

Football Findings

*Artifacts From The First 100 Years of
American Football*

Early NFL Contracts

Posted on [August 5, 2013](#) by [MM](#)

Finding contracts from the early years of the NFL is not an everyday occurrence, but when they turn up they often yield both great autographs and interesting information. For example, the contract for the last game the Duluth Eskimos played in the NFL, shown below. In the first detail view you can see that the Bears made a \$4,000 guarantee to the Eskimos for the game. NFL records show that 2,500 people attended. I don't know what the ticket prices were at Wrigley field, but I do have a photocopy of a statement of receipts from a December 1928 game the Giants played at Yankee Stadium. At that game the attendance was 6,836 and the receipts were \$5,820.70. I think it would be 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.

The autographs are a great group. For the Bears 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.

Haugsrud may not be a household name today, but to the players of that era he was a founding father. According to an article by Ralph Hickok in Sports Illustrated in 1987, at the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Football Hall of Fame in 1973, both Johnny Blood and Ernie Nevers recommended that if owners were going to be enshrined in the Hall, Ole Haugsrud should be among those honored: "He did more for the NFL than Dan Reeves, Charlie Bidwill and Larmar Hunt combined," said Blood. "Amen," said Ernie Nevers.

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 ~~plus hotel 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.

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 official's 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. Strueman

By Geo. Halas

Approved by:

THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE

DULUTH ESKIMOS FOOTBALL CLUB,

BY Ole Engvall

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, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX for hotel expenses and XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX for 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.

CHICAGO BEARS FOOTBALL CLUB,
By Edw. C. Struman
By Geo. S. Halas
DULUTH ESKIMOS FOOTBALL CLUB,
UE BY Ole Engvall
by the party of the first part.

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