VAGABOND HALFBACK

The Saga Of Johnny Blood McNally

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Dedicated to the memory
of my sister,
Ellen Jane Hickok-Wall

1946-2017

She loved many,
was loved by many,
is missed by many

PREFACE

For years before Vince Lombardi arrived, Green Bay was haunted by the spirit of Packer teams past. After winning six of the National Football League's first 24 championships, the Packers won only 55 games, while losing 107 and tying 3, from 1945 through 1958. No wonder that Packer fans dwelt on the past, and the great legends of the past—Canadeo, Hutson, Herber, Hubbard, Hinkle, Dilweg, Lewellen, Isbell, Michalske, Lambeau.

But the greatest legend of all was Johnny Blood, because he was not only a great football player, but also a colorful, flamboyant personality off the field. (His one-time teammate and fellow member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Clarke Hinkle, once said, "Next to Johnny Blood, Joe Namath looks like Little Lord Fauntleroy.")

I grew up in Green Bay during that period and, by the time I was thirteen and thinking of becoming a writer, I knew that someday I wanted to write a book about this legendary character. So I absorbed as much information as I could. I was fortunate in that my father worked for the Green Bay *Press-Gazette* and, on home game Sundays, for the Packers, keeping play-by-play summaries and statistics in the press box. I often worked with him and, as a result, I got to meet and talk to and eavesdrop on a lot of people who had Johnny Blood stories to tell, including former teammates, drinking acquaintances, and sportswriters.

After my first book was published in 1971, I thought perhaps I had the credentials to approach him about the idea, so I wrote a letter to John Victor McNally, a.k.a. Johnny Blood, in St. Paul, Minnesota. The letter was mailed from New Bedford, Massachusetts, where I was working for the local newspaper, on a Tuesday. The following Sunday afternoon, I got a phone call from Johnny Blood.

"I like the idea of doing a book with you," he said, "and I want to talk about it. I'm parked downtown, in front of the newspaper, but the building's all locked up. Can you tell me how to get to your house?"

(Later, when we had come to know one another pretty well, John told me that several other writers had approached him about a biography, but that he'd turned them all down. "I decided on you for two reasons," he said. "First, you grew up in Green Bay, so you know the place and the history. Second, I'm a big fan of *Moby Dick*, and this gives me an excuse to visit New Bedford, finally.")

During the next five years, John and I worked on this book from time to time. He would visit New Bedford for a week or two, several times a year, and I'd tape interviews and conversations with him during every moment I could spare from my job.

Twice during that period, he and I got together to continue talking and taping while I was visiting my family in Wisconsin. On one of those visits, we spent nearly two weeks traveling around Wisconsin and Minnesota, interviewing other people—including even his first-grade teacher in New Richmond, Wisconsin. And I always had the tape recorder with me in the car, to capture any bits of conversation we might have while traveling.

In 1973, we spent five days in Canton, Ohio, for the tenth anniversary celebration of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It was an invaluable trip, because it gave me the chance to talk to George Halas, Art Rooney, Ernie Nevers, Red Grange, and Duke Osborne. All told, I would guess that John and I spent 600 to 700 hours together.

I had virtually finished a first draft of the manuscript in 1975 when a got a letter from John saying, in part, that he had decided he didn't want it published in his lifetime. There were some things in it, he said, that he wouldn't want to see in print. I replied that I hoped he might reconsider, but I never heard from him again. So I put the manuscript away.

At the time he made that decision, John had read only the first three chapters. I suspect that he was bothered by some of the things he'd told me about his parents, although they certainly don't emerge as ogres. His reaction says something both about his sensitivity and about his attitude toward

this book. He could have asked me to delete or change whatever bothered him, but he suggested only a couple of minor changes involving matters of fact.

Vagabond Halfback is, therefore, neither a collaboration in the "classic" as-told-to mold nor an authorized biography. I prefer to think of it as a cooperation.

For better or worse, I determined the general shape of the book and wrote it. But it obviously could never have been written without John's cooperation. His willingness to talk to me at length, to introduce me to people who had something to contribute and, in several cases, to suggest incidents that perhaps ought to be included, and which I probably never would have known about otherwise, was absolutely necessary. The primary example is the story of his brief boxing career. So far as I know, not even a hint of that episode has ever appeared in the thousands of words that have been written about Johnny Blood during the last eighty-plus years.

He did not help embellish his legend. On the contrary, he debunked several apocryphal stories. Perhaps the best known of these was a Shakespeare-quoting contest that he and John Barrymore were allegedly involved in, in a New York speakeasy—with Johnny Blood, of course, emerging as the winner.

"I never met John Barrymore," he told me, when I asked about this anecdote. "Never even saw him, except in a couple of movies. There was such a contest, but it took place in Kansas City, when I was with the Duluth Eskimos. A stock company was in town, and some of the actors happened to show up at a speakeasy where we were enjoying a drink. One of them started to spout garbled Shakespeare, very loudly, and I stood up and corrected his errors, just as loudly. He eventually shut up and sat down, which was all any of us wanted. But he was no John Barrymore."

During many of my interviews with other people, John left us alone for all or most of the time to avoid interfering. But I should point out that most of those interviews were tape-recorded and, with the permission of the subjects, John did listen to them afterward and make his own comments. In most cases, he did nothing but give me additional, clarifying information.

In the nearly five years we worked together on this book, I acquired a good and valuable friend. Johnny Blood McNally was a remarkable man, even more remarkable than the legend I had grown up on. We had many long conversations on topics that had little or nothing to do with our ostensible purpose. We shared enthusiasms for Joyce, Melville, and Shakespeare, and for a number of other subjects. At times, our talks in motel rooms, restaurants and lounges in Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Ohio reminded me of the one-on-one bull sessions I'd enjoyed, years before, in various dormitory rooms at Harvard—except that John and I both knew a lot more about the subjects than my friends and I had known in the late Fifties.

In the process, we developed—I believe I can speak for John—a genuine affection for one another. While publication of *Vagabond Halfback* is the fulfillment of that goal I set for myself more than sixty years ago, my satisfaction is greatly tempered by the fact that it had to await the death of a good friend. I wish that John could have read the book in this final form. I can only hope that he would have liked it.

Beyond the legends that I grew up on, I drew on several printed sources for my preliminary research. By far the best and most accurate was Gerald Holland's article, "Is That You Up There, Johnny Blood?" in the September 2, 1963, issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Also helpful were *The Game That Was* by Myron Cope (World Publishing, 1970) and *What a Game They Played* by Richard Whittingham (Harper & Row, 1984), both collections of interviews with former pro football players. Johnny Blood was interviewed for both books.

Material on the Packers' history was drawn from Arch Ward's *The Green Bay Packers* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1946) and Larry D. Names' much better researched *The History of the Green Bay Packers: The Lambeau Years—Part One* (Angel Press of Wisconsin, 1987).

I found details about the Kenosha Cardinals in Bob Gill's article, "KENOSHA CARDINALS: Life on the Fringe," which appeared in the Pro Football Researchers Association newsletter, *Coffin Corner* (Vol. 5, No. 1, 1983).

For statistics and details about some of the games touched on in the book, I frequently visited two websites: Pro Football Reference (http://www.pro-football-reference.com/) and Packers History Net (http://www.packershistory.net/index.html).

But oral sources were far more important than printed matter. Five of those sources—Ole Haugsrud, Ernie Fliegel, Jim McNally, Art Rooney, and John himself—literally speak for themselves in the text. Three others, while not so liberally quoted, deserve special mention. Two of John's former Packer teammates, Mike Michalske and Cal Hubbard, gladly shared their recollections. Thanks to them, I had three eyewitness versions of almost every episode from John's years in Green Bay. Similarly, Ernie Nevers contributed greatly to the chapter on the Duluth Eskimos. The importance of having three eyewitnesses is demonstrated by the case of the "dirtiest football game ever played." Ole Haugsrud was positive that the game was played in Pottsville. John was equally positive that the site was Providence. Nevers cast the tie-breaking vote by agreeing with John. (Pottsville, as Chapter 4 reveals, was memorable for a couple of other reasons.)

Finally—or, as you may be saying, at last—a little bit about the style of the book. John Lahr's excellent biography of his father, Bert Lahr, *Notes on a Cowardly Lion*, was written largely in the historical present tense: the "he is, he says" style, applied to past events. Bert Lahr died while the book was being written, but the author continued in the same style, as he explained in his introduction. I have followed that example. As I've already said, the first draft of the manuscript was written long ago and then put aside for possible publication after John's death. I saw no reason to go through it and change every "is" to "was," every "says" to "said," afterward.

But it should be noted that the historical present tense can be misleading, at times. When I say, for example, that New Richmond, Wisconsin, "now" has a population of about 5,000, I am making a statement that was true when written, circa 1973. It may not be true now. The reader should be aware that this book may contain many such "facts" that are no longer facts.

PROLOGUE: VALHALLA IN OHIO

Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
--Kipling, "Recessional"

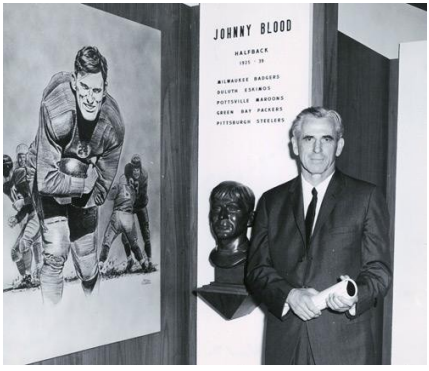
It is a warm, sunny day in July of 1963. The new Professional Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, is being dedicated with the induction of its charter members.

Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White, better known to football fans as "Whizzer" White, an All-American halfback at the University of Colorado in 1937 and the National Football League's leading rusher in his rookie year with Pittsburgh, steps to the lectern just outside the Hall of Fame's front door. He is going to speak in tribute to an old friend, Johnny Blood McNally—the man who talked him into postponing his Rhodes Scholarship for a semester in order to play for Pittsburgh.

Seated on the platform behind him are eleven of the seventeen charter members of the Hall of Fame. Most of them are in their fifties or sixties; large, hard men in their prime, most of them are now even larger, but softer. The two youngest are Don Hutson and Sammy Baugh. Johnny Blood is among the oldest. But, tall and slender, he is only a few pounds above his playing weight and, despite his silver hair, he could easily pass as a contemporary of Hutson and Baugh. In a way, he is—for, despite the age difference of ten or more years, his career overlapped Hutson's by five years and Baugh's by three years.

Johnny Blood's lips are pursed in an ironic semi-smile, as if, while Justice White speaks, he is amused at the idea of being here, of being welcomed into pro football's own version of Valhalla with all those fabled names: Jim Thorpe, Bronko Nagurski, Red Grange, Ernie Nevers, George Halas. . .

Oh, there are times when he almost knows that he belongs here. He certainly has the credentials. He set a record for pro football's one-platoon, sixty-minute era by playing for fifteen seasons—still a record for a halfback, even after nearly seventy years of specialization. He and Red Grange were the halfbacks on the first official All-Pro team, in 1931. And, if All-Pro teams had been chosen in 1929 and 1930, he probably would have been on them, too. He scored fourteen touchdowns in 1931, setting a record that wasn't broken until 1942, when increased emphasis on passing had raised scoring totals considerably. (His record, however, was never formally recognized; official NFL statistics begin with the 1932 season.)



Pro Football Hall of Fame Photo

Above all, there was that intangible that Justice White will soon talk about: the ability to come up with the clutch play. He spent seven full seasons with the Green Bay Packers, and in four of those seasons the Packers won championships. In many crucial games during those championship seasons, it was Johnny Blood who came up with the play, on offense or defense, that won for the Packers.

Justice White closes his tribute: "Not only was John a magnificent player and a brilliant entertainer, but he had that rarest of qualities, namely giving his greatest performance when one was required. This, of course, is the hallmark of the great athlete, and it is also one of the major tests which time applies to the deeds of men."

There have been other, less formal tributes, too, including a couple from men who are also entering Valhalla in Ohio on this July day. From Red Grange: "He was a lovable guy, a very learned guy, and one whale of a football player. A long-legged guy who could kill you in every way. Run, punt, pass, catch passes, a great football player." And from Ernie Nevers: "God never made another athlete so damned exciting, so extremely talented in so many ways."

Yet, while John can accept the tributes, while he knows he was a great football player, he still wonders. . .

His thoughts are interrupted. He goes forward to the podium to accept the honor, to enter Valhalla. He thanks his friend, Justice White; he thanks coaches and owners and teammates; he thanks sportswriters. And he closes with a quotation:

The tumult and the shouting dies,
The captains and the kings depart.
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.

His former teammates smile. They have heard him reciting Kipling many times before, in bars, trains, buses, dressing rooms, hotel rooms, sometimes even on street corners to non-paying audiences glad of a diversion. It is only natural that, for this occasion, he would pluck an appropriate quotation from the poet to whom "football" meant "soccer." He has been reciting Kipling since before he learned to read, since long before he began to play football.

He acknowledges the applause, shakes hands with master of ceremonies Bob Considine, and returns to his seat. The ironic semi-smile reappears. He alone knows why he picked that quotation. His leprechaun mind plays with questions arising from a humble, if not totally contrite, heart. Does he really belong here? Was he elected entirely for his playing ability? Or partly, at least partly, because of his name, and the color it connotes, and because he more than lived up to it, furnishing sportswriters with good copy even when he wasn't playing?

He thinks of the time, in 1932, when he didn't have enough money to go to training camp, after leading the league in scoring and making All-Pro; so he simply hopped a train, hobo-like, to Green Bay, and a sportswriter found out about it and began calling him "the Vagabond Halfback."

He thinks, too, of how he plucked his football alias, Blood, from a theater marquee on the spur of the moment, with absolutely no idea that it would turn out to be the perfect sort of name, as flamboyant as his most celebrated exploits on and off the field. (Later, he learned that Colonel Thomas Blood tried to

steal the Crown Jewels from the Tower of London in 1663, and was foiled only by a very unlucky accident. With a bow of recognition to Colonel Blood, and to Rafael Sabatini's cool, clever, swashbuckling physician/pirate Captain Blood, he sometimes calls himself "Lieutenant Blood," the third in this illustrious line.)

And he thinks, above all, of a skinny kid growing up in New Richmond, Wisconsin, a kid who was "always full of run"…

CHAPTER ONE:
GROWING UP
IN NEW RICHMOND

To all swift things for swiftness did I sue;
Clung to the whistling mane of every wind.
--Francis Thompson, "The Hound of Heaven"

"I'm half stud and half philosopher," he says. By that he means that he was born under the sign of Sagittarius, the centaur, half horse and half man. The astrological sign is only one emblem of what he calls his "schizophrenic" personality; it is not really schizophrenic, but it is certainly full of paradoxes.

A case could be made for the idea that we are dealing with two people, just as we are dealing with two names. There is Johnny Blood, the Hall of Fame halfback who for fifteen years signed his professional contracts with that accidentally assumed name; and there is John V. McNally Jr., who has spent much of his life pondering the profundities of such works as "The Hound of Heaven," *Moby Dick*, *The Meaning of Meaning*, *Finnegans Wake*, and *The Logic of Modern Physics*, and who went back to college in his forties to get his bachelor's degree and all the credits toward a master's in economics. In the Pro Football Hall of Fame roster, he is listed, alphabetically, between George McAfee and Mike Michalske, but people whom he doesn't know invariably hail him as "Johnny Blood."

But the two aspects of the Blood-McNally personality are pretty well intertwined, just as the names are in the signature he sometimes uses: "John McB." They are aspects of the same personality. As Demosthenes was a stutterer who became a great orator; as an actor who is shy offstage can let himself become an exhibitionist onstage, when there is a reason for it; so John V. McNally Jr. becomes Johnny Blood when it seems necessary or

appropriate, in order to do certain things that he wants to do, or is driven to do.

Yet Johnny Blood at his most characteristic—reciting Kipling on street corners or riding the rails to get to training camp—is simply the John McNally who learned to reel off Kipling by the stanza before he could read, and learned to hop rides on freight cars on a three-block stretch of railroad track in New Richmond, Wisconsin.

One of the deepest of the Blood-McNally paradoxes is that the Vagabond Halfback, known for his sudden impromptu trips to distant places, is constantly drawn back to New Richmond, his birthplace and the seat of St. Croix County. It is impossible to say whether he leaves it in order to be able to go back, or goes back in order to be able to leave again. But, certainly, the roots of many of his personality paradoxes must be sought in New Richmond, and in his childhood there. So I drove to New Richmond with him, the first stop on a trip along what I have come to think of as the Johnny Blood Trail.

He drives fast but expertly. He has the intense concentration on the task that marks the good driver and makes him a much safer animal than the character who drives at or below the speed limit but keeps looking at his passenger to make sure that his constant conversation is not being ignored. Seeing him like this, you might think that his deep-set, slitted eyes were dark, but they are not. They are actually grayish-blue, but when he is at his most intense, concentrating or talking or thinking, they narrow and seem dark.

Driving, he alternates postures, leaning way back and stretching his legs out luxuriously for a time, then suddenly hunching forward under his helmet of silver hair as if trying to get a closer view of something in the road—a rabbit, a piece of paper?—but he remains in that position, too, for some time before again leaning back.

He says little. Occasionally he reaches over and switches on the radio, only to turn it off again after a minute or two. And occasionally he smiles and seems about to say something, but most of those times he doesn't say a word.

Then, abruptly, he says, "Xanthippe."

"What?"

"Xanthippe. Socrates's wife. I've been trying to think of her name for a couple of days now, and it finally came to me."

We take U. S. Highway 29 northwest from Green Bay to Shawano, about forty miles away, then head due west, and we drive in silence for what seems like a very long time. Suddenly John pulls onto the shoulder and stops the car, for no apparent reason. "Know where we are?" he asks.

"Somewhere in the middle of Wisconsin."

He chuckles. "More than that. We're right in the middle of our octant of the globe. We're at Longitude 90 west, Latitude 45 north. I've always wanted to build a bar here and call it the 45-90 Club."

He starts the car again and we continue westward, almost all the way across the state. There is intermittent heavy rain and somewhere along the way the windshield wipers stop working, but when we enter St. Croix County—John translates it to "Holy Cross County"—the sun is shining. It is mid-spring, and the landscape is lovely. The trees are green clouds of buds, the streams and rivers are alive with fresh new water, the cultivated land offers interesting textures and shadows that would intrigue Ansel Adams.

Highway 29 is virtually a man-made boundary between southern Wisconsin, the dairyland region of relatively flat grasslands, and the rolling woodland and lake region of the north. St. Croix County, just north of this boundary, combines elements of both regions. It is, for the most part, farmland, but it is nowhere near as flat and monotonous as the farmlands of the Great Plains. Even the cultivated land rolls gently, like long slow ocean swells, and there are frequent hills too steep for cultivation, each crowned with its own copse of trees.

Small lakes and ponds are sprinkled all over the county, and there are three very attractive rivers. The St. Croix begins in the far north, about twenty miles from Lake Superior, and is the boundary between Wisconsin and Minnesota for more than a hundred miles, until it flows into the Mississippi, which then becomes the boundary. It gained some measure of fame as the star of a *National Geographic* television special, "Wild River," in

1970. The narrow, swift Apple River, which originates just a short distance north and meanders an even shorter distance before joining the St. Croix just west of New Richmond, has also achieved some fame: A *Life* magazine layout once portrayed its unique rite of spring, when the water reaches its peak in late April or early May and it becomes alive with people of all ages, clad in bathing suits and inner tubes, who come bobbing precipitously down its current, like lemmings in life preservers.

The Willow River's source is also just north of the county, and it seems but a tiny, weak stream for most of its length. But, just as it enters New Richmond, it suddenly broadens into its "wide spread," which might be mistaken for a lake. It is actually a millpond, largely man-made, the chief reason for New Richmond's existence. The city originally grew up around a roller mill, which used the Willow for its power to grind wheat into flour. New Richmond Roller Mill eventually became Doughboy Enterprises, now Domain Enterprises, still the city's biggest employer. John V. McNally Sr. was manager of the mill from 1896 until his death in 1921.

John V. McNally Jr. was born in New Richmond on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1903. A seeker after signs and significations, he sees a double significance in the date. First, it makes him a Sagittarius, "half stud and half philosopher"; second, a short time later the Wright Brothers made their first flight, so he considers himself one of the first children of the Air Age—which is only appropriate for someone who was to become pro football's first great pass receiver and a star on its first great passing team.

In 1903, professional football was little more than ten years old. Recent research has established that the legendary W. W. "Pudge" Heffelfinger of Yale was paid $500 to play one game for a Pittsburgh team, the Allegheny Athletic Association, on November 12, 1892. Another player was paid $250 for a game the following week and the AAA had three players under contract for the entire 1893 season.

That was the pattern in early professional football, so called. The teams were actually town teams that paid a college star or two to bolster their home-grown squads. That form of the sport

was at first concentrated in Pennsylvania. A little later, it moved into upstate New York and Ohio.

Pro football made a minor breakthrough in 1902 when Connie Mack, part owner and manager of baseball's Philadelphia Athletics, organized a football team called the Athletics and featuring the talented, eccentric left-handed pitcher, Rube Waddell. Mack claimed the world championship after his team beat a Pittsburgh squad that starred Christy Mathewson, another Hall of Fame pitcher—and former Bucknell football player—at fullback. But the world little noted nor long remembered that "championship"; it's merely a footnote in the annals of pro football, and might not even be that if it weren't for the famous baseball names involved.

Also in 1902, the first indoor professional game took place, at Madison Square Garden. In that game, on December 28, a Syracuse team that starred Glenn S. "Pop" Warner beat the Philadelphia Nationals, 6-0.

Those teams and a few others were genuinely professional, in that all the players were paid. But such teams were usually organized just for one or two special games. The professional teams that played anything approaching an entire schedule were still basically town teams.

If anyone in New Richmond had been aware of pro football's existence in 1903, it would have been John V. McNally Sr. He loved sports. John L. Sullivan was his greatest hero, and he was an avid baseball fan—a brother-in-law, Joe "Pongo" Cantillon, was the Washington Senators' manager from 1906 through 1908, and Joe's brother Mike owned the Minneapolis franchise in the American Association. Professional baseball players were frequent visitors to the McNally home, and John Sr. undoubtedly had some sort of hope that his son might become an outstanding athlete. After three daughters, the birth of that first son must have made November 27 a day of special Thanksgiving for him.

Johnny Blood McNally is proud of the fact that he's one hundred percent Irish. His eight great-grandparents were named McNally, Murphy, Barrett, McCormick, McGough, McGraw, McGannon, and Reilly. His ancestors came to this

country during the great emigration caused by the Irish potato famines of the late 1840s and early 1850s.

Great-grandfather Myles McNally arrived in Baltimore with his son William in 1845. They went from there to Wheeling, West Virginia, and then began to move west while working on the railroad, like many Irish laborers. By 1855, they were in Wisconsin. Myles visited St. Croix County, staked out a number of claims for himself, his relatives, and friends, and moved there permanently in 1857.

Large numbers of Irish were settling in the county. Two of the earliest towns were named Emerald and Erin Prairie, and Myles is believed to have named both of them. He became town clerk of Erin Prairie. Early in 1865, he was walking to nearby Hudson with the town books when he slipped while crossing the frozen Apple River. He lay unconscious on the ice for several hours and died of pneumonia a few days later.

His son, William, succeeded him as town clerk. While in Wheeling, William had married Honor McCormick. She was known as "the Wheeling Clipper" because, at nineteen, she had been considered the most eligible girl in town, attractive, vivacious, and intelligent. William, like his father, was a large, handsome man, but he was also a sedentary soul, much respected for his book learning. Johnny Blood's younger brother, Jim McNally, says, "He would sit on the front porch, thinking about Plato and Aristotle. Grandma McNally would say, 'Why aren't we in Minneapolis? That's where the action is.' But he'd just sit there, thinking."

Honor probably had enough energy for two: It is said that, even when she was eighty, she was the best dancer in the county. Although William was a reader and a schoolteacher, it was Honor who insisted that their sons, William Jr., John V., Myles, and Thomas, should be sent to college. Will and John went to St. John's, a two-year school run by Benedictines in Collegeville, Minnesota.

Having gone to the same college, the two oldest McNally brothers then went to the same family for wives: William chose Margaret Murphy and John V. married Margaret's sister Mary. Their father, James Murphy, had emigrated to Prescott, Canada, with his older brothers in 1845, when he was fifteen. He moved

to Hudson, Wisconsin, about 1854. On July 4, 1856, he married Mary McGraw, whose family had come to the United States in 1847. Her father became foreman of a glass manufacturing company in Saratoga, New York. In the meantime, his brother John had settled in Hudson. James advertised for his brother in the *Boston Pilot*, a diocesan newspaper with a far-flung readership among Irish immigrants. Mary's father answered the ad and then moved to Hudson to rejoin his brother.

Though the McNallys and Murphys were both Irish farming families who had settled in the area at about the same time, there was a basic difference. The farms were only about six miles apart, but the center of the McNally social life was Erin Prairie, a boisterous town that boasted nine saloons and a hot-headed rivalry between the local Irish farmers and the rough Irish lumberjacks who went logging in the north during the summer and returned during the winter, with their accumulated pay and pent-up frustrations. It was an Upper Midwest version of the Western frontier town and its cowboy-sheepherder conflicts, but the fights were generally settled with fists, not guns.

The Murphy social life, on the other hand, was centered in two more genteel towns, Hudson and Hammond, where people found their fun at hoe-downs, barn dances and church socials, and public drinking was almost unheard of.

Mary Murphy was a tall, slender, attractive woman, 5-foot-8 and 120 pounds in her youth. While growing up on the farm, her favorite pastime was breaking colts to ride. She went to nearby River Falls Normal School and then taught in New Richmond for two years. "I've talked to several of her former pupils," John says, "and they tell me she ruled the classroom with an iron hand—which doesn't surprise me a bit."

In 1898, she married John V. McNally. Three daughters—Lucille, Honor, and Helen—were born in rapid succession. And then came John V. McNally Jr.

Johnny Blood seems to know the county as well as William Faulkner knew his own creation, Yoknapatawpha County. And he seems to have the same sort of ambivalence toward it. "It seems to me," he says, "as if every bit of this county has some kind of association, some kind of string attached to it. With all

those strings, I begin to feel bound and I've got to get away, get free of it all. But they always pull me back, eventually."

He points out the old Murphy farm, the old McNally farm, the spot on the now bubbling Apple River where his great-grandfather slipped, lay unconscious, and caught pneumonia. There is the school where his sister Honor taught. "Part of the job was that she had to go to all the dances and dance with all the hired men. She had a rough year," John says.

There is the Fay farm, where he and other schoolchildren could earn a little money by picking strawberries, melons, and vegetables. There is another farm, where he helped with the threshing one fall, as a young teen-ager.

Erin Corner, which was once the center of Erin Prairie township, is now just an abandoned church, a cemetery, and a general store. Adjoining the store is the proprietor's house, where an auction is going on. "We might be just in time to see the end of Erin Corner," John says. But it is not quite the end. John knows the owner, and he learns that the man has decided to retire, but someone else will operate the store.

Among many weathered, nearly illegible gravestones, John finds some ancestral plots in the cemetery, which is set on a hill. Then he walks to the edge of the cemetery and points to the horizon. "You can see New Richmond from here," he says.

Our first stop in New Richmond is at a Buick dealer's on the outskirts of the city. A mechanic discovers that the windshield wiper motor is burnt out. There is none in stock, and it will probably be a week before they can get one. John asks him to order the motor, and we head for the center of the city.

New Richmond was originally settled in 1855; it was then known as Foster's Crossing. After the Civil War, it went through a small boom. Logging brought a certain prosperity to all of St. Croix County. Then the roller mill was established, and the town was renamed New Richmond. It attracted many first- and second-generation Irish and Norwegians, mostly farmers and lumberjacks settling down to new jobs at the mill. Some transplanted New Englanders, mostly professional men, also arrived.

Perversely, Johnny Blood translates the English of New Richmond into French and the French root into English, to come up with "Nouveau Riche World" as a pet name for his birthplace. It was not exactly nouveau-riche, but it was, and is, a fairly prosperous middle-class town. When John was growing up, the population was about 2,500; now it's about 5,000. Not far away, in Minnesota, is Sauk Center, where Sinclair Lewis grew up, the town he satirized in *Main Street* and which was also partly the model for Zenith, the larger home town of *Babbitt*. One can imagine a similar business-boosterish attitude in New Richmond and in thousands of other young Midwestern towns around the turn of the century. After all, Minneapolis and St. Paul were born about the same time as New Richmond, with nothing but water power and a flour mill to spank life into them.

If you are a rootless city person or suburbanite, you drive through a small city like New Richmond and wonder why people still live here. Why haven't they all moved to Minneapolis, "where the action is"? Or to Green Bay or Milwaukee or Madison or Chicago? If you stop for a while and talk to the people, you find out there's a very simple reason: They like it. This is their town. It's a fine place to live. They're proud of it, proud to live here. They're particularly proud that native son Warren Knowles, who read law in the office of Johnny Blood's uncle, was elected governor of Wisconsin in 1965; Main Street was promptly renamed Knowles Avenue.

Johnny Blood, too, believes it's a nice place, and he points out all of its attractive features as we drive around. The streets are wide. The houses are set well back, so there's plenty of grass and trees and yard space. There is no ghetto; a thorough tour of the city reveals only two somewhat dilapidated houses. Domain Enterprises is a going concern, the local cannery is also doing well, and they are the industries that support the city and most of its inhabitants. In New Richmond, you can almost rediscover the "normalcy" of the Harding-Coolidge era.

Yet here, too, there is a paradox. Running through the very heart of New Richmond is the Willow River, the original lifeblood of the flour mill; and along the banks of the Willow is what Johnny Blood calls "the jungle." It *is* like a jungle: Right near the canning factory is an area so overgrown with trees,

brush, bramble, and briars that it's impossible to walk the twenty yards to the riverbank. We drive from there to what is the economic, if not the geographic, center of the city, near the mill and the railroad depot, and John points out another heavily overgrown area along the river. "The hoboes would come in from all directions," he says, "and this jungle area was their hangout. We had them by the scores."

We move on to the railroad depot. Trains had to stop here and again at a crossing only three blocks away. "We used to hop on the freight cars here, ride the three blocks, and then hop off again. It was a pretty good training ground."

In that golden age of railroading, twelve trains a day stopped at New Richmond, eight traveling north or south, four traveling east or west. The depot and its trains fascinated John, and he got to know many of the trainmen. He became especially friendly with a locomotive engineer. John used to bring him box lunches nearly every day during the summer, and the engineer would reward him by taking him on the three-block ride from the depot to the crossing. On one occasion, he let John ride in the cab of the locomotive to Cumberland, about fifty miles north, where he visited the Doars, good friends of his family. He had permission from his parents for that trip. But John remembers another, not so happy occasion, when his father caught him hitching a ride on a freight car for that three-block trip between stops. "That was the worst whipping I ever got," he says. "I had the marks for weeks. But I guess it all shows that I had tendencies toward vagabondage even then."

About five blocks away from the mill, and just two blocks south of the river and its former hobo jungle, is the McNally home. John's brother Jim, seven and a half years younger, now lives alone in this large white frame house. It's set well back from Second and South Montana Streets, on a sizable corner lot. In back of the house, the land slopes down to another good-sized lot, studded with trees and flowerbeds. There was a pond in one corner of this lot when John was growing up.

The big, high-ceilinged living room is wallpapered with a blue print on a white background. There's a lot of dark woodwork, and the room is dark; there are only four windows

and they are well shaded by trees and shrubbery. A rather idealized charcoal portrait of a younger Johnny Blood McNally hangs over the fireplace, and there are similar portraits, probably by the same artist, of his parents and some aunts and uncles here and in the entranceway.

The McNally house
Photo by Alexius Horatius

"There used to be a lot of laughter here," John says, looking around the empty living room. "My parents didn't drink much, but they didn't have to, because they were naturally high. By that, I mean that they were almost always in a mild state of elation. They both had a lot of charm, and people liked to be where they were. On Sunday mornings, the whole family would stop in here after going to Mass."

The whole family added up to a lot of people. At one time, there were twenty-six cousins living in New Richmond, including a number of double cousins, children of the two McNally-Murphy marriages. John McNally Sr. was the chief source of entertainment at these happy Sunday gatherings. His quick wit, along with his ability to tell stories and mimic almost anyone, kept laughter bubbling from the assembled members of the clan.

Johnny Blood is talking about an article on the actor Paul Newman that he has read recently. “I guess he and I have something in common. He says he doesn’t like heights, but he’s always felt forced to try climbing them anyway—maybe because he *is* afraid of them. I’ve been through that a few times myself.”

When he was four years old, he climbed out of his bedroom window onto an eave trough, clambered up to the peak of the roof on the three-story house, crept along that for twenty feet or so, then sat there until his father came home from work and saw him. The senior McNally didn’t panic. “Stay right there,” he said calmly, then got a ladder and climbed up to rescue his son.

“I still don’t know why I did something like that,” John says. “I suppose no one really knows why he did things when he was four. But there have been so many things, so much like that, since I’ve been old enough to know better, that are just as hard for me to explain.”

A little later he says, “I suppose I must have a strong need for attention. I can’t explain some of the things I’ve done on any other basis.”

If that is true—and it probably is—it isn’t surprising. The example of his father, with his great ability to entertain people, undoubtedly contributed to that desire for attention. And there was also his mother’s belief in cultural things—meaning, in the Irish bardic tradition, some form of the performing arts. She taught him to memorize and recite large blocks of poetry, especially Shakespeare and Kipling, before he could even read it. Later, he was also given lessons in public speaking, debating, and the violin.

When he was eight years old, his mother and his grade school teacher teamed up to book him into Hagan’s Opera House to recite Kipling’s “Gunga Din.” It seems to have gone well.

A similar musical performance was not so successful. He still shudders at the memory of a violin recital when he was in the seventh or eighth grade. He murdered “Turkey in the Straw” and retired from the stage in disgrace, at least in his own eyes. “I haven’t gotten over that yet,” he says, sixty years later.

His mother also introduced him to ancient Greek, Roman, Irish, and Scandinavian myth, and to the legends of King Arthur, and John found it all fascinating.

John McNally Sr., himself a college man and the son of a schoolteacher, agreed with the idea of instilling culture into the boy. But there was something else, something more subtle and yet, to the sensitive antennae of a child, quite palpable. "My father never *told* me he wanted me to succeed in sports," John says. "He could see, I suppose, that I was too small, that I didn't have the tools—not then. So he never said so. But I could see it. I could see who his heroes were. He was always talking about boxers, especially John L. Sullivan, and about baseball players. He was always happy to box with me, or to get me out on the lawn and pitch to me, or bat the ball to me. He didn't say, 'You're going to be a failure unless you become an athlete,' and I didn't think of it at the time, consciously. But, unconsciously, you soak it up, and I can see it now."

His brother Jim also talks about it, but from a somewhat different perspective: "Our dad had a great personality. He was like a deputy father to all the other McNally and Murphy children, and they all wanted to be like him. They wanted to be as athletic as he was. Our sisters, Honor and Helen, felt the same way, and they could throw snowballs, or baseballs, as well as any boy could."

There was an athletic tradition in the family. New Richmond at one time had a town baseball team with an all-McNally infield—John's father and three uncles. Led by Honor and Helen, the girls' high school basketball team went two seasons without a loss. (Jim McNally says that, when Helen went to the University of Minnesota, she was asked not to go out for basketball "because she was so good, her side always won 30-2 or something like that, and it was just no fun for the other girls.")

In John's senior year, the high school football team was also undefeated, but he didn't play for it. He was only thirteen when the school year began, and he was small even for his age. On graduation day, he was still wearing short pants, the mark of a boy. He was fourteen years old, about 5-foot-4, and very skinny.

But he had become something of a solitary athlete. "I was always full of run," he recalls. "I loved to get out and run and jump and climb trees in the fields and in the jungle."

And he had performed one athletic feat in public. At twelve, in front of a large Fourth of July crowd, he climbed to the top of

the bridge crossing the Willow River, right near the roller mill, and made the dive into the water, about thirty feet below.

"It was a kind of tradition that a couple of kids would do that on the Fourth of July. I didn't plan to be one of them. But a friend of mine dared me to do it, so I climbed up there. I was scared to death. I didn't want to jump. But, with all those people watching, I had to. So I did."

There is, of course, nothing unusual about an emotional tug-of-war between parents for influence over a child. But it usually operates on the subliminal level. In the case of the McNallys, however, it was an overt contest, at least early in John's life.

He has no personal recollection of it, but his aunt, Margaret Murphy McNally, has told him about it. When he was three or four years old, his parents would stand him in the middle of the living room and sit on opposite sides, equidistant from him. Then they would simultaneously call to him.

"Which one do you love most, Johnny?" they would coax. "Pick the one you love the most."

And he would stand paralyzed, looking from his father to his mother, from his mother to his father.

Finally, Aunt Margaret, who witnessed the "game" several times, told the McNallys they ought to stop doing it. "You're tearing that poor boy in half," she warned them.

A bedroom on the second floor of the McNally house is still John's, though he rarely uses it now. Here is a large trophy presented to him by the Green Bay Elks at their annual sports award night in 1965; there is a plaque announcing his induction into the Wisconsin Hall of Fame. A framed certificate proclaims that he is a member of the Helms Athletic Foundation Hall of Fame. The honor he most values, though, is the bronze scroll given him by the citizens of New Richmond. "I never expected *them* to honor me," he says, with a wry grin. "They know me too well."

One wall is covered with framed maps. On another wall hangs a photograph of "Ernie Nevers' Duluth Eskimos," for whom he played in 1926 and 1927. A plaster replica of the

Blood-McNally Pro Football Hall of Fame bust is on the floor in a corner of the closet; the bronze original is, of course, in Canton. A bookcase near the bed contains a miscellany of titles: C. G. Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Ogden and Richards' *The Meaning of Meaning*, a collection of William F. Buckley's essays side by side with *The Liberal Answer to the Conservative Challenge*, Richard Ellmann's biography of James Joyce, *Moby Dick*, assorted lesser novels of various types, Walter Kaufmann's *The Faith of a Heretic*, a paperback entitled *The Call Girl*.

From the window, you can see the Catholic church, about three blocks away. It is a modern building, as is the parochial school next to it. An older church and school stood on the same site well before the turn of the century. John went to that church and, sometimes, to the school. But his mother, whom John describes as "a free-thinking Catholic," felt he should have a better-rounded education than the parochial school might offer, so she sent him to first grade in public school, second grade in parochial school, and he more or less alternated between the two until he entered the public high school.

At one point, when his mother decided to transfer him from parochial school back to the public school, the parish priest gave an angry sermon attacking people who deprived their children of a good Catholic education. It was obviously aimed at Mary Murphy McNally, though he didn't mention her name. Angered, the McNallys walked out of church before the sermon was over. A few days later, John's father encountered the priest on the street. "They had quite an argument," John says. "My father told him that if he ever did anything like that again, he'd rip off his clerical collar and beat the living daylights out of him. I have no doubt that he would have."

The day after that encounter, the priest was killed when a train hit his car. "It would be ridiculous to say it was some kind of judgment," John says. "But"—he pauses, deliberates, decides to say no more. But he is fond of Jung's "synchronicities," coincidences that might, just might, be meaningful. He even searches for them.

And, if we want to search for paradoxes in New Richmond and Johnny Blood McNally's background, we can certainly find them. The middle-class "Nouveau Riche World," with scores of

hoboes living in the jungle that runs through its center. The McNallys, from boisterous Erin Prairie, united with the Murphys, from more genteel, more sedate, Hudson and Hammond. The meditative schoolteacher and philosopher paired with the Wheeling Clipper, who wanted to go where the action was. The father who, though he never said so, wanted his son to be an athlete; the mother who, though she had loved breaking colts in her youth, emphasized the importance of cultural things. Older sisters who could throw baseballs and play basketball better than most boys, while their younger, shorter, skinnier brother could compete only in debating and public speaking.

Having found the roots of some aspects of the Blood-McNally personality, it is time to move on. Leaving the burnt-out windshield wiper motor behind, we pray for clear skies and leave New Richmond, for the time being.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE EDUCATION
OF A ROAMIN' CATHOLIC

Down to Gehenna or up to the throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.
--Kipling, "The Winners"

His parents decided that John, a high school graduate at fourteen, was too young to go to college, so he spent a post-graduate year at New Richmond High School, studying typing and commercial subjects. The following fall, he enrolled at River Falls Normal School, now Wisconsin State University at River Falls, where his mother had trained to be a teacher.

The "vagabondage" was about to begin. John would spend a total of nearly five years at three different colleges, without earning a degree. And twice he would feel forced to take flight.

River Falls, about thirty miles south of New Richmond, is partly in St. Croix County and partly in Pierce County. It has a population of not quite five thousand. The college buildings, like those of many older small colleges that have recently expanded, are new but not modern. They are no-nonsense buildings that proclaim: Education is fine, as long as it's good and practical and not very expensive. The complex could be mistaken for a high school with a junior high and a couple of elementary schools as satellites. This is all solid, three-story, red brick construction, the little red school house enlarged and multiplied into university status.

The surgery of expansion has been performed so well that it's confusing. Johnny Blood, roaming through the main building, the only one that was here when he went to the school in 1919-1920, doesn't realize at first that a new wing has been added. The secret is revealed when he opens a fire door in what used to be the auditorium and is now a lecture hall. It should open onto a fire

escape; instead, it leads to a short corridor that connects the old building to the newer wing.

"There used to be a fire escape here," he says, "so that part of the building wasn't here in 1919. I used to put something in the door, late in the afternoon, to keep it open and then, sometimes, I'd bring a girl up the fire escape and through the door, for a little romancing on the stage."

He wasn't a success at River Falls, and the "romancing" was part of the reason—or, rather, a symptom of the reason. "It was puberty," he says. "Adolescence. I was discovering girls, I had temporarily lost interest in books, I was away from home and feeling my oats. In River Falls, I behaved differently than I ever had in New Richmond."

Further complicating the situation, his parents went to California for the winter, leaving him with a checkbook. The house was locked up and Jim McNally, just eight years old, stayed with his Uncle Will's family, a few blocks away.

North Hall of UW-River Falls
Photo by Bobak Ha'Eri

Jim has a vivid recollection of John's discovery of girls during this period: "I used to come back to the house to play in the yard sometimes, and one day I saw John bring this girl—I'll call her Mary Jones—into the house. He had a key. Well, I didn't say anything then.

"But later, when our parents were going to come back, I saw him at the house again, on the front porch. Well, you know how little brothers are. I went up to him and said, 'I saw you bring Mary Jones into the house one day.'

"He kept asking me, 'What do you think I brought her in the house for?' I wouldn't say, because I was scared of him. But he kept coaxing me, and finally I said, 'I think you took her in there to screw her.'

"So John grabbed an ax that we had out there on the front porch. He put my head over the railing, and he said he'd cut it off if I didn't promise not to tell. I didn't think he would, at first, but he kept holding me there, and I got scared and began to think maybe he would cut it off, so I promised not to tell.

"I guess he felt bad then, seeing how scared I was, because he gave me the ax and put his head on the railing, and said, 'Now I'm going to let you cut my head off.' But, of course, I couldn't do that."

By spring, John's grades were poor, the checking account was badly overdrawn, his parents were due back shortly, and he could think of only one way out: Go to sea. The obvious way was to join the Navy. But the Navy recruiter in Minneapolis rejected him, saying something about poor eyesight. "I've never needed glasses," John says, "and I played fifteen years of pro football with these eyes. I suppose he must have guessed that I was lying about my age, so he lied about my eyesight."

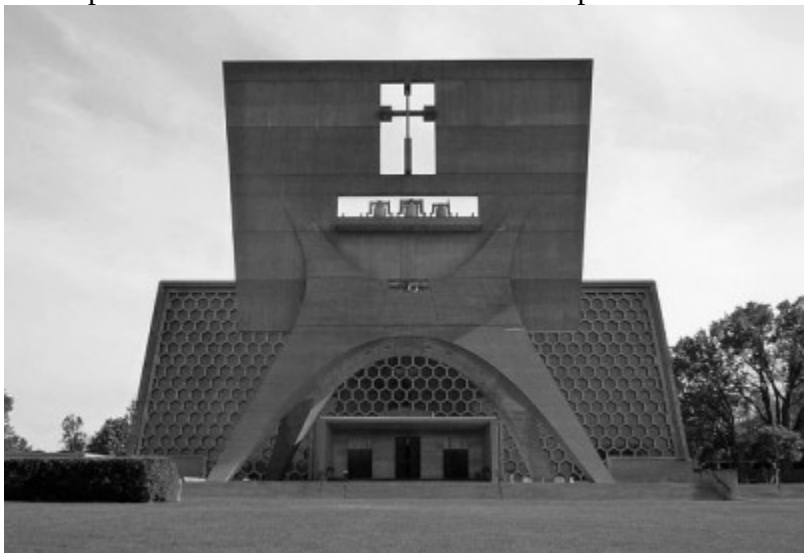
His dream of going to sea was postponed for twelve years, and he went west instead, riding freights to South Dakota, where an uncle, Fred Murphy, had a farm. Murphy, later to become publisher of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, was pushing a philosophy of diversified farming, epitomized in his slogan, "The cow, the sow, and the little red hen." His sixteen-year-old nephew went to work for him as a farmhand, working by day, sleeping in a hay wagon by night, and hating the whole experience. John still remembers the longest day of 1920—June 21, the summer solstice. He awoke at dawn, got rid of the bugs that had been his bed partners for the short night, and then worked for fifteen hours, first feeding the animals and then cultivating a section of land. He decided he didn't want to be a farmer, so he went home.

All was forgiven. He had tried and failed at his mother's school; now, his parents decided, he should try his father's.

St. John's University, as it is now called, is located in Collegeville, Minnesota; and Collegeville is St. John's. There are so many Saints among the towns and cities in this area that you might think you are in St. Earns County, but it is Stearns, as in T. S. Eliot's middle name. Stearns County is rather remote and

largely rural, and it was quite a moonshining center during Prohibition. There were so many hiding places, both for illegal booze and for the people who made it, that the federal revenue agents couldn't make a dent in the business.

Like River Falls Normal, St. John's has changed a great deal since John was a student, but it has not merely added buildings; it has become much more modern in appearance and in philosophy. The first sight of the campus, from some distance away, is the "Banner of the Cross," a huge concrete slab, cut away in the center to show the outline of a cross. It, and the massive new church behind it, were designed by Marcel Breuer, who also drew up a hundred-year plan for the college's development. A member of the famed Bauhaus school of architecture, Breuer was once a partner of Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius.



Abbey Church at St. John's University
Photo by Matthew Hranek

The church is a modern masterpiece, a monolith of rough concrete. A large stained glass window in the front glows with an abstract design; a cantilevered balcony protrudes precariously from above the rear pews. Behind the altar there is what appears to be a seating area for an enormous choir; it is, in fact, where the Benedictines, who run the school, sit during services.

In contrast to the modernity of the newer buildings is the Medievalism of the three buildings that were here when John enrolled. The gymnasium looks like a fifteenth-century fortress,

complete with battlements and turret. The red brick science building is surmounted by a small, square tower with Gothic windows. The old Gothic church, now a reception area, was in the main building, which also housed the monastery, dormitory rooms, and classrooms. (During John's tenure here, a fourth building—called, simply, the "New Building"—was constructed.) The twin spires that once marked the old church have been lopped off because they would have diverted attention from Breuer's Banner of the Cross.

St. John's Quadrangle in 1912

Students lived in dormer rooms in the attic of this main building. "We had a table, a couple of chairs, a bed, and a locker—that was it," John recalls. "It was pretty Spartan, but we didn't even notice. We liked the place. We had a good time. And I seemed to fit in here."

The discipline was also Spartan. "They'd hardly let us out of the place. You really had to *try* to get into trouble here." So he stayed out of trouble. After a year pretty much on his own, and the resultant problems, John was ready to accept some discipline.

He was now nearly seventeen, closer in age to his college classmates than he had been the year before, at River Falls, and much of the always hazardous transition of early adolescence was behind him. He had also grown three inches in a year, to about 5-foot-10 and, although still slender at around 150 pounds, he had toughened his muscles considerably while working on his uncle's farm.

His growth spurt had awakened the idea that he might become an athlete after all. He had certainly decided to try. He became known at St. John's as the kid who ran everywhere. And it was not just exuberance and excessive energy; he was consciously trying to make himself a runner. Even on the rare

occasions when he visited the nearest "big city," St. Cloud, about seven miles away, he jogged in both directions.

"And," John smiles, "I was usually so exhausted by all that running that I went to bed early. Very early. There was no energy or time left for romancing at St. John's."

In the fall of 1920, St. John's didn't have a varsity football team, but it did offer intramural tackle football. One day in October, a student whose name John can't recall walked up to him and said, "I chose you for my football team."

"I've never played football in my life," John replied. But the student persuaded him to come out for the team.

"The system they had," John says, "was to name six guys as team captains, and then they'd just sort of choose up sides from among all the students. This guy thought I looked the right size to be a football player, I guess, so he chose me."

The team, which was called the Cat's Pajamas, won the intramural championship with John as the starting tailback. He was also the center on the varsity basketball team--he still thinks basketball was his best sport—and he captained the newly-formed track team in the spring of 1921. But his first major athletic triumph came on the annual student field day, on Memorial Day of 1921. Competing in ten of the fourteen events, he won three—the high jump, the half-mile, and the mile—and finished second in four others, the 220-yard dash, 440-yard run, discus, and broad jump. All that running paid off in new school records in both the half-mile and the mile. And, as high point man in the meet, he was awarded a silver loving cup.

It was a very important trophy for him. He presented it to his father as tangible evidence of his athletic success. John still recalls this as his most satisfying moment—more satisfying than any of the Packers' championships, more satisfying even than his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

It happened just in time. His father had been suffering from what was usually called "melancholia" at the time. "Having been in that natural high, that state of elation, all of his life, he simply didn't know how to cope with depression," John says. "He couldn't understand what was happening to him."

Others couldn't understand it, either. His business associates, his friends, his relatives, his wife all thought that the senior

McNally just didn't want to work anymore, that he had been overcome by some sudden, inexplicable laziness. They didn't realize that he simply couldn't concentrate on his work because he was too busy trying to handle this strange depression that had settled over him like a shroud.

John was visiting an aunt in Minneapolis during summer vacation when word came that his father was missing and that there was a search going on. John returned to New Richmond to join in the search, along with almost every other able-bodied person in the county. On August 21, 1921, nearly three days after his disappearance, the body of John V. McNally Sr. was found in the Apple River, near Somerset, Wisconsin, about five miles west of New Richmond.

"My first thought," John recalls, "is that it was such a terrible tragedy, such a waste. I had a great admiration for him, I thought he was a great guy, and we were good friends. My second thought was, 'Now he can see me, he can watch everything I do, and he can see what a son-of-a-bitch I am.'"

His father's suicide, and his own guilt feelings, undoubtedly contributed to John's eventual success in pro football. He might well have become a great football player, anyway; but his desire for athletic success, already whetted by his first year at St. John's and that silver loving cup, was further sharpened by this loss. He knew that his father had wanted him to be an athlete; he felt that he had let his father down, in many ways. The tremendous competitive drive that was to make him such a great clutch player must have owed something to his need to atone. His subconscious must have been telling him, at times, "Now he can see me, now he can watch everything I do, and I've got to show him the kind of athlete I can be."

It was a good thing that John had St. John's to return to in the fall of 1921. His father's death had been a severe blow to his mother, and it would strain relations between them for some years. "She was overly nervous and hard to get along with," John says. "I can see now that she wasn't to blame, and I shouldn't have blamed her. Her personality changed, and it wasn't her fault. She had no control over that. But, at that age, I didn't

understand that. I just didn't realize what she was going through."

Despite the severe discipline, St. John's was a very pleasant place in many ways. It still is. Although it's now a four-year college, with a greatly increased enrollment and many new buildings, there is still a lot of open space at St. John's. The large campus rings Lake Sagatagan and the buildings occupy only one shore. The rest is open, primarily to give the Benedictines quiet areas in which they can take meditative walks. But those areas are also open to the students. John spent much time, during his sophomore year, walking along the lake shore, contemplating his life and his future.

But he didn't lead a solitary, contemplative life. He had many good friends, as the signatures in his yearbook attest, and he plunged into a variety of activities. He was exchanges editor for the newspaper, drama and features editor for the yearbook, and secretary of both the Alexian Literary Association and the Honor Club.

Academically, his chief interest was philosophy. "I thought somebody must have the answers," he explains, "and I wanted to find them. Fairly early, I got the idea that what I really wanted was a set of opinions that I could respect and defend. Not necessarily the *correct* opinions—who knows what they are, if they exist?—but opinions that seemed as if they might be correct, and that I could stand on."

The big news in the fall of 1921 was that varsity football was to be reinstated after a seven-year hiatus. John became the starting tailback in the standard single wing. It wasn't a very successful season—the team won only one game out of five—but John scored the first touchdown of the year, the school's first touchdown since 1913.

He again centered the basketball team, which had a 7-6 record. And, in the intramural track meet, he finished second to win a silver medal instead of the loving cup, but he set a school record in the 220-yard dash and he also won the broad jump, high jump, and 120-yard high hurdles. In the Minnesota state college meet, he finished third in both jumps; what would have been a

record-breaking broad jump was disqualified because he fouled on the takeoff.

Still only eighteen, John decided to return to St. John's for a year of post-graduate work in 1922. Again, he was the starting tailback on the football team, which won just one game of six. The basketball team had a 5-9 record but John, scoring 95 of the school's 236 points, was named all-conference center. Having won letters in three sports (including track, for his performance in the state meet), he decided to try for a fourth. And, he reasoned, the fastest way to win a letter in baseball was to be the winning pitcher in an important game.

One Sunday morning in the spring of 1923, a friend was shocked to see John, at Mass, making strange gestures behind his missal. It wasn't a heretical ritual: Christy Mathewson's book on pitching was hidden behind the missal and, on an imaginary baseball, John was practicing the proper grips for various pitches. He put them to use a few days later. In the only baseball game he ever played for St. John's, he pitched a four-hit shutout to beat Macalester, a Scots Presbyterian college in St. Paul and, naturally, an archrival. That was enough to make him St. John's first four-letter man.

Years later, John learned that his father had been expelled from St. John 's College. "I never had any idea, until I met this gas station owner in St. Cloud, who'd been a classmate of my father's. He told me all about it. According to him, my father got into a tobacco spitting contest with another student. They were spitting for distance out a classroom window. They got caught, and they were both expelled.

"Somehow, finding out about that made me feel much better about my own academic accomplishments, such as they were."

Urged by relatives, John applied for a Rhodes Scholarship in the summer of 1923 and went through all the necessary testing and interviewing. He wasn't chosen. According to his brother Jim, one of the Minneapolis area selectors told someone in the family that "John had scored the highest in every category. But they felt he was too young. The Rhodes Scholarship is supposed to go to college graduates, but John was only nineteen,

going on twenty, and St. John's was just a two-year school then. They thought he ought to get his degree somewhere and reapply." John, however, shrugs this off as unsubstantiated hearsay.

With Oxford denied him, the obvious next step, at least for a Midwestern Irish Catholic in search of a degree and curious about his athletic ability, was Notre Dame.

"Success in sports at St. John's was not really a very big thing," John says. "Oh, it was gratifying, but I had no illusions about it. It was high school sports. As a matter of fact, we got beat in football by a high school team—the state championship team, but still a high school team. And the track wasn't even high school level, because we had absolutely no coaching. We just went out and ran and jumped without having any idea of what the right techniques were. I thought I would find out, at Notre Dame, if I really had any skill worth bothering about. And, of course, I was still looking for a degree."

Knute Rockne
Library of Congress

It was quite an era at Notre Dame. A young football coach named Knute Rockne had produced two unbeaten teams in five seasons. Rockne, as a player, had helped to bring Notre Dame its first measure of fame by catching Gus Dorais's passes in the school's astounding 35-13 upset of Army in 1913. Now, as a coach, he was bringing Notre Dame even greater football glory.

But John was primarily interested in finding out how he would do in basketball. Maybe it's too bad he never did find out; George Keogan, now in the Basketball Hall of Fame, had just taken over as Notre Dame's coach, and he was soon to make the school almost as well known for basketball as for football. But

Keogan was also an assistant football coach, assigned to handle new players, and he decided that John, now 6 feet tall and about 175 pounds, should be a tackle.

Rockne liked relatively small backs, in the 150- to 160-pound range, and 175-pound tackles weren't at all unusual at the time. Besides, the Four Horsemen—who hadn't yet won that nickname—were all juniors, so the Fighting Irish weren't exactly desperate for backs.

John didn't like the idea of being a tackle after two years of starring at tailback. "I said, 'Mr. Keogan, a tackle's job is to seek contact. A halfback's job is to avoid contact. I think my talent, if I have any, lies in avoiding contact.'"

Keogan told him to forget about playing football at Notre Dame if he didn't want to be a tackle, and John left the practice field. Because of this encounter, he never tried playing basketball for Notre Dame, either. Instead, he played for the South Bend YMCA. But he did make one small contribution to Notre Dame football. He became friendly with Harry Stuldreher, the Four Horsemen's quarterback. Stuldreher was taking a course in writing poetry, and was baffled by it. So John wrote all of his poetry assignments, allowing Stuldreher to maintain his academic eligibility.

John had a dormitory room, but he had also rented an apartment in downtown South Bend, a violation of college rules. It was convenient to the YMCA and to the part-time clerical job that helped pay his way through school. "I did use it for romance, maybe once a month, which is what they were worried about," he admits, "but basically it was just a convenience. It was a place where I could go to study in peace when I got done working."

(He didn't know it, but the precedent had been established by the legendary George Gipp. During his last two years at Notre Dame, Gipp had a room in the Victoria Hotel in South Bend, as well as his dormitory room. Gipp, however, used the hotel room because it was convenient for the hobbies that helped him earn his way through school—billiards and card playing.)

The off-campus apartment might have gone unnoticed. But St. Patrick's Day, which has been the downfall of many an

Irishman (and of many an Irishman-for-a-day), arrived. John and some friends had a vehement celebration. They became part of a large group of students who tipped over a streetcar—a serious strain on town-and-gown relations.

John was the only student caught by the police. "I should have run like everybody else, I suppose. But it seemed a cowardly way to react. All those other guys went running in all directions, so I was an easy target, just standing there. I felt, I guess, I did it, it seemed like the right thing to do at the time, I'm not ashamed of it, so why run away? And I just let them arrest me."

The South Bend police turned him over to Notre Dame's prefect of discipline, who wanted names of other students involved. John refused to name any of them and was suspended for sixty days. But he was never to go back. (More than twenty years later, when he decided to get his degree, he thought of returning to Notre Dame. When he investigated the possibility, he discovered that someone—he suspects the prefect of discipline—had scrawled across his file, "Gone, never to return!" So he went back to St. John's, instead.)

Jim McNally recalls, "Knowing his temperament, the whole family was excited and worried. He could have waited out the suspension and gone back, and that's what they wanted him to do, of course. But they were afraid, knowing how he could react, that he wouldn't; and that's what happened."

There were several possible reactions. John could have become angry; he could have sulked for a long time; he could have been penitent and vowed to return to Notre Dame after his suspension to redeem himself in the eyes of the authorities and his family.

But he decided to buy a motorcycle and take a trip.

Back in his bedroom in the big white house in New Richmond, there was a St. John's yearbook that contained some remarkably perceptive words next to the photograph of John V. McNally Jr. First, a quotation from Shakespeare's Cleopatra: "I have immortal longings in me." Beneath this, the yearbook editor had written: "When light was made, most of it condensed into Mac's smile. His specialties are impulses and

individuality. In track he'd beat Atalanta without apples; in poetry Voltaire would yield him the laurel. Elysium will find him pursuing Diana, the elusive, and hobnobbing with Bacchus, the unbeatable."

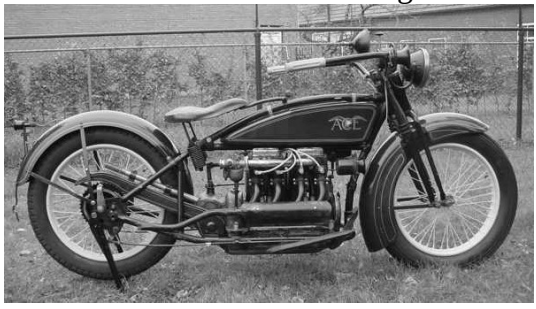
John has no comment on Voltaire's poetry. But he points out that Diana, goddess of the hunt, was a beautiful woman, and that Bacchus was the god of wine and drama. "And I've certainly had my share of wine, women, and drama," he says.

Atalanta, in Greek legend, was a huntress who had first vowed never to marry and then decided she would marry any man who could beat her in a footrace. (Losers were put to death.) No man could beat her, until Hippomenes used cunning: He dropped three golden apples on the track and, when Atalanta stooped to pick them up, he dashed past her to cross the finish line.

Without golden apples, what better way to beat Atalanta than on a motorcycle?

John had a reason for the trip. Or, at least, he could rationalize it. Two of his sisters, Lucille and Honor, were about to sail to Europe, and he wanted to see them off. But, he says now, "I can't really say what I thought I was doing. I wanted to see the ocean, maybe. I wanted to get away, to escape, that's the closest guess."

He went to work as a clerk-typist at the Studebaker plant in South Bend, continuing to play an occasional game of basketball for the YMCA and maintaining his friendships at Notre Dame.



Ace motorcycle of the period
Classic Motorcycle Archive

By the beginning of June, he felt he had enough money for the trip. He bought the motorcycle, a used four-cylinder Ace, for $125, and then began learning to ride it. After a couple of days of practice, he rode to a dance and found himself doing the Charleston with an attractive, eighteen-year-old blonde who wore a wedding ring. After the

dance, he took her back to her rooming house and mentioned that he was about to go to New York on the bike.

"I'd like to go with you," she said.

"I was intrigued, naturally," John recalls. "So I said I'd think it over that night, and let her think it over, and then I'd come back the next morning. I told her that, if she really wanted to go, she should be sitting on the porch of the rooming house."

She was sitting there the next morning. John, though he still had a few things to learn about riding a motorcycle, had decided to go to Chicago to buy a suit at a cut-rate place he'd heard of. The blonde climbed onto the back of the motorcycle and off they went. By the time he had his suit, the sun was going down. They spent the night on a Chicago park bench to save money.

The next morning, they went to Fort Wayne, Indiana, where the young woman's parents lived. She warned John that her father was a member of the Ku Klux Klan and violently anti-Catholic, and she told him not to use his real name or to mention that he had gone to Notre Dame. John doesn't remember what alias he used, but it wasn't Blood.

"Her parents weren't overly hospitable to us," he says, "but they didn't turn us away. We told them we were on our way to New York, and they let us spend the night and gave us breakfast. I learned then, by the way, that she had two children, who were staying with her parents."

After breakfast, they set out for New York. The first day of the trip was uneventful. They stopped in Alliance, Ohio, and again slept on a park bench. It rained most of the second day, when they had to go through the Cumberland Mountains en route to Wheeling, West Virginia. Racing down an incline, John saw that sparks, caused by static electricity, were leaping from one of his knees to the other. "Like St. Elmo's fire," he laughs. "Here I was, a novice motorcyclist, rolling down a mountain with this dame hanging on behind me for dear life, and suddenly I'm radioactive, or something. But we made it."

They stopped to visit Wheeling, where John's McNally grandparents had been married. The next day, they went to Washington, Pennsylvania, about fifty miles south of Pittsburgh, and they were practically out of money. The young woman suggested that they pawn her watch and wedding ring, and John

agreed, promising to redeem them for her later. They got something like fifteen dollars and moved on to Baltimore.

When they got there, they were again almost broke. But one of John's many cousins worked in a Baltimore lumber warehouse. The cousin was out when they arrived, in late afternoon, so they spent another night on a park bench. John borrowed twenty dollars from his cousin the next morning and they continued on to Washington, DC. His companion suddenly decided she'd like to go to Norfolk, Virginia, to see her husband, who was stationed aboard the battleship *West Virginia*. But, in Norfolk, they learned that the ship was bound for Europe, taking Navy athletes to the 1924 Olympic Games.

Money was scarce again. John took the young woman to the Norfolk YWCA. "I talked to a lady named Mrs. Parker and explained our dilemma. I told her I was going to New York and that I'd send the girl some money from there so she should get home. She took the girl in and I started for New York on the motorcycle."

It broke down in Fredericksburg, Virginia. John left it at a machine shop and hopped a Fredericksburg and Southern freight train to Washington, where he hopped off again and bought a ticket to Baltimore, using most of his money. In Baltimore, he got another loan from his cousin and bought a ticket to Wilmington, Delaware. At Wilmington, he moved from the passenger compartment to the "blind baggage"—the accordion-like connection between the engine tender and the baggage car, which offers some protection from the elements for non-paying passengers. Despite that protection, he was about to get a soaking.

Steam locomotives sometimes took on water for their boilers "on the fly." The water was kept in a long, narrow trough between the tracks near a depot, and the fireman would lower a pipe with a scoop on the end into the trough. The speed of the train would force the water through the pipe and into the tender.

On a train traveling at fifty or sixty miles an hour, this creates a lot of spray in the blind baggage, just behind the tender. "I'd never heard of a train taking water on the fly before," John laughs. "All of a sudden, I got a very cold, very unexpected shower. I damn near fell off the train."

But he stayed on to Newark, where an aunt of his worked in the advertising department of a large store. He washed up in the depot, called his aunt, and stayed with her that night. He had missed another ship: His sisters were already on their way to Europe.

John's next stop was to call on yet another relative, the mechanical superintendent of the *New York Sun*, who gave John a job as a stereotyper. During his relatively brief stay in the city, John managed to crash a session of the Democratic National Convention to hear a speech by William Gibbs McAdoo, an unsuccessful candidate for the presidential nomination.

After working at the newspaper for three or four weeks, John sent fifty dollars to his erstwhile co-rider in Norfolk so she could get home, and he then returned to Virginia to get his motorcycle repaired. He climbed onto it once again and headed, not for home, but for Massachusetts. His third sister, Helen, was attending Radcliffe Summer School in Cambridge, and she cashed a check for him.

Now, at last, he did start for home, but he took a rather roundabout route. He visited a Notre Dame friend in York, Pennsylvania, then went almost due north to visit another friend in Corning, New York. The friend threw a party in John's honor at nearby Keuka Lake. The party lasted all night. At six o'clock in the morning, John decided to visit Niagara Falls and rode off on his bike. About an hour later, he dozed off briefly—very briefly, for the motorcycle went off the road and threw him into a ditch. The handlebars were badly bent but the engine was undamaged, so he pushed on to Niagara Falls, where he took a very welcome shower in the Cave of the Winds.

After a day in Niagara Falls, he went to Cleveland, where he faced a familiar problem: lack of money. He stopped at a gas station and sold his toolkit for enough money to get him to Sandusky, Ohio. The Four Horsemen had summer jobs at Cedar Point Resort in Sandusky. (Cedar Point always seemed to have summer jobs for Notre Dame football players. In the summer of 1913, Rockne and Dorais worked there and practiced passing and pass catching techniques on the beach during their spare time, leading up to that historic victory over Army.)

Harry Stuldreher cashed a check for John. The check wasn't covered by any funds but, John explains, "I figured I'd be home before the check got there, and I was." But not before one more problem. The motorcycle broke down once more, in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin. John left it in a garage and hopped a freight to New Richmond. July was almost over. The whole mad trip had taken about seven weeks.

(The blonde who had begun the trip with him reappeared briefly, visiting him in Minneapolis for a couple of days in September, and he sent the money to Washington, Pennsylvania, to redeem her watch and wedding ring.)

John looks back at the escapade with an unbelieving shake of his head. "It seems absolutely incredible to me now," he says. "When I think about it, it's just the way the hippies are. I was an easy rider." He laughs. "Maybe I was the first hippie, just forty years ahead of my time."

CHAPTER THREE:
THE BIRTH
OF JOHNNY BLOOD, AGE 21

There is a glory in all things;
But each must find his own,
Sufficient for his reckonings,
Which is to him alone.
--Kipling, "The Glories"

"I was drifting along, just looking for the right lifestyle, as the phrase goes now." To the extended McNally-Murphy family, John was a black sheep. He had no career, no profession, and no apparent aspirations. He had run away from one college, on the verge of flunking out, and had run away from another after being suspended.

He should not be allowed to drift. If he wouldn't anchor himself, the family would try to do it for him.

So he was sent to read law in his Uncle Will's office—along with another young man named Warren Knowles, who was to become governor of Wisconsin. "Because of my interest in words," John says, "my mother thought I should be a lawyer. I said, 'Okay, I'll try it out.' But it didn't work. I kept falling asleep over the law books. Trying to read Blackstone just wasn't my cup of tea. I didn't care for it at all, at least not going at it that way, which was already outmoded, anyway."

Uncle Fred Murphy, who had come back from his South Dakota farm to become publisher of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, thought a newspaper career might be just the thing. After all, hadn't John worked for the St. John's college newspaper and yearbook? As a poet, hadn't he been compared favorably to Voltaire?

The idea was that John should start at the bottom and work his way up, through various departments, learning every aspect of the business. Since he'd already had that brief experience as a

stereotyper in New York, he started in the stereotyping department at the *Tribune*.

For his part, John knew, in a vaguely yearning kind of way, what he wanted. None of the stereotypes. Not the kind of job which you take so you can earn enough money to buy enough food to give you enough strength to get to work in the morning to earn enough money…

"I wanted to be able to do something I enjoyed," he says, "and something that would leave me enough leisure time to do other things that I enjoyed. The family, I'm sure, thought I was being lazy, afraid of work. But that wasn't it. I've worked hard at a lot of jobs. I worked hard at being a stereotyper. What I wanted was freedom, and freedom meant, to me, being allowed to choose what I wanted to do."

Since he didn't want any of the stereotypes, it was only natural that he took the job as a stereotyper.

A stereotype is a printing plate, a half-cylinder of type metal, mostly lead, cast from a "matrix" of papier-mâché. It's the size of a newspaper page and a couple of inches thick, so it's quite heavy. One of John's jobs was to gather up used stereotypes and take them to a "hellbox," where they were melted down so the metal could be re-used. Instead of carrying them all the way, John got into the habit of shot-putting them in from some distance. It was more fun and it also built up some additional muscle.

Shortly after he began work at the *Tribune*, his Uncle Fred visited John at his Minneapolis apartment. Fred had no children, so he took a paternal interest in the now fatherless McNally children. After a brief chat, he quietly remarked to John, "You know, you can own this newspaper someday, if you're willing to work for it."

"I don't remember exactly what I said to that, but it was nothing very appropriate. I didn't say, 'How can I do it? Tell me what to do it and I will do it,' or anything like that, which was undoubtedly what he wanted to hear. I wasn't sufficiently interested. I was too steamed up about the new freedom of being an adult to think about owning a newspaper someday."

One of his fellow stereotypers was Ralph Hanson, who had played football with him at St. John's. They heard that a Minneapolis semi-pro team, the East 26th Liberties, was looking for players and they decided to try out.

John suggested they should use aliases, since they both had college eligibility remaining. As they sped on his trusty motorcycle toward the practice field, they passed a movie theater. "RUDOLPH VALENTINO STAR OF BLOOD AND SAND IN MONSIEUR BEAUCAIRE," the marquee proclaimed.

"That's it," John said over his shoulder to his passenger. "I'll be Blood and you'll be Sand."

So Ralph Sand and Johnny Blood played for the East 26th Street Liberties in 1924.

Minneapolis, like its smaller sister city, St. Paul, is comparatively young; it was incorporated in 1867. There was plenty of land available when development began, and the city was well planned. It's remarkably spacious. The population of something more than a half-million is spread over 58 square miles, less than fifteen persons per acre. Most of the streets are very wide, and many of them are genuine boulevards, with well-planted median strips. For a city of its size, Minneapolis has a very high proportion of owner-occupied, single-family homes.

Despite its youth, Minneapolis has gone through urban renewal. The *Tribune*, which was right near the center of the city in 1924, has moved away from the area, as have many other businesses that were once here, near the Mississippi River and St. Anthony Falls, whose power established the first industries in the Twin Cities. The older buildings were knocked down, the streets widened, and new buildings constructed.

We drive past the corner of Second and Nicollet, where the *Tribune* used to be located, and retrace the route that Blood and Sand took to the Liberties' tryout. Remarkably, the movie theater is still there. "If Olsen and Johnson had been playing," John comments as we drive by, "I guess we would have been John Olsen and Ralph Johnson." And, in Minnesota, both names would have been much more likely.

“But,” I say, “if you’d called yourself John Olsen, you probably wouldn’t have played under that name for all those years.”

“Probably not,” he agrees.

“Did it occur to you at the time that Blood was a more colorful name than Sand?”

“No, not consciously. But I can’t speak for my subconscious. The idea was probably lurking around in there somewhere. You never really know what your subconscious is doing, and it’s always up to something.”

The team’s field is still there, too, behind two factories and alongside a railroad track. On this day, after a moderate amount of rain, it’s full of mud and water-filled ruts. When the Liberties practiced here—usually at night, because all the players had jobs—there was a single floodlight mounted high on a post, approximately at the 50-yard line.

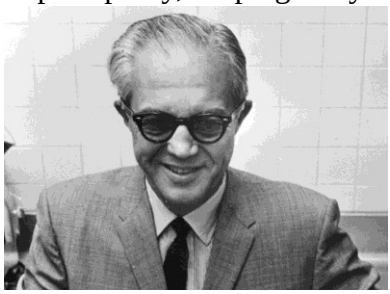
“This is all we needed to play football then,” John says, “a flat field that we could run on. Nothing was marked except the sidelines and goal lines, and we didn’t have goalposts, so you had to run or pass for the extra point.

“About twenty guys came out—cops, truckdrivers, a couple of kids just out of high school, and a few guys, like Ralph and me, who’d played some college ball and just wanted to keep playing.”

The Liberties played in the Park Board League, which included six teams. They were, essentially, neighborhood teams. Players furnished their own equipment, chipped in money to buy whatever else they needed—a football, for example—and passed a hat among the standing spectators at halftime. The money they collected was split up equally. “We usually got enough to have a couple of beers after the game,” John says.

With Johnny Blood at tailback, the Liberties went undefeated. John was a starter on an all-star team that played a post-season exhibition game against the Minneapolis Marines of the National Football League. The Marines won, 6-0. Afterward, their coach spoke to John about the possibility of playing for the Marines in 1925. John said he’d be in touch. But, before embarking on a career in professional football, he was going to try boxing.

In Duff's, a downtown Minneapolis restaurant-lounge known as a hangout for sports figures, we are greeted by Ernie Fliegel, a small, wiry man with short-cropped curly hair. He's about seventy, but he could pass for fifty or so. And he is unmistakably a former boxer. He has the characteristic gravelly, rather high-pitched voice; as he talks, standing, he circles almost imperceptibly, keeping away from the ever-dangerous right hand; and, when we move to a table, he bounces ahead of us on the balls of his feet, as if returning to his corner after a good round.



Ernie Fliegel
Minnesota Historical Society

Ernie Fliegel was Johnny Blood's trainer and manager during his three-round career as a boxer.

"It started with this guy ribbing me," John recalls. "The pressroom boss, a big guy named Billy Hoak, was a real boxing fan. He said, `So you think you're an athlete? Well, there's a little guy named Pete Sarmiento who'd just kill you.'

"I said, `How big is this Sarmiento?' He said, `Well, Sarmiento's about 5-foot-6 and about 132 pounds, and he'd just take you apart.' I said, `If you say so, no doubt he would, but I'd like to try it out sometime.' And Bill laughed and said, `Don't try Sarmiento, try someone a little easier.' Well, I just couldn't believe a guy that small could handle me, even if he was a professional boxer. It was undoubtedly true, but I could never just accept something on theory; it had to be proved to me."

"Petey Sarmiento was a featherweight contender out of the Philippines," Ernie Fliegel explains. "Actually, he only weighed about 122 pounds. But he was tough, a really savage fighter, and I think he *would* have taken you apart."

Fliegel was himself a professional featherweight, well known in the Midwest. His manager, Freddie Lucas, owned a pool room next to the Tribune, and Labe Safro's gym, where he trained, was just a couple of blocks away. Fliegel often made the trip from pool room to gym just about noon, when John was on his lunch break.

"I'd see John out there, and I didn't know him personally," he says, "but I knew who he was. I knew he was supposed to be a pretty good football player, and he was always eating a candy bar. I'd say to myself, 'If he's an athlete, how the devil can he eat candy?' In boxing, we never ate candy. We had to stay in shape."

John also knew who Ernie Fliegel was, and one day he called him over. "I want to box," he said. "I want to go to the gym with you and learn a few things."

Fliegel laughed. "Stick to football, kid," he said, and went on to the gym.

The next day, John hailed Fliegel again. "I'm serious," he told him. "Take me to the gym and give me a few lessons." So Fliegel took him to the gym.

"The first thing you do," Fliegel says, "is teach a guy how to place his feet and where to hold his hands. That's what I did with Johnny. Then I put him in front of a punching bag and I said, `Hit it with a straight left—like this,' and I showed him. Now a guy doesn't just watch something like that once and then do it exactly right, but Johnny did. He threw out that straight left, and moved the bag, and did it a few more times. So I said, `Now try to get some real zing behind it,' and he really popped that bag. I was amazed."

When it was time for John to go back to work, Fliegel suggested that he should work out every day for a couple of months, and a suitable fight might be lined up for him. But a couple of months was too long for John. He wanted to spend a week learning to box and then have a match. And he had already picked his opponent: Johnny Anderson, the Minnesota professional middleweight champion, who hadn't lost in more than fifty fights. Fliegel told him it was a ridiculous idea, but John insisted.

Every week, a series of three-round fights was staged at the Gayety Theater in Minneapolis. Fliegel arranged the bout with Anderson, but he had to threaten the Gaiety's promoter to do it. "I told him that if he wanted my brother and me to keep fighting there, he'd have to do it. And we were pretty good draws, so he did it, but he wasn't happy about the whole business and neither was I. I figured they'd laugh me out of town when Johnny got kayoed. I was very nervous."

The opening bell rang and Fliegel started yelling from John's corner, "Keep the left up!" John kept the left up. Every time Anderson moved in to attack, John hit him with a straight left. Anderson did manage to land a couple of hard right hands, but John, still listening to Fliegel's shouted advice, didn't panic. At the end of three rounds, the fight was ruled a draw. But Fliegel now faced a problem in diplomacy: A three-round draw was supposed to go to a fourth round to reach a decision, and Fliegel didn't want his fighter to go out for the fourth round.

Fliegel says, "I figured it'd be impossible to talk him into quitting, because I knew by now he was a strong-minded guy. I told him, `John, you beat him in three rounds, as far as I'm concerned,' and I meant it, I think he did beat him, he licked him, `but stop now. Let him have the decision.' And, you know, he surprised me. He said, `All right, if you say so.'"

John recalls, "I was tired. I got tired in the middle of the second round, and by the end of three, I was really out of gas. You have to be in real good shape to box and I wasn't in that kind of shape."

While John was in a downstairs dressing room after the fight, Fliegel was accepting congratulations for discovering this promising new fighter. Then he went down to tell John to rest for a few days before starting to work out again. John replied, "I'm not going to box anymore."

Fliegel was amazed again. "Everything was a surprise with this guy. I asked him why he spent a week working out just to get this one fight, and he told me he wanted to find out what it was like and how well he could do. I said, `Why didn't you let me get you a fight with someone just starting out, like you?' He said, `I wanted to fight someone really good. Otherwise, I wouldn't have found out what it was like.'

"I was involved in boxing for more than twenty-five years, as a fighter, trainer, and manager. And I have to say I never saw any guy pick it up as fast as John did. He was a real natural, the most natural fighter I ever saw. I honestly believe he could've been heavyweight champion of the world if he'd kept at it. But I couldn't talk him into fighting any more. He just wasn't interested."

Exit John McNally, middleweight boxer. Enter Johnny Blood, pro football player.

John continued working at the Tribune until the late summer of 1925, when two players from a semi-professional football team in Ironwood, Michigan, came to Minneapolis and offered him $60 a game to play for their team. He was flattered that a team from that far away had heard about him. And he was beginning to realize that he liked football very much. So he packed his bags and headed northeast.

"My mother was really upset," he says. "Here I had a chance, maybe, to own this newspaper someday, and I was going to play a game instead. And, of course, from her point of view, it was another abandonment. First my father, and now me. Only she figured, I guess, that I was going to a fate even worse than death.

"If I'd been a black sheep before, now I was a real family problem. Playing pro football in those days made you a problem child. Mother tried to convince me I should be an actor. Actually, she got that idea from a shrink; she was going to a psychiatrist down in Chicago, and he decided I was a large part of her problem. For some reason, he told her I ought to be an actor, and she thought he was right.

"But I stuck to football—wisely, I think."

Ironwood is on Michigan's Upper Peninsula, just north of Wisconsin. There are other towns around here named Iron River and Iron Mountain and Bessemer. This is mining country. Because of the ranges in the Upper Peninsula, Michigan led the United States in iron ore production for many years, until 1901, when the associated ranges to the west, in Minnesota, began to be tapped. North and slightly east of Ironwood is the Keweena Peninsula, which juts nearly fifty miles into Lake Superior and produces America's richest copper ore. (George Gipp, the Notre Dame halfback of "win one for the Gipper" fame, came from Laurium on the Keweena Peninsula.)

Mining and steel mill towns tended to be football towns, too, in the early part of the century. They attracted men who were tough to begin with and were further toughened by their work—hard, muscular men for whom football was an outlet, a sanctioned form of violence. Many of the most famous early

teams were in the northern part of the Allegheny coal region, stretching from central Pennsylvania into eastern Ohio. The first known professional player was Pudge Heffelfinger, a three-time All-American guard at Yale, who was paid $500 by the Allegheny Athletic Association for a single game against the arch-rival Pittsburgh Athletic Association in 1892. Canton, birthplace of the National Football League and home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, is also in this region.

There was a football tradition in the iron and copper range towns of Michigan and Minnesota. Ironwood's rivalry with nearby Bessemer eventually reached such a peak that, for one game in the early 1920s, Ironwood imported the Duluth Kelleys and Bessemer imported the Minneapolis Marines. ("Which," Johnny Blood comments, "is a strange way of upholding civic pride." But it was also a foreshadowing of the modern professional sports scene, in which a bunch of people in, for example, Green Bay cheer for a bunch of players from Alabama, Texas, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.)

To get to Ironwood from Minneapolis, we drive through the north woods and lake country of Northern Wisconsin. One of the checkpoints along the way is Siren, Wisconsin. "Maybe you'd better stop my ears with wax and lash me to the steering wheel, if you want to get through here," John says, with the wry smile of one who has had his encounters with Sirens in the course of life's odyssey.

No expressways here; not even many divided highways. These are the old, two-lane U. S. highways most of the way. When we come to a town like Siren, population 679, we slow to twenty-five miles an hour for a half-mile or so. The hundred miles takes nearly three hours, but it's lovely country and the drive is much more pleasant than an hour on the typical expressway.

As we travel east on U. S. Highway 2, not far south of Lake Superior, the border between Wisconsin and Michigan is also the border between Ironwood and Hurley. They are twin cities, but not identical twins. Hurley, on the Wisconsin side of the line, was a timber and pulp town, and it was also notorious as a very easy place to get a drink during Prohibition. When Ironwood's miners wanted to have fun after work, they went to Hurley. (When I was

growing up in Wisconsin, people would ask, "Are you from Hurley?" if someone used vulgar language in mixed company. It was that sort of place.)

Hurley now looks almost like a ghost town. Many buildings in the downtown area are completely boarded up, but an old theater is still open. "Lovely! Girls! Lovely!" says the marquee and, on the glass entrance door, there's a poorly lettered sign, in felt tip pen on typing paper, announcing that the place features the newest dance sensation, "The Toilet Paper Roll."

Crossing the line into Michigan and Ironwood makes quite a difference. The downtown area looks much like New Richmond's, but it's somewhat more crowded and a bit dingier.

"This was quite a training ground," John says. "The games were rough as hell, but the parties after the games were even rougher. Both teams would usually go over to Hurley to drink, and the brawls that started during the game would resume right where they'd been left off."

As we stroll from downtown to the high school football field where the Ironwood Miners played, he comments, "This is probably the only place I've ever been for any period where I don't know anybody anymore."

The main reason is that he wasn't in Ironwood for very long. He played just three games for the Miners. Then the Milwaukee Badgers of the National Football League decided they could use this big, fast halfback, and he accepted their offer of $75 a game and went to Milwaukee.

Thus, with no fanfare at all, began the longest career in the NFL's one-platoon era.

During the early part of the century, town teams proliferated throughout Western Pennsylvania and the Midwest. Many of them would hire an extra player or two for an important game. There were some players who made a pretty good living by taking pay from one team one week and from another team the next week. Knute Rockne and Gus Dorais of Notre Dame, for example, spent the 1914 season traveling through Ohio, selling their services for a game at a time. Al Nesser of the Akron Pros once said, "Every time we played a game that year, Rockne and Dorais were on the other team."

In 1915, the Canton Bulldogs signed the great Jim Thorpe to a contract for the entire season, at $250 a game. It was the first genuine professional contract, since it required Thorpe to play only for Canton. (There had been a few earlier cases of players signing for the season, but those contracts bound the player to the team only on game days; he was free to play for anyone else on days when that team didn't have a game.)

The Bulldogs signed a few other players to exclusive contracts in 1916, but most of the Canton roster, like other "professional" rosters, was still made up of genuine townies who were in it for the glory and were paid little or nothing.

George Halas, who had played football at the University of Illinois, with the Great Lakes Naval Training Station team during World War I, and with the Hammond, Indiana, Pros in 1919, was hired as athletic director by a starch manufacturer, the A. E. Haley Company of Decatur, Illinois, in August of 1920. His main job was to put together a football team to publicize the company's corn starch. He was allowed to offer players full-time jobs plus a share of gate receipts from the games.

Halas was able to line up a strong roster that included four future members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame—Guy Chamberlin, Jimmy Conzelman, George Trafton, and Halas himself.

He then began contacting other teams to line up a schedule. One of the first people he talked to was Ralph Hay, owner-manager of the Canton Bulldogs. Hay told Halas he was thinking of forming a league, and Halas was interested.

The American Professional Football Association was organized on September 17, at a meeting in Hay's Hupmobile show-room in Canton. Ten teams joined the APFA at that original meeting: The Akron Pros, Chicago Cardinals, Cleveland Tigers, Dayton Triangles, Hammond Pros, Muncie Flyers, Rochester Jeffersons, and Rock Island Independents, along with Canton and Decatur.

Jim Thorpe, who was still playing for Canton, was named president of the new league simply because his name had publicity value. The APFA was very loosely organized in that first season. There was no formal schedule. In fact, there's some confusion about which teams actually belonged to the league.

Fourteen of them are listed in the unofficial standings, including the Buffalo All-Americans, the Chicago Tigers, the Columbus Panhandles, and the Detroit Heralds. Although they hadn't officially signed up with the APFA in September, they played so many games against league teams that they were considered members. On the other hand, the Muncie club disbanded after losing its only game, 45-0, and the Rochester Jeffersons didn't play any games against other APFA members.

The Akron Pros, who won six games and tied three without a loss, were generally considered the 1920 champions, while Decatur was ranked second with a 5-1-2 record.

The APFA took a major step forward in 1921 by hiring Joe Carr to replace Thorpe as league president. The manager of the Columbus Panhandles, Carr was also a minor-league baseball executive. He established a permanent office in Columbus, drew up a standard player's contract patterned after the one used by professional baseball, and issued official standings every week.

There were twenty-one teams in the APFA that year, but some of them played only one or two league games. Among the new entries were the Green Bay Packers, who had been organized in 1919. Halas's team, though still called the Staleys, had moved from Decatur to Chicago, and they won the league championship with a 9-1-1 record.

In 1922, Halas and Dutch Sternaman formally acquired the Chicago franchise from the Staley company and the team was renamed the Bears, an attempt to capitalize on the popularity of baseball's Chicago Cubs. Halas also suggested that the APFA change its name to the National Football League, and other owners agreed.

An undefeated Canton team won the first NFL championship. Three future Hall-of-Famers, Link Lyman, Wilbur "Fats" Henry, and player-coach Chamberlin, formerly of the Staleys, were on that club. The Bears finished second. Jim Thorpe had left Canton to form his own team, the Oorang Indians, who played out of Marion, Ohio, and boasted a number of Thorpe's former teammates from Carlisle Indian Institute, alongside players with names like Arrowhead, Wrinkle Meat, Black Bear, Deadeye, Deer Slayer, and Laughing Gas. (Blood

would have fit in well here, but he was still John McNally, a student at St. John's.)

Canton was again undefeated in 1923. The Bulldogs moved to Cleveland the following year and finally lost a game, but they won their third straight title.

In 1924, professional football was still little known outside of the towns and cities in which it was played. Nationwide attention was focused on college football. The best known college players in the country were probably the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame: Don Miller, Harry Stuldreher, Jim Crowley, and Elmer Layden.* But there were also two juniors who got a lot of headlines. They were Harold "Red" Grange of Illinois and Ernie Nevers of Stanford, and they were destined to bring pro football its first real national publicity.

The Milwaukee Badgers didn't have much of a team in 1925. They lost all six of their league games, scoring only one touchdown, and that came on a fumble recovery.

Up to this point, football was more or less a hobby with John, a temporary escape from routine existence. Now he began to think it might be more than that. In eight games, three with Ironwood and five with Milwaukee, over a period of nine weeks, he had earned $555. That was at a time when the average American made about $25 a week.

A couple of days after John returned to Minneapolis from Milwaukee, the biggest news in the brief history of the NFL broke: Red Grange had turned professional, just three days after his college season ended, and was going to play for the Chicago Bears during a post-season barnstorming tour.

Grange had signed a personal services contract with C. C. "Cash and Carry" Pyle, the P. T. Barnum of sports; Pyle had then sold his client's services to the Bears for the tour. His long-range

*Like Johnny Blood, the Four Horsemen owed their nickname to a Rudolph Valentino movie, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." George Strickler, a Notre Dame student who helped with sports publicity, had that 1921 silent film in mind when he posed the Notre Dame backfield on horseback for a photo, captioned "The Four Horsemen of Notre Dame." Only Grantland Rice paid any attention to it. And, after Notre Dame beat Army in 1924, Rice wrote the immortal lead paragraph that made them famous.

plan was to use Grange's leverage as a drawing card to persuade the NFL to give him a franchise in New York City, in competition with Tim Mara's brand-new football Giants.

Pyle belonged to a unique American breed: The chronic promoter who, while he certainly hopes to make some money along the way, seems to get his kicks primarily by promulgating and promoting new ideas. Pyle was the man who established the professional tennis tour, though other people later made most of the money out of it. He also lost a lot of money on a typically flamboyant promotion, a trans-continental footrace that became known as "the Bunion Derby." At the time of his death, in 1939, he was managing a traveling side show of freaks, and columnist Westbrook Pegler commented, perhaps with as much truth as cruelty, that he seemed more at home in that job than he had in promoting sports events.

C. C. Pyle

But Pyle realized something about pro football: If it could offer enough money to attract the players who became nationally known in college, not only would the level of play be improved, but the sport would also be able to cash in on the ready-made publicity. In the league's six years of operation, only a few college All-Americans had played for NFL teams, and most of them had very brief professional careers. For one thing, pro football was considered suspect; for another, a college graduate could usually make more money in a more respectable career.

Grange was the natural player to start with. In the Golden Age of Sports, he was the Golden Football Player, as celebrated as baseball's Babe Ruth, golf's Bobby Jones, boxing's Jack Dempsey, and tennis great Bill Tilden. The Galloping Ghost, the Wheaton Iceman, Number 77, as he was variously known, was the kind of fast, elusive breakaway runner who has always excited fans. Playing for Bob Zuppke at Illinois, he was a unanimous All-American three years in a row. As a junior, he scored four touchdowns against Michigan the first four times he touched the ball, on runs of 95, 67, 56 and 45 yards. As a senior, he converted some remaining skeptics in the East by gaining 363

yards on 36 carries in a 24-2 victory over a previously unbeaten Pennsylvania team—and on a muddy field, at that.

As his senior season neared its end, there were rumors that Grange planned to play professional football. Most colleges, and many college fans, didn't like pro football. Zuppke begged Grange not to turn professional. Hundreds of fans, appalled at the idea of a college star sullying himself by taking money for playing football, sent letters and telegrams pleading with him not to do it.

But Grange was being offered something like $125,000 by Pyle, in a package deal that was to include commercial endorsements, movie appearances, and a vaudeville tour as well as football, and he couldn't see any point in refusing to cash in on his fame while it was fresh. So he signed the contract with Pyle and on Thanksgiving Day of 1925 he began his tour with the Bears.

Red Grange
Library of Congress

(Grange's enormous salary was well publicized, but Ernie Nevers of Stanford was paid at a much higher rate. Nevers got $25,000 for playing just five games with a Florida all-star team in January of 1926. His team played Grange's Bears and the New York Giants, among others.)

The Bears' tour wasn't a complete success. Ten games were scheduled in the first seventeen days, but Grange had to leave the seventh game with an arm injury and fans booed him. He tried to play the next game but was forced to leave, and he was again booed. He sat out the next two games and thousands of people got their money back because they weren't going to see the featured attraction.

However, Grange's appearance against the Giants in New York drew 73,651 fans and may have saved the franchise; in its first NFL season, the team had lost about $20,000, but that one

game turned the loss into a profit of $20,000. After a one-week break, the Bears went on to Florida and the West Coast with a healthy Grange and they drew enormous crowds everywhere, including nearly 80,000 people in Los Angeles. Fans who had never heard of professional football before were coming out to watch Grange play, and the game was, for the first time, getting headlines on sports pages all over the country.

There were still those who hadn't heard of professional football, though. After the tour, Grange went to a reception at the White House and was introduced to President Calvin Coolidge. "Mr. Grange is with the Chicago Bears," Coolidge was told. "Pleased to meet you, young man," the President said, shaking Grange's hand. "I've always enjoyed animal acts."

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GREAT ESKIMO MIGRATION OF 1926

All they feel is this: 'tis glory.
A rapture sharp, though transitory,
Yet lasting in belaureled glory.
So they gaily go to fight,
Chatting left and laughing right.
--Melville, "The March into Virginia"

In early September of 1926, a small but brave band of Eskimos set out on a long journey, charged with an important mission: To help save the National Football League from extinction.

These Eskimos were not from the Arctic. They were from Duluth, Minnesota—which is probably as close to the Arctic as the average person would care to get. And they were not really Eskimos. They were football players. During the 1926 season, Ernie Nevers' Duluth Eskimos, as they were billed, played twenty-eight games, twenty-seven of them on the road, in less than four months. During one nine-day period, they played five games in five different cities. They traveled 17,000 miles by train, boat, bus, and automobile. They won eighteen games, lost seven, and tied three. They did it with a roster that never numbered more than sixteen players and at times was down to only thirteen. And they just might have consumed more alcohol per capita than any football team before or since.

It all came about because Ole Haugsrud bought the Duluth franchise for one dollar…and because he had been a high school classmate of Ernie Nevers.

"Duluth," according to Ole Haugsrud, "is twenty-four miles long, a mile wide, and a mile high." He exaggerates only slightly. The city is just a mile wide in some places, but its width stretches to as much as four miles in others. And, while it's built

high on a series of rocky cliffs and ledges, most of it is just 600 to 800 feet above sea level. Still, Haugsrud's description accurately portrays the city's pattern of growth: Instead of sprawling out into unoccupied prairieland, as most Midwestern cities tended to do, Duluth grew, serpent-like, along the shore of Lake Superior.

It was named for a French explorer, Daniel Greysolon, Sieur Du Luth or, more probably, Du Lhut, who arrived in 1679 and spent eleven years exploring the area. The chief village here was originally called Fond du Lac ("Bottom of the Lake"). It was an important Northwest Company fur trading post in the late eighteenth century. But the fur trade declined and there was little further interest in the area until the discovery of copper deposits and iron ore to the north in 1854 and 1855. Suddenly, there were eight rapidly growing villages in the area. They were merged into the newly-incorporated Duluth in 1870.

Duluth's sister city in Wisconsin, Superior, had the better port because a long sand spit, Minnesota Point, blocked direct access to Duluth Harbor. Boats and ships coming into Duluth had to take a seven-mile detour. In 1871, a steam shovel was put to work digging a canal through Minnesota Point to open up direct entry to the harbor. Superior complained to the federal government. As an inland waterway, Duluth Harbor was under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers, and improvements could be made only with the Army's permission, so a federal court in Washington issued an injunction to stop the work.

When word reached Duluth on a Friday in April that the injunction was on its way, virtually every able-bodied person in the town turned out with shovels. They dug Friday night and through the weekend. By the time the injunction arrived on Monday morning, the canal was finished. Duluth had suddenly become an important harbor. More important than Superior, as it turned out.

Duluth grew from a population of 1,300 in 1873 to 33,115 in 1890, 52,969 in 1900, 78,466 in 1910, and 101,463 in 1930. While grain, flour, and lumber were major cargoes for the Port of Duluth, the key to the growth was the iron ore of the Vermilion, Coyuna, and Mesabi Ranges, to the north and west. The rich

Mesabi ore was discovered in 1890; in 1895, three million tons of ore came out of the range and most of it was shipped through Duluth to Cleveland. During the 1930s, production was up to nearly fifty million tons a year.

As we drive from Ironwood to Duluth, John says, "This is what the Indians called Arrowhead Country. It's characterized by shallow, sandy-bottomed lakes, wild rice, blueberries, and black bears."

The next morning, we sit in the shadow of a black bear in the restaurant of the Hotel Duluth. A plaque and a note on the menu explain its presence: In 1933, a bear came walking down Duluth's Main Street and into this restaurant. A Duluth policeman eventually killed it with his service revolver. Then it was stuffed and mounted, virtually on the spot of its demise.

John asks our waitress if this is the very bear that was killed here in 1933. She doesn't know. He insists on an answer. She goes away and comes back a couple of minutes later with the word from above: "No, this is a different one. The other one was here for a long time, but it got kind of moldy or something, so they replaced it."

I order wild rice pancakes with blueberry syrup. "If they could only put a small, shallow, sandy-bottomed lake in here," John says, "they could sell that as the Arrowhead Country breakfast special at twice the price."

On very short notice, Ole Haugsrud picks us up at the hotel. He is a short, squat gnome of a man, about seventy. He's impatient, because he has a family luncheon to go to. He can't give us much time, he says. John sits in the back seat so I can sit next to Haugsrud and talk to him, but Haugsrud, while driving us around and pointing out the sights, clearly doesn't really want to talk to me. Then we approach a nightclub called The Flame.

"My great-aunt used to play piano there," I say casually, by way of conversation.

Haugsrud gives me a sharp look. "Her name wasn't Gladys Anderson, was it?"

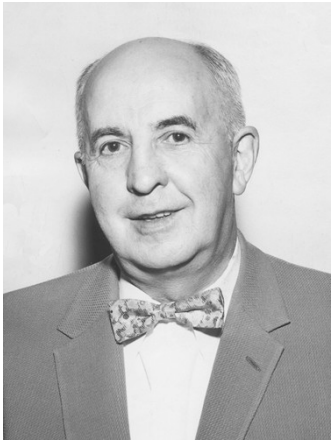
"That's right. She was my grandmother's sister."

"Your grandmother was an Anderson? From Duluth?"

"That's right. Rose Anderson."

"Tell you what," Haugsrud says. "I think you ought to come to this luncheon with me, so we can talk." My credentials have been established.

Duluth-Superior has a proud athletic tradition, and Ole Haugsrud seems to be its custodian. This area produced not only Ernie Nevers but also Alphonse "Tuffy" Leemans, a running back with the New York Giants for eight years and the NFL's rushing leader in 1936. (Leemans was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1978.) We drive slowly past a white frame house, the home of David "Beauty" Bancroft, a major league shortstop from 1915 through 1930, who is in the Baseball Hall of Fame. There is a Grant Field in Superior, named for the father of Bud Grant, long-time coach of the Minnesota Vikings.



Ole Haugsrud
Duluth News-Tribune

A high school coach in Superior invented the modern, needle-valve, re-inflatable football in the early 1920s. Haugsrud remembers the first test of the new football: "A fellow kicked it and when it came down, it was flat as a pancake. There was still some development work to be done."

This is also hockey country. The U. S. Hockey Hall of Fame is located in Eveleth, about sixty miles north of Duluth, near the Mesabi Range. Frank "Mr. Zero" Brimsek, an outstanding goalie with the Boston Bruins and Chicago Black Hawks, was from Eveleth; he's one of the few U. S. natives in the International Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto.

In modern football, quarterbacks are the highest paid and most publicized players. When leagues clash, the biggest fights are waged over quarterbacks—Joe Namath's choosing the American Football League over the NFL in 1965 was a major victory for

the new league. But in the 1920s and 1930s, the tailback was the sought-after, make-or-break, franchise player.

It's an accident of history and nomenclature that Ernie Nevers is called a fullback. In the standard single wing, the line was unbalanced, with both guards on the same side of the center, usually the right. The quarterback lined up approximately halfway between the guards and about a yard deep; he was used primarily as a blocking back. Assuming that the formation was strong to the right, the right halfback was the wingback, stationed just outside the right end. The fullback was behind the quarterback, about five yards deep, and the left halfback was the tailback, seven yards behind the center.

Of course, if the formation was strong to the left, the left halfback was the wingback and the right halfback became the tailback. But this was unusual because the passing game, such as it was, was based on the running pass, much like the halfback option that Vince Lombardi introduced to the NFL, first with the Giants and then with the Packers. Since most people are right-handed, the single wing was almost always strong to the right.

In the single wing, therefore, the left halfback was the triple threat who usually took the snap and then ran, passed, or kicked, though he might hand the ball off to the fullback for a plunge into the line, or possibly to the wingback on a reverse. Sometimes, the fullback would take a direct snap from center to keep the defense off balance.

Glenn "Pop" Warner, Nevers' coach at Stanford, perfected the single wing after other coaches had developed similar formations. Warner then moved on to the double wing, in which the quarterback became the second wingback, stationed just outside the left end. He unveiled this formation in 1913, when he was coaching Jim Thorpe at Carlisle Indian Institute, and Thorpe, a left halfback, was his tailback.

Later, Warner developed another type of double wing. In this version, the quarterback remained behind the guards, the left halfback became a second wingback, and the fullback was the tailback. He handled all of the snaps from center. He was the triple threat. This was the position that Nevers played at

Stanford—the man who made the offense go, the man whom defenses had to stop.

In Nevers' three years as a starter at Stanford, the team had a 21-4-1 record. They lost to Notre Dame's Four Horsemen, 27-10, in the 1925 Rose Bowl, but Nevers was the hero. Both of his ankles were in casts for most of December. The casts were removed just ten days before the bowl game. Wearing pieces of an inner tube to protect his still sore ankles, he played all sixty minutes and rushed for 114 yards. According to one writer, he also made three-quarters of Stanford's tackles on defense.

Jim Thorpe was voted the greatest football player of the first half of the twentieth century. But Warner coached them both in college and he claimed that Nevers was better. They were about equal in talent, he said, but he gave Nevers the edge because he always played as hard as he could, while Thorpe often loafed.

Nevers was born in Willow River, Minnesota, and went to high school in Superior, Wisconsin, where he was a four-sport star. One of his classmates was Olaf "Ole" Haugsrud, who came from a fairly well-to-do Norwegian-American family. Haugsrud was not an athlete, but he loved sports and he helped manage the school's teams. He and Nevers became friendly.

After graduation, Nevers went to Stanford while Haugsrud moved across the bay to Duluth. He had inherited some money and he bought several commercial buildings. While Nevers was starring in Warner's double wing, Haugsrud was first the volunteer bookkeeper and then the secretary-treasurer of a struggling NFL team.

The team was called the Kelley-Duluths because the original backer was the manager of the sporting goods department at the Kelley-Duluth Hardware Store. That backer dropped out after the 1922 season. Player-coach Dewey Scanlon then took over the franchise and the team became a kind of cooperative, not unlike the East Twenty-Sixth Street Liberties: Players shared the operating costs and hoped to share in profits.

But Duluth's out-of-the-way location, its cold climate, and its lack of a good stadium made it difficult to book home games with NFL teams. The players lost $44 apiece in 1925 and decided they needed help. They offered the franchise to Haugsrud, on the condition that he would manage the team. To make the

transaction legally binding, Haugsrud paid a dollar, which the players promptly splurged on nickel beers.

The Duluth franchise wasn't the only one in trouble. The whole National Football League was worried about an upstart new league, the first of the three American Football Leagues that have challenged the NFL. After being denied a New York franchise in the NFL, "Cash and Carry" Pyle created his own league, with Red Grange as the featured attraction; his team was the New York Yankees. He also had Harry Stuldreher and Elmer Layden, two of the Four Horsemen, under contract to play with a team called the Brooklyn Horsemen. George "Wildcat" Wilson, the other halfback with Grange on the 1925 All-America team, also had a namesake team, the Los Angeles Wildcats. And Pyle was telling the world that he had signed Ernie Nevers, too.

Haugsrud, alone among the NFL owners, wasn't sure. Nevers, the one player who could possibly compete with Grange as a drawing card, was pitching for the St. Louis Cardinals in the summer of 1926 and Haugsrud went to St. Louis to visit him.

"He had a contract from Pyle, all right," Haugsrud recalls. "But he hadn't signed it yet. It called for $15,000 plus a percentage of the larger gates. He told me that if I could match it, he'd rather play for me than for Pyle. We shook hands on it, and then I got him to sign a formal agreement that I could take to the league meeting."

When Haugsrud displayed the agreement at the August meeting, NFL President Carr rushed over to him and shook his hand. "Young man, you've just saved the National Football League," he said.

Other owners were now eager to add Duluth to their schedules. But they still didn't want to play in Duluth because Nevers' power to attract crowds would be seriously diluted there. They wanted Haugsrud to turn his team into a traveling club that would play all of its games on the road. Haugsrud agreed, in exchange for a stiff price—a $4,000 guarantee per game, plus a cut of gate receipts if they went over $8,000.

(There was another "road team" in the NFL that year, the Kansas City Cowboys. They played just one game at home, the last game of the season—against the Eskimos, of course. Led by Steve Owen, later the coach of the New York Giants, the

Cowboys rented horses and paraded through town in cowboy suits before every game to drum up interest. "Sometimes," Haugsrud says, "it was hard to tell if they were a football team, a circus, or a rodeo.")

Haugsrud left the meeting with fifteen games scheduled against NFL teams. After returning to Duluth, he lined up a series of exhibition games on the West Coast, where Nevers was particularly popular because of his years at Stanford.

"I knew we had some pretty good players, but still I wanted to add a few more, from outside the Duluth area, to give Ernie more help," Haugsrud says.

From little St. Thomas College, near Minneapolis, he got a Mutt and Jeff pair of guards, Jimmy Manion and Walt Kiesling. Manion was about 5-foot-6 and 150 pounds, Kiesling 6-foot-3 and 240 pounds. (That wasn't actually so strange. Single-wing teams usually had a big "standing guard," who made most of his blocks at the line of scrimmage, and a small, fast "running guard," who more often pulled to lead plays and made most of his blocks downfield.)

He signed a big tackle from the University of Minnesota, Harry "Porky" Rundquist. And he also signed a tall, fast, rangy halfback known as Johnny Blood.

"I was real glad to get Johnny, especially when I saw him," Haugsrud says. "I was surprised at how big he was—6-1, 190 pounds or so. That was bigger than a lot of linemen in the league at that time."

"I grew three inches and gained about twenty-five pounds after I was twenty-one," John puts in. "I was a late bloomer."

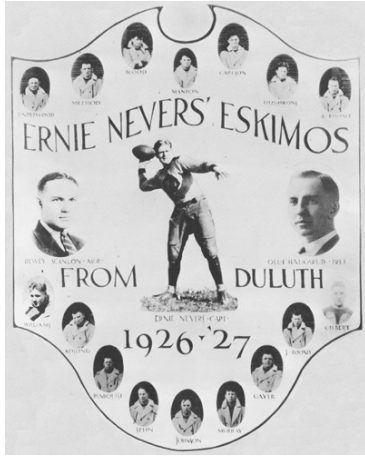
"And he was fast, too," Haugsrud continues. "He was the perfect kind of guy to take some of the pressure off Ernie, because he was a triple threat himself. He could hit the line on a power play and break a tackle and then outrun everybody. He could pass and kick pretty good, too. And he was a terrific defensive player."

But it was as a pass receiver that John would make his biggest mark in the NFL. And Haugsrud has an interesting comment about that: "John did something no other pass receiver of the time did. He was a very good basketball player, you know, a center, and he went after passes like rebounds. He always kept

his body between the ball and the defensive man, and he used his body, his elbows, his shoulders, everything, to protect the ball, just like a good rebounder does. We knew, even if he was covered, we could throw him an alley-oop pass—we didn't call it that, then, but that's what it was—and he'd probably come down with it."

Nevers emphasizes Johnny Blood's intangible value to the team: "We'd be sitting there before a game, or at halftime, tired as hell, wondering if we were going to make it, and I'd try to get everybody going with a pep talk. Then John would make a joke or two, or start clowning around, and everybody would grin and relax, just like that. It was like the sun suddenly came out. He was always loose, and he helped the rest of us loosen up, too."

To capitalize on Nevers' name, Haugsrud called the team "Ernie Nevers' Eskimos from Duluth." It was the first professional team to have an out-of-town training camp, at Two Harbors, about twenty-five miles northeast of Duluth on the western shore of Lake Superior. Haugsrud set up the camp, he explains, "to keep the boys away from the temptations of the city, so Ernie could install his system." Although Scanlon was still nominally the Duluth coach, the team used the Stanford version of Warner's double wing to take full advantage of Nevers' skills and experience, and Nevers had to teach it. The Eskimos spent two weeks practicing before the season, an unusually long time for that era.



The Eskimos were also the first team to have a distinctive emblem. That, too, was Haugsrud's idea. "I thought, if we were going to go to all these places to attract fans, they ought to know we were in town before the game started." The Eskimos wore parkas emblazoned with a large white igloo and the team name. Their luggage and equipment trunks bore the same symbol and, when they arrived in a town to play, they all wore their parkas

and carried their luggage from the station to the hotel to let prospective fans get a good look.

Each player had just one uniform. Nevers recalls that, because of the muddy fields and the crowded schedule, the Eskimos usually took two showers after a game—one with the uniforms on, to wash them, the second with uniforms off. "Then we'd hang the uniforms up and beat them like rugs to get some of the water out, throw them into our bags, and go running out to catch a train. Hell, we were usually only half-dressed when we got on the train."

Nevers, as mentioned, was getting $15,000 plus a share of the larger gates. The other fifteen players on the original roster were to be paid $75 for a victory, $50 for a loss, and $65 for a tie.

How did they feel about getting that amount of money, when Nevers was being paid so much?

"How could we complain?" John asks. "Without Ernie, we wouldn't have been able to make any money at all. Ernie was the drawing card. If he could get the people—and he could—more power to him. There was no resentment. The way Ernie played, there couldn't be any resentment. He was really the coach of the team, as well as the star. And he only missed twenty-seven minutes in twenty-eight games. He earned his money."

In addition to Nevers, Blood, Kiesling, Manion, and Rundquist, the original members of the Eskimo cast were:

Daniel "Doc" Williams, a 6-foot-5, 250-pound center who had played at St. Cloud State, not far from St. John's and St. Thomas.

Wally Gilbert, a local product; according to Haugsrud, in a 1925 game against Rock Island Gilbert drop-kicked a 60-yard field goal and also got off a wind-aided punt from one end zone to the other. He was later a third baseman with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Russ Method, a tiny but tough back who was, according to Haugsrud, one of the best blockers on the squad. During World War I, Method had played for the American Expeditionary Force team that introduced American football to Europe.

Harry "Cobb" Rooney, a quarterback from Virginia, Minnesota, the "Queen City of the Mesabi Range."

Joe Rooney, Cobb's brother, an end. (A third Rooney brother, Bill, had played for Duluth in 1925. A fullback, he became expendable when Nevers arrived, and Haugsrud sold his contract to the New York Giants for $100.)

Haugsrud and Bill Stein with Eskimo memorabilia
Duluth News-Tribune

Bill Stein, a center-guard who had played at Fordham under former Harvard All-American Charlie Brickley.

Eugene "Oke" Carlson, a big all-purpose lineman from Duluth and Iowa State.

Jack Underwood, an end-guard, who had been a teammate of Method's on the AEF team.

Paul Fitzgibbons, a small break-away runner out of Creighton University.

Dewey Scanlon, the player-coach, a quarterback out of West Duluth High and Valparaiso College.

Charles "Doc" Kelly, a dentist affectionately known as "the Superior Tooth Carpenter," who had played at Northwestern University.

"Ole was like a lot of the early owners—Halas, Lambeau, people like that," John says. "He was a real sports fan, and he loved football. But he was also a shrewd businessman. He had to be, to keep that team going, because it wasn't always easy to collect the money from the other owners."

Haugsrud agrees with that last statement. "You couldn't collect the money in advance, because the gate receipts weren't all in and counted," he says. "I always tried to collect at halftime, because then I could threaten to take my team off the field if I didn't get it."

Late in the season, the team's bank sent Haugsrud a telegram: "OLE YOU BETTER GET THOSE ESKIMOS HOME WHILE YOU STILL GOT ENOUGH BLUBBER MEAT TO FEED THEM."

It turned out that a check Haugsrud had accepted from another owner had bounced. Haugsrud couldn't pay his players for the time being. So he called them together and explained the situation, assuring them that they would get paid when the money came in. They all agreed to keep on playing.

"There wasn't much else we could do," John says with a smile. "We were stuck in the middle of New England with no money. We couldn't get home, so we might as well play."

Another time, an owner paid in cash but, when Haugsrud counted the money, he discovered it was about seventy dollars short. "I lit out after him and he went running into a ladies' room," he recalls. "I guess he thought I wouldn't dare chase him in there. But I did, and I got the rest of our money."

There was also the problem of managing the players. And Johnny Blood was by far the hardest to manage.

"Some people will tell you that Prohibition was in effect in the United States at that time," Haugsrud says wryly. "If so, it was mighty hard to tell. For a dollar, you got all you could drink, and these guys drank plenty. They served it up in regular tubs and in big ten-gallon pitchers. Johnny and the rest of them drank from the time the game was over almost until the next one started. And Johnny could be pretty unpredictable when he drank."

John smiles. "I can be pretty unpredictable when I'm sober."

After their two weeks of practice in Two Rivers, the Eskimos returned to Duluth. They were supposed to stay at the West Duluth YMCA, but the stay was interrupted. "I got a call that night," Haugsrud recalls, "inviting me to move my players out of there. It was an innocent mistake. The boys had somehow got the impression that there was a fire, and they went out and got the fire hose and sprayed the halls and stairs. I had to move them all to the YMCA in Superior."

The Eskimos' first game was a 25-0 win on September 12 over the Gogebic Panthers (also known as the Bessemer Legion), a team from Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The game was played at Hislop Park in Superior, the very field where Nevers had played his high school football.

A week later, they played their only home game, against the Kansas City Cowboys, winning 7-0, and then they began their long journey. They had another 7-0 victory, over the Minnesota

All-Stars in St. Paul, then played a scoreless tie with the Packers in Green Bay and beat the Hammond Pros, 26-0, in Gary, Indiana. From there, the Eskimos went to Racine, Wisconsin, for a memorable experience.

A speakeasy owner in Racine was very proud of his German shepherd's sprinting ability. He boasted that the dog could run twice as fast as any football player, and he was willing to put money on it. The Eskimos scraped together seventy-five dollars and nominated Johnny Blood as their champion.

The man shut down his speakeasy and a whole crowd trooped over to Horlick's Field for the race. "There were so many people there," John recalls, "that Cobb Rooney suggested we should hold the race at halftime to attract a bigger crowd to the game."

The speakeasy owner had his race routine down pat. While two handlers held the dog back, he tempted the animal with a large steak, then ostentatiously carried the chunk of raw meat down to the other end zone. The dog strained at his leash at the far goal line; John got into his sprinter's crouch at the fifty-yard line; and the starter yelled "Go!"

John won the race handily. "The speakeasy owner was really mad," he says. "What really made him mad was that I crossed the goal line before the dog got to the fifty-yard line."

"But did you get the steak, John?" Haugsrud asks.

"No. But I don't think the dog did, either."

The Eskimos collected their winnings and sportingly offered the speakeasy owner a chance to win his money back on the football game. He accepted. John caught two touchdown passes from Nevers in the first quarter as Duluth won 21-0, and the Eskimos collected again.

In Chicago, they suffered their first defeat, 24-6 to the Bears. Then they went back to Wisconsin for a game on Halloween against John's original NFL team, the Milwaukee Badgers. Nevers was feeling sick and suffering from abdominal pain. Haugsrud in later years said it was appendicitis, but Nevers denied this. "Sometimes Ole inflates things a little," he said with a smile. "I think it was just something I ate but, whatever it was, I really felt terrible."

Nevers started the game, but had to take himself out. He tried again in the second quarter, but was again forced to leave. With the Eskimos trailing 6-0, Nevers went back in once more in the second half, threw a touchdown pass to Cobb Rooney, and kicked the extra point to win the game.

Up to this point, the Eskimos had played a normal schedule, pretty much like a modern NFL schedule: a game every Sunday. That was about to change dramatically.

After a leisurely trip from Milwaukee to St. Louis for an exhibition game on Saturday, November 6, the Eskimos played five games in nine days, eight games in sixteen days, and eleven games in 23 days.

Player-coach Dewey Scanlon didn't actually play very much. He wore his uniform to make it look as if the Eskimos had more players than they actually did. So did Haugsrud, who also practiced drop-kicking before the games and at halftime. He began to think he was pretty good. "Some time, we'll let you kick an extra point, Ole," Nevers kidded him.

The exhibition game against the St. Louis Blues was a laugher. The Eskimos had a big lead early in the fourth quarter when John got well behind the St. Louis secondary and caught a pass from Nevers.

"He could've walked the last forty yards to score a touchdown," says Haugsrud, "but that would've been too easy for John. I guess he was bored. He just stopped and stood there, and here came some guys chasing him, three of theirs and one of ours, Paul Fitzgibbons, who was trying to get in front of them to block somebody.

"John just waited until they almost caught up to him, then he lateraled the ball back to Paul and blocked two of the other players so Paul could score the touchdown. You know, Paul was so surprised he almost dropped it. But he hung on and scored. The play covered about eighty yards."

After another touchdown put Duluth ahead 48-0, Nevers waved Haugsrud in from the bench. "Here's your chance, Ole," he told him. "You're going to kick the point."

Delighted at the chance, Haugsrud rushed onto the field. He had no idea it was a joke: The Eskimos weren't going to give him any blocking.

"The ball came back to me," he recalled, "and I hardly got my hands on it before seven or eight people were on top of me. They were mad, of course, because we were beating them so bad, and they took it out on me."

But Haugsrud got his revenge. After the game, he put his right arm in a sling and told his players it had been broken; he wouldn't be able to sign any paychecks until it healed. He kept the sling on for two weeks.

The next day, Sunday, the Eskimos played a scoreless tie at Detroit. Then they went to New York for a Thursday game against the Giants. Two players were recovering from injuries, so the squad numbered only fourteen.

Tim Mara, the founder of the Giants, was a good host who always arranged bus tours of the city for visiting teams. On Wednesday afternoon, he arrived at the Eskimos' hotel with a sightseeing bus and Haugsrud led his players on board. The bus stayed there for several minutes, until Mara said, "Come on, Ole, get the rest of your boys out here."

"Well, I told him we'd been traveling a lot, and the rest of my players were tired of buses. I didn't want him to know this was the whole team."

At game time the following day, however, it was obvious that this *was* the whole team. Mara eyed the Eskimo squad. "You call this a football team?" he asked scornfully.

Sportswriter Grantland Rice, standing nearby, said, "I'd call them the Iron Men of the North." And so he did, in a column the following day. (The Giants, who finished with an 8-4-1 record that season, barely edged Duluth, 14-13.)

On Saturday, the Eskimos lost to the Frankford Yellow Jackets, who went on to win the 1926 NFL championship with a 14-1-1 record. Then they went to Pottsville for a Sunday game against the Maroons.

"We were pretty thirsty when we got off the train in Pottsville," John says, "so naturally we went looking for the local speakeasy. It was hard to find, and most of the guys gave up

and went back to the hotel. But Cobb Rooney, Walt Kiesling, and I persisted, and we finally found it. It was the firehouse.

"We gave the password and walked in and here were all these firemen sitting around, drinking something, and here were all these what you might call visiting firemen, also drinking something, and in the back room, which was supposed to be the kitchen, there was a bartender, backed up by a whole bar.

"So we became visiting firemen ourselves, and proceeded to have a good time."

Late that night, John and Rooney got into a friendly argument about which of them would win if they had a fight. Finally, Kiesling suggested that the only way to settle it would be to fight it out, and he offered to referee.

They went out a side door into an alley. "We took some swings at one another," John recalls, "but we weren't very accurate. Then I tried to hit Cobb with a big right roundhouse, and he ducked, and I hit the firehouse wall. It was a brick wall. Broke my hand. I didn't know it was broken at the time, but the next day it was all swollen up and we wrapped a few yards of tape around it."

Haugsrud was furious. "I fired all three of them," he says. "But that was in the morning. Well, I knew I needed them for the game, so I hired them back in the afternoon. But, you know, a funny thing—Kiesling and Johnny are both in the Hall of Fame now. I'm probably the only manager who ever fired two Hall of Fame players in one day."

"When we got to the field for the game that afternoon," Nevers recalls, "the whole damn Pottsville fire department was there. They were soaking the field. I guess they figured the only way they could beat us was to slow us down."

"Everybody talks about artificial turf nowadays," John adds, "but that might have been the only game ever played in artificial mud."

Thanks at least in part to that artificial mud, the Maroons won, 13-0. The Eskimos had played five games in nine days; now they had three days off, which must have felt like a luxury.

As the long trip wore on, Haugsrud realized he needed to schedule more games to pay the $15,000 that Nevers was due, on top of his cut of the gate receipts. After the Pottsville game on November 14, the next NFL game was against the Canton Bulldogs on November 21. Haugsrud found two semi-pro teams near Canton, the Cleveland Indians and the South Akron Awnings, who were happy to grab the opportunity to make some money by booking Nevers and the rest of the Eskimos. They stayed at the Allerton Hotel in Cleveland for the three Ohio games.

"It was a kind of show-business hotel," Haugsrud says. "The Marx Brothers and Mack Sennett's Bathing Beauties were there at the same time we were. Now, show business types weren't considered very reputable then, but the owner had a very strict rule to prevent hanky-panky: Women only on even-numbered floors and men only on odd-numbered floors."

Such a silly rule was made to be broken, Johnny Blood reasoned. So he stole the elevator.

"John just walked onto the elevator," Haugsrud explains, "like he was going up to his room, and then he handed the elevator girl some change and asked her to get him some cigarettes. So she left the elevator to go to the cigar stand and he stole it. Of course, he didn't stop it at a men's floor, he stopped it at a women's floor. When he opened the door, a bunch of the bathing beauties were going by in their nightgowns. You could hear them holler all over the hotel."

The ensuing chase would have delighted the Marx Brothers. Haugsrud and Nevers went running up and down stairs, trying to catch the elevator. Finally Haugsrud happened to look out the window at the end of a corridor and saw John on the fire escape. He and Nevers corralled him there and persuaded him to go to bed.

Cobb Rooney was another free spirit; he and John became good friends. On their second night in Cleveland, the players went to a dance in the hotel ballroom and Rooney became infatuated with an attractive blonde—so infatuated that he propositioned her. "She" turned out to be Harpo Marx, in drag.

Their stay in Cleveland was not only fun, it was good for Duluth's won-loss record. After losing their previous three, they won three in a row in northeast Ohio. They had easy victories in their two exhibition games, against the Cleveland Indians on Thursday and the South Akron Awnings on Saturday; then they beat the Canton Bulldogs on Sunday, 10-2.

Next stop: Buffalo, for a Thanksgiving Day game against the Buffalo Rangers. As it turned out, the game was canceled because of cold and snow, so the Eskimos celebrated the holiday at their hotel. Happy to have a day off, some of them celebrated too much. Especially Johnny Blood.

Haugsrud managed to get John up to his room and into bed, then sat in the hotel lobby to make sure none of his players sneaked out. A little later, someone walked up to him and said, "That fellow you took up to his room is down on the corner, giving a talk to the public."

"I went out," Haugsrud says, "and sure enough, there was John. He had one of our Eskimo parkas on. He was talking and talking, and there was a pretty good crowd, considering the snow. I heard him say his ambition was to be the fastest miler in the country. So I just went up to him and tapped him on the shoulder and said, `Let's see how fast you can run back to the hotel.'

"So he says, `Gangway!' and away he went. Without stopping, he went running right in the front door and up the stairs."

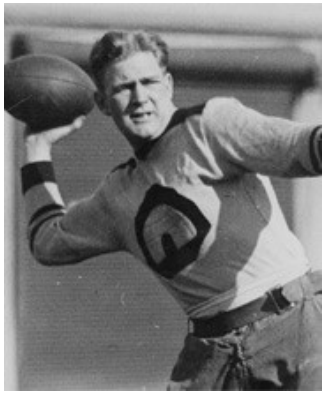
This time, Haugsrud locked the door to John's room. But, a short time afterward, another informant turned up. "That fellow you locked in his room is out again," Haugsrud was told. "I saw him hanging from a window up there, and he lit on the next windowsill and jumped down."

Once again, Haugsrud captured his runaway halfback. This time, he not only locked the door, he took all of John's clothes away.

John's roommate was Paul Fitzgibbons, the little halfback, about 5-foot-4 and 140 pounds. "Next thing," Haugsrud says, "Doc Williams and Walt Kiesling walked out of their room and saw Johnny Blood coming through the transom, wearing Fitzgibbons' suit. It didn't fit him too well. They grabbed him and

put him to bed. They held his wrists so tight to keep him there that some blood started to show. But he finally went to sleep."

John has a laconic comment on the episode. "I had more than Thanksgiving to celebrate. My birthday was coming up and I took the opportunity to have a party."



Ernie Nevers

His twenty-third birthday fell two days later, on Saturday, November 27, when the Eskimos beat the Hartford Blues 16-0 in Connecticut. Then they traveled about 90 miles to Providence, Rhode Island, for a game against the Steam Roller. John, Haugsrud, and Nevers are unanimous: It was "the dirtiest football game ever played."

"You don't hear about 'homers' in pro football anymore," Haugsrud says, "but in those days all the officials were homers. The home team hired them and paid them, and often got the benefit of the calls. But that crew in Providence was the worst I've ever seen."

"We were used to rough games," says Nevers. "Hell, all the games were rough. But Providence could get away with everything, so they did everything. The guys in the line, especially, were taking a beating on every play. They were getting held, thrown down, kicked, punched, clawed, bitten—everything. And if one of our guys retaliated, there was an immediate penalty.

"In the second half, the guys kept coming up to me after every play and saying, `Ernie, you've got to do something about this.'"

The Eskimos kept moving the ball, but whenever they got close to the Providence goal line, the officials started moving it the other way. The culmination came about halfway through the fourth quarter, when John caught a pass from Nevers and was knocked out of bounds on the five-yard line. The Eskimos were promptly hit with three consecutive fifteen-yard penalties, moving it back to the fifty.

"Now, Bill Stein was probably our coolest player," Haugsrud recalls, "but even he got mad. He yelled, `This is the payoff! Let's get those blankety-blanks!' And he didn't mean the other team."

Nevers agreed. "I decided, to hell with the game. So I called a very unusual play."

Haugsrud remembers the play: "Russ Method, a terrific blocker, threw a block at the referee that knocked him out. Five of our linemen put five of their linemen out of action. Jimmy Manion had this trick of jumping into the air, feet first, and kicking a guy in the teeth, and he did it to the umpire. Meanwhile, Johnny, pretending he was going out for a pass, just ran right over the field judge and trampled him.

"There were only three officials back then, and all three of them were on the ground, along with five of their players. One official still had his whistle and he blew it and said time had expired, although there must have been seven or eight minutes left to play." So the game ended, prematurely, in a scoreless tie.

The Eskimos' original schedule called for an NFL game against the Brooklyn Lions a week later, on December 12, but Haugsrud got a telegram informing him that the Brooklyn team had disbanded after losing eight of its first eleven games. Staring at a two-week break with no money coming in, he scrambled to find some more exhibition games. With help from the manager of the Hartford team, he booked a game in New Britain, Connecticut, against a team that had also disbanded but was willing to reassemble for a game that might draw a big crowd.

The Hartford and New Britain managers put Haugsrud in touch with promoters in Boston and Portland, Maine, who agreed to put together "all-star" teams from their areas to play the Eskimos. Johnny Blood contacted his cousin in Baltimore, who also found someone to field a team. So the hiatus turned into two weeks of travel, punctuated by four exhibition games.

The Eskimos traveled back to Connecticut for the game in New Britain; then went through Providence again and up to

Boston for another game; and took a boat to Portland for the third game.

Immediately after the game in Portland, they piled into three taxicabs to catch a train to Boston, where they caught another train to New York, where they got on a bus that took them to a boat that took them to Baltimore, where they won yet another game.

They finally had some free time now and they spent several days in Baltimore. The day they were scheduled to leave, Haugsrud came down to the lobby of their Baltimore hotel and saw the woman in charge of the cigar stand arguing with "a little guy." She pointed to Haugsrud. "There's the man you want to see," she said. "He's the manager of the team."

"Well, he came over to me," Haugsrud recalls, "and he says, `Two of your guys rented a car from me and they haven't brought it back yet.' It was hard enough finding a hotel for football players, I didn't want to have a big altercation right there, so I brought him outside to discuss it.

"We no sooner got outside than here comes a car down the sidewalk, and in it was Johnny Blood and Cobb Rooney. They came as close to the door as they could get, and they just missed me and the fellow that owned the car before they turned into the street again. I said, `There goes your car,' and he says, `Why didn't you catch them?' I said, `Catch them? It's your car. I got enough problems without trying to catch a runaway automobile with two crazy football players in it.'

"His car rental lot was across the street, and he went over there, and just then they drove into the front of his lot, but they drove right out the back of it again and down the street, with him chasing after them."

"Cobb was driving," John interposes, to keep the record straight.

"Well," Haugsrud concludes, "they did bring the car back before we left. And it wasn't damaged. They had to pay a little bit more than their initial rental fee, that's all."

(Later, in California, John and Cobb Rooney had another adventure with an automobile. They took two young women out and needed a cab to get them home. The only cab they could find was driverless, but the keys were in the ignition. So

they took the taxi, brought the young women home, and returned the cab to where they'd found it, leaving a dollar bill in the seat to pay for the ride.)

The Eskimos then traveled to Kansas City to play the Cowboys for a second time, finishing their NFL season with a 12-7 loss. But they still had five games to play on the West Coast. In Los Angeles, Cobb Rooney got hurt and Dewey Scanlon had only one substitute left—himself. So he grabbed a helmet and rushed into the game.

"It was the wrong helmet," Haugsrud says. "After a couple of plays, it just went flying off, and then Brick Muller's cleats almost scalped him. Russ Method, who doubled as our trainer, wrapped his head up in gauze, like a turban, and the boys promptly christened him 'the Turk.'"

The already battered Rooney was kicked in the eye in a game in Sacramento and was taken to the hospital. Again, Scanlon was the only backfield substitute available, and he played the rest of the game.

The Eskimos had to go to San Francisco that night for a game the following day. Before they left, Haugsrud called the hospital and was told the surgeons had saved Rooney's eye, but he would have to stay in the hospital for at least a week.

Rooney was not supposed to have visitors, but John managed to visit him, in a typically unorthodox fashion.

"Johnny climbed more buildings than a house painter," Nevers says. "Cobb was in a room on the third floor, and John just went around to the back of the hospital, climbed up there, and went in the window."

"I thought he could use some cheering up," John explains, "so I paid a call. When I saw his nurse, I decided he was a lucky man after all. If he was going to spend a long time in the hospital, at least he was going to be in very attractive company."

The next morning, Haugsrud called again to check on his quarterback's condition. "I wish I knew how he was," the hospital superintendent replied. "And I wish I knew *where* he was. And I'd also like to know what happened to the special nurse who was supposed to be taking care of him."

"Well, I'd hardly hung up when there came a knock on my door," Haugsrud recalls. "I opened it, and there was Cobb, with a very pretty young lady. `Ole,' he said, `I want you to meet my wife-to-be.' Of course, it was the special nurse. They'd run off from the hospital."

Rooney played in San Francisco that day. And he married the special nurse a few days later.

The Eskimos finally got back to Duluth in early February of 1927. Haugsrud did some bookkeeping. Then he paid Nevers nearly $65,000. Each of the other Eskimos made $2,100; that was $75 per game for twenty-eight games, a slight bonus, since they were entitled to only $1,920 at the agreed-upon rate of $75 a win, $65 a loss, and $50 a tie.

The National Football League had been saved, just barely. The AFL folded, but so did twelve of the twenty-two NFL franchises. Red Grange's New York Yankees, sole survivors of the AFL, moved into the NFL. And Cleveland regained a franchise, bringing the total number of teams to twelve in 1927.

That wasn't enough to make the Eskimos' second and final season profitable. Haugsrud could line up only nine league games and a couple of exhibitions. "And a lot of our players were just getting too old now," he says. "We only won one game out of nine. I lost money that year and Ernie decided to go back to Stanford as an assistant to Pop Warner, so we didn't field a team in 1928."

The Duluth Eskimo story has a couple of interesting historical footnotes. Haugsrud still held a franchise in 1928, even though he had no team. In 1929, the other NFL owners wanted him to sell the franchise to a buyer from Orange, New Jersey. Haugsrud was asking $3,000, but the prospect was willing to pay only $2,000.

Finally, Haugsrud struck a bargain. He'd sell if the league would agree to give him an option on the next NFL franchise located in Minnesota. He got the agreement in writing and sold the franchise for $2,000.

Haugsrud and Nevers were reunited with the Chicago Cardinals in 1929, Haugsrud as business manager and Nevers as

player-coach. According to the official NFL history, the Cardinals that season became the first team to set up an out-of-town training camp, in Coldwater, Michigan. But Haugsrud was simply doing again what he'd already done in 1926, getting the players away from the distractions of the city so Nevers could install the double wing.

The Cardinals beat their cross-town rivals, the Bears, 40-6 that season and Nevers scored all 40 points, on six touchdowns and four conversions, still the NFL single-game scoring record.

In 1961, when the Minnesota Vikings were born, Haugsrud brought out his 1929 option agreement from the league and, as a result, he was allowed to buy ten percent of the team's stock for $60,000. At his death in March of 1976, his share was worth nearly $20 million…all because of that one-dollar investment he'd made in 1926.

CHAPTER FIVE:
THE TOILET PAPER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

God gives all men all earth to love,
But since man's heart is small,
Ordains for each one spot shall prove
Beloved over all.
Kipling, "Sussex"

Green Bay was accidentally "founded" in 1634 by a French explorer who thought he was discovering China. Jean Nicolet had been sent by Samuel Champlain, the governor of New France, to find a rumored "People of the Sea" somewhere to the west of Quebec.

Jean Nicolet statue

They might be the Chinese, Champlain reasoned. Nicolet was equipped with damask mandarin robes and a few words of Mandarin Chinese so he could make a suitably impressive arrival.

Reaching the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, he assumed he had found the Pacific Ocean, especially when the Native Americans here told him that the people on the other side of the water spoke a strange, unintelligible language. (His guides spoke an Algonquian language, while the Native Americans on the western shore spoke a Siouan language.)

Nicolet donned his robes, armed himself with two pistols, and his guides paddled him across the lake in a large canoe to a spot now called Red Bank, about seven miles from the present city of Green Bay. The Winnebagos had an encampment of about

5,000 warriors at Red Bank. Nicolet fired his pistols into the air to get their attention and spoke his few words of Chinese. The Winnebagos, of course, didn't understand and Nicolet realized he hadn't landed in China after all.

Swallowing his disappointment, he claimed the land for the King of France, negotiated a peace treaty with the Winnebagos and explored the area, which he called simply "La Baye." He also reported to Champlain that, at a feast in his honor, the main course was beaver. Beaver pelts were the staple of the fur trade in New France, and Nicolet's report attracted itinerant fur trappers and traders across Lake Michigan for the first time.

Wisconsin is shaped like a mitten. Green Bay is both a bay and a city, located between the mitten's thumb and fingers. The Fox River flows north from Lake Winnebago into the bay. It's one of the few major rivers in the Northern Hemisphere that does flow north. The Fox has its origin about eighty miles southwest of Green Bay, a short distance from the Wisconsin River, which in turn flows into the Mississippi.

In 1673, Louis Joliet and Father Jacques Marquette discovered the Fox-Wisconsin-Mississippi connection and La Baye suddenly became vital to the booming French fur trade. Pelts gathered throughout the interior could be brought up the Mississippi and Wisconsin, portaged the short distance to the Fox, then carried up through La Baye and across New France to the Atlantic and Europe.

After the French and Indian War, the Northwest Territory, which included La Baye, came under British control in 1761. The British renamed the area Green Bay, probably because of the wild rice (actually a type of swamp grass) that grows in the bay's backwaters during the spring. And the fur trade became even more important under British rule than it had been under the French.

When the American Revolution ended in 1783, the Northwest Territory became part of the United States. John Jacob Astor organized the American Fur Company in 1808 and built his own "town of Astor" around a luxury hotel in 1835, in competition with the town of Navarino, which had been platted in 1829 by Daniel Whitney. Both of these towns were on the east

bank of the bay; on the west bank was a small village that had grown up around Fort Howard, built in 1816 by the federal government. Green Bay was incorporated in 1854, absorbing Navarino, and the town of Astor was added in 1857. The town of Fort Howard also became part of Green Bay in 1895.

After the fur trade came the lumber trade and then the pulp and paper industry. While Green Bay calls itself "Packerland" and, during the Packers' better seasons, "Titletown U. S. A.," native son sportswriter Red Smith preferred to call it "the Toilet Paper Capital of the World." With good reason. Green Bay is the home of Charmin and Mr. Whipple, and of the Fort Howard Paper Company, to name just two of the biggest paper mills that grew up in the city after the Civil War.

Green Bay had a semi-pro football team as early as 1896. That team had only one paid player, Tom Skenandore, a Native American from the nearby Oneida Reservation who had played at Carlisle Indian Institute, later to become famous as Jim Thorpe's alma mater. The team won all of its games, including a 44-0 victory over Lawrence College from Appleton, Wisconsin.

Less than two years later, on April 9, 1898, Earl L. "Curly" Lambeau was born in Green Bay. The date he fell in love with football is not known so precisely, but it was very early in his life. The beginning of the football season in his neighborhood was signaled when young Curly emerged from his house with a home-made ball—a salt sack stuffed with leaves and, for ballast, some pebbles—to round up players.

The football rivalry between East and West High Schools began in 1905 and was dominated by West High. They won seven games in a row until Lambeau's senior year at East High, in 1916, when he led his school to a 7-0 victory. He not only captained the team, he coached it, unofficially. The nominal coach was a teacher who knew nothing about football. He called Lambeau aside before the first practice and said, "I want to read a book on football, so you go ahead and do whatever you want to do."

After graduation, Lambeau worked for his father's construction company for a year. He briefly attended the University of Wisconsin, but dropped out because freshman

football was canceled due to World War I, and he played for a neighborhood team called the South Side Skidoos in the fall of 1917.

The following year, he enrolled at Notre Dame, where young Knute Rockne had been appointed football coach for the 1918 season. Rockne obviously wasn't yet famous as a coach, but he was known for catching Gus Dorais' passes in Notre Dame's 35-13 upset of Army in 1913. That attracted Lambeau, who was already interested in the passing game.

Curly Lambeau at Notre Dame

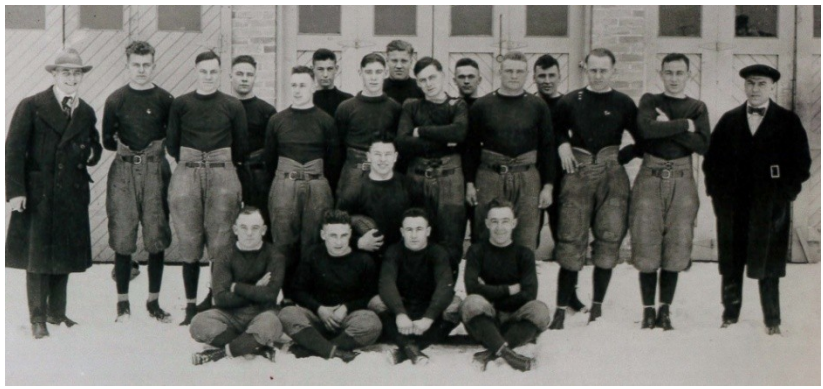
Because of World War I, freshmen were eligible for the varsity in 1918. Lambeau made the team, playing both right halfback and fullback. He scored Notre Dame's first touchdown of the season, the first ever by a Rockne team, and he was the only freshman among the thirteen Notre Dame players who won letters.

Early that winter, however, he developed a severe sore throat and had to go back to Green Bay for a tonsillectomy. While recuperating, he was offered a job as traffic manager at the Indian Packing Company for $250 a month, a very good salary at that time for a twenty-year-old. So he forgot about college and took the job.

Green Bay's town team had been reorganized in 1918 after a year's hiatus. Lambeau joined the team in August of 1919 and was elected captain. He then went to his boss at the packing company, Frank Peck, and asked if he'd sponsor the team. Peck agreed to pay up to $500 for uniforms, provided they carried the name of the company. So the Green Bay Bays, as they had previously been called, became known as the "Packers"—or, on occasion, the "Indians."

George Whitney Calhoun, the sports editor of the Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, was the team manager, responsible for handling money, but there was no real coach. As team captain, Lambeau

was the *de facto* coach, which was a common practice at the time.



1919 Packer team photo

The Packers won their first ten games, including victories over athletic clubs from Milwaukee and Chicago. And they did it in an unusual way: by passing. Official statistics weren't kept, but the Packer center, Fritz Gavin, kept his own count of passes. According to Gavin, Lambeau completed 37 of 45 in one game that year.

That may seem improbable, but look at the Packers' winning scores: 53-0, 61-0, 54-0, 87-0, 76-6, 33-0, 85-0, 53-0, 46-6, and 17-0. They must have thrown a fair number of passes to average more than 56 points a game in an era when scoreless ties weren't unusual.

Green Bay fans proclaimed that the Packers were state champions. But a team from Beloit with an unlikely name, the Fairies, was also unbeaten. The Fairies challenged the Packers and Lambeau accepted. Beloit beat Green Bay, 6-0, at home and claimed the championship. (The Beloit team was so named, by the way, because it was sponsored by the Fairbanks-Morse Company.)

Despite that loss, it had been a good season. The Packers' home games were played on an open field at Hagemeister Park, and Calhoun passed a hat among spectators to collect money. After expenses had been paid, each player received $16.75 for the season.

Lambeau's father was hired in 1920 to fence in the Hagemeister Park field and build a 3,000-seat grandstand. The ticket

price was set at fifty cents. For the first time, the Packers hired outlanders, two players from Marinette, about sixty miles north of Green Bay. The team had a 9-1-1 record that year, including a 3-3 tie with a Chicago club. They lost again to the Beloit Fairies, 14-3 in Beloit, but beat them 7-0 in Green Bay.

However, the team lost money. Lambeau and Calhoun had to get donations from some local businessmen to pay off debts at the end of the season, and there was no money left for the players.

Lambeau was undaunted. As a matter of fact, he had a new ambition: To get a franchise in the American Professional Football Association for the 1921 season.

Some of his former players hold differing opinions about Lambeau, depending in part on the era in which they played. For the team's first eleven seasons, 1919 through 1929, Lambeau was a player as well as a coach, although he played little in the last couple of years. He seems to have been highly regarded as a field leader during that time. Charles Mathys, who quarterbacked the Packers from 1922 through 1926, said this about Lambeau in a 1969 interview with Lee Remmel of the Green Bay *Press-Gazette*:

> He took charge—he was a leader. And what he said went. He was stern, on the order of Vince Lombardi. There was no standing around at practice. Everybody worked and worked hard—he was a driver. He meant business and everybody knew it and toed the mark.

But a couple of men who played for Lambeau later, when the Packers had become a truly professional team with players who had considerable experience, have questioned his football knowledge. One of them is Cal Hubbard, the Hall of Fame tackle.

"To be frank," Hubbard says, "Curly really didn't know all that much about football. After all, he spent just that one year at Notre Dame—how much did he learn? Most of us knew more because we spent more time learning, four years of college and then, for most of us, some professional experience, too.

"Why, sometimes Curly would design a new play, draw it up on the blackboard, and we just knew it wouldn't work the way he

drew it. He'd have impossible blocking assignments, or the play would just take too long to develop, the defense would mess it up before it got going. And we'd have to tell him that, and one of the veterans would go right up to the blackboard and change it around. Most of the time, Johnny Blood was the spokesman, because he was always ready to speak up to Curly, or anybody."

"Not that I necessarily did the thinking," John says. "As Cal said, I was the spokesman. I'd go up and get the chalk, and then we'd all kind of talk about it, a group discussion, and we'd keep working on it until we got it right."

Mike Michalske, another Hall of Famer, has a somewhat different view. He says much the same about the younger Lambeau, but he adds a qualification: "I will say that Curly was willing to learn from us. He really learned football from his players and, after a few years, I think he knew as much as any coach in the league. He just had to have that learning experience for a while."

Whatever his football knowledge at the time, there's no doubt that, if you wanted to start a semi-pro team in 1919, keep it going through difficult years, and eventually build it into an NFL powerhouse, Lambeau had the qualifications. For years he sold real estate and insurance while also coaching the Packers, and he was very good at it. More than anything, the Packers needed a salesman: Someone who could talk his boss into contributing money for uniforms, someone who could persuade people to chip in to keep the team out of the red, someone who could not only conceive the vision of a big-time football team in a small city, but also sell that vision to others.

Lambeau put his salesmanship to work in 1921. The Acme Packing Company had acquired the Indian Packing Company and he persuaded the owners, John and Emmett Clair, to take over the team, which became known as the Acme Packers for a year. And he also talked them into buying a franchise, in the one-year-old professional league. The franchise was officially held by Emmett Clair.

The Acme Packers finished sixth that season with a 3-2-1 record. But a scandal erupted when Rockne, as Notre Dame's athletic director, suspended three athletes for having played under assumed names for a professional team after the end of the

college season. It was eventually revealed that they had played for the Packers in a post-season exhibition game. As a result, the APFA took the franchise away from Clair at the January owners' meeting.

Lambeau remained undaunted. He borrowed the necessary $150 from a friend, Don Murphy, and went to the APFA's pre-season meeting in late June of 1922. The Packers were re-admitted to the league, with Lambeau as franchise owner. The APFA members also voted to change the league's name to the National Football League that day.

Howard "Cub" Buck

The Packers hired their first high-priced player shortly afterward. He was Howard "Cub" Buck, who had been an All-American tackle at the University of Wisconsin in 1919 and had then spent two seasons with the Canton Bulldogs. Buck was paid $75 a game. He was not only an outstanding player, he was also very popular in Wisconsin, and Lambeau figured he could help the team at the gate as well as on the field.

Nevertheless, the Packers finished about $2,500 in debt after the 1922 season, in which they had a so-so 4-3-3 record. Most franchises would have folded. But Lambeau found four powerful men to help out: Andrew J. Turnbull, general manager and later publisher of the *Press-Gazette*; Leland H. Joannes, owner of a wholesale grocery business; Gerald F. Clifford, an attorney who later took in a young partner named Lavern Dilweg, an All-Pro end for the Packers; and Dr. W. Webber Kelly, who was to become Green Bay's first team physician.

(Dr. Kelly might well have been a soulmate of the Vagabond Halfback. Born in Jamaica, he was educated in England and Belgium. After a stint in the consular service in the West Indies, he served for a time as a crewman on a two-masted schooner. Then he went to McGill University and Bishop's College in Canada to get his medical degree before settling in Green Bay.)

These four men, plus Lambeau, were to become known as the "Hungry Five" for their indefatigable fund raising on behalf of the Packers. They began by forming a public corporation to operate the franchise and taking out a loan to pay off the $2,500 debt. Then, early in 1923, they held a public meeting in the Elks Club. About four hundred people attended. Shares of stock in the new corporation were sold at five dollars apiece; anyone who bought five shares was given a season box seat ticket.

This was the beginning of a unique franchise in professional sports: a community-owned team. It was also the beginning of a long love affair (sometimes a love-hate affair) between a small city and its football team.

In his *Education*, Henry Adams says something to the effect that he grew up thinking that, like him, every American boy was descended from presidents. Only much later did he realize that his was a unique background.

Growing up in Green Bay was similar: It never occurred to us that it was unusual to be surrounded by past and present pro football players.

When I was a kid in Green Bay during the late 1940s, both the fire chief, Dave Zuidmulder, and the police chief, Tubby Bero, were former Packers. Zuidmulder's daughter was a babysitter for me and my two sisters. George Whitney Calhoun, the original manager of the Packers, was telegraph editor at the *Press-Gazette* and my father was his assistant for several years before succeeding him when "Cal" went into semi-retirement.

The "Gray Ghost of Gonzaga," Tony Canadeo, the third NFL player and first Packer to gain more than a thousand yards rushing in a season, lived a couple of blocks away, across the street from my aunt and uncle. One afternoon, my sister stuck her hand in my bicycle spokes and was badly cut. We took her to my uncle's house to get a ride to the hospital, but he wasn't home. So Tony Canadeo took her to the hospital.

Don Hutson, one of the greatest pass receivers in history, owned a bowling alley-nightclub where my parents took me, when I was very young, to see Bill "Bojangles" Robinson dance. Ted Fritsch, a fullback who scored the winning touchdown in the Packers' 1944 championship victory over the Giants, coached

three sports at Green Bay's Central Catholic High School and often umpired our sandlot baseball games. John Biolo, football coach at Green Bay West High, was also a Packer alumnus.

The treasurer of my high school class was the daughter of Francis "Jug" Earp, a former Packer center (and a descendent of Wyatt Earp). Another contemporary was the son of Verne Lewellen, a Johnny Blood teammate who is still considered by old-time Packer fans as the greatest punter of all time. The son of Joe Laws, a Packer back in the 1930s, was a year behind me and a member of my high school football and basketball teams.

Several times, when I went to the supermarket with my mother, we saw the unforgettable figure of Dick Afflis, a 6-foot-1, 265-pound middle guard, pushing a shopping cart around. (He became better known, a little later, as "Dick the Bruiser," a bad-guy professional wrestler.) And one Saturday afternoon, the day before the Bear game, I suddenly confronted the enemy: Chicago tackle-linebacker George Connor, striding toward me down Jefferson Street. His cold blue-gray eyes met mine and I actually shuddered. (Green Bay mothers used to tell their children that George Connor would get them if they didn't behave.)

The Packers didn't have very good teams in the late 1940s and early 1950s, but somehow that didn't bother us much. They were still our Packers. They played their home games at City Stadium, whose rickety wooden stands could just barely hold 25,000 people. And they usually practiced in an open field outside the stadium.

On hot August days, three or four of us from my neighborhood would pack lunches and ride our bikes several miles to City Stadium to watch the practices, along with forty or fifty other boys, aged approximately ten to twelve. Nobody seemed to mind our presence, although now and then an assistant coach would ask us to move back a little, for our own safety. We snickered at the foul language, smiled at the proliferation of accents and dialects, laughed at the often crude jokes. During breaks, we edged closer to the sweaty players to eavesdrop on their conversations. We learned inside football: Watching line coach Tarz Taylor, once a hated Bear and now a beloved Packer,

demonstrate a trap block to a young guard; watching veteran receiver Billy Howton digging divots to guide a rookie through the precise footwork required for a buttonhook route; watching quarterback Tobin Rote demonstrate the timing required to throw a sideline pass.

But, above all, we reveled in being young and being Packer fans and being right there with our heroes.

Afterward, a couple of us would always hang around for punting practice, while the rest of the players showered and the rest of the kids headed home. This was our chance to show off. We fielded the kicks and returned them for twenty or thirty yards, sidestepping and stiff-arming imaginary opponents, before throwing the ball back.

Vito "Babe" Parilli was one of the Packer punters during that period. Later, when he was playing quarterback for the Boston Patriots, I saw him at the Patriot training camp and told him that I used to catch his punts. Parilli laughed and said, "That's one thing I'll always miss about Green Bay—all those crazy little kids."

Two of us were especially crazy. We discovered a way of getting into City Stadium, a complicated route that involved squeezing through a loose board on a wooden fence, climbing over a wire fence, shinnying up a pole under the stands to a support girder, and then climbing the girder to come up through the seats. From there, we simply had to walk down an aisle, go over the railing to the track, and hop over the low fence surrounding the field. We used to bring a football and play our imaginary games out there, on the very chalk-line turf used by the Packers. . . an unimaginable thrill, like a couple of kids from the Bronx hitting fungoes to one another in Yankee Stadium.

One day in 1951, we were surprised to learn that the Packers were holding a secret practice inside City Stadium. A whole bunch of disappointed kids rode their bikes home. But my friend and I stayed and sneaked inside the stadium to see what was going on. We were astonished to see the Packers practicing a strange new formation, with quarterback Tobin Rote operating as a tailback, seven yards behind the center.

This was later to become known as the shotgun, and San Francisco 49er Coach Red Hickey was credited with inventing it

in 1961. The Packers in 1951 called it the "R formation" for Rote and Head Coach Gene Ronzani, who dreamed it up to take advantage of Rote's skills as a runner and passer. Rote led the team in rushing with 523 yards that season and also passed for 1,540 yards, but the team won only three of twelve games.

We watched the entire practice and then rushed home—but not to tell anyone. Good citizens of Green Bay, aware of the danger of leaks to the enemy, we kept our secret. When the Packers officially unveiled the R Formation the following Sunday, the rest of their fans, their opponents, and the sportswriters were as astonished as we had been, four days earlier.

It could have happened only in Green Bay.

The Packers moved into City Stadium in 1925. Lambeau had gradually expanded his search for players and was slowly creating something more than a hometown team. Jug Earp, a center from Monmouth College and the Rock Island Independents, and Whitey Woodin, a guard from Marquette University, joined the team in 1922, along with Cub Buck. In 1924, halfback Verne Lewellen arrived from the University of Nebraska. "Sleepy Jim" Crowley, one of Notre Dame's Four Horsemen and, like Lambeau, an alumnus of Green Bay East High, agreed to play for a time in 1925. Fullback Carl Lidberg from the University of Minnesota signed up in 1926.

Lambeau went even farther afield in 1927, signing Claude Perry out of the University of Alabama, one of the first players from the Deep South to join an NFL team. And Lambeau also picked up a passing combination from closer to home: Red Dunn and Lavvie Dilweg out of Marquette. Two more Southerners arrived in 1928—Jim Bowdoin, a guard from Alabama, and Tom Nash, an All-American end from Georgia.

During their first eight seasons in the NFL, the Packers were competitive. They never had a losing season. They won fifty-two games, lost twenty-five, and tied thirteen. They finished second to the New York Giants in 1927 and they also had a third-place finish and two fourth-place finishes during that period.

But Curly Lambeau wanted a championship. He knew he needed a few more players to accomplish it. And, after the 1928 season, he got a letter from a player who could help—a halfback

known as Johnny Blood, who would fit perfectly into the Packers' passing offense.

During that trip to the firehouse-speakeasy in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, in 1926, John struck up a friendship with Robert "Duke" Osborn, a guard from Penn State who had played for the Canton-Cleveland teams that won three straight NFL championships before he joined the Maroons in 1925. With the Duluth franchise dormant in 1928, John needed a new team, and Osborn persuaded him to come to Pottsville.

Duke Osborn

John in turn talked Walt Kiesling and Joe Rooney, Cobb's brother, into going with him. But first they went to California for a late summer vacation.

"We had a good time," John says. "As a matter of fact, we had such a good time that we ran out of money and couldn't pay the fare to Pennsylvania. So I sent a telegram to Duke and he wired us enough money to take the train.

"But I spent most of my share. So, when we went down to the station, Kies and Joe bought their tickets while I slipped into the blind baggage compartment, and I rode all the way to Pennsylvania in there."

The Pottsville player-coach was the legendary Wilbur "Fats" Henry, a 5-foot-10, 240-pound tackle who had been an All-American at little Washington and Jefferson College in 1919. A member of both the College and Pro Football Halls of Fame, Henry was an outstanding kicker. He once held the NFL record for the longest punt, 92 yards, and he still holds two league drop-kicking records, for the longest field goal, 50 yards, and the most consecutive extra points, 49.

"Fats was the right nickname for him," John says, "although that was just a sportswriter's nickname. Everybody actually

called him Pete. He looked less like a football player than anyone else I ever played with, because he really was fat. You got the feeling that if he ever got hit in the gut, it would take him three days to catch his breath.

Wilbur "Fats" Henry

"He was a smiling, laughing, jolly kind of guy, the stereotype of the jolly fat man. But on the football field, he could be ferocious. And he was surprisingly quick and agile. Underneath that layer of blubber, there was a lot of pretty good muscle."

The Maroons, like the Eskimos, had three future members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame—Henry, Kiesling, and Johnny Blood—but they could win only two of their ten games in 1928. One of those victories, though, was vitally important to John's future. He caught two touchdown passes in a 26-0 upset of the Packers. Curly Lambeau was impressed.

For his part, John thought he'd like to play for a team in his native state. Especially since it was a promising team with a good passing attack.

From his home in New Richmond the following summer, he wrote to Lambeau, offering his services to the Packers. Lambeau was glad to get the letter. He immediately replied by telegram, asking John to come to Green Bay and talk about a contract.

CHAPTER SIX:
THE GREEN BAY
TREE BLOSSOMS

Green Bay, the home of the perpetual fatted calf.
--Johnny Blood McNally

"Here's my proposition," Curly Lambeau said. "I'll give you a hundred and ten dollars a game if you won't drink from Wednesday until after the game."

Johnny Blood didn't even have to think about his answer. "Make it a hundred dollars a game and let me drink on Wednesday."

Blood and Lambeau
Associated Press

Lambeau was startled. He stared at this big, dark-haired halfback; and the halfback looked back at him with twinkling blue-gray eyes and a trace of a sardonic smile. Lambeau wanted Johnny Blood to be a Packer, because he knew what he could do on the field. But he had also heard about the off-the-field exploits, so he had come up with this unusual contract offer.

Finally, the young Packer coach laughed. "You're so honest about it," he said, "that I'll give you the hundred and ten and still let you drink on Wednesday."

"Green Bay was definitely the place for me," John says. "My destiny, maybe. I loved the place and, I have to say, the place, the people, loved me. If you play for the Packers, the people in Green Bay know you better than they know their own brothers. And they care more about what you do. I imagine that's not so good if the team isn't going well, but I was lucky to be there during those great years.

"One thing about Curly was that his teams always went first class. We traveled on the best trains, stayed at the best

hotels. In Green Bay, we lived at the Astor. Compared to what players get today, the money doesn't seem like much—the typical player got $75 to $100 a game. But there weren't many guys our age earning that kind of money then. The YWCA was right across the street from the Astor, and we usually ate there. You could get a terrific meal for seventy-five cents.

"And the fall weather in Green Bay was beautiful. A lot of the time, of course, we had nothing to do—and just to do nothing was marvelous, in Green Bay."

Green Bay offered another important fringe benefit: It was very easy to get a drink. Speakeasies flourished. John repeats a legend that I've heard from a number of sources at various times. It may be apocryphal but, as with many apocryphal stories, the fact that it has been told and believed through the years indicates that it conveys reality, if not absolute truth.

"Federal agents from Milwaukee and Chicago planned a major crackdown in Green Bay," John says. "They were going to raid every joint, shut them all down, arrest everybody in sight. But the police chief got a tip. When the agents arrived, they were arrested and thrown into jail before they could do anything. After they got out of jail, they just went home, with their tails between their legs, and the speakeasies kept right on going."

Lambeau had signed not only Johnny Blood but also Robert "Cal" Hubbard and August "Mike" Michalske. All three were named to the first All-Pro team, in 1931, and all three are in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Since this was the era of single-platoon football, getting them was like adding six All-Pro players to the roster. The Packers were about to win three consecutive NFL championships.

Hubbard was an amazing specimen for the era, at 6-foot-5 and 265 pounds. He had played for Alvin "Bo" McMillin, first at Centenary College in Kentucky, then at Geneva College in Pennsylvania, and had been mentioned by some All-America selectors despite the relative obscurity of those schools. Then he'd spent two years with the New York Giants, including their first championship season in 1927. He was more than big; he could do the hundred-yard dash in just over eleven seconds,

and he was agile as well. Old-timers in Green Bay say he was the first middle linebacker; opposing teams got into the habit of running away from him, so Hubbard moved himself off the line to be able to chase plays. (Clarke Hinkle, the Hall of Fame fullback, once said that he signed with the Packers because he'd seen Hubbard in action and he decided he wanted to play with him, not against him.)

Cal Hubbard
Green Bay Packers

At 200 pounds, Michalske was a "running guard," often assigned to pull out and lead plays. Most men at that position weighed twenty to thirty pounds less. He had been considered a likely All-American before his senior season at Penn State, but he was then switched to fullback. Before Lambeau signed him, he'd spent three years with the New York Yankees, originally in the Pyle-Grange American Football League in 1926, then in the NFL in 1927 and 1928.

These three were vital to the Packer championships, but obviously they were not alone. It's worth taking a look at the other starters, and occasional starters, on the 1929 squad:

CENTERS

Francis "Jug" (for "Juggernaut") Earp, a big man out of a small school, Monmouth College in Illinois. At 228 pounds, Earp was bigger than most centers and could also fill in at guard or tackle. When he did, Bernard "Boob" Darling, a Green Bay product who had gone to Beloit College, replaced him at center.

GUARDS

Howard "Whitey" Woodin, from Marquette University, and Jim Bowdoin, from the University of Alabama.

TACKLES

Claude Perry, who had played for Wallace Wade's unbeaten Alabama team in 1925, and Ivan "Tiny" Cahoon, from Gonzaga University in Washington State.

ENDS

Lavern "Lavvie" Dilweg of Marquette, a superb athlete, one of the best pass receivers of the day and also a strong blocker and solid defensive player; Tom Nash, a 1927 All-American from Georgia; and Dick O'Donnell, a tall, speedy wide receiver from the University of Minnesota, who'd played for the Kelley-Duluths in 1923 and then joined the Packers in 1924.

BACKS

Joseph "Red" Dunn of Marquette, the team's top passer; Verne Lewellen, from the University of Nebraska, whose all-around skills were often overshadowed by his great punting ability; John "Bo" Molenda of the University of Michigan, who joined the Packers in 1929 after two years with the New York Yankees; Hurdis McCrary, a rookie from Georgia; Eddie Kotal from Lawrence College in nearby Appleton; and Carl Lidberg, the Minnesota fullback.

John has special comments on three of these players: "Red Dunn could throw the ball as well as anybody at the time. Benny Friedman was considered the best pro passer then, because he had the big college reputation, but every time we played the Giants, Red outplayed Benny, as far as I'm concerned.

Red Dunn
Green Bay Packers

"I still haven't seen anybody who could punt the ball like Lewellen. He kicked it deep and very high, so there was just never any chance for a return. They talk about the kicking game now, but it was even more important in some of those low-scoring games we

had, especially toward the end, when everybody was getting worn out. If you could out-kick the other team by five or ten yards, you could practically march for a touchdown just by exchanging punts. And he was accurate, just great at the coffin corner kick.

"Lavvie Dilweg was a tremendous competitor. He absolutely hated to lose. He and Red Dunn were the reasons the Packers had a good passing attack before other teams threw the ball very much. Of course, too, they knew one another's moves because they'd played together at Marquette."

Packer backs were expected to be versatile in those years, because the team used the Notre Dame shift that Lambeau had learned in his one season of playing for Rockne. Designed by Jess Harper, Rockne's coach, and refined by Rockne after he replaced Harper in 1918, the shift started with the backs lined up in the T formation behind a balanced line.

Occasionally, a play would be run directly from the T, but usually the backs shifted into any of several formations. Sometimes they would shift two or even three times before running the play. In the single wing, with its unbalanced line, the strength of the formation was on the side where both guards were positioned. In the Notre Dame shift, the final position of the backs determined the strength of the formation.

Rockne called his three basic formations the square, the Z, and the V. The most commonly used was the square, which became better known as the Notre Dame box. It was similar to the single wing except for the balanced line and the fact that the "wingback" was actually a slotback, lined up between the tackle and the end, rather than outside the end. To give the wingback a path down the field, the end on that side was usually split out somewhat—"flexed," in Rockne's terminology.

Another important difference was that, because of the balanced line, the quarterback was stationed much closer to the center, so he could take a direct snap—not a hand-to-hand snap, as in the modern T, but a short pass of about a yard and a half. In one series of plays, the quarterback could hand off to any of the other backs. Or he could fake a handoff or two and fade back to pass.

And, because the quarterback didn't have to throw on the run, as the single-wing tailback usually did, the formation could set up strong to either side without losing the passing threat.

The positions in which the backs lined up could, and often did, change from one play to the next. Since the fullback was usually the power runner, he might line up at quarterback and then shift into the blocking back position, either to take a snap and plunge directly into the line or to lead one of the deep backs on a running play. The quarterback was usually the best passer on the team, so he might end up as the tailback in a passing situation.

Harper and Rockne designed the system to confuse defenses and to make use of the special skills of the backs. But it also called for a variety of skills. A back might be a passer in one set, a runner in another, a blocker in another, and a pass receiver in another, on four consecutive plays. With the Notre Dame shift, there might be three or four double-threats and two or even three triple-threat backs.

The versatility required by the system is shown by the Packers' statistics for the 1929 season. John led the team in rushing with 406 yards. He was also third in passing with 16 completions in 30 attempts for 271 yards; second in receiving; second to Lewellen in punting; second to Dilweg in interceptions; and second to McCrary in punt returns. Eleven Packer backs carried the ball at least once, ten of them attempted passes, seven of them caught passes, four of them punted, six of them attempted extra points or field goals, and eight of them returned punts that season.

The only real constant was the man who called the plays, usually the quarterback. During the Packers' three straight championship seasons, Johnny Blood, although he played right halfback, was the signal caller whenever he was in the game. Curly Lambeau once said, "I never figured out how somebody who seemed so erratic could call plays the way he did. But he did it like a master."

Like the Eskimos, the Packers had trouble getting home games against NFL teams. They played only five league

games at home in 1929 and finished the season with eight straight games on the road.

After a 14-0 exhibition victory over the Portsmouth Spartans, they began their league season by beating Dayton 9-2 on a touchdown set up by a Cal Hubbard interception.

Then came a big game against the Bears, already considered arch-rivals. More than 13,000 cheered at City Stadium as the Bears suffered what was then their worst defeat ever, 23-0. Johnny Blood threw a 15-yard pass to Tom Nash for the Packer's second touchdown.

The game against another set of visitors from Chicago, the Cardinals, was much tougher. The Cardinals took a 2-0 lead on a first-quarter safety. The Packers were moving the ball but not scoring until Dunn kicked a field goal for a 3-2 lead at the half.

Early in the fourth quarter, the Cardinals moved to the Packer 29 but lost the ball on downs. Lewellen then took charge. He ran for 22 yards, completed four passes and ran for 12 more yards to move the ball to the Cardinal 4. Two running plays produced a touchdown that wrapped up a 9-2 win.

The unbeaten Frankford Yellowjackets came into Green Bay next, but they were easier. Frankford picked up a safety but could do little on offense and the Packers won 14-2. The next victory, 24-0 over the Minneapolis Red Jackets, was even easier. According to the Milwaukee Sentinel, Blood made "a spectacular catch" of an 18-yard pass from Dunn in the third quarter to put the ball on the Minneapolis 4-yard line. After one running play failed to gain yardage, Blood ran it in for the Packers' third touchdown on the next play. An oddity was that Green Bay scored four touchdowns and missed all four extra point attempts.

The Packers had won their first five league games. But now came the long road trip.

It began in Chicago against the Cardinals and Ernie Nevers, who had missed the game in Green Bay. This turned into a defensive battle, with Lewellen's punts keeping the Cardinals in their own territory through most of the first half. Near the end of the half, Eddie Kotal intercepted a pass in Cardinal territory. A few plays later, Lewellen faked a pass and ran 15 yards for a touchdown.

Nevers' running brought the Cardinals close late in the game. He reversed Lewellen's tactic, running wide as if to run and then throwing a touchdown pass, but the conversion attempt missed and the Packers won 7-6.

In Minneapolis, Johnny Blood and O'Donnell caught touchdown passes in a 16-6 win. But Lewellen was injured and several other players, including Earp and Hubbard were battered. And the next game was against the Bears, who badly wanted revenge.

More than 2,500 Packer fans took a special train from Green Bay to Chicago to watch the rematch on a cold, drizzly day. Neither team could score in the first half. Johnny Blood handled the Packer punting and did an excellent impersonation of Lewellen, keeping the Bears out of range.

In the third quarter, Dunn went to work despite the wet ball. He threw to Blood, to Dilweg, to Blood again, and then to Hurdis McCrary in the end zone for a 7-0 lead. Shortly afterward, Dunn left the game with a separated shoulder, but McCrary intercepted a pass and returned it for a touchdown and a 14-0 victory.

The Packers remained in Chicago for their third game against the Cardinals. Dunn and Lewellen were both out with injuries. In their absence, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported, "Blood passed, received and lugged the oval in fine style, and defensively stopped the Cardinals' passes with fine intuition, coming up from the safety position at least four times to intercept passes and also knocking down several more."

One of his interceptions set up a touchdown that gave Green Bay a 6-0 lead. In the fourth period, the Packers threatened again. They lined up for a field goal, with Blood holding for Molenda. But, while Molenda faked the kick, Blood straightened up and threw a touchdown pass to Dilweg. The final score was 12-0.

The Packers had now won nine in a row, while the Giants had won eight and tied one. And the next game was in New York.

A crowd of several thousand fans turned out at the Green Bay depot to wish the Packers good luck as they left on

the overnight train trip to New York. It seemed they would need luck. Dunn was still unable to play, and the Giants had an outstanding offense, with Benny Friedman throwing to Ray Flaherty, a speedy end out of Gonzaga University. Friedman was also a fine runner, and the defense was solid, too. In nine games, the Giants had outscored their opponents, 204 to 29, including a 34-0 win over the Bears the previous week.

There had been some scoffing at the Packers when they arrived in New York the year before, the big city sophisticates looking at them as a collection of country cousins—and the Packers had come up with a 7-0 upset. The attitude was somewhat different in 1929. The winner of this game would probably win the NFL championship, and more than 30,000 people turned out at the Polo Grounds to watch. It was the largest crowd for an NFL game since Red Grange's tour with the Bears in 1925.

The first time the Giants had the ball, Blood recovered a fumble at the New York 38-yard line and the Packers scored from there in nine running plays. Then the defenses took over for the rest of the half.

Early in the third quarter, the Giants finally got moving and Friedman threw a short touchdown pass to wingback Tony Plansky. But Jug Earp blocked the extra point attempt and the Packers still led 7-6.

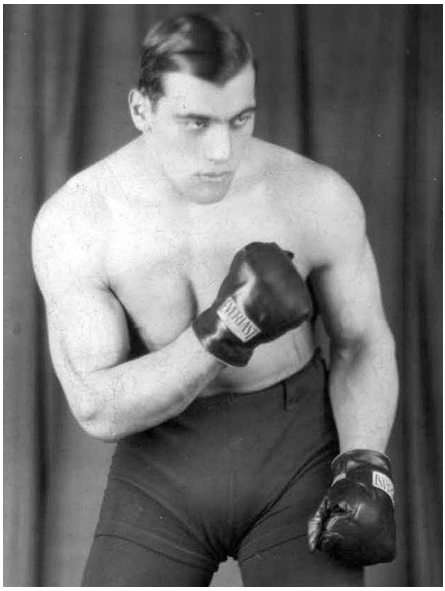
Johnny Blood made the first of two big plays at the beginning of the fourth quarter. Flaherty got behind the Packer defense, caught a pass from Friedman at midfield, and Giant fans cheered what looked like a certain touchdown. But they quieted when John caught Flaherty from behind and brought him down at the Packer 10. On the next play, a Friedman pass was intercepted in the end zone.

Blood ripped off tackle for 11 yards on the Packers' first play, from the 20. But three more Packer runs filed to gain another first down, so Lewellen went into punt formation. Aware of his great kicking ability, the Giant safetymen dropped deep. Blood set up as if to block, then slipped into the flat. Lewellen faked the punt, threw the ball to him, and John danced down the sidelines for a 26-yard gain to the Giant 35.

The Packers promptly moved for a touchdown on a series of runs, with Molenda plunging for the score. Shortly afterward, Earp intercepted a pass and returned it to the Giant 37. Again, runs moved the Packers into scoring position. Then Blood headed toward the line and suddenly swerved and sprinted around end for a 5-yard touchdown. He held in the ball in the air and yelled to his teammates, "Let's make `em like it!" as he approached the goal line.

The 20-6 win left the Packers all alone in first place, still unbeaten and untied. Obviously, a celebration was in order.

The Packers were staying on the eighteenth floor of the Lincoln Hotel in New York City. Fighter Primo Carnera, the 6-foot-6, 280-pound "Ambling Alp" from Italy, who was to become world heavyweight champion for a short time, happened to be staying on the same floor. John spotted him getting off the elevator. "He looked like a pretty good lineman to me," he recalls, "so I invited him to the party, and we offered to teach him how to play football."



Primo Carnera

It was a good party until about two-thirty in the morning, when disaster loomed. The ice was all gone. Others thought about the problem, or complained about it. Johnny Blood did something about it. He looked out the window, saw an ice wagon making deliveries to Eighth Avenue bars, dashed out to the elevator, rode to the lobby, raced out into the street, and caught up to the ice wagon.

The driver was quite willing to sell him some ice. "How much?" he asked.

John pondered for a moment. The party was still in full swing; there were lots of people and still plenty of alcohol. He bought a 140-pound block of ice, put it on his shoulder, and started back to the room.

The ice began to get heavier. And more slippery. His shoulder and hands began to grow numb with the cold, and he wondered whether he could hold onto it all the way to the eighteenth floor. Two women who had got onto the elevator with him were probably wondering, too. Ordinarily, they might have been thrilled at sharing an elevator with a tall, dark, handsome stranger. But this was obviously a madman. Who else would be wrestling with an enormous block of ice in a hotel elevator at nearly three o'clock in the morning?

Finally, the elevator reached eighteen. John staggered out, along the hall, through the door of the room, and to the bathtub, where he carefully deposited the ice. There was a burst of spontaneous applause. Carnera rushed over to shake his hand.

And the party went on.

It was more than a party, it was a moveable feast. The Packers took it with them to Atlantic City, where they practiced for a Thanksgiving Day game against Frankford.

The inevitable happened. The self-crowned champions of the National Football League suffered what coaches and sportswriters like to call a letdown, but in this case it was probably more like a collective hangover. They didn't lose, but they staggered to a scoreless tie.

(In fairness, it should be noted that the Yellowjackets were well rested, having had Sunday off, and they had scouted the Packers *en masse* in New York. Not only that, but the Packers were on the Frankford 12-yard line when the gun suddenly sounded, ending the game. There was no game clock then, so players frequently checked with the officials to find out how much time was left. Just a short time before, the Packers had been told that seven minutes remained in the game. They argued furiously but, of course, in vain.)

The game against the defending champion Providence Steam Roller on Sunday was the Packers' fourth in two weeks, but they won easily, 25-0, with John scoring two touchdowns, on a 26-yard pass reception and a 73-yard punt return.

Even now, after twelve games without a loss, they couldn't take the championship for granted. The last game would be against the Bears in Chicago. If the Packers were to lose while the Giants won, New York would win the title with a 12-1-1 record to the Packers' 11-1-1.

That final game was anti-climactic. Again, the Packers won 25-0. They had claimed their first NFL championship and they had done it impressively, outscoring their opponents 198 to 24. The defense had given up only three touchdowns, without even allowing an extra point; the other six points had come on three Packer safeties.

There was another celebration on the train headed home to Green Bay, with the usual horseplay—people pouring drinks on one another, and so forth. John was wandering around, snapping a wet towel at his teammates. Lavvie Dilweg pretended to be angry and grabbed at him; John evaded Dilweg's grasp and snapped at him again. Now Dilweg was really angry, and came out of his seat. A chase ensued, John racing through cars toward the rear of the train, Dilweg hot behind him.

Eventually, of course, John ran out of train and burst onto the rear observation platform. Dilweg opened the door. "Now I've got you," he said.

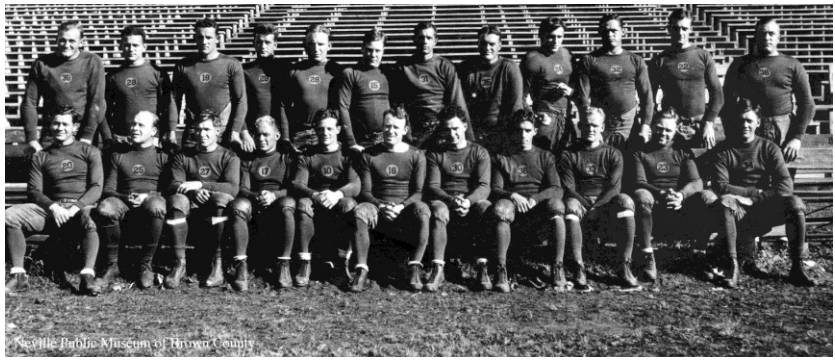
"No, you haven't," John replied. He leaped onto the platform railing, climbed to the top of the car, and began scrambling forward.

The story has been told many times—at least twice by John himself—that he went the entire length of the train, atop the cars, and finally dropped into the cab next to the engineer. But John admitted to me that that's not true.

"I went forward seven or eight cars, far enough to get past the Packers' cars," he says, "and then I climbed down. I went forward, through the cars, all the way to the front of the train. Then, when we stopped in Green Bay, I got out, ran up to the locomotive, climbed in next to the engineer, and let everybody think I'd made the whole trip along the top of the train."

When Green Bay was still about five miles away, eerie red lights could be seen along the tracks ahead of the train. Some of the passengers thought they might be warning lights; maybe there had been an accident on the line ahead.

It turned out that Packer fans had lined the tracks, waving lighted red flares at their heroes. This was the night of December 9, and it was bitterly cold in Green Bay. Nevertheless, 20,000 cheering fans rushed the train as it pulled in. Police and soldiers struggled to keep order. The players were finally hustled into autos for a procession to City Hall, where Lambeau was presented with the key to the city.



1929 Packers team photo--From left, back row, Cal Hubbard, Hurdis McCrary, Tom Nash, Bernard "Boob" Darling, Claude Perry, Red Smith, Verne Lewellen, Roger Ashmore, Johnny Blood, Jim Bowdoin, Lavvie Dilweg, Jug Earp; front row, Curly Lambeau, Paul Minnick, Bo Molenda, Roy Baker, Eddie Kotal, Red Dunn, Dick O'Donnell, Mike Michalske, Bill Kern, Whitey Woodin, Carl Lidberg.
Neville Public Museum of Brown County

The next night, about 400 guests attended a victory banquet at the Beaumont Hotel. Each player was presented with a watch and a bonus check for $220. There were several speakers. Johnny Blood, chosen to represent his teammates, was the last to go to the podium.

"I want to thank all of you, on behalf of the players, for being here and for supporting us all season," he said. "I am especially grateful for the check. I was reading the other day in a Chicago newspaper where they shot fourteen wolves in Rhinelander. It's going to be a long, hard winter.

"I spent four previous seasons in pro football, with three other teams. I've been in all of the cities in the league, and a lot of cities that aren't in the league, and I starved in most of them. But I haven't starved in Green Bay.

"Cal Hubbard was on the New York championship team when it brought home the bacon," he continued, "and the great city of New York presented each player with a ten-dollar gold piece as evidence of their enormous appreciation. That makes you people worth at least twenty-two times as much as the fans in the big city.

"I'm very, very happy to be playing football in Green Bay—the home of the perpetual fatted calf."

Meanwhile, Clarence Saunders, the founder of the Piggly-Wiggly grocery store chain, had called Lambeau and challenged him to a post-season exhibition game against his team, the Memphis Tigers.

The Tigers were a very good independent team that had won all nine of its games against other independent teams, but they had lost an exhibition game against the Chicago Bears. The Tigers played the Bears tough for most of the game. They led 13-7 early and trailed only 20-19 at the end of three quarters, but then the Bears exploded for three touchdowns to win 39-19.

On the day that the Packers beat the Bears, the Tigers scored a 12-6 win over team called the Notre Dame All-Stars that included Ed Healey, who had not played at Notre Dame but had been a five-time All-NFL lineman with the Bears.

Saunders strengthened his team for the game against the Packers by signing two NFL stars, fullback-kicker Ken Strong and guard Joe Kopcha.

"We weren't very interested in the game," John recalls. Then, with a smile, "Oh, we were interested in the paycheck, but not the game. We were already the NFL champions and a post-season exhibition couldn't change that."

The lack of interest showed. On the train to Memphis, the Packers thoroughly celebrated their championship and most of them weren't feeling very perky when they took the field. After a scoreless first half, the Tigers scored three touchdowns to

take a 20-0 lead. The Packers managed to salvage a bit of respectability by scoring a late touchdown to make the final score 20-6.

The Tigers did benefit from a lot of questionable calls. When the game ended, Lambeau yelled, "Your officials won the game for you!" to the Memphis coach, Larry Bettencourt.

Saunders claimed that the victory made the Tigers the world champions of professional football, but nobody outside of Memphis paid much attention. The NFL invited the team to join the league in 1930, but Saunders rejected the offer, preferring to play most games at home against hand-picked opponents. The Tigers played four exhibition games against NFL teams that season and lost all four.

The Packers still had a lot to prove when the 1930 season began, despite the championship pennant that fluttered proudly on the blue and gold flagpole at City Stadium. No NFL champion had repeated since 1924. In fact, no defending champion had finished higher than sixth place since then.

But the team was relatively young, the starting lineup was still intact, and another future Hall of Famer had been added to the roster. Arnie Herber was part Oneida Indian, a graduate of Green Bay West High School. In his early teens, he had been a Packer water boy. After playing freshman football at the University of Wisconsin, he had gone briefly to Regis College in Colorado. Now he was home and playing for the Packers. Though he wasn't a starter when the season began—Blood, Dunn, Lewellen, and Molenda still made up the starting backfield—Herber played an increasingly important role as the season wore on.

Arnie Herber
Green Bay Packers

Nicknamed "Flash," Herber had been known primarily as a runner in high school, but he was to become the NFL's first great long passer. The ball was still rounder than the modern

football, which came into the NFL in 1933, and Herber held it the wrong way, with his thumb, rather than his fingertips, on the laces, but he could throw it a long way with remarkable accuracy.

(In 1937, the Packers made a short film during a post-season visit to California. Herber was asked to throw the ball at a two-foot-square pane of glass from sixty yards away. To the surprise of the cameraman, who wasn't ready for the shot, Herber picked up the ball, glanced at the target, and threw, shattering the glass. Another pane of glass was brought out for a second take, and Herber repeated the performance. This time, it was captured on film.)

After an easy 46-0 victory over Oshkosh in an exhibition game, the Packers opened the season against the Cardinals. Lewellen threw to Molenda for one touchdown and Herber threw to Dilweg for another in a 14-0 win. Then came the Bears, who had a rookie fullback named Bronko Nagurski. He gained a lot of yardage, but the Bears were always stopped short of the goal line. Meanwhile, the Packers weren't moving the ball at all until Blood intercepted a pass at the Packer 45. Blood, Lewellen, and Hurdis McCrary took turns running the ball from there until Lewellen plunged in for the touchdown. Dunn kicked the point and that ended the scoring.

The crucial game came on the third weekend of the season, when the New York Giants played in Green Bay for the first time, in a rematch of the contest that had effectively decided the 1929 championship. It went down to the wire. The score was 7-7 in the middle of the fourth quarter, with the Packers on their own 30-yard line. Dunn took the snap and began running to his right, with a couple of receivers downfield in front of him. The Giants moved with him, watching for the running pass. Then Dunn suddenly stopped and threw the ball back across the field to Johnny Blood. John eluded two would-be tacklers, broke into the clear, and sprinted for the winning touchdown.

John suffered a serious injury in that game, although he didn't realize it until the Packers practiced on Tuesday. Severe back pain forced him to the sideline and Lambeau sent him to a doctor on Wednesday.

The diagnosis was a ruptured kidney and emergency surgery was the treatment. The Packers were told that he would be out for the rest of the season, but he actually missed only four games. The Packers won all four rather easily.

After beating Frankford 27-12, they played their first road game, against the Minneapolis Red Jackets. They won 13-0, then returned to Green Bay for a 19-0 victory in a rematch with Minneapolis. The Packers' final home game was a 47-13 win against the Portsmouth Spartans on November 2, with five different players scoring touchdowns. It was the highest point total for the Packers in an NFL game at that time.

Then they began a seven-game road trip that opened with a rugged battle against the Bears in Chicago. Blood was back, and he opened the scoring in the second quarter by catching a 19-yard pass from Lewellen. The *Chicago Tribune* reported, "Blood leaped high in front of a defensive man, then fell across the chalk mark for the six points."

The Bears tied the score at 6-6, but Dunn threw a 21-yard touchdown pass to Lewellen and then kicked the extra point. That extra point was all-important. Led by Nagurski, the Bears rushed down the field for a touchdown but missed the conversion. On the last play of the game, Blood intercepted a pass in the end zone and the Packers were happy to escape with a 13-12 victory.

The Packers' 7-0-0 record put them in first place, just ahead of the Giants, who were 8-1-0, and they had now played 22 games without a loss, going back to the 1928 season. John's old Duluth teammate, Ernie Nevers, ended that string in another game in Chicago. He passed for one touchedown, ran for another, and kicked an extra point in the Cardinals' 13-6 win. However, Nagurski scored two touchdowns that day as the Bears beat the Giants 12-0, so the Packers remained in first place.

For the Packer-Giant showdown on November 23, a crowd of 40,000 fans turned out at the Polo Grounds. They got their money's worth. Chris Cagle, an All-American halfback from Army, joined the Giants for this game, but he was pretty well bottled up. It was Hap Moran of Carnegie Tech who came up

with the big play for the Giants, running 91 yards to set up the winning touchdown in a 13-6 New York victory.

Suddenly, the Giants were leading with an 11-2-0 record to Green Bay's 8-2-0. Thursday was Thanksgiving Day and Johnny Blood's birthday. This happy conjunction put the Packers back into first place to stay. John caught touchdown passes of 41 and 30 yards from Dunn to lead his team to a 25-7 win over Frankford while the Giants were being upset 7-6 by the Staten Island Stapletons.

On Sunday, the Packers faced the Stapletons, who were led by Ken Strong, a great runner and kicker from New York University. It was a surprisingly easy victory. Blood, Lewellen, Molenda, and rookie Wuert Engelmann each scored a touchdown. So did Paul Fitzgibbon, the little halfback who had played with Ernie Nevers' Duluth Eskimos; he was with the Packers for their entire road trip because of injuries to other substitute backs.

With a 25-7 lead late in the third quarter, John and Red Dunn decided it would be fun to let Cal Hubbard catch a pass. Hubbard had moved to right end, as he often did to give the Packers additional blocking power when they wanted to run the ball. Blood and Dunn devised an impromptu play in the huddle. John, from his wingback spot, went downfield, drawing defenders, and Hubbard broke into the clear behind the secondary to catch Dunn's pass for a 10-yard touchdown. Meanwhile, the Giants suffered their second straight 7-6 loss, this one to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

It was a peculiar season. The Giants had scheduled seventeen league games, the Packers only fourteen. At this point, the Packers were 10-2, the Giants 11-4, and each team had two games left. Two New York victories and two Packer losses would give the Giants the title.

In Chicago, the Bears made things closer by whipping the Packers 21-0. The Giants, who had beaten Frankford 14-6 the day before, ended their season that day with a 13-0 win over Brooklyn. So the Packers went to Portsmouth, Ohio, on December 14 needing at least a tie against the Spartans to clinch the championship. That was what they got, a 6-6 battle

that gave them a 10-3-1 record (.769) to the Giants' 13-4-0 (.765).

Blood's interception in Packer territory to end a Portsmouth drive was a key play down the stretch. He also caught a 13-yard pass for a first down that helped keep the ball away from Portsmouth and then he punted out of bounds deep in Portsmouth territory to make a comeback all but impossible.

On the trip back to Green Bay for another victory celebration, the train stopped at Columbus, Ohio, where NFL President Joe Carr greeted the team. "When the smallest city in the league can win the championship two years in a row," he said, "it's something to be proud of, and I'm as proud of the Green Bay Packers as any of their fans up there in Wisconsin."

The Giants struck a blow for pro football in a post-season exhibition game to raise money for the New York Unemployment Fund. Their opponents were the Notre Dame All-Stars, a team that included the Four Horsemen and two-time All-American Frank Carideo, whom Knute Rockne had called "the greatest quarterback in football."

Benny Friedman
Mike Moran Collection

Rockne had said many times that a good college team would beat a good professional team because, he felt, college players had more pride and spirit; pro players wanted only the money. Most college coaches and many sportswriters and fans agreed.

They were proven badly wrong in a game that packed 50,000 people into the Polo Grounds. With a great passing exhibition from Benny Friedman, the Giants won 22-0. The Notre Dame All-Stars didn't even make a first down, although most of the Giant starters sat out the second half. (It has generally gone unnoticed that this was the last game Rockne coached. He died in a plane crash in March of 1931.)

A little later, the Packers played an exhibition game in Memphis against an all-star squad that included several Giants.

They decided to try the same pass play that had beaten the Giants in Green Bay, with Dunn running to his right and then throwing back across the field to Johnny Blood. But the Giants remembered, and this time they had several people waiting for Blood when he caught the ball. His path blocked, John simply turned and threw it back. Since he was farther down the field than Dunn, it was a perfectly legal lateral, and Dunn had room to run, but he was so startled by the return pass that he just stood there for a moment and was eventually stopped before he could get back to the line of scrimmage. It took quite a while for the Packers to get organized in the ensuing huddle; Blood and his teammates were laughing too hard.

When the Packers won their third consecutive NFL championship in 1967, Vince Lombardi exultantly but precisely pointed out that it was the first time a team had won three straight since the championship playoff system had been initiated, in 1933. That qualification has often been ignored. Unaware of the early history of the NFL, many people, including too many writers, think that the Lombardi Packers were the first and only team to win three titles in a row.

But, as we have seen, the Canton team that won two in a row in 1922 and 1923 then moved to Cleveland and won again in 1924, a fact often unnoticed because of the move. And the Green Bay Packers of 1929-1931 also won three straight championships.

The 1931 team had two rookies who were to have long careers with the Packers: Milt Gantenbein, an end from the University of Wisconsin, who played through 1940, and "Hard Luck" Hank Bruder, a quarterback from Northwestern, who played through 1939.

Although all of the 1930 starters were back, Lambeau signed a number of other rookies, including Frank Baker, an end from Northwestern; Wayne Davenport, a back from Hardin-Simmons; Waldo Don Carlos, a center from Drake; Roger Grove, a back from Michigan State; Ray Jenison, a tackle from South Dakota; Arthur "Swede" Johnston, a fullback from Lawrence College and the only local product

among the newcomers; and Russ Saunders, a fullback from the University of Southern California.

Lambeau also brought in four veterans: guard Rudy Comstock and tackle Dick Stahlman from the Giants, halfback Faye "Mule" Wilson from Providence, and center Nate Barrager from Frankford.

The starting lineup had a new look. Lewellen, a long-time star, became a backup, replaced as a starter by Bruder, and Johnny Blood took over as the team's top punter. Stahlman, Comstock, and Barrager moved into the starting line, while Jug Earp, Claude Perry, and Jim Bowdoin went to the bench.

But "starting lineup" didn't have quite the same meaning that it had had in 1929. For one thing, the roster limit had increased from 18 to 20 in 1930, meaning a club could now have almost two teams' worth of players. For another, the more successful teams could afford to stockpile players. Before a game, the coach had to submit a list of 20 players who were on the roster that day, but there was no limit on how many players a team could have under contract.

Substitution patterns had also changed, at least among the better teams. The rule of the day required that, when a player was taken out, he couldn't return to the game during the same period. But the starters were no longer expected to go all sixty minutes, barring injury, as they had been a few years before. It wasn't unusual for a coach to remove a player midway through a quarter to have him well rested for the next period.

The Packers obviously had a very strong squad in 1931, and they might well have been able to win the championship with a basic roster of twenty. Yet they used thirty-six different players in the course of the season, and eighteen of them scored at least once. Lewellen, though not a starter in most of the games, finished second to Johnny Blood in team scoring, and substitute halfback Engelmann was fourth, just one point behind Lavvie Dilweg.

Fourteen different Packers carried the ball that season and eight of them gained 177 yards or more. Ten players attempted passes and eight of them threw at least one touchdown pass. Fourteen players caught passes, six of them punted, and nine of them returned punts.

By contrast, the Frankford Yellowjackets, who finished last in 1931, used only twenty-one players, and five of them were traded away during the season, while only one was acquired—meaning that, for at least part of the season, the roster numbered only sixteen. Only one player on that squad rushed for more than 100 yards.

Because they were two-time champions, the Packers found it easier to line up home games in 1931. They opened with seven straight games at home, went to Chicago to play the Bears, returned to Green Bay for their final home game against the Staten Island Stapletons, and then went on the familiar season-ending road trip. In 1931, however, the trip lasted for only five games, not seven.

Their first two home games were against weak teams and the weather was unusually hot, so Lambeau elected to rest some veterans. He started six rookies in each of the games. Two of them, Baker and Saunders, scored touchdowns in the opener against the Cleveland Indians. Wilson, essentially a third-string fullback behind Molenda and Hurdis McCrary, also scored and McCrary added the fourth touchdown in a 26-0 win. Five Packers scored touchdowns when they beat Brooklyn 32-6, and only one of them was a genuine regular.

The Packers won their third straight when Lewellen came off the bench to score the only touchdown in a 7-0 victory over the Bears on September 27. Then the dreaded Giants came to town, but the Packers handled them easily, 27-7. John, who had played sparingly up to now, caught his first touchdown pass of the season. The *Press-Gazette* reported, "It was a great catch by Blood and he took the ball out of the hands of a Giant back."

Led by Ernie Nevers, the Cardinals had a 7-0 halftime lead in the fifth home game, but Johnny Blood took over in the second half. According to the *New York Times* account, "he made two sensational catches for touchdowns" to give the Packers a 13-7 lead. On the first touchdown catch, Green Bay faced a third-and-ten situation at the Cardinal 40. John went downfield far enough to make the first down, outfought Nevers for the ball, and eluded two other Cardinal defenders to cover

the final 30 yards. A few minutes later, said the *Press-Gazette*, he "took the ball out of the air with a seemingly impossible catch, stumbled three yards, and fell over the goal" for a 15-yard touchdown. In the fourth quarter, he intercepted a Nevers pass and ran it back 44 yards for his third touchdown. The Packers ended up winning 26-7.

Against Frankford, the Packers again played poorly at first and had only a 2-0 lead at halftime. Again, Blood pulled them through in the second half. The Packers had a fourth-and-goal at the Cardinal 7 when Roger Grove threw a quick, low pass to John short of the goal line. He "fell on his face catching the ball, rolled over, and lunged across the goal line," the *Press-Gazette* reported. In the fourth quarter, John sprinted around end from 19 yards out to make the final score 15-0.

Blood's backup, Wuert Engelmann, starred in a 48-20 win over Providence on October 25. Engelmann caught two touchdown passes and returned a kickoff for another score.

Despite seven straight victories, five of them by lopsided scores, the Packers were in a first-place tie with the Portsmouth Spartans. So their first road game, against the Bears in Chicago, was crucial. More than 30,000 fans turned out, a record for the Bears at home. Chicago had a 2-0 lead and was threatening to score again late in the game when Cal Hubbard burst through the line to force a fumble. Mike Michalske picked it up and ran 80 yards for a touchdown and a 6-2 win.

That was on Sunday, November 1. Meanwhile, difficult scheduling dropped Portsmouth into second place. The Spartans had beaten Frankford 14-0 on Saturday. But, while the Packers were edging the Bears, Portsmouth had to travel to New York to meet the Giants in the Polo Grounds. Benny Friedman, who had temporarily retired after the 1930 season, returned to the New York lineup to lead a 14-0 victory. The Packers were now 8-0-0, while the Spartans were 8-1-0.

A potential scheduling problem loomed ahead. Green Bay and Portsmouth weren't going to play one another during the regular season. The president of the Packers, Lee Joannes, talked with Portsmouth Coach George "Potsy" Clark about a possible post-season game, which might well decide the NFL championship. Joannes suggested playing in Milwaukee,

supposedly neutral ground. Clark, of course, wanted the game to be in Portsmouth. It's impossible to say whether any actual agreement was reached; there was to be a controversy about that when the season ended.

Blood scored two touchdowns, on a 37-yard pass reception and a 13-yard run around right end, when the Packers beat Staten Island 26-0 in their final home game, while Portsmouth lost its second straight game, 9-6, to the Bears. That gave Green Bay a two-game lead going into the season-ending five-game road trip.

As usual, the Packers had problems with the Cardinals in Chicago, losing 21-13. Meanwhile, Portsmouth picked up two more victories, beating Staten Island 14-12 on Thursday and Cleveland 14-0 on Sunday.

Even though the Giants were out of the running with a 5-4-0 record, the Packers drew 40,000 people to the Polo Grounds on November 22. The fans were rewarded with an exciting game. In the first quarter, Red Dunn threw the ball to John, who "made a leaping catch on the [New York] 35-yard line," according to the *New York Times*, and "and raced to the right and down the field" for a 53-yard touchdown that gave the Packers a 7-0 lead. The Giants scored the next 10 points. Dunn threw another touchdown pass, this one to Hank Bruder, in the fourth quarter for a 14-10 lead. The Giants promptly moved the ball to the Packer 20, but they were still there when time ran out. Meanwhile, the Cardinals pulled their second straight upset, knocking off Portsmouth 20-0.

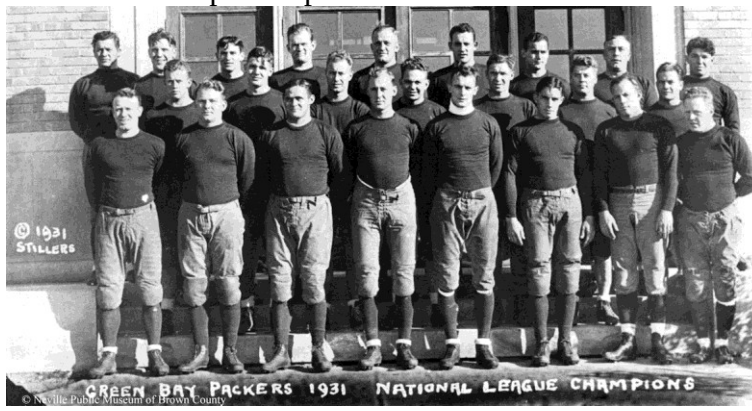
In Providence, Blood's three touchdown catches, of 22, 30, and 50 yards, led the Packers to a 38-7 win on Thanksgiving Day. Playing their third game in eight days, Green Bay then eked out a 7-0 win over Brooklyn. The Packers went into Chicago on December 6 for the traditional final game of the season with nothing to lose. They had a 12-1-0 record, while Portsmouth had already finished with an 11-3-0 mark.

Carl Brumbaugh threw a touchdown pass on the first play from scrimmage and the Bears took a 7-0 lead. John caught a 32-yard touchdown pass in the second quarter, but Dunn

missed the extra point kick. That was the end of the scoring and the Packers suffered their second loss, 7-6.

It didn't matter. Or did it? The Spartans hadn't disbanded; they were still in Portsmouth, awaiting the playoff game that they thought had been scheduled. Lambeau and Lee Joannes argued that they had meant to have a playoff only if the teams were tied at the end of the season and that, if there was such a game, they had planned to play it in Milwaukee.

The Spartans appealed to NFL President Carr. He ruled there was no point in a playoff. Even if Portsmouth won, he pointed out, the teams would have identical 12-3 records. And then, presumably, another playoff game would be necessary to decide the championship.



1931 Packers team photo--From left, back row, Curly Lambeau, Dick Stahlman, Johnny Blood, Red Sleight, Cal Hubbard, Tom Nash, Hurdis McCrary, Jug Earp, Arnie Herber; middle row, Roger Grove, Waldo Don Carlos, Hank Bruder, Milt Gantenbein, Bo Molenda, Rudy Comstock, Russ Saunders; front row, Red Dunn, Nate Barrager, Jim Bowdoin, Wuert Engelmann, Lavvie Dilweg, Mike Michalske, Mule Wilson, Paul Fitzgibbon

Neville Public Museum of Brown County

So the Packers had won three titles in a row. Despite the grumbling from Portsmouth, Green Bay was probably the better team. The Packers scored 291 points that season, 116 more than the Spartans, against essentially the same schedule. They gave up just 87 points, while the Spartans gave up 77.

In the three years since the arrival of Blood, Hubbard, and Michalske, the Packers had compiled a record of thirty-four wins, five losses, and two ties, outscoring the opposition 723 to 229.

Johnny Blood had had three fine seasons in Green Bay, but 1931 was unquestionably the greatest season of his long professional career. He caught only 22 passes, but 11 of them went for touchdowns, and he averaged 22.3 yards per reception, an incredible figure for the era. Though used sparingly as a runner, he rushed for 195 yards and two touchdowns. He completed just 3 of 10 passes, but one of the completions went for a score. As noted, he took over as the team's top punter that season, kicking 55 times for a 37.3 average (the league average was only 36.8 yards). John also led the league with 6 interceptions, and he returned one of those for a touchdown.

Mike Michalske

His 84 points, all on touchdowns, easily led the league. Ernie Nevers finished second with 66 and Dutch Clark of Portsmouth was third with 60, but both of them also kicked extra points and field goals. Although the NFL didn't keep official records at the time, Johnny Blood's 14 touchdowns was the league's unofficial single-season record until 1942.

The first official All-Pro team was chosen after the 1931 season. Johnny Blood was on it, along with the entire left side of the Packer line, Michalske, Hubbard, and Dilweg.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
OKELAHAO
AND ALOHA

An' if sometimes our conduck isn't all your fancy paints,
Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster saints.
--Kipling, "Tommy"

The Packers had become one of the best-known teams in football and the fact that they represented a small city only added to their popularity. To capitalize on that popularity, Lambeau scheduled an exhibition tour, including some games on the West Coast, after the 1931 season. Red Grange joined the team for several games. His roommate was Johnny Blood.

"In Los Angeles," Grange recalls, "John and I had the room right next to Curly, up on the seventh or eighth floor. Curly had got a case of Scotch from somewhere—and it was pretty good Scotch, too—and somehow John found out about it.

"Well, John and I are in the room and he says he knows where he can get a free bottle of booze, and then he goes out the window and onto this ledge—it's maybe six inches wide, maybe a foot wide, but whatever it is, it's pretty narrow when you're up that high—and he inches along the ledge about twenty feet to Lambeau's window and climbs in, and then he inches back and climbs back into our room with this bottle.

"I don't know if Lambeau ever found out who took the bottle, but he must have had a pretty good idea. But then, I guess Johnny and Curly never got along too well," Grange concludes.

This stunt was only a foreshadowing of one of John's best-known exploits, which took place just about a year later.

Johnny Blood, the NFL's leading scorer, All-Pro right halfback, and signal-caller for a team that had won three straight championships, didn't have enough money to get from

New Richmond to Green Bay when the Packers began training in 1932. He decided to resort to an old trick: hitching a ride on a train.

The trip had to be made in two stages, from New Richmond to Amherst Junction via the Soo Line, then to Green Bay via the Green Bay and Western Railroad. The problem was that the Green Bay train was scheduled to leave Amherst Junction a few minutes before the train arrived from New Richmond. However, if the engineer knew that someone heading for Green Bay was coming in on the New Richmond train, he'd wait. So John used what money he had to send a telegram to the Amherst Junction station master, asking that the train be held. Then he got into the blind baggage and rode happily to Amherst Junction. His train was waiting. He jumped off the first train and into the blind baggage of the second.

After waiting a few minutes for the apparently nonexistent passenger, the train pulled out, bound for Green Bay. About halfway there, the baggage car door opened behind John, who was by now known to many railroad men in Wisconsin.

"Aren't you Johnny Blood?" the baggage man asked.

"That's right."

The baggage man eyed him. "Say, are you the passenger who sent the telegram?"

"That's right, too."

"Well, I'll be," the baggage man said, shaking his head. "This is the first time we ever held a train for a hobo."

But he invited John into the baggage car, shared his lunch with him, and loaned him his razor.

A couple of days later, John told sportswriter Oliver Kuechle of the *Milwaukee Journal* about his trip and Kuechle said, "I'm going to write a column about that. I'll call you the Hobo Halfback."

Lambeau overheard him and objected. He didn't want one of his players identified as a hobo in the public prints. So Kuechle called John the Vagabond Halfback instead. Lambeau still wasn't particularly happy. "It makes me look like a cheapskate," he told John. "I pay you enough, you just spend it too fast. But people are going to think you don't get enough money."

A not-so-funny thing happened to the Packers on the way to their fourth consecutive NFL championship. They won ten games, lost three, and tied one—but they finished third, behind two teams who won only twelve games between them.

The Packers were obvious favorites in 1932. Red Dunn had retired, but they had Arnie Herber to throw the ball. And they'd added Clarke Hinkle, a hard-running fullback from Bucknell, to complement their passing attack. Hinkle had led the nation in scoring as a college sophomore and finished third in the country despite missing several games as a junior. After leading all college players in touchdowns in 1931, he was chosen the most outstanding player in the post-season East-West Shrine Game, and he would ultimately join Blood, Herber, Hubbard, Lambeau and Michalske in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Clarke Hinkle with his Pro Football Hall of Fame bust

Once again, the Packers got off to a great start, partly because of that opening string of home games. They beat the Cardinals 15-7 in their opener. After a scoreless tie against the Bears, they whipped the New York Giants 13-0, then faced the Portsmouth Spartans in what was considered by some the playoff game that should have been in 1931. Hinkle was the star. With the Spartans winning 10-7 in the fourth quarter, Hinkle got off a 66-yard punt that rolled dead on the Portsmouth 1-yard line. A safety on the next play made it 10-9. The next time the Packers got the ball, they faced a fourth-and-one situation at the Portsmouth 22. Portsmouth braced to stop the plunge but Hinkle burst through the defense and went all the way for the winning touchdown.

A rematch against the Bears in Chicago was almost a replay of their first meeting. However, the Packers got a safety on a blocked punt for a 2-0 victory this time. Then they returned to Green Bay to beat the Brooklyn Dodgers 13-0. In their final home game, Herber was the star. He threw two touchdown

passes and had intercepted two, one of which he returned for

This is the only known photo of Johnny Blood in action. He's shown, left of center, carrying the ball against Staten Island.
Milwaukee Journal

85 yards and a touchdown in a 26-0 win over the Staten Island Stapletons.

The Packers continued to roll on at the beginning of their road trip. In a 19-9 win over the Cardinals, Johnny Blood caught touchdown passes of 45 and 17 yards and made one of his patented leaping catches between two defenders at the Cardinal 5-yard line to set up the third score. He caught another touchdown pass, of 35 yards, in a 21-0 victory over the Boston Redskins on November 13.

The Bears and Spartans played a 13-13 tie that day. At this point, it didn't look like much of a championship race to most observers. The Bears had won only two games while losing one and tying five, and Portsmouth had a 4-1-3 record. At 8-0-1, the Packers seemed to be almost out of reach.

Their next game was in New York, where John met an old friend, Ernie Nevers. Nevers had retired from pro football, but he'd agreed to put together a California all-star team to play the Packers after the season. They had a few drinks together and Nevers mentioned that there was a lot of interest among Hawaiians in bringing a professional team over for some post-season exhibition games. Nevers had been approached about it, but had declined. John filed the information away.

When the Giants and Packers played at the Polo Grounds on November 20, rain was falling heavily and the field was layered with mud. Despite the weather, 30,000 fans were there.

Late in the first half, Roger Grove of the Packers fumbled a punt and the Giants recovered on their own 49. After a first down, New York went into an unusual formation, with a back and an end split out to one side and two backs flanked to the other side. While the Packer secondary covered those four receivers, the remaining end, Ray Flaherty, ran a delayed route over the middle and was all alone to catch Jack McBride's pass to give the Giants a 6-0 lead.

That was the final score. The Packers threatened only once, late in the game. According to the *New York Times* account, "A beautiful run by fast-stepping Johnny Blood, after taking a pass from Arnold Herber, was good for a 29-yard gain." That put the ball on the Giants' 26. The Packers moved to the 19 in two plays but lost yardage on third down and then a pass fell incomplete. The Giants quickly punted out of trouble and the Packers had their first loss of the season.

The *Times* also commented, "Time and again both Herber and Blood, the two speedsters of the Packer team, started out on what appeared to be long runs, only to slip and be easy prey for tacklers."

The loss seemed relatively unimportant. Green Bay's 8-1-1 record still looked far better than Portsmouth's 5-1-3 mark and the Bears' 3-1-5 record.

Within a week, the Packers were 10-1-1. They beat Brooklyn 7-0 on Thanksgiving Day and Stapleton 21-3 the following Sunday, Blood clinching the victory by running back an interception for a touchdown. The Bears and Portsmouth played a 7-7 tie. It was Portsmouth's only game of the week, but the Bears also picked up their fourth victory, 34-0 over the Cardinals.

On December 4, the Packers met Portsmouth in Columbus, Ohio. It promised to be an exciting game. "They had a helluva running attack and a fair passing attack," John says. "We had a helluva passing attack and a fair running attack."

It was bitterly cold in Columbus. And it had become obvious to the entire nation that the Depression was not just a temporary business slump; it had already lasted more than three years and, whatever optimism might have been inspired by the recently-elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a lot of people wondered whether happy days would ever be here again.

As John walked to the Packers' hotel through the swirling snow in Columbus, his pockets almost empty, he began to wonder what would happen after the season. Jobs were almost nonexistent; he would get paid for two more regular-season games and for a post-season game in Los Angeles. At least it would be warm in Los Angeles, for that exhibition against Ernie Nevers' All-Stars. The association led him naturally to think of Hawaii. He had never been there, but he had heard a lot about its climate, its scenery, its climate, its friendly people, its climate…

Reaching the warmth of the hotel, he went to the Western Union office in the lobby and sent a telegram to the sports editor of the Honolulu newspaper, asking if anyone in Honolulu would be interested in bringing the Packers over for post-season play. Within a few hours, a telegram came back, telling him to contact a man named Scotty Shuman. So John wired Shuman, who asked how much money the Packers would want for two games.

John brought Shuman's telegram to Lambeau. "Here's something we can do after the season," he told the coach. Lambeau did some rapid figuring and decided he wanted $9,000 plus expenses for the trip. John promptly wired Shuman that the Packers would play the two games in Hawaii for $10,000 plus expenses and a cut of the gate receipts. He expected this to be the starting point for some haggling, but Shuman agreed without hesitation.

The Packers seemed to be ready for the game against Portsmouth. John remembers the Friday practice: "I never saw such a workout. Everybody was running hard, catching the ball, hollering, and four of us were kicking the bejesus out of it. It was one of those emotional things that happen. It was really spectacular, we were really on an emotional high. Then, on Sunday, we were flat."

They were never really in the game. Portsmouth's perennial All-Pro quarterback, Dutch Clark, returned two interceptions for touchdowns and the Spartans won 19-0. The Bears also won that day. Portsmouth's season was over, and the Packers were suddenly out of the race.

To understand why, you have to know that, at the time, the NFL had a peculiar way of looking at ties—or, rather, of not looking at them. Ties simply didn't count. A team that won one game and tied thirteen, for example, would have a perfect record and would finish ahead of a team that won thirteen and lost one.

With ties ignored, the standings looked like this:

Portsmouth	6	1	4	.858
Chicago Bears	5	1	6	.833
Green Bay	10	2	1	.833

The season-ending game between the Packers and the Bears would determine the champion—but in the wrong way, as far as the Packers were concerned. A Packer victory would give Portsmouth the title. If the Packers lost, the Bears and Spartans would be tied for first place.

It was cold and snowy in Chicago, too, and the game was a battle of defenses and punters. Then Bronko Nagurski got loose on the slippery field, picked up some momentum and, John says, "Everybody fell off him and he went all the way." A safety late in the game made the final score 9-0.

The first-place tie led to the NFL's first championship playoff game on December 18. It was scheduled for Wrigley Field but, because of terrible winter weather, the game was moved indoors to Chicago Stadium, home of hockey's Blackhawks.

The 1932 NFL championship game

Dirt and sod were trucked in to cover the concrete floor. The field was only 80 yards long from end line to end line, 60 yards

long from goal line to goal line, and just 138 feet wide—22 feet narrower than regulation. The sidelines came to within a few feet of the stands, so a special ground rule was established: After an out-of-bounds play, the ball would be moved ten yards in from the sidelines, rather than being put into play at the spot on the sideline where it had gone out of bounds. Because the end lines had to be curved to fit into the hockey arena, the goalposts were moved up to the goal line.

The game was scoreless until late in the fourth period, when an interception set the Bears up at Portsmouth's 7-yard line. Nagurski gained 5 yards on first down but was then stopped twice for no gain. On fourth down, Nagurski again headed toward the line, but he suddenly stopped short and threw a touchdown pass to a wide-open Red Grange.

The rule at the time was that a player had to be at least five yards behind the line of scrimmage to throw a forward pass. Portsmouth claimed that Nagurski had been closer than that, but the touchdown was allowed. The Bears added a safety in the closing seconds for a 9-0 victory.

That strange game had a lasting impact on professional football. The rules were changed to allow a forward pass from anywhere behind the line of scrimmage and to bring the football in from the sideline on an out-of-bounds play, resulting in the now familiar hashmarks on the standard gridiron. The goalposts were also moved from the end line to the goal line. And the fact that the game had drawn a capacity crowd despite the terrible weather led NFL owners to go to a two-division format, with an annual championship playoff game between the division winners.

"By any ordinary method of accounting, we won the championship," John says. As a matter of fact, the NFL changed the rules in 1972; a tie now counts as half a win and half a loss. Using that method, the Packers would have finished the 1932 season in first place, at .750, with Portsmouth second at .727 and the Bears in third place at .692.

The Packers weren't happy about losing the title. But at least they had the trip to Hawaii coming, thanks to Johnny Blood, and that was some consolation. After four days of rest in Green Bay,

they were to take a train to California and a ship to Hawaii for their post-season tour.

At the time, John was going out with an entertainer at a Green Bay nightclub. They were driving to the railroad depot in her car and John insists they were going to make the train. But he was driving too fast and a policeman stopped them. By the time John explained who he was and where he was going, they couldn't make it.

The train waited for a couple of minutes, but finally the conductor told Lambeau they couldn't delay any longer. Lambeau nodded. They would go to California without the Vagabond Halfback. The train pulled out, but there was a car blocking the tracks at an intersection not far from the station. Johnny Blood had put it there. The train had to stop for the temporary obstruction. John kissed his girlfriend goodbye and climbed aboard while she drove away.

"I could see Lambeau wasn't happy," John says, "but he didn't say anything. Nobody did. I was pretty popular because I'd set up the Hawaii trip." He became even more popular when a friend of his got aboard at Tucson with several gallons of moonshine. "From then on, we had a merry trip."

The voyage to Hawaii was sponsored by the Matson Steamship Lines, which had a virtual monopoly on passenger and freight traffic to and from the islands. Matson also owned the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu, where the Packers were to stay.

Prohibition had been in effect for more than twelve years. "Most of us were too young ever to have had a legal drink in a legitimate bar," John says. "But we had all taken a drink or two, here or there. We got on a Matson ship called the *Mariposa* and, when she got outside the three-mile limit, the bar opened. It was really something for us, to be able to drink legally. And the prices were half of what they would have been on the mainland—a shot of Johnny Walker for twenty cents. We were traveling second class, but they gave us the run of the ship. And the Packers were pretty well known, with those three championships, so we had no trouble at all making acquaintances. We had a ball."

After the trip, which took five and a half days, the Packers received an outstanding welcome in Hawaii. "Everybody was there," John recalls. "The Hawaiians, the United States Navy—it almost beat the reception we got in Green Bay after winning the 1929 championship. The people offered us the use of their

Packers wearing leis after arriving in Hawaii

homes, their cars, anything we wanted."

Mark Twain, who visited what were then known as the Sandwich Islands in 1868, noted this remarkable hospitality, and visitors are still noting it. Twain wrote, "They will make any chance stranger welcome, and divide their all with him—a trait which has never existed among any other people, perhaps."

The same sort of hospitality in a National Football League city would have stirred the suspicion that the Packers were being softened up for the local team, but there was no such suspicion about the Hawaiians. The Packers knew they had nothing to worry about. They were going to play a couple of games against some high school graduates, they'd been told.

"We thought we'd be playing a bunch of teen-agers," John says. "We never stopped to think that *we* were all high school graduates. We were surprised when we saw their team. These guys were just about as old, as big, as strong, and as fast as we were. And they'd been working out. We were a little bit out of shape."

The home team scored on a touchdown pass on the first play from scrimmage. But the Packers eventually pulled that game out and then won the second easily.

The Hawaiians were just as friendly the day the Packers were due to leave as on the day they'd arrived. There was an aloha party with plenty of *okelehao*, a liquor brewed from the *ti* root. (*Ti* is the plant whose large green leaves are often used to wrap Hawaiian food for baking.)

Okelehao is pretty potent stuff. Twain wrote about a Hawaiian liquor called *awa*, which is milder than *okelehao*: "Whisky cannot hurt them; it can seldom even tangle the legs or befog the brains of a practiced native. . . it is what cider is to us. . . . The native beverage, *awa*, is so terrific that mere whisky is foolishness to it. It turns a man's skin to white fish scales that are so tough a dog might bite him, and he would not know it till he read about it in the papers."

John drank a good deal of *okelehao*, and then it was time to leave. The Hawaiians, as was their custom, followed the Packers for some distance in small boats, wishing them aloha all the while. Aboard the ship, the party continued. After a while, some of the Packers noticed that Johnny Blood was missing. Clarke Hinkle and Milt Gantenbein went looking for him.

They didn't see him anywhere below deck, so they went above deck. Still no sign of him. And it was so dark and windy, nobody would be up here, anyway. . . but, on a hunch, Hinkle and Gantenbein wandered toward the stern.

Hinkle remembered: "We turned white. We froze. Johnny Blood was outside the safety railing, on the extreme stern end of that ship. He was hanging onto the flagpole. There he was, in the middle of that pitch-black night, with the ship pitching, and he was swinging around that flagpole. He didn't even know he was in any danger."

With the help of a couple of crewmen, Hinkle and Gantenbein rescued their teammate. "If he'd have dropped off that stern," Hinkle said, "nobody would ever have found him."*

*Quoted in Myron Cope, *The Game That Was* (New York, World Publishing Company, 1970), p. 100.

The next stop was Los Angeles for the game against Ernie Nevers' All-Stars.

John had worked on Santa Catalina Island, off the coast of California, for a couple of years during the off-season. "I don't exactly know why I went to Catalina," he says, "but I suspect that Avalon had something to do with it. Avalon is the only real city on the island and, of course, in the King Arthur stories it's where heroes went when they died. That probably in some way influenced me—I guess I figured it was the right place for a pro football player to go after the season."

During one of his stays, he says, he worked twenty-four hours a day: Eight hours in a brick factory, eight hours as the bouncer in a gambling casino, "and eight hours honeymooning with a redhead."

Now that he was in California, he thought of that redhead and of other friends on Catalina. But, as usual, he was short of money. In the hotel lobby, he asked Lambeau for an advance. Lambeau refused and went up to his room.

"I was mad," John says. "I'd set up the Hawaiian tour, and I'd even got him more money than he asked for. He was really surprised when I gave him the check from Shuman, because I hadn't told him about the deal I'd arranged. I figured he ought to give me a cut, but he didn't. So I thought he at least owed me an advance."

John thought about it for a while, then called Lambeau on a house phone. Lambeau refused again. John thought about it some more, then went up and banged on Lambeau's door.

"For once, I'm going to know exactly where you are," Lambeau told him. "You're going to have to stay right here in this hotel, because I'm not going to give you any money. I don't want you to call again, and I don't want you to knock on this door again."

John pondered some more. He had to get some money and go to Catalina. Lambeau didn't want him to call or to knock on the door. But he hadn't said anything about the window.

Lambeau's room was on the eighth floor. John found out from a chambermaid that there was an unoccupied room across an airshaft from Lambeau's, and he charmed her into letting him in. The airshaft was about twelve feet across. And a light rain

was falling. John opened the window and climbed out onto the ledge. Then he hesitated. Eight floors would be a long fall. And twelve feet, from ledge to ledge in the rain, could be a difficult standing broad jump.

At that moment, Mike Michalske happened to look out of his window, a couple of floors below, and he saw John. Michalske opened his window. "Is that you up there, Johnny Blood?" he called.

"Yes, it's me, Mike."

"What are you doing?"

"Curly wants me to discuss our strategy for the game, so I'm going to visit his room," John replied, and he leaped across the airshaft onto the ledge outside Lambeau's window.

The window was unlocked. (Asked what he would have done had it been locked, John immediately replies, "I would have kicked it in, of course.") John opened it and climbed in. Lambeau awoke from a nap and was naturally startled to see the apparition of the Vagabond Halfback standing beside his bed. He pointed to a pair of trousers draped over the back of a chair. "My wallet's in there," Lambeau said. "Take all the money you need. Just don't ever do anything like this to me again."

So John enjoyed himself in Catalina, after all.

The 1932 season was a disappointment; 1933 became a disaster. Verne Lewellen, Jug Earp, and Nate Barrager had retired, but the starting lineup was made up entirely of veterans from the 1931 championship team. Lambeau also added Charles "Buckets" Goldenberg, a guard-fullback from the University of Wisconsin, who was to spend thirteen seasons with the team; Bobby Monnett, a dangerous runner out of the University of Michigan; and Lon Evans, a guard from Texas Christian University.

However, starting linemen Hubbard, Michalske, Comstock, and Perry were all in their thirties, and their ages began to show. The Packers suffered the first losing season in their history. And the franchise also faced the most serious financial crisis of its history.

The NFL essentially entered a new era in 1933. In his eight seasons, Johnny Blood had seen the face of the league change

considerably. Akron, Canton, Columbus, Dayton, Frankford, Hammond, Providence, and Pottsville had dropped out of the NFL for good. Green Bay and Portsmouth were now the only small cities left among the ten franchises in the league, and the Portsmouth Spartans would move to Detroit and become the Lions in 1934. The other cities represented in the NFL in 1933 were Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago (with two teams), Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh.

As already noted, the league had been split into two divisions, with a championship playoff game between the division champions after the regular season. The Packers, in the Western Division with the Bears, Cardinals, Portsmouth, and Cincinnati, had high hopes. After all, during the last four seasons they had won forty-four games while losing only eight and tying three.

But, atypically, they got off to a bad start. Blood missed the first game with an injury, and Boston tied the Packers 7-7. Against the Bears in Green Bay, the Packers took a 7-0 lead into the fourth quarter, but Chicago end Bill Hewitt blocked two punts to set up touchdowns for a 14-7 win. The game attracted so many fans that temporary bleachers were erected at one end of City Stadium. A fan fell from the bleachers and was hospitalized.

In a game at Borchert Field in Milwaukee, the Giants took a 10-0 lead at the end of the third quarter. Blood caught a 43-yard touchdown pass, but that was the only Packer score in a 10-7 loss.

While the team was rallying with two victories, 17-0 over Portsmouth and 47-0 over Pittsburgh, to even its record, the fan who had fallen out of the bleachers during the game against the Bears was filing suit for $5,000. That shouldn't have created a financial crisis, since the Packers were insured. But, shortly after the suit was announced, the insurance company went out of business, a victim of the Depression.

In Chicago, Arnie Herber threw a 50-yard touchdown pass to Johnny Blood to give the Packers a 7-0 lead with about three minutes to play. But Red Grange threw a touchdown pass to Luke Johnsos to tie the game and shortly afterward Hewitt blocked another punt, this one setting up a last-second field goal that gave the Bears a 10-7 victory.

The Packers beat the Eagles 35-9 in Green Bay, Blood intercepting a pass to set up one touchdown and catching a 15-yard pass to score another. Then they returned to Chicago for a 14-6 win over the Cardinals. Their record was now 4-3-1. But, in the meantime, the public corporation that owned and operated the team had gone into receivership. Lambeau was told to cut costs wherever possible. He sold end Tom Nash to the Brooklyn Dodgers to raise some cash, released several other players, and took an unusually small squad on the ensuing Eastern trip.

The Packers immediately lost to Portsmouth, 7-0, and to Boston, 20-7, dropping below .500 again and erasing any hope of a championship. So they arrived in New York City depressed about the season and about their futures.

They checked into the Lincoln Hotel late Friday afternoon. After eating, John settled down with a book. Then the phone rang: It was the wife of a millionaire from the Green Bay area. She was visiting New York and wanted John to meet her at the Stork Club.

"This may wreck my image as a ladies' man," he says, "but I've got to tell the truth. I told her I was going to get a good night's sleep, because we had a big game coming up Sunday. So I didn't meet her. And I would have got a good night's sleep, too, except that just when I was ready for bed there was a knock on the door, and there were these two goddamned nurses. They were Packer fans, they said, and they wanted to meet us.

"So my roommate and I invited them in and had some drinks sent up."

Johnny Blood on football groupies: "We didn't call them groupies, of course, but there were a lot of them around, even then. Girls and women who just liked athletes, and they'd show up all the time. This millionaire's wife, who called me from the Stork Club, was one of them. She used to turn up pretty often in the cities where we were playing, and she'd call me or one of the other guys.

"The two nurses were the same. They were young, and they were attractive, and they knew the Packers were in town. They wanted to find out what pro football players were like, I guess."

Johnny Blood on alcohol: “My parents hardly ever drank. They were naturally high, naturally elated people, and a couple of drinks might have sent them out of sight. I’m the same way, except that I do drink. It’s a family thing. I’ve had three or four cousins die of alcoholism. My brother probably would have, too, but I saved his life—locked him in a room for a month, brought him food, wouldn’t let him drink, and it cured him. But I could never cure myself.

“Alcohol really hangs onto me. It’s partly because I don’t eat; I’m one of those people, if I take two or three drinks I don’t eat. It just shuts my appetite off. Now that I’ve thought about it for many years, I think it’s probably an unconscious drive just to have the experience that’s going to happen to me, whatever it may be.”

John and his roommate had quite a few drinks that night with the nurses. When John showed up for practice Saturday morning, the alcohol was still hanging onto him. “Curly gave me kind of a funny look when I came onto the field. I guess it showed. Then, when I tried a punt, I missed the ball completely and fell flat on my ass. Curly sent me back to the hotel.”

And, when Lambeau returned to the hotel after practice, he fired John. “He just called me to his room and said he had to let me go. I didn’t argue, just said `Okay, Curly,’ and walked out. I couldn’t really argue.”

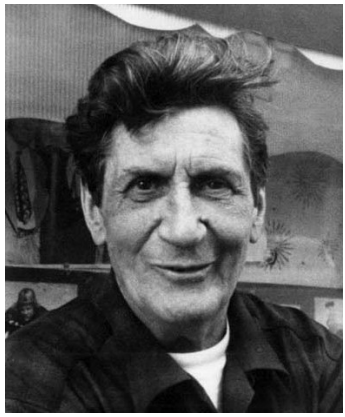
While the Packers were losing to the Giants, 17-6, and beating Philadelphia, 10-0, John earned some spending money by playing for a semi-pro team in Paterson, New Jersey. The Packers’ final game, as usual, was against the Bears in Chicago and Lambeau asked John to rejoin the team there. The Packers still had a chance to avoid a losing season.

It was one of those games. Clarke Hinkle returned the opening kickoff 95 yards to the Bears’ 5-yard line, but the Packers couldn’t score. The Bears finally took a 7-0 lead in the third quarter. In the fourth, Bobby Monnett ran 85 yards for a touchdown, but Hinkle’s extra point attempt was blocked. The Packers lost, 7-6, to end the season with a 5-7-1 record, despite having outscored the opposition, 170-107.

The Giants and Bears were the NFL’s first division champions, and the Bears won the first inter-divisional

championship playoff game, 23-21, before a crowd of 26,000 people in Chicago.

During the Packers' trip to the West Coast in 1932, John met Aloysius P. "Shanty" Malone, the owner of a San Francisco speakeasy. And not the way you might expect: Malone simply came up to John's hotel room, knocked on the door, and introduced himself. He was a real football fan, he said, and especially a fan of Johnny Blood.



Shanty Malone
Maury Edelstein Photo

"Shanty liked my style, I guess," John says. "He liked to see teams throw the ball, especially if somebody was there to catch it. And he was a very interesting guy, a working philosopher, a little like Eric Hoffer,* except that Shanty never wrote a book. We became good friends, and every time I've been in California since then I've gotten together with Shanty."

After the 1933 season, John hitched rides on trains to California, as he had in 1925 to play against Red Grange. For a few weeks, he was a pick-and-shovel worker on a WPA project in Los Angeles. Then he went to San Francisco and looked up Shanty Malone.

Prohibition had ended and Malone now owned a legitimate bar. John went to work for him as a bartender. "Shanty owned several different places through the years," he says, "and I tended bar for him several different times. His places were all pretty much alike—genteel, in a knockdown, dragout kind of way."

In May of 1934, the International Longshoremen's Union went on strike on the West Coast, and many other unions joined the ILU strike in sympathy. John suddenly saw a chance to go to sea.

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*Eric Hoffer was a longshoreman-philosopher who wrote a number of books. His *The True Believer*, a study of fanaticism, is considered a minor classic.

"I didn't mean to be a scab, necessarily," he says. "By that I mean that I had no interest in helping the boat owners break the strike. But I did want to go to sea, go to some different places, see some different things, and this was a way of doing it. So I signed on as a supposedly able-bodied seaman."

He worked on freighters that went to Yokohama, Hong Kong, Hawaii, the Philippines, Panama, and Cuba. He spent a night in jail in Havana for getting into a fist fight over "a matter of principle. I don't remember now just what principle it was, but no doubt it was very important to me at that time."

And he also suffered what he considers his narrowest escape, in Shanghai, when he arrived at the dock to see his ship pulling out. "I made a leap for the railing and missed," he recalls. "I landed in a whirlpool or something. The water was just very heavy and it was almost impossible to swim. Fortunately, some people pulled me out and got me aboard."

When he finally returned to the United States, he discovered that he was no longer a Green Bay Packer. He had been sold to Pittsburgh.

"I think Curly rehired me for that last game in 1933 because he realized I'd be a free agent if I was still fired at the end of the season," John says. "This way, he got some money for me."

The 1934 season in Pittsburgh was much worse than the 1933 season in Green Bay. The Pirates (they didn't become the Steelers until 1940) lost ten of their twelve games and scored only 53 points. John suffered a severe ankle sprain in the preseason and missed the first four games. He'd been acquired by the Pirates to improve their passing attack, but they didn't have a passer who could get the ball to him, so he was used only sparingly in the next six games. Then he re-injured the ankle and missed the final two games of the season.

He decided he wanted to get back to Green Bay.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
THE TREE'S
SECOND BLOSSOMING

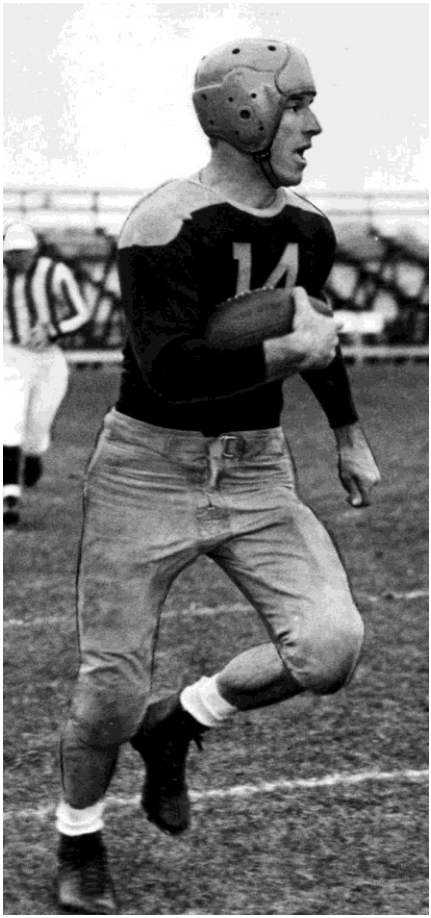
Here come I to my own again,
Fed, forgiven and known again,
Claimed by bone of my bone again
And cheered by flesh of my flesh.
The fatted calf is dressed for me. . .
--Kipling, "The Prodigal Son"

The Portsmouth Spartans became the Detroit Lions in 1934, leaving Green Bay as the only small city in the NFL. "The Hungry Five" had pulled the Packers through the 1933 financial crisis with a public fund-raising drive that brought in nearly $15,000, including pennies from schoolchildren and large contributions from businessmen. The team rebounded with a 7-6 record and a third-place finish in 1934.

On January 26, 1935, the Green Bay Packers were reorganized as a public, non-profit corporation. Six months later, Don Hutson became a Packer. He would quickly establish himself as the game's most dangerous pass receiver and one of its most exciting drawing cards.

Like Johnny Blood, Hutson became a football player almost by accident. He had been a high school baseball and basketball star in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. In his senior year, a friend, Bob Seawell, talked him into trying out for football and Hutson made the team. When University of Alabama recruiters showed an interest in Seawell, he told them he'd go to their school only if they'd take Hutson, too. (Ironically, Seawell dropped out of Alabama after two years.)

Hutson didn't became a starter for Alabama until late in his junior year, but then he was an immediate star. He and Millard "Dixie" Howell were the top passing combination in the country and Hutson was a unanimous All-American choice after Alabama went undefeated. Then he caught six passes, two for touchdowns, in a 29-13 Rose Bowl victory over Stanford. Known as "the Alabama Antelope" because of his effortless stride and deceptive speed, Hutson ran the 100-yard dash in 9.7 seconds, the 220 in 21.3 seconds. (The world records at the time were 9.4 and 20.6.) Along with speed, he had exceptional faking ability and great hands.



Don Hutson

Since the NFL's college draft had not yet been established, Hutson was free to sign with any team that wanted him. However, only two NFL teams, the Packers and the Brooklyn Dodgers, were interested, because of his size. At 6-foot-1 and only 175 pounds, he was generally considered too slender to play defense. John "Shipwreck" Kelly, the colorful Brooklyn owner, told Hutson that he would match any offer the Packers made, and a long, slow bidding war by telephone began. Lambeau would make an offer, Kelly would agree to match it, and Lambeau would raise the ante, usually in increments of $5 per game.

Finally, Lambeau went to $175 a game. Time was getting short, so Hutson sent Kelly a telegram about the new offer, unaware that Kelly was vacationing in Florida. After waiting a few days for a reply, Hutson decided that Kelly was no longer interested and he asked Lambeau to send a contract.

Shortly after Hutson signed the contract and mailed it to Green Bay, Kelly appeared at Hutson's home in Pine Bluff, having finally heard about Hutson's telegram. Again, he said he would match Lambeau's offer, so Hutson signed a second contract with Brooklyn.

But the contract with the Packers reached the league office first, so Hutson went to Green Bay. In his eleven seasons there, he caught 488 passes for 7,981 yards and an even 100 touchdowns. He also carried the ball 56 times on end-around plays for 262 yards and 3 touchdowns. And he kicked 172 extra points and 7 field goals for a total of 823 points. When he retired after the 1945 season, he held every NFL pass receiving record, along with records for most points in a career and in a season.

Johnny Blood decided that the best way to get back to the Packers was to prove to Lambeau that he could still play football. He decided to do it as an opponent. The Packers had three pre-season exhibition games against Wisconsin semi-pro teams in 1935, one against the Chippewa Falls Marines and the other two against the Lacrosse Lakers. John played for both teams and proved his point.

"I did pretty well in those three games, and then I told Curly I'd like to play for him again. He was agreeable," John says. "I think Curly rehired me partly because he could see that Hutson and I could be a really devastating combination, with Herber throwing the ball. I was thirty-one, going on thirty-two now, but I really hadn't slowed down much, if at all—maybe because I was such a late bloomer. As a matter of fact, when Hutson arrived after the College All-Star Game, I challenged him to a race the length of the field and he beat me by about a stride. And, remember, he was a big-time college sprinter as well as a football player.

"But I think a big reason was the fans. They'd been pretty upset about Curly getting rid of me and there were a lot of complaints. The fans really liked me—hell, I'd probably had a drink with every one of them, at one time or another. But that also caused problems with Curly. His ego had really got swollen by this time; he thought he *was* football in Green Bay, and I think he was kind of jealous of me.

"He'd sit me on the bench for no particular reason, and then the fans would start chanting `We want Blood!' and finally he'd put me back in. Or we'd be behind, and he'd have to put me in to try to get back into the game. That's one reason I developed a reputation as a clutch player, I think—a lot of times, Curly would use me only when he really needed a big play."

In addition to Hutson, there were several other important new players on the 1935 squad: Chet Johnston, a back from Marquette; George Sauer, a back from Nebraska, whose son, George Jr., was to become one of Joe Namath's favorite receivers with the New York Jets; Champ Seibold, a tackle from the University of Wisconsin; and George Svendsen, a center from the University of Minnesota. John was also reunited with Walt Kiesling, his friend and teammate at Duluth and Pottsville, who joined the Packers after several years in Chicago with both the Cardinals and the Bears.

The season began inauspiciously. Herber and Hinkle were out with injuries, and Blood and Hutson didn't start the opening game. The Cardinals won at Green Bay, 7-6.

Then came the Bears. Herber returned the opening kickoff to the Packers' 17-yard line, and Green Bay came out in an unusual formation, with Hutson split to the left and Blood flanked to the right. "It was similar to the pro set they use now," John says. "We used it all the time, with Hutson and me. But this was the first time anybody had seen it."

Tailback Herber took the snap and faded back. The Bears concentrated on Blood, who was streaking down the right side of the field. Hutson faked to the left sideline and slanted over the middle, running past his defender. Herber's pass hit him in full stride at the Bears' 45 and nobody could catch him. That

83-yard touchdown pass on Hutson's first play from scrimmage in the NFL was the only score of the game.

"The reason Hutson beat us on that play," George Halas recalls, "is that we never wanted Johnny Blood to beat us, so we covered him. The Packers had a lot of great players but until Hutson came along, Johnny Blood was the one guy who could beat you with one big play. Then, when they added Hutson, it was something really new in football. That combination was like Ruth and Gehrig or Mantle and Maris in baseball. If one of them didn't beat you, the other one probably would.

"There was nothing like it until the Rams had Waterfield and Van Brocklin throwing to Tom Fears and Crazy Legs Hirsch in the Fifties."

The following Sunday, the Giants' passing attack was the Packers' best weapon. The Giants were leading 7-0 early in the third quarter when Hank Bruder intercepted a pass and ran it back 65 yards for a touchdown. The conversion was blocked. A little later, George Sauer ran 45 yards to set up a field goal that gave the Packers a 9-7 lead. Then, late in the fourth quarter, Hubbard intercepted at the Giants' 8-yard line and ran it in for a 16-7 victory.

Hutson caught two touchdown passes, one of them for 50 yards, in a 27-0 win over Pittsburgh. But, in Milwaukee, the Cardinals beat the Packers again, 3-0. Johnny Blood made a leaping catch over the middle in the fourth quarter of that game and was immediately hit by three defenders. He left with a serious concussion.

There were reports that he'd be out for the rest of the season, but he missed just two games. Hutson was about all the Packers needed for those games, anyway. He blocked a punt and ran it back 41 yards for a touchdown in a 13-9 win over Detroit at Milwaukee. Then, when the Packers were losing to the Bears 14-3 with three minutes remaining, he caught touchdown passes of 69 and 4 yards to pull out a 17-14 victory.

After a week off, the Packers played the Lions twice in a row. They were winning the first game 10-7 when Blood replaced Bruder. He promptly caught a 70-yard touchdown

pass from Herber. A few minutes later, Herber threw to him in the end zone from 26 yards away. In the fourth quarter, Herber and Hutson connected on a 44-yard touchdown, Blood threw to Hutson for the extra point, and the Packers won going away, 31-7.

But the Lions got their revenge a week later. An old Packer nemesis from the Portsmouth Spartan days, Dutch Clark, intercepted four passes and threw for a touchdown while rookie Bill Shepherd ran for two scores as Detroit won 20-10. Blood caught a 27-yard pass from George Sauer to set up Green Bay's only touchdown.

On November 24, three days before his 32nd birthday, Blood caught a 44-yard touchdown pass and returned an interception 11 yards for another TD. Sauer also scored twice, including a 75-yard interception return, in a 34-14 rout of Pittsburgh.

As it turned out, a missed field goal cost the Packers the championship. In their third game against the Cardinals, they led early, on a 60-yard touchdown run by Bobby Monnett in the first quarter, but the Cardinals came back with a field goal and touchdown to take a 9-7 lead. With seconds remaining, Art Schammel's 18-yard field goal attempt went wide.

In the final game of the season, Clarke Hinkle starred on a muddy field in Philadelphia. He kicked a 39-yard field goal, ran 47 yards for a touchdown and added the extra point, then kicked a 37-yard field goal in the fourth quarter, scoring all of Green Bay's points in a 13-6 win over the Eagles.

Once again, the Packers missed out on a possible title because of ties. They won eight games and lost four—three of them to the Cardinals by a grand total of five points—and finished second in the Western Division behind Detroit, which had a 7-3-2 record. Under today's rules, they would have been tied and there would have been a divisional playoff game. The Lions went on to beat the Giants 26-7 for the NFL title.

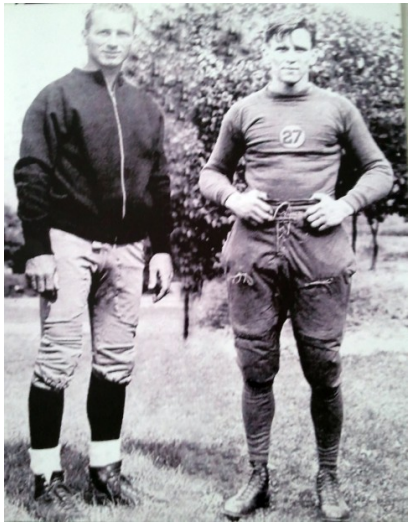
Before the 1936 season, Johnny Blood did something almost unheard of at the time: He held out for more money. "I was getting $150 a game," he says, "and Hutson was getting $175. I figured I deserved to get paid as much as he did.

Curly didn't see it that way at first, but he came around after I missed the first three games."

The Packers finally beat the Cardinals, 10-7, in their opener, but were then shocked 30-3 by the Bears at Green Bay. After they beat the Cardinals again, 24-0, in Milwaukee, Blood played for the first time against Boston. He and Hutson each caught a touchdown pass in a 31-2 win.

Then came the Lions. Lambeau, remembering Dutch Clark's four interceptions in the 1935 game that had, in effect, cost the Packers the division championship, decided on an unusual strategy: The Packers would surprise the Lions by running the ball. No passing, he ordered. And he started Hank Bruder in Blood's place to call the signals.

With Hinkle doing most of the running, the Packers moved the ball at first. But then the Lions adjusted and it became harder to gain yardage. Lambeau sent Blood into the game in the second quarter of a scoreless tie. "Remember, no passes," he reminded him.



Hutson and Blood
Lacrosse Tribune

The Packers moved inside the Lion 20, but Hinkle was stopped twice at the line of scrimmage. Blood called a pass play. While he and Hutson took defenders to the sidelines, right end Milt Gantenbein got free over the middle and Herber threw him a touchdown pass. Lambeau immediately pulled Blood out of the game.

A fumble recovery set up a field goal and a 10-0 Packer lead. But, in the third quarter, Ernie Caddel ran 28 yards for a Detroit touchdown and a safety cut the lead to 10-9. Then Clark threw a touchdown pass to Caddel in the fourth quarter and Detroit was ahead for the first time, 16-9.

Packer fans began to chant, “We want Blood! We want Blood!” So Lambeau decided to put him back in. “If you call a pass, you’re fired,” he told him.

The Packers were on Detroit’s 46-yard line. Blood called the play: a fake to Hinkle and then a pass. “Zoom it to me,” he told Herber. “I’ll be open.”

Hutson split left and Blood flanked right. John figured he’d be able to get free because Hutson would draw his usual double or triple coverage. But the Lions were thinking differently. Since Blood was well rested, they concentrated on him. While Herber faked to Hinkle, three defenders surrounded Blood as he sprinted downfield. Herber looked toward Hutson on the left, then turned to the right and threw the ball downfield into a swarm of people. All four leaped inside the Lion 10-yard line; eight hands grasped at the ball. But Blood came down with it and fell across the goal line.

After the extra point gave the Packers a 17-15 lead, Blood trotted along the sidelines past the Green Bay bench and grinned at Lambeau. “I guess I was unemployed for about 46 yards,” he told the coach.

The game still wasn’t over. Clark kicked a field goal with three minutes left and Detroit led again. But Blood called another pass, this one to Hutson, that set up a field goal by Tiny Engebretsen and the Packers pulled it out, 18-17.

Hutson and Paul Miller each scored two touchdowns, while Blood scored on a 58-yard interception return, threw a touchdown pass to Miller, and ran for an extra point after a bad snap from center when the Packers beat Pittsburgh, 42-10, in Milwaukee.

Then they went to Chicago for a rematch with the Bears, who had won all six of their games. The Bears took a 10-0 lead in the first quarter and Packer fans shuddered at the thought of another big defeat. But Herber threw to Hutson for a 9-yard touchdown and Hinkle ran 59 yards to give the Packers a 14-10 halftime lead. In the fourth quarter, Sauer scored on a 2-yard plunge after a fumble recovery to make the final score 21-10.

On November 8, the Packers edged the Boston Redskins, 7-3, on Hutson’s 20-yard touchdown reception in the third

quarter, while the Bears were beating the Giants to remain tied for first place.

Lambeau played Johnny Blood only sparingly because he didn't need him in three easy victories, 38-7 over Brooklyn, 26-14 over New York, and 26-17 over Detroit on Thanksgiving Day. The Bears, in the meantime, won two games but lost to the Cardinals, 14-7, to drop into second place.

The Packers needed nothing more than a tie in their final game, against the Cardinals, to clinch the division title. Blood started this game, on a field covered with icy puddles. The teams slid and splashed to a scoreless tie. The only big gain was a 28-yard run by Blood on an improvised play.

Two of the best-known Green Bay plays were called 40 and 40-X. On 40, the tailback simply handed the ball to Hinkle, running off tackle, and faked a reverse to the wingback. On 40-X, the tailback faked to Hinkle and gave the ball to the wingback, which often resulted in long runs. But the Cardinals stopped the play by assigning their end, Bill Smith, to tackle the wingback whether he had the ball or not.

In the third quarter, John called a new play: "Forty Double X."

"What's that?" asked George Sauer, the wingback.

"Just do what you do on 40," John replied.

John took the snap, faked to Hinkle, faked the reverse to Sauer, and then followed Sauer around end. While Smith was tackling Sauer, John went past him and got to the sidelines. "On a good field, I would have had a touchdown," he says. "But I hit one of those wet, icy patches and slipped, and then somebody pushed me out of bounds just across the fifty."

The Boston Redskins won the Eastern Division championship and were supposed to host the playoff game, but owner George Preston Marshall decided to play at the Polo Grounds in New York because of poor attendance in Boston. Only 3,715 fans had attended the Redskins' crucial season-ending game against Pittsburgh, which clinched the title for them. (The following season, Marshall moved the team to Washington, DC.)

Blood didn't start this game, but again he came up with the big play. Early in the first period, Lou Gordon of the Packers recovered a fumble at the Boston 47-yard line. After Hinkle gained 5 yards, Herber threw a 42-yard touchdown pass to Hutson. But the Redskins came right back, marching 79 yards for a touchdown. The extra point was wide and the Packers led 7-6 at the half.

Blood went into the game in the third quarter and immediately came up with what Arthur Daley of the *New York Times* called "the crusher," catching a 52-yard pass to set up a touchdown. Daley wrote:

> Blood was the hero because of his artful feinting of Irwin, his personal guardian. The veteran Packer went down straight and pulled the Bostonian with him. Then he cut to his left and went down straight again. Irwin did not know what to expect, unable to tell whether Blood was a decoy or the genuine article.
>
> Green Bay's "old man" never made a move until Herber had thrown the ball. It was a terrific toss, 65 yards in its flight, but the pigskin wabbled (*sic*) in midair. Blood, swinging left again, had to chop his stride to pull it down. That pause gave Irwin a chance to pound him out of bounds on the 8-yard line but the damage had been done.

The Redskins held the Packers for three plays, but on fourth down Herber threw to Milt Gantenbein for the touchdown. Late in the fourth quarter, a blocked punt set up a 2-yard touchdown run by Monnett to make the final score 21-6.

Johnny Blood had now played seven seasons for the Packers and they had won four championships in that time. But this was his last season in Green Bay. Art Rooney, the Pittsburgh owner, offered him $3,000 a year to become a player-coach, and he decided to take it.

"For one thing, the money was pretty good," John says. "For another, I just felt I couldn't play for Curly any more. And

I know he was glad to see me go at last. We were both chasing the same woman at the time, and the Pittsburgh job took me out of the picture.

"But I was surprised that Art Rooney wanted me back, because I'd been a disappointment to him in 1932—not so much as a player, since I didn't get to play much with the injuries, but as a Roman Catholic. Art was a very devout Catholic, as well as a devout horse player, and he liked to get good Catholic players. He always had several guys from Catholic schools like Duquesne and Fordham and Temple.

"When I was there, he was always after me to go to confession and go to mass and so forth. I used to tell him that I'd start going to church when he'd stop playing the horses, which was the equivalent of saying when hell freezes over. And I think—hell, I know—that was a disappointment to him.

"Maybe he thought he could reclaim me for the church on the second try. So he invited the prodigal to return."

Like Curly Lambeau, Art Rooney founded a football team primarily because he wanted to play the sport. Rooney was born in an Irish neighborhood of Pittsburgh known simply as "the Ward," where his father owned a saloon. In his early twenties, he became owner of the saloon and was also elected chairman of the Ward's Democratic Committee.

Art Rooney

He had been a good amateur boxer and he'd had one season as a minor-league outfielder, but a sore arm forced him to give up baseball. At the age of twenty-two, he formed a semi-pro football team called the Hope-Harveys. Rooney coached and played halfback.

By 1933, he had retired as a player, but he still liked the sport. So he bought an NFL franchise for $2,500 and named the new team the Pirates, just as Tim Mara had named his team the New York Football

Giants to capitalize on the popularity of a baseball team. The Pirates were renamed the Steelers in 1940.

Until Chuck Noll arrived to coach the Steelers to four Super Bowl victories during a six-year span in the 1970s, it was a woefully unsuccessful franchise. Rooney struggled for a long time trying to find the right coach. But, because of his impatience, he rarely gave anyone enough time to establish himself. Before hiring Johnny Blood, he had gone through three coaches in four seasons. After John's departure, the team changed coaches thirteen more times in thirty years.

"I think Johnny Blood was a great football player, and I think he could have been a great coach because of his intelligence," Rooney told me. "That's why I hired him. Unfortunately, he just wasn't disciplined enough to do it. He didn't work enough on the fundamentals. His approach was to try to inspire the team by using slogans and sayings, and that just wasn't enough.

"He'd have them doing calisthenics and chanting, `Pirates don't quit' or something like that, instead of the usual `One-two-three-four.' That's all right, a team has to have spirit and emotion, but it takes more than that."

John agrees, in part, with this assessment. "I don't have the temperament to be a really successful coach. I'm not ashamed of my coaching record, but I don't go around bragging about it, either. Part of my problem was that I concerned myself too much with the marginal players, trying to make something of them. You just can't do that. You have to work with the good players, the guys who are really going to do something for you, and just forget the others.

"It could be that stemmed from my own background. I was a late bloomer, remember, and maybe I was hoping that those marginal players were late bloomers, too."

Many professional coaches say that the toughest part of the job is cutting players. That was definitely a problem for John. When, as a rookie coach, he had to cut four players, he called other teams, trying to find places for them. He learned that the St. Louis Gunners of the Midwest Football League were still looking for players and then he persuaded Rooney to pay their fares to St. Louis for tryouts.

They didn't make it in St. Louis, either. So they sent Johnny Blood a telegram: "Where to now, Coach?"

John was enthusiastic about the Pirates' prospects when he took over the team. "They'd broken even the year before [with a 6-6-0 record], and I thought there was a nucleus there. I especially liked a couple of the backs—John (Bull) Karcis, a good all-around veteran, and a rookie named Stuart Smith, out of Bucknell. He was very fast, so I used him as an end at times. There was also a good veteran end, Bill Sortet; a pretty good kicker, Armand Niccolai; and a guy named Max Fiske, who could throw the ball pretty well."

Then, with a smile, he adds, "Karcis played for Carnegie Tech when they beat Notre Dame in the game that Rockne missed."*

A major problem with the Pirates was that they had only fourteen players back from the 1936 team. Of the thirty-one men who played for John at one time or another in 1937, thirteen were rookies, and only one of those lasted more than three years in the NFL. There were also a lot of "hometown" players on the squad, from Duquesne, Carnegie Tech, the University of Pittsburgh, and Temple.

"I soon discovered that we were very thin—just no bench strength at all," John says. "And that was a real problem, because the better teams in the league were beginning to use Rockne's `shock-troops' tactic, using one team in the first quarter and then bringing in a whole new team—or at least eight or nine new players—in the second quarter. We just couldn't keep up with that."

*This is a reference to Knute Rockne's greatest embarrassment. In 1926, the Army-Navy game was played in Chicago, and the Big Ten coaches were meeting there at the same time to draw up their 1927 schedules. Rockne wanted to schedule as many Big Ten teams as he could, so he decided to go to Chicago and let his assistant, Hunk Anderson, coach Notre Dame in its final game, against Carnegie Tech. While Rockne was watching the Army-Navy game from the press box at Soldier Field, the news arrived that Notre Dame, previously unbeaten, had been upset 19-0 at Pittsburgh.

But the Pirates and their new coach got off to a good start. They took a 14-0 lead in their opener against Philadelphia at home. After the Eagles came back to tie the game early in the fourth quarter, John put himself in to return the kickoff. He ran it back 92 yards for a touchdown. Late in the game, he caught a 44-yard touchdown pass from Fiske. Then he took himself out and trotted over to Rooney on the sidelines. "There's your ballgame, Art," he grinned.

The following week, they beat Brooklyn 21-0. John threw a 23-yard pass to Clarence Thompson to set up the first touchdown, a 2-yard run by Karcis. Then, in the fourth quarter, after the Pirates took over on their own 45, he caught three straight passes from Fiske, of 15, 32, and 6 yards, to score the third touchdown.

But Pittsburgh's lack of depth began to show in the third game of the season, against the Giants. The Pirates held onto a 7-7 tie for a good part of the game, only to lose on a field goal late in the fourth quarter. Then, at Detroit, Pittsburgh led 3-0 at the half but lost 7-3.

In Chicago, the Pirates outgained the Bears, 374 yards to 261, but couldn't score. They came close in the third quarter only to lose the ball on downs at the Bears' 18-yard line, and Chicago immediately went on an 82-yard drive to win 7-0.

John was involved in all three Pittsburgh touchdowns in a 34-20 loss at Washington. He caught a 43-yard touchdown pass from Fiske, threw a 55-yard touchdown pass to Thompson, and caught a 28-yard touchdown pass from Karcis. Again, the lack of depth hurt: The Pirates led 13-7 at the half, but Washington's Cliff Battles scored on runs of 65, 60, and 62 yards in the second half against the worn-out Pittsburgh defenders.

(Oddly enough, Johnny Blood was referred to by his real name, John McNally, throughout an Associated Press story about that game—the only time that ever happened, to my knowledge.)

After their fifth straight loss, 13-7 to the Cardinals at Pittsburgh, the Pirates beat the last-place Eagles again, 16-7, then lost to the Giants, 17-0. The high point of the season was a 21-13 upset of the Redskins, who went on to win the NFL

championship. But Pittsburgh's final game was a 23-0 loss at home against the Brooklyn Dodgers.

The record of four wins and seven losses was a terrible disappointment to the new player-coach, especially since his team had won its first two games. He couldn't even take much pride in the fact that, in a season in which he turned 34, he led the team in pass receiving and scoring.

The most exciting player available in the 1938 college draft was Byron R. "Whizzer" White of the University of Colorado. He led the NCAA in rushing with 1,121 yards in just eight games, and he had touchdown runs of 42, 47, 51, 57, 75, 78, 97, and 102 yards. He also completed 21 of 43 passes for 475 yards and he finished second in the nation in punting with a 42.5-yard average. Although Colorado lost 28-14 to Rice, White was the star of the 1939 Cotton Bowl, in which he ran 50 yards for a touchdown, passed for the other, kicked both extra points, and had an interception.

Whizzer White in action at Colorado
University of Colorado

White was ignored by other NFL teams because he had his sights set on more important things than pro football. Besides starring in three sports, he graduated first in his class, was a Phi Beta Kappa, and won a Rhodes Scholarship, so he planned to be studying at Oxford University when the season started.

But Art Rooney wanted White and made him Pittsburgh's first-round draft choice. White turned down an offer of $15,000 for two seasons. Johnny Blood then stepped in. He had, of course, been a Rhodes candidate himself, and he knew something about the scholarship. He told White it was possible to wait until the second semester, after the football season,

before entering Oxford. And he also had a new offer from Rooney—$15,000 for just one season. White was persuaded.

Besides White's signing, there were other reasons for optimism. John Karcis, the fullback who had finished third in the NFL in rushing in 1937, would be returning. The Pirates also added a good rookie passer, Frank Filchock from Indiana. And Rooney traded his first-round draft choice in 1939 to the Chicago Bears for a tough, experienced end, Edgar "Eggs" Manske. (The Bears, incidentally, used that choice to draft Sid Luckman, the first of the NFL's great T-formation quarterbacks.)

Nevertheless, serious problems lay ahead. "Rooney was impossible because of his horse-playing," John says. "He'd be rich one day and broke the next. And he had to pay White's salary. He'd take the gate receipts to the track and, when he lost, he'd sell a player to make up for it."

A check of the Pittsburgh roster for 1938 shows that there were definite personnel problems. The roster limit that season was thirty; the Pirates used forty-three players, far more than any other team in the league. Of that number, eighteen were rookies, and ten of those rookies played just that one season of pro football. In the course of the season, four different people played center, seven played guard, eight played tackle, nine played end, and sixteen played in the backfield.

Practicing was also difficult. The Pirates worked out at Greenlee Field, named for and owned by W. A. "Gus" Greenlee, a tavern owner and numbers operator who was the founder of the second Negro National League and owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, an outstanding team whose players included Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, Oscar Charleston, and Judy Johnson, all of whom are now in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

But, while the Crawfords had a good team, they had a terrible playing field, like most black major-league teams of the era.

"It was the ultimate in training conditions," John says sarcastically. "Absolutely unbelievable. The field was uneven and full of rocks. It was hard to run ten yards at full speed without stumbling or tripping over something. And there was

no hot water, so we had to take cold showers after practice. I don't know how they ever played baseball on that field."

The Pirates had a rather strange schedule. They opened at Detroit on a Friday night and lost 16-7, with White scoring their only touchdown. A day and a half later, on Sunday afternoon, they held a 14-13 lead over the Giants at the half, but lost 27-14. White accounted for a total of 175 yards in that game, rushing, passing, and returning kicks.

In another Friday night game, at Buffalo, they lost to the Philadelphia Eagles, 27-7. It was their third game, and third loss, in eight days.

Then came the best part of the season. Their next two games were against Brooklyn and New York, and the Pirates moved into a hotel on Long Island, near a big practice area. "It was the first time we were able to practice comfortably, without worrying about spraining ankles because of the rocks and ruts," John says.

They beat Brooklyn, 17-3, and then they upset the Giants, who went on to win the NFL championship. The score was 13-10, with both Pittsburgh touchdowns coming on passes from Filchock to Bill Sortet.

"Now we had another game coming up against Brooklyn," John recalls. "I wanted to move it from Pittsburgh to New York. For one thing, I knew we wouldn't draw many people in Pittsburgh. But, above all, I wanted to have those good practice conditions. But Rooney wouldn't do it, so we went back to Pittsburgh and practiced at Greenlee Field again."

Rooney was having cash flow problems, partly because of his losses at the track and partly because of White's salary. He sold Manske back to the Bears, leaving the Pirates nothing to show for the first-round draft choice they'd given up. Next, he sold Karcis to the New York Giants. Immediately after the Pirates lost to Brooklyn, 17-7, at Forbes Field, he sold the team's only other fullback, Ed "Scrapper" Farrell, to the Dodgers. John had to move Stu Smith from quarterback to fullback to fill the gap.

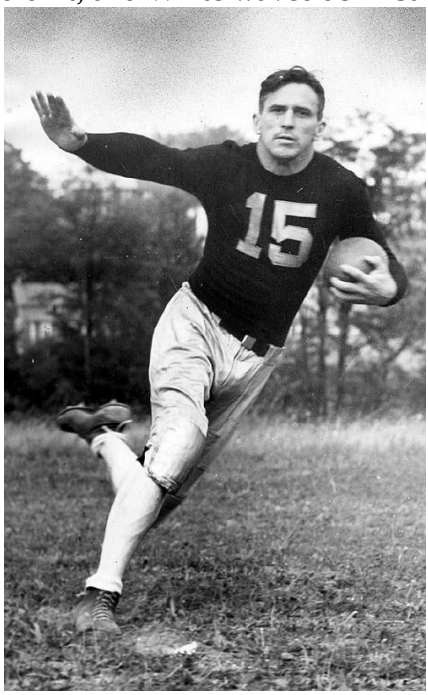
A day later, Rooney sold two more backs—Filchock, who was to lead the NFL in passing in 1944, went to Washington

for $1,000 and Tom Burnette was sold to Philadelphia for an undisclosed amount.

On top of that, three starting linemen were out for the season: Center Mike Basrak, the team's best interior lineman, with a broken leg, guard George Kakasic with a broken ankle, and tackle Ted Doyle with a broken arm.

After a game against Cleveland was postponed, the Pirates headed to Green Bay to play the Packers. This was the origin of one of the fictitious Johnny Blood stories, which Art Rooney has told a number of times.

According to Rooney, John tried to put himself into the game as a substitute. White, the Pittsburgh captain, asked the official if he had to accept a substitute. The official said he didn't, and White waved John back to the bench.



Johnny Blood as a Pirate
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

John bristles at that. "That's absurd," he rasps. "Do you seriously think that, when a coach puts himself into the game as a player, the captain could keep him out? Or would even try? That would be the end of that captain, no matter who he was. And no referee, then or now, would tell the captain that he could refuse to accept a substitute. If the coach sends in a substitute, he's in."

In his version, it happened the other way around. "We were short of players when we got to Green Bay. Lambeau and Red Smith [a Packer assistant coach, not the sportswriter] had been telling everybody I didn't know how to block. I didn't appreciate that. Hell, other players know whether you can block or not, and nobody I ever played with said that I couldn't block.

"On top of that, the Packers had a Sunday morning meeting at the Northland Hotel the day of the game, and Lambeau had written `Today we're out for Blood' on the blackboard. One of my friends on the team told me about it.

"Well, we needed a blocking back, so I played sixty minutes at blocking back that day. Walt Kiesling was in charge of the team from the bench. In the fourth quarter, he figured I must be tired, and we were losing, so he sent a substitute in for me. But I waved the substitute away, because *I* was the coach. You see, that's how crazy stories get started."

Stu Smith was injured in the 20-0 loss at Green Bay. Against Washington the following week, John replaced him and played all sixty minutes at fullback. It was the only time in his professional career that he was a fullback for more than two or three times in a game. Pittsburgh lost 7-0 on a fourth-quarter touchdown pass by Sammy Baugh, a rookie quarterback who was to break Johnny Blood's record of fifteen seasons in the NFL. (Mel Hein, a center for the New York Giants from 1931 through 1945, tied the record.)

With their depleted squad, the Pirates now had to play three exhibition games in three cities over a five-day period. Rooney had set up the exhibition tour to help pay Whizzer White's salary. After a victory over a semi-pro Cincinnati team on November 9, they lost to the Los Angeles Bulldogs 17-6 in Colorado Springs on November 11 and then tied the Bulldogs 14-14 in Los Angeles on November 13. White scored both Pittsburgh touchdowns in the game, one of them on a 40-yard interception return; John played sixty minutes at right halfback in both games against Los Angeles.

Another spurious story that has often been printed grew out of this trip. When the Pirates returned to Pittsburgh from Los Angeles, Johnny Blood wasn't with the team. Instead, the story goes, he turned up in Chicago to watch the Packers play the Bears. When a sportswriter asked him why he wasn't in Pittsburgh, John allegedly replied, "We don't have a game today." A moment later, the public address announcer gave the score of the Pirates' game.

John admits he missed a game, but insists he didn't watch the Packers play the Bears that day. (In fact, he couldn't have—

the Packers were playing the Giants at the Polo Grounds.) And he has an explanation of what happened:

"I was not only the coach and a player, I was the trainer and business manager. I had orders from Rooney to send him the money as fast as I collected it. We got $10,000 for each of those exhibition games and I sent him all the money. He was supposed to wire me enough money to get the team back to Pittsburgh.

"Well, he didn't. I kept calling him, but he was never in—he was probably at the race track. Finally, he sent some money, but it wasn't quite enough. I sent the team back on the train, with Walt Kiesling in charge. Then I called Art a few more times, but couldn't reach him.

"The day after I missed the game, he wired me the money to get me back to Pittsburgh. He probably took it out of the receipts from the game I missed."

The Pirates lost that game, 14-7, to the Eagles. Their last game, with Cleveland, had been postponed from October 16 to December 4. It was played in New Orleans. John again played all sixty minutes at right halfback in a 13-7 loss. The Pirate touchdown came on the last play. After running 46 yards to set it up, White threw a touchdown pass to Bill Sortet as the gun sounded.

So Pittsburgh lost nine of eleven games in 1938, winning just those two games in New York while they were training on Long Island. Aside from that two-game winning streak, the only bright spot was White's performance. He led the NFL in rushing with 465 yards on 152 carries, an average of 3.7 yards per attempt.

But White was studying at Oxford University in 1939. Those other young, promising backs, Filchock and Karcis, were also gone. And the Pirates didn't have a first-round draft choice. Nevertheless, John decided to try one more year of coaching.

On July 31, as the Pirates were about to go to training camp in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, he announced that he was retiring as a player. "Barring an unforeseen emergency," he said, "I will be strictly a bench coach this season." As it turned out, he

didn't actually get into a game in 1939; but, because of Pittsburgh's shortage of backs, he did keep himself on the roster, so he's listed as a player for that season.

Blood and Lambeau got together before the season to create a unique event: the only doubleheader in NFL history. The Pirates and Packers played back-to-back games, with 10-minute quarters, at City Stadium on August 25, two weeks before the regular season opened. The first game was a 7-7 tie and the Packers won the second, 17-0.

Pittsburgh opened the regular season with a 12-7 loss to the Dodgers at Ebbets field. A field goal attempt that would have tied the score at 10-10 missed when the kick bounced back off the crossbar. Then, in the fourth quarter, a Pirate rookie fumbled a punt at his own 5-yard line and bobbled it into the end zone, where he was tackled for a safety.

The Pirates lost their next two games, 10-0 to the Cardinals and 32-0 to the Bears. On the morning after the game with the Bears, John handed Art Rooney his resignation.

"Most of the time when a coach resigns," John says, "he was asked to. Art never asked me to, but maybe he should have. I was just tired of it. I decided coaching was not for me—at least, not in that kind of environment, with players coming and going constantly."

He was replaced by his good friend, Kiesling. The Pirates played eight more games that year. They beat Philadelphia 24-12 on the last Sunday of the season to finish with a 1-9-1 record.

John's NFL career ended as quietly as it had begun. But it had been a spectacular career. The league didn't begin keeping official statistics until 1932 and didn't pay much attention to records until after World War II. Despite the fact that stats are incomplete for his first seven seasons, when he retired he held career records for most pass receptions, 178; most receiving yards, 3,173; average yards per catch, 17.8; and touchdown receptions, 37. He was second in total touchdowns with 46. And, though he's best known as a receiver, he also had more career interceptions, 32, than any other player at that time in NFL history.

CHAPTER NINE:
A MEDITATIVE MAGIAN ROVER

To any meditative Magian rover, this serene Pacific, once beheld, must ever after be the sea of his adoption.

Melville, Moby Dick, Chapter III

When John F. Kennedy was campaigning in Wisconsin in 1960, "Whizzer" White introduced him to Johnny Blood. "Your name was a household word in my home," Kennedy told John.

They met again at a White House reception after Kennedy's election. "I was standing in the reception line right behind Walter Heller, his chief economic adviser," John recalls. "Unfortunately, JFK knew me only as an old football player. He didn't realize that I was the better economist."

There is a legend that Johnny Blood wrote a college textbook on economics. He didn't. Nor did he write a treatise on "Malthusian economics," as several writers have suggested. However, he did write a 150-page manuscript, entitled *Spend Yourself Rich*, which was never published. And he wrote it "in a madhouse," as he says.

"I was drinking too much," he explains. "Especially after the Pittsburgh experience. A couple of friends came up to me and said, `John, you've been on a big song-and-dance for quite a while now, and it's time you did something about it.' So I checked into Winnebago State Hospital with a portable typewriter and a lot of paper, and I wrote my book while I dried myself out for three months."

Like most thoughtful people, John wondered what had gone wrong when the Great Depression arrived. Unlike most, he began reading books on economics in an attempt to find out.

"I learned that economics is a quagmire," he told me. "No one has the full picture. Not Karl Marx or Adam Smith or Maynard Keynes or John Galbraith or Walter Heller—they all have only a partial grasp of the subject.

"They know more than I do, in the academic sense. But they're just wrestling with serpents. The trouble with the subject is that half of it is inside us and half of it is outside us. A lot of economic reality is based on people's needs and desires and values and distinctions. And we know what a wilderness psychology and psychiatry is.

"Classical economics, of course, is based on the idea of the `rational actor,' and what he will do under certain circumstances. This makes it all theoretical, because finding a genuinely rational actor in real life is virtually impossible. People buy or sell or save or spend because of their hopes, their fears, their dreams, their ideals, their beliefs, what they think they know. In the marketplace, all of the actors are at least partly irrational.

"When an economic crisis occurs, the economists are like the expert psychiatric witnesses in a murder trial, testifying vehemently on opposite sides. We don't have this when we send a rocket to the moon. We know when it's going to go, how long it's going to take, when it's going to get there, and where it's going to land. If something goes wrong, we can find out what it was. Economics isn't even close to being a science. We've learned the mechanics of production in this country, but we haven't learned the mechanics of consumption."

Thomas Carlyle called economics "the Dismal Science"; John prefers to call it "the study of morals and money." (His aunt, Margaret Murphy McNally, once asked him what he would do after he retired from pro football. "I think I'll continue studying morals and money," he replied. She laughed. "That's very funny," she said, "because you'll never have any of either." Similarly, Ernie Nevers once commented, "It's funny to think of Johnny teaching economics. He was always broke.")

By 1940, John had developed a theory: For the American economic system to work, people have to spend money, rather than saving. Thrift, usually exalted as a virtue, is actually a vice. Instead of "saving themselves poor," people should "spend

themselves rich." That's the basic thesis of the manuscript, which uses a number of parables to make the point.

One simple parable will illustrate what John was driving at. He imagines an island populated by just two couples, separated from one another by an impassable wall. They have a total money supply of only sixty dollars. One man makes bread, the other makes wine. Each Monday, the baker puts twenty dollars on a conveyor belt that runs through the wall, and he receives twenty bottles of wine. Every Thursday, the winemaker puts twenty dollars on the conveyor belt and receives twenty loaves of bread.

One morning, the baker's wife tells her husband she had a dream that hard times are coming, and she suggests that they should save some money. They put an extra dollar aside and send just nineteen dollars through the wall, receiving nineteen bottles of wine. The winemaker is sure hard times are here, because his income has gone down by five percent. So he puts a dollar aside and buys only eighteen loaves of bread on Thursday.

Now the baker's wife feels that her dream was indeed prophetic. She and her husband add another dollar to their savings and buy seventeen bottles of wine. This downward spiral goes on until the baker is buying ten bottles of wine and the wine-maker is buying ten loaves of bread per week. They're not willing to go below this limit. "At the ten dollar per week level," John writes, "these islanders found that their desire to consume overcame their fear of consuming, and the bottom of their depression had been reached."

Eventually, the wine merchant becomes morose and starts to drink his excess wine. In his drunken state, he decides to splurge, and sends twenty dollars through the wall. The baker and his wife are overjoyed: The depression has ended. They send twenty loaves of bread back and then buy twenty bottles of wine with which to celebrate their new-found prosperity. The following weekend, after making another twenty-dollar sale, they celebrate again, and on Monday they buy thirty bottles.

Now the spiral is reversed. The wine merchant buys thirty-one loaves of bread; the baker and his wife buy thirty-two bottles of wine; and on it goes, until each couple is spending fifty

dollars a week. They have gone from "saving themselves poor" to "spending themselves rich."

"I set out to prove that Poor Richard was wrong when he preached about thrift," John says. "He said a penny saved is a penny earned. I set out to show that a penny saved is a penny wasted. As a matter of fact, I wanted to show that thrift was what made Poor Richard poor."

Johnny Blood's football career was not quite over. In 1940, after leaving Winnebago State Hospital with his manuscript, he rejoined the Packers. He made only a brief appearance in the first of their two exhibition games, against the Washington Redskins, but he started at right halfback against the Kenosha Cardinals and was used mainly as a runner, gaining 46 yards on 7 carries.

Immediately after that game, the Packers released John and he was signed by the Kenosha team as a player-coach. That team unofficially won the 1941 Canadian football championship and invented a new formation in the process.

Kenosha, Wisconsin, is between Milwaukee and Chicago, not far from Racine, where John had won the race with the speakeasy owner's dog fourteen years before. The city had an NFL team, the Maroons, in 1924. Before and after that brief moment in the sun, Kenosha was represented sporadically by various semi-pro town teams.

During the 1930s, the semipro team was sponsored by the Cooper Underwear Manufacturing Company and was known as the Coopers, Cooper's Cardinals, or simply the Cardinals. After winning eight games and tying one in 1938, Kenosha became an all-professional team, hiring a number of outside players and joining the American Football League. Formerly the Midwest Football League, the AFL had taken its new name as a first step toward challenging the NFL.

The Cardinals were no more successful in the AFL than they had been in the NFL: They won only two of nine league games, although they won all four of their non-league exhibition games in 1939. The AFL was even less successful; it folded after that season—although, confusingly, it was replaced by a new AFL.

Kenosha was denied entrance into that new league, so it once again fielded an independent team in 1940. But management persisted in signing more players, including Blood and another player the Packers cut, Beattie Feathers, who in 1934 had become the first NFL player to rush for more than 1000 yards in a season.

Kenosha lost just three games in 1940, including the exhibition against the Packers, and they went 4-2 in exhibition games against teams in the new AFL.

John stayed with the team in 1941, when they played a very ambitious schedule, with exhibition games against five NFL teams. Kenosha managed to tie the Chicago Cardinals, but lost to the Packers, Giants, Bears, and Cleveland Rams.

They did have two victories over the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, who were the Canadian Football champions that season. Both games were played under Canadian rules, which call for twelve players per team instead of eleven.

John was listed as backfield coach, but he was more like assistant head coach to John Reis. “We didn’t want to change our offense or defense, so I just became the twelfth player,” John says. “You’ll remember that Red Blaik used the `Lonesome End’ formation at Army a while back, with Bill Carpenter flanked out all the time. He didn’t even come into the huddle.

“Well, we invented the `Lonesome Coach’ formation. I was the twelfth player. On offense, all I did was to go way out on the flank to occupy one of their defensive backs. I’d usually just run down the sideline to take him with me so we could run our usual eleven-man offense against their remaining eleven players. On defense, I just covered one of their backs all over the field. It was as simple as that, and we beat them at their own game.”

Actually, he played a somewhat more important role than that indicates. In the first game, played at Winnipeg, he caught a pass for what turned out to be the winning touchdown in an 18-16 victory.

That was on October 4. The team had three weeks off because of cancellations and the restless Blood headed off with two teammates to play a game for the Buffalo Tigers of the American Football League. Ironically, Blood disguised his identity by using his real name, John McNally.

The second game against Winnipeg was played at Kenosha on November. Again, the Cardinals used the "Lonesome Coach" formation; this time, they won easily, 35-6. As a result, John says, "We claimed the Canadian football championship for Kenosha."

Soon after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, John V. McNally Jr., age thirty-eight, enlisted in the Army Air Corps. En route to the China-Burma-India Theater, he assumed his Johnny Blood personality a couple of times to show that he cared as little for Army rules and regulations as he had for Curly Lambeau's.

As his troop train headed west for San Francisco, the port of embarkation, John managed to slip out of his assigned car. He climbed atop the train and crawled forward to the tender, where he lay on top of the coal and looked at the sky.

"It was New Years Day, and cold as hell—down around zero, I imagine. But it was also remarkably clear and peaceful," he says. "Here I was, headed for a world war, on a train going sixty or seventy miles an hour across country, gazing up at the stars. Everything around me was moving, but the stars weren't. Not that I could notice, anyway. It was reassuring to know that something was eternal."

When dawn broke, he returned to his car to learn that he'd created a furor. Officers had discovered that Pfc. McNally was missing and had assumed that somehow he had got off the train and gone AWOL. But nothing came of it.

In San Francisco, he did go AWOL before shipping out. He met a former girlfriend and decided to have a good time until he had to go to war. The good time lasted for nine days. Just as the troop ship was about to leave, a taxi arrived at the dock, and John leaped out and scrambled aboard. Because of that escapade, he was busted back to buck private for a while.

"I was not alone," John explains. "Quite a few soldiers took the opportunity to have one last fling ashore before getting into the war. However, I certainly was the last one to get back to the ship.

"I wish I could say that, once I got into the war, I helped to win it. But my major contribution to the war effort was teaching Chinese soldiers how to play basketball. I guess the Harlem Globetrotters had played in China before we got there, but I was certainly one of the first people to actually teach the Chinese how to play the game." (Actually, the Globetrotters, despite their name, didn't begin trotting the globe until after World War II and they didn't get to China until 1952.)

John, now a staff sergeant, was back in the United States on furlough when the war ended in August of 1945. He immediately went to the Packers' training camp and Lambeau made him a part-time assistant coach. The Packers had won the 1944 NFL championship and John was assigned to scout the College All-Star practices.

After the Packers beat the All-Stars 19-7, they played an exhibition game against the Eagles in Philadelphia. John, who had been involved in some scrimmages during Packer workouts, decided that maybe he could still play pro football, and Lambeau was agreeable. John got in for a couple of plays near the end of the first half. Then Lambeau sent him in to return a punt during the third quarter.

"I got under the ball all right, and I caught it all right," he recalls. "But then—well, I don't know how many Eagles hit me, or what they hit me with, and I don't remember anything else. I was carried off the field, unconscious, and that was the genuine end of my pro football career."

After a pause, he adds, "But, you know, at nearly forty-two I might have been the oldest guy ever to catch a punt in the NFL, even if it was an exhibition game."

Then he began drifting again, searching for a lifestyle, as he had twenty years before. And he was drinking too much again, he admits. "The madhouse and the war slowed me down for a while," he says, "but they didn't cure me. I'd finally found my career, my calling, but it was over, and I couldn't see any-

thing else to turn to. So I spent a couple of years re-investigating the effects of alcohol.

"Finally, I decided I couldn't just keep on like that. So I packed some books and took a tramp steamer to Guam, of all places. I spent about a year there, just reading and thinking."

He returned from Guam in the late summer of 1948 and promptly enrolled at St. John's, which had become a four-year college. Still an underclassman, he coached the freshman team to an undefeated season.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1949, at the age of forty-five, he intended to go on to the University of Minnesota to get his doctorate in economics. But he was offered a professorship at St. John's, and he decided to take it. He also got married, shortly after graduating, to Marguerite S. "Peggy" Streater, who was a secretary at the college.

Joe Benda, who had been the head football coach off and on since 1930, died in June of 1950 and John was asked to take over that job, in addition to his teaching duties. He agreed.

John doesn't talk about his first marriage, which lasted just seven years. But he does talk about coaching at St. John's, where his teams had a 13-9-1 record in three seasons:

"Everyone knows there's a lot of pressure in coaching at a big college, but there are also pressures, of a different kind, at a school like St. John's. At a big school, it's the alumni and the press, but at a small school, it's more personal. It's like playing in Green Bay, where everybody knows you. The monks and the parents and even some of the students give you advice, suggest plays. They all want to get involved.

"And there's the school pride, which is even more powerful at a small school. I mean, those guys in the black suits, the Benedictines, who've been there forever, they say, `We should win all our games, because we've got the best boys, so they must be the best football players, so we should have the best football team.' And you say, `What makes you think we've got the best boys?' And they say, looking at you as if you're crazy, `Because this is St. John's.'

"It's hard to argue with that kind of logic, if you can call it logic. I didn't even try to argue with it. I got an ulcer instead. Some of my friends were surprised that I got an ulcer. They'd

say, `John, you're not the type to get an ulcer. You're always kidding around, always clowning.' Well, let me tell you, even clowns get ulcers.

"Actually, I was just learning how to be a good college coach when they let me go. Part of it had nothing to do with my coaching. I didn't go to church, and the guys in the black suits thought I should. I didn't tell them that I'd given that up more than thirty years before."

John helped seal his own fate late in the 1951 season, during a practice for an important game. The field was surrounded by monks and parents while the team worked on a new play. One of the players kept missing his assignment.

Finally John called the player over and proclaimed, loudly enough for everyone to hear, "You'd better make that block next time, or God save your soul … if there is a God, and if you have a soul." His contract was not renewed and he was free to study for his doctorate.

His successor as head coach was John Gagliardi. He told Gagliardi not to take the job because "nobody can win at St. John's." It wasn't an accurate prophecy. Gagliardi coached at St. John's for 60 seasons, winning 465 games, 27 conference titles, and four national championships. He had just two losing seasons.

After leaving St. John's, John spent just two years at the University of Minnesota, working as a hotel clerk at night and as a part-time assistant football coach during the fall. He accumulated more than enough credits for his master's degree, but he never claimed the degree, nor did he ever finish the work on his doctorate.

"I realized that I wouldn't know what to do with a doctorate," he says. "My experience at St. John's had shown me that I really wasn't interested in teaching, and I didn't want to work for the government, either. So I decided just to cut myself loose and drift again for a while."

In the process, he also cut himself loose from his first wife.

John's mother, Mary Murphy McNally, died in 1956, after a long death watch during which she continually slipped into and out of a coma. "A couple of days before she died," John recalls, "she opened her eyes and looked at me and asked, `Well,

what will you do now, John?' as if I were a little boy who would be left helpless. And off the top of my head I said, `I guess I'll become a prophet.' I've never really thought much about this before, or about what the word meant to me at the time. But I suppose it indicates I've got messianic delusions.

"On second thought, that's probably putting it too strongly. I have those delusions only up to a point. When I wrote *Spend Yourself Rich*, I thought I had the final answer to our economic problems. But, once I'd finished it, I was satisfied. I saw no need to spread the gospel, once I'd laid it out to my own satisfaction, so I never even tried to get it published.

"Probably, when I said `prophet,' I mean something more like Melville's 'meditative Magian rover'—someone who just kind of wanders around, looks at things, thinks about things, and at least pretends to have some Magian wisdom."

Messianic delusions or not, John's next step was into politics, in a mild way. In 1958, three friends persuaded him to run for sheriff of St. Croix County. His platform: Honest wrestling.

"Actually," John explains, "that was not my platform, although that is the myth. I never said that in the county. What happened was that I was in Chicago for the College All-Star game and I went to a party the night before. Somebody asked me what my platform was, and I said, jokingly, 'Honest wrestling.' Well, it got into all the papers, of course.

"Among friends, I'd say that I was running just to give the prisoners a break. I have to admit I didn't take it very seriously. I knew I wasn't going to win. These three supposedly practical people who talked me into it thought I could, but I knew better. When they asked me to run, I said, 'Who the hell would vote for me as sheriff?'

"I had no platform. I simply made it a point to really see the county and talk to people at all hours of the day and night. That was my campaign. I don't know what I would have done if I'd been elected. Anyway, I had a lot of fun running."

No longer a halfback, but still a vagabond, John now spent nearly eight years traveling aimlessly around. His mother

had left an annuity that allowed him to live reasonably well without having to work. He spent varying periods of time in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Florida. He turned up at College All-Star games, Packer games, Viking games, NFL championship games. He visited friends: Ernie Nevers in Santa Rosa; Shanty Malone in San Francisco; Don Hutson in Rancho Mirage; Byron White in Colorado and, later, in Washington, DC; Ole Haugsrud in Duluth; Bronko Nagurski in International Falls; Cal Hubbard, who had become supervisor of American League umpires, in Boston; Mike Michalske in De Pere, just outside Green Bay; Ernie Fliegel in Minneapolis. And continually he returned to the big white frame house in New Richmond for brief stays.

He was visiting Curly Lambeau, in retirement in Palm Springs, in the winter of 1962, when they learned that they had both been elected charter members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. They went out to celebrate at a lounge where Chubby Checker, inventor of "the twist," was entertaining, and John recalls in amazement that the 64-year-old Lambeau got out on the dance floor and twisted for hours.

"Funny," he says, "that was part of Curly that I never knew before. Of course, he and I had never done much celebrating together, either."

In 1965, John more or less settled down: He remarried and became the stepfather of three sons. He had actually met his second wife, Catherine, about 40 years before. A friend had suggested that he should meet a woman in Chippewa Falls who was an heiress to the Leinenkugel Brewing Company. So John went to the woman's house and was greeted by her 17-year-old daughter, Catherine.

The mother wasn't home, but John invited the daughter to go out with him and she agreed. They had "a couple of dates," John recalls, but nothing came of it at the time. Many years later, when Catherine was the divorced mother of three sons, she saw an article about John in *Sports Illustrated*. She wrote him a note, they met once again, and this time it did lead to something. They were married in Las Vegas in 1966.

But he still took off on occasional unpredictable trips to visit someone or see someplace. And, in the early 1970s, he charged off on two quixotic crusades.

He decided in 1972 that Richard Nixon should not be the next president and that none of the candidates for the Democratic nomination could beat him. John had a better candidate, he felt: Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White.

Armed with his own slogans—"The dark horse is White" and "Get the All-American off the bench and into the ballgame"—he traveled across the country and got newspaper space that most candidates would have envied. He called it "Operation B Bonnet." He explained, over and over, "That means we're going to put a B in the bonnets of convention delegates. And the B stands for Byron, as in Byron White."

He had more than slogans. He had precedents. "There have been six dark horse presidential candidates in history," he told people. "By that I mean candidates who weren't even considered candidates until someone had to be chosen. They were Polk, Pierce, Hayes, Garfield, Harding, and John W. Davis. Five of them won. That's an .833 winning percentage."

He had his candidate's qualifications to talk about. "Look at his credentials," he said. "Phi Beta Kappa. All-American football player. Rhodes Scholar. Two Bronze Stars in World War II. Magna cum laude at Yale Law School. Strong on civil rights. One of the youngest men ever appointed to the Supreme Court. And then there's the Kennedy connection."

After talking about all of Justice White's qualities and qualifications, John would add, "He failed once. Just once. He tried to enlist in the Marines, but they turned him down for color blindness. So he went into the Navy instead. Wouldn't it be nice to have a president who's color-blind, for a change?"

Stories about the one-man movement to draft White appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post*, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, the *Pittsburgh Press*, the *Rocky Mountain News*, the *Minneapolis Star*, the *St. Paul Dispatch*, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and many smaller newspapers—including, of course, the *New Richmond News*.

But they all appeared on the sports pages. They all focused on Johnny Blood, rather than his candidate. And, of course, the name of Associate Justice Byron R. White was never placed in nomination at the Democratic National Convention. George McGovern was nominated, and lost overwhelmingly to Richard Nixon. And then came Watergate.

John's second crusade was an effort to get a pension for NFL players who'd retired before 1959, when the players' pension plan went into effect. The NFL Alumni Association was also campaigning for pensions for the older players at about the same time. But John had a plan to raise the money.

His plan was to have a three-game Super Bowl series. Others had talked about a Super Bowl series, most notably Al Davis, managing general partner of the Oakland Raiders. John gave the idea a couple of twists. There would always be three games, even if the same team won the first two games and, therefore, the NFL championship. And a sizable share of the money brought in by the third game would go to the pension fund for old-time players.

But how can you make the third game interesting if the championship has already been decided by a sweep of the first two games?

John had a simple answer: money. He figured about two and a half million dollars as the total purse for the teams involved. If a team won two of the three games, it would get sixty percent, or a million and a half; if it won all three, it would get eighty percent, or two million dollars.

Again, he traveled around the country, talking to sports-writers about his plan. He called it "Operation Bread and Circuses," explaining, "The people want circuses and the old-time football players need bread."

He also put together an organization of NFL players who had retired before 1959. "The Naked Alumni," he called them. "If you're looking for a headline," he told Bob Oates of the *Los Angeles Times*, "make it `Blood Covers Naked Alumni.'"

But this crusade, too, failed. The proposal was briefly discussed at the NFL owners' meeting in April of 1973, but it was never formally considered.

Every year since 1963, Hall of Fame weekend has been celebrated in Canton in late July or early August. The three-day celebration includes the first exhibition game of the pro football season, played at little Fawcett Field to benefit the Pro Football Hall of Fame. But the main event, of course, is the induction of new members.

It was an extra special celebration in 1973, because the Hall of Fame invited all of its members back for a tenth anniversary reunion.

If you were in Canton that weekend, you might have encountered Johnny Blood. Maybe, knowing him and knowing that he now lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, you walked up to him with outstretched hand and said, "John, how's St. Paul?" To which he replied, "Dead. Many years ago."

If you were an attractive young woman anywhere near the Hall of Fame activities, he said to you, "The Marines are looking for a few good women. Care to enlist?" (And you may have been the young woman who replied, "Can I enlist for just one night?")

If you were a long-haired, bearded young man leaning against a street sign standard about a block from the Hall of Fame, he looked at you for a long moment and asked, "What theory have you evolved?" And you replied, "Man, I'm still trying to evolve one."

If you were a middle-aged woman sitting behind him while the 49ers played the Patriots, he turned around in the middle of the second quarter and asked abruptly, "Does it offend you that I haven't shaved?" And you hurriedly said, "No, of course not," and turned your attention back to the field.

You may have been the local Hall of Fame enthusiast who asked him, "Have you met the chief of police yet?" To which he replied, "Probably—I usually do."

Or, if you were at the very exclusive Friday luncheon at the Brookside Country Club to hear Ohio State Coach Woody Hayes, you may have been startled when this unscheduled speaker asked for a minute at the podium and suggested that the Hall of Fame and the Canton Chamber of Commerce should exhume Jim Thorpe's remains from the town in Pennsylvania named after him so that he could be reburied in Canton with a suitable monument.

"I don't know," he said, "that Jim Thorpe had many happy times in his life. But I do know that his happiest times were spent right here in Canton, and here he should be buried."

And, after a moment of stunned silence, you applauded the sentiment and the audacity, if not the practicality, of the idea.

"If you're going to be a mythical beast, sometimes you have to play the part," he remarks during the weekend. "I don't believe Jim Thorpe will be brought back to Canton. But talking about the idea is a pretty good way of attracting some attention."

Asked to pick an all-time team and the greatest player of all time, he refuses. "It's just impossible to compare players from different eras," he says. But, a moment later, he adds, "If I were going to choose up sides, and I could pick anybody from the whole history of football as I know it, I'd pick Sammy Baugh first. He led the league in passing, in punting, and in interceptions one year. He could beat you in a lot of ways."

A few minutes later, though, he says, "The best backfield I can imagine would have four Bill Dudleys in it. He could beat you every way possible, sometimes just out of sheer determination. In 1946, he played for a Pittsburgh team that won five games, lost five, and tied one. Without him, they probably would have lost all eleven games. He led the league in rushing and in interceptions that year."*

On the changes that have taken place in football, he says, "It's a much better game today. I wouldn't necessarily say the best players are better, but there are more very good players, partly because the population has grown, partly because there are black players in the NFL now, and partly because they get better coaching starting at an early age.

"But conditions are the big difference. We'd play on muddy fields half the time, using one ball and basically one team for the

*Dudley also led in punt returning, with an average of 14.3 yards per return; finished second in punting with a 40-yard average; completed 32 of 80 passes for 451 yards and two touchdowns; averaged 20 yards per kickoff return; caught four passes for 109 yards and a touchdown, averaging 27.3 yards per catch; and kicked twelve extra points and two field goals.

whole game. In a lot of those games, if the score was tied at the start of the fourth quarter, the fans could get up and go home, because they knew it would end up that way. The players were exhausted, the ball was heavy and slippery, and the field was a mess, so nothing was going to happen.

"The fields are better now, the players stay fresh because of platooning, and they bring in a dry ball for every play if they have to. There's no comparison."

After the game between the Patriots and the 49ers at Canton's Fawcett Field on Saturday afternoon, there was a cocktail party for Hall of Fame members only. John thought I should go to it, since I hadn't yet had a chance to interview Art Rooney. A security guard stood at the door, beside a sign warning "GREEN BADGES ONLY!" Hall of Fame members wore green badges; I was wearing an orange press badge.

"They won't let me in there," I said.

"Take off your badge," John replied, "and just walk in with me."

So I put my orange badge in my pocket, hoping the security guard wasn't watching, and followed John. But the guard grabbed my arm as I reached the door and said, "Sorry, you can't go in there."

"You mean my son can't go to this party?" John asked him.

The guard looked at his name badge. "I'm sorry, Mr. McNally, but I've got strict orders—green badges only."

"We traveled all the way from Hawaii to get here," John said. "That's a lot of miles. And I brought my son with me so he could meet some of my former teammates at this party. Now you're saying he can't get in?"

"Green badges only," the guard repeated, imploringly.

"It says McNally on my name tag, but I'm better known as Johnny Blood. I'm a charter member of this place. Were you here in 1963?"

The guard shook his head.

"Well, that's when the Hall of Fame opened," John said, "and I was one of the first people inducted. If my son can't go to this party, I'm not going, and a lot of people in there will be disappointed."

The guard looked at me, at John, at me again, then at John again. “Okay,” he said hesitantly. “I guess it’s all right to make one exception.”

So I went to the party and interviewed Art Rooney for about half an hour. Then I rejoined John, who was talking to Mel Hein, the great Giant center and the only other man to play fifteen seasons in the NFL during its single-platoon era.

Shortly before the party was due to end, a side door opened. Alvin “Pete” Rozelle, the NFL commissioner, came in and began going from table to table, shaking hands. John nudged me and smiled. “You and Pete Rozelle are the only people in here who don’t have green badges,” he said.

As we were leaving the party to go to the banquet for the newly-inducted players—Raymond Berry, Jim Parker, and Joe Schmidt—Hein put a big hand on my shoulder. “Take good care of Johnny Blood,” he said. “He’s a precious national resource.”

After the banquet, we ended up in a special Hall of Fame suite at the host motel. Two hall officials, John Bankert and Jim Campbell, were there. They wanted to know if any players from John’s era ought to be in the Hall of Fame. He immediately made the case for two of his Packer teammates, Lavvie Dilweg and Verne Llewellyn.

“For at least five years, Lavvie was the best all-around end in the NFL,” he said. “He was certainly the best in the late Twenties, and he was an All-Pro in 1931 [when the first official All-Pro team was selected]. He could block, play defense and catch passes as well as anybody. There might have been a couple of guys who were as good at a couple of things, but nobody was as good as Lavvie in all three areas.

“Llewellyn should be in the Hall of Fame just on his punting ability. He’d be an All-Pro punter if he played today. But, remember, he did everything else, too, and he did it all well. He was an excellent runner, a good passer, a good receiver, and a hell of a defensive back.”

John then put in a word for fullback Tony Latone, who had been a teammate at Pottsville in 1928. “Tony was a Jim Taylor type, ran low with real high knee action, and you couldn’t hit him hard enough to make him happy. You could just clobber him,

you'd think you wiped him out, knocked him out of the game, and he'd get up and grin at you. Like he was saying, `Is that the best you can do?' If you tried to tackle him low, one of his knees might break your nose, and if you tried to get him high, he'd carry you on his back for five or six yards, and then he wouldn't go down unless a couple other people helped you out. He was also a great linebacker. If he played today, he'd be in a class with Nitschke and Butkus, the same type, a ferocious hitter. And he could also get into pass coverage when he had to."

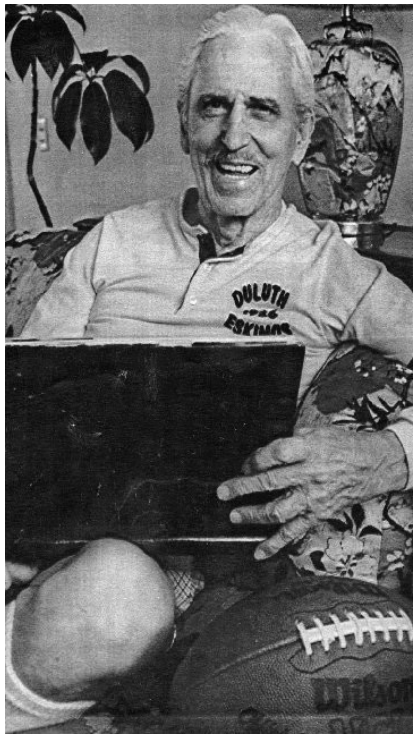
(Latone, who never went to college, spent six seasons in the NFL, 1925 through 1930, with Pottsville, Boston, and Providence. Incomplete statistics credit him with 2,648 yards rushing on 744 attempts, a 3.6 average, well above the league average for that period. He scored 26 rushing touchdowns and also returned one of his 22 interceptions for a touchdown.)

Asked about another Pottsville teammate, Duke Osborn, John hesitated. It was Osborn who talked him into playing for Pottsville in 1928 and wired money to California so that John, Walt Kiesling, and Joe Rooney could get to the team. He and his wife were visiting the Hall of Fame from their home in nearby Dubois, Pennsylvania, and Duke was campaigning, more or less openly, to be elected to the hall.

"Let me say this about Duke," John said slowly. "He was a very good guard for quite a few years. Under-sized, but very, very tough, the kind of guy you hate to play against, but you love to have him on your team, because he'd do anything to beat you. He'd grab, slug, bite, kick, claw, scratch, whatever he had to do. But—Hall of Fame caliber? I hate to say it, but I don't think so."

A few minutes later, John was criticizing the Hall of Fame for electing owners. "If they're going to be here, they should have a separate wing, but they shouldn't be in the same bunch with players and coaches. Dan Reeves? What did he ever do to get into the Hall of Fame? Put a team on the West Coast? Hell, people are still bitter about Walter O'Malley moving the Dodgers and Horace Stoneham moving the Giants, but Dan Reeves is glorified for moving the Rams from Cleveland to L.A. He did it for money, not for the good of the NFL. I don't think O'Malley or Stoneham will ever make it to Cooperstown, and Reeves shouldn't be enshrined in Canton.

"Lamar Hunt? He had a lot of money and he wanted a toy to play with, so he started his own league. Hell, if I'd had the money, I would've done it myself, and I would have been a player-coach, too. I understand the owners bankroll the Hall of Fame, so you have to throw them a sop now and then. But put them on an honor roll or something, like the Baseball Hall of Fame does with sportswriters and broadcasters, don't put them on the same list with Red Grange and Ernie Nevers."



Johnny Blood at 83

John and I were both scheduled to leave Canton on Sunday afternoon. Typically, he decided at the last minute that he would stay a little longer. As I checked out of the motel, he was telling a desk clerk that Jim Thorpe should be buried right on the grounds of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

More than two weeks later, on a Tuesday afternoon, John called me at my office. "I just wanted to let you know I'm back in St. Paul," he said.

"When did you get back?" I asked.

"Just now."

"You mean you've been in Canton all this time?"

"Yes, the shrine seemed worth the time. I spent a week just feeling the shrine and the second week looking at.

"You know," he laughed, "it's what I learned from those Norse legends my mother made me read—once you get to Valhalla, it's hard to leave."

EPILOGUE:
VALHALLA
IN MINNESOTA

The tumult and the shouting dies. . .
Kipling, "Recessional"

I had very little contact with John for the last nine or ten years of his life, after he wrote that he didn't want this book published until after his death. He sent a few cards and notes from various locations, but he never included an address, so I couldn't respond. And once he called me from Caracas, Venezuela.

"What are you doing there?" I asked.

"I've never been to Caracas, and I decided it was time I saw the place," he explained.

There were occasional reports from other sources. He was given an award at a banquet in Appleton, Wisconsin, where my mother and sister spoke to him, in 1978. He had suffered a mild stroke a short time before but seemed well, I was told, except for some slight—and uncharacteristic—lapses of memory.

Shortly after that, he retired to Palm Springs, California. But, in 1983, he appeared at the twentieth anniversary reunion of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. At the same exclusive jacket-and-tie luncheon at which, ten years before, he had advocated exhuming Jim Thorpe's body, he showed up wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the Duluth Eskimos emblem.

In October of 1984, he was one of three men presented with an Alumni Achievement Award during the annual Fellows Day festivities at St. John's University. The other men honored were Roger E. Birk, chairman of the board of Merrill Lynch and Company, and John Simonett, a justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court.

I learned about the award nearly nine months later, when a New Bedford friend of mine who'd also gone to St. John's showed me a copy of the school's alumni bulletin. In the photo of John receiving his award, he was adorned with what he called his

"Captain Ahab beard"—he had worn it proudly to New Bedford, and to the Whaling Museum, on a couple of his visits.

Remembering how he'd prized his award from the people of New Richmond, an award he'd never expected, because he thought they knew him too well; remembering, too, that the proudest moment of his life had come when he presented his father with the silver loving cup from the St. John's intramural track meet; I wondered whether, to John, this might not be the greatest honor of all: To win an Alumni Achievement Award, in such distinguished company, from the school that had expelled his father for spitting tobacco juice out of a classroom window.

So I wrote a letter of congratulation and sent it to the St. John's alumni office, asking that they forward it. "This must be the real Valhalla," I suggested.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 28, 1985, I watched on television as the New York Jets played the Detroit Lions in the Pontiac Silverdome. At the half, NBC did a feature about Cloyce Box, an end with the Lions in the early 1950s and a member of their 1953 championship team.

McNally family stone

After retiring from pro football, Box went back to his native Texas and made a lot of money. Enough money so that he could sponsor a reunion of that championship team, present each player with a championship ring, and establish a $1 million trust fund to benefit former NFL players who don't qualify for the pension plan.

I assumed that John was watching and applauding. His idea for a pension plan for the old-time players never got anywhere, but certainly he would appreciate the fact that at last someone was doing something to help the "Naked Alumni."

But he wasn't watching. I learned the next day that Johnny Blood McNally had died in a Palm Springs hospital that Thanksgiving afternoon, the day after his eighty-second birthday.

About the Author

Ralph Hickok grew up in Green Bay, where his father worked for the *Press-Gazette* and was the official scorer for the Packers from 1947 to 1965. He graduated from Green Bay East High School, the high school of Curly Lambeau and "Sleepy Jim" Crowley, who was one of the famed "Four Horsemen of Notre Dame" and later Vince Lombardi's football coach at Fordham University.

Ralph majored in English at Harvard and then resumed a newspaper career that had begun during summers when he was in high school and college. After ten years as the Sunday magazine editor for the New Bedford, MA, *Standard-Times*, he became copy chief for the largest Massachusetts advertising agency south of Boston.

He also became a leading authority on sports history. He is the author of *Who Was Who in American Sports*, *The New Encyclopedia of Sports*, *A Who's Who of Sports Champions*, *The Pro Football Fan's Companion*, *The Encyclopedia of North American Sports History*, and *Bibliography of Books About American Football 1891-2015*.

Ralph is a member of the North American Society for Sport History and the Pro Football Researchers Association. In 2008, the PFRA gave him the Ralph E. Hay Award for "lifetime achievement in pro football research and historiography."

He lives in New Bedford, Massachusetts, with his wife, Diane Bolton.

Front Cover Illustrator John Gordon

John Gordon, who did the front cover illustration, graduated from St Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin, in 1964 with a Bachelor of Science degree in art. He received his MFA in painting from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1966 and has taught art at various levels for 50 years, including 15 at St. Norbert College, where he taught basic drawing and design classes. He has taught over 3,000 students in 20 countries through his home-study correspondence courses and nearly half that many through his private classes in and around Green Bay, Wisconsin.

John has lectured on art history and theory and conducted workshops in painting and drawing at various colleges, arts organizations, and museums, including the University of Georgia, Andrews University, the Elvejihem Museum of Art in Madison, Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin Art History Department in Madison. He recently retired from St Norbert College.

In March of 2017 he was honored with a retrospective exhibition of his drawings and paintings in the Baer Gallery at St. Norbert College's Bush Art Center.

Incidentally, while John was still a college student, he worked as an assistant equipment manager and trainer for the Green Bay Packers. In that capacity, he designed the original Packer logo—which is regarded as one of the most recognizable sports images in the world. A re-enacted drawing of his logo design is currently in the Packer Hall of Fame.

Author Ralph Hickok is shown with the statue of Johnny Blood McNally at the Packer Heritage Trail Plaza in Green Bay.
Photo by Diane Bolton