

RAMS LET THE BIG ONE GET AWAY, 23-20

BY BOB OATES
Times Staff Writer



WINNER—Minnesota quarterback Joe Kapp shouts encouragement to defensive team as Saturday's game with Rams nears end. Moments later Vikings intercepted a pass to end Los Angeles drive.

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL—On a cold winter afternoon, the Rams played about as well as they can play but lost the Western championship by the margin of a missed field goal here Saturday, 23-20.

Artistically it was a standoff between two clever quarterbacks—Roman Gabriel, who drove Los Angeles into a 17-7 halftime lead, and Joe Kapp, who won it for Minnesota with a second-half rally.

This was a game, however, in which some of the big plays in the third and fourth quarters were made by the officials.

The penalties could have been well-deserved (in which case the Rams fouled themselves out of the championship) or they could have been marginal (in which case the officials took the game out of the hands of the athletes).

In either event, the officials' interpretation of the rules

on four plays all went against the Rams in the second half.

A clipping penalty against Bob Brown, pass interference against Jimmy Nettles and a piling-on infraction by Jack Pardee helped the Vikings in the third period. And a Viking safety (when Carl Eller tackled Gabriel in the fourth quarter) also was a judgment call.

Minnesota coach Bud Grant, commenting on the officiating afterward, exclaimed: "It was excellent, just excellent. I wouldn't change a thing."

As groups of reporters filed by in many waves, Grant also made it a point to keep passing judgment on Gabriel.

"He was the outstanding player on the field," the Viking coach said, "Gabriel dispelled the last doubt

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Los Angeles Times
Sports

CC SECTION D 24

SUNDAY, DEC. 28, 1969



OVER THE TOP—There's nothing wrong in being backward as far as Minnesota back Dave Osborn is concerned as he sails over heads

of Ram players for first Viking touchdown in Saturday's NFL playoff game in Minneapolis. Osborn's dive into and zone tied game at 7-7. (By Wirephoto)

JIM MURRAY

Slue-Footed Joe Puts Kapper on The Rams

BLIZZARDTON, Minn. — Shucks, and it wasn't even cold.

The Los Angeles Rams lost a football game Saturday in this suburb of Sweden on a day you could have gone to the beach. They masterfully earned their way into the Playoff Bowl, a so-called contest known in the locker rooms as the "Go-Stand-in-a-Corner" Bowl or other times as the "Get Lost" Bowl. They played themselves right onto Page 3.

Tom Mack, who plays the left offensive guard for the Rams, removed whatever chance his team had of winning by doing something nobody else has ever been able to do with as much success — knocking Alan Page out of the play.



Alan Page plays right tackle for Minnesota and he has eaten so many quarterbacks this season he has numbers on his teeth. But, with the game running out and the Rams trying to get in position for a tying field goal, Alan Page couldn't get close enough to Roman Gabriel, the quarterback, to wave. He got knocked so far out of the play, in fact, Gabe thought he was a receiver.

Turned out he was, as a matter of fact. That, it so happens, was the first pass Alan Page had ever caught in his life—from anybody. Defensive tackles only get the football with quarterbacks attached, but this was one time Alan Page could reach up and take it without peeling a guy off it first. He caught it on the Minnesota 45 and, a half hour later, he had gone clear to the Ram 25. He may have gone clear to the Super Bowl.

The Rams played 40 minutes of broken-snow football. Then, they tried to smuggle the game into the clubhouse. It was like trying to smuggle an elephant through cus-

oms. The Rams are at least as good a football team as the Vikings, which is some praise, indeed. They led the first 53 minutes and 30 seconds of the game. They made Minnesota's vaunted defense look like the Seven Panes of Glass. They were so far ahead at halftime, I think they spent most of it icing the champagne.

They got beat on a run by Joseph Robert Kapp. Now, before you throw that line away, let me tell you that this is like getting set on fire by Smokey the Bear, getting your diamond returned by Zsa Zsa Gabor or getting your pocket picked by J. Edgar Hoover.

Which is to say, he can keep well ahead of a glacier. Joe Kapp is, you might say, glacier fast. Sap runs faster than he can. Yet, in the championship game, he and Roman Gabriel were the day's leading ground-gainers. Gabriel averaged 6.5 yards on 4 carries and Kapp averaged 6 yards on 7 carries.

When you get beat by a Joe Kapp run, you're entitled to a new deck. To tell you the truth, you shouldn't get beat by a Kapp ANYTHING. It is a rule of thumb in the National Football League that you have 3.5 seconds to get rid of a pass. It takes Joe Kapp that long to turn his back and start to the pocket.

His passes look like a wounded airplane looking for a place to land—in the dark. He played his college football at the University of California and he got drafted so close that the team that picked him sent him a bill for a season ticket.

He went to Canada where they watched him drop back to pass and decided he was too slow to play anything but pinochle. They thought they could use him on the kickoff teams until they found that Joe couldn't get downfield under any kick that didn't come down with snow or a stamp on it. He made the tackle once on the opening kickoff, but the score was 14-7 by the time he made it.

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The Viking Method: Win or Lose, They Do It as a Team

BY JOHN WIEBUSCH
Times Staff Writer

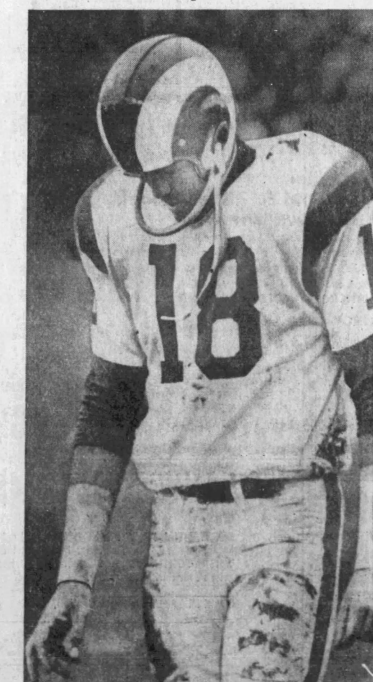
MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL—The streak ran down his back, a gash of crimson that had come from the chalk that made a sideline on the tundra of Metropolitan Stadium, and someone chuckled and said: "Joe, that red looked good on you on national TV today."

Joe Kapp pulled a piece of tape off his knee and looked up. "Well," he said, "at least it wasn't yellow." The quarterback for the Minnesota Vikings, champions of the Western Conference Saturday after a 23-20 victory over the Rams, is a man with rugged good looks and a crooked smile. He is tough, Joe Kapp is, and when he talks about himself he says, "What the hell good does it do if your bark is bigger than your bite?"

Kapp turned down the Vikings' Most Valuable Player Award two weeks ago, telling a banquet audience: "There ain't no red-nosed reindeer, there ain't no Santa Claus—and there ain't no most valuable player (on the Vikings)."

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RAM DRESSING ROOM No Tears, Just Stunned Silence



BY MAL FLORENCE
Times Staff Writer

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL — Bob Brown extended his long arms to allow Dr. Jules Rasninski to cut the blood-soaked bandages away from his hands. His knuckles were raw where stitches had been torn loose in the violent combat of the Western Conference championship game.

But Brown paid no heed to the pain in his hands. He had a greater pain—one of the soul—and he reflected the attitude of the entire Rams team when he whispered:

"Six months, seven days and a few hours work and it all goes down the drain. Right now I've never felt so bad in my entire life." There were no tears . . . no excuses . . . just stunned unbelieving silence in the dressing room as players sat slumped on benches staring into space.

Wasn't Enough

They had fought the good fight but it wasn't enough. For the second time in three years the Rams had been eliminated in a Western title game.

But Saturday's 23-20 loss to Minnesota was more frustrating because of the closeness of the score. Green Bay soundly defeated the Rams, 28-7, in the 1967 playoff game in Milwaukee . . . a result that didn't encourage as many self-doubts or what-might-have-beens.

George Allen was remarkably poised considering the enormity of the defeat. His Rams have one of pro football's most glittering records in the past three years but despite their success they have not been able to advance beyond the conference title game in post-season competition.

"What hurts," said George as he twisted his neck in an unconscious effort to alleviate pressure, "is that everything was right on the button. We were mentally and physically prepared for the game. We were sure we'd win."

"Yes, the Vikings were the better team . . . but only three points better. I can't single out any one

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ANOTHER UCLA ROMP

Bruins, Princeton Reach Finals of Classic

BY DWIGHT CHAPIN
Times Staff Writer

The UCLA Bruins have won 98 of their last 100 games.

One of the losses didn't come Saturday night.

The Bruins were expected to be lousy hosts in their own tournament at Pauley Pavilion and they admirably lived up to that role, removing the sting from the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets early and then coasting to a 121-90 victory before 11,142.

With the triumph, UCLA advanced into the finals of the Bruin Classic Monday night against Princeton, an 82-76 winner over Indiana in Saturday night's first game.

Coches John Wooden's Bruins took a 62-36 halftime lead on some fine shooting (56.3% from the floor). Four of the five Bruin starters—John Vallely, Sidney Weeks, Curtis Rowe and Henry Bibby—were in double figures by the intermission.

UCLA seemed to lose interest after that and was restless through much of the second half, but never was in

danger of losing its unbeaten string (which is now six this season). Bibby, the sophomore guard, answered nearly every attempted flight by the Yellow Jackets, with 15 second-half points.

Left hander Rick Yunkus, Georgia Tech's 6'9½ All-America prospect, gave the Bruins more trouble than any center they've faced this year. He scored 38 points, and forced Steve Patterson to foul out with 7½ minutes left in the game.

Forward Bob Seemer helped out

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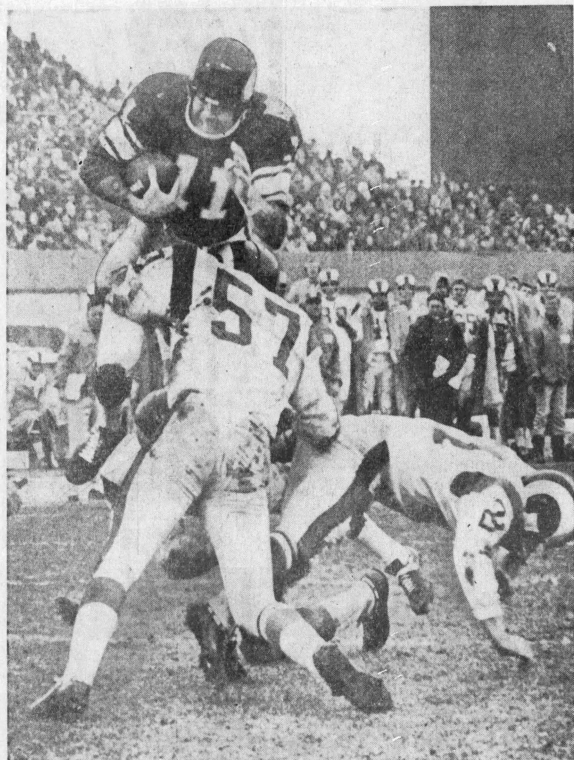
LOSER—Dejected Ram quarterback Roman Gabriel leaves field with head bowed after Minnesota's Alan Page intercepted one of his passes at game's end to stop the Rams' hopes of a comeback.



CAUGHT IN BLITZ—Roman Gabriel is blitzed by Vikings' Carl Eller (81) who charges by Bob

Brown (76) and wraps arms around the Ram quarterback on goal line in the 4th quarter Saturday.

It's Open Season on QBs



AIRBORNE — Minnesota quarterback Joe Kapp is lifted into air by Rams' Doug Woodlief after he gains 5 yards in third quarter.



SACKED FOR SAFETY — Eller's charge brings Gabriel down behind goal line and officials ruled it a safety. This extended Minnesota's lead to

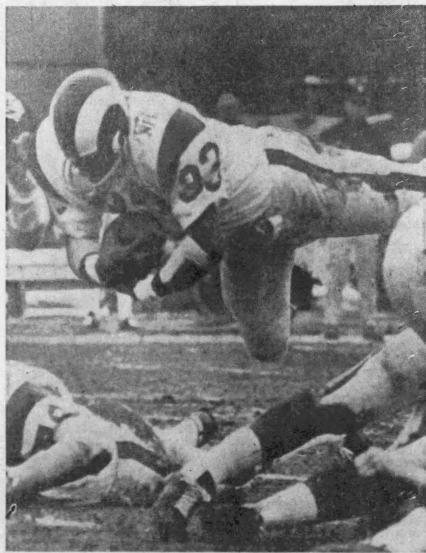
23-20. The Rams questioned the ruling, claiming that Eller had forced Gabriel into the end zone. The play had started on Ram 12-yard line.



HIGH STEPPER—Viking quarterback Joe Kapp vaults over Ram defensive back Jimmy Nettles on

goal line in fourth quarter to score Minnesota's third TD which tied NFL playoff game at 20-20.

What's Holding Him Up?



KERPLUNK!—Willie Ellison of the Rams is about to make a belly-flop of a landing after plunging for a first down early in the playoff battle when the Rams dominated play. Minnesota later took the initiative and won by 23-20.



RAMS' FINEST MOMENT—The Rams boasted a commanding 17-7 lead when Bill Truax caught second-period TD pass from

Roman Gabriel after eluding Earnest Mackbee (right). At this point L.A. looked like a winner in the Western Division playoff.

VIKINGS' METHOD: WIN AS A TEAM

Continued From First Page
Saturday, in the steam-crushing of the Vikings' locker room, he talked loudly and freely, and when he laughed—which was often—he noticed the scar that covers the right side of his chin.

He played football for eight years in Canada and he has been around the National League now for three seasons. But the scar is not a memento of football. It came when a man in a bar in Calgary shattered a beer bottle across Joe Kapp's jaw.

"Let me say this," he said Saturday and he paused for a moment while he glowered at two men who had not stopped talking. Let me say this: We beat an outstanding football team. A great one."

Two-Yard Run for Six
Kapp was the man who gave the Vikings the lead in the fourth quarter, a two-yard rollout around the end on third down, and he was asked how he runs that fast. "I don't," he said.

The former University of California quarterback completed four passes for 61 yards on the drive to the Vikings' first touchdown, one pass for 41 yards on the second and three for 40 yards on the third. But there were mistakes, and the mistakes were costly.

Minnesota moved within 17-14 early in the third quarter and they began from their own 30 after a two-minute rest after that. Five plays brought the Vikings to the Ram 11 but a pass was intercepted by Eddie Mearns and the bid was thwarted.

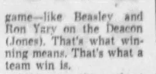
"Now that really made me mad," said Kapp.

Petition Intercepts
The Rams could do nothing again and the ball went back to the Vikings on a punt. On the third play of the series, Kapp's pass was picked off by Richie Peterson, who returned it four yards to the Viking 36.

"At this point I was fuming," said Kapp, "and when the Rams got a field goal out of it (making their lead 20-14) I knew that unless we started cutting it everything was over."

Kapp's contributions on the 65-yard score to the winning touchdown included fast completions of 20, 12 and 8 yards, a scrambling run of 12 yards that brought the ball to the Ram 4 and, finally, the touchdown with less than 8½ minutes left to play.

"We didn't play our best football in the first half," said Kapp. "At halftime there was a kind of quiet resolve in here. We knew that those 10 points the Rams and on us weren't enough to beat us. We knew we had time to do it, when we lose, we do it as a team—and we did it last week in Atlanta—and when we win we do that as a team, too. The kind of come you don't see at the little games within the



game-like Besley and Ron Yerv on the Deacon (Jones). That's what winning means. That's what a team win is.

"The nice thing about today was that the field was perfect. It was just ideal conditions. It was championship football."

"The Vikings won with their passing game and the men who made it go were the long-legged receivers, Gene Washington (four catches for 90 yards) and Tom Henderson (four for 68 yards).

"The Rams tried to cover us man-on-man," said Washington, "and I think we showed that any team that tries to do that is in trouble. What surprised me—and all of us—was that the Rams did exactly the same thing in Los Angeles three weeks ago. We didn't take advantage of it then because we didn't have to—but the openings were there again today and we grabbed them. Joe did a marvelous job of getting the ball out of us."

No Changes
The Vikings' coach, Bud Grant, was dressed in gray undergarments and heavy yellow boots—the kind that Minnesota line fishermen use—and he was asked what he had told his team at intermission.

"I would like to tell you it was something profound," he said, "but it was nothing really. It was intermission because my wife and I went to the ball game."

"The Rams finished with a total advantage of 65-50 in total plays but it was 36-21 in the first half and 29-20 in the last 30 minutes.

"We had the ball for nine plays from scrimmage in the second quarter," said Grant. "That's not the formula we used to win 12 games this year. The formula was highly emotional. I don't know if you could write a script like that."

Gabriel 'Best'
The coach shook his head. "I thought there was no question that Roman Gabriel proved today that he's the Most Valuable Player in this league. He did a marvelous job (22 completions in 32 attempts for 150 yards and both Ram touchdowns). He was the outstanding player on the field."

Over another corner of the room, in the corner where the men who play defense for the Vikings pointed out, sat on a chair and talked of the rush that flattened Gabriel and gave the Vikings a safety that increased a one-point lead to three.

"I didn't know what I did," said Eller, "until I saw the rest of the guys. It tickled me because that just about made sure that we'd get a tie and the worst that could be was sudden death."

Eller was asked if he

Continued From First Page

that he is the most valuable player in the league."

Grant won with the better team. He has now defeated the Rams twice this month—first ending their 11-week winning streak and then ending their Super Bowl dream.

But the whole point of Saturday's game is that Gabriel was beating Grant and Kapp when the Rams suddenly blew up.

All year, they had been alternately a big-play and a big-mistake team, leading the league in touchdowns and penalties.

In the first 30 minutes here, they made the big play as usual, except for a missed field goal by Bruce Gossett. In the last 30, they made the big mistake as usual, except for the fumbles, as well as dropped passes by Larry Smith and Billy Truax on two clutch plays.

Not in Minnesota
The Rams can do that and outscore Dallas. Gabriel is not quite good enough to do it and win from a better team when they are playing below a friendly crowd on its own field in the dead of winter.

And so, after starting the season with 11 consecutive wins, coach George Allen's four Los Angeles edition closed unhappily with its fourth straight setback.

Kapp's courage and talent prevailed again as the Vikings won their 13th game in 15 weeks to qualify for next Sunday's NFL championship game here against today's winner of the Cleveland Browns.

The weather next week could be worse. It was playable Saturday on a reasonably good field as the temperature ranged from 21 to 26. The wind was insignificant.

'Summers' Play
In fact, by turns, Kapp and Gabriel marched as if it were a summer day. Gabriel earned a pair of touchdowns on drives of 45 and 56 yards and a pair of field goals on advances of 65 and 36 yards.

Kapp, who led the Vikings in ground gaining with 42 yards forward—and almost that many up on high-jump scrambles—earned three touchdowns on drives measuring 75, 71 and 65.

The statistics were about even. Minnesota finished ahead in yardage, 275-255, but Los Angeles led in first downs, 19-18, and plays, 65-50.

In the end, defeat came with an extra dash of bitterness to the Rams because they had been in front most of the way.

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They were still on top in the fourth quarter, 17-14, and Gabriel fired at the Minnesota 20-yard line—third down, six to go—when the game got away from them.

There were several turning points in the second half, but this was the crack Viking defense. A straight pass to Truax for what was going to be a first down on the 10-yard line if Billy had held the ball.

Bringing it down, he dropped it.

This was the one play of the afternoon that may have been clearly influenced by the cold weather. If so, that is reason enough for foot football to cease playing its big games in this climate.

Six-Point Lead
Truax normally is sure-handed when he gets 10 fingers on a fast ball above his head. He couldn't cling to the crack Viking defense, and he was obliged to settle for a 24-14 lead that could have been decisive.

Kapp is a man who knows what to do with opportunity. Likewise he had the resources (the best backs and ends on the field) to capitalize on the opportunity. Down six points—instead of the 10 that might have been—he manipulated those resources to cover 65 yards to the winning touchdown.

The Rams, playing without linebacker Maxie Baughan from the first quarter on, couldn't stop the big drive.

On second and nine at the Ram 27, Kapp scrambled for 15 yards and Dean Jones met Dave Osborn behind the line but fell off as the Viking halfback spun away.

Rolls Out for TD
Then Kapp was scrambling and clawing and hurdling once more, for 12 yards this time, and on the last of the 10 winning plays he rolled two yards into the end zone.

The final Ram mistake planted him there. No Ram tackler was outside to force him inside. Baughan is a signal caller who habitually takes care to prevent such a lapse, but Baughan, by then was in a sweat-suit on the sideline, rendered helpless by a bad knee.

Kapp's last charge was helped by the three penalty plays which enabled him to cut the Ram lead from 17-7 to 17-14 in the third period.

Gabriel had moved the ball continually in the first half, when the Rams never punted, and he began the second half the

same way. He had reached midfield, again, when he penalty had what the Vikings could not.

Brown was called for clipping as Lester Josephson for a first down outside the neutral zone when he clipped — and that is a marginal interpretation of a first down, particularly in a game as meaningful as this.

Clipping is a 15-yard foul, and Gabriel couldn't make it up. Against almost any other club, he would have had an even chance. The officials believed he was own or Eller's. A man holding a football cannot commit a safety if he is pushed into the end zone.

The point is that the call was close—and that the Vikings batted 1,000 on the four close calls that destroyed the Rams in the second half.

The safety did not hurt. When Gabriel fell back, the Rams were losing 21-20. Now they were losing 23-20, and with a field goal

they could get into sudden-death overtime.

What hurt was that the Rams lost possession on the safety. With eight minutes remaining, Minnesota had the ball, and Kapp used up three of them before fumbling.

Coy Bacon, the young Ram tackle, forced that fumble. And Dean Jones was in position to get it if he had seen it. He didn't. Ron Yerv had the Minnesota tackle from USC who helped keep Jones at bay much of the afternoon, got to the fumble first. And when Minnesota punted, Gabriel started from the

Nettle's Interference
Gabriel, retreating to pass from the Ram 12, was tackled by Carl Eller. And when Gabriel went down in the end zone, the referee signaled safety. Gabriel planted his foot as Eller hit him. He may have planted it on the one-yard line. Or he may have been on the goal line.

The question is whether the impetus that put him in the end zone was his own or Eller's. A man holding a football cannot commit a safety if he is pushed into the end zone.

The officials moved in on Pardee. They penalized the Rams half the distance to the goal for piling on.

The infringement, if any, was not flagrant. On the contrary, it was another marginal interpretation.

Kapp, however, took it and promptly delivered to Gene Washington for 41 yards to the Ram 12.

There, Nettles got a hand on Washington's feet. Washington stumbled, fell, and immediately got up, whereupon Jack Pardee tackled him.

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