

## **THE STATEN ISLAND STAPLETONS**

By John Hogrogian

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Trollies rolled down Broadway and Calvin Coolidge was president when the NFL came to New York City in 1925. In the years since Tim Mara founded the Giants, NFL teams have made their home in each of the City's five boroughs. The Giants played in the Polo Grounds in upper Manhattan through 1955, then moved to Yankee Stadium in the Bronx through 1973. The Brooklyn Dodgers football team thrived in Ebbets Field during the 1930s and 1940s. The Jets made their home in Shea Stadium in Queens from 1964 until recently. And, in the sleepiest of the boroughs, the Staten Island Stapletons played NFL ball from 1929 through 1932. The Stapes struggled through life on a shoestring, but helped keep the NFL afloat as it fought for life in the Depression.

The Stapes started out in 1915, five years before the NFL was born in the midwest. Dan Blaine, a good halfback and a native of the working-class neighborhood known as Stapleton, along with three other players formed the team to play other semi-pro squads from New York and New Jersey. The Stapes played more for fun than money. Just as well: crowds were small; salaries averaged \$10 per game.

Nevertheless, they managed to do well, winning several local semi-pro titles before World War I. After military service, Blaine took over sole ownership in 1919.

Blaine himself prospered in the 1920s. His ownership of several restaurants on Staten Island made him wealthy. Some people say the restaurants were actually speakeasies where one could still get a stiff drink during Prohibition, and that Blaine was deeply involved in bootlegging. At any rate, he stayed in the Stapleton lineup at halfback until retiring in 1924 at the age of 33.

That same fall, the Stapes claimed the Metropolitan championship by beating the best independent pro teams in the area. However, Mara's newly-formed Giants moved into the Polo Grounds the next year and completely eclipsed the Stapes, particularly with the sell-out visit by Red Grange and the Chicago Bears on December 6. Earlier, on Thanksgiving Day, the Giants played the Stapes in an exhibition game and bested them 7-0.

Blaine began upgrading his operation during the 1926 season. His squad started poorly and fan interest dwindled. Then, on November 14, the Newark Bears of the American Football League visited Staten Island. The AFL, the newly-organized challenger to the NFL, had gathered many high-caliber players. The Newark squad featured rookie fullback Doug Wycoff of Georgia Tech and a number of players from southern schools, but the team owner had run out of money and his players had gone several weeks without pay. When the Bears whipped the Stapes 33-0, Blaine hired the Newark squad en masse to finish out the season as Stapletons. The move killed the Newark franchise and gave Blaine a roster of big-league quality.

In 1927, the Stapes fielded basically the same squad, although Doug Wycoff defected to the Giants. The Maramen, an awesome team, won the '27 NFL championship and twice humbled the Stapes in non-league games, 19-0 and 18-0. The Stapes enjoyed a moment of glory when they beat the NFL Duluth Eskimos, starring Ernie Nevers 7-6 on November 27.

By 1928, Blaine was in full pursuit of an NFL franchise. He bolstered his squad by luring Doug Wycoff back as player-coach and by signing six graduates from the nationally-ranked New York University team. The southern veterans and N.Y.U. rookies blended together to give the Stapes their best season ever. They went 10-1-1, including a 3-1 record against NFL teams. They even fulfilled a Staten Island fantasy with a 7-0 victory over the Giants on Thanksgiving Day.

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When the NFL met the next summer to consider new members, Blaine's application for a franchise was approved, and thereby hangs a tale.

Back in 1927, the down-the-drain Brooklyn Lions' franchise was transferred to Giants' owner Tim Mara in lieu of debts owed by the Brooklyn management. With Giants about to win their first NFL championship, Mara needed another franchise the way Jimmy Walker needed more charm, but he saw it as a way to protect his territorial rights. In '27 and '28, Mara allowed C.C. "Cash-and-Carry" Pyle, owner of the former AFL Yankees, enter the NFL and operate out of Yankee Stadium under the authority of the Brooklyn franchise. When Pyle gave up in '29, the franchise reverted to Mara, who then transferred it to Staten Island.

None of this should be construed to mean Mara owned the Stapletons. He didn't, but they joined the NFL only at his pleasure. The real irony is that Mara's team filled the most important slot on every Staten Island schedule, and the main Mecca for any Stapleton team was to beat the Giants.

About to enter its tenth season, the league lined up with twelve teams: the Green Bay Packers, New York Giants, Chicago Bears, Chicago Cardinals, Providence Steam Roller, Frankford (Philadelphia) Yellow Jackets, and Dayton Triangles returned from 1928, joined by new teams in Staten Island, Boston, Orange (N.J.), Buffalo, and Minneapolis. Although it had been talked about for several years, there were no official divisions. Each team had the responsibility of arranging its own schedule, and, as a consequence, the Stapes did not play Green Bay, Buffalo, or either Chicago team in '29. Squads were limited to 18 men.

Blaine now had a full major-league schedule to play in cozy Thompson's Stadium, the Stapes' classic minor-league ballpark. Built in the early 1920s by the wealthy owner of a local lumber company, Thompson's nestled against a hill in the working-class Stapleton neighborhood and doubled in summer as a home for semi-pro baseball. Inside its stockade fence, about 8,000 uncovered bleacher seats ringed the field. The team's dressed in sheds standing just outside the fence. One of Blaine's restaurants was next door, and after games and practices, fans could rub elbows and maybe even quaff a beer with the players. A hard core of 3,000 fans paid their way into every game, but another couple hundred usually watched for free from the hill behind the south end zone. Although dwarfed by places like the Polo Grounds and Wrigley Field, little Thompson's Stadium hosted four years of NFL football in an often electric atmosphere.

Blaine wanted to polish his team by hiring a glamorous superstar and set his sights on Ken Strong, All-America tailback from N.Y.U. One of the most versatile backs in football history, Strong ran with speed and power, blocked and tackled fearlessly, and was a fine enough punter and place kicker to earn a living as a specialist long after his days as a regular ended. In his senior year, he led all college players in scoring.

After graduating from N.Y.U. in the spring of 1929, the Connecticut native signed his first pro contract with the New York Yankees baseball team as a power-hitting outfield prospect. He hit .285 and poled 21 homers for New Haven in the Eastern League during the summer, leaving pro football offers aside until late in the diamond season.

As he was leaving the ballpark in New Haven on Friday afternoon, August 31, Dan Blaine and Doug Wycoff walked up to Strong and introduced themselves. They explained the Stapleton's new adventure and offered the then-very high salary of \$300 per game to put his famous name and talents to work for the Stapes.

This was years before the college draft started, and Strong had a date in New York that night to speak with Giants' coach Leroy Andrews. Blaine gave the young star his phone number and asked him to call right away if things didn't work out with the Giants.

That night Andrews shocked Strong by offering him only \$200 per game. The coach spoke eloquently of the Giants' already heavy payroll and of the influential people owner Tim Mara could introduce him to. Strong told Andrews that he was interested in getting paid to play football, not in hard luck stories or contacts. Andrews handed Strong the phone number of Mara's office and told him to call back tomorrow.

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After leaving Andrews, Strong called Blaine and bent the truth, telling him the Giants offer was \$350 a game. Blaine countered with an offer of \$5,000 for the season plus a rent-free apartment. Strong accepted on the telephone, and the newspapers broke the story the next day.

\* \* 1929 \* \*

The Stapes began their "training camp" at 6:30 in the evening of Tuesday, September 3, at Thompson's Stadium. Wycoff ran two-hour drills each evening because most of his players had jobs during the day. A mere 25-years-old, Wycoff's coaching style relied on an easy-going rapport with his players, including soliciting their ideas for plays and formations.

Strong joined the team on September 17, after the Eastern League baseball season ended. From the start, he and Wycoff bickered over how often each should carry the ball.

Blaine advertised season tickets for \$18, including a single pre-season game with a team from Millville, N.J., on September 29, The Stapes won that 27-0 before a full house of 8,000 fans.

The 18-man roster had almost equal numbers of N.Y.U. men and southern college players. The starting backfield showed Wycoff and three N.Y.U. grads – rookies Strong and Charlie Riordan and second year pro Frank Briante. The first-string line had a newcomer in center Harry McGee and holdovers in ends Tom Leary and Sammy Stein, tackles Bing Miller and Cy Williams, and guards Jack Lord and Walt Godwin. Miller was a second-year pro from N.Y.U. Stein and Williams had come to Staten Island with the Newark Bears, and both starred as pro wrestlers in New York City during the week. The average salary was between \$100 and \$150 per game.

On October 6, the Stapes opened their ten-game NFL schedule by hosting the Dayton Triangles, a club which had gone 0-7 in '28 and had no prospects for improvement this year. The Stapes wore jerseys which were solid black in front and on the sleeves and solid white on the back with a big black number.

The 6,000 fans enjoyed some collegiate flavor provided by the team's official cheerleader, Beanie Bramhall. The dapper young man paced the Stapleton sideline in white shoes, white pants, and a black sweater with a big "S", barking cheers through a large black megaphone.

The Stapes smothered Dayton 12-0, allowing only one first down. Both Strong and Wycoff plunged for touchdowns.

The following week, the Stapletons made their first visit ever to the Polo Grounds. After a poor year in '28, the Giants had rebounded as one of the NFL's strongest teams, paced by the many skills of tailback Benny Friedman. A 1926 All-American from the University of Michigan, Friedman was the best passer football had ever seen. Tim Mara brought him to the Giants by purchasing the entire roster of Friedman's '28 Detroit team.

The crowd of 30,000 included 10,000 from Staten Island. Early in the first period, a Strong punt nailed the Giants deep in their own territory. When the New Yorkers tried to punt out, a bad snap gave the Stapes a safety. In the second quarter, Friedman fumbled a Strong punt on his own six-yard line, and Stein pounced on it for Staten Island. Strong plowed into the end zone and added the extra point for a 9-0 lead. Midway through the period, the Giants began moving downfield on Friedman's arm. A pass to Len Sedbrook closed the gap to 9-6. Late in the half, New York blocked Strong's punt on the 32-yard line and marched to the one. On fourth and goal, Stein nailed Giant back Gerry Snyder for a loss to preserve the 9-6 lead into halftime. But while the Stapleton ground attack stalled in the second half, the Giants scored twice on touchdown passes to Hap Moran to take a 19-9 victory.

The Stapes never quite recovered from the disappointment of that second half. After beating a non-league team from Atlantic City, they played the Frankford Yellow Jackets twice on the weekend of October 26-27. The Yellow Jackets, one of the better NFL teams, played in a suburb of Philadelphia where pro sports were prohibited on Sunday. As a consequence, they played home games on Saturday and usually traveled to their opponent's city for a game on Sunday.

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The Stapes caught a train out of Manhattan early Saturday morning for the afternoon game in Frankford. The 7,000 spectators included NFL president Joe Carr, who sat on each bench for a half, and 1,000 Staten Islanders who came down in a car and bus caravan.

The Yellow Jackets took a 6-0 lead in the first quarter, but the Stapes evened the score on an 11-yard touchdown pass from Strong to Leary in the second quarter. Both teams missed their extra points, and, when neither could score in the second half, the game ended at 6-6. When the clubs reassembled at Thompson's Stadium the next day, they continued their defensive battle, with Frankford coming out on top 3-0.

November began with four home games. They tied Orange 0-0 and 1928-champion Providence 7-7, then beat Boston 14-6 and Minneapolis 34-0. The Minneapolis game was distinguished by the appearance of Jack Shapiro, another N.Y.U. man and surely one of the tiniest players ever to appear in an NFL game. A blocking back, Shapiro stood 5-2 and barely fluttered the scales at 126 pounds. In Staten Island, all this was seen as preparation for the visit of the Giants on Thanksgiving Day.

Even with a price hike for this game, over 10,000 fans bought tickets, the largest gate to date for a Stapleton home game. The Giants, who had lost to Green Bay at the Polo Grounds the previous Sunday in a battle of undefeateds, keyed their defense on Ken Strong all afternoon and smothered the Staten Island offense.

First quarter touchdowns on a run by Tony Plansky and a 34-yard pass from Friedman to Sedbrook got the Giants out to a lead they never relinquished. In the third period, the Stapes inched up to 14-7 on a touchdown plunge by 30-year-old Hinkey Haines, a former Giant star who came out of retirement to join the Stapes in November. Late in the game, Friedman hit Ray Flaherty with a 20-yard touchdown pass on a fake field goal play, running the final score to 21-7.

Three days later, the Stapes ended their season with a game in the Knights of Columbus Stadium in East Orange, N.J., against the Orange Tornadoes. A fellow newcomer to the NFL, the Tornadoes learned from the example provided by the Giants and keyed on Ken Strong. When the Stapes went to a passing attack, the Tornadoes picked off a few aerials at opportune moments to win 3-0. This final loss dropped Staten Island to 3-4-3 overall, good for sixth place in the twelve-team league.

\* \* 1930 \* \*

The deepening Depression shrunk the NFL from 12 to 11 teams over the summer. Gone were Dayton, Buffalo, and Boston, victims of poor financing and bad times. The New Jersey franchise moved from Orange to Newark, and new clubs took the field in Portsmouth, Ohio, and in Brooklyn. The Portsmouth Spartans had been an independent team in southern Ohio, while the Brooklyn Dodgers were built from scratch to fill Ebbets Field on Sunday afternoons after baseball season.

Doug Wycoff again piloted the Stapes, a squad with few changes from last year's edition. The key backs were again Wycoff and Strong, who hit .373 with 41 homers for Hazleton in the New York-Penn League during the summer. Joining them were two rookies from N.Y.U., Beryl Follet and Ed Buckley. The line had a new center in Jim Fitzgerald from Holy Cross and a new end in Harry Kloppenberg from Fordham. Returning to their posts were wrestlers Sammy Stein and Cy Williams and N.Y.U. grads Bing Miller, Ollie Satenstein, and John Bunyan. Fitzgerald and Bunyan were the heavyweights at 215 pounds.

After their daily workouts in early September, including a 6-0 victory over a team from Coaldale, Pa., the Stapes opened their 12-game NFL season by hosting the Newark Tornadoes on September 21. Ken Strong ran for one touchdown and threw for another to lead the Stapes to a 12-6 victory before 7,500 sun-scorched fans.

The next weekend brought one of those home-and-home double-headers with Frankford. In Philadelphia on Saturday, the Stapes had a 3-0 lead at halftime, but lost the game 7-3. On Sunday, Stapleton turned the tables at home with a 21-0 victory. The crowd of 6,000 saw Wycoff throw two touchdown passes to Strong and run for a third.

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On Wednesday, October 1, the Stapes played a night game at Newark and came away with a 7-7 tie. The most notable incident was a punch in the nose that staggered Strong in the second half.

The Brooklyn Dodgers came to Thompson's Stadium on Sunday and embarrassed the Stapletons 21-0. Humbled by their new neighbors, the Stapes rebounded by beating the non-league Long Island Bulldogs 7-0 the next Sunday. Blaine then signed the Bulldogs' best player, David Myers from N.Y.U. One of the few black players in the NFL, Myers was used at guard although he had starred in the backfield in college. He saw action in Staten Island's 7-6 loss at Providence on October 19 and in a 6-0 victory at Newark on October 26.

The Stapes brought their 3-3-1 record into the Polo grounds on November 2 to meet the 7-1 Giants. The crowd of 18,000 witnessed an inspired effort by both teams. After taking the opening kickoff, the Giants drove to a touchdown in six plays, with Benny Friedman connecting on several long passes. In the second quarter, the Giants drove down to the Staten Island six-yard line, but Strong picked off Friedman's pass in the end zone to end the threat. The Stapleton passing attack sputtered as usual, but the ground game asserted some authority in the second half. Then, in the third quarter, Wycoff hit Strong with a screen pass on the Stapleton 45-yard line. Strong broke into the clear and bowled over Friedman, the last man in his way, en route to a 55-yard touchdown. Strong's extra point made it 7-6. An upset loomed as New York's Dale Burnett missed a 15-yard field goal early in the final quarter. With under a minute left to play, the Giants battered their way into distant field goal range. While some Staten Islanders claimed that the clock was being stopped illegally, Friedman drilled home a 42-yard field goal for a 9-7 Giant victory.

The bitter loss was followed by a bitter tie with the Portsmouth Spartans at Staten Island. The Stapes took a 13-0 lead into the second half but gave up that number to the visitors while adding none to their own total. Then Mother Nature turned bitter and the November 16 game with the Minneapolis Redjackets was cancelled by a rainstorm.

But the Stapes were about to begin their most glorious week. On November 23, they took on the Dodgers at Ebbets Field before 18,000, including a delegation of 5,000 from Staten Island. Still smarting from the beating Brooklyn had administered seven weeks before, the Stapes battled the 5-2-1 Dodgers to a standstill Brooklyn drove to the Staten Island five-yard line in the second quarter, but on fourth and one, Wycoff threw Indian Yablok for a loss. With under five minutes left in the scoreless game, the Stapes launched their first extended drive. A 29-yard pass from Wycoff to Strong moved the ball down to the six, and with only two minutes on the clock Wycoff carried it into the end zone. The Dodgers blocked the extra point, but the victory was the Stapes' – 6-0.

Having avenged themselves with Brooklyn, the Stapes prepared for the visit of the Giants on Thanksgiving Day. While Stapleton was beating the Dodgers, the Giants upset the Packers 13-6 in the Polo Grounds to move into first place. But the Maramen needed a win over Stapleton to maintain their narrow lead.

Thompson's Stadium bulged with 10,000 ticket holders while hundreds more watched from the overlooking hill. All shivered in the chill November air from the 2:00 kickoff until the final play.

Veteran Mule Wilson, recently cut by the Giants, started in the Stape backfield and led his new teammates by frequently nailing Friedman for losses. But, with under a minute remaining in the first half, Giant end Glenn Campbell blocked Strong's punt and fell on it in the end zone for a 6-0 New York lead at halftime.

In the third quarter, the Stapes got the ball on the New York 45 after a Friedman punt. The feeble Stapleton passing attack suddenly found a seam in the New York defense. Wycoff twice reached Bernie Finn, a back picked up from Newark four weeks earlier, to move the ball to the Giant four. Two plays later, Wycoff crashed into the end zone. Strong's extra point put Staten Island ahead 7-6.

Later in the third period, Friedman suffered a leg injury putting him on the sideline for the rest of the game. Midway in the final quarter, the Giants drove close enough for Ossie Wiberg to miss a 15-yard

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field goal try, but without Friedman's arm, there was no last second comeback for New York. The upset dropped the Giants back into second place behind the Packers who beat Frankford 25-7 in Philadelphia.

The Packers came to Staten Island three days later and beat the Stapes 37-7 in a laugher. Green Bay won the NFL championship for the second straight year, and the Stapes took sixth place with a 5-5-2 record, the only .500 season they would ever post in the NFL. Strong scored 53 points for the year, fourth best in the league.

\* \* 1931 \* \*

The summer brought changes to Ken Strong and the Stapes. Strong was hitting .340 for Toronto in the International League when he broke a bone in his right wrist. The surgeon who treated him botched the operation and left Strong with restricted mobility in the wrist. His promising baseball career came to an immediate end. His right hand had been weakened by a car accident during his college days, and the wrist injury further lessened his already limited passing ability. In fact, from that time on he may have been the worst thrower ever to toss any considerable number of passes in the NFL. Nevertheless, his football talents were so general that he continued as one of the league's foremost stars.

In July, the team's official name on the league records was changed from the Stapleton Football Club, Inc., to Staten Island Stapes, but a rose by any other name still needed the players ....

Strong's companion in the Stape backfield, Doug Wycoff, left Staten Island to rejoin the Giants. Blaine hired Hinkey Haines, the 32-year old veteran who had played briefly for the Stapes in '29 as his new coach. Haines preferred using more experienced players and planned an old-fashioned offense which rarely threw the ball.

Joining Strong in the backfield were veterans Mayes McClain and Stu Clancy and rookie Les Hart from Cornell. McClain was a 6'3", 200-pound fullback out of the University of Iowa. Clancy was a Holy Cross grad who'd become a New Haven undertaker. N.Y.U. men Bing Miller and Ollie Satenstein returned in the line, joined by 1929 N.Y.U. alumnus Bob Barrabee, veteran pros Hec Garvey and Cookie Cunningham, and rookies Al Kanya of Syracuse and Herb Rapp of Xavier.

After slumbering through two pre-season games in unimpressive fashion, the Stapes opened at home by beating the Dodgers 9-7 before 7,000 appreciative fans. The V.F.W. fife and drum corps marched across the field before the game, but neither team did much marching anywhere in the scoreless first half. In the third quarter Brooklyn's Indian Yablok fumbled a Strong to set up Ken's 40-yard field goal. Yablok fumbled another of Strong's punts in the fourth period to give the Stapes the ball at the Brooklyn 29. Strong promptly threw a short pass and – wonder of wonders – completed it to McClain who got up a head of steam and dragged a pair of Dodgers with him into the end zone. A late Brooklyn touchdown could not change the Stapleton victory.

The next week in Ebbets Field, the Stapleton passing attack reverted to form. The Dodgers intercepted three "flights errant" and evened matters with an 18-6 triumph.

Next came the annual invasion of the Polo Grounds. Benny Friedman had retired for a bit to coach at Yale, removing the Giants from title contention. The scoreless first half saw Strong belt several 70-yard punts but miss on three field goal attempts.

Still scoreless in the fourth period, the game was handed to the Giants by the Stapes – several times. First, New York drove from their own 37-yard line to the Stapleton ten, only to have Dutch Kitzmiller miss a short field goal. The Stapes took over, and on third down Hart threw a pass right at a Giant. The interception gave New York the ball down deep again, but again the Stapes defended bravely and Kitzmiller again missed a chip-shot field goal. As soon as the Stapletons got the ball back, McClain fumbled it away on his own 20. This time the Giants cashed in, driving to a touchdown with under a minute left to make the final 7-0.

Haines cut Hart after three straight poor games and put himself into the starting backfield against the Portsmouth Spartans, one of the league powers. The Spartans were held to a 7-7 tie through 58 minutes. Then Strong started passing and two interceptions later Portsmouth had a 20-7 win.

When the Providence Steam Roller came to town on November 1, only 3,500 fans witnessed a 7-7 draw. Strong showed his top form for the first time this season. The tie, however, was not enough to save Haines' job. He and Blaine announced his resignation with the team record at 1-3-1.

As his replacement, Blaine named perhaps the most inexperienced NFL head coach ever. Marty Brill was 23 years old and had just graduated from Notre Dame where he was a blocking back for Knute Rockne. Signed by Blaine as an assistant to Haines only a few days before the Providence game, Brill assumed the head slot for the rest of the season. The players relaxed under the reins of the earnest youngster and governed themselves well.

The next contest was a Wednesday night home game against Brooklyn. For the Stapleton's first ever night game, Blaine rented portable lights to ring the field. 3,500 squinted and Strong sprinted 70 yards to a touchdown to pace a 13-0 win for Coach Brill's men.

On Thursday night, November 7, the Stapes climbed aboard a train to make a western swing. Brill didn't make the trip because of previous commitments, leaving the players to their own devices. Tired from the trip and coachless, the Stapes were throttled at Green Bay 26-0 on Sunday. The following Wednesday night, they dropped a squeaker at Portsmouth 14-12. Then they caught another train back to New York, only to leave by boat Saturday night for Providence, where on Sunday they completed zero passes and lost 6-0.

Just when the season was disintegrating like an old soda cracker, the Stapes came home and beat Cleveland 16-0 before a meager crowd. Strong scored all of the points, six on a 55-yard run.

With this victory as a springboard, the Stapes greeted the Giants for their annual Thanksgiving Day tussle at Staten Island. New York owned a so-so 5-5 record, but Benny Friedman was back in the lineup.

Ken Strong put the Stapletons ahead 7-0 in the first quarter with a short touchdown plunge and an extra point. In the second period, Friedman fueled a long drive with a 36-yard pass to Ray Flaherty and then covered the final 15 yards himself on a nifty dash. Hap Moran missed the extra point.

The Stapes held a one-point lead late into the final quarter when the Giants recovered Strong's fumble at the New York 30. They marched inexorably down the field to the Stape four. Only four minutes remained as the Stapes put up a last-ditch effort. Three times they stopped the New Yorkers, and on fourth down Hap Moran fizzled a close field goal try. A safety near the end increased the Stapleton lead to a 9-6 final.

The big victory washed away much of the bad taste of the season. For all the problems, the Stapes still wound up 4-6-1, good for seventh place. Ken Strong's fine performance over the last half of the schedule won him a second-team berth on the Official All-League Team, the only Stape to be rank that high.

But one win and a bit of honor could not soften the financial beating Dan Blaine had taken this year.

\* \* 1932 \* \*

The Depression compressed the NFL into eight teams, the lowest enrollment ever. Frankford, Providence, and Cleveland – all cities that had hosted champions in the '20s – dropped out. The tight circuit had three teams in New York, two in Chicago, a new Boston team called the Braves, and the two "midgets": Green Bay and Portsmouth. The blend was as stable as a nitro malted.

In Stapleton, Dan Blaine completed some sort of circuit by hiring Hal Hanson to direct a rebuilding. Hanson had been coach of the the Newark Bears in 1926 and 1927 when they defected to the Stapes.

This time around, Hanson would coach a line of holdovers Al Kanya and Ollie Satenstein and a mixed bag of rookies and NFL castoffs. Strong was the fixed point around which the backfield revolved. 28-

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year old Doug Wycoff returned after a poor '31 season with the Giants to play fullback but not coach. The other starters were rookie blocking back Dick Frahm from Nebraska and Bob Campiglio, a swift runner who had starred at tiny West Liberty State College in West Virginia.

After two pre-season victories over non-league teams, the Stapes began their fourth NFL season by hosting the Dodgers on September 25. The Dodgers were also rebuilding under their new player-coach, none other than Benny Friedman. After the 54-piece Manhattan College band paraded up and down the field, the 7,000 fans saw a familiar performance. The Stapletons threw only five passes, Brooklyn keyed its defense on Strong, and the Dodgers won 7-0.

The loss didn't dim the excitement of the next Sunday's first-ever visit by the Chicago Bears. The newspapers hyped the game as the first clash between Ken Strong and Red Grange, the fabled Galloping Ghost. The underdog Stapes stood off the powerful Bears, holding them to a scoreless tie. Chicago's iron fullback Bronko Nagurski and young Campiglio gained the most yardage – so much for hype – but the closest thing to a score all day was Luke Johnsos' end-zone drop of a fourth down Grange pass.

The Stapes pulled another surprise the next week when they took on the Dodgers before 20,000 at Ebbets Field. The fans stirred up when they spotted Bing Crosby among their number, but the Stapletons quieted them down by winning the contest 7-6, despite completing a paltry two passes for the day.

One week later, on October 16, 4,500 fans assembled at Thompson's Stadium to watch the Stapes tie the heavily favored Portsmouth Spartans 7-7. With his team playing well, Blaine immediately arranged with league president Joe Carr to have the Spartans stay in town for a rematch on Thursday night.

Half the portable lights blew out in the first quarter, leading to a dim, scoreless period. By the second period, they were functioning again and so was Dutch Clark. The fans had a good look at his 74-yard touchdown run and dropkick extra point. The stiff Portsmouth defense set the tempo for a close game which wound up in a 13-6 Spartan win.

Two days later, the Stapes left for their annual western embarrassment. As usual, the coach – this time Hanson – had other obligations and didn't come along. He didn't miss much.

The Bears crushed the Stapes 27-7 on October 23, with Nagurski scoring two touchdowns. On October 30, the Packers had the privilege, 26-0 behind Arnie Herber, the NFL's new passing king. Herber threw a 30-yard scoring strike in the second quarter. Then, in the third period, when the ground-bound Stapes essayed one of those new-fangled passing things, he intercepted a Campiglio wobble and rumbled 85 yards to another TD. Shortly after the kickoff, Strong – who should have known better – threw a pass to the winds. There was Herber again to pick it off, and a few moments later he showed how it was supposed to work with a 35-yarder to Grove again for another six.

The Stapes limped home, caught the boat to Boston, and lost 19-6 on November 6. Strong was ill and could not play. Boston rookie Cliff Battles provided all the excitement, scoring twice.

Roundly cuffed in four straight losses, the Stapes headed for the Polo Grounds. The Giants had fared as badly as the Stapletons and stood – or rather slumped – at 1-5-1. Wycoff plunged over in the second quarter to cap a 62-yard Staten Island drive. Several minutes later, the Giants evened the score when Chris Cagle carried a Stapleton punt 68 yards for a touchdown. Just before the half, New York guard Patsy Jones carried an interception 22 yards to put the Giants ahead. The second half was all Giants, with the final being 27-7.

Coach Hanson cut five players after this game and added some new blood for the final three home games. The changes paid an immediate dividend in a 27-7 triumph over the Chicago Cardinals on November 20. After scoring the first touchdown in the opening quarter, Strong sat out the rest of the contest with an injured ankle. Campiglio scored the other two touchdowns before a meager crowd of 2,000.

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Four days later, for the Thanksgiving Day ritual. Only 4,500 fans turned out for the contest which had filled the wooden bleachers in the past. The Giants used accurate passing by Hap Moran and Jack McBride to take a 13-7 lead at halftime. In the third quarter, Ken Strong brought his tender ankle into the contest for the first time. He and Campiglio chewed up the yards in an extended Stapleton drive which knotted the score. Strong missed the extra point and the 13-13 tie stood up until the end.

Just three days later, the Packers arrived to play before 3,000 shivering die-hards. With Strong able to make only a token appearance, the Stapes summoned up a supreme effort to lead Green Bay 3-0 at halftime. The Packers launched a long drive in the third quarter, capped by Clarke Hinkle's fourth-and-goal dive into the end zone. Now trailing 7-3, the Stapes were forced to put the ball into the air, somewhat akin to attacking a shark with raw hamburger. Twice in the fourth quarter, halfback Stapleton Tom Hanson heaved passes to Packer backs who obliged with TD returns. At the final gun, the cold fans walked out on a scoreboard reading 21-3.

The Stapes ended the season in last place with a 2-7-3 record. The Packers, Spartans and Bears battled into December, with the Bears winning the NFL title by a whisker. No Stapleton player made either the first or second All-League teams, but young Bob Campiglio finished second in the league rushing tables with 504 yards. Published for the first time, the statistics also showed Strong as the fifth best rusher with 375 yards. To Dan Blaine, however, the most important statistic was that his financial losses were adding up as the crowds at Thompson's Stadium melted away in the bad economic times.

### \* \* THE FINAL YEAR \* \*

At the league meeting in July, when Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati became NFL members, Blaine asked for and received permission to suspend league operations for a year. They played that season as an independent, filling their schedule with other independents from the metropolitan area and five exhibition games against NFL clubs. The Stapes lost to the Giants, Dodgers, Spartans, and Packers, and beat the new Philadelphia Eagles.

Doug Wycoff stayed with the Stapes, and Bob Campiglio stuck around for part of the season. Some of the other '32 Stapes continued with the team, while a few others caught on with NFL teams. Ken Strong signed with the Giants for \$250 per game, a drop from what Blaine had paid him, but things were tough all over. He gave the Giants good running and kicking and helped turn a losing '32 team into the '33 champs of the newly-created Eastern Division. He went on to a long career, mostly with the Giants, and eventual enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

As for the Stapes, they continued to lose money in 1933. Blaine went through the formality of again getting NFL permission to suspend league operations for 1934, but he had no team at all during the season. In June of 1935, Blaine's franchise was finally declared forfeit.

Probably, the Stapes never had a chance for a long run. The band-box stadium could have never accommodated enough fans to make the team profitable, and after the Depression hit, Stape fans couldn't afford enough tickets to make a team possible.

By the time Blaine died in 1958, Thompson's Stadium had been ripped down to make way for a school, and the Giants were, for the time being, the only pro football team in town. In the era of Sam Huff, Frank Gifford, and Rosey Brown, the old Thanksgiving Day battles with the Stapes were remembered only by a few fanatics on Staten Island.

But they never forgot.