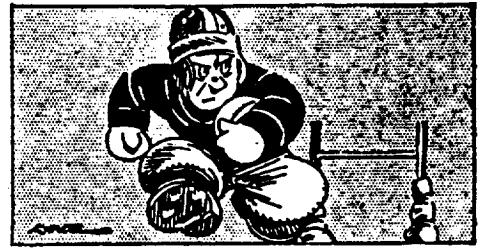


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## The Dixie Classic

By Ray Schmidt

As the decade of the Roaring Twenties was coming to a close Dallas was a city bursting at the seams with prosperity. Regarding football as a way of life, the business and civic leaders of Dallas looked with undisguised envy at the national attention focused each year on Pasadena by the Rose Bowl and on San Francisco by the East-West Shrine game.

So it was in late 1928 that the idea was put together for Dallas to host an annual college all-star game to be called the Dixie Classic. In 1922 and 1925 Dallas had hosted a post-season game called the Dixie Classic, but the new organizers choose to call the 1929 contest the "first annual".

The initial game was held on New Years Day, 1929 and featured the all-stars of the Big Six Conference tackling the Southwest Conference stars. The Big Six came with a massive front line which spent the day opening nice holes for the slashing runs of Blue Howell of Nebraska and Bob Mehrle of Missouri. Behind Howell's two TD's in the first half the Big Six won the game by a 14-6 score, and Dallas now had an annual football "Classic".

As the 1929 season was coming to a close plans were underway to have another Dixie Classic game. This time the contest would be between the Southwest stars and a team of seniors representing the Middle West, comprising not only players from the Big Ten, but also schools like Notre Dame and Drake.

The Southwest stars, fortified by the outstanding Centenary halfback Jake Hanna, were to be coached by SMU's Ray Morrison. The SWC had turned out many excellent teams over the years, but by the late-20's the Conference was suffering from a regional inferiority complex. The 1930 Dixie Classic was meant to change all that.

The Midwest was popularly regarded as having "the greatest wealth of talent anywhere" and as "the stronghold of great football players". The Dallas media indicated that a victory by the Southwest would be for Morrison "a lasting

tribute to his success as a coach."

The game shaped up as a battle of the great size and strength of the Midwest against the speed and aerial attack of the Southwest, led by the great TCU quarterback Howard Grubbs. The Southwest believed that it had developed the passing game "to an extent that is claimed to be entirely new to the Midwest where straight football is the main form of offense."

The Midwest was coached by Jimmy Phelan who had just led his undefeated 1929 Purdue team to the Big Ten title. He brought a team of stars from eleven schools, led by Purdue's All-American back Ralph "Pest" Welch.

Came New Years Day, 1930 and 15,000 fans flocked to Ownby Stadium for the Dixie Classic. In the first period the gold-clad Middle West stars' defense chased quarterback Howard Grubbs all over the field, while the offense of the visitors demonstrated a powerful running attack. Despite all this the first period remained scoreless.

For the next two periods the crowd was kept on it's feet cheering by what many called "the most thrilling football" ever seen on a local gridiron. Early in the second period the Midwest stars pounded to the Southwest 3 yard line before losing a fumble. Regaining the ball after a punt the Midwest then staged a bruising 47 yard drive, which ended with Harold Rebholtz of Wisconsin scoring the TD from 2 yards out for a 6-0 lead.

The crimson-clad Southwest team then came back with a brilliant passing attack. Starting from the Midwest 49, the Southwest staged an eleven play drive which featured eight completed passes. It culminated with Grubbs rifling a pass into the end-zone where Clarence Geis of Arkansas made a diving catch for the TD and a 6-6 tie at half-time.

Early in the third period the Midwest was on their own 33 yard line when Allen Holman of Ohio State fired a 28 yard completion to Herman Young of Detroit. Two plays later Welch was running for his life trying to elude the pass rush of Baylor's Weldon Lucas. Welch barely got off a wobbly desperation pass which Young again hauled in, this time at the Southwest's 11 yard line. Four plays later Young scored the TD on a lateral and the Midwest led 12-6. The Southwest then elected to kick-off and the Midwest started from their own 40. Welch blasted up the middle for 18 yards and, on the next play, Holman fired a long pass to Young for a 42 yard TD and an 18-6 lead.

Late in the period Grubbs intercepted a pass and ran back 13 yards to give the Southwest the ball on the visitor's 33. On the third play Grubbs, scrambling around the backfield, found Geis open and hurled a 30 yard TD pass to cut the margin to 18-12. On the Southwest's next possession Grubbs completed a long pass to Geis for an apparent TD, but the Arkansas flash was caught from behind at the 8 yard line by Cornell of St Louis. The Midwest turned away this threat, and the two teams battled back and forth well into the fourth period. Late in the game the Midwest staged a 48 yard drive, ending with Rebholtz running 12 yards for the TD, and producing the 25-12 final score.

The bid by the Southwest for instant national respectability had failed, but Dallas had a post-season game popular beyond expectations. The enthusiasm generated by the Dixie Classic led to the debut in 1937 of the Cotton Bowl game, which continues to this day as a true "Classic".