

THE FIRST PRO PASS

By P.F.R.A. Research

Does the name Eddie Wood ring a bell? Eddie was a pretty good end way back around the turn of the century. He played for most of the top teams in the Western Pennsylvania-Ohio cradle of professionalism. He moved around a lot, wherever the money was.

But if you remember Eddie, it's probably because he is credited -- whenever credit is given -- with being the first pro player ever to catch a forward pass. Perhaps that doesn't qualify Eddie for the Hall of Fame, but it's kept his name in various standard pro histories. It seems kind of a shame at this late date to point out that Eddie probably wasn't the first.

What happened was this. 1906 was the first year the forward pass was legal, either in college or pro ball. The move was made in an effort to open up the game and reduce the injuries inherent in grind-it-out mass and momentum plays. Actually, another rule change that stated a team had to make ten yards in three downs instead of five in three opened things up more that year than any foolishness about tossing the pumpkin-shaped pigskin. The forward pass was generally ignored in 1906. Only a few farsighted individuals saw merit in the new maneuver.

The first successful legal throws were made by St. Louis University in early September, according to an article by researcher Tony Cusher, founder of the College Football Research Association.

But what about the pros? The big pro games that year pitted Canton against Massillon. They were important enough to find newspaper space outside Ohio. Canton won the first meeting on November 16, and Massillon took the second on November 24. Then everything blew up in accusations of fixing. However, one smatch of honor emerged from the second game -- Eddie Wood, playing end for Canton, caught a couple of the new forward passes.

Somehow those catches in the big game at the end of the season were translated into the very FIRST catch by Dr. Harry March in his entertaining but unreliable *Pro Football: Its "Ups" and "Downs"*. Subsequent writers took the good doctor at his word. If they'd checked, they'd have learned that Eddie had been imported from Latrobe to play in that one game. Canton's regular ends, Schrontz and Gilchrist, weren't able to suit up.

Earlier in the season, on October 27, Schrontz caught a seven-yard pass from Townsend in a game against the Lyceum team at Pittsburgh. The toss played an important part in a touchdown drive in one of the few tough games the Bulldogs had before meeting Massillon.

However, two days earlier, Massillon completed a throw while stomping a combined Benwood-Moundsville, West Virginia, team by the score of 61-0. The toss was good for only a few yards and played no decisive part in the game's outcome, but -- so far -- it's the earliest documented completion by the pros. The receiver was a young man named

Dan Policowski who saved proofreaders countless headaches by playing under the name of "Riley." The passer was quarterback George "Peggy" Parratt. Understandably, no one got excited about Peggy's short pass; his 65-yard run from scrimmage and 100-yard kickoff return got the headlines.

Documentation aside, was the October 25 toss the first completed pro pass? Probably not. Massillon had played four earlier games in 1906, and Peggy well may have unlimbered his arm in any one of them. And, despite their fame, Canton and Massillon were not the only pro teams around in 1906. In fact, there was a darn good one over in Latrobe with Eddie Wood playing end. Do you suppose ...?