

# DOC YOUNG AND THE HAMMOND PROS

By Bob Carroll

When the National Football League lists its founders -- those hardy entrepreneurs who got things started in the early 1920s -- it points with pride to the success stories: Joe Carr who became league president, George Halas of the Bears, Tim Mara who brought big league football to New York, and Curly Lambeau who started and then saved the Green Bay Packers. Less honored and less well known are the men who risked their modest fortunes on a pro football dream -- and failed.

They were not rich. They dared (and, for the most part, lost) a few thousand dollars rather than the millions we speak of so easily with today's game. But those were real dollars in those days, and a few thousand of them meant more back then to a cigar store owner (like Akron's Frank Nied) or the proprietor of a Hupmobile dealership (like Canton's Ralph Hay) than a check with six zeroes will mean to Jerry Jones today. It took courage, enthusiasm, and maybe a little blind optimism to back a pro football team in the rag days.

Dr. Alva Andrew Young was one of the founders of the National Football League right up there with Halas -- unless one includes victories or box office success in the mix. Doc's team, the Hammond Pros, never had a winning year in the league and probably never finished a football season with a black entry in the ledger book. Nevertheless, Doc Young helped get the league started, helped for a while to keep it going, and deserves some measure of honor for fighting the good fight.

Young was a respected medical doctor, but he was also ever ready to treat his dearly-loved horses. In the summer of 1942, he developed pneumonia from working late attending a sick horse. On August 9, he died of a cardiac ailment. His obituary cited his "acts of generosity" and described his "varied career" in medicine, athletics, and politics. "Many of those indebted to the kindly doctor did not attend his funeral ... [but] we know, however, they were sorrowed by the passing of their friend."

Doc Young was friend to a lot of people during his lifetime.

A descendant of Brigham Young's brother, Alvah Andrew Young was born December 18, 1881, in Hamilton County, IN. He received his medical degree from Central College of Physicians and Surgeons in Indianapolis in 1905 and married Lillian Fallowes Young, an English girl, the next year. He established a general practice in Hammond. Among the police of Calumet County, he was considered the leading authority on gunshot wounds, particularly those to the chest and abdomen. In 1915, he temporarily left Hammond for New York City to take post graduate work at N.Y.U. Another interruption of his practice came in 1917-18, when he served with the U.S. Army Medical Corps at Camp Travis in San Antonio, TX.

An athlete, he played semi-pro baseball and was a lightweight wrestler in his youth. In the years before and after World War I, he promoted amateur and semi-pro boxing matches in Hammond. His son, Harry N. Young, remembered, "He always tried to get me to go to Macy Roberts' gym which was primarily a fighters' gym. Macy played football for Dad and had his gym in Hammond. Dad attended the Dempsey-Tunney fight in Chicago.

"Dad was also an excellent chess player and I never once beat him at checkers. He loved to play cards too. Any time my mother needed him for a call, she could usually find him at the Elks Club playing bridge."

Doc's greatest love was horse racing; he owned a stable of horses and spent several happy years making the circuit of the leading race tracks. He founded a company called A.A. Young Laboratories that developed a vitamin-calcium supplement for thoroughbreds called Min-O-Lac (Minerals of Milk). Hard-headed horse trainers of the day didn't see any need for such aids. In horse care as well as pro football, Young was thirty years ahead of his time.

He was a supporter of professional football when the game was getting its first foothold in Indiana. He served as team doctor and trainer for the Hammond Clabby A.A. during the 1915-17 period. In 1919, promoter Paul Parduhn established a strong Hammond team to compete for the mythical U.S. pro football

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championship. The team played its home games in Cub Park (now Wrigley Field) in Chicago, and one of its stars was end George Halas. It is likely that Dr. Young was a part owner.

By the next year, things had changed. The 1919 Hammond Pros with their high-priced stars were gone. Many of their players appeared for the Chicago Tigers who played at Cub Park that year, indicating a possible connection. Meanwhile, Dr. Young formed a team with fewer stars in Hammond.

On September 17, 1920, Dr. Young represented Hammond at a meeting of the nation's leading pro football team managers held in Canton, OH, for the purpose of creating a pro league. The American Professional Football Association formed at the meeting became the National Football League in 1922. Dr. Young's Hammond Pros were members of the organization from 1920-26 and are considered one of the charter members of the NFL. They played three league opponents in that first season and lost all three games by big scores.

The Pros had some fair players. Former All-America Hank Gillo played fullback and was nominally the coach. There wasn't a whole lot he could do. Most of his players held regular jobs through the week and only assembled for games. That worked all right against most of the semi-pro squads Doc Young scheduled, but when he matched his boys against a well-drilled team like Halas' Decatur Staleys, they were in for a long afternoon.

According to one story, Dr. Young promised each member of his 1921 squad five percent of the game profits. Supposedly after the team's opening game at Buffalo each player received \$67; a few weeks later at Evansville, each player earned 65 cents. Ironically, Evansville was the only league opponent Hammond defeated that year.

Although seldom successful on the scoreboard, Hammond always made a fine pre-game appearance splendidly outfitted in purple and gold. Reportedly Dr. Young's favorite advice to his team was, "Go out there looking nice, boys, even if you can not play so good. People like to see a team look nice at the kick-off."

He was well known around Hammond for more than his sports activities. In many ways he was the old-fashioned, "neighborhood" doctor oldtimers remember fondly. No one was ever turned away from his office for lack of insurance. "Young extended his services to all who called upon him without regard to their ability, or even their willingness, to pay the modest fees he charged," according to none account. "If he kept books there was little evidence of it for few, if any, of his patients were ever pressed for payment and after a time, the obligations were for gotten."

He thought son Harry might follow in his footsteps and take up medicine. "He tried to push me hard as a child, taking me to post mortems, operations, or making his hospital rounds with him trying to interest me in medicine. All it did was scare the hell out of me."

"He always tried to be a buddy to me and took me on football trips, which I loved. I remember leading a parade around the field at Canton, Ohio," Harry Young recalled. I must have been about six so that was probably 1920-21. Pathe News filmed the parade and I wore number seven which was Ink Williams, my buddy and hero. We tied the Bulldogs 7-7, but Dad thought the greatest player we ever faced was [Canton tackle] Wilbur 'Fats' Henry."

Dr. Young had one thing in common with the famous Henry -- a big appetite. "He was a heavy eater and loved pork chops and apple pie for breakfast. He ate all the things a modern doctor forbids. He wasn't a drinking man. We rarely had any liquor in the house."

Young was also active in politics, considering himself a "Jeffersonian-Democrat." Harry turned out to be a Republican.

In addition to games, Doc took Harry to at least two league meetings. In Green Bay, Dr. Young got into an argument with Curly Lambeau over the kind of football the league would use. The Spalding J-5 was watermelon-like and perfect for drop kicks. Lambeau wanted to use a thinner ball better-suited for passing. Young figured Curly was trying to put something over on the others. He was. Curly was one of the best passers of the era. At the same meeting, young Harry met Dr. Harry March, the author of the first pro football history, who talked to him about the honor code at West Point. Eventually Harry followed a military career.

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Dr. Young served on several league committees that helped shape the future of pro football, but his team continued to lose on the field. Over seven seasons, the Pros compiled a league record of 5-26-4. Their "big" year was 1924 when they went 2-2-1 in five league games.

Because there was no adequate ballpark available in Hammond, the team played nearly all of its games on the road, settling for the visitor's guarantee and severely limiting its ability to pay top salaries. In part, because they were usually "away," the Pros had little following in Hammond. Far more popular were the semi-pro Scatenas or "Scats," made up mostly of locals who, ironically, were hoping to graduate to the higher salaries paid by the Pros.

Perhaps the Hammond Pros' most important contribution to the early NFL was that Dr. Young, unlike some of his contemporaries, was willing to employ black players, particularly notable in that Indiana was a bastion of the Ku Klux Klan at the time. Such outstanding black stars as Fred "Fritz" Pollard, Jay "Inky" Williams, John Shelbourne, and Sol Butler appeared with the team during its years in the league.

"Dad was not a civil rights activist as we know them today," Harry Young says. "He was simply color blind.

"I never knew Fritz Pollard very well. I think he left to join other teams rather early. Dad thought he was very talented; I have a feeling he was slightly controversial.

"Dad was very proud to have Paul Robeson on the team. Later, every time Paul was in a movie as a singer, Dad would mention that Paul had played for him.

"Sol Butler was a large, powerful back -- a very good player and a friend. He became editor of a black newspaper in Chicago. Dad and I visited him before the war.

"I never knew [Dick] Hudson's first name. He was called 'Super-Six' after the automobile. He was a fine player. When I was in high school, Jesse Owens addressed our school at an assembly. He mentioned that his manager, Hudson, had played football for Dad.

"My favorite, the fellow who really took care of me, and who I worshipped was Mayo 'Ink' Williams, number seven from Brown University. I believe he got the name 'Ink' because of the way he smeared the opposing teams. He made great shoestring tackles. Ink rarely wore a helmet, and when he did, you knew he was not feeling well. Later, Ink ran a black recording and booking company in Chicago. I'd see Ink at the paddock sometimes when we had a horse running. Ink stayed at our home many times and he visited as a friend after he was done playing football. Dad would shake his head sometimes and say to mother, "Lill, do you know that Ink spent \$25,000 on cars last year?"

"The black players had a rough time in Indiana. The Christian Church next to my grammar school had a fiery cross burning from its steeple. Many times I would see a KKK Funeral after school with the white robes and masks. I remember we once played a game in Kokomo and the restaurants had signs that 'This is a 100 percent American establishment -- no Koons, Kikes, or Catholics.' They refused to feed our black players. I don't know what Dad did, but I know he cussed all the Apple Knockers. Ink Williams kept his helmet on the whole game."

After the NFL had triumphed over Red Grange's American Football League, it became a leaner-meaner league by pushing out most of its small town and traveling teams. It was the end for teams in Akron, Canton, and Hammond. With the passing of the Pros, Indiana would not have another NFL team until the trucks arrived from Baltimore in 1984. By then there were few around the state who remembered Doc Young's Hammond team.

Doc apparently took the end of his NFL days in stride. He still had his practice, his politics, his horses, and his many, many friends. "Above all," was the comment at his death, "he was a square-shooter, a good sport, a good loser and a booster. He was democratic in his daily life as well as in politics, and practiced a happy philosophy that endeared him to all who knew him."