THE TAYLORVILLE SCANDAL

By Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll

Strange as it may seem, a semi-pro football game played in central Illinois once knocked Green Bay out of the National Football League. Although the Packers proudly proclaim their membership in the league as continuous since 1921, there was a five month period in 1922 when the Wisconsinites were persona non grata around the N.F.L.

Mostly, it was because the football world found out what had happened out there in Taylorville, Illinois.

This is how the Associated Press reported the story:

“Chicago, Jan. 28 -- (A.P.) -- The bitter rivalry between two country towns, which became so acute that approximately $100,000 was bet on a football game, was the real cause of the athletic scandal which resulted in the disqualification last night of nine University of Illinois athletes and which threatens to reach into Notre Dame University.

“A group of citizens of Carlinville, Illa., it was learned today, decided last fall to financially "clean out" the rival town of Taylorville, Illa., by obtaining 10 college stars to play on their football team, and with victory apparently assured, to bet the limit on the annual contest between the two elevens. But Taylorville learned of the plan, obtained nine college stars for its own team and not only defeated Carlinville, but won close to $50,000 by covering every Carlinville bet made, thus beating the rival town at its own game.

“Ten Notre Dame players were in the Carlinville lineup, according to statements by citizens of that town, while the nine Illinois men disqualified last night played on the Taylorville eleven.

“In the Carlinville line-up, according to persons associated with the team, were Gus Desch, member of the American Olympic team, and world champion 440-yard hurdler; Chester Wynne, selected by some as All Western conference fullback, and John Mohardt, All-American selection of several football writers. All played on the Notre Dame eleven last fall.

“In 1920 Carlinville won from Taylorville, 10 to 7, at Carlinville. Taylorville at the time loudly boasted that next year, with their team on its home ground, there would be a different story.

“Several Carlinville people then conceived the "safe betting" idea of filling their lineup with college stars. Overtures were made to Notre Dame men, according to backers of the Carlinville team, and it was agreed to pay the ten men $200 each plus their expenses.

“The persons who arranged the affair passed the word to their friends to bet the limit. These friends went to the bank, the family stocking and the cupboard to bring forth, in some cases, the savings of years. A special train was hired and a band taken along on the trip to Taylorville. Farmers from all the nearby towns arranged to join the pilgrimage and in nearly every case a well filled wallet was taken along. The clinching of the game became a common gossip on the street corners, in the grocery stores and wherever persons gathered.

“But each person who received the "confidential" information apparently passed it on to another friend, for gradually the word spread through Macoupin and Montgomery

counties into Taylorville. At the same time Taylorville received word that Carlinville was ready to back its team with the family jewelry if necessary.

“Consternation spread through Taylorville at the idea of sending their team against nationally known college players. Then, a few citizens decided to seek a little college aid themselves. Quietly the word was passed around not to fear Carlinville -- that a means of defeating their rivals' plans had been found.

“When the time for the game came, a group of Carlinville citizens began checking up over in one corner of the field. They found that their citizens had bet close to $50,000. Over in another section some Taylorville citizens reached the same conclusion.

“When the Carlinville eleven came on the field the visiting rooters rose to cheer.

"What are we yelling for? That's the Taylorville team," said a Carlinville woman.

"Oh no, that's Carlinville," replied a Taylorville policeman.

"I guess I know our boys and not one of those fellows is from Carlinville," indignantly replied the woman.

“Taylorville in the first half used its regular home town team. At the end of the half Taylorville led 7 to 0. Then out on the field trotted nine stars from the University of Illinois. They had been held under cover for the first two periods.

“Little Sternaman ran circles around the Carlinville ends. Jack Crangle plunged through the line and Larry Walquist forward passed for big gains. The game ended with Taylorville winner 16 to 0, fifty thousand dollars in cash to the good, and Carlinville out an equal sum.”

Other news stories followed. One proclaimed the scandal rivaled that of the baseball "Black Sox."

Dick Simpson, manager of the Taylorville team, readily admitted hiring the Illinois team, but because he "did not want to get any college players in bad" he would not say whether or not he had paid them. The Illinois players said he hadn't.

The Big Ten coaches unanimously praised the suspensions of nine Illinois players. Even Illinois coach Bob Zuppke called it a good thing, no doubt through tightly clenched teeth.

The Taylorville coach had an interesting point of view. He insisted that the Illinois players were already professionals, having been hired by the university. Illinois, he said, "fired them when they played for someone else."

At South Bend, Johnny Mohardt denied playing for Carlinville, and suggested that the small towners had been duped into hiring some non-football-playing Notre Damers. He offered an interesting piece of proof. How could nine Illinois players, coming off a so-so 3-4-0 season, have licked ten Fighting Irish, fresh from a 10-1-0 year? Even more, who would believe the Taylorville farm boys could lead Notre Dame 7-0 at the half? He had a point.

Eventually, the Taylorville scandal faded from the sports pages. Had it appeared a month earlier or a few days later, it is unlikely that Green Bay's tenure in the N.F.L. would have been interrupted. Such was not the case. In fact, the timing was exquisite. On the very day that the story broke, the National Football League owners were assembled in Canton, Ohio, for their annual winter meeting. It was more than a coincidence that the Canton *Evening Repository* placed its story of the suspensions at Illinois (headlined: "Illinois Hangs the Can on Nine for Semi- Pro Playing") directly below its story of the

league meeting (headlined: "Pro Football Moguls Here Today to Thresh Out Many Problems for Next Season").

One of the problems was how to stop teams from playing (and paying) players with college eligibility left. This practice had been outlawed on the books ever since the league was first organized in 1920, and the rule had been scrupulously obeyed -- whenever convenient. Allegedly -- hell, actually -- several NFL teams had refused to be inconvenienced during 1921 and had hired themselves college boys.

It was this practice that made the pros as popular with college coaches as acne at the junior high. At a meeting in New York earlier in January, the college coaches had vowed to pen drastic legislation that would somehow doom the pros. Few really believed the coaches would go that far (and no one know how they might accomplish such a thing), but when they came to Canton the pro owners were in a mood to placate the colleges.

Then word arrived of the Taylorville scandal. The situation was ripe for over-reaction.

Ironically, one of the teams accused of playing a college man was the host of the meeting -- Canton. Notre Dame's great guard, Heartley "Hunk" Anderson had been spotted in a couple of Bulldog games near the end of the previous season, playing under an assumed name (the league also had a rule about playing under fake monikers). However, Ralph E. Hay, the Bulldog manager, facilely explained that Anderson had only played in exhibition games, and, besides, he'd already been ruled a professional for other transgressions when he joined Canton. The N.F.L. decided to avoid any hint of bad manners; they would not slap down their host.

Next came Philadelphia.

Well, explained Manager Leo Conway, his team had not even been an N.F.L. member in 1921 and was only now applying for a franchise. Besides their collegian -- All-American Glenn Killinger of Penn State -- had signed a baseball contract before he played for Philadelphia and so he was already a professional too. So there!

There was a lot of sense in that, decided the N.F.L. owners. Perhaps they didn't even consider the possibilities of lucrative Philadelphia crowds as they voted Conway aboard. (Unfortunately, Conway was not able to put a team on the field in 1922, and the N.F.L. had to wait until 1924 when the Frankford Yellowjackets joined the league to gain a member in Philadelphia.)

So far the N.F.L. was 0 for 2 in sacrificing lambs. Still, some kind of show was necessary, especially in view of Taylorville.

The owners took a dinner break at Bender's Restaurant, and when they all went back to resume the meeting at the Courtland Hotel, everyone no doubt had a bellyful of Bender's food and the search for a scapegoat.

The matter was dispensed with quickly. J. E. Clair of the Acme Packing Company, the boss of the Green Bay Packers, took the floor. Yes, the Packers had indeed fielded college players in 1921. Yes, they were from Notre Dame (again!). Absolutely, they had played under assumed names. No, there were no extenuating circumstances. Yes, the Packers were heartily sorry. And, yes, they asked permission to withdraw from the National Football League. That permission was voted quicker than you could say "Packer Backer." Mr. Clair was returned his $50 -- the price of an N.F.L. franchise in those days -- and the Packers had been officially punished.

The N.F.L. had thunderingly upheld the sanctity of college amateurism.

News stories of the meeting -- based on interviews with owners -- stressed the league's firm stand against seducing amateurs. That didn't stop the N.F.L. from getting its first big-city, eight column, newspaper headline two days later when Chicago University coach Amos Alonzo Stagg sounded off in the Windy City. The *Herald and_Examiner* headed the story "Stagg Says Conference Will Break Professional Football Menace."

By June, the heat had lessened considerably. Enough so that Green Bay coach Earl "Curly" Lambeau could walk into the "Menace's" summer meeting at Cleveland and plop down $50 to put the Packers back in the N.F.L.

No one asked any embarrassing questions, like who was more likely to have been responsible for those illegal Fighting Irish in 1921 -- owner J.E. Clair or Notre Dame alumnus Lambeau?

Curiously, no other N.F.L. team has ever been forced to turn in its franchise for playing college men although incidents were reported as late as 1930. On the other hand, no one has yet come forward with proof that Green Bay's five month exile from the N.F.L. was a put-up job, conveniently times to shore up the league's honor. Most likely, it was just what it looked like -- a simple case of panic.

Today, the Green Bay Packers are a healthy anachronism -- the last of the N.F.L.'s small town teams. For the record, neither Taylorville nor Carlinville ever asked for a franchise. The Carlinville folks probably couldn't scrape up the $50.

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FOOTNOTES

The Taylorville Scandal was the biggest of the accusations of professionalism that shook more than one campus during the winter of 1922. By early February, two west coast college players and twenty-two mid-western college players had been declared ineligible for professional play, and several others were under a cloud. In many cases, of course, the athletes were not really being punished in that they had completed their football careers and were not "out for" other sports.

Next to Taylorville, the most notorious case occurred on December 4, 1921, when Hunk Anderson, Hec Garvey and Ojay Larson, all of Notre Dame, played for Green Bay against arch-rival Racine, not yet a member of the NFL. Despite Racine's non-league status, this was apparently the game which led to Green Bay's ouster from the league.

During the 1922 season, the Chicago Bears topped the league in censured players, showing Hunk Anderson, Garvey, Larson, Joe Sternaman and Laurie Walquist on their roster. Chet Wynne put in the season at Rochester, and Johnny Mohardt and Eddie Anderson played for the Cardinals. Jack Crangle joined the Cards in 1923.

Mohardt and Gus Desch were exonerated of playing in the Taylorville game, but then Johnny admitted to being in the Racine lineup against Green Bay on December 4.

This didn't seem to bother anyone when Racine was admitted to the NFL, along with Green Bay, during the summer of 1922.

All of this casts some strange shadows on Green Bay's unusual ouster and easy re-entry. The authors feel that there is a great deal more information needed. Some of our Green Bay enthusiasts may like to find out what was said in Wisconsin at the time.

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ADDENDA (CC II, No. 9)

From the *Milwaukee Journal*, Jan. 28, 1922:

PACKERS CHANGE NAME:
FEAR LEAGUE ACTION

Green Bay -- Capt. Curley Lambeau and Donald Murphy, Green Bay millionaire lumbermen, left Friday to attend the Professional Football league meeting which will be held in Canton, Ohio, Saturday.

Fearing that some action may be taken against the Packers for the alleged playing of college men in the professional games last fall, the Green Bay representatives will seek a new franchise under the name of the Green Bay Athletic club.

This new organization is prepared to take over the football situation here and put one of the greatest elevens in the country on the gridiron. Unlimited capital will be behind the Green Bay team and an effort will be made to make it an all-time football organization like the Decatur Staleys.

Cub Buck, Lambeau, Jab Murray, Tubby Howard and Emmet Keefe of the 1921 squad are under contract and the management is negotiating with Wenig and Jimmy Conzelman, the two mainstays of the Rock Island Independents.

In other words, when J.E. Clair turned his franchise back to the league on that Saturday night, he no longer had a team. And, the NFL was "forcing" the resignation of a team that no longer existed!

One last piece of trivia: the "new" Green Bay team of 1922 took as its official nickname the Blues, although most cities around the league continued to call them the Packers.