

A.B.C.

1st ISSUE



20¢

# FOOTBALL

WORLD  
WRESTLING  
ARTICLES

## ACTION

*Hipper-dipper*  
*Novel*  
by WM. R. COX

**"PASS,  
YOU  
TOUCHDOWN  
CHUMPS!"**



**CAPTAIN ZANY  
CALLS THE PLAYS**

*A gridiron Moses, he drove 'em to the Promised  
Land but he couldn't lead 'em in.*

*A novelet by* **BILL HEUMAN**



# 1949 Football ACTION

T. T. SCOTT, President

MALCOLM REISS, Editor & Gen. Mgr.

## *A Thrilling Novel of the Gridiron*

### **CAPTAIN ZANY CALLS THE PLAYS . . . Bill Heuman 87**

The big question in the Midwestern stands that cold day was: Who would tackle cleat-nutty, buck-biffo George Slater first—the big boys in the green jerseys or the little men in the white coats?

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They called him the Yo-Yo Yahoo because of that dipsy-do stride that spun him goal-wards like a top gone wild. Only trouble was a green-eyed babe named Moira held the strings!

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A Midas of the pigskin Pro mines was "Greenbacks" Al Watson, jolting six-point tycoon of the glory-minting *Condors*. Every football he touched was earmarked for end-zone investment, and every touchdown he scored put more damning dollars in his ever-growing bank account.

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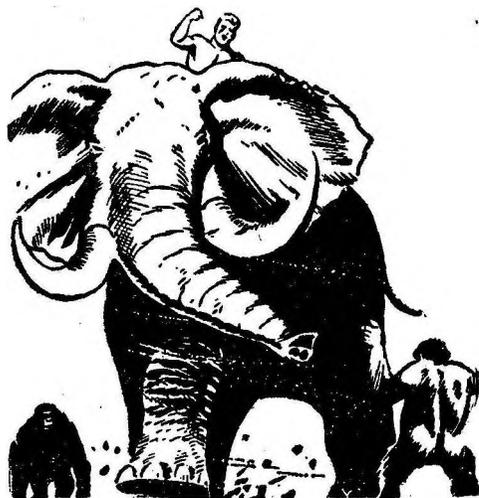
1st Fall Issue, 1949  
Vol. 2, No. 8



20c per copy

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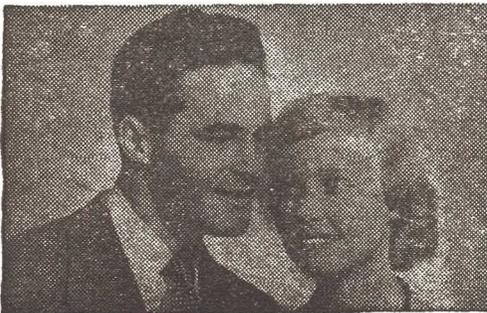
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# “Pass, You Touchdown Chumps!”

By WILLIAM R. COX

**F**RED MACEDON WAS HAVING one of his great days of worrying. He scowled, he fretted, watching the young men who did not quite cover the practice field of Mordaunt College. A tall, ugly end ran down, cut in, reached for a spiralling pass. The ball hit his hands. It bounced off like spilled water.

Alongside him a pleasant voice drawled,

“He should have cut wide.”

Macedon wheeled, his chin jutting. He was a very young man to be head coach anywhere, much less at Mordaunt.

The lad who had spoken grinned, unperturbed. He was a medium-sized youth. He would weigh maybe one-sixty, Macedon automatically guessed. He had large, round eyes, an innocent expression, a cow-

*That swift, hesitant pace made the  
Kid look like a yo-yo, when he  
ripped through the line . . .*





lick on his carrot-top. He was wearing a beat-up red jersey, a pair of tight-fitting football pants, tennis socks and worn kangaroo shoes. He said lightly, "I'm Harry Payne. They sent me to you. I'm an end, I like to think . . ."

Macedon said, "You're an end? Pretty short for an end, aren't you?"

"Pretty fast, too," said Harry Payne without losing his grin.

Macedon's voice was a growl. "You weren't out for freshman ball. You didn't see spring practice . . ."

"I had to build up last year." Payne's voice was apologetic, now. "I was hurt, a little, and lost weight. And you don't show up in springtime unless you're invited, remember, Coach?"

"I got to invite players in this jerkwater school?" Macedon fought for control, achieved it. He said, "Ends I have got. In spite of Taxco's butter-fingers. Why do I need an end under six feet? Why must my troubles be greater?"

Harry Payne said, "Coach, I just like to play football. In high school I got only one year, being shorter then than now. In the army I was too light. I came to Mordant because it's not big league. I figured I'd have a chance here. I just like to play, that's all, Coach."

Fred Macedon had been a great back in his day. On one of the powerhouse Michigan teams he had made All America. The war had caught him up; now he was resuming his chosen career of coaching the game he loved. He too had liked to play football. He remembered, staring at this smiling, loose-jointed kid.

He snarled, "Report to Micky Hale. Draw a uniform." He spun on his heel and strode to where Moe Taxco was waiting his turn to go down under another pass. He had a few thousand words to say to Taxco.

He saw the new kid trotting up to Micky Hale. That was another problem—he had inherited Hale. He knew the end coach had wanted to be Head Coach. Micky was big and tough and had been a pro for years. He was not the sort to give up easily. He had been polite to Macedon, but hardly friendly . . .

Macedon said, "Taxco, on my club the

ends hang onto passes."

"Sure," said Taxco. He was five inches over six feet. He grinned down impudently. "Only, Coach, if I could hang onto them all I'd be gettin' a free ride at a bigger school than Mordant!"

A lineman, shoving against a workout horse nearby, snickered. That would be Gran Medalie, Taxco's running mate at tackle. Macedon snapped, "You were loafing, Taxco. I won't stand for loafing. Keep doing it, and you'll be drawing your scholarship at an even smaller place than Mordant!"

Taxco complained, "Micky already gave me hell . . . I know I flubbed a couple . . ."

A figure flashed by them. The red jersey was a flying flag. Harry Payne ran close to the ground, with a peculiar knee action. He shifted, started, stopped, ran and cut. Buck Chase, throwing the ball, feathered one down deep. The kid took it in full stride, cut again and zig-zagged.

Taxco exploded, "Looka the Yo Yo Kid! A shrimp, yet!"

Macedon's voice pealed out, "That's the way to catch passes. You other ends get in there and put on pads. All of you get dressed. What this squad needs is some action. You're all dead on your feet. Scrimmage in half an hour!"

Taxco sneered, "You can't scare us with a skinny little end, Coach. We'll show you . . ."

Macedon was walking away. Micky Hale came over, heavy-featured, scarred from the football wars, an imposing big man. "It's too early for scrimmage, Fred My boys ain't ready."

"They never will be if they don't snap out of it," said Macedon. "This is for morale, Micky."

"Aw, the ends and line are all right. They're just takin' it easy, gettin' in shape."

Macedon was watching the new kid. He had turned and was throwing the ball back. It snaked through the air with amazing speed, smack into the hands of Buck Chase. The men were trotting toward the clubhouse for their pads, exchanging glances, muttering among themselves. They needed a tuning up, all right.

Macedon said, "Watch that light kid,

Micky. He may be some good on spot plays."

"That pest? I'm surprised you let him on the field," grunted Hale. "Too little and too light. Unless you want him for a back."

Macedon said, "I want him for an end!" He walked away. The line coach was a kid named Greeley, solid, but colorless and no spiritual help. Macedon was alone on this deal. He had to work it out for himself, and Micky knew the boys better than he did. Micky had the pro attitude . . . which is fine if you are a pro with college experience behind you. Relax, be smart, play the ball, pass on fourth down . . . that is fine for pros, thought Macedon. But for college kids . . . He had other ideas.

**T**HEY HAD HIRED him because he had ideas. Mordaunt gave out a sum total of twenty scholarships for football. The Board paid no one spending money, gave out no convertible automobiles. Mordaunt was a respectable, medium-sized school in the Delaware Valley, playing a near-big time schedule, striving not to over-emphasize the game. Macedon, thoroughly agreeing to this principle, had advanced the idea that the school could have a good football team, win enough games to satisfy the alumni and hold up its head among its rivals . . . given speed, given sound coaching, given co-operation and spirit on the squad.

They had hired him. But it was up to him to make the boys co-operate, to instill in them the winning spirit. He knew that. His sense of responsibility was keen and deep.

He saw Moira Kelley in the stands, a lone little figure in a green dress. The Wild Irish, they called her. Micky Hale was supposed to be engaged to her. Nothing official, but they were together a lot. Fred Macedon hardly knew her, but he wished she would not come out to practice. Her slim, pretty legs and lovely trim body distracted him. She waved at him as he went by and he smiled thinly at her. He wanted no complications with a girl, especially Micky's girl. Troubles enough, he had . . .

## II

**T**HEY LOOKED good, Macedon thought. There were not so many of them. He was two deep in pretty fair material, but they were big. They were only fairly fast, but they had muscle. It was up to him to train them.

Taxco and Hack Holland were first string ends. Medalie and Tom Grogan were tackles, each over two hundred. Boyce Regan was the pull-out guard, and Boyce had speed and brawn. Von Varick was a husky hunk of rock, at right guard. Ham Kessler was a sturdy center. They were not yet pulled together, and their subs were not quite up to par and the third string was . . . well, they looked good and it was up to Hale and Greeley to bring them around.

The backs, the first string, were his direct charges. Buck Chase, senior quarterback, was a quiet, smart kid who could pass and kick and block. Orey Cobb and Kit Lund were rangy halfbacks. Lobo Nevada was a husky, 220 pound fullback, fast and rugged. Corbin, Jones, Neely and Burton were adequate subs, all solid in Macedon's winged T tactics, a good bunch of hard-working boys.

If only the ends and the tackles and guards would perform, he thought, he would have a chance of breaking even in this, his first season, against a rough and rugged schedule of bigger teams. If only he could weld them all into a fighting unit, if only he could speed them up a little. Speed and more speed, he insisted, was the answer against teams out-manning his Mordaunts.

He lined them up, first string against ineligibles and scrubs and varsity reserves combined. He was looking for units of men who would play well together, but he had no offensive-defensive set-up, not on this small squad. He left Taxco and Medalie together on the first team and put Pep Cole and big Grundy against them. On defense the wing-back outside worked with the end on the tackle, and he put Orey Cobb over there, a slightly malicious gleam in his eye, then threw Corbin, a green but tough boy in the scrub backfield in a like position.

Then he said, "Now get in there and show me who starts against Nordwich. This is old-fashioned stuff, maybe, but it's mine. You win your jobs right here. No spirit here, none in a game."

Micky Hale muttered, "He's gonna kill a couple of these boys before the season opens. It's too early . . . It's too hot."

Greeley said nothing. Macedon pretended not to hear. He said, "Micky, you referee, Greeley will umpire." He threw them a ball with a fast underhand toss and stalked to the sidelines.

A figure walked at his side. He saw out of the corner of his eye that it was Harry Payne, the new kid. Payne swung a headgear and dawdled a step behind, watching the field. He seemed very young and innocent with his tousled hair and large, wide eyes. "Yo Yo", they had called him, and he looked like the yo yo age and type. But he said nothing and Macedon forgot him, watching the action.

The scrubs took the ball on their twenty. Corbin called for the conventional plunge. Burton carried through guard. It was a straight buck. He got five yards, Kessler nailing him behind the line. Macedon moved restlessly along the sideline.

Again Burton slugged inside tackle. There was a melee and Burton came through, running, head up. Kit Lund got him after he had reached the thirty-five.

"Holes," Macedon groaned. "Laziness."

Corbin called for a simple reverse. Jones, a slim, swift kid, ran right like a wraith with Neeley and Burton blocking. Taxco came roaring in. Burton took him cleanly from the play. Jones nimbly stepped inside and ran twenty yards to the varsity 45.

A cheerful voice said, "If Taxco would sidestep, fake and crash, he'd stop them."

"How can you make the big lug do it?" demanded Macedon stormily.

"Teach him," said Harry Payne, still grinning.

"That's Hale's job . . . Macedon shut his strong lips tight. He shouldn't be talking to a player about the end coach. He said, "Go in there. Take Taxco's place on defense."

"Sure," said the kid. He was still grinning. He ran onto the field. Watching

him, Macedon had an uneasy qualm. Payne looked terribly small to be sent in there against the big boys. Something in the pert attitude of the lean little guy had annoyed him for a moment and he had spoken upon impulse.

He heard another voice. It was his day for being put upon, he thought grimly. The girl in the green dress said audibly, "Why, that little Harry will be killed! Shame!"

He did not dignify Moira Kelley's crack with an answer. He merely stared at her a moment. He looked away, then stared back. She was regarding him coolly. She was looking at him as though he was a person she was examining the first time.

She said, "Well . . . at least you look determined."

He bowed. He wheeled and paid no attention to the field. Moe Taxco was coming slowly toward him, his wide-jawed face sulky. Corbin was promptly and correctly sending Jones around end again.

Harry Payne started fast. Macedon blinked at the surge of speed in the small end. Tackle and end and back converged upon him.

Payne's feet did amazing, quick things. Head and shoulders feinted like a snapping turtle. His legs coiled, uncoiled. He disappeared among the big men.

Jones was running, then something seemed to snatch him off his feet. His head hit the dirt with considerable force. He lost a yard on the play.

Payne was up, his teeth showing, dancing back to position. Corbin swung back to a plunge on the next try. Payne slid in behind the play and while the reverse was forming, the lithe body leaped what seemed an incredible distance, pounced on Burton's back. The fullback carried him to the scrimmage line, then someone came up underneath and Burton went flat.

Ham Kessler's bull voice roared, "'At's pilin' 'em up in there, Yo Yo! 'At's the way to go in there!"

It was the first vocal demonstration of the week. Macedon said crisply to the lowering Moe Taxco, "No use to tell you anything, smart guy. Just go in there and let me see you try that kid's stuff."

Taxco said, "Hell, he's a flash in the

pan . . . A cute kid."

"Try to be a little cute yourself," said Macedon. "I know it will be difficult, you and your big, clumsy feet, but try it!"

He wanted Payne out of there before they ganged on the slight boy. The angered second string was sending a power play right at him, everybody in it, all bowling along, riding him down. He was getting no help from Medalie, who seemed bewildered at his style and speed. Kessler, and Lund, however loyally swung in behind him to meet the attack.

**A**ND THEN Payne was hand-fighting the big men, coolly, shoving them, sidestepping them, shutting the blockers out of the play. Lund shot in there. Kessler backed up. They all went down as Taxco loped on. Macedon crouched, looking for the prone form of his new spark plug.

Payne was up, laughing, clapping his hands together like a kid at sight of a Hallow'en punkin. He spied Taxco, slapped him on the back, said something cheerful and came running off.

Moira Kelley said, "Maybe you're not so dumb, after all, Coach. Look at him, he doesn't know he's bleeding!"

Payne's face was scratched. He put a hand to it, surveyed the blood on his palm, looked past Macedon to the girl and chuckled, "Nothing like a little blood. Stirs up the boys!" He was as unselfconscious as a goat at a pile of tin cans.

Macedon said, "Where did you learn to play end like that?"

"Oh, here and there. Worked it out for myself. I was in the service awhile," said Payne carelessly. "Jones is tippin' the play, you know. He's a nervous-type kid. Fast, but jittery."

Macedon said, "That's why he's second-string. Hey, Kid, you see everything, don't you?"

"Nope," said Payne. "Just some things. We've got a pretty good club, haven't we, Coach?"

Macedon said thoughtfully, "Yes. *We* have . . . Go change and get the first string signals from the manager, Payne."

The kid said, "I'm all right, Coach. I can stick around."

"Gwan," snarled Macedon. "And take

some toughening exercises. I don't want you killed in there."

"Toughening?" Harry Payne giggled like a small boy, turning obediently. "Yes, SIR." He bestowed a broad wink on the girl in green and trotted away.

Moira Kelley said, "Coach, how did you dig up that child? He's terrific!"

Macedon said stiffly, "He just appeared. I haven't even seen his card."

"Oh, he's Harry Payne, but I didn't know he could play football," said the girl chattily. "He dances like an angel. And he always trots or runs. He never walks. The girls in my dorm love him. But who'd ever think he'd be a footballer?"

Taxco was slashing in and stopping a powered attempt inside his position. Ham Kessler had come to life and was bellowing and the Varsity forced the seconds to punt on fourth down.

Some of the strain vanished from Macedon's soul. He said almost pleasantly, "It's spirit and speed, of course. He can't possibly be first string material. Maybe as a scat back . . ."

"He seems to be an expert on end play," demurred the girl.

"You may be right," said Macedon politely. Twice today, he admonished himself, he had received gratuitous advice from young upstarts, one male, one female. Who, he asked himself irascibly, was coaching this Mordaunt team?

He strode onto the field and began issuing crisp orders and pointing out errors. He snapped hard at Taxco and inferentially at Micky Hale. He made them all step around until it was time to cease firing.

Then he went in and looked for Harry Payne's card. There was none. The kid had neglected to file one. He had merely appeared, in his own tattered old unie, ready to play.

Macedon made a mental note to have this error corrected—and like all mental notes, this one went into his mental waste basket when he got into an argument with Micky over end playing and coaching.

He left Hale in a bad humor. The girl in the green dress had a small car and Hale got into it and drove off. Coaches should not be consorting with co-eds,

either, he thought angrily.

It was pretty lonely in his own severe room just off the campus.

### III

**M**ORDAUNT COLLEGE'S football team was about to take the field against Nordwich's valiant crew from upper New York. Moira Kelley sat in the stands, low down behind the bench. She wore another shade of green today and Micky Hale surveyed her fondly, looking over Macedon's shoulder.

Macedon was saying to his starters, "Go out there and take charge of the game. Kessler, you're captain for today. I want to hear you. Buck, snap those signals. I want spirit and I want speed!"

Kessler bayed, "Let's GO in there . . ." They broke onto the field, lining up to receive. They looked even better than they had in August. They looked trim in their golden helmets and blue jerseys and silken pants. Their bare legs were corded, strong, heavy. They ran lightly, heads up, following Kessler.

Harry Payne said, "Gee, they're great."

Micky Hale was looking at the girl in green. The subs sat on the edge of the bench, tense, straining. Macedon walked up and down, unable to sit still. Harry Payne knelt at the end of the line, his eager face alight with sheer pleasure. Alone of them all he seemed without strain. He squinted at the Nordwich giants . . . they were bigger than the Mordaunts by ten pounds per man. He picked out the tackle and end on the side in which he was most interested. He did not watch the ball fly out and soar down to Orey Cobb. He watched the charging Nordwich line.

Orey came up the funnel, with the blocking precise and starched. Nordwiches went tumbling. One white-clad stalwart flung himself beneath the blocking. Orey delicately stepped over the carnage and sprinted. Two of the enemy trapped him on the thirty.

Macedon muttered, "Taxco missed his block."

Micky Hale, walking near him, said, "Moe's a slow starter."

"Huh." Macedon swung. The girl in the stands was regarding him expectantly. He wondered if she had seen Taxco flub it. Macedon snapped, "Payne!"

The kid came up, grinning, swinging along, headguard dangling from a relaxed hand. "Yes, SIR."

"In there for Taxco. Tell Buck 92."

"Yessir."

He loped into the field. He ran with a peculiar, low-slung stride, scarcely seeming to hurry, yet skimming the ground. Taxco stared unbelievably at him, then turned and hammered off. Macedon went to meet his end, throwing an arm about his shoulder for the benefit of the crowd, patting his back, but whispering, "I warned you, Taxco. You hit them, or stay on the bench."

Taxco said furiously, "You can't do this to me. I wasn't warmed up."

"You can warm up on the sideline until you feel hot," growled the Coach.

Buck Chase was giving them 92. This was an idea of Macedon's own conceit. The Mordaunts lined up as though for the conventional line buck, to try out the Nordwich strength up front. Lobo Nevada slammed his bulk inside guard. Drifting on the play was Orey. Faking was Buck, under the center, spinning, shoveling the ball out viciously as Orey sprinted.

The fast back took it out ahead of him, clutched the ball under his arm. Little Harry Payne fainted, then brushed his man so hard the big fellow fell over his own feet. Then Harry hit the wing back. He seemed to fold, leap and unfold in one motion. The back went head over heels.

Orey shot into the open. Large men pursued him. But Orey had speed. He ran away from them. The safety man headed him off on the Nordwich ten yard line. Macedon's opening bomb had struck its objective with a vengeance.

Nordwich hastily assembled itself. Mordaunt lined up fast, every man set and grim. Buck, on his own now, for Macedon never called them except under stress, yapped a signal.

Orey started out around the end. The Nordwiches spread loosely, suspecting any sort of trickery after that opening play. Lobo Nevada took the ball under his arm

and charged straight in behind a flailing, charging Ham Kessler. Payne was through, slipping over to hamstringing the backer-up. Lobo went nine yards to the one.

Now the Nordwiches took time out. Ham panted, "Did you muggs see Yo Yo slam on those blocks?"

Medalie grunted, "Moe woulda done all right . . . . Hell, Moe's slow warmin' up . . . ."

Kessler roared, "You work with him on that team-up or I'll bust you right in the nose, you hear me, Medalie? . . . Buck, you know what to call, kid . . . These guys are big . . . but slow, pals, slow . . ."

Harry Payne grinned. He was having a merry time.

Buck Chase whipped them into line as the whistle blew. He snapped off signals. The line shifted right. Harry Payne went wide on the wing. The ball snapped back. Harry charged into the end zone, yelling, "I got it! I got it! I got it!" zigging and zagging and jumping up and down.

Buck threw a short pass over the line to Orey Cobb. The halfback leaped and snagged it, alone and untouched, as three men chased Harry Payne.

**L**OBO NEVADA converted and Ham Kessler chortled with glee as the team trotted back up the field for the kick-off. Moe Taxco came on, his heavy face thoughtful, his eyes sliding to Harry Payne, then off to Medalie, then into the middle distance, surveying nothing.

On the sideline Macedon was waiting for Payne. He hugged him and said, "That was superb faking on the touchdown play . . . . But your blocking was the thing which pleased me."

The Yo Yo Kid said, "They're awful big, but we can run rings around them. Their left tackle plays one yard too wide and a step too slow."

Macedon said, "When we get the ball again I'll send in Corbin and talk to Buck."

"Their fullback doesn't get into the holes fast enough to hold Lobo's plunges," offered Payne.

The Coach nodded. He too had noted that. But he had not detected the tackle

playing outside his hole . . . . he looked and saw Nordwich run the kick-off back to their twenty-five, then set about tearing Mordaunt's line to pieces. Harry Payne sat on the bench, lounging, smiling a little, watching the play, as relaxed as an old rag rug. Nordwich's big backs gained three, five, then three again for a first down, plowing off the tackles.

Micky Hale strode to where Harry Payne lounged. He said importantly, "Now on the defense, you don't slash every play y' know. You're goin' to get mouse-trapped next, the way you dive in there . . ."

"Yessir," said Harry, his grin broadening.

Hale's jaw hardened, "And that yo yo style of runnin' . . . You don't run right, y' know. Somethin' wrong with your stride. I'll work on that durin' the week."

"Had an injury, sir," said Harry, shrugging. "I just am not as fast as I was."

"Oh, you're fast enough," conceded Hale handsomely. "You'd have to be fast, a little guy like you. But you got no form, style . . . ."

Moe Taxco went gracefully into a play and the play rode over him for five yards. Payne said solemnly, "You mean like Taxco, sir?"

"That's right. . . ." Hale brought up sharply, staring at Payne. But at that moment Macedon called impatiently and the kid arose.

"Excuse me," said Payne sweetly. "I have to see a man about those five yard gains around end!"

Macedon said in his ear, "Ignore that Hale . . . . Can you stop those big guys?"

"Yes sir," said Payne. "I like stopping big guys." He ran onto the field in that peculiar manner of his and someone started a cheer. The girl in the green dress screamed piercingly, "There goes the YOYO Kid! Whee!"

Nordwich was almost to midfield. Moe Taxco was furious. He kicked his head-guard off the field ahead of him. Macedon pointedly did not meet him this time. But Micky Hale did, sponging him, fussing over him as though Taxco was a wounded hero coming out of the big game of the year.

Nordwich was rolling. They sent one toward right end. It was a slow reverse with all the power riding out in front.

The tricky-gaited kid came around from behind, following the play. The Nordwich wing turned to hand-off to the burly full-back. In between them shot the projectile-like little end. The ball flew up into the air. Harry Payne put a hand on it. He batted it ahead of him. He caught it before it hit earth. He ran.

He was all alone. No one, not a friend or foe, was near. And, it was noted, no one gained an inch on him after he got started. He ran over the goal line, did a comic little jig-step, and set down the ball exactly between the goal posts.

"Oh, that YOYO!" screamed Moira Kelley, and the cheer leaders took it up and it rolled down to the ears of the smiling boy, "YoYo, YoYo, YoYo . . ." a chant of victory.

Macedon threw in his second string backfield and the Jones boy ran riot and the game became a track meet. Nordwich fell apart at the seams and the final score was 48 to 0 . . . . .

Moe Taxco caught two touchdown passes . . . . and held onto them . . . .

Harry Payne rested . . . . and watched, although much against his will.

Macedon returned to his quarters flushed with victory and satisfaction and received a telegram saying, "Congratulations. Look good, every game, so we can look better trimming you . . . . signed Conroy."

That was from his friend and enemy Milt Conroy, Head Coach at Tech. Well did Macedon know he hadn't a chance of beating Tech—nor Pennsylvania—nor Army's great double-team. But he could win the rest, he thought happily, and that would be good enough this year. Next year . . . . He was getting into the realm of wishful thinking indulged by all Coaches, he reflected . . . . Next Year Dreams . . . .

#### IV

**T**HE TEAM did not fail him. They beat Easton, Brunswick, Lambert and State. The halfway mark was reached.

They were playing together in a manner Macedon had not expected. Moe Taxco was rounding into form, sullenly, egotistically, but efficiently. Micky Hale was swaggering among his ends and bragging a lot about how he had made the team click . . .

On a snappy autumn evening Harry Payne was walking across the campus with Macedon. They were together a lot, the YoYo kid and the Coach. Neither seemed to have particularly close friends around Mordaunt College, excepting each other. They passed a girl walking toward Chumley Dorm and the girl paused and said, "Hey, you YoYo."

They stopped. Harry said, "Hiya, Moira. Do you know the Coach? Fred Macedon . . . . Moira Kelley."

She said in her off-hand way, "We have talked together, briefly."

Macedon said stuffily, "I've seen you with Hale, Miss Kelley."

"I see," she said. Lamplight fell upon her elfin, lovely features. She was smiling somewhat derisively. She wrapped a loose tweed coat about her lissome figure and remarked, "There's a small party at the Quad later. Local dance band . . . how about it?"

Harry said, "We'll be there. Save us a couple, huh, Irish?"

"You can have all you want, especially rhumbas," she said. "Does the Coach dance, or just make mad faces all the time?"

Macedon said, "I'm afraid I can't make it."

"That's what I thought when I drove up," she said blithely. "You never have any fun. Micky's right about you." She walked away. She was as graceful as Moe Taxco missing a tackle, Macedon thought, and was conscious of a pang somewhere in his chest.

"Hale's got no business talking about me to a girl," he grumbled.

Harry Payne said, "Aw, let's go to the party, Coach. What have you got to lose?" He treated the Head Coach in an off-hand, casual manner always, as though they were contemporaries. He was the best poised kid Macedon had ever known . . . completely adult, yet with boyish impulsiveness and charm.

Macedon said, "I believe I will, at that. I believe I will!" The pang in his chest became an anticipatory tingle. They walked into the training table a little late and Micky Hale was waiting impatiently.

Hale said, "I wanted to speak to you, Coach. Now about the captaincy for the Pennsylvania game next week. How about Medalie? Then Taxco for Army . . . or Tech?" He hesitated on that one, watching Macedon. Captains were appointed each week at Mordaunt and the Tech game was the prize. Everyone wanted to captain the eleven against Tech . . . it was the big game for Mordaunt.

Macedon said, "I'm considering that problem, Micky."

"You've used about every regular except them two," said Micky angrily. "I'm protecting my boys . . ."

"Medalie is a tackle," Macedon pointed out coldly. "Taxco is not my idea of a leader."

"You're prejudiced against Moe," Micky said in an ugly tone.

"You're looking for trouble," said Macedon softly.

"You and your pet, that YoYo Kid," said Micky savagely. "I'm goin' to blow the lid off this . . ."

Macedon said without heat, "The team is going nicely now. You start blowing off and you can find another job, Micky. I won't have you creating dissension."

"ME? Me find another job? We'll see who finds another job." Hale was in the throes of utter rage. "And you keep away from my girl, see? I saw you on the campus"

"You'd better cool off and get right," said Macedon. "You're heading for trouble, Micky."

The cool accents, the Coach's indifference, gave Micky Hale pause. The big man struggled, bit back hot words. He walked away and took a seat next to Taxco. They all ate like horses.

Macedon was amazingly peaceful within himself. He looked up and down at the healthy young animals under his charge. They had come through so far without major injury, they were well-conditioned, they were a happy bunch. Harry Payne was kidding Ham Kessler about a tackle

the center had muffed and Kessler was jawing back with gusto. Buck Chase was delineating a switch on a reverse which he had worked out with Macedon that afternoon and the other backs were listening attentively, nodding confirmation. This had the makings of a football team.

He was aware of Hale's enmity and the danger thereof, but tonight it did not seem to bother him. Taxco was also an unknown quantity of the future, but Taxco was playing good ball right now. Pennsylvania's power house was next Saturday's problem—Penn and Army were the best teams in the East this year and both were on the schedule, but that was another matter.

Tonight Macedon was happy. After the meal he looked for Harry Payne with eagerness. They left and went across the campus to Quad, the long, low building where the mild social affairs of the coeds and their men friends took place under the watchful eye of the faculty.

**T**HE DEAN greeted him, showing surprise. Macedon said apologetically, "Don't get much time for this sort of thing. Payne, here, convinced me I should look in."

"You're young enough to dance," the Dean said. "Good for you."

Macedon sat at the end of the room with Payne. He said, "Harry, maybe Micky had something. Maybe you'd make a regular back for us."

The YoYo Kid grinned. "You've got plenty of backs. Good ones. And I like to run. An end gets more chance to run . . . he's always in motion. I've played backfield, Coach . . ."

"I've wondered where you played . . ."

The music started and the red-haired girl was wearing white. She was talking to Micky Hale, but she turned and came straight toward them. Macedon arose, beaming. Moira Kelley said, "Harry, take me out there and slay me again. My hero of terpsichore!"

The kid grinned as always, sliding an arm about her waist, beginning to beat time to the music with his moccasined feet. He certainly could dance, even Macedon could see that. Micky Hale, pretending to

make character with the Dean, was watching with evil eyes. The girl was laughing, moving languidly, matching every move of the graceful Harry Payne.

Hale swung away, put a heavy hand on the kid. Harry stepped back, bowing a little. Moira Kelley bit her lip . . . it was the first time Macedon had ever seen her in the least flustered. Her gaze swung down, fastened on him at the end of the hall. Harry was already blithely cutting in on a slim brunette . . .

Macedon arose. As the red-haired girl came down in the thick arms of the big end coach he stepped out and smiled. "I'll finish this, if I may, Micky . . ."

She was in his arms, smiling up at him. He had never thought of her as particularly short, but now he knew she was tiny. She said to him, "You're a good guy to have for a friend, all right. Harry calls the turn on you better than Micky after all."

"You check up with everyone," he accused. "You never come to headquarters."

"I'm of the quaint notion that headquarters might come to me. And then—there's the football season. I know what it means to you . . . How about Penn? Do you know you could beat Penn?"

He said, "I could also cut off my head and use it during the second half for a football . . . But it's nice to have you on our side." He could see Hale as he swung. The end coach looked murderous. Harry Payne was heading toward them. The YoYo kid was going to cut in on Moira . . . Micky was, for the present, shut out. It was an old fraternity house trick, but tonight Macedon was enjoying it . . .

He had not enjoyed an evening so much in years, he admitted, going home with Harry Payne later. The kid said, "Well, we might as well break the grind . . . We've about had our fun for the season, huh, Coach? Now we got Penn, Southeast . . . Army . . . and Tech."

Macedon said, "I got a wire from my pal Conroy. He begs us to beat Penn. So Tech, when they beat us, will surely get a Bowl bid. A great character, that Conroy. I'd like to send him Hale for his end coach."

The YoYo Kid said, "It's funny. Micky knows plenty about end play. But he ain't teachin' it."

"Some people can't teach . . . Now if we could only work up a surprise angle on Tech, something we haven't done all season . . . But hell, it would have to be awful good . . . ." Macedon had skipped the other games. He was thinking only about Tech . . .

## V

THERE WERE a million things a Head Coach had to see about. And then on top of it there was the vague uneasy feeling that he had ought to do something about Moira Kelley. He kept seeing her and she kept looking past Micky Hale, straight at Macedon. Harry Payne would drift over and con with her. Harry seemed always nearby when she turned up.

Penn had fine ballplayers by the dozen. They also had a few spots which could have held better men, like all Ivy League teams. They took the field a four touch-down favorite over Mordaunt College.

Franklin Field was a cavern of sound, all Penn sound, and the Mordaunts shivered a little as the wind came down. Fred Macedon said to them, "You go out there and you hit them with 92. You smack them and see what happens."

Big Ham Kessler roared, "Who's scared? C'mon, you bums!" Ham was again Captain for the afternoon, and Taxco was still sullen, as was Gran Medalie, Macedon realized. But Ham was the natural leader. He had tried the other lineman, Buck Chase, Lobo, Kit Lund . . . he well knew the value of a good field captain, especially when a team is not manned for the two-platoon system which so dehumanizes the game of football . . . In a way he was glad he did not have the manpower for that new, somewhat frightening system of winning at sacrifice of color, all-around ability, team personality . . .

In a way, he supposed, he was wrong about a lot of things. He sent in his regular starters. Moe Taxco was the biggest man on the team and one of the fastest. Micky Hale gloomed at the far

end of the bench, among end subs and backfield reserves.

He looked for Harry Payne and there the kid was, kneeling that glow on his freckled, sandy face, his attention intent on the canvas vested Penns he would face sooner or later, as excited as if this were a close one with Easton or Brunswick or State . . . . He was young enough to get a kick out of everything in football, Macedon reflected, yet old enough to have balance and judgement. A queer combination. . . .

Penn received. Their offense men came in and began rambling behind a huge line. Ham roved up and down behind the struggling Mordaunts, making tackle after tackle, but on came the Blue and Red, to midfield, over midfield, to the forty, the thirty . . . .

Then the Mordaunts began to field the power plays a little better. First down, one yard gain . . . second, two yards gain . . . third down . . . . Harry Payne said unhappily, "A pass, of course. And Orey's too far in."

Penn scored on the pass play and converted to make it 7 to 0.

Penn kicked off. Moe Taxco missed his block. Orey was nailed on the fifteen yard line.

Buck called for a 92 and made it snappy and classy and Penn gaped. Taxco lunged for the wing back. Orey had a clear field for anyway thirty yards . . . . Moe missed the wing, merely brushing him. Orey went for a first down on the Mordaunt 35.

Macedon said evenly, "All right, Payne."

The YoYo Kid ran on the field. The Penns looked curiously at him. They had heard about the small end the eccentric Macedon used occasionally, but they had not taken him seriously. One set-to with the sizeable Red and Blue boys would fix him for the day . . . . Taxco showing his disgust at leaving, further reassured them. Even Payne's own teammates had no faith in him, it was plain to see.

Buck Chase said grimly, "92. . . . this time the doodler, Kid."

The Penn defensive team was almost kindly, surveying the set-up. As Harry Payne broke into the flat and began his

jumping about and crying for the ball, they gave him no heed. The safety man drifted, covering the deep pass; after all, nobody expected the little Morduant team to run against Penn; they had to pass. . . .

Somehow Harry Payne had negotiated the territory slightly beyond that covered by the wingback. Buck, faking to the right, suddenly wheeled, counted four and threw left.

The wingback scurried, wild-eyed. Harry Payne was down on the sideline, hooking back, taking the ball at his shoe-tops, then scuttling inside, picking up the pace, watching the safety man. His gait was still uneven, almost fantastically so, making it hard for the opposition to time him down the field.

The safety man came whirling. Without blocking down that far, Harry fainted, then ran out of bounds without being touched. The big marker at this point said "20". This was Penn's twenty-yard line! Harry had toted the leather down there.

Buck was saying, "Okay, give them the deal, pals."

It was the same set-up, Buck handling, then faking out. Only now Lobo had it under his arm and the center was splitting behind Ham and Varick and Lob boomed for eight yards.

Penn began to spread at the nostrils. Buck said, "This is really gravy. One score on these schmoes!"

They sprinted from position, every-Mordaunt running right, all the Penns going with them. Kit and Lobo gave Buck wonderful protection. He took plenty of time . . . then threw a pass that seemed to go directly into the hands of the Penn left wingback.

A streak of speed interfered. The red and blue-stripped arms were swept aside. Harry Payne took it at arms length, but he had never dropped one yet, not one he got his hands onto . . . . He took it and slid a few feet, then sunfished over a diving tackler. He landed beyond the goal line, flipped to his feet and laughed at a gigantic Penn linesman whose eyes were bugging out at this cavalier treatment of the class of the Ivy League.

It became 7 to 7. The Penn ballcarriers

and their aids came roaring back afield. Macedon made a few substitutions. He left Harry Payne in, however. Micky Hale came over and growled, "You goin' to leave that shrimp get killed?"

"Why not? You don't think he's any good," said Macedon.

Micky said, "If you don't season the other boys, you won't have anything for next season."

Macedon said, "But you're not counting on me for next year, are you, Micky?"

The big end coach walked away without replying. On the field Penn tried to turn Harry Payne's flank . . . and failed as the kid went in, under and up and snagged the ball carrier. Macedon grumbled to himself, "If he was only bigger . . . and older . . . and tougher . . ."

He took Payne out, having made his point with Hale . . . Taxco went in. Penn boxed him and gained ten, then twenty. They let him in, mousetrapped him, gained fifteen.

Macedon grimly put in Pep Cole, third string end, a green but willing young lad. Penn threw a pass which failed, then dumped the power off the tackle. Once, twice . . . they got to three . . .

Harry Payne looked whitely eager, although he did not speak. Macedon heard himself say, "Go in, Harry . . ."

The YoYo Kid went on the field. Taxco and Hale stood together, like two lowering bulls, watching in disbelief and chagrin.

Penn tried the end run Macedon had forseen. It was second down, three to go. Harry Payne was swift as a bird, in among them, hand-fighting the big man in the lead, then under and up.

The play piled. It became third down . . . four to go for touchdown! Payne had spilled them for a yard loss . . . with Gran Medalie and Ham Kessler staunch in there to help. Medalie was playing like a mule . . .

They tried a pass. It failed as Buck knocked it down. They formed and came with the power, disbelieving the small end could play his part again.

Payne stumbled as he went in. But he moved left, then right. Medalie, working with him, would not be moved out. The

Penn back came winging, and the smallish end bent, rose. Medalie crashed. The Penn back toppled—bent toward his own goal.

Taxco was on the field, his eye shifty, his mouth set. Buck was going to punt out . . . maybe. It was 7 to 7 and the first quarter was almost ended . . . Let them put that out on the wires! 7 to 7, tiny Mordaunt against mighty Penn . . . Harry Payne ran off the field, his grin spreading . . .

**A**ND AT THE HALF it was still 7 to 7.

But in the fourth quarter the weight of four teams against barely two teams counted. Harry Payne was in there, on the goal line, when the fresh blockers and fresh runners came storming.

Medalie tried, but he had been sorely beaten all afternoon. Ham Kessler, raging, tried harder. They all went down, with Buck coming in to throw himself into it at their backs . . . and Penn scored.

But that was it. All the headlines tomorrow were wondering . . . what kind of team is the Mordaunt College outfit? Only 14 to 7 could Penn take them! Whence came these little giants, who their coach?

And then, the irony. Whisk Hayworth, greatest expert among the sports writers, said flatly, "That end play of Mordaunt, which held the heavier Penns in check all afternoon and accounted for the brilliant passing attack which threatened the bigger team and almost scared them out of their own park was the outstanding characteristic of this gallant little crew. Taxco, Holcomb, Cole, Mason and the small, freakish scat end, Harry Payne, were all thrillingly good. More power to Mickey Hale former pro end, now in charge of wingmen at Mordaunt under the new Head Coach, Fred Macdeon, formerly of Michigan, currently in his first Head Mentor assignment at Mordaunt."

The other papers took it up that week, too.

The following Saturday Mordaunt beat Southeast 21 to 0, with Harry Payne catching two touchdown passes and Taxco

one; again the papers raved about the puissant end play which had stopped the Southeast offensive as well as scoring all the points. . . . No word about Buck's canny passing and the protection given him on the plays so carefully worked out by Fred Macedon and Harry Payne.

## VI

**M**OE TAXCO was learning to hold onto those passes, to break outside for Buck's painstaking tosses. Mickey Hale was laboring with the giant end . . . Micky was making capital from the news columns like mad.

The whole thing was beginning to come in on Fred Macedon. He had a once-beaten team which was winning praise from everyone in the nation . . . and he still had to meet Army's mastodon and Tech's Bowl Team-to-be.

Army took care of things. Army beat them by two touchdowns . . . but Harry Payne caught one pass over the line and Moe Taxco another. . . . It was 27 to 13, and no one could call that score disgraceful . . .

So now came Milt Conroy and the Techs, the slick articles, the powerhouse club with brains, the team which was supposed to be able to beat Penn or Army or even Notre Dame by a score or more of points. Milt sent his telegram, "You did good against Army and now are only on the short side of thirty points! Congrats."

Milt was quite a card. Fred Macedon would give anything short of an arm or a leg to beat his old friend until his brain fell out. He said as much to Harry Payne as they walked over toward Chumley Dorm; Harry trotting a little, like always, skipping over the cold flagstones, doing a jig-step, always in motion. There was open house at Chumley that evening, on the Wednesday before Tech game, the big game of the Mordaunt year.

Harry said, "We got a pretty nice thing, with Moe holding onto them. Now if only we had something new, something very new and good. We might scare

them, like we did Penn."

Macedon said, "I've been thinking of many new things. Milt scouts carefully. They'll be onto Buck and his passes, lots of things. I've got plenty of new things. . . . But Mickey doesn't care for them. He just wants us to chuck to you and Moe . . . especially Moe."

Harry Payne said, "Okay. . . . We'll work it out. . . . Is that Irish in the window? Without Micky Hale?"

They went in. It was Moira Kelley, without Hale. The house mother poured tea and people came and went, but no Hale. The red-haired girl smiled easily, talking with the Coach and the kid end. Fred Macedon wondered where the hulking end coach could be. . . .

He heard the girl say, "I wouldn't know, Harry. Micky hasn't been around so much lately. Maybe because I said I wouldn't marry him after the season . . . even if he did get the Head Coach job!"

Harry Payne said, "I hear you telling me, Irish."

"I thought you ought to know. Fred just hasn't got any sense about politics. He trusts everyone. You know how he is."

Harry Payne said, "I know how he is. How is it with you and me?"

Fred Macedon abruptly walked out of earshot. It seemed impossible. The YoYo Kid, with his cowlick and his young, innocent face and kidlike ways . . . asking Moira Kelley how he stood in her graces! The Coach's face was suddenly drawn and hot. Hale . . . Payne . . . both after the cool, red-haired beauty. And where did that leave Fred Macedon?

He could answer that: out in the cold. From the beginning he had been out in the cold. Possibly he had chosen that chilly realm for himself; at any rate he had been left there. He moved back in the room, color in his face now. He made his excuses and departed abruptly; that night he sat up until the wee hours working on plays.

That night, in fact, he remembered a thing from his youth, a man seen, a play or two executed; in his mind formed a pattern and with eyes feverish he mapped out plays. . . .

"That'll be it for Milt Conroy," he said aloud, falling into bed. "That'll stop his mouth—and those damned telegrams for awhile." But he knew better than that. . . . Conroy had the ball club, with his Tony Trusso, his Bugs Kosciusko, Patsy King, Sam Spokane, and all the big, fat, lovely linesmen and rangy ends and tough reserves. . . . He shuddered to think about Jack Greco and Fatso Gordon and what the two could do to a small end like Harry Payne . . . or a slightly stupid one like Moe Taxco . . .

He wondered where Micky Hale had spent the evening. Moira may have turned him down . . . but Micky wasn't one to give up easily.

He wondered how Harry Payne was making out with the red-haired girl. He stuffed his face against the pillow and tried sternly to keep himself from thinking about it. Everyone was long since in bed except Fred Macedon, that young fool!

The next day he gave them his plays. Micky Hale looked at them in disbelief, said, "Are you nuts? This is Thursday! We play Tech on Saturday. Are you completely nuts?"

"Yeah," said Macedon. "I'm nuts. So is Harry Payne. How do you and Moe Taxco feel?"

Hale said, "Fred, I'm sorry, but this don't make sense. I'm going to have to report this. To the Board of Trustees. I don't want any part of this. I got my reputation—you know what everybody says about our end play. I want out of this. And Fred . . . I can't advise Moe Taxco to lend himself to it, frankly I can't."

Macedon said, "You met with the Board members last night?"

"Well, Fred, it was a sort of private get-together, nothin' official," said Micky Hale in lordly accents.

"I heard so," said Fred.

"Nothin' personal, Fred," said Hale, grinning from ear to ear.

"You just want to be Head Coach next year." Moira had tipped him. He remembered now. Moira had tipped him off at the Chumley tea.

"Nothin' personal," said Hale again.

"But during the week of the big game

you can go behind my back and work against me. Nothing personal . . . you big hunk of shark-bait!"

Micky Hale said, "Now, wait a minute . . ."

**T**HEY WERE in the gym. Buck was there and Greeley, the young line Coach and Moe Taxco . . . and Harry Payne.

Fred Macedon said tightly, "You've worked for yourself alone all season, while the rest of us have done our best for the team. You've succeeded in one thing—teaching Taxco to catch a pass. I still have to use Payne, half his size, on key defense jobs. That's how great you are, Micky. That's the great Coach you are. Now you're ready to rat out on the team . . . Who'll go along with you? Taxco? I doubt that!"

Hale said insolently, "Taxco will do as I say."

Harry Payne and Buck had said nothing. Now they faced the big end. They stood, staring at him. Greeley, the silent, the meek, stared at him.

Micky said, "C'mon, Moe. The hell with this. You'll be All America next year!"

There was a long moment of silence. Then Moe Taxco said in his surly, deep voice, "Nope. I can't do that. I may gripe. But I stick, win, lose or draw. I got no love for Macedon, for YoYo. But Medalie's my pal. We've played good together. Nope, I stick."

Micky Hale said, "After all I've done for you . . ."

Macedon said, coldly, "You'd better go, Micky. You'd better go to the Board and blow your top. Go as far as you like. We're playing Tech come Saturday."

Micky promised, "You'll never coach Mordaunt to another game. After you blow this one to hell with your crazy ideas—you and that YoYo . . ."

Macedon said, "You'd better go before I lose what control I've got left. Get out!"

For a moment it seemed that Micky Hale would stay and show them what a tough pro end he had been. But they were too many, even for him. He wheeled and left.

Macedon said steadily, "I had to gamble

on you staying, Moe. I had to take a chance you didn't have rat in you. Thanks for bearing out my belief."

The big end said stoutly, "I'm stickin' by my guns, Coach. I said I'd do what I could and I've done it. Maybe I'm no All America, not now, not next year, not any time. But I'm stickin'."

Macedon said, "Take these diagrams." He handed a sheaf of typed cards to the tall end. "Read them. Study them. Keep them a secret. Only certain key men are getting these plays, you understand?"

Taxco muttered, "It sounds dopey to me, too. But I'm in there with you all."

Macedon said, "Come on. We're going to finish up the practice for Tech. We can only try one or two more desperate remedies. Then it's fool them or be murdered by them."

It was late that night when Moira Kelley met them on the campus, in a dark spot between Chumley and the gym. She was muffled in a fur coat, a felt hat pulled over her eyes. She said, "He's what you both said. He's already taken off for Milt Conroy and Tech. He swears you tried to ruin him and he's gone to the enemy. He says that'll prove, later on, that he wouldn't have any part of your screwy ideas."

"Milt'll throw him out," said Macedon.

"He's just going to make himself an out," explained Harry Payne. "That's his idea."

"With the Board behind him and Milt admitting that he came to him—to protest that he was out—he'll have something." Moira Kelley wrinkled her nose in the cold night air. "Now you've got to show them on the field or forever hold your peace, Fred Macedon."

Harry Payne said, "It's not a question of beating them. Just showing good, like against Penn and Army . . ."

"Milt will roll up a hundred if he can, for the Bowl Game bid," said Macedon.

Moira Kelley said, "If you let him, he will. I've been watching this team all season. I don't believe he can."

Macedon said, "You've been watching. Harry's been slipping in his two cents' worth. What conspiracy is this between you two? I sense something."

Moira said, "He's awful smart, Harry. He senses something."

"Don't tease him," said Harry softly. "He's a right guy. There is something, Coach. If it works . . . I'll tell you, gladly. Believe me, it's on your side."

"I know that," said Macedon impatiently. "I trust you. But a man can be curious, can't he? How about leaving me to talk to Moira now, young fellow?"

"Sure," grinned the kid. "Go ahead." He trotted off.

But it was not much good, talking to the red-haired girl. She was off-handedly delightful . . . and that was as far as it went. Macedon left her still far from satisfied.

But he slept better that night than in weeks . . . Something about Moira Kelley gave him peace, if not confidence.

## VII

**T**HE TECH TEAM was impressive. Milt Conroy met Macedon in mid-field and said, "Too bad you didn't beat Penn and Army. But you did good in your own class, Fred. I'm sorry you're in that jam."

Macedon said, "I suppose Hale gave you all our plays?"

Milt Conroy, a lean man with a long neck and sharp eyes which gave him a crane-like aspect, said, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"You're a first class heel," said Macedon. "You're no better than Hale. Why don't you hire him? After today he'll be available."

"You mean if we don't beat you thirty points?" Conroy laughed. "I always liked you, Fred. But you're not tough enough to be a head coach. Too idealistic. Come see me when you're fired. I would rather hire you than Hale."

Macedon met his men on the sideline, led them to the dressing room after the warm-up. He waited for silence, then said, "I'm appointing co-captains today. Moe Taxco and Harry Payne!"

Ham Kessler bayed, "That's the way we go in there!" clapping his big paws together.

Macedon said, "Buck Chase will be boss

in the huddle. We've done everything we know how, men. I ask only one thing. Hold them early, rock them and sock them . . . and get at them late!"

Taxco blurted, "We'll do our best, Coach. Maybe better!"

Harry Payne just grinned. He looked like a baby, but Ham and the big linesmen clustered about him, patting him and Moe as they bunched before taking the field. Taxco would start. If the big end could use his beef and strength and natural speed to advantage for awhile, Macedon fretted, going outside into the crisp air of late November. Moira Kelley was waiting for him in the car.

She said, "Micky's wormed his way into the box of the Board of Trustees and is beefing about everything. You stole some kudos by making Taxco co-captain, though. That's one beef discredited."

Macedon said, "You've been great, keeping us informed, Moira . . ."

"Think nothing of it," she said almost sharply. "Just watch Harry and the boys and don't worry. I'll be around when it's over. This is it, Coach. All season we've been pointing at this . . ."

"WE sure have," he muttered. Again that slightly uneasy feeling persisted within him. He went to the bench. The teams were ready to go on. Taxco and Harry came running in . . . they had lost the toss.

Macedon checked the numbers of the Techs . . . Milt was starting the first team, all right; Greco and Gordon on the strong side, with Pup Fordyce at guard. Huck Finley at center, Rouge, Berger and Cansino on the right side of the line. The ball-carrying backs, Trusso, Kosciusko, King and Spokane . . . a rugged crowd of men. And there was another crew for defense.

Macedon sent his first team in to defend. He would make substitutions, but in his own fashion. He sat, waiting for the kick-off, his eyes sliding down to Harry Payne, as usual. The YoYo Kid was kneeling, staring at the Tech pair, Jack Greco and Fatso Gordon . . . also at Ratsy King, the backer-up on that side. Harry's eyes were razor sharp, diagnosing every move these men made.

It was strange the way Payne took them apart before he got in there, Macedon

thought . . . Then there was a sodden sound, a wild cry from a filled stadium and he had no more time for random thinking . . . the Tech game was on.

Medalie's kick went deep. Buggsy Kosciusko took it on the Tech goal line. Interference formed like swift, small tanks. Buggsy came straight up the middle of the field under convoy of these units. He made the twenty-yard marked going full steam ahead.

Holcomb was down; Holcomb was out, but took a blocker with him. Moe Taxco came slamming. An interferer ran into him. Moe threw the man ten feet on his forearm nudge. Kosciusko tried to squirm away. On the twenty-five yard line Taxco knocked him flat on his pants seat.

Macedon turned and stared at Harry Payne, who was nodding and winking and grinning. Macedon walked the sideline, tugging at his baseball cap, observing this minor miracle.

Tech was lining up. The swift-moving, smooth pattern of Tech play unfolded. Milt always had slick plays with slick men handling the ball. It went hither and yon, with Buggsy, Trusso, King and Spokane all handling it while Tech linemen performed miracles of blocking and indirection.

Spokane had it, the giant fullback crashing for a tackle slot. And there was Moe Taxco, large, stubborn, dealing that nudge to blockers, nailing Spokane after a meager two yard gain. Medalie was there, too, and Ham Kessler, but it was Taxco leading them.

Harry Payne shifted on the bench. Tech kept hammering. Taxco and his pals kept stopping the attack. Tech kicked.

Macedon said, "All right, Harry . . . Pep . . . Grundy . . . Just to give those guys a rest . . ." Taxco came off and the stands nearly tore down the place cheering him. Holcomb shared the applause and Medalie . . . grinning, cocky, happy. Macedon met them with outflung arms. They squatted, watching the field, all in a group with blankets about them, the core of the Mordaunt College defense, united at last.

Buck was calling the 92, with a variation, knowing Milt Conroy had spotted that one long since. On their own twenty,

Buck handled the ball, faking a pass.

Then Lobo had it, nailing into center. He picked up seven yards while Harry Payne faked the pass attempt in the flat.

The Techs substituted seven men . . . Buck laughed and lined up behind his big blocking back, Kit Lund . . . and quick-kicked on second. Harry Payne, wide on the play, ran like a scatted deer to touch the ball down on the Tech fifteen yard line.

**T**HE STADIUM was hushed, astounded . . . then it was a screaming mass of rooters; the Mordaunts chanting the old "hold 'em" refrain, the Techs begging for a touchdown. The strategy was clear now . . . daring little Mordaunt would try to hold mighty Tech, playing for the breaks. It seemed very daring of Macedon . . .

Harry Payne kept slashing at first. He was in the Tech backfield so often they had to punt on fourth—and he almost blocked the kick. They put two men on him after Buck had kicked in return. Two men on a small end . . . he laughed at them.

They put three men on him and Buggsy swiped one at his jaw. He went out like a light—Buggsy could hit like a mule.

Moe Taxco came on, a light in his eye. Harry's jaw was slightly bruised and swollen. Tech had to punt again. Neither team had come close to a scoring opportunity. No team had held Tech scoreless for an entire period. Yet the time of the first quarter was running out.

There was a brief melee and Tech's King got the punt away. Taxco was in very fast. It almost seemed as though he might block the kick. But Taxco was delayed . . .

They sent in a sub for Buggsy Kosciuko. He lay cold as a mackerel. An official coldly surveyed Moe Taxco, who kept his right hand concealed in his left palm until his knuckles cooled off.

That was the story of the first quarter.

It was the story of the first half.

The score was 0 to 0 when a bleeding, torn but jubilant gang of Mordaunts flew into the dressing room in search of clean jerseys and bandages for their wounds. Fred Macedon, grim-faced, calm, steady,

was waiting for them. They laughed and sang as he had never known them to before as he helped Greeley and the trainer patch their wounds.

Moe Taxco boomed, "This is really fun. Since Harry showed me how to bunt them guys with my forearms, I'm free as a daisy in there."

"Hell, Micky never showed me any side-step routine," said Holcomb.

"Me neither," chimed in Pep Cole. "Harry, you and the Coach sure made it different in there."

Medalie yelled, "Workin' with you ends is a cinch now. Whee! Who said Tech's tough?"

Macedon got them quiet at last. He said grimly, "They'll be tougher this half. Conroy's got reserves you haven't seen yet. This half we've got to fool them."

"Okay, Coach . . . leave us fool 'em!" Taxco didn't even hesitate to roar now. "All the way . . ."

Outside the red-haired girl was waiting. She had been alongside the Trustee's box all during the half. Micky Hale had glared at her for awhile, then changed his mind and attempted to get her to join him. And she had got Micky told. Now she was waiting.

## VIII

**I**T WAS the fourth quarter of the Tech-Mordaunt College game. The radio announcer was hoarse, the wires were loaded with the heroic story of the shifting, clever defense which had held Tech scoreless until now, rocking the sports-loving nation on its heels by the tremendous upset of the dope.

Fred Macedon looked at the bruised, grinning YoYo Kid. He said dubiously, "You're not too exhausted to try it?"

Harry Payne said drily, "Coach, I'm fresher than anyone."

"I don't quite get it," said Macedon slowly. "But I'm beginning to guess . . . Go in there for Pep Cole."

Harry Payne nodded. Moe Taxco was still standing firm at left end. Holcomb and Cole had not fared so well. Harry went in at right end. Buck Chase was playing quarterback. Macedon hastily sent

in Cobb and Lund and Lobo Nevada, although Tech had the ball on its own thirty-five and would be booming for a score as never hitherto in the game.

Conroy had a trick of course. Mordant's line-up was orthodox and the Techs suddenly shifted from the T to the single wing, unbalancing the line right. Fred Macedon came to his feet, fists clenched . . . If they muffed this one . . .

Medalie came burgeoning over, scrambling into place alongside Taxco . . . Varick went over . . . Ham Kessler shifted . . . The ball went back and Trusso started passing, handing-off to Kosciusko, who wore a black eye and handed-off to Spokane. Then it went to Trusso again, who was fading to pass . . .

Buck was slightly fooled. But from nowhere came a slim, sprinting figure. The uneven pace proclaimed it to be the YoYo Kid. The ball was nestling into the arms of Greco when the Kid hooked out. Greco tried to snatch it back, but Harry Payne was wheeling, on the Mordant thirty-five, trying to get back to pay dirt with the pigskin under his arm.

Fatso Gordon hit him there, almost knocking him into a cocked hat. He got up, still grinning. He took off his head-guard and tossed it over to where Macedon waited tight-lipped on the sideline. He said to Buck, "Time's a-waistin', pal . . ."

Big Moe Taxco was eyeing Fatso Gordon, who had been working him over all afternoon with Greco's help. Moe was saying, "So you wanta hurt the lil kid, huh? Okay, wise guy."

Gordon blustered, "We'll fix you, too, brother."

"Uh-huh," nodded Moe. "You been tryin' that."

Buck snapped his signals. Taxco shifted. It looked like a line play, snappily executed, with Lobo plunging. Gordon and Greco piled in. Taxco met them, nodding them with everything he had.

Then there was a terrific howl. For running behind the line, criss-crossing the field, was Harry Payne. Swinging, handing him the ball, was Buck Chase, who promptly mouse-trapped a guard.

That swift, hesitant pace distinguished him always. He moved past the flounder-

ing Greco. He cut back and was over mid-field and down to the forty. Kosciusko and Spokane trapped him there. He went down, but slid to the thirty-eight on the tackle.

His hair was a wiry shock, the cowlick waving. He pranced into the huddle and Buck was moaning the signal low. Moe said, "I hear you, brother" and winked again at the Kid, a confident, bloodied, poised figure now . . .

Three big subs came into the Tech lineup. Again Buck put Mordant into the cross-buck, faking the ball to Lobo. Again the bare-headed Kid came swinging out wide, past the end.

There were three Tech men waiting. Milt Conroy was no dope. He had tipped off his men, sent them in. Milt always ran his teams like that, smart as a whip, giving instructions from play to play. That's how Milt won . . . quarterbacking his team on offense and defense . . .

So three men were waiting when Harry Payne came sailing. He therefore had to retreat. Buck Chase, Medalie and Kid Lund seemed to be out of position, too, as the three subs came lunging and the wing-back trekked in, then relaxed, seeing the end-around all gummed up this time.

Moe Taxco, running like a deer, shot past them. The little, wild-haired end, standing in the basket provided by Chase, Medalie and Lund, hauled back.

Fred Macedon had seen that the very first day, when Payne had chucked back Buck's pass on a line, with zooming effect. Now he saw it again. He saw the elbow bend, the ball shoot from the ear . . .

"I've played some in the backfield. I'd rather be an end."

The pass went far downfield. Moe Taxco was loping. Startled, the Techs were giving chase. Moe took a sneak look. His face was no longer sullen, determined. The last beam of sunlight on that cold afternoon caught a glint of teeth, a smile of happiness as he lovingly reached out and caught the ball and ran unmolested over the last, double-barrelled, white line of lime.

That was all . . . after Buck had converted to make it 7 to 0.

**B**EHIND THE GRANDSTAND the two men waited in the lee of an abutment. Harry Payne had changed swiftly; Fred Macedon's overcoat was turned up about his red ears. They set their jaws and waited.

The girl's voice said steadily, "You sold him out all the way, Micky Hale. Harry got onto you quickly enough. You weren't coaching the ends . . . Harry gained their confidence and tipped them off on things. You ratted all the way."

"You were spyin' on me," grated Micky Hale. "You were just goin' with me to spy on me. I oughta grab you by the throat . . ."

"That wasn't true at first," said the girl slowly. "I thought you were a pretty nice guy. Then I got to know you. Then I got to know Harry—and Fred."

Micky growled, "And you know too damned much about football, too . . ."

"Oh, don't be silly," she said almost wearily. "Harry Payne and I grew up in Payneville. Everyone in Payneville knows football. Why, couldn't you see Harry playing like Bill Hewitt used to? We ran pictures of Hewitt, of all the great ones, when we were in high school. Go away, Micky. You just don't know anything."

The two men came padding into view. Macedon said, "Yes, go away, Micky. And take this souvenir with you."

He was a little rusty, but it was a nice, winking right. It knocked Micky clean around the corner, into the wind which was beginning to howl as though in celebration of Mordaunt's stunning victory.

The Coach said, "It's about time I contributed something . . . What I don't understand, though, is where and how you got to be able to coach without coaching, instill confidence without words . . . the things only an adult should know, after learning the hard way."

Moira was leaning against the slight figure of the YoYo Kid. She said, "Oh, you don't know about Harry's war record . . .

Lawzy me, Harry, he thinks you're a school kid. You look such a baby!"

Harry said diffidently, "I guess I never did fill out that card, Coach . . . You see, I was on Tarawa. Got wounded there, but stayed in the Marines. I played a little, coached a little—teams you never heard of, in the Pacific. It made me strong again, except for this little limp. I used to be right fast, Coach."

"Used to be!" Macedon stared at the couple. Moira was openly holding the Kid's hand. He felt a little stab of pain, but he never lost his smile. He said, "I couldn't have saved my job without you two. I can't thank you enough. I know Payneville, all right. I know what a football town it is."

"My uncle started it," said Harry mildly. "He 'bout owns the place, the old rascal . . . Used to play with the Stahleys, you know . . . Mostly it's a pro-crazy town . . ."

Moira said, "Even the girls diagram new plays . . . It's nauseating in some ways. I revolted and got out . . . But Harry's so nice . . ."

Macedon said, "Say . . . how old are you, anyway, Harry?" He couldn't get over it—the YoYo Kid, on bloody Tarawa, 1941.

"Twenty-six," said Payne, almost guiltily. "I had a little bulge on the kids, didn't I? But we had a good season, Coach. And you'll be back and Mordaunt'll be better off, having you."

For a moment they were very close together, the three of them. It was a warm moment, and Macedon knew instinctively that he had gained a pair of friends and allies he could never quite lose.

Maybe, he told himself, that was better than having a red-haired girl. Notorious for their hasty tempers, red-heads, he had always heard.

But as they turned to rejoin the team for the big celebration he could not quite make himself believe it . . .



# DESTINY BACK

By **TED ROEMER**

When the ground-hopping *Flyers* met the high-buzzing *Comets*, only a magic-cleat miracle could save big-talkin' Nick Randig from choking on his red-hot pre-game prophecies . . .

**T**HE BLEAK NOVEMBER SUN-light that had crept across the floor of the hotel room all morning finally touched Nick Randig's face and he awakened.

Memory, a little fuzzily, a little reluctantly, came back to him. There had been a banquet. He, as a one-time Farrell University football "great", had been there . . .

He winced and sat up, murmuring to himself:

"Randig, you wonderful bum. The first time off the wagon for twelve months and you pick a Farrell alumni banquet. With Steve Lacy there! And Joe Thomas! And all of Farrell. Randig, you wonderful, brainless sap."

He closed his eyes.

He had come to town with his team, the professional *Flyers*, for their final game with the first-place *Comets* Sunday. The town was also the home of Farrell University, and Joe Thomas, big wheel of the Farrell U alumni, thought it a fine stunt to invite the greatest blocker Farrell had ever known—Nick Randig—seeing as he was in town. He invited him to the pre-lanyard banquet.

And Nick thought it a fine gesture also, in spite of the fact they'd chosen Steve Lacy over him for the freshman coaching job six years ago. His blocking had made Lacy famous.

And so he had gone, closing his eyes to the knowledge that he was on his last legs with a last-place outfit like the *Flyers*. He had gone brightly and manly, in a rented tux and with a borrowed sawbuck in his jeans.

They'd asked him for a speech he re-



membered, and he'd gotten up with the old bravado and spouted the college fight stuff with some funny quips larded between at which he'd always been good, and he'd gotten a great hand. But he couldn't recall what he'd said.

However, one person on his left had laughed and he hadn't thought it a complimentary laugh. But he was quite sure it wasn't Steve Lacy.

He swung his feet to the carpeted hotel floor and held his great, burly head almost in self pity. He'd made a fool of himself. He'd tried to wear the cloak of success for just one night before old-time buddies and . . .

The hotel door opened. Bob Zotalis walked in. Zotalis did the blocking for him on the Flyers.

"Hullo, palsy. Big party?"

"So-so." Nick stood up. A heavy, thickening man stared back at him from the mirror. Grey eyes, slightly rimmed with red. Tousled, black hair. With that eyescar, he thought, it makes my head look like a meat block. He scowled at his image in the mirror.

"What do you want?" he snapped at Zotalis.

Zotalis grinned. "My ten bucks. You borrowed 'em last night."

Nick looked at his torso. It looked wide and flabby, like hogmeat, and his strange irritation increased. "I'll pay you back Wednesday." He wished Zotalis would go. The guy reeked of cigar smoke and he hated cigar smell. It made him sick now. He wouldn't be much good Sunday unless he got a lot of fresh air, and Pat Rice would cuss plenty. Their last game and a shellacking for sure.

Nick dressed slowly forgetting Zotalis who had lighted another cigar. Three years ago when Pat Rice had hired him, he'd been pretty good. He was big and still fairly fast. He'd won plenty of games for the Flyers. Then he'd hurt the shoulder. He hadn't been so good last year. That's when he'd made the bad investment in a string of oil stations. Later he'd worked in one of his busted stations. He'd tried night school, picking up the threads of his old law course, which he'd never finished at Farrell. He'd gotten sore when Lacy

had been picked over him. He shouldn't have quit school.

He lathered the black stubble on his face, trying to remember what he'd said last night that had drawn the applause, and also the nasty laugh. He tried to forget that the Flyers were no good and neither was Nick Randig any more. He felt punk.

He heard Zotalis chuckle behind him. "I've rented me a car. I'm going out to the Grid Bar. Want along?"

In the mirror Nick saw Zotalis' big, white teeth. They showed in the scarred face like hunks of white paste. Two were broken. Zotalis also was at the end of his football career. But Zotalis never had anything to begin with. He was straight from a coal mine.

The vague irritation again struck Nick. "No," he said shortly.

"Air will do you good," Zotalis said. He laughed.

Nick shrugged. He knew why Zotalis laughed. Zotalis had met a girl out there the last time the Flyers had played this town; she worked at the Grid Bar. Zotalis was funny. Played the horses, blew his dough, took terrific punishment every Sunday, and now, at the end of the trail, and broke, had fallen for a girl. But the girl made him happy. He was laughing.

And suddenly Nick remembered the grey-eyed kid he'd met in Moline where they'd played an exhibition game this fall. She was a senior at the Teacher College in Moline; her father owned a foundry in the town and was on the college board. He'd said they were looking for a new football coach . . .

Nick shaved with thoughtful motions and Zotalis lay on the bed, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling. And each man had his thoughts.

**F**IFTEEN MINUTES LATER they rolled down Suburban Avenue. Nick wondered if it were hatred in his heart for this familiar, tree-lined street. Surely he had no love for Farrell. He wished now that he hadn't accepted Joe Thomas' invitation last night. Now he was sure it had been Steve Lacy who'd laughed at what he'd said.

Zotalis stopped the rented car and they went inside the tavern, but the girl Zotalis had met was not on duty. She would be there at twelve, if she hadn't quit. She'd said something about quitting. Why, the proprietor didn't know. He was in ill humor.

They sat down to wait. Zotalis grew morbid. He ordered a steak and ate it. Nick just sat, twirling his water glass thoughtfully, and listening to the talk swirling around them. It was about Steve Lacy's undefeated season so far and the game this afternoon. The tavern was in the shadow of the campus. And, closing his eyes, Nick found it wasn't hard to go back six years. Six years . . .

He heard the booming sounds, the blare of trumpets, the shrill of whistles. They came from that great pile of brick and stone. He heard the cheers. He was the runner in those days, his sophomore year. Then Lacy, a transfer, had come along. Lacy, faster shiftier and the coach had made Nick Randig into a blocker a fast, hard-hitting blocker for the fast, shifty Steve Lacy. And both men had hated each other. And Nick had built fame for Steve Lacy.

And then the final year, the big year in which Farrell had paid off the stadium mortgage and its football team had gone to the Rose Bowl—they had given Steve Lacy the frosh coaching job even before he'd gotten out of college. And they'd given Nick Randig—nothing.

Nick twirled the water glass. The movement hurt his shoulder. He opened his eyes. It was after twelve.

"Shall we roll, palsy?" he asked Zotalis.

The big guy swung to his feet. His eyes were tight with disappointment. He pulled his big shoulders silently into topcoat. The two pro football men left the college crowd.

Driving down the avenue Zotalis finally said, "Pat Rice says signal practice this afternoon."

Nick said, "Don't you know her address?"

Zotalis said, "I'm not going to practice either."

Nick, with gloved hand, fumbled with

the broken radio. He felt for the guy. Zotalis had no education, had never known the finer things of life. He'd taken his fun in big, raw hunks, and girls—nice girls—hadn't been a part of it. And now when he'd thought he had something—But then maybe she had forgotten Zotalis had written that he'd be in town this afternoon and at the tavern at twelve. Nick hoped it was that way.

The car got caught in the football crowd stadium-bound, and Zotalis began cursing at the snail-like pace. Nick tried to ease his feelings.

"What's eating you, Bob? You aren't going anywhere. Not, at least, if Pat Rice gets his big paws on you." He forced a chuckle.

Zotalis' heavy, Slavic face twitched. "Bah! You like this creeping along? Maybe you like this school that spat on you."

"It wasn't the school."

"The athletic board. Same thing. Bah!"

The thought, for the first time, brought out another thought clearly. He opened the car door. "See you later, Zotalis." And he stepped out.

"Hey—" Zotalis yelled, but the thick stream of traffic pushed his car onward. Nick waved a big hand, then through a quick opening he leaped and made the curb. Today was Steve Lacy's day, a time Lacy had to show his stuff. Tomorrow it would be his turn. His heavy face showed new satisfaction. There was an air of power and sureness to his movements. He entered the stream of gay and excited people hurrying to Farrell Stadium.

**H**E LOOKED DOWN from his seat high up next to the rampart, and he never thought the place had looked like this. The pattern lay down there, the two squads, one red, the other blue. The scarlet band from Farrell marched and played; the Lanyard band answered. Everybody cheered. The college spirit. And Nick got the feeling that this was the stuff of which his speech had been last night, but now he wasn't stirred. He leaned forward and his grey eyes, no longer red-rimmed, were suddenly very keen. The first teams of both schools had come out down there, and you learn things in four years of pro slug-

ging, things to watch for in a football team.

In two minutes he had them tabbed. Lacy's team was bigger, faster; it deployed in fake plays with dash and cockiness. They were good; they knew it, but—Nick chewed his lip thoughtfully.

Lanyard was smaller; they used a close-up formation; their knotty, hard, blue figures spun and moved with a fixed intensity. Nick's wide mouth corners hooked down with new thought.

Lanyard kicked off to Farrell. A tall, willowy Farrell back plucked the ball from the sunshine with one-handed grace and was moving behind his red screen. Nick stiffened. It could have been Steve Lacy down there.

The graceful runner got to the thirty, lost his blockers and blue men rolled over him. The stadium was in an uproar, and a burly man punched Nick in the back.

"Wow! Wasn't that some going by Brown? Say, these kids got it this year. And he isn't the only one. We've got Koski, Mullen and Batson down there. All three ace ball carriers."

Nick nodded quietly, hat pulled low over his eyes. He wondered if what he'd guessed were true of Lacy's team. A few more plays would tell him.

The Farrell team whipped into their single-back formation. The man next to Nick said, patronizingly, "Watch it this time, friend. I know Lacy's strategy. Brown will fake and that fast Koski will run the opposite end. Watch it."

The man was right. The blue team also guessed it, fanning to drive the speedster to cover. But Koski was too fast for them. He made six yards around. It was second and four. Nick's companion chuckled.

"I told you. Now he'll mix 'em. Lacy calls all signals from the bench. He's got four of his fastest babies in there."

Nick grimaced. So Lacy was a quarterback-coach. Nick didn't like that stuff. He was of the old school—let the men on the field play the game. If they weren't smart enough to win it themselves after being coached all week, they didn't belong out there.

But knowing Steve Lacy, Nick understood. Play it crafty, the surer way. Nick

spat slowly to the cement floor between his feet.

Another first down and Nick was wetting his lips slowly. Maybe he was wrong—the kids were excited, missing those blocking assignments. After their speed and whirlwind tactics wore down, then they'd pick up their fundamentals. And so Nick Randig, the pro ball carrier for the lowly Flyers, hunched with chin in thick hands and watched while everyone about him went gently nuts as Steve Lacy's varsity ran over a touchdown in four minutes flat.

"Six to nothing!" the man next to him shouted. "In less than four minutes. Wow! What a score this will be!"

Nick again spat slowly to the cement floor, then watched the Lanyard team, unexcited, lining up to receive. And he wanted to say to the man, "It might be a high score, mister, but my bottom dollar says it won't be in Farrell's favor."

The kick-off came down to the blue team. The Lanyard quarterback was giving orders to his blockers even while the ball was coming down to him. Nick stiff-end to watch. The Lanyard quarter ran it back to the thirty two. Two smashes at the line gave them eight yards, then the quarter dropped back to kick.

The fullback, instead, took it around left end for fifteen yards. Blocking had done it.

The man beside Nick snorted. "Luck. Fool luck. The guy gambled and won."

But Nick knew the quarterback hadn't gambled. The man knew his team. And with that seeming break, Lanyard began hacking out three and four-yard gains with ruthless dispatch. A fumble on the Farrell twenty halted the march.

Steve Lacy sent out an entire new team.

"Now we go! Now we get 'em! We got fresh blood," the man beside Nick cooed.

But Lacy's second team, fast as they were, couldn't break loose. They punted on third down, and beginning the second quarter Lanyard scored.

They scored again ten minutes later, after Farrell had threatened three times with dazzling runs and thrusts, and the half ended with Nick's companion cursing.

"Fourteen to seven! What luck they had. What stinky, lucky luck. But we'll get 'em next half."

But Nick got up. He'd seen all he'd wanted. And he wondered how Lacy's three fast, exceedingly clever teams had come through the season this far without a defeat. Every man was a runner. There wasn't a blocker on the team. And that, Nick decided, was Steve Lacy all over.

**O**UTSIDE THE GIANT, noisy stadium, that meant nothing to him now, he looked for Zotalis, walking even back to the Grid Bar tavern, but the big blocking half was gone. Ruffling up his coat collar against the chill breeze he moved along Suburban Avenue for downtown, wondering how tough Pat Rice would be on him and Zotalis for chucking final practice. And Kormer wouldn't like it. And the beady-eyed quarterback could be nasty. And Big Red Smith would be dour and so would Stewart—

Nick shrugged his big, sloping shoulders. Today had been Steve Lacy's day for football; tomorrow would be his. What the hell if it would be his last one.

He was entering the hotel when a familiar voice called thickly, "Palsy. Wait up," and turning he saw Zotalis come across the street on thick, weaving legs.

Nick stiffened. Zotalis had been drinking! And the guy never touched a drop. Horses, cards, gambling, anything but liquor, but this time—

"She two-timed me palsy. I knew her name. I traced down where she lived. She was married. Look, I gave the guy some knuckles." He showed his big white teeth from his leathery foreign face and lifted his right fist that displayed scratches. There was a bruise under Zotalis' left eye. Zotalis grinned. It was a twisted thing.

Nick thought, *the guy's busted up inside. A girl promises to wait for him then flips her skirt. Maybe the kid should have slapped her down instead of tagging the guy.*

Out loud he said, "Shut up and I'll help you get to your room before Pat Rice sees you."

But they weren't lucky. Halfway up the side stair, a voice came from the lobby.

"Go right on up, Zotalis, if you can make it without falling on that ugly face. Randig, you come here. I've been waiting for you two." The voice was devoid of all feeling.

Nick turned. Then he was surprised to see a second man beside the giant, grey-haired Pat Rice, coach of the Flyers. The second man was Joe Thomas, fat, chubby little Joe, black cigar and all. The man behind the power of the Farrell alumni.

Nick came down slowly shooting glances from Rice to Thomas. He was puzzled.

Rice spoke first. The anger that he'd pressed from his voice the first time now came out in blurred accents. It whirled in his wrinkled slate eyes.

"This is the end, Randig. I don't blame Zotalis too much; he was at the end of his football playing days and he knew it, but with you it was different. You had a chance to hang on, make something good for yourself in the game . . ."

A radio was blaring out a sports program. Nick caught the Farrell-Lanyard final. It was 30-13, Lanyard. And Pat Rice kept on talking.

Nick felt quick anger. "Can it, Pat. You didn't carry me because I was a cousin. You carried me on the Flyer payroll because I could still deliver a six-pointer now and then in the clutch. The same goes for Zotalis. Today he's got a reason to be drunk. As for myself, I haven't touched a drop today, in spite of what Thomas there might say. Okey, the end, you say. Then cut the damn'd preaching. G'night." He turned on the stair and went up. He could taste his anger.

**T**HE BRIGHTNESS of yesterday had gone from the world. Nick dressed on a bench in the grey gloom of the visitors' locker room. Kormer, the bald-headed, veteran quarterback who knew only love for a dollar bill, looked at him with sullen, grey eyes. Big Red Smith and Cram Stewart, who completed the backfield, had only ugly silence for him. He'd cut final practice. The Flyers had the slimmest of chances of making a game of it today and bettering their bargaining powers with the owners for next year contracts, and Nick Dayton and Zotalis had

pared those chances still more.

Zotalis, a third-string blocker, hadn't even showed up.

They were almost in togs when the Polish kid showed up. His face was pale; the whisker-stubble like a swipe of black paint across his jaw.

Pat Rice looked across once, then went on talking to Kormer. The rest of the squad finished tucking in white jerseys. The silence was unbroken.

They were all dressed. Pat Rice walked in front of them. "The writers say you haven't a chance. There's a lot of people sidin' with them. You guys want to make a liar of them?" He looked bleakly at them. And Nick knew what Pat Rice felt.

But shaggy Pat Rice said no more. He jerked his thumb and Kormer snapped, "Let's go."

Rice came to the bench after the preliminaries. "You're starting, Randig." Nick stared. He'd thought young Hill, the Flyers' speed merchant, would surely get the starting nod. Then he shrugged. Rice wanted him to take the edge off the Comets. Then Hill would have a better chance. Rice thought Nick Randig deserved getting his brains scrambled. Well, maybe he would. Nick jogged out.

Kormer looked at him, spat in his capable hands. Nick fitted himself into the left half's spot and the white-jerseyed pros spread out to receive. Up-field the Comets, in their blue and gold-spangled shirts, moved out confidently.

Nick took the ball out of the grey overhead with an easy, running catch—he'd go good, he knew, while his legs and shoulder held up—and he swung into the pocket behind Kormer, Big Red Smith and Stewart.

Kormer took the first blue runner. According to play, Smith and Stewart feinted to the long side then cut sharply, and all three white-shirts were racing for the open side line.

It almost worked. But on the thirty-five a blue jersey sliced over Cram Stewart's rolling Indian block. A big hand slapped Nick's right cleats. He went forward on his nose, two Comets hitting him solid.

The two blue-shirts got up, grinning. "Hurts, old-timer, does it?"

Nick grunted. "Let's play ball." They were kids; they didn't mean it. They'd learn. He wished, however, that Big Red or Stewart had said something back for him.

The game went into its old pattern, that he knew so well through the back years, and they slugged it across the mid-field stripe before Kormer was forced to boot it.

Nick made the tackle when the punt failed to hit the corner. He made it ring. It was Comets', first and ten on their eight.

The battle moved around, and mostly against Nick's outfit. The Comets had the class and speed. Kormer saved two touchdowns with his canny pass defense. On the third, however, they hit. The kick was good. Comets 7—Flyers 0.

The Flyers received and again Nick carried. They hit him with enthusiasm this time, warmed to the battle. Nick's breathing was coming hard. His nose leaked blood. Kormer didn't look toward the bench and in the cold and thin slanting snow the game went on.

Kormer threw him at right tackle. He got three. He whipped around right end for six. A scattering of cheers went up from the Flyers' side. Kormer gambled and flung the man, who once had been one of the greatest collegiate plungers, at the center.

Nick went for two, then down on his face, and the frozen, cleat-sharpened turf ripped at his jaw.

But there was an off-side, and the first down was not good, and Kormer kicked.

The high-class pro boys across the line swung into high gear then. They ripped out three firsts. On third and five in Flyer territory, Jorgens, the Comets' big gun, came through the line at Nick.

Nick launched his big body, blocking the hole. He met Jorgens' power full-on. Cold shock stunned him. By instinct he grasped, got the man's head and slammed him to earth. Jorgens fumbled. Red Smith fell on the ball.

The cheer strengthened from the Flyers' side. Halfway through the second quarter and the score only 7-0 against them. Their team was making it a fight, at least.

But that play had done Nick. He knew it. He felt something go in his shoulder. His legs were still good, but the torn muscles in the shoulder . . . Nick gritted his teeth and kept plugging the holes with his good side, and after a while Jorgens and the entire Comets' backfield had a thin-eyed respect for the big, bloody man at the Flyers' left half position.

Passes put the Comets downfield in four plays. In two more they'd scored. On the try for point Nick tried to make the tackle coming around end. He couldn't. And he couldn't get up. He was just gone inside.

Pat Rice sent in fresh backs. Young Hill was among them.

Rice came over; he looked down at Nick on the bench. Then he walked away.

Nick wondered what had been on his tongue.

**T**HE COMETS camped on the Flyers' goal line but failed to score before the half ended. Even the subs thought their Flyers had been lucky.

Rice put Nick back in opening the second half. On the second play a blocking whirlwind took Nick across the middle, another cross-sliced him out of the slot with a shoulder drive, and Neck felt the blackness coming.

He came to with Eddie Kane working over him on the sidelines. The trainer grunted.

"You sure got conked. But I got the shoulder taped. Hurt much?"

Nick said, "Not much. They score?"

"Both did. Big Red did on a fluke. 20-7 now."

Nick looked at the sky. 20-7. Not a bad score. Better than the shellacking the writers had predicted, that is if they could hold them from now on in.

Kormer, Big Red and Stewart were still in there. Pat Rice was sure trying to make a showing. The three big men were trying to spring young Hill loose. Then Nick saw Jorgens and Stewart meet, head-on, and the Flyers' right half folded.

Nick looked to see Bo Watts go out, but was astounded to see Pat Rice jab a finger at Zotalis. The big blocker flung his blanket. His scarred face was inscrutable, but Nick knew he'd give Rice his money's

worth. Zotalis, while he lasted, was a football man.

The wind died away. The snow changed feathery, drifted down. Subs ran out frequently now. The cheers from the crowd faded to long silences. It was a bitter, dreary fight out there and Nick had the vague thought that it was a little like his life—his quitting school, his try at law, his investments that failed, and all the while his going on in football, the game he loved. And now he was at the end of that trail also.

A scattered cheer from the crowd. Nick looked. Zotalis had sure pinned a block on Jorgens that time. Hill had made it a first. Nick watched and saw Zotalis hit Jorgens a second time. The ex-All-American went down and Hill made twelve good yards. The cheer strengthened from the Flyers' side of the field.

Nick sat up and he watched. And a small wonder crept into him at Zotalis' work. The guy was something remarkable to watch. He was a big, rough customer. In life he was a nobody, a guy who yesterday had reached out a blunt finger for one of the finer things of life—the first time for the kid—and he'd gotten burned. He didn't know any better than to get soused the night before the final game when all the Flyers were scrapping for better bread and butter next year. Nick thought, he, himself, hadn't known much better the night before.

But now that the boss had called, Zotalis had gotten up and in spite of feeling like hell and knowing the squad hated him, he'd gone out and was doing as good a job as he could for the while he lasted. He was taking everything this side of hell from those Comets. He was doing it for no thanks at all.

Nick sat up amongst his blankets with the strange and inscrutable wonder of it, and he watched Zotalis.

The ball was on the Flyer's 45. Kormer called a delayed smash, Hill carrying. Zotalis hit the tackle spot and the wide, hard man was moving. Hill came through the slit, timed to the split second. Zotalis cut for Jorgens to make the center alley clear for Hill while Kormer came around for the quarter.

Jorgens read danger to his team; Jorgens saw the play. Jorgens set to throw Zotalis and block out Hill. But Zotalis lowered his thick shoulders and went into the man, cutting with a savage, rolling motion. He made contact. And Jorgens found himself without legs.

Hill went through to the Comets' eighteen.

The crowd had awakened now. They were up roaring. The Flyers were making a fight of it. They were rolling. Five yards. Four more! Another first for Hill! On the Comets' seven now. Two yards. One. They were coming harder. The Comets had gotten over their first flurry of panic. They were leading this game, 20-7. They were big, alert pros.

Zotalis led the drive at center and Hill made it to the three-yard marker.

Nick knew pride then. A wide, dark-visaged guy by the name of Bob Zotalis was carrying the load out there. And for why? There was nothing in this for Zotalis. Pat Rice had given him the gate. And then Nick knew the answer; it was football. It was Zotalis' life. He was having one last fling.

The next moment Zotalis carried Jorgens on a shoulder pad for one brief instant, took fists and legs and a ton of weight before him, then Hill was past and over.

Kormer, the automatic, kicked the point, and the score was 20-14.

The Flyers' side of the field roared with new hope.

The Comets, alarmed, began to hustle. They received. They whipped into their dazzling double-wing formation, running their plays like fire. Their fire back-fired. Jorgens fumbled. Zotalis recovered. Jorgens was out on his feet. They led him off the field. This was the tough game, the money game. And Zotalis was getting in his last two-bits of it. Nick saw him wet his bloody lips.

There was a punt at mid-field. Every Flyers' backfield man was in on it. It was a convention, a rough convention, and when they started to un-pile, Nick held his breath. Kormer was getting up, Zotalis, the man in for Stewart—

Nick came to his feet. Big Red Smith

was down. Nick moved over to Pat Rice, swiftly.

"How about a go at Smith's spot?"

Rice's lips twisted. It wasn't humor; it was pressure. This game meant a lot as to how well Pat Rice was to eat next year.

Rice snapped, "We've got a runner in there—a good runner."

"The'll with running. You need a blocker."

"You mean—" Rice looked at the field. They were leading Smith off. He said slowly, "It takes a big, tough man—"

It was all Nick needed; he scooped a helmet and ran.

He didn't know why he was doing it. Somehow the thought of Bob Zotalis fired him. Somehow he wanted to be in there with the guy. He knew how Zotalis felt. A piece of that was in his heart also.

He said to himself, "You're going to get your insides mixed this time and good," but aloud he said to the umpire, "Randig for Smith."

**T**HE FLYERS looked at him with dull amazement. And Zotalis also couldn't comprehend. Nick knew he wouldn't. None of them would. He couldn't himself. And then Kormer was rasping out signals in his choicest sneering manner.

They worked side by side, he and Zotalis. Kormer gave the plays. Hill did the running. And he and Zotalis did the horse-work.

Nick felt the dull blows. He felt the earth come up and rock him. The sod was sharp with cleat marks. It was frozen to a saw-like edge. He and Zotalis rolled and scrambled over it. They pounded down blue jerseys before them. Pounded and ran. Ran and fell.

On the fifteen Kormer called 86. Nick hit the tackle and Zotalis took the half. Nick duplicated Zotalis' fine play earlier in the half by clearing a hole through tackle, but he stumbled in reaching for the full. The Comet fullback lunged into the hole. And then Nick had a fleeting glimpse of a white jersey taking out the blue and gold man with a magnificent hip-block, and the dark, saturnine visage of Zotalis flashed above him.

Hill ripped through and Zotalis went on

and rolled out the half.

A second later Nick heard the crowd roar. Hill had gone over. 20-20.

They lined up for the important kick, and Kormer, the guy with no feeling, missed it.

A bleeding linesman cursed with bone-deep bitterness in the brief silence. It was Zotalis who said, "This is it—unless we fight. We've still got three minutes."

Nick looked to Kormer. The money-hungry quarterback's face was washed grey. There was only one man on that field at that time in white jersey. It wasn't Kormer.

The three minutes were three hours to Nick. The Comets had the ball. The Flyers couldn't get it away from them. The champions were blazing passes to all corners, criss-crossing the murky skies, screening them, protecting them and trying their mightiest to score.

Nick saw a pass come into his territory. Frantically he leaped above the blue and gold about him. But his lunge was too early. A Comet was closing on the ball. A second Flyer in a jersey that once had been white and whole, sprang up. He and Nick both batted at the ball, desperately. The whistle sounded, then a gun and Nick felt Zotalis grab him and hold him up.

"Whatcha trying to do, palsy? Knock me out?" Zotalis gripped him hard and friendly. And the aches were gone from Nick, even from his shoulder. The two of them had made it a game.

They walked off. Nick, somehow, was not surprised to see fat Joe Thomas standing with his cigar beside Pat Rice. The rest of the Flyers were trooping toward the ramp. Zotalis walked toward the stack of windbreakers but Nick stopped.

"Randig," Pat Rice said. "Come here."

Nick didn't move. Zotalis tossed him a windbreaker.

It was Rice who walked forward. "Thomas has been telling me things. Some of it is about what you said at the Farrell banquet Friday night."

Nick widened his eyes. Rice went on.

"Seems like you made some sort of boast—something about that the Flyers would win this game. You, personally, would see to that."

Nick blinked. So that was it. His fast tongue really had had a field day.

"It also seems," Rice continued, "that you gave the boys a pretty good talk. Thomas says you've got a way with you, talking to alumni. And you know what you're talking about, especially when it's about the job you're best at—blocking. You gave them both barrels, and it seems you hit a sore spot. Thomas says Lacy's teams haven't got it."

"It's this, Nick," Joe Thomas blurted, stabbing with his cigar. "We know Lacy's a smart coach, but we need a good back-field man who can teach blocking. We want you. You'll work under Lacy, but . . ."

Nick looked at the king-pin of the Farrell alumni, ripping off a flock of enticing facts about salary, living quarters, and easy hours, then he saw Zotalis waiting, listening. Again he heard a low, derisive laugh coming out of his memory. His distaste for Steve Lacy came up hard against his teeth. He said,

"Thanks, Joe. I saw what your team lacked yesterday, and I felt sorry for them. But about helping them—" He shook his head. "Yesterday was his day. Today was mine. You'll have to find another guy to teach your boys how to block."

He turned to the astounded Pat Rice. "Thanks, Pat, for the chance at this wind-up. Slip an extra century into Zotalis' final envelope. He really made this game for you—if you don't know it."

He pulled the windbreaker around his shoulder and walked off with Zotalis. He wondered how the guy would fit in as assistant at Moline Teachers. Or maybe how they'd both like working in a foundry. He wondered how his try for his girl would turn out.

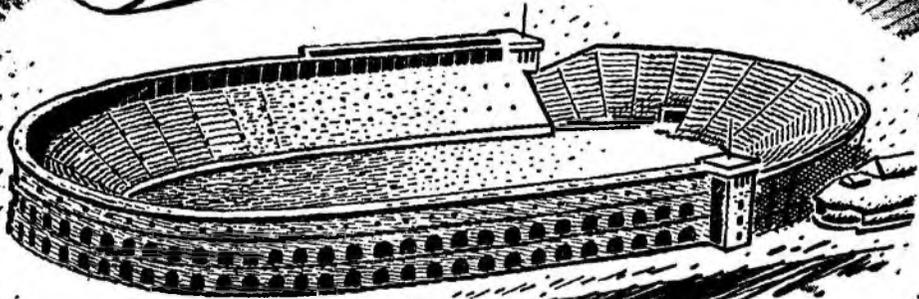
# Famous Football Firsts!

WALTER CAMP'S FIRST ALL-AMERICA TEAM--1889

... ..  
 END .. CUMNOCK .. HARVARD  
 TACKLE .. COWAN .. PRINCETON  
 GUARD .. CRANSTON .. HARVARD  
 CENTER .. GEORGE .. PRINCETON  
 GUARD .. HEFFELFINGER .. YALE  
 TACKLE .. GILL .. YALE  
 END .. STAGG .. YALE  
 QUARTERBACK .. POE .. PRINCETON  
 HALFBACK .. LEE .. HARVARD  
 HALFBACK .. CHANNING .. PRINCETON  
 FULLBACK .. AMES .. PRINCETON

WALTER GALLI

The FIRST GAME OF NIGHT FOOTBALL WAS PLAYED IN LOS ANGELES ON THE NIGHT OF NOVEMBER 25, 1905!  
 ... BETWEEN THE UNIV. OF ARIZONA AND ST. VINCENT'S COLLEGE ...



## HARVARD STADIUM

WAS THE FIRST FOOTBALL STADIUM ERECTED IN AMERICA

... IT WAS DEDICATED ON NOVEMBER 14, 1903 ...



ACCORDING TO THE BOOKS--THE FIRST FORWARD PASS IN FOOTBALL HISTORY WAS THROWN BY MOORE OF WESLEYAN--AGAINST YALE!... 1906

# THE GOLD CLEAT KID

By ADD ARETZ

A Midas of the gridiron was jolting Al Watson, six-point tycoon of the glory writing Condors. Every pigskin he touched was earmarked for end-zone investment, and every touchdown he scored put more damning dollars in his ever-growing bank account.



**A**L WATSON, CROUCHED ready in his backer-up slot, lifted his eyes off the visiting Stags' huddle and glanced again at the big clock atop the stadium wall. Ten more minutes. A shadow of a smile flashed over his face. Ten more minutes in the maroon and gray of the Pro League Condors. Ten more minutes of walking alone and then . . .

But the Stags, with their 14 to 9 edge, were deep on the twenty-one, driving towards the score that would bump the Condors out of that play-off spot. Al rubbed his hands dry, alerted himself for action. Even if it was for only ten minutes more he *was* still a Condor.

The orange-clad visitors spun confidently out of their huddle and dropped into a double wing. With a second and four it could be a quick opener or a reverse. Al didn't think so. The Stags had just completed three successive passes and he had a hunch they'd flip it again.

"Flat pass, Peep! Flat pass!" he called as he faded for five steps.

It was meant for Peep Yaschuk, his line-backing partner on his right, but the big center wasn't hearing Al Watson. He ignored the warning and stayed close.

And the pass came, deep into the unprotected acres behind Peep. Al vacated his own territory and raced over to cover.

Snebold, the Stags' long-fingered left end, was already in the air when Al reached him. He went up, got a hand on the pig-skin and shoved it clear of Snebold's grasp. He trotted back to position unmindful of the silence coming from his teammates.

The Stags lined up quickly and behind a wedge of blockers, Abe Nixon, their fullback, stormed the Condors' right side. The maroon line crumpled and the orange horde broke through into the clear. Al slipped his block, roared in for a try at the ball carrier, then seeing Hump Slattery rushing up from his halfback post, he forgot Nixon and went after his guardians instead. If he cleared the path, Hump would handle Nixon. He dove headlong into the flying cleats, spilled one pair with his hip, then a rolling block on the remaining two Stags and Nixon was running alone. As he went down, the sharp spat of leather against leather told Al that Hump had arrived. And in time. Nixon got two, maybe three, no more.

He pushed himself off the sod and the smile on his lips vanished. Norm Appel and Willy Holsinger, left and right end, respectively, were hauling Slattery to his feet, affectionately hammering the rugged veteran's broad back.

"That's chillin' 'em paly," Appel laughed.

Other Condors crowded around Slattery, thumped his back, slapped his pants.

"Humpty the dumpster!"

"Chalk one up for Hump!"

Al wanted to laugh but after eight years with the Condors there was too little left to be wasted. He trotted back to position, thinking about it.

"Chalk one up for Hump!"

"Chalk one up for Peep!"

Chalk one up for everyone. Everyone but Al Watson. It was not a nice thing. Not at all as he had dreamed it would be. No bull sessions, no pinochle, no off-season visits. Seldom a spoken word, never a friendly one. You did your job on the field, then went your way. Alone. You kept wondering why it had to be, when knowing why, only deepened the wound.

He had come off an Ohio farm a shy, awkward kid. Two years of All-American fullbacking at State had cured the awkwardness, but some of the shyness still

remained. Would no doubt always be there.

In the player draft he had been the first choice of the Federal League Philadelphia Condors; the first choice of the rival National Conference Columbus Caps. He wanted to sign with the Caps. It was his home team. He had met most of the Cap players, knew some of them personally, and until now the Federal League was just something you read about in the papers.

But there was Mom and Dad and the kids to think about. The Caps offered him five thousand to sign, the Condors fifteen. To an Ohio truck farmer, that ten thousand dollars was ten million.

HE FLEW EAST amidst much hubbub and signed with the Condors. Al Watson was the catch of the year; the Heisman Award winner. The Condors were happy to have him; the League overjoyed. They had scooped that upstart Conference. There was handshaking, pictures to be taken, toasts to be drunk. The Condor fans, the League supporters, deserved a statement from their new star.

Al talked. He talked about the thing he knew best. The Columbus Caps and football as played in the National Conference. But what about the Condors? And the League? Al didn't know. He *guessed* they played good ball, too.

In the cold black print of the headlines it didn't at all look as it had sounded. Al Watson was a wise guy, a snob. He was too good for everything in the League but the dough they paid. He should go play for his beloved Conference.

Only one man understood. And when the Condors gathered at their summer camp, that man, Condor owner C. J. Rickard, attempted to put his players straight. It didn't come off. His plea only succeeded in making things worse. Al Watson was not only a snob, he was a cry baby too.

He also proved, that first season, to be Mr. Fullback. Nothing the League nor the Conference had to offer came close. It salved his teammates wounds and in time would have healed them completely. But

that year the heads of the League and the Conference finally bowed to the will of the masses and decided to play this game together instead of apart. In that momentous World Series, between the two professional league champions, it was the Condors against the Caps.

Al went into the game realizing what a convincing win for his team would do for him. He went out and tried to get it for them. He tried too hard. That Sunday afternoon Al Watson played the one bad game of his career. There was no doubt now as to where his heart lay. After that 28 to 7 thumping his teammates let him strictly alone.

The Stags lined up and their placement specialist Les Strub, dropped back. They were going after the three points.

Al moved in close behind his line, slapped Maxie Cousin's wide rump. "Clear the path, Maxie!" he gritted. "Leave Strubie to me!"

If the big tackle opened a way for him, he might get through to the kicker in time.

The brown oval sailed back and Al leaped at the hole he hoped would be there. It was. Maxie had done a job. He dove in but was still three strides away as Strub's foot swung down out of its arc. He leaped high into the air, reaching there for one fearful moment, feeling nothing. Then something hard stung his palms. He snatched at it and crumpled to the ground. The ball was pressing tight into his middle. It felt very fine.

He hurried back to the huddle grinning. There was still time. Seven minutes.

"We've loafed long enough," he said. "Let's move. What say?"

No one answered. Quarterback Mike DePerna sent Maurie Lowe through left tackle for three, then took Yaschuk's snap and faded to pass. Al dropped back to protect. He spilled the Stags' charging right end with his shoulder, then two more orange-shirts came rushing at Mike. Al lit into them. As he went down, in a welter of arms and legs, he heard the massive roar of the crowd, then sudden silence followed by a desperate groan.

He scrambled to his feet in time to see Norm Appel, the intended receiver, chase

a flying orange-clad out of bounds on the mid-field stripe. The Stags had intercepted.

Al trotted up to position cracking his hands together.

"Lotta time, gang! Lotta time!" he shouted. "Make 'em get rid of it!"

His dejected teammates eyed him suspiciously and he knew why. Coming from Al Watson, this constant chatter was an innovation. After eight silent years, they thought there were no words in him. They were there all right. Volumes of them. He kept them to himself only because he knew these Condors wanted it that way. But right now they needed a lift. If his tongue could do it, fine. If it couldn't, nothing lost.

"They're coming at ya, Truck! Chop 'em down!" he called to Truck Thomas, the Condors' box-car right tackle.

**T**HE STAGS did come at Truck and he chopped them down. It was second and nine. A drive at right guard failed to gain, then Al jammed through to foul an attempted lateral and the Stags were forced to punt. Nixon's high spiral soared out on the Condors' six and the crowd began moving for the exits. The four minutes that remained didn't look like enough.

In the huddle Al said, "Give me a start an' I'll get us out of here. Then we go. What say?"

Mike DePerna threw him a wary look then said, "Ninety-one."

Ninety-one. Al down the middle.

He cradled Peep's soft snapback to his middle and with that long, deceptive stride that was his he dug for the slit. He cannonaded through, then angling hard to his right, he went to the eighteen before three tacklers hauled him down.

He bounced to his feet grinning. "Good!" he chortled. "Now we go!"

In the huddle, Bud Franks studied Al for a long moment, started to speak then shrugged it off. Hump got three at right tackle, then Al made it third and one through the center. Maurie's wide sweep caught the Stags' right terminal in too close, and the slippery right half galloped to the forty-seven. Al banged through for

five, then eight more to the forty and the sagging visitors called time.

When Al joined his teammates sprawled on the fifty he said. "They're shot. Keep plugging and we're in. That play-off will help fill the Christmas stockings."

Hump Slattery grunted. "Who's stockings, Watson?" he growled. "The Conference Bombers?"

"Yeah, boys," Mike laughed bitterly. "Keep plugging into the play-off so Mr. Watson can hand his beloved Conference another title."

Al let them talk. This was only the second time any of them had hinted that he had thrown that Cap game. The first time it happened, he hauled the offenders, Hump and Mike, under the stands and shoved their words down their throats. After that episode, the Condors were very careful in choosing their words in his presence.

But here with only three minutes left, that play-off cut was slipping away. It had them tight, edgy. They needed an outlet to get them back on their game. If they choose to use him, Al was satisfied. Win, lose or draw today, this was his last game as a Condor.

**N**EXT SATURDAY, at two o'clock, in a Columbus court house, a judge would open three envelopes.

Those envelopes contained bids for the insolvent Columbus Caps. One of those envelopes was Al Watson's. The one with the biggest figure inside was his. Of that he was certain. The two other men who were after the Caps, Earl Frew and G. M. Crouch, were business men looking for an investment, not a ball club. As an investment, the Caps were worth only so much. Al's bid was that and much more. He was after a football team. His home town team. It would clean him and there would be tough sledding for a spell, but he'd be back home.

It meant of course that all ties with the League had to be severed. No one person could hold interest in more than one club. Football Commissioner Mathews, Rickard and coach Ben Mitchell had all been very helpful. They understood how it was. He had—

The shrill blast of the timekeeper's horn cut his thoughts.

Mike called his number and he went all the way to the twenty-five. "Keep moving!" he shouted above the din pouring onto the field.

He rammed the center for two, and Lowe, scooting wide, went to the twelve. "This is it," he told them in the huddle.

Lowe carried twice for five, then after hesitating Mike called for Al through the middle.

He took the snap and bolted forward. The hole at center didn't open but between left guard and left tackle a thin strip of daylight was showing. He hit for it. He slithered through between reaching hands and was over with the score that gave them the league pennant. Condors 15 Stags 14.

Joe Logan's placement was wide but nobody minded. The Stags brought the kick-off back to the twenty, threw three futile passes and the ball game was over.

Al took his time going in. For eight years, this field had been home and now it was good-bye.

He stripped unnoticed amidst the hilarity in the dressing room and went in under the shower. He stayed until he heard the last player leave. Then dressing hurriedly, he began stripping his locker.

Ben Mitchell's head popped into the room. "Al, will you come into Rickard's office a minute. We want to see you."

He followed the coach into Rickard's office and the Condor owner waved him to a chair.

"That was a game you played today, Al. Thanks," Rickard said. "I hope we do as well next week without you."

"You will," Al replied. "With Poole in there, I won't be missed."

Mitchell lit a cigarette and taking a chair across from Al said, "Yeah, we hope. But that's what we wanted to see you about, Al. The Bomber game."

Al frowned at the two men. "But—"

Mitchell cleared his throat. "You see, Al—well we figured it this way. Rickard and I, well—"

"What he's trying to tell you is this, Al," Rickard broke in. "We—"

"It was my idea an' I'll tell him," the

coach interrupted irritably. "It's a helluva thing to say, Al, but it's this way. If it's possible we'd like you to stay with the team till next Friday at least. No one but the Commissioner and we three know that you're after the Caps, and the team will think you're still with us. They read the stuff the papers printed about you being after the Caps, but when they see you practicing, they'll figure for sure that was so much hokum. When you don't show on Saturday, I could tell them you jumped the team. Knowing how they feel about you, we figure that will make them sore as hell and they'll go out and trim them Bombers just to spite you. It's a helluva thing, I know, but I think it'll give them the lift we're going to need."

Al leaned back in the leather chair and smiled. It amused him. Mitchell's dilemma and the idea. It was a good one he had to admit, and would work.

He nodded. "Sure, why not. I don't have to be in Columbus till Saturday."

It was the least he could do for these two. He owed them this much and more.

Gratefulness spilled from their eyes. "Fine, Al," Rickard said. "I'll make it worth your while."

"Forget it," said Al, scraping back his chair. Then turning to Mitchell he added, "I'll see ya Monday at practice, Coach."

## II

**T**HE QUAKER CITY bubbled with football the following week. It would be Watson and Lowe on the ground against the Bomber's Monk Moorehead through the air. Mike DePerna's pitching arm was out of this one. The Bombers' vaunted pass defense would render it useless. But the sport boys still liked the Condors. Watson and Lowe would out-score Moorehead by at least one, maybe two touchdowns. So they said.

When Mitchell ran Whitey Poole with the first eleven, the Condors asked no questions. In fact they liked it. Al knew what they were thinking. The first time he flubbed one Saturday, Whitey would be ready to take over.

After Friday's light drill, Al waited until all the players had left the dressing

room before cleaning out his locker, then bidding Rickard and Mitchell good-bye, he lingered for five more minutes, then taxied to the airport and boarded his plane for Columbus.

Sleep came leisurely that night. He was back home and it was good.

Saturday morning he was up at nine, ate a quick breakfast in the hotel Coffee Shop, then went back to his room to watch the clock. The hands dragged. He listened to the radio; tried reading, then hauled out the used notebook that contained the roster of the Caps, and for the thousandth time began his imaginary maneuvering of the squad that would soon be his. The Detroit Comets could use a strong end. If they would swap Granger or Valarik for Ross or say Hurley, that would ease the weak tackle situation. Garrison converted from his blocking back post should fill that hole—A commanding voice from across the room, jerked up his head. It was coming from the radio on the night stand.

**“. . . interrupt this program to bring you a news flash just received from the wires of the Associated Press. Columbus, Ohio: Professional Football Commissioner, H. B. Mathews, announced from his suite in the Statler Hotel this morning, that because of suspected association with known gamblers Maurice 'Maurie' Lowe and George 'Whitey' Poole, members of the Federal League Champion Philadelphia Condors, will be withheld from today's championship game against the New York Bombers. Commissioner Mathews, who is in Columbus to attend the sale of the Columbus Caps, stated that no further action would be taken against the two players until he can personally investigate the matter. For further information keep tuned to this station.**

**"And now to continue our Saturday morning stroll down memory lane. Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians take us back to nineteen twenty--"**

Al stared at the radio, not hearing the music that was coming from it. What sort of nonsense is this? Maurie and Whitey withheld from today's game? Why—

He leaped across the room and snapped off the radio, then snatching up the phone he said, "Get me Commissioner Mathews

at the Hotel Statler."

"Whom shall I say is calling?"

"Watson. Al Watson."

Someone was off the beam here. Maurie and Whitey throw a football game? Ridiculous! If he didn't know either of them too well, he knew that much about them. He had played ball with them hadn't he? And you knew what a man was, from the way he hugged that leather to him, from the way he scrambled after a loose ball. These two loved this game, would do nothing to discredit it. Why they—

"Hello! Watson?" Commissioner Mathews' voice came over the wire.

"Commissioner, that report that just came over the radio? About Poole and Lowe, I mean. That's a mistake isn't it?"

There was a short silence on the line then, "A mistake, Watson? Why no. I—"

"But it is! I know Whitey and Maurie! They wouldn't do—" Al stopped short. He hadn't realized he was shouting into the mouthpiece. "I'm sorry, Commissioner," he went on evenly. "But hearing that—"

"Of course, Watson. Of course," Mathews interrupted soothingly. "I understand. It's a shock to all of us. I was positive we had this thing licked but evidently I was mistaken."

"But there is a mistake," Al insisted. "Whitey and Maurie are good kids. They wouldn't pull a stunt like this. Somebody's framing them."

"Perhaps, Watson. Perhaps." There was another short pause then, "I haven't released the whole story yet, but you were close to the Condors, perhaps you can shed some light on it."

"Yes?"

"Well last night, sometime around eleven, both Poole and Lowe were seen in the Blue Swan, *talking to Lou Camporinii*. Herb Murdock of the Globe, and Ray Walsch of the Mirror were there at the time and saw them. Thank heavens, both men were considerate enough to get in touch with me before printing the story. When we questioned Poole and Lowe they admitted being there.

"Lowe claims he was making the rounds of the taverns and night clubs hoping to locate a brother-in-law of his who had

come down from Boston for the game. It seems that this brother—"

"He's telling the truth!" Al blurted. "I heard Maurie talking about the guy! He was—"

"Yes, I know," Mathews interrupted patiently. "The entire Condor squad substantiated this part of the story. That's the very thing that makes it too pat. Lowe claims that Poole just went along to help out, and when they did locate this fellow he was dead drunk. They said they had some trouble trying to persuade him to leave and a man, whom they thought was a bouncer or the manager, came over and offered to help. They swear they didn't know it was Camporinii. They told Camporinii how it was and he offered to help straighten out the brother-in-law. The three of them took the man into Camporinii's office and were there for forty-five minutes. What went on in there, we don't know. Both men claim that all they did was sober up Lowe's brother-in-law. Knowing Camporinii like we do that part of the story is hard to believe. Particularly so when the Condors are a two to one favorite over the Bombers."

"I believe them!" Al said emphatically. "They're telling the truth."

"I wish I could be as sure as you," the Commissioner answered. "The game can't afford another scandal. I must remain neutral of course but if the Condors can only win today. It will give credence to their—"

"The Condors win without Whitey and Maurie? They don't have a chance."

"Both Murdock and Walsch told me that losing Poole won't hurt too much," Mathews said hopefully. "Of course they don't know that you won't be playing."

"They don't have a chance," Al said more to himself than into the mouthpiece. "And when the Condors get walloped, Whitey and Maurie won't have a chance either."

"I'm sorry, Watson, but if the Condors should lose, it will no doubt mean a suspension. Five years, perhaps life? We simply must impress on all connected with the game that we can't tolerate association with gamblers."

"You're sure there's no chance of them

playing today?" Al asked hopefully.

"None, Watson. Absolutely none," Mathews' voice came over the wire finally.

Al nodded numbly. "Well, thanks, Commissioner. I just wanted to be sure it wasn't a mistake."

"That's all right, Watson. I'll see you at two o'clock then."

THERE was a faint click in his ear and Al slowly set the phone in its cradle. He stood for a long moment, staring at the black instrument, then shrugging, he went back to his notebook. After all this didn't concern him. It would hurt the game, but then professional football was still young. Baseball, hockey, boxing, they had all gone through this. And all had licked it. Pro football would do the same. A lifetime suspension was too dark a stain for a man to carry to his grave.

He leafed through the notebook for five minutes then slammed it shut. It was a tough break for Lowe and Poole. They were still youngsters yet, with plenty of good playing time ahead of them. And it was a mistake. Of that Al was certain.

He glanced at his wrist watch. Ten o'clock. Four hours yet. He tried killing time by reading but it was no go. He couldn't get his mind off Whitey and Maurie. And Rickard and Ben Mitchell? They didn't deserve this either. Both men had worked hard to perfect this team. If any one deserved that championship, these two were it.

He picked up the morning paper and scanned the sport pages. It was laughable, this two touchdown win these writers predicted for the Condors. They were forgetting completely that DePerna's arm would be useless out there today. This game would be won on the ground.

And now with Maurie and Whitey out of it, the Condors were stripped of all their power. It would be brutal.

He glanced again at his watch. Ten fifteen. Even if he did want to do something about it, it was too late. Philadelphia was five hundred miles away. And anyhow he owed these Condors nothing.

He went to the bathroom and washed, shaved, then began dressing for the sale. He'd have a light lunch, then mosey over

to the court house. It wouldn't hurt to be a bit early.

He walked in front of the full length mirror on the bathroom door and tied his blue and white polka dot four-in-hand. It didn't suit him. He untied it and tried again. This business about Maurie and Whitey had him all thumbs.

It was a tough break all right. For all of the Condors. Most of them could use that winner's share, he knew. If he wasn't so far away. A plane might make it. But—

He ripped off his tie and hurrying to the phone he snatched it up.

"Number, please?"

"This is Al Watson again! Get me Commissioner Mathews at the Statler and hurry. It's urgent!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir," a cool voice replied.

Of all the damn fools, he was the biggest. Even if he did get there in time what good would it do without Maurie in there? And the Cap deal? He had waited eight years for—

"Watson? What is it—"

"Commissioner, listen," Al broke in. "Could I still play today? For the Condors, I mean. If I got back in time?"

"Why—but—What are you talking—"

"If I resigned my old contract, or even a new one," Al explained hastily. "Could you approve it so I could play today? Would the whole thing be legal, I mean?"

"Why, yes. You'd be eligible to play. But what—"

"Good! I'm going back then. I'll have to hurry so—"

"Watson, wait!" Mathews interrupted. "Your bid you have in for the Caps? You understand that if you play today for the Condors you'll have to withdraw that."

"Yes, I know. I'm telling you now, I'm withdrawing it."

"You're positive you want to do this, Watson?" the commissioner asked deliberately. "You realize what you're doing?"

"You said a win for the Condors would help clear Poole and Lowe, didn't you?" Al replied impatiently.

"Yes."

"Then I'm going. Maybe I'll get my chance again."

"I hope so, Watson! I hope so!" Ma-

thews declared. "You certainly deserve it. And listen, you'll have to rush so I'll call Rickard and tell him that it's all right to use you. Give you a chance to get on your way."

"Thanks, Commissioner. I'll be seeing you."

"Good luck, Watson. I—"

Al dropped the receiver. There was no more time for talk. Ten forty-five. He had three hours and fifteen minutes to get from Columbus to Philly. It would be close. Very close.

He called the desk. "I have to be in Philadelphia by two o'clock," he told the desk clerk. "Can you tell me if I can get a plane that will get me there in time?"

"Just a moment, sir."

There was a very long two minute pause, then, "I'm sorry, sir. The next plane for Philadelphia doesn't leave until four twenty-five."

"Four twenty-five!"

Al sagged to the chair. *Four twenty-five!* If only he'd have—

"You might try the Airway Field sir," a far away voice said in his ear. "It's a private field and they charter private flights. I can't say—"

"What!" Al shouted, leaping to his feet. "Can you get that airport for me?"

"Yes sir. I can."

"Good! And hurry!" Al said, banging down the receiver.

He hurriedly finished dressing, then slapped his clothes in his bag. Even if he got there in time for the second quarter. Or even the half.

**F**ROM SOMEWHERE up the street, a bell began tolling. Eleven o'clock. Why didn't that guy call? Maybe he should—

The phone on the stand jingled. Al leaped at it, snatched it to his ear.

"Yeah!"

"Is this the guy who wants to fly to Philly?" a cordial voice asked.

"Yes! Can you get me there by two?"

"I think we can. Eddie Heller can take you over in his Stinson. It's sixty dollars, one way. If he has to wait for—"

"He won't have to wait," Al broke in. "When can we leave?"

"As soon as you can get out here. He's warming—"

"Okay, okay," Al nodded. "I'll be right out."

He banged down the phone, grabbed his Gladstone and not taking the time to wait for an elevator he hurried down to the lobby, paid his bill then dashed out to the cab that the desk clerk had waiting for him.

When he arrived at the air field, his plane was waiting for him. He didn't know why, but it was a larger plane than he had expected. There were seats for four passengers but besides the pilot and a wide-eyed youngster of perhaps twelve, he was the only passenger.

As he took his seat, he asked, "Can we make it by two?"

The plane started to roll forward and the pilot nodded. "We oughta be there about one-thirty. Depends on the weather of course. But from all reports, everything's clear."

Al leaned back relieved. The events of the passed hour had left him a little fagged.

When they were in the air, the pilot tried to strike up a conversation but Al cut him short. The fellow was only trying to be sociable, he knew, but he needed these two hours to collect his thoughts. Now that the Cap deal was off, his future was a bit vague. Should he continue playing? With the Condors? Perhaps he could buy into another club? He could always go back to State. They told him the day he graduated—

"Say, mac," the pilot's voice cut his thoughts. I know he's wrong, but my boy here keeps insisting that you're Al Watson. The Condor's fullback, you know."

Al grinned at the starry-eyed youngster who was staring back at him from the co-pilot's seat. "It's dad that's wrong this time isn't it son?" he laughed.

"What!" the pilot exclaimed, snapping his head around. "You mean, you *are* Al Watson?"

"In the flesh," Al replied.

"Say! I get it!" the pilot went on with gusto. "That business in the papers about you buying the Caps. It was true then, huh? Well for my money—"

Al's deep laughter cut him short. "No, it isn't true," he explained good-naturedly. "I didn't buy the Caps. But I do have to get to Philly to play a ball game."

"Yeah, say! How about that business about Poole and Lowe? That's gonna make it tough for you guys ain't it?" the pilot queried.

"Not with Al Watson in there it won't," the youngster blurted out indignantly "Heck, them Bombers won't even—" The boy stopped short, embarrassed. He looked first to his dad, then to Al. "Well—" he went on hesitantly, above his father's laughter, "You will rip them Bombers apart, won't you Mr. Watson?"

Al could only stare at the boy. He hadn't felt so good for a long, long time.

"Freddie here, is a great admirer of yours, Watson," the pilot was saying. "With him, you're the tops."

**A**L SLIPPED across the aisle into the seat behind the boy, and offering his hand he said, "Say, how would you guys like to help root the Condors home today? I'm pretty sure I can dig up a couple tickets. What say?"

"It's okay by me," the pilot answered. "How about you, Freddie?"

Freddie didn't answer. He couldn't. But then he didn't need to. It was okay by him, too.

"Good," Al said. "I'll have to beat it right out to the park, but give me your name and I'll leave the tickets at gate A for you. You ask for them there."

Al and the boy spent the remainder of the trip talking football and it was good. It took his mind off Maurie and Whitey, off the Bombers and off the Caps. When the plane set down at the Municipal Airfield, he was cool and loose. Ready, he hoped for the game of his life.

The plane rolled to a slow stop and Al hopped out.

"Don't forget," he called over his shoulder. "Gate A. And I'll look you up when I get to Columbus."

He ran across the runway and bolted into the first taxi he came to. It was one thirty-five.

"Shibe Park!" he said. Then holding up a twenty dollar bill for the driver to see

he added, "Make it by ten to and this is yours."

It was twelve minutes to two when he walked into Rickards' office.

"Hot ziggity!" Ben Mitchell yelled, bounding to his feet. "You made it! I gotta go down and tell the boys what you're doing."

"No!" Al snapped, grabbing Mitchell's arm as he rushed past. Then still holding the squirming coach he asked, "Did the Commissioner call?"

Rickard nodded. "He called and it's okay," he explained. "There no need to sign a contract. A verbal agreement will do. The same contract you had with a thousand dollar bonus for today and—"

Al shook his head. "No bonus and no telling anybody. It's just like I never left. Understand?"

"Okay, chump," Mitchell shrugged. "But for crump sakes let go of me and get dressed. It's late."

Al released his grip on Mitchell and said, "I'll get right down. But I promised the guy who flew me in a couple tickets. How about taking care of him? His name's Haller. I told him I'd leave them at gate A."

"Of course, of course," Rickard smiled. "And thanks, Al. I won't forget this. I realize what—"

Al whirled and hurried out of the office and down the hallway towards the door marked DRESSING ROOM.

He hesitated a split-second then pushed open the door and went inside. The Condors were there, dressed, ready, waiting for Ben to send them out. They eyed him curiously as he went down the aisle to his locker but said nothing. It was old times again.

He spun the combination on his locker and jerked it open. *It was empty.* He had forgotten about cleaning it out; forgotten that his uniform, his gear, was no doubt already stored away. These teammates would wonder about that.

He searched the room for Ben Mitchell but the coach hadn't yet come into the dressing room. Truck Thomas had come down the aisle and was staring into the empty locker.

Al feigned surprise, then called to Dolly

Boyd, the locker boy, who was at the far end of the room, making his last minute check of the supplies he would need at half time.

"Hey Dolly!" What happened to my suit?"

"Your suit?" the teen-ager looked at Al surprised. "Mr. Mitchell told me to send it to the cleaners, why?"

The room went suddenly still and Al could feel the hard eyes of the players on him. He searched frantically for an out, then said, "To the cleaners? Now why the heck did he do that? Is it back yet?"

"I don't know," Dolly replied weakly. "I'll go out front and see."

There was another second of silence then, "Well, now, ain't that just lovely." Hump Slattery's sarcastic growl filled the room. "His nibs here saunters in an hour and a half late and whats he do? Hurry a little bit? Not him. He raises hell because his uniform ain't back from the cleaners all pretty and fresh. Why we—"

"All right! Enough of that!" It was Ben Mitchell. He had entered unnoticed and was walking down the line motioning each man to his feet. "Save your strength for the Bombers. You'll need it," he said. "Sending Watson's suit away was a mistake, and he's already told me his reason for being late. A very good reason, believe me. Let's get out there and win a ball game."

**A**L STRIPPED, ready to pull on his gear as soon as Dolly returned. The locker room clock with the Quaker Beer ad on its face said two o'clock. In just minutes now a judge in a Columbus court room would begin opening sealed envelopes. Who would be high, Al wondered? Frew or Crouch? As if it mattered. It was an opportunity lost. Perhaps he had acted—

"Here ya are, Al. All shiny and clean." It was Dolly back with his uniform.

Al suited up and went out. The day was brisk, the December sky a solid slab of blue and white crockery. The park was jammed to the overflow. Out on the fifty yard line, Hump and Norm, a green-clad

and four spangle-clad officials watching a coin spin into the air.

Al jogged down the line towards the Condors' bench, then seeing Mitchell waving him out to the playing field, he veered across the sideline and joined his teammates, bunched on the twenty-five.

"My, ain't he pretty," Mike DePerna greeted him.

"Okay, so I look pretty," Al said. "Let's forget me and think about Whitey and Maurie for a spell."

Hump and Norm rejoined the team while he was talking, in time to hear his last remark. Hump scowled at him, then spit, "Just where was you, paly, during the preliminary hearing? Out hunting a ball club to buy maybe?"

Al stiffened then relaxed. Of course all the Condors had gone to bat for Poole and Lowe. All of them but him.

He said, "It's still like the Commissioner said, Hump. A win for us will clear Maurie and Whitey. Let's get that first, then argue about me afterwards."

Hump Slattery started to speak but stopped. He studied Al with doubtful eyes for a moment, then turning away said, "We kick. Let's go."

The twenty-two men scurried to position and an expectant hush fell over the park. Al took his accustomed spot between Norm and Maxie on the thirty yard marker and that rise of tension, that always knotted his middle just before the kickoff, was there. It was good. He flailed his arms windmill fashion, pistoned his legs. That Columbus court room was a distant, forgotten thing now. He was here doing his job. Playing the game, helping to keep men in it that belonged.

The referee's arm dropped and the maroon line swung forward. DePerna's kick soared high and deep, giving his tackler's plenty of time to get down there. Slip Smith, the Conference's ground gainer, took it on the goal line but never had a chance. Al, Bud Franks and Will Holsinger smothered him on the five yard line and a massive roar welled up from the stands.

The Bombers played it safe. Nino Falascii, dropped ten yards behind his goal line and punted out on first down.

The strategy backfired. The oval slithered off Falascii's toe and bobbed out of bounds on the Bomber's forty-two. It was as a big break for the home team.

Al hustled back to the huddle grinning. "They're asking for it," he chortled. "Let's give it to them."

"Sixty-three," Mike muttered

"Good boy." Al agreed.

Sixty-three. Hump at left tackle on a hand-off from Al. It should be good for yardage. The Bombers would be expecting him to go.

He palmed Yaschuk's snap-back, faked a lunge at the right side, then slapping the pill to Hump's middle, he kept moving into the line, watching Hump go for a big six yards.

Back in the huddle Al gritted. "That's six for Maurie. Six more now for Whitey."

Dutch Kunselman checked Mike's call. He glared hard-eyed across the circle at Al then said, "Shiny pants, I had enough of your lip the last game. I'll thank you to keep it buttoned."

"Amen," Truck Thomas added and eight maroon helmets nodded an agreement.

Al ran his eyes around the circle, then dropped them to his shoes. The old bitterness was still in these teammates eyes. It was really old times again.

Mike tried Art Zinn, Maurie's replacement on a sweep at the Bombers' right flank but the willowy half just didn't have it. He was willing enough, but he lacked that sixth sense that told all great backs where the running lane would be even before it showed. He ran too wide, hesitated a fatal split-second before cutting into the hole that Al and Hump opened for him, and two Bombers dove in and pinned him back on the forty-two. Those six precious yards were lost.

They huddled and Mike said, "Ninety-three."

Al at right guard.

**H**E GRABBED the leather, buried his chin on his chest and hurtled forward, searching for the opening that never came. He felt a driving impact against his helmeted head but kept his cleats churning and bulled through. He spurted

straight ahead for three short steps, then lurching clear of a flying green-shirt, he veered to his right, straightened out of his crouch and using his long deceptive stride he knifed between the two Bombers who were angling in on him and was away. Falascii cut him down on the eighteen.

The unraveled visitors called time. Al Watson was the single menace that stood between them and a National Title. They came on here today primed to stop him, and now, the first time he carried the leather he had gone through them for twenty-four long yards. It needed some rehashing.

During the two minute time out, Al stood apart from his teammates watching Hump and Mike lecture young Zinn. The two vets realized how it was too, he knew. This sprint of his had been pure luck. The Bombers were caught overconfident and it wouldn't happen again. Not unless Zinn could come through and take some pressure off the middle of that green wall.

The timekeeper's horn shrilled and Zinn got two on a reverse. An in-and-out caught the New Yorkers waiting for Al, and Mike got through to the ten. They fed it to Al and he made the first down. It was close. They had to bring in the chains, but was first and goal on the Bomber's eight.

The Condors wheeled up to the line amidst the wild roar of the partisan crowd, and Slattery jammed at the weak side. The snarling green forward wall stopped him cold. It was second down and they were still eight long yards away. Al blasted through for three on a cross-buck, then added one more on a straight power smash at left guard and it was fourth and four. The pressure spot.

In the huddle Mike hesitated, then said, "Ninety-six."

The lines tensed, exploded and the ball came back too low. Al shoveled it up and ripped headlong into the straining mass of humanity in front of him. A sledge hammer thumped against his shoulder, rocking him back, but he held his feet and propelled himself forward. He felt the grip of hands, a restraining shoulder in his middle but they could not hold him. The wall toppled backward and he was

half-tramping, half-stumbling over them. Then out of nowhere a shot exploded against the ball, blasting it out of his arms. He wrenched free of the arms around him, and for one mad second he searched for the brown oval. He saw it then, on the five yard line. Safely cuddled in the arms of a grinning green-clad.

Al trudged back to position heartsick. His teammates, he noticed, were eyeing him dryly. It was as if they had expected this from him.

The Bombers spun into position and Al cleared his mind for action. If his fumble had cost the Condors a score, it was still the Bombers who were in the hole.

Monk Moorehead dropped five yards behind the double white line and the pigskin floated back to him. He swung his leg back, then down, but the punt, the Condors were expecting, didn't come. It was a fake. Moorehead, the ball cocked behind his right ear stood poised, then he let-fly. It was a long heave straight down the middle and it caught Art Zinn too deep.

Ray Thompson, the Bombers' sticky-fingered right end, hauled it in on the forty and swerving clear of Zinn's desperate dive, he went all the way. Falascii's boot made it Bombers 7 Condors 0 and the home crowd sat back stunned. Their big gun had been silenced; the Bombers' hadn't. It looked like a long afternoon.

Hump ran the kickoff back to the eighteen and the Condors desperately strove to get back in the ball game. But it was no go. The fire had gone out of their game.

Al plowed for two first downs to the forty-one then was stopped cold. Splitting that close-knit green forward wall was like cracking rocks with your head. It just couldn't be done for long.

Mike punted out on the visitors twelve and they booted it right back. They wanted more room before working their passing game, and were content to wait for it. It would come. Al Watson was going no place today.

A cross-buck with Al toting went for a weak two yards, then Mike in desperation threw two successive passes, and as pre-

dicted, the alert Bombers covered them like inlaid on the kitchen floor.

Mike kicked and Falascii sent it right back. That was the ball game. The Condors couldn't move, the Bombers didn't try.

**M**IDWAY in the second period, Bud Franks slipped through and got a hand on the oval as it came off Falascii's shoe. It angled off to the right and skidded out of bounds on the Bombers' thirty-two.

The crowd came up with a roar. Here was another break for their club. Maybe this one would pay off?

Two tries netted Al six yards, then the fans groaned, as Zinn, on a wide sweep gave two of them back. In the huddle Mike hesitated then said, "One twenty-four."

A long heave down the middle. DePerna to Holsinger. A gamble at its best, Al was thinking as he crouched behind his line. But then what else?

The ball shot between Peep's legs and the two lines collided. A green-clad ripped through, but Al was there to dump him on his pants. As he went down, he caught a quick glimpse of the pigskin sailing downfield. Mike had gotten it away.

He scrambled to his feet praying. On the goal line Holsinger, and Tom Henry, the Bomber's safety man were in the air reaching for the ball. Henry hit the ground running. The ball was tucked under his left arm.

He raced straight up the middle to the ten, outmaneuvered Norm Appel on the fifteen and picking up his blockers, he carried it back to the forty before Al and Mike could squeeze him out of bounds.

The Bombers had the room they wanted and Monk Moorehead went to work. A screen pass got them eight, a short flip to Henry made it first and ten on the Condors' forty-seven. Falascii ran it for three, then Moorehead took over again.

Watching from his defensive slot, Al couldn't help but admire the guy. He was everything that had ever been written about him. He threw them long, he threw them short. A soft one this time, a hard one next. Unless you knew where it

was going, it was a very hard ball to follow. And the Condors didn't know.

Twice, Al got his fingers on one but he couldn't hold it. Falascii dropped one on the five, but Moorehead pitched two perfect strikes to Thompson and with three minutes remaining in the half it was the Bombers' ball first and ten on the Condors' sixteen.

Maxie cracked through and dropped Slip Smith for no gain but it only served to slow the drive not stop it. A heave, Moorehead to Henry put the ball on the nine, then a bullet pass to Thompson put it over. The conversion made it 14 to 0 and the Condors were finished.

Watching them line up to receive the kickoff Al knew it. The dull spark that had remained in a few of them was gone.

Mike took the kickoff back to the twenty, then Al bucked it three times for eight yards and the gun banged.

Al followed the beaten Condors off the field and flopped down on the bench in the dressing room. He closed his eyes and lay there for a moment still and relaxed. If he had gone nowhere out there today, it wasn't because he hadn't given. His aching muscles were proof of that.

He heard the door open, then, "Hey, Watson!"

Al sat up. It was Dolly Boyd. He was standing in the open doorway at the far end of the room.

"Hawkins just called from gate A," he called down to Al. "He said to tell you he has your suitcase. The guy that flew you in from Columbus said you forgot it in his plane so he left it there for you. D'ya want me to go down and bring it up?"

Al nodded.

Dolly swung out of the room, then a volcano erupted. Hump Slattery, cursing, wildly, had Dolly by the cuff of the neck and was dragging him through the doorway into the room.

"What did you say?" Hump was shouting at the startled locker boy. "What's that about Columbus?"

Dolly looked around at the wide-eyed players gulped twice, then sputtered, "I said that Hawkins told me—"

"About Columbus, I mean!" Hump

shouted impatiently. "About that plane from Columbus!"

Al got to his feet and started down the aisle towards Slattery. It wouldn't do to have Dolly repeat his story.

The big blocker saw him coming and waved him back, "You keep out of this, Watson," he snapped.

Other Condors pushed past Al and crowded around Hump and the frightened Dolly.

"What goes, Hump?"

"Something wrong? What ya—"

Hump shoved them back. "Shut up!" he roared. "Everybody shut up, see."

He released his grip on Dolly's neck and said, "Now, Dolly, real slow and easy like, tell me just what Hawky said."

Dolly licked his lips gulped again, then explained. "Just like I said, Hump. Hawkins called and told me to tell Watson that his suitcase was at gate A."

"Yeah, go on."

"He said that the guy who flew Watson in from Columbus told him that Watson was in such a rush to get to the park that he forgot it in the plane. So this guy just brought it to the park and left it with Hawkins to give to Watson, that's all."

SLATTERY pulled at his battered nose, nodded. "It fits," he mused. "Like tights on a chorus girl, it fits."

"What fits, Hump?" Peep asked.

"Yeah," Maxie Cousins spoke up puzzled. "And what was shiny-pants doing in Columbus?"

"Quiet, punk," Hump growled at Maxie as he elbowed his way towards Al.

Al watched him coming. Hump knew. It was all over his face. He had added things up and he knew. Knew that he had been in Columbus and knew why. There were others too. Mike, Norm, Dutch, Will. They pressed behind Hump, studied him uncertain.

"What brought you back, Watson?" Hump demanded.

Al feigned puzzlement. "Brought me back? I don't get it."

"Huh," Slattery grunted. "I get it. You breeze in here at ten to two, your locker's cleaned out, the commissioner tells you a win will clear Whitey and Maurie.

He didn't tell us that, Watson. Then you forget your bags on a plane that flew you in from Columbus. You was out there to buy the Caps. What brought you back?"

Al's forced smile was dry. "My bid was too low, Hump. No use—"

"Huh-uh, Watson," Mike broke in shaking his head. "The papers said that sale didn't start till two o'clock. At two you were in here dressing."

"Whitey and Maurie. What did they have to do with it, Watson?" Slattery asked pointedly.

"They had everything to do with it, Hump." It was Ben Mitchell. He wormed his way beside Al, then went on. "I wanted to tell you boys before, but Al wouldn't let me. But if you must know you might as well get it straight."

He told them everything. He told them why Al had stayed with the team until Friday and how he had refused Rickards' thousand dollar bonus. When he had finished he turned to Al and said, "I'm sorry, Al. But they'd have found out anyhow, maybe it's better this way?"

The room had become strangely still. Al lifted his head and looked at the men still bunched around him. They were standing hypnotized, their incredible stare glued on him. Someone near the door coughed, a cleated foot made a scraping noise on the floor.

Hump Slattery ran his eyes around the room, then facing Al, he stuck out his hand. "Wat—Al I—Well, shake will ya?" the calloused old halfback stammered with a voice that wasn't his. "I don't just know how to get at this, but—Well, I—"

"Look, Al," Mike DePerna broke in laughing. "What Frankenstein here is trying to say is, let's you and him bury the hatchet. And I'm saying the same." DePerna's hand was out beside Hump's.

Al stepped back and worked his lips but no words came.

Al! They had called him Al! He had played beside these men for eight years and now, for the first time, they had called him Al.

He nodded numbly, reached out and gripped Hump's hand, then Mike's. They felt very good. There were others now, too. But Peep's, Norm's. More almost

than he could count.

An arm draped around his shoulder. It was Dutch Kunselman.

"For Maurie and Whitey, thanks, Al," the big guard said for all to hear. "Playing ball with a guy like you is gonna be a privilege. A privilege us monkeys don't deserve."

"Yeah, Dutch," Will Holsinger piped. "And while you're at it, kiss him for me too."

"Why you smart punk!" Dutch roared, lunging futilely at the nimble end. The room swelled with hoarse, good-humored laughter.

Al laughed with them a moment then said, "Only one thing wrong, Dutch. We aren't doing too much playing today."

"Ha!" Peep Yaschuk boomed. "Them Bombers had their fun. When we're finished with them, they won't be Bombers no more. Pea Shooters that's what they'll be."

"Reet, Peep!" Maxie Cousins agreed, lunging at an imaginary ball carrier. "That jerk, Cabbagehead, ain't so tough. This half it's different."

It would be different. Watching the hilarious confusion of the room, Al knew. And he knew why.

Losing Maurie had been a great blow. He was one of them. Without Maurie in there, they had no one behind them to lug the leather. But now for the first time, they realized that Al Watson was one of them. The yards he ground out were their yards too.

It made a difference.

"All right! All right!" Ben Mitchell's voice carried above the noise. "Time to get out. Let's go."

Hump Slattery slapped the ball he was carrying into Al's middle and said, "You first, Al. We're right behind ya. If you know what I mean?"

Al knew.

They hustled out in front of the silent crowd that had lost hope. The Bombers kicked and Hump took it up to the sixteen. In the huddle Mike said, "How's to plow for a few, Al? I got a notion about these jerks."

"At right guard there will be a hole," Bud Franks said.

THE HOLE was cramped, but Al squeezed through for three. He ripped down the center for three more, then got the first at left tackle.

Mike said, "Lovely. Can you do that again?"

"I should live so long," Al answered.

Maxie asked eagerly, "Them guys playing rough, Al? Just gimme some names."

Al laughed, shook his head. He said, "They're gentlemen, Maxie. Tough gentlemen."

He was piled up at right tackle for no gain, then the hole, that Bud promised earlier, materialized and he cannonaded through for eight to the thirty-five.

Mike waited for them on the twenty-five. "Now we spring it," he said in the huddle. "Hows for you pitching one, Al?"

"What!" Al exclaimed. He hadn't thrown a pass in his life.

"The surprise element, you know," Mike explained.

A smile broke over Al's face, he nodded. "Whose pocket do I put it in?"

"Mine, Al," Norm Appel spoke up. "Throw it and forget it. I'll do the rest."

The ball came back and Al folded around it. He dug, head down for three short steps toward left guard, then stopped short and straightened up. Norm, he saw, was cutting hard for the flat. He cocked his arm, prayed, then let go. Two green-shirts crashed into him and as he went down the roar of the crowd came to him. It was very lusty and very long.

When he got to his feet, he searched downfield. Norm was nowhere in sight, but under the goal post, Dutch and Maxie were doing an artistic bit of Virginia Reeling. The pass had gone all the way.

He joined his teammates and they hammered his back raw.

"That's one for Maurie," Will yipped. "One for Whitey, then one for us. That's all."

Al grinned. "Us," he repeated. "One for us."

Hump Slattery was watching him. The old guy understood.

Hump said, "Sounds pretty good, does it?"

It did. It sounded very good

Joe Vogel came in long enough to make it 14 to 7, and the Condors lined up to kickoff.

Hump's boot sailed to the five, and the Bombers came thundering back. Moorehead pitched twice to the twenty-four, then a tricky reverse made it first and ten on the twenty-nine.

Al bolted through to pin Falascii three yards behind the line and the 'Arm' went to work with a vengeance. It was rugged.

He hit Lippert, his briar-fingered left wing with two, then a long one carried across midfield to the forty-five.

Pleas of, "Get that ball!" came from the stands.

Slip Smith went for three off an in-and-out, then Moorehead had it again and was fading.

Al slammed in to do some rushing, then seeing Lippert cut back from the flat towards the scrimmage line, he went backpedaling fast. This had all the earmarks of a button-hook. It was. Moorehead rifled the leather over the line and Al went up reaching. The ball ripped into his fingers, started through, but he clenched it and hit the ground running.

He didn't run far. A Mack truck hit him on the forty and he went down. He lay there grinning foolishly. The fact that his inners were scrambled wasn't important. For a minute or two at least, Moorehead wouldn't be doing any pitching and that much was good.

A worried Maxie yanked him to his feet. "You all right, palsy?"

Al shook his head. "Not till we get those TD's, Maxie."

"That Lippert," Maxie snarled. "He elbowed ya. I saw him. Just say the word, Al. I'll—" Maxie gestured fiercely with his hands.

Al went back to the huddle laughing and the Condors eyed him curiously.

"What is it, Al?" Mike asked.

He couldn't tell them. *These Condors just itching to go to bat for Al Watson.* He'd be a long, long time getting over it.

He said, "I just thought of a story."

"Huh!" Truck grunted. "We're down seven points and he's thinking up stories. Did you walk out of that plane or fall out? From a thousand feet maybe?"

"Get us ten an' we'll forgive ya," Mike said.

He got the ten and five more.

Norm said, "Tell us another story."

HE SLICED inside tackle for five, and a cross-buck netted him three to the visitors thirty-seven. The New Yorkers were digging in, laying for him. In the huddle he said, "Look, gents. Artie here can run it if someone shows him where to go. I'll lead the way and Art can follow. What say?"

"Amen" Mike agreed.

Al took the snap, spun to his right as he handed it off to Zinn, and went low behind his line searching for some daylight. Norm and Maxie were mauling the Bombers' right tackle. The opening would be there. Al hit for it. It opened and with Artie's cleats pounding his tail he started through. A green-shirt jammed in to plug the gap and as Al exploded into him, a maroon streak raced past. It was Zinn. In the clear, the guy could run and he was clear. They finally caught him on the eleven.

"Could we try that again?" Art asked eagerly. "I might score a touchdown once."

"You better score a touchdown once, you mean," Norm snorted.

They worked it again with a slight variation and Art had his touchdown. The stands were a riot.

Joe came in and tried too hard to tie it up. His boot skidded under the cross bar and with ten minutes left it was Bombers 14 Condors 13.

Joe had tears in his eyes. Al walked over to him, patted his back. "Who wants a tie, Joe?" he said consolingly. "You'll get another chance, forget it."

Hump kicked off and Peep stormed downfield and flattened Smith on the sixteen. The green team came up swinging. They didn't win that Conference Title just because they wore pretty uniforms.

Moorehead pitched two strikes down the middle then when Al stopped two running plays, he started a bombardment again.

On the thirty, Al got his hands on a hard one but couldn't hold it. The ball

teetered on the end of his fingers then rolled off. Right into the waiting mitts of the prone Hump!

"My, my," Peep declared. "They should be on the radio."

"Radio?" Bud laughed.

"Television, stupid," Peep shot back.

They huddled on their twenty and Mike said, "Let's grab us a championship. Junior wants a bike for Christmas."

Two tries got Al all of six yards and Mike said to him, "How's the arm? We could surprise them again, maybe?"

Maxie ballooned out his chest, flailed his arms, cursed fluently. "Surprise 'em!" he growled. "Nuts! Al passes, Art runs. Them paper boys said it was our Al against their Fathead, didn't they? That surprise stuff! Insults! To Al an' us Condors. Insults! Let Al run it I say. We got pride, ain't we?"

Al wanted to kiss the big guy. He said, "Maxie, I love you. For your pride I'll run."

He did.

He boomed into the middle for five, then took a hand-off from Mike and following Hump through the hole at right guard, he crossed midfield to the Bombers forty-four.

As he went back to the huddle, he glanced at the clock. Two minutes. It would be close. Maybe too close.

He sliced off tackle for three, then on a variation of the same play he got two. The Bombers were digging in. It was rugged.

He tried a weak-side drive but it was no go. The visitors plowed him under on the thirty-nine for no gain and it was fourth and five.

He crouched, rubbed his palms on his gray mole skins and looked at Peep's up side down face.

"—three—four—five—"

The oval came rifling towards him. He lurched forward, pulled it to his middle and exploded into the straining mass of maroon and green. It held him. He drilled his cleats into the turf, worked his head and shoulders furiously. He was through. A green-clad streaked at him, he knocked it aside, kept running. Two more Bombers came at him. He slowed, then going down

low, he spurted forward bolted between them, and was clear. On the fifteen, Monk Moorehead angled in to cut him off. He timed his strides, checked himself and pirouetted free of Moorehead's diving tackle. He went across standing up. He stood there a moment listening to the thunder that was rocking the park, then dropped to the grass.

**T**HREE SECONDS later the avalanche buried him. It felt very good, this avalanche of maroon and gray.

When the officials got order restored, Joe Vogel came in to boot the point they didn't need, but Mike chased him back.

"This one Al kicks," he shouted.

Mike held it for him and he booted it. It was too funny. It went over to make it Condors 20 Bombers 14.

They went back upfield like a bunch of fifth graders leaving P. S. 10 the last day of school. Mike kicked off and Moorehead threw one for thirty yards and the gun banged.

It was a place of riot and shouting and Al was a very popular man.

Truck Thomas sat down beside him. "And just think, Al," Truck shouted above the din. "You almost bought into that jerk, Conference."

"Yeah, we're Boy Scouts," Maxie bawled. "We saved ya from a fate worse than death. Owning a ball club in that Conference."

"Maybe you boys aren't such Boy Scouts after all." It was Rickard. He wormed his way through the puzzled players and

stopping in front of Al, he went on, "The Commissioner called me at half time, Al. When old Frew and Crouch learned what you did, they withdrew their bids too. They feel you deserve a chance at the Caps. It left the judge with a club to sell but no takers. So he had to postpone the sale until next Saturday. The Commissioner said your bid is still good. How's that sound?"

Al stood up. The room had become suddenly still. He ran his eyes over the sweaty, stained, faces that were on him. He dropped his eyes to a towel that lay in the middle of the floor, studied it a moment. He looked at Rickard, moistened his lips then said, "Well, I don't know? I've been thinking about it. Maybe I'm too young to own a ball club? Maybe I ought to stick around a few years. There's three or four good ones left in my frame. And too, I kinda know the League, maybe by that time I can pick up a club in it. Maybe that would be better."

The stillness held for a second then the roof blew off. Every man of them agreed that this was the only thing to do.

"Oh yeah, Al," Hump said, "I almost forgot. We're having a blow-out at my place tonight. You're expected of course."

"Expected hell!" Maxie roared. "He's gotta be there. He loves me, remember?"

"I'll pick ya up at eight. Okay, Al?" Mike asked. "You just wait, I'll be there."

Al got the ball out of his throat. He said, "I'll be waiting, Mike. I'll be waiting."

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# HOW TO MAKE THE VARSITY

By **DOC MCGEE**

Do you stack up as varsity material? Next fall, when cleats boom against pigskin, will you be a fame-fetchin' fullback or a wing-ding waterboy? That wily old trainer Doc McGee tell you how to make your dreams of grid glory come true in this sage summary of training rules for future All-Americans.



*"Brawn and muscle," says Trainer Doc McGee, "have ceased to be the main qualities of the football man. It's speed and brains today."*

**A**S AN ATHLETIC TRAINER, interested primarily in the physical development of boys and young men, I have watched with great satisfaction the growth of public interest in the sport of football.

There can be no question of the value of college and school sports. Any activity which centers the minds of growing boys upon the advantages of a sound physique and healthy competition is to be encouraged to the limit. The wholesome attitude which is so general today among under-

graduates and schoolboys has its origin in the enthusiasm for sports. Youth is the time for play, the period when a man is most eager for experiences and when the thought of his future is being molded. The boy who can find an outlet for his exuberance and high spirits in tests which call for physical strength and agility, coupled with mental alertness, is the boy who'll make the better man almost every time, a fact which is underestimated. I'm afraid, by a great many educators.

Baseball, basketball, rowing, hockey,

track and lacrosse have their followers in school and college. Each of these branches has its particular requirements of mind and body and each is highly beneficial to the participant. But football remains the greatest sport of college and school. It requires the utmost in strength, courage, speed and quick wit and is the one sport which can whip the general student body to the highest pitch of enthusiasm.

It's natural that every schoolboy should hope to make the football team. The football men are the heroes of the campus, and what normal boy wouldn't want to join that favored company?

The high school or prep school is the starting point for the football man. College teams usually are drawn from the ranks of schoolboy stars. A player on a college team seldom is less than nineteen years of age and as such has reached a stage of physical development adapted to the strenuous game. So to the prep school, the incubator of college football, we must look for the proper groundwork—and proper precautions.

Football is not a game for a weakling or for a boy who is under-developed, a fact which every physical instructor, school official and parent must realize. Nor should any boy be permitted to play organized football until he is at least fifteen years of age, preferably sixteen.

The reason for this is easily understood. The sinews, tissues and bones of a boy under fifteen or sixteen years have not been fully knit or settled. Any severe strain during this under-developed stage can do permanent injury to a growing youngster. Muscles can be impaired for life by a wrench or a violent fall. Nature requires just so long to do its preliminary building. Even a boy of fourteen, who may look as husky and strong as a lad two or three years older, has not had the proper chance for normal bodily growth.

I firmly believe schools should bar from the football field all boys who are under sixteen. Another point of equal importance. I am also convinced from personal experience in the handling of boys and young men that no youngster should take the football field without at least a year of advance preparation.

The training should start at the age of fifteen. Every muscle and tissue must be developed, slowly and unhurriedly. The spine and the muscles of the intestines—the parts of the body most easily liable to permanent injury in violent play—must be strengthened particularly. Legs, arms, chest and shoulders must be hardened. Wind and endurance must be developed. All without any severe strain upon the heart. Do not start this training until a physician has examined your heart carefully. With the preparations underway, there should be weekly examinations by the doctor. A murmur or leakage of the heart can result quickly from over-exercise.

The first steps come in the gymnasium. With dumbbells—one-half or three-quarter pound—in each hand, begin exercises to develop the upper arms and the shoulders. The arms are held out sideways, straight and stiff. Then the hands are twisted forward and backward. This exercise should be followed in the morning about an hour after breakfast. It should be done ten times at once and may be repeated once again during the morning after a proper rest interval.

A month of this will help the arms and shoulders greatly. Then comes the exercise for the intestines.

This is a matter which must not be rushed. After you have been practising for a week, you can do the full stunt as follows: lie on the floor with the hands extended stiffly upwards, then raise body and bend over until the fingers touch the toes.

**A**T THE START, do not attempt to lift your body more than half-way, since this exercise, one of the most beneficial of which I know under proper circumstances, brings a heavy strain on diaphragm and groin if not worked into gradually. But at the end of a week, provided you feel no pain in the groin, you may begin doing the full exercise five times at once—and only one time a day. At the end of a month more, the exercise may be extended to seven times and then should be kept up daily for two or three months more. But I can't warn too greatly of the need for caution. The diaphragm and groin

are mighty tender parts of the body and will not stand sudden, severe twists or strains.

The shock of hard blows and fierce twistings in football falls most often on the spine and it is this which must get most careful development. Here's how:

Place hands on hips, with feet spread apart. The head is bent forward until the chin rests on the chest. Then the body is bent forward, twisted to the right and then backwards. This three times. The same movement then to the left, also three times. Six times in all daily, never more at the start. Don't bend backwards too far at the beginning, and stop the instant any pain is felt. But as you feel the spine strengthening, the number of times to perform the exercise may be advanced to five each way, daily. A month of this, and then another spinal exercise may be attempted.

In this, you stand erect, feet apart and chin on chest. The hands are held over the head, the knees are bent. Bend backward until you feel you have reached the spine, then swing the body forward until your hands are hanging between the legs, and then backward again until the spine is reached a second time. The full backward and downward movement to be performed five times, altogether, once a day. At the end of a month or so, advance to seven or eight times.

The exercises I have proposed here will take you over a period of seven or eight months during which the muscles and tissues have been strengthened to a great extent. Now comes time for the development of legs and wind.

This is to be done by road-work. Start with a mile a day, walking fifty yards, running the next fifty yards, then walking fifty more, running fifty more, and so on. At the end of a month, the road-work may be extended to one mile and a half. It never must exceed two miles in any one day. The road-work should be done in the afternoon, two or three hours after the noon-day meal.

Another point which must be remembered. Under no circumstances are all these exercises to be attempted on any one day. In the interests of safe-guarding the heart,

you should limit your exercise time each day of the whole year period to not more than twenty minutes. This allows room for only one exercise at a time. There's one exception to this rule. Deep-breathing may be done from the start and carried throughout the entire period. Five minutes of deep breathing in the morning at first, then add a second five-minute period in the evening during the last six months.

All bending exercises should be performed at night shortly before bed-time. These may tire you at the out-set and you should have the benefit of a night's rest afterwards.

During the year of your training period be careful both of rest and food. Get eight hours of sleep each night, and nine hours won't do you any injury. On the question of meals, follow as nearly as possible the regular training table diet which eliminates all greasy articles.

I'll suggest here a menu beneficial to any young fellow who plans to engage in athletics:

For breakfast: stewed prunes or other stewed fruit; toast (bread always should be toasted for boys and adults for easier assimilation by the stomach); soft boiled eggs, never cooked more than two minutes, or poached eggs; coffee or tea.

We'll follow the old-fashioned habit of regarding the noon meal as dinner: Roast beef, roast lamb or roast chicken with potatoes, cauliflower and spinach. For dessert, rice pudding, a small cup of custard or ice cream.

For supper: Cold meats or steaks, or lamb chops, with at least two vegetables. Choice may be made from lettuce, boiled beets, peas, carrots, beans, stewed corn, stewed or sliced tomatoes. The dessert may be cantaloupe or melon.

Soups may be taken with the noon or evening meals, but these must not be greasy. All pork products such as roast pork, pork chops, sausages, should be avoided. Frankfurters also are out, although I know there's something mighty toothsome about a "hot dog."

Eat your fill at every meal, but don't stuff yourself. Eating between meals also should be avoided both during training and when out of it. Sweets should be taken

with extreme moderation and there should be no heavy pastries.

Foods such as I have suggested above are easily digestible and extremely nutritious. You can't go wrong by following my instructions.

With the training period completed, another important step should be taken before you turn loose on the football field. You should receive competent instruction on the rudiments of the game, both at blackboard talks and in "walking through" the various plays. The science of tackling should be understood before you test yourself against the tackling dummy.

Then try for the positions which your build and speed best fit you to fill.

I don't pretend to be a football coach, of course, and realize that a great many youngsters may develop into crack performers in positions for which their bodies don't seem to fit them. But I've helped in the past to train football teams for Morristown Preparatory School, Princeton Prep and at Columbia College. What applies to the high school, I might add, applies in a general sense, also, to the handling of college football candidates.

**M**OST FIRST-LINE PREP schools of today have expert physical guidance and the best of coaches for their various athletic teams. The coaches at these schools recognize that their own reputations are enhanced along with the school's if the players they turn out are able to make the big college teams. Consequently, they work cautiously and bring their promising players along gradually, aiming to have them develop their greatest skill in the junior and senior years.

Now for a word with the parents and the older men guarding the athletic destinies of these youngsters. The feeling which we describe as "school spirit" always is encouraged by the physical trainer and the coach. It has all the attributes of a religion in the bigger schools and imbues the youngster with the determination to make good for the school. But it's a spirit that sometimes leads a boy astray on his own physical abilities. The youngster is ready to risk any injury if he can make the team or the squad. A careful check-

rein must be exercised by the coach and parents.

The average husky boy of fifteen is impatient. In a game that fosters the highest principles of manliness, he can't see why he must wait. But parents should make a law of the year's preliminary training. I've seen some very promising youngsters suffer permanent spinal injuries by starting violent exercise too early. No game is worth a life-time of physical deformity or incapacity.

But while parents should be certain that proper precautions surround the young boy's participation in football, I have little sympathy with the father and mothers, particularly mothers, who refuse to let their youngsters attempt the game on the ground that it's too rough. A well-trained boy benefits from hard knocks, gains confidence, assurance and courage when he holds his own against other boys in a stern physical test. Football develops rugged bodies and it's a game for every normal, strong boy. Fatalities do occur and men of the highest training and strength sometimes suffer severe injuries, but the number is small. Few sports are free of danger. There's as much peril in an automobile ride as is found on the football field.

Football is far less dangerous today than it was twenty, or even a dozen years ago. The old mass plays and formations responsible for so much of the game's reputation for undue roughness, long since have gone into the discard.

And the game has made more heroes than any other general sport I know except, possibly, boxing—and boxing is a game for individuals, not for teams. Ted Coy, the greatest fullback Yale ever knew, played one game after an operation, actually holding his intestines in place with one hand. Eddie Hart, All-American tackle of Princeton, played for years with a broken neck, wearing a specially constructed harness. Brickley performed prodigies for Harvard while suffering the pains of appendicitis. Men have played with broken arms, cracked ribs, twisted knees and ankles.

Not that I sanction any such fool-hardy risks, but these truly reflect the spirit of the game and type of men it builds.



*Wally felt the breath leave Harlen's body in a surging gasp, felt his own ribs give again in a thrust of pain . . .*

# A BLUEBLOOD WON'T BLOCK

By LES ETTER

**The guys on the team hated his guts. The coach wouldn't speak to him. Even his old man had cut him off. How could a pre-war has-been like Wally Madison rise to football fame against such odds?**

**E**IGHT MINUTES OF THE final quarter remained . . . Wally Madison hunched forward on the Middleton bench and fought back the mist that rose in his eyes, the ache that tightened his throat. Glumly he watched Rick Donati, Middleton tailback, race thirty yards around Purdue's right end to grab a hunk of goal stripe and put the Panthers back in the ball game again. Purdue still led, 10-6, but now there was a chance.

Behind him a substitute pounded his

back violently, screaming: "Man—oh, man! Did you see Eldridge take out two men with that block? Wow!"

Wally did not get up a moment later when the rest of the bench gang leaped to the sidelines to applaud Quarterback Whitey Nichols' perfect try for point to make it 10-7—still for the Boilermakers.

The kid behind him was slugging his shoulders again. "A touchdown will do it now, gang!" yelled the sub. "Let's take the old apple away from 'em now!"

But Wally Madison still sat silent. Through the hurt in his soul his mind flashed back to another Purdue game—four years ago. He'd been a seventeen-year-old wartime freshman then. He'd been Wally Madison, the flashy Chicago high school star, the boy who had broken up the Boilermaker contest with a sixty-yard touchdown stab. It had been the same in other games—long scoring runs that had given him the heart-racing thrill of lugging leather in big time college circles.

Things had changed, however. A post-war army hitch was between him and those glamour days. He'd found a star-packed squad of ex-GI's when he'd returned. Middleton had the greatest squad in its history—the backlog of the war years. He'd tried his hardest, but there were ball-packers like All-American Bobby Chapman, like Don Clarke and Rick Donati around. They had that tailback slot sewed up. And Buddy Wilson and Jinks Eldridge were fixtures at right half.

Wally felt he could lug leather with Wilson and Eldridge, but those guys could block. When he'd played during the wartime years, he'd done the running—the other guys did the blocking.

But Skipper Slade's single-wing offense, now that it was back on a peace-time basis again, stressed sharp and deadly blocking from the right side. The Skipper had tried Wally there, and then had shaken his head. Wally was lost unless he was hauling the oval, and there were better runners now.

Next year things would be different, Wally had felt. Chapman, Clarke and Wilson would be gone. But here it was—next year—and here he was—still on the bench.

He felt lower than a snake's stomach as he watched Skipper Slade wave in the defensive unit to kick off against the wind. It was a whole new team—except at right half.

A hard knot of resentment gripped Wally as he saw the cold gray eyes of the huge, granite-jawed Slade flick over him briefly, then turn toward the field again. He could sense what the coach was thinking.

In his anger, Wally half rose. He was going to demand that he be sent in. Then he sank back, kicking his cleats viciously into the turf. He knew it would do no good

to protest. Slade, a genial and courteous man off the field, was an icy-nerved disciplinarian on it. Besides, there was a complication—Cornelius Madison III, his father.

Cornelius Madison III, wealthy, politically-powerful, a big shot alumnus, had been friendly with Skipper Slade until a few weeks ago. But when Cornelius found that Slade had no intention of using his son in a starting position, he had marched angrily out on the practice field to demand an explanation from the Skipper. The friendship terminated on the spot with a loud and explosive bang.

Slade had listened to the elder Madison's tirade, his eyes glinting with a frosty light. When old Cornelius had finished, the Skipper cleared his throat.

"Mr. Madison," he said, "while I am coach at Middleton, I will run this squad to the best of my ability and my judgment—for the good of the team. If I think a man merits promotion—he'll get it. Otherwise—no. I wish you would please step over to the sideline—and stay there. This is practice time."

Cornelius Madison III, purple with rage, had gritted: "Slade—I'll not forget this. I can get you, too, just like I got—"

He checked himself abruptly and walked from the field and on out through the gate.

Wally's ears still burned at the low ripple of amused contempt that had swept through the squad. His ears grew fiery red as he recalled some of the audible comments.

"The Skipper sure told off that old windbag," Rick Donati had exulted. "A guy earns his way in this outfit. His old man's dough or politics don't mean a thing."

Someone else said: "Did you hear what he started to say—about Jimmy Carter? Why the old—"

Jimmy Carter. Wally did not like to think about Jimmy, his first backfield coach at Middleton. Jimmy had taken a fatherly interest in him. He had been someone to talk to when a guy felt low. The stocky, gray-haired little coach had only one failing—a hot temper and a quick tongue. That combination had gotten him in diffi-

culty before, but when he tangled with Cornelius Madison III over some relatively trivial point in coaching, he was the loser.

Skipper Slade had rescued Jimmy on several previous occasions. But this time the Skipper held his counsel. Skipper had only a few years to go before retirement. Why risk everything on a guy who would only talk himself into trouble again?

CARTER had taken it tough. His whole life had been centered around football. Now he was running a couple of small filling stations, and not too successfully, because his heart was not in his work. When he should have been busy on the job, he was studying the sport pages, doodling those little diagrams that coaches love to doodle, on any scrap of paper that happened to be at hand.

The shrilling of the referee's whistle blasted Wally back to the present. He saw the Skipper leap toward the sidelines. Dimly he had been aware of what was happening on the field. Purdue had fumbled and the Panthers had recovered. The ball now rested on the Middleton forty. Automatically Wally glanced at the clock and saw there were five minutes left. Then he saw the real reason for Skipper Slade's dash to the sidelines—and his own heart and mind jarred to instant attention.

Jinks Eldridge was writhing on the ground, clutching his right knee, his face contorted with pain. Now they lifted him on a stretcher and headed for the dressing room.

Slade's harsh voice crackled in Wally's ears. "Madison—take right half. And remember those blocking assignments. All right, offensive gang! Get out there—and SCORE!"

Rick Donati trotted out beside Wally. Rick did not like him, and it was mutual. Rick was a dark-skinned, handsome youth, only an unpleasant twist to his mouth, marring his looks. Rick was a big city kid—up from the slums. He was a tough, sneering guy, from a world where only toughness paid off. He was intensely proud of the fact that he had fought his way to an education by taking every inch on every play—on the field or off of it. He had an

instinctive dislike for those who had their way made easy.

"Listen, Blue Blood," Rick said now. "All you gotta do is throw a couple of decent blocks for a change. I'll take care of that touchdown!"

"You take care of your position—I'll take care of mine," snapped Wally grimly.

They ducked into the huddle with no further words. They spread from it and the crowd stormed to its feet once more. The clock showed less than five minutes now.

Whitey Nichols sent Boots Hauser ramming through for six yards on a fullback dive at guard. Next it was Rick, jackknifing over tackle for six and a first down on the Purdue twenty-eight. It was Rick again, a quick pass to Nichols, and the Panthers were across the nineteen. Hauser stormed through for a first down on the Purdue seventeen, and now there were three minutes left.

The Purdue veterans were smart. They unplied with maddening slowness, using up precious seconds, trying to stall out the clock. An over-eager Panther guard charged off-side and the crowd groaned. The referee paced back to the twenty-two.

"They'll be looking for Rick, either passing or running," whispered Nichols in the huddle. "We'll give 'em X-Twenty-two."

Wally's heart leaped. That meant him—on a quick-breaking reverse.

Rick Donati snarled sudden protest. "That's taking a big chance with that—"

"Shut up!" snapped Whitey Nichols. "I'm calling the play!"

Wally felt the oval slap solidly into his hands from Whitey. Donati was racing wide in the opposite direction, his hand behind his hip as if concealing the ball. He glimpsed Nichols diving into the defensive end with a bone-jarring block. Putting down his head, he bent low and dug his cleats savagely into the turf. Suddenly he cut in and there was the goal line dead ahead. There were no defenders in that shining path.

He put everything he had now into that final sprint . . .

He barely heard the warning cry of a gold-helmeted Purdue back. He hardly

glimpsed the flash of the Boilermaker jersey tearing in from the side.

Too late he tried to shift the ball and use a straight arm. In one fleeting moment of frenzied horror he felt the ball jolted from his arms. He dove at it as it bounded across the sidelines. He had gained three yards.

Donati was raging as they huddled. "We get you a clear field," he snarled. "And then you can't hang onto the ball! You want handles—"

"Pipe down!" snapped Nichols. "We got work to do!"

Donati's turn now. This would be the pay-off punch. It had to be. But it called for split-second blocking, and the right half had to throw the key block.

Wally crouched, trying to collect his scattered wits. That fumble had jarred him like a knockout punch. He stared at the broad back of Bill McNeal, right end, crouched ahead of him, and tried to concentrate upon what he must do.

At the center snap he feinted at the in-rushing end. He felt his cleats slip clumsily as he wheeled to charge at the defensive halfback. He heard the solid sound of a jarring block and knew the end was out of the play. Desperately he lunged at the defensive half. The back was coming in fast. But his eyes were only on the ball carrier. He hadn't even seen Wally, and the blocking angle was perfect. It would be like shooting ducks in a barrel.

Wally threw his body into the path of the Boilermaker defender. He lunged—and instinctively shut his eyes, a thing he had always had to fight in blocking. Too late he felt his shoulder plow turf, felt the scrape of leaping cleats across his body . . .

Rick Donati lay exactly parallel with the scrimmage line behind Wally. The defensive half's arms were still locked around Rick's thighs. The tailback's eyes were hot and accusing as he stared back at Wally.

"I get it," he said. "We'll see."

Wally wanted to protest. He was sick at heart. But there was no time and he knew Rick would never believe him. Missing that block had not been intentional.

There was a minute left. The Panthers

switched to their version of the T, and Whitey Nichols hurled a desperate pass into the end zone. Bill McNeal went higher than he knew how to do, but a Purdue man went higher, and tumbled to the ground, stumbling back to the one yard line. That was it.

It made no difference that the Boilermaker's punt was a ragged, end-over-end attempt that curved out of bounds on the thirty-five. The gun sounded almost before the Panthers could huddle. The score: Purdue 10, Middleton 7.

**I**T WAS SILENT as a tomb in the Panthers dressing room. Only the steady hiss of the showers, the occasional banging of a locker door, or a low-voiced oath, broke the stillness. The loss had snapped an eighteen game victory string. And if they'd lost Jinks Eldridge for the season—the future could be even bleaker. It was plainly evident that they needed a right halfback.

One or two of his mates mumbled: "Too bad, Wally," or "tough luck, kid," but mostly they were silent, miserable with their own thoughts. Wally was in the depths of despair. This was the end of the road—he'd kicked the game and his big chance away. All of his bright and shining dreams lay broken in the dust of defeat now.

Mechanically he dressed, then walked to the wall mirror to fasten his necktie. In the glass he saw Rick Donati moving toward him. He tried to ignore Rick's bitter and accusing eyes, boring into his back.

"Well, Blue Blood," he said with startling loudness. "Your old man must be happy now. This should start off his campaign against the Skipper with a bang. You and your old man should make a good team in politics—you should—"

That was as far as he got.

All of Wally's pent-up feelings were behind the right fist that he threw as he whirled around. Rick flew backward across the room, tripped over a bench and landed in a clattering heap against a row of lockers. He looked up dazedly for a moment, blood trickling from a split lip.

Wally walked over and waited for him to get up. "Well?" he heard himself say

hoarsely. "Got anything else on your chest? This is as good a time as any to get it off."

Rick's eyes cleared. Wally saw them flash fire as he came up, fists flying like twin windmills. Wally Madison hadn't had a fight since his kid days. The set he came from did not often settle disputes that way. Rick Donati had been raised in a neighborhood where fighting was almost as natural as eating.

A barrage of fists blinded and stunned him now, sweeping him backward. Blood spurted from his nose as his back struck the opposite wall. He doubled up as a hard fist plunked into his stomach, as another lashed into his mouth.

Instinctively he stuck out a clumsy left to shove his tormenter away. It was just enough of a blow to let him lash out with a right hand. It was not a stylish punch but it was a straight one, and his back was braced against the wall. It caught Donati squarely on the chin. Rick's eyes dulled and his knees sagged. Wally threw another swing that caught Donati on the side of the head.

Then somebody was holding his arms, and he saw Boots Hauser leap in to catch Rick's sagging form.

"What's all this about?" shouted Whitey Nichols in Wally's ear. "Break it up!"

Then Skipper Slade stood before them. "I ought to fire both of you off the squad," he grated. "We've got problems enough without a couple of soreheads on the squad."

"But he said—" began Wally hotly.

"I don't care what he said—and I heard part of it—" Slade said sharply. "You're both supposed, at least, to be grown up. If there's any further trouble, you both turn in your suits. Now forget it. Let's all start thinking about next week."

There was a perceptible sag to Slade's shoulders as he stalked from the room. Wally barely glanced at Donati. But he read the hatred in his eyes. The feud was not settled. He washed the blood from his face and finished dressing.

**I**T WAS LATE when Wally left the dressing quarters. The huge stadium lay silent and deserted now. As he walked

along beneath the mammoth structure, the crunching of the cinders beneath his feet sounded unnaturally loud. The rich, full rays of the Autumn moon cut silvery paths through the ramps.

Suddenly he heard a clicking, shuffling sound, like slow, dragging footsteps, echoing through the ghostly gloom. It came again and he stopped. Could there be anyone still out there in that vast area of empty seats? He hesitated, then walked softly up the ramp to look around.

Glancing upward, he saw a figure outlined against the brilliant, moon-lit sky. The man was hatless, head thrown back, eyes closed. It was as if some ancient high priest stood in a temple, paying weird homage to the moon. A long, wrinkled topcoat hung from his shoulders like a shroud.

It was an eerie picture. It might even have been funny—except that the man was Jimmy Carter.

Wally stood undecided for a moment. He was about to tiptoe quietly down the ramp again when a sudden wave of emotion came over him. "Jimmy," he called quietly, "Jimmy."

Jimmy Carter started. He peered down through the gloom and recognition dawned upon his face.

"Wally Madison!" he exclaimed huskily. "What're you doing here, boy?"

"Just—just leaving," Wally replied. "Come on with me—let's get a cup of coffee."

Carter swallowed and blinked a couple of times and then followed without a word. They went into a hot dog stand where the coffee was hot and good. Jimmy began to relax.

He grinned shame-facedly. "Guess I shouldn't let sentiment rule the old head," he said. "Only the heart." He lit a cigarette. "I felt pretty tough about seeing us lose today—even if I'm not around any more."

Wally squirmed at the question in Jimmy Carter's eyes. And before he knew it, he was pouring out the whole story. Jimmy was a swell listener. He did not interrupt once as his eyes slowly studied the boy.

"I'm glad to know it's as simple as that,"

said Jimmy finally. "You know I had high hopes for you—and I still have. Your problem is not so tough. I know that you're a football player—else I wouldn't have bothered with you before. If we'd been around together, things might have been different—but they didn't pan out that way."

He hesitated, slowly tapping the ash from his cigarette. "This Donati is one helluva football player," Jimmy said. "I don't think you could ever beat him out of that tailback spot. But I think you could be as good, or better, than Jinks Eldridge. You are bigger and more rugged, and you run well, but you **MUST** learn to block. You've got to learn to block better than anybody else on the squad—because Eldridge is that good."

"Yeah?" said Wally. "And me on the sidelines most of the time, even during scrimmage. Today was my first real chance of the year—and then I muffed it."

Carter was silent for a moment. "Maybe I can help you," he said. "That is, with this blocking business. You need a lot of work—individual attention and practice. They haven't got time to give it to you out there right now."

"You mean—well, just what do you mean?" asked Wally eagerly.

"This would have to be strictly hush-hush," replied Jimmy. "Skipper might not like it and your dad would skin you alive if he knew I was trying to help you."

"But how—?"

"My idea is this," Jimmy said. "I can get a blocking dummy from Al Jones, the high school coach. We could find a nice quiet corner under the arc lights in Logan Park and work for an hour or so each evening. That is—if you want to."

"Want to!" exclaimed Wally. "Holy Cow!"

Jimmy Carter grinned. "Maybe it will help me, too, kid. You know I'm lost without football." He sighed, then added. "But this is strictly off the record."

"Right!" agreed Wally enthusiastically. "But, Jimmy, after what Dad did—and me—his son—"

"Forget it, boy," Jimmy said quietly. "Maybe I'm just a sentimental old fool—but when you've been around college foot-

ball as long as I have—you'll realize it is a pretty good game for youngsters, in spite of its faults. No room for pettiness. What was it—my old friend Fielding Yost used to say? 'No one man is ever bigger than the game'."

Old Jimmy Carter braced a leg against the heavy canvas blocking dummy and gripped it firmly by the handle. The flickering shadows from the arc light shown down upon the perspiring pair of sweat-shirted figures.

"X-Nineteen," snapped Jimmy. "What do you do on this one?"

Wally Madison crouched weary and sore. His shoulder ached where he had been slugging the dummy. They had been at it for more than an hour.

"Hike!" snapped Jimmy Carter.

Wally took his quick driving strides, wheeled and hit the dummy. "Keep those legs under you. A good end would make you look very silly," said Jimmy.

Later they drove slowly back to Wally's room. Jimmy emphasized, over and over, the fine points of blocking. "Like learning to ride a bike," he said. "You work and work, and then suddenly you have it."

"Yeah?" said Wally. "I've been working and working, and I still haven't got it."

"You will," said Jimmy Carter quietly. "You will."

**T**HE IOWA game—and Rick Donati passed for one touchdown and ran for another and the game ended, 20—7 in favor of Middleton. Wally spent practically the entire game on the bench. But he was not moping now. Jimmy Carter had told him to watch Jinks Eldridge, to study his every move.

When it was over, he had a new insight upon the way the Middleton offense really functioned.

"Say, that Jinks is really good!" he exclaimed after the game.

Jimmy Carter grinned. "I guess there's hope for you. Let's eat."

They started to climb into Jimmy's convertible when a heavy voice halted them.

"I've been looking all over for you, son," said Cornelius Madison III, petulantly. "Where are you going?"

"Out to eat with Jimmy here," replied Wally.

Recognition dawned swiftly on the face of Cornelius Madison III. "What are you doing with this—this man?" snarled his father.

"As I said," Wally replied again. "Going out to dinner."

"Get out of that car at once—get—out—I forbid it!" thundered the elder Madison. "I won't have you associating with that—that—miserable failure!"

White-faced, Jimmy Carter started toward Cornelius Madison III. Wally grabbed him by the arm and turned to his father. "Jimmy Carter is my friend," he said steadily. "I won't have him insulted by you. I know you were responsible for having him fired. At least, he had nerve enough to stand up to you—and I admire him for it. Is there anything else you wish to talk about?"

"Talk about!" gasped the older man. "You get out of that car—You—you—I won't have —" He ended sputtering incoherently.

"Let's go!" snapped Wally, urging Jimmy into the car. Wally gunned the motor and they left Cornelius Madison III staring after them in impotent rage.

They drove in silence for a while. Finally Wally said: "Don't worry about Dad, Jimmy—I should have talked up to him long ago."

"I just don't want to get you in trouble, son," Jimmy said. "After all, he is your father."

When Wally returned to his room there was a note from his father under the door. There were certain things that Cornelius Madison III wished to discuss with his son—when he came to Middleton for the next game.

WALLY looked up from the blocking dummy he had just shouldered into. The shrill whistle of Skipper Slade blasted three times into his ears. The coach was calling off the starting line-up for the varsity for that practice session.

"— Madison, take right half!" he concluded.

There was a murmur of surprise from the sideliners. Wally's heart leaped and

he shot a quick glance around. He saw Jinks Eldridge, swathed in sweat shirts, limping slowly along the far edge of the field.

He moved in and crouched, forearms on thighs, as Whitey Nichols barked the signal. Left half around end on a sweep. Rick Donati's favorite. Rick had the option of running or throwing on the play, and he was a master at confusing the opposition.

There was a further secret to the play. A perfectly-timed block by right half. Jinks Eldridge had been played up in the newspapers because of his running ability. But Jinks also was a master of the block—a phase which only good football men appreciated. Jinks had made this play go for two seasons.

Jimmy Carter had been grooming Wally for it in their nightly sessions.

"Let that end come in—let him charge," Jimmy had urged. Time him—show him the bait—then hook him!"

Clean and spanking, the sound of leather beat against Donati's hands. With it Wally took four quick measured steps. The over-eager end saw the false and inviting lane down to the ball carrier. Suddenly he was tumbling through space toward the sidelines . . .

Rick Donati raced twenty-five yards on the play. As Wally picked himself up, a heart-warming shout came from the sidelines. "Nice blockin' in there, kid! Nice blockin'!"

It was a very satisfactory feeling. There were a couple of other blocks that gray afternoon that made a difference. Wally's body ached under the shower but there was a comfortable feeling in his mind for the first time in weeks.

That feeling was not deflated when he met Jimmy Carter that night. "They say you were a ball of fire out there today," grinned Jimmy. "Those blocks, they say, were terrific."

"How'd you find that out?" asked Wally in surprise. "You weren't out there."

"A little bird told me, son," cracked Jimmy. "I get around."

Jinks Eldridge was back for the Indiana game. As good as ever the fans said. But reputations meant little to the Hoos-

iers. They were very rugged. They had a very good colored boy at left half. They had a dish-faced guard with a chip on his shoulder and a bear-like pair of hands. They had a fullback, too, of All-American variety in Duke Jablonski, a steel puddler out of Gary, Indiana, during his summer vacations.

Middleton scored first, however, in exactly six plays off the kickoff. Boots Hauser started the drive and then finished it by tearing twelve yards up the middle for a touchdown and then Whitey Nichols made it a fat seven points with a perfect placement.

Middleton led and still led, 7-0 at the end of the first period.

The Panthers moved to increase their lead in the second quarter with quick darting rushes by Donati and Eldridge and an occasional flipping pass by Rick or Whitey Nichols. It was a smooth, sure and sharp pattern. Middleton moved down to the Indiana forty on successive plays.

It was Jinks Eldridge this time, weaving in, close off tackle. The book said the play had plenty of deception. But Jablonski and the dish-faced guard hadn't read that book. They trapped Jinks near the sidelines and then all three flew headlong into a red-faced and swearing drummer from the Indiana college band.

It should have been funny because the drummer's head stuck for an instant through a gaping hole in the drum. It was not very funny, however, a moment later when the Middleton trainer, with the aid of a couple of assistants, carefully placed Jinks on a stretcher, white-faced and tight-lipped.

"Madison in!" snapped Skipper Slade. Middleton still clung to that 7-0 lead but that was not enough, especially with Eldridge out. Wally felt rather than heard the thudding letdown in the stands as he trotted upon the field. It both angered and un-nerved him.

He missed his first block. Donati went crashing and cursing into the turf for a five-yard loss. Nichols called his signal next but the pass from center was a bit low and he bobbled it. He drove frantically for it, got it, but it was three more yards lost. The Panthers seemed to be-

come jittery then, and it was still 7-0 as the half ended.

They pulled together a bit in the third period but they could not put over the clincher. Going into the final quarter and through the first eight minutes, the score remained the same. But Indiana was fighting desperately, getting stronger. Their big line was taking over control of the situation.

The Hoosiers' colored halfback, Dick Hawkins came back with a punt to the Panther forty. Jablonski, their pig iron fullback, hit tackle so hard he landed flat on his face—eight yards past the scrimmage line. He came back immediately through the same spot and it was first down on the Panther twenty-eight.

Wally got in on the second tackle and felt his whole right side go numb from contact with the rugged Jablonski. He was still shaking himself when Boots Hauser, who called defensive signals, whispered. "Snap out of it, guy. This is a sweep or a running pass. Don't get sucked in!"

Wally crouched, straining to catch the tip-off on the play. The Hoosiers were in a single wing, Hawkins back. The colored boy took the oval and raced wide his right arm flashing high.

But suddenly Wally saw it would not be a pass, and then Hawkins was running straight toward him, knees pumping high, leaning in like a bicycle racer taking a steeply banked curve.

Wally set himself, moved up to meet the colored back, digging his cleats solidly in the turf. He saw the flash of the red jersey with its white-blocked numbers, the blur of gold pants, and then he dove. Too late he had sensed his mistake. The clever colored back had timed Wally's dive perfectly—and changed direction with split-second swiftness.

When he rolled over and rubbed the grass from his mouth and eyes, the sick feeling already was welling high within him. The roar of the crowd told him what had happened . . .

They lined up for the try-for-point and Rick's voice was bitter in his ears. "All right—let's block it and save the pieces!"

Boots Hauser did that. It seemed impossible against that big and raging Hoos-

ier line. But Boots was that kind of a player. Somehow he broke through, and his huge hand struck a piece of the ball—enough to deflect it and send the kick spinning wildly. So it was still Middleton 7; Indiana 6—even when the game ended.

The Panthers left the field slowly, feeling like a defeated team. Whitey Nichols said: "And the smart boys had us in front by twenty points—we stink!"

Later from the shower Rick Donati's voice sounded thin and bitter. "We either get Eldridge back—or we're done. That other guy—phooey!"

Anger and despair locked in Wally's throat. He wanted to punch Donati's face once more. But the feeling drained quickly out of him. What good would it do? He wanted to play football—not fight. He wanted to play the game to gain the respect of his team-mates—and most of all, of himself.

**W**ALLY found a further complication to his woes when he returned to his room. His father was seated there, an angry light in his eyes. The storm was not long in coming. But Wally was dumbfounded at the turn it took.

"Son," said the elder Madison without preliminaries. "I assume that you realize the rotten deal you are getting here at Middleton. Frankly, I am ashamed for the old school. Yet I feel that I am the cause of it all."

Wally's jaw dropped. It was the first time in his life he had ever heard his father accept the blame for anything. Cornelius Madison III went on.

"Skipper Slade hates me," he said. "But the only way he can hurt me is through you—my son. I even believe it was he who put Jimmy Carter up to hanging around you—knowing how I detest the man."

Hot words tumbled from Wally's lips as he recovered his voice. "If you think for one minute, Dad, that Jimmy would have anything to do —"

His father interrupted. "Give me a moment to finish, *please*," he snapped. "Now—I want you to quit the squad—show Slade that you refuse to be publicly humiliated—or to have me publicly humiliated by his tactics. Do that, and I shall per-

sonally see to it that Mr. Slade is put in his proper place—completely off of the Middleton campus!"

For an instant Wally could not speak. Then he said, in a cold voice that he barely recognized as his own: "Dad—leave this room—get out, before I throw you out!"

It was his father's turn to gasp. "What—before you *what*?"

"Get out!"

Cornelius Madison III turned livid, then started to speak. But something in his son's eyes checked him. He picked up his hat and marched stiffly through the door. Not until Wally heard the whirr of the starting motor, and the slam of the door of his father's car, did he relax. Then he sank down in a chair, his face covered by his hands, trying to stifle the sobs that wracked his body.

Jinks Eldridge did not report for practice the following week. He would not report for practice again that season. Middleton had a bone specialist of world renown. The medic also was a great grid fan, and he offered to examine Jinks. But when he had completed his examination he shook his head. A knee operation and complete rest would be necessary. There would be no more football for Jinks Eldridge for a year, at least. And Jinks was a senior.

Wally shared the deep and abiding gloom that descended upon the campus. The more he thought of the situation, the deeper became his depression. Actually, this should have been his big chance. But no one had confidence in him—even his own confidence was badly shaken. He knew that the Panthers were great with Eldridge in there—he also knew that he had tried and been found wanting—and without Jinks things could be mighty mediocre.

Jimmy Carter, however, did not share this dim view. "It could be worse," said Jimmy, drawing slowly on his pipe. "They still have you."

"Are you kidding?" asked Wally bitterly.

"I am not kidding," Jimmy said flatly. "But you are—kidding yourself."

The ex-coach paused. "Now look, Wally," he said quietly. "You've let this

Donati guy buffalo you. You've let the whole situation get out of hand. It's really none of my business, but your father also—"

"We can leave him out of this—" Wally said quickly.

"I'm sorry, Wally, but you can't if you wish to be honest with yourself," said Jimmy.

That did it. Before he knew it Wally had recounted the whole scene between himself and his father. When he had finished, Jimmy said: "Good—it's time you told him off. You've already made a step forward."

Jimmy chose his words carefully now. "You know—you may not believe it, but mechanically your blocking is two hundred per cent better than it's ever been before. Blame it on Slade's teaching—mine—on your own initiative. But Slade must have noticed it, too. You've had some bad breaks—you're jittery. You've got to master yourself now—you're on the spot, with yourself—and you are the only guy who can help yourself. Forget the past—relax—Middleton is going to need you—and need you badly, against Ohio State in two weeks."

"Ohio State?" Wally snapped bitterly. "Slade certainly won't let me off the bench the rest of the season—even if he'll let me back on it. Maybe Dad was right . . ."

"Nuts!" Jimmy cracked. "Who else has he got? He's got to string with you. And if you'll think straight instead of moping around feeling sorry for yourself, you can make a sucker out of Donati, your Dad and even Slade. The situation is hand-made for you—if you'll open your eyes."

Wally stared at Jimmy Carter, but Jimmy only winked back at him. "You see, I sort of believe in you, son —" he said.

**T**HE CENTRAL STATE game came and went. Skipper Slade had ignored him the first part of the week, then sent him to varsity right half on Thursday. He started against the weak Central State outfit, played nearly three full quarters of a game that ended 35-7.

Wally got away for two long runs, one of which would have been a touchdown if he had not slipped to one knee on the

ten-yard line. Twice a missed block had caused Donati to be tossed for slight losses.

Nobody seemed particularly elated about the victory. But nobody commented upon Wally's errors—except Rick Donati. Rick said to Boots Hauser, loud enough for Wally to hear behind the next row of lockers: "So what—we're still getting lousy blocking from the right side. We should have had at least one more touchdown if the guy didn't have two left feet. Boy! What wouldn't I give to have Jinks back!"

Hauser, usually a very amiable guy, snapped. "Aw, layoff. We got other things to think about for next week."

Later Jimmy Carter said: "You're trying too hard son. You've got to learn to let the play do the work. Your timing is off because you're starting ahead of the rest of the gang. You've got to be sharper against Ohio State—they're shooting for that title, too, you know. If you're not too tired, we work a little tonight."

Wally sighed wearily. "Might as well," he said. "Better than sitting around worrying."

It was a dreary task. But Jimmy insisted they keep the workout at half speed. Patiently he pointed out in detail the errors of the afternoon.

"Look, son," said Jimmy Carter. "Remember on that X-twenty-six play—where you handle the end?"

Wally looked miserable. He knew all too well what had happened.

Jimmy grinned. Don't let it get you down—I had a helluva time teaching Jinks Eldridge on that one, too."

"You see, Wally," he explained. "It's something like this—you block that end out—not in. You've got to feint him, make him commit himself—then keep your legs wide and make contact. You don't have to knock him down—just ride into him, and keep pushing, always keeping your head and shoulders between him and the ball-carrier." Jimmy paused a moment. "Sounds easy, doesn't it?" he said.

Then he continued: "Now here's what you did—you charged straight into him. You were trying to flatten him. He suckered you by stepping back and then leaping over you as you dove into the ground. You've got to be thinking all the time

when you block—and you've got to remember—you don't block for headlines—they're for the guy who lugs the apple."

"Once more now," Jimmy soothed. "That was better . . . but once more, this afternoon you were doing this . . ." Jimmy Carter pushed the blue baseball cap back on his perspiring forehead, and demonstrated the fault he had detected.

The pair did not notice the maroon and silver roadster glide silently into the drive and stop thirty yards away. Its lights were dimmed as it slid to a smooth halt. Nor did they see the tall, dignified figure move slowly toward them along the bush-lined path to a point where he could watch them unobserved.

They did not see the look of chagrin on his face, nor did they see it turn to one of surprise and wonder. They did not see old Cornelius Madison III start forward, halt uncertainly, then turn and climb heavily into his roadster and coast it quietly into the roadway. As the lights of the car flashed on, the rays caught the little scene under the arc-light briefly.

Jimmy Carter looked around and grinned. "Looks like we spoiled somebody's romance," he said. "Now about the blocking on X-twenty-six —"

They barely heard the subdued hum of the motor, and they did not hear at all as the car slid into high gear.

**T**HIS WAS for the conference championship. So the Panther dressing room under the Ohio State stadium was very quiet. The Buckeyes were unbeaten but they had been tied by Northwestern's Wildcats. A win would clinch the crown; the once-beaten Panthers were acutely aware of that.

Wally Madison felt the tightness in his stomach. He could not control the nervous flicker along the back of his calves. He knew the chips were down, and that meant for Wally Madison, too.

Somebody leaned against an open locker door and it banged shut with a hollow crash that made everybody jump. There was some muttering, but somehow the sound relieved the tension.

Boots Hauser said in his deep voice:

"Feels like a good scoring day—let's go out and catch us a few."

"All we need is blocking," snapped Rick Donati tightly. His eyes, fastened on Wally, did not veil their feeling. "We get it—or else—"

Anger, almost to the bursting point, welled steeply inside of Wally. "You'll get it—and 'or else', too, right after—"

"Cut it—both of you," Skipper Slade said sharply. "Now!"

He paused and cleared his throat. He spoke slowly now. "Remember to watch for passes too—they'll be firing. We've stressed halting their running attack. We've got to be very sharp out there, with very fast reactions. Go out and do what you must do—to win. But above all—be like all good Middleton teams always have been—be a *poised* team. Keep your heads no matter what happens!"

The Skipper motioned toward the door. "Let's go!" he said.

They crunched across the cinders and into the bright sunlight. A perfect football day, crisp and sharp. The roaring thousands in the double-decked stands greeted them with wild acclaim. This was for the title.

The quick, crashing beat of the Middleton band cut through Wally's dark and bitter thoughts.

Somehow the strains of the college song caught in its swelling triumph as it rolled across the field.

He trotted along the sideline in front of the Middleton bench. Looking up he saw Jimmy Carter standing in an aisle. Jimmy waved and grinned. Wally felt better as he waved back. He pranced, kicking his knees high to warm up his legs. Then he spied his father, seated in a nearby box, surrounded by the usual crowd of alumni.

His dad caught his eye and waved uncertainly. The elder Madison's face looked pinched and haggard to Wally. He wanted to wave back, but turned away, a raw ache in his throat, a quick mist before his eyes . . .

The Buckeyes came out and their white and scarlet uniforms made them look even bigger than they were. They had the reputation of being a big and bone-crushing

outfit with plenty of sock, good passing, fair speed and deception.

Wally heard his name blared over the public address system—"Left Half Donati, —Right Half, Madison—and Fullback, Hauser."

Boots came back from the little huddle of officials in the center of the field. The Panthers had won the toss. Skipper Slade stuck his head into the little circle of starting players near the sideline.

"We got this break" he said grimly. "We won't get many. Let's score now—before they get their hands on the ball!"

The kickoff arched high and deep, way back to Rick Donati standing on the Panther five. Joe Valdez the Bucks' All-American guard, led a husky pair of ends down on Rick. Boots Hauser slowed up Valdez with a nudging shoulder block. Whitey Nichols cut the legs from under a charging wingman and Wally dropped the other end with a rolling twisting dive.

Rick brought a roar from the crowd by racing diagonally across the field to the Panther thirty-two before a huge tackle trapped him. He twisted away and fell out of bounds on the thirty-five.

"Nice Rick," panted Whitey Nichols in the huddle. "Y—twenty—two pass!"

There was a murmur of surprised delight among the tight little group of players. The Buckeyes would not be expecting this one—not a pass on the first play of the game.

Donati took the rifled pass from center, faked a run and hurled a bullet pass to Bill McNeal on the Ohio forty-five. McNeal got five more before Jack Harlan, the Bucks' safety man, downed him.

Boots Hauser slanted off tackle to plant leather on the Ohio State thirty-two. Whitey Nichols nose-dived through guard for first down on the twenty-nine. Big Danny Daniels, the Ohio captain, signalled for time out. The Scarlet and Gray lads huddled, trying to collect their scattered wits, to break up the continuity of the Middleton rush.

"All the way, now, gang!" yelled Mc Neal as the two minutes of time out ended. "This time we go in!"

It was Donati. Wally went in motion, took his steps, wheeled and cut in. He

tossed a bone-jarring, old-fashioned block at the defensive half, and they crashed to the ground together. The wind was almost driven from his body and his ribs felt like broken sticks. But looking up from the grass, he saw Rick Donati fighting for that last precious yard on the fifteen. It was another first down.

They went to the T-formation. Whitey faded, and fired a quick pass that barely eluded McNeal's finger tips. Boots Hauser went for four, and it was a first down on the five. But the big Buck line smeared Donati for a yard loss on the next play.

"Reverse—they're over-shifting toward the strong side. X—twenty-nine," whispered Whitey in the huddle.

Wally's nerves and muscles tightened. This was it. He took the oval cleanly from Whitey Nichols as Rick ran to the right. Rick's hand was cocked behind his hip. He gave an excellent imitation of a gent going somewhere with a football.

**I**N THE FRACTION of a second Wally saw the defense accept the bait. He, himself, drove around the naked Buck flank as fast as his legs could pump. The Buckeye safety man yelled a warning and dashed toward him.

He tried to time the safety man's dash. But suddenly another white-sweated figure loomed ahead, and he caught the flash of someone closing in from the side. He went down with a solid thump.

As he fell, his elbow struck the ground and he felt the oval pop from his arms. He dove for it in a nightmare of horror but an Ohioan lay across his legs and pinned him down. He saw a blue-shirted figure dive at the leather as a host of white jerseys piled in. In that brief instant Wally Madison died a thousand deaths.

"Out of bounds!" shouted an official. "Middleton's ball!"

Not until then did he dare breathe. It had been a very lucky break. Very lucky, indeed, because when the official moved the pigpelt in, it rested exactly one yard from the goal line.

"Nice, Wally," said Boots Hauser. "But for the love of Mike, hang onto it!"

In the huddle Rick Donati snarled, "Give it to me—I can at least hold it!"

Whitey chose to ignore him, however, and it was Boots again. The big boy powered across the Ohio final stripe like a runaway tank. Officially it was Middleton 6; Ohio State, 0, first quarter.

Officially, it was still that a moment later as the Panther's try for point was blocked. Grim forboding filled Wally. A six-point lead meant nothing in this ball game.

Ohio State stormed back to their own thirty with the kickoff. And then Jack Harlan, the great Buckeye tailback, took the leather and did not stop until he had crossed the Panther forty-five. Herb Schmidt, Buck right half, started on a reverse, then fired a pass that placed the leather on the Panther twenty-five.

Exactly three plays later Ohio State had a touchdown. They did not miss the try for point, and so it was 7-6 for the Bucks. Then misfortune struck the Panthers. Big Danny Daniels laid the ball on the ground for the kickoff and promptly booted a grass cutter that took a wild hop off the leg of Ike Stone, Panther right guard. Joe Valdez, the Buckeye guard, pounced upon the bounding leather immediately. And it was first and ten for Ohio from the Panther's forty.

A line buck and an end run by Harlan netted eight yards, and bullet pass over center by Herb Schmidt put the leather on the fifteen. The pass was completed in Wally's territory. He had backed up instead of coming in to take his man. There was a grimness about the mouths of the Panthers as they came back in the huddle, and they eyed Wally angrily.

He was still dazed and unstrung when Schmidt came racing low and hard toward him on the next play. Caught napping, he was off balance. Desperately he tried to hurl his body across the runner's path. Something hard banged against his plastic helmet, and his face ploughed turf in a dazzling array of lights . . .

And then the score was 14-6 for the Buckeyes.

A sub came in at right halfback and as Wally trotted toward the bench, Donati mouthed: "You're a helluva help, Blue Blood—like I thought you'd be in the clutch!"

Wally did not answer, and for the rest

of the half he sat disconsolately on the bench as Middleton waged a stubborn defensive battle to contain the rampaging Buckeyes.

When the gun barked the intermission, Wally trailed along the sideline toward the dressing room. Sick at heart, he dreaded the between-halves dressing room scene.

Suddenly he heard his name shouted, and he looked up toward the retaining wall. The grinning face of Jimmy Carter was just above him.

"Don't let it get you down, son!" shouted Jimmy. "Give 'em hell, the next half! You can do it! Just keep those legs driving!"

Wally waved back and tried to grin but his face felt very stiff. Give 'em hell, huh? He was getting all the hell, himself, out there.

**D**URING the rest period the Panthers' dressing room was grim and silent. They had taken a severe physical beating from the hard-smashing Ohio State line. But the mental beating had been worse. To have had the jump on the Bucks, only to have the Ohio advantage increase on one break and one misplay. It had not been a heartening experience.

Wally could feel the tension and bitter disappointment in the room. No one spoke to him, and it was only Rick Donati who said: "The big chance—the pay-off, and one guy has to kick it away."

No one else agreed—or disagreed. Skipper Slade walked into the dressing room. He spoke calmly but the paleness on his bleak face, the taut jaw muscles, belied that outward calmness. He did not grow oratorical; he merely reviewed the first half, the mistake and the good work—both impersonally.

"Good blocking and tackling still can do it," Skipper said. "You know the plays. But you've got to get that ball and keep it. And you've got to block ahead of the ball-carrier!"

Suddenly he beat his fist against his left palm to emphasize his words: "You've got to block through your man—not just to him! Now drive him out of there!"

He called off the second half line-up and Wally's name was in it. They started

to leave the dressing room. Suddenly Wally was surprised to feel the Skipper's big hand on his shoulder, holding him back. They waited until the rest of the gang crowded out.

"Block—block—and block, this time!" the Skipper growled. "Block as you've never blocked before. Forget the past. Lick *yourself* as well as Ohio out there this half. Show 'em—show your father—show Donati—show Jimmy Carter—show 'em all—just what a guy named Wally Madison can do!"

Abruptly Slade's hand fell away from his shoulder. And then they were up in the sunlight again.

Wally tried his best. But it did not seem to help much. Going into the fourth quarter the score remained the same—Ohio State, 14; Middleton, 6. It looked as if the Bucks were masters of the situation, and they were playing it smart. They were taking no chances.

Whitey Nichols grew desperate as the seconds ticked on into minutes. After Donati took a Buck punt on his own twenty-five and returned ten, Whitey gambled and called a first down pass.

Jack Harlan promptly intercepted and ran it back to the Panther twenty. Three plays netted only six yards but the place-kick was a cinch for Danny Daniel from the fourteen, and that was the clincher. Ohio led 17-6. In another twelve minutes the Buckeyes would be the new champs. It looked hopeless . . .

**T**HE DOWNCAST PANTHERS deployed for the kickoff. Boots Hauser was slapping players on the back. But as Wally glanced at his team-mates' smerec and tired faces, he saw with a sickening feeling that they were licked.

They were licked—all except Rick Donati.

Rick was grim and snarling. His eyes were hot with hate as they locked with Wally's.

"All right, Blue Blood—you got us fixed up!" he sneered. "Your Old Man must be proud of you! But I'm not giving up—I'm sticking! I'll lick your Old Man, and I'll lick these—"

Wally leaped at Donati, grabbing at

his sweater front, his right fist raised. He wanted to rip that right into that hated face in front of him . . .

Dimly he heard the surprised roar of the crowd, even as Boots Hauser and Bill McNeal leaped at him. Then something clicked in his brain.

His twisted face was inches from Donati's. "O.K.," he snarled. "O.K., Big Mouth. You talk a lot of football—but let's see your guts now when the chips are down. You run—I'll guarantee the blocking. I'll guarantee something else—we get two touchdowns, or I'll take you apart—you slum bum!"

Donati gaped. But he saw something in Wally's eyes he had not seen there before. "Just remember what you said—about the blocking," he mumbled, and turned toward his position, his face tight.

"All right, you guys," snapped Boots Hauser. "Let's see if you mean it!"

Big Boots lifted his hand at the referee. The kickoff came, high and deep. It took a sharp dip and then Donati had it. Rick bobbed the ball for an instant, then started forward. But that instant of hesitation had given Joe Valdez a shot at him, Wally saw.

Wally whirled in his tracks and Jimmy Carter's words sizzled in his brain: *Always keep your head and shoulders in front of your man's body—and keep those legs driving!*

Four drumming foot beats . . . and his shoulder was in Valdez' midriff. The big boy half-spun, and Wally thought he had been side-swiped by a skidding truck. The light dimmed for a moment—and then the roar of the crowd brought him back to the reality of the Ohio stadium. He blinked and shook his head. But his heart leaped as he saw Rick slam the ball on the Middleton forty.

"Brother!" exulted Whitey Nichols at Wally. "That was a man-sized block!"

The spread to the T-formation on the first play. Wally shot a quick glance at Donati. Rick's face was bleak as granite. The play was a throw-out, Whitey to Rick. It was old X-twenty-six.

*Remember, Jimmy Carter had said, you've got to feint him, keep the legs wide . . . block him out, not in . . . don't*

*knock him down . . . just ride him, boy . . . keep the head and shoulders between him and the runner . . . ride him now . . . keep pushing!*

The end saw his mistake too late. Frantically he tried to shift and fight off Wally. But Wally was close now, past those pawing hands, thrusting a driving shoulder into the belt line . . . Drumming feet grazed his ankles as the runner raced through the gaping hole. First down on the Ohio forty-nine!

Wally went in motion, whirled, and saw Boots Hauser tear straight up the middle to the forty-three. Then it was a pass, Whitey Nichols out to Wally in the flat zone. It was an official's time out for measurement, but they gave it to Middleton on the Buckeye thirty-nine.

Wally got up and almost fell from the knifing pain in his side. But in the huddle Whitey panted: "Wally—the old reverse!"

Dizzy with pain Wally threw himself forward. There was a hard, slapping sound. From the corner of his eye, he saw Rick crash-dive a charging halfback. Twisting and clawing, Wally fought his way to the thirty-three. But he could not get up immediately. When he did, Whitey fired a bullet-pass to Rick on the nineteen. Rick again. And this time Rick pulled out all stops.

*Keep your head and shoulders between the runner and the tackler, Jimmy Carter had said . . .*

Wally drove himself forward, and sobbed weakly as he banged into a defensive back's knees. He knew it had been lousy, but it had knocked his man off-balance, and instinctively he knew that Rick Donati had scored.

He was dimly aware of a vast wall of sound beating down from all sides as Whitey Nichols kicked the point. And it was: Ohio State, 17; Middletown, 13.

Feverishly the Panthers eyed the clock. The flickering red ball said seven minutes, forty seconds. It was not enough . . .

Jack Harlan brought the Panther kick-off to his own twenty-four before a bolt of blue struck him. Bill McNeal had made his finest play of the day. Two plays later and the Bucks were no farther than their

own thirty. Danny Daniel called time out for the Staters. But after a pass failed, they had to kick. It was a beautiful boot, angled just inside the sideline, that rolled with drunken and devilish precision for ten yards more before it hopped outside . . . on the Panther eighteen.

Wally was sick with the pain in his ribs. But this was no time for fooling now. Whitey Nichols was not fooling either. He called for a Donati pass on first down. It was a beautiful throw and nobody could have covered the angling, pace-magic of Bill McNeal on that one. McNeal fell across the midfield stripe with the leather.

Donati started to get up, then fell back. Big Danny Daniel had broken through—and neither had he been fooling. The officials hesitated, glanced at one another, and did not call a penalty.

Rick finally limped into position. Whitey glanced at him, then turned to Wally. "Yours—this time," Nichols said.

Reverse. Boots Hauser's block cleared the first man. Then a wave of white jerseys surged toward Wally. He dipped his shoulder and plunged at a minute streak of waving color that was in the stands at the far end of the field. A bomb burst nearby . . . but Wally did not care . . . then the turf felt cold and comfortable beneath his face.

First down—on the Ohio State thirty-six, the man on the public address shouted.

The circle of faces was blurry in the huddle. Wally thought. Funny-looking guys. The way those mud and blood-streaked pans danced up and down. Clowns, that was it.

Whitey was saying something . . . Rick—lug it boy! Got it fellows . . . X-twenty-one . . . then we'll throw . . . "

"Oke!" Rick panted. "Give it to me, baby!"

"I'll give him the best damn block!" snapped Wally. He was quite surprised that he had said anything at all. His team-mates stared at him queerly.

They moved out of the huddle. Wally's legs weighed a hundred leaden pounds each. His left side throbbled dully and his lungs were bursting. What was it Jimmy Carter had said? Oh yeah. *'Keep that old*

*head and shoulders in front of the guy . . . always drive with those legs . . . body under control at all times . . .*

He threw it at the big white-shirted defensive back—everything he had. He doubted if he'd ever get to his feet again . . . They took time out for the defensive fullback, too.

But they were on the eighteen and the flicking red point of light showed three minutes . . .

Wally stared groggily at the Buck defense. He saw that they were dog tired, too, and that they knew it had to be now, also. And they had the best pass defense record in the Big Nine. He glanced at Whitey Nichols, read the doubt and indecision in his eyes. He shook his head and something snapped. His mental processes started working again. This was the pay-off punch.

Wally straightened up and took a deep breath. He felt the power surge back into his rugged frame despite the knifing pain of his ribs. Those weary chilly nights in the park after the day's work on the practice field were paying off in stamina, too. He had not reached down to scrape the bottom of the barrel . . . yet.

He looked at Whitey, and then he said: "Let me heave one to Rick—they'll never look for that."

Whitey's forehead creased in a puzzled frown. And then it cleared. "Sounds good—let's go!"

"You better make it good!" snarled Donati. "I'll be waiting for it!"

Wally took the hand-off from Nichols—then faded with deceptive suddenness.

The huge white wall lunged toward him. He took two steps and leaped high.

The clean slap of leather against Donati's palms, banged into his ears, even above the crowd roar, as he tumbled to the turf under the rolling wave of Buck-eye linemen.

But the referee's whistle had shrilled as Rick fell on the four.

"One — two — more plays!" Whitey jerked out. "This one goes!"

"Give it to Rick," Wally said. "My turn to block!"

Rick stared at him through blood-shot eyes. There was a new light in them, Wally saw. He did not figure out what it was. There was not time now . . .

*On this one, a two-count after the ball is snapped, Jimmy Carter had said. You time your man . . . head and shoulders . . .*

One . . . two . . . and then he charged. The drumming of Donati's cleats cut through the crisp Autumn air behind him. He nudged the charging tackle, delaying him for a panting second. Then he drew a bead on Harlan, the Ohio State safety man.

*Head and shoulders between . . . tackler, and ball carrier . . .*

He felt the breath leave Harlan's body in a surging gasp, felt his own ribs give again in a flame of pain . . .

Somebody was hauling him to his feet. He lurched upward, tried to shrug off the flailing arm across his shoulder. But Rick Donati still clung to him.

"Blocking, Blue Blood!" said Rick huskily. "Beautiful, wonderful blocking!"

Very suddenly it was all ended. Somebody was hugging him again and his own arms were around that somebody—a guy named Rick Donati. The pain in his ribs wasn't so bad, anyway.

The scoreboard read, Middleton, 21; Ohio State, 17. And then there were a lot of people on the field, yelling, as they trooped to the dressing room.

Suddenly there was a louder commotion. "You did it, kid!" roared Jimmy Carter, charging into the dressing room.

Jimmy slugged Wally's aching ribs with another bear hug. "And hurry and get your shower—there's a guy out there named Cornelius Madison III—'Cornie' we call him now—wants to take us all out to a steak dinner—you and Rick and the Skipper—even me—hurry up—we're hungry!"

For just a moment Wally hesitated. Through his mind ran something else: "What was it your old friend Yost said?" he asked. "Something about—no one man is greater than the game?"

"Get your clothes on, son," said Jimmy, his eyes glistening. "We're hungry!"

# SIX-POINT SWINDLE

By PAUL PORTER

Ace seatback Terry Blaine had one more chance to wipe the easy-buck stigma from his name. The stands were hushed. Would he fumble? The ball snapped back. Then he heard his dear old Aunt Agatha scream: "The fix is on, son!"

FOR THE SECOND MONDAY morning in a row, Terry Blaine opened a typewritten, messageless envelope and watched a crisp, hundred dollar bill flutter down onto Aunt Agatha Blaine's glossy Chippendale hall table.

Terry, a quite normal young man in most respects, reacted as though the yard of lush green were a loathsome species of snake; or a blackball from the fraternity of his dreams, maybe. His long legs buckled noticeably, his ox-yoke shoulders sagged a good three hands, and his nor-

mally sunny features clouded all up and got ready for a squall.

It came. Terry shook the envelope to make sure no communication of any kind had accompanied the money, then blew his top. He whacked the palms of his big hands up and down on Aunt Agatha's Chippendale table and stomped his five-dollar number elevens on Aunt Agatha's priceless hardwood floor. He also delivered himself of a few choice words he kept stuffed around in an otherwise unprofane memory for just such occasions.



*The forward wall collapsed. Terry cut back sharply, digging in with everything he had . . .*

The massive doors to the library slid apart a few inches and through them glided a wraith in lavender and old lace. Aunt Agatha could do that. She was a fragile, wispy little somebody who looked not long for this world. She had looked that way for all of the twenty-one years of his orphaned existence Terry could remember, and it was a damned lie. Aunt Agatha was as tough as a tenpenny nail; twice as sharp.

"Such language!" she remarked in her deceptive quaver

Terry's carrot-colored hair cracked brimstone. "I learned it all from you, you old fake," he yelled, waving the hundred dollar bill at her. "You sure you're not mixed up in this some way?"

Aunt Agatha's sardonic chuckle was a complete and trustworthy denial. "Why, Terrence!" she said. "I couldn't be that cruel."

A good one that, her manner plainly stated. It was a sly dig at Terry's stubborn insistence upon making his own way, even though she herself possessed most of the dough not buried at Fort Knox.

Her nephew, completely malleable in other matters, was a pig-headed Sir Galahad when it came to accepting money he didn't feel he had earned.

The storm warnings were up, but Agatha Blaine was not one to duck a good blow. "If that's from where I think it's from," she said, inclining her head daintily at the bank note quivering a scant inch from the tip of her patrician nose, ". . . and you know no better use for it than to brandish it about in the air, you might give it to me, and I'll take care of it for you"

"Like the other eleven hundred!" Terry snorted, ramming his best four-buck hat down over his flaming ears. "No thank you, dear Aunt Aggie. Thank you ever so much, but go to the devil!"

He slammed the ornately carved front door and bounded down the marble steps, his parting words sounding something like, "You and your damned bingo!"

Agatha Blaine sighed, and the soft, delicate sound was as that of a capricious breeze ruffling the foliage on an otherwise unshakeable tree of wisdom. This probably meant no bingo for a while. Modern youth was so all-fired noble! She supposed he'd

run right to that gimlet-eyed football creature, now, and hand him that perfectly good hundred dollar bill.

And it would be perfectly good, Aunt Agatha reflected. Probably marked, but not counterfeit. *Now that coach person!* A crinkling of the delicate skin across the bridge of Aunt Agatha's nose proclaimed this to be another matter. A phony, be-mustached article, if ever she saw one!

COACH BARCLAY TOWNES fingered his close-cropped, iron-and-gray mustache worriedly all the time Terry was relating his story. It was a rather baffling story; one without much head or tail, so Terry plunged right into the middle of it and did the best he could.

When he had finished, Coach Townes nudged the hundred dollar bill this way and that on his battered desk top with lean, fine-looking hands that might have belonged to a banker. He was an impeccable man in his early forties, given to quiet pin-stripe suits and brief, subdued utterances. The Western campus had known him only a few short months, but already it was hailing him as something new and slightly colossal in coaches. He looked, it was often observed, more like the president of the university than the president of the university.

"Let's get this straight," he said in his well-modulated baritone. "You took your aunt to what you thought was a harmless bingo—ah—emporium. Had you been there before?"

"Often," Terry said. No use explaining that he hated the darned game, but was sort of fond of Aunt Aggie, even after living with the slightly wacky old character most of his life. And Aunt Aggie could bull him into almost anything—even Bingo.

"This man . . ." Townes went on, ". . . a complete stranger . . ." He asked for help with expressive brows.

"He called me by name, remember?" Terry said. "Told me there was an exclusive—that's the word he used—gaming room in the rear he'd be glad to show us." Terry paused. Again he was at a loss to explain Aunt Aggie's unconventional whimsies. He tried a patronizing, you-know-women smile and said, "My Aunt

wanted to see it." An understatement if ever there was one. She had practically created a scene when he tried to talk her out of accompanying the dapper stranger.

"And it was back there that the other man came up and handed you the envelope with the hundred dollars in it?"

"Yes."

"For doing a good job against Tech?"

"That's what he said."

"Why didn't you give it back?"

"I thought it was some kind of gag. When I opened the envelope he was gone."

Barclay Townes sighed. "And then?"

Terry hunched forward in his chair. He looked like an overgrown kid on the witness stand; a kid you couldn't help but believe. "It was like I told you, Mr. Townes. I still can't figure their angle, but I know it was the gambling joint's dough. I tried to lose it back on every crooked wheel and dice game they had, and inside an hour I had run that hundred into a thousand." Terry shrugged. "The word had gone out they were all to take care of me, I guess. I gave up and turned the money over to Aunt Ag . . . my aunt. She's—uh—holding it for me."

"And after each of our last two games you've received a hundred dollar bill through the mail?" Western's new coach looked suddenly tired. "Twelve hundred dollars!" he said, his deep-set black eyes stealing a hurt look at Terry. "You might have come to me right away, you know. This makes it difficult." He flipped the bill with a disapproving finger.

"I realize that now," Terry said.

*Damn Aunt Aggie!* "Keep quiet about it," she had told him; she herself would handle all the investigating necessary and see that the money was put to a good use. Probably one of the screwball charities she supported, like the Society for the Abolition of Mustaches!

The whole thing in a nutshell was that she hadn't wanted him to come to Coach Townes, who had hair on his upper lip, and was, therefore, not to be trusted. Barclay Townes!

The Great Man resolved the dilemma much as Terry had known he would; in a direct, straightforward manner that left no room for the lingering doubts lesser

minds and smaller natures might be inclined to entertain.

"Men," he told the assembled squad that afternoon before practice, "there has been an attempt to smear the name Western with the filth from a world so depraved, so . . ."

It was inspiring. Terry stood before them modestly, the Coach's ringing words making him feel as though he'd done something noble. His team-mates must have been stirred to similar depths of empathetic nobility. When Barclay Townes put his hand on Terry's broad shoulder and inquired how anyone could suspect such a clean-cut youth of the horrible thing 'they' were trying to pin on him, there were several ominous growls from the tight-packed group of loyal Cowboys.

That was on Monday. On Saturday, when Terry dropped a medium-tough pass in the Huskies' end zone, Harv Newsome, Western's fun-loving right half, deadpanned owlishly in the huddle and asked, "How much d'you s'pose they'll pay you for that one, Terry?"

It was so outrageously unfair, so manifestly unjust, that Terry himself led the burst of laughter which followed. After all, the money he'd received so far was 'for doing a good job'.

He'd always given the team the best he had in him—they knew that. Nevertheless, Terry found himself punching just a little harder every time his number was called during the remainder of the game. Before it was over he had scored three touchdowns and set up two others with a sizzling display of radar-like passing. They took the Huskies 34-0 for their fourth consecutive win of the season. It looked like a good year.

**T**HAT was the devil of it; this looked like *the* year. If only those anonymous goons would leave him alone. In the preceding two seasons at Western, Terry's left halfback post had been just another backfield position in an attack that demanded versatility on the part of every ball carrier. That was the way Rex Lang insisted his 'Crazy T' should work; and it was a noble idea, only it hadn't worked. Even Jake Levin, Harv Newsome and

Slug Lowery had started complaining the second year.

"I'm a blocker," Harv said once. "So what do I do? I play swing-'n-sway around the ends. That's Terry's department—he likes the fancy Dan stuff."

"How about me?" Quarterback Jake Levin asked. "The Noodle," they called me in high school. Now I've gotta block, beat my brains out against that forward wall every other play or so, and throw passes!" He rolled his opaque eyes. "Hell, that's Terry's job. The Army even turned me down because of bum peepers."

Big Slug Lowery, the mental midget of the quartet, couldn't quite isolate the source of his unhappiness. "This 'T' thing goes too fast," he said. "I like to wind myself up real slow, and then go 'splat' into the line. Remember how I used to go 'splat', fellas?"

"We've got to give the thing time to take hold," Terry always maintained stoutly.

Nevertheless, it was wrong for them, and he knew it. After Western had finished its second dismal season under Rex Lang, the Athletic Board served notice it was finished with Rex Lang, period.

Barclay Townes had arrived, watched the various squads scrimmage a few times, then called them all together and said, "I think we'll employ the single wing this year."

A plenty-plenty smart cookie; and it was rumored Western had picked him up for a song at some jerkwater junior college in Brooklyn!

So Terry was once again the climax guy in a Western attack that functioned; and nobody—least of all Terry Blaine—was griping. Harv Newsome was cutting swaths through enemy ranks like an elephant making trail through a canebreak; Slug Lowery was going 'splat' louder than ever before; and Jake Levin was concocting black magic potions for the opposition with all the wizardry of a twentieth century Merlin.

Terry Blaine? He was delivering the stuff Jake doled out of his red-hot cauldron: passes, double reverses, ping-pong laterals—anything that called for a keen sense of timing and a knack for staying on

one's feet when all the world seemed insistent upon one's being seated, but quick.

And as Jake was confounding the opposition, so Western was stumping the experts, including the boys who backed their opinions with large chunks of hard cash. Three of their wins thus far were decided upsets, and the fourth, in which they had been doped to squeak by a green Stamford eleven, they had taken by a rollicking 53-6 count. The experts were beginning to whip out hankies and polish spectacles for another look at this unheralded blue and gold comet.

"Ain't we devils!" Harv Newsome chortled in the dressing room after their rout of the Huskies. "Six points I got from a bookie down at Kelsoe's. Man, am I loaded!"

"Me, too," beanpole left end Slate Gordon grinned happily. "You have a ticket on the gravy train this week, Terry?"

Terry shook his head. He couldn't see risking money that came at the rate of a buck an hour on something that could take it at the rate of all-you-had an hour. Terry was night circulation manager for a local paper.

"You lugs better lay off those bookies," he said. "I understand a big new syndicate is moving into town, and the small fry is just about broke. Besides, the conference rules . . ."

"Hogwash!" Jake Levin interrupted. "Who's hurt if we bet on ourselves?"

"Okay, okay," Terry snapped. He was feeling peevis, and that wasn't like him—especially after a win. "Maybe we won't always be so lucky," he said darkly.

They hooted him down with derisive glee.

"S'matter?" Bubber Weeks, their broad-beamed center, inquired. "You got some inside dope from the new syndicate?"

That's the way it started. A playful little dig here, a playful little dig there; nobody even half serious about the thing, and nobody—least of all the even-tempered, level-headed Terry Blaine—ever dreaming it would get under his skin.

An odd thing happened, though, on the following Saturday's opening kickoff. The letter had come as usual on Monday, and all week the gang had given this new toy

a stiff workout, outdoing each other in manufacturing bizarre charges to hurl at Terry whenever he stopped some routine assignment. He took it all with a grin, because these were his buddies, and they wouldn't say things like that if they meant them.

But the red-faced jerk with the megaphone in the Santa Carla stands that Saturday at Harbor City was a total stranger to Terry. He was a card. One of those 'Hey - you - in - the - blue - and - yellow-undershirt!' jokers; and he had been running off at the mouth ever since the Cowboys started warming up. Terry paid him scant attention, spotting the corny humor as the variety that comes out of a bottle, and lasts, ordinarily, no longer than its source. But after a time the whistle blew, and all at once the voice wasn't remotely funny any more. It blasted out during that comparative lull in the crowd sound when the initial kickoff is still high in the air, and there is as yet nothing to squeal or roar about.

"Two to one the big jerk misses it!" loudmouth bellowed into his megaphone.

Terry's arms, already outstretched to receive the descending ball, were suddenly two horizontal icicles, jutting out from his quick-frozen body. All he could think of was that the news was out; the mystery of the weekly pay envelopes now public knowledge. It was the betting term that probably touched off this chain reaction in Terry's already jumpy conscience.

But whatever it was, the results were little short of a self-admission of guilt. The ball came, came, came at Terry's head; and he couldn't have crooked a finger to catch it if his life hung in the balance. It hit him flush in the mouth, and he stood there shaking his noggin dazedly while a rangy Saint tackle chased the crazy pig-hide all the way into the end zone. Santa Carla quickly converted, and it was 7-0 with less than a minute of playing time elapsed!

For once Harv Newsome wasn't grinning. "What's the trouble, Terry?" he asked, his mild blue eyes heavy with concern.

Terry licked his lips thoughtfully. Blood always had such an odd, surprising taste,

he was thinking. "It's okay, kid; it's okay now." Jake Levin prattled quickly.

He was still machine-gunning pepper talk in Terry's direction when the second kickoff floated down. Terry wasn't missing this one. He latched onto the ball with all the ferocity of a hungry boarder spearing the last pork chop. Grabbed the thing, and then stood there glaring at it vindictively while two hungry Saints bore down on him as though *he* were the last pork chop on the plate.

**B**ARCLAY TOWNES took him out before the end of the first quarter. Once, just once in that nightmarish opening stanza, he had stumbled into the right hole for a decent gain. Other than that, he reflected agonizingly there on the bench, he had really stunk up the joint.

Townes was like a dignified mother hen. At least twice during that dismal first half he wandered down in Terry's direction for a word of encouragement, and a sort of half-defiant pat on the back. The defiance, Terry knew, was for anyone who might be harboring slimy notions as to what caused his star half-back's stinko performance. Terry wished he wouldn't bother. All he wanted now was peace and quiet and a little hole to crawl into. It was bad.

It was worse during the intermission. The Saints had struck hard and often at the demoralized Cowboys, and now held an almost unbelievable 20-0 lead. Western should have had this game packed on ice by this time, and every one of them, including Barclay Townes, knew it. No few of them wondered what his reaction would be now that they had disappointed him for the first time.

Townes was cool. Townes was big. Townes wasn't the least bit unreasonable, as lesser coaches might understandably have been. He smiled at them chummy-like, hooked an immaculately creased trouser leg over a rubbing table, and said, "I saw Babe Ruth strike out four times one afternoon against Cleveland."

Slug Lowery stared at Jake Levin and whispered, "Baseball talk! The guy nuts?"

"Listen!" Jake hissed.

"The fans rode him a bit," Townes continued reminiscently, "but nobody thought

he had sold out to the Indians. They all knew the Babe was tops." He spread his slim hands in an eloquent gesture. "He was having a bad day, that's all."

Terry felt his ears start to warm; in two seconds they were burning holes in his head. It was slick psychology, of course, but by gosh it sounded mighty cruel from where he sat. Townes wouldn't have needed to have done this; the gang understood—not a one of them had harpooned him since the opening kickoff.

Townes evidently didn't see it that way. Without seeming to have moved he was suddenly a firebrand—a Patrick Henry addressing the assembly at Philadelphia. It was something he did with his chin; that angular, nobly formed lower jaw of his.

"The Yanks," he said, his voice quivering in the stone dead silence, "won that ball game 8-7. They didn't quit. They stayed right in there and swung from the heels. Nobody was going to have the chance to accuse *their* buddy of deliberately blowing a ball game!"

Oh, but that Barclay Townes was cute. The trouble with most of the evangelical brethren is that they don't know when to knock it off. Not Brother Townes. Suddenly he took a snowy handkerchief out of his breast pocket and dabbed apologetically at his forehead.

"My, my!" he said, "I must be getting ancient. Imagine boring you with a lot of old memories at a time like this."

Then he went to work on a blackboard with a piece of chalk, and in five minutes they were scuffing their cleats to get back out there and do a few things right.

Terry started, and even he had absorbed enough of the Townes electricity to snap out of his blue funk. It was a slaughter. The Saints proved by no means willing martyrs, but neither were a lot of those Nero tossed into the arena against his packs of raging lions. The Cowboys tore into the warriors of Santa Carla, and when the smoke lifted from the field of battle a significant rearrangement was discernable in the numerals on the big scoreboard. These now read Western 21, Santa Carla 20.

Close, but a lot better than no win at all. The record books registered it merely as

the Cowboys' fifth against no defeats, and a good half of the male population of Harbor City resigned itself to a week of no lunches and buses to and from work, instead of taxis. The point odds had been all wrong, they consoled each other with their typical, Monday-morning, post facto logic. After all, their Cowboys had won, hadn't they? Why gripe over a few lousy bucks? But next week, by gosh, there'd be no giving that rugged Cal outfit two blankety blank touchdowns!

Most of the bookies in town were of the same rueful opinion. They had taken all the Santa Carla money they could find, and unloaded the other variety on that lucky bunch of such-and-so's who operated the new syndicate

**SOMEWHERE** in Harbor City there was much joy and smacking of lips, and as he opened his usual, first-of-the-week envelope Terry found himself wondering rather hysterically just where in hell it might be. He had scored two touchdowns in Saturday's hectic last half, but his over-all performance would hardly rate lush payment like this from someone interested in seeing Eastern overwhelm its opposition.

Aunt Aggie, who couldn't be expected to know the difference between point or money odds and the figures in a Pigalle girlie show, was little help to him. She wasn't even surprised that the century note had continued to arrive.

"I suppose you'll turn this right over to that—that coach creature," she sniffed haughtily.

"Oh Aggie!" Terry censured her listlessly. "He wouldn't touch the other one." He fumbled in his wallet. "Here, take the both of them. I don't know what to do with the filthy stuff."

Aunt Agatha didn't exactly grab, but the two crisp bills made an unmistakable 'swish' as they left Terry's hand.

"I'll take care of it," Aunt Agatha said in an off-hand manner. Then, brightly, "Now don't you worry about this messy business. I'm—ah—having a man look into it, and I'm sure we'll have it all cleared up before long."

"Sure you will, Aggie," Terry repeated,

aiming his voice toward conviction. Who was he to spoil her fun?

SATURDAY there was no drunk in the stands with a megaphone and no public parable by Barclay Townes. He called Terry aside before the game and said, man to man, "Look here, Blaine. I'll grant that it's difficult to produce one's best when laboring under a cloud of suspicion. The point is, I've assumed the responsibility for your integrity by permitting you to play. Now, in fairness to the other boys, would you mind taking care of your own job and letting me do the worrying about what people are thinking?"

*Man to man, hell!* Terry felt as squelched as a bumptious little brat whose rear flap had just been lowered and still-glowing bottom soundly spanked. He almost hated Coach Townes at that moment. And that was queer, because the guy was obviously one of the squarest shooters he had ever known.

Terry stormed onto the field with the look of a man who has stubbed his toe in church, and is hunting a spot to explode. He found it in Cal's backfield a few moments later. Goose Gosmer, Cal's line-busting fullback, rose unsteadily to his feet after the first play from scrimmage and moved a numbed jaw from side to side with blunt fingers.

"What happened?" he asked Dade Thompson.

Cal's quarterback spat disgustedly and nodded toward their own goal line, some thirty-two yards away. Terry Blaine was just tossing the ball to the head referee "That red-headed character blitzed you," Dade told the dazed Gosmer. "Swoosh—bang! and you're on your can; he's on his way to a score. Someone must've fed him some raw meat."

As the afternoon waned, more and more of the fans began entertaining similar notions. The dopesters had been right when they rated this one a toss-up. Cal had a big, fast line—Western had a big fast line; Cal had a smooth-functioning backfield operating out of a slick 'T'—Western had a quartet of ramrodding Cowboys and a power-gearred single wing.

Cal didn't have Terry Blaine, and that

was the difference. They tried everything but nailing the rampaging red-head to the turf with a goal post, and still they couldn't keep him bottled up. He broke away for sixty-two yards and his second score early in the first quarter; twice for long, hysteria-inducing runs in an otherwise stalemated second half.

Western 27—Cal 0, the papers said. Down in fine print most of them went on to explain that it should have read: Blaine 27—Those Opposing, none.

Aunt Agatha surveyed the welts and bruises on his face with her customary mixture of sympathy and disdain and said, "Looks like they larruped you good, boy. Serves you right; nobody with any sense . . ."

" . . . ought to play that barbarous game," Terry finished, tossing his hat at the proudly shabby hall tree.

Aunt Agatha nodded approval. "Ought to make the gamblers play it. They cleaned up enough today, I'll wager."

Terry glanced at her in surprise. Ordinarily she didn't even follow the scores. "I don't think so. Most of them were riding Cal, with seven to ten point . . ." Terry broke off. Get into *that* with Aunt Aggie and he'd be all night explaining. "I don't think so," he finished lamely.

"Bet the new syndicate did," Aunt Agatha said. "Bet not much of that dough was from the small fry in this town—they weren't giving points after last week."

Terry's chin was resting against the fist-sized knot of his green twill tie. His eyes were resting almost on his chin. Aunt Agatha winked at him solemnly, placed a transparent-looking hand on one of his bulging biceps, and trilled, "Shall we go into dinner, Terrence?"

"Todo el mundo," Terry—who still retained a little of his freshman Spanish—muttered, "is completely nuts!"

As the weeks rolled by Terry began to fear that it was he who was off his trolley, and everybody else who was solidly on the beam. He had another good Saturday against the tough Pasadena Lions, co-favorites with Northern Cal to cop the conference title, and Western pulled another stunning upset to the tune of 21-13.

Then, in the two games calculated to be

the only breathers on their schedule, he was once more a butter-fingered stumblebum who could do nothing right—as far as helping his bewildered teammates was concerned—except asked to be jerked and go hide his head in a parka. That happened in both games long before the end of the first half, and the Cowboys were lucky to squeak by Nevada Tech 7-6, and Berkley 3-0.

That left the two big ones against the Wolves and Northern Cal.

**A**ND AN EXTREMELY bad taste was left in the mouths of a bunch of guys who were getting fed up with this diet of performance that smacked alternately of whipped cream and limburger cheese.

They elected cagey Jake Levin their spokesman, and the stocky little quarterback tackled the job right after practice on the eve of their tussle against the Wolf pack from San Francisco.

If anything, Terry's play had seemed to get worse as that week's scrimmage drew to a close. Jake watched Terry button his shirt up cockeyed three times in a row and decided to forego any attempt at subtlety.

"What's happened, Terry?" he asked. "With your game, I mean; it's lousy." Jake was serious.

Terry's eyes studied another extra button he'd found. He was miserable. More miserable, even, than the time he'd tried soccer and forgot to turn sideways when the other guy kicked.

"Jake," he said, "I wish I knew."

Jake said, "It's not because we quit ridin' you about that . . . uh . . . business, is it?"

"No. I mean . . . not exactly . . ." Terry ran a trembling hand through hair still damp from his shower and shrugged hopelessly. How could he explain something that was buried four layers deep in his own subconscious? They trusted him; he'd stake his life on that. Especially on the days when he was going good. On the other kind of day—those horrible nightmare-in-the-afternoon things—well, they were just ten more pairs of eyes staring at him from the foreground of a Dali-like

mural that was slowly driving him utterly, bats-in-the-attic, mad.

And if suspecting his own buddies of disloyalty wasn't sufficient proof of his loopiness, there was one final bit of sheer lunacy that a jury of live Napoleons would recognize. It was Barclay Townes who was responsible for his unsettled mental condition!

Just to test the complete ridiculousness of his suspicions he said, "Jake, this Townes. The fellows all still sold on him, aren't they?"

For a few brief seconds Jake's dark eyes were aghast. Then, as his mind adjusted to this abrupt change of pace, his swarthy features lit up with a rapt glow. Given a turban, and a minaret somewhere in the offing as a background, Jake might well have been a devout *mustim* contemplating the question, "What do you think of this guy, Allah?"

"Are you kiddin'?" he gasped.

Terry managed a quick, "Ha, ha!" and said, "Of course. Skip it."

All right then, why did he keep having that dream about being a miscast Trilby, and playing in a never-ending, jumbled-up 'Svengali' that featured the suave Barclay Townes in the title role? The man sure as heck could put the whammy on him, intentionally or unintentionally, with no more than a few well-chosen words. And recently it seemed like there had to be a few of them before every game.

Buy phooey! He'd been listening to Aunt Aggie too much. Of late the old fuss-budget's condemnation of 'That man with the mustache', had taken on more and more of a note of authority. As though Aggie knew something damning about Coach Townes, but wasn't quite ready to release her findings to the gullible public. Terry sometimes even suspected that Aunt Aggie was convinced it was Townes, himself, who pulled the hidden strings by which this new syndicate operated!

"Lace me up tight, doctor," Terry mused wryly, "I feel another nightmare spell coming on!"

To Jake he said, "Look. I've been in a blue funk—I know that. I know I've let you guys down something rotten. The harder I try to snap out of it the lousier I

get; so Jake, you tell me the answer. Do I turn in my suit?"

Jake flushed and slammed his locker door shut with a bang that rattled the windows. "You do and we all do!" he roared. He stood there, his breath coming in jerks and snorts, until he'd simmered to a slow burn; then he put his hand on Terry's shoulder and nodded at the door leading to the field office. "And that . . ." he said, his voice choked and husky, ". . . would be one hell of a trick to play on *him*—a guy who's sweating blood to bring us a conference championship for a change." Jake squeezed the shoulder under his blunt fingers, turned, and walked slowly away.

There was no band there playing Western's alma mater, but Terry could have sworn he heard the mournful strain, somewhere in the distance, beating a lachrymose accompaniment to Jake's even, receding steps.

**"RAH, RAH, RAH!"** Aunt Aggie **R**said, her expressive upper lip curling derisively.

Terry stopped his cautious tip-toeing and turned toward the library doors. The bag in his hand contained only the few items he'd need for the short hop to Pasadena and back, but he put it down anyway. He was tired. It was six A. M. Saturday. At four A. M. the Examiner's route truck had dropped him off outside the same door he'd been headed for a moment ago.

"Now Aggie," he said, "let's not start that again. I'll catch up on my sleep when I'm old." He grinned at her and nodded. "Like you."

"Humph," Aggie humphed. She handed him the cup of steaming coffee she held in her hands. "You'll notice I was up. And not," she added hastily, "to see you off to a silly football game. I'm always up early."

"How are the worms these days?" Terry asked.

Aunt Agatha wrinkled her nose distastefully. "The only worm I'm interested in catching . . ." She broke off.

That mystery stuff again, Terry mused tolerantly. "Does it have a distinguished appearing mustache?" he teased, between

noisy sips at the coffee. "And does it look like the senior senator from Massachusetts?"

"No mustache looks distinguished," Aunt Aggie snapped. "And a lot of people who look like senators have their pictures hanging around in post offices and police departments."

Then Aunt Aggie said something peculiar. Even at the time Terry considered it peculiar; and later on he was to wonder if his unpredictable aunt had been patronizing some new, remarkably accurate crystal-gazer.

"But you needn't worry about him today." She underlined the 'him' with a raised eyebrow. "He'll see that you do your best against Pasadena."

For just a few seconds it failed to register. Terry glanced at his watch and gulped the last of his coffee. Grabbing his worn leather bag he started for the door, then paused once more as it finally hit him.

"How's that again?" he asked.

Aunt Aggie was going to be coy, he saw, and there just wasn't time for it.

"Oh," he said, "yes. You're probably right."

They thumbed noses at each other—their customary greeting or leave-taking—and he took off.

The Pasadena Trojans threw a surprise double 'T' at them, and Coach Townes jerked Terry after the first play from scrimmage, motioning him to a place next to himself on the bench. Dykes and Fetterley were lining up in the same formation, and the down chain was now thirty yards nearer Western's goal.

"Blaine," Townes said, "I'm on a spot. I had no idea the Trojans had this up their sleeves, and if you can't stop it for us . . ." When the coach spread his fine hands he had his soul in them, and was entrusting it to *him*, Terry Blaine! ". . . Well," he continued frankly, "we're sunk."

No mention of Terry's previous spotty performances; no delicate hint that this was his chance to redeem himself; no—to coin a phrase—nothin'. There was a lot of things implied, but of the variety which, if encountered enough times in his life, wears down a man's resistance to the point

where he decided perhaps all just *might* be lost, at that, unless he agrees to run for the presidency.

"You,"—the coach's manner seemed to imply, "are our only salvation. The others are nice kids, sure, but after all . . ."

One picayune, un-noble portion of Terry's brain did keep tossing him the base reminder that Barclay Townes seldom delivered lines like these without a definite audience-reaction in mind, but he dismissed the thought as unworthy. The drama unfolding before them was too tense, too all-enveloping to admit of personal suspicions as to the sincerity of one of the principal characters.

Fetterly took the ball, handed it off to the Trojan fullback, and darned if the whole off-tackle thing that developed wasn't a figment of some thirty thousand imaginations! It was Dykes who actually had the pill, not Fetterly; and when the Cowboys had finally tackled every eligible ball carrier, thus getting around to Dykes only through a process of elimination, the Trojans had reeled off another eighteen yards to the Western forty.

Townes rattled instructions into Terry's ear as though he were a chef imparting an urgently needed recipe. Once again it wasn't until later that Terry recalled how pat Townes' information had been. Nobody—not even Barclay Townes—could have been that smart. Not on the spur of the moment.

"Forget Dykes and Fetterly," he said. "The key men are their two guards. Watch them. Only one of them pulls out on each play. He's your boy; spill him and you'll pile up the action. Let him go if they switch to the straight 'T'. The rangy tackle with the bandage on his thumb handles most of the leading then. On the man in motion . . ."

When Terry streaked back on the field he knew enough about the Trojan attack to apply for a job on the Crimson and Gray coaching staff. *And there was no time to explain it all to the others.* Townes had warned him against trying. The Cowboys had already used up their allowable number of times out in stalling until he could get back in there. Now it was strictly up to him.

It was as simple as playing a pin-ball machine whose glass top has been removed. No matter which way Fetterly and Dykes directed the power, there was Terry Blaine to run it into the ground. The Trojan's little red wagon was fixed, but good. Stalled. De-railed. And one guy (they acknowledged this by the dirty looks thrown Terry's way) was responsible for the beautiful job of sabotage.

It is an axiom among men of sport that as one aspect of their particular skill improves, their entire game seems to benefit. A 200 hitter enjoying a red-hot year at the keystone sack suddenly finds himself walloping the cover off the horsehide—that sort of thing. Terry, who hadn't been able to do anything right for the past two weeks, suddenly could do no wrong. The old split-second timing was back, the sureness, the speed, and the feeling of invincibility as well.

**T**HEY TOOK the Trojans 27-0, and not a bookie on the west coast had figured the boys from Harbor City better than an even bet to win! Until as late as the middle of the following week Terry found himself stooping when he passed through doorways, and testing walls gingerly before leaning his entire weight against them. It was great, this feeling of near-immortality. He was nine feet high, and as powerful as a character out of a comic strip!

By Wednesday, though, he had isolated the one sour note in this symphony all the world hummed to his greatness.

"Why," he asked Aunt Aggie at dinner that evening, "do you persist in grinning at me like I had two heads?"

"Maybe you have," Aunt Aggie chuckled. "Tried a hat on lately?"

Terry passed her the butter with a tricky, last-moment lunge that immersed her thumb well beyond its neatly kept nail.

"Why should I feign modesty?" he asked. "Everybody knows I'm good. A-P back-of-the-week this week."

Aunt Aggie shook her expensive coiffure disapprovingly, and it wasn't because of the butter on her thumb—she was used to that. "Next week," she said, "East Lynne. Or something equally tragic. It

amazes me how blind you young people can be when you set your mind to it."

Terry was suddenly serious. "What do you mean?"

"This game Saturday is your last, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"And it's the one that settles everything, isn't it?" Aunt Aggie waved her napkin ineffectually. "Championship, and bowl invitations—all that stuff?"

Aunt Aggie was no longer ineffectual. "All right," she cut in, "you figure it. The thing's a gambler's dream. Here locally they're quoting Western a two-touchdown favorite. You're the Cowboys' sparkplug. Whom do you suppose they'll take a monkey wrench to? The fix is on, boy; wake up before it's too late."

Aunt Aggie sighed, indicating the subject was closed. "Oh dear," she murmured, "I suppose it will be months before I've rid my vocabulary of this dreadful lingo."

Terry merely stared at her. Not in amazement now, because at some indefinite time within the past few weeks he had arrived at the belated conclusion that Aunt Aggie wasn't one to be taken for granted. Nor quite the delightful jumble-brain he had always—and with lofty indulgence, he recalled shudderingly—considered her.

Terry thought long and hard upon what she had just said. Aunt Agatha herself was off on some sort of tirade against the government. Inefficiency seemed to be the general target area; the postal and internal revenue departments the immediate objectives of her deadly aim. Terry should have been listening. He would have slept better, those final three nights before the big game, knowing that Aunt Agatha was nearing the conclusion of the 'investigation' she'd promised him.

By Saturday morning, after replaying every game on their schedule at least a dozen times, Terry had reached a decision: Barclay Townes wasn't going to put the whammy on him just before *this* rumpus. O. K., so it was nuts to suspect a swell Joe like Townes. Nobody would ever know, and after today he could forget the whole business. It would be a pleasure.

Just as it would be a pleasure to be late

for once, deliberately late, and savor the delightful new experience of visualizing the sedate Townes dancing around on needles and pins, for a change, instead of himself.

When he got to the stadium there were exactly eighteen minutes left until whistle time. Townes wasn't on needles and pins; he was furious. The taut smile bracketing his mustache was a lie.

"Trouble, Blaine?" he asked, his mellow baritone fighting a betraying tremulo.

"Gosh, yes," Terry said innocently.

They were alone, the squad having tramped out for its final warmup just as Terry reached the locker room. He felt the coach's eyes boring into him—probing.

"I'll tell you about it later," Terry said hastily, and began tearing off his clothing.

Townes wasn't having any of that. "Tell me about it now," he said, his voice downright ugly. "There's plenty of time—you're not starting."

Terry whirled around and stared at the face confronting him. For the first time he noticed things about Barclay Townes that Aunt Agatha must have seen right from the start: the cruel lines about the mouth, the animal-like flare at the wide nostrils, the menacing glitter of those cold, expressionless eyes. And as he looked, Barclay Townes smiled at him. It was an evil, mocking thing, that smile.

"So it's going to be that way?" Terry asked.

"That's right, smart boy. I thought you were acting a trifle suspicious lately." His hard eyes flickered toward the ham-like fist bunching at Terry's side. "Don't be a fool," he snapped. "Think what that would do to the team's morale."

It wasn't cowardice; Townes was no coward. He was big, too; and his well-kept bigness presented a challenge that was almost too much for Terry. With a great effort he anchored the hand to his open locker door.

"You're an expert on morale, aren't you?" he asked.

"I think so," Townes said expansively. He was enjoying himself. He took out a fat cigar, bit the end off with a fastidious clamping movement of his small, even teeth. "And just . . . in . . . case . . . you

get any fancy ideas," he said as he lighted up, ". . . forget them. You're a nice boy, and I've already treated you scandalously; but if I have to, I'll paint your name so black around here that a Blaine won't be able to show his face on this campus for three generations." i

HE WASN'T bluffing. A man pulling a bluff would have hung around to build it up pretty. Townes smiled once more and turned to go. "Oh," he added, as though it were an after-thought, "I wouldn't bother suiting up; you won't be playing at all today." This time he nodded briefly over his shoulder and was gone.

Somehow Terry managed to get into his gear unaided. It must have taken him a long time, because when he emerged from the ramp and crossed the cinder track the scoreboard clock showed five minutes gone of the first quarter. It showed also that the score was already Northern Cal 7, Western 0.

A wave of nausea hit Terry, and he thought he was going to be sick right there in front of eighty thousand screaming people. Some of them had noticed him step from the shadow of the stands, and there was an anticipatory buzzing from Western's cheering section. Terry stumbled blindly to the bench and sat down.

A scrub named Deerfield gaped at him and made a motion to spring to his feet. "He's here!" he yelled. "Tell Coach he's . . ."

Terry jerked him back to the bench. "Shut up," he said thickly. "He knows it."

He leaned forward and cupped his chin in his hands. There was a lot of thinking to be done, and he was anxious to get started. Automatically his eyes followed the play on the field.

The Bruins had possession on their own forty. Bull-necked Pete Crano called two line smashes in a row, and it was first down at the midfield stripe. Crano sent big Bumps Offenbacher crashing off left tackle again and they were on the Western forty-two.

That was all Terry really needed to see. The Bruins didn't have to punch it out in tough chunks like that. They had

Walker and Jenks, two speedsters, to get it the easy way; and Crano—Mr. Overhead himself—to toss bullseyes for it if things really got tough. Things were not very tough just now though. Western's forward wall was listless, sluggish. In trying to fill Terry's shoes as a line backer poor Shep Collins, a willing, but green Soph, was running back and forth like the "it" guy in a game of musical chairs. It was awful.

The Bruins smashed over once more shortly after the start of the second quarter. The kick was wide, and the score stayed at 13-0. Slug Lowery took a knee in the belly on the ensuing kickoff and came out for a short breather.

He went immediately to a vacant spot beside Terry. "Why?" he asked. "That's all we want to know—why?"

Coach Townes was leaning forward on the bench, his face turned their way.

Terry shook his head at Slug. "Later," he hissed through set lips. "At the half."

Townes smiled and eased back into the line of slumped figures.

A few moments later Slug was back in, and not too long after that the Bruins' rangy "Hi" Jenks intercepted an attempted pass by Collins and ghosted fifty-three yards for what proved to be another seven points.

That was the first half, and Terry was the first one into their dressing room. He stood in the center of the room, his jutting chin and unmistakable challenge.

Barclay Townes made a great show of being completely fair. He said nothing, waited until they were all there, then announced, "Blaine has a few words to say, I guess." Then he eased his trim bulk onto his favorite rubbing table and began a deep study of the wrapper on his cigar.

Terry scanned their strained, puzzled faces and jerked his head toward Barclay Townes. "This guy's a phoney," he said.

He might as well have coughed up a gob of phlegm and spat it in their faces. They were horrified—disgusted with him. At first they could only gasp their indignation. Then they began letting it back out in an angry rumble—a shocked protest that leaped from throat to throat and threatened soon to become a roar.

"Wait!" Terry begged. He lowered his hands and started again. "He's going to make a monkey out of me—I know that. I don't know how, but that's not important. What matters is that we're going to lose this game today, and we wouldn't have to. If I can only make you guys doubt him a little . . ."

Terry moistened a lower lip that had begun to tremble slightly, then caught it between his teeth. When he was ready to resume again several of them noticed the thin red trickle at the corner of his taut mouth.

HE EXPLAINED as best he could what Barclay Townes had been pulling on them, and why. He named incidents many of them had witnessed, and told them about some of the other stuff Townes had worked on him in private. Then he went on to quote scores at them, and to show how the suave coach's shrewdly applied psychology had worked to the advantage of the new gambling syndicate. When Western was the top-heavy favorite the final score had invariably been close; when they were the underdogs—or if the game rated as a toss-up—they had mopped up on the opposition.

It was almost unbelievable, he acknowledged, that a man could be so diabolically clever. It was a shame, too, because as they all knew, he was a tactical genius as well.

"I was the goat," Terry admitted. "He built everything around me. When he had us all—me included—believing I was indispensable, he was all set." Terry paused.

From their faces it was hard to tell whether he had made an impression or not. Probably not. Suddenly he felt whipped, beaten. Proof was what he needed, and he had none.

"That's about all," he said dully. "If I've made you doubt this—this scum just a trifle I've accomplished what I've set out to do. He's throwing this one because it was the only way he could safely fix the point odds. You're playing right into his hands by folding up just because I'm not in there."

Terry looked at Bubber Weeks, at Jake

Levin, at big Mike Bronski. His eyes were suspiciously brilliant. "Don't let him get away with it fellas," he implored.

Barclay Townes didn't even bother moving from the table. He sat there swinging his legs leisurely, confidently.

"I'm disappointed," he said. "Frankly, I had expected something a bit more original than that from our bright young Mr. Blaine." As he talked he had been fishing in the coat pocket of his natty sport jacket. Now he drew out a squat manila envelope and tossed it onto the table. There was finality in the gesture. Finality and utter scorn.

"I won't insult your intelligence by attempting a rebuttal of these childish accusations," he said. "It's all there in the envelope. Blaine made his mistake when he flaunted some of his bribe money in my face. After noticing it was marked I decided it might be wise to hire a detective. Sure enough, your noble, upstanding pal was betting that same rotten money back through the syndicate which was paying it to him." Townes shook his head and sighed. "Look for the tiny star before each set of serial numbers on the photostatic copies I had made up," he said, motioning that they were free to examine the evidence for themselves.

Terry fought the sickness welling up within him once more. There was a stirring at the outer perimeter of the circle of bodies, but as yet nobody had stepped forward. They were staring at him.

"It's a lie!!" he gasped out. I don't care what he has in there—it's all a damned lie!"

"No it isn't," a thin voice quavered from the middle of the area of disturbance Terry had noticed.

The human circle parted before this small, but determinedly independent wave, and Agatha Blaine stepped defiantly into their midst. In her wake, like two giant freighters trailing a perky little pilot boat, moved a pair of mere males who would obviously have preferred being somewhere else.

One of them was the cop assigned the University to guard the dressing room door, and the other—Terry closed his eyes, counted to three very slowly, then

opened them again. The other one was still George, Aunt Aggie's long-suffering chauffeur!

But what a strange new George! Instead of his customary drab uniform he was attired in a get-up that fairly screamed of the wide open spaces. Everything quality, though, from the gleaming hand-tooled boots right up to the natty, fawn-colored Stetson. One immediately visualized George's wide-open spaces as being heavily populated with future porter-houses, or perhaps bubbling with potential oil wells. George, ordinarily a nondescript-appearing old gent, looked fine.

The cop didn't. A portly gentleman, he seemed in imminent danger of exploding. He quivered his flaming jowls at Barclay Townes and roared, "I told her dames weren't allowed in here!"

Aunt Aggie said, "Fiddle-de-dee," and winked roguishly at Terry, who was still gaping a George. "Something, isn't he?" she whispered proudly. "Wangled him a special investigators badge from the bureaucrats, too. Didn't even have to pay our way in at the gate!"

Then, with a flourish worthy of an only slightly withered Bernhardt, she pointed dramatically at Barclay Townes. "George," she commanded her rodeo-resplendent chauffeur, "identify this—this imposter."

George was magnificent. "Howdy, podner," he drawled. Another manila envelope joined Townes' on the rubbing table. "And I do mean partner," George finished, his drawl suddenly gone.

Townes—the cool, self-possessed Barclay Townes—was all at once an animal at bay. There was no mistaking the wild look in his eyes as he glared at George, nor the growl of sheer rage in his throat as he catapulted his lithe bulk from the table.

Aunt Aggie squealed, "Terrence!" at about the same instant that Terry, unaware of his own movement, found himself reaching out and grabbing a handful of the coach's immaculate sport jacket.

"Well, well!" Terry chuckled as he spun Townes around. "Well, well!"

Someone had just removed a mountain from his chest, and he was once again nine feet tall and as powerful as a

souped-up Samson. "My Aunt Agatha," he said to the face almost touching his, "claims that even your teeth are phoney. Mind if I shove a fist in your mouth and find out?"

Barclay Townes wasn't the kind to quit without a try. He backed off and threw a right that would have torn the head off of the Statue of Liberty, had it connected. Terry flexed his knees, grinned, then straightened and buried a small mountain range of freckled knuckles in Aunt Aggie's pet aversion—the Townes mustache.

Western's coach went one way; a gleaming, perfectly matched set of lowers another.

Aunt Agatha adjusted her bi-focals to peer at the slumped figure wedged into a corner between two rows of metal lockers. "Must find out what he uses to keep his uppers in place," she muttered. "Really fine stuff, to take a whack like that."

**T**OWNES, at least, had had his warning. Northern Cal never knew what hit them. For one moment of the third quarter they were a cocky, wise-cracking group of supremely confident players. Then their Captain's arm went down, the ball went into the air, and after that they were a bunch of bums who should 'of stood in bed that Saturday. A holy terror in a spanking fresh jersey marked "88" took Cal's opening kickoff and ran it ninety-six yards almost straight down the center of the field for Western's first touchdown.

The Bruins might have mistaken this catastrophe for one of those lucky breaks, except for the fact that so many of them had trouble getting to their feet after the cyclone had passed. As the two teams formed for the point try Pete Crano, usually a pretty cagey man with a quip, pulled one that backfired disastrously for Cal.

"S'matter with you guys?" he called across the line. "Coach Townes put some cayenne in his pepper talk?"

It was like using gasoline to put out a fire. Their anger flared at him from all sides.

"Shut your mouth, ugly!" the normally egregious Bubber Weeks growled.

"Let's smear that smart aleck!" Harv Newsome challenged.

Slug Lowery glowered and flexed his long arms. "Yuh want I should go 'splat' with yuh?" he asked.

Crano scratched his chin and turned perplexed eyes toward Bumps Offbacher. "What gives?" he asked. "You'd think they didn't love me."

A moment later he was sure of it. Instead of kicking, Jake Levin handed Lowery the ball, and the entire Western team seemed bent on taking turns playing "bounce the blabbermouth" with the hapless Bruin quarterback. The last man to take his cracks was the ball-toting Slug Lowery. There was an unmistakable, resounding 'splat,' and Crano went soaring gracefully into the end zone. When they carted him off the field the score was 20-7, and Western had just begun to fight.

As football games go, the thing that developed was a beautiful example of one way to go about solving the world's overpopulation problem. Before the end of the third quarter Hal Boyd, the Bruin coach, had abandoned his two-platoon system, and was reportedly calling for volunteers. On the Western bench Chuck Doerfler, who as chief assistant had inherited Townes' job, had long since given up hopes of gaining recognition for a spot job of master-minding.

"I send them in and Jake Levin sends them back out," he complained to line coach Carl Malone. "What do those guys think they're running' out there, a union?"

"Let 'em alone," Carl said ecstatically. "The Red Cross has lots of plasma!"

Almost as he spoke the Cowboy forward wall tore another gaping hole in the Bruin line, and Slug Lowery skidded across the last double stripe on his battered face. The score was now only 20-13, and you'd think Slug would be a very happy man. Slug was disgusted.

"Hey you jerks!" he yelled above the demented roar of the crowd, "after this leave me one of those pansies to go 'splat' on."

Terry Blaine sprayed a mouthful of red-

dish fuzz onto the ground and grinned. This was the most fun he'd had since the day Aunt Aggie decided she wanted to learn how to box. Good old Aunt Aggie! A screwball, but she kept a person young! "Bet we win this game yet!" he shouted gleefully in the huddle.

Harv Newsome's cleat-branded features were the picture of scorn. "We should risk our dough against a crook like you?" he jeered.

"A sharpie!" Jake Levin advised. "Lay off him, men!"

They nodded their agreement solemnly.

It was wonderful. Almost as wonderful as the feeling he experienced when, at the final gun, they hoisted him to their shoulders and carried him proudly from the field. The fans, still limp from the screaming and back pounding they'd inflicted upon one another only moments ago, after Terry's scintillating, game-winning romp, rose once more and delivered an ovation that seemed to shake the stadium. Another, almost unbelievable, 21-20 thriller-diller! And this time it was he who had manipulated the strings, not Barclay Townes! It was all so—well, just wonderful, Terry guessed.

Even Aunt Aggie seemed impressed. She was waiting for him in her venerable model "T" when he emerged from the players' exit.

"Made quite a fuss over you, didn't they boy?" she greeted him. "Hop in."

"What gives?" Terry asked. "Thought you came down with George?"

"Brought both cars," she said, thus maligning the block-long Cadillac George must be driving. Aunt Aggie was partial to model "T"s; claimed they left her free to talk with her hands.

She now jammed the hand throttle down, did things with her tiny feet, and the violently trembling tin box leaped forward as though stung by a hornet. "George and that turkey-wattled policeman are taking *him* down to the pokey," she explained further, almost choking herself on the "him."

Then, negotiating a corner and waving an arm toward the stadium at the same time, she asked, "How come they were yelling your name so often? All you

youngsters down there looked alike to me; you do something special?"

Terry opened his eyes, which had been closed since that last screeching turn, and stared at her. "You—you mean you didn't even see . . ." He winced, thinking of that last run of his. Eighty-seven yards! 'How thrilled Aggie will be,' he had exulted at the time!

"Silly game," Aunt Aggie sniffed. "Makes no sense whatever. Explain it to me."

Terry opened his mouth, then shut it again. The pattern was too familiar: his aunt was trying to save *herself* some explaining. "Oh no you don't," he said finally. "Give!"

"Oh Lord help us!" she groaned. "I suppose I'll have to draw it all out for you nice and plain, like two plus two! Don't they teach you how to think in that blasted school?"

Terry chuckled. It was a challenge, and he decided to accept it.

**FIRST OF ALL**, why had Aggie suspected Townes right off the bat? Well, that one wasn't too tough; he himself should have done so immediately. A coach with his team's best interests at heart would have kept the information Terry brought him to himself. Or, looking at it from the other end of the horn, if someone *had* intended that bribe money as a psychological whip, to be held over his, Terry's, head, it would have to be someone close to the team; someone with authority. That added. Aggie would have arrived at the same answer with no more mental effort than to notice that the twirp had a mustache.

Okay, but what would her next step have been? He smiled, recalling her sulphurous references to those 'damned bureaucrats'. Let's see: she'd mentioned the post office and internal revenue departments. Poor devils! They had probably issued her George's special investigator's badge just to get rid of her.

All right, where would Aggie start digging next? Knowing Aunt Aggie, that one was easy: headquarters—the syndicate.

Things were beginning to assume a definite pattern now; George in that corny cowman's get-up; Townes blowing his top when George addressed him as 'podner'. *That was it! Aggie had bought into the syndicate, using George as a front! Oh man!*

That part of it she was simply going to have to tell him about some time. Poor George! Terry got a fleeting mental picture of Aunt Aggie coaching a harried-looking George on his western drawl.

Yep, the details of this affair would make mighty interesting listening some day, but no use prying for them now. Aunt Aggie liked to savor morsels like these, then dish them out in little tid-bits, like prizes. He'd get them all in time.

There was one last thing, though, and Terry shuddered as he considered his own responsibility in this particular matter. One didn't buy into gambling syndicates with bingo markers; it took dough. More dough than Terry was likely to earn in the first ten years of his teaching career. He set his chin stubbornly.

"I just want you to tell me one thing," he said. "How much did you sink in this venture? No nonsense now, I want the truth."

"*Me invest my money with that bunch of crooks! Don't be silly! I used theirs. Bet that bribe money of yours back through the syndicate as fast as they sent to to you.*" Aunt Aggie made a clucking noise with her tongue. "Boy, did I get the juicy odds!"

Terry doubled over in the cramped seat and exploded with laughter. When the spasm had finally spent itself he straightened and gazed devotedly at the frail looking creature slipping the model 'T' in and out of the heavy Saturday afternoon traffic.

"You're priceless," he said. "What can I ever do to repay you?"

"Bingo!" she exclaimed. "We'll go tonight. I've heard of a new place that sounds interesting. They have penny slot machines—penny ones, mind you! And . . ."

Terry sighed. Aunt Aggie wanted to play bingo, and that, brother, was *that!*

# CAPTAIN ZANY

## CALLS THE PLAYS

By WILLIAM HEUMAN

**T**HERE was a grim smile on Steve Bent's face as he studied the cartoon on the sports page. It was very well done, by a top sports cartoonist, and it portrayed a picture of a football player, a swivel-hipped runner, skipping deftly between sprawling tacklers, side-arming one sad sack full in the face. The runner was heading for a pair of goal posts on which was tacked the placard, Midwestern U.

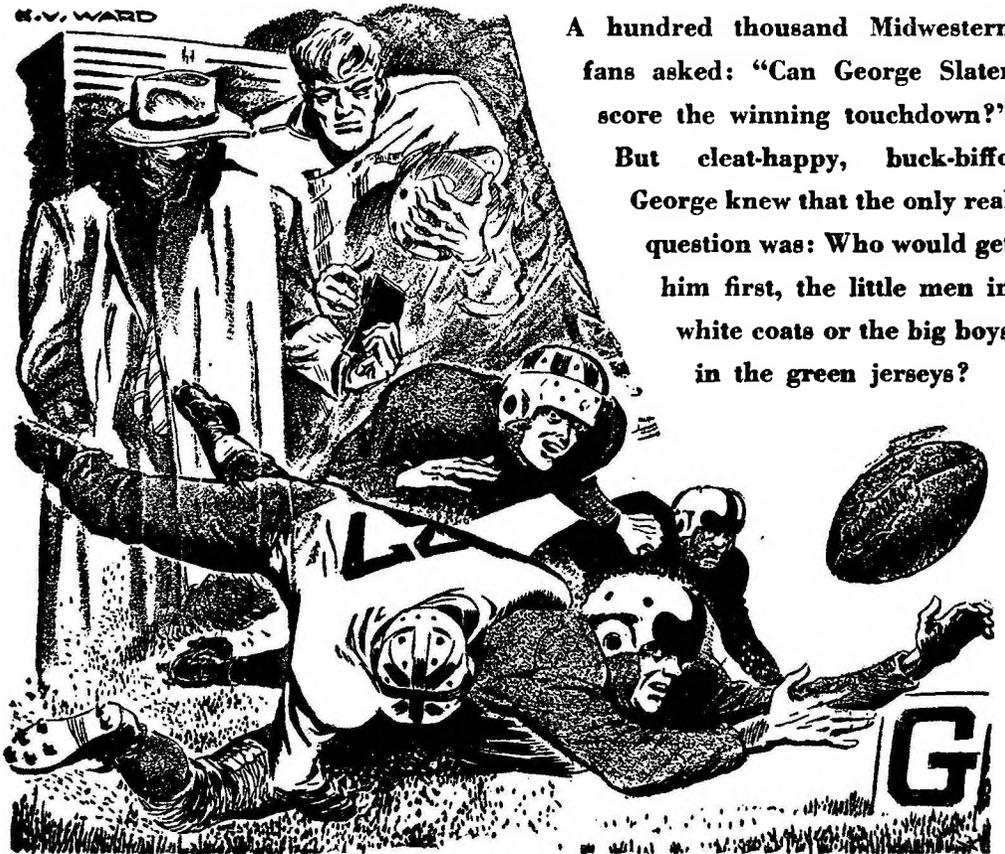
There was one very strange thing about the runner. In place of a number on the back of his jersey he had a dollar sign. The face could not be seen, but Steve

Bent, last fall's great running back for State, All-American choice, unanimously, knew that that face was his own.

He had his back turned toward State and he was heading for Midwestern U. as fast as this train could carry him; he was supposed to be heading there for the big dollars. The rumor had it that a Midwestern alumnus, a wealthy football bug was to pay him a salary while he was carrying the mail for Midwestern, and get him a big job.

Steve Bent folded the paper and dropped it on the empty seat beside him. He stared out the window, hurt in his gray

H. V. WARD



A hundred thousand Midwestern fans asked: "Can George Slater score the winning touchdown?"

But cleat-happy, buck-biffo George knew that the only real question was: Who would get him first, the little men in white coats or the big boys in the green jerseys?

eyes, wondering what kind of reception he would receive at Midwestern after this.

There was utterly no truth in the cartoon as far as he was concerned. He'd transferred to Midwestern his junior year because the year before he'd suddenly developed an absorbing interest in psychiatry, and he definitely intended to enter the field upon graduation. On the Midwestern U. faculty was the famed Professor Joshua Prymm, one of the great psychiatrists in this country, and Steve had decided that he wanted to study under Prymm.

His statement to the press, giving this as his reason for the transfer, had been met with a tongue-in-cheek attitude. The reporters had laughed knowingly. Out on the coast, Sam DeSpain, the great Pacific U. passer, when transferring from Pacific to another coast university, had given as his reason the fact that he wanted to please his grandmother, his only living relative! Everybody knew that DeSpain was being subsidized, and had been guaranteed a high-salaried position upon graduation.

There had been other cases, all too many of them, coming one after the other, big football stars transferring their allegiance because of the big dollars involved then, or upon graduation. Steve's case had drawn down upon his head the wrath of the amateur football world. Because of his big name his decision had caused a bigger splash.

After that single statement to the press had been scornfully printed, he'd made no other attempts to clear himself, knowing that it would be futile, and he didn't want to crawl. Somewhere the rumor had started about the wealthy Midwestern alumnus, and Steve realizing that a denial meant nothing, had remained silent. He had an idea though what was waiting for him when he arrived at Midwestern. He was marked, and the mark was a dollar sign.

At quarter of six Steve got up and headed for the dining car. The train wasn't due at his station till nearly nine o'clock at night. He walked through the long line of cars, noticing here and there suitcases in the racks overhead with the Midwestern U. pennant pasted on them.

Several of the undergraduates glanced

at him as he went by, and one man turned his head completely to look, undoubtedly recognizing him from the newspaper photographs.

Steve Bent kept going, not wishing at this time to test the nature of his reception at Midwestern. He would find out soon enough how the student body was going to react to him.

He was in the last car next to the dining car, walking toward the door, when he saw the husky, black-haired young man slumped in one of the seats up ahead. The suitcase on the rack above bore the buff and white Midwestern pennant, indicating that he was an undergraduate.

There was something very strange in the posture of the black-haired man. Steve could not see his face. He was hunched against the side of the seat, his face pressed against the window pane as if sleeping, but from the tense position of his body, Steve was positive he could not be asleep.

There were only a few passengers in this car, and they were at the far end, leaving the black-haired man quite alone up here. Steve was about to pass him when he noticed that the fellow was mumbling to himself.

Glancing down curiously, Steve pulled up abruptly. The black-haired guy was in a kind of stupor. His face was clammy, a strange whitish color. His lips were quivering and he was mumbling words.

Steve glanced around, wondering if he ought to call a doctor, or summon help of some kind. Sweat was beginning to pour down the black-haired man's face. As he hesitated Steve caught some of the words the young fellow was mumbling through clenched teeth.

"I did it! I took their dirty money."

**S**TEVE BENT dropped down in the seat beside him. Grasping the dark-haired man's arms he shook him vigorously as if to jar him out of the coma. The fellow's eyes popped open.

Steve said quietly, "How do you feel?"

The big man was still breathing heavily, but he'd recovered himself somewhat. His face was still white and sickly, but he managed to smile. He said,

"I—I must have been dreaming."

Steve nodded in agreement even though he knew this had not been a dream and the young man had not been asleep. It was something else—something a trained psychiatrist might be able to explain. This young man from Midwestern had had an experience which had upset him so deeply that it was preying upon his mind. According to his words he'd sold somebody out for money.

"Why don't you step inside for a cup of coffee?" Steve invited. "You look like you need something."

"I'll be all right," the big man murmured. "Thanks for stopping." He was looking at Steve a little suspiciously now, as if wondering how much he'd heard, or how much he knew.

Nodding, Steve got up again. He said, "Get a good night's sleep." He went on into the dining car and sat down at an empty table. As he picked up the menu those words were running through his mind again.

"I did it. Dirty money."

He frowned at the menu. He ordered his meal and he ate, scarcely knowing what he ate. When he came out of the dining car he noticed that the dark-haired man had left his seat. His suitcase was gone, too, indicating that he'd moved to another car for some reason or other.

Walking back to his own seat, Steve's eyes were still clouded. The big man, not knowing that he, Steve Bent, was also a Midwestern undergraduate, had undoubtedly moved to another car so that he would not come in contact with the man who'd surprised him in one of his spells. He was undoubtedly a psychiatric case, and as such should have whetted Steve's appetite. However, in this instance Steve discovered that he could not become enthused over his discovery. The big fellow with the nice brown eyes was in trouble—the kind of trouble which had preyed on his mind, torturing him. It had become so bad that he was having mental lapses, and it would grow steadily worse as the years went on, unless something happened.

He wondered who the big man was, and what he'd done to bring himself to such a state. He had the answer to the first ques-

tion two days later at the first practice session of the Midwestern football squad.

Coach Ed Saunders had called upon him, personally, his first day at school, and Saunders wanted to get a few things straightened out. There were no subsidized athletes at Midwestern, and Saunders had to know definitely whether or not Steve Bent was on the payroll of a wealthy Midwestern alumnus.

Assured that he wasn't, he'd earnestly requested Steve to come out for football, even though he realized his appearance on the team would be greeted with some coldness.

"We need runners to help out George Slater," Saunders explained. "Last fall George carried the team alone. With you teaming up with him I believe we'll go places this year."

Steve had heard vaguely of big George Slater, Midwestern fullback. He'd played eastern football, himself, but he'd read the accounts of Slater's exploits on the gridiron. Like himself, Slater was All-American, a bruising line plunger, and a great defensive man.

Steve had promised to come out although at times he'd contemplated quitting football altogether to prove to the skeptics that he hadn't transferred to Midwestern for mercenary reasons.

Coming in to the Midwestern dressing room for this first practice session, Steve spotted a big, dark-haired man dressing at one of the lockers. He was getting into his shoulder harness and he had his back to Steve when another player moved down the aisle, clapped the big man on the back and said jocularly,

"How's it, George?"

When George turned around, Steve recognized him as the black-haired fellow he'd met on the train; he knew instinctively that this big man was George Slater, famed Midwestern fullback.

Slater looked in his direction, started to turn around toward his locker, and then came around again very quickly, staring directly at Steve this time.

Steve nodded to him, seeing the recognition come into the fullback's eyes. Slater moistened his lips and then came over, hand extended. He said quietly,

"You're the chap I met on the train the other night. I'm George Slater."

Steve took the big man's hand. He said, "I'm Steve Bent."

Slater's eyes widened. "Heard a lot about you, Bent," he muttered. "Hope you like it here."

They went out on the field and Steve had a glimpse of Slater in action. He liked the way the big man ran. Slater was two hundred and twenty pounds, but he didn't run like a heavyweight. There was a strange lightness about him on the football field. He didn't plod as most fullbacks did who carried that much weight. He ran lightly, gracefully, but Steve got the feeling that when those two hundred and twenty pounds hit the line the momentum would be terrific.

**S**AUNDERS had a big squad out on the field, and for the first hour Steve remained anonymous. Several men recognized him, and others were looking for him. He did the setting-up exercises with the others; he tossed a football around and he caught punts.

In picking out prospective backs, Saunders lined up twenty of his candidates for a hundred yard sprint up the field. Steve and George Slater were in the line which toed the mark at the one goal line.

With the signal Steve shot up to the front, carrying his one hundred and seventy-eight pounds very lightly. He had a peculiar running motion which was very deceptive. He ran with little effort, but he moved with tremendous speed, and it was this deception which had made him hard to stop on the gridiron. Tacklers learned to their regret that the man they were stalking was moving with much more speed than they had thought, and as a result he was past them while they were getting ready to launch their tackle.

Once past the middle of the field on this particular sprint, no one came near Steve. Slater, surprisingly, was second, two or three yards behind. Steve looked at the big man with even more respect in his eyes. He said,

"You move pretty fast, mister."

Slater nodded. "I move," he admitted. "You fly."

The news had gone through the squad now that the man who'd won the sprint was Steve Bent, formerly All-American from State. It created quite a stir. He could see in their faces that the emotions were somewhat mingled. They realized that he would be a valuable asset to the team, but they resented the fact that he was reputedly being paid to play.

It would take time, Steve realized, before he was accepted on this squad as one of their own. He wanted to play football; he'd loved the game from prep school days on, and he didn't like the thought of giving it up unless playing became entirely obnoxious. He liked the looks of this Midwestern squad, also, and he liked the big, gray-haired Ed Saunders.

Saunders called the squad together immediately after the sprint, giving them a few minutes rest. He sat them on the grass and made a brief talk, asking for cooperation. He finished by saying quietly,

"We have a man on this squad whom the newspapers have given a pretty bad name. They have asserted that he is a professional and is receiving money to play for State."

Steve Bent felt himself getting red in the face. He looked at the ground and then he glanced at George Slater. He'd already ascertained that Slater was not only the backbone of this outfit, but the spiritual leader as well. They looked up to the big fullback and captain; they looked upon him as a god, and Steve Bent was thinking of Slater's mumbled words on the train that night coming in. Now those words didn't make sense.

Slater was chewing on a blade of grass as Ed Saunders spoke. The Midwestern coach said,

"I have every reason to believe that the newspaper stories concerning this fellow are entirely wrong. He has a clean slate as far as I'm concerned."

The Midwestern captain was the first one to come over after Saunders ended the brief meeting. Slater said,

"As far as I'm concerned a man has a right to attend any school he wishes." He laughed and he added, "We do have the finest psychiatrist in the country at Midwestern. You'll like Professor Prymm."

"Speaking of psychiatry," Steve laughed, "have you had any more of those bad dreams, Slater?" He was watching the man closely as he spoke even though he was offhanded about it.

The fullback glanced at him quickly, the smile leaving his face for the moment, and then he recovered himself.

"Must have been something I ate for dinner that day," he explained. He was watching Steve very closely as he said the next thing. "Did I say anything foolish, Bent?"

"You were mumbling," Steve told him, "and you looked kind of sick."

"Oh," Slater said, and he looked relieved.

Steve trotted up the field to receive punts again, and as he ran he was trying to figure the thing out. George Slater, one of the nicest men he'd ever met, was either a consummate crook or a god with feet of clay.

Sometime, somehow, Slater had done something wrong, and it was on his mind. It was wearing him down. Occasionally, as on the train, it got the better of him and it affected his mind.

He needed help very badly; he couldn't help himself, and probably with the kind of story he had to tell he was afraid to go to anyone else. There was no other conclusion to be drawn from the remarks he'd made while in this semi-coma. He'd sold somebody out, and for dirty money. George Slater had been coming back to Midwestern for the start of the football season. It followed that it was the football team he'd sold out.

**T**HAT NIGHT Steve Bent discovered how. He had as his roommate, the quiet, studious Bob Littleton, captain of the tennis team. Littleton was a football enthusiast and he answered all of Steve's questions readily. Steve Bent was particularly interested in the final game the previous season with Tech. Tech was the big Midwestern rival, and the contest had been a rough, bruising one, Tech winning by a 3 to 0 score.

Steve had known Tech had defeated Midwestern in that final game, but he hadn't read the details. Littleton, a slen-

der, blond-haired man, provided them.

"Tech had us 3 to 0 from the first quarter on," Littleton explained, "but our team started to come on in the final quarter. We had the ball down on the Tech four yard stripe with two minutes to go, first and ten."

"And Slater couldn't put it over?" Steve repeated slowly, "when he had four chances to run it over and only four yards to make. There's no line in the country could hold Slater to less than one yard a plunge on four attempts."

"It was tough," Littleton said. "Slater left the game after the next play. I suppose he was broken-hearted, as were the rest of us."

"He must have been," Steve murmured.

Littleton looked at him curiously. "What does that mean?" he asked.

Steve Bent managed to smile even though he didn't feel like smiling. The thought of a man like George Slater taking gamblers' or racketeers' money to throw a football contest made him sick inwardly. It still didn't seem possible, but the pieces were beginning to fit together. Steve wondered what he would do if he ever had this jig-saw puzzle entirely assembled.

"I'd feel broken hearted, too," he told Littleton, "if I fumbled the ball just when I was about to score the winning touch-down."

He wondered if it was his duty to report his deductions to Ed Saunders. He had no proof as yet that Slater had played loose with the Midwestern team; he didn't even know who the men were who'd paid him off. There was the slim possibility that Slater *had* been having a bad dream or nightmare of some kind, but that fumble in the Tech game seemed to disprove this theory.

There was the alternative of waiting and watching Slater, hoping against hope that he didn't slip again. Steve decided upon this course.

He met Professor Joshua Prymm the next morning, the first day of school. Prymm was a small, jovial man with reddish hair, considerably younger than Steve had imagined him to be. The Professor looked at Steve curiously. He said,

"So you're the great football player who came here to study under me?"

"That's right," Steve nodded, "I believe I made the right choice."

"According to the newspapers," Prymm observed, "your choice was not a happy one."

"I'm in a better position than the newspaper reporters," Steve said dryly, "to decide that issue."

Prymm smiled. He said quietly, "I think we'll get along, Bent. Any time you have any problems I'd be glad to talk them over with you."

Steve had one already. They were alone in the professor's office, and he could speak freely. He said,

"What would cause a man to lapse into a kind of semi-coma and start to repeat the details of a guilty act?"

Joshua Prymm's blue eyes widened. "You already have a patient," he murmured. "Any more details?"

"Consider the case," Steve told him, "of a man who was inherently good, and for some reason or other slipped. We'll assume the matter has been preying on his mind for some time. Would the pressure of his guilt eventually cause these comas?"

"Not necessarily so," Prymm said quickly, "depending, however, upon the man in question. If he were a weak character that might be true. These blackouts you mention usually come from pressure upon the brain. Was your patient ever injured — particularly about the head?"

Steve thought rapidly. Slater was a fullback, a line plunger, and during the course of an ordinary game he would take a fairly good beating. He would be punished around the head taking, or making tackles.

"I'd like to talk to your patient sometime," Professor Prymm was saying. "I might be able to help him."

Steve frowned. "This might be a hypothetical case," he said. "I don't really have a patient, Professor."

"I believe you do," Prymm said softly, "but he doesn't know it. Am I right?"

Steve laughed. "You're a mind reader," he grinned.

"A psychiatrist," Prymm told him. "We have something in common."

**D**URING THE next two weeks Ed Saunders smoothed out the rough edges of his squad and put them in condition for the opener with Burton U. They weren't anticipating any trouble from Burton. Saunders had arranged the schedule, giving them a few easy touches in the beginning in preparation for the tough ones later on in the season.

Steve was first string right half back, having won the position without any particular fight. They had a big crowd for this opener, not quite as big as the crowds he'd played before in the east, but this was big time football in every sense of the word.

Standing on the five yard line, waiting for the Burton kick, Steve glanced over toward George Slater. The fullback was patting his helmet, staring toward the kicker. He looked over in Steve's direction and he smiled. During those two weeks of practice and scrimmaging, Steve had watched the big man in action. He'd seen and played against some of the best fullbacks in the country the previous season, but from what he could see none of them hit a line with the splintering force of George Slater, Midwestern captain, and very few of them could back up a line as could he.

Steve had watched the man carefully without intending to spy on him, but in no way was Slater anything other than he pretended to be—the Midwestern U. football captain, most popular man on the campus, and a great and clean football player.

The Burton kicker moved forward, swung his right foot, and the ball sailed up into the air, coming straight toward Steve. A roar went up from the crowd, but it stopped abruptly when the ball settled in Steve's arms. There was still that feeling against him — a subtle thing, but it wouldn't go away. The members of the football squad had treated him decently, but even here, with the exception of Slater, there was a kind of reserve as if they were withholding final judgment on him.

Smiling grimly, Steve moved up behind George Slater and they sprinted up the

middle of the field, other blockers in buff jerseys crossing to join them. In other years Steve had been handicapped with slow blockers. He'd been forced to slow down and as a result he'd often been caught from behind. This afternoon it was not going to be so. With Slater up ahead of him, running like a sprinter, plowing a hole through the maize of tacklers, he could keep going at almost top speed.

He went up to the fifteen, the twenty, and then Slater cut off toward the right side line, Steve following him. Slater hit tacklers with terrific force, but he didn't go down himself. As he bounced them off to the side, Steve edged up on the other side, always keeping Slater in between himself and the tacklers. He got up to the forty-five before they threw him out of bounds.

The Midwestern crowd gave him a polite hand. He got up and he smiled at Slater. He said, "I'll never get better blocking in this world, George. Thanks."

The Midwestern captain smiled at him. Bud Kerrigan, Midwestern quarterback, got them into the huddle, and called the first play for Slater. The big man struck the center of the line with the force of a pile-driver. He went through for eight yards.

Steve Bent caromed off right tackle for twelve, putting the ball well into Burton territory, and that was the pattern for the afternoon's work. Slater drew the defense in toward the center, and then Steve opened it up again with wide end runs. To add to the consternation of the Burton eleven, Kerrigan, a very good passer, occasionally crossed them up with short flips over the center of the line or out on the wings.

Steve scored once from the eighteen; Slater scored twice from inside the ten, and then Steve broke away again from midfield, eluded the Burton safety man, and ran all the way to pay dirt.

Ed Saunders took him out of the game after that with the score 28 to 0 for Midwestern, and the game rapidly developing into a rout. Sitting on the bench Steve watched Slater crash into the line time and time again before he, too, came out of the game.

Slater, unlike most fullbacks, got off to a flying start almost from a standing position. By the time his two hundred and twenty pounds reached the line of scrimmage he was moving at top speed, and he hit the enemy tacklers with maximum force.

Ed Saunders worked his two great backs for only eight minutes of the entire second half, but in those eight minutes they again tore the Burton defense to shreds. It was Slater inside, and Bent outside, tearing off the yardage, going over for two more scores, and the crowd gradually coming to realize that they were watching the greatest offensive threats in the country.

Coming in to the bench after his third touchdown of the afternoon, Steve realized what had happened. He'd played good football last season for State — good enough to be named on the All-American eleven, but this season, working with Slater, he was even more of a threat. Steve did not have a man like Slater to crash a line and to befuddle the defense.

The enemy tacklers never knew whom to watch. They were slow forming their defense on every play, and Steve managed to get that extra step on them. He was around the ends and tearing down the sidelines, or he was through the tackle slots, while the defense was still trying to determine whether he or Slater had the ball.

It worked the same with George Slater. The big man had been very good last year, but he'd never been teamed up with a runner of Steve's calibre, who could open the defense for his driving smashes into the line. The power of one man was complemented by the speed and drive of the other.

Saunders was smiling broadly when Steve came in. He said, "I like your style, Bent. You give everything."

*And for free*, Steve was thinking somewhat bitterly, but he knew that the crowd didn't think that. They'd applauded him when he scored from the field just as they would applaud a professional who knew his business, but it wasn't the same thing that Slater received. The Midwestern captain was the idol of this crowd. Every

time he got his hands on the ball and started to run they came up screeching.

Steve tried to tell himself that he wasn't envious of the man but considering all the circumstances he knew he had a right to discomfort. He was being wrongly accused; he'd done nothing to merit censure, but Midwestern had not accepted him. On the other hand George Slater might well have done the lowest thing it was possible for an athlete to do, and Slater was the idol of the school.

The final score of the Burton game was 51' to 7. It was an example of what was to come. Saunders, an untiring worker, had turned out an eleven which would be competing for national honors this fall. The man deserved it, too, Steve Bent knew. Saunders was a sound football tactician, and he was a fair-minded man.

**A**FTER THE GAME the squad trooped into the dressing room in jubilant mood, all except George Slater. Steve had been watching the man as he sat on the bench the last quarter of the game. Slater had scored three touchdowns and he should have been feeling good, but he wasn't.

He sat on the bench, staring across the field and occasionally looking down at the ground. Several times Steve saw him rub his hand across his face, and when he looked up there was a kind of wildness in his eyes. He looked as if he wanted to get up and run, but he didn't know where to run to.

Slater dressed in the far corner of the locker room. He was in the shower room for quite a while, and he was the last one to come out. When he started to dress finally, he was almost alone in the room.

Steve, already fully dressed, lingered behind, combing his hair at the mirror, occasionally looking in Slater's direction. He was convinced that there was something the matter with the big man. George Slater had the same kind of expression on his face that he'd had the night Steve first met him on the train. That haunted look was in his eyes.

Bud Kerrigan, the quarterback, walked past Steve, nodding his goodbye. Kerrigan was whistling as he went through the door.

The janitor was sweeping up at the far end of the big room, and Steve could not see him beyond the rows of lockers. He could hear the swish of the brush on the cement floor. Water was trickling from one of the showers in the shower room, striking the floor with a steady splash.

George Slater was standing up, his back toward Steve, slipping into his shirt, when it happened. He reached out suddenly to grasp the open door of the locker to steady himself; he staggered, still holding onto the door, and then as the door swung open he lurched against the next locker, nearly falling. He'd brought his free hand up to his head and he was holding the hand across his forehead as if in great pain.

Steve ran to him just as he sank down on the bench. He was mumbling again, exactly as he had been on the train, and the words were similar,

"Sold them out — sold them out. I took the money."

They were spoken through clenched teeth. He looked up at Steve when Steve grabbed his arms and held him from falling off the bench. There was no recognition in his brown eyes. They were the wild, hunted eyes of a big stag, surrounded by the wolf pack.

"George," Steve snapped. "George!" He had to keep his voice down because he didn't want to bring the janitor down this way. "Wake up, George."

"I did it," Slater panted. "I sold them out."

His face was wet with perspiration. He was breathing heavily. Steve shook him again, wondering if this time he should call in a physician, and then very suddenly the fullback came out of it. Recognition came into his eyes. He started to breathe more normally and he sat up on the bench. He said weakly,

"Hello, Steve. What's up?"

Steve moistened his lips. "I'm afraid you're a sick man, George," he said quietly. "I believe you've had a kind of spell."

George Slater looked at him closely. The color was coming back to his face. He said,

"Did — did I say anything, Steve?"

"You said that you did it," Steve told him. "That you sold them out." He real-

ized that this thing could not go on indefinitely. Slater's mind would crack.

Steve tried not to think of the horrible consequences if it were later revealed that big George Slater had thrown the Tech game. The entire student body would be shocked; Midwestern football would be shaken to the roots. If a man of Slater's moral character could be reached by the gambling element, where would it stop?

Slater was looking down at the floor now. He said slowly, "I — I'll tell you about it some day, Steve. I think I'd better see a doctor."

A doctor wasn't going to help him and Steve knew it. Slater would go to a physician with the story that he had pains in his head, and that he was having spells. He'd be told to rest, to relax mentally and physically, but that wouldn't solve his problem. Slater had something on his mind which made it impossible to rest. He had to take that pressure off his brain before he'd be a well man.

"You sure it's a doctor you need?" Steve asked him. "How about a psychiatrist?"

George Slater glanced at him quickly. "You mean Prymm?" he asked.

"He's rated one of the best in the country," Steve told him. "He'd be glad to talk to you, George."

Slater nodded. He was rubbing his big hands, and then he looked at Steve queerly. He said, "I suppose you're wondering about this business, Steve, especially the remarks I've made while under the weather. I have no doubt you heard something on the train that night, too."

"It hasn't made too much sense as yet," Steve said, "but I will admit I've been wondering." He knew that he had to do something desperate to get Slater to act, and he added, "Particularly in view of the fact that I've learned the big Tech game last season was lost on your fumble."

All the color left George Slater's face again. He dropped his face in his hands and he sat that way for some time. Steve said to him finally,

"I think we'll find the Professor in his rooms, George. He'll be glad to talk to you."

Slater lifted his haggard face. He nod-

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ded and he got up to put on his coat. He said to Steve without looking at him,

"I've been through a lot of hell, Steve, all last winter, all this summer, right up to now. It's got to stop."

"Did you throw that Tech game?" Steve asked him.

The answer he got stunned him.

"I don't know," George Slater said simply.

**P**ROFESSOR Joshua Prymm was in his rooms. He shook hands with both men, and he eyed Steve curiously. He said, "Sit down, gentlemen. Can I pour you a cup of tea?"

"A little arsenic in mine," George Slater muttered.

Prymm laughed. "The world is never as bad as it looks," he said philosophically. "What is our trouble?"

Steve said, "Would you rather talk to the Professor alone, George?"

"Stay here," Slater told him. "You're in on most of it already." He started to talk when they were seated, and it was one of the strangest stories Steve Bent had ever heard. It was almost unbelievable.

At half time last year's Tech-Midwestern game, with the score 3 to 0, George Slater had wandered into the dressing room in a kind of daze, having been kicked in the head the last play of the first half. He scarcely remembered the play. There had been a line buck by a Tech runner, with the ball on the Midwestern five yard stripe. Slater had been in on the tackle along with half the Midwestern team. He thought he'd taken a knee in the forehead, but he wasn't sure.

When he went up the ramp from the field he was only half-conscious, like a professional pugilist who has been pummeled badly and walks to the wrong corner at the end of the round. He was still on his feet, but he was looking at the world through colored glasses.

There was a lot of confusion in the corridors leading to the dressing rooms. There were Midwestern well-wishers and reporters scattered around. Men he'd never known or seen in his life pumped his hand and was speaking rapidly. The

face was kind of hazy. All Slater could remember was that the man wore spectacles, horn-rimmed spectacles, probably more for disguise than anything else, and that he spoke with a husky voice.

He'd promised to slip an envelope containing five thousand dollars under Slater's door if Midwestern lost this afternoon. That was all he had time to say because others were swarming around; other Midwestern players were moving past them, and they were going into the dressing room.

"I don't remember anything about that second half," Slater said slowly. "I don't even remember playing it. I was in the dressing room a half hour after the game when my mind cleared up sufficiently for me to ask who had won. They thought I was kidding. I didn't remember anything about that fumble which had lost the game for Midwestern."

"What about the money?" Steve asked.

"I found the envelope that night under my door," George Slater said. "The fellow probably thought I had accepted his proposition and he was paying up." He added bitterly, "There must be honor among thieves."

Professor Prymm said thoughtfully, "And you've been wondering if, while in this dazed state, you did actually throw the game. You're thinking that possibly your subconscious mind accepted the proposition and you went through with it."

"I remember that at the time I needed money badly," Slater said. "Dad had experienced some business reverses, and there was the possibility I might have to leave college."

"What did you do with the five thousand?" Steve wanted to know.

"When the money arrived and I learned what had happened those last few minutes of the Tech game," Slater explained, "I guess I was panic-stricken. I should have gone to Saunders with the whole story, but I was afraid. It did look as if I'd made a deal with a crook, and then when it was over I'd regretted my move and wanted to make up for it, but you can't make up for a thrown football game in which ten other men have played their hearts out to win. Besides, you know

my reputation on the campus. I couldn't bear to have men looking at me queerly." He added, "I donated the money to a charitable organization."

Steve glanced at Joshua Prymm. The little man was studying Slater's face intently. He began to ask questions then, many of which seemed to have utterly no bearing on the case; he asked questions concerning Slater's childhood. He went way back and deep down. He was particularly interested in that kick Slater had received in the first half of the Tech game; had he ever had a physical examination after that. Did he have pains in the head?"

"Right before I go into these comas," Slater admitted, "I have pains in the head. It feels like an iron band around the forehead. I believe intense excitement, like a football game, might bring it on." He was watching Prymm's face intently. He said, "What do you think, Professor? Did I throw that Tech game?"

The Professor rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "From what I have learned of your past history," he stated, "I would say not. You are not the type of man who would stoop to such an action even when your mind wasn't functioning properly."

"But I'll never have any proof," Slater said tersely. "I'll never know for sure whether or not I threw that game."

"I'm afraid," Professor Prymm said sadly, "that fact will be forever hidden in the inner recesses of the mind. You want proof. I can only give you my theory."

George Slater stared at the floor, his face haggard again. Steve Bent said slowly,

"Isn't there anything we can do, Professor?"

Prymm was watching Slater's face. He said, "The man who paid out the money doesn't know; Slater doesn't know because he was only partly conscious. There is the possibility that a duplication of that event might prove conclusively whether or not George was guilty. His sub-conscious will work in exactly the same manner the next time it happens."

"A duplication of the event," Steve re-

7—Football Action—1st Fall



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peated bitterly. "A situation like that can occur only once in a million years. Slater has to be half out, and someone must arrive at just that propitious moment to offer him a bribe."

"If I were Slater," Prymm advised, "I would try to forget the whole matter. I would rest assured that because my former life had been impeccable I would react accordingly when the bribe offer was made. It is my theory that the fumble he made in the Tech game was a very normal fumble and he cannot be held accountable for it."

**S**TEVE went out with George Slater, realizing that they'd accomplished nothing. Slater still felt the same way about the thing; the pressure was still on his mind, and it would not go away. There was the possibility that it would grow worse with the years, seriously damaging his mind.

"I needed the money last fall," Slater said when they were on the campus again, crossing toward the dormitory. "When a man needs money desperately he will do almost anything."

"Only you didn't do it," Steve assured him.

"You should be getting those cheers," the fullback said bitterly, "when you know all along that you're a dirty dog who sold out his team in the biggest game of the year. You don't know what that is, Steve."

"I know what it is," Steve said quietly, "to have people look upon you as a dog when you know damned well that you've never done anything wrong."

Slater looked at him quickly. He put his hand on the smaller man's shoulder and he said, "I'm sorry, Steve. I'd forgotten about that. It looks like we're both in the same boat."

It didn't help Slater any to know that he had a companion in misery. The following Saturday against a mediocre Spring Valley eleven he made three fumbles, and astounded the Midwestern student body by his haphazard play. It was in direct contrast to his work the previous week, and Steve Bent knew what had caused it.

Slater, after seeing Professor Prymm,

had lost all hope that he could solve his problem. He felt now that he'd never know whether he was guilty, and the thing had begun to prey on his mind in earnest. The more cheers he received; the more handshakes, and the more encomiums in the press, the worse he felt. It was finally beginning to affect his play very badly.

Coach Saunders was bewildered when it was over, and Midwestern had eked out a miserable 13 to 3 win. Spring Valley had not been rated above Burton U., and they had swamped Burton the week before.

Steve Bent accounted for both touchdowns, one a long, scintillating seventy yard dash down the left side line. He drew less cheers for this feat than did Slater when the fullback picked up eight yards on a line buck. He didn't particularly care; he was worrying about Slater now, watching the big man in the huddles, almost seeing the pressure piling up inside his brain. He was desperately afraid that Slater would lapse into one of his comas and start talking.

The resultant disgrace would drive the big man out of school, ruining him perhaps forever.

Slater held up. He went out of the game late in the second half, having accomplished very little offensively or defensively. He was slow diagnosing enemy plays; he was slow getting off with the ball.

He was terrible.

In the dressing room after the game he looked sick, and Steve stayed close to him. Bud Kerrigan came over and said half-jocularly,

"Got something on your mind, George? I've never seen you miss a signal before."

Slater had gummed up more than one play by missing his assignments. It was his ineffective blocking which did more damage than his inability to get going with the ball.

Slater just shook his head when Kerrigan spoke to him, and the quarterback slapped his shoulder. He said,

"You'll be back in the groove next Saturday against Union, George."

"Yeh," George said.

III

SLATER was in the game against Union, but he was not in the groove. He fumbled the ball on the Union six-yard stripe; he fumbled again at midfield, permitting Union, their first real contender, to score the opening touchdown of the game.

Midwestern came back with two scores in the second quarter, Steve accounting for one of them on a fifteen yard dash through tackle, but George Slater contributed nothing for the second successive Saturday, and the harassed Ed Saunders finally benched him early in the third quarter. He didn't play any more that afternoon.

Midwestern won by a 19 to 13 score, but it was a different Midwestern outfit from the one which had run rampant over Burton U. two weeks before. It was a confused and bewildered Midwestern — a team which lacked drive through the center of the line, and which was week defensively.

Playing at the safety position, Steve could see the runners coming through holes in the line—holes which George Slater had been plugging up the moment they opened. The team which had been rated as a national contender, with two All-Americans in its backfield, was now relegated to the position of second or third rate power because of these two poor showings.

After the Union game Steve returned to the dormitory with George Slater. They'd switched roommates and they were rooming together now in order that Steve could keep a better watch on the big man. Slater was relying upon him more and more, whether he wanted to or not. He'd objected to Steve becoming involved in the matter, claiming that he had troubles enough of his own, but Steve had insisted.

"Misery likes company," he grinned, "and we both have miseries."

"You'll add to your own," Slater warned him. "I wish there was something I could do for you, Steve."

In the dormitory room, after the Union

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game, Slater had another of his strange attacks. He started to talk wildly; he became physically ill, and then it was over just as suddenly as it had become, but the big man was trembling like a leaf and he was as sick as a cat.

"Lie down a while," Steve advised him. He was sick at heart himself, watching Slater. The fullback was becoming rapidly worse, and it was only a matter of time before his parents would have to be informed and he'd be taken from the school.

Still there was nothing that could be done. Professor Prymm had stated that possibly a duplication of the events which transpired that fatal afternoon might prove something, but that was hoping for the impossible. The Tech game was more than a month off, and the way Slater was going he wouldn't even last a month before the break came.

The 'duplication of events' idea ran through Steve's head all during the early part of the week as Midwestern prepared for its first real test against an aggressive, highly-rated Wycliffe eleven.

George Slater had been given a few days off from practice, Saunders thinking he was overtrained and needed a rest. Saunders was at his wits' end trying to figure the thing out, and several times Steve considered going to him and giving him the entire story. It was George Slater's story, however, and the Midwestern captain was the man who would have to stand the consequences. Saunders would not condemn him; no man at the school would condemn Slater, but they would pity him, and knowing Slater, Steve realized the big man would prefer their contempt to that.

Slater had another attack on Thursday afternoon, two days before the Wycliffe game. Again Steve had just gotten back with him to the room after a tough practice session, and Slater started off. That kink in his brain was not straightened out, and it never would be unless something drastic was done.

When the big man came out of it, Steve was nearly as spent as he was. Slater was muttering from the couch.

"I'm getting out after the Wycliffe

game, Steve. I can't stand this any more. I meet men on the campus who tell me they're putting me up for senior class president next semester. Freshmen stand and look at me as if I were a god. They don't know."

"Neither do you," Steve told him. "You're only assuming you've played crooked. Even Professor Prymm doesn't think so."

"He doesn't know," Slater said miserably.

Steve Bent went out, feeling worse than he'd felt in a long time. He walked across the campus, queer thoughts running through him. He'd been considering this angle for days now, and it was wild plan, but it was something, and something had to be done. Joshua Prymm had mentioned a duplication of events as possibly the only solution.

Steve went down into the 'Elbow.' Midwestern was located on the fringes of a big city, and the 'Elbow' was the slum district, home of the underworld, the underprivileged, the crook and the racketeer. Out of the 'Elbow' had come the man who'd tried to bribe George Slater the previous season, and out of the 'Elbow' would have to come the man who would do it again.

For five hours Steve moved through the maize of streets, stopping in occasional taverns and beer joints, dropping a remark here and a remark there, talking to bartenders loudly enough so that other drinkers could hear him. His theme was always the same. He knew a Midwestern player who could be bought.

It was well past midnight when he made his strike. He was in a pool room then, and as he knocked the balls around he continued with his remarks. He didn't expect to find the same man who'd put up the money the last time, but that didn't matter. Any man, any representative of a gambling mob, would do. They were always looking for a sure thing.

No one recognized Steve down here, and he was positive they wouldn't. The star back of Midwestern wouldn't be expected to be drifting around through the 'Elbow' after midnight. He posed as a disgruntled student just expelled from the

school; he said that he had inside information.

A fat-faced man with a mole on his left cheek drew him to one side to ask a few questions.

"Who's the guy?" the fat man wanted to know.

"Slater," Steve said promptly. "I'll lay money he threw that Tech game last season too." He was reaching in the dark here with this statement, hoping that the story of Slater's supposed treachery was known in the underworld. He saw the light come into the fat man's opaque eyes and he knew that he'd hit home. This man was aware of the fact that Slater had been paid off in that Tech game.

"Where do you get your dope, kid?" the fat man wanted to know.

"I roomed with Slater," Steve growled, "before they kicked me out. I know the guy. He'll take any loose dough laying around. If somebody had a man down near the dressing room between halves and the price was right, Slater would double-cross his own grandmother."

The fat man laughed. "You got a grudge against the school, kid, haven't you?" he asked.

"I don't have too much use for it," Steve said tersely. He went on playing pool, but he knew now that the seed had been sown. The fat man would take it on to an associate higher up. That money would be forthcoming to bribe Slater. Bets would be placed on Wycliffe. The next step, and the big one, was to put Slater in a semi-conscious condition between halves of the Wycliffe game. Steve had an idea how that could be done. In Slater's present mental condition, subject as he was to these recurring comas, it should not take too much to daze him much as he'd been dazed between halves of the Tech game.

Slater was still awake when Steve came in that night. The big fullback sat up in bed when he heard the door open. He called softly,

"Steve?"

"Okay," Steve said.

Slater snapped on the light and looked at his wrist watch. He said softly.

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"For crying out loud!"

"I was playing pool," Steve laughed. "Now don't ask too many questions."

"You'll run into a hell of a lot of trouble," Slater warned, "coming in at this hour. Suppose somebody saw you?"

"I don't think anybody did," Steve assured him. "I was extra careful."

He hadn't been as careful, though, as he thought he was. Down in the 'Elbow,' he'd wandered around freely, positive that no one down there would spot him. He'd been wrong.

Ed Saunders called him into the office the next afternoon before practice. Saunders wasn't smiling. He closed the door after Steve had come in, and nodded to a chair. He said quietly,

"Bent, I've played ball with you since you came to Midwestern. I've taken your part. I believed your story. I want to know what you were doing down in the 'Elbow' last night at one o'clock in the morning, and I want the truth."

STEVE stared at him, a sick feeling coming over him. He started to sweat profusely, and he realized that this sweating, too, was a sign of guilt. Saunders was watching him intently as if trying to read his mind.

"I was in the Elbow last night?" he repeated.

"Sam Weaver of the Tribune spotted you," Saunders said slowly, "and he spotted you chatting with Fat Abe Dorgan. Do you know who Dorgan is, Bent?"

"No," Steve murmured.

"Dorgan is supposed to be the leg man for the Lulu Bender bunch," Saunders said tersely, "and Bender is an acknowledged mobster, race track fixer, and general all-around crook."

Steve didn't say anything. He could almost feel the net tightening around him. He had a reputation already at the school; he was supposed to like a dollar—anybody's dollar.

"Tell me what you were doing down in the Elbow," Saunders said quietly, "and tell me what you had to say to Abe Dorgan and I'll stop that story. Weaver is holding it up because I asked him to."

Steve cleared his throat. He said slow-

ly, "You'll have to take my word for it, Mr. Saunders, for the time being. I didn't make any arrangements to take crooked money. I didn't make any deal with Dorgan, but I can't tell you what I was talking about."

Ed Saunders' face was gray. He said heavily, "Bent, you're putting me on the spot."

"Possibly, after Saturday's game," Steve said, "I can clear things up for you. I can't talk now."

Ed Saunders got up. He looked older than when he'd come into the room. He said,

"All right, Bent. I'll do the best I can with Weaver. I think he'll keep it out of the news as a personal favor to me, but I don't like it."

"I'm sorry," Steve said. "I'm not in a position to talk about it right now. There's someone else involved."

Saunders dismissed him, and Steve went out on the practice field. He was wondering what would happen if the team got wind of this story. To some extent they were beginning to accept him as one of them. They watched his play on the gridiron and they were satisfied. He never dogged it; on blocking assignments he worked just as hard as when he was carrying the ball, and they liked that. A story like this would put him right back where he was the first day he landed at Midwestern.

He was positive though that Saunders would be able to squelch the story for the time being, and then he learned that night that he'd been wrong. George Slater brought him the news, and there was bewilderment in Slater's brown eyes when he came in.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and they were to turn in early because the next day was the Wycliffe game. Slater had been in the library. He came in, put his hat on the hook, and said quietly,

"Steve, there's talk on the campus that I don't like. Talk about you."

"What do you mean?" Steve asked evasively.

"It's spreading like wildfire," Slater growled. "They're saying you were down in the 'Elbow' the night you came in so

late, and that you made a deal with the Bender mob."

Steve moistened his lips. "I didn't make any deals with anyone," he said.

"Then what—?" Slater started to say.

"Must I explain every move I make on this campus?" Steve scowled.

"You don't have to," George Slater murmured, "but you know what's going to happen, Steve."

Steve Bent knew all about it. In the morning it was confirmed amply. He was a marked man on the campus. In some way that story had gotten around even though it hadn't been published in the paper. There had been a slip-up, and the Midwestern student body thought their money-mad halfback was going to pull a fast one in the Wycliffe game.

Only George Slater had faith in him. The big fullback was puzzled but he was standing by loyally; he was defending Steve on the campus. It was a harrowing morning, and down in the dressing room it was even worse. The Midwestern players looked at him, and then looked away. The contempt was in their eyes. Even Ed Saunders didn't attempt to defend him. Saunders called for team play, stressing the point that Wycliffe was the rock upon which they split, or the jump-off place to great things. Saunders didn't look in Steve's direction as he spoke; it was as if he were avoiding something.

He announced the starting line-up, and Steve was at the halfback position as usual. George Slater was at fullback. The team took the field amidst a dead silence after Saunders' talk, and in the stands there was more silence. Many of the Midwestern fans had expected Saunders to drop his star back from the squad, but when they spotted Steve's big Number Eighteen they were disappointed.

The game got under way with the Midwestern team in a bitter, angry mood. Kerrigan took the opening kick, and the blocking for the quarterback was the sloppiest Steve had ever seen. Kerrigan was knocked down on the thirteen. From there on in the first quarter it was all Wycliffe.

The purple and white team had been pointing for this game, and they were

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ready to give it the gun. They were running out of the double-wing, and they sent their runners around the ends and into the line with power-driving force.

George Slater, who'd been the bulwark of the Midwestern defense for two years, was as bad as he'd been the previous Saturday. He was very slow getting started, and when he did go into action he went the wrong way.

Wycliffe scored from the fifteen on a run around the left end with Steve chasing a decoy pass receiver into the end zone on the far side of the field. He had to cover the man because the Wycliffe passing attack was as good as their running attack.

Lightning struck twice in the same place. With an almost identical play eight minutes later, the purple and white scored again after driving sixty-eight yards with the ball. Steve managed to be in position to make a stab at the runner as he came around the end behind a phalanx of blockers. He'd come up fast, crossing over to meet the runner, but he was all alone with no one to knock down a blocker or two and let him go through for the tackle.

He went in with a high dive, reaching for his man, and he got one hand on the runner's jersey. He tore the jersey open at the shoulder, but the Wycliffe runner kept going all the way to the goal line. It was 13 to 0 for Wycliffe with the purple and white just getting warmed to their task, and the sports writers turning out the obituary for this supposedly great Midwestern eleven.

**S**UDDENLY Steve Bent realized that if Wycliffe piled up a big lead in the first half there would be no need for the Bender mob to attempt to buy George Slater. Their representative would not be in the corridor when the teams left the field at the end of the half. It meant that the half-wild scheme he had in mind to duplicate the events of George Slater's fall would fail dismally, and that he'd gotten himself into a terrible morass from which he'd never be able to extricate himself. He'd be through at Midwestern, and Slater would be through, but Slater would be a hundred times worse off than him-

self. Slater's mind would be going.

Wycliffe was getting ready to kick off after the second quick touchdown. Steve watched the man holding the ball, and then the kicker, coming up toward it. The purple and white wave was waiting to rush down the field to engulf the ball carrier; they were enthused, flushed with victory.

The ball came straight toward Steve. He backed up two steps, caught it against his stomach, and then started up the field. He was slowed down by George Slater. The fullback didn't swing over in front of him fast enough and he lost a step or two.

The Midwestern men gathered in front of him half-heartedly. There was none of the hard, vicious blocking they'd shown in the first game of the season when they were accepting Steve as one of their own. He knew that he had to go it alone, and he was ready.

The purple and white men were converging in his direction as he got to the fifteen yard stripe. He had Slater and Jay Partridge, the left halfback in front of him, and then Partridge went down under the onslaught. Slater was still up, but he was making no hole for Steve.

Desperately, Steve swung away toward the left. He picked up speed and then suddenly lunged forward, ducking down low, driving hard between two tacklers. He stumbled, but his hands didn't touch the ground. Righting himself, he sidestepped another tackler, warded off a third with his free hand, and then started to sprint up the left sideline.

The sudden maneuver brought him into the clear for one moment, and that was all he needed. He opened up with a burst of speed which carried him past the nearest Wycliffe tackler, and then he was at midfield with only one man in front of him.

Instead of driving straight down the line, he suddenly veered in toward the center, heading straight for the would-be tackler. He was running at top speed now while the Wycliffe man was drifting back, very nervous, knowing that he had to make this tackle or give Midwestern a score.

The advantage was with the runner. Moving at top speed he could change his direction with much more rapidity than the man who was almost standing still.

Steve Bent fainted toward the right when he was within five yards of the Wycliffe man. He fainted right and went left, never breaking his stride, doing the fainting with his shoulders, head, torso. He felt a hand touch his right leg as he went by, and then he saw the goal line still thirty yards away. It was a straight run for the score.

There was applause but most of it was from the Wycliffe side of the field, paying tribute to a remarkable run. The Midwestern players looked at Steve curiously, not quite getting this. They'd been told that he was going to dog it in this Wycliffe game, but he'd really put on the heat on that play. He'd gone ninety yards to a touchdown.

They lined up to kick and Steve waited at his position, looking up field, still breathing hard after the run. He glanced at George Slater. The fullback was watching him, and then Slater shook his head.

Steve went downfield with the kick. He broke from his position like a sprinter. He hurtled past the first Wycliffe blocker. He dodged another, using his hands to get past him, and then he was up on top of the runner who'd scarcely gotten under way.

There were two blockers with the runner. Steve went up over the top of one man. He got both hands on the shoulders of the runner, and as his body came through he hung on and dragged the man to the ground on the twelve-yard line.

Again that strange silence greeted him from the Midwestern side of the field. He got up and he trotted back to his position at safety. He watched the ineffectual defense of Midwestern, helpless to do anything from his position far behind the line. He watched the runners crashing through for short gains, always getting the jump on the Midwestern line, moving up the field.

On the fifty Midwestern held for two plays, and then Wycliffe tried a long pass

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along the right alley. Steve had been expecting the play. He'd watched the Wycliffe right end moving out wide, and he was positive from the attitude of the man that he was going out for a pass.

Purposely, he let the receiver go, angling over slightly as if giving him only cursory attention, and then when the Wycliffe quarterback faded and let the ball go, Steve galvanized into action. The pass necessarily had to be high because it was long.

The Wycliffe crowd howled when they saw their man in the clear, but he wasn't free very long. Steve Bent, sprinting, moved in front of the ball, plucked it out of the air, and continued up the side line. He was running very fast when he made the interception, but with the ball under his arm he really opened up, moving over one white stripe after the other.

The purple and white jerseys tried to hem him in on the sideline at the fifty where the play had begun, but he suddenly reversed his field and fled across to the other side.

He got a little better blocking this time, and he was able to thread his way through the fallen players. He saw Slater slam into one man, and on that particular play it looked like the old Slater.

Steve crossed the midfield stripe and started down into enemy territory. The sudden reversal of the field had thrown most of the Wycliffe team off balance and he had the jump on them again. One tackler touched him on the thirty-five; another made a flying leap after him on the twenty, his groping hands touching Steve's ankle, but he slipped off, and Steve continued into the end zone. It was thirteen all.

Kerrigan kicked the extra point, giving the Midwestern team the lead by 14 to 13. The stunned Wycliffe rooters watched the numbers go up on the scoreboard, and it didn't seem possible. Wycliffe had been outplaying their rivals all the way. Midwestern scarcely had had the ball in their possession, and yet they were leading.

The Midwestern players didn't seem to know what to make of it. Kerrigan looked as if he wanted to say something to Steve,

and then he changed his mind. George Slater slapped his back and smiled. Slater said quietly,

"I was never worried about you, Steve."

Steve Bent nodded. Slater wasn't worried about him, but he was worried about Slater. Very soon now he'd have to attempt the next phase of this plan to restore the fullback to normal. He had no doubt now that the 'fix' man would be waiting for them under the stands when they went off the field at the end of the half. An approach would be made to George Slater, but Slater had to be partially blacked out, and his sub-conscious had to be operating when the bribe was offered.

Steve had to hope against hope that in Slater's present befogged mental condition a good bump would do the same thing which had been done in last year's Tech game. It was a long chance, but it was a chance. It was something.

**W**ITH the score 14 to 13 against them, Wycliffe put on another concerted drive to move ahead. They were the aggressor team every moment, and they never let up, but Midwestern was playing considerably better football now, heartened by those two quick scores. They were better on the defense, but their offense was still woefully weak. There were no holes for Steve when he carried the ball, and he was never able to get into the clear where he could use his tremendous speed and dodging tactics.

Slater, hitting the line, was only a poor facsimile of his old self. The big man ran into the line, struggled a little, and then went down under a swarm of Wycliffe players. He no longer exploded when he reached the line of scrimmage.

It was still 14 to 13 when they neared the end of the first half and Steve began to move up closer to the line, waiting his chance now. There was the slim hope that Slater would be injured during the normal course of play, but that was asking too much.

With two minutes of the half still remaining Slater was on his feet, backing up the line in ineffectual fashion. Wycliffe had the ball on the Midwestern thirty-

eight, still driving desperately, throwing occasional long passes down the field, but Kerrigan was back with Steve on the defense for these last minute thrusts and they failed.

It was less than a minute now, possibly time for two more plays before the gun went off ending the half. Steve watched the Wycliffe huddle tersely. It was third and nine. He figured they might try to fool them with a running play, and then save the last one for another long toss down the field. With the wide open defense, watching the Wycliffe passes, the ground play would be good strategy, and the running play was the one Slater would be in.

Steve watched them lining up, and even before the ball was snapped, he started to move in. It was a faked end run, with the Wycliffe fullback driving through the Midwestern line at right guard.

The fullback came through with pile-driving force. There was a big hole and he lunged through it. Hackett, the Midwestern center, and George Slater, backing up the line, converged on him, and Steve Bent came up on the dead run. Hackett and Slater hit the fullback as one man after he'd made about four yards on the play.

The three of them were going down together when Steve came in on the tackle. They weren't down yet, and this could not be construed by the referee as piling up, but they might label it unnecessary roughness. He drove into the three men on the dead run. He was reaching for the ball carrier, but his knees were coming up hard. As they went down in a heap, he brought his right knee up against Slater's forehead.

The big fullback's body went limp for a moment. He rolled off the Wycliffe ball carrier, and he sat there, looking at the ground. Then he got up and walked away.

Steve was watching him intently as he got up from the ground himself. There was a curious expression on Slater's face. His eyes were blank. He was walking back to his position automatically.

When Steve started back toward his own position at safety, he walked straight

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up to Slater and he said,

"George."

Slater looked at him, hearing the words. There was no recognition in his eyes. Had the man been a pugilist, Steve was positive he'd have had a glass jaw. It was not that he lacked courage and that he'd quit under fire, but he was so constructed that a clean blow to the head dazed him, shocked his senses temporarily.

The whistle blew after the next play, a long pass which Kerrigan knocked down. The players walked toward the exit gate. Slater walked by himself. He even forgot to go in to get his sheepskin jacket, and one of the players on the bench handed it to him.

Steve followed him. As they neared the door he touched Slater's arm, stopping him for a moment to let the other man go ahead. He said,

"Nice game, George."

Slater looked at him. He moistened his lips and he said, "Yes." That was all.

#### IV

**A** GAIN Steve dropped behind as they went up the ramp toward the dressing room. He spotted fat Abe Dorgan waiting, a cigar in his mouth. He saw Dorgan moving up toward Slater, and he walked past the two swiftly, holding his hand up to his face so that Dorgan wouldn't recognize him.

When he reached the dressing room door all the other men were already in. He glanced back and he saw Dorgan looking up into Slater's face, talking rapidly. Then Slater was walking again, woodenly, looking straight ahead of him. Steve held the door open for him and he went inside. He sat down in a corner and he rubbed his hands together.

Ed Saunders came over to Steve. He said quietly, "I was wrong, Bent. You were the best man on the field that first half."

Steve nodded his thanks. He watched Saunders walking over in Slater's direction, and he had the sudden horrible feeling that Saunders would recognize the symptoms and bench the man for the remainder of the game. He got up and

walked after the coach. Saunders was saying,

"How do you feel, George?"

Slater just looked at him. He didn't answer for a moment, and then he said vacantly,

"All right."

Saunders stared at him. He looked around as if searching for the team trainer, and then Steve said tersely,

"Mr. Saunders, will you leave this to me? George is only partly conscious."

The big coach's mouth opened. He repeated, "Partly conscious?"

"I'll explain the whole business after

They went out on the field fifteen minutes ago," Steve told him, "but you've got to let George start that second half."

Saunders stared again into Slater's face. The fullback was watching them, no expression on his face. It was as if he were still far away and the voices were coming to him from a distance.

"I can't let a man play in that condition," Saunders objected. "He might be ruined mentally."

"He *will* be ruined mentally," Steve assured him, "if he doesn't play. I deliberately knocked George unconscious on that last running play. He was just offered a bribe out in the corridor on the way in here, and we've got to know whether he'll accept it. We won't know until he carries the ball."

"Bribe?" Saunders gasped. "What's going on here, Bent?"

"Professor Prymm will explain after the game," Steve said quietly. "Slater is a psychiatry case. He thinks he threw the Tech game last year while in a similarly dazed condition. We've got to find out now whether his sub-conscious is as honest as his conscious self. This is the only way we can find out."

Ed Saunders gulped. He said weakly, "Now I've seen everything. Go ahead, Steve, if you have Prymm's approval."

Steve sat down beside Slater. He had a clear road now. This crazy scheme had worked out perfectly thus far. It was only up to George Slater to play his usual slam-bang football the next half, particularly when Midwestern was in scoring position. If Slater, playing automatically, playing

true to form ripped through the opposition on a scoring play, there could be no doubt in his mind or anyone else's mind that he'd done the same thing in the Tech game when he was partially blacked out.

Then a cold sweat broke out on Steve's face. He looked at Slater, wondering what would happen if the big man intentionally fumbled the ball as he'd done in the Tech game! There was the possibility Slater was crooked underneath, and that offered the right amount of money his sub-conscious would accept it! It was something Steve had not even considered, and yet it could happen. The mind was truly a strange thing.

They went out on the field fifteen minutes later, and Saunders had his first string backfield in the line-up. Bud Kerrigan came over to Steve and he said,

"Saunders gave me orders to run Slater when you give me the sign. I don't get it, but I suppose Saunders knows what he's doing."

Steve nodded. "I'll let you know, Bud," he said.

Kerrigan cleared his throat. He said, "You're all right, Bent." Then walked away.

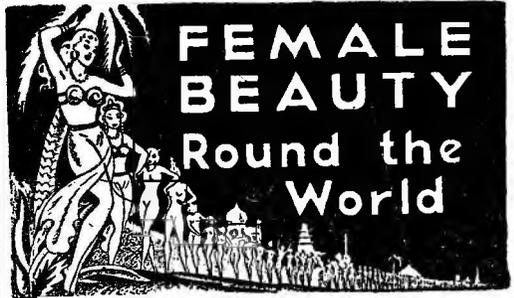
Midwestern kicked off and Wycliffe brought the ball up to the twenty yard line. The first play was a quick kick which caught Steve by surprise. The ball sailed far over his head, bouncing down in Midwestern territory. He went after it as fast as he could go, Wycliffe players driving after him.

The ball was still bouncing when he picked it up on the Midwestern twenty. He swerved over toward the right side line and managed to bring it back fifteen yards to the Midwestern thirty-five before they threw him out of bounds.

He glanced anxiously in Slater's direction. The fullback had not as yet been involved in any of the plays, and there was the possibility he would come out of the coma before the test could be made. They had to get the ball down near the Wycliffe goal line and get it there quickly.

In the huddle Steve said, "Bud, how far can you throw a football?"

The Midwestern players were looking at him with respect in their eyes now.



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He'd had to fight to bring the ball back those fifteen yards after that disastrous kick. He'd been hit hard by half a dozen men. They'd spilled him out of bounds and they'd rubbed his face in the dirt, but he was up, anxious to go, his face tense.

Kerrigan smiled a little. The quarterback was a good passer, and he did throw a long ball on occasions. He said,

"I guess I could put it on the fifteen from here, Steve, if anybody could get down there that quickly."

"I'll be there," Steve assured him. "Just throw it. They won't be looking for a long pass on the first play any more than we looked for that surprise kick."

Kerrigan nodded. "You have something, Steve," he admitted. "I'll put the ball down there if you can reach it."

The teams lined up and Steve moved out on the wing. He glanced once at Slater, blocking for Kerrigan. The big fullback was hunched, elbows on knees. Steve could only see the side of his face.

**T**HE BALL was snapped, and Steve started to run. He cut out wide along the right side line and when he reached the Wycliffe forty yard stripe he started to swing in toward the middle.

The purple and white safety man was drifting back with him, watching him intently. Steve put on another burst of speed which for one brief moment got him beyond the safety man.

It was then that he glanced back over his shoulder. The ball was already in the air. He'd been sure of that because of the noise from the stands. He saw it floating down toward him, spiralling perfectly against the blue of the sky.

The Wycliffe safety man was scrambling back, reaching also. His fingers grazed it, but the ball settled in Steve's hands. The Wycliffe safety, in falling, grabbed Steve's ankles. He held tightly and Steve fell where he was on the eight-teen yard stripe.

This time the Midwestern rooters let out a mighty roar. There was nothing restrained about it. Steve got up, the ball in his hands. He tossed it to the referee who was trotting toward him. He looked into the faces of the Midwestern players

and he saw the new hope there. This team had been pushed around in the first half, but they were going to find themselves now. Nothing was going to stop them.

Kerrigan gave the ball to Partridge, and the halfback slid off tackle and fought his way to the ten yard stripe. They were within striking distance now—the spot Steve wanted for his test. He looked at George Slater. Slater had been blocking on these two plays, and it had been impossible to tell anything. This next play was his to do with it as he would.

In the huddle Steve said quietly, "Will you let Slater run with it this time, Bud?"

Kerrigan glanced at Slater who was looking at the ground. He said, "No. 24-A, George." Then when Slater didn't look up he repeated the play.

Some faint light showed in Slater's brown eyes. He nodded briefly. No. 24-A was a line buck over right guard, after a fake spinner by Kerrigan.

The backfield lined up. Kerrigan was in the running position after the shift. Steve was the decoy on this buck, moving off to his own right on the play to draw off the defensive left half backing up the line.

When the ball was snapped, Steve didn't run very far. He was watching Slater and his heart was scarcely beating. He found himself muttering, "Go it, George. Go it!"

The big fullback went. Kerrigan spun and handed the ball to Slater. Slater took it on the run and he kept going. He was the big panther, moving on padded feet. In two steps he was at top speed, and Steve Bent wanted to shout aloud for joy. It was the old Slater—the Slater of the Burton U. game—the hardest driving fullback in the game. It was the man who had been lost all these weeks, but now with his mind beclouded he was himself physically.

There was a small hole in the right guard spot. Slater made it big enough for a truck to go through. Two tacklers bounced off him as he exploded at the line of scrimmage. He went through low, the ball tucked under his right arm, head down between his shoulders, knees driving.

Gardner, the Wycliffe fullback, tried to

stop him on the five, but the two hundred and twenty-five pound Gardner was sent reeling to one side, dazed, bruised. Slater kept going as straight as an arrow toward the goal line.

Two tacklers hit him with terrific force as he was crossing the line. He carried both of them with him into the end zone, and the three men lay there in a heap five full yards on the other side of the last white stripe.

Steve raced up. He crouched down beside the big man, pounding him on the shoulder. Slater was shaking his head dizzily. He was saying,

"What hit me? What hit me?"

Bud Kerrigan, running up, yelled, "That's what Wycliffe is saying, George. Let's run over them now."

That blank stare had left Slater's face. He was looking at Steve strangely. He said, "I just had a hell of a dream, Steve. I——" He stopped and rubbed his forehead.

"I know all about it," Steve assured him.

Slater had to almost yell to make himself heard. He said, "I dreamed a fellow with a fat face tried to bribe me, Steve. He said I'd get five thousand if Midwestern lost this afternoon. It——it was crazy."

"Just like in the Tech game last year," Steve told him. "You were struck in the head, knocked half out, and then this fellow put up his dirty money."

"Then I'm all right," George Slater said slowly. "I reacted the way Professor Prymm thought I would."

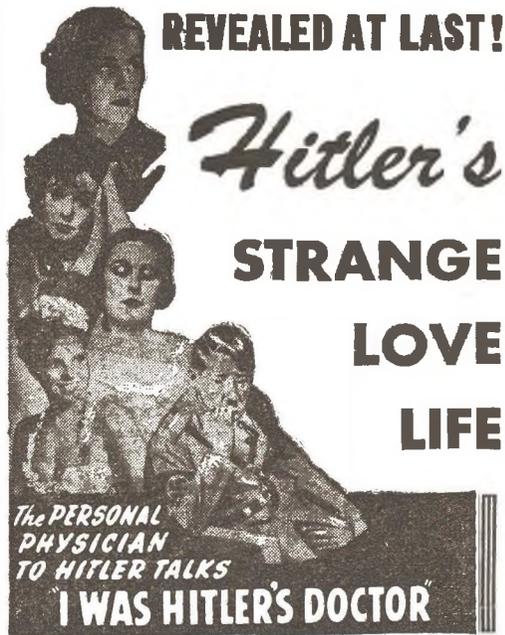
"You're all right," Steve told him, "and you always were, conscious, unconscious, or sub-conscious. Now let's pile up this score."

"Brother," George Slater said fervently, "lead me to it."

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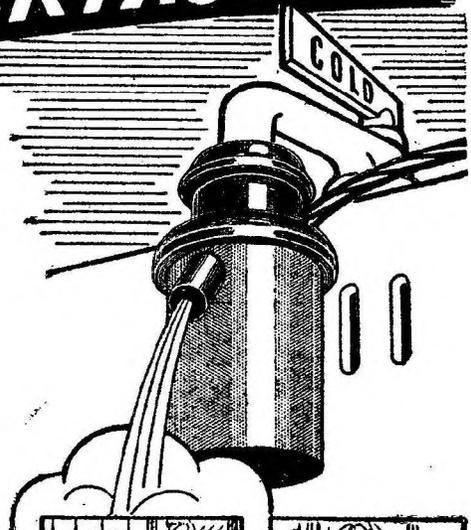
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