



Sport Talk by Ron Sykes, Sports Editor

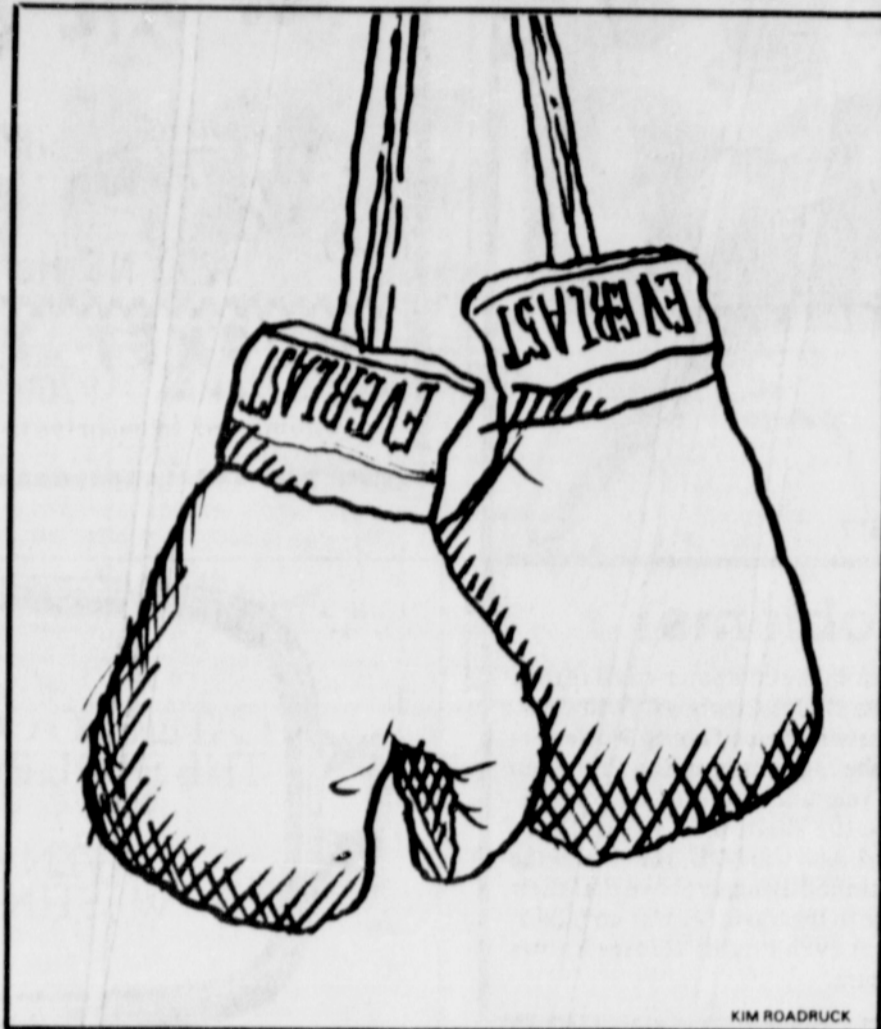
Remember Howard Davis Jr.? Remember the young lightweight that was rated the most superior boxer on that great 1976 U.S. Olympic boxing team? Remember that the Spinks brothers Leon and Michael were members of that team. Also Sugar Ray Leonard was the captain and Leo Randolph was there and that Davis was considered the best of the lot. Remember that history has shown us that all the above fighters eventually won championships except one. And if you haven't already guessed that lone exception was none other than Howard Davis Jr.

Between 1973 and 1976 Davis reached such superiority and excellence in the amateur ranks that some considered him the finest ever to lace on a pair of Everlasts.

He won a World Championship in Cuba. He won the prestigious New York Golden Gloves tourney four consecutive years. In the 1976 Olympics he fought 20 rounds against the world's finest amateurs and never lost a single round on any official's score card, while winning the gold. Davis had speed. A plethora of it. Hand speed he had. Foot speed a-plenty.

He was both thunder and lightning with boxing gloves on.

During the Olympics he was a blur. He would flash those quick lefts and rights and the next second he was gone. He was a classic fighter and seemingly had his head on right. Davis captured the hearts of most Americans when he showed the world just how great he was. During the Olympics his mother, whom he loved dearly, passed away. Instead of quitting right there he decided to go on because he knew that an Olympic title is what his mom wanted most of all for him to achieve.



KIM ROADRUCK

Professional boxing would be the next milestone for the young man from Long Island. The lightweight division was slowly deteriorating with names such as Ray Lampkin, Leoncio Ortiz, Esteban De Jesus and Vilomar Fernandez all on the decline. Some new blood was needed to challenge the powerful champion Roberto Duran, and Davis was thought to be the man.

Davis became an instant celebrity in his home. After all, he was thought to be a sure thin, a can't miss and was soon to wear the light-

weight crown.

After signing a professional contract with real estate man Dennis Rappoport for around 50,000 Davis set out to fulfill his dream.

He was signed to fight his first pro bout on January 15, 1977, in a six-round bout, televised by CBS.

Davis' ship was sailing the same course as Sugar Ray Leonard's.

Davis was put in with Jose Resto, a fighter most considered as the worst fighter in any professional division. He was merely a setup.

When Resto climbed through the ring to box Davis he brought with him more than 70 losses, 28 of them in a row. How Resto could receive a license is still a mystery to most. Resto was only put in against Davis to ensure that he (Davis) got off on a winning note.

Rick Craney was Davis' next opponent—another set up. Craney fell in round three. The Davis train was rolling.

Howard stood 5-10 and almost always had a height advantage against the smaller lightweights. His cat-quick jabs kept his opponents off balance.

Davis was fighting six- and eight-round fights, but against inferior opponents his fights seldom went more than three or four.

Davis next went against former lightweight contender Turi Pineda, a man with experience and who at one time fought the WBC lightweight champion Ishimatsu Suzuki to a standstill before losing a tough 15-round decision.

The Pineda fight was perhaps the finest for the 20 year old Davis.

Howard was simply awesome is thus his first fight against an experienced boxer. He rained punches so fast and furious upon Pineda's head that he had the Los Angeles fans dazzled. Punches flew in bunches. Pineda was later to say that "I've never faced anyone with that kind of speed." Davis finished Pineda in four rounds. Three months later Davis signed to fight Larry Stanton. This was to be his first 10-rounder. At this point in his career, he went from great to mediocre. For all his abilities he could not ever become champion because he was only a 3-6 round fighter. Davis disdained going into the gym. And that led to his demise.

The \$330 million handshake Players to the NFL: "This is our game."

by David Mergyes, Pacific News Service

A profound and significant event recently occurred among the 28 teams in the National Football League. Prior to the start of the first pre-season games, the football players on each opposing team walked to the center of the stadium fields and shook hands. This simple act of recognition and respect broke forever a 62-year-old NFL rule that prohibited, under penalty of a \$100 minimum fine, fraternization with the "enemy" before an NFL game.

Reaction from the NFL was swift and desperate: "We'll fine them if they shake hands, we'll fine them if they fight, this is *our* game," said Jack Donlan, NFL management councils executive director. "These are Black Panther tactics," fumed Forrest Greg, head coach of the Cincinnati Bengals.

Whose game is this, anyway? That's the question players have been asking themselves and each other for the past year. In no uncertain terms, the handshake shouted the answer: This is *OUR* game.

What has occurred throughout the league is a fundamental re-definition by the players of who they are in relation to the NFL. Call it consciousness-raising or a quantum leap in political and economic self-awareness—it has happened.

From a general perspective, NFL games are for the players a paid forum which allows expression of their considerable athletic artistry and skill. For the fans, NFL games are athletic entertainment events. The pro game, and the big-time college game, ultimately and primarily involves a relationship between these two groups, athletes and fans—those who play and earn money and those who watch and pay money. In essence, the game belongs to the players and the fans.

In the NFL in 1982, this player/fan relationship will generate over \$600 million, \$21 million per club. But standing between the 1,500 players and the millions of pro football fans are the 28 NFL monopolist owner/promoters, who in 1982 will pocket most of the revenues generated by this player/fan relationship. Last year the 1,500 pro football players received 30 per cent of the

gross and were the lowest paid—and highest-risk—of the four major pro sports: football, baseball, basketball and hockey.

What do these 28 NFL owner/promoters do? They organize the events, rent the stadium and print the tickets. The press and other media promote the event for nothing. These 28 middlemen take absolutely no risk, while players risk their career every time they step on the football field.

In contrast, other entertainers, who are as popular as professional football players, like rock music groups, receive between 80 and 90 per cent of the gross, while the promoter gets 10 to 20 per cent.

This multi-million dollar NFL fi-

nancial super-structure rests firmly on the shoulders of the 1,500 NFL football players—the people the spectators come to see. These players, this year, have come to understand that together they can absolutely control their economic destiny. In the words of songwriter Joe Glazer, "Without the players there ain't no game."

In 1982 that prospect is about to become reality. Withholding their services is precisely what the NFL players are prepared to do if they do not get an acceptable per cent of gross revenue.

NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle recently signed a \$2.1 billion television deal with the three major networks guaranteeing each NFL team

an average of \$14 million per year in TV revenues for the next five years; the players want their fair share of that financial bonanza. If they do not play, things will back up very fast for the networks, which stand to lose \$25 million per week in ad revenues.

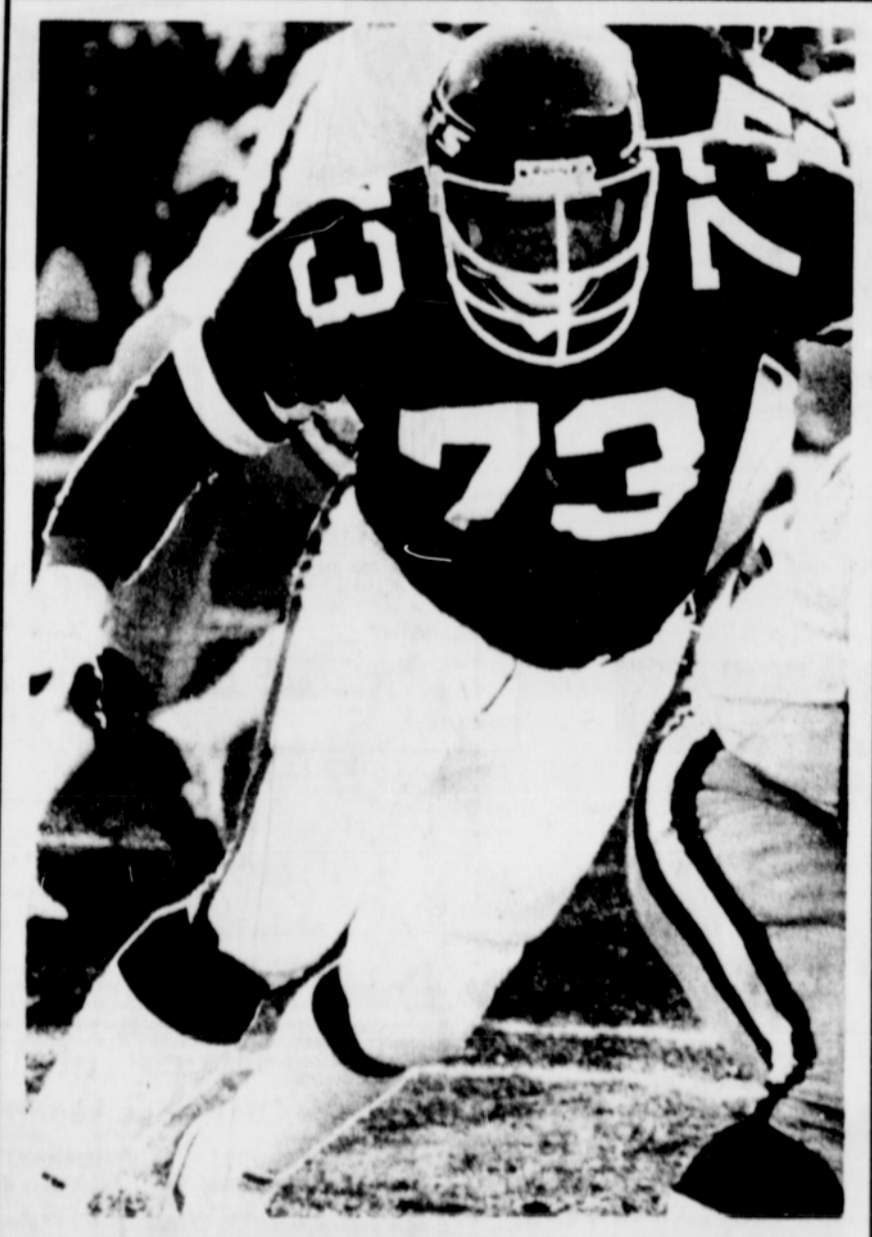
Historically, the key factor in maintaining the NFL superstructure has been the league's ability to deliver all the players on time, for every game, every weekend. There have been no work slow-downs, no "blue flu." In fact, the incredibly interdependent relationship within the league and with the TV networks demands every game must be played as scheduled, on time, with no flexibility or change. Until this year, the NFL promoter/owners had unlimited confidence in being able to deliver.

The owners' view of the players has been one of mindless chattel, replaceable parts; anyone who got uppity was driven from the league; anyone who got damaged was replaced by a new player-part. They knew, and the players knew, the NFL was the only game in town. If a player didn't like how much he was paid or how he was treated his only choice was to quit football.

Because the 28 teams shared equally 97 per cent of the league revenues, each team "owned" 1/28th of every player in the league so there was absolutely no leverage on the players' part to bid his services to other promoter/owners even if he could "get free" from the team that drafted him; no other team would bid for his services.

Significantly, all has changed during the past year. The pre-season handshake was the first clear message to NFL management that the traditional and expected blind obedience to league orders is history.

What the players want is a fair share of the revenues they produce. They want a minimum 55 per cent of the gross which, given the NFL's projected \$600 million in revenues next year, will equal \$330 million. This will be placed in an independent fund and distributed by a formula devised by the players at the NFL Players Association Convention in Albuquerque last March. The formula is based on years of service in the league and individual



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and team performance. While in Albuquerque, the 536 players present also unanimously endorsed a proposal to roll back ticket prices to 1980 levels. In the face of the new \$2 billion TV contract, 12 NFL teams are raising ticket prices this year. The players also realize the NFL is not the only group of promoters capable of presenting professional football, nor are the big three networks the only broadcasters capable of nationally televising pro football games. Independent pay-TV promoters are hungry for programming, and the players know it doesn't matter who promotes or televises the games—as long as high quality games are played with the best talent and the games get the widest possible audience. The NFL may own their franchises but they don't own the players. The only hope NFL management has to keep the league intact is to get people to the bargaining table

who have authority to make decisions, namely some promoter/owners and Rozelle, and negotiate a fair contract. If not, they could lose it all. As Players' Association president Gene Upshaw said, 55 per cent of the gross is not the main issue. "We see it as a fight for dignity. Workers should have a say in their wages, hours and working conditions." The 1980s are a time of unparalleled change in all areas of our national life. Professional football is no exception. In 1982, for the 1,500 men who play pro football, this profound process of change means collectively re-claiming their game and athletic craft. It is within the nature of sport to reflect the highest and best potentials of our human enterprise. The players in the NFL are an example for all of us, for in claiming what is truly theirs, they lay claim to the best within themselves.