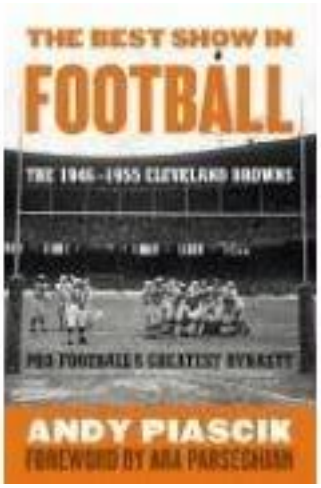
Good stuff from The Rhino today as he takes some time out to make Cleveland fans aware of a great book about the Browns 1946-1955 dynasty. In it, author Andy Piascik makes a very interesting argument for the proposition that the Cleveland Browns of the 1940s and 1950s were head and shoulders above every other football dynasty, including the 1960s Packers, the 1970s Steelers, and the 1980s 49ers.



One of the things that many hard core fans like about baseball is the way that the game's statistics allow comparisons between today's players and those who played a generation or more ago. People like Bill James and organizations like The Society for American Baseball Research have turned the analysis of baseball statistics into an art form, and books like Moneyball
show that they have also had
a profound influence
on how major league baseball teams are run.

Whatever other contributions Bill James may have made to the game, he's given fans hours of enjoyment through his books, especially his Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract , which is one of the most comprehensive and interesting books about baseball history that I've ever read.

I used to think that football didn't lend itself to this kind of statistical analysis. The seasons were too short and there were were too many differences between how the game was played over the years to allow people to make meaningful comparisons of players and teams across eras. But ever since The Hidden Game of Football was first published in 1988, football scholars have been trying to outdo their baseball brethren in using statistics to reach objective conclusions about the game and the guys who've played it. If you want to get a sense for what they're up to, check out the Football Outsiders
website
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Although I was aware of this hard core statistical analysis of football, for some reason I found it a lot less interesting than its baseball counterpart. That was until I read The Best Show in Football: The 1946-1955 Cleveland Browns -- Pro Football's Greatest Dynasty
by Andy Piascik. Piascik tells the story of those great Browns teams in an entertaining and insightful way. He makes a compelling statistical case that the AAFC was every bit the NFL's equal during its brief history, and that while Paul Brown's willingness to sign black players may not have sprung from an enlightened racial attitude, it proved to be one of the major factors in

allowing the Browns to separate themselves from the rest of the league.

Those are interesting tidbits, but what makes Piascik's book really interesting is how he uses statistical tools to demonstrate just how excellent the Browns and some of their players were. One of the best illustrations of this is the case that he makes for Mac Speedie's induction into the Hall of Fame. Fortunately, his analysis of Speedie is available online, and you can read it here .

Piascik also makes a very interesting argument for the proposition that the Cleveland Browns of the 1940s and 1950s were head and shoulders above every other football dynasty, including the 1960s Packers, the 1970s Steelers, and the 1980s 49ers. You'll have to buy his book to get the details on that, but it's worth the money. If you're a Cleveland Browns fan, this is a book that definitely belongs in your book shelf.