

Forward Into Invisibility

1920

By PFRA Research

Any football season has its share of thrilling, strange, and memorable events. Certainly we'd expect the National Football League to have long ago cast its first season -- 1920 -- in bronze and enshrined it whole at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Maybe they would have, if they could have remembered it. Until recently, the games and happenings of the autumn of that first NFL year were nearly a blank. Among other tidbits the league wasn't certain about was who won.

A few legends survived. On inspection, most of them have turned out to be false. Conversely, many of the things historians have long believed didn't happen did!

Several pro teams swung into action on September 26. In Wisconsin, an independent team sponsored by a local meat packing company began its second season with a 3-3 tie against the semi-pro Chicago Boosters. Probably no one on either team knew or cared that the American Professional Football Association, the organization that would two years later change its name to the National Football League, was about to embark upon its maiden season. The Boosters have long since disappeared, but the Green Bay Packers would eventually see the wisdom of joining a league.

The only team counted among the traditional APFA charter members to play a game in September was the tough Rock Island aggregation misleadingly called the "Independents" which opened at home against the St. Paul, Minn., Ideals. The St. Paul group proved ideal guests by getting run over 48-0.

Almost every important pro team tried to lead off its season by scheduling a "soft touch" so its record would not be at risk while its men played themselves into shape. As a consequence, the scores of most games in the first week of October tended to be very one-sided.

The Canton Bulldogs, with their leader (and APFA president) Jim Thorpe "retired" on the sideline, crushed the Pitcairn Quakers 48-0. The Decatur Staleys, with Coach George Halas doing double duty as a star end, plowed the Moline Tractors under 20-0. The Akron Pros burned the Wheeling Stogies 43-0. And the Buffalo All-Americans established themselves 32-0 over West Buffalo. The Rochester Jeffersons, not one of the league powers, stopped the All-Buffalo team by a mere 10-0. None of the losers have ever been considered APFA members, although the qualifications for membership in that first year were so vague that no one can say for certain who the members were.

From an historical standpoint, only a game involving two known APFA members can be called the "first" league game (although it

most surely was not thought of as such at the time). On October 3, both the Muncie Flyers at Rock Island and the Columbus Panhandles at Dayton Triangles qualify. The question of the true league inaugural comes down to a comparison of time zones.

By an hour, the nod goes to Columbus at Dayton. There, a hard-fought game was only resolved in the second half when the Triangles' speed gave them a 14-0 victory. Dayton's Frank Bacon became the first association player to return a punt for a touchdown in a "league game," when he brought a Frank Nesser boot back 60 yards to score. It is unlikely that Dayton scored the first APFA points however. Both Triangle touchdowns came after halftime, and by then, Rock Island already had run up a ton of points at Douglas Park.

No self-respecting league would want to claim the Rock Island-Muncie affair as its first game. The first quarter was a travesty. After the kickoff, Muncie met a stone wall and Ken Huffine went back to punt. In roared Rock Island tackle Ed Shaw to block the kick. Former Minnesota All-America Arnie Wyman scooped up the ball and ran 35 yards for a touchdown, probably the APFA's first, and definitely the first on a blocked punt.

After another kickoff, Muncie again failed to gain. This time Huffine got his punt off, but Rock Island quickly drove down the field to the two-yard-line. There, they fumbled. Huffine went back behind his own goal line to kick out of trouble. In came Rock Island's other tackle, Walt Buland, to block this punt and Wyman fell on it in the end zone for another touchdown.

Another kickoff, another failure to gain, and another Huffine punt attempt. This time Shaw and end Oke Smith blocked it. A moment later and Rock Island had its third touchdown of the opening quarter to make the score 21-0.

After that, The Islanders coasted to a 45-0 final that included at least two more scoring firsts: Wyman's 86-yard kickoff return for a TD and "Rube" Ursella's field goal. Rock Island's Bobby Marshall, a 40-year-old end who'd starred for the University of Minnesota back at the turn of the century, became the first black player to appear in a game between two league teams.

Muncie performed so poorly that Decatur immediately cancelled a game scheduled for October 10. Reportedly, the Flyers' financial backers pulled out, and their best players quit the squad. The team folded. Many later histories reported they had not played at all in 1920. In one sense, the historians were right.

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The distinction between "league games" and "non-league" games seems to have begun the next year when standings were finally kept. In 1920, all games apparently counted. For the record, however, the only accepted members of the APFA were Canton, Akron, Cleveland, Dayton, and Columbus in Ohio, the short-lived Muncie Flyers and Hammond in Indiana, the Tigers and Racine Cardinals, both of Chicago, the Decatur (Ill.) Staleys, Rochester and Buffalo in New York, and the Detroit Heralds.

To some extent in an age of boosterism, all midwest newspapers were "homers," but a week later the Hammond *Times* set some sort of chauvinist record before their darlings took the field at Rock Island by headlining: "Hammond Stars Ready for Suckers." The next day, the Rock Island *Argus* got to headline the Independents' 26-0 win.

In other games between APFA members, Akron smashed Columbus 37-0, Dayton and Cleveland tied 0-0, and, in Chicago, the Cardinals and Tigers battled to the same score, leaving the question of Windy City superiority up in the air.

Other games saw Canton whip the Toledo Maroons 42-0, the All-Americans wrap up the Buffalo city title by wiping out All- Buffalo 51-0, Decatur stop the Kewanee Walworths 25-7, Detroit top a semi-pro club from Cleveland 40-14, and Rochester grab the day's scoring title with a 66-0 romp over hapless Fort Porter.

On October 17, Thorpe ended his brief retirement with a token appearance against Cleveland, as the Bulldogs won 7-0. The Chicago Tigers converted poor punting by Detroit into a 12-0 victory. Rochester lost its scoring punch in a scoreless tie with Utica. Columbus was bested 14-0 by the non-APFA Ft. Wayne Friars with ex-Muncie Flyer Ken Huffine in the backfield. The Cardinals went to Moline to down the Tractors 33-0.

Lightweight boxing champion Benny Leonard served as head linesman in Akron as the Pros bested the Cincinnati Celts 13-0.

At Buffalo, Eddie Casey -- erstwhile Harvard great -- made an auspicious debut at halfback as the All-Americans romped over the McKeesport, Pa., Olympics 28-7. The administration at Mt. Union College where Casey was coach exerted pressure and Casey's pro career ended with that one game. He'd been the eighth legitimate All-America in the Buffalo lineup, making them one of the most aptly-named teams ever. Other former honor-squad members for Buffalo included end "Heinie" Miller, tackle Lou Little (the future Columbia coach), and center Lud Wray, all of the University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth guard Adolph "Swede" Youngstrom, Michigan quarterback Ernest "Tommy" Hughitt, and Colgate halfback Oscar "Ockie" Anderson.

The Dayton Triangles used their speedy attack to run rings around the heavy and slow Hammond Pros to the tune of 44-0. When Ralph Hay in Canton heard the score, he cancelled November game with the Pros and opened negotiations with the Chicago Tigers. If the Tigers joined the league during the season as most historians believe, it probably happened while they were arranging a game with Hay.

His Bulldogs were shocked on October 24 when they went to Dayton and came away with only a tie. Had it not been for Thorpe,

the result would have been worse. The Triangles held a 20-14 lead in the third quarter when Thorpe entered the game. He dropkicked a 45-yard field goal to narrow the score and then knotted the game at 20-20 in the final minutes with a 35-yard placekick.

At Rock Island, Cardinal star "Paddy" Driscoll's best efforts weren't enough to pull out a victory, as the Independents took a 7-0 verdict. Meanwhile, Decatur downed the Chicago Tigers 10-0, to make it a bad day all around for Windy City teams.

The Detroit Heralds won a 6-0 game from the Columbus Panhandles on an 85-yard return of a pass interception. As this was the first touchdown of this sort recorded in a "league" game, it's worth noting that the errant toss was thrown by Frank Nesser, the same player who's punt was returned for a TD in the "first" game at Dayton, giving him a dubious double-entry in the record book. Buffalo shut out the Toledo Maroons 38-0, and Rochester was touched for a touchdown but still topped the Syracuse Stars 21-7.

The surprising Akron Pros remained undefeated with a 7-0 win over Cleveland. The touchdown came on an odd play in the first quarter when Akron's Bob Nash snatched the ball out of the air just as Stanley Cofall was punting it. Cofall kicked the air and Nash kicked up his heels on an eight-yard dash to paydirt.

As the end of October approached, the most disappointing APFA team was Cleveland. Boasting a lineup studded with ex- Massillon Tigers and former collegiate notables, they were expected to be Canton's strongest challenge in Ohio. The toothless Tigers hadn't scored a single point in their first three games although they'd held three strong opponents to a total of only two touchdowns. But defense didn't sell tickets, and, after three punchless appearances, Manager Jimmy O'Donnell cleaned house. Out were a half dozen Tigers whose college reputations hadn't put any points on the pro scoreboard. Most famous of the missing was Stanley Cofall, the player-coach -- and, incidentally, the vice-president of the APFA. On the last day of October before 5,000 Cleveland fans, several new Tigers helped bring about a 7-0 win over Columbus.

At Buffalo, the Rochester Jeffersons played their only 1920 game against an APFA opponent, losing 17-6 to the All-Americans. The Cardinals used three blocked punts to top Detroit 21-0 at Cubs Park while the Chicago Tigers were over at Rock Island losing 20-7. The Hammond Pros beat a Chicago semi-pro team, the Logan Squares, 14-9. In Rockford, Ill., Decatur zapped the local A.C., 29-0. Dayton moved its record to three wins and two ties with a 23-7 victory over the visiting Cincinnati Celts. Dayton had better coaching than many pro teams; Nelson Talbott doubled as mentor for both the Triangles and Dayton U.

In the day's biggest game, Canton hosted the Akron Pros and lost its first game since 1917. The Pros were ahead 3-0 in the second quarter when Akron tackle Charley Copley tipped a Canton pass into the hands of "Pike" Johnson, the other Akron tackle, who rumbled 55 yards to a touchdown. Canton couldn't get anything going all day and Akron went home with a 10-0 triumph.

November

As November began, four APFA teams remained undefeated. Decatur and Buffalo were no surprises, and Dayton had been

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expected to do well. The real shocker was Akron. No one outside the Rubber City had figured the Pros as more than so-so, despite the presence in the lineup of one of the game's best breakaway runners: black star "Fritz" Pollard, an All-American at Brown University in 1916.

However, unheralded rookie "Rip" King gave them a pass threat as well as a second strong runner. Another rookie, Harry Harris, turned out to be an adequate quarterback. Then, early in the season, Coach Elgie Tobin converted tackle Frank McCormick into a hard-blocking fullback, and the Pros had an effective backfield.

A third rookie, Russ Bailey, anchored the line at center, but the rest of the line was made up of veterans. Al Cobb and Brad Tomlin were a fine pair of guards. Tackles Copley and Johnson were small but tough. The ends provided inspirational play all season. Al Nesser, the youngest of the six football-playing Nesser brothers, had played for Akron teams since 1917. His best position was guard, but he could hold his own on the flank. The other end, Bob Nash had earned his nickname "Nasty" during several frustrating years with the Massillon Tigers. No doubt he and Al enjoyed the win at Canton more than anyone.

When a scheduled game with Detroit was rained out on November 7, the Akron club got another week to savor its victory over the Bulldogs.

It rained in Cleveland too, but Jimmy O'Donnell -- after two years of trying to get Jim Thorpe and the Bulldogs as an attraction -- was not about to cancel. He might as well have called the game off. Most Clevelanders preferred staying dry at home to getting wet seeing Thorpe. And, to ruin O'Donnell's day altogether, Canton defeated his Tigers easily 18-0.

Columbus finally won its first game of the season, topping the Zanesville, O., Mark Greys 10-0. Hammond won over another Chicago semi-pro squad, the Pullman Thorns, 14-13, and Rochester defeated Utica 27-7. None of the three would make any impression on the championship race during the rest of the season. The All-Americans took on All-Tonawanda, a strong non-APFA team, and romped 35-0.

At Chicago's Cubs Park, "Paddy" Driscoll's 40-yard dash to a touchdown gave the Cardinals a 6-3 win over the Tigers. An interesting legend has always surrounded this game. Supposedly, Cardinal owner Chris O'Brien bet the APFA franchise on the game, with the loser honor-bound to close up shop and leave Chicago to the winner. When the Cardinals won, the Tigers did as they'd promised and disappeared the next season. In later years, even O'Brien himself was heard to tell this yarn.

It's a good story, but an unlikely one. It ignores the fact that the APFA did not yet have "franchises" in the sense of territorial rights or any other special privileges. The APFA had memberships in which teams promised to honor contracts and eschew hiring collegians. It's hard to see how or why a team would play with that as a stake.

More to the point, contemporary Chicago newspapers make it clear that the two teams were playing for the pro championship of Chicago, or -- to be exact -- the leadership in the local race, since

the season still had nearly a month to go. Compared to today's Super Bowl, the championship of Chicago may not sound like any great shakes, but in 1920 it was worth more in prestige and a great deal more at the turnstiles than the leadership of the APFA, a group few Chicagoans had ever heard of.

Until the game, the Tigers had the best of the limited newspaper coverage in the city because they played in Cubs Park, scheduled more famous opponents, and had more recognizable names in their lineup. After the Cardinal victory, O'Brien's team gained better coverage while the Tigers lost ground in the press. The Tigers also continued to lose on the field. Their attendance dwindled to the point that they were fatally in the red. Rather than retiring gracefully under some "gentleman's agreement," it seems likely that the Chicago Tigers folded simply because they lost too much money.

A different championship was awarded at Rock Island. The day after the Islanders' November 7 meeting with Decatur, the ARGUS headlined: "Staleys Win World's Dirt Title" and "Unsportsmanlike Conduct of Starchmen an Utter Affront to Fair Name of Clean Sport." The bulk of the story was devoted to detailing the alleged unfair play of the Staleys, particularly that of star center George Trafton. A reader had to look twice to notice the Islanders had managed a scoreless tie with the undefeated Starchmakers.

The Islanders went into the game banged up and came out of it worse. Four Rock Island players were knocked out of the game, including halfback Fred Chicken with a possible broken leg and center Hal Gunderson who was nearly decapitated when Trafton slid across his face in a pile-up.

Rock Island fans developed a special hate for Trafton, nicknamed "The Beast." On Decatur's earlier trip to Rock Island, he was forced to run when some unhappy fans spotted him after the game. He jumped into a convenient taxi, only to jump out again when a rock shower shattered the windows. A passing motorist rescued him and gave him a lift across the state line into Iowa.

From there, he made his way back to Decatur.

Needless to say, the Rock Island faithful were in an even more murderous mood as the second game ended. Just as the final whistle blew and Trafton started to make his getaway, Coach George Halas handed him a sack containing the Staley's share of the gate -- supposedly \$7,000 in cash. "I'll meet you at the hotel!" Halas shouted, and off pounded Trafton with a hundred angry fans in hot pursuit.

"I figured he'd run faster than I would," Halas explained later. "He was running for his life. I would have just been running for seven thousand."

Seven thousand dollars for a visiting team's share is an amazing figure and has probably been inflated by memory about a thousand dollars for each elapsed decade. A crowd of 7,000, including "freebies," was unknown in Rock Island.

On Thursday, November 11, a limping Rock Island team could accomplish only a 7-7 tie against the Thorn Tornadoes at Monmouth, Ill. At Champaign, the Staleys celebrated Armistice Day with a 20-0 romp over the American Legion team.

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Sunday saw all teams in action. Rochester lost to All-Tonawanda 6-0, and Hammond lost to the Gary, Ind., Elks 7-6. Detroit was tied by Ft. Wayne 0-0. The Cardinals upheld the APFA's honor against a non-association foe with a 20-0 victory over the Cincinnati Celts. Decatur had a tough time at Minneapolis before slipping past the Marines 3-0 on halfback Dutch Sternaman's 25-yard field goal.

Dayton took advantage of Rock Island's injuries to defeat the Independents 21-0 at Rock Island, ending any hopes for a title among the Islanders. Buffalo took advantage of Columbus' ineptitude to thrash the Panhandles 43-7. At Canton, the Bulldogs topped the Chicago Tigers 21-0.

At Cleveland, O'Donnell's Tigers completed a 50-yard touchdown pass for the first points scored against Akron all season. It was enough to earn Cleveland a tie with the unbeaten Pros.

On a rain-swept field at Buffalo, the Bulldogs knocked the All-Americans from the ranks of the unbeaten. The conditions limited play to a shoving match between the 30-yard-lines for nearly the whole day. Late in the fourth quarter, Thorpe left the game, believing neither team was likely to score. Then, with fewer than three minutes left, Joe Guyon returned a Buffalo punt to the All-Americans' 40-yard-line. Three line plunges gained only eight yards, and on fourth down the Bulldogs set up for a field goal. Thorpe was on the sideline, and under the rules of the day, not allowed to return, so center Al Feeney went back to try a placekick. Feeney, who later became mayor of Ft. Wayne, swung his foot, the ball sailed true, and Buffalo had lost 3-0.

At Akron, in a battle of unbeaten, the Pros stopped Dayton 13-0. The Staleys remained the APFA's only other undefeated team with a 28-7 win over Hammond before a crowd of 3,000 at Decatur. It was only the third time the Staleys had played at home.

In other games, the Cardinals topped the Lansing, Mich., Oldsmobiles 14-0, Cleveland whipped the Toledo Maroons by the same score, the Rochester Jeffersons upended the crosstown Scalpers 16-0, and Columbus tied the Zanesville Mark Greys 0-0 in their second meeting.

Thanksgiving Day games were often profitable, but some pro teams avoided them. Many pro players had coaching jobs at colleges and high schools that also played that day. A pro team could find itself severely shorthanded. As a consequence, teams that scheduled Thanksgiving Day games often "borrowed" players from teams that had open dates -- an example of team jumping that was conveniently ignored. At Akron, the Pros and Canton Bulldogs managed to turn out nearly all of their regulars for what was probably the most important game of the season to date. In the first quarter, Canton's Cecil Grigg fumbled an Akron punt at the his own 32. "Rip" King passed to "Scotty" Bierce at the twelve, and then zipped another pass to "Nasty" Nash in the endzone. From there, the staunch Akron defense took over to preserve the lead and make the final 7-0.

At Chicago, the Staleys had a surprisingly tough time with the Tigers before winning 6-0. Dayton got back on the winning track with a 28-0 victory over Detroit, but three other APFA teams had less luck against non-association teams. Hammond was

hammered by the Chicago Boosters 27-0. Rochester went down to a second defeat at the hands of All-Tonawanda 14-3. At Lorain, O., Columbus played its second straight scoreless tie.

The Cardinals were neither the best nor the worst club operating in 1920, but they had probably the best player in triple-threat "Paddy" Driscoll. To show just how important Driscoll was to his team, when "Paddy's" father died, Chris O'Brien cancelled a potentially lucrative Thanksgiving Day game rather than play without him in the Cardinal lineup.

Two days after Thanksgiving, an all-star game was held in Pittsburgh. It was not the first pro all-star game and it had no sponsorship from the APFA, but it did involve several APFA players. Local Clerk of Courts John Douglas hoped to make a strong contribution to Duquesne University's financial drive by sponsoring major professional games. These were to be played on Saturdays after the college season ended because Pennsylvania "Blue Laws" forbid Sunday football in Pittsburgh. In Douglas' original scheme, the all-star game was to be followed by a series of "championship games" involving Canton, Akron, and Buffalo.

Rainy weather and local apathy held the crowd to a mere 3,000 -- despite a publicity blitz in local newspapers -- and no further games were tried. Of the many promised Ohio pro stars, only "Fritz" Pollard showed and he retired after a brief first quarter appearance. Most of the lineups were made up of secondary Ohio players and Pittsburgh sandlotters. "Mose" Kelsch, a sandlotter who would finally reach the NFL in 1933, was the star of the game with 15 points scored.

In Sunday's lesser games, the Jeffersons won again against the crosstown Scalpers 7-6 at Rochester, the Chicago Tigers finished their season and their existence with a 27-0 pounding of the Thorn Tornadoes, Detroit and the Lansing Oldsmobiles tied 0-0 at the Motor City, and Rock Island defeated something called the Washington and Jefferson Collegians 48-7. The Collegians reportedly had All-American Russ Stein and several other undergraduates in their lineup.

The Buffalo All-Americans shook off their first defeat and trumped O'Donnell's Clevelanders 7-0. Akron went to Dayton and showed they were for real by handing the Triangles another loss 14-0. That win left Akron as the only undefeated APFA team when the Staleys were upset, 7-6, in Chicago by Paddy Driscoll and the Cardinals.

With the end of November, many teams called it a season and disbanded, but a few still had some loose ends. The Columbus Panhandles, despite an horrendous year, gained a measure of honor on December 5 by winning their city's championship with a 24-0 victory over the local Wagner Pirates. The Detroit Heralds and Rochester Jeffersons couldn't even claim undisputed local titles. The Jeffs got only a scoreless tie in their third meeting with the Scalpers, and the Heralds were also tied, 7-7, by the Detroit Maroons. It marked the final game in the history of the Heralds, a team that dated back to 1905.

The Contenders

George Halas wasn't exactly getting rich in Decatur either, but at least he had an outstanding team in 1920. The Decatur Staleys, who'd claimed a mythical "western championship" until they were

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dethroned by "Paddy" Driscoll and the Cardinals, immediately demanded a rematch. George Halas hoped to parlay a revenge victory over the Cards into a "championship game" against Akron. He scheduled both the Cardinal game and the proposed Akron game for Cubs Park, making the Staleys "visitors" at their own home games. The first part of his plan went well. Fully 11,000 fans -- the largest pro football crowd in Chicago history -- turned out to cheer for the Cardinals, but Halas and the Staleys won 10-0.

The Buffalo All-Americans also had plans for Akron. But first, they also had to avenge a blot on their record -- the late November loss to Canton. In a brilliant piece of creative scheduling, Buffalo Manager Frank McNeil booked Canton into New York's Polo Grounds for a Saturday game and the Akron Pros for the next day at Buffalo. So as not to spoil the attendance for the Akron game should the All-Americans lose to the Bulldogs, McNeil labeled the Buffalo-Canton tilt an "exhibition." Canton's Ralph Hay considered it a championship game, reasoning that a victory over the All-Americans followed by a Buffalo win over Akron would give his Bulldogs a credible claim to the title.

It's important to note that all this championship scheming was for the mythical "U.S. Professional" crown. No one mentioned the real American Professional Football Association championship, at least not in print.

Canton newspapers had spent the season shaming their readers by telling them how Akron had gone "wild" for its team while the Bulldogs' attendance slumped. Suddenly, in December, the same papers predicted the Pros would be forced to move to Cleveland in 1921 because they'd lost so much money. Sour grapes.

Whatever their financial status, the Pros had one advantage in all this championship scheming. They were still undefeated. Either Buffalo or Decatur had to beat them to claim top honors. Akron only had to keep from losing.

The Buffalo-Canton match drew a crowd to the Polo Grounds variously described as from 10,000 to 25,000. Thorpe -- still the main draw -- rewarded the fans by kicking a field goal, but Buffalo's "Swede" Youngstrom made the big play of the game by blocking a Thorpe punt and recovering it for a touchdown. The former All-America from Dartmouth reportedly blocked nine punts during the season. This one gave Buffalo a 7-3 win.

Several newsmen, viewing their first pro game pronounced it less "wide-open" than college football.

With the loss to Buffalo, even the Bulldogs' most fervent admirers admitted there was no way to claim pro honors for 1920. However, the team was in the east for the first time in its long history, and Hay decided to play a late-season "tour," hoping to lure crowds on the strength of Thorpe's name and the Bulldogs' former glory.

The tour was less than triumphant. The day after their Polo Grounds loss, a tired troupe of Bulldogs were held to a 0-0 tie by the Washington Glee Club team at New Haven. The next Saturday saw them in Philadelphia where they lost to the Union A.A., 13-7, before an excellent crowd. The Union team was virtually the same as the Buffalo All-Americans. All season, at least eight players would perform as the Unions in Philadelphia on Saturdays, then take a

train to Buffalo to become the All-Americans on Sunday. They had an even better record in Philly, going 11-0-0, but their schedule was not nearly as rugged as that of several APFA clubs including Buffalo. One Union star who played only in Philadelphia was the fullback who joined them after the season began -- Stanley Cofall.

Canton completed its trip on Saturday, December 18, by thumping the Richmond, Va., A.C. 39-0 for its only win in the east. It had been, all things considered, a very disappointing year for the Bulldogs.

The Union A.A. did not play on December 4 so its players could be Buffalo All-Americans at the Polo Grounds. After defeating Canton, Buffalo came home for the Sunday game with Akron. McNeil knew his men were used to playing two games on a weekend, but this time he'd asked just a little too much of them. His master plan failed when his team could not score against the Akron defense. Akron was held scoreless too, but the Pros didn't need to win; they only had to avoid defeat.

Before the game, the first reported APFA player deal took place when Akron sold "Nasty" Nash's contract to McNeil for \$300 and five percent of the gate. Nash did not play in the game and may have jumped the team for his home in the east. The deal was probably to compensate Akron for its trip when only 3,000 showed for the game that was supposed to decide the U.S. championship.

The 1920 season finally reached its quiet climax on Sunday, December 12, at Cubs Park in Chicago. Though not officially so, the contest was indeed the championship game newspapers called it. Even the trappings of divisions were there had anyone taken the time to recall the traditional APFA teams. Akron was the best in the "east" which could have been considered to include Buffalo, Canton, Dayton, Cleveland, Columbus, and Rochester. The Staleys represented the top western team, having defeated the Cardinals, Rock Island, Chicago Tigers, Hammond, and having no need to demonstrate their superiority over Detroit or Muncie.

With Akron undefeated, George Halas' Staleys needed a victory to validate their championship pretensions. He hired "Paddy" Driscoll of the Cardinals for the day. The crowd was estimated as 12,000 by one newspaper. If true, that set still another Chicago pro football record.

Driscoll played well, and so did "Fritz" Pollard of Akron, but the game belonged to the defenses, where -- amid all the famous stars -- Akron guard Brad Tomlin was the standout. The Pros had slightly the better of it in the first half, and the Staleys held an edge in the second. Neither team could score.

For Akron, the tie was as good as a win.

Christmas was in the air when the last game was played on Sunday, December 19. Chris O'Brien's arrangement with "Paddy" Driscoll called for \$300 a game and a guarantee of ten games. The Cardinals had played only nine times. So, O'Brien gave "Paddy" and the other Cardinals a Christmas gift of a final payday by scheduling one last game. The opponent, nominally the Chicago Stayms, was reinforced by four Staleys, including Halas and Trafton, and a couple of Chicago Tigers. Surprisingly, two real

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Stayms players scored touchdowns, and the game ended in a 14- | 14 tie -- an appropriately indecisive end to an indecisive season.