



LOOKING BACK AT THE '91 EAGLES DEFENSE

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with middle linebacker Jeremiah Trotter and ask him a couple questions about you, the alumni. I was eager to find out if there was a former player who he especially admired. Maybe a fellow monster in the middle like Bill Bergey or Chuck Bednarik. Instead of singling out a specific player, he named a unit. A band of brothers who made up one of the most dominant defenses in history. The only defense in the last 30 years to finish a season ranked first in the league against the pass and the run. The “Gang Green Defense” of the 1991 Philadelphia Eagles.

“I have a lot of respect for that unit,” Trotter said with a sense of awe. “To finish first against the pass and the run was quite an achievement. Harold Carmichael once told me that I could have played on that defense...that my style of play would have fit in well with their system and spirit...what a compliment that was...”

As he spoke about that hallowed unit, he singled out three players in particular: Reggie White, Jerome Brown and Andre Waters. It is hard to believe that those three players have been taken from us in the years since that special season, but in 1991, they were more alive than most people could ever dream of being. They struck fear into the hearts of opponents leading up to game day and once the whistle blew, they unleashed hell.

Who can forget the “House of Pain” game or the 11-sack shutout they pitched against Troy Aikman and the hated Cowboys. *(continued on back page)*



EX-EAGLE VINCE PAPALE TO RECEIVE ED BLOCK AWARD

The Ed Block Courage Award Foundation announced the names of special awards that will be presented at the 29th Annual Ed Block Courage Awards on Tuesday, March 20, at Martin's West.

Vince Papale, a former Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver, will be attending the 29th Annual Ed Block Courage Awards and will be presented with a special Courage Award. In 1976, at the age of 30, Vince tried out for the Philadelphia Eagles, made the team, and became the oldest rookie in NFL history... a record he still holds today. The movie “Invincible,” starring Mark Wahlberg and Greg Kinnear, was made about Vince Papale and his story. Vince was with the Eagles for four seasons and was voted special-teams captain by his teammates. Papale was also voted “Man of the Year” by the Eagles in 1978 for his many charitable contributions.

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NFL COMMITTEE ON CONCUSSIONS UNDERGOES CHANGES AT THE TOP

Dr. Elliott Pellman, the longtime chairman of the NFL's committee on concussions, has resigned from the post.

Pellman, the head physician for the New York Jets, will be replaced by Dr. Ira Casson of the Albert Einstein School of Medicine and Dr. David Viano of Wayne State University.

Pellman had suggested that new co-chairmen unaffiliated with teams be named to the position. He will remain on the committee along with a group of other non-NFL doctors and doctors from the Baltimore Ravens, Indianapolis Colts and Kansas City Chiefs, and the head trainers from the New York Giants and Philadelphia Eagles.

EVERSON WALLS DONATES KIDNEY TO EX-TEAMMATE RON SPRINGS

Maybe the Cowboys aren't as bad as we think? Former Dallas running back Ron Springs was recovering on March 1st after receiving a kidney donated by former teammate Everson Walls. Springs, 50, has suffered from diabetes for 16 years and has been on the national transplant waiting list since 2004. The disease has led to the amputation of his right foot and forced Springs into a wheelchair. Providing his body accepts the new kidney, he'll no longer need dialysis and should again be able to walk on his own. Walls, 47, volunteered to be tested after things fell through with two of Springs' relatives who were perfect matches. "I said, 'Well, look, I know my blood type is the same as his. Why not give it a shot and see what happens?'" Walls told The Associated Press in December. Springs and Walls played together only four years, but developed a close friendship. The duo had wanted to keep the transplant quiet until it happened, but word leaked out in December through Springs' oldest son, Shawn, who plays cornerback -- Walls' old position -- for the Washington Redskins.



TURN BACK THE CLOCK... THE 1961 SEASON

Monday, December 26, 1960

Despite the fact that I wasn't born until 1971, I have often referred to that date as the greatest day of my life. It was the last time that the Philadelphia Eagles were world champions. After winning back-to-back NFL crowns at the end of the forties, the 11 year gap between championships seemed like an eternity. Who could have imagined that 46 years later we'd still be waiting for the next one. After winning seven out of eight games to begin the following season, it appeared that the wait between championships would be short-lived.

Despite the great start in 1961, that one defeat in week three would prove costly. After holding a 13-point lead late in the game, the Eagles allowed 16 unanswered points and lost to the Cardinals 30-27. After winning the next five games to move to 7-1, the Eagles were in first place in the division and appeared to be destined for a championship game rematch with the Packers.

NBC paid \$615,000 for the rights to broadcast the 1961 Championship game...nearly two million dollars less than what a 30 second commercial cost advertisers during the 2007 Super Bowl. 1961 was also the year that Canton, Ohio was chosen to be the site of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. During that era of the NFL, there was no such thing as a wild card team or tie-breaking procedure. There were two divisions and the team with the best record in the Western Division played the best team from the East for the NFL crown. In the case of a Divisional tie, a playoff game would be played to determine which team would represent its division in the title game.

A late season stumble by the Eagles coupled with a Giants surge left the Birds a game out of first place going into the final week. Despite the fact that the Giants had won both meetings that season, a Philadelphia victory at Detroit coupled with a Giants loss to the Browns would set the stage for a playoff game between the two clubs. Trailing by a touchdown in the fourth quarter, the Eagles rallied for a 27-24 victory over the Lions. Now Philadelphia needed some help from Cleveland in order to punch their ticket to the post-season.

After allowing a Y.A. Tittle touchdown pass in the first-quarter, the Browns defense clamped down and held the Giants scoreless the rest of the way. A Milt Plum scoring strike tied the affair in the third quarter and as the Eagles game ended, the stage was set for the dramatic finish to the regular season. NBC switched over to the Giants game so that Philadelphia fans could watch the fate of their team unfold before their very eyes. *(continued on back page)*





WHERE ARE THEY NOW? "REDS" BASSMAN - OLDEST EAGLE

A few years back, a book was written by Bob Gordon titled: "The 1960 Philadelphia Eagles: The Team That They Said Had Nothing but a Championship." The premise of the book was that the last Eagles team to win it all was looked upon by most of their opponents as inferior. Tom Brookshier would often comment about how sweet it was to win games you weren't supposed to win and steal a championship against a superior opponent. In hindsight, the victory over Green Bay in the championship game was a huge upset. Vince Lombardi vowed afterwards that his Packers would never lose another championship game. They never did. Lombardi led the Packers to nine straight playoff victories including five championships, but on December 26, 1960 at Franklin Field, the underdog was king.

It was in that same stadium 26 years earlier that one of the greatest upsets in college football history paved the way for Herman Bassman's NFL career.

In 1934, The University of Penn was one of the powerhouses of college football. Every now and then, the Quakers would schedule an early tune-up game against Division III Ursinus to build their confidence for the "real" games. In the nine prior meetings leading up to the 1934 tilt, Penn had only allowed one touchdown to the small school from Collegeville, PA. After seeing their team jump out to an early six-point lead, the 10,000 fans at Franklin Field sat in stunned disbelief as Herman "Reds" Bassman soared through the air and intercepted a pass from Penn QB Bill Shanahan. The crowd grew silent as Bassman weaved his way through shocked Penn players for a 55-yard touchdown return and a 7-6 Ursinus lead. Unable to recover from the dramatic turn-of-events, Penn failed to score another point all day. David beat Goliath, 7-6.

The upset made headlines nationally and locally, catching the attention of the NFL's brand-new franchise in Philadelphia. The Eagles sent a letter to the hero of the game and asked Bassman to try out for the team. If it was a publicity stunt, it worked. After failing to draw 20,000 fans to a home game during their first three seasons in the league, Bert Bell's team eclipsed that mark in each of Bassman's first three games in Philadelphia. The success at the box office did not translate to the field however, and after an opening week victory against the Giants, the fledgling Birds dropped their final 11 games of the season. "We had a poor offensive system," Bassman recalled when looking back 70 years to his season in the sun. "We just couldn't throw the ball."

The Eagles interception to touchdown ratio that season was an eye popping 36 to 3. "My closest friend on the team was a hulking fullback out of Temple named Dave Smukler," Bassman said. "Dave was 240 lbs. which was huge back then. Our owner/coach, Bert Bell, chose to play Dave at quarterback instead of running back and it just wasn't meant to be." Despite Bassman's differing views about how to run an offense, Reds and the Eagles founder enjoyed a great relationship off the field. "I used to chauffeur Bert's wife around during the offseason," Reds recollected. Bert Bell's wife, Frances Upton, had been a Broadway performer before marrying the NFL mogul. In an ironic twist, two of Reds' grandchildren have gone on to Broadway careers.

As for Reds' NFL career, it was short-lived, but special. "I suffered some injuries and there was no such thing as medical benefits or anything back then so I decided I better not take any chances and I joined the Army." While stationed in India, football caught up to Bassman again as he was asked to coach a team of GI's.

When Bassman looks back at his days with the Eagles, there are some special memories that have survived the 70-year journey: "I remember traveling to play the Rams and the announcer was so puzzled about how to pronounce Ursinus that he exclaimed over the loud speaker, 'Herman Bassman from...how do you pronounce the name of this school?!'" His greatest game with the Eagles turned out to be the final game of his career. "We played the Brooklyn Dodgers and I had some great runs that day." It has truly been a great run for the 94 year-old Bassman. His Central High team won the first City Championship in Philadelphia history. He was team captain for both the football squad and wrestling team while at Ursinus, but his time in the NFL was really special: "Being a Philadelphia Eagle was the greatest honor of my life."

Herman "Reds" Bassman is the oldest living Eagle and recently celebrated his 60th wedding anniversary and 94th birthday. He and his wife Helen live in Petersburg, VA.





TURN BACK THE CLOCK... THE 1961 SEASON *(continued from page two)*

In the waning seconds, Milt Plum found sure-handed receiver Ray Renfro wide open with nothing but green between him and the winning touchdown. John Paris, a lifelong Eagles fan who was 14 at the time can remember the play as if it happened yesterday. "That pass was perfect!" Paris said. "Ray Renfro had the best hands in the NFL and 1961 was the best season of his career. I can still see that ball sailing through the air and right through Renfro's hands," Paris lamented. The uncharacteristic drop cost the Browns the victory and the Eagles a chance to repeat as champions. The Giants snuck out of Yankee stadium with a 7-7 tie giving them a 10-3-1 record, and a half-game margin of victory over the 10-4 Philadelphia Eagles.

Two weeks later, the Giants endured one of their typical post-season collapses as they fell to the Packers 37-0 in the title game. From 1958-1963, the Giants advanced to the championship game five out of six seasons and lost the title game each time. The only time they failed to reach the championship game during that span was the magical 1960 season when the Eagles not only got there but won it all. The team the Eagles beat that glorious day went on to win five of the next 7 NFL titles. The Packers dynasty that was delayed a year by the Eagles may have had to wait another year had Renfro just caught the ball.

EAGLES TRIVIA QUESTION

What NFL team did Norm Van Brocklin coach the season after he led the Eagles to the 1960 NFL Championship and was named MVP of the game?

- A. Vikings B. Falcons
C. Rams D. Seahawks

(Answer from last month: THE ST. LOUIS RAMS)

FINANCIAL FOCUS

MORE MONEY COLLECTED FOR NFL RETIREES

The latest phase of an effort to help ex-NFL players has brought in \$75,000 from the public through an auction and donations, bringing the total raised to over \$200,000. The Gridiron Greats Assistance Fund said three other individuals, who wish to remain anonymous, have pledged another \$200,000 for the cause. The fund was launched by Jerry Kramer, star right guard of the Green Bay Packers four decades ago under Vince Lombardi. Kramer started the effort by auctioning off a replica of his Super Bowl I ring last spring, raising more than \$22,000 to help supplement pension and disability benefits for other former players. "I am so encouraged by the public support and the support of other NFL players and I see a real opportunity to help some of the guys who really need it," Kramer said.

About \$125,000 came in through donations and a week-long online auction leading up to the Super Bowl and an additional \$75,000 has been raised in the weeks since. Assistance has already been sought on behalf of more than 30 retired National Football League players, according to Jennifer Smith, GGAF executive director. "It is important for everyone to remember who the funds are going to," Mike Ditka said. "It's going to the guys who started football. Not the ones making the money off it now, the guys who started it." Visit jerrykramer.com to learn more about the Gridiron Greats Fund.

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LOOKING BACK AT THE 1991 EAGLES DEFENSE

I can still remember sitting in the stands with my father the last week of the season and watching the Redskins back-up quarterback get crushed by an Eagle blitz. We watched with glee as he stumbled to the sideline with a busted helmet looking for relief. Instead of smelling salts and a seat on the bench, starting QB Mark Rypien handed the stunned signal caller his own helmet and retreated to safety. The Eagles defeated the eventual Super Bowl champions that day 24-22. Who could have imagined that it would be the final game of Jerome Brown's career and life.

Despite the historic defense and a 10-6 record, the 1991 squad failed to reach the playoffs. A season-ending injury to Randall Cunningham in the first game of the year led to a parade of quarterbacks that ultimately foiled the Super Bowl aspirations of the team. With the loss of Jerome Brown that off-season, '91 proved to be the last and best chance for the Buddy Ryan-built and Bud Carson-driven unit to prove that "defense wins championships."

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have any story ideas or know of any alumni members who are not receiving this, please call Harold Carmichael at 215.463.2500.

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