Podolsky, Rich. *You Are Looking Live: How The NFL Today Revolutionized Sports Broadcasting*. Lyons Press, 2021. 226pp. $29.95.

*You Are Looking Live* is, in part, an insider’s look at “The NFL Today,” the first of what is now thought of as the pregame show for National Football League games. As such, it developed the model for the Sunday morning football shows leading into the networks’ NFL broadcasts.

Rich Podolsky is an award-winning writer with an impressive resume in and out of sports. He wrote for “The NFL Today;” covered the Miami Dolphins for the *Palm Beach Post;* wrote for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, ESPN, TV Guide and was a staff writer for CBS Sports. His interest in the music of the ‘60s and ‘70s led him to write *Don Kirshner: The Man with the Golden Ear* and *Neil Sedaka: Rock ‘n’ Roll Survivor*.

*You are Looking Live* starts with a brief look at the early stages of television coverage of the NFL in the ‘50s and ‘60s. In the next several chapters, Podolsky writes about those who he considers the most significant contributors and innovators at CBS Sports and “The NFL Today.” A chapter is devoted to each of these and Podolsky lays out their career trajectories along with their role in the development of “The NFL Today.”

He begins with Brent Musburger, then goes to Phyllis George and Bob Wussler. Michel Pearl and Bob Fishman are treated together, followed by Jimmy the Greek and then Irv Cross. Once the introductions are made Podolsky moves to a more or less chronological development of his main subject, the National Football League and the corresponding growth of CBS Sports and sports television. Other important figures in the story are NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle and Van Gordon Sauter, president of CBS Sports.

This lively book is full of good stories, entertaining gossip and even some valuable information on the development of sports television from the inside. It is also a tale of big egos, petty jealousies and unpleasant human behavior.

It is doubtful that what Podolsky terms “a revolution” was all that revolutionary. It is more an evolution of the broadcasting of NFL football. If this was a revolution, then it fell victim to the forces of counter-revolution which tamed and dulled the lively early years of “The NFL Today.”

Podolsky considers Brent Musburger a genius and the most talented host of “The NFL Today” to ever anchor the program, However, Musburger comes off as an altogether unpleasant and petty human being. His ego knew no bounds, and despite his talent, he still found it necessary to steal ideas and lines from his on-air compatriots ensuring there was no question about who the star was. Still Brent held the show together and made it work under the considerable stress of live television and he worked on a blank slate.

For many, the hiring of Phyllis George was incomprehensible other than to have a pretty face on the set of the program. On the contrary, what Podolsky reveals is a very talented person who had a great understanding of people and how to get the most out of those she interviewed. She knew and understood football, was a very quick learner of the technical aspects of the show and was a very nice human being. Needless to say, she broke new ground in television sports. Her personal life was a bit chaotic and let to her departure from the show, only to return four years later. In the last thirty-five years of her life, she suffered with a rare form of leukemia, which she hid from her friends.

As the first co-anchor of a live network sports show, Irv Cross was regarded as Mr. Reliable. He was the first African American to occupy such a significant on-air position at CBS. He had a great range of football knowledge and kept himself on top of all the important developments and personalities in the NFL. He was the steady voice of sanity and had a calming effect on his colleagues.

The other on camera talent, who came to “The NFL Today” a year later than the other three, was Demetrios Synodinos, Jimmy the Greek. Jimmy, too, was a volatile personality and a loose cannon on and off air. As one of the best known professional gamblers in the United States, the addition of the Greek was a major departure for the NFL. Pete Rozelle liked to project the fiction that there was no gambling associated with professional football and did not like the addition of the Greek to “The NFL Today.” The increase of ratings that came with the Greek helped to lessen Rozelle’s discomfort.

The Greek and Musburger were often at odds, as egos clashed. The Greek felt Musburger sabotaged him, which was probably the case, and, at one point Jimmy punched Brent during a heated argument. Nonetheless, the two did manage to work fairly well together on camera.

Both men would ultimately be fired. The firing of Jimmy the Greek was a highly public event resulting from an interview he gave at a restaurant in D.C. He was asked by a reporter about the issue of Civil Rights and sports. In his answer, Jimmy wandered off to explain how and why Black athletes were bigger and stronger than white athletes, and, as he did so, he got into some dubious genetic theories and shaky history.

Podolsky devotes a chapter to the interview, the public comment that followed and the subsequent firing. He offers a lot of quotes on the subject, and serves up an analysis of the affair that is sympathetic to the Greek. Much of this is quite interesting but it also exposes the lack of understanding of the issues involved in the Greeks comments, as well as, American History.

One other person who spent a short time on the program is Jayne Kennedy, an African American, who was hired following Phyllis George’s first departure. Her career path and hiring for “The NFL Today” reveals the perils of being a woman in the Sports universe and being an African American breaking barriers in television.

The last chapters deal with the transition to the second generation of the star sportscasters at CBS. These included Greg Gumbel, Lesley Visser, Pat O’Brien and Terry Bradshaw at “The NFL Today” and Jim Nance, who Podolsky identifies as the Future of CBS.

This is an entertaining book for anyone who grew up watching the NFL on CBS. It is a lively narrative of the growth of CBS Sports, a part of the development of sports on television. For those who wonder about the phrase “You are looking live” that became Brent Musburger’s signature, Podolsky explains both its origin and its appropriateness.

However, this volume lacks historical depth and could have been strengthened considerably by drawing on the work of Michael Oriard, Michael MacCambridge, Craig Coenen and David Harris. Also there is a vast amount of research and writing on the growth of television and media that could add depth to *You Are Looking Live.*

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