

A SHORT HISTORY OF PLAYER LISTS

By Bob Carroll

The "I Did Not Play" article on page 7 got us thinking about all the Team Roster lists out there. We thought we'd try to make a little sense out of them.

ROGER TREAT: Roger was the first, publishing his encyclopedia for the first time back in 1950. It was a landmark book because no one had ever tried to identify the names, positions, and colleges of all the players in the NFL's first 30 years. But Treat wasn't really a researcher; he was a "gatherer." As such, he took the stuff researchers like George Calhoun, Edward Caswell, John Crelli, and those retired players he could contact and put it all together. There were a lot of guesses – and a LOT of mistakes. Treat continued with new editions until his death in 1969. Each one got a little better, but there were still too many errors to make it a valid source today.

PALMER: After Treat's daughter edited one new edition of the encyclopedia, Pete Palmer took over. Pete added some very interesting statistical tables, but made little change in the player rosters other than adding new ones for the years he was in charge.

NEFT-COHEN: David Neft and Dick Cohen began publishing their encyclopedia in the early 1970's. They added stats, heights, weights and ages. To do this, they started from scratch, checking each player anew. Many, MANY changes! Also they continued checking and re-checking, mainly through colleges and old newspapers. Again, each addition improved. If you're still looking at a 1970's edition, you should get a newer one. Despite the death of Dick Cohen, David Neft continues the work. He's perused several hundred newspapers, contacted hundreds of colleges, written, phoned – on and on. A new edition came out last year, but there'll be updates in the next. As of now, this is the only source the Coffin Corner uses or trusts for rosters – which is not to say it's perfect. One problem, for example, is that the Neft-Cohen gives the "use" name of a player which is not always his true name. How many Tom's, Dick's, or Harry's were actually named George?

THE OFFICIAL NFL ENCYCLOPEDIA, 4th Edition: A terrific book with all kinds of useful information. Its player roster, however, is not as accurate as Neft-Cohen (although better than Treat). Beau Riffenburgh edited the book and Jim Campbell worked on the rosters. Both deserve a tip of the hat.

TEAM ROSTERS IN MEDIA GUIDES: These are generally okay for the last 20-30 years. Very shaky for teams that were around earlier. I may be wrong, but I think some teams took their early information from Treat. Once in a while, you find a modern player listed who is not found in Neft-Cohen. My guess is that this means the player was on an active roster but didn't get into a game.

TOPP'S FOLLY: Richard Topp has been working on a player roster for PFRA for three years, with a lot of help from Tod Maher. When finished, it will list every pro team (U.S. and Canada, major or minor league) a player performed for. By agreement, Topp started with Neft-Cohen but he's also a world-class researcher himself. The great thing about this list is that you'll be able to push a button and get everyone who played for a team, or in a year, or was under 5-11, and so forth.

CHUCK'S NECROLOGY: Chuck Hershberger has been keeping a year's obit list for Oldtyme Baseball News and is putting together a similar football list. This became crucial when The Sporting News decided it had better things to do.

CARROLL'S DEATH LIST: Starting with a list of TSN obits supplied by Frank Phelps, I started putting together a death-date-and-place list for every NFL player I could find. Mostly it's been adding information from Pearce Johnson, Rich Bozzone, Mel Bashore, and Shawn Gray, as well as Topp, Maher, Hershberger and Neft. (I KNOW I left out a couple of names. Sorry!) Recently, I've begun expanding it to a birthdate-place & deathdate-place list. I irregularly send updates to Neft, Topp, Hershberger, and a few others. Primarily, I'm looking for pre-1960 players.

FOR THE CASUAL READER: If you happen to be on speaking terms with a pre-1960s player, I'd be beholdin' if you'd ask him where or when he was born and send it to me. Or, if you see an obit, send me the info. Better yet, make a copy and send that.

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FOR THE hardcore digger: If you really – REALLY – want to get involved, I can send you a print-out if you'll send me the postage. It's about a buck now, but the list keeps growing.

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