

FRANKLIN'S WORLD'S CHAMPION FOOTBALL TEAM

By William R. Smith

[Editor's note: *The following article first appeared in an anthology on the history of team sports in Franklin, Pa. about the time of World War I. It is reprinted here for the excellent capsule biographies of Franklin players and for the light it sheds on local fan support of professional teams before the beginning of the National Football League. Further information on Franklin pro football is contained in the article "Tom O'Rourke's World Series" by Bob Braunwart and Bob Carroll in the 1980 P.F.R.A. annual.*]

During the past decade or two there have been a number of high-class football elevens that claimed to be world champions. Notably among these were the ones managed and organized by Jim Thorpe, the famous Carlisle Indian player, at Canton, Ohio, the past few years. Thorpe, it will be remembered, was the athlete, undoubtedly the greatest the world ever knew, who carried off about all the honors at the great meet in Denmark a few years ago, only to be stripped of them because a jealous and unsportsman rival alleged he had played baseball for money in order to keep body and soul together.

As stated above, there have been numerous first-class teams, but none has approached the great team Franklin put on the field in the fall of 1904. The team was under the management of "Dave" Printz, who had the financial backing of some of the real dyed-in-the-wool sports who have made Franklin famous in all manner of clean sports. Dave gathered together the greatest team that ever stepped upon a gridiron. There was not a team in that day that could even make a showing against it, and when they played at New York for the championship of the world Glass, the great Yale guard, stated that no team of players in the country could ever be gotten together that could win from the team Franklin had on the field.

Ten games were played by the team before entering in the world's champion events at Madison Square Garden, New York, where they easily won their two games. In these 12 contests they piled up a total of 461 points and were not scored on in any of their games. The nearest any opponent got to our goal line was when the great Indian player, Wier, playing right end for Syracuse University, on a double-pass raced over the field to our 35-yard line, where he was stopped by Quarterback Hayden. This is the only time an opposing player carried the ball across the centre of the field. After the play by Wier, Syracuse immediately lost on downs, after losing a number of yards on their attempts to push further toward our goal posts.

Following is the record of the games that fall:

October 21 – Franklin 74, Youngstown 0
October 24 – Franklin 28, Primrose, of Pittsburgh, 0
October 28 – Franklin 46, Jamestown 0
October 31 – Franklin 56, Wheeling 0
November 7 – Franklin 33, Ellwood City 0
November 11 – Franklin 74, Niagaras, of Buffalo, 0
November 14 – Franklin 45, Sewickley 0
November 18 – Franklin 12, Syracuse University 0
November 21 – Franklin 47, Allegheny College 0
November 26 – Franklin 23, East End, Pittsburgh, 0

December 15 – Franklin 12, Orange, N.J., at New York, 0

December 17 – Franklin 12, Watertown, N.Y., at New York, 0

The team was composed of some of the most famous players of the world, men whose names will go down in football history for ages to come. Early in the season The Evening News published a biography of the players from which we take the following:

Clark A. Schrontz, left end. Six feet tall and weighs 186 pounds. He played three years at end for W. and J. College and was known as one of the fastest men to get down the field on a punt in the game.

John Lang, tackle. Not so tall – just 5 feet, 10½ inches – but he tipped the scales at 208 pounds. Jack was another W. and J. graduate and a tackle of rare ability. He had a habit of breaking up plays of his opponents before they were started, was in every play and was seldom worsted.

W.P. McNulty, a little fellow of 5 feet 11½, played left tackle when Lang wanted a rest. His weight was 203 and he made himself felt decidedly in many a charge. McNulty had much experience before coming to Franklin, graduating from Notre Dame University and following this up with seasons at Paterson, N.J., Homestead, at that time champions of the world, and the Pittsburgh All-Stars.

Standing to the left of Lynn Sweet, the centre, was what a good many people, before they learned better, believed to be a mountain. But when time for action came it was discovered that the supposed mountain was none other than Herman Kirkoff, the greatest guard who ever lived. He was only 6 feet 4, but he kept the weighing man busy until he had shoved the beam over 242 pounds. We have seen him go down the field with the ball tucked under his arm and half a dozen opposing players hanging onto his back and legs, but he moved along as though nothing was opposing him. Herman had played for eight years before coming to our beautiful city, including one year at Purdue University, one with Indianapolis, three years with the Denver Athletic Club and two years with the famous Chicago Athletic Club, finishing his work before coming to Franklin with a year with the Pittsburgh All-Stars.

Lynn D. Sweet, centre supreme, short but solid. He stood 5 feet 7 in his socks and weighed 172. Sweet was also a college graduate, played a year at tackle for Bucknell and two years at centre for the same college. He then shifted to State College, where he was discovered by Connie Mack for his Philadelphia Athletics. In all the comings and goings at centre Sweet has never had a peer.

A splendid running mate to Kirkoff was Arthur L. McFarland, who stood at Sweet's right. "Tige," as he was lovingly called by his many friends and admirers, was almost as ferocious as his name implied. He could rip a hole in the opposing line with the ease of a Sampson, and even the great Roller, who played here with Syracuse, was unable to stop him. He started his career at Greensburg at a time that that place and Latrobe were having regular Franklin-Oil City battles. He stayed with the team for three years and then entered W. and J., where he soon became the most famous guard ever turned out by that college. He remained there two years and then played two years for the University of West Virginia, following this up by joining Connie Mack's Athletics, his last engagement before joining Manager Printz's gladiators. It has often been said that there

were but four perfect guards in the world. Of these Glass, of Yale, and B.F. Rollier were two, while Kirkoff and McFarland made up the quartette.

Those who remember “Blondy” Wallace will laugh when they are told that his parents burdened him with the names of Charles Edgar. This marvel of 6 solid feet and 240 pounds was certainly a wonder at tackle. Fast, strong and unusually quick to size up a play, he was made captain of the team. “Blondy” played two years at Peddie Institute, helping win the championships in 1896 and 1897. He then moved over to the University of Pennsylvania for three years. Following his college days, he was captain of the Philadelphia Nationals for one year and then captain of Mack’s Athletics for the year before he became captain of the world’s greatest football team – Franklin.

The real guiding hand of this great team was the quarterback, “Jack” Hayden, than whom a better quarter never lived. Hayden wasn’t very tall, being but 5 feet 8, but he weighed 170 pounds, and every one of these were hard as nails. It took him but an instant to pick out the weak spots of his opponents and the rapidity with which he pulled off his plays was amazing. He was unusually expert at making fake plays. Jack’s full name was John Francis Hayden and he was in his prime while playing with Franklin. His experience before coming here was varied. First he played a couple of years with Villa Nova, spent the next at the University of Pennsylvania, following this up with seasons at the University of Maryland, the Maryland Athletic Club and Mack’s Athletics. After leaving here he went to the Brooklyn Nationals and from there spent several summers as manager of the Louisville Colonels.

Perhaps the most popular member of the team was John A. Matthews, familiarly known as “Teck.” He had been engaged the previous season as coach of the Franklin eleven and was so successful and such a remarkable player that he was immediately engaged as halfback for the championship team. He had no trouble in holding his own and was acknowledged the peer of all the backfield men. From his name one could not guess his nativity, but when you saw him it was not hard to tell that he belonged to that great race, the American Indian. His home was in San Marcos, Texas, but he came north while a young man for an education, starting at Kiskiminetas. From this prep school he went to W. and J., where he became the greatest football player ever turned out at any college up to that time, and it is doubtful if he has been surpassed to this day by any person with the possible exception of Jim Thorpe. Teck was a wonderful runner with the ball, his 197 pounds tacked onto 5 feet 11 inches of framework mowing down his opponents like a battering ram. Whenever it was necessary to make a few yards to hold the ball and it was given to Matthews, the gain was practically certain. In fact, in the two years he played at Franklin we do not remember of his ever failing to make his gains. He was just as good on the defensive as the offensive.

H.A. (“Bull”) Davidson was the fullback. He was almost as heavy as his coach, being 5 feet 10 inches and weighing 220 pounds. Previous to coming to this city he was the star fullback of the University of Pennsylvania for three years and also played with the Philadelphia Professionals, the Athletics, and then coached the Maryland Athletics.

There was one more member of this team who was with Franklin for two years. This was Paul Stainberg, the 175-pound halfback. He was a good running mate for Matthews, and at the close of the season was engaged to coach the baseball team the next summer and later on to coach the football eleven. Never have we seen a better man to squirm out of a tight place while running with the ball. He was called “the twister”

here on account of his peculiar whirling motion while going down the field and was an expert on running back punts down through a broken field. His experience before joining the "greatest of all" was with the Syracuse Athletic Association, coach at Carthage College, coach at the All-Syracuse eleven in 1901, and the next year was with the Philadelphia Athletics. He was also an expert basket ball player and went from this city to Little Falls, N.Y., where he was physical director of the Athletic Association.

Over at right end was the smallest member of the team. B.D. Sutter was just 5 feet 4 and weighed but 150 pounds, but his ability as a player was unquestioned. In fact, one had to be of the highest calibre in order to hold down a job with the world champions. His first experience at the big game was with Western Reserve at Cleveland, and he then entered W. and J. In fact, five members of the team were graduates of this famous Washington county school. He was not in the best of health while in Franklin and on several occasions his place was taken by Eddie Woods, another W. and J. man.

There were two other members of the team, but they were seldom called upon for duty. They were W.J. ("Bill") McConnell, a local boy who afterwards became Mayor of the city, and "Chal" Brennan, now Street Commissioner.

The fans of this city will probably be surprised, in looking over the list of games, not to find Oil City mentioned. And right here is where we can show up some of the supporting fraternity of the town at the junction of the Allegheny river and Oil creek. Before the season started a schedule between Franklin and Oil City was arranged and a forfeit put up by each team to play a certain number of games. Oil City was over-anxious for the contests and was of the opinion that they were going to put something over on their rivals. Immediately upon the signing of the contract they started hotfoot after their players, only to find that Manager Printz had been weeks ahead of them and had signed every man they wanted with the exception of "Doc" Roller. They were up against it good and proper and made a proposition to Roller to give him \$1,500 if he would get a team to beat Franklin, but if he failed was to get something like half that amount. "Nothing doing," said Roller; "I couldn't get a team together that would beat Franklin for \$15,000." Then the great big yellow streak showed up. Those Oil City "sports" came to Franklin, whined around awhile, claiming we had signed all the players they wanted, that they could not get a team together that would give us a decent argument, and then asked to be allowed to withdraw their forfeit. This request was so surprising and unusual, even though coming from Oil City "sports," that it was granted, and this is why we did not wallop the daylights out of them in the year 1904 like we have in practically every other season for the past 30 years.