
College Football Historical Society



VOL. I, No. IV

MAY, 1988

Robert 'Tiny' Maxwell

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In 1905, 18 players died playing college football and 159 were seriously injured. One particular injured player probably caused more attention to be brought to the brutality of the game than any other. He was a lineman from Swarthmore College and his name was Robert "Tiny" Maxwell. Robert was a giant of a man in an era when most linemen weighed under 200 pounds. He tipped the scales at 250 pounds and stood 6'4" tall.

The most significant game of that 1905 season was played at Franklin Field on Oct. 7 between Swarthmore College and the University of Pennsylvania. Maxwell had played so well in 1904 that Penn assigned three players to cover him during this game, and on every play those three worked on Maxwell and on him only. He took what was described as a savage beating. His nose was broken, his eyes swollen shut and his face dripped with blood. Bob courageously continued playing until near the end of the game, when his face was so bloody and swollen that he could no longer see, yet he never complained of the physical beating.

A photograph of Maxwell's face shocked President Roosevelt into threatening to abolish football, if the colleges themselves did not take steps to eliminate the brutality and reduce injuries. President Joseph Swain of Swarthmore responded by saying, "Swarthmore College stands for clean manly sport, shorn of all unnecessary roughness. President Roosevelt should have and I believe will have, the cordial support of the colleges and universities of the country ... Let dangerous plays and ungentlemanly players be eliminated or let the game be eliminated from college life. Let college authorities see that only gentlemen are permitted to coach the teams and act as officials at the game. Football properly played and controlled is a good college recreation and sport, and it should be saved from its enemies. Swarthmore College will cooperate with others to secure clean college athletics."

In December, 1905, 62 colleges agreed on a set of innovations that significantly changed the game of football. Yardage for a first down was changed from five to 10 yards; there was a neutral zone established between opposing lines, and the time of the game was reduced to 60 minutes. But the innovation that would in time totally revolutionize the game was the legalization of the forward pass.

The following year, 1906, playing under these new rules Swarthmore defeated Penn for the first time 4-0. The loss broke Penn's unbeaten streak at 30 games, and Swarthmore went on to finish the season at 7-2. They were not only an Eastern power, but had become one of the better teams in the

country for the year of 1906.

Bob Maxwell entered the world in Chicago on Sept 7, 1884. His athletic career began at Englewood High where he excelled in football and track. He also played the mandolin and was a student actor in the Shakespearean plays at the school.

Because of his size and play on the gridiron, he was recruited by Amos A. Stagg from the University of Chicago. Bob played guard for Chicago in 1902 and 1903. In his autobiography, Stagg praised Maxwell when he stated, "I never saw a finer piece of football timber physically. He weighed 240 pounds and was lightening fast in his Chicago days. For 40 yards he could travel with anyone, and he was All-American material to any eye."

He was also one of the track team's best weight men. His specialty was the shot-put, and for many years he held the school shot-put record. This was set on July 4, 1904, when Bob heaved the iron ball 42'9".

Bob left Chicago after two years and transferred to Swarthmore where he acquired the name "Tiny". Coach Stagg, in reference to this nickname, said "Robert Maxwell was always known to us as 'Fatty' but was renamed 'Tiny' in the East when he left us to play at Swarthmore in 1904." In 1904, Tiny's first year at Swarthmore, the team finished 6-3, which included a 9-0 win over a strong Navy team. Swarthmore went 7-1 in 1905, their only loss coming to Penn by a score of 11-4. The 1905 season reached its climax when two Swarthmore players were selected on Walter Camp's All-American team. One was their quarterback Wilmer Crowell, and the other was Robert "Tiny" Maxwell.

Bob left Swarthmore in 1906 without receiving his degree, and that Fall he played professional football for the Massillon Tigers, later moving to the Canton Bulldogs and the Pittsburgh Lyceums. Significantly, Maxwell insisted on wearing his Swarthmore jersey with its big "S" in team pictures during his pro career.

Meanwhile, Swarthmore had dropped football in 1908 in exchange for a bequest of substantial coal and mineral rights from a wealthy benefactor. President Swain explained, "Football had become too encompassing of college life; winning had become too important." However, this arrangement lasted only one year, and then Swarthmore resumed college football for the 1909 season. That same year, after three seasons of pro football, Bob Maxwell returned as an assistant coach, later moving to Penn in the same capacity.

While coaching, Maxwell also enrolled at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia where he completed his pre-clinical studies, but withdrew

after two years. As a student at Jefferson, Bob again played guard on the football team. In 1911, he was in Chicago to begin working for a newspaper, and eventually became city editor for the Chicago Inter-Ocean. In 1914 Bob returned to Philadelphia and landed a job with the Public Evening Leader, and was appointed the Sports Editor in 1915.

During this time Bob also began his officiating career, and Walter Camp described him as the fairest and best official in football. Bob worked the famed Penn-Dartmouth game at the Polo Grounds in 1919, referred to as "The Bloodiest Battle of World War I". Lou Little, Penn tackle, who later coached at Georgetown and Columbia, said Maxwell alone prevented an open riot. The great sports writer, Ring Lardner, remarked that, "Tiny should be disqualified for roughing. When officiating, he plays a roving game, swaying from side to side like a chained hippo. When any trouble arises, Tiny just falls on it and irons it out."

On June 29, 1922, during the prime of his life, Bob Maxwell was in a fatal car accident. The accident caused Bob to be pinned beneath the car. He had seven broken ribs, a dislocated hip and other injuries, but those who were there told of his command, "get the others out. I can wait." The others lived, but Bob died the following morning at Montgomery Hospital in Norristown. He was only thirty-eight years old.

On the night of February 24, 1937, at a meeting in the Ritz Carlton Hotel in New York, the Robert W. Maxwell Football Club was established. It was quite an honor for a man who only lived to the age of 38. Bert Bell was elected the club's first president, and in 1937 they selected Clint Frank, an All-American back at Yale, as their first college player of the year. The annual Maxwell Award has continued to this day.

Bob Maxwell was a man of many facets. He was a scholar, athlete, writer, medical school student, musician and coach. Many remember his most outstanding newspaper career, while others recall his athletic accomplishments. There remains one undisputable fact about him; Bob Maxwell loved his fellow man. His fellow man loved the big guy nicknamed "Tiny".