

SHORT MAN -- LONG LEGACY

By Bob Carroll

Probably the least-known enshrinee of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Hugh L. "Shorty" Ray (9/21/1884 at Highland Park, IL-9/16/1956) was National Football League Supervisor of Officials from 1938 through 1952. He never played or coached a down in the NFL, but he deserves much credit for the success the pro game achieved by the 1950s.

Shorty attended the University of Illinois but at 5'6" and 138 pounds was too small even by early standards to play varsity football. Intensely interested in sports, he turned to officiating. For more than 30 years he was an active official with the Big Ten. He was probably the only man ever to officiate in three major sports in the conference – football, basketball, and baseball.

In 1925, he organized the American Officials Organization to improve the quality of sports officiating. Among his useful innovations were conducting rules-interpretation seminars and forcing officials to submit written reports on each game they handled.

His greatest contributions were in football. The National Federation of High School Athletic Associations asked him to write its football rule book in 1929. Ray's code was so successful that it became the standard for all football rulebooks.

In 1938, he became Technical Advisor on Rules and Supervisor of Officials for the NFL. Until then, with only a few exceptions, pro football simply used college rules. A master of detail, Ray instituted the practice of touring the training camps to explain and clarify the rules. He traveled to countless games and practices, armed with a stopwatch, clipboard, binoculars, pencils and charts, studying the way the game is played and always seeking ways to improve it.

Many of his discoveries have become common football knowledge. Among them: the faster a game is played, the more time it consumes; more plays are run in the second quarter than in the first and more in the fourth quarter than any other; and a team can actually lose because it plays "too fast" (the subject of a famous bet between Ray and Green Bay coach Curly Lambeau).

No doubt his most important achievement was in improving the caliber of officiating in the league. It was his proudest boast that when he began only a few NFL officials could score 95 on a written test of rules with the book open beside them. When he retired in 1952, all of them could score better than 95 without using the book.

Bibliography: Mike Rather and Don Smith, *Their Deeds And Dogged Faith*, Balsam Press: New York, 1984. Howard Roberts, *The Story Of Pro Football*, Rand McNally: New York, 1953. Beau Riffenburgh, *The Official NFL Encyclopedia*, NAL Books: New York, 1986.