

## THE EARLY YEARS OF PRO FOOTBALL IN SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA

By Robert B. Van Atta

Among the least known of southwestern Pennsylvania's historical distinctions is the region's substantial role as the originating center of professional football in the 1890's before the "play for pay" sport spread to central Ohio, eastern New York, and eastern and midwestern metropolitan locales.

The originally accepted belief that the sport was initiated in 1895 at Latrobe has been superseded by results of subsequent research. However, the additional material has strengthened southwestern Pennsylvania's position – including Pittsburgh, Greensburg and Latrobe – as the central spawning point for a sport that today dominates the sports pages from July training camps until January's Super Bowl.

During the decade of the '90's, the proposition of paying players, particularly eastern college stars, to play for town and city teams spread from here into the midwest and north, as well as catching on in eastern metropolitan centers.

From southwestern Pennsylvania, the concept fanned out to Chicago, Detroit, Canton (Ohio), and as far as Wisconsin, to the booming petroleum area in northwestern Pennsylvania, and to upstate New York.

That pioneer pro football movement lost its momentum in the early years of this century, but was rekindled in the post-World War I era and generated a veritable explosion of interest following World War II.

Was this professional football? Or, as some skeptics have said, semi-pro ball where a few dollars from the gate were shared by the players. While not of the dollars of later years, the answer points to genuine pro.

One evidence was demonstrated when the last Greensburg team disbanded in 1900. A story appeared in a Pittsburgh newspaper carrying player gripes about final pay settlement when the season was curtailed. The retort appeared in that evening's Greensburg newspaper, which said in part:

The contracts with the players were carried out to the letter, and ... they received every dollar coming to them ... Their pay started on the first day of October ... With the exception of the local men, none of them reported on time ... Not a cent was taken off for the time lost ...

When it was impossible to get a Thanksgiving game (to replace one cancelled by Latrobe), it was decided to disband early, and one week's pay was deducted ... Where a contract called for transportation to and from a player's home, it was paid ... Where a contract called only for room and boarding, transportation was not paid.

The story added, "Had some of the players from a distance been paid according to the touchdowns they made, they would have walked home!"

### Play for Pay

To explain how the “play for pay” concept began, it is necessary to focus on 1890, the first year of football significance in western Pennsylvania. Perhaps the strongest force in the development was the sponsorship of teams by the then quite popular athletic clubs and associations, plus activity at private prep schools subject to eastern colleges’ influence.

That year marked the start of formal football competition in southwestern Pennsylvania. A number of teams were organized in 1890, including then amateur club teams and some school elevens. Among these were Allegheny Athletic Association of Pittsburgh’s North Side, Greensburg and Altoona Athletic Associations, Johnstown Athletic Club, Shadyside Academy, Kiski School, and Washington & Jefferson College.

The first recognized football game in Pittsburgh came that October 11, when Allegheny A.A. played Western University of Pennsylvania (which later became Pitt) at Recreation Park on the city’s North Side. The W.U.P. squad was assembled to play that game, which the club eleven won easily, 38-0. It also marked the start of Pitt football.

Many Allegheny club members, as at other clubs which shortly organized teams, had gone to eastern colleges and played football. At that time such clubs and associations, ranging from the best with extensive facilities to local organizations with minimum meeting rooms, were in their prime as a source of fraternal and athletic fellowship for boys and men.

The Three A’s, as Allegheny A.A. was called, went on to defeat Shadyside Academy and an all-star pickup team before losing to a touring Princeton team (probably the seminary), 44-6. A 6-6 tie with Detroit and a 6-0 loss to Cleveland, both amateur club squads, completed that first season.

For 1891, the older East End Gymnasium Club (which the next year became Pittsburgh Athletic Club) decided to field a team. Allegheny’s footballers had brought the club a lot of publicity, which the East Enders didn’t like.

Publicity, and football victories, were important to clubs in those days. Fame, glory, and increased income resulted. Members made money wagering on their successful teams. Sedentary club members enjoyed associating with noted athletes “in my club.” And new members were attracted to clubs with stature.

That quest for club prestige led to recruiting of football players, at first with indirect financial inducements. A famous New Jersey club gave its key players quite handsome trophies at season’s end, which could be sold for a tidy sum of money. Others were lavish with expense money, or provided the “living well” on team trips.

When the East End Gymnasium Club formed its team in 1891, its physical director, William Kirschner, was an outstanding and powerful lineman who became the team’s bulwark. Critics also noted that his salary was increased during football season, while his regular duties were lightened.

Despite much effort to get these two pioneering Pittsburgh club elevens on the field to oppose each other, the event didn't occur until 1892. The first game was played on Columbus Day at East End, a 6-6 tie. There were accusations of dirty play and professionalism, as well as other aspects of an already bitter rivalry. A rematch was scheduled for November 12 at the Allegheny field.

In preparation, both clubs went into full scale behind-the-scenes maneuvering to strengthen their teams. Outright cash offers and other inducements were made to players from New York to Chicago.

By the end of October, Pittsburgh P.A.C. (its name had been changed that year) offered \$250 to William (Pudge) Heffelfinger, three-time All-American guard from Yale considered the best player of the times. He was working as a railroad clerk in Chicago, and playing for the Windy City's top team between arguments with its management. Others received offers, as well.

But when the day for the game came, the 3,000 spectators crammed into Recreation Park saw Heffelfinger come out onto the field in Allegheny colors. This set off quite a controversy as Pittsburgh A.C. protested the presence of the famed Yale ace and other Chicago players. A.A.A. retaliated with the fact that P.A.C. had imported players as well.

After a negotiating delay during which a substitute game was actually started, and with great pressure from the spectators, it was finally agreed to stage the game as an exhibition with all bets canceled. Midway in the first half, Heffelfinger's savage hitting forced a P.A.C. fumble which the Yale All-American gathered in and ran 25 yards for a touchdown (then worth four points).

The game was contested "with ferocity" until ended prematurely by darkness after 18 minutes of the second half. A.A.A. was triumphant, 4-0. It turned out that Heffelfinger received \$500 plus \$25 in expenses for the game, too much for a low-paid railroad clerk to pass up. Two of his Chicago teammates received "liberal" expense money.

Thus, William (Pudge) Heffelfinger now is acknowledged as the first professional football player anywhere.

During the next two years, by various subterfuges, others joined the ranks of paid players throughout the east and midwest, although direct contracts were still few and far between.

### The Brothers Fiscus

In 1891, two brothers from Indiana County, Lawson and Ross Fiscus – both of whom had played football at Indiana Normal School (now Indiana University of Pennsylvania) – were recruited and played halfback for Allegheny A.A. Lawson attended and played football at Princeton in 1892, then returned to the A.A.A. team as an amateur in 1893.

A powerful runner and defensive hitter, Lawson Fiscus also played for Greensburg Athletic Association in 1893. Then he was offered \$20 a game plus expenses by the Westmoreland County team in 1894 to become one of the acknowledged pioneer pro gridgers.

By 1895, the football fever spread to Latrobe and the Y.M.C.A. sponsored that community's first organized team that fall. When the team's quarterback had a conflicting baseball obligation for the September 3 opener, a young (nearly 19 years old) quarterback from Indiana Normal, John L. Brallier, agreed for \$10 a game plus expenses to play for the Latrobe team against Jeannette. At the time, he was waiting for the start of school and football practice at Washington & Jefferson College.

At one time recognized as the first pro, Brallier brought untold volumes of publicity and recognition to Latrobe. The spirit that prevailed at the time is perhaps best demonstrated by an 1897 newspaper account:

It was a red letter day for Westmoreland County. The cheers that started in Greensburg re-echoed through the streets of Latrobe and shook the chestnuts from the trees on the top of Laurel Ridge. Never in the history of the county was so great a glory brought to her in one day as her football champions won for her yesterday in the laying low of the brawn and muscle that has for lo these many years been the pride of Allegheny County. Greensburg's victory over Duquesne [Country & Athletic Club] was great, but the slaughter of the Pittsburgh Athletic Club Braves by the doughty champions from Latrobe capped the climax and bathed the Ligonier Valley in one great flood of red light that night.

By way of explanation, celebrations of football victories were often marked by bonfires.

The Duquesne club joined the pro scene in 1895, and by 1899 had every player under a money contract, to make it one of the first completely professional teams.

By 1896, the Amateur Athletic Union (A.A.U.) suspended the Allegheny A.A. team for its flagrant violations of amateur rules. After quite successful years in 1896 and 1897, the pro football turmoil had so greatly upset the club that the sport was dropped.

### Pro Boom

By 1900, a major center of gridiron activity as in the steel towns of Homestead and Braddock, cited briefly as the "blast furnace era" of the pro football sport.

Elsewhere, Massillon and Canton, Ohio became a center of at least quasi-pro football just after the turn of the century. Others fostering the sport were Franklin and Oil City, booming Pennsylvania's petroleum centers; Buffalo, Syracuse, and Watertown, N.Y.; and the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia Athletics teams which played for the 1902 state pro "title."

Numerous baseball personalities played on those teams, and A's baseball manager Connie Mack was the football team's general manager. Barney Dreyfus of the Pittsburgh Pirate ownership was prominent in his city's grid organization, as well.

The Jeannette Indians Athletic Association had a brief fling in these exalted football circles for a few years, beating Johnstown 41-0 in 1900 and Steelton 6-0 in 1903 for memorable wins.

Just about all of these teams faded from the pro and semi-pro scene by 1906, except in Ohio. There Youngstown, Canton, Shelby, Akron, and Massillon kept competitive fervor high through the first decade of the 1900's.

What happened to the "pro" boom? Competition for top players was so great that organizations could not keep up with the cost. Communities and individuals soon lost enthusiasm for providing the extra financial support necessary. The money just wasn't available in those days when more practical needs had to come first. And community pride and identification suffered when so many out-of-town players were involved.

As a consequence, the concept of professional football receded on the national scene until after World War I, when it was fostered primarily in the middle west. Gradually, quite slowly for many years, it evolved into the colorful sport we know today.

\* \* \*

### Greensburg Takes the Field

"The death knell of professional football in Greensburg was sounded Saturday night [when] it was decided to disband the team. The players were paid off this morning and some are already on the way home," the Daily Tribune reported on page one, Monday, Nov. 26, 1900.

Thus ended a colorful era of Greensburg sports which began with an 1890 amateur team and nourished a lively decade with the city's brief but historic role in pro football annals.

The first three years of Greensburg Athletic Association football, starting in 1890, were not particularly successful. Lack of local opponents, rivalries which did not develop until later years, and relatively few experienced players among local residents available for the team were drawbacks.

At one point in that formative year of 1890, a group of college boys home for vacation played a Pittsburgh team at the Fairgrounds (now the Lynch Field athletic complex), and lost by a narrow margin. The association team played at least two other games that year, record existing of a 6-6 tie with Indiana Normal School and a 34-6 loss to Kiskiminetas School.

It was not unusual in the '90's (and even into the early years of this century) for the established eastern Ivy League schools to play some of their games against athletic clubs. In Western Pennsylvania, it was necessary to fill schedules.

In 1891, the Greensburg A.A. team played Indiana Normal, and lost to both the Allegheny Athletic Association, 10-0, and the Pittsburgh Athletic Club, two crack teams from the city which were active in recruiting players and paying expense money. Names in the Greensburg lineup included locally familiar ones, such as end Barclay, tackle Jamison, guard Donohoe, center Coshey, and halfback Bovard, to cite a few. One of the Fiscus brothers from Indiana County was at tackle that year, but which cannot be determined from sketchy published accounts.

Among 1892 games, the team dropped a 6-2 decision to western University of Pennsylvania and took a 28-0 walloping from Pittsburgh Athletic Club.

By 1893, however, a more dedicated approach was being made to provide quality football at Athletic Park, where the games were played. That field is still in use today as Offutt Field, sit of Greensburg Salem and Greensburg Central Catholic high school games.

Lloyd B. Huff of the prominent banking family was the team manager, and Richard Coulter Jr., field captain. Other players included Charles Copeland, John Coshey, Tom and Charles Jamison, Leo Furtwangler, Joe and Tom Donohoe, Harry Bovard, John Cribbs, Ed Mechling, W.C.L. Bayne, Will Theurer, Frank Hargrave, H.L. Welty, Morrison Barclay, Joseph Wentling, and an Indiana County school teacher named Lawson Fiscus who the year before had played for Princeton University.

In a 10-0 loss to Pittsburgh Athletic Club, a newspaper report noted that "the referee gave P.A.C. decidedly the best of it," and cited the play of several Greensburgers, including Fiscus, Donohoe, Hargrave, Coulter and Copeland.

Further strides toward gridiron eminence were evident in 1894. A new player, Richard D. Laird, joined the team. Better known in later years as presiding judge of the Westmoreland County courts, he played football at Grove City, where he was quarterback and captain.

That 1894 team achieved an excellent record, winning five games over Kiski School, Indiana Normal, West Virginia University, Carnegie A.C. of Braddock, and Holy Ghost College (which later became Duquesne University) before losing to Altoona A.C., 10-0. A scoreless tie with Jeannette followed, called at halftime because of a player scrap involving Lawson Fiscus.

On Thanksgiving Day, the homestanding Greensburg eleven avenged its only loss with a 6-4 conquest of Altoona in a return match. In those days, a touchdown counted for four points, and the "goal after touchdown" for two. Over 2,500 fans were on hand, and a newspaper reported that "while the game was in progress, the good natured spectators indulged in all the football yells known to the game."

But the significant aspect of that 1894 season was the fact that Lawson Fiscus, ace halfback, became one of football's first pros. He accepted an offer of \$20 plus expenses to play for Greensburg, while teaching school at South Fork, near Johnstown. An outstanding halfback then in his late 20's, he also had offers from Pittsburgh clubs.

By 1895, Greensburg was widely recognized as a powerful force on the gridiron scene. Its roster included fullback and captain Charles Atherton, who played three years at Penn State; halfback Fred Robison, a speedy Penn Stater; halfback Lawson Fiscus of Indiana Normal and Princeton; quarterback Richard Laird, who had captained the Grove City College squad that won the Western Pennsylvania championship; and center R.M. (Mack) Shearer, who learned the game at Fordham.

Also included were guard Adam M. Wyant of Bucknell and the University of Chicago, who served as principal of Greensburg schools and later became the U.S. congressman

from this area; guard Richard Thomas of Indiana Normal, tackle Richard Coulter of Princeton, end Joe Donohoe of Fordham, tackle Charles Copeland of Franklin & Marshall, fullback Ed Mechling, also of Indiana Normal; and non-college players William Theurer, John Irwin, Tom Donohoe, Leo Furtwangler, W.C.L. Bayne, and Frank Kiehl.

In addition to Fiscus, paid to play as "pros" were Wyant, Atherton, and Robison.

Dr. J.E. Mitinger was the general manager of the team for that and the next several years, setting the pace for his sons and grandsons who achieved prominence in football.

Six victories were chalked up to start the season, over Latrobe Y.M.C.A., Western University (Pitt), Altoona, Carnegie A.C. of Braddock, Wheeling Tigers, and Connellsville. A scoreless tie with Pittsburgh A.C. and a 12-0 loss to Duquesne Country & Athletic Club followed. Then came three games in eight days, a 17-4 win over Altoona, a 24-0 Thanksgiving Day conquest of Beaver Falls, and two days later, a highly emotional 4-0 defeat by Latrobe in a quite rough game.

For 1896, Alfred Sigman of Lafayette became fullback and coach, and two more Fiscus brothers, Ross of Indiana and W.&J. and Newill of Indiana Normal, were among additions.

A five-game winning streak began the season. Jeannette, Wheeling Tigers, Beaver Falls A.C., Pittsburgh A.C., and Latrobe lost to the Greensburg team, acclaimed by Pittsburgh papers at mid-season as perhaps the best in Pennsylvania. A noteworthy play in the Beaver Falls game was Tom Donohoe's 44-yard run with an intercepted pass (probably a lateral, since the forward pass was not legal until 1906).

In the first win in history over Pittsburgh A.C., Lawson Fiscus ran 80 yards around left end for a score, "one of the longest ever on the field." Fiscus also tallied the other two G.A.A. touchdowns in that game.

But came Saturday, November 14, and at Exposition Park in Pittsburgh, Greensburg A.A was "badly beaten" by Duquesne Country & Athletic Club, 18-4. A muddy 0-0 game was played with Pittsburgh A.C. at East End Park the following Saturday, and on Thanksgiving, Latrobe fell to Greensburg by a 10-0 score.

### **1897 Season**

The pinnacle of the Greensburg pro football era probably was the 1897 campaign, with 10 victories in 11 games. The only negative note was a 12-6 loss in the ninth game to powerful Latrobe, an outcome that was reversed by a 6-0 score in the return game and season finale at Latrobe.

That year's squad was large by standards of the day, 27 players, including a number of new ones. Among these, George A. Barclay of Milton, Pa., a great halfback at Bucknell and Lafayette, brought in several Lafayette stars to enhance the team.

The first eight 1897 games were decisive wins, 22-6 over Swissvale A.C., 74-0 over Jeannette with nine first-half touchdowns, 90-0 over Allegheny Imperial A.C., 34-0 over

Geneva College, 28-0 over Altoona, 30-0 over Wheeling, 47-0 over W.U.P. (Pitt), and 24-6 over Duquesne C.&A.C.

This focused the football limelight on the upcoming game with Latrobe. Arrangements for special police were made, field privileges were limited to the press and physicians, space across Jack's Run (which then ran along the field) was divided into carriage stalls, and seating capacity increased. Noon and afternoon trains that Saturday brought 1,000 fans from Latrobe, while others came from Pittsburgh and elsewhere for the 3 p.m. game.

One of the most humorous plays came on the opening kickoff. The Greensburg Daily Tribune reported, "The ball was kicked into the creek, Dunsmore [Greensburg left tackle] following it like a demon. He took to the water like a duck and brought forth the ball dripping with the slime of Jack's Run."

The Latrobe newspaper said "the ball bounded merrily into the creek, where half a dozen long-haired fellows [in those pre-helmet days] followed it head first. Okeson [Latrobe playing coach] waded out with the ball and a smile of heavenly forgiveness. It was Latrobe's ball."

Near the end of the first half, George Barclay "oozed through left tackle" for a Greensburg score, and Donohoe kick goal. Just after the second half began, "like a flash, Gass shot through left tackle" from the Greensburg 12. Abbaticchio kicked goal and the score was deadlocked at 6-6.

After a late-game Latrobe defensive stand inspired by manager Berry's emotional plea, "Hold for the sake of old Latrobe," the tide turned. A Latrobe punt was touched by a Greensburg player, then grabbed by end Okeson who "dashed between the goal posts for the winning touchdown."

A page one Greensburg headline bannered, "WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND WE ARE THEIRS!"

A sidelight to that game, witnessed by over 5,000 and the largest crowd in the early years of football in the area, was the fact that two backfield stars, Barclay of Greensburg and Abbaticchio of Latrobe, later became major league baseball standouts.

Greensburg then took the measure of Pittsburgh A.C. on Thanksgiving Day, five days later, and the following Saturday avenged that only loss with a 6-0 triumph at Latrobe.

For 1897, Greensburg A.A. and Washington & Jefferson College had the best football records in Pennsylvania. W.&J. lost to the University of Pennsylvania for its lone setback. Latrobe lost two, the other to Duquesne C.&A.C.

### Later Years

Perhaps the next best Greensburg team was the 1898 edition, coached again by Barclay. Three games were played with Latrobe, which won two of them. All other games on the Greensburg schedule were won by the countyseaters except scoreless ties with Pittsburgh A.C. and Duquesne C.&A.C.

Many of the Greensburg players in those halcyon years were from out of town, attracted by jobs made available while they played football, or by salaries and other inducements. Turnover each year was fairly substantial, and many of the well-known local players were no longer on the team.

These factors contributed to a sharp decline in interest after that 1898 season. An effort was made in 1899 to stock the team with local players only, but it didn't materialize. By that time, some of the Pittsburgh clubs were also cutting back from the fierce and costly competition for top performers.

A new Greensburg organization undertook team sponsorship in 1900, and indulged in a fund-raising effort to finance the team. Money for new uniforms was aided by a progressive stag euchre at the Elks Club. The last week of September the roster of the team was announced: "Men of brawn and muscle gathered from the stars of the American gridiron," said a Greensburg Daily Tribune page one headline.

One of the new players for 1900 was Isaac Seneca of Carlisle, an All-American from an Oneida Indian reservation in New York. In a game with Latrobe, a fight between Seneca and Latrobe quarterback Kennedy triggered such a donnybrook that for the return game the county sheriff arranged a corps of special police.

The team won only four of ten games, defeating Altoona twice, Indiana Normal, and Duquesne C.&A.C. Two games were lost to Latrobe. The season was a financial disaster after the last two games with Duquesne (weather) and Latrobe (withdrew from Thanksgiving match to play another team) were cancelled.

A Daily Tribune story summarized the situation accurately, as it turned out:

The death knell of professional football in Greensburg was sounded Saturday night and the ghost walked this morning, but the echo of the rattling clods still lingers.

A meeting of the advisory board was held Saturday night, and after reviewing the situation financially and otherwise, it was decided to disband the team. The players were paid off this morning ... The football exchequer is short about \$1,000 on account of bad weather and the failure of Latrobe to play the Thanksgiving game ...

No team was fielded in 1901, and although the Pittsburgh pros practiced in Greensburg in 1902, that was in fact the "death knell" of professional football's colorful but short tenure at Greensburg.

\* \* \*

### **Football at Latrobe**

The recruitment of a quarterback for an 1895 football game, and highly successful teams through 1907 developed a heritage for Latrobe that has been a point of pride for that Westmoreland County community since.

However, research in recent years has corrected and updated some of the inaccuracies accepted and perpetuated by many writers and fans since that time.

Prior to 1895, Latrobe's only football was informal or pickup teams, mostly of boys home from college and a few local former college players. But that year, with enthusiasm for the sport reaching a peak in the area from Pittsburgh to Johnstown and Altoona, the Y.M.C.A. there decided to sponsor a team.

Russell Aukerman, the Y's physical instructor and former Gettysburg College halfback, was named playing coach. The promotionally minded editor of a Latrobe newspaper, Dave Berry, was chosen general manager.

Several days before the first scheduled game, quarterback Eddie Blair, a University of Pennsylvania student who also played baseball for Greensburg, discovered that the football opener conflicted with a baseball commitment. So manager Berry contracted former Indiana Normal quarterback John Brallier, who finally agreed to play for \$10 a game plus expenses.

Brallier, at the time, was nearing his nineteenth birthday (not age 16, as most histories note) and was preparing to enter Washington & Jefferson College to play football. When he arrived in Latrobe the night before that 1895 opener, he later said, "it was a thrill seeing my first paved street."

The game, with Jeannette, was played Tuesday afternoon, September 3, beginning at 4 p.m. Stores, mills and mines closed early that day to mark the event, won by Latrobe 12-0. Aukerman scored two touchdowns (each worth four points) and Brallier kicked both goals after (each worth two points) in the first half.

The lineups for that famous game were:

LATROBE		JEANNETTE
Jacoby, Cooper	LE	Crookston, Long
C. Saxman	LT	Eisenhart
Brown	LG	Yeager
Flickinger	C	Seybold
Lafferty	RG	Burheim (or Burhenn)
Ryan	RT	Reynolds
Story	RE	Heintzelman
Brallier	QB	Flowers
Aukerman	LH	Householder
Hargrave, Rock	RH	Long, Lewis
Howard	FB	McConneghy

That 1895 Latrobe team played eleven games, losing four to Greensburg (twice), Altoona, and West Virginia University. That year was the start of the first of two peaks of early success, the first through 1898 and the second from 1903 through 1905. The record of Latrobe football from 1895 through 1907 was:

Year	W	L	T	Pts	PA
------	---	---	---	-----	----

1895	7	4	0	140	61
1896	7	3	0	226	30
1897	10	2	1	288	28
1898	7	3	0	170	40
1899	4	0	0	104	2
1900*	5	2	0	85	23
1901**	0	1	0	0	12
1902	2	0	2	39	2
1903	9	0	0	284	5
1904	9	0	0	323	0
1905	8	0	0	187	0
1906	3	1	2	110	16
1907	5	2	2	110	20
Total	76	18	5	2156	239

\*Score of one game not known

\*\*Score of two games not known

The 1896 opener, a 12-0 win over Altoona, caused one Pittsburgh newspaper to observe that "Latrobe played fast and clean football, and will make the crack clubs of western Pennsylvania hustle." Then followed a 4-0 victory over Western University of Pennsylvania and the town went "wild with excitement." The local newspaper reported, "The W.U.P. eleven came out at noon today and struck terror to our men by their size and appearance, but they went down like grass before our farmers, as the Pittsburgh boys called them."

The first loss was to Greensburg, after a 38-0 conquest of Indiana Normal. The Latrobe newspaper noted, "Lots of betting was done, and they were large stakes, too. Most of it was bet that Latrobe would not score ... Greensburg got the game and Latrobe got the cash."

The Latrobe eleven went all-professional in 1897, signing college players from the east coast and as far as Iowa. Walter Okeson, Lehigh All-American end who later headed the Eastern Intercollegiate Football Officials and the N.C.A.A. Rules Committee, was named coach.

"The revolving wedge and the criss cross were played to our advantage every time," reported one newspaper, demonstrating the style of play used, in this case in a 36-0 thrashing of Altoona. Community enthusiasm in those days is portrayed in this game report in 1897:

Amid the flashes of red fire and the tremendous cheers of 500 people together with the notes of the horns and drums and such things as would enliven the occasion, the Latrobe football team was welcomed home last Saturday night after a glorious victory over Youngstown (Ohio).

Immediately upon the arrival of the train, the deafening noise began and lasted long into the night. The mob paraded the principal streets of the town for over two hours, fairly making the night hideous for those citizens who oppose the game ...

Victory is ours, and once more we make Youngstown drink the bitter cup of defeat, dragging their football boys to dire disaster. We bested Youngstown at Mahoning Park, 14-4 ... their first defeat on their home grounds ...

Two games that year with Greensburg were highlights, the first a 12-6 victory for Latrobe and the second a 6-0 loss marked by disputes over officials, players and game arrangements.

The Latrobe team won its first seven games in 1898, including two from archrival Greensburg, before losing the last three to Duquesne Country & Athletic Club, Pittsburgh A.C., and Greensburg. Coach in 1898 was Al E. Bull, who coached the University of Iowa eleven the year before. Bull played quarterback.

Another 1898 addition was famous strong man Charles Lloyd Barney from Iowa. Barney, who had played the year before at Ohio Wesleyan, appeared at expositions and shows lifting horses, breaking chains, and performing other feats of strength.

A controversy arose in the first Greensburg game over four W.&J. players who showed up to play for the countyseaters, but Latrobe manager Berry's protest was upheld. The Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph published a lengthy poem about the game, the last stanza of which read:

Gay Latrobe's bold pigskin chasers  
Now are the owners of the town,  
And upon his head each hero  
Wears the victor's laurel crown.  
They have shown to all Westmoreland  
That they're skilled in football tricks,  
For the Greensburgs drew a cipher  
While Latrobers tallied six.

A driving rain at Latrobe marked the second Greensburg game in 1898. Late in the game with Greensburg ahead by 5-0 (touchdown value was up to five that year), the leaders had the ball at the Latrobe 15. "The ball went to Barclay [Greensburg ace halfback], and the crash came. After the swaying pile had toppled over, Lang [Latrobe] merged with the tangled mass and sped away up the field making a 95-yard run for a touchdown."

Greensburg's protest that the play was over was of no avail. When Abbaticchio kicked the goal after, "the wild enthusiasm of the moment paled into insignificance before the demoniacal demonstration, the wildest orgies of howling dervishes."

Latrobe played four games as an amateur team in 1899, winning all of them. The last of these, Thanksgiving Day, was a 35-0 rout of Indiana Normal, in which "the leading features were runs made by Howard, McDyer, and Abbaticchio, assisted by magnificent interference. McDyer proved himself a star notwithstanding the fact that he had two smashed fingers ... Captain Ryan and Marcus Saxman proved irresistible."

Hopes were rekindled in 1900, and a new field was used. One Pittsburgh newspaper commented, "Far out in the heart of Westmoreland County, there is at present under

way one of the greatest football revivals ever experienced ... [T]he crack eleven chosen to defend Latrobe's colors opens the season backed by an army of the most enthusiastic supporters that ever rooted for a football team ... After a year in the football background, Latrobe comes to the front with a roar heard everywhere on the rugby map."

New playing coach was Russell Knight, halfback star at eastern power Lafayette College the prior two years. Players were recruited from all over the east.

Enthusiastic fan support came after a 6-0 win over Greensburg.

The "guards back" formation was the successful game strategy, but the celebration afterward dominated news coverage. One story related:

The town was wild and the din terrific. It started when news of the great victory was phoned down and it grew every minute until the climax was reached at 10 o'clock when the team came home. Billy Showalter had the brass band out and two thousand people packed the streets. Town was ablaze with red fire and Roman candles and the din was incessant and awful. Five hundred tin horns kept up a crash while a skillet brigade created a new and strange noise.

After Duquesne C.&A.C. dropped a 5-0 decision to Latrobe at Pittsburgh's Exposition Park, that club's second loss in three years, "bitter woe" prevailed at the Duquesne club camp at the "sting of defeat at the hands of coke-eaters from the wilds of faroff Latrobe."

An 11-0 triumph over Greensburg in 1900, in that year's second meeting of the rivals, marked the end of that colorful and intense competition as Greensburg gave up pro football at the end of that season.

### Amateur Era, 1901-1907

The year of 1901 was one of a low profile, only three games being played, but some talent was developed that was to be of help later.

The fortunes of John Brallier and Latrobe football were reunited in 1902 following his graduation from dental school and the opening of his office there, after he turned down pro offers from Franklin and Oil City. He served as player-coach for the four games played that fall, scoreless ties with Indiana Normal and Wilkinsburg Sterling A.C. being followed by triumphs over Indiana First Regiment and Latrobe Steel Works.

Latrobe Steel backing helped in 1903. A fence was built around the Latrobe Steel grounds with money subscribed by merchants, and new uniforms were ordered.

The season opener, a 28-0 conquest of Jeannette House Co. Four, was marked "with many ludicrous features, the chief of which was the losing of [Latrobe halfback] Don Miller in an old stump hole."

Locally, Latrobe was acclaimed as 1903 western Pennsylvania champion after an unbeaten season, especially after the top pro eleven, Franklin, refused to play the Westmoreland Countians. The team was an amateur one that year, and "received

nothing but the evanescent glory that hovers around the heads of football heroes," a news story for a team benefit talent show at season's end stated.

Momentum from 1903's success helped with early organization for 1904, when many teams were refusing to play Latrobe because of its prowess. The year's highlight as its undefeated string continued was a 5-0 victory at Steelton, where the central Pennsylvania squad hadn't lost a home game for several years.

A Latrobe newspaper published an "extra" that Saturday evening with a telegraphed account of the game, and claimed the state championship for the local heroes. When word of the result arrived at Latrobe, "the news spread from store to store. Businessmen and clerks left their customers and hurried out into the streets to confirm the glad tidings, and there was joy and happiness unalloyed manifested on the faces of all." When the team returned at 2 a.m. Sunday morning, a hardy crowd defied a heavy, wet snow to acclaim their heroes at the railroad station.

After debts and expenses of the 1904 season were paid, the sixteen players divided \$500 in profits.

Enthusiasm continued high for 1905. Several new college players were obtained. Jobs were secured to bring some to Latrobe, and to keep others. By this time Canton and Massillon, Ohio had developed pro teams of wide repute. Canton was particularly strong, scoring over 100 points frequently. A game was finally arranged for November 18 at Latrobe.

The game nearly resulted in a scoreless tie, but Latrobe's high second half kickoff was fumbled and "Pop" Hayes recovered inches over Canton's goal line. Brallier's kick made the score 6-0. "LATROBE WON FROM CANTON IN THE BEST GAME EVER PLAYED HERE," trumpeted the local newspaper's front page headline.

By the end of 1905 the three-year winning streak was at 26 games, with a single touchdown scored by East End in 1903 the only defensive blot. This brought widespread recognition, and players from many parts of the country inquired about coming to Latrobe to play in 1906.

But fund-raising efforts were unsuccessful, and the season didn't get started until late October. Three games were won to extend the win streak, but an era ended November 29, 1906, when Latrobe went down to a 16-0 defeat at Canton. Not only that, but Canton could not pay the financial guarantee to Latrobe, and the local Y.M.C.A. had to borrow money to pay the bills.

That experience ended pro football in Latrobe. Community sentiment had moved forward using only local players, and a newspaper editorial said that it was better to suffer defeat and keep the team a local one – this was "real sport."

Dr. Brallier played his last with the 1907 team, which had a winning year on that basis. One last incident stems from a visit that year of a team from California (Pa.). What was labeled as the California Y.M.C.A. team was ejected from its rooms at the Parker House for "chasing and frightening a chambermaid," jumping on beds and breaking two of

them, and for language “far from what might be asked for from Y.M.C.A. boys.” Latrobe won the game, 38-0. And it turned out that there was no Y.M.C.A. at California.