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# A study of the influence of a professional football career upon the occupational future of 227 professional football players

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Thesis

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL  
CAREER UPON THE OCCUPATIONAL FUTURE OF 227  
PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL PLAYERS

Submitted by  
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(B.S. in ED., BOSTON UNIVERSITY, 1946)

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

1949

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#### Acknowledgement

My sincere appreciation to Dr. G. Lawrence Rarick, whose sustained interest during the difficult period of collecting the data, has tended to make this study a more valid instrument of guidance.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem: Professional football is a profession of short duration. The period of time during which the professional football player is active is the time which he normally would spend in becoming established in a trade, business or profession. While it is conceded that the earning power of the professional football player is greater than could be expected for a man just entering his life time career, the question arises as to the effect the time spent in professional football may have in shaping his own future.

Therefore the problem resolves itself into a study of the following:

1. The number of seasons that the man entering professional football may expect to play and the factors which may affect this number.
2. The influence a professional football career may have upon a man's preparation for a trade, business or profession.
3. The effect a professional football career has in enhancing or limiting the occupational opportunities and employment of the men who play the game.

Purpose of the study: It has been the purpose of this study to learn more about the influence a professional football career may have in shaping the man's future.

Justification of the study: Because of the expansion of "big league" professional football to a second league, the game has taken on the aspect of the so called national pastime, baseball. The minor league or source of new players is the college gridiron of America. It is true that the relationship is low between the number of men who enter professional football and the number of good college players graduating each year. Nevertheless, there is no instrument of guidance available to the college player contemplating a playing career or for the college coach to use in his advisory capacity.

Therefore the author feels that the conclusions of this study will be of immeasurable value to the men who want the answers to the questions.

CHAPTER II  
PLAN OF SURVEY

Method of procedure: Due to the author's previous connection with the National Professional Football League as a player it was at first deemed possible to contact enough men personally for a reliable study of this problem. Upon the completion of three teams, Boston, New York and Washington it was apparent that the time, money and travel involved would become prohibitive. Therefore the mailed questionnaire became the instrument for data collection in those instances where personal interview was impossible.

The most difficult aspect of this method was the uncertainty of a professional athlete's address from year to year. Considering the amount of money he earns in a short space of time the inclination is to travel.

However, the results attained are sufficient to warrant reliability of the data analysis.

The following is a chronological account of the data accumulation:

Active players.

1. Boston Yanks, 28 players, November 26, 1948.  
(Personal interview on train enroute to New York)
2. Washington Redskins, 33 players, November 27, 1948.  
(Personal interview at Griffiths Stadium, Wash., D.C.)
3. New York Giants, 29 players, November 29, 1948.  
(Personal interview at the Polo Grounds, New York)

4. Pittsburgh Steelers, 27 players, December 1, 1948.  
(Individual questionnaires mailed to the Steeler's office. 18 questionnaires returned)
5. Los Angeles Rams, 32 players, December 1, 1948.  
(Individual questionnaires mailed to the Ram's office. 25 questionnaires returned.)
6. Green Bay Packers, 32 players, December 1, 1948.  
(Individual questionnaires mailed to the Packer's office. 22 questionnaires returned)

#### Non Active Players

A request for a list of names and addresses of players whose last playing season was 1940, 1941 or 1942 was mailed to:

1. Washington Redskins - January 24, 1949 - Received list of 40 men, February 3, 1949.
2. Los Angeles Rams - January 24, 1949 - No list available.
3. Chicago Bears - January 24, 1949 - No list available.
4. Chicago Cardinals - January 24, 1949 - Received list of 36 men, February 5, 1949.
5. New York Giants - January 24, 1949 - Received list of 33 men, February 9, 1949.

Mailed 33 questionnaires to former Giants - February 3, 1949 - 14 returned by February 27, 1949.

Mailed 76 questionnaires to former Redskins and Cardinals February 6, 1949 - 43 returned by February 28, 1949.

Mailed follow-up cards to 52 questionnaires not returned by February 28, 1949 - 15 returned by March 21,

1949.

### The Questionnaires

The Questionnaire (appendix) mailed to the active players asked for exactly the same information as that used in the personal interviews with active players.

The questionnaire (appendix) mailed to the non active players contained four parallel questions for comparison with the active player and two objective questions of a retrospective nature.

Both questionnaires were set up with a view toward simplicity and brevity. No information of an extremely personal nature was asked for.

### Justification of Questionnaire

"To the surveyor, the questionnaire is fundamentally a method of collecting data."<sup>1</sup>

It is a neat, practical and economical manner of collecting data. The personal interview method was considered too costly and too time consuming after the first three teams had been completed. Lack of documentary sources on the information sought further justifies the questionnaire method used in this study.

Most writers in educational research recognize the usefulness of the questionnaire in education. Douglas<sup>2</sup> says

1 Elwood Craig Davis, "Methods and Techniques Used in Surveying Health and Physical Education in City Schools", Contributions to Education No. 515, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1932, p. 51-52.

2 H.R. Douglas, "The Questionnaire - To Be or Not To Be." School and Society (April 1922) 15: 399.

"I believe in the questionnaire as one extremely valuable method of inductive research into educational practice."

Stokes and Lehman <sup>1</sup> show a similar interpretation in their statements: "This method is apparently still indispensable to medicine, the social sciences, education, religion, government, etc. At the present time it seems unlikely that the questionnaire method will ever be wholly discarded."

Limitation of Method.

The writer along with other men recognizes the limitations of the questionnaire in collecting personal data.

Stokes and Lehman <sup>2</sup> support the above statement by commenting as follows: "The questionnaire technique is peculiarly vulnerable when employed for collection of personal information or when used with subjects who see (or imagine they see) an opportunity to advance their personal interests by means of the returns made by them."

Koos <sup>3</sup> practically repeats by stating, "Some likelihood of intentional erroneous response exists with respect to reports in this stricter sense on account of the desire of the respondent or institution he represents to appear to qualify on standards that are actually being infringed."

1. Stuart M. Stokes and Harvey C. Lehman, "The Influence of Self Interest Upon Questionnaire Replies" School and Society (September 1940) 32: 435.

2. Ibid, p. 436.

3. Leonard V. Koos, "The Questionnaire in Education", The Macmillan Company, New York, 1928, p. 23.

Reliability and Validity.

According to Koos <sup>1</sup> reliability of a questionnaire is based on the ability and willingness of the recipient to respond. Even though the writer has no practical method of determining the reliability of his instrument, he believes that because there is no premium to be gained or lost, the respondents answers in alteration of the truth will be negligible.

"Having established the reliability of questionnaires there is the further problem of determining their validity, which is more difficult because we are never sure that the criteria used for its establishment are themselves valid." <sup>2</sup>

In a survey of validation of factual information, the type gathered in these questionnaires, Smith <sup>3</sup> found, "that factual data of a personal nature tends to suffer loss of validity due to overstatement."

In speaking of the questionnaire and its validity Smith <sup>4</sup> comments: "In no case studied does the validity of the questionnaire data seem to meet the rigorous demands made by more precise sciences than those which depend in part upon the questionnaire for the collection of their data."

1. Ibid, p. 23.

2. Robert A. Davis and Edwin L. Barrow, "A Critical Study of the Questionnaire in Education", Educational Administration and Supervision, (February 1935) 21: 144.

3. Mapheus Smith, "A Note of Stability in Questionnaire Responses" American Journal of Sociology (March 1933) 38: 713

4. Francis F. Smith, "The Direct Validation of Questionnaire Data", Educational Administration and Supervision (November 1935) 21: 561.

P.V. Young <sup>1</sup> of the University of Southern California, after heading a study covering a period of 16 years, on the validity of questionnaires describes it when used as a sole method of study as the "underworld method of science."

There is documentary evidence in the office of the Commissioner of the National Football League in Philadelphia which shows that each man, whose questionnaire was used as data, was a bona fide player of one year or more in the league. On the face of this evidence, at least one strong point for validity is established.

The other point that would strengthen validity was the number of seasons each player participated, in order to indicate the intensity of the effect of professional football on his life's occupation.

#### Treatment of data.

There are approximately 300 players in the National Football League. The writer considered that about half this number would be sufficient for a reliable study of this problem.

It was extremely difficult to find and contact men whose playing season was 1940, 1941 or 1942. The 72 returned questionnaires from men in this group was an arbitrary number that the writer considered sufficient.

The purpose of the two groups (two questionnaires) was to compare certain parallel questions in respect to the effect of professional football on these men past and present.

1. Pauline V. Young, "The Validity of Schedules and Questionnaires" Journal of Educational Sociology (Sept. 1940) 14:26.

Active players: Men who were actually playing professional football during the 1948 season in the National Football League.

Active player questionnaire returns.

Team	Information on	Total Roster	How Acquired
Yanks	28	28	Interview (personal)
Steelers	18	27	Ind. questionnaire mailed
Giants	29	30	Interview (personal)
Redskins	33	33	Interview (personal)
Rams	25	32	Ind. questionnaire mailed
Packers	<u>22</u>	<u>32</u>	Ind. questionnaire mailed
Total	155	182	

$\frac{155}{182}$  86% return of all men attempted to contact.

$\frac{90}{91}$  99% return by personal interview method.

$\frac{65}{91}$  71% return by mailed questionnaire method. (individual)

Non active player: Men who are no longer playing professional football and whose last playing season was 1940, 1941 or 1942.

Non active player questionnaire returns.

Source of names and addresses.

New York Giants	33
Chicago Cardinals	36
Washington Redskins	<u>40</u>
Total	109

Total number of questionnaires mailed. 109

Total return in a three week period. 57

Percentage return for this period. 52%

Number of follow-up cards to outstanding questionnaires. 52

Total return from this group in a three week period. 15

Percentage return for this group. 29%

Total number of questionnaires mailed. 109

Total number of questionnaires returned. 72

Percentage return. 66%

CHAPTER III  
ANALYSIS OF DATA

In order to study comparisons and to make objective conclusions the data was analyzed for the following:

Active players;

1. To find their educational background (major study in college for potential occupational training.)
2. To find their off-season occupations.
3. To find what they plan to work at when their playing days are over.
4. To find how many years of football and what recognition was gained prior to playing professionally.
5. To find how many have skilled or semi-skilled trades.
6. To find how many feel that professional football is worthwhile in respect to the time and money involved.
7. To find the age and marital status of the average player.
8. To find the average number of years this group has been playing professional football.

Non active players:

9. To find their educational background (major study in college for potential occupational training)
10. To find their present occupations.
11. To find whether or not they were trained for their present occupation prior to playing professional football.

12. To find whether business contacts or opportunities were encountered in professional football and if they materialized.

13. To find whether they felt in retrospect that professional football was a waste of time and they would have been wiser to start sooner in a more permanent occupation.

14. To find the average number of years this group has played professional football.

TABLE I

A comparison of the educational backgrounds of active and non active players.

	Active		Non active	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
College graduates	112	72%	67	93%
Non college graduates	43	28%	5	7%
College Major Study				
Physical Education	52	46%	34	51%
Business Administration	20	18%	9	13%
Social Studies	9	8%	5	7%
Engineering	8	7.5%	3	4%
Agriculture	5	4%	2	3%
Law	2	2%	2	3%
Science	3	2.5%	3	4%
Journalism	1	1%	1	2%
All others	<u>11</u>	<u>9%</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>12%</u>
Total	112	100%	67	100%

The first important revelation from Table I is the remarkably high percentage of college graduates among the professional football ranks. The author gives the following reasons. Potential professional football players create the reputation that makes them desirable by the caliber of their play on the college team. The most outstanding reason in the author's opinion is the National Football League's rule that states: "No National Football League team shall sign a player to a contract until after his college class has graduated." By virtue of restraint, he might just as well stay in college until he graduates, which is what all but a very few do.

In Table I the correlation is very high between active and non active college graduates. Assuming that the 26 active players who gave their off season occupation as student complete their degree requirements, the comparison will be 89% to 93% which is remarkably even.

About one half of the players active (46%) and non active (51%) majored in physical education. This seems a very natural result, since football is a ramification of physical education and surely the most popular varsity activity on our college campuses today. The relationship was also high for business administration and social studies, the next two majors on the scale of popularity.

Table I shows that the educational background of professional football players during the last ten years is remarkably constant.

TABLE II

Occupations of non active players as compared with the planned occupations of active players.

Occupation	Active		Non active	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Business	57	36%	15	21%
Coaching	40	25%	28	40%
Ranching and Farming	13	8%	2	3%
Engineering	8	5%	2	3%
Sales	5	3%	10	15%
Doctor	4	2.5%	2	3%
Lawyer	3	2%	1	1%
All others	<u>25</u>	<u>18.5%</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>16%</u>
Total	155	100%	72	100%

In Table II the comparisons as shown will differ immensely when the active player retires from professional football. On the whole the off-season occupations of active players are temporary. They are primarily to earn enough money for current expenses in order to consolidate the monetary gain during the playing season. However, the trend is indicated toward coaching. The high percentage of non active players who are coaches indicates the popularity of the occupation, when the playing days are over. Do not forget, that 50% of all players active and non active who graduated from college majored in physical education.

For the non active business category, only those men who owned and operated their businesses were included. For active players only those who planned to own their businesses were included.

It is interesting to note that the combined percentages of coaching and business for the active players is exactly that for the non active, 61%.

TABLE III

A comparison of training and occupations of active and non active players.

In the case of the non active player the occupation was actual and for the active player it is what he plans to do when his playing days are over.

	Active		Non active	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Trained for their occupation prior to playing professional football.	75	48%	34	46%
Not trained for their occupation prior to playing professional football	67	43%	38	54%

13 or 9% of the active players were undecided as to their plans after professional football.

Just a word in explanation for Table III. If a man studies Medicine for five years then practices as a Doctor, we assume that his occupation is one for which he was trained. If a man studies Music and becomes a Football Coach, the assumption is deviation from his field of training. However in borderline cases where the occupation might possibly be allied remotely with the college major, the author considered the occupation one for which the man was trained.

The responsibility for making these connections was up to the author in the case of the active players. For the non active players, this was a direct and very objective answer on their questionnaire.

Table IV

## Distribution of Active Player's Off-Season Occupations

	No.	Percent
Sales	29	18%
Student	26	15%
Business	12	7%
Coaching	10	5.5%
Farming	9	5%
Insurance	7	4%
Contracting	5	3.5%
Trucking	4	3%
Engineering	4	3%
Restaurant Owners	4	3%
Ranching	4	3%
Teaching	2	2%
Advertising	2	2%
Printing	2	2%
Banking	2	2%
Chemists	2	2%
Cartoonists	2	2%
Oil Field Workers	2	2%
All others	<u>27</u>	<u>16%</u>
Total	155	100%

The following data was compiled from the active player questionnaire:

Average years of experience playing organized football prior to professional career; 2 years of high school and 2 years of college.

Recognition prior to professional football.

From a total of 155 men contacted there were 44 (28%) All Americans and 93 (60%) All Conference men (The All Americans are included in the latter figure.)

55 (35%) active players have trades and 100 (65%) do not.

150 (97%) felt that professional football for a player's standpoint was worthwhile in respect to time and money. 5 (3%) said no.

The average age of the active players is 25.9 years old. 106 (68%) were married. 49 (32%) were single.

The average number of years this group has played professional football is 2.70 years.

The following data was compiled from the non active player questionnaire:

69 (96%) felt that professional football offered occupational opportunities and contacts that would not otherwise have been encountered. 3(4%) said they did not.

34 (46%) said that these opportunities had materialized.

38 (54%) said they had not materialized.

68 (94%) felt that their professional football career offered over all advantages superior to those which might have been realized by directly entering a more lasting profession.

4 (6%) felt that it did not offer such advantages.

The average number of years this group had played professional football was 2.78 years.

Many times the question has arisen, "What section of the country produces the most professional football players?" To be fair the author has taken the home location of the player rather than the college he attended. It is well known that many colleges with outstanding football teams draw their stars from sections of the country other than the state in which the institution is located.

For facility of division let us use the five areas as follows:

The East: New England States, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware.

The South: Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Kentucky, Tennessee.

The Southwest: Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona.

The Middlewest: Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri.

The West: North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Nevada, California, Washington, Oregon, Nebraska

From the 155 active players contacted the data produced the following distribution:

The East	<u>53</u>	<u>35%</u>
The South	<u>27</u>	<u>17%</u>
The Southwest	<u>22</u>	<u>14%</u>
The Middlewest	<u>23</u>	<u>14.5%</u>
The West	<u>30</u>	<u>19.5%</u>

While the limitation of this data is notable in that the total personnel of the National Professional Football League is not used, it never the less suggests a trend as to the sources of player material. There are ten teams in the league, five in the Eastern Division, Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Washington and also five in the Western Division, Detroit, Chicago (2), Green Bay, and Los Angeles. Although four out of the six teams used in this study are from the Eastern Division the distribution of player material throughout the league is constant in relation to source.

CHAPTER IV  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Purpose of the study

This problem was undertaken to consider the following questions:

1. The number of seasons that the man entering professional football may expect to play and the factors which may effect this number.
2. The influence a professional football career may have on a man's preparation for a trade, business or profession.
3. The effect a professional football career has in enhancing or limiting the occupational opportunities and employment of the men who play the game.

Statement of procedure

Questionnaires were mailed to 91 men who were actually playing in the National Professional Football League during the 1948 season. Of these 65 or 71% were returned. Questionnaires were also mailed to 109 men whose last playing season in the league was 1940, 1941 or 1942. Of these 72 or 66% were returned. 91 active players were interviewed personally.

Summary

Nine out of ten professional football players are college graduates. One half of this number majored in physical education.

Sixty one percent of the active players plan to either

coach or operate their own business and the same percentage of non active players actually do coach or own their business.

About one half of the active players plan to work at what they were trained for prior to playing professional football and one half of the non active players actually are doing what they were trained for prior to playing professional football.

The average active player had played two years of high school and three years of college football.

Sixty percent were the best at their position in their conference and one in four was the best at his position in the nation at one time during his collegiate playing days.

About one third of the active players had skilled trades.

Ninety seven percent of the active players felt that professional football was worthwhile in regard to the time involved and the money earned.

The average age of the active players is 25.9 years old. A little more than two thirds were married.

The average length of time the active players had been in professional football was 2.70 years.

96% of the non active players felt that professional football offered occupational opportunities and contacts that would not otherwise have been encountered.

About half of this group said these opportunities had materialized.

94% of the non active players felt they were wise in choosing a professional football career first rather than directly entering a more lasting occupation.

The average length of time this group had played professional football was 2.70 years.

### Conclusions

Professional football while sometimes considered a rough and hazardous occupation is nevertheless composed almost entirely of college graduates. (90%).

There is a great monetary gain (from two to five times the annual income for this average age group in normal occupations) in a short period (five months) from professional football. Considering the intelligence (college background) of professional football players, it is understandable that when their playing days are over, they tend to operate their own business or engage in what they were trained for prior to their playing career.

There are rare cases of sandlot players making good in professional football. The majority are highly trained and recognized stars of the college game before they enter the professional ranks.

A comparison of the average playing period for active and non active players produced almost an equality, 2.70 to 2.78 years. This would indicate that the career duration expectancy has remained constant for the past ten years.

Most of the non active players (96%) felt that associating with successful business men, travelling, favorable monetary return in connection with professional football offered occupational opportunities that would not otherwise have been encountered. One half of these players said that these opportu-

nities had materialized. This statement compliments the data result that one half the non active players work at what they were trained for prior to their playing career. Of course this is based on the assumption that the men whose business opportunities materialized entered occupational fields for which they were not trained prior to playing professional football.

Since money is of prime consideration in the contemplation of marriage, it is not surprising that most professional football players are married (68%).

It is the author's opinion, based on the data collected for this problem, that the following is true:

1. That the average professional football player is a well educated and highly trained person, as well as being a widely recognized athlete.

2. That professional football offers business contacts and opportunities that would not otherwise be encountered.

3. That although some players play ten years or more, two years is all that the average player should expect to play. This is perhaps due to the speed and caliber of the game, and the ever pressing demand for young new college players.

4. That the monetary gain from two years of professional football is a tremendous advantage in the future plans for business, marriage or for the monetary needs of life.

5. That professional football enhances rather than limits a man's preparation for a trade, business or profession.

### Limitation of study

The greatest factor effecting the study was World War II. The economic system of the country from 1940 till the present day has been anything but normal. Not only did the war force men of playing age to change their pursuits but upon its completion, two leagues were formed, each paying high salaries. The salaries were higher because of competitive bidding for outstanding players to insure large attendance receipts. Because these salaries cannot remain at their present levels, the incentive to play professional football is perhaps greater today than it will be during the next ten years.

The sampling would have been more complete if the author had attempted to contact all the active players in both the National Professional Football League and the All American Professional Conference (about 660 men). Another 100 men would have made a more reliable study of non active players.

Documentary source of players salaries was not available to the writer and the information was not asked for on the questionnaire for obvious reasons.

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APPENDIX

Content of letter mailed with questionnaire to active players.

Dear Sir:

I am making a study of professional football players, which I hope will be of interest to men considering the value of this occupation as a temporary career.

Your honest completion and early return of the enclosed questionnaire will be greatly appreciated.

Yours truly,

---

Content of letter mailed with questionnaire to non active players.

Dear Sir:

I am contacting a group of professional football players who were actively competing during the 1940, 1941 or 1942 seasons in the National Professional League, in order to gain information concerning their reaction to professional football.

This information will in no way be associated with your name.

I am interested solely in gaining an over all reaction of former players which should be of value in the guidance of men considering a career in professional football.

Your cooperation in this effort will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Content of the follow-up card mailed to 52 outstanding non active player questionnaires.

Dear Sir:

A few weeks ago I mailed a questionnaire to you concerning your professional football career. For the purpose of an impersonal study it is very important that I have a high percentage return on these questionnaires.

Your completion and early return of that information will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Content of the questionnaire used in personal interview and mailed to the active players.

1. Age \_\_\_\_ Height \_\_\_\_ Weight \_\_\_\_
2. Married \_\_\_\_ No. of children \_\_\_\_
3. Home \_\_\_\_\_
4. Number of years in professional football \_\_\_\_
5. College attended \_\_\_\_\_ Major study \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of years \_\_\_\_\_ Degrees \_\_\_\_\_
6. Off-season occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have a skilled or semi-skilled trade \_\_\_\_\_
7. What are your plans after professional football?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Are you saving toward that goal now \_\_\_\_\_
8. How many years have you played organized football prior to professional?  
High School \_\_\_\_ College \_\_\_\_ Service \_\_\_\_
9. What All teams were you recognized on and what All Star games did you play in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you feel that professional football is worthwhile in respect to the time and money involved \_\_\_\_\_

Content of the questionnaire mailed to the non active players.

1. Number of years in professional football \_\_\_\_\_
2. College attended \_\_\_\_\_ No. of years \_\_\_\_\_  
Major study \_\_\_\_\_ Degree attained \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your present occupation \_\_\_\_\_
4. Is your present occupation one for which you were trained prior to entering professional football \_\_\_\_\_
5. Did professional football offer occupational opportunities and contacts that would not otherwise have been encountered \_\_\_\_\_ Have these opportunities materialized \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you feel that your professional football career has offered over all advantages superior to those which might have been realized by directly entering a more permanent occupation \_\_\_\_\_