

# Sid Gillman

**Courtesy of the Pro Football Hall of Fame**

Sid Gillman came within five games of coaching the Chargers (Los Angeles in 1960, San Diego from 1961 on) throughout the entire history of the American Football League. A duodenal ulcer and an hiatal hernia, both no doubt accurate yardsticks of the intense way he pursued his job, forced a premature – and, as it turned out, temporary – retirement in 1969.

It gave people a chance to reflect on just what the veteran coach-administrator had meant to the AFL and there could be only one answer: A LOT! As one AFL owner had expressed earlier, “Sid Gillman taught us how to go big league!”

The Chargers played in the AFL championship game five of the first six years and they attracted universal attention with their 51-10 slaughter of Boston in the 1963 title game. For the first time an AFL team, featuring such exciting stars as John Hadl, Lance Alworth, Paul Lowe, Keith Lincoln and a host of others, commanded a certain amount of respect, even from those who felt the NFL to be a far superior league.

Gillman’s team was one of pro football’s most potent offensive outfits for an entire decade but the Chargers’ position in the standings began to slip in 1966. Injuries, a poor draft, heavy losses to the expansion teams and the emergence of Oakland and Kansas City as perennial powerhouses all contributed to the Chargers’ slippage.

Still, Gillman’s Chargers finished below .500 only in the injury-ridden 1962 season and they never finished below third in their division. Their 10-year won-lost record came within a whisker of being the AFL’s finest.

The simple truth is that the Chargers got the jump on the rest of the new league in 1960 because of Gillman. Gillman’s coaching was important – he was the only original AFL coach with NFL head coaching experience – but his organizational genius was even more important.

As he had always done, Sid surrounded himself with talented assistants that soon were being sought by rival clubs. He set up an ultra-professional player scouting department that had orders to build on a foundation of new players, rather than NFL rejects.

Bolstered by the financial support of his owner, Barron Hilton, Sid was able to sign top young college stars. In 1961, for instance, the Chargers nabbed six of their first 10 draft choices. Even at the start, Gillman insisted on the advantage of a “taxi squad,” a luxury many AFL teams didn’t enjoy until years later.

Gillman’s advanced concepts that got the Chargers off to such a good start were the same traits that made him the winner of the Los Angeles Rams’ coach selection derby in 1955. Staging one of the most intensive manhunts in pro history, the Rams scouted coaches from every walk of football life ... from the junior colleges to the pros, winners and losers, veteran strategists and ambitious young men.

Gillman, who had a sensational college record at Miami of Ohio (31-6-1) and the University of Cincinnati (50-13-1), was the choice. Sid guided the Rams to an NFL western division crown in his very first year and managed to stick with the Rams for five seasons. To many, staying with the Rams that long – they had had five head coaches in 11 years before Gillman – was the finest testimonial to Sid’s many abilities.

Sid’s health improved dramatically during his year as Chargers’ general manager only in 1970 and, in 1971, he asked to return to the active coaching job. But Sid, who had always insisted on running his football teams with a one-man iron hand, quickly clashed

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with his owner over certain aspects of this doctrine. Ten games into the season, Sid suddenly resigned.

He left San Diego with a lifetime record of 114 pro victories. Only five coaches have ever won more.