



Tribune Photo by Don Casper

Would-be Honey Bears wait for their turns to try out at the Lake Shore Sports Center. More than 500 women competed for 42 spots.

Honey, this judge knows the score

IT WAS almost like any routinely tough day at the office.

More exciting, though, because it involved the best combined rookie-veterans tryout camp the Chicago Bears ever held.

There was more responsibility, too. The Bears, finally getting smart, asked me to appraise the 1980 talent, to watch the drills, and to help decide what talent was to be retained for the season at Soldier Field.

It was last Sunday. But when I noticed all that eager, enthusiastic, healthy young talent, giving it 100 per cent, it was reminiscent of any of the Bears football Sundays. Except Bears public relations man Ted Haracz did not bellow: "OK, now let's all get to the dressing room for interviews."

Sunday's adventure started with a call from Haracz. He needed my expertise in judging auditions for the 1980 Honey Bears, the public relations legs of the Chicago National Football League entry.

"THERE ARE MORE than 100 finalists," explained Haracz. "You will judge on conformation, personality, intelligence, and each girl's general enthusiasm for the Honey Bears."

"It's not important that the girls know football. In fact, we asked a couple—Vernonica George and Carol Fugami—to name the Bears' quarterback. Neither had any idea."

That figured. Since the Sid Luckman-Johnny Lujack era not even the Bears coaching staff has had a set idea of who is the team's quarterback. One suspects that many in the Bears' brain trust do not even know the score.

"These young ladies know the score, at least," said Haracz. "Otherwise we would not have an old goat like you for judge. You will rate the Honey Bear candidates on a scale of 1 to 10. That makes it simple."

"It would be simpler to rate your players," I said. "Except for Walter Payton, we could do that on a scale of 1 to 2."

NO MATTER. I showed up for judging at the Lake Shore Sports Centre, where I immediately spotted a quartet of "10s" playing tennis doubles. If you accept a job, accept it with enthusiasm.

In the Wake of the News

By David Condon



"The potential Honey Bears are upstairs," reminded Haracz. "And it looks like a Super Bowl squad."

He was correct, but what good did it do a man the calendar has passed by? Once, about the time Abe Lincoln was studying law, I would have been overwhelmed by such an assembly of flowers. Now, like the Bears in the fourth quarter, I was all but out of it.

"I do notice," I said to Haracz, "That none of these flowers has two left feet. That's more than I can say for the football squad."

I wiped my cataract glasses, adjusted the girdle, combed some sparse hair over the bald spot, and said to Haracz:

"I feel as inferior as a house painter summoned to calcimine the walls of the Prado. But, shoulders to the wheel—there's a job to do."

HARACZ SAID, "You watch the girls dance, and you'll see you're right about none having two left feet. But there's one lady — Janet Del Rio, I think — who broke two toes in gymnastics. The broken toes couldn't keep her way from the finals."

That's the old Bear spirit, Janet.

"Seven of the finalists are named Susan," said Haracz. Pro football praise agents always are giving you such stop-the-presses items. "On with the judging," I said. "I have to be home by 8 to take my Geritol."

So, suddenly, there I was. The Flo Ziegfeld, Billy Rose of pro football. Watching these lovelies wiggle and squiggle and kick fancily. Nice work if you can get it — if you can get it before Social Security numbers are more than telephone numbers.

"That No. 80 — Teresa Pfister — kicks better than anyone the Bears have had since Jack Manders," I told Haracz.

"CONCENTRATE on the judging," said Haracz. "And remember, you don't have a No. 1 draft pick." We talked to the girls. Susan Larry said this was her third year at auditions. Deborah Howell hoped it was her lucky day, because the rest of the week had been the pits: "My hair curler burned up, and I tripped over my Chihuahua doggie."

Several were asked if they thought the Honey Bears should practice five days a week instead of two. Many opted for five, some thought two or three would be sufficient.

"It's the football team that needs more practice," I said.

That seemed to give the girls confidence in me. They suddenly realized I was a man who knew what he was talking about.

Would the girls be in Soldier Field when winter's cold blasts were assaulting their long legs? No one dissented. Some thought the Honey Bears should have more daring costumes.

"After all," said one, "the Honey Bears are better than the Dallas Cowgirls. Or we would be if the Bears played as many games as Dallas plays."

THERE WAS ONE thing, though, that was most obvious. This was not a beauty contest with flesh on parade. None of the contenders thought they were sex symbols. They wanted to be cheerleaders. They wanted to provide animation to inspire more than 50,000 fans to cheer for the Bears at home games.

A few looked plastic when they first paraded in. Their personalities emerged, though, as they talked and danced and cheered. This was a big thing for them.

So there were tears and sobs, of course, each time the chief judge posted a list of girls who were excused.

Finally, 42 girls were summoned back before the judges. They included Debbie Anthony, Susan Siegel, Cathy Abelson, Dawn Worthy, Susan Thompson, and Lynn Salafatinos.

The 42 were told: "You are the 1980 Honey Bear squad." Shrieking, screaming, jumping, hugging and kissing and laughs. No tears for these winners.

One lovely kissed me and said, "Thanks, grandpa." All in a day's work.