

The Imprints of American Football

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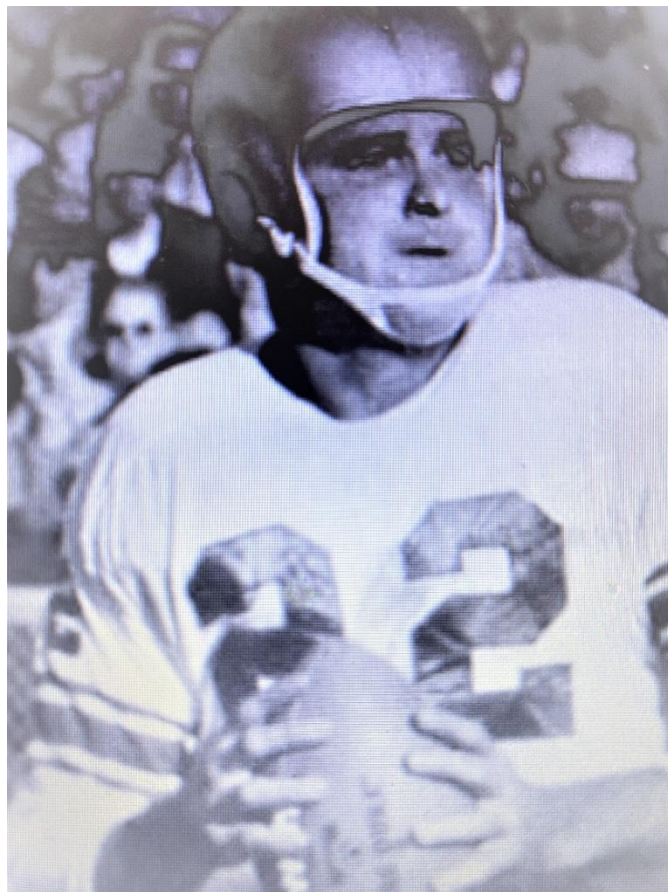
American Football is closely related to two ancient English sports: Rugby and Football “Soccer” in North America. The American Football is more properly called “gridiron football” because of the way vertical yard lines mark the field. It is also the way the game was played as a non-tackle football program for kids between 4 to 17 years of age, better known as “flag football”. It originated in North America universities in the late 19th century. Players at Princeton and Rutgers Universities, on November 5, 1869 were the first one to compete in New Brunswick, New Jersey during the first intercollegiate football contest.

They were playing at that time, a football (soccer-type game) with rules adapted from the London Football Association... In lights of this new Superbowl LVII, ready to be played on Sunday 2-12'2023, I wanted to bring back some little facts of history, on a game, we may have forgotten or simply not known. A number of other northeastern colleges joined the tournament years later like Harvard University (1870) which was playing a rugby-soccer style they called the “Boston Game”. They also extended the game to Canadian universities, inviting in may1874, school like McGill University of Montreal to participate to the competition.

McGill style was adopted by Harvard and soon Yale played their first competitive and intercollegiate game with rules of their own. The style was embraced by other players of Princeton University in 1875 and an inter-collegiate league was created.

In May 1874, after a match against McGill University of Montreal, the Harvard players decided to give preference to the McGill’s rugby-style and created

rules to their own. In 1875, Harvard and Yale played their first intercollegiate match. The players and the spectators (including Princeton students) embraced the new rugby style as well. A league was born and a man, named Walter Camp became the “Father of American Football. He attended Yale as an undergraduate and went to medical school from 1876 to 1881 and as the captain of the team, he played the tailback position but was considered as the head coach. His leadership allowed him to enforce the rules for a newly formed Intercollegiate Football Association (IFA).



Walter Camp while playing at Yale University as a player-coach.

As we are in the midst of the next Superbowl LVII between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles, a big event in the country. It lies on the creation of the American Football League (AFL) in 1960 by a group of businessmen who wanted to create their own professional Football franchises

while the NFL was unwilling to expand. The AFL became an alternative league and a rivalry started propelling pro Football ahead of Baseball as the most popular sport in the country. In the end of the 1960's, the commissioners of the AFL league met with the owner of the AFL Kansas City Chiefs to negotiate a merger between the leagues in 1970, with the agreement that the winner of each league would play each other at the end of the season. It was concluded that " Superbowl" would be the name of such event. The involvement of the television with millions of viewers and advertising have made this event, the largest sporting event in the United States.

The game became popular after the New York Jets upset the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III which definitively gave a certain credibility to the AFL. Once the league merged, the NFL was split into the American Football Conference (AFC) and the National Football Conference.(NFC) where the teams finishing first in each league will compete in the Superbowl at the end of the season. The Super Bowl game was then scheduled two weeks after the play-off to determine the league champion. In 2022, it was decided to play the game on the second Sunday of the month of February. Prior super-bowls were played in the mid-January, on a "Super bowl Sunday". The Vince Lombardi trophy was decerned to the winner of the game in honor to the first coach to have won two super-bowls.

The super-Bowl is watched as a single sporting event and command the largest audience among all American broadcast. Commercial airtime during the super bowl is very expensive and each company participating want to expose the best in their advertising. In the early 1900's, the Super Bowl was played in Pasadena California as part of the Pasadena Tournament of Roses and later in 1923, it was moved to the Rose Bowl Stadium, similar to the Yale Bow in Connecticut and many contests were created around the nation like the Orange Bowl in Miami, the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, the Sun Bowl in El Paso (1935) and the Cotton Bowl in Dallas (1937). By this time, the term "Bowl" became familiar to all Americans.

I grew up in Montreal PQ and we learned the rudiments of the game while being a student at the Bourget College in Rigaud. The game was similar but showed some differences in the rules, The ball was larger and more difficult to handle. The same changes pertinent to the game was seen in the Canadian league as well, Football fever in Washington DC was significant during my years of residency in General Surgery and Orthopedics at Howard, I was a Dallas fan and Tony Dorsett, Randall Cunningham etc competed well with Joe Theisman and Riggs, the locomotive. We will not be able to argue about statistics in the present moment.



After Playing a Football game in Montreal, Quebec during late 60's.

I remember well when (LT) Lawrence Taylor, a linebacker of the New York Giants sacked Joe Theisman, Quarter back of the Washington Redskins and on the play Theisman sustained an open tibia and Fibula fracture. I was then, the chief resident on call at DC General Hospital in Orthopedic and we were expecting the ambulance to bring the injured player for better care at the closest hospital. He was transported to Georges Washington, Hospital Center at our deception. Indeed, playing any sport brings also risks of injury especially with this sport: American Football.

Recently, on February 12, 2023, the Super Bowl LVII was held in Glendale Arizona. between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Kansas City Chiefs in a duel at the State Farm Stadium where around 70,000 fans were looking for the opportunity to support their favorite teams. It was also expected to be a super game because both teams were favorite and have a similar path in winning their respective division and conference with a 14-3 record. The most anticipated was the matchup of two black quarterbacks, for the first time in the history of the NFL, in a championship game.: Jalen Hurts of the Eagles and Patrick Mahomes of the Kansas City Chiefs.

The game started nicely for the Eagles with Hurst scoring at the one-yard line with a quarterback sneak, one of his three touchdowns, a record that may stand for longtime. The Chiefs answered rapidly with a Mahomes touchdown pass, to tie the game. Two brothers were playing against each other, was also a hallmark nice to know while in the public, their mother was unable to show any preference and she was found wearing a blouse supporting each of her sons' 'teams. The Kansas Chief kicker attempted to kick a 42-yard field goal which bounced to the vertical pole without allowing a score. More, a perfect 45-yards touchdown pass was the answer of the Eagles' quarterback. Unfortunately, a fumble by Philadelphia and a recovery by Kansas City... Philadelphia answers with a second quarterback touchdown placing the Eagles in control of the game. at the half time.

Rihanna was chosen for the halftime show and performed well, singing and dancing. Many discovered that she was expecting her second child but was unafraid of the heights, suspended above the field while performing during her half time entertainment show. After the festivities at the halftime, it was time for the Kansas City Chiefs to get back seriously to the game, down by two touchdowns. They needed to gain momentum and get to work. They did score one touchdown but going to the fourth quarter, the Philadelphia Eagles were still leading 27-21.

The lead evaporated as the Chiefs took an advance for good on an extra point 28-27 after a controversial holding penalty and in spite of a punt return with a Superbowl record of 65 yards. Soon after, Kansas City scored and the lead grew to 35-27 with an answer from the Eagles quarterback scoring his third touchdown of the night, a record for the NFL Score 35-33. The Eagles elected for a two- point conversion to tie the game 35-35 with less than 5 minutes remaining to play. The Chiefs held on the ball until they were able to score on a 27-yard field goal, for a score of 38-35, leaving only 11 seconds remaining in the game. This controversial holding-call will bring a bitter taste to this beautiful and well discussed Superbowl game. Both quarterbacks played an exceptional game even if Patrick Mahomes was declared Most Valuable Player, This "Superbowl match LVII" will be remembered in the annals of professional Football as one of the most memorable game ever played.

I want only to pay homage to the players who impressed me the most over the years by their way of playing and imposing themselves to the game... In the quarterbacks mix, I would like to cite a Joe Montana and some of his 49ers legendary crew namely Jerry Rice, Ronnie Lott or the Cowboy's Dallas Danny White, Randall Cunningham with their running backs Emmy Smith, Tony Dorsett and later Herschel Walker...or others teams with their leaders like Lawrence Taylor, John Elway, Peyton Manning, Dan Marino, Tom Brady, Joe Theisman who transcend the game. I can't conclude without citing a few because I saw them play so rarely while they made me understand the

rudiments of the game of Football in the United States of America. I may have missed so much for not being present at all the games of the legendary Walter Payton of the Bears for seeing him play during his last seasons or the exceptional move of Orenthal James (O J) Simpson, “the Juice” of the Buffalo Bills and 49ers or the elusiveness of a Jim Brown of the Cleveland Browns.... I will pass on so many other outstanding athletes, but I remain convinced that I have an idea of what it takes to understand and love Football. I finally want to remember a game- analyst of the name of Joe Madden who served on all the television channels, describing the technical aspects of the game, play by play during the matches. He may have been a coach in college prior to being a broadcaster but definitively, he was the best at it and his knowledge of the sport has no limit.

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