

CHAPTER ONE



BUCKEYE REFLECTIONS

LEGENDARY MOMENTS FROM
OHIO STATE FOOTBALL



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CHAPTER ONE

1890-1912

The Early Going

Today's rich and splendid tradition of Ohio State football stands in dramatic contrast with its humble beginning. While Ohio Stadium crowds of 108,000 fans and millions of national television spectators now scrutinize all aspects of the Buckeyes, early games were played before small, casual groups who were learning about this new sport of "foot ball."

What we know and love as football today most likely traces its roots to the ancient Roman game of "harpastum," a raucous, mob-like, exhausting contest where two teams competed to keep a small ball on their own half of a field by any means possible. Points were awarded when a team succeeded in throwing, running or kicking the ball past a line on the field of play.

While the game is mentioned in some ancient literature, there is very little information about the game's structure, strategy or rules — although it appears that the game resembled rugby. Similar mob-like games emerged in China in the third century, as well as other countries including Australia, Japan, Italy, Ireland and England as late as the 12th century. However, the games were considered violent and dangerous, and were banned in Europe for hundreds of years.

In the early 1800s, some schools in England were developing similar team games that involved kicking and running balls toward opposing goal lines. From school to school, the games differed slightly with variations in rules and structure, and eventually two distinct sports emerged: rugby and association football (soccer). The two sports crossed the Atlantic and a rugby-like game caught on in American colleges.

Sports historians generally agree that Nov. 6, 1869, is the birth date of football in the United States when Rutgers and Princeton, two East Coast universities, met for the first intercollegiate football game. In those early games, there were 25 players to a team and the sport still more closely resembled rugby than modern football. The scoring standard was simple: kick the ball through a set of upright goal posts that were 25 feet apart to get one point.

The Ohio State University, originally titled The Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, opened on September 17, 1873. Baseball, already a popular sport in the United States, was the first recreational sport at the school, and many

intramural baseball games were played in the late-1870s and 1880s. In 1878, the school officially was renamed The Ohio State University.

Unorganized football was played by male students in the 1880s. These “jolly games” were played with homemade footballs in the early evenings on a large athletic field near the old North Dorm on the west side of Neil Avenue near Eleventh Avenue, directly across from where Oxley Hall and Mack Hall now stand. By this time, in New England, the rules of the game were solidified and standardized, largely due to the efforts of a Yale football player named Walter Camp.

Camp was influential in establishing such norms as the line of scrimmage, the snap of the ball from center to quarterback, scoring standards (which emphasized kicking over running or passing), and the number of players per side (11). A kicked goal was worth four points, a touchdown four, and a safety two.

Players wore no protective gear, and the game still resembled rugby with a scrum-like group huddle formation pushing against the opposing team on each play. Forward passing wasn’t part of the game, but drop-kicking was a frequent strategy of game play. However, these rules and standards developed in New England had not yet made their way to Columbus, so the early games were very unstructured.

After several years of this informal play, Ohio State student George N. Cole, class of 1891, helped organize Ohio State’s first official football team. Cole purchased a rules book and a “real football” from the Spalding Athletic Supply Company, and arranged for his friend Alexander S. Lilley to coach the team. Lilley lived on East Main Street in Columbus and rode an Indian pony to campus for practices. The students did not realize a football was oblong in shape, having played with a more spherical rugby-like ball, and there was some concern that it had been shipped in error.

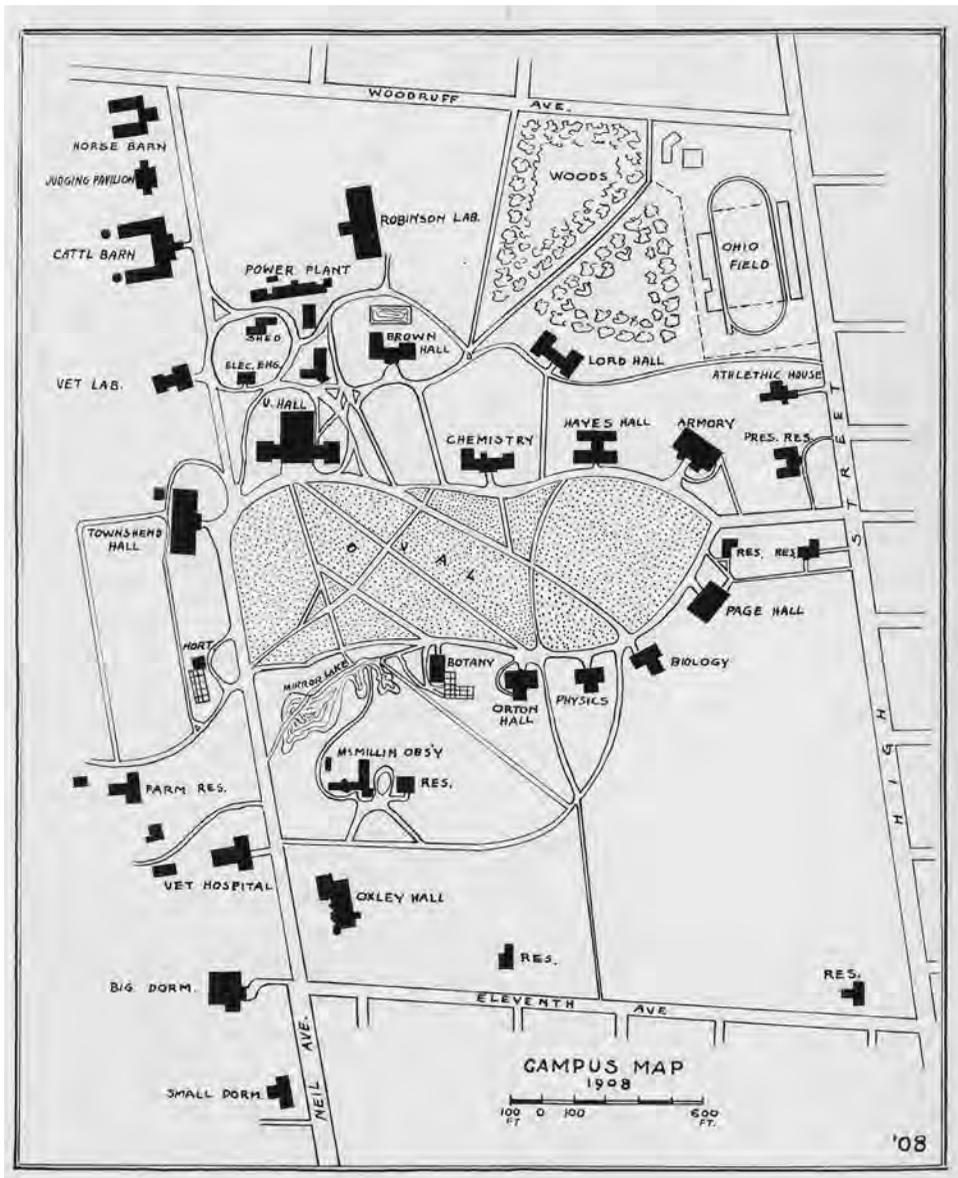
Ohio State’s first game was a 20-14 victory at Ohio Wesleyan University in



Informal baseball and football games were played during the early years near the old North Dorm. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

Delaware on Saturday, May 3, 1890. Quarterback Joseph Large scored OSU's first touchdown. The Buckeyes played three more games in November, losing all three — 0-64 at home to Wooster, 0-14 at Denison, and 10-18 at home to Kenyon on Thanksgiving Day.

By the close of the 1800s, football had spread rapidly to colleges in the United States, and some 250 sported teams. It is interesting to note that while football caught on as a favorite activity, many school administrators were opposed to the sport. The game was still rough, despite regulations and refereeing, and universities were not in favor of something that so distracted students from their academics.



Ohio State Campus. 1908 Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives

In the book *“The American College and University: A History,”* author Frederick Rudolph writes, “... administrators initially were not eager, generally speaking, to embrace such contests that they viewed as inappropriate distractions from serious scholarly work.” Indicative of the administrative outrage at such elaborate contests was the telegram sent by President Andrew White of Cornell University to officials at the University of Michigan in 1873, when he learned that student teams from the two institutions were planning to meet in Cleveland for a football game: “I will not permit 30 men to travel four hundred miles merely to agitate a bag of wind.” So, many school programs in these early years were led by students and alumni, often without support, control or involvement by the school administration.

Ohio State played home games during the early years in several locations including Recreation Park at the intersection of South High and Whittier Streets, Goodale Park on West Goodale Street, and on campus at the aforementioned North Athletic Field.

In 1898, a new 500-seat capacity playing field was developed at the southwest corner of North High Street and Woodruff Avenue. Unofficially called both University Field and Ohio Field, it was the first on-campus home to both football and track events. It was officially named Ohio Field in 1908. The seating capacity was periodically increased, and in 1910 it could hold 14,000 fans. The enrollment was steadily increasing, and by 1912 the student population was nearly 4,000. The campus itself was blossoming as more than three dozen buildings dotted the landscape.



Ohio State fielded its first football team in 1890. At left is coach Alexander S. Lilley. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

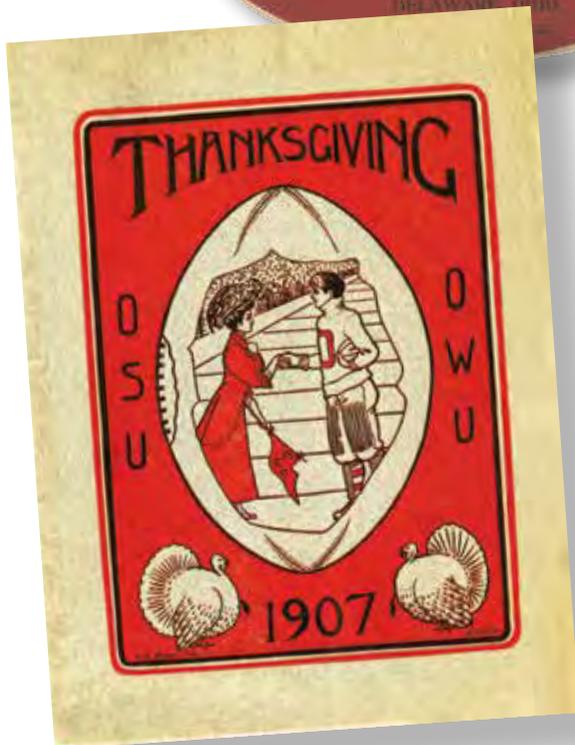
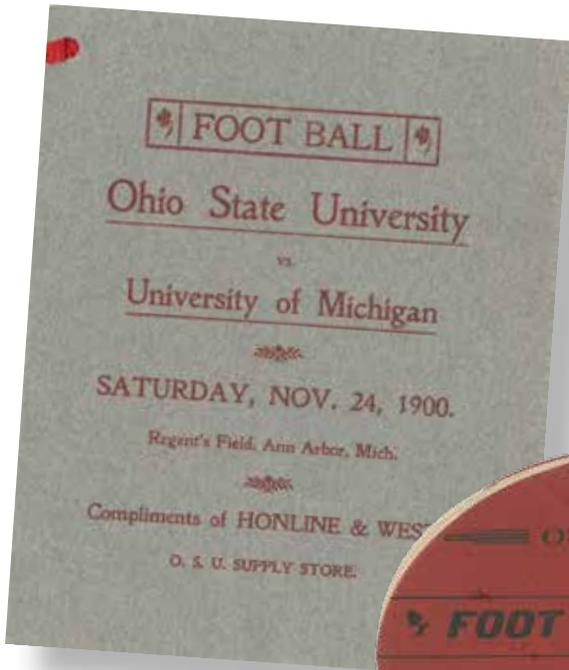


Ohio State defeated Denison 8-4 in 1891 at Recreation Park, near the corner of South High and Whittier Streets in Columbus. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

The Buckeyes' 23-year record from 1890 through 1912 was 126-72-17 (62.6%). During this period, Ohio State had 11 different head coaches, with five staying just one season. For 22 of those 23 years, the last game of the season was on Thanksgiving Day, with Kenyon College being the opponent 12 times. All of those final games of the season were played in Columbus except for an 11-6 victory at Cincinnati on Thanksgiving of 1911.



Michigan defeated Ohio State 21-0 in 1901 at University Field. Basketball games were played at the old Armory, shown in the background. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*



First School Colors

The Ohio State University library website includes a wonderful story of how scarlet and gray were chosen as the Ohio State colors. But some of the intersecting stories from other colleges make the Ohio State story even more interesting.

In 1866, a Princeton freshman named George Ward noticed that other schools had an identifying color scheme, but Princeton did not. He and some classmates wanted a way of distinguishing themselves from other schools. Princeton's oldest building is Nassau Hall, named to honor King William III of the House of Nassau. William III was also called The Prince of Orange, so Ward suggested orange as the school color.

It took more than a year before the rest of the student body embraced the idea, and in 1867 the Princeton baseball team sported badges of orange ribbon printed with black ink. This was the first time the orange and black color combination was used by the school in an athletic contest. Princeton officially adopted the colors in 1868.

In 1869, Rutgers wanted to use orange as its school color for a similar reason as Princeton. Rutgers University was established by the Dutch Reformed church, which has history that is traced to the same William III of the House of Nassau/Orange. However, students suggested scarlet because, in their opinion, it was a more striking color. Probably more importantly, red ribbon and fabric were easier to obtain than orange. Interestingly, the first intercollegiate football game was played between Rutgers and Princeton on Nov. 6, 1869. Rutgers wore scarlet turbans and scarfs. It is assumed that Princeton wore its orange and black colors.

Fast forward a few years to Columbus, Ohio, where school colors were a topic of conversation at Ohio State. In 1878, 12 years before Ohio State fielded its first football team, a committee of three students put considerable effort into color selection. They went to a dry-goods store and from the array of colorful ribbons, chose orange and black as the school colors because they looked good together.

GREAT GAME REMEMBERED

Ohio State 26 - Kenyon 10 November 24, 1892 - Columbus, Ohio

A Thanksgiving Day gathering of 1,200 cheered the Buckeyes to their first victory over Kenyon, after losing to the Lords during their first two seasons of football. The Buckeyes used the "Ryder wedge" formation to successfully gain yardage throughout the game. Ohio State finished with a record of 5-3 to garner its first winning season.

The game was scheduled for Thanksgiving morning, but the Kenyon team chose to attend a Wednesday dance in Gambier rather than travel to Columbus that evening. The season-ending contest was postponed to the afternoon to accommodate the visitors, causing many disturbed Ohio State fans to adjust their Thanksgiving dinners.

However, they soon learned that Princeton had already chosen orange and black, so they instead chose scarlet and gray. An excerpt from the OSU library page reads: “Alice Townshend, one of the members on the committee, reported that the colors did not signify anything. Instead, the committee wanted to choose something that was a nice combination and had not been used by any other college.” Apparently they were unaware that Rutgers was unofficially using scarlet.

Regardless of the history of the color choices, it can't be denied that the combination of “scarlet and gray” elicits fierce loyalty and impassioned devotion from all dedicated Ohio State fans.

Ohio State and the Heisman Launch

Ohio State was defeated 40-0 at Oberlin on Oct. 15, 1892, in the season opener for both schools. Later that fall on November 7, Oberlin overwhelmed Ohio State 50-0 in Columbus. Oberlin was directed by John W. Heisman, 23, who was in his very first season as a college football coach. The Yeomen finished the 1892 season at 7-0, outscoring their opponents 262-30.

This was the very beginning of Heisman's highly successful 32-year coaching career at eight different colleges and universities, with a career record of 186-70-18 (71.2%). He became one of the game's greatest innovators, and the coveted Heisman Trophy is named in his honor.

Heisman was born at 2825 Bridge Avenue in Cleveland, Ohio on Oct. 23, 1869. He grew up in Titusville, Pa., where he played high school football and was salutatorian of his graduating class. Heisman played college football at both



Oberlin Coach John W. Heisman in 1892. *Courtesy Oberlin College Athletic Communications*

Brown University and the University of Pennsylvania. He died of pneumonia at age 66 in New York City on Oct. 3, 1936. Heisman and his wife, Edith, are buried in her hometown of Rhinelander, Wisc.

Oberlin's team trainer in 1892 was a pre-med student named Clarence Hemingway. He later earned his medical degree from Rush Medical College, established a medical practice in Oak Park, Ill., and became father to future author Earnest Hemingway.

Bush Boosts The Buckeyes

Samuel P. Bush, grandfather of President George H.W. Bush and great-grandfather of President George W. Bush, was an Ohio State volunteer assistant coach in 1892 under Coach Jack Ryder.

GREAT GAME REMEMBERED

Ohio State 6 - Oberlin 0 October 28, 1899 - Oberlin, Ohio

After losing its first six games to Oberlin and being outscored 200-10, Ohio State finally gained its first victory over the Yeomen. Delbert Sayers, left tackle and Buckeye captain, sprinted 25 yards for the game's only score after recovering an Oberlin fumble early in the first half. A special train carried 327 faithful Ohio State students to Oberlin to support their team. Heavy rain throughout the day forced the game to be played in a quagmire of mud.

It was the Buckeyes' third year of football, and their very first winning season with a record of 5-3.

The Bush family has always had a very strong sports tradition. In 1884, Samuel Bush graduated from Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J., where he played on one of the very first college football teams. After graduating from Stevens, Bush began working in the rail industry and was transferred to Columbus in 1891. He moved to Milwaukee in 1899, then returned to Columbus in 1901 to work at The Buckeye Malleable Iron & Coupler Company. In 1908, Bush became president of the company, which had been renamed Buckeye Steel Castings Company. He held that position until 1927.

Bush was a successful industrialist, civic leader, and avid sports enthusiast who had a tremendous impact not only on the nation's business environment, but on central Ohio cultural and athletic history. He organized the first amateur baseball league in Columbus, helped develop the Scioto Country Club golf course, was the first president of the Ohio Manufacturers Association, and co-founded the Columbus Academy.

Samuel P. Bush died in 1948 at age 84, and is buried at Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus.

Super Spy

In the fall of 1893, a newly enrolled Ohio State student practiced with the Buckeye football team just long enough to learn the plays, then disappeared. He was recognized a few weeks later as a member of the Kenyon College team when Ohio State played at Kenyon on Oct. 28. Kenyon romped over Ohio State, 42-6, handing the Buckeyes their biggest loss of the season. A month later, on Thanksgiving Day, Kenyon again defeated Ohio State by a score of 10-8. Years later, when reminiscing about the first game and the lopsided score, Ohio State quarterback Charles Wood recalled that "Kenyon just seemed to have all of our signals down pat."

That player was never identified. Ohio State finished the season with a 4-5 record. Perhaps it could have been 6-3 if this mystery man had stayed with Ohio State.

Football at the Fair

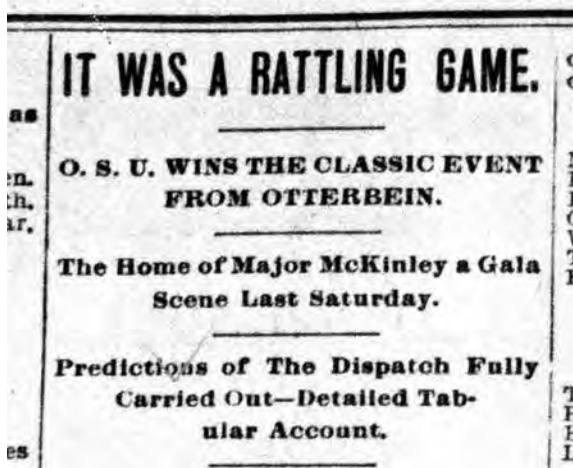
The Ohio State Board of Agriculture scheduled two Ohio State football games for the 1894 Ohio State Fair in Columbus. The major intention was to introduce football to those who were not familiar with the sport and had likely never attended a game.

Akron defeated Ohio State 12-6 on Saturday, Sept. 15, and Wittenberg defeated Ohio State 6-0 on Monday, Sept. 17.

Ohio State – Otterbein and the Presidency

The Ohio State-Otterbein game of Oct. 17, 1896, was played in Canton, Ohio, home of former Ohio Governor William McKinley who was running for President. The game was scheduled for 2:30 p.m., but was postponed until 3:45 p.m., when the train bringing many fans from Columbus was delayed. By mutual consent, the game was called because of darkness with six minutes remaining.

Bringing this game to Canton as part of his presidential effort might have been good luck for the famous “front porch” campaigner. Ohio State beat Otterbein 12-0, and McKinley defeated William Jennings Bryan by just under 600,000 votes for the Presidency.



Courtesy The Columbus Dispatch, Oct. 19, 1896

Whose Side Are You On?

Marietta College played at Ohio State on Oct. 22, 1898. It was Judge C. M. Showalter’s second season as Marietta coach and his first game against Ohio State.

As was typical in the early days of college football, the Marietta Pioneers’ traveling squad consisted of only 12 players — 11 starters and one substitute. Midway through the second half two Marietta players were injured and unable to continue play. With only one backup, and not wanting to forfeit the game, Showalter asked Ohio State Coach Jack Ryder if Marietta could “borrow” one of the Buckeyes’ players to finish the game.

Ryder somewhat reluctantly agreed, and signaled to his bench for a Buckeye substitute to join the Marietta squad. The player assigned to the Pioneers is believed to have been halfback Bob Hager. On his very first carry, Hager sprinted 67 yards around end for a Marietta touchdown. Ohio State (and probably everyone in attendance) was totally stunned! Marietta held on and secured its first victory over the Buckeyes in Columbus, 10-0.



Courtesy Tom Hayes

The following year, Ohio State piled up over 300 yards in a 28-0 win over Wittenberg. Hagar had another stupendous game with 153 yards on 28 carries. Thankfully, Mr. Hagar contributed them to his own team, Ohio State.

And Coach Ryder? He never again loaned a player to an opposing team!

First Come, First Serve

The Cincinnati Bearcats were scheduled to play Ohio State in Columbus on Saturday, Oct. 19, 1901. On Thursday, Oct. 17, just two days before the scheduled game, Cincinnati canceled and provided no reason for the abrupt decision.

Ohio State sprang into action to find another opponent. Telegrams were sent quickly to Denison, Heidelberg, Marietta, Mt. Union and Wooster, offering a game against the Buckeyes in Columbus to any school that might have an open date. Marietta accepted Ohio State's invitation and traveled to Columbus, where the Buckeyes defeated the Pioneers, 24-0.

Can you imagine this happening today? Football schedules are not only set years in advance, it's unthinkable that a school would cancel a game just two days before kickoff. Furthermore, the chances of scheduling a comparably-skilled and well-prepared opponent with two day's notice is beyond remote!



Courtesy The Columbus Dispatch, Oct. 18, 1901

Remembering John Sigrist

Ohio State defeated Western Reserve 6-5 in Columbus on Saturday, Oct. 26, 1901. It was the Buckeyes’ very first single-point victory. The triumph was greatly overshadowed by heartbreaking news: Center John Sigrist sustained severe neck injuries and died two days later at Grant Hospital. Sigrist is the only Ohio State player ever to die from a football injury.

The university canceled Tuesday’s classes and funeral services that morning were held in the chapel in University Hall. The entire football team attended, along with hundreds of students. Mourners formed two long lines down High Street as the casket was moved to Union Station for transport back to Sigrist’s hometown of Congress, a small village north of Wooster in Wayne County, where he was laid to rest. The Columbus Dispatch said of the funeral, “Gloom was heavy upon all.”

Ohio State President William Oxley Thompson canceled the following Saturday’s game against Ohio Wesleyan, and it was never re-scheduled. A segment of the students and faculty were in support of eliminating the sport because of its brutality, and the Ohio State Athletic Board allowed the players to decide if the sport should be continued.

On Wednesday, Oct. 29, the majority of the players endorsed the continuation of football, and no other games were canceled. Right tackle Charles Sigrist, brother of the deceased, spoke strongly in defense of continuing the sport. His support was a key factor in the team’s decision.

Never Again!

Ohio State’s 86-0 loss at Michigan on Oct. 25, 1902, is the highest margin of defeat in all of Ohio State football — and it could have been worse. Michigan scored 15 touchdowns when touchdowns counted five points. Using today’s scoring with touchdowns counting six points, the final score would have been

GREAT GAME REMEMBERED

Ohio State 20 - Ohio Wesleyan 9 October 31, 1908 - Columbus, Ohio

Halfback Leslie Wells scored three second-half touchdowns to pace the Buckeye victory. While many Ohio Wesleyan male students traveled to Columbus to support their Battling Bishops, female students were not permitted to attend the game. The Ohio Wesleyan faculty felt "it would not be proper" for co-eds to leave the Delaware campus.

Ohio Wesleyan was coached by Branch Rickey, who later would become President and General Manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Rickey would break Major League Baseball's color barrier in 1947 with the signing of Jackie Robinson to a Dodgers contract.

101-0. Because of the lopsided score, the game was simply stopped with 10 minutes remaining in the second half.

The 86 points represent the highest combined score in an Ohio State-Michigan game, even though one team did not score! The second highest total is 83 points in 2013, with Ohio State defeating Michigan, 42-41. The attendance at the 1902 game reached 6,000, including 2,000 Ohio State supporters. At the time, it was the largest crowd to attend a football game at Michigan's Ferry Field.

During this period, Michigan coach Fielding Yost cultivated an impressive team of skilled players who were nicknamed the "Point-A-Minute Teams." During the 1901 and 1902 seasons, Michigan was 22-0 while outscoring its opponents 1,194-12 — at five points a touchdown.

Refunds for All

College football rules in 1905 specified two 35-minute halves with a 10-minute halftime. The length of either or both halves could be shortened by mutual agreement between the opposing captains.

The Ohio State and Denison captains could not agree upon the length of halves for an Oct. 14, 1905 game at University Field. The Buckeyes wanted 35-minute halves but the Big Red strongly preferred that they be shorter. When mutual agreement could not be reached, the officials ruled in favor of Ohio State (who had won the coin toss) and set the game at two 35-minute halves. Denison refused to play. After a warning and a two-minute wait, the game was forfeited to Ohio State, 2-0. The Denison squad quickly left the playing field and headed home to Granville.

Fans were visibly upset with the entire situation as they stood in line for refunds on their tickets. Ohio State may have won the game, but the Athletic Department definitely lost at the gate. Income from ticket sales totaled \$1,078, but the refunds amounted to \$1,206, a deficit of \$128. Many youngsters had sneaked inside University Field, then stood in line to collect their "refunds."

Enough is Enough

Ohio State and Penn State first met on Nov. 16, 1912, in Columbus. The Buckeyes entered the game at 5-1. The Nittany Lions were 6-0 and had outscored their opponents 210-6.

Penn State was clearly the better team and dominated play right from the start. Throughout the afternoon, Ohio State coach John Richards complained to the officials about what he considered “unnecessary rough play.” With nine minutes remaining and Penn State leading 37-0, Richards had had enough and pulled his team from the field. When the Buckeyes refused to continue, the officials awarded the Nittany Lions a 1-0 win by forfeit, although both schools have always reported the score as a 37-0 Penn State victory.

After the game was called, an Ohio State student set fire to the Penn State colors on one of the goal posts in view of Dr. E.E. Sparks, President of Penn State University and an Ohio State University alumnus. Several students and alumni immediately apologized to Dr. Sparks, and a formal apology from Ohio State was issued the following week. It would be 44 years before the two schools would again face each other. In 1956, Penn State defeated Ohio State 7-6 in Columbus.



Courtesy Tom Hayes

THIS IS NOT YOUR ORDINARY BUCKEYE BOOK

The Ohio State Football narrative overflows with impressive statistics, scores and superstars. But peel back the curtain of what's in the media, and you find a treasury of inspiring, funny and even peculiar stories not found in the headlines. This book tells those stories, showcasing the human side of the Scarlet and Gray. Games are won and lost at the line of scrimmage, but it's the people and their stories that are the golden threads that give the Ohio State heritage its rich luster.

Each chapter highlights a coaching era led by one of the preeminent architects, including John Wilce, Paul Brown, Woody Hayes, and Jim Tressel. Read about players, coaches, fans, politicians, sportscasters and a myriad of others whose poignant perspectives, joyful celebrations and heartwarming experiences all spring from their connection to the Ohio State gridiron. Laugh over hilarious pranks and oddball coincidences. Feast your eyes on the photos that bring these stories to life. But most of all, be proud to be a Buckeye fan, because you're part of a remarkable and robust football culture.



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