Greece Link to the National Football League  
by Marie Poinan

As we celebrate Super Bowl LIV and the NFL’s 100th season, we might want to consider the very “local” Greece connection to the game.

Joseph McShea was a talented athlete who grew up on his family’s farm on Dewey Avenue, just north of Latta Road. His great-grandparents emigrated to the town shortly after the potato famine of the 1840s and by the 1880s, the family had accumulated over 180 acres of land. Part of their family farm became the site of the Odenbach Shipbuilding Corporation.

Joe attended Holy Cross school in Charlotte (Greece had no Catholic school at the time) and graduated from the first Charlotte High [at the triangle] in 1919. He played a number of sports and also boxed under the name of “Irish Joe” McShea. After returning home from the University of Rochester to help on the family farm, Joe signed a contract to play football for Leo Lyons and the Rochester Jeffersons. His contract was signed by his aunt, Miss Marguerite McShea, a beloved teacher at Holy Cross and later Our Mother of Sorrows grammar school. Joe was paid $25 per game!

Leo V. Lyons was born in 1892 and started playing football for the “Jeffersons” in 1908 at the age of 16. He later became their coach, manager and owner. In 1919, the Jeffersons won the city’s semi-pro championship. Leo was one of the pioneer founders of the National Football League. On September 17, 1920, he represented Rochester at a meeting of the nation’s pro team managers held in Canton, where they created the American Professional Football Association. The league became the “National Football League” in 1922 and the Rochester was one of its 14 original teams.

Lyons lost his NFL franchise in 1928 but never lost his love of the game, serving as “Honorary Historian” of the NFL from 1965 until his death in 1976 at the age of 84. Lyons was present at the opening of the Hall of Fame in 1963. Although nominated several times, he was never inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Lyons moved to 604 Beach Avenue in 1938. His contributions to football are numerous, not to mention that he collected all types of memorabilia on the game. Joe McShea lived in the area at 305 Beach Avenue.

My thanks to Tom McShea, who provided the info on his grandfather Joe, a featured athlete in our local sports exhibit chaired by Tom Sawyer. A book on our local sports figures is sold in our gift shop.  For more on Lyons and the Jeffersons, see www.nfl.com and www.rochesterjeffersons.org