



BILL GLEASON

Eller Had His Day

Carl Eller, an All-American tackle at the University of Minnesota, may soon be an All-Pro defensive end in his old school town. If the Moose, as he is called by his teammates, doesn't make the NFL honor team this season, he's almost a cinch to be there one day in the position that has been glorified by Willie Davis, David Jones, Doug Atkins, Gino Marchetti and Andy Robustelli.

The 6-6, 265 pound Eller has everything that is necessary, including desire. Against the Green Bay Packers last Sunday, Eller's day was the kind that a guy can put in his memory book to review when the aches and pains in ankles, knees and shoulders are his other souvenirs of a long football career.

The Moose is a modern Chuck Bednarik. Eller doesn't go all the way, all the time, as center-middle linebacker Bednarik did for the Eagles, but Carl could do it if he were asked.

When the Vikings are down there inside the five-yard-line, with the defensive giants massing to throw back a smash at the line, Eller comes in to block from tight end. He moves people out of there.

He did that Sunday when two yards were needed for the Vikings' second—and as it turned out—final touchdown against the Packers.

Fullback Bill Brown piled through for six points as the Green Bay line was moved back as though it had been hit by an earth-grader.

After the game Brown said, "Eller pushed 'em back. He's a good sized boy."

A good-sized boy he is, strong enough to have thrown Bart Starr for a 10-yard loss with a tackle that sent the great quarterback reeling to the bench. Tall enough to have blocked a 25-yard field goal attempt by Mike Mercer that could have cut Minnesota's margin to 14-13. Agile enough to have knocked the ball from the hand of Donny Anderson when the Packers were threatening again late in the fourth quarter.

When Carl blew in on Starr for a 10-yard loss, it looked

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very much as though the Vikings end ran right through Forrest Gregg, a perennial all-pro offensive tackle. Gregg's helmet popped from his head during the furious combat with Eller. After the game, though, the Moose said, "I used more of a move than a straight-ahead rush. There's not an offensive tackle in the league that I'm going to run through and especially not Gregg. Nobody runs through him."

"That was one of the few situations in a game where a defensive lineman had the advantage of knowing what should happen. It was third down and long yardage and I knew that Bart almost had to throw."

About his block of the field goal attempt, Eller said, "Whenever you block a field goal, it's just luck. I threw my hand up and the ball happened to hit it. You do the same thing every time but once in a hundred tries you get a hand on the ball."

While he was talking, Carl cut away a bandage wrap and adhesive tape that brace his right knee. The knee was repaired by surgery after an injury during the 1967 exhibition season and the Moose proved that he does everything quickly by recovering in remarkable time.

Eller, in his fifth pro season, is only 26. He's just coming into the age when defensive ends get the "smarts" and enable them to combine moves with power. Minnesota's front four of Eller, Gary Larsen, Alan Page and Jim Marshall could be next year what Green Bay's defensive front was in the glory years.

Last Sunday Eller took charge of a game and kept pushing it into grotesque shapes as Packer backers saw it—just as Willie Davis has done so often. Rarely have I seen a defensive end make so many big plays. This young guy seemed to be telling himself, over and over, "This is my game. This is my day."

Eller is not recognized as a super player as yet. He merely plays like one.

In two games this fall the entire Minnesota squad—offense, defense and special teams—demonstrated that it can play the Green Bay way better than the Packers do these days.

Green Bay scored 23 points against Minnesota in 120 minutes of football. If the Packers are to win the Central Division—that's still possible—they must forget about their running game and go to the forward pass which had been their major weapon in the two Super Bowl seasons.

At the moment, with Chicago's Gale Sayers out for the rest of the year, the Vikings have to be the favorites. Should they go all the way, the turning point will be remembered as the Afternoon of Mighty Moose.