

WHEN ORANGE & NEWARK HAD AN NFL TEAM

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

ORANGE : Forgotten among the anticipated battle between the New York Giants and New England Patriots in Super Bowl XLVI at Indianapolis Feb. 5 - and an emerging dispute between Govs. Christopher Christie and Andrew Cuomo over where to hold a prospective Giants victory parade - lies a fact that may warm the hearts of fans in and around Orange and Newark.

Orange and Newark once had a National Football League team of their own in 1929-30. East Orange was also present during the team's formation.

Granted, two years are almost footnotes in the NFL's 92-year-old records. Edwin "Piggy" Simandl's team became one of at least 51 defunct NFL teams in the league's first 40 years. Simandl, his players and other traces of the team are long gone - as well one of its five venues.

But Newark and Orange were part of what became North American football's premier league. That team played the Giants four times - and the Giants play a team that might even have ancestral roots to the Newark and Orange franchise on a yearly basis. The team's name even lives on at the high school level.

Let us now recall the 1929 Orange Golden - or 1930 Greater Newark - Tornadoes.

The story began with Orange meat salesman Simandl buying the Duluth (Minn.) Eskimos franchise from Ole Haugsrud over the 1928-29 off-season. The Eskimos, which began life as the Duluth Kellys, amassed a 16-win, 20-loss and 3-tie career record since 1923. The NFL's northernmost team, given Minnesotan winters, had few home games.

The NFL - which was formed by 10 businessmen and independent team owners in Canton, Ohio in 1920 - was still finding its feet along the Eastern Seaboard.

While most of its early teams were in the Midwest, they were competing with the long-established college football teams in the Northeast for public attention. (It took NASCAR and its stock cars four decades into the 1980s to oust open wheel Indycar racing, in terms of ticket sales and media space, as foremost in American motorsports.)

Simandl, as general manager of the Orange Athletic Club, first drew players from that organization's football team. The OAC's squad was an amateur team in 1887 that became an independent semi-pro group by 1919.

The OAC played a range of opponents from fellow athletic clubs to college or professional teams into 1928. It had narrowly lost to the 1927 NFL Champion Giants, 0-7, while playing before 5,000 fans in Orange's Knights of Columbus Stadium, 54 Bell St., Sept. 23, 1928.

The club began calling "Casey Stadium" home in 1926 after playing at Orange's Central Playground in 1923 and on East Orange's Ashland Field (Now Paul Robeson Stadium) and "Orange Oval Park". The club had owned Orange Oval, off North Grove Street near that street's railroad station site, before that city received the six-acre lot and revamped it into East Orange Playground, or "Oval Park," in 1908.

The club may - or may not - have been in East Orange when Simandl bought the NFL franchise. The OAC club house, in 1891-92, was located along the Lackawanna's Morris & Essex Line railroad tracks near Brick Church Station. The Price and Lee" Directory of the Oranges of the 1920s-40s, however, does not list an address for the club.

Simandl took the natural course of taking the club's players, home field - and "Tornadoes" name. The OAC footballers began calling themselves "The Orange AC Golden Tornadoes of the East" in 1909.

"The Orange Golden Tornadoes," - with players, home field and name in place - debuted to a 34-0 blanking of the independent Elizabeth Collegians in a Sept. 22, 1929 exhibition game at KoC Stadium. An estimated 9,000 fans returned to "Casey" Sept. 29 to see the Tornadoes hold the Giants to a scoreless tie.

The Orange Tornadoes went on to a 3-4-4 NFL and a 6-5-4 overall 1929 record. Their NFL losses, on one hand, include a Nov. 10 22-0 rematch against the Giants before 20,000 at New York's Polo Grounds and a Dec. 8 26-0 blanking by the Chicago Cardinals. The Giants, which joined the NFL in 1925, the Chicago/St. Louis/Arizona Cardinals and the Green Bay Packers are the league's three oldest teams.

The Tornadoes' NFL record was good enough to be ranked sixth to the 12-0-1 champion Packers and 10 other teams. They made the rankings' top half by edging the 3-4-3 Staten Island Stapletons.

Three of the rankings' lower half, however, included the Buffalo Bisons, Minneapolis Red Jackets and the cellar-dwelling Dayton (Ohio) Triangles. None of those three finished a season which

saw the Oct. 29 stock market crash usher The Great Depression. The 22 NFL teams of 1926 would drop to eight in 1932.

The Triangles' bankruptcy may have led to the NFL Tornadoes' demise. Tornadoes head coach Jack Depler and a Brooklyn businessman bought the Ohio team's franchise for \$2,500. Most of the Tornadoes players went with Depler to Ebbets Field as the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Simandl got the mass-defection news while completing a deal for a new home field for the re-named Greater Newark Tornadoes. He became dissatisfied with the local Knights failing to expand the Orange stadium's seating to 15,000 and late-season attendance dropping off to 1,500.

The Greater Newark Tornadoes, by unofficial "Local Talk" count, became one of at least 26 professional sports teams that bore the "Newark" in name and/or held its home games in New Jersey's largest city. That still under-research count runs from the Clark's OAT soccer team of the 1880s to the present-day NHL New Jersey Devils. (The NFL Giants and Jets meanwhile keep their administrative offices in New York City.)

The Newark Tornadoes got two home stadiums for its 12-game season for 1930. The first four games were at the 15,000-seat Newark Schools Stadium in the North Ward. The other two games, due to already scheduled high school events, were on the infield of the 12,500-seat Newark Velodrome in the West Ward's Vailsburg section.

Simandl meanwhile restocked the roster with mostly local college ball players. He named player-coach Al McGill, who helped the Orange A.C. Tornadoes into winning seasons in 1925 and 1927-28, as their leader.

But the Greater Newark Tornadoes' season turned into a 1-11-1 nightmare.

Their season began with a 13-6 loss to the Portsmouth (Ohio) Spartans at the latter's Universal Stadium Sept. 14. Their Schools Stadium debut Sept. 17 ended with a 32-0 blanking by the Giants. McGill was dropped as head coach after a 12-6 loss in Staten Island Sept. 21.

Players Jack Fish and Andy Salate were brought up as co-head coaches for the rest of the season. Although they lost, 13-6, to the Frankford (Pa.) Yellow Jackets at Schools Stadium Sept. 23, they tied the Stapletons there, 7-7 Oct. 1 and blanked Frankford, 19-0, at Philadelphia's Frankford Stadium Oct. 5.

Simandl, in a May 22, 1964

recollection to "Newark Evening News" sports columnist Hy Goldgerg, said that he played as fullback in several games that year.

The Providence Steamrollers flattened the Newark Tornadoes' resurgence, 14-0, in Rhode Island Oct. 5. The losses continued through an Oct. 30 34-7 finale by the Giants at the Polo Grounds. Their two defeats by the Brooklyn Dodgers in a home-and-home series - 32-0 Oct. 12 at Ebbets and 14-0 at the Newark Velodrome - were especially bitter pills to swallow.

The Newark Tornadoes were ranked 11th and last to the 10-3-1 champion Packers. Green Bay edged the Giants for the championship twice in a row. The 7-4-0 Dodgers, which would be defunct after 1931, was ranked fourth.

Simandl turned in the NFL franchise to the NFL in the winter of 1930-31 but kept the Orange AC Tornadoes running five more years. It would lose to the Giants three more times at Casey or Ashland stadiums either as an independent team or under 1936 American Football Association sanctions.

The club was renamed the "East Orange Tornadoes" from 1934 until it stopped playing after 1936. The Newark Velodrome bicycle oval, where the new Speedway School now stands, was demolished after 1930. The Orange public schools district received the 3.55-acre "Orange Schools Stadium" lot from the Knights by 1942.

The ex-Tornadoes NFL franchise, depending on the source, either remains in Canton or lies with Washington, D.C. One source said that the NFL accepted the Boston Braves as part of its 1932 expansion - provided it took what was left of the Tornadoes.

The Braves renamed themselves as "Redskins" the next year and moved to Washington, D.C. in 1937. Washington defeated the Giants, 28-14, in their 2011-12 season opener at FedEx Field, Landover, Md., Sept. 11. They would win another matchup against New York late in the season at MetLife Stadium.

Since then, the Giants have not lost a game, going into their Super Bowl XLVI game against the New England Patriots. The Giants defeated the then-undefeated Patriots four years ago in Super Bowl XLII 17-14.

Orange High School, going by its "Peel" yearbooks, meanwhile first took up the "Golden Tornadoes" nickname for its football team in 1933. The now "Mighty Tornadoes" name has spread onto their other scholastic teams.

WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL SOCCER SUSPENDS PLAY FOR 2012 SEASON

SAN FRANCISCO, CA : Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) announced today that its Board of Governors has voted to suspend the 2012 season to permit the League to focus on the resolution of certain pending legal issues and the challenges that now face the League as a result of its ongoing dispute with a

and that is what we are taking the time to ensure we deliver when we resume play in 2013 and beyond." WPS has established its plans to return to play in 2013, and all five owners of the League's existing teams - Atlanta Beat, Boston Breakers, Philadelphia Independence, Sky Blue FC and Western New York

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