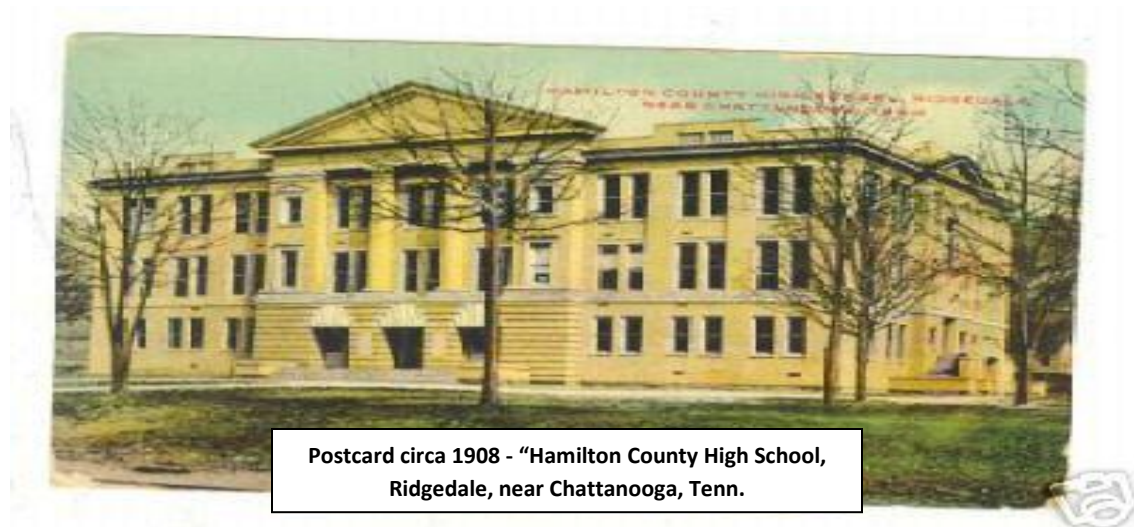


A Brief History of Central High Football

Part I. Beginnings (1907-1918)



When the new Hamilton County High School in Ridgedale opened on September 9, 1907, football was already on the mind of school officials. The new principal, A.E. Darrah, had been in the Nashville area as a schoolteacher since the 1880s, had witnessed the introduction of football and its profound effect on school spirit at Battle Ground and Montgomery Bell Academies, and was determined to harness that energy at the new school. Darrah just happened to have on his new faculty, a former coach at BGA, Mr. Curtis Green. On September 20, Darrah's intentions were announced in the *Chattanooga Times*, page 3:

The Central High School is now figuring on a football team. Among the members of the county high school faculty is Coach Green, formerly of the Battle Ground Academy, Franklin, Tenn. At that school Coach Green put out two very fast teams the two seasons he was there, and it is believed he will put out a very fast team at Central High School, providing money can be secured to start the movement. It is understood that the authorities will be asked for the necessary funds at once, and if they are successful in obtaining enough to outfit the team, Coach Green will start to work at once on his material. There is an abundance of material at the Central high school, and many believe a great team can be turned out there.

Actually, initial enrollment at Central was only 156 and, of the 22 seniors enrolled, only four were male. Moreover, Central had no equipment or practice facilities, and had yet to move into the magnificent new building on Dodds Avenue, holding temporary classes until January, 1908 in the old Ridgedale School. However, the sales pitch must have been successful, for one week later the September 27 issue of the *Times* reported:

The Central high school is the latest to get in the field with a football team. A day or two ago an order was placed for equipment enough for about twenty-five men, and within the next week the boys will get out to practice.



**Alexander E. Darrah, First Principal
of Central High, 1907-1912**

Central became the fourth local high school to field a football team. City High had begun fielding teams as early as 1903 and by 1906, under Coach Sam McAlester, had laid claim to the East Tennessee Championship, by way of defeating the other handful of East Tennessee schools fielding teams. McCallie had opened in 1905 and immediately put a team on the field, and Baylor had recently announced intentions to field a team for the Fall of 1907. Eleven days following opening practice on October 15, the first Central football squad did battle, for the October 27, 1907 *Times* reported:

Another bunch of future football stars made their debut yesterday when the Central high school eleven ran out on the field to play the Baylor team. They were defeated—17 to 5—but the fact was established that the material for a great team is in them...The Baylor team played in much better form than three days ago when McCallie defeated it... The Central high eleven made its first appearance of the season. With the exception of Captain Shackleford, not a member of the team had ever played in a game before... The team will play the Chattanooga high school in the next few days. The lineup:

<i>Baylor</i>	<i>Central</i>
<i>Hutchins.....C.....</i>	<i>Ely</i>
<i>Tatum.....R.G...Greenwood,B.</i>	
<i>Hulbert.....L.G...Greenwood,R.</i>	
<i>Wilson.....R.T.....Colbaugh</i>	
<i>Hunter.....L.T.....Cox</i>	
<i>Walker.....R.E.....Maddux</i>	
<i>Connelly.....L.E.....Gaston</i>	
<i>Whiteside.....Q.....Ware</i>	
<i>Rice.....R.H.B.....Wallace</i>	

*Thompson.....L.H.B.....Shackelford
Stone.....Full.....Revington*

The next week, on Halloween, October 31, Central again took the field against City High, the defending East Tennessee Champion, and was humiliated 63-0. The Times did not bother to credit individual scores, but summed up the game this way:

The Chattanooga high school eleven rolled up the largest score reported in the south this season on the Central high school aggregates, the final figure being 63 to 0. The game was played before a large number of students, practically the entire membership of each school being present. As indicated by the figures, there was never a time when the Central lads had an opportunity to score. They were hopelessly outclassed...

The humiliation prompted Darrah to raise the stakes, and he began searching for a coach that would bring instant success. At the same time, Baylor was also smarting from beatings by McCallie, City, and others and began a similar search. These parallel efforts would have long-lasting impact upon local football, for Baylor was able to lure away Coach McAlester from City for the 1908 season. But Central pulled off a bigger coup, with the help of the University of Chattanooga, when they hired James B. Rike, a football star from Ohio Wesleyan College, to be the first athletics coach and biology teacher. It was a complicated arrangement with Coach Rike, who had been a running back at Wesleyan under Coach Branch Rickey, the latter now known for his contributions to baseball, rather than football. In the September 1, 1908 *Chattanooga Times* it was reported:

By an agreement reached yesterday by those concerned, James B. Rike, late football star at Ohio Wesleyan University, will have charge of the Central High Football squad this year. In addition, he will coach the team that will represent the University of Chattanooga. In the latter, he will be assisted by Prof. Sam J. Mc Alester of the Baylor School. Captain Hampton of last year's University* team will assist Mr. Rike in handling the Central team.... It has been virtually agreed between the athletic authorities of the University, Baylor's and Central that all three teams will use the Chamberlain Field at specified hours. Central High will go on from 2 to 4 o'clock; Baylor's probably at the same hour, and the University from 4 o'clock on, each afternoon. Rike will have absolute charge of the University and Central squads.

*The University of Chattanooga was called U S Grant University until 1907

The Times later reported on September 25, 1908 that the High School (City) squad had also joined the fray and that each afternoon up to 100 players were practicing on the newly completed Chamberlain Field – typically 25-40 from Baylor, 20 to 30 from Central, and 15 to 20 for the University and City High squads, plus a few outsiders.

Within three weeks of arriving, Coach Rike decided that the Central squad was ready for battle and scheduled a game with Rhea County High for Friday afternoon, September 25, 1908, which was also to be the first athletic contest ever held on Chamberlain Field. Central won 10-6 (in 1908 a touchdown was worth 5 points). A week or so later, Coach Rike was diagnosed with typhoid fever, causing him to miss the University's opening game and the next two Central games. Central, with Rike sidelined, lost

games to TMI at Sweetwater 10-0 on October 17 and two weeks later to Huntsville Williams 23-0 at Huntsville,AL. When Rike returned to the sidelines, Central ventured to Dayton on November 7 for a return match with Rhea County, which ended in a 0-0 stalemate. Then on November 20, Central exacted revenge on City with a stunning 6-0 upset. The Times again ran a large article on November 21, with the headline- LUCK SMILES ON CENTRAL. This was because on the second play of the game the City fullback fumbled and a Central player returned it for a 20 yard touchdown. The Times concluded that, "Outside of this play, there was not a great deal of difference in the strength of the two elevens." Central did venture into Alabama again, one week after the City win, shutting out Huntsville Butler 11-0 to end the season.

Rike would coach only for the 1908 season at the University, having a full plate as coach of both men and women's athletics at Central.



James B. Rike, first football coach at Central 1908-1918, from 1913 yearbook

In 1909 Central could only schedule one local school, City, and won 16-3. The April 1911 *Digest* later reported that in 1909 "local teams declined to play." Other games included an opening 11-5 loss at Rhea County, a controversial scoreless tie with UC that the University insisted was a "scrimmage", an October 17 game with Mooney that had to be cancelled because of injuries to many of Central's players, and an 11-0 loss (with missing starters a major factor) to the Morgan School of Fayetteville on October 23. After the November 6 win over City, Central then ran off wins over Huntsville Butler 5-0, Knoxville Central 41-0, and South Pittsburg 11-2 in a span of only eight days. In the season finale at Sweetwater, Central slugged out an 11-11 tie with a favored TMI team.

The 1910 season was shortened by an unfortunate event. In that year Central again had difficulty scheduling opponents and finally arranged a game with Grant University of Athens, TN on Oct 7, in which Central lost 6-0, despite outgaining their opponents. On November 2, 1910 Central traveled to Knoxville and played a scoreless tie with Knoxville Central High. Two days later, Central was soundly defeated by Mooney School of Harriman 22-0, with Mooney having assembled a team of well-known amateur and professional athletes. After the game Coach Rike was notified of his wife's (Nelly Prugh

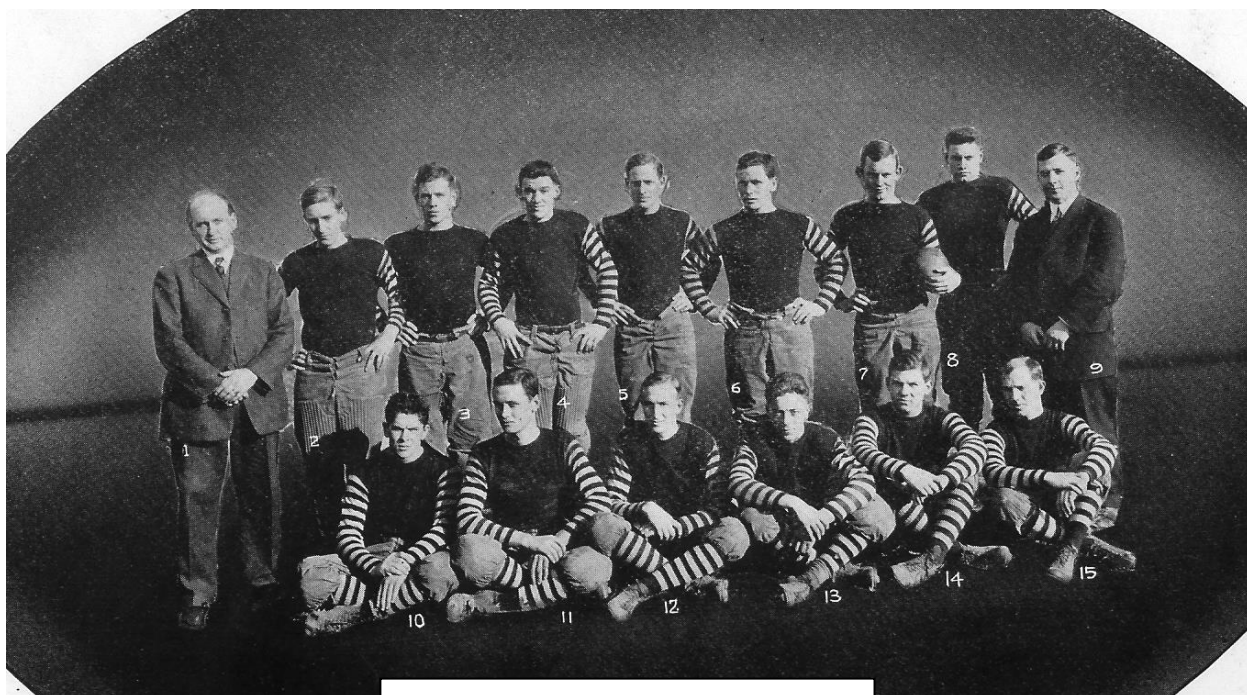
Rike) illness in Ohio, where she had returned and given birth to their daughter, Eleanor, on October 28. Coach Rike went directly to his wife's side, where she died on November 15. (Eleanor would later become the wife of Davis "Sandy" Sandlin, long-time trainer for both the UC Moccasins and Chattanooga Lookouts.)

The remaining game with City had been cancelled due to Rike's absence, but he returned in late November and hastily scheduled a season-ending game on Thanksgiving Day (Nov 24) with Harriman High School at Harriman, won by Central 47-0. Attempts to re-schedule City (Called Dickinson High for the 1910-11 seasons) for the traditional Thanksgiving tussle were futile, compounded by Dickinson's having problems with ineligible players. The following Spring, the drawings of a proposed athletic field complex for Central were shown in the Central Digest with no dates nor potential locations mentioned; but the immediate success of Central in football, as well as baseball, would have been a major factor in getting the needed facilities. [The basketball gym had already been completed in September, 1909.]

Central's football teams of 1911-1914 have been described by Baylor historian James Hitt as "powerhouses". The 1911 team opened with a 37-0 pounding of Knoxville Central, then followed by defeating two older groups – the Jr. Varsity team of UT Knoxville 5 to 2 and the Grant University team of Athens 14-12. The season turned sour after a 12-0 physical beating at the hands of the Anderson Institute of Murfreesboro, for in the traditional Thanksgiving game for the City Championship, Central pushed Baylor around for most of the game, but eventually lost 12-5 on long touchdown runs of 50 and 100 yards by Baylor late in the second half. Rike's 1912 team won four and lost two with 24-7 and 53-0 wins over Knox County and Jasper, an 18-0 loss to Castle Heights Military Academy, a 14-12 win over Athens (Grant U.), a 7-0 loss to Brandon School of Shelbyville, and a 13-6 win over City on November 22. [In 1912 revised football rules had upgraded a touchdown to 6 points].

At the end of the 1912 school year, an unusual headline and article appeared in the May 24, 1912 *Times*, in that the graduating seniors of Central had petitioned the Hamilton County School Board to "re-elect" Principal Darrah for the following year. A hands-on administrator who was well-liked by both students and teachers (he was noted for sitting in on classes, leading cheers, and attending all athletic events), Darrah had apparently offended some on the school board, because he was replaced by a noted academician, Dr. J. S. Ziegler, for the 1912-13 school year. [Ziegler was later to become President of Austin Peay College]. Ziegler was not noted for support of extracurricular activities, and hopes for getting the athletic fields championed by Darrah soon faded.

The 1913 team began a most memorable season with a 44-0 thumping of Knox Central, then at Rhea County stumbled to a 0-0 tie. After that, Central then reeled off 5 shutouts: 26-0 against Baylor, then 21-0 in a return match with Rhea County, 42-0 against Brandon, City High by 26-0, and 45-0 in the season finale at Jasper. Despite the one tie, later avenged, the 1913 football team was not scored upon in all 7 contests.



1913 Central Football Team ,
 Undefeated, One Tie, and Unscored
 Upon

With five starters returning in 1914, but only 16 players on the squad, Central began as the year before by demolishing Polk County at Chamberlain Field 80-0, then defeating Knox Central in Knoxville 20-0, and Jasper 33-0. In the fourth game, Central met a strong Rhea County team that had already soundly defeated City High, but Central prevailed 10-0, highlighted by a drop-kick 40-yard field goal. In the fifth game Central was scored upon for the first time since 1912 by Brandon Institute but won 58-7. However both halfbacks were injured in this game and out for the rest of the season. Using a makeshift lineup the following week against Baylor, Central surprisingly won handily 28-7, but suffered even more injuries. Then illnesses further reduced the number of available starters to three, forcing Coach Rike to cancel a game with Castle Heights on November 13. The *Times* ran a long article in the Nov. 12 issue, chronicling the team's misfortunes. In the season finale against City, Central suffered one of the biggest upsets in school history by 27-0, their only loss in two seasons, as most of the starters from earlier games watched from the sidelines.

In 1915 only 15 players reported for practice, but Rike's squad had no problem with Polk County in the season opener 48-0, then surprisingly beat a much larger Somerset, Ky team 6-0, then Knox County 39-0. In the fourth game against Baylor, Central's superior speed was negated by the effects of two days heavy rain, and Baylor escaped with a 7-6 win. Central then rebounded for a 21-0 win over Anderson Institute of Murfreesboro. In a return game with Somerset in Kentucky, Central scored two quick touchdowns but was worn down by the larger team, losing 35-12. Down to five healthy starters and some "pick-ups", Central traveled to Jasper and were defeated 7-0 on a last-minute touchdown.

City was heavily favored over the crippled Central squad, but, aided by a heavy downpour, Central held City scoreless in a 0-0 tie in the season finale.

By Fall, 1916 America was on the verge of entering World War I and the throngs of young working class boys volunteering for military service had reduced the number and quality of available bodies for Central's football squad. Only thirteen players entered the season, and injuries again took a toll. Central started strong, winning games against Rhea County 32-0, Sewanee Military Academy 33-0, and Athens twice, 21-7 at home and 19-0 at Athens. But losses to Gurley (Madison County, AL) 6-0, Baylor 13-0, Somerset, KY 47-0 and Brandon 14-0, and a season-ending tie with City 7-7, left Central with a 4-4-1 record for 1916, the worst since the abbreviated 1910 season.

The following year, of the 79 graduating seniors of the Class of 1918, only 19 were male. The military training unit at Central totaled only 50 males. With few players again available, Central surprisingly handled both Knoxville teams to start the season, beating Knoxville Central in Knoxville 10-0 and Knoxville City at Warner Park, 27-0. But a devastating loss to Sewanee Military Institute, 53-12, left the squad depleted. Then successive losses to Baylor 52-0, Bradley County 24-13, Darlington, 13-12, Polk County 13-6, and City 21-0 culminated the worst season ever (2-6) for Coach Rike. Rike had waited for 7 years for the athletic fields promised him in 1911, and with no football facilities, little support from the administration, and few boys available for the team, Rike resigned from Central after the 1917-18 school year and became athletics director at the Army YMCA in Fort Oglethorpe. His ten years at Central totaled 34 wins, 22 losses and 6 ties. Except for a brief return as a volunteer coach to help the 1919 basketball team, Rike's meteoric tour at Central had ended, but his coaching fame had just begun.

Baylor had moved to the foot of Signal Mountain in 1916 and had plans and donors for creating extensive athletic facilities and recruiting athletes. Dr Alex Guerry, headmaster at Baylor, offered Rike the unheard of sum of \$400 a month to teach and coach at Baylor in the Summer of 1919 (at a time when the highest salaried faculty member at Baylor was \$200 a month), and Rike accepted. His first teams at Baylor were well stocked with former City and Central players. The reader is directed to James Hitt's excellent book on Baylor School history up to 1968, entitled, *It Never Rains After Three O'Clock*, to read the rest of Rike's story – head football coach for 20 years (record of 139-41-17) and track coach for 40 years, 26 of them having area or league championships. Rike was one of two ex-Central football coaches initially inducted into Baylor's Athletic Hall of Fame in 1993.

After Rike's sudden departure in 1918, Central had no athletic coach, but a handful of returning players from 1917. Using former players as volunteer coaches, Central managed to get football games with three local teams, losing their first game to McCallie 20-0, but rebounding to shut out both Baylor, at Andrews Field, 18-0, and City High 6-0.

Next: Part II. Recovery and Growth of Central and Football (1919-1929)

High school football in the early 20th century was played much like “club” sports are today. The rules for eligibility were vague and generally unenforced; players wore only minimal shoulder and elbow pads (no helmets), and substitutions for injuries were infrequent. Moreover, the players were generally small by today’s standards. The “powerhouse” teams of Central from 1911-15 were composed of 15-20 boys, typified by the accompanying roster for the 1912 team. Of the 16 players listed, only one exceeded 170 lbs and all were under 6 feet tall. Also only 3 of 16 players were seniors, evidence that a strong team was being assembled for 1913 and beyond.

Roster and Schedule/Results of 1912 Football team (from 1913 Yearbook)

50

Name	Position	Weight	Height	Nick Name	No. Years on Team	Age	School Year
Melisaac.....	L. H. B.	158	5'-8"	"Cy"	Three	18	Junior
Cornelius.....	Q. B.	159	5'-8"	"Rusty"	Three	19	Junior
Noble.....	F. B.	158	5'-8"	"Walt"	One	18	Senior
Duncan.....	R. H. B.	130	5'-6"	"Hefty"	One	17	Freshman
Stevens.....	Center	151	5'-10"	"Flop"	One	18	Senior
Van Der Cannon.....	R. E.	155	5'-8"	"Sticks"	Two	19	Junior
Robinson.....	L. E.	149	5'-8"	"Scrooch"	Two	17	Sophomore
Parker.....	R. T.	175	5'-8"	"Club"	Two	16	Junior
Bacon, F.....	L. T.	165	5'-9"	"Bake"	Two	19	Senior
Milliken.....	L. G.	167	5'-11"	"Baldy"	Two	18	Junior
Poindexter.....	R. G.	150	5'-9"	"Dex"	One	18	Sophomore
Smallwood.....	F. B.	145	5'-8"	"Woody"	One	17	Freshman
Kling.....	Center	160	5'-9"	"Seven"	One	18	Sophomore
Cook.....	End	140	5'-8"	"Cookie"	One	18	Junior
Milburn.....	Guard	150	5'-9"	"Ed"	One	18	Junior
Bacon, L.....	Tackle	152	5'-8"	"Little Bake"	One	17	Sophomore

SCHEDULE OF GAMES PLAYED:

October 4th. Central 24--vs.--Knox County High 7
October 10th. Central 53--vs.--Jasper High 0
October 18th. Central 0--vs.--Castle Heights - 18
November 2nd. Central 14--vs.--Athens - - - 12
November 8th. Central 0--vs.--Brandon - - - 7
November 22nd. Central 13--vs.--City High - - - 6
CENTRAL TOTAL 104
OPPONENTS 50