

The Centre College Football Team's Amazing Run, Climaxed by Winning the "Southern Championship" in 1924

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The Centre College Colonels had an amazing run in college football from the years 1917-1924. The little Danville, Kentucky college is probably best remembered, if remembered at all, for its 6-0 win over mighty Harvard in 1921.

Harvard at the time was one of the "Big 3" along with Yale and Princeton.

Unlike today, when the Ivy League schools make no claim to being members of the upper echelon of college football, from the first game in 1869 between Princeton and Rutgers until the early 1920's, the Eastern colleges dominated the gridiron.

Centre initially gained national attention by defeating a West Virginia Mountaineer's team in a game played in Charleston, West Virginia in 1919. West Virginia had dominated an excellent Princeton eleven, winning 25-0 at the Tigers' Palmer Stadium.

After Centre's 14-6 win, and after the Colonels finished at 9-0 in a year which also included victories over Indiana, Virginia and Kentucky, Walter Camp, considered to be the "Father of College Football," declared that Centre was the top team in the country for 1919.

Camp picked THE All-American team each year. While there were several other selections, Camp's was recognized as the most prestigious. For the first time in the history of football, a small Southern college was recognized as having talent on par with that of the larger, mainly Eastern schools.

The Colonels' Alvin Nugent "Bo" McMillin was selected for the quarterback position and James "Red" Weaver was picked at center. James "Red" Roberts was placed on the third team at end.

The successes of 1919 earned Centre a spot on Harvard's schedule for 1920. A sellout crowd at Harvard Stadium watched in awe as Centre jumped out to a 14-7 lead. The half ended at 14-14, but Harvard's size and numbers prevailed and the Crimson won, 31-14.

Centre lost to Georgia Tech the week after the loss to Harvard. The Colonels were so banged up after the effort against the Crimson that the two "Red's," Roberts and Weaver, along with George Chinn, an end, all starters in Cambridge, were held out of the game.

The Colonels regular season finished with a record of 7-2 and "Bo" landed a second team berth on the Camp All-American team.

Centre played in the second bowl venue of all time (of course, the Rose Bowl was the first) after the 1920 season, beating an undefeated TCU squad on January 1, 1921. The game was called "The Fort Worth Classic," and after TCU scored early on an intercepted pass, Centre ran off 63 straight points to win 63-7, and season ended at 8-2.

1921 was a huge year for the Colonels. The highlight was the 6-0 win over Harvard. The regular season ended at 9-0, and besides beating Harvard, significant wins were over Clemson, Virginia Tech, Kentucky, Auburn and Tulane.

"Red" Roberts was selected by Walter Camp as a first team All-American at the end of the regular season and became the third, first team player designated by Camp, joining "Bo" McMillin and "Red" Weaver from the 1919 team. "Bo" made Camp's second team at quarterback in 1921.

It was decided to reward the team with a western excursion after the season. The trip included bowl games in San Diego on December 26, 1921, and in Dallas on January 2, 1922.

Therefore, little Centre played in the third bowl venue ever held, the "Christmas Bowl" on December 26, 1921, in which the Colonels rolled over the University of Arizona, 38-0, in San Diego.

They also played in the fourth bowl venue ever, the "Dallas Classic", which found Centre losing to a very tough Texas A & M team coached by D.X. Bible, 22-14, on January 2, 1922.

The trip by train covered over 2,000 miles and took 20 days.

Centre continued to play with the "big boys" during the 1922 and 1923 seasons.

The Colonels were 8-2 in 1922, losing the rubber match to Harvard, 24-10, and going down to defeat against Auburn in Birmingham, 6-0. Notable wins were

over Clemson, Mississippi, Virginia Tech, Kentucky and South Carolina, all state universities with student bodies which far exceeded the enrollment in Danville.

By 1923, the numbers able to suit up at Centre had been greatly diminished by the “freshman rule” of 1922 which had been put in place by football authorities. The rule forbade freshmen from participating in intercollegiate sports until they had been enrolled for 12 months.

Centre had taken 28 young men to play Harvard in 1921. Fourteen were freshmen. Of the 16 who got into action, 8 were freshmen. Without those first year men, Centre would have had difficulty even fielding a team, and defeating Harvard would have been out of the question.

The strong class which entered in 1921 had allowed Centre to continue turning out excellent teams during 1922 and 1923, but it was obvious that the “glory days” of what was being called “the Wonder Team” would soon come to an end.

In 1923, the Colonels were 7-1-1. The loss was to Pennsylvania, at the time a major power, in a game played before 42,000 fans in Penn's new (1922) Franklin Field. The first half ended with the Quakers up 3-0 due to a field goal kicked just as time expired.

The Colonels were worn down in the second half, much as they had been in the 1920 Harvard game, as Penn's numbers and size increasingly took their toll. The final score was 24-0.

The 1923 season-ending tie was with a Georgia Bulldog team in Athens. Wins included victories over Clemson, Kentucky and Auburn.

Centre's coach, Charles B. Moran, “Uncle Charlie,” resigned after the 1923 season and took over the Bucknell (PA) program. Sports fans all over Kentucky and the South knew what “Unc” had meant to the Colonels' program.

Moran had taken the reins after Centre lost the second game of the 1917 season to DePauw, 6-0. During “Unc's” tenure, Centre had gone 52-6-1 and had outscored its opponents, 2113-218, for a rounded-off average score of 36-4.

As phenomenal as Centre's record was during the Moran years, it was even more remarkable due to the fact that nearly all of the major games were played on the road. The limited accommodations in Danville and the small wooden stadium (until 1923) meant that attracting programs of substance was virtually

impossible. Of the 49 contests from 1919 through 1923, 31 were played away from Danville.

Robert L. "Chief" Myers, Centre '07, had brought the nucleus of the team after the Great War to Danville from Fort Worth North Texas High School where he had been the football coach. Myers had been Centre's coach during the first two games of 1917 but moved aside when he saw that "Uncle Charlie" was available to take over the team.

"Chief" Myers continued on as the unpaid athletic director and after Moran's resignation was named the head coach for 1924.

Thus the stage was set for what many consider was Centre College's finest moment of many memorable moments in the little school's storied history – the amazing exploits of 1924.

Only 21 young men showed up for practice in the fall of 1924. The number of students on campus had dropped from 292 during the 1923-24 school year to 223. While the larger universities would hardly notice a decrease of 69 enrolled, for Centre it meant nearly a 25% decline.

Centre had a freshman team in 1924 coached by former Colonel All-American, James B. "Red" Roberts. The first-year team was also short in numbers as demonstrated by the fact that during a game with the University of Kentucky frosh in Lexington, "Red" had only 11 men available.

Only by "borrowing" a few of the freshmen could "Chief" Myers even have a scrimmage for the varsity.

Fortunately for the "Chief," the 21 team members included 7 who had been on the team since 1921. Six of the 7 were present at the famous 6-0 win over Harvard and 4 – Herb Covington, Minos Gordy, Ed Kubale and Frank Rubarth – saw action.

The seniors were dubbed "The Seven Immortals" by "Chief" Myers.

(Besides the 4 who played against Harvard, Clifton "Hennie" Lemon and Robert L. "Case" Thomasson made the trip to Cambridge. The 7th "Immortal", Howard Lynch, wasn't included on the travel squad.)

The 1924 season began not with a bang, but more like with a whimper.

Bill Shadoan, a starter at guard on the 1921 and '22 Centre teams, had taken over the coaching position at Valparaiso University in Indiana. On October 4,

he brought his well-drilled squad to Danville and played the Colonels to a 0-0 tie.

Centre got back into the win column on October 18 with an easy victory over Transylvania, located in Lexington, Kentucky. The game, played in Danville, ended at 43-0.

The Centre athletics department and administration had decided after the trips to Cambridge to play Harvard that a journey to the East brought publicity like no money could buy. The 1923 game in Philadelphia to play Penn had been scheduled for that reason, and now, in 1924, it was off to New York to play West Virginia at the Polo Grounds.

Revenge was on the minds of an excellent Mountaineer team. The 1919 loss still galled. West Virginia was 20-2-2 over the last 3 seasons, allowing only 101 points in the 24 games which included 12 shutouts.

The Colonels scored first on a 40 yard field goal by "Hennie" Lemon. During the second quarter, West Virginia scored on a "double pass" and at the half it was 6-3. The third quarter ended at 6-6 after Herb Covington, the little Centre quarterback, kicked an 18 yard field goal. Ten minutes into the last quarter, the Mountaineers began a drive which culminated in a score as the clock wound down and West Virginia walked off the field with a hard-fought 13-6 win.

The game was as statistically close as the score. Centre gained 218 yards and West Virginia picked up 234. "Chief" Myers sent in only two substitutes, a pattern which was going to define the rest of the season.

Adding to the Colonels' problems with such a small squad was the matter of injuries suffered in New York. Tackle Frank Rubarth was diagnosed after the return to Danville with a fractured clavicle and Robert Wallace, another starter, had x-rays which revealed a broken bone in his hand. Both continued to play the entire 60 minutes against the Mountaineers, but Wallace was later declared definitely out for the season.

At a team meeting back in Danville on Monday, October 27, captain Herb Covington called a meeting of the squad. He declared that he had to come to Centre because of its winning tradition and he was determined to go out a winner. And then he made a bold declaration.

"We are Centre. We play hard. We play clean. And we play to win. We have 4 games left with Southern Conference colleges. If we win all 4, we can be

declared the best team in the South. And, we will win the next 4 games and not only that, we won't give up another point the rest of the season!"

Then the captain began the chant that Centre often used to help bond the team to a common purpose.

"We are Centre!"

"We are Centre!"

"We are Centre!"

One by one, the players stood and picked up the chant.

"We are Centre!"

"We are Centre!"

"We are Centre!"

Robert W. "Red" Robertson, a senior who was "Red" Roberts' freshman team manager, later related what he had witnessed in Centre's tiny Boyle-Humphrey gymnasium.

"The seniors made a simple declaration. They would not lose another game. I was at Centre from 1921 through the 1924 season and sat in on every meeting during 1924 because "Red" Roberts was always in attendance and I was "Red's" shadow. Each of the seniors made a vow that they would play every minute of the remaining games, and the only way they'd not be in the action was if they were literally carried off the field on a stretcher."

(The Southern Conference was formed from the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association in 1921. The S.I.A.A. had grown to an unmanageable 30 members and it was decided to spin some colleges out into a separate conference. Fourteen colleges joined initially with competition beginning in the fall of 1921. Six other schools joined in 1922. Centre was left out, which was one of the reasons that the Danville school so relished playing and beating members of the newly established conference.)

The remaining schedule was as follows:

- November 1 Kentucky at Lexington
- November 8 Tennessee at Knoxville

- November 15 Alabama at Birmingham
- November 29 Georgia at Danville

Kentucky had built a new stadium which was available for the 1924 season. It was named McLean Stadium in honor of a young man, Prince McLean, a lineman for the Wildcats who had died after sustaining a head injury during a 1923 game with Cincinnati.

Kentucky waited until the Centre game to dedicate its new facility and designated the weekend to be Homecoming. The athletics department knew that the Colonels would fill the stadium and added 2,000 temporary seats to the 15,000 who could be accommodated in the new concrete edifice.

A Lexington "Herald" story about the game was headlined:

MONSTER CROWD TO WATCH KENTUCKIANS

Every Seat for Centre Game Saturday to be Filled

Eager Football Fans Snapping Up All Tickets in Sight

Centre and Kentucky had played 29 times prior to the 1924 game with the Colonels holding an 18-9-2 advantage.

The Wildcats had an overwhelming win in 1916, crushing the boys from Danville, 68-0. However, with the arrival of "Bo" McMillin and his Fort Worth teammates, Centre won 3-0 on a "Bo" field goal in 1917, and then the tide had totally changed.

- 1917 Centre 3-Kentucky 0
- 1918 No game due to the war and "Spanish Influenza"
- 1919 Centre 56-Kentucky 0
- 1920 Centre 49-Kentucky 0
- 1921 Centre 55-Kentucky 0
- 1922 Centre 27-Kentucky 3
- 1923 Centre 10-Kentucky 0

During the 6 straight Colonel wins, Centre had outscored its much larger, in-state rival, 200-3.

In an excellently played game on November 1, 1924, Centre once again triumphed, 7-0, to win its 7th straight over Kentucky. "Immortal" Frank Rubarth, just a week after breaking his collar bone, started and played into the second quarter before finally having to come out. After being rested for a few plays, he returned to action! Two substitutions for Rubarth were the only ones made during the game. The 10 other players went the entire 60 minutes. The game was close on the scoreboard but not so close statistically. Kentucky never got beyond the Centre 45 and the Colonels had a first down margin of 13-5 along with doubling the Wildcats' total yardage gained, 206-102.

Kentucky was closing the gap, but the gap with still there.

(Centre and Kentucky played 5 more times. The Wildcats finally prevailed in 1925, 16-0. Centre won for the last time in 1926, 7-0. Kentucky then reeled off 3 straight wins, 53-0 in 1927, 8-0 in 1928, and 33-0 in 1929. After the 1929 win, the Kentucky athletics department announced that it was dropping Centre from its football schedule in order to concentrate on Southern Conference foes. Centre, along with much of the state, was outraged. Word came out of Danville that Centre was severing all athletic contact. The two colleges later competed in the "minor" sports, but never met on the gridiron again. The series ended with Centre up 20-13-2.)

On November 8, the Colonels traveled on the Southern Railroad to play the University of Tennessee. The Volunteers played at Shields-Watkins Field along the Tennessee River and were 3-2 with their last game being a 33-0 loss to Georgia.

Centre felt that Tennessee wouldn't offer much opposition and the coaches talked Frank Rubarth into not making the trip in order to give his fractured clavicle from the West Virginia game more time to heal.

"We'll need you against Alabama. We can handle Tennessee without you."

Rubarth very reluctantly agreed.

The coaches were correct. Rubarth wasn't needed as Centre soundly defeated Tennessee, 32-0. "Chief" Myers played only 13 young men. Two former substitutes shared in filling Rubarth's tackle position and "Hennie" Lemon was given a rest late in the 4th quarter.

Alabama was next.

Wallace Wade had taken over the Tide's coaching position in 1923.

(Interestingly, Centre's "Uncle Charlie" Moran had been heavily recruited by Alabama when his team was in Birmingham in 1922 to play Auburn. 'Bama's administration knew that its excellent coach, Xen Scott, was suffering from an oral cavity malignancy and wouldn't be able to return in 1923. Moran turned down the position and Wade, an assistant coach at Vanderbilt, came on board and from 1923 through the 1930 season compiled a 61-13-2 record which included 3 Rose Bowl appearances with 2 wins and a tie. Xen Scott died in 1924 at age 41.)

Wade's 1923 team went 7-2-1 with losses being to an 8-1 Syracuse Orange team and a 6-1-2 Florida Gators squad. The tie was with always strong Georgia Tech.

Alabama came into the Centre game with a 7-0 record. One win stood out. The Tide had overwhelmed Kentucky, 42-7. Fans and sportswriters couldn't help but note that Centre, even though it had statistically dominated the Wildcats, only won by 7-0.

- Alabama 55-Union 0
- Alabama 20-Furman 0
- Alabama 55-Mississippi College 0
- Alabama 14-Sewanee 0
- Alabama 14-Georgia Tech 0
- Alabama 61-Mississippi 0
- Alabama 42-Kentucky 7

On the way to Birmingham, again on the Southern Railroad, Centre's quarterback and captain, Herb Covington, told a reporter that the Colonels planned on scoring first and that he felt Alabama would be unnerved since the Tide hadn't trailed all season. It was a measure of the little sparkplug's confidence that he felt his team could score first on a team that had given up only 7 points all season.

The game was played at Rickwood Field before 18,000 fans, absolute capacity. When the two teams took the field, all eyes could see that not only were there significantly more red jerseys than the gold of Centre, but that the Colonels' players seemed much smaller. Indeed, checking the line-ups in the program revealed that Alabama's starting line averaged 15 pounds more than Centre's.

Knowledgeable sportswriters felt that Alabama had the best backfield in the South led by “Rosey” Rosenfield, “Pooley” Hubert and Mack Brown.

(Mack Brown’s play landed him on a Wheaties box and propelled him into a 40 year movie career beginning in 1927 as Johnny Mack Brown, star of “B” westerns, right up there with Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, amongst others.)

Playing in Birmingham was a familiar venue for Alabama. It was actually a stretch to consider that the site was a road game for the Tide as the team had participated in 60 games in the state’s largest city since 1900.

Betting was brisk. Centre had brought a considerable number of fans on the train which carried the team’s chartered Pullman to Birmingham. Late wagers found the Alabama fans having to give 14 points in order to find a taker.

One sportswriter stated just prior to the kickoff that, “It should be a long afternoon for the Kentuckians.” After all, Alabama was virtually playing a home game. The crowd would be overwhelmingly cheering for the Tide. ‘Bama significantly outweighed the Colonels and had destroyed a Kentucky team which Centre had beaten by just 7 points.

Centre had other plans.

From the opening kickoff until the final gun, Centre totally dominated. The smaller linemen wearing the gold and white took control of the line of scrimmage early on. Leather smacking on leather could be heard far up in the stands.

Centre’s ends, “Hennie” Lemon and “Case” Thomasson, drew a line in the sand and dared Alabama to try to challenge their positions. On 15 end sweeps, the Tide had a net loss of 19 yards.

Frank Rubarth, with his healing clavicle, was impregnable on defense and led the charge on offense along with fellow tackle Howard Lynch. Two underclassmen, Walter Skidmore and Alex Bush at the guard positions, totally outplayed their opponents on the opposite side of the line. Center Ed Kubale, playing in his 36th straight game as a Colonel, seemed to be in on every tackle and played flawlessly on offense, with every “pass” back, so vital in the single wing offense, right on target.

Centre scored in the second quarter on a play that found 10 Colonels heading left while Herb Covington darted around the right end, unmolested. Lemon’s kick made it 7-0 at the half.

The margin would have been greater had 2 short field goal efforts been good. Alabama never got close enough to even consider a field goal. Lemon finally hit on a 30 yarder in the third quarter which ended 10-0.

Coach Wallace kept running in replacements in the second half, trying to get something going. Two backfield and 5 line substitutions made no difference in his team's performance, or perhaps more accurately, in Centre's.

Centre missed another field goal attempt in the last quarter. The 38 yarder had the length but was just wide.

"Chief" Myers stayed with his starting eleven until 2 minutes were left in the game. Walter Skidmore twisted his ankle and was replaced by Jim Priest who was in the game when Covington hit Lemon on a 20 yard T.D. pass. The extra point made the final score 17-0.

Everyone except the Centre supporters was absolutely amazed. What had been expected to be an easy victory for an undefeated Alabama team had turned into a classic display of power and finesse by a Centre team which simply wasn't going to be denied in reaching its goal of being crowned the "Champions of the South."

Sportswriters began to try to explain to their readers what had happened on the field that Saturday afternoon on November 15, 1924. There were terms like, Centre "out-charged them," Centre "out-fought Alabama," Centre "out-generated them," Centre "out-kicked," Centre "out-tackled" the Tide. Finally, it was up to reporter Charles Brown, formerly the head coach at Birmingham Southern, to come up with an adequate description of the game when he wrote that Centre totally "out-outed" Alabama.

Alabama only got onto Centre's side of the field but once, and that was just to the 48 yard line.

Centre had 15 first downs to 'Bama's 5. But the statistic that really stood out was that Alabama was able to gain only 78 yards on 54 plays for under 1.5 yards per effort - this from a team which had come into the contest averaging over 37 points per game.

Meanwhile Centre picked up 155 yards on the ground and completed 6 of 8 passes for 102 yards for a total yardage of 257, over 3 times the offense that Alabama was able to generate. Quarterback Covington gained 68 yards on the ground and Minos Gordy, running out of the fullback spot, picked up 67.

A headline read by the Centre team and fans during their early Sunday morning breakfasts at Birmingham's Tutwiler Hotel stated the obvious:

'Bama Lucky "Praying Colonels" Not Conference Member

The team was met by the entire student body and most of the citizens of Danville and Boyle County upon the arrival home.

There had been many boisterous welcomings over the last several years when the Colonels pulled into the little brick, Southern Railroad station just a block down from the campus. Most had been organized by the Chamber of Commerce and the college. However, after the Alabama game, the huge crowd that erupted in a deafening roar when the team stepped out of the Pullman had simply gathered spontaneously, just wanting to be present to show their love and gratitude to their heroes.

The students from Centre and the Kentucky College for Women, with the cheerleaders out front holding the school's great gold and white banner, led the team up toward the campus and then wound over to Main Street and downtown, clasping hands and weaving back and forth in a snake dance while marching to the rhythm of the town's brass band, blowing as hard as cheeks could blow.

There were no formal speeches, just hugs, kisses, pats on the back, shaking of hands, arms wrapped around shoulders, fists pumped, jumping, whistling, clapping, laughing, crying, and above all, there was great pride in this wonderful group of young men who were truly living up to the "Chief's" designation of them as, "The Immortals."

Centre's win knocked Alabama out of any claim to being the class of the South. However, as at least some consolation, Alabama was the Southern Conference champion at 5-0 after defeating Georgia to end the season at 8-1.

To put Centre's dominating victory over Alabama into a bit more perspective, it is enlightening to review the Tide's record for the 3 seasons, 1924-26.

After the 8-1 record in 1924, Alabama went 10-0 in 1925 which included a 20-19 win over Washington in the Rose Bowl, and 9-0-1 in 1926, the tie being with Stanford, 7-7, in a second straight Rose Bowl appearance. For the 3 years, Alabama had a 27-1-1 record and gave up only 60 points, excluding the 17 put on the board by the Colonels.

Centre ended the season by winning its fourth November game against flagship, Southern Conference state universities by defeating Georgia on November 29 in Danville, 14-7. Georgia had come to town sporting a 7-2 record with the only loss other than to Alabama being to Yale in New Haven, 7-6.

The game was played in a virtual blizzard before 5,000 hardy fans. Prior to the start of the game, "The Seven Immortals" received a prolonged standing ovation as they stood together at midfield.

The Colonels jumped out to a 14-0 lead but finally gave up some points which really couldn't be laid on the defense's shoulders. An attempt at a trick play on Centre's own 11 resulted in a fumble which the Bulldogs recovered. It took 3 plays to take it in and after the extra point, the half ended, 14-7.

That was the final score as the second half was a defensive stand-off. The statistics were as close as the score. Centre picked up 14 first downs to Georgia's 13. In total yardage, the Colonels came out on top, 270 to 238.

Only the original 11 starters saw action. Not one substitution was made by the Colonels.

With the win over Georgia, Centre had run the string against the Southern Conference with 4 wins in November, 1924, by a combined score of 70-7.

- Nov. 1 Centre 7-Kentucky 0
- Nov. 8 Centre 32-Tennessee 0
- Nov. 15 Centre 17-Alabama 0
- Nov. 29 Centre 14-Georgia 7

"Red" Robertson, who had followed his beloved college's team for 4 years, recounted many years later how he felt after the win over Georgia.

"I left the stadium after the Georgia game with mixed feelings. Of course, everyone was happy after our great win. The 4 straight victories over the Southern Conference teams were wonderful. It meant we truly had the best team in the South, and the way we were playing, I felt we had to have one of the best teams in the country."

“But at the end of the game, I also realized that this would be the last time I’d see the team play. I’d traveled all over to watch them, even to Harvard. For 4 years, my life had literally revolved around the team and the players.”

“I stood on the field and watched our boys cheer the Georgia team, and then they began to walk slowly toward the locker room and began to fade in the snow, and finally they were a blur, and then I couldn’t see them at all, and I felt a tremendous sadness.”

“What would it be like not to have a team to follow and love?”

“I really didn’t know, and I remember walking back to the dorm with a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes.”

“I simply couldn’t imagine not having the Centre College football team being part of my life.”

Just as the team had begun to fade from “Red” Robertson’s view, Centre College football began to fade from the sports pages and the public consciousness. The lack of numbers finally caught up with the little college and the days of walking out on the gridiron as David against the Goliaths of the sport, winning against all odds, were over.

1925 found the Colonels in unfamiliar territory. The team was 3-6. The annual trip to the East was to Washington, DC to play the Georgetown Hoyas who won easily, 41-3.

Kentucky finally was victorious, winning 16-0 in a game when Centre had virtually no offense.

The 1926, “Old Centre” yearbook summed up the 1925 season quite nicely.

“In scoring points and winning games, Centre experienced a most unsuccessful season; but in showing fight and winning honor, it compares with the great teams of the past. Possessing few experienced men and composed to a great extent of green material, Centre put on the field a team that, win or lose, earned the respect of its opponents.”

Just 3 years after the memorable 1924 season, the Associated Press sent out a December, 1927 story which appeared in newspapers all across the country.

Fickle fate is quick to forget the stellar accomplishments of the past for those of the present.

Little Centre College probably offers as fitting example of fleeting fame as any in the realm of football. A few years ago, Centre sprang into the spotlight with a sterling eleven. It swept aside all before it. The "Praying Colonels", as the team was known, because it always knelt in prayer just before starting a game, soon got to be the talk of the gridiron world.

Coached by Charlie Moran, veteran National League umpire, Centre turned out such twinklers as Bo McMillin, Red Weaver, Red Roberts, Army Armstrong, Herb Covington, and others. Some gained All-American recognition.

It wasn't long before little Centre College, situated in the Bluegrass of Kentucky, was the most sought after school in the game. Offers came from far and wide. Centre was the biggest attraction in football.

Even Harvard asked Centre to come to Cambridge. Centre accepted; in fact, met the Crimson at its Soldiers Field enclosure several times. In 1921, Centre chalked up one of its greatest feats in defeating Harvard, 6-0.

Centre's reign at the top was short-lived, however. The shining McMillin, Weaver and Roberts and others were graduated, leaving the Kentucky school nothing much save memories of other campaigns.

During the last years, Centre has done little in football. Its teams have met defeat with too much regularity and mostly at the hands of schools the Colonels would have considered hardly more than set-ups in the winning days. Only recently, Vanderbilt swamped Centre, 54-0.

In a word, Centre has slipped out of the limelight about as fast as it reached the purple heights seven or eight years ago.

No longer does the little hamlet close up shop and turn out en mass to welcome home the conquering heroes. No longer does the band play triumphant airs to lead Centre's mere handful of students in a snake dance throughout the main section of town.

Uncle Charlie is no longer guiding the Danville school's destinies.

Centre College is just a little Kentucky school now.

Early College Football Bowl History

1/1/02	Rose Bowl	Michigan 49-Stanford 0
1/1/16	Rose Bowl	Washington State 14-Brown 0

1/1/17	Rose Bowl	Oregon 14-Pennsylvania 0
1/1/18	Rose Bowl	Mare Island (USMC) 19-Camp Lewis (US Army) 7
1/1/19	Rose Bowl	Great Lakes (US Navy) 17-Mare Island 0
1/1/20	Rose Bowl	Harvard 7-Oregon 6
1/1/21	Rose Bowl	California 28-Ohio State 0
1/1/21	<i>Fort Worth Classic</i>	<i>Centre 63-TCU 7</i>
12/26/21	<i>Christmas Classic</i>	<i>Centre 38-Arizona 0</i>
1/2/22	<i>Dixie Classic</i>	<i>Texas A&M 22-Centre 14</i>
1/2/22	Rose Bowl	California 0-Washington & Jefferson 0

Ordering Information: *"The Wonder Team"* is available through Butler Books, P.O. Box 7311, Louisville, KY 40207

Phone: 502-897-9393 <http://www.butlerbooks.com/>

Editor's Comments: This book is a must for all who enjoy the history of the game, as it will bring to life part of history that isn't recorded in contemporary histories of the game—other than the 1921 Centre-Harvard Game...not by just a writer who has done his "homework" but by someone who was there and saw the games first hand and has graciously shared his experiences with us.

Once you start reading *The Wonder Team*, you will feel like you're in the locker-room with this awesome team as they prepare for their next game—regardless if it's Kentucky, Georgetown or the game that would bring this tiny school its lasting notoriety—the 1921 Harvard contest.

For those of you who know how much I like working with statistics, I found it hard to put this book down to start working on them—as each page has you "hungry" for what is going to happen on the following page.