

THE ANTHRACITE BOWL

PART I: 1983-1992

By Harold Aurand Jr.

Schuylkill County lies at the southern end of Pennsylvania's rich fields of anthracite coal. For over a century most of the local residents made their living in the mines. It was hard strenuous work, and, not surprisingly, the miners preferred hard, strenuous recreation as well. Football caught on quickly in the area. Local high schools were forming teams in the early 1900s, and every community seemed to have a semi-professional team. One, the Pottsville Maroons, even enjoyed a brief stint in the National Football League. The only type of football Schuylkill County didn't have was the college game as there aren't any colleges there.

In 1982 the lack of college football began to change. Members of the Pottsville Joint Veterans Council were concerned by what they saw as a decline in patriotism in the community. They wanted to renew the local sense of national and community pride, and provide positive role models for the younger members of the community. Some of the veterans, like former Pottsville Mayor Charles H. Quandt, knew that in addition to their Division I football teams Army, Navy, and a few other eastern schools sponsored lightweight or sprint football teams.

Founded in 1934 as the Eastern 150-Pound Football League, and now known as the Collegiate Sprint Football League, the teams' goal was to provide a college level football experience for smaller, lighter athletes. In 1996 the player weight limit was raised to 165 pounds. Despite their size, sprint players put on exciting games. Some players, especially at the skill positions, were known to play both lightweight and regular football. Harry Dietz for example, played on Navy's lightweight team in 1959, and in 1960 shared quarterback duties on the varsity team that finished 9-1 and lost to Missouri in the Cotton Bowl.

The members of the Pottsville Joint Veterans Council planned to invite the Army and Navy lightweight teams to Pottsville for a post-season bowl game. To maximize the players' impact on the community elaborate plans were made to link each cadet and midshipman to students in a local elementary school. The students and players would share letters before the game, and meet in person later. There were other planned opportunities for community involvement. For the lightweight players, the Anthracite Bowl would provide a rare opportunity for public recognition. During the winter of 1982 the veterans approached Army coach Bob Knapp. Years later Knapp couldn't remember who had been more excited by the idea of a post-season lightweight football bowl game, him or the future sponsors. His only question, he remembered was "where in the heck is Pottsville".

1983: Army, 38 Navy 13 – The local newspapers knew something special was happening. "Rallies, parades, marching bands, pageantry, parties and football. The things college weekends in the fall are made of will debut in Schuylkill County when the Army and Navy lightweight football teams arrive for the first Anthracite Bowl." For the participants, the Anthracite Bowl meant a busy three day weekend, complete with autograph sessions, an awards banquet, and receiving keys to the city of Pottsville. For the players the highlight of the pregame festivities was meeting the local children. Each cadet and midshipman had been "adopted" by an elementary school classroom. The students had been taught about the academy traditions, and were ready to cheer for their new heroes. Everybody loved it.

Army had won the regular season league title in 1983 and had beaten Navy 31-22 on their way to the crown. Most expected the Anthracite Bowl would be a lower scoring affair. At game time

the temperature was only 35 degrees, with 30 mile per hour winds and intermittent flurries making it seem even colder. The weather was suited to a defensive struggle. Instead Army quarterback Steve Bocca and tight end Paul Coyne turned the game into an aerial circus. The two hooked up eight times for 127 yards and three touchdowns. Overall Bocca passed for 286 yards on the day, as the Cadets pulled away to a 19-0 lead at the half and 35-0 after three quarters. While it wasn't the greatest game ever, 7,000 paying fans had attended. It was the start of a great tradition.

1984: Army 52 Navy 0 – Navy entered the 1984 Anthracite Bowl right off a 5-1 season. It was the twenty-second straight year the middies had finished with more wins than losses. A 17-0 win over Army during the regular season had given Navy a share of first place. The Midshipmen's only weakness was in the area of turnovers. In their only loss of the year they'd given up the ball to Cornell ten times. Unfortunately, that sort of generosity returned in the Anthracite Bowl, turning what should have been a close game into a rout.

Army jumped out to an early lead on their own. On their third series quarterback Alan Edwards carried 22 yards on the option play for a 7-0 Cadet lead. After that three Navy fumbles and four interceptions continued to set the Black Knights up in good field position. By halftime Edwards had 65 yards on the ground and 140 in the air on 9 of 11 passing. As the score mounted tempers flared. In the third quarter, with the Cadets ahead 42-0, a group of plebes came forward to do pushups. Some Navy men responded by trying to steal their hats. After three minutes of pushing and shoving several officers had to intervene. Overall Army out-gained the Midshipmen 488-148 in a one-sided game.

1985: Army 27 Cornell 0 – 1985 saw major changes to the format of the Anthracite Bowl. First, rather than being a post-season bowl game, the Anthracite Bowl became part of the regular season. Organizers hoped an earlier date would mean better weather, and a bigger fan turnout. Secondly, to manage costs better, players would now be housed by host families rather than in area hotels. The host family program later turned into one of the most successful parts of the Anthracite Bowl experience. Many long-lasting relationships have been built between the host families and the players. Finally, the game for the first time was played outside of Pottsville. As Carmen DeSanti, co-chairman of the Anthracite Bowl Committee explained, "Emphasis this year will be on more county involvement. We're really pleased with how this whole idea has expanded. Last year we had quite a few requests from school districts and towns throughout Schuylkill County wanting to become involved in some way." Minersville High School Field would be the first site outside of Pottsville to host the game.

On the field Army dominated, piling up 25 first downs to Cornell's 6 and out-gained the Big Red 495 yards to 135. Despite the lopsided statistics Army had only led 6-0 at the half. Cornell had stopped one Cadet drive on their four yard line by holding on a fourth and one play, and had seen an Army field goal sail wide after another long drive. Army used a long interception and punt return to set up short drives to pull away in the second half.

1986: Army 21 Cornell 20 – The 1986 Anthracite Bowl was the first game of the season for both Army and Cornell. The Cadets also had a new head coach Bob Thompson had come over from the Rose Hulman Institute of Technology and brought the wishbone offense with him. In addition to their football team Army brought the Cadet Glee Club. The crowd of 2,000 who turned out for the game saw one of the most exciting Anthracite Bowl finishes. With 2:54 left in the fourth quarter Cornell had a 20-14 lead and was desperately trying to stop an Army drive. A Big Red interception seemed to ice the game. Army held on downs, though, and forced a Cornell punt. With 44 seconds left Army quarterback Carl Woods completed a long pass to Ron Lewis at the Cornell two. Frank Maresco scored from there and Army won 21-20. Maresco was

the star of the game, gaining 151 yards and two touchdowns on 25 carries.

1987: Army 28 Penn 12 - 1987 was the year of the NFL players' strike. The people of Schuylkill County, like those in much of the rest of the country, were eager for whatever football they could get. The 1987 Anthracite Bowl received special attention when President Ronald Reagan sent a congratulatory telegram to both teams. Army got off to a quick start in the game, recovering a blocked punt at the Quaker 19. Quarterback Carl Woods then hit Tom Fletcher for ten yards, and on the next play carried it in himself on a keeper. Penn used a recovered fumble to set up a field goal. Another Woods touchdown pass, though, helped the Cadets pull away for good.

1988: Army 47 Penn 12 - Several weeks before the 1988 Anthracite Bowl students from Minersville and Schuylkill Haven High Schools went to visit West Point. Former lightweight

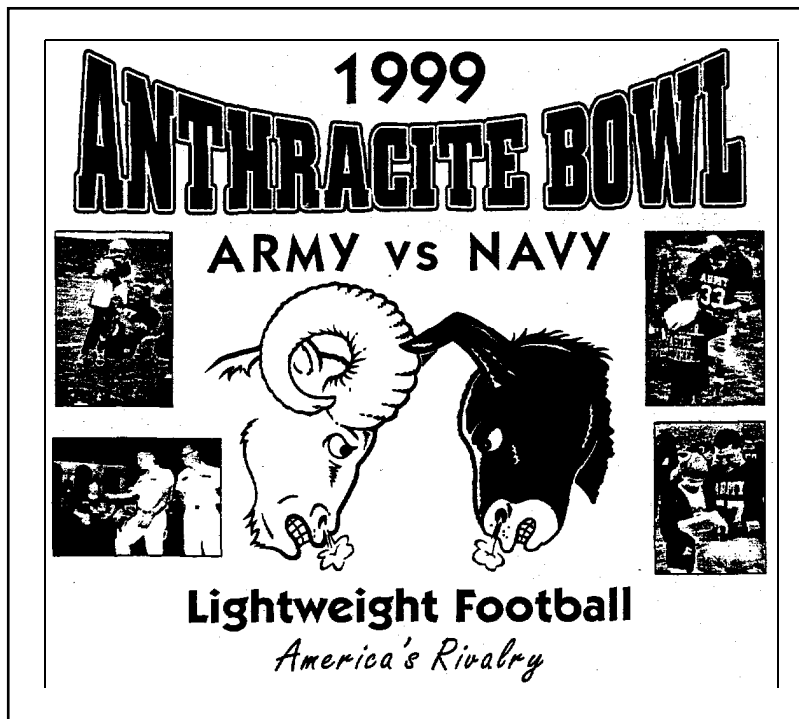
quarterback Woody Woods served as the tour guide, and let the students watch the team practice. The Anthracite Bowl seemed to be doing what the organizers had hoped, building a bridge between the Schuylkill County communities and the military academies. One freshman cadet, Kyle Feger, was a native of Schuylkill County, and said, "I really credit the Anthracite Bowl as being one of the reasons I applied to West Point."

As for the game itself, the Pottsville Republican said "What was supposed to be a knock-down, drag out tussle for four quarters quickly disintegrated into a one-sided bullying of the Quakers by the military men." Penn had their longest drive of the day the first time they had the ball. They moved fifty yards to the Cadet ten, but weren't able to push it in. Two plays later Army's Mark West

swept around the right for a 77 yard touchdown. The Quakers kept it close briefly, recovering an Army fumble in their end zone for a quick six points, but after that it was all Army. The Cadets finished with 424 yards of total offense, including 363 on the ground, physically dominating the team from the Ivy League. The next year would be a different story.

1989: Army 25 Princeton 25 - Army came into the 1989 Anthracite Bowl as the prohibitive favorite. Princeton had lost their first two games of the year to Penn and Rutgers, and had looked bad doing so. But the Tigers regrouped by the time they got to Orwigsburg.

After a scoreless first quarter, Princeton recovered a fumbled Army punt, and used an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty to set up a short drive and take a 7-0 lead. Army responded with quarterback Mark West scoring on a 25 yard keeper. The extra point was blocked though Both **teams** scored again before the half, with Army missing a two-point conversion attempt. The Cadets headed into the locker room on the short end of a 14-12 score.



In the third quarter Army used a ten yard pass from West to Jim Jones to pull ahead 19-14. Princeton came back though. A blocked punt set up a 23 yard Jeff Ramseyer to Jason Woods touchdown pass Princeton missed the extra point, but later added a field goal to go up 23-19 and set up the dramatic finish. With 5:16 left in the game Cadet Steve Cavoli scored on a ten-yard run to give Army a 25-23 lead Chris Clatto's extra point attempt was blocked and Dave Archer picked it up and went 90 yards to knot the score. The Tigers had a chance to win it as a Hail Mary pass on the last play was caught by Mike Guitierrez, but he was tackled at the Cadet four,

1990: Army 48 Princeton 8 – Army and Princeton entered the 1990 Anthracite Bowl expecting a good game. The two teams had tied the year before, and shared the league championship., Both teams ran the wishbone offense and the Bear 50 defense. A special poignancy was added by the military's involvement in Operation Desert Storm. Thirty-five Anthracite Bowl alumni were on duty in Saudi Arabia.

Once the game began Army broke out to an early lead In the first quarter the Cadets drove 53 yards after a short Princeton punt. Mark West passed eleven yards to Mike McIntire for the score. Later, just before halftime, Army blocked a punt for a second score. The Tigers came back in the second half behind the passing of Jeff Ramseyer. He completed ten of fourteen passes for 167 yards. While Princeton was able to move the ball, though, they couldn't get into the end-zone. Army used several turnovers and 275 rushing yards to turn the game into a rout.

1991: Army 23 Princeton 0 – The 1991 Anthracite Bowl, dedicated to the Emergency Ambulance Personnel of Schuylkill County, appeared to be a mismatch. Army came into the game 3-0, and had only given up ten points all year. Princeton was 0-3 and had only scored fifteen, as Coach Tom Murray's Tigers were struggling with a young team. One unexpected problem was that the Anthracite Bowl Committee had forgotten to schedule officials for the game Fortunately, at the last minute, several were found including one who had hoped to spend the afternoon in the stands as a spectator.

Except for the first series, where Princeton drove to the Army 19, the Tigers were kept out of the Red Zone all day. The Cadet defense came up with five turnovers, turning three into scores. The first came when Justin Penssek intercepted a pass at the Princeton 31. Army drove in with Steve Cavoli getting the final two yards. After a field goal made the score 9-0 Army turned another interception into a short touchdown drive and tackled the Princeton punter after a high snap to set up their final score.

1992: Navy 21 Army 14 – Having lasted a decade the game seemed to be on firm footing. To celebrate, the Anthracite Bowl Committee planned to make the game something special Eight members of the Army Black Knights Parachute Team jumped into the stadium, and the St. Ambrose Men's Club of Schuylkill Haven sponsored the Army Pipes and Drums Kilt Team as halftime entertainment. The Anthracite Bowl was even turned into a double-header, with the Pine Grove-Blue Mountain High School game following the Army-Navy tilt.

In the first quarter Navy's Brian Bruggerman intercepted an Army pass. An interference penalty moved the ball to the Cadet four yard line, and Kirby found Vinnie Smith for a short touchdown pass. Later an Army fumble set up a Navy field goal, and gave the Midshipmen a 10-0 lead. The Cadets came back in the second quarter with Paul Salmon scoring on a thirteen yard run, but two more Kirby touchdown passes broke the game open for Navy. Each team scored once in the second half. The Midshipmen only gained 14 more yards than the Cadets, 277-263. It was four Army turnovers that were the difference in the game.

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