

# **The Last Fall of the Titans**

by John Hogrogian

On January 7, 1962, the American Football League held its first All-Star game, in San Diego. Five members of the New York Titans played on the Eastern Division squad: Quarterback Al Dorow, fullback Bill Mathis, guard Bob Mischak, linebacker Larry Grantham, and cornerback Dick Felt. The West won by a score of 47-27. An audience of about 20,000 viewed the game in Balboa Stadium, while the ABC television network broadcast the game nationally. The game ended the AFL's second season.

On the morning of the game, the New York Times printed a story about the Titans on page one of its sports section. The headline read "Wismer Sells 30% of Titan Stock to Realty Investor for \$500,000." The story reported that Titan president Harry Wismer "yesterday sold 30 per cent of his stock in the club to Royal F. Raidle of Palm Beach, Florida, for \$500,000." Raidle was described as a 44-year-old real estate executive in Florida.

Wismer commented on the sale:

I lost \$1,200,000 personally in two years to bring a new football team here. The sale to Mr. Raidle leaves me with 60 percent and I will continue to control the club.

According to Wismer, "the documents for the sale of the stock to Raidle would be signed shortly in either Washington or Palm Beach."

Those documents apparently were never signed. When the Titans went into bankruptcy thirteen months later, Wismer still owned eighty percent of the stock in the team. Raidle's name appears nowhere in the list of owners and team officers in the bankruptcy papers.

Summertime, 1962

Harry Wismer had often given to the press statements with little apparent validity. He had regularly issued official attendance figures which were several times greater than the number of folks actually sitting in the stands, as reckoned by trained observers. He had issued bombastic challenges to the Giants which reaped harvests of ridicule. By 1962, Wismer and his Titans were considered a joke -- when they were considered at all.

Wismer had been a prominent sportscaster on network radio and had become wealthy through wise investments. Apparently, however, his wealth was not on the fabulous level of a typical oil tycoon. He obtained the New York franchise in the new AFL and put the Titans on the field for the inaugural AFL season of 1960. The Titans achieved 7-7 records in both 1960 and 1961. They played their home games at the Polo Grounds, the famous old ballpark which the baseball Giants had abandoned in 1957 and which was now in ill-repair. Attendance was miniscule at Titans games. Wismer probably told the truth when he said he had lost \$1,200,000 in his first two seasons.

In the summer of 1962, Wismer needed an influx of fresh money to keep the Titans afloat for the new season. He held eighty per cent of the shares in Titans of New York, Inc., the corporation which held the New York AFL franchise. Fred Crescente of Ridgewood, New Jersey and Donald O'Shaughnessy of Midland, Texas, each owned ten per cent of the shares. Wismer, however, ran the show absolutely and bore full financial responsibility for the team. Legally, the team's finances were completely distinct and separate from Wismer's personal finances. As the team continued to lose money, however, Wismer pumped more funds into the team. By the summer of 1962, Wismer was unwilling or unable to invest any more substantial sums into the corporation.

The financial prospects for the Titans in 1962 were no better than they were in the money-losing 1960 and 1961 seasons. The light at the end of the tunnel was Shea Stadium, the new municipal stadium which the City was building in Queens. In October of 1961, the Titans signed a lease to play in the new ballpark, starting in 1962.

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Construction was taking longer than expected, however. The newborn Mets had been forced to play their inaugural 1962 campaign in the old Polo Grounds, giving the place a paint job and installing some improvements. The Titans would remain in the spiffed-up, but still antiquated, Polo Grounds in 1962, as the new ballpark was still not ready. Wismer predicted large crowds for Titan games once they moved into the new stadium. The challenge was to keep the Titans together until the new stadium was done.

Wismer failed to attract any new investors. The best he could do was to borrow \$200,000 from the Mercantile Bank of Chicago. Wismer arranged to have the Titans' share in the ABC television contract with the AFL paid directly to this bank. That share amounted to \$190,000, paid in four monthly installments from October through January. Wismer would pay the remaining \$10,000 and interest. The loan would enable the Titans to start the season.

Wismer did not have a large professional staff on the payroll. At the end of the 1961 season, he hired Bulldog Turner as head coach to replace Sammy Baugh. Turner signed a two-year contract at an annual salary of \$20,000. Baugh had signed a three-year contract at an annual salary of \$20,000 running through 1962. Wismer hoped to goad Baugh into quitting so that he wouldn't have to pay both head coaches for 1962. With this in mind, Wismer did not fire Baugh. He instead declared that Baugh would henceforth be an advisor and kicking coach. He also failed to notify Baugh of the starting date for training camp.

The position of general manager had only one occupant. Steve Sebo held that position during the Titans' first two years, but he quit in January of 1962 to become athletic director at the University of Virginia. Wismer gave the job to George Sauer, an assistant coach under Baugh. For his \$14,000 annual salary, Sauer would serve as general manager and continue as an assistant coach under Turner.

Pre-Season, Week 1 (July 13 - July 15)

On Friday, July 13, the Titans officially opened their training camp at East Stroudsburg State College in Pennsylvania. This was the third training site for the Titans in three years. In a reminiscence published in Sports Illustrated in 1969, Titan lineman Alex Kroll recalled that the football field had baked concrete-hard through a hot summer of neglect. The college may have cut some corners in maintaining the field, but Wismer would give it a lesson in financial neglect. When the Titans filed for bankruptcy in February of 1963, the team still owed the College \$4,403.04 for its training camp bills. The bankruptcy papers list other unpaid bills to doctors, hotels, hospitals, and other businesses in the Stroudsburg area. As the season progressed, businesses learned to collect from the Titans in advance.

On the opening day of camp, both coaches showed up. Bulldog Turner took charge of the session. Sammy Baugh contented himself with being an assistant coach while still due to collect \$20,000 under his three-year contract. The New York newspapers highlighted Baugh's awkward presence and blamed the penny-pinching Wismer. To his credit, Baugh did not try to obstruct Turner's new regime in any way. He simply did not want to jeopardize his 1962 salary by not showing up when Wismer had not fired him.

From the first day, Turner conducted morning and afternoon non-contact drills. Sixty-three players reported on opening day, including twenty rookies. A few more players would show up later in the pre-season after finishing military reserve training.

The roster was not markedly different from the 1961 Titan squad. The most notable quarterbacks were returnee Al Dorow and newcomer Butch Songin, who was obtained over the summer from the Boston Patriots in exchange for cornerback Dick Felt. Of the numerous running backs in camp, fullback Bill Mathis was the big name. Wide receivers Don Maynard and Art Powell were the offensive stars of the team. The offensive line had all its starters back, including All-Star guard Bob Mischak.

Of the twenty rookies in camp, the only prominent one was Alex Kroll, an All-American center from Rutgers. He signed a no-trade contract with the Titans so that he could also begin a career at a New York advertising agency. He was the only draft pick that the Titans signed.

Defense had never been the Titans' strong point, and there was little new help this year. One newcomer was defensive back Wayne Fontes, a future NFL head coach decades later. The defensive star, linebacker Larry Grantham, would be on active duty in the Army for another month as the pre-season began.

Turner had only three assistant coaches to help run the team: George Sauer (who was also the general manager), John Dell Isola, and Bones Taylor. Turner exuded optimism in an interview he gave to the New

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York reporters on the second day of camp. He said that he wanted to emphasize speed and desire over size. He singled out the pass rush as the one area which most needed improvement.

### Pre-Season, Week 2 (July 16 - July 22)

On Monday night, July 16, Harry Wismer and the team were guests at a dinner held at the Penn Stroud Hotel in Stroudsburg. More than 250 local citizens attended. The New York Times described Wismer as being "in a gay mood."

On Tuesday, Wismer and Sammy Baugh turned up at a press conference in New York. They announced that Baugh would be leaving the Titans but would still receive his \$20,000 salary. Wismer praised Baugh, and Baugh praised Wismer and the Titans. Baugh stated that "the Titans are gonna have a heck of a ball club this season." The Times noted that Wismer had concluded that "Baugh's presence in camp might become embarrassing for Turner." Baugh picked up his two suitcases and headed off for a plane back to his Texas ranch.

On Saturday, July 21, the Titans played their first intrasquad game. The Blues beat the Whites 9-7. The Blues scored in the first quarter on a 44-yard pass from Bob Scrabis to Perry Richards, a veteran NFL end. The Whites scored in the third quarter on a 31-yard pass from Butch Songin to rookie Bob Fiorina. Dick Guesman won the game for the Blues with a 15-yard field goal with 24 seconds left in the game.

### Pre-Season, Week 3 (July 23 - July 29)

Not much news came out of camp this week. Don Maynard was sidelined with pulled leg muscles. The Titans played another intrasquad game on Saturday, this time at Easton, Pennsylvania.

On Thursday, the New York Herald Tribune reported an interview with coach Turner. He stated that he needed linebackers "in the worst way." He also indicated that there were talent shortages at offensive tackle, defensive end, and defensive back. He designated Al Dorow as the top quarterback, backed up by Butch Songin and Bob Scrabis. He described the Titans' quarterback situation as "good but not exactly great."

On Friday, the Herald Tribune published a feature article on fullback Bill Mathis, emphasizing that he had never been injured in football.

### Pre-Season, Week 4 (July 30 - August 5)

On Tuesday, July 31, the Titans traded defensive tackle Sid Youngelman to the Buffalo Bills for quarterback Dean Look. Youngelman was an NFL veteran and a starting lineman for the Titans since 1960. Look was a Michigan State product who had first pursued a baseball career with the Chicago White Sox. When the Titans went into bankruptcy in February of 1963, both Youngelman and Look filed claims for unpaid back salary. Also on July 31, the New York Giants cut Lee Grosscup, their third-string quarterback.

Al Dorow left camp during the week. According to Alex Kroll, Dorow "felt no affinity for Harry or for Bulldog." He returned after a few days, in time to travel with the Titans to Houston for the team's first pre-season game. On Saturday, the Oilers beat the Titans by a score of 33-27. Don Maynard and halfbacks Dick Christy and Mel West sat out the game with injuries. Larry Grantham was still in the Army.

On Saturday, Marilyn Monroe died. The circumstances remain unclear to this day.

### Pre-Season, Week 5 (August 6 - August 12)

On Saturday, August 12, the Titans brought a squad of 53 players to Bowen Field, a high school facility in New Haven, Connecticut, for the team's second pre-season game. Nine thousand fans watched the Buffalo Bills beat the Titans by a score of 20-10. The Titans generated little offense behind three quarterbacks. Al Dorow completed nine of seventeen passes, Butch Songin two of ten, and Bob Scrabis three of eight. The Bills used Johnny Green at quarterback for most of the game. Don Maynard was still out with leg woes, and Larry Grantham was still in the Army.

During the week, the Titans learned that their pre-season game against the Boston Patriots in Atlanta on August 25 had been cancelled because of poor ticket sales. The two teams rescheduled the game at the high school field in Lowell, Massachusetts, on August 22.

### Pre-Season, Week 6 (August 13 - August 19)

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The Titans had no game scheduled this week. On Thursday, the team made a big trade with the Buffalo Bills. New York sent Al Dorow to Buffalo in exchange for quarterback Johnny Green and safety Bill Atkins. Dorow had apparently grown unhappy with the Titans. Green had been a starting quarterback for the Bills, but Butch Songin was promoted to the position as first-stringer for the Titans. Atkins was among the best of the AFL as a safetyman and as a punter. Unfortunately, Atkins reported with a separated shoulder which he suffered in a game against the Patriots on the day before the trade. He considered himself able to play despite the injury.

On Friday, Larry Grantham reported for action after leaving active military duty. Of the five Titans in January's All-Star game, Bill Mathis, Bob Mischak, and Grantham were with the team. The Titans had sent Dick Felt to Boston and Al Dorow to Buffalo, receiving in exchange the starting quarterback from each of those teams, Songin and Green.

Pre-Season, Week 7 (August 20 - August 26)

On Wednesday, August 22, the Titans played their third pre-season game. They lost 17-10 to the Patriots at Lowell before 11,118 fans. The Pats drove 96 yards late in the game, with Babe Parilli plunging over from one yard out for the winning touchdown.

Harry Wismer livened up the proceedings, or distracted from them, depending on one's point of view. He prowled the sidelines and argued with the officials over their calls. He then moved up to the press box, where he continued to berate the officials. Then he announced his intention to trade Don Maynard to the Patriots. According to the New York Herald Tribune, a member of the Patriot management "professed surprise and no particular interest."

Bill Mathis broke his right collarbone on the first play of the game. He would be out for two months, leaving a big hole in the running game. In addition, Bob Mischak injured a foot. He would play on.

Pre-Season, Week 8 (August 27 - September 2)

On Tuesday, the Titans cut four players, including quarterback Bob Scrabis, to get the roster down to 38 players.

On that day, the Titans put on their ties and jackets and visited the site of Shea Stadium, where only part of the steel skeleton was standing. The New York Times printed a picture of the visit in its Wednesday edition. Harry Wismer is shown handing a Titans helmet to New York City Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris while Bulldog Turner and his players strike gentlemanly poses behind them. Beneath the picture, the Times reported that the Titans were "unable to practice yesterday at a Brooklyn high school field because of bad weather." The Titans had broken camp and left East Stroudsburg, but the sporadic newspaper coverage does not enable one to tell when they left.

On Thursday, the Titans made a move to fill the fullback gap left by Mathis' injury. They sent an unspecified draft choice to the San Diego Chargers for fullback Charlie Flowers, a fullback from Mississippi whose two seasons with the Chargers had been a disappointment. The Titans hardly ever signed draft choices, so the price was not high.

The Titans flew to San Diego for their final pre-season game. On Saturday, September 1, they lost to the Chargers by a score of 14-9 before 20,871 fans. The Chargers scored on two touchdown passes from Jack Kemp to Lance Alworth. The only Titans touchdown came on a one-yard plunge by Curly Johnson, a reserve fullback who would have a long career as a punter. The Titans ended their pre-season with four losses in four games.

Week 1 (September 3 - September 9)

As the Titans prepared for their opening game in Oakland, the team had run through most of the money borrowed over the summer. Harry Wismer apparently was unable or unwilling to invest any further substantial amount of his personal wealth in the Titans. In his 1965 memoirs, Wismer stated that "the money ran out on our opening trip to the Coast for an exhibition at San Diego and for two regular-season games at Oakland and San Diego."

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Alex Kroll confirms the presence of money problems at the start of the regular season. He recalled:

But the money problem raised its ugly head as soon as we swung West for our last exhibition game and the season opener at Oakland. Each player was supposed to receive \$50 per exhibition game. The exhibition was played and lost with no sign of a check. We held our first team meeting and issued our first ultimatum. "No pay, no play," Curley Johnson said. It had a nice ring and it became our second team slogan.

The first team slogan was "don't cash it with anybody you like," referring to Titan paychecks.

At any rate, the Titans played on toward their opener. Turner cut seven players on Tuesday, including five who would later resurface with the Titans: Jim Tiller, Dean Look, Ed Kovac, Fran Morelli, and Bob Watters. In fact, Look was recalled before the week was out and was in uniform on opening day.

On Friday evening, the AFL season began as Denver beat San Diego 30-21. On that afternoon, the Titans signed quarterback Lee Grosscup. An All-American at Utah, Grosscup had sat on the bench for the Giants for two years. After the Giants cut him on July 31, Grosscup signed with the Vikings. In a surprise move, the Vikings cut him to reach the roster limit. Grosscup chose the Titans over the CFL Toronto Argonauts.

Grosscup had a stronger passing arm than Butch Songin, Johnny Green, and Dean Look, the incumbent quarterbacks. He practiced with the team on Friday and Saturday, then suited up for Sunday's game.

The Titans put a 33-man squad on the field at Oakland on Sunday. Butch Songin started at quarterback, backed up by Grosscup, Green and Look. Curley Johnson and Charlie Flowers were the fullbacks, Dick Christy and Mel West the halfbacks. Don Maynard and Art Powell were top-notch wide receivers, with Thurlow Cooper the starter at tight end. NFL veteran Perry Richards backed up all the receivers. The starting offensive line included Jack Klotz, Gene Cockrell, Bob Mischak, Sid Fournet, and Mike Hudock. The line substitutes were Kroll and Roger Ellis. Bill Shockley was nominally a halfback but really a place kicking specialist.

On defense, Nick Mumley and Proverb Jacobs were the ends, Dick Guesman and Moses Gray the tackles. The only subs were starting offensive tackle Gene Cockrell and starting linebacker Ed Cooke. Larry Grantham and Cooke were the outside linebackers, with Hubert Bobo in the middle. Jerry Fields was the substitute at all three linebacker positions. The cornerbacks were Dainard Paulson and Wayne Fontes. The safeties were Lee Riley and Bill Atkins. Paul Hynes was the reserve defensive back. With a 33-man roster, many regulars pitched in on special teams.

Before a national audience on ABC television, the Raiders took a 3-0 lead in the second quarter. The Raiders intercepted two Songin passes early, prompting Turner to send Grosscup into the game. On his first play, Grosscup launched a long pass to Powell which went for an 80-yard touchdown. After the kickoff, Bill Atkins intercepted an Oakland pass and returned it to the Oakland 19 yard line. Grosscup then passed to Dick Christy for another touchdown. The Titans took a 14-3 lead into halftime.

Songin returned in the third quarter and threw for a 64-yard touchdown to Maynard. Grosscup returned later in the third quarter and threw another long touchdown pass to Powell. Grosscup and Powell had played together in a California high school all-star game in 1954, perhaps accounting for their instant rapport. The Titans went on to a 28-17 victory. As Kroll put it, "Grosscup was ecstatic. So was the ball club. We stood 1-0, and we had our dreams. Not even the absence of paychecks could dampen them."

Week 2 (September 10 - September 16)

The Titans took up residence in a San Diego motel in preparation for their game against the Chargers on Sunday. The temperature was in the 90's every day that week. Harry Wismer, in a fit of enthusiasm, told Turner to order full pads for all workouts that week. The Titans had never beaten the Chargers, but the opening day victory encouraged Wismer.

The workouts were at a sun-baked high school field 45 minutes by charter bus from the motel. According to Kroll, the bus didn't show up on Friday afternoon to bring the players back to the motel. The bill hadn't been paid. Bulldog Turner got a ride back to town with a sportswriter. A few players got rides with high school students watching the practice. Most of the Titans, wearing and carrying parts of their uniform, hitchhiked back to the motel.

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Morale apparently did not recover by Sunday. After three quarters, the Chargers led 31-0. The final score was 40-14. Lance Alworth scored twice on passes and Keith Lincoln ran back a kickoff 103 yards in the fourth quarter. Remarkably, the Chargers completed only six passes all day. The San Diego defense mercilessly rushed Grosscup, who threw three interceptions and fumbled three times. Six Titans were knocked out of action with injuries. The New York television audience had little to be impressed with.

Week 3 (September 17 - September 23)

The Titans returned home and went on strike. They apparently had not gotten paid after either of their two games. They were scheduled to play on Saturday night at Buffalo, but the players balked over the missing paychecks. The Buffalo Evening News described the situation: "The Titans came to town after holding only one full-scale workout all week, having a near revolt among the players over late salary payments, and with six players who were placed on waivers earlier in the week in uniform."

Alex Kroll states that the players issued a "no pay, no play" ultimatum to the coaches, who relayed it to Wismer. The owner went into a snit, forbade the coaches from conducting practices, and threatened to release the entire team. He did place eight players on waivers, but recalled six of them by Sunday. Quarterback Johnny Green and defensive tackle Moses Gray weren't recalled. Replacing them on the roster were offensive tackle Fran Morelli and defensive end Bob Watters, both of whom had been cut two weeks earlier.

According to Kroll, Turner told the Titans: "Mr. Wismer said he'll fire us if we coach or even talk to you guys. But I'm not worried. You're professionals. You got pride. You know what to do." Led by Bob Mischak and Larry Grantham, the players put themselves through a padless workout and drafted their own game plan. Wismer came up with the two missing payments in mid-week, and the coaches resumed coaching. Where the money came from is uncertain, perhaps from Wismer's own pocket.

On Saturday night, the Titans met the winless Bills before 24,024 spectators at War Memorial Stadium. Former Titan quarterback Al Dorow ran the Buffalo offense until he injured his right arm in the second quarter on a blitz. The Bills gained more yardage than the Titans, but Buffalo lost the ball seven times on turnovers, on four interceptions and three fumbles. The Titans scored on a Grosscup pass to tight end Thurlow Cooper, a short run by Dick Christy, and a field goal by Bill Shockley. The Titans won 17-6, proving the dubious value of their practices and coaching.

Week 4 (September 24 - September 30)

With a 2-1 record, the Titans prepared for their home opener against the Denver Broncos on Sunday. The New York Times printed a small article which nicely summarized the first month of the season. The Titans made a few personnel moves during the week. They signed Ed Sprinkle, a former Chicago Bear teammate of Turner's, as an assistant coach. It is unknown if Sprinkle was aware of the team's financial state. The team cut halfback Mel West and offensive tackle Jack Klotz. Alex Kroll stepped up into a starting tackle's position on offense. Jim Tiller, a fast halfback with bad hands, rejoined the team. He had been cut at the end of training camp. The Titans also signed veteran defensive tackle George Strugar, a recent cut of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

On Sunday, the Giants were out of town, making the Titans the only live action in New York. The Polo Grounds had been spruced up for the Mets' first season, but most fans preferred to stay home to watch the Giants on television. The Titans announced the attendance as 17,213. One writer estimated the actual total as about 4,000.

The game went sour for the Titans right from the start. On the third play of the game, Don Joyce and Jerry Stalcup smashed into Grosscup, who hobbled off the field with an injured left knee. Butch Songin took over, but had little success moving the team other than a 45-yard touchdown pass to Don Maynard in the first quarter. At halftime, the Broncos led 13-10. Turner tried Dean Look at quarterback. When Look suffered a concussion and several broken vertebrae in the final quarter, Songin had to return to action. In the fourth quarter, the Broncos scored 19 points to take a 32-10 victory. Gene Mingo kicked four field goals for the Broncos, while Frank Tripucka completed 20 of 29 passes for 242 yards. The Denver Post reported that, after the game, Turner "barked insults at his own men in the dressing room."

The Titans had more than hurt feelings after the game. Eight players went to the hospital for care. The most serious injuries were Grosscup's knee, Look's back and concussion, and Wayne Fontes' left ankle.

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Week 5 (October 1 - October 7)

The Titans were originally scheduled to host the Boston Patriots on Friday night, but the game was pushed back to Saturday, an off-day in the World Series between the Yankees and the Giants. The extra day of rest would also profit the Titans in recovering from the list of injuries. On Tuesday, only fifteen players suited up for a workout. Attendance was limited by injuries, not the absence of paychecks.

The Titans also made some roster moves. They put Wayne Fontes on injured reserve and cut quarterback Dean Look, fullback Charlie Flowers, and defensive lineman Proverb Jacobs. Look would take the team to court, claiming that the Titans had to pay him while he was injured. The Titans countered that Look had concealed a back condition when he signed with the team, thus releasing the Titans from any duty to pay him for back injuries. To fill the four roster spots, the Titans purchased defensive end Lavern Torczon from Buffalo and quarterback Harold Stephens from the semi-pro Louisville Raiders. They brought back defensive back Ed Kovac, whom they had cut before the start of the season. They also activated fullback Bill Mathis, who had recovered from his broken collarbone.

On Saturday night, the Titans announced the attendance as 14,412. One writer estimated the actual crowd as about 6,000. Kroll states that even that figure was swollen by thousands of neighborhood kids whom the Titans allowed in for free just before the start of the game. Kroll states that the Titans opened the gates to the kids at every home game simply to fill up some of the seats.

The Patriots led 24-7 at halftime and won by a score of 43-14. Babe Parilli threw three touchdown passes, and Gino Cappelletti scored nineteen points on one touchdown, three field goals, and four extra points. Butch Songin started at quarterback for New York, but soon gave way to Grosscup. Hobbled around on his injured knee, Grosscup operated out of a shotgun formation to minimize his steps. He did throw a 73-yard touchdown pass to Art Powell in the second quarter and an 86-yard touchdown pass to Don Maynard in the third quarter. The newly-signed Harold Stephens, known as "Hayseed," took over and completed ten of fifteen passes. The New York Times reported that "Coach Bulldog Turner's forces were quite inept in nearly every phase of these exercises."

Week 6 (October 8 - October 14)

The Titans set out on a two-game Texas trip. They would play at Houston on October 14 and at Dallas on October 21. Before leaving New York, Bulldog Turner was quoted in the New York Post: "We just hope we can field a respectable team down there. Right now, it's hard to tell." Lee Grosscup told the Post: "My knee feels okay. I'll play." Turner's response was: "He doesn't look good to me. I don't think he can play." Preparations for the Houston game hit another sour note when the team's only film projector broke down and no one had the funds to repair it.

Channel 7 in New York carried the Houston game back to the Titans' home fans, who had every reason to be appalled by what they saw. In 80° heat, the Oilers trounced the Titans 56-17. George Blanda threw six touchdown passes, one short of the AFL record he had set the year before against the Titans. New York opened the scoring with a Bill Shockley field goal, but the offense made little headway after that. The only New York touchdowns came on a 58-yard punt return by Dick Christy and Ed Cooke's recovery of a blocked punt in the end zone.

The Oilers hounded Songin, Grosscup, and Stephens in their respective tenures at quarterback. Grosscup lasted four minutes, then was carried from the field after a sack. The injuries piled up again. Among the injured were receiver Art Powell (hamstring), defensive back Paul Hynes (hamstring), and just-retired fullback Bill Mathis (knee). To make matters worse, safety Bill Atkins could not play because of a bad shoulder. By the end of the game, the Titans were using quarterback Hayseed Stephens and halfback Jim Tiller in the defensive secondary. One can only wonder whether paychecks were regularly dispensed at this juncture.

Week 7 (October 15 - October 21)

The Titans spent the week in Dallas. They held abbreviated workouts at an old baseball park, hoping to get their walking wounded into better shape. Lee Grosscup was now beyond playing. He went onto injured reserve, and the Titans recalled quarterback Johnny Green, whom they cut in September.

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Harry Wismer spoke to the press on Friday. He announced that star receiver Art Powell would be traded to the highest bidder. Powell had not signed a 1962 contract and was playing out his option. He would be a free agent after the season. Wismer stated that if Powell didn't want to play for the Titans in 1963, he wasn't welcome with the Titans in 1962. Nothing came of this outburst, as Powell finished the season with the Titans and led the AFL in pass reception yardage.

On Sunday, the New York television audience saw a surprisingly spirited Titans team face the strong Dallas Texans. Coached by Hank Stram, the Texans were battling the Denver Broncos in a race for first place in the AFL West. At halftime, the Titans and Texans were tied 10-10 before 17,814 spectators in the Cotton Bowl. The Texans went ahead 17-10 on an Abner Haynes touchdown in the third quarter, but the Titans re-tied the score on a quarterback sneak by Johnny Green.

With about three minutes left in the game, Haynes caught a pass near the Dallas sideline. Linebacker Jerry Fields drove him out of bounds. Haynes took exception, and a melee broke out. The Titans poured across the field to mix it up. Once order was restored, the officials ejected Haynes from the game. They were about to eject Fields when Hubert Bobo, the injured New York linebacker, convinced an official the Hayseed Stephens had been the main culprit on the Titans side. The official ejected Stephens, who had been only a passive bystander. Bobo explained afterward that, with his injury, only three linebackers were available, so that Stephens was more dispensable than Fields.

The game proceeded, with Tommy Brooker kicking a 42-yard field goal to put Dallas ahead 20-17 with 51 seconds left. The Titans would not score in the remaining time, but they did get into another brawl with 34 seconds left that resulted in the ejection of offensive tackle Gene Cockrell. The Titans came close, but fell short, 20-17.

Week 8 (October 22 - October 28)

On Monday, President Kennedy addressed the nation on television about the presence of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. The Cuban missile crisis seized the country's attention, as the United States and the Soviet Union faced each other in diplomatic and military brinksmanship.

According to Kroll, the Titans were unraveling at this stage. Some paychecks bounced, as the Irving Trust Company paid checks only up to the variable amount of the team's account. First come, first served was a very real principle as applied to Titans paychecks. The team no longer kept the locker room stocked with toiletries, the trainer didn't have enough tape for all the players, towels and socks were no longer laundered regularly, and the team broke down into distrustful cliques.

The Titans continued to shuffle players. Butch Songin was cut, as Johnny Green's 13 of 25 performance in Dallas had won Bulldog Turner's allegiance. Disappearing onto injured reserve was defensive tackle Dick Guesman, who suffered a broken arm in Dallas. Joining the team were tight end Karl Kaimer, yet another pre-season cut, and defensive end John Kenerson, recently cut by the Pittsburgh Steelers. Turner shifted Lavern Torczon from end to tackle to fill Guesman's spot on the defensive line. Late in the week, the league fined Gene Cockrell \$50 for his part in the final brawl in Dallas.

On Sunday, the Titans hosted the San Diego Chargers at the Polo Grounds. Just across the Harlem River, the Giants hosted the Washington Redskins at sold-out Yankee Stadium. It was the first head-to-head pro football conflict in New York City since 1949.

The Polo Grounds parking lot was filled to its capacity of 2,000 cars. Most of these cars, however, belonged to drivers who parked in Manhattan and walked across a short bridge to Yankee Stadium in the Bronx. A full house of 62,844 watched Y.A. Tittle throw seven touchdown passes in leading the Giants to a 49-34 victory.

In the Polo Grounds, the Titans announced the attendance as 21,467. The New York Times estimated the actual crowd as about 7,500. One must remember Kroll's statement that neighborhood kids in the thousands were regularly let in for free just before the kickoff.

The Chargers had been in the first two AFL championship games, but injuries had ruined their 1962 season. Jack Kemp, Paul Lowe, Keith Lincoln, and Lance Alworth were all missing on offense. The Titans were still laboring under an accumulation of injuries. The San Diego Union reported that the Titans suited only 31 players and used only 29.



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After the first half, the Titans and Chargers were tied 3-3. In the third quarter, the Titans broke the game open. Johnny Green threw twice to Don Maynard for touchdowns, and Dick Christy returned a punt 73 yards for a score. In the fourth quarter, the autumn dusk settled over the Polo Grounds. The Titans, however, refused to turn on the ballpark lights. The New York Times reported that "the crowd had some trouble seeing the ball and action during the fourth period." Despite the penny-pinching economy, the Titans enjoyed their first ever victory over the Chargers, 23-3.

Week 9 (October 29 - November 4)

The Titans brought back Bob Scrabis this week. He had been the third string quarterback for the past two years, only to be cut at the start of this season. Another quarterback, Hayseed Stephens, was shifted to the defensive secondary, crippled by injuries to Bill Atkins and Wayne Fontes. Another stopgap defensive back was Perry Richards, an experienced NFL offensive end.

Harry Wismer made the big news of the week on Saturday, the day before the Oakland Raiders came to the Polo Grounds. He announced that he wanted to sell his 80% interest in the Titans for \$2.5 million. Part of the team's assets would be his rights to a lease at the new municipal stadium going up in Flushing Meadows. Wismer stated that he had lost \$1.75 million on the team in its three-year history.

On Sunday, the winless Raiders gave the Titans a stiff fight. The Raiders used the shotgun as their basic offensive formation and blitzed a lot on defense. The New York Times estimated the crowd as approximately 6,000. The Times further commented that "the announced attendance was 18,247, and this shows that the man who counts for the Titans is as good in addition as he is in multiplication. In the three years that the Titans have played at the Polo Grounds, this was the first time that the estimated and announced attendance figures had been so close." On the other hand, the New York Post estimated the audience as about 3,000.

After a tentative first half, the Raiders led 7-3. Oakland took a 14-3 lead in the third quarter, but Dick Christy and Don Maynard scored touchdowns within 70 seconds to put the Titans ahead 17-14. On the first play of the fourth quarter, Cotton Davidson and Bo Roberson combined for a 72-yard touchdown pass to put the Raiders back ahead 21-17. Led by Johnny Green's passes, the Titans rebounded with two touchdowns and won the game 31-21. Bill Mathis had his first productive day of the season, rushing for 89 yards. Johnny Green completed 17 of 34 passes for 246 yards. Despite all the chaos, the Titans were 4-5 and rejuvenated, at least on first appearances.

Week 10 (November 5 - November 11)

There was no rejuvenation. On Monday, assistant AFL commissioner Milt Woodard told the press that some Titans paychecks for the San Diego game on October 28 had bounced. Woodard added that "we do understand that payment will be made." Woodard addressed the possibility of future reoccurrences: "I don't think the league will permit this for very long. We're morally obligated not to permit this to happen. We want the Titans to settle their own business. Yet we assure the commissioner will step in if it happens again."

On Wednesday, the public relations agency representing the Titans quit for lack of payment. On Thursday, the New York Times reported that the Titans players were upbeat for Sunday's game against Dallas at the Polo Grounds. Part of their workout on Wednesday was viewed by a touring Soviet basketball team. The Times noted that Harry Wismer was unavailable for comment on his continuing financial woes. The Times stated, however, that Wismer was trying to keep 51% of the team's stock and, thus, remain in control. No one had yet made him an acceptable offer for the 29% he wanted to sell.

On Friday, Milt Woodard made another announcement on behalf of the AFL. He said that the league had loaned the Titans enough money to meet the payroll through Sunday's game with Dallas. The loan was for about \$40,000. The league expected that Wismer would sell the team within a week, and that the league would then be repaid the \$40,000 by the Titans. Woodard stated that about half the checks for the October 28 game and half the checks for the November 4 game had not been cashed. The New York Times quoted Bulldog Turner as saying that the financial uncertainty had had a "bad effect on the club, and we had very spotty practices all week."

Sunday's game featured nonstop offense and nonexistent defense. The Texans were on their way to the championship of the Western Division behind quarterback Len Dawson and halfback Abner Haynes. The crowd was officially announced as 13,275, and the papers didn't bother to print realistic unofficial estimates. At the end of the first quarter, Dallas led 21-14. The Texans led at halftime 28-20, after three quarters 38-28,

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and at the final gun 52-31. Harry Wismer hung out on the sidelines and laughed with photographers. The New York Herald Tribune stated that "rather weird officiating" had been displayed.

After the game, Harry Wismer and AFL Commissioner Joe Foss held a press conference in Bulldog Turner's office. Wismer again stated his intention to sell the team. He said that he had two prospective purchasers, one male and one female, both New Yorkers. He said that "I ran out of money." Foss said that he knew of four interested buyers and that he expected the team to be sold within a few days.

In the locker room, Bulldog Turner spoke to the press. He said: "It was impossible to get the players up this week. They formed in little bunches on the practice field and whispered. I knew they were not talking about plays. They were talking about things developing downtown."

The New York Times reported an interview with an unidentified "informed source" described as a "Titan spokesman." He stated that the team was "well over \$400,000" in debt. He said: "We still have bills outstanding for some of the football equipment that was purchased in 1960. We haven't paid our preseason training bill, either. We were at East Stroudsburg College for a little over six weeks, and they keep writing pleading letters for the money we owe for rooms, board, and laundry. It comes to about \$20,000." The spokesman stated that a sheriff had threatened to attach the proceeds of the Dallas game because of an unpaid debt, but that the team talked him out of it by saying that the franchise would be sold within a week.

For the players, there was at least one bright side to the financial mess. As they left the locker room, Milt Woodard handed each player a paycheck drawn on an AFL account at the First National Bank of Dallas.

Week 11 (November 12 - November 18)

The Titans had no game this week. They were scheduled for a bye and would return to action on Thanksgiving Day at Denver. The break in the schedule came at an opportune time. A sale of the team seemed to be imminent. More immediately, no paychecks would have to be issued this week.

On Monday, Commissioner Joe Foss attended the luncheon of the Football Writers of New York at Toots Shor's restaurant. He stated that he expected the Titans to remain in New York and to prosper once they moved into the new municipal stadium at Flushing Meadows. Foss said: "I'm not upset by the problem. Harry Wismer contributed lots of money and interest to the team. He's out of operating capital. Four groups have contacted me who are interested in owning the franchise. The controlling interest belongs to Wismer, and they will have to deal with him or his agent."

Foss further elaborated: "I understand from Wismer there are a couple of groups presently negotiating. It's not my concern who they are. The present ownership is okay if they refinance, but we'll carry on with the payroll until the deal is finalized. In the meantime, I'll stay in town. Three-fourths of the owners of the other teams must approve the sale. My office is a nonprofit organization, and it is the clubs in the league who have contributed to meeting the Titans payroll."

The week passed without a sale. Wismer said he was negotiating with buyers. He remained the majority shareholder in the corporation that owned the Titans' franchise. The AFL looked like it would have to continue meeting the Titans' payroll for a while longer.

Week 12 (November 19 - November 25)

With no sale consummated, the league paid the Titans' air fare to and from Denver for their Thanksgiving Day game. It also cut a new set of paychecks, funded by assessments on the television revenues of the other seven teams.

On Tuesday, Harry Wismer told reporters that he had received "a very good offer" from a group headed by Frank Leahy. A famous Notre Dame coach who had retired in 1954, Leahy would be general manager of the Titans if the sale went through. He would rename the team the Long Island Titans. Leahy's group was never again mentioned in the papers.

On Thanksgiving, the Broncos were favored by oddsmakers to beat the Titans at Bears Stadium. The Broncos, however, had lost three of their last four games, as opponents grew wise to their passing attack which had no meaningful running support. Before 15,776 spectators and a national ABC audience, the Titans sprinted out to a 17-0 lead. At halftime, the Titans led 24-13. The Broncos took heart in the third

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quarter when defensive tackle Bud McFadin rumbled 69 yards with a fumble for a touchdown, bringing Denver back to a 24-20 deficit. Midway through the fourth quarter, the Broncos led 45-32. With Denver's defense an easy nut to crack, the Titans scored twice on Johnny Green passes in the last four minutes to win the game 46-45. The Titans flew home on AFL-paid tickets with AFL paychecks.

Week 13 (November 26 - December 2)

Another week passed without a sale. The New York Times reported that Wismer wanted to sell most of his shares for \$1,750,000, but that he insisted on retaining a minority share in the team. The Times called Wismer's desire to stay "the chief stumbling block."

Commissioner Joe Foss had returned to New York to participate in sale negotiations. He told the press that four parties were seeking to buy the franchise. Foss said that "all of the interested parties are New Yorkers, and now it seems that two of them are a little more active in their interest than the others. You just can't set a date on when these things will be finished, but I think we'll have it worked out before too long now."

For the third straight game, the league would pay the Titan payroll. Foss emphasized that he was encouraging Wismer to sell the franchise. The Commissioner stated that he did not plan to forfeit the New York franchise back to the league. Article XX, Section I of the AFL by-laws required each franchise owner to keep his team in a solvent condition. Article XX, Section 14, authorized the Commissioner to forfeit the franchise of an owner if "it, he or they are guilty of any act or acts which are or may be detrimental to the American Football League or to the sport of professional football," with the ratification of three-fourths of the league's teams.

On the same day that Foss spoke to the press, the New York Times interviewed George Sauer, the general manager of the Titans. He said that "it seems that since all this trouble started, they've been playing better football. I think this club has championship potentialities. We've only had one meeting with them to explain the situation. We told them not to worry, that the league would pay their salaries if necessary, that all they had to do was concentrate on playing ball. And that's just what they've done." Sauer also took the opportunity to deny reports that the hot water and electricity had been turned off at the Polo Grounds.

This week's game was on Friday night in Boston. Kroll states that the charter bus to take the players from their hotel to Nickerson Field arrived in the afternoon and let the players on. The driver refused to drive, however, until he was paid in cash. George Sauer had to return to the hotel to come up with the money. Before the bus pulled away, Harry Wismer climbed aboard, pulling his embarrassed wife with him. He announced that it was her birthday and asked the team to win this game for her. Wismer and wife then exited the bus. Kroll said that "few of us ever saw him again."

On the field, the Titans were relaxed, loosened up by the ludicrous scene on the bus. The Patriots, on the other hand, were contending for first place. Before an audience of 20,015, the Titans played surprisingly strong defense and led 10-3 at halftime. The teams exchanged touchdowns in the third quarter to make the score 17-10. A touchdown by Boston quarterback Tom Yewcic tied the score 17-17. Late in the game, the Titans punted, and the Pats began on their own 15 yard line. Boston made one first down, then found themselves in a third and fourteen situation on their own 21 yard line. Yewcic shot a quick pass to wide receiver Jim Colclough, who cut up the middle and outran safetyman Perry Richards. The 79-yard touchdown play came with 80 seconds left in the game. The Titans didn't score, and the Pats won 24-17. Quarterback Johnny Green suffered an injury to his left knee in the contest.

On Saturday, the AFL conducted its college draft. The Titans chose All-American halfback Jerry Stovall from LSU as their first pick. He would sign with the NFL St. Louis Cardinals. The Titans chose 27 players in all. With their present finances, signing players was out of the question.

Week 14 (December 3 - December 9)

On Monday, Joe Foss denied that he had set a deadline for a sale. Bulldog Turner stated his impatience for a sale, saying that "if we could get the front office situation cleaned up, we could start signing some fine prospects."

The New York Times reported that the players were upbeat during the week, preparing to host the Buffalo Bills on Saturday. The Times quoted Art Powell, Bill Shockley, and Lee Grosscup as brushing off the financial problems as matters beyond their control. Injuries were still plaguing the team. Johnny Green hurt his left knee against Boston, then reinjured it getting out of bed during the week. The Titans reactivated

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Grosscup, whose own knee was not yet up to par. Bill Mathis also had a bad knee, and an accumulation of injuries sidelined defensive lineman Lavern Torczon. Many of the players qualified as walking wounded.

On Saturday, all these bad knees put the New York offense out of commission. After one quarter, the Titans and Bills were tied 3-3, on field goals by Cookie Gilchrist and Bill Shockley. The only score of the second quarter was another field goal by Gilchrist. The Bills broke the game open in the second half on 42-yard and 30-yard touchdown runs by Gilchrist, both on draw plays. The Bills won 20-3, with Gilchrist scoring all the Buffalo points. The Titans intercepted four Jack Kemp passes, but Johnny Green could not spark any New York offense.

The next morning, all New York City newspapers went out on an extended strike. They would never cover another Titans game.

Week 15 (December 10 - December 15)

Nothing remained but to play the final game. The Titans would host the Houston Oilers on Saturday at the Polo Grounds. The game was billed as the last contest of any kind at the Polo Grounds, because the Mets expected to move into Shea Stadium in the Spring. At gametime, the temperature was a chilly twenty degrees. In the Titans locker room, Bulldog Turner gave a pep talk which was more likely to deflate morale than inflate it. Kroll states that, as part of his speech, Turner said: "This is the final game of the season. There probably won't even be any New York Titans next year. So most of you are playing in your last pro game. Most of you aren't good enough to play anywhere else."

The Titans announced the attendance as 8,167, but 2,000 was a better estimate. The Houston Post described them as "shivering souls." The Oilers decided to handle the frozen turf by wearing sneakers, 28 years after the famous Giants-Bears championship game on the same field. Only George Blanda, Gene Babb, and Mike Dukes wore regular shoes on the Oilers. None of the Titans wore sneakers.

The Oilers drove deep into New York territory after taking the opening kickoff. Titans cornerback Wayne Fontes grabbed a Blanda pass at the 17 yard line and ran 83 yards for a touchdown. Four minutes into the game, the Titans led 7-0. Before the first quarter ended, however, the Oilers scored twice to go ahead 14-7. In the second quarter, Fontes intercepted another Blanda pass, setting up a Bill Shockley field goal. The Titans never pulled closer than 14-10. Lee Grosscup, Johnny Green, and Bob Scrabis all took a shot at quarterback for the Titans, bad knees and all. For the afternoon, the Titans went 6 of 31 in passing for 77 yards.

In the second half, the Titans mustered a total offense of 66 yards. George Blanda threw three touchdown passes, Billy Cannon ran 64 yards for a touchdown, and Charley Tolar went over the 1,000 yard mark for the season. With the temperature dropping, only a few hardy spectators were left in the Polo Grounds at the end of the 44-10 Oiler victory.

That was the end of the Titans. They finished the 1962 season with a 5-9 record, good for last place in the Eastern Division. In the West, the injury-decimated San Diego Chargers and the atrocious Oakland Raiders compiled worse records.

In the final statistics, Johnny Green placed fifth in the AFL passing rankings. Art Powell, Dick Christy, and Don Maynard all ranked in the top five in pass receptions. Dick Christy led the AFL in punt returns with a 16.7 average, and Lee Riley led the league with eleven interceptions. Dick Christy, Bob Mischak, and Larry Grantham played for the East in the AFL All-Star game on January 13 at San Diego. Grantham was named to the All-AFL team chosen by a poll of league players. By the start of the 1963 season, the Titans were out of business and existence.