

THE TONAWANDA KARDEX: THE FORGOTTEN FRANCHISE

By Joe Horrigan

Quick! What is the only National Football League ever to lose just one league game during its entire existence? Don't look for the answer in the NFL's Official Standings; it's not there.

The first year the NFL (then called the American Professional Football Association) issued official standings was 1921. According to that list the 10-1-1 Chicago Staleys (renamed the Bears in 1922) were the league champions, while the 0-8-0 Cincinnati Celts finished last among the 13 listed NFL teams. What the official standings does not list is an additional eight teams that operated in the NFL during that season.

While no official explanation has ever been offered why the teams from Washington, D.C.; Muncie, Hammond, and Evansville, Indiana; Louisville, Kentucky; Minneapolis, Minnesota; New York City and Tonawanda, New York are omitted, a generally accepted theory is that they played an insufficient number of league games to be considered in the percentage race for the title. In fact, the Tonawanda team, known as the Kardex, played ... and lost ... just one league game during its brief existence.

[NOTE: Beginning with the 1987 edition of the *National Football League Record and Fact Book*, the NFL began printing corrected standings based on research by PFRA members.]

The Tonawanda Kardex (named after and possibly sponsored by the Kardex Company) was granted an NFL franchise on August 27, 1921. However, the *Tonawanda News*, that city's major newspaper, failed to report the event until four days later and after it had already appeared in the neighboring *Buffalo News*. The *Tonawanda News* quoted the Buffalo paper as saying that the team would be "utilized entirely as a road team ... with some local talent engaged." The paper also reported that there would be "eight or ten such teams to do the touring to the big cities where the dough lies." Several teams from the smaller NFL cities did operate as road teams during the 1921 season, primarily due to the lack of a suitable playing facility. The local talent contribution to the Tonawanda team consisted of five players, four from a local semi-pro team and Walter "Tam" Rose, a former star and captain of the 1915 Syracuse football eleven.

Capitalizing on Rose's notoriety, the Kardex' first game was against an independent pro team from Syracuse. In a rain-interrupted game, the two New York State teams sloshed and sloped their way to a scoreless tie.

The next and last team the Tonawandans met was the game NFL's charter member Rochester Jeffersons. The Jefferteam sons, who were by no means a football powerhouse, embarrassed the Kardex team 45-0.

Unable or unwilling to schedule any more league games for the 1921 season, the Tonawanda Kardex packed away their football togs and NFL franchise forever, leaving barely a trace of their existence behind.