

A MEMORY RETURNS

By Bob Carroll

Sam Salemi's experience in finding Cyre credited with his first pro game brought back a personal memory. When I was a senior in high school, we had a "thin" team. By season's end we dressed only thirteen players including a couple of freshmen. Everyone who was healthy enough, played both ways, but we didn't win very many games.

However, we did have one great player. Chuck Howley, who went on to star for the Dallas Cowboys, was one of our tackles. Game after game Chuck was a terror, especially on defense.

I played a guard position next to Chuck when we had the ball, and on defense moved to the other tackle slot. That was kind of an open invitation for the enemy to run plays at me, so our coach put our second and third best players – an end and a linebacker – around me.

I also called the defenses for our team. Basically that meant guessing where our opponents were likely to go and then aiming Howley in that direction. Despite our many weaknesses, our defense kept most of our games close.

Every year we played Follansbee High School. In my senior season we were at their home field, and we didn't look forward to it. They had a little halfback who was next to impossible to catch in an open field. As I recall, his name was Anastasia. He could be counted on to make a bunch of would-be tacklers like me look really stupid.

To top things off, my mother decided to make this game her annual duty trip to see her son play. She didn't care about football, but she always supported me one game a season. Knowing she was in the crowd always upped my butterfly-in-the-gut quotient.

Early in the game, a strange thing happened. I called a particular defense mainly because I hadn't called it before and figured variety might help. *Voila!* On the snap, no one blocked me and I suddenly found myself standing in the backfield next to Anastasia. As terrific as he was, he was small. I easily wrestled him to the ground.

A couple of plays later, I called the same defense and the same thing happened. Snap! And I was standing with Anastasia. From then on, I called that defense at least once each series, and I made one tackle after another. Howley didn't have his usual opportunities to make stops because I was piling up tackles. I was a star! I was my school's Arnie Weinmester! It wasn't that I had never been better – I had never before been close!

Of course we lost on a couple of Anastasia's kick returns, but I could take satisfaction in playing my greatest game. On Monday I'd be idolized at school!

And then I got home and my mother told me that the PA announcer had mixed up the numbers. Every tackle I made he announced as by Howley. "I kept yelling, 'That's my son!'" my mother said. "But he kept saying Howley."

After the season, when Howley was named All-State, I told people that it was because he was credited with my great game against Follansbee. Only my mother believed me.