

KENOSHA MAROONS – 1924

“A Brief Spot in NFL History”

By Roy Sye

Kenosha is located on Lake Michigan, just north of the Illinois-Wisconsin border in the southeast part of Wisconsin. Being 30 miles south of Milwaukee and 50 miles north of Chicago, Kenosha was in the center of a hotbed of football activity in the early 1900's. From the mid-1910's to the end of the 1920's, there were many strong amateur, semi-pro and professional football teams along the southern and western shores of Lake Michigan. From Indiana, there were strong teams from Gary, Hammond and East Chicago; Illinois had many strong teams from Chicago, Pullman, Roseland, Evanston and Waukegan; while Wisconsin offered strong teams from Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee.

Prior to World War I, Kenosha fielded amateur teams that played other local Kenosha teams and teams from Milwaukee, Racine and Waukegan. Kenosha never had a dominant team, as no team could match up with the Racine Regulars and Battery C teams, which usually claimed the Wisconsin State title. After the war, the Nash Motor Company and the local American Legion sponsored teams and Kenosha produced quality teams such as the Kenosha Nash Motors, Kenosha Nash Badgers, Kenosha Legion and Kenosha Troop E. Each year, these teams upgraded their schedule and played the strong teams from Milwaukee, Chicago and Waukegan.

In 1922 and 1923, Wisconsin had 3 teams represented in the NFL. The Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Badgers and Racine Legion each played a full NFL schedule and then played end of season games between the 2 top teams for the right to claim the Wisconsin State championship.

In mid-September of 1924, the *Kenosha Evening Press* reported "...Kenosha has purchased the struggling Toledo Maroon franchise and the team ought to be a success under the direction of George Johnson". Johnson, a former major league umpire, had been managing football teams for a few years. Most recently with the Toledo Maroons and also organizing a 1922 post-season all-star team that toured the south and included Jim Thorpe. The Kenosha team was sometimes referred to as the "Kenosha Nash-Simmons" team. Later in the year, the Maroon nickname started to take affect. Johnson, a former major league umpire, has been managing football teams for a few years. Most recently with the Toledo Maroons

By late September, Manager Johnson had signed many local players and also "secured an imposing list of ex-college players". First on the list was local Nash-Simmons baseball and football star, Earl Potteiger (HB) from Ursinus College in Pennsylvania. Potteiger, a veteran of many years experience, played for the Conshohocken (PA) Athletic Club in 1919, claimants of the 1919 Eastern Professional Championship. Potteiger also played for the Buffalo All-Americans, Chicago Cardinals and Milwaukee Badgers over the past few years.

Johnson branched out across the country and signed Marvin Wood (FB) from California, Walter Cassidy (E) from Detroit Mercy, Jim Simpson (QB) from Detroit University, Lou Usher (T) from Syracuse, Dick Stahlman (G) from Northwestern, Marty Conrad (C) from Kalamazoo, "Swede" Halstrom (HB) from Illinois and George Seasholtz (FB) from Lafayette. Seasholtz, another veteran of east coast football, spent some time with the 1922 Frankford Yellow Jackets. Johnson also was in negotiations with 3 Chicago Bear players, but refused to divulge their names to the local press.

With his team starting to fill out, Johnson announced a schedule that included road games at Philadelphia (Frankford), Milwaukee, Duluth and Racine. Home games were against Hammond, Racine, Duluth and the non-NFL Waukegan Elks. With Potteiger and "Bo" Hanley sharing the coaching duties, two-a-day practices began at Nash Field in preparation for their first game against the Yellow Jackets scheduled for Saturday October 4th at Frankford.

The Maroons were no match for the strong Frankford team, losing easily 31-6. "Dutch" Seasholtz scored on a touchdown pass to account for Kenosha's only points. Nevertheless, Mgr. Johnson and coaches Potteiger and Hanley were very encouraged with the showing of their team with only a week of practice.

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With another week of practice under their belt, the Maroons rolled out almost the same lineup against the Badgers in Milwaukee. The results of the game were the same as the week before. The Maroons were defeated 21-0 by the strong Badger team. Kenosha was able to gain yards, but never threatened the Milwaukee goal line. The Badgers used their passing attack and picked apart the Maroon defense.

Undaunted, the Maroons looked forward to their home opener against the Hammond Pros. The game looked winnable for Kenosha, as Hammond also lost their first 2 games; 10-0 against Racine and 26-0 against Rock Island. Both teams were billed as "heavy" teams, as their lines averaged over 200 pounds a man. The first half was scoreless as both teams struggled for offense. In the second half, the Maroons started quickly as Seasholtz scored a touchdown giving Kenosha their first lead of the season. The kick for extra point was blocked, and Kenosha led 6-0.

With only a few minutes left in the game, Hammond went to the aerial attack and scored a touchdown to tie the game. "Fritz" Heinsch of Kenosha blocked the kick for the extra point, thus knotting the score at 6-6. Getting the ball back for the final minute, the Maroons tried desperation passes. Fighting hard, the Maroons could not connect and the game ended in a 6-6 tie.

The game was disappointing in two ways. First, with perfect Indian summer weather for a game, the crowd totaled less than 1,000 spectators, a far cry from the 3,000-5,000 that was expected. Second, Earl Potteiger suffered a broken arm and was now out for the season. Lou Usher came out of the game with a broken nose, but was expected back for the next game.

The race for the Wisconsin state title was starting to take shape. Green Bay was in front by virtue of their win over Milwaukee. With a loss already to Milwaukee, the Maroons looked forward to their 2 games against the Racine Legion. With no scheduled games against Green Bay, Mgr. Johnson held open December 7th and December 14th for a potential title game vs. the Packers.

Next up for the Maroons was a road game against the Duluth Kelleys. The local Duluth press started advertising for the game early in the week. The *Duluth News-Tribune* wrote:

"Boasting of the greatest collection of veteran football stars that has ever represented a professional gridiron eleven in the middle west, the Nash-Simmons Maroons of Kenosha, Wis., will invade Duluth next Sunday afternoon determined to knock the Kelley-Duluth eleven off its high pedestal in the pro football ranks of the United States by giving the northerners their first taste of defeat this season."

The *News-Tribune* continued the boasting of the strong Kenosha team, even mistakenly stating that the Maroons beat the "highly touted" Hammond team. The Duluth paper had daily stories about the Kenosha team and featured the players and their All-American accomplishments. More hype for the Maroons continued with:

"Never in the history of the gridiron annals of the Twin Ports has a football eleven visited Duluth with such an aggregation of star performers composing its lineup as that which is the Nash-Simmons Maroons of Kenosha....."

The game failed to live up to its billing, as the Maroons fell easily 32-0. Duluth continued to pound the line and gained yards at will. Desperation passes by the Maroons resulted in interceptions and the Maroons could not get the offense on track. Only in the fourth quarter did the Maroons finally cross into Duluth territory, but another pass was intercepted and returned for a touchdown.

Now sitting at 0-3-1, the Maroons were at the bottom of the NFL standings. The Maroons looked forward to their next home game against the non-NFL Waukegan Elks. These two cities had been playing each other for over 20 years and the rivalry was intense. The Elks were dominating the Midwest Football League and were ready to play an NFL team. Originally scheduled to be played in Kenosha, the game was moved to Waukegan due to poor attendance from the Kenosha-Hammond game. Later in the week the Elks cancelled the game in order to play the first round of playoffs against the Chicago Murleys of the Midwest Football League. The Chicago and Waukegan papers reported that the game was cancelled because Kenosha was a professional team and teams in the Midwest Football League were not allowed to play against professional teams. Unable to schedule another game, Mgr. Johnson and the Maroons went idle for the first Sunday in November.

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The Maroons were starting to unravel. The local Kenosha paper reported that the Maroons had disbanded. Another report stated that all home games were cancelled and the team would finish the season on the road. Deflecting some of the rumors, Mgr. Johnson scheduled a game at Buffalo against the strong Bison team for November 9th. In Racine, the Legion team declared the "pro game" in Kenosha a flop and cancelled their game with the Maroons scheduled for November 16th. The Maroons traveled to Buffalo and gave a dismal showing as they lost 27-0. The Bisons dominated all areas of the game and handed the Maroons their 4th defeat.

Even though no game was scheduled for the 16th, Mgr. Johnson had not yet given up on the season. After returning from Buffalo, Johnson announced that Kenosha will finish out the season and assured the fans that the team would win at least half the games remaining on the schedule. On the 19th, Johnson announced that he had released all the Maroon players and made a deal with the officials from Duluth that the Kelleys would finish out the season in the Kenosha uniforms.

The re-made Kenosha Maroons looked forward to the Thanksgiving home tilt against the Racine Legion and then a road game on the 30th at Kansas City against the Cowboys. Even the Duluth newspapers ran stories about the Kelleys playing under the Kenosha Maroon name. The *Duluth News Tribune* even detailed what players were expected to play with the Kenosha team. Kenosha fans were rejuvenated with the new team and all indications were that the Kenosha community would come out in full force to support the new team.

With all the talk of moving around players and teams, the Kelleys never actually moved to Kenosha to play out the Maroon schedule. The Kelleys finished their schedule by beating Rock Island on the 23rd, then beating the local Superior (WI) Christy team on Thanksgiving for the regional title.

Pro football in Kenosha was dead. However, the *Kenosha Evening Press* reported that the Maroons came back to life and lost in Rock Island to the Independents 10-6 on Thanksgiving. The local press dismissed that game stating that a review of the lineups showed that no Kenosha players were in the game.

On November 26th, the *Moline Dispatch* had a mention in the paper about the upcoming game:

"Rock Island Independents will meet a team composed of star players from Three National Pro league elevens at Douglas Park tomorrow afternoon. The game will start at 2:15. Members of the Duluth, Kenosha, Hammond and Cleveland clubs will oppose the Green and White. Ink Williams, Sol Butler and Bill Gardner will be members of the invading eleven."

In the newspaper the following day, the lineups confirmed that no Kenosha players were in the game. There were no Duluth or

Cleveland players mentioned either. The "Kenosha" team consisted almost entirely of the Hammond Pros lineup. The quarterback, 2 halfbacks, fullback, 2 ends, 3 linemen and 2 substitutes were all former Hammond players. Only Herb Sies and Bill Gardner were non-Hammond players. Sies played Dayton and Rock Island earlier in the season.

This game went as an exhibition (or non-league) game for Rock Island. On the surface, an argument could be made that the Rock Island Independents beat the Hammond Pros on Thanksgiving 1924 in a league game. Even with the majority of Hammond players in the lineup, the *Hammond Times* made no mention of the game. In fact, stories about the Hammond Pros disappeared from the Hammond papers in early November, even though the Pros sported a credible 2-2-1 record.

Back in Kenosha, the Maroons never played another NFL game and quietly disappeared from the local newspapers.

Kenosha's mark in the NFL was an unimpressive 0-4-1 record after only one season. Kenosha, like many other teams in the NFL in the 1920's, suffered from a lack of talent and lack of fan support.

Game Results for 1924 Kenosha Maroons

Sat	10/04	A	Frankford Yellow Jackets	6-31
Sun	10/12	A	Milwaukee Badgers	0-21
Sun	10/19	H	Hammond Pros	6- 6
Sun	10/26	A	Duluth Kelleys	0-32

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Sun	11/02	A	Waukegan (IL) Elks	cancelled
Sun	11/09	A	Buffalo Bisons	0-27
Sun	11/16	H	Racine Legion	cancelled
Sun	11/23	H	Duluth Kelleys	cancelled
Thu	11/27	A	Racine Legion	cancelled
Sun	11/30	A	Kansas City Cowboys	cancelled

Final Record 0-4-1 Points Scored: 12 Points Allowed: 117

Sources:

Kenosha Evening Press, Moline Dispatch, Duluth News-Tribune, Hammond Times, Chicago Tribune, Waukegan Sun

Total Football – Carrol, Gershman, Neft & Thorn