



Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame

Box 1192 - Jamestown, NY 14702

March 2026

Paper Lion, George Plimpton, Bud Erickson & CSHOF

Paper Lion is a famous 1966 non-fiction book by American author **George Plimpton**. It was adapted as a 1968 sports comedy film starring Alan Alda as Plimpton, depicting his tryout with the Detroit Lions of the National Football League.

In 1960, Plimpton, not an athlete, arranged to pitch to a lineup of professional baseball players in an All-Star exhibition, presumably to answer the question, "How would the average man off of the street fare in an attempt to compete with the stars of professional sports?" He chronicled this experience in his book, Out of My League.

To write Paper Lion, Plimpton repeated the experiment in the National Football League, joining the training camp of the 1963 Detroit Lions on the premise of trying out to be the team's third-string quarterback. Plimpton, then 36 years old, showed how unlikely it would be for an "average" person to succeed as a professional football player. The book is an expanded version of Plimpton's two-part series which appeared in back-to-back issues of *Sports Illustrated* in September 1964. The book's epilogue is also an expanded article from *Sports Illustrated* which appeared one year later.

Plimpton had contacted several teams about his idea including his hometown New York Giants and New York Titans (an American Football League team that would change their name to the New York Jets) and Baltimore Colts. The Lions finally agreed to host



Plimpton in their training camp. The coaches were aware of the deception but the players were not until it became apparent that Plimpton did not know how to receive the snap from center. Despite his struggles Plimpton convinced head coach George Wilson to let him take the first five snaps of the annual intra-squad scrimmage conducted in Pontiac, Michigan. Plimpton managed to lose yardage on each play.

Feeling confident he could do better, Plimpton hung around training camp one more week as the team prepared for its first pre-season game against the Cleveland Browns, being sure if the Lions had a big enough lead near the end of the game, Wilson would let him play. However, team officials informed Plimpton at halftime that NFL Commissioner Pete Rozelle would not allow him to play under any circumstance. The next day Plimpton packed up and ended his experiment. Before he left, however, the Lions awarded him a gold football that was engraved: "To the best rookie football player in Detroit Lions history."

The book is memorable as one of the first to showcase the personalities of the players and coaches and what happens off the field. Figuring prominently in the book are linebacker Wayne Walker, quarterback Milt Plum, future Hall of Famers cornerback Dick "Night Train" Lane and middle linebacker Joe Schmidt, and defensive tackle Alex Karras, among others.



Among the others was Assistant General Manager **Bud Erickson (left)**.

Bud was inducted into the **Chautauqua Sports Hall of Fame** in 2001.

Edward Manfred "Bud" Erickson was born to Swedish-American immigrant parents in Dunkirk, New York. He participated in football, basketball, track and volleyball, but his high school did not have a baseball team which was his favorite sport. After graduating from high school in 1941, he was recruited to play freshman football at Duke University, but instead played baseball and basketball.

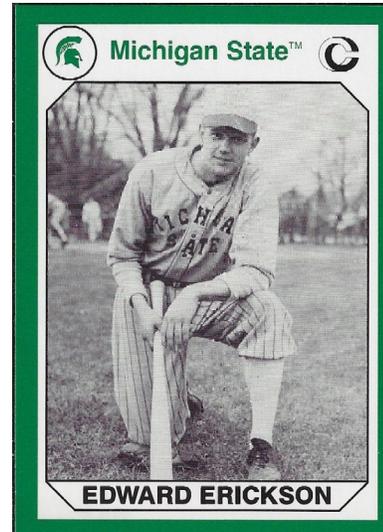
Expecting to be drafted, he transferred to Syracuse University in 1942 to be closer to his parents. When World War II broke out he enlisted in the Army Air Corp.

Diagnosed with color blindness he was not allowed to pursue pilot training, so he opted for meteorology which included studies at Hamilton College in Hamilton, New York. While there he played on the basketball team.

Because there were too many enlistees in meteorology, Bud transferred to a new specialty: weather observation. He was posted in Texas and Oklahoma. While in Illinois at Canute Field, he played on a National championship basketball team.

He was discharged from the military and enrolled at Michigan State University in 1946 to pursue a career in broadcast journalism. He resumed playing college baseball in 1947 and 1948, captaining the 1948 team.

After graduating in 1948 from Michigan State, Bud served as an assistant in the MSU sports information department under Fred Stabley.



One of Bud's mentors, Nick Kerbaway, took a position with the Detroit Lions and was instrumental in arranging for Bud to join Van Patrick on the Detroit Tigers baseball broadcasts in 1952. He married Florence "Micke" McCluskie in September 1952 at the First Presbyterian Church, Northville, Michigan.



Bud joined the Detroit Lions in 1952 as Public Relations Director. The team won the NFL championship in 1952, 1953, and 1957, he became Assistant General Manager in 1960 and he remained with them until 1965.

With a recommendation from then NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, Bud was selected as Assistant to the President of the newly established Atlanta Falcons in 1965. His responsibilities were wide-ranging including hiring coaches and administrators as well as training camp site selection, uniforms, ticket sales and other promotions.

In 1968 he was awarded the WSB Radio "Beaver Award" for meritorious commitment to the community of Atlanta. He chaired the Atlanta chapter of the Leukemia Society of America while living and working in the city.

