

CNY VINTAGE

Syracuse football flashback: 'Colgate Weekend' excites fans in 1947

Updated Nov 17, 8:09 AM;

Posted Nov 17, 8:00 AM



Syracuse University's Archbold Stadium hosted many games between the Orange and its first big rival, Colgate. SU won the 1947 game 7-0 after a fake punt late in the fourth quarter. (Photo courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association)

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Syracuse University football has had many rivals over the years.

Penn State and West Virginia served as Syracuse's biggest rivals during Dick MacPherson's era as head coach. Earlier this season, coach Dino Babers said that Pittsburgh was "our rival."

For the first 70 years of the program, Syracuse's main rival was a team from neighboring Madison County, Colgate, and it was certainly a fierce one.



Happy Syracuse University players crowd around Head Coach Reaves Baysinger, third from the left. The caption reads: "This one made up for everything," alluding to either SU's 2-5 record or the fact they had lost two in a row to their fierce rivals.

The game versus Colgate was always the most anticipated and the festivities around it were given the name "Colgate Weekend."

From 1891 to 1961, the meetings between the two teams featured bonfires, parties, dances and raids on each other's campus. In 1932, Syracuse students painted Colgate's practice field orange.

The game 70 years ago had many of things that made the rivalry great: Unbridled enthusiasm, an unbelievable prank by Colgate and an unexpected Syracuse upset win via a trick play.

Like a lot of great rivalries, it did not matter what the team's records were leading up to their game on Nov. 15 at Archbold Stadium.

Colgate was 1-3-2, their only win coming in their first game against the Merchant Marine Mariners. Syracuse was not much better; 2-5 and losers of four in a row.

Colgate though had the bragging rights; winners in the past two contests.



While fans looked forward to the game, for Syracuse police the game was a bit of a headache.

Beginning the Friday before the game, the entire motorcycle squad would patrol Syracuse's campus from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.

The city's hotels, theaters and downtown areas would be "as thoroughly canvassed as the number of men available for the duty can manage," according to the Nov. 13, 1947 Post-Standard.

Two days before the game a squadron of three planes, led by two former air force lieutenants and carrying many Colgate students, "bombed Syracuse."

With the permission of Syracuse's police chief and the CAA (Civil Aeronautic Authority), the Colgate students dropped 10,000 cards from the planes.

The cards were bordered in black and bore the following macabre message: "The Colgate mortuary society takes great pleasure in announcing the death of the late Bill Orange. Services will be held Saturday, Nov. 15 at 1:30 p.m. in Archbold Stadium."

"Full military honors" would be provided courtesy of the Red Raiders.

If Orange fans were nervous they did not show it, and it was reported that "pre-game spirit rose to a fever pitch" the day before the game.

Sigma Alpha Epsilon won the campus poster contest with its depiction of a "Freedom Train" chasing a battered Colgate football player under a caption which read, "Let's Crush the Red Menace."

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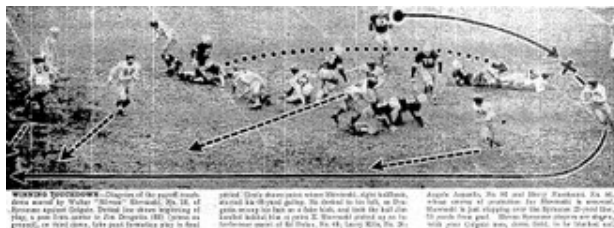


Three movie theaters were "invaded," the crowds processed up and down the aisles, as were many of the city's hotel lobbies.

Attempts to enter City Hall were unsuccessful as were attempts to interrupt the Syracuse Nats NBA game against Oshkosh at the Armory.

The crowds diminished as "co-ed curfew time approached."

Crowds gathered early for the game.



The Herald-American ran this photo illustration of the winning play the day after the SU/Colgate game. In the decades before ESPN and social media, fans depended on these to relive the action.

Fraternity and sorority pledges were sent in early with instructions to "save us plenty of seats." Attendance was 36,000, a record for a Syracuse football game.

The crowd wrapped themselves in blankets to keep warm and were thankful that the predicted snow stayed away.

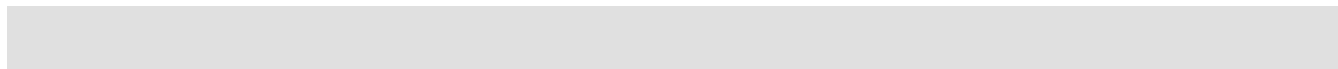
The game was scoreless until six minutes left in the fourth quarter when Syracuse coach Reaves Baysinger called for a fake punt on third down. To add to the audacity, the "Statue of Liberty" play was called out of the punt formation.

The play, which sports editor Bill Reddy said was "old when this ancient rivalry began 56 years ago" worked to perfection, and managed to "shake loose little Slivers Slovenski who raced for the touchdown."

Reddy said the winning score "redeemed an otherwise dismal season and sent Orange supporters into transports of jubilation."

The regularly scheduled rivalry ended in 1961, with just three meetings over the past 30 years. The all-time series is even at 31-31-5.

This feature is a part of [CNY Nostalgia](#), a section on syracuse.com. Send your ideas and curiosities to Johnathan Croyle: [Email](#) | 315-427-3958.





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