



Board of Commissioners of Cook County

118 North Clark Street
Chicago, IL

Legislation Text

File #: 22-5484, Version: 1

PROPOSED RESOLUTION

HONORING FRITZ POLLARD AND THE RENAMING OF LANE TECH HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD

WHEREAS, on October 1st, Lane Tech will memorialize a distinguished graduate of 1912 by renaming the school's football field for Frederick "Fritz" Douglass Pollard, who starred in three sports at Lane: baseball, track, and football, making all-county in all three; and

WHEREAS, Pollard was the seventh of eight children raised in Rogers Park. Among his siblings were one of the first Black movie producers in America and the first Black woman to graduate from Northwestern University; and

WHEREAS, after graduating from Lane Tech, Fritz went on to study Chemistry at Brown University in Rhode Island, where football became his primary sport, becoming the first Black football player at the Ivy League School; and

WHEREAS, playing for the Brown Bears, Pollard became the first Black athlete to play in the Rose Bowl, and the next season, the two-time All-America halfback, the second African American to be named to a college All-American team and the first running back, led the Bears to an 8-0 season. National news wires carried a story describing Fritz Pollard as "the football star of the 1915 season,"; and

WHEREAS, Fritz left Brown to serve in World War I and afterward began coaching at Lincoln University, a historically Black college in Pennsylvania. In 1919, he was recruited to play running back for the Akron Indians later renamed the Akron Pros in a startup professional football league, the American Professional Football Association, which would later become the NFL. He was one of two Black players in the league, and the Pros won the 1st league championship in 1920; and

WHEREAS, Fritz Pollard started playing professional football the year Jackie Robinson was born. Everyone is familiar with Jackie Robinson's story of integrating professional baseball in 1947, but not many people know that Fritz Pollard integrated professional football in 1919; and

WHEREAS, in 1921, Mr. Pollard became the first Black coach of a professional football team as the coach of the Akron Pros. He continued to play on the team while coaching. Considered an exciting and elusive runner, he was the most feared running back in the fledgling league. During his pro football career, he played and sometimes coached for four different NFL teams, the Pros/Indians (1920-21/1925-26), the Milwaukee Badgers (1922), the Hammond Pros (1923, 1925) where he continued his string of firsts by becoming their quarterback, the first of his color to play that position, and the Providence Steam Roller (1925). Fritz also spent time in 1923 and 1924 playing for the Gilberton Cadamounds, a strong independent pro team in the Pennsylvania "Coal League."; and

WHEREAS, in 1934 on what was considered one of the darkest eras in sports a so-called "gentleman's agreement" was reached between the powerful owners of the NFL teams to begin the process of eliminating black players from pro football. No African American played again until 1946. Fritz fought this policy and never stopped fighting for re-integration of the league; and

WHEREAS, in 1928, Fritz also founded the Chicago Black Hawks, an all-Black team that lasted until 1932, and in 1935 the founder of a new all-Black team in New York, the Brown Bombers, recruited him to coach. The Brown

Bombers and the Blackhawks played exhibition games against the all-white National League football stars. The Bombers were 19-0 in these matches; however, facing increasing difficulty in getting white teams to play against the Bombers he left in 1937; and

WHEREAS, Fritz Pollard was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1954, and the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2005 for his illustrious career; and

WHEREAS, after football, Pollard went into other business ventures, including newspaper publishing, a talent agency and film and music publishing, before passing in 1986 at age 92; and

WHEREAS, although Pollard didn't play in the present-day Lane Tech stadium, which opened in 1941, almost 30 years after Pollard graduated, and had retired from football, Michelle Weiner, the executive director of Lane Tech's alumni association stated "It's time Fritz Pollard was honored"; and

WHEREAS, naming the Lane football field after Fritz Pollard is a fitting way to honor a man who broke through so many boundaries, and "gives students somebody to look up to, show them what it was like to be a champion in several ways.", stated Ms. Weiner. The renaming was approved last spring by school authorities and will be made official on October 1st, 2022; and

WHEREAS, Edwina Thompson, Lane Tech's principal, said in a statement, "We are thrilled to finally acknowledge this pioneer in sports, education, and racial equity," adding, "While this moment is long overdue, we are confident that the legacy of Fritz Pollard will continue to inspire generations to strive for greatness."

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the President and Members of the Cook County Board of Commissioners does hereby congratulate the family of Frederick "Fritz" Douglass Pollard and Lane Tech High School on this momentous occasion; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, this text be spread upon the official proceedings of this Honorable Body and a suitable copy be presented to the family of Frederick "Fritz" Douglass Pollard and Lane Tech High School as a symbol of our respect and esteem.