

Book Review:

PIGSKIN: The Early Years of Pro Football

By Robert W. Peterson
Oxford University Press (1997), 228 pg., \$25.00

Some day somebody will write the perfect book about the early years of football and cranks like me will become obsolete. Bob Peterson's *Pigskin* isn't perfect. Not quite. But it is the best and most accurate early history I've seen from a commercial publisher. Moreover, the few factual errors that it contains will be corrected in the paperback edition, I am told.

Peterson, a PFRA member, draws heavily on PFRA sources as well as works by members such as Marc Maltby, Beau Riffenburgh, Tom Jable, Bob Gill, and many others in detailing pro football's story from the days before Heffelfinger to the "Sudden Death" championship game of 1958. That helps him avoid most of the old apocryphal anecdotes that mislead us through most commercially published histories and take us to what *really* happened. He may error on how many minutes are in a half for a college game -- somehow he came up with 24 -- but he's solid when explaining the evolution of the NFL.

One of the book's strong points is that it doesn't get bogged down in minutia. For example, in writing PFRA's *The Tigers Roar*, I took 70 pages or so to explain why the famous Blondy Wallace fix of 1906 never happened. There may not be 70 people who care! Peterson sums the whole thing up in under a page and tells the Blondy Wallace-junkie where to look if he really wants the details.

Peterson, who's been writing for magazines for over 30 years, is a craftsman who tells his story smoothly, convincingly, and with enough true (or probably true) anecdotes to keep the reader turning those pages. I put off reading the latest Sue Grafton to read *Pigskin* first, and I was glad I did.

Definitely recommended.

-- Bob Carroll