

Let's Play Two!

1913

By PFRA Research

The year 1913 saw an event that changed football forever -- the forward pass was unchained. Although the unfettering occurred on a college field in the East and had its greatest influence there, it also affected the way the game was played on the college and pro gridirons of the Midwest.

Forward passing had been legalized in 1906, but throwing the ball was still thought of in many influential circles as a last-gasp, desperation tactic. Small wonder considering the various rules that hedged and constricted forwards during their first years of legality.

For example, any pass thrown downfield had to cross the line of scrimmage at least five yards out to either side of where the ball was snapped. This was awkward, time-consuming, and tended to get a would-be passer flattened by a hard-charging defensive end. To aid officials in determining whether a pass had actually met the five-yard requirement, the field was lined off both vertically and horizontally making it look more suitable for a giant tic-tac-toe game than football. The passer, incidentally, was fair game for flattening both before and after he threw.

A team throwing an incomplete pass was penalized. With only three plays to gain a first down, the rule until 1912, risking a precious down on an iffy proposition like a pass did not appeal to many coaches. Moreover, a pass caught on the far side of the goal line was not a touchdown but a touchback, with the opponent taking over the ball at the 20-yard-line. Worst of all, if a pass was touched but not caught by a receiver, it was treated as a fumble and either team could recover.

Walter Camp, the Grand Guru of Football, wished to have the whole forward pass idea repealed. Usually what Camp wanted, Camp got. For thirty years he had been the prime mover on the college rules committee (which was, of course, the only rules committee at the time). However, some of the younger coaches such as Percy Haughton of Harvard saw a future in the pass and wanted the rules liberalized. A small revolt against Camp took place, and the conservative Camp lost. Although he continued to be honored and respected as the Father of Football, he never quite regained his control over his offspring.

Happily, the five-yards-out rule was eliminated in 1910 and football fields returned to looking like gridirons instead of checker boards. The bad part was that a passer had to be at least five yards behind the line of scrimmage to throw, and the pass could be in the air no further than 20 yards. Determining whether a pass had gone nineteen or twenty-one yards provoked countless arguments. In 1911, Notre Dame held on to defeat Wabash when an official decided a pass that would have given Wabash a winning

touchdown had been in the air too far. A greater breakthrough came in 1912 when the silly 20-yard limitation was lifted and the establishment of end zones made it possible to throw a pass over the goal line for a touchdown.

Things were eased, but the floodgates were far from open. This was especially true in the East where Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and a couple of other schools were still believed to be playing the best and most important football in America. A real risk-taking coach like Haughton of Harvard might use it once or twice a game as a surprise weapon. But for most coaches in the conservative East, the forward pass was still generally reserved for teams losing in the last minute of play. And, because most of the important football writers were in the important East writing about the important football there, forward passing got little mention on a national level. Nevertheless, some innovative coaches in the Midwest experimented with throwing the football. Among them were Bob Zuppke at Illinois, Alonzo Stagg at Chicago, and Jess Harper at Wabash. Harper was particularly clever. Because there was no penalty against it, he taught his quarterback, "Skeets" Lambert, to intentionally ground the ball when a completion seemed unlikely. He also figured out that because the rules gave the ball over to the defenders when a pass went out of bounds, an accurate incomplete pass could sometimes be used to pen an opponent near his own goal line better than a punt. Instead of fearing the pass as most eastern coaches, Harper embraced it.

In 1913, Harper became football coach at Notre Dame. He found himself in possession of a pair of players who had fallen in love with the pass. Knute Rockne, who would eventually succeed Harper at Notre Dame and go on to become football's most legendary coach, was at that time a squat senior end with sure hands. Charles "Gus" Dorais, who would also become a successful coach, was a 147-pound quarterback with a cannon for an arm. All the previous summer, Dorais and Rockne had practiced throwing and catching footballs on the beach at Cedar Point on Lake Erie where they had vacation jobs at a restaurant. By the time football season began, they had forward passing thing down pat.

It may be hard to believe today, but in 1913 hardly any football fans in the East had ever heard of Notre Dame. For that matter, the Golden Domers weren't exactly famous in the Midwest. The Irish usually won more than they lost and the coach who preceded Harper had gone undefeated for two years, but their opponents were schools like Butler, St. Viator, Morris Harvey, and Marquette - - none of whom were powers even in the Midwest. Just why an important eastern football power like the United States Military Academy at West Point -- Army, for short -- deigned to put this little

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school from Indiana on its 1913 schedule is hard to understand. Perhaps the Cadets were just looking for a breather.

At any rate, the out-of-towners showed up on the plains of West Point on the afternoon of November 1, 1913, and football was never quite the same again. Notre Dame didn't pass from desperation; Dorais threw with determination. The forward pass was an integral part of the Irish attack, and Army was dumbfounded. From the impact this game made, one might think little Gus tossed pass after pass. In point of fact, he threw only seventeen times. But he completed thirteen for 243 yards. And the result was five touchdowns! One reporter wrote in obvious amazement, "Dorais shot forward passes into the outstretched arms of his ends ... often as far as 35 yards away."

The 35-13 win put Notre Dame on the football map, of course. The "little school from Indiana" was on its way to making its name synonymous with gridiron glory. In retrospect, the victory was more astonishing in the East than it should have been. Although outweighed by fifteen pounds per man, Notre Dame had a terrific team that could do a lot more than pass. When Army changed its defense to stop Dorais' passes, the little quarterback handed off to fullback Ray Eichenlaub and the Irish continued to gain. Quite possibly, Notre Dame could have won with straight football.

However, among influential Eastern coaches and writers, David had downed Goliath because of the forward pass. The maneuver had been not just legalized but legitimized. It now took its place in the arsenals of football's Eastern trend-setting teams. In the Midwest where forward passes had been far more prevalent even before Notre Dame's big win, throwing the ball became all the more popular. And, of course, fans loved to see footballs flying all over the lot.

Needless to say, pleasing the fans was a necessity for any professional team's survival, and the pro teams also became more air conscious. An additional appeal for teams that imported ringers who often didn't arrive in town until the day of the game was that the passing game required little practice.

But if pro football was to grow, more than a few aerial fireworks were needed.

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For the game to prosper, Jack Cusack believed, the constant jumping of players from one team to another had to be stopped. It increased the cost of putting a team on the field. Worse, fans couldn't really identify with a team whose roster changed drastically from week to week and that cut into attendance. Cusack convinced the Canton players to play for regular salaries instead of shares of the gate receipts in 1913, a risky step but one that was necessary if the team was to grow stronger. Players with regular salaries were less likely to jump to another team to share in a big game's gate. Then he and the managers of the other major area teams quietly arranged among themselves that once a player signed with a team, he was that team's property until released. It was a gentleman's agreement that would be effective only so long as all the managers acted like gentlemen.

Whether the plan worked perfectly or partially is impossible to gauge at this distance. In his memoirs, Cusack indicated that player movement was reduced in 1913, but that contention is not necessarily supported by the lineups printed in newspapers. Parratt's lineups changed weekly. "Dutch" Speck, the eternal pro, left Cusack's Canton team after three games to join Elyria, but whether he made the jump with Cusack's blessing is unknown.

The most interesting and wholesale example of players switching teams involved Elyria. The Athletics began the season as though they would repeat their championship. On October 5, they defeated Parratt's Akron Indians 16-14 on a dropkicked, 20-yard field goal by Homer Davidson in the final five minutes. Kagy, Wertz, Collins, and Pendleton who had starred for Elyria in 1912 were in the Akron lineup alongside Parratt, but Elyria still retained several of the linemen from their championship team, including end Stan Wells. Both Athletics' touchdowns were scored by another holdover, Dud Schreiner, the Cleveland sandlotter.

Schreiner starred the following week when he raced 63 yards to a touchdown with an intercepted Canton pass to cinch Elyria's victory over Cusack's pros at Canton.

Elyria still maintained an all-star lineup two weeks later when the Athletics went back for a second dip at Akron. By then Speck was installed at guard for the Athletics. Parratt countered by bringing rugged Ted Nesser up from the Columbus Panhandles to square off against Speck. Another Akron import was Jay Ingersoll, a back who had starred in the East for Dartmouth a few years before. His strategy proved sound. Ingersoll scored a touchdown for Akron, and Nesser battled Speck to a draw as the Indians triumphed 20-0. And, with that catastrophic defeat, the Elyria Athletics disappeared. Newspaper coverage is spotty, but it's likely the Elyria team had been losing money. All their important games were played away from home where guarantees were unlikely to cover the salaries of their stars. Perhaps, the Elyria A.C. was willing to subsidize the team so long as it was a champion, but as soon as it fell to also-ran status, the cushion was removed. Or, perhaps their star players simply received better offers from other teams.

One week later, Homer Davidson, Dud Schreiner, "Dutch" Speck, and five other former Athletics showed up under the guise of the Coleman A.C. of Akron. C.P. Parker, secretary for Akron's Interstate League baseball team, had formed a new Akron football team to compete with Parratt's Indians and convinced a few of Parratt's regulars to enroll. When the Elyrians were added in November, Parker had an instant championship contender. There actually was no Coleman Athletic Club; the name was applied because the team played home games at the Coleman Athletic Field. In Akron, they were sometimes called "Coleman's Akron Indians." as opposed to Parratt's Akron Indians.

Whatever the name, the new club blitzed Canton 26-0 on November 2 at Akron, scoring two touchdowns on recovered fumbles and another on a pass interception. Tony Wein, the veteran halfback, scored the only offensive touchdown on a short plunge.

The Coleman club was scheduled to come to Canton the next week, but a snow storm postponed the meeting. On November 16, the teams met again at Canton's League Park. This time the Red

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and White played a more sure-handed game. Homer Davidson wasn't on the field when his team scored a first half touchdown so Dud Schreiner tried for the extra point and missed. In the third quarter, Canton's E.C. "Smoke" Smalley burst into the open after catching a long pass from Ray McGregor in the middle of a crowd. Dick Van Allman blocked out the final Akron defender, allowing Smalley to complete a 58-yard jaunt to the end zone. When Smalley also added the conversion, Canton led 7-6.

With time running out, Homer Davidson tried a dropkick from the 28-yard-line. Referee Haggerty standing behind Davidson wasn't sure of the result and asked the umpire, a gentleman named Schleininger. The ump signaled that the kick had missed by about eight inches. Davidson disagreed violently, perhaps influenced somewhat by the fact that Schleininger was a Canton resident. After a long, loud argument, Davidson left the field still claiming a 9-7 win, a claim that impressed Canton not at all.

The Blues went into the season determined to bring the state title back to Shelby. Manager John Miller spared no expense, signing up Don Hamilton, a former Notre Dame quarterback, "Bugs" Raymond and "Dutch" Powell, a pair of ex-Ohio State linemen, sandlot center Guy Schultz, and several other former college stars. The Blues opened at home with a 122-0 trampling of the Cleveland Brooklyn A.C., but two weeks later they were held to a scoreless tie by the Oakwoods at Dayton.

On November 9, the team and 140 of their fans went to Akron to win the title from Parratt's Indians. Instead, they ran into the same fierce snow storm that also cancelled the game in Canton. When the Blues returned on the following Sunday, a couple of the stars they'd previously lined up didn't show. Nevertheless, the reported payroll was \$700. It went for naught. Parratt's team won 20-0, effectively ending Shelby's title hopes.

The Toledo Maroons continued to improve. Manager Art Gratot, who had played center for them when they began as a kids' team, put the Maroons through a more demanding schedule than they had ever faced before, and they came through with a 7-1-1 record that included wins over the Detroit Herald, Ann Arbor, and the Columbus Muldoons. Such players as quarterback Billy Marshall, tackle Bob Trout, and runner Jimmy Baxter were improving every year. Unfortunately, when they went to Akron on November 2 to face Parratt's Indians in the one game that could have put them into the state's first echelon, they were bombed 47-0.

Though not in the same class as Parratt's Indians or Canton's pros, such teams as the Columbus Panhandles, Cincinnati Celts, and Dayton Oakwoods were respectable southern Ohio elevens. In 1913, a new power arose in Dayton -- the St. Mary's Cadets. Originally made up mostly of graduates of St. Mary's Institute (now the University of Dayton), the young Cadets included several players who would remain with them until well after they entered the National Football League as the Dayton Triangles in 1920. Two of their best were Norb Sacksteder, one of the greatest breakaway runners ever to dodge down an Ohio gridiron, and Alphonse Mahrt, a passer who Dayton fans thirty years later remembered as superior to "Slingin' Sammy" Baugh. During an undefeated, seven-game season, the Cadets downed Christ Church of Cincinnati and

the Cincinnati Celts and won their city's championship with a pair of wins over the Oakwoods.

Jack Cusack was 21 years old when he became the Canton manager in 1912; at that time the team was sponsored by the Canton A.C. In 1913, he and fullback Roscoe "Monk" Oberlin took over ownership of the team. They both realized the team needed to be upgraded if it was to compete with Parratt's Akron teams. When the players agreed to accept salaries rather than dividing the profits, Cusack and Oberlin were able to bring in a few ex-college players to supplement their team of sandlotters. They also improved the coaching by hiring Harry Hazlett, the coach at McKinley High School. The budget, however, had its limits.

"Money posed a problem for Oberlin and myself," Casack recalled. "Since our cash resources were at low ebb we had to depend heavily on gate receipts, and attendance varied. The first few games of the season often would draw as few as 500 half-dollar admissions, which didn't pay many salaries, but the games with Akron would draw around 2,500, and those with Shelby and Elyria about 1,500 each. At first we had no reserved seats to augment the take, but we installed them in the following year, gaining a seating capacity of 1,500 -- and, of course, some extra revenue."

Canton's hopes to match Parratt were dashed long before the big game with Akron. A tie with the Toledo Maroons followed by the loss to Elyria had the Red and White out of the race before October was over. Then the upstart Coleman A.C. beat them badly in early November. The turn-around win over the Coleman club was disputed, somewhat muting any benefit Canton derived.

Nevertheless, Canton felt it might gain a claim to the state title with a win over Parratt's Indians on Thanksgiving. Akron was already trumpeting a championship, but it did have a loss (to Elyria) on its record. What really put the Indians' title in jeopardy was that incredibly Parratt had scheduled two games for the same day.

As November drew to a close, Parratt had invitations from both Canton and Shelby but room for only one on his schedule. Both teams figured to draw well, and what with snow storms and rainy days, the 1913 season had not been a lucrative one. Parratt solved the problem by slating Shelby for Thanksgiving morning in Akron and then going to Canton for an afternoon game. It was a crazy sort of gamble; a loss in either contest could lose Parratt the state championship and ultimately that could cost him more in future attendances than he could make with his two-in-one day.

Shelby was out of the championship race and playing for pride, but they brought a lineup studded with former college stars to Akron for the morning game. Both teams put up staunch defenses. Akron had only two scoring chances. Kagy missed a field goal try and, on another occasion, a long forward pass fell just outside the receiver's grasp at Shelby's eight-yard-line. The Blues' offense was even more completely stymied, but the visitors nearly won on an Akron fumble. Pendleton, Shelby's big tackle, picked up the ball and had a clear field to the goal line forty yards away. But, before he could get into high gear, Ted Nesser, playing guard for the Indians, hopped on his back and rode him to earth. The scoreless tie left Parratt's club still in front in the championship race.

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A disappointing crowd of only 1,300 turned out at Canton's League Park. The same Akron crew who had earlier played 60 rugged minutes in Akron took the field at Canton. Early in the second quarter, the Indians finally scored their first points of the day. Muff Portmann, all 246 pounds of him, thundered 23 yards on a tackle-around play to set up the Indians at Canton's four-yard-line. Joe Collins slashed the remaining yards for a touchdown on the next play, and Dwight Wertz added the point.

Before the period ended, Canton countered with a scoring pass from Eddie Van Allman to Earl "Ducky" Terrett. Smoke Smalley tied the game 7-7 with his extra-point kick. The defenses clamped down in the second half, and the game ended in a draw.

The pair of ties nailed the Indians' state championship, but, because they had not played the Coleman A.C., they didn't have an undisputed claim on Akron's city title. Parratt took care of that little item three days later when his ironmen swamped the Coleman's 30-0.