

HENRY JORDAN

By Don Smith

Such offensive superstars as Bart Starr, Jim Taylor and Paul Hornung basked in the limelight during the 1960s when the Green Bay juggernaut dominated the pro football scene. But the Packers of the dynasty years also can trace at least as much of their success to a rugged defensive corps that drained the effectiveness of enemy attacks.

That defensive unit was recognized once again with the election of the late Henry Jordan, the Packers' long-term right defensive tackle, to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He is the tenth Green Bay player from the 1960s to be elected. Jordan joins four of his defensive teammates -- Herb Adderley, Willie Davis, Ray Nitschke and Willie Wood -- in the Hall. He is the 19th long-term member of the Packers, who began play in the NFL in 1921, to become a Hall of Famer.

Altogether, Jordan's NFL career spanned 13 seasons and 163 games from 1957 to 1969. The University of Virginia graduate was the fifth-round draft pick of the Cleveland Browns in 1957 but he didn't play regularly in either 1957 or 1958. Before the 1959 season, Green Bay acquired Jordan and gave the Browns a fourth-round draft choice in return. It was a trade that Cleveland would regret for years.

Jordan arrived in Green Bay at the same time that a highly-touted new coach, Vince Lombardi, came on the scene. The two were destined to share in the glory years of the Packers in the immediate future.

Lombardi's first team in 1959 gave Green Bay its first .500-plus season since 1947 and improved from 1-10-1 in 1958 to 7-5. In 1960, the Packers won the NFL Western Conference title for their first championship of any kind since 1944. The Packers lost to Philadelphia in the NFL title game but vowed they would do better the next year . . . and they did.

They won the NFL West again in 1961 and 1962 and defeated the New York Giants each year for the NFL championship. In 1962, the Packers scored the most points of any NFL team and held their opponents to just 10.6 points a game. Green Bay had to settle for second place in its division both in 1963 and 1964. With the best defense in the NFL, the Packers won league championships in 1965, 1966 and 1967, thus giving Lombardi five NFL titles in a seven-year period. The Packers finished off the last two seasons with victories over Kansas City in Super Bowl I and Oakland in Super Bowl II.

Although perhaps not as widely publicized as the more flamboyant Ray Nitschke at middle linebacker, Jordan was the Packers' most honored defensive star during the dynasty years. He was named all-NFL in 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964 and 1967. He was selected to play in four Pro Bowls following the 1960, 1961, 1963 and 1966 seasons. Jordan's blocked kick preserved a 31-30 victory for the West in the 1962 Pro Bowl and he was named the game's Most Valuable Lineman. He also was durable. Injuries kept him out of two regular season games in 1964, the only games he missed during the first 12 years of his career.

When Lombardi acquired Jordan from Cleveland, he knew he had not played a lot but he had seen enough to decide he wanted Henry on his team. At 6-3, 240 pounds, Jordan was much smaller than the prototype defensive tackle of that era but Lombardi made him a defensive tackle anyway.

In the Green Bay defensive scheme, the front line was called upon to exert almost all of the pressure on the quarterback. Rarely did Phil Bengston, the defensive coordinator, order a linebacker to blitz. Even with that philosophy, it was more common to put the pass-rushing burden on the defensive ends while the defensive tackles stayed in the middle to protect against the run.

But when another Cleveland castoff, defensive end Willie Davis, came to Green Bay a year later in 1960, the pass-rushing responsibilities changed. Jordan, even though he was a tackle, and Davis became pass rushers while Bill Quinlan at one end and Dave Hanner at the other tackle defended against the run.

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Jordan was particularly effective, harassing the quarterback with a variety of moves that shed blockers and enabled him to find his way to the passer by the tough, inside route.

Jordan explained his position this way: "Defensive tackle is no longer a position for just a big, strong football player. Football has developed into a game of playing 'keys,' which means watching what a certain man does and reacting a certain way. In the case of the defensive tackle, the 'key' is the offensive guard facing him. If I have an idea of what the guard is going to do, it will be harder for the tackle or center to block effectively. You expect to be blocked or hit but the secret of being a good defensive tackle is to escape the block as quickly as possible and to be in good position to tackle the ball-carrier."

In the rugged, ruthless arena of the pro football field, Jordan was in good position to tackle the ball-carrier hundreds of times during his career. But with an interesting mix of personalities, Jordan off the field was quiet, considerate and conservative. Even his home address -- 1616 Careful Drive -- was appropriate. On the field, he followed a personal code of never demeaning an opponent. He recognized that he could make an opponent angry and help him improve his play but, more importantly, Jordan firmly respected his opponents for their play on the NFL gridiron.

Before the 1965 NFL title game between the Packers and the Cleveland Browns, attention focussed on a duel between two former teammates, Jordan and Cleveland's Jim Brown. When questioned about the coming encounter, Jordan chose the high road.

"I was with Jimmy in the College All-Star camp and then played with him when I was with the Browns," Jordan reflected. "I used to just enjoy watching him. He is such a great runner and a fine gentleman off the field."

But in the championship game, Jordan and his mates dominated. Brown could gain only 50 yards on 12 plays and Cleveland could muster only 161 yards of total offense. Hornung and Taylor by themselves gained 204 yards and Green Bay won, 23-12.

Even though Jordan had only one interception in his career, his rushing tactics caused countless other interceptions. In the 1966 season opener against Baltimore, Jordan and his mates put a strong rush on quarterback Johnny Unitas. This constant pressure led to three interceptions, two of which were returned for Green Bay touchdowns in a 24-3 victory. One of the touchdowns was a 52-yard return by linebacker Lee Roy Caffey.

Coach Bengston was ecstatic: "In all my years of coaching, I never have seen anything to compare with it . . . all four of our linemen got at least one block on that return and Jordan got two."

Most NFL fans will remember the famous Ice Bowl, the 1967 NFL championship game in Green Bay that saw the Packers edge the Dallas Cowboys 21-17 in 15 degree-below-zero weather. But Jordan and many of his teammates felt that the Packers played their best game in their Western Conference championship victory over the Los Angeles Rams a week earlier.

Los Angeles, the NFL leader in both scoring and scoring defense, tallied first on a Roman Gabriel pass and were threatening at the Packers 10 when Jordan broke through to stop Gabriel for a seven-yard loss. The Green Bay defense did not yield another point, the offense took charge both on the ground and in the air, and the Packers won 28-7. Gabriel was held to just 11 completions in 31 attempts and was intercepted once and sacked five times for 44 yards in losses. Jordan had four of those sacks.

During the 1960s, the twice-a-year clashes between Jordan at 6-3, 240 and the Baltimore Colts' Hall of Fame guard, Jim Parker, at 6-2, 275, were classics. While Parker with his great strength often frustrated Jordan, the Packers lineman usually held his own. "After I play Green Bay," Parker said, "my ankles hurt all week. I had to stay on the balls of my feet against Henry because I never know what he's going to do next. Other tackles just don't have Henry's moves."

"I try to get the guard going one way and then use my hands to keep him going that way," Jordan explained. "Use his own momentum against him. Usually I can't overpower my opponent so I have to out-manuever him."

Jordan stood out in a group for one visual reason -- he was bald, a condition that began for Henry when he was a teenager. He was born in Emporia, Virginia on January 26, 1935. His father was a railroad car

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inspector on the Chesapeake and Ohio. He grew up in a family of six children -- three brothers and two sisters -- with a mixture of French, English, German and Indian ancestors. By the time he was 13, he already was 6-2 and his 230- pound weight was only 10 pounds under his pro football playing weight.

His father, claiming Henry still had baby bones, wouldn't let him play football. But one day when he was 14 at Warwick, Virginia, High School, his gym instructor, who doubled as line coach of the football team, challenged him: "You coming out for foot- ball this year, Henry? They're going to start calling you a sissy if you don't" Jordan did participate in football, as well as wrestling and track at Warwick High, where he was president of his class four years in a row. He earned a football scholarship to the University of Virginia, where he participated in the same three sports and earned a BS degree in commerce. He was particularly outstanding as a wrestler. At 16, he won the Virginia state AAU heavyweight wrestling title against men twice his age. In college, he advanced to the 1957 NCAA heavyweight finals.

One day during Jordan's senior football season, Dick Gallagher, then the personnel scout of the Cleveland Browns, called to ask if he would be interested in pro football if the Browns drafted him. Jordan was sure he didn't want to become a professional wrestler so he said he would be interested.

The Browns selected him in the fifth round of the 1957 NFL draft. But just before Jordan was scheduled to report to summer camp, he was picked for the College All-Star squad. "That saved me," Jordan said later. "I was in the All-Star camp the first few weeks and by the time I got to the Browns, they had cut all the rookies."

Jordan played almost every position -- offensive tackle, offensive guard, defensive tackle, defensive end, the kickoff team, the kickoff-return team, the punt-return team -- during his two years in Cleveland. The trade that sent him to Green Bay gave Jordan a permanent one-position job for the first time and conceivably prevented a premature end to his pro football career.

The Cleveland years were not totally wasted for Henry Jordan, however, for it was during his stay with the Browns that he was married to Olive Sargent of Charlottesville, Virginia.

"Our first date was on April Fool's Day. Henry was one of three popular Virginia varsity football players known as The Gruesome Threesome," Olive related. "When a girl friend bet me \$2 I couldn't get a date with him, I took the dare. I won that bet and four years later, I won Henry. We were married on New Year's Day, 1958."

Jordan was an important influence on the Packers football team off the field as well as on game day. He never lost sight of the funny side of football and his one-liners were constant morale boosters.

His 240 pounds, his Virginia drawl and gleaming bald head made his ad-libbers even funnier. As Hornung and Taylor started to age, Jordan would chide them. "You used to be 'Thunder and Lightning.' You're more like 'Cloud and Drizzle' now."

Jordan didn't mind making fun of himself, either. His bald head was a favorite target. People treated it like a good luck charm for the team and someone was always kissing it or patting it. "I lost my hair because all the girls were constantly stroking their hands through it," he joked. "But what if y'all had my problem? I have to pay a barber to find my hair."

His favorite one-liner, however, involved Coach Lombardi. A highly-sought after dinner speaker, Jordan would proclaim: "I guess all you people realize I'm the only player on the Packers who's not afraid of Vince Lombardi." After a dramatic flourish when he pretended Lombardi was really there, he would conclude: "Seriously now. Coach Lombardi is very fair. He treats us all the same way . . . like dogs."

After 11 virtually pain-free years in the NFL, Jordan's back began to give him trouble in 1968, even though he played all 14 games. Many suggested he should retire but he insisted he was going to stay with the Packers "for a couple of reasons, the love of the game, the love of money and the fear of Lombardi. Beside the smell of money clears my sinuses."

Henry played only 5 games in 1969 and was dropped from the active roster in mid season. "If I could, I would play another five years," he said when he retired after the season, "But this year, the pain was more acute than ever."

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Jordan immediately became executive director of the Summerfest, an annual festival in Milwaukee. He quickly put the Summerfest, which had been experiencing tough times, on a sound financial footing. But on February 21, 1977, at the age of 42, Jordan suffered a heart attack and died. Family, friends, teammates and the entire sports world joined in mourning the loss of a truly good human being who had constantly brightened their lives.

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JORDAN, HENRY DT-DE

Henry Wendell Jordan

6-02 248 Virginia

Warwick High School, Newport News, VA

b: 01/26/35, Emporia, VA * d: 02/21/77, Milwaukee, WI (42)

All-Pro 1960, 1961, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1967

Pro Bowl after 1960, 1961. 1963, 1967 seasons

Virginia Sports Hall of Fame 1974

Pro Football Hall of Fame 1995

YEAR	TEAM	LG	GM
1957	Cleveland	N	12
1958	Cleveland	N	12
1959	Green Bay	N	12
1960	Green Bay	N	12
1961	Green Bay	N	14
1962	Green Bay	N	14
1963	Green Bay	N	14
1964	Green Bay	N	12
1965	Green Bay	N	14
1966	Green Bay	N	14
1967	Green Bay	N	14
1968	Green Bay	N	14
1969	Green Bay	N	5
		--	--
	13 yrs		163