

Race and Football in America: The Life and Legacy of George Taliaferro

Dawn Knight

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George Taliaferro was a multidimensional football player. An All-American and Hall of Famer, he achieved and inspired excellence. Dawn Knight, Taliaferro's former student and longtime friend, saw that football was only one of Taliaferro's many remarkable layers, and in *Race and Football in America* she tells his complete story.

Taliaferro was the first African American to be drafted by the NFL and its first black quarterback, but he also distinguished himself as a scholar, educator, social worker, husband, father, and Big Brother who struggled for racial equality. In one particularly strong parallel, the book recalls how Taliaferro—after leading Indiana University to a national championship season in 1945—was not allowed to enter the restaurant where his team picture was hung. Two years later, he spearheaded the peaceful integration of that same restaurant and was finally able to stand before the photograph.

From World War II onward, Taliaferro's life paralleled the growth of football. He was a key figure in the desegregation of college and professional football during and after his playing days. While the book's primary focus is on his life, its link to race and football is consistent. It necessarily segues into the development of the NFL and to race relations in America, with Taliaferro standing as a prime illustration of the challenges that segregation and racial hatred created for African Americans, and of strong responses to them. The book's many anecdotes from Taliaferro's life are entertaining, revealing his feelings and courage while making the focus on football more approachable and personal.

Taliaferro died two years after another black quarterback, Colin Kaepernick, took a knee—and a page from Taliaferro's playbook—to protest racial injustice. Dawn Knight's readers will not be able to miss the connection between the two trailblazers.

JOE TAYLOR (July/August 2019)

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