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Football's Wine Cellar: The NFL Films Archive

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FOOTBALL'S WINE CELLAR

TRAVIS VOGAN

The NFL Films Archive

Those [NFL Films] archives constitute the soul of professional football, the stored treasures of football's wine cellar.

STEVE SABOL, PRESIDENT, NFL FILMS

The National Football League (NFL) is ubiquitous in contemporary American media culture. At any given time—day or night, during the season or not—one would be hard-pressed to flip through the television channels for long without encountering at least one representation of the NFL, from recaps of games to commercials that somehow feature the league. Many of these images derive from a single site, the NFL Films archive. Since 1965, NFL Films, the NFL's subsidiary film production company, has documented every one of the league's games and filmed thousands of interviews with its players and coaches. It uses this footage to create dramatic, made-for-television films that glorify the NFL and its history. The company now possesses the world's largest sports film archive, which is located at its headquarters in Mount Laurel, New Jersey.¹ This mammoth collection constitutes the

starting point from which NFL Films manufactures its documentaries and sells film to other media outlets. Beyond storing footage, this private, commercial archive organizes it to correspond with NFL Films's established stylistic conventions. A consideration of this collection provides a useful way to investigate the relationship between institutional moving image archives and the aesthetic, economic, and ideological imperatives that guide their operations. It demonstrates how this archive assists NFL Films's efforts to create and control the NFL's public image. Furthermore, it illustrates how NFL Films's careful management of the league's highly

visible and valuable image shapes its archive's organization, policies, and operations.

The NFL Films archive consists of two divisions that serve overlapping functions. First, there is a fireproof, temperature-controlled, limited-access vault that houses and safeguards nearly all the film the company has generated and purchased. Though its vault certainly slows the deterioration of its holdings, the NFL Films archive does not necessarily preserve materials—at least not in the conventional sense of the term. According to the National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF), the term *preservation* is traditionally equated with *duplication*, copying film onto a new and more stable film stock. However, the NFPF asserts that the definition of *preservation* has recently broadened. It is now increasingly “understood as the full continuum of activities necessary to protect the film and share the content with the public.”² In addition to the vault, the NFL Films archive features a library that organizes copies of footage for efficient use in productions and for sale to clients. Like most archives, this collection catalogs materials based on when they were created and the subject matter they feature, but it also explicitly arranges content according to the company's aesthetic conventions and even according to the material's potential to evoke certain emotions. Before footage is woven into one of the company's productions, it has already been filtered through an archival system designed to maintain the mythology NFL Films creates for the league.³

At the most basic level, archives are sites where materials are stored and organized for future use. However, these collections—even those that do not lend or sell materials—are not simply repositories. Archives are selective in the materials they collect and in how they arrange them. As Allan Sekula claims, “archives are not neutral; they embody the power inherent in accumulation, collection, and hoarding as well as that power inherent in the command of the lexicon and rules of language.”⁴ Archives' selective



NFL Films's logo. Courtesy of NFL Films.

operations are also guided by the institutions to which they are attached. The materials archives acquire, the care with which they are able to store those materials, and the conditions under which holdings are circulated or discarded are all determined in part by the organizations that define a given archive's purposes and regulate its functioning.⁵

Despite its popularity and long history, NFL Films has received little attention from scholars interested in media or professional sport. Popular and trade press coverage of the company tends to focus only on its dramatic productions and institutional history. Commentary that mentions the NFL Films archive typically does so only in passing to illustrate the thoroughness with which this organization has documented the league since 1965. Drawing from research at NFL Films's headquarters and from interviews with several members of its staff, this essay investigates the relationship between the NFL Films archive's operations and the company's overall efforts to romanticize and advertise the NFL. In fact, it is the first scholarly investigation of this enormous, powerful, and unusually visible commercial archive—a collection that features many of the most recognizable images in the history of American sports.⁶ Beyond shedding light on the NFL Films archive's institutionally inflected operations, an examination of this collection provides a starting point from which to theorize the practices that mark other commercial moving image archives—sites that seldom receive scholarly consideration. Furthermore, and perhaps more important, an investigation of the NFL Films archive offers a model through which to probe the values that inform all archival institutions' policies and practices.



The NFL Films vault.
Photograph by the author.

KEEPERS OF THE FLAME

NFL Films began in 1962 as Blair Motion Pictures, an independent production company. Ed Sabol, a retired overcoat salesman who dabbled in filmmaking during his spare time, felt that typical media representations of football oversimplified the sport's beauty and complexity. He consequently formed Blair Motion Pictures and purchased the rights to film the NFL's 1962 championship game. Sabol then gathered a five-person crew and produced *Pro Football's Longest Day*, a twenty-nine-minute production that NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle called the best football film he had ever seen.⁷ Rozelle's acclaim motivated the league's 1965 decision to purchase Blair Motion Pictures and rename it NFL Films on the condition that it produce a yearly highlight reel for each of the league's teams and for the annual NFL championship, which is now known as the Super Bowl. Rozelle viewed the company's productions as having the potential to enhance the NFL's presence on television and to create an image for the league that would set it apart from other sports institutions and forms of popular entertainment.⁸

Ed Sabol's son Steve, who has worked at the company since Blair Motion Pictures's founding and who succeeded his father as president in 1986, describes NFL Films as a group of "historians, storytellers, [and] mythmakers."⁹ The company's productions at once document the league's history and "show the game the way Hollywood portray[s] fiction."¹⁰ To accomplish its dual purposes of documenting and dramatizing the league, NFL Films established a distinct set of conventions such as ground-level slow motion, montage editing, orchestral scores, booming male voice-over narration, and the use of wireless microphones to capture on-field sound.¹¹ Unlike viewers of live television broadcasts, spectators already know how the featured games resolved when viewing an NFL Films production. The company's films thus offer dramatized reinterpretations of the events they record that reinforce the highly selective history NFL Films constructs for the league.

NFL Films's Web site asserts that its "productions aren't just seen, they're felt."¹² Along these lines, Steve Sabol claims that the main objective of NFL Films's documentaries is "to give the viewer goose pimples."¹³ Beyond dramatizing the league and its history, then, these films are designed to affect or move spectators, to produce sensations. Brian Massumi describes *affect* as an "intensity" that exerts itself on bodies.¹⁴ Though Massumi distinguishes affect from both feeling and emotion, he argues that media texts can mobilize affect in ways that strive to evoke certain feelings and that even reinforce particular values.¹⁵ This is precisely how NFL Films productions represent the NFL. They display the league through its most intense moments—graceful touchdown

runs, balls spiraling through the air and into a receiver's outstretched arms, powerful tackles—and place those moments into forms that aid their potential to impact viewers. The mythology NFL Films manufactures for the league is constructed through these efforts to move viewers. Its productions depict the NFL as a goose pimple—generating experience characterized by bone-crunching violence, sublime moments of grace, uplifting triumphs, and tearjerked defeats.¹⁶ These films mobilize the affect they generate in an effort to create affection for the league and cast it as more dramatic and historically significant than other sports organizations.

Steve Sabol often claims that NFL Films has made professional football the most thoroughly documented human endeavor in history and points to its archive as proof of that comprehensiveness.¹⁷ Though this is clearly an overstatement (as a professional mythmaker, Sabol continually hyperbolizes), it illustrates the NFL Films archive's intended function as a site where the league's visual history is housed and organized. When asked to explain the principles that guide the company's archival operations, Sabol deferred to his father's background as an overcoat salesman. He noted that after manufacturing its overcoats, his father's company would never throw away a single piece of leftover material: "They [the overcoat company] figured you don't throw this scrap away. It could be used as a pocket, it could be used as a liner, it could be used as a collar. So we [NFL Films] never threw anything out."¹⁸ As Sabol's analogy implies, the archive's operations are guided by an attitude that assumes that each frame of film has potential value and ought to be kept indefinitely. Though the archive does not literally hold every bit of film that has run through the company's cameras—a feat that would be nearly impossible—NFL Films publicizes its collection as comprehensive. Additionally, the archive is organized around an economic logic that seeks to maximize the amount of footage available for the company to use in its productions and sell to clients.

NFL Films often defers to its archive to position itself as the official steward of professional football's past. The archive's centrality to constructing this institutional image is partly built through the value the company assigns to the medium of film. Since NFL Films began as Blair Motion Pictures, it has shot games and interviews exclusively on 16mm film stock—a practice it uses to distinguish itself from most other sports media outlets. Indeed, NFL Films is the Eastman Kodak Company's biggest client.¹⁹ Ed and Steve Sabol continually assert that the use of film, as opposed to video, lends the company's productions a sense of historical authenticity that amplifies their affective potential. As Steve Sabol notes, "when we see film we get a richer feeling. We think high class. When we see [video]tape we think news."²⁰ Similarly, NFL Films's Web site claims that "film has a sense of history about it, while video is too immediate. Film is like wood—it



has a texture.”²¹ NFL Films emphasizes film’s apparent qualities to manufacture its identity as a careful and effective historian.

Building from the historical authenticity and affective power the company assigns to film, Steve Sabol calls the NFL Films archive “the soul of the NFL,” “the NFL’s Smithsonian,” and “football’s wine cellar.”²² Reinforcing Sabol’s grandiose metaphors, critics often refer to the archive as the company’s most prized possession and as the NFL Films headquarters’ featured attraction. In 1984, Twentieth Century Fox reportedly offered the NFL thirty million dollars for the archive—an offer the league declined without hesitation. Sabol considered Fox’s offer absurd, claiming that the network was “asking for the entire history of the game.”²³ The archive, according to Sabol, is more than a collection of visual documents; it contains and preserves the league’s most valuable links to its past. NFL Films even hangs a banner near the vault’s entrance that reads “Keepers of the Flame” to emphasize the company’s position as the NFL’s official historians and the archive’s central role in helping the company fulfill this task.²⁴ Although NFL Films is a decidedly commercial organization, it publicizes itself as an institution that is unconcerned with economic profit—it possesses a sincere passion for documenting, narrating, and preserving the league’s history. As Sabol notes, “people look back at what we did and say ‘you guys were great marketers; you were great packagers; you were great promoters.’ But we never thought that way. And I still never think of NFL Films as promoting or advertising or marketing. We’re just passionate observers of a sport we all love.”²⁵ NFL Films thus positions its institutional mission of keeping the

The “Keepers of the Flame” banner hanging in NFL Films’s headquarters. Throughout its headquarters, NFL Films features decor that stresses its centrality to documenting the National Football League and shaping how it is remembered. Photograph by the author.



NFL flame, along with the archival operations that aid its mission, as a labor of love born out of the Sabols' affection for the NFL.

Though it is not open to the public, the archive is repeatedly made visible through the publicity materials NFL Films generates and in popular and trade press commentary on the organization, which often features images of Ed and Steve Sabol posing in front of stacks of film canisters. Similarly, in many introductions to the programs that Steve Sabol hosts, he sits next to, and is sometimes even surrounded by, cans of film—a staging device that emphasizes the company's role as the league's chronicler and points toward the volume of material NFL Films has gathered.

The archive's importance to NFL Films's public image is most directly expressed in *Lost Treasures of NFL Films*, a television program that unearths never-before-seen footage—mostly material from the 1960s and 1970s—to create new stories about the league's past.²⁶ *Lost Treasures* emphasizes the NFL Films archive's position as a site that stores materials for future access and enables these materials to be employed in previously unanticipated ways. The program, for example, features footage of teams that have since changed their names and moved to different locations, uniforms that seem hideous by today's standards, and players who became more famous after their football careers ended, such as former U.S. Representative Jack Kemp (who played quarterback

Frame of Steve Sabol hosting *Lost Treasures of NFL Films* (2002). In publicity photographs and introductions to NFL Films productions, Ed and Steve Sabol are often shown amid stacks of film canisters. Courtesy of NFL Films.

for the Buffalo Bills and San Diego Chargers) and actor Carl Weathers (who briefly played linebacker for the Oakland Raiders).

The introductory sequence to *Lost Treasures* emphasizes the archive's significance to NFL Films's project of exalting the league and remembering its past. It begins with a combination of soothing orchestral music and the sound of film running through a 16mm projector, conventions that connect film's presumed affective potential and historical authenticity directly to NFL Films's production practices. The sequence's visual component pairs the nostalgic soundscape with a montage that transitions from sepia-toned images of projectors shrouded in a smoky haze to shots that pan across stacks of old metal film canisters and footage of the league's past that slowly transforms from grainy black and white into vivid color as the musical score swells to its dramatic peak. These elements highlight NFL Films's commitment to bringing this old footage to life and suggest that its archive makes this process possible.

In addition to the images of projectors, footage transforming into color, and shots of old film cans, each episode's introductory sequence briefly cuts to different fragments of interview footage with Ed Sabol, who discusses the company's commitment to archiving its film. Sabol explains in one of the program's introductions, "I always thought that after you went through all that work [of filming], all you had to show for it was the film. And you've got to keep the film; that's the backbone. That's what it all goes back to." A different introductory sequence features footage of Sabol stating his insistence that the company keep all its materials and his belief that this footage, however banal it might have seemed when it was initially taken, would eventually prove useful: "I felt, you gotta keep this stuff. Don't throw it out. That's almost a sin. I said, 'Don't throw anything out, keep everything. Put it on a reel and put it away. Someday you'll use it.' That someday is now." Though NFL Films does not actually keep everything and has not always taken the proper measures to maximize its content's life span, the company builds its image in part through advertising the importance it places on archiving and preserving its film.²⁷

Steve Sabol, who hosts *Lost Treasures*, extends his father's discussion in his introduction to the program's first episode. He notes that NFL Films producer Phil Tuckett found some old, unmarked cans while rummaging around in the company's vault. The cans were so old, Sabol claims, that they were rusted shut and had to be pried open. Impressed by what he found, Tuckett put together a research team to dig even deeper into the collection. Sabol notes that *Lost Treasures* is the result of this quest into the archival treasure trove. The previously unseen film has the potential to unlock the NFL's forgotten

history—a history that can be accessed only because of NFL Films's long-standing insistence that its footage be kept.

Though the archive holds the vast majority of the footage NFL Films has generated since its inception and all the programs it has produced, the company also strives to acquire a record of football that spans beyond its history, and even beyond the history of the NFL. Most of these materials reference professional football (including leagues that preceded the NFL), but the company also sometimes purchases college and even high school football footage if it is exceptionally rare or will somehow aid its productions. NFL Films's publicity materials often highlight these holdings as testaments to the archive's volume and breadth.²⁸ By acquiring and advertising its possession of these materials, the company demonstrates an interest in the visual history of football that goes beyond the NFL, and indeed, an effort to claim that history.

NFL Films sometimes uses material from other sources to assist its efforts to promote and historicize the NFL. For example, *75 Seasons* (1994), an Emmy Award-winning film that celebrates the league's seventy-fifth anniversary, puts to use newsreel footage from the NFL's early years and a clip from the television variety show *Texaco Star Theater* that features an appearance by Jim Thorpe, the famous multisport athlete who played for the NFL during its first seasons. Though this footage was not produced with the same intentions that guide NFL Films's productions, *75 Seasons* places it within a historical framework that celebrates the league. A 2003 documentary on Harold "Red" Grange, America's first football star, uses non-NFL Films footage in a similar fashion. The short documentary, which initially appeared on the syndicated series *NFL Films Presents*, employs newsreel footage; material from *The Galloping Ghost* (1931), a fictionalized biographical film serial starring Grange himself; and sequences from several short films that featured Grange. Though most of this footage was produced to celebrate Grange's talents and capitalize on his celebrity, the program incorporates these materials into NFL Films's endorsement of the NFL. To be sure, many documentaries use outside materials for purposes other than those that informed those materials' production. However, NFL Films's adoption of this common practice is particularly instructive because it illustrates how the company's collection policies—along with the films it constructs from its collected materials—are guided by its broader efforts to contain the league's past within a highly selective historical framework.

Though NFL Films routinely inserts outside footage into its texts—particularly in productions that examine the history of football prior to the company's development—it does not pass this material off as its own. Many of these films mark the outside materials

they employ with captions that list their titles and dates of production. In some cases, NFL Films is legally obligated to mention the outside materials it uses as they appear.²⁹ Beyond these legal constraints, Steve Seidman, a senior producer at NFL Films, who headed the Red Grange documentary's construction, argues that marking the source from which footage derives can provide the company's productions with legitimacy they would not have were the footage simply inserted into programs as if the company manufactured it.³⁰ This practice, according to the institutional logic that informs NFL Films's production practices, lends its programs a sense of authority—the loose equivalent to citing sources—while enabling the company to enhance the mythology it creates for the league. Furthermore, the outside footage NFL Films uses—whether or not it is marked as such—seldom appears as vibrant or as skillfully shot as the company's own content. This visual contrast allows NFL Films to advertise, at least implicitly, its place as the league's most effective historian and the rightful keeper of the NFL flame.

NFL Films has the resources to pay rights fees for nearly any footage it would want to use. Nevertheless, its main goal is to purchase this material and its reproduction rights. Chris Willis, the head of NFL Films's library, claims that the company “strives to get any footage it can that references the league”—whether it directly documents NFL games or somehow relates to it.³¹ Willis's primary responsibility is to help producers locate footage for their films. Aside from finding footage for specific productions, Willis oversees the company's acquisition of film materials. He scours the Internet and auctions for miscellaneous football footage that might help broaden the archive with the aim of expanding the narratives NFL Films can compose about the league.

Steve Sabol began the project of acquiring outside football footage soon after NFL Films's incorporation by the league. During the late 1960s, Sabol ran advertisements throughout the country—mostly in locations that were near or once near an NFL franchise—and drove from town to town to purchase nearly everything he found.³² In the early 1980s, NFL Films purchased the entire film library of Tel-Ra Productions, America's main sports filmmaking company from the late 1940s until the early 1960s and the organization that Ed Sabol outbid for rights to film the 1962 NFL championship game. Steve Sabol describes the purchase as the smartest business decision he ever made.³³ Acquiring Tel-Ra's library provided NFL Films with ownership of footage of nearly every NFL game played between 1948 and 1964.

Along with Sabol's other acquisitions, ownership of the Tel-Ra library gives NFL Films a near monopoly on pro football footage since 1948 and enables the company to use this material for whatever purposes it sees fit. As Sekula notes, “the purchase of reproduction rights under copyright law is also the purchase of a certain semantic

license.”³⁴ Purchasing Tel-Ra’s footage and the rights to it enabled NFL Films to ensure that this material—despite the particularities that mark its production—will only be used to augment its own vision of the NFL. By extension, acquiring this content allowed NFL Films to exert some control over the histories that can be created about the league.

Though NFL Films certainly limits the circulation of the materials it acquires, the company has the resources to take care of this footage in ways that many collectors and even archives cannot. Much of the footage that comes into NFL Films’s possession falls under the category of ephemeral film.³⁵ Prior to NFL Films’s acquisition of this film, the majority of it was not housed in locations that provided safe storage. Furthermore, the relatively low cultural status of sports makes football footage less likely to be cared for than film that features other content. According to Chris Willis, museums, archives, and private collectors periodically contact NFL Films to offer materials for sale or even donation. Moreover, NFL Films ensures the safety of the nitrate prints it acquires, along with any other film that requires special attention. While the NFL Films archive does not preserve film and is not equipped to store nitrate stock safely, it has copies of the nitrate prints it acquires made for its library and deposits the original nitrate at the Library of Congress for safekeeping. Although NFL Films might only use the footage it purchases to further its institutional mission, it also takes steps to safeguard footage’s previously uncertain survival.³⁶

In reference to Steve Sabol’s likening of the logic that guides NFL Films’s archival practices to his father’s thriftiness in the overcoat business, the company ensures that the film it produces and purchases is available for future use. As a saved piece of fabric might have eventually become the pocket of an overcoat, footage of an otherwise unimportant interception might someday be used in a montage of exciting defensive plays. Beyond its storage of materials and its symbolic role as football’s wine cellar, the archive’s operations are based on an effort to sustain the image the company creates for the NFL. Though it is uncertain if a piece of archived footage will eventually end up in an NFL Films production, it is assured that it will only be used to positively promote the NFL.

LAYERS OF SELECTIVITY

The NFL Films archive’s organization of materials facilitates the company’s aesthetic practices and raises theoretical issues regarding archives’ capacities to shape the meaning of their holdings. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault claims that “the archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of

statements as unique events.”³⁷ In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida extends Foucault’s discussion to theorize archives in terms of *consignation*—they bring together and make sense of varied, often disparate parts.³⁸ Archives, then, contain holdings within organizational frameworks that impose meanings on those materials.

Archives also expand their holdings’ meanings and potential uses. They abstract contents from their original contexts and place them into dialogue with other, sometimes quite different, contents. Texts that engage vastly different subject matter are placed into proximity because they have similar dates of production; materials produced decades apart share archival space because of their comparable subject matter. As such, Sekula refers to archives as “clearing house[s] of meaning” with the potential to broaden the significance of contents.³⁹

Archives assign meaning to their holdings primarily through the catalog terms they use to describe and organize them. Most archives catalog materials according to stable quantitative categories such as the date when a text was produced, its title, or the objects it depicts. However, as long ago as Sir Arthur Elton’s 1955 presentation “Film as a Source Material for History,” film scholars have argued that including qualitative cataloging criteria, such as terms that indicate the emotional states an image displays, can enhance archives’ utility by more specifically emphasizing their holdings’ potential uses.⁴⁰ As Patrik Sjöberg claims, “unlike looking for a title of a book in a library,” those searching for film material “could very well be looking for a certain quality of the subject in the footage.”⁴¹

Including qualitative cataloging terms thus expands the potential significance of archived materials—a process that is aided considerably by digital cataloging technologies. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive is one example of an archive that digitally catalogs materials according to quantitative and qualitative criteria.⁴² This archive’s qualitative catalog terms allow one to search for images that reference particular phenomena and display certain emotions such as sadness or happiness. Though organizing footage according to qualitative criteria expands its implied significance, these categories are still defined by the archive (and implicitly, by the archivist) that implements them and decides whether the footage it houses fits into the various categories. The archive’s capacity to both constrain and broaden the meanings of its holdings, then, ought to be read in relation to the specific institutional factors that shape its operations.

Before it is even placed into the archive, NFL Films footage is inflected by the practices that guide the company’s camera operators. Since its development, the company has had at least two cameras present at any given NFL game and up to twenty at

playoff games and the Super Bowl. The cameras occupy three basic positions that serve different functions. One so-called top camera is placed high in the stands to document every play. The other cameras are either situated on the sidelines to get close-up shots of on-field action or rove around the field and stadium to capture miscellaneous moments such as fans reacting to a play. Aside from these three primary camera positions, when NFL Films arranges for a player or coach to wear a wireless microphone, it includes a camera that focuses only on that person.⁴³

While the top camera strives to capture every play as clearly as possible, the others are highly selective and oftentimes quite risky in their documentation of NFL games. A sideline camera operator, for instance, might focus only on a few key players in the hope of capturing a particularly exciting play. However, Chris Willis notes that the company's camera operators balance their selective practices with an effort to capture footage that seems insignificant to telling the game's story but that might later have considerable value. When a particular player becomes a star in the league, for example, NFL Films wants to be sure it possesses footage of him as an unglamorous backup eager for an opportunity to showcase his skills. Although the company's camera operators temper their choosy filming with an effort to capture footage of the game as a whole, the film they generate is a decidedly partial documentation of the event that is shaped primarily by their efforts to obtain dramatic shots suitable for use in an NFL Films production.

Immediately after game footage arrives at NFL Films, it is developed and put on what the company calls a "special roll" that readies materials for use in the company's productions. Special rolls, which are made by NFL Films producers, are reels composed of the best and most dramatic shots from a particular game. Producers go through each roll of film from each camera present at a game, extract what they believe is the material most appropriate for use in a production, and place that footage onto a single reel. NFL Films only puts its game footage—the material that makes up the bulk of its productions—onto special rolls. Though NFL Films transcribes the interviews it films and catalogs them according to the interviewee, the date of production, and the specific project for which the interview was conducted, it does not separate this material's most potentially useful parts in the same way it does with game film.⁴⁴

Special rolls add a degree of selectivity to NFL Films camera operators' already selective filming. They enable producers to locate footage that both represents a specific event and lends itself to the company's conventions. Willis even describes special rolls as the "lifeblood" of the company's projects.⁴⁵ Though nearly all of NFL Films's content is stored in its archive and can be accessed as needed, the majority of its productions

are made exclusively from special-rolled materials.

As the special rolls' construction suggests, the NFL Films archive organizes game footage in part based on its potential to aid the company's efforts to promote the league and narrate its history by showcasing its most dramatic moments. For instance, though the special rolls always reference the particular events that their contents document, the fragments placed onto these reels are not arranged in accordance with those events' temporality; rather, special rolls reference varying instances during the game they index. Though the moments featured on special rolls document a single event, the rolls' organization suggests that these moments' potential to affect viewers is as important to their position in the archive as the subject matter they index.

The NFL Films archive's organization of game footage according to the intensity it displays has shifted over time, along with the technologies that aid its operations. Until 1994, NFL Films cataloged only its special rolls and the programs it produced. It organized special rolls according to the date and participants of the particular game their contents referenced, and it arranged programs according to their titles and dates of production. This cataloging system contained its contents' particularities within broad, quantitative categories. Moreover, NFL Films cut the footage it put onto special rolls and used in its programs from its original game film. Once special-rolled footage was used in an NFL Films program, it would be stored along with that film until it was woven into a different production, where it would stay until it was used again. For example, one of NFL Films's most iconic and frequently repeated moments—a sequence that features New York Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor hollering wildly on the sidelines to motivate his teammates—appeared in many NFL Films productions during the 1980s: the Giants' season highlights, films that showcase the league's best defenders, productions that feature the greatest on-field sound bites NFL Films gathered with its wireless microphones, and others. Clearly this fragment's implied significance shifts slightly depending on the production in which it is used. In the Giants' highlight film, the sequence primarily references Taylor's value to the team and its season; in the films on the league's best defenders, it is mainly used to illustrate the tenacity and aggression that characterize the NFL. The sequence's repetition in various contexts and movement throughout the archive suggests that it lends itself to many narrative uses. However, NFL Films merely cataloged it along with the most recent production in which it was used until it was taken from that film and woven into another. The archive thus explicitly marked this footage's potential significance only in relation to the date and title of the film in which it last appeared.

Though the Lawrence Taylor sequence has been used in a variety of different



Lawrence Taylor hollering on the sidelines. Frame from *Merchants of Menace* (1989). Courtesy of NFL Films.

NFL Films productions, the footage does not reference a particularly significant game or even a particular play. Furthermore, none of the films that incorporate this moment mention the specific game at which it was filmed, and many of them are only indirectly concerned with Taylor; rather this footage's value and usefulness to NFL Films is primarily a consequence of the emotional and physical power it displays and the consequent affectivity it can potentially bring to a variety of the company's productions. Though the footage's intensity is the primary reason behind its inclusion in so many NFL Films productions, the company's archival system before 1994 did not explicitly recognize this quality as a factor informing its position in, and frequent movement throughout, the collection.

Jeremy Swarbrick, the head of the NFL Films Media Relations Department, notes that the process of cutting special rolls and productions from original film exerted considerable wear and tear on the company's negatives. He also claims that this system did not facilitate efficient film production. The materials' movement through the archive with each use often made it difficult for producers to locate specific footage. Moreover, it indirectly encouraged the repetition of certain familiar moments.⁴⁶ To be sure, it was much quicker for producers, who were already operating under tight deadlines, simply to use generic shots they could easily locate rather than taking the time to scour the archive for previously unused footage that would serve similar purposes. Thus the same shots of fans reacting to plays and filing through stadium gates crop up in many NFL Films productions made between the 1960s and early 1990s.

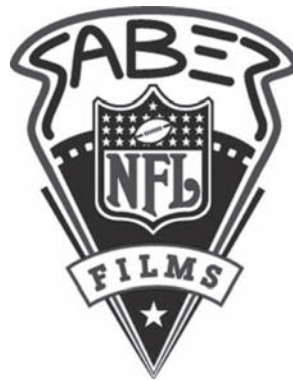
To preserve the company's negatives, increase the efficiency and precision with which producers could locate footage, and decrease repetition, NFL Films implemented

a digital archival system in 1994. Within this system, all film is transferred onto digital videotape directly after it is processed.⁴⁷ Special rolls are then made with Avid nonlinear digital video editing systems and are stored in the library, whereas the film negatives are placed in the vault. Since NFL Films instituted this system, it has transferred most of its extant productions and special rolls onto digital tape and has begun to work backward through its archive with the goal of transferring all of its material—an ambitious task that will likely take many years.

Within NFL Films's digitized archival system, the amount of footage multiplies. An individual sequence is archived with the original roll on which it was filmed, the digital transfer of that roll, the special roll made from that digital transfer, and each production in which it is used. This practice makes it easier for film materials to be located and enables more than one producer to use the same footage at a single time. Moreover, it illustrates the archive's capacity to catalog its holdings' multiple potential meanings by storing the same footage in various narrative contexts simultaneously and demonstrates how digital technologies aid this process. Whereas the company's previous system only archived footage with the most recent production in which it was used, the digitized system archives copies of the footage along with all of the films in which it appears. If all archives, as Sekula suggests, have the capacity to broaden their materials' meanings, NFL Films's archive explicitly assigns its contents multiple meanings simultaneously and readies them for different possible uses.

To increase the precision and efficiency with which footage could be located, in 1995 the NFL Films Information Technology Department developed a digital cataloging system that employees could access directly from their desktops. The Server and Archive Based Editing and Research (SABER) system classifies NFL Films's special-rolled game footage according to hundreds of search terms in categories that range from the particular season it references to the position of the camera that generated the film. NFL Films now has a staff of catalogers whose entire task consists of classifying footage. During the NFL season, catalogers log the special rolls that producers create each week. During the off season, the catalogers work backward through the archive with the goal of eventually logging its entire contents.

The SABER system is searchable through six main categories: "season," "players," "juncture," "action," "camera," and "other." Each category has multiple subcat-



The SABER system logo.
Courtesy of NFL Films.

Juncture of	Scene Rating	Sound	Conditions
Action	Poor	Arguing/Officials	Cheatable
Bench	OK	Booing	Cold
Game Prep	Good	Chalk Talk	Fog
Half Time	Very Good	Chastise	Hot
Locker Room	Great	Cheering	Mud
Non-Game	OH GOD	Chit Chat	Rain
Post Game		Classic Bites	Snow
Practice		Commentary	Wet
Pre-Game / Fans		Compliment	Wind
Pre-Game on Field		Pep Talk	
		Play Calling	
		Reaction	
		Shooting	
		Singing	
		Strategy	
		Swearing	
		Trash Talk	

The SABER system's "juncture" category. Table by the author.

egories attached to it. For example, once a particular season is selected, a search can be further limited to a given week during that season, the camera operator who took the footage, the uniforms a team was wearing (home or away), and the stadium where a game was played. The system's "players" category is organized similarly: it contains a section for each of the league's teams, with subcategories that separate offensive and defensive players and identify whether the players were competing at home or away. The SABER program adds another layer of selectivity to camera operators' shooting techniques and to the special rolls producers construct. It more specifically and explicitly organizes footage in relation to its potential to augment the mythology NFL Films productions construct.

In addition to constraining archived footage's meanings, the SABER system broadens them. Footage is listed and can be searched according to various categories simultaneously. Staff need not merely search for a player but can search for that player at a specific time, in a distinct place, and engaging in particular actions. Even if one searches only for a player or a game, the search results will always also feature the various other terms according to which the footage was logged. In this sense, the SABER system explicitly points toward an individual piece of cataloged footage's multiple meanings and the potential uses to which the footage lends itself. It does not simply allow a clip only to reference a game or player. To increase the SABER program's utility in showcasing footage's different potential uses, its categories and subcategories expand along with increasing demand for film that displays particular qualities. Furthermore, the program has a "comments" section for catalogers to add observations about footage that do not fit into SABER's already established categories.⁴⁸

Aside from cataloging footage according to multiple quantitative criteria, the SABER system explicitly organizes materials according to several qualitative characteristics. Searches for a team or player are cross-listed with an evaluation of the footage's intensity. For instance, the category "junction" contains a subcategory called "scene rating," which allows catalogers to rate footage as "poor," "OK," "good," "very good," "great," or "oh, God," based on how they decide it matches up with NFL Films's dramatic expectations. This cataloging feature explicitly marks footage according to its presumed potential to move viewers. Indeed, the "oh, God" category is named specifically for the affective response that footage given this designation is presumed to elicit.

More specifically, the SABER system's "other" category marks footage with terms that reference certain qualities NFL Films productions emphasize in their efforts to dramatize the league such as "dejection," "frustration," and "patriotic." It also has terms that reference specific conventions NFL Films productions often use such as close-up shots of players' hands, slow-motion shots of sweat dripping from players' bodies, and images of breath rising from helmets during cold weather. NFL Films typically employs these stylistic tropes to display the emotion that characterizes the league. In fact, the sequences that feature these conventions tend not to emphasize—or even mention—the players, times, or places they index; rather, this footage is focused on the league's violence, the immense physical toll the game of football takes on those who play it, and the extreme conditions players endure when competing. Thus it aids NFL Films's attempts to move viewers by showcasing the feelings the league fosters. The SABER system's practice of cataloging footage in part according to NFL Films's established, affect-oriented conventions positions these materials as lending themselves to the goose pimple-generating experience the company's films strive to construct.

There is a hierarchy implied in the SABER system's organization that arranges footage first and foremost according to the season and players it references. But the system does not prevent users from searching exclusively according to footage's qualitative characteristics, and those characteristics will always be cross-listed with the quantitative results. Moreover, there are potential problems of consistency with the SABER system's qualitative criteria that its quantitative categories do not present, as one cataloger might view and classify a snippet as "very good" while another might just view it as "good." NFL Films has implemented no hard-and-fast rules to distinguish between these subjective categories. They are designed to serve as approximate starting points that allow producers to locate footage that is consistent with the feelings they are attempting to evoke and that depicts particular times, people, and events.

The SABER system's organization of material according to qualitative catego-

Non Game	Product Shot	Specialty	Other Personnel
Aerial	Adidas	Angry	Administration
Banner/Sign	Apex	Ball	Celebrity
Challenge Play	Converse	Blood	Cheerleaders
Press Conference	Franklin	Breath	Coaches
Scoreboard	Gatorade	Cleats	Entertainers
Sky Lines	Logo Athletic	Dejection	Fans
Stadium	Motorola	Equipment	Former Players
Timeout	Newman	Eyes	Funky Fans
Tunnel	NFL Equipment	Frustration	Grounds Crew
	NFL Pro Line	Grass / Dirt	Mascot
	Nike	Hands	Media
	Powerade	Huddle	NFL Cameramen
	Puma	Patriotic	Official
	Reebok	Praying	Players
	Riddell	Records / Milestones	Security
	Starter	Snap	Trainers
	Wilson	Sun	
		Sweat	
		Talking on Phone	
		Tom Uniforms	

The SABER system's "nongame" category. Table by the author.

ries institutionalizes NFL Films's celebratory, affect-oriented practices. Though SABER's qualitative criteria expand any given footage's potential significance, the system features categories only for the qualities that lend themselves to NFL Films's conventions. Though certain footage might arguably display hatred or spitefulness, these characteristics are left out of the SABER system and, as a result, are excluded from the range of possible uses to which the system suggests content might be put. The NFL Films archive's organization of materials according to the specific feelings and conventions that mark the company's productions positions all its film materials, to greater and lesser degrees, as expressions of the affective, celebratory mythology NFL Films manufactures for the league. The varying levels of selectivity through which the archive filters footage—from the camera operators' filming strategies to the SABER system's catalog terms—always organize that material in part based on its potential to help NFL Films's staff create and control the league's image. Indeed, every detail of this private commercial archive is shaped by the institutional ideology that guides NFL Films's practices.

DISSEMINATING THE EXPERIENCE

Beyond assisting in the production of NFL Films's dramatized texts, the archive functions as the main site from which the company provides footage to outside clients. The NFL Films Media Services Department, in cooperation with the company's licensing department,



Close-up of a lineman's hands from *They Call It Pro Football* (1965). This production was the first time NFL Films used close-ups of hands to represent linemen, now a staple of its films. Courtesy of NFL Films.

locates and sells these archived materials.⁴⁹ When a client makes a request for footage, media services uses the SABER system to put together a suitable reel of film. John Murphy, the employee in the NFL Films Information Technology Department who headed the SABER system's development, notes that SABER was conceived and created based partly on the need of media services to accommodate so many outside requests.⁵⁰

The relationship between the operations of media services and the SABER system is perhaps most clearly evident in the "product shot" portion of SABER's "other" subcategory. The subcategory has terms for the brands whose logos often appear in NFL Films footage—most of which are the athletic wear companies that provide the league's equipment and the communications technology companies that furnish the headsets coaches use to converse with their staffs. The subcategory increases the facility with which NFL Films can provide footage that displays these companies' connection to the NFL and maximizes the amount of footage it can sell to them.⁵¹ Because the product shots are cross-listed with a variety of other quantitative and qualitative terms, the NFL Films Media Services Department can offer clients film material that features their brands and showcases particular subject matter or expresses a certain degree of intensity.

Though it is not readily perceptible from viewing the materials, NFL Films creates a large percentage of the nonlive footage of the NFL that appears on American and international television.⁵² During the season, media services provides the league's network partners—the television networks that have contracts to televise NFL games during a given season—with all its weekly special rolls.⁵³ The network partners use this footage

for their pregame programming, halftime shows, and any other texts they produce that comment on the league. Although the materials appear in non-NFL Films programs, the league's network partners only receive footage that NFL Films producers have already deemed worthy of inclusion on a special roll. This process allows the company to assert a degree of control over the footage that eventually appears on television.

In addition to the reels it provides the league's network partners, Swarbrick notes that media services sells footage to nearly a hundred different television programs and other media outlets every week.⁵⁴ Media services exerts even more control over the footage it sells to these clients than it does over the materials it gives to the league's network partners. When clients request film of a particular player or game, media services decides precisely what footage of that subject matter those clients will receive. It also retains the right to deny requests if it feels clients might use the footage to display the league in an unfavorable light. If, for example, a television program asks for footage of a former NFL star, media services will put together a reel of footage from the archive that at once meets those requests and does not compromise the mythology NFL Films fosters for the league. If a program asks for footage of a player who is facing legal troubles, it would likely decline the request altogether. Because media services primarily gathers footage from already special-rolled materials cataloged through the SABER system, it would be difficult to find problematic content to sell. Furthermore, the media services department's cautious distribution of materials does not necessarily prevent clients from using footage in unglamorous or critical ways. Once these outlets purchase footage, they are free to use it however they choose. Be that as it may, by exerting control—however limited—over the archived footage it distributes, NFL Films attempts to maintain the image it creates for the league beyond its own productions.

Part of the control media services exerts over the circulation of archived footage is organized around an effort to maintain NFL Films's distinction among sports media outlets. Media services primarily does this by exercising greater selectivity over its sale of sound footage. Because of its position as a league-owned entity, NFL Films has the exclusive ability to microphone players and to use roving boom microphones on the sidelines during games. The sounds NFL Films gathers of pads crunching, coaches screaming on the sidelines, and players grunting as they deliver big hits constitute primary ways in which the company strives to affect viewers and dramatize the league. In fact, along with the music it produces, on-field sound is currently the company's most distinctive stylistic characteristic within the context of contemporary sports media. During NFL Films's early years, the use of slow motion, particularly ground-level slow motion, was solely associated with the company. However, since the 1970s, live network

television broadcasts have incorporated slow motion into their coverage with increasing frequency. The current prevalence of this convention in live television broadcasts has diluted NFL Films's uniqueness in sports media. Though NFL Films does sell some sound footage to clients, it charges different rates for this material and does not include it with the special rolls it provides the league's network partners each week during the season. Media services thus protects NFL Films's exclusive association with sound footage and, by extension, the affective experiences this specific type of material creates.

Like the footage used in NFL Films productions, the content media services sells to clients is always filtered through the archive's efforts to maintain the affective mythology NFL Films constructs for the league. Through both facilitating and controlling the circulation of NFL Films's archived materials, the media services department disseminates its company's created NFL experience beyond its own productions. Whether footage is sold for use in a network pregame program or in an advertisement for soup, it is already shaped by the corporate ideology that guides the archive's organization of materials.

CONCLUSION

The NFL Films archive safeguards the NFL's visual links to its past and readies those documents for use in the company's productions and for sale to clients. Though it keeps and organizes footage, it is not merely a storehouse that indiscriminately holds materials; rather, it arranges content to complement NFL Films productions' established style and aid their overall efforts to "give viewers goose pimples"—goose pimples that will presumably enhance viewers' relationship to the NFL and its history.

This private moving image archive's operations illustrate how commercial archives shape their holdings' significance. Its digitized cross-listing of materials, placement of them in multiple sites, and organization of them in reference to qualitative criteria suggest that archives can point out—and even constitute—their content's multiple meanings. This collection exemplifies archives' position as sites of possibility—clearinghouses of meaning that can breathe new life into and broaden the potential uses and significance of their materials. Furthermore, it offers an object through which to critique how the common practice of cataloging materials exclusively according to quantitative criteria restricts their potential meanings and uses. Indeed, other moving image archives—both commercial and nonprofit—could use the NFL Films archive's intricate cataloging system as a model to expand the way they organize footage.

Though the NFL Films archive signals its content's multiple meanings and ar-

ranges contents in relation to the qualities they presumably display, these expansive organizational criteria are designed to aid the company's main goal of advertising the league and generating revenue for it. As this archive offers an instructive model for how other moving image collections might expand the potential meanings of their holdings, it also suggests that the significance archives assign to content—no matter the ends these collections serve—is always partly determined by the institutions that guide their construction and the values that mark those institutions.

Though exaggerated, Steve Sabol's gushing references to the NFL Films archive as the "soul of the NFL" and "football's wine cellar" are not altogether inaccurate. NFL Films productions advertise the NFL as an institution characterized by intense and dramatic moments: slow-motion shots of long passes floating into a receiver's hands, punishing quarterback sacks coupled with the sounds of pads crunching, ecstatic touchdown celebrations backed by soaring orchestral scores, and so forth. NFL Films uses these moments to position the league as an organization that expresses this drama. But before they are woven into a production, all the affective sequences NFL Films presents are filtered through its archive. Beyond storing these filmed moments, the NFL Films archive explicitly marks them as suitable for use in the company's productions. It thus helps create the values these moments uphold, which can then be disseminated to perpetuate the values of the NFL. This institutional archive, then, is as vital to the creation of a celebratory, affective NFL experience as the romanticized documentaries for which NFL Films is primarily known.

NOTES

I would like to thank Greg Waller for his advice throughout this essay's development. Steve Seidman, Chris Willis, Steve Sabol, John Murphy, and Jeremy Swarbrick took time out of their schedules to speak with me about NFL Films's history and archival practices. It would have been impossible to write this piece without their generosity and insight. Colleen Smith-Grubb helped me to secure permissions for many of the images used in this article. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and to the editors, whose detailed and incisive feedback significantly improved the essay.

1. NFL Films's two hundred thousand-square-foot headquarters houses each part of the company's production practices. It contains the company's archive; a film-processing lab; shooting stages; video-editing, audio-mixing, and music composition facilities; a scoring stage that can accommodate a full orchestra; and a 150-seat theater. Because NFL Films houses all its production

facilities under one roof, the company often refers to itself as “one of the last great, self-contained ‘Hollywood’ studios,” or as “Hollywood on the Delaware [River].” See John George, “NFL Films Kicks Off New Digs,” *Philadelphia Business Journal*, October 4, 2002, <http://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/stories/2002/10/07/story4.html?page=1>.

2. National Film Preservation Foundation, *The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums* (San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004), 3–4. Karen F. Gracy reiterates the National Film Preservation Foundation’s discussion of *preservation* by claiming that the term now has fluid, though hotly debated, meanings in the film archive community. See Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007). According to the recently broadened definition of *film preservation*, the NFL Films archive does technically preserve its materials by storing them in a controlled environment. Be that as it may, and to prevent any confusion, I will only use the term *preservation* to describe the rare instances when NFL Films has its holdings preserved in the traditional sense of the term.

3. Though NFL Films began as a strictly football film production company, it has significantly expanded its operations since the early 1980s. It routinely creates productions that are not made from its already archived film and even films that do not relate to football at all. Though these texts do not comment on football, they often adopt the NFL Films style. For instance, in 1980, the company made *The Greatest Adventure*, a dramatic documentary narrated by Orson Welles that memorializes NASA’s 1969 Apollo 11 voyage to the moon. NFL Films has also produced music videos, documentaries, and commercials for clients ranging from the state of New Jersey to Michael Jackson. As Barry Wolper, NFL Films’s chief operating officer, claims, “we really view ourselves now as a full-service [film] production company that can adapt to anything.” See Eric Fisher, “Branching Out: NFL Films Does More Than Just Football Games,” *Washington Times*, September 19, 2002, C1.

In addition to the nonfootball texts the company now creates, several of its most popular current productions are not made from its archived materials. For example, *Hard Knocks* (2001 to present), a reality program produced for HBO that documents a particular NFL team’s training camp each summer, uses only footage prepared on location (aside from the introductory and credit sequences). *NFL Matchup* (1993 to present), a program produced for ESPN that airs each week during the NFL season, combines studio commentary with the videotapes that NFL teams take of each game to analyze players’ performance. The program, which uses videotape shot from high in the stands with a single camera, in no way resembles the dramatic productions for which NFL Films is famous.

4. Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive,” in *Blasted Allegories: An Anthology of Writings by Contemporary Artists*, ed. Brian Willis (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 118.

5. There is a dearth of scholarship on the relationship between moving image archives and the institutions that guide their operations. Haidee Wasson’s *Museum Movies* is an exception. Wasson’s study examines how the Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) Film Library ushered in a new understanding of film’s aesthetic and civic value during the middle twentieth century. The

library collected only those texts perceived to fulfill its primarily cultural and educational mission. Furthermore, the library's mission was shaped significantly by the Rockefeller Foundation, which provided the majority of its funding. The Rockefeller Foundation's understanding of what types of film should be included in the Film Library and the specific uses to which those materials ought to be put constrained the library's capacity to acquire, display, and circulate materials. The MoMA Film Library thus created a limited framework governing the storage and circulation of film texts during this time that was shaped by the values attached to the institution that housed the library and the expectations of the organization that provided the library with economic support. Wasson's study thus considers both how archives contribute to the institutions to which they are connected and how their operations are partly guided by those institutions. See Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2005). Along similar lines, in his examination of *Victory at Sea* (1952–53), the NBC television series of celebratory compilation films about the U.S. Navy's role in World War II, Richard C. Bartone notes that 95% of the footage used in *Victory at Sea* derived from already edited productions stored in the navy's film archive. The film material the program used was taken almost exclusively from footage produced with the main objective of positively depicting the navy—and American military operations in general. *Victory at Sea's* use of the already selective footage from the navy's film archive indicates how archives impose a set of discursive boundaries on materials that can constrain their uses. See Richard C. Bartone, "Victory at Sea: A Case Study in 'Official' Telehistory," *Film and History* 21, no. 4 (1991): 114–29.

6. NFL Films and its archive are not entirely unique in American sports media. Other professional sports organizations, such as Major League Baseball and the National Basketball Association, have developed similar production companies. In fact, these subsidiaries were created in part because of NFL Films's profound success. However, these organizations do not document their respective leagues as comprehensively as NFL Films, and they do not exclusively use film, which results in their materials having poorer image quality and a shorter life span than the footage NFL Films generates.

7. Tom C. Brody, "The C. B. Demille of the Pros," *Sports Illustrated*, November 20, 1967, 82. *Pro Football's Longest Day* framed the 1962 NFL championship game between the Green Bay Packers and the New York Giants as an epic militaristic drama. The film took its title from Darryl F. Zanuck's *The Longest Day* (1962), a World War II drama released just months before Blair Motion Pictures shot *Pro Football's Longest Day*. Though the production certainly placed the game within an epic historical framework, the Sabols had yet to develop the conventions that would later come to characterize NFL Films such as slow motion, baritone narration, and orchestral scores. These practices would not be codified until 1965's *They Call It Pro Football*—the first production made after the NFL brought Blair Motion Pictures in-house and renamed it NFL Films.

8. Professional football was the third most popular American sport during the early 1960s, behind both professional baseball and college football. By the end of the decade, it would surpass its competition by a significant margin.

Furthermore, the 1960s marked a turning point in sports organizations' use of and reliance on television to maintain and increase their profitability. For an outline of how the NFL used television to amplify its status in American culture during this historical moment, see Michael MacCambridge, *America's Game: The Epic Story of How Pro Football Captured a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2004), and Michael Oriard, *Brand NFL: Making and Selling America's Favorite Sport* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

9. "NFL Films Inc.: Father-Son Team Establishes Gold Standard for Sports Photography," *60 Minutes*, August 25, 2004, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/01/26/60II/main595946.shtml>.

10. Darren Rovell, "Tales from the Gridiron," *MSN Money*, September 7, 2009, <http://articles.moneycentral.msn.com/Investing/CNBC/TVReports/TalesFromTheGridiron.aspx>.

11. Until the early 1980s, NFL Films relied primarily on John Facenda, a Philadelphia news anchor, for its narration. Facenda's baritone voice earned him the epithet the "Voice of God" from fans and constitutes one of the company's most distinctive qualities. Since Facenda's death in 1984, NFL Films has persisted in its use of male narrators, such as Harry Kalas and Jeff Kaye, who adopt Facenda's commanding style. However, the company now sometimes uses narrators whose voices are not as deep and whose deliveries are not as hyperbolically dramatic as Facenda's.

12. See <http://www.nflfilms.com/>.

13. Alex Ben Block, "The 27th Team," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 18, 1973, 21.

14. Brian Massumi, "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements," in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xvi-xix. Massumi notes that neither *affect* nor *affection* "denotes a personal feeling"; rather affect "is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution of that body's capacity to act" (xvi).

15. In *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), Brian Massumi discusses how media strive to operate affectively and to transfer the affect they generate into feelings. He notes that media texts can mobilize their affectivity through their form and the specific content they present. Though affect is an amorphous force, it can be given meaning in specific ways. Massumi even describes it as "a nonideological means by which ideology is produced" (42). Affect provides a catalyst by which meanings can be made and values can be reinforced.

NFL Films productions operate in this affective manner. They strive to generate affects and to mobilize those affects in ways that glorify the NFL. For instance, a montage-edited sequence of powerful tackles backed by a booming orchestral score and punctuated by the sounds of pads crunching and men grunting strives to move the audience. It filters the affect it attempts to generate through the romanticized image NFL Films creates for the league. In reference to Massumi's statement that affect is a nonideological means by which ideology is created, NFL Films uses affect to reinforce

the ideology it creates for the NFL. Beyond the specific ways NFL Films productions mobilize affect to celebrate the NFL, these texts' potential to create affect also, at least implicitly, reinforces certain understandings of the male body, violence, masculinity, and the intersections between these categories. Though these specific concerns are beyond the scope of this essay, they indicate the broader implications of NFL Films's mobilization of affect.

Massumi's discussion is oriented mostly around the relationship between the image and affect. Jeremy Gilbert discusses the affective in music in "Signifying Nothing: 'Culture,' 'Discourse,' and the Sociality of Affect," *Culture Machine* 6 (2004), <http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/8/7>. Furthermore, Eric Shouse offers an accessible discussion of the differences between feeling, emotion, and affect in "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *M/C Journal* 8, no. 6 (2005), <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>.

16. Beyond the intense drama that characterizes most NFL Films productions, the company also often produces human interest stories that examine different facets of the league and so-called follies films that gently poke fun at it. Though these genres approach the league from a less explicitly celebratory perspective, they ultimately persist in championing the NFL's qualities and showcasing the league through its most potentially affective moments.

17. Quoted in Glen Macnow, "NFL Films Is Scoring High," *Nation's Business*, September 1988, 44.

18. Steve Sabol, telephone conversation with the author, April 7, 2008.

19. Ed Sabol has always claimed that film's visual quality justifies its significant economic expense. Sabol would reportedly tell NFL Films camera operators to "let the film run like water" when they were shooting. In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Sabol rationalized NFL Films's commitment to using such large volumes of film despite its cost by claiming that "you remember the quality long after you have forgotten the price." See Fisher, "Branching Out."

20. Quoted in Bob Fisher, "120 Million Watch This Show," *American Cinematographer*, November 1986, 91–96.

21. <http://www.nffilms.com/media/>. Another point worth noting is that film, quite simply, lasts longer than videotape. NFL Films's use of 16mm stock has enabled the company to retain its footage, along with that footage's image quality, far longer than it would have had the footage been shot on video.

22. Mike Celizic, "NFL Films: Football as Cinematic Art," *Football Digest* 13, no. 10 (1984): 42.

23. Richard Rosenblatt, "NFL Films: Football's Soul Preserver," *Sporting News*, September 25, 1989, 56.

24. NFL Films's nickname "Keepers of the Flame" was developed by the legendary Chicago Bears coach George Halas. Halas, as Sabol often recounts, was initially distrustful of the company's operations and resented its camera operators' intrusiveness during games. He later came to appreciate NFL Films's documentation of the league's history—a history he played no small part in establishing—and affectionately dubbed the company "Keepers of the [NFL] Flame." See Gerald Eskenazi, "Sports-Tape Sales on Fast Forward," *New York Times*, December 18, 1989, C1.

- 25.** Marty Moss-Coane, "Interview with Steve Sabol," *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, November 14, 1997.
- 26.** In 2003, several episodes of *Lost Treasures* were featured in a DVD set titled *Inside the Vault*, which is part of NFL Films's "Archives Collection" of DVDs.
- 27.** Chris Willis notes that since the 1990s, NFL Films has significantly increased the care with which it organizes and stores its archived materials. Chris Willis, personal interview with the author, May 12, 2009.
- 28.** On its Web site and in press releases, NFL Films claims that its most prominent football film holding is a print of an 1894 game between Princeton University and Rutgers University shot by Thomas Edison. However, according to Charles Musser's annotated filmography of Edison Motion Pictures, Edison never shot a football game between Princeton and Rutgers. Edison did, however, shoot a football game between the Orange Athletic Club and the Newark Athletic Club in 1899. Because both these clubs were located in New Jersey, like Princeton and Rutgers, it is likely that NFL Films owns a print of this production. See Charles Musser, *Edison Motion Pictures, 1890–1900: An Annotated Filmography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 566. Though some of its claims are inaccurate, NFL Films's acquisition of film materials and the manner in which the company advertises its possession of them demonstrate the company's efforts to represent itself as an organization committed to preserving the visual history of football in general.
- 29.** The specific conditions under which NFL Films must give credit to the outside materials its productions use are decided on a case-by-case basis. Sometimes the company is only obligated to cite the materials in credit rolls at the end of a production. Other times, it is required to reference them as they appear in a text. Chris Willis, telephone conversation with the author, February 18, 2010.
- 30.** Steve Seidman, personal interview with the author, May 12, 2009.
- 31.** Chris Willis, telephone conversation with the author, July 30, 2009.
- 32.** Steve Sabol, telephone conversation with the author, May 11, 2009.
- 33.** Steve Sabol, personal interview with the author, May 11, 2009. Sabol does not remember exactly when NFL Films purchased Tel-Ra's library, and the company did not keep any receipts documenting the transaction.
- 34.** Sekula, "Reading an Archive," 116.
- 35.** Rick Prelinger defines ephemeral films as "industrial, advertising, educational, amateur and government films—films that were generally made not to show in movie theatres or on TV, but films that were made to teach, to educate, sometimes to miseducate, to train, to sell, pitch a product, or promote an idea." Lisa Rein, "CC Talks with Rick Prelinger," *Creative Commons*, October 1, 2005, <http://creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/7064>.
- 36.** Chris Willis, telephone conversation with the author, July 30, 2009.
- 37.** Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129.
- 38.** Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.
- 39.** Sekula, "Reading an Archive," 117.

- 40.** Elton claims that cataloging material according to qualitative criteria might be “essential” for film archives to provide sufficiently detailed descriptions of their holdings. Sir Arthur Elton, “The Film as Source Material for History,” as quoted in Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 46.
- 41.** Patrik Sjöberg, *The World in Pieces: A Study of the Compilation Film* (Stockholm: Aura, 2001), 54.
- 42.** It is important to note that digital cataloging technologies are expensive to purchase and implement. They are therefore not available to many archives. Much of the well-funded Spielberg Film and Video Archive is streamed and searchable online at <http://resources.ushmm.org/film/search/index.php>.
- 43.** NFL Films does not have wireless microphones present at every NFL game it documents. Wireless microphones are typically used at least once a week during the season.
- 44.** Chris Willis, telephone conversation with the author, February 18, 2010.
- 45.** Chris Willis, personal interview with the author, May 12, 2009.
- 46.** Jeremy Swarbrick, telephone conversation with the author, August 3, 2009.
- 47.** NFL Films now transfers all its game and interview footage onto high-definition digital videotapes.
- 48.** E.g., Chris Willis asserts that the SABER system developed a “Celebrity” category because of increasing requests from clients for footage that featured celebrities present at NFL games. Chris Willis, personal interview with the author, May 12, 2009.
- 49.** Prior to the media services department’s location and distribution of film materials, all footage must be licensed for outside use by NFL Films’s licensing department. The length of time a client can use footage is determined on a case-by-case basis.
- 50.** John Murphy, telephone conversation with the author, July 22, 2009.
- 51.** Because of the NFL’s immense popularity in American culture, companies pay large sums for the opportunity to associate themselves with the league. GMC currently advertises itself as “the official truck of the NFL,” and Coors markets itself as the league’s “official beer.”
- 52.** When NFL Films sells footage to clients, it typically does not demand that they mark the footage as NFL Films material when it is used but rather only in the credit roll at the end of the production. Chris Willis, telephone conversation with the author, February 18, 2010.
- 53.** Jeremy Swarbrick, telephone conversation with the author, August 3, 2009. NFL Films’s practice of providing its weekly special rolls to the league’s network partners is written into the contracts that networks sign with the league.
- 54.** The amount of footage it sells throughout the year fluctuates, with the highest volume of sales occurring during the NFL season.