

DR. JOE: A GUARD'S GUARD

JUNE 21-22
AT CANTON

By Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll

1929 -- the year of the great stock market crash. Halfback Paddy Driscoll was in his final season with the Chicago Bears after a brilliant career. He'd seen it all and he had a grizzled veteran's mixture of amused tolerance and lordly disdain for the curious ways of rookies.

Still, the kid guard bustling away in one corner of the Bears' Wrigley Field dressing room was something new to Paddy. For nearly an hour the big youngster had been fooling around with several pairs of shoulder pads, first punching holes with an awl, then stringing parts together with leather thongs, and then back to punching holes.

Paddy ambled over and stood beside the busy rookie for a few minutes. "Doc, you sure are doing a lot of fussing with all that equipment. What are you -- a shoemaker?"

"Paddy, I'm trying to make a good shoulder pad for tackling without injuring my shoulders."

The veteran nodded, not yet certain whether the kid was serious or not. Paddy Driscoll figured to know all about shoulder pads and tackling -- he'd been playing pro football since before there was a league.

The kid held up two strips of fiber board, each two inches by eight inches. These, he explained, would be taped over his shins. "I want to protect my legs from osteomyelitis disease," he explained.

Doubletalk! thought Driscoll and walked away, convinced the kid was putting him on. Rookie guard Joe Kopcha went back to "fussing."

* * *

Kopcha was a fine young lineman in 1929. That was usually worth



about \$100 or so per game, but owner-coach George Halas -- never known for the alacrity with which he parted with a buck -- added

another \$20 to the rookie's paycheck each game because he was in medical school and could help the trainer.

Sports medicine in those distant days was seldom more than a rubdown for aching muscles and a squirt of tobacco juice for a cut. However, Kopcha applied himself to preventing injuries -- at least to himself.

"Shoulder pads in those days were nothing more than epaulets -- like a hotel doorman wears. I resurrected a set to actually fit my shoulders and protect my collar bone and the acromio-clavicular joint," explains Dr. Joseph Kopcha, today a highly respected Gary, Indiana, medico. "Acromio-clavicular -- shoulder joint -- injuries occurred from

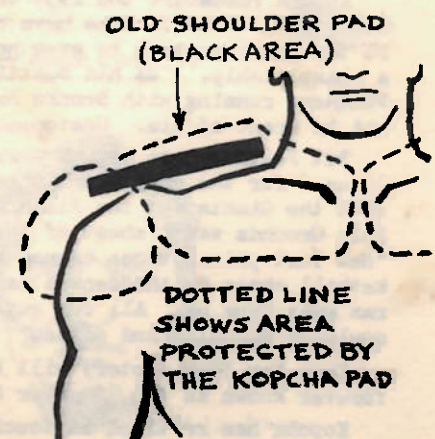
tackling. My concept of the shoulder pads generated from an injury to my left shoulder. As a result of that injury, I pinpointed where the fault was and covered my shoulders with an extra 'cup' of leather and felt, overlapping the shoulder joint.

"I was quite handy with an awl and leather -- in my younger days I even soled my own shoes -- so, with two or three old discarded shoulder pads, I put together one good set.

"I was sitting there, using an awl to make holes in the leather of the shoulder pads -- building pad upon pad and cupping them so that the pads fit way over the shoulder joint, along with an extra layer to protect my chest -- and a Spalding salesman was in the dressing room, trying to sell Halas some equipment. He watched me tightening up the cups upon cups with leather thongs. When he asked me what I was doing, I explained what I had in mind to protect myself from injury in tackling.

"Well, I didn't think anything more about it at the time."

HOW JOE "GAVE HIS AWL"



Kopcha took 1930 and 1931 off from football to concentrate on medical school. In 1932, he returned to the Bears to win All-League honors three straight years.

"So -- two years later, when I came back to the Bears -- I can't recall whether it was the same salesman or not -- it must have been -- because he came over to my locker and showed me how the company had reinforced the pads and asked me if that was what I had wanted.

"I said, 'That's fine, but I still think you need more coverage over the shoulder joint because that is the most vulnerable spot. And also put some more padding under the cups and reinforce it above.'

"Sure enough, the following year, they came out with a much improved shoulder pad with much better workmanship. It was lighter but it made the players look a lot bigger. Most important, though, it gave better protection when tackling."

Kopcha will never know how much he could have made had he patented his shoulder pad design. "I didn't even get a consulting fee," he says. "But, what-the-heck! There's a lot of guys walking around today without banged up shoulders who otherwise might be crippled. That's a terrific reward!

"Besides, I haven't missed much."

A native Hoosier, Kopcha earned ten sports letters at the University of Chattanooga. His pro football career was short by modern standards -- five seasons spread over seven years -- but he played in some of the most famous pro games ever.

"I was with the Bears when Ernie Nevers scored 40 points against us in 1929. What a player! Then, when I came back in '32, we won the championship in that indoors game on an 80-yard field against Portsmouth. The following year we won again. That was the first official championship playoff, and we beat New York, 23-21, at Wrigley Field."

Kopcha remembers the 1934 team as being even better. Some have called it the greatest team to ever not win a championship. "We had Beattie Feathers running with Bronko Nagurski in front of him. Unstoppable!"

But Feathers and Kopcha were both injured for the championship rematch with the Giants and the field at the Polo Grounds was a sheet of ice. "New York put on those damned basketball shoes in the second half and ran away from us. All our guys could do was slip and slide."

That New York victory will be forever known as the "Sneaker Game."

Kopcha has remained in touch with

George Halas over the years, holding him in the highest esteem. "I asked George to trade me to Detroit in 1936 so I might intern there. That season I helped the Lions beat the Bears and to this day he reminds me that it was one of his poorer trades."

After the '36 season, Kopcha left football to do post-graduate work at Western Reserve University hospital. During World War II, he was Major Kopcha. He served in the Pacific Theater, in Australia, New Guinea and the Philippines, for 21 months and later became a flight surgeon after training at Randolph Field in Texas.

Settling in Gary after the war, he became better known as an obstetrician than for football. ("When you think of him," said a local newspaperman, "you think of babies.")

Undoubtedly, it was a surprise to many when their "Doc" was named to the Indiana Football Hall of Fame in 1977.

Besides redesigning his shoulder pads along modern sophisticated lines and adapting small fiber boards as shin guards ("They used flying leg blocks back in those days and the blockers' heels would strike you across the shin bones and hurt like hell!"), Joe also "fussed" with his helmet.

"What we had then was like a skull cap, just a leather helmet with a little padding. I put two feet of padding in at the top and glued extra felt along the inside. Some guys kidded me, but I never had a serious head injury."

Joe does a lot of kidding himself these days. He keeps a small printing press in his cellar and often spices his correspondence with amusing printed messages. (Sample: the sober inscription -- "Remember, you're not finished until you've done the paper work!" along with a picture of an old-fashioned out-house.)

He's a charter member of P.F.R.A. And, he's a fixture at the Gary Old Timers Athletic Association Banquets where he leads the group in singing the "Star Spangled Banner." Wherever he goes, "Doc" is a popular after-dinner speaker.

He can spin a yarn with the best of them, but when he remembers how he helped improve football equipment the physician in him takes over and he speaks in dead earnest.

"Years after he retired, Paddy Driscoll checked into the Mayo Clinic because of a painful hip. The trouble, stemming from an old football block, was diagnosed as osteomyelites. Paddy shook his head in

disbelief. 'Do you know,' he said, 'years ago -- back in 1929 -- we had a medical student that used that word. I thought he was crapping me!'

"A lot of guys got hurt needlessly in the old days. I like to think that my ideas helped change some of that."

Jimmy Carter isn't the only one who has a problem with inflation. P.F.R.A. has felt the pinch of rising costs, too. To help offset some of the expenses, P.F.R.A. has been seeking sources of additional revenues. Hence ...

Announcing the Canton Collection, a set of five unique prints of Canton Bulldog players in Pro Football's Hall of Fame by The Coffin Corner's own staff artist.

Only 100 sets printed! 100!

See the Jim Thorpe picture later in this issue for an example in dull old black & white. Then, try to imagine it printed in fiery Canton red on pure Bulldog white!

Jim Thorpe: the greatest player of his time!

Guy Chamberlin: the peerless end who led the Bulldogs to three championships in a row!

Link Lyman: the Nebraskan who revolutionized defensive tackle play!

Joe Guyon: many said this Indian was even better than Thorpe!

Wilbur Henry: perhaps the best lineman who ever lived!

Individual 8½" x 11" prints, each signed and numbered by the artist, are available for only \$3 apiece exclusively to P.F.R.A. members while they last (the prints, not the members). But you'll want the whole set at the fabulous low (even cheap) price of \$10!

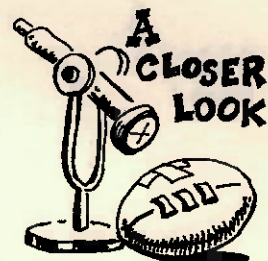
Your friends will envy you! So will your enemies!

All proceeds to go to P.F.R.A.
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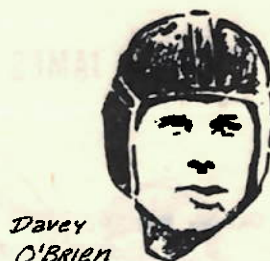
THE PASSING PARADE

By Pete Palmer



Most passes completed, game

- 37 George Blanda, Hou. vs. Buff. (AFL), 11/1/64 (68 attempts, 393 yards)
- 36 Charley Conerly, N.Y.Giants vs. Pitt., 12/5/48 (53, 363)
Bert Jones, Balt. vs. N.Y.Jets, 12/15/74 (53, 385)
- 35 Tommy Kramer, Minn. vs. N.E., 12/16/79 (61, 308)
- 34 Mickey Slaughter, Den. vs. Hou. (AFL), 12/20/64 (53, 283)
Joe Namath, N.Y.Jets vs. Balt., 10/18/70 (62, 397)
- 33 Davey O'Brien, Phil. vs. Wash., 12/1/40 (60, 316)
Sonny Jurgensen, Phil. vs. N.Y.Giants, 9/23/62 (57, 396)
Bill Wade, Chi.Bears vs. Wash., 10/25/64 (57, 321)
Archie Manning, N.O. vs. G.B., 9/10/78 (53, 303)
- 32 Sonny Jurgensen, Wash. vs. Clev., 11/26/67 (50, 418)
- 31 George Blanda, Hou. vs. L.A. (AFL), 11/13/60 (55, 366)
Virgil Carter, Chi.Bears vs. S.F., 12/6/69 (49, 301)
Steve Spurrier, S.F. vs. Minn., 10/14/73 (48, 320)
Joe Gilliam, Pitt. vs. Den., 9/22/74 (50, 348)
- 30 Frank Tripucka, Den. vs. Hou. (AFL), 11/6/60 (52, 375)
Don Meredith, Dall. vs. S.F., 11/10/63 (48, 360)
Randy Johnson, N.Y.Giants vs. Phil., 12/19/71 (47, 372)
Ken Anderson, Cin. vs. Hou., 10/27/74 (52, 375)
Ken Anderson, Cin. vs. Buff., 11/17/75 (46, 447)



Davey
O'Brien



Sammy
Baugh

Most passes attempted, game

- 68 George Blanda, Hou. vs. Buff. (AFL), 11/1/64 (37 completed, 393 yards)
- 62 Joe Namath, N.Y.Jets vs. Balt., 10/18/70 (34, 397)
- 61 Tommy Kramer, Minn. vs. N.E., 12/16/79 (35, 308)
- 60 Davey O'Brien, Phil. vs. Wash., 12/1/40 (33, 316)
George Blanda, Hou. vs. Oak. (AFL), 11/7/65 (27, 308)
Joe Namath, N.Y.Jets vs. Den. (AFL), 12/3/67 (24, 292)
- 57 Sonny Jurgensen, Phil. vs. N.Y.Giants, 9/23/62 (33, 396)
Bill Wade, Chi.Bears vs. Wash., 10/25/64 (33, 321)
- 56 Frank Tripucka, Den. vs. Buff. (AFL), 9/15/62 (29, 447)
Joe Namath, N.Y.Jets vs. Bos. (AFL), 10/2/66 (28, 338)
Fran Tarkenton, Minn. vs. Phil., 12/3/78 (30, 289)
- 55 Glenn Dobbs, L.A. vs. S.F. (AAFC), 12/5/48 (27, 405)
George Blanda, Hou. vs. L.A. (AFL), 11/13/60 (31, 366)
Roman Gabriel, Phil. vs. S.F., 12/2/73 (28, 322)



Chuck Conerly

Most touchdown passes, game

- 7 Sid Luckman, Chi.Bears vs. N.Y.Giants, 11/14/43
Adrian Burk, Phil. vs. Wash., 10/17/54
George Blanda, Hou. vs. N.Y.Titans (AFL), 11/19/61
Y.A. Tittle, N.Y.Giants vs. Wash., 10/28/62
Joe Kapp, Minn. vs. Balt., 9/28/69
- 6 Sammy Baugh, Wash. vs. Brk., 10/31/43
Sammy Baugh, Wash. vs. Chi. Cards, 11/23/47
Otto Graham, Clev. vs. L.A. (AAFC), 10/14/49
Johnny Lujack, Chi.Bears vs. Chi.Cards, 12/11/49
Jim Hardy, Chi.Cards vs. Balt., 10/2/50
George Blanda, Hou. vs. N.Y.Titans (AFL) 10/14/62
Y.A. Tittle, N.Y.Giants vs. Dall., 12/16/62
Tom Flores, Oak. vs. Hou. (AFL), 12/22/63
Len Dawson, K.C. vs. Den. (AFL), 11/1/64
Charley Johnson, St.L. vs. Clev., 9/26/65
Daryle Lamonica, Oak. vs. Buff. (AFL), 10/19/69
Charley Johnson, St.L. vs. N.O., 11/2/69 } same game
Billy Kilmer, N.O. vs. St.L., 11/2/69
Daryle Lamonica, Oak. vs. Hou. (AFL), 12/21/69, divisional playoff
Joe Namath, N.Y.Jets vs. Balt., 9/24/72
Bob Griese, Mia. vs. St.L., 11/24/77



Sid Luckman

JAMES FRANCIS THORPE

Halfback

Carlisle

6:01 190

Born: Prague, Okla., May 28, 1888

Died: Lomita, Calif., March, 28, 1953

Inducted Pro Football Hall of Fame: 1963

In the words of the King of Sweden, Jim Thorpe was "the greatest athlete in the world." The big Sac and Fox Indian excelled in track and field, played six years of major league baseball, and was — when the mood struck him — the best football player of his time. On a gridiron, he could run, pass, block, tackle, catch, and kick as well or better than anyone else.

By turning pro in 1915 — for \$250 a game when good players were getting a fifth of that — he raised the prestige of pro football. His best years were those before 1920, as he led the Canton Bulldogs to three national pro championships. When the NFL was formed, he was elected its first president, and most news stories put the name of the league far down in the account and gave Thorpe the headline.

But he stayed too long — far past his peak — until his play was a sad caricature of what once had been. After football, it was all downhill. A moody man, he drifted, worked as a laborer, drank ... died penniless.

They took away his Olympic medals and time took his skills. But the legends and memories remain.

THORPE'S SCORING RECORD *

Year	Team	Lg	TD	XP	FG	Pts
1915	Canton Bulldogs	..	0	0	2	6
1916	Canton Bulldogs	..	13	7	0	85
1917	Canton Bulldogs	..	4	1	0	25
1918	Did not play					
1919	Canton Bulldogs	..	5	4	3	43
1920	Canton Bulldogs	APFA	0	0	3	9
1921	Cleveland Indians	APFA	1	1	0	7
1922	Oorang Indians	NFL	3	0	0	18
1923	Oorang Indians	NFL	0	0	1	3
1924	Rock Island Independents	NFL	0	1	2	7
1925	New York - Rock Island	NFL	0	0	0	0
1926	Canton Bulldogs	NFL	2	0	0	12
1927	Did not play					
1928	Chicago Cardinals	NFL	0	0	0	0
12 years			28	14	11	215

* - Thorpe also played for Pine Village, Ind., early in his career, but no records are available. 1920-1928 totals include only official league games.



Emmett

1 PIC = 10,000 WDS

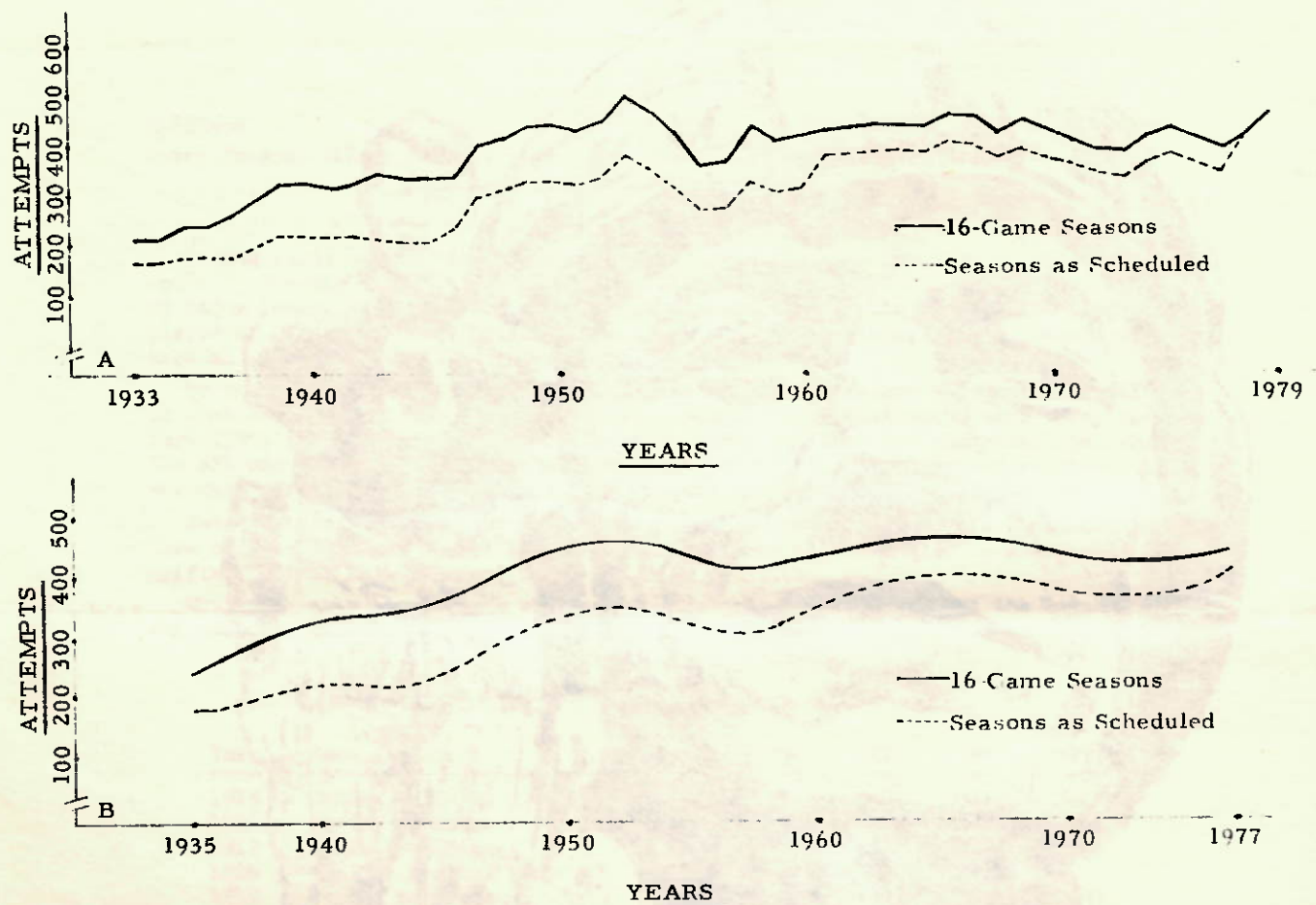


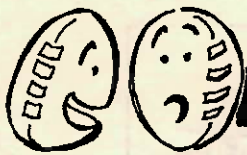
Chart II--Average Number of Passing Attempts Per NFL Team, 1933-1979

By David Shapiro

Let me repeat: this chart (like the one in the April issue) is intended to counteract three deplorable characteristics of contemporary sports journalism -- hyping, superficiality, and non-objectivity -- which, in concert, produce a distorted imagery instead of scientific reality.

Chart II deals with absolute values -- passing attempts. It is constructed in two parts -- an "A" and a "B". In A, the values are plotted as they actually occurred (dashed line labeled "Seasons as Scheduled") and after the adjustment necessary to make them arithmetically equivalent to 16-game seasons (solid line labeled "16-Game Seasons"). In B, the series are the same as in A except that each one is in the form of a 5-year moving average (intended to allow the forest to be seen instead of the trees -- a sort of trend line).

You might like to compare this chart with the one on total pass interceptions published in the April issue. I'm sure that you'll see ... sorry, I almost forgot. You do the interpreting.



P.F.R.A. - TERNIZING

THE ULTIMATE, ALL-NEW, SUPER-SENSATIONAL, NICE, EXTRA-SPECIAL, CUTE, HALL OF FAME NAME GAME !!!?#\$\$*&!!

Complete each of the following sentences with the name of a member of Pro Football's Hall of Fame. Hint: forget about the spelling. Answers at the end of the column.

1. No, we won't walk to the trampoline, we'll use the -----.
2. When I said, "-----", I didn't mean for you to dress up in your little house, boy.
3. If you play poker with him, check his sleeves. I hear he's an -----.
4. Our cat won't go outside because she has -----.
5. Was the fight at the edge of the Grand Canyon one of the great -----?
6. She will not wed in white, she'll -----.
7. Instead of a long sunbeam, we got a -----.
8. Lawrence wanted to go to Harvard, but I said, "You'll go to -----!"
9. It turned out to be only a gentle breeze in spite of the hurricane predictors and -----.
10. I call it convenient 'cause food store me -----.

Plans are moving right along for the annual meeting at Canton on June 21 and 22. President Bob Carroll visited Canton recently to confer with secretary Joe Horrigan on the program.

Members planning to attend -- and right now it looks like a pretty good turnout -- should let Joe know they are coming. Write: Joe Horrigan, 218 Wise St., N.E., N. Canton, Ohio 44720.

For those arriving in Canton on the evening of the 20th, we hope to have an informal get-together.

We will include information on accommodations in the next issue of the Corner.

P.F.R.A. welcomes Jim Fuller of Fulton, Mo. as a new member. He is our third Missouri member.

Nominations are still open for next year's officers. They will close on May 15.

Nominations should be sent to Thomas S. Nikitas, 24 Whitman Ave., Syosset, N.Y. 11791.

It has been brought to our attention that many new members may not know who the present officers are. Elected last year were: Bob Carroll, president; Bob Braunwart, vice-president; Joe Horrigan, secretary; and Vic Frolund, treasurer.

Concerning nominations, Bob Carroll has released the following statement: "I will be happy to serve P.F.R.A. in some capacity during the coming year. As a matter of fact, just try to stop me! However, I feel that the organization -- new as it is -- may benefit in its second year by having a new leader at the top. Therefore, I prefer that I not be re-nominated for the office of president."

Bob Braunwart, busily editing the P.F.R.A. Annual, reports that this first edition will be primarily concerned with origins. It will include articles on football's beginnings, the first attempt at organizing a league, the pro football "World Series," the Grey Cup, and several other entertaining pieces.

The Corner received quite a few favorable comments on the "in-depth issue" concerning the Providence Steam Roller. A second "in-depth issue" is in the works. Ed Pavlick (2469 North Maryland Ave., Milwaukee, Wisc. 53211) and Stan Grosshandler (4905 Richland Drive, Raleigh, N.C. 27612) are sharing the text which will be all about the All-American Football Conference (1946-49). Members wishing to add some tidbits should write to Ed or Stan.

One of the most interesting spots on the Directory Questionnaires turned out to be the answers to the query as to what was the first pro football game members had seen.

Here are some of the replies:

Don Smith: "Pacific Coast League game involving the San Diego Bombers (playing in Balboa Stadium) in 1944."

L. Robert Davids: "Sammy Baugh's last game, for Washington Redskins, early December, 1952."

Fred Gehrke: "In 1940 -- my first year as a pro player."

Jim Stewart: "N.Y. Giants vs. Frankford Yellowjackets, Polo Grounds -- Oct. 18, 1925."

Jim Campbell: "1948 NFL Championship Game."

Michael J. Walsh: "The 1946 Championship Game."

Lee Ballinger: "Denver-San Diego (first year of AFL)."

Joe Horrigan: "Buffalo Bills vs. Boston Patriots (AFL Exhibition), July 30, 1960. This was the first AFL game ever played."

Vic Frolund: "1907. This was more of a semi-pro game. Real pro - 1915."

Tom Nikitas: "Thanksgiving Day - 1926. Ironton Tanks vs. Kansas City Cowboys."

Bernie McCarty: "I have never been to a pro football game!"

Ed Pavlick: "Altoona Mountaineers in 1947, Minor League (Pennsylvania Pro League)."

Jeff Morey: "Steelers/Browns exhibition for the benefit of the March of Dimes in 1953(?)"

Jack Stanton: "Minnesota Vikings vs. Green Bay Packers -- Metropolitan Stadium, 1961."

Donald Mankin: "1956 Baltimore vs. Chicago Bears."

Vincent Popo: "Philadelphia vs. Cleveland (HOF Game - as a child)."

Steve Murrin: "Washington vs. St. Louis, 1965."

Steve Vasilious: "Steelers vs. Browns, 1968."

Richard Cohen: "?"

Larry Setaro: "1973 (in person), 1955 (TV)."

William Frolund: "Detroit Lions vs. Philadelphia Eagles, Dec., 1954, in Briggs Stadium."

And many others, but we're running out of space. We just want to mention that John Gunn had the easiest time remembering the date of his first game: "Bears vs. Cardinals, Dec. 7, 1941."

Answers to U.A.N.S.S.N.E.S.C.HOF Game:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. gym auto | 6. marry in motley |
| 2. don hut, son | 7. shorty ray |
| 3. ace parker | 8. Yale, Larry |
| 4. tom fears | 9. gale sayers |
| 5. cliff battles | 10. 'andy robust deli |

ABOUT PFRA:

The Professional Football Researchers Association was founded as a non-profit organization on June 22, 1979, at Canton, Ohio. The purpose of the association is to foster the study of professional football as a significant social and athletic institution. It further hopes to establish an accurate historical account of professional football and to disseminate research information.

Membership in P.F.R.A. is open to anyone with a sincere interest in the history of professional football or related subjects. Members receive: twelve issues of The Coffin Corner, the official newsletter of the P.F.R.A.; the opportunity to submit material to be considered for publication in the newsletter; an end of year Directory of Membership; a specially prepared association publication to be offered at the end of the year at a membership discount; and a P.F.R.A. Membership Card.

To join, write to P.F.R.A./ 218 Wise St., N.E./ N. Canton, O./ 44720.

To help defray operational expenses of the association, reasonable dues of \$12 per year have been set.

The Coffin Corner
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