

Stars Over All-Stars

An All-Star Team: 1898

By PFRA Research

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If someone set out to design the perfect war, he wouldn't go far wrong by using the Spanish-American as a model -- at least the way America saw it at the time. First of all, we were justified -- those rotten Spaniards blew up the Maine, remember? Secondly, we were on the side of right -- we were going to take the Spanish yoke off the Cubans' necks. Third, it was short -- lasting only from April to August of 1898. And finally, casualties were relatively light -- only about 2,500 military deaths, not even a good crowd at a football game. If war is always hell, this one was only in an outer ring.

It fell to later generations to notice that more soldiers succumbed to bad beef and yellow fever than to bullets, that we were not altogether altruistic in picking up Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines as booty, and that the Maine probably blew up of its own volition and bad boilers. At any rate, the war WAS short.

In fact, it was so brief that one of its lesser effects was to change the structure of Pittsburgh pro football.

The Westmoreland County Pair

Although neither Greensburg nor Latrobe proved able to keep the independent championship of western Pennsylvania won by the Greenies in '97 out there in Westmoreland County, both fielded excellent teams during the 1898 season. In Greensburg annals, this year's edition of the Greenies ranked only behind the 1897 champions. Latrobe was even better -- up to a point.

John Brallier entered the U.S. Army on May 11, 1898, and although he was not mustered out until November, he was stationed in the area during football season. He signed a contract to play for Latrobe, if available, for \$150 and expenses for the season, but after three games he left in mid-October to join the Pittsburgh Athletic Club at an increase in salary. After the P.A.C.'s season was over, he rejoined Latrobe for a final game with Greensburg.

In Brallier's absence, the coach of the 1898 team, Al E. Bull, played quarterback. Bull, a former Penn All-American, had coached the University of Iowa team the year before. Another 1898 addition was the famous strong man, Charles Lloyd Barney of Des Moines, Iowa. Barney, who played at Ohio Wesleyan in '97, appeared at expositions lifting horses, breaking chains, and performing other feats of strength.

Latrobe rolled through its first four games. Jeannette was slaughtered 51-0, and McKees Rocks went down 18-0. After a visit to the Big City to down Pittsburgh College, 17-0, the team used a 50-0 trouncing of the Cottage Club to warm up for its first meeting with Greensburg.

Greensburg had also started fast under Coach Barclay. The opener, October 8, was the season's highest scoring tilt, a 49-0 win over neighboring Jeannette a week after Latrobe had opened by humiliating the same club. The Greenies' score might have been much higher had they not used the occasion to work on perfecting their plays and interference. That paid off in the second victory, October 15, in which excellent teamwork was the highlight of a 47-0 pounding of the New Castle Terrors.

New to the Greensburg lineup this year was Charles "Babe" Rinehart, one of the nation's top linemen during his days at Lafayette. With "Tiger" McFarland and "Bo" Thomas, he helped give the Greenies a powerful forward wall. Joining Barclay and Charley Atherton in the backfield was Walter Bird, a nifty New Jersey halfback who'd put in two years with the Orange A.C. and one with the Elizabeth A.C.

The first Latrobe-Greensburg game was played on a muddy field at Greensburg, and Latrobe came away with a tough 6-0 win. "Doggie" Trenchard scored the Latrobe touchdown despite "a slimy ball and a slippery field," which caused Greenie fullback Atherton to fumble. The game was delayed at one point as mud was removed from the eyes, nose, mouth, and ears of Latrobe's Ed Abbaticchio, who was nearly buried on one of his carries.

A familiar dispute beforehand marred the game. Latrobe manager Dave Berry's protest was upheld, and four Washington and Jefferson players signed by Greensburg were not allowed to play.

A lengthy poem written about the game was published in the Pittsburgh *Chronicle-Telegraph*, the last stanza of which read:

Gay Latrobe's bold pigskin chasers
Now are owners of the town,
And upon his head each hero
Wears the victor's laurel crown.
They have shown to all Westmoreland
That they're skilled in football tricks,
For the Greensburg's drew a cipher
While Latrobers tallied six.

A week later, the Greensburg eleven was back on the winning track with a 25-0 triumph over the Wheeling Tigers at the West Virginian's Island Field, a pair of touchdowns by "Tiger" McFarland setting the scoring pace. He actually crossed the line a third time but fumbled, and the Tigers recovered in the end zone.

The Professional Football Researchers Association

Pittsburgh College was an 11-0 victim November 2, as Coach Barclay played cautiously in anticipation of another Latrobe game just three days away. Bird's 37-yard run and Donohoe's goal after produced a first-half 6-0 lead, and McFarland added a second half touchdown.

Latrobe played no games between the two matches with Greensburg, possibly with a cancellation figured in somewhere. The time off left them hale, hearty, and raring to go.

The game was played in a driving rain at Latrobe. The Greenies scored first when Barclay scooped up a Latrobe fumble and "after a nice run of 35 yards planted the ball behind Latrobe's goal posts." However, the try for goal hit the crossbar and rebounded onto the field, holding the score to 5-0.

Later in the game, Greensburg moved to Latrobe's 15-yard line and the "play was fast and furious. The deep inhalations of the players could be heard all over the grounds. It was a death struggle for Latrobe. The ball went to Barclay and the crash came. After the swaying pile had toppled over, Lang (Latrobe) emerged with the ball from the tangled mass and sped away up the field making a 95-yard run for a touchdown." Greensburg protested that the play was over before Lang's run but to no avail. When Abbaticchio kicked the goal after, "the wild enthusiasm of the moment before paled into insignificance before the demonical demonstration, the wildest orgies of howling dervishes," according to the partisan Latrobe newspaper.

The victory brought Latrobe to a 6-0 record but was only modestly profitable. There were 2,200 paid admissions at the wet game. Greensburg got \$447 on a percentage guarantee that may not have covered the team's payroll for the game. Latrobe, the home team, pocketed over \$900.

A social note reported that E.J. Toole, a football enthusiast, and Manager Showalter invited the team to the opera house show. The stage was decorated in, and the ladies of the company wore, the then team colors of red and blue. The team got up and sang a college song during the evening.

Three days later, the Pittsburgh College team came to Latrobe and lost 22-6. Lang again stole the ball and ran for a touchdown. Undefeated after seven games, Berry's team faced only three more hurdles to a perfect season, but those were the two Pittsburgh athletic clubs and a third match with Greensburg.

Greensburg also had its trip to Pittsburgh. On November 12, the Saturday after the loss to Latrobe, over 150 Greensburgers traveled with the team to Exposition Park to play the favored Duquesne Country and Athletic Club. The result was a scoreless tie. The most spectacular play of the game was Bird's punt return for the Greenies, a 44-yard run during which he dodged nearly every D.C. & A.C. player to reach midfield.

A week later, the team was back in Pittsburgh for another scoreless tie, this one with the Pittsburgh A.C. The offense regained its punch on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, with a 35-0 victory over Grove City in a raw, cold wind and falling snow. Bird's one-yard plunge on Greensburg's first possession started the scoring. Barclay set up the third TD, scored by Bird from five yards out, with a 70-yard

sideline run. A second-half touchdown came when a Grove City punt receiver fumbled and Greensburg's Thomas caught the ball in midair coming downfield and continued across the goal line.

While Greensburg was on the rise, things hadn't been going well at all for Latrobe. On November 19, the team went to Exposition Park to take on the D.C. & A.C., Pittsburgh's leading team. A victory would have put Latrobe out in front as western Pennsylvania's top eleven. Such was not to be the case. Ten minutes into the fray, Duquesne's Williams executed a perfect quarterback kick to move the ball to the five. John Gammons, the Red and Black's ace halfback, raced around right end for a touchdown. Later, Gammons delighted the 4,000 fans in attendance with another TD.

The perils of the quarterback kick were demonstrated near the end of the game. With the ball at midfield, Latrobe tried the maneuver but lost ten yards and the football. The Duquesne's next took a shot at it, but a Latrobe man intercepted. However, he fumbled when tackled and, after a scramble, D.C. & A.C.'s Ed Young picked up the ball and raced for the final score in the 17-0 game.

With one loss on their record, Latrobe trekked back to Pittsburgh five days later for a Thanksgiving Day game with the P.A.C. Unfortunately, they left their offense out in Westmoreland County. The P.A.C. got a first half touchdown on a plunge by Dr. Ben Roller, the west coaster who'd been lured east this season. Latrobe couldn't get much of anything going all day. Their best drive of the game stalled at the 20 in the second half, and Jack Gass missed his try for goal. The 6-0 loss left Latrobe in a must-win situation for their wind-up game with Greensburg if they were to claim the Westmoreland County crown.

The contest was scheduled for two days later, but a heavy snow storm forced a postponement. They finally got together at Latrobe on Wednesday, November 30, under very poor field conditions. John Brallier was back in the Latrobe lineup, but even his talents could not revive the team's offense. When Bird of Greensburg plunged less than a yard for a touchdown and then added a goal after only eleven minutes of play, the scoring was over for the day.

The end of the game was marred by stoning and spitting on Greensburg players and fans, "boorish conduct by ruffians," according to the Greensburg *Daily Tribune*. Stones, sticks, and snowballs were thrown at Greensburg carriages, and one player was injured when he was hit in the head by a rock.

The Latrobe fans were frustrated. What had looked to be a super season had turned sour with three straight losses. But Greensburg, despite its excellent play at season's end, had its own share of problems. Gate receipts hadn't matched expenses and looked to get worse. Moreover, George Barclay, the coach and leading player, announced he would not return in 1899 as he planned to attend medical school.

He'd already done his bit for the health of football players. In some histories he's given credit for designing the first model of the future helmet, which he'd had made for him by a local harness maker as a protection for his ears.

The Toast of Pittsburgh

The Professional Football Researchers Association

After their poor showing in 1897, the Pittsburgh A.C. took steps to improve its team in '98. The roster was beefed up with a wholesale order of new and talented bodies. In addition to luring Brallier from Latrobe and Ben Roller from the west, the most significant new man was Sam Boyle, an outstanding end for the University of Pennsylvania's national champions of the year before. In addition to playing a bang-up game of football, Boyle coached the team and was given most of the credit for its success.

Boyle fashioned a tough defense that was responsible for the scoreless tie against Greensburg and the narrow win over Latrobe in late November. Unfortunately, Boyle's men could not come up with enough offense to rate with the two powers of the area -- Washington and Jefferson College and the Duquesne Country and Athletic Club.

W. & J., under Bill Inglis, still had "Teck" Matthews in the backfield and a flock of other fine players. They raced undefeated through eight straight games before being derailed by Penn State. The 11-6 loss took some of the bloom off the season's big game against the D.C. & A.C. on Thanksgiving Day.

According to legend, the Duquesnes set out to be a good team and ended up being a great one because of the Spanish-American War. Supposedly, the club signed a number of good players to contracts following the '97 season, only to see many of them go into the army in the spring of '98. Undaunted, the Red and Black, under chairman William C. Temple, went out and signed up replacements -- some superior to the original contracted stars. Then, when the war ended in August and men began returning home, the Duquesnes suddenly found themselves up to their moleskins in football stars. They had benchwarmers that would have starred for lesser teams.

They also had a payroll that was out of sight although it was literally what they had bargained for. To continue the legend, Mr. Temple eventually took over the payments to the athletes and thus became the first individual pro team owner. The D.C. & A.C. maintained the fiction that all its star players were coming from various parts of the country just to play for the athletic club as amateurs was held to publicly, even when newspapers spoke openly of players being under contract. As a result, it is not entirely clear when Temple became the first owner -- as early as 1898 or as late as 1901.

Whatever the year, there seems little doubt that Temple deserves the honor. Certainly, his altruism in bringing first rate sport to Pittsburgh was well known. When he took over as part owner of the baseball Pirates in 1893, they were embarrassingly bad, and though they never won a pennant, the Buccaneers became competitive under his ownership. He'd also donated the Temple Cup, an innovative if ultimately unsuccessful attempt to bring some drama to the end of the diamond season. In football, his years as manager of the D.C. & A.C. saw the team consistently the best in the city. Absorbing the club's monetary losses was entirely within keeping with the man's character.

In 1898, with their returning war veterans, the Duquesnes took a giant step up in class. They'd been the top regular athletic club football team in Pittsburgh since 1895, their first season. In 1898, they became World Class.

At one end they had the great Charley Gelbert, the ex-Penn Quaker sometimes referred to as a "miracle man." At the other terminal was the equally outstanding Walter Okeson, who'd been in charge at Latrobe in '97.

So many of the football players of the day had second careers in baseball that they cannot all be named here. However, Charlie Gelbert's second sport was gymnastics, which helps explain his often acrobatic play on defense against much larger men. He was picked on several "all-time" teams during the early part of this century, and was named to the collegiate Football Hall of Fame in 1960. His son, Charles M. Gelbert, WAS a baseball player and became a good -- if erratic -- National League shortstop with the pennant-winning Cardinals of 1930-31. Because baseball history has been more completely chronicled, the average sports fan is more likely to have heard of the son than the father.

The tackles were Bill Church, a Princeton All-America, and Bill Farrar, another former University of Pennsylvania star. The 190-pound Church had coached the Purdue University team in 1897 and was put in charge of the Duquesnes this year. Possessed of a fiery temper, he was described by a contemporary: "Rough and ready Church was quick on the trigger. Socking a rival on the chin was Bill's favorite diversion." Farrar had been a second team All-America in 1895.

The middle of the line lacked the national reputations of the ends and tackles but showed no fall off in ability. At one guard P.J. "Datz" Lawler weighed in at 220 pounds. The other guard, Frank Smith was a 6-4, 215-pound giant from Brown University. Both had been two-year regulars with the strong Elizabeth A.C. in New Jersey. The center, G.A. Jennings had manned the pivot for a strong Bucknell team in '97.

The Duquesne backfield featured veteran Ed Young at fullback and still two more graduates of the powerful U. of Penn football factory, team captain Roy Jackson and quarterback C.S. Williams. Halfback C.P. Kiefer had reportedly played for Yale in '97 and would again join the Elis in '99 (though apparently never as a regular). However, the best Duquesne back -- some said the best ever seen in Pittsburgh -- would not arrive until mid-season.

On the bench for the D.C. & A.C. were such talented players as end Tommy Randolph, tackle Otto Wagonhurst, guard John Wienstein, and back Don McNeil. Probably, all of them would have been regulars for the P.A.C.

For the most part, the season was predictable. The team opened at home against the Maryland A.C. with a 46-0 laugh. The next week, they traveled all the way to New York to take on the famous Knickerbocker A.C. at the Berkeley Oval. Probably the New Yorkers took the team from Pittsburgh a bit lightly before the game; if so, they received a rude 45-0 awakening.

The competition back in Pittsburgh was a little stronger, but not threatening. The Red and Black finished off October with victories over Pittsburgh College, 16-0, and Penn State, 18-5. State was the only team to score against the D.C. & A.C. all season.

On Saturday, November 5, the Duquesnes warmed up for their game with the P.A.C. by romping over poor Geneva College, 62-0!

The Professional Football Researchers Association

Most of the betting was 2-to-1 for the D.C. & A.C., and some were getting 10-to-3 1/2, but one Pittsburgher was reported to have wagered \$200 to \$100 on the P.A.C. He must have believed the rumors that "Doggie" Trenchard and Eddie Wood were going to be at the ends for the East Enders and Frank Hudson, the Carlisle star, was coming in to play fullback. His credulity cost him \$200. On election day, the Duquesnes blasted the P.A.C., 34-0. Sam Boyle played well for the East Enders, but once he went out with an injury, the deluge really came.

Leading the charge was a new man in the D.C. & A.C. backfield, 21-year-old John Gammons, ex of Brown University. A swift, 170-pound halfback, Gammons went on to achieve superstar status in Pittsburgh. Fans stood and cheered whenever he appeared on the gridiron. Small wonder, games were few and far between when he didn't break away for at least one long run. Looking back, almost thirty years later, oldtimers would refer to him as "the Red Grange of his day."

The Duquesnes seemed to have hit their stride, but the next Saturday they unaccountably faltered against Greensburg. Certainly, the Greenies were a strong team, and certainly the toll of three games in eight days weighed on the the D.C. & A.C. And there was something to be said for an emotional letdown after the traditional big game with the P.A.C. But when all the excuses were made, the bottom line was that the D.C. & A.C. did not play as well as they should have. Once in each half they put on a good drive, but both times they were thwarted by the determined Greenies. Greensburg never threatened the home team's goal. The final scoreless tie was the low point of the Duquesnes' season and probably the high point of Greensburg's. Without a doubt, it was the biggest surprise of the Pittsburgh grid year.

By the next week, the Duquesne's had everything back in working order as they dumped previously unbeaten Latrobe, 17-0, before 4,000 fans.

W. & J. was given a chance by some in the big Thanksgiving Day bash, but the workmanlike 11-0 Duquesne win came as no surprise to most observers. A second meeting with the P.A.C. two days later was cancelled because of snow. East Enders fans must have thought of the flakes as a mercy from heaven.

The Duquesnes' team was being compared favorably with the 1896 all-star squad put together for a two-game stand by the Allegheny Athletic Association. If the Three A's all-stars had a slight edge in talent with Brooke and Heffelfinger, the D.C. & A.C. all-stars had more teamwork after playing together for a whole season.

The First All-Star Game

But the season wasn't quite over. Perhaps the comparisons with the Three A's all-stars served as inspiration, for Dave Berry. He conceived the idea of opposing the Duquesnes with an all-star crew drawn from the best of all the other area teams. A game was arranged for Saturday, December 3, at Exposition Park and Berry began signing up stars.

He didn't get everyone he wanted. For whatever reason, Greensburg leaders opposed the game and did their best to discourage their players from taking part. "Teck" Matthews of W. & J. was ordered not to play at the last minute by Prexy captain Bill

Theurer. The reason seemed to be that an election for the next W. & J. captain was about to be held and it might prove embarrassing should Matthews, the odds-on favorite, take part in a pro all-star game. On the other hand, Theurer had played several seasons for Greensburg and that connection raised some question as to where "Teck's" sit-down order really came from.

Sam Boyle was approached by Berry to coach the stars, but he passed, and no P.A.C. players appeared in the game.

Although he had to rely heavily on his own team, Berry put together a strong crew of stars. From Latrobe came ends Eddie Wood and "Doggie" Trenchard, tackles Harry Ryan and George Krebs, center Bill Hammer, halfback Jack Gass, and "Grennie" Lewis, a good fullback. Pittsburgh College contributed Mullen, its quarterback, and P.J. Comerford, a tough guard who'd been playing college football since 1891! Against Greensburg's opposition to the game, "Babe" Rhinehart and George Barclay rounded out the team.

Despite all the stars on hand, the attendance was disappointing. Only about 1,500 showed up for what should have been the jewel of the season. Part of the blame went to the lateness of the contest, many Pittsburghers considering the football season over with Thanksgiving. Part of the blame went to the uncertain weather. But most of the blame was put on the Greensburg "knockers" who were accused of spreading rumors that the various stars would not appear. Ironically, Barclay and Rhinehart were commended for their fine play in the game.

Like most all-star teams, this one showed lots of individual talent but no teamwork. The results were what might be expected.

A little past the midpoint of the first half, the D.C. & A.C. used their superior teamwork to drive in close. Little Don McNeil, calling the signals, tried a quarterback kick which Jackson took into the corner of the end zone. Duquesne could not convert the extra point, and the score stood 5-0 at intermission.

Shortly after the second half began, Mullen punted to Gammons who, with good interference, zipped 60 yards for a second touchdown. Young added the goal to make it 11-0. The all-stars continued to work hard, but the Duquesnes' team play coupled with the stars' lack of it really began to take a heavy toll.

Near the end of the game, Duquesne showed just how devastating it could be. Starting from the 30, Wienstein went twenty yards through left tackle. Young dropped back as though to kick but then shoveled to Jackson who went thirty more yards around left end. Then Gammons took the ball twenty yards to the ten. Jackson raced over on the next play. Eighty yards in four plays! Young missed the goal and the game ended a short time later at 16-0.

Chairman Temple rounded out his team's very successful season with a banquet at the Hotel Schenley. Representatives from W. & J., Pittsburgh College, the P.A.C., Latrobe, and Greensburg were also present, and most of the evening was spent in well-deserved congratulations for Temple and his team. However, the Pittsburgh *Press* observed: "There were no set speeches, but the absence of this feature was not regretted."

The Professional Football Researchers Association

At the other end of the scale, Dave Berry had a miserable end of season. His Latrobe team collapsed with three straight losses. Then at noon on the day of his all-star game, one of his Latrobe players had him arrested for a debt he claimed Berry owed him.

Dave paid the \$33 and then had the player jailed for false arrest. While the man posted bail, Berry went to the game only to learn the attendance was much smaller than he'd hoped. It was enough to make a man swear off football.