1921-1924 served as a transformative period for the Middlebury Football program. An increased emphasis on big time athletics set the stage for Middlebury to enter the national spotlight. The 1923 Middlebury Football Team validated the Panther’s presence by playing the mighty Harvard Crimson to a 6-6 tie in front of 25,000 fans. To read more about that game, visit:

<http://sites.middlebury.edu/footballhistory/the-football-in-latin-class-sparks-student-body-strike/>

Unfortunately, that 1923 team finished the season at .500 with a 3-3-2 record. However with the Coach and core of the team returning, that game gave the team a newfound confidence going into the 1924 season. To say that the 1924 Panthers were dominant would be an understatement. The team demolished opponents left and right, with the only blemish coming at the hands of powerhouse Harvard.

St. Michaels traveled to Middlebury to open the season. The Panther’s captain, Klevenow, scored early in the first quarter and Middlebury never looked back. The Panthers cruised to a 20-0 victory to start the season 1-0. Next up on the schedule was Union, a team the Panthers had tied in disappointing fashion the year before. This year would prove to be different through as Middlebury won convincingly, 16-0. The star of the game was Slick Whitney, who scored twice on a beautiful 70 yard run and a 15 yard pass from Papke. Klevenow intercepted a pass late to seal the win and the Panthers started 2-0.

The Panthers early season success set up an epic rematch with the Harvard Crimson. Middlebury traveled to Cambridge to take on the mighty foe in from of an impressive 35,000 fans. On easily one of the biggest stages in Middlebury Athletic history, the Panthers fought valiantly. The Panthers went down 7-0 after the first half but narrowed the margin in the third quarter when Whitney threw a long pass to Lobo for a touchdown. The extra point attempt failed and the Panthers trailed the Crimson 7-6 going in to the fourth quarter. The Crimson would go on to score another touchdown and a field goal to win the game 16-6. Sports critics claim that Harvard played the best game of their season against the Panthers, and even so the closeness of the game proves that this Panthers team was worthy of the big stage.

 The Panthers would rebound the next week, decisively defeating Tufts 26-7. After this game the Panthers focus shifted towards reclaiming the State Championship. The first leg of this battle pitted the Panthers against the Green and Gold of Vermont. The Panthers had not beaten their in state rival since 1920, but this team aimed to end that streak. Lobo opened up the scoring on a 17 yard pass from Papke and the Panthers never looked back. McLaughlin would score another touchdown and Potter would score a safety to give the Panthers a 15-0 victory. The score could have been a lot worse but the Vermont defense played a great game.

Now only Norwich stood in between Middlebury and a State Championship. Norwich proved to be outmatched and the Panthers raced away with the game, winning 32-7. Many Panthers contributed and every player on the squad got a chance to play. The State Championship was a major accomplishment of this squad and the Panthers had managed to win two rivalry games in deciding fashion.

The Panthers were now clicking on all cylinders, and this would prove devastating for the Trinity Bantams. The game was over from the minute the teams took the field. Middlebury cruised to a staggering 74-7 victory. 74 was the most points ever scored by a Middlebury team and the third highest total of the season in all of college football. The Bantams were helpless the entire game and the outcome was a testament to the Panther’s dominance. The final game of the season went down in similar fashion, as the Panthers drummed Lowell Textile for a 65-7 victory. They would finish the season with an impressive 7-1 record.

The Lowell Textile game was the swan song for many of the Panthers, including Coach Morey. Morey left Middlebury after this record setting year to pursue a more lucrative position in the south. The following year the Panther’s prowess would begin to decline, and the 1924 squad can be viewed as the pinnacle of Middlebury success in big time college football.