

1887-1909: In the beginning ...

Purdue's first football coach was a 23-year-old by the name of Albert Berg, who lived across the Wabash River. He was chosen as coach because it was believed he had some knowledge of the game from his days as a student at Princeton University. He was hired at the rate of \$1 per lesson. But Berg was a deaf mute, brought on by childhood spinal meningitis, and he had merely one week to prepare the squad of 12 volunteer players for its introductory game. No wonder



Albert Berg (1939 photo)

Butler College, which had organized its first team a year earlier, won 48-6 on Oct. 29, 1887, in Indianapolis.

Some 37 years later, as part of the Ross-Ade Stadium dedication festivities, Berg had the following sentiments read on his behalf: "On account of my inability to hear and my ability to talk only to a limited extent ... my instruction was mainly by imitation of my own playing. The way the boys caught on and improved would have delighted and encouraged any coach. They were a willing and loyal lot, full of pep and college spirit, and the foundation, I am sure, was then and there laid for Purdue's subsequent gridiron success."

A one-game season was it for Purdue in 1887, and with no volunteers signing up the following fall, there was no football in 1888. But after the one-year hiatus, the sport returned and has been played ever since by those who eventually would be called "Boilermakers."

Princeton was heralded for its football prowess in the sport's primitive days. Others schools desired to emulate the Ivy League school, and Purdue was no exception. In fact, five of Purdue's first six coaches were Princeton alums: Berg, Clinton Hare (1890), Knowlton Ames (1891-92), David Balliet (1893-95 and 1901) and S.M. Hammond (1896). George Reisner, who coached the team in 1889, graduated from Harvard University.

Ames, who was nicknamed "Snake,"

came to Purdue from Chicago and brought with him a former teammate, Ben "Sport" Donnelly. Over the next two seasons, Purdue never was defeated, going 12-0, and absolutely dominated, shutting out its four 1891 opponents 192-0 and outscoring its eight foes in 1892 by a 320-24 margin. Purdue won the first two of four consecutive Indiana Intercollegiate Athletic Association championships.

Ames and Donnelly moved on following the 1892 season and were replaced by Balliet, who had coached Auburn University for one game in February of 1893. Purdue's winning ways continued. On Oct. 21, 1893, the Boilermakers mauled Butler 96-0, setting school records for most points scored and greatest margin of victory that still stand today. Purdue subsequently went 9-1 in 1894.

The Boilermakers' inaugural game in the newly formed Intercollegiate Conference of Faculty Representatives or Western Conference – which ultimately became known as the Big Ten Conference in 1917 – was a 14-0 loss at Minnesota, played on Oct. 17, 1896. Purdue went 4-2-1 under Hammond that season and 5-3-1 under William Church in 1897 before turning to one of its own to become coach in 1898.



Alpha Jamison

Alpha Jamison, the only five-year football letterwinner in school history, played for the Boilermakers from 1892 to 1896 and took the coaching reins in 1898. Purdue was a breakeven team during his three-year coaching tenure, posting an 11-11-1 record. Jamison also was Purdue's basketball coach during the 1899-1900 and 1900-01 seasons and turned down an offer to become athletics director in 1914. Rather, he became a successful business-

man and community leader and ultimately was elected mayor of West Lafayette.

Balliet returned as coach in 1901 before Charles Best took over and led the Boilermakers to a 7-2-1 record the following year. All seven wins were shutouts, and Purdue outscored its opponents by a 315-68 margin.

From Nov. 17, 1900, to Oct. 3, 1903, the Boilermakers won 15 games and all were whitewashes. Under coach Oliver Cutts, Purdue was sitting 4-2 the morning of Halloween in 1903 when tragedy struck. A 14-car train carrying the Purdue team, band and fans to Indianapolis for a game against Indiana crashed into a 10-car section of coal cars being backed down the track inside the Indianapolis city limits. Sixteen Boilermakers died, and some 30 additional passengers, including Cutts, were injured or maimed for life. The balance of the 1903 season was canceled.

Proving its fortitude, Purdue football returned with a vengeance in 1904, sporting a 9-3 record under Cutts, who also served as athletics director in 1904 and 1905 and from 1915 to 1918.



Oliver Cutts

Under new coach Albert Herrnstein, the 1905 Boilermakers finished 6-1-1, losing only to powerful Chicago 19-0 on Nov. 11 while tying Indiana 11-11 in Bloomington on Oct. 28.

A pair of winless seasons followed: 0-5 in both 1906 and 1907 under coaches Myron Witham and Leigh Turner. The Boilermakers scored merely five points the entire 1906 season and only 10 in 1907.

Purdue's next coach, Frederick Speik, was a graduate of Chicago, and in his second game the Boilermakers snapped an 11-game losing streak with a 40-0 victory over visiting Earlham College on Oct. 10, 1908. Purdue won its next three and finished the season 4-3 before backsliding to 2-5 in 1909.

Next: 1910-21