

READ BY DANIEL THOMAS MAY

The National Football League is a towering, distinctly American colossus taking in \$14 billion in annual revenue and provoking intense national debate over issues from player safety to political protest. Yet its current dominance obscures a surprising origin story. As it turns out, in the beginning most people found the very idea of professional football absurd.

In *The League*, acclaimed author John Eisenberg reveals how the five men who built the NFL took an immense risk by investing in the sport in the 1920s and 1930s. Art Rooney, George Halas, Tim Mara, George Preston Marshall, and Bert Bell first achieved renown as gamblers, bookies, and prodigal sons. What they shared, other than street smarts and a competitive streak, was an unusual passion for professional football at a time when the nation was obsessed with college football, baseball, boxing, and horseracing. As Eisenberg shows in this absorbing chronicle of the NFL's first decades, the League nearly failed numerous times. It was frequently short on funds or fans, and often both. New teams appeared and quickly folded. The Depression and the Second World War only magnified the challenges the owners faced.

The five rivals succeeded because each sacrificed the short-term success of his team for the longer-term good of the League. Together they instituted a draft and revised the rules to transform a plodding, run-based game into a dazzling aerial show. Together they ushered the NFL into the TV era of the 1950s—when the league we know today first came into view.

A remarkable story of sportsmanship and business ingenuity, *The League* is an essential listen for any fan of our true national pastime.

JOHN EISENBERG is the author of nine previous books, including *That First Season* and *Ten-Gallon War*. A former sportswriter for the *Baltimore Sun*, he lives in Baltimore, Maryland.



Running Time: Approx. 12 Hours • Unabridged

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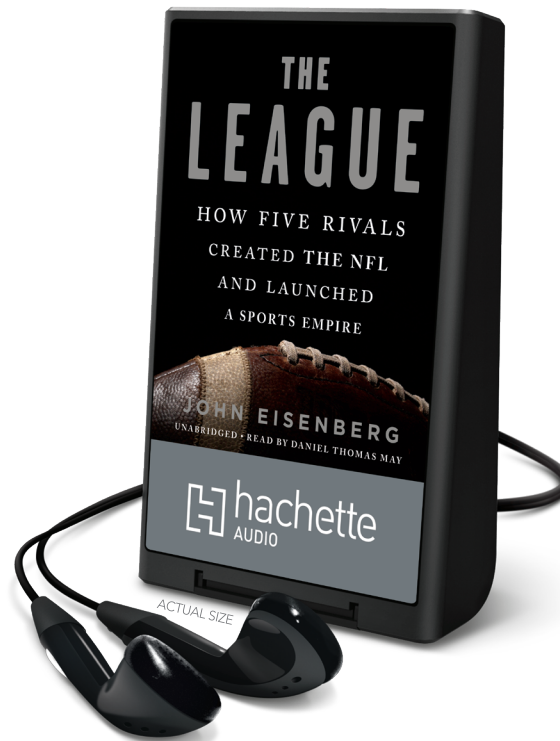
THE LEAGUE

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