A vintage model

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leading pass receiver on that catch, breaking Charley Taylor's record of 649.

He caught a simple nine-yard pass near the right sideline. A pass that placed him in the limelight of NFL history. He now has 657 career receptions.

"It wasn't a jubilant reaction because we were really getting beat," Joiner said in describing his feeling after the play. "I think if we were winning, it would have felt better. But on the plane trip home, it started to sink in. Then I realized it was good for the team and myself."

In addition to the loss, Joiner had one other regret -- "I kind of wish (Dan Fouts) could have thrown (the pass) to me," he said. Fouts, the Chargers' All-Pro quarterback, was knocked out of the game with an assortment of injuries. His backup, Ed Luther, threw the record-setting pass to Joiner.

The Steelers won the game 52-24. But the key number on that day was 650.

Later, on Dec. 3, Joiner had a special day all to himself: "Charlie Joiner Day" was proclaimed in the city by San Diego Mayor Roger Hedgecock. On that Monday night in a game against the Chicago Bears, Grambling Head Coach Eddie Robinson was part of a special halftime ceremony honoring Joiner's feat. Joiner's jersey, No. 18, and the ball he caught to break the record were enshrined in the Hall of Fame. It's probably only a matter of time before the man himself will be in the Hall, too. But first he has to retire.

"Right now, I don't even know if I'll play in '85," Joiner admitted. "If I feel I can't get up for it anymore or have my enthusiasm, I guess I'll have to give it up. If you play without enthusiasm, you're wasting the coaches' and team's time." Joiner, who will turn 38 the seventh week of the '85 season, said he'll make a decision around May on whether to return for year No. 17.

"He'll be there (playing in '85)," said the eloquent Haynes, who was named to his seventh Pro Bowl this past season. "I can remember six years ago when he said, 'It will be my last year.' I don't think his skills have deteriorated at all. If he wanted to, I think he could (play until he's 40). He looks like he's having fun out there.

"He's taken a lot of punishment over the years. But he won't let a hit destroy his concentration. You know he's going to work hard to get open. He works hard on every play. Most receivers slack off on running plays, but not Charlie. I've played against him for so long, I know what he's doing. I know he's going to work all four quarters. He uses all of his talents, and he's a real smart guy.

"I can remember six years ago when he said, 'It will be my last year.' I don't think his skills have deteriorated at all. If he wanted to, I think he could (play until he's 40). He looks like he's having fun out there."

-- Cornerback Mike Haynes of the Los Angeles Raiders

"To play 16 years, you have to be doing something special.

If Joiner decides to return, he'll have a chance to break Don Maynard's all-time receiving yardage record, 11,834 yards. ("Everything he does now is a record," says Haynes.)

Joiner has 56 career touchdowns, a 16.5-yard receiving average and a longest reception of 87 yards while with the Houston Oilers in 1970. He was All-Pro in 1976 and 1980, the seasons he played in the Pro Bowl. Joiner, who played with the Cincinnati Bengals for 3 1/2 years from 1972 to 1975 before joining the Chargers in 1976, was voted San Diego's Most Inspirational Player the last five seasons and the team's Most Valuable Player in 1976 and 1983. His best consecutive seasons were 1979, 1980 and '81, when he caught 72, 71 and 70 passes, respectively. Joiner's best overall season was 1980, when he had 1,132 yards receiving and four touchdowns.

He makes a reported $375,000 a year to rank eighth among the NFL's highest-paid wide receivers. James Lofton of the Green Bay Packers is first at $853,000 per season.

Despite the records and accolades, Joiner is seldom mentioned in the media when the best receivers are the subject. He's in that list of great, underpublicized players. However, the Chargers' lean teams the last few years haven't helped, either.

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Annual Basketball Tournament

MARCH 7-9, 1985

(Thursday, Friday & Saturday)

PALESTRA

Philadelphia, Pa.

- **Tickets** are on sale at:

MEMBER INSTITUTIONS—Athletic Office
Bethune-Cookman (904) 255-1401 Ext. 316
Delaware State (302) 736-4928
Howard Univ. (202) 636-7146
Maryland, E.S. (301) 651-2200 Ext. 605
Morgan State Univ. (301) 444-3051
N.C. A&T State (919) 379-7686
S.C. State (803) 536-7242

- MEAC Office (919) 275-9961
- Palestra Ticket Office (215) 386-0961
- **LODGING**

Lodging Coord.—Malcolm Ford (215) 879-1600
Phila. Centre Hotel (215) 568-3300 17th & JFK Blvd. (hqters. hotel)
Franklin Towne Econo-Lodge (215) 568-8300 22nd & Pennsylvania Blvd.
Penn Center Inn (215) 569-3000 20th & Market Sts.
Sheraton Univ. City (215) 387-8000 36th & Chestnut Sts.

ADULT		STUDENT	
___ Tournament Book(s)	$38.50	___ Tournament Books	$32.50
SINGLE TICKETS		SINGLE TICKETS	
___ Thursday Session I (Women 11 am, 1 pm, 3 pm)	$ 6.00	___ Thursday—Session I (Women—11 am, 1 pm, 3 pm)	$ 6.00
___ Thursday Session II (Men—7 pm, 9 pm)	$10.00	___ Thursday—Session II (Men—7 pm, 9 pm)	$ 6.00
___ Friday—Session III (Women—3 pm & 5 pm; Men 7 pm, 9 pm)	$10.00	___ Friday—Session III (Women—3 pm & 5 pm; Men—7 & 9 pm)	$10.00
___ Saturday—Session IV (Women—6 pm; Men—8 pm)	$12.50	___ Saturday—Session IV (Women—6 pm; Men—8 pm)	$12.50

* I.D. Cards are required upon admittance to games with student tickets at the Palestra

A vintage model

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"Charlie prefers to do his business on the field," says Bill Johnston, the Chargers' assistant director for public relations. "He doesn't seek publicity or attention.

"He's very soft-spoken, very articulate and thoughtful. He's a quiet person and doesn't seek the limelight."

Joiner is a throwback to the era some call the glory days of pro football. During that era you lined up your best 11 and went with them the entire game. Situation substitutions were a no-no. In 1969, Joiner's rookie season with the Houston Oilers, who drafted him in the fourth round, mud games were the "in thing," a fad that made CBS sports analyst John Madden proud. Only seven teams played on some form of Astroturf surface in '69; now 18 teams do. Plus -- believe it or not -- O.J. Simpson was a rookie that season, a first-round pick of the Buffalo Bills. The "Juice" has since squeezed into the ABC sports broadcasting booth and the Hall of Fame, the next step for Joiner.

High-fives were on the low side back in those days.

And cornerbacks could bump-and-run. Now they touch-and-go.

The game continues to evolve, but one aspect consistently flows with the tide -- Charlie Joiner.

"His durability is amazing," said Dick Haley, director of player personnel for the Pittsburgh Steelers. "To play that long and that well has to put him in the top wide receiver category. (Joiner) has to be one of the best draft choices ever made because of that durability. He has a good chance (to make the Hall of Fame).

"To me, durability means as much as ability. (A player has) got to play. He's no good if he's not on the field.

During an '81 Monday night game when the Chargers were playing the Denver Broncos for the AFC West title, Joiner was helped off the field twice because of a deep thigh bruise, then a laceration near the eye and a slight concussion. But he came back each time to play, making the winning touchdown catch on his final appearance. He was in a daze, but a winning one.

For his gallant effort, Joiner was rewarded with such adjectives as "amazing" and "remarkable" from announcers Frank Gifford and Howard Cosell.

"I really didn't know what I was doing (because of the concussion)," Joiner recalled. "You're out there, but you don't remember doing those things during the game. You just get caught up in the action. I was just thinking about playing and trying to win the game. I look back and say, 'I did that.' I just got stitched up and went home after the game."

Says Haley: "We have a guy, John Stallworth, who's four or five years younger than Charlie. If he can play as long as Chalie he'll really help us."

Joiner's durability. That's the good news for the injury-riddled Chargers of the last few seasons.

Joiner, back in the '60s, thought he wouldn't have been good enough to play for Grambling because of his size, since the Tigers had a reputation of playing big athletes. At 5-foot-11, 180 pounds, he felt like a shrimp in a whale's niche.

But a small body doesn't necessarily house a small heart.

"He looked larger than what he was," Robinson said, "because he was very muscular. He ran very good patterns, could catch the football and block. He was very consistent.

"He is the standard for Grambling. We judge other young men by Charlie. He's the kind of guy you want to have for your own son. He was the first on the practice field and the last to leave it."

"If you can survive Grambling's practice," Joiner professed, "you can survive any practice. Nobody practiced harder than we did."

Robinson's former players maintain a practice of returning to their alma mater after they have graduated to the pros. Grambling has a longstanding tradition of the older models coming back to tutor the latest products on the assembly lines.

"My relationship with Coach Rob was good," Joiner said. "He communicates well with players, players from any era. He has a way of preparing you for pro football."

Coach Rob in 1949 prepared Paul "Tank" Younger (now the Chargers' assistant general manager) to become the first black player from a predominantly black college to make it in the NFL. Younger then returned the favor, by starting the reciprocation custom. And players such as Joiner, who spoke at Grambling's banquet this past season, keep it alive for the others.

"They all come back to help us," says Robinson. "Every guy has to come back and pay his dues. They felt they had to come back and pass it on to our players."

Joiner teamed with some players who could pass the strictest talent test. Guys such as quarterback James Harris, defensive linemen Billy Newsome, Richard Harris and John Mendenhall, wide receiver Frank Lewis, running back Essex Johnson, linebacker Henry Davis, and defensive backs Robert Atkins and Delles Howell (Joiner's roommate at Grambling) were part of a bumper crop that made it to the NFL.

Grambling Coach Eddie Robinson: "We judge other young men by Charlie. He's the kind of guy you want to have for your own son" (photo by James Terry).

"We had an all-star team," said Joiner. "Back then, most of the top (black) players in Louisiana went to Grambling."

Haynes, a skilled and polished defensive back, knows how it is playing against the top offensive players. Take his rookie season in 1976, for example, when he was with the New England Patriots.

"He (Joiner) was running a simple hook pattern," said the 6-2, 200-pound Haynes. "I had looked at the film all week, and pictured myself looking for the interception on that play. I knew they were going to run it. I was playing for that one play. You aren't supposed to do that, but I did it anyway."

Joiner can't do his lightning bolt imitation as much as he used to in his prime. He's more of a possession-type receiver now, while Wes Chandler is the Chargers' burner these days. But Joiner is still a threat, and he still would like to end his career with a ring. ("That's his dream -- to play in the Super Bowl," says Johnston.)

But the Chargers have had injury problems the last few seasons, especially to "The Franchise," Dan Fouts. A few more quality players and a healthy Fouts, Joiner says, can put the Chargers right back into Super Bowl contention. "There are some areas (on the team) where a few great athletes would have helped, would have made the difference in a close ball game," explained Joiner. "(Fouts) is the team leader. He's probably the most important guy to the franchise. If we can keep him healthy, we know we're in contention."

"Even without a defense (with a healthy Fouts)," said Haynes, "they're a threat.

"They don't have skill all over the place. When one guy gets hurt, it hurts them. You're as strong as your weakest link. They just have some weak links."

Weak links have a way of becoming extinct in the evolutionary process (The weaker species tend to die out in favor of the better-adapted species, Darwin concluded). But, as exemplified by Charles Joiner, the strong have a way of surviving.

Gregory D. Clay is a sports copy editor for The Wichita *(Kan.)* Eagle-Beacon *and a football fanatic.*

DelState

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coach to build a program, I think we can have a solid basketball program," he says. "I'm not going to predict that we'll win the conference or anything like that, but I know with time we'll be much better."

Davidson says he and the Hornets are looking forward to the upcoming MEAC tournament in Philadelphia March 7-9, where a good showing could help soothe the pain of a dismal regular-season record.

"We have just as good a chance as anybody else," Davidson says of the tournament. "I really think it's going to be up for grabs."

Regardless of the tournament's outcome, Davidson says, he'll have nothing to feel bad about once the season is over.

"I'm rarely satisfied with the way a team plays," says Davidson. "But I know our guys play hard and the coaches work hard. We're making progress."