

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Jack Clary

Continuing with some memories of outstanding pro footballers who passed away last year:

In 1946 Frank Filchock and Merle Hapes were the principles in the only severe gambling incident ever to affect an NFL championship game. Filchock was the Giants best offensive performer and Hapes backed up No. 2 rusher Bill Paschal (and Jim Lee Howell was one of their teammates). They helped the Giants to win the 1946 Eastern Division title, and were set to play the Chicago Bears for the title at the Polo Grounds.

Frank Filchock: He was from the University of Indiana, and had backed up Sammy Baugh for many seasons at Washington. He was a happy-go-lucky, sometimes unpredictable guy who, as happened in this instance, often wound up in the wrong place at the wrong time. He made scrambling an art form because if his pass protection broke down, he was renowned for dancing and circling away from defenders until he found someone to throw to, or just took off and ran with the ball. But with this flamboyance also came a reputation for making mistakes -- 25 interceptions in 1946, one in every six and a half attempts, compared to just 12 TD passes. He had been traded to the Giants after the 1945 season and seemed to have at last found a full-time job as the ideal tailback in Owen's A-formation offense.

Merle Hapes: He was from Mississippi, and a rookie in 1942. He spent three seasons in the military before rejoining the team in 1946. He also was a moody, often unpredictable person who had a reputation as a hustler.

The day before the 1946 title game, Giants owners Jack and Wellington Mara were summoned to the office of New York City mayor William O'Dwyer because Hapes and Filchock were suspected of having been in cahoots with known underworld gambler Alvin Paris, who police charged, was trying to fix the outcome of the NFL title game.

Hapes had refused the bribe attempt but he had not reported it; Filchock denied bribe attempt.

After an all-night investigation, police rightly cleared both players. New NFL commissioner Bert Bell banned Hapes from the game for not reporting the bribe attempt but allowed Filchock to play on the basis of his denial. He was magnificent, throwing two touchdown passes and running and blocking with unusual ferocity. Still, the Giants lost 24-14.

Later that winter, in a public trial, Filchock finally admitted that he had been offered a bribe and hadn't reported it. Bell then suspended both players from the NFL, a move that crippled the Giants offense for the rest of the decade. Both went on to fine careers in the Canadian Football League. Filchock finally was allowed to return to the NFL with the Baltimore Colts in 1950 and later was the Denver Broncos first head coach.

Filchock had played in Washington under coach Ray Flaherty, and his teammates included end Bob Masterson, back Dick Poillon, guard Clem Stralka, and tackle Bill Young.

Flaherty, who had played for the New York Giants, was head coach of the Redskins for their early great seasons in the late 1930s and early '40s when they won NFL championships in 1937 and 1942; and also when they lost to the Chicago Bears 73-0 in 1940. His 56-23-3 record is third best in Redskins history behind Joe Gibbs and George Allen.

Flaherty was head coach of the Boston Redskins in 1936 when the team won the Eastern Division title. However, owner George Preston Marshall was so miffed that only 5,000 persons showed up at Fenway Park in a huge snowstorm to watch his team win a 30-0 battle for first place against the Pittsburgh Pirates, that after the Redskins clinched the division title in New York the following week, he moved his team from Boston. Marshall even refused to play the NFL title game against Green Bay in the Hub, and instead, booked New York City's Polo Grounds. The Redskins lost 21-6 but two months later, they were firmly established as the Washington Redskins.

Flaherty, who later very successfully coached the New York Yankees in the All-America Football Conference, was an all-business, no-nonsense coach, and a stickler for

discipline and organization. When Baugh was late arriving for his first training camp after a prolonged contract battle with Marshall, Flaherty said of the future Hall of Famer: "Well, it about time that fellow arrived. If he's going to play football for us, he'd better show up in a hurry or there won't be any place for him."

Flaherty endured Marshall's whims and fancies, which included a phone from his seat to the Redskins bench. Only World War II broke up the pairing when Flaherty went off to Navy service, but he chose not to return after the war, and joined the AAFC instead. When he left the AAFC in 1949, he went home to his native Washington state and never again had a presence in the NFL.

Filchock, Masterson, Poillon, Stralka and Young were mainstays on Flaherty's great teams. Masterson was a wide receiver and the team's best kicker during their championship run in the late 30s and early 40s; Poillon was a fine passer and runner who backed up Baugh and Filchock at tailback on the 1942 NFL championship team, and played on the 1946-49 teams; Stralka was a starting guard on the 1938-42, and 1945-46 teams (the 1945 team lost to the Cleveland Rams 15-14 in the NFL title game); and Young was one of a quartet of great tackles in 1937-42 that included Jim Barber, Turk Edwards and Vic Carroll.

And there were others who passed away recently: Chuck Taylor, a guard on the 1946 Miami Seahawks team of the All-America Football Conference, later became a very successful head coach at Stanford. There were some other AAFC originals, as well ... Chet Mutryn, a halfback from Xavier in Cincinnati, who was cut by the Browns and then had a fine career with the Buffalo Bisons/Bills; and Billy Hillenbrand, a great running back on Bo McMillan's Indiana teams in the early 40s, who played for the Baltimore Colts ... Jim Doran, an end, was a member of three NFL championship teams in Detroit (1952-53, 1957) and finished his career with the Dallas Cowboys in the early 60s ... Jerry Mays, a defensive end who played for the Kansas City Chiefs for ten seasons (1961-70), was a member of the AFL's all-time team, and a member of the Chiefs great defensive front four that also included Hall of Famer Buck Buchanan, Curly Culp and Aaron Brown . . . Verlon Biggs was a starting defensive end for the New York Jets in their Super Bowl III upset of the Baltimore Colts; and for the Washington Redskins in Super Bowl VII . . . and of course, Woody Strode, for the Rams in 1946 and a UCLA teammate of Jackie Robinson, helped re-establish the presence of black players in the NFL. He and Kenny Washington, along with Bill Willis and Marion Motley of the Cleveland Browns, who then were in the AAFC, preceded Robinson to a major sports league by one year. Strode later became a fine movie actor.