

Twilight

1919

By PFRA Research

The Great War was history but not yet nostalgia. On warm, glad-to-be-alive evenings, while midwestern spring spiced American summer, men fled the languid, lengthening twilight of shops and mills and stores and fields to muster on front porches with good cigars and pitchers of iced tea and there to consider the paramount issues of the times. For the first spring in several, the European War was not uppermost in the learned discussions. Six months ago the fighting ended and the boys started coming home -- all those who would ever come home. The War and its toll were still worth talking about, but other subjects of import now shared and often eclipsed Over There.

Instead of martial affairs, front porch conversation in many states might center on the new prohibition law set for July 1. In Ohio, such discussions were common the year before. The Buckeye State went dry in 1918 -- a fitting early start for the birthplace of the Anti-Saloon League back in 1893. In Ohio, talk -- sober talk -- ambled over other serious subjects: the weather -- mostly hot, the League of Nations -- mostly suspicious, politics -- mostly conservative, women having the vote -- mostly jocular, business -- mostly good, and, of course, football -- mostly professional and wholly anticipatory.

Except for the last-named activity, Ohio conversations differed in many specifics but little in generalities from front porch conversations enjoyed in virtually every one of the forty-eight great states. Oh, in New York City they might talk about some bolshevik nonsense, and out in Hollywood they might talk about -- well, who knew what Gloria Swanson and those people talked about -- but, in Ohio -- particularly in northeastern Ohio -- they seriously considered the pro football situation in June.

Before the war, nearly every midwestern city, town, village, and wide-spot-in-the-road across this proud American Midwest fielded a pro or semipro eleven each fall, but gridiron interest seldom blossomed in most of those places before mid-September. Even then, the Sunday games usually played second viola to the more important contests of Saturday. Professional football was only small potatoes compared to the college game. A good college team could expect five-figure crowds cheering lustily each time it took the field. The better pro squads did well to reach five figures for a whole season, enthusiasm variable. A focus on pro football in early summer of 1919 was peculiar to northeastern Ohio and particular to the environs of Canton, Massillon, Akron, and Youngstown.

Preference for professional football by sportsmen of Stark, Summit, and Mahoning Counties was rooted in provincial pride. Locally, the pro game dated back to 1903, lending an air of tradition to an activity considered slightly disreputable in many other parts of the

land. The college game, autumn's respectable version in most of the U.S. of A., had never generated widespread fan hysteria around Canton and Akron, largely because the nearer colleges had never fielded any national juggernauts. On the other hand, national professional football champions had called local gridirons their home for most of the past two decades.

From Maine to California, both brands of football took bench seats to baseball -- the National Pastime, particularly in spring and early summer when the thoughts of most young American males turned lightly to fastballs and curveballs when not heavily occupied with fast cars and curvy girls. But in northeastern Ohio, the play-for-pay grid game often crowded baseball for headlines on the sports pages of the *Canton Daily News*, *Canton Repository*, *Akron Beacon-Journal*, *Massillon Independent*, and *Youngstown Liberator* even in mid-June.

Of course, they knew baseball was in season. The big -- and therefore presumably evil -- cities of Cleveland to the north and Cincinnati far to the south sported famous baseball nines. Indeed, both cities hoped to crown 1919 by flying pennants for their respective major leagues. Those cities were a long way off, almost foreign. The day when a shining superhighway will put King's Island only down the block from Canton and bring the shore of Lake Erie into Akron's back yard is 40 years in the future. Only minor league baseballers cavorted on the dusty diamonds in Canton, Massillon, Akron, and Youngstown. Baseball had its local loyalists, of course, but the designation of inferior, minor-league status rankled. Too easily the idea of second-rank teams became coupled with the thought: second-rate town! In this age of boosterism, no shame accrued to having a "little" hometown so long as it could be proudly labeled "the greatest little"

Superlatives came easily when Ohio connoisseurs held forth on professional football. The foremost pro football players, the strongest pro football teams, and the most rabid pro football fans could all be found in and around four northeastern Ohio cities. This was the heartland of the sport.

At least, it was the heartland until 1918 when the Great War and the influenza epidemic brought an interruption to the annual grid war.

After a full year's layoff, nervous questions clouded the prospects of all four teams that made up the unofficial entity called the "Ohio League".

The Ohio League still wasn't a real league in the sense of baseball's National and American Leagues, of course. There was

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no such thing in 1919 as a real pro football league unless one counted the loose circuit of semi-pro teams around Chicago that styled themselves a "league." Certainly the Illinois group couldn't be called the "majors." The majors were here in Ohio.

By 1917, the Ohio champion was of sufficient strength to expand its horizons and term itself the "U.S. Professional Champion." Little argument came from anywhere else in the country.

The kingpin of the "league" was the one team that might have been heard of by football fans outside the midwest: the Canton Bulldogs. They held the top spot among the contenders in 1916 and 1917, primarily through the inspiring presence and inspired play of Jim Thorpe, the fabled Indian athlete.

Thorpe's heroics as player-coach had allowed Canton to claim pro football championships in 1916 and 1917 and to think of itself as the pro football center of the world. He had help, of course. Fellow Indian Pete Calac punched holes through rival lines nearly as well as Jim. Earle "Greasy" Neale showed himself a clever end before the war. Bulldog quarterback Milt Ghee threw 17 touchdown passes during the 1917 season. Any number of outstanding linemen blocked and tackled in the best of football tradition. But Thorpe was the one who made it all work. He was the nonpareil.

Bulldog fans breathed a great deal easier when Thorpe wrote from Boston, where he was playing major league baseball for the National League Braves, to say he'd return to the Bulldogs for the 1919 football season. He'd been convinced by the fans' enthusiasm and a part interest in the team.

But the great Indian was past thirty, a dangerous age for an athlete. Not many played football after exiting their twenties. Additionally, everyone had heard those stories about his drinking. The cynics, including many who'd been flattered to lift a glass along with Thorpe, speculated about Jim's spending a year away from football but nary a day away from a bottle.

But even Thorpe at his best needed allies. Could Calac still smash through opponents' lines since he suffered serious war injuries? Had Ghee switched his allegiance to some team out in Illinois? Was Neale likely to continue slipping away from his college coaching to be a Bulldog on Sundays? Who would block? Who would tackle?

The Bulldogs' new management was an unknown quantity too. When Jack Cusack, the local promoter who originally brought Thorpe to Ohio and surrounded him with a capable supporting cast, departed after the 1917 season to seek his fortune in the Oklahoma oil fields, control of the Bulldogs fell to Ralph E. Hay, a successful Canton auto dealer. Hay sported an ambiguous reputation as a "great hustler", but whether he and Thorpe could mold a team to equal those turned out by Cusack remained to be seen.

The Massillon Tigers were Canton's nearest rival both geographically and athletically. A craving for victories over the Bulldogs had been a longtime compulsion in Stark County's second city, only seven miles west of Canton and a third its size. Several years of frustration had only increased the desire among Massillon fans, but Jack Donahue and Jack Whalen, the Tigers' backers since

1915, took a \$4,700 red-ink bath in 1917. How long would they accept such financial losses in the name of civic pique?

Akron, less than twenty miles north in Summit County but with double Canton's population, hadn't seriously challenged for the pro crown since 1914 when sports entrepreneur George "Peggy" Parratt fielded teams in the Rubber City. Prospects for 1919 were hopeful but confused. Several locals promised to place elevens on the gridiron. Vernon "Mac" Maginnis managed lesser local teams after Parratt's exit, but the duo of Ralph "Fat" Waldsmith and Parke "Tumble" Crisp, erstwhile Canton players, reportedly had the backing of the Goodyear Rubber Company. Akronites feared that two teams would split both the available players and available fans, resulting in a pair of unsuccessful entries where one strong team was possible.

At Youngstown, just over thirty miles east of Akron in Mahoning County, they fretted over whether even one team was possible. The 1917 season ended disastrously for the Patricians, as the local eleven was called. First the team lost a key game to Canton; then, the following week, most of its best players jumped to Massillon, leaving the Pats awash in red ink and unable to complete their schedule. Youngstown fans wondered if the team's backers dared risk a repetition in 1919.

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By July 1, the situation began clearing. The good news for Akron fans was that Waldsmith and Crisp had combined forces with Maginnis -- "Fat" to coach and "Mac" to handle the business end -- presenting the Rubber City with the prospect of watching a single, strong team at Liberty Park. The merger came about when Goodyear backed away from supporting a football team. Who could blame them? Estimates of the projected Akron payroll ran as high as \$2,500 per week.

In Massillon, Donahue and Whalen agreed to give it another try, although a suitable field -- one surrounded by a high fence to keep out gate crashers -- had not yet been found to showcase the Tigers. Their former home, on the grounds of the state mental asylum, was in sad shape.

Youngstown couldn't make up its mind. "Mickey" Stambaugh, the 1917 manager, told the newspapers that he would have a team on the field, but rumors continued to circulate that there would be no 1919 edition of the Youngstown Patricians.

The hot rumor in Canton during July was that Jack Cusack planned to return from the Oklahoma oil fields and retake control of the Bulldogs. Jim Thorpe, playing the outfield for the Braves in Boston, was unavailable for comment.

On Monday evening, July 14, the managers held a "get-together" at Canton's Courtland Hotel. Youngstown's Stambaugh was away on vacation, but Ralph Hay represented Canton and Jack Donahue showed up for Massillon. The uneasy allies, Maginnis and Waldsmith, both came down from Akron.

No one was quite ready to discuss scheduling, the most important reason for the meeting. They did manage to set a pay scale for officials and agree to refrain from stealing each other's players this

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year. The latter idea came in the form of a "tacit understanding" and may have contained more than a trace of cynicism. The teams had been swiping players back and forth for years and agreeing not to do it for almost as long. The Tigers were easily the worst offenders, but it was the Massillon *Evening Independent* that headlined its story of the meeting: "No Tampering with Grid Players Is Decision of Pilots."

The biggest surprise came when Jack Donahue of Massillon refused to go along with a proposal to limit salaries. Hay and the Akron tandem favored the idea. Massillon's money problems in 1917 came from offering overblown player salaries and from signing up thirty athletes for the final Canton game, some hired just to keep them out of Bulldog uniforms. Presumably, Massillon would profit more by a salary cap than anyone else. Nevertheless, Donahue insisted, "If a manager wants to pay \$10,000 for a player, that's his business."

Before the meeting broke up, Hay and Donahue discussed the possibility of the Tigers playing at Canton's League Park when the Bulldogs were away. Afterward, Hay told reporters he'd received a letter from Jack Cusack wishing him luck. The oil man was staying out there in Oklahoma.

Ralph Hay's methods were coming into focus. He was never backward with the press. He knew the value of publicity and always tried to steal a headline or two with a new revelation. A signing of a new star was always good for a story; so was a statement that another star would not play. Hay usually had one or the other each week. His big news on Tuesday, July 15, was that the Bulldog organization intended to spend money to improve League Park (also called Lakeside Park) and that the field would be changed to run east to west instead of north to south. No one got very excited about it at the time, but that little change in geography turned out to be a fateful decision for the Bulldogs.

A few days later, the axe fell in Youngstown. Stambaugh came back from vacation and announced he would not manage the Patricians in 1919. Nevertheless, some hope still existed that other backers would get a team together. Newspaper readers were reminded that Youngstown started late in 1917 after everyone had counted them out.

The Akron men spread the word that several famous players held jobs in the local rubber factories and that "officials of the rubber corporations" were "taking an interest" in the team. Everyone agreed that Akron would be the dark horse of the 1919 season. To show their seriousness, Waldsmith promised his men would practice daily, a dedication virtually unknown for a pro football team. College teams practiced every day; most pro teams got together a couple of times a week.

On Wednesday evening, July 23, a little more than a week after the Canton "get-together", the pro leaders met at Akron, but it proved a waste of time. Ralph Hay refused to schedule his Bulldogs without Thorpe's approval, and Big Jim was too busy shagging flies for Boston to come to Ohio. After some hemming and hawing, Hay got everyone to agree to meet in Pittsburgh when next the Braves visited the Pirates.

No one seemed to see any irony in the fact that pro football had come to a halt to await the mighty word of a baseball player.

Ralph Hay arranged to meet with Thorpe on Saturday evening, August 2, at the Pittsburgh Athletic Club. Both Whalen and Donahue attended for Massillon. Akron came in force; Waldsmith was supported by his buddy Crisp and Maginnis was backed by Art Ranney, a Rubber City businessman and former Akron U. player. Once more no one came to speak for Youngstown, but the others were so convinced that a team would eventually be put together that they penciled Youngstown games into their schedules anyway. Unexpectedly, the secretary of the Ohio Athletic Club showed up from Cleveland, seeking games for a proposed team there. He explained plans for leasing Cleveland's League Park, a baseball field with a vast seating capacity compared to Canton's little park of the same name. Partly because they were unwilling to give up expected lucrative games among themselves, and partly because they doubted the solidity of the Cleveland proposal, none of the assembled managers was willing to chance Cleveland on its schedule. The secretary went home empty-handed.

He might have had a chance had it not been for a surprising and exciting proposal from New York City: John "Muggsy" McGraw, the famous manager of the New York Baseball Giants, intended to put a pro football team in the Polo Grounds to play on Sundays. His representative at the Pittsburgh meeting urged the hierarchy of pro football to bring their teams to Gotham where they would undoubtedly reap rich rewards.

McGraw had earlier asked Thorpe to coach the proposed team, quite a concession on Muggsy's part since he was certainly not a Thorpe admirer when Big Jim played baseball for the Giants. ("He can't hit a curveball," was one of McGraw's kinder assessments.) Thorpe eased out of an awkward situation by pleading his previous commitment to Canton. McGraw settled for Charley Brickley, the ex-Harvard star and perhaps second only to Thorpe in gridiron fame.

Massillon and the Bulldogs signed up for New York trips. The Canton papers chortled that the junket would break the Bulldogs' "farthest east" record set in 1905 on a trip to Latrobe, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh.

Although the meeting at the Pittsburgh Athletic Club was devoted to 1919 scheduling, some exploratory talk about forming a real pro football league went on. Such discussions had been common since 1904 with no discernable results. Even so, the Akron Beacon-Journal in its report saw fit to announce: "A league will be formally organized at the next meeting and officers elected." The only fly in that ointment was that no further meetings of all the managers were held in 1919.

Ralph Hay kept the Bulldogs in the Repository headlines through mid-August by his signings or failures to sign this or that famous football star. One of his triumphs was the acquisition of the services of another Indian backfield star, Joe Guyon from Georgia Tech. Guyon had actually played in Thorpe's shadow at Carlisle, but he really came into his own at Tech. He was so good in fact that Frank Menke -- second only to Camp as an All-American picker -- decided he had to have Guyon on his 1918 eleven and, finding no ready spot available in the backfield, picked him as a tackle! Joe

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had the versatility to play anywhere, but he was at his best with the football in his hands. There were even some -- and a considerable number in fact -- who in later years insisted that Guyon was a greater player than Thorpe. By signing Guyon, Ralph Hay had accomplished a feat that merited headlines.

But, on the subject of a pro football league, Hay was uncharacteristically silent.

On August 20, Youngstown settled speculation about the Patrician football team: "We regret that the Patricians from a commercial point of view cannot consider football as before. We surely would like to give Youngstown a winning football team but the cost is beyond our means and in the end no one would benefit except the players and the Idora park management."

The announcement, printed in several newspapers, blamed the park people: "Ten per cent of all money taken in at the gate is the best proposition the park people would make. In addition to that they insist on collecting and keeping 25 cents for every automobile that is driven into the park and a monopoly on all other concessions. Since it is out of the question to get a high class team like Canton or Massillon to come here for less than 50 per cent of the gross receipts it can readily be seen that the visiting club would be getting ten per cent more than the home club and in addition to that the home club has all the ordinary extra expenses to meet beside meeting the salaries of players which would average not less than \$2,000 per game."

In early September, Jimmy O'Donnell visited Canton. The smiling Irishman, best known to Cantonites as manager of a Cleveland semipro baseball team, had tucked in his pocket a contract to use Cleveland's League Park for football. He announced himself as business manager of a new pro team backed by several substantial financial men of Cleveland. His ballclub would be able to cope with Canton, Massillon, and Akron, he promised, if only he could schedule games with the big three. When he was informed that Ralph Hay was inconveniently absent from Canton, O'Donnell moved on -- hat still in hand -- to Massillon.

A few days later, Cantonites learned why Hay was out of town when O'Donnell came to call. The Bulldog manager revealed that, contrary to the last bulletin, Youngstown would field a football team in 1919 after all. The Bulldogs were scheduled to play there in late October. Without giving the details, Hay explained that he reached this agreement at a Saturday night conference with attorney Ray L. Thomas, a former Patrician player-coach, and several other Youngstown supporters. Hay also reiterated Bulldog plans to go to New York for a November 9 game with John McGraw's team.

With the Cincinnati Reds about to give Ohio its first World Series team, baseball news temporarily usurped fan attention, but pro football items still dotted sports pages in the northeastern corner of the state. As September entered its final two weeks these tidbits made news: Akron signed one-time Syracuse All-American tackle Al Cobb, a member of the champion U.S. tug-of-war team while serving with the A.E.F. in France; Jim Thorpe's wife gave birth to an eight-pound daughter in Boston; the Canton Marine Band announced plans to furnish music at home games; and Ralph Hay's brother-in-law was named treasurer of the Bulldogs.

From Hammond, Indiana, came a challenge. Paul Parduhn, the manager of the Hammond Bobcats, announced his team would play in Chicago's Cubs Park (Wrigley Field), and he intended to pay \$20,000 for players. He listed a number of well-known stars already signed, including Canton's old quarterback Milt Ghee and a former University of Illinois end named George Halas. The Canton Bulldogs would have to accept a game, Parduhn insisted, or Hammond would claim national honors.

In Canton, Ralph Hay canceled the New York game. The Bulldogs would go west to play Hammond at Chicago instead.

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Some of the second and third-line Ohio teams opened their seasons on Sunday, September 28. At Toledo, the Maroons played a scoreless tie with a barnstorming eleven under the direction of Peggy Parratt. The Columbus Panhandles, best known for the rugged Nesser brothers who filled half their lineup, swamped a team in Newark, O., 53-0. Youngstown, the last of the major teams to agree to play in 1919, was the first to take the field. Using a lineup of veterans, the Patricians had little trouble besting the Independents of Wheeling, W.Va., 21-7.

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The day after the pro football season opened in Ohio, the New York *Times* revealed the plans for a pro team in the Polo Grounds. The paper identified the National Exhibition Company, controller of the Giants baseball team, as financial backers and Charley Brickley as field manager. Apparently Ralph Hay hadn't informed New York of his intention to cancel because Canton was still billed as the top attraction on the schedule. Brickley wasn't ready to release the names of players under contract, but the *Times* printed a list of athletes he "has in mind."

Brickley's "mind" proved an embarrassment to his team. Two days later, the *Times* wrote: "Alfred G. Gennert, former Princeton centre, who was mentioned a few days ago as one of the probable players of the professional football team which is being organized to play at the Polo Grounds during the coming season, takes decided exception to the use of his name by those behind the project."

Gennert complained: "I have never been approached on this subject by any representative of the National Exhibition Company or any other professional club, and the use of my name in this connection is wholly unwarranted and inexcusable. I would not play football for money on Sunday, or on any other afternoon. I believe that any attempt to professionalize football is a direct attack on the best traditions of the game and should be resented by all loyal devotees."

On Sunday, October 5, twenty-four loyal devotees who didn't resent taking money for playing football reported to Brickley at the Polo Grounds. None of those assembled except Brickley himself was a star of the first magnitude, but several had All-American mentions in their backgrounds and all had been regulars on strong college teams. About an hour's practice was given to a signal drill with Brickley at quarterback, followed by twenty minutes of scrimmaging in which "the players did not take any unnecessary chances." Then Brickley favored observers with a dropkicking exhibition, booting accurately from various angles and distances.

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Coach Brickley, ever the taskmaster, scheduled further practices for Wednesday and Saturday. After all, the Giants' first game -- against the Massillon Tigers -- was slated for the next Sunday.

The day after their workout, the roof fell in on Brickley's Giants. A large mistake had been made. The promoters had been under the impression that a recently-passed law which allowed Sunday baseball also permitted Sunday football, but on Monday evening, Corporation Counsel William Burr rendered his decision that the grid game was still illegal on Sunday. Choice Saturday dates at the Polo Grounds were already committed to college games, leaving the football team the option of playing on weekdays or not at all. Charley Brickley's Giants disbanded after an active life of an hour and twenty minutes.

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The same Sunday that the Giants held their one and only practice in New York, Ohio professional football moved into high gear with all four recognized members of the Ohio League in action.

The Bulldogs opened at Canton against the Pitcairn, Pa., Quakers. Although the 'Dogs won, 13-7, they looked like anything but the champions they were supposed to be. Obviously, most of the players were rusty as buried beer cans. Even the great Thorpe fumbled twice in the five minutes he played.

Akron, which had taken the name "Indians", humbled the visiting Toledo A.C. 47-0. The name intentionally recalled former Akron glory. Peggy Parratt's Ohio League champions of 1913 and 1914 used the Indians monicker.

In the day's major game, Massillon smothered Youngstown 27- 0. The defeat proved so overwhelming that the Patricians called it a season and quit. This time the decision stuck. A galaxy of former college stars were reported in the Massillon lineup, but one name -- "Henry" -- wasn't former at all and it caused quite a stir.

A report that Wilbur "Fats" Henry had appeared in a professional football game upset many people and confirmed for some the insidious evil of the pro game. The young man was a Walter Camp All-America tackle at Washington and Jefferson College, slated to captain the basketball team, and a top undergraduate trackman. More, his rotund build -- he was under six feet but weighed close to 250 -- and his ever-ready cherubic smile had made him extremely popular from coast to coast with readers whose journals included photographs. They thought of him as Fatty Arbuckle in moleskins.

Henry screamed bloody murder. He insisted that the "Henry" listed in the Massillon lineup was some other guy. Indeed, there was another player with the same last name who'd been playing professionally and semi-professionally around the mid-west for several years. Numerous W. & J. football fans -- hardly the most neutral witnesses -- swore mightily that the only time young Wilbur left the Washington, Pa., campus on the Sunday in question was when he took a short automobile ride of not more than ten miles. No one checked the vehicle's odometer, but Wilbur was generally believed. Who could doubt anyone with that smile? W. & J. went on to a highly successful season.

The rhubarb, however, did nothing to improve pro football's already sullied reputation. Some critics were willing to believe that Wilbur was an amateur but that the pros had nevertheless dirtied his reputation by taking his name in vain.

Meanwhile, the Cincinnati Reds used a 16-hit attack to win the final game of the World Series amid rumors that the Chicago White Sox had been "fixed". Such assertions cast suspicion on all professional sports, but pro football, with its lack of regulation, received more than its share of raised eyebrows.

The best defense, for the time being, was good football. On October 12, Canton showed what a week's practice could do. Thorpe ran for three touchdowns and passed for a pair as the Bulldogs sank the Toledo Navy team 64-0. Pete Calac played a good game, proving that he'd recovered from the war wounds that threatened to end his career.

Massillon -- having cancelled its New York trip -- scheduled Jim O'Donnell's Cleveland team. Fittingly, O'Donnell signed up a half dozen of the players who'd turned out for Charley Brickley's lone practice session. The game was a corker, with Massillon winning 3-0 on a field goal six seconds before the end.

Akron took on the roughneck Nesser brothers of Columbus and survived 13-0.

The next week, Canton had its hands full with the Nessers. Thorpe stayed on the bench, letting Guyon, Calac, and two speedy new backs, Cecil "Tex" Grigg and Guy Chamberlin, outrun the lumbering Columbus crew. Canton fans were unhappy that Big Jim lay out, but they couldn't object to the final score of 22-3.

Football, Nesser style, was illustrated late in the game. A young Canton tackle of All-America repute had been distinguishing himself by stealthily slugging his Columbus opposite. Big Fred Nesser, all of 6-5 and 250 muscular pounds of him, moved into position across from the Bulldog offender. On the snap of the ball, Nesser -- at one time a contender for Jess Willard's heavyweight crown -- stood straight up and demonstrated the boxing maneuver known as "the old one-two." The referee immediately ordered Fred out of the game. The Canton player also left the fray -- unconscious.

While the Bulldogs were stopping and being stopped by the Nessers, the Akron Indians scalped the Pitcairn Quakers, 47-0. Massillon's Tigers went all the way to Michigan to top the Detroit Heralds, 17-0.

The shocker of the day came at Cleveland. There, the \$20,000 Hammond Bobcats ran up and down the field but failed to score. Jim O'Donnell's men cashed two field goals to win, 6-0.

On the last Sunday in October, it was Canton's turn to go to Detroit where they trounced the Heralds, 27-0. Cleveland had an easy time with Pitcairn although the final score was only 13-0. In an important game at Akron, Massillon's "Skip" Gougler, a former Pitt star, kicked three field goals to a pair by Tumble Crisp for a 9-6 Tiger win. Gougler's last successful kick came with only seconds left in the game.

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After a month of playing, both Canton and Massillon remained undefeated. Cleveland, by now regarded as the fourth member of the Ohio League, and Akron each had only a single loss. The Bulldogs were still the favorites, but no one wanted to bet the mortgage.

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Massillon, unable to fill its schedule for the first Sunday in November, was forced to take a costly day off. No game; no gate. Cleveland was busy at Chicago proving its earlier victory over Hammond was no fluke. Again they held the \$20,000 team scoreless, but this time Hammond returned the favor, and the game ended 0-0. At Canton, the Akron Indians took their second loss 19-7.

Akron couldn't afford to lose to Massillon again and stay in the race. They beefed up the next week for their second meeting with the Tigers by signing the great black star Fred "Fritz" Pollard, a former All-American at Brown. Pollard was a little man as far as football size is measured, weighing about a hundred and a half -- some say less -- and as a black player he got more than the usual surreptitious gouges and cuffs in pile-ups, but he never complained. His answer was to run harder the next time. He usually ran very well indeed, blending speed, elusiveness, and surprising power. Until the Indians called him, he'd been scoring TDs in the eastern Pennsylvania coal regions, and it took a pretty penny to get him to Akron. An estimated 10,000 fans -- one of the season's best crowds -- watched the new star run for a touchdown and play a fine all-around game against visiting Massillon, but Skip Gougler scored thirteen points by running and kicking to lead a 13-6 Tiger victory.

Cleveland edged the Toledo Maroons by a surprisingly low score of 6-0. Obviously, the Clevelander's strength lay in defense; its offense was sickly.

Meanwhile, Canton invaded Chicago for a showdown with wealthy Hammond before another 10,000 crowd. The \$20,000 team outplayed the Bulldogs all during the first half and led 3-0 at intermission. Jim Thorpe got rolling in the second half, kicking a 25-yard field goal to tie the score. Despite all-out efforts by both teams, that ended the scoring for the day. Canton continued undefeated, but Hammond trumpeted the tie as "proof" that it deserved equal rank with the Bulldogs.

In an unusual Tuesday afternoon game, Cleveland hosted Massillon to celebrate Armistice Day. Although the Clevelander's couldn't register a single first down, they took advantage of a break to boot a field goal. At the same time, Skip Gougler had a horrible day for the Tigers, missing five kicks -- three from inside the 20-yard line. Massillon regarded the 3-0 final as a gross miscarriage of justice. Cleveland thought of it as a great victory.

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The next day at a luncheon for the Cleveland financial backers, former judge W.L. Day -- a man whose opinions on football affairs were widely respected because he once played at Michigan -- startled ex-college men by saying, "I have seen Michigan play twice this year, but I shall stick to this professional game, I guess, as they

are playing so much better football." Among college football devotees, it was an article of faith -- and remained so for thirty more years -- that a good, spirited college team could always beat any team of jaded professionals.

After Judge Day's bombshell, discussion moved on to improving the product even more. By the time the luncheon ended, the Clevelanders were loudly demanding the formation of a professional football league similar to baseball's.

In Canton, Ralph 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 arch-rival Massillon was scheduled for the following Sunday.

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Fierce rivalries in pro football's early wars were not restricted to Ohio or to giants like Canton and Massillon. Skirmishes among lesser lights could be equally bitter. Any time two teams inhabited the same immediate area or especially the same city, battles for local grid supremacy were sure to follow. Often, the practices that most upset the opponents of pro ball -- use of collegians and gambling -- could be found in these games in the most blatant form. One 1919 game in Rockford, Illinois, probably set the record. Ever since 1916, the Rockford Grands and the Rockford Amateur Athletic Club had played three games each season to settle the city championship. The "Amateur" in A.A.C. was strictly for show; along with the Grands, they paid many of their better players. In the first game of the 1919 series, only a long pass from quarterback George Kitteringham in the waning moments produced a 6-0 victory for the Grands.

With the second game a "must" for the A.A.C., rumors circulated that they would "load up" for the contest by bringing in "ringers" from several strong Illinois and Indiana pro teams. A.A.C. Coach Tony Haines was known to have contacted several pro stars. The names most mentioned on Rockford street corners were Don Oliver of Chicago's Racine Cardinals, Walde of the Ft. Wayne Friars, and Stallings of Rock Island. Also in the rumor mill were the Falcon brothers of the Hammond's \$20,000 Bobcats.

The Grands' Kitteringham, coach and club president as well as team quarterback, wasn't about to be torpedoed by a bunch of foreigners. He happened to be related by marriage to Edward "Slip" Madigan, the starting center for Rockne's undefeated Notre Dame University team. George suggested to Slip that some Notre Dame footballers could earn \$200 each if they showed up in Rockford on the next Sunday.

Rockford had more than its share of visitors that week, but most of them weren't those nice young college boys. In Chicago, the term "Black Sox" was in vogue. Once the rumors became rampant that baseball's World Series had been "thrown" by eight Chicago White Sox players, the police started making things hot for Windy City

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gamblers, who began looking around for something sweet out in the boondocks where things were cooler. The A.A.C.-Grands game was made to order for the unsavory section. However, they apparently were caught short by Slip Madigan's reinforcements from South Bend, believing the A.A.C. to have the only, or at least the best, ringers. At game time, most of the "smart money" favored the A.A.C.

On the day before the second Grands-A.A.C. game, Notre Dame defeated Purdue, 33-13, in West Lafayette. The team returned to South Bend, but Madigan and five other players -- including star runners Dutch Bergman and George Gipp -- broke off at the depot, caught a train to Chicago and then on to Rockford where they joined up with a pair of tackles from the South Bend Arrows, a pro team Madigan coached in the evenings after his Notre Dame practices.

Only three regular players started for the Grands and the A.A.C. lineup had several newcomers. Rockford's Kishwaukee Park was jammed with partisans who'd come to cheer their lungs out for strangers. Although just about any Notre Dame fan knew George Gipp on sight, according to the pre-game lineup filled out by Kitteringham, "Baker" was at left half for the Grands. Other Notre Dame stars in the Grands' lineup were Madigan at center, Bergman at right halfback, quarterback Joe Brandy, fullback Fred Slackford, and end Bernie Kirk. The two starting tackles were South Bend Arrows Tommy Grzegorek, better known as "Gore," and John Klosinski.

Klosinski warned Madigan that he might be recognized by several of the A.A.C. men he'd faced previously. "Just keep your headgear on, Curly," he was told, "and they won't know you from Adam."

The South Bend ringers later swore that the referee and perhaps the head linesman had been bribed to favor the A.A.C. The players were hardly disinterested bystanders -- Madigan bet each ringer's \$200 on the outcome of the game -- but the fact that the Grands were penalized nearly every time they made a good gain tends to support the view

On the first play from scrimmage, Gipp circled right end for 30 yards. The play was immediately called back and the Grands assessed a 15-yard penalty. Gipp made that back with an off-tackle burst, but, when Bergman picked up eight yards, another penalty was called. The *Rockford Register Gazette* characterized the first half as "see-saw," with the "Grands receiving a penalty on nearly every other down."

Despite racking up more than a hundred yards in penalties during the first half, the Grands built up a 14-0 lead at the half. Early in the second quarter, Gipp tossed a touchdown pass to Bergman that, surprisingly, was not called back. The second touchdown came just before the half ended when the speedy Bergman grabbed a wild A.A.C. field goal try and zipped 70 yards to paydirt astonishing everyone, including the officials.

In the second half, the A.A.C. got stronger and the Grands began to wilt. After all, the six Notre Damers were playing their second game in two days, with only a sleepless, all-night train ride in between. Irishman Joe Brandy fumbled a punt in the endzone and fell on it to give the A.A.C. a safety. A few moments later, the A.A.C.

stormed down the field on short passes. When the last one went for a touchdown, the game was on the line at 14-9 with half the fourth quarter left to play.

Gipp took over after the ensuing kickoff. Almost single-handedly he drove the ball into A.A.C. territory with his running and passing. There was only a little more than a minute to go when the Grands' advance stalled, but Gipp stepped back and dropkicked a field goal to put the game on ice, 17-9.

Afterward, the *Rockford Register Gazette* called for an end to all this "ringer" business in settling what was, after all, a local dispute. The paper dropped several less-than-subtle hints as to just who the guys in Grands' jerseys really were, but the Notre Dame men collected their \$200 each plus another \$200 each on their bets and returned to South Bend without being found out by the university.

Ironically, Madigan's Notre Dame sub, a hulking center named George Trafton, was booted out of school this season for playing in a pro game at the personal insistence of Coach Rockne. But, when Gipp was expelled in the spring of 1920 for other transgressions, Rock and most of the South Bend merchants went to bat for him and he was reinstated. Gipp went on to All-America recognition and "win one for the Gipper" immortality. Trafton went on to a Pro Football Hall of Fame career with the Chicago Bears.

While all this was happening in Rockford, still another erstwhile Notre Dame player, tossed out a year or so earlier for participation in a pro game, was back home in little Green Bay, Wisconsin, trying to make a go of his own professional team. Although Earl "Curly" Lambeau had talked a local meat packer into sponsoring his ball club, the odds were against a pro team making good in such a small town as Green Bay.

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On November 16, Cleveland topped Columbus 20-9, and Akron blitzed Wheeling 21-3, but most eyes were on Canton. There, the Bulldogs played their finest game of the season to dump Massillon 23-0. Once again, Jim Thorpe proved himself the greatest football player in the world, but he had plenty of help. Cecil Grigg returned a punt 45 yards for one score, and Joe Guyon caught a Thorpe pass for an 82-yard touchdown. Big Jim plunged for a TD, added two extra points and a field goal, and punted brilliantly -- once for 63 yards. What had been expected as a "pick 'em" game turned into a rout.

Still in shock, Massillon could manage only a scoreless tie against the Dayton Triangles the next Sunday. At Cleveland, O'Donnell's team disappointed its followers by settling for the same score against Detroit.

At Akron, the Indians added more new players, including a couple reported to be collegians under aliases. It didn't help. Canton ended any faint hopes lingering in Akron hearts with a workmanlike 14-0 victory. Thorpe entered the game only at the top of the final quarter to satisfy the pleading of the fans. His main contribution to the win was an excellent open-field tackle of Fritz Pollard to save a touchdown.

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Thanksgiving saw Massillon struggling desperately to salvage its season by adding new faces. Some of them helped in a revenge 7-0 win at Cleveland. Akron went all the way to Pine Village, Indiana, for a game and ran smack into a snowstorm. Pine Village club officials wanted to call the game off, but -- having made the trip -- the Indians insisted on playing. Only 500 brave souls watched Akron win 12-0.

The weather was better in Chicago -- dark and cloudy but only a tiny bit of snow -- as another crowd of 10,000 showed up at Cubs Park to watch the Canton Bulldogs' second invasion. Hammond added still another high-priced player to its lineup -- "Paddy" Driscoll. A star at Northwestern a few years before, Driscoll was a fine kicker and one of the most dangerous broken-field runners in football. He played well against Canton, but his one miscue proved Hammond's undoing. On the opening kickoff, three stout Bulldogs slammed into him and the ball and Paddy parted company. "Horse" Edwards of Canton recovered at the 20. Thorpe hit the line for six yards and Pete Calac duplicated that. Then Big Jim blasted off Hammond's left tackle, threw off several tacklers, and crashed into the endzone. He topped off his efforts by booting the extra point.

The game was far from over. Canton had to put up two goal-line stands to keep Hammond from scoring. In both cases, Thorpe followed with long punts to move the Bulldogs out of trouble. When time finally ran out, Canton had successfully weathered the Hammond challenge to its championship, 7-0.

But the Bulldogs had no time to savor their victory over the \$20,000 team. Three days later they were scheduled to face Massillon again.

The season closed on the final Sunday in November. Akron continued westward, traveling to Rock Island, Illinois, only to lose 17-0.

Despite their earlier trouncing by the Bulldogs, Massillon hoped to derail the Canton Express at the finish line. Remember, with no formal league structure, championships were decided primarily by head-to-head competition. A big victory over the Bulldogs could override the Tigers' disappointing seasonal record and give them a claim to the crown.

Just as they had in 1917, the Tigers signed every available football player. Many sat on the sideline the whole game, obviously hired just to keep them from playing for Canton. One observer reported counting seventy-seven players in Massillon black and orange. Unhappily for Massillon, none of the Tigers were the equal of Jim Thorpe.

The game was a real wing-ding. Massillon started strong, threatening to score a couple of times in the first half. Each time staunch defense by the Bulldogs fended them off. At the half, the score was still 0-0.

By the third quarter, a strong wind gusted down the field at Canton's back. Thorpe, playing despite a lame back, tried to take advantage of the gale with long-distance field goal shots at the Massillon goal posts. His first two tries missed, but the third proved the charm. Pete Calac held at the 40-yard line as Jim placekicked a successful three-pointer to put Canton in front.

A few moments later, Massillon's Gougler tried one from the 45. The wind proved too strong against him and the ball bounced out of bounds at the 15. With only a 3-0 lead, the Bulldogs were in a deep hole, but Thorpe was equal to the task. He stood at the five-yard line, ignored his back, and smashed an enormous punt. The wind caught the ball, and it sailed high over the outstretched hands of the frantic Massillon safety. When it finally stopped rolling, it was across the Tiger goal line -- 95 yards away!

Massillon was dead.

Thorpe trotted off the field to rest his back, having kicked the Bulldogs to the professional football championship of the world. None of the newspaper accounts recalled that it had been Ralph Hay's decision way back in July to change the direction of Canton's field to east-west. How Thorpe's kicks would have fared with a crosswind belongs in the realm of might-have-been.

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Joe Dunn's Minneapolis Marines never got the respect afforded the strong Ohio teams, but before the war they were able to claim the "Northwest Championship" year after year by beating the semi-pro teams of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and northern Illinois. One of the Illinois teams they topped in 1917 was the Rock Island Independents. Rock Island's ambitious manager Walter H. Flanigan had hoped to get some national attention by upgrading his schedule, but when the Marines landed on his team, 7-3, before a 6,425 crowd -- the biggest in Islander's history up to then -- he had mixed emotions. A couple of weeks later at Minneapolis, Flanigan's club got popped 33-14, and his emotions weren't mixed at all.

After a bob-tailed 1918 season, Flanigan was ready to try for the big-time again. He started by inviting "Rube" Ursella, the barrel-chested Minneapolis quarterback, down to Rock Island to "talk." Within an hour after Rube arrived on a hot August day, he was hired as coach. Predictably, a whole platoon of Marines came trooping behind Ursella to become Independents. Included in the transfusion were Walt Buland, a rugged tackle, and Bob "Rube" Marshall, one of the rare black players in early pro ball. Stripped of their most important players, the Marines never recovered. Dunn's crew lingered for another decade, even joined the NFL, but the days of claiming championships were over for good.

Flanigan added some other good players, like hometown boy Jerry Mansfield, a hardnosed fullback or end who'd starred on the Camp Grant, Ill., service team, and a versatile halfback named Fred Chicken. Rock Island's reputation had been steadily growing for several seasons, and any number of young hopefuls always turned out for the first practice. Flanigan had developed a sure-fire way to weed out the chaff. For the first couple of days, he held foot races and wrestling matches until all the pretenders wilted and only the real ironmen remained. Then they started learning plays.

Flanigan needed the best crew he'd ever had. He'd upgraded his schedule for 1919 to include several famous Ohio and Indiana teams.

But, after two victories, one a 21-0 topping of the Rockford A.C., trouble arrived in the form of the Hammond Bobcats. The "\$20,000

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team" drew 7,000 fans to Rock Island's Douglas Park, but they also took home a 12-7 victory. In that just about everyone west of Ohio had conceded the star-laden Bobcats the national pro title, the Independents' narrow loss was considered a moral victory. But a loss of any kind hurt their hopes for honors. George Halas, the Bobcats' star end, continued to be a thorn in the Rock Island side for years.

The Independents shook off their lone loss and went undefeated the rest of the way, with only a scoreless tie against the famous Pine Village, Ind., team to mar the perfection. They were particularly proud of their 40-0 dismantling of the Columbus Panhandles on Thanksgiving before a reported 8,000 fans. Word had not yet reached Rock Island that the Nessler's weren't what they used to be.

Rube Ursella scored 99 points during the season, probably the top total for any pro with a major team in 1919. When the Independents finished up by topping the Akron Indians, Rock Islanders took it for more than it was really worth. Since Akron was closely associated with Canton -- one local news story called them the "Akron Bulldogs" -- the folks out in Illinois concluded that beating one was as good as beating the other.

Flanigan challenged Canton to a game to "settle" the national championship. It had already been settled to Canton's satisfaction, but at first, the Bulldogs expressed an interest. After all, Flanigan impulsively offered a \$5,000 guarantee. However, a day later, Thorpe wired to call off the proposed game, pleading that his team had disbanded for the season. Most likely his interest waned when the Akron team returned home and revealed that only 1,700 fans had been in Douglas Park for their game. Thorpe had seen more than one big guarantee evaporate when the gate was counted.

From the Rock Island viewpoint, of course, Canton had chickened. That was enough for the Independents to claim the U.S. pro title. They found support for the claim almost as far as the Rock Island city limits.

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Canton took its bows for the 1919 U.S. pro championship, but 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 nothing about it. Almost every important Ohio team had lost money in 1919.

Youngstown had folded for good.

In Massillon, Donahue and Whalen declared themselves out, unable to absorb any more huge losses.

Cleveland, despite its strong talk, faded during late November.

Art Ranney and cigar store owner Frank Nied promised to field yet another Akron team in 1920. Details were up in the air.

Even Canton's experience was not all sweetness and light. The Bulldogs drew only moderate crowds to League Park except for traditional rivalries with Massillon and Akron. Moderate crowds couldn't cover the bills.

Concern for immediate local problems in 1919, like who would play fullback this week or would that great new tackle stick around, left little time for the average fan to consider the larger issues confronting and confounding pro football, but team managers -- "moguls" as the newspapers liked to call them -- recognized the larger issues all too well. They just couldn't agree what to do about them.

First among the pros' problems, according to the managers, was the escalating price of players. In 1915, Cusack lured Thorpe to Canton for the unheard of salary of \$250 per game. The Indian proved worth it as far as his own play was concerned, but his super paydays triggered a spiraling inflation in football flesh until a strong team might expect to shell out somewhere in the rarefied 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 only filled 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 several weeks' work. Still, the issue was really not whether players were overpaid but rather whether the struggling teams could afford to pay them.

The wedge players used to drive up their prices was their ability to jump from one team to another. Youngstown's 1917 experience when half the lineup jumped to Massillon was one of the worst, but rosters changed for all teams from game to game as footballers flitted from town to town following the highest bids for their services like overgrown bees sampling ever more pollen-laden flowers. Some athletes played one team manager against another better than they played their positions. The results could border on absurdity. An athlete sometimes played for a team one week, opposed them the next, and returned to their lineup the third. The Nessler brothers of the Columbus Panhandles swore that one season they faced Knute Rockne on five different occasions in five different uniforms.

Fan loyalty was hard to come by when this week's hero halfback was the same fellow who ran your team ragged last week and would likely be scoring touchdowns against you next week. Most team managers readily admitted to being their own worst enemies in these disastrous bidding wars, but they insisted they were forced to enter into them to keep their teams competitive. If they didn't offer the stars enough money, someone else surely would. And then that someone else would bring his star-enriched team to town and wallop the tar out of the local boys. The local fans wouldn't support a loser at all, and with no bodies in the ball yard, a team was just as broke as if it had hired a batch of high-priced stars in the first place.

One could hardly blame the players for selling their services for the best offer. It wasn't like they were betraying their hometown; as often as not a player's hometown was several states away. One Ohio burg looked pretty much the same to a fellow from Delaware. The teams used the same formations. Except for the jerseys, the uniforms looked the same. The only real difference was the size of the paycheck.

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Pro football's worst notoriety came from using collegians. Too often the "moguls" induced college players to come in on Sunday and risk their collegiate eligibility by playing under assumed names. Pro team lineups had more "Smiths" in those days than could be found on any motel register sixty years later. One advantage to using collegians was that they sometimes could be paid less than seasoned pros. Another was that it could be whispered around town that "Smith" was really the famous All- America "Whosis" from "Whatsis U." and thereby hype the gate.

However, this practice more than any other had given professional football a reputation as the "reptile of the sport" and earned it the unyielding opposition of the nationally popular college game. College football, the big kid on the grid block, commanded the autumn sports sections, the best stadiums, and schools had even

been known to pressure graduates to eschew pro ball. Ultimately, pro ball's sordid reputation for entrapping nice young college boys in its greedy web was costing it far more in ill will than it could afford.

Several farsighted commentators suggested that the solutions to all major problems and many of the local ones could be found in banding together in an official league, just as baseball had done nearly fifty years earlier. With a real league, it was predicted, teams could set salary limits, enforce contracts, and abolish the use of collegians. The football managers half agreed, but none of them was willing to relinquish any autonomy until the failures of 1919 made them agree with Ben Franklin: "Hang together or hang separately."