

Chapter 2

Before 1933

American Professional Football Association

At a meeting held on August 20, 1920 in the Jordan and Hupmobile automobile showroom in Canton, Ohio, the representatives of four professional football teams formed an organization and named it the American Professional Football Conference (APFC). One month later, however, ten officials representing football teams from the States of Illinois, Indiana, New York, and Ohio met in Canton and changed the APFC's title to the American Professional Football Association (APFA).¹

Besides that decision, these individuals also elected football's greatest athlete Jim Thorpe to be president of the new league, established a membership fee of \$ 100 per team (which reportedly none of them paid), and permitted member clubs the freedom to schedule games. Thus, the APFA opened in late 1920 so that 14 professional football teams could compete and jointly entertain sports fans within their markets.

Expansion Franchises

After the 1920 APFA season ended, eight new franchises joined the league (Table A1). Besides the Evansville Crimson Giants, Green Bay Packers, Louisville Brecks, and Minneapolis Marines, the other four expansion teams folded in 1922 because of such interrelated issues as being located in small-to-midsized sports markets, poor attendances at their home games, lack of publicity and public relations, financial losses, scheduling and stadium problems, and/or inferior players and coaches. In fact, the Cincinnati Celts and Washington Senators each won only one game during the 1921 season while the New York Giants and Towawanda Kardex had zero victories. Simply put, the latter four clubs were not competitive play-

¹ Several books depict the APFA's two years as a league in professional football before renamed National Football League in 1922. For example, see Jozsa 2010; King 1994; McDonough 1999; Neft and Cohen 1997; Peterson 1997.

ing against opponents, needed more money and resources to operate, and failed to attract spectators or provide entertainment for audiences at their home games.

The other four APFA expansion teams had similar problems. For example, the Crimson Giants cancelled two games because of bad weather and finished the 1922 National Football League (NFL) season in fifteenth. Meanwhile the Brecks won one game in three seasons and during 1921–1924, the Marines never finished higher than thirteenth and experienced attendance and financial difficulties that caused owner Johnny Dunn to suspend operations in the 1925–1927 NFL seasons and cancel the franchise in 1928.

Owned by Curly Lambeau and the Clair brothers, and finishing in a tie for sixth in the 1921 APFA season, the NFL revoked the Packers franchise in 1922 for using college players in games the previous year. Although other teams had also hired college players, supposedly Chicago Bears coach, owner, and player George Halas was primarily responsible for the revocation. However, after Halas began to sign college players, the Packers rejoined the NFL a few months later. Then in 1923, local Green Bay business executives nicknamed ‘The Hungry Five’ pulled the franchise out of certain bankruptcy by organizing the non-profit Green Bay Football Corporation and offering shares of stock for sale to obtain more revenue.

Regarding the franchise’s performances from 1922 to 2013, the Packers won 15 division and 9 each conference and league titles and 4 Super Bowls. Thus, the Packers overcame financial barriers in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s, and playing their home games in a sparsely populated area of northeast Wisconsin before enthusiastic fans to become a popular, superior, and wealthy NFL franchise in the league’s current National Football Conference (NFC).²

Although the smallest of small-market teams in American professional sports, they sure are not spending money that way. Recently, Green Bay had the second-highest payroll in the NFL, behind only the Detroit Lions. Quarterback Aaron Rodgers’ contract makes up a big portion of that payroll. After leading the NFL with the highest passer rating in 2012, Rodgers signed a 5-year, \$ 110 million contract that made him the highest-paid player in NFL history. The Packers have one of the most rabid fan bases in professional sports. The population of Green Bay is approximately 105,000, yet an average of 70,507 people typically attends Packers home games. With a waiting list for season tickets of more than 100,000 people, the Packers could boost ticket prices and continue its sellout streak, which dates to the 1960s. Instead, they have kept prices slightly above the league average.

National Football League

In 1922, the NFL originally consisted of 18 teams. There were 14 of them from the APFA and 4 other but new franchises, which included the Toledo Maroons, Racine Legion, Milwaukee Badgers, and Oorang Indians. Based in Marion, Ohio and spon-

² For the emergence, development, and success of this popular and championship professional football franchise, there is Povletich and Harlan 2012.

sored by the Oorang dog kennels, the Indians had such great players as Hall of Famers Jim Thorpe and Joe Guyon. That season the Canton Bulldogs were undefeated but tied twice, and won the league championship while twelve or two-thirds of the teams each won fewer than five games. Given these results, professional football survived and became marginally popular among some sports fans in the nation's Midwest and appealed to a few entrepreneurs with assets, money, and resources to invest in new teams...

Expansion Franchises

During this period of growth in the American economy and then later collapse of stock markets and national business activity, 18 expansion franchises joined the NFL (Table 2.1). As a group, their number of regular seasons historically ranged from one to eighty-nine and championships won from zero to thirty-five. The following section contains data, statistics, and other information about their emergence and development while in the league.³

Cleveland Indians/Bulldogs

Cleveland jeweler and boxing promoter Sam Deutsch acquired an NFL franchise in 1923 and nicknamed his team the Indians. In its final game of the season, the Indians lost 46–0 to the Canton Bulldogs and finished fifth among 20 teams. During August 1924, however, Deutsch bought the defending NFL champion—but financially troubled—Bulldogs franchise for \$ 2,500. Then, he merged the Indians and Bulldogs to create a new team and named it Cleveland Bulldogs. That club played its home games at Dunn Field.

Despite a dispute with the Chicago Bears in 1924, the Bulldogs won an NFL championship with a 7–1–1 (wins-losses-ties) record. The Bears, who won six games but lost one and had fourties, attempted to count a postseason exhibition game in its regular season record. This violated a league rule previously proposed by Bears co-owner Dutch Sternaman. The rule stated that the NFL's 1924 season existed from September 27 to November 30. However, in December the Bulldogs played and lost to the Bears 23–0 in a challenge match. Although the Bears claimed the NFL championship, the issue was resolved at a meeting in January 1925 when franchise owners voted for and declared Cleveland the league champion.

After several Canton businessmen purchased rights to the old Canton Bulldogs team from Deutsch for \$ 3,000, the Bulldogs then known as the Canton Bulldogs, played home games in Canton during the league's 1925–1926 seasons. Nevertheless,

³ Three books about NFL expansion teams and their histories include Jozsa and Guthrie 1999; Noll 1974; Quirk and Fort 1992. For facts and other information regarding these teams, see *Sports Business Resource Guide and Fact Book* (Charlotte, NC: Street & Smith's Sports Group, 2012), *Official 2013 NFL Record & Fact Book* (New York, NY: National Football League, 2013), and "History of NFL Franchises, 1920–Present" at <http://www.profootballhof.com> cited 19 November 2013.

Table 2.1 NFL Expansion Teams, Before 1933. (Source: Quirk and Rodney, pp. 409–434; Official 2013 NFL Record & Fact Book, pp. 370–399)

Year	Team	Seasons	Championships	History
1923	Cleveland Indians/ Bulldogs	3	1	Team suspends operations in 1926
1923	Duluth Kellys/Eskimos	5	0	Team suspends operations in 1928
1923	St. Louis All-Stars	1	0	Franchise cancelled in 1924
1924	Frankford Yellow Jackets	7	1	Franchise bankrupts in 1931
1924	Kansas City Blues/ Cowboys	3	0	Team suspends operations in 1927
1925	Detroit Panthers	2	0	Team suspends operations in 1927
1925	New York Giants	89	35	Joined Eastern Division in 1933
1925	Pottsville Maroons	4	0	Team moved to Boston in 1929
1925	Providence Steam Roller	7	1	Franchise cancelled in 1932
1926	Brooklyn Lions	1	0	Team suspends operations in 1927
1926	Hartford Blues	1	0	Team suspends operations in 1927
1926	Los Angeles Buccaneers	1	0	Team suspends operations in 1927
1927	New York Yankees	2	0	Franchise bankrupts in 1929
1929	Minneapolis Red Jackets	2	0	Team suspends operations in 1931
1929	Staten Island Stapletons	4	0	Team suspends operations in 1933
1930	Portsmouth Spartans	4	0	Team moved to Detroit in 1934
1931	Cleveland Indians	1	0	Team suspends operations in 1931
1932	Boston Braves/Redskins	5	0	Team moved to Washington in 1937

Note: Year is these teams' first season in the NFL. Championships include teams' number of league titles (1923–1965), division and conference championships (1933–2013), and Super Bowls (1966–2013). A slash (/) indicates change in a team's nickname and/or its relocation

Deutsch referred to his NFL Cleveland franchise as the Bulldogs but then sold it to Herb Brandt in mid-1925. That season the Cleveland Bulldogs team fell to a dismal 5–8–1 record, had attendance problems at their home games, and nearly went bankrupt.

In 1926, the NFL allowed Brandt to suspend his team's operations. One year later, the Cleveland Bulldogs returned to the NFL and improved their roster by hiring players from the defunct Kansas City Cowboys. Deutsch, meanwhile, replaced Brandt and became principal owner of the reorganized Cleveland Bulldogs club. With University of Michigan superstar, quarterback Benny Friedman, the team finished fourth in the 1927 NFL season with an 8–4–1 record. After suspending operations in 1928, investors purchased Deutsch's franchise and moved it to southeast Michigan, and renamed it Detroit Wolverines. For the first time in history, there were no Bulldogs teams from Canton or Cleveland playing in the NFL.

Duluth Kelleys/Eskimos

M. C. Gerbert, owner of the Kelley-Duluth Hardware Store as well as the Duluth Kelleys independent football team, and his partners paid \$ 1,000 in 1923 to enter their team into the NFL. Residing in the northernmost city of the league, the team was unable to play at home during late November and early December because of harsh Minnesota winters and had troubles scheduling opponents due to their increased travel costs. Thus, the Kelleys had short seasons, playing a mere 16 games in 3 years. The club's best season was in 1924 when it went 5–1 but finished in fourth place in winning percentage.

In 1926, American sports executive Ole Haugsrud purchased the struggling franchise for \$ 1,000, signed star running back Ernie Nevers, renamed the team Duluth Eskimos, and scheduled two home and twenty-seven road games to become a traveling team. In the 1926 NFL season, the Eskimos finished eighth but had a \$ 4,000 profit. One year later, the team won only one game and yet earned \$ 1,000. However, at the end of the season, Haugsrud sold the team to the league, which suspended its operations in 1928. Subsequently, the NFL sold the franchise in 1929 to wholesale meat salesperson Edwin "Piggy" Simandl who moved it to Orange, New Jersey. The movie, *Leatherheads*, was loosely about the Eskimos' history.

St. Louis All-Stars

While playing for the NFL's Rock Island Independents, Ollie Kraehe believed that franchises in small towns like Green Bay, Wisconsin and Rock Island, Illinois could be successful operating a professional football team but that large-market St. Louis in eastern Missouri would attract more spectators to local football games and generate additional income. In 1923, NFL President Joe Carr awarded Kraehe a franchise. Although Kraehe supposedly paid a \$ 100 fee to the league, he organized a team and named it the St. Louis All-Stars. However, he discovered there was a lack of talent available and that many football players were local athletes from St. Louis and Washington Universities.

To begin its 1923 season, the NFL All-Stars defeated a nonleague team 25–0. In the next two games, the All-Stars tied the league's Green Bay Packers and Ham-

mond Pros but had financial difficulties. In fact, Kraehe lost more than \$ 2,000 when only 719 spectators attended the team's home opener at Sportsman's Park. He blamed the low attendance on rainy weather and that most sports fans were concentrating on baseball's World Series in New York City. Even so, the All-Stars' lack of offense made St. Louis fans reluctant to spend their money to see their hometown team not score a touchdown in their first four NFL games.

As the team's coach, manager, owner, and a player, Kraehe estimated financial losses for the All-Stars at \$ 1,300 for a game with the NFL Milwaukee Badgers and \$ 6,300 for the season. Due to players' injuries, he had to cancel his final game of the season against the expansion Cleveland Indians. As a result, the All-Stars franchise suspended operations before the league's 1924 season and then folded.

Frankford Yellow Jackets

During the early 1920s, the Frankford Athletic Association's Yellow Jackets had a reputation for being one of the best independent football teams in the nation. In 1922, Frankford absorbed Philadelphia's championship team, the Union Quakers of Philadelphia, and thus became the city's unofficial champion. During the 1922–1923 seasons, the Yellow Jackets compiled a 6–2–1 record in exhibition games against NFL teams. This success led the league to grant a franchise to the Athletic Association in 1924.

After winning 24 total games in the 1924–1925 seasons, the Yellow Jackets had the best regular season record at 14–1–2 in 1926 and named the NFL champion. As a result, the Jackets' set a league record in wins that stood until 1984 when the 15–1 San Francisco 49ers broke it.

The Yellow Jackets, unfortunately, began to decline in 1930 primarily because of financial hardships from the Great Depression. Before the start of the 1931 NFL season, a fire severely damaged Frankford Stadium. This forced the club to find another place for its home games. However, most facilities suitable for professional football were already booked. The Yellow Jackets had to overcome scheduling problems by playing at three different locations in or near Philadelphia including Frankford High School Community Memorial Stadium, Philadelphia Municipal Stadium, and Shibe Park. The latter two facilities were located outside of the Frankford area, which made attendance at games inconvenient for local fans. Moreover, the team had hoped to expand its market and draw additional fans beyond the Philadelphia area.

When Herb Joesting became a player-coach in 1931, the franchise had serious financial and public relations problems. In fact, some members of the media referred to it as the Philadelphia Yellow Jackets in an attempt to increase fan support, but that failed to occur. After witnessing the poor attendance at Frankford's home loss to the mediocre Portsmouth Spartans, NFL President Carr approved a plan for the Yellow Jackets to finish the season as a traveling team and then relinquish control of it to the league. In 1933, future NFL Commissioner Bert Bell and his former college teammate Lud Wray purchased the franchise from the NFL for \$ 2,800 and renamed it the Philadelphia Eagles.

Kansas City Blues/Cowboys

In 1924, former football player at Pittsburgh State University and the St. Louis All-Stars Leroy Andrews became player-coach and the original owner of the expansion Kansas City Blues. Operating as a traveling team, the Blues played its games in other cities' stadiums. In the club's first NFL season, the Blues finished fifteenth with a 2–7 record.

After changing its nickname from Blues to Cowboys in 1925, the team's performance improved against competitors. In that season, the Cowboys finished thirteenth at 2–5–1 and 1 year later fourth at 8–3. Even so, because the Cowboys were not popular or an established sports organization in the Kansas City area and depended on financial support from its away games played in different cities, the team sold its players and disbanded in 1927. As a result, the franchise became property of the NFL.

Detroit Panthers

Organized and owned by future NFL Hall of Famer Jimmy Conzelman, who previously played for three NFL teams, the Detroit Panthers also entered the league in 1925. Besides being owner, Conzelman served as the team's head coach and quarterback. That year, his team was competitive because of an outstanding defense. After winning eight of nine games, the Panthers lost in an upset to the Rock Island Independents, knocked out of first place, and ended the season in third behind the Chicago Cardinals and Pottsville Maroons.

Hoping to build on their success in 1925, the Panthers opened 1926 with a 0–3 record. After rallying to 4–0–2 in their next six games, they lost their last three and finished in twelfth place at 4–6–2. Because of poor attendances at its games, lack of competitiveness, and other problems, the team suspended operations before the 1927 season. Conzelman, meanwhile, joined the NFL Providence Steam Roller as their player-coach. In 1928, he won a league championship with the Steam Roller and then 19 years later as a member of the league's Chicago Cardinals.

New York Giants

With an investment of \$ 500 in 1925, Tim Mara founded and co-owned the New York Giants with Billy Gibson. Although the club was successful in its first NFL season by finishing fourth among 20 teams, the franchise had financial difficulties because professional football was not a popular American team sport in the early-to-mid-1920s. This changed, however, in the eleventh game of the season when 73,000 spectators watched the Giants play Red Grange's Chicago Bears at New York's Polo Grounds. This event provided a huge inflow of revenue from hometown fans. Despite the Great Depression, the Giants were profitable within five years. In 1930, Gibson sold his interest in the franchise while Tim Mara's sons Jack and Wellington took control of it.

The Giants have been successful across seasons. They rank third all-time with eight NFL titles including four each in the pre-Super Bowl era and in Super Bowls, and as of 2013, their teams appeared in more championship games than any others. Historically, the Giants have 29 professional football Hall of Famers and such Most Valuable Players as halfback Frank Gifford, quarterback Y.A. Tittle, and linebacker Lawrence Taylor. Tim Mara, center Mel Hein, tackles Pete Henry and Cal Hubbard, and running/defensive back Jim Thorpe were among the original class of Hall of Fame inductees in 1963 while former Coach Bill Parcells joined in 2013.

The Giants have recently been one of the best in the sports business. The \$ 1.4 billion MetLife Stadium, which houses the Giants and New York Jets, opened in 2010. The Giants sold personal seat licenses to more than 90 % of the seats to help finance the stadium. Since its opening, attendance has increased every year. The Giants packed 80,495 people per game into their stadium in 2012, more than any team except the Cowboys. With 222 luxury suites and 10,000 club seats, the team also rakes in more money in premium seating than anyone else besides Dallas. The Giants' recent success on the field—they won two Super Bowls in the last seven seasons—has helped them keep MetLife Stadium full every Sunday, even though they sell the third-most-expensive tickets in the NFL.

Pottsville Maroons

Originally known as the Pottsville Eleven, this organization was initially an independent football team who played in the local eastern Pennsylvania circuit. Home games were at a 6,000-seat high school stadium in nearby Minersville. In 1924, the club joined the Anthracite League, adopted the 'Maroons' nickname, and clinched the league title. One year later, surgeon and Maroons owner John Striegel applied for and won admission for his franchise into the NFL.

Late in the 1925 NFL season, Pottsville Maroons and the Chicago Cardinals had similar records and were the top teams in the league. At the time, the NFL championship went to the team with the best record against others in the NFL. Near the end of the season, the Maroons met the Cardinals for a game at Chicago's Comiskey Park in snowy conditions. The Maroons won it 21–7, which put them ahead of the Cardinals in the championship race.

Earlier in the year, however, the Maroons scheduled an exhibition game against a group of University of Notre Dame football stars at Philadelphia's Shibe Park. After the Frankford Yellow Jackets complained to the league that the Maroons illegally invaded their territory, NFL President Carr warned Striegel of suspending his franchise. Given a potential financial windfall for his team, Striegel went ahead with the game and claimed he received verbal permission from the NFL by telephone, though he gave inconsistent responses to which official he spoke. The Maroons won the game 9–7 but attracted only 8,000 spectators, which was a major financial disappointment. As he threatened, Carr suspended Pottsville and removed them from the NFL.

Afraid the Maroons might join Red Grange's American Football League, the NFL reinstated the team in 1926 and expanded as an organization to 22 franchises. Although the Maroons finished third at 10–2–2, they struggled to meet their financial obligations with reports of a strike by players. The Maroons' performance declined in 1927 because of losing several star players while others aged, thus finishing eighth at 5–8. After Striegel relinquished operational control for the 1928 season, the team's downward spiral continued with a dismal 2–8 record. During the off-season, Striegel sold his club to a New England partnership who then moved the franchise to eastern Massachusetts prior to the 1929 NFL season and renamed it Boston Bulldogs.

Providence Steam Roller

Established in 1916 by *Providence Journal* sports editor Charles Coppen and sports writer Pearce Johnson, the Steam Roller had a 3–2–1 record in exhibition games against NFL teams in 1924. After joining the NFL, the club won six, five, and eight games each during 1925–1927 and in 1928, it finished 8–1–2 and became the league champion.

During the 1929 NFL season, the Steam Roller became the first NFL team ever to play its home games in a bicycle-racing stadium and was first to host an NFL game at night under floodlights and to play four regular season games in six days. Built in 1925, Providence's 10,000-spectator Cyclodome surrounded the football field. Indeed, the facility was a wooden track with steeply banked ends that cut sharply into the end zones reducing them to five yards in depth. On football game days, there was temporary seating on the straightaway portion of the track, which was so close to the field that players, after tackled, often found themselves two or three rows in the stands.

When Providence hosted the Chicago Cardinals on November 6, 1929, the game occurred at night in nearby Kinsley Park, where floodlights lit the field. These teams were supposed to play on November 3 but heavy rains made the Cyclodome field unplayable. Since neither team wanted to forfeit their revenue, the historic night game was hastily scheduled. Although the Steam Roller lost 16–0, the game was a success because 6,000 fans attended it.

During November 5–10, Providence played four games. The team's schedule began against the Staten Island Stapletons and then the Chicago Cardinals, and concluded with a two-game series against the Frankford Yellow Jackets. Although the Steam Roller made history, their 0–3–1 record for the period was risky and a disappointment to the team.

When quarterback Jim Conzelman failed to recover from a knee injury and other players became ill or simply complacent, the Steam Roller had a 4–6–2 record in 1929 and finished in seventh place. This caused fans, who attended games during the previous championship season, to stay home. After posting a 6–4–1 record in 1930 and 4–4–3 the next season, and struggling financially from fans' lack of interest in them and the Great Depression, NFL team owners suspended the Steam Roller's operations in 1932 and then 1 year later returned the franchise to the league.

Brooklyn Lions

The Brooklyn Lions were the NFL's countermove to the AFL, which enfranchised a team named the Brooklyn Horsemen. In months before their regular season, the leagues battled for support from fans and the right to play games in Brooklyn's Ebbets Field. After the NFL won, the Lions signed a lease to use the stadium.

During late November 1926, the Horsemen franchise withdrew from the AFL and merged with the NFL Brooklyn Lions. Coached by Punk Perryman, the Lions finished the season with three consecutive losses by shutout and in fourteenth place at 3–8. As a result, in 1927 the Lions suspended operations with ownership of the team transferred to the New York Giants' Tim Mara. Two years later, the NFL cancelled the Lions franchise.

Hartford Blues

Connecticut sports promoter George Mulligan, who owned the independent Waterbury Blues football club during the early 1920s, received permission from the NFL in 1926 for his Hartford Blues team to join the league. The Blues played their home games at the East Hartford Velodrome, a new bicycle track located across the Connecticut River in East Hartford. Because of the track's 8,000-seat capacity, the grass football field barely fit inside it.

After finishing 3–7 in 1926, the Blues cancelled their remaining games due to scheduling conflicts or weather conditions. In 1927, the team suspended its operations and returned to being an independent club named the Hartford Giants. One year later, however, football officials cancelled the franchise.

Los Angeles Buccaneers

An expansion team during the NFL's 1926 season, the Los Angeles Buccaneers supposedly represented the City of Los Angeles. Like the AFL's Los Angeles Wildcats, the team never played a league game in Los Angeles. In fact, it operated from Chicago with players from California colleges and universities.

Regarding their location, the Buccaneers originally planned to play games in the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum but instead became a road team after the Coliseum Commission refused to allow professional teams to play there. Since there was no air travel, it was reasonable economically to put the Buccaneers in the Midwest near the majority of NFL teams. Although rejected by the Commission, the Buccaneers played two exhibition games in Los Angeles against the AFL New York Yankees and another two in San Francisco. Despite finishing sixth at 6–3–1 in the NFL, the Buccaneers cancelled operations in 1927 and folded 1 year later.

New York Yankees

After a contract dispute with Chicago Bears' owner George Halas, superstar Harold 'Red' Grange's agent C.C. Pyle submitted a request for a franchise at the NFL's 1926 winter meeting to prove he owned rights to Grange and to play home games in Yankee Stadium. If denied entry into the NFL, Pyle threatened to start his own league. Because of his threat and Grange's skills and reputation, NFL franchise owners approved the New York Yankees as an expansion team in 1927.

Although New York was the NFL Giants' market, Giants owner Tim Mara leased Yankee Stadium to Pyle for his new team. The agreement between the two rivals limited the number of home games that the Yankees could play in the stadium, which forced it to be primarily a road team displaying Grange's talents. This arrangement lasted for 2 years when the NFL Yankees finished in sixth and then seventh place. Because of economic problems, however, the team went broke and folded in 1929.

Minneapolis Red Jackets

Four years after their winless NFL Minneapolis Marines suspended operation in 1925, owners John Dunn and Val Ness paid a fee of \$ 2,500 for an expansion franchise in the NFL. Their team, named Minneapolis Red Jackets, wore red jerseys with red and white striped sleeves like the Marines did years earlier.

In 1929, the Red Jackets had a dismal 1–9 record but finished with only a small financial loss primarily because they played three games against the large-market Chicago Bears. One year later, the Red Jackets planned to play four home games during October in Minneapolis' Nicollet Park. The franchise hoped for good weather in order to get more attendance and gate receipts. Nevertheless, it rained on each scheduled date and the team bankrupted. After a 1–7–1 start in 1930, the Red Jackets merged with the NFL's Frankford Yellow Jackets, sold the Yellow Jackets several players, and then disbanded in 1932.

Staten Island Stapletons

After existing for several years as a neighborhood and then semi-professional football team, and successfully competing against a few NFL clubs and winning other league championships from 1921 to 1923, wealthy restaurant owner Dan Blaine's Staten Island Stapletons joined the NFL in 1929. The team played its home games at 8,000-seat Thompson Stadium in Staten Island.

Because of their relatively small stadium, inconvenient location, and financial troubles during the Great Depression, Stapletons teams never had a winning record in four NFL seasons. After the club finished last at 2–7–3 in 1932, Blaine received permission from the league to suspend operations. In 1934, the NFL cancelled the franchise. The team played a season of semi-professional football in 1934 before folding 1 year later.

Portsmouth Spartans

Initially formed in 1929 and able to attract football players from defunct independent professional and semi-professional clubs in the Ohio-Kentucky-West Virginia tri-state area, the Portsmouth Spartans defeated other outstanding teams in the area. After Portsmouth, Ohio taxpayers agreed to fund the construction of Universal Stadium, the NFL offered membership to the franchise in 1930. Although more populated than Green Bay, Portsmouth became the second smallest city in the league.

The Spartans finished 5–6–3 in 1930 and then 1 year later had a \$ 16,000 financial loss but ended in second place behind the Packers at 11–3. At the end of the NFL's 1932 season, the Spartans tied for first with the Chicago Bears. In a playoff game during blizzard conditions in Chicago, the Bears won on a touchdown pass from Bronko Nagurski to Red Grange. After the Spartans bankrupted, George Richardson bought the franchise in 1934 for \$ 15,000, moved it to Detroit, and named it Detroit Lions.

Cleveland Indians

Although others with its name played professional football during 1921 and 1923, the Cleveland Indians joined the NFL in 1931 as an expansion team. Owned and sponsored by the league, the club had games entirely on the road. In its first and only season, while coached by Al Cornsweet and Hoge Workman, the Indians finished eighth with a 2–8 record. The NFL intended to locate the Indians permanently in Cleveland. However, when the league was unable to find a capable owner, the franchise folded after 1 year.

Boston Braves/Redskins

A syndicate headed by George Marshall purchased an NFL expansion franchise in 1932 for approximately \$ 7,500 and named it the Boston Braves. In 1932, the team finished fourth with a 4–4–2 record. One year later as a member of the league's ED, the Braves lost \$ 46,000 while winning and losing five games each with two ties. After a change in nickname to Redskins in 1934, the club finished in second place that season and then third in 1935 after it scored only 65 points.

The Redskins most productive year in Boston was in 1936. This occurred because of the team's successful NFL draft and hiring head coach Ray Flaherty. After starting the season 4–5, the Redskins claimed their first and only ED championship by winning their last three games and finishing with a 7–5 record. However, during the final game of the regular season in a 30–0 win over the rival Pittsburgh Pirates, only 4,813 fans were spectators at Fenway Park. As a result, Marshall became angry and gave up his team's home field advantage for the NFL championship game. Played on December 13, 1936 at New York's Polo Grounds, the Green Bay Packers won 21–6. Upset in losing the game and disappointed about weak support from fans and local businesses and other organizations, Marshall moved his team in 1937 from Boston to Washington, D.C. and changed its name to Washington Redskins.

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