

Endnotes...



MARKER INSTALLED TO COMMEMORATE FIRST PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL NIGHT GAME

Author Greg Tranter, Elmira mayor Dan Mandell and Lee Elder, executive director of the Pro Football Researchers Association, pose in front of the new historical marker installed at Elmira's Dunn Field, November 21, 2025. *WETM-TV*

IN OUR FALL 2025 ISSUE, we chronicled the first professional football game ever played at night—and it happened in Western New York. The game, which took place on November 21, 1902, at Elmira's Maple Avenue Driving Park, pitted the home-town Kanawea Athletic Club against—of all things—a *baseball* team playing football in the off-season: the Philadelphia Athletics. Philadelphia destroyed the home team by a score of 39-0, but the precedent for playing football after dark had been set. Nearly 20 years before the founding of the National Football League, and just under seven decades before the debut of Monday Night Football would make the sport the most popular in America, two teams battled it out in Western New York—under the “Friday Night Lights.”

Now, thanks to the efforts of author Greg Tranter, a new historical marker has been installed at Elmira's Dunn Field (the site of the Maple Avenue Driving Park) to commemorate this historic milestone in sports history. On November 21, 2025—123 years to the day from the date of the original game—a crowd of sports enthusiasts, media and dignitaries, including Elmira mayor Dan Mandell and Lee Elder, executive director of the Pro Football Researchers Association, gathered to install the iconic blue-and-gold marker and recall the events of that day.

“Because of this game,” Tranter observed, “Elmira has a significant place in the annals of pro football history. And one that is now being recognized with a New York State historical marker.” Western New York Heritage is proud to help preserve this story, and hundreds of others like it, that document the rich and diverse history of our region. And we are proud to team with amazing researchers and history enthusiasts like Greg to create each and every issue of *Western New York Heritage* magazine. For more on this historic game, see our Fall 2025 issue.

The cover of the Fall 2025 issue of Western New York Heritage magazine. The title is "FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS: THE FIRST-EVER PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL NIGHT GAME" by Greg Tranter. It features a historical photograph of the 1902 Philadelphia A's football team. Text on the cover includes: "The game of professional football became the most popular spectator sport in America in 1972. Since that time, it has grown in popularity to rank over three times more popular than any other sport, per a 2018 Gallup poll." and "Part of that increase was driven by television. Another significant development was the National Football League adopting Monday Night Football as a weekly program in 1970. That program became so popular that it spurred the league to expand its evening television offerings to Sunday and Thursday nights. Today, the NFL often schedules night games when it believes it can draw a large audience, such as late in the season on Saturdays as well as on Thanksgiving and Christmas." The bottom right corner of the cover has the text "WESTERN NEW YORK HERITAGE | Fall 2025".

The story of the first professional football game played at night was featured in the Fall 2025 issue of *Western New York Heritage*.



Greg Tranter with the newly installed historical marker. Lee Elder photograph