

# 1965 AFL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

By Ken Crippen

The San Diego Chargers were a seven-point favorite to win the game, but most experts believed that they would win by a larger margin. How could you not think that the Chargers would win easily? They were ranked first in passing offense, first in rushing offense, first in passing defense, and first in running defense. The Buffalo Bills were second in rushing defense, but seventh in total offense.

San Diego coach Sid Gillman was so confident of his victory, he told a Buffalo News reporter "You know, there is no way we can lose this game on Sunday...We're going to win this game because Kemp has the maturity of a 10-year-old girl."

The Chargers had stars like flanker Lance Alworth, quarterback John Hadl, running back Paul Lowe, Keith Lincoln, and defensive tackle Ernie Ladd. The Bills traded away their star running back, Cookie Gilchrist, before the season. Their best receivers Elbert Dubenion and Glenn Bass were lost due to injury. Backup receiver Charley Ferguson took over for Bass, but pulled a hamstring three weeks prior to this game and was not activated.

Center Dave Behrman did not play due to muscle spasms in his back. The Bills also lost safeties Gene Sykes and Tom Keating for the season. As if things could not get any worse for Buffalo, guard Billy Shaw was injured on the first play of the game and did not return until the second half.

The Bills won the coin toss and elected to receive the ball, starting their first series of the game with three straight runs (one by Billy Joe and two by Wray Carlton) gaining 10 yards and a first down. A missed tackle by Jim Warren on a pass from Jack Kemp to Bo Roberson netted the Bills 12 yards and another first down. Warren would redeem himself two plays later by intercepting Kemp's pass to Roberson, giving San Diego the ball on their own 33 yard line.

San Diego's longest play of their first drive netted them 20 yards on a pass from John Hadl to Lance Alworth. Unfortunately for the Chargers, this was their only first down of the series with the Chargers gaining only 1 yard on the next three plays. This forced San Diego to bring in Jim Allison to punt the ball. Allison's punt went off the side of his foot for a net of 19 yards, which would be his longest punt of the game.

Buffalo continued to mix it up on their next offensive series, alternating runs by Billy Joe and passes to Paul Costa. An incomplete pass on third-and-two would end the Bills series after gaining 19 yards on five plays, forcing a Paul Maguire punt. Maguire would have more success than his San Diego counterpart, with his punt sailing 45 yards and pinning the Chargers on their own 9 yard line.

The longest play of the first half came on a pitch from Hadl to Paul Lowe in their second offensive series. After breaking a tackle, Lowe ran down the sideline for a gain of 47 yards before Hagood Clarke knocked him out of bounds. San Diego could not continue this drive, however, losing 11 yards on the next three plays forcing the Chargers to punt. Allison again punted the ball off the side of his foot, this time gaining only 9 yards. This would be Allison's last punt of the game, with coach Sid Gillman turning the punting duties over to quarterback John Hadl.

San Diego's third offensive drive gave the Chargers their first shot at scoring when Herb Travenio attempted a 35 yard field goal, but it was deflected by Tom Sestak and Mike Stratton. After an exchange of punts, the Bills put up the first points of the game with a Jack Kemp pass to Ernie Warlick in the end zone. The Pete Gogolak extra point gave the Bills a 7-0 lead with less than five minutes remaining in the first half.

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The scoring in the first half would not end there. Butch Byrd returned a John Hadl punt 74 yards for the second touchdown of the game. Byrd commented, "Henry Schmidt and Tommy Janik gave me big blocks after I caught it. I stepped inside and tried to stay along the sidelines. The referee said I stayed in bounds by about a half inch...Paul Maguire knocked down two guys at about the 10...Man, he really hit 'em. That sprung me."

San Diego's best opportunity to score came on the next series when the Chargers drove to the Buffalo 24 yard line for another Herb Travenio field goal attempt. Unfortunately for the Chargers, they again came away with nothing as Travenio's kick sailed wide left, ending the first half.

San Diego's offense continued to struggle in the second half, with the Chargers unable to cross midfield until late in the fourth quarter. The same could not be said for the Buffalo offense, which netted three field goals on their first four possessions. The first field goal came on a drive that started with a 49 yard pass from Kemp to Roberson on their first offensive series of the half. Runs by Wray Carlton and Billy Joe took the Bills to the San Diego 3 yard line where they were stopped by the Charger defense. Gogolak kicked the 11 yard field goal with 9:21 left in the third quarter.

Buffalo's second field goal was set up by another Butch Byrd interception, which started the Bill's drive on the San Diego 23 yard line. A loss of nine yards on a play fake and two runs for no gain put the Bills on the San Diego 32 yard line for another Gogolak field goal. Buffalo's third field goal came in the fourth quarter after a 10 play drive netting 44 yards.

The shutout was the first in AFL Championship Game history and it was the first time that the Chargers have been shutout since a 41-0 loss to the Boston Patriots on December 17, 1961.

How did the Bills win? Well, for the first time Buffalo double-teamed a receiver. In this case, it was Lance Alworth. Buffalo defensive coach Joe Collier said "We double-teamed Alworth on almost every play. When he lined up at flanker, Booker Edgerson and Hagood Clarke double-covered him. When he was at split-end, it was George Saimes and Booker." This held Alworth to 82 receiving yards and no touchdowns. Also, the Bills blitzed linebackers Mike Stratton, Harry Jacobs, and John Tracey along with safety George Saimes.

In addition to blitzing, the Bills applied constant pressure from the front four to force Hadl to scramble often and hurry his passes.

On the offensive side of the ball, the Bills implemented a two tight end formation with backup Ernie Warlick as the second tight end. Jack Kemp commenting on other offensive strategies, "We just wanted to roll out more and do some things like bootlegs and play action passes."

Coach Sid Gillman said, "We just got beat. We lost to a fine football team. The Bills have excellent personnel and coaching. What else is there to say?" Charger quarterback John Hadl added, "They kicked the Devil out of us." AFL Commissioner Joe Foss summed it up this way, "Lou's boys did everything right today."

The Bills may not have been first in the league in total offense and first in total defense like the Chargers, but they had the heart to overcome the year's adversity and win the championship.

"This is the only club we didn't beat this year, " said Bills coach Lou Saban. "And, of course we wanted this one real bad." Bills defensive tackle Tom Sestak added, "That was a championship ball game. We knew that we had six months to recuperate, so we went all out."

### 1965 AFL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

**BUFFALO 23, SAN DIEGO 0**

**December 26, 1965, at San Diego. Attendance 30,361**

<b>Buffalo</b>	<b>..0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>San Diego</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0</b>

Buf - Warlick 18 pass from Kemp (Gogolak kick)

Buf - Byrd 74 interception return (Gogolak kick)

Buf - FG Gogolak 11

Buf - FG Gogolak 39

Buf - FG Gogolak 32

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<b>TEAM STATISTICS</b>	<b>BUFF</b>	<b>SD</b>
First Downs .....	23	12
Rushing .....	13	5
Passing .....	9	7
Penalty .....	1	0
Total Yardage.....	260	229
Net rushing yardage .....	108	119
Net passing yardage .....	152	110
Passes att.-comp.-had int.	20-9-1	25-12-2

## **RUSHING**

Buffalo - Carlton 16 for 63; Joe 16 for 35; Stone 3 for 5; Smith 1 for 5.

San Diego - Lowe 12 for 57; Hadl 8 for 24; Lincoln 4 for 16; Foster 2 for 9; Breaux 1 for -2.

## **PASSING**

Buffalo - Kemp 8 of 19 for 155, 1 TD, 1 int.; Lamonica 1 of 1 for 12.

San Diego - Hadl 11 of 23 for 140, 2 int.; Breaux 1 of 2 for 24.

## **RECEIVING**

Buffalo - Roberson 3 for 88; Warlick 3 for 35, 1 TD; Costa 2 for 32; Tracy 1 for 12.

San Diego - Alworth 4 for 82; Lowe 3 for 3; Norton 1 for 35; Farr 1 for 24; MacKinnon 1 for 10; Lincoln 1 for 7; Kocourek 1 for 3.