

# **History of the National Football League**

## **1920 – 1932**

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# Preface

**The NFL's first 13 years** showed remarkable instability: teams came and went, schedules were rarely completed, and games were (by today's standards) boring. The league did, however, enjoy some national attention when **Red Grange** (University of Illinois) joined the Chicago Bears in 1925, **Ernie Nevers** (Stanford) suited up for the Duluth Eskimos in 1927, and third-year QB **Benny Friedman** (University of Michigan) set early passing records for the NY Giants in 1929.

Changes for the **1933 season** were many: the league's new 2-division format allowed a post-season championship game, year-end statistics were recorded, hash marks were added to the field, and rules that freed up the passing game were implemented. Pro football was now an open game - making the frequent scoreless tie a rarity.

Most importantly, the league finally achieved some stability. While teams still came and went, a number from that era remain to this day: the Chicago Bears, New York Giants, Arizona (formerly Chicago and St. Louis) Cardinals, Green Bay Packers, Philadelphia Eagles (now the Pittsburgh Steelers), Detroit Lions (1934), and Washington Redskins (1936).

**Note:** **Teams highlighted in red** were either new to the NFL, changed their name, or had moved from another city.

## Standings:

|                          |        |
|--------------------------|--------|
| Akron Steels/Pros        | 8-0-3  |
| Decatur Staleys          | 10-1-1 |
| Buffalo All Americans    | 9-1-1  |
| Canton Bulldogs          | 7-4-2  |
| Racine Cardinals         | 6-2-2  |
| Rock Island Independents | 6-2-2  |
| Rochester Jeffersons     | 6-3-2  |
| Dayton Triangles         | 5-2-2  |
|                          |        |
| Detroit Heralds          | 2-3-3  |
| Cleveland Tigers         | 2-4-2  |
| Hammond Pros             | 2-5-0  |
| Chicago Tigers           | 2-5-1  |
| Columbus Panhandles      | 2-6-2  |
| Muncie Flyers            | 0-1-0  |

## League:

9/17: **Ralph Hay**, Canton Bulldog's manager, hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the **American Professional Football Association** (APFA). The group, including George Halas, met at Hays' Hupmobile showroom in Canton, Ohio. The result was the formation of a 14-team league. The members selected **Jim Thorpe** as Commissioner. Membership fee was \$25.

Clubs were allowed to play independent teams as well as league opponents. The resulting chaos led to the APFA's demise after the 1921 season.

- From 1920-1931, either the commissioner or the owners decided the league champion.
- **Three early rules:** offense was penalized if they threw 2 straight incompletions; if the forward pass was incomplete in the end zone, the opponents got the ball on their own 20; players were penalized for piling on or roughing the kicker.
- Both the **Rochester** (NY) Jeffersons and **Racine** (Chicago) Cardinals were named after local streets.

10/3: **Dayton** beat Columbus 14-0. First league game.

10/17: **Decatur Staleys** beat Rock Island Independents 7-0. 7,000 attended. Lone TD came in 2<sup>nd</sup> Q. Rough game known for Staley's **George Trafton's** violent tackle of RB **Fred Chicken** into a fence positioned close to the playing field. The collision fractured RB's leg. Another account claimed that it was Chicken's arm that was injured, opening up a gash that required 19 stitches. Following the tackle, angry Rockford fans turned and chased Trafton out of the park. Trafton was eventually saved by a passing motorist. Earlier in the game – Independents sent 4 of their own players in with instructions to injure Trafton. Each of the 4 was eventually knocked out of the game.

12/12: **Decatur tied Akron Pros** 0-0; approximately 12,000 attended. Unofficial championship game. The Pros featured Hall of Famer **Fritz Pollard**. Pollard was 1<sup>st</sup> black to play in the Rose Bowl. **Akron** was declared league champion the following April.

- **Akron Pros** outscored their opponents 151-7. The **Muncie Flyers** dropped out after losing to Rock Island 45-0.  
Flyers ended up playing 3 league games in 2 years club was out-scored 73-0.
- **Columbus Panhandles** featured 6 **Nesser** brothers. Two played just one season, two others played through 1922. Al, the youngest of the six, played through the 1931 season.
- **Chicago Cards** allegedly played the **Chicago Tigers** in a winner-stays-in-Chicago outcome.  
10/10: Two clubs fought to a 0-0 tie.  
11/7: Cards won the second contest 6-3.
- **Buffalo** squad attracted the greatest crowds: 15K, 10K, 9K, and 5K.
- **Canton Bulldogs** went 30-5-2 in their 4 years of league play.
- **Other club in the mix:** Chicago Boosters, Champaign Legion, Kewanee Walworths, Logan Square, Moline Indians, Pullman Thorns, Rockford Athletic Club, Thorn Tornadoes, Massillon Tigers.

## Standings:

|                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Chicago Staleys</b>              | 9-1-1 |
| <b>Buffalo Bisons/All Americans</b> | 9-1-2 |
| Akron                               | 8-3-1 |
| <b>Canton Bulldogs</b>              | 5-2-3 |
| Rock Island                         | 4-2-1 |
| <b>Evansville Crimson Giants</b>    | 3-2-0 |
| <b>Green Bay Packers</b>            | 3-2-1 |
| Dayton                              | 4-4-1 |
| Chicago Cardinals                   | 3-3-2 |
| <b>Rochester Jeffersons</b>         | 2-3-0 |
| <b>Cleveland Rams</b>               | 3-5-0 |
| Washington Senators                 | 1-2-0 |
| Cincinnati Celts                    | 1-3-0 |
| Hammond                             | 1-3-1 |
| <b>Minneapolis Marines</b>          | 1-3-1 |
| <b>Detroit Lions</b>                | 1-5-1 |
| <b>Columbus Tigers</b>              | 1-8-0 |

Other pro teams included the Tonawanda (NY) Kardex 0-1, Muncie 0-2, and Louisville Brecks 0-2

## League:

- **Joseph Carr**, former manager of Columbus Panhandles, was named league president.
  - Membership fee: \$100 to join.
  - Carr declared **Akron Pros** the 1920 champion.
- Last year the league was known as the APFA. Title changed to the **National Football League** in 1922.

## Bylaws:

- Owners were not to tamper with players unless they were declared free agents.
- No player could suit up for another team during the same week (See Buffalo All-Americans below)
- Territoriality: one club was not to schedule a game in another's team's territory.
  - This became a major issue in 1926.
- To determine final standings – only games within the league were used.
- Records of teams that dropped out early were stricken from standings

RULE: After **Buffalo All-Americans** completed a scheduled game, they changed jerseys to represent the **Philadelphia Quakers** for extra money. President Carr prohibited players from suiting up for two different teams at same time.

- Offenses stuck to the **single & double wing**.
- **Defenses in the 1920s** were of the 7-1-2-1 version: 7 linemen, 1 linebacker, 2 defensive backs, and a deep safety.

- **One ball was in use.** Ball was larger with blunted ends –had the appearance of a small watermelon.
- Canvas pants included more padding at the hips.
- After season, NFL expelled **Green Bay** (formerly **Acme Packing Company**) for suiting up 3 current Notre Dame players in their 12/4 game vs. Racine Cardinals. Franchise was allowed to return before the 1922 season.
- Notre Dame grad **Curley Lambeau** served as QB, K, and coach (212-106-21 thru '49), leading them to 6 championships. Prior to joining the NFL, the Packers played as an independent team. Lambeau and Chicago Bears coach **George Halas** often feuded with each other –choosing not to shake the other's hand after a game.
- **Tonawanda Kardex** folded after losing 45-0 to Rochester.
- **New York Giants** played 2 games vs. NFL teams, losing both. Giants became a member of the NFL in 1925.
- **Louisville Brecks:** when not contending against other semi-pro teams, played NFL teams to fill the league schedule.

# NFL 1922

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## Standings:

|                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| Canton                     | 10-0-2 |
| Chicago Bears              | 9-3-0  |
| Chicago Cardinals          | 8-3-0  |
| <b>Toledo Maroons</b>      | 5-2-2  |
| Rock Island                | 4-2-1  |
| <b>Racine Legion</b>       | 6-4-1  |
| Dayton                     | 4-3-1  |
| Green Bay                  | 4-3-3  |
| Buffalo                    | 5-4-1  |
|                            |        |
| Akron                      | 3-5-2  |
| <b>Milwaukee Badgers</b>   | 2-4-3  |
| <b>Oorang Indians</b>      | 2-6-0  |
| Minneapolis Marines        | 1-3-0  |
| <b>Louisville Colonels</b> | 1-3-0  |
| Evansville                 | 0-3-0  |
| Rochester                  | 0-4-1  |
| Hammond                    | 0-5-1  |
| Columbus                   | 0-7-0  |

## League:

- Newly titled **National Football League** comprised of 18 teams– a number that would expand and contract often in the next 10 years. Despite the title, there was not much “national” to the league. Rock Island (IL) was the farthest west of the 18, and Louisville, KY, was NFL’s southern-most team.

RULE: League games were to be played between 10/1 – 12/10.

Each team had to play 7-13 games against league opponents.

Some NFL franchises played non-league clubs for more revenue.

RULE: Player wishing to be free agent had to be declared as such by *former team* prior to re-signing.

- Visiting teams were given choice by home team: pay their own travel expenses and salaries or receive 40% of gate minus 15% park rental.
- Each team was limited to 16 players. Players earned approx. \$100/game.
- May 2<sup>nd</sup>: Decatur Staleys became the **Chicago Bears**. Halas considered naming club the “Cubs” but chose current name instead – believing that football players were bigger than baseball players.

11/12: **Chicago Bears** beat Oorang Indians 33-6. **Jim Thorpe** scored Oorang’s lone TD.

**1922-23: Green Bay** franchise, deep in debt, was rescued when local citizens formed a non-profit corporation, and purchased stock to keep the team afloat. Conditions: stock owners received no dividends, and the stock itself would not appreciate in value. In addition, the shares could not be re-sold except back to the team.

- **Milwaukee Badgers** played in NFL through 1926 season.
- **Racine** was sponsored by American Legion Post 76. Re-named Tornadoes in '24.
- The **Oorang** club derived their name from Oorang Dog Kennels, of La Rue, Ohio – 50 miles north of Columbus. The kennel was known for breeding Airedales. The team played all but 1 game on the road. Roster consisted of American Indians from Carlisle and Haskell and were led by legendary **Jim Thorpe**.
- Tough-luck teams:
  - **Evansville's** season included a 60-0 loss to Rock Island.
  - **Rochester's** record through 1925 was 0-21, scoring a total of 52 points.
  - The **Hammond Pros** were outscored 69-0 in 1922.



# NFL 1923

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## Standings:

|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Canton                  | 11- 0-1 |
| Chicago Bears           | 9- 2-1  |
| Green Bay               | 7- 2-1  |
| Milwaukee               | 7- 2-3  |
| Cleveland               | 3- 1-3  |
| Chicago Cards           | 8- 4-0  |
| <b>Duluth Eskimos</b>   | 4- 3-0  |
| Columbus                | 5- 4-1  |
| Buffalo                 | 5- 4-3  |
| Racine                  | 4- 4-2  |
|                         |         |
| Toledo                  | 3- 3-2  |
| Rock Island             | 2- 3-3  |
| Minneapolis             | 2- 5-2  |
| <b>St. Louis Browns</b> | 1- 4-2  |
| Hammond                 | 1- 5-1  |
| Dayton                  | 1- 6-1  |
| Akron                   | 1- 6-0  |
| Oorang                  | 1-10-0  |
| Rochester               | 0- 4-0  |
| Louisville              | 0- 3-0  |

## League:

- NFL now up to 20 teams. The most number of teams the league fielded was 26 (1926).
- **Canton Bulldogs** out-scored their opponents 246-19.  
Chicago Cards were 2<sup>nd</sup> in scoring (161-56).
- Chicago Cards' **Paddy Driscoll** led league in scoring (78 points) on 7 TDs, 6 PATs and 10 FGs.  
Canton K **Wilbur Henry** was 2<sup>nd</sup> with 59 points.

11/4: **Chicago Bears** beat Oorang 26-0 at home. All the scoring came in 1<sup>st</sup> half.  
Bears DB **George Halas** returned a fumble 98 yards for TD.

- **Milwaukee Badger's** team sported 3 black stars: Duke Slater, Fritz Pollard, and Paul Robeson.  
Robeson later became an accomplished actor, singer, and civil rights activist.
- **Duluth Kelleys** were 1<sup>st</sup> NFL team to add symbol (an igloo) onto their jerseys.  
Team was named for a hardware store. Club played through 1927.
- **Oorang Indians** were outscored 257-43. Club folded after 1923 season.  
**Rochester** was outscored 141-6; **Louisville** was out-scored 83-0 in their 3 scheduled games.

10/7: **Chicago Cardinals** beat Rochester 60-0, rushing for 8 TDs.

# NFL 1924

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## Standings:

|                                  |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|
| <b>Cleveland Bulldogs</b>        | 7-1-1  |
| Chicago Bears                    | 6-1-4  |
| <b>Frankfort Yellow Jackets</b>  | 11-2-1 |
| Duluth                           | 5-1-0  |
| Rock Island                      | 6-2-2  |
| Green Bay                        | 7-4-0  |
| Racine                           | 4-3-3  |
| Chicago Cardinals                | 5-4-1  |
| Buffalo                          | 6-5-0  |
|                                  |        |
| Columbus                         | 4-4-0  |
| Hammond                          | 2-2-1  |
| Milwaukee                        | 5-8-0  |
| Akron                            | 2-6-0  |
| Dayton                           | 2-6-0  |
| <b>Kansas City Blues/Cowboys</b> | 2-7-0  |
| <b>Kenosha Maroons</b>           | 0-4-1  |
| Minneapolis                      | 0-6-0  |
| Rochester                        | 0-7-0  |

## League:

- Even though they playing just nine games, NFL president Joseph Carr declared the **Cleveland Bulldogs** league champions.
- Despite four new entries, the NFL contracted to 18 teams.
- Games were to be scheduled between 9/27-11/30.
- Despite going 21-0-3 through 1923, the cash-poor **Canton Bulldogs** did not field a team in 1924. Player contracts were eventually sold to the **Cleveland** franchise.
- **Rochester** squad was out-scored 156-7.
- **Frankfort Yellowjackets** had to abide by Pennsylvania's Blue Laws that prohibited the playing of football on Sunday. Club worked around the law by scheduling their games on Saturdays, then boarding a train after the game and travel out of state to play the following day.

11/23: Legendary rivalry was borne: **Chicago Bears** beat Green Bay 3-0 in game marred by fighting (Bears' Frank Hanny and Packers Walter Voss were ejected). Lone score came on 29 yard FG by Dutch Sternaman in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Q.

- **Grant Park Municipal Stadium** (later Soldier Field) was built. Dedicated to returning WWI soldiers, the original park held 45K. Early home to Notre Dame football, the stadium was re-named **Soldier Field** in 1925.

Two historic college games played on the same day:

10/18: **Notre Dame** upset Army 13-7 at New York's Polo Grounds. Following the game, sports writer Grantland Rice penned his famous *Four Horsemen* poem, describing how 4 Irish players helped defeat a strong Army squad.

**University of Illinois** beat the University of Michigan 39-14. The Fighting Illini faced a powerful Wolverines' team – winners of 20 straight games while allowing the opposition just 4 TDs the past 2 seasons.

team that had allowed the opposition just 4 TDs in the past 2 seasons. Grantland Rice's pen was busy as he described

Enter **Red Grange**, U of I's

star running back was termed *The Galloping Ghost* by sportswriter Grantland Rice after scoring 5 TDs.

After Grange returned the opening kickoff 95 yards, he rushed for 4 TDs (67, 56, 44 and 11 yards), and passed for another.

**Rookie Class:** Verne Lewellen

*(A streak of fire, a breath of flame...a grey ghost thrown into the game),*

# NFL 1925

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## Standings:

|                                |        |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| Chicago Cardinals              | 11-2-1 |
| Pottsville Maroons             | 10-2-0 |
| Detroit Panthers               | 8-2-2  |
| <b>New York Giants</b>         | 8-4-0  |
| Akron                          | 4-2-2  |
| Frankfort Yellowjackets        | 13-7-0 |
| Chicago Bears                  | 9-5-3  |
| Rock Island                    | 5-3-3  |
| Green Bay Packers              | 8-5-0  |
| <b>Providence Steamrollers</b> | 6-5-1  |
|                                |        |
| Cleveland Bulldogs             | 4-4-0  |
| Cleveland                      | 5-8-1  |
| Kansas City                    | 2-5-1  |
| Hammond                        | 1-4-1  |
| Buffalo                        | 1-6-2  |
| Duluth Eskimos                 | 0-3-0  |
| Rochester                      | 0-6-0  |
| Milwaukee                      | 0-6-0  |
| Dayton                         | 0-7-1  |
| Columbus                       | 0-9-0  |

## League:

3/14: **Walter Camp**, the founder of American football, passed away.

RULE: Games played after 11/30 were considered post-season exhibition.

RULE: Clubs must play at least 8 games vs. 8 different league members to qualify for the championship.

- Teams were limited to 16 players.
- Minor modifications were made to the football so that it held its shape.
- NFL was increasing in popularity – **Associated Press** began to carry league results in national papers.
- Between 10/18-11/26 – Chicago Bears were involved in 7 shutouts, going 5-1-1.

- Famous rookie made the scene:

**Red Grange** – “the Babe Ruth of football” signed an agreement to play for the Chicago Bears. Also known as “The Iceman,” the 3-time All-American Grange stood 6’1” and weighed 190 lbs. Famed sportswriter Grantland Rice gave Grange his legendary nickname “The Galloping Ghost” in a poem (“...a *gray ghost* thrown into the game that rival hands may never touch.”). Grange played for the Bears at the tail end of 1925 season, joined the **NY Yankees** of the AFL the following year, and returned to the club in 1929 before retiring in 1934. Grange entered the Hall of Fame 1963.

Bears owner George Halas and Grange's agent planned two lengthy nation-wide tours once the regular season ended. The first part of the tour covered the east & northeast US, involving 8 games in 11 days; 3 of the 8 games were played in Chicago. The rugged schedule meant exhausted players traveling city to city in dirty uniforms.

Second tour included Florida, Louisiana, California, Oregon and Washington. Starting on Christmas Day, the team went on to play 8 games in 30 days. Grange even found time to star in a short movie (*One Minute to Play*) while the club was in LA. The opponents were often a collection of local all-stars.

The tour was a rousing financial success for all: **NY Giants** owner Tim Mara saw a huge profit when Bears played his team in New York on 12/6. Halas and the Bears covered tour costs and received \$2K guarantee against percentage of gate for all games. For his part, Grange's pay was well into the 6 figures.

Signing Grange came at a cost: the collegiate elite (coaches and athletic directors) were upset that a college player of Grange's stature accepted to play professional football. On the other hand, Grange's addition to the professional football landscape changed the NFL's fortunes. Larger crowds began attending games, and outcomes of games were posted on the front pages of newspapers.

11/26: **Bears tied Chicago Cardinals 0-0.** Playing on Thanksgiving Day, NFL's largest crowd to date (approx. 36,000-40,000) came to see Grange's 1<sup>st</sup> game. Tickets for the game required a 2<sup>nd</sup> printing. Grange rushed 13 times for 40 yards, but his 0-6 passing included throwing an interception. Grange intercepted a pass while playing defense.

Bears/Grange's two tours included...

**Defeating** a St. Louis semi-pro team 39-6. Approximately 8,000 attended.

Grange scored 4 TDs but suffered an arm injury. Injury got progressively worse during the tour.

**Defeating the** Frankfort Yellowjackets 14-7 in the rain. Large crowd (36,000) saw Grange score twice, both from 1-yard out.

**Defeating the** New York Giants 19-7. Bears led 12-7 at half. Club had no time to wash uniforms prior to the game. Contest was sold out early. At least 100 reporters and 73,000 fans attended with another 20,000 looking down from nearby Coogan's Bluff. Thousands more were turned away.

The Bears' Dutch Sternaman scored two 1<sup>st</sup> half TDs. For his part, Grange rushed 11 times for 53 yards and returned an interception 35 yards for a score.

Outcome: The game was a windfall for the financially-hurting Giants. Bears took in \$56,000; Grange and his agent received \$69,000.

New York Yankees OF **Babe Ruth** greeted Grange during his stay.

**Defeating** Providence/Boston 9-6 away. Opponents included the famed Notre Dame Four Horsemen. Grange rushed for only 18 yards.

**Losing** to the NY Giants 9-0 at home. 18,000 turned out to see Grange-less Bears. Several thousand fans received refunds.

**Defeating** a Jacksonville club 19-6 that included Stanford All-American **Ernie Nevers**.

**Defeating** New Orleans 14-0. Grange rushed 14 times for 136 yards.

**Defeating** a Portland club 60-3; Grange scored 2 TDs.

**Streaks:** NYG won 7 in a row.

- New York City finally had an NFL franchise – **NY Giants**. Owner Mara paid \$500 for the entry.
- First season for **Providence** (Rhode Island) **Steamrollers**. Club played their games in a Cyclodrome (a bike track).
- **Pottsville** (PA) **Maroons** (1925-28) first season was a controversial one: league president Carr repeatedly warned the Maroons and threatened their expulsion if they played an unauthorized game in Philadelphia's Shibe Park (another team's territory).

The December 12<sup>th</sup> game in question pitted the Maroons against a Notre Dame alumni squad that featured the famed Four Horsemen. Pottsville violated NFL rules by scheduling a game in **Frankfort Yellowjackets** territory. Outcome was double-edged. The win over strong college team spelled doom for perceived collegiate superiority. Maroons were also fined \$500.

Meanwhile, **Chicago Cardinals** scheduled 2 exhibition games, winning both. Carr awarded the championship to Chicago despite Pottsville's vehement protests. Pottsville continued to contend the decision for decades long after the team folded. They claimed that there were no written rules where games could be played. The expulsion was a brief one: the NFL reinstated Pottsville prior to the 1927 season.

In 2003, NFL office re-investigated Carr's decision – but voted 30-2 to not re-open the case. The city instead received "Pioneer Award" from the NFL.

- Former Notre Dame Horseman **Harry Stuhldreher** was labeled an "outlaw" player for jumping his contract with NFL's Providence Steamrollers to play for the independent Hartford Blues.
- **Milwaukee Badgers** were fined \$500 and given 90 days to liquidate assets for using 4 high-school players in game vs. **Chicago Cardinals**. Owner Art Foltz was banned from league for doing the recruiting. Cards were also fined \$500 and given 1-year probation. Badgers struggled on both sides of the ball: team was out-scored 191-7. Club folded after 1925 season.
- **Rochester & Rock Island** also folded after the season. While Rochester went 0-21-2 in 4 NFL seasons, Rock Island had only 1 losing season in 5 years.

# NFL 1926

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## Standings:

|                               |        |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Frankfort                     | 14-1-2 |
| Chicago Bears                 | 12-1-3 |
| Pottsville                    | 10-2-2 |
| Kansas City                   | 8-3-0  |
| Green Bay                     | 7-3-3  |
| <b>Los Angeles Buccaneers</b> | 6-3-1  |
| New York Giants               | 8-4-1  |
| Duluth Eskimos                | 6-5-1  |
| Buffalo                       | 4-4-2  |
|                               |        |
| Chicago Cardinals             | 5-6-1  |
| Providence                    | 5-7-1  |
| Detroit                       | 4-6-2  |
| <b>Hartford Blues</b>         | 3-7-0  |
| <b>Brooklyn Dodgers</b>       | 3-8-0  |
| Milwaukee                     | 2-7-0  |
| Dayton                        | 1-4-1  |

## League:

RULE: As a result of Bears signing **Red Grange**, NFL **Commissioner Carr** pushed legislation to prohibit pro teams from signing a ball player prior to his college graduation. Teams that did so were either fined \$1000, loss of franchise, or both. Issue surfaced again in 1929 between the Bears and Packers.

- The fee to join NFL was raised to \$2,500.
- **Frankfort Yellowjackets'** 14 wins would not be matched by another NFL team until 1984. Club out-scored their opponents 236-49.
- **Chicago Bear's** home field, Cubs Park, was re-named **Wrigley Field**. Team also played at home games Normal Park and Soldier Field (11/11) while the Chicago Cub's season was still in progress.
- One of the few black stars of the era, T **Fred "Duke" Slater** signed on with Chicago Cardinals.
- **Hartford Blues** played their home games inside a bicycle arena (Velodrome).
- Following the 1926 season, NFL contracted to 10 fewer teams.
  - Four that dropped out included Kansas City, Detroit, Brooklyn, and Milwaukee.
  - **Cleveland** suspended play for 1 year. Club later acquired members of KC Cowboys.
  - **Louisville** was outscored 108-0. Team played out of Chicago as a road team. League used the club to fill the schedule.
  - **LA Buccaneers** were also a road team out of Chicago. Team included Rose Bowl hero Brick Muller.
  - **Rock Island Independents** jumped to the AFL. Team later sought re-instatement into NFL but was voted out.

- **American Football League's** 9 teams included NY Yankees, Philadelphia Quakers, Cleveland Panthers, Chicago Bulls, LA Wildcats (traveling team), Boston Bulldogs, Rhode Island Independents, Brooklyn Horsemen (2 of Notre Dame's 4 Horsemen: Harry Stuhldreher and Elmer Layden), and Newark Bears. **Red Grange** signed up with AFL's NY Yankees. Club played in venerable Yankee Stadium.  
**Outcome:** Quakers went 8-2, but only 4 AFL teams played a full schedule.  
Brooklyn's season ended after 4G, Newark & Cleveland stopped after 5G; Boston after 6G.  
AFL's LA Club folded after 2 months.  
AFL's Chicago Bulls played their home games at **Comiskey Park**, forcing NFL's Chicago Cardinals to play at smaller **Normal Park**, also located on city's south side.

**NFL Changes:** Bears added three future Hall of Famers: Paddy Driscoll, William "Link" Lyman, and HB/DB Bill Senn.  
Driscoll led league in scoring with 86 points (6 TDs, 12 FGs, and 14 PAT).

**Municipal Grant Park Stadium** (Soldier Field) opened. Stadium seated 100K.  
Site was early home to Notre Dame football.  
11/27: Stadium was renamed **Soldier Field**. More than 111,000 saw Army and Navy play to 21-21 tie.



# NFL 1927

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## Standings:

|                           |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| New York Giants           | 11-1-1 |
| Green Bay                 | 7-2-1  |
| Chicago Bears             | 9-3-2  |
| <b>Cleveland Bulldogs</b> | 8-4-1  |
| Providence                | 8-5-1  |
| <b>New York Yankees</b>   | 7-8-1  |
| Frankfort                 | 6-9-3  |
| Pottsville                | 5-8-0  |
| Chicago Cardinals         | 3-7-1  |
| Dayton                    | 1-6-1  |
| Duluth                    | 1-8-0  |
| Buffalo                   | 0-5-0  |

## League:

- **American Football League** folded.

## Changes:

Two teams were added: **NY Yankees** and the **Cleveland Bulldogs**.

**Twelve** dropped out, including Akron, Brooklyn (see below), Canton, Columbus, Detroit, Hammond, Hartford, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Louisville, Milwaukee and Racine.

Failing to join the NFL in 1926, Red Grange's agent, **CC Pyle**, acquired the defunct **Brooklyn Dodgers** and re-named them the **NY Yankees**. The NFL's Giants had enough political sway to force the Yankees to play as a road team for 2 years (Pyle's Yankees played only 4 games at the Polo Grounds). Grange, the Yankee's marquee player, suffered a leg injury vs. Bears on 10/16. Although playing hurt, Grange missed only 3 games

**Cleveland** returned after a 1-year absence, adding many of the former KC Cowboys to the squad.

- Powerhouse **New York Giants** shut out 11 of their 13 opponents – including 6 in a row. Club outscored their opponents 172-20. Defense held opponents scoreless in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of every game. Giants DB/TB **Jack McBride** led league in scoring with 57 points (6 TDs, 2 FG, and 15 PAT).
- Cleveland led in scoring (209 points); Buffalo was out-scored 123-8.
- **Duluth** signed Stanford's 1925 Rose Bowl star and Future Hall of Famer **Ernie Nevers** for \$50K. Owner **Ole Haugrud** bought the club for \$1 and changed name from Kelleys to **Eskimos**. Like the Bears the year before, Eskimos barnstormed the nation – playing 29 exhibition games in 4 ½ months (September 20 through February 5<sup>th</sup>). The front of the Eskimos' jerseys included a large **white igloo** on a black background. Primarily a traveling team, the club lasted until 1927. Nevers later played for the Chicago Cardinals and also pitched for St. Louis Browns of the American League.

- **Green Bay** included Hall of Fame T **Cal Hubbard**. Hubbard was later voted into baseball's Hall of Fame as an umpire.
- **Fritz Pollard**, college star and AAFC pioneer, formed **Chicago Brown Bombers**, an all-black team that barnstormed the nation through 1933.

**First Year:** Cleveland signed University of Michigan QB **Benny Friedman** (5'8," 172 lbs.; Hall of Fame 2005). Friedman's best years were with the NY Giants.

**League Championship:** NY Giants beat the Chicago Bears 14-7.

# NFL 1928

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## Standings:

|                           |        |
|---------------------------|--------|
| Providence                | 8-1-2  |
| Frankfort                 | 11-3-2 |
| <b>Detroit Wolverines</b> | 7-2-1  |
| Green Bay                 | 6-4-3  |
| Chicago Bears             | 7-5-1  |
|                           |        |
| New York Giants           | 4-7-2  |
| New York Yankees          | 4-8-1  |
| Pottsville                | 2-8-0  |
| Chicago Cardinals         | 1-5-0  |
| Dayton                    | 0-7-0  |

## League:

- NFL now down to 10 teams.
  - QB Benny Friedman and the **Cleveland Bulldogs** moved to Detroit, Michigan. NYG owner Tim Mara purchased the Wolverines to obtain QB Friedman.
  - **Duluth Eskimos** suspended operations for the 1928 season. Club was sold to New Jersey group and were renamed the Orange/Newark Tornadoes. Eskimos/Chicago Card star **Ernie Nevers** did not play in the NFL in 1928.
- With QB **Benny Friedman** now in the league, passing was more common – even on 1<sup>st</sup> down. Friedman led NFL in scoring (55 points). Detroit out-scored the opposition 189-76.
- **Providence's** lone NFL championship. Club was 4<sup>th</sup> in offense, but allowed league-low 42 points
  - **Dayton Triangles** were out-scored 131-9. The **Chicago Cardinals** were outscored 107-7.
- Packers **Verne Lewellen** led the league in TDs (9).
- Olympic hero **Jim Thorpe** played his final NFL games with the Chicago Cardinals.

# NFL 1929

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## Standings:

|                                 |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|
| Green Bay                       | 12-0-1 |
| New York Giants                 | 13-1-1 |
| Frankfort                       | 9-4-5  |
| Chicago Cardinals               | 6-6-1  |
| <b>Boston Bulldogs</b>          | 4-4-0  |
| <b>Orange/Newark Tornadoes</b>  | 3-4-4  |
| <b>Staten Island Stapletons</b> | 3-4-3  |
| Providence                      | 4-6-2  |
| Chicago Bears                   | 4-9-2  |
| Buffalo                         | 1-7-1  |
| <b>Minneapolis Red Jackets</b>  | 1-9-0  |
| Dayton                          | 0-6-0  |

## League:

### NFL expanded to 12 teams.

Newcomers included the **Orange/Newark Tornadoes** (formerly the Duluth Eskimos), **Minneapolis Red Jackets**, and the **Staten Island Stapletons**.

From 1929-1930 (covering 19 games), Red Jackets were outscored 350-75.

**Pottsville Maroons** moved and changed name to **Boston Bulldogs** and folded after the season.

**Dayton Triangles** disbanded after scoring only 7 points in 7 games.

Franchise moved to Brooklyn for 1930 season.

Final year for **Buffalo Bisons**. Next Buffalo franchise: the AFL's Bills in 1960.

- According to ESPN: NFL changed football's dimensions.
- A 4<sup>th</sup> official was added to the crew.
- **NYG owner Tim Mara** bought the Detroit Wolverines franchise in order to obtain his top prize: QB **Benny Friedman**. Friedman signed for \$10K/year. Fellow players received \$125/game. Giants led NFL in scoring (312 points). Average score of game was 21-6 win.
- **Chicago Cardinals** were bought by David Jones. Franchise added former Duluth star **Ernie Nevers**. Nevers also pitched for St. Louis Browns of MLB in 1928.
- **Green Bay Packers** outscored their opponents 198-22. Packers added Future Hall of Famers RB Johnny "Blood" McNally, T Cal Hubbard, and Mike Michalske.

11/3: **NY Giants** beat Chicago Bears 26-14. Giant's QB **Benny Friedman** threw 3 TD passes in a 10 minute span in 3<sup>rd</sup> Q.

11/6: **First night game**: Chicago Cards beat Providence 16-0 at Kingsley Park.

Floodlights were stationed 20' above field level. White footballs were also used.

11/17: **NY Giants** beat Chicago Bears 34-0. NYG QB **Benny Friedman** threw for 4 TD passes.

11/24: **Green Bay Packers** (9-0) faced the 8-1 **NY Giants**. Packers won 20-6.

11/28: **Chicago Cardinals** beat Chicago Bears **40-6**. Card RB **Ernie Nevers** scored all 40 points on 6 TDs and 4 PAT.

- **C George Trafton** boxed Chicago White Sox 1B Art "The Great" Shires.

Trafton won the bout in 5 rounds.

He later took a 1<sup>st</sup> round dive for future heavyweight boxing champ **Primo Carnera**.

**Streaks:** **NY Giants** won 8 in a row.

**Scoring:** Ernie Nevers, Chicago Cardinals: 12 TDs, 1 FG, 10 PAT 85 points

**QB:** Friedman threw 19 TD passes.

# NFL 1930

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## Standings:

|                            |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Green Bay                  | 10- 3-1 |
| New York Giants            | 13- 4-0 |
| Chicago Bears              | 9- 4-1  |
| <b>Brooklyn Dodgers</b>    | 7- 4-1  |
| Providence                 | 6- 4-1  |
|                            |         |
| Staten Island              | 5- 5-2  |
| Chicago Cardinals          | 5- 6-2  |
| <b>Portsmouth Spartans</b> | 5- 6-3  |
| Frankfort                  | 4-13-1  |
| Minneapolis                | 1- 7-1  |
| Newark                     | 1-10-1  |

## League:

- Squads were increased to 20 players.
- **Helmets** during decade were of hard-shell leather.  
Canvas **jerseys** were being replaced by those made of synthetics.
- From 1930-32, **goal posts** were moved back 10 yards.  
Result: Providence's Forrest "Frosty" Peters' 2 FGs led the league.
- **Dayton** Triangles moved to Brooklyn and became the **Dodgers** through 1944.  
In 1944, club changed name to **Tigers**. Franchise had just 4 winning seasons in 16 years.
- **Portsmouth Spartans** joined NFL through 1933. Later became the Detroit Lions.
- **Minneapolis** and **Newark** (formerly the Orange Tornadoes) dropped out after the 1930 season.
- **Chicago Bears** were fined \$1000 for signing current Notre Dame player, RB **Joe Savoldi**.  
Savoldi was dropped from ND squad for attempting to either annul his marriage or for getting married. Before signing with Chicago, Savoldi was about to sign with Packers – a violation of NFL rules. Three days after Packers stopped pursuing Savoldi, Bears signed him, claiming he was expelled. Halas believed that the NFL rule was not in effect. Savoldi played 3G and retired.

12/14: **NY Giants** defeated Notre Dame All Stars 22-0. Proceeds helped the unemployed citizens of NYC.  
Outcome helped generate more respect for professional football. Prevailing belief was that collegiate-level football was superior.

**Rookies:** FB/LB **Bronco Nagurski**, Chicago; QB/TB **Arnie Herber**, Green Bay.

**Streaks:** NYG won 8 in a row.

- **Steve Owen** began coaching NYG – 153-100 in 24 years.  
NYG played exhibition game vs. Knute Rockne's Notre Dame All Star squad that included the famous Four Horsemen. NYG won 22-0. Proceeds went to charity.

# NFL 1931

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## Standings:

|                 |         |
|-----------------|---------|
| Green Bay       | 12- 2-0 |
| Portsmouth      | 11- 3-0 |
| Chicago Bears   | 8- 5-0  |
| Chicago Cards   | 5- 4-0  |
| New York Giants | 7- 6-1  |
| Providence      | 4- 4-3  |
| Staten Island   | 4- 6-1  |
| Cleveland       | 2- 8-0  |
| Brooklyn        | 2-12-0  |
| Frankfort       | 1- 6-1  |

## League:

- **White footballs** were used for night games through early 1950s.
- **Uniform changes:** Helmets were made of hard leather. Still no face guard.  
Different size & length of cleats could be screwed into the bottom of the shoe.
- Use of the **box score** was becoming common.
- **College crowds** were still ahead of professional crowds by a ratio of 5-1.
- **Changes to the offense & defense:**
  - NY Giants' **Steve Owen** fine-tuned the **A-Formation**.
    - Center snapped the ball to a blocking back, QB or FB.
    - Backfield and used shifts: if right side was strong along the line, backfield was strong left.
  - Owen also helped devise defensive innovations – removing a man from the defensive line and added him to the linebacker unit – creating a **6-2-3 arrangement**.
  - Giants added future Hall of Famer C **Mel Hein** – 15 years, 172 consecutive games.
- **Only ten of 1926's 26 teams** were still operating. Chicago Bears were \$11,800 in debt.  
Three more franchises dropped out after season: Providence, Cleveland, and Frankfort.
  - **Cleveland Indians** were a road team awaiting for but never finding a backer.
  - **Frankfort Yellowjackets** disbanded after 8G. Club was outscored 99-13.  
Before dropping out, Frankfort had 5 winning seasons and 1 championship in short NFL stay.

10/25: **Frankfort** beat Chicago Bears 13-12 – lone win of the season for the Yellowjackets.

12/6: **Chicago Bears** beat Green Gay 7-6, intercepting 6 passes.

- Third straight season **Green Bay** began 7-0.
- Through 1939 season, Chicago Bears shared **Wrigley Field** with the Chicago Cardinals.

- NFL President Carr fined the Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers, and Portsmouth Spartans \$1000 each for adding undergraduate college players to rosters.
- Former Chicago Bears' coach, **Hunk Anderson**, replaced the late **Knute Rockne** at Notre Dame.
- **Al Nesser**, the last of the 6 Nesser brothers who played in the NFL, retired at end of season. Al was the youngest son of Ted, who also played in the NFL.

**First Year:** RB Swede Hanson (Brooklyn), C Mel Hein (NY Giants)



# NFL 1932

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## Standings:

|                        |        |
|------------------------|--------|
| Chicago Bears          | 7-1-6  |
| Green Bay              | 10-3-1 |
| Portsmouth             | 6-2-4  |
| <b>Boston Redskins</b> | 4-4-2  |
| New York Giants        | 4-6-2  |
| Brooklyn               | 3-9-0  |
| Chicago Cardinals      | 2-6-2  |
| Staten Island          | 2-7-3  |

## League:

- NFL pared down to 8 teams.
- League began to assemble game and season statistics.  
From 1932-37, **NFL Passing Leaders** were determined by their total yards passing.
- Squads could be increased to 22 players.
- **Chicago Bears' defense** produced 8 shutouts and allowed record low 44 points (**NFL record** 6 TDs overall, including **record** low 3 TDs rushing). No opponent kicked a successful FG. Bears scored 0 points in 1<sup>st</sup> 4 games (0-1-3).
- **Boston Braves** played their games at venerable Fenway Park.  
Team was taken over by **George Preston Marshall** at end of season.  
Marshall eventually moved franchise to Washington and changed the team's name to Redskins in 1936.
- **Charles Bidwell** purchased Chicago Cards; Bidwell had earlier interest in purchasing Bears.  
Chicago Cards included **Joe Lillard** (Oregon). Friction between Lillard, an African American, and Coach Jack Chevigny deepened. Lillard was seen as not putting forth his best effort and missed practices.

10/30: **Boston tied Chicago Bears 7-7**. Redskins' **RB Cliff Battles** rushed for 144 yards.

**Rookie Class:** Ace Gutowsky (Portsmouth) and Clark Hinkle (Green Bay), Cliff Battles (Boston), T Turk Edwards (WA), and Bill Hewitt.

Hewitt was one of the few allowed to play without a helmet before retiring.

|                   |                               |            |            |      |       |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------|------------|------|-------|
| <b>Rushing:</b>   | Cliff Battles                 | Boston     | 148/576    | 3.9  | 3 TD  |
|                   | Bob Campiglio                 | Stapletons | 104/501    | 4.3  | 2 TDs |
| <b>Passing:</b>   | Arnie Herber                  | Green Bay  | 37-101/639 | 9/9  |       |
| <b>Receiving:</b> | Ray Flaherty                  | NYG        | 21/350     | 16.7 | 5 TD  |
|                   | Luke Johnsos                  | Bears      | 19/321     | 16.9 | 2 TDs |
|                   | (5 <sup>th</sup> ) Red Grange | Bears      | 11/168     | 15.3 | 4 TDs |

**Scoring:** Dutch Clark Portsmouth 55 points (6 TDs, 3 FG, 10 PAT)

**12/18: Championship Game: Bears beat Portsmouth 9-0.** Chicago's temperature was close to zero all week and the city was buried in 6-9 " of snow. Bears previously played exhibition game against the Chicago Cardinals at Chicago Stadium two years earlier. **Dutch Clark**, Portsmouth Spartans' coach and star HB/K did not suit up due to his commitment as basketball coach at Colorado College. Approximately 11,000-12,000 attended.

**Field:** 45 yards wide (instead of 53 1/3) by 80 yards long (current Arena League size), and only 1 goal post was used. Surface also carried peculiar odor that remained from a circus that had left a week earlier. Sod was used.

No FGs were permitted and each team was to kick off from 10 yard line. A short wall replaced the out-of-bounds area; plays that ended at the wall required referees to bring the ball to a hash-mark located 10 yards from the sideline. The team on offense benefited by not having to waste a down to obtain operating room. The single goal post for the game was placed flush with the goal line.

Bears scored in the 4<sup>th</sup> Q on Bronco Nagurski's "illegal" 8-yard TD pass to Red Grange. Portsmouth charged that Nagurski was too close to the line of scrimmage to pass the ball. The rule at the time: The passer had to be at least 5 yards behind the line of scrimmage before throwing the ball. Bears later added a safety.