

THOUGHTS ON SPARTA HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL HISTORY

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November 2008

Another high school football season recently ended, and I began reminiscing about past memorable football games in Sparta High School history.

Sparta's first game came in 1903 against Greenville, and they were not prepared for what would happen. Most, if not all, of the eleven players had never even seen a game, and the resulting 103-0 score is not surprising. The total budget for the first football year was eleven dollars!

In the second game of the 1915 season Bert Young broke his cheekbone and had to be taken to the hospital. Because of the hospital costs, the athletic association canceled the rest of the season and the money saved was used to pay for his hospital bills.

The first two games of the 1917 season resulted in crushing 75-0 and 100-0 losses for the Spartans. Because of the severe beatings, the powers that be decided to cancel the last game to stop further embarrassment.

In 1918, the Spartans played their first four games of the season and then the rest of the year was cancelled. The cancellation was due to the worldwide influenza epidemic that was killing many hundreds of thousands of people.

The 1924 season saw the Spartans play 13 games, by far the most they had ever played. They often played games after only three or four days of rest. Unfortunately, they lost nine of the games and could only win four.

The 1953 season turned out to be very eventful. The Spartans were pre-season favorites to win the conference because they had many returning veteran players. Right from the beginning of the year, they showed they were the class of the Kenowa League. As the victories started piling up, their state ranking started lowering. After finishing the season unbeaten at 9-0, they ended up ranked behind only Mount Pleasant (this was before the present playoff system was enacted). This was the highest a Sparta team was ever ranked and the year included a surprisingly easy victory over a favored Rockford team. This team is still the highest scoring team in school history; the year saw many players who had played many years graduate.

The two years of 1963 and 1965 had similar games. Sparta and Rockford met both years at Rockford with each team undefeated in the league. Both years the field was ringed with fans standing many rows back. I watched the 1963 game as a freshman and played in the 1965 game as a junior, so I was personally involved with both games. Both were great games as the 1963 game ended in a hard fought 6-6 tie. Unfortunately, Sparta later lost a game and Rockford won the conference championship. In 1965, the game was the final league encounter so the winner would take all, and Sparta's 14-6 victory took the championship.

In 2003, Sparta qualified for its first state playoff against neighbor and rival Coopersville. The Spartans held a 13-12 lead in the third quarter but a later Coopersville FG in the third quarter and a last quarter TD allowed Coopersville to conquer the Spartans 22-13.

In 2006, two games were delayed by lightening; one to the next day (Coopersville) and one a few weeks later (Caledonia). I had never been to a football game postponed to a later date and now two in the same year. Both games saw the Spartans beat state playoff teams and the game against Caledonia was especially exciting as we pulled out a 7-0 victory. The year produced the first conference championship in 24 years, ending a long dry spell.

Every year at the end of the season you begin to wonder what next season will hold; hopefully it will bring a strong season that has more interesting and memorable events.