

# Story of the Decade 2000s

## **Penalty-filled Playoff Loss Leads to Near-Riotous Scene, Arrests, at Tiger Stadium**

It seemed like every successful play was penalized. Massillon was flagged 15 times in their first-round playoff game in 2000 after winning a court decision over the Ohio High School Athletic Association. With each successive flag the Massillon fan base seethed, suspecting a fix was in against their team.

The final dagger was a holding penalty on a 53-yard touchdown run by All-American quarterback Justin Zwick with four seconds left in the game. The flag, thrown some 20 yards behind the play, sealed the Tigers loss to Marion Harding, 17-13.

The loss set off a surreal scene at Paul Brown Tiger Stadium that saw fans hurling plastic bottles from the stands. Five people were arrested when fans rushed the field. One irate fan accosted an official.

“I heard rumors that it was Clair’s way—because we were in the middle of the Jessie Scott recruiting thing—this was Clair’s way of making a statement,” said Superintendent of Schools Al Hennon, referring to the officiating during the game. “I don’t know if one guy has that much power.”

Clair Muscaro was the commissioner of the OHSAA when Massillon was being

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investigated after neighboring Perry High School accused them of recruiting running back Scott. Muscaro's power as commissioner made him essentially the judge and jury when it came to interpreting the rules and handing down punishment to member schools.

H e n n o n was a central figure in the drama brought about by the ensuing legal battle that Massillon brought against the OHSAA.

The "statement" Hennon suggested Muscaro was making involved what many Massillon fans felt was an intentional effort to eliminate the Tigers from the playoffs.

"I know that there were a lot of negative feelings across the state toward us," Hennon said. "They must have thought we were going to lay down on the Jessie Scott thing and not fight. They were wrong. I remember it getting back to me that one

of the board of control members from northeast Ohio called us a rogue district. A guy named Schumacher. So I knew the negative

feelings were out there. Human nature is human nature. There might have been a guy or two on that officiating crew that would have taken the opportunity, if the call was close, it was going to go against us. It was a very difficult time in our athletic life

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here. It was a tough game to watch. I was standing with Justin's father, Bill Zwick, when the flag comes in behind Zwick's touchdown run. We were standing where Justin passed us and we saw the referee come and pull out the flag. Justin was already crossing the goal line by the time the flag landed on the ground. That is just a call you don't make.

"People could have had a burr for us, or the officials could have been incompetent," Hennon speculated.

"You never want to endorse or condone fan violence. But that is one night where you can almost understand

it," said Joe Shaheen, sports editor of Massillon newspaper, *The Independent*. It was clear to me that the officials were out to get Massillon that night. I've never seen anything like it. There were nine holding penalties. I've never seen anything like it

in my life. And the final straw was Zwick's scramble at the end of the game. That kind of made me ashamed to be covering high school football. It

was clear that the officials or *an official* had an agenda that night, and they were not going to let Massillon win that football game. That might have been, in my mind, Justin Zwick's finest moment. He wasn't gonna let 'em lose that game and the officials

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