

PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

Among the many historical distinctions that are a part of the heritage of southwestern Pennsylvania is that of being the birthplace of professional football, and we're in that season, so here's the story. The rivalries in the Jeannette-Greensburg-Latrobe area in the 1890's produced the sport which now brings together 100,000 rabid fans to a Super Bowl Game. Most historians credit the late Dr. John Brallier, the Latrobe dentist, with being the first play-for-pay star; others name Lawton Fiscus, the "Samson of Princeton"--who played for Greensburg for cash. Brallier was a 16-year old quarterback for Indiana Normal School in 1895, when the YMCA-sponsored Latrobe team found itself facing bitter rival Jeannette without a quarterback.

Brallier was induced by ten dollars and expenses. He had a key role in Latrobe's 12-0 win on that Saturday, August 31, 1895. He played professionally often, before competing for Washington and Jefferson and West Virginia in later years as an amateur college star. Fiscus, the Princeton back, was brought to Greensburg two years earlier in 1893, and paid \$20 a game and expenses. His flowing mustache and long hair was a varsity status symbol of college teams in those days--and it earned him the nickname "Samson".

Although Fiscus preceded Brallier, his arrangement was verbal--

Brallier actually signed a formal written contract as a pro. On one occasion Princeton's "Doggie" Trenchard, later coach at West Virginia, signed to play with Latrobe, and Greensburg actually kidnapped the shaggy-haired "Doggie". He played for \$75 a game. Because the players got profits as their pay, one Greensburg player tore down a building overlooking the field so that spectators couldn't stand on the roof to see the game. A near-riot occurred on November 5, 1900 when Latrobe quarterback Kennedy tackled Seneca, the Carlisle Indian All-American, imported by Greensburg, and the two exchanged blows. Twenty policemen were called out. On another occasion, Greensburg refused to hand over the game ball after a Latrobe win, and that brought on a branigan. And get this--Greensburg's first all pro-backfield was the entire Lafayette College backfield! That in the days when they took away Jim Thorpe's Olympic medals for professionalism! The professional footballers drifted away to other places, particularly the Canton-Massillon, Ohio area where the Pro Football Hall of Fame now exists. It rightfully belongs to Latrobe, Pennsylvania--or Franklin, Pennsylvania, which won the first Super-Bowl game of football at Madison Square Garden.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.