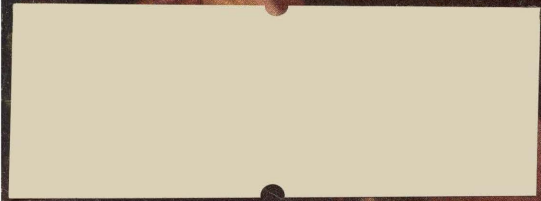
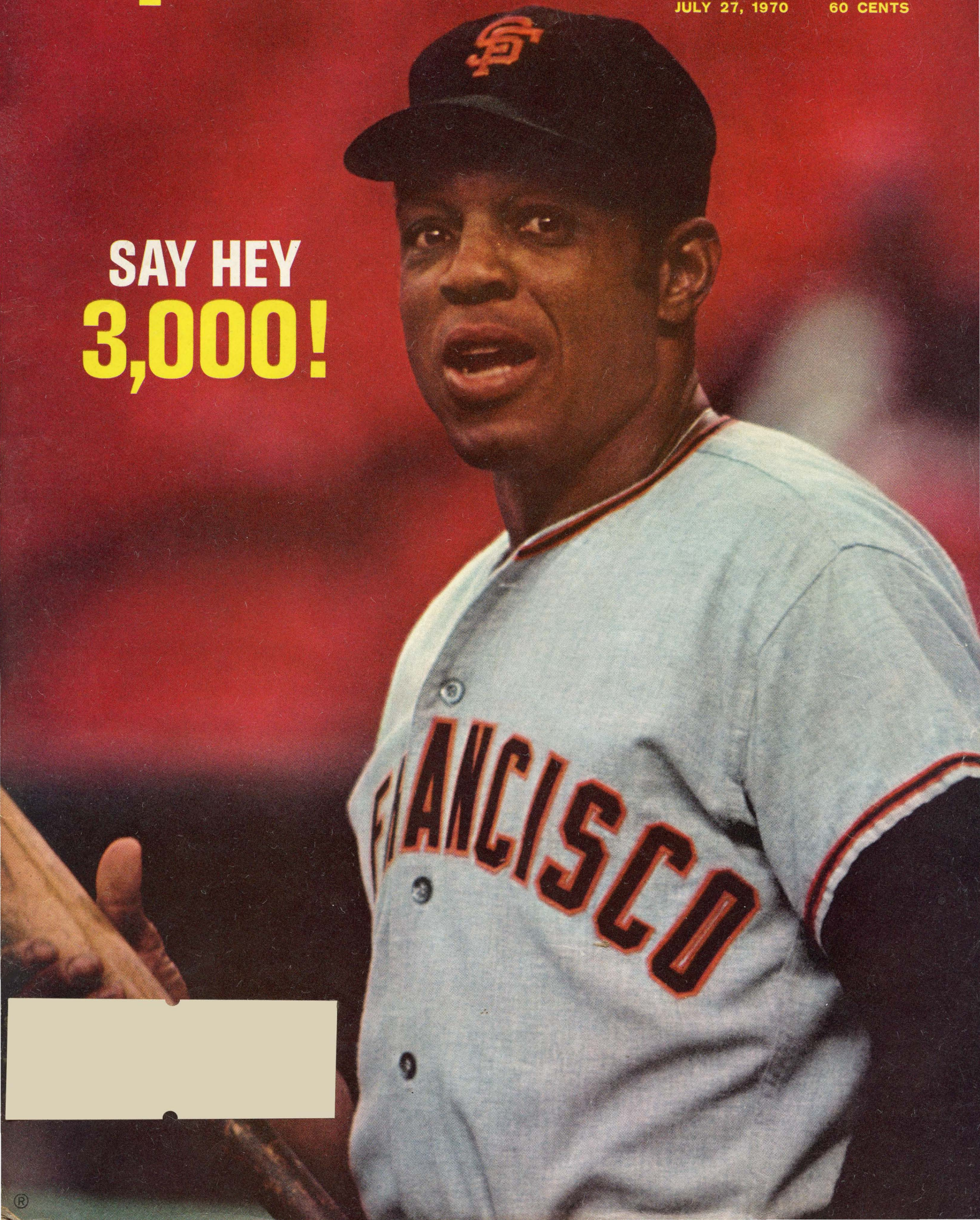


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MAN OF MACHISMO: Part 2

by JOE KAPP with JACK OLSEN

The 1968 Vikings finally put it all together. Bud Grant taught us such things as how to retain our zest and enthusiasm but to use them with a little more common sense and not take stupid penalties. The results of his teaching hit a high point in the last game of 1968, against the Philadelphia Eagles. We won 24-17 and didn't draw a single penalty. Not even an offside. We won the Central Division for the first time with a record of 8 and 6—but then we blew the playoff game against Baltimore. The Colts scored three touchdowns, one of them on a safety blitz when the ball was knocked into the air before I could get off a pass. Mike Curtis grabbed it and went 60 yards for a score. That was the game I cooked on during the winter. By the time we went to camp before the 1969 season I had played and replayed that Baltimore game in my nightmares and daydreams.

In camp last summer we began to look good, but we had a major problem: John Beasley, our star tight end, was in the Army, and we were looking for help. We had high hopes for a green rookie about half a foot over six feet and around 250 pounds with the moves of a Gene Washington and the power of a John Mackey and the disposition of Ferdinand *el toro*. Potentially, this rook was the best tight end in football, except that he was so overawed about being in an NFL training camp that he couldn't bring himself to hit anybody. He would bump somebody and say, "Excuse me, sir." *Sir!* To a guy who's trying to beat him out! One day I took him aside and I asked him how he was enjoying training camp. "Oh, just fine, Mr. Kapp," he said. "Yes, sir, just fine."

This really got me. He wasn't supposed to be feeling just fine. He was supposed to be working his

tail off, hurting, stretching his body to the limit because he needed a job and we needed a tight end. So I decided to call in my old pharmaceutical ally, tequila, to solve the problem. That night I took this big kid and his roomie to a pub. "You ever had tequila?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, sir," they both answered.

"O.K.," I said. I ordered a dozen.

Well, the drinks were served and I started sipping on one and the roommate started sipping on another and the big tight end started tossing them down like lemonade.

"Man," I said, "don't you want to make this team?"

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Well, to make the team you've got to go out there and hit people. Be aggressive! Do anything in your power to overcome the other guy."

"Yes, sir," he said. "Yes, sir."

"Don't 'Yes, sir' me!" I said. "Get mad! Get out there on that field and do something."

"Yes, sir," he said. "But to who?"

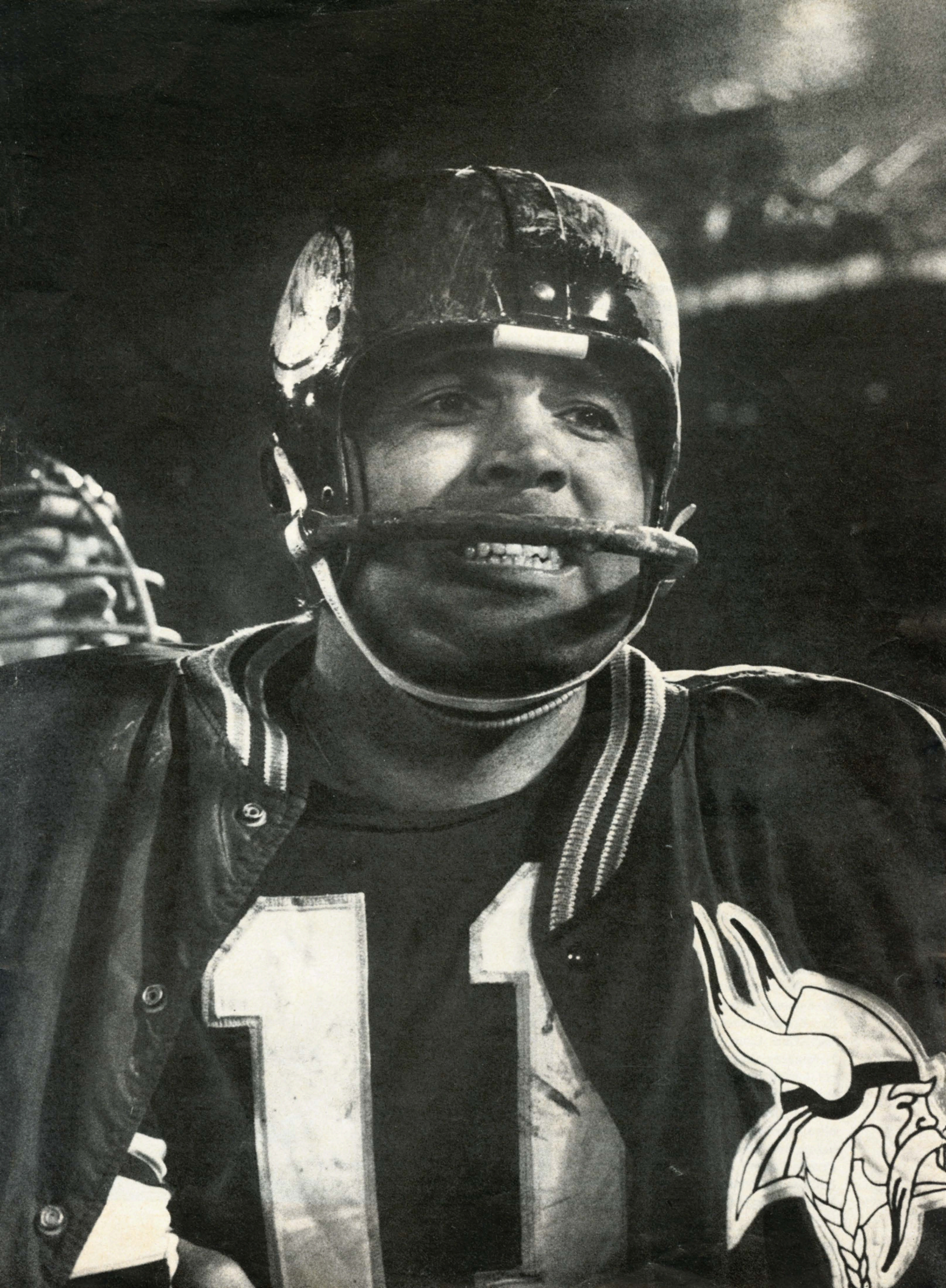
"To anybody that gets in your way," I said. "To Bud Grant, if he's in your way. Right now you'd better think about the strong safety, Karl Kassulke. He's always on you, and you don't hit him. Now tomorrow I want you to hate Kassulke, I want you to *kill* Kassulke. Tear him to pieces!"

By this time the tight end is halfway through his 10 tequilas and he's standing up and making fists and saying, "Yah, yah," just like Alex Karras. "I'll get that Kassulke!"

His roommate and I managed to haul him back to the dormitory by curfew time, and then I went to my room to talk to some of the guys. At training camp the coaches have the first floor, vet- *continued*

A MISFIT WHO LIVES TO WIN

That is Joe Kapp's assessment of himself. Quarterbacking, he says, is the natural refuge for the eager player too small to block, too slow to run. Yet no quarterback is better than his line, and here Kapp tells how the Vikings made him look great in the 1969 regular season



erans the second and rookies the third, and after curfew the rookies are sternly forbidden to leave their floor. Around 11:30 we were jawing away and Kassulke came into my room and I told him what had happened. "Thanks a lot!" he said. "Thanks for turning that big animal on me." Suddenly we heard a roar from the hall.

"Yah, yah, yahhh," this big voice was saying. "Yah, yah, YAHHH!" It was like Fat Albert in the Bill Cosby routine. I looked out my door and saw the tight end in his undershorts. He was strutting up and down the hall and opening doors. In between "Yah, yahs," he was hollering, "Where's that Kassulke? Lemme at that sumbitch! I'm gonna kill that mother!"

I slammed the door and Karl jumped into my closet. A few of the guys went out and at great personal risk tried to calm the tight end down. They finally got him back to his bed, where he drifted off into a tequila coma for the night.

"O.K., Karl," I said. "You can come out now, and I think we've got ourselves a tight end."

"Yeah," Kassulke said, "and lost yourself a strong safety!"

The next morning we all waited eagerly for the rookie to arrive, but he didn't attend the morning session. It takes a while to sleep off 10 tequilas. In the afternoon he showed up, more dead than alive, and when he banged into Kassulke on a down-and-out pass he stopped dead and said, "Oh, excuse me, Mr. Kassulke." He was cut soon after. Maybe he'll be able to pull all his great talents together and play for another team. But he may never be mean enough.

I know it must sound ridiculous for grown men to brag about how vicious they are, but that's exactly what is at the heart of our team's success. As a group, the Minnesota Vikings are a very enthusiastic bunch of guys; they like to play the game, and they like to hit. We have good, clean-cut violent types, guys like Lonnie Warwick and Dale Hackbart, Carl Eller, Jim Marshall, Wally Hilgenberg, 34 others. They're all fine gentlemen, but they're also hitters. And they're happy in their work.

You should see our scrimmages. I'm always picking up newspapers and magazines and reading about our "Purple People Eaters," our front four, but nobody has to tell me anything about them. I work out against them more than any-

body in the NFL, and I have the scars to prove it. What a group! They call themselves "three dots and a dash"—that's because Eller and Marshall and Alan Page are black and Gary Larsen is white. Larsen is the only genuine Viking on the team—he's of Scandinavian origin, and I call him "Odin." Remember in the movie *The Vikings* when Ernest Borgnine jumped into a pit full of wolves and pulled out his sword and hollered "Odin!" Odin was the god of war or something, and nothing made Borgnine happier than to die with a sword in his hand screaming "Odin!" Gary's not quite the same; he'd settle for a hunk of Roman Gabriel's anatomy. So would Carl Eller and Jim Marshall. At first we thought Alan Page might be a little more on the gentle, studious side, coming out of Notre Dame and all. But

it turned out he had a howl like a coyote, and every now and then he lets out this "Owwwwwwww!" and tries to crush my ribs. Paul Dickson, our fifth lineman, is a philosopher and poet off the field, but when the scrimmage begins he starts growling, and he drives the offensive linemen crazy because he plays dummy practice scrimmages just like a game, growling all the while. And Jerry Burns, our offensive coach, is a screamer; when we do something wrong, he'll stand there and holler "Clowns! Clowns! CLOWNS!" Can you imagine our scrimmages? I come up to the line and there's the howler howling and the growler growling and Jerry Burns hollering "Clowns! Clowns! CLOWNS!" Sometimes I welcome the league games just for the peace and quiet.

In my early days with the Vikings

WAITING TO GO IN AGAINST THE BEARS, KAPP CONFERS WITH COACH BUD GRANT.



there were times when I looked around at all this talent and wondered what I was doing there. And right from the beginning I tried to impress one thing on the club: this Kapp may not be any good, he may be lacking in certain abilities, but he wants to win more than anybody else. Maybe every quarterback thinks the same way; I don't know every quarterback. But I figure I'm playing with the finest football players in the world, and there's one department where I can beat them all: in desire. I can want to win more than anybody else on earth—and I do. Not for the press, not for the fans and not only for the money, but mostly for myself, for my personal pride. I know a lot of successful men, even a few millionaires, but there's one thing I've got that they don't have and never will have: I can play quar-

terback on a pro team, and they can't. I'm proud of that. That's what it's all about: playing—and winning—and doing something to the best of your abilities. That's where the fun comes in. So I try to impress this on the other Vikings, and maybe it helps a little. Our general manager, Jim Finks, paid me the greatest compliment: he said that the club plays 10% better for me than it would for any other quarterback, and if he's right it's only because I've convinced those other characters that I'm there to play football and to win.

I'm not interested in publicity or all the other stuff. I'm not playing football for the sole purpose of gaining prestige in my off-season job. I'm not interested in all those side issues: Brodie and his golf, Namath and his nightclubs, Kramer and his books, all those guys with

their big private enterprises. You don't hear about me in the off season. I'm a pro football player, and that's enough. Oh, I enjoy antique cars like my '39 La Salle, and I dig music and cowboy boots and good old American food like tacos and enchiladas and frijoles, but those are just to keep me going till the game starts. That's when I begin to live. I've played in one big game or another on every weekend for about 25 of my 32 years and I've developed some kind of rhythm about it. All week long my system is readying itself for the weekend—for Friday night, when we used to play our high school games, or for Saturday afternoon, when Cal played, or for Sunday afternoon, when the pros play. It's become so much a part of me that I almost become buggy on weekend nights in the off season. Marcia and I have to go out and *do* something. If she brought me a pipe and slippers on weekends, I'd go right through the roof.

In a way, I'm lucky that my high school coach, A. I. Lewis, slipped me into the quarterbacking position, or I probably wouldn't be playing ball at all. Where would they play me? It's a fundamental fact about quarterbacks, almost every one of them, that they're not good enough to play any other position. Quarterback is the natural refuge for a guy with a big mouth and few natural abilities. So you find that pro quarterbacks are the guys who wanted to play more than the others, the guys who wanted to get out and win, the misfits. Look at them stumbling around out there. Where would Sonny Jurgensen play if he wasn't a quarterback (and the finest passer in football)? Where would Bart Starr play? Even the physical types like Greg Cook and Greg Landry and Roman Gabriel would have a tough time breaking in at another position. Can they run fast enough and hard enough to fit into a backfield? I doubt it. They're like all the rest of us: not big enough to be linemen, not fast enough to be ends, not quick enough to be running backs. So they stand out there and throw a football at a tree for weeks on end until they have mastered this very unnatural act called passing, and then they hang out a sign that says "quarterback."

But that's not the most mysterious fact about quarterbacking, not by a long shot. The most mysterious thing is the way these quarterbacks, these undesirables, get all the attention. There's not

continued

THE VIKINGS WON 31-14 AS KAPP THREW TOUCHDOWNS TO BEASLEY AND WASHINGTON



a pro football player alive who doesn't know that the game is won or lost in the line, but who writes about the line? It's always the quarterback. "Starr leads Packers to Super Bowl." "Len Dawson Engineers Upset." "Tarkenton Scrambles to Victory." Bull! It's a joke! When our British Columbia Lions won everything in the Canadian League in 1964, I made a speech that the line had won it. When we lost everything in 1965, I made a speech that the line had lost it. People thought I was kidding. I wasn't.

Look at the quarterbacks who overnight went from bad to good, or good to bad. Did they change? No, their lines did. Y. A. Tittle didn't win for San Francisco, but he was sensational for New York. Bill Nelsen never did much at Pittsburgh, but when he went to Cleveland and started performing behind a strong line he won the Eastern championship. Earl Morrall had always been a second-stringer, but when he went to Baltimore he became the most valuable player in the league. Was he really the most valuable player, or was he just the same old competent quarterback that he had always been? Or take Don Meredith. When he was playing at Dallas, the cliché was that Meredith couldn't win the big ones. So he retires and Craig Morton takes over and they still don't win the big ones. Now the idea is beginning to reach the Dallas fans that there are 39 other players on the team. But that concept is slow to take hold. Even sportswriters who should know better place far too much emphasis on quarterbacking. This attitude reached some kind of new height of absurdity at this year's Super Bowl game. While we were working out at New Orleans, getting ready for the game, reporters learned that my son, J.J., age 6, was staying with his grandparents in Sacramento. They went out and interviewed him. "Who's your favorite player, J.J.?"

"Dave Osborn."

"Why?"

"Because he took me fishing."

That actually saw print. But nobody was out interviewing the sons of Grady Alderman and Mick Tingelhoff and Jim Vallone and Doug Davis and all the other fine linemen who watch over me like den mothers. No, it's always the quarterback, and if they can't find the quarterback they'll go interview his 6-year-old son.

I wind up reading so much about quar-



HIS BLOCKERS MASSES IN FRONT, KAPP SQUIRMS FOR A RUN AGAINST THE RAMS

terbacking—and about myself—that I'd almost think there's nobody else involved in pro football. At the end of last season they had a big dinner in the Twin Cities and they named me our most valuable offensive player and Jim Marshall our most valuable defensive player. Well, Jim accepted his award graciously and said that it could just as easily have gone to any other member of the front four—which was true. Then I went to the head table and accepted the offensive award, and just after I sat down they announced the award for the most valuable Viking of all, and it was me again. As I walked back toward the front I felt like the world's biggest phony, and I knew I had to do something. So I took the microphone and I said, "There is no most valuable Viking. There are only 40 most valuable Vikings." You may chalk that up as pure

hokum and corn if you want, but that's exactly how I felt. I walked back to my seat and left the trophy up there. For all I know, it's still up there.

I keep on reading stupid things about quarterbacking, like the Ray Nitschke quote to the effect that it annoys him that I think I'm a great quarterback. Where in the world did he ever get an idea like that (or was it some writer's idea)? I don't think I'm great, but I think I'm competent. What the hell, I'm playing in the National Football League, right? And on a pretty good team, right? Didn't I already say that every player in pro football is good? Well, that includes me. Of course, you'll read how I'm clumsy—I throw off balance or on the wrong foot, my passes wobble and sometimes go end over end, I run like a tank, etc., etc. None of this bothers me.

If I was out there to look good, I'd put on white shoes and wear a mustache. It doesn't make a particle of difference to me if I throw a completed pass off the wrong foot or pick up 10 yards by rushing like Dagwood Bumstead trying to catch a bus. I've seen quarterbacks who try to take that extra step to be in perfect position to unload a pass and the next thing they know they're trying to breathe under 800 pounds of linemen. You don't always have time to look like Rudolf Nureyev out there. I've seen some quarterbacks who fold up beautifully, go under with great grace and style, but I always wondered why they didn't try to salvage some yards first.

Everybody knows some of my passes flutter. I throw a few ducks. One reason is that I don't bother using the laces. Some sportswriters have theorized that this is because I learned to pass by heaving lettuce heads in Salinas, and there are no laces on lettuce. The truth is that the laces vary from ball to ball and this can throw you off. I just grab the seed and fling, and sometimes I even complete a few. Then I'll pick up the papers after the game and find out that I passed without finesse. Last year I read this complaint so often that I finally went to our star wide receiver, Gene Washington, the best in the business, and I said, "Gene, does it bother you that my passes wobble sometimes?"

"Listen, man," he said, "I don't care if the ball spirals or not. I don't care if it flutters or not, if the tip is up or down or which end of it says Wilson. I just want it to be there when I'm there."

The funny thing is that I threw maybe two perfect spirals in the whole 1969-70 season. One of them was in a key game against the Rams, and Eddie Meador intercepted it. The other was in a crucial play in the Super Bowl, and I spiraled the ball 69 yards and over Gene's head. If I'd thrown one of my typical knuckleballs, Gene would have been able to catch the pass and you'd have seen one of the most hellacious plays—and maybe a different ending for the Super Bowl. Maybe not, too. The way those Kansas Cities played, it's hard to imagine anybody beating them that day. But if we'd only—no, I don't say it. *Que será, será*, as Doris Day and my mother used to say. That means, "If the frog had wings, he wouldn't have to jump."

Super Bowl loss or not, I look back on Minnesota's last season as a supreme

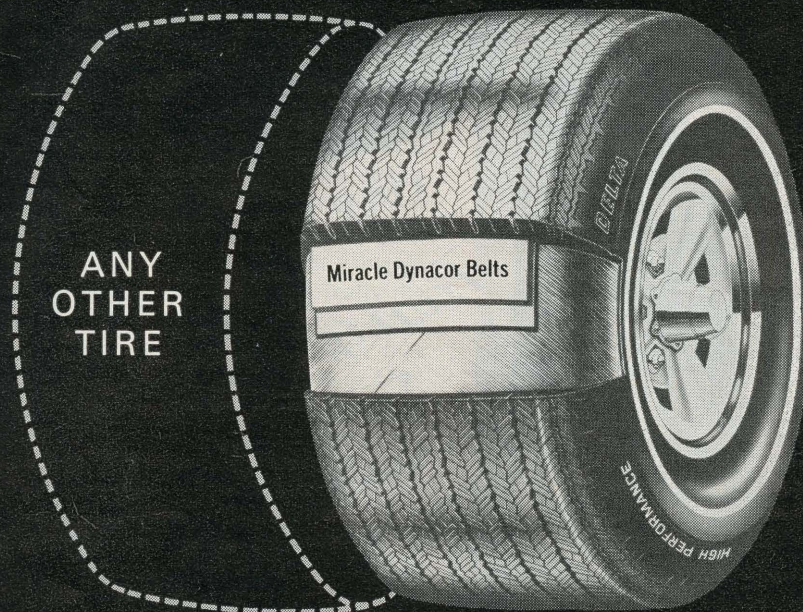
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MISFIT *continued*

expression of football togetherness, of wanting to win and committing yourselves to excellence. I told you how the scrimmages were, and the games were no different. Forty guys were working their tails off out there, enjoying every minute of it, playing for one another. Later some critics said we peaked too early, as though we were in an election campaign. Well, maybe so. We lost our opener by one point to the Giants, and then we came up against Baltimore, the team that had beaten us in the playoffs the year before, and we peaked them right out of the ball park. We had cooked on the 1968 loss all year and we were out to prove something. We won 52-14, and I tied an NFL record by throwing seven touchdown passes. After the game the usual ridiculous thing happened; the press encircled me in front of my locker and hardly talked to anybody else. I was embarrassed, because I knew better than those reporters where the game had been won, so I shouted, "Remember the Alamo!"

"What's that supposed to mean?" one writer asked.

"That's the last time the Mexicans won anything," I said. I was so exhilarated I was talking nonsense, but then the whole idea of attributing our victory to me was also nonsense.

After that game we won a long string and usually the wins could be traced to enthusiasm and togetherness and a willingness to subjugate our own individual egos for the good of the team. A team slogan had evolved: "40 for 60," meaning 40 guys functioning together for 60 minutes of every game and no individual star stuff. Our special teams under Jim Lindsey got so swept up in the "40 for 60" routine that they manhandled everybody in the league, and we actually had players on defense and offense asking to play on the special teams. Everybody picked up everybody else. I had poor games against Green Bay and Pittsburgh, and Gary Cuozzo came in both times to save us. Oscar Reed and Clint Jones filled in at running back. Ed Sharockman sprained his ankle and had to sit out as cornerman, and Bobby Bryant went in and intercepted eight passes and even made a few of the All-Pro teams. Then Bryant got hurt and Sharockman came back in and played beautifully. Dale Hackbart got beat out at safety by Paul Krause, but Dale filled in as our fifth man on pass defense and

he played on the special teams with such gusto that he almost decapitated Ron Smith of the Rams one day and whacked a couple more guys so hard that you could hear the impact two blocks away. That's what "40 for 60" is all about.

We even scored touchdowns by dumb luck, but that's the way it is when you're rolling—you get lucky and you create a lot of it yourself. You're winning, and you're having fun, and you get unexpected bonuses. On Thanksgiving Day we were having a tough game against Detroit, and then Jim Marshall intercepted a pass and took off down the sidelines. Now imagine that! Jim Marshall is just under six-four, and he weighs 250 pounds, and he doesn't exactly look like Peggy Fleming out there. He's chugging along and the Lions are about to nail him when he turns and sees our baby monster Alan Page chugging along behind him, giving his coyote howl. Just as Marshall is about to go down for the count, he flips the ball to Page, and Alan goes in standing up. Can you imag-

ine? A quarter ton of defensive linemen engineering a 60-yard touchdown like that. Later on they explained what was going through their heads. In practice, we play this French game called *la grabasse*, where the defensive line stands the offensive line and it's really nothing much more than a free-for-all, with the ball squirting all over the place and laterals and passes being thrown from anywhere on the field. So here they were in the middle of a key league game and they acted like they were playing *la grabasse*. Jim lateraled that precious sack of gold to Alan, and we were in. *Ay, chihuahua!*

But that's what positive thinking does for you. In one of our games against the Bears, I came back to the huddle and I said, "Boys, this play is gonna go to the posts. To the posts! Now here's how we do it. If they get in the over-shift, we're gonna block it sock. If they get in the undershift, we're gonna cross-block it. Ozzie's gonna carry the seed, and he's going to the posts!" Well, that's exactly what happened. Dave Osborn

went 58 yards and scored standing up, and when we ran off the field our defense was screaming at me. We were supposed to make some first downs before we scored and give our defense a rest. They were hot. I said to Ozzie, "Hey, man, you got to learn not to take me so seriously."

Ozzie says, "Well, if you want first downs, say so! You said you wanted to go to the posts, man. If you don't want the posts, then don't say the posts!"

We lost our final game of the season to Atlanta 10-3, a sweet win for Norm Van Brocklin. We'd have enjoyed winning, but after 12 straight we already had the Central Division cinched and some of our guys had trouble getting up for the Atlanta game, and maybe I was one of them.

NEXT WEEK

Superb against the Rams and Browns in the NFL playoffs, the Vikings sank in the Super Bowl. An anguished Kapp tells why.



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