

LEIPSIC'S FOOTBALL HISTORY 1921 – 2024

Essay written by Joe Kirkendall

Leipsic football got its start in 1921 when the **LEIPSIC FOOTBALL CLUB** began to organize its first team. The Football Club, which was made up of Leipsic businessmen, would oversee and fund the first football team at Leipsic High School. It would host an end of the season banquet each December. This banquet was a big event as tickets would be sold. It included a meal and a guest speaker. This group prominently supported the football program through the 1920's and early 1930's.

The **FIRST SEASON** of Leipsic football would take place in the fall of 1921 under head coach R. A. Blauvelt. This was the very first football team in Putnam County. Leipsic would earn its first win on September 17, 1921, against the Deshler Pirates. This unfortunately was the only win of the 1921 season.

It wouldn't take long for the program to gain traction however, as the 1923 team would post a record of 10-1. It was not uncommon at this time that the football roster would get larger later in the fall. As the crops were harvested and the boys went back to school, many would join the football team. This caused the 1923 team some issues however, as it was determined that several of the boys were too old to play and Leipsic had to forfeit several games thus finishing 8-3.

During these first two decades Leipsic would play its home games at **TEMCO FIELD** which was located East of the Christman Brothers building on Sugar Street. The football team would jog to the field from the old high school, usually running down 8th Street to get there. Fans would park cars around the field since the bleachers were so small. Since there were no lights, the games were played in the afternoon.

During this time Leipsic would travel all over Northwest Ohio to find opponents. They would take on all comers, as they would play many larger schools, to augment the county teams that they played on an annual basis.

The most important figure during this time was **EARNEST E. (SHELLY) RADENBAUGH**. Coach Radenbaugh came to Leipsic in the early 1930's and would lead the football program until 1941. He also coached every sport at Leipsic during this time. Coach Radenbaugh also had the football team join a new league, the **WEST OHIO LEAGUE**, for football only. This was short-lived membership, lasting for only the 1938 and 1939 seasons.

When Leipsic football started, it created a unique **LEGACY OF TRADITIONS**. One of interest, is that throughout the 1920's and 1930's the Leipsic football team was never referred to as the Vikings by the local newspaper. There was a period in the 1930's when the paper called them the Phantoms or the Purple Phantoms. It was not until 1941 that the Vikings nickname would be adopted by Leipsic High School. The one constant during this time however was the use of purple and gold in their school colors. In fact, from the very beginning, varsity players would be awarded a gold letter L outlined in purple. This was made into a big deal with the awarding of letters at the end of the season's football banquet.

RIVALRIES at this time were made from proximity. The first game played against Pandora would take place in 1922 and the first game against Columbus Grove was in 1924, both Leipsic wins. Another huge rivalry, which lasted from 1922-1931, was against Continental. Two other local opponents, McComb and Van Buren, were on the schedule in 1921 and would be seen many times in the future. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor Leipsic would suspend its football program from 1942-1944, until the war ended.

In 1948, **COACH TIP HARTMAN** would arrive at Leipsic and take over the task of trying to revitalize the football program. For the 1949 season Leipsic would move to **MEMORIAL FIELD** located at what is now the St. Mary's softball diamond. Memorial Field also would have lights, to allow for night games to be played for the first time. Coach Hartman would get the program to turn the corner in 1951 with a 4-4 record. It was the following season, 1952, that would see one of the all-time great Leipsic teams which finished with a record of 8-1. The only loss that year would be to a dominant Columbus Grove Team.

It was typical for the home team at this time to provide the **GAME BALL**. As the story goes, Coach Hartman, to try and gain a psychological advantage, had the ball painted half purple and half gold. After Columbus Grove's coach protested, a new ball was used and unfortunately it didn't provide the advantage hoped for.

During the 1950's Leipsic would still travel all over and try to find several different league affiliations. Most conferences were county based, but since there were only a few teams in Putnam County, we had to look elsewhere.

In the late 1950's, they would join the **NORTHWEST BUCKEYE LEAGUE** with Payne, Hicksville, Edon and other schools to the Northwest.

Then in 1961 and 1962, we would play in the **NORTHWEST CONFERENCE**, unfortunately going 0-14.

It was in 1964 that we would join the eight small schools of Hancock County to form the **BLANCHARD VALLEY CONFERENCE** for football. A key figure in creating the BVC was Mr. Tip Hartman, now a member of the Leipsic Athletic Hall of Fame.

Leipsic moved to the **NORTHWEST CONFERENCE** again for a brief period, seasons 2021, 2022 and 2023, before moving back to the BVC.

During the 1960's, the football program saw a lot of coaching changes as there would be five different head coaches in this decade alone. Of those, three would only serve one season and Coach Jim Restle would be the longest tenured coach as he was here for five seasons. From 1960-1969, Leipsic would have its worse decade in program history as they only won 25 games in ten seasons. The best team of the decade would be in 1960 as they finished 6-2. It was during the 1962 season that the Viking would move to their present location, **JOHN EDWARDS FIELD**.

Leipsic would have great success from 1970-1981 with the hiring of **RICK REIDER**. During this period, Leipsic would produce two league titles and the only undefeated seasons in school history, 1975 and 1981. During this period the Vikings would win 72 games in 12 seasons. Coach Reider would finish with 84 wins in 15 seasons.

JOE KIRKENDALL first coached at Leipsic from 2008-2013. He then took off two seasons and came back in 2016. He currently has coached 15 seasons with a record of 125-49. During his tenure, Leipsic has won two BVC and three District Championships. The Vikings have qualified for 15 OHSAA tournaments

In 97 seasons, Leipsic had had 20 head coaches, although five would only serve for one season and four others were here for only two. Overall, Leipsic has five BVC titles, four Putnam County crowns and 15 OHSAA playoff trips which include three Regional Runner-Ups. The Vikings overall record is **450 – 471 – 28**.