



Ray Vaughn (second from right in the middle row) was a member of the 1924 Oilers.

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On Oct. 16, 1926, a group of Oil City football fans traveled to Pittsburgh to watch Pitt play Colgate.

They came away disappointed.

That's because Ray Vaughn, one of the star players on Oil City High School's unbeaten team (8-0-3) of 1924, didn't get on the field for Colgate. He didn't even make the trip.

Why? Because he was black.

After starring on the Colgate freshmen team in 1925, Vaughn had seen action in all of the Raiders' varsity games leading up to Pitt. And, as it turns out, he wouldn't play the next game, either, at Navy.

A disillusioned Vaughn wrote a letter to his parents between the two games. The complete letter appeared on Page 1 of the Oct. 23, 1926, edition of The Derrick and accompanies this story. Portions were published in other western Pennsylvania newspapers, including the Pittsburgh Courier.

To no one's surprise, both Pitt and Navy denied they refused to play against a black player. "The University of Pittsburgh has never objected to playing teams with black players," insisted Karl Davis, graduate manager of athletics at Pitt. Navy offered its denial after it was approached by the NAACP.



The Derrick contacted Colgate coach George Hauser, and included his comments in the Oct. 23 story. Hauser said neither Pitt nor Navy officially protested Vaughn's playing, but "it had been intimated in both instances...(that) it would be advisable not to play him." Vaughn lettered three years at Colgate, unseating All-American candidate Duke Shaughnessy early in his career. He played every game except for Pitt (three-point loss) and Navy (six-point setback in another otherwise unbeaten season) along with two southern schools, Virginia Tech and Vanderbilt, in 1928.

And in those days, southern schools playing against blacks was just a no-no. In a book titled "Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930," Navy's coach claimed "Colgate officials told him Vaughn wouldn't be making the

trip to Annapolis "because (it) was rather far south."

That leads to another explanation Diane Ciccone hints at in her book "Into the Light, which details the lives of African American men who were students at Colgate from 1840-1930. She devotes a chapter to Vaughn's plight

Colgate's president from 1922-42 was George Cutten, a big sports fan, and an alleged racist/eugenicist. Ciccone, who is black and was a member of the first graduating class at Colgate that included women, admits she can't prove Cutten had anything to do with the school not standing up not only for Vaughn, but another black player, Daniel Crosby.

"However, it is unimaginable that a decision of this magnitude and attention would not have been discussed with President Cutten," she wrote in the chapter about Vaughn. And, she pointed out, Cutten didn't overrule the decision to bench Vaughn and Crosby.

One might wonder how Vaughn wound up at a place like Colgate, located in the idyllic town of Hamilton, N.Y., in the middle of nowhere -- but somewhere near the Finger Lakes. Not exactly a popular college of choice for anybody around here.

This might be the answer: Vaughn's coach at Oil City, George Woodman, was a Colgate man. In fact, he was the Raiders' starting center in 1916-17 and 1919. Colgate didn't field a team during the pandemic season of 1918.

One of the other players on Woodman's 1916 team was All-American quarterback Carl "Ockie" Anderson, an Erie native who was black. And Anderson wasn't the first black football player for the Raiders. That would be Sam Archer, who graduated in 1902, albeit as a 32-year-old.

(By comparison, Pitt's first black football recruit was Jimmy Joe Robinson, born in 1927 -- a year after this all happened to Vaughn. Penn State's first black gridder was Wally Triplett, born in 1926. And it might also be worth noting that Army's stance on playing against black in those days was the same as Navy -- this according to "Ideas vs. Reality: Colgate's True Identity" on Wordpress.com.)

Colgate had 46 black male students since 1840 -- but that suddenly stopped during the middle of Cutten's tenure in 1930.

Its most famous black alumnus was Adam Clayton Powell Jr., the flamboyant congressman who served Harlem. Powell was light-skinned so he could pass as white – and did – which didn't go over with whites or blacks, including Vaughn, when they found out.

Powell asked Vaughn, for one, to forgive him, and Vaughn did. Powell helped Vaughn with his German and the two palled around together in New York City.

A scholar, Vaughn would graduate from Colgate where he was also a member of the sociology and Maroon Key clubs. From there went to Morehouse College in Atlanta where he taught anthropology and was hailed as the best young football coach in America. The aforementioned Archer was president of the college.

During World War II, Vaughn was a USO officer in both San Francisco and Tacoma, Wash., and eventually would up in New York again as physical education teacher and assistant principal at Harlem High School -- this all according to Ciccone's book.

Vaughn later was a probation officer with the Brooklyn, Queens and Manhattan family courts.

When Vaughn was in high school, he was injured during the second game of the season against DuBois. Cyril King replaced him in the lineup, and broke off runs of 40 and 30 yards against the Beavers.

King would become executive editor of the Buffalo Courier Express, and was featured in a story that appeared in the Dec. 2, 1965, edition of The Derrick. It was partially headlined, "Integration No Problem Here in the 1920s..." King said Vaughn could run the 100-yard dash in under 10 seconds, making him one of the fastest Oilers ever. "Not only was he a great football player and track man," King said, "but...he was as fine a gentleman as you would ever want to meet."

"Vaughn is the forgotten Colgate gridiron legend," wrote Ciccone. "He...is credited with the wins against Syracuse and Michigan State (his senior year.) Nonetheless he was forced to sit out...games due to Colgate's willingness to acquiesce to racism. After Vaughn, there would be no other Black Colgate athletes during the remainder of Cutten's tenure."

She said Vaughn was asked 50 years later about his Colgate experience. "That's water over the dam," he responded.

Vaughn's letter home

Week of Oct. 17, 1926

Dear mother and dad:

I received your letter yesterday and was certainly glad to hear from home. But it found me rather discouraged with life, but I guess after all we can't have everything we want, especially when you're colored.

The coach came up to me the other day and told me that the manager had received a letter from the Navy officials prohibiting me playing against them. So consequently I don't make the trip. He also told me that was why he did not let me play against Pitt. But last night I asked the manager to let me go along but I haven't any answer as yet. But I suppose I'll be here over the weekend. And they call this a free country, a government institution refusing to play against a fellow just because he is colored. I wish to God that I would get the chance to let the world know it. It's the principle of the thing that hurts.

Oh well, I guess the only thing I could do is forget it. But God knows I'll always have it in my heart against them. And I wish as a favor that you tell my friends just the reason I did not play against Pitt and just the reason I won't play against Navy and let the people at home know just what a colored lad has to endure in this supposedly great land of "liberty and freedom."
Well, mother, I guess I've said enough about this matter. Hope I'll be in a better mood next time.
Love to all, your son, "Ray"

Ray Vaughn scored 13 touchdowns for the 1924 Oil City Oilers, who finished with an 8-0-3 record under coach George Woodman (second row, far left). The ties were with Titusville, Erie East and Sharpville. His 22 career touchdowns rank 11th on Oil City's all-time list. Vaughn later starred at Colgate, Woodson's alma mater. A severe groin injury slowed Vaughn at the start of his senior season, but the 198-pounder rebounded and scored a TD against Michigan State and not only hit paydirt, but "went the distance" on offense and defense against Syracuse, the greatest ambition of any Colgate player.