

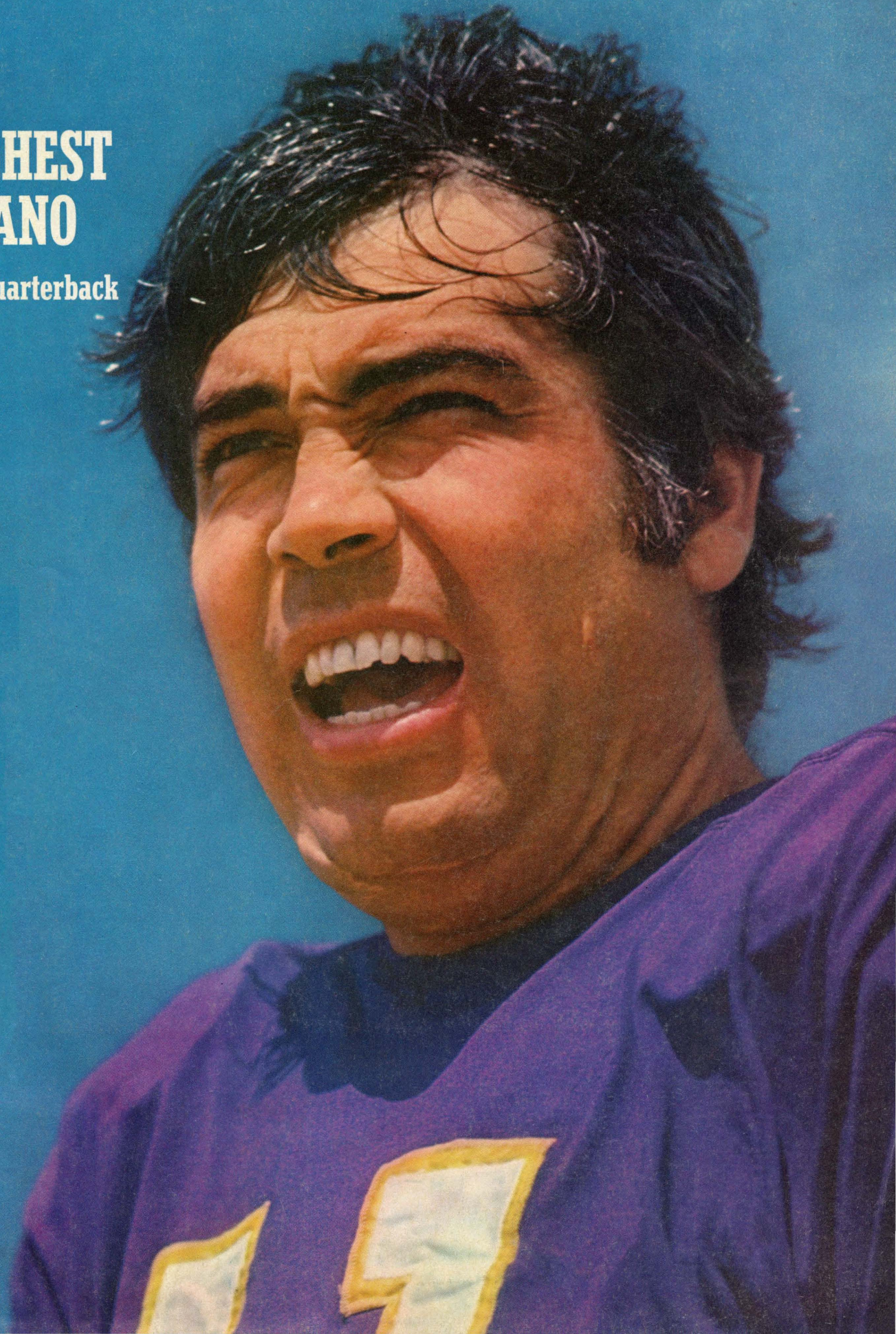
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THE TOUGHEST CHICANO

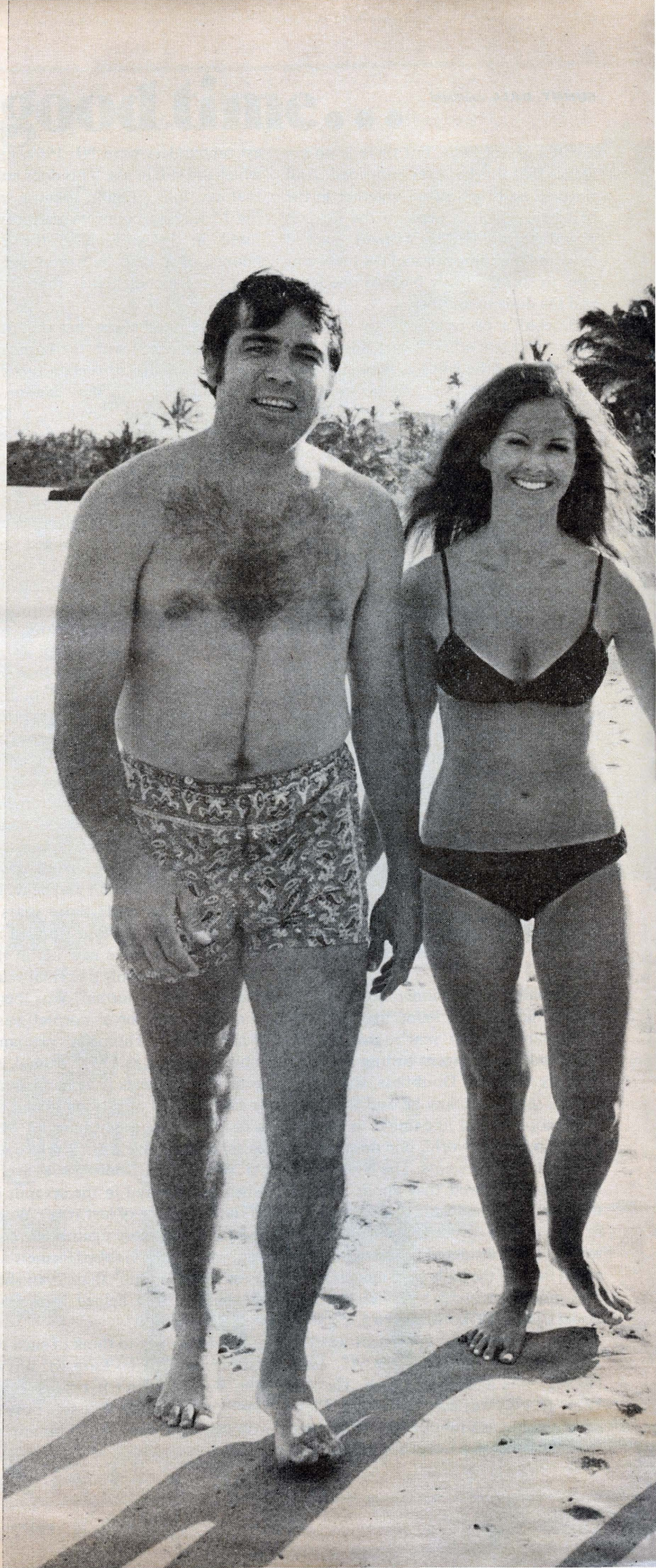
Viking Quarterback
Joe Kapp



Gentle, fun-loving Joe Kapp says that fights just seem to come looking for him—but he admits he never backs down. That, adds the Viking quarterback in the first of three parts, is what Chicanos call 'machismo'

by **JOE KAPP**
with
JACK OLSEN

A MAN OF MACHISMO





Football is a kids' game, invented to give a lot of people a lot of fun. The minute a player loses sight of that fact, he's in trouble. Like the Minnesota Vikings in the Super Bowl. We forgot we were supposed to be enjoying ourselves out there. We forgot it was a kids' game, and we wound up playing in a red-wood forest. Every time I looked up I could see those red tree trunks in front of me and on top of me and all around me. We didn't stay loose and have fun—in the traditional Viking way—and we played a poor game and they played a great one.

By having fun I don't mean goosing each other and telling dirty jokes in the huddle—although a little male humor doesn't hurt either. I mean doing your absolute best and enjoying it, because if you're doing your best you will be enjoying it. And if you're doing your best, then winning isn't so crucial. A football isn't round, and you don't always have control of whether you win or lose, but you do have control of your own effort and your own mind. If you can get enough ballplayers on your own club thinking this way, you can win anything.

I haven't missed many football games in my life, going all the way back to high school—like most pros, I've played with cracked ribs and a punctured lung and a torn knee and separated shoulder and half a dozen other injuries—and I've also never missed a postgame party. I've never missed the fun. I've known players who get a little injury and rush off to the hospital and don't make the party. Bull! Not me. I never missed one and I never intend to miss one. You play out there together and you win or lose together and you're all involved in this effort together and after the game you should party together.

Of course, there are certain players who will tell you that I never miss a party, period, and if they want to spread that propaganda, it's all right with me—mostly because it's true. I even showed up at the annual banquet of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes this year, at *their* invitation. At first I thought some terrible mistake had been made. Certainly I'm a Christian athlete, although I'm not exactly renowned for my piety. I was a little uneasy until I spotted Bobby Layne, the former quarterback, and then I felt like I belonged. And when I saw Dick Butkus, I really breathed easier. I went up to him and I said, "Whose ticket did you steal to get in?" and he said, "Why don't you go over in the corner and leave us humans alone?" Mutual respect, that's what we have. When people ask me if Butkus is the best linebacker I've faced, I won't answer. I hate to single out individual opponents. In the pro game, they're all good. I won't even vote for an all-opponent team. I rip the ballots up. They're *all* good. I'll bet you a cigar that you can't name one bad football player in pro ball. *You lose!*

I'm aware of my own reputation, and I enjoy it. I've been called "one half of a collision looking for the other." The adjectives you usually read about me are "unstylish," "brutal," "unrelenting" and sometimes "dumb." (That's when we lose; when we win, I'm a "great genius.") People take one look at the scars on my face and they assume that I spend most of my off-hours prowling around looking for fights, when the truth is that the fights are prowling around looking for me, and sometimes they find me. I think of myself as a gentle, fun-loving, peaceful person, but you can be all these things and still get in fights—especially if you don't back down, and I

continued

KAPP, WIFE MARCIA AND SON J.J. HIT THE BEACH AT WAIKIKI DURING OFF SEASON

try not to. You won't see me running out of bounds to avoid a little physical contact with a linebacker, and you won't see me ducking out the window when somebody wants to tangle. So I've been known to get in an occasional tête-à-tête.

Maybe this goes back to my Chicano childhood, and machismo. Machismo means manliness, a willingness to act like a man, and if a kid didn't have machismo in the polyglot neighborhoods of the San Fernando and Salinas valleys in California, where I grew up, he had it tough. When I was little I saw guys lying in their own blood at the corner of Mission Boulevard and Hollister Street in San Fernando. Sometimes the Mexicans would fight the Anglos; sometimes it would be the Mexicans and the blacks from Pacoima. They had gang fights going all the time and even an occasional shoot-out or knifing.

When we moved to Salinas in the California lettuce belt, we lived in a housing project with pickers, Okies, Arkies, blacks and whites and browns and purples. In the fifth grade a bigger kid called me "a dirty Mexican," and at first I didn't challenge him. But when I got home I brooded on what he had said. My sense of justice was outraged. My mother, Florence Garcia Kapp, is Mexican-American, but my father is of German descent; therefore, at worst, I could only be half of what that kid had called me. So I went back and found him and really whaled him. I didn't win the fight, but I got in some licks. That was machismo, not backing down, acting like a man. I think I violated the code of machismo only once: in the seventh grade, when two guys took my basketball and rolled it down the hill. I should have whaled them, too, but one of them was Bob Sartwell, the best athlete in Salinas, six feet tall and 180 pounds, and I chickened out. I've never backed down since. On that dry, dusty basketball court in Salinas, I would look around me and say to myself, "Well, if I'm gonna win this game I'm gonna have to kick somebody's butt!" That was valuable training for NFL football.

I went to the University of California on an athletic scholarship, mostly for my basketball, but if you have never heard of me in that connection, you may be excused. I arrived at Cal under the mistaken impression that I was the hottest athlete in town, but I was quickly disabused. Those big-city athletes had

moves I'd never imagined. In football you had to play both ways in those days, and I started at quarterback on the freshman football team. The coaches didn't know where to play me on defense, so I played corner. Against UCLA's frosh team I had to cover a pass catcher who was a star hurdler. I played him about 18 yards deep and still he caught three touchdown passes over my head and UCLA beat us 32-0. I was never so humiliated in my life. We didn't get a single point on offense and I let them have three touchdowns over my head! I was ready to quit football, but the coach talked me out of it. He let me play outside linebacker in the last game against Stanford, and my lack of talent didn't show up so conspicuously there.

Cal was going through some tough times back in those days. The Golden Bears hadn't won a Pacific Coast Conference title in years. In my sophomore year we won three football games, and in my junior year we won two less than that. By the time my senior year came around we were classed as humpties, and we opened the season by losing to College of the Pacific, with Dick Bass, and then to Michigan State. Halfback Jack Hart and I were co-captains and we sat down for a little talk after that second straight loss. "This is it, man," Jack said. "We're either gonna turn it all around right now or we're gonna have another year like the last two."

"We've got to do something wild," I said. "We've got to shake the guys up somehow."

We had a team meeting and Jack and I told everybody that time had run out on the Cal team—either we start improving right away or we forget it. The next day in practice Jack spotted a lineman who wasn't putting out and he grabbed that big guy by the back of the neck and the seat of the pants and ran him halfway across the field into a concrete abutment. "Goddamn it!" Jack shouted. "If you don't want to play, get out of here!" Sometimes you need a little dramatic thing like that to shake a team up. We only lost one more game that year, and we won the Pacific Coast championship and went to the Rose Bowl. Iowa beat us 38-12. I led the Pacific Coast Conference quarterbacks in rushing and was named to the *Look* All-America team, and so, of course, all I had to do was sit back and wait for the pro offers to roll in.

Nothing rolled. I was the 13th pick of the Washington Redskins, but they never contacted me, and I wound up signing with the Calgary Stampeders in the Canadian Football League. The ink was hardly dry on the contract before I got into the battle that produced these scars on my face. I've never told the whole story before because I didn't see what purpose could be served by it, but now I'm telling it to nip off some of the sillier versions that have been circulating.

It was a hot, humid night during the training season, and most of the Stampeders were sitting around drinking beer. We'd had the annual rookie show earlier and nobody felt like going to bed, and around 1 a.m. I walked into a room where the guys were talking. Without warning, a big linebacker broke a quart bottle of beer across my jaw and raked it across my throat. We started to tangle, but there was so much blood spurting around the room that the other guys jumped in and broke it up. A couple of players took me to the trainer's room, and when the trainer answered the door all sleepy and red-eyed he took one look at me and fainted. At the hospital they gave me 100 stitches, and the doctors said that the broken glass had missed

BEAMING BUCKAROO is Joe Kapp, age 4, in his cowboy suit on a photographer's pony in wildest Burbank. But young Kapp had no time



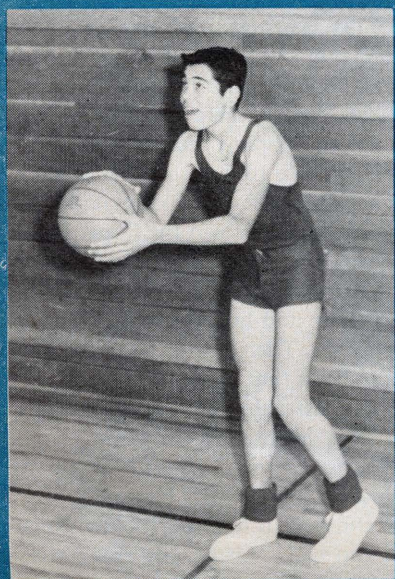
my jugular by about half an inch. At 7 o'clock the next morning there was a knock at my door, and I opened it to find the guy who had hit me. He apologized and said, "I don't know what you should do to me, but go ahead and do it."

I said I didn't want to do anything to him; we were teammates, and we'd both been drinking, and it was one of those things.

Three years later, after I'd been traded to the British Columbia Lions, the linebacker showed up looking for a job, but there was nobody in our office at the time. He went out and knocked on the door of a rectory, and when a priest answered the guy killed him with a shotgun. Ever since then he's been in a mental hospital in Vancouver. A paranoid schizophrenic. A very sick boy. It was my bad luck to be around before his sickness was diagnosed.

Some Americans look down their noses at the Canadian Football League, but that only shows ignorance. I spent eight years up there, on teams that wound up losers and on one team that went on to win the Grey Cup, Canada's Super Bowl game, and I don't look back on it as

for horseplay. "Every time I turned around he had a ball in his hand," says his mother. Here it's as a junior high forward in Salinas.



minor league experience. Canadian football is a wide-open, fluid game, with action and movement all over the place. There are five backs and no rules against motion and plenty for a quarterback to think about. But both leagues have one thing in common: a quarterback is paid to win.

I never missed a game in Canada. I played the exhibition game the week after my 100 stitches. I started and finished a game when my knee was twisted and torn. Later on the doctors took out bone chips and torn cartilage and everything else. One of them said that he couldn't believe so much matter could come out of one man's knee and they predicted that I would never play again. When the next season started, I was out there. Too dumb to know better, I guess!

After the 1963 season I picked up the nickname "El Cid." Football players go to the movies often, and I go more often than most, and we had all seen *El Cid* and that great scene where they strap Charlton Heston into the saddle so that he can lead the Spanish into battle and scare the hell out of the enemy, even though he's dead. Right after that I was dressing for a game and easing my uniform around all my injuries. One finger was dislocated and taped to the next one. One knee and both ankles were taped. I had bruised ribs and they were taped, and my shoulder was taped up because of a slight separation. I was hauling 10 pounds of adhesive around, and our captain, Norm Fieldgate, looked at me and said, "Hey, it's El Cid!" I took that as a compliment. I liked my reputation as a guy who finished the games he started, and I still do. In fact, this year's Super Bowl was the first time in my career that I was knocked out of a game.

It was 1967 before I finally reached the National Football League, and then it was as a 29-year-old, third-string rookie quarterback on the Vikings. Not only did I reach the NFL late in life, but I had a small legal battle in extricating myself from the Canadian Football League, and I wound up missing training camp. By the time I showed up, the team was playing its fourth exhibition game and I didn't even know the numbers yet. Furthermore, I barely knew any of the Vikings, and this was hard on my whole theory of quarterbacking, which is that you're not involved with a football out there,

you're involved with *people*, and you make it or don't make it in proportion to how you make it with the people.

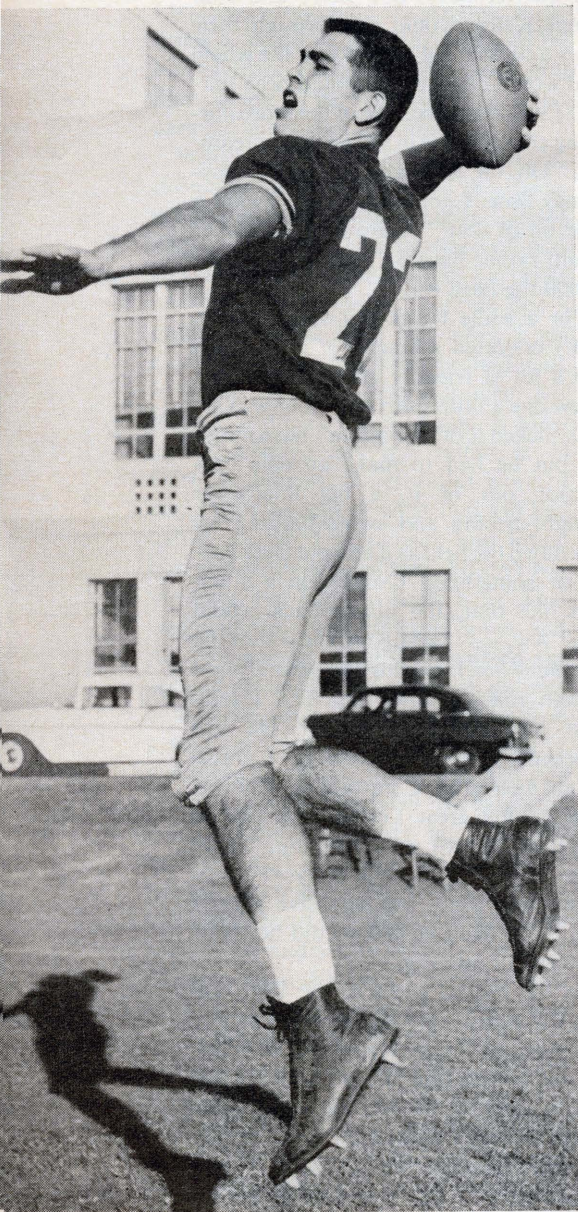
Looking back on it, it's easy for me to pretend that I figured out a brilliant approach to the problem and then went out and applied my genius, but the truth is that I just did something spontaneous, without much thought. I wanted to get involved with the Vikings, and so when it came my turn to run the ball club in the scrimmages I laid a \$1 bet on the whole defense. I would give them \$1 for each interception if they would give me \$1 for each bomb I threw over them. They accepted the challenge. The other two quarterbacks, Bob Berry and Ron VanderKelen, would run through their plays and then I'd step in and the whole field would come alive. You'd hear Earcell (Evil) Mackbee, one of the more outgoing cornerbacks in the league, screaming, "Oh, oh, look who's here! It's easy-money time. I got you, Kapp. I want a little bit of that!" A pro football player would rather have \$1 easy money than \$1,000 the hard way.

For a while I was throwing in luck, and I collected a couple of dollar bills and a lot of friendly gripes, but then I threw one a little short and Lonnie Warwick picked it off. I wouldn't have minded, but he had to make an epic production out of it, a big linebacker straight-arming and swivel-hipping his way down the field as if he were Gale Sayers or something. Usually, in a situation like that, the quarterback would say, "Aw, —" and go to the end of the line, but when I saw this 240-pound wood nymph roaring down the field I took after him and banged him. He was shocked! Who ever heard of a third-string quarterback putting a shoulder shot on the great Lonnie Warwick in practice? He got up screaming, "Yah! Yah! Yah! Kapp, we'll get you!" You know how those big defensive players are. But I liked it, and so did he. Now we were all involved.

In the second game of the 1967 season the Rams were slaughtering us and roughing up VanderKelen and Bob Berry, and Coach Bud Grant had no choice but to send in our last surviving quarterback—me. I figured the best thing to do was challenge the Rams, so I went in shouting. I don't remember exactly what I shouted, but it was something like, "All right, you sons of bitches, here I come! Let's see how good you

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are!" If you consider that the ultimate in machismo, you must also consider it the ultimate in *stupido*. I had Los Angeles Rams on top of me the rest of the night. One time Roger Brown, all 300 pounds of him, embraced me enthusiastically nose to nose. It hurt like hell. When he was a safe distance away, I holered, "Hey, Brown, didn't you ever hear of Lavoris?" But I don't think he heard me—I hope. The game confirmed everything I had suspected. First, that I wasn't ready. Once we were on their four-yard line and I called a draw play, and when I turned to go back and hand the ball to Billy Brown he was gone. I had



AT CALIFORNIA Co-captain Kapp posed theatrically and led the Golden Bears in rushing.

inadvertently called a hand-off, and Boom Boom had already disappeared through the line. I also threw a couple of interceptions and a lot of incompletions, but I wound up the afternoon completing eight passes for 157 yards and running three times for 34 yards and proving to myself that these NFL guys were only humans. Now I knew that there was going to be a lot of fun and crunch waiting for me in this National Football League.

After that I began playing more, and when we met Green Bay at Milwaukee I was listed as a starting quarterback. At the time our record was 0-4, and Green Bay was on the way to one of its big Super Bowl years, slaughtering everybody en route. If ever there was a mismatch, this would be it. A week earlier the Packers had held the Detroit Lions to a net of 59 yards passing, and the week before that they had thrown Atlanta passers eight times. So what happened? Bud Grant came up with a game plan that was different from anything I'd ever experienced. He instructed me to play a double careful game of ball control, entirely alien to my own style of play. I wound up throwing a total of 11 passes and completing only two, but our usual stout defense held and we beat the mighty Packers 10-7. "That's a new low for me, completing two out of 11," I told the press after the game, "but beating Green Bay is a new high. I'll take this anytime."

Not long afterward, at Metropolitan Stadium in Minnesota, the Packers came back for revenge. I started at quarterback and the club jelled pretty well and with two minutes to play it's 27-27 and we're about to pull off another upset by holding the mighty Packers to a tie. It's first and 10 on our seven and Bud Grant has sent in a word of caution—he tells us not to play for a tie, but also not to go crazy and start throwing the ball all over the place, either. In other words, he tells us to play our regular ball-control type of offense, and if we don't score, settle for the tie with absolutely no complaints.

Well, you know about "the best-laid plans of mice and men." I take the ball from center and bump into our pulling guard and the ball gets away. Billy Brown accidentally puts his foot into it and kicks it 13 yards down the field and into Green Bay's hands. Don Chandler kicks a field goal with a few seconds

left on the clock and we lose 30-27. That's as bad as I've felt after any loss of my life. A horrible way to lose! I mean, if you're letting it all hang out and taking a chance on winning and then you make a mistake and lose, that's fine. But if you're playing ball control, perfectly content to eke out a tie, and then you blow it, why, that's as Mickey Mouse as you can get. I felt so bad I was almost sick. So did the other guys. But I had this life-long rule about never missing a post-game party, and I didn't intend to miss this one. I dressed and went home first and poured myself a tequila, the truth drink, and for a chaser I had another. For a few minutes I entertained the thought of skipping the big blowout that was being held for the team at a fan's house, but then Dale Hackbart and Karl Kassulke called and reminded me to show up, and off I went in my 1939 LaSalle to see what was happening. You can imagine the mirth and merriment at that party. When I saw the players standing around with hangdog faces, I said, "Hey, you guys, where's the body laid out?" Nobody even cracked a smile. The great quarterback and student of humanity had failed again.

I took my bottle of tequila and I went downstairs to a gloomy corner of the basement to wallow in my despair. Somebody was already there, wallowing in his despair. It was Lonnie Warwick, the mighty hillbilly from West Virginia and Tennessee, the ex-fighter who had been working on a railroad section gang when the Vikings had signed him. Of all the players on the club, Lonnie had become one of my favorites, and I think I had become one of his—ever since I had put that shoulder into him on the practice field. We sat there together for an hour or so, sipping tequila and commiserating. We told each other what a great football team the Vikings had, and how we're going to win the Super Bowl next year, and how we were the closest bunch of athletes ever assembled together in sports, and how we would die for one another. Then I said: "It's too bad I had to blow that game for us today."

"You didn't blow the game," Lonnie said. "The defense lost the game."

"No, no, Lonnie," I said. "Don't try to make me feel better. I blew it."

He climbed to his feet, looked down at me and said, "Listen, you crazy Mexican, I told you we lost the game, not you. Stop feeling sorry for yourself."



WITH BRITISH COLUMBIA in 1964, Kapp drains Grey Cup after quarterbacking the Lions to a 34-24 win over the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in Toronto for the Canadian Football League title.

“Knock off all that bull, Lonnie,” I said, standing up myself. “I’m the one that dropped the ball, not the defense.”

This went on for about five minutes, with neither of us giving an inch, and finally Lonnie informs me that if I will not admit that the defense blew the game we will have to settle it outside in the garden. So now we’re walking side by side out the back door and I’m saying that this is crazy but what’s going to happen next is we’re going to fight, and I say that’s perfectly O.K. with me. The noise attracted some of the other guys, but by the time they were able to stop us we’d been flailing away at each other for about five minutes by the light of the moon. When it was over, with him on top, Jim Marshall and Roy Winston made us get up and shake hands. “Good night, Lonnie,” I said, and Lonnie said, “Good night, Joe,” just as if we were both normal in the head.

The next morning Lonnie called and he said, “Jeez, Joe, I don’t know what got into us.”

“I know what got into us,” I said. “Tequila. L-S-T—T for tequila, T for truth.”

“Yeah,” he said, “and T for trouble. I don’t know about you, but I got to go to the dentist.”

I said, “Well, I’m on my way to the eye doctor. One of my eyes won’t open.”

“I got a bad eye, too,” he said. “Let’s go to the eye doctor together.”

The doctor informed us that we would both live to play another day, and then we decided that we’d better tell our story to Bud Grant before somebody else told him first. Bud is no holy terror, snarling and screaming and leveling fines at the players, but he is no nasturtium either, and we knew he would really tee off on us when he found out how stupidly we had acted. So we walked into his office like a couple of scared kids and hemmed and hawed around. I kept

waiting for Lonnie to explain and he kept waiting for me.

“Why don’t you fellows take off your dark glasses?” Grant said.

“Oh, that’s O.K.” I blurted out.

“We prefer not to,” Lonnie said.

But after a while we confessed, and Bud administered a lecture and that was the end of the matter.

By the time our final game came around against the Lions, I was itching to have a great day, to put the clamp on the starting quarterback job for next season. Instead, I had one of the worst games of my career. Alex Karras was very much on my mind, and I figured I’d better not go through his tackle any more than absolutely necessary. So on the first play I called a sweep to the left side, away from Alex. Then I called a bootleg to the left, again away from Karras. On the fifth play of the game I called a roll-out to the left, but before I could get started, who do you think jumps me and whumps me to the ground and starts roaring in my ear like a wild animal? He hollers, “Yah! Yah! Yah! Kapp. Don’t ever go my way!” At that point he could have broken any one of my arms or legs, so I’m lying quietly and trying not to antagonize him. “Don’t you *ever* go my way!” he hollers again, while I’m saying to myself, “Damn, I’ve run away from him three times and here he is on top of me telling me not to go his way. Which way isn’t his way?” But as he got up and walked off, I couldn’t resist saying, “— you, Karras!” and after that his teammates were all over me. That was the day Lem Barney intercepted three of my passes in one quarter (all by myself I made him All-Pro that year), and we lost the game 14-3, finishing the year with a glorious record of three wins, eight losses and three ties. It came as no surprise to me that the Vikings traded for Quarterback Gary Cuozzo in the off season, and in a way I even welcomed the competition, although it never really developed. Off the field, Gary and I became roommates and good friends, and in training he ran into some injury problems that kept him from taking the starting job away from me.

NEXT WEEK

Although he led the Vikes to the NFL title in 1969, Kapp says he threw only two spirals: one incomplete, the other intercepted.