

BUCKETS

By Stan Grosshandler

The recent passing of Charles Goldenberg recalls one of the true success stories of the NFL. I had been fortunate enough to know him and he shared many of his stories of the early Packers with me, stories of Lambeau, Blood, Hutson, and others.

"Buckets," a name given to him as a child by an older brother, was born in Odessa, Russia, and brought as a child to Milwaukee where he became a star athlete in high school and later at the University of Wisconsin. A fullback in college, he reported to the Packers in 1933. That was the year the three-time champions (1929-30-31) began to show their age; the record slipped to 5-7-1.

Playing behind future Hall-of-Famer Clarke Hinkle, Goldenberg's five rushing touchdowns and 42 points led the team. In 1934, he was used more as a blocking back but added two more rushing touchdowns as the Packers returned to a winning season at 7-6-0.

Don Hutson joined the team in 1935, and the Pack was poised for the championships that would follow in the second half of the decade. Buckets was used almost exclusively as a blocker, carrying the ball only 15 times for 52 yards.

"In Buckets early days he was a terrific fullback," recalled arch-rival Joe Kopcha of the Bears. "But one game I stopped him three times in a row on the goal line as I would line up out of position each time and then at the last moment jump into the correct spot. I fooled them each time."

Kopcha added: "If Buckets and people like Hinkle, Hubbard, Hein, and Edwards would have only had to go one way, I am sure they would have been even greater than they were."

In 1936, as the Packers won the NFL title, Goldenberg was shifted into the line. He remembered: "The reason I played guard starting in '36 was the team was short on guards. Interestingly enough both Pete Tinsley and Russ Letlow, the other two Packer guards for most of the period had also been fullbacks in college. I have always said a guard is just a fullback with his brains knocked out."

Goldenberg's rushing attempts dwindled to 6 for 9 yards in '36 and 4 for 18 in '37. He continued to put in time at blocking back until 1939. After that he played exclusively as a guard and linebacker, clearing the way for some of the best runners in the Packers' long history.

Buckets always felt the 1939 Packer team was the best he had played on.

"The team was loaded with talent. Lambeau, Herber, Hinkle and Hutson made the Hall of Fame. Few teams had a good passer in those days yet we had both Arnie Herber and Cecil Isbell. Arnie won the passing title three times and Cec twice. Hinkle, a handsome man, was a real favorite of the fans who admired how hard he played.

"Don Hutson was a favorite on his pure skill. A critical move on the '39 team was the coming of Larry Craig who enabled me to shift from blocking back to guard and Hutson from defensive end to defensive back. While we all know what a fine end he was, few realize what a great defensive back he also was."

The Hall of Fame Selection Committee, in choosing the best players of the 1930's, listed Hutson, Herber, Hinkle, Isbell, tackle Bill Lee, guard Russ Letlow, and Goldenberg, all from the 1939 team.

Buckets had vivid memories of his days with the Pack.

On Curly Lambeau:

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"He was not as bombastic as Lombardi, yet he could yell just as loud. Vince stressed defense while Curly did not care about it. He always figured if they got 100 we would just get 101. I think if we had played the Little Sisters of the Poor they would have scored on us. Curly remembered the 6-3 games of the past and knew the fans wanted to see scoring, so he stressed the wide-open game.

"While we all liked Curly, he did not generate the trust in the players Halas did. Later, if we ever needed anything, we would go to Halas rather than Lambeau.

"People did not realize how poor the clubs really were. Once after an exhibition game the team appointed (tackle) Ernie Smith, Hutson, and me to go to the bank with Curly and make sure the team got paid."

On Don Hutson:

"I was once sitting in a restaurant with Vince Lombardi when a fan came up and asked Vince if Hutson could have made his team. "Hell," Vince replied, "If I had Hutson, no one could have beat me!"

On Danny Fortmann:

"In all the years I played against him I never got a good block on him. He was also good at fading back for a pass. I really think he could have been a great defensive halfback.

"He was a truly great guy. After every game he would walk up and congratulate you. If he and you knew you had played poorly, he would always try to cheer you up and remind you that you would be playing the Bears again soon and would have another shot at him."

On Johnny Blood:

"The greatest character I ever saw! He was so unpredictable it was good for the team as he kept us loose.

"Now Johnny was a very intelligent man from a wealthy family that was smart enough not to let him get his hands on too much money at once. He would be just as at home spending his time in a honkey tonk bar as he was talking to some of the highest society in town.

"One night after he became coach of the Pittsburgh Pirates he called me at about 2 a.m. to tell me he had just traded for me. However, I was saved when the other player would not report to Green Bay and the deal was called off."

Buckets claimed he was the original fall guy for the draw play, although he and Bulldog Turner told the story slightly differently.

In *The Game That Was*, Turner simply says that Buckets would drop back to cover passes, leaving a hole in the center of the defensive line.

Buckets' version: "I could always tell when (Bears quarterback Sid) Luckman was going to pass as he would drop his left foot back, though to this day he denies it. When I saw this, I would yell to the other guard to cover my hole and I would take off after Sid and usually nail him. Eventually Bulldog realized what I was doing and suggested Sid hand off to (fullback Bill) Osmanski rather than pass. Sure enough, he did and Bill goes roaring through the hole I left for a big gain. Thus the draw play was born."

Whoever is more accurate – whether the play stemmed from Goldenberg crashing in or fading out – it does indeed seem that Buckets' defense is responsible for the creation of what has become a standard offensive weapon.

Buckets continued starring for the Packers through several "near-miss" seasons of frustration in the early 1940's, as the team chased the great Bear squads of the era. But in 1944, they won it all, edging the Giants in a 14-7 championship game.

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He retired in 1945 after thirteen years in a Packer uniform. Modern fans seldom understand how short most playing careers were in the pre-TV, one-platoon days. Not only was the wear of going both ways a factor – Buckets used to wrestle in the off-season to stay in shape – but also the money wasn't there as an incentive to keep coming back. Most players were anxious to get started in their "life's work." When he hung up his cleats, only Blood and Mel Hein with 15 seasons each had played more years in the league than Goldenberg.

After he retired, Buckets opened a very successful restaurant in Milwaukee. His children became physicians and Ph.D.'s, and he enjoyed the role of idolized ex-football star to the very end.

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GOLDENBERG, Charles Robert (Buckets)

G-LB-BB-DB-FB

Born: 3/10/19, Odessa, Ukraine. Died: 4/16/1986, Glendale, WI

Height: 5-10 Weight: 220 College: Wisconsin (1930-31)

Pro Honors: 1942 All-NFL (2nd team) Official, A.P.

Chosen by HOF Selection Committee to All-1930s Team

YEAR	TEAM	LG	GM	====RUSHING=====				SCORING		
				ATT	YDS	AVG	TD	TD	PTS	INT
1933	Green Bay	N	11	52	213	4.1	4	7	42	1
1934	Green Bay	N	10	30	73	2.3	2	2	12	-
1935	Green Bay	N	10	16	52	3.3	0	-	-	-
1936	Green Bay	N	7	6	9	1.5	0	-	-	-
1937	Green Bay	N	8	4	18	4.5	0	1	6	1
1938	Green Bay	N	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1939	Green Bay	N	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1940	Green Bay	N	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1941	Green Bay	N	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
1942	Green Bay	N	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
1943	Green Bay	N	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
1944	Green Bay	N	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1945	Green Bay	N	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13 years NFL			120	120	365	3.4	6	10	60	10