

Rough Stuff

Oldtimers keep telling us that pro football was a rougher game in the good old days. This little news item sent along by John Alexander, who played for the Milwaukee Badgers, New York Giants, and a whole flock of independent teams in the 1920s, tends to support the view that the game was different then.

The source is the *Staten Island Advance* of November 29, 1926.

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A squad of husky southern gentlemen, who take turns calling themselves the Newark Bears and the Stapleton A.C. ... learned what real sandlot football is like yesterday afternoon. The southerners stacked up against the Orange A.C. at City Field and, after a hard fight, or rather a series of fights, emerged victors, 25-7.

When the melee was over, the players of both teams limped lamely to their dressing rooms. Carl Davis of the Bears had one eye completely closed and "Big John" Alexander, roughest of all the players, had received the beating of his young life, including a black eye administered after he had been put out of the game by referee Ed Thorpe.

About a thousand rabid fans turned out for the game, most of them attracted by the reports that the Orange players intended to display "plenty of rough stuff." As it turned out, the suburban players did not get an opportunity to show their slugging prowess in the first half, as they never had the ball long enough. The Newark team ran riot during the first two periods, piling up 25 points before Coach Hanson yanked out his varsity eleven and a new set of players, including Hanson, took on Orange.

Orange took on a new lease on life in the third period, scoring an earned touchdown after a sensational 40 yard run by Greene. Encouraged by the cheering of their few supporters, the Orange players tried for a second score but found the Newark team holding tightly. Then Mr. Alexander, former South Side High, Rutgers and New York Giants star, let loose with his choicest slugging. The big fellow had been acting rather roughly during the first half, but without much damage.

Now it was different. In every play Alexander's taped fists were prominent. This was a new brand of football for a set of southern gentlemen. They drawled their surprise and indignation, while the rooters told them to go ahead and commit any or all of the major crimes. The fans poured into the reserved seat section, while Randell Warden, supervisor of physical education in the Newark public schools, demanded that the referee stop the game until the spectators returned to their seats. He was booed back to his seat.

Suddenly "Ark" Newton took the ball and hit the Orange line. There was a hot scrimmage with arms and legs waving wildly. When the smoke had cleared, Mr. Alexander was flat on his back, "out cold" as the boys say. A dash of water and Alexander was back in the Orange line, fire in his eye. On the next play "Big John's" arms went waving again and once again he went down, this time with Doug Wyckoff bent over, drawling in his best Georgia English that it wasn't nice to play that kind of ball.

With that, the other players on both sides decided to take a hand in affairs and there were several spectacular private fights. Carl Davis, Newark tackle, came up with blood streaming from one eye and was put out of the game. So was Alexander, with a thousand fervent boos following him to the dressing room. Just as the big fellow reached the end of the stadium, there was another fuss, the net result being a straight right to Alexander's face. A couple of cops broke up that party.

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The remainder of the account deals with such ordinary things as scoring touchdowns and making first downs. Boring stuff.

John Alexander, though he enjoyed the article, raised one small quibble. He denies that anyone on the Newark side could have rendered him "out cold." But, on consideration, he admits that Doug Wyckoff was a pretty tough customer.