

Nearly 20 years ago, the NFL players' union boasted that it could run its own football league, and the press called its bluff. An embarrassing chapter in sports history, or an ingenious improvisation made on short notice? Read the story of....

The Two-Day P.A.S.S.

By Mark L. Ford

Pro sports leagues come and go, and some last longer than others. On the opposite end of the spectrum from successful ventures like the NFL, NBA, the National League and American League are well-meant attempts that launched, but could not complete, an entire season of play.

Baseball's United States League lasted for **two months** in April and May 1912. The Professional Basketball League of America (PBLA) played for only **two weeks** in November 1947. But the record for brevity of existence is held by a pro football league that played for only **two days** in the autumn of 1982. Sponsored by the National Football League Players' Association (NFLPA), the Players' All-Star Season (P.A.S.S.) staged only two games before being forced to close down.

One might argue that the NFLPA games were not intended to be the product of an organized league; any more than the Pro Bowl could be considered a two team circuit.

The truth is that the union obtained a TV contract, recruited players for up to six teams and planned a schedule of up to 19 games, knowing that the enterprise could be enjoined from operating at any moment – assuming it could even be launched. During its brief existence, the P.A.S.S. proved that football players could operate a league of their own. The effort was ridiculed at the time. In retrospect, however, this union-created league serves as an example of American business ingenuity applied to sports.

Introduction

It was 1982. The five year contract between NFL owners and the NFL Players' Association expired on July 15. The NFL's contract with the television networks had expired earlier that year, and the league negotiated TV package worth a record two billion dollars. The NFLPA, led by Ed Garvey and Gene Upshaw, demanded 55% of the league revenues to go to the players' salaries and benefits, unacceptable at the time to management.

With no agreement on a new contract, the union prepared to walk out on strike, and announced plans to stage its own games. Union president Gene Upshaw declared that the NFLPA would not only put on exhibitions, it would create a league of several teams, owned and operated by the players themselves. A final league offer was rejected, and the walkout began on September 20, 1982. The NFL would be ready to call the union's bluff, and the NFLPA had to be ready to

make good on Upshaw's boast.

Creating a Pro Football League from Scratch

As it turned out, the union was prepared to make good on its claim that it could run its own league. Shelly Saltman, an L.A. sports promoter and the NFLPA's media relations man, was given the challenge of bringing the concept to reality. [1] A contingency plan had to be in place before the players walked out in order to negotiate for TV money. However, every NFL player had a contract which barred playing in any game not sanctioned by the league. Letters had been sent to all NFL players warning them of legal consequences if they breached that part of their contract, and local courts in Buffalo, Dallas and St. Louis had issued temporary restraining orders. If the NFLPA were to stage its own games, the operation would have to be ready to go on extremely short notice.

Saltman's solution was to create a six team "all-star" league, with each team to draw personnel from one of the six NFL divisions. Players from the 49ers, for instance, would be assigned to the "National West" team, along with participants from the Rams, Falcons and Saints. By September 28, eight days after the walkout, dates had been booked in stadiums across North America for 18 games, to be played on Sundays and Mondays for the duration of the strike. [2] Ted Turner purchased the rights to televise as many contests as could be played, and participating players were guaranteed a minimum of \$2,500 per game payment. The union took out insurance in case of player injuries. Former Redskin Brig Owens was hired as commissioner of the new enterprise, and he unveiled the team uniform – which included helmets with the red, white and blue NFLPA logo – at a press conference. The all-star league was ready to go, if the law would permit.

The breakthrough came on Wednesday, October 6, when federal judge John Penn ruled that his D.C. court, rather than individual state courts, had exclusive jurisdiction over the contracts of NFL players. [3] Moreover, Judge Penn declined to issue an immediate injunction against the all-star games, so the new league could commence operations pending a review of Penn's judgment. The Federal Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that a speedy hearing was necessary, but that hearing would not take place until Wednesday, October 20, so the games were on. [4] Although

games scheduled for October 10 and 11 would be too soon, Saltman had reserved dates for October 17 in Washington's RFK Stadium and October 18 in the Los Angeles Coliseum. The union had less than two weeks to show that it could operate a professional football league.

More than 70 NFL players showed up for practice at RFK on Wednesday, October 13. By then, Tom Matte (who once quarterbacked the Baltimore Colts to a championship game on short notice), was called into action as the head coach for American East, and conducted practice that morning. Former Redskins' linebacker Chris Hanburger opened camp for National East on the same field that afternoon. Former wide receiver Roy Jefferson spent the day recruiting more players for the NFLPA's first game.

Kicking off Game One

By Sunday afternoon, October 17, 1982, the Players' All-Star Season was ready to play its first game. The Steelers had been scheduled to play Washington at RFK that afternoon. In the replacement contest, National East would host American East. The new league had everything – big league players with guaranteed paychecks, equipment, a TV contract, major league stadiums. All it needed now was fans – and that was the rub. "If you make it, they will come," was not part of this field of dreams. RFK Stadium had 55,000 seats. The union hoped to sell 30,000 tickets, but fewer than 5,000 fans were willing to pay \$8 to \$15 for a seat. But, fans or not, the union prepared to kick off.

A third of the 41 National East members were Redskins, while 12 of the 42 American East players were Buffalo Bills. The Nationals scored first, as Philadelphia's John Spagnola took a 13 yard pass from Detroit's Gary Danielson. Mark Moseley of Washington followed through with the extra point. In the second quarter, American East scored, when Patriots' backup Steve Grogan threw 10 yards to Miami's Nat Moore, but the point after try by the Colts' Mike Wood was blocked by Chicago's Steve McMichael. National East took a 10-6 lead on a 27 yard Moseley field goal. Grogan and Moore connected on a 21 yard pass play, but Wood's second kick failed, giving the Americans a 12-10 lead at the half.

The game's exciting offense was offset by a "noticeable... scarceness of all-out hitting" [5], not unusual for an all-star game. Blitzing was prohibited on first and second down, and the game took place without injuries. In the second half, Wood's field goal made the score 15-10 for American East. Danielson's 48 yard pass to Mel Gray of St. Louis, and the conversion, gave the Nationals a 17-15 lead in the third quarter. The Colts' Ray Butler took a pass from Miami's Don Strock for 61 yards, and the Wood kick made the score 22-17 after three quarters.

In the fourth, Moseley booted a 39 yarder to bring National within two points. The Americans drove the ball downfield and with less than five minutes to play, Wood's field goal attempt from the 18 was blocked by

the Eagles' Dennis Harrison. National East took the ball on its 13 yard line with 4:46 in the game, and the Bears' Bob Avellini took over as quarterback. Avellini completed five consecutive passes and drove the Nationals within field goal range. Moseley, who would hit 20 out of 21 field goal tries in the shortened 1982 NFL season, booted a 45 yarder to win the game, 23-22.

Last, and least -- The Second P.A.S.S. Game

After a respectable first game, the P.A.S.S. moved on the next day to Los Angeles Coliseum. "Tonight!!! Professional Football Returns!" proclaimed an ad for the 6:00 pm game. Tickets at the Raiders' home were offered for \$6 to \$12, but only 680 fans paid to get in. Even a ticket giveaway brought a crowd of only 3,000 in the 90,000 seat stadium. "It called to mind what it might be like worshipping in a secret church service in a country where religion is banned," wrote one reporter. [6]

The scoreboard clock was left dark to save money. American West (coached by Mike Pyle of the Bears) and National West (led by the Cardinals' Johnny Roland) were short of players, so participants were brought in from all over the country. Only 8 Raiders and 7 Rams could be persuaded to play in L.A. that evening. Twelve Chargers were flown in on game day. NFC players from Philadelphia, Chicago, Green Bay and Washington were assigned to beef up the American squad. More than a third of the National West squad (16 players) came from the Detroit Lions.

The Americans scored in the first minute of the game, as Kansas City's Joe Delaney took a 26 yard pass from Dan Pastorini. The Chiefs' Nick Lowrey kicked the extra point. A 12 yard pass from Chicago's Vince Evans to Atlanta's Floyd Hodge, followed by a conversion from the Lions' Eddie Murray tied the score at 7-7. A field goal from each kicker made the score 10-10 in the second quarter. The Chiefs' Carlos Carlson took a 15 yard pass from Chargers' backup Ed Luther, a last moment replacement for American East, while Hodge scored a second touchdown from another Lion, Eric Hipple, to make it 17-17 at halftime.

In the third quarter, wide receiver Malcolm Barnwell took a handoff and completed a 29 yard pass to his Raider teammate Todd Christensen. Atlanta's Al Richardson intercepted a Luther pass and returned it 45 yards for a touchdown, and the score at the end of three was 24-24. The Americans had the ball on their one yard line early in the fourth, and Luther drove the team the length of the field in two plays. A pass interference call brought American East to its 46. On the following play, Seattle's Theotis Brown took a Luther pass the remaining 54 yards. American West now had a 31-24 lead. This time, however, the Nationals couldn't tie the score. National West made it to the 22 yard line, and went for a field goal. The game ended at 31-27, and the players from both squads celebrated with Ted Turner, who had lost an estimated \$500,000 in making the games possible.

Turner, who would later pledge a billion dollars to the

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United Nations, laughed off the loss of a mere half million. The players chanted "T-F-L! T-F-L!" and Turner returned their admiration, proclaiming "You are the game!". [7] Turner, the NFLPA, and the players had proven that a reasonable facsimile of a professional league could be assembled without the owners. Everyone was ready, if need be, to take the Turner football league into a second weekend, with games scheduled for Toronto and Atlanta. By this time, the league was apparently down to four teams – no National Central or American Central – and National East and American West were set to square off in Canada.

The Window Closes

What one court had given, however, another court would take away. On Wednesday, October 20, a three judge panel of the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Penn by a 2-1 vote and held that the NFL was not limited to a single federal court in suing players [8]. The deciding vote was cast by Robert Bork, who would later be nominated, unsuccessfully, to be Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. The union could not afford to take on 28 teams in federal courts across the nation, and cancelled the remainder of the schedule. The Players' All-Star Season was history after playing two games.

Epilogue

The NFL strike reached an end a month later, and the players and management completed a shortened 9 game season. A few of the union all-stars did well on their return. Mark Moseley, who had been named the outstanding offensive player of that first game, was also named the NFL's Most Valuable Player that year, a rare honor for a placekicker. Twenty of the players from that first game met again in the Super Bowl, as Redskins from National East met Dolphins from American East. Jim McMahon, called as a quarterback for American West, was the NFL's Rookie of the Year. Four of the P.A.S.S. players – Mark Moseley, Mark Haynes, Lee Roy Selmon and Tony Peters – played as all-stars in the Pro Bowl.

Both labor and management appear to have learned from the brief existence of the Players' All-Star Season, and applied the lessons during the next strike in 1987. Management – the NFL – saw that entire teams of players could be assembled and ready to play within a few days, and arranged games with "replacement players" after missing only one weekend of football. On the other hand, labor – the NFLPA – learned that creating a league from scratch is expensive, and never came close to doing it again. Even a proposed touch football game in the Giants Stadium parking lot, between striking members of the two New York teams, was scrapped for lack of player interest. Eventually, both sides got some of what they sought in 1982 – a salary cap for the league, and even more than 55% of the revenues for the union. Whether the Players' All-Star Season had a role in that ultimate result is debatable, but the short-lived union league is

an interesting footnote in professional football history.

FINAL STANDINGS

PLAYERS' ALL-STAR SEASON 1982

| <u>NATIONAL DIVISION</u> | W | L | Pct. | PF | PA |
|--------------------------|---|---|-------|----|----|
| NATIONAL EAST | 1 | 0 | 1.000 | 23 | 22 |
| NATIONAL WEST | 0 | 1 | .000 | 27 | 31 |
| NATIONAL CENTRAL | 0 | 0 | .000 | 0 | 0 |

| <u>AMERICAN DIVISION</u> | W | L | Pct. | PF | PA |
|--------------------------|---|---|-------|----|----|
| AMERICAN WEST | 1 | 0 | 1.000 | 31 | 27 |
| AMERICAN EAST | 0 | 1 | .000 | 22 | 23 |
| AMERICAN CENTRAL | 0 | 0 | .000 | 0 | 0 |

| <u>Passing Leaders</u> | Comp. | Att. | Yds. |
|------------------------|-------|------|------|
| G. Danielson, N East | 13 | 24 | 198 |
| Eric Hippie, N West | 15 | 29 | 197 |
| Ed Luther, N West | 10 | 18 | 180 |
| Bob Avellini, N East | 14 | 17 | 137 |
| Don Strock, A East | 6 | 18 | 137 |
| Steve Grogan, A East | 6 | 15 | 112 |
| Vince Evans, N West | 9 | 22 | 112 |

| <u>Rushing Leaders</u> | Yds. |
|------------------------------|----------|
| Tony Nathan, A East | 60 yards |
| John Riggins, N East, N West | 24 yards |
| Joe Delaney, A West | 23 yards |
| Jim Owens, N East, N West | 21 yards |
| Mosi Tatupu, A East | 19 yards |

| <u>Receiving Leaders</u> | Yds. |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Roy Butler, A East | 98 yards |
| Mark Nichols, N West | 95 yards |
| John Spagnola, N East, N West | 92 yards |
| Todd Christensen, A West | 80 yards |
| Stanley Morgan, A East | 79 yards |

* * *

Baltimore

S - Kim Anderson, **AM WEST**
 WR - Ray Butler, **AM EAST**
 S - Nesby Glasgow, **AM EAST**
 T - Jeff Hart, **AM EAST**
 G - Glenn Hyde, **AM EAST**
 TE - Reese McCall, **AM EAST**
 S - Dwayne O'Steen, **AM EAST**
 LB - Sanders Shiver, **AM EAST**
 P - Ron Stark, **AM WEST**

Buffalo

T - Jon Borchardt, **AM EAST**
 P - Greg Cater, **AM EAST**
 OG - Justin Cross, **AM WEST**
 LB - Jim Haslett, **AM EAST**
 DE - Darryl Irving, **AM WEST**
 OT - Ken Jones, **AM WEST**
 DT - Mike Kadish, **AM WEST**
 LB - Chris Keating, **AM EAST**
 KR - Lou Piccone, **AM EAST**
 C - Jim Ritcher, **AM EAST**
 DT - Mark Roopenlan, **AM EAST**

Atlanta

WR - Floyd Hodge, **NAT WEST**
 DE - Mike Perko, **NAT WEST**
 LB - Al Richardson, **NAT WEST**

Chicago

QB - Bob Avellini, **NAT EAST**
 QB - Vince Evans, **NAT WEST**

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DT - Steve McMichael, NAT EAST
QB - Jim McMahon, AM WEST

Dallas - NONE

Detroit

LB - Jim Allen, NAT WEST
G - Russ Bollinger, NAT WEST
RB - Dexter Bussey, NAT WEST
LB - Garry Cobb, NAT EAST
QB - Gary Danielson, NAT EAST
T - Keith Dorney, NAT WEST
G - Homer Elias, NAT EAST
LB - Ken Fantelli, NAT EAST
C - Amos Fowler, NAT WEST
DT - Bill Gay, NAT EAST
CB - Alvin Hall, NAT WEST
S - Bill Simpson, AM EAST
DT - Fred Smerlas, AM EAST
G - Tim Vogler, AM EAST
DE - Sherman White, AM EAST

Cincinnati - NONE

Cleveland

DT - Mark Buben, AM EAST

Denver

CB - Aaron Kyle, AM WEST
LB - Bob Swenson, AM WEST
WR - Rick Upchurch, AM WEST
CB - Louis Wright, AM WEST

Houston

KR - Carl Roaches, AM WEST

Kansas City

G - Brad Budde, AM WEST
WR - Carlos Carson, AM WEST
RB - Joe Delaney, AM WEST
RB - Clark Gaines, AM WEST
DT - Ken Kremer, AM WEST
K - Nick Lowery, AM WEST
T - Billy Shields, AM WEST
DE - Art Still, AM WEST

Los Angeles Raiders

LB - Jeff Barnes, AM WEST
WR - Malcolm Barnwelle, AM WEST
TE - Todd Christensen, AM WEST
S - Mike Davis, AM WEST
T - Henry Lawrence, AM WEST
S - Burgess Owens, AM WEST
C - Jim Romano, AM WEST
G - Steve Sylvester, AM WEST

Miami

DE - Doug Betters, AM EAST
RB - Andra Franklin, AM EAST
T - Eric Laakso, AM EAST
WR - Nat Moore, AM EAST
RB - Tony Nathan, AM EAST
G - Ed Newman, AM EAST
QB - Don Strock, AM EAST

New England

C - Pete Brock, AM EAST
QB - Steve Grogan, AM EAST
LB - James Harrell, NAT WEST
TE - Dave Hill, NAT WEST
QB - Eric Hipple, NAT WEST
RB - Horace King, NAT WEST
G - Larry Lee, NAT WEST
K - Eddie Murray, NAT WEST
KR - Mark Nichols, NAT WEST
WR - Fred Scott, NAT WEST

P - Tom Skladany, NAT EAST
WR - Leonard Thompson, NAT WEST

Green Bay

LB - Jim Laslavic, AM WEST

Los Angeles Rams

CB - Kirk Collins, NAT WEST
LB - Carl Eckern, nw
CB - Leroy Irvin, nw
DT - Cody Jones, nw
WR - Jeff Moore, nw
CB - Ivory Sully, nw
OT - Ron Yary, nw

Minnesota - NONE

New Orleans

T - Stan Brock, NAT WEST
DE - Reggie Lewis, NAT WEST

New York Giants

LB - Harry Carson, NAT EAST
WR - Ernest Gray, NAT EAST
CB - Mark Haynes, NAT EAST
S - Beasley Reece, NAT EAST
DT - Phil Tabor, NAT EAST, NAT WEST

Philadelphia

CB - Herman Edwards, NAT EAST
KR - Louie Giamonna, N EAST, N WEST
DE - Dennis Harrison, NAT EAST
G - Dean Miraldi, NAT EAST
QB - Dan Pastorini, AM WEST
TE - John Spagnola, N EAST, N WEST

St. Louis

G - Joe Bostic, NAT EAST
WR - Mel Gray, NAT EAST
S - Ken Greene, NAT EAST
G - Terry Stieve, NAT WEST

San Francisco

QB - Guy Benjamin, NAT WEST
LB - Bob Horn, NAT WEST
T - Lindsey Mason, NAT WEST
DT - Lawrence Pillars, NAT WEST
C - Fred Quillan, NAT WEST

Tampa Bay

CB - Cedric Brown, NAT WEST
CB - Neal Colzie, NAT WEST
T - Charlie Hannah, NAT EAST
TE - Don Hasselbeck, AM EAST
WR - Stanley Morgan, AM EAST
LB - Steve Nelson, AM EAST
RB - Mosi Tatupu, AM EAST

New York Jets

RB - Marion Barber, AM EAST
LB - Stan Blinka, AM EAST
LB - Ron Crosby, AM EAST
RB - Bruce Harber, AM EAST
CB - Jerry Holmes, AM EAST
WR - Wesley Walker, AM EAST

Pittsburgh - NONE

San Diego

DE - Rick Ackerman
CB - Jeff Allen
RB - Hank Bauer
S - Tim Fox
S - Bob Gregor
DT - Louie Kelcher
CB - Bruce Laird
T - Chuck Loewen

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QB - Ed Luther
C - Don Macik
T - Bob Rush
LB - Dewey Selmon
LB - Cliff Thrift

Seattle

RB - Theotis Brown
C - Art Kuehn
S - Ken Easley
WR - Kevin House, NAT EAST
RB - Terdell Middleton, NAT EAST
RB - James Owens, NAT EAST, NAT WEST
DE - Lee Roy Selmon, NAT EAST
P - Larry Swider, NAT WEST

Washington

C - Jeff Bostic
WR - Charlie Brown
LB - Monte Coleman
DE - Daryl Grant
RB - Clarence Harmon
T - Joe Jacoby
LB - Mel Kaufman
G - Mark May
K - Mark Moseley
LB - Neal Olkewicz, NAT WEST
S - Tony Peters
RB - John Riggins NAT EAST, NAT WEST
T - George Starke
TE - Rich Walker, NAT EAST, AM WEST

THE P.A.S.S. SCHEDULE Released September 28, 1982

| | | |
|--------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| Oct 10 | Washington | Nat. East v. Amer. West |
| Oct 11 | Philadelphia | Nat. Central v. Amer. Central |
| Oct 17 | Las Vegas | Nat. West v. Amer. West |
| Oct 18 | Houston | Nat. East v. Amer. Central |
| Oct 24 | Toronto | Nat. West v. Amer. East |
| Oct 25 | (Northern Cal) | Nat. Central v. Amer. West |
| Oct 31 | Dallas | Nat. East v. Amer. West |
| Nov 1 | Ypsilanti, MI | Nat. Central v. Amer. East |
| Nov 7 | Birmingham? | Nat. West v. Nat. Central |
| Nov 8 | Montreal | Amer. East v. Amer. Central |
| Nov 14 | Phoenix | Nat. West v. Amer. Central |
| Nov 15 | Orlando | Amer. East v. Nat. East |
| Nov 21 | Los Angeles | Nat. West v. Amer. West |
| Nov 22 | Shreveport, LA | Amer. Central v. Nat. Central |
| Nov 25 | Las Vegas | Amer. Central v. Amer. West |
| Nov 28 | Denver | Amer. East v. Amer. West |
| Nov 29 | San Antonio | Nat. East v. Nat. West |
| Dec 5 | Atlanta | Nat. Central v. Nat. West |
| Dec 6 | Vancouver | PLAYOFF |
| Dec 19 | Honolulu | CHAMPIONSHIP |

P.A.S.S. Trivia

(1) Six players from the first game competed the next day in the second one, including Rich Walker and John Riggins, who would both be starters for Washington in Super Bowl XVII. The other players for two teams were James Owens, John Spagnola, Louie Giamonna, and Phil Tabor. All six had played on National East the day before; all but Walker played for National West the next day. Playing for American West, Walker earned \$6,000 by being on both winning teams.

(2) Kansas City's Joe Delaney, who scored the first points for American West in the Los Angeles game, would be dead within a year, drowning while trying to save the lives of three children during the summer of 1983.

(3) Dan Pastorini is best remembered as a quarterback for the Oilers and the Raiders, but was a third-stringer for the NFC Eagles in 1982 when he was asked to quarterback for American West.

(4) Quarterbacks Gary Danielson and Vince Evans played in both the strikers' all-star games in 1982, then crossed the picket lines in 1987 to play in the NFL replacement games. Danielson played for National East and later for Cleveland. Evans passed for National West and then for the Raiders.

(5) Not all of the All-Stars were in breach of contract. Ken Clark (79 Rams) and Cornerback Ray Waddy (79-80 Washington) were listed as free agents.

(6) The PASS schedule, as announced, was unbalanced even with only 18 total meetings between the league's six teams. Rather than giving each team six games to play, the schedule had 7 games each of the West teams, and 5 each for the East teams – for no apparent reason.

(7) The NFLPA league was a workers' paradise – all players, regardless of ability, were paid the same amount -- \$3,000 per game for each player on the winning team, \$2,500 per game for each on the losing team.

(8) As stated, game one was heavy on members of the Washington Redskins and the Buffalo Bills. The two teams met in the preseason, with Buffalo winning 20-14.

Endnotes

- [1] *Courier-Journal*, Sept. 11, 1982
- [2] *Lexington Herald*, September 29, 1982
- [3] *New York Times*, October 14, 1982
- [4] *Ibid.*
- [5] *New York Times*, October 18, 1982
- [6] *Los Angeles Times*, October 19, 1982
- [7] *Ibid.*
- [8] *New York Times*, October 21, 1982

Sources

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Los Angeles Times, October 19, 1982, Alan Greenberg, "Only the Lonely Were At Coliseum"
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New York Times, October 21, 1982, Michael Janofsky, "N.F.L. Wins on Right to Sue"