

= Arthur B. McBride =

Arthur B. "Mickey" McBride ( March 20 , 1888 ? November 10 , 1972 ) was the founder of the Cleveland Browns professional American football team in the All @-@ America Football Conference and National Football League . During McBride 's tenure as owner of the Browns from 1944 to 1953 , the team won five league championships and reached the championship game two more times . It was the most successful period for a Cleveland sports team in the city 's modern history . McBride was also a real estate developer and investor active in Cleveland , Chicago and Florida . He owned taxi @-@ cab companies in Cleveland and a horse racing news wire that sold information to bookmakers . He had ties to organized crime figures arising from the wire service , but was never arrested or convicted of a crime .

= = Early career = =

McBride was born in Chicago , where he worked as a newsboy from the age of six . His first real job was for publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst 's organization in Los Angeles , San Francisco , Boston and Chicago . He moved to Cleveland in 1913 , when he was in his mid @-@ twenties , to be circulation manager for the Cleveland News . It was a time when circulation battles over newsstands and street corners often turned violent . He started with the News on a \$ 10 @,@ 000 salary ( \$ 239 @,@ 428 in today 's dollars ) and was charged with organizing the paper 's newsboys . " This meant choosing strong young men comfortable fighting with fists , clubs , knives , chains and , when they could get them , handguns , " author Ted Schwarz wrote . " They were the business equivalent of the street gang , and McBride 's salary depended on how well he organized his newsboys to avoid losing their corners to one or more violent rivals . "

Having built up a fortune in newspapers and purchased apartment buildings in the Cleveland suburb of Lakewood , McBride in 1930 went into business for himself . In 1931 , he bought a majority stake in Cleveland 's Zone Cab Company , which later merged with the Yellow Cab Company to form the city 's biggest taxi operator . He also had taxi businesses in Akron and Canton , two cities southeast of Cleveland . As his taxi businesses prospered , McBride invested in real estate in Cleveland , Chicago and Florida . In the late 1930s , he leveraged his newspaper connections to launch a wire service that supplied bookmakers with the results of horse races . This put him in contact with organized crime figures who were behind gambling operations that relied on such services . He invested in the Continental Press and Empire News , both based in Cleveland and run by mobsters Morris " Mushy " Wexler and Sam " Gameboy " Miller . James Ragen , another friend and associate in the wire business , was murdered in 1946 in a Chicago gangland feud . A federal grand jury in 1940 indicted 18 people , including McBride and Wexler , over the supply of information used in gambling . The allegations were based on federal laws that forbade interstate transmission of lottery results ; prosecutors treated the race results as lottery lists . He was never arrested or tried over his role in the business , however .

= = Cleveland Browns = =

McBride was a fan of boxing and baseball , but knew little about football . He only grew interested in the sport in 1940 , when his son Arthur Jr. was a student the University of Notre Dame and he attended Notre Dame Fighting Irish football games in South Bend , Indiana . He was drawn by the excitement that surrounded football and thought a professional team could be profitable . In 1942 , McBride made overtures to supermarket heir Dan Reeves about buying his Cleveland Rams , a National Football League team , but Reeves rebuffed him . In 1944 , however , Chicago Tribune sports editor Arch Ward proposed a new professional league called the All @-@ America Football Conference . McBride , who knew Ward from his days in the newspaper business , eagerly signed on as the owner of the eight @-@ team circuit 's Cleveland franchise .

McBride first set his sights on Notre Dame 's Frank Leahy as his team 's head coach , and the two men shook hands on a deal to make him coach and general manager . Not wanting to lose Leahy ,

however , Notre Dame 's president objected and McBride backed off . He then asked Cleveland Plain Dealer sportswriter John Dietrich who he should hire . Dietrich suggested Paul Brown , the Ohio State Buckeyes coach who was then serving in the U.S. Navy and coaching a team at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station outside of Chicago . With his limited football knowledge , McBride had never heard of Brown , and it was Ward who made the initial approach . McBride later met with Brown , whose star was on the rise after bringing Ohio State its first national championship in 1942 , and offered him \$ 17 @, @ 500 a year ( \$ 253 @, @ 447 in current dollar terms ) ? the biggest salary for any football coach at any level ? and an ownership stake in the team . He also offered Brown a stipend for the rest of his time in the military . Brown accepted the position , saying that while he was sad to leave Ohio State , he " couldn 't turn down this deal in fairness to my family . "

McBride spared no expense in promoting the team and gave Brown full control over personnel . Brown went out and signed future stars including tackle and placekicker Lou Groza , wide receiver Dante Lavelli and quarterback Otto Graham , who got \$ 7 @, @ 500 a year and a \$ 250 monthly stipend until the end of World War II . McBride then held a contest to name the team in May 1945 ; " Cleveland Panthers " was the most popular choice , but Brown rejected it because it was the name of an earlier failed football team . " That old Panthers team failed , " Brown said . " I want no part of that name . " In August , McBride gave in to popular demand and christened the team the Browns , despite Paul Brown 's objections .

As the team prepared for its first season in 1946 , McBride stepped aside and let Brown run it . The Browns were an immediate success , both financially and on the field . A capacity crowd of 35 @, @ 964 saw the Browns play their first preseason game at the Akron Rubber Bowl , and the team led all of football in attendance in 1946 and 1947 . The Browns , meanwhile , won every AAFC championship between 1946 and 1949 . McBride proposed for the Browns to play an inter @-@ league championship game with the National Football League champion Philadelphia Eagles in 1948 and 1949 , but the NFL shot down the idea . He also played a role in negotiating peace between the AAFC and NFL after competition for talent drove up player salaries and ate into owners ' profits . After the 1949 season , the AAFC dissolved and three of its teams , including the Browns , merged into the more established NFL .

In the Browns ' early years , Paul Brown wanted to keep on reserve a number of promising players who did not make the team 's official roster . McBride made this happen by putting the reserves on his payroll as taxi drivers , although none of them were asked to drive cabs . This group came to be known as the " taxi squad " , a term still in use to describe players kept on hand to fill in for injured team members . The taxi squad was just one of the ways in which McBride backed Brown . He viewed owning the team as primarily a civic duty ? as a gift to the city . " Cleveland has been good to me , " he said in a 1947 interview . " I 've made a great deal of money here . If I was looking for a get @-@ rich @-@ quick investment , the last thing I 'd do is buy a pro football club . It 's a risky business . Too much depends on ideal weather conditions , and this is no climate to risk a buck on a raindrop . "

The Browns continued to succeed upon entering the NFL in 1950 , winning the championship that year and reaching the title game in both 1951 and 1952 . In January 1951 , McBride testified in nationally televised hearings before the Kefauver Committee , where he was questioned about his Continental Press Service and alleged ties to organized crime and illegal gambling . It emerged that McBride partnered with Cleveland police captain John Fleming in real estate deals and had Fleming on the Yellow Cab payroll until 1941 . McBride denied the mafia connections , claimed he never broke the law and was never charged with any crime . Congress later passed legislation making such wire services illegal .

During the summer before the 1953 season , McBride sold the Browns for \$ 600 @, @ 000 ( \$ 5 @, @ 306 @, @ 716 in today 's dollars ) , more than twice the largest sum ever paid for a professional football team . The old stockholders were McBride and his son Edward , along with minority owners including taxi business associate Dan Sherby , Brown and four others . The buyers were a group of prominent Cleveland men : Dave R. Jones , a businessman and former Cleveland Indians director , Ellis Ryan , a former Cleveland Indians president , Homer Marshman , an attorney

who had founded the Cleveland Rams , Saul Silberman , owner of the horse race track later known as Thistledown Racecourse , and Ralph DeChairo , an associate of Silberman . While McBride never said so , the Kefauver hearings and the growing public association between him and the mafia may have played a role in his decision to get out of football . McBride said he had simply " had his fling " with football and wanted to concentrate on other business activities . " Well , I came out clean after all , " he said . " Considering what happened to some of the other fellows who started the old All @-@ America Conference with me , this isn 't so bad . I never made anything , but I didn 't lose anything either , except maybe a few thousand dollars . "

McBride 's tenure as owner was viewed favorably , partly because of the Browns ' on @-@ field success but also because he gave Paul Brown a free hand to coach and sign players . One of the new ownership group 's first acts was to assure Cleveland fans that Brown would retain complete control over the football side of the operation .

= = Later life and death = =

McBride continued to direct his taxi and real estate businesses after he sold the Browns , but he kept out of the public eye . He died of a heart attack at the Cleveland Clinic and was buried in Cleveland 's Holy Cross Cemetery . He was married to the former Mary Jane Kane . They had three children : Arthur B. , Jr . , Edward and Jane .