

Football in Belmont, 1923-1924

The 1923-1924 school term found Professor L. D. McCoy as the superintendent at Belmont, Miss. In addition to being a good academic man, Prof. McCoy had lots of common sense. Like his predecessor, the personable J. D. Langston, Superintendent McCoy enjoyed sports, coaching the boy's basketball and football teams. In fact, L. D. McCoy was the first football coach of the first football team at Belmont in the fall of 1923. Prof. McCoy ordered one football and about 14 football uniforms. By the time the equipment arrived, there had been at least one or more box suppers or related events to raise money for the football uniforms. A number of merchants donated generously to the cause. Even after the 1923 season, there were fund-raising drives and events to pay for uniforms — truly one tremendous manifestation of town loyalty and interest.

The school provided football helmets, shoulder pads, jerseys, pants, and stockings. The players furnished their own shoes and kidney pads. Mayor A. G. W. Byram, who operated a shoe repair shop, made football shoes from either Boy Scout or lightweight plow shoes. Looking at a catalog picture of a football shoe, he did an excellent job of using varied widths of leather to build up cleats on the soles. The team had only one football the first year. By the end of the year, the shape of the football was somewhat changed. The players looked forward to a game because they got not only to test their skill but also to use a good football.

The football and basketball games covered a large area in northeast Mississippi and northwest Alabama, probably against Tishomingo, Golden, Dennis, Booneville, Marietta, Cherokee, Sheffield, Hackleburg, Haleyville, and others depending upon the sport in season. An out-of-town football game, according to C. W. Baley, Jr., posed a transportation problem. Prof. McCoy had a Chevrolet touring car, and Red Pharr had a Ford touring car that was nearly always used. Carey Stephens and Elledge Selby could get their family cars if needed. Marshall W. A. Shook would take some players to games not too far from Belmont. Something to see was three cars loaded with 14 players and football gear plus Coach McCoy and one or two drivers heading off to a football game with football equipment on the front fenders. Lots of unloading, pushing, and reloading could be expected both going and coming on the road to Booneville through Bay Springs. Some of the players avoided riding with Prof. McCoy if possible because his auto had a power pulling problem, and they had to get out more and push.

Harold Shook was the captain of the first football team. The first football cheerleaders were Lera Shook and Ruth Gilley. The football team did not win any games in 1923. One of the first few games was against Tishomingo, which had Charlie Gilbert, Candler White, and other Belmont area boys playing on the team. Charlie Gilbert, a son of Annie O. Gilbert and Ed Gilbert, was an outstanding athlete in not only football but also track and basketball. It is said that he was very gifted in reacting instinctively with much natural ability. After graduating from Tishomingo, Charlie Gilbert came to Belmont as a football coach. He also worked with Prof. McCoy in coaching basketball. Another stellar halfback for Tishomingo in 1923 was Candler White, who scored several touchdowns in the game at Belmont. Candler White returned to Belmont his senior year, 1924-1925. This Belmont football team is said to have won about three games as the football program began to become established.

The following information was transcribed by RaNae Vaughn from Jerry Martin's book, *A Place Called Belmont*.