THE CREATION OF THE MODERN NFL IN THE 1960S

Professional football became Americans' favorite spectator sport in the 1960s. It was a decade of great players (as is every decade): Johnny Unitas and Sonny Jurgensen, Lenny Moore and Gayle Sayers, Deacon Jones and Dick Butkus, John Mackey and Raymond Berry. Nearly the entire starting lineup of the Green Bay Packers—Bart Starr, Paul Hornung, Jim Taylor, Boyd Dowler, Max McGee, Jerry Kramer, Fuzzy Thurston, Jim Ringo, Forrest Gregg, Ron Kramer, Willie Davis, Henry Jordan, Ray Nitschke, Herb Adderley, Willie Wood—became household names. Without question, the greatest of them all was Jim Brown, one of the NFL's few truly transcendent players from any era. In just nine seasons Brown rushed for 12,312 yards, averaging 5.2 yards per carry and leading the league eight times. He was Rookie of the Year, then league MVP four times; he played in nine Pro Bowls and missed not a single game—then walked away after the 1965 season, at age 30, still in his prime but with nothing left to prove. Few stars in any sport have been so unfettered by their own stardom. Among other interests, Brown embraced his role as a black man in a barely integrated sport, as few African American professional athletes of his generation did, at a time when such actions provoked more anger and resentment than respect. On the field, Brown was an astonishing fusion of speed, power, and agility, but no one player, no matter how good, can guarantee championships in pro football. Brown and Cleveland were perennial runners-up,[a] winning just one title, in 1964, an interruption in the run of the Green Bay Packers through the 1960s.

a. In Brown's other eight seasons, Cleveland won two conference titles but lost the

Starr and Hornung notwithstanding, the Packers above all meant Vince Lombardi. No coach in NFL history so impressed his own personality on his team as did Lombardi with the Packers. In December 1962, when Lombardi appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, he also became the first noncollegiate coach to transcend the narrow world of football's X's and O's to become a truly national figure. Over the 1960s, Lombardi emerged as the face and the spirit not just of the National Football League but also of a vanishing America under assault from civil rights and antiwar protestors, and a counterculture that celebrated everything "traditional" football feared and despised.

The counterculture prevailed, of course, absorbed into the middle-class mainstream, but the NFL did more than just survive the upheaval. It thrived, in part by absorbing its own countercultural force in the person of Joe Namath—as potent an icon of the NFL as it headed into the 1970s as Lombardi had been in the 1960s. Lombardi and Namath were the polar icons of the NFL's cultural transformation, but the master architect of the modern NFL, the man who laid the foundations on which all of this played out, was Pete Rozelle.

Pete

Alvin "Pete" Rozelle, as the press invariably identified him (with his actual middle name, Ray, sometimes inserted as well), was no one's first choice in early 1960 to succeed Bert Bell as commissioner after Bell died suddenly of a heart attack the previous October. On January 26 Rozelle was elected on the twenty-third ballot, breaking an impasse between an old guard of owners who wanted Austin Gunsel, the compliant interim commissioner, and the new blood who wanted Marshall Leahy, an attorney for the San Francisco 49ers. Gunsel and Leahy became footnotes in NFL history; Rozelle became the most influential commissioner in pro sports since baseball's Kennesaw Mountain Landis banned eight Chicago "Black Sox" in 1921. Rozelle had been the general manager of the Los Angeles Rams and, before that, the club's director of public relations. Early in his tenure as commissioner, he established the league's first PR department, and he hired as his top executives men with backgrounds in public relations or the newspaper business. Rozelle remained essentially a PR guy for nearly 30 years as commissioner, though with much steel and shrewdness beneath the "affable" demeanor repeatedly mentioned by sportswriters.[1]

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championship, finished second four times, and third twice. In the "old days," of course, only conference champions had a shot at the title. "Wild cards" were for unserious poker players.

Rozelle's first official act—moving league offices the short distance from Philadelphia to Rockefeller Center in New York—had both actual and symbolic consequences. Through its alliances with Madison Avenue, Wall Street, and the TV networks in its new neighborhood, the NFL fully escaped its low-rent roots to become a Fifth Avenue sort of operation and the model for every major professional sports organization. The foundation for that model—what journalist David Harris has termed "League Think," the principle that clubs' individual interests were best served by sharing, not competing, financially—began with the first leaguewide network television contract negotiated by Rozelle. When the new commissioner was elected in 1960, the league's 14 clubs had individual television deals ranging from $75,000 for Green Bay to $175,000 for the New York Giants. In 1961 Rozelle persuaded the most powerful major-market owners—the Mara family in New York, George Halas in Chicago, and Dan Reeves in Los Angeles—that short-term sacrifice would pay long-term dividends. Sharing television revenue meant rough parity and financial stability throughout the league. More important, the new commissioner (following the example of the rival American Football League) understood that, because the NFL could never have franchises everywhere, viewers willing to turn on pro football every week in much of the country would have to be fans of the league, not just of the New York Giants or Los Angeles Rams. More than any other single factor, that first national TV contract made the NFL what it has become.[2]

There was only one hitch in this initial agreement: a cooperative television contract violated antitrust law. Rozelle's lobbying won congressional approval of the Sports Broadcasting Act in 1961 and secured the future of the NFL. This episode exemplifies two of the key ingredients in the spectacular success of the National Football League over the next several decades: the sealing of its marriage to television and the importance of the government (federal in this case but often local) as a powerful enabling, but non-profit-sharing, partner.

As the TV audience for NFL football grew over the 1960s, rights fees rose from $4.65 million a year in 1962–63 under the initial contract, to $14.1 million in 1964–65, $18.1 million in 1966–69, and $46.25 million in 1970—the first season of the now-combined NFL and American Football League. The sums now look paltry, compared to the multi-billion-dollar deals in recent years, but the $330,000 per club under the initial contract nearly doubled the Giants' $175,000 in 1960, and each new contract seemed at the time an extraordinary windfall that confirmed Rozelle's genius.[3]

Television was the cornerstone but also part of the broader foundation that Rozelle laid in the 1960s, which included NFL Films along with NFL Proper-

ties, merger with the rival American Football League, and creation of the Super Bowl. Rozelle established his reputation with the public and his power with the owners who paid his salary when he suspended Paul Hornung and Alex Karras for the 1963 season for betting on their own teams. Karras was just a cantankerous defensive tackle for the Detroit Lions, albeit an All-Pro, but the Green Bay Packers' Hornung was the NFL's Golden Boy, its leading scorer in 1960 and 1961 (his 176 points in 1960 in just 12 games remained an NFL record until 2006), league MVP in 1962, and the heart of its most glamorous team. Rozelle's action provoked controversy at the time—it was criticized for being either too harsh or too soft—and it has been second-guessed ever since. (Why suspend two players while ignoring the high-stakes betting of Baltimore Colts owner Carroll Rosenbloom?) But *Sports Illustrated*'s Tex Maule summed up the general response when he applauded Rozelle for taking a stand as a "strong commissioner" among the more typical "glorified secretaries" who supposedly ruled pro sports but were really just puppets of the owners. Following that 1963 season, chiefly on the basis of his "wise severity" in dealing with Hornung and Karras, *Sports Illustrated* named Rozelle its "Sportsman of the Year," the first nonathlete to receive the honor (and still the only nonathlete or noncoach).[4]

Though guilty, Karras and Hornung were also scapegoats for a larger problem among the Lions (Rozelle also fined five of Karras's teammates for betting on other games but not their own) and around the league.[b] By suspending them, Rozelle sent all NFL players a message.[5] He also sent a message to NFL fans that they could trust him to safeguard "the integrity of the game." Both potent and meaningless, that term is something like "love of

b. That players in the 1950s and 1960s routinely bet on games is widely acknowledged. That they shaved points is a more controversial claim, made most fully in a 1989 book, *Interference: How Organized Crime Influences Professional Football*, by a crime reporter named Dan Moldea. Moldea made allegations about point-shaving, based on dubious claims by a Detroit bookmaker. Most of *Interference* develops more sensationalistic (and even less credible) claims about NFL owners' relations with organized crime figures. As for Rosenbloom, the 1958 championship game was periodically haunted by a suspicion that the Colts went for a touchdown on third down in overtime, instead of kicking a chip-shot field goal, in order to cover the spread and save their owner's large bet—against the counterargument that the Colts had a certifiably lousy placekicker. Moldea claims that Rosenbloom won $1 million on that game (and lost $1 million on Super Bowl III). On the persistent rumor that Rosenbloom's drowning in 1979 was really a murder by underworld figures, Moldea concludes that his death was indeed accidental. There is too much information in *Interference* for none of it to be true, but also too much unsubstantiated conjecture that undermines the more credible assertions.

country" or "peace and justice." Who could oppose it? But what does it actually mean? For Rozelle, it seems to have meant a genuine desire that NFL football remain uncorrupted in reality but also a greater concern that it appear uncorrupted to the public. Ultimately for Rozelle, the quintessential PR man, reality and image were indistinguishable. In notes written on the occasion of his retirement in 1989, Rozelle remembered a lesson from a childhood church camp that had guided him as commissioner: "Character is what you are as a person and reputation is what people think of you. If you have a bad reputation you might as well have a bad character."[6] By the same reasoning, the game's actual integrity was its appearance of integrity. This was the creed of a PR man.

During this period, sociologists were writing about the decline of "character" into "personality," and of "inner-directed" individuals into "other-directed" ones. Rozelle's views about "character" and "reputation" might be taken as a case in point. My point, however, is not that Rozelle was superficial, but that he was right. Unlike other forms of popular entertainment, NFL football is *real*—the players actually do what they appear to be doing—yet at the same time it is a creation of the media, and it generates some of the most powerful fantasies in our culture. The actuality of football is the source of its cultural power, but media-made images of that reality are all that most fans know. Pete Rozelle understood this about football long before "spin" became the official language of the realm.

NFL Films and the Epic of Pro Football

In 1963, the same year that he suspended Hornung and Karras, Rozelle incorporated NFL Properties, and in 1964 he brought NFL Films in-house as "a promotional vehicle to glamorize the game and present it in its best light."[7] In relation to the later marketing of NFL football, Rozelle's initial steps seem small, and they were always predicated on the assumption that pro football itself, the game on the field, was the NFL's own best advertisement. But Rozelle's actions in 1963–64 laid the foundation on which the later more highly commercialized, less football-centered NFL would be grounded. NFL Properties remained a relatively small-scale enterprise until the 1980s, with profits so modest the league gave them to charity for the public relations benefit. (I will return to NFL Properties in Chapter 5.) NFL Films had a more immediate and enduring impact as pro football's troubadour and epic poet.

NFL Films' own story, more fairy tale than epic, is nearly as well known as its highlight reels. Once upon a time, an overcoat salesman named Ed Sabol received a 16-millimeter Bell & Howell movie camera for a wedding present

and began shooting everything in sight, eventually including his son's prep-school football games. After many years of this, Sabol retired from the clothing business because work felt like going to the dentist every day, and he began looking for ways to make money from his hobby. "Big Ed" was passionate about two things, sports and movies, and after watching the highlight film of the NFL's 1961 championship game, he decided that he could do better. Learning that the NFL had received $1,500 for the filming rights in 1961, Sabol submitted a bid to Pete Rozelle for twice that amount for the 1962 contest between Green Bay and New York. (As befits a creation myth, there are variants and apocrypha. *Sports Illustrated* in 1967 put the price at $12,500, and a $5,000 figure appeared in some later retellings, but $3,000 has become the more or less official version.) Despite his lack of experience (not to mention staff and equipment), and perhaps aided by Rozelle's four martinis at lunch, Sabol convinced the commissioner by telling him that he would shoot the game with eight cameras instead of four, from ground level as well as high in the stadium, and in slow motion as well as normal speed. In due course the game was played, in freezing temperatures in Green Bay that left cinematographers, cameras, and film frostbitten or frozen, but Sabol and his crew salvaged enough footage for a 28-minute film that Rozelle proclaimed the finest football movie he had ever seen. Sabol repeated his performance under better conditions the following year, making a few extra bucks by renting his films to Kiwanis Clubs and Boy Scout troops. He then persuaded Rozelle and the 14 NFL owners to purchase his company, Blair Productions (named after his daughter), for $20,000 per club ($12,000 in one version of the tale) and bring it in-house. NFL Films was born.[8]

Unlike some modern fairy tales, this one actually happened. And it has a long sequel. Ed Sabol conceived the basic idea to shoot football games like Hollywood movies. His son Steve transformed that vision into the distinctive look and sound of NFL Films. Steve grew up like his father, loving football and movies, then went to Colorado College, where he majored in art and was "a pretty average fullback" according to his roommate (*Sports Illustrated* elevated him retroactively to All-Conference). The next part of the story is always the same: father Ed calls son Steve and tells him, "I can see by your grades that all you've been doing for the past four years is playing football and going to the movies. So that makes you uniquely qualified for this assignment."[9] Steve comes home to work for his father, bringing with him an artist's sensibility and an athlete's passion for football.

In interviews over the years, the younger Sabol has consistently invoked the same handful of painters, filmmakers, and classic film moments that shaped

his own crafting of the NFL Films style. For tight close-ups: the impressionist Paul Cézanne taught him that "all art is selected detail," and in the 1946 film *Duel in the Sun*, shots of hands digging into rock and sweat pouring from faces captured the struggle of Gregory Peck and Jennifer Jones as they claw their way up a hill. For multiple camera angles: Picasso painted a woman's figure from several angles simultaneously. For use of light and shadow: Renaissance painters used chiaroscuro "to heighten certain dramatic effects." For low-angle shots, with sky and clouds in the background: Leni Riefenstahl, in her classic film of the 1936 Olympics, "used the sky in a way that increased the grandeur and epic sense of the competition." A relatively obscure eighteenth-century painter, Giacomo Di Chirico, framed his subjects in a manner that taught Steve how to shoot stadiums. Claude Lelouche's 1966 film, *A Man and a Woman*, demonstrated how a moving camera could tell a story without words. The rousing musical scores for film classics *Gone with the Wind*, *Victory at Sea*, *High Noon*, *El Cid*, and *The Magnificent Seven* showed how music could tell the same story that the actors played out on the screen.[10]

NFL Films always emphasized telling stories: from the beginning, the Sabols did not merely record football highlights but told stories about pro football in a self-consciously epic mode. The NFL Films style was fully developed by 1966 in the company's first feature film, *They Call It Pro Football*, which Steve Sabol likes to call "the *Citizen Kane* of sports films."[11] The instantly recognizable style begins with the use of film itself, whose textures are warmer and deeper (and much more expensive) than videotape. The key elements of the style are familiar to virtually any sports fan who has watched pro football on television sometime in the past 40 years:

- Images: slow motion and tight close-ups, shot with telephoto and zoom lenses by cameras located at various positions throughout the stadium
- Sound: equally important elements of symphonic music punctuated by grunts, collisions, and shouts caught by wireless microphones on players and coaches
- Narration: lean and weighty (Sabol calls it "Hemingwayesque"),[12] sometimes poetic, always melodramatic, and in the major productions from NFL Films' classic period intoned by John Facenda
- Editing: montages with distinct segments (collisions, followed by graceful receptions, screaming coaches, crazy fumbles, snowflakes floating downward in super slow motion, and so on)
- Story: romantic, melodramatic, epic, mythic, usually with playful and humorous interludes

Ed Sabol used slow motion in his very first highlight film, and he invented the shooting of football by what he called "Trees," "Moles," and "Weasels." The Tree had the fixed camera high on the 50-yard line, from which all football games had been shot since the early newsreels. Sabol's great innovations were the Moles and Weasels. The Mole had a handheld camera at field level for shooting close-ups of faces, hands, and tight-spiraling footballs (NFL Films' signature image). The Weasel also carried a handheld camera but "burrowed" through the stadium, high and low, looking for anything striking or bizarre. Beginning in 1964, NFL Films covered every regular-season game with at least two and usually three cameras, one of them shooting only in slow motion, adding more cameras for the playoffs and eventually as many as 18 for the Super Bowl. For his very first film, Ed also abandoned Sousa marches for music modeled after Henry Mancini's jazzy score for the hit TV series *Peter Gunn*. He set out from the beginning to make *movies* about football, not just document the games.[13]

Steve turned his father's original innovations into the full-blown NFL Films style. Steve himself wrote the scripts, looking to Rudyard Kipling and Grantland Rice for inspiration. To read them, he hired John Facenda, whose resonant baritone, "the voice of God," rumbled over most of NFL Films' major productions—features and Super Bowl films but not the routine weekly highlights—from 1966 to 1984. Steve hired Sam Spence to write original music recorded in Munich with a 64-piece orchestra from 1966 to 1990. Something like symphonies for bassoon, French horns, and tympani, Spence's music was percussive, soaring, pounding, jaunty (with moments of tinkling counterpoint). Listen to the early music without the images and you think you are hearing the soundtrack from a widescreen Western of the 1950s or early 1960s (with the theme from *The Magnificent Seven* most explicitly echoed). The unsung hero of NFL Films was Yoshio Kishi, a Japanese film editor who had never seen a football game before he joined the company. Without understanding the game, Kishi immediately understood that highlights need not show the entire play, only "the apex of action." Kishi's montages, which first appeared in *They Call It Pro Football* (along with the first microphone on a coach, the first original score, and the first narration from Facenda), immediately changed the standards for editing highlight films.[14]

Major trade journals such as *American Cinematographer* and *Film Score Monthly* have saluted NFL Films for its technical innovations and artistic achievements. A writer for the *New York Times* has gone so far as to call Steve Sabol "perhaps the most underrated filmmaker working today." With its distinctive style, NFL Films has been likened to the Hollywood studios of the

1930s. I would add that the alternating segments of percussive violence, balletic grace, and slapstick humor also resemble the acts in a vaudeville or burlesque show—only they are done in high dramatic style, with colliding male bodies substituting for female ones. NFL Films has no equal when it comes to capturing the varied moods and rhythms of football.[15]

The technical innovations of NFL Films, adopted by ABC for *Monday Night Football* and eventually by all the networks for routine telecasts of games, made football more comprehensible to television viewers. The artistry of NFL Films has done more: in an era of debunking, it has not just sustained but increased football's cultural power. NFL Films is one of the all-time great masters of illusion. A highlight reel or feature from NFL Films is no less artificial than one of the NFL's marketing campaigns of the 1990s. Yet the effect of the technical virtuosity is a hyperrealism that is at once larger than ordinary life and more "true" than the football we watch with our own eyes. An NFL Films cinematographer has described the goal as portraying "reality as we wish it was."[16] Through the montages of violent collisions and the close-ups of bloodied fists and contorted faces spraying sweat drops in super slow motion, NFL Films lets the viewer see and feel more intensely the thrill and power and struggle of professional football.

The presence of NFL Films' cameras and microphones sometimes turns players into conscious performers, mugging for the viewers or screaming at teammates and opponents in the adopted role of team leader.[17] But against this manufactured drama, NFL Films also captures subtle dimensions of football that elevate it. For several years after freezing weather nearly sabotaged them in Green Bay, the company's cinematographers dreaded rain, snow, and fog. In time, however, they started praying for bad weather,[18] for the stunning shots of snowflakes floating gently down on embattled armies, of muddied warriors trudging to the line like Napoleon's forces before the gates of Moscow, of players appearing then disappearing into eerie fog, of footballs and feet bouncing and sliding crazily on ice. In these otherworldly moments pro football seems like a mighty struggle governed by the forces of nature, like Odysseus blown by fair winds or foul as the meddling gods dictate. The alternating segments of endlessly drawn-out, slow-motion images followed by rapidly cut collisions likewise create a sense of football time unbound from the ticking of mechanical clocks. A season can be compressed into 30 seconds; a long pass can seem to float forever before descending into outstretched hands. With "the voice of God" intoning martial poetry and "gladiator music"[19] thundering in the background, NFL Films has sustained a sense of mythic grandeur in our decidedly antimythic times.

Merger

While Pete Rozelle was laying the foundation for the National Football League with NFL Films, NFL Properties, and the national TV contract, competition from the rival American Football League was threatening to undermine it. In August 1959, five months before Rozelle became commissioner, 27-year-old Dallas oilman Lamar Hunt, son of the legendary billionaire wildcatter H. L. Hunt, announced plans for a new league with teams in Dallas, Houston, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and New York. Buffalo and Boston were soon added. Hunt, along with Houston's Bud Adams (a fellow Texan and oilman) and their other partners, did not want war with the NFL. Hunt came up with the idea for a rival league only after failing to acquire an NFL franchise, then discovering that he was not alone in his frustration. Hunt even naively approached Bert Bell to be commissioner of both leagues, à la Major League Baseball with its American and National Leagues. For his part, Bell had his own worries, as a Senate subcommittee was investigating the NFL's seemingly monopolistic behavior. With Hunt's approval, Bell in his testimony before the subcommittee actually made the public announcement about the new AFL and assured the senators that he was "all for the league and would help nurture it."[20]

How far Bell would have gone to back up his word can never be known, because he died suddenly in October 1959, leaving key NFL owners to begin behaving suspiciously like monopolists. The NFL with supposedly no interest in expansion now offered franchises to Hunt and Adams, who turned them down out of loyalty to their partners. Not all of their partners were so loyal in return. On January 27, 1960 (the day after Rozelle became commissioner), the group representing Minneapolis withdrew from the AFL and accepted an NFL franchise a day later—the same day that Dallas also received a franchise. Hunt now had a crosstown rival as well as a hole in his new league, which Oakland filled two days later. In June the AFL filed a $10 million antitrust lawsuit over the expansion franchises for Dallas and Minneapolis. The same month, the AFL's prospects became instantly promising when the league signed a five-year, $8.5 million TV contract with ABC, the weakest of the networks and the only one willing to take a chance on the upstart league. Television, along with the deep pockets of Lamar Hunt and Bud Adams, assured at least short-term survival. When informed that his son lost close to a half-million dollars in the AFL's first season, H. L. Hunt, either the richest or the second-richest man in the world according to journalists, and the source of Lamar's trust fund, commented, "At that rate, he can't last much past the year 2135 A.D."[21]

In May 1962 the AFL lost its antitrust case in district court, then lost its appeal in November 1963, but despite these setbacks it would not go away. The turning point came with a new five-year, $36 million television contract with NBC, signed in January 1964 to begin with the 1965 season, paying about $900,000 per year to each team—just under the $1 million per team negotiated by the NFL for 1964–65. (Unable to match NBC's offer, ABC sold its rival the final year of its initial AFL contract.) Gate receipts were still the major source of revenue in pro football, and the NFL's average attendance roughly doubled the AFL's,[c] but $900,000 was $100,000 more than clubs' average annual expenses. The contract with NBC guaranteed the AFL's survival. The NFL had to win the war; the AFL only had to keep hanging around.[22]

And winning was becoming expensive. After the owner of the New York Jets, David "Sonny" Werblin, shocked the football world by signing rookie Joe Namath for $427,000 in January 1965, salaries quickly spiraled out of control. In the most-publicized signings, Green Bay coughed up $1 million for Donny Anderson and Jim Grabowski, and Tommy Nobis leveraged $600,000 from the new NFL franchise in Atlanta. Facing a ruinous bidding war for rookies, Rozelle authorized Dallas general manager Tex Schramm to meet secretly with Lamar Hunt through the spring of 1966 to work out a merger. On June 8, Rozelle announced a peace settlement, over the objections of Al Davis, who had recently replaced Joe Foss as the AFL's commissioner and wanted a fight to the finish. The two leagues agreed to form a single National Football League by 1970, with a single draft of college players in the meantime and a championship game between the leagues (later conferences) beginning with the 1966 season. Rozelle would be commissioner of the combined leagues, a decision that left Davis embittered and his personal war with Rozelle and the NFL only postponed.

As with the national television contract, one more hurdle remained: the merger violated antitrust law at the expense of the players, who would no longer be able to pit one league against the other in bidding for their services. Rozelle succeeded in Congress again, this time by promising Senator Russell Long and House Majority Leader Hale Boggs, both from Louisiana, to place a franchise in New Orleans. Boggs circumvented the antagonistic House Judiciary Committee by attaching the antitrust exemption to a budget bill with unshakable support in both houses. Congress passed the bill on October 21,

c. AFL average attendance increased slowly but steadily—from 16,538 in 1960 to 17,905 in 1961, 20,486 in 1962, 21,584 in 1963, 25,855 in 1964, and 31,828 in 1965—while the NFL's rose from 40,106 to 47,286 over that same period.

1966. New Orleans received an NFL franchise on November 1. NFL rookies again had to take whatever their drafting teams offered them.[23]

The merger in 1966 completed the creation of the modern NFL. The 14-team league of 1960 now had 26 teams, acquiring an entire extended family in something like a second marriage. AFL coaches were more freewheeling and innovative, and by the 1970s the old NFL clubs would have to adjust. The AFL also had "fan-friendly" rules, such as the two-point conversion and players' names on their jerseys, which the combined league adopted.[24] In Davis, Rozelle acquired an evil stepbrother, and in Namath the entire league acquired the wayward son who proceeded not only to break all the rules but to get the other kids acting out. Rather than continue an expensive war, the NFL had grudgingly accepted the lesser league as a full partner, only to be remade in the AFL's image.

Football in Red, White, and Blue

Among other consequences, the NFL-AFL merger begat the Super Bowl—destined to become the country's number-one sports attraction, TV attraction, and showcase for advertisers, though only its number-two day for eating (behind Thanksgiving). But not right away; the first two Super Bowls did not yet have that official title, let alone a Roman numeral after it. They were the NFL-AFL World Championship Games, in which the established league demonstrated its indisputable superiority. Kansas City stayed close to Green Bay for the first half of the first contest, in January 1967, before being swamped 35–10. Oakland never threatened the Packers in 1968, falling 33–14. Both games drew large television audiences: 41.1 percent of all TV sets in 1967 (split between CBS and NBC because each owned the rights to one of the two leagues), just under 37 percent in 1968 for CBS alone.[25] But there were 31,000 empty seats in the Los Angeles Coliseum in 1967, and neither game was anything more than football's version of a pro championship.

The victories of Joe Namath and the New York Jets over the Baltimore Colts in the 1969 championship (the first to be officially named the Super Bowl, becoming Super Bowl III in the retrospective counting) and of Kansas City over Minnesota in 1970 were more momentous because they established parity between the two leagues as they became one. But in 1969 and 1970, the Super Bowl was still several years away from becoming an unofficial civic holiday and orgy of consumerism. For all its historical importance, Super Bowl III had the lowest TV rating in the game's history, as the public expected another NFL blowout despite Namath's shocking "guarantee" of a Jets' victory. For Super Bowl IV, the rating improved from 36.0 to 39.4, still almost 10 rating points below the eventual peak in 1982.

It seems clear, however, that Pete Rozelle early on envisioned something like what the Super Bowl would become; and his vision, as always, concerned the NFL's image. The fact that Rozelle decided from the beginning on a neutral site for the contest meant that he expected it to stand alone without needing home team partisanship. In this sense, the Super Bowl extended the philosophy behind the national TV contract, which marketed the entire league, not individual teams. What kind of event Rozelle envisioned, though, is most evident in what he later called "a conscious effort on our part to bring the element of patriotism into the Super Bowl."[26] "Superpatriotism" would be more accurate. After the unspectacular staging of the inaugural game, the second one included what would become a Super Bowl signature: a pregame flyover by Air Force jets following the national anthem. The halftime show for Super Bowl III was the first to have a theme, "America Thanks," which struck the patriotic note that would become embedded in the event. The pregame show that year (and again in 1970 and 1973) featured astronauts leading the Pledge of Allegiance, inaugurating the NFL's special tie to NASA. The New Christy Minstrels, who provided the pregame entertainment in 1970, were introduced as "young Americans who demonstrate—with guitars." The halftime show featured a reenactment of the Battle of New Orleans.[27]

All of this, of course, resonated more deeply in 1968, 1969, and 1970 than it would have even a couple of years earlier. Those years marked the height of everything that the term "the sixties" has come to mean, and the NFL positioned itself clearly on one side of the era's political and generational divide. (As a college football player during these years, I knew that one could play football and oppose the war in Vietnam, but I also understood that many people regarded football as a kind of war, whether heroic or imperialistic.)

Pete Rozelle and the NFL were not the first to make this move; they learned how to play the superpatriot game from Earnie Seiler, the impresario of college football's Orange Bowl from 1935 through 1974, where he reigned as the entire football world's king of pious and patriotic kitsch. The NFL first hired Seiler to stage the second Super Bowl, played in Miami, then again in 1969 and 1971 when the game returned there. (New Orleans was the site in 1970.) Whether or not Rozelle and the NFL might have followed a similar course independently, Seiler brought the spectacle and superpatriotism of the Orange Bowl to the Super Bowl. To some degree, the Orange Bowl simply exported Bible Belt piety and Dade County politics to a national TV audience. For Rozelle, the Super Bowl was chiefly an advertisement for NFL football, investing the game with "traditional American values."

Compared to the Orange Bowl, the Super Bowl was actually a restrained

affair in its early years, though of course that changed. To get ahead of the story for a moment, the intensity of the patriotic display at the Super Bowl slackened with the fall of Saigon and the resignation of Richard Nixon—the end of "the sixties"—but routine celebrations of patriotism became as predictable as dousing the winning coach with Gatorade. By the 1990s, when the United States was actually at war—in 1991 in the Persian Gulf, then in 2002 in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, then again after 2004 in Iraq—an element of self-conscious calculation was unmistakable. Rozelle's successor, Paul Tagliabue, shared Rozelle's view that the Super Bowl, as Tagliabue put it, is "the winter version of the Fourth of July celebration."[28] For the 1991 game, played just a few days into the Persian Gulf War, that meant American flag decals on the players' helmets, images of soldiers in the desert throughout the pregame show, and a halftime address from President George Bush, who described the Gulf War as *his* Super Bowl.

The highest PQ (Patriotism Quotient) thus far belongs to Super Bowl XXXVI in 2002, telecast by Fox, the network more generally known for excess. To have the *Patriots* of New England pitted against the St. Louis Rams was a marketer's dream, as American troops pursued Al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Tagliabue spoke before the game of the NFL's responsibility as "a keeper of the nation's mood" and of the league's objective "to strike a balance between reflecting the risks that our society faces on the one hand and being positive, self-confident, resilient, and inspirational on the other." The NFL had by this time become hyperconscious of not alienating any part of its audience.[d] In contrast to the more militaristic displays during the Vietnam era, NFL vice president Roger Goodell disavowed "making any political statements" this time, because "it's not our place." The telecast would focus on "everyday heroes" and "American ideals." "Fewer F-111s, more founding fathers," as a reporter for *SportsBusiness Journal* put it.[29]

Fox's three-hour pregame show, "Heroes, Hope, and Homeland," opened with actor Michael Douglas's voice-over declaring this Sunday "a special day where Americans come together to share a common vision." "Postcards" from American soldiers in Afghanistan preceded commercial breaks, and the feature stories included one on the firefighter brothers of Patriot guard Joe Andruzzi (one of whom nearly died in the World Trade Center) and another on Bob Kalsu, the only NFL player to lose his life in Vietnam. For the climactic

d. The muting of patriotic display in 2006 and 2007, when the public had turned decisively against the younger President Bush's war in Iraq, illustrates the NFL's desire to connect with the popular mood, not promote any political agenda.

"Tribute to America," former NFL stars read from the Declaration of Independence, and former presidents recited Abraham Lincoln's speeches from an earlier national crisis, as the Boston Pops played Aaron Copeland's *Lincoln Portrait* in the background. After this, the halftime show—a musical performance by rock band U2, whose lead singer Bono flashed the American-flag lining of his leather jacket at the finale as a list of those who died on September 11 scrolled up the TV screen—seemed relatively subdued.

It is impossible to know how many viewers were moved by these highly choreographed expressions of spontaneous feeling, or how many believed that such sentiments had any relationship to the football game at hand.[30] One member of the Andruzzi family conspicuously declined to be interviewed for the pregame show: Jimmy, the brother who nearly died at Ground Zero. Whatever his reasons, Jimmy Andruzzi's silence invited the thought that the bombastic production of the Super Bowl might not be the proper venue for honoring "true heroes."

Likewise, the profile of Bob Kalsu might have reminded older viewers not just of an earlier war that divided rather than unified the country, but also of how few NFL players actually fought in it, or in any war since. Kalsu had long been forgotten, until *Sports Illustrated* did a cover story on him in July 2001. Rocky Bleier, my old Notre Dame teammate, was the NFL's most famous Vietnam veteran, a man of limited physical gifts but great heart who recovered from serious leg wounds to create with Franco Harris the league's best running game in the late 1970s. A total of 638 NFL players served during World War II, 19 of them dying. Besides Bleier and Kalsu, just four other pro football players served in Vietnam.[31] To protect their economic interests, several NFL clubs in the 1960s had special ties to local reserve or National Guard units for sheltering their players from the draft (at a time when these units had long waiting lists). This was no secret. *Life* magazine in 1966 described such arrangements for the Dallas Cowboys, Boston Patriots, Washington Redskins, Green Bay Packers, Philadelphia Eagles, and Baltimore Colts. That year, when 27 percent of young men between 18 and 35 classified 1-A by the Selective Service were drafted, just two NFL players failed to avoid the draft.[32]

The NFL's "warrior culture"[e] has always been about image.[33]

e. The outpouring of tributes in April 2004 when Arizona Cardinal safety Pat Tillman died in an ambush in Afghanistan, after leaving behind a $3.6 million contract (and a new wife) to enlist in the war on terrorism, was another collision of image and reality. With Army Rangers standing grimly behind him, Tagliabue at the 2004 NFL draft saluted Tillman as a man who "personified the best values of America and of the National Football League." Tillman, however, became a hero by *abandoning* the NFL.

Football in Prime Time

To return to Pete Rozelle and the foundation he laid in the 1960s, we have one more cornerstone to consider. All of Rozelle's promotional efforts derived from a bedrock belief in the marketing power of pro football itself. Rozelle's challenge as commissioner was to bring NFL games to an ever-wider audience and to satisfy the desires of an audience that already existed. Televising games in prime time was yet another of Rozelle's early ideas, a plan for reaching beyond the serious fans who tuned in on Sunday afternoons. Between 1966 and 1969, CBS indulged Rozelle by broadcasting five games on Monday nights, but always "to mediocre ratings." At the networks, only Roone Arledge believed that football could compete for a general audience with sit-coms and serial dramas, but Arledge could not persuade his bosses at ABC. When Rozelle in 1970, however, threatened to sell a Monday night package to the independent network owned by Howard Hughes, executives at ABC suddenly foresaw their third-ranked network dropping to fourth. Rozelle's shrewdness as a negotiator won Monday night for the NFL, but when *Monday Night Football* debuted in 1970, Roone Arledge at ABC did much more than Pete Rozelle at the NFL to make the first decisive shift from treating football as a sport to treating it as an entertainment product.[34]

Arledge brought to televised football the idea that the show, not the game, was what mattered. In a famous memo, written in 1960 to his bosses at ABC before he had filmed his first football game, Arledge described applying the techniques used for televising variety shows, political conventions, and travel or adventure shows in order to target women as well as men by appealing to their interest in the pageantry and "the feeling of the game." Instead of the standard three stationary cameras, which missed much of the action and all of the color and surrounding excitement, Arledge would use six cameras that would shoot anything of interest in the stadium when not focused on the play. He would mount cameras on jeeps, on risers, in helicopters, on mike booms. And he would use a "creepy-peepy" (handheld) camera

> to get the impact shots that we cannot get from a fixed camera—a coach's face as a man drops a pass in the clear—a pretty cheerleader after her hero has scored a touchdown—a coed who brings her infant baby to the game—the referee as he calls a particularly difficult play—two romantic students sharing a blanket late in the game on a cold day—the beaming face of a

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Also, it turned out that Tillman was killed by friendly fire, and that the army deliberately lied to his parents as well as the public in order to have a "poster boy" for the war.

substitute halfback as he comes off the field after running 70 yards for a touchdown, on his first play for the varsity—all the excitement, wonder, jubilation, and despair that make this America's number-one sports spectacle, and a human drama to match bullfights and heavyweight championships in intensity.

In short—we are going to add show business to sports![35]

Here lay the future of televised football, before any part of it had yet arrived (and before Ed Sabol sold his similar vision to Pete Rozelle).

Historians Randy Roberts and James Olson call Arledge "probably the most important single individual in modern sports."[36] Behind his revolution in televising football lay an understanding that the game itself provided "a supply of human drama that would make the producer of a dramatic show drool." Or to put the matter more simply, that football by its very nature tells powerful stories. Arledge worked out his ideas initially with ABC's college football telecasts, then for one season (1963) of broadcasting the AFL, which provided "a veritable production laboratory on the field and the freedom to experiment." The upstart AFL allowed ABC latitude in its game coverage that the NFL would not give CBS. While CBS (and NBC) still shot games from the 50-yard line, Arledge (like Sabol) placed cameras and microphones throughout the stadium and along the sidelines. NFL Films built on Arledge's innovations, and Arledge in turn learned from NFL Films how to achieve a "cinematic look" with low angles and tight close-ups, along with driving music and powerful narration. He personalized the players after they made key plays, with on-screen graphics and videotapes of previous highlights. He even tried miking a quarterback (for an episode of *Wide World of Sports*), until the device picked up a lineman yelling "Shee-it!" after a missed call by an official. Arledge's work with AFL games laid the groundwork for *Monday Night Football* and became the standard for the industry soon after.[37]

Adding show business to football broadcasting initially meant enhancing the game's storytelling ability, not reducing but amplifying football's epic or mythic power. More cameras, including the use of close-ups, slow motion, and replays, meant an ability to capture the raw human emotions of joy, agony, disappointment, and rage. With *Monday Night Football*, Arledge would add another element: his broadcasters went beyond describing and analyzing plays to establishing "storylines," with plots as simple as the raw emotions. Any football fan could name several off the top of his or her head—the traditional-rivals story, the bitter-enemies story, the wounded-hero story, the Cinderella or Ugly Ducking story, the son-challenging-the-father story (for-

mer assistant versus wily mentor), and so on. These stories, unsurprisingly, are versions of the oldest and most-repeated narratives in the Western world. Football itself tapped into them, and from the moment that newspapers began extensively covering the games in the 1880s, the media elaborated on them. Beginning in the 1960s, however, sportswriters and broadcasters became increasingly self-conscious and intentional about doing this, and Arledge led television in this direction. By the 1990s, showmanship itself would increasingly become the story, at the expense of the elemental stories inherent in the game. Arledge enhanced football's cultural power, but the forces he put in motion would later threaten to undermine it.

Monday Night Football introduced "the new paradigm of sportscasting," replacing "the game-in-a-cathedral model of CBS and NBC" with "up-close, camera-rich, three-in-the-booth entertainment."[38] With Chet Forte as his director, Arledge had a prime-time arena for televising football games with new camera angles and more cameras than the other networks used, as well as more graphics, more men in the broadcast booth (where irreverence and controversy replaced solemnity and deference), and "storylines" to guide the commentary—all of this, as Arledge put it in that early memo, "to gain and hold the interest of women and others who are not fanatic followers of the sport we happen to be televising."[39] By the late 1980s, *Monday Night Football* would become just another football game on TV, but in the 1970s it was a cultural phenomenon. It altered domestic relations, leisure habits, and workplace gossip; and it was indeed more about Howard Cosell trading jibes with "Dandy" Don Meredith in the broadcast booth than about the Redskins and Cowboys or Rams and 49ers fighting it out on the field. As Roberts and Olson put it, while Arledge's technical innovations gave every game "an epic quality," the announcers "made the show."[40] Cosell played the key role here. Even more than Roone Arledge, Howard Cosell believed that *he* was the show on Monday nights, the football game just his stage. To some degree he was right. Cosell instantly became both the most admired and most despised broadcaster in sports, and in both roles he drew viewers to *Monday Night Football*, which just as quickly became one of the top-rated shows in all of prime time.

I was among those who despised Cosell for his ignorance about football despite his constant *ex cathedra* pronouncements.[f] Above all, I resented Co-

f. I would not appreciate Cosell's politics—his championing of Muhammad Ali when the sporting establishment reviled and feared him—until many years later. I viewed Cosell as Ali's creation without giving Cosell himself sufficient credit. And I would not realize that Cosell was a passionate defender of striking NFL players in 1987 until I researched this book.

sell's belief that he was, in his own words, "bigger than the game." Cosell was great at getting the "inside" story from coaches and players before the game. He was lousy at analysis, and he too often insisted that the "storylines" he announced at the beginning of the game were playing out on the field even when they did not. Cosell railed against the "jockocracy" of ex-athletes allowed into the broadcast booth without professional training for the job, including his own partners Frank Gifford and Don Meredith. The fact is, the ex-jocks, for all their limitations as broadcasters in some cases, understood football.[41]

Where Cosell had no peer was in the drama he brought to the halftime highlights of Sunday's games, which became a weekly TV event in themselves. NFL Films provided the footage; Cosell added the hyped-up narration. Here was born the highlight film that ESPN's *SportsCenter* would eventually make the very center of our sporting universe.

As a show-biz phenomenon, *Monday Night Football* could not be sustained. The ratings slide from their 1981 peak began before Cosell left in 1984, and subsequent personnel changes in the booth had little impact. As Sunday night football and Thursday night football made Monday just another football night, whether the games themselves were thrilling or boring determined the quality of the broadcast. But Arledge and Forte had by then created a new technical standard for all of the networks by putting a premium on production values and storytelling. In the 1990s, when the NFL itself authorized "Ump Cams," miked players, halftime interviews with coaches, and sideline interviews with players, it was embracing and extending the vision of Roone Arledge.[42]

Before the 1977 Super Bowl, the sportswriter Roger Kahn asked Pete Rozelle "if the National Football League was show business." "Sure," Rozelle told Kahn, "but we prefer the word entertainment. What we do object to is constant psychoanalysis. Football is warlike. Football is violent. . . . The game has nothing to do with war. Our league provides action entertainment, nothing less and nothing more."[43] Rozelle shared Arledge's vision, but whether he spoke for the fans is not so obvious.

St. Vince and Broadway Joe

As Vince Lombardi lay dying of colon cancer in the summer of 1970, his wife Marie heard him bark in a troubled sleep: "Joe Namath! You're not bigger than football. Remember that." Describing the scene for *Esquire* in 1997, David Maraniss explained that for the three years before his death the

coach "had been giving speeches lamenting what he considered the deceit of modern times. . . . In the rebellious sixties, freedom had become idealized against order, he said. The new against the old, genius against discipline. Everything was aimed at strengthening the rights of the individual and weakening the state, the church, and all authority. Now he feared that the battle had been too completely won and that society was reeling from the superficial excesses of freedom." Muttering in his sleep "Joe Namath" gave a specific name to the changes he feared were already accomplished, while Lombardi himself, of course, represented everything that had been cast aside. As Maraniss wrote in 1997, "It was as though, in his dying vision, [Lombardi] saw Michael Irvin and Brian Bosworth and Deion Sanders coming along behind Broadway Joe."[44] The dying icon of a vanishing football world might have been even more shocked to know that the rights of the individual against authority and "the state"—the NFL, that is—would be invoked by profit-minded owners such as Al Davis, Jerry Jones, and Art Modell over the coming decades, not just by high-stepping cornerbacks and strutting receivers.

Lombardi was right about the battle already having been "too completely won." Namath was the NFL in 1970, as Vince Lombardi had been the NFL in the 1960s. Several later coaches and innumerable players would have a greater impact on how professional football is played, but not on what it means. And despite the tremendous expansion of the engines of celebrity making since the 1960s, none would come close to their impact on the larger culture. As symbols, "Lombardi" and "Namath" could represent opposed values at the heart of football itself since its beginnings—violence and discipline on the one hand, artistry and self-expression on the other. Football exerts its unique power in the tension between the two. Lombardi and Namath also harken back to older and more universal archetypes: to the Apollonian and Dionysian principles that seemed to show up everywhere in my literature classes in college in the 1960s; to work and play, control and abandon, pain and pleasure, deferred and instant gratification. But Lombardi and Namath embodied those ideas in distinctive ways for their own time. By the end of the 1960s, Lombardi was football's past, Namath its present and future. "Lombardi" is still with us, and not just on the trophy awarded each season to the Super Bowl champion. In Super Bowl pregame shows and elsewhere, Lombardi's name and image are repeatedly invoked to conjure up the world of pro football when it was more elemental, less glitzy. Less Namath-like. Joe Namath made football safe for the counterculture, the Me Generation, and the Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers of the future, for all of those who would want their football with a bit of style.

The Lombardi Sixties

Although Lombardi came to symbolize a kind of "traditional" football, he by no means created the tradition, nor was it a tradition already associated with professional football. In one sense Lombardi simply brought to the NFL a coaching style with a long history in the colleges. Impassioned tyrants could be found throughout the college football world in the early 1960s—several of them would face rebellion from their black players by the decade's end—and their lineage could be traced back through coaches like Red Blaik (Lombardi's own mentor), Frank Cavanaugh (the "Iron Major"), Biff Jones, and Jock Sutherland, all the way to Doc Spears and Bill Roper in the 1920s. The iron-fisted style supposedly would not work with professionals, who were adults, not children. Many old-time pros were barely housebroken, if the stories told about them had any truth. The 1997 issue of *Esquire* in which Maraniss recounted Lombardi's dying words carried a companion piece by Charles Pierce, "Does Football Matter?," about the "authentic barbarians" of the early NFL, men like Green Bay's Johnny Blood, who trained in brothels and honky-tonks and played football with a kind of joyful recklessness that supposedly had disappeared from the game. "By comparison," declared Pierce, "Namath's entire career as a public sybarite probably didn't add up to a good weekend for Johnny Blood."[45] Coaches of old-time players, by necessity, would have had to be closer to harried zookeepers than all-powerful leaders like Lombardi, or sideline "geniuses" like Paul Brown and later Bill Walsh.

Pierce lamented the sterility of the modern game and its personalities, the disappearance of football as unleashed Id. As legendary Bad Boy, Joe Namath served as a measure of how far the NFL had fallen away from being an entire league of true Bad Boys, "authentic barbarians." Pierce's lament fit into a long tradition of nostalgic complaints: the game is always declining from some Golden Age. (There is also, of course, a competing narrative, in which today's football is always better than the past's.) In mourning that NFL football might no longer matter, Pierce failed to mention that in Johnny Blood's time almost nobody cared.

As a self-proclaimed bible of masculinity ("The Magazine for Men" or "Man at His Best" in different eras), *Esquire* has published a number of perceptive essays about football over the years, including Thomas Morgan's "The American War Game" in October 1965. The memorable cover had a New York Giant kneeling on the field, hands clasped and head bowed in prayer, with the caption, "Heaven help him—he's going to play 60 minutes of pro ball." With the war in Vietnam just beginning to escalate, Morgan saw "an eerie parallel in the recent histories of U.S. politics and pro football," as

the NFL's "sluggardly, ground-oriented game" gave way to aerial attacks ("Throw the bomb!") that mirrored the Pentagon's shift toward a doctrine of "massive retaliation."[46]

"The American War Game" did not glibly celebrate football's violence but challenged the tendency to emphasize its cerebral and technological aspects in accounting for its appeal. Basically, Morgan argued that football expressed, in a controlled way, something profoundly primitive that held a special appeal in over-civilized times, though he insisted on football's "lethal difference" from actual war. Contrary to the idea, prominent during both World Wars, that football was an ideal training ground for combat, Morgan endorsed what became known as the catharsis theory of violent sports. Football's "purgative purpose," Morgan wrote, was to provide a vicarious outlet for the human instinct for war. Writing before the massive buildup in Vietnam, Morgan could contemplate football's warlike nature more positively than would soon be possible.

Morgan did not mention Vince Lombardi, but Lombardi was in fact becoming the dominant symbol of a 1960s football world defined by violence, discipline, and stoicism. Lombardi had been what would now be called the offensive coordinator for the New York Giants teams of the late 1950s that were celebrated for their "sanctioned savagery," but journalists heaped most of their praise on the architect of the defense, Tom Landry. Had the cerebral, bloodless Landry gone to Green Bay in 1959 instead of Dallas in 1960 and been as successful as Lombardi became, the popular image of pro football in the 1960s might have looked very different. But Landry and the Cowboys won no championships until the 1970s; the 1960s belonged to Vince Lombardi and the Packers.

Green Bay in 1959 was one of the NFL's most-storied, most-sentimentalized, and in recent years least-successful franchises. In 1958, the year before Lombardi arrived, the Packers won just 1 of 12 games and had not had a winning season since 1947. In Lombardi's first season as coach, the team went 7–5. In his second season, the Packers topped the Western Conference but lost the title game to the Philadelphia Eagles. Green Bay then won NFL championships in 1961, 1962, 1965, 1966, and 1967, along with the first two Super Bowls, after which Lombardi retired briefly, then was lured back to the sidelines by the Washington Redskins for the 1969 season. Again he turned a loser into a winner (the team went 7-5-2), though whether he would have repeated the rest of his Green Bay magic can never be known. He died the following September.

Lombardi's life has been chronicled in a first-rate biography by David

Maraniss, but to appreciate his impact on his time it is useful to go back to the magazine profiles of the 1960s.[47] The Lombardi known to football fans—like the public image of Namath—was the one created in the media. The sporting press responded immediately to Lombardi's success in Green Bay, and in his second season, when he won his first conference championship, the news weeklies and general-interest magazines also began paying serious attention. The outlines of the Lombardi Legend that would be full-blown by 1967 emerged in these earliest pieces.[48] The "stocky, swarthy" Italian American from Brooklyn had been an undersized but overachieving guard on Fordham's famous Seven Blocks of Granite in the 1930s. After graduation he began law school at Fordham but left in 1939 to coach at St. Cecilia High School in Englewood, New Jersey, where he also taught chemistry, physics, and Latin. (*Sports Illustrated* awarded Lombardi a law degree, but in reality he left law school after one semester with poor grades. Successful coaches in this era did not have to pad their résumés; sportswriters did it for them.) After eight years at St. Cecilia's, including a stretch of 36 straight victories, Lombardi coached two seasons as an assistant at Fordham, five seasons under the coach who most influenced him, Col. Red Blaik at Army, and five more under Jim Lee Howell of the New York Giants before his call to the Packers.

Mythological heroes always have obscure, unpromising backgrounds. Then come the successes and setbacks and the ultimate triumph over the forces of darkness. In Green Bay, the "Siberia" to which opposing coaches threatened to trade their unruly players, Lombardi inherited a team of losers and underachievers, acquired some castoffs through trades and a few shrewdly selected draft choices, and then transformed all of them through the force of his will. To the self-effacing quarterback, Bart Starr, Lombardi gave self-confidence; to the confused All-American washout, Paul Hornung, he gave a clear role; to the entire team he gave "backbone." "To play in this league," *Time* magazine quoted him as saying, "you've got to be tough—physically tough and mentally tough."

Lombardi football was a violent game, to be played violently without apology; it was "rugged" and "old-fashioned." He had no use for fancy formations and tricks on offense. Every defense that took the field against Green Bay knew the Packers' sweep was coming—Hornung around end, with a fullback, tight end, two guards, and even a tackle in front of him—but no defense could stop it. "Football," Lombardi liked to say, "is two things. It's blocking and tackling." In 1961, in only Lombardi's third season and before he had won his first NFL title, the sports editor of *Look* magazine Tim Cohane (a friend and admirer since their time together at Fordham in the 1930s) already predicted

that Lombardi would "become one of the greatest coaches of all times, if, indeed, he is not that already."

Initially, the story was as much about the resurrection of the Green Bay community as the personality of Vince Lombardi. Later, the emphasis would shift more and more to Lombardi's handling of his players. *Sports Illustrated*'s "New Day in Green Bay" in 1960 told a story whose details would be repeated by other sportswriters and journalists, the kind of romanticized hardship tale of the old days told by grandfathers to wide-eyed tykes. Green Bay was "the last of the 'town teams' " from the original NFL, the sole remaining link to "the romantic yesterdays when the game was the product and the possession of Canton and Massillon, of Muncie and Hammond, of Decatur and Rock Island."

Curly Lambeau started the team in 1919 with $500 for uniforms from the Indian Packing Company and divided the profits at the end of the season, $16.75 per man. After several more years of shaky finances, the Packers won NFL titles in 1929, 1930, and 1931, then three more in 1936, 1939, and 1944; yet bankruptcy always loomed. Once, in the 1920s, Lambeau saved the team by persuading a friend to sell his Marmon roadster and loan him the proceeds. The final crisis was repeatedly postponed until after the 1949 season, when the franchise was salvaged by a sale of stock to local citizens, with most of the 1,699 stockholders buying just one $25 share, and no one allowed more than 200. The town owned the team, not for profit (there would be no dividends), but for pride. Frank Capra could have made the movie.[49]

The reborn Packers survived without thriving. Home attendance in the mid- 1950s averaged about 22,000, but paid attendance was half that, and NFL rivals hated to travel to Green Bay. Then came Lombardi. In his first year the club set financial records with a million-dollar gross and more than $100,000 in profit. More important, success restored pride in the community. "You can't realize how much joy there is in this team," a local druggist told *Sports Illustrated*, "until you know the heartaches and despair of the last few years."[50]

This was a feel-good 1950s story: small-town America with old-fashioned values whipping Chicago, New York, and the rest of the big-city bullies.[51] The way the Packers did it became the 1960s story of Vince Lombardi. Although Lombardi employed brutal and uncompromising methods from the beginning, the early accounts only hinted at this. *Sports Illustrated*'s first notice of Lombardi emphasized his "combination of steely football acumen and arrant sentimentalism." *Time* reported that "Lombardi yelled so long and loud" during the first week of practice "that he lost his voice." He also required injured players to run during practice and warned that anyone who crossed

him would be run all the way out of town. Cohane called Lombardi a "driver" but insisted that he was "above all a teacher," with a "penetrating, logical mind." Herbert Warren Wind wrote in the *New Yorker* in 1962 that, though very emotional, Lombardi's "chief characteristics are a really formidable intelligence, thoroughness, pride, and a quiet but relentless drive." That "quiet" is what most surprises. Wind clearly formed his impressions in Lombardi's office, where the coach appeared "cogitative, analytical, and almost scholarly" in talking about football, not at Packer practices.[52]

With a long cover story in *Time* magazine in 1962, Lombardi fully arrived as a national figure, with a full-blown legend now rather than a mere story. "Lombardi hit Green Bay so hard the grass is still quivering," *Time* reported. He drove the slackers out of the training room, complainers out of town. He instituted fines for breaking curfew, and players who missed a block or dropped a pass "instantly felt the sting of his acid tongue." Lombardi fired up his players with locker room talks "like something out of *The Spirit of Notre Dame*" (later stories would add that he also choked up and often cried when his players came through for him). With this mix of brutality and sentimentalism, Lombardi took "a gang of has-beens" and "romantically molded" them into "superstars" by making them believe in themselves and in him.[53]

Over the next few years, a small body of anecdotes and quotations became Lombardi lore: his first encounter with his new team, when he routed a couple dozen players with minor hurts from the training room; the words he used to instill confidence in Starr, Hornung, Willie Wood, and Willie Davis; the price his wife Marie paid for his preoccupation with the week's opponent (he didn't talk to her on Mondays, Tuesdays, or Wednesdays, said "hello" on Thursdays, became "civil" on Fridays and "downright pleasant" on Saturdays); and the most-quoted line of all, Henry Jordan's remark that Lombardi treated all of his players the same: "like dogs." Football fans became familiar with Lombardi's "grass drills" and "nutcracker drill" and the endless wind sprints that hardened his players while nearly killing them, with his contempt for malingerers nursing minor injuries, with "Lombardi Time" (arrival 15 minutes before the bus was to leave or practice to start). Lombardi would not allow his players to drink water during practice. He preached the importance of God, family, and Packer football, supposedly in that order. He also preached that second place was for losers, that a team that *will* not be beaten *can*not be beaten. He called football a "game for madmen" that required hate but was also somehow a higher calling.[54]

Lombardi's football world was the one in which I played as a kid growing up in Spokane, Washington, far from Packerland. The Lombardian virtues—

mental toughness, physical conditioning, stress on the fundamentals, playing with pain—were the air I breathed. My high school coach did not believe in injuries, either ("Rub a little dirt on it!" he'd growl), nor in drinking water during practice. He did not learn this approach from reading about Lombardi; both men absorbed it from a common source, the world of football in which they played in the 1930s, coached in the 1940s and 1950s, and carried into the 1960s.

But I was a kid, taught to trust and obey my elders; Lombardi's Packers were grown men, many with children of their own. Lombardi motivated his players by fear—fear of his wrath, fear of losing their jobs. He tore down their egos, making them hunger for his approval, then doled out that approval in just the right way at just the right time. From our vantage point today this sounds like psychological terrorism, the pathology of the concentration camp. Packer right guard Jerry Kramer described himself to a reporter as "brainwashed" by Lombardi to never be satisfied with his performance. In 1968 that word conjured up *The Manchurian Candidate* and stories of North Vietnamese POW camps. Kramer recalled the 1962 season, when Lombardi "had me all screwed up. He would call me an old cow and say I looked like homemade horseshit. I really believed I was the worst football player in America. Then when the polls came out I was voted all-pro by the A.P., all-pro by the U.P.I, and then All-Star. I couldn't believe it. I thought they were all crazy."[55]

Kramer more than forgave Lombardi every cruelty. "I loved Vince," Kramer wrote (with Dick Schaap) in his "diary" of the 1967 season, published first in *Look* magazine in the fall of 1968, then as *Instant Replay*, pro football's first best seller. With this book, along with the photograph of Kramer rooting out Jethro Pugh at the goal line so that Bart Starr could score to beat the Dallas Cowboys for the conference title in 1967's "Ice Bowl," Kramer became the most famous offensive lineman in America. Yet the book mostly focused on Lombardi. "Sure I had hated him at times during the season," Kramer summed up his feelings in one of the excerpts in *Look*, "but I knew how much he had done for us, and I knew how much he cared about us. He is a beautiful man; and the proof is that no one who ever played for him speaks of him afterward with anything but respect and admiration and affection. His whippings, his cussings, and his driving all fade; his good qualities endure."[56]

Instant Replay appeared just after Lombardi retired. He went out on top, winning his second straight Super Bowl and fifth NFL championship in nine seasons. (After Lombardi's first two years in Green Bay, the Packers failed to win the NFL title only in 1963, when Hornung was suspended for gambling

and Starr and Nitschke were injured; and in 1964, when Kramer missed the season due to injury and Hornung had not yet regained his kicking accuracy. Key Packer players obviously mattered as much as their coach.) Lombardi had perfect timing, not just because the aging Packers would have declined in 1968 with or without him (they finished 6–7–1), but also because signs of a blacklash to the Lombardi Legend were already beginning to appear. Kramer's comments about brainwashing appeared in a 1968 profile of Lombardi as "The Toughest Man in Pro Football," written by Leonard Shecter for *Esquire*. By this time a distinct formula marked the profiles of Lombardi: "he is a raging tyrant, but . . ." Anecdotes of his bellowing and bullying were followed by stories about his sentimentalism or his kindness, or by testimonies from his players to the debt they owed their coach for their own success and the achievements of the team. Shecter followed this formula, too, but he shifted the emphasis—more on Lombardi's abusiveness, less on its compensation—and he implicitly questioned whether the ends justified the means. Admirers and detractors shared a common understanding of Lombardi's complexity and his players' conflicted feelings about him. Jerry Kramer wrote that he hated Lombardi, *but* he loved him. Leonard Shecter wrote that the Packer players respected Lombardi, *but* they despised him. Whether respect trumped hate or hate trumped love was a personal matter for the players and a matter of journalistic priorities for sportswriters.

Shecter, along with Larry Merchant of the *New York Post* and Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times*, belonged to a new breed of iconoclastic sportswriters in the 1960s beginning to question old verities. For *Esquire*, Shecter largely maintained his journalistic detachment, allowing the details to speak for themselves. Free to express his own opinion in his 1969 book *The Jocks*, Shecter acknowledged that "it takes toughness to be a successful coach," but there is "a high price" to pay; "this toughness is paid for in humanity." In *And Every Day You Take Another Bite* (1971), Merchant wrote that "Vince Lombardi was a hard man coaching a hard game with a hard code, and he coated it in moral rectitude, in terms of God, family, and team, duty, responsibility and discipline, and respect for authority. Not a bad list but all too often used by coaches as more of those animal biscuits to get athletes to sit up on their hind legs and follow by blind unreasoning obedience." Merchant saw less danger in the man he called "St. Vince" than in the appropriation of his "tough slogans" by "every little high school despot with a whistle and a ball." In *SportsWorld* (1975), Lipsyte looked back on Lombardi as a "decent man" with a dangerous legacy, "the subordination of self to group, of group to authority, of authority to goal. All to win a football game."[57]

The psychoanalytically inclined among both Lombardi's fans and his critics saw in his relationship to his players an all-powerful "Father" dealing with unruly or needy "Sons." Jerry Kramer described how he once played a full game with two broken ribs. After a doctor finally diagnosed the injury the following week, Kramer went to Lombardi, expecting a "pat . . . on the head" or a "nice going." Lombardi only muttered, "I guess they don't hurt any more." Kramer followed this story with another, about Lombardi visiting him in the hospital after he had "nearly died" from a variety of ailments in 1964, telling him "that the Packers would pay my salary in 1964 and 1965 even if I couldn't play, and would pay all my hospital bills." Kramer's comment: "He really cares about his players. They're his children, and he nurses them when they're sick and scolds them when they're bad and rewards them when they're good." In a review of *Instant Replay*, Richard Schickel described Lombardi as "the pater familias, demanding that his respect—his love—be earned and re-earned constantly." Under the title "Proud Father, Proud Sons," *Time* magazine's obituary summed up Lombardi's career this way: "Football's proudest father died of cancer last week at the age of 57, and the rugged sons who loved, hated, feared, and—most of all—obeyed him will never forget how he took them to heights that they never knew they could reach."[58]

The same idea sounds more problematic coming from Larry Merchant or Robert Lipsyte. Merchant called Lombardi a "stern patriarch" who "became the big daddy and the players his children whose only desire was to please him." Lipsyte wrote that Lombardi "believed that athletes, like children, respond best to absolute power used responsibly and fairly."[59] In the saga of Lombardi and the Green Bay Packers in the 1960s, Bart Starr was the "dependable son," Paul Hornung the "prodigal son," and Lombardi's own child Vincent "the conflicted son."[60] The crux of the matter was how one felt about grown men, who happened to play professional football, being treated like children. What sort of character did football build if it locked players in childhood?

Back in 1961, in a profile of Hornung for *Sport* magazine written by Dick Schaap, Lombardi appeared briefly as a thoughtful and modest man, and Schaap wrote that his players "kid about Lombardi and accuse him of distinct martinet tendencies. But every single one of them respects what he has done for them." Many years later, describing this same visit to Green Bay, Schaap admitted "being frightened" of Lombardi when he interviewed him, and he described Hornung and several other Packers listening to a tape recording of a Lombardi tirade at practice, into which they had edited their own comments: "Yeah, sure. Yeah. Go —— yourself, Vince!" and the like. Schaap de-

scribed the players laughing as they listened to the tape, "with hilarity and glee and terror," finding "private release from the pressure Lombardi imposed."[61] It is a funny scene, but a painful one, too, and none of it appeared in the 1961 article. These were men reduced to little boys, mocking Big Daddy behind his back, fearful that he would catch them but enjoying their private revenge before returning to the field for more abuse.

In 1961 the image of professional football players as rambunctious boys, lovable but irresponsible, had a fairly long history. By the end of the 1960s, a younger generation had rejected its elders, and "boys" playing college football, particularly black ones, demanded treatment as men. Lombardi was remarkably free from racism and generous to his black players, but in a paternalistic way that might not have worked with a new generation of young black men entering the NFL at the end of the decade. In the 1970s, NFL players would begin demanding their rights as workers, striking briefly in 1970 and much longer in 1974. Boys don't strike.

Vince Lombardi ultimately was a paradox as a man and an anomaly among coaches. He went to daily Mass. His sentimentalism was as real as his brutality. He failed his family, knew it, and regretted it. He struggled with his temper. He believed in fair play but not in good losing. He was obsessed with football yet ambivalent about his obsession over what was, after all, a game.[62] But he won championships. He had to win, of course. One of his great players, Willie Davis, admitted almost 30 years later in a tribute to Lombardi before the 1998 Super Bowl, "It was only in victory that you could tolerate what Lombardi put you through."[63]

Lombardi won with carefully selected and self-selecting players. He won with men who were willing to be his boys. The ones whom Lombardi ran off mostly left no record of their feelings. At least one of them did, a tough little player named Billy Butler, who played just one season in Green Bay. Butler considered Lombardi "the biggest asshole I ever met in my life."[64] Lombardi had initial success with the Washington Redskins before he was stricken with cancer, but had he repeated the same methods and not quickly produced a champion, he might have faced rebellion. On the other hand, to the consternation of his admirers he might have succeeded by adjusting to the changing times. Either possibility would have been hard on the Lombardi myth.

The Coming of Broadway Joe

The idea that Vince Lombardi and Joe Namath were yoked in some kind of fearful symmetry emerged after Namath's Jets upset the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III to displace Lombardi's Packers atop the world of pro football.

Lombardi recognized this in those dying words in 1970. Namath did, too. It so happened that Namath occupied the same hotel suite before Super Bowl III in which Lombardi had stayed the previous year. As Namath coyly put it in his autobiography, "I'm not sure he would have approved of everything I did in his old room the week before the Super Bowl."[65] Larry Merchant offered readers of his 1971 book back-to-back chapters on "St. Vince" and "The Sensuous Quarterback." Robert Lipsyte described Lombardi and Namath as "the two most important culture heroes that football imposed upon us in the sixties." Lipsyte noted that Lombardi and Namath were "both sons of immigrants, both hard-working, loyal, talented products of Americanization, and both willfully misunderstood." But the two were radically different cultural icons. Lombardi was the father, Namath the son, in a football "psychodrama." Lombardi stood for football "as a sadomasochistic adventure show." Namath was "Flash. Zap. Pizzazz."[66]

Writing shortly after Super Bowl III, Merchant called Namath "one of the most important athletes this country has ever spawned." Writing just a few years later, Lipsyte was already debunking Namath, who no longer seemed a "threat to the moral order of the universe."[67] Namath did not change; the NFL and the country changed by absorbing him.

As with Lombardi, it is useful to reconstruct Namath's impact on NFL football from contemporary accounts. Before he emerged as the anti-Lombardi, Namath was repeatedly set against other representatives of Establishment values. Upon signing with the New York Jets immediately after playing brilliantly for Alabama in a narrow loss to Texas in the 1965 Orange Bowl, Namath was initially contrasted to John Huarte, the quarterback from Notre Dame signed by the Jets for $200,000 as insurance on their $400,000 investment in Namath. Unlike the "easygoing" Namath, Huarte was "ramrod-straight," "precise and analytical," and a conservative dresser. Huarte intended to work on his MBA while in New York. Namath had not quite graduated from Alabama, where he carried a "C" average in industrial arts with a minor in P.E. (This was before the Buckley Amendment of 1974 made student information confidential.)[68]

Once Namath became the Jets' starting quarterback, he was set against Fran Tarkenton, rival quarterback for the crosstown Giants. Here, Namath represented the razzle-dazzle, upstart AFL; Tarkenton, the established and buttoned-down NFL. (Ironically, due to bad knees Namath was a classic drop-back passer, while Tarkenton was a scrambler who threatened to turn every play into a circus. Tradition and improvisation cut both ways.) The more important contrast was moral and cultural, and faintly political. Tarkenton

was a neatly groomed preacher's kid and active member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He stood for marriage, home, and smart conservative investments for his family's economic future. Namath was the scruffy son of a western Pennsylvania millworker, and a hyperactive member of the Jet Set. He stood for promiscuous sex, bachelor pads, and cashing in on his celebrity. As Merchant put it in the short-lived *Jock New York* magazine, Namath "lives out his fantasies Monday through Saturday as gadfly–enfant terrible–single swinger–pop hero," while Tarkenton is "as orthodox as the law allows." (For the visual joke, a scruffy Tarkenton adorned the front cover, with a neatly groomed Namath on the back.)[69]

The Namath/Tarkenton split chiefly interested New Yorkers. Super Bowl III set Namath against Baltimore's Johnny Unitas for the entire football world. Unitas had missed most of the 1968 season with tendonitis in his elbow, but he was still football's most famous quarterback, and he entered the game in relief of Earl Morrall to rally the Colts' to what little offense they could muster. As the reigning NFL quarterback, Unitas had an image out of the 1950s: crew cut, high-topped black shoes, workmanlike demeanor, and flawless execution (with a similar crew cut, Morrall was a lesser Unitas). Unitas's story was out of Horatio Alger: cut by the Steelers after being drafted in the ninth round, he toiled on the sandlots in western Pennsylvania for $6 a game until the Colts signed him; he then led Baltimore to an NFL championship in his third season and became the dominant quarterback of his generation. Namath's long hair, white shoes, playboy lifestyle, and erratically brilliant or dreadful performances made him Unitas's antithesis in every way. There was no slow, determined rags-to-riches rise for Namath but something closer to the luck of the novice who hits the jackpot the first time out in Las Vegas: an initial contract guaranteeing him more than $400,000 (at a time when NFL stars made $25,000), "just enough to pay the annual salaries of 75 postal clerks," as John Underwood put it in *Sports Illustrated*.[70]

Sportswriters defined Namath as much by what he was not as by what he was: the anti-Lombardi, anti-Huarte, anti-Tarkenton, anti-Unitas. He also played under circumstances that were a gift from the gods. Drafted by both the NFL's St. Louis Cardinals and the AFL's New York Jets, when the war between the two leagues for college players doubled or tripled their market value, Namath nearly chose the Cardinals (who would apparently have traded him to the Giants). Either way, he was destined for New York. Main Street Joe in St. Louis or Kansas City would not have been the cultural icon that Broadway Joe became in New York.[71]

Had Joe Namath ended up in New York but with the Giants instead of the

Jets, he would likely have been smacked down from the outset and crammed into the image of a proper NFL quarterback. The NFL had a commissioner and ownership group obsessed with maintaining a conservative image for the league. The AFL had an overriding need to attract fans. It was an accident that came to seem foreordained that the managing partner of the Jets happened to be Sonny Werblin, who had worked for 30 years at the Music Corporation of America, the largest talent agency in show business, before retiring as vice president to join four partners in paying $1 million to salvage the AFL's pitiful New York Titans in 1963. The Maras, who owned the Giants, were as old-school as they come. Werblin regarded pro football as show business and was looking for a marquee star.

"I believe in the star system," Werblin told *Sports Illustrated*. "It's the only thing that sells tickets. It's what you put on the stage or playing field that draws people." In Namath, Werblin saw a young man who walked into a room and "you know he's there."[72] Namath's $427,000 contract was itself a star maker, instantly transforming a rookie quarterback into a celebrity. A month after Namath signed, not only *Sports Illustrated* but also *Time* gave the surgery performed on his "$400,000 knee" the sort of coverage, complete with anatomical illustrations, usually reserved for the separation of conjoined twins or the first experimental heart transplants.[73] As Namath's career unfolded over the next few years, Werblin always insisted that Namath deserved special treatment. When Jet assistant coaches suggested at one point that Namath ought to move from midtown Manhattan closer to the Jets' practice facilities in Queens, Werblin objected, "Oh, no, not Joe. He's a Park Avenue guy."[74] Werblin never fit in with other NFL and AFL owners, and he lasted a short time as the Jets' president (forced out by his partners in 1968, partly over a dispute concerning Namath's new long-term contract), but the NFL's future would ironically prove Werblin to have been a visionary, the first owner to believe he ran an entertainment business.

Joe Namath was neither pro football's first playboy nor its first Bad Boy, merely the first Playboy/Bad Boy to play in New York for an owner who understood and exploited his marketing value on those terms. Johnny Blood had played in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in the 1930s when an indifferent public viewed pro football players as semisavage. As a quarterback for the Detroit Lions in the 1950s, Bobby Layne was known to enjoy a drink and a party, but he looked like an overweight steelworker who punched the clock every Sunday afternoon to do a tough job. Paul Hornung, handsome lady-killer and brilliantly efficient running back for the Packers, could have claimed Namath's role, except that he played a few years too soon, in Green Bay, and for

Vince Lombardi. Sonny Jurgensen, Billy Kilmer, and Hornung's bar mate Max McGee also maintained an NFL tradition of partying, but mostly outside the public view. According to Hornung, many of the sportswriters and broadcasters of that generation were themselves hard drinkers, not likely to spill the secrets of the players' private lives or to report on the times they showed up for a game drunk or with a hangover.[75] And for all of these players, the playboy image ended where the football began.

Namath was the first to blur the boundary and get away with it. As the literary critic Leslie Fiedler pointed out around this time, Americans had a long love affair with what he called "Good Bad Boys," rascals with good hearts, like Tom Sawyer or the hipsters in Jack Kerouac's saga for the Beat Generation, *On the Road*. Fiedler offered no comments on the world of sports, but he could have mentioned Babe Ruth and Dizzy Dean, or Bobby Layne and Paul Horning, as adult versions of this cherished figure: wild men off the field who always came through for the coach, their teammates, and their fans. (Only whites could play this role. At 6′7″ and 295 pounds, Eugene "Big Daddy" Lipscomb, with an appetite for women and drink as prodigious as his strength and speed on the football field, was also known for his gentleness with children; but in the racial climate of the 1950s and early 1960s, Lipscomb, as a black man, was too frightening to be lovable.) Just before Namath arrived on the scene, *Life* magazine and the *Saturday Evening Post* cast a hugely talented but troubled running back named Joe Don Looney for the role as "football's marvelous misfit" and the "bad boy of the pros," but Looney finally could not adapt to the NFL's demands, or the NFL to his needs. Namath thus initially seemed a familiar figure, but whether he was another Good Bad Boy or just a bad one—maybe a complete jerk—was the question for sportswriters and football fans to ponder over his first four years with the Jets.[76]

After the initial gasps over the $427,000 contract and the knee surgery to salvage it, Namath's career fell into two distinct phases: Before the Super Bowl and After the Super Bowl. BSB Namath polarized sportswriters, teammates, and fans. He became known to the football world as "Broadway Joe" the summer before his rookie season, when teammate Sherman Plunkett christened him after seeing the *Sports Illustrated* cover of Namath in his football uniform in Times Square. Inside, Robert Boyle described Namath as "a real ring-ding-a-ding finger-snapper, a girl ogler, a swingin' cat with dark good looks who sleeps till noon" and whose "major interests are 'girls and golf, girls and golf.' "[77]

But Namath still needed a truly inspired Virgil to properly sing his exploits.

Such a bard arrived in the person of Dan Jenkins, in his account of "The Sweet Life of Swinging Joe" for *Sports Illustrated* a year later. Jenkins's opening paragraph captured Namath for the moment and the ages:

> Stoop-shouldered and sinisterly handsome, he slouches against the wall of the saloon, a filter cigarette in his teeth, collar open, perfectly happy and self-assured, gazing through the uneven darkness to sort out the winners from the losers. As the girls come by wearing their miniskirts, net stockings, big false eyelashes, long pressed hair and soulless expressions, he grins approvingly and says, "Hey, hold it, man—foxes." It is Joe Willie Namath at play. Relaxing. Nighttiming. The boss mover studying the defensive tendencies of New York's off-duty secretaries, stewardesses, dancers, nurses, bunnies, actresses, shopgirls—all of the people who make life stimulating for a bachelor who can throw one of the best passes in pro football. He poses a question for us all: Would you rather be young, single, rich, famous, talented, energetic and happy—or President?[78]

The answer in 1966, as they would now say, was a no-brainer. Joe Namath had everything that Youth could want—Youth not marching for civil rights or against the war, that is. Namath's hedonism belonged more to an older era than the 1960s—booze and broads, not dope and hippie chicks—but set against the ascetic and violent image of professional football, it seemed not just rebellious but revolutionary.[79]

Jenkins wrote self-consciously as an "ancient" contemplating the unprecedented celebrity of a precocious 23-year-old. Compared to Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, and Sugar Ray Robinson—also New Yorkers but "grown men" when they achieved their fame—Namath represented the supremacy of resplendent Youth. He was also decidedly not what an American hero should be. When Namath's draft board the previous December classified him 4-F for his damaged knee, the public outcry prompted a review by the surgeon general and forced the Pentagon to justify the decision with a fact sheet for members of Congress. The *New York Times* editorialized at the time that Namath should have been approved for limited duty, so as not to demoralize the troops abroad and anger their families at home. Instead of keeping quiet, Namath offended the country's "superpatriots" when he cracked, "I'd rather go to Vietnam than get married." (He was commenting on marriage, not the war.)[80]

Jenkins reported that Namath did indeed shine shoes as a kid, but unlike the honest bootblack in a Horatio Alger story, he also earned spending money by hustling pool and delivering messages for bookies. Now he lived in an apartment on the Upper East Side with a llama-skin rug, Italian marble bar,

and large oval bed nearly as famous as he. He drove a Lincoln Continental convertible with the radio blaring, wore "tailor-made suits with tight pants and loud print linings, grabbing checks, laughing, enjoying life, spending maybe $25,000 a year ('On nuthin', man') and wondering why anyone should be offended." He lived by a simple philosophy: "I believe in letting a guy live the way he wants to if he doesn't hurt anyone."[81]

Jenkins also more soberly retraced Namath's rise from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, to Alabama with Bear Bryant, then to the New York Jets, whose 5–8–1 record Namath's rookie year did not quite meet the rookie's dazzling promise. And the usually tough-minded Jenkins could not resist a sentimental conclusion to his tale, the glimpse of the "genuine, considerate, sincere, wonderfully friendly and likeable young man" behind the "gaudy surface." Bad Boys must be Good, finally, to be eligible as heroes. But the Namath who came alive in these pages was the casual hedonist with the magical right arm who only wanted to "live and let live."[82]

Accounts of Namath's pre–Super Bowl life were always the same, even to the specific details.[83] The llama-skin rug, along with his full-length mink coat and Fu Manchu mustache a bit later (which he shaved off for $10,000 in a TV commercial during the 1968 season), became familiar symbols of the Namath style and lifestyle. Namath was not the first star to party late and play well the next day, but even more than Paul Hornung, Namath shattered the myth that sex before a game would sap the athlete's strength. And then there were his white shoes. It is difficult to conceive today what it meant when Namath took the field in white football shoes in 1965. Imagine an ambassador wearing sneakers to a state dinner, or a debutante showing up in work boots for the cotillion. The real problem was not that no pro football player had ever worn anything but black, but that Namath's white shoes *looked good*. What business did a football player have in looking good rather than unselfconsciously doing his tough job? Football fans might not read all of the stories about the penthouse apartment and the late nights at the Copa and the Pussy Cat, but when the Jets played on TV, they could not miss the white shoes. Of all the Namath totems, the white shoes most clearly defined his live-and-let-live philosophy in defiance of tradition and The Establishment.

Namath was despised as well as idolized from the beginning. Football had long been a working-class game, but Namath reeked of privilege despite his own working-class roots. Football was a *team* game, but Namath seemed to believe he was a solo act. The first rumors of dissension on the Jets came just a month after he signed with Werblin, when *Sports Illustrated* reported that "other Jets resented Namath's fat contract." Midway through his celebration

of Namath's "sweet life," Jenkins quoted teammate Gerry Philbin, who admitted that the previous year "there was an undercurrent of resentment . . . about Joe's money and his publicity," but it "disappeared when everybody found out what a great guy he was."[84] Positive stories referred to resentment in the past; negative or ambivalent stories said that it continued. Due to his sore knees, Namath missed preseason practices and games that teammates had to play. He ignored curfews. He criticized Jets head coach Weeb Ewbank, and Werblin always backed his star against his coach. He went AWOL from training camp in August 1967 and ended up in a scuffle with the sports editor of *Time*. The team split over Namath, first between veterans and young players, then between offense and defense. (Larry Merchant later reported that at least one teammate on the offense, running back Matt Snell, "made no secret of his contempt for what he saw as a double standard in the organization's indulgence of Namath.") In his first three seasons with the Jets, Namath's teammates did not even vote him their MVP (he finished sixth in 1967).[85]

While *Sports Illustrated* (with the exception of its chief pro football writer, Tex Maule) celebrated Namath, writers for its sister publications, *Time* and *Life*, loathed him. *Time* described him arriving at his first Jets training camp in his green Continental and with unlimited self-regard, reporting the line that became another of Namath's totems, as well as the title of his autobiography: "Ah cain't wait 'til tomorrow," Namath said as he gazed at himself in a mirror, "'cause ah get better lookin' every day." Namath also regaled "barflies" at a local tavern with tales of his football exploits, then left them with a farewell, "Ah'm glad y'all had a chance to meet me." Tone and context are everything, but *Time* offered no hint that Namath might have been poking fun at his own celebrity. *Life* was appalled by Namath's initial contract, then ignored him until the end of the 1968 season, just weeks before the Jets took on the Colts and the NFL in the Super Bowl. On the occasion of Namath shaving his mustache for a commercial, *Life*'s John McDermott opened his story this way: " 'Ain't he neat?' snarled one of Joe Namath's teammates, as if what he really wanted to do was rip off that mandarin hairlip with his bare hands." More barbed paragraphs followed, with comments about the "moody quarterback," his "magnanimous disdain" for booing fans, and the tolerance of teammates for a guy who "sometimes acts like Superjerk" so long as he helps them win. McDermott eventually got around to the "tremendous courage" with which Namath played on his injured knees, but not before he made it clear that the Jets succeeded for all the wrong reasons.[86]

The 1968 season determined what Namath would ultimately mean for professional football. After a miserable rookie season in 1965, he had im-

proved, along with the Jets, but not nearly to the level expected of one of the game's highest-paid players. Famous for a rifle arm and the quickest release anyone had ever seen, Namath also had a bad habit of throwing to covered receivers instead of taking a loss. Following their 5–8–1 record in 1965, the Jets finished 6–6–2 in 1966, as Namath threw 19 touchdown passes but 27 interceptions. In 1967, he became the first pro quarterback to throw for more than 4,000 yards but also had another 28 interceptions (to go with 26 touchdowns), as the team went 8–5–1 and finished second in its division. At the beginning of the 1968 season, *Esquire* magazine published a fawning tribute to Namath from a friend and teammate, Bill Mathis, intercut by debunking comments by the journalist Al Hirshberg.[87] Two radically different views of Namath were up for grabs. The Jets won 11 and lost 3 in 1968, as Namath threw for fewer yards and fewer touchdowns (17), but also fewer interceptions (19), than the year before. The Super Bowl in January would determine whether or not Joe Namath finally mattered.

In Super Bowl III, Namath did what a rule-breaking athlete must do: he delivered on the field. Just as Lombardi's players would not have tolerated his treatment had they not quickly won NFL titles, many of Namath's teammates would not have accepted his behavior had he not taken them to the championship. And to old-fashioned fans he would have been just an overpaid loudmouth, rather than a brilliant quarterback who preferred the truth to Frank Merriwell platitudes. The Packers' easy victories in the first two Super Bowls had confirmed the NFL's overwhelming superiority. For the third test, *Sports Illustrated*'s Tex Maule, the epitome of NFL traditionalism, was fairly typical in giving the Jets no chance to win (he picked Baltimore, 43–0), but he went further in finding "unfathomable" most experts conceding an edge to the Jets at quarterback.[88] With the outcome seemingly inevitable, Namath provided the only drama. In the week before the game, he absolutely shattered the Merriwellian code. First, he predicted the Jets would beat the Colts (nearly 20-point favorites with the bookies). Then he told reporters that five or six quarterbacks in the AFL were better than Earl Morrall, who had recently been named the NFL's Most Valuable Player as Johnny Unitas's replacement (Namath won that honor in the AFL).

As the Colts played surprisingly badly, Namath coolly picked apart their secondary in the face of their supposedly unnerving pass rush, then trotted off the field waving his right index finger to signal that he and the Jets were "Number 1"—yet another insult to football tradition that within a few years would become as routine as mouthing "Hi, Mom," to the TV cameras. The white shoes of the rinky-dink AFL walked away with a 16–7 triumph over the

black shoes of the not-so-mighty NFL, with Unitas himself on the field at the end. Even Maule now conceded that "the folk hero of the new generation" was also "a superb quarterback." And that professional football had forever changed: "So the era of John Unitas ended and the day of Broadway Joe and the mod quarterback began. John is crew cut and quiet and Joe has long hair and a big mouth, but haircuts and gab obviously have nothing to do with the efficiency of quarterbacks."[89] A bitter pill, but Maule swallowed it.

Super Bowl III was the first NFL championship officially named the Super Bowl, and, thanks to Namath, it established the title game as truly super. Not everyone embraced him afterward, but Namath could no longer be dismissed as a minor irritant that would fade away. The sports columnist for the *Oregon Statesman* likely spoke for many in the provinces when he wrote after the game that the guy he had considered "little more than a spoiled, mouthy jerk who needed a lesson" had proven himself "one of the best, mechanically, if not the very best" among NFL quarterbacks. "Too bad in a way," he added, "for now that he's established himself to such extent, everything he says or does will be noted more and more. And many of the things he says and does aren't what you'd like your kids to become interested in."[90]

While Namath had proven that first-rate football was compatible with the hedonistic lifestyle of Youth and the counterculture, his significance was still mostly limited to the world of sports. Then, in June, Namath inadvertently became a hero and victim of a vaguely political sort, when NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle ordered him to sell his interest in a Manhattan saloon called Bachelors III because it was frequented by gamblers and mobsters. Rozelle did not question Namath's integrity but, as always, he worried about the NFL's image. All of the news organizations covered Namath's press conference, during which he tearfully refused Rozelle's ultimatum and retired from football "on principle." Ever ready to dump on Namath, *Life* magazine did a cover story complete with mug shots of five Cosa Nostra wiseguys known to frequent Bachelors III. *Life*'s Sandy Smith acknowledged the appearance of a double standard, by which Rozelle seemed unconcerned that the Jets' new president, Philip Iselin, owned a race track, and that the Colts' owner, Carroll Rosenbloom, had bet heavily on his team in the Super Bowl. But Smith also reminded readers that players had more power to affect the outcome of games. He marveled that "Namath seems to be absolutely charmed by wrongos and has made a practice of talking, drinking, and chumming around with an appalling lot of larcenous slobs, as if totally oblivious to the fact that the most casual word from a quarterback before a game could affect the point spread." Even William F. Buckley Jr.'s conservative *National Review*, no fan of

countercultural rebels, weighed in—on Namath's side!—not against Rozelle's ruling but against the unrestrained FBI wiretapping that had turned up the evidence about Bachelor III's unsavory clientele.[91]

Magazine accounts of men with names like Tea Balls, Harry the Hawk, Snake, and Johnny Echo gave off a whiff of Damon Runyon, but Rozelle saw nothing lovable in such characters. Rozelle had secured his credibility and power as commissioner by suspending Paul Hornung and Alex Karras for merely betting on NFL games. Bachelors III offered another ready-made opportunity to stand up for "the integrity of the game." In 1969, however, the issue took on larger significance, with Namath standing for individual rights and personal freedom against the power of The Establishment. As *Newsweek* put it, "in an age of youthful independence and rebellion inside and out of sports," the conflict between "the most vibrant young star" and "the strongest commissioner in sports . . . could hardly be more dramatically symbolized." *Life* less evenhandedly attributed to Namath "that same delight in anarchy which motivates the more typical 'revolutionists' of his age group." Three of Namath's teammates vowed to quit if Joe did; another saluted their star's stand on "principle" and called his retirement a "tragedy." Namath remained "retired" for a little over a month, until he and Rozelle announced an agreement that he would sell his share in Bachelors III and return to the Jets.[92]

The Bachelors III incident left Namath permanently embittered against certain sportswriters and publications,[93] but otherwise everyone could be happy. Joe Namath was the best thing to happen to the NFL since television, and the PR-minded Rozelle undoubtedly knew that, but Rozelle also had to know that Namath needed the NFL more than the NFL needed Namath. The incident strangely benefited both parties, as Namath's capitulation was generally satisfying. Retiring was foolish—not enough was at stake. The dispute mirrored the conflict tearing American society apart, but it concerned a game, not war in Vietnam or war in the streets. The stakes were more symbolic than real. Those outraged by Namath's rebelliousness could take pleasure in Rozelle's having put him in his place, but those who took Namath's side could be satisfied, too. They had the pleasure of despising Rozelle and The Establishment, and of seeing Namath as a victim of tyranny, while also agreeing that Namath had made a sensible decision and feeling relieved that he would still play. The games would go on, with the NFL's most glamorous star on the field, where he belonged. Namath emerged as a rebel but no martyr over Bachelors III. He was becoming a safe antihero for a changing mainstream society cautiously exploring its new freedoms.

Restored to the Jets, Namath entered the 1969 season as the most domi-

nating presence in professional football since Red Grange in 1925. The September cover of *True* magazine captured the playboy football hero: Namath in his uniform, sitting on a bench in the locker room, with a miniskirted young woman peaking out of one of the lockers behind him. The introduction to his interview in *Playboy* that December called him a "kind of Belmondo with a jockstrap," a comparison that would puzzle most readers today, for whom Namath's fame has outlived the hunkish actor's. Cover stories in more respectable magazines like *Newsweek* and *Esquire* assessed the quarterback who now transcended sport. *Esquire* cast Namath on its October 1969 cover as King Kong in a Jets uniform under a mink coat, perched atop the Empire State Building with a football cocked to down the strafing aircraft coming at him from all sides. Inside, Jack Richardson, Rex Reed, and William F. Buckley Jr. contemplated "The Higher Truth of Joe Namath," their seriousness laced with irony. *Newsweek*'s Pete Axthelm played it straight. As "a free spirit and a rebel," Namath now clearly exceeded the boundaries of mere sport; but whether he was hero or villain, "a model of youthful independence—or a shaggy symbol of what is wrong with the younger generation," was the question of the moment. His "breakaway from the mold of the clean-cut and modest athletic star that other generations came to know and love" was obvious. "Whether his individual bag is serious politics or sheer style" was not so clear. Namath was more than just a football hero now, but what exactly was he?[94]

History's answer is that Namath's "bag" was more about style than politics, though this was an era in which style, for a brief moment, was political. Namath rocked the National Football League in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the NFL absorbed him and his iconoclasm to attract and hold a new generation of fans. Namath had a solid season in 1969, with his highest quarterback rating as a pro, but the Jets lost the AFL championship to the Kansas City Chiefs (who went on to beat the Minnesota Vikings in the Super Bowl and secure the parity of the AFL with the NFL). He then broke a bone in his passing hand in 1970 and tore another knee ligament in the 1971 preseason, playing a total of nine games over those two years. His status as football's greatest celebrity was in no way diminished, as he continued to make commercials and appear on talk shows and magazine covers, and started what proved to be a brief movie career (*C. C. and Company*, with Ann-Margaret, and *Norwood* both appeared in 1970, *The Last Rebel* in 1971).

Namath separated his shoulder in 1973 and severed two of the three hamstring muscles in his left leg in a waterskiing accident before the 1974 season, the unpublicized injury that rendered him truly immobile.[95] Namath played

eight post–Super Bowl seasons with the Jets, sometimes brilliantly, more often not, as the team descended into mediocrity. He was then traded to the Los Angeles Rams in 1977 and retired reluctantly after the season. Namath ended his career with a completion average of barely 50 percent, with 220 interceptions to 173 touchdown passes and with a quarterback rating of just 65.6 (74.3 in his best season)—well below the records of the top quarterbacks.[g] Namath was not efficient but brilliant, and for 13 years he was always the most compelling player in the game. When he walked onto the field, everyone in the stadium knew he was there. Opponents went after him with ferocity, believing the Jets to be overmatched without him; but they spared his legs. They knew that he made money for everyone in the NFL; they also knew what courage it took to play on his damaged knees. "You have to live with yourself," my Chiefs teammate Willie Lanier stated simply in explaining to a reporter why he would never hit Namath below the waist.[96]

Those knees undid Namath, but they also eventually won him the esteem of the entire football world and made him a near-tragic figure. From the beginning, when he signed a contract for $427,000 the day after his final college game, then had surgery a month later, there were always two Namath stories: the one about his golden, god-favored life on and off the field, and the one about the knees that could end his golden football life tomorrow. Journalists made the public as constantly aware of his damaged knees as of his swinging lifestyle, and the added poignancy invested him with a bit of romantic doom. Writing in *Vogue* in 1967, Barbara Long, a writer not typically assigned to interview athletes, called Namath's fragile legs his "Aristotelian tragic flaw."[97] Sportswriters described them more prosaically: they marked his toughness. The pretty boy in white shoes and a fur coat played in constant pain and stood up to the fiercest pass rush, knowing that a single hit could end his career. Over time, the tough competitor increasingly became a wounded god, almost classically tragic, not like the angelic child with a terminal illness in a TV melodrama but something less sentimental, more genuinely haunting. The god-favored was also god-cursed. At the same time, his fragile knees also made Namath merely mortal, despite his fame and celebrity and the available stewardesses on every flight. He was greater than the rest of us but one of us, too. Or, as Murray Kempton put it in *Esquire* in 1972, "He is most immortal in his mortality."[98]

g. Namath's rating is not as low as it seems when compared to those of quarterbacks since the 1980s, when the short-passing game raised efficiency ratings (Joe Montana's lifetime rating was 92.3; Steve Young's, 97.6). Unitas's rating was 78.2; Y. A. Tittle's, 73.6; Terry Bradshaw's, 70.9. (All figures from *Total Football II*.)

Even *Life* magazine came to embrace Namath on these terms. A cover story in 1972 described Namath as "an astonishing combination of talent and vulnerability: the finest passing arm in football mounted on the game's most wretched pair of scarred, misshapen legs." The title of the piece was "Pain Pays the Bills for Joe's Good Life," with a cover photograph of Namath as a smartly dressed young man-about-town, lounging before the fireplace of his antique-furnished apartment. Namath had abandoned his notorious bachelor pad for "a slick Manhattan town house." Instead of flashy mink coats he now wore "$500 Rome-tailored suits." Joe Namath's "good life" had become a model for Park Avenue, not Broadway, let alone Haight-Ashbury. But he paid for it with daily whirlpool treatments and constant pain.[99]

Compared to Muhammad Ali, or to football players Dave Meggysey and Chip Oliver, Namath was finally not much of a rebel, yet he had the greatest impact on his sport. Ali, a genuine revolutionary, didn't change boxing; he changed the country. Oliver, the Oakland Raiders linebacker who left football to join a hippie commune, could be dismissed as a flake. Meggysey was truly radical, his 1970 book, *Out of Their League*, a devastating indictment of football at both the college and the professional levels; but by the time the book appeared Meggysey had left the game, and he had been only a lineman and linebacker, anyway. *Out of Their League* could become gospel to football's radical critics but be ignored or dismissed by the mainstream. Namath, on the other hand, was a star quarterback, a league and Super Bowl MVP, and after Super Bowl III no one could simply dismiss him. But what he stood for came to seem not very daring after all. He was, in political columnist James Reston's pithy phrase, a "long-haired hard-hat." Within the conservative football establishment he was a transformative figure, but in superficial ways. He stood for "hair and hedonism" when they seemed like radical statements, but by the end of the 1960s they were already defining a new middle-class lifestyle.[100]

J. Edgar Hoover once announced, "You won't find long hair or sideburns à la Joe Namath in the F.B.I."[101] Namath even inexplicably showed up on Richard Nixon's notorious "enemies list," the only sports celebrity so distinguished. Yet the "most politically charged words he ever uttered" followed a post–Super Bowl USO tour of military hospitals in Vietnam, that moved Namath to "wonder what the hell we're doing there."[102] That remark was surely offset by comments he made, in early 1973, during a controversy over playing the national anthem at sporting events: "I like it played. Every time I hear it before a game, it reminds me of where we are in the world, in life. I kind of thank God that we're in this country." Namath was fundamentally apolitical, and even as a countercultural rebel at his most flamboyant he barely kept

ahead of the middle-class mainstream. On Haight-Ashbury or in Golden Gate Park, Broadway Joe's Beatle-length hair and occasional goatee would have seemed about as radical as the *Smothers Brothers* or *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In*.[103]

Namath permanently altered the public image of the football hero. By 1974, as one sportswriter put it, Namath's lifestyle was "now standard among most of the country's top athletes."[104] He had this impact because he was actually old-school as much as new-school. His flamboyant style made football more appealing to the rebellious young. His toughness made a new style of football acceptable to traditionalists. But he did not challenge the economics of pro football, or the legal rights of the players, or certainly the political direction of the country. Namath was a safe rebel, the NFL's first football star to become a genuine celebrity in the larger culture, a crossover celebrity between the counterculture and the great American middle class. He even became available as a role model. In 1969 *Senior Scholastic*, the weekly magazine distributed to schoolchildren, ran a two-part profile of Namath as a hero who succeeded by overcoming obstacles, while becoming "a 100 per cent team man." His mother later published a book about her son Joe.[105]

By 1970 or so, to embrace Namath as a football hero was about as daring as letting your sideburns grow to the bottom or your ear lobe or buying a pair of polyester bell-bottoms. Magazines had already begun anointing Namath's heirs apparent, players with good looks and football style like Cincinnati quarterback Greg Cook and San Diego receiver Lance Alworth. Charger quarterback Marty Domres tried self-anointing with an account of the "days and nights of a rookie quarterback" called *Bump and Run*. Over the early 1970s, Namath off the field became a sex symbol firmly committed to a very old-fashioned sexual double standard (he expected his girlfriend of the moment to stay home while he prowled, and when he married, his bride must be a virgin). Following the Jets through the 1973 season, *New York Daily News* reporter Kay Gilman discovered that the club had to post a guard, "sometimes a guard plus a ferocious dog," outside Namath's hotel rooms on the road, to ward off groupies. "Joe Namath is America's sexiest sports personality ever," Gilman concluded. His impact on women lasted for decades.[106]

The safe rebel became as well known for his commercials as his touchdown passes, particularly the ones for Noxema with Farrah Fawcett and for Beautymist pantyhouse, in which the camera moved up a pair of shapely nylon-sheathed legs to find Broadway Joe's grinning face at the other end.[107] Namath even became an advertisement for consumerism itself. Perhaps the most revealing image of Joe Namath is the February 1971 cover of *Esquire*,

announcing a story about the new style of motorcycles popularized by the film *Easy Rider*. The cover photograph had Namath astride a bike, with a caption: "Which of these two items is a priceless work of art?" The article inside, not an ad but a piece of journalism, did not even mention Namath or football; it described the motorcycles. Namath was simply the icon of the hip male, summoned to validate the hipness of the machine. Football players had been endorsing brand-name products for decades. Namath was the first athlete in any sport to be himself an advertisement for a lifestyle.

Joe Namath transformed American football, but in ways that made it easier for the great American public to continue loving football after the convulsions of the 1960s. In his *Playboy* interview in December 1969, Namath disavowed "being anti-establishment or whatever; it's just that if it's not right for me, then I can't go along with it." What Namath finally stood for is "doing your own thing," a fundamental principle of American life in the 1970s and after. To read today a list of the charges levied against Namath 30-odd years ago, what shocks is how un-shocking they all now seem.[108] That's the point. Joe Namath made the NFL safe for a post-1960s world in which Vince Lombardi had lost relevance. Football still depended on its fundamental tension, but "Lombardi" became the recessive trait, "Namath" the dominant. Broadway Joe helped make NFL football a show that could play in prime time (the first *Monday Night Football* game featured the Jets and Cleveland), turn its Super Bowl into a national holiday, and eventually command billion-dollar television contracts. And as the dying Lombardi seemed to prophesy, Namath made "Prime Time" Deion Sanders and all the lesser Deions possible.

The 1974 players' strike marked the official end of the Lombardi era in the face of the Namath insurgency. Throughout the strike, Prescott Sullivan, a longtime columnist for the *San Francisco Examiner*, repeatedly invoked Lombardi as the one man who could have forced the intransigent players back into line. (Ironically, in 1968, as Bart Starr remained aloof from the NFL's first labor-management confrontation, Lombardi had called his quarterback into his office and told him that he owed his loyalty to the Players Association.)[109] When 49er running back Vic Washington accused his own coach, Dick Nolan, of being a "dictator," Sullivan shot back that the greatest coaches—Knute Rockne, Paul Brown, Bear Bryant, and above all Vince Lombardi—had all been dictators. Yes, but times had changed, and the signs had been visible for some time. Try to imagine Lombardi allowing NFL Films to place a microphone on him for Super Bowl I or II, as Hank Stram did for Super Bowl IV. Namath wore white shoes? In 1972 the entire Kansas City Chiefs team took

the field in white shoes—on the road, that is, coordinated with white jerseys and red pants. At home, we wore red shoes, to go with red jerseys and white pants.[h] In 1974 the Baltimore Colts—the team that had "sneered when . . . Namath made white shoes the 'in' thing in pro football"—adopted white shoes, too. And in Atlanta, after the Falcons' old-school dictator, Norm Van Brocklin, abandoned his team's hair code, his middle linebacker, Tommy Nobis, of all people—the epitome of Lombardi-era rock-'em-sock-'em football—reported to camp with a Fu Manchu mustache. Symbolically, this was little less strange than Lombardi himself showing up in Green Bay some summer with a neatly trimmed goatee.[110]

Beneath the visible signs were real changes. With *Monday Night Football*, NFL football now competed in the prime-time TV market. And although the strike itself was widely viewed as an uprising of self-interested players against the traditions of the game, the truly self-interested ones were the veterans who abandoned their teammates on the picket lines. A note of me-first individualism now openly challenged the sanctity of "the team." The reality had never been as simple as it had seemed from the outside. As a product of the old school, I was shocked during my rookie season the first time Kansas City's coaches let several of my star teammates get away with loafing during a special teams drill. Lombardi famously treated all of his players "like dogs." Namath made the case for special treatment for top dogs. Perhaps this had long been the case in professional football. Lombardi, after all, was more an exception among NFL coaches than the standard-bearer of tradition. And perhaps Namath was more a symbol than an agent of change. Over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, labor strife and franchise mobility would profoundly restructure the National Football League; but in the age of television, the reality of professional football for fans more than ever lay in its image, and it was the NFL's image that Joe Namath irreversibly changed.

h. Before our first home game, as I was about to take the field for warm-ups with the kickers, specialists, and other centers, our team clown, George Daney, called out to me, "Let me know if anyone laughs."