

Let George Do It

By Don Smith

George Blanda played pro football for 26 years with the Chicago Bears, Houston Oilers and Oakland Raiders. His career finally ended in 1976 just before his 49th birthday. He passed for 26,920 yards and 236 touchdowns. He scored 2,002 points, far more than anyone in history.

Taken individually, none of these factors – playing time, age, a good but not great passing record, kicking field goals and extra points – would qualify a player for Pro Football Hall of Fame membership. Taken as a whole, however, these elements make for an exceptional career, one deserving the Hall of Fame membership accorded Blanda in his first year of eligibility in 1981.

Today, Blanda commands special attention in a new display created during the Hall's recent \$250,000 refurbishing project that produced dramatic content and cosmetic advancements in the Hall's renowned exhibition rotunda.

Featured mementoes in the George Blanda display are the No. 16 jersey he wore when he "saved the day" for the Oakland Raiders five consecutive weekends in 1970 and the football he kicked to reach the 2,000-point scoring plateau in the final game of his career at the end of the 1975 season.

Of major interest is the detailed account of the five-game string in 1970 when George demonstrated the kind of heroics week after week that ordinarily are found only in fiction. The streak began on October 25 when Blanda replaced Daryle Lamonica at quarterback and promptly threw three touchdown passes and kicked a field goal to break a 7-7 deadlock and give the Raiders a 31-14 victory over Pittsburgh.

The next week, Blanda kicked a 48-yard field goal with three seconds left to give Oakland a 17-17 tie with Kansas City. Next came a 23-20 triumph over Cleveland made possible by his touchdown pass with 1:34 to go and his 52-yard field goal as time ran out. Then Oakland beat Denver, 24-19, when George threw a 20-yard scoring strike with 2:28 to play. Finally, on November 22 against San Diego, Blanda kicked a field goal with seven seconds left, giving the Raiders a 20-17 victory.

Never has one individual held his team's destiny so completely in his hands and feet for such an extended period. Making the feat even more remarkable was the fact that Blanda was 43 years old at the time. He became an instant hero whose deeds for five unprecedented weeks may never be forgotten!