

Stoll Field Historic Gridiron

University Playing Field Is One of Oldest Gridirons in the United States and Is Birthplace of Intercollegiate Football In the South

(By DAN M. BOWMAR, JR.)

History and a perfect gridiron combine to give Stoll Field, home playground of the University of Kentucky Wildcats, a unique position among college athletic fields.

All who visit the lair of the Wildcats are impressed by the playing field, recognized as one of the best in the country, but few know that Stoll Field is the birthplace of southern intercollegiate football and that it is one of the oldest gridirons in the United States.

While the Wildcats now call this historic plot of ground their own, it was not a University of Kentucky team which first used the field for football. Nearly 50 years ago, April 9, 1880 to be exact, Transylvania College and Centre College met on Stoll Field, then known as City Park, in the first game of intercollegiate football ever played in the South. It was possibly the first game ever played west of the Allegheny mountains and followed by only a few years the first game ever played in this country.

The boys who played in this first game selected Stoll Field as the best ground to be found for a football battle and it has been recognized as the best gridiron in the State ever since. Transylvania won this first game, which was played according to the Princeton rules.

John Fox on Team

The Transylvania line-up included such men as John Fox, the author; the late James Logan, eminent Kansas City doctor; the late W. K. Shelby, former principal of the Johnson school of this city; J. L. Patterson, a member of the faculty of the University of Louisville; the late E. L. Graves, of Lexington, and others who later became prominent. Patterson was captain of the team.

Names appearing in the Centre line-up were Ernst, captain; Fulton, Dunlap, Vaughan, Clark, McCartney, Cowan, Moore, Cowles, Barbour, Taylor, January, Skinner, Webster, Read, Barrett and McKee.

The Lexington Transcript, of April 10, 1880, in commenting on the game, says: "A large crowd

of ladies and gentlemen, estimated at 500, witnessed the game. It was pronounced that football had the decided advantage of baseball as a means of amusement for spectators."

It is interesting to note that this fall is the golden anniversary of Kentucky football as the game was really started at Transylvania in the fall of 1879, although the first game was not played until the spring of 1880. A week after the first game played on Stoll Field, the Transylvania team went to Danville to play a return game with Centre and the Lexington squad was again victorious, winning the second game by a score of five and one-half to one-half.

Oldest Dual Series

Vanderbilt and the University of the South (Sewanee) claim the oldest intercollegiate dual series in the south, but history gives a clear claim for this honor to Transylvania and Centre as the Vanderbilt-Sewanee battles did not start until 1891—more than 10 years after the first Transylvania-Centre struggle.

The University of Kentucky used Stoll Field for football for the first time in the fall of 1880. The University, then known as A. & M. College, did not engage in intercollegiate football.

Football was not looked upon with much favor in those early days and often this disfavor was expressed by violence. An example of this attitude is given in a story appearing in the Lexington Press of December 5, 1880, which says:

"On Tuesday evening as some of the students of the A. & M. College were playing football, a man, who afterwards gave his name as White, came riding by, and not liking the noise the students were making, commenced firing a pistol at them. They all ran and were followed by this fellow, who repeatedly loaded and fired whenever anyone appeared in sight. This continued for about an hour, when two or three of the more courageous approached near enough to knock the pistol from his hand, when they all pitched in and gave him a severe drubbing. They then took his cartridges from him and started him home.