

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The fall of 1920 was like every other that Fort Myers had experienced except for the new sounds being heard at League Park on McGregor Blvd. For the first time high school aged students could be heard and seen playing a new game catching on everywhere called Football. Fort Myers High School was preparing for its first football season with a total of six games scheduled.

The boys in the community had been hoping for a team for several years but they lacked a coach, money, and opponents. However, the school had been thinking about making it a sport for several years. In 1917, Athletic Director, W.D. Wilson decided that every boy participating in an inter-scholastic football game would earn a block letter "G" award for representing Gwynne High School. Finally in 1920, W.D. Wilson, who had by then become school superintendent, took on the task of coaching the first high school football team. On Tuesday, October 26, 1920 he ran the following front page ad in the Tropical News.

To every citizen of Fort Myers:

It goes without saying that you are all interested in the welfare of the city schools. Your loyal support in the past, and your present attitude toward the work which we are trying to do, bear witness to that. It is to thank you for this manifestation and to solicit a continuation thereof that this brief article is penned.

When the writer assumed charge of the city school system the boys of Gwynne High School proposed that a football team be organized this year so that Fort Myers might take her place beside the other leading schools in the state which are fostering clean amateur athletics. At first I hesitated because I realized the geographical disadvantage of the city which adds materially to the expenses in playing other teams. Then, too, new uniforms had to be purchased for every man on the squad. All told, it was seen that about \$760 would be needed to put the season over. This seemed at first impossible but knowing the spirit of the school and the loyalty of Fort Myers I decided that it could be done if the team would only do its share.

The team is now a reality. It is composed of a clean, manly bunch of fellows who are doing all in their power to bring honors to the school and city which they represent. The school is practically unanimous behind them. But they need the assistance of the citizens' of the city to succeed. We are not asking anyone for donations. However season tickets will be placed on sale the latter part of this week and it is earnestly requested that each individual purchase one or more, if possible. These tickets will be sold for the small sum of \$5.00. If the people of the city will back the school for one hundred or more of these tickets and do it now, the teams of Gwynne High will show their appreciation by putting Fort Myers on the map so far as athletics is concerned this year. I believe you will do it.

**Yours for a better school system,
W.D. Wilson,
City Supt.**

Most of the boys playing that first year had no formal training or knowledge of the new game they were taking up. But their participation was two-fold. They were all competitors who wanted to go up against a man across the line and let the best man win. Football was a new challenge to their athleticism, manliness, and determination.

But probably the biggest driving force behind that initial team was the immense pride the boys had in their community and tremendous school spirit. A football team would allow Fort Myers to be compared favorably to all other communities and schools in the state. A good showing by the hometown boys would leave a high impression of Fort Myers to its opponents. Thus Fort Myers would develop a positive reputation. This was the initial heartfelt driving force. The boys played for pride: self, school, and community.

Mr. Wilson had some previous coaching experience in Tallahassee and leaned heavily on his right hand man junior quarterback D.B. Johnston. He was from up north, (Pennsylvania) and was the only player with any football experience. Due to the lack of available students, the team practiced against a bunch of town citizens.

On Saturday, October 23, 1920 Fort Myers played its first football game ever at Fort Meade. The result was a 19-19 tie. The following Saturday Fort Myers played its first home game at League Park on McGregor Blvd. They played ex-college players known as the Carlstrom Fields High Fliers, a bunch of Army-Air Force personnel. The result was a 19-0 loss. Finally, on Saturday November 27, the last game of the year the Greenies won their first football game ever by trouncing Fort Meade at home 41-7. Although the Greenies finished their inaugural campaign at 1-4-1, it was a success. A tradition had begun and community support forever entrenched firmly behind them.

Members of that first team included: Fred Bartleson, Shep Bass, Granville Bryant, Howard Colbert, Ronald Halgrim, Albert Hansen, Winfield Hendry, Victor Heusted, Elmer Ihrig, D.B. Johnston, Ernest Raymond, and Virgil Sykes.