

PREFACE

ON THE MORNING OF THE SUPER BOWL PARADE, I was walking past the Museum of Art when I heard someone calling my name. A man was standing behind a police barricade, wrapped in a blanket, motioning for me to come over. After we shook hands, he reached in his pocket and pulled out a photograph of a little boy and an older man at Franklin Field.

“That’s me and my father at the 1960 championship game,” he said. “I was ten years old.”

I said I was there, too, with my parents and grandparents. We were sitting in Section EE.

“So were we,” the man said. “Bednarik tackled Jim Taylor right in front of us.”

The man looked at the picture again, and his eyes filled with tears. He said he and his father often talked about that day and how they hoped one day they would see the Eagles win it again. They vowed to go to the game, wherever it was, and watch it together just the way they did in 1960. They were in Jacksonville at Super Bowl XXXIX, and, of course, we all know how that day ended. So they waited for the next time.

“My father died three years ago,” the man said, “but when the Eagles won on Sunday, I felt like they won it for him. I camped out here last night so I’d have a good spot for the parade. Having this picture with me, it’s like we’re here together, just like we talked about. You know what I mean?”

I understood perfectly. We all did. Everyone at the parade, everyone watching on TV, everyone who picked up a phone when the Eagles won and shouted, “We did it!”—we all understood. That emotion was about so much more than football. For millions of people, it was about family. It was about something we shared for generations.

That is really the theme of this book. Like any encyclopedia, it is full of records and statistics, but they merely form the framework for the real story. This is a book about a city and a team and the emotion that binds them. It is a book about frustration, about heartbreak, and about jubilation, but mostly it is a book about devotion. It is a love story, pure and simple.

After the Eagles won the Super Bowl, there were news stories about people going to cemeteries and draping green jerseys over the headstones of loved ones. At the parade, there were people carrying urns with the ashes of fathers and mothers and brothers and all the family members who loved this team and would have wanted to be there. Yet in a very real sense, they were.

In Philadelphia, fans build their lives around the Eagles. They show up to tailgate five hours before the game. They dress their dogs in Eagles green. They ask the Pep Band to play at their funerals (more on that later). They line up at tattoo parlors to have plays like the Philly Special celebrated on their bodies. That is the very definition of having skin in the game.

With the Eagles, there is an investment of time and emotion that is unique. Many of the fans who flew to Minnesota for Super Bowl LII had fathers who were at Veterans Stadium when the Eagles defeated Dallas for the NFC title in 1981. They had grandfathers who were at Franklin Field in 1960 when Chuck Bednarik wrestled down Jim Taylor. They had great-grandfathers who trudged through the snow to see the Eagles win their first world championship in 1948.

For years, amateur psychologists have tried to explain this devotion. One theory is that Philadelphia has an inferiority complex, something about living in the shadows of New York and Washington, DC. That is supposed to explain why Eagles fans are so rabid; we see each Sunday as a chance to get even. There may be some truth to that. I know how Philly fans feel about New York fans, but that works both ways.

I don’t think it is that complicated. Simply put, I think the people in this area just love the game of football. They love it in a way that has nothing to do with demographics. They see the game as a reflection of who they are: tough, working-class, outta-my-way people who identify with a game in which you win by knocking people on their butts.

Paul Daugherty, a columnist for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, recognized this years ago. He wrote: “Every city not named Los Angeles tries to portray itself as ‘blue collar’ and its teams as ‘throwbacks.’ Few

qualify. Pittsburgh loves its Steelers. Green Bay always will claim ownership of the Packers. But the Eagles are different. No town derives its identity from its football team the way Philadelphia does.”

That feeling has sustained the Eagles from the beginning, when a former Penn quarterback named Bert Bell founded the team, through the lean years when the club moved around the city like a floating dice game, going from the Baker Bowl to Temple Stadium to Municipal Stadium. Bell believed pro football and Philadelphia were a perfect marriage. It took a while, but he was proven right.

The history of the franchise can be found in this book. There are bleak stretches, to be sure. The first decade, for example, did not produce a single winning season. There were the 11 consecutive losses to Dallas from 1967 through 1972. The disappointment of Super Bowls XV and XXXIX. The financial collapse of not one but two owners: Jerry Wolman and Leonard Tose. It is all part of the story.

But so are the championship games of 1948 and 1949, the win over Lombardi in 1960, the Miracle of the Meadowlands, the Body Bag game, four consecutive division titles under Andy Reid, and, finally, the against-all-odds saga of the 2017 season. Those highlights are here as well.

But the real story is what’s between the lines, the hard-to-define, impossible-to-measure-but-we-all-can-feel-it emotion that defines the Eagles’ hold on the city. No one understands this better than Ed Rendell. He was mayor for two terms, and while he was in office, he sat next to me on the set of *Eagles Postgame Live* every Sunday, talking football. Name another city in America where the mayor doubles as a football analyst. That wouldn’t fly in most big cities, but in Philadelphia, it is a perfect fit. Rendell understands fully the love affair between this town and its football team.

“There is nothing else like it,” he said. “The Eagles affect everyone. Win or lose, they pull people together. I remember one day after a big win seeing a businessman getting a shoeshine, and the guy in the three-piece suit and the guy shining his shoes were talking about the game. There was no [class] distinction, no rich and poor, no black and white, just two guys talking about the Eagles. So when I hear people say, ‘It’s only a game,’ I think of that scene and realize, no, it’s not. Not with the Eagles, it’s not.”

Ray Didinger
August 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHEN BOB LYONS AND I COLLABORATED ON THE FIRST EAGLES ENCYCLOPEDIA IN 2004, the team was on its way to Super Bowl XXXIX. They fell short that year, losing to the New England Patriots in Jacksonville, Florida.

At the time, Bob and I talked about doing a revised edition of the book if the Eagles ever made it back to the big game.

“Okay,” I said, “but only if they win.”

I thought about that conversation as I watched the confetti fall in U.S. Bank Stadium as the Eagles and their fans celebrated the 41–33 win over the Patriots in Super Bowl LII. I liked the idea of putting out a new edition of the encyclopedia and reliving the 2017 season in all its unlikely glory. But it saddened me to know I would be doing it without my friend and coauthor.

Bob died in 2013 before we had a chance to work on the second edition of the book, *The New Eagles Encyclopedia*. I did the work, and the book was published in 2014, but it wasn’t nearly as much fun. I feel the same way now, maybe even more so, because I know how much Bob would have enjoyed writing about the Eagles finally winning it all.

We often talked about the 1960 championship game, when the Eagles defeated Vince Lombardi’s Green Bay Packers at Franklin Field. We were both there. I was there with my parents and grandparents. Bob was there with Joan, his sweetheart who would later become his wife. It was their first date, and what a fine way to start a life together, celebrating an NFL championship.

Bob was hoping he would be here to see the Eagles win another one. Sadly, when it happened, he was gone, but in writing this new edition, I feel like I was able to share the excitement with him much the way families shared the moment across generations.

I know Bob would have joined me in thanking the people who made this third edition possible. Joe Horrigan, Pete Fierle, and Saleem Choudhry at the Pro Football Hall of Fame were a big help in finding material. The late Jim Gallagher, who lived Eagles history for almost half a century as director of public relations, was an unfailing source of information.

Team president Don Smolenski lent welcome support to the project. Derek Boyko, director of media services when we did the original book, and Brett Strohsacker, who succeeded Boyko, were only too happy to let us use their archives. Margaret Jerrido and her staff extended similar courtesy at Temple University’s Paley Library.

Ed Mahan, the Eagles photographer, was instrumental in gathering illustrations for the book. Mahan has chronicled the team’s history for almost 50 years, and his images, along with those of staff photographers Drew Hallowell, Hunter Martin, Joseph Labolito, and Tom Briglia, helped bring the book to life.

We thank Pat McLoone, executive editor of Philly.com, and Michael Mercanti, photography editor, for allowing us to display some of their best material. We also thank Michael Panzer, library supervisor at Philly.com, as well as Bob Vetrone, Jr., Ed Barkowitz, and Paul Vigna of the *Daily News* for helping us find the best notes, quotes, and anecdotes on the Eagles, past and present.

Others who helped include Ernie Accorsi, Bill Campbell, Merrill Reese, Mark Eckel, Mike Adams, Vince Papale, Ralph Goldston, Al Wistert, Tommy McDonald, Ron Jaworski, Leo Carlin, Upton Bell, and Jim Murray, all of whom were interviewed for the book. They contributed to making this account of Eagles history as accurate and detailed as possible.

The staff at Temple University Press worked tirelessly to make sure the book was completed on time. Director Mary Rose Muccie, editor in chief Aaron Javsicas, and editorial assistant Nikki Miller guided the project every step of the way. Art manager Kate Nichols and senior production editor Dave Wilson kept the book on schedule, while Ann-Marie Anderson, Irene Imperio Kull, and Gary Kramer handled the marketing. I should also mention Micah Kleit, the former editor in chief, who proposed the book originally, and former press director Alex Holzman, who supported the project from the start.

My wife, Maria, once again put her own work aside to proofread page after page of Eagles history. I could not have finished the book without her assistance and, most of all, her patience. Special thanks go to Hank Harrison, who restored our computer when it crashed on deadline. When I feared the entire project was gone, Hank somehow brought it back.

I also have to thank my former boss at NFL Films, the late, great Steve Sabol, who gave me the time and encouragement to finish this project.

Ray Didingar