



45TH ANNIVERSARY OF AFL

In 1960, the upstart American Football League kicked off in eight cities. It was a league which featured wide-open offensive play and utilized the two-point conversion. In addition, the AFL put names on the backs of jerseys to more easily identify players. But the scope of the new league's impact was greater than any on-field innovations.

"The game took on a national face," says **LAMAR HUNT**, founder of the Kansas City Chiefs. Hunt organized the AFL in his hometown of Dallas, and started his own team – the Dallas Texans. After three seasons in Dallas and an AFL championship in 1962, Hunt moved his franchise to Kansas City. He re-named the team the "Chiefs" in honor of Kansas City mayor **H. ROE BARTLE**, who was nicknamed "Chief."

"Before 1960, you had two West Coast cities [in the NFL] and the rest concentrated in the northeast," says Hunt. "The AFL changed all that. Suddenly you had pro football in cities that didn't have it before: Dallas, Denver, Houston, and Buffalo."

It wasn't easy, however. Games in Houston and Oakland were played in high school stadiums for several years at the start. The Boston Patriots, meanwhile, scheduled many of their games on Friday nights, because they could not compete with the New York Giants' games on television on Sundays.

"We had hard times in the early days," Hunt says. "But every one of those teams made it."

And the games and players provided lasting memories. Buffalo's **COOKIE GILCHRIST** rushed for 1,096 yards and 13 touchdowns after eight years in the Canadian Football League. Houston's **GEORGE BLANDA**, who was cut by the Chicago Bears in 1958, became an AFL star, passing for 24 touchdowns and leading the Oilers to the inaugural AFL title. And, of course, there was "Broadway Joe." The New York Jets signed Alabama quarterback **JOE NAMATH** to a \$400,000 contract in 1965 – unprecedented for a rookie entering professional football.

Namath played in two of the most memorable AFL contests. The first, on November 17, 1968, was the fabled "Heidi Game" and was voted by fans as the 10th Most Memorable Game of all-time in 1999. Later that season, in January 1969, Namath "guaranteed" victory in Super Bowl III and delivered, as the Jets became the first AFL team to win a Super Bowl (16-7 over Baltimore).

These were some of the memories that lived on after the NFL and AFL agreed to merge in 1966 and instituted a common schedule in 1970.

AFL FAST FACTS

- More than 300 players showed up for the first Boston Patriots tryout in 1960.
- The 1962 Denver Broncos wore vertically-striped, brown and yellow socks. They were so ugly that the club scheduled a public burning and 8,000 fans attended.
- The Boston Patriots played in four stadiums in their first 11 years.
- Said New York Titans owner **HARRY WISMER** on naming his team: "Titans are bigger and stronger than Giants."
- Two different footballs were used in the first Super Bowl. When the Green Bay Packers were on offense, they used the Wilson "Duke" football, the choice of the NFL since 1941. When Kansas City was on offense, the Chiefs used the AFL-sanctioned Spalding J5-V.

Q&A WITH LAMAR HUNT

Did you ever think the AFL would become as big as it did?

No I didn't. The sport of professional football has grown beyond anything that I ever would have expected. The biggest reason for that is the television coverage which makes the sport so national and all-encompassing in the way it is reported. It enables teams, even in small markets like Kansas City, to have a great national following.

What is your best memory from the AFL years?

The final game at the end of the 10th year when we beat the Minnesota Vikings to win Super Bowl IV. That was a wonderful culmination of the 10-year history of the American Football League.

Why did the AFL put names on the back of uniforms?

We tried to do things that made us fan friendly. That was one of them. Another was adopting the two-point conversion, which had been started in college football. We thought that was fan friendly as well. Many years later, the NFL adopted it.

How important was it for the AFL when the New York Jets won Super Bowl III?

That was a defining moment because the first two Super Bowls were one-sided in the final score. There was some feeling that there was a great disparity between the leagues. When the Jets pulled that upset it was very dramatic because the Colts were thought of as one of the better teams of all-time at that point. That was even more key because it was a New York team with Joe Namath involved and guaranteeing the Super Bowl.

What were your initial thoughts on the merger?

It was the right thing to do. It consolidated the sport. It assured the continuity of every team in both leagues. There were some teams that were pretty weak financially at that point. Previous mergers in sports generally were accompanied by some teams going out of business. We assured that every team would stay in business. We also assured the addition of new teams in Cincinnati and New Orleans. It gave the public the Super Bowl. It also provided the teams and the league with a common draft, which provided for an equal dissemination of playing talent.

