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"LEATHERHEADS"

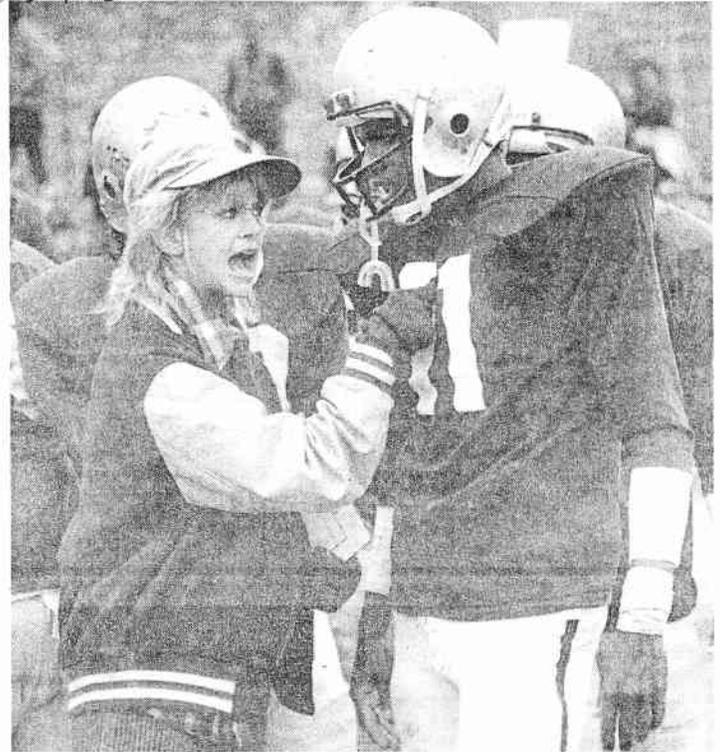
Gridiron giggles

George Clooney, Renee Zellweger and John Krasinski (of "The Office") went all the way back to the 1920s for "Leatherheads," a romantic comedy (opening Friday) that's set in the early days of professional football.

Krasinski is an uptight, upright college player recruited by the pros — only to find his team's quarterback (Clooney) falling for his girl (Zellweger).

But you don't have to go back that far to find other examples of movie comedies built around football. It's rough, it's raucous, and watching lumbering giants pound a quarterback into the dirt is always funny — unless the quarterback is on your team. Here are some football follies from recent years.

Michael Giltz



THE LONGEST YARD (1974)

The Play: Burt Reynolds is a washed-up pro quarterback trying to quietly do his time in prison. But a vicious warden obsessed with the game insists Reynolds organize a team to compete against the guards.

The Score: One of the rawest sports comedies ever. Millions of teens undoubtedly mimicked the scene where a quarterback drills a ball into a rushing player's crotch. Adam Sandler's 2005 remake fumbled by softening the humor to get a PG-13.

HEAVEN CAN WAIT (1978)

The Play: Warren Beatty co-directed and starred as a Los Angeles Rams quarterback

snatched up too soon by an overeager angel; he gets a second chance on Earth.

The Score: No one would mind a little pass interference from the luminous Julie Christie, and bachelor Beatty realizes that a Super Bowl ring isn't as desirable as a wedding ring.

THE WATERBOY (1998)

The Play: Bobby Boucher (Adam Sandler) seems like a half-wit, but no one's laughing at the waterboy when they see how hard he can tackle.

The Score: Boucher may be nine yards short of a beautiful mind — but who cares when the big game is on the line. The top-grossing football movie of all time. Yep.



WILDCATS (1986)

The Play: Heck, track coach Molly McGrath (Goldie Hawn) knows as much about football as any guy. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy to turn a bunch of misfits at Central High into a winning team.

The Score: Hail Mary? Hail Goldie. For a while there in the '80s, "Send in Hawn!" seemed a can't-miss way of attracting audiences. The then little-known duo of Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson are her key players.

NORTH DALLAS FORTY (1979)

The Play: Nick Nolte and Mac Davis provide a peek into the drug-crazed, sex-filled world of professional football via a thinly disguised look at the Dallas Cowboys.

The Score: Talk about touch football — those cheerleaders worked even harder off the field than they did on it. It's amazing the team found any time to play the game.

MASH (1970)

The Play: Robert Altman's black comedy about the Korean War climaxes with an anarchic football game as surreal as the war itself.

The Score: Way offside when it comes to decency and political correctness. The ringer



(Fred Williamson) is nicknamed Spearchucker, a lineman casually uses the F-word and quarterback Johnny Unitas (still playing pro ball at the time) is seen taking a hit from a joint. ♦