

Flatbush Kingsmen and friends

By Ed Gilleran Jr.

New York City was a "hot-bed" of college football in the years between the two world wars. But not all the gridiron thrills were provided at Yankee Stadium by the big schools. A lot of the action was being provided by the city's smaller colleges.

The year 1937 was an exceptional one for the Brooklyn College team called the Kingsmen, as Coach Lew Oshins guided the Maroon and Gold to an outstanding season of seven victories and only two losses. Six of the wins came back to back as the Brooklynites overwhelmed Wagner, Hofstra, Lowell Tech, Trenton Teachers, the Fort Hamilton Army team, and the New York Aggies. Five of these wins were shutouts, as only Trenton managed to score a TD against Oshins' eleven. Meanwhile, the Kingsmen scored 181 points in the last six games. There was a lot to celebrate on the Flatbush campus which was comprised of five attractive Georgian Colonial Buildings.

A lad named Sid White, the "Flatbush Flash" scored 113 of those points on 18 TD's and 5 PAT's. Since White was injured and did not play in Brooklyn's first three games, two of which they lost (CCNY and Rensselaer Poly), many wondered if Brooklyn might have gone unbeaten had the spectacular ball-carrier been available all year. Against Fort Hamilton White scampered to four TD's on runs of 35, 40, 60 and 90 yards. He tallied three times against the New York Aggies on runs of 6, 30 and 72 yards.

The 1941 Brooklyn team played superbly even though it lost a thriller to Hofstra, 13-7, before 4,000 out in Hepstead. Coach Howdy Meyers' Hofstra team was a highly-regarded small college team in those days. Howie Packard played well for Brooklyn that day, as did Irwin Shaw, the future author, and Allie Sherman, who later became coach of the New York football Giants.

Did C.C.N.Y. (City College of New York) ever play football? You bet they did. There were no bowl teams, no All-America players, no big intersectional games, but the Beavers of CCNY played because they loved the game. One of the CCNY coaches was Michigan's famous forward passer and All-America quarterback of 1926, Benny Friedman. He had succeeded Dr. Harold Parker. The Lavender and Black of CCNY did not have a wealth of talent, since there were no athletic scholarships at City College. Most of the boys who played for City headed home after practice on the Washington Heights line of the Subway or hopped on the IRT's Broadway line at the 137th Street Station. But Friedman nevertheless put a fighting team on the field at Lewisohn Stadium.

Lewisohn Stadium (a gift to the city from Adolph Lewisohn in 1915) was built of concrete on a grade sloping east from Amsterdam Avenue. With tiers of seats and a Doric colonnade, the structure was a simplified version of the ancient Greek hillside amphitheatre. The edifice was known to the public less for its college football than for its summer evening music concerts given there by the Philharmonic Symphony.

The best football player CCNY ever had was probably Jerry Stein, a center. In 1938 he was selected on the Metropolitan College All-Star team that played the Brooklyn Dodgers of the NFL in a charity game. Other CCNY football players of note were Jasper Jones in 1942; Stan Romero-1941; Art Gmitro and George Alevison-1940; Bill Mayhew, Harry Stein and Jim Clancy in 1938; Roy

Ilowit, Adolph Cooper and Mike Weisbrod in 1936; Joe Marsiglia-1937; John Schlesinger, Harry Schneer, Ed Dubinsky, Sid Eisenberg and George Clemons in 1930.

The best football a CCNY team ever played was the first quarter of the 1936 game with NYU at Yankee Stadium before a crowd of near 10,000, and it was the biggest game ever for CCNY. The Beavers shocked NYU in the first period when Roy Ilowit recovered a Violet fumble on the NYU 15. Weisbrod and Schimenty bulled their way down to the NYU goal, and Schimenty crashed over for the TD. Rockwell kicked the extra point and CCNY was ahead of the NYU team that a week later would knock Fordham out of the Rose Bowl picture. NYU caught up and tied the game at halftime, and then went on to win 25-7, but that first half was a glorious time for CCNY.

CCNY played a thriller against NYU in 1934, although the final score did not indicate how close the contest was. The game was replete with unexpected and breath-taking plays. One was a 69-yard sprint for a TD by CCNY's triple-threat halfback, Adolph Cooper. Adolph drop-kicked the PAT, and later passed to Carl Schwartz for a second Lavender TD. But NYU had too many players and they eventually wore down CCNY, and took a 38-13 win.

CCNY defeated Fordham regularly in basketball in the 20's and 30's but could not work the same magic when the Rams and Beavers met on the gridiron. But City made a close game of the 1926 contest at Lewisohn Stadium. Five thousand people watched CCNY go ahead 3-0 on a 24-yard field goal by Willis Halpern in the first quarter. Fordham persisted however, and mounted an 80-yard drive in the final four minutes. The Rams' tally came when Tom Leary caught teammate Delaney's pass, and future All-America player, Earl "Zev" Graham, kicked the PAT for a Ram win.

Two of the most notable wins CCNY recorded in football were the 21-0 win over Brooklyn College in 1938, and the 44-12 victory over Seton Hall in 1930. In 1938 the largest crowd ever to see Brooklyn and CCNY play, 8,000, saw City win its seventh in a row over the Brooklynites as Jim Clancy scored twice, and Bert Redoy tallied on a pass from Harry Stein after the score was set-up by the fine running of Yale Laitin.

In 1930 St John's (located in Brooklyn) had the second best football record in the city; six wins and one loss. The Redmen beat Niagara, Drexel, Washington College, CCNY, Providence and Manhattan. The New York Times described St John's passing attack as "sensational" when the Redmen beat Providence 13-6 at Dexter Park. Five passers were involved: Tom Neary, Sam Cooper, Bob Sheppard, Mike Rubinsky and Abe Margolies. In St John's win over CCNY 12-0, the feature of the game was the Redmen's flea-flicker pass, with Margolies faking a run, passing short behind the line of scrimmage to Sheppard, who then tossed a "bomb" to Rube Mann for the TD.

The thriller of St John's 1930 season took place against Manhattan on Nov. 22 before an overflow crowd at Dexter Park. Abe Margolies, the Redmen's "midget" triple-threat back, threw a 25-yard pass to Rube Mann to start the scoring. Sam Cooper and Tom Neary combined on a 35-yard pass-run play for a TD, and in the final quarter Margolies plunged over from the 1-yard line

after picking up most of the ground in a 50-yard St John's drive. The Redmen added three PAT's for a 21-point total. Meanwhile, the Manhattan team, paced by Eddie Ashkar, scored three times but missed two of the extra point tries, and the game ended with St John's a 21-19 winner and possessor of a 6-1 record for the season.

The two teams met again in 1931, this time in the final game of the season, at Jasper Stadium in Riverdale before a Manhattan Homecoming crowd of 4,000. It was another thriller. In the first quarter Captain Babe Pace of St John's caught a TD pass from Mike Stephens, followed by a Stephens pass to Mike Rubinsky for the extra point. The PAT loomed large because Manhattan's conversion attempt after their TD was blocked by Art Gallo. With less than five minutes remaining in the contest St John's was protecting the 7-6 lead when a bad pass from center bounded into the end zone, and St John's punter Art Wright was buried there by Manhattan's Walt Jucunski and Howie Smith for the 2-point safety. It was a gloomy end to the game for St John's.

In the 1931 finale at Lewisohn Stadium, the St John's Redmen defeated CCNY 13-0. "Red" Stephens scored on a pass from Sheppard and Art Gallo tallied on a pass from Stephens. Mike Dallolio was outstanding in the line for St John's. But St John's terminated varsity football at the end of the 1931 season and did not resume the sport until the 1970's, and then as a club sport.

Two other colleges in the New York City area sporadically attempted varsity football in the pre-war years. In 1932, St Francis College of Brooklyn played two varsity football games, losing one to Brooklyn College, but achieving a considerable moral victory in holding Wagner College to a scoreless tie. In 1934, the Terriers lost the "Battle of Brooklyn" game to crosstown rival Brooklyn College by a 14-0 score. Long Island University also had a modest football program, but did produce an outstanding player in 1941 by the name of Dolly King.

EDITORS NOTE: The preceding article is an "excerpt" from the as-yet unpublished book by Mr Gilleran on NYC football, titled "One Last Look".