

Arch Ward and his new Professional Football League

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While Arch Ward was sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, he organized a new professional football league to compete with the National Football League at the end of World War II. He not only lined up the owner-investors for the eight franchises in the All-America Conference but he also traveled around the country to military bases personally recruiting future coaches and players for the new league. For the team that came to be known as the Cleveland Browns, for example, he found the owner (Arthur B. McBride), the coach and general manager (Paul Brown), and the quarterback (Otto Graham).

Ward convinced Col. Robert R. McCormick, the eccentric editor and publisher of the *Tribune*, that it would be in the newspaper's interest for him to do this "on company time" and on the company's expense account while continuing to function as sports editor and continuing to oversee his daily column, "In the Wake of the News."

During the four seasons of the AAC - 1946 through 1949 - the *Tribune* acted as "house organ" for the new conference, providing the "promotional fundamentals" that Ward had said would be needed for it to succeed. Yet, one of the principal reasons why the AAC did not succeed was the failure on the field and at the gate of the Chicago franchise (the Chicago Rockets). Both Chicago clubs in the NFL - the Bears and the Cardinals (now in St. Louis) - happened to have exceptionally good teams during this period. When the AAC disbanded in 1950, three of its clubs - the Cleveland Browns, San Francisco Forty-Niners, and Baltimore Colts - were absorbed into the NFL.

Arch Ward saw himself as a maker as well as a recorder of sport news. As a promoter and generator of ideas, he used the power (and the news columns) of the *Tribune* to help shape the history of sports.

The author suggests these reasons for what must be remembered as the most audacious involvement by a newspaper in the big-money world of spectator sports:

First, the peculiar culture of Chicago, in which people who "do things" have always been held in high esteem.

Second, the understanding by the sub-editors that Colonel McCormick liked to see them emulating his own imperial style, to impress advertisers with *the* power of the *Tribune*. Consequently, almost nothing was unreasonable on *the Tribune* under Colonel McCormick's leadership, if it was something of which he approved.

And, finally, the promotional zeal, organizational talent, sense of showmanship, and access to the levers of newspaper power that made Arch Ward possibly the most influential of all newspaper sports editors.