

What would a Coffin Corner be without a Beattie Feathers article? In a story that has more chapters than the Sigma Chi's, we'll give Mark Purcell the almost-final word; but remember, the opinions expressed are his own and do not reflect those of the management.

FEATHERS -- AGAIN!

By Mark Purcell

The non-statistical readers of the CC may by now be Feathers-ed out on the great Thousand Yard (1934) issue. If, however, the reader can indulge my special interest in the question, I think anybody who read the editor's original pro-Feathers He Did Do It piece (May-June) and my anti-Feathers No He Didn't (July-August), and then uses his head or the nearest computer on the generous spread of stats supplied by me, the editor, and David Neft, can see we are closing in on an accurate season figure for Beattie in 1934. For starters, we can now make two conclusions on the specific questions that have always bothered statisticians:

THE BLIP: Mr. Seymour Siwoff of the Elias Sports Bureau once said in a printed interview what bothered him about Beattie's yardage figure was the length of time (13 years) it took someone to break it, which he felt was a statistical anomaly. But the figures Neft has recovered for us apparently retain the blip. As I, an anti-Featherite, compute them below, Beattie will go over 900 yards and the closest successors to him in the next twelve years are 830 by Leemans in 1936 and 832 by Van Buren in 1945. It may help reassure us that it took O.J. ten years to knock off Jim Brown's mark and Dickerson eleven years to pass O.J. Probably the real explanation was the pre-war demand on the old single-wing tailback, usually the team's star rusher, to double up and do the passing with many of his offensive attempts. Van Buren was a straight power runner out of the T, something like a Feathers but with more size and more rush attempts.

THE AVERAGE: On the other hand, the official 9.9 Feathers rush average, even more bothersome to some of us, is now shot to hell and can be written off. [*Ed. note: please, reread final sentence of introduction.*] Neft's verified stats for eight games total 76-623 yards. The old guides claimed three-game stats for the missing games total 40-373 yards. This gives Beattie 116-996 yards, both maximum, and 8.59 as his new official average. I tinker with both these figures below, mainly in an attempt to lower that still only partly credible average, but the basic point is, thanks to Neft, we are now disputing a 1934 running back who made 900 yards UP and averaged 8.6 DOWN. In the purely technical bar-room bet sense, Beattie did not we now know make his thousand yards, but if the totals used stand up to more sifting by Neft, (a) his yards figure will only be corrected by a totally insignificant 8 yards, and (b) we are rid for good of that stupid first-down-every-carry claim inflicted on us by the old guides.

We are even closer to the truth, in all probability, than a matter of missing verification on three games. Game IV, the official claim of 8-101 in a game where Beattie had an 82-yard TD dash, is obviously a conservative and acceptable official call. Game II (18-140), the yards though not the attempts are verified in a conservative way by a Wednesday (10/2/34) NFL publicity story in the Seattle *Times*. This gives the three leading rushers after two weeks of the 1934 season as: 188-Swede Hanson, 186-Warren Heller, 181-Feathers. Obviously, this is not a story designed to inflate Beattie, and the 181 total fits the official two-game claims made for Beattie.

That leaves Game III (14-132 claimed vs Brooklyn) which may be OK but where we get our first sign of bollixing in the midweek stats reports with the error of a listed 32 attempts for four games. This was done, we can see, by adding Beattie's rushes from Games I-II + IV (34) or I, III, IV (30) or in some other way eliminating Beattie's active game III. (The NY *Times* game report is statistically incompetent but indicates a big game for Feathers with Nagurski the No. 2 Bear runner.) So of II-III-IV we need only zero in on Game III, though, knowing Neft, he will only be satisfied with all three in his game bag.

My second problematic game in fact is not II or IV but X. I am bothered by that change from the old realistic 10-47 yards figure to 7-74 in what was a hard-hitting, low-scoring 10-9 game where Halas alternated six running backs in a finally successful effort to wear down the opponent Giants in the fourth quarter. Is there game report verification for that 7-74 yards replacing 10-47?

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The editor's original piece, which started this, raises several questions *Ed. note: Unfortunately, we are not able to print the remainder of Mr. Purcell's article. In the last CC, we stated we would not consider the conspiracy theory without some proof. Mr. Purcell suggests that NFL players were low paid in the 1930s and that somehow this proves that the league office would fake records.*

Perhaps we've read the wrong 20-or-30 newspapers, but we can find no publicity blitz of the proportion necessary to support an essentially libelous charge. Does anyone beside Mr. Purcell really believe the NFL would run the risk of possible exposure in a hoax at this time? Halas, Bell, Rooney, Marshall, Mara, etc. had their hands full getting a Depression-ridden fandom to lay down cash for a game that was just beginning to sniff the rarified air of legitimacy. Would they really toss it all in the pot just to fool the public into paying a few extra admissions to see a thousand-yard runner?

As to whether the league office made an honest mistake when they totalled up Feathers' figures, we agree that it was possible. But, unless we practice the "one-from-column-A and two-from-column-B" statistics that will prove whatever we want, we can only say what we really said in the first article: as nearly as we can tell, there is no conclusive evidence that Feathers did not gain 1,000 yards and the 9.6 average was within the confines of his verified performance.

Enough!