

Ray Robinson (1999) *Rockne of Notre Dame: The Making of a Football Legend*. New York: Oxford University Press; pp. 290. USD 25.00, ISBN: 0788197339 (hb); USC 16.95, ISBN: 0195157923 (pb).

Ray Robinson's examination of Knute Rockne offers an interesting look at the Notre Dame legend. Robinson analyses Rockne's life from his birth in Voss, Norway in 1888, to the plane crash that took his life in a Kansas field in 1931. The book focuses on Rockne's career at Notre Dame as there is little discussion about Rockne's family life or activities outside of the football season. Rockne's childhood is explored briefly in the opening chapters but the story starts to take shape when Rockne arrives at Notre Dame as a player in 1910. The book then takes a season by season look at Rockne and Notre Dame.

Several things are revealed about Rockne that other biographies of the legendary coach do not fully explore. Rockne was concerned with his financial situation throughout his life. Robinson recounts how Rockne basically took any odd job he could while a student at Notre Dame including one as a janitor in a chemistry lab. He charged people a fee to help them sneak food into the student residence hall, and took part in many boxing matches for small purses.

Rockne took his football skills to the professional ranks while playing and coaching at Notre Dame as well. He played professional football during his final year at Notre Dame as long as the games did not interfere with Notre Dame's schedule. He continued to play professional as his schedule allowed during his early days as coaching. Always mindful of the dollar, Rockne considered leaving Notre Dame on several occasions to coach at other universities where the financial rewards may have been greater. There was a time in fact that Columbia University leaked news to the press that Rockne would become its head coach. Rockne had agreed to become the coach of the Lions at more than double his salary at Notre Dame, but he was still under contract with Notre Dame. The situation was quite embarrassing for Rockne and Columbia. It could be argued as well that Rockne's death was the result of him chasing after money. He was en route to Hollywood to discuss his appearance in a movie for a fee of \$50,000 when a plane crash took his life.

Robinson also reveals that Rockne was willing to overlook the undesirable qualities of his players, as many other coaches did, as long as the players produced on the field. The author in particular debunked the myth of George Gipp. Gipp may have been a great player on the field but he was hardly a model citizen off the field. He was certainly not an academic and his favorite places around campus were the neighbourhood bars. Robinson also debunked the notion of Rockne speaking to Grantland Rice and devising the "Win One for the Gipper" speech prior to the 1928 Army game. Jack Dempsey reportedly spoke to the team before the game, and Robinson points out that Rockne would certainly not have followed Dempsey with the speech. Rice was not in New

York the Friday before the game so it is highly unlikely that Rockne could have spoken to him about Gipp. Robinson also points out other fallacies in the story.

One prevalent theme throughout the book was Rockne's understanding and awareness of the media. The media at the time was limited to newspapers and magazines but Rockne had a keen sense of the influence these two entities had. Rockne took advantage of his understanding of the media and used it to help make Notre Dame a household name throughout the country.

Robinson provides examples throughout the book to demonstrate Rockne's use of the media. Rockne coached a professional football team during his first season as an assistant at Notre Dame in 1914. He invited the press to watch his team's practices because 'he had a keen instinct for the use of the press exposure, and he would work assiduously to manipulate stories to his advantage' (p. 54). Rockne became friends with the leading sportswriters of the era and used these to his advantage. The press admired Rockne's achievements on the football field and was willing to overlook Rockne's occasional rule-breaking and lack of attention to academics. Robinson notes that Rockne 'had become particularly facile at handling the press, most of who had happily contributed to Notre Dame's gridiron mystique' (p. 113). Rockne realised that Notre Dame benefited from press exposure and did what he could to gain exposure. That was one of the compelling reasons Rockne wanted to play Army and other national powers. He wanted to get Notre Dame into the New York media market and the national spotlight. The exposure that football received would help the team as well as the University. Rockne was always a source of good copy and that added to the appeal that he had to sportswriters. Rockne handled himself with the press, which also that added to his image.

Several other noteworthy incidents were revealed in the book, which did not directly involve Rockne but are nonetheless interesting. Two instances stand out. One involved another great sportsman of the 1920s in New York, Yankee first basemen Lou Gehrig. Robinson discusses the game Notre Dame played against Princeton in 1924, following the famous Four Horsemen game against Army. Charlie Caldwell was centre and fullback on that team but made his mark on history when he was trying to earn a roster spot on the New York Yankees in 1925. He was a pitcher and hit Wally Pipp with a pitch. Pipp was unable to play because of the injury thus allowing Lou Gehrig into the starting lineup. The rest is history. The 1926 season at Notre Dame concluded with a dramatic win over Southern California. Southern Cal did boast a future star in its lineup though. Marion Morrison of Winterset, Iowa, was a member of that Southern California, and he went on to fame and fortune as actor John Wayne.

Missing from the book was the inclusion of sources for quotes Robinson uses, as well as sources for other information. This supporting evidence would enable the reader to further explore the context of Rockne's career. A source or reference list is not provided either which would help someone wanting to further explore the people and events mentioned in the book.

Notre Dame was struggling to gain recognition and respect as an institute of higher learning in the Rockne years. The hierarchy at Notre Dame recognised that football could help make Notre Dame a reputable school and attract students. This gave Rockne the freedom to run the football program with limited checks and balances. Rockne's image was enhanced by the 'adoring and romanticizing press' of the 1920s and whatever flaws the sports heroes of the day had were 'glossed' over by sportswriters (p. 79). Robinson certainly makes the point that Rockne played a major role in the rise of Notre Dame into national prominence but also revealed that Rockne was not the All-American hero that many people thought or still think he his. He had flaws but they were not reported because the press liked him and were willing to overlook them. Rockne's owes his present-day image to his success on the field but also to the adoring press of the 1920s. Robinson provides a revealing look into Notre Dame during the Rockne years and how his image was shaped by the press.

Robin Hardin
University of Tennessee