

The 1918 Buffalo Semi-Professional Football League

by Ken Crippen

The 1918 Buffalo Semi-Professional Football League was made up of four teams: the south-side Hydraulics, the war factory Pierce-Arrows, the Tommy Hughitt/Warren D. Patterson aggregation Niagaras, and the first time footballers Pittsburghs Colored Stars. On October 17th, League Secretary Balch announced the schedule, which would consist of eight games for each of the teams.

Before the league announced its schedule, the Hydraulics played their first game of the season against the South Park squad on October 6th. This game would be played to raise money for the *Buffalo Evening News* "smoke fund." The \$13.37 raised from the game was used to buy cigarettes for the soldiers fighting the war.

The League season would not get off to a very good start, as the first week's games were cancelled. The Public Health Department banned all out-of-town teams from playing in Buffalo, due to the Hun Flu epidemic. The city did not want to take responsibility for spreading the virus, or for bringing in infected people.

On October 27th, the first sets of games were played. The early game was a match between the Pierce-Arrow squad and the Pittsburgh Colored Stars. Russ Monkhouse set up the first score, after intercepting the ball and returning it 30 yards. On the next play, Cavello ran it in for the score. The second touchdown came when Lynch caught a pass from Gene Dooley. The scoring would not end there, as Dooley ran 30 yards for the third score of the first half. The Pierce-Arrows continued to score in the second half, when Bob Green returned a punt 65 yards for a touchdown. The Pittsburgh defense could not stop the Pierce-Arrows, as Dooley ran around left end for the final touchdown and a 31-0 victory for the light blue.

The second game of the day would pit two powerhouse teams of the previous years: the Niagaras and the Hydraulics. Weight became an issue, as the heavier Niagara team (average weight: 193 pounds) was able to wear down the Hydraulics. Cogswell received many long passes from Tommy Hughitt and Barney Lepper to help the Niagaras move down the field. Hughitt's kicking (as well as touchdowns by Cogswell and Amos) gave the Niagaras a 20-0 victory to start the season, and the Hydraulics first defeat in four years.

The following week, Pittsburgh scored their first points in the league when Hickman caught a pass from Poodry. Unfortunately for the Stars, the Hydraulics scored the next 48 points in an easy rout. In the second game of the day, Niagaras continued their winning streak with a victory over the Pierce-Arrow squad. The Niagaras spent most of their time near their opponent's goal line. The first score was set up when Hughitt passed to Harold McDermott, and McDermott ran to the Pierce-Arrow 5-yard line. Barney Lepper then ran through the center of the line for the score. The touchdowns continued in the fourth quarter, with Hughitt running the ball in for the first score, and Yeates catching a pass for the second.

Rain hampered the next week's contests, as the *Buffalo Courier* described the field for the Hydraulic vs. Pierce-Arrow game as a "sea of mud." Both teams were close to scoring three times, but came away empty-handed. At the end of the third quarter, the Hydraulics were able to work their way to the Pierce-Arrow two-yard line, but came away empty as the Pierce-Arrow defense held for the scoreless tie.

After losing each of their first two games (by a wide margin), coach Poodry bolstered his Pittsburgh lineup with W. Talchief and Kittle. This seemed to help through the first three periods, as the Colored Stars held the powerful Niagara team to just three points. The score came when Tommy Hughitt kicked the field goal from the 35-yard line in the second quarter. The Niagara team came close to scoring again in the second period, when Amos ran it in for the apparent score, but it was negated when the Niagaras were called for an offside penalty. Pittsburgh's defense started to revert to their old ways as the Niagaras scored 20 points in the final quarter. The first touchdown came when Hughitt caught a pass from Wesley Abbot, and

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002)

then passed it to Chet Amos who ran it in for the score. Timlin chalked up the next score, with Yeates catching a pass from Hughitt for the final tally.

Injuries plagued the Pierce-Arrow team the following week, as Cavello was out for the game, and Latona and Gray were hurt during the game. This, along with what the *Buffalo Courier* described as a "constant downpour" helped the Pittsburgh Colored Stars gain their first (and only) victory of the season. The lone touchdown drive started when Poodry tossed Williams a forward pass for 15 yards. Williams again got the ball, and ran 10 more yards before being tackled at the Pierce-Arrow 12-yard line. Pittsburgh drove to the one-yard line on runs by Pierce (two yards), Poodry (three yards), and Pierce again (six yards). After being pushed back a few yards by the Pierce-Arrow defense, A. Talchief caught a Pierce pass for the touchdown with a minute and a half to play in the game. The rain continued to pour throughout the game, and made the field too muddy for the Niagaras-Hydraulics contest. Officials postponed the game until the next week.

The first touchdown scored against the Niagaras this season came in the rescheduled game between the shoemakers and the Hydraulics. Bonnor was responsible for the feat, as he ran 20 yards for the score. The Niagaras came back with 18 points of their own, leaving no doubt as to who is the strongest team in the league.

The lone score of the Pittsburgh vs. Pierce-Arrow game came on a penalty, when a Pittsburgh defender interfered with a receiver, which gave the ball to the Pierce-Arrow offense at the Pittsburgh one-yard line. Dooley ran it in for the score, and a 6-0 victory.

The following week would prove to be the final week of the season, as the Niagara team once again showed why they are the champions. The Pierce-Arrow defense put up a fight-but to no avail-as the Niagaras won their fifth straight game, and the league championship. The Niagaras were held on the opponent's one-yard line for four straight downs, and, on another occasion, held for three straight downs on the Pierce-Arrow three-yard line. This defensive stand did not deter the Niagara offense, as it still ran up 20 points and the shutout victory. Final game was to be played between the Hydraulics and the Pittsburgh Colored Stars, but since there was really nothing to play for, the game was cancelled.

Tommy Hughitt and Warren D. Patterson would take their championship team into the 1919 season as the Buffalo Prospects, the only heavyweight semi-professional team of that year.

<u>Standings</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>PF</u>	<u>PA</u>
Niagaras	5	0	0	109-	7
Pierce-Arrows	2	3	1	37-	54
Hydraulics	1	2	1	55-	44
Pittsburgh Colored Stars	1	4	0	13-	109

Scores

October 6, 1918

Hydraulics 31 vs. South Parks (Cazenovia Park) *

October 20, 1918

Hydraulics vs. Niagaras (Dolls Park) Cancelled**

Pierce-Arrows vs. Pittsburgh C.S. (Liberty Park) Cancelled**

October 27, 1918

Pierce-Arrows 31 vs. Pittsburgh Colored Stars 0 (Liberty Park)

Niagaras 20 vs. Hydraulics 0 (Dolls Park)

November 3, 1918

Niagaras 27 vs. Pierce-Arrows 0 (Liberty Park)

Hydraulics 48 vs. Pittsburgh C.S. 6 (Dolls Park)

November 10, 1918

Pierce-Arrows 0 vs. Hydraulics 0 (Ryans Park)

Niagaras 24 vs. Pittsburgh C.S. 0 (Liberty Park)

November 17, 1918

Pittsburgh C.S. 7 vs. Pierce-Arrows 0 (Liberty Park)

Niagaras vs. Hydraulics (Liberty Park)Postponed***

November 24, 1918

Niagaras 18 vs. Hydraulics 7 (Liberty Park)

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 25, No. 1 (2002)

Pierce-Arrows 6 vs. Pittsburgh C.S. 0 (Liberty Park)

November 28, 1918

Niagaras 20 vs. Pierce-Arrows 0 (Liberty Park)

Pittsburgh C.S. vs. Hydraulics (Liberty Park) Cancelled

December 1, 1918

Hydraulics vs. Pittsburgh C.S. (Liberty Park) Cancelled

* Non-league game.

** Games cancelled due to the Hun Flu epidemic. The public health department banned all public gatherings.

*** Postponed due to heavy rain.

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