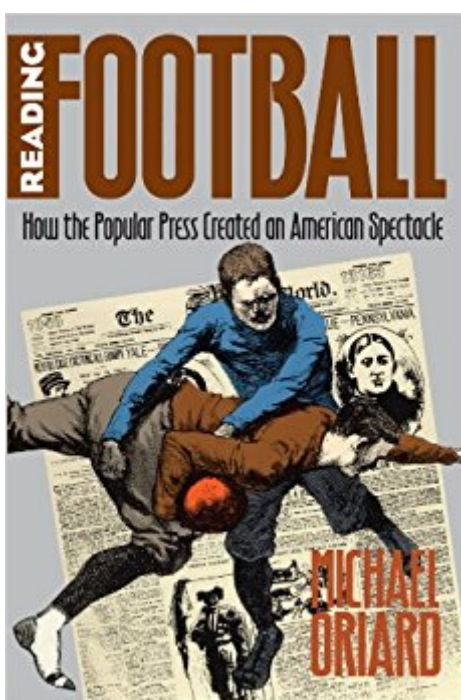


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# Reading Football: How The Popular Press Created An American Spectacle (Cultural Studies Of The United States)



## Synopsis

Is football an athletic contest or a social event? Is it a game of skill, a test of manhood, or merely an organized brawl? Michael Oriard, a former professional player, asks these and other intriguing questions in *Reading Football*, the first contemporary book about football's formative years. American football began in the 1870s as a game to be played, not watched. Within a brief ten years, it had become a great public spectacle with an immense following, a phenomenon caused primarily by the voluminous commentary about the game conducted in popular newspapers and magazines. Oriard shows how this constant narrative in football's early years developed many different stories about what the game meant: football as pastime, as the sport of gentlemen, as a science, as a game of rules and their infringements. He shows how football became a series of cultural stories about power, luck, strategy, and deception. These different interpretations have been magnified by football's current omnipresence on television. According to Oriard, televised football now plays a cultural role of enormous importance for men, yet within the field of cultural studies the influence of football has been ignored until now. From the book: "A receiver sprints down the sideline, fast and graceful, then breaks toward the middle of the field where a safety waits for him. From forty yards upfield the quarterback releases the ball; it spirals in an elegant arc toward the goalposts as the receiver now for the first time looks back to pick up its flight. The pass is a little high; the receiver leaps, stretches, grasps the ball--barely, fingers clutching--at the very moment that the safety drives a helmet into his unprotected ribs. The force of the collision flings the receiver backward, slamming him to the turf. . . . This familiar tableau, this exemplary moment in a football game, epitomizes the appeal of the sport: the dramatic confrontation of artistry with violence, both equally necessary."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A former player in the National Football League and now a professor of English at Oregon State, Oriard advances the thesis that football is a cultural text, complete with metaphoric content and social context, read differently by people whose interpretations vary over time. He considers the formative years of the sport from the 1870s to the early years of this century, arguing that a reading of the popular press of that era helps us understand how actual audiences "read" the sport, based on the narrative structure established first by Walter Camp, who at the turn of the century was the Yale football team's "unofficial, unpaid, unquestioned chief mentor and arbiter," and subsequently expanded by other interpreters. An added attraction of this book is the three dozen-plus excellent illustrations, most from magazines like Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Weekly*. Because it is about football as a cultural and even a literary phenomenon, this study is unlikely to appeal to a general sports audience. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The hype surrounding modern football is not new. The sport and popular newspapers and magazines grew up together in the late 19th century. Football, with its play-by-play format, was seemingly made for journalism. In this account by a former player, the game's early era (1876-1914) is reconstructed with original narratives and illustrations from the popular press. Oriard shows football's early evolution as a sport, pastime, science, and "definition of male identity." His is a scholarly book on a topic often ignored by the scholarly press. It can be recommended for libraries with collections in sports history and popular culture.- Donald W. Maxwell, Stone Hills Lib. Network, Bloomington, Ind. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

for anybody with an interest in sports or how media creates culture this is a must read

This book offers the reader an evaluation of the early years of football and the press' role in popularizing football for the American consumer. A must-read for anyone who loves football.

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