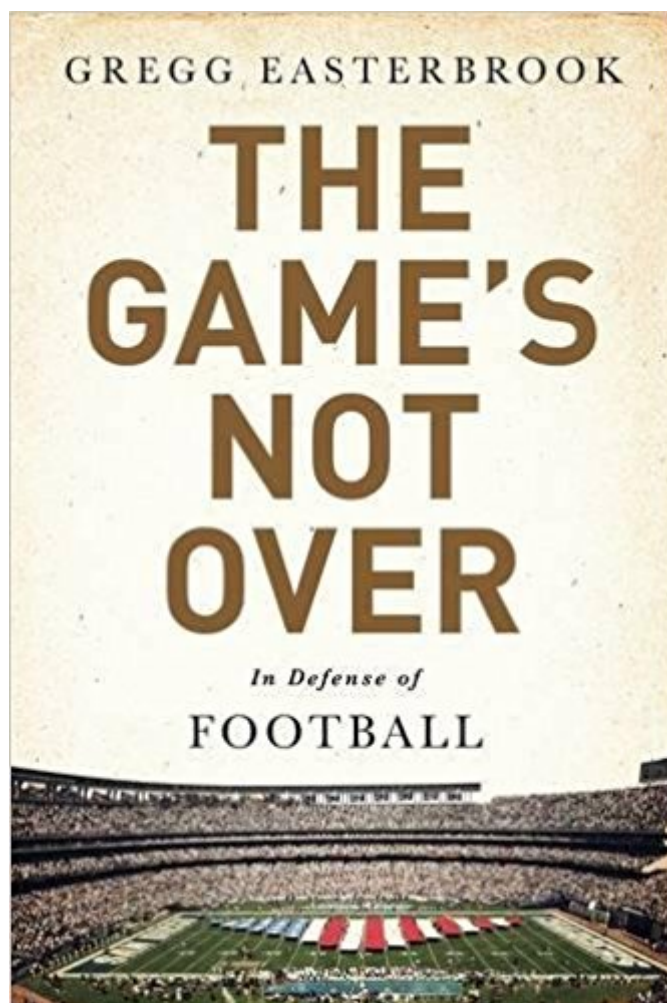


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The Game's Not Over: In Defense Of Football



Synopsis

Is there anything more universally American than NFL football? Love of the NFL runs deep and broad. It is a primetime TV event on multiple national networks, subsidized by public funds and popular from Mount Rainier to Miami Beach. The 2015 Super Bowl, a thriller between the Patriots and Seahawks, was the most-watched program in the history of television, with more than a third of the country watching. Yet football is in trouble. Public anxiety over football spiked in 2014 during the heat of the Ray Rice domestic violence scandal, the ongoing concussion crisis and the league's appropriations of tax money for its own ends. The mounting problems have led some to question the ethics of watching America's beloved game. In this sharply argued, witty, observant book, Gregg Easterbrook makes a spirited case in defense of the NFL. As he shows, the league brings together Americans of all stripes, providing a rare space to talk about what matters. Indeed, the various issues we see in the league are often microcosms of the ones we see elsewhere, whether it's suspicion of the rich, or gender politics or even concern over bullying. The NFL's social, economic and legal problems are real, but they also produce some of our best and most valuable discussions of those issues. Football is a magnificent incarnation of our national character. It has many flaws, and they need fixing—but the game's not over.

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Easterbrook's analysis suggests that the game is becoming safer even as it becomes more compelling and competitive. The debate over football and its risks will continue, but both NFL fans and foes will enjoy this readable and entertaining book. • James Freeman,

Wall Street Journal; Conflicted fans might take some solace in Easterbrook's unabashed enthusiasm for the game and its strategies. • James Sullivan, Boston Globe; A breezy read that provides cultural context to accompany another football season; It offers comfort to fellow fans that the sport deserves their attention and even their love. • Kirkus Reviews "With a distinct voice, Easterbrook makes important observations about the game that will have a broader appeal than just football fans." • Library Journal; Easterbrook...is a serious author with serious points to make. • New York Times; Easterbrook...writes nothing that is not brilliant. • Chicago Tribune

Gregg Easterbrook is the author of ten books, including *The King of Sports*, *The Progress Paradox*, *The Leading Indicators* and *Sonic Boom*. He is a contributing editor to the *Atlantic* and *Washington Monthly* and a former columnist for *ESPN.com*. He has been a distinguished fellow of the Fulbright Foundation, a visiting fellow of the Brookings Institution and a political columnist for Reuters.

In this book Author Gregg Easterbrook tells us why football is a microcosm of America. He starts with the positive aspects by explaining that the essence of every great American value has been distilled into the game: the pageantry of affluence, the spirit of teamwork, the quest for excellence on and off the field, the elegance of the game in strategy and athletics, the application of brute physical power, and even the politics of the game. Later on he delves into the game's controversies: the danger of invisible brain injury to young players under age 14; the irresponsible off-field antics of some players; and the alleged financial chicanery of NFL owners. He criticizes NFL owners for asking the public taxpayers to pay for their stadiums, then charging the public top dollar to see the games. He says that NFL owners exaggerate the economic value that their teams add to cities when they lobby municipal governments to take on debt to subsidize NFL stadiums and operations, thereby shortchanging citizens of adequate schools and police and fire protection. He derides NFL owners for asking the Army, Navy, and Air Force not only to bear the expense, but also to pay promotional fees, for providing the color guards and flyovers that open NFL games. Then he addresses the overriding question of the sport's safety, especially regarding brain trauma, from Pop Warner to NFL. In between these serious discussions, he gives his many interesting and often sarcastically amusing takes on the trivia of the game that makes for such passionate discussions. He says that even with its defects, football is so much a mirror of American society that it is destined to hold its grip on us. He includes some worthwhile gleanings on how to maximize our enjoyment of the game as spectators. And he's not shy about making some interesting speculations

about where NFL will go in the future --- everything from rule changes to anticipated new expansion teams. He leavens his prose with lighthearted "Football Haiku" tersely stating the essence of NFL teams and their strategies. Having watched football since the late 60's, I remember most of the great football anecdotes he mentions. My first football memory was the "Ice Bowl" of 1967. Since we coincidentally lived a few blocks from Bart Starr's parents' house in Alabama, my Dad was a big fan of the Packers. The first football words I remember him saying were "Jethro Pugh (rest in peace) just got knocked on his ---." Most every autumn Saturday afternoon and evening our house hosted a riotous party dedicated to watching those great SEC games with Alabama (during Bear Bryant's era) and Auburn. Later on I lived in Chicago during the Super Bowl year of Mike Ditka's team with Walter Payton, Mike Singletary, and Jim McMahon. I've lived in other cities with NCAA and NFL championship teams, and have enjoyed many happy years as a fan. The book recalls memories of most every great game I've seen from that '67 "Ice Bowl" to the Internet broadcast of the Jacksonville Jaguars (my current home town team) and the Tennessee Titans from London a few weeks ago. The most provocative part of the book is "Chapter 7. Is Football Bad for Boys and Good for Girls?" Easterbrook dares to ask the question of whether playing football is detrimental to school boys by damaging their brains with concussions, while diverting them from academics with the pipe-dream (for most) of having college and NFL careers. He theorizes this might be "good" for girls in a relative sense by opening up more college admission slots for the female gender, as boys whose brains have been deformed by playing football would no longer have the mental capacity for higher education. Should parents even allow their school boys, especially those younger than 14, to play tackle football? I played tackle football when young, and now as a parent have dealt with the issue of whether to allow my son to play. This is a very tough decision for many parents, as it certainly was for me. Football teaches invaluable life-lessons to young boys, and makes them into men, physically, mentally, and spiritually. But Easterbrook points out the hidden costs. Parents and their sons (and nowadays occasional daughters) who want to play tackle football should consider the entire spectrum of pros and cons, then decide wisely. There are also some great "Bonus" Chapters at the end of the book that are sure to strike a nerve with football fans. One bonus chapter explains something I've often wondered about, which is the rationale behind the irrational decisions by coaches to punt the ball instead of "going for it" on 4th and short. Easterbrook says that coaches punt, even when they're behind a few points near the end of a game and must keep possession of the ball to win, because punting makes them look like prudent strategists who should not be fired when they lose. "I

the coach is more concerned with his own job tenure than with seeking a win, then fraidy-cat punting is quite rational. This is reminiscent of many counter-productive strategies you see employed in the business world to protect people's positions, while causing the company to lose business opportunities. Here again, football mirrors life! Another bonus chapter explains Easterbrook's sure-fire simple formula that yields the highest probability --- 72% --- of predicting the winning team. Easterbrook explains how this simple formula is right more often than the estimates of coaches and professional gamblers who supposedly bet on inside information. The last two bonus chapters "Iron Laws of the Gridiron" and "Football Maxims to Live by" are cookbook recipes of tactics and strategies that coaches at any level should find useful. I came away with the conviction that collegiate and pro football is going strong, despite controversies, and is going to be improved and made even more exciting, with more games and more expansion teams coming down the pike. This book captures the essence of the game --- glories and controversies --- past, present, and possibly future.

I am a long time reader of Mr. Easterbrook's TMQ column, which this year is found on the "Upshot" section of the NY Times website every Tuesday during the NFL season. It is easily the most entertaining and informative look at football and culture, pairing innovative statistics and analysis with an absurdist's humor. This book is only about football, but in the grand context of American culture, and it emphasizes our use of football to look at ourselves. Football is very dangerous at every level, especially to the brain, which is not built for the kind of blows so many players inflict on it. These blows come from a desire to impress coaches, pundits and fellow players in order to make huge amounts of money in a short career, and Mr. Easterbrook has always been at the forefront of player safety concerns, especially concussions and CTE. He also is a master of the absurdity of the rules of the game, the perpetual timidity of coaches who strut around exuding pseudo-military authority but make decisions more to protect their careers than win the games (just like the military authorities I've dealt with), and the shameful activities of the NFL and the team owners, especially when it comes to soaking the taxpayers of their teams' cities while they live like royalty. If you read TMQ, you will not find much new here, but it is still fun to go through it all, and if you don't, start with this book and then look for the column each week. The King of Sports is also a great read about football and is a good companion piece to this. Football needs to change - I hope it will in the next few years to make it safer and more fun and ethical to watch, but if not, let the lawyers have at it and shut it all down. It is just a game, after all.

Gregg Easterbrook is one the most entertaining and smart football writers. His weekly column during the NFL season is always a joy, and this book is more of the same. If you're not sure you're a football fan, read this and you will, at the very least, come away with an appreciation of the sport. Highly recommended.

Great read! We need to do more to prevent injury in our national sport. Start by protecting kids, reduce contact non game practices. Pro Bowl has no kickoff that should be copied in all football.

Really miss Easterbrook's "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" column, always enjoy his writing. He's dedicated to the game and very knowledgeable.

If Mr Easterbrook would have quit when the book was done it would have been a better book. Didn't need all the trivia.

Good read, interesting viewpoint.

love this author

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