

A DISGRACE

by Stan Grosshandler

"They were a disgrace!"

This terse statement from Dick Hoerner, a former Ram fullback great and a member of the 1952 Dallas Texans, aptly describes a nadir in the history of the NFL.

The sad story of the Texans actually begins during the height of World War II, when Ted Collins tried, where others had failed, to put a team into the bastion of collegiate football, Boston. His Yanks under coach Herb Kopf went 2-8-0, 3-6-1, and 2-8-1. Under new coach Clipper Smith they got up to 4-7-1, then fell back to 3-9-0.

In 1949, the team changed cities, nicknames, and coaches, but Charley Ewart's New York Bulldogs finished 1-10-1. Bobby Layne was the quarterback that year, condemned by Poppa Bear Halas to suffer a season with the 'Dogs. Later, Bobby said, alluding to the fact that Collins was the manager of famed singer Kate Smith, "We were always afraid that Kate would get a sore throat and the team wouldn't get paid.

In 1950, the team stayed in New York, hired Red Strader as coach, and returned to the Yanks nickname. A non-stop offense led by George Ratterman and a load of AAFC acquisitions gave the club an un-Yank like 7-5-0 mark and its only winning season. However, in 1951 they were back down to 1-9-2. Ted Collins threw in the towel, selling the franchise to the league.

Two groups bid for the franchise: the Board of Directors of the old Baltimore Colts and a group from Dallas headed by 31-year-old financial genius Giles Miller. All the guiding fathers of the league, save Art Rooney, felt that Baltimore could not support a team and that Texas was surely ready for the pros. They pointed out the great success of high school and college football in the Lone Star State. They remembered how well expansion to Los Angeles and San Francisco had turned out. Miller got the franchise.

Jimmy Phelan, a highly successful college coach, was chosen to lead the new-born Texans. He assembled a pro-wise staff in Cecil Isbell, Alex Agase, and Will Walls.

The roster was composed of 12 players from the New York Yanks, a scattering of veterans from other clubs, and 16 rookies. Included among the first-year men were Hank Lauricella, Keith Flowers, Pat Cannamela, and Stan Williams, all of whom had received All-America mention the previous year. A fifth rookie destined for considerable fame was Gino Marchetti.

One setback was the fact that the team had no quality quarterback. George Ratterman had been the QB the previous season; but he had a clause that let him out if the team left New York. George took the option and went to the Browns. Phelan was forced to go with Californian Bob Celeri who had backed Ratterman in New York.

The home games were scheduled for the spacious Cotton Bowl. The season opened with the Governor and many other dignitaries in the stands. The only people not in attendance were the cash-paying fans. Only 15,000 turned up. Presaging the rest of the season, the Texans lost to the Giants 24-6.

Hall of Fame tackle Art Donovan, a member of the squad, has some choice comments:

"We really had some good players. Don Colo was one of the best defensive tackles I have ever seen; while Kenny Jackson and Joe Campanella were terrific offensive tackles. You might recall Joe died of a heart attack the week he was to become GM of the Colts.

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"Our best receivers were Dan Edwards and Dick Wilkins. Stan Williams played both offensive end and defensive back. In my opinion he was the best athlete on the team. He quit after his first season and we could not talk him into coming back.

"Barney Poole played both ways. You remember he played college ball five or six years at Mississippi, North Carolina, and Army. He was so tough that one game he ripped up his hand, went to the hospital to get it fixed, and returned to the game.

"Billy Baggett, a rookie, hit so hard in practice the coaches made him ease up. Also we had Gino that season. Another rookie George Robison was always cracking jokes in the huddle."

Things went from bad to worse with scores like 49er 37-14, Bears 38-28, Packers 24-14, 49ers again 48-21, and back-to-back games with the Rams, 42-20 and 27-6.

The second Ram game was the fourth home appearance of the season and the team had attracted only about 50,000 paying customers. The young financial genius packed it in and turned the team over to the league. Commissioner Bert Bell decided it would finish as a road team and stationed them in Hershey, Pa.

"We had no morale problem when we went to Hershey," Donovan stated. "In fact, we had a heck of a lot of fun. One day Chubby Grigg celebrated too much (obviously not over the successes of the team) so we 'borrowed' a sled and carted him home. Bob Celeri also enjoyed a good time. He got released midway in the season and then re-signed at a lower salary. We never did have a quarterback until Frank Tripucka came over from the Cards."

The new base of operations did not make much difference as the Texans lost at Detroit 43-13 and at Green Bay 42-14. The final home games were to be against the Bears and Lions. It was decided that the Bear game would be played at Akron and the Lion game in Detroit. Sandwiched between was a trip to Philadelphia.

The Akron game was scheduled as the second part of a Thanksgiving doubleheader. The morning game pitted two high school teams against each other, while the Texan-Bear game was slated for the afternoon. The high schools played to a full house; then everyone went home.

Legend has it Phelan suggested that rather than announce the players over the PA system, the go into the stands and introduce themselves to the fans personally. The league never did release any attendance figures.

"George Halas did not take this game seriously," recalled Don Kindt, an ace bear defender. "He never put in our first team until we were down 20-2. My roomie George Blanda threw two quick TD passes and we had them 23-20.

"I spotted the Texans putting in defensive star Tom Keane and I went to Halas. I asked if we could switch our double-team pass defense from Buddy Young to him. We had been successful against Buddy, and I felt certain they would pass to Keane this time. I usually ran the defense on the field, and I was surprised when George said no.

"They threw to Keane and he and I went up for the ball together. I swore I took it away from him but the officials gave it to the Texans on our one. Now big Dick Hoerner slams into the line. We stop him and I steal the ball. But no, again the officials give them the ball. Finally, with 34 seconds left, Tripucka sneaks it over. Halas is so mad he rushes out on the field and kicks me!"

Flushed with success, the Texans prepared for the Eagles.

"Eagle coach Greasy Neale thinks maybe he better take us seriously," laughed Art Donovan. "So he send a scout to watch us practice in Hershey. When the guy gets back, he tells him we were playing volleyball over the goal posts. Neale thinks the guy is crazy."

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The Texans reverted to form with losses to the Eagles 38-21 and to Detroit 41-6. On the season the team scored but 182 points while giving up a monumental 427. They were last in total yards, missed 7 of 27 PAT's and amazingly failed on all four field goal attempts. George Taliaferro, the leading rusher, was chosen to the Pro Bowl. Tom Keane's 10 interceptions placed him second in the league. Buddy Young, not surprisingly, was tops in total yards on kickoff returns.

The next year it was back to Baltimore. 20 players had had enough and retired, but Donovan starred with the Colts when they won their first NFL title in 1958.

Historians have attributed the failure of the Dallas franchise to several causes. Harold Claassen in *The History of Pro Football* cites poor promotion, poor operations, lack of personnel, and the lack of any attempt to educate Dallas fans.

The NFL's Official Encyclopedic History of Professional Football (PFRA's Jim Campbell is part of the editorial staff) adds the loss of George Ratterman leaving the team without a top quarterback, the fact that the top running stars (Taliaferro and Young) were black at a time when Texas was not ready to accept such a thing, and a trade of a great lineman in Les Richter.

But Dick Hoerner explained it most succinctly. "They were a disgrace!"

ROSTER 1952 DALLAS TEXANS

Player	Pos	HGT	WGT	AG	Y	COLLEGE	GM	NOTES
Bob Celeri.....	QB	5-10	180	25	2	California.	8	Y; ret. 1953
Chuck Ortmann....	QB	6-1	190	23	2	Michigan...	3	Ret. 1953
Frank Tripucka...	QB	6-2	180	24	4	Notre Dame.	6	Fr Cards;to CFL 53
Hank Lauricella..	HB	5-11	175	22	R	Tennessee..	11	Retired after 1952
Buddy Young.....	HB	5-5	180	26	6	Illinois...	12	Y; to Balt. 1953
George Taliaferro	QB-HB	5-11	200	25	4	Indiana....	12	Y; to Balt. 1953
Dick Hoerner.....	FB	6-4	220	30	6	Iowa.....	11	Ret. 1953
Zollie Toth.....	FB	6-2	215	28	3	LSU.....	12	Y; to Balt. 1953
Billie Baggett...	HB-DB	5-11	175	23	R	LSU.....	11	Ret. 1953
John Petitbon....	HB-DB	5-11	185	21	R	Notre Dame.	11	To Clev.; Mil.1953
Jerry Davis.....	DB	5-10	180	30	5	S.E. La....	7	Ret. 1953
Dick McKissack...	DB	6-2	208	26	R	SMU.....	1	Ret. 1953
Will Sherman.....	DB	6-2	197	23	R	St. Mary...	2	To LA 1954
Tom Keane.....	DB-OE	6-1	190	25	5	W. Virginia	12	To Balt.
Stan Williams....	DB-OE	6-2	195	23	R	Baylor....	12	Ret. 1953
Dan Edwards.....	OE	6-1	195	26	5	Georgia....	1	Y; to Balt. 1953
Gene Felker.....	OE	6-1	198	23	R	Wisconsin..	6	Ret. 1953
Ray Pelfrey.....	OE	6-0	190	24	2	E. Kentucky	6	To Cards mid-season
Dick Wilkins.....	OE	6-2	195	26	2	Oregon.....	12	To Giants 1954
Art Tait.....	DE	5-11	205	23	2	Miss. St...	8	Y; ret. 1953
Barney Poole.....	CE-DE	6-2	225	29	4	Miss.; Army	12	Y; to Balt. 1953
Sonny Gandee.....	DE	6-1	210	23	R	Ohio State.	2	To Det. mid-season
Ken Jackson.....	OT	6-2	225	23	R	Texas.....	12	To Balt. 1953
Jim Lansford.....	OT	6-3	235	22	R	Texas.....	12	Ret. 1953
Hamp Tanner.....	OT	6-2	280	25	2	Georgia....	10	Ret. 1953
Gino Marchetti...	OT-DE	6-4	235	26	R	San Fran...	12	To Balt. 1953
Joe Campanella...	DT	6-2	235	21	R	Ohio State.	12	To Balt. 1953
Don Colo.....	DT	6-3	252	27	3	Brown.....	4	Y; to Clev. 1953
Art Donovan.....	DT	6-2	260	27	3	Boston Col.	6	Y; to Balt. 1953
Chubby Grigg.....	DT	6-2	280	26	7	Tulsa.....	10	Ret. 1953
Joe Sobeleski....	DT	6-0	210	26	4	Michigan...	1	Ret. 1953
Weldon Humble....	OG	6-1	225	31	5	Rice.....	11	Ret. 1953
George Robison...	OG	6-2	215	21	R	VMI.....	4	Ret. 1953
John Wozniak.....	OG	6-0	220	31	5	Alabama....	12	Y; Ret. 1953
Joe Reid.....	MG-LB	6-3	225	22	2	LSU.....	11	Ret. 1953

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Sisto Averno..... OG 5-11 235 26 3 Muhlenberg. 12 Y; to Balt. 1953
Brad Ecklund..... C 6-3 215 30 4 Oregon..... 12 Y; to Balt. 1953
Keith Flowers.... C-LB 6-0 211 21 R TCU..... 6 Ret. 1953
Pat Cannamela.... LB 6-0 195 23 R USC..... 12 Ret. 1953
Keever Jankovich. LB 6-0 215 23 R Pacific.... 10 To Cards in 1953

Misc.: Mike McCormack in Military Service. Benny Aldridge listed on roster for one game but did not play. (Y) indicates played with New York Yankees in 1951.

Former Yankees (1951)-----12	Retired after 1952-----20
Rookies-----16	With Baltimore in 1953-----12
Others-----12	With other teams in 1953--- 8