

## 115 YEARS AGO: “PUDGE” HEFFELFINGER BECOMES FIRST FOOTBALL PRO

When one thinks of legendary professional football players, names like **JOE NAMATH**, **JIM BROWN**, **DICK BUTKUS**, **JOE MONTANA** or **JOE GREENE** probably spring to mind. Few, however, would name **WILLIAM “PUDGE” HEFFELFINGER** among those legends. Yet Heffelfinger was the player who preceded all of these superstars.

On November 12, 1892 – 115 years go – at Recreation Park on Pittsburgh’s North Side, “Pudge” Heffelfinger became the first-ever professional football player.

The Allegheny Athletic Association and the Pittsburgh Athletic Club were fierce intra-city rivals. The two teams had played to a previous 6-6 tie in front of 3,000 fans on Columbus Day in 1892.

Heffelfinger had been an All-American at Yale from 1889-91 and was the most revered football player in the nation at the time. For that reason, the Allegheny Athletic Association decided to pay Heffelfinger \$25 in expenses and a cash bonus of \$500 to play for its squad in the rematch against the PAC.

Before a crowd of 5,000, Heffelfinger led the AAA team to a 4-0 victory over the PAC team. In the first half, the ex-Yale hero, playing guard, forced a fumble, recovered it and returned it for the game’s only touchdown. On that day, “Pudge” Heffelfinger and the Allegheny Athletic Association began 115 years of professional football.

A breakdown of “Pudge” Heffelfinger:

Position	Height	Weight	High School	College
Guard	6-3	195	Central HS (Minneapolis, MN)	Yale University

- Was a member of the first three All-America teams (1889-91).
- Was a charter member of the College Football Hall of Fame (1951).
- Coached at the University of California in 1893 (5-1-1), Lehigh University in 1894 (6-8), and the University of Minnesota in 1895 (7-3) for an overall record of 18-12-1.

## 75th ANNIVERSARY: THE NFL INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIP

The national anthem. A colorful fireworks display. A star-studded halftime show. These are just some of the characteristics of the biggest spectacle in all of sports, the Super Bowl. The NFL’s annual championship game was not always as glamorous as Super Bowl XLII will be in Glendale, Arizona this February. In fact it took a stroke of luck for there to be an NFL championship game to be played in the first place.

During its first 13 years of existence (1920-32), the NFL did not have a championship game; the league champion was determined by best regular-season record. In 1932, both the Chicago Bears and the Portsmouth Spartans (renamed the Detroit Lions in 1934) finished the season in a first-ever tie for first. Chicago was 6-1-6 and Portsmouth 6-1-4. Since the teams had already tied twice during the season, the league office ruled that a “playoff,” which counted toward the season standings, would be needed to determine a champion.

Chicago’s Wrigley Field was scheduled to host the game but a blizzard made it impossible to play, and the game was moved indoors to Chicago Stadium. So on December 18, 1932, the NFL had its first playoff game...and indoor game. The history-making didn’t stop there. Because of space limitations, the field was only 80 yards long, and the following changes were dictated:

- Kickoffs from the 10-yard line.
- Teams penalized 20 yards when crossing midfield, thus making field 100 yards long.
- Goal posts moved from end line to goal line.\*
- Field goals not allowed.
- Ball spotted on hashmarks drawn 10 yards from each sideline.\*

\*Later adopted for all league games.

Perhaps the most significant development of the game occurred on a play in the scoreless fourth quarter. Bears back **BRONKO NAGURSKI** took a snap from the two-yard line, faked a run, dropped back to pass and connected with back **RED GRANGE** for the game-winning touchdown. But a controversy immediately arose as to where Nagurski was when he threw the ball. The rule at the time stated that a forward pass had to be thrown from at least five yards behind the line of scrimmage. The officials overruled Portsmouth’s protest that Nagurski was not five yards from scrimmage, and the touchdown stood. Chicago went on to win 9-0 and claimed their second league championship.

At a February league meeting, the NFL was changed forever when a forward pass thrown from anywhere behind the line of scrimmage was legalized. Also, as a result of the success of the game, the league was divided into two divisions with the division winners meeting in an annual championship game. This paved the way for the annual league championship game to evolve into the season-ending phenomenon it is today, the Super Bowl.