

THE DEATH OF AN ALL-STAR GAME

by John C. Hibner

On July 23, 1976, a torrential rainstorm struck Chicago Soldiers Field, where the World Champion Pittsburgh Steelers and the College All-Stars were playing in the 43rd annual College All-Star Game.

The game was in the third period with the Steelers ahead 24-0 when it happened. Suddenly sheets of rain drenched the entire area, including the players and fans. The wind blew layers of water across the slick Astro-Turf of Soldiers Field. The crowd of 52,895 poured onto the field, frolicked on the slippery surfaces, and proceeded to tear both goal posts down at the ends of the field.

With the players huddling under the stands, Commissioner Pete Rozelle of the N.F.L. and officials of the Chicago Tribune put a stop to the game. The game was stopped because the security people were unable to clear the fans from the flooded field. Rozelle said the fourth quarter would never be played.

This was the first time in the history of the annual classic that the game had been cut short for any reason.

The fans were still milling around the field, and let out boos and jeers. The P.A. system announced to them that the game was over. Numerous fights broke out on the field before order was finally restored. The rain was coming down hard.

Let's look at the College All-Star Game closely -- what really was it? It was Arch Ward, then the Sports Editor of the Chicago Tribune, who first suggested a game between college seniors and the N.F.L. champion team of the previous season. The game was always held in August and marked the

opening of the collegiate and professional football seasons.

This event was conceived primarily as a means of raising money for the many different charities in Chicago. The game was sponsored by the Chicago Tribune Charities, Inc., which was a nonprofit organization. From the first game in 1934 until 1942 the net revenue was divided among united, Catholic and Jewish Charities of Chicago. During the war years of 1943-45 profits of the games were donated to many of the war charities such as Army and Navy servicemen centers, etc. in Chicago.

The first game was played at Soldiers Field before 79,432 on August 31, 1934. The coach of the All-Stars was Noble Kaiser, who was in his fourth year as the head coach at Purdue University. He had a record of 28 wins, 4 defeats, and 2 ties then, and is famous for being one of the "Seven Mules" in his playing days at Notre Dame under Knute Rockne.

This first game ended in a scoreless tie. Perhaps the Chicago Bears and Coach George Halas didn't take the game seriously. The All-Stars drove down to the Bear 13 the first time they had the ball, but failed to score. The Bears took over on downs, and proceeded to march downfield. A 20-yard pass from George Corbett to Gene Ronzani put the ball on the Collegians' 10-yard line. On the very next play Corbett's wild lateral pass was recovered by Adolph Schwammel (Oregon) of the All-Stars.

Late in the third quarter, the All-Stars' Bill Smith (Washington) tried a field goal from around mid-field, and missed.

In the fourth period, the Bears reached the All-Stars' 26, aided by Red Grange's 22-yard pass to Johnnie Sisk, but the drive bogged down. With less than two minutes to play, Smith again attempted a field goal from the Bear's 40. It was left and low.

The first win for the College All-Stars came in the fourth game, which was played on Friday evening September 1, 1937 before 84,560 fans. The collegians' head coach was Bernie Bierman of Minnesota, sometimes called the "Silver Fox of the Northland." The All-Stars scored on a 47-yard pass play from Sammy Baugh (Texas Christian) to Gaynell Tinsley (Louisiana State). He caught the ball on the 25 and eluded both Packer defenders -- Hank Bruder and Joe Laws -- for the touchdown. The conversion failed and the Stars led 6-0.

The Packers came back with a drive to the All-Star two-yard line. The big gain was a 41-yard pass from Arnie Herber to Don Hutson. Herber on fourth down tried a swing or flat pass to Hudson, who was tackled on the 3-yard line by John Drake (Purdue) for a loss. This ended any further scoring threats, although Herber tried to connect many times through the All-Star defense. It was Baugh's booming punts and his two key interceptions that kept the Packers on their side of the field.

The largest crowd ever to witness this classic was on August 20, 1948. It was the 15th game of the series, which stood 7-5-2 in favor of the pros. That evening 101,200 fans watched the Chicago Cardinals defeat the All-Stars 28-0.

The Cardinals were out to avenge the last two humiliating defeats, suffered by the Los Angeles Rams in 1946, 16-0, and in 1947 the Chicago Bears by the same score. They made shambles of an All-Star team that had a lot of talent, and was coached by Frank Leahy of Notre Dame.

Elmer Angsman cracked over from the two-yard line in the first period and Pat Harder converted to give the Cardinals a 7-0 lead.

In the second quarter, Vic Schwall broke through tackle and raced 14 yards for the touchdown. Harder converted to make it 14-0 at the half.

There was no scoring in the third period, but early in the fourth Vince Banonis intercepted a Perry Moss (Illinois) pass and raced 31 yards for a score. Harder again converted. Later Ray Mallouf passed to Charlie Trippi in the end zone. Harder's fourth conversion made the score 28-0.

The last game that the Stars won was in 1963, when they defeated the Green Bay Packers on August 2 before 65,000 customers on a cool summer night at Soldiers Field. The heroes were Ran VanderKelen (Wisconsin) and Glynn Griffin (Mississippi), who presented an offense with great agility, quickness, and strength. This wasn't expected after such a short time of practicing together.

The All-Star defense seemed to stop the aerial game of the Packers, and the All-Stars actually gained more yards rushing and passing than their opponents. The collegians brought groans and boos from the crowd when Larry Ferguson (Iowa) fumbled the ball the first time they took over. It was recovered by Willie Davis for the Packers on the 11-yard line. Three plays later Jim Taylor scored from two yards out, and Jerry Kramer made it 7-0 with only 4:54 played.

The All-Stars came back and drove 71 very hard yards, and scored when Bob Jencks (Miami-Ohio) kicked a 20-yard field goal to make the score 7-3 with 2:43 to play in the first period.

Bart Starr, attempting to pass on third down, was rushed very hard by Dave Robinson (Penn State) and Lee Roy Jordan (Alabama). The ball was intercepted by Tommy Janik (Texas A & I) on his own 45. He ran the ball back 28 yards to the Packer 27. Ferguson hit the line for no gain, and then VanderKelen hit Pat Richter (Wisconsin) for a 21-yard gain. On the next play, Ferguson boomed into the

end zone for the first All-Star touchdown and Jencks converted for a 10-7 lead.

The Packers tied the score at 5:02 after driving 74 yards in 12 plays. Kramer and the Packers settled for a 21-yard field goal rather than six points. Just before half-time, Jencks missed a chance to put his team in front. His 19-yard kick was partially blocked by Herb Adderly.

There wasn't any scoring in the third period, but a ten-point surge in the last period cinched victory for the Collegians. Early in the fourth period, with Griffing leading the team down the field, they marched 82 yards in 8 plays. Jencks kicked a 33-yard field goal for a 13-10 lead.

With the All-Stars on their own 27, they struck gold on a 73-yard pass play. VanderKelen on third and three hit Richter 13 yards down the field. Richter left two Packers grabbing air, and broke into the open. In fact, the speeding Richter was convoyed the last 50 yards by three joyous teammates, who he had no need for. Jencks kicked the extra point out of VanderKelen's hold for a 20-10 lead with 4:09 left to the play in the game.

The Packers did come back and score. They drove 63 yards in 15 plays, but it was too late. Taylor smashed off left guard with 0:06 left in the game and Kramer added the extra point to make the score 20-17.

It was the first All-Star victory since 1958, when another college gang coached by Otto Graham defeated the Detroit Lions 35-19. It was their ninth victory in 30 games played, and their last in the series.

They did come close in 1969 to the New York Jets, 26-24.

The 1976 All-Star team was coached by former Notre Dame Coach Ara Parseghian. He was assisted by Dick Nolan, former head coach of the San Francisco 49ers, and Ron Waller, former head coach of the Philadelphia Bell of the World Football League.

The Steelers, making few errors, were in control of the game from the beginning to the rain-drenched end. The best thing the All-Stars did was defend against the touchdown. Kevin McLain (Colorado State) once took a sure score away from the Steelers with a last-second deflection of a Bradshaw pass. Ron McCartney (Tennessee State) contributed many key tackles during the first two quarters. Other All-Stars who also contributed to the defense were Troy Archer (Colorado), LeeRoy Selmon (Oklahoma) and Steve Niehaus (Notre Dame). The All-Stars have seldom fielded a better defense.

Of offense, the All-Stars used three men at quarterback. They started with Boston College's Mike Krueczek, finishing up with Craig Penrose (San Diego State) and Jeb Blount (Tulsa). The most promising of them was Penrose, who was injured in the game and really never got a chance to show his stuff. Tulsa's Blount, who got the most playing time, didn't pass well.

In the first half the All-Stars lost the ball twice on three fumbles. The first one led to a Roy Gerela field goal. Then Blount had one pass intercepted, leading to another Gerela field goal.

The All-Stars were on the Pittsburgh side of the field only twice in the first half. The first time was on a Blount pass that Dave Hill (Texas A & I) caught and ran 26 yards to the Pittsburgh 46. For lack of any offense, the All-Stars stalled there. They found it difficult to run against the famous "Steel Curtain" made up of Joe Greene, L.C. Greenwood, Ernie Holmes, and Dwight White.

But several minutes later they got a break when Steve Wagner (Wisconsin) intercepted a Terry Bradshaw pass on the Steeler 25. That was to be the closest they would come, for Blount's fumbles ended the threat. The first lost two yards and the second lost the ball when White recovered.

The first half ended with the Steelers ahead 9-0 on three Gerela field goals of 23, 29, and 32 yards. Bradshaw had good field position for his team throughout the first half. On his first five series he was operating on or about the fifty-yard line, but he failed to find any holes in the All-Star defense.

But the trouble really began for the All-Stars in the second half before the rains came down. It was the decision by All-Star coach Parseghian that started it all. With his choice of possession or sides at the opening of the third period, he elected to receive the ball. The wind was blowing hard out of the north. Pittsburgh's coach Chuck Noll thereupon opted for the wind at back, and the game was over!

After receiving the kickoff, the All-Stars gained 17 yards on a pass to Joe Washington (Oklahoma), but lost yardage on three successive plays and were forced to punt. The rain began to fall.

Center Ray Pinney (Washington) then snapped the ball 33 yards over the head of Rick Engles (Tulsa) and out of the end zone for a two-point safety. Score: Pittsburgh 11, All-Stars 0. Engles had trouble punting into the wind on his free kick, and Jack Deloplaine returned it 32 yards to the All-Stars' 30-yard line. Three plays later, Franco Harris broke off tackle and ran 21 for the game's first touchdown. Gerela's conversion attempt was good, and Pittsburgh had an 18-0 lead.

Officiating meanwhile also helped to keep the All-Stars in a hole. Good gains were called back because of clipping, holding and offsides.

Pittsburgh again forced the All-Stars to punt late in the third period. The kick went out of bounds at the All-Star 34. Two plays later Tommy Reamon took a screen pass from Bradshaw for 25 yards to the All-Star two-yard line. Reamon on the next play plowed his way into the end zone for the second major score and a 24-0 lead. Gerela's attempted conversion was wide.

The All-Stars got one more chance. Coach Noll replaced Bradshaw with Terry Hanratty. This came about one minute before the storm hit. Hanratty was chased by the All-Star defense, and threw a desperation pass. It was intercepted by Shafer Suggs (Ball State), who returned the ball 16 yards to the Pittsburgh 39. A five-yard penalty by the Steelers moved the ball to the 34.

At this moment -- the first time that the All-Stars had the ball in Steeler territory in the second half -- the rainstorm roared across the field. With 1:22 left in the third period, the officials called time out and sent the players off the field. The game was never resumed. The Steelers' victory gave the pros a 31-9-2 edge in the series, which had become very one-sided. Thus one can say on that rainy and windy night a once great and prestigious game died, but not in the record books or in our hearts.

1976 All-Star Roster

Baschnagel, Brian – WE – Ohio State
 Broks, Bill – WR – Oklahoma
 Harris, Duret – WR – New Mexico St.
 Logan, David – WR – Colorado
 Sammy White – WR – Grambling
 Barber, Mike – TE – Louisiana Tech
 Hill, David – TE – Texas A & I
 Devlin, Joe – T – Iowa
 Eidson, Jim – T – Mississippi State
 Koner, Mark – T – Colorado
 Lick, Dennis – T – Wisconsin
 Glassic, Tom – G – Virginia
 Jones, Ken – G – Arkansas State
 Macek, Don – G – Boston College
 Slater, Jack – G – Jackson State
 Walters, Rod – G – Iowa
 Brock, Peter – C – Colorado
 Ploney, Ray – C – Washington
 Krueczak, Mike – Q – Boston College
 Penrose, Craig – Q – San Diego St.
 Blount, Jeff – Q – Tulsa
 Galbreath, Tony – RB – Missouri
 Griffin, Archie – RB – Ohio State
 Jensen, Jim – RB – Iowa
 Muncie, Chuck – RB – California
 Pruitt, Mike – RB – Purdue
 Washington, Joe – RB – Oklahoma
 Lawson, Mike – DL – Arizona
 Frazier, Cliff – DL – UCLA
 Niehaus, Steve – DL – Notre Dame
 Novak, Ken – DL – Purdue
 Philyaw, Charles – DL – Texas So.
 Selmon, Dewey – DL – Oklahoma
 Selmon, Lee Roy – DL – Oklahoma
 White, James – DL – Oklahoma St.
 Archer, Troy – LB – Colorado
 Bokamper, Kim – LB – San Jose St.
 Buttle, Gteg – LB – Penn State
 Gordon, Larry – LB – Arizona State
 Green, Sam – LB – Florida
 McCartney, Ron – LB – LSU
 McLain, Kevin – LB – Colorado St.
 Simonini, Ed – LB – Texas A & M
 Woodcock, John – LB – Hawaii
 Clark, Mario – DB – Oregon
 Fox, Tim – DB – Ohio State
 Haynes, Mike – DB – Arizona St.
 Hunter, James – DB – Grambling
 Kyle, Aaron – DB – Wyoming
 McCoy, Mike – DB – Colorado
 Suggs, Shafer – DB – Ball State
 Wagner, Steve – DB – Wisconsin
 Engles, Rick – P – Tulsa

Pittsburgh Steelers Roster

Allen, Jimmy - DB
 Banazak, John - DE
 Bleier, Rocky - HB
 Blount, Mel - DB
 Bradley, Ed - LB
 Bradshaw, Terry - QB
 Brown, Dave - DB
 Brown, Larry - TE
 Clack, Jim – C / OG
 Collier, Mike - HB
 Davis, Sam - OG
 Edwards, Glenn - DB
 Fugua, John - HB
 Furness, Steve – DE / DT
 Garrett, Reggie - WR
 Gerela, Roy - K
 Gilliam, Joe - QB
 Gravelle, Gordon - OT
 Greene, Joe - DT
 Greenwood, L.C. - DE
 Grossman, Randy - TE
 Hanratty, Terry - QB
 Ham, Jack - LB
 Harris, Franco - FB
 Harrison, Reggie - FB
 Holmes, Ernie - DT
 Kellum, Marv - LB
 Kolb, Jon - OT
 Lambert, Jack - LB
 Lewis, Frank - WR
 Mansfield, Ray - C
 Mullins, Gerry – OT / OG
 Reavis, Dan - OT
 Russell, Andy - LB
 Shell, Donnie - DB
 Stallworth, John - WR
 Swann, Lynn - WR
 Toews, Loren - LB
 Thomas, J.T. - DB
 Wagner, Mark - DB
 Walden, Bobby - P
 Webster, Mike – OG / C
 White, Dwight - DE