

Repeat Performance

The D.C. & A.C. Continues Winning: 1899

By PFRA Research

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It's a matter of taste. Some fans like suspense in their football -- close games decided only in the final seconds, championship races with all the teams in contention, everybody at .500 -- even-money bets. On the other hand, some fans prefer to see their favorite team win every game with enough points to look like an FM station, have the title locked up October 1, the closest opponent experiencing vertigo -- sure-things. THOSE fans would have loved the 1899 season so long as they rooted for the Duquesne Country and Athletic Club. If they had the misfortune to be supporters of the Pittsburgh A.C., the Greensburg A.A., or Latrobe, they wouldn't have been very happy. In fact, they practically wouldn't have had anybody to root for.

The P.A.C. finally decided the cost of paying football players only to watch them lose to the D.C. & A.C. was a poor investment for the club's treasury. They disappeared from the Pittsburgh grid scene with hardly a ripple.

Greensburg also closed up shop for 1899 after a decline in both interest and finances in 1898. In mid-August some efforts were made to reorganize a team around a nucleus of local members of the '98 squad abetted by some pirated Latrobe players, but the plans fell through.

John Brallier was off to Philadelphia to study dentistry at Medico-Chiurgical College and star for its football team. Before leaving, he coached the Indiana Normal team for a few weeks. As usual, Latrobe's football revolved around Brallier and Greensburg. With the quarterback unavailable and no rivalry with Greensburg to spur local enthusiasm, there wasn't any good reason to field a pro team. They played as an amateur team in 1899 although some of the players had been paid in seasons past. Ed Abbaticchio, doubly a pro in that he also played major league baseball, Harry Ryan, Marcus Saxman and Charles McDyre were among the born-again amateurs who toiled for Latrobe's play-for-the-fun-of-it bunch.

The team supposedly won all four of its games, with a 35-0 Thanksgiving Day victory over Indiana Normal climaxing the season, but some scores have been lost and one is in error. According to Latrobe's records, they opened their short season with a 12-0 win over the Duquesne Country and Athletic club. Not only was Latrobe incapable of beating the D.C. & A.C. in 1899, they couldn't have got on the Red and Black's schedule with a gun. It's possible Latrobe played the Duquesne's reserves, but more likely the opponent was the Duquesne Club, another amateur outfit, whose football team resembled the mighty D.C. & A.C. in name only. In 1899, the Duquesne Country and Athletic Club were even stronger than in '98. Hot-tempered Church went off to coach Georgetown University, but the line remained rock solid. Gelbert

was still the "miracle man" at one end. Otto Wagonhurst, ex of Penn, drew raves at tackle. Weinstein, Lawlor, Jennings, and "Doc" Rayl were strong in the middle. New in the backfield with Gammons was Dave Fultz, another former Brown University star and another athlete who had a successful baseball career, playing seven seasons in the majors. On the gridiron, Fultz was a slashing runner. He and Gammons made a nearly unstoppable combination. Figures are incomplete, but in ten games Gammons scored at least 16 touchdowns and Fultz eight. Captain M. Roy Jackson, the fullback, scored 14 TD's, often on short plunges after Gammons or Fultz had put the ball close.

The Duquesnes ripped through the season, easily disposing of such opponents as Bucknell (with future baseball star Christy Mathewson at fullback), Baltimore Medical College, the University of Buffalo, and Penn State (64-5!). Gammons had a 90-yard touchdown run against Bucknell. The New York Knickerbockers came to Pittsburgh in mid-November and lost 47-0.

A week later, the D.C. & A.C. crushed the Orange A.C. of New Jersey, 29-0. "Babe" Rhinehart played an outstanding game at tackle for the visitors, but the Orange were outmanned at nearly every other position. For several seasons the Orange had claimed to be the U.S. independent champs, but this was the first time they'd met a Pittsburgh club.

The Pittsburgh *Leader* led off its story of the game in typical overblown pose:

Brightest and grandest in the athletic club constellation to-day shines the star of the the Duquesne country and athletic club, and above the heads of the warriors who have borne the red and black standard to victory on the gridiron glows a halo of glory. Far above all rivals towers the great D.C. & A.C., the goal has been reached and the last foe to bar the way to the summit of fame lies humbled in the dust.

Wars have been won to less decorative accolades.

Among the local athletic clubs, only newcomer Homestead Library A.C. dared face the Red and Black, losing twice by an aggregate 75-5. Homestead, a suburb of Pittsburgh was the recipient of the first public library donated by steelman Andrew Carnegie. Hence the curious name for the club.

The closest game of the season was the last. Washington & Jefferson "held" the Duquesnes to three touchdowns -- one another 90-yard sprint by Gammons -- in losing 18-0. A huge crowd,

The Professional Football Researchers Association

reported at 17,500, "belched out a mighty roar of enthusiastic approval at every successful play," said the Pittsburgh Leader. W. & J., as visitors, got 25 cents on all 50 cent general admissions, earning \$2,900. The D.C. and A.C., charging extra for seats, cleared \$7,000.

Before meeting the D.C. & A.C., Washington and Jefferson had lost only to powerful Princeton, 6-0. Comparing scores is often misleading, but Princeton defeated Yale, 11-10, and the Eli's tied Harvard, the national collegiate champions. Pittsburgers could make a legitimate argument that their D.C. & A.C. team was the most powerful in the nation, including the big four Ivy League college teams. That was a first.

The College Pros

After losing to the Red and Black, some W. & J. spokesmen complained that the D.C. & A.C. was a professional team, as though this was news to them. When they threatened to take the Duquesnes off their schedule, the Pittsburgh Press, outraged at the hypocrisy, listed four of the Presidents' men who were obviously pros themselves.

Writing in *Harper's Weekly*, Caspar Whitney, noted football authority and the first man to choose an All-America team, stated, "No self-respecting college should meet this team (W. & J.) on the gridiron." His reasoning seems to have been that some of the W. & J. players had played for pro teams in seasons past.

In Western Pennsylvania there is at Washington and Jefferson college an athletic condition which should drive away all college teams that have regard for their amateur status. On the Washington and Jefferson football eleven are Hammer (center), McFarland (left guard), and Bird (fullback). McFarland and Hammer were respectively left tackle and center on the Latrobe, Pa., eleven, and Bird, fullback on the Greensburg eleven last year. The Greensburg and Latrobe teams were professional and did not pretend to be otherwise.

Whitney did not accuse W. & J. of paying the players during their time at college. The *Press*, however, made the point, asking why these players would play as amateurs when "profitable engagements could have been secured elsewhere." The fourth player tagged by the *Press* was, of course, "Teck" Matthews. "In what particular branch did Matthews study the last two seasons?" it asked. The editorial philosophized: "There would be no grumbling if W. & J. would cease howling about other elevens to cover up her own tracks. The adage about stone throwers who occupy glass residences is never heeded in some quarters."

All Hail!

If W. & J.'s "amateur" team had a high incidence of what eventually became known as "tramp athletes," the D.C. & A.C.'s professional squad included quite a few "professional men." L.M. Schoch was said to be a power in Scranton, Pa., politics at the tender age of 24. Charley Gelbert was a veterinary surgeon in Scranton. "Doc" Rayl was an M.D. in Wellsville, O. Captain Jackson was listed as "Dr." Frank Smith was a lawyer in Washington, D.C., where Jennings, the center, attended law school in the off-season. Rice, a seldom-used backfield sub, was about to be admitted to the bar in Wilmington, Del. Dave Fultz entered law school after the '99 season.

None of the players seem to have been accountants, but the team put up impressive numbers, scoring 65 touchdowns while averaging 37.2 points per game. With modern, six-point scoring for touchdowns, the average would have been 43.7! Opponents totalled only 15 points for the year.

In its season-ending summary, the Pittsburgh *Press* listed in its "season of surprises" the touchdown scored against the D.C. & A.C. The surprise was justified; no team had been able to register a touchdown against the Duquesnes in '98. In 1899, two field goals were kicked against the Red and Black, but only Penn State managed to put a man over the goal line. The score at the time was 35-0, so the only damage was to the D.C. & A.C.'s pride. Still the Pittsburgh Leader devoted nearly half of its game story to describing in excruciating detail the 69-yard run by State's Martin that set up the score. Readers could relive the tricky series of lateral passes that sprung Martin around right end. "Past the backs he went at tremendous speed, and suddenly the spectators awakened to the fact that he was clear of the bunch and headed for the goal line. Breathless they watched him in his flight, and when Jackson made a dive for him and missed there was something akin to heart disease among the fans."

Next the Leader gave a near step-by-step account of Gammons' pursuit of the ball carrier. The verbiage was so long-winded that not even an Evelyn Wood valedictorian could read about it in less time than it took to happen. Suffice to say that Gammons dumped the runner at the five-yard-line. Captain Jackson called his whole D.C. & A.C. team together to consider the unthinkable -- that someone might actually score a touchdown against them -- but the conference was in vain. On the next play, another series of laterals brought the TD. "The uproar continued for several minutes."

When the acme of the local football season is a single touchdown scored by an already-beaten opponent, you've got a pretty good team in town.