

# Smiling Irish Eyes: Art Rooney And The Pittsburgh Steelers

Andrew O'Toole

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Art Rooney founded the Pittsburgh Steelers of the National Football League in 1933. He, along with other pioneering owners such as George Halas, George Preston Marshall and Tim Mara, built the NFL up from a fledgling circuit that was just one step above sandlot ball into a multi-billion dollar enterprise. Unfortunately his beloved team, first known as the Pirates and then later the Steelers, would spend years as a league doormat before becoming a powerhouse. Rooney never gave up on his team. Far from being a "loveable loser," Rooney had a burning desire to win and was a fierce competitor. The ultimate sportsman, Rooney dabbled in nearly every game in his younger days. Football, baseball and boxing; both as an amateur and pro Rooney excelled at every sport in which he participated. He made his name, however, not on the playing field, but as the gentlemanly owner of the perennial loser, the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Despite Rooney's great importance to the growth of the NFL and his enormously varied and entertaining interests outside the world of football, no one has yet documented his remarkable life. The story of Art Rooney reaches beyond sports into the realm of politics and the criminal underworld. A modest man, Rooney was extremely devoted to his family, friends, and faith. He cared as much for the groundskeeper as he did for the star player. Stories of his thoughtfulness and generosity are legend. It can be said that Rooney's life embodies the fulfillment of "the American Dream." Though raised in a household of modest means, Rooney bequeathed to his sons a multimillion-dollar sports empire.



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