



The 1949 Shamrock Bowl: The All-America Football Conference's Final Game

(NOTE: The following text comes from a March 3, 2009 post on the Pro Football Researchers Association forum, by "BrownsHistorian." Credited to a combination of sources, including the Houston Chronicle (newspaper) website, the Cleveland Browns official archives, and www.mmbolding.com, this post gives significant background information on the 1949 Shamrock Bowl football game.

To view the post directly, go to <http://www.pfraforum.org/index.php?showtopic=730>)

On December 9th, 1949 a merger was announced between the upstart All-American Football Conference professional football league and the established National Football League, in an effort to end to four years of financial losses in both league stemming from a growing bidding war for players. The AAFC's final championship game took place on December 11, 1949 at Municipal Stadium in Cleveland, Ohio. There, the Cleveland Browns won their fourth consecutive AAFC title, defeating the San Francisco Forty-Niners 21-7 in what's widely thought to have been the last AAFC game ever played.

But, it wasn't...

The final league game actually occurred about a week later--December 17, 1949--with the Shamrock Bowl Charity All-Star Game, held at Rice Stadium in Houston, Texas.

The idea for the game was put forth to AAFC owners ten months earlier by Houston oil millionaire "Diamond Glenn" McCarthy, in February 1949. The cash-strapped AAFC had contracted to just 7 teams for the '49 season, after of the merger of the Brooklyn Dodgers and the New York Yankees. Thus, the AAFC would be forced to play an unbalanced schedule until they could add an eighth team. McCarthy wanted that team.

Although both Oakland and Dallas were also making bids for the eighth franchise, McCarthy felt that he could win the competition by showing the league owners and officials how enthusiastic the city of Houston would be about hosting an AAFC team. In a June 1949 meeting with AAFC Commissioner Oliver Kessing and the AAFC Management Committee, McCarthy presented a formal proposal for a charity football game in Houston, which he would personally finance, between the league champions of the AAFC and the NFL. Wanting to put pressure on the NFL owners, the AAFC committee voted to accept McCarthy's proposal. Furthermore, they also scheduled their "End of the Year" meeting in Houston, and indicated to McCarthy that the league's eighth franchise would be awarded at that meeting.

Energized, McCarthy took the plan to the NFL, which promptly rejected it based on a league rule on exhibition games. However, the AAFC, having already made arrangements for the meetings to be held in Houston, and still in need of an eighth franchise, elected to go ahead with the game anyway. Instead of a game between league champions, they decided that the game would feature the AAFC champion against a team of all-star players from the other six AAFC clubs.

Once this alternate plan was finalized, McCarthy publically announced that he would sponsor the game as a fund-raising vehicle for several Houston-area charities, including the Holly Hall Home for the Aged, the Damon Runyon Cancer Fund, and the National Kids Day Foundation. A few months earlier, McCarthy had opened his brand new, \$21 million hotel in Houston, the Shamrock Hotel. Naturally, he saw the charity event as an opportunity to promote the hotel. Thus, he christened the game "The Shamrock Bowl."

In addition to being one of the wealthiest men of the 1940s, McCarthy was also a well-connected one. His friends included Hollywood celebrities and established and rising stars in both politics and business. Wanting to make an overwhelmingly favorable impression that would leave the AAFC management committee no choice but to award him a franchise, McCarthy pulled out all the stops. He contacted many of his top celebrity friends, including Jack Benny and Dinah Shore, and got commitments from them to entertain at his event the weekend of the game.

From July through December, McCarthy spent a great deal of time and money making preparations both for the Shamrock Bowl, and for the pro football franchise that he felt assured he would be awarded as a result of its success.

The All-Stars were to be coached by Red Strader of the New York Yankees, who had just coached against the Browns in the AAFC playoffs. Strader also was allowed to bring a large number of his players. Strader, his players and his assistants arrived in Houston on December 7th—four days before the AAFC Championship Game--to begin their game preparations.

On December 10th, McCarthy and the rest of the football world learned the news about the AAFC merger with the NFL. McCarthy saw this as a significant setback, but also saw an opportunity: he felt that he could use the game to make a case for earning a franchise in the newly-merged league. So, McCarthy told Commissioner Kessing that the game was still on, despite the merger.

After the AAFC Championship game on December 11th, the AAFC Management Committee decided by telephone on a final roster of All-Stars whom the Browns would play in the Shamrock Bowl. Since the AAFC would no longer exist, the owners wanted to showcase players from disbanded teams who would be assigned to new teams in the merged league. A trio of the AAFC's top quarterbacks was selected to headline the game for the All-Stars: rookie sensation Y.A. Tittle, from the Baltimore Colts, George Ratterman from the Buffalo Bills, and Frankie Albert from San Francisco 49ers.

Meanwhile, fervor for the game continued to build in Houston. On December 12th, the Houston Chronicle headline following the AAFC championship read, "Browns Brush Aside 49ers To Qualify For Bowl Game."

The Browns arrived in Houston by rail on December 14, three days after their championship game victory in Cleveland. The weather in Houston was adverse: rainy and cold. Brown's coach Paul Brown had no problem with it--when asked if the weather would be a factor in the game, Brown responded, "I don't see why it should. We have been practicing and playing in rain all season." But McCarthy began to worry about the how the weather would affect attendance. On the 14th, fearful of a low turnout, McCarthy convinced several of his celebrity friends to agree to appear in a one hour pre-game show. Benny and Shore were put on the bill, along with Phil Harris, Jimmy Fidler, and Walter Winchell.

On the night of December 15th, McCarthy threw a banquet for the AAFC, the Browns, the All-Stars and the Hollywood celebrities he'd brought in. With the rain pouring down outside the hotel, the celebrities put on an impromptu show for the guests, because they expected the game to be rained out. To their chagrin, however, two days later, despite a relentless downpour, the Shamrock Bowl was played as scheduled.

McCarthy expected a crowd of about 35,000, but only about 12,000 fans showed up. The fans who braved the rain got at least a portion of the pre-game show they were promised. Winchell and several others were no-shows, but Jack Benny, Phil Harris (Benny's radio show co-star), and Dinah Shore did appear. Umbrellas were held above the them as each did abbreviated performances, little of which could be heard by anyone due to sound problems, and the rain.

Finally, the game began.

The first ten minutes was a mud brawl as neither team threatened. After two failed offensive series for the All-Stars, coach Strader made a switch at quarterback, pulling Ratterman in favor of Albert. Late in the first period, Albert led the Stars on a sixteen-play drive starting from his own 32, connecting on passes to the Bills' Chet Mutryn and the Colts' Lamar Davis, moving the ball to the Browns' 26 yard line. He then hit End Otto Schnellenbacher of the Yankees for a first down at the 15. Halfback Buddy Young of the Yankees picked up five yards to the 9 and fullback Joe Perry of the

49ers got five yards and a first down at the 4. From there, Mutryn carried twice for the score. Albert's point-after kick was blocked by the Browns' line, but the All-Stars led 6-0 with about a minute and a half left in the first quarter.

On the last play of the first quarter, the Browns Marion Motley burst through the line and rumbled 59 yards to the All-Stars 25 yard line. The Browns pounded it out on the ground all the way to the 2 yard line, but there the All-Stars defense made a goal line stand, and the Browns turned the ball over on downs. However, after failing to pick up a first down, the All-Stars were forced to punt from deep in their own territory, and the Browns' Cliff Lewis brought the ball back to the All-Stars' 40. On the next play, Browns quarterback Otto Graham connected with halfback Dub Jones, who took it in at the 5 and skidded across the goal line. Lou Groza's extra point kick made the score 7-6 in favor of the Browns.

Starting from their own 9 yard line after being assessed a clipping penalty on the ensuing kickoff return, the All-Stars responded by mounted a 91 yard drive on twelve plays behind the passing of Albert and the running of Young. The big play of the drive came from the Browns' 26, when Young shot off tackle, sprinted to his right and took the ball 23 yards to the Cleveland 3. After a loss of 2 on first down, Albert, completely surrounded by Browns, passed to Buffalo's Al Baldwin of Buffalo who shook off defenders at the 5, reversed his field, and carried it in for a touchdown. Albert's extra point was again blocked but the All-Stars had re-gained the lead, 12-7. That score stood as the game went to halftime.

In the second half, the defenses played to a stalemate under what became increasingly awful field conditions. The Browns threatened three times in the fourth quarter, but scored no points.

Early in the period, the Browns drove from the All-Stars 44 to the 16, but Jim Cason of San Francisco intercepted Graham's pass. With eight minutes remaining, the Browns got a huge break when Young fumbled a pitch out from Albert and George Young recovered at the Stars' 21. But three running plays netted only 5 yards, and on fourth down from the 17, Graham's pass to Edgar Jones was knocked down by defensive back Pete Layden of the All-Stars.

The Browns got one more chance starting at their own 32 after a punt late in the game. Graham hit end Dante Lavelli for 29-yards, and halfback Tommy James for 12 more to put the Browns at the All-Stars 29 yard line. But the All-Stars sacked Graham for a ten yard loss and then held the Browns from there, forcing a punt. The Browns never got the ball back, as the All-Stars ran out the clock. The final score was 12-7.

For Cleveland it was just the fifth loss in the club's four-year history. The All-Star defense put pressure on Graham all day, allowing only 8 completions in 19 passes for just 101 yards, and sacking him three times. The All-Stars' Young was the leading ground gainer on the day, with for 75 yards in 12 carries, as the All-Stars out-rushed the Browns 162-82 yards. Albert was 6 of 13 passing for 70 yards.

Even though it was still pouring down rain, many of the Houston fans hung around after the game to meet the players. Tittle later said the game was one of the highlights of his career, "they treated us like royalty." In a latter interview, McCarthy claimed he lost almost a million dollars on the Shamrock Bowl, but that it was still worth the gamble to get a franchise. McCarthy never did get his franchise but due to the excitement this game created, eleven years later when the AFL started, pro football DID, finally, come to Houston.

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I hope you enjoy re-playing this historic football game with SECOND SEASON Pro Football Game! The teams were rated based on statistics from the 1949 AAFC season and I expect you'll get an authentic re-creation of the action that took place in Houston that afternoon. If you'd like to re-create the actual game conditions, you could introduce the "R" effect from the Weather Effects chart. Or, perhaps you'd prefer to see what the game would have been like without the rain—probably a much higher-scoring affair! In either case, I think the All-Stars will give the Browns as good a game on your tabletop as they did at Rice Stadium.

By the late 1940s, pro football was beginning to resemble the game we're familiar with today, but you'll notice some differences when playing these teams. First, the defenses are arranged in a 5-3-3 alignment, standard for the day. Offenses feature three running backs and two ends. Neither the "flanker back" position—essentially a pass-catching halfback—nor the run-blocking tight end position had been devised. Place-kicking was unrefined, and used sporadically.

If you have any question about the teams, or the game, please let me know! The e-mail address is info@plaay.com.

INT A-D
 Lewis 1-6
 James 7-11
 Lahr 12-16
 Horvath 17-18
 Saban 19-20

INT E-K
 Adamle 1-6
 Agase 7-12
 Humble 13-16
 Thompson 17-18
 Willis 19-20

SACK
 Young 1-8
 Rymkus 9-13
 Willis 14-16
 Humble 17-18
 O'Connor 19
 Adamle 20
 Yonakor 20
 Palmer 20

KICK RET
 Motley 1-8
 Boedeker 9-14
 D. Jones 15-20

PUNT RET
 Lewis 1-14
 Lahr 15-18
 Horvath 19-20

RET
Cliff Lewis -- **9***
Marion Motley **22*** --
 Bill Boedeker 21 --
 Dub Jones 26 --
 Warren Lahr -- 14
 Les Horvath -- 6

[NC] TEAM DEFENSE Y: [+2] FUMBLES: [A] PENALTIES: [A]

A [HB]
1/0+ Tommy James
 1/0 Les Horvath

B [S]
2/1 Warren Lahr
 1/1- Lou Saban

C [HB]
2/1 ⚡ Cliff Lewis
 1/0 Ara Parseghian

D [OLB]
2/1+ ⚡ Tony Adamle
 1/1 Horace Gillom
 1/0 Lin Houston

E [MLB]
1/2 Tommy Thompson
 2/1 Frank Gatski
 1/0 Lin Houston

F [OLB]
1/1 Alex Agase
 1/1 Horace Gillom
 1/0 Lin Houston

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G [DE]
2/1 ⚡ George Young
 1/0 John Yonakor

H [DT]
1/0+ Weldon Humble
 1/0 Derrell Palmer

I [MG]
1+/1 Bill Willis
 1/0 Derrell Palmer

J [DT]
2/0+ Lou Rymkus
 1/0 Derrell Palmer

K [DE]
1/0 Bill O'Connor
 1/0 John Yonakor

1949A Cleveland • DEFENSE

1949A Cleveland • OFFENSE

† Otto Graham is given a Y grade of 3 in second half; Bill Boedeker is given an OU grade of AAA on first two carries; Ed Susteric is given an IN grade of AA on first two carries.

TA [OT]
2/2- ⚡ Lou Groza
 0/1 Tommy Thompson

GA [G]
1/0+ Ed Ulinski
 1/0+ Weldon Humble
 0/1 Tommy Thompson

CE [C]
2/1 Frank Gatski
 1/1- Lou Saban
 0/1 Tommy Thompson

GB [G]
1/0 Lin Houston
 1/0 Alex Agase
 0/1 Tommy Thompson

TB [OT]
2/0+ Lou Rymkus
 0/1 Tommy Thompson

EA [E] **R**
2/2 Mac Speedie **17****
 1/0 Warren Lahr (20)

QB [QB] **CMP** **X** **Y** **Q** **OU**
2/2 → Otto Graham **D** **4** **4†** **15** **A**
 1/0 → Cliff Lewis **F** **10** **10** **14** **F**

EC [E] **R**
2/1 ⚡ Dante Lavelli **17***
 1/1 Horace Gillom 16

RB [HB] **IN** **OU** **R**
1/1 Bill Boedeker **C** **B** **(34)**
 1+/1 Edgar Jones **C** **C** **(14)**
 0/1 Tommy James **(D)** **(D)** **--**

FB [FB] **IN** **OU** **R**
1/2 ⚡ Marion Motley **A** **C** **13**
 0/1 Ed Sustersic **C** **E** **(7)**
 0/1 Tony Adamle **(B)** **(B)** **(13)**

EB [HB] **IN** **OU** **R**
1/1 Dub Jones **D** **B** **(20)**
 1/0 Les Horvath **(C)** **(B)** **(35)**
 0/1 Ara Parseghian **E** **D** **--**

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PK **XP** **FG** **LFG** **KO**
Lou Groza **AA** **E** **+50[F]** **E**
Lou Saban **AAA** **E** **+25[F]** **F**

INSIDE **OUTSIDE** **SC-SH-MED** **LONG**
 Motley 1-11 Motley 1-2 Speedie 1-8 Speedie 1-10
 D. Jones 12 D. Jones 3-9 Lavelli 9-12 Lavelli 11-14
 Boedeker 13 Boedeker 10-14 Gillom 13-5 Gillom 15-17
 E. Jones 14-15 E. Jones 15-16 Motley 16 Boedeker 18
 Susteric 16-17 Parseghian 17 D. Jones 17 D. Jones 19
 Adamle 18-19 Horvath 18 Boedeker 18 Horvath 20
 James 20 James 19 E. Jones 19
 O. Graham 20 Horvath 20 Susteric 20
 Lahr 20 Adamle 20

PU **AVG** **RET** **COF** **BLK**
Horace Gillom **37** **C** **B** **B**
Warren Lahr **39** **E** **E** **F**

[+3] TEAM OFFENSE FUMBLES: [C] PENALTIES: [B]

INT A-C

Cason 1-10
Layden 11-15
Alford 16-18
Davis 19-20

INT D-K

Ecklund 1-6
Grgich 7-12
Weinmeister 12-14
Rapacz 15-17
Russell 18-20

SACK

Weinmeister 1-9
Russell 10-12
Grgich 13-15
Reinhard 16-17

Kissell 18
Johnson 19
Davis 20
Poole 20

KICK RET

Young 1-10
Grimes 11-17
Perry 18
Cason 19
Davis 20

PUNT RET

Grimes 1-12
Young 13-18
Cason 19
Davis 20

RET

Buddy Young
Bill Grimes
Joe Perry
Jim Cason
Lamar Davis

KR
28*†
25
24
17
20

PR
12
15*†
--
7
8

[+/-] TEAM DEFENSE Y: [N] FUMBLES: [N] PENALTIES: [N]

A [HB]

1 / 1 Pete Layden
1 / 0 Lamar Davis
1 - / 0 Otto Schnellbacher

B [S]

2 / 1 Jim Cason
1 / 0 Lamar Davis
1 - / 0 Otto Schnellbacher

C [HB]

1 / 0+ Bruce Alford
1 / 0 Al Baldwin
1 - / 0 Otto Schnellbacher

D [OLB]

1 / 1 Brad Ecklund
0 / 1- Joe Saginago
0 / 1- John Wazniak

E [MLB]

1 / 0 Duke Iverson
0 / 1- Frank Perantoni
0 / 1- John Wazniak

F [OLB]

0 / 1 John Rapacz
0 / 1- Joe Saginago
0 / 1- John Wazniak

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G [DE]

1+ / 1 Jack Russell
1 / 0 Lamar Davis
0 / 1 Barney Poole

H [DT]

2 / 2 Arnie Weinmeister
0 / 1 Nate Johnson
0 / 1- John Wazniak

I [MG]

1 / 1+ Visco Grgich
0 / 1 John Kissell
0 / 1 Nate Johnson

J [DT]

1 / 2 Bob Reinhard
0 / 1 Nate Johnson
0 / 1- John Wazniak

K [DE]

0 / 1 Barney Poole
1 / 0 Al Baldwin
0 / 1 Barney Poole

1949 AAFC All-Stars • DEFENSE

† **Buddy Young** scores TOUCHDOWN on any KICKOFF RETURN over 45 yards;
Bill Grimes scores TOUCHDOWN on any PUNT RETURN over 45 yards.

1949 AAFC All-Stars • OFFENSE

† **Chet Mutrym** is given an OU grade of AAA on first four carries.

TA [OT]

2 / 2 Arnie Weinmeister
0 / 1 John Kissell
0 / 1 Nate Johnson

GA [G]

1 / 1+ Visco Grgich
0 / 1- John Wazniak
0 / 1- Joe Saginago

CE [C]

1 / 1- Brad Ecklund
0+ / 1 John Rapacz
0 / 1- Frank Perantoni

GB [G]

0 / 1 Dick Barwegen
1 / 0 John Mastrangelo
0 / 1- Joe Saginago

TB [OT]

1 / 2 Bob Reinhard
1 / 1- John Woudenberg
0 / 1 Nate Johnson

EA [E]

1+ / 1 Jack Russell
1 / 0 Lamar Davis
0 / 1 Barney Poole

R

19
14*
(20)

QB [QB]

2 / 1 → Frankie Albert
1 - / 1 George Ratterman
1+ / 0 → Y.A. Tittle

CMP

E
B
C

X

10
5
5

Y

6
5
6

Q

14
12
13

OU

AAA
C
C

EC [E]

2 / 1 Al Baldwin
1 / 0+ Bruce Alford
1 - / 0 Otto Schnellbacher

R

14**
20
(9)

RB [HB]

1 / 2- Buddy Young
1 / 1 Bill Grimes
0 / 1 Jim Cason

IN

D
B
C

OU

AAA
AA
C

R

14
15
13

FB [FB]

1 / 2 Joe Perry
0 / 1 Ollie Cline
1 / 0 Duke Iverson

IN

AAA
C
(B)

OU

AAAA
E
(F)

R

(13)
(3)
--

EB [HB]

1 / 1 ⊕ Chet Mutrym
1 / 0 Bob Hoernschemeyer
1 / 0 Pete Layden

IN

B
C*
(C)

OU

AA†
C*
(B)

R

12*
--
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PK

Frankie Albert
Joe Perry

XP

D
D

FG

E
F

LFG

+25[F]

KO

F
F

INSIDE

Perry 1-5
Mutrym 6-8
Young 9
Cline 10-13
Grimes 14-16
H'meyer 17-19
Iverson 20

OUTSIDE

Young 1-8
Perry 9-14
Mutrym 15-17
Grimes 18
H'meyer 19
Layden 20
Cason 20
Albert 20

SC-SH-MED

Baldwin 1-7
Mutrym 8-11
Davis 12-14
Young 15
Russell 16
Grimes 17
Alford 18
Poole 19
Cason 20

LONG

Baldwin 1-10
Russell 11-14
Davis 15-17
Alford 18-19
Poole 20

PU

Tom Landry
Frankie Albert

AVG RET COF BLK

44 B A B
44 D C A

[+/-] TEAM OFFENSE FUMBLES: [N] PENALTIES: [N]