BLACK HATS IN A GOLDEN AGE

By Bob Barnett & Bob Carroll

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Bobby Layne was a gutsy quarterback who led by macho example. "When Bobby said 'Drink,' we drank," explained one teammate, "and when Bobby said, `Block,' we blocked!" And when Layne had an offense in high gear, it was a work of art. He would probe, plunge, and sweep with his ground game until he had a rival defense just where he wanted it, then suddenly launch one of his fluttery but devilishly effective passes for the kill. Layne's fiery play led the Detroit Lions to three division titles and two NFL championships in the early 1950's. On the afternoon of December 16, 1956, at Wrigley Field, he was ready to capture yet another Western Division crown for Detroit.

The Lions' foes that day were the second-place Chicago Bears, a half-game behind and already demolished 42-10 two weeks earlier in Detroit by Layne and company. The Bears held an 3-0 lead early in the second quarter, but Lion fans weren't worried. It was an article of faith in Detroit that Bobby Layne never lost a game (although time sometimes ran out on him), and now he had three-fourths of the clock in which to accomplish victory.

Early in the second stanza, Detroit began to move the ball. Layne -- still building the scaffold -- took the snap from center, stepped back, and pitched the ball to a sweeping running back. Then he turned to watch the play unfold.

Suddenly, time ran out for Layne and the Lions.

Two-hundred and twenty pounds of Bear defensive end, all of it named Ed Meadows, blindsided Layne with enough force to level a small brick building. They carried Bobby off the field and into an ambulance, through for the day with a concussion. Sans-Layne, Detroit lost the game and the title to the Bears, 38-21.

The Lions screamed foul. Lion coach Buddy Parker asked bluntly, "Why didn't Meadows bring a blackjack?" but the officials hadn't seen a thing. Meadows pleaded a little blindness himself, insisting he never saw Layne get rid of the ball. If he didn't, said Bobby later, after the cobwebs cleared, he was "the only guy in the whole stadium who didn't know."

Many of the "guys" in the stadium had actually come to Wrigley Field that day in expectation of seeing just the sort of lethal smash Meadows delivered.

When pro football first achieved status as a major sport in the 1950s, the "enforcers" -- or Black Hats -- were among the most celebrated and certainly the most controversial players in the National Football League. "The Golden Age," as author Mickey Herkowitz dubbed the decade, was plagued (or blessed) by exceptionally violent play that, given the infancy of the game and the league, was still technically legal.

One man's assassin was another man's rough -- but perfectly legal -- teammate, as partisanship dictated the definitions of "tough," "mean," and "dirty" play. As a rule of thumb (a digit often aimed at an opponent's eye), a "tough" player used his forearms, elbows, and knees to torment a foe until the whistle blew. A "mean" player used anything available -- spikes, teeth, nails -- to ravage a rival and didn't always hear the whistle. A "dirty" player did all of the above -- and played for the other team.

Ed Meadows was but one of the NFL's "enforcers," a leg-breaker whose job seemed to be to render various members of the opposition *hors de combat.* Picturesquely nicknamed "Country," Meadows parlayed a moderate amount of talent and a major willingness to bend the rules into a six-year NFL career (1954-1959). He moved around quite a bit, making stops in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Washington, as well as Chicago. Somebody was always willing to hire him to wreak a little havoc on the

opposition. Word around the league was that his failure to find a permanent home stemmed from a peculiar streak of nastiness which caused him often to try to injure his own teammates in practice.

Intent counted. San Francisco 49er linebacker Hardy Brown was banned from scrimmages with his teammates because he tended to put them on the injured list. He didn't try to; he just did.

Ed Sprinkle was the most celebrated of the Black-Hat Brigade. During a 1950 game, he broke teammate Clyde "Bulldog" Turner's nose. All Turner had done for Sprinkle was get him his job with the Bears and then threaten to quit the team when the coaches were about to send the raw rookie home. As Turner was perpetual All-League center in those days, the coaches reconsidered and eventually Sprinkle's talent for mayhem paid off in a few All- League selections of his own. Still, if Sprinkle owed his career to anyone it was Turner, and busting his benefactor's beak came awfully close to the old saw about biting-the-hand.

But both Turner and Sprinkle were quick to point out that Ed didn't MEAN to do it. He didn't even KNOW he did it. It was just that in the flurry of forearms and elbows that was Sprinkle's forte, Turner's nose happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. That made it all right of course.

According to his teammates, Ed Sprinkle was a prince of a fellow. Tackle George Connor called him "about the quietest guy on the team." Coach George Halas termed him "a fine, clean-cut young man." Bulldog Turner said he was "as fine a gentleman as you could meet." On closer questioning, his fellow Bears admitted they didn't particularly enjoy playing pick-up basketball with Sprinkle because when he went for the basket, it was worth your life. But that, they agreed, was just Ed.

YOUR Man Plays Dirty!

The hottest accusations of dirty play came right after games, when the heat of battle melted the pros' reserve of caution.

Buddy Parker lost his cool over Sprinkle right after a game in 1949 when Parker was coaching the then-Chicago Cardinals. In the course of a 17-7 Bear victory, Ed left five very visible cleat marks on the chest of Cardinal halfback Elmer Angsman. Additionally, two other members of the Cardinals' starting backfield suffered disabling injuries. Parker blamed the Bears' defensive end. "Sprinkle is the dirtiest football player in America," he said, leaving diplomacy in the dust. "Commissioner Bert Bell ought to kick him out of football. He's a disgrace to the game."

Parker eventually apologized to Bell for usurping the commissioner's prerogatives, but he let his tribute to Sprinkle stand. Only two weeks later, Philadelphia Eagles' coach Earle "Greasy" Neale took umbrage at Sprinkle's play.

Neale's Eagles were cruising undefeated to their second NFL Championship. Although running back Steve Van Buren, passer Tommy Thompson, and receiver Pete Pihos got most of the headlines, the real key to the Eagles' success was Neale's intricate revolving defense. The irreplaceable man in Greasy's scheme was linebacker Joe Muha, the one player who made the defense work.

October 17, 1949. The Eagles played the Bears at Wrigley Field in a contest necessary to Chicagos' pretensions to the NFL's Western Division title. Sprinkle specialized in defense, but as luck would have it, he lined up at offensive end at the opening of this affair. By the strangest of coincidences, on the first play of the game, Gentleman Ed just happened to meet the irreplaceable Muha, in a brief encounter that put the Philley linebacker on the sideline for the remainder of the game. With the Philadelphia defense in disarray, Chicago romped to a 38-21 victory (ironically, the same score that gave them the '56 title in the "Meadows-Layne" fracas), the only loss for the Eagles all season.

Innocent Ed later explained how it happened: "I had a good blocking angle on him. He was slanting toward me but he was watching our ball carrier. I was running about twice as fast as he was when we hit and my helmet caught him in the stomach. It knocked the wind out of him and bruised his ribs a little, but the block was <u>perfectly</u> legal. I just had the jump on him, that's all."

But Coach Neale didn't see it that way. "Action should be taken against Sprinkle for his illegal use of the arms. Not only in our game Sunday but also in other games." Ominously, he added, "Unless something is done about it, we'll take matters into our own hands."

Commissioner Bell replied: "The league will take care of Sprinkle or any other player it deems necessary. But nothing has come to my office to indicate Sprinkle used his arms illegally." He invited Neale to lodge a formal protest, but Greasy thought better of it. After all, he had a few charmers on his own squad whose methods would not bear too close a scrutiny.

Killer with a Grin

Frank "Bucko" Kilroy, a large Eagles' lineman, was once described in a Chicago newspaper as "a knuckle-duster in knee pants who gives our fellows that boyish grin while knocking their teeth loose in a pileup." More than one foe alliterated his nickname to "Killer" Kilroy -- apparently with good reason. Nonetheless, Bucko was tossed out of only two games in his 13-year career, a tribute either to the subtle ways he handled his mayhem or to an unusually high number of nearsighted officials employed by the NFL.

On the second expulsion (for doing something despicable with his forearm to an opponent's head), Bucko was fined $250 by Commissioner Bell, who may have arrived at that figure by reading Kilroy's listed weight in a program -- the going rate was $50 per banishment.

Now, $250 might pay for a modern day player's breakfast, but in Kilroy's day it represented a fair-size chunk of change. In his best season, the Eagles deigned to pay him $8,000 and this was several years before that. But, if Bucko was chastened by the fine, his wife was livid. Bell kept the league office in Philadelphia, and a short time later he ran into the angry Mrs. Kilroy.

"You didn't fine my husband," she snapped, "you just cost me a new spring coat."

Bell was a fair man. "I'll tell you what I'll do. You go home and tell Bucko that if he behaves himself and doesn't get tossed out of any more games this season, why, I'll rescind the fine."

According to Kilroy, he was a model of deportment for the rest of the schedule. After the final game, Bell gave him a check and made him endorse it over to Mrs. Kilroy.

Bucko laughs about it today: "The joke of the thing was that he gave her back $500. So she called Bell and said, `Bert, you made a mistake.' And he said, `Boy, am I lucky! If Bucko had gotten his hands on it, I would have never seen that other $250.'"

A Headhunter's Dream

Bucko came into pro football in the 1940s, earning his pay by both blocking and tackling, but by the 1950s he played mostly on defense.

The two-platoon system which became universal in pro ball at the top of the decade was a head-hunter's dream and contributed mightily to the violence level of "Golden Age." An offensive player had a specific assignment on every play. If he failed to execute it, a teammate paid for his absence. In the relatively unsophisticated defenses of the 1950's, defenders also had assignments, but there was more room for freebooting. An enterprising defender could find countless opportunities for improvisation. Best of all, he didn't have to risk retribution by going on offense himself.

Defenders had more to work with from the start. Few rules limited their use of hands, arms, or elbows. Such greetings as the head-slap were yet to be outlawed. The combination of an unhampered defense against a "programmed" offense was all a true tough guy needed.

Not coincidentally, Sprinkle, Meadows, and most of the other Black Hats played on the defense.

Ex-Marine Ernie Stautner gained Hall-of-Fame status on Pittsburgh's defensive line. "Stautner would blast you with a shoulder," according to Lin Houston, a Cleveland Brown offensive guard who faced Ernie often. "You might think you got him, but the next play he would come back and hit you harder. At the end of the game, he was playing just as hard as he did at the start of the game."

Stautner adds, "I wasn't much for moving around a guy, I wanted to go straight through. I had a theory that if I kept this up for three quarters, the guy would belong to me in the fourth quarter. A lot of games are won in the fourth quarter."

Despite Stautner's best efforts, Pittsburgh didn't win many games in the 1950's, fourth quarter or otherwise. They were known around the league as a tough bunch, more likely to put opponents into the hospital than into the loss column, but on one happy occasion they did both, burying the Giants 62-7. When New York ran out of healthy quarterbacks, Stautner promptly broke the emergency signal-caller's nose. The Mayday quarterback was future Dallas Cowboy leader Tom Landry, for whom Stautner worked as an assistant coach from 1966 until Toms final season in 1988.

Although most of the renowned members of the Black-Hat Brigade played on defense, the blockers were not all sitting ducks. Lou Creekmur, a 260-pound All-Pro offensive tackle with the Lions during the glory days of Bobby Layne, had a way of letting a defender seem to slip past him and then whipping his legs around into the guy's shins so that for days afterward the poor fellow found walking a supreme test of manhood.

It was Creekmur, incidentally, who gained a small measure of revenge against Country Meadows after he blitzed Bobby Layne. When the game went on sans-Layne and it was clear that the officials weren't going to do anything untoward to Meadows, Creekmur made the Bear end his personal target, systematically working him over. As Creekmur recalls, he broke Meadows' nose and jaw before Country attempted to retaliate in such an open and obvious manner that even the myopic referee had to kick him out of the game for fighting.

The Other Side of the Pass

The 1950's saw plenty of "getting even" and a surprising amount of "just plain orneriness," but those things had always been around. The platoon system lent freedom to the festivities, but another ingredient reached its peak during that era and was perhaps the most important contributor to an increase in questionable tactics. In the 1950's, the forward pass -- originally legalized to make football less brutal -- was adopted by the pros as their Ultimate Weapon. And that spawned a whole new series of brutalities.

Passers had been around since 1906, but in earlier eras good ones were about as common as tutus in the locker room. When an accurate tosser happened along, he was put at tailback in the single wing formation, and that meant he had to run, kick, play defense, and get his uniform muddy right along with the rest of the guys.

Then, around 1940, George Halas, Clark Shaughnessy, and a few other coaches took the ancient T-formation out of mothballs, dusted it off, added some new blocking techniques, and revolutionized football. By the 1950's, the T-quarterback had become the glamour player of pro football. He was a specialist in a spotless uniform whose unerring arm was more important to victory than the time-honored virtues of brawn and guts.

Defenses moved from a passive way of thinking -- stop the opponents -- to an aggressive posture -- stomp the opponents!

By 1952, every National Football League team lined up in the T- formation. And, as Halas explained, "every team in the league has a passer who can beat you if you give him time to throw. The only way to stop them -- guys like [Otto] Graham or [Bob] Waterfield or [Norm] Van Brocklin -- is to rush them, to knock them down before they throw."

All eleven men on the defensive platoon geared their game to "getting" the passer, or, when necessary, getting the guys who kept them from getting the passer. Pass rushers such as Sprinkle became the stars of their side of the line of scrimmage.

"To stop those passes," Halas explained, "Sprinkle has to fight and claw past the blockers. He has to go in high with his arms up to slap at the ball or make a shoulder tackle. And he has to do all this before the receivers have a chance to break into the open -- maybe four or five seconds at the most."

Once a pass was launched, all was not lost. Some of the most feared Black-Hatters were relatively little men in the secondary. Dick "Night Train" Lane was adept at a tactic called "clotheslining." This consisted of extending one's arm stiffly and just about neck-high directly in front of a speeding receiver. Invariably, when the receiver reached the arm, his feet kept running but his neck and head stopped cold. This tended to set pass receivers to considering other vocations and was finally outlawed by the league. Nevertheless, Lane and others continued to find ways to keep receivers' minds on things other than spiraling passes.

Jim David, a mere 185-pounds of defensive back, was particularly adept at tackling a receiver at the same moment the ball reached his hands. It was noted that when a softly-thrown football, inflated to about twelve pounds, arrived in front and a nail- hard, 185-pound Jim David arrived in back at the same moment, the football seldom got the receiver's full attention. In the 1950's, the big hit by the little man became de rigueur in every secondary.

Hardy Brown: Specialist

When it came to big hits, 49er linebacker Hardy Brown was the absolute master. Before a game in 1950, quarterback Y.A. Tittle, then pitching for the Baltimore Colts, was approached by a teammate, running back Rip Collins. "Whatever you do," said Collins, "don't throw the ball to me in Brown's territory." Tittle in his first NFL year had never heard of Brown and decided that Collins must be joking. Sure enough, in the course of the game, Y.A. tossed one to Collins while Rip was in the vicinity of Hardy Brown. The next time Tittle had occasion to speak to Collins was when he visited him in the hospital.

The next year, Tittle was shipped to San Francisco and spent six seasons as Brown's teammate where he could observe the linebacker's technique from the safety of the sideline. So taken was Tittle that in his memoirs, I Pass, he devoted a whole chapter to Brown.

Hardy had only fair speed and wasn't much for covering on passes. At 190 pounds, he couldn't plug holes in the line like the league's more muscular linebackers. In fact, Brown had only one really marketable skill -- he knocked people cold.

By Tittle's count, Hardy kayoed 21 opponents in 1951. As the teams played only twelve regular season games at that time, that's moving up on two a game. Of course, some days he might be feeling charitable and bag only a halfback, but when he was really on a roll he could get his full limit. One day, he knocked out the entire Washington Redskin starting backfield. They were all carried off on stretchers.

Brown's *modus operandi* in accomplishing his sandman act was devilishly simple and, to coin a phrase, perfectly legal. As the poor ball carrier would approach, Hardy would crouch low. Then, with exquisite timing, he'd launch himself forward and upward. He never wrapped his arms around his man to make a tackle; the shoulder did all the work. Bam! Without fail, the runner was propelled suddenly backward and off his feet, and when Brown's aim was really true his shoulder met not a chest but a chin. In which case, it was time to call for the stretchers.

"He'd always try to tackle high," Lou Groza, the Cleveland Browns' Hall-of-Famer, remembered. "What made it worse was the fact that there were no face masks then. When he had the chance to blind side you, he'd do it with relish."

Another ex-Brown added sourly: "He'd wait until somebody stopped a guy and then finish him off with the shoulder."

Speculation held that Brown's meanness stemmed from his boyhood as an orphan who never knew his parents. Others suggested it came from his experiences as a Marine paratrooper during World War II. Whatever, the source, he became a legend around the NFL. His lethal shoulder pads were regularly examined for foreign objects, like a rumored sheet of steel. They never found metal, but some said there were notches.

A whole coterie of sadists supposedly came to 49er games just to watch Brown do his thing. One day, he broke Giant halfback Joe Scott's jaw and the whole Giant squad went for him. Reports vary. Some hold that Hardy retreated immediately. Others swear he left three more Giants in his wake.

The Rams were said to have put together a pool to "get" Hardy. After the game they had to give everone his money back. The only time Brown was ever hurt, according to Tittle, was when he slammed into a Detroit runner so hard the guy bounced off the ground and caught Hardy under the chin with his cleats, requiring six stitches. "But he was back in action in a few minutes," Tittle insists.

After Brown left football in 1960, he dropped out of sight completely, only adding to his legend. "I wouldn't be surprised to hear he was murdered," says one former associate.

Carl Brettschneider, a tough linebacker himself with the Cardinals and Lions, added: "He used to have little tricks, like on a punt. When a team would line up to punt, usually an official would stand about five yards in front of the center. So Hardy would hide behind the official and when the center would snap the ball, the minute he'd raise his head up, Hardy would hit him right under the jaw with his shoulder."

"But," Brettschneider added whistfully, "the game's changed; it's not that bad any more."

Historically Violent

Professional football grew up with a merited reputation as a rougher version than the game played by collegians. Pro players were bigger, faster, and knew all the nasty angles. Moreover, for them victory meant bread on the table, not just a letter on a sweater.

In 1920, the NFL's first season, the Rock Island *Argus* headlined the story of their local professionals' meeting with the Staleys of Decatur: "Staleys Win World's Dirt Title." The article detailed how four Rock Islanders were knocked out of the game by Decatur's dirty tactics, including the case of one Hal Gunderson who was nearly killed when Staley center George "The Beast" Trafton "slid across his face."

Interestingly, Trafton's Staley coach was the same George Halas who later proffered paychecks to Ed Sprinkle and Country Meadows. Halas must have liked something in Trafton's style of play. He continued to employ him as a player for a dozen years and later hired him as an assistant to teach some of the niceties of the game to young Bears.

News stories of pro games in the twenties and thirties sometimes devote so much space to describing slugging and other illegal tactics that only a close reading will reveal who won the game.

Little Pay; Lots of Pain

As a matter of fact, in most cities it took a close reading of the sports page to find any story at all. Pro football was a second class sport through its early years. The pay was correspondingly second-rate.

The low pay pro footballers received even by the '50s made violence easier to justify. Only the biggest stars could afford to play football exclusively. For everyone else, pro football was a part-time job, a way of picking up extra money while they pursued "real" careers in the off-season. Under those circumstances, the thought that a man's football playing might be ended forever by a severe injury was not something likely to keep a dedicated head- hunter awake at night.

After all, it wasn't like you were depriving him of really important money. Football was seasonal work. "It carried you for six months," according to New York Giant linebacker Sam Huff. "If you tried to live on it all year, you had nothing left. The trick was to get a good job in the off-season."

Although the pay was low, it was a factor. Bobby Layne explained it this way: "Everybody was trying to make a living. We played to win because you lost your job if you didn't. Everybody had a fear of getting cut and going home. So everybody played extremely hard even in exhibition games.

"We had to play hard in exhibition games because in the early 1950s there wasn't TV. We had to get the fans excited enough to buy a ticket. In Detroit in '50 and '51 we really had to work to get the fans out."

TV Changes the Picture

But all that began to change during the 1950's. Television reared its lovely head and brought new money into the game. Salaries started to creep higher. In 1960, a rival to the NFL -- the American Football League -- began play largely on the promise of untold riches from TV, and the resulting bidding war sent pro football salaries skyrocketing to the point where a man and his family could live very well indeed on what he made for playing football. And, at that point, the thought of ending a player's career began to weigh heavily on the collective consciences of the Black-Hat Brigaders.

Television turned pro football into a major sport. Although the first pro game had been broadcast in 1938, it was in the 1950's that TV really discovered pro football. For the first time millions of Americans could sit safely in their living rooms and watch large men colliding with each other at full force. It was better than wrestling because the body slams were for real.

Pro football's vicarious violence struck a responsive chord. Perhaps we've always been violence-groupies. Perhaps it was doubly nice to sit snug in our favorite chairs while watching the spectacle. Perhaps a peacetime America embroiled in a frustrating Cold War just ached to see somebody knocked on his can. Whatever the appeal, television made stars of the Black-Hat Brigade.

Eventually, a CBS television special, "The Violent World of Sam Huff," went on in prime time! To anyone who tuned in as the cameras followed the Giants' linebacker through practice scrimmages and games, it wasn't the sights of crashing bodies that remained in the mind, it was the sounds. They'd wired mikes to Huff, and for the first time fans could hear the smash of leather on leather and on flesh, the grunts, the sharp intake of breath when a forearm found a belly. It was all "up close and personal" and horrifying -- and wonderful!

Quicker than you could say "Neilson," Sam Huff became the spokesman for the Black-Hatters, at least in the public's mind. He told Mickey Herskowitz: "From the minute practice starts in July, until the season ends, you make yourself mean. You get mad. You say, `To hell with them all. Look out for Ole Sam Huff. He's mean today.'"

People began to say all the same things about Huff that they'd said about Ed Sprinkle.

The Meanest Man

Sprinkle's antics won him attention just as pro football began moving into the national limelight. In 1950, *Collier's Magazine* christened him "The Meanest Man in Pro Football." Two years later, *Sport Magazine* insisted "Sprinkle Stops at Nothing." He was probably the game's first full-fledged anti-hero.

He always had an explanation. "When they said I stomped on Angsman deliberately, I couldn't even remember touching him at first. Then later I remembered that he tried to throw a block on me on an end run and that I had had to hurdle him. I may have stepped on him as I crossed over, but I certainly didn't do it deliberately."

Certainly not!

He could also explain, with disarming innocence, how he put 230- pound Los Angeles Ram fullback Dick Hoerner down for the count, or how it happened that Ram quarterback Bob Waterfield came out of a game with a broken jaw, or how, after he'd sidelined a pair of New York Giant backs in the 1946

Championship Game, he broke tailback Frank Filchock's nose on a pass play that ended in a crucial Bear interception. All of it, was perfectly legal.

Civilization and Lombardization

By 1960, five years after Sprinkle retired, pro football was changing. Some of the old "damn the torpedoes" attitude was slipping away. The Pro Bowl and the Players Association began bringing players from rival teams together. Artie Donovan, Baltimore's 280-pound defensive tackle, talks nostalgically of dealing a retaliatory kick to Lion Gil Mains: "I always thought he was a jerk." Then later, he met Mains and decided the Lion was really a nice guy. "He bought the beer and everything," Artie recalled. It's hard to kick a man who buys you beer.

In 1954, face masks became the law for all players entering the league. By 1962, Bobby Layne's final season, he was the last player whose features could be read from the grandstand or rearranged by a forearm.

New rules restricted the defenders' use of hands, and -- more important -- new officials were added to enforce the new rules. It got so any good roundhouse was liable to clip a back judge on its way to the target.

The money increased. And the investment. If you put someone out for good, you were taking a lot away from him. And from the team owners. And from the TV folks.

But, if any one man deserves responsibity for ending the Black-Hat Brigade, it's Vince Lombardi. Vince took over as Green Bay Packer coach in 1959 with a simple philosophy -- run the ball down their throats. In his scheme, the forward pass was reduced in importance and the ground game returned to preeminence. He practiced his men over and over until they could run their plays perfectly in their sleep. If a defense over-reacted, if one defender was out of place, Lombardi's backs were schooled to spot the opening and "run to daylight."

When Lombardi's methods brought success -- he won five championships in the '60s -- other coaches copied his ways. Against such offenses, defenses had to become more sophisticated, with each defender taking on a variety of situational assignments. The day of the roving Black Hat was over.

The Last Hurrah

The parting shot of the Golden Age came in November of 1960. Significantly, it was delivered by a throwback from an earlier era to a symbol of pro football's TV-dominated future.

Chuck Bednarik began backing the line for Philadelphia in 1949. A Pennsylvania Pole from steel-making country, his battle-scarred face looked like someone had used it to pound spikes. Chuck was as tough as a beanery steak, but, at age 35, he'd been relegated to offensive center, leaving the defense in younger hands. Then one of the regular Eagles' linebackers went out early in the '60 season, and Chuck moved in there too, going both ways, just like he'd done years ago.

Frank Gifford was a nifty, do-everything halfback for the New York Giants -- a tanned southern Californian, well-spoken, with movie-star looks, and a smile that could light up a cathode-ray tube. If television hadn't existed, they might have invented it just for him.

In November of 1960, the Eagles and Giants met in New York with the Eastern Division title on the line. By the time there were less than two minutes left to play, Philadelphia held a 17-10 lead but Gifford held the football on a pass from Giant quarterback Charlie Conerly. He headed upfield right toward Bednarik. As Chuck tells it: "He took his eye off me. He never made a bigger mistake. It wasn't dirty -- it was a clean shot. I caught him high in the chest with my shoulder and ran right through him. It snapped his head back like a boxer. He never saw me."

Gifford went five feet up in the air and came down like a rag doll. The ball skittered loose. When an Eagle recovered, assuring victory, Bednarik lept in glee. The Giant fans booed him mercilessly, interpreting his victory dance as delight at injuring Gifford.

Gifford was unconscious for 36 hours and out of football for a year. When he came back he was never quite the same. Some Giant fans swear to this day that Bednarik should have been arrested for assault, but Chuck says -- and the game films back him up -- it was all perfectly legal.

OUR ALL-RUGGED TEAM

A holy terror, this imaginary team could send their opponents' insurance rates out of sight. If anyone suggests we'd say anything but the nicest things about these fine gentlemen, we're leaving the country.

OFFENSE

OE - **Pete Pihos** (6'1"-211; Philadelphia 1947-55). An end with a lineman's personality. Ran hard after catching the ball, sometimes too hard, running INTO people instead of away from them.

OE - **Jim Doran** (6-2-201; Detroit 1951-59, Dallas, 1960-61). A clutch receiver. On the other hand, he was once named team's MVP as defensive end.

OT - **Bob St. Clair** (6'9"-263; San Francisco 1953-63). Huge and strong, a fine offensive tackle. But best known because he liked to eat raw meat.

OT - **Lou Creekmur** (6'4"-246; Detoit 1950-59). In '54 Detroit's middle-defensive guard Les Bingaman retired and Creekmur was moved in. Would really battle; if he lost his temper, he would use his fists. On offense, was named all-pro at both guard and tackle.

OG - **Abe Gibron** (5'11"-243; Buffalo [AAC] 1949, Cleveland 1950- 56, Philadelphia 1956-57, Bears 1958- 59). The Browns' home uniforms were white jerseys and white pants. Gibron looked like a snowball from the grandstand, but played like an avalanche.

OG - **Bucko Kilroy** (6'2-243; Philadelphia 1943-55). Better known on defense, but he often played here. Used forearms liberally, and occasionally kicked in retaliation.

OC - **Frank Gatski** (6'3"-233; Cleveland 1946-56, Detroit 1957). Protected Otto Graham, the league's #1 target. Went into football to avoid the West Virginia coal mines. That tells you a lot about the mines.

QB - **Bobby Layne** (6'1"-201; Bears 1948, New York Bulldogs 1949, Detroit 1950-58, Pittsburgh 1959-62). Who else? One thing not always remembered: Layne gained nearly 2,500 yards running!

RB - **Charlie Trippi** (6'-186; Chicago Cardinals 1947- 55). Once attacked Ed Sprinkle! A talented player who was at times his team's best runner, passer, receiver, kicker, and defender.

RB - **Marion Motley** (6'1"-232; Cleveland 1946-53, Pittsburgh 55). Played linebacker on goal-line defense. The man has the biggest hands I've ever seen. I shook hands with him once and he massaged my elbow!

RB - **John Henry Johnson** (6'2"-210; San Francisco 1954-56, Detroit 1957-59, Pittsburgh 1960-65, Houston 1966). Twice gained over 1,000 yards rushing after age 30. He was the best -- THE best -- blocking fullback in football with elbows like iron.

DEFENSE

DE - **Ed Sprinkle** (6'1"-206; Chicago Bears 1944-55). A pussycat -- if you like Tigers. Good with a forearm and a blindside hit. Always said one of the reasons he got a "bad rap" was that he was a lefthander playing right defensive end, putting his strongest arm on the inside.

DE - **Gino Marchetti** (6'4-244; Dallas 1952, Baltimore 1953-64, 1966). Voted the best defensive end of the NFL's first 50 years. Now serves a mean- tough hamburger.

DT - **Ernie Stautner** (6'1"-230; Pittsburgh 1950-63). The Giants could have had him but they felt he was too small.

DT - **Leo Nomellini** (6'3"-259; San Francisco 1950-63) Wrestled in off-season. Made all-pro on both offense and defense. Before a play he would contort his face, huff, snort, growl, and make other inhuman voices. If the guy on the other side of the line wasn't scared into the next county by the time the ball was snapped, Leo would flatten him.

MG - **Bill George** (6'2"-237; Bears Bears 1952-65, Los Angeles 1966). An undersized tackle until they moved him into the middle. Usually given credit as the first middle linebacker.

LB - **Hardy Brown** (6'-193; Brooklyn [AAC] 1948, Chicago [AAC] 1949, Baltimore 1950, Washington 1950, San Francisco 1951-56, Chicago Cardinals 1956, Denver 1960. One of the few men to play football in three different decades. Threw his shoulders. Dislocated whole faces. Pioneered use of helmet as a weapon.

LB - **Chuck Bednarik** (6'3"-233; Philadelphia 1949-62). Got less notice during the mid-50s than he did at the beginning and end of his career because his team wasn't winning.

CB -**Jim David** (5'-11"-178; Detroit 1952-59). Wasn't big but would sting you when you weren't looking. One team offered a $50 to anyone who could get him. His fellow defensive backs Jack Christiansen and Yale Lary were better known to the fans.

CB - **Dick "Night Train" Lane** (6'1"-194; Los Angeles 1952-53, Chicago Cardinals 1954-59, Detroit 1960-65). Played 14 years at the hardest defensive position. His nickname refers to the song he played constantly as a rookie.

DS - **Jack Butler** - (6'-195; Pittsburgh 1951-59). The best defensive player from the 1950s not yet in the Hall of Fame. Could have been a star as a receiver (and the Steelers needed him there too) but he was too valuable at safety.

DS - **Emlen Tunnell** - (6'1"-193; New York Giants 1948- 58, Green Bay 1959-61. Started as a free agent- walk on with the Giants and went on to the Hall of Fame. At one time he held the NFL career records for most interceptions and yards returning punts.