

OPINION: PRO FOOTBALL RECORDS SHOULD INCLUDE THE AAFC

By Ed Pavlick

Pro football records are very much incomplete in that the NFL does not "recognize" records and statistics from the All- America Football Conference. The AAFC was a bona-fide major league that existed 1946 through 1949. Many great players performed in that league including: Otto Graham, Dante Lavelli, Lou Groza, Frankie Albert, Joe Perry, Y.A. Tittle, to name a few. How can the records of these greats and others who played in that league be ignored? The league was much closer to parity with the NFL of its time than was the AFL in its first few years. Unlike the AFL, the AAFC did not start with only rookies and castoffs. Over 100 players whose contracts had run out were lured from the NFL. It also signed a flock of top college stars, many of whom had played service ball in addition.

The NFL claims it does not recognize AAFC records because no "official" game sheets are available. When the AAFC folded, most non-financial records were bundled and sold for waste paper. However, the NFL has included in its manuals several records set in the 1920s when no "official" game sheets were available. This is nit-picking. The AAFC record manuals are available and these ARE the official statistics, corrected from the season ending data.

Interestingly enough, the NFL recognizes all records and statistics of the AFL. Had the AFL folded instead of merging with the NFL would their records have been ignored? The NFL did not recognize that the AFL existed during the early 1960s. Suddenly, with the merger, the AFL records became "acceptable." In the first record manual to include the AFL, Cookie Gilchrist's 247 yard game became the NFL record. Only the year before, Jimmy Brown's 237 yarder was the recognized mark. Actually, the top pro mark at the time was Spec Sanders' 250 yards in one game.

Including AAFC stats makes quite a difference in all-time record listings. In lifetime scoring, for example, Lou Groza is second to George Blanda when his AAFC points are counted. Why should Blanda get full credit for his AFL statistics and Groza not be credited for his AAFC marks? In lifetime rushing, Joe Perry is third behind Jim Brown and O.J. Simpson when his AAFC stats are included. The NFL lists Brown's 5.2 lifetime rushing average as tops. In actuality, Marion Motley's 5.7 is the best mark for all rushers with 3,000 or more yards. In lifetime passing, based on the NFL rating system, Otto Graham is number one with his 86.8 rating.

In team records there is a big difference. Counting the AAFC, the Cleveland Browns won the most consecutive league championships -- 5. The 1948 Browns were the first major league pro team to go undefeated in regular and post season play. Only the 1972 Miami Dolphins have done it since. An important team record is still held by an AAFC team. The 1948 San Francisco 49ers rushed for 3,663 yards and a 6.1 average. This powerful running attack was led by John Strzykalski's 915 yards and featured two great fullbacks in Joe Perry and Norm Standlee. The team had seven runners with 260 yards or more.

Spec Sanders had several record accomplishments. He gained 250 yards in one game, and was the first runner to average 100 yards per game when he gained 1432 yards in 14 games. His 18 rushing TDs in that year was the top mark until 1962. Lou Groza and Ben Agajanian brought field goal kicking to new heights and established the trend toward making the field goal an important weapon. Frankie Albert's 29 TD passes in 1948 wasn't surpassed until John Unitas notched 32 in 1959. Several other AAFC records came close to being new pro standards.

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 2, No. 7 (1980)

It seems unrealistic as well as unfair that the NFL ignores the AAFC in view that other authorities do indeed recognize them. The Pro Football Hall of Fame includes the AAFC marks in its "lifetime leaders" listings. Two definitive works on pro football -- Treat's *Encyclopedia of Football* and *Sports Encyclopedia: Pro Football* -- both include AAFC records, as does the Sporting News' *National Football Guide*. It is interesting to note that all baseball guides, record books and encyclopedias recognize defunct major leagues such as the American Association, Union Association and Player's League. All players who played in those leagues are given full credit for their service and statistics.

Seymour Siwoff, the NFL's official statistician, is also responsible for *The Book of Baseball Records*. In it, he includes all the defunct leagues mentioned above and gives full credit to all players who performed in those leagues. Yet he does not do so for the AAFC players in the NFL Record Manual.

I believe that P.F.R.A. should campaign for AAFC records and statistical recognition. Both the NFL and the media must recognize it as an historical fact. Those media people who fail to include AAFC records in their commentaries should be corrected by P.F.R.A. members. The players who performed in the AAFC deserve full credit for their entire careers in pro football.

Note: The Editor of *The Coffin Corner* strongly disagrees with the premise set forth in this article. As an AAFC fan, he is all for granting any due recognition to players from that late and lamented league. However, he fails to understand why the NFL should recognize as an NFL record a record not achieved in the NFL. That's what the author is advocating. Entities which recognize "pro football" records (such as the Pro Football Hall of Fame) all include the AAFC. Entities which recognize "NFL records only" (such as the annual *NFL Record & Fact Book*) do not include the AAFC. To us, this makes perfect sense.