

“The Time Machine”

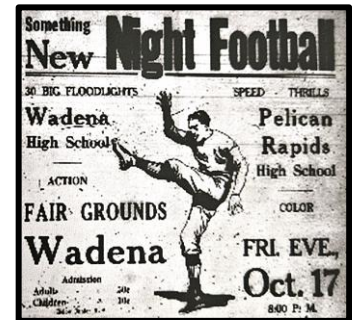
## Lights, Action.....Hut-Hut!

Article #27

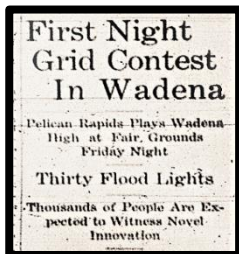
The great Depression lasted ten years, from 1929-39. Households and businesses had to make significant sacrifices to survive. Below are a couple of examples of professional sport franchises being creative to increase ticket sales.

On November 3, 1929, the NFL incorporated floodlights into its games. Six thousand fans packed into Rhode Island’s Kinsley Park Stadium, where the Chicago Cardinals faced off against the Providence Steam Rollers as the sun set. However, because the lights were not bright enough to fully illuminate a brown football, at halftime the ball was painted white; the next day, reporters commented that the game resembled two teams of men throwing around a large egg.

By 1930, the Great Depression was already taking its toll on baseball teams, and many were nearing bankruptcy. Because games took place during the day, they were difficult or impossible for working Americans to attend. Desperate to save his team, J.L. Wilkinson, owner of the Kansas City Monarchs, decided to play games at night so that fans could come after work. Using six 50-foot-tall floodlights with electric tungsten filament bulbs, Wilkinson made his idea a reality. Wilkinson managed to triple the attendance of Monarch games that season.



When I was researching and documenting the 1930’s history of WHS football I came across a real eye catcher. That poster promoting WHS hosting its first game ever, under the lights. Recently I had reason to review the 1930’s in the “1900-49 WHS Football Scrapbook.” Here is what I found:



*“There were 15 floodlights purchased by the school and another 15 funded by the city council. In addition to use for fall football they were used in the winter when the rink was in use as well as in the summer for “kittenball” (what is now known as “softball”).”*

Wow! The NFL brought in lights on November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1929. MLB did so in the summer of 1930. Wadena got on board on October 17, 1930!

I have uncovered so many fascinating stories that after some time I forget most of them. This story is no different. However, recently I was giving a tour of the WCHS. As my guests walked through a large storage room I was gazing around the room. Suddenly I locked in on an artifact that I had noticed before but had not thought much about it at the time. This time was different. My cranial fuse box was suddenly in full operational mode. I could feel the dots connecting as images raced through my.....cranial cavity.



One of thirty floodlights, fully extended to 8' compared to itself when fully retracted at 5'.



Manufacturer's nameplate in Art Deco style.

There is only one way I can explain how, and why, WHS and the Wadena city council were able to spend money on this luxury item during a time of great economic turmoil nationally, regionally, and locally. It was done in Wadena for the same reason it was done in the NFL and in MLB. It was not a luxury to have lights to play football games at night. Lights were needed in order to be profitable. Makes sense.

Jebb '74