

FOOTBALL, ANYONE?

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This story about football is meant to be funny. I don't want to get serious about football; in fact, I don't think anyone in their right mind could have played football as long as I have if they were serious. I think you have to have a sense of humor to play professional football.

I've heard many stories about guys like Dave Meggyesy, who have written articles about how they felt about football, and have gotten into real serious discussions about the game.

I respect their feelings toward the game. On the other hand, even though there are many negative things about the game, the positive things overshadow anything I've done.

Sure, I've had my setbacks like anyone else. In 1962, I was suspended for betting. That was a setback, and one I thought was unjust. I still think it was unjust, but that's part of living, and I can't beef forever about things like that. If I wanted to get serious, I could talk about the suspension, which right now I am trying to forget.

For me to get serious about football and say the bad things about it would be kind of ridiculous and a waste of time. I like to think about the light things.

I would like to start talking about football when I started the game, my first year in high school. I was more or less forced into playing football because I had four brothers who had done so well. Two of them, Teddy and Louie, had been all-stars in Indiana. Naturally, I was forced to play.

Personally, I didn't want to play football. I much preferred playing with girls, playing hopscotch, or hot-water blue-beans on the corner. Teddy was very influential in my switching.

A lot of people didn't realize this, but Teddy had a tremendous temper which would get way out of hand. My mother was very disturbed about it. Thank goodness she was a registered nurse and figured out a way to help Teddy. At the time, I didn't appreciate it, but looking back, it was the only idea she could have had.

Teddy would flare into these rages, embarrassing my family. Every time he did, Mother would take Teddy and me and lock us in a closet. He would then proceed to beat the stuffings out of me. It was a terrible, terrible situation.

At school they passed out pink slips to report to the principal's office. They had a different meaning for me. They meant my brother was having one of his rages, and I had to go let him beat the stuffings out of me. Terrible, terrible.

I played football because Teddy made a deal

with me. He said if I went out for the football team, he wouldn't beat the stuffings out of me for six months, which I thought was a good deal.

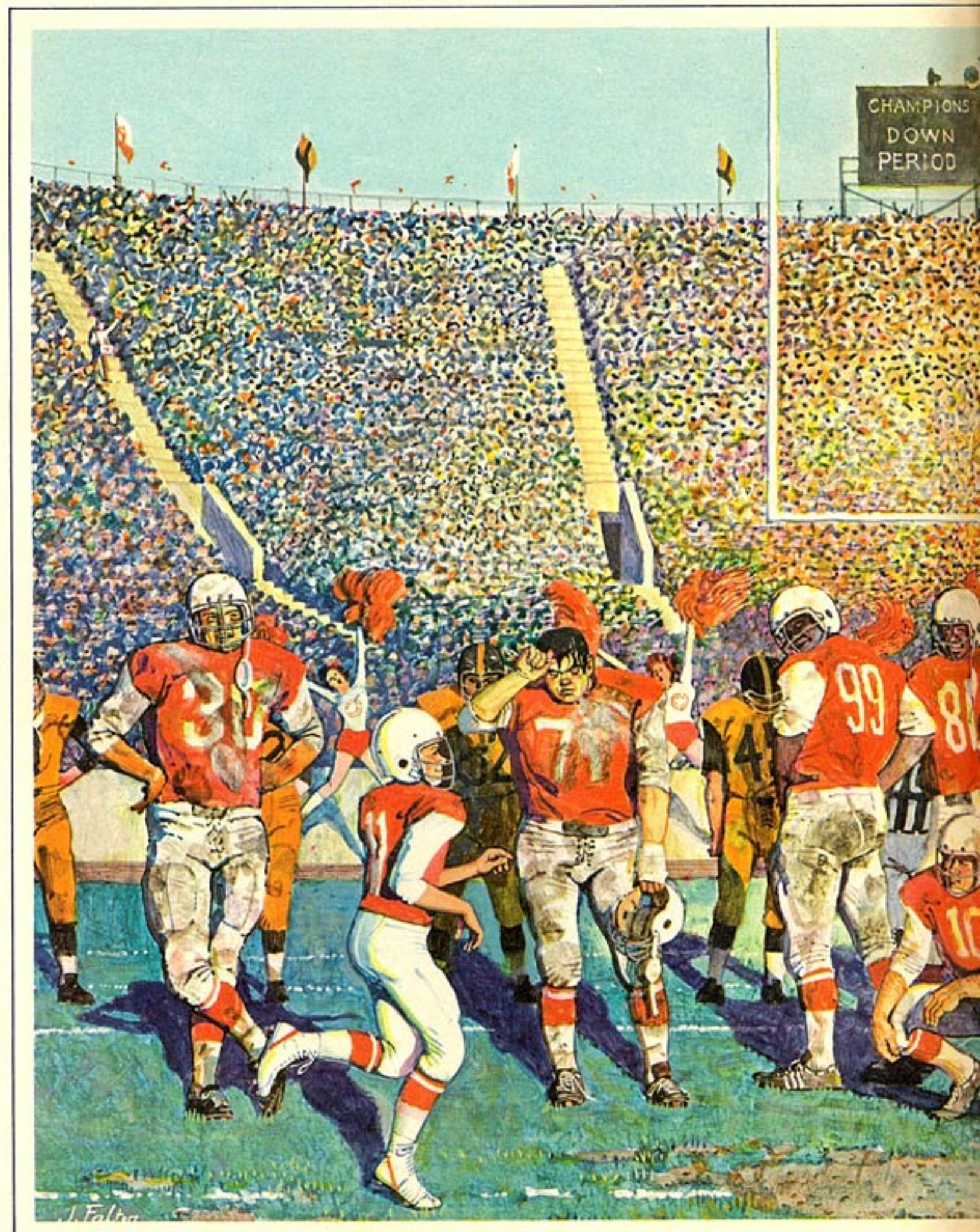
People ask if I was scared the first time on a football field. No, never. Anything I did after those physical, violent things with Teddy were powder-puffy. I have been embarrassed.

For instance, the first time I hurriedly put on my uniform and ran out on the field, the coach said something like, "Karras, that belongs on the inside of your uniform, and certainly not on

your nose, you dummy."

These are things I remember first about the game. The great thing, of course, was the fact that Teddy hadn't been beating me up. I was playing fourth string at the time, but three of the tackles got drafted for the Korean War. I moved up with Teddy.

Teddy was playing right guard and I was playing right tackle. I didn't do a thing that year, block or tackle. Teddy did it all. It was a tremendous sight to see this great player not only



... and a little 5'1" foreign soccer-style kicker comes out yelling,

doing his job, but mine as well. Things went well and I didn't get the stuffings kicked out of me all season.

Again I was unfortunate. Although we won the big titles, when the all-state team came out they made a mistake and listed A. Karras instead of T. Karras, and Teddy beat the stuffings out of me for four weeks.

Thank the Lord, Teddy finally graduated and went to the University of Indiana. Many people ask why I didn't go to Indiana. They didn't know my brother Teddy. Well, I'm not that dumb!

I went to the University of Iowa. The fact they didn't have entrance exams wasn't the only reason. One prerequisite was that you had to be able to spit across the Mississippi River. I was young and strong, and could do that then.

My whole career at Iowa went very smooth. At that time I had the greatest football coach to

ever coach a college team. I knew that on the first day we gathered at the fieldhouse as freshmen, when Forest Evashevski told us he was the greatest college coach we had ever seen. That's how I knew.

Evy had a lot going for him. He had good assistants. I didn't get along with Forest Evashevski for many, many reasons. I've kind of forgotten the miseries at Iowa as many wonderful things happened there. I met my wife there, which probably isn't too big a thrill to you, but it showed me there was something else going on besides football.

I don't remember too much about my studies at Iowa. It will be clear from this piece of writing that I was not an English major. I did go out for debating. I won almost all of the time, too. Except once. My opponent was captain of the wrestling team and he looked an awful lot like my

brother Teddy. So I let him beat the stuffings out of me . . . in debate. I remember our topic well: "If the dodo is extinct, then why is he in the dictionary?"

We were very fortunate and won the Big 10 title while I was there. It was one of the big highlights in my career. Going to the Rose Bowl was not.

Football season was over and we had to go right back into it. It was drudgery. I was never one for all the rah-rah stuff. I have never considered football a rah-rah sport. It was something that basically I had to do early, and I later did for what it brought me.

I can honestly say I never did have much fun playing football. I'm not trying to degrade the game, it's the situation I was in. Basically, it is a rough sport, and when I speak of sense of humor, I mean being able to forget it off the field and make fun of the things you have to do.

We have summer camp that lasts six weeks. This means going twice a day starting in July when the temperatures are in the mid-80's or higher. If anyone enjoys that he must be a little sun-tetched.

There's not much to do — it just consumes a lot of time. You're there early in the morning, in the afternoon, and at a meeting in the evening at 8. This lasts until 9:30 and we have curfew at 11.

There's really not a helluva lot to do between 9:30 and 11. I always wanted to be able to have fun in that hour and a half, so I thought of many things I could do.

I always wanted a pet. Last year, at the age of 35, I decided to buy a pet and take it to camp with me. My pet and I could spend that hour and a half together. I didn't really think a dog or cat would be fitting, cooped up in that cubicle we live in.

Finally, I came up with a great idea. A clam. I bought one and put it in one of those pails we use. My clam and I spent many weeks together in my room. We really didn't do that much, just look at each other and spit. That little clam would spit and I would spit back. At the end of the evening when the coaches said lights out, I would play his favorite record — "Ebbtide."

My clam and I had everything going until some damn, dumb rookie who got thirsty picked up my pail for a drink. He didn't even use a dipper; he just tipped the pail up and swallowed everything in that bucket, including my clam.

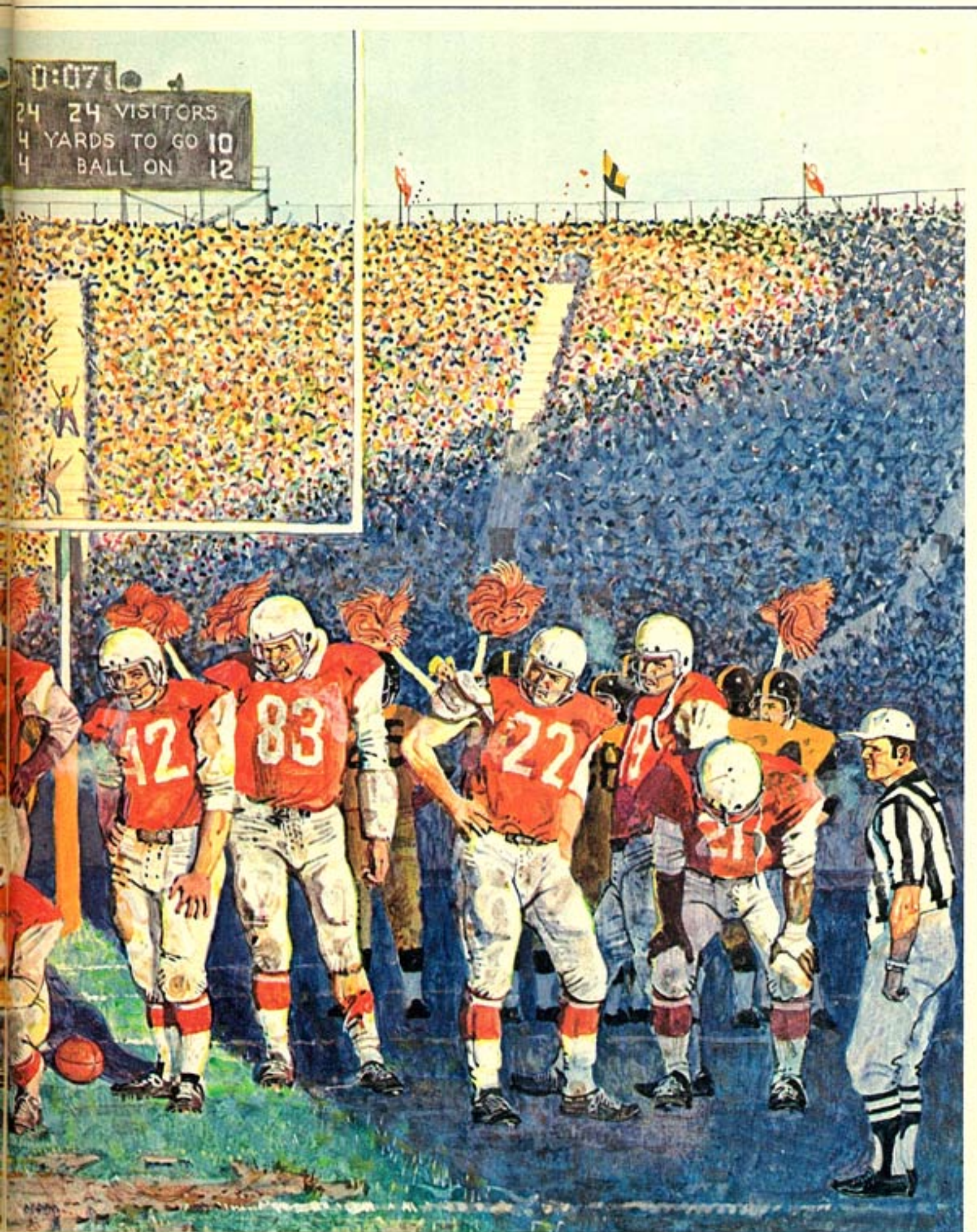
I think professional football has changed in many ways over the years. Money has brought about many of these changes.

When I signed as Detroit's Number 1 draft choice in 1958, prior to the American Football League, I was a little hesitant on what to ask for. So I talked to the one I considered the smartest of the Karrases, my brother Louie.

Louie said if he signed for \$3,000 as the seventh choice of the Washington Redskins in 1952, as first choice of the Lions I should ask for at least twice that much, \$5,000. My brother Louie is the dumbest Greek I have ever known. He lives in my basement now, and I sometimes let him out for Easter or Christmas.

We have a guy playing with us who signed for \$800,000. A lot of people think I must have some animosity because of this. Well, I have none whatsoever.

I did until I took him out on Lake Michigan and he walked for three and a half miles on the Lake.



"I'm going to kick a touchdown, I'm going to kick a touchdown!"

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work smoothly in a democratic form of government. So we blame it on Washington, we blame it on the President, we blame it on the Vietnam War, we blame it on anything and anybody. There's a great variety of objects for our wrath, indignation, and abuse.

"The easiest way out is to think all of those things are forces beyond our control. So long as we believe that, we are off the hook. The truth is that the only place where those problems can be corrected is within ourselves. We insist that our world change without stopping to consider that our world is made up of individuals. When enough individuals change, everything else will change."

"Betty's way of thinking certainly has made deep changes in you," I said.

"A friend told me not long ago, 'If I lost my wife I don't think I could cope with life.' How do you think I feel about the thought of losing Betty? With her, the dark frightening experience, during my time of crisis, has developed meaning. She has given our whole future purpose. I think if she were to go out of my life, half of me would go too. I might go on or I might not. I don't have to make the decision now. I just enjoy the fact that she's still here. And she's enjoying the fact that I finally caught up with her. She had been beckoning to me for years and I was dawdling along the road. But somehow she knew that the day would come, if she were patient enough with me, when I'd be walking side by side with her."

"She is a woman of infinite patience and wisdom. Apparently she's been that way from birth. It was a part of her from the very beginning. As far as I know Betty has been surrounded by love all her life. As a result she is love herself. She imbues her surrounding with love. She is a rare creature."

On the front door of the Young's home in Rancho Santa Fe is a brass plate. On it, Bob has had these lines engraved:

No work, worry or fear allowed on these grounds.

Within these limits dwell love, romance, faith, hope, peace of mind and courage.

Take and drink from the cup that runneth over.

For here you are loved for what you are and all that you can become.

Enter with joy and know that you are free and at peace with yourself and the world.

The atmosphere and spirit belongs to you. It is yours to possess.

—BHY '67

The initials engraved in brass are Betty Young's. She wrote these words about a year after she brought Bob home from Chicago to Rancho Santa Fe.

It's my guess that Betty Young is enjoying Bob's second life most of all. ☼

Then I knew we got him pretty cheap, and were probably underpaying the rascal.

These are some of the things I look back upon and laugh about. As I said, football should be a sport where there are a few laughs involved.

Football is going into a stereotype situation as far as the structure of the game is concerned. They are tightening up all these ridiculous rules like having a tendency to yank a guy if he occasionally gets into a fight with another ball player.

I remember one fight my first year in the league. We were playing the Chicago Bears in the last game and Stanley Jones was opposite me. Stan had been trying to teach me the two-step all afternoon. Heck, I learned how to two-step in high school, so I told him to change or I would do something drastic. Here, it was a case of a rookie against the 13-year veteran.

Many of you know I have poor eyesight. I knocked him down on the next play, and all I could see was his back end. I placed my 11½-D's right there and the referee pulled me. As I started to leave, I felt a tug at my pants and looked down. It wasn't Stanley.

They had taken him out for one play and I hadn't noticed the change. It was my brother Teddy, switched from one side of the line to the other. Needless to say, he beat the stuffings out of me for the next six days.

I think this is a physical type of game, and tempers are going to flare. Yanking a guy as fast as they do kills the killer instinct in a player. If one of them is going to be worried about losing his temper, he's not going to be a terribly tough football player.

There is something else I have given much thought to, and I hope Commissioner Rozelle will be taking some action in this.

The guys I play with are all 6-6, weigh 270 upwards, and run like gazelles. After they bang heads for 59 minutes and some odd seconds the coach calls time out.

"Oh Brucie, oh Brucie!" and a little 5-1 foreign soccer-style kicker comes out yelling, "I'm going to kick a touchdown! I'm going to kick a touchdown!" This little twerp is instrumental in winning this massive, manly game. That little twerp comes out and kicks a 45- or 50-yard field goal to beat you after you have beaten the stuffings out of your opponent for 59 minutes and some odd seconds.

I don't think this is right, Mr. Rozelle, and if that's not bad enough — they're taking showers with us, too. I don't think it's right. They don't pay these guys. From what I hear about negotiations they offer them three drachmas and 15 additional

minutes in the showers.

I'll tell you what happened to us in New Orleans, which I think is ridiculous. I hope the Commissioner will take a stand on this.

We had won five or six games straight, and our intentions were to go to New Orleans and have a good time. We played the Saints the following day and it looked like we'd had a good time. We were playing just well enough to be leading by one point and felt good about that.

New Orleans had the ball on their own 27-yard line, 27 seconds left to play in the game, fourth down, and called time out. We were waiting for the punting team to come out and the darndest thing happened.

The only person to come on the field was a stubby looking fellow with an odd type helmet. I haven't seen a helmet like this since the banana peel helmet of the Knute Rockne days. I'm not quite sure, and I hate to say this if it isn't true; but on top of the helmet was a beanie-shaped thing with a propeller on it, and the propeller was going in the opposite direction propellers should go. It was the darndest thing I've ever seen.

I asked the referee if this was the new punter. No, he was their field goal kicker.

He was going to try and kick a 63-yard field goal. That was the funniest thing I'd heard in my life, and about five guys on our team who heard this went into convulsions laughing and had to leave the field as did three of theirs.

I flipped with the fellow on the outside to see if I could play there,

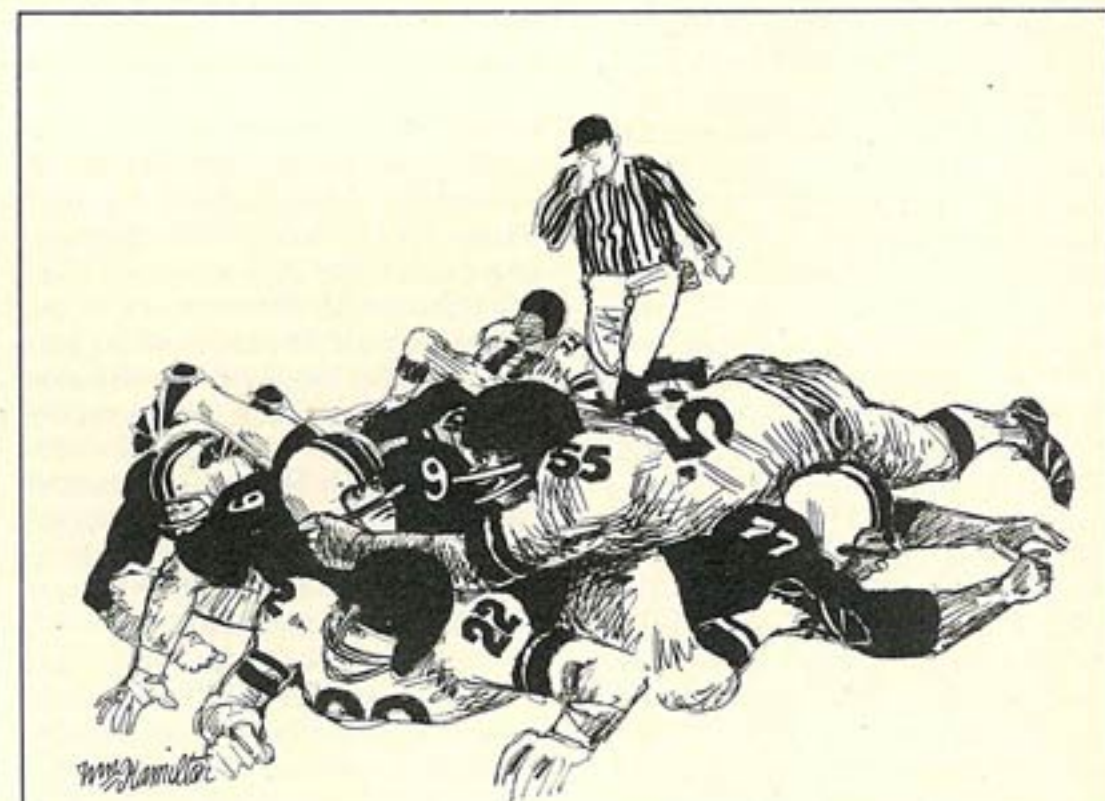
as I wanted to look over the little halfbacks who look like frogs on kicking teams. I wanted to watch this funny, funny sight — a guy trying to kick a 63-yard field goal. It was the darndest thing I'd ever heard.

The only other guy who was serious at the time was their center. They can thank the Lord, for he did snap the ball correctly, and it did go into the quarterback's hands, who placed it down.

I never will forget the laugh. We laughed for about 62 yards. Then we got real serious about the whole thing. Tom Dempsey kicked a 63-yard field goal and beat us.

I hope these random memories of mine have been interesting to you. There is much that could be said about football, much more that could be written. However, as I said at the beginning, I enjoy the light things about the game. Why get serious? ☼

[Editor's Note: Alex Karras is the defensive left tackle of the Detroit Lions and has been for 13 years. Despite the violence of his trade, he is a gentle and literate giant off the field, a devoted father, president of the parent-teachers group in his home town, and is willing at all times to offer his talents as an after-dinner speaker for worthy charitable causes. Looking 10 years younger than his 36 years, and oddly unmarked either physically or spiritually by his career, he has a strain of throwaway humor that suggests a locker-room Mark Twain. Most teams facing Karras put two men on him, so greatly is he feared, and it is reported that they can't see anything funny about him.]



"By the way—I found your autobiography well-constructed and informative, at times sentimental, but never mawkish."