

JUST STATEN OUT ON THE ISLAND

How Dan Blaine's Stapletons earned their shot at the NFL

By Bob Gill

The Staten Island Stapletons may not have had a great impact on pro football, but their story has definitely been one of the best-chronicled in the pages of the Coffin Corner. In 1985 (Vol. VII, Nos. 11 & 12) John Hogrogian covered the team's history from its inception to its demise, focusing mainly on the Stapes' NFL seasons, 1929-32. In 1990 (Vol. XII, No. 5), working from copies of newspaper articles supplied by John, I took a very detailed look at the team's only post-NFL season, its 1933 finale.

Now, with another huge assist from John, who provided an exhaustive collection of articles from the Staten Island Advance, it's time to go back to 1927 and 1928, the years immediately preceding the Stapes' entry into the NFL.

Though owner Dan Blaine had provided Staten Island teams with reputable pro teams since 1919, the history of what became the NFL Stapletons begins in 1926. And oddly enough, it begins in Newark, N.J.

That was the year of "the Red Grange league," also known as the AFL. Though Grange's AFL succeeded in signing several major college stars, it had little success on the field or at the gate - one of the least successful teams in both regards being the Newark Bears. The Bears failed to win in five league games, the last of them on Oct. 24. After that, with their owner out of money and no paychecks coming in, the Bears tried to stay afloat by scheduling non-league road games for which they could collect a guarantee.

One such game took place Nov. 14 at Staten Island, where the Bears demolished the Stapletons 33-0. Impressed by this display, Blaine hired the whole Newark team, thus turning the Stapes into the equivalent of a major league team, even though an unsuccessful one. A much higher percentage of these players had college experience, most notably Doug Wycoff, an All-American from Georgia Tech. Coach Harold Hansen, a former Minnesota star, had coached at Wycoff's alma mater, and largely through the influence of their coach and their star player, the Bears - er, Stapes - featured four other Georgia Tech alumni, plus several others from southern schools like Florida and Vanderbilt.

Over the short time remaining in the 1926 season, Blaine's new team posted four consecutive wins. And a new era in Staten Island football had begun. Fifteen players from the Newark/Staten Island amalgamation (a "great collection of southern football stars," as the Advance called them) returned for the 1927 season, including coach Hansen, who also played occasionally in the backfield. The three most important new arrivals were linemen Walt Godwin and Jack Lord (not known for his cries of "Book 'em, Danno!"), plus fullback Carl (Rusty) Waite. But their presence was somewhat offset by the loss of Wycoff, the team's biggest star, who was lured away by the New York Giants.

Still, there was an air of optimism surrounding the Stapes - so much so that Blaine, for the first time, offered \$20 season tickets to the games at Thompson's Stadium. Thirteen games were advertised, though as it turned out only ten were played. According to Blaine, nearly 100 requests came in within 24 hours.

Football season opened in Staten Island on Oct. 2, with the Stapes hosting the Atlantic City Roses of the Eastern Football League. The Roses had signed several members of the defunct Philadelphia Quakers, champions of the 1926 AFL - most notably, backs Al Kruez and George Sullivan. But they were upstaged by Staten Island's Ark Newton, who broke loose for a 50-yard touchdown run in the game's opening minutes, thrilling the crowd of 6,000 and giving the home club a 6-0 lead.

It was still 6-0 in the fourth quarter when the Roses drove deep into Staten Island territory, only to have Kruez stopped on fourth and goal from the 1-yard line. The visitors came right back, but on first and goal from a yard out they fumbled the snap, and the Stapes recovered to preserve the victory.

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According to a play-by-play account in the Advance that may not be complete, Newton rushed for 88 yards on four carries, and Rusty Waite chipped in with a pair of interceptions. Atlantic City's standout was end Whitey Thomas, another ex-Quaker, who caught four passes for 101 yards - a remarkable total for that era.

Next on the schedule was the Orange A.C., perhaps the Stapes' biggest rivals. But Orange manager Ed "Piggy" Simandl canceled the date in a dispute over the distribution of gate receipts, and Dan Daley, Blaine's business manager, booked the All-New Britain team, the best club in Connecticut. However, it rained all morning and most of the afternoon on Sunday, and the game was postponed.

Undaunted, the Stapes prepared for a game with a team from Millville, in the Pine Barrens region of southern New Jersey. For years Millville had been vying with Atlantic City and Orange for the Jersey championship - a remarkable achievement for a town so small that, as the Advance reported, "arrangements have been made to transport the entire populace to Stapleton, via bus," for the game. And this year the visitors had a new weapon in their arsenal: Les Asplundh, a triple-threat back from Swarthmore who had been playing professionally since the early 1920s.

But two Staten Island backs, Newton and Matty McCormack, stole the spotlight on Sunday afternoon. McCormack went 38 yards for a touchdown in the second quarter, and Newton, after sitting out the first half, reached pay dirt on runs of 28 and 20 yards in the final period to cinch an 18-0 win.

McCormack, incidentally, was probably playing under an alias. Advance columnist Hal Squier implied as much in this coy reference to "the big boy with the little mustache":

"Many Saturday afternoons we spent in the press box at Baker Field, watching this McCormack doing his stuff for 'Dear Old Columbia.' We knew him by another name then, but what's in a name."

Speaking of names, the Stapes' next opponents, the Wilkes Barre Panthers, featured one of football's biggest names in quarterback Harry Stuhldreher, one of the famed Four Horsemen of Notre Dame. But once again Hansen's men outshone the visitors' star. Newton scored three times in the first half, and the Stapes held on for an easy win. The only consolation for Wilkes-Barre was a short touchdown plunge by Chris Cortmeglia for the first points scored against Staten Island in 1927.

As it turned out, this game had major repercussions in the Eastern Football League, of which Wilkes-Barre was a member. The Panthers had scheduled the Staten Island appearance on the same day they were supposed to be playing in Atlantic City. Manager- A.W. Johnson and/or coach Matty Owens arranged to have a lower- level team from East Falls, Pa., fill in against the Roses. But the stand-ins didn't fool anybody, losing 34-0, and the league kicked Wilkes-Barre out when the fiasco came to light.

Unaware of the deception, the reporter for the Advance mentioned only that three Wilkes-Barre players had failed to show for the game with the Stapes, explaining that they "got their signals mixed as to where the team was playing and were at Atlantic City looking for their mates."

The rescheduled game with All-New Britain was next on tap, and the Connecticut crew, led by Fordham stars Zev Graham, Jim Manning and Tom Leary, plus Shep Bingham of Yale, put up a real fight. The game's only score came in the opening period. Gerry (Babe) Thompson picked off a New Britain pass to set it up, and a few plays later Newton turned in another sparkling run, this one of 35 yards, for what turned out to be the game.winner.

The Williams brothers - quarterback Ike and tackle Cy - stood out for the home club, and Hansen made his first playing appearance of the season, replacing Waite at fullback in the second half.

Unbeaten and untied as October came to an end, the Stapes prepared to meet the legendary Canton Bulldogs. Though not in the NFL any more, the Bulldogs featured familiar names like Pete Calac, Harry Robb and Al Michaels in their backfield, and the Advance observed that they were "the best (team) that has opposed the Stapes this season." They lived up to that billing by holding the home club to a scoreless tie - the first time the Stapes had failed to win since Blaine's purchase of the Newark players in 1926.

Still, Hansen's men had their chances. In the first quarter Newton got loose for his weekly touchdown run, this time a 25 yarder; but an offside penalty brought it back. And in the third quarter a fumble

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recovery gave the Stapes another shot at a score, but Waite was stopped a yard short of pay dirt on a fourth-down play.

Actually, Canton had a slight edge offensively, as Robb led all rushers with nine carries for 36 yards. But five interceptions - four thrown by Michaels - kept the invaders from seriously threatening the Staten Island goal.

Just two days later the Orange A.C. made its long-awaited appearance in Thompson's Stadium for an Election Day game. Adding spice to this traditional rivalry was the fact that the visiting team included five former Stapleton players - Ken Hauser, Gene Smith, Paul Longua, Al Greene and Ted Plumridge - who had been deposed after Hansen and his "southern stars" arrived. In fact, a local group called the Buffalo Club declared that Tuesday Gene Smith Day and came out in force to make a presentation to their former lodge brother.

Orange entered the game as the favorite, but the Stapes had the early edge. A 45-yard pass from Waite to Newton put them on the visitors' 10-yard line midway in the first quarter; but on fourth and goal from the three, Newton's pass for end Sammy Stein fell incomplete.

Early in the second quarter Orange launched a drive from its own 40. Led by backs Heinie Benkert of Rutgers and Don Buell of West Point, they moved to the Staten Island 22. An off sides penalty set them back, but Buell got away on the next play for a 27-yard touchdown gallop. Ted Drews missed the extra point, but the Stapes found themselves trailing for the first time all season.

It was still 6-0 in the fourth period, and the home team really turned on the heat. Coach Hansen completed a 30-yard pass to Waite, who reached the Orange 20-yard line. Newton carried it to the 10, but Hansen passed incomplete into the end zone, resulting in a touchback.

The Stapes held, though, and Orange punted to Newton on his own 30. The Staten Island star came through again, sprinting 47 yards to the invaders' 23-yard line. Hansen blasted to the 12, and on the next play Newton squirmed through the whole Orange team for the tying score. With less than two minutes left, Ike Williams stepped back for a conversion attempt that could have won it, but his kick sailed low and outside. The game ended 6-6 a few moments later.

Of course Newton was the big star for the Stapes, but several Orange players stood out too. Buen ran nine times for 48 yards; Benkert picked up 40 yards on 13 carries, and also had a 45-yard punt return. Quarterback George Pease, a 1926 teammate of Red Grange with the AFL New York Yankees, completed five of 11 passes for 57 yards. And fullback Hauser, one of the ex-Stapes, picked off two Staten Island passes.

After complaining about the size of the crowd for the Canton game, the Advance said a big crowd attended this one. That would seem to indicate that the turnout must have substantially exceeded 4,000, the number who saw the Bulldog game, according to the New York Times. However, as we'll see later, the New York paper often reported attendance figures at odds with accounts in the Advance. (When the Times' figure is the only one available, though, I'll still list it, though with some reservations.)

The season's biggest crowd - 8,000 - came out the following Sunday when the Stapes hosted the New York Giants. The local fans were hoping for an upset, but they didn't get one. En route to their first NFL title, the Giants handled the Stapes easily and posted a 19-0 win. Blaine's charges never threatened against the Giants' suffocating defense. Even Newton was held in check, though he did manage to pick off two of Jack McBride's passes.

Despite those mishaps, McBride had an outstanding day passing, clicking on 12 of 18 for 140 yards and a touchdown. But the star of the day was the Giants' Doug Wycoff. Still a favorite in Thompson's Stadium, he topped all ground gainers with 55 yards on nine carries, punted five times for a 48.2-yard average, and intercepted a pass for good measure.

Besides losing the game, the Stapes also lost backs Ike Williams and Matty McCormack to season-ending injuries.

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But the team bounced back with a 27-0 rout of the All-Lancaster Roses, champions of the Eastern Football League. Newton scored three times, including a 66-yard jaunt on the first play from scrimmage. Even coach Hansen got into the scoring column on a short plunge in the fourth period.

That was the good news. The bad news was the abundance of empty seats in the stands. Squier's column in Tuesday's Advance was headlined "Come on Fans, Back the Stapes!" It began:

"Dan Blaine is wondering today whether he should play his remaining few games at home, or take his team on the road. The support given him in last Sunday's game against Lancaster has practically settled the question that Staten Island doesn't want high-class football."

A review of the season written a couple of weeks later also mentioned the dismal turnout for this game, and said if not for "the fact that a crowd of several hundred people had made the trip in a special train from Lancaster, the field would have been quite empty of spectators by game time."

Squier concluded his Nov. 22 column with the opinion that everyone appreciates the Stapes except the few local fans."

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1927 Staten Island Stapletons

Oct. 2	H	Atlantic City Roses	6- 0	6,000
Oct. 16	H	Millville	18- 0	-
Oct. 23	H	Wilkes-Barre Panthers	20- 6	-
Oct. 30	H	All-New Britain	7- 0	4,000
Nov. 6	H	Canton Bulldogs	0- 0	4,000
Nov. 8	H	Orange A.C.	6- 6	-
Nov. 13	H	New York Giants	0-19	8,000
Nov. 20	H	All-Lancaster Roses	27- 0	-
Nov. 24	H	New York Giants	0-18	7,500
Nov. 27	H	Duluth Eskimos	7- 6	-

<u>Name</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>Pos</u>	<u>Hgt</u>	<u>Wgt</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>College</u>
Black, Ed	6	E	5-10	175	22	Muhlenberg
Brewster, Jimmy	9	QB	5-10	155	26	Georgia Tech
Carpenter, Six	3	T				Georgia Tech
Clark, Ray	4	HB				Georgetown
Davis, Carl	3	T	6-0	194	24	West Virginia
Godwin, Walt	10	G	5-7	205	26	Georgia Tech
Hansen, Harold	6	FB	5-10	200	33	Minnesota
Kerr, George	3	T-G	6-1	243	34	Catholic U.
King, Ken	10	E	5-10	175	26	Kentucky
Lord, Jack	10	T-G	6-0	195	23	Rutgers
Manella, Don	10	G	5-9	205		none
Maurer, Adrian (Red)	5	HB	5-10	154	26	Oglethorpe
McCormack, Matty	6	HB				Columbia
Morris, Bob	2	G-T				Tulane
Murray, Johnny	7	C	6-0	180	22	Georgia Tech
Newton, Bob (Ark)	10	HB		185	27	Florida
Nicholes, Bob	1	T	6-1	205	28	Oglethorpe
Rice, Orin	9	C	6-0	165	23	Syracuse; Muhlenberg
Smith, Ray	5	FB			27	Lebanon Valley
Stein, Sammy	9	E	6-0	190	22	Pennsylvania
Thompson, Gerry (Babe)	6	HB				Georgetown
Tursi, Silvio	7	E	5-7	165	26	Muhlenberg
Waite, Carl (Rusty)	9	FB	5-9	207	25	Rutgers; Georgetown
Williams, Cy	10	T	6-0	210	26	Florida
Williams, Ike	7	QB	5-10	180	24	Georgia Tech

The fans got a chance to show their support when the Giants returned for a Thanksgiving Day rematch, and it attracted another fine crowd of 7,500. Though the Advance reported that the Stapes "gave the

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Giants a far better battle than in the previous game," the result was virtually identical: New York 18, Staten Island 0. Once again McBride was too much for the home club, running for one score and completing a 69-yard pass to Chuck Corgan for another.

Jimmy Brewster provided the highlight for the Stapes, picking off one of McBride's tosses and racing 85 yards for what appeared to be a touchdown. But the officials said he stepped out on the Giants' 22, and four plays later the Stapes lost the ball on downs.

Though losing to the mighty Giants was no disgrace, it might have left a bad taste in the mouths of local fans. But Hansen's men got a chance to redeem themselves three days later when Ernie Nevers and the Duluth Eskimos came to town. And they didn't waste the opportunity.

Having lost to the Frankford Yellowjackets just 24 hours earlier, the Eskimos looked a bit tired early in this game, and the Stapes took advantage. Ark Newton reeled off a 42-yard run to the Duluth 20 on the second play from scrimmage, but the Stapes turned the bag over when Newton's pass fell incomplete in the end zone. Shortly thereafter he picked off a pass and the Stapes started another march. This one ended with - who else? - Newton plunging over for the score. He topped it off with a successful conversion for a 7-0 lead.

Late in the half Newton got loose for 48 yards, and a pass from Waite to end Silvio Tursi put the Stapes within three yards of another score. But two runs went nowhere, and another end-zone incompletion resulted in a touchback.

A short punt by the Stapes' Ray Smith, followed by a roughness penalty, gave the visitors an opening in the fourth quarter, and they took advantage of it. Nevers and Johnny Blood pounded the Staten Island line until Ernie went over from a yard out. His conversion attempt was wide by inches, and the Stapes were still ahead. But it wasn't over yet.

Blood stopped a Stapleton threat in the game's waning moments by picking off a pass on the Duluth 5-yard line. Three completions by Nevers moved them to the 47, but Newton intercepted the next one to clinch the victory.

There was no play-by-play for this game, but Newton must have topped 100 yards rushing, with the two long gains to build on. Add to that his two interceptions and you have yet another starring performance for the man the Advance liked to call "the Galloping Ghost." But he wasn't the only standout this time - at least on pass defense. Tursi went him one better, picking off three Duluth passes.

The news at the turnstiles wasn't as encouraging. Rainy weather "held the crowd down to a very small number," and afterward the Advance reported that "Blaine is rather skeptical about arranging (another) game."

Two days later, though, Blaine and Daley announced that the Orange would return for the season's finale on the first Sunday in December. But 48 hours later the game was off, former Stapes Ken Hauser and Al Greene reportedly having persuaded manager Simandl to demand that the Stapes play in Orange this time. Blaine, who had promised 13 home games in his pitch for season tickets but had staged only 10, had little choice but to refuse.

After trying to book the Bayonne Vikings, another strong independent team in the metropolitan area, he finally settled on a team of college all-stars from Pennsylvania. But sleet covered the field on Sunday and forced the game's cancellation. The Stapes' season was officially over.

With a 6-2-2 record against the toughest schedule a Staten Island team had ever taken on, it had certainly been a success. For Ark Newton, who rushed for 12 touchdowns and more than 500 yards (maybe a lot more), it had been - in the parlance of the '90s - a career year.

But the best was yet to come.

1928: One Step Closer

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Determined to improve on his 1927 club, Dan Blaine went to work in the offseason. His biggest coup came when Doug Wycoff agreed to leave the Giants and return to Staten Island, this time as star player and coach, replacing the departed Harold Hansen.

Another development, though it received less fanfare, may have been even more important. Moving away from their tradition of hiring stars from southern schools, the Stapes signed five players from New York University, all of whom became starters under Wycoff: linemen Johnny Bunyan, Bob (Baron) Dunn, Bing Miller and Dave Skudin, plus back Frank (Bullet) Briante, who had received some All-America mention in 1927. Moreover, the NYU connection thus established may have paid dividends a year later by helping Blaine to sign the school's greatest player, Ken Strong.

The newcomers from NYU strengthened the Staten Island line, and things looked even better in the backfield, where Ark Newton, last year's MVP, was joined by Wycoff and Briante. Quarterback Paul Kuczo of Villanova, another new recruit, completed the backfield quartet. The Stapes' backs were so strong, in fact, that Rusty Waite, the second-leading ground gainer of 1927, found himself the odd man out and was shifted to end.

Blaine and booking manager Dan Daley arranged a more demanding schedule, with five games against NFL teams, including two with the Giants. Blaine repeated his season ticket offer of a year earlier, this time asking \$18 for twelve games. He hoped to find 1,800 subscribers, but ten days before the season started, the Advance reported that "the demand is still far from expectations." It may be that Staten Island fans were waiting to see whether Blaine's team could live up to its expectations.

Eschewing any warmup games with no-name opponents, the Stapes opened the season Sept. 30 against the Dayton Triangles of the NFL. Though the Triangles had won only two league games since 1924, they still wore the major league label, and 5,000 fans turned out to see how the locals could do against them.

After a scoreless first half, Dayton put the pressure on in the third quarter, Ebby DeWeese picked off one of Wycoff's passes and made a long return to the Stapes' 15-yard line. Wycoff returned the favor three plays later, intercepting a pass by Jack Keefer to stop that threat. But after an exchange of punts, Dayton's Earl Britton completed a pass to Keefer for 27 yards to the Stapes' 20. Three running plays went nowhere, and on fourth down Fay Abbott booted a 25-yard field goal to give the Triangles a 3-0 lead.

Early in the fourth quarter Newton fumbled a punt on his own 5-yard line, and the invaders were threatening again. Keefer circled his end and found some daylight, but he was hit at the goal line and fumbled. The ball rolled through the end zone, giving the Stapes possession on their own 20.

Heartened by this stroke of good fortune, the Stapes began to click on offense. With Wycoff and Newton carrying the ball, and two Wycoff-to-Newton passes mixed in, they drove 80 yards in 12 plays for the game-winning score, Newton doing the honors.

As expected, Newton and Wycoff were the statistical stars of the game. The coach picked up 54 yards on 18 carries, outgaining his backfield mate by a single yard. Newton also caught four passes for 50 yards, all of them thrown by Wycoff. The visitors didn't muster much offense outside that Britton-to-Keefer pass - their only completion of the game. The Triangles' best "offensive" weapon was probably Britton, who averaged 47.5 yards on four punts. The mystery is why he didn't do all the kicking: Keefer punted five times but averaged only 30 yards.

Britton, incidentally, had been the focus of most pregame articles in the Advance, mainly because he had played in the same backfield with Red Grange at Illinois. Such was the fame of the real "Galloping Ghost."

With one win under their belts, the Stapes prepared for another visit from the Millville club, pride of the Pine Barrens. Les Asplundh was gone, but this year's Millville backfield included ex-Frankford Yellowjacket Tex Hamer, ex-Canton Bulldog Doc Elliott, and ex-Philadelphia Quaker Adrian Ford. The team was coached by one of the best of the era's forgotten stars, Swede Youngstrom, who also served as a reserve lineman.

Youngstrom's club gave the Stapes all they could handle during a scoreless first half, but early in the third quarter the home team finally got rolling. Starting from their own 35, the Stapes drove to the Millville 5-

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yard line in eleven plays, all on the ground. But there Briante botched a pitch to Newton, Millville recovered, and Hamer punted out of danger.

Thus ended the only serious threat in what turned out to be a scoreless tie, and a moral victory for Millville.

The visitors' three backfield stars all contributed to their team's strong showing. Elliott gained 27 yards in nine carries; Ford ran five times for 19 more, and also intercepted a pass. Hamer did little in the way of ground-gaining but caught three passes, intercepted one, and punted nine times for a 38.9-yard average.

For the Stapes, Wycoff and Newton combined for 71 yards on 17 carries, but the top ground-gainer was Briante, who had shown little in the first game. The NYU star picked up 47 yards on 15 tries and caught a pass from Wycoff for 29 more when the Stapes launched a desperate air attack in the game's final minutes.

Next to visit Thompson's Stadium was the Orange A.C., another New Jersey team with a star-studded backfield. AU Americans Eddie Tryon and Frank Kirkleski joined holdovers George Pease and player-coach Heinie Benkert to form a quartet that promised trouble for Blaine's warriors. They took advantage of a break to take a quick lead before the crowd of 6,500 had settled into their seats. Newton fumbled on his own 18-yard line, and two plays later Kirkleski passed to Pease for a 6-0 lead.

After that, though, the Staten Island line began to assert its superiority. Newton's 52-yard run launched an 88-yard drive that tied the game in the second quarter, Wycoff going over from eight yards out. In the third quarter Johnny Murray recovered a fumble by former Stape Ken Hauser on the Orange 22, and in two plays Wycoff scored again for a 12-6 lead that held up until the final gun.

All told, the Stapes piled up 212 yards on 44 carries, their starting backs - Wycoff, Newton, Briante and Kuczo - accounting for the entire total. They dominated the line of scrimmage so completely that Wycoff tried only three passes, completing one for a mere five yards.

Orange did little damage on the ground, Tryon leading them with nine carries for 14 yards, but they did move the ball through the air. Pease and Kirkleski combined to complete eight of 23 passes for 149 yards without any interceptions - a rare accomplishment in 1928. End Paul Longua also did a good job of punting, averaging 42.6 yards on five kicks to give him an edge on Wycoff, who averaged just under 40 yards on his five punts.

A week later the Stapes faced a real test: a game against the Frankford Yellowjackets. The 1926 NFL champs had bounced back from an off year in 1927 and were on their way to a second-place finish, but the crowd of 8,000 saw Wycoff & Co. battle them on even terms in one of the best games ever played on the island.

Shortly after the opening kickoff Newton reeled off a 32-yard run to the Frankford 35. A Wycoff-to-Newton pass made it first and goal on the 10-yard line, but on fourth down Newton was stopped inches short of the end zone, and a 69-yard punt by Ken Mercer got the 'Jackets out of trouble. Before the quarter was over the visitors drove 80 yards in 17 plays, a fourth-down pass from Mercer to Joey Maxwell covering the final 13 yards. Mercer's conversion made it 7-0.

Wycoff was injured shortly before the touchdown, but even without their coach and star player, the Stapes owned the second quarter. A 40-yard pass play from Kuczo to Waite put them on the scoreboard, but Jack Lord missed the extra point. A short time later Kuczo returned a punt to the Frankford 40. With him and Newton leading the way, the Stapes drove down to the 10. But they turned the ball over when a fourth-down pass failed, and the half ended with Frankford leading 7-6.

Briante took the second-half kickoff back 50 yards, and the Stapes were on their way again. Briante's 23-yard run put them in the shadow of the Frankford goal posts, and he capped the drive by going over from three yards out. Newton converted.

It was still 13-7 in the fourth quarter when the Yellowjackets took over on their own 27. In 14 plays, mixing runs and passes, they drove to the Stapes' 5-yard line, where another fourth-down pass, this one from Wally Diehl to Mercer, clicked for a game-tying touchdown. A successful conversion by coach Ed Weir gave Frankford a 14-13 lead, and that's how it stood when the game ended a few minutes later.

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With Wycoff on the sidelines for most of the afternoon, Newton, Briante and Kuczo picked up the slack, and the Stapes outgained the Yellowjackets on the ground, 142 yards to 125. Blaine's outfit also did well through the air, completing six of 12 passes for 117 yards. But the 'Jackets outdid them, clicking on 13 of 24 for 136 yards - including, of course, both of their touchdowns. Mercer was Frankford's chief tosser, connecting on nine of 17 for 94 yards.

Newton stood out as a pass receiver, with four catches for 65 yards. Frankford wingback Arnie Oehlrich caught one more pass, but fell short of Newton with 59 yards.

Next on the schedule was the annual visit of the Atlantic City Blue Tornadoes, New Jersey's No. 3 team. Coach Wycoff was still ailing and spent the game on the sidelines, but Kuczo and a new back, Hersh Martin, led the Stapes to a 20-0 win. (Incidentally, the Advance called Martin "Jack" until mid November.) There was no play-by-play account of this game, but Martin broke away for a 35-yard touchdown run in the first quarter, and Kuczo completed at least eight passes, including two scoring tosses to Ike Williams.

The Times said 6,000 fans were in attendance, but Hal Squier of the Advance said the crowd was about half the size of the one that saw the Frankford game, which would mean around 4,000 showed up. Squier wasn't happy with the turnout, either. As he had a year earlier, he blasted Staten Island fans for staying away unless the Stapes were playing the Orange A.C. or an NFL club. The headline of his Tuesday column told the story: "Where Was the Crowd?"

The Stapes had a Nov. 4 game scheduled with the New Britain Nutmegs, who had appeared in 1927 as the All-New Britain team. But the Connecticut contingent arrived under a cloud - a rain cloud, in fact. A driving rain forced the game's cancellation, just as it had on their first visit a year before.

Two days later the Orange A.C. returned for another Election Day appearance in Thompson's Stadium. This time it wasn't close, as the Stapes cruised to a 19-0 victory. Martin starred again, rushing for 55 yards and the game's first touchdown. Wycoff, though still slowed by his injury, plunged for another score. The final tally, in the fourth quarter, came about when Orange's Kirkleski got off a high punt from his own end zone that carried only to the 25-yard line. The ball took a high bounce, and while everyone stood around and watched, Kuczo plucked it out of the air and sprinted to pay dirt.

Kuczo had a tough day passing, though, a big contrast to his fine effort against Atlantic City. He completed only one of ten passes for 19 yards, and two were picked off.

Orange hardly moved the ball, gaining only 14 yards rushing and completing four passes for 74 yards. The Stapes' secondary negated those completions by intercepting six passes; Wycoff had three of them himself.

The New Britain Nutmegs returned the following Sunday, and this time the weather cooperated. After a solemn pregame Armistice Day ceremony, the Stapes struggled through a scoreless first half as the visitors turned out to be tough Nutmegs to crack. But in the second half the superiority of Wycoff's men began to tell. After a fumble recovery at midfield, Newton and Martin required only five plays to reach the end zone, Newton doing the honors. Later, a long pass from Kuczo to Sammy Stein put the Stapes on the New Britain 6 yard line, and Briante went over a couple of plays later for a final score of 12-0.

Once again, though, the lack of a "name" opponent had cost the Stapes at the gate. "The smallest crowd of the season turned out for the game," the Advance reported. (The Times, on the other hand, said 5,000 fans showed up.)

There was no such problem with the Stapes' next scheduled opponents, the Chicago Cardinals, who had booked an unusual Saturday game in Staten Island for Nov. 17. But two days before the game a different and more serious problem popped up: NFL president Joe Carr forced the Cardinals to cancel the game.

The Advance reported that Carr acted after protests from the Frankford Yellowjackets and the New York Yankees, who were scheduled to host the Cardinals on the following weekend, Nov. 24 and 25. It's not clear exactly what grounds they had for wanting the game called off, but the paper offered this explanation: "At least once every football season the National Football League attempts to wreck the schedule of the independent professional teams who are stronger than most of the National League clubs, and this week Dan Blaine's Stapes are the victims."

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And who knows? That may have been the answer. Certainly the Stapes would have been favored against the Cards, who went 1-5 in NFL games in 1928 and were outscored 107-7.

Unwilling to spend the weekend idle, Dan Daley hurriedly arranged a Sunday game with a motley crew dubbed the Newark Professionals, who may have been assembled just for the occasion. The predictable result was a 51-0 Stapleton win in which Martin (now being called "Hersh" in the local paper) led the way with three touchdowns.

By this time, every football fan on the island was looking ahead to a Thanksgiving Day game with the New York Giants, but first the Stapes had to prepare for a visit by the Canton Bulldogs. Though they had the same name as the team the Stapes had fought to a scoreless tie a year earlier, and a few of the same players, this was actually a different Canton team. At home they were known as the Rogers Jewelers, in honor of their sponsor; but on the road they took the name of their more distinguished predecessors.

Apparently unaware of this change in the team, the Advance reporter covering the game remarked: "The Canton boys believe in the power of advertising. Rogers Jewelers was prominently written across their backs."

The Stapes had little trouble with these "Bulldogs," rolling to a 27-6 win. Wycoff was the star, plunging for three touchdowns. Canton scored in the fourth quarter after Newton lost a fumble on his own 5-yard line. But Ark made amends a few minutes later, tallying on a short run that concluded the day's scoring.

Other than Wycoff's performance, probably the best news for the Stapes was the play of Tom Leary, an end from Fordham who had been signed during the week. Leary had impressed the locals in 1927 when he played with the All-New Britain team, and he turned in a fine performance in his debut with the Stapes. With Stein continuing his solid play, for the first time all year Wycoff had two ends he could count on.

And just in time, too, because four days later his team had to face the Giants.

This time, though, the invaders were ripe for the picking. In the midst of a five-game losing streak, the defending champs were on their way to a sixth-place finish. For the first time since the Giants had appeared on the New York scene, the Stapes probably had a better team than the big leaguers. And a crowd of 8,000 came out to see if they could prove it.

They did.

A 63-yard punt by Wycoff in the first quarter set the Giants back to their 5-yard line, and play remained in the New York half of the field until Johnny Bunyan gave the Stapes their first scoring opportunity, intercepting a pass and returning it the Giants' 6. Wycoff blasted into the end zone in three plays, and Ike Williams added the conversion.

After the kickoff Jack McBride broke away for a 32-yard run to the Staten Island 30, but three plays went nowhere and Bruce Caldwell's 37-yard dropkick went wide of the uprights. It was the best scoring chance the Giants had.

The Stapes threatened again in the third quarter. Kuczo, who had been married the day before but postponed his honeymoon so he could finish the season, returned the opening kickoff to the Staten Island 47-yard line, then got the attack rolling with a 14-yard run. He and Wycoff took turns carrying the ball until the Stapes faced fourth-and-one on the Giants' 2-yard line. But Wycoff ran into a stone wall. The Giants took over, and Mule Wilson punted them out of danger.

The rest of the game was played between the 20-yard lines, and when it was over the Stapes had finally achieved their impossible dream: a victory over the Giants.

Wycoff had played the biggest role in defeating his former team. Carrying 26 times, the Stapes' coach amassed 127 yards, the season's best total. (As a team, the Stapes ran 54 times for 207 yards.) Wycoff's nine punts averaged an ordinary 36.3 yards, but his long one in the first quarter had helped to set up the game's only score - which he took care of personally. It may have been the most satisfying day of his 11-year professional career.

Another key to the win was the Stapes' ability to stifle the passing of McBride, which had been decisive in the Giants' two wins a year earlier. The New York ace completed just three of 16 for a paltry 22 yards,

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with two intercepted, including Bunyan's game-breaker. But McBride did do a good job on the ground, rushing for 66 yards on only seven carries while the rest of his team managed only eight yards in 20 tries. Wilson turned in the only other creditable performance in the New York backfield, punting 11 times for a 35.6-yard average.

The Stapes had only two days to celebrate their biggest win, because on Sunday they hosted another NFL team, the Pottsville Maroons (who the Advance insisted on calling the Miners). The visitors drew first blood, blocking a kick by Newton and recovering on the Staten Island 2-yard line. It took four plays, but Johnny Blood finally plunged into the end zone.

The Stapes came back in the second quarter, downing Blood in the end zone for a safety after he covered a bad snap from center. The play of the game occurred on the free kick that followed: Hersh Martin took it on his own 20 and returned it 80 yards for a touchdown, shaking off the last Pottsville tackler on the 10-yard line. The Advance called it "the most spectacular (run) seen at Thompson's Stadium this season."

The Maroons put together a good drive to open the second half, reaching the Stapes' 20 before Ike Williams' interception ended the threat. Shortly thereafter the Stapes launched an attack of their own, going 58 yards in seven plays, the last of them a six-yard touchdown pass from Kuczo to Martin. Briante's 28-yard scamper was the longest play of the drive.

There was no play-by-play for this game, but Martin was clearly the star of the day. Coach Wycoff kept himself on the bench most of the afternoon, following his yeoman effort against the Giants.

While the Stapes were trouncing Pottsville, the Giants and Yankees were squaring off in their second meeting of the season. The Stapes expected to conclude their season against the winners, and thought everyone involved had agreed to that arrangement. But after the game, a 19-13 victory for the Yankees, Giants owner Tim Mara insisted that his team had already contracted for a Dec. 9 rematch with Blaine's team. Yankees owner C.C. Pyle, worried that his charges would have no one to play that weekend, promptly lined up a home game against Benny Friedman and the Detroit Wolverines.

That left the way clear for the Giants to play the Stapes again in the season's climactic game; but a heavy snowstorm on Sunday nixed that plan too.

The team could have called it quits at that point, but Blaine wasn't anxious to close the books on the most successful season in Staten Island grid history. He quickly arranged one more game against the Orange A.C. - this one to be a road game, the Stapes' first of the year. A fleet of eight buses was enlisted to carry an estimated 1,000 local fans to Orange for the season's finale.

The game itself was something of an anticlimax, with neither team generating much offense. The only score came in the third quarter when Briante picked off a pass by Orange's Frank Kirkleski and ran 45 yards for a touchdown behind some excellent blocking. Final score: Stapes 6, Orange 0.

1928 Staten Island Stapletons

Sept. 30	H	Dayton Triangles	7- 3	5,000
Oct. 7	H	Milleville	0- 0	4,000
Oct. 14	H	Orange A.C.	12- 6	6,500
Oct. 21	H	Frankford Yellowjackets	13-14	8,000
Oct. 28	H	Atl.City Blue Tornadoes	20- 0	4,000
Nov. 6	H	Orange A.C.	19- 0	4,000
Nov. 11	H	New Britain Nutmegs	13- 0	5,000
Nov. 18	H	Newark Pros	51- 0	4,500
Nov. 25	H	Canton Bulldogs	27- 6	2,500
Nov. 29	H	New York Giants	7- 0	8,000
Dec. 2	H	Pottsville Maroons	15- 6	4,500
Dec. 16	A	Orange A.C.	6- 0	4,500

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<u>Name</u>	<u>G</u>	<u>Pos</u>	<u>Hgt</u>	<u>Wgt</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>College</u>
Black, Ed	7	E	5-10	175	23	Muhlenberg
Briante, Frank (Bullet)	10	HB	5-10	185	22	NYU
Bunyan, Johnny	10	G	5-10	215	22	NYU
Dunn, Bob (Baron)	8	C	6-1	200	23	NYU
Godwin, Walt	6	T-G	5-7	205	27	Georgia Tech
Kuczo, Paul	11	QB	5-9	165	24	Villanova
Leary, Tom	4	E	5-11	180	24	Fordham
Lord, Jack	10	T-G	6-0	195	24	Rutgers
Martin, Hersh (Buzz-Saw)	8	HB	5-11	180	22	Missouri
McCrary, Larry	2	E				Oklahoma
Meller, Bing	9	T	6-1	180	24	NYU
Murray, Johnny	6	C-E	6-0	180	23	Georgia Tech
Nevin, Jack	8	HB	6-4			VMI
Newton, Bob (Ark)	8	HB		185	28	Florida
Skudin, Dave	8	G	5-11	195	23	NYU
Smith, Gene	4	G				none
Stein, Sammy	11	E	6-0	190	24	Pennsylvania
Waite, Carl (Rusty)	5	E	5-9	205	26	Rutgers;Georgetown
Wilder, Neil	1	C				Georgia
Williams, Cy	10	T	6-0	200	27	Florida
Williams, Ike	9	QB	5-10	180	25	Georgia Tech
Wycoff, Doug	10	FB	6-0	200	24	Georgia Tech

The game's most notable play occurred in the fourth quarter when Ken Hauser of Orange, known for his pugilistic exploits, scored a one-punch knockout of Sammy Stein. Hauser was ejected, but before he could leave he was surrounded by hundreds of angry fans from Staten Island, and he needed a protective escort to get him off the field.

Thus ended the Stapes' last season as an independent team. Considering the club's obvious strength, plus the reluctance of Staten Island fans to turn out for games against teams like New Britain and Atlantic City, it didn't take a genius to figure out that the NFL might offer Dan Blaine a better chance for financial success. In the offseason he applied for membership in the league and was accepted.

But that's another story.