

EIGHT TRIES AT THE END ZONE
The Giants-Browns 1950 Playoff Game

by Jack Ziegler

In December 1950 Harry Truman was President, U.S. Marines were fighting off Chinese divisions at Chosin Reservoir and the Giants and Browns found themselves deadlocked for the lead in the American Conference (later the Eastern Division) with 10-2 records. On December 17, 1950 the two teams met in Cleveland's Municipal Stadium to decide the American Conference championship in terrible weather. The temperature stood at a frigid 17 degrees, causing even some hardened linemen of the day to wear gloves. Snow flurries swirled around Municipal Stadium while icy wind gusts blew in from Lake Erie. *N. Y. Times* sports columnist Arthur Daley noted that even though the field had been covered by a tarpaulin, it was still "slippery as a skating rink."

Despite the Giants' two regular season wins over the Browns (6-0 and 17-13), the hometown Browns were a seven point favorite. The Browns boasted a rugged defense and a high powered offense led by QB Otto Graham (137-253 - 1943 yards - 14 TD - 20 Int), FB Marion Motley (140 - 810 yds - 3 TD - 5.8 yds rushing average) and sure handed receivers Dub Jones, Mac Speedie, and Dante Lavelli. The Giants depended on rookie fullback Eddie Price (126 - 703 yards - 4 TDS, 5.6 rushing average), fleet HB Gene "Choo Choo" Roberts and throwing A-formation halfback Charlie Conerly (56-132-1,000 yards - 8TD - 7 Int). The heart of the Giants though was their tough defense. Arnie Weinmeister anchored the defensive line while coach Steve Owen's specially designed umbrella defense (halfbacks Tom Landry and Harmon Rowe, safeties Emlen Tunnell and Otto Schnellbacher) throttled enemy pass offensives.

Because of the slick footing both sides donned sneakers. The Browns operated from their T-formation while the Giants used the T sparingly (Travis Tidwell at QB), most of the day going with Conerly in the long snap A.

The Browns scored in the first quarter, capping a 64-yard drive to the Giants 4 with an 11-yard field goal by Lou Groza, Tommy James holding. That was the scoring until the fourth quarter, as both teams skated all over Municipal Stadium, neither side moving beyond their own 39 yard line.

The Giants finally came alive early in the fourth quarter. From the Cleveland 36 Gene Roberts reversed around right end, then cut upfield toward the Browns' goal line. Only a come-from-behind tackle from Cleveland's all-pro Bill Willis at the Cleveland 4 prevented a Giant TD and a conference victory. But instead of six points, the Giants only had a first and goal.

Here began the bizarre eight play sequence ending in a New York field goal. Two plunges by Eddie Price netted only a yard. On the third play, Conerly lobbed a wobbly pass to end Bob McChesney for an apparent TD. However, the Giants were offsides and the referee moved the ball back to the eight. On the fourth play, a Conerly to Joe Scott pass was picked off by Tommy James but the Browns were called for defensive holding.

The Giants got the ball back plus half the distance to the goal line, first and goal from the four. On the fifth play, Price gained one yard on a plunge. Then Giant center John Rapacz moved the ball before the snap, and the Giants were assessed five yards back to the 8. On the sixth play from scrimmage (not counting the Rapacz illegal motion penalty), Joe Scott ran into his blocker Joe Sulaitis for a loss back to the 13. With third and goal (the seventh play), Conerly tried a pass which was knocked down by Browns' defensive end Jim Martin. The eighth and final play was a twenty yard field goal by Randy Clay, the second-string place-kicker, subbing for injured Ray Poole. With less than nine minutes on the clock, the Giants had tied the Browns, 3-3.

On the kickoff, Dom Moselle returned the ball to the Cleveland 29. Otto Graham breathed fire into the Browns' attack, bootlegging the ball three times for 45 yards. The Browns finally stalled at the Giants' 22, and Lou Groza booted a 29 yard field goal. With 58 seconds left, the Browns led 6-3.

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The Giants got one more chance but New York's hopes died when Bill Willis, Jim Martin, and George Young ran down Conerly in the Giants' end zone for a safety with 8 seconds to go. The Browns had won their first in a five-in-a-row division championships in a game characterized by frozen turn, frozen fingers, and rock-hard defense.

New York	0	0	0	3 = 3
Cleveland	3	0	0	5 = 8