

# CHC- Giants and Falcons Play in 1966 at Dudley Field

by Bill Traugher

**Nov. 29, 2006**

Vanderbilt's Dudley Field was the site of a National Football League preseason exhibition football game in August 1966. The expansion Atlanta Falcons were playing the New York Giants.

The Falcons were an expansion team full of rookies and leftovers from other team rosters. In the league's draft, Atlanta received the first and last choices in each of the first five rounds, and the first choice in rounds six through 20. The draft consisted of 305 selections. The NFL was also in competition for players with the American Football League.

In February, the Falcons selected 42 players in a special expansion draft. Each of the other 14 NFL teams froze 29 players from its 40-man roster. The Falcons chose one player from those remaining on each team, and then the other teams froze two additional players, leaving eight on each list from which the Falcons chose two more. Texas All-American linebacker Tommy Nobis was Atlanta's first pick of the college draft.



*Tommy Nobis*

Allie Sherman, who was in his sixth year leading the New Yorkers, coached the Giants. In his first three years he led the Giants to three NFL eastern division championships, but failed to win the title. In 1961, the rookie coach was named Coach-of-the-Year. Sherman followed that award with his second in 1962 to become the first NFL mentor to earn the prestigious award in consecutive years.

One of the Giants players was former Auburn running back Tucker Frederickson. He was joined by quarterback Earl Morrall, offensive tackle Roosevelt Brown, flanker Homer Jones, place-kicker Pete Gogolak, defensive back Dick Lynch, halfback Joe Morrison, running back Chuck Mercein and linebacker Jerry Hillebrand.

Norb Heckler, 38, had been the secondary coach with Green Bay for seven years before gaining the Falcons head coaching position. He brought experience coaching for Vince Lombardi his three NFL championships. Heckler was credited with developing all pro's Willie Wood and Herb Adderley.

On the Falcon roster was future Vanderbilt head football coach, rookie quarterback Steve Sloan. Other players were end Gary Barnes, linebacker Andy von Sonn, Ernie Wheelwright and defensive back Ron Smith.

John Bibb of the *Tennessean* summed up the game:

"New York's suddenly aroused Giants defeated the punchless Atlanta Falcons, 14-7

last night at Dudley Field in a national Football league exhibition game before 20,945 fans.



*Earl Morrall*

"Earl Morrall, current standing in the long line of outstanding Giant quarterbacks, threw for both New York touchdowns on trigger-quick tosses to Joe Morrison and Homer Jones. Pete Gogolak added the Giants extras with his soccer-style placements.

"The Falcons, who now have lost all three pre-season games, got their touchdown in the third quarter on a 68-yard pass interception by Ron Smith. The defensive spectacular squared the score, 7-7 when Bob Jencks booted the extra.

"In the second quarter, Morrall had directed an 80-yard surge, capped by his two-yard bullet to Morrison, breaking back of the goal post. The winning score was from the three as Jones raced frantically toward his sidelines deep in the end zone."

Nashville's Isaac Litton High School Band provided the halftime show with 115 strong members. Also at the half was a ceremony to recognize the soldiers fighting in Vietnam.

Atlanta was led in rushing by Wheelwright with 28 yards in five carries. Falcon quarterback Dennis Claridge connected on 12-of-26 passes for 142 yards while rookie Randy Johnson hit only one pass in nine tries for three yards. Sloan did not see any action.

Mercien led the Giants with 92 rushing yards in 18 attempts. Morrall passed for 213 yards while hitting on 20-of-35 passes.

The Falcons finished their inaugural season at 3-11. Atlanta lost its first nine games before beating the Giants. When Atlanta went 1-12-1 in 1967, then lost its first three games in 1968, Heckler was fired and replaced by Norm Van Brocklin.

The Giants concluded the 1966 season with a 1-12-1 record. Sherman was fired after losing the first three exhibition games in 1969. His records in 1967 and 1968 were both 7-7. Alex Webster became the new Giants coach at that time.

Nobis had a borderline NFL Hall of Fame career playing 11 seasons and becoming a five-time Pro-Bowler. With little help from the young Falcon defense, he made his first Pro Bowl trip in just his second season.

Gogolak had an interesting background as he and his family escaped Hungary in 1956 when Russian tanks were squashing a revolt by the Hungarian people. He had been kicking a soccer ball



*Falcons/Giants Program*

since he was three years old. Gogolak saw Cleveland Browns kicker Lou Groza boot a field goal on television and thought that the straight-ahead approach was strange.

Gogolak was so successful as a soccer-style kicker in high school and Cornell that the pros began scouting him. He signed with the Buffalo Bills of the AFL, but joined the Giants in 1966. Gogolak was professional football's first soccer-style kicker.

Morrall was the first selection of the San Francisco 49ers in the 1956 college draft. In his 21-year career, he was rarely a genuine starting quarterback. Before joining the Giants in 1965, Morrall played for the Steelers and Detroit. Morrall concluded his stint with the Giants after the 1967 season. He later played for Baltimore (1968-71) and the Miami Dolphins (1972-76).



*Falcons/Giants Ticket Stub*

When the Colts' Johnny Unitas was injured early in the 1968 season, Morrall led Baltimore to the NFL championship game, but lost to the Jets 16-7 in Super Bowl III. For his effort, Morrall was named the league's Player-of-the-Year. Morrall also replaced Unitas in Super Bowl V getting a 16-13 victory over the Dallas Cowboys.

During the 1971, Miami starter Bob Griese was injured and Morrall guided the Dolphins to 12 of their 17 wins in an unprecedented 17-0 season. He was named American Football Conference Player-of-the-Year. Morrall is considered one of football's greatest backup quarterback.

*Next week read about the Vanderbilt/David Lipscomb rivalry from the 1940s-50s.*

**Traughber's Tidbit:** There were more professional exhibition games played on Dudley Field. On December 26, 1932 the Chicago Bears beat the Boston Braves, 25-0. George Halas was the Bear's coach and scoring touchdowns were Red Grange and Bronco Nagurski. The Philadelphia Eagles beat the Green Bay Packers 38-13 in a midseason exhibition game on October 14, 1944. On August 28, 1965, rookies Gale Sayers and Dick Butkus led the Chicago Bears over the Los Angeles Rams, 28-14. George Halas was making a return visit to Nashville with his quarterback, former Vanderbilt great and Nashvillian, Bill Wade.

*If you have any comments or suggestions contact Bill Traughber via e-mail [WLTraughber@aol.com](mailto:WLTraughber@aol.com).*