

WALTER WATSON "BILL" CURTIS (1918-1919)

"Bill" Curtis played his two years of football at Marblehead High School in 1918 and 1919 under Coach Ed Pidgeon. Curtis had previously been a student and football squad member at Lynn English High School.

Curtis was the Marblehead High captain in the 1919 season. He played at right halfback in 1918, but throughout the 1919 season, he was stationed at fullback. Curtis over two seasons at MHS scored 15 touchdowns and one conversion. He threw one touchdown pass.

Marblehead has never had an unbeaten and untied season. It would have had such a record in an abbreviated 1918 season if it had not played Scott High, of Toledo, Ohio, in a post-season game which Marblehead lost 19-0.

The 1918 season was a winning one for Marblehead. The record was 5-1-0. The entire region suffered through a flu epidemic near the close of World War I. For much of the early fall, schools were closed. Marblehead's opening game was at Seaside Park on October 26, 1918. Marblehead won the game 6-0 but Curtis did not figure in the scoring. MHS defeated Peabody.

A week later on Nov. 2, 1918, at Seaside Park, Curtis scored a touchdown in Marblehead's 32-0 win over Lynn Classical. Game accounts were often brief that year.

Marblehead, in its third game of the 1918 season, trounced Punchard High School, of Andover, 51-7. Curtis scored one of Marblehead's touchdowns in this game. The Salem Evening News, in regard to the interference that was provided for Glover Broughton's running, stated, "...the excellent interference by Curtis, Lewis, and Snow who bowled over time after time the ends of the Punchard eleven..."

The Salem paper also stated, "Curtis played a remarkably fine game and his 75-yard run in the last half was of spectacular order."

Marblehead continued to win as it blanked Dummer Academy 42-0. One of Marblehead's touchdowns was scored by Curtis. He set up Marblehead's first touchdown with 75-yard run to the Dummer 5.

Marblehead whaled Swampscott on Thanksgiving Day, 1918, 59-0. On a Swampscott kickoff, Curtis returned the ball all the way to the Swampscott six-yard line. He scored one of Marblehead's touchdowns.

In a post-season game at Seaside Park on Dec. 7, 1918, Marblehead lost to Scott High, of Toledo, Ohio, 19-0. The Lynn Item said of Curtis in the post-season game, "Curtis, the former Lynn boy, was in every play during the first half and played a great defensive game."

By the close of the short 1918 season, Curtis had scored four touchdowns for 24 points.

He gained much more fame in Marblehead's 7-3-2 season of 1919. That year he scored 11 touchdowns, made one conversion, and threw a touchdown pass which occurred in a post-season victory.

Having been shifted to fullback, Curtis scored three touchdowns to lead Marblehead to a 24-0 opening game victory over Winchester High School at Seaside Park. The Lynn Item said of his performance in this game, "Bill Curtis, Marblehead's fullback, was the hero of the matinee, his dazzling work arousing the big crowd of spectators to unbounded enthusiasm. He scored three of the four touchdowns made by his team each one being accomplished by a long run. The tackling and all around work of Curtis was good."

Three days after the first game, Marblehead, on Tuesday afternoon, Sept. 30, 1919, blanked Saugus 19-0 at Seaside Park. Curtis, according to brief game reports, scored two touchdowns. The Lynn Item stated, "Bill Curtis was the star performer."

Four days later on Saturday, October 4, 1919, Curtis scored both touchdowns as Marblehead topped Gloucester 12-7 at Seaside Park. Again, the game accounts were brief. Curtis' first touchdown put Marblehead in front in the first period. Gloucester went ahead in the second period 7-6, but in the third period, Curtis scored his other touchdown to give Marblehead the 12-7 win. The Salem Evening News stated Curtis and Tansey were carried off the field by the Marblehead fans.

A week later at Winthrop, Marblehead's good fortunes came to a sudden halt with the home team prevailing 35-0. The Salem News said that Curtis was Marblehead's ace.

Marblehead recovered its winning ways on October 18, 1919, by taking Lynn English 6-0 at Seaside Park after the Lynn team had won its first three games. Curtis scored the game's only touchdown on a brilliant end run from near midfield.

Marblehead lost the following week 1-0 at Revere on a forfeit. Coach Pidgeon withdrew the MHS team from the field after only eight minutes of the game had been played. The Marblehead coach didn't think the three Revere police officers who were at the game were giving the playing area of the field adequate protection from the crowd which was moving in from the sidelines. The ropes and posts which were to have been used to keep back the crowd were reported by Revere officials as having been stolen. There had been no scoring when the Marblehead team left the field.

Marblehead suffered its third and final loss of the season as it fell to Lynn Classical 13-7 in a game played in Lynn. Curtis scored Marblehead's touchdown. The Salem News stated, "The home team, though defeated, played a good game, Capt. Curtis being the star..."

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Also in regard to the loss to Lynn Classical, the Lynn Item stated, "Bill Curtis, Marblehead's ace, turned in the feature play of the game which resulted in the Marblehead touchdown. He made a feint at circling the Classical left side, shifted, and with the whole team on one side of the field, circled the right end for a 40-yard run."

Curtis scored two touchdowns and a conversion point as Marblehead edged Wakefield 19-18 at Seaside Park on Nov. 8, 1918. The Lynn Item stated, "The brilliant and dashing playing of Bill Curtis, Joe Tansey, and Howard Eustis were the chief factors in producing the 19-18 victory which the Marblehead High School football team achieved over Wakefield High at Evans Park Saturday afternoon." (The field hadn't as yet been dedicated as Evans Park.)

In the Wakefield game, several fine forward passes were said by the Item to have been thrown by Curtis to Tansey. At the end of both the first half and the third period, Wakefield led 18-13. Marblehead won in the final quarter.

None of the local area newspapers gave any game details or scoring summaries of Marblehead's 34-0 victory over Essex Aggies on Tuesday, Nov. 11, 1919. The Lynn Item said Coach Pidgeon used mostly subs in the game.

On Saturday afternoon, November 15, 1919, Marblehead played a scoreless tie at Peabody. The Marblehead Messenger reported, "The fine toe work of Captain Curtis of Marblehead was a feature of the game and enabled the Marblehead team to make the showing it did as Peabody is declared to have excelled in rushing the ball. Curtis did some phenomenal kicking, making punts time and time again that averaged 50 yards or more and which more than once saved the day for his team."

Similar wording appeared in the Salem News about Curtis' performance in the Peabody game.

Because of weather conditions Marblehead's game with Swampscott was postponed from Thanksgiving Day until Saturday afternoon, November 29, 1919. One week before this game, Seaside Park, the location of the game, had been dedicated as Evans Park in memory of Second Lieutenant Charles Herbert Evans, who became a World War I fatality in the battle at Chateau Thierry, France, in July, 1918. The name Evans Park was being used in town reports as late as 1933. Since then, the field has been again regularly called Seaside Park.

The 1919 Marblehead-Swampscott game ended in a scoreless tie. In regard to field conditions from the Thanksgiving Day stormy weather, the Messenger stated, "Curtis was thus relied on to do a good deal of punting and met all expectations although the Swampscott punter was almost as good. Without the fine toe work of Curtis, the home team would inevitably have lost as time and time again his agile toe booted the ball out of danger."

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The Salem News reported Curtis made a 30-yard end run in the Swampscott game and also that Curtis backed up the Marblehead line. The Salem paper also said, "Curtis of Marblehead was the whole works for his team, doing the punting that kept Swampscott away from his goal and also coming in for three quarters of the tackles made by his team."

The Lynn Telegram-News said in part of its writeup of the 1919 Swampscott game, "Bill Curtis' right foot and Bill Curtis' tackling stopped Swampscott High yesterday afternoon at Marblehead..."

Marblehead, in a Dec. 13, 1919, post-season game at Evans Park, defeated Proviso High School, of Maywood, Illinois, 6-3. Curtis passed to Joe Tansey for Marblehead's touchdown. The Messenger stated, "Marblehead owes its victory to the snappy work of its forwards and the steady kicking and running of Curtis."

The Salem Evening News said, "Walter Curtis, captain of the winners was about the main attraction. On the defense he rambled about behind Doherty, Marblehead's center, speared Maywood men on line and end plays, frequently sifting through the interference. On the offense he skirted the ends and broke the center. He did the punting and forward passing for his team. He threw the forward pass that Tansey caught for the score."

The Salem paper also stated, "On one run, around his right end, Curtis straight armed four tacklers before he was thrown out of bounds after a 25-yard gain. On another occasion he fumbled a kickoff. He recovered the ball and ran 55 yards up the field after shaking off five tacklers. Saturday afternoon Curtis played the best game of football ever played by any Marblehead man on any Marblehead team."

According to the Salem paper, it was at the end of the first period Marblehead took over at midfield following a blocked Proviso punt. After Curtis ran for a first down to the Proviso 40 he passed 20 yards to Tansey who reached the Proviso 20. Later Curtis passed to Tansey for 13 yards for Marblehead's touchdown. The Marblehead score came early in the second period. Proviso's field goal came in the closing minutes of the game.

Regarding Curtis' performance in the Proviso game, the Lynn Item stated, "To Bill Curtis goes the greatest honors of the game. In addition to punting well, throwing forward passes and directing the Marblehead attack his broken field running and defensive work were easily the best shown by any schoolboy in this section for years."

Regarding Curtis, Harvey L. Southward wrote in the Lynn Telegram-News, "Bill Curtis, as usual, was the main works of the Marblehead machine, not only pulling off two long runs, but often breaking through the Western interference on the fly and

nailing a well-protected runner carrying the ball for what looked good to become a long run. He also intercepted forward passes, kicked calmly and deliberately, recovered a kick blocked by Hamson, tossed the forward pass to Tansey that brought victory and many other things except keep score and carry the water bucket."

The Boston Sunday Globe as part of its Proviso game writeup stated, "One of the neatest exhibitions of backfield work given by any member of the North Shore League this season was that of Curtis of Marblehead High, easily the headliner of the day. He proved a terror for the visitors to check once under headway. His cross bucks, off-tackle plunges and runs, and ability to buck the line fairly astonished the crowd."

An unidentified newspaper clipping stated that immediately after the game the Proviso High School coach, F. C. Berry, said, "Bill Curtis is without any doubt the best backfield man I have seen in action this year."

Curtis, one of the greatest players of the early era of Marblehead High School football, was graduated from MHS in 1919.