

How the Scouts Changed Football

The Pittsburgh Steelers' all-time leading interceptor organized a scouting combine in the 1960s, and the college draft hasn't been the same since

By JOHN CLAYTON
SCORE! Pittsburgh

THREE football players from St. Bonaventure College's Class of 1950 revolutionized professional football, not on the field, but in their dorm.

After practice each day, they dragged into their room and discussed their progress. Left out of the conversation was the fourth resident of the room, who knew little about the game.

The ignored youth got tired of the same conversations each night and decided to try it himself. So the next day, the irritated youngster pestered the coaching staff to give him a tryout.

He had a vague knowledge of the game and was a short, skinny kid, who could run fast. Wouldn't you know that the youth would be the only member of that class to get a shot at the pros?

His name was Jack Butler, a defensive back who got a call upon graduation to try out with the Pittsburgh Steelers, a team he barely knew existed.

From 1951-1959, Butler intercepted 52 passes, a Steeler record, one of the greatest careers among defenders in NFL history. And he did it on teams that were bad.

After assistant coaching under Buddy Parker a few years and later becoming the Steelers' player personnel director, early in the 1960's he and Art Rooney Jr. discussed the possibility of having a cooperative scouting service. A few teams seemed interested, but no team would give out secrets about players they were interested in.

A separate, impartial scouting service proved to be the only solution. So Butler took control of Blesto-V, which

stands for the (Chicago) Bears, (Detroit) Lions, (Philadelphia) Eagles, Steelers Talent Organization with a V attached to the end for the Minnesota Vikings.

Butler organized the company that would supply lists of college recruits to his five employers to help them in drafting.

Now more than ten years later, Blesto has ballooned to nine teams, with the addition of Baltimore, Miami and Buffalo and, just this year, Kansas City. Group scouting has revolutionized this most important phase of pro football.

Every team in the National Football League — except Cincinnati and Oakland — belongs to a scouting combine. But the man who runs the oldest and most successful service never played high school football.

"You don't have to be an old football coach to be a scout," Butler said from Blesto headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh. "To be a good scout requires work. When I hire a scout for Blesto, I look for a guy who has a basic understanding of the game, but the key is his willingness to learn and work.

"If you study films and are willing to learn, you can become a good scout."

Blesto employs 12 full-time scouts, who must report on every college prospect in the country. The country is broken down into regions, in which an area scout canvasses his own locality. The scout establishes personal contact with the coaches and studies his area's colleges.

There are regional scouts, who cross

NFL Professional Scouting Organizations

BLESTO — Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Miami, Baltimore, Buffalo and Kansas City.

CEPO — New York Giants, St. Louis, Green Bay, Washington, Atlanta, New England, and Cleveland.

QUADRA — San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego and Dallas.

Galaxie — Houston, Denver, New York Jets and New Orleans.

Independent — Cincinnati and Oakland.

How BLESTO Rates Players

0.0-1.00—Superstar status, should start and excel.

1.1-1.40—Should start on a professional roster.

1.5-1.8 —Should make a professional team and contribute.

1.9-1.00—Should make the team, possibly the taxi squad.

2.0-2.4 —Has some good qualities, but not good enough to make a roster.

territories to give other opinions as does the national scout.

"We rate players from their size, speed, attitude, ability, and a number of other factors," Butler explained. "With the area scouts, they get to know the coaches and the players. After a couple of years, if they work, they can tell you what the player eats for breakfast and what he does with his spare time."

Players are rated from 0-4 in divi-

