

# THE BIRTH OF PRO FOOTBALL

By Beau Riffenburgh and Bob Carroll

## Introduction

*For many years, little was known about the history of professional football before what was widely accepted as the beginning of the National Football League on September 17, 1920.*

*There was no attempt to write a history of the pro sport until 1934, when Dr. Harry March, who had served in several executive capacities with the New York Giants in the late 1920s, wrote the popular **Pro Football: Its "Ups and Downs."** March's rambling, often inaccurate book included some important information and interesting anecdotes, but much was of questionable value to a real historian of the game.*

*Jack Cusack, manager of the Canton Bulldogs from 1912 to 1917, summed up the book's flaws succinctly when he wrote, "In my library is a book... entitled **Pro Football: Its "Ups and Downs"** and in my opinion it is something of a historical novel."*

*In actuality, March had been only peripherally involved with pro football prior to the formation of the NFL, and he did little genuine research into what he wrote about, relying for his details several decades later on his apparently faulty memory and unsubstantiated rumors. This resulted in his making many factual errors.*

*These inaccuracies were compounded when later "experts," and that included virtually everyone who wrote a football history for the next three decades, borrowed liberally from March's book, apparently never bothering to check his information for accuracy.*

*An example of March's influence is the story of John Brallier. Until the 1960s, the information about the beginning of professionalism in football was based solely on Brallier's claim, and March's subsequent publicizing of it, that he became the first pro when he received \$10 and expenses to play quarterback for the YMCA in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, against a team from Jeannette, Pennsylvania, on September 3, 1895. Although Brallier, a dentist of indisputable integrity, honestly*

*believed that he was the first paid player, he was incorrect. However, his claim was accepted at face value by March, and such was the misplaced faith in what March had written that, despite later evidence to the contrary, books published more than 40 years later still supported Brallier's claim.*

*It was not until the 1960s that the first of a new breed, a pro football researcher, walked into the office of Dan Rooney, the president of the Pittsburgh Steelers. After a brief discussion, the man gave Rooney a typed, 49-page manuscript about the early history of pro football. [See **PFRA Annual, 1986** - Ed.] When Rooney read the paper, he realized he had a piece of research of incalculable importance. Unfortunately, by that time the man had departed. As best Rooney could recall, the visitor's name was Nelson Ross. But although Rooney tried to track down Ross, the man never resurfaced.*

*Until Ross gave Rooney his paper, the roots of pro football were traced to Brallier. However, Ross's paper indicated that the accepted origin of the sport was wrong - by three years and 40 miles. His examination of Pittsburgh newspapers indicated that the first pro football player actually was William (Pudge) Heffelfinger, a three-time consensus All-America guard at Yale, who was paid to participate in a game in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1892.*

*Eventually, proof of Ross's claims surfaced in two places. Dick McCann of the Pro Football Hall of Fame discovered a page torn from an 1892 account ledger prepared by O.D. Thompson, manager of the Allegheny Athletic Association of Allegheny, Pennsylvania. The ledger included the line: "Game performance bonus to W. Heffelfinger for playing (cash) \$500." Then, J. Thomas Jable of William Paterson College published an article in which he reviewed and confirmed Ross's main points. Jable also added clarifying and insightful material from his own research.*

*Subsequent research throughout the 1970s and 1980s, notably by Bob Carroll, Joe Horrigan,*

*David Neft, Robert B. Van Atta, and other members of the Pro Football Researchers Association (PFRA), as expanded and corrected the knowledge base about the growth of the sport leading up to the informal September 17, 1920 get-together now known to have been the second organizational meeting of the NFL.*

*However, all of the up-to-date research had not been compiled in one place until Carroll, the executive director of PFRA, and Beau Riffenburgh, the senior writer for the National Football League's publishing branch, NFL Properties, put together this study. It is not only the first-ever 17-year history of the Ohio League, the NFL's predecessor, but also the first work to correct many commonly held misconceptions about historical events in pro football and to discount myths that were created by Harry March. [This article appeared previously as "The Ohio League: The Birth of Pro Football" in *Touchdown* magazine, September through November, 1988 - Ed.]*

*Although this study expands the knowledge of the early days of pro football, the story still begins where Ross started - in Pittsburgh of the 1890s.*

### **Beginnings in Pennsylvania, 1892-1902**

By 1890, college football had become a nationally popular game and, with direction from innovator and coach Walter Camp of Yale, had begun to resemble the game it is today, rather than its predecessors, soccer and rugby.

### **The Rise of the Athletic Clubs**

Concurrent with the growth of college football in the later decades of the nineteenth century was the rise of athletic clubs throughout the nation. Such clubs emerged after the Civil War, with the first -- the New York Athletic Club -- founded in 1868. These athletic clubs had several important functions. Through competitive athletics, American men, while still remaining gentlemanly, could "countermand the Victorian principles of delicacy and refinement." The new form of football, which was aggressive and occasionally violent, served this need especially well.

Popular functions of the athletic clubs were more social than athletic. The members were able to enjoy both the excitement of sporting events and the chance to engage in friendly -- or serious --

wagers on those games. The older or more sedentary members were able to enjoy the personal benefits of associating with athletes. Membership in a successful athletic club also could be the beginning of an individual's climb toward joining society's elite, who banded together in the more exclusive university or metropolitan men's clubs. But movement up the social ladder from the athletic clubs depended upon the success of the clubs' athletic fortunes. Therefore, the sports ceased to be played simply for the love of the game, and winning became the all-important goal. How to win while maintaining a socially desirable clientele and barring entry to those of moderate social status became a major issue for the athletic clubs, especially because many of the finer athletes possessed neither money nor the status desired by the memberships.

The solution for many athletic clubs, adopted in the 1890s, involved admission of individuals who did not become full-fledged members, but who competed for the clubs in exchange for use of facilities and receipt of expenses for their efforts. These special-qualification members were the clubs' first step toward professionalism, but because the general public displayed negative feelings about professionals in athletics, the clubs maintained fronts of strict amateurism. This entailed somewhat questionable dealings, as when an athlete was awarded a watch that he subsequently sold to a pawn shop for \$20. The club then repurchased the watch from the pawn shop and later gave it away again to the same athlete.

### **Pittsburgh Takes the Lead**

Other early steps toward professionalism were taken in western Pennsylvania in 1890. The previous year, the Allegheny Athletic Association (AAA) was formed in the city of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, and area that today is part of north Pittsburgh. In most sports, the AAA was little competition for the older East End Gymnasium Club (EEGC), which in 1892 became the Pittsburgh Athletic Club (PAC). In 1890, however, the AM found an area in which it could compete -- football. Several members of the AAA, notably John Moorehead and O.D. Thompson (both of whom had been at Yale with Camp), previously had played football, so the forming of a team was a natural development. Moreover, the team immediately gave the AAA a strong following since

the East Enders did not play football. The AAA finished its six-game season with an impressive 3-2-1 record against some strong teams. The EEGC organized a team late in the year and scheduled two games, but played only one. Star of the East Enders was William Kirschner, a physical education instructor at the EEGC.

In 1891, a bitter rivalry developed between the two clubs. The AAA dropped to a 2-2-1 record, which forced the resignation of Thompson, who had served both as manager and captain of the team. The East Enders, behind Kirschner, rolled to a 7-0 record. But it was at the cost of being labeled "semi-pro." It was noted in the Pittsburgh papers that Kirschner's salary nearly doubled during the football season, while his classes were cut in two. The papers at times made two-edged remarks as to Kirschner's dubious status, although no one accused him outright.

Throughout the 1891 season, local newspapers regularly called for a meeting of the two teams, but Thompson, perhaps fearing a one-sided loss because his team didn't have the time to practice together that the EEGC team had, carefully avoided a contest.

In 1892, however, the AAA and the PAC scheduled a game for October 21. The AAA opened its season with a victory, and the PAC with three straight wins. As expected, the teams were undefeated when they met. On game day, more than 3,000 spectators flocked to the grounds, overflowing PAC Park and crowding windows and roofs of surrounding buildings. The game ended in a 6-6 tie. As a result of the contest, the two clubs divided \$1,200 in gate receipts and each processed about 100 new members in the following two months.

New hostilities flared quickly, however. The PAC accused the AAA of purposely trying to injure Kirschner, who had been knocked out of the game with an ankle injury. The Three As, as they were called locally, dismissed the accusation with the retort that Kirschner was a professional and should not have been playing anyway. E.V. Paul of the AAA announced he was willing to bet anyone that the PAC had used a pro, and he said he didn't mean Kirschner.

Paul's comment proved accurate. The PAC had played the game with a new center, a man who had been introduced by PAC captain Charley Aull

as an old friend named "Stayer," whom he happened to meet on the street and who agreed to replace the injured regular center. A week after the game, it was disclosed that "Stayer" actually was A.C. Read, the captain of the Penn State football team.

Although no one could prove that Read actually had been paid, and Aull had not tried to present him as a PAC member, the Penn State center definitely was imported talent. By using him, the PAC had escalated the situation. A climate now existed in which neither club would hesitate to take the final step to professionalism.

A rematch was scheduled for November 12, three weeks after the first game. Almost immediately, charges that one team or the other was trying to hire ringers (or players imported solely for the game) began to surface, with frequent mention of the name of William (Pudge) Heffelfinger and Knowlton (Snake) Ames, two former All-Americans who currently were playing with the traveling Chicago Athletic Association team.

George Barbour, the PAC manager, denied all charges, but on November 7 he traveled to Chicago with a large sum of money to pay Heffelfinger and Ames to join the PAC. Unfortunately for Barbour, both had quit the Chicago AA team over the benching of a teammate, and currently were in Pittsburgh. The timing could not have been worse for Barbour, or better for AAA manager Billy Kountz.

When the game time rolled around at Exposition Park in Allegheny, Heffelfinger and his former Chicago AAA teammates Ed Malley and Ben (Sport) Donnelly were at the game all right. But they were lined up with the AAA. Ames had decided to forego the game rather than risk his amateur status.

Upon seeing Heffelfinger and company, the PAC immediately protested the AAA ringers and walked off the field. All bets were off, the PAC insisted. But it offered to play a scrub game. While the crowd of 3,000 grew restive and the regular argued, the substitutes began to play. The Pittsburgh *Press* recorded the scene: "Confusion reigned dire all this time and it seemed as though the best advertised and most promising event of the football season was about to wind up in a farce. The Allegheny men claimed that they had only followed the East Enders' example, in that

they had got these three men. It was cited that on Columbus Day the East Enders had played a State college man at center under an assumed name and the As made a virtue of the fact that they had not complained at the time."

Ultimately, after more than a half-hour of argument, the real game was played. Because of the long delay and the approaching darkness of night, the halves were shortened to 30 minutes each, rather than the 45 then common. Predictably, the AAA won with the help of the three Chicago players. Midway through the first half, Heffelfinger jarred loose a fumble, picked up the ball, and stormed 35 yards to a touchdown. The extra point was missed, and the final score was 4-0.

After the game, Heffelfinger was paid \$500, plus \$25 for expenses, and Malley and Donnelly each received \$25 for travel. The first acknowledged pro football player had made his appearance, although it is highly likely that Heffelfinger (and others) had been paid all along by the Chicago AA; what else would explain two facts: that Heffelfinger had quit his job in Omaha, Nebraska to play football, and that Northwestern University (from the Chicago suburb of Evanston) had refused to play the Chicago AA because it wasn't considered amateur?

The controversy over professionalism raged in the Pittsburgh papers for weeks, but it wasn't enough to stop the AAA from paying Donnelly \$250 to play against Washington and Jefferson College seven days later. The AAA and PAC each threatened to turn in the other to the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU, the organization that policed amateur athletics), but both, having professional skeletons in their closets (Heffelfinger and Kirschner), backed off and decided to wait until the next year, when they again could settle the issue on the field.

In 1893, the AAA and the PAC split two games, with the PAC winning 6-0 at Exposition Park and the Alleghenys evening the score, 8-4, at PAC Park. The year was far more significant for several other reasons, however. On October 4, the PAC, represented by George Barbour, signed a player to a formal pro football contract, which read, "I agree to participate in all regularly scheduled football games of the Pittsburgh Athletic Club for the full season of 1893. As an active player I agree to accept a salary of \$50 per contest and also acknowledge that I will play for no other club

during PAC games." Although the contract is torn across the signature, it is believed that the player was Grant Dibert, a halfback who had been with the East Enders since 1890. Several other PAC players undoubtedly were paid, but the AAA certainly had three pros on its roster all season -- Ollie Rafferty, Jim Van Cleve, and Peter Wright. After losing their opening game, the Alleghenys also went outside their club to hire the first full-time coach, Sport Donnelly.

In 1894, pro football spread outside the immediate Pittsburgh area. The Greensburg Athletic Association offered former Princeton and AAA star Lawson Fiscus, then teaching in the town of South Fork, \$20 a game to play for its team. Fiscus accepted, and Greensburg became the third football team to turn pro in as many years. [See Robert B. Van Atta, "The History of Professional Football at Greensburg, Pennsylvania (1894-1900)," *P.F.R.A. Annual* 1983, p. 1 -- **Ed.**].

In September, 1895 the AAA found that it was under investigation by the Amateur Athletic Union. If the AAU discovered that the AAA had been paying players, it would declare the club professional, and no other team would dare play them and the club's membership would dramatically fall. Hoping to avoid punishment, the AAA simply decided not to play in 1895.

The void in Pittsburgh was filled by a new team, the Duquesne Country and Athletic Club (DC&AC, or Duquesnes), which challenged the PAC to a series of games. William C. Temple, a steel magnate who managed the Duquesnes, promised that only amateurs would play for his team, but after a slow start the Duquesnes began paying players.

Meanwhile, 40 miles away Dave Berry, manager of the Latrobe YMCA team, was desperately searching for a quarterback for his opening game with the Jeannette Athletic Club. [See Robert B. Van Atta, "Latrobe, Pa.: Cradle of Pro Football," *P.F.R.A. Annual* 1980, p. 14 -- **Ed.**]. He offered 18-year-old John Brallier, who had quarterbacked Indiana Normal the year before, \$10 and expenses to play for him. Brallier accepted.

Although players had been paid for three years, none ever openly admitted it. Brallier, on the other hand, was proud of doing what he considered something original, and never told anything but the truth about his payday. His honesty eventually got

him recognized as the first pro football player. Since the truth came to light about the earlier pros, Brallier has been considered the first admitted pro, something that, upon reflection, is actually a more honorable designation.

The 1896 season saw five professional teams, but it is best remembered for the short, two-game season of the AAA. During the winter of 1895, the AAU finally disciplined the Alleghenys. The club was found guilty of paying cash to players and was permanently barred from any kind of competition with other AAU members. The punishment was a mortal blow to the club, and by the time the 1896 season arrived, about the only members the AAA had left were the football players. At a meeting on October 27, they decided not only to field a football team in defiance of the AAU but to make it their best ever. To lead the club, they turned again to Sport Donnelly.

Donnelly immediately contacted some of the best pros in the country -- Heffelfinger, Tom (Doggie) Trenchard, George Brooke, and Langdon (Biffy) Lea. He offered each man \$100 a game, plus expenses. Donnelly scheduled only two games, but they were back-to-back on November 10 and 11 against the Duquesnes and the PAC. His 12-man team not only was thin, it had only one day of practice together before playing the games. Nevertheless, the AAA won both games, 12-0 over the Duquesnes and 18-0 over the PAC.

Despite the Alleghenys' victories, the \$2,400 the club had to pay the players was not offset by the paid attendance. The club was totally broke and, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist. It had left an incredible legacy, however. It had the first known pro in 1892, the first regularly salaried players in 1893, and the first completely professional team in 1896.

### **The Spread of Professionalism**

The AAA had come and gone, but it was just the first of a growing number of pro teams. The sport spread across the country. The Copper Kings of Butte, Montana were a team put together by a rich copper mine owner. The Copper Kings were one of the country's best clubs until the AAU declared them professional and other teams, themselves usually professional, refused to play them. Other teams were located in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Youngstown, Ohio.

Most of the research on the period from 1897 to 1901, however, includes little except that done about the Pennsylvania teams. More is known about these teams, and they are generally considered to have been the best during the period; the top Pennsylvania team of any year undoubtedly would have been correct in calling itself the national professional champion.

Of course, teams still were afraid to admit openly that they were professional. An AAU sanction would have killed most teams -- like the Copper Kings -- because their opponents, whether other pros, amateur associations, or colleges, would have stopped playing them. So teams played for local or regional championships, with the only generally recognized national champion being the best college team.

In 1897, the Latrobe team, now known as the Latrobe Athletic Association, went entirely professional, signing players from as far away as the East coast and Iowa. Walter Okeson, an All-America end at Lehigh who would go on to fame as the head of the NCAA Rules Committee, was signed as coach. The Latrobe team went 10-2-1, losing only to the Duquesnes until a season-ending 6-0 defeat by arch-rival Greensburg. The Greenies finished with the best record among athletic clubs in the state, but were not as highly regarded as Washington and Jefferson, which had the same record.

The Spanish-American War of April to August, 1898 was not a long or particularly bloody war by modern standards, but it did help change the face of pro football in Pittsburgh. The Duquesne Country and Athletic Club had fielded the best team in Pittsburgh since 1895 (with the exception of the AAA's two-game wonders of 1896). In 1898, the Duquesnes decided to build an even better team, while dispelling rumors of either Greensburg or Latrobe being as good. After the 1897 season, the club had signed a number of good players to contracts for the next year. When many of the players went into the army in the spring, the DC&AC signed up replacements, many of them even better than the originals. When the war ended, the Duquesnes suddenly found themselves with a load of expensive stars.

When it became apparent that the DC&AC could not survive financially while paying its players, William C. Temple, its chairman, took over the payments to the athletes, thus becoming the first

pro football owner in history. The fiction that everyone was playing for an amateur athletic club was held to in public, even when newspapers wrote openly of players being under contract. As a result, it is not entirely clear when Temple became the first owner -- as early as 1898 or as late as 1901 -- but there is little doubt that he deserves the credit.

The Duquesnes had become the best pro team in Pennsylvania and, almost certainly, in the country -- the first pro team that could claim to be as strong as many of the better college teams of the day. In fact, on Thanksgiving Day, the Duquesnes defeated powerful Washington and Jefferson 11-0. They accomplished the same feat the next year, while going 10-0 and also defeating Penn State and Bucknell.

In 1900, many of the best players from the DC&AC joined the new Homestead Library and Athletic Club (HLAC), and organization that had existed since 1894 in the Pittsburgh suburb of Homestead. This was also the home of the Homestead Steel Works, with the world's largest blast furnaces.

In 1901, the HLAC fielded the best athletic club team ever organized. In going 11-0, the Steelers, as they were known, outscored their opponents 313-12. Unfortunately, because of bad weather, a lack of strong local rivals, and the team's own power, the HLAC could not draw big crowds and lost \$8,000. Losses off the field stopped the HLAC like no team on the field could; immediately after the season, the Steelers began to break up.

### **The First National Football League -- 1902**

Losing money was not an unusual occurrence at the time in western Pennsylvania. Greensburg, Latrobe, and the Lalus AC (which had succeeded the PAC as the second Pittsburgh athletic club power) all had financial problems. Yet across the state in Philadelphia, football was about to catch on, and it could thank professional baseball for helping out.

In 1902, the established National League and the new American League were in the midst of a war that saw each stealing the other's players. Nowhere did emotions run higher than in Philadelphia, where Connie Mack's Athletics, the American League champions in 1902, had signed several of the Phillies despite their having valid

contracts. When Phillies' owner John I. Rogers organized a football team, Athletics' owner Ben Shibe decided to have Mack join with former Penn tackle Blondy Wallace to put together a stronger team. But the best players in the state were in the west, so Rogers and Shibe called in Dave Berry, former manager of Latrobe. Berry gathered much of the HLAC team and in short order joined Rogers and Shibe in what they called the National Football League. [See Bob Carroll, "Dave Berry and the Philadelphia Story," *P.F.R.A. Annual* 1980, p. 45 -- **Ed.**] Granted, the new three-team league was not actually national, but it was the first pro football league of any type. Even more important, by openly admitting they were pros, the three teams encouraged others to do the same.

The historical highlight of the NFL season was the Athletics' 39-0 victory over the Kanaweola AC at Elmira, New York -- the first night game in pro football history. In league play, the three teams finished with 2-2 records, each splitting with the other two. Each claimed the championship, but Berry, who had been named league president, proclaimed the Pittsburgh Stars the champions, because they had the best point ratio.

### **The First World Series -- 1902**

In December, 1902 Tom O'Rourke, manager of Madison Square Garden, decided to match the five best teams in the country in what he called the "World Series" of football. [See Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll, "Tom O'Rourke's World Series," *P.F.R.A. Annual* 1980, p. 60 -- **Ed.**] Although the three NFL teams and the Watertown, N.Y. Red and Blacks were the class of the nation, none of them wanted to play. So O'Rourke ended up with the Orange, N.J. A.C. and four New York teams -- the Syracuse A.C., the Watertown A.C., the Knickerbockers, and a team made up of players from both the Phillies and the Athletics, but named simply "New York." Syracuse won three straight to capture O'Rourke's world championship.

O'Rourke, encouraged by his earnings and by the fact that his idea had been so successful that the two major baseball leagues had adopted it and played a World Series in 1903, again put on a football World Series in 1903. This time the contestants were the Orange AC; the Oreos AC of Asbury Park, New Jersey; a club from Franklin, Pennsylvania; and the Watertown Red and Blacks, who, for the third year in a row, claimed to be the pro national champion. The Franklin team,

however, proved otherwise, shutting out Watertown in the finals.

Despite the success of the Franklin team, 1903 marked the beginning of a decline in pro football in Pennsylvania. The Pittsburgh Stars folded. The PAC was hurt when four of its players were hired by the Massillon Tigers, the first Ohio team openly to turn pro. Massillon's example was followed in the next several years by many teams in Ohio. As the best players began to move to the Buckeye State -- to Massillon, Canton, Akron, Shelby, Dover and Columbus -- the clubs and teams in Pennsylvania and New York declined, and many became extinct.

So, although by 1905 pro football had for all intents and purposes ended in its birthplace and most other areas east of Ohio, it was just beginning there -- in the cradle of the sport.

### **The Ohio League, 1903-1906**

Few football fans today have ever heard of Ohio's Stark County, and those who drive through it on their way elsewhere may wonder just what the area near the center of the nation's Amish population has to do with the sport. A newcomer to the pro football scene might be surprised to learn that it is not New York or Los Angeles or even Green Bay that is the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame, but Stark County's largest city, Canton. Canton was selected as the site for the Hall of Fame because it was in that city that the NFL's organizational meetings were held in 1920. But Canton could have been selected for older, perhaps better, reasons as well. On the other hand, so could have Massillon, Stark County's second-largest city. For it was these two cities, and their natural rivalry, that threw the door wide open to the growth of pro football in Ohio.

As in Pennsylvania, pro football in Ohio had its roots in teams sponsored by athletic clubs. The first known club football team in the state was the Dayton AC in 1889. It was joined by teams from the Cleveland AA in 1890, the Cincinnati AC in 1891, the Akron AA in 1894 and the Canton AC and Youngstown AC in 1895. From early on, Ohio had strongly amateur competition, and state champions were proclaimed from 1895 to 1902.

But in 1903, a decision was made that would revolutionize forever the game of football, and it was made in Stark County's second city.

### **Massillon Goes Pro -- 1903**

Through much of the 1890s, Massillon had fielded amateur teams made up of local players. Despite regularly having representative teams, Massillon rarely could compete with Canton. Not only was the string of losses embarrassing, but the men of Massillon always lost large amounts wagered on the games.

By 1903, the football enthusiasts of Massillon had had enough. On September 3, they met at the Hotel Sailer to find a solution. A new team was organized with Jack Goodrich as manager and Ed Stewart as coach. When the city's sporting goods store could supply only jerseys with striped sleeves, the town adopted the nickname "Tigers."

Although many towns throughout Ohio organized teams the same way Massillon did, the Tigers were not just any team. For one thing, they made sure to spend time practicing together, which town teams often did not do. For another, they appeared to have some real talent on the squad. Guard Frank Botoner, a 32-year-old policeman; Goodrich, who was a halfback as well as the manager; Stewart, the coach, quarterback, and editor of the Massillon *Evening Independent*, and Mully Miller, the 170-pound fullback and the group's real star, immediately gave the Tigers a strong team.

After losing its opener 6-0 to Wooster College, Massillon rapidly became one of the best teams in the state, winning its next four games. Then the Tigers easily disposed of Canton 16-0 before beating a team from Cleveland. At that point, Massillon challenged the Akron state champions to a game for the state title.

The championship the Tigers were pursuing was not official. In a method dating back to the 1890s, the championship of the state was awarded by popular acclaim at the end of the season. All games played were considered, but some games were more important than others. Victories over big-city title contenders were much more important than wins against little-town teams, although a loss against one of the lesser teams could eliminate a contender from the title picture. By 1903, the East End team of Akron had been recognized as the state champions for several years.

The East Ends initially dismissed Massillon's attempt to schedule a game, but the Tigers continued to pursue their claim. Finally, a game between the Tigers and the East Ends was set up for December 5, with an agreement that the winner would receive 75 percent of the gate and the loser 25 percent. Almost immediately, stories appeared claiming that Massillon wanted to win at any cost. On December 2 the Akron *Beacon Journal* announced that the Tigers had hired four members of the PAC (the Pittsburgh Athletic Club). The four were Bob Shiring, who had been the center for the Pittsburgh Stars in 1902, meaning he was the best center in western Pennsylvania; Harry McChesney, a back who was one of the best punters available, and his brother Doc, a lineman who could play tackle or end equally well; and a sterling tackle by the name of Peiper.

Massillon's tactics infuriated the Akron paper, but not as much as did the game. In the first half, Doc McChesney recovered a fumble for a touchdown. In the second half, Massillon scored on a tackle-around play. The Tigers proceeded to win the Ohio Independent Championship 12-0.

The controversy about Massillon using pros raged in northern Ohio for weeks, but the Massillon team was not bothered in the slightest, nor were the managers of other Ohio teams. By the beginning of the 1904 season, at least five teams besides Massillon -- Canton, Dover, Shelby, Lorain, and Salem -- openly had begun paying players.

Actually, recent research by Joe Horrigan of the Pro Football Hall of Fame indicates that the Shelby team had been paying players since 1902. Despite Shelby's precedence in hiring pros, however, Massillon must be accorded the place of honor on the road to pro football in Ohio because it was the Tigers who opened the floodgates for a previously unpopular process and who initiated the importation of out-of-state talent.

Shelby receives credit in one other historical note, however. On September 16, 1904, Charles W. Follis signed a contract to play for the Shelby AC. Although Shelby had been paying some of its players since 1902, Follis had played for the team in exchange for working at the Howard Seltzer and Sons Hardware Store. His actual signing of a full-season contract in 1904 not only indicates how valuable he was considered, but made him the first verified black professional football player.

Follis' outstanding play as a halfback was a major reason Shelby went 8-1-1 in 1904, losing only to Massillon.

Meanwhile, the collection of Ohio teams informally known as the "Ohio League" began to be recognized as official. Starting with Massillon's first pro championship in 1903 and throughout the succeeding years, the league used the same rules for determining a pro champion (or independent champion, as it was still known in the early years) that the amateur teams in Ohio had used in the 1890s. The members of the league played most of the other teams once or twice a year, allowing for a champion to be determined by consensus. Although sometimes there were differing opinions about which team should be champion, the system generally worked very well. As the years went by, the top teams in this unofficial league were so strong that each year the best of them was able to call itself, deservedly, the "U.S. Professional Champion."

The 1904 Ohio League champion, the first in a mainly professional setup, was once again Massillon. Although rain and difficulty in finding opponents who wanted to risk being slaughtered kept the Tigers to only a 7-0 record, they still were the best team in Ohio. Before the season even opened, the Tigers put a fence around where they played, Hospital Grounds Field, which was located on the grounds of the state mental asylum.

The Tigers rolled through three opponents, beating the Canal Dover Giants 57-0, the Franklin AC of Cleveland 56-6, and Marion 148-0. In the Marion game, Massillon scored 26 touchdowns and 18 extra points. (A touchdown had been raised to five points and the goal after reduced to one in 1898.) The large score was in part due to the rules then in force, which stated that the team that scored received the next kickoff. After Marion punted on its first possession, it did not possess the ball for the rest of the game.

For their fourth game, expecting to have problems with a strong Pittsburgh Lyceum team, the Tigers imported yet another Pittsburgh lineman to join Shiring and Doc McChesney, both of whom had returned in 1904. Guard Herman Kerchoffe (6-5,235) was perhaps the best lineman in the country: and he helped lead the Tigers to a 44-0 victory. Massillon then defeated Shelby 28-0 and the Sharon Buhl Club, the self-styled champions of western Pennsylvania, 63-0.



On Thanksgiving Day, Massillon took on the Akron AC (which had changed its name from the Akron East Ends) for the state title. By this time, Akron was a pro team as well, featuring virtually an all-star team. Late in the first half, the Tigers went ahead 6-0 when Emery Powell scored and Ed Stewart kicked the extra point. Midway through the second half, with the game about to be called on account of darkness, Akron scored to cut the lead to 6-5. Akron had a chance to tie for the state championship, but, under the rules of the time, the extra point had to be made from where the touchdown was scored -- in this case the edge of the field. With almost no light, a difficult angle, and a crosswind blowing, Joe Fogg missed the kick. The Tigers won 6-5 and were Ohio League champions for another year.

Two consecutive state championships for Massillon were more than its jealous neighbor to the east could stand. Canton hadn't even fielded a major team in 1904, but late that year plans were announced to organize the Canton AC, which would include a pro football team with a pro coach.

Of course, the best way to build a team that could challenge Massillon was to hire all the other best players available. That is exactly what Canton tried to do. From the Akron AC team, Canton signed seven players, including halfback Eddie Murphy, guard Doc Rayl, and tackle Bill Laub, who became captain and coach. Canton also signed a number of other star players and, on paper, looked every bit as good as Massillon's team, although the Tigers added to their already strong squad by signing four players from the Franklin All-Star team that had won the 1903 World Series. Cost obviously was no object to gain or keep the state championship.

For both teams, as well as for most fans in the state, the Canton-Massillon game in late November was the key to the whole season. The other games figured to be just so many warm-ups. Indeed, through October, Canton defeated its first six opponents by a combined score of 409-0, a points total that would have been even greater if a number of the games hadn't been ended early by darkness. Massillon had been just as dominant.

In early November, Massillon traveled to Cleveland to play the Carlisle Indians, the team that a few years hence would feature Jim Thorpe.

Although Carlisle was academically more along the lines of a high school, its football team was big time, playing many of the best colleges in the country. The first important pro game in Cleveland saw the Tigers win 8-4.

Meanwhile, Canton had traveled to Latrobe to play what was once again the best team in Pennsylvania. When Latrobe kicked off to open the second half of a scoreless game, a botched play on the return resulted in a fumble at the Canton 5. A Latrobe player recovered the ball and ran it in for a touchdown. John Brallier kicked the extra point, and Latrobe held on to win 6-0.

The Latrobe game was more than a disaster on the scoreboard. Canton also lost Laub, who severely tore a muscle in his leg, ending his career. An urgent call went out to Charles E. "Blondy" Wallace, a Canton native who had captained Connie Mack's 1902 Philadelphia pro team and had held down a similar position with the Franklin All-Stars of 1903. At 6-2, 240, Wallace was a giant by the standards of the day, and more than Laub's equal on the field. His being named the captain would have repercussions in both 1905 and 1906, however.

In the week prior to the Canton-Massillon game, Wallace completely revamped the Canton team. He brought in three new linemen and added three new starting backs, including Willie Heston, a two-time All-America for the point-a-minute teams at Michigan and a player at the time thought to be the best back in college football history. To obtain his services for one game, Canton paid him \$600, a figure "that would be the highest paid to any football player for a game until Red Grange entered the NFL in 1926.

At halftime, the score was 4-4, but in the second half Massillon took control when Canton guard Doc Rayl was expelled for slugging one of the Massillon players. From that point on, Massillon was able to move the ball by consistently running directly at Rayl's replacement. The Tigers scored twice on runs by Red Salmon and won the game, and their third consecutive championship, 14-4.

### **Pro Football's Biggest Scandal -- 1906**

Although the 1906 season in the Ohio League again revolved around the two giants, Massillon and Canton, the whole football world temporarily was thrown into confusion before the season

opened. Late in 1905, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, horrified by a sport that had recorded 18 deaths and 149 injuries in the 1905 season, threatened to ban football if those in charge did not clean it up.

In December, 1905 the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was organized to assist in the formation of sound requirements for intercollegiate athletics, particularly football. In 1910, the IAAUS changed its name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

At a meeting on January 12, 1906, the new rules committee for the IAAUS dramatically changed the focus of the game from that of brute force to an open, quick-striking offensive attack. The rules changes included legalizing the forward pass; reducing the game from 70 to 60 minutes; establishing a neutral zone separating the teams by the length of the ball; increasing the distance to be gained for a first down from five yards to ten yards; adding a third official; and requiring six (later seven) men to be on the line of scrimmage.

The 1906 changes were just as important for the pro game as for college football, because at the time the pros had not developed any independent rules. Although legalizing the forward pass eventually was to be the most important of the 1906 rules changes, those with the most immediate effect were requiring six men on the line, which thereby helped eliminate the popular but dangerous mass plays such as the flying wedge; and the increase from five to ten yards for a first down, which forced the development of outside running attacks, helped lead to the actual use of passing, and increased the importance of the kicking game.

With the new rules and the expectation of a cleaner, less vicious game, 1906 promised to be the greatest pro season yet in Ohio. Instead, it developed into a season of unmitigated disaster, both for pro football in general and for Massillon and Canton in particular.

Before the season started, Canton coach Blondy Wallace had looted Massillon of players. By offering more money, he was able to sign Tigers' quarterback Jack Hayden, tackle Jack Lang, guard Herman Kerchoffe, and end Clark Schrontz. He also signed a number of outstanding college players.

The Tigers tried to replace the four players who had gone to Canton, but could do so with equal -- or nearly equal -- players only twice. To replace Kerchoffe, new coach Sherburn Wightman (who had replaced Ed Stewart, who in turn had moved up to manager) signed Bob (Tiny) Maxwell, a 250-pound giant. And to replace Hayden, he plucked up the enormously popular and talented George (Peggy) Parratt.

Parratt was perhaps the best athlete in Ohio when he attended Case University, which was a major sports power at the time. He was the captain of the baseball team, the star of the basketball team, and such an outstanding quarterback that he was pushed as the first All-America from Ohio. In fact, he eventually played all three sports professionally.

Although on paper Canton appeared to be a little stronger than Massillon, some had thought the same thing the year before and had been proven wrong. As both teams knocked off opponent after opponent on the way to their two expected November showdowns, Massillon under Wightman showed more cohesive team play than did Canton under Wallace.

After eight games, Canton, which for the first time was being called the Bulldogs, had outscored its opponents 285-0. Massillon, on the other hand, had outscored its eight opponents 438-0.

Three of Massillon's games proved to have some significance later. On October 20, in a 57-0 victory over the Shelby team (regarded as the third best in Ohio), the Tigers installed Walter East, an Akron baseball player, at end. East had a big day and his play was publicly commended. A week later, against a combined Benwood-Moundsville team, Parratt completed a forward pass to (Bullet) Dan Riley, the first authenticated pass completion in pro football history. Then, on November 4, East was released after having a good game in a 33-0 victory over the Pittsburgh Lyceums. Although Stewart and Wightman appeared to be ready to sign some big names to replace East, and therefore simply could have been upgrading their team, a more sinister reason for East's departure would be announced later.

In later October, the Tigers and the Bulldogs finally worked out a contract for their November tilts. The two teams would equally share the gate

receipts from two games, one in Canton on November 16, and one in Massillon on November 24, the weekend before Thanksgiving. It was "mutually agreed" that both teams had wanted to play on Thanksgiving, but that it had proved impossible due to Canton having scheduled a game that day with Latrobe. Another part of the contract stipulated that each team would put up a \$3,000 guarantee to insure appearance on both dates.

Nowhere was a lack of trust between the two teams, and more specifically between Wallace and Stewart, shown as vividly as in the section of the contract stating that Massillon's gate receipts from the first game in Canton would be placed in a Canton bank and were to be forfeited to Canton if Massillon did anything to spoil the Canton-Latrobe meeting. On the other hand, Canton's half of the receipts from the second game would be deposited in a bank in Massillon, and if for any reason other than mischief by Massillon the Latrobe team did not play in Canton on Thanksgiving, Canton would forfeit the money to Massillon. Thus, the fiscal futures of both teams were staked on the Canton-Latrobe game, and both teams' finances were shaky anyway. Although each team's signing the best players in the country increased its chances of winning, it also decreased the chances of finishing in the black. The salaries had long ago doubled or tripled former all-time highs, and the Canton *Repository* estimated the Bulldogs' payroll to be at \$8,700 and the Tigers' at \$9,000.

When November 16 finally arrived, nearly 8,000 fans showed up at Canton's Mahaffey Park. Canton played virtually flawless football, building a 10-0 lead before Tiny Maxwell scored on a 55-yard fumble return late in the game. The Bulldogs' 10-5 final margin represented the town's biggest victory ever.

Eight days later, the rematch was held at Hospital Grounds Field, Massillon. Before the game began, a dispute developed over the selection of a football. Massillon had decided to use a Victor football, one several ounces lighter than the Spalding that most teams, including Canton, used. Although Wallace protested, Canton was forced to accept the football or forfeit its \$3,000 guarantee.

Once play began, the reason for Massillon's preference became obvious. Peggy Parratt was shifted to end, and Homer Davidson moved to

quarterback. Davidson had learned the signals, but his primary responsibility was to kick the daylights out of the ball. The combination of the light Victor and Davidson's powerful leg was amazing. Six times punts sailed over the head of Bulldog safety Jack Hayden. Davidson's punting and the resulting field position helped the Tigers gain a 5-0 halftime lead. Early in the second half, the Bulldogs scored a touchdown to go ahead 6-5, but a blocked punt resulted in a safety, two points for Massillon, and the disheartening of the Canton team. The Tigers eventually won 13-6, clinching their fourth consecutive state championship.

But the most important part of the game story was just beginning. Soon after the actual contest ended, things turned ugly. On the Monday after the game, Ed Stewart charged in his newspaper that not only had an attempt been made to fix the game, but Blondy Wallace was at the bottom of it. Wallace's plot, according to Stewart, involved splitting the first two games, thereby forcing a third. [See Bob Carroll & Bob Braunwart, "Blondy Wallace and the Biggest Football Scandal Ever," *P.F.R.A. Annual* 1984, p. 59 -- **Ed.**]

To this day, events following the second Canton-Massillon game of 1906 are misrepresented in nearly every book on pro football history. It is widely thought that, under the orders of Wallace, the Bulldogs "threw" the game. Moreover, the consensus is that the discovery of this "fix" destroyed pro football in Ohio for at least five years.

The major source for these misconceptions is Harry March's *Pro Football: Its "Ups" and "Downs."* Of all the errors in March's books, none was more significant than this one, nor has any been more difficult to correct.

At the time, March simply was one of the people in Canton not interested in hearing about strategy that backfired or in acknowledging that they might have made mistakes in betting on the Bulldogs. Many suspected there was something more, and it wasn't something very nice.

The day after Stewart made his charge, a committee drew up a list of 11 questions for Wallace. He answered them all, and most of the committee left satisfied, while the Canton *Morning News* printed both the answers and an apology for writing negative things about him after the game.

March, for one, apparently was not satisfied, and

propagated the "conspiracy myth" in his book. However, March apparently misread the first article by Stewart and then missed some of the important developments of ensuing weeks that helped to clear a muddy picture. First, Stewart had not said the game was fixed. He wrote that an attempt had been made to bribe some Tiger players before the first game. Even this attempt had failed. Walter East, the Akron baseball player, had solicited Tiny Maxwell and Bob Shiring to fix the game, but he had been released after the two players told Stewart and Wightman about the attempt. Both games appeared, therefore, to have been played on the up-and-up.

It is true, however, that Stewart had said East had an accomplice, Blondy Wallace. But the day after the game, which was the day before Stewart's accusation came out, Wallace had told a *Canton Morning News* reporter that he did not favor a third meeting between the Tigers and the Bulldogs. Since, according to Stewart, the extra game was at the heart of Wallace's machinations, that statement should have gone a long way toward clearing Wallace of any wrongdoing. But Wallace's reputation for liking life in the fast lane did not help him gain the public's confidence. He knew and openly consorted with men and women of shady reputation. He drank too often and too much. And he rubbed too many conservative Midwesterners the wrong way. There were many who were only too willing, with or without evidence, to believe Blondy Wallace had set their team and their town up for a fall. The facts just did not support their beliefs.

On Thanksgiving Day, George Williams, the Bulldogs' manager, publicly gave his version of the story. He stated that on November 16, Stewart had met with him and indicated that East had tried to make a deal with some of the Massillon players and that Wallace was implicated. However, according to Williams, Stewart also stated that the while plan had been nipped in the bud and that publishing the story would only hurt the game's attendance. Stewart also said that as far as he was concerned the game was going to be played totally on the square.

After Williams' meeting with Stewart, Williams also met with Wallace and asked him about the story. Wallace gave Williams his assurance that he knew nothing about the bribery attempt and that his team was going to do its best to win the game. Before the second game, Wallace repeated the

same thing. Williams fully believed him and actually went ahead and bet money on the Bulldogs winning the game. Williams also indicated that a number of players had bet on their own team, after asking for and receiving advance money for that purpose.

The same day as Williams' story was published, the Bulldogs defeated Latrobe 16-0 before a crowd of only 939, less than one-sixth the turnout expected. Unfortunately, the victory was not as important as the fact that the Bulldogs were entirely broke -- in fact, they could not pay their players for the Latrobe game and many had to play a public pickup game several days later to earn enough to pay for railroad tickets home.

Meanwhile, Wallace announced a \$25,000 libel suit against Stewart and his newspaper.

A week later, the chief actor in the play, Walter East, who had been traveling in the east, made a statement to the *Akron Beacon Journal*. Incredibly, East accused Sherb Wightman of being behind the whole thing. According to East, Wightman had first asked East to solicit Maxwell and Shiring, then had East find a backer who would pay Wightman \$4,000, but then at the last minute had backed out of the deal.

East exonerated Wallace of any charges, saying that neither Wallace nor any other member of the Canton AA had any connection with the deal in any manner. And he stated that the only reason Stewart went public with the story was to hurt the attendance for the Canton-Latrobe game. As proof, East produced a contract in which Wightman agreed to throw the game for \$4,000. The document was signed by East, Wightman, and John Windsor, one of the owners of the Akron baseball team.

Shortly after East's confession, Windsor added his, which backed East in all particulars, including the comment that he never had met and still did not know Blondy Wallace. The conclusion from these statements was simple: to all except the most diehard Wallace haters, Blondy had been completely cleared. Wightman now was on the hot seat.

However, Wightman, backed by Stewart, came up with a new story. He explained that he had entered into the contract with East in order to get the goods on the fixers. That meant once Stewart

and Wightman had the names of East and Windsor on a contract, East could be released, the fixers would see they had been exposed, and the honest Massillon management could keep East and his crew away from the game.

With stories contradicting each other constantly, it was left up to the people of Canton, Massillon, and the entire state of Ohio to believe whom they would. The one thing that had been conclusively shown was the Blondy Wallace had had nothing to do with any of the shady dealings.

The Canton officials shortly thereafter leveled charges against Stewart, stating he had deliberately set out to injure Canton football by destroying confidence in the team and ruining the attendance at the Latrobe game. But in retrospect, they may have underestimated Stewart. He may have had an even bigger haul in mind. Had the Canton-Latrobe game been canceled, the Tigers stood to gain all of the gate receipts from the second Canton-Massillon game. There always was a possibility that the Canton players would believe Wallace was not on the square and would quit the team before the Latrobe game. Even more likely, the Latrobe team might decline to involve itself with such sordid business and cancel. That neither of these possibilities occurred was not Ed Stewart's fault.

Regardless of fault, the damage had been done. The Bulldogs were broke and out of business. And the Tigers, although still alive, were considerably in the hole financially.

It has been commonly written that the fix scandal killed pro football in Ohio. But even if there had not been a scandal, pro football could not have continued in the manner in which Canton and Massillon played it. Constantly fielding true all-star teams had become too expensive a proposition. The Tigers had cost more than \$20,000 in 1906, and the Bulldogs probably more. Attendance did not support the high salaries, especially when virtually all games except those between the giants were going to be runaways. After several games, fans had grown bored and had just stopped coming to see the contests.

With the death of the Bulldogs, an era in pro football was over. In 1907, Massillon and the other teams throughout Ohio consisted mostly of local athletes who were paid much-reduced salaries.

On a personal level, most of the best football players scattered to their homes around the country, some retiring, some playing again at lower pay, and some lucky ones finding a big payday occasionally. In general, nothing much changed in the lives of most of the key performers in the fix scandal. However, it did have a lasting effect on one person's place in history.

Neither Wightman nor Stewart had lost face in Massillon, and up in Akron Walter East generally was thought of as having been the hapless victim of a crooked coach and a Machiavellian manager.

Apparently the only one who lost anything more than money was Blondy Wallace, the proverbial innocent bystander. His libel suit never came to trial. The reason was probably that he settled out of court, rather than that Massillon had some sort of secret evidence, as Dr. March alleged. With Wightman and Stewart under the gun, they would hardly have held back any facts that could have made them look better. At the same time, Wallace was too deeply in debt to turn down any reasonable cash offer.

Perhaps he should have gone to court. Because he didn't, there is no real end to the fix scandal. It just whimpers out in charge and countercharge. But because Dr. March and his followers have had the last word for three-quarters of a century, the name of Blondy Wallace has lived on in infamy.

#### **Parratt Keeps the Game Alive, 1907-14**

When today's sports historians consider the period from 1907 to 1914, not many think of football in Ohio. And not many people around the United States thought of it at the time either.

Unlike 1905 and 1906, when people nationwide had turned their sights to the center of the country and anxiously had awaited the outcomes of the struggles between the football behemoths -- Canton and Massillon -- the focus of the United States, and indeed the world, was turned to the north and south starting in 1907. For the next five years, as the pro football colossi disappeared from the newspapers, people followed rather the giants of exploration on their journeys to the last frontiers on earth. In 1907-09, Great Britain's Ernest Shackleton led an expedition that discovered the Beardmore Glacier, pioneered the way to the South Pole, and walked to within 97 miles of the southernmost point in the world. In 1909, two

Americans, Frederick Cook and Robert Peary, each claimed to have become the first man to reach the North Pole, although there since have been doubts cast upon the validity of both claims. Then, from 1910 to 1912, the world waited breathlessly as Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen and British naval officer Robert Falcon Scott raced to the South Pole, with Amundsen arriving on December 14, 1911, five weeks before Scott.

The excitement and thrill of exploration lasted only a short time, however. The international race to the Poles gave way to a race among European imperialist powers for colonial, military, and naval supremacy. The attention of the world became riveted on the political rivalries that threatened to drag Europe into a war that looked more and more inevitable.

Events such as these diminished the importance of football even to fans in Ohio, but the game did not need help from foreign explorers and expansionist governments to fall from the public eye. As the big-name players who had dominated the Ohio professional football scene scattered around the country to be replaced by local talent throughout most of Ohio, glamour left the sport, replaced by small crowds, small headlines, and low pay for players.

Yet the game did not totally die, as frequently is stated. In one way, the games actually were better than they had been. They were less predictable. Talent was so dispersed that each year a half-dozen or more teams seriously contended for the state professional championship.

Without the Canton Bulldogs or Massillon Tigers around to make the accomplishments of the other teams seem Lilliputian, as in the past, the notion of an Ohio pro league -- first seriously mentioned in 1904 again came to the fore in September, 1907. The plan involved a semipro arrangement in which teams around the state would share gate receipts, instead of receiving regular salaries. Therefore, the players would necessarily be local athletes willing to play on speculation, rather than the high-priced pros who had been imported for several years. However, the plan died in October, when most of the cities involved could not get enough players to take the chance financially.

Although the Bulldogs and Tigers were gone, Canton and Massillon still fielded teams. Stark

County's number-one city actually had several teams, although none was very strong. The best was the Canton Indians, an amateur team that twice beat the Alliance AC but could not beat anybody else. The Canton AC played only one game and then disbanded, after losing to the Akron Tigers.

Meanwhile in Massillon Sherb Wightman put together another strong team with many of the locals who had been integral parts of the Tigers in 1903 and 1904. Fred Haag, Frank Botoner, and Mully Miller all returned and helped the All-Massillons, as they were known, to four consecutive victories before a scoreless tie with the undefeated Shelby Blues in November. The next week, the All-Massillons struggled to a 6-4 victory over the Columbus Panhandles, who had been reorganized by Joe Carr after two idle years.

After an easy victory over a local amateur team, the All-Massillons met the Panhandles again on Thanksgiving Day. The game was for the state championship, since Shelby, although undefeated, also had a tie with the Columbus team. Because of the game's importance, the Massillon team imported several familiar faces -- Peggy Parratt, Bob Shiring, and (Bullet) Dan Riley. With this outside help, the All-Massillons won 13-4, and the city celebrated its fifth consecutive state title, which now was commonly known as the "professional championship."

Although losing to Massillon, the Panhandles had become the first pro team from southern Ohio to challenge for the state title. But it is not for the quality of their play as a team that they are remembered, but rather for the team's makeup. In 1907, the Panhandles were represented by six of the Nesser brothers, seven of whom would play for the team before it folded after the 1926 season. The Nessers, in order of age, were quarterback John, tackle Phil, coach and halfback Ted, tackle and end Fred, halfback Frank, guard Al, and the youngest, Raymond. All except Raymond had long careers together, and in the early 1920s Ted's son Charles also played for the Panhandles, making them the only father-son due ever to appear in a pro football lineup together.

Although the Nessers played for teams other than the Panhandles, year after year their primary allegiance was to Joe Carr's club. Other players, however, continued to move regularly from team to team. No one was more active this way -- or

more successful -- than Peggy Parratt.

If there were two things that could be said about Peggy Parratt, they would be that he was superbly talented on a football field and that he knew how to look after Number One. Parratt had made his first big splash in the pro football world as the quarterback for Massillon in 1906, but he actually had been a pro the year before, while still playing for Case University.

Late in 1905, Parratt was accused of playing professionally for Shelby under the name Jimmy Murphy. Although such charges were not unusual at the time, Case officials had no choice but to call Parratt in to answer them. A regular scenario had developed when such incidents had taken place at other institutions. It went like this: this star athlete was asked about his involvement in professionalism; he denied it; and the school announced its investigation had exonerated the star. It was all very pat.

However, when Case officials asked Parratt if he'd been playing pro football, the answer was a little different.

"Sure," and Parratt. "And I intend to keep doing it."

It is an indication of the esteem in which Parratt was held that after being ruled ineligible, he still was awarded a varsity letter by Case, which cited his invaluable leadership on and off the field. He also was selected to the all-Ohio college team for 1905. Oddly, Parratt did not play for Shelby after losing his college eligibility, but signed with the Lorain team for the rest of the season.

After playing for the Tigers in 1906, Parratt started the 1907 season with the All-Massillons before returning to his home in Cleveland, where he played for the Franklin AC and also refereed games. By the end of the season, he was back helping Massillon win the state championship.

In 1908, Parratt rejoined his first pro team, the Shelby Blues. Shelby fans had been vociferous when their team lost the championship to Massillon because of playing to one more tie. To help gain that title, Parratt was brought in as coach and star. Shelby already had an excellent quarterback in Homer Davidson, who had gained fame as the punter of the Victor football in the 1906 Canton-Massillon game and who was one of the best kickers around (an important asset even

though in 1908 the field goal had dropped from four points to three). The versatile Parratt, however, also could play halfback and end.

But Parratt was more to both Shelby and pro football than a great player. He was the undoubted master of the new brand of "cut-rate" pro ball. He was able to bind enough good players to his personal entourage to win more often than not, yet keep them playing at rates low enough to allow him to turn a profit. He sometimes was unpopular with his own men because of his niggardly ways, but they stuck with him because they could depend on being paid.

### 1908-09 Seasons

With Parratt leading the way, the Blues had an undefeated season in 1908. However, Shelby again had to settle for second best when they could not arrange a game with the Akron Indians. The Indians, who were led by black halfback Charles Baker, won eight games and generally were given the nod as the state champion, despite managing only a tie with the cross-town rival Tigers.

The power center in Massillon, meanwhile, disappeared when Sherb Wightman took many of his star players with him to Canal Dover. There his Giants became one of the state's best teams, destroying the Lorain AC 158-0 and defeating an improving Canton AC team before being shot down by the Akron Indians 10-0 on October 31.

Massillon was not the only team with a heritage not fielding a representative team in 1908. The Toledo Athletic Association (TAA) had been perhaps the best team in northwest Ohio from 1902 to 1907. The team had been led by Louis Kruse, an outstanding halfback, and 18-year-old Fred Merkle, who later would gain fame -- the nickname "Bonehead" -- when his failure to touch second base led to the New York Giants' loss in the 1908 National League baseball pennant. But in 1908 the TAA didn't return for rather unusual reasons. That year, the TAA may have been the only football team ever to be put out of business by habitual mud. They played their home games at Armory Park, an unsodded field that inspired the name for Toledo's minor-league baseball team the Mud Hens. Armory Park was bad enough in the summer; in the less-than-ideal weather of the autumn it took an ox team to make a successful end run. The ground was in such bad condition by

1908 that the TAA refused to play there and disbanded.

### 1910 Season

The 1909 season was in many ways a continuation of 1908. Once again the Blues and the Indians went undefeated, and once again Parratt publicly lobbied for a game between the two powers. This time he got it. The Indians went ahead early 6-0, but Shelby tied the game on Parratt's 45-yard fumble return for a touchdown. When Davidson dropkicked a field goal late in the game, Shelby appeared to have a victory, but the Indians turned to desperation passes. Several of them worked, leading to the winning touchdown and another championship for Akron.

Meanwhile, there was a changing of the guard in Canton. When (Bullet) Dan Riley took over the leadership of the Canton AC in 1909, it appeared to spell the start of a new power. However, after a good start the team lost its last six games. In the final game of the year, against the cross-town rival Simpson Tigers, the Canton AC lost without playing a down. The Canton AC had dressed three players who had not been with the team before. Although they were locals, not out-of-town ringers, the Simpson manager argued that, according to the contract, they could not play. When the Canton AC refused to play without them, the referee ruled the game a forfeit, and the Tigers won 1-0. But the game was more important than it seemed, because the victory, no matter how technical, made the Simpsons city champs. More importantly, it established their young players as the nucleus Canton would use to get back into the race for the state football championship.

Whereas Canton's rebuilding program was just starting, Shelby's finally was culminating in its goal. In 1910 a new team in town, the Shelby Tigers, went 7-0 and received some backing for the state title. However, they still couldn't match their cross-town rivals. Parratt combined his team with a squad from Mansfield, forming the Shelby--Mansfield Blues. He then signed some of the state's best former players, each of whom had gone into coaching. That mixture of football brains and brawn paid off, as the Blues twice upset the still-powerful Akron Indians, 16-6 and 8-6, to pick up the Ohio title.

Actually, Parratt's team was more than just the

best in Shelby or even Ohio. For the first time since the Massillon Tigers in 1906, it made an Ohio team probably the best in the nation. The three previous years, many of the former Tigers and Canton Bulldogs had gone home to Pennsylvania. There, in an echo of former glory, Pittsburgh produced its last pro football power for nearly 70 years -- the Lyceum team. Doc McChesney, Bob Shiring, and a few other pros returned from Ohio to join with the Dillon brothers, who had starred at Princeton. The result was a team that stayed undefeated for nearly three seasons. Their victims included many of the strongest teams in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio, justifying a new title -- the "Tri-State Champions." With all the area, state, county, city, and even neighborhood crowns floating around, it seemed everyone was champion of something, but the Lyceums' claim was legitimate. They finally were upset by the Dayton Oakwoods in their final game of 1909. After that, the Lyceums broke up and pro football in western Pennsylvania drifted into the "also-ran" category.

### 1911 Season

Powerful football teams were disappearing in some places, but Parratt was far from through in Shelby. In 1911, he combined his team with the Shelby Tigers and recruited a number of players from schools outside of Ohio. The Blues again won the state championship, shutting out the tough Akron Indians twice, 6-0 and 3-0.

The sport also came back to Massillon, and a new team there challenged Canton's best team to a game for the Stark County championship. Canton easily won the game against Massillon, but it was not as successful in an attempt to wrest the state title from Shelby, which won 1-0 after a dispute over an offside call. Actually, Parratt had been willing to compromise with Canton over the official's call, in an attempt to ease the ill-feelings between the teams, but Canton's captain, Harry Turner, in a fit of anger called his team off the field and refused to continue the contest.

In a post-game statement, Turner told the local newspapers, "Right or wrong no more football for me after this. These old football duds, mud and dirt, go up to the attic. I'm done."

Turner made his vow to quit football on November 26, 1911. It would have been better for him if he had kept his word. As it turned out, he wanted so



badly to beat Peggy Parratt that he returned to play for Canton against Parratt's teams for the next three years. It proved to be a fatal mistake. Parratt, Canton, and the rules of football all had new looks in 1912. The major rules changes increased the value of a touchdown from five to six points, added a fourth down to each possession, and established end zones while decreasing the actual playing field to 100 yards from 110.

But from a professional standpoint even more important were the changes brought about by Parratt, who was more than a player, a coach, or a manager. Most of all, he was a promoter. And he had a master plan for pro football -- a parity plan almost 70 years ahead of its time.

Parratt had learned from his Massillon days that one-sided victories did not fill the grandstands. Just being good wasn't good enough. To make money, a team needed close, exciting games against worthy rivals -- games that the fans would beat down the gates to see.

After his Blues repeated as state champions in 1911, Parratt moved on to rebuild the Akron Indians. He was careful to leave enough good players in Shelby to keep the team competitive. Some of the leftover talent went to the Elyria AC, putting a third worthy challenger on the field.

### **Jack Cusack and the Canton Revival**

Parratt had helped to build three teams. Meanwhile, a new force appeared in Canton. Jack Cusack, who was to prove to be Parratt's only serious rival as a promoter, became the secretary and treasurer for a new team that had been organized from the best players of the Simpson Tigers and several other Canton teams. Although he had taken the unpaying job only as a favor to team captain Roscoe Oberlin, before the new Canton Professionals could take the field the 21-year-old Cusack suddenly found himself in the midst of a power struggle. As Cusack himself later recounted the situation:

H.H. Halter, who was the manager at the time, did not take well to the arrangement, giving a rather cool climate to our association. Halter booked the games for the season, a total of nine, with emphasis on Akron. The Akron Indians, owned, coached, and managed by Peggy

Parratt ... were a real drawing card as an opponent because of the intense rivalry between Akron and Canton, but Parratt was a hard man to do business with when it came to dividing the gate receipts. He liked to divide the money half-horse and half-rabbit, his preference being the horse end.

Finally, the two managers had so much difficulty in arriving at an agreement that Parratt refused to meet Halter, but said we would be willing to discuss contract terms with me. Accordingly, we met in Akron and signed a contract after five hours of talk. The situation naturally displeased Halter, and during my absence in Akron he called a meeting of the team, at which a vote was taken to dispense with my services. I circumvented that by securing a five-year lease on League Park, with an option for five more years, and installed myself as manager. Halter was out and the team continued with the exception of one or two who resigned.

[See Jack Cusack, "Pioneer in Pro Football," *P.F.R.A. Annual 1987*, p. 1 -- **Ed.**]

Cusack quickly built the Canton team into a power that went 6-3 its first year, losing only two games to Parratt's Indians and once to Elyria. With those three teams, plus Shelby, the state suddenly had four first-class teams competing, and all of the games among the four were close on the field and profitable off. As a consequence, 1912 came to be known as the "Renaissance of pro football." Parratt's former teammates who had joined the Elyria Athletics won the championship with an 8-0 record.

The 1913 season saw even more parity among the big four teams. In Canton, Cusack quickly realized that to compete for the championship he would have to have some former college players with more experience. Of course, that meant paying salaries, so with the help of Oberlin he persuaded the players to take salaries instead of splits. He and Oberlin became the owners, with Cusack remaining as manager.

Meanwhile, Parratt brought some of Elyria's championship team to Akron. The result was that the Indians defeated Elyria and Shelby, while tying

Canton. Despite a less-than-perfect 8-1-2 record, the Indians won the state title. Perhaps the most important game of the season came in early November, when Shelby visited Akron. The Blues hired a number of famous players from eastern colleges, running up a one-week payroll of \$700. However, the fates were on Parratt's side. A snowstorm forced the postponement of the game, and when Shelby returned the following week minus a few of their more expensive imports, Parratt's Indians were waiting with superior talent. Akron won 20-0 to earn the state championship.

Meanwhile, although almost unnoticed in Ohio, there were important rumblings coming from west of the state. For several years, pro football had been growing in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois. Although the teams were not of the quality of those in Ohio, they were improving. This was especially true in Illinois, where there were several good teams, including the Rock Island Independents, the Moline Red Men, and the Peoria Socials.

Both in Europe and in Ohio, the middle of 1914 saw the still-smoldering rivalry of the great powers begin to erupt again. In the summer, Cusack was summoned to a secret meeting in Massillon. There a group of local businessmen indicated that they intended to field a major team, something that hadn't been done since 1907. Cusack liked the idea of a team in Massillon, since a Canton-Massillon game would be a terrific payday. But he did not like the group's plan to steal its players from Parratt's Akron team by offering more money. So he reminded the group that it was just such action that helped bring on the 1906 scandal, and stated that he would refuse to play against any team so assembled.

"I'd rather fold at Canton than risk losing the confidence of the public, thus destroying the game," he said.

Without Cusack's support, the Massillon group did not field a football team in 1914, and Parratt started the season with his regular crew. But for a while it looked like the Indians had lost their team anyway. After two victories, they were thrashed 26-0 by the Columbus Panhandles, who put themselves in the thick of the race for the first time since 1909. A week later, the Indians had problems again, being fortunate to escape with a 7-7 tie with the Youngstown Pros.

The week after the Youngstown-Akron game tie, Canton, which had started with four consecutive victories by a combined 209-0 margin, put itself in the driver's seat for the state title by embarrassing Youngstown 31-0. Then, in the last week of October, Cusack's team administered the first loss of the year to the Panhandles, 40-10.

On November 1, Akron climbed out of the grave and gave Joe Carr's team a shove into it by beating Columbus 14-0. The Panhandles were out of the race, but still a force to be reckoned with. They won their last three games to finish 7-2.

Prior to the Akron-Canton game, both Parratt and Cusack went all out, beefing up their teams with powerful collegians. Robert (Butts) Butler, a tackle from Wisconsin, was the first All-America to play for Canton since 1906, while the left side of Parratt's line came entirely from Notre Dame, including end Knute Rockne. On November 15, before a crowd of 3,000, Canton took a huge step toward the state championship by defeating the Indians 6-0. However, it was the turning point in the season, as tragedy marred Canton's victory.

Years later, in his short book *Pioneer in Pro Football*, Cusack wrote about the incident.

Harry Turner, a Canton boy who played center, died of injuries received in the game, which brought our first victory over Parratt's Akron Indians. In making a tackle, Turner's back was fractured and his spinal cord completely severed, but he showed a rare type of courage and spirit. I was at his bedside when he died. He was conscious almost to the end, and his last words left an indelible imprint on my memory.

"I know I must go," he said, "but I'm satisfied, for we beat Peggy Parratt."

The death of Turner, the team captain who had been driven to beat Parratt ever since he had forfeited the 1911 game to Parratt's Shelby Blues, turned the season upside-down. Several players quit then and there, and the heart went out of those who remained. Cusack, who only that year had been the first to conceive of the idea of selling season tickets, considered closing down the whole operation. But Cusack and the players had spent so much time bringing the team to the point of both profit and a championship that they decided to finish the season.

However, although the Professionals did win the next week over Shelby, they had to close out the season on Thanksgiving Day with another game against Akron. Sadly for both Turner and legend, the Indians easily won, 21-0.

The game turned out to be more than just one defeat, however. It was Canton's only loss in a 9-1 season, but coming when it did -- in the finale -- and at the hands of Akron, it dropped Canton behind the Indians in the estimates of most football experts. Although Canton's record was better than the Indians' 8-2-1 mark, Parratt had won another championship by winning when he needed to and winning the games that counted.

It was only fitting that Parratt's Indians won the title in 1914. Parratt had helped carry pro football through its toughest times, when many people had given up on it. And this final championship year marked a beginning for the sport. For pro football finally had turned the corner towards becoming a bigger and better game. Although the 1914 season seemed -- except for Turner's death -- much like 1913 or 1912, a closer look at the lineups shows it was actually a transitional year. The quality of play was being significantly upgraded by the importation of more ex-college players from more distant and more prestigious schools. Symbolic of that was Cusack's hiring of Butler. Similarly, Turner's tragic death symbolized the passing of the sandlot player from the mainstream of action.

It would be several seasons before this transition would be completed, but 1915 saw a tremendous acceleration. More than that, 1915 would see the coming to Ohio of the sport's first great legend -- the man who would, more than any other, put professional football on the map.

### **Bulldogs and Indians, 1915-1919**

It was not a decision that made newspaper headlines, nor was it ever glorified by a movie script, but the personal career choice made by an Ohio gas company employee late in 1914 was a critical event in the development of pro football into America's premier spectator sport.

Jack Cusack had worked for a gas company in Canton for seven years and by 1914 had risen to a position of trust and responsibility. In fact, he was the only employee with the combination to the

company safe, and his major duty was to deposit daily cash receipts in the company's bank. In late 1914, Ralph Gallagher, his general manager, informed Cusack that he either had to give up football or leave the gas company. Cusack promptly resigned.

Cusack did not wait long before taking major steps towards his bonanza. Before the end of 1915, his far-sighted policies had assured his Canton team of fiscal stability and guaranteed that the team would be a power on the field for years to come. Many football historians consider 1915 to be the year pro football finally attained major-sport status. Cusack had a lot to do with it, but so did the return of the most legendary rivalry in pro football history.

Before the 1915 season, Cusack again was invited to Massillon by some businessmen interested in organizing a football team. Unlike the previous year, this group, headed by Jack Whalen and Jack Donahue, was successful both in gaining Cusack's blessing and in launching the team, which quickly established itself as one of the top teams in the state. In a nod to former glory, the Massillon team was quickly christened the Tigers, which encouraged the people of Canton to rename Cusack's Professionals the Bulldogs. Immediately, many fans expected the championship to hinge on the two games scheduled between the old rivals for late November.

### **1915 Season**

But 1915 was not to go quite like the fans figured. It turned out to be the one season in the history of the Ohio League that there was no team dominant enough to receive consensus acclaim as the champion.

Actually, by 1915 football fans had begun referring to the Ohio League by name, as if it were a real entity. However, there never was anything official about it, and its makeup changed from year to year. Essentially the Ohio League was made up of those teams that were strong enough to be considered "major." In any given year, that usually involved from three to five teams in northeastern Ohio and, depending on their fortunes, two or three from Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, or Toledo.

In Akron, Peggy Parratt decided to take the year off, his Indians collapsed, and the city championship went to the little-known Burkhart

Brewers. Shelby and Elyria also fell on hard times and never were in title contention. The Toledo Maroons opened quickly, but had some key losses. The contending teams narrowed to Canton, Massillon, Columbus, and the surprising Youngstown Patricians.

The Patricians, a team representing a men's club from the St. Patrick's Parish on the south side of Youngstown, had been formed only a year earlier, but they had gone 8-1 in 1914 and clinched the city and Mahoning Valley championships with a 3-0 season-ending victory over the Crescent AC, which had been the local champion for several years.

In 1915, the Patricians put together an even better team, including Ray Miller of Notre Dame, Elgie Tobin of Penn State (who later would be co-coach with Fritz Pollard of the Akron Pros of the American Pro Football Association (NFL)), and Busty Ashbaugh of Brown. Under the leadership of player-coach Ray Thomas, the Patricians won eight games while outscoring their opponents 271-22. Included in the victories was a 13-7 win over the Washington Vigilants. During the previous nine years, the Vigilants had won 90 games while losing only three, each to college all-star teams. The Vigilants consistently had beaten a collection of New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania teams, and had claimed the title of world champs for eight consecutive seasons. With the Patricians' victory against the Vigilants, the Youngstown club claimed to be world as well as state champions.

However, the Patricians' claim did not win widespread support in Ohio. They played a relatively weak schedule, and the one team of substance on their schedule -- the Columbus Panhandles -- marred the Patricians' otherwise perfect season with a tie.

The Panhandles' 1915 squad has been called the best in the club's history. The Nesser brothers all were in top form, and only some tough losses -- they went 8-3-1 despite outscoring their opponents 192-37 -- kept the team from a potential state championship. The key game for the Panhandles was a 7-0 loss to Canton early in the season.

The Bulldogs wasted no time in establishing themselves as one of the better teams in Ohio. Before the season opened, Cusack, figuring he

was going to have to go all out to keep up with the Massillon bunch, recruited some new stars. When Canton began the season with a 75-0 victory over a team from Wheeling, West Virginia, the Bulldogs' starting lineup included newcomers Bill Gardner, a tackle and end from Carlisle Indian School; Hube Wagner, an All-America end from Pittsburgh, and Earle (Greasy) Neale, the coach at West Virginia Wesleyan and an outstanding halfback. Neale, as well as some of the others, played under an assumed name because there still was a stigma attached to playing professionally and he might have lost his coaching job had it been known he was also a pro player.

Massillon also had some big names in its lineup in 1915. The Tigers were represented by four former Notre Dame players -- ends Knute Rockne and Sam Finegan, tackle Keith (Deak) Jones, and quarterback Gus Dorais -- and Ohio State halfback Maurice Briggs.

As the two games between the renewed rivals approached, it was just like old times, with Canton and Massillon appearing to be the best teams in the state. Each had lost only once, and Canton's defeat had been while traveling out of state, a 9-3 verdict to the Detroit Herald. With fans anxiously awaiting the first game, Cusack, in a move reminiscent of the old Canton-Massillon wars, signed the best football player in the world -- Jim Thorpe.

Thorpe first earned national attention in 1911-12, when he was an All-America halfback at the Carlisle Indian School. He received the acclaim of the world when he won gold medals in both the decathlon and the pentathlon at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. It was there that King Gustav V of Sweden told him, "Sir, you are the greatest athlete in the world." Thorpe also had played pro baseball, as well as football, with the Pine Village team in Indiana. When Cusack contacted him, Thorpe had slid into semi-oblivion and was coaching backs at the University of Indiana. Nevertheless, he was still Jim Thorpe. The great Indian was a star at any sport he set his mind to, but on a football field he was in a class by himself. Some players could run as well, some could pass, a few were on a par defensively, and a very few could kick equally well, but no one at the time -- or possibly since -- combined all these skills to an equal degree of perfection. Still, when fans heard that Thorpe had been promised \$250 for each game, they figured Cusack had lost his

mind.

But Cusack had the last laugh. The paid attendance for the Bulldogs' games had averaged 1,200 before he signed Thorpe. For the final two games with Massillon, Thorpe helped draw crowds of 6,000 and 8,000. Everyone wanted to see the world's best football player in action.

Unfortunately, Thorpe didn't help the Bulldogs as much on the field as off in the first game, won by Massillon 16-0. Thorpe didn't start, although he did break loose for a 40-yard run to the Massillon 8-yard line, before he slipped trying to avoid Dorais.

Two weeks later, the teams met at Canton, with the Bulldogs winning 6-0. First, Thorpe dropkicked a field goal from the 18-yard line, and later he made a 45-yard field goal from placement. But it was one of the most exciting finishes ever that earned the game its place in history.

The second game was played before a crowd so large that fans had to stand in the end zones. Ground rules for the game were adopted providing that any player crossing the goal line into the crowd had to be in possession of the ball when he emerged from the crowd. Late in the game, Massillon drove the length of the field to try to score the winning touchdown. That is when the fireworks really exploded, according to Cusack:

Briggs, right end for Massillon, caught a forward pass on our 15--yard line and raced across our goal right into the midst of the "Standing Room Only" customers. Briggs fumbled -- or at least he was said to have fumbled -- and the ball popped out of the crowd right into the hands of Charlie Smith, the Canton substitute who had been following in hot pursuit. Referee Connors, mindful of the ground rules made before the game, ruled the play a touchback, but Briggs had something to say about that.

"I didn't fumble!" protested the Massillon end. "That ball was kicked out of my hands by a policeman -- a uniformed policeman!"

That was ridiculous on the face of it. Briggs was either lying or seeing things that didn't happen to be there -  
- for most everybody knew that

Canton had no uniformed policemen in those days. But Briggs was unable to accept this solid fact.

"It was a policeman!" he insisted. "I saw the brass buttons on his coat."

As the arguing over the call continued, the crowd grew more and more restive. Only three minutes remained in the game that would determine the Ohio professional championship. If the touchdown counted and Massillon either won with an extra point or tied, the Tigers would win the undisputed championship. However, if the score did not count and the Bulldogs held on to win, they might be awarded the title. Finally fans of both teams could stand the strain no longer, broke down the fences surrounding the field, and swarmed by the thousands onto the playing surface. The officials, unable to clear the field, ended the game.

However, the officials were not allowed to escape. The Massillon team and its fans demanded that they settle the matter by making a definitive statement about the referee's decision. The officials agreed to make the statement, but only if it were to be opened and read by the manager of the Courtland Hotel at 30 minutes after midnight. That would give the officials time to leave town, thereby avoiding the wrath of either the Canton or Massillon fans.

That night the lobby of the Courtland was filled to capacity with both Canton and Massillon fans, waiting for the statement to be read. When it was announced, the fans learned that the officials had backed the referee's decision and ruled that the Bulldogs had won the game.

The last chapter of the season did not end at the hotel, however. It was not until 10 years later the Cusack solved the mystery of Briggs' fumble and the phantom policeman. As Cusack wrote about it:

While on a visit back to Canton I had occasion to ride a street car, on which I was greeted by an old friend, the brass-buttoned conductor. We

began reminiscing about the old football days, and the conductor told me what had happened during that crucial final-quarter play back in 1915. Briggs, when he plunged across the goal line into the end zone spectators, fell at the feet of the conductor, who promptly kicked the ball from Briggs' hands into the arms of Canton's Charlie Smith.

"Why on earth did you do a thing like that?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "it was like this -- I had thirty dollars bet on that game and, at my salary, I couldn't afford to lose that much money."

That kick might have saved the conductor \$30, but it cost Massillon a consensus state championship. Instead, the Ohio League title race was left in a muddle, with three teams -- Canton, Massillon, and Youngstown -- all claiming the championship. As it turned out, the only clear winner in 1915 was Canton, and that was off the field, where the signing of Thorpe not only helped lead to immediate financial success but gave the Bulldogs a bright future.

Thorpe actually did more than that, helping football throughout Ohio. More important than anything he did in any single game, Thorpe's presence at Canton focused the attention of the whole country on Ohio professional football. More players of quality began arriving and both attendance and salaries went up. Ohio sportswriters -- without blushing -- began to trumpet the "world professional championship." True, pro and semi-pro teams could be found from New England to Iowa in nearly every town with eleven able-bodied men and a flat expanse of 100 yards, but they all took the aspect of minor leaguers; Ohio held the majors. The annual talk of forming a real pro league -- with Thorpe's Canton Bulldogs as the cornerstone -- became more vocal than ever before.

### 1916 Season

One of the top advocates of a pro football league came back into the game in 1916. Peggy Parratt returned to the football wars with a new team in his native city, the Cleveland Indians. Parratt brought together some members of his old Akron team and some former college stars, and the Indians immediately fielded a representative

bunch that split two games with the Columbus Panhandles and tied Massillon. The Indians were not enough to beat Canton, however, as the Bulldogs took a pair of games from them. Unfortunately, the Cleveland fans quickly lost interest when the Indians fell from contention, and Parratt's team disappeared after a financially unsuccessful season. Likewise, Parratt called it quits at the end of the year, retiring from football until the mid-1920s. Despite the problems, the year did have one highlight. On October 22, in a 96-6 loss to Columbus, Parratt inserted himself at quarterback, playing in his last game ever.

Parratt's last opponent, the Panhandles, also could not quite match the Bulldogs. The Panhandles lost to Canton and to Massillon and finished with a 7-5 record, although they did defeat the Youngstown Patricians 13-0 in the season finale. The Patricians, who had expected to challenge Canton and Massillon, started off with five consecutive wins before losing to Massillon 3-0, to Canton 6-0, and to Massillon again 26-0. Their 7-4 record left them among the also-rans.

As the season wound down, Canton appeared to be the strongest team in the state, with Massillon a close second. The Bulldogs won their first eight games, including victories over the Panhandles, the Indians, and the Patricians, while giving up only one score all season, a touchdown to Parratt's team, scored on a blocked punt. Massillon was undefeated, although tied by the Indians.

On November 27, the two teams met before more than 10,000 fans at Massillon. The day was cold with a high wind that whipped across the muddy playing field, and the bad weather and slippery footing robbed both teams of much of their offensive might. Canton never threatened, the Wind blew two field-goal attempts by Dorais off line, and the game ended in a 0-0 tie.

In an effort to avoid being completely stopped again in the rematch with Massillon, Cusack added another star to his roster. The new player was fullback Pete Calac, an Indian and a former teammate of Thorpe's at Carlisle. Calac moved right into a starting position, which allowed Thorpe to be moved from fullback to left halfback.

The combination of the two Indians was simply too much for Massillon. The Bulldogs won 24-0 by scoring four touchdowns and missing each of the

conversions. With Thorpe and Calac ripping through the Massillon defense and the eleven starters all playing the entire game, the Bulldogs dominated the contest. They scored on a fumble return by "Fat" Waldsmith, a short run by Calac, a long pass from Milton Ghee to Ernie Soucy, and a short run by Thorpe. Canton, with a 9-0-1 record, finally had won its first undisputed state title.

## World War I

Things continued pretty much the same for Canton in 1917, although they changed dramatically for most teams, as the new football season brought with it a challenge that the Ohio League could not cope with for long. The United States had entered World War I, and not only did the drafting of players into the service make building teams difficult, attendance at games fell off dramatically.

The Youngstown Patricians were one team really hurt by the war. They fielded an almost entirely new squad, including former Notre Dame All-America back Stan Cofall and Bart Macomber of Illinois. The Patricians won their first four games, but on November, Doc Spears of Canton kicked a field goal while Macomber missed his three attempts. The Bulldogs won 3-0. The next week the Patricians defeated Massillon 14-6, but then were beaten again by Canton, this time 13-0. The second Canton game abruptly ended Youngstown's season, as a number of players joined the service, Cofall and several of his teammates jumped to Massillon, and the weakened team closed for the duration of the war.

The influx of Youngstown players made the Tigers an immeasurably stronger team. For much of the season, they had matched the mediocrity of most of the other Ohio teams, and they approached their concluding two games against Canton with two losses. Even the Columbus Panhandles, who had fallen to a 2-6 record and had lost to Canton 54-0, had played the Tigers tough.

On November 26 the Bulldogs had little trouble with their opponents from Stark County's second city. Canton took the kickoff and moved right down to a touchdown, which Thorpe scored on a short run. The Bulldogs' defense totally shut down the Tigers, allowing only a field goal on a dropkick by Charlie Brickley, and Canton won 14-3.

A week later, however, the scenario changed

dramatically. In a game that turned into a personal duel between Thorpe and Cofall, the younger player had the better of it, kicking 34- and 31-yard field goals for a 6-0 Massillon victory.

Despite the split, Canton was regarded as the better of the two teams everywhere in Ohio except in Massillon. Even in the Tigers' victory, the Bulldogs outgained them 186 yards to 35. Although the Tigers argued that their season-ending victory should give them the Ohio League championship, they had lost three times during the season, and no real expert felt that their record constituted a legitimate claim to the title. Canton, with a 9-1 record, retained its Ohio championship.

Although Cusack was able to keep the Bulldogs in the black, the 1917 season had not been as successful at the gate for many Ohio League teams. In Massillon, Whalen and Donahue had lost more than \$4,700, while in Youngstown the Patricians had been a financial disaster. The primary reason for the monetary drain was that each team manager wanted to be able to improve his team at any time during the season by stealing another team's players for a little more money. As a result of this philosophy, salaries continued to escalate, going dangerously high. Although fans and managers alike kept the idea of a league alive -- with its ability to rein in the out-of-control salary problems -- no one seemed interested in actually joining a formal organization that would be able to establish and enforce rules.

The issue was dismissed the next year, however, when thoughts of football took a sabbatical for 1918 as World War I, with its "work or fight" orders, closed down most of the major clubs. Indeed, between the war and a major influenza epidemic, not even Canton or Massillon fielded a team, and Cusack left Canton to try for a fortune in the oil business in Oklahoma.

The Ohio League championship was awarded, virtually by default, to the Dayton Triangles, led by coach and fullback Greasy Neale. The Triangles, the only major Ohio team to play a full schedule of games, easily won eight consecutive contests against out-matched opponents to claim a title few cared about. The ease of Dayton's schedule was indicated by the fact the Triangles played seven teams from Indiana and but one from Ohio -- the Columbus Panhandles, for whom it was the only game of the season.

## First Steps at League-Making -- The 1919 Season

By mid-1919, in the months before the football season, the basic problems of the pro game remained but the will of the team managers to spend money seemed to be waning. As in the past there were three major concerns facing the teams.

First among these problems was rising salaries. In 1915, Cusack had lured Thorpe to Canton for the unheard-of salary of \$250 per game. Thorpe had proved worth it, but his super paydays triggered a spiraling inflation until a strong team might expect to shell out somewhere in the vicinity of \$2,000 per game. That was tough to cover, with most tickets going for about a dollar each. Moreover, most of the small Ohio ball parks seated only a few thousand and were filled only for the biggest games.

By today's standards, the players were paid peanuts. Only top stars earned much over \$100 for a game. But this was 1919, and a lot of folks didn't make \$100 for a whole week's work. Still, the issue was really not whether the players were overpaid but rather whether the struggling teams could afford to pay them.

Another problem was the players' ability to drive up salaries by jumping from team to team following the highest bidder. Youngstown's experience in 1917 was one of the worst, but rosters changed for all teams from game to game as the players went from manager to manager in search of the highest bidder. For example, the Nesser brothers claimed to have faced Knute Rockne on five different occasions with five different teams in one season. The managers, of course, were their own worst enemies because they were willing to pay in an attempt to have the best possible teams. But they felt that if they did not, someone else would get the best players; since the local fans would not support a loser, a team would be just as broke as if it had hired the high-paid stars. On the other hand, one could not really blame the players. They had no allegiance to any town and the only difference between teams was the size of the paycheck.

The third problem was the use of college players. These players would participate in college games on Saturdays and, under assumed names, in pro games on Sundays. The use of college players generated a negative image for the professional

sport, which was seen by the public as enticing honorable young men with illicit inducements.

Although having college talent in a team's ranks could improve it on the field and also could hype the game among people who knew which college players would be involved, it earned the pro game the enmity of the popular college game and cost the pros far more in ill-will than they could afford.

Meanwhile, no one had been sure if even the top teams of the 1917 season -- Canton, Massillon, Akron, and Youngstown -- having taken a financial beating that year and not playing at all the next, would return for 1919. Finally, in July the situation began to clear.

In Canton, Ralph Hay, a friend of both Cusack and Thorpe, requested permission from Cusack to take over the Bulldogs. Cusack turned over to him the lease to League Park and Thorpe agreed to return from Boston, where he was playing baseball. After only one year off the Bulldogs were back in business.

In Massillon, Whalen and Donahue decided to give it one more try, although a suitable field, one surrounded by a fence to keep out gatecrashers, had not yet been found. In Akron, two different groups that were trying to organize teams merged and formed a new edition of the Indians. And in Youngstown, Mickey Stambaugh announced that he would not manage the Patricians, although hope remained in the community that somehow the team could be put back together.

On July 14, the managers of Canton, Massillon and Akron met at Canton's Courtland Hotel. There they set a wage scale for officials and agreed not to steal each other's players during 1919. However, they could not agree to a salary limit when Donahue refused to go along with the proposal.

Three weeks later, the managers, having arranged the meeting to include Thorpe, who still was playing baseball, got together at the Pittsburgh Athletic Club to discuss schedules. No one showed up from Youngstown, but the other managers were so convinced that the Patricians would field a team that they penciled them into the schedules anyway.

But scheduling was not why the meeting received publicity. The news was based on some



exploratory talk about forming a real pro football league. Such discussions had been common since 1904, with no discernible results. Even 50, the Akron *Beacon-Journal*, in its report of the meeting, saw fit to announce, "A league will be formally organized at the next meeting and officers elected."

The only fly in the ointment was that no further meetings of all the managers were held in 1919.

At the beginning of September, the Ohio League gained both a new member and an old one. In Cleveland, Jimmy O'Donnell, a minor promoter, leased League Park and hustled the financial backing for a team he named the Tigers. And Hay, after meeting with former Patrician coach Ray L. Thomas, announced that Youngstown would field a team.

Meanwhile, Hay also responded to a challenge. In Hammond, Indiana, Paul Parduhn announced that he would pay \$20,000 to put together a team that would represent Hammond but would play its games in Chicago. Parduhn already had signed a number of well-known players, including former University of Illinois end George Halas, the player of the game in the 1919 Rose Bowl (when Halas had been with the Great Lakes team). According to Parduhn, Canton would have to accept a game with Hammond or relinquish its claim to the national title. Hay readily scheduled the game.

Some of the Ohio League teams began the season on September 28, while most opened the following week. On October 5, after having defeated the Independents of Wheeling, West Virginia the week before, the Youngstown Patricians were thrashed by Massillon 17-0. But it was more than a loss on the field. The defeat proved so overwhelming that the Patricians called it a season and quit. This time the decision stuck.

Otherwise, the season on the field turned out to be one of the best ever for the remaining Ohio League teams. By the end of October, Canton and Massillon still were undefeated, while Akron and Cleveland were hot on their heels. Akron had lost only to Massillon 9-6 on a field goal by Skip Gougler in the final minute. Cleveland, meanwhile, had upset the Hammond team 6-0 and had fallen only to Massillon 3-0 when the Tigers scored a field goal with six seconds left.

November produced more key matchups. On the

first weekend of the month, in Canton, the Bulldogs administered Akron its second defeat, 19-7. Meanwhile, Cleveland again played Hammond, with a 0-0 tie the result. The next week Akron signed former Brown All-America halfback Fritz Pollard, but the Indians still fell to Massillon 13-6. On the same day, Canton could manage only a 3-3 tie with Hammond.

On Armistice Day, Skip Gougler missed five field goals and Massillon was handed its first defeat, 3-0 by Cleveland. The next day, a luncheon held for the Cleveland financial backers ended with demands for the formation of a professional football league similar to baseball's. Nothing was done about it right away.

In Canton, Hay responded cautiously, insisting, "We will be on the ground floor when a meeting for the formation of a league is called." But, he added, the Bulldogs wouldn't even consider such thoughts until the present season ended. Hay was no doubt miffed that rank newcomers to the pro football wars had initiated the call for a league without checking with Canton. Additionally, he had more immediate worries. Canton's first meeting with Massillon was scheduled for the following Saturday.

On November 16, Canton staked its claim for the Ohio League championship with a 23-0 victory over Massillon. Thorpe again played magnificently, but he was helped by two other Indians, Calac and Joe Guyon, the latter having signed with the Bulldogs out of Georgia Tech. Almost certainly, he gave Canton the best set of backs in football- pro or college.

In the next three weeks, all the pretenders to the Bulldogs' throne were eliminated. Massillon defeated Cleveland 7-0, while Canton ended any title hopes in Akron by beating the Indians 14-0. On Thanksgiving before a crowd of 10,000 in Cubs Park at Chicago, the Bulldogs again met Hammond. The Indiana team had added yet another high-priced player, former Northwestern star John (Paddy) Driscoll, one of the best kickers and open-field runners in the game. Nevertheless, Thorpe's eight-yard touchdown run and a stingy Canton defense gave the Bulldogs a 7-0 victory.

Three days later, the Bulldogs met the Tigers again, with the Massillon players and fans hoping a victory in the season finale could propel them to the national title. But Thorpe took over. In the third

quarter he kicked a 40-yard field goal for the only points of the game, and in the fourth quarter he punted 95 yards to keep the Tigers away from Canton's end zone. The Bulldogs left the field with a 3-0 victory, a 9-0-1 record, and the state and national professional championships.

Although Canton celebrated its third championship in four years, no amount of cheering for the Bulldogs could hide the fact that pro football in Ohio was in deep trouble. And the loose, unofficial Ohio League could do virtually nothing about it.

Despite attempts to control the problems faced by the league prior to the season, few efforts had been successful. Some of the ugliest charges yet about hiring collegians had surfaced in October, with a report that Washington and Jefferson All-America tackle Wilbur (Fats) Henry had played for Massillon. Henry had vehemently denied the charge, but it left the Tigers and the other Ohio League teams with another black eye. Moreover, despite the "tacit understanding" about tampering that had been arrived at over the summer by the Ohio League teams, players had continued to move from team to team, with the result that salaries had continued to rise. In addition, strong teams, willing to pay large amounts for players, had surfaced in Indiana and Illinois, threatening to lure Ohio's top pros and garner its prestige. And almost every important Ohio team had lost money in 1919.

In fact, there was potential for a mass exodus from the football business in Ohio late in 1919. In Youngstown, the Patricians had folded for good. In Massillon, Whalen and Donahue declared that they were unable to absorb any more losses and were out of the game. In Cleveland, attendance had faded late in the year, leaving Jimmy O'Donnell's team in limbo. The backers of the Akron team had pulled out, and although two relative newcomers, Art Ranney and Frank Nied, promised they would field a team there in 1920, details were sketchy. Even Hay's team had lost money, because Canton had produced only moderate crowds, except for the games against Massillon and Akron, and moderate crowds could not cover the Bulldogs' large salaries.

As the year ended, the concept of a league was discussed more and more as a panacea. On the editorial pages of most Ohio newspapers, it was a bad word: Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations found few supporters among opinion-makers in

the state. But on the sports pages, the idea of a football team giving up some of its autonomy for the sake of better organization and scheduling kept growing.

As the decade changed, many supported the 15-year-old idea of forming a league. However, few realized not only that it was just around the corner, but that the Ohio League -- the unofficial organization that had nurtured the game until its popularity demanded the birth of a real league -- had just faded into history.

### **The Association -- 1920**

"Change" was in many ways the best word to describe 1920. On January 16, one year after its ratification was completed, the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution officially prohibited the manufacture, sale, or transportation of alcoholic beverages within or into the United States. In Washington, the Senate broke with President Woodrow Wilson and refused to ratify the League of Nations Covenant. In Massachusetts, the arrest of two anarchists -- Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti -- for murder led some Americans to decide that the country's traditional set of values had been destroyed. And late in the year Republican candidate Warren Harding, running on a ticket that stressed a return to "normalcy," was elected president, ending eight years of a Democratic presidency.

The notion of change spread to the sports world. By the summer of 1920 the idea of a modification in the structure of professional football was becoming more and more popular with fans throughout Ohio. To the man in the street, a league sounded like a grand notion, because it would allow for a recognized champion and regular scheduling.

However, to the managers of the teams throughout the state there was more -- a lot more -- to the issue of a league than excitement for the fans. Rather, it was a matter of life or death. The problems that beset the 1919 teams and took Youngstown and Massillon under looked to become worse in 1920. Spiraling salaries, team-jumping, and the use of college players beset pro football as the three witches hounded Macbeth.

In the football centers of the state the team managers finally realized that forming a league

was their only chance for survival. And it was their desire to avoid an imminent financial catastrophe more than anything else that forced them to take drastic action in 1920.

### **Beginning of the National Football League**

That action began on the evening of August 20, when Ralph Hay held a meeting at the office of his Hupmobile agency in Canton. Representatives of four teams attended the meeting. Hay and Jim Thorpe were there for the Canton Bulldogs. From Akron came Art Ranney and Frank Nied, two businessmen who were attempting to form a team to replace the Akron Indians. Cleveland Tigers' manager Jimmy O'Donnell showed up with his new coach and star Stan Cofall, who had played with Massillon in 1919 but had joined O'Donnell when Massillon threw in the towel at the end of the season. And, somewhat unexpectedly, an appearance was made by Carl Storck, owner-manager of the Dayton Triangles.

Hay and others had hoped that Massillon's F.J. Griffiths, vice-president and general manager of the Central Steel Company, would show up with plans for a new Tigers team, but the meeting passed with no word from him. However, that did not mean the four teams present considered themselves to be alone. Three teams had written to Hay before the meeting. Although it is likely these three simply wanted to schedule a game with the Bulldogs, they were considered by the four teams present at the meeting to be charter members of their new league.

Unfortunately, because Hay recorded only the cities from which these three teams wrote and not the names of the teams or the managers, it is impossible to say with certainty which teams were the three that had written the letters. One message, from Rochester, New York, was most likely from Leo Lyons, manager of the Rochester Jeffersons, the strongest and most successful team in that city. Another probably came from A.A. Young, owner of the Hammond Pros, although that is not certain because the Pros were a new team, different from the 1919 Hammond Bobcats that had played in Chicago (although to compound the confusion, Young was part-owner of the Bobcats). The third entry, from Buffalo, remains a mystery. Although the Buffalo All-Americans of Frank McNeil were officially admitted to the league in 1921, they were not even in existence in 1919, and they played the early part of the 1920 season

without openly acknowledging the operation of any pro organization. However, they did play Canton in November, and historians traditionally have included them as an original member.

Having only four teams to work with initially did not prevent a great deal from being accomplished. The group gave itself a name -- the American Professional Football Conference (APFC) and elected Hay as secretary. It also addressed the three major issues troubling the pro sport. According to the *Canton Repository*, "The purpose of the APFC will be to raise the standard of professional football in every way possible, to eliminate bidding for players between rival clubs, and to secure cooperation in the formation of schedules, at least for the bigger teams."

Raising the standard of professional football, according to the *Dayton Journal Herald*, meant: "The league voted unanimously not to seek the services of any undergraduate college player.

The new group also discussed team-jumping, as the *Repository* reported: "Members of the organization reached an agreement to refrain from offering inducements to players to jump from one team to another, which has been one of the glaring drawbacks to the game in past seasons. Contracts must be respected by players as far as possible, as well as by club managers."

However, the most important thing the representatives did was to place a maximum on financial terms for players.

Although the new APFC had tried to solve all of the major problems facing pro football, the solutions, unfortunately, were binding only on the teams present. That was an important consideration for the four teams, because regardless of what the conference did, if the other major teams refused to join in the pledges and promises, the Ohio quartet would soon find itself victimized by the very practices it was swearing to forego. Perhaps it was in recognition of this that Hay was instructed to contact the rest of the nation's leading pro football teams and invite them to the next meeting.

Later historians, including those of the NFL itself, would call the August 20 get-together simply a preliminary meeting, setting up the "organizational meeting" that would be held on September 17. However, both Hay and Storck represented the

August meeting as being much more. It could simply have been because of the larger scope of the September meeting -- there were more teams represented, more business conducted, and more publicity attending it -- that some newspapers mistakenly reported the second meeting as the first.

Indeed, a more accurate description of the August meeting would recognize it as the founding of the first serious pro football league. True, it was not the first or even the second league, but it was a real league. Among the less than illustrious predecessors was the 1903 National Football League, national in that it was made up of two Philadelphia teams and one Pittsburgh team. In 1917, three Indiana semi-pro teams styled themselves a league but failed to produce much excitement even among Hoosiers, and the idea disappeared with World War I. Both before and after the war, Chicago newspapers spoke of a league of local independent teams, but some of the clubs weren't even semi-pros. Considering the prestige of Ohio pro football, the American Professional Football Conference marked the most ambitious effort to date.

Although later events of the year were to relegate the APFC to being a footnote in sports history, for a month is represented pro football's best chance for survival.

That chance improved dramatically on September 17. Once again a meeting took place at Hay's auto dealership, but this time Hay's invitations had interested so many teams that there were not enough chairs in his office and the meeting had to be held in his showroom. According to legend, some of the men sat on the running boards of cars, and Hay provided buckets of beer that hung over the fenders. Apparently no one was worried about the police arresting the group for violation of the Prohibition law, but it is interesting to speculate whether there ever would have been an NFL if the police had shown up.

The meeting was a success, and it was attended by representatives of ten teams. The original four teams were back with the same spokesmen, and Leo Lyons from Rochester and A.A. Young from Hammond were there. Also present were Earl Ball of Indiana's Muncie Flyers and the representatives of three teams from Illinois -- Walter H. Flanigan, manager of the Rock Island Independents; George Halas and Morgan O'Brien for A.E.

Staley's Decatur Staleys; and painting and decorating contractor Chris O'Brien, who had run the Racine Cardinals since 1899.

Actually, Art Ranney, who took the minutes, confused later historians when he mistook O'Brien's Racine Cardinals, who were named after a street in south Chicago where they played, for a team from Racine, Wisconsin. For years, until Joe Horrigan of the Pro Football Hall of Fame made a close study of the NFL's minutes, it was thought that both the Cardinals and a team from Wisconsin had been present at the meeting. The Racine Cardinals were later known as the Chicago Cardinals, the St. Louis Cardinals, and then the Phoenix Cardinals.

Again, Massillon didn't send a representative to the meeting. However, Vernon (Mac) McGinnis, an Akron promoter, attempted to obtain a franchise named the Massillon Tigers. McGinnis intended for his club to be a traveling team, playing its entire schedule on the road. However, the plan for a "Massillon" team backed by outside financing and really having nothing to do with Massillon was not viewed favorably by the member clubs, who didn't allow McGinnis's representative into the meeting. Instead, Hay spoke for Massillon and said that the city would not operate a team in 1920.

The meeting also settled several other major issues. Early in the meeting, the APFC changed its four-week-old name to the American Professional Football Association (APFA), possibly reflecting a broadening of the geographic area covered by the organization. The word "league" was noticeably absent, possibly because the managers felt "association" was a milder word, denoting less of a commitment for the members - an association was loose and general, a league tight and specific. And considering how things were to go in 1920, association was the right word.

Hoping to capitalize on his fame, the members elected Thorpe association president. Cofall was elected vice-president and Ranney secretary-treasurer, giving the three main Ohio clubs all the executive positions.

A membership fee of \$100 per team was charged to give an appearance of respectability, but according to Halas no one ever paid. Each team agreed to have the words "Member of American

Professional Football Association" printed on its stationery. Each club also agreed to mail a list of players used in the 1920 season to Ranney, so that each would have first choice in 1921 of the same players it had used in 1920.

A Mr. Marshall of the Brunswick-Dalke Collender Company, Tire Division, presented a silver loving cup to be given to the team awarded the championship by the APFA. Any team winning the cup three times was to become its permanent owner. However, the issue of determining a champion was to prove tricky, due to the difficulty of determining standings. The association had not reached the stage at which an equal schedule could be drawn up by every club. Scheduling was left up to the clubs themselves, and there was a wide variation both in the overall number of games played and in the number played against association teams.

The meeting adjourned with the promise that the president would call another session in January, after the association's first season. Interestingly, according to the league minutes, none of pro football's three major problems had been addressed, even though they were why the teams needed an organization in the first place. However, according to newspaper accounts, a number of agreements had been reached before the meeting was officially called to order. These agreements included a pledge that the association would never sign college undergraduates and that contracts with other clubs would be honored. Yet, nothing was said about a maximum on salaries. Whether that was because it had been decided at the August meeting, or because the managers were taking a step back from the previous meeting is unknown, although it has been speculated that it was in order to keep the Decatur Staleys in the league. The members of Halas's team were able to be paid twice, once as employees of the Staley Manufacturing Company and once for playing for the company team. The Staleys almost certainly would have gone over any salary cap had any been agreed upon.

The association now had been created, but in exactly what form nobody is sure to this day. It long has been a source of debate just which teams to include when discussing the APFA in 1920. The ten teams represented at the September meeting generally are considered charter members of the APFA and, therefore, of the National Football League, to which the

association changed its name in 1922. The Buffalo All-Americans and three teams that joined the league in its first year – the Detroit Heralds, the Chicago Tigers, and Joe Carr's Columbus Panhandles -- also are considered charter members. But it is difficult to make a hard and fast ruling on those teams because mention of the organization virtually disappeared from the sports pages, even in game stories, until it met again in 1921. Moreover, the APFA didn't keep standings, choosing to determine its champion by the same method the Ohio League had used, not by win-loss record, but by a consensus of which was the strongest team. Thus, even after the APFA was founded, it did not totally break with its roots, that is, the Ohio League.

### 1920 Season

On September 26, the first game featuring a team from the association was played at Rock Island's Douglas Park. A crowd of 800 watched the Independents defeat the St. Paul Ideals (not an APFA team) 48-0 in the rain.

A week later, October 3, the first games matching two APFA teams were held. After a scoreless first half at Triangle Park in Dayton, what can be considered the first touchdown in a game between two NFL opponents was scored. Early in the third period, Lou Partlow of Dayton ran seven yards for the score. George Kinderdine kicked the extra point. The Triangles went on to defeat the Panhandles 14-0.

That same day, Rock Island scored three touchdowns through blocked punts in the first quarter and whipped the Muncie Flyers 45-0. The Muncie team played so poorly that Halas, the Decatur player-coach-manager, immediately canceled a game that had been scheduled against the Flyers for the next week. At the same time, the team's financial backers pulled out, and the Flyers folded.

By early in the season, the Racine Cardinals generally had come to be known as the Chicago Cardinals. On November 7, Paddy Driscoll ran 40 yards for a touchdown to lead the Cardinals to a 6-3 victory over the Chicago Tigers. Legend has it that Cardinals owner Chris O'Brien had bet the APFA franchise rights to Chicago on the game, with the loser being forced to fold. Indeed, at the end of the season the Tigers did just that. But the story still is questionable. In 1920, the APFA didn't

have the kind of franchise rights that existed later. In addition, the newspapers of the day make it clear that the game was for the pro championship of Chicago, a title with more prestige than rights to anything in the little-known APFA.

The Cardinals' victory certainly helped push the Tigers into oblivion. Before the game, most of the city's newspaper coverage had gone to the Tigers. After the Cardinals won, they surpassed the Tigers in both media attention and attendance. The dwindling attendance and an expensive roster forced the Tigers to fold because they lost too much money.

By the beginning of December, most of the teams in the association had abandoned hope for a championship, and some of them, including the Tigers and Detroit Heralds, had finished their seasons, disbanded, and had their franchises canceled by the association. Four teams -- Akron (the only undefeated team), Buffalo, Canton, and Decatur -- still had championship aspirations, however. Frank McNeil of Buffalo came up with a plan to give his team the championship, playing Canton in New York City and Akron in Buffalo on back-to-back days, December 4 and 5. The plan started well when the All-Americans defeated the Bulldogs 7-3. The next day, however, in a storm that alternated between dumping rain and snow, Buffalo and Akron struggled to a scoreless tie. The game not only eliminated Buffalo from the championship picture, it also marked the first APFA player deal. Either directly before or immediately after the game, Akron sold tackle Bob (Nasty) Nash to Buffalo for \$300 and five per cent of the gate receipts.

Also on December 5, the Staleys staked their claim with a 10-0 victory over the Cardinals, the only team that had beaten them. The 1920 season reached its climax in a game on December 12 between Akron and Decatur. Despite hiring Paddy Driscoll from the Cardinals for the game, the Staleys could achieve no more than a scoreless tie against a team they had to beat to win the championship.

Akron not only finished the season undefeated, the team made history by having Fritz Pollard as its co-coach, along with Elgie Tobin. Although it hardly was noted at the time, Pollard was the first black coach in the NFL. Only in later years was much made of the fact, and an effort made to ascertain the role Pollard played in the handling of

the team.

### **Future Prospects**

The league meeting that had been scheduled for January, 1921 wasn't held until April 30, at the Portage Hotel in Akron. There the first order of business was to award the championship trophy for 1920 to the Akron Pros. Realizing that they needed more experienced leadership than Thorpe could supply, the team owners and managers installed Joe Carr as president. Carr, a Columbus sportswriter, was the manager of the Panhandles, a minor-league baseball executive, and a pioneer in professional basketball. In the next decade, he would supply the firm control that the new league needed in its formative years. The next priority in the meeting was to review the past season and plan for the future.

Even with the founding of the APFA, pro football was not exactly in great shape in Ohio and the Midwest. Despite the promises made in August and September, throughout 1920 salaries had continued to rise, players still had jumped from team to team, and some teams had continued to use college players. At best these practices had been slowed.

From the standpoint of the teams, the 1920 season had been less than successful. Many of the teams had lost money, while the Muncie Flyers, Chicago Tigers, and Detroit Heralds had folded. And actually, within a decade, all of the Ohio League teams would go out of business.

But even though the Ohio League teams that had nurtured pro football and then, for their own survival, had forced a league upon the game, would one day fold, the APFA owners and managers could show one major accomplishment. And they still could point to the single accomplishment today as the most important of all -- their league, and their game, had survived.