

HOMINY INDIANS

Buried deep in the dusty files of the Hominy (Okla.) News is an account of a professional football game between the Avant Roughnecks and the Hominy Indians played in October 1924:

"Johnnie Martin, former pitcher for the Guthrie team of the Oklahoma State League, entered the game in the fourth quarter. On the first play, Martin skirted right end for a gain of 20 yards. However, Hominy was penalized 15 yards for Martin having failed to report to the referee. On the next three plays, the backfield hit the line for a first down. With the ball on the 20-yard line, Martin again skirted right end for the winning touchdown."

This speedy, high-stepping halfback was none other than Pepper Martin, star third baseman of the St. Louis Cardinals' "Gas House Gang" of the 1930s. Pepper became famous during the 1931 World Series when the brash young Cardinals beat the star-studded Philadelphia Athletics four games to three.

Nowhere is Pepper more fondly remembered than in the land of the Osage. For all his fame as a baseball star, he's best remembered as a spectacular hard-running halfback on America's most famous and most colorful professional football team, the HOMINY INDIANS. It was here that Pepper got the name "Wild Horse of the Osage."

This football team was organized in late 1923 at a time when Hominy was riding the crest of the fantastic Osage oil boom. Wealthy Osage tribal elders furnished the financial backing for the operation, and they wanted a team made up entirely of "real" Indians.

Early on, many players from the famed Indian school, Haskell Institute at Lawrence, Kansas, were recruited to play at Hominy. One of the more talented of these players was All-American, John Levi. John and his brother, George were of the Arapaho tribe. Many other tribes were represented: Osage, Pawnee, Otoe, Creek, Seminole, Cheyenne, Sioux, Cherokee, Navajo, Kiowa, Seneca, Sac and Fox, and even one Eskimo.

The Hominy club once put together a string of 22 consecutive victories, but their most notable victory came against the newly crowned NFL Champion New York Giants played in Pawhuska, Okla. in Dec. 1927. Pepper Martin was off playing baseball when the Indians got this shocking win, but John Levi sparked his team to victory.

After this victory, the Indians were much in demand and they began to travel. They never owned a bus, but used a caravan of touring cars. The breakdown of a lumbering Pierce-Arrow or Marmon or Buick, the ragged jerseys, the greasy lunch rooms, the smell of liniment and sweat, the rejoicing after a victory - all were part of the game.

When playing far from home, many of the Hominy players would dress in their tribal dress and put on a "pow-wow" dance before a game. Complete with drums, whoops, chants and feathers, they could always bring out a crowd, especially in the East.

Away games were played in Tulsa (against a team headed by Red Grange), San Antonio, St. Louis, Memphis, Orange, New Jersey, New York City (against the New York Giants), ~~and~~ Boston, and Buffalo.

In December, 1932, Pepper Martin couldn't resist playing with his old teammates in a game in Memphis. He broke loose for a 75-yard run to pay dirt, then made a shoestring catch of a pass and ran 22 yards for another score. But he was in a losing effort.

Despite that fine showing, however, the St. Louis Cardinals' front office was extremely upset with Martin and forbade him from playing future football games.

An attempt was made to get the Indians into the NFL or the new AFL, but negotiations fell through when the Osage backers felt that they would lose control of the team. It seems that 1936 marked the end of the line for this unique and colorful team. They played all comers. They played on fields that were little more than chalked-off pastures, and they played

in stadiums seating thousands of fans. They played because they loved the game, and because they could play as an all*Indian unit.

There are no former players still living. The descendents of the men who played for the Hominy Indians over the years, have banded together to raise money for a memorial to be erected in Hominy, Oklahoma. This memorial ~~is~~ will have a brief summary on the history of this Native American football team, plus listing the names of many of the men who played in a Hominy uniform.