

Grange, Red. *The Red Grange Story: An Autobiography, as told to Ira Morton*. New York: Putnam, 1953; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xxii, 178. Photographs.

Originally published in 1953, *The Red Grange Story* was written well before the era of exposes and behind-the-scene accounts of the underside of organized sport. Perhaps the greatest football hero of all time, Red Grange symbolized what a boy from modest beginnings could achieve through hard work and sacrifice in America. Clearly, Grange was grateful for his long association with the game of football, and he used much of his autobiography to express his gratitude for all the opportunities it offered him.

Extremely humble, Grange dedicated the book to the University of Illinois: "Everything good that happened to me in my life stems from the roots I planted there as a youth"; he credited Robert C. Zuppke, his coach at Illinois, with making him a football player of strong character; he defended Charlie "Cash 'n' Carry" Pyle, the agent who made him rich in the twenties; and he disputed the miserly reputation of George Halas, the owner/coach/player of the Chicago Bears who first featured Grange as a professional and later initiated the star's comeback. Finally, Grange appreciated that his

performance on the gridiron led to his career in radio and television broadcasting and that his celebrity helped him build a successful insurance business.

The ideal athlete, Grange had remarkable talent, gave 100 percent and did what he was told. When he wanted to quit football as a young boy due to numerous injuries, his father told him to keep it up because it would make him a man. In college, when he decided to abandon football in favor of basketball and track, “his best sports,” his fraternity brothers told him to concentrate on football. As a professional, Grange put his future in the hands of Charlie Pyle.

The terms of the contracts for his first tour with the Bears in 1925 were brutal, a grueling 10 games in 17 days. Pyle and Halas guaranteed their opponents that Grange would play at least 30 minutes in each game or no money would exchange hands. There were no injury clauses and Grange was under severe pressure to play, even when seriously injured. Grange found himself in the same position two years later while playing for the Yankees. Once again, Pyle’s contract with the other National League teams called for Grange to play in every game as a drawing card. Seriously injuring his knee in the third game of the season against the Bears, Grange came back too soon. He admitted: “With such pressure on me I forced myself to return to the football wars . . . just four weeks after that fateful day in Chicago” (p. 136).

Grange was most forthcoming concerning his decision to play professionally. Uncharacteristically, he challenged the logic and motivation of those who opposed the professional game and defended his right to get paid for the work he did. He stood his ground against the likes of Amos Alonzo Stagg, Fielding Yost, and his beloved Zuppke, claiming that their opposition centered on the issue of money. Grange believed university officials resented that a star player could make more than his former coaches and that the professional game might one day rival the college game. Unlike his mentors, Grange had no problem calling college and professional football what it was, “big business,” and he had made a legitimate business decision when he turned professional.

More frequently, though, Grange’s humility prevented him from acknowledging his contribution to sport history. Though co-author Ira Morton marvels at Grange’s ability to remember “minute details of almost all the major and minor events of his life,” the book seldom ventures beyond simple description. Written in the fifties, the autobiography affirmed the belief that football built character, without questioning the game’s value. Thirty years later, the legendary Grange was more candid in *What a Game They Played*. Richard Whittingham’s book about the early days of the National Football League. Perhaps most frustrating for historians of sport is Grange’s failure to expand on his key role in the initial television coverage of football: we need to know more about the origins of the now pervasive union between sports

and television. Unfortunately, some 40 years after the first publication of *The Red Grange Story*, readers hoping to gain new insight into college football during the twenties and the early days of the professional sport will be disappointed.

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