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*Gene's Blog:*

## **Legends of the Fall, 60 years ago**

### **Gene McGiverns, St. Thomas, Minn. Sports information director**

St. Thomas players celebrated their 1948 trip to Tampa's Cigar Bowl. The years have zipped by. The game has evolved. Yet even the passing of 60 years has done nothing to diminish the magic of the Tommies' 1948 football season.

Led by Coach Frank Deig, St. Thomas outscored conference opponents 138-6 that fall and was rewarded with a rare invitation to a Jan. 1 bowl game -- the Cigar Bowl in Tampa, Fla.

Deig's squad took the longest train ride in school history at Christmas 1948, leaving behind sub-zero Minnesota for sunny Tampa. UST faced Missouri Valley College, the Mount Union of that decade. Missouri Valley took a couple of seasons off for World War II, but came into December 1948 with a national-record 41-game winning streak dating back to 1941. A close loss at Evansville (Ind.) College on Dec. 4 in the Refrigerator Bowl ended MVC's win streak.

The bowl game lived up to the hype. St. Thomas rallied from a 13-0 halftime deficit, controlled the second half, but in the end settled for a 13-13 tie.

It was the first Jan. 1 bowl game played by any Minnesota university. The University of Minnesota, which later played in the 1961 and

1962 Rose Bowls, is the only other institution in the state to play on Jan. 1.

Little All-American end Jack Salscheider was among five Tommie Cigar Bowl players who received NFL contract offers. Salscheider played two seasons with the New York Giants; halfback Jim "Popcorn" Brandt played with the Pittsburgh Steelers; quarterback Ed Krowka signed with the Detroit Lions before a heart ailment prematurely ended his career; end Don Simensen played with the Los Angeles Rams and started as a rookie; and tackle Jim White turned down an NFL contract offer from the Giants to attend medical school. (White went on to become a prominent doctor and medical school professor at the University of Minnesota).

The team still has 24 living members, and the players often return to campus. In 2006, a plaque was placed on the south wall at O'Shaughnessy Stadium to recognize the Cigar Bowl unit.

That was part of a dominant era of St. Thomas football. In 11 seasons from 1938-49, St. Thomas went 51-4-1 in MIAC play, with six conference championships. Included was a 15-game winning streak in conference games from 1947-1949.

Tampa's Cigar Bowl, which debuted in 1947, hoped its event would grow and eventually join established bowls like Miami's Orange Bowl and Jacksonville's Gator Bowl. The 1949 Cigar game was played at night to avoid conflicts with radio broadcasts of the major bowls played that afternoon. The event was played until 1954, then discontinued. The only other upper Midwest team to make the trek to Tampa for the Cigar Bowl was Wisconsin-LaCrosse, which played in two Cigar Bowls. It would be 30 years

until Tampa regained a college bowl game when the Hall of Fame Bowl relocated from Birmingham in December 1986. The bowl was renamed the Outback Bowl for the title sponsor in 1995.

College football held 15 bowl games on Jan. 1 that season, including the East-West college all-star game in San Francisco. The Cigar was one of five bowl games that day in Florida along with the Orange (Miami), Gator (Jacksonville) and Tangerine (Orlando) plus the Flower (Jacksonville), one of two bowls for black colleges (along with Birmingham's Vulcan Bowl).

Other Jan. 1 bowls that year were the Rose (Pasadena), Sugar (New Orleans), Cotton (Dallas), Delta (Memphis), Dixie (Birmingham), Sun (El Paso), Harbor (San Diego), Salad (Phoenix), Raisin (Fresno), Prairie (Houston), Ice (Fairbanks), Pineapple (Honolulu) and Lily. There also was a semipro Tobacco Bowl and the high-school Peanut Bowl played that day.

### **Rare Invite**

St. Thomas, with just four seniors on a 35-man roster, started 7-0 but lost its final game to Loras. The Tommies were still chosen for the Tampa bowl trip among two other finalists -- Wofford (S.C.), and Bowling Green (Ohio). Wofford started the 1948 season with a collegiate record five consecutive ties before winning its last four contests. In fact the Jan. 1, 1950 Cigar Bowl pitted Wofford against Florida State, then a smaller college which played in the Dixie Conference.

Word came on Dec. 1 that the Tommies were the pick to play Missouri Valley, the defending champions. A newspaper story said that Chicago native Ed Krowka, in the excitement

over the bowl bid "dropped the Polish sausage he was eating" in the cafeteria.

The St. Paul Dispatch newspaper sent a photographer to campus and posed Toms tackle Bernie Graham being kissed on each cheek by "a couple of pretty secretaries employed at the school," according to the newspaper.

The Vikings of Missouri Valley College were playing their fifth bowl game in 13 months. The 1947 Vikings won the Mo-Kan Bowl; beat McMurry in the Boys Ranch Bowl in Texas; then beat West Chester (Pa.) in the Cigar Bowl.

Viking coach Volney Ashford was called "the Frank Leahy of small college football." Ashford sounded like a John Gagliardi of his era, often talking of how "lucky" his team was to win 41 consecutive games.

"If this boy Salscheider and the other one, Krowka, are as good as they say they are," Ashford said the day before the Cigar Bowl, "we are going to need all of our luck and a little football, too. I read that if Salscheider had been with Minnesota, the Gophers, instead of Northwestern, would be playing California in the Rose Bowl. I sort of wish Mr. Salscheider were playing in the Rose Bowl tomorrow. Come to think of it, that would be an excellent idea."

The 1948 Gophers were indeed close to a breakthrough. They finished 7-2 under Coach Bernie Bierman, including a 5-2 record in the Big Nine.

### **Game Prep**

The Toms worked out in the University of Minnesota fieldhouse over the holiday break. They left Dec. 26 via train, on a day when the Twin Cities' overnight low dipped to 10 degrees below zero.

After arriving, St. Thomas publicist Dan Hergert joked, "We didn't know weather like this existed on the globe."

Deig told reporters, "I have been looking forward to feeling some of this Florida sunshine for a long time." A box of snow from the St. Thomas campus was packed and shipped to Florida by courier. The team opened the box on arrival in Tampa "to make them feel at home on the Florida beaches."

The Tommie travel party of 42 included Hergert; coaches Deig, John Lackner and Bill Funk; equipment manager Jim O'Brien; trainer Clem Stramel; and team chaplain, Rev. B.J. Coughlin. The reigning Miss America, Hopkins native BeBe Shopp, was among those in attendance.

The 35 players who traveled were offensive starters Pat Alvey (LE, 173 pounds), Bernie Graham (LT, 200), Tom Pacholl (LG, 187), John McManus (C, 195), Jack O'Brien (RG, 185), Don Simonsen (RT, 193), Smith Eggleston (RE, 176), Ed Krowka (QB, 180), Jack Salscheider (HB, 185), Dave Brill (HB, 165) and Stan Martinka (FB, 180).

Other squad members were Don Sovell, Frank Quinlan, Jack Cosgriff, Bill Boland, Norm Tokarz, Jack Okoneski, Urban Schaaf, Tom Hritzko, Dan Dolan, Jack Dolan, George Hanrahan, John Haider, Joe Podolinsky, Don Morrison, Jim White, Joe O'Brien, Jim O'Brien, Pat Sampair, Frank Gray, Pat Kelly, Dick Pappenfus, Bill Webster, Bill Andersen, Jim Flaherty, Harold Romansky, Don Harris and Herb Dornfeld.

(Andersen's grandson, linebacker Willie Baregi, played on the 2008 Tommie team, and Bill was able to come out and see several games this fall.)

Tampa's newspaper had one big scoop: The town of Olivia, Minn., population 2,500, had 16

students attending St. Thomas in that year, and seven attended the Cigar Bowl game, including football starters Jim "Popcorn" Brandt and Jack Cosgriff.

As part of the festivities, Tampa's cigar manufacturers handed out boxes of cigars to visitors from Missouri and Minnesota. Game tickets were sold at Walgreens, with most priced at \$4.80, \$3.60 and \$2.40.

The Tampa Tribune said coaches Ashford and Deig considered the game a toss up. "They are neither using the crying towel, nor making any rash predictions of victory," the newspaper noted.

Hergert said Salscheider was as good as any running back in the Midwest. "I believe he would have made the University of Minnesota a big threat for the Big Nine championship," Hergert told reporters. "Another newspaper clipping called St. Thomas 'The Notre Dame of the Northwest' and declared this team 'The best eleven in St. Thomas history.'" Another story mentioned that several Tommies had the talent to play in the Big Nine Conference, the forerunner to the Big Ten.

Salscheider served in the U.S. Marines in the WWII in the Pacific Island engagements before enrolling at St. Thomas. He finished the 1948 regular season with 919 rushing yards in eight games, a 9.3 yard per carry average, and a 43.8 yard punting average. He scored 12 touchdowns and kicked 19 PATs, and made Little All-America and Catholic All-America.

In a story headlined "Tampa Cold Wave boosts Toms' hopes", Ken Murphy of St. Paul Pioneer Press wrote:

"It will be the Toms' speed and passing vs. the (Missouri Valley) Vikings' power running and

fair passing. The odds are strictly even here for the game but this observer favors the Toms by a pair of touchdowns despite all the ballyhoo about the Vikings' line being one of the greatest in small college circles... The strong point of the Missourians seems to be a stalwart line which can make a touchdown or two stand up. That forward wall will outweigh the Toms by several pounds and as the Tom coaching staff has emphasized all week, the game will be won up front on the charge...

"Much to the dismay of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce and natives in this usually warm and sunny state, the weatherman issued a frost warning... and predicted temperatures might be as low as 40 at game time. The forecast was joyously received in the Tom quarters."

The Tampa Times wrote: "The Viking defenders will have to keep a watchful eye on Eddie "Fingers" Krowka, who has a reputation of handling a football like a baseball pitcher can a baseball. Krowka specializes in long throws, and his passes usually average from 40 to 50 yards. His passing, and Salscheider's running, make up a deadly offense."

Missouri Valley had its version of a webcast for the game. Its booster club rented the Marshall High auditorium and set up a live telephone hookup to give play-by-play reports over the loudspeaker. They expected 2,500 people to turn out, and they passed the hat for donations to defray the significant costs of "keeping the wire open for the two hours of the game."

### **Game Write-up**

The Tampa Times' Jan. 2 game recap read like this:

"The spunky Tommies of St. Thomas College and the Vikings of Missouri Valley, Marshall,

Mo., were en route home today after playing to a 13-13 hat-grabbing tie... before about 9,000 shivering fans."

UST had a 14-6 advantage in first downs and outgained Missouri Vallley 216-173 yards, but held the Viking to no pass completions. The Toms had three turnovers to one for the Vikings. The Tampa Times story added, Jack "Salty" Salscheider "ran away with just about everything except a deed to the University of Tampa field."

After a scoreless first period, two special teams plays hurt the Toms in the second quarter. The Toms were unable to get off a punt against a big rush, and the Vikings took possession at the Tommie 25-yard line. Missouri Valley scored a few plays later and kicked the PAT for a 7-0 lead. The Missourians made it 13-0 when freshman Roscoe Bedell returned a punt 56 yards for a TD. The kick failed and the halftime score was 13-0.

Popcorn Brandt's 80-yard punt return in the third quarter and Salscheider's kick made it 13-7. With about 3:00 to go in the game, Salscheider's three-yard scoring run capped a 59-yard drive and tied the game 13-13, but the go-ahead PAT kick was blocked. In the final minute, St. Thomas just missed a winning TD pass late as Ed Krowka's 60-yard heave to Salscheider was juggled and fell off his fingertips near the goal.

The Tommies left Tampa by train on Monday and returned Wednesday to what newspapers called "a hero's welcome" at the St. Paul Union Depot. The St. Thomas band led the welcoming committee which newspapers said included

"scores of students                      Ed Delaney."  
and St. Paul mayor

Deig, who coached at St. Thomas Academy before joining the St. Thomas staff in 1941, was named National Catholic Small College Coach of the Year in 1956, and Bernie Raetz and Dick Trafas made the Little Catholic All-America team from that unit.

Sadly, Deig retired in the summer of 1958 due to failing health, and he died in 1960 at age 50.

### **Hall of Famers**

Brandt, Salscheider and Simensen were all charter members of the St. Thomas Athletic Hall of Fame when it was created in 1974. Krowka was inducted in 1977; Deig was enshrined in 1983; and Smith Eggleston, also an excellent long jumper in track and field, was inducted in 1986. Eggleston still ranks on the Tommies' all-time best lists in the long

jump. In 1949 he jumped 23-8 indoors then leaped an amazing 24-0 outdoors.

"We had great talent on our team. It was just a great group of guys, coaches and athletic administration," said team member Dick Pappenfus, now retired and living in St. Paul.

"Popcorn" Brandt played three seasons with the Pittsburgh Steelers (1952-1954). In 33 career games he scored four TDs and had 405 yards of total offense. "He had a gifted sixth sense that would make tacklers miss," Pappenfus said. "Former Tommie basketball coach Tom Feely remembers Popcorn running back a kickoff for a touchdown when the Steelers were in town to play an exhibition game at Parade Stadium."

Pappenfus said Krowka signed with the Detroit Lions, although a heart murmur ended his career. "He played service ball at Great Lakes for he famed Paul Brown. He might have been the best passer in the MIAC in the past 50 years. He had a great arm and could throw passes up to 70 yards."

Salscheider played one season with the New York Giants – he returned a kickoff for a touchdown -- before injuries ended his career.

End Don Simensen played with the Los Angeles Rams, starting as a rookie

on the Rams' NFL championship team which included Norm Van Brocklin, Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch and Dick "Night Train" Lane. "He had the ideal attitude," Pappenfus recalled. "He was mean and nasty. That caught the attention of the Los Angeles Rams."

Tackle Jim White turned down an

NFL contract offer

from the New York Giants to attend medical school, and went on to a successful career in medicine and as a professor at the U of M medical school.