I have felt a far-off kinship with George Taliaferro for a long time. While he is my dad’s age, we have similar backgrounds. In fact, I feel I have followed in his footsteps in a lot of ways and that the path was much smoother because of him. George was a great football player, but his story is about much more than that. He was one of the first great African American players in the Big Ten and went on to become the first African American to be drafted and the first to play quarterback in the NFL.

That was two generations ago, and some things George Taliaferro had to go through seem unimaginable now. Taliaferro chronicles a journey through college and professional football that was uncharted territory in the 1940s. It tells a story of talent, character, and perseverance coming together in a man who helped change the landscape of football, much as Jackie Robinson did for baseball.

If this book were only about football exploits it would be fun to read. But it goes deeper than that. It’s a history lesson that gives some insight into how the social structure of Indiana University and the NFL was changed by a very strong-willed person.

I mentioned following in George’s footsteps. In 1973 I enrolled at the University of Minnesota, primarily because I wanted to play quarterback. The Big Ten had a strong history of black quarterbacks, and that tradition was started by George Taliaferro. In 2003 I became the first African American head coach of the Indianapolis Colts—fifty years after George had become the Colts’s first African American quarterback. Every African American in the NFL today owes a debt of gratitude to George, and I am thrilled that his story is now finally being told.

Tony Dungy
Head Coach
Indianapolis Colts