

Parratt Wins Again

1911

By PFRA Research

The revitalized Canton A.C. came back into the picture in 1911 with a team made up of local sandlotters who were to receive shares of hoped-for gate receipts instead of salaries. The new Canton team, known as the "Pros," opened its season in late September at Whitacre Field with a hardfought 6-0 win over the Akron East End Tigers. Although Akron never threatened Canton's goal line, it proved adept at defending against Canton's straight power tactics. The Pros' were bigger than the visitors, and eventually out-muscled them. Early in the second quarter, Canton drove in close to the Akron goal line. Fullback Roscoe "Monk" Oberlin crashed over for the game's only touchdown. Akron players protested vehemently that Oberlin had rolled or crawled the last few yards, but their sincere allegations did not convince the officials.

The following week wind and rain kept most Canton fans away from Whitacre Field and made it impossible to judge the merits of either the Pros or their opponents, the Hinkle All-Stars, a team sponsored by a Cleveland brewery. The Hinkles had been making themselves available to strong opponents for several years, usually losing by a score close enough to earn them an invitation back the next year. Considering the weather, Graham of the Hinkles made a foolish decision in the second quarter when he fielded a Canton punt in his own end zone, hesitated, and then tried to run the ball. Pat Steiner, the Canton quarterback, nailed him for a safety. Those proved to be the game's only points as Canton won 2-0.

On October 8 with better weather, a good crowd of at least a thousand turned out at Whitacre, but they didn't see much of a game. Canton used straight-ahead plunges, most for five or ten yards, to dominate the Akron Crescents 39-0. Oberlin scored five touchdowns for the home team.

The Crescent game began a string of easy triumphs over weak teams by the Pros. In the following weeks, they kayoed the Alliance A.C. 19-0, the Akron Tigers 30-0, the Cleveland Neagles 33-0, the Canton Indians 52-0, and the Massillon Tigers 47-0. The Massillon game was hyped beforehand as a return to the rivalry of 1905-06, but it quickly became apparent that the Massillon aggregation bore little resemblance to the powerhouses of yesteryear despite the presence in the Tigers' lineup of Baldy Wittmann and Frank Bast, two members of those earlier squads. The game against the local Indians was, of course, for the city championship. It was preceded by a seemingly endless wrangle over where it was to be held and a great deal of betting. When it was finally played at League Park, the 1,500 fans on hand were shocked by the one-sided exhibition. Oberlin scored the first five touchdowns for the victors, and by the fourth quarter when the Pros had all their subs on the field, they seemed able to move the football at will.

Through eight games, the Canton Pros were undefeated and largely untested. They'd scored 216 points -- Monk Oberlin had 19 touchdowns alone -- to their opponents none. On Canton street corners there was some talk of the state championship but such a thing could not be consummated without a victory over the reigning champions from Shelby.

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In 1911, Peggy Parratt's Shelby Blues and Homer Davidson's Shelby Tigers merged, taking the "Blues" name (although another Shelby Tigers was formed and played a schedule). Although he had gained fame as a quarterback, Parratt usually relegated himself to end or halfback whenever Davidson was on the field. Both were dangerous runners and, in terms of the day, good passers, but Parratt couldn't compare with Davidson as a kicker. No one in Ohio at the time could. In addition to Parratt and Davidson, the team included big "Dutch" Powell, a former Ohio State tackle, and Guy Shultz, the outstanding center.

Most of the Blues' games were easy wins, including a 41-0 drubbing of the Columbus Panhandles. Another Columbus team, the Northerns, were slaughtered 84-0. The Akron Indians gave the Blues a good battle in late October, only to lose 3-0 on a Homer Davidson field goal. The Indians, with their home-grown stars, were generally regarded as the second or third strongest team in the state, depending on how Canton's upstart squad was ranked.

The season's most controversial game found the Shelby Blues at Canton. Homegrown though it was, the new Canton team was an excellent outfit, but getting them together with Shelby proved to be a chore. The Canton manager, H.H. Halter was distrusted in Shelby, where it was said he "ate soup with a fork." Canton had similar feelings toward Parratt. Each team posted a \$250 bond to insure its appearance on the game date. Upon their arrival at the Canton's League Park, the Blues were met with large signs bearing the legends "Get Parratt!" and "Get Davidson!" They'd heard rumors that the Canton team had hired two professional boxers to do just that.

No boxers were in moleskins, but both sides used their fists throughout the scoreless first half. At one point, Canton's player-coach Ben Clarke was ejected for slugging Cantonite "Bullet" Riley playing for the Blues, but that seemed only to spark more fisticuffs. Near the end of the third quarter, Shelby began to take command and drove toward the Canton goal line. Suddenly, Homer Davidson fumbled while making a handoff and Canton Captain Harry Turner recovered. The Canton players began to celebrate, but the umpire dashed in to rule that a Canton man had been off-side on the play.

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The referee stepped off the penalty to the Canton two-yard-line and returned the ball to Shelby.

Canton refused to accept the verdict. They continued to argue, accusing the umpire of favoring Shelby all day. At last, the Canton coach ordered his team off the field. Captain Turner led the way. When they refused to return after two minutes, the game was forfeited to Shelby. In a post-game story, Captain Turner, 24, announced his retirement from football. Shelby had to go to court to get its \$250 bond back from Canton's Halter.

The Blues wrapped up their undefeated season by stopping the Akron Tigers again 6-0 at Akron on Thanksgiving Day, and then repeating that victory with a 3-0 win over the the Tigers played in Cleveland. After years of being also-rans, Shelby had back-to-back state championships.

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Although they lost almost as often as they won, the 5-4-1 Columbus Panhandles had nothing to be ashamed of in 1911. They played several of the top teams in Ohio, and, except for one terrible defeat at the hands of Shelby's state champs, the railroaders held their own. As usual, the 'Handles relied on the six Nesser brothers' muscle. The team had little speed and scored in double figures only twice. But, when the other guys had the ball, Columbus was in its element. Getting into the Panhandles' end zone was harder than squeezing President Taft into a telephone booth. Of course, the Nessers taken as a group had a slight weight advantage over fellow Ohioan Taft -- whereas our fattest President topped out around 300 pounds the six Nessers totalled almost three-quarters of a ton.

With so many Nessers and the two Kuehner brothers, Oscar and Roscoe, in the same lineup, Panhandle box scores on the

newspaper looked like the typesetter had a bad case of the stutters.

The high point of the Panhandles' season came at Dayton on November 12. Despite bitter cold that froze the field, an overflow crowd turned out to see the famous Nessers take on the local champion Oakwoods. Dayton scored early in the first quarter when a series of spectacular end runs by Captain Allen moved the ball to the three-yard-line. From there, he crashed over to put his team into lead. However, the try for point was missed.

Under the rules of the day, Columbus kicked off to Dayton after the score. The Panhandles completely surprised the Oakwoods with an on-side kick. Tackle Phil Nesser recovered at the 40 and ran all the way to the end zone for a tying touchdown. Frank Nesser booted the PAT to put the railroaders ahead 6-5. From there, the Nesser muscle and the extreme cold stymied Dayton's offense.

The Toledo Maroons, a team that began a half dozen years earlier as a "kids" squad, had matured although it wasn't ready to challenge for the state title. On November 5, they gave some indication that they had become competitive when they upset the Panhandles, 9-0, at Columbus. The 'Handles were under-Nessered with Frank playing injured and Ted off performing for another team. The little town of Shelby was able to compete with Ohio's larger cities because, in addition to a judicious sprinkling of outsiders, the Parratt-Davidson combine brought all the best local players together on a single squad. Most of the bigger cities split up their local stars among several teams. Akron had the Indians, Tigers, and Crescents; Toledo had the Maroons and Glenwoods; Columbus saw the Panhandles, Northerns, and Muldoons; Cleveland players split among the Hinkle All-Stars, Genesees, Erin Braus, and Neagles; and the Canton Pros lost a few good players to the Canton Indians.