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Rob Ruck

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ROONEY

ROONEY

A Sporting Life

Rob Ruck,
Maggie Jones Patterson,
and Michael P. Weber

University of Nebraska Press
Lincoln and London

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Set in Sabon by Kim Essman.

For Alex Ruck and Pittsburgh's next generation

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Preface

ROB RUCK

This biography has been ten years in the making, but its genesis goes back further, to the late 1970s when I met Michael Weber. I was a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh writing a dissertation on sport in black Pittsburgh. Mike, then a historian at Carnegie Mellon University, was one of a handful of scholars whose work helped me understand the history of Pittsburgh in its ethnic and racial complexity. Mike had a quick smile and an incisive mind, and he carried himself with the agility of the college wrestler he had been. He became the dean of the Graduate School of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Duquesne University in 1986 and its provost and vice president for academic affairs in 1987.

In 1981, while writing his superb biography of David Lawrence, *Don't Call Me Boss: David Lawrence, Pittsburgh's Renaissance Mayor*, Mike interviewed Lawrence's close friend, Art Rooney. I had talked with Rooney a year before, about Gus Greenlee, the numbers baron who owned the Pittsburgh Crawfords, a team in the Negro National League.

Greenlee had been a patron of sport in black Pittsburgh. Several of the older sandlot and Negro League players I had interviewed about him responded by telling me stories about Art Rooney instead. They spoke warmly about how Rooney had befriended them. One called him a Robin Hood for black athletes; another added that he had never tolerated racial nonsense on the sandlots. I had never heard African Americans in Pittsburgh discuss a white person in such adulatory terms.

I spoke with Rooney in his office at Three Rivers Stadium, which was built on the site of Exposition Park, where he had played as a young man. Rooney, then seventy-nine, turned in his chair and gestured toward the photographs of former players and old buddies that surrounded

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him. As he spoke of his friendships with Gus Greenlee and Cumberland “Cum” Posey, the owner of the Homestead Grays, I better understood why he was held in high regard by the black community. Rooney had quietly helped Posey and Greenlee make Pittsburgh the crossroads of black baseball during the 1930s and 40s. I had known of Art Rooney mostly as the owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers; I began to realize that he was much more than that. Rooney’s life tracked the evolution of sport from the sandlots in the early twentieth century to its emergence as a corporate juggernaut in the 1980s.

“How come nobody’s ever written your biography?” I asked near the end of the interview. Rooney shrugged off the question: “It’s been written a hundred times.” When I pressed him, he suggested that I read a recently published biography of his friend, Chicago Bears owner George Halas. Halas was the one worthy of such attention, he said.

A few days later, I left for Cuba to research Caribbean connections to the Negro Leagues. I returned with some cigars that I sent to Rooney, who responded as if they were his favorite smokes in the world.

Several years later, I asked Joe Gordon, the Steelers’ extraordinary public relations director, if he thought Rooney would be amenable to a biography. He doubted it; “Mr. Rooney” did not relish being the center of attention. Art Rooney died not long afterward, in 1988. I let the idea of a Rooney biography slip until I was asked to put together a session about him for the American Studies Association meetings held in Pittsburgh in 1994. Mike Weber and I were talking with Dan Rooney following the session when I mentioned that I had long thought that his father’s life would make a worthwhile biography. Mike seconded that notion. Dan, who knew Mike because he was on the board of trustees at Duquesne University, replied that he would think it over.

He thought about it for a long while. Five years later, Dan gave Mike the green light for the two of us to write a biography of his father. Dan, a man with a passion for history, promised us access to Steeler materials and his full cooperation, with the understanding that he would have no editorial say in the final product. Dan’s brother Art Jr. also readily agreed to help.

Mike and I began working on the book in 1999 and conducted

Preface

interviews over the next year and a half. Mike was poised to retire from Duquesne in the summer of 2001 and work full-time on the book when an illness he thought he had beaten recurred. He died in July 2001. This book would not have been written without Mike's involvement; his thinking about Pittsburgh has guided how we approached it. If Mike had lived, he would have made it a better book.

At Mike's funeral Mass, Father Sean Hogan, Duquesne's vice president for student life, stopped as he led the procession from the University Chapel. Taking one of my hands in both of his own, Father Hogan said, "You're going to finish the book, aren't you?" I did not think he meant it as a question. I told him that I would. Art Rooney Jr., who had sat behind Maggie Patterson and me during the Mass, then tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You should get Maggie to work on this with you; you're not going to get the Irish Catholic part of the story." Art Jr.'s advice made sense. Maggie Patterson, Mike's Duquesne University colleague and my wife, had played a substantial editorial role in almost everything I had ever written. When she offered to write this book with me, I gladly accepted.

We soon discovered that many Pittsburghers, as well as folks from New York to Northern Ireland, had a story or two about Art Rooney. Most were respectful, but some hinted at racketeering and skullduggery. Our backgrounds in journalism and history had prepared us to become cynical and disillusioned about Art Rooney as we dug into the less savory aspects of his life. We looked for evidence that would confirm Rooney's involvement in illicit activities. But we found no direct evidence of Rooney engaging in illegal activities. The circumstantial evidence amounted to little more than guilt by association and uncorroborated hearsay. Art Rooney was a friend to bootleggers, gamblers, and ward heelers, and he was a gambler himself. But scant evidence indicates that he was more than peripherally engaged. Art Rooney was no angel. But we heard much more about his generous actions, known only to their recipients, than about any perfidy. Surprisingly, the more we researched his life, the more respect and affection we felt for him.

A son of the sandlots, Rooney took his team from Pittsburgh's Northside into the National Football League. He helped that league survive the

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Depression and World War II and championed the one-for-all, all-for-one ethos that made it the most successful venture in American sport.

It is largely forgotten today, but Rooney might have been the best all-around athlete in Pittsburgh during the 1920s. Yet, he left more of a mark off the field. A product of Pittsburgh sport and the city's hard-working people, he was also their paladin. The city and its football team struggled for much of the century, but both of them persevered and ultimately triumphed. As success dawned, Pittsburghers placed sport and Rooney's Steelers at the core of their collective identity. More than any other individual, he shaped Pittsburgh into the City of Champions.

Rooney is more than a Pittsburgh story. It is the saga of American sport and its century-long journey from the sandlots to corporate boardrooms. *Rooney* recalls a time when sport emerged more from the nation's communities than from its commerce. In those bygone years, sport helped people craft a sense of identity. It was the one arena where immigrants, native-born Americans, and black migrants challenged each other on relatively level footing. Art Rooney's story reminds us of a different era, when a saloonkeeper's son could ditch his image as sport's all-time loser and become Pittsburgh's favorite son, the nice guy who finished on top.

Acknowledgments

Writing this book depended on people willing to think about the past and share their recollections with us. We interviewed over one hundred individuals, several on multiple occasions. Many of them searched family records and dug through scrapbooks and memories. Their participation was an invaluable contribution to our efforts to recreate Art Rooney's life, and we are deeply obliged to each of them. Their names are listed below.

Many Rooneys, McGinleys, and Laughlins helped us along the way, answering questions and expediting our investigations. Dan Rooney, Art's oldest son, was especially gracious and engaged. His encouragement and friendship mean much to us. His brother Art Jr. was also an encouraging ally in our endeavors and ever ready to help. Both Dan and Art Jr. published their own memoirs during the time it took us to finish this book; we hope our conversations aided them in their own writing. Dan's wife, Patricia Regan Rooney, was another source of help, as were Art's other three sons, Tim, John, and Pat; his nephew Jamie Rooney and Jamie's wife, Susan; his niece Kathy Rooney; his brother-in-law Jack McGinley; and his sister Margaret Laughlin Rooney, who reached back into childhood memories and who died with an early draft of chapter one beside her reading chair. Kathy Rooney helped us gather the photos that illustrate this book. Joseph A. Rooney at Lynn University provided information about the Rooneys as saloonkeepers. Mary Ellen Davisson shared some early Rooney history, and Paul Greenaway, who read the manuscript, Anne Jackson, and Father Ray Utz gave us insight into the Murray side of the family.

The staff of the Pittsburgh Steelers was enormously supportive and

Acknowledgments

friendly, confirming what football writers around the country know about the competence and affability of that organization. Dave Lockett, Jan Rusnack, Vicki Uni, Ty Ryan, Monica Shields, Stacie Lawrence, Geraldine Glenn, Ron Wahl, and Mike Fabus were a delight to work with in researching this book. So were Art Rooney Jr.'s very able assistant, Dee Herrod, and Kathleen Klotz at the Palm Beach Kennel Club.

Our investigations relied heavily on the staffs of the following libraries and institutions: Duquesne University, the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, The Senator John Heinz History Center, Georgetown University, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and the Pro Football Hall of Fame; The National Library of Wales (Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru) in Aberystwyth; the National Library of Ireland in Dublin; the Newry and Mourne Museum and the Arts Centre and Museum in Newry, Northern Ireland; the Montreal Central Library; the Ebbw Vale and Tredegar, Wales, town libraries; and the Gwent County Council records in Ebbw Vale. A special thanks to Eugene Sawa of the university library system at the University of Pittsburgh, Lauren Uhl at the Heinz History Center, Gemma Reid and Noreen Cunningham at the Newry Museum, Paul Demilio in the Duquesne Archives, Marilyn Holt of the Pennsylvania Room of Carnegie Library, the Whitegates Community Centre in Newry, and the researcher at the Tredegar town library who gave up the best microfilm reader and guided us through the oddly organized 1871 and 1881 British censuses.

Roy McHugh, the dean of Pittsburgh sportswriters, was a source of much insight and a terrific sounding board. Anne Madarasz, the chief curator of the Western Pennsylvania Sport History Museum at the Heinz History Center, shared her intimate knowledge and contacts in Pittsburgh sport. Joel Tarr, James Barrett, and Marcus Rediker wrote in support of the project. Anne Knowles of Middlebury College helped us understand Wales and Welsh émigrés. Gerry McCauley, a Pittsburgh native, Pitt grad, and exemplary agent, led us to Bob Diforio, our agent, who found our manuscript a good home at the University of Nebraska Press and a good editor in Rob Taylor.

In investigating the Rooneys and Murrays, several area residents went out of their way to help us track down genealogical information

Acknowledgments

and recreate a sense of what Coultersville, Monaca, Wireton, and the Northside were like when the Rooney and Murray families were there. They include Ray, Jim, and Estelle Shepherd in Coulter; John Canning on the Northside; Dolores Morrison in Wireton; Bob Bauder in Beaver County; and William Irions and colleagues at the Beaver Falls Carnegie Library.

In researching Shamrock Farm and Art Rooney's career in racing, we are indebted to Jim and Chrissie Steele, Cindy Deubler of the Maryland Horse Breeders Association, Phyllis Rogers at the Keeneland Library, and Bob Curran of The Jockey Club. Jeanne Schmedlen and Troy DeFrank helped us track Jim Rooney's legislative career.

The following individuals and institutions located church and company records: Mrs. Nancy Yuhasz, chancellor, Diocese of Youngstown; the National Library of Ireland, Dublin; Father Michael Hagerty, Ebbw Vale, Wales; and Pat Jaynes at Corus Steel in Ebbw Vale.

Our families have retained their Pittsburgh connections even though they no longer reside in the city. Several of them read drafts of the manuscript, including Rob's parents, Elaine and Mort Weissman (who also researched Florida racing); his sister and brother-in-law, Linda and Bruce Mittleman; and Maggie's brothers Ken Jones and Dave Jones. Ken suggested we include a map while Dave, a metallurgical engineer, researched the particulars of nineteenth-century iron production. Maggie's other brother, Bob Jones, kept us laughing.

We received financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities through the McAnulty College of Liberal Arts at Duquesne University and the Central Research Fund at the University of Pittsburgh that allowed us to travel to Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Wales to investigate the Rooneys' Old Country antecedents. Support from Alec Stewart, dean of the Honors College at the University of Pittsburgh, made it possible for Gordon Burk and Bill Schlacter to do yeoman's work for us in the archives. Pitt students Jimmy Jones, Pete Jones (Maggie's nephew), and Michael Cunningham, as well as Ryan Hardesty and Gabriel Celli as part of the First Research Experience Program, tracked down dozens of leads and pored over microfilm.

At Duquesne University, Mary McIntyre was Mike Weber's assistant

Acknowledgments

in the provost's office. She was of immense help and transcribed many of the early interviews. Jen Pearson spent hours and hours in the Steelers' archives; Kelley Crowley helped with family records; registrar Pat Jakub found old student records; and administrative assistants Jane Gardner and Sally Richie and graduate student Jamey Stewart performed many acts of kindness that made this work easier.

Members of the history department at Pitt have long known that its staff—Molly Dennis-Estes, Kathy Gibson, Patty Landon, and Grace Tomcho—is a precious group of personable and highly competent women. Their contributions to this project are too great to enumerate.

Many colleagues and friends helped us with this project. The Rooneys are bound by history and values to Duquesne University, which gave frequent and generous support to this project. Father Hogan never lost his concern for Mike Weber's legacy. Maggie's colleagues in the journalism and multimedia arts departments have been loyal and cooperative while she spent years researching and writing. In addition to their moral support, colleagues gave their expertise: John Shepherd on technology and sports; Mike Dillon on biography; and Joe Sora and Rob Bellamy about publishers. They and other faculty and administrators shared their excitement and enthusiasm for this endeavor while helping to make the work easier.

In Rob's peripatetic academic career he has never known a finer department or a better group of colleagues than those in the history department at the University of Pittsburgh. It is, as Alejandro de la Fuente calls it, *mi patria pequeña*. The department has molded Rob as a historian and influenced his approach to sport. As chair of the department, Bill Chase navigated university minefields to create the time and space for Rob to finish a draft of the manuscript; good friend Reid Andrews has been a longtime source of wisdom and laughs over dinner and on the bike trails. Ted Muller is a Pittsburgh native who returned and became the city's foremost historian. His insights, shared over coffee most weekday mornings, have shaped a vision of Pittsburgh. Bernie Hagerty gave this manuscript a penetrating read-through and conveyed his thoughts and bonhomie many an early morning. Loyalty defined Art Rooney as much as anything. It's the same for Marcus Rediker, with

Acknowledgments

whom Rob has run the gamut, including some of the sweetest evenings at the Petersen Center (the House that Brandin Knight Built) and Madison Square Garden.

Our good buddy David Bear was the first to read anything we had written. He sits beside us during Steeler games and pushes Rob's limits along the Youghiogheny River and their journeys into the backcountry. Jay Reifer read the manuscript, as did his father, Irwin Peewee Reifer. Jay and Ken Boas contributed their thoughts during runs in Schenley Park. Mark Cohen has had Rob's back in travel and on trial since 1970. He's been a counsel on this project and the best of conspirators along the way.

Maggie's dear friend Liane Norman read early drafts of the manuscript and wisely advised us to keep the language and organization simple and straightforward, as befits the subject. Patty Weber encouraged us to continue after Mike's death and became our most faithful advocate. She and John Brungo read drafts of the book and cheered for us at every step. Our son, Alex, not only put up with his parents' preoccupation with this project but spurred us on with his interest in history and intense love of Pittsburgh and its football team.

Introduction

American Football Conference Playoff

Three Rivers Stadium, December 23, 1972

As writers in the press box composed their epitaphs for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Art Rooney stood and headed to the elevator. Pittsburgh had won its first division title in forty years that season, but Rooney's Steelers were losing 7–6, and only 22 seconds remained in their playoff game against the Oakland Raiders. Facing fourth-and-ten from their own 40-yard line, they needed to gain 25 yards to get within field goal range. Pirates announcer Bob Prince held the elevator door for Art, two priests, and a friend. Art said nothing as the elevator slowly descended. "I figured we had lost," he later explained, "and I wanted to get to the locker room early so I could personally thank the players for the fine job they'd done all season."

On the field, quarterback Terry Bradshaw had one last chance. Coach Chuck Noll called a play designed to hit rookie receiver Barry Pearson down the middle and put Pittsburgh in field goal range. Bradshaw dropped back to pass under a heavy rush. A Raider grabbed him around his shoulders, but he twisted free. Steeler halfback Frenchy Fuqua curled into the center of the field, deep enough to give Roy Gerela a shot at a field goal if the pass could be completed, and the game clock stopped by quickly downing the football. But another Raider lurched toward Bradshaw and he was forced to unload the ball. "I saw Frenchy and I didn't see anyone around. Then I don't know what happened," Bradshaw said. "I got knocked down."

The football, Frenchy Fuqua, and defensive back Jack Tatum converged

at Oakland's 35-yard line. The ball bounced off Fuqua or Tatum or both and ricocheted backward. Fuqua, who had not seen Tatum coming, fell to the turf, dazed. "He gave me a good lick. Everything was dizzy." But then Fuqua looked downfield in disbelief. "I saw this dude at the 5-yard line and I couldn't figure out why." The dude—teammate Franco Harris—had caught the deflected football at his shoe tops and was crossing the goal line.

By midnight the play had a name: the Immaculate Reception.

Art saw none of it. He was inside the elevator grappling with what he would tell his players when the stadium reverberated. "We heard a wild scream from the crowd," Art said. "It could only mean one thing but no one in the elevator dared believe it." He had waited a long time for this moment, only to miss it.

Sandlots to Pros

The Pittsburgh Steelers wandered sport's wastelands for nearly half a century before winning the hearts and minds of the people of Western Pennsylvania. As they blossomed into football's best team ever, the hard-boiled man who had created the team from a group of scrappy sandlot-ers on the city's Northside became the region's icon.

Art Rooney was once described as a cross between Charles Bronson, the rough-hewn actor from Cambria County's coalfields, and Jiggs, the comic strip character. Rooney personified the evolution of sport as it grew from the sandlots to corporate money-ball. Yet throughout his eighty-seven years he remained close to his roots and as much a part of Pittsburgh as its shot-and-a-beer taverns. Pittsburghers called him The Chief, a nickname his twin sons had given him for his resemblance to Perry White, Clark Kent's editor in the *Superman* television series.

Art's heart always belonged more to the sandlot than the bottom line, and his life tells a story America likes to hear about itself. Fans across the country, many with no connection to Pittsburgh, see something of America's smokestack spirit in Rooney and his Steelers.

Rooney was shaped by his Irish Catholic immigrant family, by Pittsburgh, and by sport. His people came to Pittsburgh from Ireland via Canada, Wales, and Youngstown, Ohio, arriving at the dawn of the steel

age. Their descendants saw that epoch end. The men on the Rooney side of the family worked in iron and steel for three generations; those on his mother's side, in coal. There was nothing lace curtain about either.

In more recent times, sport—even more than iron and steel—has broadcast an indelible image of Pittsburgh to the world. It has offered Pittsburghers a way to tell their story of sacrifice and commitment, loss and triumph. Art Rooney was both a product of that heritage and its paladin.

No other city of comparable size experienced such singular success in twentieth-century American sport, especially at the professional level. The Pirates, Crawfords, Grays, Penguins, and Rooney's Steelers won more than a score of championships while creating some of sport's most unforgettable icons and moments: Honus Wagner scooping up dirt and pebbles along with the ball from his position at shortstop; Josh Gibson swatting a ball into the heavens; Bill Mazeroski rounding third, leaping into the air, and heading for home to end the 1960 World Series; Roberto Clemente unleashing a throw from right field; and Franco Harris catching a football before it touched the turf in the 1972 playoffs. Rumpled and unfazed, puffing on a cigar, Art Rooney was there for each of these moments.

But Art was more than a bystander, and his persona as homegrown sports mogul is only part of the story. An extraordinary athlete, Art grew up in a Runyonesque setting, a neighborhood called the Ward on the Northside in Pittsburgh where his father owned Dan Rooney's Cafe and Bar, known for its nickel beers, free lunches, and the sportsmen and politicians who congregated there.

The family lived atop the saloon, near honky-tonks, gambling parlors, and Exposition Park, home to the Pirates until 1909. Art loved the neighborhood, where the Irish and their descendants set the tone, with Gaelic spoken in many homes and wakes lasting for days. After moving there as a boy in 1913, Art never really left. He and his wife, Kass, bought a large Victorian house on the Northside in 1939 and stayed in it for the rest of their lives while the area's racial and class balance shifted. After they died their son Dan and his wife, Patricia, moved in.

Art came of age on the Phipps Playgrounds, a short walk from home.

Introduction

At Phipps, Exposition Park, and the St. Peter's Lyceum, Rooney's mantra was to think ahead of the play, and he did that on and off the field all his life. He was a prodigy, combining speed, agility, and strength—if not much size—with a keen comprehension of the game and competitive zeal. His body control and hand-eye coordination allowed him to excel in baseball and football. Few could best him in a footrace or a fight, and when he took up golf in middle age he became a scratch player.

By the 1920s Art Rooney had become Pittsburgh's best all-around athlete. He was in full stride, playing for college and semipro teams. On the diamond he battled future Hall of Famers Cum Posey, Martin Dihigo, Joe Cronin, Oscar Charleston, and Smokey Joe Williams. On the gridiron he held his own against Jim Thorpe and the Canton Bulldogs. Knute Rockne tried to lure Art to Notre Dame, while the Red Sox and Cubs offered him the chance to play professional baseball. In the ring he beat 1920 Olympic gold medalist Sammy Mosberg.

Although Art boxed professionally and starred in the minor leagues, he put away his gloves and his spikes for good by the 1930s. He recognized that his real talent was promoting sport, not playing it. In 1933 he transformed the Hope Harveys, a sandlot club he had formed on the Northside, into an NFL franchise. As a boxing promoter he helped make Pittsburgh a fight town second only to New York. His career intertwined with those of Billy Conn, Fritzie Zivic, Ezzard Charles, and Ray Robinson. Rooney's greatest notoriety as a player came at the racetrack. In 1937, the year Seabiscuit became the people's choice on the track, Art was heralded as America's greatest horse player.

His football teams, however, remained perennial losers. After more than a decade as NFL doormats, Rooney's Steelers finally enjoyed success after World War II. Jock Sutherland coached them into the playoffs, only to die of a brain tumor following the 1947 season. Pittsburgh returned to mediocrity, but Art began putting his stamp on the NFL. He helped to make it the best-run league and most popular ticket in American pro sport.

While his team could not beat George Halas's Chicago Bears for the longest time, when the league decided whether to recognize the players' union, Rooney—not Halas—prevailed. George Preston Marshall talked

louder and longer about how television revenues belonged to each team, but Rooney waited until the Washington Redskins' flamboyant owner talked himself out. In the end the owners adopted Rooney's position to share and share alike.

Rooney's influence within the NFL was cloaked to the public, but he was a consummate inside politician. He knew how to get people to compromise, to sacrifice immediate and personal interests for the long-term collective good. Rooney was patient and affable, but he could be tough and skilled at creating win-win deals. His political mentors, Pennsylvania governor David L. Lawrence and state senator James J. Coyne, had prepared him well.

Art held the NFL together when arguments between Halas and the Giants' Tim Mara or George Marshall's histrionics threatened to pull it apart. His fingerprints were on every decision that defined the league. Art convinced the NFL not only to recognize the players' association but to accept it as a partner. He persuaded his colleagues to share television revenues, a decision that every small-market team has come to view as the cornerstone of its existence. And when the other NFL teams balked about joining the less-attractive American Football Conference, Rooney moved the Steelers to ensure the merger. A seeming sacrifice at the time proved to be a pivotal moment in turning the Steelers into winners. Art had a knack for turning virtue into success. Sometimes it just took awhile.

Loyalty was his chief virtue. In 1970 when Art was still regarded as professional football's champion loser, sportswriter Myron Cope asked why he had never sold the club. "Money has never been my god—never," Rooney replied. "Back in the early 1950s, I could have moved to Baltimore, and then later, to Buffalo, Atlanta, New Orleans, Cincinnati. The propositions they made were fantastic." Other owners might have leaped at the chance, but not Rooney. "If you didn't have ties," Rooney reasoned, "if you didn't care for your city and its people, if you were just looking for wealth, you could have picked up and gone. But that's not you, not if you care for your city . . . I believe if we win, we'll do as good as we would in probably any of those other towns." Art's Steelers would win, but only after his sons assumed bigger roles.

Introduction

By 1980 Pittsburgh reigned as the City of Champions. Sport had become its persona: tough, hardworking, and resilient. In other words: Rooney. People came to identify Pittsburgh sport with its professional teams. But the city's sporting excellence was rooted in the sandlots that dotted western Pennsylvania. These sandlots had always been Rooney's domain. There, boys and men created a sporting life that did more than lay the foundation for the city's emergence as a citadel of sport. That sporting life helped generations of men cope with their lives in mills and mines at a time when Pittsburgh still was referred to as "Hell with the lid off." Though Rooney moved on to Madison Square Garden, the Saratoga racetrack, and the Los Angeles Coliseum, he never turned his back on the sandlots of his youth, the values he formed there, or the players who embodied them.

Despite his celebrity, Rooney remained an unpretentious man, loyal to the city where he lived all but a few of his eighty-seven years. A bit of a rogue and a poker-playing raconteur who rarely missed morning Mass, Rooney displayed the constancy and loyalty that characterize Pittsburgh—and sport—at their best. This is his story.

