



Insider

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The Hall's
New Look, p. 4

CLASS OF 2008

DEAN, GREEN, MONK,
THOMAS, TIPPETT, ZIMMERMAN



50th Anniversary of “The Greatest Game Ever Played”

In 1958 *Sports Illustrated* writer Tex Maule called it “The Greatest Football Game Ever Played.” Although the 1958 NFL Championship between the Baltimore Colts and the New York Giants may not have been the “greatest” ever played, it certainly was historically significant and ranks among the best finishes of all time.

The now-famous game featured two very different teams. The Colts franchise was just six years old and had, in large part, been put together with castoffs from other teams including the NFL’s last failed franchise, the 1952 Dallas Texans. On the other hand, the Giants were one of the league’s oldest and most storied franchises and featured All-Americans like USC’s Frank Gifford. Though dissimilar in their historical structure, in 1958, the Colts and Giants were clearly the best the league had to offer. In point of fact, when the two teams met, both squads included six future Hall of Fame players. The Colts roster included Raymond Berry, Art Donovan, Gino Marchetti, Lenny Moore, Jim Parker, and Johnny Unitas, while the Giants featured Rosey Brown, Gifford, Sam Huff, Don Maynard, Andy Robustelli, and Emlen Tunnell. Add to that the Giants coaching staff included future Hall of Famers Tom Landry and Vince Lombardi, as well as future Hall of Fame owners Tim Mara and Wellington Mara. And oh yes, the Colts were coached by future Hall of Fame coach Weeb Ewbank. In all 17 future Hall of Famers were involved in the game.

As talent rich as both teams were, however, at times they looked like expansion franchises seeking a creative way to lose. In his book *NFL Top 40*, author Shelby Strother accurately points out that there were “six lost fumbles, numerous breakdowns on each side of the line, interceptions, penalties, field goals missed and made, a failed four-play series that started inside the other team’s 5-yard line, cries of conservatism that reverberated and butted heads with echoes of reckless play-calling, and all the deliciously smothering, snow-balling suspense football is capable of manufacturing.”

Still, the late fourth quarter Unitas-led drive that tied the game and then another in overtime that set up Alan Ameche’s one-yard plunge for the win, are legendary. The fact that the game and its exciting finish were nationally televised made it even more significant. The excitement of the televised game definitely enhanced the “national” value of the NFL, whose regular season games, up until then, were at best regionally broadcast. Ironically, the television world almost missed the 1958 Championship Game’s dramatic finish. With the Colts inside the Giants 20-yard line, the game went off the air as NBC somehow lost its connection. A frantic sideline technician alerted the game official who, believe it or not, extended a commercial timeout just long enough for the problem to be solved.

Fifty years later, the game still holds its special place in NFL history.



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