

The Official
Newsletter
of the PFRA

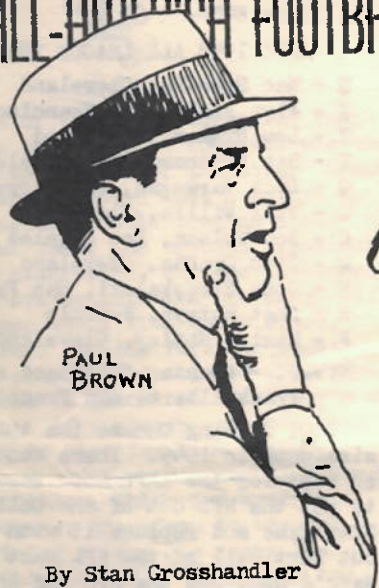


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Vol. LL, No. 7

July, 1980

ALL-AMERICA FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

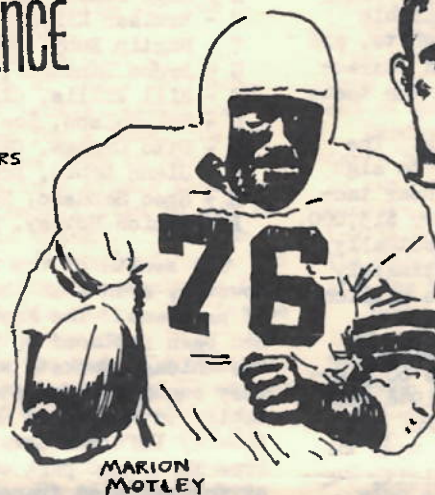


By Stan Grosshandler

Two days prior to D-Day 1944 a group described by the A.P. as "men of millionaire incomes" met in St. Louis to organize a new professional football league. They had been called together by Arch Ward, the innovative sports editor of the Chicago Tribune and organizer of the college and baseball All-Star games.

Ward reasoned that the end of World War II would provide the professional gridirons with a brand new crop of players. In addition to experienced pros, there would be high school and college players who had competed with the pros while in the service, plus the players who had remained in college during the war.

The initial meeting, attended by representatives of Buffalo, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Cleveland (for whom Ward carried a proxy) led to a second organizational meeting on Sept. 3, 1944 in Chicago. John Keeshin, a trucking executive, represented Chicago; oilmen James Breuil and Ray Ryan were from Buffalo and New York respectively; boxer Gene Tunney sought a team for Baltimore; actor Don Ameche wanted one for L.A.; Tony Morabito, a lumber executive, was from San Francisco; and Arthur Mc-



Bride, a Cleveland taxi man, came from that city. Also present was Mrs. Eleanor Gehrig, widow of the baseball Hall of Famer, who later became a league executive. It was reported that Detroit, Philadelphia and Boston were also interested in the new league.

The name All-America Football Conference (AAFC) was chosen.

Resolutions were passed stipulating that no club could sign a coach or player under contract to any NFL team nor could a player with remaining college eligibility be signed.

Apparently at this time it was felt that a relationship could be made with the NFL and a "World Series" of pro football played.

This idea was crushed when Elmer Layden, the NFL Commissioner, issued the scornful statement: "Let them get a ball, draw a schedule, and play a game. Then I will talk to them."

At the September meeting Mr. Ryan announced he had signed college stars Glenn Dobbs of Tulsa, Martin Ruby of Texas A&M, Jack Russell of Baylor and Bob Daley of Minnesota and Michigan.

A commissioner -- Jim Crowley -- was picked Nov. 22, 1944. Curiously both the AAFC and the NFL commissioners were now former members of Notre Dame's famed Four Horsemen.

A state of flux existed in 1945 as there were some changes in ownerships and Baltimore decided not to field a team. McBride pulled a big surprise by signing Paul Brown as coach even though Paul was still in the navy. Brown was a second choice after the president of Notre Dame asked McBride not to ask Frank Leahy.

A major break came in December when Dan Topping took his Brooklyn team out of the NFL and put them in Yankee Stadium and in the AAFC.

By Jan. of 1946 the league was set: West - Cleveland, McBride owner, Brown coach, Municipal Stadium; San Francisco, Morabito, Buck Shaw, Kezar Stadium; Los Angeles, Ben Lindheimer, Dudley DeGroot, L.A. Coliseum; and Chicago, Keeshin, Dick Hanley, Soldiers Field. The East had New York, Topping owner, Ray Flaherty coach, Yankee Stadium; Buffalo, Breuil, Sam Cordovano, Civic Stadium; Brooklyn, Bill Cox, Mal Stevens, Ebbets Field, and Miami, Harvey Hester, Jack Meagher, Orange Bowl.

The league signed the biggest air charter ever negotiated with United Airlines, made plans for a secret draft (which never came off), went on record as being against the free substitution rule, and added a fifth official, the sideline judge.

Soon turmoil hit the league with a rash of litigations. L.A. started a

suit over Angelo Bertelli and Cleveland over Chet Adams. In the meanwhile, Cordovano resigned as coach of Buffalo before ever sending in one wrong play. He was replaced by Red Dawson.

Bertelli was considered a real trophy for the new league. He had been Notre Dame's first T-formation quarterback and won the Heisman Trophy. However, he never lived up to expectations in the AAFC.

The league mounted a publicity campaign stressing diversity (the Browns would use the T, the Yankees the single wing, Buffalo the winged T, and Chicago the spread double wing), and color (the red, white, and blue of San Francisco would characterize the snappy uniforms the teams would use).

Now came the signing war. The first established NFL star to sign with the AAFC was Chicago Bear tackle Lee Artoe who jumped for \$15,000. This and other signings eventually raised all salaries and ultimately cost both leagues over five million dollars.

Roughly 100 former NFL players joined the AAFC. 44 of the 60 players chosen to play in the 1946 College All-Star Game went AAFC.

"The men who had signed with the AAFC received all the publicity during the All-Star training camp," recalled Pat Harder who had chosen the NFL. "It was as if we had two different camps, an NFL camp and an AAFC camp. As you know, Arch Ward was the AAFC and the All-Star Game. I even doubted that I would get to play in the game. The big news was that my former teammate Elroy Hirsch and his El Toro mates had signed with the Chicago Rockets whose coach was Dick Hanley, the El Toro coach."

Training got underway as the Dodgers flew to Bend, Oregon, and the Rockets to Santa Rosa, Calif. The first exhibition game pitted these teams against each other and resulted in a 14-14 tie.

The AAFC was for real on Sept. 6, 1946, when 60,135 fans at Cleveland saw the Browns blow the Seahawks in to Lake Erie, 44-0. A Cliff Lewis to Mac Speedie pass was the first TD scored in the AAFC. That crowd was the biggest ever to see a regular season pro game up till then. Later that season Cleveland set a new record while beating L.A. before 71,134.

The Miami franchise was a disaster with owner Harvey Hester losing his life savings. Late in the year their debts were paid by the other clubs and the franchise transferred to Baltimore.

New York won the East in 1946, followed by Brooklyn, Buffalo and Miami. The Browns took the West, followed by San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago.

The first title game was won by the Browns who beat the Yankees, 14-9. Yankee kicker Harvey Johnson kicked a field goal to put New York into the lead. A one-yard plunge by Marion Motley sent the Browns ahead. Spec Sanders scored from the two and the Yankees were back on top. Then an 18-yard Graham to Lavelli pass became the margin of victory. Graham iced the game when he intercepted a desperation New York pass at the end.

AAFC 1946 ALL-LEAGUE TEAM

E - Dante Lavelli, Cleveland
E - Alyn Beals, San Francisco
T - Bruiser Kinard, New York
T - Martin Ruby, Brooklyn
G - Bruno Banducci, San Fran.
G - Bill Willis, Cleveland
C - Bob Nelson, Los Angeles
Q - Otto Graham, Cleveland
H - Glenn Dobbs, Brk (M.V.P.)
H - Spec Sanders, New York
F - Marion Motley, Cleveland

The zenith of the AAFC was 1947. However, even then there were signs of problems. The Miami franchise had been replaced by Baltimore, but the Chicago Rockets were in trouble. They could not compete with the established Bears and Cardinals. Jim Crowley left the Commissioner's office to become part owner and coach of the troubled franchise. He was succeeded by Admiral Jonas Ingram.

The schedule used the year before of having a game almost every day had not worked out, so the league went to playing on weekends.

Again it was Cleveland in the West, followed by San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. The Yankees repeated in the East, followed by Buffalo, Brooklyn and Baltimore. The Browns once more won the title game, 14-3.

AAFC 1947 ALL-LEAGUE TEAM

E - Dante Lavelli, Cleveland
E - Mac Speedie, Cleveland
T - Lou Rymkus, Cleveland
T - Nate Johnson, New York
G - Bruno Banducci, San Fran.
G - Bill Willis, Cleveland
C - Bob Nelson, Los Angeles
Q - Otto Graham, Cleve. (M.V.P.)
H - Spec Sanders, New York
H - Chet Mutryn, Buffalo
F - Marion Motley, Cleveland

The handwriting began to appear on the wall in 1948. Numerous ownership changes occurred, one of which found Branch Rickey taking over the Dodgers in Brooklyn. It was hoped that baseball's wizard could perform some football miracles. Branch even tried the old Cashouse Gang hero Pepper Martin as a place kicker.

Early in the year peace overtures had been made to the NFL but were turned down. The AAFC "Haves" were asked to give to the "Have Nots" and Cleveland gave Y.A. Tittle to the

Colts.

That fall a secret draft was proposed. Available at the end of the 1948 college season were Lou Kusserow (a prominent TV producer today), Abe Gibrion, Chuck Bednarik, Frank Trippka, Pete Elliott, Terry Brennan and Bill Fischer.

Cleveland went undefeated. The 49ers, losers of only two games to the Browns, finished second. L.A. and Chicago followed. The East was a farce. The Yankees and Dodgers trailed badly. Buffalo and the Colts tied for the lead at 7-7. The Bills won a playoff only to have the honor of getting trounced 49-7 by the Browns in the title game.

AAFC 1948 ALL-LEAGUE TEAM

E - Mac Speedie, Cleveland
E - Alyn Beals, San Francisco
T - Lou Rymkus, Cleveland
T - Bob Reinhard, Los Angeles
G - Dick Barwegan, Baltimore
G - Bill Willis, Cleveland
C - Bob Nelson, Los Angeles
Q - Otto Graham, Cleveland
H - John Strzykowski, San Fran.
H - Chet Mutryn, Buffalo
F - Marion Motley, Cleveland

M.V.P. - Graham, Cleveland and Frank Albert, San Francisco

O.O. Kessing became the third Commissioner in 1949. There was a ray of hope for the AAFC when Ward tried to get the NFL out of the College All-Star game and replace it with the AAFC. But Bert Bell of the NFL went over Ward's head and the NFL had another victory in the war.

The Brooklyn franchise failed and merged with the Yankees. Only seven former Dodgers stayed in New York and the rest went to Chicago. Cleveland finished on top of the seven club league, followed by San Francisco, Brooklyn-New York, Buffalo, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Baltimore. In the first round of the playoffs, the Browns beat Buffalo 31-21 and San Francisco beat the Yankees 17-7. In the final championship game the Browns beat the 49ers 21-7. There was talk of a championship game with the NFL but Bert Bell argued it would be in violation of the older league's constitution.

AAFC 1949 ALL-LEAGUE TEAM

E - Mac Speedie, Cleveland
E - Alyn Beals, San Francisco
T - Arnie Weinmeister, New York
T - Bob Reinhard, Los Angeles
G - Visco Grgich, San Francisco
G - Dick Barwegan, Baltimore
C - Lou Saban, Cleveland
Q - Otto Graham, Cleveland
H - Frank Albert, San Francisco
H - Chet Mutryn, Buffalo
F - Joe Perry, San Francisco

On December 9, 1949, Cleveland, San Francisco and Baltimore were taken into the NFL. The rest of the players were divided among NFL teams.

Although Baltimore was not a particularly successful team, they got in because George Preston Marshall felt they would be a natural rival for his Washington Redskins. Buffalo, a success both at the gate and on the field, was denied entry and owner Jim Breuil had to settle for a share of the Cleveland team.

One of the odd facts of the war is that the loser, the AAFC, averaged 38,310 a game while the NFL averaged only 27,602.

CLEVELAND



BROWNS

One of the most successful franchises ever seen in football was the Cleveland Browns of the AAFC. Coach Paul Brown showed that a return to fundamentals could produce a successful team. He brought organization, discipline, and the messenger guard system into the pro game. It has been said, with great error, that Paul was the first to employ black players; but he did give them a chance to become integral parts of a team. If a player gave his best he got to play for Paul Brown.

Brown had been a successful coach at Massillon, Ohio, and again at Ohio State; therefore it was not surprising to see his teams loaded with Ohioans. His first team had George Cherokee (G), Jim Daniell (T), Lindell Houston (G), Dante Lavelli (E), Gene Fekete (FB), Lou Groza (T), and Bill Willis (G). All had played for him at Ohio State. He had seen Marion Motley as a high schooler at Canton against Brown's Massillon Tigers. Later Paul got Horace Gillom and Tommy James, both of whom had played for him at Massillon.

His biggest masterpiece was the conversion of single wing tailback, music major, Otto Graham into one of the great T-quarterbacks. Brown used Motley to set up the pass. The Graham/Motley draw play became devastating. Another feature of the Brown attack was the use of the halfbacks as both runners and receivers.

In the early years, most of his players went both ways, but ends Mac Speedie and Dante Lavelli played only offense as George Young and John Yonaker came in on defense.

"When I got out of the service," Dante Lavelli recalled, "I stopped off to see a pro game and decided I wanted to play professionally. I also realized it was best for you to have some sort of gimmick, something you did better than anyone else. I hit upon the sideline pass and it became our trade mark. We practiced constantly and it paid off."

Eleven players from the 1946 squad enjoyed their first NFL title in 1950. They were Graham, Groza, Lavelli, Motley, Willis, Speedie, Young, Rymkus, Houston, Cliff Lewis, and Frank Gatski.

The '47 club went 12-1-1. New players included Lou Saban, a great linebacker, Weldon Humble, one of the first messenger guards, and linebacker Tony Adamle.

Another addition was punter Horace Gillom, whom many consider the greatest booter ever.

In 1948 the Browns were undefeated. Chubby Grigg, Alex Agase, Ara Parseghian, Ollie Cline and Dub Jones came on board.

Jones, father of Colt QB Bert, was the epitome of the T halfback, able to go off tackle, sweep the ends or go deep for a pass. He is one of only three pros to have scored six TDs in a single game.

"I would always listen to Dub in a huddle," said Graham. "When he said he could beat the defense I had the confidence that he could do it and would call his play. The day he scored six TDs Brown sent in a running play near the end of the game. I knew Dub needed one more TD and so I asked him if he could beat their man. He said he could, so one of the few times I disobeyed Brown I called a pass. He got it and had six touchdowns."

On Oct. 10, 1948, Cleveland had an odd situation. That afternoon the Indians played the Braves in a World Series, then at night the Browns beat the Dodgers, all in Municipal Stadium.

In 1949 Darrell Palmer and Warren Lahr were added to the roster, and the team went 9-1-2.

The Cleveland Browns were a two-edged sword for the AAFC. They showed the world that the AAFC was indeed a major league and there is no doubt that in any of the four years the Browns would have been a top contender in the NFL. But ultimately they hurt the AAFC. Their record of 51-4-2 indicated a tremendous lack of balance. When there was no competition the fans ceased to show up.

Crazy Legs Hirsch said, "When I was with the Rockets and we played Cleveland, it was not whether we would win or lose, but just how bad they were going to beat us that day."

NEW YORK



YANKEES

For two seasons the New York Yankees gave the Browns some competition.

Under coach Ray Flaherty the Yanks won the East 10-3-1 in their first season. Flaherty used the single wing and had signed some impressive names for his triple threat tailback. He had Ace Parker, Frank Sinkwich and Spec Sanders lined up for 1946.

The Ace gave Flaherty one last good year before he retired, but Sinkwich, who had been an NFL MVP with Detroit, failed in New York.

"I had had a good year with the Lions and then went into the service," Sinkwich recalled. "However, I'd hurt my knees at Georgia and again while playing service ball. I was foolish to try to come back and play in the AAFC. I couldn't do a thing. I've always thought what might have been had I been able to play with a set of good knees."

Sanders, who had been Pete Layden's backup at Texas, led the AAFC in rushing in '46. The rest of the backfield had Lloyd Cheatham at blocking back, Bob Sweigert at wing, and fullbacks Eddie Prokop, Bob Kennedy and Pug Manders.

Young Jack Russell and Bruce Alford and vets Perry Schwartz and Bob Masterson held down the ends. Nate Johnson and Bruiser Kinard were the tackles. The specialist was just beginning to emerge and kicker Harvey Johnson was one of the tops.

The 1947 team went 11-2-1 with Sanders rushing for 1,431 yards, the only man who ever exceeded 1,000 in the AAFC.

The new fullback was 5'5", 170 lb. Buddy Young. Sanders explained, "In our system we did not need a bruising fullback so Buddy's weight was not against him. His speed and deception made him the ideal man for our system and we complemented one another."

The late Dick Barwegan took over a guard position and proved to be one of the best.

On Friday night, Oct. 24, Spec Sanders had one of the greatest games any runner ever enjoyed. He rushed for 250 yards on only 24 attempts against the Rockets. He scored a TD on a 20-yard run, using a "vicious" straight arm, passed for another TD, and accounted for still another when he faded to pass, found his receivers covered, and ran 70 yards through the entire Rocket team. Oddly, Sanders remembered little of the game. He recalled that Buddy Young opened the second half with a 95-yard TD return of the kickoff, and that he sat out most of the second half because the game was one-sided.

Sanders was nagged by injuries in 1948 and the team fell to 6-8-0. Red Strader replaced Flaherty.

"I would consider Spec Sanders one of the five or six truly great players I have seen," said Buddy Young. "He was in a class by himself. You could say he was a late maturation factor."

At Texas he played behind Pete Layden and then spent several years in the service. He really came of age when he got to the Yankees." Ironically, when Layden joined the Yankees in 1948 he backed up Sanders.

"We all felt that the way Spec ran he would burn himself out fast," recalled Elroy Hirsch. "His hard, reckless way of running certainly shortened his career."

An injury put Sanders out for the entire '49 season. The team had switched to the T, with Young, Sherman Howard and Lou Kusserow the runners. Brad Ecklund, Martin Ruby, Arnie Weinmeister and Joe Signiagio were in the line, and three outstanding defensive backs -- Tom Landry, Otto Schnellbacher, and Harmon Rowe -- guarded the air lanes.

Unfortunately for the Yankees, quarterback Don Panciera did not rate with the league's top signal callers. The team went 8-4-0 and lost to San Francisco in the first round of the playoffs.

CHICAGO



ROCKETS

The greatest disappointment of all was the Chicago Rockets. They were stocked with former All-Americans yet could never put it all together.

The 1946 Rockets started out with Dick Hanley as coach, but he lost control of his former Marines after three games. Sid Luckman was approached as coach. When he turned down the offer, a triumvirate of players -- Bob Dove, Ned Mathews and Willie Wilkin tried to run the team. After five games of that, Pat Boland took over. Boland, along with Ernie Nevers, had been one of Hanley's assistants.

Overloaded with All-American offensive stars such as Hirsch, Billy Hillenbrand, Bob Hoernschemeyer and Max Morris, the Rockets had little defense. They were bombarded with such scores as 51, 48 and 35 points.

Jim Crowley took over as coach in '47 and lasted but 10 games before he turned the club over to Hamp Pool. The team finished 1-13-0.

A bizarre trade saw MVP Glenn Dobbs go from Brooklyn to L.A., Angelo Bertelli from L.A. to Chicago, and Hoernschemeyer to Brooklyn. Bertelli threw seven passes in combat, hitting on only two, as Sam Vacanti and Al Dekdebrun ran the offense. Bill Daley was the best rusher as Ray Ramsey and Elroy Hirsch spent most of the season injured.

Hirsch was sidelined again in '48 as the team used its third straight

group of owners and still another coach, Ed McKeever. Jesse Freitas was the new QB and Julie Rykovich was a good runner. Again, 1-13-0.

1949 brought a fourth set of owners, yet another coach in Ray Flaherty, and a new name -- the Hornets -- but the same old brand of football.

The attack centered around the returned Hoernschemeyer and Johnny Clement. Dan Edwards was a good receiver and John Rapacz emerged as a top center.

The 1949 team had a member who is in the trivia annals. Linebacker Hardy Brown, along with itinerant kicker Ben Agajanian who played for L.A., played in the AAFC, the NFL, and the American Football League.

SAN FRANCISCO



FORTY-NINERS

By far the second most successful team was the San Francisco 49ers. They were a spectacular unit on the field and did well at the box office.

Their first season was 9-5-0 under coach Buck Shaw who built his offense around the brilliant lefthanded QB Frank Albert. Albert, a scrambler before the word was coined, had his old Stanford teammate Norm Standlee at fullback and two fantastic halfbacks in John Strzykalski and Len Eshmont. His receivers were Allyn Beals who specialized in TD receptions and Nick Suseoff. Joe Vetrano was a gifted kicker, and the line boasted John Mellus, John Kuzman, John Woudenberg, Bruno Banducci, Dick Bassi and Visco Grgich.

In '47 the team went 8-4-2.

Probably their strongest team was in 1948 (when the Browns went undefeated). Joe "The Jet" Perry joined the club, and took his first handoff 58 yards to the end zone. Also added were center Bill Johnson and guard Riley Matheson. The club had two backfields of almost equal quality. Albert, Standlee, Eshmont and Strzykalski rushed for 2,122 yards and Bev Wallace, Perry, Veri Lillywhite and Forrest Hall logged 1,016.

The final edition of the 49ers in the AAFC went 9-3-0 but lost again to the Browns in the final championship game. Their finest moment came on October 9 when they ended the Browns' 27-game winning streak, 56-28.

The 49ers were a stable team, using the same nucleus throughout four years. Once they joined the NFL they continued their high grade of play.

LOS ANGELES



DONS

The Los Angeles Dons' battle with the Rams (transplanted from Cleveland) in Los Angeles proved costly to both clubs. The Dons were a colorful team and were just beginning to draw when the AAFC closed up shop.

The first team under Dud DeGroot went 7-5-2. They were a fine offensive club that allowed as many points as they scored. At tackle the Dons had Lee Artoe, the first man to flee the NFL for the new pot of gold, and Gil Duggan. Guards were Ray Frankowski, Bill Radovich and Al Lolotai. In the backfield were Charlie O'Rourke and John Kimbrough, two of the most famous players of the time, and Harry Clark and Chuck Fenenbock. Bob Reinhard was a star tackle who also punted, and Bob Nelson was a perennial all-league center. Dale Gentry, a rookie, enhanced a fair group of veteran ends including Bob Nowaskey, Al Krueger, and Joe Aguirre.

The 1947 team was a razzle-dazzle bunch that put on an interesting game and began to attract fans. This was not reflected in a 7-7-0 record and coach DeGroot was replaced by Ted Shipkey and Mel Hein. New additions were guard Len Levy and end Burr Baldwin, while O'Rourke and Kimbrough carried the offense.

Jimmy Phelan moved in as coach in 1947 and the team was again 7-7-0. This season they added Herman Wedemeyer at a reported salary of \$12,000. Len Ford was another new man.

Glenn Dobbs, obtained the previous season, had another big season. Kimbrough, Walt Clay and Wedemeyer provided the running and Aguirre, Ford, Gentry, Baldwin and Bill Fisk were fine receivers.

Although the attendance improved in 1949 the record sank to 4-8-0. Their generous owner Ben Lindheimer not only kept his own team afloat but paid part of Wedemeyer's salary when he was traded to Baltimore and helped support Chicago.

Dobbs was again the offense, supported by George Taliaferro, Hosea Rodgers, Billy Grimes and Ford. Bob Reinhard and Bob Nelson remained two of the leading linemen in the game.

With the merger the Dons sank from sight along with the fact that they were one of the first to bring major league pro football to the West Coast.

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BROOKLYN



DODGERS

The name Brooklyn Dodgers opens the gates of nostalgia to both baseball and football fans. There were the "daffiness boys" of baseball lore and Jock Sutherland's NFL Dodgers.

The initial AAFC Dodger coach was the famed orthopedic surgeon-coach Mal Stevens. He lasted seven games and was replaced by Cliff Battles.

The keystone of the club was the single wing triple threat tailback Glenn Dobbs. Other than Dobbs, Martin Ruby at tackle and Saxon Judd at end, the Dodgers were a lack-luster team that finished 3-10-1.

The next year saw no improvement and another 3-10-1 record. Dobbs was traded away and his place taken by Bob Hoernschemeyer. Mickey Colmer switched from blocking back to full-back and was the top ground gainer.

In 1948 Branch Rickey took over and Carl Voyles became coach. Despite some assistance from Bob Chappuis and Dan Edwards the cast was still much the same and the record was worse, 2-12-0.

At the end of the season the club was merged with the Yankees.

* * *

BUFFALO



BILLS

The one club really shortchanged in the NFL-AAFC merger was Buffalo. The team was successful both on the field and at the box office.

Red Dawson took the first club to a 3-10-1 record. It was pretty much of a land team as Harry Hopp, Vic

Kulbitski, Steve Juzwik and Ghet Mutryn carried the mail. Fay King was a good receiver and Hal Lahar a top guard.

George Ratterman joined the club in 1947 and they moved to a 8-4-2 record. George zipped passes to King and Al Baldwin, and Ghet Mutryn developed into one of the best ground gainers in the game. Julie Rykovich and Vic Kulbitski also contributed to the solid ground game.

The 1948 squad ended 7-7-0, yet tied Baltimore for the Eastern Division lead. In the playoff with the Colts, the Bills came from behind to win only to be demolished by the Browns in the title game. A guard on this team was Ed King, present governor of Massachusetts.

Under Glen Grove the 1949 Bills went 5-5-2. They tied the Browns twice to become the only AAFC club to go through a season without losing to the Browns. This season Abe Gibron joined the club; Ratterman, Mutryn, Ollie Cline, Rex Bumgardner, and Baldwin provided thrills.

When the team was dismantled, Gibron, John Kissell and Bumgardner joined the Browns.

* * *

BALTIMORE



COLTS

The Miami team proved to be an embarrassment to the AAFC, going down in a blaze of red ink that the rest of the league had to bail out.

Jack Meagher was the first coach, but he was soon replaced by Hamp Pool as the team went 3-11-0. Marion Pugh made a valiant attempt to play quarterback. However, the ability of the line can be appraised by the fact that all five players who attempted to play QB ended up with minus rushing marks. Somehow, Lamar Davis managed to catch 22 passes at end.

Baltimore replaced the sunken

Seahawks in 1947 with Cecil Isbell as coach. The Colts went 2-11-1 on the season. Bud Schwenk, acquired from the Browns, gave the team a passing attack, throwing to Davis and Billy Hillenbrand.

The '48 team tied Buffalo for first place but lost the playoff. This club had Y.A. Tittle as an outright gift from Cleveland. Dick Barwegan, acquired from New York, was the top lineman.

Prior to the playoff, the players threatened a strike. This was only averted when management offered an extra game salary.

The final edition went 1-11-0 with Isbell being replaced during the season by Walter Driskill. What little good that occurred stemmed from Tittle's passing.

Despite their poor record, the Colts were taken into the NFL with the merger. However, they failed to improve and disappeared after one season. The present-day Colts are not their descendants.

* * *

Many reasons have been offered for the demise of the AAFC. Perhaps the nation was not ready for a new pro football league; it was the zenith of college football interest, with Notre Dame, Michigan and Oklahoma riding high.

The teams played few exhibition games, depriving themselves of an important source of revenue.

Buddy Young has suggested mismanagement. He also points out that, except for Paul Brown and Buck Shaw, the best coaches were in the NFL.

Many experts have suggested that the AAFC suffered because it had no television revenue (which was such an important factor in the later success of the American Football League), but the NFL had no TV money to speak of at this time either.

Finally, there were the Browns. In their success they were the AAFC's greatest triumph; in their dominance they were its greatest failure.

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OPINION

PRO FOOTBALL RECORDS SHOULD INCLUDE THE AAFC

By Ed Pavlick

Pro football records are very much incomplete in that the NFL does not "recognize" records and statistics from the All-America Football Conference.

The AAFC was a bonafide major league that existed 1946 through 1949. Many great players performed in that league including: Otto Graham, Dante Lavelli, Lou Groza, Frankie Albert,

Joe Perry, Y.A. Tittle, to name a few. How can the records of these greats and others who played in that league be ignored?

The league was much closer to parity with the NFL of its time than was the AFL in its first few years. Unlike the AFL, the AAFC did not start with only rookies and castoffs. Over 100 players whose contracts had run out were lured from the NFL.

It also signed a flock of top college stars, many of whom had played service ball in addition.

The NFL claims it does not recognize AAFC records because no "official" game sheets are available. When the AAFC folded, most non-financial

records were bundled and sold for waste paper.

However, the NFL has included in its manuals several records set in the 1920s when no "official" game sheets were available. This is nit-picking. The AAFC record manuals are available and these ARE the official statistics, corrected from the season ending data.

Interestingly enough, the NFL recognizes all records and statistics of the AFL. Had the AFL folded instead of merging with the NFL would their records have been ignored?

The NFL did not recognize that the AFL existed during the early 1960s. Suddenly, with the merger, the AFL

records became "acceptable." In the first record manual to include the AFL, Cookie Gilchrist's 247 yard game became the NFL record. Only the year before, Jimmy Brown's 237 yarder was the recognized mark. Actually, the top pro mark at the time was Spec Sanders' 250 yards in one game.

Including AAFC stats makes quite a difference in all-time record listings. In lifetime scoring, for example, Lou Groza is second to George Blanda when his AAFC points are counted. Why should Blanda get full credit for his AFL statistics and Groza not be credited for his AAFC marks?

In lifetime rushing, Joe Perry is third behind Jim Brown and O.J. Simpson when his AAFC stats are included.

The NFL lists Brown's 5.2 lifetime rushing average as tops. In actuality, Marion Motley's 5.7 is the best mark for all rushers with 3,000 or more yards.

In lifetime passing, based on the NFL rating system, Otto Graham is number one with his 86.8 rating.

In team records there is a big difference. Counting the AAFC, the Cleveland Browns won the most consecutive league championships -- 5. The 1948 Browns were the first major league pro team to go undefeated in regular and post season play. Only the 1972 Miami Dolphins have done

it since.

An important team record is still held by an AAFC team. The 1948 San Francisco 49ers rushed for 3,663 yards and a 6.1 average. This powerful running attack was led by John Strzykalaki's 915 yards and featured two great fullbacks in Joe Perry and Norm Standlee. The team had seven runners with 260 yards or more.

Spec Sanders had several record accomplishments. He gained 250 yards in one game, and was the first runner to average 100 yards per game when he gained 1432 yards in 14 games. His 18 rushing TDs in that year was the top mark until 1962.

Lou Groza and Ben Agajanian brought field goal kicking to new heights and established the trend toward making the field goal an important weapon.

Frankie Albert's 29 TD passes in 1948 wasn't surpassed until John Unitas notched 32 in 1959.

Several other AAFC records came close to being new pro standards.

It seems unrealistic as well as unfair that the NFL ignores the AAFC in view that other authorities do indeed recognize them. The Pro Football Hall of Fame includes the AAFC marks in its "lifetime leaders" listings. Two definitive works on pro football -- Treat's Encyclopedia of Football and Sports Encyclopedia: Pro Football -- both include AAFC

records, as does the Sporting News' National Football Guide.

It is interesting to note that all baseball guides, record books and encyclopedias recognize defunct major leagues such as the American Association, Union Association and Player's League. All players who played in those leagues are given full credit for their service and statistics.

Seymour Siwoff, the NFL's official statistician, is also responsible for The Book of Baseball Records. In it, he includes all the defunct leagues mentioned above and gives full credit to all players who performed in those leagues. Yet he does not do so for the AAFC players in the NFL Record Manual.

I believe that P.F.R.A. should campaign for AAFC records and statistical recognition. Both the NFL and the media must recognize it as an historical fact. Those media people who fail to include AAFC records in their commentaries should be corrected by P.F.R.A. members.

The players who performed in the AAFC deserve full credit for their entire careers in pro football.

1946 STANDINGS

WESTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
Cleveland Browns	12	2	0	.857
San Francisco 49ers	9	5	0	.643
Los Angeles Dons	7	5	2	.583
Chicago Rockets	5	6	3	.455
EASTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
New York Yankees	10	3	1	.769
Brooklyn Dodgers	3	10	1	.250
Buffalo Bills	3	10	1	.250
Miami Seahawks	3	11	0	.214

Cleveland 14, New York 9

1947 STANDINGS

WESTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
Cleveland Browns	12	1	1	.923
San Francisco 49ers	8	4	2	.667
Los Angeles Dons	7	7	0	.500
Chicago Rockets	1	13	0	.071
EASTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
New York Yankees	11	2	1	.846
Buffalo Bills	8	4	2	.667
Brooklyn Dodgers	3	10	1	.231
Baltimore Colts	2	11	1	.154

Cleveland 14, New York 3

1948 STANDINGS

WESTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
Cleveland Browns	14	0	0	1.000
San Francisco 49ers	12	2	0	.857
Los Angeles Dons	7	7	0	.500
Chicago Rockets	1	13	0	.071
EASTERN DIVISION	W	L	T	PCT
Buffalo Bills	7	7	0	.500
Baltimore Colts	7	7	0	.500
New York Yankees	6	8	0	.429
Brooklyn Dodgers	2	12	0	.143

Buffalo 28, Baltimore 17

Cleveland 49, Buffalo 7

1949 STANDINGS

	W	L	T	PCT
Cleveland Browns	9	1	2	.900
San Francisco 49ers	9	3	0	.750
Brk.-N.Y. Yankees	8	4	0	.667
Buffalo Bills	5	5	2	.500
Los Angeles Dons	4	8	0	.333
Chicago Hornets	4	8	0	.333
Baltimore Colts	1	11	0	.083

Cleveland 31, Buffalo 21
San Fran. 17, Brk.-N.Y. 7

Cleveland 21, San Fran. 7

AAFC COMPOSITE STANDINGS

Includes all regular season, playoff and championship games.

	W	L	T	PCT
Cleveland Browns	52	4	3	.929
San Francisco 49ers	39	15	2	.722
New York Yankees, 1946-1948	27	15	2	.643
Brooklyn-New York Yankees, 1949	8	5	0	.643
Los Angeles Dons	25	27	2	.481
Buffalo Bills/Bills	24	28	5	.462
Baltimore Colts, 1947-1949	10	30	1	.250
Chicago Rockets/Hornets	11	40	3	.216
Miami Seahawks, 1946	3	11	0	.214
Brooklyn Dodgers, 1946-1948	8	32	2	.200

YEARLY AAFC LEADERS

SCORING

YEAR		TD	XP	FG	PTS
1946	Lou Groza, Cleveland	0	45	13	84
1947	Spec Sanders, New York	19	0	0	114
1948	Chet Nutryn, Buffalo	16	0	0	96
1949	Alyn Beals, San Francisco	12	1	0	73

RUSHING

YEAR		ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1946	Spec Sanders, New York	140	709	5.1	6
1947	Spec Sanders, New York	231	1432	6.2	18
1948	Marion Motley, Cleveland	157	964	6.1	5
1949	Joe Perry, San Francisco	114	783	6.8	8

PASSING

YEAR		ATT	COM	IN	YDS	TD
1946	*Glenn Dobbs, Brooklyn	269	135	15	1886	13
	*Otto Graham, Cleveland	174	95	5	1834	17
1947	Otto Graham, Cleveland	269	163	11	2753	25
1948	Otto Graham, Cleveland	333	173	15	2713	25
1949	Otto Graham, Cleveland	285	161	10	2785	19

*-Co-Champions

PASS RECEIVING

YEAR		NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1946	*Dante Lavelli, Cleveland	40	843	21.1	8
	*Alyn Beals, San Francisco	40	586	14.7	10
1947	Mac Speedie, Cleveland	67	1146	17.1	6
1948	Mac Speedie, Cleveland	58	816	14.1	4
1949	Mac Speedie, Cleveland	40	1028	25.7	7

*-Co-Champions

INTERCEPTIONS

YEAR		NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1946	Tom Colella, Cleveland	10	110	11.0	0
1947	*Tom Colella, Cleveland	6	130	21.7	1
	*Bill Kellagher, Chicago	6	77	12.8	0
	*Len Eshmont, San Francisco	6	72	12.0	0
1948	Otto Schnellbacher, N.Y.	11	239	21.7	1
1949	Jim Cason, San Francisco	9	152	16.9	0

*-Co-Champions

PUNTING

YEAR		NO	AVG
1946	Glenn Dobbs, Brooklyn	80	47.8
1947	Mickey Colmer, Brooklyn	56	44.7
1948	Glenn Dobbs, Los Angeles	68	49.1
1949	Frankie Albert, San Francisco	31	48.2

PUNT RETURNS

YEAR		NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1946	Chuck Fenenbock, Los Ang.	16	299	18.7	0
1947	Glenn Dobbs, Los Angeles	19	215	11.3	0
1948	Herman Wedemeyer, Los Ang.	23	368	16.0	0
1949	Jim Cason, San Francisco	21	351	16.7	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

YEAR		NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1946	Chuck Fenenbock, Los Ang.	17	479	28.2	1
1947	Chet Nutryn, Buffalo	21	691	32.9	1
1948	Monk Gafford, Brooklyn	23	559	24.3	0
1949	Herman Wedemeyer, Balt.	30	602	20.1	0

FIELD GOALS

YEAR		NO
1946	Lou Groza, Cleveland	13
1947	Ben Agajanian, Los Angeles	15
1948	Rex Grossman, Baltimore	10
1949	Harvey Johnson, New York	7



MAC
SPEEDIE

DICK
BARWEGAN



ALL-TIME AAFC LEADERS

SCORING

	Yrs	TD	XP	FG	PTS
Alyn Beals, San Francisco	4	46	2	0	278
Lou Groza, Cleveland	4	0	165	30	259
Joe Vetrano, San Francisco	4	2	187	16	247
Spec Sanders, New York	3	40	0	0	240
Chet Nutryn, Buffalo	4	38	1	0	229

RUSHING

	Yrs	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
Marion Motley, Cleveland	4	489	3024	6.2	26
Spec Sanders, New York	3	540	2900	5.4	34
Chet Nutryn, Buffalo	4	475	2676	5.6	25
John Strzykalaki, San Fran.	4	429	2454	5.7	14
Bob Hoernschmeyer, Chi.-Brk	4	506	2109	4.2	10

PASSING

	Yrs	ATT	COM	PCT	YDS	TD
Otto Graham, Cleve.	4	1061	592	55.8	10085	86
Frankie Albert, S.F.	4	963	515	53.5	6948	88
George Ratterman, Buf.	3	831	438	52.7	6194	52
Glenn Dobbs, Brk.-L.A.	4	934	446	47.8	5876	45
Y.A. Tittle, Balt.	2	578	309	53.5	4731	30

PASS RECEIVING

	Yrs	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
Mac Speedie, Cleveland	4	211	3554	16.8	24
Alyn Beals, San Francisco	4	177	2510	14.2	46
Lamar Davis, Mia.-Balt.	4	147	2103	14.3	12
Dante Lavelli, Cleveland	4	142	2580	14.8	29
Al Baldwin, Buffalo	3	132	2103	15.9	22

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 \$15 per year have been set.

The Coffin Corner
12870 Rt. 30
N. Huntingdon, PA 15642



The first annual P.F.R.A. convention, scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, June 21 and 22, actually began a day early. Most of the attending members had arrived in Canton by Friday evening and they assembled in P.F.R.A.'s Hospitality Room for moderate refreshments and an immoderate amount of conversation about our favorite subject — pro football.

The next morning, we met at the Pro Football Hall of Fame for two historical films, one — the oldest in the Hall's archives — highlights of the Providence Steamroller's 1928 championship season. After that, Joe Horrigan presented a brief account of how misunderstandings in terminology can produce king-size snafus in PF history. He used the infamous Pottsville case as an example, showing that much of that city's oft-written contention that it won the 1925 NFL championship is simply based on a misunderstanding of the terms employed by earlier writers.

The members then moved to Bender's Restaurant in downtown Canton for an excellent lunch. Bender's is famous both for its fine food and as a onetime hang-out of the Bulldogs.

A number of subjects were discussed and acted upon in the business meeting that followed. Some of the more significant items were plans for P.F.R.A. to investigate the process of becoming incorporated, the unanimous decision to raise yearly membership dues to \$15 effective July 1, and, of course, the election of officers for the 1980-81 year. The members elected Joe Horrigan, president; Bob Braunwart, vice-president; Bob Carroll, secretary; and Vic Frolund, treasurer.

Another decision was to postpone choosing a site for next year's convention. Although the majority present strongly favored returning to Canton, it was felt that an expected significant increase in membership over the next six months made it preferable to wait in making the final choice of site.

Treasurer Vic Frolund reported that P.F.R.A. had ended the year with a moderate bank balance, but that we had several large bills due in July. However, this should be offset when our charter members renew their memberships and

by the sale of additional copies of the 1980 Annual.

In making the report of the publications committee, Bob Braunwart brought up the possibility of finding sponsors for our publications. A lively discussion led only to the decision to look into the matter more closely.

Back at the HOF, Don Smith presented an explanation of the NFL's passer-rating system. He detailed the reasons for the league's adoption of the present system and showed exactly how it works. Despite certain reservations on the part of some P.F.R.A. members, it was the consensus that the present system is the best yet employed by the NFL to rate throwers.

The following seminar traced the history of black players in pro football and presented filmed interviews with Fritz Pollard, Raymond Kemp and Marion Motley, thus encompassing three separate eras in PF history.

That evening, everyone went to a chicken barbecue at Chez Popo (formerly known as Vince Popo's home). The refreshments and the conversations were stimulating and several members considered this the high point of the convention.

The final seminar took place the next day, when the history of the AAFC was traced and members watched a film of the game played between the Cleveland Browns and San Francisco 49ers on October 30, 1949.

Some time was also made available for members to tour the Hall and to do individual research.

Members and guests attending the convention were: Bob Braunwart, Bob Carroll, Tony Cusher, Vic Frolund, Joe Horrigan, Bernie McCarty, and his son Mark, Anne Monnot and her friend George Mangus, Tom Nikitas, Pete Palmer, Vince Popo, Don Smith, Jim Stewart, E.M. Swanton and his son Mike, and Dennis Tanis.

On behalf of P.F.R.A., the Coffin Corner would like to thank Joe Horrigan for his fine work in organizing the convention, Vince Popo for lending his home and culinary expertise to the barbecue, and, of course, the Pro Football Hall of Fame for serving as our host in its usual supportive and courteous manner.

* * *

A limited number of extra copies of the 1981 P.F.R.A. Annual are available and may be purchased for \$5 each. Write to P.F.R.A. / 218 Wise St., N.E. / N. Canton, O. / 44720.

* * *

All charter memberships are renewable on July 1. Members unsure of when they should renew should check the expiration date on their membership card. Don't forget, dues (like everything else in this world) have gone up and are now \$15 per year.

* * *

Larry Setaro writes the following in regard to our Taylorville story in the last issue: "While it is generally conceded that the American Professional Football Association (predecessor of today's NFL) had intended to make an "example" of the Packers by revoking their franchise, it is also quite evident that some owners recognized an opportunity to rid THEMSELVES (not the Ass'n) of a small-town franchise which presented (at the time) no evidence of comparable "gate-cut" for the visiting team. This line of reasoning would tend to "justify" expulsion. In fact, several of the Packers road opponents from back east chose to refrain from playing in Green Bay until the late '20s, when the Packers were finally in a position to guarantee them a proper financial return.

"It was on August 27, 1921, that the Packers were first admitted to the league. John and Emmett Clair were granted the original franchise. The Indian Packing Co. (the Packers' original sponsor) had been bought out by the Acme Packing Co. (the Clairs' interest). It was they who were to be held accountable. It'd be tough to pin it on a whole town.

"Following the re-awarding of the Green Bay franchise to Curly Lambeau on June 24, 1922, he incorporated the Packers for the first time in their brief history. The papers were filed with the Wisconsin Secretary of State

on Sept. 13, 1922, and were signed by Lambeau, George W. Calhoun, Joe Ordens, and Nathan Andrews.

"According to Chuck Johnson's book, The Green Bay Packers, three NFL teams were cited and fined \$1,000 each in 1930 because they had elected to carry upon their official rosters, players whose college classes had yet to graduate. The teams were Portsmouth, the Chicago Bears, and Green Bay, but the names of the players involved were not given. By process of elimination my most likely candidate for ineligibility on the Packer roster would have to be Dave Zuidmulder. His Packer program write-up states only that he had attended high school locally where he played football for four years, and that he first attended St. Ambrose College but later changed over to Georgetown where he played freshman football. There is no mention of either varsity football or graduation."

(Ed. note: we believe the Bears' ineligible player was former Notre Dame fullback Joe Savoldi. We have no idea who the Portsmouth player was. We would appreciate hearing from any member with further information.)

* * *

P.F.R.A. member Donald S. Andrews is busy on a book about coaches and would be most interested in any information on any coach's career previous to his coaching in the NFL -- all coaches prior to 1945. Write to Donald S. Andrews / Kinesiology / University of Waterloo / Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1 / Canada.

* * *

We are happy to welcome two new members to P.F.R.A.; Tom Averell (of Pittsburgh, Pa.) and Richard Gonzalvez (of Gloucester, Mass.) are the first new members of the 1980-81 year.

* * *

A final convention note: although football was the main topic of conversations, members are well aware of other sports. For example, Jim Stewart entertained us with his reminiscences of his boating trips.