

# He's Holding Franco's TD Ball In Hope Of Trade With Steelers

By MIKE ANDERSON

Jim Baker of West Mifflin says he has something hundreds of Pittsburgh Steeler fans would give their right arm and/or money for — the football Franco Harris carried across the goal line for the winning touch down in the Steelers' miracle victory over Oakland last Saturday.

## Hints Trade

The owner of an auto body shop already has offered Baker \$1,000 for the ball, but

Baker says it's not for sale.

He wants it to get back into the hands of Franco.

"I don't feel it should be sold. I want to see Franco get it somehow. He's done so much for this town," he said. "Maybe a trade with the Steeler management" for an autographed football or two.

Tony Stagno, the leader of Franco's Italian Army and an East Liberty baker, offered Baker a lot of "dough," a

ticket to Sunday's game and a lifetime supply of birthday cakes for the ball. But Baker is holding out.

## Hectic Week For Baker

The past week was hectic for Baker. His second son, Samuel, was born Dec. 19.

On Saturday, the day of the game, he went to the hospital to bring his wife, Mary, and Samuel home.

"I told the doctor I had to go to work early and would it be

okay to pick them up early. I didn't want to say I had to get to the football game. I showed up late for the game as it was."

Samuel has played second fiddle to a football all week.

## Friends Saw Ball

"When I got home, I called our friends and they came over to see the ball, not the baby. They wanted to touch it. It was unreal," Baker said.

How Baker got the ball is a story in itself. He and hundreds of other fans circled the field in that last minute and roared approval as Franco sped through the end zone and into the arms of his fans.

Baker kept his eye on the ball, which was snapped up by an official. After the long discussion and the touchdown was awarded, the ball was set down for the extra point and Roy Gerela kicked it through.

The kick was good, but it sliced to the right and caromed off the concrete wall. Baker took off on a dead run and fell on the ball like Andy Russell does to a fumble.

## 10 Others Chased Ball

At least 10 other people were in hot pursuit, Baker recalls, and they landed right on him.



—Press Photo by Robert J. Pavuchak

## Benjie Baker gets a 'kick' out of 'Franco's' football his father retrieved during Steelers' win over Oakland.

The ball started to squirt away, but Baker frantically grabbed it back.

Amid threatening glares from those who missed their chance, Baker stuffed the ball inside his coat and left.

He paid the price.

He has bruises and a sore neck. His coat and pants were torn, and the lens of his 35-mil-

limeter camera was scratched. "But it's worth it," he said.

"I was afraid to walk over to where my car was parked downtown, so I hailed a car and paid a guy to drive me over.

"Funny, but the guy and his girl didn't even get in the game. They came looking for tickets but couldn't get any, so

they sat in the car and listened to it.

"He wanted to touch the ball and said that was payment enough, but I paid him anyway."

When he got home, Baker showed the ball to his wife.

"I was really excited and happy for him," Mary said. "The baby sort of took a back seat as all these people came

over to look at the ball. They just couldn't believe it."

Their older boy, Benjie, 22 months, has had a lot of fun with the ball. He's practicing Gerela-style kicks with it.

The whole family is happy about it, but most of all Baker himself.

"Between the baby and the ball, it was an unbelievable Christmas."