

Lions Boast Six All-Americans

Lion Greats: Dunn, Higgins, Killinger, Bedenk, Gajecki

By PETE WARKER

Since its debut in intercollegiate football ranks with a 54-0 victory over Bucknell in 1887, the fame of Penn State grid teams has been kept alive in the minds of sports fans throughout the nation by six great Lion All-Americans.

The practice of choosing All-American teams started during the first decade of the 1900's. First conceived by Casper Whitney, who took his idea of All-American selections to the editor of Harper's Weekly, the custom of annual selections was perfected by Walter Camp. Camp later became the possessor of the title "Glorifier of the American boy."

All of the Penn State All-Americans mentioned here were members of Camp's teams except Leon Gajecki, who was chosen All-American by the News Enterprise Association and Liberty Magazine's board of experts.

"MOTHER" DUNN '06

First of the Penn State football players to receive national recognition in the All-American ranks was William T. "Mother" Dunn in 1906. Despite his rugged 200-lb. frame which towered 6 feet 4 inches, Dunn's quiet manner and kindly actions earned him the nickname of "Mother."

Although Dunn had no previous football experience before reaching college, he gained a center berth soon after he reported for the team in 1905.

Captain of the squad in 1906, "Mother" Dunn sparked that year's Lion team to their greatest season since the sport was inaugurated at the College. That season the Lions won 8 games, lost 1, and tied 1. Yale's victory over State by 10 to 0 was the only opponent to score against Dunn's eleven.

"MOTHERLY" QUALITIES

Named to Walter Camp's All-American team in the same season, Dunn was described in Collier's Weekly article as "... the ideal pivot man. He was a reliable ball snapper, secure in blocking, active in breaking through, a keen mind on diagnosing plays, a persistent blocker of kicks, and the only stumbling block to a great Yale team."

On Thanksgiving Day of 1906, "Mother" Dunn inspired a tired Penn State team to a 6-0 victory over Pitt, playing the greater part of the game with a torn tendon and dislocated knee. Dunn's action in this game evoked this eulogy from the press of that day: "Penn State loves, respects and prizes her 'Mother' Dunn."

"THE HIG" '19

Penn State's present football coach, Bob Higgins, was the second Lion griddler to join the ranks

of the nation's All-Americans. Struggling against family opposition to his participation in sports, Higgins was finally able to get their consent while he was a student at Peddie Prep.

After graduation from Peddie, Higgins was snatched from the hands of other interested coaches by Dick Harlow, Harvard's present head coach, who was then an assistant coach at Penn State. His varsity end in his first year at State in 1914, Higgins was elected captain of the Lion eleven in 1917.

After a two year lapse spent overseas with the A.A.F. in the first World War, Higgins returned to captain the 1919 State eleven. It was in this year that Walter Camp picked him for an end post on the only All-American team selected that year.

"HIG" SCORES

One of Higgins' favorite football stories concerns the time one of Lehigh's great teams of old came to New Beaver Field. The score was 0-0 and it was late in the game. A new pass, with Bob on the receiving end, was good for a touchdown, but the happy moment turned to despair when State was penalized for having 12 men on the field. A substitute, obviously sent in to give instructions, was on the field when the play started.

It was an angry group of Lion gridders who met that substitute, Chuck Yerger, by name, who had been sent in by Harlow, then the head coach.

"Harlow says to throw that pass," was the pained answer.

"We just did!" chorused the reply.

Time was getting short when the Lions lined up again. They called the same play, threw the pass to the same spot where the waiting Higgins gathered it in and romped to another and accepted touch-

down which meant the game, 7-0.

GLENN KILLINGER

The period around 1920 ushered in the greatest era of football at Penn State, and introduced two more Lion All-Americans to the country's pigskin panorama.

Glenn Killinger, an unheralded substitute backfield from Harrisburg Technical High School, quickly developed into a rugged power runner who could pick up a yard when it counted.

His value, when it came to selecting him for All-American in 1920, lay in his punting, passing and field generalship which guided Penn State through two undefeated seasons in 1920 and 1921.



BOB HIGGINS

Killinger was as well known on the basketball court and baseball diamond as he was on the gridiron. He was a m.o.n.g. State's greatest basketball players and a brilliant third baseman on a fine Lion nine. He went up to the major league with the New York Yankees after graduation.

"GANG" WAY

The other Penn State griddler who received All-American honors during this time of great Penn State elevens was Charlie Way.

An untutored, 145-pound, third-string quarter back during his first year at college, Way soon became one of the most deceptive broken field runners ever seen at Penn State.

His ball-carrying prowess later became such a threat to opposing teams, that the slogan "Watch Way" became an accepted byword on the oppositions' campuses before a Penn State game.

After reeling off a particularly scintillating pair of 85 and 90 yard runs against a strong Dartmouth eleven one afternoon in 1919, he was nicknamed "Gang Way" by sports writers and columnists.

A POWERFUL DUO

A great passing and receiving combination, Killinger and Way combined to pull one out of the fire in 1920 to keep the Lions undefeated. Lehigh had a 7-0 edge when the two All-Americans went to work late in the game. With Way running and receiving Killinger's bullet passes, the Lions marched 80 yards to pay dirt and 7-7 deadlock.

While Way was getting off long runs, it was Killinger who was calling the plays, punting, passing, sparking the Lion defense with his hard tackling, and using his fighting spirit to lift the State eleven to great heights.

JOE BEDENK

In 1923, Joe Bedenk, a 200-pound graduate of Mansfield Normal School, became the fifth Penn State footballer to be named to All-American honors. The present head baseball coach at the College, Bedenk also holds the line coach's post on the football team.

Under the tutelage of the same Dick Harlow who brought Bob Higgins to State in 1914, Bedenk developed into the outstanding guard in Lion gridiron history.

Not content with playing a brilliant defensive game and leading the interference, Joe shared every lineman's dream of scoring at least one touchdown in his career.

The honor came to him in 1921 against North Carolina State on New Beaver Field. Breaking through the Tar Heel's line Bedenk knocked an attempted forward pass high into the air. Catching the ball on the way down, he scampered 25 yards for the most important touchdown of his personal football career.

JOE VERSUS NAVY

Games with Navy will always be remembered by Coach Bedenk. In his sophomore year, Penn State scored a 13-7 win over the Midshipmen in Philadelphia. In Washington the following year, Navy retaliated with a 14-0 triumph over the Lion gridders, leading up to a third and deciding battle which was played on New Beaver Field in 1923.

Although Navy registered 18 first downs to State's 4, the Lions chalked up a 21-3 victory. Three long runs by "Lighthouse Harry" Wilson accounted for the triumph, but it was a guy named Joe Bedenk who, as running guard, led Wilson's interference.

LEON GAJECKI

Leon "Gates" Gajecki, another lineman like Bedenk was the sixth All-American to earn his laurels in Lions' den. A 6 foot 1 inch husky from Colver, Pa., Gajecki was one of a long line of great Lion centers.

Famed for his consistently brilliant defensive play and stamina, Gajecki played a total of 414 minutes during his junior year in 1939—more than any other Lion footballer of that season. Sports writer Dick Peters of the Collegian described Gajecki's line work during the same year as "outstanding."

In a write-up of a crushing 40-0 Lion defeat at the hands of the Big Red of Cornell, Peters says, "One bright spot kept the otherwise tarnished afternoon from complete darkness. That was the brilliant play of Leon Gajecki, Lion center, who played his heart out on defense during the first half. Gajecki was in on every tackle, and until withdrawn from the massacre in the second half proved himself the best backer-up in the history of Penn State football."

DYNAMITE ON DEFENSE

Following the Lions' upset of Penn, Peters again wrote, "Leon Gajecki at center was his usual playful self—only we'll play with dynamite."

Named to both the Associated Press and International News Service All-Pennsylvania teams in 1939, Gajecki joined the coveted circle of All-Americans in 1940.

A senior and captain of the Lions in this year, he was chosen on the NEA and Liberty All-American teams, and on the Associated Press's All-Pennsylvania squad. He was also picked on the East's team for the East-West game that year.

Although Camp's All-American selection was a highly respected criterion for nearly 34 years, the early 1920's saw such a swift growth of football throughout the country that it was impossible for one man to fairly judge the relative abilities of the nation's gridders. In 1924, the All-American Board of Football, composed of coaches from all parts of the country was established to choose All-American teams.

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