

# The NFL's Persona Non Grata

I love the game of football. I am grateful for the opportunity to have played professionally. My playing days were, thanks to the NFL, high times indeed.

I loved playing in the League. It wasn't until later that I paid the price for taking the drugs my team provided. It was with a sense of irony and even sadness that I had no choice but to sue the league that gave me the opportunity to play for a living. The NFL helped turn me into an addict and addiction left me unable to earn a living after football. This wasn't exactly a fitting end to my glory days on the field. As Chad and Jeremy crooned back in the 1960s, "They say that all good things must end someday."

In 1995, I won the first round in my legal battle with the National Football League Players Association. The NFL was ordered to pay me \$1.8 million in disability payments after a federal court ruled the League had pushed drugs on me. The NFL threw a challenge flag and, in 1997, the appellate court overturned the ruling of the lower court.

Fifteen years have passed. More broken bodies are piled like cordwood, but the National Football League remains apathetic.

My drug addiction is directly related to the game. It was the San Diego Chargers trainers and doctors who gave pre-game amphetamines to rev me up, post-game sedatives to bring me down, pain killers as "needed" and steroids, said to be vitamins, for better health.

I considered taking drugs as normal for game day preparation as putting on my game face. Better living through chemistry.

It took a long time for me to realize that medication was exploitation especially since drug use was rampant within the Chargers organization. I have accepted my responsibility in this matter. Nobody held me and forced a fistful of pills down my throat, but I ask the NFL to own up to their responsibility for providing the drugs.

The NFL's complicity in dealing with rampant drug usage in the 1970s involved a cover-up that included trading several members of the San Diego Chargers, including me, to other teams. When I was with the Washington Redskins, after eleven years with the Chargers, head coach George Allen said he'd buy a truckload of pills if it would make us win.

Well, the Chargers brought in truckloads for a long time and encouraged their players to take plenty of drugs. Did it help us win? That's debatable, but drugs certainly made me feel bulletproof. It was after football that my bulletproof shield got lost at the cleaners.

Steroids have permanently stained Major League Baseball's record book. Drugs, including steroids, never caused the same public outrage in football as they did in baseball. The fans want bigger, stronger, faster football players. Football is a violent game. The NFL has instituted several rule changes to protect the players. A cynic might say rather than being concerned about safety, the NFL wants to protect its investment in the players. When they are used up, the League has to buy some more.

I never missed a regular season game during my career. I played in 181 straight games. Nine Pro Bowls were my reward for the job I did on the field. I earned respect from other players, coaches, sportswriters and the fans by playing like a savage turned loose on his prey. I had job security; I was untouchable. I never worried about being replaced. Football legends Sid Gillman and Al Davis

told me that I belong in the Football Hall of Fame, but it's tough to get invited to the party when you've piss in the host's punch bowl.

Perhaps my success on the gridiron can be traced to my early dysfunctional family life. It wasn't exactly *Leave It to Beaver*. It was more like *Destruction Derby*. What would you expect from a working class Irish home with six boys? My story is about a long struggle. I'm just glad to still be here to tell it.

*This book is dedicated to my wife, Nanci  
You said I'd miss you . . . and I do.*

