

# MUNCIE FLYERS - 1920

By Roy Sye

Muncie Indiana is an All-American city located about 85 miles south of Fort Wayne and about 65 miles northeast of Indianapolis, located in the Gas Belt region of east-central Indiana. Muncie, like many other cities in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, grew by annexing neighboring communities. Muncie was no different, annexing the communities of Congerville, Avondale and Heekin Park, to name a few. Not much is left of these communities other than an occasional reference to a bank, grocery store or a city park.

The Muncie Flyers (referred to as the Congerville Flyers) date back to 1905 when they first formed a team. Playing mostly neighboring towns, the Flyers did play against teams in larger cities such as Indianapolis, Fort Wayne and Wabash. In 1919, the Flyers upgraded their schedule and hosted the Cincinnati Celts and the Dayton Oakwoods. Finishing with a 4-1-1 record and winning the Muncie city championship by defeating the Avondale AA, the future for the Flyers looked bright.

On August 29th, 1920 upon hearing the news that a professional league was forming, manager Earl Ball started the process of gaining entry into the league. He quickly signed the following players to contract:

|                        |                            |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| QB - Cooney Checkeye   | of Muncie                  |
| FB - Kenneth Huffine   | Col: Purdue                |
| HB - Archie Erehart    | Col: Indiana               |
| HB - "Dutch" Sternaman | Col: Illinois              |
| E - Spencer Pope       | Col: Indiana               |
| E - Jess Reno          |                            |
| E - Pete Slane         | of Muncie                  |
| T - Russell Hathaway   | Col: Indiana               |
| T - Bobby Berns        | Col: Purdue                |
| G - John Redmond       | Col: Indiana               |
| G - Al Feeny           | Col: Notre Dame            |
| G - "Babe" Hole        | of Muncie                  |
| C - Owen Floyd         | Col: Rose Holman-Poly Tech |
| Sub - Mickey Hole      | of Muncie                  |
| Sub - Cliff Baldwin    | of Muncie                  |

(Note: All of the players listed above played in the 10/03 Rock Island game, with the exception of Dutch Sternaman, who played with the Decatur Staleys and continued as player/co-owner with the Chicago Bears and Al Feeny, who played two more years with the Canton Bulldogs.)

Although not having a finalized schedule, Ball speculated that the Flyers' first game would be played in Canton. Ball then attended the famous September 17 "Hupmobile Room" meeting in Canton. (You know the one about bottles of beer in buckets, sitting on the running boards, nobody having the \$100 to pay the league fees, electing Jim Thorpe president, etc.) In the days following the meeting, Ball continued to sign players, adding Francis Bacon (HB) of Wabash College and "Big Ed" Davis (T) of Indiana.

Ball came back from the meeting with confirmation that the first association game that the Flyers were scheduled to play was in

Rock Island against the Independents on October 10. Ball was looking to schedule a practice game on October 3 against the Fort Wayne Friars or the Decatur Staleys. The Flyers ended up playing a practice game against the local Muncie Tigers on September 26 and then playing in Rock Island on October 3.

Most of what has been written about the 1920 Muncie Flyers states that the Flyers opened the season in Rock Island and were demolished 45-0. Some reports continue that the Flyers had also scheduled a game the following week in Decatur against the Staleys. But when the Staleys heard about the Flyers poor showing in Rock Island, the Staleys cancelled the game. After that cancellation, all that is reported is that the Flyers folded for the season and then miraculously came back to life in 1921 for another attempt in the APFA and played two more APFA games in 1921 and then folded forever.

As Paul Harvey would say "Now for the rest of the story".

Yes, the Flyers went to Rock Island for one of the first games between two APFA opponents. Yes, the Flyers got crushed by a score of 45-0. Yes, the Flyers had a game scheduled in Decatur the following Sunday. Yes, the Staleys cancelled the game due to the Flyers poor performance against Rock Island.

No! the Flyers did not fold up their tents and disappear until next year.

The Flyers were unable to schedule a game for October 10 and went idle for that week. Some of the players signed on with other local teams. Mickey Hole and Cliff Baldwin went across town and played with the Muncie Tigers. On October 17, Mickey Hole and Cooney Checkeye played for the Wabash AA, losing a close game to the strong Gas City Tigers. After missing three games, the Flyers began getting back on track and scheduled two more games. The first was scheduled for October 31 in Cleveland against the Tigers and the second was November 7 in Dayton against the Triangles.

During the three idle weeks for the Flyers, two other Muncie teams were grabbing the headlines. The Muncie Tigers defeated the Wabash AA and the Indianapolis Independents, while the Muncie Offers More AC team defeated the Jonesboro AC and the Portland-Redkey Legion. Also strong in the area was the Gas City Tigers, winning their first five games by a combined score of 338-9!

The Flyers ended up not playing in Cleveland on the 31, as the Tigers hosted the Columbus Panhandles; the Flyers practiced instead. The October 28, 1920 edition of the Muncie *Evening Press* had this to say about the upcoming game against the Triangles:

"The Flyers club, with an all-star lineup, will play the Dayton Triangle team at Dayton, Ohio, Sunday, November 7. Both teams are members of the newly organized American Professional Football Conference".

Manager Ball signed a few new players to strengthen his team:

(G) Tibbs of the Wabash AA and (G) Bissmeyer of the Cincinnati Celts; (T) Bourbon "Bunny" Bondurant of DePauw; (E) George "Mac" McIndoe of the Fort Wayne Friars; (QB) Thomas of DePauw

## THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 24, No. 3 (2002)

The new players were welcome additions to the core team of Cooney Checkeye (QB), Mickey Hole (HB), Archie Erehart (HB), Kenneth Huffine (FB), Jess Reno (E), Chuck Helvie (E), "Big Ed" Davis (T), Russell Hathaway (T), Bobby Burns (T), "Babe" Hole (G) and Wilfred Smith (G). However, on game day heavy rains washed out the game against the Triangles. A total of 11 players who were scheduled to play in the Triangle game, also played in the October 3 Rock Island game. This is good evidence that the Flyer team of November 7 was the same team as the Flyer team of October 3.

Again unable to schedule a game for the next two Sundays, several players signed on with other teams. Cooney Checkeye, Mickey Hole, "Babe" Hole, Cliff Baldwin, Pete Slane, Kenneth Huffine and Gus Redmond signed to play for the Muncie Tigers on November 21. On November 18, the Flyers accepted a challenge made by the Gas City Tigers for a big game to be played in Gas City on Thanksgiving. The Gas City Tigers had won their last 4 games by a combined score of 105-0, giving them a perfect 9-0-0 record and outscoring their opponents by an incredible margin of 443-9!

The Thanksgiving edition of the Gas City Journal had this to say about the upcoming Thanksgiving game:

"Congerville (Muncie) has been playing in the football association with Akron, Canton, Dayton, Chicago and other big teams, and have been successful.... Congerville (Muncie) will have a bunch of noted stars in their lineup, and hope to humble the unbeaten Tigers."

(I'm not sure what the definition of "successful" is, but if a sportswriter said it, it must have been true!)

The Flyers defeated the Gas City Tigers by a score of 19-7. Halfback Mickey Hole scored 3 minutes into the game on a 45-yard run. On the next possession Kenneth Huffine scored and Checkeye kicked the point after, making the score 13-0. Early in the second quarter Checkeye scored, but failed on the point after. The Tigers finally scored early in the third quarter, but could not cross the goal line again and the game ended with a long awaited victory for the Flyers. The Tigers and their fans were not satisfied with the defeat and challenged the Flyers for another game on December 5. Six players who played for the Flyers in the Rock Island game also played in this game, including three-fourths of the backfield. This is a good indication that the Flyers team on November 25 was a similar team as the one who played against Rock Island and was scheduled to play against Dayton.

Following the Flyers strong victory over the previously undefeated Gas City Tigers, the Muncie Offers More AC challenged the Flyers for a game the upcoming Sunday to decide the Muncie city championship. This game was billed as the Flyers "a team of college stars" vs. the Offers More AC "a team of highly skilled players". On a muddy field at Walnut Park, frequent fumbles by the lighter OMAC's proved to be their downfall as the Flyers quickly capitalized on the turnovers. Following a stern half-time lecture, the Flyers came out quickly in the third quarter and scored, increasing the score to 14-0. Tacking on 10 more points in the last quarter, the Flyers won the city championship, 24-0. With most other teams in the area being done for the season, both the Flyers and the OMAC's expanded their rosters and played as many as 20 different players during the game. The Flyers again kept the same backfield with Checkeye at quarterback, Mickey Hole and Cliff Baldwin at halfbacks and Huffine at fullback.

Soon after the Gas City Tigers loss to the Flyers, the Tigers started beating the bushes for men to "load up" for the rematch against the Flyers. The Tigers signed Wren, former Harvard star, and Kilrain from the famous Kirklain team to bolster their lineup. The Flyers came into the game with the same players that played against the OMAC's. The game was scoreless after the first quarter when the Flyers tried a drop-kick, which was blocked. After an exchange of punts, Weaver of Gas City took off on an 85-yard touchdown run. Following the point after, the Tigers lead 7-0. On the next drive, Woody of the Tigers dropped a pass in the endzone and the ball went over on downs to the Flyers. That would be the closest the Tigers came to scoring for the rest of the day. Early in the third quarter, the Tigers fumbled on a punt attempt and the Flyers recovered on the 5-yard line. Four plays later, Huffine went over for the score and the point after was kicked for a 7-7 score. In the fourth quarter, Cooney Checkeye took a punt

and raced 60 yards for a touchdown, but failed on the point after. The Tigers tried to rally, but fumbled on their last possession. Final score: Muncie Flyers 13 - Gas City Tigers 7. The Tigers ended up with a 9-2-0 record and the Flyers with a 3-1-0 record, but the Flyers claimed the fictitious Indiana State Championship based on their victories over the Gas City Tigers and the Muncie Offers More AC.

In summary, the Muncie Flyers should be credited with 3 more games played in 1920. Although they played non-APFA teams, the same team that started the season played in these games. Other APFA teams played a heavy non-APFA schedule; Rochester Jeffersons (10), Decatur Staleys (5), Buffalo All-Americans (5), Chicago Cardinals (5), Canton Bulldogs (5), Columbus Panhandles (5), Detroit Heralds (4) and Hammond Pros (4). Hopefully, this article provides sufficient evidence that the Flyers did indeed continue playing (however sporadically) after the Rock Island game.

### Game Results for 1920 Muncie Flyers

|           |   |                          |                     |   |
|-----------|---|--------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Sun 09/26 | H | Muncie Tigers            | practice game       |   |
| Sun 10/03 | A | Rock Island Independents | 0-45                | L |
| Sun 10/10 | A | Decatur Staleys          | cancelled           |   |
| Sun 10/17 |   |                          | no game             |   |
| Sun 10/24 |   |                          | no game             |   |
| Sun 10/31 | A | Cleveland Tigers         | scheduled/cancelled |   |
| Sun 11/07 | A | Dayton Triangles         | cancelled - rain    |   |
| Sun 11/14 |   |                          | no game             |   |
| Sun 11/21 |   |                          | no game             |   |
| Thu 11/25 | A | Gas City Tigers          | 19-7                | W |
| Sun 11/28 | A | Muncie Offers More AC    | 24-0                | W |
| Sun 12/05 | A | Gas City Tigers          | 13-7                | W |

**Final Record 3-1-0 Points Scored: 56**  
**Points Allowed: 59**

In the rag-tag days of the APFA, players hopped from team to team, depending on what team was paying the most and what the match-ups were. Below outlines all the players who played with the Flyers and how they hopped from team to team. This list is not complete, but gives a good indication as to how players moved around.

**Cliff Baldwin** started with the Flyers, then played with the Muncie Tigers, then finished off playing the last 3 games for the Flyers.

**Cooney Checkeye** played in all the Flyers games, and also for the Wabash AA on 10/17 and the Tigers on 11/21.

**Ed Davis** played for the Flyers in Rock Island then, played 8 games for the Dayton Triangles.

**Russ Hathaway** played for the Flyers in Rock Island, then played 2 games for the Dayton Triangles.

**Chuck Helvie** played for the Flyers in Rock Island, then played 5 games for the Dayton Triangles.

**Babe Hole** played in all the Flyers games, and also for the Wabash AA on 10/17 and the Tigers on 11/21.

**Mickey Hole** played in all the Flyers games, and also for the Tigers on 10/10, 10/24 and 11/21 and for Wabash AA on 10/17.

**Kenneth Huffine** played in all Flyers games, for the Fort Wayne Friars on 10/17 and 10/31, Kirklain on 11/14 and the Tigers on 11/21.