

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 13, No. 6 (1991)

LARRY WILSON

A two-way star at Utah, Wilson was the St. Louis Cardinals' 7th round draft pick in 1960. The Buffalo Bills also drafted him but shied away from giving him a \$3,000 signing bonus. With the Cards, he quickly developed into one of the greatest free safeties in NFL history.

A cat-quick defender and exceptional team leader, the 6-0, 190-pound blond made the safety blitz famous. He had 52 career interceptions. In 1966, he had steals in seven straight games and went on to lead the league that year. Willing to play hurt, he once intercepted a pass with both his hands in casts.

Larry played 13 seasons with the Cardinals (1960-72) and was All-NFL six times. He played in eight Pro Bowls.

YALE LARY

The Detroit Lions made Lary their third round draft pick in 1952, and he went on to become a major contributor to three Lions championships: 1952, 1953 and 1957. During his 11-year career --1952-53, 1956-64, with time out for military service --he was a fixture at right safety, an integral part of the famous "Chris Crew." He was a sure tackler and fine pass defender.

Yale intercepted 50 passes in his career, but he was also an exceptional punter with a 44.3 lifetime average. He won the NFL punting title three times. The 5-11, 189-pound former Texas A & M star was deadly in returning punts too, bringing three of them back for touchdowns.

Lary played in nine Pro Bowls and was All-NFL four times.

RAY NITSCHKE

Along with Bill George, Joe Schmidt, and Sam Huff, Nitschke formed the first wave of great NFL middle linebackers. The 6-3, 235-pound University of Illinois star was the Green Bay Packers' third draft pick in 1958. He remained with the Packers throughout his 15-season NFL career, and when it came time to enshrine the members of Lombardi's five-time NFL champions in the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Ray was the first Packer defensive star chosen.

Tough, strong, fast, and an exceptional team leader, Ray was a savage defender on rushes and cat-quick on pass defense. He intercepted 25 passes during his career, not counting the one he ran back for a TD in the 1964 Pro Bowl. He was MVP in the 1962 NFL championship game win over the Giants.

Ray was named All-NFL three times, and in a 1969 poll he was picked as the NFL's all-time middle linebacker.

DICK BUTKUS

When the discussion comes around to great middle linebackers, Butkus gets more votes than anyone else. After two All-America years at the University of Illinois, he was chosen by the Chicago Bears on the first round of the 1965 draft. The Bears hit the jackpot; a second first round pick yielded Gale Sayers.

At 6-3 and 245 pounds, Butkus had size, strength, speed, quickness, and a tremendous instinct for the ball. Moreover, he was tremendously competitive which translated into making him the meanest man on the field. No one hit harder or more consistently. He was adept at forcing fumbles and equally skilled at collecting turnovers with 22 career

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interceptions and 25 opponents' fumbles recovered.

Dick was All-NFL in seven of his nine seasons and chosen to eight straight Pro Bowls. A serious knee injury ended his career. Since then he has often been seen in acting roles on TV, usually in a comedic vein --but he was no laughs when he played for the Bears.

JOHNNY UNITAS

Johnny U. is pro football's great Cinderella story. After his career at Louisville, he was drafted by the Steelers in 1955, but they cut him in training camp. In 1956, he was playing semi-pro football for \$18 a game when the Baltimore Colts, desperate for a quarterback, called him. He went on to a legendary career. Many still rank him as the greatest quarterback of all time.

The 6-1, 195-pound signal caller led the Colts to NFL titles in 1958 and 1959 and went on to play through 1973, his final season being in San Diego. He completed 2,830 passes for 40,239 yards and 290 touchdowns. His most famous record: TD passes in 47 straight games. Yet as great as his passing was, his greatest attribute was his coolness under pressure.

All-NFL five times, he was Player of the Year three times and MVP in three of his ten Pro Bowls.

DAVID (DEACON) JONES

Jones invented the term "sack" and, for 14 seasons, he was one of the maneuvers' leading practitioners. Fast, tough and mobile, the Deacon could stop the run as well as anyone, but he really shown on pass rushes. An obscure, 14th-round draft pick by the Rams in 1961 after attending both South Carolina State and Mississippi Vocational, he quickly established himself as the bane of quarterbacks with his clean but hard-hitting style. He was one-fourth of the Rams' famous "Fearsome Foursome" defensive line.

After eleven seasons in Los Angeles (1961-71), the 6-4, 272-pound defensive end played two years with San Diego and a final season (1974) with the Washington Redskins' "Over-the-Hill Gang."

He was unanimous All-NFL for six straight years, 1965-70, and played in eight Pro Bowls. In both 1967 and 1968, he was NFL Defensive Player of the Year.

RON MIX

The Colts drafted Ron Mix number one in 1960, but he decided on an American Football League career instead. The former University of Southern California star chose to sign with the San Diego Chargers. He went on to become arguably the top AFL offensive lineman in the league's ten-year history. "The Intellectual Assassin," as he was called, played with the Chargers from 1960-69 and then came back in 1971 for a final season with the Raiders.

The 6-4, 255-pound lineman had excellent size, speed and strength, and played with both intensity and consistency. He was equally adept at blocking for running or passing plays. Amazingly, he had only two holding penalties called on him in ten years.

Ron was All-AFL tackle eight years and All-AFL guard once. He played in seven AFL All-Star games and five league championship games.

HERB ADDERLEY

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Adderley starred at Michigan State as an offensive halfback and it was in that capacity that the Green Bay Packers made him their first-round draft choice in 1961. However, late in his rookie year he was switched to cornerback, and the rest, as they say, is history. He went on to become one of the top defensive stars of his era.

He played nine seasons with the Packers (1961-69) and then finished up with the Dallas Cowboys (1970-72). The 6-1, 200-pound defender hit with power and covered receivers with speed and daring. In his career, he intercepted 48 enemy passes for 1,046 yards and seven touchdowns. In Super Bowl II, he returned an interception 60 yards for a touchdown. A top kickoff returner, he brought back 120 for 3,080 yards and two TDs.

All-NFL five times, he played in five Pro Bowls, five NFL and two NFC title games, and four Super Bowls.