

Hey! Time-out! Pro Football's Gotten Slow, Boring, and Stupid!



(Fortunately, I Know How to Fix It)

By GLEN "IRON HORSE" WAGGONER

Hey! Wait a minute! What's going on here?! Pro football used to be so great! You know what I mean! Guy in a red jersey fades back and throws a bomb—Zip! Another guy runs and catches it and jukes a defensive back and—Bam! Touchdown! Then a guy in a white jersey runs off-tackle—Smack!—and cuts outside and flies past everybody right down the sideline and—Zoom! Another touchdown! Exciting! Simple! Big, mean-looking guys slugging it out down in the trenches! Little fast guys jumping and catching and dancing around! Heroes, gladiators, guys with *names*! Nitschke and Butkus and Karras! Bradshaw and O.J. and Staubach! Nicknames! Sweetness and Rocky and Bubba! Big Daddy, Deacon, and Dandy Don! Mean Joe, Broadway Joe, Turkey Joe! People in the stands screaming their lungs out and spilling their beers and getting all worked up! Guys all taped and banged up, snorting and kicking the grass like a bunch of bulls looking for somebody to hit! Blood and guts, snow and mud, banging and hitting, broken-field runs and long bombs! Hey, that's *football*!

But look what you got now! Hand off, sweep right, three yards. Bunch of new guys come on. Everybody's got clean shirts because they're playing on a doggone carpet. Sideline pattern, incomplete. Another bunch of new guys run out. TV guy draws play on screen, shows why it didn't work. Couple of minutes later we get another play. Square out and this time it's complete for about 6 yards to a guy who only plays on third-and-seven situations. Then a secondary back who comes in on the nickel defense bumps him and he lets go of the ball. Fumble? Wait a minute. Gotta let some guy up in the press box look at replays from a lot of different angles and figure it out. Knee touched first? Okay, offense runs off, field-goal team runs on. Then a little round guy, looks like he oughta be a bun in a Burger King commercial, kicks it 30 yards with the side of his foot. Good? Doesn't matter. Either way you stop for about ten minutes of commercials. Which is okay—at least *they* have some action!

Hey! You call that *football*?!

Glen Waggoner, senior writer at *Esquire*, played defensive tackle for the Sunset High School Bisons in Dallas, Texas, in 1958. He did not earn a varsity letter.

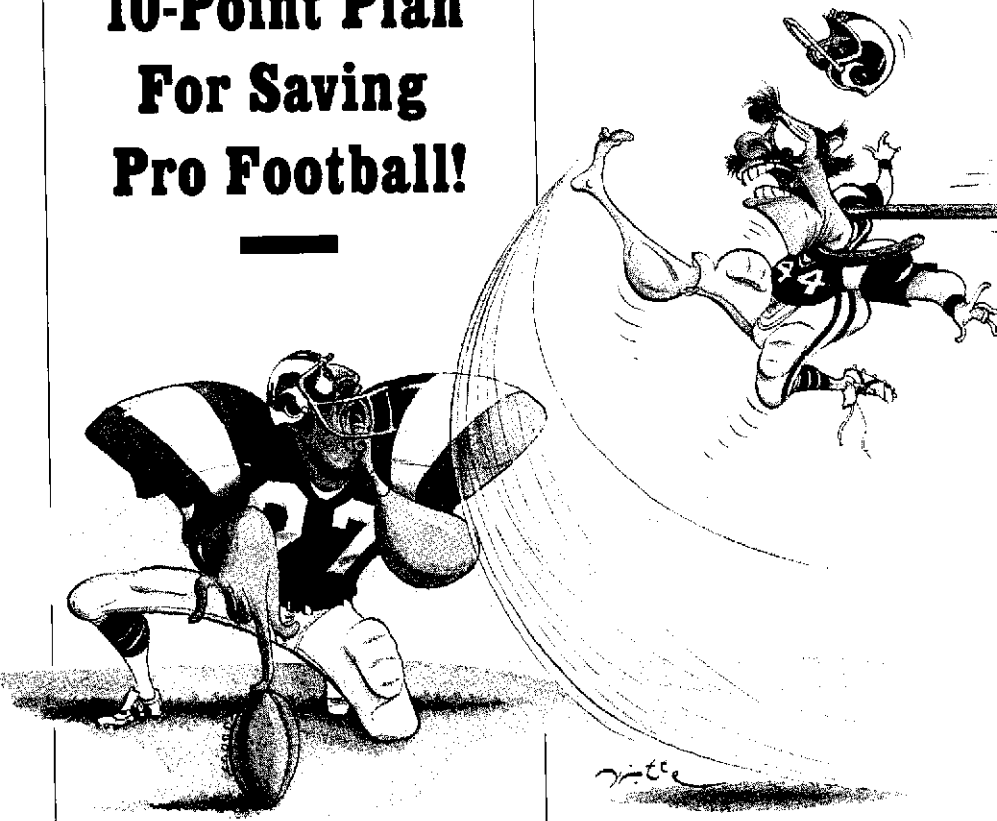
NFL Owners Are Dead Meat!



Gr-gluk damn
slerg-sptzts boring
guffig pizzazz
Nagurski wuzstk and
more exciting!

Let's face it: pro football stinks! It's stale! Predictable! Clean! It needs a kick in the pants, a shot in the arm, *something!* What it needs, and needs quick, is

My Modest 10-Point Plan For Saving Pro Football!



1. Get the Foot Out of Football!

Nothing frosts my pumpkin more than when a team gets the ball on its own 15, drives down the field with big gainers and razzle-dazzle and other good stuff, and then goes conservative when it gets inside field-goal range. Hey! The only thing more boring than a field goal is an extra point. Everybody knows that, so why don't they do something about it!

What to Do: Field goals you've got to keep, I suppose. Otherwise you'd have to come up with a whole new name for the game. But only if the line of scrimmage is beyond the 30. No more chippies!

On points after, get rid of the kick altogether. Wouldn't you rather see Montana rolling out or the Refrigerator busting over the middle or L.T. chasing Herschel Walker as he runs for the corner? Sure you would! Fix it so you get a point only if you run or pass it in. And while you're at it, put the line of scrimmage back to the 5 yard line, so the play means something.

Look, I know this could put some guys on the street. But, hey, kickers—don't get your dobbers down! America is hosting the World Cup soccer matches in 1994. If you cut back on the groceries, get in shape, and learn a few moves, maybe you'll land a job in a profession you're suited for!



2. Stamp Out NFL Socialism!

Let me tell you, these owners, they have themselves a bird's nest on the ground. They're choppin' in tall cotton, as my daddy would say. They get all this TV money, and they divide it up into equal piles, and everybody gets one. And you know what? There's enough money in each pile to cover every team's annual expenses, with a nice piece of change left over! And that's before they sell a single ticket or skybox or program or four-dollar container of lukewarm beer! Hey, ask any one of them what he thinks about socialism, and he'll say it kills a man's competitive spirit. Exactly. The way the NFL is set up now, an owner has *no financial incentive to win!* Doesn't matter if his team's a doormat year after year; he gets as much money from the game as the guy who busts his butt to build a good organization and put a winning team on the field. That's why nobody went after Walter Payton a few years back when he tried to go free agent. It wasn't a matter of collusion. It just didn't make any financial sense to pay Sweetness a big salary, *even if he led your team to the Super Bowl!* In fact, you could make more money by *not* signing him and *not* going to the Super Bowl!

What to Do: Easy. Set up incentives. Forget twenty-eight equal shares. Divide up the TV pie into twenty-eight *unequal* pieces, with the best team getting maybe ten times more than the worst team. If your team is a loser, it'll bite you in the wallet, hard enough to make you want to turn your program around... fast!

Chop 'Em Up and Turn 'Em into Brent Musburgers!



3. Enough, Already! Kick the Zebra Out of the Press Box!

Talk about dumb moves! "Limited instant replay" takes the cake! *So what if an official does blow a call now and then?* Big deal! Did the rocket scientist who thought this one up ever hear of Big Mo? Nothing kills a team's momentum faster than to have to stop and stand around and cool off when it's hot. And for what? So some guy up in the press box can make decisions that guys down on the field have been making since George Halas gave up baseball?! C'mon! It's a downright embarrassment!!

What to Do: Tex Schramm of the Cowboys is the big cheese on the NFL Competition Committee. This is his baby! Get on the horn and tell him it stinks!

4. Promote Regional Rivalries!

Everybody knows what makes college football so great: regional rivalries! Texas-Oklahoma, Auburn-Alabama, Michigan-Ohio State, games that get your heart pounding even if both teams are lousy. But look at pro football: somebody ought to face-mask the geography genius who put teams from three different time zones into the NFC West! Gimme a break! And what about the Dallas Cowboys and the Houston Oilers? One's in the NFC East, the other's in the AFC Central, and it's only a five-hour drive from parking lot to parking lot! Some people in Texas drive that far for a barbecue sandwich! But the Cowboys and the Oilers sometimes go years without playing each other. That's just plain stupid!

What to Do: Reorganize the NFL so people will remember what football's really all about—a bunch of warriors fighting over turf!

► Yankee Division: New England, Buffalo, Philadelphia, Washington.

► Sun Belt Division: Dallas, Houston, New Orleans, Miami, Tampa Bay.

► Sunset Division: San Diego, Seattle, Phoenix, Denver, San Francisco.

► Rust Belt Division: Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh.

► Heartland Division: Kansas City, Indianapolis, Minnesota, Green Bay, Atlanta.

► Bicoastal Division: New York (Giants), New York (Jets), Los Angeles (Rams), Los Angeles (Raiders).

Yeah, I know: putting both New York and both L.A. teams in the same division will cause TV problems. Tough TDs.

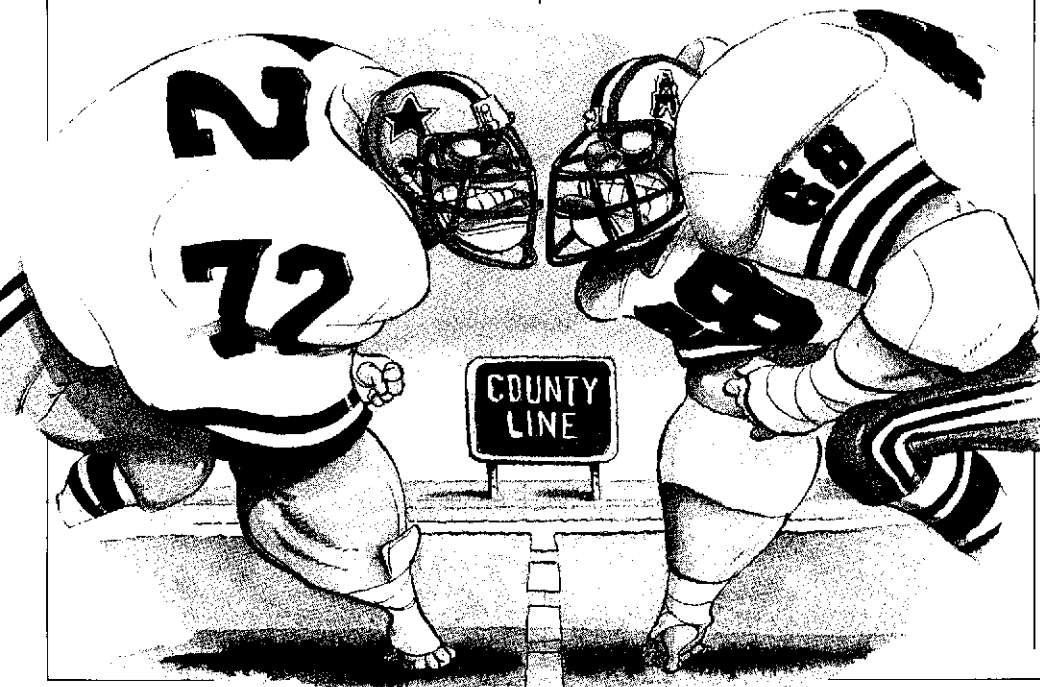


5. Get That Mob Off the Field!

They call it "situational substitution." I call it a pitcher of warm spit. You know what I'm talking about. Specialists! Specialists for tackling! Specialists for intercepting passes! Specialists for singing "The Star-Spangled Banner"! Strong-side inside linebackers, weak-side inside linebackers, nickel backs, second tight ends. Not so long ago pro football didn't even *have* tight ends; now they have second ones for certain running plays. You don't even know what some of these positions are, much less who plays them. But you always knew what positions guys like Ray Nitschke, Alan Page, Charlie Kreuger, and Sam Huff played, right? Hey, those guys might not make the average NFL squad these days: they wouldn't be specialized enough. How do you expect to develop football heroes and fan loyalty when you *really* can't tell the players without a scorecard?

What to Do: Reduce rosters from forty-seven to forty, which is still more than they had in the early Sixties, when pro football was taking off. Then limit substitutions to two players per down, except on fourth.

(Speaking of cutbacks, we've got to find Brent Musburger another sport. Don't laugh: it worked for Chris Schenkel! Know what Brent's good at? Calling baseball on radio, that's what. Yeah, I wouldn't have thought so either, but I caught him summer before last on CBS's *Game of the Week*. Not bad. Of course, it may have been some other Brent Musburger.)



Kick 'Em in the Super Bowls!



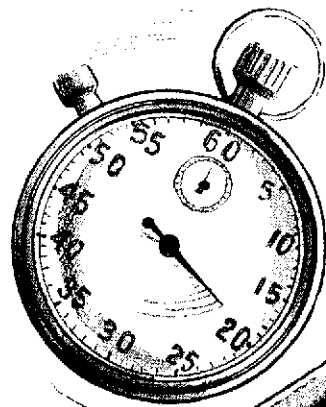
Is this
pigskin dead
or just
bored flaccid?

6. Speed the Play!

Ever wonder how come it takes more than three hours to finish a game with four fifteen-minute quarters? I'll tell you. Players standing around adjusting their jockstraps, that's what! Lookit, if you give a team thirty seconds to put the ball in play, and you have a couple of two-minute-warning time-outs to go with the regular time-outs and the commercial time-outs and the replay time-outs, pretty soon you got a game that's mostly *huddles and time-outs*! Hey, an NFL team spends more time huddling than it does running plays! You sit in front of the tube for three hours and get maybe fifteen minutes of actual rocking and socking! What do they think this is, chess?!

What to Do: Give teams just twenty seconds to put the ball in play. Do that and you'd see a lot of good things start to happen. You'd see players *running* back to the huddle, like they did back in college when they had that good old hustle. You'd see a lot more plays called by the quarterback, the way they used to be. Why? Because there wouldn't be time for the offensive coordinator on the sidelines to talk to the assistant offensive coordinator up in the press box and then have a huddle with the head coach and maybe look at the playbook and check the computer printouts for tendencies and consult the team astrologer and then flash a bunch of crazy-looking hand signals to the quarterback out on the field who's been waiting there patiently since Johnny U. threw his last pass.

Hey, let's get serious for a minute! How about one less commercial break per half? The owners and the networks already make more money than Switzerland, and if they would eliminate just two lousy commercial breaks most games would come in under three hours. That way everybody could watch a whole football game *and* have sex with the wife, all before midnight! And not miss a single score.



7. Hey, Pete! Take Green Bay and the Points!

I've had it up to here with all those pious hypocrites who whine so much about "the integrity of the game" and swear that pro football and gambling have nothing to do with each other. Hey, guys—*wake up and smell the spread!*

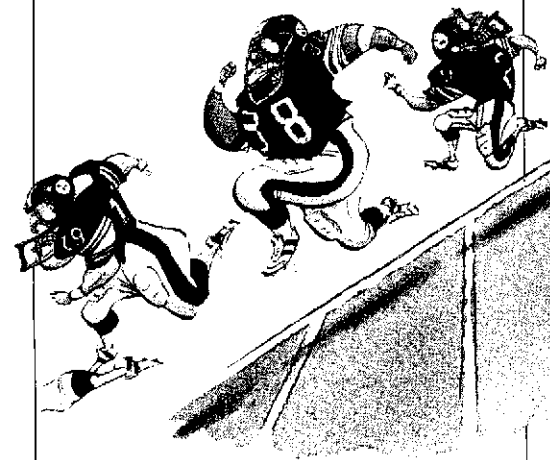
Does anyone with half a brain seriously believe that anybody in America would pay attention to a late November game between the Detroit Lions and the Kansas City Chiefs if it weren't for the action? Anyone does, I got a nice bridge he might be interested in.

Cut the comedy. Americans bet \$100 billion on pro football every year, and the guys who own the game say they don't *know* that? Does the name Carroll Rosenbloom ring a bell? Leonard Tose?

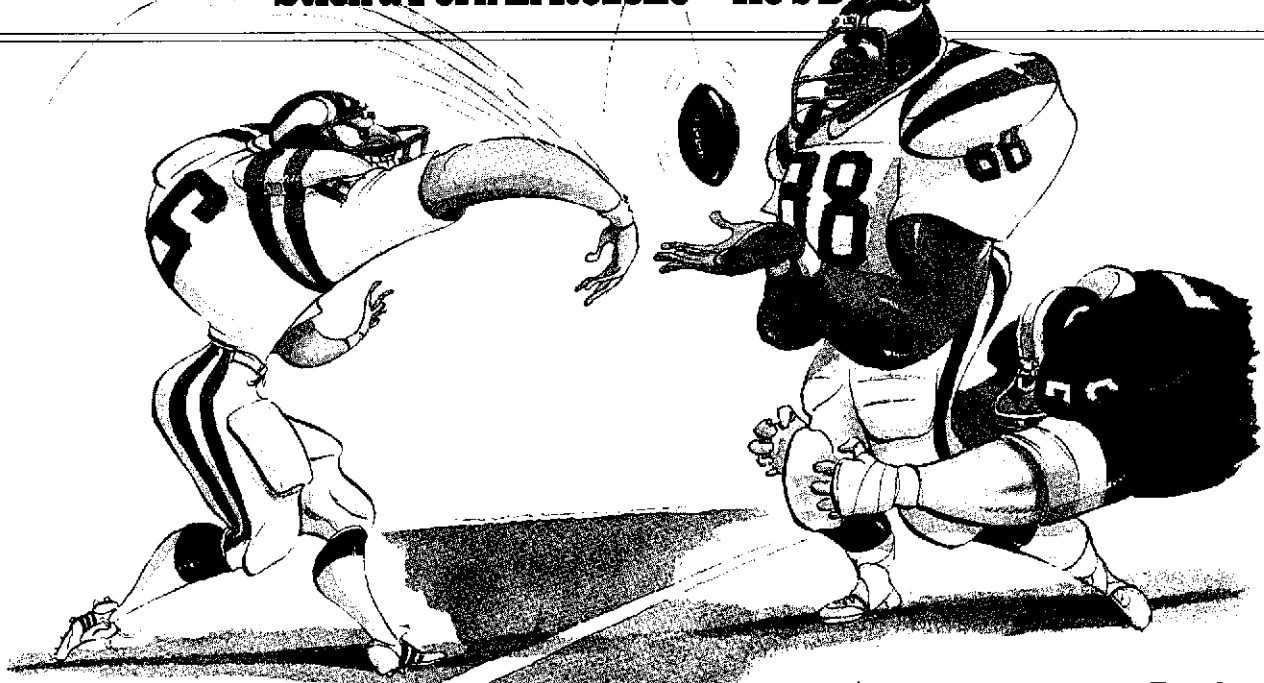
Say, Pete—you think maybe the TV guys want to cut out betting on football? Sure they do, and have half the country switch to the cowboy flick on WTBS when a ten-point underdog goes up by three touchdowns early in the fourth quarter.

For Paul Hornung's sake, give it a rest! Football and betting are like ham and eggs, ice cream and cake, Troilus and Cressida. Let's keep it that way!

What to Do: Come out of the closet: put the latest point spread right up there on the scoreboard for everyone to see. And don't forget the over/under. For both halves. On the pregame TV shows, how about a serious discussion from the so-called analysts about last-minute moves in the line, plus each team's record on covering. I want to know where Ax and Paul and Frank are sending *their* money. Hey, we're grown-ups!



Stick a Fork in Rozelle—He's Done!

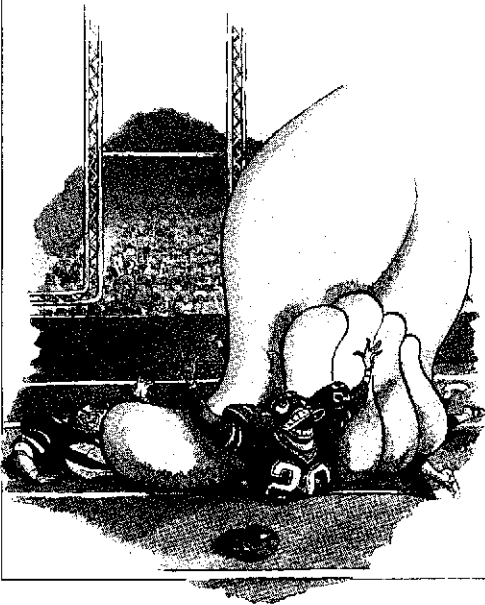


8. Steal a Page Out of Arena Football's Playbook!

You've got to hand it to the NFL, they know how to deal with competition. The AFL? Merge the heart out of it! The WFL? Smirk while it runs off-tackle into bankruptcy court. The USFL? Stand back and watch it devour its own young.

Hey, just for a change of pace, how about trying to pick up something positive from the other guys? Sure, arena football is a joke, but it's fast, there's a lot of scoring, and the players go both ways. The way it used to be in real football!

What to Do: Go to a game or two, suck up the best ideas arena football has to offer, then crush it to death.



9. Cut the Crap and Give Us the Only Stat That Really Matters!

So-and-so has a terrific "ratio of touch-down passes to interceptions," Merlin tells us. Such-and-such has a great "percentage of conversions on third down," we learn from Al. This guy "leads the league in pass-completion percentage," Pat glows, failing to mention that not one of those passes was good for more than 3 yards. What blow-hards! What hooley! What do they think we are, stupid?!

Don't know about you, but I'm getting tired of being fed a load of bullchips by TV guys trying to fill up airtime. The fact is, pro football is a simple game, and there is only one stat that you really need to know: average yards per pass. No team in the NFL can be a consistent winner without averaging more yards per *pass*—not per completion—than its opponents. Leading the league in rushing? Big deal: it means you run with the ball more times. Great "D"? Super important, but you still gotta move the ball when you have it.

Remember this: *every team that's ever gone to the Super Bowl has a higher yards-per-pass average than its opponents.* You can take that to the bank.

What to Do: Go make a sandwich during the pregame show; turn down the sound at half time. At least until they stop insulting your football smarts!

10. Bring Back the Tooz!

Hey, the game hasn't been the same since John Matuszak took off his headgear. He was a giant among giants! Even crazy guys thought he was nuts! We're talking about a time when Roger Staubach seemed colorful because he was so straight!

Today's football players? No character! No pizzazz! And the few guys that do have a little color couldn't carry Tooz's jock! (Hey, not many people could!) Brian Bosworth? Manufactured, not born. Jim McMahon? Bruce Willis with cleats. Mark Gastineau? His old lady's tougher.

What pro football needs is a bona fide space ranger like Tooz! Sure, at thirty-seven he may have lost a step. But there's got to be a job for him *somewhere* in the game!

What to Do: Pete, I hate to be the one to break the news, but the fans think maybe it's time you moved on. . . .

