

1926 BUFFALO RANGERS

By Ken Crippen

After a dismal 1-6-2 season in 1925, Buffalo needed to make a change with their pro football team. Jim Kendrick was hired to replace Wally Koppisch as manager. Kendrick, a former Texas A&M player who played seven games for the Buffalo Bisons in 1925, planned to put together an all-Texas team. This team was sometimes called the “Texas” Rangers or “Cowboys,” but they represented the Queen City in the National Football League (NFL). Made up of “Southwestern products,” Kendrick believed that if the players had no outside interests or anything to divert their minds from playing football, they would play better. The player’s families would remain in the southern states, while they were alone in Buffalo. This was an experiment for the new manager and the season would determine if his theory was correct.

Professional football had gained popularity since the NFL was formed. The 1926 season saw the emergence of a rival to the NFL: the first incarnation of the American Football League (AFL). Illinois gridiron legend Red Grange and sports agent Charles C. “C.C.” Pyle – sometimes referred to as “Cash-and-Carry” Pyle – started the league after NFL President Joe Carr refused the pair a franchise in New York City. The league only lasted one season, but it was the first competition for the relatively new NFL.

While they were waiting for their new home in Bison Stadium to be ready for football, the Rangers practiced at Grover Cleveland Park on Bailey Avenue. In an attempt to bolster his roster, Kendrick tried to sign Shag Sheard, a member of the Kansas City team and former member of the Rochester Jeffersons. Sheard lived in Rochester and had expressed interest in playing for Buffalo. Unfortunately for Kendrick, Sheard signed as coach and player for the Rochester Oxfords, a local semi-pro team, before the Buffalo manager could ink the deal. Kendrick was able, however, to sign Ralph Pittman and Ben Hobson and negotiated with Mike Traynor and Lou Feist. Traynor did not sign with the team and decided to work with the semi-pro Nash-Buffalo team instead, but Feist signed before the start of the first game. Kendrick continued to modify his roster as the season progressed.

The Buffalo Rangers started their season with a practice game against the soldiers of the 174th Infantry Regiment. Captain Kline of the 174th bolstered their roster from the previous year by adding Mike Goldback of the 1925 South Buffalo team (city champions); Mat “Sailor” Hearne, who some considered to be the best fullback in Western New York; former Niagara University star Cy Hatch; Harvey Yeates of Colgate; along with Dutch Henning and Freddie Nuschel. Coach Bounce Brennisson and assistant coach Lou Knauff felt that they could give the Rangers a tough test.

It was a “torrid and sultry” day at Bison stadium for the Rangers practice game against the 174th Infantry. The heat seemed to affect the 174th more than it did the Buffalo team as the Rangers had a 7-5 advantage in first downs. The front line played well for Buffalo, helping the team tally the first score of the game. Aided by two offside penalties and a 25-yard pass from Kendrick-to-Mule Wilson, the Rangers were able to march down the field to the Infantry six-yard line. On the

next play, Pittman broke through right tackle for the score. The 174th continued to falter in the first period when Feist intercepted a forward pass at midfield.

The second period was a punting duel, but in the third period, the Infantrymen started to show signs of life. They recovered a punt on their own 40-yard line and proceeded to march down the field. A twelve-yard pass to Hearne gave the 174th a first down. This was followed by a Nurschel 47-yard run to put the ball at the Ranger one-yard line. The next play saw Hearne break through the line for the score, but the extra point was missed on a bad pass. The final score came in the fourth period when Kendrick threw to Pittman, who ran 40 yards down an open field for the touchdown. The Rangers missed the extra point due to an offside penalty, but escaped with the 13-6 victory. Kendrick commented later in the season that it was “a hot, moist Sunday. It was the sort of day Texans never know. The boys fairly melted in their suits, and were falling down at every time out to get the coolness of the earth. We won, but were scored on. That didn’t help us.”

After a listless performance in their practice game, Kendrick needed to bolster his lineup for the start of the NFL season. The Buffalo manager added Neely Allison of Texas A&M and Gus Edmondson of Oklahoma in preparation for Al Nesser’s Akron Indians, but neither were able to get to Buffalo in time. Akron came off a respectable 4-2-2 season in 1925 and had earned a 6-6 tie against the mighty Frankford Yellowjackets the previous day. It was a tough test for Buffalo and they worked to improve the deficiencies detected in their warm-up game against the 174th. During the week of practice before the game against the Indians, Kendrick decided to work on several trick plays and pass formations in order to improve his team’s performance. This was in addition to the added conditioning and exercise from assistant coach Dim Batterson. Kendrick also toyed with the idea of moving Roy Guffey from tackle to end and adding Firpo McGilbra to the starting lineup at tackle in place of Guffey. It made a difference.

The Rangers outplayed the Indians in every facet of the game, as Akron only crossed the Buffalo 35-yard line twice in the contest. The scoring started in the second quarter when Buffalo got the ball at midfield. Wilson ran through right tackle for a three-yard gain. The next play was a 30-yard pass from Kendrick-to-Guffey. Two plays later, Kendrick threw an incomplete pass, but Akron interfered with the receiver, Wilson, and the officials awarded Buffalo the ball at the Akron one-yard line. From there, Kendrick ran through right guard for the score. Schwarzer missed the extra point, but an Akron offside penalty gave the Rangers the goal and a 7-0 lead. It turned out to be the only score of the game and the Rangers remained undefeated on the season.

Buffalo had a 5-2 advantage in first downs, with three of the first downs coming from the running game. The Rangers were able to get a first down in each of the four quarters, while Akron was only able to run for a first down in the first quarter and pass for another in the fourth quarter. Kendrick did not employ as many trick plays as promised, as they were not needed. The Rangers were able to run the ball effectively, with the only miscue coming from a Hobson fumble, giving Akron the ball at the Buffalo 40-yard line. Runs by Hal Griggs and Fritz Pollard moved the ball a total of ten yards on the first three plays, but Akron was not able to move the ball thereafter. George Rohleder dropped back for a placement kick, but it came up about 10 yards short. Pittman recovered the kick and ran it back to the Ranger 28-yard line. The rest of the

second period was a punting duel. The closest Akron came to scoring was in the fourth quarter, when they drove to the Buffalo 35-yard line, but again the drive stalled and they failed to score.

Neely Allison arrived in camp the day after the Akron game in preparation for the Dayton Triangles matchup. He was not the only addition to the Ranger lineup, as Kendrick also signed Gus Edmondson out of Oklahoma. Dayton, led by former Notre Dame end Gene Mayl, outplayed Buffalo in the first half, and had the advantage in first downs for the game: 15-12. This put the Rangers in a position of resorting to an aerial attack, with Kendrick completing twelve passes in the game (compared to three completions for Dayton), but was not able to put the ball across the goal line. Only three times throughout the game did Buffalo cross the Dayton 20-yard line.

The Triangles came close to scoring in the first quarter when Al Graham recovered a Buffalo fumble and ran 33 yards before being tackled at the Ranger seven-yard line. Three attempts to run through the Buffalo line resulted in a loss of five yards. In the second period, the Triangles drove the field with the help of a Lou Mahrt-to-Mack Hummon pass, which put Dayton on the Buffalo ten-yard line. Again, attempts to break the Buffalo line resulted in no gain, setting up a placement kick by Art Beckley from the Ranger 15-yard line for the only score of the game.

The Rangers had two scoring opportunities, one in the third quarter and the other on the fourth quarter. In the third quarter, Cop Weathers inadvertently touched a forward pass from Kendrick-to-Feist on the Triangle eight-yard line and the ball bounced off Weathers into the hands of Guffey. Unfortunately for Buffalo, Weathers was an ineligible receiver, and since the ball touched an ineligible receiver, the Rangers lost possession of the ball. In the fourth quarter, Dom Dimmick had a Dayton forward pass hit him in the chest and drop to the ground. This proved to be costly as Dimmick had an open field in front of him to return the ball for a score. The Rangers lost 3-0.

Next, the Rangers faced a home-and-home series with the 1925 Eastern Division champion Frankford Yellowjackets, consisting of ex-Buffalo players Swede Youngstrom, Doc Bruder, and Max Reed. Elmer Slough was added to the Ranger lineup to help alleviate the problems the team had been having on defense. Buffalo traveled via the Lehigh Valley railway late Friday night to meet the Yellowjackets in Philadelphia Saturday afternoon for their first of two meetings in two days. The Yellowjackets had an easy time with the Rangers, beating them 30-0 at Franklin Stadium. Frankford slowly wore down the Buffalo defense with strong line plunges and was able to score in all four quarters. Johnny Budd started the scoring with a field goal in the first quarter. This was followed by a Doc Bruder line plunge for a touchdown in the second. Hust Stockton ran 30 yards for a score in the third period and Tex Hamer and Ned Wilcox each scored in the fourth. Kendrick said after the game, "We were licked, but there's plenty of fight left. We'll get these boys in Buffalo Sunday." Unfortunately, the rematch would not be held, as on Sunday, the management of both teams agreed that the Bison Stadium field was too muddy to play the game. Local columnists claim that fields much muddier have been played on, and that both teams were too banged up to play the game. This coupled with interest in the World Series may have contributed to the decision.

Next up for the Rangers was a rematch with the Dayton Triangles (who beat them 3-0 two weeks earlier). Dayton's score came shortly after the midway point of the first quarter. Dick Dobeleit

took the ball and ran it 20 yards to bring the Triangles to the Buffalo 15-yard line. On the next play, a 15-yard Lou Mahrt-to-Mayl pass gave Dayton the first score of the game. Unfortunately for the Triangles, Beckley missed the extra point. This would prove to be costly as Buffalo scored in the second quarter on a Kendrick-to-Judge Swain 30-yard pass. Buffalo's scoring drive started in the beginning of the second quarter when they had the ball on the Dayton 40-yard line. Three rushes yielded only two yards, but Kendrick then tossed a pass 30 yards down field. Two Dayton players touched the ball before Swain jumped to catch it just before he stepped into the end zone. Kendrick kicked the extra point for the 7-6 lead. Dayton had a chance to score in the fourth quarter, but Buffalo was able to block Faye Abbott's field goal attempt. The 7-6 score stood and Buffalo had their revenge and a 3-2 record for the season (2-2 against NFL opponents).

The next week, Buffalo faced Brick Muller's Los Angeles Buccaneers. This would be the first time in local history that a Pacific coast team played in Buffalo. Both teams were coming off of a win, as the Los Angeles team beat the Canton Bulldogs 16-13 the previous week. In preparation for this contest, Kendrick tweaked his roster by adding Lester Caywood from Oklahoma and cutting Firpo McGilbra, George Nix and Tex Kelly. On Wednesday of that week, Buffalo also signed Joe Willson, captain of the 1925 University Of Pennsylvania team. Willson was in camp earlier in the season, but had to resign to devote time to his business commitments.

A steady downpour during the game against the Buccaneers made the field muddy and the ball slippery. Buffalo was able to get close to the Los Angeles goal line four times in the first half, but was unable to score. Conversely, the Buccaneer offense was not a threat to the Ranger goal line throughout the game. The highlight to the contest was scheduled to be Muller's passing ability. In practice, he regularly hurled the ball 65 yards in the air for completions, but that day was a different story. Due to the wet conditions, Muller only attempted one pass and it fell to the ground incomplete. Here was how the first quarter played out: After an exchange of punts, Elmer Slough intercepted a Buccaneer pass on the Ranger 30-yard line. Kendrick then punted to midfield. Los Angeles started their offensive drive with a Tuffy Maul run for eight yards. George Kirk recovered a Los Angeles fumble on the Ranger 40-yard line and Kendrick punted to the Buccaneer 20-yard line. Los Angeles then proceeded to fumble the ball, with Allison recovering on the Los Angeles 25-yard line. Wilson ran twice, gaining ten yards. On his third attempt, Wilson gained six yards but fumbled and Al Young recovered. The teams exchanged punts throughout the rest of the first quarter. Kendrick attempted a 25-yard field goal, but it was blocked. Buffalo was able to get within the opponent's 20-yard line twice in the second quarter, but again was not able to score. Neither team was able to do much in the second half of the game, as only the Rangers were able to get a first down. The game ended in a 0-0 tie and Buffalo was now 2-2-1 against league opponents.

The Ranger's next game was played on a rain-soaked field against the Pottsville Maroons, who claimed that they were robbed of the NFL Championship in 1925. The Chicago Cardinals and the Pottsville Maroons were the two top teams in the NFL in 1925. Late in the season, they played each other in Chicago and the Maroons won 21-7. This should have locked the championship for the Maroons, but a costly decision was made. Pottsville scheduled a game against the Notre Dame All-Stars at Shibe Park in Philadelphia. The problem arose in that the Frankford Yellowjackets had scheduled a game for the same day in another part of the city.

Frankford, fearing a loss of gate receipts, claimed territorial rights and protested to league president Joe Carr. Carr sided with the Yellowjackets and warned the Maroons not to play the game at Shibe Park the same day as the Frankford game. Pottsville went ahead and played the game – winning 9 to 7 – but was fined and suspended by the league. Their 1925 NFL Championship was stripped from them and given to the Cardinals. The Maroons were allowed back into the league in 1926, to prevent them from jumping to the rival American Football League.

Soon after the opening kickoff, Pottsville drove the field for the first score. Barney Wentz was responsible for putting the ball into the endzone. Later, in the third quarter, Buffalo's own Jess Brown (Nichol's prep on Colvin) intercepted a Buffalo forward pass and ran it back to the Ranger 35-yard line. From there, Pottsville resorted to line plunges, with Tony Latone scoring the touchdown. Buffalo's only scoring opportunity came in the third quarter when the Rangers recovered a Maroon fumble on the Pottsville 25-yard line. Three runs later the Rangers had a first down, but Wentz knocked down a Kendrick forward pass over the goal line. Buffalo lost the game 14-0 and fell to a 3-3-1 record for the season.

After weeks of negotiations, Buffalo finally signed Wes Bradshaw of the rival AFL. Bradshaw was the captain of the Baylor University team and was all-Southwestern for three years. Unfortunately for Buffalo, Bradshaw had a commitment to his previous team – Rock Island – to play a game in Philadelphia on Saturday. In that game, Bradshaw injured his knee and was not able to report for the Buffalo game against Columbus on Sunday. The Rangers did not need him, however, as the Columbus Tigers were not much of a threat. Buffalo scored touchdowns in all four quarters, with Kendrick completing 21 of his 34 passes, and the Rangers were able to intercept four of the opposition's forward passes. Buffalo also showed maturity in their running attack. Previously, the Rangers resorted to line plunges for their gains, but this time they tried more sweeps and deceptive plays. This was very effective against the Tiger defense as Buffalo won the game 26-0. Bradshaw promised that he would be able to suit up for the Rangers next game against the Hartford Blues.

Buffalo scored first in their game against the Blues. Elmer Slough caught a 25-yard pass from Kendrick and ran it ten more yards into the endzone. The Rangers scored again in the second period. The offensive drive started on the Hartford 40-yard line, with Allison catching a Kendrick pass for twelve yards. This was followed by a five-yard gain by Hobson. An offside penalty gave Buffalo the ball on the Hartford 20-yard line and Mule Wilson, returning after recovering from a shoulder injury in the Los Angeles game, ran the ball three times to get the Rangers to the Blues' three-yard line. Kendrick ran for the score, but his extra point kick was blocked. Buffalo seemed to hold back in the third quarter, content with a punting duel to preserve their 13-0 lead.

Hartford's first signs of life appeared in the fourth quarter when they were able to drive from their own 20-yard line to score on a Vic Radzievitch-to-Jim Manning forward pass. Hartford continued their offense with another drive, starting with a 15-yard roughing the kicker penalty giving the Blues the ball on their own 30-yard line. Manning tossed a 16-yard pass to Frank O'Connor, followed by an eight-yard pass from Radzievitch-to-Manning. A pass followed this from Chuck Corgan to Manning to give Hartford the ball on the Ranger 15-yard line. The Blues

were able to get a first down, due to the efforts of Manning and Jim Foley. Radzievitch dropped back to pass, but was tackled for a loss as the game ended. Buffalo won 13-7 to even their record against NFL opponents at 3-3-1 (4-3-1 overall).

Buffalo's next-to-last home game of the season matched the Rangers against the Kansas City Cowboys. The Cowboys came off of a 22-0 drubbing of the Providence Steam Roller and felt that they could stop Buffalo's aerial attack. It is fortunate for Kansas City that the field was covered in snow, slush, and mud, which limited Buffalo's attempts at passing. The game resulted in a punting duel with Kansas City eventually winning the battle. Buffalo's only scoring attempt came in the second quarter, when Allison recovered an Al Bloodgood fumble on the Kansas City 20-yard line. Three rushing attempts only gained six yards for the Rangers, leaving Buffalo with a fourth down decision. Bradshaw was called in – his only appearance of the game – for the placement kick. He was obviously still bothered by his knee injury, and subsequently the kick was low and rolled out of the endzone for the touchback. In the third period, Buffalo's offensive drive stalled, leaving the Rangers with another fourth down decision. Since Buffalo only needed one-half yard for the first down, Kendrick decided to try and convert on fourth down instead of punting. The Rangers were not able to convert on fourth down, and turned the ball over at midfield. Al Bloodgood kicked the ball, which landed at the Ranger one-yard line. Kendrick tried to punt out of danger, but Kansas City tackled him in the endzone for the safety and the only score of the game and the 2-0 victory.

The Rangers had a rematch with the Pottsville Maroons for the last game of their NFL schedule. Pottsville beat Buffalo 14-0 earlier in the season and Buffalo wanted to even the score. Jim Welsh attempted four placement kicks in the game, but all were wide of the goal posts. Buffalo's only sustained drive was in the second quarter, when starting at their own 20-yard line, the Rangers were able to drive to midfield. They lost possession of the ball when a forward pass inadvertently touched an ineligible receiver. Mule Wilson and Zeke Wissinger were ejected from the game for fighting in that same quarter. The game ended in a 0-0 tie, which pleased the Ranger team. Pottsville had only lost one game at that point in the season, so holding that team to a tie was a moral victory. Buffalo was now 4-4-2 against NFL opponents and 5-4-2 overall. A definite improvement over the 1-6-2 season the previous year, they still were not one of the better teams in the league.

Buffalo's last game of the season was to be an exhibition game with the Nash-Buffalo Collegians, the city's semi-pro champions. This team was made up of all former local collegians like Mike Traynor, Russ Burt, Ed Short, and Chick Guarnieri; all of Canisius. The Nash-Buffalos were taking this game very seriously. Manager Traynor added former Georgetown player Jack Flavin, who was an assistant coach for St. Bonaventure and considered one of college's best punters. Also added to the roster was Eddie Ivers, a six-foot-two, 195-pound lineman who was the assistant coach at Niagara University under Pete Dwyer. Unfortunately, this game would not be played due to about two feet of snow covering the field. The teams waited until about 1:00 PM before calling the game, hoping that the snow could be removed and the game could be held, but to no avail. The snow was too deep, and the players felt that it was impossible to play. About 1,000 fans were in attendance at the time the game was called.

This ended the Rangers season. Jim Kendrick commented, “We will be goin’ back to where the air is balmy, the weather God’s kind and there’s no snow to freeze your nose and toes... I hate to leave you folks, for Buffalo and all its people have been mighty kind to me and my boys. We have had the best of treatment, and while the crowds might have been larger, I blame the weather entirely, and the poor condition of the field. These are things which we could not control. The boys are all solid on Buffalo and the men who backed us. They’ll all be glad to come back again next year.”

When asked on how his ‘experiment’ worked out using imported players, Kendrick replied, “This idea of importing an entire team from the Southwest was in the nature of a pioneer undertaking and an experiment, and I should be inclined to state it proved successful. In fact, I think it panned out marvelously. Remember the big fact that only two of the entire lot, myself and Benny Hobson, had ever played pro football. All the others came straight and clean from colleges. They were a little out of their element at first, but I leave it to the fans whether they weren’t all that could be asked at the finish. There may be one or two brighter individual stars, but I wouldn’t trade my line for any line in professional football.” Kendrick continued, “Mule Wilson was hurt twice, and Buffalo never has seen how good a man he is. Elmer Slough gave but a faint idea of what he really can do. Boy, on a fast and dry field that little man will make the Buffalo fans forget all about such players as Ockie Anderson and Benny Boynton. He’s flash and go, and how he steps! Hobson is a wonder and Bill Vaughn too. I wish they could have seen Rabbit Bradshaw in there. The New York papers say he’s the best quarterback in pro football. I KNOW it. He’ll be with us next year, and so will all the other boys. And with a year of pro football under their belts, and plenty of time to think over mistakes and what other fellows did to us, which we didn’t try to do to them, they’ll be better players when they return next fall.” Kendrick finished by saying, “I wish you would say for me that I want to congratulate the Frankford Yellowjackets on winning the championship. I mean that congratulation. Also, I have never made a single complaint, but now I want the fans to know that we had a right to beat the Yellowjackets in that Philadelphia game, instead of being beaten 30 to 0. Mule Wilson had a touchdown in the first five minutes, but it was called back. We were penalized 165 yards in that game, and never have been able to find out what it was all about. I myself was kicked in the side and put out of the game within the first ten minutes, and others of us badly hurt. I am still of the opinion we should have and could have beaten the Frankfords. I shall make that game my objective next year.”