

## ALL-PROS OF THE EARLY NFL

by John Hogrogian

When I was in high school, I spent five dollars on a paperbound edition of the Treat football encyclopedia. The book's list of All-Pro teams caught my interest. Official selections were given for 1931 through 1942, wire-service teams from 1943 on. There were no teams listed prior to 1931. Later, I discovered that the league record manuals, which began in the mid-1930s (and from which Treat presumably took his information) also began their lists at 1931.

Apparently I was not the only one to take an interest in early All-Pro teams. One football magazine even took it upon itself to choose 1920 to 1930 teams some 40 years after the fact. These were added to the later editions of the Treat book once Peter Palmer became its editor. These are interesting and of some value, but, of course, they reflect the latter day reputations of many players rather than the contemporary judgments that we should like to have. And they have no official status whatsoever.

After I finished college, I began my own research into the NFL of the 1920s. In going through newspapers of that era, I would occasionally run across references to one player or another as having been named All-Pro. My newspaper burrowing has now convinced me that there was an annual All-Pro selection in the 1920s that had some recognition in league cities. This team was chosen by a poll of experts, and although it appeared sporadically in several newspapers, its home was in *Green Bay Press-Gazette*.

The *Press Gazette*, like other papers in small NFL cities, covered pro football thoroughly. Big city papers would not reach this level of coverage until the television era. From 1923 through 1931, the *Press Gazette* published this All-Pro in mid- December each year. No other paper carried it consistently during this period.

The articles accompanying these selections never make clear who has conducted the poll. I assume that the sports department of the *Press-Gazette* did the canvassing, but nowhere in any of the articles is that stated as fact. An interesting item is that the *Press-Gazette* published the annual poll in 193? but also published another All-Pro team that year in the newspaper's name.

The 1931 poll is identical to the 1931 official selections. I am convinced that Treat's (and the NFL's) first official listing is in fact the results of this poll. I did not find any announcement in the 1931 article that the poll would henceforth have official status. The 1931 poll was clearly considered a continuation of the past polls and the poll went back to 1923. The selection of an All-Pro team by the NFL coaches began in 1932. I do not know why 1931 should be the cutoff point in the league manuals (and Treat). At any rate, the poll results give us a valuable view of the NFL's early years by contemporary experts. While popularity and politics inevitably entered the voting, the results nevertheless say something about the performances of players that most of us can never see.

\* \* \*

### 1923 ALL-PRO first team

E- Inky Williams, Ham  
E- Gus Tebell, Col  
T- Ed Healey, ChiB  
T- Wilbur Henry, Can  
G- Swede Youngstrom, Buf  
G- Bub Weller, StL  
C- Harry Mehre, Min  
Q- Paddy Driscoll, ChiC  
H- Jim Thorpe, Oor  
H- Al Michaels, Akr  
F- Doc Elliott, Can

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 11 (1982)

---

### second team

E- Guy Chamberlin, Can  
E- Duke Hanny, ChiB  
T- Russ Hathaway, Day  
T- Duke Slater, RI  
G- Frank Morrissey, Buf  
G- Hec Garvey, ChiB  
C- Larry Conover, Can  
Q- Jim Conzelman, Mil  
H- Harry Robb, Can  
H- Curly Lambeau, GB  
F- Dinger Doane, Mil

### third team

E- Ben Winkelman, Mil  
E- Dick O'Donnell, Dul  
T- Cub Buck, GB  
T- Tillie Voss, Tol  
G- Tom McNamara, Tol  
G- Al Nesser, Akr  
C- Charlie Guy, Cle  
Q- John Armstrong, RI  
H- Milt Romney, Rac  
H- Hal Erickson, Mil  
F- John Kyle, Cle

Source Green Bay *Press Gazette*, Dec. 21, 1923.

The poll made its first appearance in 1923, although the *Press-Gazette* did publish an All-Pro team selected by George Halas in 1922. The article accompanying the poll indicated that a panel of sports writers did the choosing. These writers worked for newspapers in Green Bay, Racine, Milwaukee, Duluth, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Rock Island, Akron, Cleveland, Canton, Dayton, Columbus, and Pittsburgh.

I find interesting the absence of any Chicago writer and the inclusion of one from Pittsburgh. The Steel City had no team in the NFL.

Of the selections themselves, the first-team berth accorded Jim Thorpe may have been more on reputation than performance. Four future Hall of Famers made the first team, three the second team, and none the third team.

\* \* \*

### 1924 ALL-PRO first team

E- Joe Little Twig, RI  
E- Tillie Voss, GB  
T- Ed Healey, ChiB  
G- Swede Youngstrom, Buf  
G- Stan Muirhead, Day  
C- George Trafton, ChiB  
Q- Joe Sternaman, ChiB  
H- Charlie Way, Fra  
H- Benny Boynton, Buf  
F- Doc Elliott, Cle

### second team

E- Eddie Anderson, ChiC  
E- Paul Goebel, Col  
T- Link Lyman, Cle  
T- Duke Slater, RI  
G- Doc Williams, Dul  
G- Jim McMillen, ChiB  
C- Andy Nemecek, Col  
Q- Paddy Driscoll, ChiC  
H- Dave Noble, Cle  
H- Curly Lambeau, GB  
F- Tex Hamer, Fra

### third team

E- Guy Chamberlin, Cle  
E- Oscar Christianson, Min  
T- Cub Buck, GB  
T- Mike Gulian, Fra  
G- Al Nesser, Akr  
G- Ralph King, Rac  
C- Len Peterson, KC  
Q- Lin Winters, Col  
H- Joe Guyon, RI  
H- Wayne Brenkert, Akr  
F- Hank Gillo, Rac

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 19, 1924.

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 11 (1982)

---

The article accompanying the second poll indicates that it was "based on replies received from about a dozen sport scribes from cities having teams in the NFL and from six (NFL game) officials. There is no specific list of who the voters were.

The selection of Joe Guyon for the third team is surprising, given Guyon's scant activity this season. Perhaps the compilers mistakenly listed Guyon in place of teammate Buck Gavin.

The article states that Ed Healey was the only unanimous choice. He was one of two Hall of Famers in the first team, while three made the second team, two the third team. The Bears led with three first team members.

### 1925 ALL-PRO

first team	second team
E- Charlie Berry, Pot	E- Red Maloney, Prov
E- Ed Lynch, Roch	E- Lynn Bomar, NYG
T- Ed Healey, ChiB	T- Duke Slater, RI
T- Gus Sonneberg, Det	T- Dick Stahlman, Akr
G- Art Carney, NYG	G- George Abramson, GB
G- Jim McMillen, ChiB	G- Duke Osborn, Pot
C- Ralph Claypool, ChiC	C- Dolph Eckstein, Prov
Q- Joe Sternaman, ChiB	Q- Jim Robertson, Akr
H- Paddy Driscoll, ChiC	H- Verne Lewellen, GB
H- Dave Noble, Cle	H- Cy Wentworth, Prov
F- Jack McBride, NYG	F- Tex Hamer, Fra

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 18, 1925.

The *Press-Gazette* published only first and second teams this year. The selectors were "sports editors from a dozen of the leading papers in the Pro league area." Several eastern teams came into the NFL this season and had representatives on the All-Pro teams. Perhaps eastern writers participated in the poll for the first time.

Ed Healey won a place on the first team for the third straight year. Two Hall of Famers made the first team, none the second team. Ed Lynch gave the winless Rochester Jeffs their only first team representative.

\* \* \*

### 1926 ALL-PRO

first team	second team
E- Brick Muller, LA	E- Lavern Dilweg, Mil
E- Charlie Berry, Pot	E- Fred Bissell, Akr
T- Ed Healey, ChiB	T- Steve Owen, NYG
T- Walt Ellis, ChiC	T- John Thurman, LA
G- Johnny Budd, Fra	G- Jay Berquist, KC
G- Gus Sonnenberg, Det	G- Bill Buckler, ChiB
C- Clyde Smith, KC	C- Herb Stein, Pot
Q- Tut Imlay, LA	Q- Bert Bloodgood, KC
H- Paddy Driscoll, ChiB	H- Hinkey Haines, NYG
H- Verne Lewellen, GB	H- Curly Oden, Prov
F- Ernie Nevers, Dul	F- Hust Stockton, Fra

Source Green Bay *Press Gazette*, Dec. 17, 1926.

This year's selectors were "sports editors and pro football managers from 17 NFL cities." The article does not indicate the total number of voters, although 17 may be a good guess.

The article lists the top vote getters as Ernie Nevers (17), Paddy Driscoll (15), Brick Muller (14), Tut Imlay (11), and Walt Ellis (10).

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 11 (1982)

---

Ed Healey won his fourth straight first team berth, and Paddy Driscoll won his third in four years. Gus Sonnenberg finished third among the tackles, but because he had more votes than any guard, he was placed on the first team at guard. Three Hall of Famers made the first team, one the second.

\* \* \*

### 1927 ALL-PRO

#### first team

E- Lavern Dilweg, GB  
E- Cal Hubbard, Giants  
T- Gus Sonnenberg, Prov  
T- Ed Weir, Fra  
G- Mike Michalske, NYY  
G- Steve Owen, NYG  
C- Clyde Smith, Cle  
Q- Benny Friedman, Cle  
H- Verne Lewellen, GB  
H- Paddy Driscoll, ChiB  
F- Ernie Nevers, Dul

#### second team

E- Ed Lynch, Prov  
E- George Kenneally, Pot  
T- Century Milstead, NYG  
T- Duke Slater, ChiC  
G- Al Graham, Day  
G- Milt Rehnquist, Cle  
C- George Trafton, ChiB  
Q- Hinkey Haines, NYG  
H- Bill Senn, ChiB  
H- Ed Tryon, NYY  
F- Jack McBride, NYG

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, December 16, 1927.

The NFL radically changed its character during the summer of 1927. The league chose to pare down to 12 clubs, junking the unwieldy format of 22 clubs. For the first time, a writer or coach could see most, or even all, of the league's teams in action during the year. The selectors for this year's All-Pro poll were sports writers, team managers, and game officials. A total of 18 ballots were cast.

Both Paddy Driscoll and Gus Sonnenberg earned their third straight first team spots. Five Hall of Famers made the first team, one the second.

\* \* \*

### 1928 ALL-PRO

#### first team

E- Lavern Delweg, GB  
E- Ray Flaherty, NYY  
T- Bill Owen, Det  
T- Bull Behman, Fra  
G- Mike Michalske, NYY  
G- Jim McMillen, ChiB  
C- Clyde Smith, Prov  
Q- Benny Friedman, Det  
H- Wildcat Wilson, Prov  
H- Verne Lewellen, GB  
F- Wally Diehl, Fra

#### second team

E- Cal Hubbard, NYG  
E- Carl Bacchus, Det  
T- Link Lyman, ChiB  
T- Gus Sonnenberg, Prov  
G- Al Graham, Day  
G- Milt Rehnquist, Prov  
C- Joe Westoupal, Det  
Q- Curly Oden, Prov  
H- Paddy Driscoll, ChiB  
H- Eddie Kotat, GB  
F- Tony Latone, Pot

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 17, 1928.

The selectors for 1928 were an unspecified number of reporters and nine team managers. Verne Lewellen and Clyde Smith made the first team for the third straight year. For Smith, this was the third and final season of his NFL career. Two Hall of Famers made the first team, three the second team.

\* \* \*

### 1929 ALL-PRO

#### first team

E- Lavern Dilweg, GB  
E- ray Flaherty, NYG  
T- Bull Behman, Fra  
T- Bob Beattie, Ora  
G- Mike Michalske, GB  
G- Milt Rehnquist, Prov  
C- Joe Westoupal, NYG  
Q- Benny Friedman, NYG

#### second team

E- Bob Lundell, Min  
E- Luke Johnsos, ChiB  
T- Bill Kern, GB  
T- Duke Slater, ChiC  
G- Frank Racis, Bos  
G- Hal Hanson, Fra  
C- Jug Earpe, GB  
Q- George Pease, Ora

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 11 (1982)

---

H- Verne Lewellen, GB      H- Ken Strong, SI  
H- Tony Plansky, NYG      H- Johnny Blood, GB  
F- Ernie Nevers, ChiC      F- Wally Diehl, Fra

### honorable mention

E- Chuck Kassel, ChiC; Tony Kostos, Fra  
T- Steve Owen, NYG; Don Murry, ChiB  
G- Walt Kiesling, ChiC; Jim Bowdoin, GB  
C- Ted Mitchell, Ora  
Q- Red Dunn, GB; John Singleton, Day.  
H- Swede Hagberg, Buf.; Gibby Welsh, Prov.  
F- Tony Latone, Bos.; Bo Molenda, GB

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 20, 1929.

The *Press-Gazette* added an honorable mention list of 13 players to the All-Pro team this year. The 16 selectors included writers, team owners, and team managers.

Of the first team members, Verne Lewellen made it for the fourth straight year, while Benny Friedman, Lavern Dilweg, and Mike Michalske ran their strings to three in a row. Ernie Nevers returned from a year's retirement to win his third first team berth in as many NFL seasons. Friedman, Lewellen, and Michalske were unanimous selections. Three Hall of Famers made the first team, two made the second team, and two made honorable mention. The New York Giants placed four men on the first team. NFL champion Green Bay placed three.

\* \* \*

### 1930 ALL-PRO first team

E- Lavern Dilweg, GB  
E- Luke Johnsos, ChiB  
T- Jap Douds, Port  
T- Link Lyman, ChiB  
G- Mike Michalske, GB  
G- Walt Kiesling, ChiC  
C- Swede Hagberg, Bln  
Q- Benny Friedman, NYG  
H- Red Grange, ChiB  
H- Ken Strong, SI  
F- Ernie Nevers, ChiC

### second team

E- Tom Nash, GB  
E- Red Badgro, NYG  
T- Jim Mooney, Bkn  
T- Bill Kern, GB  
G- Hal Hanson, Fra  
G- Rudy Comstock, NYG  
C- Joe Westoupal, NYG  
Q- Red Dunn, GB  
H- Stumpy Thomason, Bkn  
H- Father Lumpkin, Port  
F- Bronko Nagurski, ChiB

### third team

E- Chuck Kassel, ChiC  
E- Tony Kostos, Fra  
T- Duke Slater, ChiC  
T- Cal Hubbard, GB  
G- Les Caywood, NYG  
G- Al Graham, Port  
C- Nate Barrager, Min  
Q- Carl Brumbaugh, ChiB  
H- Johnny Blood, GB  
H- Chuck Bennett, Port  
F- Jack McBride, Bkn

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 20, 1930.

For the first time since 1924, the All-Pro poll included a third team. The selectors included sports writers, team officials, team coaches, and game officials. The number of voters was not published.

# THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 4, No. 11 (1982)

Benny Friedman, Lavern Dilweg, and Mike Michalske made the first team for a fourth straight year. Ernie Nevers made it for the fourth time in his fourth NFL season. Six Hall of Famers made the first team, two made the second team, and two made the third team. Two of the top 22 players spent substantial time with two different clubs, Jap Douds starting the year with Providence and Jim Mooney with Newark.

\* \* \*

## 1931 ALL-PRO first team

E- Lavern Dilweg, GB  
E- Red Badgro, NYG  
T- Cal Hubbard, GB  
T- George Christensen, Port  
G- Mike Michalske, GB  
G- Butch Gibson, NYG  
C- Frank McNally, ChiC  
Q- Dutch Clark, Port  
H- Red Grange, ChiB  
H- Johnny Blood, GB  
F- Ernie Nevers, ChiC

### second team

E- Luke Johnsos, ChiB  
E- Bill McKalip, Port  
T- Jap Douds, Port  
T- Dick Stahlman, GB  
G- Walt Kiesling, ChiC  
G- Al Graham, Prov  
C- Mel Hein, NYG  
Q- Red Dunn, GB  
H- Ken Strong, SI  
H- Glenn Presnell, Port  
F- Bo Molenda, GB

### third team

E- Ray Flaherty, NYG  
E- Al Rose, Prov  
T- Lou Gordon, Bkn  
T- Bill Owen, NYG  
G- Zuck Carlson, ChiB  
G- Maury Bodenger, Port  
C- Nate Barrager, GB  
Q- Benny Friedman, NYG  
H- Dick Nesbitt, ChiB  
H- Father Lumpkin, Port  
F- Herb Joesting, ChiB

Source Green Bay *Press-Gazette*, Dec. 19, 1931.

The results of the 1931 poll apparently gave the league and Roger Treat the first "official" All-Pro team. The text accompanying the picks in the *Press-Gazette* indicates that this year's poll was a continuation of past polls. No trumpets sounded the "official" status of the 1931 selections as opposed to earlier teams. The unnamed number of selectors included sports writer, team officials, and game officials. Lavern Dilweg and Mike Michalske earned first place berths for a fifth straight year, while Ernie Nevers won a place for the fifth time in his five-year career. Seven Hall of Famers made the first team, three made the second team, and one the third team.

\* \* \*

In 1932, the selectors of the poll were the coaches of the NFL teams. The coaches' poll picked an "official" team through 1949, after which sports writers reclaimed the job. Much remains unknown about the mechanics of the 1923-31 poll, but it nevertheless appears to be a good eye-witness account of the NFL's early years.

\* \* \*