

# Research Notes

## THE 1954 LIONS

By Stanley Grosshandler

I recently found a table listing the 1954 Lions' roster that had been published in a national magazine prior to the championship game between the Lions and the Browns. The historical significance of it is the fact it illustrates the transition between the two way and platoon system. Though the platoon rule had been in effect for several seasons, it appears that some coaches were still reluctant, either from practice or lack of talent, to make the switch completely.

The table consists of three columns listing offensive, two way, and defensive players. Centers Charles Ane and Andy Miketa were listed as offense, while Lavern Torgeson was defense. Dick Stanfel was the only OG, Jim Martin and Harley Sewell were both ways, and Les Bingaman and Joe Schmidt were defense. No tackles were total offense. Lou Creekmur, Thurman McGraw, and Bob Miller went both ways and Gil Mains and Gerry Perry were defense.

Cloyce Box and Dorne Dibble were offensive ends, Jim Doran and Leon Hart both, while Jim Cain, Bob Dove, and Sherm Gandee were DE. Lew Carpenter, Bob (Hunchy) Hoernschemeyer, Dick Kercher and Doak Walker were offensive backs, Jug Girard went both, and defensive men were Jack Christiansen and his "Chris Crew" consisting of Jim David, Carl Karilivacz, and Bill Stits.

Quarterbacks Tom Dublinski and Bobby Layne and fullbacks Bill Bowman and Bob Smith were strictly offensive players.

*Pro Football-The Early Years* differs slightly from the table. Ane is listed as strictly OT and Dick Kircher is cited as both ways. A DE, Hal Turner is also listed. His entire NFL career was three games this season.

The Lions had defeated the Browns in the two previous title games and were hoping to establish a dynasty this season. Two notable training camp notes came from their base in Ypsilanti. First, the only scale that could weigh Bingaman was at the local farm bureau where he hit 349½. Later, a pilot refused to take off until Bingaman and Hart were transferred to another plane.

Coach Buddy Parker did not believe in the status quo, and from the previous club John Prchlik, Pat Harder, Vince Banonis, and Bill Swiacki were retired, and Yale Lary, Stan Campbell, Gene Gedman, Jim Hill, and

Ollie Spencer were in the military. Rookies included Bowman, Mains, Stits, Perry, and Miketa.

The season opened with a 48-23 trouncing of the Bears as Bowman brought a kickoff back 100 yards and Walker a punt 70. The next week saw the Lions off as they were scheduled for Cleveland, but a World Series had forced them out. They offered to play the game in Detroit giving the Browns all the home team amenities, but Paul Brown refused to play before a hostile crowd and the game was set for after the season ended.

With Layne unable to play against the Rams, Dublinski started and led the Lions to a 21-3 win. Bobby came back the next week and threw three TD passes in a 35-0 rout of the Colts. On the two-week western trip the Lions lost to the 49ers, but with Dublinski again in the controls they beat the Rams a second time.

The club was now on a roll as they beat Baltimore, San Francisco, and the Packers twice in a row to clinch the division crown. They then tied the Eagles, lost to the Bears, and won the make-up game with the Browns in a blizzard. Buddy Parker had now beaten Paul Brown seven straight times.

The opening lineup for the title game lists LE Dibble, LT Creekmur, LG Sewell, C Miketa, RG Martin, RT Ane and RE Girard, QB Layne, LH Walker, FB Bowman and RH Carpenter, who was to play for three different clubs (Lions, Browns, and Packers) in title games.

The best I have been able to reconstruct the Lions' depth chart is on offense: Box and Doran LE, McGraw LT, Hart RE, and Smith FB, with Hunchy RH. On defense were Dove and Gandee LE, Mains LT, Bingaman MG, Miller and Perry RT, Cain RE, Schmidt LLB, Martin RLB, David LH, Stits RH, Chris LS and Karilivacz RS.

All thoughts of a dynasty went down the drain that day as the Browns behind behind Graham demolished the Lions.

The season's stats provide more interesting information as Carpenter carried 104 times for 476 yards. Bowman logged 397 yards and Hunchy 242. Walker only carried 32 times for 240 and Layne gained 119. Girard carried but nine times and Karcher and Smith only three indicating that they saw little action as running backs.

Dibble was tops in receptions with 46, Bowman 34, Walker 34, Girard 27, Hart 24, Hunchy 20, Carpenter 16, Doran 10 and Box 6, indicating the once great receiver played little. Box retired the next year.

Walker kicked the PATs and FGs though Martin tried six. Pat Harder once told me that contrary to what the writers wrote, Doak was a much huskier man. However, they frequently used him as a decoy to save him. Girard did all the punting and kickoff returning. Several returned punts.

The stats bear out the versatility of the players as the teams gradually went to total platoons and the coaches were forced to "struggle and adapt" with only a 34 man roster.

Sources used were: *Football-The Early Years*, *NFL Records and Rules Manual 1955*, *The Detroit Lions-NFL Great Teams Series*, and *Treat's Encyclopedia*, second rev. ed.

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## NOTES

By Johny Shevalla

Chuck Mehelich, the former Pittsburgh lineman (1946-1951), died December 2, 1984. An unusually hard hitter, he was called "Iron Man" by Steeler owner Art Rooney. Bill Fralic, Pitt's All-American tackle, is his nephew.

Five of the "Seven Blocks of Granite" still are living: John Druze, Leo Paquin, Ed Franco, Al Babartsky, and Alex Wojciechowicz. Coach Jim Crowley, the last of the "Four Horsemen," is also still alive.

Speaking of Wojciechowicz, when the Philadelphia Eagles honored their Hall of Famers on October 28, 1984, each player had a banner with his name on it. Wojo's was 14 feet long!

The complete list of Eagle honorees: Pete Pihos, Steve Van Buren, Chuck Bednarik, Bert Bell, Sonny Jurgensen, Bill Hewitt, Ollie Matson, Norm Van Brocklin, Jim Ringo, Earle "Greasy" Neale, and Wojciechowicz.

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## THOSE '47 IRISH

By David Neft

No single college squad ever sent more players into major league pro football than the 1947 Notre Dame team. No less than 30 members of the undefeated Irish went on to play in either the NFL or the AAFC.

The complete squad, as listed in the *Notre Dame Football Guide* (with those who played major league pro ball in CAPITAL LETTERS):

**LE** - JIM MARTIN, 6-2, 205; Doug Waybright, 6-0, 180; Ray Espenan, 6-2, 189; BILL LEONARD, 6-2, 190

**LT** - GEORGE CONNOR, 6-3, 220 (Captain); GASPAR URBAN, 6-2, 200; Ralph McGehee, 6-1, 211, GUS CIFELLI, 6-4, 225

**LG** - BILL FISCHER, 6-2, 230; Bob Lally, 6-0, 185; John Frampton, 5-11, 180; Steve Oracko, 6-0, 190

**C** - BILL WALSH, 6-3, 205; GEORGE STROHMEYER, 5-9, 195; Walt Grothaus, 6-2, 197

**RG** - MARTY WENDELL, 5-11, 198; JOE SIGNAIGO, 6-0, 205; BILL (BUCKY) O'CONNOR, 5-11, 196; FRANK GAUL, 5-10, 200

**RT** - ZYGMONT (ZIGGY) CZAROBSKI, 6-0, 213; GEORGE SULLIVAN, 6-3, 206; Ted Budynkiewicz, 6-0, 205

**RE** - LEON HART, 6-4, 216; BILL WIGHTKIN, 6-2, 200; FRANK KOSIKOWSKI, 6-0, 202

**QB** - JOHNNY LUJACK, 6-0, 180, FRANK TRIPUCKA, 6-1, 175; Roger Brown, 5-11, 180

**LH** - Terry Brennan, 6-0, 173; BOB LIVINGSTONE, 6-0, 168; LARRY COUTRE, 5-9, 170; Coy McGee, 5-9, 155, BILL GAY, 5-11, 170

**RH** - EMIL SITKO, 5-8, 175; MIKE SWISTOWICZ, 5-11, 185; BILL GOMPERS, 6-1, 175; FRANK SPANIEL, 5-10, 180; Jim Brennan, 5-8, 160

**FB** - JOHN PANELLI, 5-11, 190; FLOYD SIMMONS, 6-0, 195; CORWIN (CORNIE) CLATT, 6-0, 200; Len LeCluyse, 5-11, 188

**SPECIALISTS:** K - Fred Earley, 5-7, 170; DB - Russell (Pete) Ashbaugh, 5-9, 175; Lancaster (Lank) Smith, 5-11, 160

**RESERVES:** E - Frank (Rodney) Johnson, Bill Michaels; T - Emil Ciechanowicz, Ed Hudak, Al Zmijewski; G - Jim Dailer; C - Don Carter, Jack Jeffers, ART STATUTO; QB - Gerry Begley, Russell Skall

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## OPINION

By Bob Carroll

"Hello, Grandma? How're things over there in Philadelphia this Sunday?"

"We're bored to death here, watching re-runs of *Green Acres* on TV. Have you heard the Eagles' score?"

"No. We have the Steeler game on here because Mr. Rooney is so nice, but you know we hate football."

"(Sigh) I haven't watched my Eagles since Mr. Tose did that thing about Phoenix."

"That'll teach him, Grandma."

"I really miss them though."

“Well, you know the old saying, Grandma; ‘Spare the TV and spoil the owner.’”

If you find nothing odd in the above conversation, you probably enjoyed the recent *TV Guide* editorial blaming pro football’s falling TV ratings on team owners who tend to move or threaten to move their ball clubs.

Apparently, *TVG* believes fans watch football so they can root for the owners.

Forget all that stuff about too many TV games or that games are too predictable, if you don’t like the owner, your team can go to the Super Bowl unwatched. Tonight, by the way, I’m watching *Dallas*. Hate the show; love the sponsor.