



Starry Knights: The 1963 College All - Stars and the Forgotten Story of Football's Greatest Upset

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The Packers entered the game as two-time defending champions and were widely considered the greatest team ever assembled. Their opponents, the 1963 College All-Stars, were given no chance at all. But that night, before a Soldier Field crowd of 65,000 and a nationwide television audience, the All-Stars shocked the world. In what would be the last All-Star victory in the long unique history of this beloved series, the collegians defeated Green Bay by a score of 20- 17. "They shouldn't beat us in a million years," a depressed and bewildered Green Bay quarterback Bart Starr said after the game, "but they did." *Starry Knights* tells the story of how they did it.

Starry Knights: The 1963 College All - Stars and the Forgotten Story of Football's Greatest Upset Details

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Mick says

The annual College All-Stars Classic. Talk about a blast from the past. For more than 40 years this exhibition game featuring former college all stars about to embark on their pro careers versus the reigning NFL champs from the previous gridiron campaign marked the beginning of a brand new football season. Personally speaking, my memories of this game almost exclusively entail the overmatched All-Stars getting served up to the pros for an overall yawn fest; yet I recently learned that for many years the College All-Stars game was a highly competitive, highly anticipated event. And my source is football enthusiast John McCarthy, who has penned a delightful account of the 1963 College All-Stars game in his book *STARRY KNIGHTS*. The NFL opponent that year was the near-unbeatable Green Bay Packers of Vince Lombardi; the All-Stars' subsequent stunning upset would mark the last time the college players would win this contest.

Yet McCarthy's book is more, much more, than a summary of an upset that occurred on a steamy Chicago night in August of 1963; *STARRY KNIGHTS* furnishes a history of the College All-Stars game, from its inception in 1933 to its dispatch into the pages of history following a shortened rain-drenched exhibition in 1976. During the Thirties and Forties the All-Stars game was overwhelmingly popular, sporting crowds at Chicago's Soldier Field in excess of 100,000. And the games, for the most part, were very competitive, with All-Stars rosters featuring players who eventually would become NFL Hall of Famers in their own right.

With the 1963 game now on the horizon McCarthy patiently sets the table, telling the reader about several of the college players who would make up the All-Stars roster, describing the segregation problems experienced by the All-Stars' African-American players, and detailing the Packers' mindset as that dominating franchise entered the 1963 season. And once the opening kickoff is underway, McCarthy gives a riveting account of the actual game--a game seeing a determined group of former college players upsetting the vaunted Packers, 20-17. McCarthy also includes photos from the game, game stats, rosters, and brief bios of all the All-Stars.

STARRY KNIGHTS is a real treat; McCarthy's prose is a throwback to the old school method of writing (adjective-laced, cliché-ridden). Yet once in awhile, the author will insert a zinger of his own to pique a little additional reader interest. And while I enjoyed all that McCarthy presents, I respectfully take issue with his contention the 1963 Rose Bowl (Wisconsin losing a squeaker to USC) was the 20th Century Game of the Century; I maintain by far it was the 1971 OU-Nebraska game. In any event, 1963 marked a turning point, both for the author (who was then a football-crazed youth of 12) and a nation; in just a few short months following that August game innocence would be lost for both McCarthy and America as the turbulent Sixties unfolded with the assassination of a young president. *STARRY KNIGHTS* brings back that magical night in 1963, a night before innocence lost, a night when lofty dreams dared come true. Highly recommended for all football buffs.

Meijer Bjorn says

"*Starry Nights*" by John McCarthy is a close examination of the 1963 college all stars vs. the Green Bay Packers exhibition game. The story details the game from the all stars perspective. It also looks into the history of the game from the beginning to its eventual demise.

McCarthy does a good job detailing information regarding the picking of the team to the actual game. It's a decent look at a past national tradition.

Interspersed within the book are correlations to the upset of the 1980 USA Hockey team of USSR; details of events of the time; and future historical events past 1963. For me the discussion of all these subjects interspersed throughout the book was a little too much. It became a distraction from the main story.

Many aspects of the '63 all star team were thoroughly detailed. Some of the players on the team were rarely discussed. Though their roles may have had less impact, I was wanting more information on them.

Overall, it was apparent that this game had a big affect on the author as a child. It showed in the effort McCarthy put into the book. Though I felt it had problems focusing on the main subject, it was a good look into what was the College All Star Game. I would recommend it to those interested in college football history.

Todd Stockslager says

John McCarthy's book debut has what may be the best sports book title ever, an apt play on words that describes this book about the 1963 College All-star victory over the vaunted NFL champion Green Bay Packers.

McCarthy wisely spends the first half of the book setting the stage for this upset, because the once well-known and well-contested summer College All-Star game against the previous season's NFL champion is a fading footnote in football history. The game began as a Chicago charity event and newspaper publicity stunt in 1933 and played to as many as 100,00-plus fans in its heyday. But by 1963, as McCarthy sets the scene,

--The NFL was showing signs of the television and athletic juggernaut it was about to become, bypassing the college game in size, speed, skill and fan interest.

--The finances of both major college football and NFL teams and contracts were changing, so that NFL owners had little interest in risking their valuable players health in a one-shot exhibition game.

Indeed the college and professional football landscape has changed so dramatically in the 40-plus years since that it is hard to imagine that this game was ever competitive or even possible. Before reading McCarthy's book, I had vague recollections of the series fading to an end in a thunder-storm washout of an unfinished game, and in fact that is what did happen--in 1976, as McCarthy describes in his excellent coda on the final games of the series and the "Where are they now?" capsules about the careers of the 1963 College All-stars after that starry night.

But that one night in 1963? Well, the second half of the book details the coaches, players, and plays of the 1963 upset, the last time the College All-Stars beat the professionals, and did it in solid fashion against the team widely considered the best of the pre-Super Bowl era. It was indeed, an alignment of the stars on one great night. McCarthy goes drive by drive through the game, highlighting key plays and decisions, bolstered by his review of a rare 16mm game film.

As a rookie author, McCarthy sometimes overdoes the sports cliches, although his writing style mimics that of the classic sportswriting-era also seeing its fade to black in the early 1960s but still pulled out in long gray columns for events like this in 1963. But he makes the wise choice as a rookie writer in choosing a non-fiction topic that he cares deeply about, and has well-researched, so the result is both entertaining and

informative
