



No Medals for Trying: A Week in the Life of a Pro Football Team

Jerry Izenberg

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Last season, football's New York Giants invited sportswriter Izenberg (*How Many Miles to Camelot*, 1972) to observe a week of practices and team meetings. He made the most of the opportunity, coming up with this engrossing day-by-day account leading up to an important game. Coming off a bitter and disappointing Monday night loss to the San Francisco 49ers, the Giants, faced with a shortened workweek, waste no time in beginning preparations for Sunday's crucial matchup with the tough Philadelphia Eagles and their outstanding quarterback Randall Cunningham. As Izenberg makes clear, the most important members of the team during the week are trainer Ronnie Barnes and Dr. Russ Warren. Can they mend quarterback Phil Simms' bum ankle? More important, can they have inspirational linebacker Lawrence Taylor (with a painful, hobbling knee injury) ready by game time? Coach Bill Parcells downplays the possible loss of Simms by touting inexperienced backup Jeff Hostetler. Announcing that Taylor will not play, Parcells inserts reserve Johnie Cooks as outside linebacker--but no one, including Cooks, is under any illusion that Taylor is replaceable. As the week unfolds, Izenberg observes closed-door offensive and defensive strategy sessions in all their arcane intricacy. He provides a rare look at an evolving game plan contingent on something as basic as one man's ability to play with pain. By game time both Simms and Taylor are, somehow, ready to play. In an emotional, hard-fought game played in subzero temperatures at wind-swept Giants Stadium, the Eagles come away winners. The Giants will rebound, however, to capture the NFC East title. Izenberg succeeds in penetrating the complexity of the Xs and Os and in describing the essential role of basic human emotion in a game he calls ""a chess match with muscles.

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