

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.peninsuladailynews.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Article published Feb 2, 2008

Port Angeles superfan recalls the first AFL-NFL 'super' championship game 41 years ago — and a coach named Elway

By Brad LaBrie, Peninsula Daily News

PORT ANGELES — Port Angeles native Sonny Luke knows a little bit about sports history. He has lived it.

The 67-year-old longtime millworker, who has lived all but about 20 years of his life on the North Olympic Peninsula, attended the first "super bowl" 41 years ago.

That was the game for pro football's "world championship" between the two rival National Football League and American Football League.

It was before it was officially called Super Bowl and took on Roman numerals, and long before it became America's most popular TV event.

But Luke knows a little bit about football and about sports history because he played for three years at Port Angeles High School for a little-known football coach named Jack Elway.

Luke, a 1960 Port Angeles High School graduate, began playing for the late Elway when he was a sophomore.

Port Angeles was Elway's first coaching job. The young man was just out of college and was "broke" at the time, his own word, according to Luke.

Elway, though, immediately displayed his talent for coaching by leading the Roughriders to some of their best years in football.

Luke remembers losing just one game each year during his sophomore, junior and senior seasons when the Riders were consistently ranked fourth or fifth in state.

The Riders won the Olympic League all three years, and were one of the first teams to beat powerhouse East Bremerton High School in several years, Luke recalled.

They never got the chance to play for a state championship, though.

"I wish they would have had the state playoffs back then," Luke said.

Without a playoff system, the Riders didn't have the chance to show how far they could go.

And Luke believes Port Angeles would have gone a long ways.

"Jack was ahead of his time," Luke said. "We had a wide-open offensive attack."

Luke, a running back, was all-conference as a sophomore and junior, and all-state his senior year. **Passing records**

And Elway helped develop Gary Gagnon into one of the top quarterbacks in the state.

Gagnon broke the state record for passing his junior year and broke it again his senior season.

The Riders had a state-class quarterback, running back and wide receiver.

Speedster Mike McDonald was the prototype receiver with quickness, size and good hands.

McDonald was a sprinter on the track team in spring.

Elway coached in Port Angeles about four or five years, according to Luke.

In Elway's last year or so in Port Angeles, he and his wife had twins, a brother and sister.

The boy was named John.

"It was a pleasure to watch John grow up, and to see him become so successful," Ann, Luke's wife of 32 years, said.

Sonny and Ann Luke were lifelong friends of Jack Elway, with Sonny Luke following Elway to Grays Harbor College after graduating from Port Angeles.

Elway went to coach at the college and offered a scholarship to Luke, who became an All-American halfback while playing for the elder Elway at the community college.

A few years later Jack Elway was coaching at Cal State Northridge when he invited Sonny and Ann Luke to visit.

While they were sitting in the kitchen, Sonny and Ann looked out in the backyard as the 16-year-old John Elway was throwing the football.

"We were amazed because he was throwing it 50 yards," Ann Luke said.

The youngster was a sophomore in high school at the time. **'I was broke'**

It was through the John Elway-connection that Sonny Luke eventually found out that Jack Elway was having normal financial difficulties right out of college during his first couple of years in Port Angeles.

Luke went to a Seattle Seahawks game at the Kingdome with the Denver Broncos when John Elway was the quarterback.

"I went to the game early hoping to run into Jack," Luke said. The elder Elway was the

director of pro scouting for Denver at the time.

Luke was hanging around the tunnel and he did see Jack Elway.

"Your dad gave me my start, and I have never forgotten that, son," Elway said to Luke.

Luke's father, Richard, was a Port Angeles real estate agent when Jack Elway moved to Port Angeles. Richard Luke offered to find a house for Elway.

"I can't buy a house, I'm broke," Elway told Richard Luke.

"My dad sold Jack a house on Jack's sheepskin," Sonny Luke said.

Sonny Luke never knew that until that Sunday in Seattle.

"I was a kid, and that was a deal between two adults," Luke said. "My dad never told me what he did at the office."

Luke ended up at the first Super Bowl after he moved to Southern California in 1966 after divorcing his first wife after five years of marriage.

"I needed to get away," Luke said.

In 1967 he became one of just 60,000 fans to watch the first Super Bowl at the 100,000-plus capacity Los Angeles Coliseum on Jan. 15 when the Green Bay Packers took on the Kansas City Chiefs.

It wasn't even officially called Super Bowl at that time. It was called the sleep-inducing AFL vs. NFL World Championship Game — even though Luke has kept a souvenir ribbon with the words "1967 Super Bowl" on it.

He keeps the ribbon in a glass display case with his original program and ticket of the game.

The ticket cost \$6 for a seat on the 5-yard line behind the Green Bay Packers bench. That's when regular people could afford a Super Bowl ticket.

Luke went online to discover the same ticket costs \$5,925 for Sunday's 42nd Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and the New York Giants.

And that's just the second most expensive ticket fans can buy. The seating between the 30 and 50 yardlines costs a cool \$8,745 per seat. Howard Schultz and Bill Gates, step right up.

The "cheapest" item is \$350. And that's for a parking pass.

"Things have changed," Luke said.

What hasn't changed is the rich history of the Super Bowl.

And Luke, a student of the Jack Elway-system of football, was right there in 1967 for the beginning of what has become a cultural event.
