

RALPH VINCE

In the early 1980s, Ralph Vince was a guest at a PFRA meeting and spoke to the members about his long and varied football career, which included two seasons in the National Football League, one in the 1926 American Football League. and participation in the famous Rose Bowl game in which little Washington & Jefferson held the University of California's "Wonder Team" to a scoreless tie.. In the course of his remarks, it came out that Mr. Vince had played a little more football than most people knew. While still a student at Washington & Jefferson, he had played a few games under an assumed name for a semi-pro team from Wheeling, West Virginia, around 1919 or 1920.

Unfortunately, he couldn't remember what name he'd used, the specific year, or the opponents. Surprisingly, two PFRA members who had been researching that era, remembered seeing articles that confirmed what Mr. Vince had said, but they too could not remember the details.

Several years later, Mr. Vince asked PFRA to try to come up with those articles for him. We tried several times but were never able to find them again.

Now it's too late. The following is excerpted from an obituary written by Alana Baranick for the Cleveland Plain Dealer of October 30, 1996.

RALPH VINCE, 96, JUDGE, WAS JOHN CARROLL COACH

Ralph Vince, a former John Carroll University coach and athletic director who went on to become a prominent Cleveland lawyer and Municipal judge, exemplified the American dream.

He was an Italian immigrant who grew up working in the coal mines of southern Ohio. He watched his first football game when he was a senior at Martins Ferry High School. Seeing that the sport was his ticket out of the coal mines, he joined the varsity team, then studied at and played for Washington & Jefferson College in Washington, Pa.

He played guard both ways on the underdog W&J Presidents team that battled the favored University of California team to a scoreless tie in the 1922 Rose Bowl. On the 60th anniversary of that game, Mr. Vince was an honored guest at the Rose Bowl.

Mr. Vince, 96, died October 29, 1996 at his home in Shaker Heights.

Pro Career Paid the Way

After graduating from W&J in 1923, Mr. Vince enrolled at Western Reserve University's Law School. He paid his way through law school by playing in the young National Football League for the Cleveland and Canton Bulldogs and coaching the St. Ignatius High School Wildcats.

He coached St. Ignatius to its first city championship in 1925. The Widcats' record from 1923 through 1926 under his tutelage was so impressive, Mr. Vince was asked to coach at John Carroll University.

Mr. Vince led the JCU team for seven years and served as the school's athletic director for two years.

In 1935, Mr. Vince left JCU to practice law. But he kept his hand in sports by officiating at high school, college and NFL games.

Many Honors

Later, he was appointed as a Municipal judge. He also served for two years as a councilman and four years as a law director in University Heights.

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During World War II, he agreed to coach at University School for one year. He stayed on an additional 12 years with winning teams.

In the early 1950s, he was appointed the master commissioner of the SS Noronic disaster. He heard 669 lawsuits filed by those who were injured or lost their kin in the 1949 ship fire.

Mr. Vince continued to maintain an office with the Burke Haber Berick law firm after retirement as a senior partner in 1990.

He served on several boards of trustees, including W&J, JCU, St. Alexis Hospital and Parmadale. He helped found the Cleveland Touchdown Club.

Mr. Vince was inducted into the St. Ignatius, JCU and Cleveland Sports halls of fame. In 1991, the Ralph Vince Fitness Center was dedicated at JCU.

His wife, Florence, died in 1983. They had been married 58 years and raised three children.