

TRACY FOOTBALL: WHEN IT ALL BEGAN, 1921-1938

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It's a cold night in Sacramento, California and 10,000 screaming football fans are witnessing the final minutes of the 1987 Sac-Joaquin Section Football Championship game between Tracy and Yuba City. Tracy, who had lost the lead a few minutes earlier, is down by five points with just over a minute left to play and has the ball on the Yuba City 18 yard line. It's fourth down and four yards to go, with just over a minute remaining in the game. Quarterback Steve Thompson runs down the line on an option play and makes a last second pitch to runningback Danly Daniel before being tackled. Daniel takes the ball and rumbles for a touchdown that earns Tracy the championship.

The week before the championship game with Yuba City, Tracy defeated Atwater High in the semifinals, although the Atwater squad outweighed Tracy at every position and some Tracy players were bested by as much as fifty pounds. When Tracy defeated Atwater 21-7, the citizens of Tracy took joy

in the team's success. Signs, reading "Go Bulldogs", "Good Luck Tracy High", and "Beat Yuba City", could be found at Tracy High School and along Central Avenue, Tracy's central business district. Tracyites were curious about the teams progress as many players were stopped by fellow Tracyites who would inquire about the "Big Game". Michael Serrato, starting linebacker for the Tracy High team, was assigned by the Tracy Press to write a column for the town newspaper. In it he detailed the teams preparations for the "Big Game." This column was similar to those written by professional football players concerning their teams performance prior to the Super Bowl.

Football's importance to Tracy was also demonstrated on the field after the "Bulldogs" had completed their triumph. Three-thousand Tracy fans stormed the field to congratulate the team, players were screaming with excitement, hugging each other as if they had just been victorious in a war. The fans from Tracy also showed their loyalty for they traveled sixty-five miles to support their team. This, however, was not unusual for Tracy High because their fans continually outnumber the fans of the opposing team, whether they are non-league, league, or playoff opposition. The weeks following the victory were filled with award banquets and victory ceremonies. Players were given official city of Tracy medals while head coach Wayne Schneider was awarded the key to the city. Tracy businesses also showed

their support for the team by offering discounts to members of the football team for a week following their triumph. The Tracy High football program stood as the pride of the community.

Although the Tracy High football team, coaches, and student body relished their championship season, this was more than just a high school event. The Sac-Joaquin Section Football Championship, was seen by many citizens of Tracy as a victory for the community and the result of a long football tradition that had its origins in the 1920s and 1930s. A football tradition that included an impressive record of league and sectional championships, exceptional players and coaches, and committed community support. The purpose of this essay will be to examine the origins of Tracy's favorite pastime and the impact football had on the communities during the 1920s and 1930s.

Tracy Football's Origin

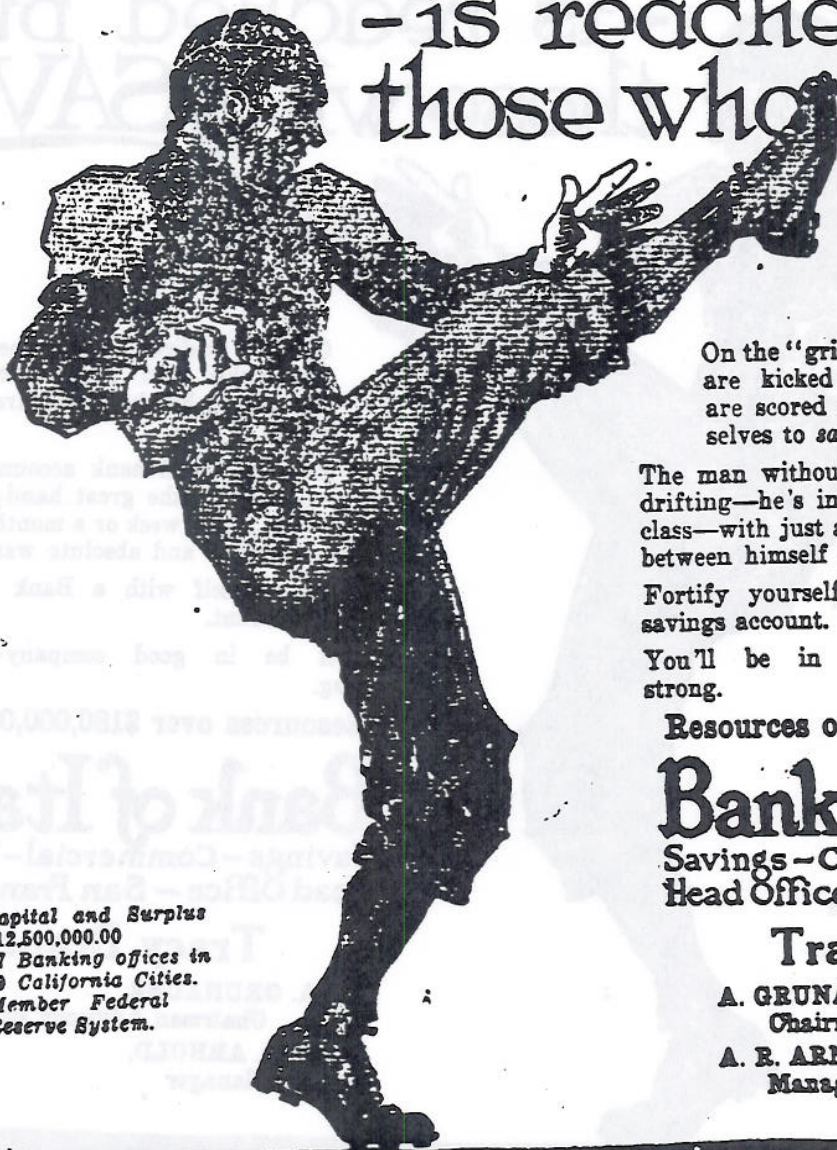
In the 1920's, Tracy was a growing community. It had been growing since it became a Southern Pacific Division point in November 1910. It was an agricultural community that was beginning to prosper by the installation of irrigation. Tracy was a community known by visitors as 'Poker City' for its gambling and prostitution institutions that lined Tracy's southside. It was a community that was proud of its baseball teams and intrigued by a new form of

athletics that was originating in its only high school.(1)
Football first came to Tracy in 1921 with the arrival of a
new shop teacher who was also a football coach, Garland
Hunter who had previous playing and coaching experience.(2)
"Although this is Tracy's first attempt at football we hope
to have a team that will be a credit to this High.", said a
Tracy High student in the Sept. 24, 1921 issue of the
Tracy Press. (3)

Football was well received by townspeople and students as
they eagerly awaited the beginning of Tracy High's first
football season. The Tracy Press even provided a space for
a student written column that kept Tracyites informed of the
progress of the football team and other school activities.
The "Orange and Green" announced in the October 22, 1921
edition of the Press: "Football and baseball seem to be the
sports especially fitted for the Tracy High School and at
present time, football predominates."(4) Tracy businesses
also tried to capitalize on the institution of football in
Tracy as was demonstrated by a Bank of Italy advertisement
which pictured a football player kicking a ball and saying:
"The goal of financial success is reached by those who
save."(5)

After the school board furnished the necessary
equipment, Hunter and his boys were primed for action,6 but
Tracy's excitement was soon diminished as the team failed to
win a game that year. They finished with an 0-6 record

- the goal of financial success - is reached by those who **SAVE!**



On the "gridiron" of life the "goals" are kicked and the "touchdowns" are scored by those who train themselves to save.

The man without a bank account is just drifting—he's in the great hand-to-mouth class—with just a week or a month's wages between himself and absolute want.

Fortify yourself with a Bank of Italy savings account.

You'll be in good company—280,000 strong.

Resources over \$180,000,000.00

Bank of Italy
Savings - Commercial - Trust
Head Office - San Francisco

Tracy Branch

A. GRUNAUER,
Chairman Advisory Board

A. R. ARNOLD,
Manager

Capital and Surplus
\$12,500,000.00
37 Banking offices in
29 California Cities.
Member Federal
Reserve System.

losing games by as much as sixty points and never coming closer than eighteen, and that was to a junior varsity team from Stockton.(7) Excuses were made by students pointing out the team's inexperience. "The local players are an inexperienced squad and have been practicing only about 3 weeks.", said the "Orange and Green" column in the Oct. 29, 1921 issue of the Press.(8) "Coach Hunter and Asst. Coach Bone have been giving all their time to develop the team, but it looks as if the line can't come through with a little pep and fight.", commented that same column on Nov. 26, 1921.(9) After a loss to Sonora the column said, "The second string of players ^{to play} wert [sic] started against the husky "Mountaineers"."(10)

After the 1921 season, the high school dropped the sport for three years due to the disastrous season, lack of funds, and lack of interest.(11) Tracy would forget about the "new" sport and concentrate on something it was more successful at- baseball.

As Tracy's football fortunes declined, the sport gained immense popularity in the rest of the United States. Stadiums with 50,000-70,000 people capacity would fill for football games. People such as Knute Rockne and Red Grange were becoming American favorites to rival those of the "Great American Pasttime" (baseball).(12) The Twenties became known as "The Golden Age of Sports." Eventually football's popularity carried over to Tracy and the high

school decided to reinstate the game in 1925.(13) It also marked the first win for Tracy in football. The first win ever for Tracy High football came against Patterson 7-6, who in later years became one of Tracy High's biggest rivals. That win would be the only victory of 1925, but the blowouts were fewer.(14) The football program would survive the year and each year after and the team would gradually improve and win three games in 1926.(15)

Although Tracy High was winning more games, the fan support was not enthusiastic. "If only more people in Tracy would show some spirit by coming out Friday and giving your local high school some support, ^{to the} "athletics" at Tracy High would be more of a success," commented the Tracy Press on September 24, 1926.(16) And one week later, after a loss to Antioch, "There were people out to see the game, but the attendance was far short of what it should've been"(17)

The most important support the football team received during the mid-20's was financial. During the '26 season a few Tracy businessmen donated enough money to buy new bleachers for the athletic field.(18) They did this in an attempt to rally support for the football program in Tracy, hoping to lure more people out to the games. The fan support of the team finally increased towards the end of the year due to a few hardworking businessmen and the Tracy Press. Hard work was climaxed in a late season game against Livermore which the newspaper said was, "the most exciting

game of the year."(19) The teams played to a 12-12 tie in front of a large crowd that was close to capacity. "The game was the most exciting because of the good support by the student body and townspeople.", commented student Glen Owen.(20) "They (the new bleachers) proved to be very successful when they were filled to the limit during Friday's football game.", stated player Ernest Belloumini.(21)

The Livermore game would be a foundation upon which future fan support would be built. The bleachers and business support lured the fans while the teams performance encouraged them to return. From its beginnings in 1921 until the end of the 1926 season, Tracy's football program attracted an inconsistent following, but this would change as the 1927 season would roll around.

Tracy Football's Big Break

The 1927 football season would change the way Tracyites felt about football. It would create a consistent following for Tracy's football program and give it an identity.

The reasons for the consistent fan support were quite unusual. Two Bay Area men and two Tracyites would directly effect the institution of football in Tracy forever. Peter B. Kyne, a popular author of inspirational self-help books, and Stanley R. Dollar, owner of the Dollar Steamship Lines, took an interest in an athletic program that desperately

needed an identity and consistent fan support. Through their friendship with Tracyite A.J. "Gus" Russell, Santa Fe Lumber Co. official, Kyne and Dollar made frequent visits to Tracy and developed an interest in Tracy's "recreational activities." (22) Kyne and Dollar's recreation included weekend excursions to the newly established Tracy Inn. During the Prohibition era, Tracy was known for its liquor, gambling and prostitution, although it was never substantiated that Kyne and Dollar were drawn to Tracy by these activities. As previously printed in the Centennial Edition of the Tracy Press wealthy Bay Area businessmen would embark upon Tracy frequently to visit the famed Red Light District of 'Poker City' during the mid 1920's. (23) So, a popular belief of Tracyites was that Kyne and Dollar may have been one of these Bay Area men who would enjoy the pleasures of Tracy during the Prohibition era. (24)

What has been substantiated is that Kyne and Dollar had an interest in Tracy football. They would attend many Tracy High football games and, as the Centennial Edition stated, "root for the Bulldogs." (25) Kyne and Dollar's fan support turned to financial support after Russell, an avid booster of Tracy High athletics, asked them to donate to the football program. (26) Their contribution solely to the football program may be explained by the friendship of Russell and then head coach Bill Nichelmann. (27)

Nichelmann's friendship with A.J. "Gus" Russell linked Kyne and Russell directly to the high school.(28) The financial support of Kyne and Dollar included the fencing of Tracy High's athletic field and the donation of various awards to the football program.(29) These donations gave Tracy football an identity it had lacked up to this point.

After the field, which to this day is still located along East Street and called Peter B. Kyne field, was fenced, it was named after Kyne. Dollar's donation included the "Dollar Cup" which was awarded each year to the winner of the Tracy-Patterson game.(30) Another donation of Kyne's was the Peter B. Kyne trophy which was, in Kyne's words, "To be given each year to the man who had made 'good' in the highest sense on the football team." and not necessarily to the best player on the team.(31) Today the trophy remains the most prestigious award given to a Tracy High football player and is highly regarded by the citizens of Tracy. Its significance can be measured by such things as front page coverage by the Tracy Press and its award banquet which is attended by the entire football team and members of the various service clubs of Tracy. Although the original recipients of the Kyne Trophy did not have to be the best player on the team, the award has evolved into an award given to the Tracy High Varsity "Most Valuable Player."

After the donations were made and an identity established, a distinct pride began to evolve in the minds of Tracyites toward its football team. The stands began to fill and the team began to improve under first year coach Nichelmann.(32) After winning the first annual 'Dollar Cup' game with Patterson the Tracy Press described the game, which was covered on the front page, as follows," at Peter B. Kyne field with a crowd of 2000 people cheering, the locals prevented the visitors from going over the goal line. The score was 19-0."(33) For the first time ever, the football team was making the front page of the newspaper.(34) Until 1927 baseball had always earned this privilege, but now it was football's turn and football began to receive the same respect that baseball had enjoyed for many years. It was ironic that the new popularity of Tracy football had nothing to with the Bulldogs performance on the football field. A few famous men, and not a successful football team, ignited a fire that has remained in Tracyites to this day. The love affair of a community and a sport was born.

Immediately after the donations, Kyne became a celebrity in Tracy. He was present at dedication ceremonies of the Peter B. Kyne field and Peter B. Kyne trophy and he also attended the first annual "Dollar Cup" game which was covered extensively by the Press. "Peter B. Kyne, the man for whom the field was named, was present to cheer the Bull

Dogs.", said the November 25, 1927 edition of the Press in its coverage of the first annual "Dollar Cup" game. In this issue a full length picture of Kyne appeared on the first page.(35)

During these ceremonies he would speak about the boy and girl of that day concerning their modern-day advantages. During the dedication of Peter B. Kyne field the Centennial Edition of the Tracy Press commented, "He spoke on what can result from the proper school spirit."(36) While at the dedication ceremony of Peter B. Kyne field he confessed, "that he had never enjoyed the privileges of a high school or college education and in that had necessarily missed the happy school days the boy and girl of modern time enjoy."(37) Peter B. Kyne was special to Tracy and Tracy to him. Like Tracy's present day sports editor, Ron Flatter, said in the Jan. 27, 1988 issue of the Tracy Press, "Peter B. Kyne quite simply had a love affair with Tracy."(38)

After the completion of the '27 season Kyne began to separate himself with his beloved Tracy. He did this apparently because of a disagreement he had with a school official. The disagreement was over a portrait that was to be taken of Kyne. This portrait was going to be displayed in the school lobby, honoring him for his generosity. Mike Miatovich, 1938 Peter B. Kyne winner said, "It was my understanding that Kyne wanted his picture taken with a pipe in his mouth. The school official thought that improper to

be displayed in a school so Kyne, taking offense to this, began to separate himself from the community." (39)

Kyne's, and for that matter, Dollar's absence did not affect the pride Tracy had for its football. The community faithfully followed the Bulldogs throughout the 20's. 1932 Peter B. Kyne winner Waldo Coffman said, "Football was more important [than other sports] to Tracy during my time and it's remained that way since." (40) Where the pride of the community during the late 20's soared, the success of the team did not. Coach Nichelmann compiled a 16-34-3 record before he was replaced by John Hurley in 1933. (41)

The Nichelmann era brought Tracy football an identity and loyal fan support. The Hurley era brought Tracy football a different identity, one of success.

Tracy Football Becomes Successful

"He [John Hurley] was a real good coach who knew how to handle the players," said Waldo Coffman, 1932, Peter B. Kyne trophy winner. "When he came we began to play smart football." (42)

During the Depression years, John Hurley gave Tracy something it had never had- a consistent, winning football team. Hurley arrived when Tracyites were experiencing hard times. His timing was significant as Tracyites, like most Americans of that time, needed a relief from disparity. Hurley's teams provided such relief. (43) For what Peter B.

Kyne, R. Stanley Dollar, and A.J. "Gus" Russell did for pride, Hurley did for winning.

In his first year of coaching at Tracy High, in 1933, Hurley took an 0-8 team from the previous year and turned it into a 6-2-3.(44) Hurley's "smart football" may, in part, be attributed to the new offense he brought to Tracy. Hurley instituted the Pop Warner single wing offense.(45) This move helped Tracy to score over 200 points in a season for the first time.(46) Before Hurley, Tracy's highest point total for a season was 110 points.(47) "John Hurley has met instant popularity and success," said the Tracy Press on Dec. 19, 1933, upon the completion of his first season.(48)

In his second year as head coach, Hurley led the Bulldogs to an 8-1 record and more importantly its first championship ever. They won the Valley Oak League title and lost only to Turlock.(49) The highlight of the year had to be a 37-6 thrashing of arch-rival Manteca. The Bulldogs had reached a level they had never reached before. Tracy High was finally the premiere team in the area. They shook the reputation as a "loser" and had started a winning football tradition.

Miatovich, who played under Hurley, said: "He had a system that worked; a smart, consistent one." (50) Consistent was an appropriate word to describe Hurley as he posted a 23-4-3 record in his three years as coach.(51) This was a drastic

change for Tracy football at that time. John Hurley relinquished his coaching post to his brother George at the conclusion of the 1935 season after accepting a coaching position at Washington State.(52) Shortly after, tragedy struck the Hurley family as John was killed in Italy during World War 2, but not before he showed the Tracy High football program how to win.(53)

The Prestige of Winning the Peter B. Kyne Trophy

The awarding of the Peter B. Kyne Trophy is the way Tracy honors its most celebrated player of its most celebrated sport. To this day it attracts the attention of virtually every Tracyite and is the Tracy football player's most coveted individual award. The Kyne trophy fanfare is an example of football's importance to the community of Tracy.

Runningback Ernest Belloumine, Tracy football's first Peter B. Kyne winner, runningback was an impressive runner who was well liked by his fellow teammates and students.(54) An ideal winner who exemplified the wishes of Peter B. Kyne. The choice of Belloumini was joined with much excitement. It was covered on the front page of the Tracy Press. The significance of the award was demonstrated when Belluomini was unable to be present at the award ceremony. He and his family were on their way to Italy to visit relatives, so

Tracy High officials sent a wireless message to the family that reached them upon their arrival in Italy.(55)

In talking to two former Peter B. Kyne winners from the 1930's one begins to understand the impact this award leaves on the recipient. "I was speechless," said 1938 winner, Mike Miatovich upon hearing the announcement of his accomplishment at a school assembly.(56) "Being a Junior, I was surprised when I was announced the winner, because all previous winners had been seniors.", said 1932 Kyne winner Waldo Coffman who quarterbacked the Bulldogs that year.(57) Coffman is the oldest surviving recipient of the Peter B. Kyne Trophy.(58) Incidentally, Coffman was also the leading scorer on the basketball team.(59)

Coffman, who quarterbacked the '32 team, was a versatile athlete who also played defense.(60) In the Nov. 18, 1932 edition of the Press, Coffman was described as a good example of what a Peter B. Kyne winner should be like, that being one who has, "many qualities such as scholarship, ability on the field, morale, and the way he keeps training rules.(61) Miatovich was a four year starter at guard. He was a tough, intimidating player from whom teams often avoided.(62) He too was reminiscent of the all-around person that exemplified a Peter B. Kyne winner.

Miatovich and Coffman thought other members of their team were as deserving of the award as they were. This characteristic exemplifies the personal qualities Peter B.

Kyne wanted the recipient to have when he initiated the award. Miatovich summed it up best when he said, "It was an honor [receiving the Peter B. Kyne Trophy], I know my name will be associated with Tracy football as long as there is a high school in Tracy." (63)

Present Day Tracy High Football, Recipient of Early Triumphs

The Tracy High football tradition continued through the 40s with such greats as the Marlow Brothers, Ed, Al, and John, and into the 50s with coaches like George Ker and Don Brown, and outstanding players like runningback Ed Biggs. During the 60s, Nick Eddy became one of Tracy's most celebrated football heroes, and while at Notre Dame became the Heisman Trophy runner-up. (64) Later in that decade Tracy would see one of its best all time passing quarterbacks in Gordon "Scooter" Longmire whose emergence paralleled the arrival of coach Wayne Schneider, who reinstituted the winning tradition on the gridiron, that had failed during the late 50s and early 60s, at Tracy High. (65) Today, 164 wins later, Schneider can be seen leading Tracy's most loved sport to championship after championship (including numerous league titles and two section championships in the last five years).

The 1920s and 1930s created a foundation for which Tracy's football heroes are a reflection. During those

early days of Tracy football created a consistent following, distinct identity, and winning tradition thanks to people from outside of Tracy, Tracy businessmen, a newspaper that acted as a major booster, and coaches who guided the football program. As Wayne Friedmann, reporter for San Francisco's KRON, Channel 4, said in "The Boys of Autumn," a documentary that examined the football tradition in Tracy, "The tradition began in 1921. Actually those Bulldogs never won a game, but in time became a dynasty. With championships, undefeated seasons, in this one high school town, to be from Tracy is to root for the Bulldogs win, lose, or draw, season after season." (66)

FOOTNOTES

1. "The Formative Years: Part 2 and 3", Tracy Press Centennial Edition, Sept. 6, 1978.
2. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Sept. 24, 1921, pg. 4. The former column is the one referred to as student written column on Page 1.
3. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Sept. 24, 1921, pg. 4.
4. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Oct. 1, 1921, pg. 4.
5. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Oct. 22, 1921, pg. 10.
6. Tracy Press, Oct. 29, 1921, pg. 4. The following is an advertisement for the Bank of Italy.
7. Tracy High Varsity Football records from 1921-1986. Compiled by Tracy Press sports writer Ron Flatter from past issues of the Tracy Press and Tracy High El Portal yearbooks.
8. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Oct. 29, 1921, pg. 10.
9. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Nov. 26, 1921, pg. 4.
10. "Orange and Green", Tracy Press, Oct. 3, 1921, pg. 4.
11. Tracy High Varsity Football records from 1921-1986.
12. Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday. New York: Harper and Bros., 1957, p. 207-9.
13. Tracy High Varsity Football records from 1921-1986.
14. Tracy High Varsity Football records from 1921-1986.
15. Tracy High Varsity Football records from 1921-1986.

16. Tracy Press, Sept.24, 1926, pg.3. Report on Alumni game.
17. Tracy Press, Oct. 1, 1926, pg.2.
18. Tracy Press, Nov.5, 1926, pg.1.
19. Tracy Press, Nov.5, 1926, pg.1.
20. "Tracy Hi Notes", Tracy Press, Nov. 5, 1926, pg. 4.
21. Ibid.
22. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press Centennial Edition, pg.11-"The Formative Years Part 3.", Sept.6,1978.
23. "The Formative Years Part 3", Tracy Press Centennial Edition, Sept.6,1978.
24. Interview with Tracy Press Co-Publisher Sam Matthews, January 5, 1988.
25. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, pg.11, Sept. 6, 1978. The Bulldog is the official Tracy High mascot and has been used as a nickname for most Tracy High athletic teams since it was first suggested by 1925 football captain Vance Brown.
26. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, Sept. 6, 1978, pg. 11.
27. Interview with former Tracy High football player Waldo Coffman (1930-1933), March 9, 1988.
28. Ibid.
29. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, , Sept. 6, 1978, pg.11.
30. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, pg.11, Sept. 6,1978.
31. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, pg.11, Sept.6,1978.
32. Ibid.

33. "Tracy Takes Dollar Cup", Tracy Press, Nov. 25, 1927, pg. 1

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. "Just who was this Kyne fellow?", Tracy Press, Jan. 27, 1988, pg. 5.

39. Interview with former Tracy High football player Mike Miatovich (1935-1938).

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. "Bull Dogs Preparing for Manteca", Tracy Press, Dec. 19, 1933, pg. 7.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. "First Kyne Winner Selected", Tracy Press, Dec. 2, 1927, pg. 1

55. Ibid. "Sports Develop as High School Grows", Tracy Press, pg.11, Sept.6, 1978.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. El Portal, Tracy High School yearbook, 1934.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. "Tracyites are 'sports-crazy' in 1960's-70's", Tracy Press Centennial Edition, pg.6, "The Contemporary Years", Sept.6, 1978.

65. Ibid.

66. "The Boys of Autumn"(video), KRON, Channel 4, San Francisco, 1987.

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