing on the health of pro football than any games played. The stock market crashed in October, and by the time the last contests were played in December, the country was beginning to feel the pinch. By the next season, it would be in a vice. But just when the Depression was making ownership of an NFL franchise a shakier proposition than ever and ownership of a small town team almost suicidal, "Curly" Lambeau turned the Packers of little Green Bay one of the league's best attractions. With perfect timing, Lambeau upgraded a good Packer team into an NFL powerhouse by signing three veteran players of all-star rank.

In the next few years, as the Depression deepened, every small town NFL team except Green Bay went under. Green Bay's little City Stadium was consistently filled (9,000 seated and 1,500 standing on the best days) and the Pack filled bigger stadiums on the road. Although the town owned the Packers, it was Lambeau, who'd helped found the team in 1919 and salvaged the franchise in 1922, who brought the Packers intact through the nation's most devastating economic crisis. Today, the fans who jam Lambeau Field for every Green Bay game owe their thanks to him.

The Winter Meeting

At two P.M. on Saturday, February 2, President Joe Carr called the annual winter meeting to order at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago. After Carr read his usual hopeful State of the League report, Treasurer Carl Storck read his financial statement, which was received with "considerable comment, all very complimentary," according to Secretary Storck.

Things were in decent shape financially for most clubs, but they couldn't afford to overlook a windfall -- what to do about Buffalo's \$2,500. The Buffalo team had quit in mid-1927 and not operated in 1928. The \$2,500 they'd put into the guarantee fund was still sitting there. It's dispensation occupied much of the afternoon and was finally handed over to the Executive Committee.

C.C. Pyle was one owner in deep financial trouble. His New York Yankees had been without their main attraction, Red Grange, in '28 but Pyle's problems also were reported to stem from some bad investments. At the end of the season, he still owed his players \$7,200. If he couldn't pay them, he'd

lose them as free agents. Pyle insisted he'd already paid \$1,200 of what he owed and asked to be given until April 15 to come up with the rest. The league gave him until May 1. Pyle was nothing if not slick. Heaven only knows all of his wheelings and dealings, but a good example is the case of guard Mike Michalske. The former Penn State star had put in a couple of seasons for Pyle, and C.C. owed him \$400. Tell you what I'll do, said C.C. Forget the \$400 and I'll let you become a free agent. Then you can make your own deal with some other club and no doubt get a lot more. That sounded okay to Mike who eventually became one of the threesome signed by Lambeau for the Packers. The only thing was, had he waited until after May 1, he'd have become a free agent anyway and Pyle would have still owed him \$400.

Eventually, Pyle handed the franchise for his Yankees back to Giant owner Tim Mara and left pro football. As far as is known, no one suggested a farewell testimonial.

Once Pyle had his extension, business moved on at the league meeting. The 1928 championship was officially awarded to Providence, and the treasurer was instructed to dole out the cash for the usual trophies and pennant.

The summer meeting had been scheduled for Pottsville, but the owners had second thoughts and rescinded that idea. Maybe they just didn't want to go to Pottsville, but more likely they knew what was going to happen to the Maroons because they next voted the July meeting for Boston "in the event there is an applicant acceptable for the Boston franchise on file with the League at that time." If no such applicant was found, they would go to Dayton which was probably going to be open.

The afternoon was growing late, so they adjourned to a dinner hosted by the Bears and Cardinals. By nine o'clock when they reconvened, the Executive Committee was ready with its report. Most of that dealt with small claims by one club against another of ten and fifteen dollars. The real backbreaker was the \$1,932.50 the committee decided the Cardinals owed the Triangles as a guarantee for their game the previous October. Ironically, the 7-0 affair was the only league game won by the Cards in '28, indeed, the only game in which they scored.

Rather surprisingly, the Executive Committee recommended and the owners agreed that Ambrose L. McGurk be allowed to operate the Milwaukee franchise. McGurk was the former Milwaukee owner forced out after the '26 season for employing high school players. Either the league was desperate for an active Milwaukee franchise or they figured everyone had forgotten about the high schoolers. Re-admitting McGurk was certain to be a bad PR move.

Buffalo money, the committee said, in effect, everyone put in a claim and we'll divvy it up in July. They then "legalized" the whole thing by declaring the Buffalo franchise forfeited.

In the elections, Carr was again named president and Storck secretary-treasurer. The Hon. James E. Dooley of Providence, H.S. Royle of Frankford, and George Halas of the Bears were elected to the Executive Committee. Aaron Hertzman, owner of the Louisville Brecks, one of several franchises suspended with league permission, was elected Sergeant of Arms in an "old boy" move that gave him an excuse to come to the meetings.

The league offices were now all in the hands of some of pro football's least successful entrepreneurs. President Carr's Columbus team had long since folded. Vice President John A. Dunn's Minneapolis club had been inactive since 1924. Storck's Dayton team was all but dead. And now Hertzman!

A week after the meeting, Storck wrote Carr a letter. He included the various claims the teams had against Buffalo's \$2,500. However, he added, "I met Mr. Weil of the Buffalo Club in the Hotel Sunday and he advised me that they were going to start legal proceedings with reference to their guarantee fund. I imagine that we will have some problems on our hands with this before we get through."

In view of the league's modern experiences with multi-million dollar lawsuits, it's rather quaint to see the league officers nervous over a mere \$2,500. But everything was scaled down in those years. As an example, Storck in the same letter discussed Carr's salary and the expenses of the league office: annual salary \$3,500, out of which came office rent of \$165 and stenographers fees of \$360, leaving the president \$2,975 for his year's work.

Friedman to the Giants

The Packers were not the only team to improve itself with new talent. Before the July meeting -- which turned out to be in Atlantic City -- owner Tim Mara of the New York Giants purchased the franchise and entire squad of the Detroit Wolverines, the third place team in 1928. The combination of the best of the Giants and Wolverines squads gave New York a good defense and the best offense in the league.

Benny Friedman, the main reason Mara swung the deal, shone as a runner, passer, kicker and gate attraction. He made the Giants a profitable enterprise after Mara had lost about \$40,000 in the 1928 season. Friedman's high salary, said to be \$10,000, was well-earned. Easily the best passer in football, Friedman's throws gobbled up more than 1,500 yards, and his 20 touchdown passes would not be topped until 1942.

Roy "Bull" Andrews, the Wolverines' coach was put in charge of Mara's club. The important players accompanying Friedman and Andrews from Detroit were backs "Tiny" Feather and Len Sedbrook, center Joe Westoupal, and tackle Bill Owen, whose older brother Steve had been with the Giants for several years. Besides Stout Steve, another key holdover was Tony Plansky, a talented track and field athlete from Georgetown who bounced back from an injury-spoiled 1928 rookie season to become, next to Friedman, the chief New York runner. Friedman's favorite pass targets were Sedbrook and end Ray Flaherty, a refugee from the Yankees.

With his Detroit purchase, Mara controlled three NFL franchises: his Giants, Detroit, and the one C.C. Pyle had returned.

The July Meeting

Most of the July meeting was taken up with who was in and who was out of the league. Among those who showed up were Messrs Lowe and Weil of Buffalo. In effect, the league caved in to their threat of a lawsuit and gave them another chance -- so long as they promised they'd really and truly play a whole season in 1929. To save a little NFL face, they had to post an extra \$2,500, but if they stayed through the whole season they'd get \$5,000 back. Then, to insure their staying, Carr finagled his trouble shooter Jerry Corcoran in as team manager.

Ambrose McGurk never got off the ground with his Milwaukee team. The league insisted that he post the regular \$2,500 guarantee. He asked that they skip that little technicality and they refused.

One of the NFL's pioneers called it quits in July. Chris O'Brien sold the Chicago Cardinals to Dr. David Jones for a reported \$25,000. The Cardinals had been around in one form or another since the turn of the century and had been the champs in 1925. But they'd never recovered from the 1926 war with Grange's American Football League.

Upon the motion of Robert Haines of Frankford, seconded by "Curly" Lambeau, the owners tended a rising vote of thanks to O'Brien "for the manner in which he operated the Chicago Cardinal Franchise and to express the regret of the club

owners at his retirement from active participation in the league."

Right on the heels of the Cardinals' news came the announcement that the Duluth franchise, inactive in 1928, had been sold to Orange, NJ, interests by Ole Haugsrud and Dewey Scanlon.

Later that summer, new Cardinal owner Jones hired Haugsrud as his team manager and Scanlon as his coach. Although Haugsrud and Scanlon had sold their Duluth franchise to Orange, they had several of the Duluth players under personal contract. By far, the most important was Ernie Nevers who was willing to return to pro football.

Jones tried hard to bring the Cards back to major-league caliber. Before the season he sent them to an out-of-town training camp at Coldwater, Michigan. This was long considered the first example of an away-from-home pre-season camp but recent evidence is that the Giants and, perhaps, Duluth both tried it in 1926. A more significant move was to return the team to Comiskey Park for its league games.

Nevers, the big blonde fullback, missed the Cardinals' first two games because he was playing baseball, and then he needed a few games to gel with his teammates. Once they came together as a unit, the Cards won three of their last four games. In the annual Thanksgiving Day meeting with the Bears, Nevers scored a record 40 points by running for six touchdowns (another record) and kicking four extra points as the Cardinals won 40-6. That performance helped Nevers win the league scoring championship with 85 points, a mark that would hold until 1940.

The Stapes

Another versatile back was Ken Strong, a rookie out of New York University, who signed with a new NFL member -- Staten Island Stapletons. Strong, an All-America tailback from N.Y.U., was one of the most versatile backs in football history. He ran with speed and power, blocked and tackled fearlessly, and was a fine enough punter and place kicker to earn a living as a specialist long after his days as a regular ended. In his senior year, he led all college players in scoring.

The Stapes started out in 1915, five years before the NFL was born in the midwest. Dan Blaine, a good halfback and a native of the working-class neighborhood known as Stapleton, along with three other players formed the team to play other semi-pro squads from New York and New Jersey. The Stapes played more for fun than money. Just as well: crowds were small; salaries averaged \$10 per game.

Nevertheless, they managed to do well, winning several local semi-pro titles before World War I. After military service, Blaine took over sole ownership in 1919.

Blaine himself prospered in the 1920s. His ownership of several restaurants on Staten Island made him wealthy. Some people say the restaurants were actually speakeasies where one could still get a stiff drink during Prohibition, and that Blaine was deeply involved in bootlegging. At any rate, he stayed in the Stapleton lineup at halfback until retiring in 1924 at the age of 33.

That same fall, the Stapes claimed the Metropolitan championship by beating the best independent pro teams in the area. However, Mara's newly-formed Giants moved into the Polo Grounds the next year and completely eclipsed the Stapes, particularly with the sell-out visit by Red Grange and the Chicago Bears on December 6. On Thanksgiving, the Giants played the Stapes in an exhibition game and bested them 7-0.

Blaine began upgrading his operation during the 1926 season. His squad started poorly and fan interest dwindled. Then, on November 14, the Newark Bears of the American Football League visited Staten Island. The AFL, the newly-organized challenger to the NFL, had gathered many high-caliber players. The Newark squad featured rookie fullback Doug Wycoff of Georgia Tech and a number of players from southern schools, but the team owner had run out of money and his players had gone several weeks without pay. When the Bears whipped the Stapes 33-0, Blaine hired the Newark squad en masse to finish out the season as Stapletons. The move killed the Newark franchise and gave Blaine a roster of big-league quality.

In 1927, the Stapes fielded basically the same squad, although Doug Wycoff defected to the Giants. The Maramen, an awesome team, won the '27 NFL championship and twice humbled the Stapes in non-league games, 19-0 and 18-0. The Stapes enjoyed a moment of glory when they beat the NFL Duluth Eskimos, starring Ernie Nevers 7-6 on November 27.

By 1928, Blaine was in full pursuit of an NFL franchise. He bolstered his squad by luring Doug Wycoff back as player-coach and by signing six graduates from the nationally-ranked New York University team. The southern veterans and N.Y.U. rookies blended together to give the Stapes their best season ever. They went 10-1-1, including a 3-1 record against NFL teams. They even fulfilled a Staten Island fantasy with a 7-0 victory over the Giants on Thanksgiving Day.

When the NFL met the next summer to consider new members, Blaine's application for a franchise was approved. The Stapes came into the league on the old Brooklyn Lions-New York Yankee franchise which they obtained from Tim Mara after C.C. Pyle returned it to him. Although the same franchise was involved, the 1926 Lions, 1927-28 Yankees, and 1929 Stapletons were three different teams. Tim Mara, with actual ownership of three franchises, counting the inactive Detroit Wolverines, was only concerned with protecting his territorial rights and made no attempt to influence the Stapleton owners in running their team. If he had, Ken Strong would have joined Benny Friedman in the 1929 Giant backfield.

Blaine now had a full major-league schedule to play in cozy Thompson's Stadium, the Stapes' classic minor-league ballpark. Built in the early 1920s by the wealthy owner of a local lumber company, Thompson's nestled against a hill in the working-class Stapleton neighborhood and doubled in summer as a home for semi-pro baseball. Inside its stockade fence, about 8,000 uncovered bleacher seats ringed the field. The team's dressed in sheds standing just outside the fence. One of Blaine's restaurants was next door, and after games and practices, fans could rub elbows and maybe even quaff a beer with the players. A hard core of 3,000 fans paid their way into every game, but another couple hundred usually watched for free from the hill behind the south end zone. Although dwarfed by places like the Polo Grounds and Wrigley Field, little Thompson's Stadium hosted four years of NFL football in an often electric atmosphere.

Blaine wanted to polish his team by hiring a glamorous superstar and set his sights on Ken Strong,

After graduating from N.Y.U. in the spring of 1929, the Connecticut native signed his first pro contract with the New York Yankees baseball team as a power-hitting outfield prospect. He hit .285 and poled 21 homers for New Haven in the Eastern League during the summer, leaving pro football offers aside until late in the diamond season.

As he was leaving the ballpark in New Haven on Friday afternoon, August 31, Dan Blaine and Doug Wycoff walked up to Strong and introduced themselves. They explained the Stapleton's new adventure and offered the then-very high salary of \$300 per game to put his famous name and talents to work for the Stapes.

This was years before the college draft started, and Strong had a date in New York that night to speak with Giants' coach Roy Andrews. Blaine gave the young star his phone number and asked him to call right away if things didn't work out with the Giants.

That night Andrews shocked Strong by offering him only \$200 per game. The coach spoke eloquently of the Giants' already heavy payroll and of the influential people owner Tim Mara could introduce him to. Strong told Andrews that he was interested in getting paid to play football, not in hard luck stories or contacts. Andrews handed Strong the phone number of Mara's office and told him to call back tomorrow.

After leaving Andrews, Strong called Blaine and bent the truth, telling him the Giants offer was \$350 a game. Blaine countered with an offer of \$5,000 for the season plus a rent-free apartment. Strong accepted on the telephone, and the newspapers broke the story the next day.

Strong rushed for 527 yards in his first season. Together with player-coach Doug Wycoff, he gave the Stapes a powerful running attack, but their inability to come up with an adequate passer kept their offense from scoring many points.

Other New Teams

Another "new" team, the Boston Bulldogs, was actually the Pottsville Maroons relocated. Dr. J.G. Striegel had apparently found new financing in Massachusetts. The Providence Steam Roller acted as guardian angel for the deal, guaranteeing the check that brought the Bulldogs into the league and later helping out financially. It's not clear whether the money might be considered loans to a franchise Providence hoped would become a profitable rival or if the Steam Roller was actually backing the franchise.

Some of the old Pottsville players went along with the team to Boston; others, including speedy halfback Johnny Blood, made their own deals. The Bulldogs played a pair of games at Pottsville during the season.

NFL Vice President John Dunn resurrected his Minneapolis Marine franchise in a new incarnation -- the Redjackets -- primarily as a vehicle for Herb Joesting, the popular All-America fullback from Minnesota.

Of these new members, Buffalo and Boston would fold after one season. Also going out of business after this year were the Dayton Triangles, charter members of the league who lost all six games this season and scored only 7 points.

For more than a decade, college games had been controlled by four officials. In 1929, the NFL finally added the fourth man, the field judge, to the crew. Another important rule change declared a fumble when the ball hit a member of the receiving team but that it was dead if touched by a member of the punting team. And, in an effort to control fighting, the penalty for such an offense was placed at 15 yards or half the distance to the offender's goal line, whichever was greater.

No one recorded the number of fights during the season, but one game in October saw a 40-yard penalty stepped off.

Building a Winner in Green Bay

The three Packer newcomers -- "Cal" Hubbard, Mike Michalske, and Johnny Blood -- blended perfectly with talented holdovers like tailback Verne Lewellen, the NFL's best punter, blocking back and ace passer "Red" Dunn, All-NFL end "Lavie" Dilweg, rugged fullback "Bo" Molenda, and veteran center "Jugger" Earpe. Together, they formed a versatile offensive unit and the league's most impressive defense.

Three Packer runners -- Lewellen, Blood, and Molenda -- rushed for more than 400 yards each, prospering behind a line bolstered by 250-pound Hubbard and cat-quick Michalske. Big "Cal" had requested a trade to Green Bay after starring for two years with the New York Giants. Michalske signed as a free agent. Both were fine blockers. On defense, they made the Packers nearly impregnable. Green Bay matched its 1928 total of 39 pass interceptions and allowed only three touchdowns to its opponents all season.

The third newcomer was one of pro football's most colorful characters. His real name was John McNally, but early in his career, while on his way to earn some secret cash with a semi-pro team, he picked up a pseudonym from a movie marquee. The theater was playing the Valentino film "Blood and Sand," and John McNally became forever afterward "Johnny Blood."

He'd put in four years with weak NFL teams in Milwaukee and Pottsville before coming to Green Bay. Lambeau, upon learning Johnny was available, called him and offered him \$100 a game, but \$150 if he'd stop drinking. According to the legend, Johnny opted for the hundred.

With a team like the Packers, Johnny could showcase his talents. He could outsprint most other players, was a slashing inside runner, caught passes better than any back or end in the league, and was a first-rate punter and defensive back.

Additionally, he led the league in times fined by his coach. He ignored training rules and curfews, but his ability was so great that Lambeau, who was now a bench coach, had to put up with him.

The Race: Small Town vs. Big Town

Both the Giants and the Packers raced through the first two months of the season without a loss. The Packers won their first five games, all at home, by allowing their opponents a

total of four points on two safeties. Next came four victories on the road in the midwest, in which the Pack finally gave up two touchdowns. Their only close call came in a fumble-filled performance against the Chicago Cardinals before 10,000 fans at Comiskey Park. Leading by only 7-0 midway through the final quarter, the Packers let a long Cardinal pass slip by them for a touchdown. Only an extra point try that sailed wide of the crossbars kept Chicago from a tie.

The Giants, meanwhile, had opened their season with a scoreless tie with the Orange Tornadoes, a new member of the league from a small city outside of Newark, New Jersey. After that slow beginning, Friedman got the offense in gear and the Giants reeled off eight straight victories. Two of those wins were shutouts over the Providence Steam Roller, who dropped from champions to also-rans with the retirement of key players "Curly" Oden, Gus Sonnenberg, and Clyde Smith, along with the lackluster play of tailback Wildcat Wilson.

The most impressive New York victory of the string was a 32-0 trouncing of the Frankford Yellow Jackets on October 20 in the Polo Grounds. The Yellow Jackets had their usual tough squad, but they could not best either the Giants or Packers in five meetings this year. Nonetheless, they had a solid star in fullback Wally Diehl, who gained more than 500 yards rushing on offense and intercepted seven passes on defense.

The season's showdown came on November 24 in the Polo Grounds when the 8-0-1 Giants faced the 9-0-0 Packers before an audience of 25,000. The Packers did not have the services of key backs Red Dunn and Eddie Kotal, who had been injured in the November 10 victory over the Bears. Hubbard and Michalske led a Green Bay pass rush that gave Benny Friedman little time to set up. Verne Lewellen consistently boomed 60-yard punts to keep the New Yorkers in poor field position.

In the first quarter, Johnny Blood helped set up a Green Bay touchdown with a short run. A few moments later, Lewellen threw a short pass to blocking back Hurdie McCrary for the TD.

Defense dominated the second quarter, and the Packers clung to their 7-0 lead at the half. In the third period, the Giants finally showed some of their league-leading offense. Three Friedman passes sandwiched among some good line smashes moved them 70 yards. A pass to Plansky yielded the touchdown, but when Friedman missed the extra point, Green Bay still led.

The roof caved in on New York in the final quarter. Lewellen went deep in punt formation, but instead of booting, he tossed a 26-yard pass to Blood, good for a first down at the

New York 43. Hurdis McCrary threw to Lewellen for 16 more. Then fullback "Bo" Molenda drove in for the touchdown on a series of plunges.

Moments later, veteran center "Jugger" Earpe intercepted a Friedman pass at the Giant 37. The Packers took the ball into the endzone on a drive culminated by Blood's scoring run.

In their 20-6 triumph the Packers played practically the entire game with only eleven players. Guard Jim Bowdoin had to leave the field with an injury in the final minute of play.

Neither team lost any of its remaining games. The Packers played a scoreless tie at Frankford on Thanksgiving Day, then routed Providence and the Bears to wrap up the season as undefeated champs, the first since 1923. When the Packers arrived home by train on December 9, a welcoming party of 20,000 fans danced and celebrated all night in freezing temperatures.

Bad News for the Bears

Among the many highlights of the Packers' season were their three victories over their arch-rivals, the Chicago Bears. After six games, the Bears stood at 4-1-1, but their final nine contests resulted in eight losses and a tie. It was the Bears' first losing season.

Part of the problem was that the Bruins had too many past-their-prime regulars, but even more destructive was the trouble at the top. The team's co-owners, George Halas and Dutch Sternaman had differing opinions about how the offense should work. Consequently, the offense didn't work at all.

On the bright side, Halas coaxed Red Grange back into uniform to share a halfback slot with Paddy Driscoll, playing his final season. Coaxable because of stock market losses, Grange played well, rushing for 552 yards. However, the lingering effects of the leg injury that had forced him to the sideline in 1927 meant he was no longer the awesome breakaway runner of old.

Let There Be Light

No doubt the Packers' showdown victory over the Giants was the most important game of the season as far as the championship race was concerned. However, the Bears' 40-6 loss to the Cardinals wherein Nevers scored all of the Cards' points remains the most famous tilt of the season. But neither game had the lasting significance of a contest the Cardinals played earlier that year in Providence.

The Steam Roller had scheduled a visit from the Cards on Sunday, November 3, but heavy rain forced a postponement.

The Providence management certainly didn't want to miss a chance to benefit from Nevers' drawing power, so they talked the Cards into sticking around for a Wednesday meeting. Meanwhile, the Steam Roller went down to Staten Island for a previously-scheduled election day meeting with the Stapletons. After tying the Stapes, 7-7, they grabbed a train back to Providence.

The novelty of the Wednesday game was that it was played at night -- the first night game in the NFL. Temporary floodlights were installed at little Kinsley Park, rather than the Cycledrome. About 6,000 curious fans filled the tiny park.

Nevers rose to the occasion with one of his greatest performances. He threw a touchdown pass, scored a running TD, kicked an extra point, and booted a 33-yard field goal. For those who thought night football would make passing impossible, he completed 10 of 18 tosses for 144 yards, while running for 102 yards on 23 carries.

1929 NFL FINAL STANDINGS

<u>TEAM</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PCT.</u>	<u>PTS-OPP</u>
Green Bay Packers	12	0	1	1.000	198- 22
New York Giants	13	1	1	.929	312- 86
Frankford Yellow Jackets	10	4	5	.714	139-128
Boston Bulldogs	4	4	0	.500	98- 73
Chicago Cardinals	6	6	1	.500	154- 83
Staten Island Stapletons	3	4	3	.429	89- 65
Providence Steam Roller	4	6	2	.400	107-117
Orange Tornadoes	3	5	4	.375	35- 90
Chicago Bears	4	9	2	.308	119-227
Buffalo Bisons	1	7	1	.125	48-142
Minneapolis Redjackets	1	9	0	.100	48-185
Dayton Triangles	0	6	0	.000	7-136

1946 All-America Conference All-Rookie Team

By John Collins

Some time ago, I found out about some all-rookie teams that the NFL had during the 1960's. After looking over the various lists, it occurred to me that one of the greatest all-rookie teams must have been the 1946 all-rookie team of the All-America Conference, or the AAFC. Many of the players from that league in 1946 are now in the Hall of Fame and others arguably should be in there. As far as I know, no one has ever made out such a list of players, so here may be the first one.

1946 ALL-AMERICA CONFERENCE ALL-ROOKIE TEAM

OFFENSE

E-	Dante Lavelli	(CLE)
E-	Alyn Beals	(SF)
E-	Mac Speedie	(CLE)
T-	Bob Reinhard	(LA)
T-	Ernie Blandin	(CLE)
G-	Ed Ulinski	(CLE)
G-	Lin Houston	(CLE)
C-	Frank Gatski	(CLE)
QB-	Otto Graham	(CLE)
QB-	Frankie Albert	(SF)
FB-	Marion Motley	(CLE)
HB-	John Strzykalski	(SF)
HB-	Bob Hoernschemeyer	(CHI)
TB-	Spec Sanders	(NYY)

DEFENSE

E-	John Yonakor	(CLE)
E-	George Young	(Cle)
DT-	Nate Johnson	(NYY)
DT-	Martin Ruby	(BKN)
MG-	Bill Willis	(CLE)
LB-	Lou Saban	(CLE)
LB-	Visco Grgich	(SF)
LB-	Marion Motley	(CLE)
DB-	Ken Casanega	(SF)
DB-	Cliff Lewis	(CLE)
DB-	Elroy Hirsch	(CHI)
P-	Glenn Dobbs	(BKN)
K-	Lou Groza	(CLE)

People may notice that this team is dominated by players from the Cleveland Browns, and this is probably the reason that the Browns only lost four games in the four years of the All-America Conference (1946-49). The rookies for Cleveland formed the foundation of a team that was to dominate pro football for the next ten years, which included six years after the Browns entered the National Football League in 1950.

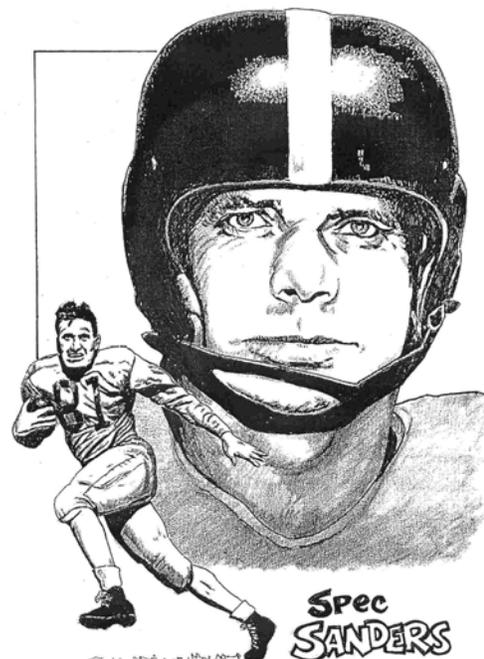
I had Marion Motley at both fullback and linebacker because he was a great player at both positions. Frank Gatski was not a starter for Cleveland in 1946 due to the fact that the Browns decided to go with a good veteran center in Mo Scarry, but Gatski was probably one of the best backup centers in football history and eventually not only became a starter, but ended up in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

I had two quarterbacks and three ends on the offense because I just did not want to leave off any players who were obviously deserving. Besides, every team needs an extra quarterback and who knows when an extra end won't come in handy.

Ernie Blandin played defensive tackle for most of the 1946 season, but was used as an offensive tackle for the 1946 championship game due to the fact that the regular left tackle for Cleveland was fired just days before the title game. Blandin apparently got the job done for Cleveland as the Browns won the title game.

I have Spec Sanders as tailback because some teams in the AAFC used the single wing and Spec Sanders was a standout at that position.

There is my AAFC All-Rookie team for 1946. I hope that I have not left off any deserving players, but in all probability there are some.



Violet and Walter

By Tracy Thibeau

In April of 1947, Violet Bidwill became the first woman to own an NFL franchise. Her 51-year old husband, Charlie, died suddenly of pneumonia and willed her the Chicago Cardinals.

Bidwill was the son of a politician. He had a brother in politics too. They were raised near Wrigley Field. During WWI, Charlie was an officer in Naval Intelligence and befriended footballers George Halas and Jimmy Conzelman while stationed at Great Lakes. After his discharge, he was an attorney for a few years. Then, sometime in the early Twenties, he began to acquire some businesses and stopped practicing law.

Bidwill was always a sport. He had an interest in Chicago Stadium, became a stockholder in the Bears and bought the Cardinals in 1933. At the time of his death, Charlie owned a national gambling empire: horsetracks, dogtracks, and he even owned the company that printed the tickets and scratch sheets.

His widow, Violet, was left to raise their two sons. Charles Jr. known as "Stormy" (18) was at Georgetown University and Billy (16) was in high school. The Chicago *Tribune* quoted "close associates" as saying that the boys would "move into the sports operation" after finishing school.

Violet was resolute about remaining in Chicago. She stubbornly hung on to the franchise even when Texas millionaire Lamar Hunt made a generous offer to buy it. It was this rejection that inspired Hunt to form the AFL in 1960. It is estimated that her battle for Chicago with George Halas cost Violet over a million dollars.

She must have been referring to the Chicago *Tribune's* sports editor and AAFC founder, Arch Ward when she said, "They tried to run Charlie out of town ten years ago and they couldn't do it. Now they're trying to do the same thing and the answer is still no."

But more than likely it was spite for George Halas that motivated Violet to fight for Chicago. Charlie Bidwill never displayed such fierce loyalty to the city. In fact, he planned to move the Cardinals to Los Angeles in 1941 but the war stopped him. There is evidence that he considered a move to San Francisco in 1946 to compete with the AAFC's 49ers. Instead, he teamed up with Halas to squeeze out the invading AAFC Chicago Rockets. The plan worked with the

Bears winning the NFL Championship in 1946, the Cards in 1947 and almost repeating with their division title in 1948.

Violet had also inherited \$50,000 worth of stock in the Chicago Bears. One of her assistant coaches, Buddy Parker, had urged her to acquire third string, rookie quarterback Bobby Layne from the Bears. Violet told Halas that she was willing to trade the stock for Layne's contract.

But like Parker, Halas knew that Layne, a future Hall of Famer, had the potential to develop into one of the best. Why would Halas want to fortify the Cardinals, now a formidable cross-town rival, and risk his investment? Apparently, any loyalty George had felt for Charlie was not transferred to his widow.

Instead, Halas sold Layne to the New York Bulldogs for \$50,000 and two draft choices. Halas paid Violet in cash and settled their business. Although Halas said that he made the trade as a favor to New York's struggling owner Ted Collins, he also insisted that there be a clause in the sales contract stating that Layne would never be sold or traded to the Cardinals.

The affair came back to haunt Halas, because when the New York franchise folded after the 1951 season, he was unable to reclaim Layne from the dispersal pool. Detroit's new head coach, Buddy Parker, claimed Layne and the Lions, a division rival, became a thorn in the Bears' side for the almost the next decade.

The first person in the Cardinal championship organization to resign was head coach Jimmy Conzelman in January of 1949. Jimmy worked for six non-consecutive years as Charlie Bidwill's head coach and said that Violet "seldom if ever" missed a game at home or on the road. He said she was "a real fan for a woman" and that she "would sit in the stands and watch even daily pre-season practices."

Violet, a beautiful, athletic woman had struck up a romance with St. Louisan Walter Wolfner. Just how St. Louis native Conzelman and Wolfner had known each other before this is unclear. One newspaper reported that they had been classmates but the two men attended different high schools and colleges. Wolfner's son John thought they had been business acquaintances. Whatever the circumstances, they definitely didn't get along.



Violet Bidwill Wolfner

Walter Wolfner was a coffee broker in St. Louis. During the war, he manufactured soluble coffee for the government. He sold the company to Nestle when the war ended. He was active in the Democratic Party and was not only the treasurer for Gov. Forrest Smith's campaign, but also Harry Truman's when he ran for Senator. Gov. Smith appointed him a Colonel on his gubernatorial staff. He was a frequent visitor to Truman's White House.

The Cardinals were in Philadelphia on December 19, 1948, to play the Eagles for the NFL championship. Conzelman had brought along his wife and son, James Jr. According to Conzelman's son, Wolfner, who was not yet married to Violet, came into their hotel room and started giving the coach "suggestions and directives."

Conzelman was in the NFL from its' beginning in 1920. He coached two different NFL championship teams. The two men clashed. On one train trip, three members of the Cardinals were passing between cars when they witnessed Conzelman threatening to toss Wolfner over the side. The ballplayers had to intervene.

Although their feud was a contributing factor, Conzelman's son went on to say that it wasn't the reason his father ultimately resigned. The coach felt that the team had peaked, would not repeat, and that he wanted to go out on top. He'd been offered a great job in advertising and wanted to settle his family in St. Louis.

Wolfner divorced his first wife and wed Violet just days later on September 28, 1949.

Ray Bennigsen was President of the Cardinals from 1933 until he resigned in July of 1951. Ray never interfered with the head coach on the field and the coach stayed out of Ray's business in the front office. It was a good working relationship.

Bennigsen wanted to promote Buddy Parker to head coach. Violet and Walter wanted Phil Handler. The compromise was to make them both co-coaches. The results were disastrous. Bennigsen said: "After Vi married Walter Wolfner, I felt it was time to go. I don't think any decision I ever made in my life was as difficult as that one."

During Wolfner's eleven years as managing director of the Cardinals, 1951 through 1961, no fewer than ten men could have called themselves a "head coach." At least 22 quarterbacks were used during that time. It soon became apparent to the people in the business that Walter didn't know whether a football was pumped up or stuffed. One former Cardinal was quoted as saying "Making him managing director of the team just because he married the owner is like you should send me to manage the New York Philharmonic."

First-string fullback and place kicker, Pat Harder, was so unhappy with the management that he threatened to retire if he wasn't traded.

Sportswriter Bill Gleason of the Chicago *Daily News*, a native southsider and a lifelong Cardinal fan, believed that Wolfner always intended to move the team to St. Louis. "He just wrecked that franchise," said Gleason.

The Wolfners had issues other than football. When Ray Bennigsen resigned from the team, he also resigned as president of the Bentley-Murray Printing Company. This left the family's most profitable company in the lurch. The company's main business was sports. Programs, tickets, scratch sheets and other related supplies were provided for different sporting venues, nationwide.

Also, the annual horse racing meet at Chicago's Sportsman's Park, where Violet served as treasurer, was suspended in 1950 due to the results of a Kefauver Committee investigation. It was discovered that an organized crime figure had received an \$80,000 loan from the track and another gangster was operating the parking concession at two of her racetracks.



Walter Wolfner

It is conceivable, even probable, that Violet had no knowledge of these things. She was a woman in a man's business. Because she had inherited Charlie's money, she had apparently picked up some of his business acquaintances too.

In the summer of 1951, four armed men broke through a basement window in the Wolfner's Chicago home at 5825 W. Washington Boulevard. Water and Violet, along with Walter's daughter from a previous marriage, were terrorized at gunpoint.

The invaders took Wolfner into the basement. This was where Violet stored her luxurious wardrobe. She happened to be in an adjoining bathroom and Walter courageously shouted a warning to her about the danger outside. She immediately locked the bathroom door and escaped through the basement window. Her neighbors identified her to the police. They had been alerted by the home alarm system.

The men asked Walter where the safe was. Wolfner told them that there was no safe. The thieves took jewelry and ransacked the drawers. They took all the cash they could find.

One of the escaping bandits saw the police, grabbed the housekeeper and used her as a shield. Then he hit her in the head with his pistol, flung her aside and went back down into the basement. Another man bolted for the back door but was captured by two policemen.

The man in custody was encouraged by the cops to relay to his accomplices downstairs that the place was surrounded. One of them shouted back, "Big Boy, (his nickname) get out of here or we'll kill you too."

Wolfner told his captors that if they gave up their weapons, he would plead for mercy at their trial. After fifteen minutes of arguing, two of the others surrendered.

When a policeman found the fourth suspect hiding in a closet, the perpetrator took a shot at the cop and left a powder burn on the officer's ear. They got into a tussle and a second cop shot and killed the perp on the spot. The whole ordeal took three hours.

All of the home invaders had prison records. The dead man, well known to the Chicago police, had a brother who had been shot to death by Chicago police ten years earlier. The three surviving bandits all told the same story. The dead man had paid them each \$1000 to help him break into the Wolfner home. The dead man also claimed that he was going to collect a \$20,000 debt from Wolfner and that they would get half for their assistance. Wolfner later denied owing any such debt or that he knew any of the men.

Two of the thieves were later tried, convicted and sentenced from 20 to 25 years. True to his word to the bandits, Wolfner asked the court for mercy and to reduce their sentences to 5 to 10 years.

"The court will give no consideration to the recommendation of the witness," said the judge. "I am amazed and surprised that he would make such a recommendation."

A third suspect skipped a \$30,000 bail bond and was on the FBI's most wanted list for about two years. He was later found to be living on Chicago's south side and was arrested again. At his next trial, he repeated his recollection of the evening's events. But this time he said it was a man from St. Louis who gave each of them \$1000 to break into the home and that the \$20,000 was to complete a "business deal" with Wolfner.

The *Tribune* stated that the "business deal" was never described.

A Chicago jury acquitted this man on the grounds that he was completing a "business deal" not a robbery. "I was amazed and shocked at such a terrible verdict," said Wolfner. "I can't understand it."

In December, 1951, Cardinals Coach Curly Lambeau resigned. Wolfner told the press, "He always blamed the assistants for the defeats."

Lambeau responded diplomatically. "There is hardly a coaching set up in which there is complete agreement. But club owners certainly don't air this kind of thing in public." Curly told the *Green Bay Gazette*, "No man can do a satisfactory job if he is constantly harassed by front office second guessing."

Wolfner also denied rumors that the Cardinals were moving or for sale. "You can say 100%," asserted Wolfner, "that the Cardinals are not for sale and won't be. My ol' lady sure can take it on the chin!"

In 1952, the Cardinals signed a three-year lease with Comiskey Park. Wolfner hired Coach Joe Kuharich. After a 3-1 start, the team lost 7 of 8. Wolfner ordered Kuharich to fire two of his assistants. Kuharich refused. Wolfner fired all three of them.

In 1953 the Cards drafted a record six quarterbacks. When the team record reached 0-10-1, Coach Joe Stydahar said, "I don't know what's the matter with this team. The boys don't seem to have any pride in their work. They play just well enough to lose."

The final game of the season was at Comiskey Park against the Bears. Stydahar assembled the team and told them, "I always thought you guys were a bunch of gutless losers. If you don't beat the Bears on Sunday, none of you gets paid." The Cardinals won 24-17 before 38,059.

That season the franchise lost \$272,365.

Pat Summerall played for the Cardinals from 1953 thru 1958. The place kicker complained that he never had the same holder two years in a row. He said, "The Cardinal organization was always trying to save pennies and by the time the season ended we were sometimes down to 25 players. At one point we almost didn't have enough footballs to practice with. It just wasn't much fun losing every weekend and if I hadn't been traded to the Giants I was going to retire."

Receiver Gern Nagler played for the Cardinals between 1953 and 1958. He told a story to NFL Films about a rookie quarterback who couldn't get the ball 20 yards down the field. "Well it turns out nobody ever scouted him," said Nagler. "Someone in the front office saw his photo in one of those magazines, like *Street and Smith's*, and he looked really impressive, standing there with his arm cocked. But they never saw him play! They drafted him because he looked good in a photograph!"

Not all of Walter's moves were bad. In 1954 he drafted Quarterback Lamar McHan and traded for Richard "Night Train" Lane.

Night Train Lane was one of the best defensive backs in the NFL. In 1952, when playing for the Rams, he set a single-season record with 14 interceptions. The record still stands. He accomplished this feat during a 12 game season. Lane was unhappy in Los Angeles. After the trade, Wolfner met him at the airport in Chicago and handed him a \$1000 bill. Lane was astonished and was reassured by Walter that there was more where that came from.

"I had no idea the next six years would be the most unjoyful of my entire 14 year career," said Lane. "Not only did the money dry up quickly, I came to see that the team was badly disorganized with only a few of the players having the proper mental attitude to win."

Lane played both offense and defense for the Cardinals. He complained that the finances of the team were so bad that the Cardinals had to take trains and busses while the other teams were flying to their destinations. This made getting rested before a game much more difficult. He cited the transportation situation as one of the main reasons the team couldn't win. Still, Lane led the league in 1954 with 10 interceptions and was named to the Pro Bowl in 1955, '56 and '59.

Another Wolfner scheme was his profit-sharing program. He announced that he would distribute half the team's profits to players and coaches. It was supposedly a motivational tool. His logic was that attendance, and profits, would increase if the team won more games. "The incentive program will in no way affect the players and coaches salaries," said Wolfner. The Cardinals number one draft pick in 1951 was Jerry Groom. He signed for \$8500 the first year and \$9000 for the second. He was led to believe that he was getting a \$500 bonus, too, but \$100 was deducted from each of his first five checks. He was later informed that the money was an advance, not a bonus.

When Groom was negotiating his next contract, Wolfner told him that none of the players were getting a raise but rather participating in the profit sharing plan.

One of front office personnel had previously confided to Groom that there were no deposits in the profit sharing plan so Groom refused to sign without a raise.

Wolfner caved in and said "Okay, but don't tell the other guys."

"If Mr. Wolfner included his race track profits in the deal, I think he would have something tangible to offer," commented George Halas. He knew that it was Violet's racetrack profits that were covering the football team's red line expenses. That year, Violet and Walter signed a postnuptial agreement. In the event of their death, each partner waived any claims to the others estate.

In 1955, Charles A. Comiskey II was named to the board of directors. "Chuck Comiskey's entrance into the Cardinals organization," said Wolfner, "is just the first step to perpetuate the Cards in Chicago."

By 1956, CBS television was trying to gather all the teams in the NFL under one tent. Most of them had contracts with independent TV networks. The Cardinals and the Bears, up until this time, had a lopsided deal with a network in which the Bears made more money. "Nobody wants to see your games anyway," Halas told Wolfner.

The situation in Chicago became intolerable. Neither team could televise its away games back home. It violated the NFL's blackout rule. It was costing the other owners money. The more TV revenue increased, the more they lost. Commissioner Bert Bell was pressured to resolve the problem.

According to Wolfner, Bell was after both owners to do something about the problem or the league would step in. Both teams were charter members of the league. The Cardinals, however, had been rooted in Chicago since 1920. The Bears moved in from Decatur in 1921. So, the Bears argued that they had significantly better attendance, by a two to one margin, and that they should be allowed to stay. Both teams were willing to pay the other \$500,000 to leave. Wolfner claimed that the Cardinals offered the Bears a cool million.

Whenever he visited St. Louis, Walter was badgered by the local sporting community to move the team there. "I'm not the one to say," he would reply.

But Wolfner was the catalyst in the NFL's return to the city. In 1954, he promised two local businessmen that the Cardinals would play a preseason benefit game in St. Louis and then signed a commitment for ten more years. They became locally known as the "Cardinal Glennon Games" and the proceeds benefited the construction of a children's hospital. Beginning in 1956, the games were played on Saturday nights at old Busch Stadium. When the weather cooperated, the games attracted over thirty thousand people. The consistently strong attendance at these games convinced NFL owners that St. Louis should be considered in their expansion plans.

Responding to questions that he was plotting a move to St. Louis, Wolfner said: "I believe St. Louis would support big-league football, but there would have to be tangible evidence of a guaranteed interest before I'd ever consider moving."

The Cardinals experimented with relocation by playing a regular season game in Buffalo in 1958. It was also the last year the Cardinals played at Comiskey Park.

When Comiskey was the landlord, Wolfner was known to be demanding when discussing the lease agreement. Bill Veeck had purchased the White Sox in 1959. Veeck's father, Bill Sr., became president of the Chicago Cubs in 1920. Bill Sr. was the first man to rent Wrigley Field to Halas beginning in 1921. They had an amiable relationship and chances are that the loyal Bill Jr. sided with Halas in this dogfight for Chicago. Post-season play may have influenced their decision, too, because the Sox went to the World Series that season. Whatever transpired, negotiations stalled and the 1959 Cardinals played their home games, with the exception of two in Minnesota, at Soldier Field.

The Cardinals had spent a big slug of money for improvements at Soldier Field. They moved the playing field to the far south end of the pasture and erected some bleachers behind the north end zone. Still, conditions and attendance there became unacceptable.

The Matson trade in 1959 that sent Ollie to Los Angeles in return for nine players was not a Wolfner idea. It was Rams General Manager, Pete Rozelle, who arranged the deal. During the days of negotiations in Chicago, Rozelle lodged at Bill Bidwill's apartment. Bill, who had played some college football, was taking a more active part in the teams' operation now. It was Bill who notified Ollie that he'd been traded.

In 1960, the NFL guarantee for the visiting team was going up from \$20,000 to \$30,000. With the poor attendance at Soldier Field, the Cardinals simply couldn't afford that. Wolfner wanted to move the teams' home games to Northwestern University's Dyche Stadium. The college is located in the northern suburb of Evanston. But Halas invoked an agreement that had been on file since the early thirties. It stated that each team would operate on its own side of the city's north-south baseline which is Madison Avenue. Halas refused to grant a waiver. The Cardinals now had nowhere else to go.

In September of 1959, Bert Bell announced expansion plans and began accepting applications. Originally, only two owners objected to expansion. George Preston Marshall soon reconsidered his position. The only other abstention was Walter Wolfner. He claimed that it was in protest of what he termed George Halas' one-man rule over the league. Bert Bell died of a heart attack in October of 1959. This tragic

event temporarily stalled expansion plans until his successor, Pete Rozelle, was named commissioner.

In November, Joseph Griesedieck and the Falstaff Brewery of St. Louis submitted a check for \$50,000 and guaranteed a sale of 25,000 season seats in hopes of securing an expansion franchise. But the first one went to Dallas. On November 20th, Halas took delight in announcing that the second expansion franchise had been awarded to Minnesota. What amused Halas was that the Cardinals, who were considering a move to that location, were scheduled to play the Giants in Bloomington on the 22nd.

Besides Buffalo and Minnesota, the Wolfners also considered moving the team to Atlanta or Houston. In January of 1960, Lamar Hunt and the AFL began exploring the possibility of a franchise in St. Louis. Now time became a factor. In early March, the stubborn Violet allowed beer baron, Joseph Greisedieck, to buy ten percent of the team for \$250,000. Only two more things were necessary to make the move to St. Louis, a television agreement and a place to play.

A television contract was drafted quickly. The Falstaff Brewery sponsored the broadcasts. The team would play at Busch Stadium, a.k.a. Sportsmans Park. An 8000-seat, uncovered, bleacher section was set up along the sideline in front of the right field pavilion. Bill Bidwill once remarked that the stadium had 34,000 seats but 24,000 of them were bad for football.

The stadium was owned and operated by brewery competitor Anheuser-Busch. Fortunately, Gussie Busch graciously welcomed the football Cardinals and was more than fair in dealing with the team. The city soon advanced plans for a new dual-purpose stadium to open in 1964, but it actually didn't open until 1966.

By the end of March the move was permanent. "Basically, it was because of television," said Bill Bidwill. "It wasn't necessarily a move to anywhere but a move out of Chicago because of television problems."

"It just got so that we weren't having any fun here anymore," understated Wolfner

The crowds in St. Louis averaged 23,337 the first year. At the home opener, the Cardinals unveiled the "determined bird" logo on their helmet. But season seats were hard to sell.

The ballpark site had been in use for over 50 years as the city's baseball stadium and therefore was easily accessible by public transportation. But by the 1960s, the population had spread out and it created some parking problems. The bleachers in right field exposed the spectators to the elements. At least once, marching band members lost their

shoes in the mud on the playing field. Unless you were sitting high up in the grandstand, the view from your box seat on the west side was blocked by the activity on the sideline.

In 1961, during Water's final year as managing director, attendance fell off 15%.

He still held the title in January of 1962 when Violet Bidwill Wolfner suddenly died from a bad reaction to penicillin. It happened in the Miami Beach doctor's office where she went for treatment of a throat infection. She was only 58 years old. Her estate was valued at three to five million dollars. The postnuptial agreement that she and Walter signed in 1954 was presented in probate court. Violet's will made it clear that Stormy (32) and Bill (30) were in charge of the football team now.

According to Wolfner's son, the day after she was buried, the Bidwill boys "kicked him out." A month later, a bitter Wolfner challenged the Bidwill boys' right to the estate. Walter claimed that the boys misrepresented themselves in court. He protested that both of them had been adopted and did not inform the judge. Neither Stormy nor Bill knew that they had been adopted until then. Walter's legal action was how they found out.

Although Wolfner said he never owned any stock in the franchise, the will that he produced in court awarded him the entire team along with a large amount of racetrack stock. He testified that the boy's "hated" him.

It took about a month before the boys could amend their claim to the estate and prove that their adoptions were legal. During that time, custody of the team was passed between different trustees appointed by the court.

Violet did bequeath Walter the income from five Oklahoma oil wells. It amounted to about \$400 a month. She also ordered that the revenues from the wells revert to her sons upon Walter's death. The Bidwill boys were reputed to have unusual sibling rivalries and eventually split up their fortune.

In August of 1965, Wolfner settled out of court and went into semi-retirement. He remained comfortable, was an expert card player and went golfing at every opportunity.

He suffered a stroke in 1968 and entered a St. Louis nursing home. He died on June 30, 1971, at the age of 73. His obituary called him the man "primarily responsible" for the Cardinals move to St. Louis.

Violet is interred in a mausoleum alongside Charlie Bidwill at a cemetery in Chicago. Walter is buried, coincidentally, less than a football field away from Jimmy Conzelman in St. Louis' Calvary Cemetery.

The NFL World Championship Game: December 24, 1950

Los Angeles Rams vs. Cleveland Browns

By Bob Follensbee

Two of the finest football teams ever to meet in a World Championship Game were going to meet in Cleveland on a bitter cold day, on a slippery field, the day before Christmas in the year 1950. Both teams would be defending an image of invincibility: the Browns, their invincibility based on four All-America Football Conference (AAFC) Championships and their 35 to 10 defeat of the 1949 NFL Champion Philadelphia Eagles and the Rams, their record setting total yards and points per game average in the just completed 1950 season stamped them as a team with an awesome offense.

For both teams there was a great deal at stake. It would be as great a Championship game as ever was played; for both teams it would be the longest day.

Both teams played a new brand of offensive football. They had brought the forward passing game to a higher state of precision and perfection than what had been the more recent NFL norm. Both teams were using the unlimited substitution rule to develop a specialist capability, both offensively and defensively. The two-way player had now become a one-way player, more specialized and more skilled. The field goal was now a major scoring weapon as the kicker's kicking distance was increasing. The spread offensive formation was enhancing the passing game by throwing more receivers at the defenses. The pass defenses out of necessity were advancing using zone coverage in place of the man-to-man.

All of these improvements in the playing of the game would be on display by both teams. During the season the Rams set offensive scoring records that still stand today. Their two quarterbacks threw the ball long and often to big, fast receivers. The Browns, also, were a strong passing team. There were eleven future Hall of Fame players on both teams. No prior championship game could show this many skilled players. The game had in Otto Graham, Bob Waterfield and Norm Van Brocklin; three of the game's greatest passers.

There was another element to this game that made it unique: It was going to settle for all time that elusive question about the quality of the AAFC players and their play. The AAFC and the old NFL, formerly bitter rivals, were now merged into the new NFL. This would be the first championship game

following the merger where the best team from the AAFC met the best team from the NFL.

Joe Stydahar, in his first year as the Ram head coach, had assembled what was probably the greatest Ram team ever. He had a high-powered offense featuring a record setting passing game driven by two strong armed quarterback's – Bob Waterfield and Norman Van Brocklin – and a trio of big, fast receivers; Elroy Hirsch, Tom Fears and Bob Boyd.

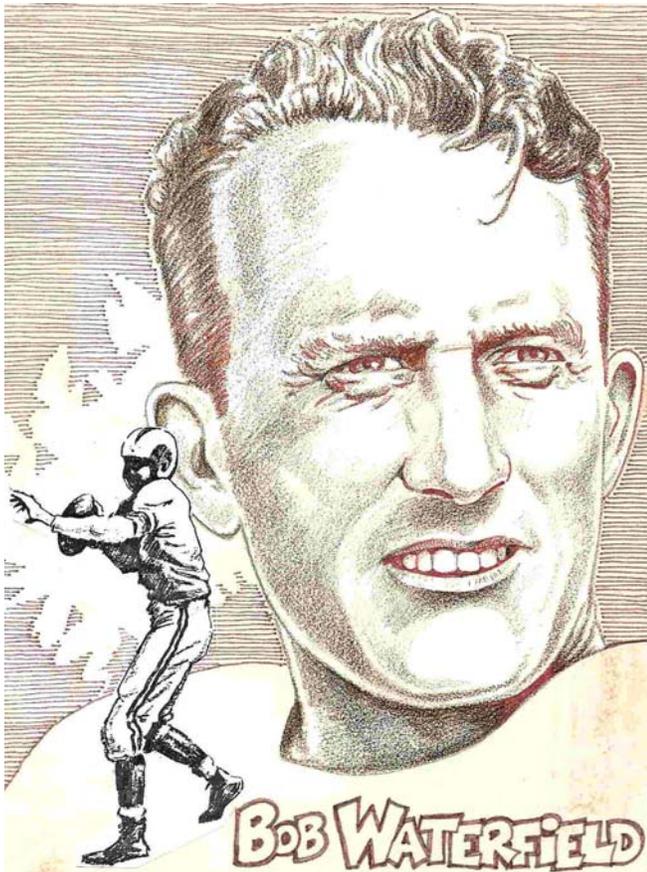
Fears was the most fearsome of the three. He was big, 215 lbs, very fast and very physical. He did not avoid contact with the rival pass defenders, he sought it and used it to his advantage. He was almost unstoppable. His 84 catches for the 1950 twelve game year put belief in his doubters, if there were any.

Stydahar also had a backfield of unusually fast sprinters, like Glenn Davis of the great Army teams and Vitamin T. Smith. The Ram halfbacks ran the 100-yard dash in 9.8 seconds. For short yardage power Dan Towler and Dick Hoerner were big, hard driving fullbacks weighing in at 225 and 220 lbs respectively.

Stydahar, a former Bear and later Hall of Fame inductee, knew all about defense and had rounded up some tough, quick, defensive lineman and defensive secondary players. But his offense is what made this game one of a kind. It was the brainchild of a brilliant offensive innovator named Hampton Pool. Pool's offensive dynamo averaged 416 total yards per game in 1950, a record that still stands. Their offense averaged 38.8 points a game, also a record that still stands. These high powered numbers had every one guessing about how far Joe Stydahar's unstoppable force would move Paul Brown's immovable object.

Paul Brown, more than any individual in the history of professional football, defined the game that is played today. He designed a precision passing attack that demolished the NFL Champion Philadelphia Eagles 35 to 10, to start the 1950 season. Against these record-setting Rams the Browns would field a very potent offense with an equally effective defense trying to slow down the Ram offensive juggernaut.

The Browns were an impressive team, very well balanced, a large number of positions manned by exceptional athletes selected by and coached by Paul Brown and four full time coaching assistants. They played in the AAFC the four years that it existed and won the Championship every year they played. This led the Brown detractors to illogically claim the AAFC was an inferior league; when pitted against the NFL the Browns would be one of the weaker teams in the league. But these critics were old-guard NFL loyalists resentful of Paul Brown's extraordinary success and fearful that his football innovations would upset their dominance of the game. The Los Angeles Rams, it should be emphasized, were not of this mind. In their thinking they were on a par with Paul Brown's advanced football passing game. They had no doubts that the Browns were a great football team.



Paul Brown had put it all together with his 1948 Brown team. This team was his coaching masterpiece. It finished the season unbeaten and went on to set a professional football record of 29 games without defeat, including two ties, a record that still stands and is not likely to be beaten. Yet, strangely, to this day the dominating old-guard powers in the NFL stubbornly refuse to recognize this remarkable achievement.

The Browns had their big guns; Marion Motley, the 238 lb fullback, ran at sprinter speed, was a devastating blocker for both running backs and for the quarterback (when passing).

He ran for career yards per carry numbers that have never been beaten. He had been slowed by bad knees but in his prime he was the greatest fullback the game has ever seen; some say the greatest player. He was the outstanding linebacker on a team that was exceptionally strong at that position.

Otto Graham, the Brown's quarterback, was pro football's first precision passer, who threw to three exceptional receivers running very precise pass patterns. His receivers, Mac Speedie, Dante Lavelli and Dub Jones, had few equals. The Brown defense was rock solid led by the incomparable Bill Willis at middle guard and Len Ford at defensive end.

So, the stage was set for one of the all-time great professional football championship games. It did, indeed, start that way. On the game's opening play from scrimmage Waterfield passed to Glenn Davis who, wide open, ran unmolested to score on an 82-yard touchdown play. To the few watching TV, only recently made available, and to those of us listening by radio, it was an electrifying start.

How would the Browns answer this? Following the Ram kickoff the Browns, behind the passing of Otto Graham, moved rapidly into Ram territory where Graham threw a long strike to Dub Jones running at top speed. He made an exceptional catch of a perfectly thrown pass that came down directly in front of him eight yards into the end zone.

The Rams came right back and scored again, going up 14 to 7. The Browns then responded with another Graham touchdown pass but the extra point was muffed when the pass from the center, Frank Gatski, got caught in a gust of wind and could not be handled by the holder Tom James. The first half ended with the score Rams 14, Browns 13.

Early in the third quarter Graham hit Lavelli with another perfectly thrown 39-yard pass. The defender had his arm and hand over Lavelli's shoulder but couldn't reach the ball because its high looping trajectory put the ball in front of the receiver where the defender could not get a hand on it. One can see in Graham's distinctive high-arching long passes the long shots of the professional basketball player. He was a first string forward with the NBA Rochester Royals 1946 championship basketball team before joining the Browns.

The Browns now had a lead 20 to 14 for the first time in the game, but the Ram offense was not finished. Waterfield's strong leadership put together a drive that culminated in Dick Hoerner banging in for the score. The Rams now led again 21 to 20. On the ensuing kickoff Motley fumbled from a hard hit. Larry Brink recovered for the Rams and ran six yards for another Ram score. It was now the Rams 28 to 20, two scores ahead, and the fourth quarter just starting.

In his excellent book about the Cleveland Browns Dynasty, *The Best Show In Football*, author Andy Piascik describes Graham's play in the Brown's great comeback in the fourth quarter. He notes that the Brown defense played a decisive role by intercepting two Waterfield passes, giving the Brown offense their opportunity. In the first of two scoring drives the Browns faced fourth down situations three times. On two of those fourth downs Graham ran and made the first down; one yard and three yards. He passed seven yards for the other. From the 15-yard line he passed to Rex Bumgardner in the end zone corner. Bumgardner caught the ball with an extraordinary diving effort. The Browns had now closed to 28-27 with time to score again if they could keep the Rams from scoring.

Waterfield had the Rams moving after the Browns kicked off but his pass was deflected and caught by a Brown defender. The Browns then in a series of plays moved the ball into scoring territory when Graham, running into the Ram line at the 24-yard line, was blindsided and lost the ball. This was a terrific break for the Rams. There was slightly more than three minutes remaining. If the Rams could maintain control of the ball, they would win the game.

Waterfield, from the 25-yard line, elected to stay on the ground, avoiding an interception but also eating up time by keeping the clock running. The Browns held the Ram backs to six yards after three downs forcing them to punt with two minutes remaining. Waterfield was kicking from his 20-yard line. If the punted ball was run back to the 50 or further into Ram territory the Browns would have a good shot at a field goal. Groza could kick the long goal from 45 yards. They had only to reach the Ram 35-yard line to put the kick 45 yards out. (Note: the goal posts were on the goal line. In later years they were moved back by rule changes.)

For Bob Waterfield and the Rams this was a critical time. He had played probably his greatest game, all things considered. The field conditions did not favor the Rams style of play; icy, slippery field, damp cold weather. Still, under his direction the Rams had scored 28 points against one of the toughest defensive teams he had faced in his impressive career. But Bob Waterfield was a quiet, no-nonsense leader on the field who rose to the occasion when the circumstances required it. His team had the slimmest of leads but if he could drive the football deep into Brown territory Joe Stydahar's defense had a good chance of holding the Browns out of field goal range until time ran out. Waterfield got off a tremendous kick, 60 yards to the Brown 20, where Cliff Lewis ran it back to the 32. Waterfield had done his job; it was now up to the Ram defense.

Otto Graham and the Brown's offensive team had less than one minute 50 seconds to get within Groza's field goal range starting from their own 32-yard line. The Ram defense was

set up to stop Graham's passes with special attention to his long passes.

On the first play from scrimmage Graham retreated as if to pass and was rushed by two Ram linemen. He dodged a diving Ram rusher with a quick sidestep and simultaneously gave another rusher a stiff arm. He then took off down field. It was typical Graham evading a near sack and running for a 15-yard pickup and a first down on the Browns 47-yard line. But the clock continued to run with the running play just completed, so time-management by the Browns was essential if they were not to run out of time-outs and time.

It was here in this final drive, with little time left, that Paul Brown's team demonstrated a strategy of time-management in those waning seconds of the game that gave the Brown offense the time it needed to make their successful drive to a score. Time-management, in the waning minutes of a football contest, has evolved since this game, into a highly developed science. If time-management did not have its start with this game it became more widely known and understood as a result of the game's dramatic ending.

With a minute and seconds left to play on the Brown 47, Graham's first pass was a sideline pass, 13 yards, to Bumgardner, who stepped out of bounds to stop the clock. Following an incomplete pass, Graham hit Jones on the Ram 23-yard line and then called a time-out with one time-out left. There was about 50 seconds left, time for one more pass to get the ball closer for Groza's field goal. Bumgardner made a sensational catch of Graham's pass eleven yards from the goal line. The clock stopped when Bumgardner stepped out of bounds. Graham then ran the ball to a better kicking position before calling a time-out with 15 to 20 seconds left to play. Groza put the ball through the uprights making the score: Browns 30, Rams 28. Following the ensuing kickoff and with some time left, Van Brocklin threw a long Hail Mary pass to Glenn Davis, but it was intercepted by Brown's Warren Lahr to end the game.

For the Rams it was a difficult loss and a very long day. Stydahar and Waterfield gave the Browns credit for coming back under difficult circumstances. But they had come close to winning, making defeat tougher. For the Browns, they had beaten an extraordinarily talented team and a very capable coaching staff.

There is one player who deserves to be singled out for his play. That one is, of course, Otto Graham. In his book about the Cleveland Browns, referred to above, author Andy Piascik makes a persuasive case for Graham's performance being the greatest ever by a quarterback in a world championship game, including the Super Bowls. His four long scoring passes kept the Browns in the game and prevented the Rams from running away with it. His running was often under

do-or-die situations that got the Browns out of several holes. He finished rushing with 99 yards and 8.3 yards-per-carry. That kind of rushing yardage by a quarterback in a World Championship game is remarkable, but even more so when combined with his four touchdown passes. Clearly, he was the dominant player in this game and, arguably, the most dominating performer of any NFL World Championship game including the Super Bowls. He completed an astounding 69% of his passes, 9.3 yards-per-pass-attempt, a very high number under any conditions. The game was played in a different way from the NFL Championship games that

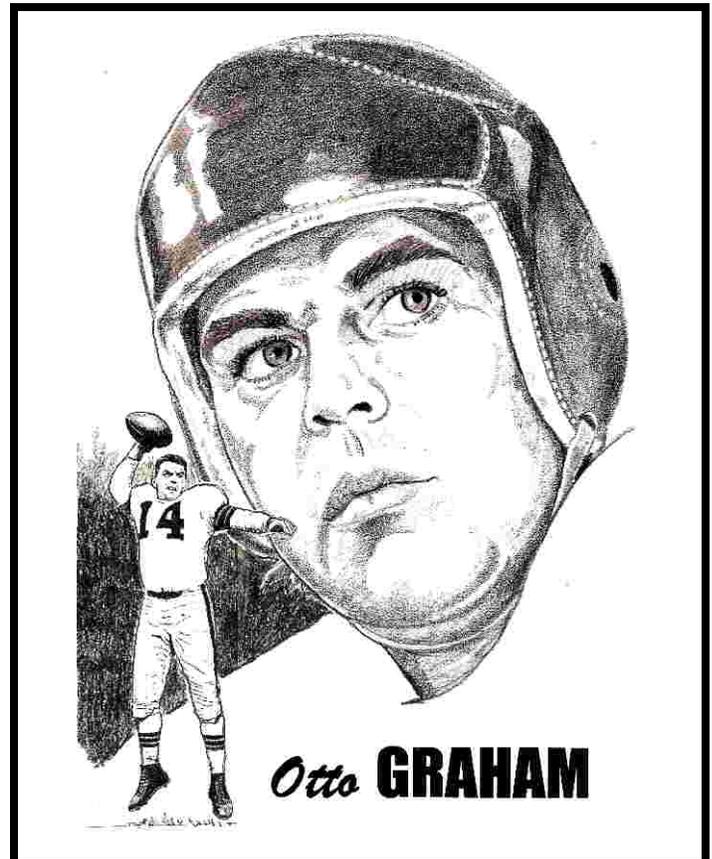
preceded it. Most of the differences were on the offensive side. Both teams had exceptional speed that made the game more wide-open, faster and more interesting. As such the game was a precursor of the modern game and was the beginning of the modern era as it has finally evolved. As noted in the earlier paragraphs new rules allowing unlimited substitution led to specialization and the one-way player. This rule was fully exploited by both teams. Both teams had developed the precision pass offense, a system where multiple receivers run a predetermined pattern of routes designed to confuse the defense and put the receivers open ready to receive the pass. The precision comes from the ability of the receivers and the passer to read each other's intentions and moves as the overall pattern is unfolding. The passer will attempt to time his pass so that it hits the receiver just as he has made a break away from the defender. When done successfully, the pass is nearly impossible to stop.

Looking at the offensive statistics of this game they look like the typical NFL modern day team statistics. Otto Graham threw 32 passes for 298 yards; Waterfield threw 33 for 312 yards. Dante Lavelli caught 11 passes and scored two touchdowns, Tom Fears caught 9 passes for one touchdown. Even the score was reflective of today's game. The two NFL World Championship games played prior to this one ended 7-0 in '48 (played in a snowstorm) and 14-0 in '49 (played in mud). In '47, Chicago Cardinals over Philadelphia 28-21, Cardinal quarterback Paul Christman threw 14 passes, three completions and no touchdowns for 54 yards.

The AAFC Championship games had always been more wide open and higher scoring than the more conservative NFL. So this game being the first title game following the merger of the two leagues its style of play tended to be more like the AAFC.

The interest in the 1950 game and its outcome was widespread. For the first time a TV audience, although limited in the distribution, would be following the game in addition to the national radio. It's not unreasonable to say the game was a factor in setting the stage for the, then, rising popularity of professional football, eventually becoming America's favorite sport. The game demonstrated in dramatic fashion the entertainment potential of the forward-pass dominated, open-

style play that was to become the hallmark of professional football. While the Browns, under Paul Brown, had been playing an open style that was ahead of its time, the Rams, under Joe Stydahar and Hampton Pool, had undergone a major transformation in a little more than a year. They had caught up with the Browns and outclassed the rest of the NFL along the way. Both teams showed the relative superiority of their football systems by winning again the next year their respective conference titles and playing for the 1951 World's Championship Title.



This game, all facts considered, is one of the greatest Championship football games to be played in any Professional Football League ever and a case can be made for judging it the greatest Pro Football Championship game ever played. Still, in spite of the unassailable logic that classifies this game among the all-time great NFL Championship contests, the staff at *Sports Illustrated* Magazine - a very knowledgeable group, fully aware of this very exceptional game, its importance and meaning - chose not to include it in a very Special Publication² that discussed the 29 greatest pro football games ever played. On the other hand, an NFL Publication³ issued several years later called this game "A Title Game for the Ages" and listed it as one of the 25 greatest pro football championship games.

The *Sports Illustrated* Staff have decreed the "1958 Colt - Giant" Championship game to be the greatest football game

ever played. It is assumed they mean it to be the greatest "NFL Championship" game ever played.

The "greatest" game designation, to have any validity, must be based on a logical comparison with other recognized great games. The outcome of this exercise should be conclusive. Although there was no comparison made, the NFL Publication did give reasons why the 1958 game is the greatest ever played. These are summarized below in the words as presented. But when compared with the "1950 Rams vs. Browns" game the "1958 Colts vs. Giants game comes up short as we explain further in this article. Referring to the 1958 game "reasons for greatness";

1. The sea-saw battle provided gripping drama.
2. The two teams delivered all that football has to offer.
3. It was the first overtime period in NFL history.
4. The game ended in dramatic fashion.
5. 15 future hall of fame members played or coached in the game.
6. Television brought the drama into people's living room.

The greatness of the game must be based on how the game was played and its ultimate outcome. The fact that the new overtime rule came into play is interesting, but that did not make the game great. Likewise the fifteen future Hall of Fame participants attests to the skill of the players, but how they played the game is what counts and so the number of future Hall of Fame members by itself does not make the game great. The television issue also lies outside the question of the greatness of the play. Television was certainly not new in 1958. There was the televising of NFL games for seven or eight years prior to 1958. It was a very well established medium for showing football games long before the Colt-Giant Championship game. So the reasons for saying the 1958 Colt-Giant game is the greatest NFL Championship game rest with those given by 1, 2, and 4.

Comparing the 1958 Colt-Giant game with the 1950 Rams-Browns game, it's not evident that the 1958 game excels in any of the three reasons listed in the NFL Publication.

The 1950 game had all football has to offer and certainly as much as the 1958 game.

As for drama and a dramatic finish, the 1950 Rams vs. Browns game was a more closely fought game from start to finish. The game started with an electrifying 82-yard touchdown pass and its tempo never let up, the lead

changing four times. The suspense started with that first play and continued unabated until the Brown's interception of a Hail Mary pass with seconds left to play.

The Brown's final drive started with 1 minute 50 seconds to play. Prior to this there was Graham's fumble on the Ram 20 yard line with the Browns trailing by one point and three minutes left to play and well within range of a winning field goal. The great quarterback had played his greatest game up to this point only to be blindsided and lose the ball. He had to leave the field certain he had lost the game for his team. The emotional devastation of this series of events is easily seen. This was followed by Graham's subsequent return to lead a brilliant final offensive drive that had drama and suspense the equal of any in the history of NFL Championship Football.

The 1950 game was classic Cleveland Browns, start to finish. Unitas, in the '58 game, put on a great performance but Graham's was greater. He led in pass completion percentage, yards per pass attempt, and in TD passes, 4 to 1. Graham's 99 yards rushing with an 8.3 average per carry was nothing less than extraordinary. Finally, Graham surpassed Unitas in the area of "clutch performance." On three fourth-down, do-or-die situations in the final 10 minutes, Graham, each time, pulled his team out of a hole with his clutch fourth down running and passing performances. He kept the Brown's in the game until the last two minutes when he put them in position to win it with a field goal.

The Rams and Browns fielded fourteen future Hall of Fame players and coaches. But as stated, the greatness of the game has to be based on the play of the game. The Colts and Giants offered nothing new or different in their play from what preceded their game. The Colts coach, Weeb Ewbank, had been a protégé of Paul Brown. His passing game was the Paul Brown passing game. The Giant's game was what they had developed in the early 50's. So, on the subject of which game offered something very new, different and advanced, the 1950 game wins hands down.

The 1950 Ram-Brown NFL Championship game was truly the start of the modern era in Professional Football. The logic of the game and the circumstances that surrounded it say it was as great a game as has ever been played; for 58 years it has been so. There is, and has always been, far more to commend it than the twenty nine games cited by the *Sports Illustrated* Staff. It's time the game, its players and coaches receive the recognition they have earned and deserve.

SOURCES

¹ The Best Show In Football, The 1946 - 1955 Cleveland Browns, 2007 by Andy Piascik.

² Sports Illustrated Football Classics, Greatest Football Games of All Time, 1997 by Hank Hersch.

³ NFL'S Greatest, 2002 Foreword by Steve Sabol.

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5 **EVOLVEMENTS OF EARLY AMERICAN FOOTBALL: THROUGH THE 1890 / 91 SEASON** by Melvin I. Smith.. This book is a 724 page revision/extension to the author's first book and includes many more games found under the name of foot ball played up through the 1890/91 season. The games are separated by three major styles in their time. The kicking game/association football/soccer is the original style of foot ball. The second form of foot ball is the carrying game/Boston rules game/American rugby game/English rugby union game/rugby. The third form of foot ball is the American collegiate game/American rugby football/football. By the 1905 period these games are known as soccer, rugby and football. All games are divided into three groups: colleges, independent clubs and high schools; plus divided into two and three divisions by seasons. There also is a section with early leagues/conferences. Three appendices list short histories and the types of foot ball played by most of the teams found in the book. It will be available in other bookstores after January 2009. AUTHORHOUSE, 1663 Liberty Drive, Suite 200, Bloomington, IN 47403 / Book Order Dept. Tele. 888-280-7715; Fax. 812-961-3134. Shipping by UPS

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