

THE CONTINENTAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

A Mini-tragedy in Five Acts

By Sarge Kennedy

*with special thanks to Steven Brainerd, Gino Malattia, Lee Grosscup
and, especially, Ron Real, for his outstanding report of the 1969 ContFL
Championship Game in Pro Football Weekly.*

The announcement of the formation of the Continental Football League on February 6, 1965, marked the beginning of a most ambitious but ill-fated venture. Not since that September day in 1920, when George Halas and the representatives of other "local clubs" laid the foundations of the National Football League had such a venture been tried in the "minor" league realm of professional football.

There had, of course, been other "major leagues" established – four versions of an American Football League (1925, 1936, 1940, and 1960) and the All-American Football Conference (1946). But those, generally, were the playthings of wealthy businessmen. This was a different scene. This was the scrappy kid from the other side of the tracks standing up and saying "Hey, look at me. I can play football, too!" This was a mid-60's version of an Andy Hardy movie. This was a real live version of the "American Dream"--except that it turned quickly into one long-running nightmare. Here follows a brief year by year review of the Continental Football League's unfortunate saga.

1965: OUT OF THE RUINS, A NEW BEGINNING

The ContFL was primarily formed from teams in the United and Atlantic Coast Football Leagues.

The Newark Bears, Springfield Acorns, Richmond Rebels, and Hartford Charter Oaks, came from the ACFL. The Springfield franchise was relocated to Norfolk, VA, where it was renamed the Neptunes, prior to the start of the season. The ACFL, though also losing the Atlanta and Westchester franchises, continued with the 8 remaining teams: Jersey City, Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Scranton in the Southern Division; and, New Bedford, Boston, Mohawk Valley, and Holyoke in the Northern Division.

The Wheeling Ironmen and Charleston Rockets came directly from the UFL. The Toronto Rifles, Philadelphia Bulldogs, and the Ft. Wayne Warriors had been the Montreal Rifles, Canton Bulldogs, and Indianapolis Warriors, respectively, in the UFL. The remaining UFL teams (Joliet Explorers, Toledo Tornadoes, and Grand Rapids Blazers) folded.

Providence, or Rhode Island, was the sole new franchise.

The league adopted a "professional" appearance. The teams were sorted into two divisions and each time sported a 36-man roster with a 5-man "taxi" squad. Each franchise met the financial requirements of a \$5,000 franchise fee and the posting of a \$25,000 letter of credit.

The rules were primarily those of the NFL except that a "sudden death" overtime period was employed to break ties.

The league named A.B. "Happy" Chandler, the former Kentucky Governor and retired Commissioner of Baseball, as its first Commissioner on March 17, 1965.

The teams, to reinforce the image of league autonomy, were restricted from loaning players to, or receiving optioned players from, the NFL or the AFL.

The first ContFL season opened with three games played on August 14, 1965.

Aug. 14:	Ft. Wayne 16	Hartford 17	Toronto 20
	Norfolk 7	Richmond 10	Wheeling 0

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Aug. 15: Charleston 27 Philadelphia 35
 Providence 16 Newark 30

The Continental Football League provided a brief bloom to the marked career of a well-traveled quarterback from the University of Utah. The young man, a first round draft choice of the New York Giants in 1958, had worked seven seasons in four leagues on both sides of the U.S./Canadian border. He caught on with the Hartford Charter Oaks and, for \$650 per week, served as the starting quarterback, a player-coach, interim head coach, publicist, and personnel director. He went on to become the Public Relations Director for the Oakland Raiders, a color commentator for ABC's NCAA Football telecasts (often teamed with Keith Jackson), a color commentator for the USFL's Oakland Invaders and the University of California, and a male model whose hands are seen in numerous advertisements. His name, Lee Grosscup.

Final Standings in 1965

WEST				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Charleston (WV) Rockets	14	0	462	129
Ft. Wayne (IN) Warriors	8	6	351	256
Richmond (VA) Rebels	6	8	283	385
Providence/Rhode Island Indians	3	11	182	401
Hartford (CT) Charter Oaks	2	12	193	455

EAST				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Toronto (CAN) Rifles	11	3	412	258
Philadelphia (PA) Bulldogs	10	4	414	341
Springfield (MA) Acorns /				
Norfolk (VA) Neptunes	9	5	326	280
Newark (NJ) Bears	5	9	297	310
Wheeling (WV) Ironmen	2	12	175	280

The Charleston Rockets defeated the Toronto Rifles, 24-7, for the initial ContFL Championship in 1965.

The 1965 ContFL All-Star Team

Offense: H.D. MURPHY (Philadelphia) Split End; CARL ROBINSON (Charleston) Left Tackle; ARLEN CULLORS (Charleston) Left Guard; D. DONATELLI (Wheeling) Center; EUGENE KELIUKULI (Ft. Wayne) Right Guard; JIM BOGDALEK (Toronto) Right Tackle; JIM MOSS (Charleston) Tight End; BOB BROADHEAD (Philadelphia) Quarterback; ROGER LOPES (Ft. Wayne) Fullback; JOE WILLIAMS (Toronto) Left Halfback; BRUCE SMITH (Providence) Flanker; DICK LIMERICK (Toronto) Flanker; JIM HOLLINGS-WORTH (Charleston) Punter; ED MITCHAMORE (Charleston) Placekicker; BILL JOYNER (Richmond) Placekicker

Defense: ANDY RICE (Wheeling) Left End; BILL MILLER (Charleston) Left End; MONTE DAY (Richmond) Left End; BILL CLAY (Norfolk) Left End; JOE CRITCHLOW (Charleston) Left Tackle; LEWIS IRVIN (Richmond) Left Tackle; BILL BOSCHINI (Ft. Wayne) Right Tackle; LEON CRENSHAW (Providence) Right End; DAN UNDERWOOD (Ft. Wayne) Linebacker; SAM FERNANDEZ (Charleston) Linebacker; BILL LEEKA (Hartford) Linebacker; MIKE FITZGERALD (Charleston) Cornerback; DICK PESONEN (Newark) Cornerback; RODGER MCFARLAND (Charleston) Safety; ALVIN HALL (Providence) Safety; JOE HIGHTOWER (Norfolk) Safety.

1966: A YEAR OF REASSESSMENT AND TURMOIL

East Div: Norfolk (VA) Neptunes; Philadelphia (PA) Bulldogs; Toronto (CAN) Rifles; Brooklyn (NY) Dodgers; Hartford (CN) Charter Oaks

West Div: Orlando (FL) Panthers; Wheeling (WV) Ironmen; Montreal (CAN) Beavers; Charleston (WV) Rockets; Richmond (VA) Rebels

Final Standings in 1966

TEAM	W	WEST		
		L	PTS	OPP
Orlando	12	2	485	227
Charleston	10	4	357	267
Montreal	7	7	317	331
Richmond	4	10	229	367
Wheeling	0	14	205	400

TEAMS	W	EAST		
		L	PTS	OPP
Toronto	9	5	344	280
Philadelphia	9	5	410	355
Norfolk	8	6	297	294
Hartford	6	8	293	353
Brooklyn	5	9	296	359

Playoffs

WEST	EAST
Orlando 31	Philadelphia 31
Charleston 24	Toronto 14

The 1966 ContFL Championship was played in Philadelphia on Dec. 4. The Philadelphia Bulldogs beat the Orlando Panthers, 20-17, in "sudden death" overtime.

The league's second year began with controversy. Abandoning the "league autonomy" posture of its initial season, it strived to establish working relationships with the NFL and AFL clubs. Commissioner Chandler, charging that the league was retreating from the terms under which he had accepted the position, resigned on January 20, after a tenure of only 10 months. He was replaced by Sol Rosen, the league's secretary and owner of the Newark Bears franchise.

The growing financial influence of television led the league into a flurry of futile preseason attempts to land an agreement for the televising of its games by the Empire Sports Network.

League stability was not sound. The Ft. Wayne franchise moved to Montreal and Newark's franchise found a new home in Orlando, Florida. The Providence organization called it quits and a new franchise was located in Brooklyn. Although named the Dodgers, coached by Andy Robustelli, and under the General Managership of Jackie Robinson, this combined "magic" was insufficient to carry the team at the turnstiles and the franchise became a league-operated "road club" early in the season.

A noteworthy item concerns the Charleston Rockets. The Rockets' defense was bolstered by a young and aggressive end who earned a place on the 1966 ContFL All-Star Team. He went on to play in the NFL for over a decade with the Rams, Chargers, Bengals, and Redskins. His name, Coy Bacon.

The 1966 ContFL All-Star Team

Offense: WALLACE DICKEY (Orlando) Tackle; CLYDE WILLIAMS (Charleston) Tackle; RICH LUCKA (Toronto) Guard; BOB PETERSON (Toronto) Guard; MILT CRAIN (Toronto) Center; DAVE WASHINGTON (Philadelphia) Tight End; BILL BARBER (Richmond) Split End; BOB BROADHEAD (Philadelphia) Quarterback; BOB REED (Brooklyn) Flanker; JOE WILLIAMS (Toronto) Running Back; BOB BLAKLEY (Toronto) Running Back.

Defense: COY BACON (Charleston) End; JOHN PAGLIO (Brooklyn) End; ERNIE WADE (Toronto) Tackle; DICK HERZING (Brooklyn) Tackle; SAM FERNANDEZ (Charleston), Middle Linebacker; ROB HUCKLEBRIDGE (Orlando) Outside Linebacker; DAN UNDERWOOD (Montreal) Outside Linebacker; DICK PESONEN (Orlando) Cornerback; JOHN WALKER (Montreal) Cornerback; LEON MAVITY (Toronto) Safety; RODGER MCFARLAND (Charleston) Safety.

1967: COAST TO COAST, IS THIS CONTINENTAL?

Atlantic-North: Norfolk (VA) Neptunes; Hartford (CN) Charter Oaks; Montreal (CAN) Beavers; Toronto (CAN) Rifles; Akron (OH) Vulcans

Atlantic-South: Orlando (FL) Panthers; Charleston (WV) Rockets; Wheeling (WV) Ironmen; Richmond (VA) Rebels; Philadelphia (PA) Bulldogs

Pacific: Victoria (CAN) Steelers; San Jose (CA) Apaches; Orange County (CA) Ramblers; Seattle (WA) Rangers; Eugene (OR) Bombers; Sacramento (CA) Buccaneers; Long Beach (CA) Admirals

Final standings in 1967

Atlantic North				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Norfolk	11	3	422	289
Hartford	5	7	211	260
Montreal	4	8	175	278
Toronto	1	3	39	52
Akron	1	3	59	84

Pacific				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Orange City	10	2	394	104
San Jose	8	4	310	150
Seattle	7	6	248	236
Eugene	6	6	239	260
Victoria	4	8	120	268
Sacramento	2	10	110	352
Long Beach	0	1	13	37

Atlantic South				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Orlando	11	3	422	290
Charleston	6	8	292	224
Wheeling	5	9	252	395

The 1967 ContFL Championship was played in Anaheim on Dec. 10. Don Jonas, later to make his mark in the Canadian Football League, threw 5 touchdown passes to lead the Orlando Panthers to a 38-14 win over the Orange County (CA) Ramblers.

The league's 1967 season was essentially a repeat of its second year, only worse. Instability abounded and, unable to establish working relationships with the NFL or the AFL to improve its "image", the league experienced the folding of several of its franchises. Brooklyn went by the wayside early on, followed by Richmond and Philadelphia before the season's opening games.

Akron and Toronto caved in within the first month of play followed by Hartford and Montreal which were forced to curtail their schedules before the season's end. Of the ten clubs that were slated to play in the Atlantic division, two never got started and of the remaining eight, only four finished the season.

The only bright spot in the league's third season was that, for the first time, it began living up to its "Continental" name. A Pacific division was brought into the league and, with the exception of Long Beach which folded following its initial outing, its franchises played the full season.

The 1967 San Jose franchise was coached by a young junior college coach who was later to gain recognition as a winning head coach at Stanford University and the "genius" behind the San Francisco 49ers' success. His name, Bill Walsh.

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The 1967 ContFL All-Star Teams

Atlantic Div.

Offense: SAM WEIR (Orlando) Split End; WALLACE DICKEY (Orlando) Tackle; CHARLIE BRAY (Orlando) Guard; WALT HIGHSMITH (Charleston) Center; SAM WORKS (Orlando) Guard; STEVE SMITH (Norfolk) Tackle; DAVE WASHINGTON (Norfolk) Tight End; DON JONAS (Orlando) Quarterback; PAUL DUDA (Norfolk) Running Back; PAT BATTEN (Orlando) Running Back; DON FLOYD (Orlando) Flanker.

Defense: RON NERY (Norfolk) End; ART STRAHAN (Orlando) End; BOB MCADAMS (Orlando) Tackle; JOE CRITCHLOW (Charleston) Tackle; FRED ZIMMERMAN (Charleston) Outside Linebacker; SAM FERNANDEZ (Charleston) Middle Linebacker; BOB GREEN (Orlando) Outside Linebacker; BILL WOODS (Norfolk) Cornerback; MILLARD FLEMING (Charleston) Cornerback; LEON MAVITY (Hartford) Safety; JOE HIGHTOWER (Norfolk) Safety; JIM HOLLINGSWORTH (Charleston) Punter; DON JONAS (Orlando) Placekicker.

Pacific Div.

Offense: JOHN PEYTON (Seattle) Split End; BRUCE SMITH (Orange C.), Split End; JERRY KNOLL (Seattle) Tackle; STEVE SMITH (San Jose) Tackle; JIM KILLMAN (Eugene) Guard; MIKE GIERS (Orange C.) Guard; LARRY METEVIA (Orange C.) Center; RHOME NIXON (Orange C.) Tight End; JERRY OTTERSON (Orange C.) Quarterback; LES MUELLER (Seattle) Half-back; BOB JACKSON (Orange C.) Fullback; DICK TATLEY (San Jose) Placekicker; LEN FRKETICH (Eugene) Punter; BILL FORD (Eugene) Flanker.

Defense: ROB BERGER (Orange C.) End; WALT JOHNSON (San Jose) End; SKIP DIAZ (Eugene) Tackle; TERRY OAKES (San Jose) Tackle; JACK O'BILLOVICH (Eugene) Linebacker; TIM CASEY (Eugene) Linebacker; DICK DEGEN (Orange C.) Linebacker; FRED FORSBERG (Victoria) Linebacker; RON FOWLKES (Orange C.) Def. Back; JIM JACKSON (San Jose) Def. Back; MILT JACKSON (San Jose) Def. Back; DARRELL HOOVER (Orange C.) Def. Back.

1968: FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA, THE VOID IS FILLED

Atlantic Div: Orlando (FL) Panthers; Charleston (WV) Rockets; Michigan/Detroit Arrows; Ohio Valley/Wheeling (WV) Ironmen; Norfolk (VA) Neptunes; Alabama/Huntsville Hawks

Central Div: Indianapolis (IN) Capitols; Omaha (NE) Mustangs; Oklahoma City (OK) Plainsmen; Chicago (IL) Owls; Arkansas/Little Rock Diamonds; Quad Cities (Davenport, IA & Rock Island, Moline, & East Moline, IL) Raiders/Las Vegas (NV) Cowboys

Pacific Div: Sacramento (CA) Capitols; Seattle (WA) Rangers; Orange County (CA) Ramblers; Spokane (WA) Shockers

Final Standings in 1968

Atlantic Division				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Orlando	10	2	378	160
Ohio Valley	9	3	388	257
Charleston	8	3	287	180
Norfolk	7	5	361	222
Alabama	5	7	264	233
Michigan	1	11	130	418

Central Division				
TEAMS	W	L	PTS	OPP
Indianapolis	8	4	300	169
Omaha	7	5	242	261
Chicago	6	6	284	241
Oklahoma City	5	6	199	265
Arkansas	2	10	177	425

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Las Vegas	1	9	105	325
Quad Cities	0	2	15	84

Pacific Division				
Teams	W	L	PTS	OPP
Orange County	11	1	331	146
Seattle	7	5	302	206
Sacramento	5	7	218	248
Spokane	3	9	163	302

Atlantic/Central Play-off:

Orlando	28	Indianapolis	14
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The 1968 ContFL Championship was played in Orlando on Nov. 30. The Orlando Panthers, led once again by former Penn State quarterback Don Jonas, won their second straight championship by defeating the Orange County Ramblers 30-23.

As the league entered its fourth season it was "continental" only in that it had teams on each side of the continent. The vast area in between, however, was without representation. In order to remedy this situation, negotiations were initiated which led to the absorption of the Professional Football League of America, a midwestern organization established following the demise of the United Football League three years earlier.

Two of the PFLA franchises, Des Moines and Joliet, bailed out. It is of some interest that this marked a second time that the Joliet Explorers/Chargers had rejected membership in the Continental Football League. The franchise had previously been a member of the United Football League and opted not to become a charter member of the ContFL in 1965.

New franchises were located in Detroit, Indianapolis, and Little Rock. The Michigan franchise joined the PFLA Huntsville, Alabama organization in the Atlantic division while the Arkansas unit joined the remaining members of PFLA (Chicago, Quad Cities, Oklahoma City, and Omaha) to form a Central division.

The former PFLA Quad Cities franchise floundered after only two games and was quickly replaced by a new team in Las Vegas. The Charleston Rockets and the Oklahoma City Plainsmen played eleven games before folding. With those exceptions, the remaining nine teams in the Atlantic and Central divisions completed their full twelve game schedules.

Instability was also the byword in the Pacific division. San Jose, Eugene, and Victoria went the way of the 1967 Long Beach franchise. A new franchise in Spokane, however, provided a four-team Pacific division for the 1968 season.

For the first time, the league was playing solely on American turf. However, had it not lost its two Canadian entries, Toronto and Victoria, the Continental Football League would have been truly "continental" in scope.

New Commissioner Danny Hill had established a weekly payroll ceiling of \$200 per player and \$5000 per team. Despite this action there still remained an expenditure differential of as much as 400% between teams. The future, however, looked bright for the ContFL as it readied itself for its fateful fifth, and final, season in 1969.

An item of passing interest concerns the Spokane franchise. It initially sported a young quarterback, fresh out of the University of Alabama, who completed 17 passes out of 41 attempts for the Shockers.

He went on to become the outstanding quarterback for the Oakland Raiders. Known as "Snake", his name was Ken Stabler.

The Shockers opened their season against the Michigan Arrows whose squad included a soccer-style kicker. This tie salesman was later to prove in the Super Bowl that he had serious deficiencies as a passer. His name, Garo Yepremian.

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The 1968 ContFL All-Star Team

Offense: JOE WYNNS (Indianapolis) Split End; MIKE CAPSHAW (Norfolk) Tackle; DICK FITZGERALD (Omaha) Tackle; SAM WORKS (Orlando) Guard; DWIGHT LITTLE (Indianapolis) Guard; TOM MITRAKOS (Spokane) Center; RHOME NIXON (Orange C.) Tight End; JUNIOR EDGE (Norfolk) Quarterback; EUGENE WREN (Indianapolis) Half-back; BOB JACKSON (Orange C.) Fullback; DON FLOYD (Norfolk) Flanker.

Defense: BOB MCADAMS (Orlando) End; BOB HOSKINS (Seattle) End; RICH ZECKER (Sacramento) Tackle; JOE CRITCHLOW (Charleston) Tackle; LEROY ADAMS (Chicago) Outside Linebacker; RON SBRANTI (Sacramento) Middle Linebacker; FRANK GALLOWAY (Charleston) Outside Linebacker; RON FOWLKES (Orange C.) Cornerback; PETE ATHAS (Orlando) Cornerback; JOE HIGHTOWER (Norfolk) Safety/Placekicker; DARRELL HOOVER (Orange C.) Safety; JIM HOLLINGS-WORTH (Charleston) Punter; CORNELL CHAMPION (Orlando) Kick Returner.

1969: ASHES TO ASHES, DUST TO DUST

Atlantic Div: Jersey (City) (NJ) Jays; Orlando (FL) Panthers; Norfolk (VA) Neptunes; Alabama Hawks; Arkansas Diamonds

Central Div: Omaha (NE) Mustangs; Indianapolis (IN) Capitols; Ohio Valley/Wheeling (WV) Ironmen; Chicago (IL) Owls; Tri-City/Midland (MI) Appolos

Texas Div: Dallas Rockets; West Texas/Odessa-Midland Rufneks; Texarkana Titans; Oklahoma/Tulsa Thunderbirds; Ft. Worth Braves; Mexico/Monterrey Golden Aztecs

Pacific Div: Spokane (WA) Shockers; Sacramento (CA) Capitols; Seattle (WA) Rangers; Las Vegas (NV) Cowboys; Hawaii Warriors/Portland (OR) Loggers

The Final Standings in 1969

<u>East</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>
Orlando	10	2
Norfolk	8	4
Jersey	7	5
Alabama	6	6
Arkansas	5	7

<u>Central</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>
Indianapolis	8	4
Ohio Valley	6	6
Omaha	6	6
Chicago	5	7
Tri-City	2	10

<u>Texas</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>
San Antonio	7	4
West Texas	7	4
Texarkana	7	5
Tulsa	5	6
Ft. Worth	5	7
Mexico	2	6
Dallas	1	10

<u>Pacific</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>
Las Vegas	8	4
Sacramento	8	4

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Seattle	7	5
Spokane	5	7
Portland	3	9

In the play-offs: Las Vegas beat Sacramento 31-0 to win the Pacific title
San Antonio beat Texarkana 20-7 to win the Texas title

In the semi-finals: Indianapolis beat Orlando 27-7
San Antonio beat Las Vegas 21-17

In the championship game, played at Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis beat San Antonio 44-38 in "sudden death" overtime.

With seeming good reason, the league approached the 1969 season with considerable optimism. Casualties from the 1968 season had been minimal, with only three clubs, Charleston, Oklahoma City, and Orange County, failing to be around for the 1969 roll call. For the first time in its short existence some clubs had actually finished the year out of the red ink. The Championship Game, unlike its three predecessors, had turned a profit.

With a new Commissioner, Jim Dunn, at the helm and a new division covering the state of Texas, where football is supported with a zeal that approaches religious fanaticism, hopes were high indeed.

Such optimism didn't rest solely in the minds of those connected with the league. Sports Quarterly's 1969 "Pros Football" magazine boldly stated, "With the addition of the Texas Football League as a new division, the sprawling Continental Football League has emerged as the clearly dominant force in professional football outside the NFL-AFL."

Was the situation this rosy? When the country was on the verge of losing a major football league with the impending NFL-AFL merger, was it about to gain a replacement in the Continental Football League?

True, the 1968 teams played before more than half a million spectators. But that meant an average attendance per game of about 5700, and, with Norfolk averaging more than 13000 in its six home games, some teams must have seen very little action at the turnstiles.

Further, based on the Texas League's 1968 figures, its inclusion in 1969 would have little positive impact in improving the situation.

So, despite reports of increased season ticket sales for the 1969 schedule, there appeared to be insufficient action at the gate to offset the continued absence of a television agreement over the long run. Without such an agreement, the economics of the situation were not positive.

The situation was not rosy and the expressions of optimism were merely "hype" and wishful thinking. As the 1969 season approached, it appeared (and it was probably suspected by many) that, instead of being on the verge of "making it", the league was about to begin singing its swan song and become another footnote in the history of professional football.

The absorption of the PFLA had had positive results for the league. It had fulfilled the suggestion of a nationwide organization inherent in the league's name. The league had survived the season with greater stability than any previous year. Some clubs had made money. Attendance had increased. So, why not do it again?

The league, never really quite certain what it was -- starting with the notion of being autonomous, then seeking to be a "farm system" for the NFL-AFL -- was now going to be, in the words of Commissioner Dunn, "fulfilling its objective of unifying under one umbrella, all national elements of professional football outside the NFL-AFL" by observing the four year old Texas Professional Football League.

The TPFL began play as a six-team league in 1966, playing in Texas and Oklahoma. Experiencing its own problems of instability, it had not been able to capitalize on Texas' football idolatry. It completed its

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1968 season as an eight-team league with teams in Texarkana, Tulsa, Dallas, Beaumont, San Antonio, Fort Worth, Odessa, and El Paso.

With the impending absorption by the ContFL, Beaumont and El Paso followed the example set the year before by Joliet and Des Moines and "bailed out" leaving only six teams in the Texas division. These were augmented by the establishment of a seventh franchise in the division. For the first time, a professional football team was going to represent Mexico. Playing in Monterrey, the team was to be known as the Golden Aztecs.

The remaining three divisions were also subject to some additions and realignments. The loss of Charleston, Oklahoma City, and Orange County had to be addressed. A new franchise was awarded to Jersey City and placed in the Atlantic division. Ohio Valley and Michigan were sent from the Atlantic division to the Central division in exchange for Arkansas. Las Vegas was sent to the Pacific division from the Central division and a new franchise was granted to Hawaii for play in the Pacific division. Hawaii was given claim to the roster of the Orange County team and shared with Jersey City the rights to first claim of players from the defunct Charleston and Oklahoma City franchises. All of this didn't help the Hawaii Warriors get "off the ground" and the franchise soon found itself in Portland.

Thus expanded and realigned, the ContFL entered its terminal season. Its hopes were so high that Indianapolis was actively bidding for the services of USC running back O.J. Simpson. As the season progressed, its optimism was dashed by reality and it sputtered its way to the season's end. Only the entry from Mexico, which folded after eight games, failed to complete its full schedule. But there was little financial strength left in the organization.

In what could be termed a symbolic finish, the championship game ended in "sudden death" -- as did the Continental Football League soon thereafter.

Surely, the 1969 championship game has to be considered one of the most exciting finishes to a season in professional football history. *Pro Football Weekly* described it "as major-league a football game as this minor league ever produced" and "filled to the brim with drama." It was the final bloom of life for the ill-fated league and the 74-minute, 51-second contest had all the twists of an Alfred Hitchcock plot.

The Capitols took the initial lead in the game's first series when Gerry LaFountain blocked a Jerry Moritz punt and crawled the six yards into the end zone for the score. The lead was increased to 14-0 in the opening period when Johnny Walton hit Al Moore for a 16-yard touchdown.

The Toros narrowed the gap later in the period with a 25-yard toss from halfback Ray Farias to R.A. Johnson making it a 14-7 affair at the end of the first period.

Both teams added 14 points to their scores in the second period to make it 28-21 at the half. Early in the period, Walton pitched a 49-yard pass to Roy Winston which set up a 3-yard scoring dive by fullback John Nice. Toro quarterback Sal Olivas came right back minutes later with a 53-yard pass to Johnson setting up a 1-yard touchdown scamper by A.C. Lex.

Then, with 1:10 left in the half, Olivas hit Johnson twice, once for 30 yards and then 4 yards to knot it up at 21-21.

The Caps came right back to take a 28-21 halftime lead when Walton followed the kick-off with a 53-yard aerial to Joe Wynns. The third period was somewhat tranquil, with San Antonio knotting the score at 28-28, following a pass interception by Johnny Mata on the Indy 36. Four plays later Olivas carried it into the end zone for the only score of the period.

The stage was now set for the climactic finish. The Caps regained the lead after Brown Marks stole an Olivas toss setting up a 55-yard march, capped by Moore's 1-yard jaunt to pay dirt. Indy increased its lead by way of a Lou Bobich field goal from 9-yards out with 1:10 left in regulation play. The Toros, down by 10, appeared to be out of it. But, with a scant 30 seconds remaining, they eluded the grasp of defeat and scored twice.

The first score, a 29-yard Olivas to Johnson pass play, was followed by a successful on-side kick which set up a 38-yard Jerry Moritz field goal, with two seconds left, to take the game into "sudden-death" overtime.

For the first nine minutes of overtime, the two teams fought it out in the middle of the gridiron with neither team threatening to wrap things up. Then the "never say die" Toros reached field goal range and Moritz was looking at a 25-yard attempt. The San Antonians' luck, however, deserted them and Moritz' kick went off to the right.

The game staggered on for five more minutes and it was beginning to look like there would be co-Champions in 1969. But the Capitols had other ideas. As time ran out, they drove 70 yards in eight plays.

Walton found Wynns for 11 yards, hit Winston for 21 yards, lost one to Wynns, but tossed one to Moore for 15 yards and the Indys were suddenly on the Toro's 23 yard line. Moore, who wound up with 92 yards rushing for the day, picked up 8 yards on a left side sweep. Nice picked up one and Moore another for the first down on the Toro's 13 yard line with only nine seconds remaining. Suddenly, the Capitols' front line exploded and Nice ran untouched through a massive hole in the San Antonio defense to give Indianapolis sole possession of the final ContFL Championship.

The Indianapolis hero of that 1969 Championship game was a young black rookie quarterback from Elizabeth State College. Johnny Walton had come on strong in the last half of that 1969 ContFL season. He had thrown 15 touchdown passes in the final six games of the regular season and led the Capitols to a 27-7 play-off win over two-time ContFL champion Orlando. In the title game, he completed 14 passes out of 30 attempts for 217 yards and two touchdowns. But it would be fourteen years before his name would become prominent in professional football circles.

With the demise of the ContFL, Walton spent two years on the "taxi" squad of the Los Angeles Rams and two years with the Midwest Football League's Columbus Barons. He then reappeared on the national scene in 1975 with the San Antonio Wings of the World Football League. This was followed by three years as the "back-up" quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles until he retired in 1979. He passed the next four years serving his alma mater as the head football coach.

Then, at the young age of 35, he left retirement and joined the Boston franchise of the fledgling United States Football League. There he earned national respect as one of the League's top quarterbacks during the 1983 and 1984 seasons as the field general for the Boston and New Orleans Breakers. In 1985, he retired and returned to his alma mater once again.

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The ContFL lived five years, three years longer than any earlier challenger to the NFL except its contemporary, the 1969-69 AFL. It would also be longer than the next two characters on the professional football scene, the World and United States Football Leagues.

Born out of the demise of one league and the severe crippling of another, the Continental Football League saw its end come with the merger of the NFL-AFL in 1970. This monolith left very little room for another nation-wide football organization – as the World and United States Football Leagues would later discover.

It left its legacy in serving as the spawning ground for several future NFL "names" such as coaches Bill Walsh (San Jose/49ers) and Sam Wyche (Wheeling/Bengals), quarterback Ken Stabler (Spokane/Raiders), tackles Gary Bugenhagen (Indianapolis/Bills) and Wallace Dickey (Orlando/Broncos), center Jim Clack (Norfolk/Steelers), defensive ends Coy Bacon (Charleston/Redskins) and Otis Sistrunk (Norfolk/Raiders), defensive tackle Bob Hoskins (Seattle/49ers), linebackers Fred Forsberg (Victoria/Broncos), Tim Casey (Eugene/Bears), Ron McCall (Las Vegas/Chargers), Pete Athas (Norfolk/Giants), and, finally, a short balding tie salesman who proved that, although he was not able to run or pass the football, he was a deadly accurate placekicker with his soccer-style approach, Garo Ypreman (Michigan/Dolphins).

But its perhaps most illustrious alumnus didn't make his mark in the NFL. He chose, instead, the northern route and played in Canada following the 1969 season. Quarterback Don Jonas (Orlando/Winnepeg Blue Bombers) was a dominant force in the ContFL and a "star" in the Canadian Football League.

Named the ContFL's Most Valuable Player for leading his Orlando Panthers to two ContFL Championships in 1967 and 1968, Jonas also led them all the way to a "sudden death" overtime loss to

Philadelphia in 1966's championship game, and into the semi-finals in 1969. He was a major figure in four of the League's five years of operation. In his five Canadian seasons Jonas completed 977 of 1930 pass attempts for over 15000 yards. In 1971, he was the top passer in the Western Conference of the CFL and won both the Schenley Award (Outstanding Player in the CFL) and the Jeff Nicklin Memorial Trophy (Most Valuable Player in the Western Conference).