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# The Columbus Metros: Forced to Punt

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With a football tradition firmly established on the collegiate level by the Ohio State University's Buckeyes, fifteen semi-professional and professional teams since 1900 have attempted to capture the loyalty of fans in Columbus, Ohio.

Teams in the American Professional Football Association, the National Football League and the third American Football League did poorly at the gate, and usually as poorly on the field. Semi-professional football has been the only level beyond the amateur game Columbus has had since 1941. The Columbus Metros Professional Football Club, Incorporated, was the latest organization to make the attempt. The 1978 season found the Metros in the Midwest Football League with four Michigan teams, the Lansing Capitols, Kalamazoo All-Stars, Grand Rapids Cobras and Hamtramck Indians, in addition to the Indianapolis, Indiana Caps.

After waltzing to the Midwest League crown with an eight wins and one loss record, the Metros played a series of exhibition games in hopes of capturing a national semi-professional championship by way of a number one ranking by *Pro Football Weekly*. Despite a final seconds seventeen to fourteen victory against the then first ranked Delavan, Wisconsin Red Devils, the Metros closed their inaugural campaign with a twelve and one record and a number two *Pro Football Weekly* ranking.

With the off-season collapse of the Midwest League, the Metros were sought by the Mid-Atlantic Football League for 1979. The Mid-Atlantic featured the Cleveland Academes and Youngstown Hardhats in Ohio, the Pittsburgh Colts in Pennsylvania, and

the Toronto Grizzlies in Ontario. Columbus easily won the Mid-Atlantic title with a seven and one record, including a ninety-two to nothing humiliation of the Cleveland Academes.

Again seeking the elusive number one *Pro Football Weekly* rating, the Metros closed out 1979 with another series of exhibitions. Again, Delavan was defeated in the final seconds, seventeen to fifteen, in the first Arthur S. Arkush Bowl. The Arkush Bowl, named in honor of the late publisher of *Pro Football Weekly*, was then followed by a twenty-one to fourteen Columbus victory against the then first ranked Chambersburg, Pennsylvania Cardinals. But for the second season the Metros would finish ranked second nationally, although this time with an eleven and two record.

Staggering financially, the Metros organization pinned its hopes of survival in 1980 on what has been called the most unique sports event yet conceived and carried out. With most of the original organizers now gone, the Metros entered into an off-season agreement with a Columbus cable television system, Warner-AmEx QUBE, to play a televised game for \$2,500 and a \$2,500 winner-take-all purse against the Racine, Wisconsin Gladiators in Columbus, July 12. The unique element was that QUBE's home viewers, using the cable system's interactive television push-button consoles, would direct the Metros' offense and defense against the Racine coaching staff. The home viewers, given several options designed in respect to field position and game situation, would push their play selection, with the plurality's choice then being relayed to the players on the field.

"Your Call Football" turned to disaster as a severe thunderstorm washed away Franklin County Stadium's synthetic surface's markings and much of the stadium crowd. It marked the third time the Metros began their home season in a cloudburst. After a long delay, play began with the Metros scoring first on a first quarter end around by Cornelius Green. The Metros' armchair coaches were not able to continue their early success and Racine dominated the rest of the game, winning ten to seven.

With Lehr's interest and \$175,000 of his own money now gone, several Metros players and some coaches attempted to continue operating the team for two games before finally giving up and jumping to the other Columbus semi-professional team, the Winds of the Ohio Football League. The Winds managed to reach the playoffs of the newly created Minor Professional Football Association, only to be eliminated by the Delavan Red Devils, twenty-eight to nothing.

Remnants of the Metros organization spent the remainder of 1980 attempting to meet the club's financial obligations and in remembering the good moments in the team's short-lived history. They knew however, that the Columbus Metros had been forced to punt.

