

Postcards of The Tonawanda 'Jacks: The Fifty Dollar Franchise

BY MIKE BONNER AND CARL LAMENDOLA

The early National Football League was a rough and ready scene, functioning mainly on the fringes of organized sport. The professional teams of the day were typically semi-pro squads, as few could make a full-time living playing football back then. Probably no better example of the fluid nature of the sport at the time exists than the Tonawanda Lumberjacks, or “Jacks” for short, a team from a town outside Buffalo, New York. Theirs was a one-game participation that now claims the distinction of being the shortest-lived franchise in NFL history.

Recently, a series of six Tonawanda picture postcards came to light, featuring images of the players just as the team was close to participating in the venture that would eventually evolve into the multi-billion-dollar enterprise today known as the National Football League.

The cards were among items from the estate of an old timer who collected them, and were brought to the attention of the hobby by an antique picker (like the show) capable of spotting a

potentially valuable card find. Football memorabilia maven Dan Hitt calls these types of pre-NFL items highly significant to the hobby. “Scarce and very desirable,” Hitt says.

Confirmation of the player identities on the Tonawanda cards

Regnet, William Freck, Jibe Gagnon, Hank Winters, Treat Maul, and Aloysius Harmon.

Unfortunately not included is player-coach Walter “Tam” Rose, who upon joining the squad in October, 1919, quickly became



1920 Tonawanda Jacks team photo

comes from team photos, courtesy of the Tonawanda Historical Association. A number of the stars shown are genuine pioneers of pro football. The six locally celebrated names are Hanley “Slip”

its heart and soul, the driving force behind a team that went from small to big in the space of about three years. Rose also quarterbacked Tonawanda during its lone NFL game.