

# A Rosey Career

By Rick Gonsalves

When you are chosen on the late rounds of the NFL draft in the early 1950's, your chances of making the team were next to nothing. But this was the position offensive tackle Roosevelt Brown found himself in when the New York Giants picked him on the 27th round of the 1953 NFL draft, the 318 player chosen. Had the draft been held today though, Brown might not have been selected. In the 1950's, the NFL draft ran to 30 rounds for 12 teams, not 7 rounds which the league has now.

"We had nothing to lose," Wellington Mara, New York's personnel chief said at the time. "We never even heard of him until we read in the Pittsburgh Courier, that Roosevelt of Morgan State in Maryland had been named to the Negro All-American team in 1952. He was a strapping 6-foot, 3-inch, 215 pounds, but with a 32-inch waste. He looked like a pretty good gamble."

This gamble however, would pay big dividends for the Giants, as Roosevelt would become the greatest "sleeper" draft pick of all time. Because of his size and agility, Brown was an outstanding wrestler at Morgan State being named two-time captain of the team. He also lettered in baseball. "The only reason I even ended up playing football at all," Brown said, "is because my high school football coach thought I was too big to be playing the trombone in the school band."

When Roosevelt reported to training camp in 1953, the Giants saw a 20-year old kid, who did not know how to take the proper stance for an offensive lineman. He kept his back high and could not get off on the right foot or block with technique. In team scrimmages, he was pitted against Arnie Weinmeister, New York's All-Pro defensive tackle. The veteran just ate him up. After these bruising practices, Brown would stay on the field to work on his technique. This impressed the coaches and Rosey made the team.

In his rookie season, Brown, at right tackle, found himself facing many fine defensive linemen. When the Giants played the Browns, Rosey's assignment was Cleveland's All-Pro defensive Len Ford. Again, Rosey found himself overmatched. New York head coach Steve Owen then pulled Rosey off the field and threatened to cut him if he could not handle Ford. Brown went back into the game and out of pure frustration, tackled Len twice in an effort to stop him. "If you do that again," Ford warned him, "I'll kill you."

"If I don't stop you, I'm going to get cut. So, what's the difference if you kill me?" Brown replied.

Besides trying to battle opponents, Brown also had to face racial segregation at that time. It was everywhere, in schools, restaurants, train and bus stations and hotels. Sometimes, he could not stay with the team in hotels in certain cities in the South and had to settle for lesser places.

"I was bewildered in my first training camp," Roosevelt explained, who hailed from Charlotte, Virginia, "because I knew I was in a distinct numerical minority. I knew I had to work my way through this challenge too."

Rosey continued to work on his blocking techniques and began to improve at his position immensely. He also bulked up to 260 pounds. With his slim hips and runner's legs, he was too valuable as a blocker just to keep at the line of scrimmage. The Giants then changed their playbook for him. Normally, only the guards would pull on running plays to escort the backs. Now, the Giants made Brown the first "pulling tackle" to lead the way for Alex Webster and Frank Gifford. Rosey then built a reputation for leveling opponents with downfield blocks. This now attracted attention from opponents, writers and sportscasters.

On one play against Washington in 1959, Brown, on a sweep, leveled two defenders, which helped spring Frank Gifford loose for a 79-yard touchdown run. It was the longest of his career. "I saw Rosey make a block at the line of scrimmage just as I was making my cut to run downfield," Frank said. "On my way to the goal line, I looked up and was surprised to see him in front of me and he wiped out another guy."

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The 1956 season perhaps, was the best in Brown's stellar career. Rosey was named NFL Lineman of the Year and All-Pro in addition to being chosen to play in the Pro Bowl. Plus he was wearing a championship ring as the New York Giants crushed the Chicago Bears 47 to 7 for the NFL title.

By now, Brown became even more of an aggressive player, so the Giants put him on their kickoff return team as a blocker and their punt coverage team as a tackler. And because of his physical prowess, he was used on the goal line stand unit as well, and helping to give it a very stingy reputation in the league.

In the opening game of the 1960 season, this unit stopped the San Francisco 49ers from scoring inside the Giants' one-yard line to preserve a 21 to 17 win.

This group again prevented the Baltimore Colts from routing the New York Giants in the fabled 1958 NFL Championship game. In the third quarter, the Colts held a 14 to 3 lead. They had the ball first and goal from the Giants' three-yard line. The goal line stand unit then entered the game and four times the Colts tried to crack it to score and four times they were denied. This enabled New York to mount a comeback but had Baltimore cracked this unit for a touchdown, they would have held an insurmountable 18-point lead, 21 to 3.

Once more in the 1962 NFL Championship game, the goal line stand unit kept Green Bay from scoring late in a close contest which the Packers eventually won 16 to 7.

By 1966, Rosey was suffering from phlebitis, a painful inflammation of the veins in his legs thus forcing him to end his 13-year career. By that time, he had been named to eight All-Pro teams and 10 Pro Bowls. He also played in 6 NFL Championship games. His greatest honor came in 1975 when he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Later, he was named to the NFL's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Team.

Rosey remained with the Giants as an assistant coach before being appointed as a scout. He stayed with the team for 51 years until he passed away on June 9, 2004 from a heart attack at 71. Hearing of Brown's death, Frank Gifford said, " I would not be in the Hall of Fame , if it weren't for him."

Rosey was born October 20, 1932 in Charlotte, Virginia. He is survived by his wife Linda, a stepson, Kyle and a stepdaughter, Tiffany.

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## **GREEN BAY AND DENVER**

If Vince Lombardi had been put back on earth the day after Super Bowl XXXII between his beloved Green Bay Packers and the Denver Broncos, he would have been absolutely stunned that the Packers had lost the game. For during Lombardi's lifetime and his pro coaching career, the Packers and Broncos could not have been more different.

From 1959 to 1967, Lombardi coached Green Bay to six Western Conference titles, five NFL championships, and victories in the first two Super Bowl games. His teams never had a losing record or finished lower than second place in the standings.

During that same period and the rest of the 1960's, the Denver Broncos, born in the AFL in 1960, never won a division title. The Broncos were the laughing stocks of pro football what with their brown and yellow uniforms and vertically striped socks in their early years. Even after changing uniforms, the Broncos continued to lose.

Denver would finish last in the AFL's Western division six times during the decade, including five consecutive years from 1963 to 1967. Their best record was 7-7 in 1962. The only thing that stopped them from finishing last in 1968 and 1969 was the addition of the expansion Cincinnati Bengals to the Western division.

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But 28 years later, here was Denver trying not only to defeat the defending champion Packers, but also trying to end the AFC's string of 13 consecutive Super Bowl losses. And they would do it by a score of 31-24.

The way that the Broncos defeated the Pack would have no doubt infuriated Lombardi. For under Sir Vincent, the Packers had always been a running team. Their most famous play was the power sweep. In Super Bowl XXXII, Green Bay scored all of their touchdowns via the forward pass.

The Broncos, on the other hand, were descendants of the pass happy American Football League. To this day, no running back who played the majority of his career in the AFL is in the hall of fame. Well, on Super Sunday 1998 the Broncos scored all of their touchdowns on the ground. Halfback Terrell Davis tied a Super Bowl record with three scores of his own and ran for 157 yards. He was named the game's most valuable player.

If Lombardi had been able to walk out of his front door, pick up the newspaper and read the headline "Broncos Run To Daylight To defeat Packers In Super Bowl, Davis Scores Three TD'S", undoubtedly he would have read the game story and shouted to no one in particular, "What the hell's going on down there?"

By Timothy Holland