

The Early Years

Massillon's Tradition Rooted in Pro Tigers Success

Football tradition is woven into the very fabric of life in Massillon, Ohio.

ships line both sides of the street all the way through town.

Everywhere you look downtown you see signs—and plenty of them—proclaiming the Massillon Tigers. Storefront display windows contain elaborate football motifs and a painted banner stretches across the town's main thoroughfare encouraging the Tigers. Orange and black flags that proudly inform visitors of Massillon's 22 state champion-



J. J. Wise was a founding father of the Pro Tigers.

Massillon's football tradition goes back so far that even today's most ardent Tiger fans don't realize just how deeply-rooted the tradition is.

The tradition *didn't* start with Paul Brown, the town's favorite son, whose coaching legend at Ohio State, with the Cleveland Browns, and with the Cincinnati Bengals

A CENTURY OF HEROES

make him, arguably, the greatest football coach of all time.

Sportswriters were already heralding the *Massillon Tradition* when Brown moved to town in 1916. Brown was a childhood fan of the Pro Tigers, and many of the semi-pro teams that flourished in the area.

The founding fathers of the 1903-07 Pro Tigers were J. J. Wise, E. J. "Doc" Stewart and J. W. McClymonds.

Yet in Massillon, where anyone in town can regale you with stories about Massillon teams from yesterday and today, you would be hard pressed to

find anyone who has heard of Massillon football's founding fathers.

Wise was well respected in Massillon at the turn of the century. He organized a group of 35 local busi-



This 1906 cartoon shows the Massillon Tiger guarding his "bones," symbolizing the professional football championships of 1903-05.

nessmen who met in the Hotel Sailer in downtown Massillon, most likely at the behest of McClymonds. McClymonds was the head

A CENTURY OF HEROES

of Russell and Co. and one of Massillon's wealthiest and most influential individuals. His residence remains a local landmark today, serving as the site of the Massillon Women's Club on Historic 4th Street.

The Hotel Sailer meeting, on September 3, 1903, laid the groundwork for the Massillon football tradition. Prior to that meeting, Massillon's only football win was a dubious 30-0 victory by the high school team over the Massillon Business College in 1899.

Worst of all, the high school team was 0-5 lifetime against Canton Central. These flag-

ging football fortunes are believed to have led to the Hotel Sailer meeting.

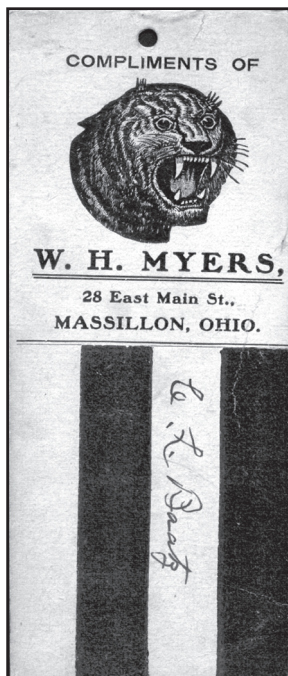
The meeting led to the formation of the original Massillon Tigers.

Legend has it that Massillon became the Tigers because a local sporting goods store had matching jerseys with stripes. The founding fathers bought up the striped jerseys and named the team the Massillon Tigers.

McClymonds was the chief money man, Wise the financial wizard,

and the team's manager.

Stewart was the coach and



This small tablet served as a program for the 1905 Pro Tigers.

A CENTURY OF HEROES

quarterback. Stewart was also editor of the Massillon newspaper, *The Morning Gleaner*. Stewart's presence ensured the team would have comprehensive media coverage.

Little did anyone know that the seed that sprouted from the Hotel Sailer meeting would still be flourishing in Massillon—and across the USA—over 100 years later.

The original Pro Tigers were comprised of mostly local talent who played for the love of football.

The Pro Tigers were 41-2-1 through their first five seasons, winning the champion-

ship each year. They never lost a home game. In 1904 they beat Marion, 148-0.

Legendary sportswriter Luther Emery, who started covering Massillon's high school team in 1923, had many first-hand accounts of the Pro Tigers.

“The Pro Tigers in 1903 got quite a rivalry going with Canton and had pretty good backing,” Emery said. “In 1905 it became very hot, the rivalry between the two teams. They say some people

would mortgage their homes on the outcome of the games. I don't know about that. My dad saw the game in 1905. I

MASSILLON TIGERS.	
T I G E R S	Wise (Mgr.)
	Wittmann. RE (Capt.)
	Stewart. QB (Coach)
	Schrontz LE
	McNulty LT
	Kerchoffe LG
	McFarland LG
	Shiring C
	Haag C
	Botoner RG
	Lang RT
	T. Nesser LT
	Merriam RE
	McChesney. RE & RT
	Hayden QB
	Bast QB
Riley LHB	
Matthews LHB	
Moran FB	
Salmon FB	
Miller FB	
J. Nesser RHB	
Featheringham. RHB	
Clapper FB	

Roster from 1905 tablet program.

A CENTURY OF HEROES

have a program of it. It was like a little penny tablet. It had the pictures of the players in it.

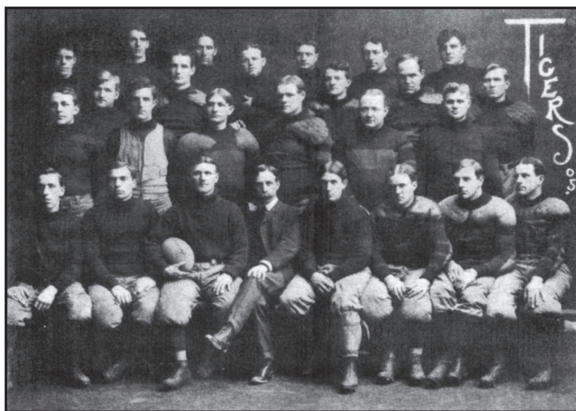
“Irv Whitman, the son-in-law of Jakey (J. J.) Wise told me this story,” Emery said. “The story is this: Willie Heston—the University of Michigan star—Massillon thought they had him signed up. But Canton had him signed up.

So Mr. McClymonds brought Mr. Wise in and asked, ‘Who do you need to beat Canton?’ Wise said, ‘Well, I think Red Salmon of Notre Dame.’

“McClymonds asked, ‘Where is he?’ Wise told him that Salmon was working as

an engineer on the Holland Tunnel in New York. ‘Well, go get him,’ replied McClymonds.

“So Wise went to New York. He came back with-



The 1905 Pro Tigers were the best of Massillon's champion professional teams.

out Salmon,” Emery said. “McClymonds was at the railroad station with his best rig, horse and carriage. ‘Where’s Salmon?’ McClymonds asked. ‘He wanted too much money,’ Wise said. ‘Did I mention money?’ McClymonds asked. ‘No,

A CENTURY OF HEROES

you didn't,' Wise answered. 'Get on the next train to New York and sign him up for whatever he wants,' McClymonds said. So he did. They paid him \$900 to play in the game. Red Salmon didn't come until after he saw the Tigers when they were playing in Cleveland to see what kind of football they were playing. He came to Massillon and they won the game, 14-4. They played on a field in front of the state hospital.

ing plants would blow in triumph. So the headline of the Massillon paper the next day was 'The Whistles Were Not Blown.'"



Canton's professional team, represented by a gladiator, and Massillon's by a tiger.

"Canton came over to Massillon with an ambulance carrying a Tiger on it, and they returned on the back roads," Emery chuckled. "In Canton, when they won the game, all the whistles in the manufactur-

After a seven year hiatus, the Pro Tigers returned in 1915. Emery was also familiar with the second generation of the Pro Tigers.

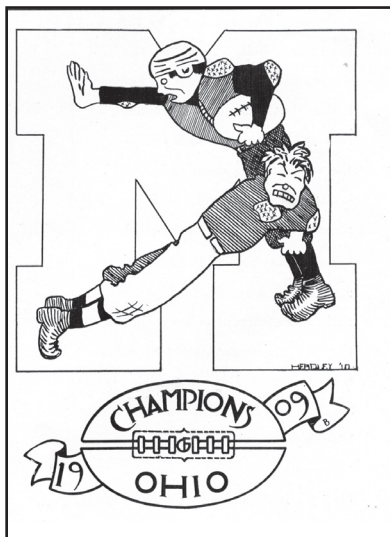
From 1915-17 the profession-

A CENTURY OF HEROES

al game saw Knute Rockne leading Massillon against Jim Thorpe and his Canton teammates. The Tigers were 17-6-2 overall and 2-3-1 against Canton during that stretch.

“They used to come in here Friday night or Saturday morning without their team intact,” Emery said. “They usually only practiced Saturday night, maybe in the high school gymnasium or Sunday morning on one of the practice fields. I saw them practice on the Agathon field. The high school team moved from

the Meadows field to the Agathon field when the Pro Tigers moved.”



In 1909 it was the high school team that was making all the noise. It was the first of Massillon's 23 undefeated high school seasons.

D u c k y Schroeder played high school football for Massillon in 1923. He was also an assistant coach from 1948-1970. He had a good feel for why Massillon football has stood the test of time.

“I think it's tradition,” Schroeder said. “It started with

the old Massillon Pro Tigers. Then the fans transferred their loyalty to the Massillon high school football

A CENTURY OF HEROES



The original Massillon Maroons of 1917. The Maroons were probably Massillon's most famous semi-pro team. Relatives of many of these players still reside in Massillon. Front row, Russ Hall, Chet Featheringham, Poss Kannel, Louie Seimetz, Maury Griffith, Hap North, Tink Ulrich. Center row, Jim Graybill, Emmit Graybill, Walt Liebermann, Heck Silverthorn, Bow Liebermann, Bob Featheringham. Back row, Joe Graybill, Walt Hamilton, Vern Giltz, Leo Baus.

team. There seems to be a special breed of people here in Massillon who take a deep interest in their schools and their activities, and they want to be winners. From way back, I've always felt that way. The Massillon people, lots of times, were not satisfied. But they're really a high class of people. They give their kids lots of support. Make good in every-

thing they do. I don't know if that causes a good football team or if that's a result of a good football team. I think it's the fact that the community backs the football program. It's more of a community effort than it is in any other town, possibly. That's the reason Massillon High School's become famous across the United States."