By Jim Campbell

Before the current proliferation of post-season college bowl games, there was only one - "The Grand Daddy of Them All" -- the Rose Bowl Begun in 1902 as a feature of Pasadena's Tournament of Roses, the game annually pitted a Pacific Coast team against an "Eastern" squad, the "East" being roughly anywhere on the Atlantic Ocean side of the Mississippi. After the 1902 game - a 49-0 Michigan victory over Stanford - another football game was not played until 1916. They have continued ever since.

Eastern representatives leading up to the 1922 game had been Brown, Pennsylvania, Great Lakes Naval Training Station during World War I, Harvard, and Ohio State. In the previous year's Rose Bowl, Coach Andy Smith's undefeated University of California "Wonder Team" had dismantled the Ohio State Buckeyes, 28-0. In the 1921 season, California's Golden Bears were again undefeated - during a seven-year stretch (1919-1925), Smith's teams compiled a 56-5-5 record.

Washington & Jefferson, a school then of about 450 students, located in Washington, Pennsylvania, was also undefeated in 1921. Though small, the Presidents were mighty. They took on, and defeated, such worthy opponents of the day as Bucknell, West Virginia Wesleyan, Carnegie Tech, Lehigh, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, and Detroit. W&J was a legitimate Eastern power at the time, and although the two schools no longer play, still holds a series edge over West Virginia University of 20-12-2.

Despite the impressive record of Washington & Jefferson, other Eastern schools felt they should receive the coveted Rose Bowl bid. Cornell, Lafayette, and Penn State were all unbeaten and viewed themselves as worthy opponents of the day as Bucknell, West Virginia Wesleyan, Carnegie Tech, Lehigh, Syracuse, Pittsburgh, West Virginia, and Detroit. W&J was a legitimate Eastern power at the time, and although the two schools no longer play, still holds a series edge over West Virginia University of 20-12-2.

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Ralph Vince, who remained a practicing attorney into his 90s in Cleveland, was one of the three nonagenarian survivors from the W&J team, and he was always quick to point out the tiny Western Pennsylvania school's credentials: "We were for real. We played - and knocked off - the best there was. There was no doubt in our minds before the game that we belonged - afterward there should have been no doubt in a lot of other people's minds."

Vince, a native of Italy who came to the United States at age six and settled with his family in Martins Ferry, in the soft-coal region of southeastern Ohio, continued: "We allowed six first downs in our last four games leading up to the Rose Bowl, and that includes a game with the University of Detroit that was called the Little Rose Bowl because we knew we had the bid before we played Detroit. They were undefeated, like us. We gave 'em a safety, and then nothing
else. We whipped 'em 14-2. I remember our Detroit alumni didn't want us to play them. They
thought we couldn't handle 'em Detroit got 21 yards against us - four rushing and seventeen on
the only pass they completed. We felt we could play with anyone."

The man behind the 1921 Presidents was head coach Earle "Greasy" Neale. It was Neale's first
year at W&J after a successful stint at Marietta College and a major league baseball career.
Right fielder Neale was the Cincinnati Reds leading hitter in the infamous 1919 Black Sox World
Series when the Chicago American League champions were accused of fixing the outcome. Neale
would always bristle at the mention of that series being fixed, lest someone might think his 357
batting average was tainted. Neale would later enjoy tremendous success as the Philadelphia
Eagles head coach in the 1940s, winning two consecutive shut-out NFL championship games,
1948 and 1949 -- the only time that has happened.

Ralph Vince had great respect for Neale's coaching ability. "Greasy was very innovative,"
explained Vince. "He would take stock of his team, see what his needs were, and then recruit
players to specifically fill those needs. That led to an interesting confrontation between me and
Neale. He brought in a fellow by the name of Daugherty to play right guard. Thursday before
the first game (in 1921) I could see that Daugherty was Greasy's boy. I said to myself, I'm gonna
have it out with Coach Neale' So I made an appointment with Neale for after practice."

In their meeting Neale confirmed that Vince was not starting in the opener and the player
replied, "That's a mistake." "I was mad," continues Vince. "I was ready to do or die for dear old
W&J, and Greasy wouldn't let me There was a long pause and then I said, 'I should start.' There
was a longer pause, and then Greasy said, 'Daugherty will play the first and third quarters, you
will play the second and fourth.'"

Vince went on: "I simply said, 'Thank you' and abruptly left. Years later I got a letter from
Greasy thanking me for being assertive at the time. Coming from a Hall of Fame coach, that
meant a lot to me" Before long, Vince was playing the entire game or close to it.

In December of 1921, President Simon Baker of W&J received the following telegram from the
Rose Bowl committee: "The directors of the Tournament of Roses Association have unanimously
resolved that the artistic and educational pageant of New Year's Day, January 2, 1922 (January
1 was on a Sunday that year) shall be followed by a football game between the best teams of the
East and the West, and by like vote have determined to issue an invitation to Washington and
Jefferson College to send its eleven (the committee could have had no idea just how prophetic
they would be) as the Eastern representative."

With the Rose Bowl bid secured, the Washington & Jefferson team - after a big sendoff --
boarded their train for the Coast. Vince recalled the trip west: "Reserve end Lee Spillers got
pneumonia on the trip out west and we had to leave him in a hospital in Kansas City. We stopped
there to practice briefly. We were still at full strength though-- if you call nineteen players full
strength -- because J. Ross 'Bucky' Buchanan, another reserve, who had stowed away on the train,
was given Spillers' ticket. He continued: 'We continued west, stopping again briefly at the Grand
Canyon. That was some sight to see. Then we arrived in Pasadena cm Saturday, December 31. It
was New Year's Eve, but no celebrating for us. We came to play football.'

Saturday was the last practice day - a double session. The morning was given "to blackboard
instructions, devoting time to diagrams of how to stop California's forward passes" The afternoon
session - a secret one - was held at the Arcadia balloon field. Walter Snyder, a sophomore
reserve center on the team, recalled the security measures: "I don't know if they were state
militia or what, but there were soldiers with rifles guarding our practice field." Snyder, who came
from a national championship high school team -- Toledo Scott in Ohio - recalled Neale's attention to detail: "Coach Neale worked with the kickers and then drilled us on forming interference on kickoff returns and running back punts. That would play an important part in the game."

No one knew it at the time, but the eleven starters for W&J would play the entire game without substitutions. The Prexies' ironmen were Herb Kopf and Carl Konvolinka at ends, captain Russ Stein and Chet Widerquist at tackles, Vince and Ray Neal at guards, Al Crook at center, Charlie "Pruner" West - in place of the injured Ray McLaughlin - at quarterback, Hal "Swede" Erickson and Wayne Brenkert at halfbacks, and Joe Basista at fullback. W&J's Erickson is an interesting story in that he was no stranger to the Rose Bowl. In the 1919 game, he was on the victorious Great Lakes team that defeated the Mare Island Marines, thus being the only man to play in two Rose Bowls with two different teams - and never losing.

An overcast day didn't prevent the last game at Tournament Park - the present Rose Bowl would be completed for the 1923 game - from drawing a record crowd of 50,000. -- Cal's "Wonder Team" was anywhere from a 14-21 point favorite at the kickoff. While there was no rain, there was plenty of moisture from the previous day's rainfall and the field quickly became a quagmire. California kicked off to start the game and W&J marched from its 25 yard line to the Golden Bears' 35 without much trouble, Vince described the action: "We (the linemen) opened the holes and Brenkert and Erickson ran through - nothing fancy."

At the Cal 35, the most crucial play of the game would take place, as Brenkert was the deep man in a short punt formation -- an offensive set that didn't necessarily mean a kick was to follow. With help from Vince and other linemen, the rangy halfback "dodged through the entire California team for thirty-five yards, going over the goal line standing up." However, umpire Tom Thorp -- one of the crew of four officials of whom it was noted that they had traveled 17,320 miles to officiate the game -- threw a flag. Washington and Jefferson had been offside. Specifically, Captain Stein was the one called for offside. Shortly after the penalty, "Crip" Toomey of Cal intercepted a Presidents' pass and returned the ball to the W&J 35 yard line. Four plays by the Golden Bears then netted only two yards against the rugged Western Pennsylvanians and W&J took over on downs at their 33. For the rest of the period the teams exchanged punts.
Both the Bears and the Prexies seemed to be following the conventional wisdom of the day: "Kick the ball back to the other guy and wait for him to make a mistake - then capitalize." California seemed to follow it to the letter, often punting on first down. W&J took a more liberal interpretation, running a couple of plays and punting on third or fourth down. Archie Nisbet was Cal's kicker; Erickson was W&J's. Nisbet was outkicking Erickson by 12-15 yards per kick, but according to Vince, W&J was getting the best of the exchanges. "Erickson was uncanny running back those punts," noted Vince. This was something Greasy worked on - it paid off. Although Nisbet was kicking farther, we actually got better field position because of Swede's great returns. We kept creeping up on their goal line." As the first half ended scoreless, California had one first down to show. They would get one more in the second half.

Cal's All-America end Harold "Brick" Muller was now in the game. He had become an instant folk hero in the 1921 Rose Bowl by throwing what was described by some as a "seventy-yard, in-the-air, touchdown pass" against Ohio State. Actually, it was 53 yards but given the pumpkin-like shape of the ball in those days, it was still a notable achievement. Muller, who had won a silver medal in the high jump at the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, Belgium, and would later become a physician, did not start against W&J because of "a terrible case of carbuncles." Muller would prove to never be a factor in the game. He completed just two passes - one for a loss; the other was fumbled by the receiver after making the catch. The tenacity of the W&J defense, as it had done to nearly all 1921 opponents, completely stifled the vaunted California attack.

Washington & Jefferson would have two more scoring opportunities in the game. Each time the Red and Black got close to the Cal goal line though, the Bears would stiffen on defense. Each time W&J would attempt a field goal, yet neither kick by Captain Stein would be successful. Both were in the 30-35 yard range. The first attempt was wide; the second was blocked. Although they didn't score, W&J continued to dominate play. A Brenkirt-to-Erickson pass play netted 10 yards. Erickson had other nice runs that were stopped by last-ditch tackles by the Cal defenders.

The game eventually ended in a scoreless tie -- Washington & Jefferson 0 California 0. However, few except Cal diehards would say anything other than the better team that day was the Presidents from the little Pennsylvania college. It's probably safe to assume that after the game writer Jack James of the San Francisco Examiner certainly knew that this Washington & Jefferson was very much alive.

In a 1992 matchup, Jeff Jacke of Missouri kicked a school-record five field goals in the Tigers' 22-17 victory over Kansas. His boots covered 21, 39, 40, 23, and 43 yards. This game was the 101st meeting in the gridiron rivalry between the two schools.

After the 1938 season finale for the Brooklyn College football team, Coach Louis Oshins of the school announced that the squad would schedule no home games for 1939 as the players felt "they weren't appreciated on their own campus." This was in the aftermath of the final home game of 1938 against Susquehanna when only about 200 fans had been on hand. Less than 100 tickets had been sold for each of the four home games that year.

In 1920, Bob Zuppke of the University of Illinois told reporters that "the brand of football played in the East is as croquet compared to the football played by elevens of the Western Conference" A writer from the New York Post said that Zuppke was probably "spoofing," and added that "such outgivings, besides being in bad taste, tend to make more remote that interchange of intersectional games which most of us have been working for."

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