

Ed. Note: Readers probably thought they saw the last of the Beattie Feathers/1,000 yard controversy in the last issue, but like Jason in Friday the 13th, ad nauseam, it just won't die. Here is the other side of a constantly-flipping coin.

Feathers: The Other Side

By Mark Purcell

I have read Bob Carroll's article on Feathers' 1,000 yards in 1934 with much interest since I am almost certainly one of the villainous targets of the piece. At least in correspondence with the CC's editor, I have certainly argued Point 2 (somebody lied in 1934) and Point 3 (Beattie's yards are more or less OK but the attempts are off). Now that Bob and David Neft have summarized the available evidence for us, we anti-Featherites can regroup and try again.

TIME OUT! Between 1931, his sophomore year at Tennessee and game eleven of 1934, his first pro season with the Bears, Beattie was a great outside running back. He was only a marginal All-America choice in 1933, his senior year. The consensus AA choices were Warburton of USC, Sauer of Nebraska, and possibly Lund of Minnesota. Beattie's college AA problem was not his excellent rushing stats, but that he was a negligible passer in the age of the college single wing passing tailback. Additionally, his '33 Tennessee team had a poorer record than the '31 and '32 teams.

Back to 1934. Among the several important news items Bob had no space to mention in his two fact-packed pages, is that Beattie's incredible 9.9 average (101-1004) is only a belated invention of the NFL office and not the original 1934 stats they gave him rushing. 9.9 means that every time Beattie made "only" five yards rushing, he needed 15 yards someplace else. In good healthy years, McElhenny and Sayers only averaged 5-plus.

The original figures in the oldest NFL guides are 117-1004-8.5. (See Ed. Note #2) This was broken down by game.

Ed. Note #2: The question of the oldest NFL guides may turn on interpretation. The guides published in the 1930s by Spalding were sanctioned as "official" by the NFL. The 1935 Spalding Guide lists Feathers' 1934 season as 101-1004-9.9. The 1938 Spalding Guide – the first to list all-time rushing records – also gives his totals for 1934 as 101-1004-9.9. In 1943, the NFL guide (not Spalding) gives the game-by-game list with its 117 attempts. This was carried through 1947.

If, as I shall argue, we stipulate only one lie (error, goof, mistake, exaggeration), the given figure for Game XI, his final, I am prepared to settle on behalf of my clients, the anti-Featherites, for giving Beattie 117-984-8.4 in 1934. This amounts to a very generous settlement in that 8.4 is still the NFL record.

For starters, we need three columns. A – how the old guides originally totalled Feathers game by game for 1934. B – the figures recovered by David Neft (with a ? for game X). C – the weekly contemporary 1934 stat totals published during the 1934 season by the NFL in their publicity releases. Incidentally, the pros did serious comparative stats earlier than the NCAA.

Column A, the guide figures, total 117-1004-8.5. This gave the NFL its first Thousand Yard Man with an almost credible yards per attempt figure attached to the freshman star assigned to replace the great Grange at his own position on his own team and, hopefully, as a crowd draw.

There is only one problem with this game by game breakdown. Game XI against the Cards had to be boosted from 22 yards – the figure that appears in contemporary newspaper game reports and verified by Neft – up to 42 yards to get Beattie over 1,000 yards.

So the NFL started over. (Ed. Note #3: Just when this happened – if it happened – is not known. However, by the 1949 guide, the NFL was again giving Beattie's totals as 101-1004. A good place to look for any revisions would be the 1947 season, when Steve Van Buren was becoming the second NFL thousand-yarder.) This time someone restored the authentic 22 yards in game XI – this was Beattie's

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injury game and he left early – and the extra 20 yards were assigned to an earlier game. But, fatally, the total was thrown off by starting from the post-game 4 publicity release with its total of 32 attempts. Sixteen too few!

If Game XI was corrected, Beattie still needed 16 yards somewhere earlier to make his 1,000 (plus a few added on for verisimilitude). The fixing seems to have settled on Game X, perhaps by finding an erroneous 1934 game report for game X. That game, however, was played against the New York Giants of Stout Steve Owen, an NFL defense unlikely to aid an opponent to a new rushing record. I note that Neft lowers Feathers total for Game VIII, also against the Giants, from 55 to 45.

Game X in the guide started Beattie with a credible and good 10-47 in a bruising and decisive battle where he functioned as one of eight Bear backs. A change to 7-74, along with the earlier error united to produce that 9.9 average and the 1004 yards.

If we omit the original 20-yard difference from Game XI, we can settle for 117-984-8.4 as fairly close to what Feathers actually did in 1934 behind Nagurski & Co.

I still have trouble with that lowered 8.4 average. According to Neft-Cohen, only three other NFL league leaders have topped the 8.0 mark since 1934 and their attempts were 39, 50, and 64 respectively. Beattie ran the ball 117 or 101 times, countering the Carroll argument that his high average derived from not running the ball much.

It's significant that the three early games still needing serious checking (II-IV) boost that average. I think an early-season total yards figure squeezed into Beattie's scrimmage rushing, and I am encouraged by an early-season PR story I found in the *Seattle Times*, covering NFL players' all-purpose yards. I suspect Hugh McElhenny's 8.0 rushing average in 1954 broke the real Feathers 1934 average.

No question, Beattie was the premier running back of the 1934 NFL.

GAME	DATE	OPPONENT	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	COMMENT
			NFL GUIDE	NEFT	WEEKLY PUB.	
I	S-23	G.B.	8- 41	7- 42	---	-----
II	S-30	Cin.	18-140	(5- 99)*	---	-----
III	O- 7	Bkn.	14-132	(3- 38)*	---	-----
IV	O-10	Pit.	8-101	(1- 82)*	32-413	48-414 (Guide)
V	O-14	ChiC.	15- 97	15- 98	47-511	63-511 (Guide)
VI	O-21	Cin.	7-114	7-114	---	-----
VII	O-28	G.B.	15-155	18-158	---	-----
VIII	N- 4	N.Y.	8- 55	8- 45	77-835	93-835 (Guide)
IX	N-11	Bos.	11- 80	11- 80	88-915	104-915 (Guide)
X	N-18	N.Y.	10- 47	7- 74	---	----- (?)
XI	N-25	ChiC.	3- 42	3- 22	107-1052	117-1004(Guide)
			117-1004	101-1004		

*=Partial stats

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A Far from Final Word from the Editor:

Frankly, we wish we could agree with Mark on this dispute. It would be a *Coffin Corner* exclusive if we could headline "PFRA Exposes Feathers Sham." Unfortunately, we still have to take the position that there is no positive proof that he didn't do it, and lacking such, we tend to accept his record. It's like a baseball expose that begins "Babe Ruth probably did hit 60 homers in 1927 ..." Let's face it, no one is going to stop the presses.

Nevertheless, it has been our experience that things quite often are just what they seem. In twenty-odd years of research, we have again and again been surprised to discover that the NFL in its youth was much more organized, consistent, and – well, professional – than a lot of writers from the '50s and '60s gave them credit for.

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Mark Purcell is an excellent researcher. We have admired other pieces he has done for the *CFRA Bulletin*. However, in this case, we are still waiting for any indication that the NFL purposely fudged its records for Feathers. That the records were changed is obvious. That this was done for any nefarious purposes seems to be the product of a rather jaundiced view of human nature.

Can anyone show that there was a publicity blitz in 1934 when Feathers apparently passed 1,000? This should have occurred between November 19 and 25 when the weekly totals indicated (erroneously) that he had achieved that level. Was there, at that time, anything magical about 1,000? We have seen contemporary notices that referred to Feathers' mark as extraordinary, which it certainly was, but nothing to indicate the NFL thought it had found a pot of gold.

In other words, can anyone produce even circumstantial evidence that there was any intentional fraud?

Is there evidence that this was ever done by the NFL in any other case?

Is there any evidence of a serious lack of integrity by the NFL powers in anything concerning their records during this time?

Enough. If anyone can come forward with something other than suspicion, we will consider the conspiracy theory farther. Otherwise, let's deal in facts.

As we said, a mistake was made somewhere. Was it in 1934 with the weekly total of 107-1052 or the final official total of 101-1004? Or was it in 1943 when the 117-1104 appears? Or was it in 1947 when things went back to 101-1004?

The game accounts for the league have long since been lost. But when did they get lost? We do not know, though we assume, that they were used in 1934. Were they still around to be checked in 1943? In 1947?

All we can do at this point is check newspaper accounts of the games. Neft has been through just about every newspaper on microfilm, but he admits that some contemporary papers in Cincinnati and Chicago have not been microfilmed. Would anyone in either of those cities be willing to spend a long afternoon at their library? If so, please write to the CC.

Finally, if you have anything in your personal library that can shed new light on this discussion, please xerox and send.

David Neft has said (and the CC concurs) that we have no axe to grind for or against Feathers or the NFL. All we want is the truth.