

ALL-PROS

FROM THE DETROIT NEWS, 1958-72

Part 1

By Bob Gill

Ever since 1982, when John Hogrogian discovered the Green Bay *Press-Gazette* all-pro selections from the 1920s, I've been fascinated by all-pro teams. My favorites, of course, are the major teams chosen by polling sportswriters, players, coaches, and so on. Since the 1950s, that means AP, UPI, NEA, the Pro Football Writers Association, *Pro Football Weekly*, *The Sporting News* and the New York *Daily News*; of these, the only ones still choosing teams today are AP, TSN and PFW (in conjunction with the PFWA).

Of all the other all-pro selectors from the past five decades, my favorite by far is the *Detroit News*, which chose teams from 1958-72. And since the *News* teams weren't included in the recent PFRA publication "All-Pros: The Modern Years," I thought it would be useful to examine the annual selections here. (The first two *News* teams, for 1958 and '59, did appear in the PFRA's first all-pro volume, but I'll include them for the sake of completeness.

Before we start, a little background information is in order.

First, as explained in the article accompanying the paper's first All-pro team, the sports department at the *News* chose its squad "in consultation with coaches and other sources." Occasionally the article accompanying the selections would explain an unusual choice by quoting an NFL coach, player or official, but the *News* sportswriters and editors actually picked the teams.

Second, although they're clearly the result of a serious selection process, the *News* teams reveal a definite Detroit bias, which is about the only thing that keeps the paper from qualifying as a major selector, in my estimation. The headline for the announcement of the team often says something like "4 Lions Named to All-Pro Team," and generally at least one of them failed to make any major all-pro team that year. To demonstrate, let's start at the beginning....

The *News*' first all-pro team set the pattern for those that followed: It included three Lions who failed to turn up on any all-pro first team selections that year. Terry Barr was a second-team pick by the New York *Daily News*, but Alex Karras and Darris McCord weren't mentioned at all by anyone else. Karras, though, was eventually recognized as an outstanding player, and his appearance on the team may have indicated prescience rather than prejudice on the part of the hometown paper. The same goes for the selection of Karras as rookie of the year; Bobby Mitchell and Jimmy Orr were named by the major selectors, but in retrospect the choice of Karras stands up pretty well.

The choice of Unitas as player of the year is interesting, since everybody else picked Jim Brown, but it's hard to argue with Johnny U. in any case.

1958 AII-NFL

Offense

E Raymond Berry, Bal
E Del Shofner, LA
T Jim Parker, Bal
T Bob St. Clair, SF
G Duane Putnam, LA
G Jim Ray Smith, Cle
C Ray Wietecha, NY
QB John Unitas, Bal
HB Jon Arnett, LA
HB Rick Casares, ChiB
FB Jim Brown, Cle

Defense

E Gino Marchetti, Bal
E Darris McCord, Det
T Gene Lipscomb, Bal
T Alex Karras, Det
LB Joe Schmidt, Det
LB Sam Huff, NY
LB Bill George, ChiB
HB Jack Butler, Pit
HB Terry Barr, Det
S Andy Nelson, Bal
S Jim Patton, NY

Player of the Year: John Unitas, Baltimore
Coach of the Year: Weeb Ewbank, Baltimore
Rookie of the Year: Alex Karras, Detroit

Three others on the *News* team failed to qualify as first-team All-pros anywhere else: Rick Casares was the most unusual, but he did make UPI's second team and was a reserve in the Pro Bowl. Bob St. Clair had a couple of second-team mentions and was a starter in the Pro Bowl, and the same goes for Jim Ray Smith, who went on to be a unanimous all-pro for the next three seasons. Casares, St. Clair and Smith replaced three players who were otherwise unanimous all-pros: the Colts' Lenny Moore, the Giants' Roosevelt Brown and the Redskins' Dick Stanfel.

The article announcing the *News* selections cautioned that "An honest effort was made to weed out 'hollow-shell' choices, meaning name players who didn't have particularly good years." One such "hollow shell" was apparently Yale Lary, the Lions' perennial all-pro defensive back who made every major team in 1958, but not this one. In fact, although Lary turned up on all-pro teams with some regularity through 1962, he never appeared on the *News* team. So there was at least one Lion who didn't benefit from a hometown advantage.

1959 AII-NFL

Offense

E Raymond Berry, Bal
E Del Shofner, LA
T Jim Parker, Bal
T Bob St. Clair, SF
G Jim Ray Smith, Cle
G Art Spinney, Bal
C Ray Wietecha, NY
QB John Unitas, Bal
HB Frank Gifford, NY
HB J.D. Smith, SF
FB Jim Brown, Cle

Defense

E Andy Robustelli, NY
E Henry Jordan, GB
T Leo Nomellini, SF
T Gene Lipscomb, Bal
LB Joe Schmidt, Det
LB Sam Huff, NY
LB Bill George, ChiB
HB Dean Derby, Pit
HB Dave Baker, SF
S Andy Nelson, Bal
S Jim Patton, NY

Player of the Year: John Unitas, Baltimore
Coach of the Year: Red Hickey, San Francisco
Rookie of the Year: Nick Pietrosante, Detroit

Three players on this year's team didn't show up on any major all-pro teams: Bob St. Clair (again), Henry Jordan and Dave Baker. St. Clair, of course, was bound for the Hall of Fame, but all the other selectors

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must have excluded him under the "hollow shell" clause in 1959. Baker is a quirky selection, considering he never made a major all-pro first team in his career. The fact that all three of these players come from Western Division teams points up another possible bias in the *News* selections, which isn't surprising, since the staff saw teams from their own division more often, and could talk at greater length with coaches and players from those teams.

Henry Jordan's appearance on the *News* team this year -- beating out Gino Marchetti, otherwise a unanimous choice -- is interesting, since he became a regular all-pro selection a year later. The PFRA publication "All-Pros: The First 40 Years" cites this as the paper's "finest moment," incidentally.

The other idiosyncratic choice for 1959 was Red Hickey as coach of the year. In his first year as the 49ers' head man, he inherited a 6-6 team and guided it to a 7-5 record. Vince Lombardi, everyone else's choice as the season's top coach, posted an identical 7-5 record with a Packer team that had gone 1-10-1 in 1958. The *News* gave Hickey "the edge for keeping his 49ers in championship contention throughout the season." Basically, that means the 49ers started out 6-1 before dropping four of their last five games - - not usually a path that leads to an award for the coach.

1960 All-NFL

Offense		Defense	
E	Raymond Berry, Bal	E	Doug Atkins, Chi
E	Sonny Randle, StL	E	Gino Marchetti, Bal
T	Jim Parker, Bal	T	Alex Karras, Det
T	Forrest Gregg, GB	T	Henry Jordan, GB
G	Jerry Kramer, GB	LB	Bill George, Chi
G	Jim Ray Smith, Cle	LB	Joe Schmidt, Det
C	Chuck Bednarik, Phi	LB	Walt Michaels, Cle
QB	Norm Van Brocklin, Phi	HB	Night Train Lane, Det
HB	Lenny Moore, Bal	HB	Tom Brookshier, Phi
HB	Paul Hornung, GB	S	Dave Baker, SF
FB	Jim Brown, Cle	S	Jim Patton, NY

Player of the Year: Norm Van Brocklin, Philadelphia

Coach of the Year: Buck Shaw, Philadelphia

Rookie of the Year: Gail Cogdill, Detroit

Only two players on the *News* team for 1960 failed to show up on any of the major selectors' first teams: Walt Michaels and Dave Baker (again). Michaels received just a single second-team mention, but Baker was a consensus second-team choice -- the Cardinals' Jerry Norton was everyone else's first-teamer at safety.

Another unusual choice was Chuck Bednarik at center, where the Packers' Jim Ringo was an otherwise-unanimous pick. Bednarik did show up on three major all-pro teams, but at linebacker.

For the second year in a row, the *News* didn't include any questionable selections from the hometown Lions, although some might question the fact that Detroit players had been named rookie of the year three times in a row. But Karras was probably a justifiable choice, as I mentioned earlier, and Pietrosante and Cogdill were consensus picks as the top rookies.

1961: The token Lion on this year's team is Harley Sewell, who received no other all-pro mention at all in 1961. Though he was an occasional second-team selection over an eleven-year career, he never appeared on an all-pro first team -- except this one. On all the other all-pro teams, the Browns' Jim Ray Smith was the second guard.

1961 AII-NFL

Offense		Defense	
SE	Del Shofner, NY	E	Doug Atkins, Chi
TE	Mike Ditka, Chi	E	Jim Katcavage, NY
T	Jim Parker, Bal	T	Alex Karras, Det
T	Mike McCormack, Cle	T	Gene Lipscomb, Pit
G	Harley Sewell, Det	LB	Joe Schmidt, Det
G	Fuzzy Thurston, GB	LB	Cliff Livingston, NY
C	Chuck Bednarik, Phi	LB	Bill Forester, GB
QB	Sonny Jurgensen, Phi	HB	Night Train Lane, Det
HB	Lenny Moore, Bal	HB	Jess Whittenton, GB
HB	Paul Hornung, GB	S	Jim Patton, NY
FB	Jim Brown, Cle	S	Don Burroughs, Phi

Player of the Year: Del Shofner, New York
Coach of the Year: Vince Lombardi, Green Bay
Rookie of the Year: Mike Ditka, Chicago

Four others on the 1961 team earned only second-team status elsewhere: Mike McCormack, Chuck Bednarik, Cliff Livingston and Don Burroughs.

The most interesting choice this time is Del Shofner as player of the year. The major selectors were split between Paul Hornung and Y.A. Tittle -- Hornung because he led the league in scoring for the third year in a row, Tittle because he led the Giants into the championship game in his first year in New York. But it was also Shofner's first year in New York, and it's certainly possible that the unanimous all-pro was as much responsible for the Giants' resurgence as Tittle was.

1962 AII-NFL

Offense		Defense	
SE	Gail Cogdill, Det	E	Gino Marchetti, Bal
TE	Mike Ditka, Chi	E	Andy Robustelli, NY
T	Jack Stroud, NY	T	Alex Karras, Det
T	Forrest Gregg, GB	T	Roger Brown, Det
G	Jim Parker, Bal	LB	Galen Fiss, Cle
G	John Gordy, Det	LB	Joe Schmidt, Det
C	Jim Ringo, GB	LB	Bill Forester, GB
QB	Y.A. Tittle, NY	HB	Night Train Lane, Det
HB	Dick Bass, LA	HB	Jimmy Hill, StL
FB	Jim Taylor, GB	S	Willie Wood, GB
FL	Bobby Mitchell, Was	S	Jim Patton, NY

Player of the Year: Y.A. Tittle, New York
Coach of the Year: George Wilson, Detroit
Rookie of the Year: Ronnie Bull, Chicago

Quite a few players from this year's team earned only second-team mention from the major selectors: Gail Cogdill, Jack Stroud, Andy Robustelli, Galen Fiss, Jimmy Hill and Willie Wood. There's nothing particularly remarkable in that, except that the *News* chose Wood over the Lions' own Yale Lary, a consensus choice at safety, and Fiss over the Packers' Dan Currie, a unanimous choice of the major all-pro teams. Also of note: Cogdill's selection makes this the only all-pro team from 1958, '59, '61, '62 or '63 that doesn't include Del Shofner.

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Once again, the team includes a Detroit player who received no mention on any other all-pro teams: guard John Gordy, who beat out Jerry Kramer, an otherwise-unanimous selection. In all fairness, though, I should add that Gordy turned up on several all-pro teams over the next five years.

Also of note is the hometown selection of George Wilson as coach of the year, when everyone else picked the Giants' Allie Sherman. The Lions had improved from 8-5-1 to 11-3, though, so it's not exactly an indefensible choice.

The *News* gave several players their only first-team all-pro recognition this year: among them, Charley Bradshaw, Bob DeMarco and Terry Barr on offense, and Willie Davis, Galen Fiss and Jim Patton on defense. Fiss didn't get any other all-pro mentions, though he did play in the Pro Bowl. Patton had been a consensus all-pro for the previous five seasons, but got only a single second-team mention in 1964, aside from the *News*.

1963 AII-NFL

Offense	Defense
SE Del Shofner, NY	E Doug Atkins, Chi
TE Mike Ditka, Chi	E Willie Davis, GB
T Forrest Gregg, GB	T Henry Jordan, GB
T Charley Bradshaw, Pit	T Merlin Olsen, LA
G Jim Parker, Bal	LB Joe Fortunato, Chi
G Ken Gray, StL	LB Joe Schmidt, Det
C Bob DeMarco, StL	LB Galen Fiss, Cle
QB Y.A. Tittle, NY	HB Night Train Lane, Det
HB Tommy Mason, Min	HB Dick Lynch, NY
FB Jim Brown, Cle	S Richie Petitbon, Chi
FL Terry Barr, Det	S Jim Patton, NY

Player of the Year: Y.A. Tittle, New York
Coach of the Year: George Halas, Chicago
Rookie of the Year: Paul Flatley, Minnesota

Perhaps the most notable pick on this team is Merlin Olsen. All the other selectors put him on the second team, so this was the first time he showed up as a first-team all-pro, though far from the last. In doing so he edged out Detroit's own Roger Brown, who was otherwise a unanimous first-team choice.

Jim Ringo, chosen on every major team, and Roosevelt Brown, chosen on all but one, deserve special mention. This was the third time Ringo had been shut out by the *News* despite being a consensus all-pro, and the fourth time Brown had been snubbed.

1964 AII-NFL

Offense	Defense
SE Paul Warfield, Cle	E Deacon Jones, LA
TE Mike Ditka, Chi	E Gino Marchetti, Bal
T Forrest Gregg, GB	T Henry Jordan, GB
T Dick Schafrath, Cle	T Roger Brown, Det
G Jim Parker, Bal	LB Wayne Walker, Det
G John Gordy, Det	LB Rip Hawkins, Min
C Bob DeMarco, StL	LB Joe Fortunato, Chi
QB John Unitas, Bal	HB Pat Fischer, StL
HB Lenny Moore, Bal	HB Herb Adderley, GB
FB Jim Brown, Cle	S Paul Krause, Was
FL Johnny Morris, Chi	S Willie Wood, GB

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Player of the Year: John Unitas, Baltimore
Coach of the Year: Don Shula, Baltimore
Rookie of the Year: Charley Taylor, Washington

Like his teammate Merlin Olsen a year earlier, Deacon Jones made his debut as a first-team all-pro in the *News*, taking the spot given to the Packers' Willie Davis by all the major selectors, who relegated Jones to the second team.

Others who had no other major first-team selections were the Lions' Roger Brown (beating out Bob Lilly, who made every major all-pro team), Herb Adderley (beating out consensus first-teamer Bobby Boyd of the Colts) and Rip Hawkins. Brown and Adderley were consensus second-team picks, but Hawkins, who essentially replaced consensus choice Ray Nitschke on the *News* team, received no mention from anyone else.

1965 AII-NFL

Offense	Defense
SE Dave Parks, SF	E Deacon Jones, LA
TE Mike Ditka, Chi	E Ordell Braase, Bal
T Dick Schafrath, Cle	T Alex Karras, Det
T Bob Wetoska, Chi	T Bob Lilly, Dal
G Jim Parker, Bal	LB Dick Butkus, Chi
G John Gordy, Det	LB Wayne Walker, Det
C Bruce Bosley, SF	LB Chuck Howley, Dal
QB John Unitas, Bal	HB Dick LeBeau, Det
HB Gale Sayers, Chi	HB Herb Adderley, GB
FB Jim Brown, Cle	S Willie Wood, GB
FL Tommy McDonald, LA	S Roosevelt Taylor, Chi

Player of the Year: Jim Brown, Cleveland
Coach of the Year: George Halas, Chicago
Rookie of the Year: Gale Sayers, Chicago

Three players on this year's team didn't get any mention from the major selectors: Bruce Bosley, Tommy McDonald and Chuck Howley. All three did play in the Pro Bowl, though, and a year later Howley began a stretch of six straight seasons with at least one first-team selection. Bosley beat out the Vikings' Mick Tingelhoff, otherwise a unanimous choice.

Another unanimous choice of the major selectors who failed to make the cut was the Eagles' Pete Retzlaff, who was beaten out by Mike Ditka, a consensus second-team choice.

Two others, Roosevelt Taylor and Ordell Braase, had only a single second-team mention to their credit aside from the *News*, where they replaced consensus choices Willie Davis and Paul Krause. In fact, the *News* also picked a second team this year (for the only time), and it too omitted Krause in favor of Larry Wilson and Mel Renfro. The major selectors also relegated Bob Wetoska and Dick LeBeau to second-team status, but the *News* staff was obviously more impressed. LeBeau, in particular, got the nod over Bobby Boyd, who made everybody else's first team.