

PAT HARDER

By Stan Grosshandler

The only time Pat Harder makes headlines today is when his officiating crew is involved in a controversial play. Plays such as Franco Harris' "Immaculate Reception" gain the 15-year veteran official notoriety he would rather not have.

A native of Milwaukee, Pat Harder gained All-America mention at Wisconsin when he played along with "Crazy Legs" Hirsch in the early 1940's. Their 1942 team beat a great Ohio State squad in one of the biggest upsets in Big Ten history. Pat then spent several seasons in the Marine Corps during World War II before he joined the Chicago Cards as a number one draft choice in 1946.

The following season, Charlie Trippi joined the team and the Dream Backfield was complete. This high-scoring quartet led the Cards to two division and one league title.

"I have always felt that our coach, Jimmy Conzelman, never got the credit he so richly deserved," Pat recalls. "For example, he took backs who had never played the T-formation and made one of the highest scoring units in the postwar era. He was a wonderful coach and a great innovator; he could really handle men. Jimmy was also a great psychologist and humorist who would constantly try to keep the team loose. Before one game, he gave us a concert on the piano of corny honky-tonk music.

"Paul Christman had been an All-America tailback at Missouri who Jimmy made into a quarterback. Paul was a dear friend of mine and reminded me very much of Bart Starr. He was a gentleman, unselfish, and most conservative. He carried out the game plan well.

"Trippi was also a singlewing tailback at Georgia and played left half, while Goldberg had played both tailback and fullback at Pitt, and I was a fullback. Goldberg was about at the end of his career and shared the right half position with Elmer Angsman. He was still very valuable on defense and we made great use of that.

"In Mal Kutner and Billy Dewell we had the ideal ends for our passing attack."

Playing with the Cards from 1946 through 1950, Harder led the NFL in scoring for three consecutive years, scoring over 100 points each time to set a record. He also set records for most extra points in one game and most extra points without a miss in a season. Besides being a devastating runner and superb place kicker, he was a vicious blocker. His encounter with Hall of Famer Len Ford will long be remembered by pro fans. Ford received a broken nose, a smashed mouth, bruises, lost three teeth, and was penalized 15 yards!

"I have always felt the '48 club that lost to the Eagles in the snow was our best team. We had a year of experience behind us in playing together. We opened the season by beating the Eagles and lost only to the Bears in the second game. We did not lose again. However, we had to beat the Bears in the final game to win the division title. We did this only to lose to the Eagles under adverse conditions when we fumbled deep in our territory. Actually, it was not all that cold. In fact, I have officiated colder games in Green Bay.

"There was a lot of tragedy on that Card squad. Before the '47 season opened, owner Charles Bidwell died. Then, during the season, we lost a rookie back, Jeff Burkett, in a plane crash. Finally, at the beginning of the '48 season, Stan Mauldin died of a heart attack in the locker room following a game. I vividly recall I was not aware of what happened to him until I heard it on my car radio as my wife and I drove home from the game. He was a truly great player, one of the best blocking tackles I have ever seen.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 3, No. 4 (1981)

"The linemen on those clubs were not very famous -- fellows like Ray Apolskis, Plato Andros, and Vince Banonis were good solid players. In Babe Dimancheff we had another good runner, a fine defensive back in Red Cochran and a good backup quarterback in Ray Mallouf.

"I rarely played defense. One day they put me in on defense. Ken Kavanaugh (Chicago Bear end) got behind me and the only way I could avert a TD was to trip him. After that, they rarely called on me to play on defense."

Although Harder was a great place kicker, he seldom booted field goals. "We did not practice kicking much in those days. It was the philosophy of the day that when you were deep in your opponent's territory you should get the ball over the goal line. We just did not think field goal."

While Pat had many memorable games, he particularly like to mention that he was in four College All-Star games and the first Pro Bowl and was on the winning team every time.

After five seasons as a Card, he spent three more as a Detroit Lion. Buddy Parker, who had been an assistant coach with the Cards, was the head coach at Detroit and used to say he had coached the two best backfields in football, the Dream Backfield in Chicago and the Lion backfield of Bobby Layne, Doak Walker, Bob Hoernschemeyer, and Pat Harder.