

## Collecting Football

Bet you didn't know why November 12th is special! That's when Pro-Football started!

The date was November 12, 1892, a day that would forever be etched in sports history, although no one involved that day could possibly have recognized the importance of the occasion. It was the day that the Allegheny Athletic Association football team defeated the Pittsburgh Athletic Club. The game in itself was not a momentous event. But one of the circumstances of the game did make it a never-to-be-forgotten moment in sports history – one of the AAA players, William (Pudge) Heffelfinger, was openly paid \$500 to play the game. Thus pro football made its debut more than 100 years ago in comparatively obscure surroundings that could not possibly have provided the slightest clue to the world-wide popularity the sport would be destined to enjoy, particularly in the waning decades of pro football's first century. While the PAC had suspected something illegal was afoot, there was no immediate evidence to back up its belief that the AAA had abandoned the standard practices of the day by actually paying someone to play football. Absolute verification, in fact, did not become public for almost 80 years until the Pro Football Hall of Fame received and displayed a document – an expense accounting sheet of the Allegheny Athletic Association that clearly shows a "game performance bonus to W. Heffelfinger for playing (cash) \$500. While it is possible that others were paid to play before 1892, the AAA expense sheet provides the first irrefutable evidence of an out-and-out cash payment, appropriately referred to today as "pro football's birth certificate."

The sport of American football itself was relatively new in 1892. Its roots stemmed from two sports, soccer and rugby, which had enjoyed long-time popularity in many nations of the world. On November 6, 1869, Rutgers and Princeton played what was billed as the first college football game. However, it wasn't until the 1880s that a great rugby player from Yale, Walter Camp, pioneered rules changes that slowly transformed rugby into the new game of American Football. [http://www.profootballhof.com/index.cfm?section=history&cont\\_id=186551](http://www.profootballhof.com/index.cfm?section=history&cont_id=186551) Actually, when you research the history of Pro-Football, you encounter different stories. Here's another, quick one...

On September 13, 1895, the first professional football game was played at Latrobe, PA, between the local YMCA team and the Jeannete (PA) Athletic Club. Each player was paid \$10 [*ouch! Time for free agency!*]. But...back to the game! Each team fielded 11 players on a rectangular field.

So, perhaps September 13th should be the special day...but there are still others. Still, whatever the day in history was, there are Football covers to be had, and, for the collector, that means all sorts of possibilities. Usually, a collector into Football collects such covers as part of a bigger Sports-themed category... hmmm.....such as.....“Sports!” But for the sake of discussion here, let's consider a collector who is *only* interested in Football. What are his or her options as far as cover availability is concerned? Let's see...

- Sports Jewelites** (this would obviously be the biggest source. The late Win Lang, CA, reported having 1,234 *Football Sports Jewelites* in 1993)
- Group I Football** (this would be the 2nd biggest source...*technically it might have the potential to be numerically bigger than the Sports Jewelites (with all the sets and variations; I haven't done the math, though)*, but your chances of getting all of them are nil.
- Commercial Advertising covers - Bank sets, for example** (Washington Redskins, for example; Numbers are small here)
- Nationals and Store Sets** (I can't think of any teams here, but there are football pics and related info covers to be seen here)