

1920 All-Pros

By John Hogrogian

Pro football turned a corner in 1920. The managers of the country's best teams got together that fall and formed the American Professional Football Association. The APFA was a loose group of teanis rather than a modern league, but it gave pro football its first national organization. After two years, the Association blossomed into the National Football League.

For the two APFA seasons of 1920 and 1921, picking All-Pro teams was not a popular job. My survey of newspapers turned up one interesting selection for 1920 and nothing for 1921. [Ed.: After years of searching, an 11-man team was discovered to have been picked by a Buffalo sportswriter in 1921.]

On December 2, 1920, the Rock Island Argus printed the All-Pro selections of Bruce Copeland, the paper's sports editor. Like many other 1920 writers, Copeland ignored the existence of the APFA and continued to talk of all pro teams as the free lance operations they had always been. He chose his honor roll from what he called the "big eight" of pro teams: Akron, Dayton, Decatur, Rock Island, Chicago Cardinals, Canton, Chicago Tigers, and Cleveland, in that order. Copeland thus ignored the strong Buffalo teams and five lesser APFA members.

He wrote that he based his picks on games played in Rock Island, newspaper reports of other games, and personal knowledge of the Akron, Canton, and Cleveland players. He also stated that "this season's selections were picked largely upon their respective merits as defensive players."

Copeland chose three All-Pro teams which are reprinted here. He also picked eleven substitutes for each of the teams and topped his work with an honorable mention list of 44 players. All together, he honored 111 players, but only the top 35 were truly All-Star selections.

His picks reflect a bias in favor of Rock Island players, and he omitted the many stars of the Buffalo team, but Copeland's picks nevertheless are a fascinating contemporary view of 1920 pro football.

First Team

E - Guy Chamberlin, Decatur
E - Oke Smith, Rock Island
T - Wilbur Henry, Canton
T - Hugh Blacklock, Decatur
G - Fred Denfield, Rock Island
G - Dewey Lyle, Rock Island
C - George Trafton, Decatur
Q - Paddy Driscoll, Chicago Cards
H - Eddie Novak, Rock Island
H - Fritz Pollard, Akron
F - Rip King, Akron

Second Team

E - George Halas, Decatur
E - Obe Wenig, Rock Island
T - Cub Buck, Canton
T - Ed Shaw, Rock Island
G - Alf Cobb, Akron
G - Harry Dadmun, Canton
C - Shorty Des Jardien, Chi.Tigers
Q - Al Mahrt, Dayton
H - Norb Sacksteder, Dayton
H - Joe Guyon, Canton
F - Gil Falcon, Chicago Tigers

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Third Team

E - Bob Marshall, Rock Island
E - Bob Nash, Akron
T - Burt Ingwerson, Decatur
T - Walt Buland, Rock Island
G - Brad Tomlin, Akron
G - Ross Petty, Decatur
C - Freeman Fitzgerald, Rock Isl.
Q - Milt Chee, Chicago Tigers
H - Ed Sternaman, Decatur
H - Frank Bacon, Dayton
F - Pete Calac, Canton

source: *Rock Island Argus*, Dec. 2, 1920.

Twenty of the stars were Illinois players, and only thirteen played for Ohio teams.