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**WHERE'S THE EARL OF BALTIMORE?**

I read Jack Zanger's article "Fran Tarkenton In New York" (October *SPORT*). It was a fascinating story, but don't you think Earl Morrall of the Baltimore Colts has done a little "black magic" himself? When is America going to get an inside view on Morrall?

Warren, Mich.                      Jerry Mantel

*Next month, Jerry.*

Letter to the Editor, *Sport*, January 1969

## *The Baltimore Colts, Me, and the Motor City*

A Tale of Incompatibility by Gerry Mantel

Co-starring the Steelers and the city of Pittsburgh

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When I blew into Pittsburgh in mid-2007 seeking the proverbial "new lease on life," I soon found myself unexpectedly renewing an old one: oddly enough, my fascination with the National Football League's old Baltimore Colts.

Though I'd long known #19 of the Colts, John Unitas, as native to the Burgh, it wasn't until buying and reading Tom Callahan's funky bio of the former quarterback that I had the idea, the details, and the added incentive to find the hero's boyhood home. Finally, after two dismal dead-end heats and a long night of contemplating and cross-checking street maps, I managed to park myself in front of 345 William St., directly above the Liberty Tubes atop Mount Washington, with a magnificent overview of the Steel City—an excursion taking me up about a thousand feet but also back nearly forty-four years.

Johnny U wasn't my first hero (John F. Kennedy was), nor was he my first sports hero, that being Mickey Mantle (\*interesting endnote ahead). Unitas followed, and soon after him came Jerry West of the Lakers.

I became hip to these star athletes and their professions in 1964, a Very Good Year for the Beatles, Satchmo Armstrong and, particularly, professional sports, in their still-glorious era of all-star intimacy that would, as a victim of its own success, soon succumb

to massive expansions, free agency, mega contracts and unhealthy media overexposure, in that order. My sudden sports awareness is best left for psychotherapists to determine whether it was out-of-the-blues of the national depression stemming from an event the previous November or simply due to my coming of age. Either way, by the fall of '64 I was fully turned on to the pros and trying hard to emulate them on the streets and playgrounds of my typically suburban neighborhood in metropolitan Detroit.

There at home on Sunday, September 20, 1964, I eagerly settled into the national telecast of the big Colts-Packers game from Lambeau Field in Green Bay, this just weeks after LBJ's infamous Tonkin Gulf resolution that kicked off my generation's defining event, the Vietnam War, a period also known as The Sixties. And inspired by their tenacity in pulling out a tough 21-20 win, I was henceforth hooked on the Colts & Johnny U (as I still am now, even a quarter-century after the team's demise and a few years beyond the man's sad passing).

From the get-go I sensed the uniqueness of Unitas, an inkling lacking proper historical or statistical context, and based instead on his confident, stutter-stepping dropback into the passing pocket, paired with a determined, *mean* stare that warned he'd have his way by game's end, even if it meant cheating. Perhaps paradoxically, I came to believe that John truly called the plays as would Jesus (or vice versa, since we *are* talking about Johnny Unitas).

In short order, I began to think even more highly of the team, one from which a huddle's worth of stars and coaches would honorably retire to Canton. "Canton" of course meaning the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Ohio that, last I heard, still doesn't recognize distinctly the *Baltimore* Colts, a dirty rotten shame considering it was on their backs that the NFL rode into its (currently ultra-popular) modern era, starting in 1958.

And just how good *were* the Colts? For starters, consider the fact that they went 27-2-2 from December 19, 1966 till the eve of Super Bowl III; between '58 and '70, they won three world championships, "just" missing out on four more. But to be a tad more telling, let me reveal that although John Unitas was my second sports hero (behind baseball's Mantle), he wouldn't endure as my favorite pigskin practitioner, nor as my favorite quarterback nor even as, for that matter, my favorite *Baltimore Colts* quarterback, in which case Unitas places second again, this time behind Bert Jones, tied with Earl Morrall, and uncomfortably ahead of Marty Domres—**THAT'S** how good the Colts were.

Early on, I followed them via the sports pages of *The Detroit News*, the occasional feature in jock mags like *Sport* and *Sports Illustrated*, and especially, national TV coverage; in those days catching the Colts on CBS was the essence of life, paid tribute by my talent for tweaking the rabbit ears. TV anchor Chuck Thompson was cool with his fashionable fedora & slick cadence, possibly out-cooled only by smooth Ernie Harwell, whom I'd listened to all summer long doing the radio play-by-play for the Detroit Tigers—Ernie Harwell who, quite fittingly, had wet his feet in the 50s with Chuck Thompson, the Baltimore Orioles, and the Colts.

Like the "typical" fan of the Colts, my loyalty was occasionally earmarked by semi-

obligatory but thoughtful touches of overkill, with an equally intense flip side that had me crying like a baby—and often. The agony of defeat in store was something my mother had never warned me about (surprisingly, after she'd done such a good job of explaining the thing about wooden nickels). I learned that Colts' horseshoe meant "Good luck, pal" just three months into that first season of '64, when my heavily favored team got black-eyed by the Browns (led by the baddest Brown, Jim) at Cleveland in what was then rumored to have been a championship. I've since read that a participant, former Brown defensive back Bernie Parrish, belatedly expressed suspicion that the game had been "fixed," alluding to his team's easy 27-0 win. Although no credible corroboration has surfaced, my gut feeling is that given a thorough crime scene investigation, the marvels of modern forensics, and 4-1 odds, we Colt fans may still be able to press charges, thus saving some face.

If the '64 Championship was a Preview of Coming Attractions (sic), then the 1965 season was their epitome. Off the starting line Baltimore had it in gear, determined to keep on truckin' to a title and cruising along until they blew a gasket at the corner of Michigan and Trumbull, where the Lions inexplicably and shamefully tied them on Turkey Day. The next week they wrestled Da Bears on a very grey Sunday at Memorial Stadium, in a televised toughie I didn't dare miss and that still haunts da hell out of me, perhaps unrealistically. Or maybe not: early that afternoon Uncle John went down for the count and out for the year under the leg-crunching assault of Butkus & Associates, heathens obviously bent on a Riot Act reading. Then just to rub it in, Chicago's sleek Gayle Sayers took a lateral while rolling starboard, streaking toward the sideline. By the time the defense arrived, he had not only signed the guestbook but cut and breezed well up field, scampering along the chalk past the outstretched arms of a frantically diving #40 for an unkindly 60-or-so-yard six-banger, givin' dem law-zee Bears da lead, one they wouldn't relinquish. (Bastards!)

To make matters worse, the backup signal caller, "Super Sub" Gary Cuzzo, soon joined *Unitas* on the M.I.A. list, during a subsequent plundering by Public Enemy #1, the Pack. Tucked behind the eight, the Colts assigned halfback Tom Matte to the job that surely brought with it nervous flashbacks to Ohio State. But that grim reality also bred opportunity, and m'man Matte seized it to bravely jump-start an ascent to NFL stardom that grabbed my utmost attention along the way. 'Tis true that when I started into Callahan's recent bio of *Unitas* I specifically checked first for references to *Matte*; lo and behold, such references included a few factual blunders regarding #41's genealogy, the corrections of which I've since offered to Callahan. For instance, the book erroneously credits Tom's father Roland with eighteen years of service to the Detroit Red Wings (he had but one) and mistakenly regards Tom himself as a "Canuck" (but like John *Unitas* he's from Pittsburgh, though I've not gone looking for *his* old house ... yet).

The Matte-at-QB drama of '65, spiced with wristbands and rollouts, turned out to be among the league's most legendary, certainly one I was thrilled to witness. As for the field goal that beat the Colts in the double-overtime conference playoff at Packerland (IMHO, the greatest game in NFL history), well, from what I hear the referee who made the call is *still* making excuses, with his personal website providing the latest updates.

Sometime earlier in that nail-biting season, I'd been pulled aside after class by my fifth grade instructor, who calmly confided to being a close friend of Steve Stonebreaker—Colt linebacker! Though that moment didn't inspire me to "Hang 4.0" on my report card, it certainly incited me to become an *interactive* fan of the Colts. That's when I wrote to their Lombard Street business office and promptly received in return (along with other, forgotten goodies) a generous stack of 8 x 10 autographed black-and-whites, each with a nice white border and not so much as a handling fee attached. Ah, the Good Ol' Days!

In the fall of 1966 my dad took me to see the Colts play the Lions in Detroit, a nighttime preseason clash. We sat high in the endzone at Tiger Stadium and during halftime became part of the backdrop for *Paper Lion* (based on George Plimpton's classic book) as a camera crew filmed action staged on the field. *All* the stars were there—that is, Alan Alda *and* the Baltimore Colts. (Just for the record, the Colts won the "real" game.)

The summer of '67 brought on a strange combo of Flower Power, Peace, Love & Dope, along with the ugly, hateful civil unrest in downtown Detroit. That fall, the Colts produced a messy mix of their own: a very groovy stretch without a loss through their first thirteen games, topped off by a not-so-groovy last-game rampage by the Rams in L.A. that was *just* enough to mathematically nudge the Colts out of the postseason, dig? Sadness enveloped even my father, who by then had likely misconstrued my loyalty to the Colts as an emotional hang-up. Sure, the lame-duck reality of the NFL's divisional realignment scheme had disadvantaged the Colts as the league transitioned towards accommodating the formerly antagonistic AFL. But as a silly, rambunctious kid I didn't understand all of that, preferring instead to view it as nothing short of the Crime of the Century; only later with maturity did I come to realize the need for extending to the C.I.A., and possibly the Joint Chiefs, the apology owed Oswald. Otherwise, I've mellowed merely to the point of wondering what Bernie Parrish might've thought about the trials of my team.

We would surely get 'em next year, but the next year was not to be the wisest of choices: a most-perplexing 1968 season capping a most-exacerbating year in America as exemplified by the disasters in Memphis, Los Angeles and Chicago. Enter Earl Morrall, who lends much credible coherence to my story as he is (like me) a native Michigander who is (unlike me) a local celebrity in Detroit. Back when I was a kid, he didn't stack up with Al Kaline (baseball), Gordie Howe (no ball), and Soupy Sales (goofball) but fell more in line with weatherman Sonny Eliot and portly southpaw Mickey Lolich (whose time, like Earl Morrall's, was very soon to come). According to Tom Callahan's book, former Colts Head Coach Don Shula considered Morrall to be one of the finest human beings he'd ever met. Aided by hindsight I would've boldly substituted "finest Godsend" but for fear of upsetting the Real Deal, also worshipped every Sunday, but prior to game time.

For now I'll honor #15 simply as "Mr. Morrall," with whom I had shared a banner year in 1955, the year when Detroit saw Gordie Howe win a fourth Stanley Cup in six tries with his Red Wing teammates and Al Kaline of the Tigers become the American League batting champ, the youngest ever to do so. Both Mr. Morrall and I had plenty of cause for cheer then, too—in February 1955 (just prior to the Colts' historic draft), I was

delivered deep inside Motown at Hutzel Women's Hospital, and on my tiny heels just 90 miles away at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Mr. Morrall became a first-team All-American quarterback, placing fourth in the Heisman Trophy balloting and leading the Spartans to a big Rose Bowl win over UCLA.

Within a few years of his graduation (and roughly concurrent with Alan Ameche's appearance on Ed Sullivan, if you get my drift), Mr. Morrall joined the then-sagging Detroit Lions, residing close to me in the suburbs of Detroit. His tenure with that team (right through my first season as football fan) constituted a considerable portion of the Lions' "dynasty" of futility, currently celebrating 50 years, exactly half of which I served, first unwittingly and later unwillingly, as a backyard material witness. On my watch, their generally lackluster realm included a couple of very ugly seasons (one in '66 deeply involved the antics of the late, aptly named Joe Don Looney of "Western Union" infamy who had, just two years earlier, been a multi-talented member of the Colts). To say I wasn't particularly fond of the Lions would have been the understatement of my life, and therefore I promised myself early on never to switch allegiance to them. Sensibly, during all my years in metro Motown I attended only two of their games, both preseason tune-ups that were (not coincidentally) against the Colts, the first one in 1966 having the mild interest I've already explained and the second (as we shall see), massive consequences. Quite predictably, then, when Colts tight end John Mackey miraculously bulldozed his way to paydirt in Detroit during the '66 regular season, he instantly joined my list of sports heroes, hitting the charts at #6.

By this time Mr. Morrall was playing for the disintegrating New York Giants (an experience I'm quite sure he found equally unamusing), having gone there by trade after suffering a serious shoulder injury in Detroit. Then in 1968, by the grace of the Gridiron God (i.e., the disability of Unitas), he was dealt to the Colts, reaffirming to my delight the team's apparent hankerin' for Michigan players, as the mere mention of '68 teammates Bubba Smith and Rick Volk will quickly confirm. Mr. Morrall filled in brilliantly, and as the season progressed I dashed a letter off to the editors of *Sport* (re: "The Earl of Baltimore"), complaining of their incognizance. By golly if they didn't publicly acknowledge my beef and soon follow it up with a nice spread showcasing Mr. Morrall (which is what I call *Service*), thus allowing me to keep pace with Ogden Nash, the famous Baltimorean who'd just gotten his cool Colts poetry published in *Life*. "The Greatest Team Ever" (as I remember them saying) went on to a 13-1 season with Mr. Morrall bailing out Unitas the way Mickey Lolich had just bailed out Denny McLain back in Detroit, as dutifully reported by Ernie Harwell.

After bashing the Browns in the league final (payback time that I hope restored Bernie Parrish's confidence in the system), the Colts headed into Super Bowl III in Miami, having been denied the first two mainly courtesy of (to use my dad's dialect) Dat No-Good-Nik, Vince Lombardi. Trouble was, I'd placed bets with every English-speaking, bellbottom-clad classmate at my junior high school, offering the New York Jets and up to 28 points (the often-kosher point spread), ignorant of the unavailability of student loans in the case of disaster; I dared to gamble against even my good friend & classmate Jeff Gamble. As for the game itself ... allow me to summarize historically by saying that when I learned in February 2006 of the death of legendary announcer Curt Gowdy, it

immediately reoccurred to me that Mr. Gowdy had indeed called “*The Game—NOT*” on NBC-TV, as we were jettisoned by the Jets, 16-7, on an imMorrall Sunday, the morning after which I would forego school to pity Mr. Morrall, Coach Shula, and myself, not to mention Joe Willie, whom God would never forgive. Oh Mamma Mia!

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HALFTIME !!!!!!! (Stay tuned for the exciting conclusion)

*Let's go, you Baltimore Colts,  
And put that ball across the line.  
So drive on, you Baltimore Colts,  
Go in and strike like lightning bolts.  
FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!  
Rear up, you Colts, and let's fight,  
For Baltimore and Maryland,  
You will march on to victory!*

There would be little joy in Orrsville until the 1970 season when, as part of the merger rigmarole, the Colts were voluntarily transplanted to the American Football Conference, a switch that I (Ye Olde Colt connoisseur) deemed as very appropriate if not exactly a stroke of genius; the AFC was where it was “*at*” then as it is now. Baltimore quickly forged sizzling rivalries with the Jets, Miami Dolphins, Boston Patriots and Buffalo Bills (in that order), though the infrequent, equestrian Colts-Denver Broncos matchup also had tantalizing appeal. The Colts wasted no time jumping all over the new opportunity by winning the ’71 Super Bowl, a victory that admittedly seemed anticlimactic in light of the six consecutive, dizzying years I’d spent spinning high aboard the Wheel of Misfortune. Nonetheless, beating the Dallas Cowboys in the Big One (Us 16, Them 13) put fans of the Colts in Fat City (the capital of Hog Heaven), and I for one was not without a tiny measure of relief. And once again Mr. Morrall had come to the rescue, now alongside his heroic backfield mate, Tom Nowatzke, former first-round draft pick of the good ol’ Lions.

In high school now, I was often preoccupied with minimum graduation requirements and the prospects of Canada in my near future. Otherwise I thought about chicks, sadly the subject of their own entire essay; suffice it to say for now that I often went after them with the same mindset that Mike Curtis went after wayward fans. Mainly due to women did I drift from the Colts, taking away but sparse memories of the next few seasons, except for Shula’s and Mr. Morrall’s coming back to haunt as Dolphins. That, and a most memorable ’73 game won by my retooling team in Detroit, 29-27 (with Marty Domres earning his keep), one of only four victories in the second season under the new owner who’d shamelessly purged the roster of stalwarts like Unitas, Matte, Mackey, and others. Also not forgotten is George Plimpton’s “comeback,” this time playing quarterback *for* the Colts and *against* the Lions—go figure—in another preseason stunt meant as fodder for more of his crafty creative writing.

By 1974 Nixon had fallen from power, and so had the Packers. Late that season, the young Colt quarterback Bert Jones started making waves, and a fresh, exciting vision emerged—a sack-free Second Coming based on a simple formula whereby B.J., with a little luck, would call the plays like J.U., who had in turn taken his cue from J.C.—not only in keeping with the Ten Commandments and the principles of modern math, but also according to Hoyle. That wasn’t long after Coach Howard Schnellenberger had kindly asked Robert Irsay (He with Whom the Buck Stopped) to make like Gordie Howe and get the “puck” out of the Coach’s face—where it apparently had gotten lodged in a sideline face-off that sent Schnellenberger skating for a new job.

Things really came together in 1975 under the wing of western Pennsylvania native and former Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ted Marchibroda, the new coach, who would soon have the Colts soaring. Teamed with Jones were Lydell Mitchell, Roger Carr, George Kunz, the Sack Pack and my favorite dude, third-down Don McCauley—a lineup so collectively hardnosed and tough that, in a game in which they harpooned the now-dogmeat Dolphins, they scored 33 points by throwing a scant fourteen passes whilst KO’ing the star passer of the ’Fins, Bob Griese. If the war hadn’t just ended, these guys could’ve taken Hanoi in a week.

But it was especially Jones who lived up to his billing. A few years ago I sat and watched one of the late-night TV hosts prod current New England coach Bill Belichick as to who his ultimate “go to” guy was—and get a snappy response of “Bert Jones.” If you note that Mr. Belichick is a Baltimore native who was a special assistant coach for the ’75 Colts, you might laugh away his opinion as a simple case of bias, with a capital B. Perhaps, but I’ll defer if you’ll pardon *me* for noting Belichick’s undeniable expertise in light of his Hall-of-Fame success as the Patriots’ skip.

In ’75 the Colts won their last nine games including a couple of ridiculously incredible comebacks, a “sweet” season rewarded with a playoff date versus the “bogue” Burgh, on what happened to be my best buddy’s wedding day. After standing in the ceremony, I lickety-split the reception at the bride’s home to fixate upon my team in her folks’ bedroom upstairs, having copped a spot on the edge of the bed, in front of the television, after locking the door. And thus on a day meant to party hardy with friends, I nearly got fired by a couple of my closest. Apparently unfazed by the risks, I’d chosen the Colts and watched with the hope that Bert Jones (inactive on the bench) would mimic Unitas a little less or that Mr. Domres might muster up a Plimpton-fit impersonation of Mr. Morrall. Or that maybe the Steelers had a soft spot in their hearts for their alumnus, Coach Marchibroda, though with nice folks like Mean Joe Greene on their team, I frankly doubted it. Prayers unanswered, the Colts proceeded to get, in Steel City terms, smelted.

In 1976, as Mr. Morrall was competing in the last of his twenty-one NFL seasons (ending with the Dolphins), Bert Jones had his career year, owning the NFL the way the Tigers’ Mark “The Bird” Fidrych owned the major leagues, the Birthday Industry owned America, and Jimmy Carter owned my presidential vote. And the Colts went back to the playoffs, this time waltzing. Unfortunately, the biggest drive of the day in a rematch with the Steelers was engineered by the pilot who crashed his small plane into the upper deck of Memorial Stadium at the start of the fabled “5<sup>th</sup> quarter.” The bottom line: pit-bulled by Pittsburgh, again.

Nonetheless, the team generally had success right through the ’77 season (sabotaging the Steelers 31-21 on October 30, 1977 in a nationally televised game that wasn’t nearly as close as the score suggests, just so y’all know) and the historic “Ghost to the Post” double-overtime roughnecking by Da Raiders in the playoffs, the night before which I had broken up with my girlfriend, a sad affair that actually turned out to be the weekend’s highlight.

That takes us into the preseason of 1978 and the climax of my teeth-clenching tale.

The Colts were coming to Detroit to engage the Lions at the Silverdome in Pontiac, and I (still lingering in the backyard of the Lions’ Den) had secured two tickets, one for my brother, a diehard Lion Lover and as such, not the brightest bulb in the socket. Little did we know at the coin toss that our festive mood had a forlorn destiny: one that would leave my brother brooding over yet another Lion loss (as some things *never* seem to change) and me devastatingly shell-shocked—for this was *The Night the Colts Died* or at least, inarguably, the very beginning of the very end.



At the critical juncture the Colts had the ball, I think at around their own 40. Quarterback Jones had taken the snap starting the next play and, thinking pass, backstroked just a couple of steps when the shark named Bubba bit, sinking Jones into the rising tide of the deep silver-and-blue sea, then running him aground where he lay, ground into landlubber Lion meat.

Jones' crewmates quickly sounded an "all hands hoay," granted by the Rules Captain. After the extended effort to revive Jones, he staggered to the galley, his evening shipwrecked and his season scuttled, with his career headed for dry dock. It shivers me timbers now to recall that able-bodied seaman Tom Matte or Alan Alda hadn't been on deck to weather the storm, but I'm way overboard with the spectre of former first mate Mr. Morrall standing watch like myself in our "home" port (which he may well have been). Taken aback in the hostile environs, I sat quietly glued to my seat, marooned by sadness.

Having gone to the Silverdome laughing at the papyrus Lions, I later left for home, laughed at. Call it Bad Karma if you will: I'll concede to it all as fitting when viewed in the context of my long history of relentless Lion Bashing, and thus I *still* can't help but wonder if my presence at that game wasn't a nasty omen for my team.

The Baltimore Colts never seemed to recover from that disaster, save for one very memorable Monday night provided by all-purpose Joe Washington, with his excellent impression of Gayle Sayers, or at least Lenny Moore. The organization began to unravel, gradually fraught with confusion, chaos, contract disputes and coach firings (the whole "cit"-and-caboodle), not necessarily in that order. Total implosion was averted by the efforts of the few, including former Lion QB Greg Landry (if that comes as any big surprise) along with another of my favorites, Nesby Glasgow.

Incensed with disgust, I split the Motor City within a few years of that Last Supper of the Lions, never to return (and I really shouldn't say *just* because of what had happened to my team, but for purposes of adding high drama to my story, why not?). Back then, my behavior seemed quite reasonable since there'd been hotheads aplenty poppin' off, the short list including Mount St. Helens, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Unit 2 at Three Mile Island and, most certainly, the Russian Olympic hockey coach. At any rate, I'd decided on enrollment at an Upper Peninsula university as my ticket out of Detroit.

But in a move bound to make Hoyle weep, the Colts themselves followed suit, sailing the Mayflower to Indianapolis in 1984. In my mind, taking the team from Baltimore was the moral equivalent to taking the firepower from Fort McHenry, the blue crab salsa from the Inner Harbor, the trifecta from Pimlico, the mystery from Poe, or (God forbid) Brooks Robinson from third base. With regard to the sad outcome, I want to add that my clan of close rellies who have long-resided in Indy never did think much of the Indianapolis Colts, though everybody now seems to like Peyton Manning and that's cool because I like him too, even though he came from Tennessee. I've nothing further to say about Indy except that, chances are, you can't find blue crab salsa there, at least not the name brands; the Indianapolis Colts are the subject of yet another entire essay beyond the scope of this report though, in their case, *we don't even wanna talk about 'em then*.

In the meantime my college education continued, miraculously ending with graduation in '86. Right after that, I hit the road and traveled, working various jobs in my chosen field of foundry engineering, casting the Colts aside. But in '93 a friend and I went to check out the Orioles-Yankees baseball game at the then-fresh Camden Yards (egad, Brooks Robinson *was* gone!); it was my first-ever visit to the city of Baltimore that begged for some *real* sightseeing, satisfied by our hitting a few taverns and talkin' Colts all the way to a hangover or two.

In 2001 I was living in Wisconsin (about an hour and a half from Lambeau Field by way of the crow, FYI). One day I sat thinking about the Colts and decided on a whim to contact John Steadman, the popular Baltimore sports writer and Colt historian, about pertinent reading he might recommend. I don't recall exactly how I'd gotten in touch but he responded by telephoning me, leaving a straightforward message with the answers I'd sought—just weeks before he died. John Steadman, who'd worked for the Colts back when Ernie Harwell (whom I'd listened to, on radio) and Chuck Thompson (whom I'd watched, on TV) were starting their careers in Baltimore, right around my birth in Detroit, soon after which Mr. Morrall starred at MSU while the guy he replaced at quarterback in 1968, John Unitas, was headed off to join Ted Marchibroda and the Steelers in Pittsburgh, where I currently live—making history the fascinating subject that it is, one that I obviously lean hard on, although I don't know exactly how I'm going to explain any of this, if at all, in my next letter to mom when I tell her how wisely I've invested all my wooden nickels.

You're probably wondering if I was I ever able to replace the Baltimore Colts in my life, and that answer depends on the viewpoint. I've sporadically tried to fill the void created by loss of the team, most recently by reading Callahan, revisiting Vince Bagli and William Gildea, and hunting down a couple of ancient classics by John Steadman (recommended by him ☺). On the video front, I recently watched *Paper Lion* in its entirety for the first time (unaware that those takes I'd witnessed in 1966 didn't make the final cut) as well as some rare, highly cherished footage from the week of the 1964 NFL championship, including most of the "game" itself (and unsuccessful in unmasking clues per Bernie Parrish, I might add). I've lately watched *Diner*, too, for about the sixth time.

I've also connected with Rich Ellerson's fabulous "Baltimore Colts Mania" website, linking it to my IE favorites and checking in whenever I can; for a Colt maniac like myself, it's just what the doctor ordered.

Pittsburgh has not only instigated my latest Colts' revival but has also encouraged (given its proximity to Baltimore) more Colts' field trips, the first of which I took last summer, visiting the Sports Hall of Fame at Camden Yards (highly recommended!), John Unitas Stadium at Towson University, the former Memorial Stadium site, and the Colts' old training town of Westminster. On the next trip I'll add Club 401 and "The Horse You Rode In On" to my itinerary.

The aspect of my ties to the Colts that's managed to stay alive and well has been not only reliably replicated but also effectively *extended* by, of all creatures, the Green Bay

Packers and the Pittsburgh Steelers. You might ask what's up with that, since both had been pesky, pesty nemeses of the Baltimore Colts—the Packers the Villains of the 60s and the Steelers likewise in the 70s.

Well, I have an amazingly simple answer for you, my friend, and if I sound a bit too nostalgic in explaining it, tough.

Having cheered the Packers from 1993-03, and now the Steelers, I'm very hip to and thus respectful of these two franchises as the old NFL's last vestiges (genetically unmodified and organically grown, as they say back on the farm) with their rich, time-honored traditions and unwavering fan support, just like the Baltimore Colts once upon a time. After all, when they say "it's only a game" it reaffirms the idea of having fun as a community by supporting what is normally a competitive, entertaining football team and forging for that team a Real History loaded with memories, ultimately keeping the team competitive and the fans coming back, and so on. As much as I despised the Packers at one time, I can honestly say that there's nothing like a day at Lambeau (I've done that about a half-dozen times), tailgating and talking football and then heading inside to watch Brett Favre work his wizardry. In the Burgh I haven't yet advanced that far, but for now I sure get a kick out of standing in the checkout lines at Shadyside's Giant Eagle and striking up conversation with folks about our favorite topic, the Steelers. And while I still wouldn't mind serving up a knuckle sandwich to Terry Bradshaw (for what he did to my team), I would just as gladly do lunch with Big Ben (while I tell him all about Bert Jones, of course). Simply put, in either the case of Green Bay or Pittsburgh I've (quite ironically) experienced something I lacked by not living in Baltimore, but now have a fan-tastic feel for.

On top of all that, my experiences in Detroit have led to a big revelation—namely, that all the "Root, Root, Root for the Home Team" jive is no joke but rather something to be taken *very* seriously, thus respecting, even guarding, the sanctity of the home team. I really hate to sound like Confucius here but I gotta say I got burned on this one—and badly—can you dig it?

These, then, are the lessons learned from my often painful (yet unregretted), sometimes sad (but *always* exciting) experiences as a serious fan of the grand old Baltimore Colts.

And that's the Morrall of this story, right Earl?

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\*(from pg. one)—Though my surname is Mantel, it's pronounced exactly as the Mick's, and I'm a close relative of *Roger Maris* by way of our common roots on the Mesabi Iron Range of Northern Minnesota. So there's more to the M&M Boys than you thought!



**NFL: This means you!**



**Tailgate partying at the "Horse," in honor of the Baltimore Colts.**



At Fort McHenry they once took aim at the British and later, at the evil Army of the North; it was here at the Fort I learned that the first draft of the "Star-Spangled Banner" included the line "First and Goal at the Packer Six."



Lowell Thomas used to say, "And now, the rest of the story . . ." which I was kind enough to supply to my new friends in the Sports Legends Museum at Camden Yards.





No man in NFL history has gained more respect than the one honored here with the possible exception of one, whose name I can't now recall 😊.



As an aficionado of history I knew that Poe was just a tad too old to have recognized the Colts, so I left him my notes; perhaps we'll yet see the likes of "The Tell-Tale Touchdown."



**I made a small upgrade to this important literary site.**



**"We'll get 'em next time," and Mr. Poe thinks so, too.**



Enjoying Uinitas' former spot at Club 4100, spiced up with a little added reverence.



At Club 4100, there are photos you won't find anywhere else, not even on eBay.





A great shot of the Ruston Rifle; the thing he's holding is known as a RCBM, i.e., Roger Carr Ballistic Missile or perhaps Raymond Chester Ballistic Missile.



Sure, Baltimore native Ruth was a hardball legend—but methinks he would've looked even better in blue-and-white, anchoring the defensive line.



**Doin' my Golden Arm imitation in front of the Unitas boyhood home.**

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