

ROBERT RIGER

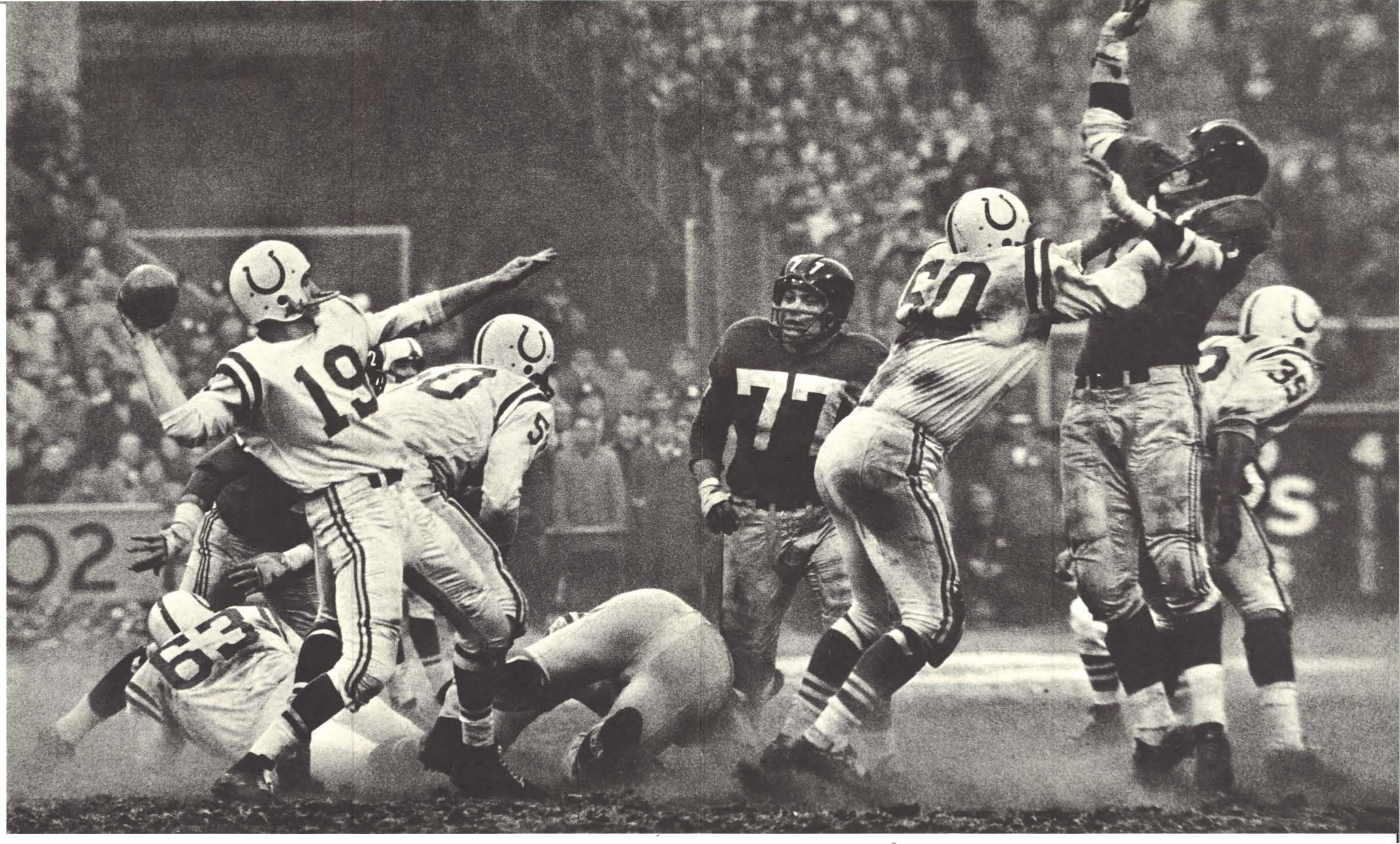
THE PROS

*A Documentary
of Professional Football
in America*

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

Gallery of Photography

OCTOBER 12 through DECEMBER 2, 1962



LONG BEFORE his photographs were known to the public, Robert Riger had become famous as a sports artist to the thousands of readers of *Sports Illustrated*, where his drawings were reproduced. In the preparation of these drawings Robert Riger made use of the camera to document his subjects in the field. What other medium could catch for permanence the most revealing details of the game of football and the race track which cannot be apprehended by our fallacious eyes and memories? In 1960 his wife prevailed upon him to publish his "research" photographs and the result was *THE PROS*, the handsomest and most complete photographic record of a sport ever made. In the past year his drawings and photographs have both appeared in *Esquire* and he is one of the few journalists to be so published in national magazines.

The distinctions these great pictures evidence when compared with other sports photographs are obvious. Although we may except photographers like Harold Edgerton and Barbara Morgan, the action photograph is seldom a thing of beauty. Robert Riger's subjects, however, are not shot and impaled like dead ducks in these evocations of blinding incidents. With Unitas, Berry, Huff, Gifford, Brown and many other intelligent titans as their protagonists, they show the nobility of the completed gesture, not merely a split fraction of movement, stopped dead. This was something we believed possible only in the hands of geniuses of draughtsmanship like Géricault and Degas and did not demand it of the camera which showed already so much our eyes could not comprehend. Robert Riger, in some inexplicable way, is able to suggest what comes before and after each flash of movement he catches and he realizes for us these abstracts of rounded and rhythmical gesture.

Perhaps games are the purest form of human expression and Pierre Bost has said all art is an attempt to make gesture permanent. But even those not to be envied people who cannot see as far as football may find substance for esthetic enjoyment and stimulation in these photographs. That they transmit the messages of Uccello and Pollaiuolo is certain enough, for these are grand compositions, moving forward from a strong, unfailing background of tradition. And what may be most admirable about them are the testimonials they offer of Robert Riger's sincere passion for his large subject, his thorough knowledge and presentation of it, and the suggestion of the immense American setting which is behind it, of the highways and their cars, the spreading suburban elucidations, the thousands of people in the stadium, free and safe for a few hours away from the daily dullness and worries of their lives, the afternoons of autumn and winter, all magnetized by the game and secure for you here in Robert Riger's pictures.

HUGH EDWARDS, *Curator of Photography.*

an exhibition...



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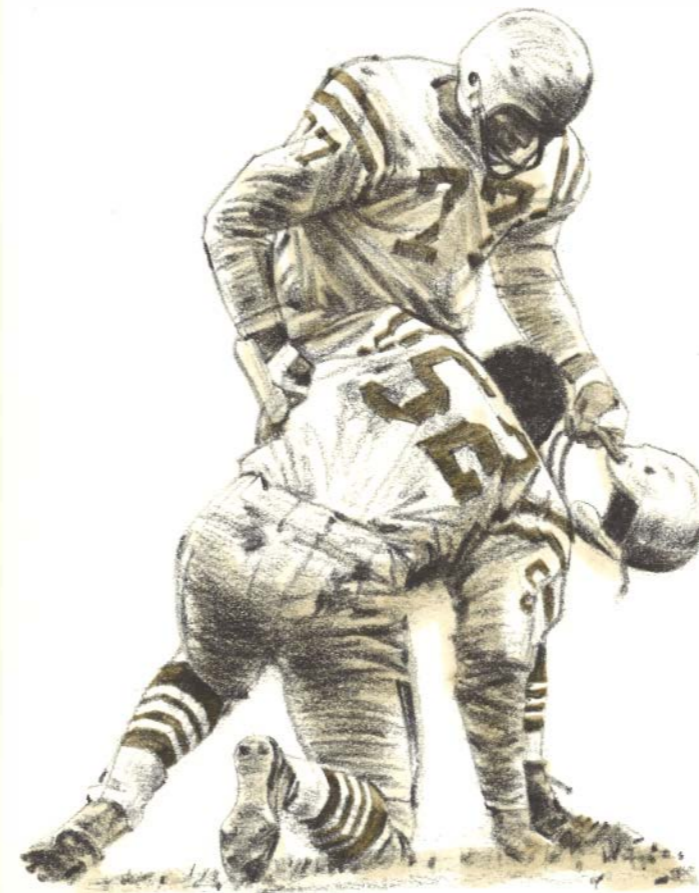
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