

SHOOTING STARS:

THE RISE AND FALL OF BLACKS IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

by Gerald R. Gems

American culture faced a difficult period of transition during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Civil War had shredded any figment of national unit and Reconstruction had failed to bring about an assimilation of the emancipated slaves into the mainstream culture. A growing urban-industrial complex continued to transform traditional American values and lifestyles. From the 1880's to 1920 foreigners flocked to American shores in search of opportunity and the promise of a better life. Europeans, as well as black migrants from the American South, filled northern cities and industrial labor forces. Production soared as cheap labor proved a significant contribution to the growth of American commerce and to the United States' emergence as a world power; but the American ascendance was not without problems. The influx of alien cultures and the overwhelming numbers of immigrants challenged American society with new languages, religions and value systems, and with their alternative customs and institutions as well.

Progressive reformers confronted a host of social ills emanating from the urban, industrial and foreign elements with programs designed to instill traditional American middle-class values among the disparate groups. Such reforms were intended to bring a consensus to the American culture by educating children in city parks and playgrounds, as well as in the public school systems. Sport figures prominently in the Progressives' strategy to attain physical and moral improvement. Robust physical activity, it was believed, strengthened will power and left little time for the immoral temptations of the city.

Within this ideological framework, football proved ideally suited as an example of the "rugged individualism" needed to confront societal ills. Despite excesses that led to deaths, injuries, and charges of brutality during the decades that flanked the turn of the century, the game witnessed phenomenal growth as a spectator sport on college campuses. The reasons for the popularity of football within the general sports boom are not altogether clear, but the inherent physical contact and support of such national leaders as President Theodore Roosevelt lent credence to the virtues of strength and ruggedness. In these characteristics, combined with those of precision and teamwork that were necessary for success, football symbolized the prized middle-class values of vitality, efficiency and order in a game perceived to be uniquely American. This element of nationalism and the aggressive nature of the game characterized American society during the 1890s and may account for its mass appeal in a decade when baseball, which claimed the same qualities and characteristics, was foundering amidst internecine quarrels and affronts to public mortality.

Drinking, gambling, and unsportsmanlike play characterized "America's national game" during the decade; but progressive reformers found value in its assimilative potential for foreigners. Baseball was seen as a visual medium of communication which depicted American values to those unfamiliar with the American language and way of life. While all other ethnic groups might avail themselves of the benefits of organized baseball, blacks had been excluded from the professional game by the 1890's.

White Americans had not yet decided how blacks were to fit into their society, but they were more willing to accept the ideology of the black leader, Booker T. Washington, in his Atlanta Compromise speech of 1893. Washington espoused an attitude of self-sufficiency and self-help for blacks while adopting white culture and white institutions. That doctrine of separate but equal was legalized by the Supreme Court in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson in 1896. The court's decision only reinforced established practices in the Southern states and spawned hundreds of Jim Crow laws to institutionalize the separation of the races.

Unlike professional baseball, however, college football provided at least the appearance of a true democracy. Black players appeared on interscholastic teams throughout the Progressive Era. The Amherst teams of 1891-93 included William Henry Lewis and William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson. Lewis, the son of ex-slaves, served as team captain in 1891 and is generally considered to be the first black collegiate football player. He continued to play as a law student at Harvard, and was the first black to earn All-America honors, as a center in 1892 and 1893. Jackson earned the same status as a

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halfback. Lewis returned to Harvard as the line coach in 1898 and both players went on to distinguished careers in public service as shining examples of the virtues of rugged individualism.

Although Lewis and Jackson were the most prominent, other blacks played at northern institutions and all-black teams were fielded by the segregated schools of the South. George Flippen played halfback at the University of Nebraska in 1892-93, Joseph H. Lee was a Harvard tackle in 1896, George M. Chadwell played end for Williams from 1897 to 1899, and William Washington starred at Oberlin, an Ohio school, from 1897 to 1899. Matthew W. Bullock was a standout end for Dartmouth from 1901 to 1903. He became the first black head coach at a college, serving Massachusetts Agricultural College in that role in 1904 and again in 1907-08. He later attained prominence as an educator and attorney. Another black, William H. Craighead, played for Massachusetts Agricultural from 1901 to 1905 and captained the 1905 team. Numerous other blacks competed on college football teams during the inaugural decade of the twentieth century, and both Robert Marshall of Minnesota and Edward Gray of Amherst earned All-American honors, in 1905-06 and 1908, respectively.

It was during the last decade of the nineteenth century that the advent of professional football occurred. Although the practice was possibly in effect for some time, the first known case of professionalism occurred in 1892 when a Pittsburgh athletic club hired Pudge Heffelfinger, the most dominant collegiate player of the period, to perform against their local rivals. The success of such a policy proved obvious, as Heffelfinger caused a fumble and ran it in for the only score.

The prestige and the financial gain garnered from enormous bets on the game engendered similar recruitments by teams throughout the region. By 1903 Pennsylvania teams had formed a "National League." A loose-knit organization of teams in the northeast region of the state formed the amateur "Ohio League" the same year. The Massillon Tigers hired four Pittsburgh professionals to insure the championship against the East Akron team, thus bringing the professional version of the game to Ohio. Within two years professionalism became firmly entrenched, as Massillon pros went undefeated in 1904, and Canton organized a professional team in 1905.

In addition to the distinct regionalism of professional football at the turn of the century, it differed from the collegiate game in its cross-class appeal. College players, and presumably the majority of their spectators, came from the middle class, which supplied the clientele for institutions of higher learning. Football provided one medium for generating interest and income for growing colleges and universities. Professional football was less class conscious in its focus or in its recruitment. While most of the early professionals were inducted from those same college ranks to play for middle-class athletic clubs, the Ohio League teams sought the best players based solely on ability rather than social status. Among these players were two blacks. Charles Follis, the first known black pro football player, was a halfback for the Shelby Blues from 1904 to 1906, and Charles "Doc" Baker played for Akron from 1906 to 1908. Northeastern Ohio provided fertile ground for the growth of professionalism. The 1906 season brought on escalating salaries, raiding of college players, and charges of a gambling "fix," all of which gave the pro teams a disreputable image and fostered a decline in the professional system until the close of World War I. Although competition continued, most teams had to be content to struggle along with local talent. In the 1911 season, however, "Doc" Baker returned to play halfback with the Akron Indians and Henry McDonald, long thought to be the first black pro, was paid as a halfback with the Oxford, New York Pros in a circuit that developed in the western part of that state. He continued to play for three different New York teams until 1920. In 1915, the Canton Bulldogs hired Gideon (alias "Charlie") Smith, a Michigan A&M lineman, to play tackle in their November 28th game. He later became a physical education professor at Hampton Institute in Virginia.

Despite such apparent success stories, blacks had come to realize their isolated status in American society prior to World War I and proceeded to form their own social, political and economic institutions, modeled on those of whites. Sport was no exception, as blacks organized YMCAs and baseball leagues of their own. Football, unlike other commercial sport forms such as professional baseball or boxing, seemed alone in its failure to draw the color line. This might be attributed to football's lack of administrative cohesion, but when entrepreneurs finally succeeded in imposing a formal organizational structure on professional football, black athletes played a prominent role within the system. This particular anomaly is even more significant when one considers the formation of the National Football League in its historical context.

In 1915 Jack Cusack, manager of the Canton Bulldogs, hired Jim Thorpe to play for his team. The signing of an international athletic figure drew national attention to the small Ohio town and led to a resur-

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gence of the Ohio League. Other teams scurried to gather the services of athletes to counter Thorpe. Knute Rockne and a number of Notre Dame players became familiar faces (under assumed names) on Midwestern gridirons in the ensuing seasons as players' salaries soared. Interstate games became more common as Ohio teams began to compete with teams in Indiana and an established semipro circuit in the Chicago area. The Hammond, Indiana payroll reached \$20,000 in 1919 as football became a considerable financial enterprise.

While pro football suffered through its infancy, the migration of rural Southern blacks to the urban industrial centers of the North created competition for jobs and urban space. The consequent social stress produced open strife in the summer of 1919, as Chicago erupted in racial violence that resulted in 38 deaths. Despite the evident turmoil between the races, professional football promoters sought the best talent, regardless of color. Robert "Rube" Marshall, the All-American end at Minnesota, was signed by the Rock Island (Illinois) Independents at the age of 39. Even more remarkably, he continued to play in the NFL with three other teams through the 1927 season, when he was 47.

The Akron Indians hired Fritz Pollard, a Brown University All-American in 1916, as player-coach in 1919. In an interview conducted during 1978, Pollard indicated that the Chicago outburst was not an isolated incident of racial conflict. He gave accounts of widespread racist incidents at Brown, the 1916 Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, and at Akron. "Jackie Robinson had an easy time compared to me.... At the kickoff they'd come after me even if the ball wasn't kicked to me. I learned how to 'ball up' on the ground and absorb the blows."

Despite Pollard's reminiscences to the contrary, white entrepreneurs were both hopeful and optimistic in their promotion of pro football. They were on the verge of a great popular movement and expected to capitalize on it. The 1920s would witness the phenomenon of mass spectatorship at athletic events and the media provided ever-increasing support for sport in general. Team managers and promoters were mostly small businessmen who saw a chance for increasing their profits during the boom times which followed the war.

The interstate football games of 1919 had brought together a group of such men who were interested in consolidating the loose association into a more formal structure to alleviate perennial problems. Those problems were essentially the same as the ones facing professional baseball a half-century before -- escalating salaries that decreased profits and players jumping teams for better offers. If football was to be successful, promoters would also have to address the factors that gave professionalism such a desultory image -- the use of collegians and gambling. The Black Sox baseball scandal of 1919 had begun to cast a pallor over all professional sports.

It was in such an atmosphere that the American Professional Football Association (later renamed the National Football League) was born on September 17, 1920 at Canton, Ohio. Team representatives met to address the problems of salary, team jumping, scheduling, organization, and the signing of players to thwart attempts by rival leagues in New York and the Midwest.

The scheduling format was truly associational in nature. In their attempts to decrease costs, teams played mostly local games against nearby league and nonleague opponents. The Akron Pros, coached and led by the scoring of Fritz Pollard, were "voted" the champions of 1920, with a record of 8-0-3.

Pollard was joined by another black, an All-American end from Rutgers in 1917 and 1918, Paul Robeson, whom he had met as an opponent in college. ~~Robeson spent his Sundays split between the Hammond and Akron teams in 1920,~~ but he performed solely for Pollard and the Akron Pros in 1921. Both Pollard and Robeson were joined by Duke Slater, an All-American tackle from the University of Iowa, on the 1922 Milwaukee Badgers team.

In addition to Slater, four other black players appeared in the league during the next two years: Jay Mayo "Inky" Williams started with the Hammond team in 1922 and was chosen an All-Pro the following year. John Shelburne also played with Hammond in 1923, as did Edward "Sol" Butler. Dick Hudson joined the league with the Minneapolis Marines in 1923, quit in 1924, and returned the following year with Hammond.

Robeson left the game in 1922 to devote more time to his burgeoning theatrical career, and Shelburne took a teaching job after only one season. Butler played for Hammond in 1923, and again in 1926, while Williams played until 1926 with four different teams. Pollard continued to play with Hammond in 1923-24

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and Providence in 1925, before ending his career with Akron in 1926. Slater enjoyed the greatest longevity of the lot, playing nine seasons with the Rock Island Independents, the Milwaukee Badgers, and the Chicago Cardinals, where he was a perennial All-Pro selection through 1930.

After "Rube" Marshall's retirement in 1927, Slater was the only black in the NFL in 1928-29. In 1930, David Myers, a black back from New York University, appeared briefly as a guard with the Staten Island Stapletons. Slater, who had opened a Chicago law office in 1929, retired after the 1931 season. He was later to become a municipal court judge in that city.

The 1920's, the "Golden Age of Sport," had also witnessed the golden age of blacks in the NFL. That decade had produced a parade of black talent. The next would confirm the color line that baseball had established so long before.

A decade after its inception the NFL had not attained a great measure of stability. Underfinanced franchises often suspended operations and most teams still represented areas that had a limited spectator pool. Only the signing of Red Grange by the Chicago Bears in 1925 and the consequent barnstorming tour generated the same kind of interest, spectators, and revenue enjoyed by the college game. This too was short-lived, as Grange and his agent, "Cash and Carry" Pyle, embarked on their own enterprise, the rival American Football League, the next year.

The Depression brought greater financial woes to shaky franchises, and as attendance decline at games, so did teams in the NFL. Its usual complement of 12 teams had been trimmed to 8 by 1932, with 3 teams in the New York area, 2 in Chicago, another struggling in Boston, and one each in Green Bay and Portsmouth, Ohio.

During the early years of the Depression two other black players made an appearance in the league. Joe Lillard was banned from college football after his sophomore year at the University of Oregon when it was revealed that he spent his off-season as a professional basketball and baseball player. Considered by some to be the best sophomore athlete ever produced on the West Coast, he was quickly signed by the Chicago Cardinals in 1932.

Newspaper accounts indicate that Lillard was an immediate success, at least on the field. The Chicago Tribune called Lillard the Cardinals' triple-threat "star," as the lowly Cards managed to tie the mighty Bears in an intracity rivalry on November 9, 1932. The following week the Boston Globe's sports page headline read "Negro Star of Chicago Eleven Thrills 18,000 Fans by Dazzling Runs as Cardinals Down Braves." The sub-heading reiterated that he had "starred" in the game, and the story stated that "The Windy City club brought with them a Negro of startling ability... one who could run, pass, and kick." A picture of a key Lillard pass, as well as an account of an extra point and his 44-yard punt return were also included. It was a dismal showing for the Boston Braves, a team that had recently been acquired by George Preston Marshall.

Joe Lillard was not as successful off the field, however. The following week he was suspended for the remainder of the season. The Boston Globe stated that he missed a team meaning and was fined \$50, a sum which seems unduly harsh. A week later he was suspended by the Cards' coach. The Chicago Defender, a black newspaper, took a different perspective. "The suspension of Lillard by the Cardinals is traceable directly to the disfavor he ran into with his coach, Jack Chevigny, former ace at Notre Dame, you know, and Chevigny may or may not have been prejudiced against the flashy back."

Lillard did return to the Cards and further acclaim in the 1933 season, however. In a close 7-6 Cards' loss to Portsmouth the Chicago Tribune proclaimed him an "outstanding threat" and the star of the game as he scored the Cards' only points. Headlines the next week stated the "Lillard Scores With Fists and Toe" in a game in which he was ejected for fighting after kicking the winning field goal. It proved to be the team's only win of the season.

Lillard accounted for all the points again the next week, as the Cardinals lost a close 12-9 game with the Bears. In addition to a field goal, Lillard returned a punt 51 yards for a touchdown, one of six returns totaling 110 yards. The Tribune concluded that the "Card attack centered around Joe Lillard, the colored athlete who can do everything with the best of 'em." Curiously, Lillard did not start any of the three remaining games, but accounted for the team's only points during that period as a substitute. He played his last game on December 3, 1933.

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During that last season Lillard was joined by another black, Ray Kemp, who played for the Pittsburgh Pirates. Kemp, an All-American honorable mention as a guard for Duquesne University, was invited by Art Rooney to play for his semipro team in 1932. When Rooney won an NFL franchise the following year, Kemp became a full-time pro, albeit briefly. After three games, Ray Kemp was released. A Pittsburgh Courier story of November 14, 1933 claims that he was placed on the reserve list and quit, although fans had rated him highly. Art Rooney stated that he was limited to 22 players and preferred to keep the more experienced players.

Kemp's recollections are somewhat different. He had received a tremendous ovation from the home crowd of 25,000 upon entering his first NFL game on September 20. His distinctive style of defensive play (an upright stance and use of his hands, similar to today's linebackers) was more appreciated by the fans than by his teammates. This was particularly true of player-coach Jap Douds, who played the same position. Kemp claimed that the coach had a lot of cronies on the team. Kemp discussed his play with his former college coach, ex-Notre Dame great Elmer Layden, who assured him that he saw the game and Kemp "was tremendous."

On September 27 the Pirates played the Chicago Cardinals and Joe Lillard. Lillard's first-half exploits led Coach Douds to exclaim "We have to stop that nigger!" in his half-time oration, a remark for which he later apologized. Lillard was ejected from the game in the second half for fighting, and the Pirates went on to win by a single point. Kemp explained that "Joe [Lillard] was an angry young man and the players on the field knew what would set him off."

After another loss Kemp received notice of his release by mail. In a talk with Art Rooney, the owner revealed that he felt Kemp was as good a player as he had, and that he had strong personal feelings for him, but could not, or at least would not, overrule his coach. When the Pirates lost 5 of their next 7 games Kemp was recalled and started the next game against the Giants. After arriving in New York he was told that he could not reside at the team hotel and had to make arrangements at the Harlem YMCA. It was Kemp's last game in the NFL. Neither he nor Joe Lillard were offered contracts by any NFL team in 1934. It was to be twelve long years before another black player would get the chance to exhibit his skills in the National Football League.

The owners offered a number of reasons for such a travesty, but none were very plausible. One excuse was familiar; it echoed major-league baseball's claim that there simply weren't any qualified blacks to be found. This contention could be dismissed as pure fantasy for a number of reasons. Historically, a number of black players had starred in the NFL in the preceding decade and some had demonstrated their credentials with All-Pro status.

In addition, Joe Lillard was still a young man whose skills were hardly deficient. He played professional baseball and basketball with black teams in the off-season, forming his own pro basketball team in 1934 when his contract was not renewed. Lillard continued to play professional football in the minor leagues, the only avenue open to blacks after 1933. He spent the 1934 season playing with a Los Angeles area team, moved to New York in 1935 to play on Fritz Pollard's Brown Bombers, and continued to play in the East for a number of years. In 1938 he was listed as an All-League selection for the Clifton, New Jersey Bears of the American Football Association. While the league did not carry the status of the NFL, its level of play can be estimated by the large number of former and future NFL players who competed on its teams.

Club owners also stated that there weren't any black players being recruited by major schools, such as Notre Dame and the Ivy League colleges. While it was true that a dozen black stars were named to All-American teams during the period after the ban, all of them played for white institutions in large metropolitan areas where they were well-known and publicized.

Kenny Washington, an All-American back at UCLA in 1939, was a celebrated case. Jimmy Powers, sports editor of the New York Daily News, took up his cause in urging both the Giants and Yankees football teams to sign him. Sam Balter, a sports commentator, was more direct in asking the owners if there was a league policy to exclude blacks, the only apparent reason for the failure of any team to draft Washington.

The NFL draft was initiated in 1936, and Art Rooney has contended that teams simply lacked the financial resources for scouting and tended to draft from within their own region. In 1936, however, the Pittsburgh team had 9 selections; 3 of their first 6 selectees played for schools beyond the Mississippi River, one as

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far away as Stanford. All other teams chose between 4 and 8 of their 9 picks from regions well beyond their own geographical areas. In 1937 the teams chose between 5 and 9 of their 10 picks from regions well beyond their own, the Pirates choosing 7 players from the West or Southwest. Only one of their draftees could be considered local. The pattern was consistent for all teams in succeeding years, and selections indicate that owners had no reservations about drafting white players from small schools, which they assumed did not prepare blacks with the necessary skills.

Football team owners, like their baseball counterparts, could not evince the argument that spring training camps, necessarily located in the South, would place an undue hardship on black players. Instead, they formulated a variation, as explained by Ozzie Simmons, a black back at Northwestern in the 1930's and later a star in the American Football Association.

'The owners contend that the reason the colored stars are not playing in the National Football League is because there are too many southern players in the league. I had the pleasure of playing with the Patterson [New Jersey] team in the American Association for two years. And not only did the southern boys block for me, they even fought for me. The players have a job to do -- WIN GAMES -- and they are out to do their best, because that's what they are getting paid for. And if they can't produce, they are fired.'

Another theory stated that owners would have to protect blacks from mass attacks, gang tackling, and maiming; to which a number of played replied. Pollard stated that "I played 20 years with whites and against them and was never hurt; and I weighed only 160 pounds, nor was Inky Williams ever hurt."

John Shelburne claimed that "our white teammates, many from the South, didn't resent our presence on the team. It was a lesson in fellowship that most of them were glad to have. They got the type of contact never open to them before and liked it. Remember that all of us were college graduates and thus on the same educational level. Pollard, Williams and Shelburne played in the early 1920's, but Duke Slater played throughout the decade -- and without a helmet!"

Joe Lillard's response was "Why, I never got hurt among the pros like I did when I was in college. It's a business in the league, and they let you be.... I don't think I have ever been hit as hard by a major leaguer as I was struck by three members of a Jersey semipro team...."

The owners' contentions notwithstanding, the true explanation probably lies rooted within the social context of the period. The Depression left most people with little money to spend on amusements. At that time, professional football could be considered little more than that. The college game was still firmly entrenched as a superior product, and baseball was still the national game. Pro football had started to shed its small-town image, but had not yet discarded all of its negative connotations. Many owners were avid gamblers and the pro game was still in a quest for respectability.

George Halas hired a sportswriter to insure a favorable press.

Other sports editors were giving us serious consideration, too. One wrote: "Pro football is building a new class of sports fan, people who work hard on weekdays. The majority were deprived of a college education. The patronage of college sports is confined almost exclusively to students and alumni. Naturally, the uncollegiate element sought an outlet for its curiosity which has developed into enthusiasm."

Football, therefore, had to gain respectability and the support of its working-class clientele.

The Depression took both an economic and psychological toll on white Americans. The traditional male breadwinner could no longer support his family, and blacks were often perceived as threats, or at least competitors for jobs. At the height of the crisis a new president took office. His New Deal policies, given even greater emphasis by his wife's advocacy of liberal causes, seemed to many a threat to the capitalist system. Labor conflict and radical militancy would soon result in the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, which made an active effort to recruit and serve blacks.

Amidst such an atmosphere the NFL held an historic meeting in 1933. Three new owners joined the league and sweeping changes were effected in both the league structure and its rules in an attempt to divorce the pro game from its college influence and help it achieve its own identity. The NFL had been playing by college rules since its inception. Apparently, the owners added some unwritten rules as well.

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The black press reported that

George Preston Marshall, owner of the Boston Redskins franchise, George Halas, owner of the Chicago Bears franchise, and Art Rooney, who owned the Pittsburgh Pirates, had a 'gentlemen's agreement' concerning the exclusion of black football players. Joseph F. Carr, league president, sanctioned the ban. Marshall publicly declared that his team was "the team of the South," and he did not mean Southern blacks. Football was seen as a soon-to-be rival of baseball. Millions of dollars were to be made, and historically when vast sums of money are involved, blacks are either placed at the end of the line or taken off the line altogether. In the midst of the Depression it was considered unseemly for a black man to earn more money than a white man, whatever the field of operation....

Such an assertion would explain why both Kemp and Lillard were beset with problems throughout their final season. It might also suggest that reasons were manufactured for the "benching" of both players during the year, which provided a rationale for not renewing their contracts. Lillard was involved in at least two fistfights for which he was ejected from games. Ray Kemp stated that "it wasn't long before I became aware of the fact that professional football too had its version of racism on both local and national levels."

Among the three accused owners, Halas was a charter member, while Rooney and Marshall were new initiates. The other newcomer was Bert Bell of the Philadelphia Eagles. Charles Bidwill was the owner of the Chicago Cardinals, and responsible for the release of Joe Lillard.

Bert Bell would later effect great changes as the commissioner of the league, but it is doubtful that he carried much stature in 1933. While the possibility of his influence cannot be ruled out, he was only a part-owner of the Eagles at that time and his importance would seem to be limited.

Charges of racism would not seem to be warranted in the cases of Rooney or Bidwill. It was Rooney who personally recruited Kemp for his team, and Kemp's stated impressions of the man indicate a sincerity that has been consistent throughout his lifetime. Likewise, Bidwill was the one who had employed Lillard in the first place. If either or both acquiesced in such an agreement their motivations were probably not of a racist nature. Rooney was entering the league as a junior member, and in such a situation might be hard pressed to present any opposition even if he were so inclined.

Bidwill had a longstanding friendship with George Halas. He was reputed to have helped finance the Bears' move to Chicago in 1921, and was possibly a part-owner as well. He purchased the Cardinals in 1929, but remained enamored with the Bears, never missing a game, even when his own team played simultaneously in Chicago. It is likely that Bidwill and Halas voted as a bloc on any manner.

Halas presents a greater enigma. As a baseball player in the Yankees' farm system he met and maintained a lifelong friendship with Ty Cobb, an ardent racist. In his autobiography, Halas maintained that he tried to recruit Paul Robeson for his first professional team, and later honored Duke Slater as a "great player." He unsuccessfully sought league permission to sign Kenny Washington in 1939; and he was the first to draft a black quarterback, Willie Thrower, in 1953. Halas also enjoyed a close relationship with Gale Sayers in his later life.

While Halas's autobiography was written with the advantage of hindsight and reflection, it cannot be dismissed altogether. Halas was, after all, a charter member of the league. As one whose team had the greatest stability throughout years of transition, he had always maintained considerable power in all league affairs. Had he been so inclined he could have moved for the exclusion of blacks long before 1933. Given his relationship with Charley Bidwill he most certainly would have counseled him against signing Lillard in 1932 after Duke Slater had retired the previous year.

George Preston Marshall's racial attitudes were well-known. He adamantly refused to integrate his team until 1962, despite its dwelling in the league cellar, and long after the other teams had desegregated their rosters. Even at that point, Marshall was pressured to do so by the federal government, which threatened to withhold funding for his new stadium in Washington, D.C. if he did not comply.

It was Marshall who submitted the reorganization plan at the 1933 meeting, which was seconded by Halas, and it is this relationship that seems to be most central to the issue. They had first met as owners of fledgling pro basketball teams in 1926. The relationship has been characterized as a close but stormy one. Marshall's wife described it accordingly. "It seems that at their first meeting, Halas and George

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were drawn together. Each had a peculiarity, a certain imperfection, hateful in the one which proved fascinating to the other.”

In the 1937 championship game between the two teams in Chicago the two owners nearly came to blows on the field. Afterward Marshall castigated his wife for her derogatory remarks about Halas, claiming him to be his best friend. It was Halas who had assisted Marshall in signing Sammy Baugh for the Redskins, the cornerstone of the team's success from 1937 onward. Marshall's antagonistic remarks after the Redskins' early-season victory over the Bears in 1941 resulted in Halas's retaliatory 73-0 decimation of Marshall's team in the championship rematch that year. Such incidents are exemplary of the relationship.

Marshall was a showman and promoter, as well as an entrepreneur. Perhaps influenced by his wife, a Hollywood starlet before their marriage in 1936, he introduced the first marching band to pro football. In 1933 he hired William “Lone Star” Dietz as coach and three other Indian players from the Haskell Indian Institute to publicize the team's name change from Braves to Redskins. Dietz wore a headdress and players were required to don war paint on game days.

Neither Marshall nor Halas could have been enthused by the way Joe Lillard embarrassed their teams with his stellar play, as described by the newspaper accounts. While one man would not upset the balance of power within the league, particularly one with the lowly Cardinals, Lillard's performance exacerbated Marshall's problems in Boston. He had enraged Bostonians by raising ticket prices while sales were still in progress on opening day. Clannish Boston sportswriters looked unkindly on his alien ownership of the team thereafter, and perhaps aware of his racial attitudes, reveled in Lillard's performance. Marshall's experience in that city caused him to lose a large sum of money and brought about the relocation to Washington in 1937.

Key figures in the exclusion of blacks remained reticent in discussing their actions during the intervening years. We do know, however, that George Preston Marshall submitted a reorganization plan for the league at the owners' meeting in 1933. It may have included an unwritten recommendation for the exclusion of black players. George Halas, whose influence in league matters was always substantial, may have provided the necessary support. Had Halas been motivated by purely racial attitudes, he had ample opportunity to employ the policy in the years preceding that meeting. He probably respected Marshall's business acumen, and in a quest for respectability among the working class, perceived it as a sound business decision along with the other changes proposed by Marshall to increase fans' interest. Halas was always quick to grasp changing times, a mark of his longevity in a transitional association.

Other owners, often described as members of an Irish Catholic club, supported, or at least acquiesced in their approval. A missing link in such an analysis is Joe Carr, commissioner of the NFL. Carr had been serving a primary leadership role since his election to the league presidency in 1925. While not a “czar” in the mold of Judge Landis, the baseball commissioner, he obviously played a role, the significance of which is unknown.

From 1934 to 1946 blacks had no recourse but to play in football's minor leagues. UCLA stars Kenny Washington, Woody Strode and Jackie Robinson earned a living in the Pacific Coast League. Although the strength of the league varied widely in any given year, the Los Angeles Bulldogs enjoyed a 5-4-3 record against traveling NFL teams between 1937 and 1939. Washington was the main attraction, but the caliber of other black athletes in the league was demonstrated when Mel Reid, the Oakland Giants' back, was selected as most valuable player. It was probably little consolation to Washington and Strode that they were the first two blacks signed by the NFL in 1946.

A number of factors culminated in the desegregation of professional sports in 1946, the year in which both baseball and football dropped the color line. Labor activism and the formation of black rights groups increased opportunities starting in the 1930's. World War II brought greater integration of the races and Eleanor Roosevelt's support gained publicity for minority causes. The ideological focus of the war for democracy presented a stark paradox to the reality of life for black Americans. A Detroit race riot in 1943 made that point dramatically.

After the war the G.I. Bill provided entrance to higher education for many black veterans; and 1947 marked the first appearance of a black football player on a southern campus. Charles Pierce, of Harvard, was accorded the dubious distinction when his team played the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. Black participation in college athletics outside the South and successes in other arenas, such as boxing and the Olympic Games, had helped to mask the severity of the problem and the extent of discrimination

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in American society. The campaign of black journalists for the integration of sport focused on major-league baseball as the bastion of white supremacy. It was baseball that still symbolized America's character in 1946. Despite the apparent fulfillment of black hopes in Jackie Robinson, true integration of the American society would be a long, gradual process.

That process had started in professional football as early as 1904 and gradually increased through the 1920's. It was inexplicably curtailed after 1933, to be resumed in 1946. For George Preston Marshall, the process was not inevitable. He acceded begrudgingly, finally obtaining Bobby Mitchell, the Redskins' first black player, in 1962. Mitchell promptly led the league in pass receptions and the Redskins back to respectability. The experience, however, may have been devastating to Marshall. Suffering from an illness, he died shortly thereafter.