

The Last Stand of the DULUTH ESKIMOS

Two pieces of memorabilia highlight the dying days of the NFL franchise known as the Duluth Eskimos, a team that showcased the talent of Ernie Nevers (right), one of the members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame's inaugural class of 1963.



DULUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

Michael Moran _____

There are many kinds of artifacts that fall into the category of football memorabilia. If you were at a game and purchased a pennant or a program or even saved your ticket stub and brought it home, you would be a collector of football memorabilia. Football cards from the National Chicle Company, Topps, Bowman or modern set producers are probably the most collected form of memorabilia. Some people collect equipment and jerseys (or little swatches of jer-

seys embedded like holy relics in limited edition modern cards), while others stick to autographs or, even more selectively, Hall of Fame autographs.

Many collectors of early NFL material are eclectic in their taste because the pickings can sometimes feel very slim and you're happy just to find something—anything—that gives you a hands-on feeling for the early years of the league. Such was the case with the contract between the Chicago Bears and the Duluth Eskimos for a game on December 11, 1927—a game that turned out to be the last ever played by the Eskimos.

The National Football League GAME CONTRACT

For the purpose of playing a game of football, CHICAGO BEARS FOOTBALL CLUB, Inc., party of the first part, and DULUTH ESKIMOS FOOTBALL CLUB, with ERNIE NEVERS, party of the second part, both being members in good standing in **The National Football League**, hereby agree as follows:

That a game of football shall be played in the city of Chicago, on grounds furnished by the party of the first part, on the date of Dec. 11, 1927, between the hours of 2 P. M. and 6 P. M.

That the length of each quarter period of said game shall be 15 minutes.

That the party of the second part shall receive as consideration for said game, the guaranteed sum of \$4000.00 ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX for hotel expenses and XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ with the option of taking 40 per cent of the entire gross receipts after 15 per cent thereof has been deducted for park rental, not including war tax, to be paid at the conclusion of the game.

That party of the second part, for the game aforesaid, shall bear their own expense, and party of the first part shall pay all officials for said game, except that party of second part shall pay one-half of officials' traveling expenses.

That the eligibility of all officials and players participating in said game shall have the approval of the officials of **The National Football League**.

That in case of any dispute regarding plays made during the game, Spalding's Official Football Guide shall govern, and the decision of the President shall be final.

Special Provisions:

That party of the first part shall have the right to cancel said game in case of inclement weather only, by giving notice to party of the second part at least five hours before departure of second party's train. In the event first party shall fail to give such notice of cancellation to second party, as above provided, and no game is played, party of the second part shall receive only actual expenses (railroad fair, hotel and meals for twenty [20] men).

That if both teams have arrived on the field of play, and it is found that said field is questionable for play, the question of cancellation of said game shall rest solely with the manager of the home team.

Party of first part shall issue passes and party of second part shall receive passes.

In Witness Whereof, the said parties have hereunto set their hands and seals this 7th day of December, 1927.

CHICAGO BEARS FOOTBALL CLUB,
By Edw. C. Strassman
By Fred A. Halas

Approved by:

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE DULUTH ESKIMOS FOOTBALL CLUB,
BY Bluff Hunsford

Secretary and Treasurer

This copy to be held by the party of the first part.

That a game of football shall be played in the city of Chicago, on grounds furnished by the party of the first part, on the date of Dec. 11 1927, between the hours of 2 P. M. and 6 P. M.

That the length of each quarter period of said game shall be 15 minutes.

That the party of the second part shall receive as consideration for said game, the guaranteed sum of \$4000.00, ~~plus or minus for total expenses and~~ ~~travel~~, with the option of taking 40 per cent of the entire gross receipts after 15 per cent thereof has been deducted for park rental, not including war tax, to be paid at the conclusion of the game.

In the contract the Bears made a \$4,000 guarantee to the Eskimos for the game. NFL records show that 2,500 people attended. It's safe to say that an attendance of 2,500 at Wrigley Field did not generate \$4,000 in receipts, so the Bears must have been backed into a corner—financially speaking. No doubt it was part of the reason the Bears ended the 1927 season \$3,488.35 in the red.

For autographs you have Dutch Sternaman and George Halas, co-owners of the Bears until Halas bought out Sternaman in 1933. For the Eskimos you have Ole Haugsrud, the man who brought Ernie Nevers into professional football and who supposedly paid \$1 to purchase the team from the players, who had been running it as a cooperative venture. When Haugsrud sold the Duluth franchise to a team in Orange, New Jersey in 1929, it was with an agreement that he would receive a percentage of the next NFL franchise in Minnesota—thirty years later he became a part owner of the Minnesota Vikings.

A companion piece is the letter on Eskimo stationery from 1929 seen on the next page. It is collectible for the letterhead, the autograph and the historical content. It shows that prior to the Duluth franchise being sold to Orange there was a final attempt to field an Eskimos NFL team. The date of the letter, July 22, is interesting because both Haugsrud and Scanlon were at the same time in negotiations with Dr. David Jones, who became the new owner of the Chicago Cardinals four days prior, to manage and coach that team—and to bring Ernie Nevers along with them. Maybe when Johnny Blood McNally signed with the Packers they gave in to the pressure at the owners meeting to sell their franchise to Newark, but the letter shows they struggled to the bitter end to keep the Eskimos alive.

MICHAEL MORAN is the senior pastor of the First Congregational Church in New Milford, Connecticut. His research and collecting interests focus on his father, Hap Moran, who played in the NFL from 1926 to 1933, and the game of that era.

to set their hands and seals this 7 1927

CHICAGO BEARS FOOTBALL CLUB,
By Edw. C. Sternaman
By Geo. Halas

BY Ole Haugsrud

the party of the first part.

OLUF HAUGSRUD
PRESIDENT
BOX NO. 297
DULUTH MINN.
PHONE. CALUMET 499-W

ERNIE NEVERS' ESKIMOS



DEWEY D. SCANLON
MANAGER
5811 CODY STREET
WEST DULUTH. MINN.
PHONE. CALUMET 499-W

Duluth, Minn., July 22nd, 1929

Mr. John McNally,
New Richmond, Wisconsin.

Dear John:-

We are going to operate a Club in the National Pro Football League this coming season. I am writing you at this time, to ask if you would be interested in a contract with this Team. The Schedule meeting takes place at Atlantic City, July 27th and 28th, after which time we will be able to give full information as to terms and schedule.

Expecting an early reply, we are

Very truly yours

DULUTH FOOTBALL CLUB

Dewey D. Scanlon
Manager

MEMBER NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE
