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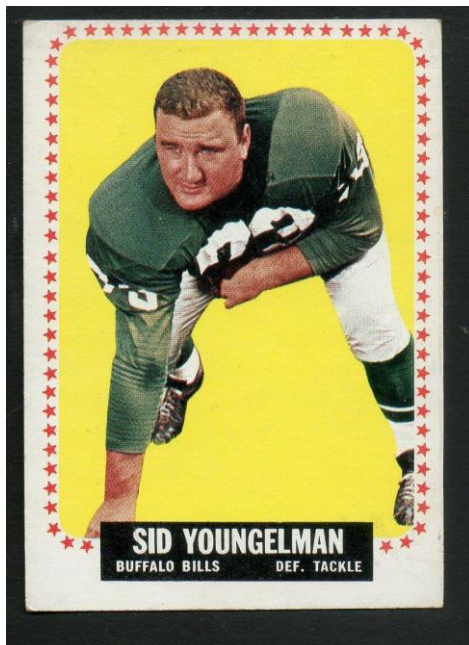
Sid Youngelman

This article was written by Budd Bailey

Of the thousands and thousands of people who have played in the National Football League over the years, only one is named Youngelman.

That's not surprising, since it is a last name that was made up by Sid Youngelman's father. As you might guess, the story has a connection to an immigrant dating back more than a century. It's a tale that starts our look back at a veteran defensive tackle who played pro football for nine seasons.

This biography starts, in a sense, on June 15, 1892. That's when a man named Max Josefowitz was born in a town called Pavlichy, Russia. It's located fairly close to the point where Belarus, Ukraine and Russia meet today. It was at the beginning of a time of upheaval for Russian Jews, featuring anti-Jewish riots called pogroms – particularly in the 1903 to 1906 era. More than two million Jews left Russia between 1880 and 1920, with most of them going to the United States.



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Max left for the U.S. via Germany in February 1910, at the age of 17. According to records, it appears that Max already had a brother in America who had taken the name of Sam Yungleman. It's easy to guess that Max tried to "borrow" his brother's last name, but it came out Youngelman. Max soon married Annie Hassa, moved to Chicago and had two children before the decade was out.

Sadly, Annie passed away in 1919 at the age of 29, leaving the family. The remaining Youngelmans moved back to New York, where he landed a job as a woodworker. There he found the woman that would be his second wife – Molly Telesnick. She was born on August 25, 1898 in Podolia Gubernia, Russia (now the Ukraine), and had immigrated to the U.S. in 1921. They were married in 1924. The couple had a son later that year. Seven years later, we finally get to the focus of our biography. Sidney Youngelman was born in Newark, New Jersey on December 1, 1931. During the next decade, the family moved to Brooklyn and had one more child.

Youngelman, then, essentially spent his childhood in Brooklyn. He must have grown up big and sturdy, because he became an important part of the football team at Abraham Lincoln High School. At the end of his senior season, Sid was presented with the Morris Kaufman Memorial Trophy for character, leadership, sportsmanship, and ability. He also won a cup as the team's outstanding lineman, and a silver football for his career at the school.

Yet Youngelman probably was a bigger star in basketball in those teen years than he was in football. He played the sport at Bensonhurst Jewish Community House's Open League and was quite quick for someone who was approaching his adult size of 6-foot-3, 257 pounds. One of Sid's teammates on that squad was a player who was good enough to earn a basketball scholarship at the University of Cincinnati. His name was Sandy Koufax, who soon switched to baseball.

Youngelman wasn't the biggest standout to come out of his school. The list of graduates includes Mel Brooks, Neil Diamond, Louis Gossett Jr., Harvey Keitel, Buddy Rich, and Neil Sedaka. On the athletic side, the alumni list has such names as Marv Albert and Lee Mazzilli. But only one other pro football player has come out of Lincoln: Pete Emelianchik, who played one game with the Philadelphia Eagles in 1967.

Sid received and accepted a scholarship offer to play basketball at the University of Alabama in 1950. It's difficult to imagine the cultural shock of a young man who grew up among Russian immigrants in New York and then landed in Tuscaloosa. An incident

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during his freshman year of 1950-51 changed his life's trajectory. Youngelman, who had a reputation in high school for being crude and boisterous, missed a practice. When he was kicked off the team by head coach Floyd Burdette, Sid shoved Burdette into a wall and threatened him.

Burdette went to athletic director Hank Crisp and told him to send the brash freshman home for good. Crisp, though, apparently realized that the university had already spent some money on Youngelman in terms of tuition, room, and board. He called Sid into his office and made him an offer: "You can either stay here and play football and do what we tell you, or you can go home."

Going back to Brooklyn didn't sound like a good option, perhaps in part because the Korean War was taking place at that time. Youngelman showed up at spring practice for the Crimson Tide, and never looked back.

In 1952, Sid was part of an Alabama team that went 10-2 and defeated Syracuse, 61-6, in the Orange Bowl to earn a top 10 ranking in the national polls. A year later, Youngelman helped the Tide win the conference championship with an odd-looking 4-0-3 record. And in 1954, Sid was a team captain and was a third-team all-conference selection. Youngelman's teammate during those years was future Packers quarterback Bart Starr. After that season Sid played in the Blue-Gray All-Star Game in Montgomery, Alabama.

In 1954, Youngelman was a seventh-round draft choice of the San Francisco 49ers. He made the team as a rookie in 1955 as a defensive tackle and played in 10 games – starting five of them. But he never had the chance to do more for the 49ers. In June 1956, Sid was traded to the New York Giants with tackle Al Carapella and guard Eldred Kraemer. The Associated Press story about the deal did not indicate what San Francisco received in return. Adding to the mystery is that none of the three players ever played a down for the Giants. Carapella was never even invited to training camp with the Giants that summer, perhaps because of a mix-up on addresses.

Instead, Youngelman turned up on the roster of the Philadelphia Eagles in 1956. There he was a regular for his first of his three seasons, starting 10 of 12 games. But his playing time dropped off in 1957, and only participated in five games in 1958 – perhaps due to injury. Youngelman was released by the Eagles after the 1958 season.

That might have been it for Sid, but the Cleveland Browns signed him to a contract. He moved right into the starting lineup, and helped the team compile a 7-5 record. But along

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the way, Youngelman reportedly wasn't getting along with an assistant coach of the team. That led to his release after the season; Floyd Peters took his place in the lineup in 1960.

While waiting to find out what his future held for him, Youngelman spent another offseason earning some more spending money through professional wrestling. It was his third year at it, and he reportedly earned \$300 a week - good money at the time. He took part in matches with such names as Legs Langevin and Dick "The Destroyer" Beyer.

Luckily, Sid found a new outlet for his football talents. The American Football League was about to begin play, and Youngelman signed with the New York Titans for the 1960 season. Sammy Baugh greeted a cast of characters one July day that included everyone and anyone who wanted another chance to play pro ball. Youngelman fit right in. No one knew what to expect.

"That's how it is at the beginning," Sid said. "They're all suspicious and nervous and maybe even scared of the next guy until that first scrimmage. Everything's OK after they knock the daylights out of each other."

It didn't take long for Sid to get noticed. At the age of 28, he had gone up to 265 pounds. What's more, he seemed to know most if not all the dirty tricks in the book. One teammate remembered that sometimes Youngelman didn't take sides in vicious play; he'd bite his own teammates at times. He was thrown out of several games for fighting during his two years with the Titans.

Despite all that, Sid was one of the smartest guys in the locker room, according to those who were present. He also established a reputation with the Titans as quite a ladies' man. "He wasn't the best-looking guy in the world, but he always had a way with women," one teammate told author William J. Ryczak. "He'd take them to dinner and feed them nice drinks. He'd get the limos and everything."

It took Sid little time to figure out the status of the league. After the team's first game, he told Sports Illustrated, "In the NFL there are no weak spots. Here, while you don't relax, you are better able to pace yourself." Youngelman had a nice ride with the Titans. He played for two full seasons with the team, starting almost all their games. It wasn't the NFL, but it was a job.

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The teams of New York had a rather one-sided rivalry at that point in terms of publicity, since the Titans were more or less ignored compared to the attention received by the Giants. At one point in 1961 Titans owner Harry Wismer challenged the Giants to an end-of-the season city championship game. Youngelman responded, “Maybe he has insurance policies on us. I think he wants to get us all killed.”

Sid was named a second-team All-AFL player in both of his seasons. But then the team started to crumble. Wismer was running out of money and sold a portion of the team early in 1962 in an attempt to stay afloat. Veterans started departing quickly in an effort to keep the Titans alive financially. Youngelman was one of them, as he went to the Buffalo Bills on July 31 for quarterback Dean Look. (Footnote: Look threw one pass in his entire NFL career. He did better as a football official, serving in that capacity for 29 years and three Super Bowls. If you can picture Dwight Clark’s famous touchdown catch for San Francisco to beat Dallas in the 1982 NFC Championship game, perhaps you can see the side judge signaling touchdown. That was Look.)

It’s interesting to note that Youngelman’s birthdate in the Bills’ media guides of 1962 and 1963 is listed as December 1, 1932 – one year later than the one on Ancestry.com for him. Sid was listed as eight years old in the census taken in the summer of 1940. It wouldn’t be the first time a veteran tried to get a little younger on a football roster.

Youngelman proved to be a good fit for the Bills. He teamed up at defensive tackle with a rookie named Tom Sestak, who turned out to be one of the great players in team history. Sid spent two seasons in Buffalo. The Bills had started to turn things around during those seasons, improving to 7-6-1 records in both 1962 and 1963. The ’63 team lost a playoff game for the division title to the Boston Patriots.

Buffalo was about ready to take a big leap forward, but Youngelman was not going to be a part of it. The Bills drafted Tom Keating and signed Ron McDole as a free agent, and they needed to make room for them on the defensive line. Youngelman turned out to be expendable. He was sold back to New York (now known as the Jets). But he didn’t play a game for the Jets, who moved from the Polo Grounds to Shea Stadium that year and was done with football.

Youngelman went into the air freight business in the New York City after football and did well at it. He received some attention in 1983, when former Cleveland teammate Jim Brown talked about making a comeback. Youngelman sent Brown a telegram that read, “Talk about it, but don't do it. Despite the fact you might be in great shape, you'd be

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jeopardizing your life. You have nothing to prove. Everyone is aware you're the greatest ball carrier of all time." Sid went on to offer Brown a job at his firm, saying, "I'd much rather have him on my side." Brown did not try a comeback.

Youngelman died at the age of 60 in Lake Hiawatha, New Jersey. At last report, wife Vicki and son Dr. David, a clinical psychologist, and his wife were living in Pennsylvania.

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