

## LITTLE BETHANY: CRADLE OF PRO FOOTBALL

By Bob Carroll

Here's something interesting.

There's a little school that you probably never heard of called Bethany, and before you say, "Oh, sure, it's in Kansas," we don't mean THAT Bethany. The Bethany whereof we speak is up in the the northern West Virginia panhandle, about a half hour from Wheeling if you're willing to risk your life on a road that makes the one in Burma look like a freeway. More curves than the Swimsuit Issue!

If you get to Bethany -- by the way, there's a town of Bethany, too; it's under the sign -- anyway, if you get to Bethany, you'll find a charming and picturesque campus that looks like it could relate to Bigtime Football the way Mr. Rogers can relate to *Winning Through Intimidation*.

So, what's the point? Okay, let's go back 68 years. In 1922, little Bethany had pretensions. The football squad went 8- 2-0 which was the most games the Bisons (that's what the West Virginia Bethanys are called; the ones in Kansas are Swedes) had ever one in a season. Darned near in TWO seasons!

To be honest, most of the teams the Bisons buffaloed came from places you'd need an atlas, magnifying glass and tweezers to find, but they DID knock off Ohio U. And they absolutely destroyed George Washington, 52-0, which is better than the redcoats ever did. One of the losses was by a respectable 7-19 to Washington & Jefferson, only one year removed from the Rose Bowl squad.

Say, said the Bisons, this football stuff's a snap. And the next year they went out and scheduled Army. Can you believe it? Bethany versus the same Army team that played Navy and Notre Dame! Seeing the mighty Beths on their schedule sure must have set those cadet knees to knocking.

Well, it could have been a lot worse. The Bisons got through it with only a 20-6 count against them, but the whole season was a 1-5-2 disaster which looked like the old Bethany records. Whoever made up the schedule just hadn't figured on graduations, desertions, and like that.

Still, it's the '22 team that won 80 percent of the time we're interested in for this little essay. Some interesting people there.

Let's start with Harry F. Randolph from Dickerson Run, PA. Harry was good enough to find a spot as a blocking back for the Columbus Tigers in 1923. Dickerson Run hasn't been on the Grande Tour of late, but you can see how a Pennsylvania boy could wind up at a little West Virginia school. The states are next to each other.

Okay, moving on, we have Emil "Puss" Mayer from East Liverpool, OH, a sophomore in '22 and a pro with Pottsville and Portsmouth later on. Makes sense: East Liverpool is up a few miles and across the river from Wheeling. (When I was a kid growing up in Wheeling, I didn't know about the English Liverpool, so I figured the town up the river got its name because its citizens threw meat in the water.)

But when you get to the biggest star on the team in every sense, things look a little suspicious. Karl T. Broadley, who later used his 6'4" height and 238 pounds for the Cleveland Bulldogs came all the way from Ft. Worth, TX, to get an education. Sure, those things happen, but check this:

Also on that '22 team were Hubbard Shoemake from Oskaloosa, IA; Sid Gepford and Roy Adkins both from Decatur, IL. And the next year, Kyle McWhorter also came in from Decatur. You might recognize Shoemake and MacWhorter. You'll find them on page 16 of David Neft's *Pro Football: The Early Years* as members of the 1920 Decatur Staleys -- George Halas' precursor of the Chicago Bears. Moreover, Gepford and Adkins were also on that Decatur team although they didn't play in any games against APFA opponents and so are not listed in the Neft's book.

In other words, little ol' Bethany imported at least four players who'd already spent time playing pro football in Illinois. Does the NCAA know about this?

## **THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 12, No. 4 (1990)**

---

And here's the coda. A Bethany senior in 1921 was Walt Jean (real name LeJeune), a combative guard-fullback, who joined the Akron Pros in 1922 and went on to play six seasons in the NFL. Everyone from Treat to Neft (until he checked a Bethany yearbook last April) had listed Jean as from the Kansas Bethany.

To sum up, not only did little Bethany blatantly fracture all the rules of amateur sport by using four players who'd previously played professionally, but -- perhaps more amazing for an obscure school its size -- no fewer than EIGHT past and future pros played for the team in the space of three years.