Rooney: A Sporting Life
By Rob Ruck, Maggie Jones Patterson, and Michael P. Weber
(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010)
Photos, endnotes, bibliography, index. $36.95 hardcover

Bishop Leonard, in his eulogy of Steelers’ founder Art Rooney in 1988, concluded, “Perhaps we shall never see his like again.” This mammoth work proves the testament to Leonard’s words, blending a biographical portrait of the man Pittsburghers know best as “The Chief” with the forces of family, community, ethnicity, and sport that shaped him. Rooney came of age at a time of promise and of power, as the city of Pittsburgh and the nation emerged on the world stage. His story is, as the authors argue, one that the city tells about itself: a story of “unpretentious style,” a story of a place and a people with deep, proud roots, where hard work and struggle lead to success. Emblematic of a larger American tale, Art Rooney’s life story becomes all the more relevant for the lessons it teaches about who we are and where we have come from.

This book benefits from, and yet is never burdened by, the extensive research conducted by the authors. Undertaken first by Ruck and Mike Weber (who passed away in 2001), the 100+ interviews allow for a first-person accounting of events that in places reads like a well crafted novel. We walk the sewage-ridden streets of Ebbow Vale, Wales, and sense that the authors have walked there too, climbing the narrow stone steps to the house that once sheltered Art Rooney’s grandparents. We feel the changing economic forces that swept immigrant craftsmen by the thousands from the British Isles across the sea to America and eventually Pittsburgh, clinging to their skills as iron puddlers as Bessemer steel chased them across the ocean. We sit in the backroom of Daniel Rooney’s North Side saloon and trudge the oil-slicked playing fields that first tested young Art Rooney. We see Rooney grow from a boy to a man on those fields, honing his inherited traits of loyalty, humility, and leadership in ways that will benefit his own family, his business, and ultimately American sport. We revel in the intimate detail of how football, born on neighborhood sandlots, grew into big business with Rooney there at its core and how the Steelers—once lovable losers—became key to Pittsburgh’s recasting as the City of Champions. And we understand how Art Rooney became “The Chief,” an amalgam of his Irish Catholic heritage, tested in the coal and iron fields of the Old Country, infused here in the Steel City with a thoroughly American spirit.

At 521 pages plus extensive notes, this book is large. But it never felt long. Art Rooney, reputedly a man that everyone felt comfortable with, makes for approachable, yet fascinating reading. My only critique is that he did not live long enough—this is a story that I did not want to end.

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**Book Review Capsules** are now online.
In anticipation of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Pirates’ victory in the 1960 World Series, several new works on the Series, the team, and individual players have been published. What most share is the element of memory, of the author’s revisiting a place and time that represents both a seminal moment for them as individuals and a pinnacle moment in the city’s history. In these books, the telling of sports history is interwoven with a recounting of personal narrative and community history.

**1960 Pittsburgh Pirates Day by Day: A Special Season, an Extraordinary World Series**
Rick Cushing
2010.

**The Whistling Irishman: Danny Murtaugh Remembered**
Colleen Hronchak
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**Kiss it Good-bye: The Mystery, The Mormon, and the Moral of the 1960 Pittsburgh Pirates**
John Moody
2010.

**Destiny’s Darlings: The 1960 Pittsburgh Pirates**
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Jim O’Brien
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2005.

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Jim Reisler
2007.