

Famous New Yorker Glenn Scobey “Pop” Warner

“Pop” Warner’s name is identified with football like no one else’s. Long before he lent his name to youth football, Warner had earned a place in history as one of the sport’s greatest coaches.

Glenn Scobey Warner was born in Springville, Erie County, on April 5, 1871. He worked on his family’s wheat farm when he wasn’t attending school. After graduating from the Griffith Institute in 1889, Glenn applied for the U.S. Military Academy at nearby West Point. When he didn’t make it, he joined his family in Wichita Falls, Texas, where he worked on a ranch and became a tinsmith.

While visiting Springville in 1892, Glenn decided to study law. He enrolled in the Cornell Law and joined the college’s football team. Since he was the oldest player, Glenn’s teammates called him “Pop.” By the time he graduated in 1894, “Pop” Warner had become Cornell’s captain and substitute coach. He practiced law for a short time before Cornell recommended him for a coaching job at Iowa Agricultural College. Looking to earn more and gain more experience, coached two teams in 1895: Iowa Agricultural in the summer and Georgia in the fall. In 1897 he returned to Cornell as the team’s head coach.

American football had evolved rapidly since its beginning in 1869. Based on rugby, football was first little more than one line of players charging into another to gain yards. Coaches were inventing more complex plays by the start of “Pop” Warner’s career. Warner became one of football’s great innovators. Historians credit him with inventing the single-wing formation, placing most of his players on one side of the center to overwhelm the defense.

He also invented the screen pass, having the passer throw to a receiver behind a line of blockers.

When Warner couldn’t overpower a defense, he tricked it. His passer would pretend to hand the ball to one player, only to give it to another running the other way. His players sometimes hid footballs inside their jerseys so opponents wouldn’t know whom to tackle. Some of Warner’s trick plays were declared illegal. Many others are basic football today.

“Pop” Warner became one of the first star football coaches. After making his name by leading Cornell to a 10-2 record in 1898, he became even more famous as the coach of the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, starting in 1899. Carlisle was created to transform Native Americans into modern, “civilized” Americans. Under Warner, Carlisle gave students a chance to prove their equality to white athletes. In a period when wealthy Ivy League schools were the football elite, Warner made humble Carlisle a national football power with players like the legendary Jim Thorpe.

Warner also coached Pitt, Stanford and Temple in a career that lasted through the 1930s. While coaching Temple In 1934, Warner was invited to a Philadelphia football clinic held by the five-year old Junior Football Conference. “Pop” was the only invited guest to show up. To honor him, the Junior Football Conference renamed itself the Pop Warner Conference. Today, the Pop Warner Little Scholars is the nation’s largest and best-known youth football organization. “Pop” Warner died on September 7, 1954, but Pop Warner Football carries on his legacy by developing scholar-athletes for the future.



Warner in 1894 - Courtesy of Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library



Springville is a village in the southeast part of the town of Concord in Erie County in western New York State. It’s about 35 miles south of Buffalo.

To learn more about Glenn “Pop” Warner and the organization that shares his name go to www.popwarner.com. This is one of a series of Famous New Yorker profiles written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA-Newspaper In Education. All rights reserved 2014.