



Last Team Standing: How the Steelers and the Eagles—"The Steagles"—Saved Pro Football During World War II

Matthew Algeo

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Tracing the history of the National Football League during World War II, this book delves into the severe player shortage during the war which led to the merging of the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Philadelphia Eagles, creating the "Steagles." The team's center was deaf in one ear, its wide receiver was blind in one eye (and partially blind in the other), and its halfback had bleeding ulcers. One player was so old he'd never before played football with a helmet. Yet somehow, this group of players—deemed unfit for military service due to age or physical ailment—posted a winning record in the league, to the surprise of players and fans alike. Digging into the history of the war paralleled by the unlikely story of the Steagles franchise, both sports fans and history buffs will learn about the cultural significance of this motley crew of ball players during a trying time in United States history.

During World War II, the National Football League faced a crisis unimaginable today: a shortage of players. By 1943, so many players were in the armed forces that the league was forced to fold one team and merge two others: the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Philadelphia Eagles—the Steagles. Its roster that included military draft rejects, aging stars lured out of retirement, and even a couple of active servicemen who managed to get leave for the games. The team's center was deaf in one ear, its wide receiver was blind in one eye, and its halfback had bleeding ulcers. One player was so old he'd never played football with a helmet. Yet, somehow, this motley bunch managed to post a winning record—the first for the Eagles and just the second for the Steelers.

But *Last Team Standing* isn't just about football. It's also about life in the United States during World War II, a time of fear and hope, of sacrifice and momentous change. It's about rationing, racism, and Rosie the Riveter. It's about draft boards, bond drives, and movie stars. Above all, it's about the men and women of the Greatest Generation who couldn't fight, but helped win the war in immeasurable ways.

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