BOOK REVIEW


In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, one of the biggest names in college football was that of little Grambling College of Louisiana. With a soon-to-be legendary coach named Eddie Robinson, the Grambling football team and its outstanding marching band traveled to seemingly every corner of the country, produced an endless flow of players to pro football, and was for a time a serious contender for the title of "America's Team."

The man who played a major role in all these accomplishments, along with the expansion and development of Grambling itself into one of today's most prestigious of the historically black colleges, is the subject of this new biography. His name was Collie J. Nicholson - usually called just "Collie" or "Nick" - and he served as the sports information director at Grambling for 32 years (1948-1979) and was the driving promotional force that made possible so much of the attention for the Louisiana school.

Growing up in Winnfield, Louisiana, Collie talked himself into a job writing a weekly football article for the town newspaper while he was still in high school, even as he was a star baseball player. Graduating from high school in 1941, his baseball talent helped get some financial aid so he could attend Grambling. Entering the Marines in 1943 for World War II, he became the first-ever Black combat correspondent as he was attached to the all-black 51st Defense Battalion in the Pacific Theater. After the war he was headed to journalism school at the University of Wisconsin, but instead ended up back at Grambling where he graduated in 1948 and was hired as one of the first SID's at a historically black college.

After starting with an account of Collie's involvement in getting the first Pioneer Bowl game in Japan organized in 1976 with Grambling as one of the competing teams, the author turns to the tale of Collie's pre-SID days with plenty of historical material included about Grambling itself, including President Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones and Coach Eddie Robinson - both of whom joined with Nicholson in carrying the little school to the heights of popularity. There is plenty of information about Grambling football - especially some of its future NFL stars - but this is definitely not an exclusively hard-core football book. Included also is a nice sampling of Collie's many newspaper dispatches on Grambling football through the years.

The author, a major authority on black college football, is a former newspaper writer for papers in Houston and San Francisco, and USA Today, and so, not surprisingly, this book reads like feature stories you would expect to find in newspapers or popular magazines. This is an informative, well-written, and easy-to-read account of the behind the scenes promotional efforts that made Grambling such a well known college football name in the 1970s. While not a definitive history of Grambling football, it definitely makes a major contribution to the still far from complete documented history of football at the black colleges, and as such, this book should be on the reading list of college football historians.

RS.