

BIG DEAL IN NEW YORK

by Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll

The Los Angeles Rams had a tough decision to make after the 1955 season. Two-time All-League defensive end Andy Robustelli had asked to be traded to an eastern club so he could be nearer his Connecticut sporting-goods business. But Robustelli was one of the few defensive stalwarts on a club more noted for its offense. He'd been knocking down enemy runner in fine style ever since the Rams had selected him out of little Arnold College in the 19th round of the 1951 draft.

The determining factor was Robustelli's age. He was pushing 30, and, after five tough seasons, the Rams decided he was on the verge of slipping. They arranged a trade with the New York Giants.

For Robustelli, the move was a godsend! He went from a team that emphasized offense to a team that traditionally lived on its defense -- and just at a time when everything was coming together for New York. The '55 Rams had won the Western Division title; the '56 Giants won the World Championship.

Far from slipping, Robustelli was just coming into his greatest years when he joined the Giants. He put in nine seasons in New York and was chosen All-League five more times.

He wasn't particularly big for his position at 6-0 and 230 pounds, but he was smart strong and exceptionally quick. His pass rush was noteworthy, and he seemed to have a special knack for being in the right place at the right time. In 14 yards, he recovered 22 opponents' fumbles. Amazingly, in all those years of tough, pressurized football, Robustelli missed only one game.

In 1962, the Maxwell Club named him the top player in pro football.

More important, the Giants won consistently. After the '56 championship, they came back to win the Eastern Division title in 1958, '59, '61, '62, and '63. Robustelli was a key member of the defensive unit that many regarded as the best in pro football.

It was during this time -- and largely due to the success of the Giants until -- that a change took place in the fans' appreciation of pro football. The members of the defense who had so long labored in obscurity became heroes.

Great players like Joe Schmidt, Gino Marchetti and Bill George suddenly found themselves famous. But the number one cover boys were in New York, partly because the Big Apple was the media center but mostly because the Giants stopped the opposition so well.

Other important members of that great defense during those title seasons were Sam Huff, Emlen Tunnell, Rosey Grier, Jim Patton, Jim Katcavage, Harland Svare, Bill Svoboda, Cliff Livingston, Lindon Crow, Dick Modzelewski, Ed Hughes, Dick Nolan, Pat Summerall, Tom Scott, Dick Lynch, John Lovetere, Erich Barnes, and several others. Although Robustelli, Huff, Tunnell and others had their individual cheering sections, they never lost sight of the fact that their success was a product of team play.