

Michigan Every Day

By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberely

Sept. 28, 1912
Muskegon 216, Hastings 0

It was the best day in Michigan high school football—or the worst. That depends on where one sat at Hackley Field, still home of the Muskegon Big Reds, who still lead Michigan high schools in all-time victories. One of those came that Saturday afternoon, Sept. 28, 1912, when Hastings High School came to town and left with a 216-0 drubbing by the home team. The daily Muskegon news Chronicle headline gloated: “Muskegon High Sets World Record for High School Game with Hastings; Team’s Weak Point Seems Eliminated; Visitors Totally Helpless.” Nearly a hundred years later, the game remains the most lopsided in Michigan high school history. Muskegon player Fred Jacobs scored 54 points for the Big Reds with nine of the team’s 32 touchdowns. But most of the News Chronicle story focused on the shortcomings of the Hastings team. “Although the world’s records fell in the game,” the story reported, “it is not anything to be proud of, for such an aggregation termed a football team as Hastings had gathered could not be found again for a long search. The visitors had three men that know a football from an egg and those three could not make the Muskegon second team.” The story also focused on the differences between the towns themselves and why the outcome of the game could have been predicted before it began.

While the big city daily boasted about its town’s gridiron glory, the weekly in Hastings, The Hastings Banner, handled the loss with some grace and understatement.

That week's report of the game appeared on page 13 in a column labeled "Items From the City Schools." One had to sort through the week's school news, such as "The ninth grade English class has been making short oral reports of interviews on various subjects," to finally find news of the football game, under the headline "Defeat at Muskegon Taken Cheerfully."

The report on the game explained the varying level of seriousness each town took in the game. The Hastings writer declared: "We are glad to say that Hastings played in the football game that was, for Muskegon, the World's Championship." There was no mention of the score but the article did note that some Hastings fans attended the game. That left the front page of the Hastings paper open for more important news – "A Drunken Stranger Makes Dire Threats;" "Runaway Horse Leaps Clean Over a Buggy." But the story lingered until the following week's edition. A Banner writer attempted to put the stunning loss in perspective, noting that another team, fielded by the Ferris Institute, bowed to Muskegon in a 165-0 loss. "So we are not the only ones who have been beaten by Muskegon."