

Perrin, Tom. *Football: A College History*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1987. \$29.95.

In 1982 John Naisbitt depicted in *Megatrends* the transformation of the United States from an industrial to informational society. Sophisticated computer chips, telecommunications, and fiber optics have enabled us to gather and analyze a nearly infinite supply of data and then transmit it as useful information to many locations around the world. The building blocks of this modern development are plain and simple facts.

Football: A College History by Tom Perrin reflects one-half of that transition for it is packed with nearly 400 pages of college football facts. However, the other half is missing because the author did not convert the basic facts into meaningful information through interpretation and synthesis. In his quest to present copious information, he overlooked interpretation, giving us a history without meaning or much focus. The book itself is a year-by-year chronicle of the college game from 1883 to 1986. For each season, the top two teams are featured. Their schedules and results have been reproduced along with one or two lines of text about each of their contests. Other prominent teams receive some coverage, and after the mid-thirties, when the rankings began, the Top 10 teams are recognized.

Seemingly, little forethought went into the organization of the book. In keeping with its chronological format, the book's ten chapters, except for the first, begin conveniently at the dawning of each new decade. But even here, opportunities for interpretation are lost. Chapter titles such as "The Turning Point: 1900-1909," "Football Comes of Age: 1910-1919," "Football in Transition: 1950-1959," and "The National Pastime: 1970-1979" whet the reader's appetite for interpretive statements and synthesis, but the text falls far short of satisfying it. We are never told what the turning point was, how or why football came of age, how and why the game changed in the 1950s, or what evidence led to the conclusion that college football was our national pastime in the 1970s. In the turning point chapter, for instance, the author mentions Walter Camp's adoption of the new tackle back formation, Teddy Roosevelt's involvement in the 1905 football controversy, the formation of the NCAA, and the increasing use of the forward pass. His few general statements about each of these developments are confusing, leaving the reader in a quandary about what he meant by the turning point.

Titillating chapter titles without substance and the lack of synthesis are serious shortcomings, but even more frustrating for the reader is the lack of a thesis statement defining the book's purpose or the author's intent. Consequently, the reader has no idea why the author wrote the book. The only clue we get comes from this statement in the foreword: "In this book the top teams and events have been discussed, but it could easily be dedicated to also rans."

The book is desultory, superficial, and laden with occasional poppycock. The latter was illustrated by a Yalie, Blagden, who played the entire 1901 Harvard game with appendicitis which hit him two days earlier, or the Wiscon-

sin trainer who, “watching on the sidelines, dropped his water bucket in amazement” when Pat O’Dea drop-kicked two field goals on the run in an 1898 game against Minnesota. At times, it is marred by value judgments that stray from the topic. Commenting on a 1970 Vietnam War protest that attracted 3,500 Nebraska students, the author wrote that the “14,000 students at the intrasquad game that same afternoon helped remind people that not everyone had lost their way.” Moreover, the book is beleaguered with a multitude of trivial “firsts.” Do we really need to know that Bum McClung in 1890 was the first ball carrier to fake an end run by cutting back over tackle, or that John Heisman was the first player to call out “hike,” or that Yale first sang “Boola, Boola” at the 1900 Harvard game?

In spite of the shortcomings of *Football: A College History*, the effort of Tom Perrin should not go unrecognized. A retired high school English and history teacher, Mr. Perrin obviously labored long and hard poring through newspaper accounts and college press guides to gather information for his 104-year odyssey of college football. He could have strengthened his work with documentation; even a bibliography would have helped. His encyclopedic version of the college game contains over 4,600 names and more than 100 illustrations, that may be helpful for tracking careers of players and coaches such as Bear Bryant, Bob Neyland, or Pop Warner as they moved from one institution to the next. One may also trace the course of important rules changes, though this is somewhat more difficult because that information is blended with players’ achievements and coaching strategies. But if factual information on players and teams is needed, reputable sports encyclopedias such as Porter’s *Biographical Dictionary of American Sport: Football* or Menke’s *Encyclopedia of Sports* are more reliable and easier to use.

While I commend Mr. Perrin for his effort, I cannot recommend his text. Chronologies are perhaps necessary first steps in uncovering facts that give rise to the study of an issue, movement, or institution like college football, but in the late 1980s with what we already know about college football’s history, this book will have little impact.

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