





ONE

FOR THE HISTORY BOOKS

On the 125th anniversary of the first
PC/GA football game,
a look back at this storied rivalry.



by Lea Sitton Stanley

A LOOSE-KNIT GROUP OF Penn Charter boys arrived at Germantown Academy's home field on a Friday afternoon one November to play a game of football.

The year was 1887. The foe was formidable. GA had been fielding a team in the still-evolving American sport since 1880, and this season, it was undefeated. PC, on the other hand, had the habits of a pickup team. "The practice they have been able to get was obtained in match-games only, and of these not many have been engaged in," according to an account in *The Penn Charter Magazine*.

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When the first game was played in 1887, the football was round, or very close to it. The game was more kicking, less throwing, more like rugby. The GA boys (below) won that first game, 20-6.



The Inter-Ac was formed in 1887, with Headmaster Richard Mott Jones providing leadership for PC, and GA teacher George H. Deacon and Headmaster William Kershaw acting for GA.



Henry M. "Dick" Merritt came to PC in 1912 after graduation from Yale and became one of PC's most prominent early coaches. In 1922, after PC's 10th straight title, the New York Herald wrote: "[Penn Charter's] consistent support of football for nearly forty years, by providing the very best coaching possible, and adhering to strict rules of eligibility and insisting on high scholarship, furnishes a most

substantial reason for the high position football has gained for itself all over the country."

For the 100th anniversary game in 1986, the two schools worked together to create memorabilia. This game was played on GA's Deacon Field, and quarterbacks Mike Skoczynski (PC) and Matt Basilli (GA) shared the Geis trophy that day.



What began as an all-boys football contest, and then contests for other boys sports, opened to girls in the 1990s when both schools became coed. Boys water polo was added in 2001, and the latest addition was girls water polo, added in 2008.



High school football drew big crowds in the early days; newspaper accounts report that 6,000 attended the 1922 game and 7,000 in 1934. Crowds shrank as professional football grew in popularity. Today the stands are filled mostly with loyalists for either the Patriots or the Quakers.

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So it was no surprise when GA won, 20-6, even though the PC boys had played, at times, "most brilliantly" before suddenly weakening or making "some costly blunder," the magazine reported. Clearly, the game was not one for the history books, and yet it became exactly that.

When those players walked off the field, damp with sweat, steeling themselves against temperatures in the 40s, they stepped onto a timeline. Their game was the first in what is believed to be the nation's oldest uninterrupted football rivalry among prep schools. This year, on Nov. 12, Penn Charter and Germantown Academy made it 125 football games, one a year since Nov. 18, 1887. The tally: 81 for PC, 33 for GA, and 11 times a tie.

In modern times, the rivalry has become the centerpiece of a daylong series of athletic contests with a history of assorted side events, an art show, a wing bowl, and countless luncheons and cocktail parties among them. The annual PC/GA Day (or GA/PC Day, if you root for the other side), which initially expanded to include boys soccer and cross country, in recent years has added matchups in girls soccer, tennis and field hockey, as well as in both girls and boys water polo. (Both schools went coed in the second half of the 20th century.)

Since 1996, one point has been awarded to the winner in each sport, with the highest-scoring school snagging the Competition Cup. Each school also honors a boys soccer player — at Penn Charter the outstanding player receives the James H. Rumpp OPC '55 Memorial Soccer Award.

Still, football is the heart of the contest, and since 1953, the most prestigious award, the Geis Trophy, has gone to the game's MVP. Occasionally, two players have shared the trophy, sometimes from opposite sides. The award memorializes Joseph Geis III, president of GA's Class of 1948, who died in the Korean War.

It's not clear why these two Inter-Academic League teams became locked in a historic rivalry. But both were founders of the league, reputed to be the oldest scholastic sports league in the country. Both dominated the fledgling organization and, when GA christened its new playing field in 1921 with a football game, Penn Charter was its opponent of choice.

Early in 1887, headmasters Richard Mott Jones, of Penn Charter, and William Kershaw, of Germantown Academy, along with teacher George Hartley Deacon, GA's "father of athletics," joined to form what was first called the Inter-Academic Athletic Association. According to GA accounts, Deacon also enlisted Henry I. Brown, a former GA student in his last year at PC, to help rally support for a league.

The Inter-Ac's inaugural football season included the first PC/GA contest. GA was a powerhouse based on School House Lane in Germantown, then a suburb of sprawling estates and other large open spaces for play. Penn Charter at the time was at 8 South 12th Street, a

school for city boys. Joseph Brevitt Townsend Jr., an 1878 graduate, wrote of football in the 12th Street schoolyard that “on a long punt, the ball frequently went over the wall” separating school and Meeting House. Younger boys would stand by, ready to run, jump, catch the top of the wall and throw themselves over to retrieve balls.

The first game most likely took place on a GA home field that was off campus. When Germantown Academy bought adjacent properties and added a field in 1921, it was reported that students would be able to play Inter-Ac games at GA for the first time. Mayor J. Hampton Moore dispatched the Philadelphia Police Band to mark the occasion, and an estimated 3,000 spectators showed up. That contest, on Nov. 5, 1921, was the 35th game in the series — and PC steamrolled its host, 20-0. By the '20s, Penn Charter was the powerhouse.

The team had developed quickly after Headmaster Jones lined up a playing field. In 1892, the Sporting Life newspaper reported that the rivals played on PC's home field, then the Pennsylvania Railroad grounds at 52nd Street Station, in West Philadelphia. PC won, 8-4, and also secured the league title. The year before, 1891, PC had racked up what remains the rivalry's most lopsided victory, 70-0 — just one year after winning its first game of the series, 46-4, and two years after the 1889 tie of 4-4.

PC had been heavily favored in 1888, but lore has it that a pileup inspired a GA rout, 37-8.

Edward O. Parry (GA 1932) wrote about that second game in the joint program for the rivalry's 100th anniversary. His father, George Gowen Parry (GA 1889), had carried the ball a short distance when he fell beneath “an avalanche” of PC defenders. “An accidental but bloody injury resulted, leading to a near riot. ... Football is an emotional game, and this fact has been demonstrated many times in the GA-PC football series.”

It was demonstrated the very first time the two met, when the game “became very warm, and [PC] rusher [Henry] Granger showed more fight than he was supposed to possess,” The Penn Charter Magazine reported. “When time was called, after Granger had many times been calmed and restrained from inflicting injury, the score stood 20 to 6 in Germantown's favor.” The reporter concluded, “How a football contest must act upon the nerves of some!”

Oh, yes it does. Oh, yes it does. *pc*



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

For photos and results of the 125th game, visit www.penncharter.com/pcga.



GA won the 1938 game 6-0 with a thrilling score in the last 5 minutes. PC won the 2007 football game with a thrilling final play, a hook and ladder pass from John Ryan, to Blaise Fullen, to Eddie Bambino (see above) for the game-winning touchdown. Watch it on www.youtube.com/pennchartertube.



Pep rallies and sales of buttons and T-shirts pump up school spirit in the days leading up to the Big Day.

In 1996, the first Competition Cup was bestowed on the overall winner of PC/GA Day. Head of School Darryl J. Ford accepted the cup in 2007.



The James H. Rumpff OPC '55 Memorial Soccer Award is awarded to PC's outstanding player in the boys soccer game. Michael Goldman took home the trophy in 2010, the year PC boys captured the Inter-Ac title with a 3-2 win over GA.

The Geis Trophy goes to the MVP of the football game. It is named for Joseph Geis III, a 1948 GA grad killed in the Korean War. Senior Kolonji Smith won the trophy in 2010.



When PC beat GA 57-0 in 1924, two of the school's greatest players ever were on the field: Marty Brill (left) and Barney Berlinger (center). Brill went on to play for Notre Dame, and Berlinger was a three-time winner of the college decathlon at the Penn Relays; Berlinger finished fourth in the 1928 Olympics and a severe hamstring injury kept him out in 1932. Matt Ryan OPC '03 started as Penn Charter's quarterback for three years and, in his senior year, led the team to an Inter-Ac championship in 2002 (shown here, above right). In his four years at PC, Ryan passed for more than 3,000 yards and threw 30 touchdown passes with a 52 percent completion percentage over four years. His performance won him All Inter-Ac honors as a junior and senior and offers from top college football programs — he chose Boston College. Today, Ryan is a star in the NFL as quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons.