

DOWN WITH FGS

By Stan Grosshandler

The field goal, once a rarity in the game, has now become one of the dominant offensive weapons. The chief scorers since 1968 have been the placekickers; and a team without a consistent one can not hope to be a contender.

For many a fan there is nothing more boring than the final minutes of a close game where the field goal will either decide or tie it. There are a few feeble line bucks, that come as no surprise to anyone in the stadium, to prevent the fumble, maintain possession, and run down the clock. These come between numerous time outs and what seems like a hundred beer commercials. Finally, with a second left -- the longest second in the world -- the kick is made. I sadistically hope it is blocked; but it rarely is.

Why not avoid all this and can the field goal? Let all the FG kickers go back to their native lands and play that grand and boring game -- soccer. Let's win games on long runs and beautiful passes, not chip shot field goals.

As would be appropriate, the first top FG man in the NFL (then APFA) was league president Jim Thorpe, who tied with Laird of Rochester with three. The following year, Dutch Sternaman kicked five, and from 1922 through 1926 Paddy Driscoll was the dominant FG man, scoring a high of 12 in '26.

Between 1927 and '32 the leaders showed a grand total of two each year. In 1933, Jack Manders of the Bears emerged as the best in the game as he kicked five and the Bronx added one for the Monsters. Their rivals, the Giants, saw Strong with five and Newman with one. In '34 "Automatic Jack" hit for 10, which remained as the record until Lou Groza popped 13 in '46, the opening season of the AAFC. The next season, Ben Agajanian, the only man to score points in the AAFC, NFL, and AFL, upped the total to 15.

Attempts were finally recorded in 1938 and though Ward Cuff hit five of nine, the percentage winner was Lion guard Regis Monahan with 4/5. The great Bear powerhouses of 1940 and 1941 kicked a total of six three-pointers.

Pat Harder, the NFL's top scorer for three consecutive years (1947-49), was considered one of the top placekickers of his era, yet Pat's marks of 7/10, 7/17, and 3/5 were nothing to really write home about. "We just didn't think field goal," Pat said. "When we got near the goal line, we only thought TD. We felt it was our duty to score. Since we did not have large squads, we had little time to practice the FG."

Lou Groza continued as a major offensive force when the Browns came into the NFL. In 1952 he was the first man to hit over 20 FGs in a season.

It certainly must surprise the present day fan to learn the great Colts of '58 hit on only 35% of their FG attempts. Steve Myhra was the short man and went 4/10. Bert Rechichar, used in long situations, was 1/4. The following year, Steve was 6/17 and Bert 0/1.

Don Chandler, of Lombardi's first Super Bowl team, went 12/28 for a 43% which would bring a ticket home to most kickers today.

By removing the field goal, we can take away the feeling that both teams are playing their cards close to the vest, afraid to error, afraid to take a chance, just carefully move the ball in, kill time, sell beer, get the FG. Perhaps if they had to run or pass, we'd see more spectacular runs and "Hail Mary" passes. Now, that's entertainment!