

Book Reviews

MALTYBY, MARC S. *The Origins and Early Development of Professional Football*. Garland Studies In American Popular History and Culture Series. New York: Garland Publishing, 1997. Pp. 250. Notes, bibliography, short essay on sources, and index. \$75.00 lb.

A number of black holes have existed in academic sport history research. One such hole has been the history of professional football before the founding of the National Football League (NFL). Except for Thomas Jable's research that established that Pudge Heffelfinger who received \$500 from the Pittsburgh Athletic Club in 1892 to play against their rivals the Allegheny Athletic Association was the first paid football player, little research has been conducted on that topic by academic historians. Bob Carroll and the members of the Professional Football Research Association (PFRA) have published most of the good research on early professional football. Carroll, a prolific, professional, freelance writer, is the editor of *Coffin Corner*, the PFRA monthly newsletter, and numerous other PFRA publications. He and co-authors Bob Braunwart and Bob Gill have published at least 25 pamphlets or articles on early professional football, which represents the largest body of work on that subject.

Marc S. Maltby has mined the works of the PFRA researchers, the archives of the Professional Football Hall of Fame, newspaper accounts, and numerous secondary sources to write *The Origins and Development of Professional Football*. This slim volume, based on his Ohio University dissertation, traces the beginnings of football from the public schools of England through the development of American football in the colleges and athletic clubs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the founding of the NFL in Canton, Ohio, in 1920. Maltby focuses on the emergence of professional teams in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio during the period from 1895 through 1920.

Professional football began in the athletic clubs that blossomed in the United States in the late nineteenth century. By the late 1890s the western Pennsylvania clubs in Pittsburgh, Allegheny, Latrobe, and Greensburg were the powers of pro football. Clubs like the Pittsburgh Athletic Club desperate to win big games over rival clubs began to pay out-

standing outside players or "ringers" to ensure victory. However, by the turn of the century most clubs had to hire players to remain competitive. Ironically, many clubs would accuse their opponents of professionalism and cheating while continuing to secretly pay some of their own players. Unfortunately, the secret payments and the mercenary quality of the pros combined with the brutality of early football to give professional football an unsavory air that would hang over the game until well into the 1950s.

Fueled by the rivalry between Canton and Massillon the power in pro football shifted to eastern Ohio by 1905. Both teams began to recruit heavily and to pay exorbitant salaries. For example, Canton paid former Michigan All-American Willie Heston \$600 for one game and had a payroll estimated at \$3,000 a game. That payroll was double the receipts for the big Thanksgiving game. Other strong teams using less expensive, local talent during that era were the Shelby (Ohio) Blues, Hinkel's All-Stars (sponsored by a Cleveland, Ohio, liquor store), the Rochester (N.Y.) Jeffersons, and the Louisville (Kent.) Brecks, to name a few. In 1906 the huge expense of maintaining the super teams, extensive use of "ringers," and accusations of fixed games virtually destroyed pro football.

Strong teams developed in Cleveland, Columbus, Youngstown, and Akron (including The Silents, a team entirely of deaf players). More intelligent and stable management in Canton and Massillon helped create a resurgence in pro football just prior to World War I. Following the war, professional teams sprang up in the East and Midwest, including the Providence (R.I.) Steamrollers, the All-Buffalo (N.Y.), Detroit (Mich.) Heralds, Hammond (Ind.) Pros, and Minneapolis (Minn.) Marines. In August 1920 a group of the stronger pro teams met in Canton to form a league that they hoped would enforce player and game contracts and establish a salary cap. That league would become the NFL.

In his conclusions, Maltby attributes the development of pro football to a "search for order" as town teams attempted to retain fading small town identities in an increasingly more urban nation. He contends that pro football did not prosper because it could not achieve popularity in large cities as baseball did nor could it justify its existence by promoting wholesome values as college football did. However, the success of the 1920 season did show some promise of the game pro football would become.

Although the book does not uncover any new material nor develop any powerful thesis, Maltby has done a workmanlike job of synthesizing both new primary and existing secondary sources into a comprehensive academic study. Unfortunately, the writing style reads much like a dissertation with many long convoluted sentences and too many mundane pieces of information. The reader should have been told more about what Massillon, Canton, Akron, Latrobe, and Pittsburgh were like during the period, which could have suggested why they became hotbeds of pro football and other cities did not. Despite minor flaws, *The Origins and Early Development of Professional Football* was well researched and neatly fills a black hole in academic sport history knowledge.

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