

# Football Chronology III

## Pro Football Moves to Ohio and Becomes the APFA: 1903 to 1920

Pro football declined in the Pittsburgh area because of falling attendance. Poor weather and a growing interest in college football were at least part of the cause. Interest in the pro game moved west from Pennsylvania to Ohio.

### 1903

Pro football was popularized in Ohio when the Massillon Tigers, a strong amateur team, hired four Pittsburgh pros to play in the season-ending game against Akron. The Tigers triumphed and claimed the unofficial Ohio Independent Championship. The use of pros elicited much criticism but by the next season, other teams were paying imported players.

### 1904

Ohio had at least seven pro teams, with Massillon winning the Ohio Independent Championship, that is, the pro title. Talk surfaced about forming a state-wide league to end spiraling salaries brought about by constant bidding for players and to write universal rules for the game. The feeble attempt to start the league failed.

Halfback Charles Follis signed a contract with the Shelby (Ohio) AC, making him the first known black pro football player.

### Rule Changes

A field goal was changed from five points to four.

### 1905

The Canton AC, later to become known as the Bulldogs, became a professional team. Massillon again won the Ohio League championship.

### 1906

Arch-rivals Canton and Massillon, the two best pro teams in America, played twice, with Canton winning the first game but Massillon winning the second and the Ohio League championship. A betting scandal and the financial disaster wrought upon the two clubs by paying huge salaries caused a temporary decline in interest in pro football in the two cities and, somewhat, throughout Ohio.

### Rule Changes

The forward pass was legalized. The first authenticated pass completion in a pro game came on October 27, when George (Peggy) Parratt of Massillon threw a completion to Dan (Bullet) Riley in a victory over a combined Benwood-Moundsville team.

### 1907

Massillon fielded a semi-pro team that included several subs from the pro team of 1906. It was still strong enough to be considered the 1907 independent champion.

### 1908

A strong team emerged in the Akron Indians with black star Charles Baker at halfback. The Indians went undefeated for two seasons.

### 1909

The Shelby Blues under the leadership of George "Peggy" Parratt, a former Massillon quarterback, lost only to Akron in pursuit of the Ohio championship.

### Rule Changes

A field goal dropped from four points to three.

### 1910

Parratt's Shelby Blues defeat Akron 8-5 to claim the title.

### 1911

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 2 (2001)

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Jack Cusack became treasurer of a new Canton A.C. team. They forfeited their game to Shelby when they left the field over a dispute with the referee. When Shelby went on to defeat Akron, it had its second championship in a row.

### 1912

Cusack became manager of Canton's pro team, and Parratt moved to Akron, but Elyria became the surprise champion in Ohio.

### Rule Changes

A touchdown was increased from five points to six.

### 1913

Notre Dame's highly-publicized use of the forward pass to defeat Army reverberated through all football. It helped move the pass from a rarely-used, desperation tactic to an important offensive weapon.

Parratt's Akron Indians won the Ohio Independent Championship by playing two tie games on Thanksgiving Day, against Shelby in the morning and Canton in the afternoon.

### 1914

Canton scheduled a pair of games with Parratt's Indians. In the first game, a superior effort gave Canton a 6-0 victory. However, the cost was high. Canton center Harry Turner, one of the team's most popular players, was fatally injured in the game.

The heart went out of the team. They were easily defeated by Akron in the rematch. Parratt had his fourth Ohio title in five years.

### 1915

Massillon again fielded a major team by "stealing" many of Parratt's best players. By building a strong Massillon team revived the old rivalry with Canton. Cusack was forced to upgrade his roster. Just before Canton and Massillon were to meet, Cusack signed Jim Thorpe to play for Canton for \$250 a game. Thorpe, a former football and track star at the Carlisle Indian School (PA) and a double gold medal winner at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, also played a game for the Pine Village Pros in Indiana between his two appearances for the Bulldogs.

The Canton coach kept Thorpe on the bench for much of the game, and the team, which had restored the "Bulldog" nickname, lost. For the next meeting, Cusack named Thorpe coach. He kicked two field goals to win, 6-0.

### 1916

With Thorpe and former Carlisle teammate Pete Calac starring, Canton went 9-0-1, won the Ohio League championship, and was acclaimed the United States pro football champion. However, there were other strong teams in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The Minneapolis Marines claimed the "Northeast Championship."

### 1917

Despite an upset by Massillon, Canton again won the Ohio League championship. Besides Thorpe and Calac, the Bulldogs boasted "Greasy" Neale, "Cap" Edwards, and Milt Ghee.

### 1918

World War I and the influenza epidemic combined to keep most pro teams inactive. The Dayton Triangles, coached and starring "Greasy" Neale, went undefeated in eight games, although against less than sterling competition.

### 1919

Canton again won the Ohio championship, despite the team having been turned over from Cusack to Ralph Hay. Thorpe and Calac were joined in the backfield by Joe Guyon.

Earl (Curly) Lambeau and George Calhoun organized the Green Bay Packers. Lambeau's employer at the Indian Packing Company provided \$500 for equipment and allowed the team to use the company field for practices. The Packers went 10-1.

### 1920

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 23, No. 2 (2001)

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Pro football was in a state of confusion due to three major problems: dramatically rising salaries; players continually jumping from one team to another following the highest offer; and the use of college players still enrolled in school. A league in which all the members would follow the same rules seemed the answer.

An organizational meeting, at which the Akron Pros, Canton Bulldogs, Cleveland Indians, and Dayton Triangles were represented, was held at the Jordan and Hupmobile auto showroom in Canton, Ohio, August 20.

This resulted in the formation of the American Professional Football Conference. A second organizational meeting was held in Canton, September 17. The teams were from four states – Akron, Canton, Cleveland, and Dayton from Ohio; the Hammond Pros and Muncie Flyers from Indiana; the Rochester Jeffersons from New York; and the Rock Island Independents, Decatur Staleys, and Racine Cardinals from Illinois. The name of the league was changed to the American Professional Association.

Hoping to capitalize on his fame, the members elected Thorpe president; Stanley Cofall of Cleveland was elected vice president. A membership fee of \$100 per team was charged to give an appearance of respectability, but no team ever paid it. Scheduling was left up to the teams, and there were wide variations, both in the overall number of games played and in the number played against APFA member teams. Four other teams – the Buffalo All-Americans, Chicago Tigers, Columbus Panhandles, and Detroit Heralds – joined the league sometime during the year.

On September 26, the first game featuring an APFA team was played at Rock Island's Douglas Park. A crowd of 800 watched the Independents defeat the St. Paul Ideals 48-0. A week later, October 3, the first game matching two APFA teams was held. At Triangle Park, Dayton defeated Columbus 14-0, with Lou Partlow of Dayton scoring the first touchdown in a game between Association teams. The same day, Rock Island defeated Muncie 45-0.

By the beginning of December, most of the teams in the APFA had abandoned their hopes for a championship, and some of them, including the Chicago Tigers and the Detroit Heralds, had finished their seasons, disbanded, and had their franchises canceled by the Association. Four teams – Akron, Buffalo, Canton, and Decatur – still had championship aspirations, but a series of late-season games among them left Akron as the only undefeated team in the Association. At one of these games, Akron sold tackle Bob Nash to Buffalo for \$300 and five percent of the gate receipts – the first APFA player deal.

## 1920 American Professional Football Association

### Final Results

<b>Teams (alphabetically)</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>T</b>
Akron Pros	8	0	3
Buffalo All-Americans	9	1	1
Canton Bulldogs	7	4	2
Chicago Tigers	2	5	1
Cleveland Tigers	2	4	2
Columbus Panhandles	2	6	2
Dayton Triangles	5	2	2
Decatur Staleys	10	1	2
Detroit Heralds	2	3	3
Hammond Pros	2	5	0
Muncie Flyers	0	1	0
Racine Cardinals (Chi.)	6	2	2
Rochester Jeffersons	6	3	2
Rock Island Independents	6	2	2