

MIKE McCORMACK

Big Mike McCormack was one of the best linemen ever to come out of the University of Kansas. At 6-4 and 250 pounds, the former Jayhawk could move people no matter which side of the line he played on.

The New York Yankees made him their number one pick in the 1951 draft, but after his rookie season, he spent two years in the U.S. Army. While he was in the service, the Yankees franchise moved first to Dallas and then to Baltimore. While Mike was still in the service, Cleveland and the new Colts engineered a 15-player trade with McCormack the key man for the Browns.

Although Cleveland acquired him to solidify the offensive line, Mike played middle guard on defense in his first season with the Browns, a move necessitated by the retirement of the great Bill Willis. He had an outstanding season and helped Cleveland win its second NFL Championship. The following year, he switched to offensive tackle where he stayed until his retirement in 1962. His bulldozing blocks helped runner Jim Brown achieve five rushing titles. Six times Mike was selected to play in the Pro Bowl, but perhaps his greatest honor came when Paul Brown called him "the finest offensive lineman I ever coached."

ARNIE WEINMEISTER

Throughout his career, Weinmeister was celebrated for his speed, size (6-4, 235) and his determination. Together, they made him one of pro football's greatest defensive tackles. Originally a fullback at the U. of Washington, he became a tackle after a 1946 knee injury. His play was little noted by All-America selectors, but he was picked for the College All-Star Game and the pros regarded him as a top prospect. He turned thumbs down on an NFL offer in 1948 to join the New York Yankees of the rival All-America Football Conference. By his second season, he was being hailed as the best tackle in football.

When the AAFC made peace with the NFL, Arnie was awarded to the New York Giants. Coach Steve Owen used him exclusively on defense where his speed and strength made him a sensation. Owen's famed "umbrella defense" required the defensive ends to drop off the line and cover passes in the flat. That made the tackles responsible not only for run-control but also the main pass rushers. Weinmeister was one of the few tackles who could handle this demanding dual role. In each of his four Giants seasons (1950-53), he was a consensus all-pro.

Despite some fine individual performances, the Giants slipped steadily in the standings. When Coach Owen was fired after the 1953 season, Arnie accepted a hefty raise by signing with Canada's British Columbia Lions. He played north of the border for two years, then retired.

CHARLEY TAYLOR

Taylor might have been one of the NFL's great running backs if he hadn't been such a fine pass receiver. The 6-3, 210-pound Arizona State star was drafted in the first round by Washington in 1964 as a runner and won Rookie of the Year honors by rushing for 755 yards.

Midway through his third season, he was switched, to' split end by Coach Otto Graham; a change he personally opposed. Nevertheless, in his first game at his new position, he caught

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eight passes. The next week he tied the club record with 11 catches. His 72 receptions led the league that year. He retained his receiving crown in 1967 with 70 catches. In 1969, he caught 71.

Charley finished his career in 1977. Although bothered by several serious injuries – he missed the entire 1976 season with a shoulder separation – Charley caught 649 passes for the Redskins, the top total in history up to that time. He had 9,140 yards gained and 79 TD receptions. ..

FRANK GATSKI

Gatski anchored the middle of the Cleveland line during the days when the Browns played for the championship every year. At 6-3 and 240 pounds, the former Marshall University stalwart was equally adept at protecting passer Otto Graham or opening holes for runner Marion Motley. "Gunner" (apparently for no other reason than the sound of it) was immensely strong and incredibly durable. It is said that in 20 years of high school, college and pro ball, he never missed a game, a practice, or even called a time out. .

In his twelve pro seasons, Gunner played in eleven league championship games. The first four (1946-49) were in the old All America Football Conference. Then from 1950 through 1955, the Browns played for the NFL title, winning three of the six games. Cleveland failed to win in 1956 and Gatski was let go to Detroit. He helped the Lions win their division title and then played every offensive down in his eleventh championship fray, as Detroit crunched his old team Cleveland, 59-14.

PETE ROZELLE

In 1960, the NFL owners went through 23 ballots without settling on a Commissioner to succeed Bert Bell. At last, Rozelle, the 33-year-old general manager of the Los Angeles Rams was put forward as a compromise candidate. He was elected primarily because no one disliked him, and the press considered him a lightweight. By the time he retired in 1989, Rozelle had become the most respected commissioner in sports. He grew into the job.

The NFL faced many problems over the Rozelle years: the war with the AFL and subsequent merger, periodic TV negotiations, the Hornung-Karras betting scandal, drug scandals, challenges from the WFL and USFL, expansion, strikes, countless litigations. Though Rozelle didn't win every battle, he kept the NFL always moving forward. Nothing underlines his success more than comparisons between 1960 and 1990 showing enormous increases in such areas as average game attendance, TV revenue, player salaries, franchise value, and on and on.

ROGER STAUBACH

After earning the Heisman Trophy at the Naval Academy in 1964, Staubach waited four years fulfilling his service obligation before joining the Dallas Cowboys as a 27-year-old rookie. Then he backed incumbent Craig Morton for two seasons. When he finally became number one in 1971, Roger made the most of it, winning the NFL passing championship, being named Player of the Year, and leading the Cowboys to victory in Super Bowl VI.

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Over the next nine seasons, the 6-3, 202-pound Staubach won three more passing titles, and took Dallas to three more NFC titles and a win in Super Bowl XII. His career passing stats were 2,958 attempts, 1,685 completions, 22,700 yards gained, and 153 touchdowns. "Roger the Dodger" also ran for 2,264 yards and a 5.5 average.

His remarkable knack for bringing his team back from the brink of defeat won him the nickname "Captain Comeback." No fewer than 23 times he led the Cowboys to fourth quarter victories. On 14 of those occasions, the winning points came in the final two minutes or in overtime.

O.J. SIMPSON

O.J. (for Orenthal James) was a Heisman Trophy winner and two-time All-America at USC, so when he failed to rush for as many as 750 yards in any of his first three seasons with the Buffalo Bills, he was considered a major disappointment. The problem was more in the way he was being used – sparingly. Then Lou Saban took over as Buffalo coach in 1972 and Simpson began running the ball 25-30 times a game. In his first year under Saban, O.J. had his first of five straight thousand-yard-plus seasons.

In 1973, Simpson rushed for 2,003 yards – the first player ever to top the two-grand barrier. He averaged 6.0 yards per attempt on 332 attempts and scored 12 rushing touchdowns. In 1975, he came close with 1,817 yards and scored 16 times rushing. During the five-year period, Simpson won four rushing titles.

After nine seasons in Buffalo, he finished his career with two seasons for the San Francisco 49ers. His career rushing totals were 2,404 attempts, 11,236 yards, and 61 rushing TDs.

JOE NAMATH

Although he was an outstanding passer and quarterback, Namath's impact on pro football went far beyond his playing ability. In his 13 seasons (1965-77) he was often hampered by injuries and poor support, yet for most of that time the charismatic QB was the best known football player in America. His career totals – 3,762 attempts, 1,886 completions, 27,663 yards, and 173 touchdowns – are only half the story. "Broadway Joe" was news whether he made a pass on the field or in a New York night spot.

When the 6-2, 200-pound former Alabama star signed with the New York Jets for the then-incredible figure of \$400,000, he brought a new respect to the American Football League. His entry into the pro game was a major factor in bringing an end to the costly war between the AFL and NFL 18 months later.

Namath's rifle arm, quick delivery, quick wit, and legendary lifestyle combined to make him worth every cent on the field and at the box office. In his third pro season, Joe became the man to pass for over 4,000 yards, but he is most famous for "guaranteeing" a win for his underdog Jets in Super Bowl III -- and then succeeding.