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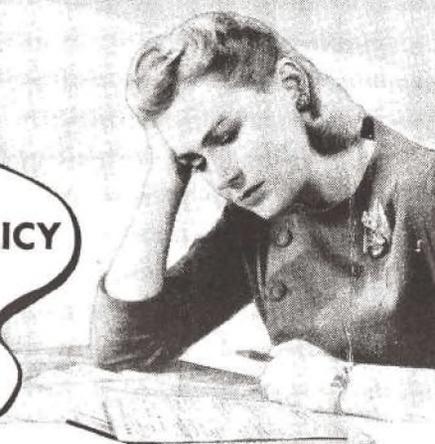
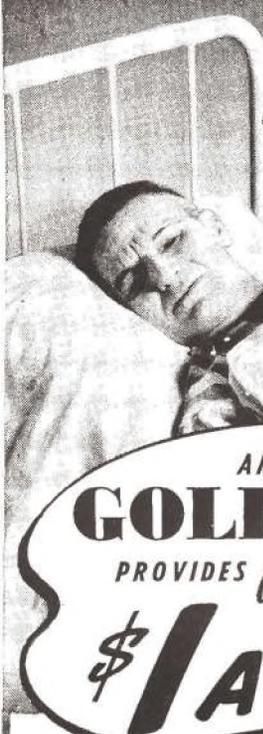
*The* **DIPSY-DOO BOYS**  
a big gridiron novel  
by **C. PAUL JACKSON**

**"BLOCKERS AIN'T SO DUMB"**  
a novelet of rugged football  
by **CURTIS BISHOP**

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# 1946 Football ACTION

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## *Three Powerful Novels of Goalpost Thunder*

### **THE DIPSY-DOO BOYS**

**C. Paul Jackson** **2**

Saturdays were field days for those fuzz-happy gridiron gazelles, Chick Young and Joe Holt, who considered the scoreboard their personal pig-skin mirror and the coach just a sideline statue.

### **"SAY IT WITH YARDS"**

**Harold Rogers** **48**

Monty Taylor was just an end-stripe stooge for Flip Conners—and to Diane, you had to "say it with yards".

### **"BLOCKERS AIN'T SO DUMB"**

**Curtis Bishop** **90**

Swivel-hipped Orv Hunter's touchdown prances gave Winston fans the Rose Bowl rash. But blocker Cam Elliott only smiled pityingly.

## *A Gridiron Fact Feature*

**TRAIN 'EM ROUGH** . . . . . **Parke H. Davis** **85**  
Old-time football was rugged stuff. Even the great John L. said: "It's murder!"

## *Four Line-Plunging Short Stories*

**PHANTOM IN THE FLAT ZONE** . . . . . **Bill Henman** **30**  
Everyone thought the Japs had blocked McBride out of football for good—until he hung that goalpost miracle on the scoreboard.

**GOLD TO GO!** . . . . . **Tom O'Neill** **40**  
Dutch Bernhardt was shooting for a record. And now he had to forget it—or see his team go down in defeat.

**TOUGH TOMATO** . . . . . **Brad King** **65**  
Thompson thought guards should bust opposing linemen—until that day when he tried busting signals instead.

**PIGSKIN PURGE** . . . . . **Richard Brister** **73**  
With the Beavers, Danny was in football heaven—'til he found that holding the job meant cleat-whipping his best friend.

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*Holt took Young's pass and rode the wild yell from the stands down the sideline.*

# THE DIPSY-DOO BOYS

By C. Paul Jackson

Saturdays were field days for those fuzz-happy gridiron gazelles, Chick Young and Joe Holt, who considered the scoreboard their personal pigskin mirror and the coach just a sideline statue. Then came the Middle U. game and the bench was very hard . . .

ROCKY STEELE had few illusions as he faced the West State football squad, crowded into the little projection room that one of his coaching predecessors had rigged in the gym. Rocky knew that a new mentor has to prove himself to the men he coaches, and he knew that the move he was going to make would most probably antagonize some of the veterans of this squad. He could even have picked them out now, before he started.

"You men know by now that I'm no Rockne at talking," Rocky said quietly. "So I won't attempt any speech. I asked you to come up here before we start the heavy stuff on the field because I have certain plans that I think can best be explained against the background of the movies of last year's West State—Middle U game."

Absently he rubbed a thumb across the cleat scar that adorned the bridge of a slightly crooked nose. The features of his ruggedly homely face were sober and his steady brown eyes held a seriousness. Almost imperceptibly his compact, thick-shouldered bulk stiffened as he drew in a breath that deepened his stevedore chest.

"Some of the plays will be run in slow motion and I'll have comments to make," he went on. "Anyone who has a question, or anything to contribute, is invited to do so."

He flicked off the room lights and started the projector. The screen came alive and figures in the white jerseys and white pants of West State were spread over half the gridiron while a line of Middle U men in dark jerseys and golden pants stretched across the middle of the field and moved forward under the kickoff.

The white-clad men dropped back and formed a huge V of interference as a lithe, wide-shouldered figure with the numerals 13 on the back of his jersey gathered in the ball on the five yard line. Someone in

the room noticed a West State man, apparently clear out of the play.

"Who's that guy coasting along the sideline," he whispered. "He looks like he's lost!"

"Watch!" That was the voice of Bill Moore, captain and center and the only senior on the squad. "That's Joe Holt, Middle U thought he was lost, too!"

Blockers in front of the ballcarrier thinned as they took out tacklers until only one man remained in front of Number 13. That lone interferer threw a rolling block at a dark-clad player and it looked as though two other tacklers closing in fast had the ballcarrier trapped.

Suddenly the man wearing Number 13 all but stopped, dropped his shoulders to mask his intentions, and tossed an underhand pass across the field. The lad who had apparently been out of the play grabbed the lateral and was away down the sideline. The camera had picked up a part of the wildly waving and yelling fans in the stands as Joe Holt scampered down the far chalk mark. Not a Middle U man came close enough to him for even a forlorn shot. The camera followed him all the way, showed the wide grin on Holt's face as he circled into the diagonally-striped end zone for the touchdown and showed him slapping Number 13 on the shoulder as the man who had started the play came downfield.

"Young and Holt, the old hipper-dipper combo!" someone in the room said. "Boy, no wonder you had that Middle U gang crazy!"

"We didn't wait too long to spring our stuff!" Rocky recognized the breezy, confident tone of Chick Young. Young went on: "Joe and Jerry and I had that one all set. It would have been Jerry doing the sneak if the kickoff had gone to Joe!"

"A touchdown before they were over the first minute nervousness!" someone breathed. "Boy, what a shock!"

Rocky said quietly, "A beautiful exhibition of ball handling and timing, and incidentally some sharp blocking to get Young as far upfield as he was. Still, the shock couldn't have been too overwhelming. Middle U fought back and won by a touchdown."

Rocky wondered if he imagined the sense of disapproval that he got. He wished he hadn't said that, then he was glad he had. No use in letting these lads build too much on something they weren't going to get.

The picture went on. It showed Middle U taking the next kickoff and grinding across the barred lines of the gridiron on straight power. They did not give up possession of the ball until they had completed a sustained drive of eighty-six yards for the tying touchdown and every yard was notched by a well-conceived, perfectly balanced ground game.

**T**HE REEL unwound and the projection room almost took on the feeling of a rooting section as the teams put on a fast, race-horse scoring duel. Once Rocky stopped a play, ran it back in slow-motion. Clearly the ballcarrier, Holt, should have gone for a long gain on an off-tackle slant in which he broke clear of the line and was in the secondary, except that Number 13 waved wildly, showed by the expression of his face that he yelled for the ball, and Holt flipped a lateral toward him. A Middle U back deflected it so that Chick Young was lucky to cover the ball in a mad pile-up.

"Application of razzle-dazzle fuzz in the wrong spot," Rocky commented, his eyes sweeping the room.

"Oh, baloney!" That was Chick Young. "I would have gone for a touchdown, if that Middle U guy hadn't been shot with luck. Or else I'd have flipped the onion to Jerry and he woulda gone all the way. That Middle U guy had no business to be where he was."

"Good defensive men have a habit of being where they're not supposed to be at embarrassing moments," Rocky said dryly. "That play illustrates perfectly a point I want to make. Fuzz is all right, in its place, but the place is as a threat to keep the defense loosened. Good old rock 'em and sock 'em power in a running game is still

the backbone of any offensive system that will stand up."

"Nuts!"

Rocky wasn't sure that the derisive ejaculation came from Chick Young but he thought it probably was. Rocky's jaw tightened a little. This Chick Young was apt to prove more difficult than he had anticipated.

The picture went on and the tempo of the furious scoring battle heightened. West State had scored four touchdowns—all of them on tricky laterals and forwards and combinations of the two—and had missed one conversion. Middle U had scored four touchdowns and had yet to throw a pass of any kind, and they had added the try-for-point each time. A 28—27 ballgame going into the final five minutes and the ball in possession of West State on their own forty.

They ran three plays through the line and each time it seemed as though the ballcarrier was all but away. The punches were off tackle and a brawny giant in a sweat-smearred white sweater ripped great holes in the Middle U line for each try. But always at the last second, the Middle U secondary managed to drop the ballcarrier.

"This is where the game was lost," Rocky said. "No blocking except in the line. And this next play threw away what chance West State might have had for a storybook finish. I'm going to run it in slow motion. Remember that it is fourth down and inches to go and . . ."

"Just a minute, Coach." The interruption came from Chick Young. "Do you mean that even a point behind and the time running out, we should have punted?"

"No." Rocky said without hesitation. "There are spots where a football team has to gamble and this was one of them. No question but that you should have tried for that first down. But the try you made was certainly wrong. Larson was on the rampage and all that had to be done was to send anyone into his tackle."

What had happened in that fatal play was painfully clear as Rocky ran it slow motion. The ball went to Holt on a direct pass and he faked handing it to Young in what looked like a reverse cutback into Larson's tackle slot. But then Holt faded and shot a lateral pass across to Young.

The Middle U flankman was cutting fast across and it seemed that he would get Young. Then the figure on the screen with the big 13 on his jersey cocked his arm and heaved a forward to a lanky figure racing wide into the flat.

It was a dangerous play and the danger exploded in the faces of West State. Jerry Barnes, the lanky end, would have gone for a touchdown all right, there was no one near him, but suddenly a speeding man in the dark jersey of Middle U came from nowhere. That defensive back had again sensed a phoney and was where he wasn't supposed to be.

He leaped in front of Barnes, plucked the football out of the ozone and came down with his legs already pumping toward the West State goal.

Nobody got within hailing distance of the Middle U man. They added the point and that made the figures on the scoreboard roll to 35 for Middle U.

Chick Young and Joe Holt and Jerry Barnes collaborated on a daring lateral-forward-lateral in the last forty seconds of the game for the fifth West State touchdown, but the good point still left the final figures on the electric board reading Middle U, 35; West State, 34.

"A one point loss is as much of a defeat as a hundred," Rocky Steele said. "I think you fellows will understand a little better when I tell you that this season we are putting major stress on a strong running attack, rather than emphasis on the hipper-dipper stuff."

He turned up the room lights and Rocky saw more than one of the squad looking thoughtful. He had counted on this. These lads were smart, they got the point he had wanted to make. Then he glanced at Chick Young. A careless grin wreathed the lips of the star halfback. Young and big Kalmar Larson and Jerry Barnes and Joe Holt were the last to leave the room. At the door Chick Young turned and regarded the stocky coach a space.

Young was an inch over six feet but his sleek long-muscled frame camouflaged the two hundred pounds he carried. You thought of him as slender until you noticed the width of his shoulders. He had a general devil-may-care appearance, wavy chestnut brown hair and impudent gray eyes that were very sure of themselves.

He grinned abruptly at Rocky Steele now.

"Coach," he said, "You're off the beam. I'm afraid you are trying to sell us something you don't really want yourself."

Chick Young laughed as though he was thinking of a good joke.

"The small-time league you used to coach in probably never put out much hot stuff," Young said. "But you're in the big time now, Coach. We've got the game and the men to play it that will make you the glamor boy of the coaching union. Just ride along with us, that's all."

He looked at Rocky then and added impudently although he laughed along with it, "It would be too bad if you threw a perfect setup out of gear by tampering with a machine that's ready to go."

ROCKY STEELE slouched in the chair behind the desk in the gym office. The desk top was littered with sheets of paper, diagrams of plays and defensive formations. Rocky stared moodily at the papers. What good were the best formations in the world if the squad you coached insisted on hashing them?

In two days West State would open the season and Rocky knew his team wasn't ready.

Ten days of heavy work on the field had left Rocky with the knowledge that he faced a real fight. The West State varsity just simply refused to take to the change of offensive system that Rocky was trying to install. He thought grimly of that day's workout.

For a solid thirty minutes Rocky worked the varsity on a power smash off-tackle. It was the meat of Rocky's system. Larson opened gaping holes—the giant Swedish lad never failed at that—and Joe Holt high-kneed through the openings, but there it ended. Every time, a backer-up in the scrub secondary barged in and stopped Holt after only a nominal gain.

"There has to be downfield blocking," Rocky said impatiently. "It's your assignment to cut down the key man in the secondary, Young. What's the matter, can't you block!"

Chick Young had just looked at him, shrugged and grinned, not saying a word.

"Step out a minute and watch," Rocky said.

The stocky coach crouched in Young's

spot. Larson ripped a hole in the scrub line and Rocky knifed through a second before Joe Holt got there. Rocky drew a bead on the backer-up, threw his block just as Holt shot into the secondary. Rocky washed the legs from under the backer-up and Holt flashed past, in the clear. Rocky rolled free, raced downfield and put a full body block on the safety who was pinching Holt off against the sideline. Joe Holt trotted the rest of the way to the goal line.

Rocky came back, said quietly, "That's all it takes. That play is a potential touch-down anytime—if we get downfield blocking. Varsity take the ball on the forty and run the same thing again."

They ran the play and Chick Young catapulted into the secondary ahead of Joe Holt. The halfback star threw his block at the backer-up and it was sharp and crisp and scythed the tackler as efficiently as had Rocky. Holt went for eight yards before he had to slow in an attempt to evade a second tackler and a scrub lineman who had followed the play nailed him.

"Nice work, Leigh." Rocky threw an approving glance at the second string tackle. "That's the way to follow that ball." Then Rocky said to Chick Young: "A beautiful block." He didn't add that with his speed Young could have gone on and mowed down the safety so that Holt would not have been slowed. "You really *can* block!"

"Sure," Young said carelessly. He grinned. "I never claimed I couldn't!"

Something in the inflection of the halfback's tone made Rocky look at him sharply.

"Then why haven't you been putting out those kind of blocks?"

Young's eyes held a defiance when he looked at the coach. He spoke clearly and distinctly.

"I can't see the logic," he said. "You make four, six or maybe eight yards and you wreck yourself slamming into guys!"

"Football has always required slamming into guys, Young!"

"Sure, we agree on that, Coach. We don't want to play a lacey-pants game or we wouldn't be out for football. But *modern* football is different. Given the right men—and we've got them—the same amount of slamming will gain four or five times the yardage." Young grinned, winked

at Jerry Barnes and added—"and it's a lot more fun!"

Rocky moved impatiently there in the chair behind the desk. He knew that things couldn't go on as they were. Not that Chick Young or Barnes or Holt or Larson had openly rebelled, but they were not putting out the way they should and could. They seemed determined to force their coach to adopt the hipper-dipper game that they had played the year before.

The situation was having a bad effect on the squad. Those four swashbuckling lads represented eighty percent of West State's strength and they were the leaders. Rocky sighed.

Better get busy thinking of something to give out to the *West State Daily*. Tony Dale, editor of the college paper had phoned for an appointment and was due any minute.

ROCKY WAS still staring gloomily at the littered desk when the knock came on the door. "Come on in," he called, didn't bother to get up. This would be Tony Dale. When Rocky looked up his jaw sagged and he stared wide-eyed.

A girl stood in the doorway, and what a girl! She had hair that was neither platinum blond nor golden but a sort of rich combination of the two and it was a riot of curls. She was small, a full half-head shorter than Rocky's own five-seven, and she had a pair of deep blue eyes with little lights in them. Her brows were dark and, with dark curling lashes, they made a startling contrast to her blond complexion.

"I—I—golly," Rocky stammered. He jarred the desk as he arose hastily. "I was expecting Tony Dale."

She looked at him and a little dimple quirked beside one corner of her mouth as she smiled. White even teeth emphasized the red of her lips.

"I'm Tony Dale," she said.

Rocky stared. "But—but you're a — that is—well, I expected—"

"You expected a male to be editor of the *Daily*," she said. Rocky felt like a schoolboy being laughed at as a sort of husky chuckle came from the girl. "It's still a man's world," she added. "I suppose that's one reason I don't object to being called Tony. It's really Tonia Dale."

Rocky gulped. He knew he was staring

almost rudely. He couldn't look away. He wondered what had struck him. He had no intention of blurting the words he was startled to hear himself say.

"You don't look like a college kid! You—you—well, you seem more mature or—or—"

Again the dimple flashed at the corner of her mouth and her eyes sparkled. Rocky felt like a dope but he somehow gathered that Tony Dale was not laughing at him.

"Perhaps that's a doubtful compliment," she said. "But I like it. To be perfectly frank, I am older than the usual college girl. I enlisted in the WACS on my twentieth birthday. I was a Sophomore at West State then."

Something like regret momentarily darkened the blue of her eyes then and she wasn't smiling.

"Two years make a difference. Sometimes I feel as though the girls here now are mere children. Maybe it's the bouts of malaria I picked up on Luzon that make me feel older."

Rocky looked at her and a softness was in his eyes.

"Malaria is bad medicine," he said. "I'd probably still be in the Pacific myself if malaria hadn't put me out. I know how you feel."

Her face lighted and an eager friendliness was abruptly in her eyes.

"Army or Navy?" she asked.

"Both." He chuckled. "At least that's what the slave-driving sergeant I had in boot camp used to tell us. 'Marines are Army and Navy *and* Marines,' he used to say."

Suddenly it was as though they were old friends. Rocky knew that she felt the same as he did, that their service in the Armed Forces and having been both knocked out by malaria gave them a common bond.

They gabbled at each other like two excited kids, recalled places in the islands, battle-scarred scenes. They were both surprised at the coincidence of having been stationed on the same island, even though it had been at different times.

Tony glanced at her wrist watch finally, said smilingly, "I have to get an interview with you, remember? You've heard of newspaper deadlines, we'd better get at it."

Rocky's rugged face abruptly lost its

glow. For a few minutes the grief that he had with the squad had been pushed out of his thoughts, but now it was back.

"What do you want to know?"

She said, "It's a tradition at West State that the coach gives out with the McCoy before the opening game. Just what the prospects are for the season, how big the score will be in the first game et cetera."

"We should win Saturday," Rocky said slowly. "On paper, we're three to five touchdowns better, but they don't pay off on paper." He drew in a breath then and added cryptically, "Prospects for the season depend on whether the coach turns out to be the coach!"

Tony Dale gave him an odd look.

"Do you want me to print that funny prediction?" she asked.

He shrugged. "It's as good as any I could make," he said. "And too darn true to be funny!"

He sort of shook himself then and the eagerness came back into his eyes.

"How about having dinner with me and a show afterward," he said. "Maybe we can find a newsreel of some of the spots we used to know."

She hesitated briefly, then nodded.

"I'll buy that," she said. "But I'll have to break a half-way date. And I'll have to phone your interview to the sheet."

ROCKY STEELE finished reading the names of his starting lineup and let his gaze drift over the assembled squad in the dressing quarters beneath the huge stands of West State stadium.

"These Teacher's College boys are not supposed to be in our league," he said. "We outman them and we should be a lot better. But remember that we pull our pants on the same way as they do and we're not supermen. I'd like it if we could get far enough ahead so that we could use most of the squad, but I expect you to go out there and play football from the opening whistle just as though it was Middle U. All right, everybody out."

The boys crowded for the door, shouting and jostling. It was not supposed to be a tough battle, just a first-game breeze, but the season opener always finds a team with a certain amount of nervousness. Rocky started to follow the boys, head down, thinking of a lot of things. He hadn't

noticed that four of his players were still in the dressing room.

"Just a minute, Coach."

Rocky looked up into the eyes of Chick Young. The other three of the Big Four flanked Young. Kalmar Larson met Rocky's gaze for an instant and then a scowl broke over the Swede's square, blocky face and he ran a big-knuckled hand through the sandy hair that was always uncombed. Larson's wide blue eyes were troubled and he looked away.

Chick Young flicked a glance at Jerry Barnes. The lanky end always made Rocky think of a powerful, sleek-muscled cat. A panther. Barnes stood relaxed now, his dark eyes watchful and his long face expressionless.

Joe Holt stood beside Young. Holt rarely had much to say. He had dark hair and quiet gray eyes and a strong face. He gave an impression of solidness, unspectacular but going all the way. Rocky knew that Holt was from the same town as Young, had played high school ball with Young and followed the star blindly.

"Well?" Rocky said.

"Not too well." Chick Young grinned. "Things could be a lot better, Coach. They've got to be better."

"I'll go for that," Rocky said dryly. "What is this, a confessional?"

Chick Young eyed the stocky coach a space.

"No confessional," he said. "We want to make one last plea, Steele." Rocky didn't miss the change in Young's tone nor his use of Steele instead of coach. "We want to save you—and the team."

Suddenly then the cocky confidence came into Young's tone.

"We've tried your stuff for two weeks, and it doesn't work," he said. "Jerry and Joe and I have been working out outside of practice hours and we're as sharp as ever. We're set to go with some dippy-doo that will knock the eyes out of these Teacher's College guys. We're asking you to give us the green light to spring *our* stuff today!"

Rocky felt the muscles along his jaw tighten. This Chick Young was really something. You had to hand it to him. Young certainly was persistent. Rocky throttled the irritation that welled in him, chose his words carefully.

"The West State Athletic Board of Control got in touch with me two months ago," he said slowly. "I wasn't sure that I was ready for a big time coaching job. I'd had only two seasons of coaching before the war broke. I told them all that, frankly. They knew my record. They knew the school of football that I was trained in. They still wanted me as coach.

"They gave me a three year contract, Young, as head coach. They assured me that West State alumni were tired of being ballyhooed as potential National Champion, winning early season games by big scores that seemed to bear out the sportsheet predictions, and then year after year losing to Middle U or Eastern State or both."

"And don't think we aren't just as tired," Chick Young broke in quickly. "We're going to change it this year. That's why—"

"They gave me a contract as head coach," Rocky repeated as though he hadn't heard Young. "Nothing was said about an assistant coach—or *four* assistant coaches from the squad itself!"

Suddenly then Rocky Steele's tone hardened.

"I have no desire to be dictatorial or iron-fisted," he said. But I *am* coach and it's to me that the Board of Control looks for results. We're playing the type of game today that we have been working on. Give it a chance—and we'll have a football team!"

Chick Young's gray eyes held the gaze of Rocky for a long moment. Young didn't drop his eyes, but turned away with a shrug.

"Okay," the star back said, repeated, "Okay. If that's the way you want it."

Something about the way he said those words warned Rocky that Chick Young was not backing down.

**C**APTAIN Bill Moore won the toss and following Rocky's instructions, elected to receive. Rocky sat tense on the end of the bench. He hadn't been so taut since his own playing days. He watched a high booming kick arc down the field and settle in the arms of Chick Young. Automatically Rocky's eyes flicked over the gridiron, checking assignments. Abruptly he froze as a pointer does when a bird is spotted.

Joe Holt was making no attempt at

blocking Teacher's College tacklers sifting down the field. Holt sort of casually and unobtrusively drifted toward the sideline. Rocky's fingers bit into the edge of the bench. Neither Holt nor Chick Young saw the Teacher's College man who had spotted Holt and was racing to cover him.

Chick Young deftly paced himself to use every blocker in his interference. When there was only one left, Young veered to the side opposite Holt. The last blocker heaved himself at a tackler and another Teacher's College man rode Young toward the boundary chalkmark. Chick Young socked his cleats into the turf, half-turned and ferried a lateral pass across the field toward Joe Holt.

That spiralling pigskin never reached Holt.

The Teacher's College man flashed in and plucked the pass out of the air and sped over the yard marks toward the West State goal.

Only Bill Moore's lack of speed saved West State from having a touchdown scored on them. The big center had blocked out a man early and was lumbering downfield far in the wake of things when that Teacher's College man intercepted the pass. Moore dumped him on the West State twenty-four.

The Teacher's College team received a tremendous lift from that unexpected break, but they just didn't have the power to cash in on it. The big West State line was too tough. Larson raged at tackle, smeared a back for a loss. He broke through and rushed the passer on the next play, forcing him to throw wide. Bill Moore smothered two tries at the center. West State took over the ball on their own twenty.

Rocky Steele looked down the bench, nodded at a raw-boned redhead and a shorter, heavy-built blond player.

"Get loosened," Rocky said. "If I send you in, Red goes in for Young, and Cotton, you report in for Holt."

Rocky watched the West State huddle. He saw Pete Bartel, his quarterback, arguing with Chick Young and he saw Bill Moore join the argument. For an instant Rocky had a hope that the captain and the field general would stave off the thing that he felt was coming. He knew when the team snapped into formation from the

huddle that he was hoping in vain.

It wasn't the tight box formation that Rocky had been stressing. Chick Young was deep in the tailback spot and Joe Holt was wide in a single wing. The ball was snapped and Chick Young took the direct pass from center, bluffed starting on a sweep, and faded back. He cocked his arm and made a motion as though he was going to pitch in one direction, suddenly reversed and rifled a pass across to the opposite flat where Joe Holt stood waiting.

Holt rode the wild yell from the West State stands down the sideline. He rode it all the way downfield until the Teacher's College safety man dragged him down on the twenty-eight.

Rocky Steele drew in a long breath. Fifty-eight yards that play had covered. It was something for a coach to take out of the game two men who had just engineered such a gain. But more than a temporary gain was riding on this.

"All right, Red and Cotton," Rocky said. "Report in as I told you." He eyed the two replacements. "I hope you lads haven't any screwy ideas!"

Rocky didn't know just what to expect when Chick Young and his sidekick came in. His first urge was to peel the hide off them in the blistering castigation that a man who had worked up to a Marine Gunnery Sergeant was well capable of dishing out. But he knew he'd better say nothing or he would do just that. He thought for a moment that Chick Young was going to pop off, and Rocky knew that if the halfback did, it would be too bad. But Young eyed the coach a space and shrugged.

"Okay," Young said. "If that's the way you want it."

"That's the way it's going to be!" Rocky said tightly. "And I mean *that's the way it's going to be!*"

THAT GAME was torture for Rocky to watch. It seemed as though the football fates must be all aligned against West State. Time and again their sheer power, Larson's raging tackle play, drove the ball deep into the Teacher's College territory. But something always happened. Off-sides at critical spots, fumbles, missed signals. Something always happened to stall West State in the shadow of the goal posts.

The game went into the fourth quarter with a scoreless deadlock still registered on the scoreboard. That was when some guy in the stands bellowed in a fog-horn voice:

"Somebody down there on the bench better get wise! We want Young and Holt!"

A buzz of comments in agreement with the leather-lunged West State supporter rippled through the stands. Raggedly the chant started at first, then swelled to a rhythmic roar.

"We want Young and Holt! We want Young and Holt!"

Rocky Steele sat immobile there on the bench. He was aware that men in the line of replacements glanced warily at him. He kept his gaze glued on the field.

Bartel was alternating Red and Cotton on crashing drives inside and off tackle. Swede Larson was ripping holes in the line and always there was a gain and West State moved down field. But it was a slow battering process. The tired Teacher's College team were playing over their heads. They stopped the redheaded successor to Chick Young on the sixteen, inches short of a first down and took over the ball.

Teacher's College made exactly one yard in two line smashes and Bartel batted incomplete a long third down pass. The Teacher's College punter was rushed by Larson, barely got his kick off, but the ball took a nice roll and slithered out of bounds on the West State nineteen.

"We want Young and Holt! We want Young and Holt!"

The insistent roaring chant poured down from the West State stands.

West State began another tortuous bruising drive. Cotton broke loose off-tackle and was momentarily in the clear on the forty but the second-string back just didn't have the finesse to outsmart a cagy Teacher's College safety and was dumped by a vicious tackle. He fumbled. White-jersied men and red-clad Teacher's College players dove at the ball. It was a West State man who was over the oval when the referee delved to the bottom of the pile and the ball was on the thirty-five yard stripe.

The scoreboard clock registered less than two minutes to play. The stands beat that chant down around Rocky's ears.

"We want Young and Holt! We want Young and Holt!"

They slogged away at line smashes. Bartel saw that the rival secondary was pulled in tight and he called a reverse that stemmed out of a fake off-tackle slant. Cotton was a little slow in the hand-off to Red and the backer-up who had been sucked a little out of position had time to get back. He stopped the redhead on the twenty-four. First down but the clock was starting on the last minute.

Cotton made two on a drive over guard. Red picked up a skimpy yard inside tackle. The electric light on the clock seemed to be flying toward the end of the game.

"We want Young and Holt! We want Young and Holt!"

An angry undertone came into the shout from the stands. Rocky Steele flicked a glance down the bench. He encountered the eyes of Chick Young. The halfback ace looked expectant and a kind of cockiness was in his expression. Rocky motioned to a slender lad beyond Young.

"Report in there for Red," Rocky ordered. "Bartel will know you're in there to boot a field goal." He smacked the slender lad on the rump. "Make it good!"

The chant from the stands broke off as the sub ran out on the field then the fans saw that the replacement bore neither the 13 of Chick Young nor the 22 of Joe Holt on his jersey. A disappointed roar broke from them. It stilled as the West State team snapped into formation from the huddle. Pete Bartel kneeled on one knee and the slender lad stood poised, waiting for the rifle from center.

Bill Moore's pass was perfect. The West State line held off plunging opponents, gave their kicker plenty of time for the field goal try. He took one step and swung his leg and the leather oval lifted straight and true and dropped over the crossbar of the goal posts.

A three went on the scoreboard opposite West State. The three was the only digit on the board a few seconds later when the gun banged. But as he trudged down the dressing room ramp, Rocky heard a disgusted student wail loudly.

"Three to nothing! A lousy field goal win! We beat those guys sixty to fourteen last year! We're in for one swell season—I guess not!"

**R**OCKY Steele eyed Bill Moore across the desk in the coach's office. The captain was one of those lads who look soft and fat but are more solid than they appear. Bill Moore had the traditional fat man's reluctance for grief. He moved uneasily now and his dark eyes were troubled.

"Do I have to be in on this, Coach?" Moore asked.

"You're captain. It's your team, you want the most successful season possible, don't you?"

"Well, sure. But I—well, darn it, I'm not very good at this sort of thing. I hate trouble."

Rocky sighed mentally. Things would be a lot easier if he had a captain who was aggressive, a real leader. Rocky was well aware that Bill Moore felt as though it would be better to take the path of least resistance and let Chick Young have his way.

"I'm afraid a measure of grief can't be avoided," Rocky said. "I asked Young and Holt to come here rather than bring the matter before the whole squad. But what takes place in this office is bound to get around. I want you here to let Young and Holt know that you, as captain representing the squad, don't go for the sort of thing they pulled Saturday."

Bill Moore moved restlessly, said nothing. Rocky stabbed a look at him.

"You don't go for it, do you," said the coach suddenly.

"What? Oh. Well, you're the coach and—but darn it all, Chick and Joe are mighty good backfield men!"

Rocky felt his jaw tighten. He had been afraid that he was not going to get much support from Moore. He was seeking for words to make clear to the captain the position they were both in and that it *was* both of them, when the door opened and Chick Young and Joe Holt came in.

"Hi, Bill," Young said breezily, glanced quickly at Rocky Steele and added, "Well, here we are, Coach. Let's get the spanking over and get out on the field."

"You admit that you've got a spanking coming then," Rocky said.

"Oh, I suppose you have to do something! The by-laws of the coaches' union probably insist on some kind of gesture in a spot like this!"

Rocky experienced momentarily again a

fleeting admiration for this kid. But Rocky did not smile. He admired a man who stuck to his guns, but . . .

"Let's understand one thing from the start," Rocky said quietly. "Any action I take is for the greatest good of the greatest number as I see it. Don't get the idea that I am making any attempt to bolster any false sense of position or power."

He eyed Chick Young steadily and added in level tone:

"You and Holt deliberately took matters into your own hands Saturday. You had specific orders to play the type of game that we've been stressing. Bartel called the signals for one of our regular plays. Bill, here, tried to argue you into using your head. You over-ruled your quarterback and captain and insisted on playing it your way and it darned near proved disastrous. Men don't do that on my teams. I'm ready to listen to any explanation you care to make."

Chick Young flashed an odd look at the stocky coach and for just an instant something flickered in the back of Young's eyes. Then the easy grin broke over his face and he spoke carelessly.

"We tried to get you to see reason before the game," Young said. "If the thing hadn't gone sour—" he shrugged. "Well, if we'd made a touchdown on that first play, there wouldn't be any need for explanations, would there, Coach?"

**R**OCKY did not answer for a space. He needed time to control the rage that welled in him. Every word, every action of this cocky young squirt suggested that it was a battle between them to see who was going to be boss. Well, maybe it is, Rocky thought grimly. But how can I make the swellheaded dope see that I'm not trying to smash him down?

"You and Holt would have been taken from the game if you had run the kick-off back for a score and if that second crazy maneuver had accounted for another touchdown." Rocky's tone was quietly controlled but a thread of steel ran beneath it. "No man, or men, can be bigger than the team, Young."

"Horatio Alger and Dink Stover of Yale stuff!" Young met Rocky's gaze boldly and he made no attempt to gloss over the ridicule in his words. But there was that

odd flicker in Young's eyes as he added: "You mean you would drop me from the squad?"

"If necessary."

"Oh, come now, Steele! I'm not handing myself and Joe any bouquets when I say that you haven't got an offense with us out of there. Saturday proved that."

"We won the game," Rocky said grimly. "Don't get the idea that West State will cancel the remainder of the schedule, should you decide to take your toys and play in your own back yard!"

Chick Young flushed and his gray eyes flashed angrily.

"You won—by a three-point margin from a team that Middle U romped over a week ago thirty-eight to nothing and used subs more than half the game!" Young laughed harshly. "Who do you think you're kidding, Steele!"

Rocky looked Chick Young over from head to foot, allowed his gaze to be deliberately slow and probing.

"Not you, surely," Rocky said slowly. "You know too much to be kidded. But there a few things you don't seem to know that you should. You have an over-developed opinion of Chick Young. Nature was good to you, endowed you with unusual physical advantages, but somewhere along the line your sense of proportion has been sadly neglected.

"I would be the last to deny that we need you—and Holt—if we are to put out our strongest attack. But there will be a team out there representing West State, if neither one of you ever puts another cleat mark in the stadium turf!"

Rocky flicked a brief glance at Bill Moore. The chunky captain was looking at Chick Young and a slight frown marred the round smoothness of Bill Moore's face. The captain had said no word since Young and Holt came in nor had Joe Holt. Rocky let his gaze rest for a moment on Joe Holt. When the coach spoke again his tone was softer and his words were directed more at Holt and Moore than at Chick Young.

"We've got material for a better-than-average ballclub—if we all play together," Rocky said. "Friction and dissension on a squad never got anyone very far."

"Do we have to have dissension?" Bill Moore queried plaintively. "Can't we—ah

—sort of overlook some things that have happened and—and—well, sort of start over again with everybody working together?"

Rocky drew in a breath. He knew there could be no compromise in this. Before the coach could say anything, Chick Young cut straight to the heart of the matter.

"I can't go for this trudge-and-sludge game," Young said. "If start over again means to junk that, why, yes."

Chick Young looked at Joe Holt for a moment, swivelled his gaze to Bill Moore and then faced Rocky Steele. When he went on, defiant challenge was in Young's tone.

"This beating around the bush is getting nowhere," Young said. "I suggested when Joe and I came in that we get the spanking over and get out for practice. Joe and I are ready to spend two or three days on the scrubs—if that will satisfy you!"

Rocky tried to hold tight to the urge in him to cut loose on the cocky youngster. Chick Young was irritatingly flippant now.

"Just what are your terms for the ba-a-ad boys, Steele!"

Rocky wondered just how much benefit it would do this big lug to be turned over someone's knee and given the blistering that his schoolkid attitude rated. In spite of himself the disgusted anger that filled him showed in Rocky's tone.

"You're amused, aren't you, Young? Well, laugh real heartily about this: No man who cannot obey orders will get in a ballgame for West State as long as I am coach! When you can convince me that you are ready to be a cog in the whole machine, then you can play ball. My terms, as you choose to put it, are exactly that."

"Somehow I don't think you mean that." Chick Young made no attempt to camouflage the incredulity in his tone. He turned to Bill Moore. "You might tell him that the fellows wanted to elect me captain last year, Bill, that I wouldn't listen to it because you're a year ahead of me."

Rocky got the implied threat in Young's words, and he knew that Chick Young was the real leader. He knew that the star figured he had him over a barrel and abruptly Rocky had all of this he could take.

Rocky didn't see the door of his office open. He wondered afterward if he had

seen the editor of the *Daily* step into the room whether it would have softened the hardness of his tone or changed his words.

"You could *be* captain, Young." Rocky said tightly. "And you would still conform to my orders! It's time someone whittled you down to size! You can figure that you will not play again until you are willing to play on that basis!"

Rocky saw Chick Young's eyes flash and he looked quickly to the back of the room. The coach followed Young's gaze, saw Tony Dale standing in the doorway. The girl threw a quick glance at the tense faces of the men in the room.

"And you told me I must be mistaken!" Chick Young said to Tony Dale. He shrugged. "He thinks he's the Iron Duke, or something! Joe and I are . . ."

"I know." Tony Dale cut in on Young. She was eyeing Rocky and her startlingly blue eyes held a bright sheen. "Seems that I heard a rumor that dictators went out with Hitler!" she said.

ROCKY tried to go about practice as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. He couldn't help but know that word had spread through the squad that there had been fireworks in the gym office before the workout started. He could feel the unease of the squad even before he whistled them together for dummy scrimmage.

"I don't need to tell you that we didn't look so hot Saturday," he said quietly. "Sometimes it's as well if a team doesn't go so good in the opener. Forget last Saturday. We go against Rallton this week and we're setting our sights for them. Varsity take the ball on the forty and Blues on defense."

Rocky didn't glance toward Chick Young or Joe Holt standing in the outer ring of players beside Swede Larson and Jerry Barnes.

"The seven men who started Saturday take line positions for the varsity," the coach said. "Pete, Red, Cotton, and Blacky in the backfield."

He could feel the electric tension that went through the squad. Players looked at Chick Young and Joe Holt. Holt's longish face was expressionless but not Young's. The star halfback looked as though he'd been slapped.

He still didn't believe I could go through with it, Rocky thought. Aloud he said:

"All right. Everybody snap into it!"

No coach could have found fault with the eagerness of Red and Cotton. Rocky couldn't see but that Pete Bartel and Blacky Byrnes did everything they could, either. But from the first the practice was ragged.

The stocky coach was patience personified, went over and over assignments with Red and Cotton.

"Timing is what we've got to work for," he told the carrot top in Young's left half spot. "You've got to pace your cut into the hole so Blacky has time for a shot at the defensive half. Try it again."

They tried it again. And again. They tried it many times. Red was pathetically eager to make good, but it takes more than eagerness. Given a season or two and the redhead would be a better than fair back, but he didn't have the natural flair that Chick Young had.

Cotton was much the same in the full-back spot. He was big and rugged and anxious to learn, but he was a long way from the finished driving machine that was Joe Holt.

Rocky knew by the end of the practice period that no amount of work and no amount of effort on their part could make Red and Cotton into reasonable facsimiles of Chick Young and Joe Holt on a football field.

Rocky had inaugurated a practice of meeting briefly each night with his captain after practice in the gym office. This night Bill Moore wore an expression of gloom.

"We're sunk," the captain said glumly. "We can't get along without Chick."

Rocky eyed the chubby captain bleakly. It looked as though Bill Moore needed a little jarring.

"You've got to make a decision," Rocky said grimly. "Now. Either you are with me and are going to do all you can to hold things steady on the squad, or you're in favor of turning everything over to Chick Young. Which is it?"

"Well, gosh, Coach. I—I—darn it, you know what I meant. I'm probably not a good captain. I didn't want the gang to choose me, but as long as they did, it's my team. The thing I want is the men playing that will give West State the best team

that can be made out of the squad we have."

"Don't we all!" Rocky said. "I want Young and Holt in the backfield as much as you or anyone else. But more than wanting any one or two men, I want West State to get out of the doldrums."

**H**E EYED the chubby captain a moment and abruptly pulled a sheaf of papers from a desk drawer. The papers were covered with the little squares and circles and crosses and arrow-tipped lines that make diagrams of football plays.

"Take a look at those," Rocky said. "Every one is a play designed to utilize the razzle-dazzle talents of Young and Holt and Barnes, not overlooking the devastating power that Swede Larson is capable of putting out. Does that look as though I'm trying to freeze out Chick Young? Or his Big Four? Does it look as though I had planned deliberately to force that gang of hipper-dippers to give up handling the ball and go back to the old flying wedge game?"

Bill Moore shuffled through the diagrammed plays. His eyes bugged and his jaw dropped open. He muttered aloud.

"Forwards and forward-laterals and lateral-forwards. Flea flickers and wide open sweeps and reverses. Gosh! Some of this stuff is new! They look mighty good, Coach!"

The captain looked up suddenly and comprehension was in his eyes.

"You don't hate open football! Anybody could see that who took a gander at these!" Bill Moore frowned a little. "I don't get it, Coach. Chick and the boys would feel a lot different, if they knew this was coming up. It'll make a whale of a difference when I tell them."

"You aren't going to tell them—now," Rocky said. He took the sheets of plays from the captain. "Those have been in process of formation since the day I signed the contract to coach at West State. All summer I studied our material through the medium of last year's movies. I've been adding to the plays, shaping them to utilize every bit of talent, since the season began."

"What do you mean, I can't tell the squad now? Why haven't you told us?"

"No one gave me much of a chance to

give out what was coming up later," Rocky said. "I deliberately withheld any promise of a return to the fancy stuff. West State teams have relied entirely too much on the frosting without having a good, sound cake beneath it. We've stuck to the fundamentals, drilled on blocking and tackling, for two reasons.

"First: call it the psychological effect on the boys if they could be convinced that we've lost important games in the past because we lacked a thorough grounding in a sound ground game. Second: opponents have a habit of scouting West State teams as many games as they can, because they have learned in other years that tricky setups and fuzz have to be tried out under game conditions. If we could steer clear of any hint of razzle-dazzle in the early games, our stuff at least wouldn't be catalogued and filed by every tough team we meet later."

Bill Moore looked at this rugged-faced coach and new respect was in his eyes. Rocky went on.

"You can't tell the squad now, Bill. Chick Young would grab the idea right away that it was a sudden about-face on my part, that I was tacitly acknowledging that I was in the wrong and making a bid for him and Holt."

"But you do want them back, Coach?"

"Sure." Rocky sighed. "About as badly as I want to retain the use of an arm or leg. Maybe I'm wrong—no, I'm right, I know I'm right. There has to be discipline of a sort in any human activity. There has to be a head. Chick Young—all of you—are kids, really. I don't claim that my judgment is infallible, but I've got to make the decisions. I want Young and Holt back playing regularly—sure. But it has to be on the terms I outlined!"

**R**OCKY Steele looked at Tony Dale and rubbed a thumb along the cleat scar on his nose.

"Why shouldn't I keep our date?" he asked.

She answered his question with one of her own.

"Have you read the *Daily*?"

Rocky looked at her again and his gaze was thoughtful. He pulled a folded copy of the college paper from his pocket. It was already creased to an inside page. In

the middle of the page was a column headed: CAMPUS CHIT-CHAT. The by-line read Tony Dale. Rocky read slowly from the paper.

"Quote," he said. "Prospects for improvement over the gridiron prowess exhibited by West State Saturday received a decided setback today when Coach Steele made indefinite the return of Chick Young and Joe Holt to the backfield. Young and Holt, veteran stars of last season, were summarily removed from the Teacher's College game, which action left your correspondent, as well as numerous other West State supporters, puzzled, to put it mildly. Coach Steele perhaps retains a bit too much of the rigid discipline he was accustomed to in the Marine Corps. Unquote."

He looked at the girl and color was suddenly high in her cheeks.

"A bit rough on the Marine Corps, weren't you?" Rocky's question was in a sort of noncommittal tone.

"I don't think so."

"Didn't the WACS have military discipline?"

"We maintained a high standard of discipline," she said spiritedly. "But high-handedness in the military forces and the same sort of thing with college youngsters are two different categories!"

"High-handedness? You left that one out of your column. Kind of a strong term."

"I heard what you told Chick!"

Rocky eyed her curiously.

"You heard me tell him that it would make no difference if he was captain, he would still need to be taken down some. You heard me tell him that he won't play until he is willing to conform to my orders. Is that being high-handed?"

The color in her cheek heightened. She flashed a glance at him then looked away. She didn't answer his question.

"Young made a crack about you telling him that he must be mistaken," Rocky said. "I sort of gathered that you had been defending me. I intended to thank you but I'm not so sure, after wincing under the veiled tomahawk in your column."

Again Tony Dale flashed a quick look at him and again the flush reddened her cheek. She jerked her gaze straight ahead and her rounded chin lifted.

"I see no reason why I should be called upon to make a report to you," she said. "But I have nothing to hide. I dated Chick Young Saturday night. He was naturally upset over what had happened. I did not defend you. I simply told him that he was talking like an adolescent when he said some rather bitter things that I did not believe had any basis of fact."

Rocky said, "Things like the reason I took him from the game was because I was jealous and afraid that he would show me up for a small-timer in a job too big for me? That I didn't know yet that modern football is a wide-open game and that I didn't have the gumption to hide my ignorance and coast along while Chick Young made everything cozy, maybe?"

HE SAW THE startled amazement in her eyes and knew that he had come mighty near the mark.

"You didn't believe there was any basis of fact in the crazy kid's ranting," Rocky said. "But now you do. You think I'm pulling a Little Caesar line."

They walked perhaps ten strides before Tony Dale answered.

"College kids are different than battle-toughened Marines," she said.

"Look," Rocky said. "I'll go for your college-kids-are-different theme, but after all, they *are* kids. I've never liked coaches that cry character-building the minute they run into a spell of tough going with their teams. But I also don't believe that any man in the coaching game lasts, or gets much personal satisfaction in the long run, who doesn't do his level best to build character.

"I don't mean that you hold meetings and pull sanctimonious speeches. But loyalty and sacrifice and whatever you choose to call the quality of getting along with other men are factors of character. I've never stopped to formulate my philosophy of football coaching, but all that would be in it. As I see it, I wouldn't be doing justice to them if I failed to instill those qualities in the boys under me."

Rocky stopped. A brief grin wrinkled his rugged features and he rubbed a thumb across the cleat scar on his nose.

"Maybe that sounds sort of high-falutin', coming from an ex-Leatherneck," he said. "I'm not so good with words. What I'm

trying to say is that Chick Young needs to learn some things. He's a youngster, headstrong, cocky, and a bit on the selfish side or he wouldn't have dragged Joe Holt with him. I want to win games, sure. I want Young and Holt to help West State to win games. But subordinating everything to one or two individuals in order to win is another matter."

Tony Dale gave Rocky a searching look. Then she sighed and suddenly the little dimple beside her mouth quirked and she smiled.

"I'd still vote that you were more than a little on the dictatorial side," she said. "But I also admit that I wasn't quite fair in writing anything on the basis of hearing only Chick's side. Perhaps a few days on the bench will be good for Chick. Now let's forget him and Joe. I'm sure that the boys will play such a grand game for you against Rallton that you will forgive them anything."

Rocky jerked a startled gaze to the girl. She didn't get this thing at all. He had the gravest doubts that Chick Young would play in the Rallton game, but—well, why waste a perfectly good evening? He could hope that things would work themselves out.

They didn't mention football or Chick Young for a long time. Rocky enjoyed her company more than anything he could remember. Tony Dale was his kind of people and she seemed to reciprocate his feeling. They had a lot of laughs and a good time just walking. Rocky had no idea that he was wading into a mine field when he indirectly brought up the Chick Young matter as they turned into the walk of Tony's sorority house.

"You know," he said, "that Chit Chat you author in the *Daily* is read by everyone on the campus. You swing more influence locally than even the big name columnists of metropolitan papers."

"Thanks. Are you trying to turn my head?"

"I mean it."

Rocky didn't notice that she was regarding him rather sharply.

"And so?" she said. "Newspaper people don't usually rate flattery unless someone wants something."

"You could help me, help the team," he said.

Tony Dale made no reply for an appreciable space then she said:

"Perhaps that is the reason you have been . . . working on me, shall we say?"

Rocky looked up, startled at the flatness of her tone.

"What do you mean?"

"Maybe even an adolescent slant has its points," she said. "The *Daily* lends itself to no personal aggrandizement! Good night, Mr. Steele!"

He reached out almost without conscious volition and clutched her arm.

"Wait a minute, I don't get this! Personal aggrandizement! Working on you! An adolescent slant has its poi . . ." Rocky broke off and the warmth went out of his narrowed brown eyes. His tone was rough when he went on. "Maybe I *do* get it! That guff is more of the bilge Chick Young handed out to you!"

The girl's chin lifted again and her eyes were cobalt ice. She didn't exactly wrench free from Rocky's grasp but she gave that effect.

"Good night, Mr. Steele," she repeated coldly.

She turned and went up the steps of the sorority house.

**R**OCKY WORKED the squad hard in preparation for the Rallton game, stepped up the usual procedure to a short scrimmage during Tuesday workout. When he called off the varsity backfield and Red and Cotton were named, the stocky coach caught a flash of the expression of Chick Young's face.

The rigging he gave Tony was confidently expected to blast me loose from my mooring, Rocky thought grimly. He gave no sign that he was aware that Chick Young was on the field.

"All right, gang, let's get on the ball," Rocky said. "Rallton gave Middle U a terrific battle for three periods last week. Pete, pay special attention to running Red on the cutback."

Pete Bartel was a natural in the field general spot. He mixed plays perfectly, kept the scrubs guessing constantly. Gradually though, the scrub secondary crept closer and closer to the forwards and Red's and Cotton's gains were chopped shorter and shorter. Rocky watched gloomily. Of course, the scrubs had the advantage

of knowing beforehand that there was to be no threat of forwards or tricky hip-dipper stuff, but Rocky knew that the same thing would happen in a real game. He knew, too, that the soundest ground attack would find tough going against a seven man line and a secondary that could disregard defense against open stuff and play tight to the forward wall.

If it hadn't been for the inability of the scrub defense to cage Larson, the varsity offense would have bogged completely inside the twenty. The giant Swedish tackle ripped yawning gaps in the line and Red and Cotton hammered through for a touch-down. But it took six plays.

Rocky sighed. Without Larson the West State line would be a fair defensive wall, but they wouldn't be so hot on offense. You don't win games with just defense.

"Okay," Rocky said. "Play it as a game scrimmage from now on."

He watched the varsity kickoff to the scrubs and he saw Jerry Barnes go down under the kick, hugging the sideline to preclude any sudden dash around the flank, angle in sharply and nail the scrub ball-carrier on the fourteen.

Barnes always made Rocky think of Bennie Oosterbaan when Oosterbaan was an All-American end at Michigan. Barnes had the same cat-like smoothness of movement. Never a lost motion, always relaxed and making difficult plays look easy.

Jerry Barnes owned all the attributes of a superb end.

The scrubs tried two slashes at the line. Each time Larson smashed through the efforts to block him out and dropped the ballcarrier. The scrub quarterback sent a back on a projected sweep around Jerry Barnes' end. It was beautiful to watch Barnes ride with the interference, hand-fight blockers and force the ballcarrier to cut in when the sideline loomed. Barnes split two blockers and cut the legs from under the scrub back and they hadn't gained an inch.

The scrubs were forced to punt and the varsity started in again with power slashes inside and off the tackles. Bartel kept stressing Red on the cutback, but not a single time did the redhead break away for any sizeable gain.

It took the varsity eleven plays to get

to the ten yard line. A little over four yards a try. Not good for a varsity backfield against the scrubs.

For an instant a kind of helpless rage swept Rocky. Blast Chick Young! Young's speed and Holt's power, running the same plays, would reel off twice the yardage that Red and Cotton got. But Rocky was too honest to blame the poor showing of the varsity entirely on the absence of the stars. Rocky came to an abrupt decision. He whistled the scrimmage to a halt and called the squad together.

"You looked better on the cutback, Red," he complimented. "Keep trying that cut-over step. You'll get it."

He gave a word of encouragement to Cotton and told Bartel that his selection of plays had been perfect. He gave Blacky Byrnes a verbal pat on the back for his blocking and he let others know that he had seen and appreciated their efforts.

"We're going to give that Ralton line some bad moments Saturday," he said. "In case their secondary should swing in there to loan the forwards too much support, we're going to prepare an antidote."

Rocky saw the quick eagerness in Bill Moore's eyes as the chubby center swiveled his gaze to him. Rocky nodded.

"Every man will get a mimeographed sheet of the plays and his assignments tonight," Rocky said. "Study them and tomorrow we'll give them a try."

Moore walked off the practice field with Rocky.

"Gosh, Coach," the captain said. "I'm glad you're gonna give us that stuff. It'll make a big difference with the boys. Why, it wouldn't surprise me to have Chick and Joe back in time for Saturday, when they see your stuff unwind!"

Rocky looked sharply at his captain, opened his mouth to say something then thought better of it. It would be a shame to dash the hope that was in Moore's tone.

**T**HERE WAS nothing very startling about the new stuff. Just a pair of simple pass plays, but the varsity received them enthusiastically. There were surprisingly few rough spots to be ironed out. These lads took to the dipsy-doo stuff. Rocky blew his whistle after a time and called off a list of men to don blue jerseys for the scrub eleven.

"Same lineup for the varsity as yesterday," he finished. "We'll go for thirty minutes, regular game conditions. Varsity receives."

"Just a minute, Steele!"

Rocky turned to face Chick Young. For a second's fraction the wild hope that Young was capitulating surged in Rocky. It died when he saw the cocky coolness in Young's eyes. Rocky could feel the tension that suddenly held the squad and he knew that they had been expecting something since last Saturday.

"Well?" Rocky said.

"Are you figuring on using Joe and me in the varsity backfield today?"

Rocky eyed Young. Well, it had to be brought down to cases, he thought. Let's get it over with. Before he could say anything, Young went on easily.

"Because if you're not, how about us working out with the scrubs? After all, you didn't bar us from playing altogether—or did you?"

Rocky recognized the challenge in Young's tone.

"Any barring that has been done, you fellows have done for yourselves," Rocky said. "You know how you can take down the bars."

Young said, "We could help the team, even while serving our penance!"

"Help the team!" Scathing scorn was in Rocky's tone. "I doubt that you know what that means, Young! Get blue jerseys for you and Holt from a manager."

Rocky sat on the bench and his thoughts were bitter. He had made a mistake with Holt and Young. He should have put it up to them squarely that they would obey orders and go along or be summarily dropped from the squad. There was more behind Young's desire to get into the scrimmage than just to help. Rocky had a hunch that things were coming to a head and that it was not Rocky Steele who was shaping them.

**C**OTTON took the kickoff. The tow-head plowed upfield behind good interference. His blockers convoyed him to the twenty-five before the scrubs knocked him over.

Rocky leaned forward on the bench. Bartel sent Cotton on a power smash over guard and it went for six yards.

"Come on, you guys, get in there!" Chick Young yelled from his position. "Show 'em they put their pads on the same as you do!"

Bartel shot Red into a hole behind Larson. The walking-beam shoulders of the big Swede split the scrub line and the red-head went for a first down before Joe Holt hit him.

A spinner with Cotton carrying gained three. The hole had been there but Cotton was a little off-time in hitting it. Bartel carried on a quick opener through the center and then tried the cutback and Red made it another first down on the forty-eight.

"Get in there!" Chick Young was slapping scrub linemen on the seats of their pants. "Let's show these guys who's really varsity around here!"

A scrub backer-up came in fast on the next play and they stopped Cotton for a scant yard. Rocky saw that Bartel noted the scrub secondary had closed in. The varsity came out of the huddle and it looked as though they were pulling the same old line smash.

Cotton faked going into the line but Bartel did not complete the handoff. He masked the ball, half-spun and tossed the leather backward toward Red. The carrot-top in Young's spot faded.

"Pass! Pass!" Chick Young shouted. "Watch it!"

Young tacked onto Jerry Barnes. The lanky end jogged half-heartedly toward the sideline, then abruptly he turned on a burst of speed and was behind Young. Young was amazingly fast and owned the hair-trigger reactions of a natural athlete, but for just a second's fraction Barnes was in the clear.

Barnes was in a spot for a touchdown run but the play went only for a down against the varsity. Red's pass was terrible, yards wide of the mark. Barnes leaped six feet but his fingers barely grazed the pigskin.

The pass served its purpose as a threat, the scrub secondary laid back for three or four plays. The varsity got a first down on the thirty.

"Close in, up there," Chick Young yelled. "We'll take care of the passes. They haven't got a passer anyway!"

It required the full series of downs for

Red and Cotton to batter to the twenty. It took four more, including a short pass attempt that missed by a country mile, for the varsity to get the touchdown.

"We'll receive," Chick Young said. A glint was in his cocky gray eyes. "Let's get that one back, gang—but quick!"

The kickoff was taken by Holt and he circled diagonally wide. Young ran in front of him and they made a bluff at hocus-pocus ball-handling but it was Holt who still had the oval. Larson and Barnes collaborated to dump Holt on the eighteen.

The scrubs came out of the huddle with extra snap and hustle and chattering fight talk. Rocky knew that Chick Young was responsible and he gave Young credit. It takes a leader to steam up a gang of second stringers.

They made a slit for Joe Holt inside tackle and the ace fullback drove for nine yards before Red got him. Now the scrubs really chattered pepper talk. They slammed Holt right back at the same spot and he was over the thirty before they dropped him.

The third sashay started with Young carrying. He slanted toward tackle then veered wide with Joe Holt ahead, apparently to block. Suddenly Young cut sharply as Barnes rode the interference and at the same time Holt threw a block at the varsity end. Jerry Barnes easily avoided the block and drove for Young.

Then the thing broke. That hadn't been a legitimate blocking effort Holt made. He rolled, bounced erect like a tumbler, and just before Barnes hit Young, the halfback flipped a lateral to Joe Holt. Holt tight-roped the chalkmark. Bartel angled across from safety and shoved him out of bounds on the varsity twenty-two.

The scrubs had all the fight in the world now. They lined up aggressively. Rocky Steele sized up the formation and knew what was coming. It came.

It was the identical pass play that the varsity had tried a few minutes before—except that now Chick Young was on the passing end and Joe Holt went out there in the flat.

Holt loafed along and Red had him covered. Then suddenly he didn't have Holt covered. The sturdy fullback didn't look fast but the way he fish-hooked around in back of Red, grabbed the crisp pass that Young hung on the hook, and

hightailed it for the corner of the field, belied his looks. He scored standing up.

"Four plays," someone on the varsity bench said. "Four, count 'em—and it took us twenty-four to travel seven yards less!"

ROCKY STEELE opened the *West State Daily* to the inner page and glanced down the Campus Chit-Chat column. He didn't have to read very far before he found what he suspected in that issue of the college paper.

"The chaos that has characterized football practice this week came to a peak yesterday. Coach Steele seems reluctantly to have arrived at a decision to equip West State with tactical weapons to allow them at least a chance, but he continues to refuse use of the best manpower at his disposal.

"In a thirty minute scrimmage, the varsity succeeded in making two touchdowns. Each was counted only after long marches wherein short gains and constant threat of losing the ball on downs predominated. In the same time, the so-called scrubs—with Chick Young and Joe Holt in the scrub backfield!—scored three touchdowns. Sensational passes or runs by one of the two stars accounted for each of the scrub scores.

"Can Coach Steele afford personal discrimination? West State campus expects to be represented by the best men available. Need we say more? . . ."

Rocky's rugged features were set as he finished Tony Dale's column. That the girl was sincere, he did not doubt. But also he did not doubt that she was going to cause plenty of trouble with such sentiments. His thoughts went back to the previous evening when Tony had phoned.

"I'm calling to learn what you intend to do about Chick Young and Joe Holt," Tony had said.

"What more is there to do about them?"

"After this afternoon, you surely know that you need Chick and Joe in the varsity backfield!"

"I've known that from the beginning."

The phone had been silent for a space. Then Tony Dale said, "This is for publication: I ask you candidly whether Young and Holt will play in the Rallton game?"

"It is entirely up to them."

"But you can't punish the whole school,

all the alumni, for personal reasons!"

Rocky had sighed. She simply did not get this thing.

"Young and Holt know how they can avoid punishment, if that's what you choose to call it," he said.

"That is all you have to say?"

"That's all I have to say."

A SIZABLE gathering of students were in the stands of West State Stadium as Rocky came from the gym. Probably due to the Chit-Chat item. Well, campus interest in the team was okay. If only Tony Dale would get the right slant, she could bring Young and Holt to time in short order. Rocky whistled the squad together after a period of loosening-up work.

"No tough scrimmage today," he said. "We'll brush up our offensive stuff in dummy scrimmage, take a final look at Rallton formations, and go through three or four kickoff setups."

He was puzzled by the restlessness of the squad. Players looked uneasily at each other and furtive glances were thrown in the direction of Chick Young. A cocky confidence was on the star halfback's face.

"Varsity take the ball," Rocky said. "Run through all the stuff we have, Pete."

The hesitant uneasiness of the squad grew. Rocky glanced sharply at Bill Moore. The captain's round face had lost its usual placidity.

"Just who is the varsity?" The question came clearly from Chick Young. "There would seem to be a doubt, after yesterday!"

Rocky flicked his gaze around the group. So this was it, huh? Everybody there seemed to know what was happening except Rocky Steele.

"The men who are willing to accept orders and put their team above personal pettiness are the varsity." Rocky looked steadily at Chick Young. "Does that include you?"

Young flushed, said, "My idea has always been that the *best* men made the varsity. Joe and I are ready to go, Steele—we proved that yesterday. And the boys want us. I'm asking you flatly whether we are starting Saturday?"

"I'll go along with the men who have been loyal," Rocky said. "You and Holt

know that you will be welcome when, and if, you are ready to subordinate Young and Holt to the best interests of the team. Until then you stay on the bench.

Some feather-brained idiot in the stands chose that moment to let out a yell: "We want Chick Young!"

Young flashed a triumphant look at Rocky as more students joined in the cry.

"Let's go, Pete," Rocky said quietly. "The varsity backfield is unchanged."

"But the line is changed!" Young said. "And how! Come on, Jerry, Swede. All for one and one for all! That should appeal to the Iron Duke, he goes for the copy-book maxims!"

Doubt was on the broad square-cut face of Swede Larson. He met Rocky's gaze for a moment and the honest blue eyes of the big tackle were troubled. Jerry Barnes didn't look at the coach. Barnes half-pushed the Swede over to the side of Chick Young. The Big Four stood apart from the squad.

"We're sticking together, Steele," Young said. "We *all* play Saturday—or none of us play!"

Rocky was momentarily stunned. Wild thoughts kaleidoscoped through his mind. Now he *was* out on a limb. His jaw set. He was right, blast it. He eyed Barnes and Larson. His gaze swept the rest of the squad.

"Anyone else who wants to throw in with these fine examples of West State spirit!" he bit out.

Silence.

"You'll be at left end, Brown," Rocky nodded at a lanky lad. "Leigh, you're in at tackle beside Brown. All right, Pete, get going. We've still got to practice."

ROCKY CUT across behind the Library and down the hill to the Gym. West State owned a beautiful campus and this particular route was dotted with great maples and elms and oaks. Rocky noticed a placard tacked to one of the trees and went closer to read it.

ALL CAMPUS MASS MEETING!  
West State Men and Women Attention!  
Be at the Gym tonight at 8 o'clock.

Important Football Rally!

Rocky thought it was odd that nothing had been said to him about the rally. They usually wanted the coach and the captain

and members of the varsity squad to say a few words.

His rooms were in a house just off the campus less than a block from the gym. That night the hubbub of students gathering for the rally was clearly audible. He went to a window and saw that the meeting had overflowed the gym. A huge crowd was milling about on the practice field.

Two students carrying a banner came from the gym and in the light from the doorway Rocky saw the lettering: DOWN WITH THE IRON DUKE! Rocky grabbed his hat.

As he pushed through the fringe of the crowd, Rocky heard some youngster speaking from a bench on the slope from the gym doors. He was fairly screeching.

"... And I say that we are not going to stand for it! Chick Young and Joe Holt and Jerry Barnes and Swede Larson are West State students. Are they to be barred from carrying the West State banner because the Iron Duke? . . ."

The crowd roar that welled up from the students drowned the speaker's words momentarily. Rocky started pushing through the crowd.

"... We call upon Bill Moore, as captain, and the rest of the varsity to take action. It is their responsibility as much as Steele's! We demand that the Big Four be reinstated! We . . ."

Rocky spun the soap-box orator around, not too gently. Rocky said grimly, "I think a word from me is indicated at this point!"

"It's the coach!"

"The Iron Duke himself!"

"Anyway, the guy's got guts!"

Rocky disregarded the comments that buzzed like wildfire through the crowd as he was recognized. He climbed on the bench.

"This is your show," Rocky said. "I wasn't invited and I don't intend to stay. Some time ago I reminded the Big Four that I have been hired to coach West State football. I intend to continue to do so—without the aid of a gang of campus rabble-rousers! Two things must be made clear: no man has been barred from carrying West State's banner—and the full responsibility for refusing to be coerced into taking Young and Holt back to the regular backfield is strictly mine. Bill Moore and the boys of the varsity squad who have

remained loyal to me—and to their school—are in no sense responsible!"

Rocky swept his gaze over the crowd. He thought that he saw the Big Four in the background. The coach said no more. The crowd parted to let his stocky figure through.

The rally broke up shortly after Rocky was back in his room. A knock came on his door and when he answered there was Bill Moore and most of the varsity crowded into the hall.

"Coach," Moore blurted, "We want you to know that we're with you! I've been a sap! I guess Chick Young's shine blinded me but this pulling Larson and Barnes into his baby act, and stirring up a bunch of dizzy campus cruds is going too far. I told 'em off, after you left."

"I'm speaking for the squad when I say that tomorrow we're going to show these Big Four lugs," the captain went on. "We're going to play better than we know how!"

Somebody in the back growled, "Maybe a few fatheads would be improved if they had some sense punched into them!"

"Nothing like that," Rocky said. "Save your fight for Rallton."

He added mentally: we'll need it. Something inside him swelled at this action of his squad, and he knew that fight and spirit could work wonders. But Rocky held no illusions. Without any of the Big Four, the varsity was apt to be just eleven willing lads in West State uniforms.

**B**ILL MOORE won the toss and following Rocky's orders, the chubby captain elected to receive.

"Give 'em all we've got right off the bat," Rocky instructed Pete Bartel. "If we score, play the old army game."

The quarterback nodded, glanced sourly down the bench to the end where sat the Big Four. Chick Young and his trio were not exactly receiving the homage that would be paid to martyred idols.

Rocky was glad that he hadn't forbade them to dress out. He'd thought when he came into the locker room and found the quartet dressing that they had a lot of brass and his inclination had been to tell them bluntly that there was no room on the bench for them. Still, he wasn't ready to give up on the Big Four and forbidding

them to dress out was tantamount to asking for their equipment.

He'd heard Bill Moore say grimly, "You prima donnas have a fat chance of playing! Why don't you get next to yourselves!"

"We'll be ready when Steele calls for help to keep you from being swamped," Chick Young had replied.

Rocky thought that there wasn't quite the cocky confidence in Young's tone that it had carried heretofore and the chorus of bronx cheers from the squad was music to Rocky's ears.

Bill Moore shook a clenched fist as the referee's whistle blew. "Let's go!" he yelled. "Eat 'em alive, gang!"

The kickoff was a booming end-over-ender straight down the middle. Cotton gathered in the pigskin on the five and Blacky Byrnes cut down a Rallton lad who had rushed down under the kick. Cotton swung in behind his blockers as West State linemen dropped back and then swept upfield.

Rocky's fingers bit hard into the bench. His varsity was putting out sharp blocking, mowing down tacklers. Rocky swiftly scanned the pattern, saw that there was a chance for Cotton to go all the way. A runback of the initial kickoff for a touchdown would do a lot for these kids. Rocky's pulse hammered as he saw the last Rallton man with a shot at Cotton edging across and Leigh bearing down on the defensive man.

Leigh threw his block an instant too soon. The Rallton tackler slipped it, banged into Cotton and the towhead was spilled on the Rallton forty-five.

"The way to go, Cotton!" Bill Moore yelled. "The old jinegar! Keep rolling, gang!"

Today was the first that Moore had given out with the old pepper talk. He sounded like a leader should.

Pete Bartel sized up the defense. Rallton played a seven man line and a tight box secondary. Rocky held his breath on the bench as West State hustled from the huddle. Pete was calling the short pass out in the flat zone. It was a smart play—if it came off.

It came off.

Brown was a long, long way from being the offensive end that Jerry Barnes was,

but the lanky substitute got out there in the flat and he was under the wobbly pass that Red heaved. He took the ball on the enemy thirty and he ambled to the twelve before the safety got him.

That play threw Rallton momentarily into confusion. Their scouts no doubt had reported that West State lacked a passing attack. Pete Bartel took full advantage of their confusion. He shot Red off-tackle from the same setup that he'd run the pass and Red went for six yards. Pete popped the carrot-top right back inside the same hole. They smothered him on the four. Now the Rallton defense was digging in.

The wily quarterback suckered them beautifully for the score. He sent Red on an apparently orthodox drive at the tackle, faked the handoff, faked a second time to Cotton tearing by on the other side, completed his spin and sneaked along behind the line. He sneaked all the way around the flank before Rallton got wise that he had the ball. Pete beat the Rallton defensive halfback in a race for the corner of the end zone and dove over the goal line.

**TOUCHDOWN!**

West State stands went crazy. This was more like it! This was the way West State teams did!

The slender kicking specialist went out there and pumped the try-for-point over the bar and a juicy 7 went on the scoreboard for West State. Now all they had to do was hold Rallton.

**R**ALLTON received, came back to the twenty-five and their quarterback began probing for weak spots. They played a double wing and the lad in the tailback spot reminded Rocky of Chick Young. He carried the brunt of the Rallton attack but another thick-shouldered back demonstrated with two yards needed for first down, that he could crack a line.

Rallton moved upfield steadily. They got a second first down in midfield. Leigh crashed through and spilled a tailback for a two yard loss.

"Atta kid!" Bill Moore yelled. "Sock it to 'em!"

But on the next play Rallton neatly mouse-trapped the green tackle and their flash sped through the yawning hole. Blacky Byrnes knocked him out of bounds on the West State thirty.

Rallton went to work on Leigh. They made three outside his tackle. Three more inside. Four yards and a first down on a cutback into the same spot. Bill Moore slapped the big kid on the rump. Leigh dug in. Rallton made only three yards in two tries through him and it was third down on the seven. They tried the cutback again and Leigh slowed the ballcarrier enough that Blacky Byrnes hit him hard. The pigskin squirted from the Rallton man's grasp.

Bill Moore's pudgy body was curled over the oval when the referee dug to the bottom of the pile and warm satisfaction flowed through Rocky. It had to be a fighting ballclub to take the ball on downs inside that ten yard mark.

Bartel remembered Rocky's instructions. He ran Red and Cotton into the line for eight yards in three tries. Then Pete punted. Three into the line and a kick, the old army game. The punt went out of bounds on the Rallton thirty.

Rallton ground back. The power of their running game wore on the West State line. Leigh and Brown bore the brunt of the attack and they gave ground. Bartel intercepted a pass on his own twelve to halt the second scoring drive.

Three smashes into the line and Bartel angled a wicked bounding kick out of bounds on the Rallton sixteen.

Rallton roared back. Now their quarterback had located the vulnerable spots. He hammered at Leigh. He sent the tailback threat sweeping around Brown's flank. He mixed in passes to Cotton's area and he tricked Red into going after a decoy while another receiver cut across fast and took a zipping forward good for a first down on the eighteen as the period ended.

Rallton scored in the first minute of the second quarter. The touchdown was made through Leigh's tackle. They kicked the point easily and another 7 went on the scoreboard.

Rocky Steele sat there and watched this team of his battle their hearts out in the remaining minutes of the first half. Pete Bartel discarded defensive tactics, went after a West State score. But there was no confusion in the Rallton defense now. They smelled the headlines of an upset win. Their secondary came in close to the line and cut down smashes. They rushed

Red on two pass attempts and neither was even close.

"Nothing to worry about!" A Rallton back yelled. "Pour in there!"

West State was forced to punt and Rallton brought the ball back to the forty. In five plays they drove to the West State twelve. An off-side set them back and Pete Bartel saved a touchdown with a desperate leap to bat down a pass.

West State's offensive was throttled again. Rallton took the punt and began that inexorable drive. Now they were confident, it was only a matter of time. West State battled back furiously. The half-time gun banged with Rallton in possession and the ball on the West State six.

Quietly Rocky went among the weary players in the dressing room between halves. He pointed out mistakes, handed out praise.

"You're giving out with everything you have and you played a good, sharp team even," he said when it was time to go out again. "I haven't a criticism. I'm proud of you!"

"Up and at 'em, gang!" Bill Moore cried. "We're better than they are!"

Rocky sighed. Good fighting talk, but it takes more than fight talk to score touchdowns.

**R**ALLTON received to start the third period and it was hammer, slash, batter! Soon they were knocking on the touchdown door again. Bill Moore submarined under the Rallton center and there was a big pile-up on the ten yard line. Moore had the ball when officials unscrambled the pile.

Rocky breathed again, looked at the clock. Less than three minutes had elapsed. He must have looked at the clock a score of times that third period. It seemed to develop creeping paralysis. Four times Rallton drove deep into West State territory. That they did not make four touchdowns was almost incredible. They powered through the West State defense almost at will.

The fourth period started. Rallton had made yardage enough to be leading by five touchdowns. Rocky didn't know just when the little voice inside him began to plague.

*Through Leigh again, see? Swede Larson*

*would mangle that Rallton tackle smash!*

Blacky Byrnes dashed over and batted a pass out of the hands of a Rallton receiver in the end zone after Brown had been fooled again.

*Nobody would ever sucker Jerry Barnes like that!*

Red fozzled a pass attempt when Brown was in the clear.

*Young or Holt would have dropped that ball right in the basket!*

Rocky shook himself. Fool! The Big Four had laid down an ultimatum, they didn't want to play unless they called the turn!

*They're in uniform. You could reward these kids who are battling their hearts out!*

Rocky was no more than human. He hadn't a doubt that the roistering quartet could go in there and set Rallton back on their heels and change the 7 on the board opposite West State to 14 or 21 or more and the temptation was powerful.

He came awful close to giving in. He wasn't being fair to the lads out there battling against odds. Then he remembered Bill Moore and the boys coming to his rooms last night. "We're going to play better than we know how! . . . We're going to show those lugs!"

Rocky abruptly realized that he'd be letting the boys down if he gave in to the Big Four now. He sat there glumly and watched Rallton crash and batter his team.

It seemed again and again that only a miracle could stave off a Rallton score. But always that dogged, battling gang of weary kids came up with the miracle. Once they took the ball on downs one single solitary inch from the payoff stripe.

Three minutes to go now. Rallton sent in fresh men. They roared inside West State's twenty. They got a first down on the nine. It seemed that the light on the scoreboard took minutes to make each one-second jump. Now it was the final thirty seconds.

Rallton hurried. Blacky Byrnes buttressed Leigh at tackle and they stopped the surging attack on the two. One more play. Rallton threw everything they had at the green tackle. Twenty-two bodies clashed in bruising sweating panting turmoil. The field judge fired his gun. Officials burrowed into the pile—and the ball was inches short of a touchdown!

Rocky stared glumly at the scoreboard figures. West State, 7; Rallton, 7. He knew that Rallton should have won, that his kids deserved all the credit in the world for fighting them off, but—. He sighed. He was thinking of next week and the next and the weeks afterward.

Rallton was traditionally the weakest football school in the conference. Middle U had surged to a three-touchdown win over them last week—and Middle U was coming up for West State the next Saturday. Middle U, Stratton U, Grandley, Aggies, and East State. Five really tough teams coming on successive weekends.

It was a bleak prospect.

**R**OCKY CALLED the squad together Monday after they were loosened.

"No speech," he said. "You've all earned a rest, but we've got to forego it. We've got to do about three week's work in one to get ready for Middle U."

He sent the guards and tackles to the blocking dummies. He gave instructions to the ends. He told Red and Cotton and Blacky what to do. He gave everybody instructions except the Big Four. He ignored them.

"What do you want us to do, Steele? Practice adagio steps for a floorshow at the Junior Prom?"

Chick Young attempted to swagger, to be funny, but an undertone of worry underlay his words. Rocky eyed the four levelly, shrugged.

"Maybe that isn't such a bad idea. You might as well *be* bad actors as play it. Frankly, I don't care what you do!"

Chick Young flushed. The other three shot quick glances at him. Larson rumbled, "All right, do it. You told us that you'd settle this thing and . . ."

"Shut up," Young cut in. He turned to Rocky. "What do you mean, you don't care what we do?"

"Just that," Rocky said quietly. "You don't need coaching. You know more than I do about football. You need someone to pamper and feed your egos. I suggest that you go off by yourselves and take turns telling each other how good you are! But I really don't care what you do!"

"You're crazy, Steele! You're kicking away any chance you have to go places in the conference. You need us!"

Rocky surveyed the four for a space. He noted that Larson's big frame moved restlessly and that Barnes was eyeing Young peculiarly.

"Any squad can always use a pair of triple-threat backs," Rocky admitted. "And our line would be a lot more potent with a rip-roaring tackle and a pass-grabbing end who can also turn in a bang-up defensive game. But you're wrong in saying we need you."

He eyed Young then and Rocky's lips curled.

"We may not win a conference game, but we'll always have eleven men in there giving out with the best they have. There is no place on this team for school-boy sulkers!"

"Does that mean we are to turn in our equipment?"

Again Rocky's lips curled.

"You'd like me to say yes, wouldn't you? Then you could run to your newspaper gal and bawl your head off that you were being discriminated against! No, if you turn in your equipment, you'll do it on your own initiative."

"What do you expect from us?" The query came quietly from Jerry Barnes. "Let's have it all out in the open."

Rocky shot a keen look at the end and for a second's fraction hope leaped in the coach. Then it died. He saw that Barnes wasn't really cracking.

"I don't expect anything but grief," Rocky said bitterly. "But if you want it at all, my terms are the same. Any man who is prepared to give his best for the team—and that includes following instructions even though he might privately think they are wrong—will get fair and just treatment and the job he shows he can earn."

Rocky gazed momentarily at each man then and his jaw was set when he added, "But understand that when you come back it has to be on my terms."

A silence held for a moment then Young laughed without mirth.

"When we come back," he said. "It won't be us that does the crawling! Come on, gang. If he wants to stew in his own juice we can keep in condition to save something after he's boiled dry!"

Then, following Young, the four men turned and went out.

ROCKY PUT on pads and demonstrated backfield play to Red and Cotton that week. He went on the opposite side of the scrimmage line and showed Brown and Leigh all the tricks that a man picks up in ten years of grid warfare. All the while he sweated with the youngsters, the back of Rocky's mind was conscious that down at the far end of the practice field the Big Four went through their paces. Four swashbuckling aces that could change a mediocre West State varsity into a band tough to beat.

The practice field presented an odd sight. At one end Rocky and the varsity slaving, straining, working at fundamentals. At the other, Young Holt, Barnes and Swede Larson cavorting, throwing the ball around, occasionally practicing blocks on one another.

Rocky had never been more immersed in his coaching. He was so intent and desperate in trying to whip the squad into some sort of shape that he was not aware of the distinct coldness that had developed toward the Big Four. He ate, slept, and dreamed football but it all had to do with how he could ready his team. He had no time even to read Tony Dale's column in the *Daily*.

He knew at the close of Thursday practice that West State was not a team ready to cope with Middle U. The boys would fight. They would give one hundred percent. But Middle U had essentially the same powerhouse that had run over West State the previous season for five touchdowns—and the Big Four had been in there for West State that day.

Prospects were that Rocky Steele and West State supporters were in for a bleak Saturday afternoon.

EXIGENCIES of the schedule brought Middle U to West State Stadium early this season but the great concrete memorial structure was packed. It was always packed for West State—Middle U games. It was a classic in the same category as Yale—Harvard; Army—Navy; Michigan—Minnesota.

Middle U won the toss and elected to receive. Brown and Leigh teamed to drop the ballcarrier on the twelve and West State stands yelled wildly. But in a few seconds it was the Middle U side that was

on its feet and roaring their marching chant.

Middle was a big rugged team. They rolled an off-tackle drive at Leigh on the first play from scrimmage and it looked as though they threw everyone except the trainer in front of the ballcarrier. Brown was boxed out, two blockers gave Leigh the old high-low treatment and a guard, pulled out of the line to spearhead the interference, scythed the legs from under Blacky Byrnes.

The ballcarrier lugged the pigskin over the twenty-five before Pete Bartel dropped him.

Again that thundering herd rolled Leigh aside. It was another first down for Middle on the thirty-six. Leigh changed tactics and charged across fast. He was neatly cut down by a blocker and the play steamed through a wide hole in his tackle for six yards.

Rocky sat helplessly on the bench. There was nothing he could do. It would take a super-tackle to shatter that Middle juggernaut. A tackle like Swede Larson, Rocky thought bitterly.

"Roll, Middle, Roll! Roll, Middle, Roll!"

The triumphant marching chant of Middle U beat down on Rocky's ears. And Middle rolled.

Six, eight, ten yards at a crack. Sheer, raw power drove West State back and back. Bill Moore called a time out when Middle got a first down on the West State ten. Rocky could see the pudgy captain giving out with fight talk to the sprawled and panting West State men.

They made Middle fight for every inch of that ten yards. Blacky Byrnes and Red tore in and backed Leigh and somehow stopped that devastating power drive for only a yard gain. They held again for three. Third down and five.

When the blue-jersied herd surged once more inside tackle and the white-clad wall held, Rocky began to hope that the fighting kids would stall Middle as they had Rallton. It was fourth down and three yards to a touchdown.

Middle came out of the huddle and started what looked like the same off-tackle smash. West State converged at the point of attack and for the first time the white wall pushed back the blue line. But the referee's whistle shrilled and he ex-

tended his arms high above his head and the Middle U stands exploded.

TOUCHDOWN!

The Middle quarterback had faked the handoff to a line smasher and slipped around the opposite side unmolested.

Rocky sighed. This was going to be bad. A world of power and a quarterback cagy enough to know when to shift from the straight driving offense.

MIDDLE kicked and the West State offense looked drab and pale in comparison to the slashing drive Middle had exhibited. Red and Cotton pounded away, made gains, but it was in chunks of three or four yards.

Middle played a shifting defense. For a time the lad who called defense signals was wary, shuttled between a five man line with a three-tiered secondary and a loose 6-2-2-1. But as it became apparent that West State had no open threat, Middle shifted to a seven man line and a diamond secondary with the front man roving to any point of attack.

They stalled West State, forced Bartel to punt. The kick went out of bounds on the Middle eighteen.

Middle started right back. Now they mixed in spinners and quick openers and once they caught Red badly out of position on a reverse. It looked as though Middle was toying with Rocky's team. They came leisurely downfield. They had the ball inside the twenty as the first quarter ended.

Before two minutes of the second period had passed, the figures on the scoreboard changed to Middle, 13; West State, 0. They went over on a beautifully executed cutback over guard when the play had started as a smash outside tackle.

Methodically they added the point and it was 14-0. It looked as though Middle could score as they pleased.

Rocky sat there grimly and knew the inevitableness of defeat. His kids were fighting, giving everything they had. They were good game kids. They deserved something better than the prospect of a dismal season of weekly beatings.

The second period wore on and something began to wear on Rocky's mind. It wasn't the kids who had failed, it was he. Somehow he should have been able to keep

the Big Four in line. Rocky had never quit in his life, but he knew he couldn't sit here on the bench and watch those kids tear their hearts out. He'd give in. He'd tell Chick Young that he had won, to get out there with his gang. He'd write his resignation and send it to the Athletic Board that night.

Rocky glanced at the clock. Three minutes left to the half. He'd tell the Big Four and the squad at intermission. He'd . . .

"I don't care what you say! I've had all I can take!"

Rocky looked up at the interruption to his thoughts and saw Swede Larson jerk his arm away from the grasp of Chick Young. Young's eyes held a panic as he grabbed again for the big fellow's arm.

"Sit down, you square-headed dope! I tell you everything will be all right. Just sit tight and . . ."

"Square-headed dope, huh!" Swede Larson's blue eyes glared. "I've *been* a square-headed dope to listen to you! But not anymore!"

Larson was suddenly in front of Rocky Steele. The big fellow gulped.

"I was wrong, Coach! I want to play football, any way you say! I can't sit here and watch them pour it on that Leigh kid! That Middle guy opposite the kid thinks he's All-American. Shove me in there, Coach! I'll take any medicine you ladle out, only let me get in there and ram some of their own stuff down that Middle gang's gullet!"

Rocky sat there stunned. It was hard believe. Why he'd been on the verge of admitting inability to get along without the Big Four, ready to plead with them to come back on any terms!

He flicked a glance down the bench. Chick Young was arguing furiously with Jerry Barnes. The tall end was on his feet.

"Swede's got the right slant," Barnes said. "I'm sorry I ever went for this thing. Call it that I can't take the gentle barbs we've been handed lately. But most of all I want to play football. I'm eating whatever crow necessary to get in there!"

Then Jerry Barnes was in front of Rocky. Barnes met Rocky's eyes steadily.

"Times two on everything the Swede says for me," Barnes said. "I don't de-

serve it, but I'd certainly appreciate a crack at that Middle stuff!"

Rocky was abruptly weak as a dishrag. He waved the tackle and end out on the field.

"Report in for Leigh and Brown," he said. "They're practically out on their feet."

THE WEST State stands were quiet a space as Barnes and Larson ran from the bench then a wild yell that carried a thread of hope welled from the West State side.

Middle had possession on the West State twenty-five. They rolled that awesome power shot at the tackle, but this time they ran into something. The giant Larson hurled one blocker from his path, split the pair in front of the ballcarrier and staggered the man with the pigskin. Jerry Barnes had waited as a good end should before committing himself but when he saw the man with the oval cut in, Barnes launched his tackle and the staggering ballcarrier quit staggering.

The play gained exactly nothing.

Middle couldn't believe it. They slammed the same play at Larson again. The Swede roared into the interference and stripped the ballcarrier bare. Larson made the tackle himself. He grinned widely at the Middle tackle who had been having a field day against Leigh.

"Third and ten!" the referee shouted.

Now Middle tried the cutback. Big Swede smeared the man with the ball before he could complete his cutover step. Fourth down and still ten to go.

Middle ran a play to the opposite side, trying to get away from Larson. They got away from the Swede but Jerry Barnes followed that play across so fast that he cut down the runner from behind and West State took the ball on downs on their own twenty.

They still retained possession and they were hammering slowly upfield behind a wild man at tackle when the halftime gun banged.

"Brown and Leigh have earned the right to start this period," Rocky said at the end of intermission. "I want you all to know that I'm not forgetting who stuck when the going was roughest. But they are both bushed. They ask that Barnes

and Larson go back. There is nothing I can say. Middle is the sharpest club we've met and we won't meet any that is more powerful. They're good."

He didn't raise his voice nor glance toward the remaining pair of rebels.

"They would be tough to take even if we were at full strength."

**T**HAT THIRD period was rough rugged fare from the opening whistle. Middle kicked off to Cotton and the tow-head was hit hard by two men on the fifteen. Cotton got up slowly and Rocky knew that the stocky kid was plenty shaken by that bone-rattling tackle.

Pete Bartell called his plays cagily. He served notice early on Middle that with Barnes in the ballgame they couldn't count on no passes. Barnes made a spectacular catch of an uncertain heave from Red and snaked eighteen yards before they nailed him. Middle went to a five man line and diamond secondary with one man delegated to watch Barnes.

Red and Cotton hammered at the line. There was always a hole at Larson's tackle and West State slowly ground up-field. They got a first down on the Middle thirty but Cotton did not get up when the referee took the ball.

That does it, Rocky thought. The kid is all through. He started out on the field when abruptly someone tugged at his arm.

"I'm licked, Coach." Joe Holt said. "I've been whipped from the start, only I didn't have sense enough to know it. Chick and the rest of us have been wrong. I—I feel small enough to crawl through the eyelets in my shoes! Coach, I want to go out there in Cotton's spot—on your terms!"

Rocky said gruffly, "Report to the umpire."

Holt was fresh and raring to go and Pete Bartel made full use of him. The bruising fullback hammered four straight times at that tough Middle line and it was a first down on the four.

The West State stands billowed a plethora of wild yells on the next play. Everybody could see that Bartel faked the hand-off to Holt and slipped the ball to Red. The carrot-top hit the short side of the line like a scared jack-rabbit and cantered untouched into the end zone.

The slender kicking specialist went out and did his stuff and the board showed Middle, 14; West State, 7.

It got tougher and tougher on the field after that touchdown. Middle discovered that their power shattered itself on Swede Larson and the broad shoulders of Joe Holt. They had to kick. But the tough Middle line smothered Holt and Red and Bartel. Time drained away until only a minute of the third period remained. In that minute West State struck unexpectedly.

It was just the simple pass play with Joe Holt pitching and Jerry Barnes ambuling out there to grab the toss. But it was Holt and Barnes. It was well-nigh perfection, stemming from a fake tackle smash and everything going just right. Barnes grabbed the ball on the thirty and no Middle man came close to getting him.

Then disaster struck West State. Somebody missed an assignment and a rangy Middle lineman broke through and blocked the try-for-point.

It was 14-13 for Middle.

Rocky gripped the bench wood hard. Was history going to repeat? Were they destined to lose again by one point to Middle?

**M**IDDLE concentrated on bottling Holt as the fourth period started and they did a job. West State couldn't get an attack going. Even with three of the Big Four in there, and giving out, the stuff Rocky had drilled into them looked slow and dreary and impotent. That lone point loomed bigger and bigger.

"If only we had another threat in there so they couldn't afford to concentrate on Holt!" Rocky moaned.

Someone down the bench growled, "Yeah. Quote: Maybe there are foxholes in grid warfare, too, and men in foxholes don't make their own rules! Unquote."

Then abruptly Chick Young was in front of Rocky and pouring incoherent words at the coach. Selfish dope, and rotter, and fathead stuffed-shirt were some of them and a lot of stuff about not figuring he was any better than guys in foxholes. Young's mouthings didn't make much sense to Rocky but it made sense when Young pleaded:

"Send me in there, Coach! You've got

to give me a chance to prove that . . . that . . . well, you've got to send me in there! I'll follow orders!"

The stands must have recognized the 13 on Young's jersey but oddly there was no great cheer when he raced out to the Umpire. Red got the cheers. Rocky didn't get this at all.

He should have felt an exultation that the Big Four had capitulated. He didn't. He only felt an anxiety. Even with the Big Four in there, Middle was still ahead and now it was a turmoil of battering, slamming blocks and tackles out there.

Chick Young and Joe Holt couldn't get away. Middle had slowed Larson by putting two men on him. They were battling to protect that slim one-point margin.

The light on the electric scoreboard clock moved inexorably. Six minutes', five minutes, three minutes left to play. West State's ball on their own thirty-five. Chick Young tried a sweep around the flank Jerry Barnes guarded. Middle floated with the play, refused to give ground. They forced Young out of bounds after a scant three yard gain.

Suddenly then Rocky called: "Red! Go out there for Young!"

Chick Young came to the bench, white-faced. There was no cockiness in him. He was almost in tears.

"I didn't do anything, Coach! I swear I was only trying to . . ."

"Shut up and listen," Rocky cut in. "You and Barnes and Holt have been practicing together all week. Are you sharp enough on the hipper-dipper stuff to go back out there and catch Middle on it!"

Young stared at the coach. "My gosh!" he ejaculated. "I thought you didn't believe in razzle-dazzle!"

"I never said that. Fuzz is necessary—in its place—and this is the place. Go out there now and tell Pete that I want you and Holt and Barnes to pull the same play that cost you the ball game last year against these guys!"

West State lined up in punt formation with Young in the hole. The snapback went direct to Holt and then the hocus-pocus unwound as though they had rehearsed it all year. Holt faked handing the ball to Young as the tailback shot past him toward Larson's tackle. Young slid

along behind the line as Holt abruptly spun and faded back. Middle linemen charged through and bore down on Holt but they couldn't keep him from whipping a lateral across to Young.

While this maneuvering went on, Jerry Barnes raced wide into the flat zone on the opposite side. A middle man belatedly awoke to the danger and yelled, "Pass! Pass!" but even as he yelled Chick Young bored a spiral diagonally across that led Barnes just right.

Jerry Barnes cradled the ball in the relaxed basket of his big hands and sped down the sideline with not a dark jersied man near him.

That was the ballgame. Middle had time to run three plays after the kickoff and Larson and Barnes and Holt and Young were in on smothering all of them. The gun barked and the scoreboard registered a lovely sight.

West State, 19; Middle U, 13!

**R**OCKY HAD slapped every man on the back and handed out praise unstintingly. They were heading toward the ramp to the dressing room and oddly Chick Young was beside the coach. Rocky saw Tony Dale standing by the gate. He suddenly felt like an empty old man. It was a kid's world, after all.

"I'll not be keeping you." Rocky nodded toward Tony and started away. "There she is, waiting for you."

Chick Young hesitated briefly, then swung the coach around.

"You're a tough, hard rooster, Coach," Young said. "You're the kind of sideline tyrant that guys like me need and I'm for you a hundred percent from here on in. But you certainly are a stupe where girls are concerned!"

Rocky stared uncomprehendingly.

"You been reading the *Daily* lately?" Young asked. Rocky shook his head.

"The way that gal's cut me down in that column!" Young grinned wryly. "The foxhole crack she got off yesterday really put the screws on me."

Young gave the stocky coach a half-shove in the direction of Tony Dale.

"She's for you, Coach," Young said. "That's for sure. And my money is riding on Tony to gentle even a sideline tyrant!"

# Phantom In The Flat Zone

By Bill Heuman

**The wise boys thought the Japs had blocked big Ed McBride out of football for good—until he called on a fighting heart and hung that goal-post miracle on the scoreboard.**

**Y**OU SIT UP high in the upper tier because you can see the plays unfold up there. Down below, in the six dollar box seats, you see twenty-two guys pushing each other around, with a yellow football intermixed, falling down and getting up. It was like the army—riding in a Sherman tank. You saw other tanks, infantrymen, pill boxes, dust, noise, confusion, and you had your small part to play. You concentrated upon that, but the generals sat in the upper tier, and they watched the play unfold; they could see what each move meant.

Ed McBride, former Cougar left end, watched the tough Mustang backs going around that wing position he'd occupied himself four years back. The Mustangs were running three man interference in front of the ball carrier, and they had the kid at the position crazy.

"I got a hole at left end," George Brown, Cougar owner and coach, had told Ed when he had his army discharge. "They're liable to run us right out of the league this year, kid."

"That's not good," Ed McBride had agreed. You needed good wing men these days; you needed them on the offense to catch passes, and you needed them badly to break up this fast-running game they were playing in the pro loop.

"Now," George Brown had smiled, "you look like you're in pretty good shape, Ed."

"No football," Ed said quietly, and that had ended it. He wasn't too old for this game. He'd been twenty-four when he joined up, and he was twenty-eight now. He'd spent two years in a Jap prison camp and he'd learned to live on a cupful of rice a day; it hadn't built up his weight, but it had made him tough inside, and he'd been rated a pretty tough customer at left end even before he went into the army.

Ed watched the Cougars take possession of the ball on their own twenty-three. Tommy King, the slim, hatchet-faced quarterback who'd played with Ed three years at State and three more as a pro was calling the boys into the huddle.

Tommy hadn't changed. He was the same cool, sandy-haired man, pegging those passes over the center of the line, calling his plays, making few mistakes, always calm, always collected.

"What do you do?" Ed McBride asked himself, "when you come home to find your best pal married to your best girl, and you listed as killed in action?"

Tommy had married Kay Allen. They had a three months old baby now, very cute, very tiny. Ed had held it in his arms and grinned. He said that it had Tommy's pointed chin, and Kay's violet eyes. He said a lot of other things he'd forgotten now, but he had kept talking, and he had put up a good enough front because nobody knew what to say. Tommy couldn't apologize for marrying her and Kay was a mother now, Tommy's wife.

Even when Ed had been going out with her, Tommy coming along as their best friend on occasions, they'd never been engaged. But it was understood. It had been understood on the State campus that Ed McBride, All-American end, and Kay Allen, most popular girl on the campus, were that way about each other.

"You were listed as killed in action," Kay said at that first meeting, "and then we got the news that you were freed from that prison camp on Luzon." She didn't know what to say then, and she added, "We're all very happy, Ed."

"So am I," Ed McBride grinned, and wondered if he was. He was supposed to get back in the old groove again—Tommy King pitching and himself catching—the

top passing combination in the circuit. He was supposed to knock down those enemy runners when they came around his end. He was supposed to forget that Tommy King had the wife and baby, a home, while he was living in a hotel room by himself. Very happy! . . .

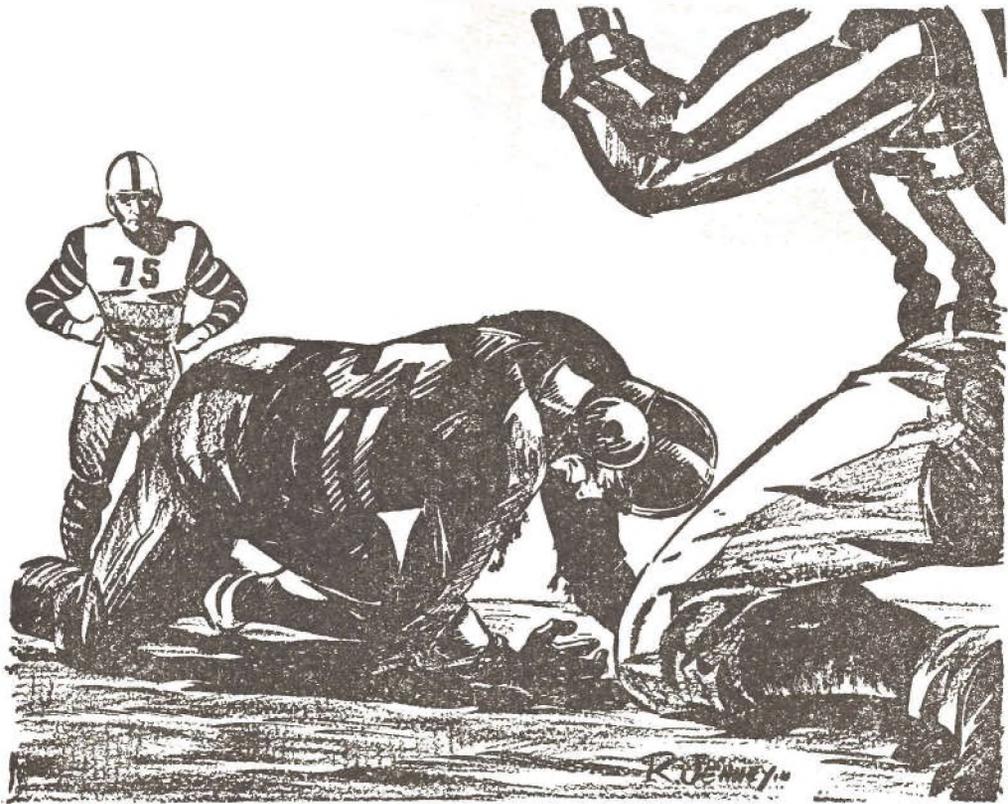
**E**D WATCHED young Bill Cranston get taken out with little trouble by the tough Mustang tackle. Cranston was holding down that left end spot. The Mustang fullback, working directly behind the tackle, went in to nail Tommy King for

Tommy King, even though Brown was a considerably older man, the father of a twenty year old daughter.

Ed remembered the promise he'd made to Brown the previous night. He was supposed to meet George's kid at the Penn Station at eight o'clock that night.

"You'll remember Alva," George said. "She's going to Briarhurst now, Ed."

"Sure," Ed said. Alva had been a skinny kid, a great football fan. Sometimes she'd sit on the bench and yelled for the Cougars. When she was younger she'd always tried to get into the dressing room.



*Ed felt as if he had been broken in two.*

a five yard loss. The tackle and fullback had been working that old saw all afternoon until it looked as if the defensive Mustang fullback played in the Cougar backfield!

It was 14 to 0 for the Mustangs in the fourth period. Ed McBride watched big George Brown move back to the Cougar bench and sit down. Brown had a back like a brick wall. He'd weighed two hundred and sixty pounds when he played center for the old Cougars. George Brown had been Ed's best friend, along with

"The kid's coming home for a few weeks," George said, "and I have to grab a plane for Chicago after the Mustang game. I'd like somebody to meet her at the station, Ed."

"I'll be there," Ed promised.

He got up from his seat now and started pushing toward the aisle. Somebody behind him yelled,

"Down in front!"

"Hell with you," Ed murmured. He went down the stone steps and along the shadowy passageway beneath the stands,

He heard the noise from the crowd overhead, but he didn't go back. Nothing interested him back there. He went down to the games on Sunday afternoons from force of habit; the crowd from Nick's place were there, and Nick's was empty.

He liked Nick's because there was always a crowd around. In the beginning he'd stayed away for that very reason. The pro football crowd hung out at Nick's, and when he came in they looked at him queerly. They sympathized with him, and they wanted to say something, but they didn't know what. He made people uncomfortable. He stayed away for a while, hanging out by himself in small bars, drinking alone, trying to avoid big George Brown, and always running into him.

"I thought you'd go back with the paper," Brown said once. "You were doing pretty good with the sport reporting, Ed."

"Give a man a rest," Ed had grinned. "Those little yellow-bellies worked the hide off me, George." He knew he was back in shape again, and maybe a trifle past that stage. The beer had blown up his face; he was developing a small paunch around the belt. In the old days he'd weighed one hundred and ninety, and he was the fastest man on the field going down after a punt. Now he was up to two-ten, and it wasn't all muscle.

There was that job with the local "Bugle." He'd done some sport reporting for the "Bugle" before the war, and old man Harrison said there would be a job there when he got back. He had a nice touch in his writing, and the editor thought he would go places—maybe a column of his own. He'd never even gone to see Harrison since he got back. He wasn't interested in sport writing; he wasn't interested in football.

**O**UTSIDE the stadium, he caught a cab and rode downtown to Nick's. It was already past five o'clock and the game was probably over with the Cougars taking it on the chin again.

He slid into a corner booth and had a sandwich and coffee. Nick, himself, came from behind the counter, a fat Greek with jet black hair and oily skin.

"How's the game?" Nick wanted to know.

"We lose," Ed McBride told him. It was

funny how he always considered the Cougars his club even though it had been years since he'd played for George Brown.

"George needs a guy out at that wing," Nick said sagely. "He—"

"Bring me one beer," Ed said. He sat in the booth and rubbed a big hand through thinning black hair. He thought of Kay King sitting in a box seat behind the Cougar bench, watching her husband.

They had pictures on the walls in Nick's. He spotted one of himself—the year he'd been named the most Valuable Player in the circuit. It was a good shot, directly over the next booth. Ed McBride looked at it and grimaced. He rubbed his face, feeling the extra flesh on it. In the old days there had been no excess avoidupois from the heels to the top of his head. Somebody had made the remark that he had muscles in his hair!

He had his beer, and then he began to get fidgety again. The old restlessness came over him. In another hour the crowd would begin to troop into Nick's. Some of the Cougars would be with that crowd, and they'd be talking football. Tonight he didn't want to be with them.

"Stromberry pie tonight," Nick said.

"You eat it," Ed murmured. He went out and started to walk across town. He remembered those early walks the first week he'd been back when he'd avoided everybody; he remembered the years in that camp when he'd thought of Kay Allen. He'd planned things, like the kind of windows they'd have in their home, the garden they would have. It kept him from going nuts altogether.

Off Eighth Avenue there was a little bar and grill which he remembered. He had that sick feeling inside him again, and only one thing took it away. He never touched any hard stuff in Nick's because he was a little ashamed. The word would get around that Ed McBride was drowning his sorrows, heading for the gutter. He didn't want any more sympathy, or pity.

Very few men drank straight whiskey these days, preferring to mix it up with something, make it a little more mild. Ed had two straight ones, and he felt the stuff burning his insides. It took away the sickness, but he knew it wouldn't last. He told himself that he'd have to get straightened out. He'd go to see Harrison tomorrow;

he'd work himself up to a column in the paper. A lot of fellows thought he had a good radio voice. Maybe he could get in as a sports commentator. Those chaps were making real money.

He always felt that way after the first two drinks, but after the next two the old bitterness came back, the feeling of futility. He didn't look drunk, and he could walk a straight line, but it was there in his eyes, a certain wildness.

AT SEVEN-THIRTY, he remembered that he was supposed to meet George Brown's kid at the station, and he didn't like it. He began to feel annoyed because Brown had asked him to do the favor. He wasn't in the mood to meet people. He didn't want to talk with them, chat about a lot of meaningless things.

"Hell!" Ed McBride muttered. He caught a cab for the station and made it in time. Alva Brown was coming in on the Washington Special. Ed stood in the crowd by the gate, hands in his pockets, listening to the noise. People pushed past him; red caps jostled him with heavy luggage, and then a girl came up—a girl with brown eyes, the color of ale, a small smile playing around the corners of a rather wide mouth. She was tall, athletic, with wavy chestnut hair.

"Ed McBride," she said. "Glad to see you."

"Sure," Ed murmured. He racked his memory and he didn't have to go far because he'd never known many girls besides Kay Allen. This was a coincidence—a girl, knowing him, coming in on the same train with Alva Brown.

"Father wired that you'd be here," the girl grinned. "It was nice of you, Ed."

McBride gulped. "Alva!" he stammered. "Why damn—"

"You can leave off the swearing," Alva said, "and get us a cab."

Ed picked up her small bag, his head in a whirl. This kid he'd left years ago, high-school age; he remembered her as a brat who always got in the way, always listening in when he visited George Brown. He'd pictured her as a stringy college girl now, gawky, maybe with horn-rimmed spectacles.

"You—you're kind of grown up," Ed

stammered again. "What did they do to you at college?"

"They feed us vitamins," Alva chuckled. "They tell us how to wear clothes and win men."

"A nice business," Ed said, "if you can get it." He hailed a cab outside and opened the door for her. He'd noticed already that she was staring at him strangely, and he was sure she smelled the liquor on him. He was ashamed now that he'd let himself go back in that bar and grill. He should have known better.

"How are you making out?" Alva asked quietly. "It was pretty tough."

Ed McBride moistened his lips. "What?" he asked. He didn't think anybody would mention the business with Kay Allen—at least not in front of him.

"With Kay," Alva said. "You don't blame her for what she did, do you?"

"No," Ed muttered. "I never did." He didn't quite get this. The subject was supposed to be taboo; a man didn't discuss a matter like that, but this girl was talking as if it were a common occurrence. Didn't she realize he'd come back from the dead and he'd found his girl married to his pal? A vague kind of resentment crept over him. This kid was old enough to know better. She didn't look like the stupid kind.

"I hear," Alva went on, "that Kay and Tommy get along very well, and that they have a beautiful baby."

"All right," Ed said tersely. He looked out the window, jaw tightening, the old hardness coming into his gray eyes. "So what?" he snapped.

"So forget about it," Alva Brown smiled.

"Who's worrying?" Ed growled. He was nettled, angry, and also surprised at this. They were taking the matter out of the dark closet into which it had been consigned by his closest friends, and they were examining it as a man looked over old manuscripts.

The cab rolled along through heavy traffic, and Ed wondered what he was going to do with her. Undoubtedly, she'd not eaten as yet, and he couldn't walk off as if she were anybody. This girl was George Brown's kid, and he was big George's best friend.

"You're not worrying," Alva said, "but you get tanked up. You're beginning to

blow up like a beer barrel. You won't play football because if you do you know they'll push you from one end of the field to the other."

"Look——," Ed started to say, and then he stopped very suddenly. He was grinning. "That one, Alva," he chuckled, "is growing whiskers. Why don't you and your dad think up something new?" He had it now. George Brown had been plaguing him since the start of the season to come back with the Cougars because Big George needed a wing man. He and his daughter had cleverly fixed this thing up. Alva was trying to goad him into going out on the field.

"My father," Alva said stiffly, "has no idea I'm talking along these lines."

Ed McBride didn't say anything to that. He could tell from the tone of voice she used that she was speaking the truth.

"You were rated as pretty tough on the field," Alva Brown said quietly. "It's too bad you can't take it in other things."

"Look," Ed snapped. "I'm taking it."

"You go around with a long face," Alva said. "You carry your heart in your hand and you show it to everybody. You say 'look it's broke'."

"Hell with that," Ed grated.

"It takes guts to get up when you're knocked down on the gridiron," Alva said, "and it takes more guts to get over the kind of licking you took."

"That's nice language," Ed McBride observed. "It sounds like they taught you how to be a lady at Briarhurst."

"No matter how you say it," Alva Brown told him stiffly, "it means the same thing, and don't change the subject."

"Rebecca of Briarhurst Farm," Ed McBride said scornfully, "passing out some nice sisterly advice. I'll go back with the Cougars and I'll kick those guys around down on the field. That's satisfaction is it? What do I get out of it?"

"You might find somebody," Alva Brown told him. "You might find a certain man you left four years ago. He was really tough."

**T**HE CAB pulled up outside the hotel before Ed could come back at that one. "I'll take you to dinner," he scowled. She was already opening the door. Before he could get out, she'd closed the door and

was speaking to him over the half-opened window.

"Thanks, Mr. McBride," Alva Brown said, "but, unlike yourself, I'm not on a liquid diet."

"That's a nice crack, too." Ed called after her. "I should tell your father what a nice kid he raised." He dropped back into the seat, out of breath, conscious of the fact that he was breathing heavily. "Nicks," he growled at the driver. "Fifty-third Street."

Doug Howlett, Cougar left tackle, was having a late supper in one of the corner booths when Ed McBride came in. Doug waved a big hand, his mouth full of food. Ed paused at the table, watching Howlett's face closely. Doug was a big man, two hundred and twenty pounds, red-haired, heavy-jawed, formerly All-American tackle at West Coast.

"What happened out there today?" Ed demanded. "You guys were falling all over your feet, Doug." He'd noticed the old expression coming into Doug's pan. Doug Howlett was looking at him the way a man looks at a sick friend on a hospital bed.

"Now," Howlett said, a little peeved, "could you do better, kid?"

"With one hand tied behind my back," Ed snapped, "and a three hundred pound iron ball on one foot." The sick look had left Howlett's face, and the anger was coming into it. Howlett's blue eyes had a dangerous glint in them.

"I'll see that day," the tackle said flatly.

"Okay," Ed McBride growled. "And what about Kay and me?"

Doug Howlett looked shocked. Mouth open, he stared at Ed.

"What?" the tackle asked.

Ed was grinning coldly now, enjoying this. "I wished Kay and Tommy all the luck in the world," he said flatly, "and I meant it. That's all there is to it, Doug. Get it?"

"Sure," Howlett muttered. "That's your business, kid."

"So stop looking like a sick cat every time you see me," Ed McBride snapped. He knew now where the chief trouble lay. He would have gotten over his disappointment, but his friends had kept the fires burning. By keeping the thing under cover, banking it as a man banked a furnace at

night, they'd kept it alive by their attitude. If he'd had a chance to discuss the matter with one person he could have gotten over it, and taken a more healthy view.

There were thousands of other guys coming out of the service—coming out to run up against disappointments—and they didn't want to be greeted by pall bearers. They were coming back toughened, able to stand almost anything. They didn't want sympathy. Only Alva Brown seemed to know that.

Big George Brown came back two days later and called up Ed at the hotel.

"Thanks for meeting the kid," Brown said.

"Yeah," Ed said grimly, "the kid."

"What happened?" Brown wanted to know.

"We had a few words," Ed admitted. "You got some kid, George."

The Cougar owner chuckled over the phone. "She used to be nuts about you, Ed," he laughed. "Kept a scrap book and all—full of your pictures and write-ups."

Ed McBride stared into the mouthpiece.

"Crazy kid," George Brown said.

"Sure," Ed murmured. He knew, though, that Alva was no kid. She was past twenty, and she was a lot wiser than her father in many things.

George Brown went off on another tack. "We didn't look too good last week, Ed," he said. "Now we got the Steers for next Sunday, and you know how tough they are."

Ed McBride did. He remembered those gruelling games with the midwest club. The Steers usually came up with the hardest running backs in the circuit, and they ran the ends.

"Now," George Brown went on, "I could use a good—"

"What time is practice today?" Ed asked.

"Eleven o'clock," Brown told him. "I—"

"See you there," Ed McBride said. He heard a noise over the other end of the wire. Brown was spluttering something or other.

**S**TANDING on the forty yard stripe the following Sunday, Ed McBride could see Alva Brown in the box behind the Cougar bench. Kay King was there also,

and other wives of some of the players.

Doug Howlett clapped his hands and jumped up and down a few times. Howlett had one hand taped up. He looked at Ed McBride and shook his fist, grinning.

Ed stared up the field toward the brown-jerseyed Steers deployed across the field, waiting for the kick-off. He'd had three day's practice with the Cougars and he'd nearly killed himself trying to get into shape. It couldn't be done in that short time. He'd taken off some weight, but there was plenty left in the wrong places.

He went up under that first kick and he felt that he was running with the same speed, but he wasn't the first man to reach the runner. A brown jerseyed Steer linesman crashed into him, knocking him off-stride, and Joe Farrar, Cougar tackle, nailed the runner on the twenty-one.

Ed McBride walked to his position, puffing a little, feeling the strain in the back of his legs. He'd put too much pressure on coming down the field that time. He knew he should have waited till he was really loosened up.

The Steers ran the first play toward the other side of the line, and Ed let it go. These were all new Steer backs, but just as good as the guys he'd pushed around years ago. The Steers had always specialized in backs, and they had them again this fall.

It was second and eight on the Steer twenty-three. Ed edged out wide, tightening up, knowing that they were going to test him on this next play. The Steer quarterback, Johnny Dale, was wise enough to know that the Cougars had a veteran on the wing position, and if that veteran was a trifle slow . . .

Kerrigan, Steer right half, came out wide when the ball was snapped. He had two men in front of him with another blocker assigned to the left end.

Ed McBride went out wide with them, using his hands beautifully to hold off that blocker. They were heading for the side-lines, trying to outrun him for the edge of the field. He remembered the days when not a quarterback in the league would attempt such a thing, but this Kerrigan could run. He was a lanky man, long legs, tremendous stride. He didn't look like a running back.

Ed made his play when they came up

to the line of scrimmage. He went in fast, trying to knife between the two blockers. He heard other Cougars coming up behind him. Doug Howlett was probably watching for him to knock down a blocker and open the way for a tackle. Ed went in straight for the runner.

He wasn't sure how it happened, but Kerrigan seemed to pick up a trifle more speed. There was no hurry, no excitement. Kerrigan increased his pace, throwing the gears into high speed, and he kept going. Ed's fingers grazed the runner's shoes, and then his face made contact with the turf.

Kerrigan went on for seven yards before Howlett threw him out of bounds. Ed McBride heard the noise in the stands. They had a capacity crowd for the Steers because the Steers had color—backs like Kerrigan, Dale, and big Bull Moffatt, the fullback. And a very tough line to spring those backs loose.

A lot of people had come out today to see Ed McBride make his comeback with the Cougars. They remembered him when.

Tommy King slapped Ed's back as he climbed to his feet and walked after the play.

"Go get 'em, kid," Tommy said.

Ed McBride licked his lips. He saw Johnny Dale grinning as if he'd discovered something that pleased him. The Steer quarterback whispered to Bull Moffatt, and Ed saw the fullback nod his head. Moffatt weighed two hundred and thirty pounds, and he ran with terrific speed, a blond-haired giant with oak stumps for legs:

"I'm thinking," Doug Howlett murmured as he crouched down in the line of scrimmage, "that they'll be coming this way a lot, Ed."

"Okay," McBride growled. He was wondering now. He knew he'd lost something, and he wasn't sure whether it was lack of condition, or just age. Sometimes an athlete was washed up even before he reached the thirty mark. He rubbed his hand across his stomach and he knew where the difficulty lay. He'd let his body go. He'd been pouring beer into his stomach for the past few months, and now he was to pay for it.

**T**HE STEERS came around again, Moffatt running this time, driving straight at the left end. They piled over Ed,

blockers and runner, flattening him to the turf. He tried to dig in and hold them, but Moffatt's tremendous weight and power did the trick. It was another first down on the Steer forty-five.

They were opposite the Cougar bench now, and the boxes were less than twenty yards away. Ed McBride fingered his puffed lower lip and glanced that way. He saw the contempt in the eyes of the tall Alva Brown.

"Paste that one in your scrap-book, kid," Ed growled to himself. He tried to laugh it off and tell himself he didn't give a whoop what that crazy kid thought. She kept a scrap book with his pictures in it! She was as nutty as they made them.

Johnny Dale shot a short pass over near the side lines to the Steer end, and Ed was supposed to cover the man. The end was very fast on his feet. He feinted one way, and went the other, leaving Ed standing flatfooted while he streaked down the sidelines for fifteen yards.

The Steers hit at that left end steadily, moving down the field to the fifteen yard stripe. Ed made one tackle during the process. He caught Moffatt when the big man swung away from his blockers. He got through to nail the fullback around the knees, and he felt the old thrill when he made the contact. It was a bruising tackle with Moffatt coming down on top of him, pinning him to the ground, wrenching his back slightly. It didn't feel too good, but Ed McBride heard the old roar from the stands and it was enough compensation.

He tried hard on the next play, but Kerrigan got away from him, outrunning him for the corner. The Steers went over for a score.

On the offensive he was a little better. The Cougar crowd was expecting great things from him and Tommy King, but he couldn't seem to break loose, and twice King was tackled behind the line of scrimmage, waiting vainly for him to get out in the clear.

Doug Howlett said it. Doug was the guy he'd needled after the Mustang game.

"You the guy was gonna show us how?" Doug asked.

"Never mind," Ed McBride said. George Brown pulled him out of the lineup after the first quarter, and he trotted toward the bench, body feeling as if it had been through

a meat grinder. He'd gotten it plenty around the middle because he was soft there, but his legs were in bad shape also.

"Take a rest, kid," Brown told him. "The first mile is always the hardest."

"And sometimes the last," Ed told himself. Putting on his fleece-lined coat, he glanced at Alva Brown. She was watching the play at the far end of the field, and then she looked toward him, and he saw the thin smile around the corners of her mouth. "Go ahead and laugh," Ed growled inwardly. "It's funny." Then he began to feel sorry for himself again. He tried to reason that he had a good cause for going on those occasional binges. He'd fought for his country; he'd taken his licking at home and abroad.

He knew he wouldn't be going in this half any more so he got up and trotted past the stands toward the dressing room door. Nobody noticed him because the Steers were down at the other end of the field, hammering at the Cougar goal line for the second time.

**I**N THE dressing room it was very quiet, the thick walls keeping out the sounds from the field. There was a big clock over the door, and Ed could hear it ticking. He sat down on a bench, the big coat still buttoned around his neck even though it was very warm here.

His mind began to slide along familiar channels again—Kay, Tommy, himself, the injustice of the whole thing. Tommy King had been a 4-F with a perforated ear-drum. He'd gotten the big end.

He told himself that he was a sap to let that slip of a kid goad him into making another try with the Cougars. He was kicking off his cleats, ready to take a shower and get out, when an usher opened the door. This kid wore a green coat and a red hat. He had a silly grin on his freckled face, and he was holding something in his hand when he came up.

"Mr. McBride," he called.

Ed McBride's jaw fell. The kid was holding a corsage in his right hand. It was a large yellow chrysanthemum, trimmed with red oak leaves. He'd seen the flower pinned to Alva Brown's fur coat as she sat in the box. There was a note with the flower. Ed read it as the kid usher waited, grinning.

The note read,

"For the funeral," and it was signed, "A.B."

Ed hurled the big flower against the wall. He glared at the usher.

"Any answer?" the kid wanted to know. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"She can go right to hell," Ed McBride snapped. "Tell her that."

"She wouldn't like it," the boy chuckled.

"Get out," Ed growled. He was still sitting there when the Cougars came in at the end of the half. Big George Brown was shaking his head. Tommy King came over and sat down next to Ed.

"How do you feel, kid?" the quarterback asked. "You kind of took it out there."

Ed nodded sourly. "They have me labeled as a set-up," he said flatly. "That kid, Dale, is giving me the old steam-roller."

"I would have liked to see that Moffatt go past you five years ago," King observed. He got up and walked over to the water fountain, stripping off his blue Cougar jersey.

Ed McBride sat on the bench, glaring at the floor, feeling the weariness inside. He saw Doug Howlett pick up the flower, look at it curiously, and toss it aside.

George Brown came over then, rubbing big hands. "We held 'em to seven points, Ed," he said. "Now it's our turn." He paused, and added, "Maybe if you got out wider, kid, you'd be able to turn 'em in toward the line."

Ed laughed. He'd tried that in the beginning, but Steer blockers had boxed him out of the plays entirely, pushing him toward the sidelines, and running the play between tackle and end. That was one of the reasons Doug Howlett was peeved. He'd had to take the Steer backfield himself.

"Tell Tommy to shoot me a few short ones," Ed said quietly. He knew he could step over the line and catch those short flat passes. It meant taking a terrific beating because he was right in the middle of everything on those flat passes. They hit him from every angle, and they'd be hitting hard, trying to get him off the field.

George Brown knew that, also. He moistened his lips and stared at Ed McBride curiously.

"You've been taking plenty already, Ed," he stated.

"Tell Tommy," Ed growled. The more he thought about it, the madder he became. That kid considered him as dead! She intimated that the guy who used to be was washed up!

**T**HE FIRST short one Tommy King threw went for five yards. Ed McBride skipped over the line, feinted a down-field dash, and spun around, waiting in his tracks. Bull Moffatt was not more than three yards away.

King looked to the right, and then shot the ball left into Ed's hands. Ed relaxed, fingers very loose, knowing what was going to happen the moment he caught the pigskin. He let it strike his chest and he went up on his toes. He hugged the ball tightly, but his body was loose when Bull Moffatt's two hundred and thirty pounds smacked into him. Kerrigan was in on that tackle also, coming from another angle.

Ed felt as if he had been broken in two. He lay on the ground with the ball up against his chest. Moffatt's hand had been in there as they were going down, trying to rip the ball away. That was an old pro stunt, one Ed had been used to in the old days.

"Better not try that too much, pal," Moffatt grinned. "You'll end up in the nut house."

"You stop me," Ed challenged. He'd made five yards—five valuable yards. In the huddle he looked at King, and Tommy knew what he meant. The ball came down flat—over the line, and very hard. King could throw them like bullets on those short ones, knowing that he had a man in front of him who had glue in his fingers.

There was no chance to run on that kind of stuff. You took it and waited for the collision. Bull Moffatt came in late on the tackle, but he didn't come in softly.

Ed McBride got up a trifle more slowly, but they'd made seven yards. His right side was aching now, the way it had ached when he'd cracked two ribs in his last game with the Cougars before the war.

"We're moving," Doug Howlett growled in the huddle. He looked at Ed McBride, and he grinned.

"Throw to me," Ed said sourly.

King crossed up the Steer defense with a straight run around the opposite end, and then he shot another short pass into Ed's hands—good for seven. The crowd was beginning to perk up, and the Steer line-backers were watching Ed warily, knowing that it was a problem stopping a guy who wouldn't drop the ball, and who refused to get panicky when they drove at him. They knocked him down, and they piled up—once getting a penalty for it. They tried to put him out of the game, and they tried to make him fumble, but he held the ball.

Ed McBride heard that noise from the stands as the Cougars went past the middle of the field—past the Cougar bench, and the box seats, past a quietly-watching Alva Brown.

King threw that short one twice in every series of downs. Once it missed, but the other times it went through. Moffatt knocked the wind from Ed McBride's body with one tackle, and they had to call time. He lay there, gasping for air, swearing to himself, but he got up. He caught another one for six yards with the crowd going wild as the Cougars moved to the Steer fifteen yard stripe.

"Get killed," Bull Moffatt growled. "Come out here again."

He went out again, feinting them out when they came in for him, cutting to his right or left, and taking that bullet pass from King. Tommy had them scared always with threats of a long overhead pass. Right end, Dick Redmond, cut across field, behind Moffatt, worrying him, keeping him back, and then King fed it to McBride.

They were on the eight, third and two. King tried a crack at the line, and picked up a yard. Everybody in the stadium knew what the next one was going to be. They were standing up, howling. Time was out for the Cougars.

**E**D McBRIDE waited for the water boy. He had his drink, lips puffed, one eye badly swollen, that bad pain in the right side. He could scarcely move his legs any more. He wiped his face with a towel and he looked toward the Cougar bench. She thought he was dead.

In the huddle King said, "How about it?"

"Feed me," Ed McBride told him. They were directly in front of the goal posts. He went out on the wing, and he crouched, Moffatt watching him, Kerrigan watching him, not sure. The Cougars needed one yard, and they might try a plunge. "Get it up against that damned goal post," Ed had whispered to King.

He listened to the numbers now, and he could scarcely hear anything. King had to stand up and wave for silence from the crowd, beginning his signals over again.

The ball spun back, spiralling up from the ground. King took it, went back one step, and raised his arm. Ed McBride cut down, plunging like a mad man. He spun toward the right and in the direction of the goal posts. He yelled and reached even before the ball left King's hands.

Moffatt was there, and Kerrigan and Dale. Ed McBride went up high, leaping straight at the nearest padded, striped post. He got his hands on the ball, and then his body smashed into the post. Moffatt hit him there, and Kerrigan, smashing his face against the wood high up, twisting him around. His ribs got it too—very bad. But he went down on the other side of the white line.

George Brown sent in a substitute for him, and he stumbled toward the bench, dazed, but grinning. Brown slapped his shoulder, and said quietly,

"Take a shower, kid. We'll get that other score for you." It was tied up now.

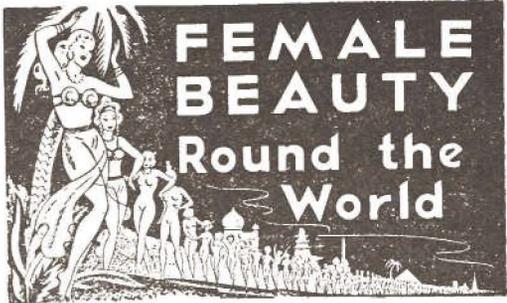
Ed McBride listened to the noise. He had to go past those box seats to get to the dressing room, and he saw Alva Brown looking down at him. She was watching him curiously.

Ed cupped his hands and yelled.

"Paste that in your scrap-book, kid!"

He wasn't sure that she had heard it because there was a lot of noise. Kay King was there, smiling at him, and then Alva Brown started to grin. Ed McBride was walking on, but he looked back, holding one hand to his side, face puffed and battered like a pugilist's. Then he started to grin, also. He looked at Kay King, and then he looked at Alva Brown. They were both smiling.

"Hell," Ed McBride chuckled. Tomorrow, he knew, he would see Harrison!



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*He was a piledriver . . . nothing human could have stopped him.*

## GOLD TO GO!

By Tom O'Neil

Player-coach Dutch Bernhardt was shooting for a record—ten full years of playing sixty minutes a game. And now, with only one quarter to go, he knew he had to bench himself—or watch his team go down in defeat!

THE PACKERS were playing desperately now. Walter "Dutch" Bernhardt, in there at fullback with the Titans, hitched his pants up around his compact hips and leaned forward tensely.

"Watch 'em now," he barked at the straining linemen crouched up ahead. "We got 'em right where we want 'em. Let's keep 'em there."

They were in an enviable position. It was close to the end of the game, and the score was 7-0, Titan's favor. The Packers were going all out in a final convulsive effort to put over one touchdown, and at least pull out a tie from the situation.

The ball snapped. Their left halfback grabbed it, faded fast, and flipped a low, fast bullet over the line of scrimmage. It was aimed at their right end, a tall fast devil. He went up in a stretching leap for it.

Walt lanced over on tiring legs and stuck one straining hand up. It was a close shave; he just about got two fingers in front of it. But he managed to deflect it upward a bit, and their end came down empty-handed. Meanwhile, Bart Williams, the Titans' signal caller, had come scoot-

ing over. He nailed the ball before it reached turf for a neat interception.

Titans' ball on their own forty. Walt ran to the huddle, chortling gaily, "All right. So we freeze it. You ask me, we've won us another ball game."

Bart Williams nodded luke-warmly. "Let's go. Make it number thirty."

Bart's play, through center. He hit a brick wall though Walt had gone crashing through to clear a path for him. The weary quarterback just didn't seem to get off his marks quickly enough.

Walt said sourly, "Gimme that thing. I'll—"

"Take it easy, Dutch." Williams was crinkling his blond eyebrows, frowning at him. "Why kill yourself, man? You're not as young as you once were. We've got two more games to go, and—"

"And nothin'," Walt snapped. He didn't like that crack about his age. He was thirty-six. So what of it? He was still playing good fullback, and his record of yardage gained for the season proved it. He was blocking as good as he ever had, and he was contributing his full share of tackles.

He said, "We got two more games, and I'll go 'em. Now gimme that thing, and watch how your Uncle Dutch does it."

Bart Williams shrugged. Walt was combination backfield coach and player, and as such, his suggestions carried more than a bit of authority here. The quarterback wasn't going to cross him. "Go ahead, Dutch. Take it on ten."

Walt went back there. He took the low pass from Burns at center. He pivoted smartly, dashed hard through the hole that appeared momentarily off the right tackle spot. He was in their secondary, going full steam ahead, when a Mack truck ploughed into him. It was Wentz, the Packers' line-backer.

They went down in a heap. Walt stood up, feeling somewhat shaky, and strode to the huddle. He wasn't sure, but he thought he detected slow smiles on some of his teammates' faces. It burned him a little. He had been up longer than any man in this huddle, ten years this season, and some of them were understandably jealous of him.

The newspapers had been playing him up a lot lately. He was an indestructible sort. In his ten years with the Titans, he had not missed one minute of action in any game scheduled. That was an amazing stunt to pull, in a game like football, and the writers were speculating on whether or not he'd make it to the end of this season. If he could complete the ten years without missing a moment of game time in action, he'd rate a spot with old Heff as a legendary Iron Man in the annals of football.

Bart Williams called one for Toby Nelson, around the right end. Toby got loose for seven, but it was Walt's blocking the halfback inside that made the romp possible for him. He was a little smug, going back to the huddle. An old man, was he? He could show most of these kids plenty, when the heat was on.

He carried one through center again. He ripped off four yards. He got stopped cold, on a dime, when those two Packer backs hit him together, and he thought for a moment that one of his ribs had been broken.

He shrugged off the burning pain in his side as he joined the huddle. He was staying in, he told himself grimly. The big clock at the end of the crowded grand-

stand said they only had time for one more play, anyhow.

Bart tried to run one off tackle. He got stopped cold, at the line of scrimmage. It didn't make any diff, Walt thought, shrugging. 7-0, favor the Titans. Two more games, and they'd have racked up an undefeated season, another league title. He grinned, thinking of the thousand buck bonus that would mean for every man of them.

**L**OPING OFF, he saw squat, bow-legged Bill Hervey coming at a slant from the bench toward him. Hervey was just a kid, about twenty-three. He was an agreeable sort of youngster, friendly and ingenuous as a pup. Walt felt the same fondness for Bill Hervey that a father feels toward an only son. Which was surprising, in view of the fact that Hervey was number one sub fullback for the Titans, and as such, was gunning for Walt's job.

"Nice goin' in there, Dutch," he greeted. The kid sort of hero-worshipped him. It made Walt uncomfortable, and at the same time, it sent a warm feeling scudding around a small racetrack somewhere within him.

"Ah . . . I dunno. I'm slowin' down some. Bound to, at my age, I reckon."

"Well," the kid hesitated, "maybe. You did look tired in that final quarter. But you made the touchdown that won the game for us."

Walt frowned. So now it was Hervey, joining the others in mild criticisms of him. He hadn't expected the boy to agree when he'd said he was beginning to slow down a bit out there. He said sourly.

"Matter o' fact, I coulda gone another half, if there'd been any need of it." He grinned. "Sorta tough on you, son, me bein' such an Ol' Ironsides, an' you subbin' for my position. But cheer up, I won't last forever."

The kid looked at him squarely. "I'm not worried, Dutch. You told me the minute you figured I'd be able to do a better job in there than you could, you'd yank yourself. That's good enough for me."

Walt frowned. He'd said that to the kid earlier in the week, prompted by something the kid had said about not getting much chance to show out there. He sometimes wondered if he'd really meant it.

Oh, he'd tried to be honest, But sometimes a guy said things without thinking. There was that ten-year record without missing a moment of game time, for one thing. He'd sure like to set that one up on the records.

And it was only natural for a man to try to keep going as long as he could, in a setup like his was on the Titans. After all, football was his bread-and-butter, always had been, And Blubber McCoy, the portly head coach, had put the thing up to him squarely, at the start of the season.

"I think we've got something good in this youngster, Hervey," Blubber had said thoughtfully. "He's young, of course, and he's not too rugged for the sort of game we play up here. I'll leave it in your lap, Dutch. Any time you figure the boy's ready—or feel you're slipping out there—just yank yourself out of the ball game. Okay?"

Walt had grinned. "Old Ironsides has still got quite a few good games left in him, Blub. But, thanks. I mean—for leavin' it up to my own judgement. Some guys—without mentionin' names—seem to think I've lost a lot this year. Me—I feel hotter right now than I did any time last season."

"It's your oyster," the head coach nodded gravely. Beneath the thick folds of flesh, the black eyes narrowed. "I'm depending on you to use good judgement about it. That Hervey's a nice sort of kid. I understand he never had much, before he landed up here with us. He's helpin' out a big family back in Pennsy, and—well, if he got a chance to show something this year, the office might shell out with some decent dough for his next year's contract."

All in all, Walt thought now, it made quite a nice little problem. And it was no wonder he sometimes questioned his own integrity, in such a setup. No wonder he felt just a bit guilty, about playing out the string on those ball games. The kid deserved a chance, but—he made a wry face. He was getting too soft for his own good, he realized. If he wasn't so fond of young Hervey, it would be no problem. He had been fair, he thought grimly. He was a better player than the kid any day in the week. Those were the plain facts of the matter, and besides, sentiment had no place in football.

He said to the boy now, "You said it,

Bill. You can count on that, one hundred per cent. The minute I figure you can handle it better'n me, I'm yankin' myself an' stickin' you in there."

As he said the words, he felt a new twinge in that rib that had been bunged up out there. The reminder sent a sharp thrust of guilt through him. Had he been as good as the kid would on that last play, he wondered, when the rib had him gagging so with pain that all he'd been able to do was go through the motions of blocking Bart Williams?

**I**T WAS A meaty problem. He carried it with him all week, and he was still toting it along the following Saturday, when they kicked off to the Bucks before a record crowd of sixty-eight thousand.

His rib was okay now. He threw himself into the play, determined to leave no doubt in anyone's mind as to whether or not he was holding his job under false pretenses.

He had noticed, while coaching the backs during the week, that they seemed mildly resentful toward him. Almost as if they felt he was handing the kid a dirty deal. Hervey was a good-natured sort, universally well-liked, and it was only natural for the gang to feel a bit sorry for him.

Walt shrugged. He felt just as sorry for the boy as any one else did. But football was football. And he was Dutch Bernhardt, one of the greatest backs the game ever produced. Yes, even at thirty-six.

He maneuvered beneath the kickoff ball from the Bucks. It was a high loafer, late in coming to rest, and he had to move fast. Their ends were down on him almost the moment he pulled it in. Bart knocked one of them looping. Toby Nelson got another.

Walt scooted hard toward the right sideline, then cut in swiftly down the center. He threaded a needle down through the line-up of eager Buck tacklers, flicking his hips this way and that to throw them off balance. He got his old straightarm out of mothballs, poling men over like tenpins with it.

He made it two yards past the midstripe before they finally ganged up on him. He strutted a bit, on the way to the huddle. Guess that'd show 'em Dutch Bernhardt still had it.

He showed 'em all through that opening

half. In the second quarter, he got loose on a rampaging romp from his own forty-one, clear down to their eight-yard line.

Toby Nelson flipped a neat little pass over the line of scrimmage to Bart Williams. Bart took it nicely just beyond that end stripe, and it was 6-0, favor the still-undefeated Titans.

Walt insisted on trying one through center, for the extra point. He had driven himself like a fury all through that opening half, though, and it was beginning to tell on his legs, the first place an aging athlete usually begins to get danger signals.

He kept chugging away at them, there in the line, but he just didn't have the drive that he'd once had. The Bucks stopped him cold, one scant foot from that goal line, and the extra point try had gone *psft*.

They were a quiet bunch, going back. "Look, Dutch," Bart Williams said gently, "you've played a great game of football. The half's almost over. Why not let the kid have it, from here? You're pooped, and you know it. The kid deserves a chance to show, and——"

"And you're crazy," Walt grated. "I haven't even *begun* to get going yet."

He raced down field for all he was worth, determined to prove it by making that first tackle after kick-off. He was down there first, but a meaty Buck lineman got him off balance and threw a body block at him. He went down with the guy, pinned hopelessly. And as luck would have it, Bart Williams made the tackle.

"You see what I mean?" the quarterback said idly, not making too great a point of it.

"Get off me," Walt grated. "It's my own decision. I'm gonna make it."

He was aware of the team's wondering glances. He knew, instinctively, that he was losing face with them. It got him sore. He threw himself into the play even harder, as if to show them. But his legs were gone. He didn't manage to make one tackle, before that gun came for the recess. He had never been so glad of a recess in his life, he thought wearily, romping off with them.

He came back, in the third quarter, and really showed them. He got going on an off-tackle slant, from the Buck twenty-three, and he kept going, lunging right through the clutching hands of the tacklers.

He took it all the way down to the one, before the safety man finally dragged him to turf.

Bart rammed it over through guard. 12-0, favor the home gang. And Walt tried through center again for point, and muffed it. It came to him, with an ugly prod of conscience, that seven years ago, at twenty-nine, he'd have romped through this weak Buck line. He was thirty-six now, and not getting much better in the dying minutes of this ball game. Why not admit it? But there was that darn streak of Dutch stubbornness in him that wouldn't let him quit.

He still wasn't quite convinced that he didn't have more on the ball than that green kid would have in here. And that was the bargain, wasn't it? Until he *was* convinced, he had a perfect right to stick with it.

He stuck with it right to the final gun. But he wasn't a whole lot of good to them during those final ten minutes. He only made one tackle, in all that time, and he failed to gain through the line as he certainly would have, if his legs weren't tingling so with utter exhaustion.

**H**E ROMPED off with the others, when it was over, thinking that they'd just won themselves another game, at 12-0, and that maybe it would've been 18-0, or 24-0, if he'd let Hervey take his place in there.

The kid came over like last week, but his congratulations were luke-warmish this time. "Nice game, Dutch. But——uh—— weren't you sorta pooped, during that final quarter? I——I mean——"

"Me?" The kid had hit the nail on the head so squarely he felt a pressing need to bluff the thing out. "Never felt better, youngster. You know what made it look that way? Those Bucks. They were fightin' harder, in that final frame. Tryin' to make a come-back, that's all."

Oddly, he found himself half-believing the words, as he glibly spoke them. That *might* explain it, he told himself sourly. He'd won this game for them, setting up both touchdowns. Why did they all have to keep sniping at him? He could understand the kid's disappointment, that was only human. But not the others. He was practically putting that league title in the bag

for them, all neatly wrapped with a blue ribbon on it.

It would put a thousand buck bonus in every paycheck on the squad. Including young Hervey's! Shucks, Walt thought grimly, he didn't have any cause to be feeling guilty about the game he'd played out there.

He said, "I know it's tough on you, kid. But look, mebbe I won't even try to play next season. You'll get your licks in. Rome wasn't built in a day, and—"

"It's all right," the kid said. He looked sort of peaked, like his gods had been shown up as no better than human. Then his face brightened. "Listen, Dutch, there was a favor I wanted to ask you. For next Friday night. I—uh—I've got a—" His face reddened. He stammered to an awkward silence.

Walt stared at him. "Go ahead, kid. What is it? Anything at all, within reason. If it's dough you're needin'—" he grinned "well, I know I got a rep for bein' closer than most on the team with my sugar, but—"

"It—it isn't that. It isn't money. Uh—I've got this date with a tricky little number, and—well, a car'd be a big help to me. I mean—if—"

Walt frowned. He didn't make a regular practice of lending his coupe out, and the kid must certainly realize it was a good deal to ask. Walt loved that brand new crate of his like a baby. And it was true, what he'd just told on himself. He was considered the tightwad of the team, for the simple reason that he knew the value of a dollar and never squandered. It was just that a pro athlete's earning years were short-lived, and the guy who didn't save would soon live to regret it. But he never passed up Blind Joe, outside the stadium, without flipping a dime in his tin cup, and you couldn't say that for most of the others.

It surprised him that the kid, knowing his rep, would have the nerve to brace him to use the jalop. And yet, somehow, it pleased him. It showed the kid wasn't bearing a grudge, for one thing. And that the kid, at least, didn't think he was such a skinflint.

He said easily, "Sure, kid. Why not? I'll leave the crate in the hotel garage, Friday night."

"Swell, Dutch. Gosh, thanks, that's darn'—"

"Don't give it a thought, kid. Glad to do it."

THERE was a record turnout for the Cougars, the final game of the season. This was the payoff, the big test, to determine whether the Titans would finish up as league champs, or just another team in the first division.

Blubber McCoy built it up for them, in the lockers: "I want every man of you out there today, to remember one thing: There's an extra thousand bucks riding on the outcome of this game—in each of your paychecks. You're professional athletes, and pros are supposed to be money players. I hope that little thought will keep you punching out there. Okay, let's get goin'!"

The Cougars kicked off. Walt got under the pill. Bart Williams fell into place at his left. Toby Nelson drifted along to his right. They moved up the field that way. The Cougars came lancing in. Bart nailed one of them. Toby went down under a pair of them.

Walt got caught in a hopeless pocket, tried to fight free, and muffed on it. He went down on his forty.

These Cougars were a tough bunch of monkeys. They intercepted a pass from Toby, on the third play, and moved down to the Titans' twenty-six with it. They promptly stole the initiative and flung one of their own into the end zone. They connected, too. 6-0, their favor, and the game had started only a moment ago.

They sent a neat kick soaring end-over-end through the uprights, making it seven.

Walt swore gently as he loped back downfield with the others to take the new kickoff. "Come on, you guys," he gritted. "Let's fight. One touchdown don't mean the game. Not by a long shot!"

They fought. They fought like demons, all through that first half. But you never saw a team click like those Cougars. They were really hot stuff. They not only held the league-leading Titans. They tallied again, in the second quarter, on a long pass from the forty into the end zone. They missed the point, but it was 13-0 now, their favor.

And going in for the recess as the gun

sounded to end that first half, Walt was so tired he almost staggered. He had been throwing himself into this game harder than ever before during this season, knowing a thousand bucks for him rode on it. He had never been one to sneeze at a thousand cents, much less at a thousand berries.

The kid, Bill Hervey, romped in alongside of him. The kid had been acting strangely aloof toward him all day, and now the boy suddenly blurted, "I—uh—I've got some news for y-you, Dutch. Sorta bad n-news, I'm afraid. I—it's about the car."

"Huh?" Walt felt his heart lurching. "The car? What about it? Didn't you bring it back to the hotel garage last night, like you said you were going to?"

"I—I couldn't, Dutch. It's—" His face was red as an apple. He didn't finish.

"It's—*what?*" Walt thundered.

"I had an accident with it. The—the handbrake. I parked on the hill in front of my date's house, last night, and—"

"Blast it, kid! I *told* you to watch out for that handbrake. Didn't you leave it in gear, you young monkey?" He was sweating. That sweet new jalopy! He could about imagine what came next. "All right, spill it. So it coasted down the hill on you. How bad was the damage?"

The kid sighed, and tossed his wide shoulders. "It—went down an embankment. The garageman I got to look at it says it's—well, gosh, I'm awful sorry to have to say this, Dutch. But—it'll have to be junked."

"Junked!" Walt stormed. "Blast it, I paid a thousand bucks for that heap just two months ago."

He felt completely deflated. A thousand bucks, right down the drain. He felt like blowing his top at the kid, but the kid looked so darn broken up about it, he didn't have the heart to lace into the youngster. Those things do happen. The kid certainly hadn't done it on purpose. But a thousand berries.

He had a right to ask the kid for it. But even as the thought crossed his whirling mind, he knew he wouldn't even think of it. The kid wasn't drawing much, as a sub fullback here, and Blub said the boy was giving most of his dough to his folks back in Pennsy. He'd had a rotten

piece of luck, and there was no sense rubbing the thing into him.

Walt knew what he was going to do. He was going out there this next half, and get that thousand berries right back. He was going to spark that gang, force them by his own driving example, to convert a 13-0 score into a victory. It was the only way.

He said wearily to the kid. "All right. I know how you feel about it, young fella. We'll just have to forget about it, that's all." He thought a moment. "Where is the crate?"

The boy's face reddened with embarrassment all over again. He was completely flustered by this trying set-to, and he stammered, "Had it r-right on the t-tip of my tongue a minute a-ago. Now I forget it." He pondered a bit. "It was at Halleck and Bent Road, out in Ogontz."

Walt said, "Okay, forget it for now. I'm going to, till we win this blasted ball game."

**H**E DIDN'T though. He was thinking about that car all through the third quarter. Maybe he was sort of a cheap skate, as the others contended. The thought of his loss was a driving incentive to him, out there. He rammed through the center of the Cougar defense six times straight, only stopping when Bart Williams insisted on letting someone else take it.

They moved down to the thirty, the twenty. Walt got it again, went slashing through left tackle. He kept going, thinking about that thousand berries. They couldn't hold him. He went weaving down there, straight into the end zone, still standing.

You never heard anything to match the crowd's roaring. He went through center for the point, making it 13-7, and then abruptly, his legs folded.

He asked Bart Williams to call a time out. Bart did, and they sat on the turf in a tense small circle. Bart said worriedly, "You're on fire, Dutch. What gives? You gonna make it?"

"I dunno," Walt panted. "Just wanta get my breath back."

"Give the kid a break now, why don't you? He's a good ball player," Bart insisted.

Food for thought, that, Walt decided, at a time like this. He *was* done in now,

and there was no earthly sense trying to kid himself any more about it. The kid might provide just the touch of new pep that would swing the balance in the final quarter. It would be ironic justice, if the kid came out and scored to pay back the thousand berries he'd lost Walt, when he junked the jalopy.

Walt said slowly, "Okay, that's it, then." He got up quietly and romped toward the bench. There was a moment of tense silence, till the crowd had identified him. Then a tumultuous roar came down from all sides. They were paying to him the tribute he had justly earned. He had played approximately nine and ninety-nine one-hundredths of ten full seasons without missing a second of action in there with the Titans. It was an historical moment, he knew, and his eyes misted at the riotous tribute.

On the bench, he sat stolidly, watching them out there. He kept his eyes on the kid. There were only two plays, before that third quarter ended, but young Bill Hervey showed well, in even that little time. He ran one, around the right end, and made nine yards for them. He did a masterful job of blocking for Toby Nelson's stab off right tackle.

Then they changed. The kid looked masterful on defense, when the Titans finally lost it on downs. He gained steadily through the line. He was bearing down out there. All in all, Walt thought watching, the kid was an A-1 ball player. He had probably done the boy an injustice, making him wait this long for his chance. But football was not an exact science, was it? There was no certain way of settling that issue.

He summoned Ben Pay, Titan man-of-all-work, down the bench to him. "I want you to make a phone call for me, Ben." It was the car. It would not let his mind alone, not since the moment he'd heard the rotten news of it. He had to make sure it was going to be a total loss. "I want you to call Brigham Hotel Garage and ask for Teddy Lennis. Tell him my car's wrecked at Halleck and Bent Road, out in Ogontz . . ." He waited, as Ben took out a pencil and scribbled hastily on an envelope from his pocket.

Ben looked up. "Yeah? That all?"

"Tell him to go out and take a look at it. Tell him to phone me back right after

the game, in the stadium office, to let me know what he thinks can be done about it."

Ben Pay nodded, and went scooting off. Walt sighed gloomily and watched the game. Hervey was playing a bang-up game out there. No getting around it. But the gang was stalled, somehow. They couldn't seem to get going. Twice, they were down within scoring range of the visitors' goal, and they fizzled out on it, lost the ball on downs.

The time clock ticked away the precious seconds. They played seesaw over the midstripe awhile, and as the time grew shorter and shorter, it began to look as if 13-7 would be the final story.

There were only two minutes left when Ben Pay came racing along the bench to where Walt sat, gloomily watching his hopes fizzle away out there.

"Hey, Dutch," Ben said wonderingly, "you never went in for gagging. What's the idea sending me off on a goose chase?"

"Huh?"

"Are you goin' nuts? Your car ain't no wreck. That guy Teddy Lennis at the hotel garage says it's sittin' right there where it always sits, without a scratch on it. What's the—"

**W**ALT GASPED. His mind was in a whirl of doubts and wildly jumbled conclusions. He sat there exactly ten seconds. Then he snapped in a voice that was cold and hard as ice: "I'm goin' in there, Blub. You nor Joe Louis couldn't stop me."

As the kid, Bill Hervey, loped out, Walt grated at him. "Thanks, kid. That was a sweet little gag you pulled on me. I'll remember it, later."

He went on out there, paying no attention to the kid's mumbled answer. They had possession on the Cougar's thirty-eight. Walt said, "Bart, I'm just about as primed as a man *can* be."

Bart Williams looked at him strangely, then at the time clock. A smart kid, that Bart. He knew it was no time to talk. He called Walt's signal, said to the others, "Let's really hit it on this one. Old Ironsides looks about to go 'Boom!'"

You said it, Walt thought. He went back there. He put his hands up. The ball came back from Burns, straight to him. He was moving long before it reached him. The lead was just right. He was around

the right end before the guy even got off his marks, and Bart was with him, boxing in their right halfback neatly.

Walt zipped up past the line of scrimmage. He was in the broken field now, his specialty, and he was burning inside as he never had burned before in his life. The kid had borrowed his car in good faith. That was the worst part of it. Ask a favor of a guy, and then use his kindness against him. That's what the kid did. Cooked up that crazy yarn about the jallopy just to get Walt out of the game, so he, the kid, would have a chance to show in here.

And Walt had fallen for it, hook, line and sinker. What a chump! And he'd been fond of that little punk, he thought disgustedly. The kid had swiped his job for next season, on the strength of his showing, unless Walt made him really look silly, during these final moments of play.

He kept his big legs driving. He could feel the hands of the Cougars grab at him. He swiveled his hips and they faded back, clutching empty air. He struck out for the sideline, straight-armed a man, and saw him dig his nose in the dirt.

Toby Nelson was down with him again. He got another Cougar out of there. For a moment, Walt had clear sailing. He moved down to the twenty, the fifteen. He could hear the crowd roaring like a million zanies up there above him. This was football, he told himself gaily. This was the old days, the way he'd thrilled them during his zippiest twenties. He still had that old touch, at least for a moment.

He saw the safety man looming before him. A tall broad guy, that safety, with meaty legs wide spread, and arms like an ape. He looked very intense, knowing the game could ride on the outcome of his attempt to stop Walt now.

Walt grinned at him arrogantly, and flicked a hip to the left. The big ape went for it slightly, but still kept his balance. Walt swept to the right, then suddenly stopped, pirouetted like a ballet dancer, and streaked for the sideline. He raced the guy to the corner, and just beat him by inches. But it was all that counted.

He put that pill down on paydirt and knelt holding it a moment, panting hoarsely, listening to the crowd-roar all around

him. It was 13-13. They were seeing themselves a football game, up there.

THERE was no argument about who was to take it for point. Walt took it through center. He was a piledriver going through there. Nothing human could have stopped him. He saw the ref's arms go out, and knew it was 14-13 now, and the title for the Titans, and a thousand berries.

He went straight to the kid. "Kid," he said, "if I had a gun right now, I'd—"

Bill Hervey was grinning. "Wait, before you say something you'll wish you hadn't. I had to tell you that cock-and-bull yarn, Dutch. For your own sake."

"Huh?"

"You've been under consideration for Blubber's job, all season. I guess every man on the team knows about it, by now. When the news got out, somehow, Blubber made us all promise not to say anything to you.

"The owners have been a little doubtful about your—uh—your judgment. You were after that ten-year record, not missing a moment of play. They decided to make a test out of that, see if you'd be sensible enough to yank yourself when you started folding up out there, and stick someone fresher in the game. You did, today, and that oughta just about satisfy 'em. You're in, for Blub's job next season."

"But—holy cow, kid—Then—that's why you rigged up that yarn—about the jallopy? I thought—"

"I know," said Bill Hervey. "I can't say I blame you. It must've looked lousy, from your standpoint. I had to do something. I'd given my word of honor not to tell you the set-up. So I just had to force you to make that decision for yourself."

Walt stood there for a long moment, drinking it in. How he had misjudged this kid! He felt utterly ashamed. He felt a new wave of affection for the kid surging within him. He said thoughtfully:

"So I'm gonna be head coach, next year, huh? Reckon I'll have pretty much say-so about how much goes in the paychecks, then, by golly. Wait'll you see your contract for next season, young fella. Maybe I do kinda pinch my pennies. But I'm not gonna let the club pinch 'em, when it comes to our new first-string fullback!"

# SAY IT WITH YARDS

By Harold Rogers

**Monty Taylor was just another blocking back playing end-stripe stooge for flashy Flip Conners—and, to a girl like Diane, you had to “say it with yards”.**

**M**ONTY TAYLOR shifted uncomfortably in the Panthers' big outer office, where the girl, with blue eyes and a pair of dimples, pounded away at a typewriter. But he couldn't hear the rattle of the machine above the hammering of his own heart, which if anything, sounded even louder than the noises drifting up from the canyon of a street ten stories below.

He took Packy Ladd's telegram out and read it again. It was his way of proving that it had actually happened. The girl at the typewriter saw him and smiled sort of impersonally at him. Monty tried to smile back, but his face felt frozen and his collar was too tight for his neck.

He wondered vaguely if she knew about the telegram and imagined that she did. Back home in Longview, where he worked in a filling station six days in the week and played for the town team on Sundays, it wasn't fifteen minutes after the telegram came before everyone knew that he was going to the city to play for the Panthers. He was going to take Stu Bailey's place.

Stu Bailey was a blocking back. He blocked mainly for one, Flip Conners.

Flip was ninety percent of the Panthers. With the ball he could do many things, but mostly when he had it he tucked it under his arm and moved like a runaway express train.

Of course there were others on the team. There was Charlie Schwartz, the big fullback and Skipper Hogan, the quarter. In one of the tackle spots there was big Ed Wedisone and at one of the end positions Bill Bishop was still doing a creditable job. Occasionally Flip tossed a pass

to Bishop. Bishop, Schwartz, Hogan and Wedisone had been All Americans in their day, only their day was forgotten now. You saw their names in the lineup, but it was Flip Conners who rated the headlines. Flip was the boy who scored the touchdowns. Flip had a movie contract as soon as the season was finished.

No one had ever heard of Stu Bailey until last Sunday, when he broke his leg in the game with the Bears. Then he rated six lines half way down one of the columns that told about Flip beating the Bears. Stu had just sprung him loose for about a dozen of those long runs, but nobody saw that. They were watching Flip and he was worth watching. His change of pace, his way of reversing his field were like hot music. He ran low and hard. Off the field he was a shade over six feet, but all a tackler ever saw were knees and shoulders, unless he tasted one of Flip's stiff arms.

**I**T WASN'T the girl at the typewriter or her smile that caused the tumult in Monty's breast. It was the idea of associating with such people as—well, Flip Conners, and of course the rest of them. He had read their names in the paper, seen their pictures, but he had never expected to meet them, let alone play with them.

Back home he had been treading on air, but here it seemed very grim and real. He wondered how Packy Ladd had ever heard of him. Ten years ago Packy had been doing the same thing for the Panthers that Flip was now doing, but the football wars had done things to Packy's knees. The thing that had saved the day for him was



*Monty hit Frazzetti head on in a blasting tackle.*

his head. The front office could use that.

Ever since Stu Bailey had broken his leg, Packy had been using his head and the telephone and telegraph lines. With only two games left to play, the majority of good blocking backs were taken. Besides good backs came high, and after Mr. Connors received his check . . . Then out

4—Football Action—1st Fall Issue

of one of the smaller recesses of his mind Packy Ladd suddenly remembered that some time, somewhere, one of his scouts had mentioned an ex-high school player who wasn't doing too bad in an industrial league. After that Packy got very busy.

His second telegram contained just two words: "Report immediately."

Monty had arrived in the city that morn-

ing and had come directly to the Panthers' office, carrying a suitcase that was as new as his haircut.

The door in a paneled wall opened. Monty rubbed a hand through his thick, sunburnt hair and his heart beat wildly. He took just one look at the man in the door and knew who he was right away. The years might have done things to Packy Ladd's knees, but they hadn't to the rest of him. In a rugged way he was a handsome bear of a man. The face, burned with the sun and wind of many years, was strong. The piercing black eyes, the dark, bushy hair, now faintly tinged with gray, the broad sloping shoulders, the way he rocked up on the balls of his feet, all marked him as a man whom anyone would notice either on the football field or in an office. He divided his time between them. Afternoons, during the football season, he was right out on the field along with his coaches. Mornings he took care of the details, such as hiring new players. Now he motioned for Monty to come in.

He shook hands with Monty and nodded to a chair, but he didn't sit himself. He stood there in the center of the room tapping a cigarette against his thumb nail. He said, "This is tough on the Panthers, but it's a break for you, kid."

"Yes, sir," Monty answered. "I know that. I'll do my best." His voice had a noticeable drawl.

Packy lit his cigarette. "They tell me you were doing all right in your industrial league."

"We won our share of the games," Monty said. "We played some good teams too." He hoped Packy Ladd didn't know how nervous he was.

"Turn in a good performance here and we'll really make it worth your while," Packy said. "You won't have to go back to that filling station. Play hard and if you make the team save your money."

**M**ONTY caught his breath. "If he made the team — " The telegram hadn't implied that. Surely Ladd wouldn't have asked him to come, sent him a ticket, if he weren't sure that he would make the team.

Packy Ladd walked around and sat down behind his desk. "This isn't going to be too tough. We're playing the Owls this

Sunday. They're down in sixth place. We should take them by about four touchdowns. All you've got to do is spring Flip loose, he'll take care of that. We can get in three practice sessions so that you can learn the signals. Jim Curtis, the coach, will work with you evenings."

The door jerked open and Flip Conners strode in without bothering to knock. Monty knew it was Flip from his pictures. He wasn't as tall as Packy by an inch but he carried his weight better yet. Like Packy, he was rugged and dark, but his nose was still straight. The only mark he had on his face was a small cleat scar above his left eye.

He asked, "What's the idea of getting me out of bed in the middle of the night?" If he meant it to be a joke, his voice spoiled it.

Packy nodded toward Monty. "I wanted you to meet your new blocking back, Monty Taylor. He's taking Stu Bailey's place for awhile at least."

Flip turned and looked at him, but he didn't offer to shake hands. Monty could feel the dark eyes running up over his own hard body. Alongside of Packy Ladd and Flip Conners, he felt small and uncomfortable. He didn't weigh an ounce over one seventy and both of them, he judged, would tip the scales at better than two hundred.

"So you're going to be blocking for me?" Conners appeared to be weighing the thing in his mind. His eyes seemed to force themselves physically into Monty's gray, level gaze.

"I'm going to try." Monty wished that Conners wouldn't continue to stare at him in such a condescending way.

"Where have you played?" Conners asked.

"High school and the Valley Industrial League."

Flip Conners frowned and there was a bit of disbelief in his eyes. "High school? An industrial league?" He whirled on Packy. "What is this anyway? If I've got to carry the ball and run my own interference . . ."

Before Packy Ladd could reply, Monty spoke. He could feel a hot anger rising in himself. It crowded out the nervousness. He said, "I may be new to your type of playing, but I think I can keep out of

your way."

Connors swore but he was looking at the Panthers' manager. "Damn it all Packy, if you don't want to win your games I still have my reputation to think about."

He scowled at Monty. "I'm sorry, kid, but this is big time. When I get the ball I want to travel. It isn't your fault—"

Packy found his voice. "Now wait a minute. We're having practice this afternoon. Give him a chance. If reports are correct—"

"To hell with reports," Flip Connors snapped. "What I want are yards."

He turned then and started to leave the office.

"Hold on, Flip," Packy called. "A couple of photographers are coming up to get some pictures, publicity stuff."

"You'll look good in them," Flip called back over his shoulder and kept right on walking.

"Damn these prima donnas," Packy said. "He's got his reputation to think about. Well, what about my gate receipts?"

He crossed the room, came back to Monty. "Don't let it get you down, kid. If you can spring him loose . . . Say, have you got a place to stay? See my secretary out there. She'll make reservations for you in one of the hotels. I've got a million things to do, a million of them, and there's practice this afternoon at two. You know where the park is?"

**M**ONTY had no idea where it was, but he said he thought he could find it. He started for the outer office. It would be good to get out where there was some air. In there, with Packy Ladd and Flip Connors, he had felt smothered.

He opened the door leading to the outer office and saw that Flip Connors had stopped and was talking with the girl at the typewriter. He would have walked right by them, but there was the small matter of getting a place to stay. Just outside the door he hesitated, waiting. Flip was no longer scowling. He was talking and laughing all at the same time. Monty couldn't hear what he was saying, but he could see the stars in the girl's eyes.

She saw him, finally, and asked, "Was there something, Mr. Taylor?"

It brought him up with a guilty start. His homely, but rather pleasant face, broke

into an embarrassed grin. "Mr. Ladd said you would make room reservations for me."

Flip started to move away, then turned and came back. His face was still all smiles. He said, "She'll try to boss you and mother you like she does all the rest of the club, but don't get any queer ideas, Taylor. This little bit of fluff is all mine." He was still laughing when he went through the door.

It wasn't so much what the guy said, but the way he had of saying it, that made Monty want to punch him. He looked at the girl and saw the twin flames that were stabbing her cheeks and the desire to work on Connors grew, but he shoved his hands in his pockets and waited. If he stayed around it probably wouldn't be too long before he and Mr. Flip Connors had a show down, but there was a time and place for everything.

She said, "I already have your hotel reservation, Mr. Taylor. Here, I'll write the name and address for you." She looked up at him and smiled and now Monty knew why his heart increased its tempo. "I hope you don't believe everything Flip tells you. Really he's not a bad sort when he forgets himself." She wrote quickly. "Just in case you ever do get in trouble I'll give you my name and address too." She added that to the card with the name of the hotel. "Don't forget," she called, "practice at two this afternoon."

Monty was in the elevator when he finally looked at the card. Before he had been too busy looking at the girl. Now he saw that her name was Diane Crewe and he thought it was quite the nicest name he had ever heard.

A taxi took Monty to a hotel that could have housed the entire population of Longview. A bellboy showed him to a room and he hung his few extra clothes in the closet, hoping that they would lose some of their wrinkles. Then he went down to the dining room and had breakfast and dinner all in one. There was a crowd all around him, but he felt very much alone. Minute by minute the entire affair was losing its appeal. Then he shifted his thoughts to Diane Crewe and decided that by hook or crook he would stay around a long time; but that, he knew, was going to be one hell of a job.

Here he was fresh out of an industrial league, expected to block for a guy like Flip Conners. The more he thought about the situation the more he wondered if Packy Ladd hadn't made a horrible mistake somewhere along the line, or maybe that he had made a mistake in coming to the city.

Blocking for some backs he might have had a chance, but Flip Conners was a headliner. He played to the stands and he didn't care who knew it, but he didn't have to as long as he kept on making touchdowns. When he didn't—Monty Taylor stopped right there. He knew what Flip would do and he didn't like him any better for it. Anyway, how could you like a guy who so obviously didn't like you?

## II

HE THOUGHT about it all the way out to the park in a taxi. He rode in a taxi, not because he thought it would give him prestige, but because it was the only way he could find the place. But when it came time to go into the door marked, "Players Entrance," he had another bad few minutes and wished that the taxi driver had also lost the way.

At Longview they had stuffed their meager equipment into their football pants and carried it down to the basement of the armory where they dressed. Then after the game they carried it home again the same way. Here the magnitude of the place almost bowled him over. Someone showed him to the equipment room, where he was given pads and a practice suit, then they took him into the main dressing room and to a locker.

All around him men dressed and undressed, but there were more than just players in the room. It was filled with sports-writers and photographers. They asked him a million questions, a million questions, as Packy Ladd would say. Monty tried to dress and not say anything that would look foolish in print. He had an idea now how a gold fish felt. He hadn't realized that he would make such a splash, but a cub from one of the papers unintentionally spilled the soup.

He said, "You know, Taylor, anyone who is paired with Flip Conners is worth some attention. During the week there

isn't too much to write about anyway."

They went out on to the practice field finally. Monty Taylor would never forget those next three days. He didn't know that so much football could be crowded into such a short space.

Once Flip said, "Don't forget, kid, this is only practice. In a real game you're going to have to move or I'll run right over you." He wasn't nasty about it. He was just stating a fact. Then he asked, "Did you ever carry the ball?"

"Only once," Monty told him. "I lost three yards."

Flip looked down at him puzzled. "I never could figure out why a man will take all the punishment a lineman or a blocking back does, when there aren't any thrills in it for him. Oh, maybe I'm wrong," he conceded airily, "but where I get my thrill is seeing those white lines slip under my feet."

There was almost disgust in Monty's voice when he answered. "We're just big hearted. The other ten of us just string along to see that guys like you are made happy."

Flip looked at him through narrowed lids. "Just make me happy against the Owls, kid, and I won't kick. Don't forget I've got to say it with yards."

At the finish of the last practice for the week, Monty went back to his room and sat down with a bundle of plays and charts, as he had done the past two evenings. But he found it difficult to concentrate. He kept thinking of Flip Conners and wondering what went on inside the guy's head. There was something likeable about the big lug even if he did have a one-track mind. He remembered what Diane Crewe had said during the few minutes that he had talked with her. "Really, he's not a bad sort when he forgets himself."

After that he thought about Diane. That was more pleasant. He wondered if she would be out at the game when they played the Owls and where she would sit. He hoped that he could do a real job of it without making Flip Conners look too good. It was Saturday night. He wondered if Flip and Diane were out dancing somewhere. A player like Flip could pretty much disregard training rules. All he had to do was carry the ball.

**M**ONTY was in the dressing room an hour ahead of everybody the next day. He went early because he was too nervous to stay anywhere else. The butterflies were jumping around in his stomach and all the time he had to keep wiping his hands and forehead.

Jim Curtis, the coach, strolled in, smoking a cigar. He looked at Monty and grinned. "A couple of games and you'll get used to it. After that it's just sixty minutes of hard work."

It was too early to dress so he sat on the bench in front of his locker and tried to study plays, but his mind was blank. He couldn't remember anything except some of the plays he had used back home and even they were all jumbled now.

Flip Conners was the last man in the dressing room. He was wearing a natty tweed outfit with a snap brim hat. He nodded to some of the boys, but for the most part he ignored them. When he was about half dressed he looked over at Monty. "How do you feel today, kid? Ready for the bumps?"

Monty nodded. "I might be able to hand out a few." Conners did something to him. He made him feel small and angry all at the same time. Who did the guy think he was anyway? Just because he was a ball carrier it didn't put him in a class all by himself. Other men had toted the mail.

They went out on to the field finally and Monty stopped and stared. The practice field was on the outside and it was the first time he had seen the big stadium from the playing field. It was so much bigger than he had imagined. It was like being down in the basement of a skyscraper. Back home, when he had played, he could look up and see the cars parked all around the field. Usually people sat in them to watch the play or followed along the sidelines. It was still early, but to Monty the stands looked pretty well filled.

Before he thought, he asked, "Do you always have a crowd like this?"

Flip Conners had the ball and was getting ready to punt. Without turning he said, "Sure. Where do you suppose the management gets the dough to pay me fifteen thousand a year?"

Monty turned and stared at Conners. Fifteen thousand! The big man booted a sixty yard spiral down field even while he



*Diane Crewe*

spoke. Without watching to see where the ball went he held out his hands for another one. "You'll get used to it if you stick around. Anyway you don't have anything to worry about. If you were a ball carrier . . ."

Without waiting to hear more, Monty walked away. This was his big moment. It was the thing he had dreamed about, but had never expected to have happen. He wasn't going to have a man like Flip Conners spoil it for him.

If he stuck around . . . There it was again. He had his work cut out for him. But how did a man, fresh out of an industrial league, play with a man who was big news.

**M**ONTY went through the motions of warmup practice with the rest of them but he was just an automaton. His stomach was the only part of him that was alive and it was slowly freezing.

He saw Skipper Hogan walk toward the mid-field stripe and meet a man wearing the blue Owl uniform and a couple of stripe-shirted officials. A coin spun in the air, then Hogan was walking back.

He said, "They're going to try lugging it to start. We defend the south goal." He scowled at Flip. "I guess that means you save yourself while the rest of us meatballs work."

Flip took off his helmet and trotted toward the sidelines. Hogan growled something about property that was too valuable to do anything but come in when the time was right for a push. He didn't say much,

but from it Monty gathered that there were others on the club who felt the same towards Connors as he did.

A back by the name of Hawks trotted out and took Flip's place. He was a gnome-like individual with a flat scarred face. Monty hadn't heard the man utter a dozen words since he had been with the club. Now his thick lips drew back and Monty saw that two of his front teeth were missing. "I just plug holes, now," he said. "I used to carry the ball like him." Taking too many tackles hadn't helped the man. He was still grinning when Charlie Schwartz's toe sent the ball down into the Owl's end zone.

An Owl back took the ball over his shoulder and tucked it under his arm. He scooted back to the eighteen before a Bishop knocked him out of bounds. Monty rubbed his hands together and wondered where Packy Ladd had ever come up with the idea that the Owls weren't going to be tough.

The Owls started chipping away at the line. They picked up a few yards that way, then uncorked one of their running plays. It started out like a spinner into the line. It developed into a lateral and finished with a sweep around the end. It wasn't too hard to follow if you kept your eyes open. Monty did. He knew where the ball was every minute of the time. He saw the Owl halfback cutting around into his territory, with the ball cradled in his arms as if it were a million dollars. Monty went after the man's legs but he never got there. Something hit him hard and he spun around twice, then lit on the back of his neck. Skipper Hogan pulled the man down on the thirty-one.

Hogan grinned at Monty. "Those Owls have blockers too. You want to remember it and not get yourself killed."

The Owls went back into the huddle, but they didn't stay there long. They had more deception than a magician. A pass into the flat netted them another first down.

Hogan took time out, but the Owls would not be denied. In four minutes, by the clock, they had themselves a touch-down, but they failed to convert.

To Monty that looked like a lot of points in a very short time, but Skipper Hogan didn't seem to be discouraged. He said, "After the kickoff they send Flip into the

fray and then we'd better start moving.

THE Owls kicked off. The ball came to Hawks, but he didn't keep it. He lateraled to Hogan and slipped in ahead of him. Hogan ended up on his own twenty with half of the Owl lineup straddle of his neck.

Over on the Panther bench there was a stir and Flip Connors slid out of his blanket. Up in the grandstand there was a roar that drowned out the public address system as Flip started to make his entrance into the game.

Hawks tapped Monty on the shoulder. "They used to do that for me. It sounds nice." He sighed and trotted off the field.

Connors slipped into the huddle and said, "Well, let's not catch cold standing around."

Hogan sent Schwartz into the line for five. That put them up on their own twenty-five. Hogan stood with his hands on his hips and glanced down field. "We'll run twenty-one," he said.

Monty felt his scalp tighten. All he had to do was spring Connors loose, spring him loose with eleven guys waiting to bust the thing wide open and thirty thousand people watching.

He saw the ball come back and fit into Flip's big hands as if it were on a string. Up front the guards were pulling out to lead the way and Monty fell in behind them. When Connors carried the ball he wanted room to get started.

An Owl tackler sifted through the line and one of the guards batted him out of the way with his shoulder. They moved on and Monty saw the left end for the Owls getting set to muss things up and turn the play in. He went out with the idea of clearing the road but something hit him instead and he sprawled directly in Flip Conner's path. Connors came down on top of him cursing. The play cost them three yards.

They went back into the huddle and Flip said, "It's this way, kid, I can play against eleven men, but when it comes to twelve . . ." His voice was as patient as a buzz saw.

It brought the red flooding to Monty's face. He glanced at Hogan. The quarterback said, "Same thing again this time. Try and stay on your feet, Taylor. We've

got places to go and things to do this afternoon."

The try picked up the three they had lost and netted them a miserly four more. That left them a yard short of a first down. Back in the huddle again, Hogan said, "It's early yet, boys. I guess we'd better boot it."

Schwartz went back and smashed his toe into the ball. When the thing ended it was the Owls' ball on their own thirty-eight.

They managed to hold the Owls for downs and they kicked just as the quarter ended. Again Monty glanced up at the score board. Packy Ladd had predicted that they would win by at least four touchdowns. Monty had a picture of himself going back to Longview on tomorrow morning's train.

**W**ITH THE intermission over they went into the huddle. Monty could feel ten pairs of eyes staring at him. Before, when Flip Conners had come into the lineup, it had meant yards, but now . . . He swallowed and ran his tongue over dry lips. He didn't know how much longer Packy Ladd would leave him in there.

He heard the signal called without being too sure what it was, but he didn't ask for a check. He only knew that he had to get in ahead of Flip Conners, stay there somehow, until he got him into the clear. After that it didn't matter. Flip would do the rest.

He saw the ball come back to Flip and they started moving. Up front the line held, bent, broke, but by that time they were moving. Side-stepping and dodging, they made fifteen yards together, then Monty went down but he took an Owl tackler with him. After that Flip picked up five yards by himself.

On the next three plays, the Panthers moved the ball down to the Owls thirty-two yard stripe, but all of the time the going was getting a little tougher. In the huddle Skipper Hogan said, "So far we've been doing it the hard way, now let's take to the air."

Flip Conners took the ball and started fading back. Owl linemen came knifing through, but Flip shifted and skipped around like a ballet dancer. Monty saw a would-be tackler make a lunge at Flip

but somehow he got there and cut him down first. Just as he went down he saw that Bill Bishop was completely surrounded by blue clad Owls. There wasn't a chance for Flip to chuck one to him. And Flip was back, way back. Then, from his position on the ground, he saw Flip start to run. He struggled to one knee but there was no chance for him to get up and run interference. Flip was off like a horse to the races.

He moved over to the sidelines, skirted them until a couple of tacklers got in his way, then without breaking his stride he turned and cut back. He crossed the field almost laterally. Suddenly there was only one man between him and the goal. It was the Owl safety, but Flip took care of him easily. He just fed him a straight dose of that famous Conner's stiff arm and kept right on going. Then, while thousands of throats screamed out their approval, Flip Conners touched the ball down and turned on his best smile for the cameras that were grinding out newsreel flashes.

Big Charlie Schwartz picked himself up off the ground and grinned. "You've got to hand it to that guy, if he can get loose he can run. We gotta get him loose somehow."

They trotted down the field and Schwartz kicked the ball through the uprights for the extra point. They took Flip Conners out then and Hawks came back into the lineup.

"Now we'll kick off to them," the substitute back said, "and I'll just plug holes. That's all I ever do any more is plug holes around here. I used to be like him."

But for the next few minutes it seemed to Monty that neither Hawks nor any of the rest of them were plugging the holes. The Owl forward wall was big and tough. If they had to make their yards the hard way then they would make them the hard way. They did, right through the line and about five yards at a clip until they were down on the Panther's twenty-seven where they took to the air.

### III.

**F**ROM HIS position in the backfield Monty saw the pass play develop. He saw Kelton, the Owls' left end, take the ball over his shoulder without breaking his

stride and drop in behind a two-man interference.

Skipper Hogan yelled, "Bust it!" and Monty started driving in, but this time he remembered that the Owls had blockers. He side-stepped a rolling block, and dived in under a straight arm, to dump Kelton on the thirteen. There, let them talk about that. Maybe he had loused up a couple of runs for Flip Conners, but at least he wasn't sitting on the bench half of the time.

Monty glanced up at the clock. It seemed that he had been out there half of the afternoon and there were still four minutes to play.

With things clicking as they were, the Owls didn't waste too much time in the huddle. They sent their big fullback smashing into the line for a couple of yards before Charlie Schwartz drove his shoulder into the ball carrier's middle and dumped him. The next play started as a delayed line buck, developed into a criss cross, and from that into a forward pass. But the Panthers followed it. Charlie Schwartz went up into the air like he was climbing an imaginary rope, got one of his paws on the ball and pulled it down, took two quick steps and chucked it over to Skipper Hogan.

Monty stepped in ahead of Hogan and they started to roll. They got the ball back to the twenty-two yard line before Monty had to leave his feet to take an Owl out of the play. That left Hogan very much alone and the Owls swarmed him under on the twenty-five.

Automatically as he climbed to his feet, Monty glanced over at the bench. Flip Conners was coming back into the game. He heard Skipper Hogan growl, "Now what the hell, we were doing all right." But Monty didn't feel that way at all. His legs were a couple of wooden sticks and he very much wished that he might have a rest before he had to start out ahead of Mr. Flip Conners.

Conners glanced at Monty, then up at the clock on the score board. "All right, kid, we'll have to move. Time's a wasting."

Monty grabbed himself a couple of gulps of air. He wanted to say, "If I'd had the rest you have—" Then he remembered that he still didn't have a contract and glanced over at Hogan.

"Twenty-one coming up," the skipper said. "Let's make it count."

Monty knew he was slow getting started on the play. He saw the ball come back to Flip from center and for just a moment the back juggled it on the tips of his fingers. It had been just a couple of inches short and Flip had had to step up to get it. Now he tucked it under his arms and started, but that instant, while he had hesitated to see if Conners were going to fumble, had thrown Monty off stride. Conners didn't wait. With his long-gaited run he stretched out and went around his interference.

Monty tried to overtake him, but a solid half of pounding had taken something from his legs. He couldn't quite pull out the last stop. Until then he hadn't realized just how tired he actually was.

By himself Flip went out and around the line of scrimmage. An Owl came back over and made a lunge at him, but Conners just turned on the heat and went around him. He had speed and power to burn in those legs of his. He faked another tackler, made him commit himself, then raced the Owl safety man diagonally across the field and beat him to pay territory. Even Monty had to admit that it was pretty to watch and the stands were roaring.

**H**AWKS came back on to the field at once and Charlie Schwartz kicked the extra point to give them a 14-6 lead.

Monty glanced up at the clock. There was just about time for the kickoff, but the Owls went nowhere fast. Monty was still smarting about the way Flip had gone out and around him. He saw the Owl full take the ball and start down the field, with his interference beginning to form, but Monty didn't give it too much of a chance. He drove in and knocked the big man out of bounds just as the half ended. It shook Monty clear to the heels, but he got up grinning. It was a nice thing to remember while he was trotting toward the dressing room. At least partially he had made up with his tackling for some of the other things he might have lacked.

He was just about the last man inside the door. He wondered what Packy would say, but instead Flip Conners was doing the talking. He had Packy backed up against one of the lockers.

"It's just like I was telling you yesterday," the ball carrier was saying, "if I've got to carry the mail and run my own interference I've got to have more money. Twice now in that first half . . ."

Packy shook his head. "Yeah," he said, "I know, but you didn't hurt yourself any with the fans. Did you hear them howl?"

"I heard them," Flip said, "and I know just how soon they'll start to yap if I don't get them some points. If I've got to play the whole backfield . . ."

Packy turned and walked over to Monty. "That was a nice tackle you just made out there. Now if you could do something like that with your blocking I wouldn't feel too bad. As long as we can get Flip loose . . ."

"We don't have to worry about how many points the opposition makes?" Monty clipped. Damn it all, couldn't they see that he was trying? If they would only give him time.

Packy shrugged. "That's about the size of it. What those people out there pay for is to see touchdowns. If you can't shake him loose . . ." He left the sentence unfinished for Monty to draw his own conclusions.

**W**HEN they went back on to the field at the beginning of the second half, Flip Conners went with them because the Owls would be kicking off. He said, "Let's get ourselves some points and get them in a hurry. I'm not getting money enough to work all afternoon."

But at the end of the quarter the score had not changed. Flip had a tear in his jersey and his face was dirty and sweaty. After every play he came back into the huddle. The Owls were really set for him and he was getting the works. "Damn it all," he snarled, "get me loose. That's all you've got to do is get me loose."

Monty rubbed a dirty hand across his eyes. He was a little bloody around the mouth. He had been in on every play and the Owls worked on him before they got to Flip. He glanced over at the bench. If only Packy would send in a substitute for him until the hot iron stopped needling his side and he could rest his legs for a few minutes. It felt as if he had a couple of cracked ribs and his legs were leaden weights.

While they were changing goals, Skipper Hogan said, "On the ground we can't do much. Of course we're ahead, but not enough. Maybe if we take to the air—"

It was the Panthers' ball and Hogan opened the last quarter by flipping one to Bishop. He fired it hard and flat. Bishop snagged it and took two steps, but the Owls were fast. They pounced on him from about six different directions: yet the play had netted a first down.

It gave Monty a little bit of the rest that he needed. "We'll try the same thing once more," Hogan said, "and see what happens."

Hogan took the ball and an Owl broke through the line. Monty knocked him down, but it didn't do his ribs any good. He untangled himself just in time to see Bishop take the ball on the Owls' forty-eight, but that was as far as he went.

"For awhile they'll be over us like an umbrella," Hogan remarked, when they went back into the huddle. "You ready to travel, Flip?"

"Hell, yes. I've been ready all afternoon," Flip cracked.

"Twenty-one it is," Hogan barked.

Monty wanted to tell him about his ribs, but he clamped his teeth together and hoped that they would hold for one more run. Either he would get a contract or a return ticket to Longview. He clenched his fists and looked down at his feet.

He saw the ball come back to Flip out of the tail of his eye and with that spiral flash he was off, head low, feet churning the ground. He saw the two guards pull out of the line but he didn't wait. He gave a blue clad Owl the shoulder, bumping him out of the play. Behind him he could hear the thud of Flip's cleats and he headed wide around the end. He kept the alley open, bumping Owl tacklers in toward the center of the field. He felt the stinging jolts of those impacts doubling his spine and stabbing into his side, but he managed to stay on his feet and keep running.

Then they were over on the sidelines and he was still ahead of Conners, but the big Owl fullback was cutting over fast. He wasn't a man to trifle with. Monty locked his arms down tight around his ribs and threw himself into the legs of the big Owl. The man came down on him like a ton of bricks. He had a glimpse of

a pair of legs flashing past his face even as he fell and he knew that but for the safety Flip Conners was in the clear. Then while the ground changed places with the sky a roar from the stands told him that once again Flip Conners had made another touchdown, but he didn't care. Let them yell for Flip. All he wanted to do was just stretch out and stay right there on the ground. His body was just one big aching bruise.

They took him out when they replaced Flip. Packy Ladd said, "That last time in there, Taylor, that's what we want. If you can do that again next week against the Eagles—"

It made Monty feel warm all over. So next week he would be playing against the Eagles. From the bench he saw Charlie Schwartz boot the extra point and then the kickoff.

After that the Owls filled the air with passes, but there were only a couple of minutes to go and Hawks was out there grinning and plugging holes.

**I**T WAS dark when Monty got back to the hotel where he was staying, with a few yards of tape wrapped around his ribs. The rubbing table and a long stay in the showers had soaked some of the aches and pains out of his body. He thought of a show, then he thought about Diane Crewe. She had said, "If you ever get in trouble—"

Monty grinned. He wasn't exactly in trouble. He just wondered if she had seen the game and what she thought about it. After that he whistled a little and dressed very carefully. He went down in front of the hotel and called a taxi.

It was a small house, where she lived, well to the outskirts of the city. There was a big lawn covered with dry leaves now from the maples and elms that surrounded it. Monty paid the driver and went up the walk quickly. Perhaps he should have called first, but there was no turning back now. His finger jabbed the bell button.

The door swung open and Diane Crewe stood there, very slim and beautiful with the shaded overhead light turning her hair into a soft flame and making her eyes big and deep. She said, "Why it's Mr. Taylor. I thought you'd be in bed after that game you played this afternoon."

"Then you saw it?" Monty's battered mouth spread in an engaging grin.

"Of course. I see all of them. I sit up at the south end behind the goal posts with a pair of field glasses. But won't you come in? Flip is already here. We were just—"

"In that case I'll run along," he said, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice. He was just turning away when Conners' big bulk loomed in the doorway.

"Wait a minute, kid. We were going down town. We'll drop you off anywhere you say. You must be tired after slogging around out there all afternoon. If I had to earn my money that way . . ." There was a benevolent tone in the ball carrier's voice that was like a rasp to raw flesh.

"Thanks," Monty flung over his shoulder. "I'm used to working for what I get." He went on down the walk, annoyed with himself for letting the thing happen in the first place. He should have called before he went out, but he was still more annoyed because he had let Conners needle him into cracking back before Diane Crewe. It was a thing that grew with the minutes. It was a mingled feeling of embarrassment and anger.

#### IV.

**O**N MONDAY afternoon they worked just enough to take the stiffness out of their muscles, but when they came to the dressing room on Tuesday there was a notice for them to wear pads for scrimmage. Flip Conners read it and slammed the door of his locker. "What the hell is this?" he roared. "We go out there and take a lot of bumps so a damned busher can learn to block. With only a week of the season left—"

It was a thing that Monty had never thought of, that they were having a scrimmage just for his benefit, but even if they were it wouldn't hurt any of them. It wasn't his fault that Stu Bailey had broken his leg and that the Panthers didn't have another blocker they could use. He thought of that and the little things that Flip Conners had been saying all along, the first time they met when Conners failed to shake hands, the night out at Diane Crewe's.

Now he spoke almost without thinking.

"You can be civil, Conners, or you can keep your remarks to yourself. I may have to block for you, but I don't have to eat your dirt. You might as well get this thing straight once and for all."

Conners was just pulling on his socks. Monty saw his face turn red, then start to purple. There was a sudden silence in the room. For a rookie to talk to a star ball carrier that way was unexpected. Conners felt it and he stood up slowly and walked over toward Monty.

"Rookie," he snarled. "I say what I please around here. You're just a country yokel stringing along for a couple of games. Next year you'll be lucky to get back in an industrial league. Just one play when you louse things up as you did in that Owl game and I'll bat your ears clear off your head."

"Start batting now then," Monty snapped. Before Conners could get set he slapped him across the mouth with his open hand and the ball carrier gasped from the shock. Then he straightened and swung a hard right at Monty's head. Monty slid in under and grabbed the larger man by the front of the shirt and jerked. It pulled Conners off balance and before he could recover Monty slapped him again, then shoved him backwards. He stumbled against a bench and went down with his left leg twisted in under him.

Conners started to get up, but his face, red from the slapping, twisted with pain. "My ankle," he gasped.

Before, the others had been watching the thing with only a scant show of amusement. They had expected the big ball carrier to make short work of the rookie. They might or might not like it, but that was the way it would be. They hadn't expected to see him sprawled on the floor. For a moment they made no movement to help, then Denning, one of the guards, spoke.

He said, "Rookie, you better start praying that he can play against the Eagles Sunday. That game is money in our pockets. If he can't play and we lose it because of you—"

"If you lose it," Monty looked around the room and now his fists were clenched, "it won't be because of me." He stood there not entirely sure that they wouldn't gang him.

It was Skipper Hogan who broke the tension. He said, "All right, Taylor. You've had a little argument, now forget it. Next time save your temper for the opposition and not one of your teammates. We're too short-handed to have anyone getting busted up in a locker room brawl."

The quarterback crossed over and looked at Flip Conners, but he didn't offer to help him to his feet. "You'd better get in and let the doc take a look at your ankle if it's hurt." There was authority in his tone.

Conners limped into the trainer's office and they went on dressing in silence, but Denning's remark lingered with Monty and it made him just a little sick at heart. If they lost without Flip in there, they would blame him, and if Flip did get into the game and they lost they would still blame him. Either way they had a perfect alibi.

THEY went out on the field and were just finishing their limbering up exercises when Conners came limping out with a satisfied smile on his handsome face. "I can't scrimmage today," he told Skipper Hogan, "probably can't scrimmage any this week, but the doc thinks I'll be all right for Sunday."

They went to work then with Hawks in Flip Conners' spot. He said, "Jeeze, maybe if his ankle don't get well I'll get a chance to do something besides plug holes. How come you had nerve enough to hit him? He's been like that with all the boys, but he's the star. You're only a rookie. I'd hate to be in your spot if we don't beat the Eagles."

Monty looked at Hawks. "You think he won't play?" he asked.

"I don't think," Hawks told him. "I just plug holes. He's got a movie contract. He'll still get his dough and if he sits on the bench he won't be taking a chance of getting his pretty face busted like mine."

They practiced hard that week. Monty realized that much of it was for him and he also realized just how much it meant to him if they beat the Eagles. It meant a contract, probably, but he would have to be better than his best and without Flip Conners in there he was just a trifle worried. Flip might be a bluff and a show off, but he was a ball carrier. When he got that ball he really traveled. Playing along

side of Hawks, Monty realized just how good Conners was. But still that was no excuse for the guy trying to lord it over him or any of them for that matter.

Monty met Diane once during the week. She said, "You really stirred up a hornet's nest around your ears. I don't think Flip meant anything by his remarks. He just sounded off without thinking."

"Then next time he'd better think," Monty replied.

She smiled at him. "I hope you win that ball game, Mr. Taylor. I hope you get your contract for next year."

He said, "My friends call me Monty. We'll win the ball game and after we do I'll be calling your number, but it won't be because I'm in trouble."

"That's a bargain," she smiled again. "If you win I'll be waiting." But her words didn't seem to carry too much conviction.

The evening before the game Monty went up to Flip's room. He didn't waste any time. "How's the leg, Conners? You think you can play against the Eagles Sunday?"

"I'll play a lot of ball with or without the leg," the big ball carrier scowled. "There's going to be a stand full of cash customers out there to see me. I can't afford to let them down, but you'd better give me some blocking or I'll run right up your back with my cleats."

"You'll get blocking," Monty told him, "a hell of a lot of it. I just wanted to be sure that you'll be in there. There's ten other guys in there who want to win. Their public may not be quite as big as yours, Mr. Conners, but to them winning is a very personal thing. It may be the difference whether or not they eat this winter. They don't have a movie contract for a couple of grade B pictures."

Flip Conners stood up. His face was getting red. "Something tells me I ought to bust you," he said.

"I wouldn't," Monty replied. "You'd look bad limping on both legs, Mr. Conners, very bad. Your public would be just too terribly disappointed if you were limping so much that you couldn't run."

Monty stepped out into the hall and closed the door. He was scared, but he was laughing. He knew Flip Conners thought he was just a dumb blocking back. Well, let him think what he would as long as

they won from the Eagles. They couldn't win with Flip sitting on the bench, of that Monty was quite positive.

WHEN they went out on the field for their game with the Eagles, the stands were jammed until they couldn't have fitted another person in with a shoe horn. For just a moment Monty stopped and stared up into the stands in back of the south goal posts. He wondered just where Diane was up there and if she was watching him through her field glasses.

He was still wondering that when Flip Conners came trotting past, limping just the correct amount with his left leg. "How does this crowd compare with the ones you used to have back in Longview?" the ball carrier asked.

"A trifle larger," Monty told him, "but I don't have to worry about that. You're the one who has to wave to them. They're your public, but maybe they're just a little divided today. They tell me the Eagles have a very good back in this boy Frazetti."

Conner's face got red and for a moment he almost forgot to limp. "Frazetti," he said, "is a bum. I'll show you."

A few minutes later Monty saw Flip over talking with Packy Ladd. He couldn't hear what he was saying, but he could make an awfully good guess. He went over to Hawks then and grinned. "I don't think you'll have to come in and plug many holes this afternoon. I think Mr. Conners will be sticking around most of the time."

The Eagles won the toss and elected to receive, which gave Skipper Hogan his choice of goals. He chose the north one so that they would have a slight breeze at their backs. Later in the afternoon the wind might die down so it was best to take advantage of it while they could.

He came back and told them how it was and they lined up for the kickoff. In the backfield for the Panthers were Skipper Hogan, Charlie Schwartz, Monty Taylor and Flip Conners.

Up in the press box a reporter leaned over and spoke to his neighbor out of the corner of his mouth. "I don't get this," he said, "Conners being in there when the Panthers are booting. Maybe they figure he is the only boy who can stop Frazetti."

"You've got an idea, pal," his neighbor

replied and turned his collar up a little higher. "That ground is going to be awfully hard down there today and with a north wind blowing . . ." he shivered.

The whistle blew and Charlie Schwartz threw his legs into gear. The Panthers moved down the field and his toe thudded into the ball, but he was very careful to keep it away from Frazetti. Castiers took it from in back of his own goal line and brought it to the nineteen.

During the past week Monty had spent hours in the Panthers' projection room watching reels of film of the Eagles in action. He felt almost as if he personally had played against them.

He knew that very shortly Frazetti would take the ball and that he would probably come around in his direction. He knew that if it happened that way he would have to be on his toes and get the man very fast or he wouldn't get him at all. But to get him would mean blasting right through their heavy artillery because they threw enough ahead of him to bust a hole in a stone wall.

Charlie Schwartz was backing up the line on Monty's side and Donovan, the big center, was up ahead and just a little to the inside of Flip Conners. Instinctively Monty moved out a trifle wider as the play started. He saw Klemson, the end, turn the play in a little but he couldn't get at Frazetti who had the ball. He got one of the interference though and Monty dived through the opening like a fly going through a hole in a screen.

**H**E HIT Frazetti head on and it felt as if he had tackled the front wheel of a ten-ton truck and then went in underneath, because that was the way it happened. He got Frazetti low and the back went right on up and over him, before he came down with his body still curled around the ball.

They untangled and Charlie Schwartz ambled over and helped Monty to his feet. "I thought maybe you would need help on that bird, but hit him a few more times like that and he's the one who'll be needin' the help."

Only Monty or Flip or any of them couldn't stop Frazetti all the time and when he was stopped there were a couple others to be reckoned with. The Eagles

worked the ball on up and just across the mid-field, then had to kick. Hogan took it on the goal line and came back up the center. He was behind his interference for a ways, but the Eagles chopped it down and then dropped Hogan on the fifteen. He said, "If I'd had a chance I'd have lateralled it to you, Flip, but right in our own front yard that way I'd hate to have those boys steal it."

Flip said, "You get it to me, I'll do the rest."

Skipper scowled. "This is the toughest outfit we've been up against all year."

The Eagle line was big and rugged. Charlie Schwartz bounced off it like a rubber ball against a stone wall. Flip picked up three on the next try with plenty of interference ahead of him. Hogan tried a sneak and was dumped for a two yard loss. Charlie Schwartz went back to his own five and then booted. It rolled outside on the Eagles' forty-three.

Frazetti and Castiers teamed up. In the backfield they passed like a couple of basketball players. They criss-crossed until they had things well mixed up and then they did any one of a dozen different things. They picked up two first downs on the ground and passed for a third. It was like trying to stop a tank and an airplane all at the same time.

Monty wondered if his ribs would hold and for how long. He had a very disconsolate picture of himself sitting alone in the hotel lobby instead of calling Diane Crewe. Even with Flip Conners in there the thing didn't look too good.

They finally dug in enough to hold the Eagles on the twelve but Raskob came in long enough to drive three points through the uprights. Monty had about as much hopes of getting them back as he did of earning a million dollars.

The Eagles kicked and Charlie Schwartz took the ball. Charlie was no Fancy Dan. He just tucked the ball into his body and ran straight ahead. He bowled two men over by the sheer drive of his big body, but they managed to pull him down on the eighteen.

Skipper Hogan glanced up at the clock. "You ready for work?" he looked at Flip. "Forty-seven it is."

It started with Schwartz getting the ball and spinning, then going on into the line,

but half way around he handed the ball to Hogan who held it just long enough for Flip to get well out behind his own ends then Skipper would lateral it to him. It called for split second timing and perfect blocking or it would be as dead as New Years without a whistle.

### V.

**W**HEN the ball was passed Monty took off like a singed rabbit. He let the guards take care of the first couple of men to get in the path and led Flip wide around the end. He took him very nearly to the side-lines and watched Frazetti shadowing them. Frazetti was the man he had to get. They went down in a tangle on the twenty-six and Flip picked up another eight. The stands went wild. They were screaming Flip Connors' name.

But Skipper Hogan didn't let it alter his judgment. He sent Schwartz through the center of the line for five. He picked up three himself. Then he took the ball again and lateralled to Flip. The big ball carrier took the ball on the dead run and stepped in behind Monty.

Monty glanced up long enough to see both Castiers and Frazetti coming over and he thought it was like going after elephants with a squirrel gun. He couldn't get Frazetti, but he took Castiers and that slowed the other back up enough so that Flip outran him to the goal. Charlie Schwartz came over and picked Monty up.

"You think you can take many more like that?" the big fullback asked.

"They're getting their bumps too," Monty told him.

"Yeah, I know, but you're new to this thing and your ribs—"

Monty grinned at him. "Either I take it this afternoon or I'll never get old at it."

They walked down the field together and Schwartz kicked the point.

When they started back to get set for the kickoff, Skipper Hogan turned to Flip Connors, "Is this where we lose you for awhile?"

"I'll stay as long as that guy does," Flip glared at Monty.

Hogan shrugged. "You boys have your fun. If you keep on playing like you are I don't care if you never kiss and make up."

Schwartz kicked and the Eagles took to the air. Frazetti not only ran with the ball, but he tossed it around like a baseball. He could hit a dime at thirty yards and just about the time he got the defense spread out to bust a pass he cradled the thing to him and took off across country.

The Eagles racked up their first touchdown midway through the second period. Frazetti completed two passes, then took the ball on the Panthers' thirty-two and drove his way up to the twenty where Monty pulled him down with a crashing tackle that nearly broke them in two.

On the next play he started the same way, but suddenly he lateralled to Castiers. Flip went after him, but he couldn't lay a hand on the Eagle ball carrier. He headed for the corner and went across for their first touchdown of the game. Frazetti kicked the extra point and the score was 10-7 for the Eagles.

"Give me the ball," Flip snarled, "I'll get it back for you."

Only he didn't. The Eagles held them and forced them to kick. Then with less than a minute remaining in the first half Frazetti passed thirty yards for another touchdown. On the try for the extra point Monty broke through the line and batted the ball down, but the score was 16-7. For Monty that spelled just one thing.

The half ended that way and they headed for the dressing room like eleven old men. Hogan said, "We give 'em everything we've got and it ain't enough. What do you do next?"

But Packy Ladd didn't see it that way. He said, "You got to stop Frazetti. You got to stop him, that's all."

"With what?" Charlie Schwartz asked. "You haven't got a machine gun in that medicine kit, have you, Packy?"

Packy walked over to Flip. "How you feeling?" he asked.

The ball carrier looked up at him with what he probably intended to use for a scornful look, once he was in pictures. "If they'd only break me loose," he said, "if they'd just do that I'd go places. That's what I keep telling them."

**A**T THE start of the fourth quarter the score still had not changed. The closest the Panthers had been able to get to the Eagles' goal line was the thirteen.

They had tried a field goal then but the Eagle line had been too much for them and the kicker had been rushed. The ball struck the cross-bar and bounced back into the playing field.

When they changed goals it seemed to Monty that the walk down the field was more effort than it was worth. What did it matter who had the wind to their backs. His body felt as if it had gone through a concrete mixer. All he wanted to do was lie right down on the ground and hug it to him. He had blocked and he had tackled with everything he had, but it still wasn't enough.

They had played three quarters of bruising football and with their superior lead the Eagles had let them wear themselves out battering at an air tight defense.

During the third quarter Packy had taken Flip out and given him a rest, but with or without him it didn't seem to make much difference. He came in at the beginning of the last period where the Panthers had the ball on their own thirty-three. Hogan sent Schwartz into the line twice for a couple of yards, then called on Flip to pass. He took the ball and started fading. There was nothing fancy about it. The thing was just straight football. Monty went out and chopped a tackler down and from the ground he saw Flip chuck a long one to Bishop. It worked and Bishop scampered to the nineteen.

From there on it was very rough. Skipper mixed it up as much as he could but there was plenty of work for all of them to do. He sent Schwartz into the line for a few yards and he didn't spare himself. They used up their four downs and just managed to push it across the nine which made it first and goal to go.

Monty thought desperately. It will take this one and one more besides. He didn't know if he had enough left to last until the game was over, let alone trying for a push like that. Way off in the distance he heard Skipper Hogan say, "We'll try forty-seven again."

He didn't remember much about that play except that he stayed on his feet long enough to shoulder one tackler out of the way, then he had to throw himself across the legs of another, but that was no effort at all, because after that there would be a few seconds when he could just lie there

on the ground and suck the air into his tortured lungs. He felt a jolt and then a heavyweight came down on top of him. There was a big roar from the stands and he figured that either Flip or someone had gone across for a touchdown. In a hazy fashion he stopped and figured the thing out. That would give them thirteen points and if Schwartz kicked the extra point they would have fourteen. They still needed two more to tie it up, three to win.

Schwartz converted and Monty looked at the scoreboard. His figuring was right, but there were only six minutes to play. He didn't know if he were glad or sorry. He wanted those extra points if they could be had and all that went with them, but six more minutes of battering, bruising play—

They kicked off to the Eagles and somehow Frazetti got his hands on the ball. Monty cursed when he saw the fleet Eagle back tuck it under his arm and start up the field. Didn't the guy ever get tired? He remembered then that Frazetti had been over sitting on the bench for the last fifteen minutes or so and that he was probably rested and ready to go places.

The Eagle ball carrier came skipping over the white lines like a rabbit. He sidestepped two Panther tacklers and they slid in the dirt. Then another one hit him, but Frazetti squirmed free and kept coming. Monty found himself hoping that the Eagle back would suddenly decide to reverse his field and cut over to the other side, but Frazetti was coming on like a runaway horse. He was lifting his knees high and stepping fast again.

**I**N A disjointed sort of way Monty realized that unless something happened it was up to him. He tucked his head down between his shoulders and started driving diagonally toward Frazetti. The big man had lost his interference, but he had a wicked stiff arm. Monty gritted his teeth and dug. If he couldn't cut Frazetti down he could at least drive him over to the sidelines where Skipper Hogan might get a crack at him.

Ten feet from Frazetti Monty took off. He launched himself through the air like a torpedo. He reached out with his arms and wrapped them around something. He got a jolt in the face that nearly broke

his neck, but he would not be denied. One of his grasping hands came down around Mr. Frazetti's ankle. After that Monty just shut his eyes and hung on.

He got up finally and was surprised to find that he was all in one piece. He saw then that the Eagle trainer was still working on Frazetti and finally that they were helping him off the field. Then Monty remembered that they were still trailing and that he had a telephone number to call if they won.

Time went back in finally and the Eagles were in the huddle. It was the logical place for them to try and hang on to the ball but sometimes it is the illogical that works best and apparently Gaines, their quarterback figured it that way.

Monty saw the ball snapped. There was a charging jumble of players and he lost sight of the ball. It started like a spinner and developed into a forward pass.

The Panther defense had been sucked in when the ball came over. Monty had one glimpse of the Eagle end racing for it and he went smashing in. He had to get his hands on that ball.

Together he and the Eagle end went up into the air, but Monty jumped just a trifle higher. He felt the ball smack into his hand and slide down into his arms. He hit the ground running and looked around for someone to lateral it to, but he seemed to be all alone.

The white stripes sped beneath his feet, but from the corner of his eye he could see Castiers running to help the safety. Castiers was gaining on him. He would get him about on the twenty. Monty hugged the ball tighter and lengthened his stride.

He heard footsteps behind him and Hogan rasped, "Let me get up there and cut those babies down."

Only Hogan wasn't gaining and there was no time to wait. Flip had never waited for him. As a blocker Monty had learned many tricks without realizing that they would ever help him as a ball carrier. He waited until Castiers was almost ready to lunge at him, then he pushed hard with his left foot and went sprinting diagonally across toward the right side of the field. The big Eagle back, caught flat footed, couldn't turn. After that all he had to do was run and hope that his legs wouldn't

fold on him. Five yards from the goal line the safety made his big bid. He hooked Monty and they slid over together.

They took Monty out then, and as he walked to the bench, his body was heavy with bruises and weariness. He heard the cheers thundering down on him and he thought, "At least I know what it's like." He waved his helmet at them and smiled a dirty-faced grin, then collapsed on the bench.

**I**T WAS maybe an hour later. Monty had stood under the showers trying to drown some of the ache in his body and he had let the trainer work on him, patching up those spots that needed patching. He was just leaning over to tie his shoe and wondering if he could make it, when Flip Conners came up.

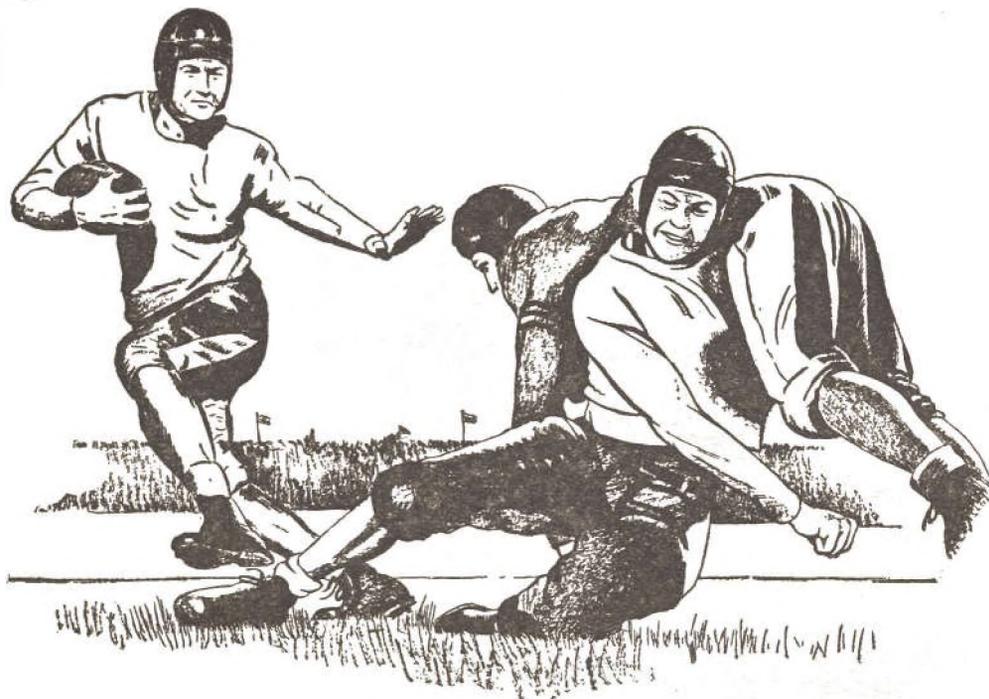
He said, "Kid, I got a little something to say to you. I didn't know you could carry the ball like that. The way you showed your heels to those babies was beautiful. I've got quite a bit of influence with Packy. If you'd like I'll go to him and see if next year you can't change over to toting the ball. I'll need an understudy. Hell, kid, you're just wasting your time as a blocker. Nobody will ever notice you."

"Maybe not," Monty said, "but what about some of those tackles I made, that last one when they took Frazetti out? Or what about the few times I did spring you loose?"

"Yeah, I know." Flip waved a hand airy, "but they pay off with touchdowns." He leaned forward. "What do you say if we go and have a bottle of beer. We can talk it over. I'll be glad to help you. The way you lug that ball is beautiful, kid."

Monty finished tying his shoe. He remembered that Diane had said Flip wasn't such a bad guy. He no longer felt any rancor toward him. He said, "Thanks, Flip. As a blocker I'm perfectly satisfied. I've had a taste of your job. I didn't ask for it so I'll let you keep it, and now you'll have to excuse me. I have a date with a little bit of fluff. Thanks for helping me there too. If you hadn't stayed in there like you did for your public . . ." He chuckled.

At the door he turned. "The name," he said, "is Monty Taylor, not kid. I'll be watching you in the pictures."



*Tomato rammed headfirst into the halfback.*

# TOUGH TOMATO

By Brad King

**Tomato Thompson spent two years on the bench thinking a guard's job was to bust opposing linemen. Then he made the grade—by busting signals!**

TERENCE THOMPSON saw by the list posted in the locker room that he had been dropped from the second team to the third. Every Monday, Coach Randolph Slater thumb-tacked neatly type-written lists on the bulletin board, and for nine consecutive Mondays now the "B" team lineup had included "Thompson, L. G." But now Hooks Houser was listed at that position and Terence's name was a column further to the right. At left guard for the "C" squad.

He went outside and peered at the University tower clock, half-hidden by the moss-shrouded oaks. An hour to kill before practice. He walked slowly across the campus and smothered the impulse to shake his fist at that clock. For over a year now his life had been regulated by the tower clock. Practice at two-thirty, and woe be to the youngster who was late without the

best of excuses. Dinner at the dormitory at six-thirty. Lights out at ten-thirty. Breakfast at seven.

Terence grinned ruefully. He had received good training for his coming Army stretch. He knew all about being somewhere on time, of having only an hour or so a day that was his own, of feeling the weight of heavy discipline on his shoulders. Randolph Slater was that, a tough disciplinarian.

"Football is tough here at Staunton," the coach had said grimly to a freshman squad which had included Terence Thompson. "We work hard and we work long. We win football games. Don't start out if you don't like it rough."

He grinned another rueful grin. Slater had lived up to his promise. It *had* been rough. They *had* won football games. In fact, they were coming up to this final game of the season sure of a conference title and needing only a victory over Bel-

mont to claim the mythical national championship. Williamson ranked Staunton third, just behind Army and Navy.

They were unbeaten and untied. They were also weary. Terence nodded to an English classmate and then fell in step with a lanky blonde boy who shot out of the Chemistry Building.

"How's trick, Peaches?"

There was a note of anxiety in his voice. This was Peaches Londquist and he was their best pass receiver. If he didn't get a D in Physics, however, he would catch no passes on Saturday. Slater had told them to expect no mercy about their grades. "I believe football players can meet their classroom requirements if they'll just buckle down," Slater had snapped.

"Not good, Tomato, not good," sighed Peaches. Everybody called Terence "Tomato" because of his bright-red face. "I'm a thick-headed so-and-so, Tomato. Mebbe I ought be a guard instead of an end."

"You can't play guard, only high school valedictorians can do that," Tomato shot back.

That was all; Peaches was running to another class. Tomato's grades never bothered him. But then it would have been a very small loss to the varsity if they had. Here at the end of the season he was being bumped down to the third string. That meant he wouldn't play against Belmont. Some of the "B" boys might get in there, but no third-stringers. And he needed twelve minutes of action to get a varsity letter.

Tomato sighed again. He was only a sophomore but this would be his last game. He would go into the Army on December 1. He strolled back to the dormitory to kill the remaining hour by writing a letter to Jean. Funny about Jean. He hadn't been so crazy about her in high school. Nor in his freshman year. But all season he had been lonely, with Slater's iron hand pushing him down, and now he was writing her three or four times a week instead of just on Monday nights. And long letters. He wrote her a five-page letter. Could she come up to the game and the dance? He was dying to see her. But he didn't expect to play much. That knee had popped out of joint again.

There was nothing wrong with Tomato's

knee. But, hell's bells, a third-string sophomore guard didn't write his best girl and say right out: "Football is rough here at Staunton. We win football games. And I can't make it."

Then he wrote his Dad. He could tell his Dad more about the game; Jim Thompson had been a football man himself. "This isn't a typical Staunton team," he explained. "They need power more than speed. Consequently, I'm paying the price. Guess I won't see much service against Belmont. They'll want power in them, and you know I'm primarily a running guard."

A running guard! Slater would laugh at that. Tomato Thompson running! In the Slater system the left guard was the rolling lineman, standing his ground, stepping back three paces if the play was wide to guard the center against forward passes. There was no more inglorious role anywhere than left guard for Randolph Slater.

TOMATO finished his letters and started walking toward the gym. Even if he didn't give two hoots in hell about the practice session, he would be on time; the habit was that strong within him. A voice sang out behind him and he waited for halfback Wes Walker to catch up with him.

"Read Grant Rice's column today, Wes," Tomato said shyly. "Guess you're a cinch for All-American."

Wes was a good guy and most of the boys weren't self-conscious around him. But Tomato couldn't help it. Here was a boy who was everything Tomato had planned to be at Staunton—outstanding in athletics, social life, scholarship, student affairs.

Wes shrugged his shoulders. "There oughta be a law against All-America talk until the season is over," he glowered.

He was repeating Randolph Slater's words then. "We're going to have enough trouble with Belmont as it is," Wes sighed. "They're always rough for us. They'll watch me like a hawk Saturday. Goober or Doc will have to do some running."

Well, Goober and Doc could run. And with them operating in the fullback and wingback positions Staunton could strike for touchdowns from anywhere on the field. Tomato grinned. He didn't think Belmont would smother Wes Walker

either. No team they had faced all season had done that.

In the locker room, Slater's voice rasped out: "Get the lead out. What is this—a day and night lodging house?"

In a minute Slater would be shouting for 'em to run. It was "hurry, hurry, hurry" on the Staunton varsity. There was nothing to be done here on the Blue squad that didn't have to be done on the run.

"C squad to the center of the field," Slater rasped. Tomato ran over. "Here are your Belmont plays," said the coach, "Know 'em by tomorrow. Now work a zone defense against forward passes."

The practice routine never varied at Staunton. Monday was a light practice day, emphasis on forward passing. On Tuesdays the "C" squad was on the defense against running plays until late in the afternoon; then were supposed to throw the formations used by Saturday's opposition against the first two varsity lineups. Wednesday was head-knocking day, violent scrimmage from the start until after dark. On Thursdays they went back to passing work, both offensive and defensive. Friday they just warmed up. Tapering off.

Tomato couldn't raise any enthusiasm for his work. The third-team was defending against forward passes. The left guard was supposed to make his feint to go through, then roll with the play, then finally drop back to guard the center against delayed-pass receivers. When Tomato lagged behind, Slater's voice cracked out.

"Faster there, Thompson."

Wes Walker tailbacked the first team, Eddie Price the second squad. The two elevens worked on alternate plays. Slater liked speed. As soon as one pass was thrown the other squad had wheeled into position with the precise Slater shift. A month of every season was spent in perfecting the timing of that shift.

Walker shot a high one to Londquist and Peaches gathered it right out of Tomato's hands with a brilliant catch and whirled on to a touchdown.

There was no praise for passer and receiver. It was always that way at Staunton practice session. The only comment to make about a perfect play was the failure of the defensive man to cover his assignment.

"Were you asleep? This isn't a day and night lodging house Tomato."

Tomato sighed. Some day, just for the hell of it, he was going to cram some of Slater's speeches down his throat.

He was dog-tired when Slater called a halt. The quitting routine was always the same.

"What time is it, Billy?" Slater would ask the line coach. He was near-sighted; he couldn't read the varsity clock without his glasses.

The boys would groan. "Five-forty, Billy?"

Billy Harris, the good-natured line coach, would peer at the clock and say: "Five-forty, coach."

"Then we'll turn in. Once around the field boys. A little snap. Always end up a practice session with a snap."

Tomato wobbled around the field. He shouldn't be so tired; he had gone through tougher practice sessions than this one since coming to Staunton. But he was weary. Every muscle in his body ached. Probably it was because the incentive was gone. He couldn't see much use of being enthusiastic about this next week. He wouldn't get into the game; he would be leaving for the Army shortly afterward.

A dozen times during the week he toyed with the idea of quitting. Why not? He needed a few days' rest before his induction. A fishing trip. Or deer hunting. Or just going home and loafing around town—seeing Jean several times a day instead of once a month.

Her letter stopped his talk of that. She was thrilled over the prospect of the big game and the dance. She hoped his knee would let him play at least part of the game. She was driving up with his father.

He groaned.

**H**E GOT a sprain in Thursday's workout and limped around Friday. He was limping when his father and Jean drove up. They thought it was his bad knee. He didn't correct them.

His father had been an all-conference halfback; was welcome at the dormitory for dinner. All of the Blue veterans could come back to Slater Hall and be treated like royalty. Randolph Slater even remembered his father. The coach had been at Staunton forever.

"Tomato has been a good boy," smiled Slater. "You know how I am about experience—no substitute for it. Tomato will play some before he's through."

"He goes in the Army next week," his father pointed out.

"Oh!" Randolph Slater exclaimed. The coach gave Tomato a funny look. "I didn't know that, Tomato."

"Didn't want to bother you with it," Tomato confessed. What was the use? The season would be over except for a post-season game January 1, which might even be the Rose Bowl. There would be no tears shed over Tomato's passing. Probably Slater wouldn't even miss him. There were a whole raft of left guards. Maybe later Randolph Slater would be screaming for material, but not now.

His father wasn't fooled. He didn't say anything but Tomato sensed that his father knew. He was just a third-string guard. Nothing wrong with his knee. Just playing out an act.

Jean was fooled, however. At the reception at the Union Building she had a great time. She and Tomato were standing at the sandwich table when Wes Walker walked up.

"Hi, pal," grinned the All-American.

Tomato introduced him proudly. Jean was properly impressed. She had heard about Wes Walker. She said so.

"Yeah, we get the breaks, we half-backs," grinned Wes. But it's boys like Tomato here who make us look good, Miss Webb."

Tomato could have kissed the triple-threater. They loved Wes for things like that. He didn't have to come up to talk to them. But he understood about third-string guards who had brought their best girls down for the big game.

"You must be somebody," Jean said slowly, "or Wes Walker wouldn't think so much of you."

Tomato didn't answer. He couldn't tell her that this was what made Wes Walker captain, and the idol of the dormitory.

She kissed him good-night. "It'll be nice when your stretch in the Army is over and you can come back here, Tomato," she sighed. "I know how you'll hate to leave it."

He didn't tell her that he didn't hate to go. He wanted to go. He was glad the

Army was reaching out a strong hand to jerk him out of his rut here. He wouldn't come back to Staunton. Somewhere there was another college where there wasn't so much material. A man who started slowly at Staunton never got a break. Slater believed there was no substitute for experience. And how could a man get experience sitting on the bench?

No, he wouldn't come back to Staunton.

HE WAS fired up by gametime. The crowds pouring in, the bands parading, the alumni back. This Staunton-Belmont game rated with any of 'em for traditional rivalry. This year the Blue was excited because Staunton might go on to the Rose Bowl.

There was a crowd in front of the dressing room when they went in at half-past one after their roast beef sandwiches and hot tea. Mostly students, but plenty of alumni. And half the band. Tomato fell for stuff like that. Always had. If he were slated to start the game he would be trembling like a leaf.

It was funny to see Wes Walker calmly eating an apple. The weight of the world on his shoulders and he was munching an apple. He grinned at Tomato.

"The girl friend is on the beam, pal. You're cooking with gas."

"Out of this world," Tomato smiled back.

Slater came in. No rousing pre-game speech. This Staunton team was ready. Slater liked his boys calm and unconcerned. It was cool-headed boys like Walker who grabbed the breaks.

Sometimes Slater could be the most casual man in the world. He was arguing now with Walker about the comparative advantages of a drop-kick and a place kick. Tomato wanted to yell out at 'em that this was no time to start an argument. All season the coach had been in the damndest rush, now he was killing time.

They went out for their warmup drill and came back. Slater was showing the line coach a new type of shoe. A glass football shoe! What was football coming to anyhow?

Somebody told the coach the time. "Oh, that late?" he said casually, laying down the shoe. "Better get on out, boys. Receive if you win the toss, Wes."

Just like that—they went out. The biggest game of the year. Slater lolled behind in the dressing room. Tomato grinned. They saw through it but still they were impatient with it. They weren't kids to be handled so obviously.

Wes lost the toss. He was as calm as the coach. "Just another ball game, boys," he murmured.

Tomato saw why the coach and captain had worked together to calm them down. The ball club was too tight. They let Spears of Belmont go right through their line for eight yards. Rushing too hard, and fell for a trap. They would get trap plays thrown at them all day.

Tomato sighed and settled back on the bench. No use getting excited about it. Nothing he could do about it anyhow.

Finally they stopped Belmont. They were supposed to beat the Tigers by fourteen points but anybody who believed that could stand on his head.

Spears kicked and it went out of bounds on the five. Wes helplessly watched it roll. It had been two years since any team had kicked to Wes.

He kicked back. Forty yards. Low and away from the safety. Belmont came up with a power surge that carried them down to the twelve before they lost the ball. Tomato shot a glance at Randolph Slater. The coach sat still and stiff.

"Gosh, those guys have it!" sighed Milt Dale, the substitute tackle.

Tomato and Dale always sat together on the bench. They made a joke of it.

But they weren't joking today. They hadn't expected Belmont to have that much power. Spears could pass. They knew that and were set for it. But fullback Murphy was packing the mail right over the center, right through the heart of the Staunton line. Five and six yards at a clip.

"If we can't stop their power," Tomato whispered back, "I don't know what we'll do."

Wes tried an off-tackle play but was smeared for a yard loss. The Blue fans above them moaned but Wes didn't seem worried. He quick-kicked on the next play. Slater stood up and sent in four substitutes. Two guards, two tackles. The varsity men came out and Neal Hill, the great right guard, was stopped by Slater before he sat down.

"Let 'em wear some of that spirit off," the coach explained. "Let 'em work off that steam on Jones."

He pulled Wes a minute later with the same explanation. Belmont was fired up. Let substitutes handle this first inspired surge. The massive Murphy went down to the thirty and Spears cut through center on a quick-opening play. They weren't looking for Spears there; he was a back who worked the flanks. Spears got down to the five before being pushed out of bounds.

The regular guards and tackles ran out. And Walker. Wes was a great defensive back, something the sports writers too often failed to mention. He went in as a line-backer and he was in on the first tackle. The play failed to gain.

Tomato's heart was in his throat. Could they possibly stop Belmont this near to the goal! They needed an inspired player, a speech maybe. But no the coach was as casual as ever. And Wes Walker was grinning as if making a joke to Cub Hodges, the center.

MURPHY cut over center, shoulders low, legs driving hard. Hodges met him in a head-on tackle and they went down on the two. Third and two. Tomato saw the tell-tale movement in the Belmont backfield. They would try a wide play. He hoped his teammates were watching the man in motion.

It was Spears. The backward pass went to him. A sweet play. Murphy taking the snap from center close in, turning at the line, lobbing it back to Spears cutting behind him. Perfectly timed. This one ought to go for . . .

No! The Staunton crowd was roaring hoarsely. Walker was cutting off at a lazy lope. Spears took a desperate risk and tried to cut back. Wes side swiped him and forced him out of bounds on the five.

Tomato mopped his brow.

Now Spears tried a pass. It failed by inches and Staunton took over on the five.

The four second-string linemen ran out, the first-string guards and tackles came off. After Walker's punt to mid-field Eddie Price took over at tailback.

The coach was taking chances. There would be plenty of criticism if substitutes messed up these defensive assignments and cost them this ball game.

Murphy started back ripping that line to shreds again. Tomato watched the second-string guards take their battering and realized that there was more of a difference between the regulars and the substitutes than he had thought. He had secretly believed that he was as good a guard on the defense as Joe Grady, the regular at that position. And that Dumpy Davis, playing the spot now, was also Joe's equal. He could see that neither he nor Dumpy was up to Grady's standard. But Grady wasn't very durable; the coach had commented on that all season.

Spears shot through tackle for eight yards. Then came the payoff. Staunton had overshifted. Spears faked a handoff to Murphy and then fired a short forward pass just over center. Endicott, the Belmont end, took it at top speed and cut wide away from the halfback. Just as he was about to be tackled he lateralled the ball back—to Spears!

A sensational flea-flicker play! And the Belmont speedster was tearing right down the sidelines for a score!

Tomato buried his face in his hands. They were growling on the bench. It always went like that. A team that got Rose Bowl fever didn't have a chance. It could happen to them just as it had happened to others in the past. Boston College, Georgia, Texas . . .

Wes Walker and the rest of the regulars ran into the game.

The try for point was wide but the 6-0 margin was pretty discouraging. Especially since Wes couldn't make a yard and his passes were battered right back in his face.

The minutes dragged on. Only five left in the half. Wes was trying to go wide and the five-man line was stopping him.

Slater stood up. He looked up and down the bench. Then he motioned to Tomato.

"Thompson!" he called out.

Tomato leaped up, almost falling in his eagerness. So his chance had come! He couldn't believe his own ears.

"I want you to carry a message to Wes," said the coach. "He's using himself too much. Tell him to save himself for the last half."

Tomato's shoulders slumped. Yeah, his chance! A messenger boy!

He trotted out as if it didn't make any

difference to him whether he went in or not. And it didn't. It would be better to stay on the bench than have to go out like this. When he came right back out a play or so later it would be clear to Jean and his father just how he rated on the Staunton varsity. A guard to send out with a signal!

Grady trotted out and Tomato joined his mates in the huddle. Wes had already asked for time out. That pained Tomato even more. Wes knew that Tomato wouldn't be coming in there except with a signal.

Wes grinned at him. "We're having a rough time out here, son," he smiled.

Wes was always calling somebody "son."

Tomato communicated the coach's message. Walker shrugged his shoulders. "Your cue, Goober," he grinned to Goober Gordon. "The boss wants you to work awhile."

Goober grinned back. They were darned casual for a team that was six points behind in its greatest test of the season. Here the blue chips were down. How could they be so indifferent?

**T**IME came back in and he knelt down low, left fingers lightly touching the turf. What a chance to be a hero. One play. He could see Grady ready to come back into the game.

The guard across from him was a squat dark-faced boy. "What did you come out here for?" he demanded of Tomato. "Don't tell me you're on the varsity?"

Tomato didn't answer. When the third-stringers came in the opposition always flung cracks like that at 'em. He crouched, drove forward with the snap. The dark-faced guard slammed him to the turf and went driving over him. Gordon was stopped at the center of the line for no gain. The guard was in on the tackle.

"Don't bother me when I start through, son," he leered at Tomato. "I don't like guys who get in my way."

Tomato grinned. What the devil? Grady would be in after the next play. Just for the fun of it he would bust this smart-alec. At the snap he rolled forward with his shoulders, grinding the pads right into this dark face. Purposely he was a little high. He fell on the guard, too. Didn't have to do that. Then he helped him up.

"How do you stay on the same field with our first string?" he asked politely.

The dark face creased in a grin. "You took me by surprise, chump. I didn't think you had it in you. This time I'll work on you."

Tomato was grinning as he joined his mates in the huddle. Wes answered his grin.

"You worked on him, didn't you?"

Gosh, did Wes see everything? How had the tailback been able to see what was happening at left guard!

"I'll go wide this time," announced Wes. "The coach won't like it, but I'm going."

Tomato crouched down again. "I'm thinking about kicking you in the teeth," the guard told him. Tomato grinned. This Belmont guard was a regular fellow. Didn't mean a word of it.

"Good," he chuckled. "I ain't used my cleats in a long time."

He raised up a trifle. Suddenly Tomato Thompson was as calm as an unruffled chicken. Shucks, he might as well have some fun out of this game! Wes was going to run wide to the right. Why not get over there and give him a jump! Of course the coach would scream out that this wasn't football but who cared what the coach thought. He had just one more play, didn't he! Then the Army for him. Then another college when he got through.

The grin widened on his face. "Sonny boy," he told the guard, "if you start this way I'll give you an elbow right in your eye."

"Get the elbow ready," said the guard. "I'm coming."

The ball was snapped. Tomato Thompson made a half-hearted lunge inside. He knew the guard would swing out to the right on that maneuver. He left the hole there. The dark-faced guard tore through it. But Tomato wasn't anywhere around. He was sprinting for the right flat just as fast as his legs could carry him. Just for the fun of it, he was going to throw a block on that halfback!

Walker was drifting out wide. His interference was down in front of him, the Belmont end had him covered and was turning him in, the Belmont halfback was coming up to make the tackle and the Belmont line-backer was cutting over to lend a helping hand.

It was luck. Tomato didn't even see the line-backer.

Somebody bumped into him. He tried to keep on his feet but he couldn't. Just as he went down he dived headfirst at the halfback's feet. He jarred the halfback but didn't knock him down. As Tomato Thompson hit the turf he groaned. His little stunt had failed.

**B**UT had it! Wes Walker sized up the situation at a glance. The linebacker was down, the halfback was staggering. Wes cut sharply inside the end and stiff-armed the halfback when the Belmont man tried to recover. He tore for the secondary with that famed Walker speed and was out in the open.

The safety tried to pin him against the sidelines, but this was Wes Walker running, an All-American in anybody's league. He went scooting across the goal line.

It was 6-6!

Beaming from ear to ear, Tomato lined up for the extra point try.

Then a voice said: "Thompson off!"

It was the referee. Grady was standing right there. Tomato sighed and started slowly off the field.

Walker caught his arm.

"That was the stuff, Tomato," grinned the halfback. "You won us a ball game there."

"Nuts," scoffed the guard.

"I mean that," said the All-American. "This will take the starch out of Belmont."

Tomato grinned his thanks and ran toward the bench. Well, maybe Walker thought so. But he knew what was waiting for him on the bench. The coach would put him in his place without much ceremony.

Slater stared at him. "Thompson, what were you doing over there?" he asked coldly.

"Well, sir, the guard—I mean the Belmont guard—was breaking through fast and I kidded him a little and knew he would tear right over me. So I thought I could . . . well, I just took a chance."

He was a little defiant in his attitude. He didn't care what the coach thought.

Slater nodded. "Sit down," the coach ordered, indicating the bench by him.

They were trying for the extra point. Wes touched the ball to the turf and

Gordon met it squarely and the pigskin went sailing between the uprights. Now it was 7-6.

"I wanted Grady in there for the point," Slater said gently. "He's had more experience. There is no substitute for experience."

Tomato groaned to himself. Hadn't he heard all of this a thousand times! Why didn't Slater just make a record of this speech and play it over and over?

"But that play of yours opened my eyes, Thompson," the coach added surprisingly. "Why haven't you shown ingenuity and hustle before?"

"Gosh, coach, when a man tries to think for himself . . .!" the youth started to protest.

"Nuts," Slater broke in harshly. "Walker thinks for himself. And Gordon. There isn't a coach in the country who wants his men to use their own grey matter more than I do. I figured you were just a plodder Thompson."

"Yes, sir," Tomato murmured meekly. Gosh, had he had the coach all wrong all of this time?

"You turned a poor play into a touchdown," went on the coach. "I don't encourage my men to run all over the field whenever they take a notion, but I certainly don't try to hold back football instinct. It is the most important thing about a football player, that hunch to go somewhere at a certain moment. You never heard me forbidding that, Thompson."

"No, sir," Tomato admitted.

The coach waved him away. This vacant seat was reserved for tailbacks with whom Slater discussed strategy.

"If we need more touchdowns, I'll use you," he said. "Otherwise, I'll keep Grady in there. He's had more experience. I think Belmont will blow up. They've been playing over their heads."

"Yes, sir."

**I**T WAS happening that way. Spears fired a long pass and Wes Walker dragged it down. Wes lateralled it off to Goober and Gordon ran fifty yards for a score. Now it was 14-6.

And the gun for the end of the first half had yet to sound.

It was a runaway from then on. Gordon

scored again, then Davis. Then Eddie Price. Wes Walker came out in the final quarter and the stands shook with the ovation. Tomato jumped up with the boys on the bench to join in that cheer. A great guy had finished his college career. He came slowly toward the sidelines and sat down on the grass. The first thing he did was grab at his shoe laces.

"There's been a damned tack bothering me all this half," he complained.

But Tomato knew better. There was a suspicious moistness about the corner of Walker's eyes.

Now it was 34-6. Tomato ran out with the third string. They played the last five minutes. Bob Richey, their tailback, scored. Forty-one to six. And that was the way it ended.

All of 'em, even the substitutes, had to fight their way through students to the dressing room. The coach was standing at the door shaking hands with each player as he came in. Tomato had never seen Slater beaming from ear to ear before. The coach was as loose and relaxed as a piece of string.

"I knew my boys could do it," he was saying.

Tomato looked up from his undressing. Slater was talking to a group of sports writers. "When you've got a club like this, you don't worry about them cracking up. But Belmont was rough. If it hadn't been for Tomato Thompson, we might not have gotten started. Tomato threw that block which got Wes in the clear."

"Thompson?" asked one of the writers. "Oh, the third-string guard."

"Yes. Good boy. Give him more experience and he'll be up there with the best of them. When he comes back from the war you may see an All-American."

It was unusual for the coach to talk like that. Tomato turned redder than ever. Some of the other boys were hearing the talk and they were grinning at him. When he came back! Tomato gulped. Sure he was coming back. No place would do after Staunton!

"Give him another year," said the coach, "and he'll be as good as Hill. Just needs experience."

"Sure, coach," Tomato chimed in happily, "There's no substitute for experience."



*Danny cut back swiftly and stepped over the end stripe.*

# PIGSKIN PURGE

**By Richard Brister**

**A bid from the league-leading Beavers! That was football heaven for halfback Danny Mahaffey—'til he learned that holding the job meant cleat-whipping his best friend!**

**D**ANNY Mahaffey pranced like a frisky colt in back of the panting linemen, watched "Buzz" Barlow grab the snapback from Ike Dinning, the Beavers' first string center, and wished with all his heart that he had never accepted this tryout in pro football.

Buzz came zooming through a wide breach in the second string forward wall. Big and fast and graceful—that was Buzz Barlow. Danny had held the big handsome halfback in worshipful awe for the past six seasons. He moved in to grab Buzz with all the aggressiveness of an autograph collector waving pencil and paper.

Buzz flicked his hips gently, swerved toward the sideline. Danny dove, grabbed two heaping armsful of empty ozone, and watched glumly as Buzz romped over the scrub's goal line.

"Mahaffey!" Bernie Bern was yanking the whistle out of his tiny mouth with angry impatience. Danny stared humbly at the choleric fat man who coached the Beavers, and said,

"Y-yes?"

"You owe Barlow money? You been borrowin' from him?" Bern's tone dripped sarcasm.

"C-course not, Coach," Danny stam-

mered. He was young. He was new to the pro game. He was acutely aware of the amused glances the old timers flung at him, in this moment of trial.

"No reason for you goin' easy on him then, is there," Bern smiled thinly. "So long as you don't owe him nothin'."

Danny flushed a bit, nodding embarrassed agreement. He could not resent the coach's sarcasm. He had earned it. And he knew Bernie Bern's rep as a handler of men. The fat man knew every trick in the book, from sarcasm, bitter tongue-lashing tantrums, to emotional pleading. He'd do anything to get the best from each of his players. Apparently he had decided that the thing to get Danny under way was sarcasm.

"All right," the big man grunted. "Let's get on with the scrimmage." His cherubic features took on a more kindly expression. "Change goals. Take your bunch back there, Mahaffey. Kick off to the first team. And—stop Barlow!"

As Danny started down the field, Buzz Barlow loped along momentarily beside him and gritted in a thin whisper, "See what I mean, kid? What'd I tell you?"

**T**HE HANDSOME varsity halfback was gone before Danny could fashion an answer. But Buzz Barlow's words left him thinking. Danny had landed in a screwy situation, when he accepted the chance to try out with the Beavers.

In the first place, Coach Bernie Bern had not come so far from the truth in suggesting that Danny had some private reason 'for goin' easy on Buzz.' Not a man on the team had any inkling of it, but Danny Mahaffey and his football idol were related by marriage! They were brothers-in-law!

Ten years ago, at the height of his spectacular college career, Buzz had met Danny's older sister, Frances, at a prom, and two months later, the pair had secretly married. Frances had been at a girl's school at the time, which frowned on undergraduate weddings, and so it had been quite a while before Danny, who was just a kid in junior high, discovered what a celebrity had come into his family.

Then Buzz went with the Beavers, and he started to come around to the house once in a while to visit his in-laws, and

Danny hung on every word the great Buzz Barlow had to say about football.

Naturally Buzz had enjoyed being hero-worshipped. He'd shown Danny some tricks and Danny had worked like the dickens. He had starred at halfback in high school and later in college. Then a Puckish fate had got him this bid to try out with the Beavers.

He hadn't known till today, though, that he was trying out for Buzz' position, left halfback!

It seemed that the great Buzz Barlow had shot his bolt. He was well past thirty; the old lightning had left him, the swivel-hip magic. And Danny Mahaffey, who'd made Rice's second All-American squad last season, had been chosen from among half a dozen candidates to replace the failing pro veteran.

It was ironical, Danny thought wryly. Buzz was the guy who'd first stimulated his own burning interest in football. He hated going after Buzz's job, for that reason. He hated it even more because Buzz was married to Frances. If he did somehow come through to replace Buzz in the line-up, he would be hurting his own sister.

Buzz had been swell. The minute Danny reported for duty, Buzz had drawn him aside for a private confab about the somewhat awkward set-up between them.

"Nobody knows about you bein' my brother-in-law, kid. You bein' all the way out there on the coast an' me back here, it just never came into the conversation. I never mix Frances in with this rough bunch on the team, so she didn't spill it. I figure that's lucky for us."

Danny looked at him. Buzz was an odd sort, for a pro footballer. He wasn't exactly a snob but he'd been to college, and considered himself, and Frances, a cut above the average pro player. He was reserved, uncommunicative toward the men he worked with in the game of football. He jealously guarded his private life from them. Danny said curiously,

"Why's it lucky for us?"

"Bernie," Buzz announced blandly. "He's all business, kid. Wait'll you get to know him like I do. He figures a football team like a banker figures a string of investments. The ones that pay dividends to him, he holds onto. And vice versa. No

sentiment in it. Sentiment kills Bernie, when it comes to the football."

"I still don't—"

"Look," Buzz said patiently, "all *we* want is a square shake, right? It's you or me for that first string berth. An' the best man oughtta get it. You with me?"

"Sure, Buzz, but—"

"All right. Suppose Bernie ever got wind we were brothers-in-law? Know what'd happen? He'd figure right off that we'd relax out there on the field, that we'd hate like blazes tryin' to beat each other out of that job, an'—"

"We do," Danny grinned weakly. He spoke for himself, mainly. He'd always been sort of a softie, with a strong streak of his mother's sympathetic nature. But he knew Buzz must share his own awkward feeling, in this situation.

"Sure we do," Buzz agreed with him. "It's only natural you wouldn't wanta knock your own sis's husband outta work. No more'n I'd wanta hurt my wife's brother's chances for big money. But we're football players, kid. First, last, and always. We'll feel those things—can't help it, if you're human—but out on that ball field we forget it. We each do our damndest, an' the best man wins. Provided—" Buzz's voice lowered, heavy with innuendo "—we get the chance to work it out that way."

"Gosh!" Danny breathed. "Y-you mean—if Bernie knew, he might—"

"That's right, kid. He'd sell one or the other of us off this club so fast we wouldn't even work in a scrimmage together. I know Bernie. Sure as shootin', the minute one of us began to look like top dog, he'd figure the other guy must be loafin', on account of this screwy set-up between us."

"Yeah," Danny said slowly. "I can see how he'd look at it."

"Good. Then—I never saw you before. Right?"

Danny smiled. "As rain," he murmured. "And—thanks, Buzz." Maybe it would not be so hard for him, going after Buzz' job, with no one else in on the secret. And he didn't want to be sold off the Beavers. Bernie's gang was headed for the championship this year, the way Danny figured.

But now, in his first scrimmage session, unseating Buzz from the lineup was proving a much harder task than he'd thought

it would be. Buzz still could turn on spectacular spurts of ball-toting brilliance, when occasion demanded. And Danny wasn't having much luck either stopping the guy, or matching his dramatic romps with the pigskin.

HE LINED up with the second string for a new kick-off, following fat Bernie Bern's instructions. The squad moved forward in a wavering line. Ben Barski's cleated toe cracked into the leather. The ball sailed downfield toward the waiting veterans in a high, looping arc.

Danny saw Buzz meandering over beneath it, and stepped up the rhythm of his own eager strides. A couple of first string linemen threw themselves bodily through the air at him. He slammed the first one down with his hands, leaped over the prone figure, and swung wide around the other.

He put his head down and went through a wedge of interferers forming around Buzz. The big blonde guy stopped on a dime, swung out toward the sideline. Danny slammed out after him, trying to wedge him over. Buzz tricked him by stopping cold, reversing field once again, and cutting inside him. Danny was off balance, but he threw himself at Buzz' middle anyhow.

His hands caught at Buzz' flying mole-skis, clutching his slippery legs like a drowning man clutches a bit of driftwood. But he just didn't have the strength to hang on. He was pulled over backward, hit the hard ground with a bone-rattling thump on the seat of his pants, and lost his hold.

He watched Buzz drive upfield past the weary second-string tacklers for another twelve yards before they finally ganged on him and dropped him.

Bernie Bern's whistle blasted fiercely. His righteous wrath descended on Danny. "What in blue blazes gets into you, Mahaffey, whenever you're goin' after Barlow? You ain't afraid of Buzz, are you?"

"I-I dunno, Coach." He wondered. Buzz had taught him his first football tricks, when he'd been just a wide-eyed football-struck youngster in junior high school. He'd been awed to death of Buzz then. Had the feeling stuck to him down the long years? Did Buzz have some kind of Indian sign on him?

"Take the bench awhile," Bernie suggested, "an' make your mind up about it. Send Lukens in here."

Danny loped off, feeling his confidence wilting, his apple cheeks burning. He sat on the bench and watched Buzz start to take things easy out there, now that Danny was off the field. Buzz was a smart guy, Danny saw. The big blond fellow wasn't sweating in scrimmage except when they were both out there together, when Bernie would be drawing comparisons, trying to make up his mind which it would be at left halfback, for the rest of the season.

Buzz was an old man, compared with Danny. He had to save his best stuff for the times when it counted.

Buzz was no sentimental softie like himself, Danny thought glumly. Buzz would take care of himself right down the line, in this battle for survival between them. "Football players, first, last and always," he'd said, and he'd meant it. There was a hardness in Buzz, an uncompromising singleness of purpose in going after whatever he wanted. Well, for Frances' sake, Danny thought grimly, it was just as well that Buzz did get what he wanted.

But Danny meant to give Buzz a run for his money, this time. *Somebody* had to take over, if Buzz was really beginning to slip, Danny figured. If it wasn't Danny Mahaffey, it would be some other ambitious youngster. So what did it matter if they were related?

**H**E GOT A new slant on the character of Mr. Buzz Barlow later that same afternoon, when Bernie Bern called him into his office

"Something's funny out there between you and Barlow, Mahaffey," the fat coach started shrewdly. "I'm not blind. You play a bang-up game of ball, so long as you're nowhere near him. But the minute you tangle with Buzz, you seem to lose all your pepper. What's the angle?"

"I—uh—I dunno—" Danny stared at the floor and looked sheepish. Could it be, he wondered, that he was subconsciously going easy on Buzz out there? He wanted Buzz' job and he didn't; that was what it boiled down to.

The fat man pursed his small lips and stared at the ceiling. He said almost idly, "You might give him a better scrap for

the job if I told you somethin'. Buzz went out of his way to see it was you that came up here for this tryout. He kept talkin' up the hot game you played last year in college. He practically sold our west coast scout a bill of goods on you, and he talked you up to the owners. And all the time, actin' sort of suspicious, tryin' to keep the whole thing a secret. Why? That's all I'm askin'."

Danny gulped. This was a new one to him. "M—maybe he thought I really was the best guy to take over for him, Coach. Not meaning *I* think I'm that good, but —"

"You're a good ball player, Mahaffey. Except against Buzz. My guess is: Buzz knew it. He's got some kind of a hoodoo sign on you, I dunno. Why else would he want you, special, for his competition? He fixed it for you to come up to the Beavers this season because he was dog-gone certain he could play circles around you. And while he was at it, draw his full season's salary."

That's just plain silly!" Danny exploded. Bernie had no right to talk that way about Buzz! "Buzz is too big a guy to pull any—"

"I've known him a good deal longer'n you have, young fellow. He's an ace half-back—granted. But don't give me that 'too-big-a-guy' routine on Buzz Barlow. He'd sell out his own grandmother for a slave, if it meant enough to him. Buzz looks out for number one. Don't kid yourself about him, Mahaffey. He can see a dollar bill from one goal line to the other. And my telling you that ain't spilling no secrets."

Daanny got a little hot under the collar. Bernie Bern was slinging mud on his sister's husband, and Danny didn't go for it. Not for a minute.

"All right," he said wearily, "so you don't like Buzz. That's plain enough now. So what's the point?"

"The point," said the fat man, and slapped his heavy palm on the desk blotter to emphasize it, "is that you're bein' made a chump of, young fellow. And don't try to tell me that Buzz hasn't got your number, some way. I been twenty-three years in this game, and I can spot this kind of thing in a minute. I don't know how well you know Buzz, but if I were you, I'd get

acquainted. The sooner you find out just what kind of an operator he is— Well, maybe when you can see what his game is, you'll get out there and turn on some real heat against him."

"Right now," Danny said loyally, "I still think he's okay. What if I don't change that opinion?"

"I'll say this much, Mahaffey," the fat man grunted. "You better change the brand of football you been playin', or you won't stick past Saturday's game with the Falcons!"

Danny had food for thought while he showered and dressed. He hadn't seen Buzz for years, till he'd come up to the Beavers, since there was a whole continent between them. But he remembered that Buzz always had been sort of slow with a dollar, on the few occasions when Frances had brought the big blond guy home to visit her family. That checked with what Bernie Bern said, and despite his loyal efforts to disbelieve the coach's insinuations, Danny was forced to wonder a little.

He went up to Ike Dinning, the towering gap-toothed center, and murmured idly, "What kind of a guy am I up against in Buzz Barlow, Dinning? Looks like one or the other of us won't finish the season, the way Bernie's talking."

The tree-tall center looked embarrassed, muttered something that sounded like "He's all right, I guess," and abruptly shifted the topic of conversation.

Danny worried. He went out to Buzz' and Frances' for dinner that night, and he studied Buzz for any sign of the trickery Bernie had suggested, during the course of the evening. Once he blurted: "I hear it bein' talked around in the lockers that you had something to do with my being brought up to the Beavers, Buzz. What's the story?"

Buzz looked up calmly. "That's right, kid."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why should I?"

"A guy likes to know—"

"Look—" Buzz sent a smile toward Frances "—the way we looked at it, kid, if old man Buzz is due for the ashcan, why not keep the job in the family? Right, Fran?"

Frances chimed in then. "It's too bad

you had to find out about Buzz putting a good word in for you, Dan. Buzz wanted you to think that your name as a college player had turned the whole trick."

Danny was ashamed of the things he'd been thinking. "Thanks Buzz," he gulped. He got out of there as soon as he decently could, and grabbed a trolley downtown to the hotel where part of the team was staying. He wished, heartfully, that he didn't have to go out there, Saturday, and try to blast a swell guy like Buzz Barlow loose from his job with the Beavers.

The Falcons were tough. Maybe he wouldn't even get in there against them, he thought. What if he didn't? Somehow, he just didn't want Buzz' job. He did not have Buzz' hard-shelled faculty for divorcing the football from the human values. He felt lousy. He wondered how long he was going to last with the champion Beavers.

HE SAT ON the end of the bench wearing a hooded sweat shirt against a fine cold drizzle, and watched the Falcons hold the champion Beaver bunch to a standstill.

Toward the end of the half, Buzz tossed a blooper pass, intended for Ed Camp, the right end. It got caught in a tuft of wind, fell short. Hannegan, the Falcon's triple-threat flash, intercepted and ran twenty-nine yards for an enemy score.

They missed the kick for point, but it was still 6-0, favor the Falcons. Gloom pervaded the bench where Danny sat. He heard fat Bernie Bern swear up the bench. He could feel the coach glancing down toward him, debating. But the expected summons to go into action didn't come. Danny relaxed, and wondered if he would have flung that pill into the hands of the opposition.

Buzz was playing slashing, aggressive ball out there. Twice he helped run the ball within scoring distance of the enemy goal line, twice he fozzled out when it counted. Once with a long uncompleted pass over the endstripe, once with a plunge through the line that just failed to go over the chalk stripe into paydirt.

Toward the end of the final quarter, Buzz dropped a long pass which was right in his hands, and down the bench, Danny heard Bernie Bern launch one of his no-

torious tantrums: "Damn that Buzz! He's sabotaging this ball game! If that slick devil is up to—Mahaffey!"

Danny leaped erect and ran down the bench. "Yes?"

"Think you can beat Barlow's time in there?"

"I—he's played all right foot—" Danny cut off the loyal outburst in midspeech, and said quickly, "Yes, sir. You're darn tootin'!"

Bernie looked quizzically at him. "All right. Don't stand there." He wagged his big head toward the field, and Danny sprinted.

He ran through the motions the first play, then stuck his head into the circle of exhausted, grimed faces. His heart was thumping wildly. This was his first pro ball game. Hunk Dooley looked at the ball, on the Falcons' forty, and then glanced at Danny. "Number fourteen," he snapped out. "Watch out for that left end, Mahaffey. He's sticky as glue, once he lays a mitt on ya."

Danny went back, feeling empty inside. The ball came back at him through Ike Dinning's huge legs. He grabbed it, pivoted sharply, and lanced out toward his right, following Hunk Dooley and Ace Harrin.

They cut in sharply. He followed, lanced past the line of scrimmage, and he was suddenly on his own in the Falcon secondary.

He slashed his way past a couple of clutching tacklers, cut hard to his left to elude another, and moved straight upfield to their twenty-nine before their safety man nailed him.

It was a first down. Hunk Dooley gave him a warm glance in the huddle. "Eat another can full of spinach, kid, an' try that again."

Danny grinned. The butterflies were gone from his stomach. He went back there, raised his hands. The ball spatted into them neatly. He stayed with Hunk and Ace better this time. But the Falcons were not fooling, or sleeping. They ganged up on him at the line of scrimmage. He kept on bulling ahead anyhow. He carried five of them for seven yards, to the twenty-two. He could hear a dull thunder of hope coming to life in the grandstand.

Hunk Dooley had a worried eye on the

time. "We got time for a couple more. You're hot, Mahaffey. Number twenty-six. Ride one through right tackle."

They made a nice hole. Danny charged through like a guy on a horse race topping a winner. He hit their backer-up head-on and knocked the guy looping. He ran toward the sideline, with about five of them trailing him, and he could hear the crowd raising a riot all around him. It steamed him up, inside.

He slammed around a pair at the sideline, cut back in swiftly, and rode a wild spurt of speed right over the endstripe. It was all over like that. Nothing to it. He didn't know when he ever had felt so damn happy. He *did* have the stuff, then, for the pro game.

He blocked out that sticky left end, while Ace booted one square through the uprights. There, he thought exultantly, went the ball game. 7-6, for the Beavers. For *his* Beavers!

**T**HERE WAS a lot of back-slapping in the lockers. They were footballers. They liked to win. Danny came in for a lion's share of the mutual congratulations. He had toted that money ball over. He noticed something. Buzz hadn't joined in the backslapping.

The big guy was dressing over in a corner of the noisy steam-laden room, and to judge from the look on his face you'd think they had just lost a ball game. Danny frowned and went over to him. "You looked good out there, Buzz. Boy, for three quarters, you—"

"Look," Buzz snapped out bluntly, "lay off me kid. I ain't feelin' so very."

Danny felt bad. If it was his job, that had Buzz down in the doldrums, that was Danny's own doing. He said uncomfortably, "Gee, Buzz, I hope—"

"It's not my job, if that's what you're thinking," Buzz grumbled. Danny couldn't figure what had the big guy so snappy, if not his job. Buzz went on slowly, "I had more than just that at stake out there, kid. Look, I'm sorry I snapped out at you that way. Try an' forget it, will you?"

"It's all right, Buzz," Danny said, and moved away, his brows dropping. What was Buzz hinting at anyhow? If he had something aside from his job at stake out there today, what could that be? Danny

wondered. And why should Buzz be acting down in the dumps, after they'd just copped them a ball game? It simply did not add up. At least, not to anything pleasant.

Once again, he found himself recalling the things Bernie Bern had said about Buzz Barlow, and wondering if there could be anything to back up the coach's opinion. "He'd sell his own grandmother for a slave," Bernie had said, "if it meant enough to him. Buzz looks out for number one. Don't give me that 'too-big-a-guy' routine on Buzz Barlow!"

And during the game, Bernie had exploded angrily, "He's sabotagin' this ball game!" Come to think of it, Danny thought weirdly, Buzz *had* played a suspiciously erratic game out there.

**S**UNDAY afternoon, the phone rang in his hotel room. It was Frances.

"What's up, sis?"

Fran's voice was hesitant, nervous. "Danny, I—I couldn't tell you that night you were out here for dinner. But you—well, you ought to know this. Buzz and I are—separating."

"What?"

"We're separating," she went on more calmly. "It's not sudden. It's been coming for some time. I—I thought you should know. You've always been so loyal, and so—well, unselfish. I was afraid you'd not try your best, since it was his job you're after."

"But—but good grief, sis, I always thought you two were naturals for each other. You always *seemed* happy."

"Well, maybe we did look that way. If we did, give us credit for good acting. We're not the first pair who've put on an act of being happy together. I'm just glad we never had children. Our separating won't hurt anybody."

"Except yourselves," Danny breathed weakly.

"Not even us," Fran said firmly. "Buzz isn't what he seems, Danny. I know it's disloyal of me, to—to talk about him. But he's fighting you for that job, and you've got a right to know what you're up against. He's tricky, and mean, and selfish, and—"

"But—good gravy, Fran—" Danny's head was whirling with conflicting thoughts. "—Buzz *got* me this chance. He

said he wanted to keep the job in the family. And—and you agreed—"

"I had to pretend to go along with him that night, Danny. Buzz—scares me, some times. I—I didn't want him to know I was looking right through him, that I intended to warn you about him. He's so tricky, Danny. If he got you your chance with the Beavers, you can mark my words: it was for his own benefit. Not yours."

"Gee, sis, I—"

Fran's voice whispered harshly, "I'm hanging up, Danny—Buzz is coming."

Danny put in a miserable weekend. The mood of uncertainty clung to him, Monday. He played football like a blind man, in scrimmage. He was afraid to approach Buzz, for fear some of his doubts about the big fellow would show through in his voice or his actions.

Once during a brief rest, he went over to fat Bernie Bern and cleared his throat doubtfully. "Uh—I been thinkin' about what you told me, Coach. About Buzz. I—"

The fat man's face was set in lines of granite. He was in a bad mood, had been testy and temperamental all during practice. He snapped out wearily, "That's your problem, Mahaffey. Don't bother me with it now. I got my own troubles—" His manner suggested that life had been crowding him to the absolute limit of human endurance.

Danny said, "I'm sorry, Coach," and would have retreated, but Bernie Bern's fingers closed on his arm.

"No reason why you shouldn't know the story, kid. There's a syndicate tryin' to buy the club, lock, stock an' barrel. Be a lotta new faces around here next year, if the owner gives in an' sells." His small mouth puckered and he spat an impatient brown stream toward the green turf. "You work your heart out buildin' a champion team, an' then the front office sells you out for a few lousy bucks' profit. It's enough to drive a man to an early grave."

"Gee, Coach, that's too bad."

Bernie Bern's fat face turned toward him. "Might not be, if either you or Buzz would come to life and plug that soft spot at left halfback. I can't break in a brand new man before Saturday's game with the Bisons. Besides, where'd I get a good left half, this time o' the season?" He

slapped knuckles against a fat palm. "We got to bust through them Bisons."

"Why's that one so important?"

"The owners mean to sell out, once we've lost our chance for the title. This guy Smith that's headin' the syndicate that wants to buy us, ain't no dumb bunny. He runs a big dance pavilion out on the outskirts of town. He and his partners've got their dough ready, cash on the line. They'll dangle their offer in front of the owners' noses right after the game, if we lose to the Bisons—and you know human nature."

"Yeah," Danny mumbled.

"Buzz still plays a good game of ball. But he's erratic, this year. Twice he folded up cold last week, and almost cost us that game with the Falcons." The fat man stroked his chin. "Got me guessing, Buzz has. He was always a money player."

Danny said, "I—uh—I don't know what to think about Buzz—any more. I—"

"Don't!" snapped the fat man. "Don't think about him. You concentrate on your own problem, Mahaffey. You worry too much for a kid your age. You looked lousy in scrimmage, t'day—"

"I—"

"Keep your mind on the football—and on that game with the Bisons!"

Good advice, that, and Danny worked on it. He tried to ignore Buzz as much as he could. He didn't go out to Buzz' and Fran's place for dinner, knowing how things were between them.

But he still couldn't shake off the ponderous thoughts that Fran's phone call had engendered within him. They were an invisible anchor on him all week. He looked rotten in practice. And surprisingly, for a man up to his neck in domestic troubles, Buzz played like a demon.

**T**HE BISONS came, and the big stadium filled with a gay, colorful crowd, and then just before the doings got started, Buzz came over to where Danny was punting a few with Barski, and explained some things.

"Looks like me to start, kid. I been goin' like a ball o' fire this week, for a reason."

Danny looked at him. He still was not entirely sure whether he liked this big blond guy who had married Fran, or not. "What's that?" he mumbled.

Buzz waved a hand to a box seat near the forty yard line. Danny looked, saw Fran sitting over there with a girl friend, and waved at her. She smiled and waved back.

Buzz was saying warmly, "Fran's the reason. She never liked watching football much. But she's out here today. I—uh—we never told you, kid, but Fran and I've been sort of growin' apart, lately."

"Yeah?"

"Only last weekend we were talkin' about separating." Buzz grinned his handsome grin. "Monday, we patched things up, though. Love an' kisses again, just like old times. I been bucked up all week, thinkin' about it. There never was anyone for me but Fran. There just isn't anyone like her."

Danny was a little confused—but glad. "Gee, that's swell, Buzz. That's—"

"You're tellin' me," Buzz chuckled happily. "You watch old man Buzz bust those babies today, kid. I got a few hot runs left in the bucket, now that Fran's back rooting for me. Whup!" He turned, watching the frisking players romp toward the sideline. "Looks like it's about that time, hey?"

"Yeah," Danny agreed. On an impulse he stuck out his hand, "Luck today, Buzz," he mumbled. And for Fran's sake, he meant it. If Fran wanted to do an about-face in her feelings toward Buzz, that was a woman's right, Danny reasoned.

As for himself, he didn't know what he wanted. He naturally wanted to play a bang-up game, if he got in there at all. Bernie Bern would expect the best from him. But gosh, it would be lousy to show up Buzz today in front of Fran, the way things were right now between them.

He took his accustomed place on the bench, and watched the kickoff, brooding over his private problem. There was just no answer to it, he decided, and watched the ball game.

Those Bisons were tough. A line that averaged two-ten, and a quartet of big rangy speedsters to tote the mail for them. Dorrie Parker, their fullback and spark-plug, took the kickoff and bulled his way straight down the center of the field for twenty-three yards before the Beavers could stop him.

Buzz Barlow made the tackle. He hit Dorrie at the knees and chopped him down

cleanly. Buzz looked peppy, eager out there, Danny thought. Apparently the big blond guy really meant to show Fran an eyeful.

Just before the first quarter ended, Buzz tried a long pass from the midstripe, to Ed Camp. Camp got down almost to the Bisons' goal line. Buzz let loose with a beauty. It lost steam near the end of its long sweeping arc. Dorrie Parker swept in from the side, went up in a stretching leap to swipe it from Camp, and charged back toward the midstripe, full steam ahead.

The home crowd groaned. They had a right to. Dorrie Parker was not the spark plug of the Bisons for nothing. He was broken field stuff from 'way back when, and this was tailored to suit him. He slashed a zigzag path up that field, through a dazed bunch of Beavers. He passed the midstripe going full steam ahead, and on the bench, Danny groaned audibly.

That Parker guy was a demon. Not a hand was laid on him. He had every trick in the bag. He stopped cold, slashed right and left. He straightarmed the Beavers, he out-fainted the tacklers. He changed pace, spurting ahead like a ten-second sprinter one second, and the next moving like glue. He went to the Beavers' fifteen, and there was no one but Buzz Barlow to keep him from scoring.

Buzz jumped too soon. He dove at the guy's ankles and Parker grinned, flicked to one side, and romped over. There was a brooding silence over the stadium as the Bisons lined up for conversion. They made the kick good. 7-0, their favor.

"Mahaffey!" It was Bernie. Danny ran down, felt his heart flop with excitement as he was sent packing in there.

Buzz' face looked eaten as he loped out. He sent a wan look at Danny, and it hurt. Danny couldn't help feeling sorry for Buzz, with Fran up there in the grandstand watching. Buzz should have stopped Parker, and there wasn't a man, or woman, in the stands, who didn't realize it.

**D**ANNY settled down. The Bisons kicked. Danny got underneath the ball. He took it on the run, on his own twenty-six. The loyal Beavers formed their tight wedge around him.

He went past the thirty. A red hot end snaked in from the side, somehow, cracked the wedge open, and dragged Danny down. He had run the ball back eight yards, on a kickoff!

Hunk Dooley looked queerly at him, as they huddled. "Get hot, kid. This one's important."

Danny reddened, and wished he could forget about Buzz. This one *was* important. The grapevine had carried the story of the impending sale to every man in this huddle, he knew. They needed this ball game. They did not want to be sold to a syndicate headed by a roadhouse proprietor named Smith. Nor to anybody, for that matter.

They were last year's champs. They were okay, as was, and the status quo suited them fine and dandy.

Hunk said, "Number sixteen. And—*hit it!*"

He meant Danny. Danny went back and grabbed it on the snapback from Ike Dinning. He put his head down and charged at the right side of the line. A hole was there. He tried to slash his way through it. Somebody tripped him. He flopped. The mighty wall of the Bison defense refused to budge for him. He lost a yard on it.

Hunk tried a pass, Danny to Camp. Danny faded and they came in at him like Japs in a banzai rush. He got excited. He couldn't find Camp, or any other eligible pair of mitts for it. He did what he had to do. He ran with it. He ran up to within five yards of the line of scrimmage and got smeared, trampled, and nicely worked over.

He heard the horn, and he sighed. It was the half. He went loping in there, knowing he'd fizzled. He wished Buzz hadn't spoken to him. He had been put out with the guy. Now he was for Buzz and Fran, right down the line. He couldn't quite get them out of his mind, not even out there. He wondered what Buzz was thinking.

He wondered again, inside there, when Bernie announced that Buzz was going back in to open the last half. Because Buzz was grinning. Danny wasn't supposed to see that, he realized. Buzz had his hand cupped over his face and was grinning behind it. It looked more like a

leer, Danny thought, and would have said something but they were on their way out there already.

He sat on the bench and watched Buzz play dazzling ball throughout that third quarter. Dazzling ball, sure, except that every time they got within scoring distance, something happened. Buzz fozzled out when it counted. It was a definite pattern, Danny thought grimly, watching the time clock. 7-0, favor the Bisons. And if they lost this one, they'd be sold down the line by the owners.

Danny looked at Bernie and thought: "Wonder if he sees what I see, out there?"

The fat coach wore a deep scowl. It was hard to say what Bernie was seeing. He just looked sour, disgusted, but that was nothing new with him.

Danny sat quiet a moment. He said to the guy on the bench beside him, "I'm over there, if Bernie wants me," and waved toward the parapet of the grandstand, where Fran was sitting. He got up and went loping over. Fran stuck her head over the cement barrier, and Danny lifted his voice above the crowd noise.

"Look, sis, Buzz tells me you two have kissed an' made up. That right?"

She popped her eyes at him. "Not for a minute," she shook her head firmly. "Did he say that, really?"

"But—how come you're here then? I—I thought you didn't like to watch—"

"For *you*, Danny. Aren't you my brother?" She looked nervous, worried. She took out cigarettes from her purse and struck a match to one. Danny's eyes froze on the book matches she flourished. The advertisement it carried was for SMITH'S PAVILION!

"Hey! Where'd *you* get those matches, sis?"

Fran stared at him. "Buzz brings them home, Danny. He's got whole cartons of them. He's a good friend of the fellow that runs that place, and—*Dan!* What's the matter?"

Dan stood there, feeling rage and disgust rise together inside him. "I'm the matter," he gritted weirdly. "I'm beginning to see some things, finally. I ought to have my head examined."

He turned abruptly and sprinted back to the bench. He stopped in front of Bernie and said, panting, "I feel like busting

things, Coach. I—I just found out something. I could do you some good in there now, if you'd let me."

Bernie Bern stared quietly at him. "Boy, you look mad as a hornet." He sighed. "All right, this is no time for questions. Get rolling!"

Danny rolled! He ran close to Buzz, as Buzz came out, scowling, and gritted through his teeth, "I wised up to you, pal. You can go into your swan song."

Buzz made with a deadpan. Danny wasn't fooled. Buzz was a good friend of a guy named Smith, of Smith's Pavilion, and Smith was dickering to buy the Beavers. Only he couldn't buy them if they won today. And for some 'strange' reason, Buzz always flopped when it looked like the Beavers would score on the Bisons.

Strange reason, hell! Danny wondered how much commission Buzz was drawing down, for throwing this ball game. He didn't know when he had been so tarnation mad.

**H**E KNOCKED a couple of Bisons for a loop and Ace Harrin followed him up to the Beaver forty. In the huddle, Danny talked fast. "Look, Buzz was tossin' this game. I'm dead certain of it. I'm mad enough to eat my own weight in those Bisons. Gimme a crack at that pill, will you, Hunk?"

Hunk was gaping. "How d'ya know Buzz—"

"Look, the time's short! Let's roll, dammit!"

Hunk was quick. "Nothin' wrong with that, any way you look at it. Number twenty!"

Danny was back in the T. Ike sent it to him. He grabbed it, went slamming out on feather strides toward the right. Ace knocked over a Bison. Hunk got two with a beautiful, rib-busting body block. Danny cut inside the sucked-out left end and snapped past the line of scrimmage.

A pair of hands grabbed at his legs. He kept them driving, driving. He shook the guy off with a ballet dancer's pivot, went slashing forward. He passed the fifty, cut around two would-be tacklers with a blinding spurt, sustained by the thought that Buzz must be watching.

He knifed past the forty, their thirty.

He could hear the crowd yelling. It started a fire inside him. They had to cop this ball game. He was loose; he had to stay that way. A contingent of Bisons rushed wildly toward him, angling, trying to wedge him over to the sideline.

He stopped dead. They were caught off balance. Danny started to cut to his left. Then a tree trunk fell on him, slammed him down, pinned him helplessly to the half-frozen turf. He looked around into the grinning face of Dorrie Parker.

"Ain't you the butterfly, kid," Parker grunted, showing his teeth. "Didn't break your wings, did I?"

Danny looked toward the sideline. He had been dropped, he saw, on the Bison twenty. He looked at the big clock behind the tall goal posts. They had a couple more minutes. He said grimly, "Not by a long sight, brother!"

They were a fever-ridden bunch, in that huddle. Hunk Dooley could hardly talk. He piped eagerly, "Number twelve. Look, if you can just stay mad, Danny—"

They lined up. Danny put his hands out. The ball. He grabbed it, drove hard through the line. The Bisons were on the Stonewall Jackson. Nothing opened. He lost one, and nearly broke his neck in the process.

Ace tried off tackle. One yard. Nine to go. Hunk figured they had to pass. Danny went back there. He faded. They came slamming in at him. He faded farther, farther. They had a tight net flung around his receivers. He dodged one diving tackler, straight-armed another.

An avalanche of Bisons charged at him. These were the behemoths of the line, large, massive, slow-thinking, slow-footed. Danny sucked them aside with a runaway feint, stopped dead—and drop-kicked!

He never knew how the ball knifed through the maze of startled, upflung hands. It did. It cut the goal posts in half. You couldn't hear yourself think once the crowd found its voice.

As he went back to the line up for the kickoff, Danny knew it was nothing. The Bisons still led 7-3 and there was time left for only a couple more plays. Their only chance was an on-side kick.

They kicked. A dribbling, bounding kick aimed straight at the Bison's left tackle. The surprised lineman grabbed for

it. It bounced off his chest. Then Ed Camp, their speedy right end, flashed in and covered the ball. It had worked!

Quickly, the Beavers lined up. Danny was thinking: *We've got to. We've got to make it!* He took the ball and inspired linemen blasted a hole at tackle. He went sliding in fast behind Ace and Hunk Dooley. They were good boys. They shouldered aside hard-charging Bisons and stayed right with him.

They rolled past the midstripe. Danny saw a trap closing and deserted quickly. He went almost to the left sideline, trailing a horde of eager Bisons. He slammed a man to the ground with a hard hand on his helmet. He fainted past another. He cut in, when he had to. He went to the thirty, and there was Dorrie Parker, closing fast on him.

Danny stuck a hand out, sliding around to the right a little. He pumped both legs like crazy. Dorrie Parker slashed in under the straightarm, dived viciously at him. Danny bent at the middle and faded away from the clutching hands. He yanked himself loose. He ducked and a big rangy end went over him in a Flying Mare motion. He got on his bicycle and romped down the rest of that field and over the end-stripe. They were going crazy up in the grandstand. He had a Gene Krupa in each ear, drumming his praises.

The team came around him. They were laughing. They were weeping with joy. Hunk said, "I don't believe it. I'm dreamin. Ace, take it through center. Number six." Ace did. Then it was over. 10-7, the Beavers. Danny sat like a king, riding a pair of sturdy shoulders into the lockers. He was smiling and crying a little, he was that doggoned happy.

**B**ERNIE WAS saying, with an amazed glance at Buzz, "I don't believe—you mean he'd've thrown this ball game, just for a few lousy bucks extra from that syndicate Smith headed?" Danny had never seen the fat coach in such a temper. Bernie picked up a shoe by the cleated toe and brandished it at Buzz, who cowered in a corner. "You lousy, sneakin'—"

Danny cut in quickly, "Jig's up, Buzz. You might as well spill it."

The team moved on the big blond guy. His face blanched. He spilled it. Danny

stood gaping, amazed as any, as Buzz filled in the picture.

Smith's syndicate had promised him Bernie's coaching job. All Buzz had to do was mess up today's game, so the present owners would sell out to the Smith bunch at a reasonable price. Buzz knew he was getting too old to play. A chance to land a job as a coach had been too much to resist.

After all, he was getting too old to last much longer as an active player. The spring had gone from his legs and, with Danny pushing him for his job, he knew he would be out in the cold next season.

But a coach's job didn't depend on physical condition. You couldn't blame a guy for trying to make a living, could you?

"So," Danny cut in caustically, "you had me brought up here. You knew my soft side. You knew you could work on that, and keep me from giving you too much competition for your job, while you were tossing games for us. That's why you told me to keep our relationship secret. Sure. And why you told me you and Fran were solid together again, before today's game. Fillin' my mind with a lot of bare-faced lies, so I'd have something to think about out there. So I'd play rotten ball, and Bernie'd yank me—and you could stay in and throw—"

"Ah—forget it, kid." Buzz' voice was a throaty snarl. He was trapped, harassed, but he could still turn on the swagger. "You make me sick with your blattin'. You and your sister!"

Danny grinned. That was all he'd wanted, really. He went in and clipped Buzz hard, on the jaw. Buzz growled, slammed out a left, Danny wound up and slugged him again. All the anger and disgust and hatred he felt for the big blond man was behind that punch. It was straight as a die. Right to the button.

Buzz went down like a wheat stalk and lay very quiet. Bernie Bern said, breaking into the stunned silence that followed, "By the rules, that's supposed to cost you fifty, Mahaffey. In this particular case, though," he grinned, "I figure you've earned yourself one cool hundred-buck bonus!"

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# TRAIN'EM ROUGH

By Parke H. Davis

Old-time football was rugged stuff. Even the great John L. said: "It's murder!"

WHENEVER I pass the cemetery at Princeton I like to stop for a moment at the graves of three men—Aaron Burr, Grover Cleveland and James Robinson. You know the first two names, but I hear you ask, "Who was James Robinson?"

Perhaps you will recognize him more easily under the name of "Jim," but under that name you should know him instantly if you are a survivor of the rugged old football days of sixty years ago. In the late '80s Jim Robinson was the foremost athletic trainer in the country, the man who established the standard regime for the training of the athletes of those golden days.

Jim was an Englishman and he looked the part. Broad, heavy, florid, and with Yorkshire side whiskers, he fairly breathed British. And there was no doubt of his nationality once you heard him speak. During an exciting moment of the Harvard-Yale game in 1891 a spectator shouted to him:

"Say, Jim, who committed that foul?"

"'Inky!" Jim bellowed back. "It was 'Inkey did it. 'E 'eld 'Allowell by the harm."

In his younger days in England Jim had been a heel-and-toe walker—an intensely popular sport at that time—and consequently he had been brought up in the rigorous methods necessary to condition athletes for the six-day walks. Among his early charges as a trainer were some of the tough-fibered pugilists who preceded Jem Mace and Charley Mitchell.

His reputation as a trainer spread, and so it came to pass that in the middle '80s Jim Robinson established at Princeton the hard, strenuous, drastic training routine that characterized the conditioning of professional English athletes. From Princeton



*A highly specialized system which made the linemen look like six pairs of flailing windmills.*

the system spread to Yale, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. Harvard, under another famous trainer, James Lathrop, took their football a little easier.

We trained like fighters in those days because we had to. The game at that time was divided in two halves, each forty-five minutes in length; which meant that we played the equivalent of six periods as they are reckoned today—a game and a half for the modern player. At that time, too, a player could not be withdrawn and another substituted without the consent of the rival captain. And said rival captain rarely gave that permission unless it was actually necessary. Such was the code of the day. There was no limit, of course, upon the number of calls for "Time out," and these breathing spells were a big help for the players.

The "Time out!" cry was not such a boon to the spectators, however, for frequently the games carried over into dusk and the dark. If a game was called before time, according to the rules of the period the score reverted to 0-0; and this actually occurred in the Yale-Princeton games of 1884 and 1886. Yale was ahead in both games but was forced to see darkness erase the Eli lead and set back to the scoreboard and the records for all time

to a double zero tally. The latter part of the Princeton-Yale game of 1881 was waged in the moonlight, and the Harvard-Princeton game of the same year lasted four and a half hours—and was even then unfinished.

But don't get the impression that the football of the '80s was a long-drawn affair like cricket with intermissions for tea. Far from it.

The game was rough and fast and furious. We had to train like fighters to guard ourselves from injury and keep the stirring pace. A man who wasn't in tip-top physical form did not last long on the old gridiron.

In those happy bygone days the style of play in the rush line differed from that of the modern game in many respects. No neutral zone separated the rival combatants of the '80s, and the players along the line did not stand still and wait for the ball to be snapped. Not a bit of it. They stood face to face and toe to toe, and sparred with one another from the moment they lined up until the ball went into play.

They kept their hands open, it is true, and did not strike the blows usually employed in boxing; but nevertheless they practiced a relentless and powerful action upon each other by thrusting with both hands, tugging and slashing. The idea was to keep your opponent back from the line and to have him off balance when the oval was passed to the back field. With five yards to be gained in three plays every inch was precious.

This sparring in the rush line invited parrying by opponents, and thus had grown into existence a highly specialized system of peculiar give-and-take which made the ends, tackles and guards look like six pairs of flailing windmills. There was wearing action in this type of work, doubling and redoubling the demands upon the rushers, or "forwards" as they were called in that day. We trained for it as the bare-buckle champions trained for their important settos. Which accounts for the fact that Jim Robinson, trainer of English pugilists, was put in charge of the conditioning of the Princeton football squad.

The squads were small in the old days and we had to be hard and rugged to avoid injuries that would have handicapped the efficiency of the team. We had to be tough to stand the gaff—and that is the way they trained us. Many a hale old survivor of

that period enjoys pleasant reveries of wrestling lessons under the peerless William M. Muldoon, under Hughie Leonard, and the celebrated Japanese wrestler Matsada Sorakichi. We learned our boxing from Jake Kilrain, Joe Lannon, Dominick McCaffrey and the monarch of them all—John L. Sullivan.

A personal anecdote will serve to illustrate the importance that the players of that time placed upon pugilistic prowess as a football asset: Before entering Princeton I had boxing lessons for years, and I rather prided myself upon my ability. I began to wonder if I was as good as I had thought. I watched the technique of the more experienced players and began to have my doubts. But I wanted to make that team; I was going to make it at any cost. And noting the usefulness of what I considered a superior knowledge of boxing, I had a sudden inspiration: I would go to the fountainhead of boxing skill. I would take a lesson under John L. Sullivan.

Jack McMasters, a Scottish trainer who had assisted Sullivan in preparing for some of his bouts, gave me a letter to the Great Man. And equipped with fifty dollars to pay for my lesson I departed for New York.

I found Mr. Sullivan in the rear room of a cafe which stood near the old Hippodrome Theatre. The picture of John L. Sullivan which ever returns to my heart as the years come and go is that of him as I entered this rear room. He was seated at a table, head and shoulders thrown back, his face beaming with cordiality. I remember him as a very handsome man, his eyes flashing with kindness, and with a face florid with good humor. He wore a gaudy waistcoat topped with a puffed ascot tie and with the largest flaring collar that I had ever seen. I think it was about a "22". I bowed and handed him the letter.

After he read it in one of the richest, most resonant voices I ever heard he wittily said to me: "Why, boy, I can't teach you anything that will help you in football. That game is nothing like boxing. It is more like murder. However, if you think I can be of any use to you I would be glad to help. Yours Truly is always ready to do anything for a fellow sportsman."

He did not use the bad grammar or the bad pronunciation with which writers and

story tellers usually dress his conversation. With me that day he was very witty and very loquacious, but throughout our meeting he employed good English, correctly pronounced.

Going to a drawer he took out two pairs of boxing gloves. When I saw them on his huge hands and against the background of his great shoulders I could have wished that they had been much fatter. I recall them as one of the six-ounce type. John L. moved the table back and set the chairs against the wall. We both removed our coats. I also took off my vest but John L. disdained to remove his or even to take out of his tie a magnificent diamond horse-shoe. Having asked me to show him some line work in football in order that he might judge what would help me in boxing he proceeded to coach me in the rigid, bent arm work—really in-fighting. With the palm of the hand open he demonstrated jolts and hooks to the body.

Naturally, the lesson soon passed into boxing. Noticing that I had a fair knowledge of the technique of the sport he asked me who had taught me. One of these was Dominick McCaffrey with whom he had fought a draw. This pleased him and he spoke well of young Dominick. But after boxing easily with me for a few minutes he suddenly said: "You are going back to college and tell those college boys that you took a boxing lesson under John L. Sullivan. But boy, I am going to do even better than that by you. I am going to send you back so that you can tell them you fought me. Now look out—every man for himself. You are now fighting John L. Sullivan."

And there I was suddenly facing in reality the most formidable fighting man of that time or any time.

Proud of the honor, I waded right in regardless of the inevitable end. Finally, while near a wall, I received a blow upon the side of the head which sent the other side of my face against a low shelf that ran around the room. The impact broke off a tooth. As the blood appeared upon my lip John L. instantly stopped and took off his gloves. Investigating the injury he said:

"Boy, I am mighty sorry for that. I wouldn't have had that happen for a thousand dollars."

Pretending to be game I said: "Come

on, Mr. Sullivan, let's continue the boxing."

"No," he replied, "We've had enough. In fact, too much for one day."

Having put on our coats I fingered the roll of fifty dollars in my pocket. I thanked him for the lesson and said, "Now, Mr. Sullivan, how much do I owe you?"

"Well, boy," he told me, "I was going to charge you five dollars but as I broke off your tooth I am going to give you five."

The dispute over the courtesies of the occasion were finally adjusted by John L. receiving from me a box of cigars—only a box of cigars. I suppose the proper post-script is that, broken tooth and all, I made the team that year.

**B**OXING and wrestling were an integral part of our football training sixty years ago. And we did not confine our training season to the fall months in those days. Upon our return to college from the Christmas vacation we began to get in shape for the gridiron, since the only winter sports of the time were gymnastics and these had not reached the stage of intercollegiate competition.

We were no sooner back from the holidays than we were turned over to the gym instructor for what was called "heavy gymnastics." This consisted of work on the parallel bars, the horse, flying rings, chest weights and dumb-bell exercises. Through January, February and March this work continued daily, varied occasionally and happily by wrestling and boxing instruction. Our trainers were intimate with the foremost professionals, and we learned the tricks of those sports from men who knew them intimately.

During the summer vacation we were required to do road work of the same kind that is shown in the boxing parlance of today. Our stint was a daily run of from two to four miles along the country roads. Most of us went to work upon farms, on construction gangs, or at various occupations requiring hard labor. The summer vacation of Red Grange—delivering ice to keep in trim—was thirty years too late to be called an innovation.

About 1890 "preliminary training" was instituted. The Pennsylvania players were assembled weeks in advance of the open-

ing of their University at Eagles Mere, a lake in Pennsylvania. Harvard mobilized similarly on a farm near Lowell; and Princeton inaugurated its first camp of the kind at Bayswater on the Long Island seashore. Thus in one way and another it was a tough, hardy, strong, and long winded squad of men that took the field on the college gridirons at the opening of the season in September.

Training tables instantly were established and training rules prescribed. The players were placed under the strict injunction not to eat a morsel of any food whatever away from the training table. Tobacco in any form was taboo, and with it all liquors, tea, coffee, soft drinks, fried foods, pastries, cakes, puddings, and even fruits except as given at the training table. Bread was prepared by drying four days until stale. Our rising and retiring hours also were fixed and rigid. We arose at seven and retired between nine and ten. Breakfast was between seven and eight, the leeway being allowed on account of chapel and possible eight o'clock recitations. For breakfast, the first of our four meals a day, we had oatmeal with milk or very light cream. The other breakfast foods that characterize the present times had not been invented. We also were allowed an apple or an orange by way of fruit. These preliminaries were followed by baked potatoes, dropped eggs, and sirloin steaks in abundance, accompanied by buttered toast and slices of stale bread. The big fellows of that day at Princeton—Jesse Riggs, Phil King and Shep Homans would each consume at breakfast a half a dozen potatoes, plus bountiful portions of eggs and steak.

Thereafter during the day our portions were limited. At eleven o'clock we repaired to the training club house where we found a delicious light luncheon awaiting us, consisting of bread and butter, and a large slice or two of cold turkey or roast beef, and fair sized portion of jelly or some gelatine derivative.

Practice came at noon, or within twenty minutes thereafter, accordingly, as the players could assemble. Quickly we donned our canvas pants and laced canvas jackets and drew on our straight cleated shoes. Peg cleats were still years away, and trousers of moleskin were just coming into use.

On the field, the entire squad was separated into two sections about thirty yards apart, and each section spread out in a long line. Then ensued for a few minutes punting and catching practice in which all participated. This was followed by the division of the players into several circular squads in which falling on the ball was practiced. There were no mechanical contrivances in those days—no tackling dummy, no charging machine, nor any other substitute for live men. With these preliminaries out of the way we went immediately into scrimmage and scrimmaged every day—not twenty minutes or half an hour but usually ninety minutes straight of hard, continuous action. This completed, we were sent at a brisk pace about half a mile around the track and then to the showers.

The viands of dinner were ample but rigidly selected and almost daily the same: First we were given a soup from which the fat had been strained. This was followed by baked potatoes, varied by the mashed variety on Wednesdays and Sundays. Our meats consisted of rare roast beef and plenty of it. For vegetables we had beans stewed in water, varied by peas and occasionally onions. And we wound up with a cold pudding. The central treat of the meal in memory at least, was a bottle of real Bass Ale, imported from England.

THE trainer invariably sat at the head of the table and carefully scrutinized the eating of every man, commanding them frequently to "go light on that", to "eat freely of this" and to "chew your food fine". Twice a week, at Princeton, Jim Robinson appeared at the table with a jug of Chamomile tea, home brewed according to a recipe that had been evolved by generations of English trainers. Going to each man "Jim" would pour out a full glass of the stuff, bitter as quinine, and with a cheery admonition, "Drink it down, lad, it will do you good," hand the glass to the player. It must have been good stuff for we suffered from none of the ills it was designed to prevent. You moderns will say of our food routine: "Not so bad." And it wasn't. The main weakness of the system was the monotonous regularity with which the same foods appeared day after

day. Along about November the training table ceased to be inviting, and its fine and well-cooked foods were consumed with little relish. Frequently, in fact, with rebellion.

The result was that many of the men went stale in their condition, and teams came up to the important games dull in body and in spirit. Yale was wise enough to correct this phase of heavy training by breaking up the training table about two weeks before the first big game and sending the entire squad to the old New Haven House. Here they were permitted to eat anything and everything on the menu—a wholesale throwing-overboard of all dietary rules. This change of scene and cooks not only prevented staleness but actually filled the players with added strength and spirit.

There were the usual college things to do after our midday meal, but later in the afternoon the punters and goal kickers usually returned to the field for practice. Some of the others, deficient in scrimmage, would also be recalled for tackling practice.

The day closed with a supper at six of dried bread, potatoes, steaks and dropped eggs. But while the solar day came to an end, the football day did not. Signals had been invented a few years before, and signal practice was held every evening in the gymnasium. Those in vogue in the '80s were primitive but required a lot of study. At first they had been simple sentences indicating who would receive the ball, and whether he should run right or left. At

about this time, what had been originally known as "guarding" was rapidly evolving into "interference." The teams were compactly assembled—no longer spread all over the field—and the sentence idea began to give way to the various numerical systems. We assembled in the gym, ran through signals for an hour, and finally at eight o'clock the rest of the day was ours to do as we wished. Of course, this did not give us much leeway since we had to be in bed by nine-thirty.

It will be noted that in our practice we had none of the instruction by details—no separate drills in stance, charging, blocking, and the other various actions that comprise the highly specialized technique of modern individual play. We learned these things in the rough and rugged school of scrimmage.

I have been asked frequently how the players of the 'TRAIN 'EM ROUGH' period would compare with the football men of today. How would they stack up in a game played in the modern way? The question is an open one, of course. It is a question just like that moot one of how Dempsey would fare if he had climbed into the ring with the Boston Strong Boy. I can say, though, that despite the crudity of our training methods the great players of our old day were far ahead of the modern crop in physical condition. They were tireless, trained to combat roughness, fiercer in competitive spirit, prepared by a strict regime for unusual feats of physical power and speed. And such, undeniably, is not the case today.

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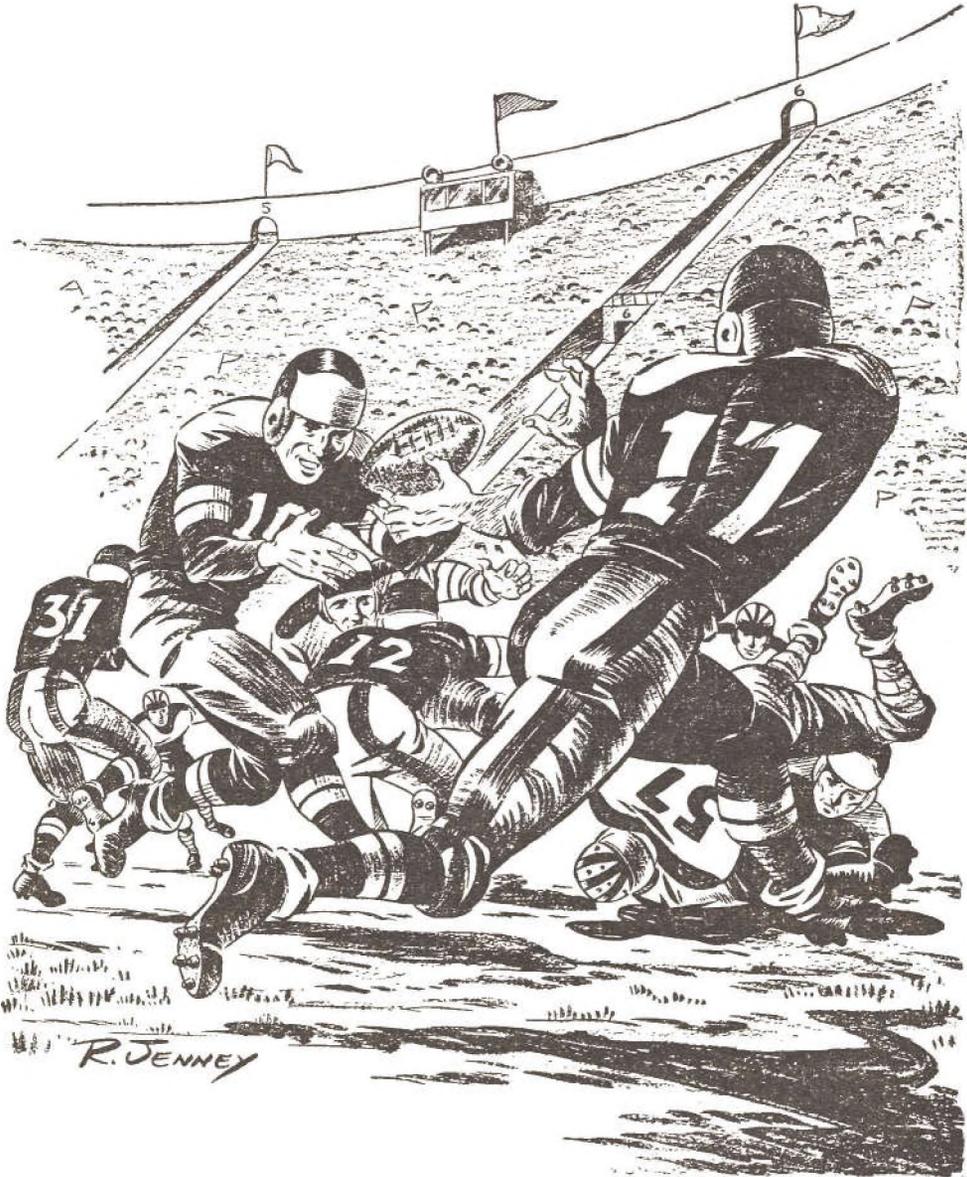


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# “Blockers Ain’t So Dumb”

By CURTIS BISHOP

Swivel-hipped Orv Hunter’s touchdown prances were whipping Winston’s football fever high. And in that frenzied Rose Bowl haze, who could see the grim smile on quarterback Cam Elliott’s face?



*Elliott pivoted, head low, and flipped a lateral to Hunter.*

WINSTON took the ball on downs, and Orville Hunter came trotting out from the bench with a smug look on his face as if to say “okay, boys, now we can ramble.” Taller Bill Jackson

played the tailback spot on defense, Hunter took over on offense. Jackson was already off the field in philosophical acceptance of his fate. He was good on defense, especially against passing, but too slow for the

Winston quick-opening plays. A Winston tailback had to have speed.

Stocky Cam Elliott gave Hunter a cold glance. "Ready, son?" he asked quietly.

Elliott was the blocking back and signal-caller. "Sure," nodded Hunter. "Shoot the fuzz."

"No. 48," Elliott called.

The blocking back took his position just behind guard. The fullback, burly Pete Russell, was three steps back. Hunter crouched another four spaces deeper. Before the snap, wingback Hub Rutherford cut along the line of scrimmage, toward the right wing. The Central Normal left line-backer in the 5-3 defense faded over to cover Rutherford.

But the snap was neither to fullback Russell nor tailback Orville Hunter. Blocking back Elliott had the ball. He wheeled and faked a handoff to Russell, who tore into the center of the line.

He pivoted again, this time faking a lunge into the right guard. This maneuver stopped the right side linebacker from sweeping across the field. Elliott bobbed back, head still low, and flipped a lateral to Orville Hunter, who was in motion at his second feint.

Hunter took the soft pass shoulder high and threw back his right arm as if to pass. Immediately the Central Normal defense shifted. The left end abandoned Hunter to take care of Rutherford, the wing back. Which was just as Winston wanted. Hunter tucked the ball under his arm and cut back outside tackle. There, after his faking, Cam Elliott was smashing into the linebacker. Elliott caught the Normal fullback low and hard. Both went down.

Rutherford kept the Normal end from rushing in and Hunter had his hole, needing only to skit away from the tackle and side-step the defensive halfback. Hunter had the speed to do both. He could run, this boy; and the quick cheers from the Winston rooters indicated that he had shown them his broken field prowess before.

The Normal safety came slowly toward the sidelines, showing respect for Hunter's heralded deception, giving ground rapidly. Now was no time to worry about yardage. The question was stopping Hunter shy of the goal line. Usually when the Winston star got into the open field, he got away.

This safety man was cautious. And

smart. He didn't fall for Hunter's feint back toward mid-field. Weight on his toes, eyes watching Hunter's feet, he held his position. The Winston runner had to reverse his field and the safety played the angle, content to keep between the ball carrier and the goal line, not coming forward a step.

Hunter reached the opposite sidelines and it looked as if he were trapped there. He couldn't cut back; this safety had followed him across the field.

Hunter clutched the ball to his jersey and prepared to put on a burst of speed in the hope he could run right through the defensive man's arms. Cleats chopped into the turf as he cut sharply. The safety took a step up and . . .

In between the two of them shot a blue-jerseyed figure. Cam Elliott!

The safety man saw him in time. This Central Normal back was a cool veteran. He turned his attention to the blocker, and pushed off Elliott with sure hands. Then, leaping away from the tangle, he made his play for Orville Hunter, the ball carrier.

Hunter now could show his deception. Cam's rush had gotten him out of the sideline box. He feinted one way, then spun another. Desperate hands caught at his ankles but Hunter kept his footing for a few precarious paces, then regained his balance and kept running.

He touched the ball to the turf behind the goal line, then stood calmly waiting for his teammates to reach the two-yard line where the ball would be set in play for the extra point try.

**A**BOVE HIM the stands were in an uproar. This made the score 13-6 in favor of Winston. A successful point try would sew up the game, for only four minutes were left and the Blue-clad warriors had done a good job of shackling Central's passing all afternoon. Hunter had scored the other time. Hunter was beating Central Normal single-handed.

Cam Elliott, the same stony-faced blocking back who had gotten downfield, was the first to reach Hunter.

"Good going," Cam said briefly.

Had the spectators been watching closely, they would have noticed that the Winston squad did not stage the usual demonstration—no bear hugs, no dancing, no gleeful

shouting. Which was something to wonder about. Something for Coach Emmett Howell of Winston to worry about.

Winston had been out in front 7-6 before this run. But against a team which specialized in the forward pass this was a slim margin. Any of Luke Conroy's forwards might result in a touchdown for Central Normal.

Out from the bench came Bill Jackson to hold the pigskin. Hunter would kick. Cam Elliott trotted slowly to the bench.

Coach Howell met him at the edge of the field and squeezed his shoulder.

"Nice hustling, Cam," approved the mentor.

Cam nodded. He hadn't carried out his man. But few blockers can lay out a safety man. He had earned Hunter a second's respite, and the ball carrier had turned that into a score. That was enough.

Hunter's kick went high and straight and the scoreboard showed 14 points for Winston. Coach Howell nodded and Elliott went right back in. "Hunter off," he told the referee.

The touchdown ace looked up at the scoreboard. Three minutes and forty seconds now!

"You guys should be able to hold them," he said.

There seemed to be reproof in his voice. Once before in this ball game he had put Winston out in front—with a punt return and a conversion. The Wildcats had yielded a score to Conroy's passing.

"Watch the passes," he called out crisply as he ran off the field.

Skinny Dugan, the Winston center, sighed. "What the hell have we been doing for fifty-six minutes?" he demanded of Cam, who was running upfield at his side.

"Aw, skip it," Hub Rutherford, the wingback, answered. "You know Hunter. He had to let the crowd see him giving us instructions."

"The hell with him!" growled Dugan. "We do the dirty work; he just romps in for a scoring play, then sits out the grief."

Dugan would kick off. Bill Jackson would hold.

"Kick her deep," warned Bill.

Dugan nodded. The center swung his toe into the ball and the pigskin tumbled over and over, finally landing in the end zone. Central Normal made no desperate

attempt to return the kickoff. The Cougars were a passing team and took few chances—on the ground. Conroy was already back on the field and the Wildcats drew up into a five-three formation. Conroy hurled one deep; Bill Jackson batted it aside.

Nobody thought much about Jackson as a tailback. He couldn't run with the ball for sour apples. When fourth down came, after three incomplete passes, Orville Hunter trotted out and it was Hunter who ran back Central's punt—for 20 yards. But Jackson, his teammates and his coaches knew, was a stalwart defender against the forward pass and also a sure tackler. The safety has to do more than run back punts in modern football. The wise coach stations a good defensive back there, or alternates one with a runner.

Hunter stayed in. But Cam Elliott didn't call any more razzle-dazzle. Cam carried the ball once, burly Pete Russell twice. They managed to pick up eight yards. Cam looked at the clock. Forty seconds left. Jackson was back in the game to kick. But Cam called another signal in the huddle. The blocking back took the ball himself, on one of their quick-opening plays. He cleared the yardage stick and Winston held onto the ball until the final gun.

WINSTON fans poured out onto the field. This was the Blue's sixth straight win, and unquestionably the campus had bowl fever. Shriill-voiced girls were as active in the demonstration as boys. Cam Elliott grinned as his shoulder was slapped and his hand squeezed. Every other varsity man was so treated . . . except Orville Hunter. For Hunter there was the usual gesture to a game hero. The speedy tailback was lifted high by a dozen eager hands and carried off the field.

Winston had no high-scoring machine. It was a veteran club, stout on the defense, quick to grab breaks and capitalize upon them. But its attack was centered around Hunter's elusiveness. Pete Russell was good for a yard anytime on the close plays but ball games can't be won by short plunges. Hunter was the boy who made Winston click.

In the dressing room Coach Emmett Howell gave them a short talk. He wasn't the usual coaching type. Instead of being

dynamic and eloquent in speech, he was slow-moving and talked in a leisurely drawl.

"That's another, boys. But don't get any ideas you can let up. They get tougher from here on."

Cam Elliott heard a chuckle behind him. Orville Hunter said in his ear:

"How's that for crepe-hanging?"

Cam shook his head. "We didn't look too good," said the blocking back. "Bainbridge will be tougher than Central Normal."

"In the air corps," Hunter said jauntily, "they say any landing you can walk away from is a good landing. We walked away from this one, didn't we?"

"Sure, sure," said Skinny Dugan. "The great Hunter never lets us down."

Skinny made no effort to conceal his feelings. Several of the other boys were openly as bitter toward their touchdown ace. Not that they resented Hunter's scoring total—in the Winston system the tailback was supposed to tally the markers. It was Orville's attitude. As Skinny complained, they were his stooges.

Skinny, Hub Rutherford, Hunter and Cam Elliott were all members of Pi Delta fraternity. They stepped out of the dressing room together, but Orville promptly deserted them for a slim dark-haired girl who sat under the steering wheel of a shiny convertible.

She waved to Cam.

"Go on and ride, chum," said Rutherford. "Don't mind Skinny and me."

"I'll walk," Cam answered. The girl driving the convertible waited a moment, then, seeing that Cam had no intention of joining them, drove on.

"The great Hunter," scowled Dugan, "gets a ride. Us guys who do the dirty work have to walk."

"That's getting to be an obsession with you, Dugan," Cam said crisply. "It isn't Hunter's idea to rest out on the defense. Jackson is the best man against passes, that's why Coach Howell has him in there."

"I know it," grumbled Dugan. "Hunter is all right. He just rubs me the wrong way sometimes."

"You're the guy who oughta be kicking," Rutherford told Elliott. "I thought Pat Warner started out as your girl."

"Who said she isn't yet?"

"Hunter seems to be leading the scoring in that league, too," Rutherford observed.

"Hunter and I get along," Cam said lightly.

That was true. Cam Elliott, the blocking back, and Orville Hunter, the speedy ball carrier, *did* get along. Coach Emmett Howell had more than once reminded sports writers that Elliott's blocking had a lot to do with Hunter's successful running. Hunter did a lot of reversing and changing his pace. Cam Elliott, in front of him all the way, seemed to sense what Orville would try next. And, Coach Howell pointed out to the press, Hunter understood, by instinct or something, where Elliott would lead. The two, said the coach, were a single unit on the field.

The sports writers nodded, and wrote a line or so about Cam Elliott. Then added paragraphs about Orville Hunter, the East's best running back. Yes, that's right, the East's best running back. Glenn Davis of Army didn't have the field entirely to himself.

THE PI DELTAS were singing their fraternity song when Cam took his place at the table. He was vice-president of this organization, and had refused to be nominated for president. None of the Pi Deltas looked down upon Cam because he worked in their kitchen in return for his meals. He could recall his offer to resign. Then his attempt to move out of the fraternity house to a cheaper place.

"Hell, Elliott," Orville Hunter had snapped, "you might as well be washing dishes for us as for somebody else. We need a dish-washer, you need a place to eat."

Cam remembered this as Skinny Dugan, on his left, growled an answer to a statement by Bill Ford that the fraternity had covered itself with gridiron glory this day.

"Give the glory to Hunter. He laps it up."

"Don't pay any attention to Dugan," Cam said quickly as he noticed Hunter's face darkening. "One of those Central Normal boys stepped on his pet corn today."

That was a joke on the squad, and in the fraternity. Dugan had never received a serious physical injury in nearly three years of varsity football. But almost every

game somebody stepped on his corn, necessitating a respite on the sidelines for the lanky but powerful center.

"Cam," Dugan said between bites, "see me tonight. I'm going to do something for you. Something nice."

Cam shrugged his shoulders.

After dinner there were the dishes to do. Skinny perched himself on the wide drainboard and watched the stocky boy with thoughtful eyes.

"How long are you going to be Hunter's shadow?" demanded the center.

"That worries everybody but Hunter and me," Cam shot back. "I'm not complaining, Skinny."

"No," growled Skinny, "you never complain. You let the heel walk all over you."

Cam continued his work. "What ever made you shift to blocking back anyhow?" Dugan questioned. "You were running right with Hunter as tailback on the frosh team. Some of us thought you might beat him out on the varsity. More power if not as elusive."

"Just like it," Cam said lightly.

That wasn't altogether true. When Cam's father died, the youth realized that he could afford to take no chances with his football playing. He could finish his schooling at Winston, but he had to have something to turn to immediately upon graduation that would pay him off. Cam wanted to be an engineer, but he couldn't take a full engineering course, play football and work all at the same time. So he had postponed his engineering courses—some of them—for a while.

And he had requested Coach Howell to shift him to blocking back. For the only answer to Cam Elliott's doubtful future was to grab a varsity berth, make some kind of a name for himself, and play professional football until he had finished his engineering studies. That would postpone his graduation, but he would be paying his own way and even piling up a cash reserve.

Why shift to blocking back? Tailbacks were a dime a dozen. A tailback who got the breaks, and the glory, was worth a half-dozen blocking backs as far as the general public was concerned. But the hard-headed pro scouts were looking for rugged blockers who didn't mind playing second fiddle to a ball carrier.

"Look, chum," Dugan whispered in his ear. "I ain't breathed a word of this, but George Grenville is my cousin."

"Yeah?"

Cam knew who George Grenville was, of course. What sports enthusiast didn't? Grenville was the country's highest-paid, widest-read sports writer. Grenville's All-American selection rated higher than the Associated Press eleven or any other authority's.

"Yeah," confirmed Skinny. "And Grenville is coming up here to cover the game Saturday."

"He is!"

"In person," Skinny said proudly. "I've been writing him all year."

"That means," Cam said slowly, "we're getting up there."

"And Cousin George is seriously thinking about one of our boys for All-America," added Dugan. "He looks all of the outstanding candidates over. Now, chum, here's the payoff. I've been writing George all year not to pay any attention to Hunter's publicity. I've been telling him that a guy named Cam Elliott really makes us click. Show him something Saturday. And for God's sake, hold Hunter back as much as you can."

Cam looked at the lanky youth and grinned. "Thanks for the tip, pal. I'll remember that Cousin George is in the press box."

"Keep it under your hat," Skinny warned him. "Not many people know George is coming. He hasn't even made a press box reservation in his own name."

"Incognito, huh?"

"Not exactly. He just wanted to keep it quiet."

"I'll remember it," Cam repeated.

**E**MMETT HOWELL sensed the temper of this veteran squad that was beginning to worry about its own future. The heat was on the Wildcats. Bainbridge and Warmouth were respected opponents, but the Blue should triumph. Then came State University, also unbeaten and untied. If Winston swept through its schedule unbeaten, the Wildcats would be strong contenders for a Rose Bowl invitation. Winston had never won a championship, much less a bowl bid. Building up the Wildcats had been a long tiresome task. Only a pa-

tient man like Emmett Howell could have stuck with it.

Now, with a great squad at long last, Howell feared it would crack around him. He disliked having his attack built around a single runner as much as any other coach. But, at Winston, a coach took what there was and did the best he could.

Cam Elliott was his confidant. The squad had elected Orville Hunter captain, but it was Elliott whom the coach turned to for counsel and for help in keeping the squad's morale high.

"Kid, if *you* crack on me, I'm ruined," sighed the coach. "We've got to keep going three more games."

"We're all right," Cam assured the mentor. "This bickering about Hunter has been going on for two years."

"I'll outline some new plays," said Howell.

But this didn't take the squad's mind off its troubles.

"What are we learning this for!" snorted Hub Rutherford. "We won't ever use 'em."

"You can't tell," said Cam. "Let's get 'em down right."

The plays featured Pete Russell and Hub Rutherford on handoffs. Bill Jackson ran with the first-string quartet as often as Orville Hunter. Did this mean the coach intended to use Jackson on the offense?

The next morning Emmett Howell stopped him on the campus and invited him to have a coke. Seated at one of the bare, initial-scarred co-op tables the coach suddenly looked hard at Cam.

"Did you know George Grenville would cover the game?"

"Yes," Cam nodded.

Emmett Howell's mild eyes studied Cam's inscrutable face. The coach never questioned Cam's judgment on the field, nor criticized the blocking back in public or private. But amazingly enough he had some hidden thoughts about stocky Mr. Elliott, the boy who was so willing to be Orville Hunter's stooge.

"Forget about Grenville," he said coldly. "We need to win a ball game."

"We'll win it," Cam promised.

Cam quickly excused himself. He had to rush to a class he said. Emmett Howell looked after Cam with troubled, faintly angry eyes. Then he pushed aside his coke and picked up the sports section.

BAINBRIDGE TO TEST HUNTER'S ALL-AMERICA CLAIM!

The coach sighed. Headlines like that hurt a team. Ahead of them was at least one rigid test. Bainbridge might offer it. Or Warmouth. If neither of these, then certainly State. The Wildcats would have to play inspired football to win all three of these games. The man Emmett Howell wanted to fire up was not Orville Hunter. Not the other boys on the squad, openly resentful of Hunter's publicity. But Cam Elliott.

II

HUNTER won the toss and Winston elected to receive.

"Let's cut loose from the start," Orville said to Cam in the huddle.

"Sure," jibed Skinny Dugan. "Let's open Mr. Grenville's eyes right off."

"Cut the gab," Cam said coldly. "I'll call signals."

Skinny frowned his resentment of this unnecessarily harsh reproof. All right, he shouldn't pop off in the huddle. But why sing him out so rough for it?

Bainbridge was careful not to kick to Hunter. Rutherford brought back the boot to the 30. Cam surveyed the Bainbridge defense. A widespread five. Afraid of the wide plays.

He nodded.

"Twenty-one," he said curtly.

He was a cold automaton on the field, sure of his judgment, sure that his authority wouldn't be questioned by any man. Or even the coach.

He took the snap himself, feinted to Hunter, then whirled back through center. If the Bainbridge line-backer had been drawn out to cover Orville . . .

He was! Cam found an open field before him. He whirled off to the sidelines and went for 25 yards.

He grinned as he scrambled to his feet. The Winston supporters were cheering wildly. It wasn't often that Cam Elliott was cheered for his ball carrying.

"Good going," Hunter told him. "That should set up our lateral."

Cam nodded, and called the play.

He took the ball again. He feinted for the hole over center. Then he whirled and made a motion toward Russell. His next

move was to cut sharply to his left, running parallel with the line of scrimmage.

Hunter was six yards deeper, fading wide to his left.

Elliott tossed the ball backward. The timing of the pass depended on the defensive end's playing. This one faded. Cam held the ball longer. Then, free of the pigskin, he crashed into the end at an angle. He carried out the wingman and saw that Orville Hunter had side-stepped the defensive halfback, who had charged up fast. Evidently Bainbridge had been told the best way to play Hunter was behind the line of scrimmage.

But now the speedster was loose. Cam scrambled to his feet and raced downfield. He was fast, almost as fast as Hunter. When Orville had to reverse his field to get away from the safety man, Cam was right there mowing down a Bainbridge pursuer who would have drug down Hunter from behind.

Orville went on over the goal line, and the Winston supporters turned the stands topsy-turvy with their cheers. On the second play!

Cam turned to the bench without even waiting for the substitution. Always Jackson relieved him for the point try.

He stood and watched Hunter's kick go through the bars. Then he looked inquiringly to Emmett Howell. The coach nodded and Cam returned to the game. Orville Hunter came off, Jackson shifting to defensive tailback. The ovation was terrific. Cam watched with a thin smile.

"Don't you ever get sick of that?" Hub Rutherford yelled in Cam's ears.

"No," was the curt answer. "It wins us ball games."

**B**AINBRIDGE had a tricky running attack but Cam shifted to a six-man defense. He and Skinny Dugan were both good line-backers. The Winston forward wall was heavy and experienced. It lacked only offensive polish and speed of being a great college line.

Hunter came running out for the fourth down kick. Bainbridge kicked out of bounds. As they gathered in the huddle, Cam caught the appeal in the tailback's eyes but shook his head. He quick-kicked instead. Bainbridge was pushed back to the 10. Hunter's punt return gave Win-

ston possession of the ball on the visitor's 35.

A scoring spot. But Cam held Hunter back. Instead there was Rutherford trying to skirt the weak side. Elliott was out in front of the blocking wave but somehow the Bainbridge men pushed through and Rutherford lost three yards.

Emmett Howell closed his eyes. How could a man be blocking wizardry personified one moment, no more than mediocre the next? On plays where Orville Hunter had the ball, Cam Elliott got his man unassisted, and sometimes another!

Accusation burned in Hunter's eyes. Cam was holding him under wraps. Orville grumbled in the huddle. Skinny Dugan took delight in telling the star ball carrier to let Cam call the game.

Bainbridge got to midfield, then yielded the ball on a fumble. Cam kicked again. He was not a spectacular kicker, but he was effective. He always kicked out of bounds, low twisting spirals away from the opposing safety men. Numerous punters led Elliott in total yards. Few excelled him in net yards. His punts just weren't returned.

It was a slow game. Bainbridge couldn't power forward and Winston's Blue was obviously holding itself back. The Visitors got to the 35 once. A kick-out to the coffin corner would have put the Wildcats in a bad hole but Orville Hunter, playing daringly, caught the short high kick on his own five and returned to his own 22.

This was spectacular running. For every one of those seventeen steps were taken with a Bainbridge tackler grabbing at him.

Cam shook his head. It was all right for Hunter to want to impress George Grenville, but snatching punts like that was risky. He eyed Orville a moment, then called "40" and turned away from the delight on Orville's face.

Cam was back in a deep punt. The pass came to him; he lifted his foot as if to kick. Several times he had punted on first down from this deep in his own territory; the Bainbridge ends were trapped into rushing this punt. Cam suddenly took a few steps to his right and tossed the ball into the arms of Orville Hunter, who had been in motion with the snap from the left wingback position.

It was a lob pass, carefully timed, traveling no more than five yards. Hunter gath-

ered in the pigskin without slowing up and broke for the sidelines.

They had worked this out through experience. Hunter cut diagonally, pulling the defensive halfback with him. When Orville reached the sidelines and cut back, Cam Elliott was there to carry out the halfback. Hunter had an open field, and the sidelines.

A ball carrier likes to run that way. For he has the advantage of the angle. When the safety man cut over to intercept, Orville simply shot across the turf to a touchdown, outrunning the last Bainbridge tackler. Bedlam broke loose in the stands. The band crashed into "Hot Time Tonight" and hundreds of blue frosh caps showered into the air. The Winston supporters were really crowing. So this Bainbridge team had believed it could stop Orville Hunter!

Cam received a faint cheer as he came out to let Bill Jackson hold.

"Nice headwork, son," Emmett Howell murmured. "You and Hunter really make a team."

Cam grinned. This ball game was going to suit him. Then he frowned, and rubbed his shoulder.

"Got a pretty bad lick on my shoulder," he muttered.

Emmett Howell nodded. "It was a hard block. We'll let Froggie Perkins work a while."

Froggie was the only other blocking back on the squad. He was powerful but he was slow. Pete Russell and Hub Rutherford followed his bulk into the Bainbridge line for short gains. But on the wide plays Froggie was in Hunter's way. The running ace complained to Coach Howell after one series of downs:

"Perkins is too slow, Coach."

Howell nodded. "Feeling better?" Hunter asked Cam hopefully.

"We got a good lead," Cam shrugged. "No use in piling it up."

**B**AINBRIDGE took heart at two consecutive fumbles by the Winston backs. The Crimson team pushed to the Wildcat 10-yard line before yielding the ball on downs. Cam went out and punted, then returned to the bench. Emmett Howell didn't question his judgment.

Orville Hunter also showed a disposition to stay on the bench.

"I can't get anywhere with Perkins in there," he told Howell in disgust.

The game dragged to an unexciting end. Fourteen-nothing, Winston. Cam gave the swarm of students pouring out onto the field a thin smile. What would expert Grenville have to say about this game?

Skinny Dugan berated him in the showers, speaking in a low whisper. "You sap!" growled the center. "You gave Hunter the breaks."

"Did I?" Cam asked coldly.

"Hell, yes. You practically pushed him over the goal line twice."

"I don't care who scores," Elliott shrugged. "We won a ball game, didn't we?"

"You got too much team spirit for your own good," complained Skinny.

Cam dressed quickly and was one of the first players out of the dressing room. He controlled his patience until 10 o'clock, and the first issues of the Sunday papers rolled out. He walked downtown and purchased several. Behind the locked door of his room he read the press accounts of the game. The first he read, of course, was George Grenville's.

"Winston's twinkle-toed speedster, Orville Hunter, twice broke loose on touchdown scampers to give the Wildcats an easy 14-0 victory over a scrapping Bainbridge team today," reported Grenville. "But to this gray-haired old-timer, who has watched some ball carriers in his time, it was obvious that any claims that Orville Hunter belongs in the same class with Red Grange are a bit premature.

"While Hunter is very fast and a talented open-field runner, a large share of the credit for his success must be given to blocking back Cam Elliott.

"Elliott had to leave the game with an injured shoulder in the third quarter, and from then on Hunter was stopped cold. It was the veteran blocking back, whom teammates and coaches alike call the unsung star of the unbeaten Winston team, who personally cleared Hunter's path for him on both touchdown forays.

"And while Hunter is just a ball carrier, Elliott punted, backed up the line and showed great generalship."

Cam laid down the paper after the

fourth reading. He looked up at the ceiling and a faint smile showed on his face.

He had hoped for this. To the mob of fans, to the screaming co-eds, Orville Hunter would still be the glory boy. But Cam Elliott wasn't concerned with ovations or with hero worshippers. He wanted the approval of men who knew their football, like George Grenville, like pro scouts.

In his Monday's column Grenville went even further.

"Cam Elliott," he stated, "is the stand-out back in the East. All along Winston fans have shouted about Orville Hunter. Elliott isn't the first blocking back to carry the weight of his team's championship drive on his broad shoulders. Nor will Cam Elliott be the first blocking back to emerge from the muck and grime of the scrimmage line to All-American honors.

"Yes, that's right. All-American! He's that good. A blocking back who can carry out one and two men single-handed on every wide play deserves that recognition."

Skinny Dugan read the Grenville column aloud to the boys at lunch. Cam kept his eyes on his plate. But, inwardly, he gloried in the sincere congratulations he was receiving on all sides. He shot a side-wise look at Orville Hunter. The ball carrier's lips were tight.

### III

**I**N PRACTICE Hunter did not even speak to Cam. The handsome tailback had a miserable afternoon. The boys could talk of nothing else but this belated recognition of Cam Elliott.

"Stow the gab," Cam said finally, "and let's get to work. Warmouth is tough. Or didn't you guys know we had some more football to play?"

He was praised for that answer. It was transmitted to the local newspapermen. It was broadcast across the country. Cam Elliott's reaction to George Grenville's nomination for the All-America was: "We have some more football to play."

Naturally Emmett Howell made no comment. To an Associated Press inquiry he stated: "Yes, Elliott is the best blocking back I have ever coached."

But the coach was worried. He was not surprised; he was *worried*.

For Orville Hunter showed no snap in

practice and this team needed Hunter like a shirt needs a tail. George Grenville could rave about Cam Elliott, and it was all so, but there had to be a man carrying the ball who could keep up with the blocking man.

And a story in the Warmouth *Herald* worried the coach more than he admitted.

"I think," blandly stated Coach George Harris of the Warmouth Eagles, "that we have found a way to stop Winston."

Emmett Howell read that and in Wednesday's workout he neglected running plays to concentrate upon their passing. The lack of a stellar passer had cost Winston an unbeaten season the year before—State University had trampled the Wildcats by a three-touchdown margin on a muddy field. Hunter could lob a ball, as could Cam Elliott. But neither were "pitchers". And neither Winston wingman was a ball-hawk.

The Warmouth strategy was obvious right after the kickoff. Instead of watching Orville Hunter, the Warmouth line-backers studied Cam Elliott. Two line-backers followed Cam's every motion. One was to take Cam out of the play, the other was to tackle Orville before the speedster could get started.

Howell groaned. It was smart football. Cam swung out ahead of the running ace and there were two Warmouth men right on him. Elliott dropped one with his crushing blocks. The first Warmouth man in made no effort to avoid Cam's lunge. In fact, it was doubtful whether Cam blocked the Wildcat or the Orange-jerseyed man blocked out Elliott. Anyhow, Cam was down in an even trade and there was the second line-backer grabbing at Hunter behind the line of scrimmage.

The Eagles penned Hunter up. In the first quarter Orville was trapped four times behind the line of scrimmage. Once, giving ground to get running room, he was thrown back to his own 10-yard stripe. Cam's sure kicking kept Warmouth out of scoring distance but the excited radio announcer reciting the statistics for the first half during the intermission emphasized that the favored Winston team had made only one first down (that with the help of a five-yard penalty) and had a net yardage on running plays of *minus ten*.

"Cam Elliott," said the announcer, "is turning in a superlative job as usual. Not

a single time has Elliott failed to get his man. But Hunter simply can't get going against this determined Warmouth team. The top upset of the football season may be in store for these 20,000 excited fans today."

**I**N THE WINSTON dressing room Cam submitted to a rubdown and winced as the trainer mauled his right shoulder. The squad sat silent and dispirited under Emmett Howell's gentle technical criticism. This was the first time this veteran outfit had come to the half without a lead.

Howell finished his lecture and came over to the table where Cam was stretched out on his stomach.

"Rough, isn't it, Cam?" the coach asked softly.

Cam raised his head. "They're outsmarting us, coach," he admitted. "I'm getting the first man, but they have Orv penned before he can turn on his speed."

Howell nodded. For two years he had put his trust in this quarterback's strategy. "What do you plan to do?"

"Punt with 'em," Cam said. "Hope for a break."

"And then?"

"Pass 'em," was the prompt answer. "And there's that sneak play of mine. I'm saving it for a spot. It'll work when we use it."

Howell nodded again. Warmouth had been joyously checking the wide plays. Yes, that quarterback sneak would work.

But it wasn't what the coach had hoped for. He turned away. Another coach might have faced the issue then and there. But Emmett Howell usually believed that tangles worked themselves out. He was sure he could go on trusting Cam Elliott. It was important to Cam to win these two remaining games and play in a bowl game. And the Winston coach had observed that Cam usually got what he wanted.

The Winston fans groaned in the third quarter when Cam started off with a quick-kick, then a punt on first down. The zero on the scoreboard worried them. A scoreless tie would eliminate the Wildcats from the Rose Bowl marathon. And this team, unable to gain against Warmouth, looked like anything but a championship outfit! If they couldn't go against the

Eagles, what would State University do to them?

Orville Hunter and Bill Jackson alternated at tailback. But only twice did Cam call Orville's signal during the entire third period. Both of these plays resulted in setbacks.

Orville did not protest. The running ace seemed to have lost much of his jauntiness. A man who has not gained a yard all afternoon cannot demand that his signal be called again.

But Hunter, observed Coach Howell, was playing some good football. Once, on a third down when Warmouth drew up in punt formation and Orv ran in to play the expected kick, the safety man ran back twenty yards to knock down a pass that had the stands in an uproar. The Warmouth halfback threw it straight and long; if Hunter hadn't gotten there just on the split second the intended receiver would have taken it and gone on for a score.

And it was Orv's 20-yard punt return which gave Winston possession of the ball on Warmouth's 40-yard line, the first time the Wildcats had pushed past midfield in this half.

Howell straightened up and watched Cam Elliott anxiously. Five minutes were gone of this final period; it was time to open up. Cam took the snap from center, fainted to Rutherford and Russell, then lateralled back to Orv. This was the scoring play they had used with telling effect all season, but Warmouth's two linebackers were right on top of Hunter and if the tailback had tried to run with it, he would have downed for a loss.

Orv didn't try to run. He took two steps, then flipped a quick pass to Cam.

Instead of charging one of the linebackers, Cam had just brushed his man and was out in the flat, free.

He had to dive back for the pass, hence lost his balance. Else he might have gone on for a score, at least a long gain.

As it was, twisting, powering, he reached the Winston 25-yard line.

Howell's face brightened. Yes, he had been right to trust Cam Elliott. Cam wouldn't let this Winston team stop short of a championship.

The Winston coach knew what was coming. After that wide play from the short man . . .

Yes, there it was! Cam took the snap again, but this time instead of feinting off to the other backs he shot through center. The Warmouth linebackers had been playing wide all during the game, so as to break through the Winston defense for their one-two play against the combination of Cam Elliott and Orv Hunter.

This thrust caught them going out, and Cam was by them with quick short steps.

The stands shook with excitement as Cam cut away from one defensive half-back and reached the sidelines with only the safety man in front of him. The safety played him cautiously, trying to box him. Cam attempted to cut back to midfield for more running room but the safety headed him off. Cam veered toward the sidelines and powered forward for precious steps, driving low and hard. He drug the safety to the five-yard line.

First and five! The Wildcat rooters chanted: "We want a touchdown, we want a touchdown!"

Emmett Howell left his chair and waved in Bill Jackson. They would try bruising power for these five short yards.

CAM NODDED in satisfaction as he saw Jackson reporting. Then his glance shifted to Orv Hunter. The tail-back did not protest the change. But Hunter was staring at his replacement as if he was unwilling to believe what he saw, and then what he heard.

The clutch, and Orv Hunter was being waved off! The score was tied 0—0, but the high scoring back of the East wasn't in there.

Cam had not realized how humiliating this would be to Hunter. Neither had Emmett Howell. But Cam's only reaction was to shrug his shoulders.

The spot called for this substitution. Jackson couldn't run with the ball but Bill was big and could block ahead of Pete Russell. They would depend on Pete's power to win this ball game for them.

Cam called a close formation. No attempt at deception. Pete took the snap from three yards back and lunged forward. Cam, Jackson and Rutherford all hit the tangle in front of the fullback. Pete made three yards.

Second and two. A short shift to the left, that was the only change. The War-

mouth defense crept closer and fully 18 of the 22 players on both sides were massed on top of the ball carrier. A foot shy of the goal!

Pete had a cut over his eye and blood dripped down his face. But he shrugged off his injury.

"Gimme the ball," he panted. "We'll get over."

Cam nodded. They could push forward another foot. He was in motion before the snap, throwing his 190 pounds into the middle of the line. Something hit him hard from behind. Then another bruising force. Cleats raked his shoulders and face. But he knew they were over. He was a yard past the goal line himself and Russell was lying on top of him.

The referee's hands were high when he looked up. And he could hear the tremendous roar from the delighted Winston fans. He got up slowly. This kind of football took it out of a man. Worse than the wide-open plays.

He turned automatically toward the bench. Hunter would come back in for the kick. The ovation which broke around him came as a faint surprise; Cam was not accustomed to being cheered for the Winston scores. His lips parted in a smile. It had taken a long time. But it had finally come, as he had been sure it would. Never would the wild acclaim greet him which Orv Hunter had known. But this was enough; Cam sank to the grass with that smile still on his face.

Orv Hunter was usually infallible with his point tries. But today Orv was a shaken youth. His relegation to the back-ground had been completed with his replacement by Bill Jackson in this touchdown surge. Not a single time had he gotten by the line of scrimmage today. If there had been any unwillingness to accept George Grenville's opinion as to who was responsible for Winston's success, it was gone now. Orv Hunter was just another boy named Joe running behind a boy named Cam Elliott.

Orv's eyes were misty with tears as he waited for the snap, and for Bill Jackson to slap the ball down. He shook his head, trying to clear his vision, but he still couldn't see and he kicked blindly. He missed, and turned to trot off the field with his head down.

Cam, already moving back into the game, observed this grief but was not moved. What the devil! Hunter had been overdosed on glory as it was.

Ed Scott substituted in for Pete Russell. The burly fullback had a bad cut in his forehead. There was an inspired cheer for Russell; the crowd hadn't missed the fact that Pete had scored with blood streaming all over his face.

Warmouth tried to overcome the 6—0 margin with forward passing but tall lanky Bill Jackson intercepted two in these final minutes and Cam's punting and line plunging was enough to keep the Eagles at bay.

Cam heard the gun with a sigh of relief. He was tired. In his three years of college football no game had been as hard on him. And he couldn't remember one that had been tougher to win. To the sports experts it appeared that when Winston grabbed a break, the Wildcats had the stuff to move right on and score—in four swift-striking plays. But Cam knew as well as Emmett Howell how uncertain had been that advance. If either their pass or his quarterback sneak had been anticipated . . . well, he shrugged his shoulders, it was a ball game. Now there was just one to go.

In the midst of his meditation, he felt himself snatched up by eager arms and carried high on the shoulders of Winston students who were still trembling from the excitement of this game. In a sense Cam enjoyed it. But he couldn't look down at the yelling fans with a happy laugh. He didn't care what these hoarse-voiced kids thought of him. He wanted to impress the men who picked the All-Americans, and the men who signed the paychecks in professional football.

**H**E WAS glad when they reached the dressing room and they set him down. He was glad, too, for the student manager's help as he stripped off his sweat-soaked uniform. He was that tired.

"Great game, Cam," somebody told him in the showers.

It was Orv Hunter. "Thanks," Cam grunted.

"Good thing we had you today," Orv said. No doubt of it, there was a catch in the tailback's voice. But he looked around, as suddenly the horseplay ceased and the

dressing room was quiet, and repeated quietly: "Good thing we have you, Cam. You proved today who makes this ball club click."

"Never knew there was any doubt of it," Skinny Dugan put in.

Cam turned away. He was sorry Skinny had said that. It was unnecessary to rub salt on an aching wound.

The Sunday papers heralded Cam's play, but predicted that State University, which had overwhelmed Bainbridge 28—0, would emerge as the top team of the East.

"Cam Elliott did his All-America campaign no harm," said one of the section's veteran writers. "In fact, Cam showed that he can, when the blue chips are down, turn to ball-carrying and pass receiving. It was Elliott's burst through the center of the Warmouth line that put the Wildcats in scoring position.

"While Emmett Howell's boys showed practically no offensive spark, Elliott played his best game of the season."

Cam shrugged off the praises of his fraternity brothers. "It's who gets the breaks," he explained to the boys at dinner.

There were always guests for Sunday dinner—sorority girls. Pat Warner was there as Orv's date.

"A guy does his job," he added. "One minute he looks good to the stands, the next minute he doesn't. But he's the same guy all along."

He heard a murmur of admiration from the dinner guests, who were clustered at the end table.

"He's so modest," one coed said.

"That's old Cam," said his fraternity brother. "Always has his feet on the ground."

He went to a picture show after washing the dinner dishes. Two pledges were sent to relieve him of this duty but he refused. They were paying him for it, weren't they?

It was five o'clock when he returned to the fraternity house. A pledge greeted him excitedly.

"You got a visitor, Cam. He's been waiting for nearly two hours."

Cam found a pleasant-faced gray-haired man waiting for him in the reception room.

"Elliott?"

"Yes."

"I'm Bert Center of the Philadelphia

Eagles. Mebbe you've heard of me?"

Cam's heart skipped a beat. Bert Center was the millionaire sportsman who had purchased the Eagles and was determined to build them up to championship caliber. When he talked football, it was reportedly with folding money.

"Yes, sir," Cam agreed.

"Stubby Wright scouted you for us yesterday," went on Center. "You played a magnificent game, Elliott. Stubby is sold on you."

"I'm tickled over that," Cam murmured. His usual self possession had failed him.

"Of course, Elliott," went on Center, "we don't attempt to sign up college football players until after their final season is over. I can make you no offer. But I would like to ask if you're interested in playing pro football?"

"Yes, sir," was the prompt answer.

Was he interested? Cam Elliott had planned his future around that.

"Have you any ideas about another team?" asked Center. "Or will you let money do the talking?"

Cam liked the sound of that. "Money will do the talking," he said.

Center squeezed his shoulder. "Give me a ring when you're clear. That may be after next Saturday night."

"No, sir," Cam answered promptly. "We'll beat State."

"Yeah!" grinned Center. "I admire your spirit, son, but not your judgment."

"I'll want a bonus for signing, Mr. Center," he said. "I'll call you as soon as I can."

Center shook hands and left. Cam went to his room and stretched out on his bed and beamed at the ceiling. He had two hundred dollars saved up, money he had earned during the summers. That would pay his expenses until he had signed with the Eagles and received his bonus. It wouldn't be chicken feed, that bonus. Cam pondered over a figure. He would demand ten thousand dollars on the spot. And as much per season.

So for the rest of the month—to hell with penny-pinching. To hell with letting Orv Hunter get all the dates. He had \$200 and he might as well shoot the works.

He went downstairs and called Pat.

"Can I come over?"

"Why, yes," she agreed immediately.

## IV

IT WAS A sunny afternoon and they sat on the front porch of her sorority house. Swiftly he explained what had happened. He had assurance that the pro's would take him at a high salary.

"That makes things different with me, Pat," he explained. "I never could justify my rushing you before; I had nothing to offer you. I was just a thick-headed lug washing dishes for his meals. I didn't have over ten bucks to spend a month on entertainment. Rather than ask you to suffer with that, I just pretended to be indifferent. But I haven't been."

Her eyes studied his face. "Now what?"

"How about a date tonight?" he answered promptly. "Tomorrow night? Monday night? Tuesday night? Wednesday night? And so on."

Her lips curved in a smile. "I can have a date with you Wednesday night," she said. "And Friday."

"Just two!" he protested.

"I'm not a football team, Cam," she answered. "You can't engineer *me*."

Cam tried to argue but Patricia wouldn't be moved. He returned to the dormitory and called several pledges who owned automobiles into his room.

"I got a date Wednesday night and one Friday night," he explained. "Who would like to lend me a car?"

The loan of an automobile was quickly arranged. What Pi Delta pledge could resist such a request from Cam Elliott!

The next Monday morning he selected a new suit of clothes at the leading haberdashery. Then a new pair of shoes, several shirts, a new pair of slacks. The manager of the store came up when he was writing a check for the bill. The check was jerked out of Cam's hands and ripped to shreds.

"Your money isn't good here, Cam," smiled the manager.

Cam hesitated. "I couldn't . . ."

"Nonsense," said the Winston fan. "You've given me lots of thrills this season. Just a little appreciation."

PAT WAS surprised at his new wardrobe. And the car he was driving. It was the first time in three years Cam had ever used a car.

"My, you're a playboy!" she murmured.

He accepted the compliment with a grin. "Old Elliott has sweated blood for this."

Twilight was just beginning to darken into night as Cam swung the car out of the sorority house driveway. Along the campus streets, couples strolled hand-in-hand, enjoying the crisp Fall air. From somewhere came the smell of burning leaves.

Cam finally parked on the edge of the lake. There, relaxed, with the chill, wet breeze blowing in their faces, he began to explain how he had planned every step of his college career. Pat listened, and her eyes widened.

"Cam, you mean every word of that, don't you?" she asked in surprise.

"Why, yes."

"You're a strong character," she murmured. "To keep plugging, never complaining, never asking for sympathy."

"That never helped anybody," he said. "I made up my mind to take what I had and make the most of it."

"It never even worried you," Patricia mused, "when Orv Hunter got all the glory, did it?"

"No," admitted Cam. His face relaxed in a smile.

"It takes a blocking back to make a ball carrier," he explained. "Red Grange had Brittain. Shaver had Ernie Pinckert. Jack Crain had Vernon Martin. Those guys did the dirty work and made ball carriers famous. But I looked at it this way. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. A blocking back makes a ball carrier great, but a great ball carrier also calls attention to the blocking back. Orv Hunter was welcome to the cheers. I wanted the pro contract."

There was a long silence. Finally Pat spoke.

"Cam," she said gently. "I should have told you before tonight but . . . Well, I'm accepting Orv's pin."

"I had this date with you for old time's sake," she went on. "I've always liked you, Cam, ever since we were together as Freshmen. I admired the way you took your father's death and just kept going. I don't mind admitting that, at one time, I thought maybe we would . . . But it just didn't work out that way."

Cam's face was a mask.

"I didn't take Orv seriously for a long

time," Pat continued. "Like everyone else I was blinded by his insufferably cocky attitude. But now I can see beyond that. Orv is terribly unsure of himself and, being in the limelight all the time, he puts on that swagger act as a protective covering. Underneath, he's still a boy, Cam. But a very human one."

"That all?" he asked quietly.

"Yes. We'd better cancel that Friday night date, Cam."

"Yes," he agreed, "we might as well."

"As usual," she observed, "you face a situation calmly."

"Yes."

"I wish you luck, Cam," Patricia said earnestly. "All the luck in the world."

EMMETT HOWELL studied Cam's face. "What are you going to try, son?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know," Cam admitted. "I'm scared, coach. I think we can check Booth's passing if we don't have to use a six-man line to stop Kellar's power."

Howell nodded. Every team State had faced this season had been confronted with just that dilemma. If they stayed in close to check Rip Kellar's line plunges, Bryan Booth ran them crazy around the wings and in the air. State had that versatile an attack. No way of getting set for them. No way of anticipating where the Purple Raiders would strike next.

"They'll score on us," Coach Howell said. It was nice to have a boy on his squad he could talk to in such a manner. "I don't think we can stop that. How many touches can we score, Cam?"

"That depends on Orv," Cam shrugged. "Can he get away?"

"Don't depend on Orv too much," said the coach, turning away to his linemen. "Warmouth knew how to handle him."

The stadium was jammed with 50,000 excited fans for this blue-chip classic of the East. State versus Winston. Both unbeaten, untied. Both eager for bowl invitations. Cam knew that a representative of the Sugar Bowl was sitting in the press box. The winner would get a Sugar Bowl bid that very night. Winston, Cam was sure, would snap up the New Orleans invitation. State, with more prestige, could afford to wait and see if the Rose Bowl made an overture.

The Sugar Bowl would mean \$70,000. Big money in this football, Cam mused. He was kicking a few to get the kinks out of his legs. Orv Hunter joined him. Orv did some quick-kicking.

The tailback gave him a weak grin. "I'm fluttery," confessed Orv. "You've got to shake me loose today, Cam."

Cam nodded. He eyed his teammate with cold appraisal. Orv, he admitted, had certainly changed since the Warmouth game. "We'll get you loose," he said. Then, hesitantly: "You got the stuff to move that ball, chum. Forget about last Saturday. Nobody could have done any better."

"Thanks," Orv murmured.

Now Hunter went out to meet the State captain. He returned with a grin. He had caught the toss again. They would receive.

"What about it, Cam?" Howell asked quietly. The coach made no effort to conceal from the squad how much he depended upon his blocking back. "Should we open up?"

"No," Cam said firmly. "Let's feel 'em out. Give us time to get over our jitters."

Howell nodded. The boys were jittery. They were veterans, but they were not veterans to this—the pressure of a championship game, the pressure of a bowl bid, perhaps of a mythical national title. They were veterans to football routine and this was football extravaganza—State versus Winston!

"Take half, Bill," Howell told Jackson.

Orv Hunter was plainly disappointed. Howell put his arm around the tailback.

"You'll see enough football, son," smiled the coach. They walked toward the bench slowly. Emmett Howell sat down and pretended to be his usual calm self as he waited for the kickoff. The boys were jittery; this championship pressure was new to them. Well, what about a coach? After twenty-odd years Emmett Howell was in his first blue-chip game, too!

He watched his Blue-clad boys spread out to receive the kick. Cam Elliott waved Bill Jackson toward the sidelines, and Hub Rutherford into the center. Howell wondered if Cam was feeling any emotion. There was no change in the blocking back's dead-pan expression. Could this seem like just another ball game to Cam Elliott? Howell prayed not. For if it was, Winston would lose it.

The kick, tumbling end over end, was high and deep. Rutherford took it on the goal line and charged up to the 15 before he collided with the first wave of State tacklers.

Hub broke away from one pair of clutching hands and danced there uncertainly a moment. Cam Elliott shot in front of him and Hub was right behind the stocky boy with a bolt of speed that carried him up to the 25, and then to the 30 as Cam dropped a would-be tackler like a sack of grain and Hub spun away from another State Cougar.

Howell nodded. This was the kind of teamwork between runner and blocker that had made the Hunter-Elliott combination famous.

Cam quick-kicked the first down. He got his toe squarely into the ball and State was taken by surprise. The pigskin rolled to the State 15 before stopping.

**C**AM MOTIONED his teammates into a six-man defense, gambling that State wouldn't want to open up this deep in their own territory and this early in the game. A close six, with Cam himself going for Rip Kellar with the snap. He and the State fullback collided right at the line of scrimmage. As Cam had guessed, Rip had the ball. This Cougar weighed over 200 pounds and he hit like a freight car. Cam Elliott, a stout line-backer, gave two yards before Kellar's rush.

State worked out of a "T" with Bryan Booth as the up-man. Booth's wide plays and passing had been impressed upon the Winston ends. The line-backers, Cam and Skinny Dugan, couldn't help on the wide plays; they would have to play superhuman ball to help the guards and tackles subdue the powerful Kellar. Cam Elliott wasn't sure their wings could hold down the wide plays. Neither was Emmett Howell. But the Winston coach had no recourse but to gamble.

Kellar hit again. Another yard. Cam held his boys in a six-man line but pulled out himself before the snap and was in the middle of a wide play which sent Flip Parsons out to the weak side. Elliott had guessed rightly, and he downed Parsons two yards behind the line of scrimmage.

Fourth down now. Booth kicked. Orv Hunter, who had run out on the field just

before the play, juggled the ball on his own 35 and there was no return.

"Sorry," mumbled the tailback in the huddle. "Guess I got butterfingers today."

"Forget it," Cam snapped. "No. 84. Kick the hell out of it, chum."

This was Hunter's quick-kicking play. Orv punted well, low and twisting to the State 25. The ball was killed by right end Ed Dale. Bill Jackson replaced Orv.

Cam held to the six. Kellar hit for three yards. This bull-necked giant had bruising power; he simply pushed Cam and the right guard back that far. Then Kellar swung forward again, and Cam was in low and hard. But Kellar had trapped the Winston line with clever ball-handling; the State fullback had slipped the ball off to Parsons and the wingback found a hole between tackle and end and sliced forward for 13 yards. Bill Jackson, up from safety with a desperate rush, stopped the play.

Emmett Howell stirred on the bench. This was what he had been afraid of. They could stop Kellar's rushing with a close-spread six but that put pressure on two ends who didn't have it—Dale and Cunningham. He motioned to Pete Anderson, another end.

"Tell Cam to use a five," ordered the coach.

Anderson's entry into the game was held up by a quick-starting State play. Booth fainted to Kellar, then whirled, jumped straight up into the air and fired a short pass into the arms of Cully Mitchell, State's fine left end. Mitchell took the ball five yards over the line of scrimmage and lumbered to the Winston 40 before the same dependable Jackson ended his advance.

"Hurry," Howell barked at the substitute.

Anderson ran out and gave Cam the coach's message. Elliott nodded. He would have shifted to a five anyhow. State had too much to be held back by a close six.

Booth tried to skirt the strong side but Cam and Skinny were both in there and the triple-threatener made only a yard. But now field general Booth saw the new Winston defense. Promptly he shifted to a power game again, and Rip Kellar smashed down to the Wildcat 30 for a first down.

The Winston supporters were frantic. Their pleas to "Hold That Line" rang

out over the happy shouts of the State fans. Though this was Winston's turf, State supporters were in the majority.

Cam called time out. He lay flat on his face chewing a blade of grass, grateful for the breathing spell. Skinny Dugan flopped by him.

"They're eating us up," Skinny said.

Cam nodded. "Well," sighed the blocking back, "the coach told us we'd have to outscore 'em."

"What with?" Skinny asked scornfully. "Orv Hunter is washed up."

"Let's do some gambling," Cam proposed. "We'll alternate rushing. Cover up for me when I go in. I'll try covering for you."

**P**LAY WAS resumed with State's big Purple team grinning confidently. Kellar shot into the center of the Winston line. But Cam met him behind the line of scrimmage, rushing in with the snap, taking a reckless chance on being off-side. The play was jammed.

"I'm going in again," Cam told Skinny. "Cover up."

Cam's instinct warned him what was coming. Bryan Booth had observed Cam's recklessness. Bryan took the handoff out of the "T", leaped up and . . .

Shot a pass right into Skinny Dugan's arms!

The play should have worked for a gain. Cam was out of position and Cully Mitchell was right there in the spot that should have been open. But Skinny had deserted his own position to cover Cam's, and the center held onto the pigskin with trembling fingers. Mitchell smacked him down in his tracks but Winston had averted this first touchdown threat.

Out came Orv, off went Jackson.

"Let's go, men," panted Cam. "We've got to score against these babies."

Hunter nodded. Cam took the ball from center, tossed a lateral back to Orv, tearing wide. Then Cam swung out. Hunter would pull the end wide, then try to cut back to the shelter of Cam's blocking. Cam went for the defensive halfback. The State linebacker was there, instead, and Cam had to clear this obstacle first. It was the same strategy Warmouth had thrown against them, the linebacker was up there to block out the blocking back. Cam hit the State

player low. He bowled this man aside, miraculously keeping his own feet. Now Orv Hunter had cut back and was dancing around waiting for his man Friday to work him clear. Cam was stumbling and Hunter had to go wide again, giving precious yardage. Now Cam recovered his balance and set out for the halfback. That surprised State player was trapped with a shoulder and when Orv Hunter shot downfield with a sudden burst of speed the Cougar defensive end was left behind and Hunter got to his favorite spot—the sidelines—unchallenged.

The Cougar safety raced over and Hunter slowed up again. A blue-jerseyed player got in front of him and Orv wisely waited until the field was clear; then cut out to midfield. Here was running room, and the two Cougar men pursuing the ball carrier from behind never had a chance. Orv was five years ahead of them when he reached the end zone.

Thirty yards upfield Cam Elliott was grinning as he helped the State safety up. The All-America experts would have to look a long way to find anything more spectacular than this. Not one, not two, but *three* men out!

Skinny Dugan caught him from behind in a bear hug. "Son, that's football!" yelled the center.

His jealousy of Orv Hunter was forgotten. None of the Blue-clad boys had time to worry about who had scored. That big "six" on the scoreboard was all they could think about.

Orv Hunter ran up to meet Cam and likewise hugged him. If the fans had not noticed Cam's blocking before, they could realize from this demonstration who was responsible for the touchdown run.

"Yeah, Cam! Yeah, Elliott! Yeah, yeah, Cam Elliott!"

Cam mused as he trotted off to the bench that this must be one of the very few times a blocking back had received an ovation for a touchdown.

Emmett Howell left his chair and squeezed his blocking back's arm. "Son, you did it," murmured Emmett. "I didn't think you could."

Cam grinned. "They didn't think I'd try for all three of them."

Orv's kick was true; Cam trotted back in. Hunter slapped his back as the running

ace came to the sidelines beaming. There wasn't the usual ovation for Orv Hunter. All of these 50,000 fans realized who had been responsible for this 7-0 lead.

But Hunter, the new Hunter, didn't care. He fell to the bench by Coach Howell and he was beaming from ear to ear.

"That Cam!" he marvelled. "Gosh, I used to think I deserved the credit."

Emmett shot him a sidewise look. Yes, Orv Hunter's modesty was sincere. The coach caught Orv's knee.

"You do, son," Howell said, almost fiercely. "I'm glad your swelled head has come down some. But don't get the idea you're just a stooge for Cam Elliott. You carried that ball like a master there."

"Not a State man touched me," Orv protested.

"But you gave Elliott time," pointed out the coach. "No other blocking back in the country could have done what Cam did, I'll grant that. But no other running back in the country could have done what *you* did."

"Thanks," Orv Hunter said, a puzzled expression in his eyes. He appreciated the compliment, but why should Emmett Howell be so fierce about it!

## V

**O**UT ON THE field State was receiving the kickoff, and Parsons returned to the 35. Kellar hit center for a first down and then Booth shot a pass to Parsons for 20 more yards.

This quick the Blue was pushed back into its own territory, and the exultation of Winston fans at their 7-0 advantage was short-lived. Parsons rippled through tackle for eight yards and Kellar caught the Winston defense unawares with a short side bootleg play that sent the State full-back crashing down to the Blue 20.

No doubt of it, this was a great State outfit. Bryan Booth ran the strong side himself, twisting down to the 12.

Cam called time out. He was weary. So was Skinny Dugan. The two line-backers had taken the brunt of this offensive march. Cam brought up the halfbacks in what amounted to a 5-4-2. But Kellar could manhandle this defense. The State power boy picked up five yards. Then three. Cam signalled for a seven-man line. Kellar got

only a yard on an off-guard smash.

Another seven. Kellar came at center low and hard but Booth screened the ball neatly and it was Parsons who had the pigskin clutched to his jersey—Parsons skittering out to the strong side. Dale was in position to stop this play but Dale was trapped when the State wingback reversed his field and Parsons got over the goal line by dragging Skinny Dugan after him.

Booth converted and the score was tied at 7-7.

Orv Hunter returned to the lineup. Emmett Howell watched gloomily as State's alert team sent a halfback rushing up on the wide plays, and this third man completely checked the Hunter-Elliott combination. Cam could carry out one man, the line-backer angling in to cut him off, but the State defense didn't give him time to get another. Nor did Orv have a chance to show his elusiveness. Time after time Orv was downed for a loss.

And State, in its turn, marched to the five-yard line once, to the ten another time. Inspired play by Dugan and Elliott held them there. But, with only two minutes left, Bryan Booth shifted to long passes downfield and one of these clicked for a score. Booth converted and the State team left the field with a 14-7 advantage.

That wasn't too impressive, but the margin was wider than the scoreboard showed. The Cougars had set up a defense which could stop Winston's only scoring weapon—the Cam Elliott-Orv Hunter combination. The Cougars had showed an attack which was ripping Winston wide open.

The Blue team was licked, and they knew it. Emmett Howell knew it. So did Cam Elliott. Cam threw himself on the concrete floor and sighed wearily. He and Skinny Dugan had kept down the score by superhuman effort.

The other boys were as tired. And as resigned. Orv Hunter slumped onto a bench. For a moment no one spoke. Then Hunter lifted his head.

"I guess I'm to blame for this," he muttered. "We put all our eggs in one basket. I guess that's my fault. I wanted it that way."

The silence with which his confession was received was indicative of assent. Skinny Dugan spoke first.

"Yeah," growled Skinny. "We tried to

play big-time football with a one-man attack. You got your headlines, Hunter. You're the high-scoring back in the East all right. Mebbe you're even All-American. But we're losing a ball game."

"Yes," whispered Orv. "I see it now. If we could decoy 'em, with me as a bait."

"But we haven't got that kind of a club," snarled Skinny. "You had to be the whole show, Hunter."

Emmett Howell's sharp voice rang out. The coach was standing on the steps.

"That will be enough of that!" he snapped. They turned toward him, surprise at the hard tone showing in their faces. The coach walked very deliberately to the center of the locker room.

"We have spent our season building up one man, all right," he said. "But that man is not Hunter. He is Cam Elliott! Why do you think opposing players who couldn't even touch Hunter smothered our other backs? Why do you think Rutherford and Russell never made over five yards a run? Because Elliott layed down on the job. When Hunter wasn't running, Elliott wasn't blocking.

"Cam Elliott has never cared a damn for the team in his whole college career—all he was interested in was getting a pro contract. By making Hunter look sensational he brought his own talents to the attention of those who mattered. He's the man who put all our eggs in one basket."

Cam's eyes were half-closed. Skinny Dugan tried to come to Elliott's defense but the coach waved down the center.

"I know what I'm talking about," snapped Howell. "If I'm wrong, I'll apologize to Cam. Here before the squad and in print. Do I owe you an apology, Cam?"

**C**AM WAITED a long time before he answered. He still lay with his eyes half-closed. This had shocked him. He hated the idea of losing a ball game, but already in these anxious moments he had reconciled himself to State's victory. It didn't mean everything. He still had his All-American honors. Those were surer than ever after his blocking spree which cleared Orv Hunter and his superb defensive work against a stronger eleven. He still had his pro contract. A defeat only meant that he would get his bonus for signing sooner.

"I don't believe it," Orv Hunter said, leaping up. "Coach, Cam Elliott has carried this ball club. Every touchdown I've made in college football I owe to him."

"Shut up!" roared Howell. "You're the best running back I ever saw. Sure you have to get blocking. Who doesn't? But Cam Elliott gets you by the line of scrimmage and you're gone. Nobody ever stopped you yet in a broken field. Cam Elliott hitched his wagon to a star. You! Don't get me wrong; Cam can play football with anybody. But it takes a great running back to make a blocking back. Well, Cam. Do I owe you an apology?"

Cam raised his eyes. He looked around at the squad. And gulped. No doubt of it, they were on his side. They would take his word even against Emmett Howell, the coach they adored.

"No," he said slowly, "you don't owe me an apology, Coach."

He stood up, slowly, his face still an expressionless mask. "The only thing you owe me," he murmured, meeting Howell's glance squarely, "is the courtesy of postponing your judgment for another thirty minutes!"

"Meaning!" barked Howell.

"You can think what you please about me personally," Cam said quietly, "But I haven't led a losing team off the field this season. I'm not today, Coach. We're winning this ball game."

Cam Elliott waited. For a moment Coach Howell didn't answer. Then, abruptly, the coach held out his hand to his blocking back.

"You're still running the team," said the mentor. "I ask the squad to forget what I said. I spoke entirely too hastily. Cam lifted us up, no doubt about it. If he pulls us down with him, we still have no gripe coming."

"That's right," boomed Skinny Dugan. "We got no gripe coming."

The center looked around him challengingly. But there was no challenge. Skinny glared at Orv Hunter.

"What about it, Hunter?" he demanded.

"Me!" grunted Orv. "I got less to gripe about than anybody."

for those short passes over center."

Skinny nodded. At the snap Cam tore through guard and center. He almost caught Bryan Booth with the ball. He did hurry Booth's handoff to Rip Kellar. And he caught Kellar a yard behind the line of scrimmage. Rip broke free of his hands and tried to lumber away but right tackle Bull Dean hit the fullback head-on and both went down in a tangle behind the scrimmage line. A two-yard loss.

"Now we're going," called out Skinny. "Get in there, Hale. And you, Bull. Don't give 'em time to pass."

For five furious minutes the Winston Wildcats had battled the State team to a standstill. The Blue line was outrushing the State forward wall. Cam Elliott and Skinny Dugan were outguessing the cagy Booth. Five-man line, six-man line, seven-man defense . . . Cam was changing their defensive setup on almost every down. He stayed a play ahead of the worried Booth.

This was third down, third and fourteen. Booth went back to kick. State didn't usually play such conservative football, but none of the Purple's razzle-dazzle was clicking and Booth was beginning to glance speculatively at the clock. The way the Winston line was rushing, the State field general was afraid to wait for fourth down.

Hunter, just off the bench, returned the punt to midfield. A nice runback, ten yards right through a mass of would-be tacklers. Cam slapped Orv's shoulder in approval.

"You're the sweet running boy," Cam grinned. Gone was the usual poker face. Cam Elliott was happy. Strangely enough, he wasn't even worried about the outcome of the game. He looked from one face to another. Quiet, intent. It never occurred to any of them to question his judgment.

"No. 48," he said.

"They've got my number," Orv protested.

"We've got to start with that," Cam insisted. "I got some notions."

Cam took the snap, handed off to Orv who faded to the sidelines. The usual three State men rushed up. Cam tried to shake the line-backer with a shoulder block but couldn't. He had to go down to get the persistent man out of the way.

The end and defensive halfback were on Orv quickly, swooping up like hawks. But Cam, watching from the turf, held down

**C**AM ELLIOTT waved his squad into a five-man defense. To Skinny he muttered: "I'm going in. You got to watch

by the linebacker's weight, saw Orv Hunter spin away from the end, whirling like a dervish, and bounce off the halfback. The halfback threw a tackle at the ball carrier, but Orv simply got going. Spinning like that, he couldn't hold his balance. But he got away from these two would-be tacklers and went crashing and bobbing for ten yards—to the State 40.

This was no touchdown run, but Cam Elliott knew it was a super-dash. He squeezed Orv's shoulder.

"Boy, you can go by yourself."

The fact that Orv had gained made the next play easier. Cam took the snap, turned and tossed a short lateral to Orv. All season they had worked this for long gains. Orv had the option of going inside or outside, depending on how the defensive end played him. The end went wide and the linebacker rushed up and the halfback was quickly in position midway. Orv hesitated, and cut back sharply as if trying to go off-tackle. The halfback was up to assist the line-backer.

Cam Elliott could hit both of them. Cam threw his stocky body into the air and caught one man with his shoulder, the other with his knees. The halfback didn't go down. The halfback stumbled over him and lurched out at Orv.

And Orv turned and handed the ball off to Hub Rutherford!

All season Emmett Howell had waited for Cam to use their variations of the scoring plays designed to shake Hunter loose. The end was too wide, pulled out there by orders of the State coach. The line-backer and defensive halfback were trapped by the same ruse.

Hub Rutherford cut downfield and there wasn't a Purple jersey in sight except for the bewildered safety man.

And, sprinting ahead of Rutherford, showing his famous speed, Orv Hunter was heading for the safety!

**T**HE WINSTON stands were in an uproar. So was the State bench. Since when did the State secondary have to watch Rutherford!

The wingback wasn't shifty. He was fast, however, and the State safety had to go deep to keep his angle. Orv Hunter got a chance to carry out the safety but Orv couldn't remember throwing a down-

field block. And Orv hadn't liked sessions in the blocking pits. Orv had said then: "I'm a ball carrier," and had thought it funny. Orv regretted that now. He could have swept Rutherford in the clear. And didn't. The safety pushed him off and dived in under Rutherford's stiff-arm.

Or Rutherford himself, by reversing his field, by showing Orv Hunter's gift of timing, could have gotten away. As it was, the wingback was dropped on the 10-yard line.

Orv apologized in the huddle. "If I could help you guys out like you do me," he groaned.

"Shut up!" snapped Cam, grinning. "You were responsible for that gain. They were watching you."

"No. 48," he called again. He squeezed Orv's shoulder. "Make it work, chum. Make it set up the next one."

Again he took the snap from center, turned and lateralled to Orv. The same three State men were in fast and low. Orv Hunter ran like a demon for the sidelines, turned, sprinted back. Twice he tried to cut; twice he was turned away. Clear across the field he came. His entire team tried to get in front of him. They did clear a path for him to the opposite sidelines. There, by virtue of that blinding speed, he could cut in. He lowered his head and, digging cleats into the turf, spun toward the goal line. The State man pursuing him charged on past, out of the play. But a second Purple-jerseyed man caught him after two steps and Orv went down on the 7.

All that running for just three yards. But Cam Elliott liked it.

"No. 49," he said crisply.

The snap came to him; he turned as if to lateral the pigskin to Orv. Instantly the State defense was in frantic motion. But Cam tucked the ball under his arm and sliced outside the tackle.

The State end had gone out to cover Orv; the State linebacker and halfback were up quick to smother Orv's twinkling feet. Cam pulled away from the tackle and was in the clear for a second, for long enough to regain his balance. He took two steps, then had a half-dozen hands pulling at him. But he had the momentum to push down to the one-yard line.

First and goal. Twice Pete Russell threw

his 200 pounds against the State line. On the second time the Purple defense cracked.

Not a one of these 50,000 fans dared breathe as Orv waited for the snap, and for Bill Jackson to slap the pigskin into place. Hunter seemed calm, but actually his heart was a dull, heavy weight. What if he missed and they couldn't score again!

He swung his foot. Then he quickly shut his eyes. What if he had . . . he opened his eyes again, and looked appealingly to the referee. That official hesitated a moment, then threw his hands high above his head.

*The score was tied!*

And there was still a lot of ball game left.

State started the fireworks with a 30-yard completed pass which put the Purple on the 10-yard line. But there Winston held, and from the 6 Cam Elliott launched a sensational play. Instead of punting, he held the ball a moment, then shot a short forward pass to Orv Hunter. The running ace was still back of the line of scrimmage when he caught it. Actually Cam had done nothing more than lob the ball over the outstretched arms of the rushing end.

Hunter spun away from the halfback, who had dropped back to give his safety man protection on this expected punt. The safety charged him and a State line-backer was miraculously in the play, leaving Orv no chance but to wrestle in midfield.

The play ended the quarter. Fifteen minutes still left. And neither ball club had played out its string!

**T**RUE, THE score was tied; but Winston held the edge here in the final period. Winston suddenly had the most versatile attack. Still the Purple secondary watched Orv Hunter; still Hub Rutherford reeled off most of the yardage on short reverses. Down to the 20 marched the Blue. There State held. Booth kicked out.

Hunter came running back with the punt—five—ten—fifteen yards. All by himself. Never again, after this game, would a football authority charge this running ace with being just another guy named Joe running behind Cam Elliott. For Elliott, the obvious spearhead of this Winston attack, had shifted his front. Elliott was

throwing his powerful shoulders in front of Rutherford on the weak side plays, leaving Hunter to sweep the strong flank unprotected.

And while Rutherford amassed yardage, Orv Hunter won the hearts of 50,000 thrilled fans who swore the State-Winston game was the most thrilling they had ever seen. It was Hunter who rushed up to grab that short kick, just 25 yards over the line of scrimmage. A daring catch. Any safety man might have fumbled under the circumstances. But Hunter held on to the pigskin, and his rush carried him through the arms of two clutching State wingmen down to the 15.

The 15. Only four minutes left; the thrilled stadium knew this rush would mean the ball game. First, the weak side play which Cam Elliott had remembered was in their repertory. Rutherford slanted outside tackle for six. Then Cam cut over the same hole for two more. And big Pete Russell thrust his broad shoulders through the Purple wall for a first down on the five.

First and goal! Cam hesitated in the huddle. He looked from one of his teammates to the other.

"Just for the hell of it," he said quietly, "let's carry Orv over."

"Yeah," grinned Skinny. "The guy needs another touchdown."

"They'll be watching for 48," mused Cam. "Let's give 'em some fuzz. No. 58."

Cam received the pass. He feinted his backward pass to Orv Hunter, who took several steps off to the strong side. Then Cam whirled completely around and passed backward to Hub Rutherford, who was in motion before the snap, sprinting over from the right wing. Rutherford took the ball and tore for the left sideline. The State end had him covered, and this didn't look like a gaining play. In fact, as the State linebacker tore up, it seemed certain that Rutherford would be downed for a loss.

But, five yards from the sidelines, Rutherford pulled up. He pushed off the reeling line-backer, caught off-balance by the sudden maneuver. Rutherford cocked his arm, and 50,000 fans leaped up with an excited roar.

For, cutting right across the field, just behind the line of scrimmage, came Orv Hunter, running with the speed that had

made him the high scoring back of the East. The halfback covering him was five steps behind, and falling back steadily.

Rutherford flipped the ball 10 yards forward. It was a lobbed pass, but it was well-timed. Orv Hunter gathered it in without slowing up.

The State safety got between the runner and the goal line but since when could a single man drag down Orv Hunter in an open field! Orv led the safety a merry chase to the sidelines, then dug his cleats into the turf and spun. It was seen by a few calm eyes that Cam Elliott could have blocked the safety, but Cam turned and set up a screen between Orv and pursuing State men.

For Orv would spin over; Cam was sure of that. He crashed into the State halfback, who couldn't have caught Orv anyhow. He hit the halfback just for the hell of it. And as both of them went down, his lips parted in a happy grin. There was no doubt from the noise above him what was going on. Orv Hunter was spinning over the goal line and the boys on the Winston bench were turning handsprings and the Blue rooters were straining their lungs with wild frenzied screams and Emmett Howell was pushing his hat back and looking around in mild wonderment as if unaware what was causing all the commotion!

CAM WAS surprised at Hunter's refusal. "But, chum, you got to sign!" "It's big dough, I tell you. And with me in front of you, you'll show those pro boys some running."

"Coaching," Orv answered firmly. "Pat agrees with me."

Cam sighed. Orv wasn't getting such a bad deal out of it at that. Having Pat made up for a lot of things.

"I'll miss you, chum," Cam said softly.

"No," grinned Hunter. "You'll break another running back in to your style. And when he can keep up with you, Cam, he's All-America."

Neither spoke. Both glanced involuntarily toward their new wrist watches. For the first time since Army's great team, two backfield men from the same club had gained All-American recognition.

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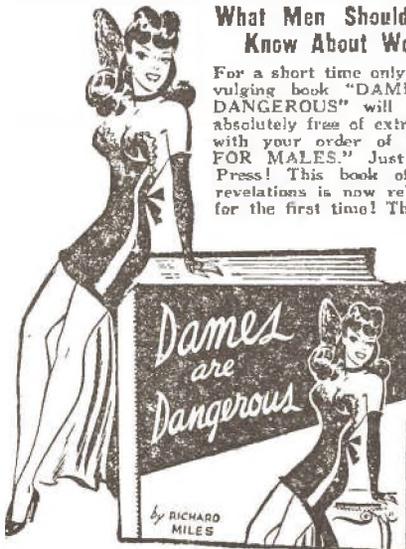
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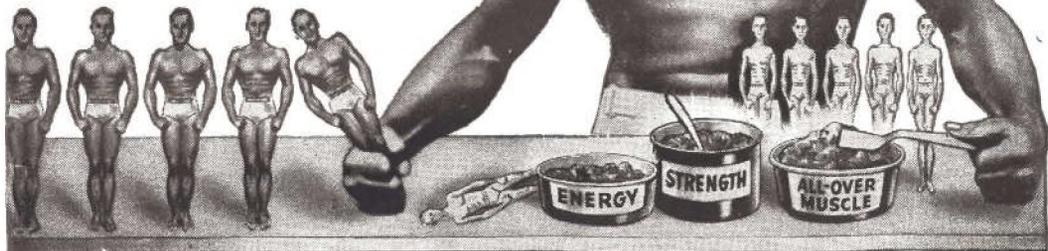
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