

# Another Super Sunday for NFL's Joe Browne

BY BERNIE BEGLANE

The date was Jan. 15, 1967.

The site was the Los Angeles Coliseum.

The occasion was Super Bowl I, which matched the Green Bay Packers, under the legendary and now deceased Vince Lombardi, against the Kansas City Chiefs.

It should be noted before continuing, that the game was not called Super Bowl until the third game when the New York Jets upset the Baltimore Colts.

You probably would have given your right arm to be there no matter the name, right? Certainly you would not have passed up Green Bay's lopsided 35-10 victory in order to take a chemistry final the next day.

And if you even had an inkling that it would be the only Super Bowl – this Sunday's contest in Jacksonville, FL, will be XXXIX – that you were going to miss, chances are you would have crawled across the country.

Not so Joe Browne, currently the NFL's executive vice-president for communications and public affairs. Then a junior at St. Francis College and a part-time employee of the league, Browne elected to pass up the historic occasion in order to be at the Franciscan Brothers' school in Brooklyn Heights the next day to take his chemistry test.

"I started working at the NFL in February of 1965 when I was a freshman," recalled Browne, who grew up in Ascension parish, Elmhurst, where he played CYO basketball. "My father, John, had passed away when I was seven and left my mother, Margaret, with five children to raise. I was the oldest boy and second oldest in the family.

"It was Bill Didie, Jr., son of the long-time high school basketball coach – the family lived in our parish, also – who told me about the NFL position. He was working there and (the late) Pete Rozelle, who was the commissioner, asked Bill if he knew anybody else who wanted to work.

"At the time I already was working in two supermarkets, but I said why not."

While holding down his third part-time job, professional football – the National and American Leagues – merged.

"The NFL went from 15 to 24 teams," continued Browne, who, after graduating from Ascension School, went on to Archbishop Molloy H.S., Briarwood, as the first basketball scholarship player (scholarships were permissible in those days).

"Shortly after the merger, Pete Rozelle told me to keep my nose clean and there would be a job for me when I graduated from St. Francis."

That took place in 1968 and, true to his word, the commissioner hired Joe in 1970. He is now the longest employee in NFL headquarters in terms of seniority. The late commissioner named him to several key front-office positions over the next 20 years.

In case you were wondering about the gap between graduation and joining the NFL, Browne joined another organization – the U.S. Marine Corps.

Paul Tagliabue, the current commissioner who succeeded Rozelle, appointed Joe as the NFL's first-ever vice-president in April 1990. There was a promotion to senior VP five years later and still another to his current position in 2002.

His responsibilities include public relations, media relations and community affairs as well as serving in Washington, D.C., as chief liaison for the 32 teams in congressional, military and other government-related matters.

To be sure, he was busier than ever this week leading up to the game between the defending New England Patriots and the Philadelphia Eagles.

Over 2,000 members of the media – national and international – will be on hand in the Florida city. Television will be carried in more than 220 countries. Little wonder that Super Bowl Sunday is called an unofficial holiday in our country.

"It's been a heck of a ride," related the soon-to-be 58-year-old Browne, who now resides in St. Peter Alcantara parish, Port Washington (Diocese of Rockville Centre), with his wife, Karyn.

"I've only had two bosses, and both of them graduated from Jesuit universities, Pete from San Francisco and Paul from Georgetown.

"On occasions I have been asked to speak at career days and I wonder what



Joe Browne and  
Former President Reagan

I can tell students since I have had only one job my whole life."

Joe, whose first CYO basketball coach was Mickey Crowley, now the supervisor of officials for the Atlantic 10 Conference, was anxious to recall his playing days at Molloy under Jack Curran.

"I was a year ahead of Lew Alcindor who was at Power Memorial Academy," explained Browne, "and played forward. Alcindor was six-eight and I was four inches shorter.

"Twice as a junior and once as a senior I jumped center against him. Power beat us in the quarter-finals of the New York City CHSAA in my junior year. And in my final season, we reached the city finals, also against Power, but lost again.

"Jokingly I say we share the New York City CHSAA record for most blocked shots – me for taking 14 and him for blocking all of them."

Joe recalled being in the White House where sport stars were being honored. Present at the ceremonies was Alcindor (now Kareem Abdul Jabbar), but stated Browne, "He didn't remember me.

"I used to ride the subways with him and I remember people gawking at him because of his height. Whatever hang-ups he had, he didn't have an easy childhood."

Following graduation from the Marist Brothers' school, Browne received a one-half academic scholarship to St. Francis College.

"I didn't play basketball at all," he continued, "and (the late) Danny Lynch (the Terriers' coach) tried to get me to play.

"The closest I came was being the public address announcer for our home games at the 69th Regiment Armory. I also edited my own Basketball Bulletin, which contained stories about the team.

"Danny told me I could write anything about the team, but to be honest. We had a great circulation system – place the papers on a chair coming into the Remsen St. entrance and put a rock on them so they wouldn't blow away."

Browne serves on the United Way of America Board of Trustees and numerous other non-profit organizations, including the American Ireland Fund and Charitable Foundation.

"I believe in giving back," continued Joe, who has stayed close to Molloy and St. Francis College, "because a lot of families helped my mother and all of the children when my dad died.

"And I am proud to say that I am one of Jack Curran's guys. Thousands of players went through him. When I flew to Los Angeles one time, I ran into a Molloy player in the terminal. The same thing happened in Chicago. More of Jack's guys."

As for his Super Bowl memories, Browne has two that will remain with him for years and years to come.

"I have met many outstanding people throughout my career," he began, "but the two atop the list are the late Art Rooney, Sr., owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and Wellington Mara, the New York Giants owner.

"Everybody wanted to see Art win a Super Bowl before he died, and when it finally happened in January 1975, there wasn't a dry eye in the locker room when he accepted the Vince Lombardi Trophy.

"Of course, that sentiment probably changed since the Steelers won three of the next five."

As for Mara, Joe stated, "When the Giants beat Denver in 1987 I was so happy for him.

"He is the NFL as far as the entire NFL family is concerned."

Safe to say that Joe Browne runs a close second even though he missed Super Bowl I. No telling what might have happened if he skipped that chemistry test.



Beglane