

**HOW TO GET FROM DAYTON TO INDIANAPOLIS
BY WAY OF BROOKLYN, BOSTON, NEW YORK, DALLAS,
HERSHEY AND BALTIMORE**

By Bob Carroll
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Once upon a time -- well, in March of 1995, to be exact -- Ragtime Sports published Rick Hines' story on Y.A. Tittle, one of my all-time favorite bald quarterbacks. Maybe I enjoyed reminiscing about Y.A. too much because I read right past an error in the article without noticing it, an error that has since given rise to a series of letter-to-the-editor corrections that may have simply confused the issue further.

To remind everybody, what Rick wrote was "... the [Baltimore] Colts were one of four AAFC teams taken in by the NFL. The other teams from the defunct AAFC to merge with the NFL were the [Cleveland] Browns, New York Yankees and San Francisco 49ers."

The question seems simple enough: which teams and how many of them from the old All-America Football Conference (1946-1949) were taken into the the National Football League in 1950? What Rick wrote was wrong. But also it was sort of right, as I will explain later.

Eric Minde, a reader who knows his AAFC potatoes (as my sainted grandpa used to say), jumped all over Rick. In Issue 4, Eric said: "... the article about Y.A. Tittle identifies the New York Yankees as an AAFC team that transferred to the NFL -- this is also wrong! The New York Yankees folded with the AAFC -- it was the Boston Yanks already in the NFL before the AAFC came into existence that became the New York Bulldogs, then later renamed the New York Yanks."

This is right as far as it goes. But, because it doesn't go far enough, it leaves us hanging. Telling us when the Yanks from Boston became the Bulldogs from New York and when they became the Yanks of New York would have helped. But we're still at sea about the Yankees.

You see, they really did merge into the NFL in a way.

We got through Issue 5 without seeing further comment about what happened with that long ago merger. But just when it seemed safe to go back into the troubled waters

Those waters were really muddied by Albert Packman in Issue 6, writing: "The reader is mistaken -- the 1950 NFL New York Yankees -- were indeed the 1949 AAC Yanks." I certainly sympathize with anyone trying to get this straight. It's easy to mis-state. But, honest, Albert, there was no team in 1950 called the "Yankees" nor was there a 1949 AAC team called the "Yanks."

Earlier in his letter, Mr. Packman, correctly stated that the Boston Yanks' franchise lasted only from 1944-1948 but he also said that the Yanks "became" the Bulldogs in 1949, and that's subject to interpretation. He also suggests that similar rosters from season-to-season constitute "documented proof" that the 1949 AAC team and the 1950 NFL team were the same whatever they were called.

Not exactly.

Truthfully, I've got lots of things to do -- tend a sick cat, watch *Due South*, read an Ed McBain novel. Important stuff! Still, if this mess is ever going to get straightened out, I guess I have to do it myself. And, to give you the whole story, I'll have to go back to Dayton, Ohio, in 1913.

THE TREK BEGINS

That was the year the Dayton Cadets, a semi-pro team made up for the most part of graduates of St. Mary's Institute, wrested the city independent football championship from the Dayton Oakwoods. Just for the record, St. Mary's Institute later became the University of Dayton. That has nothing to do with our story, but I thought you might be interested.

Or not.

The St. Mary's Cadets got stronger over the next couple of years by hiring players with other than St. Mary's backgrounds. In 1916 when they were given financial backing by several local businesses, they changed their name to the Dayton Triangles. By then, apparently, the team was fully professional and the strongest pro grid aggregation in southern Ohio, though not yet in the class with the powerhouses up north in Canton and Massillon. When World War I and the influenza epidemic caused most teams to suspend operations in 1918, the Triangles kept playing against what was left, went undefeated, and can be considered the U.S. Pro Champs for that year. Their coach and star player was Earle "Greasy" Neale who later coached the Eagles to championships.

Two years later on September 17, 1920, when most of the country's strong pro teams met at Canton to form an organization, the Dayton Triangles were front and center. What they helped form was the American Professional Football Association (APFA) and today the NFL considers it to be its -- the NFL's -- first year of existence. As a matter of fact, the APFA changed its name to National Football League in 1922.

For its first year or so, the NFL -- oops! APFA -- was a pretty loose operation with member teams drifting in and out. Dayton, under its manager Carl Storck, was quite dependable and one of the young league's better teams. The Triangles even tied Jim Thorpe and the Canton Bulldogs 20-20 in a famous game that probably represents the high-point of its history. Carl Storck was elected APFA secretary-treasurer in 1921 and continued in that office after the league became the NFL. As a secretary, he kept terrible minutes but apparently he was an okay treasurer. At least he never absconded to Brazil.

In 1922 when it became the NFL, the league was on fairly firm financial footing. Instead of just saying teams that paid their dues were "members," it began awarding franchises. This franchise thing is important to our story, so pay attention.

A franchise was issued to an individual or organization who owned a football team. It was NOT issued to a city. So, for example, when Tim Mara received his New York Giants' franchise in 1925, it was his -- not New York's. In theory, if Tim had decided to pull up stakes and relocate his Giants in Ames, Iowa, he could have done so, and it still would have been the same team because it was the same franchise. Until Al Davis came along a half century later, a team owner had to get permission from the other owners to move, but the point is that when we start tracing teams, it's franchises that have to be considered first, not rosters, cities, or even club presidents.

I know this is a bit tricky, but consider what happened to the Dayton Triangles. As the 1920s rolled on, the original Triangles players got old and retired. Carl Storck's team grew weaker and weaker. In its last years, it played strictly on the road to collect the visiting club guarantee because no one in Dayton would come out to see them lose. After 1929, the franchise was sold to some investors in Brooklyn who hired a batch of new players and called their team the Brooklyn Dodgers. Clever name!

Now, even though the owners were different, the players were different, the team name was different, the uniforms were different, and the team's home base was different, the Dodgers were operating under what once was the Dayton Triangles' franchise, so the "team line" is intact -- the Dodgers were the Triangles.

THE SECOND STEP

One thing that hadn't changed was losing. Throughout the 1930s the Dodgers found themselves at the bottom of the standings nearly every year. An energetic young sportsman named Dan Topping became owner in 1937 but it didn't help much. In 1940, Topping hired the legendary Jock Sutherland as coach and the team actually became competitive. Then World War II came along and drafted most of the best Dodgers. Back to the bottom.

By 1944, Topping was getting desperate. He changed his team's name to Tigers. Those few who showed up at Ebbets Field weren't fooled. "Same old Dodgers!" they said and seldom came back for seconds.

The really odd thing that happened in 1944 was that the NFL awarded a brand new franchise to Ted Collins, the manager of singing star Kate Smith. (The league always says it "awarded" franchises because it sounds so much nicer than "sold.") Anyway, this Ted Collins franchise is strange because there the country was in the middle of a war and NFL teams were scraping bottom to find enough 4-F's to get eleven players on the field. And then they turn around and start a new team!

Maybe it shows that if you have enough money, you can get almost anything. Kate Smith was the biggest female singer in captivity in those days, and that's not a joke about her waist size which was indeed quite ample. Hey, she didn't need to look like Madonna; she sang on the radio! Everybody just loved her. And when she sang "God Bless America," we all shivered from sea to shining sea.

Actually, money can't quite buy everything. Ted Collins really wanted to put a team into Yankee Stadium and call it the "Yankees." The Maras (remember Tim?) put their feet down by insisting on their franchise rights (there's that word again!) to exclusivity in the Big Apple. So Collins had to settle for a team in Boston which he called the "Yanks."

The most important thing a team owner got with his franchise was permission to play games with other league teams and to take part in such league activities as the player draft. But the second most important thing he bought was exclusive right to play in a particular territory. No other league team could come into that territory and start playing its home games there unless the franchise holder said it was okay. The Bears got into Chicago in 1922 only after the Chicago Cardinals gave them the nod. In 1960, the Cards got tired of being the second team in the Second City and moved to St. Louis. A couple of years ago, they moved on again, this time to Phoenix. With each move, the franchised territory changed but the team still operated on the same franchise. Therefore, the Chicago Cardinals, St. Louis Cardinals, Phoenix Cardinals, and now the Arizona Cardinals are all the same team.

A SIDE TRIP TO PENNSYLVANIA

I'll admit, sometimes things can get out of hand. It's largely forgotten today but back in 1940 Art Rooney sold his Pittsburgh franchise to Alexis Thompson who wanted to move the team to Boston. Then Rooney bought a half interest in Bert Bell's Philadelphia Eagles. The league wouldn't let Thompson go to Massachusetts and Rooney didn't really want to leave Pittsburgh. So Bell-Rooney and Thompson switched franchised territories. Bert and Art brought the Eagles to Pittsburgh and renamed them the "Steelers." Meanwhile, Thompson took the Steelers to Philadelphia and renamed them "Eagles." Most of the former Philadelphia players wound up in Pittsburgh and visa-versa. As late as 1945 the Steelers were officially owned by the Philadelphia Football Club, Inc. Apparently there was some revision the next year when Bell left his partnership with Rooney to become the NFL Commissioner. To all intents and purposes, the Steelers' and Eagles' histories run continuously from 1933 when both teams entered the NFL. But technically it's Pittsburgh (1933-1940) to Philadelphia (1941-on) AND Philadelphia (1933-1940) to Pittsburgh (1941-on). Just about everybody ignores the technically correct descent, and it's probably best that they do. I mean, how convoluted do you want your pro football history to be?

As a sidebar, I should add that a lot of very good writers have writ that Pittsburgh team changed its name from "Pirates" to "Steelers" in 1941 as a result of the franchise switch. Wrong! The name change took place the year before.

MEANWHILE, IN BOSTON

But I digress. Back to Ted Collins and Kate Smith.

So, in 1944, Kate and Ted had a football team -- even if it was in the wrong place -- that won two whole games, which just happened to be two more than Dan Topping's Brooklyn Tigers put in the win column. Trying to make a silk purse out of a couple of sow's ears, the NFL allowed Collins' Boston Yanks and Topping's Brooklyn Tigers to merge for the 1945 season. Under the arrangement, the team split its games between Boston and Brooklyn and called itself simply the "Yanks." At least that's how it went until December.

About the time the NFL was playing its 1945 Championship Game, Dan Topping announced the honeymoon was over. He planned to take his team out of the NFL and put it in a brand new league set to open in 1946 -- the All-America Football Conference (or AAFC as people who never can remember whether it's "All-America" or "All-American" prefer to call it).

As far as franchising goes, that ends the Dayton-to-Brooklyn descendancy. Topping couldn't take his NFL franchise to the AAFC; in that league, an NFL franchise was just a piece of wastepaper. He had to get himself a new AAFC franchise. Meanwhile, the NFL declared his Brooklyn franchise forfeit, ending it well and good. The league also awarded all of Topping's Brooklyn players to Collins' Yanks who went back to being the Boston Yanks. In point of fact, most of Topping's players jumped to the AAFC with him.

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To really mess things up, Topping's new team was called the New York "Yankees" and played in Yankee Stadium -- where Ted Collins wanted to be with the name he wanted to use. And, another AAFC team was the Brooklyn Dodgers, completely unrelated to Dan Topping's old NFL club.

One might suggest the new AAFC Yankees were indeed descended from the old NFL Dodgers (nee Triangles). The switching of leagues negates the franchise argument in this case. Maybe so, but events were going to soon settle the blood lines once and for all.

The two leagues hated each other for three years, but as the 1949 season approached, the outlook was beginning to look bleak for the AAFC. In January, Collins was certain the NFL was about to become the only pro football league. Then he finally got permission to move to New York. But the way he did it is really weird. First, he had the league cancel his Boston franchise. (That ends the Boston Yanks.) Then he was awarded a NEW franchise for New York! Apparently, this strange maneuver was a tax thing, allowing him to write off the Yanks.

Collins still didn't get things the way he wanted them. It turned out he had to play in the Polo Grounds, splitting time with the Giants. And he ended up calling his 1949 team the New York "Bulldogs," a name that never worked anywhere except in Ohio. In his defense, he could hardly keep the name "Yanks" in 1949 what with Topping's Yankees also in the city. Fans wouldn't know which team's games they were staying home from.

Just why the Maras were willing to let Collins come into their territory isn't clear, but it may have been prompted by a strengthened AAFC presence in New York City.

Wait'll you hear this one!

It seems the AAFC Brooklyn Dodgers were just as bad as Dan Topping's old NFL Dodgers had been even though the two clubs were related only in ineptitude. The AAFC Bums had had it after the 1948 season. And so -- now get this -- they merged with Topping's AAFC New York Yankees. How's THAT for irony! The new Brooklyn-New York Yankees (that's what they were called at first) took a half-dozen-or-so competent players off the Dodgers' roster and let the rest go. The upbeat was that the AAFC had a single strong team in New York in '49 while the NFL's Giants and Bulldogs won only seven games between them.

Even so, things didn't pan out for the AAFC. It gave up the ghost after the 1949 season, bringing about the merger that was originally mis-stated in Ragtime Sports and thus started us on this long road.

THE MERGER AND BEYOND

Okay, the first part is easy. The NFL grabbed the Cleveland Browns, a strong team that could bring in the crowds. It also accepted the San Francisco 49ers, the AAFC's second strongest team and a second payday when NFL clubs went west to visit the Rams in Los Angeles. That made for a nice twelve team league. But the NFL also took in a thirteenth team -- the weakest in the AAFC -- the Baltimore Colts. The reason for this incredible move was that Washington Redskins Owner George Preston Marshall had a lot of clout. He thought maybe the Colts and Redskins might make a lucrative rivalry and besides the Colts owners were willing to pay him an arm and a leg to come into his franchised territory.

Here's another switching-leagues thing where "franchise" doesn't really apply. The Cleveland Browns of the AAFC were indeed the Cleveland Browns of the NFL. Likewise the San Francisco 49ers. And, unfortunately, the Baltimore Colts.

Just about everybody outside of Baltimore knew the Colts wouldn't work and after one year just about everybody was proved right. The 1950 season was barely dry when the Colts owner turned his franchise and his players over to the league for \$50,000.

Thus endeth the Baltimore Colts first habitation of the NFL.

But what about Dan Topping's New York Yankees? Well, it turns out they weren't quite dead when the AAFC went under in 1949. I told you ages ago that there was a "sort of" merger. The NFL announced that the Yankees were merged with the Bulldogs. Some people might say that constitutes a continuation of the Dayton-Brooklyn-Yankees line, but I can't see it. The league used the word "merged" okay -- nice word, "merged" -- but they lied.

Actually, Ted Collins bought the rights to most of the Yankees players. It was a player deal. If the Lions sell a quarterback to the Steelers, you don't say Detroit merged with Pittsburgh! By the way, Collins was snookered. He got the chaff; the Giants got the wheat. The Giants were given rights to six Yankees, but they included Hall of Fame tackle Arnie Weinmeister and three excellent defensive backs -- Harmon Rowe, Otto Schnellbacher, and Tom Landry (yes, THAT Tom Landry!). The new guys helped the Giants go 10-2 in 1950.

Collins team was stronger too. Even secondary Yankees were better than most of his old Bulldogs. Ted enjoyed the only winning season he ever had in the NFL, winning seven of twelve games. And, he finally was allowed into Yankee Stadium. Now he called his ballclub the "Yanks." I suppose that was to avoid confusing his new team with the old Yanks in Boston or the old Yankees in the AAFC. Or the Doughboys of World War I, I guess.

Ha! Fat chance!

Collins' winning streak was short lived. His Yanks collapsed in 1951 and Ted decided enough was enough -- he'd better cut his losses. After all, Kate wasn't getting any younger. He sold his franchise back to the league for \$100,000.

THAT was the end of the Bulldogs-Yanks. And, no matter how you slice it, it was also the final, absolute end of the Cadets- Triangles-Dodgers-Tigers-Yanks-Yankees. Personally, I still say they died in December of 1945.

CLAP! CLAP! CLAP! DEEP IN THE HEART OF HERSHEY

The league turned around and awarded a new franchise to some wide-eyed Dallas businessmen, reaping a nice profit. Please note, it was a new franchise, not that same old wrinkled piece of paper Ted Collins had been carrying around since 1949. The new owners bought a pristine franchise but the same old Yanks players, uniforms, equipment, and losing ways.

Halfway through their inaugural season the Dallas Texans hadn't won a game and the players outnumbered the fans at home games. The Texas owners shuddered and handed the franchise back to the league, taking a complete loss. Everybody figured it proved pro football would never go in Texas. The NFL ran the team out of Hershey, Pennsylvania, for the last five games of 1952. Astonishingly, the Hershey Texans won a game, beating the Chicago Bears at Akron, Ohio.

When the season ended, so did the Texans.

Here we go again. In 1953, a group headed by Carroll Rosenbloom was awarded a new -- get that, new - franchise and all the old New York Yanks-Dallas Texans players and stuff. He called his team the Baltimore Colts even though his team was as unrelated to the old team of the same name as is Joe Montana is unrelated to Butte, Montana. Surprisingly, the new Colts made a go of it and won a championship six years later. You never can tell.

Okay, one more headache. In 1972, Carroll Rosenbloom and Robert Irsay, who owned the Rams, "switched franchises." Does this mean that the line of descent goes Baltimore-to-Los Angeles?

No.

As nearly as I can understand the news releases of the time, Rosenbloom bought the majority of Rams stock and Irsay did the same with Baltimore. The actual franchises stayed put but the owners changed.

However, as we all know, in 1984 Mr. Irsay brought in the trucks and carted the Colts off to Indianapolis. Oh well, nothing lasts forever. Ask Georgia Frontiere.

TO REVIEW

There won't be a test, but I hope everybody's been keeping track. I'll try to keep this short.

1. Dayton Cadets (1913-15), Dayton Triangles (1916-29), Brooklyn Dodgers (1930-43), Brooklyn Tigers (1944), Yanks (Merger with Boston in 1945). End of NFL franchise.

2. Boston Yanks (1944), Yanks (Merger with Brooklyn, 1945), Boston Yanks (1946-48). End of NFL franchise.

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3. New York Bulldogs (1949), New York Yanks (1950-51). End of NFL franchise.
 4. New York Yankees AAFC (1946-48), Brooklyn-New York Yankees (Merger, 1949). End AAFC franchise. New York Yanks bought most of players.
 5. Baltimore Colts I (1947-49 AAFC, 1950 NFL). End NFL franchise.
 6. Dallas Texans (1952). End NFL franchise. Team played out of Hershey, Pa., for final five games.
 7. Baltimore Colts II (1953-1983), Indianapolis Colts (1984- on). Franchise still active.
- A final word. If you think you'll ever wonder about this again, please don't call me. I've got to get back to tending to my cat.

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Much of this article was based on original research by Joe Horrigan, historian for the Pro Football Hall of Fame.