

Birth and Rebirth

1922

By PFRA Research

1922 saw the Chicago Bears born and George Halas win his first league championship -- though not the one for '22. The resuscitated Canton Bulldogs took that, largely because the Bears came into being. A league franchise was granted to a town that had no football field, and several were granted to cities that had no teams. The Green Bay Packers were reborn after they'd been assassinated by a couple of obscure towns in Illinois.

It was a year when money talked -- loudly at the league meetings but softly to the press. It was a year when players gained ground on the field and lost ground to the owners. It was a year of great moral outrage and sharp practices.

It was also the first year that the National Football League actually called itself that. In 1920 and 1921, it went by the awkward and -- by 1922 -- misleading title of American Professional Football Association, misleading because the organization was no longer acting at all like the namby-pamby conglomeration of "associates" who met in Ralph Hay's Hupmobile showroom two years earlier. By now, under Joe Carr's leadership, the thing really was a league - the NFL!

Although George Halas' Chicago-based team was a first-rate outfit in 1921 -- perhaps the best in pro football -- he did not actually own the franchise. The Chicago Staleys were still the property of starch-maker A.E. Staley of Decatur, Ill. Halas and his partner, Ed "Dutch" Sternaman, were the managers of the team -- as well as coaches and star players -- but old A.E. still had the official ownership according to the league.

Halas told his story around the league, the one about Staley handing the team over to him and sending him on his way to Chicago with \$5,000. Apparently some of the owners -- perhaps those who had trouble scaring up \$100 to pay a halfback -- found the detailing of Staley's largesse a little hard to swallow.

There was no denying that Halas and Sternaman had treated the Staley franchise as their own in '21, making all the decisions and, more important, taking responsibility for profits and losses -- mostly losses once the bad weather hit. They paid themselves \$100 a week, the same as the other players got. Although Halas later claimed they finished the year with seven dollars in the bank, other sources give the final figure as \$71.63 in the red.

Nevertheless, George and Dutch believed there was a future in professional football.

But technically they didn't have a team. Starchmaker Staley was through with pro football -- except for the lifetime pass Halas eventually gave him -- and the Staley franchise would lapse when the required fees were not posted with the league.

In the meantime, it became critical that George and Dutch secure their own franchise in Chicago for 1922. Chic Harley's brother Bill, a veteran Chicago promoter, applied to the league for a Windy City franchise. Halas and Sternaman immediately asked for one of their own to replace the Staleys.

Having been on the scene since 1920, the former Staley leaders had the inside track. But clouding the issue was the fact that Chic Harley, the famed Ohio State All-American back, had come to the Staleys in 1921 through a deal arranged by his brother that guaranteed him a percentage of the profits. Two other Ohio State greats, speedy halfback Gaylord "Pete" Stinchcomb and guard John "Tarzan" Taylor, came along with Harley. As a matter of fact, Stinchcomb turned out to be far more important to the 1921 success of the Staleys than Chic Harley. By most accounts Chic was mainly a pain in neck to Halas and Sternaman. Nevertheless, Bill Harley contended that the deal arranged with his brother gave him a part interest in the Staleys.

At the league meeting, held at the Courtland Hotel in Canton on Saturday, Jan. 28, the managers and owners waited until they telephoned A.E. Staley in Decatur to get his version of the arrangement made with Halas in '21. Significantly, Halas and Sternaman were allowed to sit in on the meeting from the start. Then, in a vote that wasn't even close, the moguls awarded the franchise to ol' George and Dutch. A couple of years later, Harley took his argument that he was part owner of the long-departed Staley franchise to court, claiming a piece of the new franchise. He lost.

Halas and Sternaman established the team with capital stock of \$15,000, putting them head and shoulders above most of the league's teams financially. According to Halas, "Dutch and I put up \$2,500 each and another \$2,500 jointly. We locked the remainder of the stock in a safe. The

The Professional Football Researchers Association

\$7,500 cash would see the new club through the winter and pay training costs in the autumn."

When it came to naming the club, the first thought was to call them the Cubs, after the baseball team whose park they would play in. Halas had great respect for William Veeck Sr., the Cub president. However, even the most casual observer knows that cubs are playful little fellows, amusing but lacking in ferocity. Ah, but what is a cub grown to its full magnificence?

And so, the Chicago Bears were born.

Whether the Staleys of the year before were really the defending champions was not yet officially settled. They and the Buffalo All-Americans had both finished with nine wins and one loss. The Staleys had been tied once and the All-Americans twice, but their only losses were to each other. Buffalo argued that its 10-7 defeat at Chicago on Dec. 4 was only a postseason exhibition and shouldn't be counted, but the All-Americans were willing to settle for a co-championship. Halas argued that his victory over the All-Americans in the second meeting carried more weight than his earlier loss at Buffalo. He was willing to settle for second place -- for Buffalo.

Once Papa Bear had his franchise and a permanent seat on the council, the question of whose view would carry the day became moot to anyone who knew George Halas. Sure enough, the problem was referred to the executive committee, and after that the Staleys were referred to as the 1921 champs.

Buffalo fans never quite understood how they could have been hailing their heroes as co-champions until that meeting and then suddenly found themselves with a second-best team. Reportedly, the Buffalo players had been given little gold footballs engraved "1921 co-champions."

However, at Halas's urging, the league was simply following procedure and precedent.

The procedure in its first season and for several seasons thereafter was to vote on the championship at the first league meeting after the season's end. The team with the best winning percentage didn't automatically win the title. In 1920 the Akron Pros went undefeated but had to wait until the league meeting to be officially declared the champions. The rationale was that schedules varied widely from team to team, in number of games and quality of opponents. In theory, a team might play a minimum number of games against the weakest opponents and then claim the crown while an obviously stronger team with a poorer percentage finished as an also-ran. Hence the league, not the standings, chose the champion.

The precedent had been established long before the league existed that in two meetings between teams of equal merit, the second game was the determiner. Several unofficial state championships were decided on that basis

before World War I. The Staley-Buffalo situation was classic -- both teams undefeated except against each other.

A modern fan might think of the Dec. 4 meeting in which the Staleys defeated the All-Americans as a "championship game" -- so did some contemporary writers. But such was not the case. As a matter of fact, the Staleys had to defeat Canton the next week to get their nine victories. So, while the 10-7 Staley victory went a long way toward winning them the title, it was really just a normal "league game" as far as the schedule was concerned.

To add to the confusion, sportswriters of the time had the habit of referring to any game that counted toward the championship as a "championship game." That definition included every game played between two league members. And finally, to compound the mess, at some later date the league published inaccurate standings for 1921, showing the Staleys with ten wins and Buffalo with nine. We can only theorize that someone in the league office, at a loss to explain why the Staleys were recognized as '21 champs, noticed that Chicago Bear records list ten wins for the Staleys in that year. The Bear records were right in one way: the '21 Staleys defeated ten opponents, but the first one was not a league member. On Oct. 2, at Decatur, they kayoed the Waukegan American Legion team 35-0. In modern parlance, it was an exhibition game.

THE CURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM

With the 1921 title resolved, the moguls moved on to higher finance. Leo Lyons demanded that the Washington club pay him an \$800 guarantee for a game not played in December in Washington. It happened that the weather was so awful in the capital on the day of the game that Lyons' Rochester Jeffersons refused to take the field and actually forfeited. Nevertheless, Lyons insisted that he was due \$800 for showing up at all, and the league bosses agreed.

The Washington club was instructed to pay the man his money or give up its membership in the league. Since no one from Washington had come to Canton to be instructed because the D.C. club had no intention of remaining in the league, the threat had as much effect as bombing icebergs with ice cubes.

That Washington \$800 was to become a running joke at future league meetings. Lyons kept bringing it up and the league kept threatening. And Washington kept its \$800.

Lyons needed a good lawyer, but Green Bay needed a doctor. At the same meeting that considered Lyons' \$800 and the future of pro football in Chicago, the Packers died. A small-time football game played in central Illinois killed them.

To understand the circumstances of the Packers' demise, we have to go back to the fall of 1920 in Carlinville, Ill., where the local semi-pros defeated their arch rivals, Taylorville, by a 10-7 score. Several Taylorville rooters,

The Professional Football Researchers Association

their wallets substantially lightened by the events of the day, promised loudly that next year would be different. In 1921 Carlinville would play at Taylorville, of course, but there seemed to be more than "home-field advantage" in the Taylorville boast.

Whether it was in response to the tone of the Taylorvillians or simply an idea whose time had come, a couple of Carlinvillians conceived the plan of hiring some hotshot college boys to pad their lineup for the '21 Taylorville game. Entreaties were made to members of the famous Notre Dame team in the form of \$200-per-body promises. Ten of the Irish accepted.

With the game in the bag, the instigators of the plot passed the word to some of their Carlinville buddies to bet the mortgage money. The buddies told other buddies who told others, and pretty soon just about everyone in Carlinville was hauling his cash out of the bank, the cupboard, or his mattress and looking for Taylorville takers. Even the farmers from the outlying areas, once they learned about the arrangement with the Notre Damers, joined in the general stampede to put a little money down on Carlinville. Everything might have gone as planned if only the Carlinville folks had shown a little discretion in passing along their "confidential information." But loose lips sink ships, and Taylorville soon learned it was about to be torpedoed by a crew of ringers from South Bend.

The first reaction in Taylorville was consternation. They'd been had! There was the humiliation of losing, of course, but worse was the thought of all those wagers so willingly accepted. All the money lost! What could they do?

It has not been recorded who, but someone in Taylorville made the observation that Notre Dame wasn't the only institution of higher learning to field a football team. In fact, the university right there in Illinois had been known to have some fair country players. Certain folks in Taylorville grinned. Arrangements were made, and certain "in-the-know" Taylorvillians smiled broadly. Carlinville folks kept right on dropping by with suggestions that Taylorville folks put their money where their mouths were. Certain Taylorvillians almost fell down scrambling to get their greenbacks out.

Came the big day and a special train was hired to convey the Carlinville fans to Taylorville. A band was even taken along on the trip. At the field, the last few bets were laid. Each side, it was estimated, had put down \$50,000 on its favorite.

The "Carlinville" team trotted out on the field. The band somehow suppressed the urge to play "Shake Down the Thunder," but the whole Carlinville side rose to cheer. Except for one woman who somehow hadn't gotten the word.

"What are we yelling for?" she asked. "That's the Taylorville team."

A Taylorville policeman standing nearby assured her that the athletes she saw were indeed the Carlinville team.

"I guess I know our boys!" the woman replied indignantly. "Not one of those fellows is from Carlinville!"

The policeman bit his tongue.

Taylorville used its regular team for the entire first half, and the boys did themselves proud. At the intermission they actually led 7-0. No doubt the Notre Damers were taking things a bit easy, figuring they could rip off a couple of touchdowns any time they were of a mind.

But at the beginning of the second half, nine regulars from the University of Illinois moved into the Taylorville lineup. Included among the Illini were three outstanding backs: Laurie Walquist, Jack Crangle and Joey Sternaman, quarterbacking brother of Halas' partner Dutch.

In the ensuing action, the Carlinville Irish were run silly around the ends by Sternaman, cracked comatose up the middle by Crangle, and passed weary all over the place by Walquist. Their fans were relieved of \$50,000 by the 16-0 final score.

If anyone really expected to keep a \$100,000 football game a secret he must have been raised on the moon. Before some of the college boys were back in their dorms, it seemed most of the western world knew what had happened at Taylorville.

Naturally, there was an investigation -- several, in fact.

Dick Simpson, manager of the Taylorville team, readily admitted hiring the Illinois bunch, but because he "did not want to get any college players in bad," he wouldn't say whether he had paid them. The Illinois players said he hadn't.

The Taylorville coach had an interesting point of view. He insisted that the Illinois players were already professionals, having been "hired" by the university.

At South Bend, Johnny Mohardt, an ace halfback widely suspected of having taken part in the game, denied playing for Carlinville, and suggested that the small-town folks had been duped into hiring some non-football-playing Notre Damers. He offered an interesting piece of "proof." How could nine Illini, coming off a 3-4-0 season, he asked, lick ten Fighting Irish, fresh from a 10-1-0 year? Furthermore, who would believe the Taylorville farm boys could lead Notre Dame 7-0 at the half?

On the evening of Jan. 27, 1922, the University of Illinois disqualified nine of its athletes from further sports competition for having played as professionals in Taylorville. The next morning the only professional football league on the planet opened its winter meeting in Canton. It was more than coincidence that the Canton Repository placed its story of the suspensions at Illinois (headlined:

The Professional Football Researchers Association

"Illinois Hangs the Can on Nine for Semi-Pro Playing") directly below its story of the league meeting (headlined: "Pro Football Moguls Here Today to Thresh Out Many Problems for Next Season").

One of the main problems for the moguls to thresh out was the old one of how to stop themselves from playing -- and paying -- players with remaining college eligibility. The practice had been outlawed on the books since 1920, and the rule had been scrupulously obeyed -- whenever convenient. Allegedly -- hell, ACTUALLY -- several of the assembled moguls had refused to be inconvenienced in 1921 and had hired themselves some college boys.

Indiscretions like these made the pros as popular with the colleges as acne at the junior high. Early in January at a New York City meeting, the college coaches vowed to pen drastic legislation that would somehow doom the pros. At the time, few really believed the coaches would go that far, and no one knew how they might accomplish such a thing. Still, when they came to Canton, the pro owners were in a mood to placate the colleges.

Then word arrived of the Taylorville scandal and of the nine sacked Illini. The situation was ripe for over-reaction.

Ironically, one of the teams accused of playing a college man was the host of the meeting -- the Canton Bulldogs. Notre Dame's great guard Heartley "Hunk" Anderson had been spotted in a couple of Bulldog games near the end of the '21 season, playing under an assumed name. As the league also had a rule against playing under false monickers, Canton was in double Dutch.

However, Ralph Hay, the Canton owner-manager, facilely explained that Anderson had only played in exhibition games, and besides, he'd already been ruled a professional because of other transgressions that he'd made before joining the 'Dogs. The assembled moguls decided to avoid any show of bad manners; they would not slap down their host.

Next came Philadelphia.

Well, explained Manager Leo Conway, his team hadn't even been in the league in 1921 and was only now applying for a franchise. Besides, HIS collegian -- All-American Glenn Killinger of Penn State -- had signed a baseball contract before he played for Philadelphia, and so he was already a pro, just like Anderson.

There was a lot of sense in that, the moguls decided. Perhaps they didn't even consider the possibility of sharing lucrative receipts from large Philadelphia crowds as they welcomed Conway aboard.

So far, the league was 0 for 2 in sacrificing lambs. Nevertheless, some kind of show was necessary, especially in light of Taylorville. Just before they took a dinner break, Ralph Hay pointed an accusing finger at the Green Bay management and brought up the stories about

college men playing there. Probably a couple of the assembled had to be told just where Green Bay was, but no one had to be told that it was little. A manager couldn't get rich taking his team to Green Bay. There was much to be considered here, and the owners and managers decided they could think better on full bellies. Off they went to Bender's Restaurant in downtown Canton.

In "The History of the Green Bay Packers: The Lambeau Years," author Larry Names suggests that much of the anti-Green Bay agitation came from George Halas of the Chicago Bears. Names' thesis rests in part on the fact that one of the Notre Dame players used by the Packers was (again!) Hunk Anderson, and Halas intended to sign Anderson legally for the 1922 season. The second fact presented by Names is that articles reporting the Packers' transgression appeared in the Chicago Tribune shortly after the game in which Anderson and two other Notre Damers played. Names asserts that Halas wrote the articles. Therefore, adding it all up, he finds a sinister conspiracy between Halas and Joe Carr to keep Green Bay out of the league until Anderson graduated from Notre Dame and could be signed by Halas.

Names may have a point that Halas would lobby to drop Green Bay from the league. It's hard to picture Papa Bear bad-mouthing pro football to the press, but he might well have worked behind the scenes to remove an obligation to schedule a team that figured to be a poor draw. If the league needed a sacrificial lamb, Green Bay was a prime candidate.

As to a plot to keep the Packers out of the league so Halas could sign Anderson, it seems an awful lot of trouble to go through to hire a guard, even a very good guard. Besides, couldn't Halas have simply offered Anderson a better contract than Green Bay?

Apparently things were fixed up over the victuals. When they returned to the Courtland Hotel, J.E. Clair of the Acme Packing Company, the boss of the Green Bay Packers, took the floor. Yes, the Packers had indeed fielded college players in 1921. Yes, they were from Notre Dame (again!). Absolutely, they'd played under assumed names. No, there were no extenuating circumstances. Yes, the Packers were heartily sorry. And yes, they asked permission to withdraw from the league.

The requested permission was voted in the affirmative quicker than you could say "Packer Backer." Mr. Clair was returned his \$50 -- the price of his franchise in 1921 -- and sent packing. Green Bay had been officially punished. The league had thunderingly upheld the sanctity of college amateur ideals -- and it hadn't hurt a bit.

In fact, they even let it be known that they'd required each team to post a \$1,000 guarantee to be forfeited by any club doing a no-no with a college kid. In a sense, that was true. The grand was posted as a guarantee of fulfilling contractual obligations. There were all sorts of obligations, like showing up for games, having a place to play, and so

The Professional Football Researchers Association

forth. The league was beating its collective chest against playing college eligibles, so a team was sort of obligated not to do it.

In his book, Larry Names adds that Curly Lambeau immediately applied for a new Green Bay franchise at the January meeting. A report to that end appeared in the Green Bay Press-Gazette. However, no record of such an application shows up in the league minutes, or in any of the Ohio newspaper reports of the meeting. Perhaps Lambeau was told that an official application at that time stood no chance at all of passing.

THE SKY'S NOT THE LIMIT

The annual election of officers brought no surprises. Carr was re-elected president, John Dunn of the Minneapolis Marines was the new vice president, and Dayton's Carl Storck, absent from the meeting, was re-elected secretary and treasurer.

Before they broke up, the moguls sat around discussing the various thises and thats they wanted to put into the new league constitution. Of particular interest was a proposal for setting a weekly salary limit for the 18-man roster. In other words, a manager was to be honor bound to spend no more than "X" amount in salaries each week, but he was free to spread it around any way he wanted.

The different managers were polled as to suggestions for "X," and the results were interesting. Tommy Hughitt, representing the Buffalo All-Americans but also the Buffalo quarterback, suggested \$2,000. Sternaman agreed with that figure, but Halas went for \$1,800, the most popular amount. Chris O'Brien of the poor-relation Cardinals preferred \$1,500. Considering that he was paying Paddy Driscoll at least \$300 a game, he obviously didn't plan to reward any of his other players royally. Aaron Hertzman of poor Louisville, a team that stayed on the road as a "breather" for the contenders, had the low bid of \$1,200.

Generally, the suggested salary figures could have been ranged alongside the order of the 1921 standings and it would have been hard to tell one from the other. Hughitt moved that the salary cap be set at \$1,800, including hotel and traveling expenses. Halas seconded it, but the motion lost. They decided they'd settle the whole thing later when the new constitution and by-laws were ratified.

In the meantime, maybe the bar at Benders was still open. News stories of the meeting -- based on interviews with owners -- stressed the league's firm stand against the seduction of amateurs. That didn't stop the league from getting its first eight-column headline in a major city newspaper two days later when Chicago University coach Amos Alonzo Stagg sounded off in the Windy City. The Herald and Examiner headed the story "Stagg Says Conference Will Break Professional Football Menace."

The day after the league meeting, Rivers Anderson, business manager of the Carlenville team, told the Associated Press that he had personally "hired and paid

Notre Dame men "for the Taylorville game the previous fall. He complained that many of the Irish were substitutes although he had expected the first team. Johnny Mohardt did not play, Anderson added.

The Taylorville coach, Lionel Moise, said that to his knowledge there was not a single Notre Dame man in his lineup.

At South Bend, reports indicated that Mohardt would be cleared of playing at Taylorville. Coach Knute Rockne announced, "If any Notre Dame man is found guilty of playing professional football or in any way violating the college rules, either in spirit or letter, we shall not be the least bit lenient. We cannot, for we have to protect our college, and we must protect college football from the encroachments professionalism is trying to make on it." The A.P. said Rockne had "long been known as a staunch enemy of professional football." Certainly he had been against it ever since he last played for the Massillon Tigers in 1919.

On Jan. 30, eight Notre Dame players confessed to playing at Taylorville. They included All-American end Eddie Anderson, who was to become one of the greatest and most popular of college football coaches; fullback Chet Wynne, the track team captain; end Roger Kiley, the basketball captain; tackle "Buck" Shaw, who would win most of his fame as a pro coach; center Harry Mehre; and back Bob Phelan. Since three other Notre Damers, including Hunk Anderson, had been disqualified earlier for playing for Green Bay (against Racine in a non-league game) at the end of the '21 season, and with the normal toll of graduation, the Fighting Irish had tough sledding on the gridiron in 1922. As a matter of fact, Rockne was forced to go with four sophomores as a starting backfield. Their names were Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden.

Happily, Johnny Mohardt was cleared of playing for Taylorville. Nor had he played alongside Hec Garvey, Ojay Larson and Hunk Anderson for Green Bay against Racine. On Feb. 3, just before his mid-year graduation, Johnny explained the whole thing -- he'd played for Racine! Three days later he signed a baseball contract with the Detroit Tigers.

While all this was going on, Stagg and other college coaches kept griping about professionalism and threatening drastic action. In Columbus, Joe Carr kept insisting that his league wanted only peace, honesty, fair play, and anything else the colleges wanted.

And in Carlenville, Rivers Anderson said he'd been misquoted. He never paid a Notre Dame player, never saw a Notre Dame player. What's a Notre Dame?

When the club managers got together at Cleveland's Hollenden Hotel on June 24, they decided to call their little group the National Football League. The "Football" was true enough; so was the "League" -- far more accurate and much stronger than "Association," with its "let's get together

The Professional Football Researchers Association

for lunch" connotation. But "National" it wasn't. With New York and Washington out and Philadelphia unable to get off the ground, the most eastern team was Rochester. And the Jeffersons played on the road most of the time. The same was true of Louisville, the most southernly team. Rock Island, the team farthest west, at least played there sometimes. If the league powers had been totally honest, they'd have called it the Midwest Football League.

However, they could argue that their hope was to someday be national. Just not right now. So their next order of business was to grant franchises to four more teams from the Midwest: Youngstown, Ohio, under former Akron coach Elgie Tobin; La Rue, Ohio; Racine, Wis.; and Green Bay.

Green Bay?

The heat had lessened considerably. Green Bay coach Earl "Curly" Lambeau was able to walk into the meeting and plop down some borrowed cash to put the Packers back into the league. Happily, no one asked any embarrassing questions like who was more likely to have been responsible for hiring those three Fighting Irish in '21 - meat packer J.E. Clair or ex-Notre Dame sub Lambeau? For cosmetic purposes, Curly renamed the team the "Blues," but the new title never took. After a while, even the Green Bay Press-Gazette went back to calling them the Packers. By any name, they had returned, and this time they stayed.

Youngstown didn't. Along with Conway's Philadelphians and a New Haven franchise awarded earlier, they were stillborn and played no football in 1922. But Racine, sparked by coach and fullback Hank Gillo, fielded a respectable team for several years.

La Rue was something else. La Rue, Ohio, didn't even have a football field. However, it had the biggest mail-order Aredale puppy business in the world, and pro football was still thought of in some circles as a way of advertising. But the team -- the Oorang Indians -- created an unforgettable chapter in league history. Led by Jim Thorpe, the Oorangs were the only all-Indian team ever to be a member of the National Football League.