

More Crimson Giants

by Mel Bashore

I was most interested to read Marc Maltby's account of the history of the Evansville Crimson Giants in the Coffin Corner (September 1992). In late 1989, I learned that Herbert R. Henderson, former star player with the Giants, was still alive. I wrote him a letter asking him if he would recount some of his experiences. He kindly replied in a detailed, hand-written four-page letter. He was 91 years old and confided to me that he had purchased a block of fourteen tickets to see the Ohio State- Indiana game at Indiana that fall (1989). In his letter, he made interesting comments about the kicking game and about a humorous incident that occurred in a game against the Hammond Pros. The text of his letter follows:

"The Crimson Giants were made up of mostly good defensive players. Franklin Fausch was the owner of the franchise. He was a very large man, 6'6" tall and weighed 275 lbs. He played one tackle. He was from a small college and I don't remember its name. (Bourban) Bondurant, the other tackle, was from DePauw and later played with the Chicago Bears. He was also a large man. The center came from Columbia University. We had a brilliant end. Where he came from I can't tell you. Most of the remainder were ex-high school stars. End's name was (Chuck) O'Neil. He was the best I ever saw. Only 5'10" but with long arms and fast. Must have been close to 4. He and I hooked up in forward passing close to 100% in some games. We had a hard time scheduling games. Played 2 games with Louisville, 2 with Cincinnati, one with Green Bay. I couldn't go to Green Bay and he had to pick up players in Chicago on the way. Score 55-0. Hammond beat us 3-0. They (?) one of the best outside of Green Bay. We played a team out of Indianapolis recruited (?) of a fight (?) and they put me out of business for (?) but it was our best game. It's too bad that had to happen because the team was told to pick out this star and waylay him and that's what they did to me. They apologized that evening but the damage was done. (I had an operation in the knee in the spring but all Dr. Hanson up in Washington, Indiana could do was clean out the knee joint and in doing so I may be able to walk again by exercising the joint with the hopes I can get joint strong enough again to walk. I have had the operation but walking is still a long way away.)

By the way this center was factory manager at Mead Johnson here in Evanston. He had been center on one of the tough New York teams. He and I backed up the line. We did a good job. A funny thing happened in the Hammond game. The game was stopped by referee and Hammond wanted to talk to Herb Henderson in their huddle, which was allowed by referee. Players asked me not to hit so hard on defense as they had regular jobs on Monday. I told them I was the coach of one of the local high school teams and my players were on the sidelines watching the game and I had to show them how tackling was done. We all got a big laugh (?) by team and referee.

By the way I did punting, forward passing, as well as backing up the line. Incidentally, we had to play I copied from California, Brick Muller used it against Ohio State in Rose Bowl. On a drop back pass from Brick Muller through left end--threw the ball as far as he could and result you will find in record books. This O'Neil dropped back and when twelve or fifteen yards back let fly. From short punt formation, it was a fake punt and I let off down field as O'Neil threw the ball and he was left handed and the ball and I met about thirty yards down field. It resulted in six touch down for Crimson Giants.

By the way I also punted for Ohio State. I had some very good coaching. Our athletic director, L.W. St. John had written a textbook called How to Win by the Kicking Game. He was my kicking coach at Ohio State and "Dink" Templeton, who coached the kickers at Stanford, polished up my kicking. He was #1 kicker at Stanford before World War #1. Along with this I was best high school kicker in Middle West at Oberlin High School. I'm giving you this background before talking about a punt that I made against Hammond in the regular season game. Here's the punt. We lost to Hammond 3-0, a tight game. In those days, if you had an outstanding punter you kicked on first down. It was a hot day and we stopped Hammond on ten yards when they failed to make a first down on 4th and short. (E. Menzies) Lindsey, our quarterback, called for a punt. I was standing on the goal line when my foot hit the ball. Most kickers admit their foot seldom makes perfect contact. On this kick my foot made perfect contact. Bonderant stepped back from his line position and yelled "kick the hell out of the ball." That's what I did. I still remember punt receiver dropping back twice. There was a light breeze (?) to give ball its usual

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buoyancy--ball had regular height. Ball landed so punt traveled in air 85 yards and changed game. Carried ball to our yard line and taken on two yard line as Fausch put (Joe) Windbiele in at fullback. He could make winning touchdown. Fausch ran straight up and you can imagine what happened. He was lucky he didn't lose ball. This is the kick the Evansville people who saw the game never quit talking about this kick.

More about Crimson Giants. Crowds were sparse. It was a losing proposition. Evansville was not ready for pro football. Fausch operated the team as (?) year and I don't know how they came out. In vain hopes, we could figure out how to escape losing big money. I got another team started, but we lost money so fast we quit in midseason."