A tribute to Titans of 1960s

by Jerry Magee

On Sunday, the New York Jets wore throwback uniforms harking back to the New York Titans of faint and not so fond memory. Good for the Jets, I say.

I am, you should know, an American Football League guy. You should be as well. But for the AFL, the San Diego Chargers would not exist, nor would the Kansas City Chiefs, the Oakland Raiders, the Buffalo Bills, et al. The Titans were part of the AFL, not for long and not in any way gloriously. One would think the Jets would want to distance themselves from the Titans, but there they were in Miami, outfitted as the Titans once were.

"There's nothing wrong with recognizing your origins," said Angelo Coniglio.

Coniglio is a resident of the Buffalo area who has made it his mission to make sure that the AFL is not forgotten. He happened to be watching with his wife on television Sunday when the Jets did something the Titans seldom did. They won, outpointing the Dolphins 40-13.

"My wife, who knows more about football than most men, said, 'What are the Jets wearing?'" Coniglio said. When she was advised that the Jets were masquerading as the Titans, her husband said she could not understand why those togs had not fallen apart.

"They're throwback uniforms," Coniglio said he told her.

That the Jets should go to the expense of creating uniforms matching those of the Titans was the idea of one of the New York club's equipment men, according to Jared Winley, a senior manager of public and media relations for the team. "The owners loved the idea," Winley said, and the NFL gave its approval.

The Jets first wore the Titans' regalia at home on Oct. 14 against the Philadelphia Eagles. The Eagles won 16-9. To Coniglio, it would have been more fitting had the Jets shown up dressed as the Titans while matched against another of the AFL's founding franchises.

"I also would like to see the Denver Broncos wear those striped socks," Coniglio noted. Anything to serve as a reminder of the AFL. In 1960, when the AFL got started, the Broncos wore vertically striped socks that they had obtained for a song from some all-star game, as the story is told.

The Titans' uniforms, with the navy blue jerseys and the gold pants, were styled by the club's owner, the late Harry Wismer, to resemble Notre Dame's uniforms. Wismer had had a relationship of some sort with the Irish. Wismer is remembered as a clown who did not have the financial clout to operate a football franchise in the environment that prevailed during the AFL-NFL war, but he did do some things that were worthy.

Wismer's actions, however, were difficult to credit because of how outlandishly he exaggerated the Titans' attendance at the Polo Grounds.

Once, Wismer announced a crowd of 30,000. "He must have been counting the eyes," wrote Dick Young of the New York Daily News.

I remember accompanying the Chargers to the Polo Grounds for a game against the Titans in 1963. The Chargers won 53-7, scoring eight points after time had lapsed on a touchdown and a two-point conversion. If my memory serves, Earl Faison scored the touchdown on a pass. I can recall what Young wrote in the Daily News:

"You know what it is to get beat badly? It is when the other side scores more points after the game is over than you have when it is on."

I wish I had written that.

That was the team's final year as the Titans. When Sonny Werblin obtained the club, he moved it from the Polo Grounds to Shea Stadium, changed the team's name and signed Joe Namath. The Titans' uniforms no longer would be visible. Until this season.

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