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# FOOTBALL

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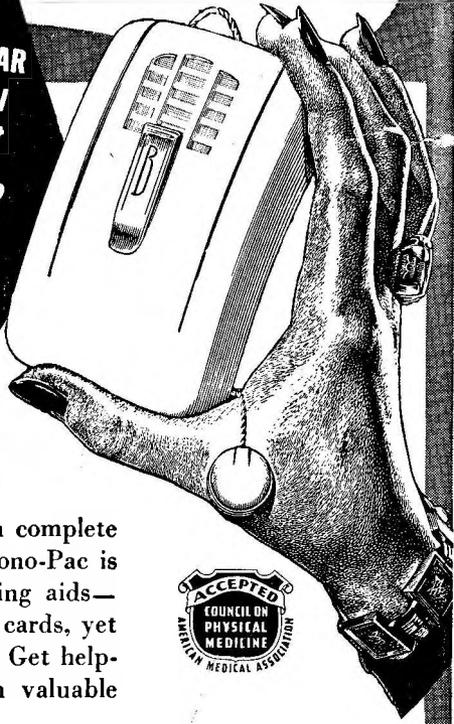
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BY WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

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# POPULAR FOOTBALL

VOL. V, NO. 2

*A Thrilling Publication*

Fall Issue



## FEATURED FOOTBALL NOVELET

# PIVOT MAN

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

Mal Kyme, the Mister Center of football, may be a fading star, but when he goes up against the Redskins and tough Joey Butcher, he proves he can still shine brilliantly! . . . 11

## TWO OTHER GRIDIRON NOVELETS

- THE HEAD COACH** . . . . . Sam Merwin, Jr. 30  
Plenty of woe is in store for "Clipper" Cotton at Jordan University, where his brand of football fails to work as the boys clash with their traditional rivals!
- THE TOP-KICK** . . . . . Roger Fuller 46  
It sounded wonderful to get triple-threat man Private Smith on the Occupation M. P. Team, but Sergeant Calverton's idea went sour in the middle of a vital game!

## SHORT STORIES

- OF THESE WE SING** . . . . . Joe Gregg 63  
It takes more than money and bands and uniforms to build up the Cubs.
- THE HUMAN SIDE** . . . . . Robert Sidney Bowen 71  
Raymond was worth plenty on any team—but not on those Beavers.
- PLAY, CLOWN, PLAY** . . . . . Willis Graham 76  
Ducky West was hired for the purpose of being a football pantaloon.
- YESTERDAY'S HERO** . . . . . Walter Roeber Schmidt 83  
The team had surly blocker Hal Benedict pegged as a small time dub.
- AUTOGRAPH ON A PIGSKIN** . . . . . C. Paul Jackson 92  
It takes a dose of a familiar medicine to cure O'Connor of a grudge.
- THE CHISELER** . . . . . Carter Sprague 101  
When wonder fullback Casales breaks training, Coach Winters is on a spot.

## FEATURES

- THE FIFTY-YARD LINE** . . . . . Cap Fanning 6  
A friendly get-together with our readers.
- THRILLS IN FOOTBALL** . . . . . Jack Kofoed 95  
True stories of exciting action on the gridiron.

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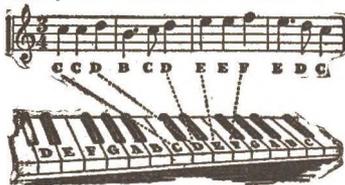
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# THE FIFTY-YARD LINE

*A Department for Readers Conducted by Cap Fanning*

**U**NQUESTIONABLY football is the most unpredictable sport around. Every year, sports writers and other publicized experts come boiling up with predictions. And every year, for the most part, their predictions fail of fulfillment.

Yet these same experts, thanks to experience and inner knowledge, have a way of coming pretty close in other sports. Not infrequently they pick big league pennant winners, prizefight champions, basketball standouts and even professional golf money leaders. They aren't so hot on race horses, but then, horses are hardly human—nor, according to some uncharitable authorities, are the men who own, train and ride them.

## A Human Sort of Game

Football, however, is an eminently human game—especially as regards human inconsistency. No team plays enough contests over a season to settle down to its rightful level of play as do ball clubs with their 154 contests. Furthermore, repeat contests against opponents are almost unheard of.

So, instead of blithely predicting what teams will be sectionally outstanding in this year of grace, 1947, we're going to cover a few ludicrous upsets of the past by way of explaining our refusal to gaze into even a borrowed crystal ball.

Last year, of course, Army was given the nod, along with Notre Dame. When these two great clubs knocked each other out to no avail in the Yankee Stadium, emerging with a scoreless tie, the experts heaved a sigh of relief. And then Army has literally to be saved by the bell (the final gun in this case) to stave off defeat against a Navy squad that

had failed to win a single previous game.

Where does a thing like that leave the experts? Why, chewing rugs, naturally.

## More Football Upsets

In 1943, Notre Dame, after trimming just about everyone of import, including both Army and Navy, eked out a one-point win over Iowa Navy, and then fell ignominiously before the Great Lakes Naval Training eleven. Last year Penn was rated highly until she met a mediocre football team. Result, curtains for Penn's championship hopes and a riot on Franklin Field. Then, the next week, the now highly touted Tigers, blew a 7-20 decision to a Virginia team which didn't rate peanuts even in a comparatively small-time circuit.

Boston College, after 16 straight wins against topflight opposition, went down by a score of 12-55 before a Holy Cross eleven that had been beaten by Dartmouth, Duquesne, Syracuse and Brown and tied by Colgate. Is it any wonder that football predictors for the most part must use a pin and blindfold? They might as well at that.

## Gridiron Comparisons

Football invites crazy comparisons. Back in 1935, for instance, the University of Minnesota Gophers, coached by Bernie Bierman, ruled the collegiate gridiron roost as was their habit in that era. Their record follows—

Minnesota 26—North Dakota State 6.  
Minnesota 12—Nebraska 7.  
Minnesota 20—Tulane 0.  
Minnesota 21—Northwestern 13.  
Minnesota 29—Purdue 7.  
Minnesota 13—Iowa 6.

Minnesota 40—Michigan 0.  
Minnesota 33—Wisconsin 7.

The Golden Gophers, in the course of their eight triumphs, rolled up a total of 194 points to the opposition's 46—and rugged opposition all the way. They deserved their national "title" as much as little Hiram College of Ohio in the same year rated its 599 spot in the ranking. Hiram did as follows:

Hiram 0—Wooster 41.  
Hiram 6—Bethany 13.  
Hiram 0—Allegheny 6.  
Hiram 6—Kenyon 7.  
Hiram 7—Otterbein 24.  
Hiram 6—Kent State 45.  
Hiram 13—Capital 25.  
Hiram 0—Bowling Green 25.

Yes, little Hiram could hardly be said to have had a good season, what with eight losses out of eight games and a meager 33 points against their opponents' 181. Yet so deceptive are football comparisons that Hiram can easily be proved to be 104 points better than mighty Minnesota. It goes like this.

Kenyon 7—Hiram 6.—Hiram one point weaker than Kenyon.

Kenyon 13—Oberlin 0.—Hiram 12 points stronger than Oberlin.

Oberlin 3—Wittenberg 0.—Hiram 15 points stronger than Wittenberg.

Wittenberg 12—Ohio Wesleyan 14.—Hiram 13 points stronger than Ohio Wesleyan.

Ohio Wesleyan 7—Western Reserve 7.—Hiram 13 points stronger than Western Reserve.

Western Reserve 27—Baldwin Wallace 14.—Hiram 26 points stronger than Baldwin Wallace.

Baldwin Wallace 33—Case 0.—Hiram 59 points stronger than Case.

Case 3—Carnegie Tech 6.—Hiram 56 points stronger than Carnegie Tech.

Carnegie Tech 0—Pittsburgh 0.—Hiram 56 points stronger than Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh 29—Army 6.—Hiram 79 points stronger than Army.

Army 28—Navy 6.—Hiram 101 points stronger than Navy.

Navy 13—Pennsylvania 0.—Hiram 114 points stronger than Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania 6—Michigan 16.—Hiram 104 points stronger than Michigan.

Michigan 7—Indiana 0.—Hiram 111 points stronger than Indiana.

Indiana 6—Iowa 6.—Hiram 111 points stronger than Iowa.

Iowa 6—Minnesota 13.—Hiram 104 points stronger than Minnesota.

All right, so you don't believe it. But by the same comparative computation Hiram can be proved 202 points stronger than Stanford, which won the Rose Bowl that same year and 215 points stronger than Texas Christian, Sugar Bowl Champion. Ultimate-

[Turn page]

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ly it is a simple matter to prove Hiram 381 points better than Bowling Green, which took them by a 25-0 total.

Which should give you some idea of why football prediction artists die young and hairless!

And now for an excerpt from a letter from the West Coast which seems to contain a highly pertinent question:

Dear Editor: Not so many years ago teams from California, Oregon and Washington held a dominant position in the national football picture. Today—well, the local picture is not so hot. That 45-14 shellacking UCLA took at the hands of Illinois in the Rose Bowl tells the story.

How come? Has West Coast football fallen so far behind or has the rest of the country picked up speed?—Henry Matthewson, Ojai, California.

Sectional collapses are nothing new in football and they may and do stem from a multitude of causes, Henry. Years ago the East and particularly the so-called Big Three dominated the entire gridiron scene—and we do mean dominated. From the mid-Eighties until, roughly, 1921 or 1922, the Ivy-clad colleges had a dismaying way of knocking off all intersectional opposition.

Once in awhile some school like Carlyle or Centre or early Notre Dame would come East to stage an upset—but not very often. Yale, Harvard and Princeton, with assists from Penn, Brown, Cornell, Dartmouth, Army and Navy had things pretty much their own way.

Came the deluge—with great Midwestern teams like Notre Dame, Michigan and Illinois doing the mopping up. Late in the 1920s the West Coast began to show its power. First came USC with its tremendous Howard Jones teams, then Stanford with Ernie Nevers and Pop Warner, then California and finally Stanford again with its T-formation specialties.

The East was pretty much lost in the shuffle—though, beginning in 1933—Columbia, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Cornell, Dartmouth and Army all had colossal seasons, along with Pitt, Fordham and Boston College. The South was never out of the big scene, the Southwest came on and the Midwest, especially Minnesota and Michigan, was never out of the picture.

Great winners went into eclipse and came back time after time as new coaching and undergraduate blood and spirit brought them once more to the top of the heap or close to it. Frankly the recent slump on the West Coast is a bad one—but it is understandable.

In the first place, it seems to be almost entirely a conference slump. Certainly St. Mary's and Santa Clara have remained well

up in the standings right along. In the second place, fewer big-time universities are located along the slopes of the Pacific and it is thus easier for all of them to nose dive at once. In other sections of the country there are simply too many fine football schools for all to suffer simultaneous eclipse.

Finally, this has not been a slump of long duration—but one which has undoubtedly been lengthened by the war. All any college needs to hit for the top is a score of first-class football players and reasonably intelligent coaching, of which no section has a monopoly.

It is our hunch that West Coast football will very shortly be back where it belongs—and eastern coaches and sports writers will be muttering that there ought to be a law against it.

## OUR COMPANION MAGAZINES

**I**T'S ANNUAL fall roundup time for us and our companion magazines, with football, of course, occupying the spotlight in all of them. We think that this year we have as thrill-packed, hard-hitting and well-written a group of novelets, short stories and features to offer as has ever stirred American blood with a high sports count.

**THRILLING SPORTS** for November, for instance, will feature a great gridiron novelet by Tracy Mason, **THE SWELL-HEADED SOPH**. And backing it up are other novelets and short stories by Irvin Ashkenazy, John Wilson, Bill O'Sullivan and H. C. Butler—and, of course, Jack Kofoed with his brilliant stories of great plays and players that have gone to make football history.

**POPULAR SPORTS MAGAZINE** for Fall is in there with Joe Archibald's brilliant novel of professional football, **MIRROR ON HIS SHOULDER**, supported by a galaxy of novelets and short stories whose authors, T. W. Ford, Tom Tucker, John Wilson and M. M. Kinney rank high on all sports fiction polls. Kofoed will also be present, doing his unique stuff.

Joseph Kenney and another fine novelet with humor as well as thrills, **THE BUBBLE BATH KING**, leads off for the **Fall EXCITING SPORTS**. On the roster as well are Tracy Mason, Jack Kofoed, T. W. Ford, John Wilson and William O'Sullivan,

(Concluded on page 111)

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# INSPECTOR MOON WON HIS BET AND THEN...



W-WHY IT'S AN ARROW!  
KEEP BACK FROM THAT WINDOW!

IN A LOFTY NEW YORK APARTMENT, DETECTIVE INSPECTOR JIM MOON AND A MYSTERY WRITER, H.H. KYNE, ARGUE OVER THE PLAUSIBILITY OF THE LATTER'S NEWEST "WHO DONE IT" WHEN...



NOW HERE'S A MYSTERY JUST MADE FOR ROUTINE POLICE METHODS

BET YOU A DINNER I SOLVE IT FIRST

SHORT ARROW... SMALL PERSON



WRONG AGAIN!  
H-M-M-M

...AND SO, WHILE AUTHOR KYNE TRIES ARM-CHAIR DEDUCTION TO FIND THE MYSTERIOUS ARCHER, INSPECTOR MOON VISITS SPORTING GOODS STORES



A GIRL, EH?  
GOT HER NAME AND ADDRESS?



HERE'S OUR ARCHER AND, ODDLY ENOUGH, HER NAME'S DIANA

I WAS TARGET SHOOTING ON MY ROOF ACROSS THE AVENUE AND...

THAT EVENING



WASN'T OUR BET "DINNER FOR THREE," MR. KYNE?

WHY CERTAINLY! SUPPOSE WE PICK YOU UP IN AN HOUR, MISS BAILEY

SHE'S MARVELOUS



I DIDN'T SHAVE TODAY AND...

YOU'RE WELCOME TO MY RAZOR



SAY, THIS IS A SWELL BLADE! SKIMS OFF MY TOUGH STUBBLE LIKE MAGIC!

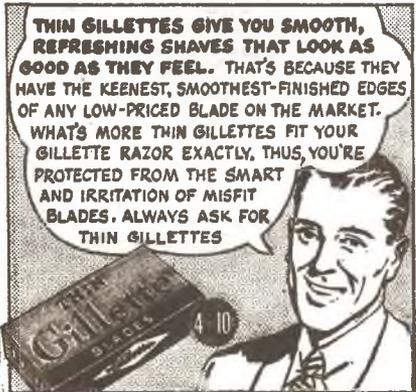
THIN GILLETTES ARE PLENTY KEEN AND EASY SHAVING



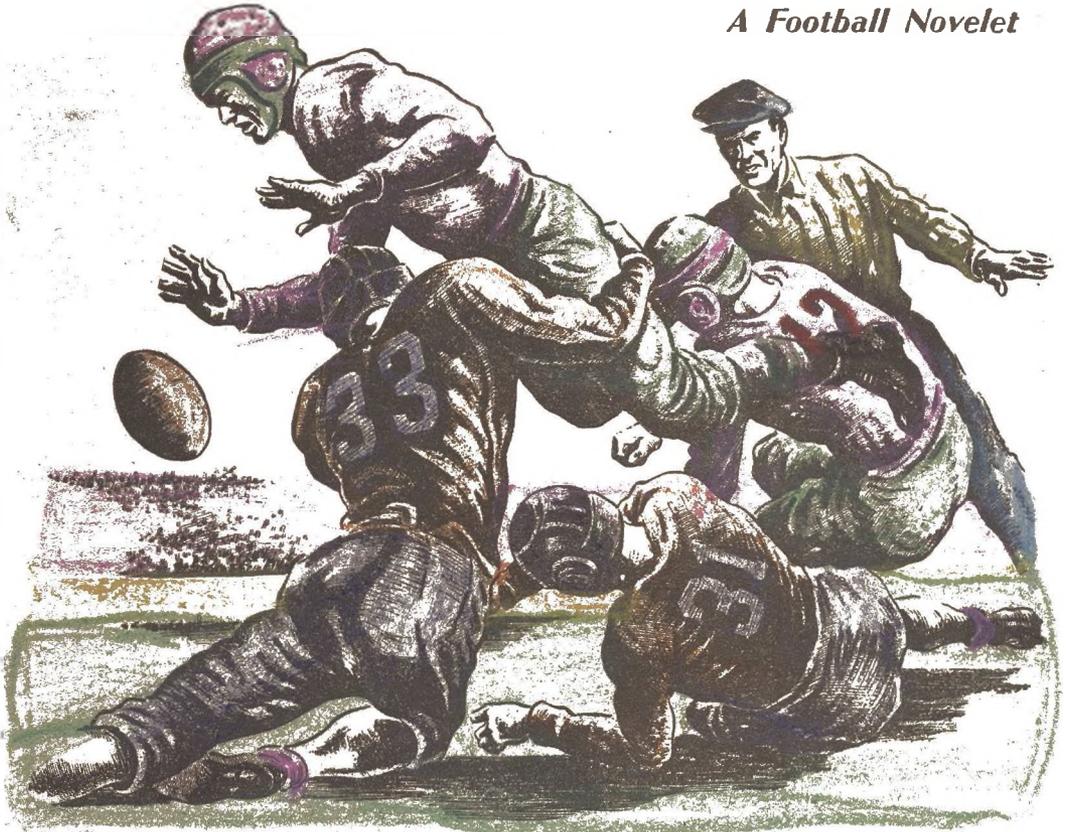
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YES, AND WITH A DASH OF ROMANCE, IT'LL MAKE A GOOD YARN

HE'S WONDERFUL LOOKING



THIN GILLETTES GIVE YOU SMOOTH, REFRESHING SHAVES THAT LOOK AS GOOD AS THEY FEEL. THAT'S BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE KEENEST, SMOOTHEST-FINISHED EDGES OF ANY LOW-PRICED BLADE ON THE MARKET. WHAT'S MORE THIN GILLETTES FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR EXACTLY. THUS, YOU'RE PROTECTED FROM THE SMART AND IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES



Bill Gaw couldn't hold the ball when Mal Kyme hit him with a hard tackle

# PIVOT MAN X

By WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN

*Mal Kyme, the Mister Center of football, may be a fading star, but when he goes up against the Redskins and tough Joey Butcher, he proves he can still shine brilliantly!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Mister Center*

**A** LANDSLIDE started high on Coogan's Bluff as an earthquake shook the bleachers and the grandstands, built by Mr. John T. Brush, and the whole thing fell on Mal Kyme, Giant center, the "Mister Center" of professional football.

Mal lay under the debris in a partial blackout, thinking, "What a swell way for the game to end! Just as if the script

had been written in Hollywood. 'Giants Saved From Defeat by Landslide and Earthquake!' Well, it was the only way we could have missed that beating!"

His broad, flattened nose was so comfortable that he opined, dreamily, that it was nestled in a groove he had made with that same nose at some earlier time. Which would have been plausible and reasonable for a center who has played twelve years on the same home gridiron.

Also, it was plausible and reasonable for anybody, even for Mister Center, who had been playing twelve minutes against

Joey Butcher, Washington Redskin center, and former Giant understudy of Mal Kyme. The Butcher had really had him—until the earthquake.

Mal was wondering if anybody else had lived through the disaster, and he was guessing not.

"No, they're all dead," he mused, snuggling his nose around so he could breathe through his mouth, one corner of it. "I'm the only one alive."

"Hey, get up, Pop! Pop! Look, I was only playing."

The veteran Kyme exhaled a snort that stirred the cleat-torn turf. It tickled his lips and he had to sneeze.

*Ssssss-ah-CHOO!*

"*Gesundheit*. Come on, Pop—quit stalling! Heck, I hardly even touched you. You think that was hard? Wait till next time. Come on, Pop. Or, do you figure Moira will go for this?"

Mal pushed the ground away from his face with a huge arm, got up and looked around him. Instead of being the only one alive, he saw he was the only one down. Mr. Brush's seats were as he had built them in 1912. Coogan's Bluff was where a Glacier Age movement had shoved it, a million years ago. Big, wicked-eyed, grinning Joey Butcher was where Mal Kyme had shunted him two years before, center of the Washington Redskins, and patiently waiting to play some more of it.

Mal looked toward the Giant bench in time to wave "Doc" Prothro, the trainer, back. Him and his water-boy, both. The players on the Giant bench were looking out at Mal, as he surged to his feet, with concern.

Owner "Humty" Dillon was looking too, but not with concern. Mal grinned tightly, made as if he had an itch at the end of his nose that needed scratching with a thumb, and then hiked his pants up comfortably.

**F**RANKIE PHILBIN and "Shiny" Silver looked at one another and then at the rest of the team, and then they huddled around him.

"You okay, Mal? Whyncha take a breather, huh? Boley Wray or Boo Farish can spell you. Hokey Joe, did that Butcher hit you! *Mamma mia!*"

"Aw, I slipped," Mal growled. "It isn't as if that was the first time I'd got dumped in twelve years."

Denny O'Hand, the quarter, blinked.

"Nor in twelve minutes. Gee, the goon sure is improving. Fast!"

Mal started to say something, but he changed his mind. That old telltale stiffness was starting in his back. He'd have to get moving again, keep moving. He started to rub his back, there over the left kidney, but stopped as suddenly, his eyes going over to that big, hunched-over figure in football gear on the bench. Humty Dillon, the old-time Giant center, and now franchise owner.

He looked at the big board and saw the 'Skins had made their yardage. He had to look, or ask, because he couldn't remember what it had been all about, and he didn't want to ask. Then the details came back to him. The Redskins had been moving the ball.

It had been third down and seven to go, and Mal was backing up the short-side, watchful for a pass, when he saw the delayed buck coming right through between Dio and "Firpo" Hammayer. Ahead of the ball-carrier was coming a Sherman tank disguised as a Redskin player—the Butcher. Big and hurtling, fists doubled into his chest, elbows spread-eagled at shoulder-level, small, dark eyes sighting over his forearms, widespread legs churning madly, he had been surging forward.

Mal had moved to plug the gap, "Smear him, Vodo, smear him!" he'd yelled. "Hit him hard, Vodo!"

Vodo Dio had hit hard. Mal, he had hit hard, in his carom back from the two-legged tank that was the Butcher. Mal's force acted to hold Vodo, and Vodo acted to straighten Mal up, and the Butcher smashed into them in a rocketing cross-body block.

Then Coogan's Bluff had slid, the stands had erupted, and Mal Kyme, "Mister Center," had laid him down to sleep like a well-behaved little man, instead of smearing the play.

"The Butcher is a terror," Denny O'Hand said again. "He's sure improved."

Mal said it, this time. "The guy never did need much improving. And it's sorta too bad he had to go do it anyway. Well, whose time-out is it? We're not waiting for me?"

O'Hand and Philbin looked around at the crowd. "'Skins time-out," Shiny Silver said. "The Butcher called it."

Mal flushed angrily and walked around in a little circle. He stopped, looked



Then Mai was leaping high and bringing his left hand up and was clutching the pigskin with his long, strong fingers

back at that certain box, then went over near the Washington center.

"Save the Galahad stuff," he said. "When I need a breather, I'll ask for it. You mind your business, kid. See?"

The Butcher grinned. "It's business," he said. "I figured it would make a hit with Moira, and maybe get me a date, so I gotta be nice to you, Pop. Where you going tonight, the Waldorf? Whyn't you take her some place where the other kids go?"

Mal Kyme was pale with fury when he went back to his position. The look that he bent over his mates was bleak. That was where that talk had started, the talk of his wanting the Butcher away from Moira, and so he'd talked Humty, Moira's father, into selling Joey Butcher off as surplus.

It had been said that when the Lord made Mal Kyme, his hand had slipped with the flint and sand measures. It had been said that after Mal Kyme had been cast in his mold, the next twenty creations of the Creator, on the masculine side, had turned out to be male-dress-makers, because the sand and flint had run out.

Mal was seething in a cold, white fury when he lined up for a look-see at what the Redskins were cooking up for a play.

Mal reasoned things out as he sized up the Redskin shift and yelled the defensive assignments for the guards and tackles. I ought to take a breather, at that, he thought. But this Humty, he asks enough questions as it is! I don't want he should wise up to my back being—bad, not even at this late date.

He could grin slightly when he thought how pleased his boss would be if he knew that he, Humty Dillon, had put such a crimp in Mal Kyme's frame those twelve years ago, that it really had not ever stopped bothering the young and cocky Packer center.

Mal had been a rookie then, fresh from his fresh-water college, and subbing for Giff Nellin of the Green Bay Packers, and Humty had been part-owner of the Giants franchise, and the regular center. Mal had taken a hitch in his pants when he had sighted the big, red-headed, big-name veteran, and he had blasted away at the man until Humty gave way to Doc Bovee, the old Michigan pivot-man.

And then Mal had done a fancy job on Bovee.

But Humty, if he was annoyed, showed

a Machiavellian twist of thinking. He promptly made use of what had given him a last, strong push toward the bench and retirement as an active player, by buying Mal's contract.

Then, he had sat on the bench and watched Mal Kyme through those twelve years, had watched, Mal often thought, hopefully. Waiting. Waiting, waiting. Watching and waiting.

And watching with him was his motherless, leggy, red-headed, freckled, snub-nosed kid Moira, but from a box. And then Moira had gone away to boarding school, but she always got in one game—to look at—a year, anyway. So that the boys saw her and got used to seeing her. And then, suddenly, they were seeing another Moira than the one they were used to, a Moira who was a long whistle from the ten-year-old with braces on the teeth that were forever worrying a cud of gum.

They were seeing a Moira who reminded them of Myrna Loy and of Lucille Ball and of Paulette Goddard, only more so. And Moira, who had been too young to see her big, quiet, morose father play at center, had tied her heart up in pretty ribbons and had it hung out for the man who played her father's old position, Mal Kyme.

**A**T FIRST it had been Coney Island and hot-dogs and popcorn; and then it had been the Giants, or the Yanks, and peanuts; and then it had been Long Beach, in the summer, and suntans, and now and again a game of tennis; or a run down a ski-slope, come winter.

But the last two years now it had been gold-plated restaurants and slick, sleek cafes and twice even the Stork Club with Leon & Eddie's, and Toots Shor's and places like that sandwiched in. It had been that and the polished do-riga-do of big-name bands.

And then two years ago, it had been Joey Butcher sticking in with his oar when he could. And he could a lot, until Mal had talked with Humty.

"Hey, you know how it is, Humty?" Mal had said. "Joey is good. The Butcher isn't just a run-of-the-mill center. He'd ought to have a chance. Okay, he learns something from us. Yeah. But his pants are getting lead in them, instead of bumped, and he's getting smooth, but he's losing his physical edge."

"Is that how it is?" Humty had wanted to know, along the barrel of his cigar. "Nice of you, thinkin' of him that way."

Mal had shrugged. "You thought of me, didn't you?"

Humty had nearly strangled. "Yeah! And what I thought of you. Okay, pal, I'll think about it."

So two years ago the Butcher had gone to the Redskins, and the 'Skins had gone booming a respectable way along the road with the big, dark, savagely slashing Joey sharpening his mayhem on the classy opposition.

A year ago the Washington team had made a race of it. It started to look as if, "As goes the Butcher, so goes Washington." And it looked that way this year, in the game against the Giants. "As went the Butcher, so went Washington." And the Butcher was going through the Giants like a cleaver through tender pork.

"Me and my ideas," Mal thought grimly, as he saw the play unfold, and moved to meet it. But warily, with an eye-and-a-half on the big, wicked-eyed, slashing center he'd marked as a better-than-good boy three years ago.

"If I'd kept my big face shut, I'd be taking a rest now, and this murdering son would be coming in to spell me, instead of taking me apart!"

Suddenly Mal felt very tired and depressed.

Humty, the team, the Butcher—everybody, he thought wearily. They all got me marked dumb for talking the kid off the team. They all want to see me get my lumps, and hanged if they aren't having a perfect day to see it, too!

He saw the offensive right guard pull out to head up the interference, and the left end, who had been playing close in, scud hard in the guard's wake. The left half was doing a crisscross, his hands pleading for the ball the quarterback held hard against his middle.

But he saw something else too, Mal did.

The right half was crossing over fast, was making for the left end's spot, was cutting back in, hard. Mal checked his rush to head off the interference, to try and flatten at least one of those hard-running men and give the secondaries a crack at the ball-carrier.

He pivoted, swung back hard to his own right, and faded with the right half as the 'Skin blocking-back came through.

He held low, until he saw the Redskin quarterback stop, jump high into the air, whirl, and rifle the pass. Then he came erect and dived.

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## CHAPTER II

### *The Moxie*

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**H**E FLASHED his right hand up to knock down the pass, then tabbed it for the floater it was and spread his fingers, his arm stretching.

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the 'Skin back pause, half turn, and hook his arms. Mal saw the man's mouth come apart, saw the despair in his eyes, and heard his choking curse when he realized that the ball would never reach him. Then Mal was bobbling the oblate spheroid up, was keeping his right hand high, was bringing his left up to clutch the pigskin in both of his huge hands.

The roar of the crowd broke out of the stands when Mal held the ball at his chest for five make-sure steps, then tucked it in securely and hit hard for the sidelines. He snatched a look over his left shoulder, straight-armed a would-be tackler so hard the man's helmet shot off his skull, and his push-off, that he helped himself to, pinwheeled the unbalanced Redskin over the sidelines, ankles over teakettle.

He pounded down the sidelines, across the Redskin forty, angled in a cut-back when the Redskin safety tried to hem him in, and crossed the thirty. The pound of feet was loud in his ears, and he got himself bunched in his run, to work a sidestep when he heard the pursuer take that slap-footed take-off for the tackle.

And the pain stabbed his back and spread in a dull blotter of sensation, sapping his speed and shortening his stride. The tackler hit him at the Redskin twenty, and Mal went down fighting for another few yards. He got two of them.

The stands went crazy. This was Mal Kyme. This was their Mister Center. This was the man who could direct defense, could smear plays taking two interferers at a time, could diagnose the enemy attack and drift to block a pass or slam in to plug a hole.

For twelve minutes of this hard-

fought first quarter, they had known it was Mal Kyme. But only because his number, a huge 33, said so on the programs. This other giant of a kid, this Joey Butcher whom Humty Dillon had let go because he had all the center New York or any other city could want or hope for, had acted like Mister Center for twelve minutes.

But now Mal Kyme, who had bided his time and played it no harder than he had to—anyone in the stands could tell you that was what marked a Pro!—now Mal Kyme, Mister Center, had made the right move at the right time and the right place, and the Redskins were not only stopped cold, but their backs were to the goal posts.

Silver and O'Hand ran up, clapping their hands and yelling for action. Silver shook his helmeted head when he looked at Mal, and O'Hand just laughed and kept a rapid line of pep-talk going.

The Butcher came back to the eighteen, looked at the ball as if to make sure someone hadn't slipped an extra one into the game, looked at Mal, and spat heavily.

"Gee, Pop, did he hurt you?" he asked. "He hit you right on the head with it, didn't he? My, my, what luck! And I don't mean for us."

"Wel-l, now, don't let it gripe you too hard, Butcher Boy," Mal said. "You sure looked pretty to the stands, doing your muscle tricks. Ummmm, boy, and you got muscles! In your head, you got 'em! Now, some centers would have been in there flattening the zone man."

The Butcher's dark eyes were glinting. "Try and get it any further," he invited, showing two bony-knuckled hams of fists. "Try it!"

"You think we're dumb?" Mal jeered. "We're gonna give it back to you muscle-headed lugs. One more play like that and we score. Heck, boy, that's the best play we got, that pass of yours into my zone!"

The Butcher made a rude noise. "Just try to plug it through!"

Mal laughed patronizingly. "You do all right, junior, until the blue chips show. Then it is a big-boy's game, see, and you small fry ought to stay clear. Know what the next play is? Our Separator Special. It separates the men from the boys. Look sharp, now, junior! Moira is watching!"

The Butcher was going to say something else, but "Bullet Bill" Gaw, who

had been rocked badly on the play, was up now and he was shaking his head at the Butcher.

"Shut up, kid," he said. "Don't let that windy old goat rile you! He'll foul you up with his tongue, if he can, and then the marbles will be spilled all over the field. Play him with your head, not with your mouth!"

**M**AL grinned, and when time was in again and they huddled, he made a suggestion to Silver. "Shiny? The big lug is so mad we may be able to tie one on him. That play they nearly put over on us—like our Fifty-two—let's try it! A fake to the right, then a flat pass over the line into his zone. The kid is mad as blazes, and he's going to play me."

Shiny licked his lips, his eyes going around his men. "Okay, we give it a try. But we're sure gonna look sour if it misses. Got it, gang? Hep!"

The Giants broke from the huddle, and Mal crouched over the ball in a stride stance, his eyes meaningly on the Butcher, his right hand gentling the ball for the floater he was going to lay into the backfield.

Mentally, he made the count after Shiny's second "Hep!" The man-in-motion started his run to the right, and Mal floated the ball back between his legs, his eyes still meaningly on the Butcher and an ugly grin on his face.

The left half came in fast and feinted a smash with the ball, and the Butcher, lusting for just such a chance to bring the play near Mal, charged. The Giant half skid-stopped, pivoted, faded, leaped, and passed—right into the zone the Butcher had quit. The enemy center saw his blunder and tried to pull back, and it left him open for the block Mal threw on him as the Giant pivot knifed between the guards.

Mal caught him off balance, caught him with a shoulder-block and pressed it, churning his feet and throwing his weight upward. The Butcher fought desperately to get clear, but he went high into the air, made a half-turn downward, and plunged to the ground with a jarring crash that brought a roar from the stands. Mal sidestepped the falling man, straightened, and was in time to throw a cross-body block on the right half of the Washington team.

Doggie Lestrade, the Giant right end, crossed over and rode the safety man

off as Denny O'Hand sprinted for the far left corner of the goal. He went over standing up, and the stands roared and whistled and stamped their approval of the lightning change of the fortunes of the game.

Bill Gaw slammed his helmet down on the ground and kicked it and raged at the Butcher, who by now was on his feet, shaken and round-eyed.

"I told you to quit jawing at Mal!" he yelled. "That guy will con you out of your shoes, you dope! Are you playing him, or are you playing the ball?"

"Well, gee, Bill!" the Butcher protested, gesturing with his big arms. "Gee, I thought—"

"Aw, rats!" Gaw snapped. He paused, raised a hand benchward in a signal, and did it again before he was understood. "You better go have a talk with the boss. Bummy Clay hasn't got your clippings, but he doesn't let Mal Kyme talk him out of his eyeteeth, either!"

Mal stood there grinning, even while he felt sorry for the kid.

"The blasted fools, chasing the kid off!" he muttered. "What if he did pull one boner? He's the spark-plug of the whole line! But he'll be playing this game with just what I want him to play it with—glued to the bench."

Shiny Silver shook his head admiringly. "Wotta Mal, wotta Mal!"

The Redskins came unstuck in their anxiety to tie things up, and the Giants played everything very close and cagey and watched the Washington hipper-dipper unfold.

Crisscrosses with forwards that blossomed into laterals. Triple passes behind the line that blossomed into long, spectacular heaves down the field. Bucket passes that opened into double laterals. And Bummy Clay was looking very good against Mal.

It was all very pretty, but it was all very ineffective. It would click one play, backfire the next. The Washington line had been shaken by the swift reversal of form in the first quarter, and it was being outcharged by the smaller Giant line, was being sucked in by clever Giant finesse on attack, was being mouse-trapped and pinched and circled by the smooth Giant line.

In the intermission, Mal got Humty aside. "Tell the boys to lay it on while they can," Mal said. "We got twenty-one points now, and it looks very nice. But

Greasy Harms may wake up to the fact that he has his head up, and if he does, brother, we'll need every point you can think of!"

**H**UMTY'S expressionless blue eyes probed his star center. "You don't look too good against Clay."

Mal grinned. "Sure not. I want Greasy to think he made a smart move, pulling the kid. You think I want to get murdered?"

"Hmmm," Humty said, rubbing his paunch with the flat of his hand. "Is that so? Then you weren't just loafing, the first ten-twelve minutes?"

Mal was grave with the realization of it. "Humty, the kid has arrived. I'm not kidding, he's terrific. I guess it looked as if I loafed along, and took him when I got ready. And so long as Greasy keeps him benched, we can take them. Otherwise—" he shrugged. "Well, that's the toss."

Humty arched his eyebrows. "Who was it," he mused, "advised me to sell the guy, two years ago?"

"That's why he is terrific," Mal answered. "Good centers don't improve on the seat of their pants. I didn't tell you to sell him. I said, use him."

"You knew the fans would murder me if I sold you." Humty puffed his cigar. "Anyway, you hoped they would."

"And anyway, you wouldn't sell me because you are still waiting to see me come apart," Mal said, meeting the man's gaze.

Humty smiled. "I came apart, once. In a Packer game."

"Yeah. But you owned a slice of the Giants. That lettuce you take in at the gate is very good material indeed to stitch a set of injured feelings."

"Sure—I bought my slice," Humty said, slowly. "I didn't steal it, or inherit it. Nor again, I didn't marry it."

"I'm not kicking," Mal replied as he flushed. "I got a coupla good years left. I figure they'll be worth something. Look, Mal, if you've got a gripe on your mind, let's have it. Right?"

"About what?"

"About anything. You know, it's sorta funny, but I'm the second oldest man on the club, in point of years with the team. Only Danny Strang has been with the Giants longer. Yet you act as if I'm a stranger, almost."

"Yeah?" Humty smiled slightly.

"Well, now, isn't that odd. And I was thinking I see more of you than any other man I got. Here," he said, "and—at home."

Mal nodded. "Yeah. You see me, period. You don't talk."

"It's the first I knew that you were coming around to see me," Humty said, still softly. "My boy, you mustn't keep these secrets from me."

"You're always getting me wrong," Mal sighed. "Always."

"Maybe I've never had you wrong, fella," Humty said. "But you are a—well, strange guy. I mean, look how young you are, for your age. Like Gargan, of Fordham, and Heffelfinger, of Yale. Frank Gargan may have two gray hairs in his head, but I'll be darned if he has three, yet he quartered Fordham back in Nineteen-eight."

"Heffelfinger, forty-some years after he was a killer-guard on Walter Camp's Eighteen-Eighty-Nine All America at Yale, played most of a pro game with the Chicago Bears, and just about crippled two guys young enough to be his grandsons. You're tough, too, Mal. Tough, and young-looking. Young acting, too."

Mal's gray eyes were icy. "Any beefs, boss?"

"When I have any, you'll hear them." Humty got rid of some ashes. "So you're good for two years yet?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, if you say so, you are, Mal. But—well, I wondered if I imagined it, but I could have sworn you ran with that interception as if something was wrong with your back. Is there?"

"I'd hate to disappoint you, Humty," Mal murmured meaningly.

"You wouldn't, pal, you wouldn't. I'm curious about your back, though."

"Maybe," Mal said, his eyes innocent, "you'd like to look at it in Macy's window? I mean, so everybody would know was there something wrong with it? Like the Butcher, for instance?"

Humty thought about it, then chuckled. "Quite a situation, isn't it? You set me on my caboose, twelve years ago. I made my enforced idleness pay me, by having you around to watch while you got ready to go on yours. But if it happens, my line is wrecked until I can get another center such as you have been these years. I wish I could make up my mind about something else, too."

"For instance?"

"Well, I'm wondering if I would see you more—or less—after working-hours, if the Butcher tied your legs up in bow-knots for you?"

**M**AL grinned. "Sweat it out, boss, sweat it out. Meanwhile, tell the lads to give with the hipper-dipper before that killing son comes back in, provided Greasy gets a rush of brains. Because the day the Butcher gets completely right and stays that way, we are through!"

He started away, but stopped when Humty said, "Hey!" He waited.

"Hey, I nearly forgot," Humty said. "Moirá has a school-friend in town, and can't make it tonight. I guess that means something to you, makes sense? She told me to tell you, before she left."

"Thanks," Mal said. He hesitated. "What are you doing later?"

"Going to the Dutchman's with some of the boys," Humty said. "Some friends of mine. The Dutchman has spareribs and 'kraut and beer, and I like that. Sawdust on the floor, no music, no women in the back room. Taboo. You wouldn't like it."

The Giants salted the game with a 28 to 7 edge in the final quarter, and Mal and the other regulars came off the field to the roars of the home town crowd.

Mal stripped for a warm shower and a rub, thinking it should never be closer! It could have been the other way around just as easy, if Greasy had kept his head.

He investigated the small of his back gingerly with a delicate hand and winced. The back ribs had set all right, but the cartilages would never be the same. The cartilages that Humty Dillon had wrecked with those berserk charges in the twilight game of his career.

Mal twisted his head and saw Humty standing there, looking at him with wise eyes.

"Everything okay, Mal?"

"Couldn't be better, boss."

Humty grinned slowly, his blue eyes disappearing in the creases of his face. "Everybody seems to be happy," he chuckled. "See you Monday, fella!"

Mal's rage rose within him. He threw his towel down as he started to get up, and then he was remembering the Butcher out on the field, earlier, and now here he was, losing his own head in rage. He picked up the towel again and laid it around his neck, then started looking at

his feet. Humty Dillon was chuckling audibly when he went away.

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### CHAPTER III

#### *Head-on Crash*

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**F**OR the first time in years, Mal became really conscious of his condition, and for the first time in years, he outlined for himself a rigorous exercise-schedule.

The beating that the Butcher had given him for those first minutes of the Redskin game had piped to him the first warning shrill of the whistle Time would blow on him some day.

He started going to Skillman's regularly, where he wrestled with Tony Lashowitz, one of the boys there. He worked up sweats and climbed into hot-boxes to sweat away excess fat. He put on the pressure in his calisthenics until he was groaning with the ache that even his conditioned muscles experienced. But he stuck to it, and the soreness went away, and new layers of muscle poked out where the fat had been.

In his eating, he cut down on fatty foods and milk, and he cut his liquids to a minimum.

Then he added routines designed to strengthen his wind.

"The Butcher is really burned up over being pulled out in our game," he told himself. "His work in the subsequent games shows that. When we play our next one against the Redskins in Washington, it really is going to be a head-on crash! And I'm afraid I know whose little red wagon is going to be unfixed."

The Butcher, as Mal knew, was reaching his prime. He had his best years ahead of him. He was good, very good, and he was strong, but he lacked the smooth savvy that nothing but years of effort, and perhaps a few minutes of heartbreak, would weld on him like a coat of enamel on a metal boiler.

"Right now, he can take me," Mal figured it. "But Greasy doesn't know it yet. Greasy Harms, the Redskin coach, thinks the Butcher is still playing Mal Kyme. Instead, he's playing what is left of Mal Kyme and his reputation. The reputation, and one lucky play, saved me, this time. I'm afraid there won't be any saving me the next time."

Nor would it have been so bad, so disturbing, unless other circumstances in Mal Kyme's setup made it so.

For one thing, a lot of the old boys had their lines set so they would step from stardom to some safe berth, such as coaching at some college, or as assistant coach at some pro club. A job with a sporting goods house. Or with a lot of money saved.

But Mal Kyme wasn't the type to invite much talk of any sort, let alone talk of what he would do when he got through. Mal was a workman, and it showed in every line of him.

Mal was a self-contained unit, and the way he looked, the way he talked, the way he handled himself, told it. He saved money and he put it away in insurance. Annuities. When he got to be crowding fifty years, he would start taking down some of it. And he would continue to take it down, steadily, for as long as he lived after fifty.

If he kept making enough to get by on, and to keep putting back into the annuities. If he didn't suddenly find himself up against it, and had to sell out his annuities for whatever they would realize.

His expenses were plenty. Taking a girl like Moira around town, even keeping to training-hours, ran into heavy sugar. You had to buy her gadgets, now and then. Not had to, for her, because Moira wasn't that sort of kid. But you wanted to.

That meant extra money on clothes. And that meant heavy tailoring bills. It meant a lot of taxi dough, unless you had a car. So Mal had got a convertible, and that meant garage rent, and repairs, and tires, and stuff like that. So here he was coming up to the big showdown and what did he have?

Money saved that would be his only if he saved more. A job, but no particularly close friend. A reputation.

Then there was a big, powerful, murderous-eyed youth thirsting to give him the trimming that would slam him down from his starry peak at the top of the pivot-heap. . . .

The Steelers hit town from Pittsburgh without Bill Dudley, and the way it worked out, it was just as well the 1946 Champ Ground-Gainer had taken a college coaching job. To Mal's way of thinking, it was, anyway.

"Backs are to score with," Mal used to

say to his mates in the line. "Backs are to tell us how we've done our work. If the backs go places, we've done a job. If they don't, we're falling down. Yeah, backs are to score with. But some backs score more than others."

**T**HE Steelers had a big, smart line, and they had a big, rough center, and Mal had to sacrifice some of his backer-up potentialities to stand closer to his guards. And then the truculent and hard-blasting Pittsburgh pivot-man would start opening up Duster Saketzman's tackle spot, or work over King Cole, at the other tackle.

And just to keep it interesting, the Steeler quarter was firing his mean little ground-gaining flips over the line into Mal's sector, every now and again.

Mal, his eyes turned inward too much, analyzed what it was that had him. Well, he was not as devastating as he once had been.

"It isn't that I'm not as fast," he analyzed it. "It's that I got to put out more effort for that same speed. And the greater effort demands more of my heart, my lungs, my muscles, my wind, and my back tires. It leaves me unstuck, pulls my stride down."

He was thinking about this when a play unfolded that had Jerry Mahar, the Steeler center, booming into the line to open a hole. Mal moved, instinctively, to back up Vodo Dio. Then, out of nowhere, a Steeler back was in his pass-sector, and the crowd unleashed a roar when the runner took a rifle pass from the faking quarter.

Mal tried to slue around fast, make the tackle before the man could get up a head of steam. Something seemed to buckle in his side, and he went flat-footed, gasping with the pain of it, and stopped.

The Steeler center hit him with a cross-body block, a growl of unholy joy coming from his lips.

The secondaries never had a shot at the fleet Steeler back. He scampered for the sidelines, cut back in, danced away from two tacklers, and his interference formed up to sweep a path ahead of him.

Mal's mates looked at him curiously, but nobody said anything. The worst of it was—or maybe it was the best of it?—Mal's pain was gone. Anyway, no sign of his recent agony showed on his face, and certainly nothing showed in the way he

scrambled to his feet and chased the play down the field and across the goal line.

Twice, again, in that last half, the Steelers threw that play at Mal, and twice, again, it clicked. But this was no Bill Dudley who was "scoring how the line did" for the Steelers. The kid was good, but he wasn't that good. Mal nailed him for moderate gains each of those other times.

And the Giant line, on the attack, worked with a smooth power that shook their own backs loose for gains in straight bucks, in spinners, in hipper-dipper ball handling that left men free for scoring plays three times in the last half.

Pittsburgh bowed by a 21 to 14 count.

And simultaneously, the Redskins led by the vengeful Joey Butcher in their berserk charges, were piling up a 51 to 17 score against a strong Philadelphia Eagles team.

Mal went around to Humty's apartment-hotel that evening. In the lobby, he asked for Moira on the telephone.

"Oh," the girl said, her voice going anxious when it was Mal. "Oh, Mal, I know we had a sort of date, but—well, a school friend is in town, and I'm getting dressed to go out with her. I know we had a date, Mal, but—please, do you mind?"

Mal was mildly annoyed. "Of course I don't mind," he said. "I'm sort of tired, anyway. Anyway, I don't know that we exactly had a definite date, did we?"

Moira's laugh was like graded chimes. "Do we ever, Mal?"

Mal thought about it after he had hung up. He guessed the only real planned date they had ever had was years ago, when she had been a leggy, freckled kid, hanging around the hotel with lonely eyes and a pinched expression, and Mal had chucked her under the chin.

"Hey, snap out of it, Red," he'd said. "Trouble with you is, you don't understand about spinners and half-spinners and cut-backs and quick kicks and triple passes. Papa Humty can't talk to you about those things, because you don't understand about them, and Papa Humty just can't talk about anything else. It can't be much fun for you."

"It's all right," the growing kid had said through stiff lips.

"Well, would it be all right to go to the zoo in Central Park, and see if the

caged inmates are as dumb as football-players? Huh? How would that be?"

"Oh, Mister Kyme!"

"Make it Mal, honey, make it Mal. Come on, get your chewing gum and hat and coat and we'll be on our way!"

**A**T THE time Mal had been new with the club, Humty's wife had been dead two years, and Humty just hadn't seemed to have time for anything but football, so Mal had started taking Moira to see this and to do that.

Year after year.

So it came to be that they didn't have dates, exactly. But Mal showed up the way he showed up at the clubhouse. He got into the habit of it. The closest they came to formal dates was when Mal would say, "Hey, Pigeon, get into the armorplate, we are going Storking. Or would you rather hear the noise at Leon & Eddie's?"

"Oh, Mal, swell!"

Then Joey Butcher had come along, and Joey had met Moira, and when he wasn't sitting watching Mal play center, he was sitting and watching Moira. And because Mal was usually taking Moira places, he was watching Mal again.

A couple times they had seen the Butcher when they were out, Moira and Mal. Maybe a few times more than a couple. Once, he was with an heiress who wore athletes the way other girls wear gadget-bracelets. Instead of collecting miniature horses and cats and dogs and cows, the heiress collected goalies and centers and catchers and milers.

Another few times, the Butcher had been looming tall on the dance floor above the coiffed head of some Hollywood starlet, or a dancer, or a comedienne. But usually, he was watching Mal, or Moira and Mal. . . .

Then had come his sale to the 'Skins, and some of the wise heads on the Giant club were looking at one another knowingly.

"No," Mal saw it now, as he waited around to see would Humty come in soon. Moira had said he had stepped out a few minutes. "No, we never had any real dates."

He was getting up, giving up waiting, when he sank back into his chair again, his eyes on a huge man who was hurrying across the lobby.

It was the Butcher. Joey Butcher!

The Butcher looked as mad as if he was getting shoved back to the bench in the Giant game, all over again. Mal thought better of talking to the kid. Anyway, there was something else, something he wanted to know. So he waited.

In ten minutes, Moira was there, laughing and talking with animation, and the Butcher was herding her out through the doors of the hotel. Mal stayed on in his corner, thoughtful, until he saw Humty come in, his usual air of preoccupation covering him like salve.

Mal stopped his boss short of the elevator. "Moira is out. What are you doing tonight, Humty?"

"Nothing you'd be interested in. Going to the Dutchman's. Who did Moira go out with, do you know? I imagine she left word for me upstairs. A note."

"She went out with a friend," Mal said evenly. "From school."

Humty blinked, colored a bit. "Er, care to come up, Mal?" he asked.

"No," Mal shook his head. "Like you say, I wouldn't be interested. Well, be seen' you, Humty."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Shining Star*

**T**HE head-on crash that Mal saw coming when the Butcher really hit his stride, wasn't seen by Mal's mates, nor by the sports writers, especially after the 'Skins lost a dingdong battle with a Pittsburgh Steeler outfit that found its scoring punch in time to take the Washington team into camp in a surprising 34 to 27 tilt.

"We're in," Mal's teammates exulted. "That gives them two losses and seven wins, to our eight-and-one. And our dropping one to the Eagles in our opener was one of those things."

"We play them again, don't we?" Mal asked, his eyes sober. "They'll be laying for us, too."

"Aw, it's in the bag!" was the consensus of Giant opinion.

On the train for the capital, the gang was whooping it up with happy chatter and not a care in the world.

"One more game, and we've got the Eastern Division title!" they all predicted. "And baby, this is our year to fix

the Bears!"

Mal, hearing it, turned his head and stared glumly at Humty.

"Looks like we're wasting our time even coming down here," he growled. "Boss, I'm telling you, they're too optimistic."

Humty shrugged his bathmat eyebrows. "I like spirit."

"I like horse sense," Mal grunted.

"With a shining star like you, how can we miss?" Humty asked quizzically. "Don't you always say the backs are to add up how you are doing?"

And if they were confident before, they were frolicsome and cocksure when they ran out onto the field in Washington for the game. To add to it, on the very first play, the kickoff, O'Hand ran the ball the length of the field for a score!

But it was like the sun setting in a blaze of glory before forty days of rain. The Redskins, grim and not a bit shaken, took the next kickoff back up to their thirty, and they started from there.

With the Butcher—a harder-eyed, grimmer-faced Butcher—leading the devastating attack, the Redskins ground out yardage like a sausage-factory turning out wienies, all neatly strung together into first-downs, and not a link broken until the end of the line was reached.

In the middle of the roaring smash of the grim ground-attack, Mal Kyme played with a cool desperation that cut down much larger gains, time and again. His mates in the line, recovering from their first stunned surprise, matched his savvy and gameness in plugging gaping holes, in smearing hard-charging running plays, in fighting the inspired passing game with which the Redskins seasoned the red, raw beef of their attack. But the Redskins were rolling.

The Redskins got the seven points back in exactly four minutes, and when they kicked off again, O'Hand was too anxious. He bobbled the ball momentarily, got it in his hands, and tried desperately to gild his earlier miracle. He slipped, in a twistaway, fell on an elbow, and the ball was rolling loose on the Giant five.

The Butcher roared in to drop on it, his berserk charge knocking Firpo Ham-mayer out of the way even as the Giant guard was about to snare the pigskin.

The Washington crowd went mad.

The Redskins lined up fast, and Mal saw, with grim amusement, that they were not even bothering with any hipper-dipper. The Butcher, his face shining with savage joy, pointed a big hand at Mal.

"Just stand there, Pop!" he cracked. "Close in! We're coming through!"

The ball snapped back, and the Butcher lunged in with a mad yell, head low, eyes wicked, arms outthrust. He hit Mal with the force of a pile-driver, and the play boiled in and over and made three yards. Mal, groggy from the smash the Butcher had given him with one of those elbows, staggered up and looked the situation over. Second and goal, from the three.

"Stay right there, Pop! We're coming again!"

Mal looked for a trick, for a sharp pass into his sector. But the play unfolded as a duplicate of the one before it. Hard at center. He feinted a sidestep, then hurled himself at the big Redskin center, his hands reaching for and getting a grip. But it was like holding to the turret-guns of a tank. He got the grip and he got a ride. Two yards back!

The Washington crowd was rolling a roar down onto the embattled players, and Mal tried to make himself heard by his mates, pleading for harder fight. His face was bruised, dirty, his mouth opening and closing on words that couldn't be heard.

**B**UT the Butcher was grinning and pointing and his face was working, too, and he couldn't be heard. He didn't have to be. His hand announced the play, his face and his eyes invited somebody to stop it. And that somebody was Mal Kyme. "Pop," as the Butcher dubbed him.

A third smash at the same spot brought a concerted Giant charge to hold it, and the Redskin forwards piled up in a bulge of fighting, sweating, grim men.

Fourth and half a foot showed on the board, and the Washington fans screamed and shrieked at the grim-faced, fighting Giant line that went down on all-fours to make the final try.

And again that Butcher calling the shots, like a Ruth in football-gear pointing where the scoring ball would be played. And again that berserk charge, with the Butcher laying the ball back

neatly, then blasting straight ahead.

This time, the dam broke wide, and the play screamed through the hole at Giant center for the score. The Redskins plopped the kick squarely between the uprights, and they lined up to kick off again.

Mal walked around among his mates, slapping them on their backs and shouting into their ears.

"Weather the storm, guys, weather it! I told you! They were laying for us, and they've got a taste of blood. Make it their own blood! Let's get that score back!"

As easy to reach into the sky with a pole and stop the sun, as easy to breast the raging torrents of spring and force the floods back in their course with sieves.

The Redskins had the bit in their teeth, and they were out to avenge their earlier defeat. That the Giants had the ball meant exactly nothing to them. They were heavier than the Giants, up there in the line, and they used that weight with savage intent, slashing the Giants furiously and continually.

"It's a contest who can take it the longest," Mal told Shiny Silver. "If we could outgame them, they'd fold, and it would be a foot-race for us the rest of the day. But they've got the jump on us. The boys were too sure. Now they're too stunned by the reversal of form, as they see it. You better uncork your best Sunday stuff, Shiny. While we last."

But the balance had already been swung, the damage had been done, partly by the pre-game confidence of the Giants, partly by the natural depression of the Giants when that costly fumble had been made.

Two hipper-dipper passing plays were smothered when the Giant line folded on the right, and then the cool, veteran Danny Strang trotted out for his one-play specialty—a kick. Mal grunted when he realized that Humty knew how bad it was. Ordinarily, the gray, smooth Danny was saved for a place-kick, or a point-after automatic score. If he was coming in just to punt, that was bad.

Mal saw the sense of it when the Redskin linemen broke through and stormed in, disregarding the danger of a pass catching the home-team flatfooted. Strang took the ball in his hands, coolly sidestepped the too-anxious Butcher who coolly stepped back the other way to let

an end flick by, and got off a boomer that went out on the Redskin thirty.

The pounding started up again where it had left off. At the tackles. At the guards. Through center. At the tackle. At the guards. Through center. Tackle, guard, center; tackle, guard, center.

Mal backed up the line automatically. He went down almost as automatically. Automatically, like a bruised, bloody robot, he got up again.

The Redskin coach rushed in reserves. But the Butcher stayed. The new line charged, smashed, blocked, and charged again. The Giants, matching reserves with reserves, substitution for substitution, except for Mal Kyme, battled grimly. But they went back and back and back. . . .

Six times in that half, the Redskins roared over to a score, working almost exclusively on power-plays. Then Mal was standing there swaying, his eyes dull, his face puffed and bruised, his lips bleeding, and Preacher Williams, the referee, was putting his arm around him, was pushing him gently toward the sidelines.

"The half is over, Mal. Yes, over. The half. Not the game. Score? Oh. Forty-one to seven, Mal!"

**I**T WASN'T the beating that the Bears had handed out to the 'Skins a few years back. It was no 73 to 0. Not quite.

It was 68 to 7. It was one of the worst beatings passed out by one pro team to another, ever. Washington could do no wrong. The Giants, after that one flashy runback of the opening kickoff, could do nothing right.

The battered and glum New York club got aboard their train amid profound silence. Even the presence of big Joey Butcher, who boarded the train with Humty and Humty's daughter Moira, didn't evoke any comment. Mal looked twice at the big youth, and saw that the Washington center was quiet, embarrassed looking, keeping his mouth strictly shut.

Mal felt a renewed throbbing in his back when he looked at his former substitute. He twisted his head around front again and looked out at the passing panorama. One of the other regulars—King Cole—had been sitting beside him. At Baltimore, the man moved out of his seat, and someone else slipped

in there. Mal looked incuriously. It was Moira.

He looked away again, out the window, wondering. Then he looked around, in back of him. Humty met his gaze expressionlessly. He faced front again.

Moira answered his unspoken question for him.

"Joey got off at Baltimore, Mal." She squeezed his hand. "I told him I had a date with you."

"Did you tell him me?" Mal asked. "Or—a school friend?"

He didn't hear her answer, or even if she made one. He was thinking again. Thinking.

There's a way to take that lug, he was thinking. Perhaps the way he took me to-day, with two guys playing me the whole way! There's a way to take him. There must be a way to take him. But—what is it?

Somewhere before Newark, Moira had moved out and Humty was there where she had been.

"The playoff for the Eastern title will be in two weeks," Humty said. "At the Polo Grounds. How is your back, fella?"

"That Macy's window offer is still open," Mal said sourly. "Who tipped the Butcher where to sink his cleaver?"

Humty sighed. "I'll pass that up, this once. You kept grabbing at your back, like instinctively, toward the end. I saw. I would, wouldn't I? After all, you're my shining star."

Mal winced. "They can be taken. Just like they took us, they can be had. If everything clicked for us from the start, I mean, the way it did for them. But it will be a fight."

"Yeah," Humty mused. "I remember, at your age, I figured a real tootsy of a beating took as much outa me as—well, as a couple of seasons would, ordinarily."

"Uh-huh," Mal nodded, his eyes speculative. "You got something."

Humty Dillon tugged at his chin reflectively and eyed Mal gravely.

"Now, how many more seasons you say you had in you, Mal?"

The Giant center blinked, his eyes thoughtful. "There's no telling."

"Two years, you said," Humty went on, getting his cigar going. "Looks like you got a choice to make. One more game like that or—two years more to play. I mean, as a regular."

Mal didn't answer. He was thinking.

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## CHAPTER V

### *The Decision*

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**D**URING the workouts for the Eastern playoff, there was an evident tendency on the part of the Giants to write off some, or most, of the terrific pasting the Redskins had given them. But Mal was quick to spike that.

"Look!" he said, the week before the game, in the dressing rooms. "We were just plain beat out of blazes with a wet rabbit. Why not admit it? We let them get the jump on us. But Greasy Harms is too smart to let his lads think it is going to be that way again! This time, we're laying for them, and he knows it. However, Greasy showed once that he hasn't got patience. That time he busted the Butcher out of the game, remember? Let things go wrong again—make them go wrong—and he may pull another corny one."

"As for instance?" Shiny Silver asked.

"Well, if we could get to the Butcher."

Denis O'Hand smirked. "My, my, but you never forget Joey, do you, Mal? First, you didn't want him on the team. Now, you figure we got to play him exclusively."

"He's the key," Mal said stubbornly, ignoring the implication of jealousy. "Pry him loose and the wall falls. And that's no fooling, pal."

To Humty, later, he said:

"How's for some plays to feed the Butcher? I got a few ideas I'd like to work out with you."

"Show me tomorrow," Humty said. "By the way—you coming over to the apartment tonight? The kid said she'd been expecting you the last few evenings, but you haven't been around?"

"Not tonight," Mal said shortly. "Okay, we'll talk the plays over tomorrow, huh? That and our strategy. I'll see you then, Humty."

And the next day, with the team lined up for practise, Mal explained his ideas to Humty, positioning the backs and the men who were to run interference, detailing the plays.

"Now, every set of downs we have the ball, we ought to work one of these two plays," he suggested. "This center-buck, with the power going through the middle, and a crisscross, with the guards

pulling out fast to run interference. Fast, see? Let's run them, and I'll show you what I mean."

The regulars ran the crisscross first, and with the guards obviously going to pull out, the reserves marked the play and came in with an unholy joy to smear it. The second time, they smeared it even worse, trapping the ball carrier five yards back of his line. The third time, it was like the second time.

"Okay," Mal nodded. "Good."

"Good?" Humty stared. "Are you loony?"

"Now, give me a chance, will you, pal? Let's have that center-buck play, now, with the power packed close up to the line, and a straight smash by the full-back. Let's try that one."

The reserves liked that one even better, though it rocked them a bit. It gained feet, then inches, then bogged down utterly. Mal nodded again.

"They'd be sweet plays if the opposition here didn't mark them so well as they unfolded."

"Western Union should copyright them, they're so telegraphic," Humty growled. "All you need is a singing messenger-boy to make it perfect. It's the same old two plays, but your power-packing ahead of time marks it clearly."

"I'm afraid you are right," Mal answered. "I'm afraid the Butcher would come to recognize them every time they lined up for that one. Boy, can't you just see him now—storming in with his tail up and his head down and his hands reaching for bodies?"

Humty's eyes considered the sight, and then his face was relaxed in a grin, and he was breaking out a fresh cigar, was beheading the tip of it, was chewing on it thoughtfully.

"Well, well," he snickered. "It is good, if it works. And I'm with you. It wouldn't have to work often before things started breaking apart with the Redskins. Or on their bench."

"Now, it takes nerve, see?" Mal said. "We got to work it that way, and we got to stick to it that way. Let's get it straight, and not get cold feet when everybody starts taking the stands apart to throw them at us."

Humty grinned slightly, shook his head, and then called the gang together again.

"Okay, now, boys!" he barked. "Let's get letter-perfect on those two plays!

You, Firpo—back a little. A little more — That's it. Now, turn your foot a bit, to be ready to come out of your slot faster, see? That's it! Okay, run it off, fellas. Get it down pat."

**S**OME of the other players looked at one another and made covert wheel-signs with their fingers, around their temples. But it was as good as anything else they could think of because, when they remembered the 68 to 7 beating, they wondered if anything would be much good anyway?

Humty stopped grinning, though, when Mal suggested that Boo Farish and Boley Wray be prepped up considerably.

"I guess you are right, pal," he murmured. "I guess you will last two more years."

But five minutes after the Giants kicked off to the Redskins, to open the playoff before a massed crowd of wild-eyed rooters, it didn't look as if they would last two minutes, any of the Giants.

The Redskins took up where they had left off at Washington, and stormed the line, intent on cracking the Giant morale by cracking their once-vaunted line into small bits.

Nor did the Giants seem too concerned with stopping them. Instead of trading smash for smash, the Giants were playing low, were going in with a submarine charge, and leaving the dirty work of bringing down the hard-charging Red-skin carriers to the secondary.

It wasn't holding the Redskins. But neither was it standing the Giant line up to be slashed to ribbons. Instead, it was tying up the interference and tripping up the linemen, and while the gains were steady, they weren't spectacular.

Twice, some of the Giants showed signs of rebelling against the orders that had been given them: "Charge low, use them up all you can, let them do the running and the smashing." But each time, the watchful Humty yanked the offender and sent in a sub with terse, definite orders. "Let them do the work."

From the stands, it looked like a conceded game, with the Giants giving where they had to, and having to give often. The razz was starting when the Redskins roared over for their first score in six minutes, and copped it with the point-after.

It increased when the Redskins kicked off and O'Hand took the ball to his forty, on a beautiful, twisty run. And then the Giants bogged down with, of all things, a crisscross that got smeared for a small loss, and a center-buck that was so telegraphed that half the Redskins were waiting as a reception committee on the line.

Danny Strang punted beautifully, getting a roll that took the ball out on the Redskin five. Then the Redskins picked up and started downfield again.

Three off tackle. Five through center. A short, rifled pass for a first down. Four through guard. One through center. Twenty-two yards on a slick lateral. Two off tackle, three through center.

This time, with two penalties to push them back in their stride, it took the Redskins nine minutes to work to a second score. The Redskins were playing with confidence, almost automatically, and the New York crowd grew restive and worked up a racket of derision and futility.

The Butcher, who was working nicely against the two-man setup the Giants were throwing at him, got a hand when Greasy yanked him late in the second period.

Instantly, an imperceptible change took place in the play of the Giant line, and the sub center got a bad working over with his opponents charging him savagely instead of submarining. Greasy showed his concern by slapping the Butcher right back in again. And again the submarining started, and the Redskins started clicking.

They lost the ball on a fumble, and the Giants worked the wide-open crisscross—for a five-yard loss—and tried the centerbuck for no gain. And Strang came in and kicked. And the monotony of it got under way again.

The Butcher was yanked back to try a placement with only two minutes of the second-quarter left, and the home team fans groaned when the scoreboard racked up a total of 17 to 0.

The first-half ended with the Giants still going nowhere.

Humty came into the locker-room to stare at Mal questioningly. The pivot-man merely shrugged and lay back to rest, closing his eyes.

Humty crossed over. "What you doing—making a sucker of me?" he asked. "By gum, I think you're playing me for

a country jake! You'll last ten years, not two, at the rate you worked this to go!"

"Keep your shirt on," Mal said. "We're nearly set to make our bid. Take it easy."

**B**UT he was far from easy himself. He knew if this idea of his didn't work, he was through. And maybe if it did work, he was through. Because there was some furious battling ahead. . . .

When the second half started, the Giants got the kickoff back to their twenty, and the dreary grind began over again. A crisscross was smeared for a loss of two. A center-buck muffed. A long pass just missed being intercepted. Danny Strang kicked a long one and the Redskins started in again.

But Bullet Bill Gaw fumbled on the Giant forty, and the New York crowd came alive with a hopeful roar. But it was short lived. After what seemed like an argument in a huddle—the delay cost the Giants five yards—the Giants showed nothing at all with their wide-open crisscross and their closed-shut center-buck, and Strang kicked out on the 'Skins twenty-five.

The third quarter was dying of boredom when the Redskins worked the ball to the twenty in Giant territory, met some stiff opposition, unexpectedly, and the Butcher rammed another one over with his toe to make it 20 to 0.

And then lightning struck. Not severely, not stunningly. It showed against the black of the Giants' chances like a ripple of forked venom in a sullen summer sky.

After taking the kickoff back to his own thirty, Denny O'Hand worked the boring crisscross again, but this time something was changed. This time, the Giant back stopped midway in his crisscross and rifled a short pass into the Butcher's unprotected territory, Clipper Santee taking it for eight.

The New York fans yawned. But they sat up with a start when the time-tested, and found-wanting, center-buck flowered a variation. Frankie Philbin took the ball and started his ramming run, then pivoted, faded back, jumped, and rifled a sharp pass to Doggie Lestrade. It went for a first down, and a few New York hopefuls in the stands started to talk it up.

But it petered out when Shiny Silver

fumbled a center pass and was lucky to fall on the ball for a fifteen loss. The crisscross won a yard, this time, played straight. The center-buck garnered three, with the Butcher playing it cagily. The Giants punted and the lightning in the summer skies flickered out.

The Redskins started working again, but the submarine charge that had held them to reasonable gains, earlier, now got some starch in its frame and reared up to give them an argument. The Butcher got to his feet, puzzled, found his helmet, and wondered with his eyes who had hit him with what.

He was mad, and he charged hard with the next snapback, and the Giant guards let him through, sidestepping, and Mal Kyme hit him with a savage block, and the New York stands roared.

The Redskins timing had gone wrong, somehow, and two of the backs were trying to decide what to do with the ball when Firpo Hammayer hit them and it was the Giant ball on the midfield stripe when Doggie Lestrade fell on it.

The Giants snapped into the huddle fast, came charging out of it, and the old crisscross play blossomed, with the Butcher hurling himself in on it, an avenging roar splitting his lips. O'Hand, who had been scudding for end, whirled, jumped, passed, and the stands barked their first real, full-throated roar when Lestrade danced twenty yards through the secondaries before they nailed him.

The Redskins tried to laugh it off, but the Giants, working fast, broke their laugh off and made them take it back with a center-buck that never bucked center. Instead, it stopped short, and Philbin whipped a pass to Santee for fifteen that made it a first down with goal-to-go.

Another center-buck followed, and the Redskins walked around and looked at one another when the referee signaled the Giant score. Danny Strang pointed it up automatically, and the Redskins lined up for the kickoff, Redskins receiving, with philosophical calm. It was 20 to 7, with the third quarter running out fast.

The Redskins ran the kick-off back nicely, but two running plays came unstuck, and they punted to the Giant thirty to end the third quarter. Somehow, the Giant line was charging harder, was unleashing power that they hadn't seemed to have earlier.

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## CHAPTER VI

### *Pay-off*

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**P**EOPLE in the stands were going mad. The lightning that had flickered, only to fade again, was flashing brightly, was striking again and again. Unlike most lightning, it was striking in the same place, constantly.

The crisscross that the Redskins had solved so easily now was growing component parts that the Redskins couldn't solve without delaying, without holding it to see what was unfolding. The crisscross no longer crisscrossed. Not entirely, nor all the time. The crisscross now was blowing up into a snap-pass across the Redskins line, or developing into a lateral. Or, again, and equally baffling, it was a crisscross.

And the center-buck became, instead of a known factor, an unknown quantity. It became a double-pass with a lateral tacked onto the end. Or it became a rifled, ground-eating forward. Or it became nothing but a center-buck that tore a chunk out of the Redskin wall when the Washington forwards hesitated.

Slowly, steadily, unspectacularly, the Giants mixed up some hipper-dipper that blossomed out of those two formations, the crisscross and the center-buck. The plays that the Redskins had come to know with contempt were bewildering them, now, with the same contemptuous ease.

First down on the Giant forty. Second on the Giant forty-eight. First down on the Redskin forty. First down on the Washington twenty-two.

The stands came alive with a realization that the game wasn't over when the Giant onslaught carried to the Redskin four, minutes after the last period had opened. They came alive to the drama of it when Mal Kyme, big and roaring and menacing, was pointing his hand at the bewildered Butcher Boy of the Washington line, and the play slammed at the young center and carried over to the second Giant score.

Then, with the count 20 to 14, Washington tried to freeze the ball, tried to tick off the minutes slowly, safely. But their edge was gone, their confidence was shaken, and the butter ran from

their sweating hides to their hands and slicked the ball so that Bill Gaw couldn't hold it when Mal hit him with a roaring tackle after Vodo Dio had mouse-trapped Butcher.

Mal heard, rather than saw, the ball bound free, and he was on it with a pounce and two Washington men slammed futilely, but savagely, down atop him.

A pain sharp as the cut of a knife stabbed the New York veteran lineman, and his face was a grimace of agony when he limped to his feet. But he bit his lip to keep from groaning, and crouched over the ball, yelling for speed.

"Let's go, gang!" he shouted, above the roaring bedlam of the New York fans. "This is it! Keep 'em rolling! Hit it!"

But the fans groaned when the play opened, and it was the crisscross again, and this time the savage Butcher Boy broke through, his eyes crazy, his fists cocked, and threw a blasting body-block at the runner.

O'Hand saw it coming, tried to sidestep, slipped and teetered precariously in the path of the slashing blocker. And then a human projectile rocketed out of the Giant line, and struck Joey Butcher so hard that his helmet was off his head before he buckled and crashed to the ground.

Mal lay athwart the huge Redskin center, the searing pain working over him until it deadened the nerves, and he was able to get to his knees. He looked around to see where the play had been stopped, and then turned his head to stare downfield when the roar of the stands broke, rocketed to a high pitch, and held it.

Down there near the goal, players were running, were going down, were coming up and looking too, after the swivel-hipped, inspired carrier. It became so terrific, the din, that it just couldn't go any higher. But it did—when O'Hand went over for the score.

New York went mad!

Mal tried to step, but couldn't. He looked down to make sure he'd got to his feet, wasn't still on his knees. And again he tried. But he couldn't move either foot. He could stand, he could twist and turn, but he couldn't move either foot. Forward, backward, either side.

He couldn't move!

**T**HE Giants came back from down the field laughing and yelling and talking it up while New York's rooters prayed for the magic foot of Danny Strang. But the Giants didn't care. 20 to 20, the score read, and they had a full four minutes left after the point-after try, and Washington couldn't possibly freeze the ball more than four times twenty-five seconds before the Giants were rolling once again. . . .

But Mal couldn't make it to line up on the two yard line. He couldn't make it, he couldn't move from his tracks, but he could twist, and so he could see what that sobbing, tearing sound was that came from somewhere nearby.

The Butcher. Butcher Boy. Joey Butcher, the Redskin center. The big kid stood there, yards from Mal, his face a broken mask and the words coming spilling out of his ruined mouth.

"It's all yours Mal. Everything! The game, the title, all yours. Moira, too. All yours! Like she says, you got everything. Mister Center. You win it all, Mal!"

Some of the other players were coming back up the field, were trotting over to where the two rival centers stood, there in the center of the gridiron under the gaze of the wild-eyed fans.

Danny Strang trotted over, his eyes puzzled. Then he saw something was wrong, and signaled the Giant bench.

"Okay, Mal, you crazy old goat! This is it! Boley Wray is coming in. Where does it hurt, guy?"

But Mal's eyes were hard, his face grim. "Lemme alone, Danny. Don't touch me. Not—yet. You! Hey, you—Butcher! Joey Butcher? C'mere. Come over here, Joey. Just for a minute."

And Joey came over and then they all saw it—the vicious, tearing uppercut that Mal Kyme threw, from his flatfooted stance, that raised the big Redskin center up from his toes and dropped him, poleaxed, forward in his tracks.

Some of the Redskin players tried to jump Mal, but Preacher Williams was in there, waving Mal off the field, and Mal was disregarding him, coldly.

"Hey, I don't want to be carried, Danny," he said to Strang, "Just helped. Get your arm around me, under my shoulders, and push me, will you? I think I can stay up but you got to push me so my feet will move. That's it, Danny Boy,

that's it. Okay. Just keep it up that way."

Danny Strang did, past the wide-eyed Giant subs, past the incredulous Humty, past the angry-eyed, white-faced Moira Dillon who watched, stonily. Past them all, and on into the dressing-room. Then Danny came out and yelled for the Doc.

Humty heard the roar, and grinned down at Mal. "There it is. They've scored again. My, my, what a game! And is Greasy sore! At poor Joey. I think I can get him, if I act quick, he's so mad. For next season. Oh, heck, you'll walk again in another hour, fella. Just your motor impulses quit under nerve pain. But—that crack you gave the poor kid? Why?"

"Moira," Mal said, with a faint grin. "Moira and I have been feeling sorry for one another for a long time. Hero-worship, it was with her, at first, then—sympathy. That I was getting to be through. Oh, I saw it each game. Me or Joey Butcher. Whichever she felt sorry for, she played it up. She's got a big heart, that kid, Humty. Me, I have, too."

Humty's mouth opened so wide his cigar fell out. "You! You? After that cold-blooded way you made a sucker of the kid for forty minutes, taking it and waiting? And after the way you pasted him when Greasy Harms got so mad he ordered the kid out of the game, and like to broke his heart? And you pasted him? You got a big heart?"

Mal felt well enough to sit up. He accepted a cigarette from Doc Hoskins. "Yeah." He got the cigarette going. "For twelve years, I been companion to a lonely kid. Moira. No, no, I'm not kicking. She's a sweet, good kid. I've been companion to her while you nursed your grief and ran your team and watched to see me get my lumps. Well, this licking Joey took with his team turned the trick. She was sorry for him—again. Just the way I wanted it.

"And then—well, shucks, with my legs gone, and me standing there paralyzed, maybe, I went nuts. I could see the nurse-act going on indefinitely due to

Moira's sympathy. So—well, I slugged the goon, Joey, to move her sympathy back to him. But permanently! I think it worked."

**H**UMPTY grinned, chuckled, laughed, then slapped his knee and broke into a room-shaking roar of mirth.

"And all the time, I—we, all of us—thought you and Moira— Oh, my! Mal, Mal, me boy, Mal! You played your two seasons out there in one quarter. But you'll be with us next year. And the next and the next!

"It'll take two of us to run that terrific center that Greasy is ready to sell down the river to us! Hey, look, do you think you'll be up to walking soon? Tonight, maybe? A few of the boys are going with me to the Dutchman's. No women, no bands, no fancy-stuff, see? Sawdust and beer and like that. I think you will like it, Mal."

Mal tried a few hesitant steps, lengthened them, breathed a huge sigh of relief. "Oh, boy! Boy, oh, boy! They work! My legs work! Yeah, Humty, I'd like to go along with you. Gee, that pain in the sore spot of my back really had me tied up. It was terrific. Worst it has been in twelve years. I—what are you laughing about, Humty?"

"How did you get it hurt to start with?" the Giant mentor asked, his eyes bright. "Twelve years, you've had it? Now, let me see— It just couldn't be that I did that, could it? Is it bad, Mal?"

Mal Kyme grinned. "I thought you wanted to go to the Dutchman's? That Macy's window offer is still open."

"Let's watch the end of it from the door, hey?" Humty said. "The end of our greatest game? Here, let me help you, guy. Let me give you a hand."

Mal didn't need it, but he didn't protest, because he was realizing how much he had always wanted Humty's hand as a friend. Old Humty Dillon, after all, would always be Mister Center to Mal Kyme.

Old Humty had been one whale of a pivot-man.

THE LAST GAMBLE, an exciting complete gridiron novelet by T. W. FORD, plus many other stories of varied sports in the gala all-star Fall issue of our companion magazine THRILLING SPORTS—now on sale, 15c at all stands!



# THE HEAD COACH

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

*Plenty of woe is in store for "Clipper" Cotton at Jordan University, where his brand of football fails to work as his boys clash on the grid with their traditional rivals!*

## CHAPTER I

### *Varsity Center*

SIXTY-TWO strong they were lined up on University Field—the Jordan Varsity squad. Forrest "Clipper" Cotton walked slowly along the line, looking them over. His camel's hair coat flapped gently in the late August breeze and he could feel the distrust flowing out to him like a wave of heat.

Well, he told himself grimly, the distrust was a two-way affair. Looking at the fresh, well-fed, well-bred, well-tanned young faces in front of him, he thought back nostalgically to the faces of the kids with whom he had played football at a great western university.

They had been tougher, harder faces—

faces whose like might be found in coal pits, on rugged construction jobs, on non-gentlemanly farms. They had been controlled faces, not given to expressing emotion, faces that had seen a lot of life for their years.

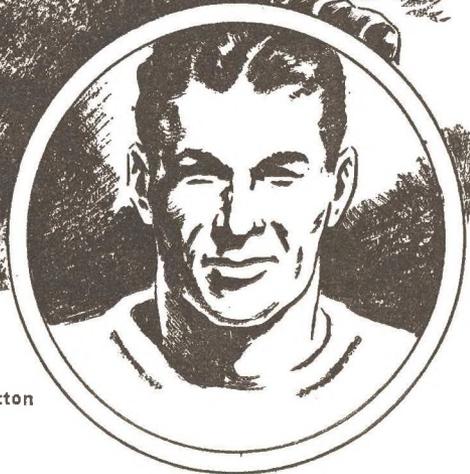
But they had been the faces of football players—not of kids who selected their sports according to whim and the changing seasons. He should know. His own face had been one of them then and for seven years as pile-driving fullback of the National Professional Football League Loons.

He was through as a player, for age and the war had seen to that. And now it was up to him to put ivy draped Jordan University back on the football map or get out. It had seemed a notable opportunity until the present moment.

A Complete  
Novelet



About to be tackled, Win-  
sted tossed a lateral out  
wide to Charters



"Clipper" Cotton

He sought reassurance in the hardy features of big Nick Leftwich, halfback, of Mike Regan, gigantic tackle, of broken-nosed Pat Comins, center. These were kids of his own sort. He had hand-picked them, arranged "scholarships" for them and sent them to Jordan as freshmen the previous year.

The Jordan frosh had won all of their games while the black and white clad Varsity was dropping all but two. Well, a coach in a new job had to have a few key men of known capabilities if he were going to build.

"Okay, fellows," he said, donning what he hoped was a friendly grin with some difficulty. "I'm here to make a deal with you. I'll deliver no fight talks if you'll deliver me some football. If you do that to the best of your ability we can safely let the character building angles take care of themselves. Well, that's it."

**H**E STARTED to turn way, then swung back.

"One more thing—you know how we're going to go at it. Tony Messina and Fats O'Brien have been dishing it out to you and will keep on dishing it out. They know what I want. They ought to. We played shoulder to shoulder with the Loons for seven years.

"With the Loons and back where I went to college we had a captain appointed just before each game by the coach. The award went to the man who showed best the previous week. I'd like to run that system here."

"Excuse me, sir," said a gigantic apple cheeked young man with a thatch of unruly straw colored hair, stepping out of line. "Here at Jordan we elect our captain for the year to come every spring, and he serves all season."

"That's fine," said Clipper with a renewed grin. "But what if he gets hurt or flunks out?"

"He appoints his successor," said another young man, this one of middle height and dark. "Winsted"—this with a nod toward the tow-headed giant—"made Phi Beta Kappa as a junior last year. And he's never had a time out for injuries."

"You must be Reggie Winsted," said Cotton to the taller young man. Tow-Head nodded. The Clipper had heard of Reggie Winsted, the one shining light on last year's very sad eleven. He cleared his throat and stepped up to him.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Winsted," he said. "I was planning to talk to you after practise. Perhaps you'll come to my office when you've had your shower."

"Glad to, sir," said the giant. The Clipper nodded to the rest of them without partiality and waved to his two assistants, Tony Messina, end coach, and Fats O'Brien, line. He himself intended to direct backfield destinies.

Narrowly he watched his charges go through their paces, asking occasional questions of his aides, offering little advice, giving no orders. He had a lot to learn about his team. A Marine major during the war, he had only got back from Korea three months before, had been engaged in belated separation proceedings since.

It was in the Pacific—at Bougainville to be exact—that he had met Percy Saunders, Jordan graduate manager, and had come to know and like him. And it was Saunders who had arranged the job here at Jordan for him.

"Lord knows we haven't got a graduate coach in prospect who can pull us out of the doldrums," he had said one night over a bottle of liberated saki. "I think you'd be the man for the job, Clipper."

The Clipper, wise in the ways of football dealmaking had hemmed and hawed and finally let himself be coaxed. And here he was—already wishing he were somewhere else. The more he watched the kids' ineptitude as they threw the ball around and practised punts and field goals, the more he wished he were somewhere else.

His own lads were all right, of course. His eyes narrowed with pleasure as he watched Nick Leftwich leap high to snag a long pass with the fingertips of one hand, pull it in safely and reverse his field on landing without breaking stride. One back was better than none.

"Line up the varsity," he told O'Brien. "Let's see if we've got eleven."

To his surprise, as the tentative first eleven moved into their positions, tow-headed Reg Winsted was at center. Clipper gave his line coach a look of surprise.

"What's wrong with Comins?" he asked in a low voice. O'Brien looked embarrassed.

"Not a thing, Clipper," said O'Brien, scratching a cheek. "He's a darn good center. But Winsted won All-American mention last year and he's captain and you just can't shelve him."

"The tradition-clad towers of Jordan getting you, Fats?" said Clipper. "Tsk, tsk! Okay, let it go for now."

**H**E WATCHED the first team run through its plays. The middle-sized, dark-haired lad who had spoken up for Winsted was calling signals. In T formation plays, Clipper noted, he handled the ball slickly, surely and with deception. His name, it developed, was Catherwood.

"Old man's the banker," said Tony Messina.

"He ought to know a few tricks then," said Clipper. He wondered why a young man who must have millions lying around in the family would want to go out for college football. Heck, the game was rugged—it certainly wasn't fun. But as long as the kid wanted to, it was no skin off Clipper's nose. And if he could handle the ball in action as he did in practise it might be manna from heaven.

Later, while studying charts on his players in his office in the Field House, Clipper called "Come in" to a knock on the door and looked up to see a freshly scrubbed young Winsted standing in front of him.

"Sit down, Winsted," he said. "You handle yourself well out there."

"Thank you, sir," said the Jordan captain. Clipper cleared his throat and smiled.

"I hope I didn't scare any of the lads out there today," he said. "It looks to me as if we have our work cut out for us."

"Yes, sir," said Winsted, sitting stiffly on the edge of his chair. Clipper wondered how he could crack his shell.

"As team captain, I'm counting on you for some much-needed help," he stated. "I'm utterly new to Jordan and vice versa. I'd like it very much if you would keep me posted so that I won't put my foot in it too often."

"Don't worry, sir. I will," said Winsted, and Clipper felt his smile go hollow. It sounded more like a threat than a promise and crystallized the mentor's resolve. He went about it indirectly, gradually drawing the team captain out about the team, about last year's mistakes and strong points, about this year's weaknesses.

"You seem to agree with O'Brien then that we are pretty weak at end," said

Clipper innocently.

"That's right, sir," Winsted replied—Clipper couldn't get used to the "sir" in civil life. "We've got Roy Charters and that's about all—unless some of the freshmen up from last year's team can handle it."

"Even if they can we'll be far from deep," said the mentor. He struck now, while the iron was sizzling. "Winsted, you've got the height and the speed and I saw you latch onto a couple out there today. Pat Comins plays plenty of center. Why don't you take a whirl at left end—for the team?"

"Who—me, sir? But I've never played end in my life." Winsted looked surprised at the suggestion.

"Which means we don't know whether you can play it or not," Clipper told him. "Winsted, I'm putting my cards on the table. I've got to make a football out of the ear of a totally different sort of animal. You know and I know that it is of vital importance to my career that I make good. But it is also important to Jordan, and you are Jordan's captain."

"If you put it that way," said Winsted, rising. "I'll give it a try, sir, but don't bet on the results."

"I shouldn't hesitate to," said Clipper equivocally. Inwardly he was jubilant. He rose and they shook hands and the Jordan captain left his office. Clipper walked over to the window and looked out at the beautiful turf of the campus with its ancient Federalist buildings and more modern gray stone Gothic. Jordan lived up to its vaunted beauty.

If the all-male campus lacked the co-ed color and laughter to which he had become accustomed in his own college days, it had a masculine dignity—much like that of a good men's club, which could not but attract him. And at that, it was not without feminine influence.

Clipper peered close to the glass at the girl who sat in one of the magnificent new Packard sports models with the graceful dip in the side. She was pulled over to the side of the tarred roadway near the Field House door.

**S**HE looked like something out of a Town and Country advertisement. She was blonde and long and sagely handsome of face and smoked a cigarette with a quiet arrogance that roused hitherto unfelt sensations in the coach. Her long yellow hair brushed an angora clad

shoulder as she flicked ashes over the side of the car.

Then Winsted walked into his line of vision, moved to the car and got in. The girl turned to look at the big ape and laughed a little and then, as she put the car in gear, tossed him a look of affection that had Clipper suddenly bright olive green with envy.

"Nan Winsted's attractive, isn't she?" said a pleasant voice from behind him. Clipper jumped and turned quickly and then was pumping the well-remembered hand of Percy Saunders, Jordan graduate manager of athletics, who had got him to come here.

"His sister, eh?" said Clipper, identifying with relief a certain hitherto unmarked resemblance between the Winsteds. "Well, you've got me, pal. Attractive is understatement. How come Winsted rates one like that?"

"Does it matter?" said Saunders. "She's a gifted wench too. Been featured in a couple of Broadway successes and is just back from Hollywood. The pictures she made aren't released, but the word is out and it's good."

"She didn't look actress to me," said Clipper. "More like an ad man's idea of a debutante—or mine."

"Oh, she's that too," said Saunders. He changed the subject abruptly, asked Clipper how he liked the looks of the job, but it took the coach several seconds to catch up with his employer's conversation. So Winsted's sister was all that—and heaven too by the look of her. He almost regretted what he was going to have to do to her brother, but perhaps, if opportunity arose, he could convince her that it was all for the good of the team. He was certainly going to try.

He ate with Saunders at the Faculty Club and was introduced to a succession of professors, deans and instructors, enjoyed a couple of cocktails with them and, returning to the Inn where he was temporarily quartered, felt full of good feeling toward Jordan and the world in general.

When Nan Winsted, taller than he had expected her to be, rose from a chair in the lobby and approached him, Clipper thought for a moment that she must be a mirage. But her first words put all doubts to rest.

"Mr. Cotton," she said and her voice was crisp and deep and far from friendly. "May I have a word with you?"

"As many as you wish, Miss Winsted," said Clipper a trifle fatuously. He snapped out of it as the icy glare she tossed him threatened to crack the plaster.

"So you know who I am. Very well, I dined with my brother this evening and he informed me what you are doing to him. He's a nice boy, Mr. Cotton, and why you wish to kick him around I don't pretend to know. I do know he is no end and is a very fine center."

"We're weak at end and Comins is also a very fine center," said Clipper, feeling as if he had been successfully scouted by a talking dog.

"I know Comins is one of your special boys," she said quietly. "Mr. Cotton, I wasn't born yesterday and I used to go around with Dick Leggett of Green and I know a little about football. I don't like to see my brother kicked around to keep a coach in old fashioned and I'm going to be right here at the Inn for some time. I don't go into rehearsal until just before Christmas."

"That will be fine, Miss Winsted," said Clipper with a bow. "I shall undoubtedly see you soon again."

He knew the latter part of his sentence to be true. The odd part of it was, as he went up the stairs to his room on the second floor, that he half-meant the first part.

Why in heck did she have to be Reg Winsted's sister? And why in heck did she have to know football? For the time being, it was a painful combination. He thought of Dick Leggett, former Green All-American and current Green coach, and winced.

Green was Jordan's traditional rival in the final game of the year. And Green had beaten Jordan five straight years. The simpler a job looks, Cotton thought as he kicked off his trousers, the faster and more complex the angles.

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## CHAPTER II

### *Up from the Scrubs*

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**T**HE Clipper was no man to let grass, especially the turf of a football field, grow under his feet. The following day he had big Reg Winsted trying out for end while his own boy Pat Comins, performed at the pivot post for the varsity.

Winsted could hang onto the ball like a Hutson, when he could get to it. The Jordan captain was tall enough and had the weight to become a colossal wingman. But his very bulk worked against him. For a few days the mentor was afraid he might have strengthened Winsted by switching him to the new position, but the center's very bulk told against him. He lacked the ability to change direction quickly, to move with deception, that a good end needed.

Under passes he telegraphed his direction and the Scrubs who covered him could almost always beat him to the ball and tip it out of his reach. Defensively he was a sucker for even the sort of interference the scrubs put up. Had he been a sophomore, the varsity captain might have learned how to play end, but as a senior he was out of luck.

However, the week of the opening game the Clipper arrived on the practise field Monday to find Winsted in the gray jersey of the scrubs. He called the player aside.

"What's this?" he wanted to know. Winsted grinned.

"As captain I just demoted myself," replied the tow headed giant amiably. "I aim to do Jordan some good this year and I won't do it at end. So I'll take another crack at center, starting from the bottom."

"It's your headache," said the Clipper, suppressing a desire to have Winsted turn in his suit for insubordination. At that he had to admire the boy's spirit.

When it came time to scrimmage, however, he found it increasingly hard to smile. Winsted was all over the place. The big fellow was uncannily quick at sizing up varsity plays. He burst through Pat Comins as if that rugged and able young man were an inert object and threw runners for losses, time after time.

When the Clipper ordered his first team to throw passes Winsted was unerringly back there and on the ball, batting down or intercepting twice his share. In desperation the mentor told the varsity to double team him, and the team captain at once adopted looping tactics that left his blockers lunging at empty air and brought him up far too often on the flank of the play.

"What's the matter with Comins?" the Clipper asked Fats O'Brien sharply after Winsted had just succeeded in

throwing Nick Leftwich for a five-yard loss. "I thought he was supposed to be ready."

"He's ready," said the erstwhile Loon guard, "but not for that. *Wow!* Did you see him hit Catherwood?"

There was no need to ask who "he" was—not that afternoon nor the two that followed. By the time light practise on Thursday had rolled around, Captain Reg Winsted was back at his pivot post and Pat Comins was working out at guard on the second team. The Clipper knew real class when he saw it and was too much of a football man to keep the lid on it.

That evening, while he was eating dinner alone in the Inn, he looked up to see Nan Winsted standing beside his table. She looked just a trifle smug he thought as he rose and admitted to himself with hammering pulses in his ears that on her it looked good.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked. "I seem to owe you something and it might as well be a dinner."

"Thanks," she said, dropping into a chair. "I've eaten." She let him light her cigarette. "Just why do you owe me anything, Cotton?"

He tried not to wince at the crispness of her tone—golly, but she had a voice that sent his spine into an Off-to-Buffalo.

"You were right about who should play center," he said. "A man in my position is grateful for good advice. He needs all he can get."

"He might do better if he'd accept it," said Nan.

"I got into the habit of doing things the hard way early in life," said Clipper. He was beginning to see red. This girl might be a post-debutante, a lady if you will, but she was hard as nails. Her eyes, blue-green, were cold as the eyes of a large cat. She had a cat's grace as well.

"Any other ideas on how I should run my team?" he added. She shrugged.

"You just gave me one," she retorted. "My team. Have you a title of ownership?"

**B**RIEFLY he closed his eyes and did a fast count to ten. When he opened them, she had risen and was looking down at him with a mocking smile. He felt like sticking out his feet and tripping her and had to fight the impulse.

"No violence, *please!*" she said and

left him with a laugh low in her throat. Clipper failed to enjoy the rest of an excellent dinner. That night he ripped to shreds the battle plans for Saturday which Fats and Tony laid before him at a postprandial coach's conference.

Robbins College, which came to Jordan forty hours later to open the season, was light and low in reserves. To Clipper they looked like a high school team. He figured his boys ought to win by at least thirty points.

But the day was hot and Robbins came up with a smartly drilled T offensive which had Jordan looking foolish throughout the first half and trailing by 0 to 6 at the gun. Clipper really tied into them in the locker room.

"I don't care if it is ninety-two in the shade," he said—the thermometer was indulging in a September sweat—"you men have a game to play. Furthermore, whether or not you remember it, you have a game to win. You've been pulled out of position and mousetrapped like grammar school kids, all of you. Now, Charters, I want you to . . ."

The afternoon must have seemed cool to his charges after the way he laid it on in the locker room. At any rate the White and Black played passable football in the second half to wrap up the game 14 to 6. Another two tallies were called back for offside penalties. After it was over the outraged mentor sent them back to the field for a prolonged signal drill.

"You'll get this every time you can't stay inside in the games," he told them. Penalties against his team affected him much as bases on balls affected the late George Stallings. "If they want yardage, let them work for it. Don't give it away."

The squad obeyed him, but without enthusiasm. To Clipper, who hated to lose, their attitude seemed almost sacrilege. Only Winsted seemed to be willing to give his all in that practise session. Disgusted, Clipper went to the movies alone. Emerging, he found Percy Saunders waiting for him. They walked back toward the Inn together.

"Any complaints?" Clipper asked his patron. "You should have plenty after the way the team played today." He was careful not to say "my" team and the fact that Nan Winsted had so deeply bitten him annoyed him.

"I thought they did pretty well for the

opener," said the graduate. "After all, they won."

"They were terrible," said Clipper, shaking his head.

"It was a mighty hot day," Saunders remarked. He put a hand on the coach's shoulder. "I'd go a little easier on them if I were you. Not that I'm meddling, mind you, but these kids aren't fools. They play football because they enjoy it, not because they have to. You're a coach, not a commanding officer."

"Maybe that's what's wrong with Jordan football," said Clipper bluntly.

"Oh, come, they'll be clicking by November," said Saunders. "Give them time. They aren't pros."

"Unfortunately," said Clipper, to whom defeat in any contest, early or late, was anathema, "we have games scheduled for October and November too."

"Clipper, old boy, football isn't a war. No one expects you to win them all."

"No one but me, and my expectations are far from great," growled Clipper. He wondered who had squawked about the extra practise. Saunders had a set job. He didn't seem to realize that Clipper's whole career, his whole life, hung on making a good showing here at Jordan. There were changes coming up in the Loon front office and, if he made good here, he might make it.

But a chance to coach the Loons looked like a fading mirage just then. Little was said until he and Saunders reached the Inn, where the graduate manager left him.

**I**NSIDE the lobby, Nan Winsted was talking to a couple of affluent looking alumni. The sight of her, easy and casually but breath-takingly beautiful in a daringly cut white satin evening gown and short ermine wrap, caused him to stop and stare like some callow freshman.

She saw him, smiled at her companions, then turned and walked toward him. Her smile faded as she approached, stood at attention and lifted a slim right arm in a perfect Nazi salute.

"Heil!" she said. "Heil Cotton!"

Clipper did see red then. On top of everything else that had happened that day, it was too much. Without a word he grabbed her arm and marched her out to the terrace. There he glared at her in the soft moonlight, harvest moonlight.

"If you're fighting your brother's battles, don't," he told her. "Reg does all right on his own."

"Gracious!" she said and the derision in her voice did nothing to calm his temper. "I thought you were going to turn me over your dimpled knee and spank me."

"My knee is not dimpled!" he shouted. Then, realizing that he was making a fool of himself, he slowed up and grinned sheepishly. "Sorry," he said. "Why the salute? I'm not giving it to Reg any more than to anyone else."

"Maybe I'm not doing it for Reg," she said. She shook her head and sighed. "You make me so gosh darned mad with your smug arrogance."

"I make *you* mad with *my* arrogance?" he said. Afterwards he decided it must have been the moon. At any rate, before he realized what had happened, he had drawn her into his arms and was kissing her.

He might as well have embraced a totem pole. She was stiff, disinterested in his embrace. Feeling idiotic, he released her and mumbled an apology.

"But you're so masterful," she sighed. He could hear her mocking laughter long after it had ceased, long after he had reached his room.

The following week, against a strong Branton squad, his charges clicked off an unexpected 28 to 10 victory that had alumni and sports writers singing happy songs about the revival of big time football at the old Ivy college.

The following week, against an in-and-out Northern squad, the White and Black went into a comedy of errors. Even the Clipper's own boys picked up the fever. Tackle Mike Regan managed to tackle Catherwood by mistake and Leftwich fumbled twice deep in scoring territory.

Jordan won, but only by grace of a field goal kicked unexpectedly by Reg Winsted in the last minute of play. They bounced back a week later to hold mighty Hallowell to a 7 to 7 tie. Clipper kept his fingers crossed.

The boys had survived the first half of their schedule without defeat, but the tougher half lay ahead. Barton, Traymore, Phillips and Green—they were all going to be tough. He took a long walk for himself after the Hallowell game in an effort to get his nerves under control.

Word had reached him through a pri-

vate source that Jack Whistler, the Loon coach for the past dozen years, was definitely moving up into the front office with the end of the season. Search for his successor was in full cry.

That was the job he wanted, and he would have to come up with something remarkable to make the grade. When he got back to the hotel he was so preoccupied that he actually failed to notice Nan Winsted, who was in the process of going out to a party. She stared at his retreating figure, an odd new light in her blue-green eyes.

Riding to Barton the following Friday, Clipper and Tony and Fats discussed the team. They agreed that, with two-man depth at each position, they had adequate if not superb manpower. O'Brien was enthusiastic about his line.

"Those wartime Army teams weren't deep," he said with a smile, "but look at what they did to the opposition."

"What I hear the opposition wasn't," said Messina. "Hey, Clipper, we got us a couple of good solid wingmen in Billings and Charters—not flashy but solid. And the Gray kid has all the flash we need when he's hot."

"Whenever that is," grumbled the head coach. "Fats, how is Pat Comins making out now at guard?"

**O**'BRIEN gave a shrug of his broad shoulders.

"He's ready to take over for Wells on the first team whenever you give the word. But that Reg Winsted—there's my idea of a player. Wish the Loons could get him."

"Fat chance!" said the Clipper. "He's got a couple of million bucks in his own name. He'd be nuts to play pro."

"Boss, you're jealous," said Messina with a chuckle.

"What you said!" cried the Clipper, but his heart wasn't in it. He wondered if he were jealous. Perhaps, he thought, he had been riding the captain because he had never had to work for anything, yet had enough talent and all-around ability on and off the gridiron for a half dozen kids who had greater need. He decided to watch it closely.

When game time rolled around the next day, he was unable to repress a stirring of excitement as the big towhead in his white and black jersey went out for the coin toss. There, he thought, was one kid who would cause him no trouble—

even if he did think football a game.

Then he was watching the rangy blue-clad opposition as they lined up to receive the kick-off. And for the rest of that half he saw little but blue jerseys. The home team was loaded for bear—the White and Black bear of Jordan to be precise—and they were giving the visitors both barrels.

Barton scored on a long pass that came just three plays after the opening kick-off. Then they dropped on a Jordan fumble just as the first period ended and bowled over another score before a bewildered White and Black could pull itself together and make a stand. At half time the Clipper's boys were on the short end of a 0 to 14 score.

The Clipper didn't say much to them between the halves because he was too sick to deliver a fight talk. Blue had been loaded for them with a flock of unscouted plays and even he, with all his experience, had not doped them out. It was going to be up to the boys to salvage what they could.

"Do your best," was all he told them. "You should have enough to manage it."

"We'll be in there," said Reg Winsted, rising wearily from a table where he had been having his ankles retaped. He was grinning, despite a black eye.

The Clipper suspected that it was Winsted who called the plays rather than Catherwood, but he didn't have the nerve to ask. Casting carefully learned system to the winds, his team played as if it were touch.

Abandoning set series and percentage plays they threw the ball around behind the line of scrimmage. They threw shovel passes and lobs and forwards and laterals, behind, on and beyond the line of scrimmage they threw laterals and backward tosses. They threw forwards with impromptu double laterals on the end. They passed the width and almost the length of the field.

And, somehow, they managed to tie up the game early in the fourth quarter. It was Barton's turn to be surprised, and the home team was smothered under the barrage. But the blue eleven was far from through.

Taking the kickoff back to their own forty, they came on down the field in a battering, remorseless drive. A judicious mixture of running plays and passes carried them over midfield and on down to the Jordan six, where at last they bogged

down and the Clipper regained his breathing powers.

"Run it twice and then kick!" he muttered. According to the clock there were less than two minutes to go.

But Jordan wasn't playing his game that half. Instead of cracking the line Nick Leftwich faded behind the goal line, cocked his arm and pitched to Billings. Only by the grace of Providence was the ball not intercepted. The Clipper hauled substitute Pete Smithers off the bench, gave him instructions and sent him in.

A moment later a distressed Smithers came back to the bench and Jordan was penalized half the distance to the goal line for excessive time out. The Clipper was on his feet.

"What's the idea?" he asked Smithers.

"Reg—Winsted—refused to accept me," he said. Before the Clipper could say another word Leftwich sent a second forward sailing far upfield.

### CHAPTER III

#### *Bad Break*

**O**UTRAGED and baffled and with his heart in his throat, the Clipper was on his feet as was everyone else in the stadium save for three elderly ladies and a baker's dozen of overenthusiastic imbibers. The ball seemed headed for Charters, the Jordan right end, and he made a magnificent try for it on the White and Black thirty-two.

But a Barton defender out-jumped him and managed to tip the ball just out of his grasp. The mentor felt as if he had been kicked in the stomach. And then, from nowhere, came Mike Regan, the stocky fullback, to gather the caroming pigskin into his arms and race it over midfield.

The Clipper sank back on the hard wooden bench and fanned himself with his hand. For the moment his anger was forgotten, in his relief. Now the worst he could expect from the afternoon was a tie.

But his charges, having taken the bit in their teeth were going all the way. On the next play, Catherwood pulled a quarterback sneak through a demoralized Blue secondary and picked up eighteen yards before he was run out of

bounds. It was first and ten on the Barton twenty-nine.

Then, after a huddle so long it nearly drew another penalty, the White and Black went into a formation with which their coach was utterly unfamiliar. The line, shifted far to the left, revealed to his startled eyes, that Pat Comins was over the ball at center while Reg Winsted flanked him at right guard. He stood up again, staring.

As the backfield shifted, Charters, at right end, dropped back a yard and Leftwich came up on the line of scrimmage on the left side to put seven men up there. Then the ball was snapped and Catherwood was racing back with it.

Turning just before he was overwhelmed, he dropped a neat little pass into Winsted's arms. Winsted, thus unexpectedly eligible, took it and pounded over the Blue twenty as the stands roared. About to be tackled, he tossed a lateral out wide to Charters, who was racing up behind him—to have it snared by a Blue defender who raced eighty-two yards for the winning score.

"Well?" he asked Winsted pointedly when the Jordan captain had showered and donned his street clothes. "Did you men go crazy out there? You kicked it away, Winsted."

"I'm sorry, sir," said the captain. "We wanted to put it on ice for you—you've been so darned patient with us. I'm responsible for throwing it away. It was a play we rigged up one night playing touch football."

"I don't suppose I can blame you for trying," said the Clipper, and there was acid on his tongue. "But since the loss will go against my record it might have been more sporting to have played it my way."

"I'm sorry, sir," the tow-headed giant repeated. Then his face broke into a broad grin. "But it was a swell game, wasn't it, sir? The fellows had a mavelous time."

"I couldn't be happier," said the Clipper, at a loss for any other safe words. He left his captain and once again sought out the graduate manager, who was also grinning.

"Don't these guys care about winning?" he asked.

"What a honey of a game!" Saunders exclaimed, giving the Clipper a slap on the back. "Clipper, you've got that gang pulling for you. Congratulations."

"Congratulations!" cried the mentor, incredulously. "But great heavens, man, we threw the game away."

"So what—who cares about Barton? What I liked was the way those boys of ours came back in the second half and kept on coming."

"Who cares about Barton?" the Clipper sank into a chair and let somebody shove a highball into his hand. "But doesn't Jordan want to win them?"

"We don't expect to win them all, Clipper," said the graduate manager. "You've piled up a swell record already. As long as you bring them in ahead of Green you won't have to worry about getting your contract renewed."

"I thought that traditional game stuff was out with the bustle," said the Clipper, feeling slightly glazed. He set his glass down untouched.

"Not at Jordan, Clipper," said Saunders. "Come on in the other room. I want you to meet some people."

**T**HE ex-pro gave it up and went along. Accustomed since his school days to play for perfection and victory in every contest, this one-victory angle was beyond him. He had heard of it, of course, but had put it down as so much newspaper eyewash. They hadn't played that way on any team he had been a member of.

Then, at the reception, he saw Nan Winsted and felt a sudden surge of resentment as he watched her, as usual the center of a cluster of opulent looking males. She still did things to his blood pressure and he resented it. Even more he resented her as the sister of the lad who had taken control of the team away from him, and done the job for which he was not receiving credit.

Suddenly she came over to him and held out her hand with a friendly smile. She was, he saw at once, a girl who should smile a lot more often. Or perhaps she did, but not for him.

He felt a wave of something very much like hate.

"Oh, come now," she chided him, "Let's pour the water over the bridge or under the dam or something."

"Okay, you played a swell game today, Miss Winsted," he said. She looked at him, saw he wasn't kidding and went back to her group while Clipper mentally kicked himself three times around the room. Why, he wondered, couldn't he

even act grown-up with Nan Winsted? Certainly he had never wanted so much to appear to advantage before any girl.

But that was like wanting the moon, he decided. He tried to think of some way of cutting her brother down to size and had to give that up too. Reg Winsted had really wanted to win that game.

The following weekend, a sadly battered Jordan managed to hold Traymore to a 14 to 14 tie, thanks to a last minute touchdown pass from Catherwood to Roy Charters. But the spirit of the team had changed—for the better. Clipper, who had studiously given up all hope of the Loon appointment, actually enjoyed himself at practise.

He wondered if this were football as his charges gamboled about the practise field the succeeding week. Since his season was already up the spout with two ties and one defeat, he gave them their head. And on Saturday Jordan whipped a smart Phillips eleven which outweighed them by fifteen pounds per man by three cleanly made touchdowns.

The Clipper felt a trifle dazed. They shouldn't have beaten Phillips. He hadn't brought them up to a peak for the game consciously, but they had hit it and ridden through to victory. These kids, he sensed, were different. Even his own hand-picked boys played above their heads.

The next week, when signs of staleness appeared in early scrimmage, he stayed up late and worked out a whole new set of plays for them, plays which involved plenty of ball throwing and wide open maneuvering.

With an open Saturday before the all-important Green contest they had plenty of time to smooth down rough edges. And since the final game was so important to Jordan, Clipper journeyed up there to scout the Green-Barton game in person. And Dick Leggett, the Green coach and Professor of Plaentology, invited him to come to lunch.

Leggett lived in a charming colonial house with modern trimmings on the edge of the ancient Green campus. An unexpectedly youthful man, who looked more the professor than the ranking coach, he greeted Clipper warmly and led him into a large living room delightfully furnished with what even to Clipper's untutored eyes, were real antiques.

"Hi, Clipper," said a beautiful modulated, too-well remembered voice. Nan Winsted was sitting in an armchair nursing a martini and regarding him quizzically. "If you think this meeting is accidental, forget it."

"The pleasure is all mine," said Clipper with what he hoped was urbanity. "But how come?"

"I've known Dicky here for ages. He's a pretty smooth article and I don't want to see him do a job on you."

"As if I would," said Leggett, grinning. It was, thought Clipper, a far cry from the sort of thing he was used to in connection with football. Maybe it would be better, Clipper decided, to reserve judgment. Then he looked at Nan and sent his judgment away.

"I hope," Leggett told him, looking worried, "that we can offer you a contest next week that won't have the paying customers howling fraud."

**C**LIPPER regarded him for a moment before replying.

"Perhaps if you'll tell your boys not to apply the crusher too early we can give you a game," Clipper replied.

"Attaboy, Clipper," said Nan. Clipper winked at her. He found he liked having her in his corner. Who wouldn't?

"I know your boys of yore to my sorrow," said Leggett sadly. "That Winsted—pardon me, Nan, but your kid brother is simply too much man for one man. And, Cotton, I understand that you have been given more latitude in the matter of scholarships than we get here at Green."

"And here I've been fondly believing that they had lowered the bars at Jordan when I caught a look at your lineup," the Clipper replied. "Quatranelli, Merino, Mankiewicz, Gustaffson. I've been a little worried about my boys."

"Give it to him, Clipper," said Nan. She looked like an undergraduate herself, sitting curled up in the chair and rooting for Jordan.

"*Kamerad!*" yelled Leggett as lunch was served. It was a pleasant meal, competently handled by Mrs. Leggett, who was as charming as her husband. Later Nan and Clipper sat high in the stands in seats arranged for them by the Green coach. Such is scouting in this era.

The afternoon was chilly and Nan wore a sheared beaver coat that made her the sleekest looking feminine object in

the stands. He laid out his charts and got his pencils ready.

"Give me some of those," said Nan, a cigarette in one corner of her lovely mouth. "I'll cover the guards and tackles and let you take the backs."

"You're deputized," he told her and somehow he could sense her competence. "How come you're up on this stuff?"

"I used to do it for Dicky," she said. "We ran around together before he got married."

"That's a break for me," said Clipper. "What made you change your mind about me?"

"You did," she said surprisingly. "You showed real caliber when you didn't bawl Reggie out after the Barton game."

Green had amassed a spotty record of three wins, two defeats and one tie. They looked big, fast and competent as they came out for practise. Certainly they had a quartet of kickers who could really ride that ball in spirals or end-over-end at will and at almost any desired angle. And Merino, their placement expert, booted one over from forty yards out, with a slight following wind.

On the whole, however, the Clipper was disappointed with the Green showing. They ran off the same few simple plays on which they had been relying all season, using an over-tackle drive which was a Leggett specialty for their key number. They moved efficiently, however, as a well-trained team should, and employed a number of variations—a spinner, a reverse, a shovel pass, a lateral and, of course, a number of forward passes.

This repertoire, plus the hard-hitting forward wall, was sufficient to give them a pair of touchdowns, one in each half. Both extra points were kicked. All in all it was a—for these days—simple exhibition of offensive football. On defense they used the six-two-two-one, again with variations, but nothing especially tricky.

Against them a Barton squad, that obviously was not up to its Jordan-game standard, managed to roll up a quartet of scores and moved along to an easy win. Watching them, even in their non-peak condition, the Clipper acquired a new respect for his own boys. They had taken all Barton had to offer and had come back to tie up the game, only to lose it on that evil break with victory almost in hand.

Barton was rough, tough and smart. They played like the professionals most of them undoubtedly were. Sitting high in the stadium, Clipper could judge correctly the caliber of their training and talent. He no longer felt as badly as he had about the one big blot on the Jordan record.

NAN was wonderful. She charted the line play with the trained simplicity of the veteran. They talked little, concentrating on their work, but when she had a remark to make it was to the point. Clipper had a wonderful time, even though Leggett's team disappointed him.

"I thought they'd have more than that," he told Nan as they waited in their seats for the post-game rush to abate. "Merino is sudden death on field goals, but that Green attack is amateurish."

"You didn't see the Green attack," said Nan. "Dicky is a nice boy but he's slicker than a snake. He'll have something juicy next Saturday." She put the point of her pencil between even white teeth and scowled. "I wish I knew what."

"You mean he deliberately lost that game?" said the Clipper, shocked. Nan shook her head.

"No, but he knows his job depends on beating Jordan no matter what. He didn't want to expose his hand."

"I don't believe it," muttered the Clipper, but an inner tension told him she was right. He felt out of his depth here.

The next week, figuring that Leggett had kept his boys under wraps, he concentrated as well on defensive formations. Reg Winsted, whose ability as a play diagnostician was unusual, was assigned to call them even while the enemy plays developed.

"Now maybe we'll have a few surprises for Leggett's blockers," he told his aides.

"That's the stuff to give them," affirmed O'Brien.

At length Saturday rolled around and the Jordan campus filled up with visitors who carried or waved green feathers and pennants, visitors whose faces were aglow with the prospects of this greatest of all traditional college contests.

The Clipper stayed with his boys, talking to them, giving them advice, keeping them bucked.

"Remember," he said. "Hit them first. Getting the jump is half the game."

The way the eyes of his team lighted

up as they replied told him that they would be in there trying. When at last it was time to go out to the field he assured himself that he had given them the right mental set for the battle ahead.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Unexpected Upset*

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**H**OW wrong he was he found out exactly three plays after the opening kickoff. Green had received and their runner had been nailed on the twenty-two. They worked a spinner into the line for no gain, then a drive off-tackle was smeared for a yard loss.

And then it happened. With Merino back to punt the ball went to Mankiewicz, who lobbed it laterally to Gustaffson, who spun and handed it to Merino, who, after faking a kick, had suddenly started around his own right end.

While all this was going on the eager Jordan forwards were falling victims to a series of cunningly contrived mousetraps which made the Clipper wonder morosely how many men Green had on the field. It was a dream play, perfectly executed, and Merino ran for a touchdown.

Stunned, Jordan began to fight back, but the breaks were not with them then. They strung together a pair of first downs that carried them to their own forty-five, but then Catherwood fumbled and lost nine and the White and Black attack bogged down. Leftwich booted out on the Green nine.

Merino promptly quick-kicked back from a running play formation. His boot, an end-over-ender, was not of great height or carry, but it cleared Catherwood and once it had hit the turf took off in a roll that carried it all the way to the Jordan twenty-eight, where a Green end downed it.

Leggett's tactics were obvious. Having the edge, he was going to make Jordan work overtime trying to get the pigskin out of their own territory. It was rugged but perfectly clean and so far the White and Black was stuck with it.

But not for long. On the next play Nick Leftwich brought the entire stands to its collective feet with a brilliant toss to Jack Billings, the left end, who caught the ball over his shoulder on the midfield

stripe. Merino, the Green safety man, sought to drive him out of bounds, but just before he stepped over, Billings tossed a lateral to Reg Winsted, who had come downfield in the center.

The score, when the extra point was booted, was a neatly tied 7 to 7.

Then Green struck back. They struck with an entire series of magnificently executed multiple mousetrap plays and spinners and spinner-forwards and spinner-laterals that had the Jordan lineman either clipped from the flank or chasing harmless decoys until their tongues were hanging out.

Before the first period had ended the Green was leading 13 to 7. And midway in the second quarter they scored again to make it 20 to 7. On the bench the Clipper fumed at the treachery Leggett had displayed and vainly considered and cast aside methods of stopping this maelstrom attack.

Onfield, Reg Winsted and Leftwich were twin towers of strength in line and backfield. One or the other or both of them seemed to come up in the heart of every play. They blocked, tackled and raged up and down in an effort to put new life into their baffled teammates.

But they were badly demoralized. After the third Green touchdown they again lost the ball on a fumble after almost reaching scoring territory. Again the Green came rushing downfield with its appalling succession of complex plays, which found every Green player hitting his assigned Jordan man from a blind spot.

The Clipper, who had been wondering since his visit to Green, saw too well how the suave Leggett had won himself a national reputation, understood all too well now. If the Loons had ever had the Green attack, with men able to play it for years on end and master its complexities completely—well, he had never seen anything like it, even from the 1937 Redskins or the 1942 Bears.

Then he was on his feet, screaming. Reg Winsted had broken through the Green line, had picked up Gustaffson, who tried to mousetrap him and hurled him into the runner, spilling both runner and ball well back of the line of scrimmage.

**I**T WAS Charters who recovered the pigskin on the Jordan thirty-eight-yard line.

"If that kid doesn't make All-American the judges ought to be shot," muttered the Clipper. Fats O'Brien, who was sitting beside him, gave his boss a nod.

"He's a honey," said the line coach. Then, "Oh, heck, skipper! There goes the gun."

As the teams trotted off the field and the Clipper, his broad brow furrowed in thought, walked slowly toward the field house, he found that Percy Saunders had swung into step beside him. The graduate manager looked unhappy.

"It looks as if Leggett outsmarted you," he said.

"Looks as if!" said the Clipper. "No doubt about it. He didn't pull any of this stuff last week. Tell me, Perce, do you think he deliberately threw the Green game?"

"Ouch!" said Saunders, wincing. "No, I wouldn't put it that way. He *didn't* throw the game, but he wanted to win this one so much more badly that he kept his boys under wraps. It's an old Jordan-Green stunt, Clipper."

"And I thought they played things a lot rougher in the places I played," said the Clipper. His eyes were thoughtful as he walked over the hard-frozen turf.

"Got anything?" Saunders asked. "You know the Green game is the big one for Jordan."

"Maybe," said the Clipper. "At any rate we're going to try. Now run along and tell the trustees not to worry."

In the locker room, when the boys had regained their wind and had their injuries taped or bound, he sat on a rubbing table and, after listening to their analyses of what had happened, gave them his idea.

"This may not be the answer, men," he said. "Only you can tell. But give it a try—and I don't mean just once or twice. You'll probably muck it up the first few times. Now line up—the varsity—the rest of you watch."

It was a defensive scheme—but some sort of defence which would hold the Green attack in check was the first thing to consider. Quickly the Clipper outlined the plays.

"Reg, you call them—you're doing it anyway," he said. "It's some of their own medicine. I want every lineman to loop to the right when Reg calls an even number—to the left when he calls an odd one. The backfield moves three steps in the opposite direction to com-

pensate. Got it?"

"I think so, sir," said Reg. In the few minutes of half-time remaining they worked at it. The Clipper himself got into it and showed Pat Comins how he wanted it done. It was at best makeshift emergency stuff, but the fact that he had come up with anything at all seemed to buoy them.

"How about when we get the ball?" Catherwood asked.

"Throw it and keep on throwing," said the Clipper, putting an arm around his shoulders. "What have you got to lose?"

"A ball game, coach," said Catherwood, moving toward the door. The Clipper looked after him, then at O'Brien.

"The son of a gun!" he said. "Doesn't know when he's had it."

"They're good boys, boss," said Messina. The Clipper nodded thoughtfully. Win or lose, he had had his entire policy as a coach reset by this season at Jordan. If the team didn't always seem to be his on the field, well, it was a lot more fun working things out man to man with them. And in the long run, what else mattered? He shrugged and led his assistants back out to the bench.

**J**ORDAN received and proceeded to cast defensive arrangements into the discard by putting on a beautiful attack that carried them all the way down to the Green six-yard-line. There they were held for downs.

Sitting forward on the edge of the bench, the Clipper watched tensely. Green went into its deceptive formation. Since Catherwood, as ordered, was playing deep, another quick kick seemed unlikely.

The ball was snapped and the entire White and Black line looped to the right as the backs went the other way. The Green play started well enough, but something went wrong in its execution and Pat Comins spilled the runner on the three. They tried to boot the next one out to safety, but Reg Winsted, moving up into the line, broke through and blocked the ball to fall on it for a touchdown. Leftwich booted the extra point and Jordan was in the ball game again, 14 to 20. O'Brien pounded the Clipper hard on the back.

"A center scoring two touchdowns!" he shouted. "What a wonder that kid is!"

"He can refuse substitutions on me

any time after this," said the Clipper. He was grinning like a kid.

Receiving the kickoff, the Green ran it back to their own thirty. Once again they resorted to their spinner and mouse-trap attack and once again found its delicate precision thrown out of gear by the improvised Jordan defense.

But on third down Gustaffson threw a short pass to Mankiewicz, who caught the ball one-handed and raced to the White and Black thirty-two-yard line before Catherwood was able to down him with a smashing tackle.

Reg Winsted was raging. On the first play he broke through the line, leaping to catch an end runner from behind in an effort to throw him out of bounds. The result was a five-yard loss for the Green.

They went into regular formation for the following play and then the talented Merino was back tracking with his hands held out. It looked like another quick kick and the Clipper leaped to his size twelves in alarm.

He didn't know the half of it. Instead of punting, the Green toe specialist calmly drop-kicked a beauty that sailed over the crossbar to put the visitors ahead 23 to 14. And the Clipper had warned them only to look out for a place kick. Leggett had pulled another ace from his sleeve.

The Clipper sent in some substitutes, but Reg Winsted and Pat Comins refused to come out. Green kicked off as the third quarter came to its end and fullback Mike Regan gathered in the short kick and came plowing up the center of the field all the way to the home forty-three.

Then it was Catherwood or Leftwich, passing, passing with just enough being completed to keep the attack moving.

Leftwich finally carried it over the goal on an unexpected sneak inside of tackle with the final quarter four minutes old. Once again the home team was within striking distance of the visitors as the scoreboard revealed a 21 to 23 count.

But Green had not yet shot its final bolt. They came roaring back from the kickoff to midfield and there Merino sent a quick-kick out of bounds on the Jordan six. And then, of all times, Nick Leftwich had a pass intercepted by Gustaffson. The visitors were again in scoring position, with possession of the ball

on the Jordan nineteen.

However, on the very first play, Reg Winsted and Pat Comins, operating as a single unit, ripped through the now-sagging Green forward wall and bore down on Merino, who for once lost his presence of mind and hesitated briefly.

It was the big towhead who hit him, hit him so hard that the ball flew from his hands to be grabbed by Comins, the man who had lost the center spot to Winsted. And Comins carried it all the way to the touchdown that meant victory.

Afterward, handsome Dick Leggett came into the Jordan locker room to congratulate the Clipper. He was grinning from ear to ear.

"Your gang deserved to win," he said. "But we made it tough for you."

"You don't know the half of it," the Clipper told him. "Next year I'll have some surprises for you."

"But none like that looping defense you pulled on us in the second half," said the Green coach. He shook his head. "I'd like to shake hands with young Winsted. He was about the best player I ever saw, out there today."

**L**EGGETT was talking to the towhead when a big, bald-headed man edged through the crowd and put a huge hand on Clipper's shoulder. It was Jack Whistler, the retiring Loon coach, and he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Clipper, you've done a whale of a job," he said. "The Loons are proud of you. Pro football is proud of you. Maybe I can see you at the Inn later. I've got a contract in my pocket."

"Swell," said Clipper. "That's great news, Jack. How's the mob?" But as he said it and listened to Jack's news of his old team, he knew his words had been hollow. He listened to the surge and babble of talk and looked at his fresh faced kids, not so fresh faced now, and sniffed in the scent of the Field House locker room and thought of the lovely campus outside and of Perce Saunders and—yes—of Dick Leggett and a couple of ideas he had for next year's Green game.

"—and if you think that young Winsted would be interested," Jack Whistler was saying, "I'd like to sign him up too. We can use him at center next year if he's half as good as he looked today."

"Why don't you ask him?" said Clipper, nodding toward his star center, who

was just getting into his shirt.

"Thanks, I will," said Whistler and left him.

Feeling suddenly let down and very happy, Clipper ducked into his office. He knew now that he was going to stay on if they wanted him. All at once he was afraid they wouldn't. He might not be a paleontologist like Leggett, but he'd like to be a fixture here at Jordan.

Percy Saunders came in then and his harried expression was disturbing. He sat down at Clipper's invitation and fished nervously for a cigarette.

"Clipper," he said, "I hate to say this. . . . Naturally it's nothing we like to do."

"Okay, Perce, let's have it," said Clipper, his heart sinking.

"You can't really be held to it, of course, not if you want to coach the Loons, but the Trustees are going to make it tough for you to switch. They want you here."

"They and me both," said Clipper, grinning. "Heck, I was going to turn down Whistler anyway. Who could ask for any more than this?"

"Come around to the house later and we'll make it official," said Saunders. "Wow! That's a load off my mind. I knew you've had your troubles this season and when I saw Whistler I thought—"

"Just tell them Jordan's got me," said Clipper and he meant it. Saunders grinned and cuffed at him playfully and left. A moment later the door opened and Reg Winsted came in.

"I was afraid you'd gone, coach," he said. He looked excited and very young and earnest despite a purpling eye and a patch of adhesive tape across the bridge of his nose. "What about this Mr. Whistler? Should I sign with him?"

"You couldn't join a better club," said Clipper. "Are you sure you want to play pro football?"

"I love the game," said Winsted simply. "Frankly I wasn't so keen on being a pro. But if they can bring out men like you, I don't see how the experience could hurt me. It might be good training for a coaching job later."

"You can sign on as assistant line coach here whenever you want to," said Clipper.

"Gee! That's swell and thanks for everything, coach. I've got to run, Nan is outside waiting for me and . . ."

His voice trailed off as Clipper went to the window, saw the Packard sports job and, flinging up the sash, threw his legs over the sill.

"This time, Reggie," said Clipper, grinning, "you're going to have to walk."

He dropped through onto the hard turf outside.



MIRROR ON HIS SHOULDER, a thrill-packed grid novel by Joe Archibald, in the Fall POPULAR SPORTS MAGAZINE—out soon, only 15c at all stands!



TOPS FOR QUALITY

BIGGER AND BETTER



# THE TOP-KICK

By ROGER FULLER

*It sounded wonderful to get triple-threat man Private Smith to play on the Occupation M. P. Team but Sergeant Calverton's idea suddenly went sour right in the middle of a vital game!*

## CHAPTER I

*Tip by Telephone*

**S**ERGEANT McDERMOTT wheeled and flicked a salute front and center.

"First platoon, all present or accounted for," he chanted.

"Second platoon, all present or accounted for," said Sergeant Roe.

Down the line went the reveille report—the three platoons, the mortar squad, the radio shack guys and the Motor Pool drivers. First Sergeant Calverton of C

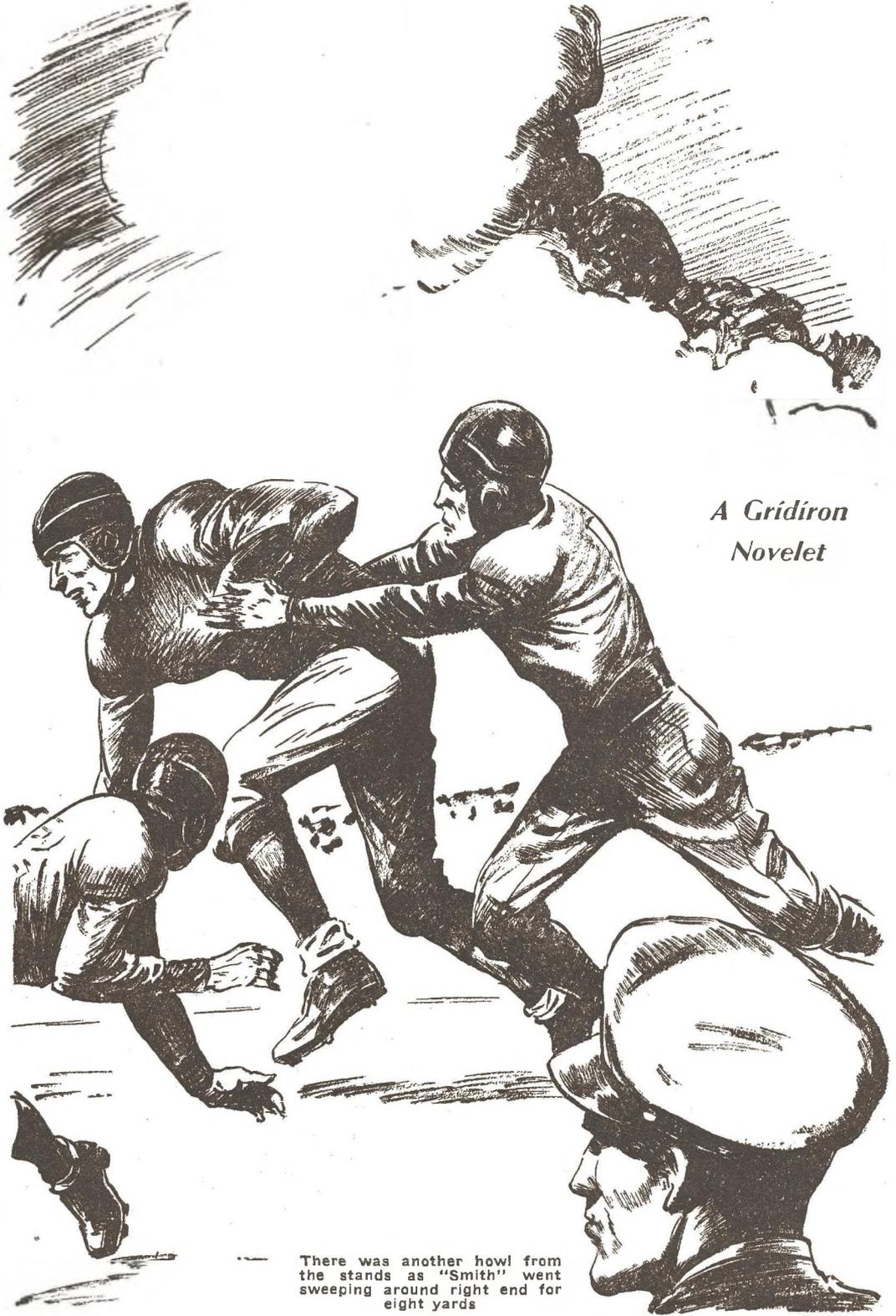
Company, 999th Military Police Battalion, took the salutes of the platoon sergeants with an abstracted lift of his hand to the wrinkled forehead he wore. He waited for the Motor Sergeant to make his report and then did a Regular Army about-face to salute the Old Man.

"C Company all present and accounted for, sir," he said.

"You'd better win Saturday," the Captain said, under his breath, as he returned the salute. "I heard last night the Colonel has bet everything but his staff car on the game."

First Sergeant Calverton winced. The





*A Gridiron  
Novelet*

There was another howl from the stands as "Smith" went sweeping around right end for eight yards

Colonel was a good enough guy, West Point and with plenty of combat to his credit, but he definitely would not take kindly to losing his bets, should the 999th lose Saturday's football game. And he'd lose, as sure as a suspect Nazi would holler about always having hated Hitler, if he put his dough on the M.P.'s to beat that artillery bunch they were meeting in a couple of days.

With "Cooler" Geis in the backfield, they might stand a chance to upset the artillery guys. But Cooler Geis had goofed off and, just at present, he was a tenant of the stockade.

The artillery team was hot. Sergeant Calverton had made it his business to see them play. With the Old Man's help, he had drawn a prison-chasing detail to Hessen, where the artillery bunch had met the 662nd Tank Destroyer team. The 662nd was supposed to have the Occupied Zone Championship sewed up, but when the dust had cleared away the artillery guys had the game, 20 to 3. And it had been a lucky drop-kick, at that, that had given the Tank Destroyers their only points.

Yeah, the artillery club was hot, all right. They should be, Sergeant Calverton reflected. The left tackle of the artillery team was a guy who had been up with the Detroit Lions before he got his greetings from Uncle Sam. The scabbard they had used against the Tank Destroyers had been a B-team man with the Washington Redskins and almost as good as Baugh and Condit, at that. The center had a different name in the lineup, but he had looked curiously like a man who had been collegiate All-American for three years, before the Bears had snapped him up.

"The trouble with this league," First Sergeant Calverton had told himself, sourly, at the time, "is that there's too many ringers. You get the big brass backin' teams to win and it's funny how a good country back gets transferred to the outfit that needs a back. And we never get anybody."

"I hope the Colonel hasn't gone overboard," Calverton said, to the Captain standing in front of him. "They got a strong team."

"He's gone overboard, all right," Captain Cherry said. "He was bragging about your team last night in the Officers' Club. Said there was no coach in Ger-

many like that grand old soldier, Sergeant Calverton."

**T**HE first sergeant's heart sank. He had a furlough coming up and there was a babe in Brussels whom he'd promised to see in the near future, to continue their English lessons. The Colonel wouldn't take kindly to signing a furlough if the artillery guys won, on Saturday.

Blast that Cooler Geis, anyway, forgetting tight and taking a sock at that Heinie civilian cop, with a big game coming up.

The O.D. called for his report, right then, and Captain Cherry was busy for a while. When the Captain turned about to give "Dismiss," First Sergeant Calverton spun on his right toe and left heel to address his company.

"At ease," he said, and felt the ranks relax in the gloomy darkness of the Fall dawn. "Now listen, men. We got word of a break across town. A lot of P.O. W.'s and D.P.'s jumped the Russian stockade last night. I want you guys on town patrol to be careful in checking papers. The word is that a couple of guys that lived in the States for a long time were included in the bunch that made the break. If you pick up somebody, they might give you a song and dance about being American citizens and that guff, but our orders are to turn 'em back to the Russky's—our Russian allies. If they're American citizens, things will go through channels and they'll get back all right. I don't want any man failing to turn in somebody that ain't got his papers right. Understand that?"

There was a stirring in the ranks, but no questions.

"Fall out," First Sergeant Calverton grunted.

There was a thunder of feet as the men raced for the latrine, to fight for the washbowls before the hot water ran out. Calverton regarded them with a jaundiced eye. They were a bunch of punks, these kids who had been foisted upon him as replacements. Not a good football man in the bunch.

All the old men, the good men, were gone. Some of them had died in Africa and some in Italy and a few in Southern France and the S.S. had gotten Tommy Carter in the last few hours of the war. A lot of them, too, had taken their points and gone back to the States to try to get

some of the big pro football money before they got too old. Cooler Geis had been the last of the giants who had made Army football history back in the States before the Battalion went overseas, and Cooler was in the stockade again. Because the people in Cooler's home town had called their jail a "cooler," Geis had earned his nickname.

"And," First Sergeant Calverton told himself, "he's certainly lived up to it since."

The Colonel, he thought, ought to know these things, realize the situation. The Colonel ought to remember that guys like "Toad" Humphrey and "Gravy" Traine and Jack Raleigh weren't with the 999th any more. If they were, First Sergeant Calverton wouldn't have to be worrying about the game with the artillery bunch, or any bunch, on Saturday.

You take Gravy, for instance; he had beaten the Camp Picket team almost single-handed with his passes. Like putting nickels in a slot machine, the way he threw them. And Jack, when he slanted off tackle, the other club sure knew somebody was coming through.

Calverton might, as has been said of him, be the best Enlisted Man football coach in the Army, but he couldn't perform miracles. And with Cooler where he was, it would take a miracle to beat the artillery guys.

He walked into the orderly room and scowled at the T-5 clerk-typist who sat at his desk, involved with his Morning Report.

"What did they say on Corporal Geis?" Calverton asked. "I mean, did the Investigating Officer spring him or crucify him?"

"He crucified him, Top," the clerk said. "Here's the report, but I can tell you now it ain't good."

First Sergeant Calverton took the sheaf papers and retreated to his chair behind the field desk.

"Flagrant disregard for dignity of the uniform," he read. "Assault without provocation . . . Corporal Geis admitted he . . . civilian policeman in pursuit of his duty . . . suffered a fractured jaw and lacerations about the eyes . . . unfavorable record of past similar offenses . . . recommend Corporal Geis be tried by Special Court-Martial under provisions of Article of War Ninety-six."

First Sergeant Calverton tossed the

Investigating Officer's report onto his desk and grunted.

"So I suppose we got to use Division's I.O. at left half next Saturday," he said. "Cooler Geis was the only decent man we had left on the Battalion squad and he had to goof off like that. And with the Colonel's dough ridin' on the team, too."

**S**URPRISED, the T-5 gaped at the First Sergeant over the top of his typewriter.

"You mean the Colonel is betting on us?" he asked, aghast. "Real money?"

"I don't mean Reichsmarks, chump!" First Sergeant Calverton said, grumpily. "And that ain't all. Before Cooler decided to play Joe Palooka with that Heinie cop I laid a few megs on the line myself. I got four to one, but it might as well have been four hundred to one, for all the good it does me now."

He shoved back his chair and walked to the window to stare out at the gray pre-dawn. The chow line was forming outside the mess hall and the thick black smoke from the stove-pipe chimney gave promise of another portion of that dish called "creamed beef on toast" in the Army's master menu, a dish that goes under another, less lovely name in Army parlance.

Off to one side of the line of soldiers were the German civilians, almost pitiful remnants of the Master Race, waiting to scrounge what they could from the Mess Sergeant's left-overs.

"Maybe," First Sergeant Calverton said, moodily, "I could round up a team of D.P.'s and P.O.W.'s to play for us. Gawsh knows they could do about as well as the bunch we've got now, without Cooler."

He reached in his pocket for a cigarette. At the door of the mess hall, somebody blew a whistle and the chow line began to move slowly forward, with a clinking of aluminum mess gear.

"I'm thinking of goin' over the hill," Calverton announced. "For ten, fifteen years I've been turning out good football teams for the outfits I've been with. And what does it get me in the end? A measly post in a place five thousand miles away from Fort Myer or any other first class station.

"After the Colonel loses his dough on Saturday's game, my life won't be worth living around here. And, besides, think

of the dough I'm going to lose on that little fiesta."

He turned from the window and scowled at the clerk at the typewriter.

"Twenty-two years I got in the Service," he said. "Twenty-two years of soldiering, with the cavalry, the infantry and now with the M.P.'s. And all the time in my off hours, my own time, I've been playin' or coachin' football. I coached the team at Leavenworth that beat everything any other post had to offer and would've beat West Point, if they'd let us play them. I was out on the West Coast with that cavalry outfit that—"

The drone of the phone on his desk cut off his words. He reached for the instrument and yanked it to his ear.

"Nine - Ninety - Ninth," he barked. "First Sergeant Calverton speaking."

The voice at the other end of the line was of a type with which Calverton had long since been familiar. It was an excitedly breathless half-whisper, the voice of a person masking his identity.

"Herr Sergeant," came the hushed murmur. "If you would go to Number Seventeen Goldstrasse, you would find a man much sought by your police. A true war criminal."

"Who's speaking?" Calverton demanded.

"It does not matter," the voice said. "But the man is an important person."

"Hitler, maybe?" Calverton asked, sarcastically.

"No, *mein herr*," said the man at the other end of the line. "Harald Josefson, the Finn."

There was the click of the receiver being put back on its hook. First Sergeant Calverton regarded his phone sourly before he replaced it on the desk-side bracket.

"Williams, we got anything on a Finn named Harald Josefson?" he asked the T-5. "We probably haven't. These Nazi roaches turn in their next door neighbors as war criminals every time they have a fight over how late little Gretchen got home last night."

"What was the name, Top?"

"Josefson, I think he said. Harald Josefson. He's a Finn, the guy said. Probably nothing to the report, but—"

First Sergeant Calverton broke off his speech and gaped at the T-5 moving toward the filing cabinets.

"Holy cow!" he cried.

"Something, Top?" asked the T-5 Williams.

"Josefson!" Calverton gasped. "Harald Josefson! It can't be!"

"Can't be what?"

"Listen, Williams," the first sergeant said, earnestly. "Try to think! Would you be old enough to remember the Harvgate team of Nineteen-Thirty-Eight? Would you possibly recall the one-man club they had, who wiped up the country with his passing, his kicking, his running?"

"Yeah," said the clerk at the files. "I remember my brothers talking about him. He came from Norway or somewhere, didn't he? They got him over in the States as a runner, didn't they, and then found out he could play football better'n anybody could."

**F**IRST Sergeant Calverton turned his eyes upon the company clerk.

"He came from Finland," he said, decidedly.

"And his name was—"

"Josefson!" said First Sergeant Calverton. "Harald Josefson. He might be an old man now. He was no chicken, when they got him over to Harvgate to run him against Fenske—and then forgot all about his running when he showed up to be such a good football man. But them Finns are tough. Maybe—maybe he could even play football."

"That's been a long time ago, Top," said T-5 Williams.

"Sure, but this Josefson hasn't been settin' in an easy chair, getting fat. When Russia and Finland had their first war, he went back to wherever he came from, remember? I read somewhere that he was quite a hero, back in the war when we were on Finland's side. And now, Mr. Squealer on the telephone says he's here in town. Just in time for the game Saturday, if we can get ahold of him."

"He's an enemy guy, Sarge," T-5 Williams warned. "Even if we never were very sore at the Finlanders, he's still an enemy, according to War Department memorandums. Maybe we'd better tell the Old Man about this."

"Maybe we'd better get in touch with the United Nations," First Sergeant Calverton said, acidly. "That guy's about as much an enemy as you are, Williams—maybe not as much, seein' the way you bollix up the reports you write for me.

"Finland may have been on the Axis

side, theoretically, but I never heard of any Buchenwald guards bein' Finns. And it was only a few years ago that everybody back home was cryin' their eyes out over poor little Finland, rootin' for her to beat Russia."

He slammed his hand down on the top of the field desk.

"Call the Motor Pool," he ordered, "and get me a jeep."

"Top, you'd better wait and get a patrol to pick up this guy," said T-5 Williams. "He might not be the Josefson that used to play football. That call might have been a phony."

"Quiet!" First Sergeant Calverton thundered. "And I mean quiet! If this turns out to be the guy I think he is, and he can play football, I don't want a lot of talk goin' around. If the Provost heard about it, he'd be likely to throw Josefson into some stockade, and he can't win us any football games in there. Also, I imagine them Russky's would like to grab Josefson for what he did to them in their first war."

"There's a new memorandum about Finnish guys," Williams said. "It tells you to—"

"You read all those memorandums they hand you and you'll be nuttier than you are," Calverton advised. "I found that out the first week I was in the Army, and Hines was Chief of Staff then. Call me a jeep."

## CHAPTER II

### *A Player Named "Smith"*

**F**IRST Sergeant Calverton discovered that Number Seventeen Goldstrasse was an apartment house that had been hit hard by something heavy, back in the shooting days. One side of the building had been blown out, revealing three-sided rooms and the tangle of twisted plumbing. The other side of the place looked fairly liveable and Calverton headed in that direction.

The bottom floor disclosed only old, old men, women and children, all of whom thrust their identification cards at the First Sergeant.

"No food, no cigarettes," one of the women whined.

"Ask the people left in Rotterdam or Coventry," First Sergeant Calverton

said. "Maybe they'll give you some."

(Basically, let it be said here, First Sergeant Cecil Francis Calverton was a generous man. He had lost some of his regard for the German people, all those millions of I-always-hated-Hitler anti-Nazis, the night a jeep-full of medics, making their way back to barracks after spending hours of "their own time," manning a clinic, was set upon and efficiently massacred by a crowd of young, well-fed, wholesome German boys who had clubbed together under the name of "Werewolves.")

First Sergeant Calverton made his way to the second floor, making a brief but sufficient inspection of each apartment. It was in the last apartment, in the rear of the place, that he found his man.

He was big and obviously not a German. When Calverton kicked open the door and advanced into the shabby room, pistol in hand, the dark-haired stranger was on his hands and knees, with two of the big-eyed, flaxen haired children who always bothered Calverton, whenever he forgot to remember the jeep-full of medics, astride his back.

The big man clucked something reassuring to his children in German and quietly helped them down from their piggy-back position. Then he stood up.

"American?" he asked, quietly, while the children scuttled out of the room. "But, sure, you must be."

"And you're an American citizen, I suppose," Calverton said.

"As a matter of fact, I am," the big man said. "My name's—er—"

"I know your name," First Sergeant Calverton said, ominously. "The only thing I want to know from you is whether you're goin' to play ball with me or not."

"Play ball?" asked the man, his eyebrows arching.

"Yeah, ball. Football. If you want to play my way, maybe we work it so the Russians don't get you back. If you don't want to play it that way, maybe the Russky's get you."

"I wouldn't like that," the big man said.

"Okay, Josefson," Calverton rapped out. "I got a proposition. I'm hard up for a good football player to fill in my Battalion team. I know your record and I've got to admit you look younger than I thought you would. Now, if you'll let

me handle this, we'll see if you can't get out of town without the Russians grabbing you."

The big man started to say something and Calverton cut him off.

"I ain't making any bargains," he said. "All I'm telling you is that if you'll play football for the Nine-Ninety-Ninth, maybe you'll get a break."

"But—but I haven't played football in years," the big man said.

"You were good enough when you did play," First Sergeant Calverton reminded his prisoner. "You shouldn't have any trouble beating the punks you have to meet these days."

"Play football again?" the tall man said. "Get out there and line up, with the crowd making that noise it always does before a kickoff? Take a ball and have a man come in to tackle you and know that he doesn't want to kill you and you don't want to kill him? Play a game again, Sergeant? Ah, you don't know how good that sounds!"

Calverton nodded. He knew what the other man meant. Men who have been through a fighting war are apt to know.

"Just to make sure you're Josefson, maybe you can answer a few questions," Calverton said, after a pause.

"Josefson?" the big man asked. "How did you get that name?"

"Never mind," the first sergeant said. "And don't worry about the Russians finding out about you, if you play along with me. I'll have to sort of hide you in the kitchen, probably, when you're not playing football, as a new Detached Service Joe we happened to get, but you let me take care of that."

"The Russians are after Josefson, then?" the big man asked.

"You ought to know," Calverton said. "They get a burn-on for a guy and they never forget it. You did them dirt at Lake Ladoga and the Kremlin won't rest easy till you've paid for it. It's the old Stalingrad court-martial for you when they get you."

"That I wouldn't like," said the big man.

**I**N HIS desperation to get a good player, the Top decided to gamble.

"You let me take care of it," Calverton said, recklessly. "Now a couple of questions, to make sure you're the guy you're supposed to be. When a line goes in,

square and face-to-face, what's it called?"

"Charging."

"What's the other way a line moves and why?" Calverton asked, warily.

"Well, you can have a slicing line, that moves over to pull the secondary defense over to one side," the big man said. "Or you can have a pull-back line that runs with the ball. I don't know just what you want me to give you as an answer."

"You did okay," Calverton said, approvingly. "Let's go."

Back at the Orderly Room, Calverton gave his prisoner instructions.

"The best way to work this," he said, "is to get you a uniform and make out you're a regular new guy from the repple depple. Nobody will know the difference, seein' as how you speak English so good, and I can carry you on the Morning Report as Detached Service. I'll probably have to put you on permanent K.P. to keep you out of the way of the Old Man and some other guys, namely Blinky Roe, but you won't mind that, will you?"

"Sergeant," said the big man, "if you knew how long it had been since I had a decent meal, you wouldn't even ask."

"Got a new guy," First Sergeant Calverton told Captain Cherry that afternoon, when the Battalion football team was assembled on the *sportzplaz*. "Says he can play football. That's him, over there. I was thinkin' maybe we could use him in Corporal Geis's place."

The captain looked at the big man Sergeant Calverton had picked up in the ruined apartment house. The man was adjusting his helmet, pulling it low, to Sergeant Calverton's silent approval, over his forehead.

"He's big enough, anyway," the Captain said. "What's his name?"

"His name? Uh—Smith," Calverton said. "Private Smith."

"He's certainly a big man," the Captain said, approvingly. "I didn't think, though, that we were getting any replacements until the first of the month."

"This guy's special," the First Sergeant said. "Detached Service. I meant to give you the order on him this morning, but it slipped my mind."

"I only hope he can play football," Captain Cherry murmured. "The way the Colonel's feeling about Saturday's game—well, Sergeant, you know how

the Colonel hates losing money to Division. And from what I heard this morning, at breakfast, the General is coming down to see the game. The Colonel would sure want to win for the General, Top."

"We'll win," said First Sergeant Calverton, desperately. "We'll win if I have to get out there and play myself."

"And me, too," Captain Cherry said, absently. "If the Colonel doesn't win, we'll all be in—hey—good heavens, look at that!"

The man whom First Sergeant Calverton had named Smith had picked up a football, one that had trickled to the sidelines from the playing field. The big fellow had hefted the ball, taken three short, running steps and had sent a punt ballooning overhead. It was a booming, lazy kick, the kind that permitted ends and tackles to get down the field and surround the receiver with time to spare.

"Migash!" Captain Cherry breathed. "That was sixty yards, if it was an inch! We've got ourselves a kicker, Top!"

They had, they discovered as the practise wore on, also got themselves a passer and a runner. The Top put his new man on the second team for the opening scrimmage and gave the subs the ball, with the instruction to the B-team quarterback to give the new man the ball in a mixed-up version of basic plays.

On the first play, the stranger, coming off a single wing, hit off-tackle into a spot where a hole should have been driven, but hadn't been. The big man's driving power sent him into the waiting guard and tackle with a crash. Of the three men, two hit the turf, out of play and the third kept on going. The third, of course, was "Smith," and it was eight yards later that the secondary dragged him down with a three-man assault.

On the next play "Smith" faded back, the football held in one huge hand like a grenade. Three first-string linemen sifted through the weak second team defense and lunged at him. "Smith" shunted off one tackler with a hand that was almost a left hook. He skipped out of the way of the second, without too much effort, and then reversed to let the third man go sprawling past him, arms outstretched.

into the air. His arm drew back and then dropped, in one motion, and the bullet pass thumped into the hands of the one receiver on the field who was not covered. The loose end romped over the line, standing up.

"Man!" Captain Cherry exulted. "What did you say this fellow's name was?"

"Uh—Jones," First Sergeant Calverton said. "Man named Jones."

The Captain hesitated in his celebration and cast First Sergeant Calverton a curious look.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I have a dim recollection of you saying his name was Smith."

"That's right," First Sergeant Calverton said, hastily. "Smith, his name is."

"You wouldn't," Captain Cherry said, speculatively, "be pulling a fast one on me, would you, Sergeant?"

"Why, sir!" the man with the stripes said, in a shocked voice.

"It's damned funny," the Captain said, in a voice filled with reflection, "that you just happen to come up with a replacement who just happens to be a football player, two weeks before the Battalion is due to have any replacements at all. It's funny I've never seen the order on this man. It's funny that—"

His mouth stayed open, hanging there, as he watched the big newcomer take the first team's kick-off and start down the field. The first team was laying for him now, discarding the niceties of practise scrimmage. They swarmed in on him with hooked hands reaching.

The man "Smith" hesitated for a second and, as the phalanx of first string tacklers leaped in with glad cries, spun on a heel, reversed his field and started out toward the other sideline. He out-distanced whatever interference was set up for him and there were only three men between him and the first team's goal line when he really started traveling.

The four men met as the defense converged. The tacklers barring the way of "Private Smith" suddenly seemed to rise in the air, pin-wheeling magically in some sort of fantastic explosion. When it was all over, Harald Josefson, "Private Smith," whatever his name was, was loping down toward the last lined stripe, unattended.

"Maybe I'd better just let well enough alone," said Captain Cherry, softly.

**N**OW an end who had raced around at him made a leap as "Smith" went

"Maybe I'd better just take my blessings where I find them and never look a gift horse in the mouth, to mix a couple of metaphors. Maybe—but I'd better get out of here before I get involved."

He started away, then turned and fixed First Sergeant Calverton with a rigid stare.

"But remember," he announced. "If there's any trouble over this new man and higher headquarters raises Cain, it'll be your stripes, Top, and not my bars. If you've happened to Shanghai a football player from some other outfit without authority for this game, Division will probably be on your neck."

He paused and each word made a dent in the air when he said:

"You see, it was the Division staff in the Officers' Club last night that the Colonel was betting against."

Calverton's eyes were bleak as he watched Captain Cherry walk away from the *Sportzplatz* with the manner of a man who has washed his hands of the whole thing.

"Fingers," he murmured, "you'll just have to get used to staying crossed till after Saturday's game, at least."

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## CHAPTER III

### *A Matter of Blackmail*

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**T**HE big man whom Calverton had labeled Smith was sweat-soaked and puffing when the first sergeant pulled him out of the scrimmage.

"I'm in rotten condition," he admitted. "I haven't been exactly sitting at a training table, eating thick steaks, for the last couple of years. But maybe I can get the hang of it back, with a couple more practise sessions."

"You did a little better than fair, considering you haven't been on a football field for quite awhile," said the Top, judiciously.

"I was a little nervous," the big man said. "I was always afraid somebody'd recognize me and turn me in to the Russians. You know a man with three kids in Kristinestad doesn't relish the idea of a Russian prison camp."

"I'll take care of the Russians," First Sergeant Calverton said. "You've got my word for that."

He had hardly returned to the orderly

room from Retreat before he had reason to wonder just how much the word he was giving to his new football star was worth. It was T-5 Williams who provided the doubt.

"Hey, Top," said the little clerk-typist. "Just got a new memorandum I thought you'd want to see. It's a Division G. O. and it's about you-know-who."

"Sometimes," First Sergeant Calverton said, heavily, "I think your mother must a been frightened by a busted mirror, the way you like to spread bad news. What does the General Order say?"

"It's all about that guy Josefson breaking out of the Russky stockade," T-5 Williams explained. "The G. O. says that just because Josefson spent a lot of time in the States and was well known as an athlete at Harvgate doesn't mean he's not still a member of the armed forces allied to the Axis. The G. O. says he escaped a Prisoner of War confinement, possibly armed. The G. O. says that any attempt by misguided sympathizers of the Allied Occupation Forces to hide Josefson will be dealt with summarily. The G. O. says—"

"The G. O. says, the G. O. says," First Sergeant Calverton snapped, irritably. "Do you memorize them things to recite on your knees just before you hit the sack?"

"Well, good gosh, Sarge! You asked me!"

"Never mind what I asked you," Calverton growled. "All I got to say is that if things get fouled up, I'm going to lose my stripes. And who's going to take over in this job, then? Blinky Roe, that's who! And if you think I'm chicken, how'd you like to be working here for Blinky?"

"I—I'd turn in my commission, Sergeant, and go back to field duty."

"A T-5, and he's talking about a commission he's got!" Sergeant Calverton stormed. He started for the door of the orderly room and then turned. His glance at the T-5 was black as he said:

"And if you got any ideers of bucking for another stripe by turning me in on this Josefson deal, I want to tell you that you're in this thing as deep as I am, maybe deeper."

"Yes, sir," T-5 Williams said. "No, sir."

"And don't 'sir' me," First Sergeant

Calverton grumbled. "I'm going to town tonight. Tell Sergeant McDermott to make the bed-check. And tell him to make it in the barracks, not down here, writin' his friends in and the guys he don't like out on the town."

The door had a satisfying slam behind him. He was on his way down the company street when the shriek of brakes, the scuff of tires and the cry of the gate guard told him that the Russians had arrived.

"I dee-mond to witness the General!" somebody was shouting. "You hawlf a lot of Russian here our preeznorgh and we take him back!"

"Corp'ral of the guard, Gate Number One!"

"He's Finnish fascist! Name Josefson. You got Josefson? Geeve him, pliss!"

"I dee-mond the General! Vodka, soldier?"

There were arms and bottles waving, Russian soldiers bulging over the sides of the lend-lease jeep, the guard with his rifle at port and the latch pulled, the situation ready to burst into something that would make headlines in the States.

First Sergeant Calverton faded back into the shadows. When next he appeared in the light of electric bulbs, it was in the small tavern that the 999th had made its own since it had moved in. He sat there, sipping his thimble-full of *ersatz* brandy, when he heard the chair on the opposite side of the table pulled back and creak, as somebody sat in it heavily.

**I**T WAS Staff Sergeant Proctor Emil Roe, known to the Battalion as "Blinky." First Sergeant Calverton greeted his platoon sergeant with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. Sergeant Roe was a fat man with a perpetual smile that was as false as the cheery note of his voice, when he spoke to Calverton.

"You left camp too early," the fat sergeant said. "There was a heck of a row, just after you left."

"Yeah?" First Sergeant Calverton asked, cautiously. "What happened?"

"Some Russky's looking for an escaped prisoner," Roe explained. "Somebody by the name of Josefson. Ever heard of him?"

First Sergeant Calverton looked down at his brandy glass.

"I used to know a guy named Josefson—ran a bar in Elmira, New York," he

said, after deliberation.

"This is a different guy," Sergeant Roe said, spacing his words. "This man's a hot-shot football star. A Finn. Being as how you're a football coach, Top, you oughta remember him."

"Now that you mention it," Calverton said, "I think I do recall a fellow by that name. Played for Notre Dame, didn't he?"

"Naw. Harvgate. That was the year they went out to the Coast and beat Western Cal forty to nothin'."

"You sure know your football," First Sergeant Calverton said, admiringly. "What happened to the Russians? Did they see the Old Man?"

"Uh-uh," Roe said, shaking his head. "The Captain was at a staff meeting at Division. The O. D. was that new lieutenant, McCreary. He turned out to be plenty rugged. He told the Russky's to get back on their own side of town before he threw them all in the clink. None of 'em had a permit to cross the line and you know what happens to our guys when they wander into the Russian zone."

"And they dragged it out of there?" First Sergeant Calverton asked.

"Yeah. After a big argument. They said they were coming back, with Molotov or Joe Stalin himself, for all I know."

He reached across the table and calmly helped himself to the pack of cigarettes Calverton had on the table beside his elbow.

"You wouldn't know anything about us pickin' up a prisoner who got away from the Russians, would you, Top?" he asked, idly.

"How would I know about their prisoners?" Calverton asked. "I got trouble with my own prisoners without worrying about some Joe who went over the Russian fence."

"I—ah—talked to the driver you had in the jeep you used this morning," Roe said. He looked at his cigarette, as though relishing its flavor. "Goldstrasse, wasn't it, you went to? From what I could understand from the Russians, the guy they were looking for was supposed to be hiding somewhere on that street."

He blew a ribbon of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Funny thing, too," he observed. "You getting a ring-ding football player the same day a guy who used to star for

Harvgate, crashes out of the Russian stockade."

First Sergeant Calverton gulped the remains of his brandy and signaled the waiter, holding up two fingers.

"Roe, you've got a bid in for a furlough, haven't you?" he said, slowly. "Seems to me I remember a request that came through not long ago."

"Yeah," said the fat man, with a genial smile. "And seems to me you said there were fifty guys ahead of me on the furlough list. But it's okay, Top. I wouldn't want to miss the game, Saturday. It's likely to be interesting if the Russkys should happen to drop in to take a look at your new backfield star. It ought to be very interesting."

There was a brief silence while the waiter put down the two brandies and retired.

"Okay," Calverton said, quietly. "What do you want?"

The platoon sergeant leaned back in his chair and spread his grin.

"Maybe," he said, "you could push my furlough through right away and maybe you could lend me some dough to have a good time on when I'm in Brussels. There's a babe there who's learnin' English from me and she's kind of expensive. So maybe you could put down a couple of bets for me on the Battalion team, at the odds the artillery guys are quoting, to help out the budget. And maybe you could copper my bets the other way, so that even if this Josefson turns out to be not so hot, I wouldn't lose money."

"Blackmail," First Sergeant Calverton said, bitterly. "I oughta—"

**H**E STOPPED, biting back the furious words that struggled to be said.

"You oughta what, Top?" Staff Sergeant Roe asked, mildly. "You oughta notify Division, maybe, that you've got hold of a war criminal? You oughta turn Josefson in and play Saturday without a star backfield man? You oughta watch the Battalion team get murdered, with the Colonel's dough and all his bragging riding on the score?"

He shook his head, clucking his tongue.

"Maybe you oughta do all them things, Top," he said, "but I don't think you will."

His smile grew a trifle more hearty.

"Not you, Top," he said. "You've made too good a thing out of this football coaching racket to take a chance of the Colonel getting so sore he might pull some strings to get you sent to Siberia. You'll be a nice guy and go along with me." He sipped his drink. "Won't you, Top?" he asked, gently.

First Sergeant Calverton opened and closed his big hands on the table top.

"Some day I'm going to forget that the New Army don't let a man take a poke at the guy he ranks," he growled.

"Sure," Roe agreed, cordially. "But in the meantime, I'll be expecting that furlough and the—uh—loans. Otherwise, I might be seeing Division tomorrow and telling them that the man they're looking for, that Finlander named Josefson, just might be the guy who's going under the name of Smith, in the Nine-Ninety-Ninth."

## CHAPTER IV

### *Hue and Cry*

**C**ALVERTON was in a murky mood, the next day, when he took his company's reveille report. Captain Cherry had left word in the orderly room, on his return from the staff meeting, that he wanted to see the first sergeant right after chow. That was always a bad sign, Captain Cherry usually preferring to see his first sergeant in the afternoon, when the previous night's Officers' Club party had worn off.

Besides, Staff Sergeant Roe was grinning at Calverton from his place in front of the second platoon, and First Sergeant Calverton never had liked his platoon sergeants to display such complete self-satisfaction so early in the morning.

"If I can just get over Saturday, I can work this thing out some way," he told himself. "I don't know just how, but I can get Josefson out of here, after he wins our game with the artillery guys, and everything will be swell—unless something happens before Saturday."

That was on a Thursday.

"Listen," Captain Cherry said, when First Sergeant Calverton reported to him, after breakfast. "I just got word that the General is due in here tomorrow, for an inspection and to stay over for the football game. I also found out

that the General has been having trouble with the Russkys. They say our troops have been Shanghaing war criminals they want to try in their own courts. It's a touchy subject, Top, and I thought I'd better tell you so that—so that—well, hang it, you know what I mean."

"Yes sir," Calverton said, stonily.

"And besides, I found out last night that the Colonel has just about doubled his bets on the game Saturday, in spite of the fact that Cooler Geis is in the stockade. Seems some Division colonel needled him into it. We've got to win that game, Top!"

"Yes, sir," First Sergeant Calverton said, again.

"I know—I think I do, anyway, what you're up against Sergeant," Captain Cherry said. "Those Russians crashing in here last night, yelling for an escaped prisoner who just happened to have been a good football player—well, they'll be back, probably. And this time they may be armed with enough authority to go through the camp."

"Private Smith is going out on the range today," First Sergeant Calverton said. "I found out that he hadn't qualified in carbine this year."

"Good!" the Captain said. "Or is it good? Maybe it would be better for the Russians to have a look at Private Smith."

"The score would be a hundred to nothing, favor the artillery, in that case," First Sergeant Calverton said, distinctly. "And the Colonel might start wondering why we'd had garrison jobs as long as we've had. He might even suggest some transfers to that Arctic operation they're having up in Alaska."

Captain Cherry covered his eyes with a hand that shook slightly.

"I'll leave it to you, Top," he said, his voice old with weariness. "Only, for gosh sakes, be careful!"

The Russians arrived at noon that day. They included a full colonel, a short squat man with an amazing amount of gold teeth, and numerous subordinates. The party also included First Sergeant Calverton's Colonel, taut with suppressed anger over the fact that higher Headquarters had given the Russians such a blanket authority to inspect a post under his command. He was courteously distant as the party went through the barracks, the mess halls, the Motor Pool and the Battalion's diminu-

tive ordnance shop.

No Harald Josefson was to be found. Nobody, it appeared, had thought it important enough to warrant mentioning to any of the visitors that a range detail was, at the moment of their inspection, popping away at A-targets, some five miles distance from the 999th encampment.

"Can't understand it," Calverton heard the Colonel tell Captain Cherry, after the Russians had trooped off. "Seem to think we've got some big war criminal hidden somewhere. They've already gone to Division and Corps about it and I suppose we'll be hearing from the Secretary of War any minute now."

"These Russians, sir!" Captain Cherry said, wagging his head. "By the way, sir, we'd like you to lunch at our mess on Saturday."

"Saturday—Saturday?" the Colonel said. "Ah, the day of the game! Why sure, Captain, I'd like to. Might I bring a couple of guests? Division officers. Gentlemen I—ahem—made a few wagers with. Might as well feed them before we rob them, eh?"

"Yes, sir," Captain Cherry said. "Ha-ha."

**T**HE laugh sounded more than ordinarily vacant to the first sergeant who stood at rigid attention as the Colonel turned toward him.

"Well, Sergeant," the straight-backed man with the eagles on his shoulders boomed. "Can't afford to hold you up from getting the men out to practise, eh? Confounded Russians and their suspicions—*har-umph!*"

He caught himself as he was about to embroider on that theme and shot First Sergeant Calverton a sharp look.

"Er—I rather expect to have a winning team out there Saturday, Sergeant," he said. To Calverton, it sounded very much like an order.

"We'll do our best, sir," the First Sergeant managed to say.

"Confounded artillery upstarts!" the Colonel growled. "I'd like to see us win by thirty or forty points."

Calverton swallowed with some difficulty. Even with this new man, this fellow that the whole Russian Army seemed intent on laying their hands on, the 999th Battalion team was going to have trouble with the club that had mopped up the Tank Destroyers in such decisive

fashion. It would take eleven Harald Josefsons, Calverton estimated, to give the Colonel a forty-point victory over the "artillery upstarts."

"We'll do our best, sir," he managed. "Of course, our star man, Corporal Geis, isn't going to be able to play."

"Geis won't play?" the Colonel asked, bristling. "Why not?"

"He—er—got in some trouble, sir," Captain Cherry cut in. "It seems he assaulted one of the German civilian police in town."

The Colonel *har-umphed* again. The look he bent on Captain Cherry and First Sergeant Calverton was not the most pleasant one he ever had worn.

"It seems to me, Captain, we could get more discipline among the men," he said in a brittle voice. "These delinquencies we've been having don't speak well for the Battalion's officers, or the first three grades of non-coms, either. Maybe, as has been suggested in certain quarters, we need a little new blood in this outfit."

He stalked off to his staff car, barely acknowledging the Captain's and Sergeant Calverton's salutes.

"Top," Captain Cherry groaned, after the Colonel had left, "we've got to win Saturday's game. If we don't, we're sunk, the pair of us."

"With the new man, Brown, we've got a chance," Calverton said, hopefully. "Without him, we haven't got a prayer, Captain."

"Is it Brown now?" Captain Cherry asked, absently. "I wish you'd stick to one name, Sergeant. Oh, why did I ever go to O. C. S.?"

He wandered off, shaking his head in a disheartened fashion. First Sergeant Calverton, after a trip to his bunk, where a search under the pillow rewarded him with something that gurgled and gave inner strength, went to the *sportzplatz* to supervise the Battalion team practise.

It was miserable. The range detail that included Private "Smith" did not return until almost dark and without the big man Calverton had found playing piggy-back in the ruined apartment house, the squad, to put it bluntly, smelled.

Punters sent angling dribblers off the toes of their boots. Passers heaved weird wabblers that missed their intended receivers by yards. The tackling suddenly developed a disinclination to stop the men they were supposed to halt in their tracks. The backfield men ran into each

other and let the passes from center go sailing out into space, unattended. The lines did nothing to each other that could possibly be interpreted as anything but lackadaisical pushing.

First Sergeant Calverton raved, swore, threatened, coaxed and pleaded, without success. The simplest plays refused to work, the scrubs over-ran the first team and, in turn, went more sour than they usually were.

"I've coached a lotta teams," First Sergeant Calverton said, weightily, his hands on his hips, after a particularly dismal exhibition, "but I never coached a bunch of nincompoops that could give a ball game away as completely as you guys seem to be trying to."

"We need that new guy you had here yesterday," somebody ventured. "He sparked the club."

"He's better than Cooler Geis, that fellow," somebody else said.

"Listen, you guys!" First Sergeant Calverton bellowed. "It's a pretty sad state of affairs when a team I've been coaching for months let's a guy who hasn't played football for years show it up. Yesterday was the first time that man Smith had a football in his hands since before the war."

"He must've been plenty good then, Top," said a second string end. "Where did he play? Seems to me he looked kind of familiar."

"You never saw him before," the First Sergeant said, hastily. "Now, never mind the new man. Let's run through those plays again and this time let's try to act as though we meant what we were doing."

**B**UT the quality of the practise failed to improve. It was with a sigh of relief that the first sergeant saw the big man he had found in the wrecked apartment house trotting toward the field in football togs.

His arrival seemed to infuse new blood into the entire squad. With him sparking the first team in a backfield spot, it was not long before the entire machine was running more smoothly. The kickers seemed inspired by the roaring punts that "Smith" sent down the field and lengthened their own kicks. The passers began hitting their targets. The blocking and tackling improved.

"Smith" seemed to be everywhere. On defense, he backed up the line and his

big frame seemed to be at the bottom of every pile-up. On offense, he carried the ball two times out of three and seldom gained less than five to ten yards on each stab at the line. First Sergeant Calverton seemed mightily heartened when the practise session finally came to a halt, with the sun below the horizon.

"Keep out of sight as much as you can," he counselled "Smith" when he got the big man to one side. "Them Russians were snooping around here today while you were on the range. It looks like somebody's squealed about me taking you out of that apartment house. I don't like to think what would happen to me if they put their lunch hooks on you before the game."

"And after the game?" the big man asked. "What are you going to do with me then?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," Calverton said, irritably. "The Colonel and the Captain might overlook a lotta things if we win Saturday and they collect their bets."

He was in the orderly room after the evening meal, when Staff Sergeant Roe sauntered in, grinning unpleasantly.

"My furlough come through yet, Top?" he asked. "Or have you forgotten about our little talk?"

"I haven't forgotten about it and your furlough hasn't come through yet," Calverton barked.

"And the dough you're gonna loan me," Roe pursued. "Have you dug that up yet?"

Grudgingly, the first sergeant reached into a pocket and pulled forth a roll of bills. He thrust the money ungraciously at his platoon sergeant.

"Here," he grunted. "I had to put the bee on nearly every man in the Company to dig it up for you, but you'll find it's all there, what you asked for."

Roe counted the money while Calverton regarded him with mournful eyes. The first sergeant was used to getting six for five on any money he lent out and it galled him brutally to shell out money at no interest and with no guarantee that he even would get back the principal. Staff Sergeant Roe's reputation for paying his debts promptly was not the best in the Battalion.

"I'll drop by tomorrow morning for the furlough," Roe said, his smile widening. "It will be ready then, won't it, Top?"

"I suppose so," Calverton groaned.

"I suppose it better had be," Roe said, meaningfully. He grinned at the first sergeant again, tilted his cap a little further to one side of his head and sauntered out.

"There goes walking proof that all the skunks in Germany aren't Nazis," growled the First Sergeant to the empty Orderly Room.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Russian Advance*

**A**TENSE Friday passed without incident beyond the fact that the worry lines in Captain Cherry's face seemed a bit deeper. Sergeant Roe picked up his furlough, due to start on the day after the game, and "Private Smith" sparkled in the final practise session before the big game.

Battalion men who watched him in action hurried to town to put down their bets on their own team before the odds dropped further. The artillery bettors who had jubilantly received the news of Cooler Geis's incarceration grew a bit more wary, although, by agreement amongst themselves, the men of Calverton's battalion kept secret the news about the new wonderman who had joined their squad.

News came from Division Headquarters that the Colonel, stung by taunts voiced by certain other high-ranking officers, had doubled his bets again. Another memorandum came through channels, urging that American military police units cooperate to the fullest extent with the Russians in their efforts to recapture the prisoners who had escaped. T-5 Williams recited the memo with relish as First Sergeant Calverton bowed his head and moaned faintly.

"Some day I'm gonna feed you a bundle of them things," he told the clerk-typist, darkly. "I'm gonna ram 'em right down your throat."

Saturday noon arrived and with it came the Colonel, together with an assortment of majors, captains and other officers from Division Headquarters to partake of C Company's fried chicken and other dainties.

To Calverton, it seemed that the

Colonel was in a dangerous mood. His years of service had taught him how to tell a high-ranking officer's state of mind at forty paces and he was of the opinion now that the needling of the Colonel's friends about the Battalion's chances that afternoon had not all been accepted in the best manner. The Colonel never had been noted for being a good loser. First Sergeant Calverton shuddered to think of what would happen if "Private Smith" didn't come through against the artillery guys that afternoon.

He kept his star hidden from view while the Colonel's party was dining in the officers' mess. To have one of the Division big-shots recognize the old Harvgate star as the man the Russians were turning the town upside down to find would, the Top thought with a shudder, be disastrous.

The *sportzplatz* was a scene of packed humanity at game time, with everybody, from the visiting General down, tense with excitement. The Battalion's season had not been an unbeaten one, but the team had racked up enough wins to be among the leading outfits in the Occupied Zone League, while the artillery eleven had yet to bow in defeat.

Then, too, there was an understandable feeling among the troops about the 999th Military Police Battalion. Enough infantry, engineering, medical and other doggies had been arrested by 999th men to develop a certain amount of healthy hostility in the minds of men who were attending the game with the fervent hope that the 999th would be beaten, but badly.

These anti-M. P. individuals backed up their sentiments with hard cash and the betting was carried on at fever pitch as the game-time hour approached. About the only person in the packed stands who did not have a bet down on the game, by opening whistle time was the General, himself, and the only reason he had not backed his choice was his fear of the charge of partiality to one section of his command over another unit.

First Sergeant Calverton addressed his charges on the sidelines, just before the team scattered to take their positions on the field. Private "Smith" sat huddled in a parka, the hood of which was drawn closely about his face. If it could have been possible, Calverton would have had him play the entire

game in that uniform, minimizing the risk of recognition but, he had decided reluctantly, "Smith's" appearance in that costume might excite some curiosity among the spectators. As it was, he hoped that the big man's helmet would mask enough of the star's face to carry him through the game.

"You know what we're up against," the Top told his men. "This artillery bunch has got a good club. They're red hot on their passes and that back, Murphy, can run. Watch him like a hawk. And I guess I don't have to tell you that you're going to build your attack around Smith, here. If you give Smith plenty of support, we might be able to pull this one out of the fire. If you don't, we haven't got a prayer. Now, go to it."

The artillery outfit had won the toss and elected to defend the north goal. The 999th decided to kick off and it was Private "Smith" who sent the ball booming downfield, to be taken by the artillery back, Murphy, on his own ten-yard stripe. Murphy headed for the further sideline, side-stepped a couple of would-be tacklers, reversed his field and then went crashing to the ground as Private "Smith" nailed him on the thirty-two.

**T**HE artillery team, running from a T-formation, slammed a straight line play at the center, "trying for size." It was Private "Smith" who made the tackle again and with only a yard gain. The artillery team huddled, scattered and attempted their first pass. "Smith's" big hand shot into the air to slap the ball down. The artillery team kicked on third down and the safety man for the 999th was spilled in his tracks on the twenty-six.

First Sergeant Calverton leaned forward on the bench, every nerve in his body quivering, every muscle tense. Now, he told himself, came the show-down. Would Private "Smith" be good enough to rip through that tough artillery line the way he had shredded his own team-mates' line in practise? Or had all the skullduggery, the finagling, been in vain?

The ball came back. The quarterback spun, faked to one half and then slapped the ball to Private "Smith." The big man shot toward his right tackle, found a hole that had appeared there miraculously, and was off. His stiff-arm

took care of the first artillery secondary that lunged at him. Another man got his hands on him but "Smith" was loose in a flicker, shaking himself out of the other man's grip with what appeared to be almost laughable ease. It was the safety man who finally dragged him down with a shoestring tackle and the ball was well past the midfield stripe by that time. The M. P. supporters in the stands roared their approval and First Sergeant Calverton relaxed.

Everything was going to be okay, then. The Colonel was going to collect his bets and there would be no Shanghai detail relegating him and Captain Cherry to some dismal station where the sun never shone. Even though it had cost him hours of anguish, even though he had had to pay blackmail money to Roe, even though he had broken about every regulation in the book, things were going to be fine. Later, after the game, he could resume worrying about what to do with this Private "Smith" he had carried on the roster without authority, a man hunted by what seemed to be the greater part of the Russian Army, a man who technically, at least, was an enemy escaped prisoner.

There was another howl from the stands as "Smith" went sweeping around right end for eight yards. On the next play, the big fellow crossed up the artillery secondary which had been drawn in closer to attempt to plug the breaks in the line.

Private "Smith" got the ball and began fading. The artillery defense scattered desperately in an effort to cover receivers, but they could not beat "Smith's" heave. Straight and true went the pass, to Wallace, the left end, and when Wallace hit the turf the pigskin was less than ten yards from the artillery goal. The visitors called time out and Calverton permitted himself a quick look in the Colonel's direction.

Yes, the Colonel was beaming now, his smile wide as he leaned over to say something to Captain Cherry. The Captain, though, did not seem too elated. The worry lines were still in the Old Man's face and his reply to the Colonel appeared to be somewhat abstracted. First Sergeant Calverton frowned. Why, he asked himself, was the Captain fretting with the game in the bag?

He got his answer in the next moment. As the Colonel turned to speak to an-

other officer, sitting behind him, Calverton saw Captain Cherry's hand move in a signal intended for him. The C. O.'s finger pointed to a section of the bleachers not far removed from the place where the General was sitting and the Top's eyes swung in that direction.

"Oh, good grief!" First Sergeant Calverton groaned. "There they are again!"

"They" were the Russians, a sizeable contingent of officers, all wearing their decorations and all with their eyes pinned on Private "Smith." They seemed to be deep in a discussion that had to do with other matters besides the football game. There was considerable waving of hands and nodding of heads. It was obvious they were excited about Private "Smith" and for reasons other than "Smith's" ability to play football.

"Death where is thy sting?" First Sergeant Calverton soliloquized.

The whistle sounded for the resumption of play, and the teams lined up, the artillery secondary crowding the line now, intent on stopping the big M. P. back who had made them look so ridiculous in the preceding plays.

"Smith" took the ball on a direct pass from center. This time, he scorned an evasive run. Head down, he bulled his way into the line. There was the crash of a collision. The artillery line bent, broke. Private "Smith" went charging over the goal line with at least three artillery linemen clinging to him. The referee's hands shot into the air and there was pandemonium. Even the General was on his feet, cheering.

The Russians were on their feet, too, First Sergeant Calverton saw, but they were distinctly not cheering. Instead, they were moving in a body toward the General's box.

First Sergeant Calverton put his head in his hands, sunk in despair.

"I've got to get him out of here," he told himself. "After all, I promised him I'd look out for him, and I can't let the Russians grab him. And there goes my ball game, my stripes and everything else."

He turned and looked down the bench. "Benjamin," he ordered. "Go in for Smith."

The other men looked at him in shocked surprise.

"You mean it, Top?" the substitute back asked. "You want Smith to come out now? He's a sure-shot drop kicker,

you know."

"I know," Calverton grunted. "But go in for him, anyway."

Private "Smith" came trotting over to the sidelines, his face reflecting his puzzlement. The first sergeant went to the line to meet him, the hooded parka in hand.

"Here," he muttered, swiftly. "Put this on and get out of here, quick. Those Russians have spotted you and they're heading for the General right now."

The big football star's face donned a peculiar expression as he took the parka from the Top.

"What do the Russians want with me?" he asked, slowly.

"You know what they want with you, Josefson," the Top said. "They want to throw you back in the stockade."

"But I'm not Josefson," Private "Smith" said.

"Not Josefson!"

"No," the big man said. "My name's Henry Smith, and I'm an American citizen."

**F**IRST Sergeant Calverton gaped at the big man, his mouth sagging.

"You mean—you mean—" he spluttered, and stopped.

"It's a long story, Sergeant," Smith said. "I used to play football for Harvgate, all right, and on the same team with Josefson. I'm over here now with an American firm that's hoping to get a slice of the reconstruction business in Germany. When Josefson escaped, he hunted me up and—I'll admit it—I hid him. When you broke in on me, taking me for Josefson, I thought it would be a smart idea to make out I really was Harald, to give Josefson a chance to get out of town. That's what I did. Those Russians may recognize me as a friend of Josefson because I tried to intercede in his behalf. At that time I didn't get to first base. That was just before Harald and the others made their break and, I guess, the Russians think I had something to do with it. Probably that's what they're squawking to the General about."

"My sainted aunt!" Calverton managed. "Then your name really has been Smith, all along?"

He slapped his forehead as he was struck with a sudden realization.

"Of course!" he said. "Hurricane Smith, they called you. The two of you, you and Josefson, made pretty nearly

every All-American in the country in your day. So *that's* it!"

He slapped Smith on the shoulder.

"Get back in there," he ordered. "There's not a rule in this league that says a club can't use a civilian, so long as it's an American citizen. We used 'em before and they passed an order okaying it. Maybe I stretched regulations a little, giving you a uniform and putting you on the roster, but I can square that—if we win this game. Get back in there and win for us, Smith."

There was a groan from the M.P. stands as the man Calverton had sent in for Smith missed the try for the extra point. The groan changed to a cheer, however, when Smith galloped back into the line-up and, it developed that one moan was the only one the 999th M.P. Battalion had to utter that afternoon. The artillery club fought hard, but when the final gun sounded, the score was 28 to 7, in favor of the Military Police.

Before the gun sounded, however, First Sergeant Calverton was a very busy man. Hardly had Smith gone back into the game before a summons to the Colonel's seat arrived. There the Top found the Russians, the Colonel, the Captain and one of the General's aides all apparently talking at once.

"What's all this, Sergeant?" the Colonel growled. "These Russian officers seem to think that our man Smith had something to do with the prison break in the Russian zone."

"That man," said the largest, most decorated Russian officer, in flawless English, "tried to procure the release of the prisoner Josefson a few days before Josefson escaped. We are confident he had something to do with it, that he is hiding Josefson. We want to question him."

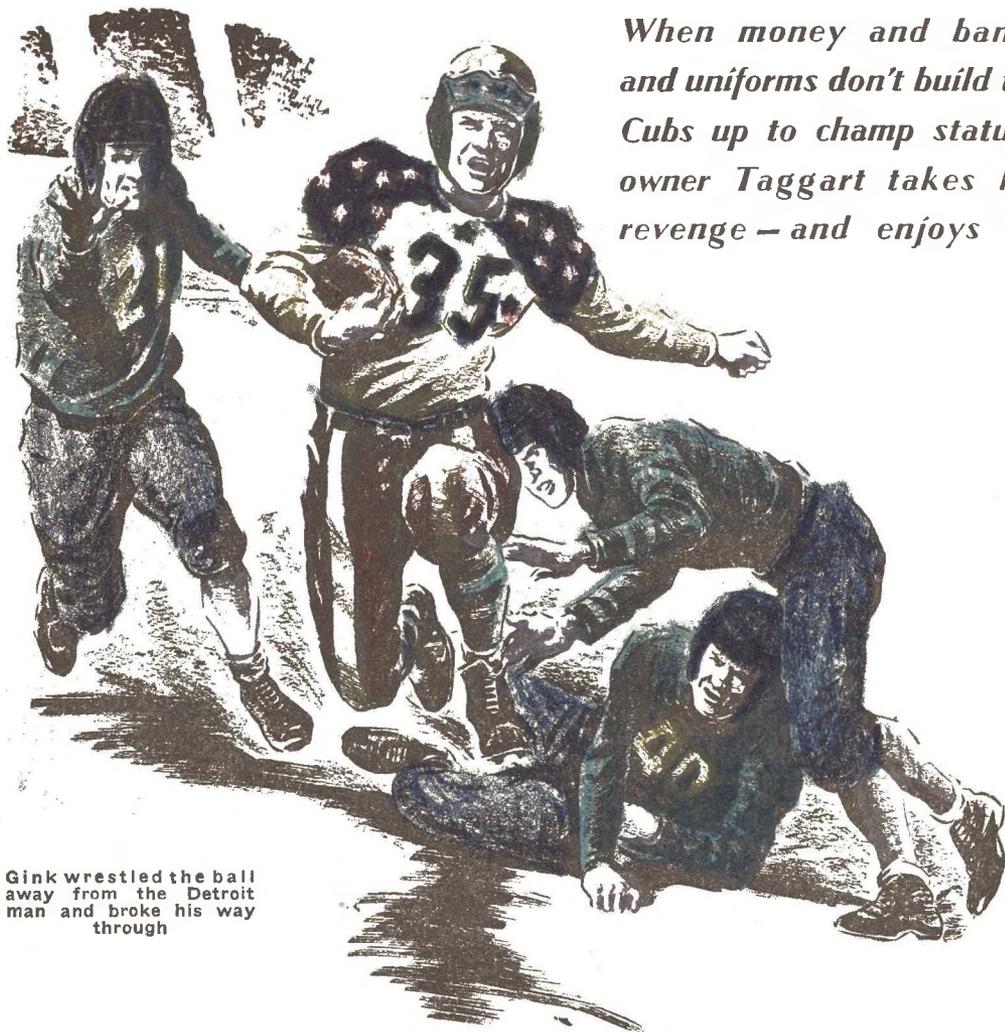
It required a great deal of talk and perspiration to convince the Russians that their questioning of "Hurricane" Smith could wait until after the game, but the Colonel's money was riding on the 999th and the Colonel, as had been noted, never enjoyed losing. He finally persuaded the reluctant Russians to assent to a delay of an hour or so, and that was how the matter eventually rested.

Then the Colonel turned on Calverton.

"Sergeant, there are a lot of angles to this case that will bear investigation," he growled. "I presume you thought you

(Concluded on page 70)

*When money and bands  
and uniforms don't build the  
Cubs up to champ stature,  
owner Taggart takes his  
revenge — and enjoys it!*



Gink wrestled the ball away from the Detroit man and broke his way through

# OF THESE WE SING

By JOE GREGG

**T**HE second game of the Chicago Cubs' new season had all the decorum and modesty of Barnum and Bailey's Circus, and for the same reason. Neither the circus nor the "Chicubs"—the latter, was the personal property of the football team's proud owner, "Deacon" Taggart—neither of the two "Greatest Shows On Earth" had the slightest intention of the second performance being any other way.

The present season was like the last one, only more so. It had to be "more so" because in the previous year the "Greatest Football Show On Earth" had lived up to everything its highly paid public relations counsel had said of it, with one exception.

The team didn't win the national title. In fact, it didn't even win the division championship. To be brutally frank about it, the Chicubs—promptly dubbed the "Shycubs"—had managed to win only two games.

But everything the public relations counsel said was 99.44 per cent pure truth.

In "Tip" Terrell the Chicubs had the college world's flashiest back of a generation. They had "Corny" Darrow, a kicker who could put stuff on the ball that many a baseball pitcher envied. They had Steve Kosawlewski—"Glue Fingers"—the game's greatest pass catcher. They had "Baron" Tillier to chuck to him. The Baron, one of the nobility of the passing game, could hit a running

man on the ear with either hand—and call the ear.

Up front they had “Horse” Zeidtz and “Buster” Phelps and “Toots” Pardee and “Stonewall” Fenton. If that failed to impress you, they also had “Scotty” Moncrief, “Butcher” Tavisser, and “Harp” Bogdanowicz up there, too.

This array didn’t have ordinary substitutes—understudies—like the common run of pro football teams. For substitutes this dazzling line-up had what was once an up-and-coming Chicago Cubs team. Deacon Taggart made this original team secondstringers by opening his purse-strings and acquiring the real stars of the Greatest Football Show On Earth.

To lead the stellar team, Taggart had obtained “Cal” Pfister, the stand-out coach of the West.

It was like acquiring a squad comprised of George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and “Ike” Eisenhower. Then coming up with Napoleon to drill them.

“Buff” Conner, the former Chicubs’ coach, was relegated to a balcony seat along with his old team, which was now the current team’s subs. New Coach Pfister brought along “Cookie” O’Doul for a line coach, so Buff Conner couldn’t crowd into the parade there. And Pfister had “Slip” Harrigan for the backfield tutoring, so Buff couldn’t slide in there, either.

**A**LL that added to the stature of the new stars. It isn’t every decade, let alone every game, that you can see a perfectly good football team and a perfectly good football coach—if somewhat old-fashioned as Buff Conner was—sitting on a bench watching the first stringers.

As if this wasn’t enough—and it wasn’t—a noted designer had blended together some colors and made designs for the new uniforms of the Chicubs. Or Shycubs!

Their jerseys had a white background peppered with constellations of red stars. Their pants were red silk, with white seam-stripes—two of them! Stockings were white with red stripes. And this unblushing get-up was topped by golden helmets with such varied motifs as stars and chevrons, each having a meaning.

The center, aptly enough, sported a blazing gold helmet bearing the three-ringed-chevron-and-lozenge of an Army top kick. This was devised, it was said, with an eye to the Service trade. The guards wore helmets that proclaimed them just ordinary or buck sarges.

The tackles were corporals. Two-stripe chevrons marked them. And the ends were PFCs, with one chevron.

The backfield was similarly identified, with Quarterback Baron Tillier carrying the five-star ring of the super-general on the front and back of his helmet.

Left-halfback Tip Terrell modestly wore one star, while right-half “Firpo” Styles, blocker par excellence, had two of the pointed doodads.

Corny Darrow, at full, was a three-star general.

The subs apparently were buck privates because they just had unblushing uniforms without benefit of stars, chevrons, or pips.

This marking wasn’t haphazard. It had been the result of long smoke-swirled meetings of the Chicubs’ brain-board.

Deacon Taggart, with Cal Pfister nodding sober approval, had said—

“The fans will be interested in our stars. They will be the ones writing football history out there. Let them alone be marked for position. They’ll work the hipper-dipper, the magic, the scoring.”

The stands were renovated, painted and upholstered with cushions of a sort. And a neat little fifty-piece band was thrown in to parade before the game, at the half, and after each victory. The band had done most of its parading before and at the half-time.

A lesser man than Deacon Taggart might have been discouraged by the dismal showing of his Greatest Football Show On Earth in the first year. But there were excuses, and Deacon Taggart was a reasonable man.

Injuries had hit his great line. Temperament had hit his great backfield. Opponents had hit his great ends.

Yet his public relations counsel continued to hit the tom-tom of propaganda, and the crowds continued to come.

Taggart, his great bulk clothed in costly garb only slightly less challenging to the eye than the Chicubs’ uniforms, did not swallow the hurt of losing. Instead, he buried it under wads of additional money to trumpet up the new season. He generously salved his temperamental stars’ differences. He paraded a galaxy of entertainers of stage, radio, and cinema fame. He upped the numbers in the band by a flat ten per cent.

And in the first game his stars got their ears beaten in by the rampant Packers! Before a record turn-out!

True, the Chicubs were packing them in, but this was not Deacon Taggart’s avowed aim.

Deacon Taggart—so-called because of the dead-pan mask with which he faced the world, after an early injury had paralyzed a facial nerve—had once plunged a length of pipe into the liquid-gold of Oklahoma's oil wealth.

Then he started to buy things. This was, of course, some time before he bought the Chicago Cubs.

He bought palaces. He bought automobiles. He bought yachts, airplanes, airports, factories, theaters, museums. He bought priceless art from the Old World and valueless art from the New World. And then, because he liked to be known as the owner of champions, his horses raced to thrilling track victories. Well, once one horse had!

When Taggart couldn't find anything else to champion, he bought the Chicago Cubs and sat back to watch the championship gush in from his football well. When only gas gushed, he took it.

"Nobody can win the first season with a bunch like the Chicago Cubs were," he said.

It was a rather peculiar argument, for the poor old fairly good Cubs never had had much chance to play at all.

One thing about Deacon Taggart was that while he spent he also expected results. You produced or else!

The Packers' win was "or else."

Taggart said to Farquhar, his "man"—

"Nobody but the Chicubs could have lost! I never saw more bums in one park unless it was when the Brooklyn Bums were catching fly-balls with their heads! My stars will produce or they'll vamoose. I can't sink a plug o' dynamite into 'em like I would a balky well, and just blow 'em higher'n their own opinions of themselves. But what I can do, I can yank in the do-re-mi and watch them scream. Eh, Farquhar?"

"Oui, monsieur."

Farquhar's eyes were a rheumy blue. Farquhar was not his name at all. It was August Schultz. But in the early days Deacon Taggart had had a mean boss named Farquhar. Taggart liked naming his valet after the fellow.

"My shoes look dirty, Farquhar," Taggart would say. "Polish them again." Or—"Hey, Farquhar, these eggs smell bad. Eat them."

"Oui, monsieur."

Taggart understood no French, and Farquhar-Schultz spoke none, except the rehearsed "Oui, monsieur." Taggart hated yes-men but he couldn't stand for a no-man among his hired help. So he had struck a compromise with that French phrase for "yes, sir"—Oui, monsieur.

WHEN the Chicubs had run in circles, large and small, and those unimpressed Packers beat them until their howls echoed louder than the bass drums of the band, Deacon Taggart had quite a bit to say to Cal Pfister behind the secrecy of oaken doors.

Not much of it was printable.

"One more stinkeroo like that and you can play patty-cake with your gang somewhere else. Oh, I'll let you down easy enough. A lot easier than you've let me down. My overpaid public relations man, J. Manse Crowe, will see to that. I'm just tellin' ya, Cal, so ya won't get any wrong ideas and believe what public relations says. What those guys say don't mean any more than what you have been sayin' for more than a year now. I'm just warnin' ya—Farquhar!"

"Oui, monsieur."

"The gentlemen are leaving, Monseer Pfister and Monseer Crowe. Their hats, Farquhar."

"Oui, monsieur."

After Crowe and Pfister had slunk out of the overdone palace to lick these verbally inflicted wounds, Taggart pointed to his humidor. He let Farquhar insert a king-size perfecto between his lips. Taggart got it going and blew a cloud of expensive smoke.

"Wait until you see those lugs play next Sunday," he said, with a wink. "Just wait!"

Farquhar said something that sounded as strangely un-French as "Says you." He recovered himself quickly and said "Oui, monsieur" twice.

"Wee-wee-wee," Taggart mimicked. "Well, that's about the way them Chicubs will sound if they don't produce come next Sunday. Wee-wee-wee. It'll be the case of a mob o' little pigs going to market. On a one-way ride. I won't let anybody make a monkey out of me. Only myself. And if you agree with that last, you are fired, Farquhar. Savvy? Savvy toot sweet, yes?"

"Oui, monsieur."

Farquhar was impressed. Maybe Deacon Taggart did speak French, after all.

The visiting Pittsburgh Pirates quietly worked out before the second Chicubs game while the fans were still storming into the stands. Then the team retired to watch the impressive home stars parade their talent and strength.

Watching Corny Darrow punt and Baron Tillier pass—great, spiraling, long flights of the football that had the crowd gasping—was like watching the "Babe" and "Larrupin' Lou" parking them into the center-field stands back in the heyday of the Bronx

Bombers. You just didn't see how anybody could have a chance against the Chicubs when they were clicking.

Then came the parade of the band. A nationally known radio singer crooned into the mike. Everybody wondered what held him up.

Then a soprano did her patriotic bit—"a certified check, if you please." She was so big and blimpy that everybody wondered what held her down. Then the teams were lined up for the kick-off.

The Pirates received. And on the very first play, their "Tuggy" O'Marra, a beer-blowed back, went through the entire Shycubs for a score.

The Shycubs got really mad then. Nobody before had seen such action as ensued thereafter. For thirty minutes the Shycubs smashed, passed and turned ends to drive the Pirates back on their heels. Right down to the Pirates' ten-yard stripe, the stars went—and stopped cold. Soon the Pirates got the ball and kicked.

The Chicubs went down the field seven times. Each arrival at the magical ten-yard marker aroused new hope in the breasts of the Chicago rooters. This was the time. No, this was the time. No. Ah! This was the time.

Each time was the time the home stars threw their trick phantom-back play at the Pirates. The four Shycub backs broke their way over the goal line while the ball bobbed around back there on the twenty-five, from where Baron Tillier passed beautifully—into the hands of a Pittsburgh Pirate back across the goal line.

It was the time when Firpo Styles side-swiped the man he was blocking for, and knocked him so hard that he fumbled the ball.

It was the time when Corny Darrow drop-kicked the ball squarely for the uprights. But the synthetic bladder took that time to hiss out its life, and the play was cancelled because the ball was not an inflated prolate spheroid when it went over.

It was that Yale-Princeton game all over again, when Yale's "Lucky Larry" Kelley scored early in the game against a tremendously superior Tiger team, and "Fritz" Crisler moaned and went mildly insane as his lads vainly tried to make a touchdown play against the Elis. And at the end the Tiger-Eli score had been 7-0.

But of course there was still time here with the Shycubs. And when they went into the dressing room for the half-time rest, Deacon Taggart was inclined to let them think it

over and come out with blood in their eyes and scores in their plays.

But not Cal Pfister. Cal ripped into his men with a verbal tongue-lashing that would have deflated even Jack the Giant Killer. All the names Taggart had called Pfister in that interview the week before were now passed on to the Shycubs. With very damaging results!

**W**HEN the stars went back out, they were either laboring under titanic inferiority complexes that marked their play, or they were so mad at Pfister, O'Doul, Harrigan and the lesser coaches that the hard faces of the determined Pirates looked like friends in the old family album.

Deacon Taggart came down to the bench to complete the emotional debacle of the hapless Shycubs. That dead-pan look of his succeeded in driving away from his immediate neighborhood all who were remotely connected with the new Cubs, leaving him in a small island of old Chicago stalwarts and some of the rookies who had somehow swum in this school of great fish like minnows among whales.

He glowered about him and found himself being stared at by a big man whose blue eyes were as calm as the skies above.

"Who are you?" Taggart asked.

"Buff Conner," was the answer. "Remember?"

Taggart winced inwardly. The emotion didn't register on his face, however. He puffed his cigar, sizing Conner up, then looked right and left about him at Conner's old charges—

"Kerry" Drago, the fullback; "Turk" Kinner, the halfback; "Gink" Bedault, the towering French-Canadian guard. The buck privates of the star-studded roster also stared at him calmly, unblinkingly.

Taggart found a cigar and thrust it into Conner's hand.

"Like a good smoke? Here. Light up."

Conner looked at the wrapper, grinned, and gave the cigar back. He took a bent and twisted stogie from the deep pocket of his windbreaker and jammed it into Taggart's lean hand.

"Wrappers don't make a cigar," Conner said. He nodded at the field and at the Shycubs. "Haven't you learned that yet?"

Taggart looked at him bleakly, then turned his eyes to the field.

The Shycubs were rapping on the goal door once more.

Deacon Taggart was not a challenge to Einstein in the world of mathematics. But

he could add. It had been somewhat sourly said by those to whom he later sold oil services that Taggart also could multiply but that he should not do it when he was supposed to add.

But he could add. He had added, "one and one oil wells make two; two and two millions make four," and so on. He looked out at the sad goings-on before him, and he said—

"Eleven and one make nothing. Nothing I care to watch, anyway." The Shycubs had driven right up to the goal line and shied again. "Listen to that crowd boo," Taggart said.

Buff Conner listened because he couldn't help himself.

"Booooo! Booooo! Booooo!"

Deacon Taggart looked around him again at the football buck-privates who flanked him on either side. He was sure he had seen these men before. Maybe they had once been head-lined. Or maybe they looked like what he had seen before he had started demonstrating his simple ability to add and to multiply. Maybe they just looked like workers.

Buff Conner glanced around, met the owner's eye, and grinned.

"You don't seem to be enjoying that cigar. I mean, the face you are making. Light up my stogie and enjoy yourself."

Taggart lighted it, puffed, found that he liked it. His eyes sparked a glow of remembrance.

"Long time since I enjoyed one o' these." He eased the band from his own king-size Havana and slid it onto his gift cigar. "My public expects me to use only the best. Except in football."

"Oh, I dunno," Conner said. "There are some of the best men in the country out there playing for you, Taggart. Trouble is, they have been taught under eleven different coaches, which is to say eleven different systems and philosophies of football. Today Cal Pfister is trying to play them under a different one again."

"And they're too dumb to learn or too old," the Chicubs' owner remarked.

"Nothing like that at all," Conner replied. "Look, you made your dough in oil. What did you do—just walk out on an oil field, stick your thumb down, and bring up a gusher?"

**T**AGGART was irritated by the booing and by this man. "Of course not. I had to learn all there was to learn. After that, I got me a partner who knew even more than I

did. We sweated and we slaved until our savvy and our sweat brought us a piddlin' trickle of oil. We nursed that, then sweated and slaved some more. Then, whether by a miracle or by maybe something we didn't realize we had learned, we hit it. Blooey! Just like that! All the oil in the world, it seemed, came up outa that pipe."

"Football is like that, too," Conner said. "You get a good man, or good men, and you sweat it out and learn what the meaning of heartbreak is. You see other teams with less than you have go by you. But for a good reason."

"Which is?" Taggart asked sharply.

"Which is that they have either the magic touch, without which there is perhaps arguing but certainly no winning, or they have been playing together longer than you have, know one another's game, know all the little things that add up into big things. Football and oil are alike, Taggart. Anybody watching a gusher or a champ outfit thinks there is nothing to it. And that the guys who own it, coach it, or play on it are so many lucky lugs."

Taggart dead-panned the coach.

"Is that why you think I bought the Chicubs? Because everything looked easy about a champ outfit?"

Conner chuckled.

"You didn't even have that much sense, Taggart. You decided to insure yourself a champ team. You thought you could buy it. It could be that you are a very smart oil man. I hope for your sake that you are. But as a football man you know where you rate?"

Taggart's eyes were level and mean. "Let's you tell me."

"You ought to be out there with those boys, stumbling around with them, taking your lumps for trying to mix an All-American dish and having it come out foreign hash. Because no matter how much dough you've spent, no matter how pretty you make it all look, it is still hash. Turkey hash, pal."

Deacon Taggart looked out at his high-priced "turkeys," as Buff Conner had dubbed them, and the blood came to the oil man's face. He didn't like this talk. He wasn't used to it. It reminded him of the time he'd spoken out of turn in Tulsa country, and a driller had beaten him from here to there as hundreds watched.

Now, as thousands watched, he was being beaten all over the Chicubs' playing field. Anger welled up in him. He turned on the big, mild football coach. Deacon Taggart had wanted a champ outfit. This man was practically telling him he would have to wait

a lifetime for it. And be lucky to get it then!

Taggart looked around at the faces of the subs near Buff Conner—at Buff's old team. Taggart was suddenly happy he was not in a dark alley with them. They were big and mean-looking. Deacon Taggart had kept them on the bench, except for occasional sorties to rest the Shycubs for another try. They were perhaps rusted, had lost their fight, were stiffened and old from non-use. And they were sore at him for it.

Taggart wouldn't take having men look at him like that. He felt like a not-too-tasty bit of cat liver, after the cat is through with it.

He slanted his gaze out onto the field again, and it came to him then! He would break the fancy football machine he had fashioned. He grimaced wryly.

"And I'd better do it quick before they break me."

Taggart would break them, and he would also cause sub-coach Buff Conner and his muscled understudies untold grief for the impolite way in which these benched nobodies had treated him. As if he were so much cat liver! He was even smiling a little when the Pirates intercepted a Shycub pass and went the distance.

But nobody knew he was smiling, least of all Buff Conner and his men. Deacon Taggart was smiling deep inside. His dead-pan face did not let on that he was.

For the third game, when the Lions came to Chicago from neighboring Detroit, Deacon Taggart's trumpet men of the public relations section had been working things up to a boiling pitch.

Newer, greater artistes were billed to entertain the fans while they waited for game time. The band had been drilled to new steps, new tootlings. Pigeons were to be released from hidden traps in the French horn section of the band, which had had another ten per cent raise. A famed strip-tease dame was to ride out and do a Lady Godiva act, starting fully clothed and finishing vice versa on a white horse. This alone guaranteed a record turn-out, because nobody had seen a white horse in a long, long time!

There had been other promises, too, made in the dead-pan manner of Deacon Taggart. "Come and see. Just come and see!"

Chicago had Bronx-cheered his costly stars. The Shycubs had left-footedly booted his fondest hopes. Buff Conner and his men had laughed at him from where they sat on the bench like so many barnacles.

Well, this was to be Deacon Taggart's day.

**T**HE Detroit Lions were touted as the coming champs, so everybody would come to see them play the Shycubs.

"Ha, ha!" Deacon Taggart laughed grimly behind his dead-pan mask.

The Shycubs were going to come out and try again.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Taggart reacted with a grisly sense of humor.

The bench gang—Conner's own bunch—were going to sit there and laugh at Deacon Taggart, were they?

Taggart sat in his several acres of gleaming living room, making plans.

"They'll see, they'll see! When I'm ready to let them see! This is my show, and it will unfold when I am ready to unfold it."

Farquhar-Shultz, watching him from behind a portiere—although he did not know the drape by that name—shivered and made himself very scarce. Farquhar-Shultz knew murder when he saw it. He was an avid reader of detective books. What he had seen in Deacon Taggart's face was disturbing. It had been the dead-pan mask of a ruthless killer planning doom to the happiness of a hundred thousand people.

Taggart stirred among his gory thoughts and shouted, "Farquhar!"

Farquhar didn't respond with a cheery "Oui, monsieur." Farquhar said in very un-French Brooklynese, "Nurs to you, ya bum!" But he was very careful not to let Deacon Taggart hear.

No man is a hero to his valet, it is said. Farquhar was a coward to his boss. Farquhar beat it, but quick.

Deacon Taggart shot his shafts of malice shortly before game time.

He came to the dressing room of the Shycubs and motioned Cal Pfister to him.

"We are not using the stars today," he said. "I have bids on every single one of them and am now waiting for the commissioner to give me the okey-dokey. They can sit on the bench and watch. I do not wish to risk injuring one of them. They might go out there and get hurt going over for a score. You cannot tell these days what will happen."

Pfister's face was stormy.

"Says you!" he exclaimed. "I'm boss here! My boys will romp all over the Lions today. They are due."

"They're due like a mortgage," Taggart said flatly. "I'm foreclosing. As to you being boss, you're through, too. I'm breaking up housekeeping."

"You can't do this to the fans!" Pfister shouted. "You can't. They came here to see

football. You can't just cancel out and send them home. There'll be a riot. People will be killed."

Deacon Taggart had forseen just that. He would play the old Chicago Cubs, and their hard-talking skipper, Buff Conner, would be killed. Taggart was going to feed him to the Lions.

He smiled inwardly with smug satisfaction as he thought of it—

"The stars get benched and traded off. Pfister feels my fist for a change. The fans get the razzberry from me with a bunch of bench-fungus to stare at when I send the Buff Conner gang out to get their ears beaten in."

Then Taggart spoke aloud.

"It will be like I say, Pfister. My way, the public relations will give you a nice let-down, which will be their last act as they go out. Otherwise, I'll really fix your little red cart for you in the propaganda aisles of the newspapers. Savvy?"

Pfister savvied.

Buff Conner took the news with a gleam in his mild eyes.

"Lord love you, Deacon, Lord love you!" he breathed. "You don't know what this is going to be for my boys!"

"Maybe I do," Deacon Taggart said evenly. "Maybe I do."

"I mean sitting on the bench like they been doing," Conner said. "Keeping in perfect shape, watching the big shots play, watching the other teams. Working out among themselves only, until each of my players knows just what the other one is thinking, let alone doing. They're what you might safely describe as ready-to-go. But Deacon, one other thing—"

"What?" Taggart thought of a condemned man making a last request. "What other thing?"

"Well, when you accepted my stogie, you hung your own exclusive band on it, your cigar band? Well, it would be nice to let my team, your team, have those helmets with the chevrons and the stars and the pips. I think they'd like that, Deacon."

Taggart was grinning all over. Perfect! Just perfect!

"Okay," he said. He crooked a finger at Farquhar, who was lingering near. "You heard, Farquhar? Tell Mr. Pfister those are my orders. Those players of Mr. Conner's, they are to wear the stars' helmets. I'm going out to get a ringside seat. This I cannot miss!"

He felt like a modern Nero going to a lion feast.

DEACON TAGGART sat very small and still in the bedlam that was being poured down on the field by the frenzied Chicago fans. Out there, football history was being written—by Buff Conner's men.

They had taken over at the kick-off from a confident, cocky, sure-fire Detroit champ eleven. And Conner's collection of Chicago bench-fungus had proceeded to set up an assembly line of score production under the dazed eyes of the Detroit Lion players.

Chicub spinners, slashes, short passes, laterals—all the power and hipper-dipper of a really great team—worked the ball down and over the Lion's goal for a score in four action-packed crazy minutes.

The Chicago team that had been pretty good when Deacon Taggart decided to buy him a championship, the non-stars that had worked together so long and then had been benched, had practised regularly, religiously, zealously. They had watched all the faults and all the virtues of other good men and had worked on those faults and virtues among themselves in their practise sessions.

Now, with the urge of action on them, with the pent-up forces of a-season-and-more of bench-warming moving them to ruthless execution of what they had learned in their moments of bitter watching, the Chicub subs were powdering the Detroit Lions with everything in their repertory.

The Lions took the kick-off after the first stunning score and hit back hard and viciously. Their top-dog halfback, "Slick" Flowers, was fancy-stepping it to a gain when Gink Bedault of the old Chicago team met up with him. The Detroit back evidently thought he was playing men who tackled in an orthodox fashion. He was mistaken.

Gink Bedault tackled the ball and wrestled it away from the Detroit man, and broke his way through the rest of them to rack up another score.

The stands went crazy. Deacon Taggart sat very still, trying to figure it all out. This was what he had planned in reverse English. It was Nero's Christian martyrs with this difference—the martyrs were eating the lions!

Then Buff Conner was speaking to him in a voice hoarse from cheering.

"Deacon, I owe you an apology. I thought you were as dumb a dope as ever I saw. But you're smart. I thought you had the idea that uniforms and propaganda and bands and the roaring crowds made a team. I was sorry the human race had to own you as a member. Because it is not that way, really. It is not of the great backs, of the flashy kickers, and

the pass-catchers that we sing in the football world. It is of a team that has come through the hell of trial and error, and has found the amalgam of understanding and mutual effort. It is of these that we sing in the football world. And what you did was just what the boys needed."

Deacon Taggart sat there wondering. He waited because he couldn't do anything else. Buff went on—

"You were smart enough to realize those boys needed only one thing to make them champs—the benching that you gave them, the time to suffer as they watched others play and saw their old errors through those others. They became knit in a determined, smart, heads-up gang of real men. It is of them we talk, a team, not just a bunch of stars. Deacon, I congratulate you. That team out there is now a championship

eleven! Look at 'em. They can't miss! Look at them! They're scoring again! They're terrific! It may not be a 73-0 trimming like another Chicago team gave a Red-skin team once. But it will do!"

Taggart grinned. It almost showed this time on his dead-pan mask. He stirred his stern around and looked at Farquhar, who was on his left.

"That's the way I figured it," Deacon Taggart said happily. "That's the way I figured! I wanted a champ gang, and I sweated it out this way. Right Farquhar?"

Farquhar-Shultz said in very good French, "Boosh-wah!" He added to this excellent French, a vulgar, ripping sound. But it was lost in the frenzy of the Chicago stands.

Deacon Taggart twisted his head.

"Huh? Whaja say, Farquhar?"

"Oui, monsieur."

## THE TOP-KICK

(Concluded from page 62)

were working in behalf of the Battalion, but I'm afraid there has been some mighty irregular procedure. I—"

There was a cheer from around them and the Colonel broke off to watch Hurricane Smith go sweeping down the field for a twenty-yard gain. The Colonel's eyes lighted with delight.

"We'll go into this after the game," he said, hurriedly. "And Sergeant, I don't think the punishment will be too severe if—ah—this man Smith keeps on making plays like that."

And, as it turned out, it wasn't bad at all. Hurricane Smith satisfied the Rus-

sians that he was blameless, so far as engineering the prison break. Neither Captain Cherry nor the Top received more than a mild reprimand for the fractured regulations. The 999th M.P. Battalion enjoyed a wave of prosperity when the bets were collected.

Yes, everybody was happy, in the end. Everybody, that is, but Staff Sergeant Roe. When he emerged from his conference with the Top Kick he looked anything but overjoyed. But Calverton, when he had finished with Blinky Roe, looked very well satisfied indeed with the world.

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(Adv.)

# THE HUMAN SIDE

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

*Raymond was worth twenty thousand dollars on any team—but on those Beavers he wasn't good for a dime!*

**P**ARKER, of the "Times," shook his head dolefully and made clucking sounds with his tongue.

"I always thought you were a smart football coach, Slage," he said. "I guess I can be wrong."

The gray haired mentor of the Boston Beavers shrugged and kept his eyes on his first squad trying out a few new plays against the second stringers.

"A man can be wrong in a lot of things, Parker," he said out the corner of his mouth. "So what?"

The sports writer flipped his cigarette away and buttoned his coat tighter against the cutting October wind.

"What I mean is I think you're crazy," he said. "Twenty thousand dollars for Kirk Raymond! It doesn't make sense."

"You don't think he's worth that much?"

"Every dime of it, Slage. But not on your team."

"Why not?"

"He asks me, why not!" the sports writer said in an exasperated voice. "There's only one answer, naturally. Because Steve Wallace plays on your team, also."

Slage straightened up from his crouch and gave Parker a withering look.

"Even you, too?" he growled. "Sweet tripe, when will people learn that college football and pro football are two different kinds of things?"

"We all know it now," Parker said smoothly. "We also know that human nature runs pretty true to form. That's something you don't seem to know, or you wouldn't have those two on the same team. They don't like each other, Slage. They don't like each other even a little bit."

"So I'm tearing out my hair with worry!" the Beavers' coach snarled. "Listen, Parker, I know all about those fellows. They played three years of football against each other. It was a regular feud. Whenever they met they tried to kill each other. I even know there was a dame mixed up in it somewheres. Sure, they hated each other's insides, but



Wallace intercepted the pass

that was in college days. They're playing for cash, now, not letters and Alma Mater glory. That's the difference."

"How you slip in your old age!" Parker sighed. "Look, Slage, those two are in pro football simply for the fun, and the kick they get out of it, plus newspaper glory. Not for cash, friend. Why either of those boys could buy the Beavers, or any other team, lock stock and barrel, and not even notice the dent in their bank balance. Why, their families are dripping with money. Look! See that? Was Wallace's heart in that block? You've got worries on your hands, Slage. I'm feeling sorry for you."

The Beavers' coach didn't say anything. He had seen the play and it was all he could do to keep the agony out of his face. It had been an off tackle smash through the weak side with Kirk Raymond carrying the mail and Wallace clearing the way.

**B**UT Wallace's one hundred and ninety-six pounds, topped by flaming red hair, hadn't cleared everything aside. He had taken one man out, but only for an instant or so. The prospective tackler had remained on his feet and with the rest of the punch-drunk second stringers, he had laid the ball carrier like a rug.

Through half closed eyes, Slage watched his two stars get up and returned to their backfield positions for the next play. Raymond's face was red and he said something to Wallace as he walked by. The redhead sneered and held both his hands out to show there had been a hole this wide that Raymond should have gone through. Raymond barked something at the quarter and smacked his two palms together hard.

The next play started from the same formation but Wallace carried the ball and Raymond ran the interference. It was like looking at moving pictures you had seen before. Wallace charged head down for the hole that Raymond seemed to open up, but the second string backfield brushed Raymond to one side and shut the hole tight. Wallace went down on his face for a wonderful seven-inch gain.

"Yes, you've got worries, Slage, old boy," Parker murmured. "I'll leave you to them. See you some more."

"Go jump in the lake!" Slage growled and put his whistle to his lips.

Scrimmage ceased out on the field. Slage yelled that was enough for the day, and beckoned to Wallace and Raymond. The two college greats ambled over, each ignoring the other. Slage gave them a scornful head-

to-toe glare.

"Maybe you two haven't been introduced!" he snapped. "You certainly acted like strangers out there. Or did graduating from college mean nothing, and you're still a couple of school kids? Well?"

Wallace pulled off his helmet and ran dirty fingers through his red hair.

"Don't look at me, coach," he said. "Our new star, here, wants to do everything. He admits he can do it. I'd offer to carry him on my back, but he wants to be a hero all by himself."

"Very funny, Wallace!" Raymond said with a sneer. "When you can really play football, that will be the day. Why don't you put Stacey at left half, coach? Now there's a man who knows something about this game. At least he can stay on his feet."

"Stay on his feet?" Wallace echoed scornfully. "Turn around, Mr. Raymond, and I'll brush the dirt off your back."

"Drop it!" Slage barked, and his eyes bored at them like gimlets. "Why don't you two grow up? The club paid out plenty of jack for both of you and expects a good return on its investment. Pro football is a business—a kind of business where personal feelings don't count. Forget this feud you had when you were lugging school books to classrooms. You're in business, now. I'm warning you, watch your step or you'll both be out on your ears. Now, beat it."

The two stars shrugged, ignored each other, and went off in opposite directions. Slage groaned and bit into his lower lip.

"A waste of breath!" he muttered. "Maybe Parker is right. Maybe I am slipping, figuring playing pro ball would make any difference to those two college prima donnas. Bah!"

Four days later the Beavers played a practise exhibition game against a local team. It was to be a warm-up in preparation for the start of the pro season two weeks hence. To Slage, however, it would be a very important game. And during those four days whenever he thought about it he acquired another gray hair in his head.

Getting Raymond and Wallace together on the same team had been strictly his idea. "Dutch" Baker, owner of the Beavers, had been against the idea of putting Raymond on the payroll. He didn't believe that the pair would get along with each other, and the result would be bad for the team in general.

Slage couldn't see that. He argued pro football was different—that when men play for cash they should forget the college stuff

and all that goes with it. He was sure he could knock sense into the pair and get them working together smooth as silk. When that came to pass the Beavers would be the hottest thing on the gridiron from Maine to Texas. In the end Dutch Baker had given in and signed the check.

Now, the deal was backfiring in Slage's face. True, the pair play'd good football. From the stands they looked great. They weren't great, and Slage knew it better than anybody else. Each did just enough to get by, but neither one of them put in that extra bit that turns a line plunge into a first down, and a pass into a score. The other players in the league were no dopes. They'd spot the friction after a couple of plays, if they hadn't heard about it already. From there on they'd kick lumps out of the Beavers.

**T**HERE was one thing Slage could do. He could send them in seperately. Keep one on the bench while the other man was working. That would gum up his play system, though.

His strategy was built around those two. Using them separately would be like taking a local instead of an express. You got there eventually, but a whole lot later than you should have. Besides, you don't pay out twenty thousand bucks to improve a team that way.

Slage felt his years more than ever, and the practise game was like a knife twisting in his heart. The Beavers took it by four touchdowns and a couple of field goals. But Slage and the league spotters scattered throughout the stands, knew that it should have been eight touchdowns, and six field goals. Wallace and Raymond mixed together like oil and water. It was pitiful. It made you want to cry.

Between halves Slage singed the pair of them to a lovely brown. They took it silently and improved during the second half exactly zero-minus.

When it was all over Slage didn't go near the dressing-room. He was afraid Dutch Baker would be there with a knife to carve twenty thousand dollars worth out of his hide.

So he walked in the opposite direction and bumped smack into Parker, instead. The sports writer raised both his hands and shook his head.

"Relax, friend," he said. "Put that gun away. I won't say a word, honest."

"But what you'll write for your department, huh?" Slage rasped. "Well, add my

comment at the end! The Beavers will win the championship this year, and Raymond and Wallace will win it for us!"

"Now, there's a juicy item!" Parker murmured and gave the gray-haired coach a keen look. "How come? I think I mentioned something about human nature running true to form, didn't I? You think you can change that sort of thing? Or what is the big secret of your expected success this year, Mr. Slage?"

Hot words rose to the coach's lips. He choked them back and stared long and hard at the autumn clouds scudding across the sky. He looked at Parker and nodded.

"You've guessed it," he said. "Human nature. It's a funny thing, is human nature, Parker. The rule works both ways."

The sports scribe looked blank, then a tiny gleam of suspicion crept into his eyes.

"Maybe that makes sense, but I don't get it," he said.

"You will," Slage told him with a grin. "You, and some other of the wise boys. Don't miss the European Food Relief game we play with the Maroons, next Saturday. I've got a hunch it will be something."

"The Maroons?" Parker exploded. "That bunch? If you don't score a hundred points against those old has-beens you should be voted out of the league. Why Clarke at left half is the only man on the squad still young enough to hang onto a ball and not drop it from palsy. And even Clarke's been out of the league for three years. A football game? Ask me and I'll tell you the customers will be robbed."

"It wasn't my idea, that game," Slage shrugged. "The management thought it would draw to have a pick-up team of the old-timers play us. Shucks, everybody knows we'll smother them, but its for a good cause, so the stands will be jammed. As I said, be there! You may see something."

"A slaughter, except for the old halfback, Clarke," Parker snorted and walked away.

Slage had called the turn when he said the stands would be jammed for the Beaver-Maroon game for the European Food Relief. There wasn't even standing room left when the first kick-off went end over end down the field. One-sided though the game was bound to be, fans dug down for the price to see some of their half-forgotten favorites in action again. And they also paid cash to see the Beavers and their two new backfield stars, Kirk Raymond and Steve Wallace.

Wallace took the opening kick on his own three-yard line. He carried it up the sideline to the fifteen. There Raymond failed to spill

a tackler but Wallace managed to sidestep him in spite of that and went angling across the field to pile on fourteen more yards. As he crossed the thirty, a thunderbolt in Maroon colors barged out of nowhere and hit Wallace so hard they felt it clear up in the press box. Wallace got up slowly, looked at the thunderbolt—whose name was Clarke—and grinned, tight-lipped.

On the next two plays Raymond went through center to make it first down. If he had received real blocking he probably would have gone for a score. Hunched over on the bench Slage never took his eyes off his star pair for a moment. That is, save for a couple of times when he watched Clarke smack into Wallace whether the redhead was carrying the ball or not. But the Big Maroon left half was only one man—he wasn't eleven. By the sheer power of youth the Beavers pushed the ball down the field for a score. An end run was tried for the extra point, and it was made.

**W**HEN the Maroons received the kickoff, the ball sailed down into the big paws of Clarke. He tucked it under his arm and dug his cleats into the turf. He went twenty yards non-stop, then dodged a tackler to the wrong side. Had he stepped the other way he might have broken through into a clear field. As it was, he went the other way and ran into four Beavers led by Wallace. It wasn't Wallace who finally pulled the big fellow to earth. Wallace got a stiffarm smack in his face that tossed him on his ear.

That run was the best Clarke could do for a while, though. The Beaver ends started charging in to smear plays almost before they were under way. The Maroons made four yards in three tries, and elected to kick.

Raymond had gone back to the safety spot and he gathered in the ball on the dead run. And he kept running. Wallace and a guard cut over to do interference.

Out of the tangled mass, where the ball had been, popped Clarke. He chased Raymond toward the sideline. Wallace threw a half-hearted block at him but Clarke didn't bother to twist away. He just kept on running and Wallace had the experience of falling against a moving stone wall. The redhead hit the ground hard and Raymond had slipped past Clarke and was across for the second score before Wallace had picked himself up.

It was like that all during the first half. It was the Beavers against Clarke mostly. And the only man Clarke seemed to be playing against was Wallace. He covered the redhead like a tent, banged him hard whenever

he got the chance, and a few pairs of sharp eyes saw the old elbow and knee being worked now and then. On almost every play, Clarke let the rest of the team worry about Raymond. He took care of Wallace, and was plenty rough about it, too.

In the dressing-room between halves, Wallace was a two-legged load of TNT with the hissing fuse getting shorter by the minute. He didn't talk to anybody. He didn't even listen to the few routine words Slage had to say. He just muttered to himself and stared at the opposite wall with murder in his eyes. Slage didn't go near him. He didn't go near Raymond, either. He said his few words and went back out onto the field.

"Hey, what's eating that Clarke?" Parker's voice spoke at Slage's elbow. "Is there a grudge between those two? I never knew they'd met."

"Me either," Slage said and shrugged. "Looks to me like Clarke figures he can smear our stuff by concentrating on Wallace."

"Seems more like Clarke's asking to get killed before the game's over!" Parker snorted. "Why three times I saw him pass up a tackle to smack into Wallace. That Wallace is getting plenty mad."

"Can you blame him?" Slage grunted, and let it go at that.

It was true, though. The redhead started the second half like a crazy man. Whenever he ran interference he was like an army equipped with tanks. He began spilling Clarke in a heap and opened up holes that Raymond trotted through without a hand being laid upon him. Not only Clarke but the whole Maroon team became so many lumps of tinfoil in Wallace's way. And when the redhead intercepted a high pass for Raymond he was a million-dollar hurricane on cleats.

Before the third quarter was over, even Raymond was pounding him on the back, and helping him up onto his feet. Whenever he carried the ball, Raymond returned the favor by making the roadway clear of all Maroon tacklers. Clarke was almost out on his feet from being spilled on his ear so many times. But he kept after Wallace until they had to take him out. Two more plays and they would have been forced to do it with a stretcher.

Finally the game ended with the Beavers so far out in front that it didn't matter by how much. The cash customers went away happy. They had had a preview of what Kirk Raymond and Steve Wallace were going to do for the Beavers that year. The

smoothest working pair of backfield men ever to pull on a shoe. They had cheered themselves hoarse as Wallace and Raymond walked off the field slapping each other on the back and grinning like apes.

Parker finally managed to corner Slage in the dressing-room.

"Okay, now tell me you're psychic!" he said. "Bunk! I don't get it at all."

"Don't get it?" Slage echoed with a grin. "Simple. Your very own words. Human nature. Wallace took it easy until Clarke started smacking him. That made him mad, and madder. He started playing football, doing everything right, instead of laying down on the job. Raymond has brains. He saw the kind of a beating Wallace was taking so's he could make those long runs for scores. When a guy gives everything he has for you, you sort of forget being sore at him. It's human nature. The kind of a thing that makes friends out of enemies, see?"

"Well, you can thank that fellow Clarke," Parker grunted. "I wonder what the grudge

is he has against Wallace? It must be something big to risk getting himself killed."

"Search me," Slage said and shrugged. "And I care less."

**L**ATER that night the gray-haired football mentor had a couple of glasses of beer with a big man with strips of surgeon's tape on his face, puffed lips, and a black eye. Slage raised his glass in salute.

"I'll never forget this, Clarke," he said. "You made the Beavers into a championship winning team out there today."

"And myself into a hospital case, the way I feel," the Maroon star said and winced. "That Wallace is plenty tough. But I was glad to help you out, coach. You were okay to me when I was on the payroll. I was glad to do you the favor. But, if they can't stay friends, don't bother to look me up again. Once is enough. Me, I've played my last game of football."

"And a game I'll never forget, son," Slage said solemnly, and put his glass to his lips.



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He collapsed two yards behind the scrimmage line

# PLAY, CLOWN, PLAY

By WILLIS GRAHAM

*Ducky West was hired to be a football pantaloon—  
but when the chips were down, he went to town!*

**T**HE CROWD laughed when Ducky West ran out on the gridiron. They always laughed when he went into the Tiger backfield. He was a born comic—all he had to do was wave his hand out and the fans would howl. Should he trot in his bowlegged style, they'd scream with mirth. And when he actually did pull one of his famous screwball gags they really brought the house down.

Ducky was Grumpy Grimes' ace in the

hole. When the game was too one-sided—and it often was since the Tigers were the best team in the circuit with the exception of the Bruins — the fans weren't given a chance to get bored. Ducky West was sent in to make them laugh.

He was short and, as time pressed him close to the 35th-year equator, he began to put on weight. That gave him a waddle when he ran. The fans loved it. With the Tigers leading the Yankees, 27—3, Ducky

took first stringer Mike Sand's place at half-back. The team relaxed as he took the ball on a run around left end. Ducky broke into the clear on the Tiger 40 and streaked for the sidelines.

At the midfield stripe he turned and thumbed his nose at the nearest Yankee player. The fans yelled with glee. They laughed even harder when the Yankee secondary hit him from behind sending him tumbling into the mud at the 45.

It had been a good run, but the paying customers didn't think about that. One touchdown wouldn't make any difference anyway. They wanted a little light comedy to entertain them for the three minutes that remained in the game.

Ducky gave it to them. When the Yankees were handed an offside penalty he did tumblersaults on the grass to express his happiness. And the crowd in the stadium shouted good natured insults at his cavorting. When the game was over Grumpy Grimes met Ducky at the dressing room door.

"You're a bigger fool than ever," he announced, taking a crooked pipe out of his mouth. "Great show, Ducky boy. They loved you."

"Thanks," Ducky said quietly. Then, as he noticed two reporters approaching, he slapped the burly old manager on the back. "I'm the greatest player this team ever had," he announced. And Grimes, playing along with the gag for the sake of publicity, agreed.

"Why do they need ten other men when they've got you, Ducky?" one of the reporters grinned.

"Have you wondered about that too?" Ducky asked innocently. The gentlemen of the press held their sides with laughter. All the while Ducky kept an innocent expression on his big homely face.

Ducky West was tired when he got home that night. These Sunday games were beginning to tell on him — even when he got in for only a few minutes they were a strain. Ducky stretched his muscles as he sat in the easy chair in the living room and wondered if he were getting old.

Kay looked up from a pair of socks she was darning and smiled at him. If she was a day older than the day he met her in his senior year at college Ducky couldn't tell it. She still had the same soft blond hair, the same warm brown eyes, the same funny tilt to her head — the same laugh wrinkles about her mouth and eyes. She put the socks in her workbasket and walked over to the little boy looking at a Black Terror

comic book on the floor under the lamp.

"Time for bed, Donnie," she said, putting him on his feet.

"But I'm not sleepy, Mummie," he protested.

"It's past your bedtime already, darling. Now, go tell daddy goodnight."

Donnie stuck out his lower lip in a pout, but he went obediently to Ducky and whispered a goodnight. Then he tilted his head on one side, exactly as Kay did, and stared at his father.

"Daddy," he said. "Why did the people laugh at you today when you were playing?"

Ducky started. Then he grinned. Kay knelt beside the little boy.

"It's because they like daddy, dear. They think what he does is funny."

**D**ONNIE puckered his brow.

"But they don't laugh at the other players. Don't they like them too?"

"Of course they do," Kay said, looking desperately at Ducky. "Come now, Donnie — to bed with you, sleepyhead."

After Donnie had said his prayers and was tucked in bed, Kay came back in the living room and sat on the arm of Ducky's chair.

"That was what I meant," she whispered.

"He's starting to notice. In kindergarten the other day some of the other little boys teased him about you. And today he was miserable every time someone back of us yelled some insult."

"What can I do?" Ducky said miserably. "It's all part of the game. That's what Grimes pays me for — to be funny. Most of those gags are his ideas anyway."

"I know, Ducky. And I understand. I know when you brag to the newspaper men and act the part of a fool that's all it is — just acting. But Donnie's at a dangerous age. Will he understand it?"

Ducky felt that Kay was right. He wished he could have gone out on the gridiron just once as a real football player. But it was no use. He was too old to change now. The fans wanted a show. It was his business to be a funnyman.

Strangely enough, his reputation as a comedian had been born quite by accident. In college he was a better than average half-back. When he joined the Tigers for a trial, he was just another college grad out seeking a niche in the big time. Then came the first game of the season with a second-rate outfit, the Bluebirds.

In the second quarter Ducky West had made his debut in professional ball. He was nervous. On the first play he became con-

fused and started his legendary wrong-way run toward the Bluebird goal line. He sprinted like a demon, eluding even his own players, who tried desperately to pull him down from behind.

Finally, on the Tiger ten-yard line, he awoke from the daze and realized his mistake. Reversing, he charged back upfield while the people in the stadium split their sides laughing. He was thoroughly angry and his swivel hips and speedy legs carried him through the demoralized opposition like a rocket. When a Bluebird man finally brought him down he had recovered his loss and made a first down besides.

The laughter that rocked the stadium confused him even more and on the next play he looked back over his shoulder as he circled end. Perfect blocking left not a Bluebird man in sight, but Ducky stumbled over one of his own men and did a flip in the air to land flat on his back on his own scrimmage line.

Grumpy Grimes jerked him after that and Ducky wasn't surprised. His eyes were on the ground as he trotted to the bench, convinced that he was through with pro football for life. As the Tiger coach approached he set himself for a verbal lacing.

But Grimes was smiling. He stuck a blunt thumb up at the cheering stadium, still yelling Ducky's name and laughing.

"You may not be a football player, boy," he said, "but they love you. That's what counts in the pro game. You were a riot out there."

"You don't think I pulled that stuff on purpose, do you?" Ducky asked amazed.

"No matter—color is what counts in drawing the customers. And you've got the makings of something original. Just stick with me and follow my lead."

After the game the reporters had swarmed about Ducky and he stumbled through the words Grimes had told him to say.

"Of course, I knew which way I was running—I was only confusing the opposition. Anyway, I'm twice as good as any man out there, so it's only fair I should run twice as far as the rest of them."

That was the beginning. The sports writers labeled him a "colorful character" and 'socko plus.' They laughed in print about his antics and kidded him openly. Everywhere he went he was recognized and fans threw good-natured insults at him in night clubs and hotel lobbies. With Grimes managing everything he did and constantly suggesting new screwball stunts, Ducky West became "the dizziest man in football."

He didn't get to play much in the tough games when the chips were down—but when boredom needed breaking because of a lopsided score, he was right in there pitching. Ducky's popularity increased—and with it his pay check. Columnists called him the "Whizbrain Kid" and the "Brooklyn Duck." One even labeled him the "biggest fool in football." But he didn't mind much.

Of course there were times when it would have been nice to have the crowd cheer for him because he was a good player. But there was one consolation. Good players came and went. Ducky stayed on the Tiger roster.

**H**E HAD married Kay six years before. The next year Donnie was born. And two years later Ducky went into the Army. When he got out Grimes insisted that he come back to pro football despite his age.

"You're what the customers want," he had argued.

So Ducky went back. But somehow it seemed different. He still pulled the same gags and the fans still laughed. But something was missing.

Perhaps, Ducky thought, he was getting too old to act the fool. More and more he longed to play a straight part on the gridiron. There was a time when he might have asked Grimes for a chance to be a regular player. But it was too late, at thirty-five, to start.

He began to dislike the people who laughed at his antics. The fools—why should he, a grown man, make himself ridiculous so they could laugh? And yet, as Kay said, they meant well. They really liked him. So his resentment cooled. But always, when they laughed, he felt a strange ache inside—because if things had gone differently they might have been cheering instead.

Two weeks before Donnie had been crying when he came home from a Tiger practise session. After that Ducky had a long talk with Kay and found out that the other little boys had said his father "is crazy in the head."

It hurt. A kid has to have respect for his father.

Then today—it had been a mistake for Kay to take Donnie to the game. But Donnie had insisted on it. It was natural for a boy to want to see his father play ball. Ducky looked up into Kay's soft brown eyes and repeated his question.

"What can I do—give up football?"

Kay snuggled closer.

"Could you, Ducky—without it hurting too much?"

"What can I do?"

"We've saved a little money, darling. You could open a restaurant or a filling station. There must be lots of businesses we could make a go of."

Kay's eyes were shining. When Ducky saw that he made up his mind. He hadn't seen her so happy in years. Tears ran down her cheeks as she kissed him. Softly she whispered things she had never told him before—about how much it hurt her when the crowd laughed at him.

"I'm not being entirely unselfish," she confessed. "Of course, I want it for Donnie. It wouldn't do for him to remember his father this way. But it's been misery for me, Ducky."

"Every time someone in the stadium has jeered you it's been like a knife in my heart. I've wanted to kill them for laughing. I knew they meant well, but I boiled inside."

The next morning, when Ducky told Grumpy Grimes his decision, the old man exploded.

"But I gotta contract with you."

"Shove it down the drain pipe," Ducky said good-naturedly. He felt like a feather in the breeze this morning. Nothing could make him angry. Grimes saw this and changed his tactics. He put an arm about Ducky's shoulder.

"You know, boy, I was thinking about giving you a raise."

"Gonna give me a new contract at double my salary," Ducky said with amiable sarcasm.

Grimes thought a moment.

"I'll do it," he said. "You stay and I'll make out a new contract today. The rest of the season at double what you make now."

Ducky's mouth dropped open. Grimes saw he had him on the run and pressed his advantage.

"Don't you see, boy—that'll give you a tidy nest egg to invest in your new business. Better make this last season a big one, Ducky. You owe it to Kay and that youngster of yours."

So, in the end, Grimes' arguments won out. And Ducky went home to break the news to Kay. She was frankly disappointed. The sparkle went out of her eyes and she had a fight to keep the tears back.

"I thought we had decided together," she said simply.

Ducky took her in his arms and kissed her. It was the last season, he told her. It would be a nest egg for the new business—he used every one of Grimes arguments. But somehow, when he said them, they didn't sound

so good. When Kay finally told him it was all right with her to go ahead and finish the season, he didn't feel happy about it any more.

**T**O THE press and to the public Ducky remained the same—a small guy, inclined to pudginess, with a disposition toward bragging and wild statements. He still hopped up and down on the sidelines and argued with referees until they tossed him out of games and ran crazy plays in the final minutes of the easy games.

Then one night, as he and Kay sat in a Pullman on the way to New York for a game, she broached an idea.

"Is there anything in your contract that says you have to be court jester for the Tigers?" she asked.

Ducky thought a moment.

"No. Just that I play."

"There are just two games left on the schedule," Kay said. "Why not play those the ways you want to—get serious and play real ball for once."

Ducky protested.

"It wouldn't be fair to Grimes."

"Fair to Grimes! You've done for him all your life. Be fair to yourself for once. Don't you see how proud it'd make me of you? Since this is your last season in football it'd be something for Donnie to remember always."

"You've got too much faith in me, Kay," Ducky said. "You forget how old I am. I couldn't play good ball now if I wanted to."

But the thought stayed in Ducky's mind. As the rails clicked underneath the train he made his decision. Ducky West the fool was gone. From now on he was playing a straight part. It was worth at least a try for Kay and Donnie.

He worked harder in the practise sessions that week and slowly his long unused muscles responded—first with an ache, finally with a facsimile of the old strength. As part of his character change Ducky became serious, refused to pull gags for the newspaper men. But they didn't notice—not at first. . . .

Then one night after scrimmage, Ducky stepped out into the street to see Bob Caradine, the Herald's famous columnist waiting for him.

"Let's go get a bottle of beer, little man," Caradine said. Ducky shook his head.

"I'm off the suds," he announced. "In training."

Caradine howled at this. Ducky West in training—what a joke! Caradine was noted

for his biting humor and the next morning he published one of his funniest columns.

"Ducky Trains for the Big Game," was the headline.

It got a laugh in the paper's city room, it brought chuckles from the milkman in Bullfrog Corners, won a howl from the night watchman in Brooklyn. Ducky was back in the headlines with another screwball stunt by the master of zaniness.

But Kay didn't think it was funny. And Ducky got irritated. What was the matter with these reporters—couldn't they tell when a guy went serious? He'd show 'em. And he did.

In the game with the Marauders the following Sunday the Tigers were leading 17—0 with five minutes to go before the end of the first half. It was a walkaway victory and Grimes saw a ripe time to use the light touch. He signaled for Ducky to warm up.

For the first time in years Ducky didn't cut capers as he took his limbering up run on the sidelines. There were no somersaults, no trick high jumps—just a slow trot, up and down. But even that got a laugh from the fans. Ducky turn serious? That in itself was ridiculous enough to excite laughter.

He trotted out on the field and subbed for Bump McAdams at halfback. Then, because they didn't need another touchdown, they gave the ball to Ducky on a spinner.

**N**OT SINCE his first pro game so many years ago had Ducky really tried to gain yardage. There were butterflies doing a ballet in his stomach as he saw the ball spiral back from the center. For the fraction of a second his mind slipped into the groove worn deep by practice—fake a run, stumble and turn a flip — anything for a laugh.

Instead, he dropped his chin to his chest and ploughed into the Marauder line, twisting, spinning. Expecting comedy, they were caught off guard, fooled completely. Ducky broke away for 40 yards before he was pulled down. Then, as he rose, he listened for the cheering. There was only a faint rustle of applause.

Ducky stared up into the cold stands. In his eyes there was a bewildered look. What more did they want? His had been the longest single run of the afternoon. Yet up there they sat unmoving. Then a voice from the front-row boxes roared out. \*

"Take that guy out—we want Ducky!"

The cry was taken up and suddenly there were catcalls and a smattering of boos. Ducky clamped his teeth together and went into the Tiger huddle. There Mike Sand

squinted at him.

"What's happened to you, Ducky?"

"Maybe I've grown up. It happens sometimes, even at thirty-five."

Twice more before the half ended Ducky carried the ball. Once he lost a yard—the next time he picked up five. But the fans didn't like it. When Grimes finally jerked him, with seconds left, Ducky heard 20,000 people boo him for the first time in his career. It hurt. Somewhere in that stadium were Kay and Donnie. Make the kid proud of him, eh? Well, hadn't he done a wonderful job!

Grimes gave him hades at the half. What did he think he was trying to pull? Ducky took it silently and without comment. There wasn't anything to say. Grimes didn't put him back in the game that afternoon—not even when the Tigers won 38—6.

"Stevens, Fallon and Sand—they're all good for a touchdown whenever I want it," the Tiger coach shouted. "But you—you're the comedian. Can't you get that through your thick skull?"

Still Ducky didn't argue. Had he had a temper it might have helped. He could have flattened Grimes' nose, quit the team and gone home to Kay and Donnie. But even that wouldn't have helped, he decided. Donnie would still remember the boos his father had gotten—and the strange hurt look in Kay's eyes would remain.

Ducky stuck to his guns as the team got set for the final game of the season. His ship of popularity was fast sinking—but it didn't seem to matter any more. When the team traveled west for the final tilt with the Bruins, Ducky didn't travel with the other players. With Donnie and Kay in his little red coupe, he pulled into town several hours after the team had already arrived.

As soon as he walked into the hotel lobby he knew something was wrong. In a corner by a potted palm several of the players stood around Grumpy Grimes.

The looks on their faces were all gloom and a yard long.

Leaving Kay at the desk Ducky joined the huddle.

"What's up?" he asked. All he got was blank looks.

Finally Grimes spoke up. "Some of the boys got a bum meal at a hamburger joint—the hospital says they got ptomaine. That means the whole first string backfield is out for the game Sunday. I gotta do some reshuffling."

"You mean Sand, Stevens, Fallon. . . ."

"Yeah, all of 'em. They'll be okay, but not

in time for the Bruin game. So there goes the title—lost to a poisoned hamburger.”

Ducky felt sorry for Grumpy Grimes. For all his bluster, the coach was a square shooter. And a first place this season would have been his only one in nine years. Ducky pulled him aside where the other players couldn't hear.

But they did hear the old man's heated reply.

“Start you at halfback? You think I'm out of my mind?”

“You're out of your mind if you don't,” Ducky came back. For once he was feeling a warm border about his temper. “You know you haven't got anybody else, and you can't get anybody. I'm not asking you—I'm telling you. I start that game Sunday.”

**T**HE sports writers put a sharp edge on their humor when Grimes announced that Ducky West was taking over as starting halfback. The fans alternately laughed and mumbled dark oaths about the new Ducky West who had turned so suddenly serious.

The opening kickoff went to the Tiger 12 yard line where Ducky caught it and ploughed upfield. The Bruin tacklers dropped him like a sack of wet flour on the 18 and a heckler in the lower part of the stadium shouted at him.

“You make me laugh, Old Man Ducky.”

But he didn't laugh. The hostile spectators didn't see anything funny about Ducky West today. Two plays later he lugged the leather for a first down on the Tiger 27 and the heckling slowed down.

But there were still occasional boos. Ducky was glad then that he hadn't let Kay bring Donnie to the game today. Sitting up in the hotel room, his son wouldn't know. It was better that way.

Ducky took a lateral around right end for eight yards on the next play and Harley Maddox plunged for a first down through center. In the huddle Ducky asked for the ball again. He hardly heard the fans now. The ache in his body dissolved to numbness. After he had carried the leather twice more the life was gone from his rubbery legs and he knew he was close to being finished.

The first quarter finished without a score. Then, with the Bruins on the Tiger 38, Ducky saw their star broken-field sprinter, Blondie Pack, break into the secondary. His churning legs were like windmills as Ducky's arms closed about them. Pack collapsed, but as he did so Ducky felt a sharp pain in his knees. He fought against the night that closed over his eyes, but in the end the dark-

ness won.

When he came to he was stretched out beside the bench and the trainer had smelling salts under his nose. He could feel a dagger in his knee and he didn't have the will power to move it.

For the rest of the half Ducky sat on the sidelines and watched the substitute left end, Stretch Tanner, trying to play his half-back spot.

When the Tigers took the field for the third quarter, they trailed the Bruins 7-0. Then, after five minutes of play, when the Bruins had scored a field goal to move far out in front, Ducky hobbled over to Grimes.

“I want to go back in,” he said.

“You want to lose that leg?”

“It makes no difference. This is my last game anyway. Gimme a chance, Grumpy.”

When he limped back out on the field, there was no applause—none of the usual laughter—but there were no boos either. Ducky asked for the ball and got it. The Tiger backfield was worn to a nub. They were lifeless in their exhaustion.

Forcing himself to ignore the pain in his leg, Ducky smashed off tackle for five yards. On the next play he gained a first down on the Bruin 45. The team was snapping back to normal and the fans were waking up.

Over the roar came a shrill voice.

“Feed it to 'em, West.”

The cry was contagious. From scattered points all over the stadium came other voices. The fans were suddenly rallying behind him.

“West!” they called him. Not “Yeah, boob” or “Oh, you fool”—but “West!” The butterflies in Ducky's stomach started doing handsprings.

He didn't kid himself. He knew he was their last hope—the only chance for a Tiger victory. Now they were pulling for him to score. But if he failed—the echo of the boos still buzzed in his mind. But the steady hum of cheering drowned it out.

When his knee collapsed on the next play, Ducky almost gave up. But he puffed away the cobwebs on the Bruin 38. The humming noise had grown into a steady roar. He stared up at the wildly cheering stadium almost afraid to believe what he heard. For the first time in his pro football career he heard the fans yelling his name and not in derision.

“Come on, West—You can do it—We want a touchdown—Drive through them has-beens, West. . . .”

Ducky wished he had let Kay bring Donnie to the game. Of course, the kid could read about it in the paper, but it wouldn't be the

same. There was a tightness in Ducky's throat as he lined up with the Tigers. Somebody slapped him on the back. They were yelling encouragement in his ears.

**S**UDDENLY alive, the Tigers moved the ball to the 12. But the Bruins fought back. On the second down they stopped the Tigers for no gain. Ducky took the ball again.

He drove to the three, just short of a touchdown. The Bruins, scrapping mad, stopped him with crushing tackles. In the pileup Ducky felt a set of cleats dig into his bad knee and his head went spinning. When the others got up he wanted to remain on the ground. Groggy, he let himself be pulled to his feet.

"You hurt, Ducky?"

"No, I'm okay. Gimme that ball again. I'll make this last down count."

His knee was a furnace that seared his nerves. The ball was a hazy shadow as it came back. But Ducky took it and started around left end. It was last down—with a touchdown in sight. He plunged forward, biting his lip against the pain in his knee.

Suddenly the knee gave way and the ground rushed up to meet him. Ducky tried desperately to take another step, but in vain. He collapsed two yards behind the scrimmage line.

As Ducky let two players help him off the field, he could feel the silence like a damp rag that seemed to cover the stadium. He couldn't blame them. Perhaps he should have stuck to comedy. He had failed them when they needed a touchdown most. It was the Bruins' ball now. Nothing could overcome that 7-0 lead.

Then somewhere in a far corner of the big stadium a trickle of noise began. The lighted fuse expanded until abruptly the thousands

of spectators exploded in a mighty burst of applause. Ducky looked up unbelievably. They were cheering for him! The whole crowd had gone crazy and his name was screamed into the cold December air.

"You fools!" he muttered hoarsely. "Don't you see what I've done? I've lost the game for you. And you cheer when you should be booing."

"I'm sorry," he said to Grimes, "guess I thought I was younger than I am."

Grumpy Grimes was grinning.

"Sorry!" he snorted. "I know this team like a book. Those boys are out for blood. I don't know what you did to 'em—but stick around and you'll see some Tiger scoring before this game's over."

But the mob wouldn't let Ducky sit quietly and watch the game. The cops couldn't hold back the hundreds who surged forward to surround the bench and yell at him. The reporters were firing questions at him. And for once Ducky West forgot his training of years and failed to make with the breezy talk.

"I'd never have believed it was you," one of the sports writers laughed. "Who was that out there anyway, Ducky?"

"That was my daddy!" a small voice said. And Donnie wriggled through the crowd and crawled into his father's lap. Ducky hugged him close and over his shoulder he could see Kay standing there, a smile on her face, looking as lovely as she had in college.

"He wouldn't stay away from the game," she said, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. "I had to bring him, Ducky—and he was so proud of you. We were so proud of you."

The old comedian, Ducky West, might have come back with a fast remark then. But that character was dead. And the new Ducky just sat there with a broad grin on his homely, happy face.



Top flight football yarns by Joseph Kenney, Tracy Mason, T. W. Ford, William O'Sullivan and others coming in the Fall EXCITING SPORTS—only 15c at all stands!



Hal smashed into the end, bowling the man out of the way without losing his own feet

# YESTERDAY'S HERO

By WALTER ROEBER SCHMIDT

*The team had surly blocker Hal Benedict pegged as a small time dub in a big time spot—but he was out to show 'em!*

**H**AL BENEDICT, star of Winton the last two years, waiting for the kick-off, looked quickly about at the change in the team. The big men were back, out of Service—the players who were tops. There were Chiocotti, a powerful mountain of a guard, the loose-limbed, sure-clutching Lindell at right end, Highson at center, and "Mick" Palmer, All-American candidate. Palmer was a big elusive redhead who, with Navy's sensational Great Lakes eleven last season, had been the nation's third ranking

high-scorer. Mick Palmer had taken Hal Benedict's spot in the ball-carrying position.

The whistle sounded. The thud of hard-booted toe against leather came next and the line of blue—the B squad—advanced swiftly under the ball as it came through the sky, end over end. Hal saw that it was dropping toward him, and elation throbbled in him. He would show them how to run back a kickoff. He'd show coach Jordan and all of them what a waste it was making a blocker out of him!

Here it was.

The hurtling pigskin settled into the cradle he made for it with arms, hunched shoulders and slightly raised leg.

In front of him as he ran, he saw two blue jerseys—Anderson and Kallep—racing toward him. The white shirts of the A's quarterback, Giles, and Mick Palmer and others were leading him, throwing out a screen. Quickly he picked them up.

Kallep went down but Anderson got through. Hal switched the leather instinctively to his right, shot his left out in a straight arm. But Anderson, last season's frosh star, fainted, hit. Hal felt the crashing weight of the other against his legs. He tried to spin out of it, almost tore free. Then a wave of blue jerseys knocked him down.

He lay there, under the mound of them, bitterness coursing through him. Why the devil hadn't Mick and Giles blocked Anderson out? How could they expect a man to get going if they didn't know the rudiments of the game? A runner had to have a chance to get started.

He rose slowly, without pain, only anger suffusing him and took his position in the T, in the blocking spot. Giles's strident voice rose above all else as the signals were called. The ball was to Mick. Hal instinctively moved ahead of the play, going through guard and tackle where the A lineman had knifed a hole. Hal cleared a secondary out of the way. Mick picked up six yards.

Last year those six yards, and many other yards and touchdowns, had been his. Before the return of Mick and the rest of the Service men, he Hal Benedict, had been tops—the toast of Winton. He had not got into the Armed Forces when it was discovered, to his chagrin, that he had a busted eardrum, a small unimportant thing. Well, the deficiency had given him two years of stardom, and—by gosh!—he wasn't through yet.

**T**HE ball snapped. They moved fast—precision-timed, helmeted figures. Giles shoved the leather at him, into him, took it away—the fake reverse—fed to Mick. Hal swept through the line, bent as if carrying, cut sharply to pick up Mick if the redhead got through. Mick came through, the way it was planned. That meant everyone had done his job perfectly. Hal slid in front of the big speedster, trail-blazing.

The B quarterback came up out of safety. Hal measured him, making sure not to leave his feet too soon, and cut the quarter down. Mick went on, alone, to score standing up.

Jordan's whistle called it a day.

Hal Benedict picked himself up wearily, moved off-field with the other tired, grimy, hungry men.

"Nice take-out, fella," Jordan, the tall slim gray-haired Winton coach, complimented as he reached the sidelines.

Benedict nodded, unimpressed. Blocking—bosh! Anyone could block. To run with the ball, to dance and straightarm and feint and dart—to hear the wild rampant roaring of your stands winging you on toward the last white line, toward victory—to know the winy thrill of that pigskin tucked under your arm and no one being able to down you, stop you. That was football. That's what a man played for.

Jordan fell into step beside him as they trudged up the knoll which separated the gridiron from the school whose churchlike towers were silhouetted boldly now against the gathering autumn dusk.

"You were a half-stride slow in picking up your interference on that kick-off," the coach commented softly. "That's why you got pinned so fast."

Hal Benedict knew this was so. He had in fact been wondering, way back in his mind, if Mick would have let himself be a half-stride slow in picking up his wall. But he rebelled now when Jordan mentioned it. Anger and bitterness coursed through him again. "They ran away from me," he answered tartly.

That was one of Jordan's favorite phrases.

"Don't you blockers run away from your carrier," he was always saying. "Remember he's got to catch that pigskin before he can begin moving."

Jordan frowned.

"I've been watching you closely now for two years. I always knew you could make a fine blocker, perhaps even a great one. Even when you were carrying last year and the year before, I felt this. But there was no one else to carry. Now there is, and I need a blocker. Gordon's all right, but young, inexperienced. I'm counting on you, Benedict."

"You're the boss," he answered without enthusiasm. "If you say block, I'll block."

The coach's frown deepened.

"It needs more than that, fella, if we're to have a championship club. Your heart's got to be in it. You have to want to block—like it,—feel that you're better at blocking than any man in the world. Unless you feel that way, you'll never be what I know you can be to this club."

"I'll do what I can."

No, he never would feel the way Jordan

wanted him to. He was a carrier, and a good one—a ball-toter whom the papers last year had termed “outstanding.” With a little more help they’d have won the championship. So what the devil was Jordan doing now, taking him out of the running spot! It was stupid. Sure, Mick Palmer was good. He must be, to have rated All-American nomination. But who was there to say that Hal wasn’t as good as Mick, maybe better? Who could know a thing like that without trial?

“I realize how you feel, Benedict.” The coach’s voice was quiet, understanding. “But it’s for the general good of the team and the school that I’m asking you to do this. We haven’t had a title in seven or eight years. Now we have the strength to win the flag, but that strength has to be balanced correctly to get the most out of it. If I’m wrong about what I’m doing, I’ll be the first to see it, and change things.”

Sure, Hal Benedict could quit but where would that get him? If he quit cold, he’d look like a heel. Besides, he’d never get a chance to move back where he knew he belonged. As long as he strung along with the way Jordan wanted it, there was always the chance that injuries would force the coach to play him back in the carrier spot.

“My plan is,” the tall lean man went on, explaining to him, Hal knew, because he was the team captain, “to use Anderson as Mick’s understudy. Gordon will understudy you. With Highson back at center, Lindell at end . . .”

Jordan’s voice droned on, with other names of men who’d returned from the war—some who had reputations before they went in, some who had gained reps while with teams like Great Lakes, Randolph, Third Air Force.

**B**UT Hal Benedict was no longer listening. For him, he saw quickly, the set-up was n.g. He would have to wait until both Mick and Anderson were sidelined before he’d ever get his chance. Maybe it wasn’t worth waiting for. Maybe they’d never get hurt and he’d never get his chance.

The gym loomed before them and they went in. Hal stayed with the team, because he could see nothing else to do. He blocked, but his heart wasn’t in it. He didn’t give a hoot if he was a good blocker or a mediocre one. All he was waiting for—waiting, waiting—was that day when he’d be needed in the spot where he knew he belonged.

The first game of the season was usually an easy one but this year the blue-and-white

eleven took on the powerful non-Conference Port Angeles team and every Winton man knew, if they could win such a big one so early in the year, it meant they had a real ball club.

Hal Benedict went out to the center for the flip. He shook hands with the chunky crimson-jerseyed Angeles captain, Higgins, and the umpire tossed the coin. Hal called “heads.” It came up heads.

“We’ll receive,” he said too quickly, realizing the opportunity he’d have for a chance of carrying, the first play of the game at least, with the kickoff to them.

Higgins nodded.

“We’ll take the north goal post.” There was a brisk wind blowing and now, as he ran back, Hal knew he’d put Mick, who did the Winton punting, on the spot. Kicking into that wind would be very tough going.

“We won the toss,” he told his men, joining them where they were waiting in a huddled knot near the bench. “We receive. South goal.”

They adjusted their helmets, silently listened to last-minute instructions from Jordan. A great roar went up from the stands behind them as they went out.

The line of crimson stretched abreast the field. It came forward on the whistle, slowly, gaining momentum as the kicker’s toe met the ball. It was not to him, the pigskin carrying high and far to the right corner where Giles took it on the goal-line and drove forward for eighteen yards before he was smeared.

The 0 to 0 first half was replete with plenty of tough, dogged football. Mick’s fine sharp-shooting booting sent the Angels back whenever they penetrated to a danger spot. Hal Benedict had to admit, grudgingly, that the triple-threater’s kicking, in the face of this wind, was a job of genius.

One of the big redhead’s punts had sent the crimson team scurrying from the Winton twenty-five to their own thirty. Another, from out of the end zone, following a recovery when Giles had fumbled a skyscraping boot, allowed Lindell and Burke, the two ends, to drop Higgins in his tracks at mid-field. Then, near the end of the half, Mick quick-kicked on second down to catch the Angels asleep, sending them back close against their own goal posts.

If time hadn’t run out, Hal figured Winton—funny how he thought of the club now, objectively, impersonally, as if he didn’t belong to it at all—would have had a good chance to score.

In the dressing-room Jordan went over

what was wrong as they lay and sat on the benches, the assistant trainer administering to their small wounds, wiping their faces clear and fresh once more with chill towels. Hal drew in deep draughts of air and only half-listened to the coach. After all, his job, blocking, was cut-and-dried. You didn't have to strain body or mind in here or out there on the field, to block. But he heard his name sting through.

"On that fake reverse, Benedict, stay low until you've gone into their secondary," Jordan said. "Make it look like you're carrying. You couldn't fool a wooden Indian the way you've been running it."

He nodded, dully. Sure, make it "look" like you're carrying. The gall within him churned again and it was only with great effort that he kept from retorting.

"Put Gordon in then, if you don't like how I'm playing it," he wanted to say. "I don't give a hoot."

It was time to go and the younger men, the subs mostly, dashed out with a yell as if their very enthusiasm would be sufficient to subdue the tough crimson visitors.

**S**HADOWS lengthened and still there was no score. Hal blocked until his body was bruised and weary but he and the others could not shake Mick completely free. Nor could Mick shake himself free. Neither could the Angels shake a man into the clear. Four minutes remained and Mick, during a time-out, made a suggestion to Giles.

"Let me try a placement," he said.

Giles frowned. He looked out to where the ball rested near the forty-yard stripe, at an angle from the far-off Angeles posts, looked questioningly at Hal.

"The wind's with me," Mick stated matter-of-factly.

Hal thought. The chances were four to one against him making it from way out here.

"We've two downs," he said. "We'll run for one, to square position. Then go ahead and try it, Mick." The way Mick was looking at him he knew the redhead had read in his voice that he felt Mick couldn't make it. The whistle called them back to the game.

Mehrtens took it on an end run to midfield, picking up a couple of yards. They huddled, quickly, knowing what they were going to do, broke out of it, Mick staying back.

He couldn't see what was happening, for his attention was focused on the two crimson-shirted men crashing through to block the kick. One went down at the line of scrimmage but the other man, Higgins, kept

coming at him, fast and hard. Hal knew Giles must be holding the ball now and Mick must be starting in.

He shifted, his senses listening for the thud of boot against ball instead of giving complete concentration to Higgins. He slammed his body toward the Angeles captain realizing as he did so that Higgins had fainted him off-balance. He hit, but not square, merely brushing Higgins as the crimson captain, hands outstretched pushing him off, sped by.

Hal heard the ball being blocked by a body—Higgins' body. He picked himself up quickly and saw Mick and Giles and Higgins racing for the ball. Giles dived for it and missed. Mick beat Higgins to it by a shade. Without leaving his feet, Mick scooped it up in a single sure motion, was away with the pigskin tucked in the crook of his left arm. Higgins made for him. Mick sidestepped, fainted, sidestepped again—and drove past the Angeles captain.

The play was far from Hal now as Mick cut across field, eluding Angeles tacklers like a ghost. Hands went out for him, had him, slid off as he pirouetted. A couple of blue and white jerseys picked him up at the sideline, cleared two crimson jerseys out of the way. And suddenly, watching Mick cut in again toward the center of the field, Hal Benedict saw that only two Angeles players remained barring the way to a touchdown. The Winton stands had come to life now, roaring their encouragement, their hope.

Mick made for the Angeles men, swerved suddenly when he was about ten yards from them. Both instinctively, fearfully, turned in his direction, to head him off, knock him down. He reversed, so abruptly he seemed not to have moved at all from side to side, and then was running past them so swiftly they never had a chance. He raced over the goal-line standing up.

They held for the rest of the short time, knocking all but one of the desperate Angeles passes out of the air, and trotted off the field with their first victory of the season.

To Hal Benedict though, as he jogged off it was no victory. Though it was his fault Higgins had got through, this did not disturb him too much. What disturbed him was the manner in which Mick had proved himself, turning a misplay into a victory. In spite of himself Hal had to admit the run had been sensational—even for an All-American candidate. Maybe, after all, he was not as good a carrier as Mick Palmer, but he remembered running back some just as sensational. Yes, he had.

He showered and dressed quickly, quietly, among the jubilation, and the back-slapping that was all for Mick. No one said anything about his having let Higgins get through, except Jordan.

"Were you thinking about the ball instead of the tackler, fella. Is that why he got through?"

Hal was irritated.

"No," he answered. "I just missed him, that's all."

"It might have cost us the ball game."

"I know," Hal said. He felt no concern, no contrition.

**T**HE team developed as it went along from game to game, and became a close-knit, hard-knocking club whose offensive was built the way Jordan wanted it, around Mick Palmer with the speedy young Anderson subbing whenever the redhead needed a breather.

Hal's interest in blocking remained at zero. There were times, when the lean-faced coach benched him in favor of Gordon, that he knew his play had been far below the standard expected of a man moving along with a championship-possibility club. But whether he warmed the bench or was in action made little difference to him. All he was waiting for was a possible chance to carry the ball.

Oh yes, on rare occasions, Giles called his number, just to throw a switch into the opposition. But three-quarters of the time Mick carried, the rest, Mehrtens, who could not block for sour beans but was a whale of a defensive player and not a bad line smasher, took the ball.

The other teams also had good, big men back from the Services but none they had met by the time three-quarters of the season was over compared with Mick, Lindell, Highson, Chiocotti and Co. Winton remained undefeated.

Two states away, over in the Midwest, another greatly improved Conference club, St. Rogers, also had bowled over all opponents. Both clubs, St. Rogers and Winton, had pushovers for their last games of the season. Thus, their meeting on the Saturday before the schedule would end, was the crucial contest. Whoever won this one would unquestionably take the flag.

In the dressing-room Jordan told them, in his quiet straight-from-the-shoulder way, what they all knew—what this one meant.

"If we play heads-up ball we've got a good chance," he said. "Any man who doesn't play heads-up ball will come out of there, fast. We can't take chances this afternoon.

The trial period is over. This is It." He did not look at Hal Benedict as he spoke, but somehow the captain knew this part of the talk was particularly for him.

They got up and filed out of the room. He heard Jordan call his name. He paused. Jordan waited until the others had gone.

"I'm starting Gordon out there this afternoon, Benedict," Jordan said.

Hal shrugged.

"That's okay," he answered disinterestedly.

The coach looked at him a long while.

"That's all you feel about it?"

"For me, it's just another drab ball game, where I smack my body into other guys for sixty minutes. That's all."

"Gordon will need rest. When I send you in for him, don't let your pals down, Benedict. They want that title, and this afternoon they're going to miss the blocker you could be if you wanted to—a great blocker."

He sat there on the bench with the subs and knew that Jordan would not use him unless he had to—which was okay with him. He didn't give a hoot in Hades about going out there anyway except to take over the Palmer-Anderson spot.

It was a tough, bruising ball game but neither team could score. Gordon tired with about four minutes left to go in the first half and Jordan sent Hal out. He reported, joined the others. They looked at him questioningly, uncertainly. Silently he laughed at their concern. He felt outside them, not one of the team but a stranger.

They huddled, broke out of it. The off-tackle stab. He was a step slow getting started and the play piled up at the line around him.

End run. The Rogers defensive half slipped in and cut Mick down from behind. Mick rose limping a bit but, after he had jogged around awhile, he said he was all right.

"Let's go," Giles barked, his eyes on Hal.

The sneak into the line. Mehrtens carried on this one while they all faked in different directions, hitting the line. There were a number of pile-ups and under one of them Mick lay, writhing in pain. Time was called. Winton's trainer came dashing out. The entire team grouped solicitously around the big redhead.

"My—ankle," he managed to say between hard gulps of breath.

When the trainer got Mick's cleated shoe off Hal saw what they saw. The ankle was ballooning.

"A nasty sprain," the trainer said, feeling it for any possible fracture. Hal Benedict was glad it was not broken, but he knew,

not without some elation, that the redhead would play no more this afternoon.

**A**NDERSON came out as Mick was helped off the field amid a tumultuous ovation, from the Rogers stands as well as Winton's. Hal Benedict admitted, vaguely, that Mick Palmer had earned that ovation. He was Conference high-scorer, a good defensive player as well, and a right guy—quiet and modest, never ranting when things went wrong, never going overboard when things went exceptionally well. Yes, Mick deserved the cheers. But Hal was glad to see him go. Now only Anderson remained, and a bit more than a full half remained to be played.

Anderson punted on fourth and six and Lawrinson, the lanky hard-running St. Rogers right half, took it in on his own ten. Hal was in on the tackle with Chiocotti, on the twenty-five.

The heavy purple-clad club used a powerhouse, line-shredding type of play, mixing it up occasionally with a pass or loose running play. But power was their basic offensive principle. This accounted for their large-scoring second halves. They wore the other teams down, then steam-rolled over them.

Hal took a quick look around at Winton's men. None appeared too tired to finish out this half which had but two minutes to go. His gaze settled on Anderson—too bad Anderson hadn't been playing right along so he'd be tired now.

He was abruptly aware that the play was in motion. Not only in motion but into him, up to him. He reflexes snapped him into action as he saw a blocker and the man with the ball loom in front of him. The blocker hit him, crushingly hard, before he could act, sweeping him out of the play. He got up quickly, angry at having been caught asleep and pursued them.

But the ball carrier was far down the field now, his interference having disposed of all Winton's secondary except the mercury-footed Anderson who was charging at the runner from behind and at a slight angle.

With every stride, the speedy ex-frosh star, the second best hundred-yard sprinter in this section of the nation, was cutting into the distance separating them.

But there was only about thirty yards to go now, Hal saw, before the Rogers carrier, digging for all he was worth with no one in front of him, would cross the goal line. It did not appear that Anderson could over-haul him in time.

Tense, and frantic inside because he knew this had been his fault, Hal, far out of the

play and helpless now to do anything to prevent a score, stood and watched young Anderson eat up the distance separating the two. As they hit the five-yard stripe Anderson was almost up to him. One stride, another. Anderson surged forward for the tackle.

Even from where he stood, in midfield, Hal could see what happened. Anderson's outstretched hands just managed to reach the man's thighs, impede his forward flight. Simultaneously one of the runner's driving heels came back and up into the tackler's face.

Even above the roar of the crowd Hal could hear the sickeningly sharp crack of the impact. Young Anderson's body went partly limp as he clung to the one foot. The kid hung on doggedly as the runner strove to break free. But forward progress was halted, momentarily, and the whistle blew. Anderson went entirely limp, then. He fell off the other man's leg and lay still.

The kid looked like death, his face all white except for the nasty red spot on the chin with the gash across it where the shoe had struck. Hal knelt down beside him. The trainer was there and other players. Even some of the Rogers men had arrived and stood now in a tight worried semi-circle as Winton's trainer worked on Anderson.

Spunk, Hal thought. That was spunky, hanging on like that in semi-consciousness.

A sudden surge of emotion swept through the Winton captain, an emotion filled with small hard anger at himself for letting this thing happen.

The youngster groaned, moved. The trainer signaled for a stretcher.

"How is he, Pop?" Hal asked, his voice low, tense.

"Won't know actually till we get him back to the dressing-room. Don't think anything's broken. Just knocked out and badly shaken up. But like I say, you can't tell."

Anderson was taken off and Gordon came running out. The whistle blew. They moved back into the shadow of their own goal posts. Gordon took over the defensive left half, where Hal Benedict had been playing all year. Hal went back into Anderson's safety spot, which took him now halfway into the end zone.

**D**KAY, this is what you've wanted all season, the carrying spot, he thought. It's all yours now, all yours!

Somehow, he didn't feel very good about it, very confident. He didn't like the way he'd gotten here. He was worried, uncertain

at the responsibility. There was no one on the bench, no Mick Palmer or Jack Anderson to come out and take over if he failed. It was all on him now—the game, the championship.

He bit his lip, pulled the helmet down hard. He'd do it. He had to do it. He had to win it now for guys like Mick and young Anderson and the rest, all playing their hearts out. They'd been playing their hearts out all season while he had been goofing, goofing because he couldn't have his own way.

Rogers came out and then huddled. It was impossible to stop them from the three-yard line and they went over in three pile-driving plays into the line. They made their kick good as the half ended to make the score 7 to 0.

He had never known a between-the-halves period to go so fast. No one censured him, not even Jordan. The coach told them, in his quiet, firm way that it looked like they'd have to win it without Mick or Anderson's help but that Hal had been, as some of them knew, a darn good ball-carrier for two seasons and there was no reason why, if they all kept working together and digging doubly-hard, they couldn't win this one.

There were some questions and answers, and then it was time to go. They went out silently, a determined band of young men.

The ball came to Hal, high, end over end, and the purple line charged down under it. He gathered it in, fell in behind Gordon, Giles and Mehrstens. All three were bowled over by the Rogers wall. He was on his own in a sea of purple jerseys. He tried to feint, sidestep, use the straightarm, but he was hit from three sides and went down. He wondered whether he should have reversed in an attempt to outrun them instead of attempting to cut through, but it was too late now to replay it.

The snap, to Giles. Giles feeding to Mehrstens. Mehrstens feeding to him on the cut-back. He followed Gordon off tackle. At the line he saw a hole that seemed to stretch all the way to the goal line. He left Gordon and made for it. The Rogers end slammed in fast, closing the hole and dumping him at the scrimmage line for no gain.

Mehrstens chucked a leading pass that was a trifle too long. His number again. Back. Punt. It came straight to him from Highson. He took his step, booted. He'd aimed for the coffin corner. It wasn't deep enough and the Rogers safety moved over, took it on one bounce and came driving forward.

Winton held, Lindell slicing in once to throw the runner for a seven-yard loss, and

it was Winton's ball once more. End run. Giles slipped it to him and he followed Gordon and Mehrstens to the right.

He was clear for a moment when they went down, taking Rogers players with them, but he wasn't fast enough, he discovered, to get past Lawrinson, the Rogers captain, who was favored by the angle. The purple back knocked him out of bounds and the whole long sideways run added up to exactly two yards. He wondered, handing the ball to the umpire, if it would not have been better to have switched, the way Mick Palmer switched, in such a case.

Giles called for a pass that clicked and it was first and ten. Mehrstens sneaked into the line on the quick-play for five. Then they went around end, the other way this time, and the same thing happened as before—only this time it was the defensive right half who bore in on him.

This time Hal shifted, as Mick would do. But either the tackler was aware of what he was going to do or he didn't possess the fluid ghost-like swivel motion of Mick, for he was nailed in the middle of what he had hoped was to be a reverse and smashed to the turf without gain.

His being smeared seemed to take the edge off the Winton momentum started by the pass and Mehrstens' sneak. Gordon missed his block on the cross-buck and the play was stopped cold. A lateral missed fire and they had to kick.

He went back, stood there breathing hard, took a quick glance at the clock. He was surprised that seven minutes were gone. Seven minutes of carrying and he had not been able to do a thing. The snap. He boomed one and Lindell and Burke got the Rogers receiver a couple of strides after the ball settled in his arms.

**R**OGERS went for first down on three plays and by the time Winton got the ball the quarter ended. Gordon had been limping on the last two plays but said he was okay—just a knock.

Hal Benedict sat there with the others and his mind fled back over the lack of success. He had not been any help at all to them, and he admitted now to himself, glancing at these weary grimy men what he refused to admit before—that Mick Palmer was a far better ball-carrier than he was. He realized suddenly how much stronger Winton was now than last year because of Mick and the other ex-Service players.

Hal gazed over to where the St. Rogers team was stretched out and he knew how

greatly they had been strengthened too by the return of their true stars. And sitting there, Hal Benedict saw the difference for the first time.

Last season this Conference had been minor league. Now it was major again, as it had been before the war. In a minor league Hal Benedict was tops. In this big-league company he was just another player, a good player perhaps, in the proper spot, but no star.

No, you couldn't fool the big-time men. When you were carrying they knew the score. You had to be big-time too—you had to be a Mick Palmer—to have a chance of shellacking them. You had to have that invisible extra something. Mick had it and, in their respective positions, Lindell, Chio-cotti, Highson had it. Throughout this final quarter Hal could be just as fine a runner as he was last year. Hal knew it and knew it wouldn't mean a thing. It wouldn't mean victory.

Without Mick, or at least young Anderson—who was a Mick in the making—they could not possibly win. Hal Benedict had had his chance and he was not good enough. He was a yesterday's hero. Somehow, now, having had his chance, he did not mind this—did not mind that his day of glory was done.

Now a strange fierce desire to do something for them, for these other Winton players coursed through him. There seemed to be so little hope left in them.

Giles' gaze caught his and the quarterback, who'd been playing a whale of a game, smiled a little sadly as if to say: Not so good, eh? Lindell's eyes were on him, questioningly, asking—what can we do about this? Chio-cotti was dismally chewing a blade of grass.

Jamison, the third-stringer, arrived to take over for Pete Gordon. Gordon muttered something about he was all right and would be back pronto, started to limp off the field.

"Pete," Hal called to his substitute.

Gordon paused. Hal got up and went over to him.

"Tell Jordan this," Hal said quietly so the other men could not hear. "I don't know what kind of condition Mick and Anderson are in—whether either of 'em possibly can come out here or not. But if they can, tell Jordan I'll block myself into insensibility for them. Tell him I know we can't win it as we are."

The whistle cut in on them. Gordon nodded and got out of there.

Second down and seven to go. A pass. No good. Double reverse. Giles to Mehr-

tens to Jamison, to him—and into the off-tackle hole. A small hole and he knifed into it. The secondary came up fast, though, and caught him in air as he was sidestepping.

Mick! he thought as he went down. Hang it all, we need Mick!

He looked toward the bench as he rose but there was no action there.

He kicked and Rogers brought it back to the Winton forty. Now the ponderous purple-clad team kept smashing into the line, absorbing time, playing it safe, trying to crack open the blue-and-white forward wall. It gave at times, in spots, but did not crack. Twice Hal Benedict backed it up from behind, swiftly, fiercely, to help keep it from cracking.

Rogers got one first down, but could not get another. They punted and Hal caught it close to the goal line. He steamed up the sideline, cut to the center, sought interference which somehow wasn't there, saw the mass of purple encircling him. There was no way to get out. At least he saw no way to get out. He tried, but they hit him hard.

He heard the whistle and as he got up saw young Anderson running out, helmet in hand. A ray of renewed hope raced through Hal.

"Jamison out," the umpire instructed.

"How are you?" Hal asked as he dropped into the blocking spot and Anderson took over the running spot.

"Okay. Pop went over me pretty thoroughly." The kid grinned. "Nothing busted. Good as new."

**E**ND run. The snap. Hal didn't know where the ball was, didn't care. He knew where and when he should go, what to do. He smashed into the end, bowling the man out of the way without losing his own feet. He went on, into the secondary, socked the defensive half. From the ground he was aware of young Anderson's cleats speeding into the open path the two blocks had made for him.

"Ha!" he murmured, rising. "How'd you like that?"

He was talking to no one in particular, maybe just to himself for he was satisfied for the first time this game and this season with what he had done. For the first time he was liking this blocking business. He wanted to block. He moved down-field twenty-five yards to where the Rogers safety had finally nailed Anderson. The clock said six minutes to go.

Giles called for a pass. Hal screened Mehrtens on the one side, and the halfback

got a short one off into his target, Lindell, who had cut across behind the Rogers line. Second and five. Off-tackle, Hal leading the play. It was on Chiocotti's side. The big guard did his part of the job and Hal came up to the line with an opening there. Anderson at his heels, they tandemed through, clutching lineman's hands not quite able to reach them.

Lawrinson and the Rogers fullback came up, fast. Hal saw that if Anderson ran outside and around him, toward the sideline, the secondaries might not be able to catch the mercury-footed kid.

Would Anderson understand what he meant to do? Well, it was the only try that would hit paydirt—if it worked. He swung slightly left, taking his runner with him. The two Rogers men bore in, chasing them toward the sideline, cutting them off. Then just as the tacklers were about to meet them, Hal slowed down the slightest bit. He heard Anderson starting around him.

He left the kid then, abruptly, and piled into the fullback who was nearest him. The man went over and though Hal strove desperately to keep his feet, his momentum was too great and he went over too. But he remembered to roll.

His roll carried him into Lawrinson's path and the purple-clad back had to stride over him to avoid tripping. That half-stride in the air, Hal saw, cost Lawrinson the fractional part of a second that counted. You couldn't give away split seconds to anyone with Anderson's high speed.

Lawrinson grabbed for Anderson but was inches short, his hands merely brushing the young fier's body. Anderson sped on, free, just inside the white sideline, to cross the goal-line standing up. The Winton stands tore the roof off the sky. The placement was good, tying the score.

Oh, they were a happy gang of Indians going back to kickoff, slapping each other's backs, crying "Let's go!" to one another—filled with enthusiasm, confidence.

Lindell came up, jogged alongside.

"That was a great block," the lanky end said, and Hal Benedict knew from the way it was said that Lindell meant it was a major-league block.

The clock read three minutes to go as they kicked off. Time raced away as Rogers, playing in deadly desperation, sought now to regain their lost lead, to win back the ball game and the championship. But they found a hard-scraping rejuvenated Winton team before them, and though they managed to nab one first down on a lateral that caught

Winton momentarily off balance, the blue-and-white took over in midfield as the clock read a minute and a half.

Giles called for a pass. No good. Off tackle then. They picked up four. Hal led on the double-reverse but the Rogers center pulled out, got around and through, nailed Anderson from behind. Another pass was batted down. They kicked. Burke and Lindell dropped Lawrinson in his tracks on his own fifteen, but hard as they hit him, the Rogers back held on to the ball.

Three-quarters of a minute. Rogers broke out of its huddle fast, passed. But Highson broke through and smeared the passer for a five-yard loss, knocking Rogers back to its own ten. Half a minute. Pass again, a long one. But Hal Benedict, drifting back with the potential receiver, wasn't fooled by the feint and went high. He couldn't catch it, so smacked the ball to earth. Rogers, knowing they couldn't have a win now played it safe, for a tie, rather than risk a possible interception of another pass attempt.

The fullback dropped back to punt. Hal moved in, close behind his own line. His eye and mind quickly figured the distance, the position of the defense.

**W**ITH the snap, he drove forward, charging like a jet-propelled human. His hands found the defensive half's helmet as the man tried to block him out, whirled the head and body to one side with a strange new strength he'd never possessed before, kept driving in, hands raised now. As the fullback's right leg swung toward the ball Hal leaped into the air.

He felt the smashing sting of the pigskin against his chin and the top of his chest. Dazedly but instinctively he kept going in, chasing after the tumbling, rolling leather. He was alone and he knew he could not, must not, miss. He fell surely on the slowly bobbing oval as it rolled into the Rogers end-zone and as he lay there on the ball, his breath coming in short hard happy gasps, the gun went off.

They picked him up, out of the frozen turf, pummeled his back and hugged him to them, yelling and laughing, some of them even crying in their excited happiness. Then, as a team, they jogged off the field, into the thunder greeting them, praising them, from the stands. Jordan came out, grabbed his hand. The coach's face was radiant.

"Benedict, that was the best gol-darned run I ever saw in my life!"

They laughed, and walked together toward the dressing-room.



"Gimme your autograph, will you?" asked the youngster

# AUTOGRAPH ON A PIGSKIN

By C. PAUL JACKSON

*It takes a dose of a familiar medicine to cure O'Conner of a grudge that has goaded him to gridiron greatness!*

**M**ICKEY O'CONNOR slid his helmet up and swiped a sodden jersey sleeve across sweat-plastered black hair as he shuffled wearily into the tailback slot. He glanced toward the scoreboard on the rim of the stadium. His eyes were sunken and hollow from fatigue.

The huge clock showed seventy-six seconds left to play. State's ball, second down and eight. Midwest, 14—State, 10.

"We can do it, gang! Block for Mickey. We can score!"

A bitter bleakness gripped Mickey at the forlorn pepper talk from someone in the State line. But he had no right to feel bitter, he knew. The guys had played their hearts out today. Midwest had merely worn them down, just as Sherry Mason had said they would.

"You've let a trivial thing get all out of proportion," Sherry had said last night. "It—it's childish and impossible. Midwest is too good. They have too many reserves. They'll wear our team down, Mickey, and they'll break your heart."

Well, Midwest reserve strength had worn

them down. State had outfought superior strength and piled up a ten point lead and now Midwest had come slamming fresh men through this last quarter for two touchdowns. Mel Hunter was going to beat him.

Mental pictures flashed through Mickey's brain in familiar pattern. A black-haired, ragged kid with stardust in his eyes, jostling against a crowd departing from another stadium. The kid's worshipping gaze on a tall, clean-limbed god in stained golden pants and torn red jersey. The man in football gear striding from the field, head high.

The great Mel Hunter, who had just carried the Red and Gold of Midwest to a win over a better team through amazing personal prowess.

The black-haired kid stuck a stub of a pencil and a wrinkled, discarded program toward Mel Hunter as the All-American swung through the gate to the dressing room ramp.

"Gimme your autograph, will you, huh? I'm gonna be a football player like you when I grow up."

Mel Hunter brushed past the kid, too great to give a grubby urchin the boon of the sim-

ple thing he asked.

Mel Hunter was just as big stuff today with this potential National Championship squad he coached. Sports writers called it the best squad Hunter had coached in ten years. A cinch to take undermanned State in stride and meet Eastern U undefeated and untied.

Mickey's jaw set now as he remembered Sherry's words. Childish, was it? Well, he was going to bring it home to Mel Hunter. There was still time. Mel Hunter's squad wasn't going East undefeated and untied.

**S**TATE'S quarterback rapped out the signal and the ball came on a direct pass to Mickey. He slanted along behind the scrimmage line, cut sharply for the hole at tackle. But three Midwest backer-ups ganged at him. He was slowed just that vital step in cutting away from the first one, and the defensive halfback smeared him.

"This guy is all through," the Midwest back chortled. "Cold meat, gang! He's slowed to a walk!"

"Take it cool, everybody. A couple more and they're washed up."

Midwest chattered confidently. A wild Irisher had fired State to superman performance, but Midwest was a truly great squad and they knew they had State.

Mickey O'Connor eyed the defensive halfback. The Midwest man wore a confident grin.

"Too bad, O'Conner," he said. "You're tough, but we've got you taped. Try my spot again so I can look good to Mel, huh?"

So you've got me taped, have you? It's cold meat and I'm slowed to a walk? Maybe that's the way you want to play it!

"Run twenty-two-B to the right," Mickey panted to the quarterback in the huddle.

The quarter looked up quickly.

"They've stopped you dead on that all afternoon," he said.

"I've got to be sure," Mickey answered.

The quarterback looked at him as though he thought Mickey was crazy.

Mickey grabbed the handoff, feinted left, flipped a lateral to the tailback and cut sluggishly as the passer faded. He had to make this look good. He was logy and slow as he stumbled downfield. A pleading roar from the stands rose to a crescendo as State's passer loosed a long spiral. The roar turned abruptly to a wail.

The ball was yards beyond Mickey's all-out leap. He sprawled on his stomach on the turf. He was slow in getting up. Time wasn't so important now. The clock stopped

on incompleated passes. The defensive halfback eyed Mickey.

"Pull that one again, huh, O'Conner?" he said. A relaxed grin wreathed the Midwest man's face. "Mel can't miss taking me East if I smear the great O'Conner three times running—even if you do think you're playing me for a sucker!"

Mickey jerked a startled look at the Midwest man. The barbering didn't bother Mickey, but if this cookie were wise that he was putting on an act, it wasn't good. He studied the defensive man. There was a doubt in the player's eye.

"Sure," Mickey said, and he put all the weariness he could in his tone. "I'll pull it again. This time we'll make it work."

He saw the Midwest man's puzzlement. Well, all it needed was a teeny fraction of getting him off guard.

"Same thing, only deep," Mickey said tensely in the huddle. "Throw that thing as far as you can, Red!"

A stillness held the crowd as State fell into formation. Everyone in the stadium knew that State's only hope was a pass—to Mickey O'Conner.

Mickey feinted, cut sluggishly as State's red-headed passer again faded. The Midwest back loped out to cover Mickey. Mickey deliberately stumbled and he caught the instinctive momentary relaxing of alertness on the defensive man's part. In that instant Mickey turned it on. He was a streak in State's Black and Silver and he was past the Midwest back before the defensive man's belated reflexes responded.

That precious one step lead!

Mickey had it and the ball was a lovely brown blob dropping through the air. Then it was a still more lovely bit of inflated leather clutched tightly in his grasp. Mickey O'Conner really turned on all he had.

No Midwest man laid a hand on him. Mickey rode the wild State roar all the way. He touched the pigskin to the turf across the double white line that was more to him than Midwest's goal.

State, 16—Midwest, 14!

**I**T TOOK minutes to fight his way through the wild, back-slapping throng to the ramp that led to the dressing rooms. A girl with nut-brown hair stood on tiptoe beyond the gate and her smile toward Mickey was radiant, and pride was in her gray eyes. Triumph filled Mickey O'Conner, a kind of hard, savage triumph. How childish was it now, his vowing that he'd beat Mel Hunter?

His eyes devoured Sherry Mason and sud-

denly he knew that more than anything else he wanted Sherry to think well of him. He held up the football the referee had given him, as captain of the winning team. A freckled, eager-faced kid jabbed a pencil and a grimy program at him. Mickey's total concentration was on Sherry and the encompassing glow that filled him. He was barely conscious that he brushed the boy aside.

He saw Sherry's eyes darken, stab an accusing look at him and fall away. He looked down where she looked and he saw the freckled boy and the hurt bewilderment on the kid's face. Mickey suddenly realized what he'd done.

He stood very still for a moment while abrupt changes took place in the familiar mental pictures that kaleidoscoped through his brain. Why, Mel Hunter might have been filled with the same unseeing exultation that other day! And Mickey suddenly saw a thing clearly that he had never before consciously admitted.

Mel Hunter had probably unconsciously given that black-haired kid of ten years ago the incentive that had driven him to reach today's peak. He would do the same for this kid. But hold on a minute. Maybe the thing worked both ways.

"How is it, kid?" Mickey said to the freckle-faced youngster.

"Gimme your autograph, will ya, Mickey, huh? I'm gonna be a football player like you when I grow up!"

Mickey O'Conner grinned, then looked at the boy soberly.

"Can I depend on that, kid? You'll hang in there and pitch all the time so you'll make somebody's team someday?"

The youngster looked at Mickey and he must have seen that Mickey wasn't kidding him.

The kid said very earnestly, "Gee, I sure will, Mickey. I'll do anything so's I can play football like you!"

The freckles jumped on the boy's face and hero worship filled his eyes as Mickey penciled his name across the program.

Mickey said, "Okay, fella. You've given your promise."

"Gee!" The kid breathed. "Mickey O'Connor's autograph! I'll sure keep that promise, Mickey!"

Mickey chunked the youngster in the ribs and tucked Sherry Mason's hand under his arm. The soft mistiness of Sherry's eyes was something. He started up the ramp.

"This is the way to Midwest's dressing room," Sherry said.

"Yeah."

Sherry's hand tightened convulsively on his arm.

"Mickey! You're not going to—" She broke off, and her tone was suddenly soft. "I see you aren't," she murmured. "I take back some things I said last night, Mickey. There's nothing childish about holding onto an ideal—even a left-hand ideal, if you don't let it sour you."

Mickey squeezed her hand. A warm lightness inside him completed a melting process on a hardness that had been in him a long time. He chuckled.

"Nothing is sour, with me," he said. He held up the football he carried. "I'm going in and thank Mel Hunter for what he did for me—and get his autograph on this pigskin. The one he's owed me for ten years!"



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*True Stories of Exciting Gridiron Action*

By JACK KOFOED

Famous Sports Commentator

## SID LUCKMAN ACCEPTS THE CHALLENGE IN A CRUCIAL GAME

**T**HE professionals don't fool about scoring. That's one reason why their games are so exciting. Take that battle between the Chicago Bears and the Los Angeles Rams in October, '46. Two of the greatest passers in football history starred in the rival backfields. Sid Luckman chucked 'em for the Bears, and Bob Waterfield for the Rams.

Luckman pitched three touchdown passes in the first half. Waterfield threw two, and



Tommy Harmon raced 84 yards for another counter, which put the Rams out in front 28-21.

This was the situation, with less than three minutes left to play, when the Bears began a desperate drive to tie the score.

Nine times out of ten, when the pros are in a hurry to get anywhere, they take to the air. No running attack for them. Throw that ball around. True, there are risks, but you have to take 'em when time is running out. The issue depended on Luckman's accuracy, and there wasn't a finer passer in the business.

The Rams knew what was coming. They

set up their defense against exactly the sort of attack the Bears were compelled to use. That made the burden on Sid more difficult, but he had to succeed, or his team was licked.

Luckman faded, cool, alert, picking out his receiver. In front of him warfare boiled, as the frantic men from Los Angeles tried to smash through to block him. Back . . . back . . . If he were trapped the loss would be terrific. Then, he cocked his arm, and let go.

The ball went straight as a homing pigeon into the arms of Ken Kavanaugh, who was twenty-five yards downfield. Kavanaugh hung onto the pigskin with the clutch of death, but even though he was nailed in his tracks, twenty-five yards is nothing to sniff at. It put the ball on the Los Angeles 30-yard line.

All right, Luckman. Get back there again. There are a lot of two-hundred-pounders who'll go gunning for you. You can't get away with that kind of stuff all the time. We're waiting. That's what the Rams were saying to themselves.

Well, there wasn't anything for Luckman to do but accept the challenge. You don't get far along the ground against a line like that of the Los Angeles Rams. So, back he went again . . . far back . . . and again the giants clawed and fought to get through at him. The secondary spread out, trying to cover every eligible receiver, but somehow Ray McLean was loose, and took the pass for a 17-yard gain.

Waterfield and Harmon and Hoffman and the other Californians were yipping things up. If they could hold now they'd win, because when they took over they'd stall until the clock ran out. Luckman knew that as well as anybody. He had the choice of switching a running play in between passes but with so little time left, he didn't want to do that.

Nobody could kid about a victory complex as far as Sid Luckman was concerned. He had played with Columbia, and Columbia had often been beaten. But defeats had never dented his confidence, or his ability to keep trying until the last gun sounded. So, he faded again . . . and once more thunder started against the battered Chicago line.

Back went the deadly arm. The ball arched high through the air, with the heart of every man on the field in his throat. Up leaped

McLean again, arms searching, and the ball settled in them. He held the leather against the impact of a thundering tackle, and went over the goal line with it clutched against his chest.

When the extra point was kicked the score was 28-28 . . . though it had seemed, only three minutes before, that the Bears were certainly beaten. It was a Frank Merriwell finish if there ever was one . . . and you can hand the laurel wreath to Sid Luckman.

## HOW THEY SHOWED UP GAMBLERS IN 1931

**T**HIS happened sixteen years ago, back in 1931, and the men involved are now verging on middle age. Sixteen years represent a lifetime in athletics; and there are not so many athletes, at that, who last so long.

Minnesota was scheduled to play Wisconsin. In these days we talk of gambling and bribes. Those things are supposed to be a modern corrupt development, but crookedness is as old as humanity. On Monday Captain "Biggie" Munn, guard and punter, fullback Jack Manders and halfback Ken MacDougal each received a letter. They were all alike.

Each offered the player \$1500 if he would do his part to throw the game.

The boys were stunned. This was something brand new in their limited experience. They played to win, because they loved the



game and were loyal to their university. In the years that have passed since that startling day, Manders has set more records than almost any other professional; Munn has become a fine coach, and MacDougal a successful attorney. But they were youngsters then, and this was a flaming challenge from the nether regions.

Each one went to the coach and showed his letter. They were burning mad, and would have loved to gang up on the men who wrote them. The coach told them to forget it. The letters would be turned over

to the postal authorities, and every effort made to apprehend the criminal who wrote them. In the meantime there was nothing else to do but get ready for Wisconsin.

This was the right attitude to take, but unfortunately a smart newspaper reporter found out about the bribe offer. This was news, and he splattered the story all over the front page of his sheet,

The coach called his squad together.

"Fellows," he said, "we're on the spot. We know these teammates of ours are absolutely on the level. So do the college authorities and the postal people. But it's different with the public. Mass psychology will blame any one of them if we should lose to Wisconsin, or if Manders, Munn or MacDougal should fumble or miss a tackle. This is one we've got to win, because if we don't they will be accused of selling out. I've never arranged for anyone to be a particular star, but that's what I'm going to do now. I worked out three plays, one each for Manders and MacDougal, and a lateral pass that will end up with Munn. They can work, and they've got to work, because I won't have three fine boys splattered with slander."

Everyone on the squad knew what that meant. Through the rest of the week they worked like mad to perfect those plays. Everyone knew how tough Wisconsin was, but the team was not only battling for the honor of their alma mater; they were fighting for three young men, whom they all loved and admired. They trained into the darkness of each night to make sure there would be no slip-up.

Even those of you who don't remember the doings of 1931 recall the amazing record as a ball carrier and kicker Jack Manders set later with the Chicago Bears. When his play against Wisconsin was called, Jack, behind superb blocking, ran fifty-five yards to score Minnesota's first touchdown. Nobody could point the finger at him.

In the next quarter an end named Robinson caught a forward pass thrown from near

the center of the field. He carried it to the twenty-yard line, and could have gone over for the touchdown, but he wasn't after glory. Robinson lateraled to Munn, and the big guard went over to confound any scandal-mongers who might have said he had contact with gamblers.

MacDougal was hurt, and taken out before he had a chance to score, but the slate was wiped clean. Minnesota scored fourteen points, and the men who had been offered bribes scored all of them.

It's a little frightening, though, to imagine what would have happened if they had run up against one of those bad days when they

couldn't have done anything right. Despite all the precautions that had been taken, they would have been smeared by unthinking people, certain to say they had thrown the game.

Bribery, almost unknown in college football in those days, has come into the open, and is being tracked down. It is one of the most vicious cycles American sports has known. Those responsible for it should serve long jail sentences. Fortunately for Manders, Munn and MacDougal, their records have remained as clear as a summer sky to this very day. They really showed up the gamblers that time.

## ONE OF THE STRANGEST STORIES IN GRID HISTORY

**I** KNOW Bill Stern has told this story, and probably others have, too, but since it is one of the strangest in football history, it is worth repeating on the chance that someone hasn't heard it.

This happened back in the days when the defensive team could recover a fumble, and run it back as far as it was able. Wofford College was the protagonist of the little drama, though I'll admit I don't know what school offered the opposition that afternoon.

At any rate, the team fumbled when on the Wofford five-yard line. A big linesman grabbed the loose ball, and started for the opposing goal line 95 yards away. He was big, but he was fast, too, and outfooted most of the enemy players.

Linesmen rarely get a chance to play such a startling and dramatic role, and this big tackle took full advantage of it. He was under a full head of steam, and the only opponent who had even the faintest chance of catching him was a frantically pursuing half-back. By the time they reached the 15-yard line the back knew he was licked. He couldn't possibly make up the needed distance for a tackle. So, being a strategist at heart, he yelped with his last breath: "You're running the wrong way!"

It was a shot in the dark, a chance in a million. The tackle wasn't a ball carrier by trade. He had heard of other players going the wrong way in the confusion of a tough game. Naturally, he figured the warning came from one of his own team-mates. So, as he reached the five-yard line, he made

a sharp turn, and headed back the way he had come.

This had the affect of not only amazing his rivals, but completely upsetting the Wof-



ford players. The big tackle was back at midfield before anybody seemed to understand what had happened in this mad pattern of events. His own pals set out after him, but though he was pretty tired by this time, they found a lot of trouble in trying to catch him. Finally one of them made a diving tackle, and nailed him on his own five-yard line, almost to the inch at the point where he had started.

The linesman had run 190 yards without gaining anything at all, which should go down in the record books as something that never happened before, and probably will never happen again!

Even Roy Riegels, now in the calm of his later years, will admit this eclipsed his feat of running the wrong way in a Rose Bowl game.

## FRANKIE SINKWICH RATES WITH THE BEST, BUT—

**I** MUST admit, being an old hand at covering sports, that the ancients almost seemed to have more glamour and skill than

their modern successors though this may be due to the kindly patina with which Nature glosses events long since past. So, in my

book Jim Thorpe was the greatest all-around football player in history, and there was never a broken field runner like Red Grange or a better fullback than Ted Coy. But, I am also a character who looks at figures, and figures do not lie as much as statistics-haters would have you believe. Did you ever convince a bank that you were right and their dope sheets wrong?

If you believe in figures, there's a fellow named Frankie Sinkwich, commonly called



“Flatfoot,” who rates right up there among the best.

In these days a statistician is as necessary to football as a triple threat in the backfield. When Thorpe, Eddie Mahan, Johnny Poe, Hamilton Fish, and others were making gridiron history, people were interested only in results, and not in any figures but those of the blondes on the sidelines. The statistical mania took a fair grip on the nation about the time Grange was swivel-hipping his way over the gridirons of the land.

In three years . . . 1923-24-25 . . . the loose-legged redhead gained a total of 4280 yards. Of this crushing total, Grange piled up 3637 yards rushing and 643 passing.

It was seventeen years later that Sinkwich, of Georgia, came along, and what did he do in three seasons? Nothing less than 4730 yards . . . divided between 2399 yards running and 2331 passing. What's the odds,

whether you carry, or throw. The idea is to go ahead.

I saw Grange run roughshod over a good University of Pennsylvania team, and others that rated in the top bracket. If you place your faith in Mr. Statistics though, there never was a contest on any gridiron so completely dominated by one man as the Georgia-Texas Christian battle in which “Flatfoot” Sinkwich played the leading role.

The Texans had a fellow named Kyle Gillespie, who was pretty hot himself that afternoon. Gillespie went over for one touchdown with a smash off tackle, passed for 15 yards to Bud Alford for another, and heaved a third for a 53-yard counter by King Kong Kringle. Compared with Frankie Sinkwich, he was standing still.

That afternoon Sinkwich piled up an offensive total of 382 yards, 243 on aials and 139 from rushing. This is the way he did it:

He hurled a pass to Melvin Conger, good for 61 yards and a touchdown. He dead-lined one into the hands of Cliff Kimsey that covered a total . . . flight and run . . . of 60 yards and another counter. Mr. Sinkwich engineered a 15-yarder to Ken Keuper for the third tally. Then, to wind up the day, he faded for another aerial, was trapped . . . so the opposition thought . . . and raced 43 yards for the final touchdown of the hectic afternoon.

The great Dixie Howell, of Alabama, piled up 239 yards against Stanford in the Rose Bowl game of 1935, but that seems sort of picayune compared with what Sinkwich did to Texas Christian, don't you think?

But, don't think me old-fashioned if I still believe Jim Thorpe was the greatest all-around football player, Ted Coy the best at smashing a line, Sammy Baugh the finest passer, and Jack Manders the best precision kicker.

Sinkwich is terrific, but I'm not entirely sold on figures. There's always something that doesn't show in the statistics.

## AN AMAZING SERIES OF PENALTIES

**P**ENALTIES often spoil a football game, and over-zealous officials can break up what otherwise might be an exciting contest, but on occasion penalties can turn a ball game into farce.

Neither Chattanooga nor Sewanee ever hit the big-time brackets on the gridiron, but they have a healthy rivalry, and it means a lot to each school to win. But in one of their contests they probably set a short-term record for penalties . . . at least a mark that

will take a lot of matching.

Sewanee was deep in its own territory when it tried to kick out of danger. The punt was blocked, and Chattanooga took over on the eleven-yard line. This looked like the pay-off. The boys were going to town.

A 'Nooga back circled right end, and romped into pay dirt for a touchdown, but the whistle blew. Instead of a score, the team was penalized fifteen yards for holding. That put them on the 26.

Then, the quarterback faded . . . tossed a pass. It was complete, and the Chattanooga fans were happy, but only for a moment. This time it was unnecessary roughness, and the ball moved back to the 41. This was movement all right, but in the wrong direction.

The field general tried again, with an off-tackle slant, but a clipping penalty moved Chattanooga back farther into its own territory. If this sort of thing kept up they might keep the ball, and be driven back to their own goal line. In desperation, the Tennessee boys punted, but the kick was called back because both teams were off-side. They tried again, but by this time Sewanee had caught the spirit of the thing, and was off-side. This, for the first time in what seemed centuries, moved the ball in the other direction.

It was still first down for Chattanooga. Perhaps the quarterback decided that this couldn't keep up forever. He might as well make another stab or two at trying for a touchdown. If my counting is right, it was first down and 55 yards to go, which should be something of a record. It's pretty tough trying to make up that much yardage on the

ground, so the next play was a shovel pass. The receiver took it, found an opening, slipped through it, and then the way to pay



dirt was clear. He faced the entire distance without a hand being laid on him . . . and scored a touchdown.

He was, by a strange quirk of fate, the same man who had scored on the first play, only to have the touchdown rescinded by the first of that amazing series of penalties!

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## NAMES THAT HAVE BEEN HEADLINED IN FOOTBALL

**J**UST as a hint to those who play up racial discrimination, and the idea that any race has a monopoly on courage, skill or intelligence, here are a few names that have been headlined in football:

Joe Raznichak (Bucknell), Bill Adamaitas (Catholic U.), Herb Baumstein (Mississippi), Paul Robeson (Cornell), Ralph O'Gwynne (Auburn), Frank Sinkwich (Georgia), Jim Castiglia (Georgetown), Mike Holovak (Boston College), Al Hudson (Miami), Russ Moseley (Alabama).

North and South, East and West. Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Negro, Pole, Irishman, Italian. Every race and creed and religion. No one cared. The ability to play the game honestly and well was all that counted. No lines were drawn. Color and religion and politics were unimportant.

If only the world could live up to the code of the gridiron. Then we would have no fear of what the future holds.

We would then approach the Utopia we all dream of.

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## BILL JEFFERSON SCORES ON A BAD PUNT

**I**T WAS fourth down. Bill Jefferson, of Mississippi State, dropped back in punt formation with his mates. Billy was a good kicker. All season long he had sent those long boots downfield. His pals thought he was as good as anybody in the land.

No punter is any better than the line in front of him. It has to hold long enough for him to get the ball away. No hurry. Just an easy follow-through. That's what Jefferson had been used to. The mules up front had held for him. But those Georgetown forwards were different. With Al Blozis and Augie Lio ripping things apart, a guy had to

hurry, or they'd walk right over him. Blozis was six-foot-four and packed with 230 pounds of muscle. Lio was almost as devastating.

The ball sailed back from center. Billy felt it against his hands. Without looking, he knew how the boys were fighting to keep the Georgetown forwards from smashing through. Billy was a cool lad, but he hurried more than he should have this time.

He dropped the pigskin, and swung his leg with driving force. At the moment of impact he felt his heart fall into his shoes. It was a bad kick . . . the worst one he had

ever made. The ball went almost straight up in the air, with almost no forward motion at all.

The score was tied at that moment, and this might very well give Georgetown the victory. Down came the ball, with everyone scrambling madly. It took one of those strange, mad, inexplicable bounces right into Billy Jefferson's hands. He plunged forward,

bounced off a couple of bodies, and made five yards before they brought him to earth. It was a first down on one of the worst punts that had ever been made in football history!

Mississippi State won that game 14-to-7, but no one knows what would have happened had a Georgetown man recovered the flop kick.

## IKE PICKLE IS A HERO AND A GOAT IN THE SAME GAME

**I**T'S funny, but a man can be a hero and a tramp in the same football game. Nobody knows that better than Ike Pickle. That's a name, honest to goodness. It isn't a gag. Ike was a star back for Mississippi



State, when that squad went into Miami's Orange Bowl on January 1, 1937.

In the first period Pickle raced around left end for eight yards and a touchdown. Later he uncorked the longest punt ever seen in the January first classic. It traveled 82 yards, which is a tremendous punt in anybody's language.

Those two incidents, by themselves, would have made Ike Pickle a hero.

There was another happening that made him the goat. Ike's touchdown had been matched by Boyd Brumbaugh, who was Duquesne's star, and there wasn't much difference between the teams at any stage of the game.

In the second period Duquesne had the ball, and Ike was back in the safety position. It was third down, and Brumbaugh faded for a pass . . . a long, long pass. Ernie Hefferle had gone kiting downfield as fast as he could. Now, it wasn't only Ike Pickle's job to watch the ball, and grab it or knock it down. It was also his job to keep Hefferle covered. He didn't do that, but allowed the Duquesne man to get behind him.

The Dukes had been on their own 15-yard line when Brumbaugh let go that gargantuan heave, which traveled 70 yards through the air. The ball landed in Hefferle's arms, and he ran the remaining fifteen for the touchdown that beat Mississippi State 13-to-12.

Ike Pickle was a hero and a goat all within a few minutes.

## SOME STATISTICS ON THE ORANGE BOWL GAMES

**S**INCE Miami's Orange Bowl has become one of the outstanding New Year's Day games, here are some statistics in case you get into an argument:

The greatest offensive team was Georgia, led by Frank Sinkwich, which rolled up 449 yards in beating Texas Christian 40-26 in 1942.

The greatest ground gaining contest came in 1943 when Boston College made 391 yards and Alabama 343 for a total of 734 yards.

Mike Holovak, of Boston College, averaged 15.8 yards in 10 tries against Alabama, but Steve Van Buren, of Louisiana State, beat his total with 172 yards in 14 attempts against Texas A & M in 1944.

Camp Wilson, of Tulsa, raced 92 yards against Georgia Tech on a kickoff return, a

touchdown and the longest gallop in the history of the Orange Bowl series.

The weakest attack was that of the University of Miami against Bucknell in 1935, when the Hurricanes gained only 18 yards all afternoon.

The wildest passing team was Georgia Tech, which tossed 38 and completed 19 in the battle against Tulsa. Tech also made seven fumbles, which is a record in that department.

Six times the losing team in the Orange Bowl has registered more first downs than the winners.

The most penalties came in 1939 when Tennessee was set back 130 yards and Oklahoma 91.

*(Concluded on page 113)*

Casales tossed passes until  
he had the regulars dizzy



# THE CHISELER

By CARTER SPRAGUE

*When wonder fullback Casales breaks training, Coach Winters is on a spot, for if he fires him—he'll have no team left!*

**H**EAD Coach Harvey Winters halted his slow march up Vine Street so suddenly that an adenoidal freshman, lapping a half pint of Jigger Shop ice cream contentedly from a wooden spoon, collided sharply with his derriere. The freshman sat down hard. The ice cream flew through the air and plopped on the sidewalk.

But Coach Winters was insensible of the minor havoc his abrupt halt had caused. Other Midvale University denizens, used to the vagaries of freshmen, paid him no heed. Few if any in fact, were aware of the cataclysm.

The cataclysm, six feet four in shoes and incredibly broad of shoulder, stopped too and looked down at the grid mentor's mere six feet with astonishment on its craggily handsome face. It pushed a tousled black forelock back from its brow with a hand the size of a porterhouse steak.

"Holy cow!" it exclaimed irreverently.

"Are you still here? I thought they shot the team out from under you."

"The surprise," said Coach Winters, regaining his normal bellow while the freshman scrambled for cover, "is mutual. As if I hadn't troubles enough without you!"

"Do tell!" said the monster. He spoke unexpectedly with the accents of loftiness, impeccably front-of-the-mouth. It had always set Winters' lower plate on edge and separation had not lessened its lack of appeal to the coach.

Then Frank Casales—for that was the monster's name—grinned engagingly.

"Perhaps you can sit back and enjoy the season then," said Casales. "Want me out for the squad, coach?"

"Anything but that," said Winters.

"How inhospitable!" Casales replied. He examined the mentor closely. "In that case, perhaps you would join me in a flagon of ale."

"You know I don't drink," snapped Winters.

"There has to be a first time for everything," the giant replied amiably. "You look as if you could stand one. But if you're not so inclined, okay!" He shrugged, lifted a huge hand in salute and went on his way.

**C**OACH Winters walked slowly back to his quarters and promptly made a liar of himself after locking the door. But even four fingers of one-hundred-proof bourbon failed to restore even his usual mood of despond. He sat in an armchair and gazed gloomily out the window at the rose and gold of the September sunset—without appreciation. It reminded him too closely of the green and black of Hoving University.

Twelve months before, his quarters on such a night, had been a hive of activity. Alumni, newspapermen, hangers-on, radio folk and all the various and sundry persons who attach themselves to the high-powered chief of a winning big-time football machine had been beating a steady path to his door or calling constantly over the wires that led to the now-silent telephone. Midvale had been merely another Winters stepping stone toward a reputation rising like a comet in grid circles.

Now—he was alone. Midvale was still Midvale, as it had been for more than two centuries, a vine-clad citadel of learning and education for those with the talent, the price or both. Midvale and its anti-football professors had put him through the wringer and left him hanging out on the line to dry. Midvale and its professors—and Casales.

For the thousandth time, Coach Winters told himself that he should have cut and run when the blow fell. He could still resign from his contract and sit out the season angling for another berth. He was far from poor. Being a bachelor, he had long earned big money as a coach, and he was far from a spendthrift. He wondered if he were going crazy.

At first he had told himself that he couldn't quit under fire, that Harvey Winters must maintain his fame as a fighting football man by sticking to his post. Now he wondered if that were his true reason—and the sight of the lovely, ivy and tradition clad Gothic towers against the afterglow only added to his unsureness. Granted that Midvale had something, what did it have for Harvey Winters?

What it had in this year of grace, or more probably disgrace, was a group of small-time players and a big-time schedule—an impossible set-up for the late Knute Rockne him-

self. The professors had gotten him—and Frank Casales was the wedge that had given them the opening.

A year ago, Harvey Winters had had his own boys to pick from—case-hardened young farmers and coal miners picked for stamina and football savvy rather than intelligence. They were boys who would take orders because they knew that, under sufferance of football scholarships, they had to produce on the gridiron or get out of school.

If the coach and his system, foisted on Midvale by a group of wealthy and enthusiastic alumni who were desirous of putting Midvale back on the gridiron map, were not popular with the mass of undergraduates and the faculty, who cared? Certainly neither alumni nor sports writers.

It was as a sop to undergraduate and faculty opinion, that he had allowed young Casales to make the first squad. The kid was a tremendous natural fullback, no doubt of it. But he wasn't the Winters type, and from the first he had caused trouble. He seemed to labor under the delusion that football was a game, not rugged big business.

"So I had a glass of beer last night," he said coolly when Winters first got him up on the carpet. "So I had twenty or thirty—I don't make a habit of counting them. Was there anything wrong with my work out there today?"

"You'll train my way or you'll be out of school!" the coach had snapped. He had forgotten that the miscreant was not one of his proselytes for the moment, that he knew little about him. But the kid didn't belong to an eating club and, off the gridiron, wore clothes a tramp would have spurned.

"I was not aware that you possessed the credentials of a dietician," the kid informed him with incredible insolence. Harvey Winters had hit the ceiling.

Having come up to his present position by dint of hard work and thereafter having handled hundreds of young gladiators, he knew that the Prussian system of absolute discipline was the only one which would hold these craggy young men in hand. Brusquely, he demoted Casales to the Junior Varsity.

"You'll have more time to drink beer there," he said acidly and turned away.

**T**HE following week, at scrimmage, young Casales had crumpled and rent his cherished Varsity line as if it were shredded wheat and tossed passes until he had the regulars dizzy. He spent so much time in the first-string backfield that he might have belonged there—all of this in front of a

choice assortment of visitors, including a bunch of sports reporters.

"Isn't that young Frank Casales?" one of the newspapermen had asked innocently.

"Just a scrub showing off," Winters had replied, but the columnist was not to be shunted aside.

"He was a holy terror at Hill two years back," said the writer, which was news to the coach, who had hitherto paid little attention to private school records, preferring the personal reports of his scouts.

"Say," said the other news hound. "He's Henri Casales' son then. Used to be an infant prodigy, I believe—a kid sculptor or something. Look at him go!"

That had been the red light, but Coach Winters had ignored it. Sculpture was not one of his hobbies, nor was genealogy. Hence he knew neither that young Casales was rated, for all his youth, high in promise as a statue maker nor that his family, from Revolutionary times, had been deservedly prominent in art and letters.

"I didn't want to talk about him," he had said instead. "The young fellow won't keep training. I've had to put him down on the scrubs for discipline."

He had forgotten it—until the following day when the columns had appeared. They in themselves had not been bad—but the resultant furor on the campus had been. The students, sensing that one of their own had been dealt a card from the bottom of the deck, grew clamorous.

Then an enterprising editor of the "Midvale Daily News" had dug up the fact that Casales had taken only two glasses of ale the night he had been reported, that he had been doing so openly every night since he had entered college.

And the following night a statue had appeared on the campus—squarely across from Lewis Hall, where most of the undergraduates attended class during the morning.

It had been a viciously good caricature of Coach Winters, of soft red sandstone and life size. His right hand, flung up and outward, might have been pointing toward a distant goal—or it might have been a Nazi salute. And while neither Winters nor the statue wore a mustache, subtle distortion of the features and the arrangement of the hair over the forehead gave it an unmistakable Hitlerian resemblance. It had been, in short, a riot.

The results had been many and drastic. First, young Casales had been promptly suspended and the statue removed—but not before an enterprising undergraduate had pho-

tographed it and sent it to one of the news photo services. It had become a nationwide sensation.

Naturally, the morale of the team had been shot before its opening game. They had won a few, but the big season had been an utter failure. Outraged alumni had demanded an investigation which had uprooted all but a scant handful of the hand-picked stars. Harvey Winters had been sunk by outraged Midvale opinion.

So here he was with a schedule and no team to meet it—unless a scraggly group of soft-handed amateurs could be called a team. And now Frank Casales, the cause of it all, was back at Midvale. Verily, life was hard.

He had been putting his nondescript charges through their paces since mid-August on University field, trying to work up interest in a gang who needed awkward squad teaching that a regular Winters eleven would have learned in second-year high.

That the boys were willing, he couldn't deny. They obeyed orders as best they could, toiling diligently under the hot sun of late summer. But, save for play-calling halfback Don Chesney, his sole proselyted survivor, and Brad Otis, a guard whose rugged physique gave the lie to his blue-blooded ancestry, they weren't football players.

But they were beginning to master the rudiments of the Winter Liquid-T, and their coach was hoping they would not utterly disgrace him when he called the first scrimmage the day after Frank Casales put in his Midvale reappearance.

**A**S THE gray-clad omelets trotted out for the slaughter, he noted among them a towering figure whose shoulders looked half again as wide as any others on the field save those of guard Brad Otis, who wore the Varsity blue and gray. Winters' nemesis had returned to haunt him.

Coach Winters bade the Varsity kick off, so that they could get practise defending against the Hoving plays which the scrubs had been practising for four days. And big Brad got a towering kick away, down to the omelet one.

Trotting back under it easily, Frank Casales plucked it out of the air and turned back upfield in casual fashion. He came up the center, stiff-armed a couple of ambitious Varsity tacklers, reversed his field to eliminate a half dozen more, dodged past big Brad Otis.

Only seasoned Don Chesney, who was playing back, was between him and the Varsity goal. He crowded the ex-infant

prodigy toward the sidelines, taking no chances on letting him get clear. And then, when it seemed inevitable that he be run out of bounds, the scrub fullback put his head down and bulled right over the veteran and trotted the rest of the way untouched. Chesney was slow getting up and Winters pulled him out of the scrimmage.

"I'm all right, coach," the ace halfback said as he left the field. "But when that big bruiser hits you, you know you've been hit."

"Take it easy," said Winters. He couldn't afford to lose his best, his only real back in practise.

The ball was put back on the fifty-yard line and the scrubs took over. Hoving used a straight T formation, and the omelets began with a fair simulation of their typical quick openers.

On the first, Casales took the ball and was flattened by an aroused Brad Otis for no gain. On the second, he appeared about to repeat, but jump-passed at the last moment to a circling scrub end who let the ball slip through his fingers. On the third play, Casales hit Otis again, knocking him flat and running for sixteen yards before he was pulled to earth by a quartet of Varsity tacklers.

He got up grinning, and Coach Winters knew at the moment what it was to hate. What could you do against a guy like that, who had everything on the field and off?

"For a longhair, Casales can go," said Don Chesney, echoing the coach's thoughts. Winters scowled.

"Go back in, Don," he said. "Take the ball and see how our plays are working. Start from your forty."

The Varsity finally scored, but only by putting three men on the mighty menace in the scrub backfield. The sculptor was everywhere, backing up the outweighed omelet line, knocking down passes, occasionally breaking through to smear a play for a loss.

When the Varsity failed to score again, Winters called it off after forty minutes. He was wondering how a diet of crow was going to taste. It had never before been on his regimen. But it was a case of when-you-can't-fight-'em-join-'em. Casales was too much football player.

Winters gritted his teeth around the stem of his pipe and paid a visit to Casales after dinner. The ex-prodigy lived in a farmhouse back of Vine Street on the opposite side of town from the campus. The coach found him in the barn loft, which he had converted into a studio.

"Hello, coach," said Casales, climbing down

from a step ladder atop which he had been attacking an apparently shapeless block of granite with a mallet and chisel. "This is a surprise. Sit down."

"I can't say I expected ever to be here," said the grid mentor. He nodded at the block of stone. "What's that?"

"The beginning of my thesis," said the young behemoth. "It will require two years to finish. I'm taking a special degree, you know. Have a bottle of ale?"

**W**INTERS just looked at him and Casales shrugged, then got a bottle of ale out of an old-fashioned ice box in a corner opened it and took a long pull. He was dripping with sweat.

"Don't look so bitter, coach," he said after the ale had gone down. "My father went to Cambridge in England. Rowed on the crew there. They trained on ale and porter. I've been brought up on it myself."

"Young man," said Coach Winters, ignoring the time-honored precepts of English athletic training, "you've been something of a thorn in my side."

"I'm sorry about the other statue," said Casales. He stared ruefully at the bottle in his hand. "I ought to be. It slowed up my education a year."

"It didn't do me any good," said the coach drily. "But that's water under the bridge. Frank, you played out there today. You know the score. How about it?"

"No soap," said the sculptor. "I can't take your kind of discipline. I'm here to learn, not drill."

"That discipline you hate will make a better man of you," Winters said, keeping his voice down with an effort.

"You mean it will make a football player out of me," the sculptor replied. He nodded toward some of the finished and half-finished statuary with which the barn studio was filled. "I suppose learning to do that didn't take discipline. Besides, I'm always in condition."

"I doubt it," said the coach grimly. He was going to have to take a second course of crow, and he didn't relish it. "But the team needs you out there. If you think you can take it, you've got yourself a job. And don't think I'm doing this because I want to. Frank, Midvale needs you."

"About as much as it needs a textbook," said Casales. "You mean Harvey Winters needs me."

"Make it both of us," said the coach quietly.

"I'll be there," said the sculptor. "But I

train my own way."

"It's your neck," said the coach. "If you want to play out of condition, don't yell for mercy."

"Don't worry," said the sculptor. They shook hands on it and left it at that. . . .

Green-bannered Hoving came to town that Saturday at the end of what was, for Harvey Winters, a hectic week to remember. He had alternated between the extremes of despair and optimism so many times he felt as if he were turning into an emotional yoyo.

Frank Casales had reported on Monday as promised. His ideas of practise had been ruggedly individualistic to put it mildly. Possessed of a chain-lightning mind and the ability to put into action anything heard but once, he shirked and clowned through signal drills.

The first peak of joy came in scrimmage, which seemed to be the sculptor's meat. In action, he was superb—and he knew it. He was no braggart, but he had a high and honest opinion of his own talents—which were, in truth, sheer genius.

It was deepened by the newspaper stories which broke as soon as his presence was reported on the Midvale Varsity. They rehashed the whole grisly story and Coach Winters had once more to gaze upon pictures of the Hitlerish statue he had hoped never to see again.

But the publicity brought an unexpected and enthusiastic throng pouring into town for the game on Saturday, a crowd which all but filled the huge stadium. Even with a highly-touted eleven, no one expected rural Midvale to draw such a crowd for an opening game. That was the final peak of joy for the harried grid mentor.

**T**HE Blue and Gray won the toss and chose goal, since the wind was blowing sharply, and Hoving chose to receive the first kickoff. They looked sinister in their dark green jerseys and black pants and helmets—sinister and slippery and professionally competent.

Promptly they set about proving it after running the long boot back to their own thirty-three, where big Brad Otis submared the interference in front of the runner, giving Don Chesney a chance to pull him down from the flank.

The Hoving T was intricate and beautifully polished for so early in the season. Most of the team were seniors, and they had had three to four years in which to polish the rough edges characteristic of most college elevens.

Big Brad Otis and bigger Frank Casales, backing up the Midvale forward wall, had their hands full as quick opening plunges split the line in front of them at unpredictable spots, to be varied with short jump passes and sweeps against the Blue and Gray ends.

Don Chesney, backing up the left wing, managed to keep it from tottering, but the other Midvale flank was a leak in the dyke. And Hoving moved smartly, steadily over midfield and into Midvale territory. They appeared to be unstoppable and Coach Winters paced restlessly up and down in front of the bench, wishing his job did not compel him to watch the slaughter.

Then Casales did something unorthodox. He switched positions with the ailing right halfback, Owens, and broke through to toss the next Hoving sweep for a five-yard loss. Winters jammed his hands angrily into his pockets.

"Bolshevik!" he muttered, for any such move made without his authority was, to the coach, gross insubordination. "Now they'll pass rings around Owens."

They tried, of course. But the sculptor came racing over in back of the reeling Midvale line and used his great height to reach up and pluck the ball out of the air on the Midvale twenty-six. He kept right on going to the left as if it were a planned end run rather than an interception.

Hoving began to gang up on him to prevent him from cutting upfield. But the big fellow spotted Don Chesney trying to get up on the play and lobbed the ball back to him before annihilating three of the Green defenders with a block. The solid shock of that contact could be heard across the field.

All three men went down, and the quick-thinking Chesney, recovering from his surprise in a hurry, lugged the leather through the opening and went on over the fifty-yard-line for twenty-seven more yards.

Coach Winters, who did not believe in throwing the ball around unnecessarily, felt cold sweat seeping down from under the brim of his gray homburg. He seemed to have added a decade to his actual forty-six years.

Midvale lined up in the Fluid-T on the Green forty-seven. It was a formation which saw two backfield men alternately in motion before the ball was snapped to the quarter-back, a formation calculated to bamboozle the most seasoned defense, to split them between two men in motion and to blast through their midsection before they could reassemble their defenses—on paper.

A year ago, thought the coach, it would

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have been the terror of the nation had not the team been shattered by the Casales affair. Now, it had not only been scouted and solved, but Midvale did not have the players to execute it properly. It demanded eleven-man perfection to succeed.

On the first play, Don Chesney took the ball inside of tackle. He lowered his head and charged like a bull—only to be set back on his haunches for no gain. On the second of the series, Chesney again set out for right end then faded to toss a short pass into the flat—only to be swarmed under for a four-yard loss before he could throw.

"Kick, you dunces!" moaned the mentor.

**B**UT though they had been ordered to boot on third down at this stage of the game if the offense failed to show signs of kicking, they didn't go into punt formation. Instead, after a prolonged huddle which cost them five more yards for delaying the game, Herschel, the Midvale quarterback, slammed the ball into Frank Casales' stomach.

And the big sculptor went through guard —through it and over it—and blasted and spun and ripped his way through a swarm of Hoving tacklers for fifteen yards. It was four yards short of a first down, but it put the pigskin on the visitors' forty-two. From there Chesney booted a lazy spiral into the coffin corner that went out of bounds on the six-yard line. Winters breathed again.

Hoving, outraged at this turn of affairs, tried a back-of-the-line lob instead of kicking the ball out and promptly found themselves behind by two points when the big sculptor chased their runner almost out of the end zone before tackling him with a resounding thump.

The Midvale cheering section, far more optimistic than the coach, came to life with a roar. Their supposedly shattered Varsity had drawn first blood against one of the most highly-rated teams in the section.

But Hoving, now angrily determined, settled down to a steady march after receiving the kickoff. And this time the Green could not be denied. They carried the ball over the home team goal line, shortly after the opening of the second quarter.

It was the Blue and Gray's turn after the kickoff. Chesney ran the ball back to the twenty-six and from there Casales jump-passed successfully to one of the ends, who took the ball up to the thirty-eight-yard line. On first down, Big Brad Otis went through for six, and the stands came once more to life at this evidence of offensive power.

But at this point, the usually reliable-if-not-much-else Midvale ball handler, Herschel, elected to fumble and the ball was covered by one of the players in the dark green jerseys. Two minutes later the visitors had another touchdown and the Blue and Gray supporters could gain only faint happiness from the fact that Casales vaulted both lines to block the kick for extra point.

It was still Hoving 13—Midvale 2 at the half.

In the locker room, Coach Winter kept an eagle eye on his problem child who came in, steaming with sweat, and collapsed full length on a bench in front of the lockers, looking like a fallen Titan. The mentor's eyes gleamed slightly, but he said nothing to the sculptor as he went amongst the other players, giving advice, checking injuries, discussing mistakes and dishing out pointers.

All in all, it was a far cry from the old-fashioned type of Harvey Winters between-the-halves tongue lashing. But the kids had been playing over their heads and both he and they knew it. Finally, just before it was time to return to the field, he stood over Frank Casales.

"Feeling the beer, Frank?" he inquired. Casales, who seemed to have fallen asleep, started and opened one eye.

"Feel all right," he murmured.

"That's fine," said the coach. "Because you're starting this half. Think you can do it?"

"If you say so, coach." He yawned, got wearily to his size twelve-D's and stretched. Coach Winters grunted balefully and read off a starting alignment consisting of the second team or what passed for it, save for Casales. Whether the sculptor needed a lesson more than the team needed him, the grid mentor did not bother to debate.

After receiving the kickoff, the attack of the Midvale second stringers promptly bogged down despite a seven-yard plunge by the sculptor. They punted over midfield, and then Hoving was on the march once more. The visitors put two first downs together to reach the Blue and Gray thirty-one.

**C**OACH WINTERS got his first stringers ready—but before he could put them into the game, the sculptor went high in the air to pull down a Green pass in territory which belonged rightfully to the home team's left half-back. How he got there, Winters never knew.

[Turn page]

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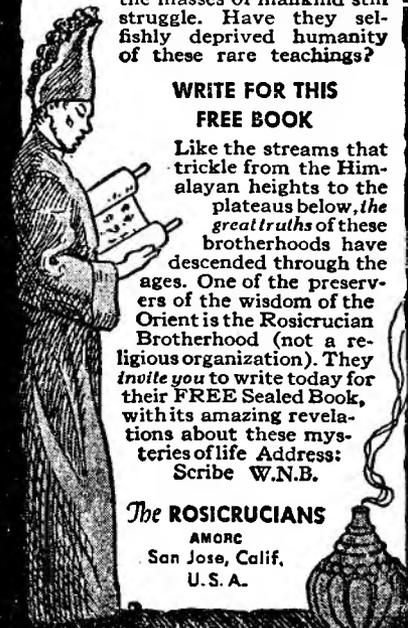
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But his dash put him wide of both teams' flanks, and he headed for pay dirt up a wide and open alley. He passed the visitors' forty, the thirty, safely, then began to slow down. As desperate Green tacklers came up on him, he trotted over the twenty-five, the twenty, the fifteen, the ten. Then, picking up a little speed, he ran easily over the goal line just beyond reach of the grasping hands of his pursuers.

The second-string quarterback flubbed the try for point, leaving the score Hoving 13—Midvale 8, but thanks to the sculptor's unexpected play it could have been a lot worse.

Hoving struck now in all its fury. When Winters finally got an aroused Varsity back in the game, the visitors had taken the pigskin from their own nineteen to the Midvale twenty-three. And they went all the way to the two-yard-line before a desperate Blue and Gray defense, aided by an offside penalty, managed to check them.

That was the story of most of the remaining time in the second half—Hoving would hit and, somehow, Midvale would check them. And in the heart of every play was the sculptor. He plunged like a battering ram when the Blue and Gray had the ball, tackled like a pile-driver when they didn't. On the sidelines, Harvey Winters began to worry. No man could take such a beating indefinitely.

As the fourth quarter reached the halfway mark, the coach felt his heart drop a foot. At the end of a particularly rugged line play, Frank Casales lay stretched on the ground, face down.

Winters gulped.

His problem player was the only member of the Midvale team who had not been given at least a breather during the contest. Casales had been playing like a lion, playing his heart out, stemming an incipient rout almost single-handed.

If anything had happened to him—Winters shuddered.

He thought of how the papers would roast him if the sculptor were seriously hurt. Then he put the thought sternly from him. He reminded himself that for all of his size and adult independence, Frank Casales was only a youth.

When the sculptor had been carried to the sideline, his mentor stood over him anxiously, went down on one knee.

"How are you, Frank?" he asked.

Casales didn't answer. His eyes were closed and he was breathing hoarsely. Win-

ters repeated the question, trying to stifle the panic that rose within him. The big kid looked all right, but he had taken a terrible beating.

Winters could cheerfully have kicked himself for letting his own prejudices blind him to such a football player.

"I'm—all right—coach," whispered the player. "How did—I do—out—there? Okay for—a—beer—drinker?"

"I take everything back," said the mentor. "You did swell, fellow. Fifty minutes of brimstone you gave them."

"Okay then," said Casales, scrambling to his feet with a grin made slightly lopsided by a split and puffy lower lip. "My wind's back. I guess I'll give them eight minutes more. Hold onto your hat, coach."

"Why, you faker!" said Harvey Winters. He all but stamped his feet in blind rage. And then he grinned. How could you get mad at a big baboon like that? For the first time in coaching history, Harvey Winters sat back on the bench and laughed until the tears came.

And Frank Casales gave them more brimstone—with interest. Taking the ball on the first play after his return to the game, he

[Turn page]

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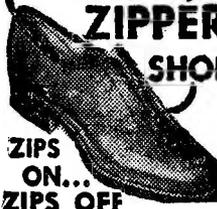
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blasted right through the Hoving forward wall for thirty-one yards.

**I**N THE next, he was dropped for a loss while trying to pass to Don Chesney. But he got up grinning and cut through the Green secondary on the following play to snag a pass himself. Reversing his field brilliantly, he scored the six points that tied the game. Seconds later, as Chesney booted the point after touchdown, incredulous Midvale rooters saw their team in front by a one-point margin.

The home eleven was on its way to another score over a demoralized opposition as the final gun sounded. The Blue and Gray had taken over the game in its closing moments and was running it to suit its own fancy.

\* \* \* \* \*

That evening, Coach Harvey Winters made his second visit to the studio barn back of Vine Street, found his refractory star again chipping away at the colossal statue. When they were seated, both men were silent, both a trifle embarrassed.

"Frank," said the mentor, finally, "may I have a bottle of that ale of yours?"

"Sure," said the sculptor. He went to the ice-box, got out a bottle, opened it and handed it to the coach.

"How about you?" the mentor asked.

"Uh-uh," replied Casales, shaking his big, rough-planed head. "Coach, I've got a confession to make. I really was knocked out there in the last quarter."

"You came back fast," said Winters. "And, gosh, man, you had played fifty minutes—and I mean played 'em."

"You embarrass me," said Casales. "But I shouldn't have faded at all. It never happened to me in school. Take a good look around you. What do you see?"

"A lot of stone," said the grid mentor.

"Exactly," replied the sculptor. "I don't know where people get the idea mine is a sissy racket. I've been lugging big hunks of stone around since I was knee high to well, to you, say. I've got more muscle and stamina than a piano mover. I guess I got a little cocky about it."

"I never thought of sculpturing that way," said the coach, nodding. "You must have muscle."

"Right, I do." The younger man was merely mentioning a fact. "But I enjoyed that game out there today. We've got a team that's weak but willing. They'll need all us strong guys can give them. So no more beer

until the season's over."

"Maybe you're a lad who needs it," said Winters. He was all against changing something proved good.

"Not that badly," said Casales. "You know, coach, you've changed since last year."

"Adversity does that, they tell me," said Winters.

"No, it's more than that. Anyway, I'm all for it—and I don't mean to be fresh. Would you like me to do a portrait bust of you—a really decent one?"

"I'd rather you drank beer," replied the coach.

## THE FIFTY-YARD LINE

(Concluded from page 9)

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**THRILLING FOOTBALL**, oldest of our magazines devoted to the great autumn game exclusively, lives up to its seniority with **NAVY CAPTAIN**, a swift-paced novelet by Bill O'Sullivan, and a supporting cast of equally stirring long and short stories and features by Jack Kofoed, Roger Fuller, Joe Gregg, Richard Brister and Joe Archibald.

Last but not least on our list is, of course, **EXCITING FOOTBALL**, which steps onto the field with a line-up as excellent as any of the above, a little later in the season.

We certainly thank all you readers who have written us recently, and wish to report that all your letters and postcards have been carefully read and considered and are deeply appreciated. Keep them coming. Kindly address them to The Editor, **POPULAR FOOTBALL**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thanks again—and so long for now.

—THE EDITOR.

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difficult to evaluate properly the significance of American air superiority in the recent conflict. But to those who know the true meaning and effectiveness of air power, it is clear that the future peace and security of the United States depends to a large degree upon the maintenance of American air strength and the continuous exploration of new air frontiers.

This year, all airmen will observe Air Force Day not only as a memorial to the heroic dead, but as a sought-for opportunity to remind Americans everywhere that we are in an air age where events move far too fast for nineteenth century thinking.

It is my hope that Air Force Day will become a symbol of American progress and that it will serve to keep our people aware of the need for air power if we are to retain our freedom and our greatness.

CELEBRATE AIR FORCE DAY ON AUGUST 1, 1947

## THRILLS IN FOOTBALL

(Concluded from page 100)

The leading pass receiver was Fred Walters, of Mississippi State, who grabbed two forwards for a total of 77 yards.

And the All Orange Bowl team, selected by the experts, is as follows:

Ends: Wyatt (Tenn.), Ison (Ga. Tech.).

Tackles: Whitmire (Ala.), Blozis (Georgetown).

Guards: Suffridge (Tenn.), Lio (Georgetown).

Center: Domnanovitch (Ala.).

Backs: Sinkwich (Ga.), Holovak (Boston College), Cafego (Tenn.), Wilson (Tulsa).

Second backfield choices were Christman, of Missouri; Van Buren, of Louisiana State; Brumbaugh, of Duquesne; and Hapes, of Mississippi.

### A RUN OF BAD LUCK

**J**UST one more item about the Orange Bowl. It has to do with the hardest luck team that ever romped onto the gridiron of Burdine stadium . . . Boston College. The men from Massachusetts were beaten 37-21, though Mike Holovak chalked up three touchdowns himself. But Lady Luck had her fingers crossed against the Bostonians from the very start.

The boys were in the locker room, dressing and listening to advice from the coaches, when the water cooler toppled over, broke and badly cut first string tackle, Joe Repko. He was a tough man, both on offense and defense, and the team needed him, but he couldn't go on.

In the second period, fullback Carl Lucks broke his ankle, and that finished him. The biggest loss, though, came when quarterback Eddie Doherty, who was called "The Brain," smashed up his shoulder. No wonder, even with Holovak's prodigious deeds, they couldn't win.

## Thrills in Football

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