

The Joey Korshalla case

By John Hibner

On Sunday, Nov 20, 1932 there was the usual list of college football results in the sports section. As one reads quickly down the list, one of the scores may catch your eye. This time one would take a second look at the score, which reads: West Liberty State 137 Cedarville-Ohio 0.

Cedarville College is located about thirty miles east of Dayton, Ohio near the small town of Xenia. In June of 1932, Marion "Killer Borst, Cedarville's football coach, resigned his position of the last three seasons, during which Cedarville had had winning seasons. The administration at the college asked J.W. Ault, who taught mathematics, to become the new football coach, and at the opening of practice thirty men answered the call for the upcoming season. Ed Irons was the only man left from the 1931 team, and Coach Ault let him be a player-coach. After two weeks of practice the squad was reduced to 24 players, as they got ready for the opening game with Ashland College. The inexperience of many of the players and the extremely difficult schedule prevented the season from being anything but unsuccessful. The Cedarville Yellowjackets were defeated by Ashland 23-0; Rio Grande spoiled the home opener by winning 14-6, followed by losses to Fairmont Teachers 59-0, Rio Grande 20-0, and New River State 81-0.

Cedarville's next opponent was West Liberty State College, located about 25 miles north of Wheeling, West Virginia. The "Hilltoppers" were coached by Harry Sweeney, who was in his seventh year as head coach, and he had compiled an impressive record of 45-14-3. The best known player that Sweeney had coached was Bob Campiglio. In 1930 Campiglio had scored 102 points, and in 1931 he was the nation's leading scorer with 22 touchdowns and 13 PAT's for 145 points. West Liberty had won the West Virginia Athletic Conference four straight years and they had compiled a 6-2 record so far in 1932 as they approached their last game of the season on Nov 19 against Cedarville.

Coach Ault and his Cedarville players left by bus for West Liberty on Friday, Nov 18. Paul Rife was one of the players, and today he still lives in Cedarville. Here are his recollections of the game that was played over 50 years ago: "The weather that weekend was rainy with snow flurries, and the field at West Liberty was in good condition, considering the weather. The playing field was cut out of the side of the mountain, and there weren't any stands on either side of the field."

"I had drawn the assignment of playing fullback because Ed Irons had been hurt and didn't make the trip. When the game started it was cold, foggy, and raining and soon the field became muddy. We just got licked, and when you lose by 137-0 you really don't have any excuses. I don't remember that Korshalla fellow, but one big fellow seemed to do all the scoring!"

Another Cedarville player, Verner Garlough, who now lives in Springfield, Ohio, gave me this statement about the game: "Our team really wasn't a match for West Liberty State. They worked and prepared all week for us because they wanted to top the score of New River State. The game was played in the rain and snow flurries. It seemed that most of our players were blowing mud bubbles when they played in the line. Yes, we were all glad to get out of there alive."

The 1932 Cedarville game was the largest score ever made by a West Liberty team. Before the day was finished many people would be talking about this game, and what Joe Korshalla had done. Korshalla was a very quiet, shy fell-

ow of Polish descent who came from the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area of Pennsylvania. He had not gone to college after he got out of high school, but somehow had enrolled at West Liberty in the Fall of 1932. Korshalla was nicknamed "Cueball" by his teammates because of his premature balding, and he had scored only one TD in the previous eight games.

Korshalla started at left halfback that afternoon against Cedarville, and set the tone of the game the first time he carried the ball, as he ran thru the left side and down the sideline for a 70 yard TD run. The game settled into this type of affair: Cedarville would run two or three plays and then punt the ball; every time the Hilltoppers got the ball, they scored. As the first half continued, both coaches saw what was happening, so they agreed to cut the playing time of the half from the usual 30 minutes to 24. Korshalla by that time had scored 6 TD's, all of them longer than 22 yards, and at halftime the score was 83-0.

Again Coaches Ault and Sweeney met and agreed to reduce the playing time to 10 minutes for each of the last two quarters of the game. The clock was never stopped for time-outs, incomplete passes, or any other reason. Coach Sweeney pulled out all of his first stringers, except for Korshalla, who was just unstoppable. He made four more TD's, kicked five extra points, and had a chance to break the school record for most points scored in one game by an individual. In the last several minutes, he returned a punt 75 yards for his 11th TD of the game and his 71st point. However, Cedarville finally got a break as a clipping penalty was called against West Liberty and the play was called back, As the clock was winding down the ball went over to Cedarville. West Liberty held, and got the ball back. The ball went to Korshalla one more time, and he broke thru the middle and ran 35 yards to a TD thus giving him his 71st point. Moments later this epic game ended.

Korshalla had carried the ball a total of 20 times, and scored 11 TD's (none of the runs were less than 22 yards). He rushed for 504 yards, and in scoring 71 points he set a new school record. Korshalla didn't play any more football for West Liberty State as he only stayed in school for the remainder of that year. This would also be the last football game for Coach Sweeney, as he went into teaching in the area and was replaced by Joe Bartell.

But the story of what happened at West Liberty that day wasn't over. In the December, 1973 issue of True Magazine, an article was printed entitled "The Record-Breaking Ringer", by Jim Benagh. One year later, Mr Benagh had a book

published by Tempo Books, entitled "Incredible Football Feats", which includes another chapter about Joe Korshalla and his record-breaking game. In both articles, the question has been brought up: "was Joe Korshalla ever enrolled in school?" The first article published in True Magazine, states: "The school, now called West Liberty State College, admits that Korshalla may not have been a student after all; the school historian can find no proof that he was ever enrolled." Art Barbeau, Chairperson of the Department of Social Sciences and sort of the acting SID, is quoted as saying: "It might have been that he was a Ringer". When asked if any of Korshalla's teammates that were in the area could solve the mystery, Barbeau said "you might try a guy over in Follansbee. He played for West Liberty for eight straight years." In my research on this game, I've found many parts of Mr Benagh's articles to be inaccurately written. In fact, many individuals feel the articles attack the reputation of the school and of Coach Harry F. Sweeney.

The first question is: was Joe Korshalla ever enrolled at West Liberty? I wrote to Mr Nelson Cain, Director of Registration and Admissions at WLSC, and here is his answer- "The records in our office indicate that Joseph Korshalla was indeed a full-time student for the school year 1932-33, having entered college on Sept 13, 1932. He enrolled for and completed 12 semester hours in the Fall semester, and 14 hours in the Spring. His academic record was very good and he left the college in good standing. There is no record indicating why he did not return the next year, but he was a properly enrolled student for the term during which the Cedarville game was played." So the truth is that Joe Korshalla was NOT a Ringer.

There might have been some confusion about the spelling of his name, which has been spelled in places as "Kershalla". It is quite possible that someone could have contacted the Admissions Office with the wrong spelling, and probably no one would have thought to look under a different spelling. But this wasn't the case for Mr Benagh, for he spells Korshalla's name accurately, and mentions "they have spelled his name 'Kershalla' ". Art Barbeau said in his letter to me that, at the time of Benagh's research visit to West Liberty, most of the records were stored away in boxes, which made it very impossible to find data. Mr Barbeau said "that much of the initial confusion began with the misspelling of Joe Korshalla's name ... West Liberty's sports records were in bad shape when I took over the SID job as a volunteer. Benagh wanted information very quickly, and did not accurately report on anything that was given to him."

The True Magazine article also gives one the impression that Coach Sweeney was regularly using ineligible players, and in fact, Paul Rife states "that West Liberty had a reputation of using professional players". The individual who probably resents the "Ringer" article more than any one person is Ethel Sweeney, wife of WLSC Coach Harry Sweeney. She feels that her husband's reputation has been damaged by this article. Mr Sweeney died in 1964, and of course never saw the article.

I sent Mrs Sweeney a list of the players on that West Liberty team. She said all of the players were full-time students and no pros were on the team. In her letter she remembered players such as Duckie Speisner, Jim Carey, Joe Powell, Francis Ryscosky, Don Miller, Carl Duncan and Stan Zanski. She wrote: "I wish the whole business could be erased from the records; to most people the game meant nothing. Poor Joey Korshalla must be turning over in his grave and not resting in peace."

Cedarville's season wasn't over yet as they still had two more games on

their schedule. Of course they lost to Union College (39-0) and Wilmington College (32-0). Cedarville finished their season with an 0-8 record, and they scored only one TD all season while allowing their opponents to tally a whopping 405 points.

Paul Rife was right when he said that "when you lose by the scores that we lost by, you don't have any excuse." All the Cedarville players on the 1932 team would agree with that comment!!