

# SCORING BINGE

By Bob Carroll

In its early years the American Football League had a reputation for bombs-away play, and it was never more deserved than on December 22, 1963, when the red-hot Oakland Raiders hosted the suddenly-incendiary Houston Oilers. The game was the last-scheduled for both teams, but Oakland, under new coach Al Davis, still had down-to-the-wire-hopes of catching western-leading San Diego and had reeled off seven straight victories toward that end. Houston had fallen on hard times after leading the east in the AFL's first three seasons but they could finish with a respectable .500 with a win.

Oakland started with a bang when Claude Gibson raced a punt back 68 yards to a touchdown the first time any Oakland player got hands on the ball. That, however, was the only Raider outburst of the first quarter as the Oilers held them without a first down for the whole opening period while pushing over two answering TDs. When Oiler QB George Blanda hit end Willard Dewveall with a 12-yard TD pass early in the second quarter, the Houston lead went to 21-7.

Then Oakland's Tom Flores unlimbered his passing arm for two quick TD tosses, one a 56-yard bomb to Clem Daniels, to tie the game. Blanda moved his team back in front on a 25-yard throw to Dave Smith.

With the score 28-21 and less than two minutes to go in the first half, things really got moving. Flores unloaded to Art Powell for 81 yards to re-knot the game. The Oilers snapped back for 54 yards in four plays, including a pass interference in the end zone. The human bowling ball, Charley Tolar, busted over from the one to make it 35-28.

There was still 1:09 on the clock and Flores used it well, driving the Raiders down the field in six plays. His 20-yard toss to Powell and Mike Mercer's PAT make it 35-35 at intermission.

Early in the second half, Flores' third bomb to Powell went for 45 yards and gave Oakland a seven-point lead. Back came Blanda with a pair of scoring strikes to make it 49-42 as the third quarter ended.

The fourth quarter saw more pressure than points, but Art Powell's fourth touchdown receptions and Mercer's seventh PAT knotted the score at 49-49. None of the 17,401 fans expected it to end that way, and they were right. With four minutes and 37 seconds left, Mercer trotted on the field. His field goal try from the 39 was good.

Flores had thrown six touchdown passes and Blanda had five to his credit. But the Oiler QB who made a career of snatching victory from defeat wasn't able to pull off a miracle this time. Oakland staved off Blanda's last-ditch efforts and cashed their eighth straight win 52-49--the second highest two-team point total in the history of major league pro football.

It was quite a cap to a great season for Oakland. The year before they had gone 1-13.

Ironically, Oakland's scoring binge with Houston wasn't enough to bring the Raiders a title. San Diego wrapped up the western championship on the same day with a 58-20 win over Denver.

But the Raiders would be back for many years to come. 1963 was just the tip of the iceberg.