

THE PROVING GROUND: A Season On The Fringe in NFL Europe

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Review by John Vorperian

In the tradition of tell-all sports classics steel yourself for a candid and detailed clubhouse view by Lars Anderson in **THE PROVING GROUND: A Season On The Fringe in NFL Europe**. Anderson, a Sports Illustrated journalist spent the 2000 season with the Scottish Claymores. From Training Camp, Orlando, Florida to their Frankfurt, Germany World Bowl appearance against Rhein Fire you will learn the Claymore game plan. Simply put the omnipresent design among Claymores and NFL Europe players alike, can be summed up as “no holiday, know my name.” Here on the bubble from the Holy Grail of Professional Sports—the National Football League, athletes viciously compete not for the money, but for the videotape.

Pros Kurt Warner, Jon Kitna, Brad Johnson, Marcus Robinson, and La'Roi Glover, played Europe. **THE PROVING GROUND** confirms those success stories are key motivation for the rosters in this last chance for stardom conference. Observing the Claymores' first orientation meeting Anderson writes, “More than anything though, what the players really saw on the screen was hope—for their careers, their futures, and their bank accounts.” Many had been on NFL practice squads or last-cuts. They had savored Major League sweetness, but had been cast out of Eden's Gridiron. Whether allocated to or a free agent in Amsterdam (Admirals), Barcelona (Dragons), Berlin (Thunder), Dusseldorf (Rhein Fire), Frankfurt (Galaxy), and Glasgow (Scottish Claymores) all were given a 10-game season to prove they belong on true NFL ground.

THE PROVING GROUND's foreword by Pro Bowl Defense Tackle La'Roi Glover reiterates the tale Anderson captures from this gritty season diary. Cut from the Raiders Glover got a second chance with New Orleans. Why? The Saints had seen NFL Europe film of Glover's handiwork as a Barcelona Dragon. As Glover says, “..your tape is your resume... If you don't have fresh tape you're going to have a difficult time making it in.. (NFL)...”

THE PROVING GROUND ranks among sports books, like *BALL FOUR*, *PAPER LION*, & *OUT OF THEIR LEAGUE*. Those titles with their revealing tales had fans amazed and club officials dazed by disclosing what actually goes on in and around professional athletics. Anderson does not shy away from his journalistic duties. Drug use, racism, and uncontrolled violence do these activities run about on NFL Europe's grounds? Judge for yourself.

Author Anderson also relates the 2000 Claymore season from the Coaches room. Draftniks, wannabe G.M.s, and armchair skippers, will truly appreciate the trials and tribulations of NFL Europe coaches. Scotland Head Coach Jim Criner foresaw the '00 season as the Claymores break-out year. We learn filling a strong NFL Europe roster calls upon a Coach's keen ability to get blue chips out of the over 140 player allocation pool. Team replacements? Well, you better move on to other grounds. **THE PROVING GROUND** notes how Coach Criner and his staff built a World Bowl contender.

NFL fans may be the greatest fans in the world. But **THE PROVING GROUND** in light-hearted fashion informs us the world certainly in those 10 European outposts of gridiron action loves the game.

THE PROVING GROUND: A Season On The Fringe in NFL Europe will be the center of your football book library.

John Vorperian and his wife Suzanne reside in White Plains, NY with two cats, Tiggy and Daisy. Vorperian is an active member of Society for American Baseball Research, Professional Football Researchers Association, & coordinator for the Westchester Baseball Group.

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