By Roger Saylor

1895-1922

The Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (SIAA) was established on December 21, 1894 at a meeting in Atlanta. This marked the beginning of organized college athletics in the south. The original seven members were Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, Georgia Tech, North Carolina, university of the South (Sewanee), and Vanderbilt. The membership was doubled the next year with the admissions of Cumberland of Tennessee, Louisiana State, Mississippi, Mississippi state, Tennessee, Texas, and Tulane.

The major objectives of the association included the establishing of standard eligibility rules plus running a track meet and a basketball tournament. The determining of a football champion was not planned. As a result there were no football standings or champions announced. This did not prevent newspapers from running stories about which were considered the strongest football teams. A series of these by J.R. Heisman was published by the Atlanta constitution.

Additional members were admitted almost annually. Included were such obscure institutions as Gordon Military Academy, Dahlonega (now North Georgia), and Southwestern (now Rhodes). Some members did not field football teams with others fielding teams only some years. The geographical area stretched from Charleston, SC, to Austin, TX, and Gainesville, FL, to Louisville, KY.

A major disagreement among the members developed quickly regarding the eligibility of first year students, freshmen or higher classmen, the so-called one-year rule. In general, the larger members favored this rule, and the smaller ones were opposed to it. A sign for the future appeared in 1915 when one of the larger members formed the Southern Intercollegiate Conference and decided they would observe the one-year rule. They did not then withdraw from the SIAA, nor did they conduct their own events.

Annual votes on the one-year rule confirmed the deep disagreement among the members, with the rule never passing for all members. A result was that in December of 1920 the Southern Conference was expanded to 14 members, with the first year of real operation to be the 1921-1922 school year. These were Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Georgia Tech, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi State, and Tennessee of the SIAA, plus Maryland, North Carolina, North Carolina State, Virginia, Virginia Tech, and Washington & Lee.

In December of 1921 the Southern Conference announced it would expand to no more than 16 members. The selection of the two additions proved so difficult that the membership was raised to 20 with the acceptances of Florida, Louisi-
ana state, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tulane, and Vanderbilt, all of the SIAA. There were no resignations from the SIAA, but after the 1922 season 13 left, leaving only Vanderbilt with dual membership. This made the SIAA effectively a small college conference. Sewanee was accepted for Southern Conference membership for 1924. After that season, Sewanee and Vanderbilt ended their SIAA affiliations.

1923-1942

with the withdrawal after the 1922 season of all the Southern Conference members except Vanderbilt, the SIAA became a small college conference. With the addition of several members, the lineup appears to have been this: From Alabama, Birmingham-Southern and Howard (Samford); from Georgia, Mercer and Oglethorpe; from Kentucky, Centre, Georgetown, Louisville, and Transylvania; from Mississippi, Millsaps and Mississippi College; from South Carolina, the Citadel, Erskine, Furman, Newberry, Presbyterian, and Wofford; and from Tennessee, Chattanooga, Sewanee, and Vanderbilt, with the last two leaving after the 1924 season.

All were private colleges except for Chattanooga and Louisville, which were municipal. The first state-supported colleges to apply for admission appear to have been Louisiana Tech and Southwestern Louisiana for 1924. The conference apparently was not quite ready for them for they were rejected and private Louisiana College was accepted.

The breakthrough for state-supported colleges came one year later when the applications of the two Louisiana schools were granted. The acceptance of Western Kentucky for 1926 followed. Eventually others from Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee became members. The first Florida members, all private, joined for 1925.

Another sign of unrest occurred for 1932 when nine members formed the Dixie Conference. They were Birmingham-Southern, Centre, Chattanooga, Howard, Mercer, Millsaps, Mississippi College, Southwestern (Rhodes), and Spring Hill, with Loyola following two years later. Not all resigned from the SIAA, and some returned later. The Citadel and Furman left to join the Southern Conference in 1936. A token expansion into Virginia occurred in 1936 with the acceptance of Emory & Henry.

It is not clear when the SIAA started declaring official football champions, but standings began appearing about 1929.

As had happened two decades earlier, the SIAA had expanded to the point of becoming unwieldy. It lasted until the World War II period, but was not revived after that. By 1948 its members were scattered over five limited area conferences, the Alabama, Kentucky (now Ohio Valley), Louisiana (later Gulf States), Volunteer state, and a new Dixie Conference, this with members in Alabama and Florida. Mercer and Oglethorpe never returned to the football scene after the war.
Editor's Note: On page 9 is a detailed review of the 1918 Cleveland Navy-Pitt game controversy by Bob Royce. It's a followup to the brief article about the game written by Lefty Farnsworth for the special August all-service football issue. Too bad these two great researchers will never meet. They live a continent apart, and Lefty, who claims to be "100 years old", seems to be more interested in fishing with his shoes off, ala Huck Finn. Lefty admits his grid articles are a little silly sometimes, but they do spark debate among CFHS members.