

ROBINSON, RAY. *Rockne of Notre Dame: The Making of a Football Legend*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. xiii + 290. Illustrations, index. \$25.00 cb.

MARANISS, DAVID. *When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999. Pp. xiv + 541. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$26.00 cb.

Writing biography is a difficult task. Writing a biography of a football coach is difficult indeed. How does one determine the extent to which a coach is responsible for a team's success or failure? Most people agree that motivation is important in athletic success, but how important is the coach in generating that motivation and/or a blue print for victory. Some observers would argue that the team with the most talented players will usually win irrespective of the coach. In *Rockne of Notre Dame* and *When Pride Still Mattered*, Ray Robinson and David Maraniss, both journalists, provide biographies of two of the most revered coaches in American sports. Both writers acknowledge that myth usually helps transform athletes and coaches into legends, and wisely organize their works around the powerful myths that surround Rockne and Lombardi.

Robinson provides a straight forward account of Rockne's life from his birth in Norway to his death in a plane crash in 1931. He portrays Rockne as an innovator who used shock troops (substitutes) to soften up an opponent, expanded the concept of intersectional play through his scheduling, and became one of the first coaches to earn big money as a motivational speaker and commercial pitchman. Robinson, unlike Maraniss, focuses almost exclusively on Rockne's career in football. We learn very little about Rockne's private and family life except that the long hours he invested in football and commercial interests (like Lombardi) caused him to neglect his wife and children. Although Robinson's sources are more limited than those of Maraniss, more commentary on the private Rockne and his family would have been a welcome addition to the book.

Robinson discusses the various myths associated with Rockne, offers his own evaluation of their significance and validity, and challenges the reader to decide the issues for himself. In the case of Rockne's famous "Win One for the Gipper" locker room speech, one of the foundations of the Rockne legend, Robinson basically accepts the traditional story despite evidence provided by Murray Sperber and others that the Gipper yarn is tainted by fabrication and embellishment. Although Robinson correctly points out that Rockne and Gus Dorais are given too much credit for popularizing the forward pass, he generally credits most of the myths and stories that contribute to the Rockne legend. He acknowledges that Rockne was a "trimmer" in upholding NCAA rules and absolves him by pointing out that many other big name coaches did the same. His own narrative, however, suggests that Notre Dame was basically an "outlaw" school in the early 1920s when it came to admission standards and the recruitment and subsidization of athletes. Comparing Bob Zupke of Illinois with Rockne in terms of NCAA rules violations, as Robinson does, is like comparing a petty thief to bank robber. Robinson would have profited by using the 1929 Carnegie Report on intercollegiate athletics as a guide in terms of discussing illegal activities by various coaches and schools. He would have found that

Rockne and Notre Dame cheated rather blatantly, even under the standards of the time. This might have raised the question of how a supposed moral and motivational leader, Rockne, reconciled that role with the illegal activities (by NCAA standards) that he engaged in at South Bend in order to win football games. Robinson's book might have been more valuable if it had been grounded more firmly in the football history of the period.

Maraniss's biography of Lombardi reads like a novel and is well written, but is also very detailed and sometimes repetitious. We are told three or four times what snack Lombardi had in his easy chair after a grueling day of practice. Maraniss traces Lombardi's career by examining the forces which shaped his character and coaching skills such as his family, his Jesuit education at Fordham, and his tenure as an assistant under Army head coach Earl Blaik. The book is held together, in part, by focusing on a series of myths and coincidences about Lombardi's life which were important in elevating him from a very good football coach to legend by the end of the 1960s. Maraniss points out the importance of his being one of the Seven Blocks of Granite at Fordham, having one of Notre Dame's Four Horsemen as his college coach (Jim Crowley), and associating briefly with General Douglas MacArthur, among other things, as adding to the mystique about Lombardi once he became a winning coach in the National Football League (NFL).

Maraniss is fair in his portrait of Lombardi, showing the many sides of a complicated man. He is not above manipulating the evidence a bit, however, to make his case that Lombardi's motivational skills and coaching ability were largely responsible for his successful teams. Maraniss spends considerable time, for example, mocking the decrepit state of the Green Bay Packers before Lombardi arrived in 1959 and then heaping praise on him for instantly turning around the program. Only after the reader is awed by Lombardi's talent does Maraniss explain that Green Bay scout Jack Vainisi had rounded up exceptional talent for the new coach. Certainly Lombardi deserves credit for reversing the fortunes of the Packers in his first season as head coach, but how much credit is more difficult to determine.

Relying upon interviews with players thirty or more years after retirement can be risky. They tend to remember the good things and are unlikely to be anything but laudatory about a coach of their championship team(s), especially if he is a legend like Lombardi. Former Green Bay halfback Paul Hornung may have summarized the majority of football games with his remark about the Packers' 16-7 victory over the New York Giants in the 1962 NFL Championship game; he noted the Giants' extreme intensity, but explained, "We just had a better football team, that's all" (334). Both authors might have benefited from carefully studying the origins and development of football coaching. A good place to begin would be Robin Lester's *Stagg's University*, a book which neither cites.

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