

# Eagles are long suffering, but Cards are cursed

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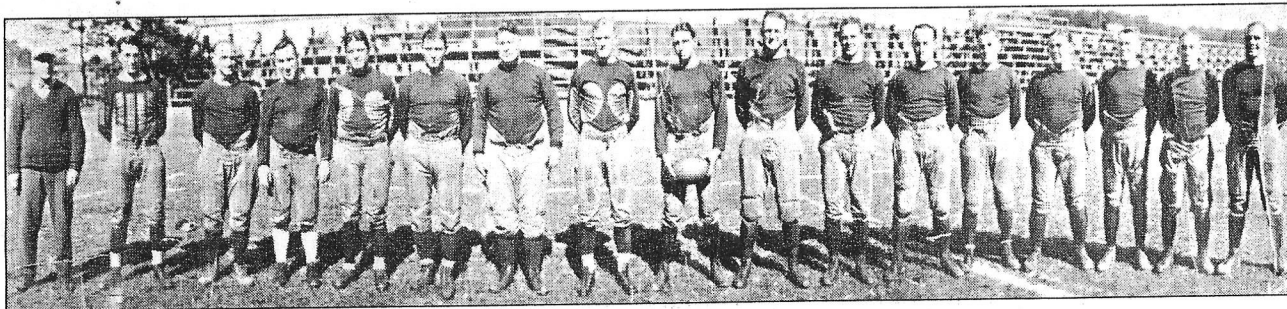
Sunday night's game between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Arizona Cardinals features a franchise that currently holds the National Football League's record for longest championship drought. And it's not the Eagles.

The Cardinals have won only one NFL title since 1925. That championship came in 1947 against the Eagles, who won their last NFL title in 1960.

In Pennsylvania's anthracite coal region, the Cardinals' 68 years of futility is attributed to a curse placed on them for stealing the 1925 championship from the Pottsville Maroons. It's arguably the most infamous controversy in the history of professional football.

The Pottsville Maroons took the NFL by storm in 1925. Coached by Dick Rauch, the Maroons were composed primarily of rough-hewn coal miners from Schuylkill and Luzerne Counties. Led by a powerful, grind-it-out running attack featuring Tony Latone, Barney Wentz, William "Hoot" Flanagan, and Walt French, Pottsville outscored its opponents, 270-45, posted seven shutouts and two lopsided victories over the Frankford Yellow Jackets (49-0) and the Providence Steam Roller (34-0).

On Dec. 6, Pottsville defeated the Chicago Cardinals, 21-7, to establish the best



**The Pottsville Maroons** of 1925, a squad of mostly miners from Schuylkill and Luzerne Counties. National Football Hall of Fame

record in the league at 10-2. The victory, coming in the final league game of the season, appeared to clinch the championship for the Maroons. At that time, the NFL title automatically went to the team with the best record at the end of the season.

However, there was an open-ended schedule in 1925. Although the final league game was played Dec. 6, teams could still schedule contests against each other or play exhibition games against semipro teams through Dec. 20 to make more money. To that end, the Maroons, on Dec. 12, hosted the University of Notre Dame All-Stars at Philadelphia's Shibe Park.

The game was originally scheduled by Frankford in mid-November as a non-league exhibition between the Fighting Irish's former stars and the top NFL team in the east. The Yellow Jackets thought they were the best team after defeating the Maroons, 20-0, in their first meeting of the season on Nov. 14. But when Potts-

ville routed Frankford, 49-0, two weeks later, the Yellow Jackets lost the right to play the Irish.

Pottsville, on the other hand, was excited to host Notre Dame, hoping to realize a huge financial windfall. Since its home field was too small for such a big event, the Maroons scheduled the game in Philadelphia, which was Yellow Jackets territory.

Frankford protested to NFL Commissioner Joseph Carr, who warned the Maroons in writing that they faced suspension if they played in Philadelphia. The Maroons ignored the warning, insisting that the league office had already approved their participation in the exhibition game in a telephone call.

Pottsville defeated the Notre Dame All-Stars by a narrow 9-7 margin. But shortly after, Carr acted on his threat and suspended the Maroons for violating Frankford's territorial rights.

Meanwhile, the Cardinals had scheduled and won two hastily arranged games

against weaker teams: the Milwaukee Badgers and the Hammond Pros. The easy wins gave Chicago a record of 11-2-1, one more victory than the Maroons, and the NFL named the Cardinals champions.

Infuriated by the ruling, Pottsville's fans argued that if the Maroons had not

been suspended, they would have won the title. Still, the league's owners insisted that the Cardinals were the legitimate champions based on the rules.

The NFL investigated Pottsville's case in 1963 and again in 1967. On both occasions, the league upheld its decision to award the 1925 championship to the Cardinals.

When the NFL decided not to reopen the case for a third time, in 2003, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell asked city and borough councils across the state to lobby the league to restore the Maroons' title. When his efforts failed, Rendell called the owners "cowardly barons" and declared he would have "no more communication with NFL officials until they award the Pottsville Maroons the 1925 title."

Whether Rendell's declaration was a threat or a promise is still not clear. But one thing's certain: the "Curse of the Coal Crackers" continues.

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