

THE AUTHORS OF THIS VERY LONG ARTICLE WOULD BE THE FIRST TO POINT OUT THAT THE MAIN FACTS IN THE CASE COULD BE SUMMED UP IN A PAGE OR TWO. HOWEVER, THE STORY OF THE SO-CALLED "STOLEN CHAMPIONSHIP" HAS GONE ON FOR SO LONG (TWO-THIRDS OF A CENTURY!) AND BEEN RECITED IN INACCURATE FORM SO MANY TIMES (EVEN BY SEVERAL NATIONAL MAGAZINES!) THAT WE FELT IT WAS TIME THAT THE WHOLE STORY GOT PRINTED. THEREFORE, WE APOLOGIZE FOR TAKING UP NEARLY ALL OF THIS ISSUE WITH WHAT IS ESSENTIALLY A CORRECTION.

-- The Authors



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POTTSVILLE: THE DISCARDED CHAMPIONSHIP

Pottsville, Pennsylvania, will never be a tourist mecca. Still, it's a pleasant little town of 20,000 or so on the southern tip of the anthracite region, the home of the Arrow Shirt, boasts a 50-foot statue of Henry Clay, and is friendly to almost anybody except representatives of the National Football League. Some Pottsville citizens believe the NFL played their town fast and loose nearly sixty years ago and they are still waiting for the league to apologize.

Since the NFL last apologized for anything about the time Red Grange was a freshman, the Pennsylvanians might just as well stop carrying their grudge and go back to stitching shirts. Yet, every couple of years — just when the rest of the football world has forgotten about Pottsville — somebody writes an article called "The Stolen Championship" or "The Tragedy of Pottsville," and the whole story — or rather, Pottsville's version of it — returns like an onion-laden meal.

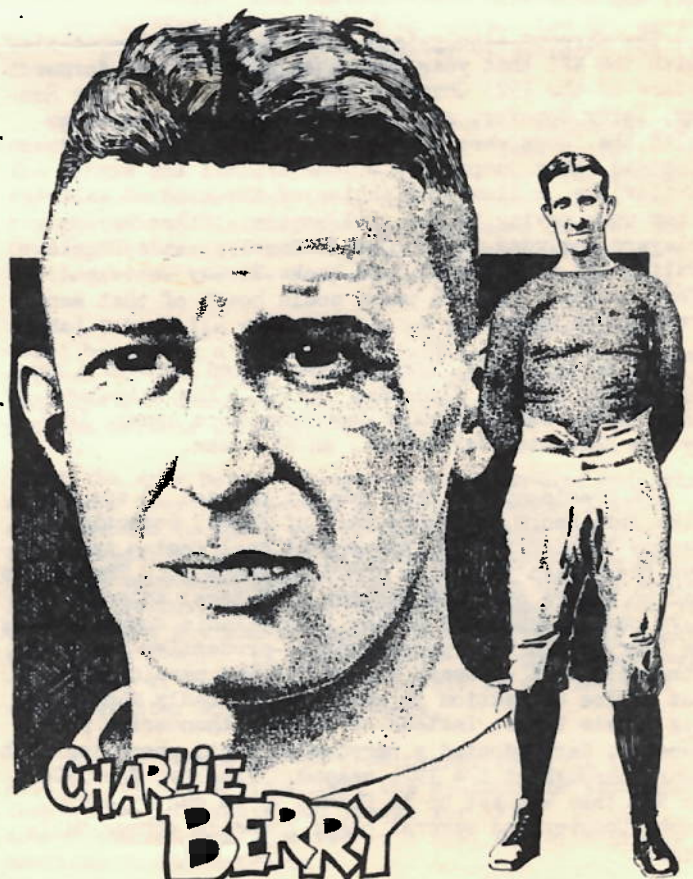
That distinction — "Pottsville's version" — is important because their story is just the opposite of their Henry Clay statue. If you actually go to the statue instead of reading the Pottsville brochure, you'll discover it is five feet of Henry Clay and 45 feet of base. If you actually check into the story of the "stolen championship" instead of swallowing the Pottsville propaganda, you'll discover it is a tale with no base at all.

Which is not to say that the nice people of Pottsville are barefaced liars. Like Don Quixote, they are simply unaware of their true situation. What follows is as much for those nice folks as for the rest of the football world, in hope that they will at last cease tilting at the NFL windmill and be proud of their very real accomplishments. They had a heck of a good team in 1925, but the NFL did not swipe a championship from it.

As a matter of fact, Pottsville threw it away themselves.

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By Joe Horrigan, Bob Braunwart & Bob Carroll



THE MAROONS JOIN THE NFL

Most of the action of this story happened in 1925, but let's set the scene first.

Like nearly every other wide spot in the road, Pottsville fielded community teams before World War I. When the boys came back from Over There, some of them got down to serious football. The All-Service Team of 1919, made up of former doughboys, was a cut above anything previously seen on a Pottsville gridiron. The local miners found a source of pride as well as pleasant Sunday relaxation in watching the exploits of their team. At the same time, neighboring coal communities, such as Shenandoah, Coaldale, Gilberton, and Mount Carmel were also playing a stronger brand of football. Predictably, things escalated as teams began to load up with imported professional talent.

The whole eastern Pennsylvania-New Jersey area underwent a pro football explosion in the early 1920's, with particularly strong teams in Philadelphia and Atlantic City. Pottsville's team was able to hold its own against the best of them.

In 1924, team manager Dr. J.G. Striegel decided to spruce up his charges. He called Joseph Zacko, owner of a local sporting goods store, and placed an order for 25 matching jerseys. "The color isn't important." When Zacko delivered 25 maroon-colored jerseys, the team gained a nickname.

The Maroons also gained a somewhat shady reputation with the NFL that year when they signed three former stars of the 1923 Champion Canton Bulldogs. Pete Henry, Larry Conover, and Harry Robb had refused to go with the 'Dogs when the team was sold to Cleveland. Instead, they jumped out of the NFL all the way to Pottsville, a clear indication of the kind of salaries they were paying in the coal region. Other Maroon players included tackle Gus Sonnenberg, ends Doggie Julian and Vic Enamel, and backs Barney Wentz and Tony Latone. Few NFL teams could boast of that many recognized stars.

Not surprisingly, the Maroons rolled through a very successful season, finishing 12-1-1. The only loss came in the season finale when they were upset, 10-7, by the Rochester Jeffersons, an NFL team.

NFL President Joe Carr was not pleased to see stars like Pete Henry, a future Hall of Famer, deserting the league to play for an independent coal region team, but there wasn't much he could do about it. The league had no powers over the Maroons, and legal action would have been laughed out of any Pennsylvania court. Moving on Henry could only prove counter-productive since the struggling NFL — awash in red ink and needing every box office attraction it could get — badly wanted the big tackle back. Instead of issuing thundering pronouncements, Carr adopted a persuasive tact, wheedling with Henry throughout the 1924 season. Finally, for 1925, an NFL team was set up in Canton to be run by Henry, Robb, Conover and several other homesick former Bulldogs.

Meanwhile, the Pottsville Maroons under Dr. Striegel believed themselves equal to any team in the world. Apparently they were encouraged in this belief by Carr. At the league's August (1925) meeting, Pottsville applied for and received a franchise in the National Football League.

Carr's motives in embracing Pottsville were probably two. In the first place, he added a strong team to the ranks of the league, and, while the Maroons' home field — tiny Minersville Park — was not conducive to lucrative paydays, the team promised to be a strong attraction on the road. Secondly, the addition of a coal region team gave Carr's predominantly midwestern league another payday stop for teams touring the east. Pottsville's proximity to Philadelphia was handy indeed. The Frankford Yellowjackets — Frankford is a Philadelphia suburb — were not permitted to play home games on Sunday because of Pennsylvania Blue Laws. The hardy miners of Pottsville had no such scruples. Therefore, convenient scheduling lent itself to a visitor playing at Frankford on Saturday and then zipping up to Pottsville for a Sunday game.

Although money was at the root of the NFL's awarding the Maroons a franchise, it no doubt crossed a few NFL minds that this gave the league a handy cudgel to hold over Pottsville's head. If the Maroons were to play in the NFL, they would be forced to follow the NFL's rules. The most obvious example was that the Maroons could no longer serve as a convenient shelter for disgruntled team jumpers such as Pete Henry. Ironically, when the crunch came, it had nothing to do with player-jumping. Instead, the Maroons were to run afoul of an even more sacrosanct NFL rule, and their indiscretion was to keep the 1925 season forever embroiled in controversy.

But that was months in the future. For the moment, Dr. Striegel put to work assembling a strong team for the Maroons' first NFL season.

He'd lost Henry, Robb, and Conover back to Canton; Julian and Enamel also left; and Gus Sonnenberg moved on to Detroit. However, Striegel was able to sign the Stein brothers, Herb and Russ, to hold down center and one tackle position. Both had been college All-Americans and continued their excellent play through several pro seasons. Russ Hathaway, a huge veteran and one of the best lined up as the second tackle. Duke Osborn, who excelled in using a baseball cap for a helmet, and Frank Racis, with no college experience but lots of talent, took over the guard spots.

Joining Latone and Wentz in the backfield were breakaway threat Hoot Flanagan, former Army great Walter French, and a clever quarterback from Lafayette, Jack Ernst. Latone has been compared with Nagurski as a plunger and the others all could fly. Ernst was a feared passer.

Topping this collection of stars was Charlie Berry, possibly the best athlete on the team. After a spectacular career at Lafayette, he signed both baseball and football contracts. He played 11 years of major league baseball and then became a respected umpire. On the gridiron, his defensive work would have made him a star, but he was better known as a dangerous pass receiver. As a placekicker, he ranked with the best in the NFL.

To coach this awesome collection of stars, Striegel signed Dick Rauch, who had served apprenticeship as an assistant to respected Dick Harlowe at Colgate. That made pretty good credentials for an NFL coach. Most of the leaders around the league were little more than on-field captains.

After a tune-up victory over a non-league foe, the Maroons entertained Buffalo and blasted the Bisons, 28-0, for their first NFL victory. Unaccountably,

they went flat the next week and the Providence Steam Roller, another new team to the NFL, held them to a 6-0 loss.

However, the Maroons righted themselves and for the next five Sundays they were unscored upon while showing an unstoppable offense. Included in the five victories was a revenge 34-0 win at Providence.

Just as Pottsville's miners were beginning to think of a championship, the team was upset at Frankford, 20-0. The next day, back at friendly Minersville Park, they got back on track with a tough win over Rochester. After an easy win over 1924 champion Cleveland, the Maroons ambushed Frankford at Minersville and humiliated them, 49-0. By now, the local press was happily declaring the Maroons the best team in the world. They'd completed November with a 9-2-0 record.

But, out in Chicago, Chris O'Brien's Cardinals were enjoying a rare good season. Led by the great Paddy Driscoll, the Cards stood at 9-1-1, leaving the Maroons a half game behind in the standings. Clearly, it seemed, a game between the two would settle the 1925 championship.

The battle was scheduled for Sunday, December 6, at Chicago's Comiskey Park.

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THE "POTTSVILLE VERSION"

It is at this point — the week before and the week following the Cardinal-Maroon game — that the "Pottsville version" and the facts begin to diverge. The differences are sometimes subtle and, for the most part, based on an insufficient knowledge of the way things were in 1925. Nevertheless, the sum total is to make the "Pottsville version" as leaky as a two-dollar dinghy.

Here is how they tell the story in Pottsville:

The Cardinal-Maroon game was billed as "a post-season affair to settle without question the championship of the pro league." Led by Walter French and Herb Stein, the Maroons won easily and thus won the 1925 championship as well.

One week later, the Maroons played another post-season game, this time with the Notre Dame All-Stars, a team made up of former Notre Dame players, including the famed Four Horsemen. Pottsville defeated the All-Stars, 9-7, in what Pottsville loyalists insist should be regarded as the first Professional vs. College All-Star game.

The game was played in Philadelphia's Shibe Park, which was located within the protected territory of the Frankford Yellowjackets. According to Pottsville, the Jackets were bitter rivals of the Maroons, and, therefore, maliciously protested the game as a violation of their territorial rights. Although the protest came both after the official end of the season and after the game itself had been played, league president Carr upheld Frankford and ordered the Maroons stripped of their championship. Most dastardly of all, this came after the league had given verbal permission to the Maroons to go ahead with the game. In order to "fix up" the official standings, Carr ordered the Cardinals

to play two extra games against teams that had already disbanded for the season. This was hurriedly done. The Cards, naturally, won both games easily to go a half game ahead in the standings and finish as the "synthetic champion."

Although shorn of most of its outrage, that is the story as told by Pottsville for nearly 60 years. If consistency is a virtue, the little town belongs with the saints. However, "consistency" and "accuracy" are two very different words ending in "y." The Pottsville version also ends with a "why." After all these years, WHY has the NFL refused to right such an apparently obvious wrong?

It certainly wasn't because Pottsville suffered in silence.

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A PETITION REJECTED

In 1962, some 37 years after the event, the Pottsville story again gained national attention.

Dick McCann, the first director of the new Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, was searching for significant football artifacts when he ran into Joe Zacko, still owner of Zacko's Sporting Goods, the official outfitter of the Maroons team. For years Zacko had been carrying the torch for his old friends, the Maroons, telling his story to anyone with time enough to listen. Zacko found McCann an eager listener, especially after he presented the director with some Pottsville football mementos. Encouraged by McCann, a committee, chaired by Zacko, requested and was granted an opportunity to present the Pottsville case to the NFL owners at their January 1963 meeting.

In a letter to NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, the committee stated, "On behalf of the citizens of Schuylkill County, we kindly request your consideration for action on the part of the National Football League to correct the 1925 championship records." The committee's petition further stated that the "erroneous action" taken by the league was the result of an invalid protest filed by the Frankford Yellowjackets. Three reasons for invalidity were given:

1. The Pottsville Maroons had verbal permission from Joseph Carr, President of the NFL who later refused to confirm this authorization although several men offer testimony to this fact today.
2. The game was played after the close of the NFL season and under the rules of the period it is certainly questionable that NFL jurisdiction should have extended beyond the playing date, December 6, 1925.
3. Since the game with Notre Dame was an exhibition event, it certainly could not affect the league standing and, if a penalty were required, it should not have been greater than a monetary fine.

The Pottsville petition was referred to a three-man committee, consisting of Jack Mara of the New York Giants, Art Rooney of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and Frank McNamee of the Philadelphia Eagles, for further study. Four months later at the May league meeting, the committee made its report. After listening to the findings and recommendations, the league owners voted 12-2 in favor

of leaving the standings as they were.

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CHAMPIONSHIP GAME THAT WASN'T

To understand what really happened in 1925, you must know a little more about the time than what Pottsville tells. Additionally, you must keep the chronology of events carefully in mind. Let's start with November 26 — Thanksgiving Day.

On that snowy Thursday, Red Grange turned pro, and everything in professional football went slightly askew. He joined the Chicago Bears at Wrigley Field for their battle with the Cardinals. Paddy Driscoll's magnificent punting kept the Redhead at bay all afternoon, and the game ended in a scoreless tie, the deadlock that kept the Cards a half game ahead in the standings.

The most significant aspect of Grange's debut was the crowd. More than 36,000 people — the largest crowd ever to witness a pro football game — braved the snow to see Grange in action. Although the Bears made out like bandits, Cardinal boss Chris O'Brien — who was losing money with a better team — had opted for the standard guarantee instead of a share of the gate.

On Sunday, November 29, while Pottsville pummeled Frankford at Minersville, the Cardinals edged Rock Island, 7-0, before a meager crowd. Meanwhile, a full 20,000 turned out to see Grange lead the also-ran Bears over the so-so Columbus Tigers. Clearly, the name of the game had changed. For the time being, championships could take a back seat while everyone scrambled to get rich quick by playing the fabulous Redhead.

December arrived and Grange departed Chicago with the Bears to play seven road games in less than two weeks. During that time, his box office magic would be unavailable to Chris O'Brien. The Cardinal owner settled for the next-best choice and scheduled the Maroons for the first Sunday of the month.

No doubt prompted by O'Brien, the Chicago papers as early as December 3, began publicizing the upcoming clash. The Tribune observed: "The game is assuming proportions of a pro football world series." The next day it reported: "The fans appear to have warmed to the spectacle of the two strongest pro teams in the league battling for the title and the sale of seats at Spalding's 211 South State street yesterday was heavy." On December 5, the Trib explained the significance of the game: "Manager O'Brien scheduled the game as a post-season affair to settle without question the championship of the pro league. The Cardinals could hang up their moleskins and quit as champions, but Driscoll's men refuse to quit until they have had a chance at the eastern champions."

The only problem with all this tub-thumping was that the game was for the league leadership rather than for the championship because it was not a "post-season" game at all. As a matter of fact, the season had two more weeks to go after the Cards and Maroons met! This is possibly the most important misunderstanding in Pottsville's version of the story.

To explain the mix-up which confused Pottsville, the Chicago Tribune, and, perhaps at the time, even Chris O'Brien, we must take a quick tour through the league's first five years. In both 1920 and 1921 (when the league was called the American Professional Football

Association), the championship races ended in dispute, partly because of disagreement as to what games to count and partly because no firm decision had been reached as to when to stop playing. With the championship based on win-loss percentage, in theory, a team could play right on through April, racking up wins until its percentage topped its fellows. In 1922 and 1923, the Canton Bulldogs went undefeated, thus avoiding any controversy. However, the NFL could not expect an undefeated champion every year, and before the 1924 season began, the owners decided the season should end on November 30 with the team owning the best percentage at that time considered the champion. All games played after that date were to be considered exhibitions. Ironically, the proposal for this cutoff date was made by Chicago Bear co-owner Dutch Sternaman, and a week into December the Bears defeated the Cleveland Bulldogs, the team with the top percentage on November 30. The Bears began calling themselves champions. Nevertheless, at the league's January 1925 meeting, President Joe Carr, backed by most of the league owners but bucking the powerful influence of George Halas, ruled that the NFL had to follow its own rules. Cleveland was declared the champion.

At this same meeting, a more realistic end date was agreed upon for the 1925 season — December 20.

At the August meeting — the one at which Pottsville joined the league — a schedule of games was okayed. Most histories indicate hit-or-miss scheduling in the NFL's early years, but that is not precisely true. By 1925, the league was able to put together a complete schedule up to a point and publish it before the season began. But, and this no doubt added to the confusion, the final listed scheduled games were on December 6. The idea was that, by that date, all of the league teams would fulfill their obligation to play a required number of games (eight games against eight different clubs). The poor draws that stood to lose their jerseys if they continued to play among December's snowflakes could pack it in for the year. Those teams that could still make money could schedule each other through December 20. The Cardinal-Maroon game, which was not on the original schedule, was just such a game.

To help fans cope with this open-ended schedule, teams that expected to take advantage of it sometimes published a note in their home game programs similar to the one found in the Detroit Panthers' program of November 11: "All games played up to and including December 20 will count in the League standings."

And that is the essential point. When the Maroons defeated the Cardinals on December 6 and newspapers around the country rushed to declare Pottsville the NFL Champions, they were a bit premature. The Maroons had merely taken over the league lead. The season still had two weeks to go. Anything could happen.

It nearly did.

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O'BRIEN TRIES FOR RED

The day before the Cardinal-Maroon game, Red Grange drew 36,000 to Shibe Park in Philadelphia to watch the Bears defeat Frankford. The next day, more than 60,000 came to New York's Polo Grounds as the Bears topped the Giants.

Chris O'Brien believed he had a good possibility of

landing Grange for a season-closing, December 20, game with his Cardinals. He also knew he could enhance his chances by reclaiming first place in the league standings. Therefore, he tried an end run.

On Tuesday, December 8, he announced the Cards would play the Hammond Pros on the following Saturday. The next day, he announced another game to be played on Thursday, December 10, against the Milwaukee Badgers.

O'Brien's intent was obvious. Two victories over so-so opponents would give his team a better percentage than Pottsville, thus — according to the Chicago Tribune — "forcing another contest with the Bears." That a rematch with Grange was the most important object of O'Brien's parlay was shown when he met with C.C. Pyle, Grange's personal manager, before announcing the Milwaukee game.

Although both Hammond and Milwaukee had disbanded for the season, the Pros were able to call together nearly their whole regular lineup and put up a good struggle before falling, 13-0. The Milwaukee game two days before was a different matter. Their lineup was so patched together with unfamiliar faces that O'Brien decided to throw open the gates and forgo any admission charge. Paddy Driscoll didn't even play as the Cards romped, 59-0.

The dates of these two games are significant. Pottsville has always contended that Joe Carr ordered the Cardinals to play them after the Pottsville-Notre Dame All-Star game. Instead, the Milwaukee affair took place two days before (Dec. 10) and the Hammond game was on the same date (Dec. 12) as the Notre Dame game. Moreover, Chicago Tribune stories make it clear that the idea of outflanking Pottsville with two extra games originated not with Carr but with Chris O'Brien.

Ironically, the purpose of all O'Brien's maneuvering went down the drain during the same week. Red Grange suffered an injured arm in a non-league game at Pittsburgh. Doctors ordered him out of action. Whether the Cardinals were in first place or not, there would be no rich payoff against Grange on December 20.

O'Brien didn't even try to schedule another team for the season's final day. That would have only cost him more money. As far as any claim to the championship, he let that turn on the resolution of the curious events taking place in Pennsylvania.

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THE WRONG PLACE FOR THE IRISH

Until the Maroons went to Chicago, there was a distinct odor of fish emanating from their record. On no fewer than seven different occasions during 1925 Pottsville played teams the day after the same clubs had fought a Saturday game at Frankford. Not surprisingly, Pottsville won six of the encounters. Some critics wondered what the Maroons' record might have been had all their opponents been fresh. However, the 21-7 victory over the Cardinals quieted speculation to the extent that most fans were willing to accept Pottsville as the top team in the league.

Certainly, the fans in Pottsville had already decided the Maroons were the champs. At the same time, someone there realized the season had not yet been completed. A game was scheduled with the Pottsville Steam Roller for Sunday, December 13.

But Pottsville was much more intent on the day before

— Saturday, December 12. In a burst of enthusiasm, Dr. Striegel had signed a contract with Frank Schumann, a Philadelphia promoter, to play a team of former Notre Dame players at Shibe Park. The game figured to be a big moneymaker; next to Grange, Notre Dame was the biggest name in football. To Pottsville's way of thinking, the Maroons had already won the NFL championship — a victory over the Irish would mean the "world" title.

In later years, Pottsville supporters tried to pass the contest off as the first pro-college all-star game, a forerunner of the Chicago extravaganza which for so many years kicked off the grid season. This it certainly was not. Nearly all of the Notre Dame men had already appeared in one professional uniform or another, some of them for several seasons. And All-Star teams were a fairly common occurrence. On Thursday, December 10 — two days before the Notre Dame game — an all-star team that included Russ and Herb Stein of the Maroons defeated the Bears at Pittsburgh in the game that saw Grange injured.

All this flummery aside, Dr. Striegel had badly overplayed his hand. Shibe Park was clearly inside the protected territory of the Frankford Yellowjackets — the Jackets had just played there on December 5 against Grange and Co. — and to secure its home territory was one of the main reasons a team purchased a franchise in the NFL. All this might not have seemed so awful had the Yellowjackets disbanded for the season, but, as a matter of fact, they were scheduled to go against Cleveland across town at Frankford Stadium on December 12 — the same day! In other words, Dr. Striegel had signed a contract to go head-to-head against a fellow member of the league!

As ludicrous as it may seem, Striegel always told reporters that he had received verbal permission over the telephone from the league before signing the contract. On close questioning, he admitted that the verbal go-ahead hadn't come from Carr, the only person who could grant it, but instead from the league secretary. On at least one occasion, Striegel even named the secretary — Jerry Corcoran. The only problem with that scenario was that the NFL secretary was Carl Storck! Jerry Corcoran was manager of the Columbus Tigers and had no more power to set league policy than Striegel himself.

Frankford did not have to lodge a protest. As soon as Carr heard about the Notre Dame game, messages began descending on Striegel, all of the "thou shalt not" variety. The Pottsville people later accused Carr of delivering his verdict only after the game had been played. Carr always maintained he warned Striegel three times before the game, spelling out the consequences. Why should we believe Carr, aside from the fact that he never identified the league secretary as Jerry Corcoran? Simply because pre-game newspaper stories also detailed what was likely to happen to Pottsville and its "championship" if they went ahead with the affair.

Striegel hesitated. He asked Carr if the league would cover the loss (and probable law suit) if he backed out of his contract. Carr offered all reasonable protection but the NFL wasn't going to pick up the tab for Striegel's impetuosity. For publication, Striegel was all bluster. He'd never backed out of a contract before, he insisted, and he wasn't going to do it now, conveniently forgetting his obligation to the National Football League.

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THE AXE FALLS

On Saturday, December 12, four things happened.

The Pottsville Maroons defeated the Notre Dame All-Stars, 9-7, on the strength of a Charlie Berry field goal before a disappointing crowd of 8,000.

The Cleveland Bulldogs defeated the Yellowjackets, 3-0, at Frankford Stadium before another 8,000 — about half what the popular team normally drew at home.

Dr. J.G. Striegel received a telegram from Joe Carr stating that the Pottsville Maroons had been fined \$500, suspended from all rights and privileges (including the right to compete for the championship, of course), and had their franchise forfeited to the league.

The Providence Steam Roller received word that they were not to be permitted to play Pottsville the next day. It took \$14 worth of long-distance telephone calls for Providence to hurriedly fix up a substitute game with Frankford.

By Sunday, all of these things were public knowledge.

Also on Sunday, without Red Grange and after returning a good deal of money to disappointed fans, the Bears lost to the New York Giants at Wrigley Field.

One week later, the Yellowjackets defeated the Bulldogs at Cleveland. They were the only two NFL teams who found reason to play a game on the last day of the 1925 season.

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MUDDYING THE WATERS

At this point, one might well wonder where all the controversy came from. It should be obvious that a team that is not in a league -- and Pottsville was officially out eight days before the end of the season -- cannot win the championship of that league. The Pottsville people argue that the penalty was harsh and would substitute a monetary fine. Realistically, how appropriate is a monetary penalty to keep a team from playing an illegal game whereby it might make more money than the amount of the fine?

However, memory is selective. Over many years the details of the story faded and only the memory of an outstanding team that did NOT win the title remained.

Then, too, events began to unfold in a way that really muddled the waters.

First, the Cardinals found themselves in trouble when the truth about the hastily-arranged Thursday morning game broke in Chicago. In order to get eleven men on the field, the Milwaukee team had put four Chicago high school boys in uniform.

Joe Carr investigated immediately and his punishment was swift. The Milwaukee team was not suspended, but the owner, Ambrose McGurk, was given 90 days to sell his club. Art Folz, a Cardinal player who admitted procuring the high school boys for McGurk, was banned from the NFL for life. And, although everyone agreed that Chris O'Brien hadn't known about the ar-

range,ment, the Cardinals were still fined \$1,000 and put on probation.

The Milwaukee game was eventually ruled as not an official contest although it is still carried in the 1925 standings appearing in the NFL Record Manual.

At about the same time, Dr. Striegel went to Columbus and begged Carr to reconsider his actions against Pottsville. Carr relented to the extent that he agreed to submit the whole mess to the league owners for review at the February league meeting. In the interim, Pottsville's suspension held.

The league met on February 6, 1926, at the Hotel Statler in Detroit. With Dr. Striegel in the room, President Carr detailed the events of the Pottsville case. Perhaps his most damning statement was: "Three different notices forbidding the Pottsville club to play were given and the management elected to play regardless."

After Carr finished his summary, the owners took ten minutes to discuss the situation and to hear anything Dr. Striegel had to say. Then they voted to accept Carr's report. Pottsville was still out of the NFL.

However, when it came to awarding the 1925 Championship, a new snag developed. Even without the Milwaukee game, the Cardinals clearly had the best record of those teams eligible for the title. But, when it was moved and seconded that the Redbirds be awarded the championship, word arrived from Chris O'Brien that the Cardinals would not "accept" the championship. The vote was tabled and apparently not picked up again. The NFL never actually went through the formality of awarding the 1925 Championship to anyone!

The distinction is, of course, purely technical. The Cardinals -- with the best record of teams actually in the NFL at the close of the season -- were indisputably the league champs, and later Redbird owners have had no scruples about claiming the 1925 title as part of the Cardinal heritage. But O'Brien's version of George C. Scott gave Pottsville supporters fuel for their fire.

Had Pottsville remained out of the league, there might have been a chance for clearing up the mess. Their absence in 1926 might have tipped researchers that the team had not completed the 1925 season. But Red Grange got the Maroons back into the NFL.

At the same Detroit league meeting, Grange and Pyle announced they had secured a lease to Yankee Stadium and intended to put a pro football team in New York. Understandably, this was distressing news to Tim Mara, who held exclusive territorial rights to the Big Apple for his Giants. Just how important it had been for Joe Carr to take a stand on the issue of territorial rights now became clear. If the NFL gave into Grange and Pyle this time, it would soon find itself at the mercy of every new star who happened along.

When the league turned down Grange and Pyle in their application for a franchise, the dynamic duo announced they would form their own league for 1926. By mid-summer the NFL was involved in a real war with Grange's American Football League.

Discretion became the better part of justice. Chris O'Brien was in deep trouble in Chicago, facing the new AFL Bulls as well as the Bears. His \$1,000 fine was rescinded to help him operate. Even Art Folz was reinstated to keep him from playing for the AFL.

One NFL team, Rock Island, jumped to the new league, but the others held firm. And that left Pottsville. The Maroons had a strong team in being but no league to play in. If they joined Grange, the AFL would gain a great deal of credibility. No doubt with some misgivings, the National Football League readmitted the Maroons at the league's summer meeting.

Although the move helped the league survive Grange's challenge, it forever obscured the 1925 situation. For the 1925 and 1926 standings did not reflect the fact that from December 12, 1925, until July 10, 1926, the Pottsville Maroons were not members of the NFL.

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IN RETROSPECT...

In summary then, in 1925 the Pottsville Maroons by their own choice and despite repeated warnings disobeyed a crucial NFL rule. As a consequence, they forfeited their franchise, did not complete their scheduled league season, and gave up any rights to a championship they were on the verge of winning. All of this occurred before December 20, the scheduled end of the 1925 season.

The last two games scheduled by the Chicago Cardinals at the end of the 1925 season were initiated by Chris O'Brien, not to secure the championship itself, but to set up a potentially profitable game with Red Grange and the Chicago Bears. The games were not ordered by Joe Carr as claimed by Pottsville. And, although the Mil-

waukee team used ineligible players in one of the games, the Cardinal management was in no way at fault.

The Cardinals at first refused to accept the championship and, in fact, the NFL never officially awarded one for 1925. However, as the team with the best record of those eligible for the title, the Cardinals must be regarded as the 1925 champs.

The attempt by Red Grange and C.C. Pyle to form a rival pro league in 1926 caused Pottsville to be readmitted to the NFL, thus obscuring the facts but certainly not making the Maroons eligible for the championship of the previous season.

And, finally, the Pottsville team in 1926 and for several seasons thereafter wore jackets with "World Champions 1925" emblazoned on the back. Apparently no protest was ever made by the league, and, indeed, none should have been. The Maroons -- with their wins over the Cardinals and over the ex-Notre Damers -- quite probably were the best team in the world that year. Had they chosen to remain in the league until the end of the season, they might also have been NFL Champions.

Instead, they chose to go for the "quick buck" in Philadelphia. By doing so they did not have a championship "stolen" as they have so long claimed. On the contrary, they discarded it themselves.

Rich Bysina sent this:

MEMO TO: Pete Rozelle & Jim Heffernan (NFL); Pete Elliott, John Bankert, Don Smith & Joe Horrigan (Pro Football Hall of Fame); Bob Braunwart, Bob Carroll & Vic Frolund (Professional Football Researchers Association); Hub Arkush & Dan Arkush (Pro Football Weekly)

NFL, PFHF, PFRA and PFW Combine to Establish New All-Time Top Twenty Defensive Categories

This fictional headline could one day become a reality if enough pro football authorities, researchers, publications, institutions, and the NFL itself pooled their resources to acknowledge -- on a continuing basis -- the contributions made by NFL defensive players.

These categories can be determined from such areas as interceptions, fumble recoveries, blocked kicks, sacks, and punting. And it would complement the Hall of Fame's All-Time Top Twenty list of offensive players in rushing, passing, receiving and scoring.

'Defense' is referred to by many as the 'name of the game'. So maybe it's time it receives -- as far as recognition and publicity are concerned -- its 'fair share'.

The Coffin Corner would like to editorially "second the motion." Additionally, we'd like to suggest that it's high time some very clever people sat down and figured out some new yardsticks to measure defensive play besides the cumulative marks mentioned by Rich.



It's nomination time! Send your nominees for president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer to Tom Nikitas/ 24 Whitman Avenue/ Syosset, NY 11791.

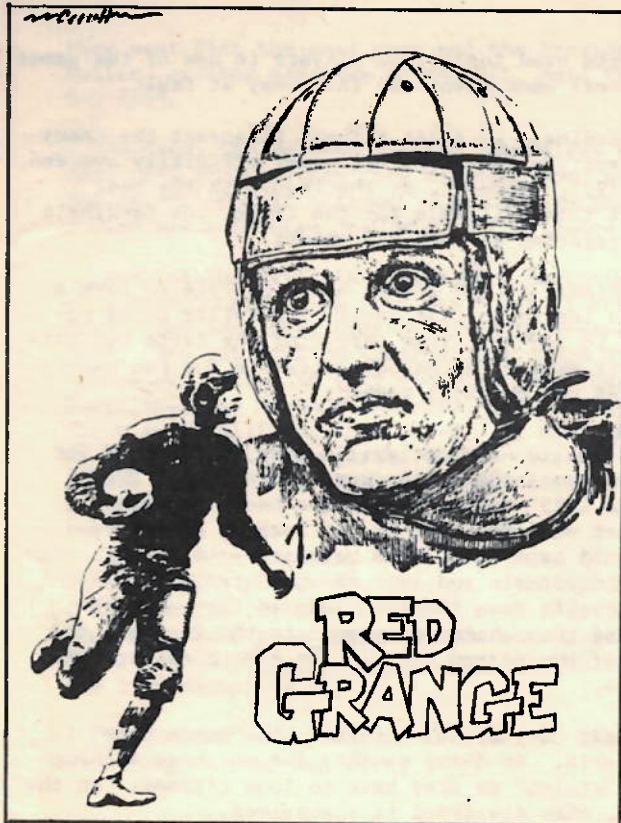
* * *

Under the heading of "You Can't Win!" No sooner do we get the Oorang Indian Media Guides in print and someone comes along with an update! David Neft informs us that the player who performed under the monicker "Deadeye" was in reality Jack Thorpe, Jim's brother. Seriously, we'd appreciate all the updates we can get, so keep looking.

* * *

We're happy to welcome two new members to P.F.R.A. They are Stan W. Carlson on Minneapolis, Minn., and Bob Kaschner of Mogadore, O. We are pleased to have you with us, fellas.

* * *



ABOUT PFRA:

The Professional Football Researchers Association was founded as a non-profit organization on June 22, 1979, at Canton, Ohio. The purpose of the association is to foster the study of professional football as a significant social and athletic institution. It further hopes to establish an accurate historical account of professional football and to disseminate research information.

Membership in P.F.R.A. is open to anyone with a sincere interest in the history of professional football or related subjects. Members receive: twelve issues of The Coffin Corner, the official newsletter/magazine of the P.F.R.A.; the opportunity to submit material to be considered for publication in the newsletter/magazine; an end of year Directory of Membership; a specially prepared association publication to be offered at the end of the year at a membership discount; and a P.F.R.A. Membership Card.

To join, write to P.F.R.A./ 218 Wise St., N.E./ N. Canton, O./ 44720.

To help defray operational expenses of the association, reasonable dues of \$15 per year have been set.

The Coffin Corner
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