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Sid Luckman

## THINGS YOU ALMOST NEVER HEAR FROM FOOTBALL FANS

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I love these pre-season games.  It's the only time you get to see the guys who'll be cut.

If they really wanted to, they could get in more commercials.

I wish those other guys would pipe down so Theismann could talk.

Extra points are the most thrilling plays.

D'ja ever notice? They never do kneel-downs in the first quarter.

I love the NFL's Passer Rating System.  It's so easy!

They ought to review every play and catch all the rule breakers.

Look out for the Bengals this year!

Do you think the offensive linemen are getting enough to eat?

After they make a play, players should show excitement so fans will know.

Our QB is just a little off today, but that's no reason to put in the back-up.

Games would be better with more field goals.

The cameras should show more of the painted fans in the stands.

While we're here. We should buy something. The team needs the money.

# It Don't Get No Better…

By Joe Ziemba

As we hear more and more about holdouts, no shows, and other unsavory things regarding money in the current NFL, former Cardinals' tackle Chet Bulger recalls a kinder, gentler age.

Back in 1942, the Cards traveled to Washington by train for a game with the Redskins. "At that time, we received $2 a day for meal money," remembered Bulger. "So my roommate Bob Morrow and I went to a local place and bought a dozen hamburgers and a bottle of butter milk for dinner. We brought the stuff back up to our room, put our feet up on the window sill, looked out at the sights and ate our hamburgers. Then Bob looked over at me, smiled and said, 'It don't get no better than this!'"

# The Most Dominant Football Teams of All Time

## By Raymond Lee

In the 2008 Super Bowl the New York Giants upset the heavily favored New England Patriots by a scored of 17 to 14! The Patriots were 18-0 before the Super Bowl started prompting many people to say and to write that if the Patriots won the Super Bowl, they may very well have been the Greatest Football Time ever. Indeed if the Patriots won they would have a good argument to that effect.

As we now know it was not to be and the Patriots finished their season 18 and 1, still a great record but not the World Champions. It still does not take away from their astonishing regular season in which the Patriots became the first team to finish a sixteen game schedule 16-0! It wasn't even that they finished 16-0 but the way they slaughtered their opponents, winning games by an average margin of close to 20 at 19.69 points per game.

Despite their loss in the Super Bowl, clearly the Patriots had one of the most dominant seasons of all time. I thought it was the right time for me to write the article I've been putting off for years in trying to see who had the most dominating teams of all time. In doing this article I will attempt to analyze the offensive and defensive units of the greatest teams in history and see how they stack up among each other.

So how do I do this, well I decided to use the same methods I used years ago when I compared the greatest offenses of all time and in another article, the greatest defenses of all time. In these articles I looked at the drive efficiency of these teams, on offense in one article and defense in the other article. In each of the articles I looked at the total percentage efficiency that the defensive or offensive unit was better or worse than the league average.

To give an example, let's look at the Patriot's historical rival in the 1972 Dolphins. The 1972 Dolphins scored 385 points but the Dolphin's offensive unit scored 378 because the team returned an interception back for a touchdown. The Dolphins that year had 5036 gained on

offense. You divide that by the 168 drives they had that year and you get an average drive of 29.78. You divide that by 12 and you get a factor of 2.50 per drive which I call the POINTS FACTOR (PF). This is the average amount of points a team should score per drive if the team had no turnovers.

However in reality turnovers do occur and you must take them into account. The 1972 Dolphins had 28 turnovers in 168 drives for an average turnover per drive of .166. A turnover, as I mentioned earlier costs a team an average of about four points, two in missed opportunities against its own offense and two for the opponent's offense. Take the Dolphins' turnover per drive (.166), multiply by two (the two points the offense lost) and subtract that from the Points Factor (2.50-.33=2.17). Call this the SCORING EFFICIENCY FACTOR (SEF).

If you multiply this by 164 drives, you will get 364 points, satisfactorily close to the Dolphins' real number of 378 points.

However it doesn't just stop here. The final and most important number is THE DRIVE EFFICIENCY FACTOR (DEF). Because of turnover costs a team about 4 points, not just 2, you take the Points Factor of 2.50 minus the turnover per drive number of .166 times 4 and you get .67. You multiple this by 168 and you get 308 which is the NET number of points the offense benefited a team.

I worked my numbers to many decimals, but in this article I rounded to hundredths so because of rounding your numbers may slightly differ from mine. Obviously the idea behind the Drive Efficiency Factor is that it is better to score 14 points and give up none than to score 21 and give up 14.

You might think that the team with the best Drive Efficiency Factor is the greatest defensive or offensive unit of all time but it's not that simple. With the tons of rule changes over the years and the new football innovations each year, offense

can be easier in one year and much tougher the next year, the same with defense. A team with a middling DEF in one year may lead the league with the same numbers in another season!

Because of this I figured the Points Factor, Scoring Efficiency Factor and Drive Efficiency Factor for the league for every year and every team I chose. This way you can see how the team compares with the league average in those factors for that particular season. This way you can see how the team you are looking at compares by percentage to the league average and if they were above or below league average. The research only goes back to 1941 because the statistics were less complete before than.

I got many of the numbers from the ESPN Pro Football Encyclopedia edited by Pete Palmer, Ken Pullis, Sean Lahman, Tod Maher, Matthew Silverman and Gary Gillette. Pete was also incredibly helpful (as he always is) in getting me the numbers for the recent 2007 season. I used the formulas from Pete Palmer's, John Thorn's and Bob Carroll's classic book "The Hidden Game of Football" and revised them a bit so we could evaluate drive data.

As I wrote before I only went back to the 1941 season since much of the information I needed was not available prior to that. I used as a rule of thumb teams that were plus 200 in point differential over the course of a 14 game season, pro rated for less or more games depending on the scheduled amount of games for that year. Some teams were eliminated because despite the fact they were plus 200 points they were simply not that good! For example the 1968 Colts, while they were an excellent team, were not nearly as dominant as the experts in Super Bowl III thought they were. In actuality the 1968 Jets were more dominant for the league they were in!

Here's the teams we will look at.

1. **1941 Bears**-10-1 Won-Lost Record, 396 points scored-147 points against.

2. **1942 Bears**-11-0 Won-Lost Record, 376 points scored- 84 points against. This Bears team had many of the same players as the Bears of 1941 except many of the Bears from 1941 went into the service. This team is included for a point of comparison. It was not a team as strong as the 1941 Bears and the NFL was not as strong as the

previous season because many players from the NFL went into the service to help fight World War II.

3. **1946 Browns**-12-2 Won-Lost Record, 423 points scored-137 points against. A number of the players on this team, like Otto Graham and Marion Motley were future Hall of Famers but it was a new league with young inexperience players. It's clear that this team was not the team the 1950 Browns or even the unbeaten 1948 Browns were. I put this team on the list also for a point of comparison.

4. **1949 Eagles**-11-1 Won-Lost Record, 364 points scored-134 points against. One of the great teams and I believe largely forgotten today because they were overshadowed by the Great Cleveland Browns teams of the 40's and 50's.

5. **1950 Browns** 10-2 Won-Lost Record, 310 points scored 144 points against. The years the Browns finally entered the NFL. They had many of the players from the unbeaten 1948 team including Graham, Motley and the great receivers in Lavelli and Speedie. The defense was awesome.

6. **1958 Colts**-9-3 Won Lost Record, 381 points scored 203 points against. This is the legendary Colts team that defeated the Giants in the NFL championship game 23-17 in the game many called the Greatest Game of All Time. They had Johnny Unitas as the quarterback and stars like Alan Ameche, Lenny Moore and Raymond Berry. The defense was excellent, especially in causing turnovers.

7. **1961 Oilers**-10-3-1 Won-Lost Record, 513 points scored 242 points against. I truly don't believe this team belongs up there with some of the truly dominant teams but they were amazing in the early AFL days. George Blanda had an incredible season with 36 TD passes.

8. **1962 Packers**-13-1 Won-Lost Record, 415 points scored 148 points against. Now this is a really dominant team. It is clearly the greatest Packer team of their dynasty years. It had Bart Starr in one of his best years and Jim Taylor in perhaps his best year.

9. **1969 Vikings**-12-2 Won-Lost Record, 379 points scored 133 points against. The first Viking team to reach the Super Bowl. The offense was

at best adequate with Joe Kapp leading them at quarterback but the defense was out of this world. The Front Four of the Viking became known as the "Purple People Eaters" because of the regularity in which they sacked the quarterback. The rush and pass defense was the best in the NFL and would be among the best for years.

10. **1972 Dolphins**-14-0 Won-Lost Record, 385 points scored 171 points against. Yes this is the unbeaten team. The team that seem to battle the 2007 Patriots even though they were never on the same field. I think the Dolphins have decided the 2007 New York Giants are one of their favorite teams. The Dolphins of 1972 were possible the greatest rushing team of all time with an excellent passing attack with stars as Bob Griese and Paul Warfield. The running backs were Larry Csonka, Mercury Morris and Jim Kiick who formed a great rushing trio.

11. **1973 Rams**-12-2 Won-Lost Record, 388 points scored 178 points against. A very underrated team that has never been thought of as one of the great teams because they always failed in the playoffs. This was an extremely talented team and the core of the team was so good that they won the division for 7 years in a row and made the playoffs for 8 straight years.

12. **1975 Steelers**-12-2 Won-Lost Record, 373 points scored 162 points against. As far as average point differential is concerned, this Steelers teams is the greatest of all Steelers teams. It's amazing to read all the legendary names on this roster. The roster seems to consist of all-stars.

13. **1975 Vikings** 12-2 Won-Lost Record, 377 points scored 180 points against. This was a far more balance team than the 1969 Vikings. The defense was not as dominating but it was still very good. The offense was one of the best if not the best in football. Fran Tarkenton had one of his best years and he led a tremendous ball control offense with Chuck Foreman as the top running back and excellent receivers in John Gilliam and Jim Lash. Perhaps the best Vikings squad and clearly their most balanced team.

14. **1976 Steeler**-10-4 Won-Lost Record, 342 points scored 138 points against. Basically the same team as the 1975 squad but this team had the greatest finishing kick in the history of Pro Football. The Steelers started out 1-4 and won

their last 9 regular season games in awe inspiring fashion. In the next 9 games, the Steelers scored 234 points and gave up a mere 28 with 5 shutouts in that span! Many people (I believe some of the Steelers also) think this was the greatest Steelers team despite the fact they were not World Champions. The Steelers were beaten by the powerful Oakland Raiders when both their starting running backs, Franco Harris and Rocky Bleier were injured and unable to play the AFC championship game.

15. **1983 Redskins**-14-2 Won-Lost Record, 541 points scored 332 points against. The Redskins set a record at that time for the most points scored in a season. It was an excellent offensive team with John Riggins taking care of most of the running and Joe Washington would come in for a change of pace. Joe Theismann was one of the best quarterbacks in football and he had great receivers to throw to in Art Monk and Charlie Brown. The defense was somewhat vulnerable to the long pass at times.

16. **1984 49ers**-15-1 Won-Lost Record, 475 points scored 227 points against. The first truly great 49ers team. It was perhaps the most versatile offensive team ever. Joe Montana led a squad that could do anything offensively. They had Roger Craig and Wendall Tyler as the running backs and both were gifted runners as well as excellent receivers. Receiving was handled by Dwight Clark and Freddie Solomon as well as the excellent tight end Russ Francis. The defense was excellent but it was a bend but not break defense, not the overpowering defense of for example the 1976 Steelers.

17. **1985 Bears**-15-1 Won-Lost Record, 456 points scored 198 points against. This is probably the best Bears teams since the merger. It has received almost legendary status over the years and many believe it to be the best team of all time. In watching the Super Bowl that year you got the impression that the Patriots had absolutely no chance in winning. The offense was very good with the great Walter Payton and Jim McMahon but the defense was what put this team in the discussion when people mention the top football teams ever. The defense had stars like Dent, Hampton, McMichael, Marshall, Singletary among others.

18. **1989 49ers**-14-2 Won-Lost Record, 442 points scored 253 points against. It was perhaps

not the greatest 49er team in terms of average point differential but in pure star power this 49er team took a back seat to none. This team had Joe Montana in perhaps his best year and all he had to throw to was perhaps the greatest receiver ever in Jerry Rice and a fabulous second receiver in John Taylor. Roger Craig was still there doing his great all purpose work and the backup QB was a name some of you may have heard of, just Steve Young. The defense was still magnificent with Ronnie Lott leading the way as per usual. The team has the greatest postseason of any team in modern history, outscoring 3 opponents by a total scored of 126 to 26. They won the Super Bowl over the Broncos by 55 to 10 and the game wasn't as close as the score.

19. **1992 Cowboys** 13-3 Won-Lost Record, 409 points scored 243 points against. The last dynasty before the recent Patriot run. It was a team that often seemed unstoppable with Troy Aikman throwing to Michael Irvin, Jay Novacek and Alvin Harper and handing off to Emmitt Smith. The defense was amazingly quick with stars like Ken Norton and Charles Haley among others. It seemed that during these times the true Super Bowl was always between the Cowboys and the 49ers and the winner would make the Super Bowl a mere formality.

20**. 2007 Patriots** 16-0 Won-Lost Record, 589 points scored 274 points against. Interesting to note that there have been only 4 teams that have gone unbeaten and untied during the regular NFL season and 3 of them have lost the championship game! Two of the losses have been to the New York Giants. Clearly over the course of the regular season the Patriots were by far the best team in football. The point differential of 315 over the course of a regular season is the best in Pro Football history and the average point differential per game has only been exceeded by a few teams in history.

And the winner is…….(I love these moments) the 1941 Bears. The 1941 Bears are the most dominating team in Pro Football history with a combined total over the league average of 268.08%. When I was younger and read about the 1941 Bears I wondered how they ever lost a game. It just amazed me in reading about them. When I first looked at their statistics, it almost seemed like a typographical error in that they were so far ahead of their competition. The

Bears of that era have the top two positions on my list, but since the NFL was watered down in 1942, I really can't believe the 1942 Bears are actually the second best team.

**Sid Luckman, Bears' QB**

One team on this list I believe has been tremendously underrated by history is the 1949 Eagles. In reading about the Eagles of that era, I believe their legacy was hurt by the Cleveland Browns in 1950. In the first game of the 1950 season, the defending NFL champion Eagles played the defending AAFC champion Browns in a game the Eagles lost by a decisive score of 35 to 10.

The impression given in the Pro Football history books was that the Eagles couldn't handle the great passing attack of the Browns and that they were overmatched and overwhelmed in talent and skill. Yet, if we examine it closely, I believe that the 1949 Eagles seem to be a close match with the Browns. First of all the great Steve Van Buren was injured and never was the same again. Various injuries and the decline of a number of players made them a .500 team.

Consider that the 1950 Rams, essentially the same team as the 1949 Rams, a team the 1949 Eagles were far superior to were 9-3 for the

regular season and barely lost to the 1950 Browns 30 to 28 in the NFL championship game. You have to conclude by this that the 1949 Eagles and 1950 Browns were very closely matched and if they both met at their peaks, the battle could go either way.



**Otto Graham, Browns' QB**

The Browns were incredibly dominant in the old All-American Football Conference. The Browns were 202.56% and 130.61% above league average for the 1946 and 1947 seasons in the old AAFC. However you cannot consider the AAFC on the same level as the NFL so it cannot compare to comparable numbers in the old established NFL.

The 1950 Browns are a different story however. Aside from the Bears' teams I mentioned earlier, the 1950 Browns are the best team of all time. As famous as the offense of the Browns were at that time with all the great names, it was by far more a defensive team than an offensive team, even though the offense was very good. The defense was possible the best defense in professional football since 1950 with a DEF of 127.52. To put it in prospective, any team with total DEF on offense and defense of over 100% is spectacular, this team more than surpassed 100% on defense alone! If they simply had an average offense those years, the defense would have made the Browns the seventh best team on this list!

For teams playing after 1960 my first thought was that the 1962 Packers were the favorite to be the most dominant team. However I was wrong. The 1962 Packers, while astonishingly good were slightly weaker, relative to league than the 1973 Rams with which I discussed earlier.

The Rams had won-lost records from 1973 to 1980 of 12-2, 10-4, 12-2, 10-3-1, 10-4, 12-4, 9-7 and 11-5. Only the 9-7 team, the Rams worst team of this era made the Super Bowl and they lost a very close game to the Steelers 31-19 after leading 19-17 in the third quarter. Clearly the Rams of that era were not a fluke, but they are largely forgotten because they failed to bring home a Super Bowl. The Rams 1973 season was the best season of a magnificent team. This team was surprisingly the most dominant team for a regular in the post merger era and with the exception of the 1961 Oilers, who played in the early and probably much weaker AFL, the best team since 1960!

The Steelers of the 1970's were surprising underachievers in the dominance categories. To be sure they were terrific but you would tend to think the 1970's Steelers, with all their future Hall of Famers in their lineup, would have been +100% or more over league average if you combined offense and defense in at least one of their seasons, but they never reached that level.

My only possible explanation is that when the stakes were highest, the Steelers raised their level of play. For example in 1976, during their season ending nine-game winning streak in which they scored 234 points and gave up a mere 28 points, the defense alone was better than 80% of league average. Considering that the yardage totals during that streak were overwhelming in favor of the Steelers as were the turnover ratios, it is most like the DEF totals during that awesome streak combined for defense and offense were over 100% better than league average.

The Steelers of the 1970's were clearly one of the great teams of all time. However from the line of scrimmage the Steelers were not quite as dominant as some teams. It seems probable to me that, considering their nine-game season ending winning streak in 1976 and their great playoff record, that the Steelers could raise the level of their game when necessary, like in the red zone or in big games.

The Great Bears of 1985 scored a very respectable 81.75 score over league average. It seems that while the Bears of that era were a very

noteworthy team, that perhaps the publicity surrounding them may have made them seem stronger than their actual ability. I don't know if the 1985 Patriots believe that considering the way the Chicago Bears manhandled them in the 1986 Super Bowl 46 to 10.

It seems like any team that exceeds the 100% over league plateau will tend to win multiple championships within a few years. Perhaps it is because the overall dominance of the team will eventually overcome all odds to win a title. Of the eleven teams who were 100% or more over league average, nine won titles either that year or within five years. Of those eleven teams, eight of the eleven won the championship that year. Only the 1973 Rams and the 1975 Vikings failed to win even one championship.

Conclusion: The 2007 Patriots regular season compares with or exceeds some of the great regular season teams of all time in total dominance. However, while the 2007 Patriots can genuinely be called a great regular season team, they are NOT quite on the level of dominance of some of the great teams like the 1950 Browns for example and (Dolphins fans and the 1972 Dolphins are cheering) the 1972 Dolphins.

When you consider that the 2007 Patriots were a "mere" 81.77% overall over league average, perhaps an unbeaten season was actually better than they should have been.

But what do the Patriots care? They have won three Super Bowls in four attempts over the last few years and have established themselves as a dynasty or near dynasty.

Here are the final standings for the team and their DEF percentages over league average. In past years I give the PF statistics and the SEF statistics but I felt this time it wasn't necessary because the bottom line is the Drive Efficiency Factor anyway. If you need to calculate PF and SEF all the information you need is in the "ESPN Pro Football Encyclopedia" anyway.

1. 1941 Bears---268.09%
2. 1942 Bears---247.55%
3. 1946 Browns-202.56%
4. 1950 Browns-163.92%
5. 1949 Eagles--158.04%
6. 1961 Oilers---129.11%
7. 1958 Colts----121.84%

8. 1973 Rams----117.59%
9. 1962 Packers--113.41%
10. 1972 Dolphins-106.85%
11. 1975 Vikings--100.65%
12. 2007 Patriots--- 89.77%
13. 1983 Redskins--83.84%
14. 1985 Bears------81.75%
15. 1976 Steelers---76.70%
16. 1992 Cowboy--66.80%
17. 1989 49ers-------66.67%
18. 1969 Vikings----66.13%
19. 1984 49ers-------65.31%
20. 1975 Steelers----60.06%



**Bob Griese, Dolphins' QB**

Top Teams since the merger in 1970.
1. 1973 Rams-----117.59%
2. 1972 Dolphins-106.85%
3. 1975 Vikings---100.65%
4. 2007 Patriots-----89.77%
5. 1983 Redskins---83.84%
6. 1985 Bears-------81.75%
7. 1976 Steelers----76.70%
8. 1992 Cowboys---66.80%
9. 1989 49ers-------66.67%
10. 1969 Vikings----66.13%
11. 1984 49ers-------65.31%
12. 1975 Steelers----60.06%

# Who Defeated The Champions ?

(NFL champions 1933-1965, Super Bowl champions 1966-1999.)

By Bob Kirlin

Sources: Pro Football SCQrebook by Ken Carlson 1933-1992; Information Please Sports Almanac 19931999.

| Year | Champ | Record | Lost to |
|------|-------|--------|---------|
| 1933 | ChiB | 11-2-1 | Bos 0-10, NYG 0-3 (tied Phi 3-3) |
| 1934 | NYG | 9-5-0 | Det 0-9, GB 6-20, ChiB 7-27, ChiB 9-10, Phi 0-6 |
| 1935 | Det | 8-3-2 | Bkn 10-12, GB 9-13, GB 7-31 (tied ChiC 10-10, tied ChiB 20-20) |
| 1936 | GB | 11-1-1 | ChiB 3-30 (tied ChiC 0-0) |
| 1937 | Was | 9-3-0 | ChiC ~4-21, Phi 0~14, Pit 13-21 |
| 1938 | NYG | 9-2-1 | Phi 10-14, Pit 10-13 (tied Bkn 7-7) |
| 1939 | GB, | 10-2-0 | Cle Rams 24-27, ChiB 27-30 |
| 1940 | ChiB | 9-3-0 | ChiC 7-21, Det 14-17 , Was 3-7 |
| 1941 | ChiB | 12-1-0 | GB 14-16 |
| 1942 | Was | 11-1-0 | NYG 7-14 |
| 1943 | ChiB | 9-1-1 | Was 7-21 (tied GB 21-21) |
| 1944 | GB | 9-2-0 | ChiB 0-21, NYG 0-24 |
| 1945 | Cle | 10-1-0 | Phi 14-28 |
| 1946 | ChiB | 9-2-1 | NYG 0-14, ChiC 28-35 (tied LA Rm 28-28) |
| 1947 | ChiC | 10-3-0 | LARm 7-27, Was 21-45, NYG 31-35 |
| 1948 | Phi | 10-2-1 | ChiC 14-21, Bos 14-37 (tied LA Rm 28-28) |
| 1949 | Phi | 12-1-0 | ChiB 21-38 |
| 1950 | Cle | 12-2-0 | NYG 0-6, NYG 13-17 |
| 1951 | LARm | 9-4-0 | Cle 23-38, SF 17-44, Was 21-31, Det 22-24 |
| 1952 | Det | 11-3-0 | SF 3-17, SF 0-28, ChiB 23-24 |
| 1953 | Det | 11-2-0 | LARm 19-31, LARm 24-37 |
| 1954 | Cle | 10-3-0 | Phi 10-28, Pit 27-55, Det 10-14 |
| 1955 | Cle | 10-2-1 | Was 17-27, Phi 17-33 (tied NYG 35-35) |
| 1956 | NYG | 9-3-1 | ChiC 27-35, Was 7-33, Cle 7-24 (tied ChiB 17-17) |
| 1957 | Det | 10-4-0 | Bal 14-34, LARm 17-35, SF 31-35, ChiB 7-27 |
| 1958 | Bal | 10-3-0 | NYG 21-24, LA Rm 28-30, SF 12-21 |
| 1959 | Bal | 10-3-0 | ChiB 21-26, Cle 31-38, Was 24-27 |
| 1960 | Phi | 11-2-0 | Cle 24-41, Pit 21-27 |
| 1961 | GB | 12-3-0 | Det 13-17, Bal 21-45, SF 21-22 |
| 1962 | GB | 14-1-0 | Det 14-26 |
| 1963 | ChiB | 12-1-2 | SF 14-20 (tied Pit 17-17, tied Min 17-17) |
| 1964 | Cle | 11-3-1 | Pit 7-23, GB 21-28, StL 19-28 (tied StL 33-33) |
| 1965 | GB | 12-3-1 | ChiB 10-31, Det 7-12, LARm 10-21 (tied SF 24-24) |
| 1966 | GB | 14-2-0 | SF 20-21, Min 17-20 |
| 1967 | GB | 12-4-1 | Min 7-10, Bal 10-13, LARm 24-27, Pit 17-24, (tied Det 17-17) |
| 1968 | NYJ | 13-3-0 | Buf 35-37, Den 13-21, Oak 32-43 |
| 1969 | KC | 14-3-0 | Cini 19-24, Oak 24-27, Oak 6-10 |
| 1970 | Bal | 14-2-1 | KC 24-44, Mia 17-34 (tied Buf 17-17) |
| 1971 | Dal | 14-3-0 | Was 16-20, NO 14-24, ChiB 19-23 |
| 1972 | Mia | 17-0-0 | The Perfect Season |

| Year | Champ | Record | Lost to |
|------|-------|--------|---------|
| 1973 | Mia | 15-2-0 | Oak 7-12, Bal 3-16 |
| 1974 | Pit | 13-3-1 | Oak 0-17, Cin 10-17, Hou 10-13 (tied Den 35-35) |
| 1975 | Pit | 15-2-0 | Buf 21-30, LARm 3-10 |
| 1976 | Oak | 16-1-0 | NE 17-48 |
| 1977 | Dal | 15-2-0 | StL 17-24, Pit 13-28 |
| 1978 | Pit | 17-2-0 | Hou 17-24, LARm 7-10 |
| 1979 | Pit | 15-4-0 | Phii 14-17, Cin 10-34, SD 7-35, Hou 17-20 |
| 1980 | Oak | 15-5-0 | SD 24-30, Buf 7-24, KC 17-31, Phi 7-10, Dal 13-19 |
| 1981 | SF | 16-3-0 | Det 17-24, Atl 17-34, Cle 12-15 |
| 1982 | Was | 12-1-0 | Dal 10-24 |
| 1983 | LARd | 15-4-0' | Was 35-37, Sea 36-38, Sea 2l-34, StL 24-34 |
| 1984 | SF | 18-1-0 | Pit 17-20 |
| 1985 | ChiB | 18-1-0 | Mia 24-38 |
| 1986 | NYG | 17-2-0 | Dal 28-31, Sea 12-17 |
| 1987 | Was | 14-4-0 | Atl 20~21, Phi 27-31, LARm 26-30, Mia 21-23 |
| 1988 | SF | 13-6-0 | Atl 17-34, Den 13-16, ChiB 9-10, Pho 23-24, LARd 3-9, LA Rm 16-38 |
| 1989 | SF | 17-2-0 | LARm 12-13, GB 17-21 |
| 1990 | NYG | 16-3-0 | Phi 13-31, SF 3-7, Buf 13-17 |
| 1991 | Was | 17-2-0·· | Dal 21-24, Phi 22-24 . |
| 1992 | Dal | 16-3-0 | Phi7-31, LARm 23-27, Was 17-20 |
| 1993 | Dal | 15-4-0 | Was 16-35, Buf 10-13, Atl 14-27, Mia 14-16 |
| 1994 | SF | 16-3-0 | KC 17-24, Phi 8-40, Min 14-21 |
| 1995 | Dal | 15-4-0 | Was 23-27, SF 20-38, Was 17-24, Phi 17-20 |
| 1996 | GB | 16-3-0 | Min 21-30, KC 20-27, Dal 6-21 |
| 1997 | Den | 16-4-0 | Oak 25-28, KC 22-24, Pit 24-35, SF 17-34 |
| 1998 | Den | 17-2-0 | NYG 16-20, Miai 21-31 |
| 1999 | StL | 16-3-0 | Ten 21-24, Det 27-31, Phi 31-38 |
| 2000 | Bal | 16-4-0 | Mia 6-19, Was 3-10, Ten 6-14, Pit 6-9 |
| 2001 | NE | 14-5-0 | Cin 17-23, NYJ 3-10, Mia 10-30, Den 20-31, StL 17-24 |
| 2002 | TB | 15-4-0 | NO 20-26, Phi 10-20, NO 20-23, Pit 7-17 |
| 2003 | NE | 17-2-0 | Buf 0-31, Was 17-20 |
| 2004 | NE | 17-2-0 | Pit 20-34, Mia 28-29 |
| 2005 | Pit | 15-5-0 | NE 20-23, Jac 17-23, Bal 13-16, Ind 7-26, Cin 31-38 |
| 2006 | Ind | 16-4-0 | Dal 14-21, Ten 17-20, Jac 17-44, Hou 24-27 |
| 2007 | NYG | 14-6-0 | Dal 35-45, GB 13-35, Dal 20-31, Min 17-41, Was 10-22, NE 35-38 |

# Steelers Dial Up a Long One

By Steve Hickoff
From *The 50 Greatest Plays in Pittsburgh Steelers Football History*



**LYNN SWANN**

If the Dallas Cowboys had one fatal flaw in the 1970s, it was that some of their players talked too much before big games. Coach Landry should have issued muzzles in certain cases.

Not that the motivation hurt the Steelers.

Three years before Thomas "Hollywood" Henderson's comments about Terry Bradshaw's intellectual abilities as the two teams entered Super Bowl XIII, a different Cowboys player mouthed off before Super Bowl X.

It was defensive back Cliff Harris.

"I'm not going to hurt anyone intentionally, but getting hit again while he's running a pass route must be in the back of Swann's mind," the Dallas safety Harris offered in veiled words of intimidation.

He referred, of course, to the lingering effects of a Swann concussion from the week prior against the Oakland Raiders in the AFC championship, and how the injury might influence the play of the Steelers wide receiver now. Swann had spent several nights in the hospital. Doctors had advised he could play, but another big hit might leave damaging consequences.

When Harris's words to the media reached the injured Pittsburgh receiver. Swann offered his own spin on the situation: "I'm still not a hundred percent. I value my health, but I've had no dizzy spells. I read what Harris said. He was trying to intimidate me. He said I'd be afraid out there. He needn't worry. He doesn't know Lynn Swann. He can't scare me or the team."

Swann would surely take the field now.
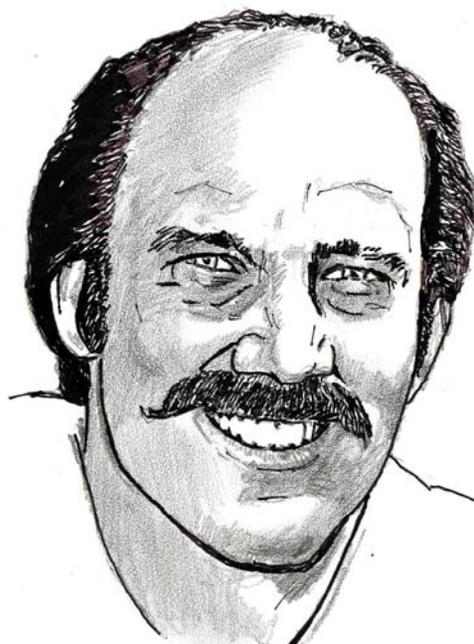


**CLIFF HARRIS**

Still, there was a little problem with timing and execution. In practice, Swann had trouble pulling in passes. The game proved to be another story

entirely. He'd catch four passes in this Super Bowl—all of them memorable.

The first reception, a 32-yard Bradshaw toss down the right sideline, found Swann blanketed by defensive back Mark Washington. Still the swift Pittsburgh receiver somehow found a way to dramatically pull the ball in, and keep his feet inbounds. This catch was particularly meaningful as it symbolized his successful return from injury.

"The most important thing to me when I stepped onto the field was to make the first catch," Swann later told NFL Films. "I had to make that catch."

That he did.

"Once I had that catch under my belt, I was back in the ballgame," Swann said.

The second pass saw the two Steelers players combine for a 53-yard completion. Bradshaw backed up to the goal line, and threw a rainbow toward the 50-yard line, and a moving Swann. It's the familiar highlight-reel reception you've seen many times over the years, easily a top-10 pick for Super Bowl history dramatics. Defying logic and the physical properties of gravity, Swann caught the ball while diving airborne and horizontal to the turf.

It's no surprise to Steelers fans he held the ball.

A review of game film over Swann's nine-year NFL career reveals other twisting, turning, striding, leaping, and lunging catches that combine his hand-and-eye coordination and body-controlling precision. This reception was no exception.

That catch earned him style points, for sure. In practical terms though, the field position he gained yielded no points. Roy Gerela would miss the field goal attempt that soon followed Swann's amazing catch.

Confidence matters in big games. At times it was as if Bradshaw knew that if he got the ball in the vicinity of Swann—and far enough away from any defenders—that his receiver would find a way to pull it in. The third catch, a 12-yarder, added another to his memorable day in the making.

The fourth catch, the most meaningful in terms of establishing the lead and Super Bowl win, provided the crucial winning score. This catch came in the game's fourth quarter. With just over three minutes to go, third-and four, the ball on the Pittsburgh 36-yard line, and Steelers leading 15-10, Swann lined up for the route.

The Cowboys' Washington, who'd had trouble with Swann all day, would fare no better this time. The Steelers receiver instinctively ran into the heart of the Dallas defense, into the middle of coverage, and took off.

After the snap, Bradshaw in the pocket, aware of the ongoing blitz, found enough leverage to muscle the pass deep. Two opposing results followed: Swann hauled in the long ball at the 5-yard line, with the defender Washington reaching toward the Pittsburgh receiver a moment before he scored, and the Steelers quarterback was on the ground, unconscious from the Cowboys' pressure.

Helped from the field by safety Mike Wagner and running back Rocky Bleier, only later did Bradshaw hear the play's results: a 64-yard pass reception to Swann to put the Steelers up 21-10.

Swann and Bradshaw had saved their best for last. The Super Bowl X MVP, Swann's four pass receptions would total 161 yards on the day and the game-clinching touchdown.

As expected, Roger Staubach, with his customary effort—though he'd been sacked seven times during the game—made a bid right at the wire, and posted a Dallas score on a 34-yard pass to Percy Howard with 1:48 to go.

Staubach's game-closing efforts would falter and fail in the face of the Pittsburgh Steel Curtain.

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# EARNEST BYNER and the FUMBLE

**By Roger Gordon**
Originally published in The Orange and Brown Report

"The Fumble."

It's the Browns and the Bills. Yes, the Bills. Nov. 4, 1984. Cleveland trails Buffalo, 10-6, on a cold, rainy day in near-empty Rich Stadium. It is a dull affair between two teams with a combined one win. The 1-8 Browns receive a break when a rookie by the name of Earnest Byner, a 10th-round draft pick that year out of East Carolina University, is in the right place at the right time. Byner scoops up the football after teammate Willis Adams fumbles it following a catch-and-run from Paul McDonald. Byner runs 55 yards with the ball, scoring what turns out to be the winning touchdown in a 13-10 Browns triumph, and in the process, keeps Buffalo winless.

If only that play was "The Fumble" Browns fans remember. Unfortunately for Byner, "The Fumble" recalled by Browns Nation is one that occurred more than three years later, on Jan. 17, 1988, in a city and a stadium eerily similar to the venue in western New York. The stakes were much higher, though; it was the AFC Championship Game in Mile High Stadium in Denver – a rematch of the previous year's title tilt in which John Elway's "Sunday Drive" doomed the Browns.

Cleveland trailed the Broncos, 38-31, late in the fourth quarter amid a deafening din fueled by nearly 75,000 Bronco backers. On second down from the Denver 3-yard line, Bernie Kosar took the snap and handed the ball off to Byner to the left. Looking like he had free sailing into the end zone for the tying touchdown, Byner crossed the goal line and fell to the turf – but minus the football. He had been robbed of the pigskin by Jeremiah Castille, who had reached in and stripped the ball from Byner, who was cradling the ball with only his left hand.

And that was it.

"It was a simple trap play," Byner says. "I bounced outside and pulled the ball in to protect it but not up and across like I should have. I wasn't even looking at Jeremiah Castille; he wasn't going to get me. I was focusing on the other safety, [Tony] Lilly."

An intentional safety later, it was game, set and match, Broncos – 38-33. And it hurt. Big time. "It was one of the low points of, not only my football life, but my *life*," Byner admits. "I felt like I let everyone down – teammates, fans, coaches."

On the other hand, Byner says it was one of the most exciting games of his 14-year NFL career. "We were down, 21-3, at the half. But we never felt like we were out of the game," he says. "We kept plugging away. We were moving the ball. They couldn't stop us."

The 5-foot-10, 215-pound Byner was a big part of the reason the Broncos couldn't stop the Browns and why the Browns were on the doorstep of the Super Bowl. The powerful running back had seven receptions for 120 yards and a touchdown, plus 15 carries for 67 more yards and a TD against Denver.

That Broncos game was just part of a pattern of postseason success by Byner. He had rushed for 122 yards and scored two touchdowns in a divisional playoff win over the Indianapolis Colts the week before. His titanic performance against the heavily-favored Miami Dolphins two years prior, in which he rushed for a Browns postseason record 161 yards, almost landed the Browns in their *first* AFC title game.

Byner's intensity level was sky high during the week leading up to the Miami game. "In fact," he says, "I was talking about it with Howard Mudd, our [offensive] line coach at the time, at the Combine in Indy this year. He told me they took me out of some of those practices for fear I'd injure some of the defensive players."

There are those who say Byner's days in Cleveland were numbered immediately after his infamous blunder on that fateful day of the 1987

AFC Championship Game in Denver, that a year later he was traded by the Browns to the Washington Redskins because of it. The move could have been prompted by his two personal fouls in a 1988 playoff loss to Houston. Perhaps it was neither.

But if either was the case, there was something seriously awry within the Browns' organization. The trade proved there was indeed something out of kilter within the team's hierarchy. The deal was perhaps the worst in club annals. In return for Byner, Cleveland received a guy by the name of Mike Oliphant, who in three seasons with the Browns, gained a grand total of 188 combined net yards – all of them coming in 1989.

"It gave me an opportunity to re-start my career," says Byner.

And how.

Byner went on to lead Washington in rushing yards three straight years, including two 1,000-yard seasons (the other a 998-yard effort). He helped the Redskins to victory over the Buffalo Bills in Super Bowl XXVI.

Although drafted by the Browns as late as he was, Byner never sweated surviving the training-camp cuts leading up to the 1984 season opener.

"I was always confident I'd make any team I was trying out for," Byner says.

As a rookie, Byner was used mainly on special teams – both as a coverage guy and as a kickoff and punt returner – and as a third-down running back. That is, until Marty Schottenheimer replaced Sam Rutigliano as head coach halfway through the season. "Marty told me I'm his guy," Byner recalls. "I knew only one way to play, and that was full speed. And I think Marty liked that."

Byner sure gave Schottenheimer and the rest of the coaching staff something to think about over the off-season by rushing for 188 yards in a season-ending 27-20 triumph at Houston. "My tendency in the pros was always to get stronger toward end of the year," Byner says.

The next year, Byner became part of only the third running-back tandem in NFL history in which both backs rushed for 1,000 yards in the same season. He totaled 1,002 (Kevin Mack had 1,104). "That was one of my proudest moments, to be part of NFL history like that," he says. "I got it on the last play of the last game. In fact, Marty came

up to me afterwards and apologized. He thought I didn't have it."

Lindy Infante came aboard in 1986 as offensive coordinator and turned the Browns into more of a passing team, utilizing the considerable talents of one Bernie Kosar. Byner was actually leading the league in receptions when he suffered a left ankle injury against Green Bay in Week 7 that sidelined him, for all intents and purposes, for the remainder of what turned out to be a glorious season that ended with the "The Drive" game against Denver.

Byner returned to the Bill Belichick-led Browns in 1994-95. "We were pretty good," he says. "We made the playoffs in '94, then 'The Move' in '95 came out of nowhere. I didn't know anything about it. We had a good start, but it was tough on us.

"The night before the last home game against Cincinnati, I was told I would start. [The running backs] prayed together that night."

Byner, who gained 3,364 yards rushing and 2,630 receiving as a Brown, rushed for more than 100 yards as the Browns defeated the Bengals, 26-10, inside an emotion-filled Cleveland Stadium.

"You couldn't have written a book any better. After the game I told Tony Jones, 'I'm gonna go over to the fans.' And I did, and Tony came with me, and then many of our teammates followed. We went around the whole stadium shaking hands with, and hugging, the fans."

Byner, who would finish out his career with the Baltimore Ravens in 1996-97, didn't weep, but he witnessed tears. "Lots of 'em," he says.

"It was a good ride in Cleveland, especially the first time around," says Byner, recently hired at running backs coach of the Tennessee Titans after stints in the same position with the Ravens and Redskins.

Regarding his still infamous "Fumble," Byner is candid.

"We focus on the negative sometimes in society," he says. "I got lots of letters from fans lambasting me like I was *trying* to [fumble].

"On the other end, there was a hell of a lot of support from fans and teammates."

# Thomas J. Holleran, The Akron's Pro Signal Caller

By Keith McClellan

Finding information about pre-NFL professional football players is an arduous task that can take years of research and more than a little luck. This is particularly true of sandlot players who were recruited to play in a handful of games for future NFL teams.

Tommy Holleran was a quarterback who played in perhaps three NFL games, but was a stalwart among the homegrown athletes that dominated Akron sports between 1915 and 1923. Born on June 24, 1897, to Bridget B. King and Patrick J. Holleran, Thomas J. Holleran was baptized at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Akron. Tommy had a brother, Martin, and two sisters. He graduated from Akron South High School, where he participated in inter-scholastics sports, including football.

Tommy was playing semi-professional football by 1915, when he barked signals for the Akron Broadways. In 1916, he quarterbacked and occasionally played right guard for the Akron Burkhardts, a professional team that was formed in 1914 by Stephen "Suey" Walsh. In 1916, Ralph "Fats" Waldsmith, the well-regarded Buchtel College [now Akron University] center who had played for the professional State Champion Akron Indians and the Canton Bulldogs led by Jim Thorpe, coached the Burkhardts, who played their games at Lakeside Park [a sight that became Summit Beach Park]. Among the Burkhadts' players in 1916, were home grown players Carl "Squash" Cardarelli [Akron Central High School], Chick Ulrich [St. Mary's High School in Akron], and "Suey" Welch's brothers, Charles "Shang" Welch and Howard "Howe" Welch.

I inaccurately reported in **The Sunday Game** (1998) that Howard Welch attended Case University. While a Howard Welch did play for Case, he was not the Burkhardts left end. That honor goes to "Suey's" brother Howe, who quite school during the eighth grade to work at the B.F. Goodrich plant, where he worked in the shipping office, drove a test car for Goodrich, and played semi-professional football, baseball, and basketball in his off hours. Howe's brothers, "Suey" and "Shang" played football at Akron

South High School before playing professional football.

In 1917 "Suey" Welch transformed much of the Burkhardts lineup into the Akron Pros. Vernon "Mac" McGinnis, owner of the Lunch Box Restaurant on Coburn Street in Akron, sponsored the Akron Pros in 1917, and "Suey" Welch managed the team. Tommy Holleran had a solid year as the signal caller for the Pros.

Sometime in 1918, Tommy Holleran and "Mac" McGinnis joined the Army and were sent to Camp Zachary Taylor in Kentucky. They both started out as "Buck" Privates. McGinnis found his way to the mess tent, where he became "the autocrat of the kitchen", while Tommy earned his way onto the Camp Taylor football team. The veteran signal barker made friends easily and kept them. He soon worked his way into officer's training school and emerged from the war in 1919 as a First Lieutenant in the artillery corps.

In 1920 Tommy tried his hand as a fight manager and promoter, steering the boxing careers of Bantamweight "Dynamite" Eddie Lavery and Jackie Palmer. In 1920 he played in one game with the Akron Pros, now owned by promoter Frank Nied, and threw a touchdown pass. However, the 1920 "World Champion" Akron Pros, featuring stars such as "Fritz" Pollard, Paul Robeson, Al Nesser, Bob "Nasty" Nash, and Elgie Tobin were to fast a company for Tommy. He made another one game appearance with the Akron Pros in the 1922 season, and a one game appearance with the Buffalo Stars of the NFL in 1923, but his glory days as a gridiron hero occurred before the formation of the NFL.

Tommy died of "inflammatory rheumatism" on October 21, 1930 and was buried in Akron's Holy Cross Cemetery. When his mother died, she was buried beside him.

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*Sources: A letter from Laurence Rohr and scrapbook clipping he sent. Most of the clippings were undated. Tommy was Mr. Rohr's great uncle.*

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# 1927: GIANTS ON THE GRIDIRON

## By Bob Carroll

"We were playing in a game against, of all teams, the Chicago Bears at Wrigley Field," "Red" Grange told author Richard Whittingham in 1984. "I had my cleats dug into the ground and it was a kind of wet day and somebody fell over my knee. It was nothing deliberate, just one of those things. I was hit from the side by somebody and boom, out went the knee." The "somebody from the side" was Bears center George Trafton, two years removed from the Grange Tours but one of the roughest players in the NFL and certainly not a man to go easy on any ball carrier, former teammate or not.

The knee, the right of the two most important knees in pro football, was never the same again. After the injury, Grange always said, he was "just another halfback." That's a modest exaggeration, of course. Grange would go on to win All-NFL honors a few years later. He was a good halfback once the knee came part way back, but he was never again the impossible-to-stop "Galloping Ghost." And, for the short term -- for the rest of the 1927 season -- he was finished. He missed only three games, then limped through the remainder of the schedule, usually playing a few minutes or a quarter, but having no impact.

The Yankees, C.C. Pyle's team, collapsed like Grange's knee. Three-and-oh before the injury, they struggled to 4-8-1 the rest of the way. This, despite good work by halfback Eddie Tryon, guard Mike Michalske, and a pair of redheaded, future Hall-of-Fame ends, Ray Flaherty and Morris Badgro. Without Grange, or with him injured, the team lost its edge, as well as its reason to exist.

On December 4, the Yankees met the Giants at the Polo Grounds in what would have been

a big draw had the Yankees' record or the weather been better. Only 8,000 braved a snowstorm to watch the Yankees lose, 14-0. Grange played the whole game on a leg that sometimes failed him on his running attempts. Toward the end, he was booed by fans who felt cheated for having spent good money to watch the "old" Grange. Rud Rennie, of the *New York Herald-Tribune* wrote, "Red Grange, the hero of many a hard-fought football game, realized yesterday as he lined up behind the retreating Yankees on the snowy, wind-swept field at the Polo Grounds that fame is futile and the wages thereof is the razzberry."

A week later, when the two New York teams met again on a muddy Yankee Stadium gridiron, about 5,000 came out to watch the Giants win, 13-0. According to Rennie, "There really was not much to it outside the of the punting and the fun of watching twenty-two men slipping and sliding in all directions and in ridiculous postures, mostly upside down." Grange again stayed in for most of the game, but, Rennie said, "What with mud under him and Giants on top of him, he did not get far. The longest run he made was from the field to the clubhouse. And he made that without the ball."

After the season, Grange received plenty of medical advice concerning his knee, most of it conflicting. An operation was risky; nothing was guaranteed. He could end with a stiff leg or even be unable to walk. One doctor had him put his knee in a barrel of ice. Another had him in a cast. He was hobbling on crutches, trying to follow the general order to stay off his leg, when a West Coast doctor ordered him to begin playing golf before the muscles atrophied. After a few months he

could walk, and after taking the 1928 season off, he was able to return to football.

## Star #1 and #1A

Ernie Nevers was every bit as great in 1927 as he'd been in 1926, but his team wasn't nearly as successful. With the NFL reduced from 22 to 12 teams, there were more good players to go around. Almost every team in the league was stronger, even if its record didn't reflect that because of the competition had improved too. But the Nevers Eskimos were not improved. They went into the new season with essentially the same iron man squad of the year before. And, what was good for six wins and three ties in 1926 could bring only one NFL win in 1927.

On October 23, the Eskimos visited the Pottsville Maroons, another of the few teams that had tried to stand pat and found itself slipping instead. Nevers passed for 305 yards and accounted for all four touchdowns in a 27-0 Eskimos' victory. Sportswriters kept careful track of Nevers' statistics in '27. As a result, we know his entire season's passing record for his nine NFL games: 89 completions in 197 attempts for 1,362 yards. By the standards of the day, that was sensational. He threw only five touchdown passes, compared to 17 interceptions. Because the rules of the day turned the ball over to the other team on an incomplete pass in the endzone, teams seldom threw the short scoring passes that modern passers use to inflate their touchdown totals. Nevers was rated the second best passer in the NFL.

Easily the best passer -- best in the history of pro football until then -- was Cleveland's Benny Friedman. The rookie from Michigan tossed twelve touchdown passes in 13 games. While we have complete stats for only eleven of his games, Friedman's marks were impressive: 87 completions on 196 attempts for 1,565 yards. In those eleven games, he had only eleven interceptions, a remarkably low number then.

The Cleveland Bulldogs were made up mostly of players from the Kansas City Cowboys of 1926, but Friedman was the feature act. From the first game, when the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* called them "Benny's Bulldogs" in its headline, his name usually topped his team's game stories -- an honor previously reserved for Grange and Nevers. Headline writers understood that fans recognized the stars' names before the names of the teams. It was Grange, Nevers and Friedman who brought the fans to the ballpark, not the Yankees, Eskimos, or Bulldogs.

Friedman, a native Clevelander and former Michigan All-America, was a good runner and fair kicker, but as a passer he was unsurpassed in accuracy, distance, and audacity. Supremely confident -- actually cocky -- Benny was perfectly willing to throw the ball on first down, a strategy unheard of in pro football before he arrived. He would sling a pass from his own endzone, if he thought the time was right for it.

On October 30, Friedman and the Bulldogs played host to Nevers and the Eskimos in one of the season's best games. Cleveland's Rex Thomas returned the opening kickoff 80 yards to the Eskimos' 15. Friedman completed a short pass, and after Thomas drove to the four, Friedman plunged over center for the touchdown to put Cleveland in front 6-0 before many of the 12,000 who turned out at Luna Park had settled in their seats.

Nevers led the Eskimos downfield with a series of short line smashes. Then, when the defenders pulled in to stop his running, he fired a 40-yard pass to Joe Rooney. With the ball at the one-yard-line, he bulled over. His placekick gave the Eskimos a 7-6 lead.

It took Friedman exactly three passes to move his team to a second touchdown and back in front. The scoring toss was a 65-yarder to Thomas. In the second quarter, the Bulldogs' widened their lead to 19-7, when Friedman's 24-yard-run set up another TD.

But Nevers was far from finished. His running and passing gave the Bulldogs two fourth quarter touchdowns and 20 points. Ironically, in a game filled with offensive fireworks, the winning points came on a defensive play. Cleveland's Ossie Wiberg usually played blocking back, but in the third quarter, he went in as a guard. His extra speed let him get through to block a Nevers punt in the endzone, and the two points from the safety provided the victory margin, 21-20, despite Nevers' fourth-quarter rally.

For the day, Nevers scored all 20 of his team's points, averaged nearly 60 yards on his punts, intercepted three passes (only one by Friedman), completed eight-of-19 passes, and gained consistently on his line smashes all day. Friedman completed seven of 14 passes (and had three dropped), including one for a touchdown. He had the game's longest run from scrimmage, scored seven points, and returned Nevers' punts for gains between ten and 25 yards. The Bulldogs won the game, but the duel of the stars was a standoff.

Yet, for all of Friedman's talent and charisma, Cleveland still wasn't ready to support pro football wholeheartedly. Jim Thorpe hadn't been able to fill the stands in 1921. Neither had a championship team in 1924. Friedman put the Bulldogs in the race, but Cleveland fans still yawned. The Friedman-Nevers duel drew 12,000, but the Giants brought out only 3,000, Grange and the Yankees a mere 2,500. The only other five-digit home crowd came on Saturday, December 3, when 11,000 watched a double-header -- a Bulldogs-Eskimos rematch won easily by Cleveland, 20-0, and the state high school championship game. It didn't take a genius to figure that most of the crowd was there to watch the high-schoolers.

## A Great Year to be a New Yorker

For baseball fans, especially New York baseball fans, 1927 will always be a halcyon year. The mighty Yankees of Ruth, Gehrig, Lazerri, and Meusel hammered the American League into submission and then swept the Pittsburgh Pirates four straight in the World Series. Many still consider the '27 Yankees the greatest baseball machine ever assembled. And, to keep fans coming to what were often one-sided games, there was the spectacle of "Babe" Ruth in pursuit of his own home run record, a race he made successful when he tied his old record of 59 on September 29 with two homers against Washington. The next day, he smashed number 60 off Senators' lefthander Tom Zachary.

New York's pro football fans can't hold 1927 in quite such high esteem as their baseball colleagues, but it is nevertheless a special year for them too. In 1927, the New York Giants won their first NFL championship. And, as a team, they posted a record that, while not so spectacular as Ruth's, will last far longer.

Tim Mara came out of the war with the AFL ahead on points. He'd lost $40,000 defending his franchise rights, but he entered the 1927 season with his Giants facing no real head-on competition. The other New York franchise, Pyle's Yankees, were hogtied under his lease. Mara made no effort to influence Yankees player signings or game strategy. All he cared about was that his Giants' scheduled home dates not put him in competition with another game at Yankee Stadium, and that's essentially what he got in his agreement with Pyle.

The team Mara put on the Polo Grounds gridiron was a veteran outfit and unusually deep. Teams were still restricted to 18-man rosters for games, but that didn't mean they couldn't keep a few others under contract to replace injured regulars or spell them in the occasional back-to-back, Saturday-Sunday scheduling. It was a little trick that Frankford had used in 1926 to help it to the title. Oldtimers still boast of 60-minute "iron men," but few successful teams really followed that practice by 1927. On most winning teams, the regulars played about three-quarters of a

game unless injuries to other team members forced them to stay in the lineup.

The Giants had no single back with the ability of Nevers or Friedman, but they had a deeper, more versatile crew than any other team. Tailback Jack McBride, who'd been with the team since 1925, was a very good triple-threat. A heavy-duty runner and fair passer, McBride led the league in scoring with 57 points, 21 accomplished by extra points and field goals. Other holdovers were Jack Hagerty and Henry "Hinkey" Haines. Faye "Mule" Wilson, a fine blocker, was picked up from Buffalo, and veterans Doug Wycoff and "Tut" Imlay came aboard from the AFL. Joe Guyon, Thorpe's old teammate, came out of retirement to play about half the schedule, as did Phil White, who'd booted a 50-yard field goal for Kansas City two years earlier.

Haines was the most dangerous of the bunch. A tremendous breakaway runner at Penn State in 1920, he'd used his great speed to run for a pair of 90-yard touchdowns against Pennsylvania that year. After leaving school, Haines had concentrated on a baseball career, reaching the Yankees in 1923 as an outfielder. However, a .160 batting average convinced both the Yankees and Haines that he wasn't likely to force "Babe" Ruth to the bench. In the meantime, "Hinkey" had been playing football each fall with the coal-region teams of eastern Pennsylvania. In 1925, he joined the Giants and combined with McBride for a strong "inside-outside" running attack.

Although the Giants were well-stocked in the backfield, their real strength was up front. Century Milstead returned from the AFL to pair at tackle with "Stout Steve" Owen, the future Giants coach. Dick Stahlman, a rugged 220-pounder who played for nearly everyone during his long career, was the number one tackle sub, though he could play anywhere on the line. The New York guards were big "Hec" Garvey, the ex-Notre Damer who'd been in the league since 1922, and Al Nesser, the last of the famous clan. Nesser had started playing professionally in 1910, but at age 34 he was still a reliable pro. On the

bench were "Doc" Alexander, the coach in '26 and muscular Riley Biggs, another graduate of the AFL. Regular center "Mickey" Murtagh was the smallest interior lineman at 190 pounds but very quick.

"Chuck" Corgan, another baseball-football athlete, was at one end. Corgan was an excellent pass receiver on the gridiron and had shown promise as a Brooklyn Dodger infielder earlier in '27. Then, after the football season, he was stricken with cancer and died in June of 1928.

Of all the Giants' players, the one who made the most impact on the season and ultimately on the sports world was huge Robert "Cal" Hubbard. Hubbard was one of those players who could have starred at any position. He is in both the College and Pro Football Halls of Fame as a tackle, but the Giants lined him up at end on offense in 1927. In an enemy secondary the 6'4", 240-pound Hubbard could outmuscle any defensive back in pursuit of a pass, but his prime concern was downfield blocking. Hubbard's ability to clear out a safetyman helped spring Haines and the other backs loose for long gains all season. When the opponents had the ball, Hubbard dropped back to linebacker, where his size and speed made him the league's most effective defender. After his pro football career ended, Hubbard became an outstanding American League umpire. In 1971, he was named to his third Hall of Fame, the baseball shrine at Cooperstown.

Backing Hubbard and Corgan at end were Jim Kendrick, another veteran wing and Paul Jappe, a former All-America from Syracuse, who could also play guard.

"Doc" Alexander was only available some of the time so Earl Potteiger, a running back who'd traveled all over the league was installed as the Giants' coach.

The team started slowly, shutting out Providence and Pottsville on the road but in between, Benny Friedman and the Bulldogs held them to a scoreless tie at Cleveland.

On October 16, they opened at the Polo Grounds against Friedman. A good crowd of 25,000, according to the *Times*, saw another defensive struggle. Neither team could score in the first half, with a wide field goal try by McBride the only real threat. After an exchange of punts in the second half, Friedman hit "Tiny" Feather on a 35-yard pass, and followed with a 15-yarder to wingback Jim Simmons. From the New York 14, Benny and Simmons took turns pounding into the line until Simmons finally put the ball over for the first touchdown against the Giants in 1927. It was enough. The Giants were held scoreless for the rest of the game for a 6-0 loss.

No one scored on the Giants again for the next five games. In the meantime, the offense kicked in, averaging better than 20 points a game. On November 20, the Cardinals finally crossed the Giants' goal line. The Cards had hired Guy Chamberlin as coach after Frankford fired him in an internal dispute, but the man who'd won four of the last five NFL championships didn't have the horses for a winner in Chicago and retired after the season. When his Cardinals broke the Giants' scoreless string in the third quarter, they were already down by three touchdowns.

One week later at the Polo Grounds, the Giants lined up against the Bears in the most important game of the season. New York stood 8-1-1; the Bears were 7-1-1 until Chamberlin's Cardinals upset them 3-0 on Thanksgiving Day, but they could still eventually end up tied for the title if they could hang a second loss on the Giants.

Like the Giants, the Bears were a veteran team. "Tillie" Voss and "Duke" Hanny were the ends; the tackles were a pair of future Hall of Famers, Ed Healey and "Link" Lyman. Jim McMillen and Bill Buckler lined up as guards, with George Trafton at center. Joey Sternaman was at quarterback, with the great "Paddy" Driscoll, Laurie Walquist and speedy Bill Senn sharing the halfback slots and rugged "Buck" White at fullback. Among the Bears' subs were co-coaches George Halas and "Dutch" Sternaman.

The Bears started off like they were going to roll right over the Giants, marching straight down the field through the best defense in the league. They made a first down at the New York eight. Walquist smashed for four yards, Driscoll picked up another, and White slammed to the one. On fourth down, White tried to leap the line but the New York front wall speared him high in the air and shoved him back.

The Giants took over at the one. Haines called signals (huddles were still not in general use) sending "Mule" Wilson back in punt formation, cautioning him to be careful to avoid stepping on the endline. Haines looked around, noted there were several puddles on the field and called to the referee to bring out a towel to wipe the ball. The Bears jammed nine men on the line in hope of blocking the kick. What they didn't see was Haines setting up a few steps deeper than normal for punt formation. When the ball was snapped, it went to Haines instead of Wilson. With only two Bears deep, Chuck Corgan was wide open. "Hinkey" shot him a pass that he carried out to the 30. Although the Bears eventually stopped New York's drive, the momentum had been changed by Haines trick. "He stage-managed it perfectly," Steve Owen said later.

In the third quarter, in Rud Rennie's colorful phrase, "McBride began to pierce the Bears' line like a knife driven into a tub of butter." He did nearly all the carrying on a 53-yard drive that put the Giants in front 7-0. After the kickoff the teams exchanged punts, but Chicago let Jack Hagerty's kick roll to the two-yard-line where a Giant covered it. The Bears punted from behind their goal line and New York had the ball at the 30. Wilson ran for a first down, and McBride completed a short pass to Hagerty to move New York to the ten. McBride gained another first down at the five. Then, after Wilson lost a yard, McBride drove through center to within half a yard of a

touchdown.  It took him two tries for the last 18 inches, but he got them.

Trailing 13-0, the Bears fought back.  "Paddy" Driscoll led a drive down to the ten early in the fourth quarter.  The Bears went into a spread formation, and Walquist zipped a short pass to Joey Sternaman, who tucked it in behind the goal line.  When Joey added the extra point, the Bears had a chance to tie or win, but the Giants defense held them off. Steve Owen called it the toughest game he ever played.  Both teams were spent.  When it was over, Owen and Bears guard Jim McMillen slumped to the ground and sat there.  At last, McMillen leaned toward Steve and shook hands limply, but it was five minutes before either could rise and head for the clubhouse.

The Giants still had to win their last two games, the long awaited meetings with the Yankees.  When they took both on shutouts, it gave them ten white washings in 13 games. The Canton Bulldogs had posted nine sutouts in 12 games in 1922, while allowing 15 points, five fewer than the '27 Giants defense, but the NFL was a much stronger league in 1927. Most observers would give the Giants' first champs the nod as the best defensive unit of the decade.

### FINAL NFL STANDINGS: 1927

| Teams | W | L | T | Pct. | Pts-Opp |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York Giants | 11 | 1 | 1 | .917 | 197- 20 |
| Green Bay Packers | | 7 | 2 | 1 | .778 |
| 113- 43 | | | | | |
| Chicago Bears | 9 | 3 | 2 | .750 | 149- 98 |
| Cleveland Bulldogs | 8 | 4 | 1 | .667 | 209-107 |
| Providence Steam Roller | 8 | 5 | 1 | .615 | 105- 88 |
| New York Yankees | 7 | 8 | 1 | .467 | 142-174 |
| Frankford Yellow Jackets | 6 | 9 | 3 | .400 | 152-166 |
| Pottsville Maroons | 5 | 8 | 0 | .385 | 80-163 |
| Chicago Cardinals | 3 | 7 | 1 | .300 | 69-134 |
| Dayton Triangles | 1 | 6 | 1 | .143 | 15- 57 |
| Duluth Eskimos | 1 | 8 | 0 | .111 | 68-134 |
| Buffalo Bisons | 0 | 5 | 0 | .000 | 8-123 |

Worth Remembering:

## VERN HUFFMAN - BOMC

The term BMOC may not be in vogue these days, but back when Vern Huffman was at Indiana University (1934-1937) it stood for Big Man On Campus. And he certainly was. At 6-2, 220, he was hard to overlook. The fact that he was an All-America quarterback for the Hoosier football team added to his status. Couple that with being an All-America basketball forward and he was even "bigger." He's still the only Hoosier in history to gain All-America status in both sports. And probably will remain uniquely so.

To further burnish Huffman's resume, he won the Chicago Tribune's Silver Cup as the Big Ten's Most Valuable Player in both sports.

He was drafted in the third round by Detroit in 1937. His NFL (1937 and 1938) stats were quite modest, but he was a versatile performer for the Lions, playing single-wing quarterback (blocking back), tailback, wingback, and defensive back.

*Review by John Vorperian*

# ROCKIN' THE ROCKPILE:
## The Buffalo Bills of the American Football League

by Jeffrey J. Miller
(ECW Press)

Who's the only Hall of Fame member to play his entire career in the AFL? Buffalo Bills lineman Billy Shaw holds that unique distinction in Pro Football's temple. Shaw has written the foreword to PFRA's Jeffrey Miller's wonderful volume about New York State's sole professional football club. If you long for the days of gridders with two-bar helmets and white pants **Rockin'** will solidly and enjoyably swing you from the Bills' beginnings to the 1970 NFL-AFL merger.

In 1960, Lamar Hunt could not crack the NFL ownership fraternity. Denied a franchise the young oil tycoon enlisted other likeminded peers and formed the American Football League. The nascent circuit's charter cities were Boston, Dallas, New York, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Buffalo. Dubbed "The Foolish Club" by NFL brass, one of Hunt's key compatriots was Detroit businessman Ralph C. Wilson.

Granted the AFL's Western New York outpost, Wilson, a lifelong Motown sports enthusiast-Tigers and Lions booster-had a design for his club. Aside from donning his team in inaugural season uniforms of silver and blue, Wilson's perseverance and vision pushed the Buffalo Bills to win consecutive championships and come within a game of representing the AFL in Super Bowl I. From Buster Ramsey, the club's initial pilot to Lou Saban, Bills Head Coaches schemed with The Game's Greats and not-so greats.

Buffalo's venue, War Memorial Stadium, a/k/a The Rockpile, hosted a career roster with QBs, Jack Kemp, a once Pittsburgh Steeler; Daryle Lamonica, of Fightin' Irish fame; CFL running back refugees Cookie Gilchrist and Wray Carlton; special teams skill players, soccer-style kicker Pete Gogolak and punter Paul Maguire.



Mike Stratton

"The Hit Heard 'round the World" from the Bills 20-7, 1964 AFL Championship victory over the Bolts graces **Rockin'**'s cover. Buffalo's Mike Stratton crushes San Diego's Keith Lincoln with a tremendous tackle. Author Miller also includes sections of rare team photographs, yearly statistics, box scores, draft selections, and an epilogue highlighting numerous Buffalo personnel and their current endeavors.

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*JOHN VORPERIAN is Host of BEYOND THE GAME, a sports history program cablecast in New York.*

# PUNT RETURNS FOR TOUCHDOWNS
## Part Three: 1970-1979

**Compiled by Gary Selby**

| No. | Date | Scoring Team | W / L | Scoring Player | Opponent | Yardage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 229 | 09 / 20 / 70 | Raiders | L | Alvin Wyatt | Bengals | 63 |
| 230 | 09 / 27 / 70 | Lions | W | Lem Barney | Bengals | 61 |
| 231 | 10 / 11 / 70 | Giants | W | Bobby Duhon | Eagles | 45 |
| 232 | 10 / 25 / 70 | Falcons | W | Tom McCauley | Saints | 77 |
| 233 | 11 / 01 / 70 | Colts | W | Ron Gardin | Dolphins | 80 |
| 234 | 11 / 16 / 70 | Cardinals | W | Johnny Roland | Cowboys | 74 |
| 235 | 11 / 22 / 70 | Dolphins | W | Jake Scott | Colts | 77 |
| 236 | 12 / 06 / 70 | Bengals | W | Lemar Parrish | Chargers | 79 |
| 237 | 12 / 20 / 70 | Falcons | L | John Mallory | Vikings | 75 |
| 238 | 09 / 26 / 71 | Steelers | W | Jon Staggers | Bengals | 67 |
| 239 | 10 / 31 / 71 | Bills | L | Alvin Wyatt | Cardinals | 61 |
| 240 | 11 / 14 / 71 | Bills | L | Ike Hill | Patriots | 68 |
| 241 | 09 / 17 / 72 | Bengals | W | Lemar Parrish | Patriots | 51 |
| 242 | 09 / 17 / 72 | Jets | W | Chris Farasopoulos | Bills | 65 |
| 243 | 10 / 08 / 72 | Bengals | W | Tommy Casavona | Broncos | 66 |
| 244 | 10 / 16 / 72 | Packers | W | Ken Ellis | Lions | 80 |
| 245 | 11 / 19 / 72 | Packers | W | Jon Staggers | Titans | 85 |
| 246 | 12 / 10 / 72 | Broncos | W | Charlie Greer | Chargers | 65 |
| 247 | 09 / 16 / 73 | Bears | L | Ike Hill | Cowboys | 59 |
| 248 | 09 / 16 / 73 | Raiders | L | George Atkinson | Vikings | 63 |
| 249 | 09 / 23 / 73 | Chargers | W | Ron Smith | Bills | 72 |
| 250 | 11 / 18 / 73 | Chargers | W | Ron Smith | Saints | 84 |
| 251 | 12 / 16 / 73 | Bills | W | Bill Cahill | Jets | 51 |
| 252 | 09 / 15 / 74 | Bengals | W | Lemar Parrish | Browns | 62 |
| 253 | 09 / 29 / 74 | Falcons | L | Gerald Tinker | Saints | 72 |
| 254 | 10 / 06 / 74 | Bengals | W | Lemar Parrish | Redskins | 90 |
| 255 | 10 / 13 / 74 | Cowboys | L | Dennis Morgan | Cardinals | 98 |
| 256 | 10 / 13 / 74 | Packers | W | Jon Staggers | Rams | 68 |
| 257 | 11 / 10 / 74 | Packers | W | Steve Odom | Bears | 95 |
| 258 | 11 / 17 / 74 | Redskins | W | Ken Houston | Cowboys | 58 |
| 259 | 11 / 24 / 74 | 49ers | W | Manfred Moore | Falcons | 88 |
| 260 | 11 / 25 / 74 | Steelers | W | Lynn Swann | Saints | 64 |
| 261 | 09 / 28 / 75 | Redskins | W | Larry Jones | Giants | 52 |
| 262 | 10 / 05 / 75 | Titans | L | Billy Johnson | Bengals | 63 |
| 263 | 10 / 26 / 75 | Cowboys | W | Golden Richards | Eagles | 43 |
| 264 | 10 / 26 / 75 | Titans | W | Billy Johnson | Lions | 52 |
| 265 | 11 / 02 / 75 | Cardinals | W | Terry Metcalf | Patriots | 69 |
| 266 | 11 / 09 / 75 | Dolphins | W | Freddie Solomon | Jets | 50 |
| 267 | 11 / 16 / 75 | Titans | W | Billy Johnson | Dolphins | 83 |
| 268 | 11 / 30 / 75 | Chargers | L | Mike Fuller | Broncos | 42 |
| 269 | 12 / 14 / 75 | Giants | W | Rondy Colbert | Saints | 65 |
| 270 | 09 / 26 / 76 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Browns | 73 |
| 271 | 09 / 26 / 76 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Browns | 47 |
| 272 | 09 / 26 / 76 | 49ers | W | Ralph McGill | Seahawks | 50 |
| 273 | 10 / 03 / 76 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Chargers | 92 |
| 274 | 10 / 10 / 76 | Bills | L | Keith Moody | Jets | 67 |

| 275 | 10 / 17 / 76 | 49ers | W | Anthony Leonard | Saints | 60 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 276 | 10 / 24 / 76 | Titans | L | Ronnie Coleman | Bengals | 69 |
| 277 | 10 / 24 / 76 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Chiefs | 55 |
| 278 | 10 / 25 / 76 | Redskins | W | Eddie Brown | Cardinals | 71 |
| 279 | 11 / 07 / 76 | Patriots | W | Mike Haynes | Bills | 89 |
| 280 | 11 / 14 / 76 | Jets | W | Lou Piccone | Bucs | 60 |
| 281 | 11 / 28 / 76 | Patriots | W | Mike Haynes | Broncos | 62 |
| 282 | 12 / 05 / 76 | Dolphins | W | Freddie Solomon | Bills | 79 |
| 283 | 09 / 18 / 77 | Bears | W | Steve Schubert | Lions | 70 |
| 284 | 09 / 18 / 77 | Packers | W | Willard Harrell | Saints | 75 |
| 285 | 09 / 25 / 77 | Giants | L | Bob Hammond | Cowboys | 68 |
| 286 | 10 / 09 / 77 | Chargers | W | Mike Fuller | Saints | 88 |
| 287 | 10 / 16 / 77 | Titans | L | Billy Johnson | Browns | 87 |
| 288 | 10 / 23 / 77 | Bills | L | Keith Moody | Browns | 91 |
| 289 | 11 / 06 / 77 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Steelers | 87 |
| 290 | 11 / 13 / 77 | Bills | L | John Kimbrough | Colts | 73 |
| 291 | 12 / 11 / 77 | Titans | W | Billy Johnson | Browns | 72 |
| 292 | 12 / 17 / 77 | Lions | L | Eddie Payton | Vikings | 87 |
| 293 | 09 / 03 / 78 | Eagles | L | Wally Henry | Rams | 57 |
| 294 | 09 / 10 / 78 | Redskins | W | Tony Green | Eagles | 80 |
| 295 | 09 / 17 / 78 | Broncos | W | Rick Upchurch | Chargers | 75 |
| 296 | 10 / 08 / 78 | Jets | W | Bruce Harper | Bills | 82 |
| 297 | 10 / 15 / 78 | Bills | L | Keith Moody | Titans | 82 |
| 298 | 11 / 19 / 78 | Cardinals | W | Willard Harrell | Redskins | 70 |
| 299 | 12 / 16 / 78 | Bears | W | Steve Schubert | Redskins | 73 |
| 300 | 09 / 16 / 79 | Chiefs | L | J. T. Smith | Titans | 55 |
| 301 | 09 / 23 / 79 | Chiefs | W | J. T. Smith | Raiders | 88 |
| 302 | 10 / 14 / 79 | Dolphins | W | Tony Nathan | Bills | 86 |
| 303 | 11 / 04 / 79 | Bears | W | Steve Schubert | Lions | 77 |
| 304 | 11 / 18 / 79 | Patriots | W | Stanley Morgan | Colts | 80 |
| 305 | 11 / 18 / 79 | Colts | L | Nesby Glasgow | Patriots | 75 |



**Billy "White Shoes" Johnson**



**Rick Upchurch**

## CLASSIFIEDS

3 STEAGLES BOOK: "Last Team Standing: How the Steelers and the Eagles – 'The Steagles' – Saved Pro Football During World War II" by Matthew Algeo is now available in bookstores and from Amazon.com and other online booksellers. Based on interviews with every surviving member of the team, it tells the incredible true story of the 1943 merger of the Steelers and the Eagles, includes eight pages of photographs. For more information, visit www.steagles.com_

2 Wanted: Photo copies of Canadian Football League game-day rosters during the 1950s – all teams. E-mail: MLemongello@optonline.net / Home address: 5 Brookline Avenue, East Hanover, NJ 07936.

TAR – The Autograph Review -- $14.95 annually, 6 editions. Special to PFRA members for new subscriptions 5/$9.95. Payable to JW Morey, 305 Carlton Road, Syracuse, NY 13207. Publishing 18 years – Addresses, info, helpful to researchers… Try us.

1 "Keep A-goin': the life of Lone Star Dietz" by Tom Benjey. Softcover $19.95, hardback $32.95, s&h $6.00. Put PFRA on order for a 5% discount. Benjey Media / 546 E. Springville Rd. / Carlisle, PA 17015. 717-258-9733 voice / 717-243-0074 fax / www.LoneStarDietz.com

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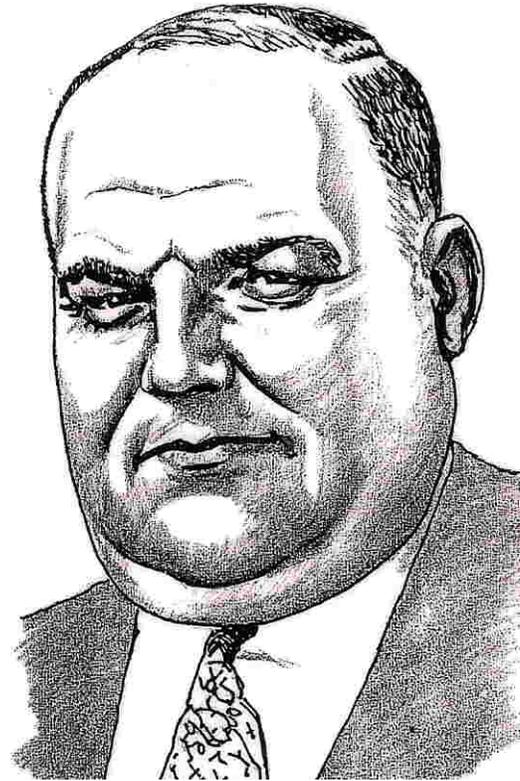


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