

Lou Feist

This article was written by Jeffrey J. Miller

Lou Feist holds an interesting place in the history of the 1920s Buffalo Bisons for he bears the unique distinction of playing for three different coaching regimes in three consecutive years (1924-26). He is also one of only ten players in the team's history to play three consecutive seasons with the club (the others being Tommy Hughitt, Swede Youngstrom, Luke Urban, Bill Brace, Frank Morrissey, Elmer McCormick, Jim Laird, Johnny Scott, and Ockie Anderson). However, what Feist might best be remembered for was having his career, and life, cut short at age 23 midway through the 1926 season.



Louis A. Feist was born in Buffalo in 1903. He learned his love of the grid game at an early age and became a star player while at Lafayette High in Buffalo. In 1919, Lou was selected to the city league All-High Team as a tackle (First Team). He moved on to Columbia University, where he played just one season under legendary coach Frank "Buck" O'Neill. Sam Salemi, who played with Feist at Columbia and later played in the NFL as member of the short-lived New York Yankees (1928), recalled that Feist was "tall and a very nice tackler," adding that he found Lou to be "a very nice fellow." The captain of the Columbia Lions was another Buffalo lad, Walter Koppisch, who would one day return to Buffalo to coach Feist and the pro team there.



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Apparently unhappy at Columbia, Feist returned to Western New York and enrolled at Canisius College, where he played football for coach Luke Urban. Urban was also playing end for the professional Buffalo All-Americans at the time, and it was most likely due to Urban's intervention that the six-foot, one-inch, 200 pounder was invited to try out for, and eventually make, the 1924 Buffalo Bisons (as the All-Americans were renamed that year). Some of Feist's teammates on the 1923 Canisius squad included Russell Burt, Chick Guarnieri, and Harry Collins, all of whom eventually joined Lou with the pro Bisons.

Lou's first practice with the Bisons was September 28 at the Troop I Armory on East Delavan Avenue. Among the players signed for this year's team were Benny Boynton, the two-time Walter Camp All-America selection from Williams College, and Eddie Kaw of Cornell, also a two-time Walter Camp honoree.

Feist was in the starting lineup on opening day, when the Bisons took on the Columbus Lions at Bison Stadium on October 5. Lou was installed at right tackle, between All-Pro guard Swede Youngstrom, and end Pete Calac, the former Canton Bulldogs star. According to the *Buffalo Courier*, Feist acquitted himself well, playing the entire game and recovering a fumble. He was also instrumental in paving the way for Buffalo's initial marker: "Buffalo's first score came midway through the third period when the backfield luminaries tore through holes, ripped by Feist and Youngstrom for several good gains." Feist's overall performance received positive reviews from the *Courier* reporter, who wrote, "Aside from the principal stars of the victory, McCormick, Feist and Youngstrom did yeoman work on the line."

A 7-0 loss to Dayton on October 12 was followed by a 26-0 rout of the Rochester Jeffersons, in which Feist was once again touted as one of the team's outstanding figures, this time by the *Buffalo Express*: "McCormick, Collins, Feist, Youngstrom and the rest of the Bison regulars played their usual star game."

Buffalo was victorious at home the following week, dispatching the Akron Pros 17-13 and improving to 3-1 on the season. But despite the team's fast start, Feist was inexplicably out of the starting lineup when the Bisons faced the Frankford Yellow Jackets on November 2, a game which saw the Orange and Black suffer its worst home loss of the season (24-0). Lou was back on the first string against the Kenosha Maroons the following Sunday, playing left tackle, and helped lead the Bisons to a 27-0 win. He was still in the starting lineup when the Bisons exacted their revenge on the Dayton Triangles with a 14-6 win on November 16, the annihilation of the Jeffersons the following Saturday at Rochester, and the 23-0 home loss to Milwaukee on Sunday, November 23. He did not play in the Thanksgiving Day loss at Akron but returned to



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the starting lineup for the season finale at Philadelphia against the tough Frankford Yellow Jackets, a 45-7 embarrassment.

All told, Feist appeared in ten of the Bisons' 11 games in 1924, starting in nine. The club's record in games in which Feist started was an impressive 6-3-0.

When Feist's former teammate at Columbia, Walter Koppisch, took over the helm of the Buffalo Bisons for the 1925 season, he was intent on using the offensive system he had learned with the Lions, for whom he had been a two-time Walter Camp All-America selection. Since Feist had played his freshman season with the Blue and White, had a year of pro experience under his belt—and was a local boy to boot—he was a natural choice for Koppisch's team.

The Bisons opened the season with an exhibition contest on September 20 versus the semi-pro Tonawanda Frontiers at Felton Field in North Tonawanda. Feist started the game at fullback, and later scored the only (unofficial) touchdown of his pro career as the Bisons cruised to a 35-0 rout. Feist did not play in the regular season opener on Saturday, September 26, at Frankford (in which the Bisons lost 27-7), but he was back in the lineup the very next day when the Bisons fell 18-0 to the Pottsville Maroons. He was out of the lineup the next week when the Bisons returned home to play the Rochester Jeffersons to a 0-0 draw, but found himself starting at right end on October 11 against the Akron Pros. Feist played the entire game as the Bisons posted their second consecutive scoreless tie. Coach Koppisch's confidence in Feist must have been buoyed by Lou's performance in the Akron game, as Koppisch kept Feist at the starting right end position for the next game against the Columbus Tigers. That faith was rewarded as Lou performed brilliantly, including being credited with a fumble recovery. Unfortunately, Feist's afternoon was cut short when he was forced from the game after being kicked in the head by a teammate while in tackling a Columbus runner.

It didn't take Feist long to recover, as he returned to the starting lineup for the Bisons' next game. However, he was of little help as the Orange and Black fell once again to the Frankford Yellow Jackets, 12-3. Feist was still in the starting lineup when the Bisons lost to the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds in New York. He did not play against Providence on November 8 but returned to the lineup for the season finale at Comiskey Park against the Chicago Cardinals in November 15.

For the 1925 season, Feist appeared in six of the Bisons' nine regular season games, starting five. The team's record in the games which he started was 1-3-1.

In July 1926, it was announced that Koppisch would not be returning to manage the Buffalo Bisons in the upcoming season, and that Jim Kendrick, who had played a handful



of games with the Bisons in '24, was taking over as the team's player-coach. It was revealed that Kendrick had met with team management shortly after the preceding season and laid out his ideas for bringing together a team made up almost entirely of men from the southwest, mainly Texas and Oklahoma.

After a recruitment tour through the southwestern states, Kendrick reported to his superiors that he has secured contracts with about a dozen ruffians who shared his vision. Buffalo in 1926 would be home to one of the most unique NFL teams ever assembled. The new Buffalo Rangers, as they were to be called in deference to the Texas' legendary peacekeeping force, arrived in town after a 1,300-mile automobile odyssey begun in Waco, Texas, six days earlier. The only player not making the trip was the Queen City's own Lou Feist, who was also the only man retained from the previous season, aside from Kendrick himself.

Being the only local boy on the otherwise all-Southern team, it was a bit of a surprise to see Feist in the starting lineup when the Rangers played their first game on September 19, an exhibition victory over members of the local 174th Army Regiment. Feist remained with the first team when the Rangers faced the Akron Indians for the regular season opener the following Sunday. He played the entire game in helping his team to a 7 to 0 win.

Feist was in the starting lineup for the Buffalo's next two games, losses to Dayton and Frankford. The Rangers rebounded on October 17 with a 7-6 payback victory at Dayton. But Lou did not play in consecutive games against Los Angeles and Pottsville. He was back in the lineup on November 7, playing the role of substitute as Buffalo rolled over the weak Columbus Tigers.

The game against Columbus proved to be Feist's last, however. While attending a team practice on Tuesday, November 9, Feist became ill and was excused by Coach Kendrick. His illness, later identified as spinal meningitis, proved fatal. Failing to respond to medical care, Feist died on Friday, November 12, at his parents' home in Buffalo. He was just 23 years old. He was not married and had no children.