

Great Scott

Ray Scott and the NFL on CBS Were a Perfect Pairing in the '60s

By ED GRUVER

For many longtime fans, the return of the NFL on CBS this fall following a four-year absence not only meant the return of a network that had broadcast professional football through 38 seasons from 1956-93, but also the return of a flood of memories.

Throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties, the NFL on CBS was Pat Summerall, Tom Brookshier, and John Madden; Brent Musburger, Jimmy The Greek and Phyllis George.

It was Bart Starr breathing steam as he burrowed behind Jerry Kramer and Ken Bowman in the 1967 "Ice Bowl," and it was Joe Montana finding Dwight Clark in the back of the end zone for "The Catch" in the '81 NFC title game.

It was Jimmy Taylor running to daylight against the AFL in Super Bowl I, and it was Lynn Swann soaring to daylight over America's Team in Super Bowl X.

It was an emotional Kansas City Chiefs team wearing both their hearts and AFL patches on their sleeves in Super Bowl IV, and it was the Miami Dolphins' machine-like precision in Super Bowl VIII.

It was poet laureate Jack Whitaker waxing eloquent on CBS' post-game show -- *"The championship for Tittle was his white whale. He chased it for 15 years, and like Captain Ahab, he committed his body and soul to its capture"* -- and it was innovative director Tony Verna pioneering the use of slow-motion instant replays.

But for those who followed the NFL on CBS in the sixties and seventies and can hum the distinctive theme song in their sleep, the enduring memory from the coverage emanating from Rockefeller Center in New York can be summed up with one instantly identifiable phrase:

"Starr...Dowler...Touchdown!"

For many fans, those five words not only characterized the greatest dynasty in NFL history, but also the resonant, concise reporting of a man considered by many the greatest play-by-play announcer in NFL history, the late CBS sportscaster, Ray Scott.

Curt Smith, who authored the book *Of Mikes and Men*, wrote that Scott "spurned happy talk for spartan discourse, and used his cadillac of a voice to sell more fans on the NFL than any broadcaster who ever lived."

Scott passed away at age 78 in a Minneapolis hospital earlier this year following a lengthy illness. Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, Scott's passing came just 15 days following the untimely death of another legend from the Green Bay glory years, Hall of Fame middle linebacker Ray Nitschke, who died at the age of 61 from a heart attack.

Scott broadcast major league baseball, college football and basketball, and golf during his own Hall of Fame career. But it was as CBS' lead announcer for the NFL in the sixties that a generation of sports fans came to recognize him. Just as Curt Gowdy was the voice of the rival American Football League on NBC, Scott emerged as the voice of the NFL on CBS, a man whose lean prose allowed the television cameras to tell the story.

And in the sixties, being the broadcast voice of the NFL meant being the voice of Vince Lombardi's great Green Bay teams.

"'Starr...Dowler...Touchdown!' is the heart of journalistic brevity," said Lee Rempel, the Packers' Director of Public Relations and a former beat writer for the team in the sixties. "And Ray Scott delivered it in resonant, stentorian tones. He had a great voice, and that added to the impact of that famous call.

"John Facenda (of NFL Films) is often referred to as the 'voice of God.' But I think that if there was anyone else you would refer to as the 'voice of God,' it would have to be Ray Scott."

Blessed as he was with a baritone voice, Scott built his legend through long hours of hard work and preparation. "Ray was a consummate professional," said Rempel, "always extremely well-prepared, and he became the premier television commentator during that era. I think Pat Summerall is the only one close to Ray now, and Pat will tell you that he learned a lot from working with Ray."

Scott's close association with the Packers began in 1956. CBS at the time assigned broadcasters to teams on a regional basis, and Scott was aligned with a Packers' team that in the pre-Lombardi years was anything but glamorous. Ghastly was more like it, and the Packers bottomed out in 1958 by winning just one game.

"CBS was almost apologetic about giving me the Green Bay games," Scott said once. "But it certainly turned into a great break."

Lombardi arrived in Green Bay in '59 as head coach and general manager, and quickly turned a rag-tag team of losers into a romantic team of legend. The Packers played in the NFL championship game six times from 1960-67, and won five, including an unmatched three straight from 1965-67.

Their success put Green Bay on the map as "Titletown, U.S.A." and put the Packers on the CBS' nationally-televised game virtually every Sunday throughout the season. In time, viewers came to know Lombardi, Starr, Hornung, Nitschke, and Adderley, and they also came to know Scott. Throughout the sixties, Ray Scott meant Packer football, and by the time Green Bay stamped itself a sports dynasty by winning the historic first two Super Bowls against the AFL, Scott's booming, baritone voice became as much a trademark of the team as its signature play, the power sweep.

"Ray was closely associated with the Packers during that era," Rempel said, "and that enhanced his reputation. It was a marriage made in heaven: The great talent of Ray Scott and what we believe is the greatest team in NFL history."

"Deep down, Ray was a Packers' fan. He had a close personal and professional relationship with Vince Lombardi, but the great thing about Ray was that he never let his feelings show (during a broadcast)."

Scott did let his feelings show however, away from the broadcast booth. A native of Western Pennsylvania, Scott began his broadcasting career in Johnstown in 1937. Ten years later, he met Rempel for the first time, beginning what became a long friendship between two men whose paths crossed again in the fifties and sixties when they both began covering the Packers.

"I met Ray in Pittsburgh in 1947," remembered Rempel, "and I considered him a good friend. He took me and my friends in, and he was a gracious and warm host."

Neither man felt very warm 20 years later, on Dec. 31, 1967, when they arrived at frozen Lambeau Field to cover the epic "Ice Bowl" championship between the Packers and Dallas Cowboys. Scott described Green Bay's game-winning drive in minus-40 degree wind-chill temperatures as a "spine-tingling, mind-over-matter masterpiece."

Later, he called the Packers' classic march as the greatest triumph of will he had ever seen in athletics. "The temperature was minus-13, the wind-chill minus-40," he said. "Players' hands were like stone. But the Packers never made a mistake, never dropped a pass, never fumbled."

"Without question, Ray would say the 'Ice Bowl' was the greatest game he was ever associated with," said Rempel. "The weather -- it was the coldest air temperature game in NFL history -- the fantastic finish, and the fact the Packers went for (a game-winning touchdown rather than game-tying field goal) with 20 seconds left, all those elements made it memorable. "I'd say the 'Ice Bowl' was number one on his hit parade."

For a generation of fans who grew up in the sixties watching the NFL on CBS, Ray Scott remains the number one football announcer on their hit parade.