

# GRIDIRON

TAKING UK FANS INSIDE AMERICA'S GAME



**ANDREW LUCK**  
TALKS PRE-DRAFT HYPE  
AND REPLACING LEGENDS

**JOHN HARBAUGH**  
CRAFTING A LEGACY

**FULL SEASON PREVIEW**  
ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW  
FOR THE COMING SEASON

*LIFE OF AN NFL SCOUT  
X'S & O'S WITH JEFF REINEBOLD  
RUGBY'S MARTIN JOHNSON ON  
HIS NFL PASSION*

## ADRIAN PETERSON

THE REIGNING NFL MVP ON BATTLING BACK FROM  
A CAREER-THREATENING KNEE INJURY

sky **SPORTS**

# CONTENTS

Adrian Peterson opens up to Neil Reynolds about his long recovery  
**Page 34**



# GRIDIRON

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**TriNorth**  
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## 1ST & 10:

### 20 Is London calling?

Sky Sports' affable anchor assesses the viability of an NFL franchise in England's capital.

### 22 Why I love the NFL

Lion-hearted World Cup-winning captain and former England coach Martin Johnson loves a pigskin ball too.

### 24 Ridin' off like Ray

Following Ray Lewis' fitting finale, Gridiron remembers four more glorious swan songs.

### 28 Inside training camp

Who better to provide insight into the NFL off-season than a player experiencing it right now?

### 30 Kirkwood connects

NFL UK's managing director reveals what British fans have to look forward to in coming months.

### 32 X's, Δ's, □'s & O's

Gridiron has a crack at EA Sports' new releases, NCAA Football 14 and Madden NFL 25.

## MOVING THE CHAINS:

### 34 Christmas in hospital

Adrian Peterson talks about that knee injury, the realities of rehabilitation and his glorious return.

### 38 Living up to the hype

Andrew Luck opens up about fulfilling lofty expectations, replacing a legend and the dreaded Sophomore Slump.

### 42 Coaching champs

John Harbaugh reflects on the world champions' off-season of change and trying to emulate last year's triumph.

### 46 Flights and room service

Scott Studwell tells Gridiron what the life of an NFL scout is really like.

### 49 Life without Hernandez

Pro Football Focus' Sam Monson breaks down the Patriots' options without their imprisoned former tight end.

### 50 Eight divisions. Eight writers

Gridiron's scribes provide all the information you need ahead of the new season.

### 74 Be the best

Want to be the king or queen of fantasy football? Pro Football Focus tell you how.

### 76 Roll Tide

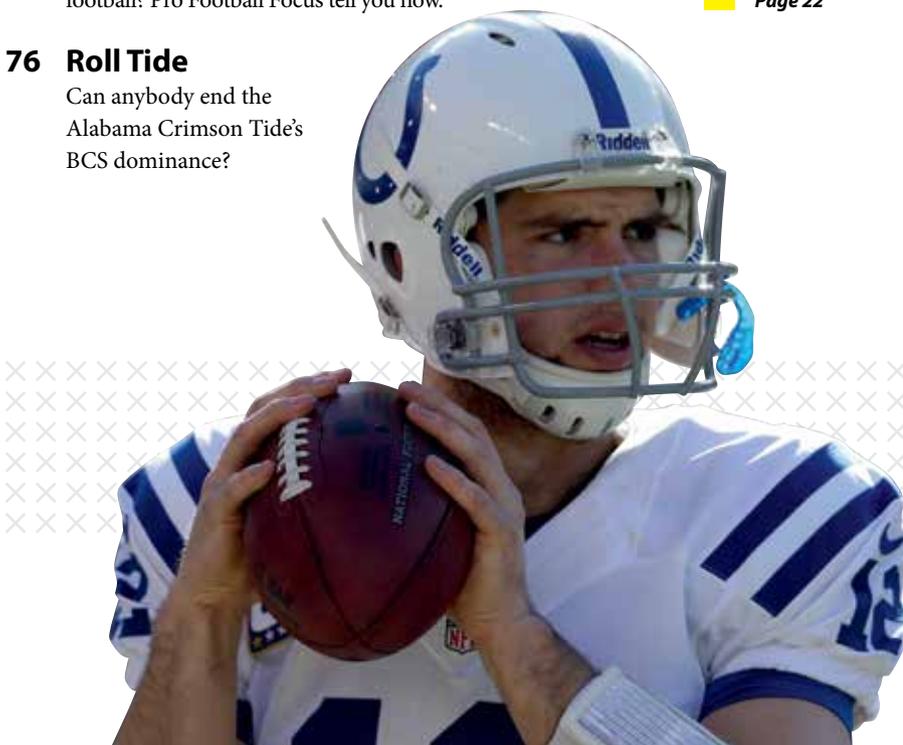
Can anybody end the Alabama Crimson Tide's BCS dominance?



Can John Harbaugh ensure the much-changed Ravens compete once again?  
Page 38



How has Martin Johnson's love of the NFL shaped his own career and philosophies?  
Page 22



## RED ZONE:

### 78 The whole 19 yards

How does a pretty-boy TV presenter end up on the UK's muddy fields every week?

### 82 Sling it like the stars

Some of the NFL's best quarterbacks reveal the keys to playing sport's most difficult position.

## END ZONE:

### 84 Read about the option

Everybody's favourite Sky Sports pundit Jeff Reinebold breaks down the game's latest craze.

### 88 Basketball or football?

Mike Carlson assesses the evolution of the passing game in his own unique way.

### 90 Flashback

Gridiron reminisces about Vince Lombardi, Barry Sanders and the Tuck Rule.

Andrew Luck is aiming to take the next step after catching the eye during his rookie campaign  
Page 38

[ INTERVIEW ]



ANDREW

LUCK

# GOOD LUCK CHARM

Gridiron talks pressure, hazing and quarterback rivalry with the game's rising force.

WORDS: MATT SHERRY

**L**ong before hearing his name called by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell as the first pick of the 2012 NFL Draft, Andrew Luck knew his career would only be deemed successful if he achieved greatness.

Perhaps that statement is not so strange, for being the opening selection any year brings almost unfathomable expectations. Yet the standard pressures were multiplied for the Stanford quarterback.

Veteran ESPN analyst Mel Kiper gave Luck the highest pre-draft grade he had dished out since John Elway in 1983, and was far from alone. Elway did not fare too shabbily in a Hall-of-Fame career highlighted by two Super Bowl successes with the Denver Broncos. Furthermore, he is widely considered to be one of the top-five quarterbacks in NFL history and still sits fourth in the all-time passing-yards list.

While being mentioned in the same breath as such brilliance was no doubt flattering, it also served to increase the already-palpable attention on Luck. Just over a year later, the engaging and highly intelligent 23-year-old chats to Gridiron Magazine about the recent past and what awaits in his second year as a

professional; we start by asking just what it was like entering the NFL with such an incredibly lofty billing.

"I did not try to buy into the number-one pick pressure, being the highest-rated quarterback since X, Y or Z," he says. "I put a lot of pressure on myself and worried about that, coaches, team-mates, family and close friends. Beyond that, first pick, last pick, middle pick, undrafted, it's all the same."

"All the same" is an amusing description, for most youngsters in America dream about being in the position Luck found himself. But modesty comes easily to this young man – something which may have spared him more of a welcome-to-the-big-time introduction to his locker room.

"There is a no-hazing policy in the NFL," he jokes, albeit having seemed to get off lightly in comparison with some stories. "But that did not stop us from having to carry Dwight Freeney's shoulder pads in from practice or maybe grabbing a couple of extra waters for the meeting room."

"They showed me (I was just another team member rather than superstar) in practice after the first couple of times they

# 15

THE NUMBER OF QUARTERBACKS TAKEN WITH THE FIRST OVERALL PICK BETWEEN 1983, WHEN JOHN ELWAY WAS SELECTED, AND 2012, WHEN ANDREW LUCK WAS CHOSEN. LUCK WAS – ACCORDING TO MANY – THE BEST SIGNAL CALLER SINCE ELWAY COMING OUT OF COLLEGE, PUTTING HIM AHEAD OF ILLUSTRIOUS OPENING SELECTIONS SUCH AS PEYTON MANNING AND TROY AIKMAN AT THAT STAGE OF HIS CAREER.



intercepted me or something. But the guys were really welcoming in the locker room; I think they realise we're all the same team and all trying to win."

Even a year before the draft, Luck had been accepted as the likely first pick, a once-in-a-generation prospect who any team would dream of being able to choose. The phrase 'Suck for Luck' became commonplace as fans of poorer franchises prayed for a dire season in the hope of adding a passer whose place alongside Elway et al in the Hall seemed already assured.

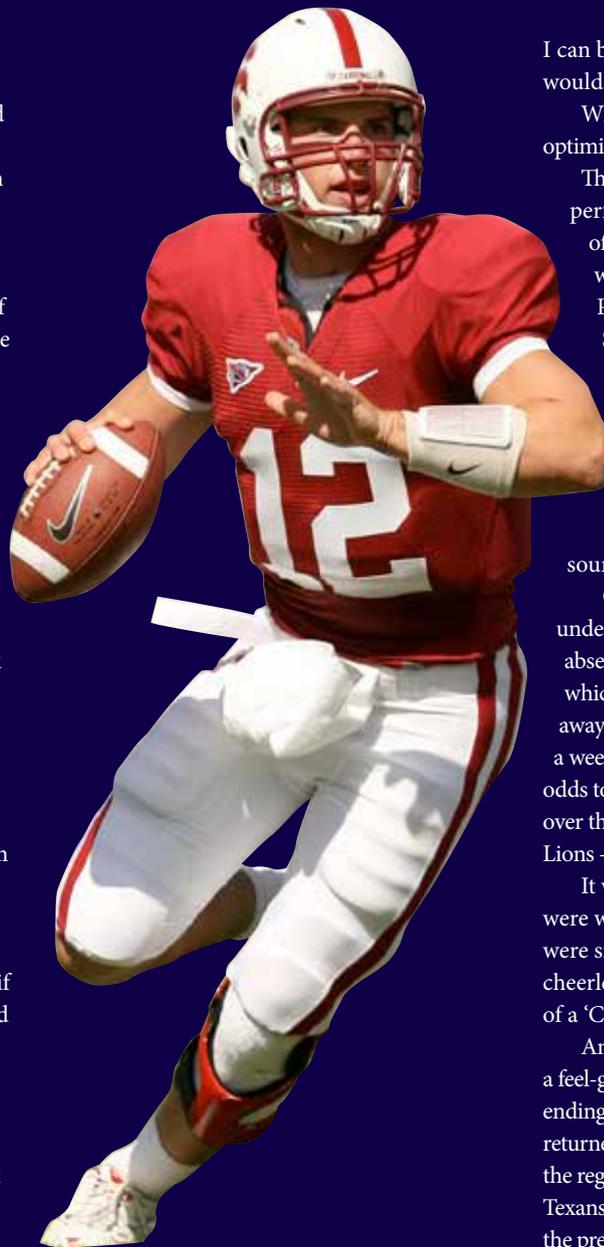
Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was the Indianapolis Colts sitting with the desired selection - much like they did when similarly sought-after prospects Elway and Peyton Manning were available; while Elway never played for the then-named Baltimore Colts - he manoeuvred a trade to the Broncos by threatening to turn his back on football for baseball - Manning became synonymous with the club and established himself as one of the game's all-time greats.

Hampered by Manning missing the entire season due to a career-threatening neck injury in 2011, the Colts - a playoff team the previous year - slumped to a 2-14 record and 'sucked' the most.

With uncertainty surrounding how the returning Manning - due millions of dollars if he were not cut - would play following a third surgery, they subsequently had a decision to make: trade away the selection for a king's ransom and surround their current passer with weapons by utilising the array of picks gained, or offload a 36-year-old living legend and start afresh.

They chose the latter. Manning was released and, somewhat coincidentally, persuaded by Elway - now the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations - to join Denver. Luck, meanwhile, headed to the Lucas Oil Stadium, known as 'The House That Peyton Built', tasked with turning around the league's worst squad. As if his pre-draft status did not bring enough pressure, he would replace a Colts hero plying his trade elsewhere in the NFL.

"It was one of those things that was completely out of my control, so why worry about it?" admits Luck. "Those were the cards that were dealt; you cannot try and live up to Peyton Manning. What he did and what he still does is unbelievable. I would never suggest I was trying to fill his shoes out of respect for what a great player he is. If



# 9.8

THE PRE-DRAFT GRADE VETERAN ESPN ANALYST MEL KIPER GAVE LUCK. THAT SCORE WAS THE SECOND-BEST KIPER HAD EVER BESTOWED UPON A QUARTERBACK, JUST 0.1 BEHIND THE 9.9 GIVEN TO FUTURE HALL OF FAME PASSER ELWAY, AND SERVED TO INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON LUCK.

I can be half as good as Peyton one day, that would be great."

What happened next, even the most optimistic Colts fan could not have predicted.

Their team got off to a 1-2 start with Luck performing admirably before tragedy - so often a misused word in sport - struck when first-year head coach Chuck Pagano was diagnosed with leukaemia. Some franchises would have wilted in such circumstances but, led by their rookie quarterback, Indianapolis used their coach - still heavily involved in team planning from his hospital bed as he underwent three rounds of chemotherapy - as a source of inspiration.

Offensive coordinator Bruce Arians undertook the role of head coach in Pagano's absence - choosing never to use his office, in which the lights remained on while he was away - and did a stellar job. The Colts became a weekly national sensation, overcoming the odds to secure outrageous comeback victories over the Green Bay Packers and the Detroit Lions - two efforts that epitomised their season.

It was not just on the field they were winning supporters. Off it, efforts were similarly notable with players and cheerleaders shaving their heads in support of a 'Chuckstrong' campaign.

An initially heartbreaking story became a feel-good tale, and one which had a happy ending. Pagano - by then in remission - returned to the sideline for the final game of the regular season, a victory over the Houston Texans that completed an 11-5 record. Suddenly, the previous campaign's worst side were in the post-season, although that is where the journey ended. Even having Pagano back could not inspire a victory over the Baltimore Ravens, who beat Manning's Broncos en route to a Super Bowl triumph over the San Francisco 49ers.

"I do not think we quite realised what was going on until after the season finished," adds Luck. "But it was unprecedented. Coach Arians did a great job of keeping us going and the veteran leadership was big in terms of making sure we did not just fall off the edge of the cliff. It was a weird situation, but we are just happy that coach Pagano is healthy now.

"But the Chuckstrong campaign was big, especially for the fans and the community. It was nice good to see all the fans and players get behind Chuck and hopefully we will raise awareness."

In an emotional post-match speech following the November victory over the Miami Dolphins, Pagano talked of “hoisting that Lombardi” and, while it never happened in 2012, few would discredit a quite brilliant season.

Luck's own numbers were very good; including the Ravens clash, he threw for a 4,374 yards with 23 touchdowns and 18 interceptions. Compare those numbers with Manning's first year: 3,739 yards with 26 touchdowns and 28 interceptions. His performances earned a Pro-Bowl berth and, in any other season, would have been afforded more notice than they were.

But 2012 was the year of the rookie quarterback, with Robert Griffin III, picked one spot after Luck, and Russell Wilson, a surprise package having been a third-round selection, also catching the eye in spectacular fashion. Each led their sides, Griffin the Washington Redskins and Wilson the Seattle Seahawks, to the playoffs and left observers split as to which one enjoyed the better rookie campaign.

It was Griffin, having beaten Luck to the Heisman Trophy in their last year at college, who scooped the Offensive Rookie Of The Year award - although there would have been few complaints had either of the other two won it.

As well as those three, there were five other rookies who started games. Brandon Weeden was the Cleveland Browns' number-one option all season and Ryan Tannehill the Miami Dolphins', lesser-known prospects Nick Foles and undrafted free agent Ryan Lindley featured for the Philadelphia Eagles and the Arizona Cardinals respectively and Kirk Cousins played for the Redskins when Griffin suffered a knee injury.

Yet it is the prospect of Luck, Wilson and RGIII leading the next generation of passers that is particularly mouth-watering.

“We were fortunate, as a good quarterback class, that coaches trusted us young guys enough to not go out and mess it up too badly,” claims Luck. “It's fun to see contemporaries do very, very well and we will see this year whether rookies can do similar. Maybe a trend has started, or maybe it was an anomaly. For me personally, there is no rivalry. I suppose it's the nature of our business that people will compare you all the time, but guys are in such different situations.”

Luck, Wilson and Griffin all looked like tomorrow's superstars in 2012, much like Cam Newton did the previous year. However,

the Carolina Panthers' signal caller could not repeat his astonishing efforts last time out and struggled. He is not the first player to be affected by a ‘Sophomore Slump’ and, undoubtedly, will not be the last. In a league that encourages continuous improvement, teams often catch up with the latest fad or superstar - something Luck, Griffin and Wilson will be acutely aware of.

“I try not to worry about it,” says the former. “You want to keep improving and that is my goal as a quarterback and hopefully I can avoid that (slump).”

As if “avoiding” the dreaded slump will not be difficult enough, Luck will attempt to do so under a new offensive system after Ariens took the Arizona Cardinals' head-coaching job. Yet the learning curve will not be quite so great given Ariens' replacement, Pep Hamilton, was Luck's OC at Stanford.

“Pep and I were together in Stanford and I am glad I do not have to learn a new language or system,” he admits. “It's going well.”

If Luck can enjoy similar success to that he managed in college under Hamilton, 2013 could well prove another fine season for Indianapolis. They have changed somewhat with big-money additions such as tackle Gosder Cherilus and safety LaRon Landry joining a draft class Pagano and general manager Ryan Grigson will hope enjoy as much success as last year's.

Luck is subsequently aiming high, adding: “Hopefully, we can try and improve on last year. Like any team we want to win the Lombardi and it starts in week one against Oakland.”

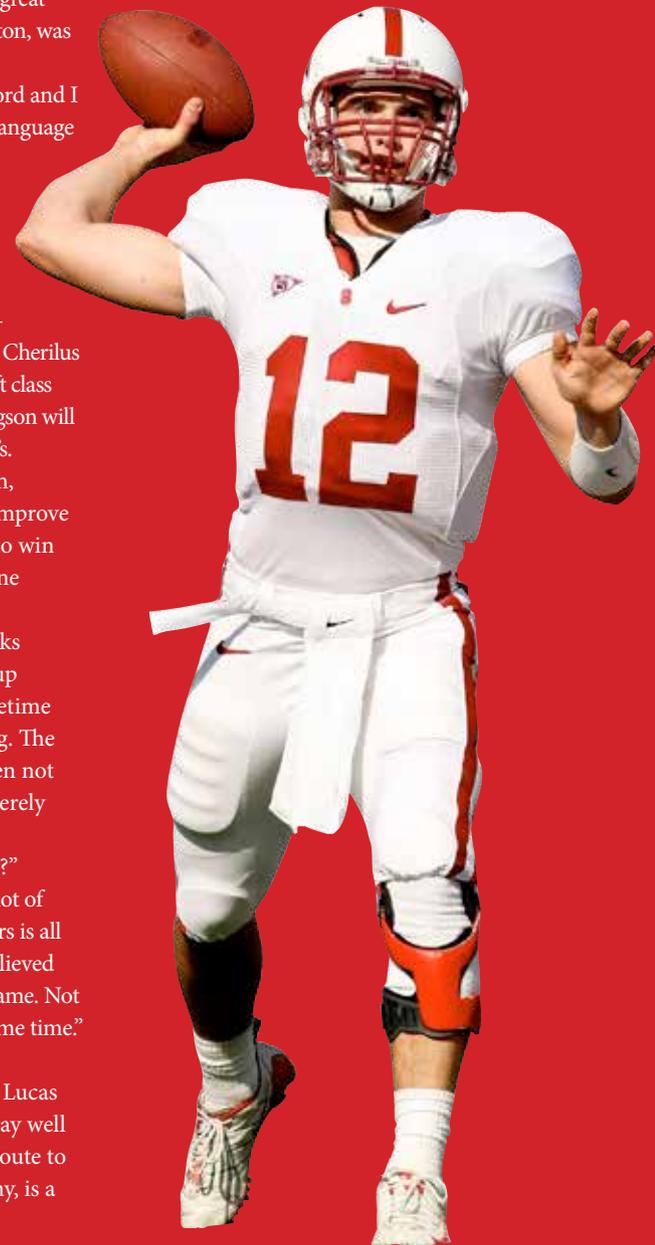
The Colts' schedule certainly looks exciting with the week-seven matchup against Manning's Broncos, on primetime October 20, particularly eye-catching. The ultra-cool Luck is unsurprisingly keen not to talk up the encounter too early, merely suggesting it will be “fun”.

“What is it, week eight, week nine?” he asks. “It will be fun but there are a lot of games before that; the Oakland Raiders is all I am worried about now. I've never believed quarterbacks play quarterbacks in a game. Not once will they be on the field at the same time.”

Even so, if Luck can out-duel his predecessor - who will return to the Lucas Oil Stadium for the first time - he may well just have taken the next step on his route to greatness; a destination that, for many, is a minimum expectation. ◉

# 4,374

THE NEW MARK SET BY LUCK FOR THE MOST PASSING YARDS BY A ROOKIE QUARTERBACK IN HIS FIRST SEASON. LUCK'S EFFORTS IN 2012 WERE ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE AS HE HAD TO AIR THE BALL OUT MORE THAN MANY OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES DUE TO THE INDIANAPOLIS COLTS' MEDIOCRE RUNNING GAME AND OFFENSIVE LINE.



PIONEERS OF THE GAME



Flashback

# Vince Lombardi

BY MATTHEW SHERRY



**H**e is best known as the man the NFL's biggest prize, The Lombardi Trophy, is named after. Yet there was more to Vince Lombardi than just an astonishing resume that leaves little doubt in many minds as to who is the greatest head coach of all-time.

Lombardi was, in many ways, your typical coach: a hard-ass; a man for whom losing was not an option. As he famously once said himself: "show me a good loser and I will show you a loser". He was a motivator in the Sir Alex Ferguson mould, someone who knew when to put an arm around a player's shoulder or deliver a 'hairdryer'. Yet his tough-guy exterior belied an, at times, softer interior; for every story documenting a rant at an embarrassed player, there is one that shows a jovial side. In the modern-day, he may have been classified as bi-polar – as his own family admit – but, in his own era, Lombardi was merely respected as a man who put winning above everything.

The Lombardi story, though, transcends sport, for he was also as atypical as typical. Being decades ahead of the curve was something that seemingly came naturally, and not just on the field. In an era when some front-offices still allowed racial stereotypes to impact

their decision-making, Lombardi publicly stated that his players were "not black or white, but Packer green". Consider, too, that such views were far from widely held in an era when the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing; nor would his decision to threaten release on any player who exhibited prejudice towards a rookie in an interracial relationship have been accepted in all quarters. He was not just 20 years ahead of everyone else, either; when in charge of the Washington Redskins, Lombardi knew one of his players – Jerry Smith – was homosexual, but assured the tight end it would never be an issue. That he took over the Skins in 1969, 44 years ago, is remarkable considering it was only in April that the first active athlete in a major sport in the United States, basketball player Jason Collins, came out as gay.

Such a zero-tolerance policy towards racial and sexual discrimination is more praiseworthy than his exploits on the sideline, be it guiding the Green Bay Packers to five NFL titles in a seven-year span, or pioneering the famous "Green Bay Power Sweep". But the latter give the former more context as such stances are a rarity in people of such responsibility. That did not deter Lombardi – someone who is truly deserving of having his name adorn the biggest prize in American football.

**I**t was 100 years ago, on June 11 1913, when Vincent Thomas Lombardi was born in Brooklyn, New York to Enrico "Harry" Lombardi (1889-1971) and Matilda "Mattie" Izzo (1891-1972). The oldest of five children, Vince – of Italian heritage – was brought up in a catholic household, with his faith so important that he spent two years studying for the priesthood at the Cathedral College of Immaculate Conception from the age of 15.

Lombardi eventually decided that career path was not suited to him, transferring to St. Francis Preparatory and becoming a full-back on their American football team. The sport would become a big part of Lombardi's life from then on, typified by him being a star player at Fordham University. He was part of the Rams' famous 1936 seven-man offensive front that became known as the "Seven Blocks of Granite", comprising of two tight ends (Leo Paquin and John Druze), two tackles (Al Babartsky and Natty Pierce), two guards (Lombardi and Ed Franco) and a centre (Alex Wojciechowicz). He was smaller, slower and less talented than his six contemporaries, yet is remembered with equal fondness having eked out every shred of ability at his disposal while motivating those around him.

A couple of Fordham's subsequent offensive lines were also afforded the nickname, although the class of 1936 are undoubtedly the most famous despite an eventual disappointing end to the season. The Rams were unexpectedly beaten 7-6 by New York University – a loss that ended their Rose Bowl hopes and taught Lombardi a lesson he would never forget about the danger of underestimating an opponent.

Graduating from university in the midst of the Great Depression meant Lombardi struggled for work opportunities, trying his hand at semi-professional football, a finance company and briefly enrolling in law school. In 1939, Vince was told by his father that he would need to secure a steady job in order to fulfil his wish of marrying girlfriend Marie Planitz – advice that persuaded him to take a position at St. Celia High School offered by their new head coach, and his former Fordham team-mate, Andy Palau. Lombardi worked as an assistant football coach, head basketball coach and teacher of Latin, physics and chemistry.

It quickly became apparent that Lombardi had an aptitude for coaching and, in particular, leadership; even in the early days he ruled with an iron fist, his methods often quite harsh but effective. He also made an impact on Palau when moving him as well

as the players with an impassioned pre-game speech that unsurprisingly meant he undertook the duty more frequently.

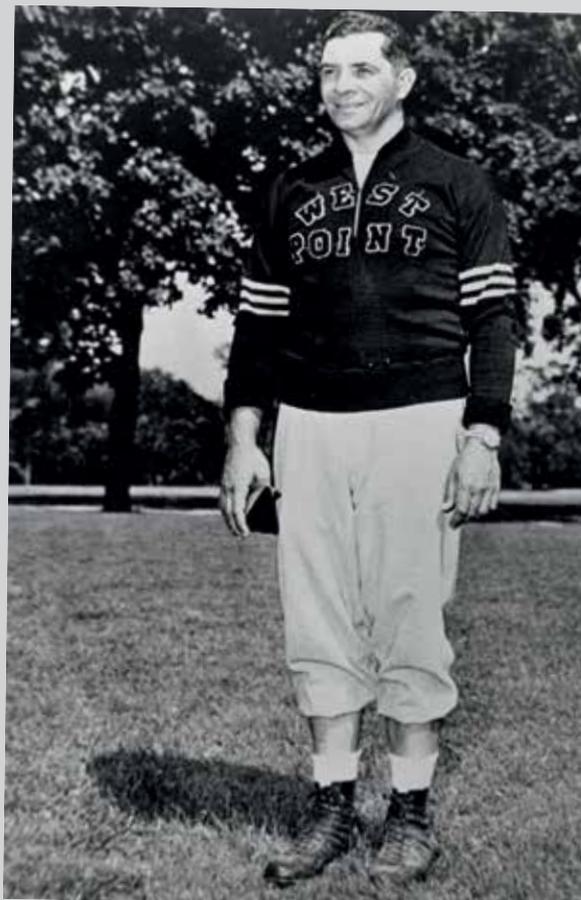
Palau left St. Celia in 1942 and after taking the reins, Lombardi brought the high school significant success. Just a year following his appointment, the team were considered the nation's best – their most notable triumph coming against a Brooklyn Prep side quarterbacked by Joe Paterno, who himself would become one of the great coaches in the college ranks.

*“I have never been associated with a loser and I don't expect to be now”*

After eight seasons in all at the high school, Lombardi decided to take an assistant's job at alma mater Fordham, with a group of former alumni deciding he would eventually take the top job when they deposed of head coach Ed Danowski. As the months wore on, rumours of such a conspiracy grew amid Lombardi working with Danowski. Embarrassed to be associated with such a coup, he decided to leave and continue his coaching career with Army, at West Point, under the great Red Blaik.

It was with Blaik, who would later be inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame with an exceptional career record of 166-48-14, that hallmarks of Lombardi's coaching philosophy – such as simplicity and execution – were identified. He spent five years benefiting from the tutelage of Blaik – who described Lombardi as the best assistant coach he had ever had – before getting his chance in the NFL.

It was with the New York Giants, in 1954 and at the age of 40, that Lombardi was finally given a crack at the professional ranks as one-half of the best assistant-coach tandem of all-time. Having Lombardi in charge of their offense and Tom Landry – who, like his one-time colleague, would become a Hall-of-Fame head coach – their defense, the Giants found a recipe for success; such was their importance that head coach Jim Lee Howell once jokingly suggested his

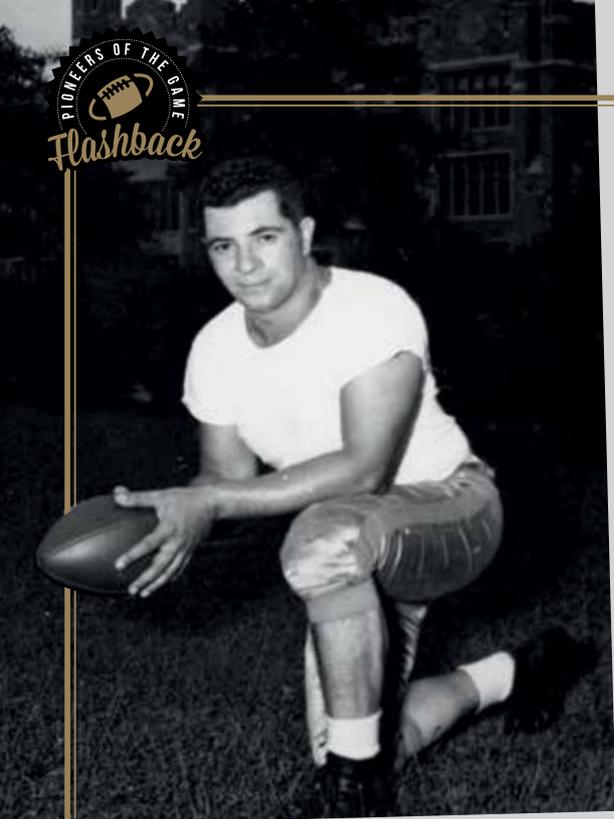


main function was to make sure the footballs had air in them. With Howell willing to allow his fledgling assistants to flourish, New York reached three championship games between 1954 and '60, winning it all by defeating the Chicago Bears 47-7 in '56.

While his success as an assistant was gratifying, Lombardi was desperate to earn a shot as a leading man – only to often be denied by the kind of discrimination he would famously fight throughout his career. His Italian, catholic roots did not sit well with some perspective employers with a famous story suggesting the Wake Forest committee, having interviewed Lombardi, said “nobody whose surname ends in a vowel is ever going to coach the Wake Forest football team”.

Those who passed up on him would live to regret it, for he was to forge a short-but-incredible career as a head coach. Yet, even when the opportunity came, it was by default. Iowa coach Forest Evashevski was the Green Bay Packers' first choice to undertake the role, yet he surprisingly opted to remain in college. Suddenly searching for a new candidate, Packers officials did their due diligence on Evashevski's recommendation and in turn made arguably the best decision in franchise history: hiring Vince Lombardi.





Despite being starved of head-coaching opportunities for so long, Lombardi immediately exuded confidence after taking over in 1959, famously saying: “I have never been associated with a loser and I don’t expect to be now”. From that point on, the word loser would only be associated with him in many of his famous quotations that discredited anything other than victory, the virtues of which he enjoyed more than most.

Taking over a laughing stock of a side with a dismal 1-10-1 record the previous season, Lombardi immediately set about turning around Green Bay’s fortunes. His punishing style, featuring harsh training regimes and demanding absolute dedication, bore immediate fruits as the Packers finished 7-5 the following year. He was not averse to taking risks, too, successfully transforming Heisman-winning quarterback Paul Hornung into someone who would eventually enter the Hall of Fame as a running back and four-time champion.

Spurred on by the lure of greater heights and far from satisfied, he oversaw further greater success the next year; initially guiding the Packers to their first NFL Western Conference triumph earned him the nickname ‘The Pope’ among fans. But a season of such joy for supporters represented great disappointment for Lombardi as a potential championship-winning drive was stopped 10 yards short, with the Philadelphia Eagles winning 17-13 despite being outgained 401

yards to 296 and 22 first downs to 13. That they won was largely due to Lombardi gambling on several fourth downs rather than taking field goals, the coach later saying: “when you get down there, come out with something. I lost the game, not my players”.

It was a different post-game declaration, though, that would be remembered for years to come; after the loss, Lombardi told his players: “This will never happen again. You will never lose another championship.” How right he was. His record in the post-season thereafter was 10-1 – the only blot coming in the 1964 Playoff Bowl, a now-defunct game that was effectively a third/fourth-place encounter; Lombardi’s disdain for the match was best illustrated by

his description of it to his players: “the ‘Sh\*\* Bowl’; a losers’ bowl for losers.”

*“You’re not bigger than football! Remember that!”*

Playoff Bowl aside, Lombardi’s Packers beat all-comers from 1961 onwards, amassing five NFL titles in seven years – including the first two Super Bowls, which pitted the AFL and NFL’s best teams against one another prior to the merger in 1970. The Packers’ success was largely built around the “Green Bay Power Sweep” or “Lombardi Sweep” as it was sometimes known. Pioneered by Lombardi, the sweep was a flagship play of his philosophy; it, like many of his others, featured minimal deception, but maximum effort.

**THE GREEN BAY POWER SWEEP:**

*The pulling guards form a convoy, with the lead guard taking out the cornerback and the offside guard picking up the middle linebacker or outside linebacker. The centre executes a block on the defensive tackle, and the onside offensive tackle pops the defensive end and then seals off the middle linebacker. The full-back leads the ball-carrier into the hole with a block on the defensive end, and the tight end*

*drives the outside linebacker in the direction he wants to go. If the linebacker makes an inside move, the tight end rides him in that direction and the runner hits outside; if the linebacker goes outside, the tight end moves with him and the runner cuts inside.*

The play required every member of the offense to play a key role, an element that made it Lombardi’s favourite. As he stated himself: “It requires all 11 men to play as one to make it succeed, and that’s what ‘team’ means.”

While all of Lombardi’s championships were memorable, it was the ‘Ice Bowl’ of 1967 that will forever go down in folklore. With Green Bay down 17-14 in minus-13-degree temperatures and only 16 seconds remaining, they faced 3rd-and-goal on the Dallas two-foot line. Quarterback Bart Starr was keen to run a wedge play with him running the ball, a quarterback sneak in today’s money, and asked for his coach’s opinion. Despite his aforementioned, self-confessed mistakes when facing similar situations against the Eagles seven years earlier, Lombardi replied: ‘Run it! And let’s get the hell out of here!’ The rest, as they say, is history; Starr ran the ball in and Lombardi became only the second coach in history – following another Green Bay legend, Curly Lambeau – to win three successive championships.

Lombardi relinquished the coaching reins at the end of that season, staying on as Green Bay’s general manager for just one year before taking over the Washington Redskins. He spent a sole campaign at the helm, although a 7-5-2 record ended a run of 14 losing seasons and laid the foundations for the Skins’ success in the early 1970s.

His tenure ended in tragic circumstances; Lombardi was found to have cancer in June 1970 and died just 10 weeks later. Even on his deathbed, football remained on the mind; less than a month prior to his passing, Lombardi woke up in the middle of the night shouting a message to the playboy, quarterback superstar of the day, Joe Namath: “You’re not bigger than football! Remember that!”

It is a statement that resonates, for Lombardi believed nobody was bigger than the game without realising he perhaps was. Little did he know how much his own name would always remain on such a pedestal, a fact confirmed a year later when The Lombardi Trophy was given its rightful title.