



# I'VE SEEN THINGS

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**On news of electric football inventor's passing, I remember my set**



Electric football linemen were set to block, except for that guy on the left, who'd instigate square dances in the middle of plays. (Miniaturefootball.com)

My best running back was tackled for a loss on fourth down. In an instant, an angry fist delivered a catastrophic blow onto the playing field.

Players went airborne. The field buckled. The place got quiet real fast.

Act of God? Not so much.

I was playing Tudor electric football and my temper got the best of me on this mid-1970s afternoon. My cousin, the opposing coach in this game, looked stunned as he surveyed the massive crater in the little metal playing field caused by my fist.

"Now what are we going to do?" he asked.

Hmmm. In those days, you couldn't just go down to Sears and buy another set. Electric football sets were hard to come by and only appeared just in time for Christmas sales.

Like Pete Rozelle, I handed down a quick decision: “We’ll play around it.”

Of course, that’s how we played electric football: We improvised. When you got one of those sets, you were so excited that you barely bothered with setting it up the way it was intended. You pulled it straight from the box, attached the bases to the players, found an electric outlet and kicked off the fun.

I’m sure my mother and aunts were more than annoyed at the constant humming noise coming out of the den. Or maybe they smiled, knowing we were staying out of trouble. Either way, we didn’t get much push back.

The set design was simple. A small motor mounted under the board caused the field to vibrate. Little feelers beneath the players’ bases allowed the players to move. The feelers could be adjusted for straight-ahead running or angles. (I found that you could increase a player’s speed by applying a fine dust beneath the feelers. I also discovered another speed trick: valve oil intended for my trumpet, also applied to the feelers).

The players were designed in varying poses. Blockers were in three-point stances. Runners and receivers were cast in a striding motion. And there were the guys who had their arms spread wide (standup ends or linebackers, I think) — which often meant they’d start square-dancing with players in similar poses in the middle of a play.

The players’ movements were unpredictable and the plays often resulted in a scrum or match of strength.

My cousin also learned that if you applied enough model enamel paint to the players, they’d get heavier and stronger. Sometimes, players’ arms were “accidentally” amputated so they would be less likely to be held up by other players.

The field itself had a plastic timing system based on two cogs. When the field vibrated, the cogs prompted the “clock” to move. That was bogus and quickly discarded. We soon timed our games on a real clock.

The triple-option quarterback was an oversized, mechanical-like player with a large handle coming out of the back of his base (imagine Dirk Nowitzki with a crooked steel beam emerging from his heel). You could tuck the felt “football” into his throwing arm and bend back the arm to fling it down field (almost in a Tim Tebow delivery). Or if you needed him to kick, you could put the felt “ball” on the kicking tee on his base. The flaws were that the passes never worked and he always fumbled. On the upside, he was able to kick 110-yard field goals. Again, all bogus.

All of this comes to mind because of recent news that Norman Sas, the inventor of electric football, died recently. Sas’ invention brought joy to millions of kids, including me and my kin. His invention inspired a book, “The Unforgettable Buzz,” which is expected to be released in the fall. Writers Earl Shores and Roddy Garcia have set up a website and Facebook page to promote the book.

About 15 years ago, I ran across an actual electric football league close to where I lived. I paid a visit and found grown men with electric football tabletops set up on the patio. I played once. Afterward, my wife let me buy a set. But I barely took it out of the box. It was one of those you-can’t-go-back moments.

Like others my age, I moved on to the electronic games, like PlayStation2’s NCAA College Football. My PS2 game could get intense; I would throw the controllers against the wall when a play didn’t go my way, which reminded me of when I punched out my electric football set.

But it just wasn’t the same as electric football. Those were some good times.