



1919-1920



THE
PACKERS CENTURY

P R O J E C T

ALL THE GAMES. ALL THE STORIES.

1919-2019

BY JIM RICE

packerscentury.com

The Packers' Century Project

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The Packers were founded on August 11, 1919.

I: Getting Started

When the National Football League began, there wasn't a community in America that supported its team more fervently than Green Bay, Wisconsin. With a storied football tradition, the new Green Bay Packers began play in 1919 very close to where the city's first football game was played in 1895.

The leader of the new team was Earl "Curly" Lambeau, a former high school football star at Green Bay East High School. In 1918, Curly left town for football at the University of Notre Dame. He played on Knute Rockne's first team, but he did not return to South Bend after Christmas. Back home in Green Bay, Curly began to miss football very much. He began thinking about organizing a team when he met a willing partner in George Whitney Calhoun, the City Editor of the Green Bay Press-Gazette. Calhoun remembered Lambeau from his standout play in football at Green Bay East High School.

They discussed organizing a "professional" team that would practice during the week, play town teams throughout Wisconsin, and be paid. Calhoun wanted to help his new friend, and he knew a good sports story when he saw one. Both men saw a new football team as an exciting venture for Green Bay as it emerged from World War I.

With Calhoun on board, the team found its legs. "Cal" as his byline often read, was a friendly, well connected, public relations machine, whose great-grandfather had founded the city of Green Bay. For three decades, Calhoun served as the team's public relations department, statistician, historian, and traveling secretary. At his disposal, were the resources of the Green Bay Press-Gazette, first published in 1866.

II: Curly

Curly Lambeau's life turned upside down in late 1918 and early 1919. He went from the backfield of Knute Rockne's first team at Notre Dame to being the leader of a football team that would soon make him one of the most famous men in America. In a little over one year, he organized the team, coached it to a 10-1 campaign, and began being recognized beyond Green Bay for his football prowess.

After coming home from Notre Dame, Lambeau worked as a receiving clerk at the Indian Packing Company. After his discussions with Calhoun, Curly asked the company president, Frank Peck, to support the new football team. The company agreed and gave Curly \$500 for uniforms and equipment. They also allowed the team to use the lot next to the packing plant for practice.

August 11, 1919	First organizational meeting
August 14, 1919	First player meeting
September 3, 1919	The first practice - 18 attend
September 14, 1919	Packers win first game 53-0.

The new team had humble beginnings. In 1919, without a fence around the field, Calhoun *passed the hat* at home games for donations. When a fence was put up the following season with the help of volunteers, and Marcel Lambeau, Curly's father, admission was charged. Two large sections of bleachers were also built.

Avid fans began buying season tickets while many others lined-up weekly for single-game seats. From the beginning and until the mid-1950s, season ticket sales were pitched to local businesses and industries. Players and management also traveled Wisconsin in the offseason meeting fans and selling tickets. Ticket sales meant stability for the fragile franchise, and season ticket sales averaged around 2,000 into the 1940s.

Season tickets to Packer games are now prized family possessions judiciously passed from one generation to the next. Currently, 133,702 fans are on the waiting list for season tickets.

III: Calhoun

George Whitney Calhoun and those who followed him at the Press-Gazette have provided the first chronicle of Green Bay Packer history. For Cal, however, it meant much more. He loved the team that he helped found, and he made no effort to conceal his affection for the 'Bays' or 'Big Bay Blues' as he loved to call them. Cal also lavished praise on Lambeau who believed that the "forward pass" was football's future.

While no stranger to hyperbole, Cal's game stories are informative, entertaining, and in keeping with the journalistic style of the day. They circulated in newspapers throughout the Upper Midwest, introducing fans to the new game of "pro" football and the Green Bay Packers.

Cal was intimately involved in leading the franchise and writing about the team from 1919-1947. He and every Packer fan had to have been shaken when the franchise was placed in receivership in August 1933 with a debt exceeding \$15,000. The team was forced to reorganize and settle its debts.

Green Bay's financial troubles coincided with those of the Portsmouth Spartans of northern Ohio. In March 1934, the owners of the financially-strapped Spartans had exhausted all options and were sold to George Richards, who owned of WJR radio in Detroit. With the sale, Green Bay became the last small town team in the NFL.

Rather than depending on a wealthy owner or ownership group to buy and save the franchise, the Packers turned to their fans. Packer President Leeland Joannes rallied fans, area residents, and statewide friends to support the team. He was successful as "twenty-five business and industrial leaders agreed in December 1934 to raise \$10,000 to 'Save the Packers.'"¹ For the first time since 1923, stock in the team was sold. At \$25.00 per share, the community responded enthusiastically, and \$12,100 was raised! The Packers lived for another day, and a fourth championship soon followed in 1936.

IV: Fast Forward!

Five times in the franchise's first 100 years, financial challenges have seriously threatened its survival. On each occasion, the team turned to supporters with the sale of stock. The shares, which have no monetary value and do not pay dividends, are essentially a donation to the team. Each of the stock sales stabilized the franchise at a critical moment in its history. Today, the Packers' remain the only community-owned team in professional sports with more than 360,000 stockholders.

Stock sales were held in 1923, 1935, 1950, 1997, and 2011. In 2000, residents of Brown County approved a 0.5% sales tax for the complete renovation of Lambeau Field.

Though the Packers were "perpetually in danger of folding into the 1950s,"² the extraordinary efforts of Curly, Cal and many, others guided the franchise through every financial obstacle for nearly 30 years. Since Lambeau's departure in 1950, the Packers have experienced two rebirths – 1959 and 1992 – that have kept the franchise relevant both on and off the gridiron.

As the Packers celebrate their 100th birthday in 2019, the winning tradition remains strong. With all the games and all the stories, The Packers' Century Project paints a one-of-a-kind portrait of the NFL's most successful franchise. Go Pack Go!

V: Town League Days - 1919 & 1920



Season 1

1919

Record: 10-1-0

Coach: Curly Lambeau

Thanks to the financial support of the Indian Packing Company, a new football club was organized in Green Bay. The team played other town teams and athletic clubs in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan.

One month after their first meeting on August 11th, the Packers played their first game. It was a home game at Hagemeister Park, the current site of Green Bay East High School. Without a fence around the park, "most fans either paced the sidelines following the ball or pulled their Model Ts close enough to watch from their front seats."³ George Calhoun and other friends of the club *passed the hat* at home games to collect funds to cover expenses.

Lambeau's boys dominated opponents all season. They came through with shutouts in their first four games and won 10 straight. In their first game, they pounded the Menominee Michigan North End Athletic Club 53-0. In mid-October, against Ishpeming, three Packers suffered early injuries which forced Green Bay to pass. The Packers won 33-0!

In 11 games, Green Bay outscored opponents 565-12! Their only loss came in the last game of the season in Beloit. In that contest, three straight penalties called against Green Bay – by an alleged hometown official – kept them out of the end zone and marred their undefeated season.

At season's end, each player took home \$16.75.

9/14	Menominee	W	53-0
9/21	Marinette	W	61-0
9/28	New London	W	54-0
10/5	Sheboygan	W	87-0
10/12	Racine	W	76-6

10/19 @ Ishpeming	W	33-0
10/26 Oshkosh	W	85-0
11/2 Milwaukee A. C.	W	53-0
11/9 Chicago A. C.	W	46-0
11/16 @Stambaugh	W	17-0
11/23 @ Beloit	L	6-0



Season 2

1920

Record: 9-1-1

Coach: Curly Lambeau

For their second season at Hagemeister Park, a fence was built around the field so admission could be charged. Volunteers helped build the fence and Marcel Lambeau, Curly's father, helped supervise the project. Two sets of bleachers were opened during the season.

Though the team wasn't as strong as 1919, the Packers had another great season. They easily outscored their opponents 227-24. Their only blemishes came in a tie in the opener and a loss to Beloit. In October, they settled a heated local rivalry with the De Pere Pros by dispatching them 62-0.

After two years of easy competition, Calhoun told Curly about the American Professional Football Association (APFA). After the 1920 season, the Packers moved into this new, more competitive league that would change its name to the National Football League in 1922.

In December 1920, the Acme Packing Company purchased the Indian Packing Company.

9/26 Chicago	T	3-3
10/3 Kaukauna	W	56-0
10/10 Stambaugh	W	3-0
10/17 Marinette	W	25-0
10/24 DePere	W	62-0
10/31 Beloit	W	7-0
11/7 Milwaukee	W	9-0
11/14 @ Beloit	L	14-3

11/21	Menominee	W	19-7
11/25	Stambaugh	W	14-0
11/28	Milwaukee A. C.	W	26-0

- 1 Green Bay Packers Media Guide, 2018, p. 555 (\$10,000 pledge)
- 2 The Heritage Trail, Christl, p. 57
- 3 The Heritage Trail, Christl, p. 113
- 4 The Green Bay Packers, Johnson, p. 43



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with Jim Rice

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