

ICE PRINCES: The 1934 Giants

By Bob Carroll

The 1934 New York Giants are forever damned in pro football lore as freaks of footwear. The story of how they donned sneakers in the second official NFL Championship Game and snuck to victory while the traditionally-shod Big Bad Bears slipped, skidded, and slid to defeat has been told more often than "the check's in the mail" or "I'll respect you in the morning."

You remember: the New York Frogs had set football back 50 years while they tripped over their feet in the first half, barely getting out of the way of the Darth Vadars from Chicago. Then, at halftime, the call of: "Tennis shoes, anyone?" Suddenly, their feet cloaked in the magic of rubber, the Frogs sallied forth in the second half as the greatest Bear-killers since Davey Crockett was only three. The shoes did it all!

Well, why not? It's a good tale, and a true one, for the most part.

But the tale-bearers always want to embellish their yarn -- make it more Horatio Algerish than it really deserves. They put Goliath in lifts and tie one of David's hands behind his back.

Sure, the George Halas' Bears were big and bad and undefeated through 13 games when they arrived at the Polo Grounds on December 9, along with 9-degree temps. But the BBB's also were minus 1,000-yard scatback Beattie Feathers, out with a bum shoulder. And without All-NFL guard Joe Kopcha, also injured. That made them about an 8 on that particular shivvery day.

Not quite the irresistible force the story-tellers would like you to believe.

And, despite the tale-bearers attempts to show the Giants as a bunch of stiffs who just happened to be in the neighborhood, Coach Steve Owen's New Yorkers weren't chopped liver. Not counting Stout Steve himself, they had four future Hall of Famers on their roster: ends Ray Flaherty and Red Badgro, center Mel Hein, and fullback Ken Strong. These were not nerds.

Oh, their 8-5 record didn't look like something to carve on Mt. Rushmore, but you had to give it a closer gander. Two losses came in their first two games, when they were out west against the strong Lions and Packers. They didn't have their offense in gear, and it showed. Another loss was in the final game, after they'd won the Eastern Division and were and just trying to stay healthy. (They didn't do THAT very well, losing All-NFL Red Badgro.)

The only losses that really meant anything were to the Bears. In the first, at Wrigley Field in early November, they got ripped, 27-7. But two weeks later, back in New York, they almost won before bowing 10-9. That game gave the best line on the relative strengths of the teams. One point does not an impending blow-out make!

And, of course, the Bears had Feathers then. Their attack all year had been Beattie wide and Bronko Nagurski up the middle. No one had stood up to it, but, when Feathers faltered, the Bruins had no one left who was likely to score from more than Mother-may-I distance.

Meanwhile, the Jints had lost Harry Newman, their star passer, in the second Bear game. But warmed-up and with three games under his belt was rookie tosser Ed Danowski. No one knew at that time that Ed would later lead the NFL in passing a couple of seasons. Possessed of that piece of future-foretelling, the smart money might have been on New York.

If you matched the lines, they'd rate about even. But, with Kopcha on the sideline, New York was stronger up the middle -- just where Nagurski was headed.

So, out they came on that ice-covered field. If anything, the skating rink favored the guys from Chicago; they were heavier. Sure enough, the first half went to the Bears, 10-3. Certainly, that's a close score, and under normal circumstances the game could have gone either way in the second half.

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But, if the Bears held on through the second 30, would any chronicler have clucked that they won "only" because the field cried out for Sonja Henie? Of course not. All you'd read was how Chicago proved they were stronger than garlic.

Maybe with Feathers they were. But the next season, when he was only at half-speed, Chicago couldn't win its division. New York, with Danowski playing in front of Newman, won the '35 East. In other words, a good argument can be made that on a normal field, the Giants just might have won that 1934 Championship fair and square.

We'll never know. At halftime, the load of basketball shoes from Manhattan College arrived at the New Yorkers' locker room and – according to the story-tellers -- won the title for them.

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NEW YORK GIANTS 1934: NFL CHAMPIONS
 8-5-0 .615 1st NFL-E Coach - Steve Owen

DAY	DATE	AT	LEAGUE	GAMES	NY-OP	R	STADIUM	ATT
Sun	S-23	A	DETROIT	LIONS	0- 9	L	U. Detroit	12,000
Sun	S-30	A	GREEN BAY	PACKERS ..	6-20	L	City Stadium	11,000
Wed	O- 3	AN	PITTSBURGH	PIRATES .	14-12	W	Forbes Field	13,020
Sun	O- 7	A	BOSTON	REDSKINS	16-13	W	Fenway Park	17,033
Sun	O-14	H	BROOKLYN	DODGERS ...	14- 0	W	Polo Grounds	30,000
Sun	O-21	H	PITTSBURGH	PIRATES .	17- 7	W	Polo Grounds	15,000
Sun	O-28	H	PHILADELPHIA	EAGLES.	17- 0	W	Polo Grounds	8,500
Sun	N- 4	A	CHICAGO	BEARS	7-27	L	Wrigley Field	25,000
Sun	N-11	H	GREEN BAY	PACKERS ..	17- 3	W	Polo Grounds	27,000
Sun	N-18	H	CHICAGO	BEARS	9-10	L	Polo Grounds	45,000
Sun	N-25	H	BOSTON	REDSKINS	3- 0	W	Polo Grounds	25,000
Thu	N-29	A	BROOKLYN	DODGERS ...	27- 0	W	Ebbets Field	
Sun	D- 2	A	PHILADELPHIA	EAGLES.	0- 6	L	Baker Bowl	12,471
Sun	D- 9	H	CHICAGO	BEARS	30-13	W	Polo Grounds	35,059

DAY	DATE	AT	NON-LEAGUE	GAMES	NY-OP
Sun	S- 9	a	New Rochelle	Bulldogs	28- 6
Thu	S-13	a	East Orange	Tornadoes	27- 0
Sun	S-16	a	Rose Bowl	Lions	19- 6
(at Paterson, NJ)					
Wed	S-19	a	Perth Amboy	Clovers .	34- 6
Sun	D-16	a	Paterson	Panthers ...	10- 0
Sun	J-20	a	Pac. Coast	All-Stars.	21- 0
(at San Francisco, CA)					
Sun	J-27	a	Chicago	Bears	0-21
(at Los Angeles, CA) (Championship Game)					

CHAM

Roster (28)	POS	YR	HGT	WGT	AG	SCHOOL	GM/ST	DE	GB	PT	BO	BK	PT	PH	CB	GB	CB	BO	BK	PH	CB	
Badgro, Morris "Red" ..	E	7	6-0	190	31	So. California	13/13	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	-
Bellinger, Bob	G	1	5-11	212	21	Gonzaga	9/ 2	G	-	-	-	g	g	G	g	g	g	-	g	g	-	-
Boyle, Bill "Knuckles".	T	1	5-11	232	25	none	1/ 0	-	-	t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Burnett, Dale	W	5	6-1	185	25	Kans.St.Teach.	10/ 9	-	-	-	B	B	B	B	b	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
a-Cannella, John	GT	2	6-1	200	26	Fordham	2/ 0	g	t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Clancy, Stu	WB	5	5-10	190	28	Holy Cross ...	9/ 1	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	B	-	-	-	-	-	-
Danowski, Ed	#	1	6-1	200	22	Fordham	8/ 3	b	b	b	-	b	-	-	-	b	-	B	B	B	B	B
Dell Isola, John	GC	1	5-11	205	22	Fordham	6/ 0	-	-	g	-	g	g	g	c	-	-	-	-	c	-	-
Flaherty, Ray	E	7	6-0	187	30	Gonzaga	9/ 7	-	E	E	-	-	-	E	E	E	E	e	E	e	E	E
Frankian, Malcolm "Ike"	E	2	5-11	207	27	St. Mary"s(CA)	13/ 6	E	e	e	E	E	E	e	e	e	e	E	e	E	E	E
Gibson, Denver "Butch"	G	5	5-9	205	30	Grove City ...	13/ 9	g	G	G	G	G	G	g	g	G	G	G	G	g	G	G
Grant, Len	T	5	6-3	222	28	New York U. ..	12/ 6	T	T	T	-	t	T	t	T	t	t	t	T	t	t	t
Hein, Mel	C	4	6-2	200	25	Washington St.	13/13	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Irvin, Cecil "Tex"	T	4	6-0	230	27	Davis & Elkins	12/ 7	T	t	t	-	T	t	T	t	T	T	T	t	T	T	T
Jones, Tom "Potsy"	G	5	5-11	210	24	Bucknell	12/ 9	-	G	G	G	G	g	g	G	G	G	g	G	G	G	G
Krause, Max "Bananas" .	B	2	5-10	197	25	Gonzaga	12/ 4	b	b	B	b	b	B	B	b	b	b	b	b	B	B	-
McBride, Jack	#	10	5-11	185	32	Syracuse	1/ 0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	b	-	b
Molenda, John "Bo"	B	8	5-10	220	28	Michigan	13/ 9	B	B	b	B	B	b	b	B	B	B	B	B	B	b	B
Morgan, Bill	T	2	6-2	226	24	Oregon	13/ 7	t	t	t	T	T	t	T	t	T	T	T	t	T	T	T
Newman, Harry	#	2	5-8	175	24	Michigan	10/10	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	-	-	-	-	-
b-Norby, John	W	1	6-0	195	23	Idaho	3/ 0	b	b	b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Owen, Bill "Red"	T	9	6-0	220	30	Oklahoma A & M	12/ 6	t	T	T	T	t	T	t	T	t	-	t	T	t	t	t
Reese, Hank	G	2	5-11	210	23	Temple	13/ 6	G	g	g	g	g	G	G	G	g	g	G	g	G	-	-
Richards, Elvin "Kink".	F	2	5-11	190	23	Simpson	13/ 1	b	B	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b
Scheuer, Abe "Babe" ...	T	1	6-3	240	22	New York U. ..	1/ 0	t	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Smith, "Wee Willie" ...	F	1	5-6	148	24	Idaho	9/ 1	-	-	-	-	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	b	B	-	-
Stafford, Harry	W	1	5-11	205	24	Texas	6/ 3	B	B	B	-	b	b	-	-	-	-	-	b	-	-	-
Strong, Ken	F	6	6-0	198	28	New York U. ..	13/11	B	b	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	b	B

a = to Brooklyn; b = to Philadelphia
 Glenn Campbell missed entire season because of illness