

THE EXECUTIVES: "WE THOUGHT LIKE CHAMPS"

By Stan Grosshandler

"Vince used to tell us, you are paid like executives so you will dress like them, act like them, and have their positive approach," recalled the late Henry Jordan, all-time great Packer defensive tackle. "Vince worshipped success. He enjoyed being with successful people and learning why they were successful. He wanted all his players to succeed."

"Look at fellows like Bob Skoronski, Willie Davis, Max McGee, Fuzzy Thurston, Gary Knafelc, Jerry Kramer, Bob Long, and Ron Kramer. They have all done well since their playing days."

A typical example of a successful ex-Lombardi player was Jordan himself. A graduate of the U. of Virginia, he was drafted by the Browns and after two seasons with them came to the Packers. During his eleven seasons at Green Bay, Henry played on five title teams, was named All-Pro five times, and played in four Pro Bowl games. In the '64 Pro Bowl he was named the Most Valuable Lineman. After his retirement and until his death in '79, Henry was the director of a large Milwaukee Extravaganza called Summerfest and also did T.V. work.

"When I reported to the Packers, Vince asked Jack Vainisi, director of personnel, "Who the hell is this guy?" When he made the deal with Cleveland, he thought he was getting another man who was much bigger than I.

"He soon realized how quick I was and decided to capitalize on this. He decided to build his front four with a good rusher at end and at tackle, rather than just at the ends. He picked up Willie Davis from Cleveland where he had been an offensive tackle and put him at left end and myself at right tackle. We were the pass rushers.

"Dave Hanner at the other tackle and Bill Quinlan at end played the run. Hanner was a real inspiration to all of us. 100% effort, 100% of the time! You probably remember how he was back playing a short time after an appendectomy.

"With this group and later when Lionel Aldridge and Ron Kostelnik replaced Bill and Dave, we got to know each other so well that when any given situation came up we knew exactly what each man would do. Just a look, a nod, or a motion and each man knew his assignment.

"Lombardi always paid attention to details. I had been having good success against Karl Rubke of the 49ers; however, before one of our games with them, Vince came to me and said that I should change my tactics for I had beat him so many times one way that he was probably on to me now.

"Our first division title in 1960 sort of took us by surprise. Suddenly we found ourselves away from our families at Christmas, preparing for this championship game. Something totally new to us!

"We lost to the Eagles but resolved that this would never happen again.

"We won the championship in '61 and knew that we were champs. We thought like champs and felt that no one should beat us. Our '62 team was probably the best of all Lombardi's teams; we only lost one game all year.

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"The next two years we lost to the Bears and then to the Colts. We felt that we were still the best team and did not really lose -- only that time ran out on us. We came back to win the next three years in a row.

"Lombardi was a hard man to get to know. Once we flew together in a small plane and he did not say a word the whole trip. However, when I visited him after he went to Washington, he almost cried upon seeing me. In Jerry Kramer and Fuzzy Thurston he had the two best guards in the league; yet he wanted them to be better so one day he was on them unmercifully. That night, when we all went out to relax, there were Jerry and Fuzzy in their room studying their play books. Vince knew that Max McGee was good for the team. Max would sit and yawn or wise crack during his meetings, something none of us would dare to do. But Max got away with it because Vince knew this helped morale.

"I would say three of the toughest men I faced were Art Spinney, Johnny Unitas, and Jim Parker, all of the Colts. Art was a great blocker, while Johnny always scared me. He drove you mad trying to figure out what he would do, and you knew that no matter how unorthodox his choice was he would probably make it work. Jim Parker -- well, I spent two years studying films trying to figure out how to beat him. One day we were playing a game and I was trying to play injured. After a play Jim walked over to me and said, "Henry, why don't you get out of here before you get hurt real bad. We play again this year and you'll get another chance at me." He was some player!"

While most feel that Lombardi's greatest club was the 1962 team, the 1967 team -- his last -- has to have held a special place in his heart. This was the team that overcame injuries, two devastating last-minute defeats, and yet went on to win the second Super Bowl.

The NFL had been divided that year into four divisions. The East had the Capital and Century divisions, while the West had the Coastal and Central.

The Packers' road to the top of the Central was a tough one. They barely tied the Lions in the opener, won their second game on a last minute field goal against the Bears, and lost their fifth game to the Vikings. Standing 4-1-1 near mid-season, they faced the Cards in a Monday night game that was the turning point of the season. The Cards were leading 20-17 and on the Packer one when they elected to take a field goal rather than try for a TD. On the following kickoff an unheard of Green Bay rookie, Travis Williams, raced back 93 yards and the Packers had the ball game.

A second setback came at the hands of the Colts and skillful Johnny U. Leading 10-0 for 54 minutes the Packers allowed Johnny to pass for 6 points. The Colts nuffed the extra point and needed a second touchdown. An onside kick was successful and three plays later Unitas hit Willie Richardson for the clincher.

Not only did Green Bay Lose the game, but they lost their starting backfield of Jim Grabowski and Elijah Pitts. It was a sorry group of men who left Municipal Stadium that day.

"Vince never got on us after a defeat or a good win, but if we won and looked lousy in doing so then he really let us have it," Jordan said. "Of course, during the week we got it no matter what we had done the previous Sunday."

The Packers bounced back the next week by scoring a record 35 points in the first quarter against the Browns. Rookie Williams carried back two more kickoffs for TD's that quarter. The following week Bart Starr got hurt, but the great relief pitcher Zeke Bratkowski pitched a shutout of the 49ers. The next victory clinched the division.

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They still had to play the Rams who were desperately trying to catch the Colts in their division. Lombardi told the press that his team only know how to play one way -- all out. And "all out" it was as they led the Rams 24-20 with only 26 seconds left. Then an "all out" Los Angeles rush blocked a punt and the Rams managed to jam the winning score across.

It was to be the Packers versus the Rams for the Western championship.

Today when a fan thinks of that Packer team, he automatically thinks of that fantastic 17- below game against Dallas and the miracle Starr touchdown or perhaps the clobbering of the Raiders in the Super Bowl. But Jordan believed they played their best game of the year against the Rams in the playoff for the West.

"I remember warming up for that game at County Stadium in Milwaukee. It was 20 degrees, dull skies, and the field rock hard. The Rams were moaning what a lousy day for a game, but all the Packers were running around saying what a great day it was. Our positive approach!"

The Rams scored first on a Roman Gabriel to Bernie Casey pass, and then both teams settled down to a bitter struggle. The first break went to the Rams on the first play of the second period when Chuck Lanson intercepted a pass and returned it to the 10. The Rams were on the five when Jordan broke through and threw Gabriel for a seven-yard loss. A penalty moved the back another five, and so they brought in their crack kicker Bruce Gossett. But Dave Robinson crashed in and blocked the kick. A little later Packer Tom Brown ran a punt back 39 yards to set the stage for "the most beautiful run of the season." Against the Fearsome Foursome of Deacon Jones, Marlin Olsen, Roger Brown, and Lamar Lundy, young Travis Williams started off right tackle, threw a head and shoulder fake to the middle and then headed for the end zone flag 46 yards away. He made it!

Willie Wood returned a short field goal attempt 44 yards and Starr hit Carroll Dale for TD two. An 80 yard march culminated in a six yard blast by Chuck Mercein. Mercein, picked up in mid- season by the Pack after the Giants and Redskins had dropped him, played like a superstar. Williams scored a fourth TD on a one- yard blast.

In all, Henry Jordan threw Gabriel for four of his five losses. The Rams quarterback could complete only 11 of 31 passes. Meanwhile, the Packers logged 163 yards and completed 17 of 22 passes.

The fans carried Travis Williams off the field. After this game, the Ice Bowl and then the Super Bowl were almost anticlimactic, according to Jordan.