

## **PAUL KRAUSE: DEFENDER**

By Joe Zagorski

The scene was repeated on many a Sunday afternoon, to the despair of quarterbacks and bliss of defenders everywhere. A sudden, purple-clad figure streaking to an arching football, snagging it from the sky, and turning it toward the opposite goal. Paul Krause!

As a free safety for the Washington Redskins from 1964 through '67 and the Minnesota Vikings from '68 through '79, Krause played a thinking man's game, using a gridiron craftiness that comes only with experience. He added his instinct to gameplans and the result was often victory.

"I would have to say that Paul Krause had the game down to a science," said former Viking Coach Bud Grant. "His intuition and instinct for playing the receiver and the football was terrific. His ability to make a big play was almost constant ... he could turn a game around for us."

Krause showed up in Washington as a second-round draft choice in 1964. The 6'3", 210-pound deep back quickly established his credentials by leading the National Football League with 12 interceptions. He set a record with interceptions in seven straight games. Not bad for a guy who wanted to be a baseball player since childhood.

"I was always a baseball player first, a centerfielder, and I wanted to play in the big leagues," remembers Krause. "One day, while I was playing for the University of Iowa baseball team, I ruined my shoulder – tore everything in it. After that, it had to be football."

Krause used his skills as a centerfielder to cover rivals' passing attacks, setting up a "Krause Zone" where few receivers cared to tread. After only a short time, most opponents avoided throwing in his direction.

The Redskins needed more in 1968. On July 4, they traded Krause to Minnesota for linebacker Marlin Mckeever and a seventh-round draft choice. For the Vikings, the trade turned out to be a steal that even Krause couldn't top.

"To play for a winning football team is one of the greatest things that a player can experience," claimed Krause. "When I got to Minnesota, I was quite fortunate to play a part in a truly great defense. I was never really that great of a defender against the run, but with the pressure that our front four put on offenses, my objective in playing the run was to just stop the runner before he reached the goal line.

"I didn't make that many pretty tackles in my day," Krause admits. "I seldom got a clean shot at a running back in the open field, so I tried to knock them down anyway I could."

Krause's main chore with the Vikings was to stop the long pass. To carry this out, the Vikings played a 3-deep zone coverage downfield, using the linebackers in the short territory and freeing three defensive backs deep to contain receivers. Krause benefitted from playing zone defense because he was able to add his natural instincts and reactions to the zone's positioning and deception.

"We tried to disguise our defense so that the quarterback didn't know what we were going to do until the ball was snapped and we moved into it," he explains. "I tried to be someplace where he didn't expect to find a free safety. Positioning was always important to me. I knew how much ground I could cover, and I knew how fast I could go. I often tried to lure a passer into throwing to my area by laying off a guy, as long as I knew that I could get to the spot and make the play."

One such play occurred on November 23rd, 1969, in Minnesota's Metropolitan Stadium. Quarterback Dick Shiner of the Pittsburgh Steelers faded to pass, looking to connect with an open receiver on the far side of the field. An instant after Shiner released the ball, Krause leaped in front of the shocked receiver and raced down the sideline with a 77-yard interception for a touchdown. The score put Minnesota into the lead, and they went on to demolish the Steelers, 52-14.

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Krause remembers the play: "We were blitzing and I took the first man out of the backfield – Dick Hoak. He took me right toward the intended receiver. The quarterback never saw me."

While retreating into the far reaches of Minnesota's rotating zones, Krause watched the quarterback's eyes, reading his intent.

"When the other team doesn't go long, you find yourself moving up a little, trying to cheat," he explained. "That can be dangerous, but again it's a matter of knowing how far you can challenge the passer and still be able to recover to make the play without getting burned."

"You can't make your move for an interception until the ball is thrown – although you can favor one side or the other. If the quarterback pumps his arm and doesn't throw, and you have committed yourself to a short pass, the receiver goes long and it's a touchdown."

"The most important thing for a free safety to remember is that his teammates – the cornerbacks and strong safety – are depending on him being back there should they run into trouble or release a receiver who goes beyond their zone of coverage."

Before each game, Krause would meet with the other members of the secondary to go over their strategy. The meeting would end with the words "Ban the bomb!" an edict the lanky safety lived by.

"The big plays can get the other team excited. If we can prevent the long pass, our chances of stopping or controlling the smaller passes are that much better."

Against the Cleveland Browns in the 1969 NFL Championship Game, Minnesota's zone coverages, led by Krause, stitched up the seams in the open areas downfield. One play in particular summed up the Vikings' pass defense philosophy, along with shutting down Cleveland's fading hopes for victory.

Early in the third quarter, Cleveland wide receiver Gary Collins was sent on a fly pattern to the endzone, whipping past Minnesota's left cornerback, Earsell Mackbee. As he reached the goal line, Collins was alone.

Browns' quarterback Bill Nelson fired for Collins. Suddenly, there was Krause, cutting in front, intercepting in the end zone – sealing the title.

"I knew it was coming," he says. "It was third and 12, and they had to go for it. They liked to throw to Collins in that situation. We were ready for it."

After the game, Nelson admitted – as had so many others – that he "never saw Krause."

Honors poured in. Krause was voted the best free safety in the NFC from 1970 to 1975. He was voted All-NFC from 1970-1973 and again in 1975. He played in six Pro Bowls.

But time was inexorable. He was slowing down. Savvy was the major part of his game.

His position on the NFL's all-time interception list continued to rise until 1978. Then, for the first time in his career, he went a full season without intercepting a pass. He was one short of Emlen Tunnell's record of 79. He'd play one more year, Krause decided, in hopes of "topping that record."

One man who knew Krause still had what it took was former Minnesota defensive coordinator Neil Armstrong: "Paul played free safety so long that he got very intelligent at it. He played against just about every type of offensive formation there is. He played defense the way it was meant to be played. He didn't guess. He knew what was going on out there. With his athletic ability and his sure hands, I knew he could re-write the record book."

By week 14 of the 1979 season, however, it looked like Krause might have to settle for tying Tunnell. He'd managed only one steal in the Vikings' first 13 games. Time was running out.

November 29th, 1979 – Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum: Late in the second quarter Ram quarterback Vince Ferragamo overthrows a receiver slightly. The ball skids off Charle Young's fingertips and hangs in the air. Paul Krause grabs it and trots upfield. Number 80!

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Later in the same game, he picked off a Bob Lee pass, making his record 81 for 16 seasons. A few weeks later, he retired, assured of his recognition as the greatest pass stealing free safety in NFL history.

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## PAUL JAMES KRAUSE

Defensive Back

Born: February 19, 1942, Flint, MI

Hgt: 6-3 Wgt: 195 College: Iowa

High School: Flint, MI, Bendle

Year	Team	Lg	Gm	INTERCEPTIONS				
				No	YDS	Avg	Long	TD
1964	Washington	N	14	*12	140	11.7	39	1
1965	Washington	N	14	6	118	19.7	43	0
1966	Washington	N	13	2	0	0.0	0	0
1967	Washington	N	13	8	75	9.4	32	0
1968	Minnesota	N	14	7	82	11.7	29	0
1969	Minnesota	N	14	5	82	16.4	77t	1
1970	Minnesota	N	14	6	90	15.0	40	0
1971	Minnesota	N	14	6	112	18.6	31	0
1972	Minnesota	N	14	6	109	18.1	35	1
1973	Minnesota	N	14	4	28	7.0	24	0
1974	Minnesota	N	11	2	53	26.5	45	0
1975	Minnesota	N	14	*10	201	20.1	81	0
1976	Minnesota	N	14	2	21	10.1	19	0
1977	Minnesota	N	14	2	25	12.5	25	0
1978	Minnesota	N	16	0	-	-	-	-
1979	Minnesota	N	16	3	49	16.3	18	0
16 years			223	81	1185	14.8	81	3