

1943 2nd
FALL ISSUE

All-American

20c

FOOTBALL

MAGAZINE



REFUGEE FROM A TOUCHDOWN

HALFBACKS CAN TRAIN ON GIGGLE-SOUP
BUT THE GUARDS EAT DIRT—AND LIKE IT

A Big Complete Novel by CURTIS BISHOP

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by WILLIAM HEUMAN

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2nd FALL 1943 All-American
ISSUE

FOOTBALL MAGAZINE

T. T. SCOTT, President

MALCOLM REISS, General Manager

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Steve's feet flew over turf. Marlowe and Shane were with him, smashing into that yellow-jerseyed wall.



A PUNT and a PRAYER

by WILLIAM HEUMAN

It was Dorgan's last chance with a Pro squad and it was like being on parole. For twenty-one players and forty thousand fans watched his every move—waiting for the double-cross tip-off.

THEY said it was a mistake bringing him back; they said Buck Ingram should have left him in the sticks where he belonged. He sat on the Bull

bench, gnarled hands clasped in front of him, the sand-colored hair a little thinner than it had been four years back. He was fullback size, two hundred and fifteen

pounds, with the weight evenly divided between the shoulders and the legs. You needed weight in the legs to hit the pro lines.

"Okay," Ingram said quietly. "You're in, Dorgan."

It was the second quarter of the Mustang game with the score 7 to 0 for the first place club. Again it was like it had been four years ago with the Bulls and the Yellow Jackets fighting it out for the top rung. It was the same pattern—most of the same men in the game.

Steve Dorgan picked up a black Bull helmet. It had a small "No. 11" written in white on the back, corresponding with the number on the black jersey. He'd worn Number Eleven years ago when he'd broke in with the Bulls. Maybe it was the hard luck number; maybe the jinx would repeat itself.

Ingram, Bull coach, stood beside him as they waited for the Bulls to run through another play.

"Take it easy for a while," Ingram said. "You're still learning the formations."

The big man stared across the field, the bitterness showing in the pale blue eyes. His face was scarred over the eyes, and the nose was dented like a pugilist's.

"You had the stuff one time," Ingram said, "and you're not old, Steve."

"No," Steve Dorgan said quietly. He was twenty-eight now; he'd been twenty-four when he broke in with the big time Bulls and made such a mess of things.

The horn blew and Ingram slapped his back. "Take it away, kid," the small, thin-faced man smiled.

Steve Dorgan trotted toward the huddle of men out on the fifty yard stripe. Ingram had always given him a square deal. It was his own fault that he'd failed the last time. He'd been a big league football player then, but he had a bushier's mentality.

"You walk around with a chip on your shoulder," Ed Walton, first string fullback had told him. "You want somebody to knock it off."

That had been before the fight in the dressing room. Walton had finally taken him on. The thing had lasted twenty minutes and both men were covered with blood when it was over. Walton had been inter-collegiate boxing champion. It made no

difference to Steve Dorgan from the steel mill in Ridge City.

The Bull team, on the eve of the big one with the Jackets, had watched silently. Walton had knocked him down eight times and ruined his hands doing it. Steve Dorgan was crawling toward him on hands and knees after the eighth knockdown. They stopped him.

The spectacle had put the Bulls on edge. Walton was out with broken knuckles. Steve Dorgan, utility back, had a smashed nose and two broken ribs. Without a fullback, the Bulls were taken over the hurdles. Each man had lost over two thousand dollars because of the fight.

"You could have helped us out, Dorgan," Ingram told him coldly. "You chose to work against us. We won't be sending you a contract next fall."

That was the end of the dream. He was the only man in the league without a college background. They didn't usually pick them up from the sandlots or the semi-pro ranks. He thought then that they were poking fun at him because of his lack of education. He didn't speak their language; he was the outsider trying to crash the charmed circle.

"I got enough of the high-hats," Steve growled at the little coach. He realized it was the voice of a small boy who had been beaten and wanted an excuse. The Bulls had played fair with him but he couldn't get in tune.

Ed Walton was coming across the field toward him. The Bull fullback had been All-Pro line buckler for five of his eight years in the league. Walton's legs had been bothering him since the start of the season and Buck Ingram went to the grab-bag for another fullback. He remembered Steve Dorgan.

"If interested," Ingram had written, "take the next train. Am ready to discuss terms."

Steve stared at the letter. He was back in the mill during week days and hitting the line for the Whirlwinds every Sunday afternoon. The Whirlwinds were tops in the semi-pro circuit.

The letter had come at a strange time. The baby was three months old, still in the hospital with the wife.

"Give it to me straight, Doc," Steve told the hospital physician. "What goes?"

"She'll get well," the doctor told him, "but not in Ridge City, Mr. Dorgan."

Steve blinked. He thought of the smoke and the noise. Ridge City was all right for him. He'd been raised next to a foundry; he had no nerves. Lou was different; she'd come from the country. They'd planned living in the suburbs some day—away from the noise, where you could breathe without taking in steel dust.

"It's affected her lungs," the doctor continued. "You'll have to send her away when she comes out."

"Where?" Steve asked, dumfounded.

"The mountains," he was told. "Arizona, away from Ridge City."

The big man thought of the salary at the mill. Even with the fifteen dollars extra for playing with the Whirlwinds each Sunday, it wasn't enough to send a woman and child to the mountains. There were only four more games on the Whirlwind schedule. After that, the fifteen would be out till next fall.

He sent a telegram to Ingram and followed it by train.

"Think you can behave yourself?" the Bull manager asked him in the office.

Steve Dorgan thought of the wife and the kid. They'd be out of the hospital in a few weeks. If the Bulls finished on top this season and got into the play-offs, there would be a nice cut for each player. Along with the two hundred per game Ingram had offered him, he would be in the clear.

"It was funny you didn't sign up with another club in the league," Ingram said. "Everybody knew you had the stuff when you ran for us."

Steve shrugged. The last place Beavers had written to him but he'd turned them down. The other clubs didn't want a trouble-maker, and the story had gotten around. He had a reputation in the league; he'd lost a pennant for the Bulls. His job was open at the mill and he took it.

He felt Ed Walton's eyes on him as they approached each other. Then Walton looked toward the bench. The Bulls wanted this pennant and they didn't trust him. He'd worked out three mornings with the Bulls during the week. Today was the first start.

N OBODY looked at him in the huddle. There were three or four new faces in the lineup, but the backfield was the same. Tip McKee at the quarterback position. George Paine at left half, Dink Jarrett at right half.

"Here it is," McKee snapped coldly. "No. 4." He glanced at Steve Dorgan. Ingram had given him orders to explain the play if he could for Steve's benefit until the new man could master the complex signals. "Left half slant off right tackle," McKee grumbled. He was a small man with a hatchet face and dark black eyes. He'd been sitting at a ringside seat for that gory spectacle in the Bull dressing room years ago.

The Bulls operated out of a single wing. The shift was over to the right. Steve crouched as McKee bit out the numbers. He saw the ball slant back and he started to run. On the oftackle slant he was to get through and nail the Mustang left half.

He heard Paine's steps behind him as the speedy left half dug for the right end. Steve sliced in between the Mustang tackle and end. He saw the Mustang line backer driving in to get Paine. Then he threw himself forward. He felt the impact—the pain in the shoulder where the Mustang's knees had hit him.

George Paine's black and white ringed stockings flashed by and Steve smiled. They made six yards on the play. He crawled from beneath the Mustang and walked back to the huddle.

"Thirty-two," McKee told them informally. It was second and four on the Mustang forty-four.

Steve Dorgan's eyes flickered. Thirty-two was his number—a straight buck over right guard. He wondered whether he still had it. Hitting the Mustang line was a lot different from driving into a semi-pro wall. The Mustangs were third place in the league and plenty tough.

They didn't say anything. When you take it on a straight buck, it's all your own play. They can't give you much support going through. If possible, they would go through to get the Mustang line backers.

"Thirty-two," McKee called. "Fourteen, eight—hipe—"

Steve hopped into the running position. He crouched low, elbows on knees, Topper

Shane, Bull center, spun it back and then lunged forward.

Steve saw the opening between center and guard. He tucked the ball under his arm on the second step and then hit. He had the drive in his legs and it didn't take long to get going. In the gap he was moving at top speed!

The Mustang center tore in at him, reaching for the shoulders. Steve whirled away from him. The Mustang fullback had rushed in on the play. He hit low but Steve carried him forward. He fell across a white stripe. It was the forty. First down.

"Let's take it across," McKee said. "Everybody hit."

Steve glanced toward the side line. He saw the small figure of Buck Ingram out on the line. The Bull coach said he wanted a "key man"—a man who would open the door to the touchdowns. Ed Walton had lost that extra step. He no longer had the drive.

"With a top notch fullback," Ingram said, "I can almost guarantee first place." They had four games left on the schedule, the last with the Yellow Jackets. The two league leaders had each lost one and won five.

"How's the line?" Steve had asked.

"We got Shane," Ingram explained, "and Marlowe in the middle. They played with you, Dorgan. Then there's Scott and Rogerson at the ends. You remember them. The other guys are new but they're good."

McKee faded back and flipped a short pass to Chad Scott. The big end took it high in the air and fell down on the twenty-nine. Another first down.

Jarrett went wide on the next play with Steve Dorgan and Paine blocking out. They cut down the side line to the twenty before a host of red jerseyed Mustangs smashed into the convoy. Jarrett was pushed out of bounds.

Steve listened to the roar from the big stands. The Bulls had a winner this year and they were getting support from the citizens.

"Seventeen," McKee said. "Roll it along."

Steve rammed the middle for five yards. The Mustangs looked at him queerly when he picked himself up. The papers had

given his come-back some publicity. They dug up the story of the fight with Walton; they blamed him for that loss to the Yellow Jackets.

"Where'd you get that dent in the nose?" the Mustang fullback grinned. "How are you and Walton getting along?"

Steve turned his back on them. He was on good behavior this time—even with the opposing team. A man in his predicament couldn't take any chances.

The Mustangs stiffened on the seven yard stripe. McKee sent Paine around right end and the halfback went down at the line of scrimmage. It was third and three. They needed this touchdown. The half was nearly up. With a fourteen-point lead instead of a seven point margin, the Mustangs would have a tough time catching up the second half. The Bulls could go on the defensive and make the wild horses come to them.

McKee glanced over the scrimmage line. "Twenty-two," he said huskily.

Steve Dorgan lined up in the running position. Twenty-two was a quarterback sneak with McKee going through right guard.

The little quarterback got through for a yard. They were on the Mustang six.

"This is yours, Dorgan," McKee said. "No. 10."

They looked at him for the first time. He was on the spot and he knew it. They needed two yards for a first down, six for the score. McKee had glanced up at the goal posts. They could have tried a placement and picked up three points. McKee wanted to gamble for the seven.

The shift was over to the right. The Mustang line grew tense. Steve saw the backs coming up close. They realized he was coming through on this play and they had to stop him.

Number Ten went over Hugh Marlowe at left guard. Steve had known the squat little line man. Marlowe would give him a hole. He had to go through it.

The ball came back hard and fast. Jarrett and Paine broke for the right to fake a tackle or end play. Steve Dorgan lowered his head and followed the big white "17" on Hugh Marlowe's black jersey.

Marlowe got the Mustang guard over to the right. Steve aimed for the target. It was like shooting a gun, only your body is

the bullet. He plunged over Marlowe's outstretched leg.

The Mustang fullback came at him on the dead run. Steve hit the man with his shoulder. He heard the back gasp. He went over a line—the five—and bulled in between two more tacklers.

They hit him around the waist and up on the shoulders but they couldn't bring him down. The momentum carried the three men down to the two yard marker. Steve was still on his feet with Mustangs leaping at him from all directions and the referee's whistle blowing frantically.

The ball was put in play on the two—first down, goal to go. He'd opened the door. Jarrett went over right guard for a yard. Then George Paine hurdled the line and came down on his face in the end zone.

McKee kicked the extra point and Steve Dorgan walked back up the field. The Bull team was out on the side lines howling. He saw Ed Walton clapping and grinning.

The Bulls kicked off, stopped one play, and the half was over. They trooped into the dressing room. Buck Ingram slapped Dorgan's shoulder.

"I don't think I made a mistake," he said softly.

"Thanks," Steve told him. "I mean business." If he'd meant business the other time and played football instead of letting things get under his skin, he would have had a nice bankroll now. He could send Lou and the kid up to the mountains and foot any bill it cost.

NO one came near him in the dressing room. He sat in the corner and listened to the Bull coach speak. The veterans who had known him when he broke in, nodded grimly that first practice session; the kids stared at him curiously. They'd heard stories.

Strangely enough, Ed Walton was the only one to shake his hand.

"Glad to see you back," the fullback said quietly. "Best of luck, Dorgan."

Steve gulped. Buck Ingram had asked him to come up to eventually take Walton's place. It meant that Big Ed was at the end of the road, but the fullback was wishing him luck!

"It'll be a tough race from now on," Ingram said grimly. "We'll have to take each game in our stride. We must play

as one man. That's the reason for the success of the Jackets."

The Bulls stirred uneasily. Steve Dorgan looked at the floor. Ingram was talking to him.

"The pressure will be on every game," Ingram told them. "The team that cracks first will be the losers."

They went back on the field with Walton in again at fullback. Steve Dorgan sat on the bench and watched the veteran. Walton had lost the drive. On the defense, only his ability to diagnose the plays kept him in the game. He was usually at the right spot as the runner came through.

The Mustangs worked the ball up to the fifty and then had to kick. McKee brought it back from the ten to the twenty-five on a twinkle-foot run. The quarterback had improved the past few years.

The Bulls made headway till they came to the Mustang forty-five. With third and three, McKee sent Ed Walton into the middle. Steve leaned forward. Walton plugged hard. He made a yard and a half. Ingram shook his head out on the line.

The Bull drive was stopped. McKee was forced to kick on the next one. Had Walton made the distance, they could have continued.

The Mustang safety took Walton's boot on the eight and threaded his way up the field. Steve Dorgan stood up. He saw Ingram crouching tensely.

The fleet-footed Mustang reversed his field on the twenty and suddenly shot out into the clear. Bull tacklers leaped at him and slid off. Walton, who had kicked the ball, tried to intercept the runner on the forty. He dived and missed. The Mustang went all the way to the Bull goal line.

Buck Ingram came back to the bench and kicked a helmet high into the air. The Mustang had gone ninety-two yards on the run. It was sensational.

A moment later, the man at the p.a. system announced that the Jackets were defeating the Cougars 28 to 3 in the third quarter.

"Okay," Ingram said. "Get in, Dorgan."

Steve scooped up his helmet. He saw the expression on Walton's face as the big man came off the field. The Bull fullback realized his missed tackle had allowed the score.

"Hold 'em," Walton said simply. "We need this, Dorgan."

They were taking the kick-off. Steve stood on the goal line. McKee was off to his left. Jarrett and Georgie Paine were strung out to the right.

The ball tumbled down the field and a rejuvenated Mustang team tore down after it. They hit Paine, the receiver, as he came over the fifteen. Steve managed to knock one red jersey out of the play. Others swarmed past him. The Mustangs still had hopes of grabbing second place money if not the top itself.

"Let's get that back," McKee scowled. "No. 2-P, Dorgan."

Steve nodded. They knew he was fresh and anxious to run. The Bulls needed ground—and plenty of it. It was 14 to 7.

No. 2-P was a reverse ending in a smash off right tackle. McKee hopped into the running position, took the ball on the spin-back and crossed it to Steve Dorgan. The two halfbacks cut in front of him and tore for the right end. Steve saw the gap at tackle and he whirled through.

A red jersey rose up in front of him and he slammed at the white helmet with his open palm. The man disappeared. He stumbled over another and managed to keep his feet. The pile-up was on the twenty-two. He'd made seven yards on the plunge.

They worked it down in a series of short plunges with Steve Dorgan and Dink Jarrett bearing the burden. McKee crossed them up with a twenty yard pass from the thirty-eight and they were in Mustang territory.

Paine sprinted around the end for another first down to the Mustang thirty-one.

"2-P," McKee snapped. "Rup it hard."

Steve slanted off the tackle position again. He got power on the tackle plays. He was able to pick up a little extra speed before exploding into the enemy line.

They hit him down on the twenty-five—six yards. He picked himself up and shook his head like a big dog. The Mustangs were putting him through the mill. Instinctively, they realized he was the man to stop. He got the yardage when it was needed; he opened the door.

The Mustang line stiffened on the fifteen. It held tight on the ten. Fourth and two. Tip McKee looked at Steve Dorgan. Again,

they had the alternative of kicking the field goal and getting three points, or taking the chance on a line smash and making the yardage. McKee elected to run. Seven more points would definitely clinch the game.

"6-B," McKee said. He moistened his thin lips. "Fake the spinner," he said to Steve. "Take it through right guard."

Steve nodded. He remembered the play. It was one of Walton's specialties before the fullback lost the touch.

McKee called the numbers above the rising sound from the stands. They were standing up, watching. This was the play. If he made the yardage and gave the Bulls the first down, the game was in the bag. If he missed, the Mustangs would still have a chance. It was still the third quarter.

THE ball spun back and Dink Jarrett cut from the right. Steve whirled and faked the ball as the right half sped by. Head lowered, he hurtled toward the line of scrimmage. Red jerseyed men braced to meet him.

There was a gap and he hit it with the force of a locomotive. He was through—down on the six, still driving. The red jerseys swarmed around him. He heard the roar from the stands. Then a hand hacked at his right arm dragging it down. He felt the ball slipping. Another man hit him from the side and he went down. The ball disappeared!

He caught a glimpse of it bobbing on the ground a few yards away. Then it was lost under a red jersey. Fumble!

He felt Tip McKee's eyes on him as he walked back to his position. The Mustangs had yanked that ball from him. It was an old stunt in the pro loop. The Mustangs needed the ball after he made the required yardage. He'd had a good grip on it, but the sudden jolt from the side had done the trick.

McKee clapped his hands mechanically. "Block that kick," the quarterback called. Again he looked at Steve Dorgan and the fullback's jaw tightened. He remembered some of the remarks in the sports column. It was a strange thing that Dorgan had consented to come back after all these years. He'd quit the pro league, turned down a bid from the Eagles. Two years

ago, the Bearcats had tried to lure him from Ridge City. He wasn't interested. Now he'd come back with the team which had broken him. Why?

The Mustang fullback was in kick formation. It was a fake. He came up the left side of the field and went to the twenty before George Paine knocked him down.

The Mustangs took a new lease on life. They were behind and they could afford to take chances. A long pass down the field was good to the fifty. McKee barely caught the receiver. If he'd gone through, the score would have been tied. A deadlock with the Mustangs would put the Jackets in first place.

They went into the fourth quarter with the Mustangs still driving. They were down on the thirty after two more short passes.

"Stop this!" McKee yelled from the rear. Jarrett and Paine came up closer. Steve Dorgan ranged behind the Mustang line. They were putting the ball over his head on those passes and he was powerless.

The Mustang fullback finally came through the middle and Steve nailed him at the line of scrimmage. But another wide end sweep by the Mustang right half set the ball up on the fifteen. The Mustang blocking was terrific.

Desperately, Steve tried to cut through the red-jerseyed blockers. They were on the way and they wouldn't be stopped.

On the eight, the Bulls held for two downs.

"They'll throw," McKee called. "Watch it."

Steve fell back a few steps. It was third and seven. The logical play was a pass to put the ball over the line or close enough for a final drive.

The Mustang quarterback faded with the ball in his hands. Steve Dorgan saw the end streaking over the middle toward the goal posts. He fell back with the man.

The quarterback let the ball fly and it came down the middle. It was low and fast as a bullet. Steve skipped over two steps. He was reaching for the ball when his heel hit the goal post. He stumbled backward. The Mustang end cut across in front of him, snatched the ball out of the air and fell over the line.

Dazed, Steve stared at the man on the ground. It had been the most ridiculous

kind of an accident. The Ridge City Whirlwinds had played with the goal posts ten yards behind the goal line—college rules. In the big-time pro loop they had the posts on the goal line. He'd forgotten they were so close.

Tip McKee's face was as cold as ice. Shane, the center, kicked savagely at the turf. In two misplays, the new fullback had put them on the spot. It was 14 to 13 with the Mustangs lining up for the extra point kick.

It was good. They were tied up. The news was sent across the air that the Jackets had won by a 38-to-14 score.

Grimly, the Bulls walked to their positions. The Mustangs kicked off and McKee brought the ball back to the twenty. They needed a score now.

"Let's work together," the quarterback rasped in the huddle.

Steve Dorgan stared at the ground. He knew what they were thinking. It would be very easy for a man to let down in the pinch. He had a score to settle with the Bulls; they'd broken him years ago. Maybe he had come back to pay the bill.

McKee worked Jarrett and Paine. He sent Steve through the middle, but there was no hole. He made a yard. He saw Hugh Marlowe's battered face and he got the implication. They weren't sure of him now. In the beginning, they'd gone all-out when he ran. He was the guy trying to make a comeback. Possibly, he was only grinding his own axe.

The Bull attack stalled on the thirty and Jarrett kicked. They had about eight minutes of the game remaining. Buck Ingram sent in replacements. The backfield remained the same.

The Mustangs opened up with another drive down to the twenty-seven. A field goal missed the mark by inches. Buck Ingram watched glumly from the side lines. It was still 14 to 14 with four minutes to go when Dink Jarrett shot around the left end on a naked reverse. The speedy back ran from his own twenty-five and he didn't stop till he was over the goal line.

Steve Dorgan listened to the noise. Jarrett's sensational trek down the field had saved the day. It was 21 to 14 at the finish.

They were in the dressing room when the reporter, Slick Edwards, came in. Steve remembered him. He'd been in on the fight

with Walton years back. He'd had a scoop on that thing and he'd made the most of it.

Steve went into the shower room to avoid the man. He'd seen Edwards threading his way through the crowd in his direction. Edwards was small, slim, with a sickly grin painted on his paste-colored face.

He was still waiting when Steve came out minutes later.

"How's it, Dorgan?" he asked.

Steve nodded coldly. Edwards had been one of the men who wanted to know why Dorgan had come back with the Bulls instead of another club. They didn't know that Ingram's bid had been the only one received. The other clubs had forgotten about him the past two years. They didn't know about Lou and the kid.

"You got anything for the sheet," Edwards grinned. "Something I could use as a story, kid?"

"No," Steve told him. "Not a thing."

"A guy could be sociable," Edwards persisted. He said it loud enough to be heard across the room. Some of the players were listening in.

"No statements," Steve told him. "Beat it." He wasn't looking for any sympathy from the public. He needed the money and he was willing to take his beatings for it.

"My paper would like to know why you came back with the Bulls," Slick Edwards smiled. "Think up something good, Dorgan."

Steve stood up. He was a head taller than the reporter and eighty pounds heavier. He felt the anger boiling inside of him. They had no right to probe into his affairs. He wasn't public property.

"To hell with you," he said slowly, "and to hell with your sheet."

"I could print that," Edwards observed, "but it wouldn't look good." He placed a polished shoe on the bench where Steve had been sitting. He leaned back against the locker insolently.

The fullback grasped the smaller man's ankle and yanked. Edwards spun across the room and nearly fell to the floor. He glared at the man before him.

"That was a funny kind of game you played today, Dorgan," he hissed. "I could make remarks about it."

Buck Ingram came up behind the reporter and tapped him on the shoulder.

"That's all," he told the news hound. "Get out."

Slick Edwards laughed and walked out. Steve Dorgan heard the silence which followed. There were Bull players who were probably thinking the same thing Edwards had voiced. He'd played a queer kind of game. He looked good when it didn't matter a great deal. In the pinch, he'd messed up things.

Tip McKee walked up the aisle and disappeared in the shower room, McKee didn't look at him. They had been lucky taking over the Mustangs. Jarrett's long run had caught the third-place club by complete surprise.

Steve dressed hurriedly and went back to the hotel. He was walking toward the bank of elevators when Ed Walton fell in step with him.

"You had a few tough breaks," Walton told him. "Forget about it. You'll make up for them next Sunday. Buck feels the same way."

Steve Dorgan looked at the man by his side. Walton was the same size, but dark where Steve was light. He had quiet gray eyes.

"Thanks," Steve said. "I'm playing it straight."

Walton nodded. "I know it," he returned, "and the others will find it out."

II

THEY had the Bearcats on the schedule for the following Sunday, and the fourth-place club was always tough. Two weeks before they had given the Yellow Jackets a scare.

"Stop McRae," Buck Ingram told them, "and you stop the Bearcats." Tommy McRae was the great Bearcat passer, leading the league in completed throws.

They worked on the pass defense during the week with Steve Dorgan at the fullback position. Ed Walton showed up with a wrenched shoulder sustained in the Mustang game.

"You might have to go sixty minutes against the Bearcats," Ingram told Steve. "Ed will be on the bench but I don't want to take a chance with him."

With the exception of Walton, the other players played little attention to the new fullback. They had seen him in the Mustang

game and it didn't look too good. Slick Edwards had mentioned as much in his column.

"I could bring a libel suit against that monkey," Buck Ingram rasped, "but they'd probably take us. He's smart as they make 'em." It wasn't what Slick said about Steve Dorgan; it was what he didn't say. Edwards had reviewed the situation as it was four years ago with the jackets and the Bulls coming down the home stretch.

"Let it go," Steve said quietly. "I can take it." Slick had a host of readers and they'd be in the stands on Sunday when they faced the Bearcats. They'd be waiting for him to make a slip.

It was cold with a leaden sky as Shane went out to the center of the field with the Bearcat captain for the toss-up. Steve felt the moisture in the air. Before the afternoon was over, the field would be a morass.

"If it rains," Ingram grunted with satisfaction, "McRae is stopped automatically."

Shane won the toss and elected to receive. The black jerseyed Bulls with the black and white ringed stockings and the gray silk pants, trotted down the field. The four backs spread out along the goal line. Tip McKee spat behind him and clapped his hands. Georgie Paine danced up and down nervously. Steve Dorgan waited stolidly two feet in front of the goal post.

The Bearcats in green and white edged up on the forty yard stripe. Tommy McRae, tall, loose-limbed, trotted up to the ball and swung his right foot. Steve Dorgan dropped back into the end zone and caught the ball against his chest. It was a terrific kick.

He came up the middle behind Paine and Jarrett. The men in green converged on him from all sides. Steve heard the yell from the stands. They were off.

Hugh Marlowe plowed down the middle like a small tank. Steve cut up behind him. When Marlowe went down, he veered to the right behind Jarrett again. He was up to the twenty-five and then hit down hard on the thirty.

Scrambling to his feet, he felt the first drops of rain. Tip McKee was grinning as they lined up in the huddle.

"That McRae can go home now," McKee said. "He's finished."

"Let's go," Shane said.

"22," McKee told them. "Run it, Georgie."

George Paine came out of a reverse and hit for the right end. The left half back picked up four yards on the play. Steve Dorgan went down beneath a swarm of green tacklers. The Bearcats surged over the blockers but missed the fleet-footed Paine.

Dink Jarrett picked himself up also. He shook his head ruefully.

"You'd think these guys were fighting for the top," he observed. "They're out of the race."

The mist, gray and wet, rolled across the field. Umbrellas popped open in the stands. Already the grass was wet and the ball became shiny as it rolled on the turf. The referee put through a hurry-up call for towels.

McKee gave it to Jarrett over right guard. They got another two yards. Third and four.

"No. 8-M," McKee said tersely. "Let's pick it up."

Steve Dorgan lined up behind the center for the straight buck. He shot through for a first down. They gave him a mild cheer from the stands. They knew he could drive when he wanted to.

"We'll work on the ground," McKee said in the huddle. It would be dangerous throwing now.

They worked up the field in a series of short plunges with Jarrett and Steve carrying. The Bearcats held them on the thirty and again on the fifteen. McKee's field goal grazed the bar on the outside. The Bearcats took over on the twenty—first and ten.

"He won't pass," McKee said. Tommy McRae faded on the first down and flipped the ball through the mist. The Bearcat end caught it on the fifty and was thrown out of bounds by McKee on the forty-five.

"The guy has sandpaper hands," Dink Jarrett said disgustedly. "It ain't right."

Hugh Marlowe sliced through and nailed the Bearcat runner for a three-yard loss on the first play. Shane broke up the second. Paine knocked down one of McRae's bullet passes. They had to kick.

McKee let the ball bounce over the goal line near the coffin corner. They put it in play on the twenty. First and ten. The rain was coming down in sheets now and

forming puddles where the turf had been worn bare.

Steve Dorgan plowed through the mud up to the thirty-two. He came back to the huddle spitting out mud. The Bearcats had given him the works. An elbow had smashed into his left cheekbone. They'd piled up on the play and the referee had been uncertain whether to call a penalty for roughing. He let it go by.

"You're askin' for it," Steve told the Bearcat fullback. "Hold on to your ears."

"Okay, Tough Guy," the fullback snapped. "Watch me run."

McKee sent Jarrett off on a swinging end run coming out of a lateral. Jarrett got up to the thirty-eight. They were making ground all the time. The Bearcats were big and rough but they lacked the polish of the first place club.

McKee faked a pass and then sent Paine through right tackle on a spinner. It was another first down to the forty-five. The quarter ended with neither team having scored.

In the second quarter Paine broke loose from the Bearcat twenty-five and splashed all the way to a score. McKee missed the point. It was 6 to 0.

"That's one," the quarterback said. "Let's get more."

McRae's passes were going awry with the muddied ball. Jarrett broke in on one and put the Bearcats in a hole. They almost went over again before the half was up.

"It's not enough," Buck Ingram told them in the dressing room. "Six points is less than a touchdown." Again, they heard that the Jackets were taking apart the Mustangs by a 13 to 0 score at half time.

"Those Jackets don't lose," George Paine grumbled.

"They lose next Sunday," Jarrett told him.

Steve Dorgan sat on the bench and wiped the mud from his face. Even Slick Edwards couldn't find any fault with his play this afternoon. He'd been bearing the brunt of things on the defense and gaining constantly on the line plunges.

Ed Walton passed by and grinned. "Nice going, kid," he said softly.

Steve nodded. There wasn't a better guy than Big Ed. Walton had been deprived of that extra cut four years back,

the same as the others, but the fullback had elected to forget about it.

THE rain let up as the second half got under way, but the field was a morass. They saw Tommy McRae rubbing resin on his hands before the kickoff.

"Watch the passes," Shane called back. He raised his hand and then trotted toward the ball.

The kick-off was brought back to the Bearcat twenty-two by McRae. The Bull backs retreated. The Bearcat runners had not been very successful against the tough Bull line. They'd have to throw and throw plenty.

The first one came down the middle. McRae leaned back and uncorked the pitch. The Bearcat end caught it for eight yards. The right half got the next one for six yards.

Steve came up closer. After two passes, McRae was bound to send the fullback through the line. He diagnosed it correctly. McRae faked the pass and sent the fullback charging over left guard.

Hugh Marlowe was "mousetrapped" on the thing. They let the pudgy Bull line man into the backfield and then hit him from the side. The fullback rammed through the opening.

Steve Dorgan crossed from the right. He dived for the runner's driving knees. Something exploded inside his head. The lights flashed a dozen colors. Then it was quiet.

Out of the darkness he heard McKee's rasping voice. He saw the bitterness in the quarterback's pale eyes. They were in the huddle.

"Give 'em the game," McKee snarled. "Hand it to 'em on a platter."

Steve blinked. He opened his mouth and then closed it again. McKee wasn't talking to him. But he was!

"What's the use," Shane said wearily. "Give us a play, Tip."

"I'd like to give him a fist full of knuckles in the mouth," McKee snorted. He looked Steve Dorgan straight in the eye.

The fullback straightened up. He moistened his lips. "You mean me, kid?" he asked quietly. It didn't make sense. McKee hadn't said anything all through the game. They knew Steve Dorgan's play was up to par.

"Act innocent," Tip McKee sneered. "You don't know anything."

The referee blew a blast on the whistle and ran in for the ball. They were penalized five yards for too much time in the huddle. Steve Dorgan turned around and walked back. He stopped and stared. They were in front of their own goal posts—the five yard stripe!

Something was the matter. On that last play when he'd hit the Bearcat fullback, they had been on the Bearcat thirty-six. Now they were in the shadow of their own goal posts! It didn't make sense.

He turned on Dink Jarrett. "How—?" he began. He saw the expression on the back's face: he read the contempt.

Something else caught his eye before he went into the huddle. Automatically, he glanced up at the scoreboard. It was supposed to be the third quarter, 6 to 0 for the Bulls. Now it was the fourth period and the score 7 to 6 for the Bearcats! They had six minutes left in the game.

Dumbly, he stumbled into the huddle. All he could remember was that dive at the Bearcat fullback as he came through the line. Then the shock. He heard Tip McKee's voice out of the mist. Something must have happened during the intermission. The Bearcats had taken the lead; they were down again at the Bull goal line.

"We'll have to kick," McKee was saying savagely. Steve Dorgan saw the hopelessness in the faces of the Bull players. They were beaten. Dimly, he was aware of the fact that he was responsible.

They lined up with Jarrett in kick formation. The green wave broke over them. Steve knocked down one would-be blocker. Others were in on top of Jarrett. The right half got his toe on the ball but the Bearcat end came in high with his chest.

The ball bounded back into the end zone. Steve heard the roar. Green jerseys were bobbing all around him. One of them fell on the ball for the touchdown. It was 13 to 6 for the Bearcats.

Steve glanced toward the bench. He saw Ed Walton standing beside Buck Ingram. Walton was in a clean black and white uniform. The crowd gave him a terrific hand as he trotted across the field.

"Okay," McKee rasped. "On your way, Dorgan."

Steve walked toward the side lines.

There was a period of silence. Then someone booed. He looked up, the sickness in his heart. He felt Walton's eyes on him.

They were giving it to him from all sides now—hisses and catcalls. Coming nearer to the stands, he saw the faces. The rain had stopped and the umbrellas were down. They were wet, bedraggled and mad.

Buck Ingram didn't look at him as he came to the bench.

"Take your shower," the Bull coach said coldly. "Stop in my room tonight."

Steve blinked. He felt the dull ache across the forehead. It was like an iron band. Ingram was telling him off. Tonight, Buck would give him a check and send him back to Ridge City. The Bulls had lost out. Even if they licked the Jackets next Sunday, they'd have to play another game to break the deadlock. Beating the Jackets on two successive Sundays, without a fullback, could be fiction but not fact.

He walked past the bench full of grim-faced substitutes and picked up his sheepskin coat. He managed to take his shower and get out before they came in. He didn't want to meet anyone now.

IN the darkness of the hotel room he sat and tried to put the pieces together. The thing didn't add up. How could he have lost the game for the Bulls? He didn't remember how the Bearcats had scored the seven points or gotten the ball down to the Bull goal line!

There was a knock on the door and Ed Walton came in. The veteran fullback switched on the light. He sat down on the bed and stared at the man across the room.

"We lose?" Steve asked miserably.

Walton nodded. "It was very bad," he stated. "The Bearcats were moving and nothing could stop them." Walton paused. "What happened, Dorgan?" he asked.

Steve shook his head hopelessly. "I don't know," he said dully. "I don't know how the Bearcats caught up to us. I wasn't there."

Walton let it sink in. He rubbed his jaw thoughtfully. "Suppose you start from the beginning, Steve," he said slowly.

"I hit that fullback," Steve told him. "Then the lights went out."

"When?" Walton asked.

"In the third period," Steve explained. "We were leading 6 to 0, the ball was on

the Bearcat thirty-six. The next thing I knew it was the fourth quarter and we were losing." He stared at Walton. "What happened?"

"You don't remember?" Big Ed asked in amazement.

"No," Steve told him. "I heard McKee talking. The ball was on the ten. The Bearcats had the lead."

"Holy Smoke!" Ed Walton whispered. "I thought you looked dopey out there."

Steve Dorgan blinked. "You mean I was in the game all the while?"

Walton nodded. "You played right through until I came into the game with six minutes left after the second Bearcat score." Walton came over and knelt down before him. With his fingers he held open Steve's eyes and stared into them. "I heard about it happening to fighters in the ring," he said, "but never on the gridiron. You were out on your feet, Steve. You must have caught the fullback's knee in the temple and the shock put out the lights. But you could still play—in a fog."

Steve Dorgan's jaw fell. "Why didn't Ingram take me out?" he demanded.

Walton shook his head. "We didn't know on the bench. You got up after that tackle and walked to your position. You seemed to be all right." He paused. "It was only after awhile the trouble began."

"What trouble?" Steve asked. He was beginning to see the light.

"McRae started to throw," Walton explained. "He put them down the middle and you just looked at them. He threw four in a row and the Bearcats had a touchdown."

Steve Dorgan slumped forward on the chair. "It must have looked good," he said quietly.

Ed Walton picked up his coat from the bed. "We're going over to see Buck Ingram," he said. "Then to the hospital."

Steve laughed coldly. "What's the use?" he asked.

Walton looked down at him. "There's something else," he said slowly, "I didn't tell you, kid. The Jackets took it on the chin also."

Steve's mouth opened in surprise.

"The Mustangs stopped the Jackets cold in the second half and ran over another touchdown. It was 14 to 13. We're still tied for the lead and next Sunday is a new

game." Walton pushed the coat toward him. "We'll have to go to the hospital for a check-up, Dorgan."

They found Ingram waiting for them. Ed Walton told the story.

"It was my own fault," the Bull coach said when he was finished. "I should have yanked him before it was too late." He placed a hand on Steve Dorgan's shoulder. "I was hoping for an excuse for your conduct on the field, Steve," he said. "I'm glad it's cleared up."

They took a cab to the hospital and a physician went over the fullback carefully.

"He's all right now," they were told. "No after affects. There's a bump on the temple but it will clear away."

Steve Dorgan sat in the cab on the way back. He'd convinced Walton and Buck Ingram that he hadn't been responsible for his play after the third period. It might be a different matter with Bull players. They remembered that other thing.

Slick Edwards was waiting for them in the lobby. Steve saw the grin on the small man's face.

"Read the 'Blade' tomorrow," Edwards told them. "Read about yourself, Dorgan."

Buck Ingram took a step forward. "If you make a remark about this guy," he snapped, "I'll—"

Walton caught the Bull coach's arm.

"Freedom of the press," Edwards observed, "is an American institution. You can't stop it, Ingram."

"It's guys like you," Walton observed, "who ruin it."

Slick Edwards didn't spare the horses. It was down in black and white in the morning paper. Steve Dorgan read the column. He didn't go down to breakfast. He was still in his room when Buck Ingram came in.

"The rat," Ingram snarled. "The stinking rat!"

Edwards wanted to know why Ingram was sticking with a man who obviously was letting his teammates down. The reporter stated boldly that Steve Dorgan was working out a personal grudge. He'd nearly lost the Mustang game and the fans were left to decide for themselves about the Bearcat affair. They had been there.

"Go on home for a couple of days," Ingram advised. "Take a plane and see your wife. But be sure to get back here

by Thursday morning for practice."

Steve packed his bag while the Bull manager made the reservations. Under the circumstances it was the best thing.

"You sure you want me back Thursday?" he asked Ingram as they were going out.

"I'm sure," Buck snapped. "If I'm not, who is?"

Dink Jarrett and Tip McKee saw him getting into the cab with his bag. They stopped at the door to watch. McKee made a downward motion with his thumb. They thought he was going for good. It would be a surprise when he returned for practice.

"They'll have to get over it," Ingram said. "Ed Walton won't hold out against the Jackets. We'll need somebody to hit that line, Steve. You're the man."

STEVE DORGAN sat in the plane and stared out the window. The Bulls had enough of him. Once again the team would be shot through with dissension when he got back into the lineup. Ingram meant well: the Bull coach was giving him a break, but the cards were against him. That Number Eleven was still the jinx.

Lou was back home with his mother when he reached Ridge City. The kid was all right but she looked pale and thin. Steve remembered the doctor's advice.

"Get her out of Ridge City. Send her to the mountains."

He sat on the back porch and he saw the gray pall of smoke down in the valley. The magazine lying on the floor was covered with dust. Ridge City was no place for a girl with bad lungs.

"What happened, Steve?" Lou asked. She'd read the "Blade."

"I got off on the wrong foot," Steve told her. "It'll take a while to get back in step." He didn't tell her that if the Bulls lost out to the Jackets Sunday, the team would hold him responsible for the defeat. Twice in five years the Bulls had been in line for the big money. Once he'd fixed it up for them; now it was working out the same way.

"Next year it will go better," she consoled.

Steve didn't say anything. There'd be no next year if they went under this week. With the money he had, he purchased train tickets and made reservations at a sana-

torium in the Poconos. She wouldn't be able to stay long if the Bulls didn't come through but it would be something.

"I'll get in touch with you when the season's over," Steve said.

"You can't afford this," Lou told him. "It will break us, Steve."

"There's plenty more," he grinned, "where this came from."

III

THE Bulls stared at him when he walked out on the field at ten o'clock Thursday morning. Tip McKee kicked the ball into the bleacher seats. They were working out at the ball park of the local semi-pro club.

Steve watched the quarterback striding toward Buck Ingram.

"How about it?" McKee demanded. "Is this guy back?"

"He's back," Ingram said coldly. "He's playing ball for me."

"Not for me," McKee snarled. "We worked too damn hard to get up here. I need this dough. I got a family to support through the winter."

"We need a fullback," Ingram explained. "Walton won't go sixty minutes against the Jackets."

"At least he'll play it straight," McKee snapped. "That's good enough for me. We can do the rest."

Steve Dorgan walked over to them. McKee wasn't trying to keep the conversation quiet. He could be heard half way across the field. Dink Jarrett and George Paine stood nearby. Ted Shane sat down on the grass to listen.

"You're makin' remarks," Steve said quietly. "I don't like them, McKee."

"What happened last Sunday?" the quarterback demanded. "What happened in the Mustang game?"

"I can explain," Ed Walton said behind him.

"I talk for myself," Steve said.

"You probably wouldn't say enough," Walton grinned. He turned to McKee. "In the Bearcat game Dorgan was hurt in the third quarter before the Bearcats scored. He didn't come out of it till the fourth period right before the blocked kick."

"It sounds nice," McKee sneered. "He

was out on his feet but he was still able to play."

"That's right," Walton said. "Believe it or not."

"Slick Edwards has a different story," the quarterback snapped. "I can believe the one I like." He stalked away. Dink Jarrett laughed. Jarrett was a hundred and ninety-five pounds—nearer Steve Dorgan's size.

He took a step toward the right halfback and then stopped. He saw the expression on Ed Walton's face and he remembered the other fight four years back. The pattern was the same.

"I'll wait," Jarrett told him quietly. "Any time you say, Dorgan." Jarrett had dark skin like an Indian, and light blue eyes in contrast.

"Line up," Buck Ingram growled, "for scrimmage. He put Ed Walton in as starting fullback. Steve Dorgan sat on the bench. Walton was running with a decided limp. He probably wouldn't even start Sunday against the Jackets.

Later in the morning Buck Ingram ran Steve with the regulars. They didn't say anything to him. The workout lacked smoothness. Tip McKee stumbled over the fullback's foot as they went round the end on one occasion. He came up swearing.

"You can cut that," Buck Ingram said.

In the dressing room after the workout it was very quiet. Steve Dorgan showered and left early. Buck Ingram shook his head at him as he went out the door. The Bull coach was at his wit's ends. He needed a good fullback against the tough Jackets and he thought he had one, but the Bulls wouldn't play ball with him.

Slick Edwards put both player and coach over the coals when it was learned Steve Dorgan would be in the game against the Yellow Jackets.

"An investigation into the affairs of the Bulls would be in order," Edwards suggested glibly. "The Bull owners should make inquiries. Ingram is either stubborn and won't admit he was wrong, or he has other motives—"

Buck Ingram ran into the reporter in the hotel lobby and flattened him with a left hook. Edwards staggered to his feet, blood streaming from his mouth.

"My paper sues you for assault and bat-

tery, Ingram," he snarled viciously.

"It's worth fifty bucks," the Bull coach grinned, "to smack that ugly puss."

Steve Dorgan witnessed the fight and then went up to his room. He was the cause of the trouble—trouble between himself and the Bulls; trouble between the Bulls and the coach, and the coach and the press.

"It'll work out," Ed Walton consoled. "You just hit that line Sunday, Steve. Watch them change their minds."

They had a capacity crowd in the stadium and the sun shone through a clear sky. The Jackets were already on the field when the Bulls came out. They were a veteran squad and raring to make up for last week's defeat by the Mustangs.

Steve Dorgan watched them charge up the field in formation. The sun glistened on the golden helmets. They were in bright yellow jackets with blue silk pants. The Jackets had annexed the championship four times in the past five years.

Buck Ingram had announced his starting lineup. Ed Walton was on the bench with Steve Dorgan starting at fullback. The Jackets had two sets of running backs. Ingram planned on using the regulars through most of the tilt with an occasional time out to rest.

"They have plenty of reserve strength," the Bull coach said in the dressing room, "and they get tougher as the game goes on."

Shane lost the toss and the Jackets elected to receive. They spread out across the field and Dink Jarrett measured the ball. The right half booted down to the goal line and Blackburn, sensational Jacket ace, came up the field with it.

Steve plowed straight down the middle. He threw one yellow jerseyed blocker aside with his hands and then dived over another for Blackburn's twinkling heels. He gripped the ankles and tugged. The Jacket runner hit the turf with a thud.

He sat up grinning sickly and tossed the ball to the referee. "The papers said you were on our side, Dorgan," Blackburn grumbled. "What's this, the doublecross?"

"Stick around," Steve told him. "See for yourself."

The Jackets were working out of the "T" with the veteran quarterback, Scoopy Craig, handling the ball. Craig sent Jack

Carr, fullback, into the Bull line, the right side.

Hugh Marlowe nailed the runner at the line of scrimmage.

"They'll try the other side," Ted Shane said. He glanced back at Steve. They were on the twenty-five, second and ten.

Scoopy Craig received the ball from center and whirled around. He pushed the ball at Blackburn, and the speed boy hit the line between left guard and tackle. Steve Dorgan cut across to get the runner.

Blackburn was stumbling through, but his hands were empty! Steve heard Dink Jarrett yell the warning. Craig was fading back with the ball for a pass. The stab at the line had been a fake.

McKee had been up close for the second down. A fleet-footed Jacket end was already past him, moving down the left alley. Craig's arm went back and the ball sailed.

Steve groaned. The end had two steps on Tip McKee and he was a faster runner. McKee leaped as the receiver took the ball over his shoulder on the forty-five. The Bull quarterback's fingers grazed the heels of the runner. He didn't hold. The Jacket end went fifty-five yards to the Bull goal line. Dink Jarrett and Georgie Paine chased him all the way.

"Lay that one to me," Steve whispered. Tip McKee had let himself be fooled on the pass. Craig had thrown into his territory and McKee had been fished in.

The extra point kick was good. 7 to 0 for the Jackets after two plays. The yellow-jerseyed team went back up the field to kick. Tip McKee looked pale around the gills.

"The game is young," Ted Shane yelled. "Let's bring it up."

JARRETT took the kick-off and was smeared on the fifteen by two speedy Jacket line men. It was amazing the way the men in yellow got down the field.

Steve picked himself from the ground. He'd taken out his man but Jarrett had elected to take a different course. They went into the huddle. McKee still looked sick.

"Forget about it," Hugh Marlowe told him. "It happens, kid."

Steve Dorgan's hands tightened on his

knees. They could say that to McKee but they wouldn't say it to him. Things had happened to him also. That fumble in the Mustang game. The accident when he'd backed into the goal post and lost that pass.

"No. 3-F," McKee said.

Dink Jarrett hit off right tackle and was thrown back with a two yard loss. The Jacket line rose up as one man and surged forward. They were irresistible.

Steve went over left guard. Blackburn and the Jacket center stopped him as he came through. Two yards.

McKee faked a pass and sent Paine around the left end. The left half was knocked down on the eighteen. They kicked on the next play.

The Jacket's roared back up the field without a moment's delay. The wily Craig kept the Bull line guessing. Constantly, they were plunging at the wrong man. Fake spinners and crossbucks bewildered them. Craig drew back his arm to throw and then tossed a lateral to Blackburn or Carr driving into the line.

They were down on the Bull twenty-two and still putting on the pressure. Shane called for time. It was first and ten.

Steve Dorgan listened to the roar from the stands. The Jackets were putting on a show today. They were hitting on all six cylinders—smooth as clockwork.

"They can't make any mistakes today," Shane grumbled. "It's one of those afternoons." The Jackets had reached top form at the end of the season. Confidence literally oozed through them.

The referee blew the whistle and they lined up again. Steve walked back to his position. Already, he'd taken plenty from the high driving Blackburn and the bull-like rushes of Jack Carr. The Bull line was wide open and the Jacket runners tore through, moving at top speed.

It was Blackburn hitting off right tackle, coming through like a sprinter, knees high. Steve threw himself at the runner's knees. Blackburn stumbled over his arms and went down. It was second and seven. The Jacket had picked up three yards.

Scoopy Craig snapped the numbers and the Jackets hopped around in that tricky "T". Johnny Wallace, Jacket right half, moved to the left on the "man-in motion." Wallace was plenty fast and Paine had been

assigned to follow him on every play. Twice Craig had shot laterals across the field to the runner and they'd made distance.

A fake spinner, and Shane hit Carr as the Jacket fullback rammed over the middle. Carr, two hundred and twenty-five pounds, rolled over the smaller man for three more yards before Steve Dorgan and Jarrett were able to get in on the play.

The quarter was up and they changed goals. The bewildered Bull team walked up the field in silence. The championship meant something. It meant a play-off with the western division the following Sunday; it meant exhibition games through December; it meant the big one with the All-Stars next fall—several thousand dollars extra per man.

The Jackets worked the ball down to the ten where the Bull's finally held them. Steve saw Buck Ingram out on the line standing with Ed Walton. He wasn't sending Walton in. The fullback had his sheepskin up around his neck.

"They're going to try a placement," Hugh Marlowe growled. "Let's smash it up."

The Jackets had worked the ball toward the middle of the field. It was third and seven. Scoopy Craig faded away and shot the pass down the center. Blackburn came over like a whirlwind, reaching for the pigskin.

Steve Dorgan was ready for it. He went up high trying for the interception. The pass was hot and he couldn't hold it. He managed to knock it to the ground.

"They have to kick," Marlowe said again.

Jack Carr was dropping back and measuring the distance.

"Block this," Shane yelled.

The ball spun back and Craig held it. Carr moved forward deliberately. The Jacket fullback was the best in the business at the feat.

Steve watched the ball sail over his head. It cut the uprights dead center, ten feet above the cross bar. 10 to 0 for the Jackets.

Buck Ingram sent in substitutions. The Jackets retaliated with eleven new men. Steve was still on the field. Jarrett had gone out limping slightly from a bruised shin. Georgie Paine and Tip McKee were still in the lineup.

"Come on, let's start something," Georgie

Paine snorted. "We need this game."

Steve Dorgan thought about the wife and the kid up at the sanatorium. If the Bulls lost this one, he'd get his two hundred and it would be all over. He'd have to bring her back in a few weeks.

He waited back on the goal line as Jackets prepared to kick off. Carr booted into the end zone. Steve stepped back and picked the ball out of the air. He came up the field in a sprint. He went over the ten and then the fifteen, running behind Paine and McKee.

Craig dived at him on the twenty and he smashed the little quarterback down with his free hand. Paine upset Blackburn and Steve went through the opening. He picked up speed and shot between two yellow jerseys. He felt their hands tearing at him, sliding off.

On the forty, Jack Carr hit him from the side. Steve dug in and kept going. He dragged Carr two more yards before going down.

"What the hell," the Jacket fullback mumbled.

Tip McKee looked at him curiously in the huddle. "No. 11-P," the Bull quarterback said wisely.

Steve Dorgan smashed through right tackle. He went through the gap, whirled, and stumbled up to the fifty. First down. They needed yardage and he had to make it.

McKee sent Paine around left end and the back got nothing.

"We'll throw," McKee said. He looked at Scott, the end. "30-P."

They nearly lost the ball. Blackburn got in front of it and fumbled. Tip McKee wiped the perspiration from his face. Steve Dorgan read the doubt in the quarterback's eye. McKee was all wrong today. Everything he did was off the beam.

"Let this guy run," Shane suggested. He nodded to Steve Dorgan.

McKee looked at the ground and shrugged. Steve went over the middle bucking like a wild horse. Shane and Marlowe gave him the hole. He hit down to the Jacket forty-two. Fourth and two.

McKee was in a dilemma. If they tried another plunge and missed, the Jackets would have the ball. They'd be poised for another drive toward the

Bull goal line. If he kicked, he could probably gain much but the Jackets would still get possession and the first Bull attack would be stopped.

Steve Dorgan moistened his lips. "I'd like to try it," he said slowly. Buck Ingram had hired him as the key man. They needed him for those two yards when the going got tough and the Bulls were on the spot. He owed this much to Buck Ingram who had stood behind him against public opinion, his team and the press.

"Let him run," Shane said. "He's hot." Jarrett was out on the sidelines warming up again. If they made this distance and were able to start another drive, Ingram was sending in the speedy back to help along.

"Take it," McKee said. "9-F."

The little quarterback fell back into punt formation. He snapped the numbers and waited for the ball. Shane shot it back on a slant to Steve Dorgan. Hugh Marlowe plunged forward kicking up dirt. Steve followed him. He put his head down and let go.

The Jacket backs had retreated for the kick. Marlowe gave him the hole and Steve hit through. A white line flashed beneath him—the forty. Another one, the thirty-five, he stepped over before two Jackets smashed him from the side.

Shane was grinning at him when he came back. Dink Jarrett sprinted across the field to report to the referee. They were on the way!

McKee let Paine fly around the end and this time Georgie made yardage. They were on the Jacket thirty yard stripe, second five.

Jarrett ripped through tackle to the twenty-seven. McKee faked a pass and slipped through a hole in the middle for three more. Steve Dorgan hammered down to the eighteen. The Jackets tried to hold them off. Carr and Blackburn roamed behind the yellow jerseyed line hitting down the runners, but they made ground.

The Jackets stiffened on the ten. They held twice and then Jarrett staggered through to the seven. Fourth and one. Tip McKee looked at Steve Dorgan. It was the fullback's play. He'd come through every time the Bulls needed the distance. Shane said he was hot.

"12-A," McKee said. They needed three

short feet to keep this drive going. A 10 to 7 score would look a lot better at half time than 10 to 0.

They lined up in the single wing and Steve hopped into the running position. He took the ball from Shane, started down the middle, and then swerved to the right. They were to give him a hole between guard and tackle. It was there—beckoning.

He went through—one, two—three yards to the four. Jack Carr crossed over and smashed in from the left. The Jacket end got him from the other side. Carr's heavy knee dug into his ribs as he went down. Steve felt the searing pain shoot through his body. He wanted to yell out in agony. The ribs had given way before Carr's knee cap. If they weren't broken, they were fractured.

Sick and weak with the pain, he tried to cling to the ball. The jolt had loosened his grip on the pigskin. It was going away. The fall to the ground twisted his arm. The ball slipped away. He heard the roar from the stands. Scoopy Craig had fallen on it. Jacket's ball.

Steve Dorgan lay on the ground as the referee pulled off Carr and the end. He didn't want to get up. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. Then he saw Tip McKee's face. Once again the fullback had failed when put on the spot.

"Nice going," McKee said. He turned on his heel and walked away.

Slowly, Steve climbed to his feet. The pain nearly took his breath away. After he'd straightened up, it felt a little better. Ed Walton was coming into the game. The Bulls stood around staring at him.

There was no sound from the stands as he walked to the side lines. They'd seen him driving down the field, sparking the Bull attack. He'd hit the Jacket line like a demon and they were sure Slick Edwards had been talking through his hat. Now they didn't know.

"Tough," Buck Ingram told him when he sat down on the bench. That was all. The coach's face was inscrutable. Even Ingram couldn't believe after awhile that the jinx followed only Steve Dorgan.

There was no further scoring in the half. It was still 10 to 0 for the Jackets when the gun went off. Jack Carr kicked from the end zone after the fumble and the ball carried to the Bull forty-five.

Trainer Mike McCord came over to Steve as he sat on the bench in the locker room, face gray with pain.

"You look like you could use a rub down, kid," the veteran said. "How about it?"

"Not now," Steve told him. If McCord monkeyed around with him, he'd be sure to notice that bruised side. Ingram would bench him and that would be the end of things. With Walton in the game they didn't stand a chance of overtaking the Jackets.

"We're not licked," Buck Ingram was saying from the center of the room, "We have thirty minutes of football and we're due for a few breaks."

Tip McKee laughed by the water cooler. Ingram ignored him. He announced the starting lineup. Steve Dorgan was back at fullback.

Ed Walton stopped the fullback as he was going out the door.

"You all right?" Walton asked quietly. He made a motion as if to punch Steve in the ribs fullilly.

The big man recoiled. He could scarcely choke down the cry coming up to his lips. Walton caught him by the shoulder and pushed him back into the room.

"I thought so," the veteran said grimly. "Off with the shirt."

"Cut it," Steve said. "I'm going in."

Buck Ingram came back and looked at the two of them. Mike McCord was at his shoulder.

"He was banged up in that last play," Walton said. "I could see it on his face when he came out. He won't let me look at it."

McCord came forward. He was a big man with bushy white hair, a long nose and pale blue eyes.

"Get on the table, Dorgan," he said. "I'm responsible for the condition of this team."

Steve sat down on the rubbing table. McCord helped him strip off the black Bull jersey. Ed Walton and Buck Ingram stood by watching.

McCord's fingers went around his chest. They pressed the left side. Steve gasped and McCord grunted. He looked at Ingram.

"How about it?" the Bull coach asked.

"Fractured," McCord said. "I can't tell

how badly till we take X-Rays." He paused. "I'll patch him up with tape. We'll go down to the hospital after the game."

Ingram turned away, shoulders drooping. Tip McKee was standing in the doorway, his eyes fastened on Steve Dorgan.

"A guy would have a hard time holding onto the ball after they smashed his ribs," Walton said quietly. "How about that, McKee?"

"Okay," Tip said gruffly. He tried to smile at Ed Walton. "You're in, Ed," he told the veteran.

Steve Dorgan sat up and held out his arms as McCord wound his body with the tape.

"Not too tight," he said grimly, "and not too high up, Mike."

"Why?" McCord asked.

"I bend when I run," Steve told him. "I don't want to be slowed up."

Mike McCord gulped. "Slowed up?" he blinked. "You're through, kid!"

IV

STEVE climbed from the table when McCord was finished. Buck Ingram and Walton had already gone out. He walked down to the Bull bench. The Jackets were preparing to kick off. Buck Ingram was out on the line.

The fullback walked over to the coach.

"I'm ready to go," he said, "whenever you want me, Ingram."

The Bull coach smiled wryly. "Ed will have to get along," he said.

The Jackets kicked off and Jarrett brought it back to the twenty-one. They needed ten points—two touchdowns to win. Steve Dorgan sat on the bench and watched. It was like sitting in at your own trial and being forbidden to testify.

McKee sent George Paine into the right side of the Jacket line. Paine made a yard. The Jacket's game was evident. With a ten point lead they could go on the defensive and play it safe. They'd take no unnecessary chances; there would be a few passes, few complicated plays, and no fumbles.

The Bulls were lining up again with Ed Walton in the running position. The fullback crashed over dead center. Steve Dorgan blinked. Walton was still going,

driving to the thirty-one. First down!

They gave the veteran a terrific hand from the stands. It had been rumored that Walton was passing out. His legs had been going for the past two seasons. The big boy wanted to make this last one the best.

Again McKee gave him the ball and he hit over for six yards. Even Jack Carr was unable to stop him.

Buck Ingram came back to the bench and sat down beside Steve Dorgan.

"There's a great guy," the Bull coach said quietly. "They don't come any better."

Steve nodded. Ed Walton was a real man.

McKee opened up with a pass from the thirty-seven. Paine caught it on the forty-five and went to midfield. A reverse with Jarrett on the carrying end went into Jacket territory.

Then it was Walton hitting over right guard, adding four more yards. They hadn't stopped the fullback since he'd come into the game.

Again and again McKee gave Walton the ball and he made ground. Ed Walton had taken a new lease on life.

The attack stalled on the Jacket thirty-three. McKee whipped a pass down the field with third and six. Blackburn broke in on it and came up to the forty before they knocked him down. It was heart breaking.

The Jackets kicked on the third down and put the ball off on the ten. They had to start all over again. Steve Dorgan shifted uneasily on the bench. He stared at Buck Ingram's back. They were half way through the period.

McKee let Walton buck the Jacket line. They came up slowly. Steve saw Walton's face as they came over the middle of the field. Ed was limping slightly and his face was drawn. He shot through the middle on a straight buck and picked up three yards. He was slow getting to his feet.

Steve stood up and walked out to the line.

"Ed's finished," he said simply. "He can hardly stand on his feet."

Buck Ingram nodded gloomily.

"Any time," Steve said. "I'm ready."

"You'll get killed," Ingram told him. "Stop kidding yourself."

Steve Dorgan went back to the bench.

He didn't sit down. Standing on the end he watched the play move down to the Jacket forty and then the thirty. The period was nearly up and they hadn't scored.

Dink Jarrett and George Paine were on their last legs also. Paine had been in since the start. Jarrett had had three minutes rest in the second period.

Ed Walton plowed over left guard. Jack Carr and Blackburn hit him at the same time. Steve Dorgan gasped from the shock. Carr was the hardest tackler in the league. He meant business when he hit a man.

Gamely, Walton climbed to his feet and weaved back into the huddle. The crowd in the stands saw him stagger and they yelled for Ingram to take him out before he was hurt.

Buck Ingram stared around hopelessly. Steve Dorgan crawled out of his sheepskin.

"No," Ingram said. "I can't take the chance."

"Get it straight," Steve said grimly. "I need this dough, Buck. I'm on the spot."

Buck Ingram stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"I got a wife with bad lungs," Steve said. "She comes back from the mountains unless the Bulls take this. I'm going in."

The play swept around right end with Dink Jarrett carrying. Ed Walton was up front with the blockers. Steve saw him dive under Jack Carr's legs. The big Jacket fullback sprawled on top of Walton. Ed lay on the ground.

"I don't know which one of you is in worse shape," Ingram said miserably. "Go ahead, Dorgan."

Shane and Marlowe were helping Ed Walton toward the side lines. Steve Dorgan, trotting across the field, heard the terrific roar from the stands. It was for Walton. They didn't cheer him.

The ball was on the twenty-three, first and ten. McKee blinked at the new fullback in the huddle. He called a play for George Paine. The left half made a yard through tackle.

The Jackets were sending in a stream of fresh line men to stop the attack. McKee stared at them and then looked at his weary running backs.

"How about me?" Steve asked coldly.

"I'm not in here just for the scenery."

Tip McKee rubbed his jaw. "Did Buck say you could run?" he asked.

"I said I could," Steve Dorgan told him. "Feed me the ball."

McKee shrugged. "Your funeral," he said.

"Let me enjoy it," Steve snapped. He took the ball on a straight buck. He went through for six yards to the sixteen. Third and three.

Dink Jarrett and George Paine stared at him. McKee had told them about the banged-up ribs. Mike McCord said he was through for the afternoon.

"You fool around," the trainer scowled, "and a piece breaks off and goes through the lung. They nail you in a box."

McKee sent Jarrett around the end for no gain. They needed three yards to keep going. It was the fourth quarter.

"I could throw," McKee said.

"Let me make this," Steve Dorgan told him. "My feet are hot." His side didn't feel good. It was as hot as fire.

"11-P," McKee said. They lined up and Steve hopped into the running position. He crouched awkwardly, hampered by the tape around his waist. The ball spun back and he cut to the left. He went through between tackle and guard, running low. Blackburn hit him first but the Jacket speed merchant couldn't hold on.

Steve rolled with the tackle and plunged forward. His shoulder smashed against Jack Carr's knee. He lay on the ten. They were yelling in the stands now but it wasn't for him.

"Take this, George," McKee said. "We need a touchdown."

George Paine looked at Steve Dorgan and then nodded. The left half cut around right end. He found his old speed and beat Blackburn to the corner. They knocked him out of bounds on the four.

McKee tried Jarrett and Dink got two of the four yards. Steve Dorgan took it on a buck over guard. He ran behind Marlowe and Shane. They pushed the yellow jerseys over the goal line. Steve sprawled over the line with three Jackets on top of him. The pain nauseated him.

He stood up and walked away. They had one. McKee kicked the point making it 10 to 7 for the Jackets.

"One more," Shane roared. "Let's get this quick." They had about eleven minutes of the quarter. Plenty of time.

The Jackets took the kick and brought it back to the eighteen. Shane and Marlowe tossed Blackburn up into the air and hammered him to the grass.

The Jackets stalled through three downs and then Carr booted from the fifteen. The ball sailed seventy yards through the air, falling behind Tip McKee at the safety position.

There was no chance for a run back. A Jacket man fell on the ball as it bounced on the Bull fifteen. It was a terrific kick.

THE goal line was eighty-five yards away. McKee sneaked through the middle on the first play for five yards. He fed it to Steve Dorgan and the fullback made six. Again he'd run into Carr with disastrous results. The Jacket line backer was made of iron.

"We'll throw," McKee said. "They're looking for ground plays."

The pass was good to Jarrett for twenty yards. They went over the middle with Steve and Dink hitting into the line.

On the Jacket thirty-three Jarrett fumbled. Steve heard the roar from the stands. They were going around right end when the Jacket wing man caught Jarrett from behind. Dink hit the turf with a thud and the ball spurted out of his hands.

Men in black and men in yellow dived for it. Scoopy Craig was on the bottom with the ball against his chest when they pulled the players away.

Jarrett lay on the ground and pounded the grass with his hands. The clock said five minutes. They knew how Jack Carr could kick. He'd push them deep into their own territory again.

"We're not through," Shane roared. "Block that kick."

Mechanically, the Jackets ran into the line three times slowly, consuming all the time possible. Then Carr was in punt formation with Tip McKee playing back on the Bull fifteen.

Marlowe and Shane got through as the ball went back. Blackburn blocked out Marlowe. Shane went high into the air as Carr swung his ponderous right foot. The ball cleared the Bull captain's fingers by inches. It went up into the air—tum-

bling weirdly against the blue of the sky.

McKee had to run toward the side line for it. He took it on the Bull thirteen and came up the field. Steve knocked down Scoopy Craig. The jar sent spasms of pain through his body.

McKee was coming up fast dodging in and out between the big Jacket line men. He was on the twenty-five and then the thirty in a brilliant run back.

Steve rolled over and threw himself against the Jacket No. 7 end. The man went down and McKee bounced over him. He was on the fifty and still going!

Blackburn forced him out of bounds on the forty-five. They gave McKee a hand.

"We take it over," McKee said slowly. He glanced at the clock. They had less than four minutes. Sufficient time for one more drive at the Jacket goal line. If they failed, there would be no second chance.

McKee let Paine run and the left half stumbled into the line for no gain.

"Try me," Steve suggested. He was still strong in the legs even though his side was burning up.

McKee called his number. He went through for eight yards. Carr and Blackburn slammed him down on the thirty-seven.

"I'll try again," Steve said. The others were out. Jarrett, Paine, McKee. It was a one man job from now on. McKee looked at him and nodded. He made six on the next plunge.

"We pass this one," McKee said. "You'll kill yourself before we get near the line."

Steve nodded. It was dangerous throwing at this time, but he had to have a little left when they got inside the ten.

McKee's pass was good to Rogerson, the end, for twelve yards to the Jacket nineteen. In two plays Steve Dorgan put it on the nine. Shane and Marlowe opened the holes but he had to get past Carr and Blackburn. The two line backers waited for him on each play. They let him have it.

McKee shifted with Jarrett carrying. Dink ran wide around right end. They chased him far across the field. He was on the eight when he went out of bounds. Steve looked at the clock. Two minutes.

"Mine," he said to McKee. The quarterback nodded.

Another straight buck and he picked up two yards. Third and goal to go on the Jacket six. They needed six yards on the next two plays and the Jacket backs were lined up behind the line of scrimmage.

"I'll take the first one," Steve said. He stood in the huddle with the blood dripping down his chin from a split lip. The pain lines showed around his mouth.

"Yours," McKee said.

Steve lined up behind Shane. He heard McKee calling the numbers through the noise. The ball spun back. He tucked it under his arm and moved forward, gathering momentum for the drive.

Marlowe had the opening—small but sufficient. He went through bent double. Carr was up there and Blackburn. Scoopy Craig yelled like a fiend and dived at his knees.

Steve dug. He kept his feet and he moved forward. Marlowe and Shane were with him smashing into that yellow-jerseyed wall. They moved forward and Steve reached for the line. He saw it a yard away, but he couldn't make it. They weighed him down with sheer numbers.

He tried to stay up. Someone was in on the side with an elbow in his ribs. Pain roared through his body. He went down and he knew he couldn't get up.

Tip McKee helped pull the players off him and then waved toward the bench that Steve Dorgan was through.

Steve sat next to Ed Walton on the bench as Dink Jarrett sailed through the air over left guard. The Bull back left his feet at the line of scrimmage. He landed in the end zone.

"A great gang," Walton whispered. "It'll be a pleasure working with them next fall."

"I thought," Steve said, "that you were retiring, Ed?"

Walton smiled. "Buck is taking me on as assistant coach. I couldn't leave this team." He paused. "How about you?"

Steve Dorgan watched the Bulls racing across the field toward the bench. It was all over. The crowd overflowed onto the field.

"If they want me," Steve said, "I'd like to play ball." He saw the grins on the battered faces of the Bull players as they came in.

"They do," Walton said dryly.

CASH AND CARRY

by MATT QUINLAN

Every gridiron stripe was a dollar sign to fleet-footed Vic Stewart. Every yard gained was just money in the bank. But how the grid-world howled when he landed with the bankrupt Cyclones.

THEY had him labeled in the pro loop. He was the guy with the dollar sign where his heart should be; every yard gained from scrimmage was money in the bank.

"I'm not asking five hundred a game," Vic Stewart said boldly, "and I'm not asking eight hundred. I'll take one grand on the line." He knew he was worth it. He'd led the league in scoring two years running; he was the most consistent ground gainer in pro football.

Dick Preston of the Beavers snarled, "The other boys are pickin' up two hundred and less. You want a grand?" Preston had had him since he'd come off the Tech campus—All-American—All-Time!

"I carry the ball," Vic had smiled. "I score the points for the Beavers."

"How about the other guys?" Preston raged. "Don't they help?"

"You worry about them," Vic said. "I have other problems." He paused, "You can either pay me the money or send me to a club which will."

The Beaver owner kicked over the waste basket. "I know where I'd like to send you, Stewart," he said savagely, "but they don't play football there."

Dick Preston put him on the block and five of the big clubs turned him down. Some of them weren't willing to meet that thousand-dollar per game demand; the others didn't trust him. Despite the fact that he'd scored a hundred and thirty points for the Beavers the past season, the club had ended in fourth place.

"It's not points that win ball games," Preston said tersely, "it's eleven men playing together. With the Beavers we've never had more than ten." The Beaver owner was free with his remarks to the press only after Dad Gardner of the Cyclones had purchased Vic Stewart's contract.

Vic stood against the wall in the Cyclone

dressing room. At Tech he'd weighed a hundred and eighty pounds spread over six feet. In the pro loop he'd pick up ten more pounds of beef. He had the drive in the legs, the power to go through a line, and the speed to cut the ends.

"If we all work together," Dad Gardner said quietly, "we have a chance to go places." The Cyclones had won two and lost two. With six games left on the schedule they had an excellent opportunity of overtaking the league-leading Bulls.

Vic Stewart's gray eyes swept the dressing room. He saw the expressions on the faces of the men. The Cyclones didn't want him any more than the Beavers or the other clubs. He had a reputation for playing ball for himself. He took all there was in the game; they didn't consider along with his other expenses. Probably that he put everything into it.

He stood near Dad Gardner, a tall man with tapering shoulders and legs like a Greek statue. His black hair, parted in the middle, was slicked down flat. He had a straight mouth with thin lips.

Fred Chambers, Tech coach, had been the only man in whom he'd confided. Chambers remembered him as a gangling freshman in a faded brown sweater and thin-soled shoes. A dollar was a hundred cents and every one of them meant something.

The Tech coach fixed him up with a job in the gym. It had been much easier the last three years; he'd hit All-American twice.

"The pro game," Chambers told him, "is right down your alley, Vic." He wasn't the hip-twisting type, high-stepping, dancing away from the tacklers. He ran through them; he gave them a leg and then took it away.

"I need the money," Vic said quietly. Even Chambers didn't know how bad it was at home with an invalid father and three small children.



In one last desperate lunge, Vic aimed at paydirt.

"I have something to sell," he told the Tech mentor, "and it's going to the highest bidder. He was the stellar attraction and he made them pay for it. The Stewarts

had their home, and the kids wore better clothing, but a dollar was still a dollar. It was something that got into the blood.

The Cyclones had the tough Blackhawks

on deck for the afternoon's game. The Hawks had lost by two points to the Bulls the previous week.

"We'll run Stewart in the straight plays," Dad Gardner said. Quarterback Chuck Russell nodded in agreement.

They went out on the field and the Hawks won the toss. The blue jerseyed Cyclones deployed across the field and fullback Johnny McCann prepared to kick.

Vic Stewart glanced up into the stands. The Cyclones weren't making the money the Beavers had made. He wondered how old Dad Gardner could pay that grand along with his other expenses. Probably the old man had plenty on the side.

THE BALL zoomed up into the air and Vic was the first man across the fifty-yard stripe. He ran with deceptive speed. A black-jerseyed Hawk blocker hurled himself in the path of the new Cyclone. Vic side-stepped neatly, scarcely breaking his stride. He knifed in between two more black jerseys and nailed the ball carrier on the twenty-three.

The Cyclones watched him and said nothing. They knew how much he was drawing from Dad Gardner. "Everybody in the league knew why he wasn't wanted.

The Hawks swung out of the "T." Two men spun like whirling dervishes, and then the ball carrier shot through left tackle. Huck Ryan, Cyclone right half knocked him down on the twenty-five.

That "T" was deceptive. Vic Stewart rubbed his hands on the gray silk Cyclone pants. There would be plenty of work for the line backers this afternoon if that first play was an example.

He came in closer on the second down. The Hawks swung to the other side and came around the end in a wide sweep, Sexton, Hawk fullback, carrying. Vic remembered the man. He'd played against Sexton and the rest of them for two full seasons.

The Cyclone end knocked down one of the blockers in the convoy. Johnny McCann got another one. Vic Stewart shot in low, grasping Sexton around the knees. He heaved and both men went out of bounds on the twenty-five. No gain.

Sexton, big, heavy-jawed, sandy haired, grinned coldly.

"How's it goin', Money-Bags?"

"I get along," Vic told him. He'd taken plenty of riding starting last season, but they never went too far. The referee had yet to put him out of the game for fighting, but twice he'd taken on the hecklers under the grandstand at the end of the game. They didn't go too far after that.

"A guy with your dough," Sexton said, "should be ashamed of himself taking money from an old man who don't have it."

Vic Stewart watched Sexton's broad back as the Hawk trotted back into the huddle. He laughed grimly. They all thought he had plenty; they didn't know where it had gone. He didn't know about Dad Gardner. The old man had had his team in the league since the beginning a dozen years back. The Cyclones were usually second rate.

The Hawks booted on the fourth down and Chuck Russell ran it back to the Cyclone forty-five. They lined up in the huddle and Russell called the play for McCann. The Cyclone fullback hammered through for two yards.

"Okay," Russell said quietly. "Your play, Stewart."

"Name it," Vic told him.

"No. 22—off right tackle," the quarterback explained. "You take it from center."

Vic Stewart nodded. He saw the expression on the face of Johnny McCann. This team didn't want to block for him any more than the Beavers had. A man had no right asking and receiving four or five times what the other men in the league received.

But they did block and Vic was surprised. McCann took out the Hawk end. Huck Ryan fell in front of a Hawk back. Vic raced through the opening for a first down. He was out in the clear on the Hawk forty when a black jersey caught him from behind with a flying tackle. It was Sexton.

"You're slowin' up," the Hawk fullback said. "You must carry your gold in your pants, Stewart."

Vic Stewart's thin mouth tightened across his face. "You're talking loud, Buck," he said slowly.

"Loud and straight," Sexton snapped, "an' I'm lookin' to be shut up."

"Let's go." Russell called from the Cyclone huddle. Vic walked away. It didn't

make sense to fight on the field and get put out of the game. You don't score points sitting on the bench.

Russell took it through the line on a quarterback sneak and netted one yard. McCann got two more on a buck over left guard. Vic Stewart waited patiently. He saw Dad Gardner standing out on the line. The old man had hired him for these emergencies. The Cyclone drive had started and was now slowing down.

"Take it," Russell said. "Around right end, Stewart."

Vic hopped over to the running position on the shift. He feinted in at the tackle spot and then cut wide behind Johnny McCann. Huck Ryan hit the defensive end. Chuck Russell got through to knock down the Hawk left half. The path was clear and Vic Stewart sailed down the field. The blocking of the Cyclones was superb—and hard to understand. They'd never blocked that way for him on the Beavers; he'd formed his own interference.

The Hawk quarterback chased him toward the side line and then McCann rammed the man. Vic shot past them, stepping over the Hawk's outstretched hand. He went over the twenty and down to the fifteen.

The Blackhawk safety backed away, waiting his chance to drive in. Vic grinned coldly. He picked up speed and ran straight at the safety. He read the surprise in the man's eyes as he ran toward him. He tore through the restraining arms at the same time slamming down hard with his free hand on the tackler's helmet.

The goal line was ten yards away. He ran over it standing up. Chuck Russell kicked the extra point. It was 7 to 0 for the Cyclones.

The Cyclones trotted back up the field quietly and Vic Stewart watched them. They weren't blocking out for him; they had another reason. Seldom during his three years in the league had he seen such vicious blocking. The Cyclones were playing like a team with pennant visions.

"Let's get another one," McCann growled. "We hit 'em before they're set." He looked across at Vic Stewart waiting on the forty-yard stripe. Again, the Cyclones were kicking off.

Vic stared back at him. There was nothing friendly in McCann's wide face

or cold blue eyes.

Vic followed the ball down the field. He was in close to the runner when McCann nailed him on the eighteen. They were hitting the Hawks before they had a chance to get started.

Two Hawk line plunges netted nothing. Ed Carson, Cyclone left guard, hurdled the scrimmage line and got his broad chest in on the ensuing punt. The ball bobbled back to the eight-yard stripe with Carson after it like a terrier. It was the Cyclone ball, first and ten, on the eight.

Chuck Russell grinned in the huddle.

"This for you, Johnny," he said quietly. "No. 15-A."

Johnny McCann bolted through to the four. Vic Stewart cut over left tackle to the one, and then McCann went through for the score.

With the count 14 to 0, Dad Gardner sent in a new set of running backs. Vic Stewart walked from the field with the others. He saw them as they passed the old man waiting on the side line. Dad Gardner's eyes were shining with pride. McCann looked at Vic Stewart and the new back sensed the hostility. This team loved the old man; they'd kill themselves for him!

Vic Stewart sat down on the end of the bench. It was unusual, this sentimentality in the pro game. He'd heard about Dad Gardner and played against the Cyclones before, but had never gotten to know the veteran coach.

The Hawks made three points in the second half but the Cyclones rang up another touchdown with Vic Stewart going over from the fifteen on a reverse around left end. He cut through between two black-jerseyed tacklers and fell across the line for his second score of the afternoon.

It was 21 to 3 at the end when the triumphant Cyclones trooped from the field. The win put them directly behind the Bulls in first place. For the first time in years the Cyclones were in the running.

VIC STEWART stood under the shower and listened to the talk. He saw Dad Gardner standing near the door talking with line-coach Andrews. The old man was feeling good.

McCann came through the door with Chuck Russell. The steam from the hot

water prevented them from seeing him clearly.

"One grand per game," McCann was saying softly. "Only a louse would take that much from the old man's pockets."

Vic Stewart stiffened. He placed the soap in a bracket. He didn't ask Dad Gardner to buy his contract. The Cyclone owner thought he would help them clinch the pennant. He was willing to pay for it.

"You boys have any complaints?" Vic asked quietly, "Take 'em up to the office."

McCann spun around. He was fifteen pounds heavier than Vic Stewart, the extra poundage being up in the shoulders. McCann had been bucking the line for Dad Gardner since he'd broken into the league six years back.

"We'll take 'em where we damn please," McCann snapped. The hot water dripped from his red face. Chuck Russell opened his mouth as if to say something, and then shut up.

"Any remarks about me," Vic told him, "I'd like to hear. Maybe we can do something about them."

"You want it straight?" McCann demanded.

Vic nodded. With his left hand he turned off the water and waited, both feet flat on the ground.

"Here it is," McCann said tersely. "Dad Gardner is gunning for the pennant this year because he needs it. He's got to have a winning club or he's washed up in the league. I know because I've worked with him. Right now he's running the Cyclones on borrowed money. He's had to squeeze the bag to pay our salaries. There are six of us who aren't taking a penny till the end of the season and the Cyclones are in the play-off game."

Vic waited. This was news to him. If Gardner was broke he'd have to sell the franchise next fall and clear out. It would probably ruin the old man.

"He picked you up," McCann went on, "because he felt he needed another running back. We'll string along with you for his sake, not because we have any use for you. Any guy who will rob—"

"Call it something else," Vic said slowly. "I work for my dough. I don't lay down."

"It's still robbery," McCann snorted, "and it's pretty cheap."

Vic Stewart lashed out with his open

hand. The palm caught McCann flush on the face. Chuck Russell let out a little cry and tried to leap between them. He was too late.

Johnny McCann let go with his right hand—wildly. Vic saw the punch coming up from the floor. He pulled back his head as the blow grazed his chin. He heard the bones crackle as McCann's fist hit the tiled wall. The fullback had been off balance on the slippery floor. He couldn't stop himself.

Vic was starting his left for McCann's jaw when he saw the fullback's face lose color. Johnny McCann stepped back, eyes rivetted on his twisted hand. Vic Stewart looked and felt sick. McCann's right hand was twisted back awkwardly from the wrist.

Russell grabbed the big man by the arm and hauled him toward the door.

"Nice going, Stewart," the quarterback rasped. "It'll take a lot of touchdowns to make up for this."

Vic walked to the door and watched them. Trainer Hal Jamison steered McCann into the office. Dad Gardner spotted the trio and hurried over, face tight. McCann's wrist was broken. Vic had seen a broken wrist before. The big man was through for the season.

They took McCann to the hospital for X-rays. He came out on the field the following Tuesday morning with the arm in a cast. Vic saw him sitting on the bench next to Dad Gardner. The Cyclone coach was working a rookie in at the fullback position. They'd miss McCann.

They had the Condors in line for next Sunday. Vic Stewart worked in the scrimmage with the regulars. Before, they had been indifferent; they didn't like him but they tolerated him because of Dad Gardner. Now they were openly hostile.

Gardner was told Johnny McCann had slipped on the floor in the shower room and broken his wrist. The players knew how it had happened.

"Every team you work with," Chuck Russell snapped, "goes bad. You're a trouble-maker, Stewart."

Vic stared down at the smaller man. "You got a big mouth," he observed, "for a small man."

Ed Carson, the guard, came over. Carson was McCann's bosom friend. They'd

come from the same campus together.

"Lay off," Carson said grimly. "You did enough damage, brother." He was a big man with red hair, colorless eyebrows, and one cauliflowered ear. Carson had been intercollegiate boxing champion.

"Okay," Vic said. "Tell these guys to lay off. That goes for you, too."

"I'm not looking for trouble," the guard said, "but I don't step away from it."

They took the field against the Condors with the odds running at 3 to 1 for the Cyclones. The Condors scored in the first quarter on an intercepted pass and a forty-yard dash down the field by the Condor quarterback.

The Cyclones stumbled through the remainder of the half with the score 7 to 0. Vic Stewart picked up yardage, but they couldn't or wouldn't throw him into the clear. You needed blocking for a touchdown run—blocking down field, all the way.

Dad Gardner spoke to them in the dressing room. Johnny McCann, his arm in the sling, and in street clothes, sat on a nearby bench. Vic Stewart listened gravely. He saw the hope still lingering in the old man's eyes.

You lose one ball game in the pro loop and it knocks you down. It's not like baseball with a hundred and fifty ball games on the schedule. In a ten-game season, one defeat at any time might mean second place or worse.

"We'll get started this half," Gardner told them cheerfully. "A little more care on those blocks. Work on the right side of the Condor line, Chuck, and easy with the passes. You have thirty minutes of football to overtake them."

The new fullback wasn't worth his salt. Vic Stewart watched the big kid drive into the line. He was a first year man and he'd been accustomed to college lines weighing a hundred and eighty-five pounds. The big Condor forward wall, with five men over two fifteen, scared him.

Vic took the kick-off and raced it back to midfield. He noticed the difference in the blocking. They were throwing their blocks reluctantly. Sometimes they missed and the tackler got through.

Huck Ryan was distinctly a blocking back, and with McCann out of the game, Russell had to carry himself. The quar-

terback was too slow and too light for the job. He had to alternate with Vic Stewart and the new fullback. After awhile, Vic was carrying almost alone. He didn't mind.

They worked down to the fifteen and lost the ball on a fumble by the rookie. Vic jumped a Condor pass and sprinted down to the opposition twenty-three. Russell's pass for a touchdown was caught by a Condor on the goal line.

"We should have run the ball," Vic Stewart said.

"Nuts," Russell snapped. The quarterback missed the steadying influence of Johnny McCann. The veteran fullback had occasionally given advice in the pinch.

It was still 7 to 0 starting the fourth period with Dad Gardner drooping on the side line. They got the ball down to the fifteen, fourth and three. Russell moistened his lips in the huddle. He stared at the goal posts and then looked at Vic Stewart. They could use three points on a field goal, or they could try for the first down and the possibility of a touchdown and a tied game.

"Any comments?" Russell asked. It wasn't the usual thing to have a round table discussion in the middle of the game, but the Cyclone quarterback wasn't sure.

"Run it," Ed Carson grunted.

Chuck Russell nodded. "No. 7-B," he said quietly.

Vic Stewart faked the spinner and then shot through the hole between guard and tackle. He stumbled through to the ten and fought his way to the five before two Condors dragged him down.

In two more bucks he went over for the score. Chuck Russell stepped back and kicked the extra point through the middle, tying up the game.

Huck Ryan picked up a Condor fumble a moment later and scooted twenty-five yards for the other score and the ball game. It was a lucky break. Ryan had recovered without a Condor near him.

IT was Dad Gardner's custom to pay off for the previous game after the Tuesday morning practice session. Club secretary, Ted Douglas, came around with the checks. He handed the long white envelope to Vic Stewart as the left half came through the door.

Ed Carson, standing nearby, laughed coldly. They knew what was in the envelope. The papers had printed Dick Preston's comments. Vic Stewart refused to sign with anyone for less than a thousand per game.

"Got your pint of blood, Shylock?" Carson asked bitterly. The left guard had been sore since McCann was put out of the game.

"We'd get along better," Vic told him, "if you kept your big mouth shut." He saw the red come into Ed Carson's face. Ed wasn't accustomed to have anyone speak to him like that.

"Get fresh," he warned, "and I'll muss up that slick hair comb." They were alone in a corner of the locker room, most of the men having gone into the showers.

Vic stood up. He slipped the envelope into a coat pocket and pulled his tie from the locker.

"I'm fresh," he said simply. "So what?"

The left guard grinned. "We could take a little walk down to the gym," he said softly, "if you got the guts, Stewart." They were working out in the local high school. There was a small annex to the regular school gym. The Cyclones worked out in it on rainy days.

"I'll be there," Vic told him. He knew he'd have to fight Carson sooner or later. He went out the door with his coat on his arm. He saw Chuck Russell watching from across the room.

Ed Carson came into the gym a few moments later. Quietly, he placed his coat on a bench and then unbuttoned his shirt. No words were spoken. Vic was slightly the taller man but Carson packed more weight in his powerful frame.

They squared off and Carson led with his left. He moved around on the balls of his feet, flicking the left, the right cocked close to his chest.

Vic threw a round house right for Carson's jaw. He knew in a boxing match he wasn't in Carson's class, but he was infinitely faster than the guard. It was the difference between the reflexes of a line man and a shifty backfield runner.

Carson pulled his head back to let the punch ride by. He caught Vic on the nose with a stiff left jab. The half back felt the sting. He shook his head and came in again, darting like a panther, lashing out

with the left. Carson made him miss twice. Then he swung his own left to the stomach and Vic doubled over.

He straightened up, grinning sickly, the hatred in his eyes. Carson was really a skilled fighter, but he could be licked. He had to be licked.

"You can take it," Carson said grudgingly.

"I can hand it out too," Vic panted. He shot the right again, fast as a streak of light. Carson pulled away but the fist caught him a glancing blow on the side of the cheek. Vic rushed him and tried to get in a few finishing blows. Carson bobbed and weaved, making his man miss easily.

In five minutes the blood was dripping from Vic Stewart's chin, but he was far from through. He threw punch after punch at the elusive figure before him. Carson lumbered around like a great bear, though surprisingly quick. He clipped the half back time and again with short punches to the face and body.

Twice Vic went to the floor from vicious right hooks to the jaw, but he got up. The second time his legs wobbled and Carson watched him thoughtfully.

"Get smart and stay down," he said.

"To hell with you," Vic mumbled through split lips. He hadn't expected to take Carson's measure from the beginning, but he wanted to give a good account of himself; he wanted to get one good right hand punch to the guard's jaw. Thus far he'd missed fifty of them.

It went on for another five minutes without intermission. Even Carson was beginning to feel it, and the collegiate boxer knew how to handle himself and save his wind.

Again Vic went down on his haunches from a stiff jolt to the body. He sat there a moment gathering his strength. Carson walked to the bench for his shirt.

"Get back here," Vic snarled. He came up off the floor swinging punches, staggering into the heavier man. Carson shook his head. He backed away, jabbing as he went. Another left sent Vic reeling against the wall. Carson moved in to finish it.

Vic Stewart braced himself against the wall and then rushed. He caught Carson by surprise and drove the man across the floor. He managed to get in two punches,

light ones, to the face. Then Carson tumbled backward over the bench. Vic saw the expression on Carson's face as he went down. The boxer hadn't realized he was that close to the object.

Carson yelled sharply as he landed on his shoulders and the back of his head. He twisted around awkwardly and then rolled over on his side. Vic watched him. Carson's face was white with pain. He made no motion to get up.

"Get Jamison," he whispered. "Quick!"

Vic Stewart caught his breath. Carson was hurt too. If anything happened to the big guard, the Cyclone line would be weakened fifty per cent. Carson was a tower of strength.

Sick at heart, Vic hurried to the locker room. The first man he saw was Dad Gardner. The old coach stared at his face. Hal Jamison, the trainer, came out of a door, looked, and then hurried over.

"Carson's hurt," Vic said. "In the gym." He saw the dead look in Dad Gardner's eyes. They faced the Bulls on Sunday and already they were missing one of the Cyclone regulars.

Jamison worked on the man on the ground. Ed Carson's arm seemed to be twisted out of shape.

"Dislocated shoulder," Jamison said briefly. "We'll have to set it in place." Carson tried to grin. It was a feeble attempt.

They had the shoulder in place and the arm bandaged to the side in twenty minutes. Carson's face was as white as chalk. He looked at Vic Stewart and shrugged.

"When can he play?" Dad Gardner asked.

"Not Sunday," Jamison told him. "Maybe two weeks—maybe three."

The Cyclone coach turned on his heel and went out. In two weeks the Cyclones could be so far behind, they would be out of the race altogether.

"It was my fault," Carson said when they were bandaging the arm.

"It doesn't matter whose fault it was," the old man told him gently. "The damage is done." He didn't look at Vic Stewart. Carson had been a sixty minute man; there was no one to replace him.

"We needed our full strength for the Bulls Sunday," Carson said after the coach left. "If they take us and grab a two

game lead, we're finished. Dad was figuring on tying them Sunday."

"What does it mean?" Vic asked, "if the Cyclones don't come through this year?"

Carson shrugged. "The old man needs the dough we get in the play off game. First place will put him back on his feet. He'll be able to arrange a half dozen exhibition games." Carson stopped, and the bitterness came back into his eyes. "Nobody told you, Stewart," he went on, "but the Cyclones are like a family—Dad Gardner's family. It means a lot to us that the old man stays in the league with his team. Taking a thousand dollars from him every Sunday —" Carson shrugged and walked out.

The remaining practice sessions were futile. Dad Gardner put another rookie in at Carson's spot. The line lost its drive. Johnny McCann and Ed Carson sat on the bench and watched the proceedings. Vic Stewart ran mechanically in the Cyclone backfield, conscious of the hatred he'd engendered in the hearts of the men.

"If we lose out to the Bulls," Chuck Russell said grimly, "this team will never forget you, Stewart. We were heading for the top till you came in."

Vic watched Dad Gardner. The old man hadn't bawled him out or slapped a huge fine on him for fighting. He'd said nothing and it was worse than a punch in the stomach.

"If we get past the Bulls," the coach said, "we might be all right." Carson would possibly be back in two weeks.

Vic Stewart listened. On paper they had about as much chance of taking the Bulls as he had of knocking out Ed Carson. The Bulls, smart and experienced, would find that weak spot in the Cyclone line. They had the line buckers to go through the hole, and there was no Johnny McCann to stop them when they came through.

On Friday Chuck Russell approached him as he was slipping on his coat.

"This isn't my invitation," the quarterback said quietly, "but you'd better come any way."

"Where?" Vic asked.

"Today," Russell said, "is Dad's birthday. We always have the party. Mrs. Gardner goes for these things." He paused. "She invited the whole team as usual and

it will seem funny if one man doesn't show up. You'd better come."

THEY went out that night, twenty-two strong. They stood around the long table in Dad Gardner's living room as the gray-haired little lady with the quick movements and the bright little eyes, carried in the huge cake with the candles. Dad Gardner had not yet arrived.

"It's supposed to be a surprise," Russell said, "but we have it every year so Dad knows. He always pretends."

Vic Stewart glanced around the room. It was dark except for the light from the candles. He saw the grim faces of the Cyclone players. In two days they were to take on the league-leading Bulls. If the Bulls won, the Cyclones would never be able to catch up with them. Dad Gardner would be through in the league which he'd organized.

The old man popped through the door at the precise time. Vic Stewart saw him register surprise, but his eyes were haggard. Dad Gardner had spent the week trying to pick up a fullback he could use in McCann's place. He had been unsuccessful.

"Happy Birthday to You," the Cyclones sang. Johnny McCann and Ed Carson stood at the other end, their arms in slings. Carson had a booming voice.

Dad Gardner made a little speech in which he thanked the Cyclones for their cooperation and spirit during the year. The old man was proud of his boys. Mom Gardner sat at his side and listened proudly.

Vic Stewart stared into his coffee. The Cyclones weren't just another pro outfit. The old man had welded them together; they had the spirit and loyalty for one man that the college crews had for their schools.

At ten o'clock, while the men were gathering around the piano in the living room, Vic managed to slip out. The gray haired old lady played for them. Dad Gardner sat across the room and listened to his boys.

"If he doesn't come through this year," Carson had said, "the old man is out in the cold. His creditors will walk in; he'll have to sell the franchise."

Vic walked down the street and then

climbed on a bus back to the hotel. He'd thought the pros had no heart; he came into the league to make all he could make. He had a reputation, and the ability to command a big salary—larger than any other man in the league. He was taking it.

In the morning he looked up Ted Douglas. He had his contract in his hand.

"How much is Dad paying Johnny McCann?" he asked the secretary.

Douglas, small, slender, with sandy hair and spectacles, blinked at him. "We don't divulge the salaries—," he began.

Vic waved his hand. He handed Douglas the contract.

"Fix this up," he said quietly. "Make it the same as McCann's."

Ted Douglas gaped at him. Later in the afternoon Dad Gardner stopped him in the lobby.

"It's okay," Vic said. "Forget about it, Pop."

Dad Gardner shook his head. "I made a contract, Stewart," he said, "and I'd like to live up to it."

"When you can afford it," Vic told him, "you can divide the extra cash among the men."

Gardner stared at him. "It's pretty decent, boy," he said.

"You don't have to tell them," Vic said. "I'd like it better."

"Any way you say," the Cyclone coach returned.

The Bulls came out on the field in natty black and gold outfits, golden helmets glistening in the afternoon sun. They were the biggest team in the league and they had the confidence of the league leaders.

The big crowd in the stands attested to the drawing value of the Bulls. Today, the black and gold team was to brush aside the last remnant of opposition in the league, and then carry on to the finish without taking a deep breath.

Vic Stewart stood on the goal line as big Jack Bonnet, Bull fullback, trotted toward the ball. He heard the roar from the stands and then the ball was sailing through the air.

Huck Ryan took it on the three and Vic moved over to block. They went up the field in a wedge which disintegrated on the fifteen. Vic saw the black and gold men driving in from all directions. He saw the eagerness in their faces.

Ryan went down before he could get fairly started. He was literally covered with the Bulls. They'd swarmed over the Cyclone blockers.

The referee put the ball in play on the thirteen, first and ten. The Cyclones went into the huddle. Already, Vic Stewart read the hopelessness in the faces of the second place club.

"No. 14," Russell said grimly.

Vic took the ball from center, spun, and then was knocked down by a huge Bull lineman. The rookie left guard, filling in for Ed Carson, was picking himself from the ground. The Bulls had found the weak spot.

Russell tried the tackle spot and was stopped without a yard. Ryan kicked out to midfield. Already, the Bulls were in position to start a drive. Vic crept up close to the line of scrimmage.

Jack Bonnet splintered through guard on the first play. He was into the Cyclone backfield before Vic could get up to him. Bonnet ran with terrific drive. His knees drove into Vic Stewart's chest as they went down. Bonnet had six yards on the play. It was an example of things to come.

The Bulls knew that McCann and Carson were out. They came through the middle of the Cyclone line, Bonnet and Joe Ravini, right half, carrying. In four plays the Bulls were down on the twenty-five and the crowd was in an uproar. On every play they made yardage.

Vic Stewart picked himself up after each play and walked back to his position. Already, the Cyclone fullback, Ken Manning, was walking on his heels.

"Hold that line," Chuck Russell called up.

Vic Stewart raced in for a tackle as Bonnet came through the middle. The Bull runner didn't have the ball. Instead the Bull quarterback, was fading to throw. The ball sailed into the end zone for a score. Ravini caught it over his shoulder inside the bounds.

The extra point kick was good making it 7 to 0 after a minute and a half of play.

The Bulls trotted back up the field yelling happily. Dad Gardner stared at the Cyclones from the side lines.

Vic Stewart waited for the second kick.

He saw Chuck Russell's face. The quarterback didn't think they had a chance. There were too many good men sitting on the Cyclone bench—incapacitated!

The pigskin twisted down the center of the field and Vic danced beneath it. He came up the middle behind Manning. On the fifteen two Bulls leaped through the air at him. He veered over toward the right and wrenched himself free. He was running at top speed in three steps and the momentum carried him through.

Bonnet piled through on the twenty and dived for his knees. Vic hit him with the open palm. He brought his hand down hard on Bonnet's gold helmet and pushed himself away.

On the twenty-eight, the Bulls smothered him from all sides. He stayed on his feet and tried to buck through. They hurled him back to the twenty-five. The referee put the ball in play on the twenty-eight.

Russell sent Manning into the line and the Bulls knocked him back. The Bull center and guard came through and lifted Manning from the ground. They hit him down hard and the ball slipped away.

Vic Stewart saw it bob once on the ground. Then it disappeared beneath a black jersey. Bull's ball.

"Damn it," Huck Ryan scowled. Ken Manning's face was pale.

The Bulls went over in five straight plunges. Vic Stewart stopped three of them on his side but they made yardage on every drive. Bonnet hit through for five yards. Ravini sailed over the top of the line for three to the Cyclone four.

Bonnet then smashed through left guard, head down, knees high. Vic Stewart hit him but the Bull fullback was already over the goal line. The kick was good for 14 to 0.

There was no more scoring the remainder of the quarter. A Cyclone drive was stopped before it reached midfield. Vic Stewart intercepted a Bull pass as the league leaders came down the field. He ran it back to the Bull forty a distance of thirty-seven yards. They hit him from all sides as he streaked down the line.

Ed Carson hopped off the Cyclone bench and roared as he crossed the middle of the field. A moment later the Cyclone backs mussed up a spinner and the ball fell free. The alert Bull end picked it up and stag-

gered to midfield before they caught him.

They got down to the twenty-five in the second period and Bonnet stepped back to try the placement.

"Block it!" Chuck Russell yelled.

Bonnet's kick passed between the up-rights for another score, 17 to 0. Vic Stewart listened to the laughter in the stands. The Bulls had been top heavy favorites and they were putting on an exhibition of power seldom witnessed in the league.

The Cyclones took the ball on their own twenty and Russell sent Vic Stewart through the right tackle spot.

"Let's start something," the quarterback scowled. "We need points—plenty of 'em.

They started out wide with the right guard falling out of the line to help on the interference. Vic darted in behind the blockers and then cut through the line. He whirled once as he went through and tore away restraining hands.

Ravini sprinted in from the defensive left half position. Vic fooled the man with a quick feint to the left and then went right. He ran away from Jack Bonnet and came out into the clear on the thirty-two. He caught a glimpse of Dad Gardner gesticulating on the side line.

The Bull safety chased him toward the left line and he ran willingly. As the safety prepared to spring, Vic reversed his field and left the man off balance.

HE went over the middle and sprinted for the goal line with the entire Bull team chasing him and the Cyclones blocking out as best they could. The stands were blurred as he ran over the white stripes. A tackler dived and caressed his heel on the ten. He went over for the score.

"A guy like you," Ravini said, "rates a grand per game. We're gonna make you earn it, kid."

"Okay," Vic said. Already his body ached from the battering. None of the other Cyclone backs had been able to make headway. As the game progressed, they would have to depend upon him more and more. The Bulls would welcome him with open arms, hard fists, elbows and knees!

It was 17 to 7 at the end of the half. Dad Gardner had sent out what substitutes

he could. The Cyclones, in comparison with the Bulls, were weak on reserves. The Bull coach could send out nearly three sets of running backs with little difference between them.

"Don't get excited," Dad Gardner told them in the dressing room. "They can't keep this up all afternoon." It was no use beating about the bush. The Cyclones realized they had been greatly outplayed in every department of the game the first half.

Vic Stewart sat in the corner and listened. He saw Johnny McCann and Carson watching him grimly. After awhile McCann came over.

"I'm not the kind of a guy to hold a grudge," the fullback said, "so I'm forgetting the past. We'd like to win this game, Stewart. You were at the party Friday. You know why."

Vic nodded. Dad Gardner knew only one game and that was football. He'd given his life to it. If they pushed him on the outside, he was through.

"The old man," McCann said slowly, "never had any kids. His football team is his family. Mom Gardner feels the same way."

Vic waited.

"You've been playing a lot of good football, Stewart," McCann told him, "for yourself. Give this game to the old man. He needs it now."

Johnny McCann went back and sat down again. A few minutes later they took the field. The Bulls had ten points on them.

The Cyclone kick went into the hands of Joe Ravini. The speedy Bull back, behind perfect blocking, went over the middle and down to the Cyclone thirty-two before Chuck Russell brought him down. It was heart-breaking.

Vic Stewart saw McCann standing out on the line with Gardner as they walked back up the field. McCann wanted him to give a game to the coach. He took the kick and blasted his way up the field to the thirty-five. The Cyclones didn't give too much blocking and he had to make his own way.

"You guys want points," Vic told them savagely in the huddle. "give me some room."

"Why?" Russell asked blandly. "You going to ask for a raise?"

Vic Stewart drew in his breath. "I'm out to beat this team," he said quietly, "and if I have to do it alone, I'll do it alone. I thought you guys liked Dad Gardner. I guess most of it was bluff."

He saw Russell stare at him and he said gruffly:

"Call a play."

Russell let him run and he hit through for a first down to the forty-seven. They gave him a hand in the stands.

"I'll throw," Russell said. "No. 17-P."

Huck Ryan caught the pass in Bull territory. He went down to the forty—another first down. They were gaping in the stands. The Cyclones had suddenly come alive.

Vic Stewart ripped over left tackle for six. Another pass was good to the Bull twenty-two.

"We take it over," Russell growled. Manning carried through the middle to the fourteen. The Bull line strained at the leash.

"We'll throw," Russell told them. "No. 16-P." He glanced at Vic Stewart.

The play started as a spinner and then Russell faded back. Vic streaked around the end and cut down the middle. He fainted away from Joe Ravini; he had a step on the Bull left half when Russell shot the ball toward him.

Ravini leaped and Vic went with him. Two pairs of hands grasped for the ball. Vic went up six inches higher. He got both hands on the ball and fell into the end zone with it. Russell kicked the extra point. It was 17 to 14 for the Bulls.

"One more," Huck Ryan grinned. "Let's get it quick."

The Bulls got it—and quick! They took the kick-off back to the thirty and then Ravini faced an end run. Vic Stewart, chasing across the field after the man, watched him fade and then hurl the ball. Ravini shot it nearly fifty yards down to the Cyclone thirty where the end took it on the run. He was alone as Chuck Russell had been sucked in on the play. It was 24 to 14 for the Bulls.

The Cyclones walked back up the field, dazedly. The sudden turn of events took the fight out of them. Again they needed two touchdowns to win the game and the Bulls were enthused and raring to go.

Manning took the kick-off and was downed in his tracks after fumbling the ball momentarily. They were on the six.

"No use kicking right away," Russell told them quietly. "Run it, Stewart." He called a kick formation but the pass came back on a slant to the left half. Vic left his feet as he hit the line. He came down in a sprawling position three yards behind the line of scrimmage. He rolled away from Bonnet's dive and scrambled to his feet. They didn't catch him till he was over the twenty.

"3-B," Russell said. Vic looked at him. Russell was digging down in Dad Gardner's bag of tricks. They needed two touchdowns in a hurry and they didn't have too much time to make them. The third quarter was nearly up.

3-B started as an off-tackle slant and ended up with Vic Stewart carrying on a naked reverse around left end. The maneuver fooled the Bulls completely. While they were knocking down Manning, Vic steamed out into the open. He was up on the thirty before they saw him.

He got away from Ravini and went over the middle with only the safety in front of him. Huck Ryan shot over from the side and Vic waved him away. Ryan blinked and then grinned.

As the safety dived for Vic's knees, the runner flipped the ball to Ryan. The Cyclone right half sprinted the rest of the way to the goal line. It was 24 to 21—a high-scoring game. They were in the fourth period.

The Bull coach sent in reserves to hold the line. Russell called all the trick stuff he knew. Vic Stewart smashed into the tough Bull line time and time again. He felt the strength leaving his body. They hit him and piled him up. They got up elbows into his face and knees into his stomach when he went down. He got up.

Once Chuck Russell slapped his back. A line man came in from the Cyclone bench and whispered to the quarterback. Russell told it to some one else during a time-out period. They lay on the ground, battered, but waiting for the whistle.

Vic Stewart watched them morosely. His left eye was half closed; there were bruises and cuts on his face. His eyes gleamed through the swollen flesh.

"Okay," he told Russell savagely.

"I'm on this team. What's it about?"

Russell grinned at him. "We just learned you asked for a pay cut from Dad Gardner. It was pretty white, Stewart."

"Nuts," Vic said. He plodded over to the water boy, took a drink and spat it out. It was the Bull's ball, fourth and three on their own thirty-six. Chuck Russell dropped back for the kick.

"It's our game," Russell said. "We can't lose." They were playing as a team.

The Cyclone quarterback took the punt on the twenty-five and raced it back to the thirty-five. They had time for a last march up the field for the score.

Vic Stewart went over tackle for four yards. The inspired Manning smashed the middle for a first down. Chuck Russell faked a pass, handed a lateral to Vic Stewart, and the left half whirled around end for eight more. They were moving.

Russell shot a pass over the center to Huck Ryan and they were on the Bull forty, first and ten. Three more plunges by Vic Stewart and they were down to the twenty-five. He went through without any fanfare. He hit the line and kept driving till it opened up.

Another pass by Russell was good to the fifteen. The Cyclone quarterback couldn't miss. He flipped one to Huck Ryan and the right half scooted across the goal line from the six.

Vic Stewart knocked down Joe Ravini on the play. Manning was through to nail Jack Bonnet. Ryan stumbled over into the coffin corner without letting his feet touch the outside.

The referee was blowing his whistle amidst the uproar. Chuck Russell raced down to pound Ryan's back. The referee, red in the face, was shouting at them.

"Offsides—Cyclone offsides!"

It took a few minutes before they got it to sink in. The play was out and the Cyclones were penalized five yards for offsides. They were back on the twenty with four minutes on the clock.

Vic staggered into the huddle. He came out of it, lined up, and then rammed the line for three yards. They could make it in short punches if Russell was afraid to pass again.

"How do you feel?" the quarterback asked.

"I can run," Vic told him. "Feed it to me." He went into the line again to the fourteen and then to the ten. First down, goal to go.

Manning took the ball off right tackle for three precious yards. Vic swept the left end and they drove him up in the air and out of bounds on the three. He raced for the corner but Bonnet and Ravini met him. He managed to hang onto the ball as they slammed him to the turf.

Russell went through for another yard to the two. The quarterback looked around in the huddle.

"Give it to Stewart," Huck Ryan said. "He's the guy to go over."

"You got it?" Russell asked. "It's the last one."

"I got it," Vic said.

They lined up and he switched over to the running position. He heard the crowd. It was a rumble and sound with Russell's high-pitched voice knifing through.

Then the ball was spinning back and he moved in. The black and gold wall loomed up. Bonnet and Ravini were driving forward to stop him. He went up high between two men in the line. Bonnet hit him in midair but was forced back by the momentum. They fell across the line. Ravini was in trying to knock the ball from his arms.

Vic Stewart grinned and clung to it. He buried his face in the grass.

"Over!" Huck Ryan howled in his ear. "It's over, Stewart."

Vic climbed to his feet. He tossed the ball to the referee. His legs started to wobble and Chuck Russell caught him and turned him toward the bench.

"You're out, kid," the quarterback grinned. "We'll finish up." It was 28 to 24 for the Cyclones.

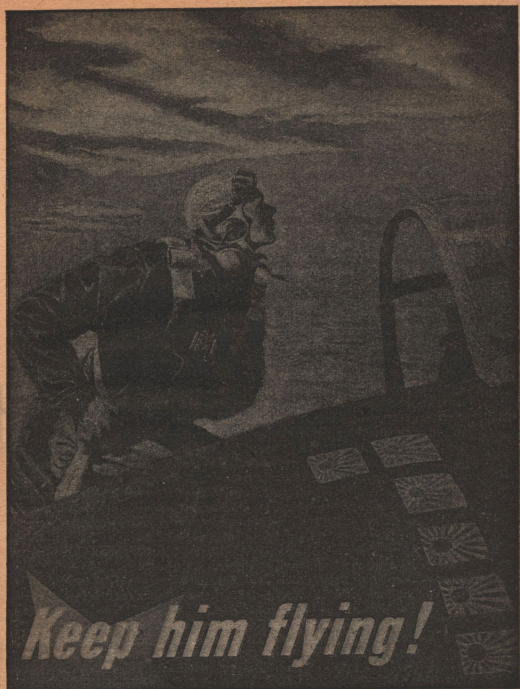
Vic Stewart walked toward the bench. Two men with their arms in slings came out to meet him. Dad Gardner stood behind them, smiling.

"How's it feel?" Johnny McCann asked.

Vic glanced back at the group of men watching him from the field.

"You'll never know, brother," he said slowly.

"I got an idea," McCann said. "Welcome to the Cyclones."



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BUY WAR BONDS

STARS OF '43

by TIM COHANE

Backfield aces in abundance is the prophecy for the season. And a pressbox expert goes out on a limb to select some pearls from among the jewels.

K NUTE ROCKNE used to say that up in the line is where the football game is played. And he was right, but you can't prove it by the fans or ninety percent of the writers. They're watching the lithe halfback dart around end or off tackle; the cobby-legged power fullback churning between the tackles for close-order yardage; the aerial artist unworried in the face of onrushing tacklers; the booming punter whose kicks send the safety man scurrying madly to coffin corner. Yes, it's the back who compels the attention of the thundering thousands once the ball is snapped.

You might ask what importance or significance any discussion of the probable outstanding backs in college football this 1943 season can have in the face of more vital news coming in from far-flung sections of the globe, where the Allies are inexorably rolling back the Nazi and the Nip. Actually, it has more importance and significance than ever before.

College backs, whose names were household words only three, two or even one seasons ago, already have died for their country or come through soul-testing hazards of war. They were inherently brave, strong lads, no doubt, but the lessons they learned on the gridiron wrought their characters in bold finish. And if the war continues through another year or two, the men who lug the leather this fall, will be the future pace-setters in routing the enemy on land, in the air, and on or below the sea.

A comprehensive outlook on the national situation reveals that while there may not be as many outstanding runners, passers and kickers as in former years, the quality will be definitely up to par. The key operatives at those schools which have the Navy V-12 and Marine Reserve set-ups on their campuses, will come up

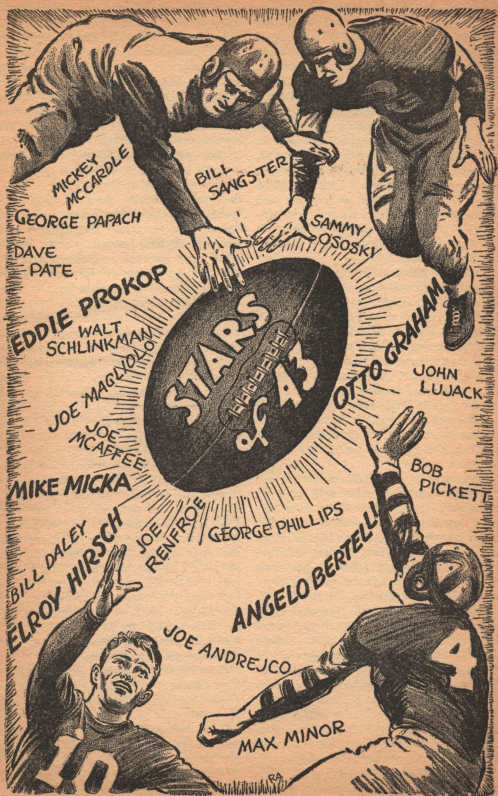
to the caliber of the stars of recent fame. From their ranks will come another Frankie Sinkwich, perhaps, or another Sammy Baugh.

There will be a certain civil war motif forming a background for the performances of some stars. For example, Bill Daley, Minnesota fullback, is now enrolled at Michigan under a Navy program and will be wearing the Maize and Blue against his old Gopher team mates when the Vikings and the Wolverines vie for the Old Brown Jug. And consider the cases of Jack Wink, number one quarterback, and Elroy Hirsch, great open-field runner of Harry Stuhldreher's Wisconsin eleven last fall. They, too, will be first-string backfield contenders on Fritz Crisler's powerful squad.

Army and Navy may well figure one-two in the East, with strong competition from Dartmouth. This pre-season estimate is founded on the fact that a plethora of fine backfield material can be found at the Academies.

In fact, there are all kinds of transfer cases, more than in two decades of peacetime seasons. Max Minor, 100 and 200-yard sprint champion, of the Southwest Conference, and a bull-in-the-china-shop fullback for the Texas Longhorns, received an early summer appointment to West Point, and Col. Earl Blaik, the Army coach, welcomed him with open arms. Blaik was also pleased to see in Cadet regalia the form of Dick Walterhouse, who was a wraith in cleats for the Michigan Freshman of 1942.

Kenna, a little tailback who was injured most of last season, was the sensation of a lengthy spring practice on the Plains. Another triple-threatener is Bob St. Onge, who was a much sought after schoolboy prize when he cavorted for La Salle Military Academy on Long Island. Bob Wood,



a veteran right-halfback who once starred for the fine 1941 Navy team; and Bud Troxell, who gained plenty of ground on spinbucks last season, are two dependable veterans. Troxell is still another transfer. He was regular fullback at Dartmouth two years ago. Tom Lombardo, who battled Troxell vigorously for the first-string fullback post last fall, will be available again, as will Carl Anderson, who came into his own as a cutback runner against Harvard. It might seem far-fetched to believe that so many potentially great backs could be found in one school, but such is the case with Army, and quite a natural, commendable situation in war time. And we haven't even mentioned Charlie Daniels and Dale Hall.

Another war-time academy appointment finds Jim Pettit, a six-foot, 205-pound tailback transfer from Stanford, drawing modified raves from Navy Coach Billick Wheelchel. In addition to Pettit, who has recovered from the shoulder and ankle hurts incurred in spring practice, Navy has Harold Hamberg, the one-time University of Arkansas ace, who scintillated last fall; Hillis Hume, another 1942 bastion, and Ben Martin, the fullback who used to sport the colors of Princeton. But Pettit is the fellow to watch for in the headlines.

And speaking of headlines, Dartmouth immediately comes to mind with its array of backfield talent. One of the many reasons why Fordham's squad is decimated is the transfer to the Green hills of Hanover of the Ram Captain-elect, Shakey-Hips Joe Andrejco, a will-o'-the-wisp who has that hallmark of the great, natural right-halfback, ability to run to his left.

Andrejco will be recalled as one of the famous Hazleton (Pa.) High School Touchdown Twins back in 1939. George Cheverko, now in Uncle Sam's Army, was the other. Andrejco (pronounced Andray-go) and Cheverko could have gone to just about any school they wanted. They chose Fordham. As sophomores, they lived up to all their promise. Andrejco caught a pass from Cheverko and wheeled and side-stepped 45 yards through a broken field to help the Sugar Bowl-bound Fordhams down Southern Methodist. And in the Bowl game, Joe was Jimmy Crowley's most consistent, ground-

gainer, biting off yardage through the Missouri line as the clock ran out.

Last season Cheverko was hampered by a bad knee, but Andrejco continued to flash long runs even with a below-par Fordham line out front. It seems silly to say that he was the best looking runner on the field while Boston College shellacked Fordham, 56-6, but he was just that. We have spent considerable space on Andrejco, because, with Earl Brown, Dartmouth's new coach, we believe that he is certain to be one of the real star backs of the year, especially since he figures to operate behind a strong forward wall. Joe doesn't kick or pass. His forte is running and catching forward passes. Brown must work hard to eradicate Andrejco's lamentable weakness on forward pass defense. When that happens he will really have a ball player.

Another Dartmouth back to keep in mind is John Sayers, also a right-halfback, and good enough to make Andrejco hustle for his job. Sayers' forte, as opposed to Andrejco's, is passing. He is a south-paw thrower who knows how to hit that target, shallow or downfield, Larry Bartnick, a sophomore triple-threat, is another name to keep in mind.

Probably the best fullback in the Eastern sector will be Dynamite Mike Micka, Andy Kerr's powerhouse buckler and blocker at Colgate. The Red Raiders had one of their best clubs in recent seasons in 1942, and the main reason was Micka's triple-threat qualifications. A clever spinner and ball-handler, he knew how to dislocate a line by his faking, either handing the ball off on reverses or smashing back over the middle on power bucks or mousetraps. Mike looks like a worthy successor to the long line of great Colgate fullbacks, including the immortal Len Macaluso and Joe Hoague.

Cornell, which has had some first class Negro stars, is coming up with some more Dark Thunder in Charley Robinson, who did good work at wingback last year, but will be used at fullback by Carl Snively this season. Says Snively: "Robinson is a triple threat in a modest sort of way." Praise from Caesar or Carl Snively is praise, indeed, so Robinson must be ready to rip. He will do the Big Red's punting in addition to the three-back spinning and

line-cracking. Bill Wheeler, a tailback, an adequate replacement for Walter Kretz in several '42 battles, also has it in him to attain stardom as a ball-carrier and passer.

Up at Holy Cross atop placid Mt. Saint James overlooking Worcester, Mass., the two Johnnies, Grigas and Bezemes, who did so much to flatten the Boston College powerhouse, 55-12, are no longer around to shatter Eagle dreams of empire, but the Crusaders still boast a neat pair of halfbacks in Steve Murphy, from the Bronx, and Joe McAfee, from Philadelphia. Murphy, a senior, never has quite realized on his capabilities, but Coach Ank Scanlon figures he's about due. He can do it all kick, pass and run. McAfee as a freshman, got into most of the games, including the B. C. upset, and showed to advantage as a weakside runner.

Howie Odell has a couple of fullbacks up at Yale whom he was sweet on the last time we saw him. They are Bob Pickett, whose savage charges, reminiscent of his Civil War namesake, won him rating as a part time regular last year, should be even more dangerous as a sophomore. Sophomores, incidentally, cannot be regarded in the light of peace times. Then they were always considered as raw and inexperienced, but now many of them come up with a year of varsity play behind them, since several major universities abandoned the freshman rule in the face of war-time manpower shortage a year ago.

Odell's other prize package for the Eli backfield is Harry Oberhelman, a late season discovery. If both Pickett and Oberhelman live up to their promise as fullbacks, Odell might shift one of them to another backfield position, in order to have their talents in the game at one time.

There are several other eastern backs, one or more of whom may rise and shine in greater gridiron glory than those we have listed so far. Let's call them the dark horses, and they would be Sammy Ososki, another Fordham transfer to Dartmouth; Earl Lambert and Tom Donovan, two more Big Green backs who used to wear the Kelly Green of Manhattan: John Burroughs' Dartmouth blocking quarterback—they have 'em at Dartmouth, don't they?—Lou Daukas, quarterback, and Howard Blose, wingback, at Cornell; Don Kas-

pryzak, still another Dartmouth Indian, who was Paul Governali's sub at Columbia; Dick Whitesell, Syracuse wingback speedster; Cy Plazak, who will try to help Clark Shaughnessy, the new Pitt coach, get the Panther back on the rick track. Joe Kane, Penn's wingback; Charlie Tiedmann, Brown speedboy, and Elting Johnson, who gained all those yards and scored all those touchdowns on short bucks for Bucknell. Will there be an All-American or two in that group? Maybe. There's a good chance of it.

A BIT of a bet would not be amiss that Eddie Prokop, Georgia Tech junior, becomes the outstanding ball-toter and passer below the Mason-Dixon line. A native of Cleveland, Eddie was a prep prodigy at Baylor School in Chattanooga three years ago, and the most sought after prospect in the South. He ended up with the Ramblin' Wrecks and became the star of the 1930 freshman team. Last year, he did not receive the publicity of Clint Castleberry, the frosh wizard, but with Clint in the service, the spotlight will be directed fully on Eddie. Prokop should be devastating. Over 190 pounds and a sprinter, he is also a thread-needle passer. He figures to help Tech revenge itself on the Georgia.

You would think that one such back as Frankie Sinkwich would be enough to come out of a town the size of Youngstown, Ohio, yet the Dixie pigskin savants claim that George Papach, a fellow townsman of Frankie, whom he followed to Georgia, may help the citizens forget The Fireball, well, a little bit, anyhow. Papach, like Sinkwich, runs better than he does anything else, and is blessed with that peculiar but valuable gridiron commodity known as peripheral vision. That, translated into simple language, merely means that George can see tacklers coming at him and avoid them, without taking his eyes off the immediate object in front of him. Albie Booth had the trick. So did Red Grange and all the other broken field brilliants of history. Of the galaxy of backs who performed in the Rose Bowl victory over UCLA last New Year's Day, only Royals Lee and Dick McPhee were around the campus in late summer, but they were advanced ROTC men and due for induction.

So Wally Butts, the Bulldoog coach, will, of necessity, have to place heavy burden on Papach.

With Tennessee, Vanderbilt, Mississippi State and Ole Miss, among others, giving up the game for the duration, there naturally aren't as many great backs stampeding down Southern gridirons as in the pre-war era. But Prokop and Papach don't complete the list by a long shot.

Alabama will depend to a great extent on Johnny August, who was some shakes as a tailback in the Orange Bowl triumph over Boston College. Joe Renfro, a 4F, is returning to Tulane, and Little Monk Simons will have to build his backfield around Joe. North Carolina has a couple of likely entries in Hugh (Shot) Cox, the Tar Heel triple-threatener, and Captain Craven Turner, who has been shifted from end to blocking back.

Turner may well develop into one of the best blocking quarterbacks in the land, despite the newness of the job. There is a great deal of truth in the adage that an outstanding football player at one position will do a good job at another. Of course, turning a 215-pound standing guard into tailback is not included as a case in point.

Red Broyles, star of the 1942 Georgia Tech freshman, will probably glean most of the Atlanta eight-column streamers that are not allotted to Prokop and Papach. Johnny Wade, Alabama's sophomore left-halfback, will give the Tuscaloosa rooters more than one thrill with this long booming punts. He is one of the best distance kickers to come under Coach Frank Thomas' aegis at the Capstone in some time.

Before swinging across to the Southwest, adjurations are also in order to keep a weather eye peeled on such Southern backfield timber as Hosea Rodgers, 'Bama's soph fullback; Johnny Cook, Georgia's swift halfback from Rome; and Billy Myers and Clay Croom of North Carolina.

If the number of backfield prospects seemed sparse in the Carolina country and the Deep South, it is even more so in the Cactus lands. Texas Christian and Rice, which, in normal years, always came up with more than a couple of outstanding runners and passers, have no idea where

their next triple-threatener is coming from.

The only Southwest Conference school that is at all well off is Southern Methodist. The Mustangs will manage to maintain their tradition as a colorful, wild-and-wooly passing team, by coming up with not one but three boys who can chuck that leather.

Abel (Frito) Gonzales, the slightly built pony back who won the number one tailback spot after midseason in '42, is a chucker to delight Jimmy Stewart, the athletic director who has gone back to coaching for the duration. Yet, Wayne (Red) Shaw, the southpaw, whose serials compelled attention as a sophomore, is right in Gonzales' class. The third sharpshooter is Billy Squires, who completed a phenomenal percentage of his passes at El Paso High. SMU also has a good blocking back in Wayne Palmer.

If a great blocking back is to come out of the Cattle Country this year, however, it will most probably be Joe Magliolo, whose truncations played such a vital part in the University of Texas' 14-7 win over Georgie Tech in the Cotton Bowl game. If Max Minor hadn't transferred to West Point, one would be inclined to predict that Dana Bible's backfield would be the class of the Southwest.

The Texas Aggies recommend Gus White, a fine passing and running prospect up from the freshman, while Hendrix Bell, sophomore brilliant, is the man they talk about at Arkansas.

Our darkhorse pick in the Southwest for national notice is a non-Conference fullback at Texas Tech. His name is Walt Schlinkman and they say he dynamites his own holes in a line. Texas Tech also has another better-than-fair performer in J. R. Callahan, versatile left-halfback.

NOW WE shift up to the Midwest, the land of plenty as far as potential great 1943 backfield men are concerned. As in other sections, the colleges which have the Navy and Marine Reserve units on their campuses, are going to feature the Four and Five Star backs.

Notre Dame is loaded. How loaded may be gleaned from the fact that even so talented a passer as Angelo Bartolo Bertelli, the football and hockey wizard from Springfield, Mass., will have to bat-

tle to hold his job. Johnny Lujack, a remarkable serial artist up from the freshman, is considered by those who have watched him as the potential equal of Angelo. Don't forget that name, John Lujack.

But Lujack is only one. Minnesota, Illinois and Marquette transfers swell the Irish attacking corps. For example, there is Vic Kulbitski, the Minnesota fullback of a year ago. Another ex-Gopher back, lightning-fast Dick Kelley, is one the South Bend campus. Still another Irish luminary will be Julie Rajkovich, Illinois freshman exploder last autumn, not to mention Rusty Johnston, a Marquette soph of promise in '42. Coach Frank Leahy, who has recovered his health, will also have a good boy from the '42 Irish frosh squad in highly-touted Gene McClinstock.

From all this array of talent, certainly one, and perhaps two will emerge as All-American candidates.

Like Notre Dame, Michigan's Naval unit figures to make for happy times on the Ann Arbor gridiron. From Wisconsin comes Elroy Hirsch, terrorizing tailback, plus Quarterback Jack Wink.

Hirsch, who was known as "Crazy Legs" by his Badger teammates a year ago, is a long-run specialist. His 35-yard scamper gave Wisconsin it's cherished 7-7 tie with Notre Dame. Against Great Lakes, he worked his way 63 yards through a broken field for a marker. Hirsch's unorthodox leg motion has much to do with his elusiveness. Says his last year's coach, Harry Stuhldreher: "He's always kicking himself in the legs with his crazy stride. He's the oddest runner I've seen. You might call it paddling, or you might say his feet travel in opposite directions."

While Hirsch is the satellite star at Ann Arbor, he will have a more than adequate supporting cast in Captain Paul White, superb wingback; Bob Wiese, veteran experienced fullback, and Bill Culligan, a standout on the frosh. Jim Brieske, although a center, should also be included in the list of offensive weapons at Crisler's disposal, since he is a place-kicking specialist, who will park those extra points on the scoreboard. Crisler will also have available Bill Daley, great Minnesota runner in '42.

One of the most sparkling individual

duels of the Western Conference season should take place between Hirsch and Otto Graham, the Northwestern Wildcat, for the mythical left-halfback berth on the All Big Ten eleven. Graham is primarily a passer, while Hirsch's specialty is toting the pigskin. But each is a master in his own way. With two solid years of experience behind him, Otto will be hard to stop. He always has been.

Notre Dame still has Don Closson, its rip-roaring red-headed line-smasher, as a perfect complement for the lancing thrusts of Graham. Coach Lynn Waldorf also has such embryonic aces as Subit, Vodich and Sunderburg to fill out a backfield that will rank with Notre Dame's and Michigan's.

No football campaign, even in war times, would be complete without an undertone of polysyllables. In the midwest, Marquette's Golden Avalanche will provide a swift, elusive and powerful ball-toter in Billy Polczynski. Polczynski, was a running mate of John Stryzalski, last year's Marquette's ace, when the two attended South Division High in Milwaukee.

Missouri, which tapered off somewhat last year after its 1941 Sugar Bowl team, yet won several key games, expects to come up with a first-water back from a group that includes Leo Milla and Kieth Parker, a pair of TNT fullbacks; Jimmy Dodd, the right-halfback who subbed for Bob Steuber, now with the Chicago Bears, and Ed Gerker, a rugged blocker.

Ohio State, which had so many fine ball-toters in the greyhound manner for young Paul Brown, its astute coach, last year, will show a definite sloughing off in backfield material. The Buckeyes can play only under-18's, 4F's and specialized students. There are a few players who may sprout into stardom among these, namely Les Horvath, veteran wingback, who can pin a tackle in with the best and run reverses handily; Dean Sensenbaugher, a highly recommended fullback; Ernie Parks, halfback sprint star, and blocking back Matt Cokor.

In the Rocky Mountain district, Colorado is much better stocked than its neighbors and has a first rate tailback in Johnny Ziegler, who was a spectacular sophomore last fall. Bob Verner, who also did well

last year, is available, and so is Clayton (Moose) Lewis, line-smashing fullback.

Other Midwesterners who shouldn't be overlooked are Iowa's Bill Sangster, All State Prep back from Iowa City, whom around Slip Madigan, the Hawkeyes' new coach, will build his backfield, and Ed Cyenas, right halfback, and one of the few football operatives left on the Lafayette, Ind., campus.

The caliber of the Pacific Coast backfield potential seems to be slightly below the Midwest, on a par with the East, and somewhat superior to the South and Southwest.

The Washington Huskies expect to have their flashy 1942 halfback duo, Sam Robinson and Bob Erickson returning. These two gave the Huskies a two-sided attack last year. Pete Susick, a capable veteran quarterback also figures to be a standout, while Bobo Moore, from the '42 frosh, is well thought of. Jay Stores, who used to be a star member of the Washington State Cougar ensemble, bitter Northwest rivals of the Huskies, will find himself among his old enemies this year. War certainly makes strange football bedfellows.

Southern California hopes to battle its way back into the Rose Bowl, and much of its hope rests on the broad shoulders of Mickey McCardle, who was a kingpin sophomore last year. Jeff Cravath will use the T formation at Troy, and his passer, probably working from the quarterback spot under center, will be Jackie Fellows, who broke a national passing record at Fresno State. Joe Day, who, you will remember, was an Oregon State star in '42, also will be on the Trojan squad.

That's a trinity of stars for U. S. C.'s Fellows and Day.

There will be some intriguing angles to the backfield set-ups on the Coast. Of great sentimental interest to every football follower everywhere is the fact that the grand old man, 81-year-young Amos Alonzo Stagg, will celebrate his 54th year of coaching by welcoming to his College of the Pacific squad, three former St. Mary's Galloping Gaels: Presto Podesto, who hails from Modesto, Frank Callan and Joe Ferrens. Podesto is quite a passer and Pop Stagg, a great utilitarian

throughout his career, is expected to feature the overhead game.

While St. Mary's loses Podesto, Callan and Ferrens to Stagg, the Gaels will not lack for color. They have Bob Hernandez, termed "a passing fool"; Herman Widemyer and Harold Van Giesen. Widemyer and Van Giesen are better-than-average. All three are Hawaiians. How Slip Madigan would have gone to town on them. He probably would have had them carrying a football in one hand and a ukelele in the other, and the Gael rooters chanting, "Aloha!"

UCLA, the Rose Bowl club, which put up an unexpectedly brilliant game in losing to Georgia, 9-0, hopes that fullback George Phillips has recovered completely from his knee injury, for George is the big Uclan hope. California will offer Art Honegger, a tricky runner, and Bill Reinhard, either of them capable of breaking up a game on his own.

Stanford speaks of fullback Dave Pate as "a coming Ernie Nevers," which is high praise. If Dave is only half that good, it will be enough. Oregon's best bet appears to be Bob Koch.

Well, there they are, the best bet backs of this 1943 wartime football season. A symphony of running, passing, punting and blocking. Big backs, small backs, nifty backs, power backs, blocking backs, wing backs, tall backs, short backs, all following the Pied Piper of autumn.

It is customary nowadays to pick "All teams." No article on football prospects seems to be authentic without them. We don't particularly believe in them. They are all right, if not taken too seriously. There are too many great backs in the country to single out only four and state, categorically, that they are the best four.

But there's no harm in guessing. And our guess would include: Elroy Hirsch, of Michigan, left halfback; Joe Andrejco, of Dartmouth, right halfback; Joe Magliolo, of Texas, quarterback, and Max Minor, of West Point, fullback.

And right behind them will be Eddie Prokop, of Georgia Tech; Angelo Bertelli, of Notre Dame; Otto Graham, of Northwestern, and Mickey McCardle, of Southern California.

Signals!

WHAT'S THE PLAY?



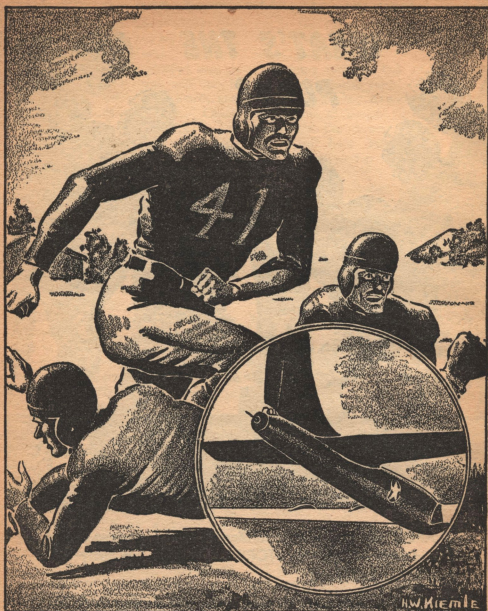
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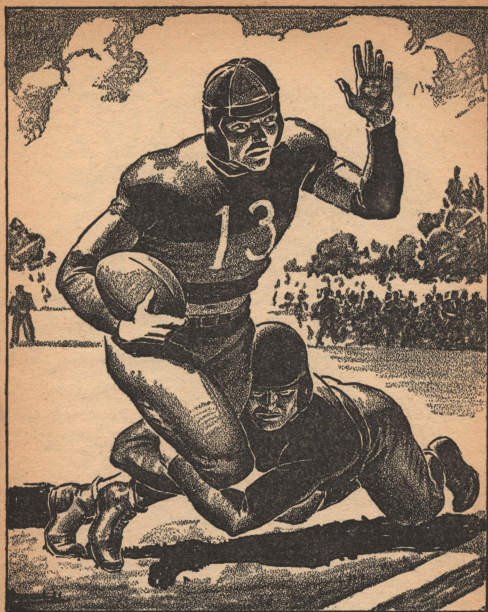
ON SALE AT YOUR FAVORITE NEWSSTAND, OCT. 1st!



HERE COMES HOGAN!

By JACKSON V. SCHOLZ

A rousing novelet of our airmen in England.



He could cause more damage on a football field than a gang of gremlins in a Flying Fortress. 'Twas no wonder Uncle Sam's bombardment squadron blew their bomb bays whenever the name "Hogan" was mentioned.

A RMY discipline is a mighty thing, but even such discipline must, at times, fall short in the face of sufficient provocation. It happened when Gil

Hogan strode upon the gridiron. Practice stopped, as if an order had been given. The players stared, bug-eyed, then slow grins began to stretch across their faces.

No one could blame them much. The uniforms they wore themselves were motley hand-me-downs. Football equipment didn't grow on bushes here in England, and a guy was lucky to get a pair of shoes with cleats left on them. A pair of sweat-stiff shoulderpads was something for a man to sleep in if he didn't want to lose them.

The supply sergeant, it appeared, had had to scrape the bottom of the barrel to find an outfit for the latest candidate, and it appeared also that the latest candidate's fantastic build was never meant for garments of this sort.

Gil Hogan stood five feet eight inches in his socks—an optical illusion. He looked much shorter owing to a torso of unusual length, and a pair of legs which looked as if they had been hammered down to fit a space reserved for them. His jersey, faded apple-green, and shrunken, ended at his navel, leaving a white encircling band of bare hide.

His pants, gathered into many pleats by the constriction of his belt, went on from there to balloon out like a pair of old-fashioned plus-fours on a golfer. They ended at his shoe tops, which probably saved the supply sergeant from handing out a pair of stockings. The shoes he wore turned up at the toes like Turkish slippers. The grins of the watchers widened, then extended further as Hogan's face came into focus.

His hair, fresh from a G.I. hair-cut, bristled like the fur on the tail of a scared black cat. His face, broad between the eyes, tapered like a triangle toward the base, but detracted nothing from a long, pugnacious jaw. The eyes themselves were an electric blue. The eyebrows tilted high at the outside edges, imparting an almost elfin look. His ears, sticking out like inverted kites, were slightly pointed at the tops. He looked like a character from Barney Google.

It was reasonable to suppose that Hogan had a fair idea of how he looked, and that he wasn't getting any pleasure from it. It may have accounted for the cocky way he walked, and for the look of smouldering challenge in his eyes.

If his general bearing was a warning, though, the others didn't heed it. An event of this sort didn't happen every day, and entertainment on the British Isles was

scarce, it had to be grabbed quick when it showed up.

One of the players demanded loudly, "Holy cats! What is it!"

None of them could dope it out, until Chuck Bender, an erstwhile gridiron pro, fell heir to a brain-storm and blurted out: "Hell! I know what it is! A gremlin!"

It was a swell gag, because gremlins played a big part in the daily existence of these men. They all knew about the tricky little rascals who drank the gasoline from airplanes, deflected bullets, and punched holes in oxygen lines. The catch was, that no one had ever seen one, and that theories as to their appearance differed. Chuck Bender's wise-crack, therefore, scored a bull-eye, because it didn't take much imagination to hook the gremlin tag on Hogan. The smiles gave way to raucous mirth.

Gil Hogan was the only one who didn't think the thing was funny. His eyes heated up like a pair of blow torches. He barged up to Bender. He had to tilt his head back to see Bender's face, because the big man towered six-four above the turf.

"Are you the guy who made that crack?" demanded Hogan.

Bender smiled down upon him tolerantly.

"What crack, sonny?" he inquired.

"The one about the gremlin."

"Aw, shucks," said Bender feigning coyness. "Don't congratulate me. I ain't that smart all the time. I'll bet I couldn't do it again even if I tried. It was just an inspiration, that's all. I took a look at you, and I says to myself, if it ain't a gremlin, it ought to be."

No one was prepared for what happened then, least of all Chuck Bender. Some of the watchers insisted later that Gil Hogan had to jump off the ground to hang that mighty wallop on Bender's button. The fact remains that he hung it there—a pip. Bender went down "as falls on Mount Alvernus a thunder-smitten oak." His long legs gave a couple of expiring twitches, and the big guy was out like a light.

For several seconds, no one could do anything but stand and stare. They couldn't have been more surprised if Joe Louis had taken the count from a fly-weight. It didn't make sense to anyone but Hogan. He alone knew the lethal mule-kick which was tucked away in his over-size torso. He should have known, he'd used it plenty.

The impromptu game of "states" was brought to a sudden end by the authoritative bellow of Major Linton, the coach. Linton was a husky ex-West Point linesman, who had never allowed his football savvy to get rusty.

"What goes on here?" he demanded.

No one but Gil Hogan had recovered sufficiently to answer.

"I smacked him, sir," he explained simply.

Linton stared at Bender's two hundred and twenty pounds of recumbent meat, and then at Hogan's one hundred and fifty pounds within the assorted uniform. The major, with a quick glance, took in Hogan's width of shoulder and length of arm.

"Could be," admitted Linton as if trying to talk himself into believing a miracle. Then, "Why?"

"He called me a gremlin."

Major Linton made a strangled sound, covered it with a cough, then blew his nose. When he came out from behind his handkerchief his face was stern. He asked:

"What's your name?"

"Hogan, sir."

"Okay, Hogan, it looks as if your football debut is going to be delayed. I don't want trouble-makers on the squad, and I don't want men who can't take a little kidding. You'll be punished for this, of course. I'll see to it. Dismissed!"

Hogan said, "Yes sir," about faced, and marched off the gridiron, his voluminous pants flapping about his legs.

"Now what the hell did I bop that big ape for?" he muttered.

HE had plenty of time to ponder this in the week that followed, because first-class private Hogan was a busy man. He peeled spuds, dug latrine ditches, scrubbed floors and labored hard at a variety of other uninspiring jobs. He was lucky, though, at that. He knew it. Major Linton could have made the punishment much tougher if he'd wanted to.

Hogan tried to solve his problem while he labored but he couldn't nail an answer down that suited him. It wasn't like him to prowl around poking people just because he wanted to. He'd fought when he'd had to, and had enjoyed it. He'd been raised in a hard school. He'd been a

rigger in the Oklahoma oil fields. He lost fights, and he won 'em, yet, up to now, he'd been certain that he didn't have the small man's complex, that pugnacious bantam streak which makes a little guy want to prove he's better than he is.

No, Gil Hogan had never been like that. He'd made friends easily, and had held them. Not until arriving recently at this advance bomber base outside the English town of Fellschire, had he felt that irritating urge to throw his weight around. It worried him, because he couldn't dope it out.

He had believed that football might ease the pressure. He still believed it. That's why he intended to have another crack at it when his week of punishment was over. He had played in high school, and had made out pretty well, his chief assets being durability, powerful shoulders and a surprising burst of shifty speed in his short legs.

And so, when he had served his term, Gil Hogan headed for the football field again. He checked out another suit, and drew a better fit this time. He didn't look quite so grotesque. His nerves, too, appeared to be in better shape, because when the sergeant said:

"How're you gonna get them ears of yours inside this helmet?" Hogan grinned at him and came back, "Hell, I just unscrew the things and take 'em off."

His way to the field led past the apron of one of the big camouflaged hangars. He paid no attention to the constant roar of motors overhead. He scarcely heard them. There were big ships in the air at all times, mostly planes for training crews into fighting units. Now and then a flight of bombers would leave upon a grimmer mission. Most of them came back—not all of them.

Some of them had just returned from a business trip across the Channel. One of these was taxiing slowly toward the apron which Hogan was passing at the time. He saw a jagged hole in the right wing. There were tiny dots upon the fuselage, but Hogan knew they weren't just dots—they were holes, machine gun holes.

His glance jumped involuntarily toward the bomber's tail. He stooped in his tracks and felt a tightening of his throat. There were holes in the tail too. Dark streaks trailed from several of the holes, trailing backward, staining the drab color of the

fuselage. They could have been oil streaks, but Hogan knew they weren't. They were streaks of blood. The tail gunner had been hit. He had been removed, of course, the moment the bomber landed.

Hogan's throat tightened to point where his breath had trouble getting through. Gil Hogan was being trained as a tail gunner. Before long now, he would be roaring across the Channel, tucked in the tail seat, gripping the candles of a pair of fifty calibers.

He forced his legs in motion once again. He kicked viciously at a clod of dirt as if it were something animate. The cockiness came back into his stride. His jaw was set as he strode upon the field. His eyes were blue as neon signs. He was looking for trouble—and he found it.

Chuck Bender, his big flat face alight with pleasure, yelped, "The gremlin's back!" Bender, it appeared, had not expected a return engagement.

Gil Hogan, for that matter, hadn't expected one either. He'd had every intention of apologizing to the big fullback. He still had that intention, but something more powerful than good resolutions had him in its grip. He wasn't sore at Bender, didn't mind, in fact, bring called a gremlin. He merely had the overpowering urge to sock someone, and Bender was the handiest.

Gil Hogan made his try—an earnest effort. He moved in fast and swung with everything he had. The catch was, that Bender was ready for him this time. Hogan missed his target, and before he knew what had happened, Bender had him by the seat of the pants and the scruff of the neck.

With no apparent effort, Bender lifted Hogan off the ground. Then, as calmly as he would boot a practice punt, Bender treated Gil Hogan likewise. The flat side of Bender's huge foot met the seat of Hogan's pants with smart precision. Hogan did a complete loop, and landed on his back.

He was thoroughly amazed, badly shaken, and, what is more, was filled with admiration for Chuck Bender's prowess. It was the sort of thing Gil Hogan understood. He'd bitten off more than he could chew, and that was that. Bender had acted without malice, had done a workman-like, efficient job. In fact, he was the sort of guy Gil Hogan wanted to know better, the sort of guy to tie to.

But he had no chance, just then, to extend the olive branch of peace. Major Linton came up again and asked his routine question:

"What goes on here?"

Climbing from the ground, Gil Hogan had the strong impression that the Major knew damn well what had happened, but, for some strange reason, was willing to let the matter slide—probably for the sake of poetic justice. So Hogan said:

"I sort of stumbled, sir."

"What did you stumble over?"

"Well—uh—my feet sir."

"You'll be a big asset to the squad," said Linton drily. "Unfortunately, I need material, so you'll get your chance. But, Hogan, watch your step."

Gil Hogan didn't miss the double meaning of the words.

II

THE gridiron squad of the 34th Bombers had chosen an apt name for themselves. They called themselves the Rocs, under the logical assumption that, if a fabulous bird such as the Roc could carry elephants to feed her young, she must lay a pretty big egg. Sinbad The Sailor confirmed this in his records by stating that he had come upon a Roc egg fifty paces in circumference, which was big enough to suit the Thirty-fourth, inasmuch as their business was the laying of eggs—over Germany.

Gil Hogan let out a big breath of relief when he found that Major Linton was going to give him a try-out, rather than send him back for another period of ignominious labor. It occurred to Hogan about that time that he wanted very much to be accepted as a Roc in good standing, and there was some obscure reason behind this, aside from the fact that he liked football.

Major Linton put him right to work on the subs, proof enough that he needed material badly. Scrimmage for a new man on the first day out, however, was not as drastic as it sounded. Hogan had been through a period of army training equally as rigid as that dished out to the average football candidate before allowing him in scrimmage. He was tough as a mule steak. He had already thrown off the effects of being punted by Chuck Bender.

The first team was working an offensive line plays, so Linton stuck Hogan at left half on scrub squad, a ragged looking crew; but earnest. The first squad looked formidable, and, after the first play, Hogan decided that it was. Major Linton had some good material there, headed by Chuck Bender.

The first play banged through the left side of the scrub line. Joe Steel, the right half, packed the mail, but he didn't have much to do, he just barged through like a rural postman following a snow plow through a drift. He got through for eight yards. Hogan had no chance to reach the play.

It was different next time. There was little attempt at deception in the first-string backfield—just straight old socko stuff which almost drew a diagram of where the play was coming.

Chuck Bender carried this time. Hogan saw the ball slap into his wide flat belly, and had a startled instant of surprise at Bender's early speed. The guy handled his weight like a range-bred steer.

Hogan saw a hole rip open inside tackle, just in front of him. His own short, powerful legs drove solidly against the cleats, sending him into motion like a cork blown out of a champagne bottle. He saw the quarterback, Jeff Blake, whip through the hole ahead of Bender, and Hogan centered on Blake first.

Hogan went in low. It came natural to him, because he wasn't far off the ground to start with. He hit Blake ankle high, slashing under him like a sharp scythe going through a patch of thistles. Blake looped up and over him, barely checking Hogan's momentum. There was still enough left when his shoulder exploded against Bender's shoe tops. Bender went down with an amazed grunt.

He was still amazed when he got up. He gave Hogan a steady, appraising look. "For a gremlin," he observed, "you're pretty good."

The words sent a quick tingle down Hogan's spine. They confirmed his previous judgment of Chuck Bender. The guy was okay, too big to hold a grudge, big enough to give credit where it belonged.

"Thanks," said Hogan. "But I guess it was just a lucky dive."

"We'll see," Bender promised.

He kept his word. He was calling signals for the first string squad, and he called an encore for the one just passed. Hogan knew it was coming before it started. He was ready.

He had never known he possessed a football instinct, but something of that sort cropped out now. A quick hunch told him what might happen. Jeff Blake had played for Notre Dame, and therefore was no dope. He wouldn't be caught by the same trick twice.

The hunch was sound. The first string line tore another hole like a trained dog jumping through a paper hoop. Blake came slamming through ahead of Bender, but this time Blake threw a low hard block just off the surface of the ground.

Hogan had it figured right, because he was already diving clean across Blake's back. Bender was an open target. Hogan nailed him well above the waist, taking the full impact of Bender's wicked speed.

It was a collision for the books. Both men went down, and neither was in a hurry to get up. Once on their feet again, Bender was the first to speak. He shook himself, worked his arms, then grinned:

"Looks like I've still got all my ribs. How about you?"

"I'm still numb," admitted Hogan. "I can't tell yet. I guess I'll pull through, though. What in hell are you built of? Concrete?"

Major Linton came up about that time, looking a little worried.

"Look," he said. "Fun's fun, but take it easy, will you? The season's still ahead of us."

"Yes, sir," Bender said. "I will. I'd rather have my gremlins in small doses."

There it was again, the gremlin gag. This time, however, it didn't seem to give Gil Hogan the hot-foot. He gave the phenomenon a little thought, and finally came up with the answer to his strong urge to sell himself to the Rocs.

His bizarre ears and diagonal eyebrows had, in the past, inspired monickers which made "gremlin" sound like nursery talk. All of which was okay by Hogan so long as the monicker was uttered with enough respect to lift it out of the epithet class, and it was a point of honor with him to

see this ultimately came to pass. So far, he had managed it. He was making progress now. Bender had used the word in a way that suited Hogan. His job, now, was to bring the rest of the Rocs in line. They could call him a gremlin, then, till hell froze over.

It began to look like he'd gotten away to a running start. Smearing Chuck Bender two times in succession didn't hurt his stock any with the other Rocs, particularly after Bender had placed his own stamp of approval on the tackles.

The first team tried a few more offensive plays, and Gil Hogan was as busy as a revolving door. He was smart enough to make the most of the toe-hold he'd already gained, and he drove himself with a reckless violence which failed to temper his good judgment. He worked hard, but used his head. Scarcely knowing how it happened, he was virtually running the second squad, with the complete acquiescence of the other men.

THE scrubs began to tighten up. Even the forward wall began to charge with a force which dulled the superior power of the first-string line. Major Linton, following the plays like a bloodhound, began to wear an expression of puzzled wonder, as if he'd found a ten dollar bill in the pocket of an old discarded suit. He finally took the ball away from the varsity and gave it to the scrubs, with the air of a man who professed disbelief in miracles, but who was willing to give Aladdin's lamp just one more chance.

The offensive signals of the scrubs were rudimentary. Gil Hogan didn't even know them, so the squad was allowed a little extra time in the huddle for Hogan to get the low down. The quarterback, Sam Peel, payed Hogan the compliment of giving him the first assignment. He called for a sweep around right end.

This suited Hogan. He spat upon his hands, and prayed for just one more good break. He'd tossed a few naturals while the scrubs were on defense, and he hoped that the dice would treat him right a little longer. This was no time for crapping out, or for rolling little Joes.

The play broke well. Peel took the ball on a snap-pass from center, and faked a

toss to the fullback, who went plugging into the center of the line. Then, with a half-pivot, Peel chugged the ball into Hogan's belly as Hogan cut over fast behind the line.

Holding the ball in front of him in his big hands, Hogan deliberately gave his interference time to get under way, watching each man like a hawk to see what sort of a path they carved for him.

They did as well as he'd expected, maybe a little better, but they were up against a lot of class in the first-string line. Brick Hodge, varsity end, refused to be eliminated. He danced wide, fading with the play, keeping his zone well covered.

A varsity linesman broke through and dove at Hogan. Hogan did something with his legs that a man with long legs never could have managed. He cross-footed like a cat, and the tackler grabbed a load of air before he hit the ground. He also left an opening in the varsity line. Hogan saw it, and cut in.

He jammed his throttle wide open, and the result was more or less incredible. His legs appeared to lose their unity. They began to blur with speed like the spokes of a spinning wheel. He hit the role in the line like a run-away jeep, and found himself in a disorganized backfield. None of the varsity men had been prepared for this sudden, dizzy burst of speed, which was really an optical illusion, because Hogan was, by no means, moving as fast as he appeared to be.

It served the same purpose, though, and what his underpinnings lacked in actual speed, they accounted for in shiftiness. Because his feet were always where he wanted them. They didn't have far to go from one spot to another.

Joe Steel made an uncoordinated grab for him before allowing himself to get set for the tackle. Hogan met the attempt with a straight-arm which smacked upon Steel's helmet and sent Steel's nose into the ground.

Hogan used the straight-arm as a swivel to help him change direction. The other halfback, Garson, had a long-range try at him, and missed when Hogan pulled a dance step that Nijinski might have envied.

Chuck Bender, at the start, had been caught flat-footed as the rest, but his magnificent coordination helped him to a fast

recovery. His effort was far from perfect, but he managed, with a long dive, to get one of his meat-platter hands on Hogan's leg. Hogan shook it off, but not without an effort. It threw him off stride, wobbled him an instant, and before he could recover, Jeff Blake came in from his safety spot to nail him. It was a twelve yard gain, however, and that wasn't cranberries against an outfit like the Roc's first squad. The men regarded him with even more respect, and it was hard for Hogan not to swagger as he returned to his position.

The varsity was too experienced to let him get away like that again, but Hogan still looked good behind the line despite his lack of practice with these men. It wasn't in the cards for him to run hog-wild against the first-string Rocs, but he kept them guessing just the same, and remained as a constant threat before Linton sent them to the showers a short time later.

As they headed for the barracks Gil Hogan felt as if he'd just stepped from a cage-full of gorillas, but otherwise he felt like a million bucks. He'd made more progress with the Rocs than he had dared to hope. His campaign had been short-lived and successful. Now they could call him a gremlin any time they wanted to.

He decided to force his luck. He had made but few attempts in his life to cultivate the friendship of an individual. That wasn't Hogan's style of aggressiveness. He let them come to him.

He recognized the exception in this instance, and he made no effort to combat it. He wanted to know Chuck Bender, wanted to know him well, because Bender was the sort of guy worth knowing. He was sound from head to toe, the sort of guy to have on your side.

So he pulled abreast of Bender now, and they walked awhile in silence. Bender showed no desire to break it. Hogan finally said:

"The Rocs look pretty good." He didn't want it to sound patronizing. Apparently it didn't. Bender said:

"Yeah. The first string seems okay. We need more replacements than we got."

"Tough schedule?"

"Pretty tough."

"Who's the toughest?"

"Seventeenth Tank Corps. They got everything." Then, abruptly, "You looked good today."

"Thanks. I've got a lot to learn."

Bender appraised him carefully, with the steady probing look of a man who takes time with his decisions—who can spot a phoney when he sees one. Finally he said quietly:

"If I can help you any, let me know. Well, here's where I turn off. So long."

Hogan went on by himself. Most of the weariness had left him now. He walked with a springiness which gave no indication of the mauling he had recently received.

He passed the apron where he'd seen the plane just back from its over-channel raid. The big four-motored bomber was still there. The dark streaks were still upon the fuselage, back near the tail. Gil Hogan's breathing quickened. A heaviness crept in his stride.

THE next few weeks were busy for Gil Hogan, so busy that moments of occasional doubt slipped in but fleetingly. Most of the day was taken up with rigid training for his job, exhaustive drill in the air and on the ground, a constant effort to weld the nine-man crew into a single fighting unit.

Privately, Gil Hogan thought this part was overdone a bit. He figured it out that a tail gunner, in particular, was pretty much on his own, stuck back there, as he was, like the stinger on a wasp. All Gil Hogan asked for was the chance to get a Messerschmitt or a Focke-Wulf on his sights, squeeze the triggers and watch the Nazi louse go down in flames. He couldn't see how team work would help him much in that.

The time was coming soon when he'd get his chance. His training was in its final stages, and his marksmanship was well above the average. He could really make those .50-guns talk turkey. He was held to be a first rate gunner, and it wouldn't be long before he'd have the chance to prove it—the hard way. That funny tightness lingered in his throat each time he thought about it.

There was another private named Ray Beeker who had the bunk right next to Hogan's. Beeker was a Tail-end Charlie

too, but the difference was, that Beeker had seen action. He'd been across France several times on daylight raids. He'd thrown steel at the Nazis, and was credited officially with a Messerschmitt.

Gil Hogan found this hard to understand, because Beeker wasn't the sort of guy you'd think would be much good at that. He was mild, quiet-spoken, almost bashful. He had large brown eyes with long dark lashes for which any girl would have swapped her last pair of nylon stockings.

He wasn't the type of person who would ordinarily interest Hogan. Hogan had a sizable stack of comic books, but when he offered them to Beeker, Beeker turned them down, preferring to read Harpers, the Atlantic Monthly, and stuff like that. It was hard for Hogan to dope out.

Nevertheless, he had to respect the guy for what he had done, and Hogan talked with Beeker whenever he got the chance, drawing him out about the action he'd seen over Europe. Beeker seemed willing enough to discuss the subject, but he talked about it in such a calm, impersonal way that Hogan felt a little cheated. Just the same, he came to like Ray Beeker pretty well.

The brightest spot in Hogan's life, these days, however, was his spectacular progress on the gridiron. Major Linton had him off the scrubs in no time flat and gave him a whirl at left half on the varsity. Gil Hogan sank his teeth in the assignment, and hung on. He fitted in like the final piece of a jig-saw puzzle, and it began to look as if the Rocs would have a ball club.

Gil Hogan was solid with the Rocs, no doubt about it. They included him in the horse-play, razzed him, and gave every other indication that he was in for keeps. Chuck Bender helped the cause along unconsciously, by putting his stamp of approval on Gil Hogan. He did it by deliberate degrees, but the deliberation suited Hogan. He figured that the gradual gaining of Bender's confidence and respect would be more lasting in the end.

Somewhat to his surprise, Gil Hogan found that his football activities extended their influence beyond the gridiron. Up to this point, he had been just another Tail-end Charlie, but now, as the first-

string Roc left half, he found himself becoming a figure of importance at the air base. He hadn't realized, until now, how much importance these soldiers attached to their football team. Every man on the base seemed to regard it as a personal possession, and it gave them all a close active interest in every man on the squad. Hogan liked it—plenty, and he didn't kid himself about it. He soaked it up, but didn't let it turn his head.

Excitement came to a pleasant boil about the place, as the opening game drew near. The Rocs would meet the Eighty-second Engineers to start the season, and word got out that the Engineers with hairy ears had plenty of dynamite in their line-up.

On the morning of the big day, the Rocs received special permission to take it easy. Word came down from the top that a bit of bunk fatigue would not be frowned upon, which went to show how much importance even the brass hats were attaching to the football squad.

GIL HOGAN, taking full advantage of the unusual opportunity, was stretched out upon his bunk in the deserted barracks reading a detective story. Shortly before lunch he was interrupted by a corporal. The corporal stopped before Hogan's bunk and asked:

"Where's Private Beeker's bunk?"

Hogan dropped the magazine upon his chest, and noted that the corporal wore the caduceus of the medical corps. Something funny stirred inside Gil Hogan. He pointed to the bed beside him.

"That's Beeker's bunk," he said.

The corporal grunted acknowledgment, then opened the chest at the foot of the bed and began methodically to remove Beeker's clothes and personal effects.

"What the hell're you doin'?" demanded Hogan, the rough edge of alarm in his voice.

The corporal shot him an impatient glance. "What does it look like I'm doin'?" he wanted to know. "Drillin' a well?"

He went on with his work, making a pile of Beeker's things upon the bunk. Hogan hauled in a couple of deep breaths to control his voice, then asked:

"Did something happen to the kid?"

"I ain't doin' this for fun."

"Did he get shot up?"

"Yeah."

"How bad?"

The corporal straightened with annoyance. He turned on Hogan and said, "Look, guy. I only work here." Then, seeing his expression on Hogan's face, his tone changed. "Pal of yours?"

"Yeah, in a way."

The corporal rubbed his chin reflectively, then said, "I guess he got it pretty bad, but a medico let a couple of words slip out which makes me think they'll pull him through okay, and those medicos ain't quacks. Becker rode the tail, didn't he?"

"Yeah."

"Hot spot back there," said the corporal knowingly. He gathered Becker's stuff beneath his arm. Before he left, he said:

"Don't worry too much about your pal. They'll fix 'im up like new."

Hogan tried to go back to his magazine, but it wouldn't work. The words were blurred and meaningless before his eyes. A slow alarm began to crowd his thoughts, as the dangerous urge to sock someone crept in again.

It scared him, made him a little sick, because he'd been so certain that he had thrown that crazy impulse off for good. He'd believed that football had entirely cured him, yet here it was again, that almost uncontrollable desire to rough somebody up for no good reason.

He glanced at the bunk beside him, and it didn't help his nerves. There probably were dark streaks on the tail of the fuselage of the ship which brought Ray Becker back. He thrust the thought aside, put on his shoes and went outside to walk until meal time.

The Engineers, who called themselves the Beavers, invaded the Roc stronghold in the afternoon. The Rocs, this time, used the same barracks as a dressing room. They had new uniforms for the occasion, but Hogan seemed scarcely aware of this. There was a glitter in his eyes. There was a jerky tenseness to his motions. Chuck Bender, after watching him awhile, moved over to the bunk where Hogan sat.

"Something wrong, Gil?" Bender asked.

Hogan started slightly at the question. He tried to make his voice sound casual.

"No, Chuck. I'm okay."

"First big game," Bender diagnosed. "I know how you feel."

"Yeah, sure," said Hogan. "I'll be Jake."

Major Linton gave them a short talk before sending them to the field. Hogan listened with a drawn, intent expression, but the words glanced off. When they clumped from the barracks on their cleats a short time later, there was a hungry shine in Hogan's eyes.

III

THE field was massed solidly on all sides with rabid football fans. They gave the Rocs a howling welcome. Gil Hogan heard his own name yelled, but it seemed, almost, as if the fans were yelling for some guy Gil Hogan didn't know.

He went through the warm-up automatically, but his eyes kept wandering toward the Beavers, who were running signals at the other end of the field. They were big brutes. That was swell. The bigger they were the harder they would smack into the ground. He tried to yank his mind away from dangerous thoughts like that, but it was just like trying to pull a thirsty horse from a water trough.

He grunted with relief when the game was finally called. Chuck Bender met the Beaver captain and the referee in the center of the field. They tossed for goals. The Beavers won, and elected to receive. The teams got into position. Jeff Blake held the ball for Bender. The whistle shrilled, the Roc line moved forward, and Bender's toe plunked against the ball.

It was a clean, long kick. The Beaver quarterback, Hal Lambert, took it near his goal line. Interference formed in a wide, mobile wedge. Hogan, as he ran, watched Lambert like a hawk. A look of avid hunger rode high in Hogan's eyes.

The teams met with a dull solid sound. A big Beaver forward came at Hogan, made his try and missed with a surprised grunt when Hogan's legs weren't there. Another Beaver threw a block which Hogan dodged instinctively, his eyes still on the runner.

The ball-toter tried to reverse his field. The maneuver called for a sudden change of direction on the part of Hogan. Hogan made the change with a swiftness which took nothing into consideration but his own desire to make the tackle.

The result was bad. Brick Hodge, left end, had worked himself into a spot where he had the runner covered like a pup tent. Then Gil Hogan came steaming right across Brick Hodge's bow without sticking out his hand for a right turn. Hodge gave a warning yelp, but Hogan heard it too late. The next instant the pair of them collided and hit the ground in a tangle of arms and legs. The ball-carrier, taking quick advantage of this unexpected gift from Santa Claus, went looping through for another thirteen yards before the Rocs hauled him down.

Hodge was a little peeved, but not enough to make an issue of it. He seemed willing to accept the incident as one of those things which are bound to happen now and then in football. He appeared to attach no direct blame to Hogan. Nevertheless, Hodge said:

"Hell, I had 'im cold."

"Sorry," muttered Hogan. "Didn't mean to spoil the tackle for you."

The ball was on the Beaver thirty-four yard line. They didn't use a huddle. The quarterback, Lambert, called the signals. He rapped out a string of numbers, and the play broke fast. It had all the earmarks of an end sweep, and that's all Hogan wanted to know. He went smashing at the Beaver line with the sole idea of getting through to smear the big fullback, Barton, before he could make use of his interference.

Hogan ripped through like a small tank, and arrived on schedule. He kept his eyes glued on Barton's big legs, then dove for them with every wicked ounce of power he had. It didn't occur to him, at once, that Barton was immobile then. Hogan's only feeling was one of savage satisfaction as he crashed violently into Barton's legs and felt the big Beaver hit the ground.

Not until Hogan climbed tight-lipped to his feet, did he see that Barton didn't have the ball. It hit Gil Hogan then, with somewhat of a shock, that the vortex of the play was not centered about him, but in a scrambled pile some fifteen yards nearer the Roc goal.

Hogan knew what had happened then. Barton had shot a completed forward pass. What is more, he had whipped it into the zone which Gil Hogan should have covered. In other words, Hogan had made a

donkey of himself by being caught flat-footed.

That wasn't the worst of it. It appeared that Barton had got the pass away before Hogan hit him, so long before, that the referee ruled Hogan's vicious tackle as unnecessary roughness. It was a tricky decision, but it stood. The referee also ruled that the pass had been received before the foul was committed, which meant that the penalty was paced off from the point where the pass was received, a nice thirty yard gain for the Beavers.

The Roc fans didn't like that. Neither did the Rocs. The looks they turned on Hogan were accusing. Hogan felt their impact, but the sting was mitigated by the lingering tingle of satisfaction still remaining from the tackle. It had boosted his morale, given him something which he'd felt he'd needed. Unfortunately, the longing wasn't satisfied. The bitter need for more rough action still was with him. He wanted it as a dipsomaniac craves liquor.

Backed up to their own thirty-five yard line the Rocs dug in. Gil Hogan got a break on the next play. The Beavers sent a load of dynamite at Hogan's side of the line. A small hole opened inside tackle. The Beaver back almost got through, but Hogan hit him like an eight-inch shell at the line of scrimmage. He struck with a force which would have folded the back of an ordinary man like an accordion. It felt good to Hogan. Furthermore, it reinstated him, somewhat, with the Rocs.

The Beavers tried the end on the second down. Hogan went raging in again to nail the passer. This time he couldn't reach him. The pass got off, but Jeff Blake was on his toes. He knocked it down.

The Beavers tried the end on the third down. Hogan went into the play like a rock out of a catapult. He went in with such violence that he over-ran the tackler. He made a futile dive, bounced hard upon his belly, but Chuck Bender was the one who timed things right and made the tackle.

The Beavers went into kick formation. The idea would be to boot the pigskin out of bounds as near as possible to the goal line. The big guy, Barton, was in the tailback spot. Hogan ran his tongue across his lips, remembering what a fine chunk of solid meat Barton was to tackle.

That's all Gil Hogan *did* remember. He got through, smeared the tar out of Barton, then had it called to his attention that roughing a kicker was against the rules. The referee took another stroll toward the Roc goal line, and plunked the ball down on the twenty yard line.

The Rocs were staring, now, at Hogan, but seemed too bewildered to be really sore. Hogan heard the center, Rutledge mutter worriedly, "Maybe the guy *is* a gremlin," but the words lacked punch enough to snap Gil Hogan from his tight-lipped concentration. Chuck Bender called for time out. He came up to Hogan, looking puzzled.

"What's wrong, Gil?" he demanded. "You're playing like a zombie."

"I'm okay, Chuck," insisted Hogan.

"Like hell! You're actin' like an engine on a one-way track. Snap out of it, guy. Relax. Take it easy for awhile."

"Yeah, sure," said Hogan. "Sure, Chuck."

Good advice, but it didn't ease the wire-tight tension of Hogan's nerves. They twanged like fiddle strings. The referee called time in, and the squads went back to work.

THE Beavers didn't kid around. Barton sizzled a pass to the coffin corner on the first play, and made it good. Luckily for Hogan, it was nothing he could have prevented. The fact remained, however, that he had smoothed the way for the Beavers' touchdown pass. He'd set it up for them and made it possible of execution.

The Rocs knew this and they weren't laughing it off. Hot resentment showed in their eyes when they glanced at Hogan. He felt a chill along his spine. He tried to pull himself together, to take advantage of Bender's sound advice. The Beavers kicked the extra point to make the score 7-0.

The Rocs took the kick-off and went on the offensive. The Roc fans howled angrily for action. Blake brought the kick-off back to the twenty-eight yard line, and as Bender called the Rocs into the huddle, Gil Hogan tried desperately to shake some looseness into his knotted nerves.

Bender toted the mail on the first play. He called for a slice outside left tackle. Hogan's assignment was to get through

the hole ahead of Bender and hack a path in the Beaver backfield.

The Roc line charged like a herd of bull moose. The hole was there, and Hogan, with his amazing early speed, zinged through the opening ahead of Bender.

Hogan's intentions were as good as a war bond, but once across the line of scrimmage, his intentions showed the tensile strength of a strand of boiled spaghetti. They snapped beneath the overpowering urge to do his job the hard way. The Beaver right half, Martin, was the man Gil Hogan should have taken out. Instead, he hurled himself at Barton, because Barton was the bigger man. Hogan crashed in to him with a vicious rolling block. He bombed Barton from the play—but Martin made the tackle, holding Bender to a meager two-yard gain.

There was no more tolerance in Bender's eyes. They were hard and brittle now, as they rested upon Hogan without comment. In the huddle, Bender called Hogan's signal, with the intonation of a man who was giving Hogan his final chance.

Hogan recognized the ultimatum, and did his best. His best was tinged with panic. He received good interference for his end run, but, trying to quell his urge to smash head-on into the Beaver squad, he followed his interference too long, followed it until it petered out, and thereby missed a chance to cut in for an almost certain gain. The Beavers nailed him for a three-yard loss.

No one spoke to him. It wasn't necessary. The expressions on the faces of the other Rocs told how they felt. They wore the looks of men who had been short-changed with phoney money, and had discovered the gyp too late to get their dough back.

Hogan felt a little sick, with a helpless sort of nausea for which he knew no antidote. The structure he had built with pride was crumbling before his eyes. In a wild urge to prop it up before it collapsed completely, he threw himself into the game with an uncoordinated fury, as if by the mere gesture of battering his own brains out he could solve the problem.

The result was pretty awful. He destroyed all of his former smooth coordination with the other men, and when that

great asset hit the skids the Rocs showed no further desire to cooperate with him. As their confidence in him oozed away, the tight unity of their play went slack. It reached the point where Hogan became no more than a useless, flapping appendage in the Roc backfield.

Major Linton, lacking as he was in reserves, gave him more than a fair chance. Linton had to yank Gil Hogan from the game, however, before the end of the first period. He headed for the bench, dull-eyed and sullen. He blamed nobody but himself, but he wondered what the hell had happened to him. He heard the bellowing of his erstwhile fans. A pair of leather lungs blared out above the rest:

"Gremlin Hogan! Gremlin Hogan! Stick the mugg on ice!"

Gil warmed the bench for the remainder of the game and learned the meaning of distilled misery. He watched the Rocs battling without him, holding the Beavers doggedly to their seven points. In the final quarter he saw Chuck Bender jam across a touchdown, then kick the extra point to tie the score. The game ended 7-7, and no one doubted but that the final score would have been 7-0 for the Rocs, if it hadn't been for Hogan.

It scared him with an ugly brand, the brand of a guy who could not deliver when the chips were down. It wasn't the sort of decorative ornament to wear about an army flying base like this. He could look into the future. It wasn't hard. It left him cold, bleak-eyed, and scared.

He wasn't surprised to receive a summons next day from the Major. He was not prepared, however, for Linton's attitude when he walked into the Major's office.

"At ease, Hogan. Sit down," said Major Linton. His tone was concerned, sober, almost friendly. When Hogan had eased himself to the edge of a chair, Linton went on, "Looks like we've got some things to hash out."

"Yes, sir," admitted Hogan cautiously, "I guess we have."

"Something's wrong with you, of course. Have you any idea what it is?"

"I—I'm not sure, sir," Hogan said.

"Okay, I'll have a go at it. I don't want to pose as an amateur psychologist, but I know this flying business pretty well. I

believe you're worried about your first combat hop."

"Huh?" jerked Hogan, taken by surprise. Then, "I—I don't think so sir. I want a crack at those Nazis as soon as I can get it."

"I don't doubt that," conceded Linton. "But you wonder what the bullets will sound like coming in *your* direction. You wonder if you'll have the guts to face the Nazi guns."

Hogan thought this over, then nodded slowly. "I guess we all feel that way, sir."

"Which is thoroughly normal," Linton said. "In your case however, it seems to take a funny twist. When the serious part of combat work is brought forcibly to your attention, for instance, like the wounding of young Beeker, you feel that you have to go to some extreme to *prove* to yourself that you still have guts to take it. It makes you want to fight, start trouble, expose yourself to a sound mauling. Am I right?"

Hogan was staring at the major now. "I—I believe you are," he said incredulously. "I'd never doped it out that way. That *must* be it."

"So far, so good," said Linton. "That, however, is not the part that worries me. The chief point of your trouble is a lot more serious than that. It showed up in the game yesterday. Know what it is?"

"No, sir, I don't," admitted Hogan, puzzled.

"I was afraid you wouldn't, and that makes the matter worse. One of the main things we try to teach our combat men at this base is discipline. It can often mean the difference between life and death. We try to hammer it into them until it's part of their instinct, and that's where we have failed with you."

"I—I don't quite get it, sir," Hogan said, alarmed.

"Simple enough," the major said impatiently. "No matter what mental strain you were under in that game yesterday, your discipline should have been strong enough to force you to coordinate with the rest of the men on the team. Unfortunately it wasn't. Your discipline bogged down. Your belief in cooperation wasn't strong enough. That's serious, Hogan—if you ever want to fight the Nazis."

It was a threat, lightly camouflaged, and

Major Linton left it hanging in the air.

"I want to fight them, sir," said Hogan hoarsely.

"Very good," said Linton. "Think it over."

Hogan thought it over in the days that followed, grim days of isolation. He moved about the base as if he wore a smallpox warning on his back. The word had made the rounds that Hogan had faded like a morning glory in the Beaver game, that he'd let his team-mates down, had folded in the clutch.

The same impression held among the Rocs themselves, but the thing that hurt the worst was the chill impersonality of Chuck Bender. There was no more friendly contact there, and the loss left Hogan numb and bitter.

He tried with a grim intensity to regain the confidence of the Rocs, but it wasn't in the books. He'd let them down, and that was that. They weren't asking for another helping of the same mess.

Linton gave him a chance in several of the following games, but everything went wrong. It wasn't entirely Hogan's fault, it was simply that an involuntary slackness settled on the Rocs when Gil Hogan stepped into the line-up.

Yet Hogan had the strong unnerving hunch that he should have had it in his power to change this, to overcome his smouldering resentment. Just how he could accomplish it, he didn't know. He merely had the growing certainty that something vital was lacking in his make-up.

It didn't boost his ego much to see that the Rocs got along right well without him. Despite their weakness in reserves, they plowed doggedly through their schedule. Led by the powerhouse Bender, they came down to their final game undefeated. They would play the 17th Tank Corps for the Area Championship, because the "Tanks" were also undefeated—in a big way.

Pre-game excitement boiled about the bomber base, but there was a worried element of doubt mixed in. The Tanks, it seemed, had everything in their line and backfield but their own machines. The experts didn't give the Rocs a show-in. The Roc fans' hopes were high, but they kept a tight clutch on their bank rolls. No one was dope enough to bet without big odds.

The excitement passed over Hogan. He tried to share it, but he couldn't. He couldn't have shared it anyway, as it turned out, not in competition with the news that came to him the two days before the game.

THE moment he had awaited for was here. He'd be going over France next morning. Tucked back in the lonesome tail spot, he would have his guns for company. His pores began to squirt sweat like a lawn sprinkler. He didn't get much sleep that night.

The dawn was cold and clammy with English, early-morning mist. The other members of Hogan's crew shot funny glances at him as he joined the bulky figures on the apron. Gil Hogan, at least, *thought* the looks were strange. It may have been his imagination, but the glances appeared watchful, questioning, as if the men were wondering how far they could trust Gil Hogan if his football team mates turned thumbs down on him.

Hogan ditched these considerations, though, in favor of his own more important thoughts. They were jumbled, and he tried to sort them out. He wondered about the coldness of his hands. Was it caused by nervousness, or was he just plain yellow? He'd soon find out.

The skipper, Lieutenant Garth, who looked like a gangling, skinny kid, said quietly:

"Okay, men. Let's go."

Hogan crouched his way to a rear seat and settled himself with his feet in the gun stirrups. He fastened his belt, and made the routine check-up. The four rumbling motors eased into a full-throated roar—their final warm-up before the take-off. Then the brakes were off, and the great ship was taxiing to the strip.

Garth took it off the ground, up through the thin layer of mist, and into the slanting sunlight. He headed east. Hogan's throat was tight. No kidding, this time. This was a business hop. He was the only raw man in the crew. He wondered if this would be his last hop as well as his first. He thrust the thought aside, tried to relax. Impossible. He remained in a taut state of suspended animation.

He went on oxygen at ten thousand feet. A short time later they were thundering

along at twenty-five thousand. He could see other flying fortresses in the formation. He counted eighteen. There were a lot more where he couldn't see them. He felt a mite less lonesome.

France ahead. The Channel underneath. He heard routine talk through the inter-com. It was cold up here. He rested his hands on the gun handles. There was comfort in their feel. Then he heard the unexcited voice of the sergeant in the top turret:

"Here they come! A mess of them!"

Garth said, "Warm your guns!"

Hogan pressed the trigger and felt the jolt of the big fifty-caliber guns against his arms. It seemed to act as a massage, shaking the tightness from his muscles. It even lessened the tightness in his throat. He wondered about this in a curious, detached sort of way.

It was his last clear thought in many moments, because all hell broke loose after that. He could hear the pounding of machine guns up above him. That would be the Yank single seaters engaging the first wave of Nazi fighters. Then the Nazis started sifting down beneath the umbrella. They came at the big bombers like wicked, humming wasps.

There was a tight grin on Hogan's face. The eyes behind his goggles glowed like bright neon. His hands were easy on his guns, his feet in the stirrups light, but firm. He looked like a man who was having fun.

He got in a short burst at a flitting Messerschmitt. He threw the slugs with accuracy and care. He nicked the Messerschmitt, but not vitally. His tracers pointed to the Nazi's tail. Not bad, though, for a quick shot.

Nevertheless, he cursed his luck, and strained for another chance. He heard a ripping sound behind him. He jerked his head about and saw a line of jagged holes in the fuselage just past his shoulder. The burst had missed him by scant inches.

"Well I'll be damned," he said, then turned back to his business.

It seemed, in a vague way, that he'd been through all this before. There was nothing really new about it, nothing calamitous or paralyzing. It seemed that all the motions he was using now had been worked out in advance. They were a part of

him. Even the calm, terse conversation through the inter-com followed a set pattern.

Gil Hogan didn't tie these things together, though, until the raid had blazed to its conclusion, until the eggs were neatly laid, until the big ship, chewed up some but without casualties, turned its nose toward home.

He had a chance to dope things out then. He wasn't bringing back the satisfaction of a Nazi plane shot down, but he was bringing back something else. He gave this thing his sober thought, and found amazement in the things he'd learned.

To start with, he knew, now, that he wasn't yellow. He believed he'd known this all along, so that part was not vitally important. The thing that jolted him was the recollection of his former bull-headed belief that cooperation and coordination weren't really necessary in a ship like this.

Almost every detail of the action came back to him now, as if it had been recorded on a mental film. There had been no hurry, no excitement in the plane, which, without the previous training of its crew, would now have been a shambles. They had all worked like a well-drilled team, and the discipline had held rigidly even when their lives were in the balance. And then it dawned on Hogan that, just like the rest, he had fitted in when the chips were down.

He wondered if he had learned his lesson. The conjecture scared him, because he knew, without a doubt, how he could make sure. Maybe, though, it was too late for the experiment. Maybe he would never get the chance. Maybe Linton wouldn't use him in the game tomorrow. That thought scared him too. It was his only chance to stage a comeback at the base. Good tail gunners were dime a dozen. Good halfbacks—that was something else again. Right now, the Rocs and the Roc fans wanted a good halfback.

IT was a revelation to Gil Hogan to find how inextricably a man's destiny could be tangled up with a mere thing like a football game. Ordinarily he might have carved a solid place for himself in the army by being a good reliable tail gunner. That stage was passed. The only way he could make himself solid with these guys now,

was through the medium of football. It didn't make much sense, but that's the way it was.

He didn't get as much sleep that night as an owl. The next morning he felt as if he'd been on a binge the night before. When gametime pulled around he was about two jumps ahead of a straightjacket.

The Tanks invaded Roc territory in trucks and jeeps. There was a slew of them, superior, condescending, and, at times, downright insulting when they couldn't get their hard cash covered at decent odds. The Roc fans were not entirely happy.

The Rocs themselves, however, showed no signs of buckling. Getting ready for the game, they were grim and reasonably assured. Neither their grimness nor their limited conversation included Gil Hogan. He sat ignored upon the outskirts. His name was not on the starting line-up. He hadn't expected that it would be.

He found his usual parking place on the bench when the game got under way. The Tanks won the toss and elected to kick off, suggesting, thereby, that they would hold the Rocs in their tracks, take over from that point, and start piling up the score.

The Rocs, however, un intimidated, had their own ideas. Blake brought the kick-off back to the thirty-three yard line. Chuck Bender pounded through the surprised Tanks for eleven yards on the first down. Then, mixing his plays with shrewd generalship, he started whipping the Rocs down the field.

He took full advantage of the Tanks' over-confidence, and the Roc fans started to go wild. It was a premature hysteria, because the Tanks, recovering from their first surprise, began to tighten up.

Hogan saw something then that added to his misery. A little more power in the Roc backfield—just a little—would have made a lot of difference. Ned Gregg, at left half, was a good man, but he definitely lacked the class to compete on even terms against the Tanks. He ran interference well, but lacked imagination when it came to carrying the ball.

The inevitable happened with the slow deliberation of leaking oil. The Tanks got their feet upon the ground, faced facts, and began to move. They forced the Rocs

to kick just beyond the mid-stripe. Bender angled a nice one out of bounds on the Tank sixteen yard line. The ball came in fifteen yards, and the Tanks got down to work.

They had it. The yarns about them weren't exaggerated. They packed the speed and punch of a herd of water buffalo, with a-full of tricks to match their talent. They rolled eighty-five yards for a touchdown, then calmly kicked the extra point. It looked too easy.

Unfortunately, the Roc offensive crumpled badly against the protective armor of the Tanks' defense. The Rocs seldom got beyond the midfield stripe, while the Tanks were battering away almost constantly in the Rocs' trouble-zone. They got another score—a long field goal. That left the score 10-0 at the half.

It was a gloomy fifteen-minute rest period. All it needed was a body to turn it into a wake. The Rocs were too smart to kid themselves, or to be kidded. The handwriting was upon the wall. The Tanks were tough—too tough to handle. Gil Hogan stewed in a broth of helpless misery—the forgotten man.

He had even resigned himself to his unhappy lot when the squad headed for the field again. His surprise, therefore, was more complete, when Major Linton fell into step beside him. The major said:

"I hear you went on your first combat hop yesterday."

"Ye—yes sir," admitted Hogan through a tight throat.

"Learn anything?"

Something began to roller skate along Gil Hogan's nerves. He scarcely dared to hope that the coach was building up to something big. Hogan hauled in a deep breath.

"I learned a whole lot, sir," he stated quietly.

"Think you could apply it now?"

Gil Hogan took his time, and made an honest answer. "I don't know sir, but I'd like to try."

"Go in at left half," the major said abruptly, then lengthened his stride to join the men ahead.

Hogan's knees almost gave out on him. He had to stop and let them stiffen up. They strengthened fast, so fast he felt that he could reach the field in one more easy

jump. He wanted to yell, but he held his jaws clamped tight and tried to keep his head.

The magnitude of the job ahead was born upon him by the tight-faced disapproval of the other Rocs. He also heard a few howls of disapproval from the fans. Chuck Bender treated him impersonally. Gil Hogan might have been a water bucket, instead of a replacement. He kept his own eyes hard, and took up extra notches in the buckles of his belt and helmet.

The Rocs kicked off. Hogan went sprinting up-field with the rest. He saw the charging Tanks, saw them with some amazement, as if his eyes had undergone a change. He had no desire to crash head-on into them, just for the sake of seeing if he could take the punishment. That problem appeared settled. The pattern of the play was clean-out, sensible. Gil Hogan snorted with relief. His first great fear was laid to rest.

He worked his way in toward the runner, but when he saw he couldn't make the tackle he didn't clutter up the works. He left the job to those who were in position. Brick Hodge hauled the Tank down on the twenty-six yard line.

When the teams lined up, Hogan still had a lonesome feeling in the Roc backfield. He tried to forget it, though, and watch the play. The danger spot on the Tank offensive was Hank Boochee, a two hundred pound vat of poison who was apt to spill over almost anywhere.

The Tanks used a diamond formation in the backfield, with Boochee always in the deep spot as a constant threat. He took the ball now on a direct pass from center, and headed for his right end.

GIL HOGAN'S strategy, of the recent past, would have been to slash through and blast at Boochee with disregard for life and limb. It wasn't that way now. Hogan's instinct came back at him with the solidness of something tangible. He didn't try to understand it. He merely let it have its way with him.

He started fading with the play, until he saw that Brick Hodge had the end spot well covered. Hap Flynn, Roc left tackle, was also in the play, swinging out to help Brick Hodge.

Hogan, therefore, changed direction and

headed for the line of scrimmage, keeping himself well under wraps in order not to over-run Hank Boochee when Boochee cut in.

A navigating officer couldn't have solved the problem more neatly. When Boochee swerved and came roaring for the hole he'd hoped to find, it wasn't there. But Hogan was. He went in low and hard. He smacked Boochee before the latter knew what hit him. The play went for a four yard loss.

There were some funny looks on Roc faces. Puzzlement predominated. They couldn't dope it out, because obviously they weren't ready yet to give Hogan credit for anything but a lucky break. That didn't bother Hogan at the moment. He was too busy digesting a big lump of satisfaction.

The Tanks tried the left side of the line on the next play. Bender and Steel got in to hold the drive to a three yard gain. The Tanks, with a what-the-hell-do-we-care attitude, kicked on the third down, and Jeff Blake brought it back to the Roc thirty-eight yard line.

With the Rocs about to go on the offensive, Hogan's nerves began to jump again, but he shook them loose. He warned himself not to expect too much, not right away at any rate.

Bender called for a sweep around right end. Open plays were about the only things left for the Rocs to use. It was senseless to batter their brains out against the immovable Tank line.

Bender carried the ball himself. The play broke cleanly, and the line held long enough for the sweep to get under way. Hogan swung over fast to join the interference, but the run seemed covered like a blanket.

Hogan knew that Bender would have to risk a cut-in, and the stop watch in Hogan's head began to click. He watched the positions of the Tanks with narrowed eyes, trying to judge the exact instant Bender would cut in.

When the time arrived, Hogan cut in first, driving for the line like a small compact chunk of pig iron. He kept his head up, played for the break he wanted, and then judged things to a gnat's whisker.

He hit the first man low, almost at the shoe-tops with a wicked rolling block. He kept on rolling with another lightning turn

after the first Tank had soared above him, out of control.

Hogan came out the other side like a bowling ball, and hit the pin he was aiming at—another Tank who had been in tandem with the first. The second one tried a wild jump, but Hogan nailed him with a shoulder. That one did a ground loop too, and Bender sailed through for a twelve yard gain.

Bender didn't beat around the bush. When Hogan came up Bender demanded bluntly: "Did you dope out that double block deliberately?"

Hogan looked him in the eye and said, "I did. So what?"

Chuck Bender still saved words. He said, "I'm glad to have you back."

Hogan was lucky on the next play. There was a big wad of emotion in his throat, which made it hard for him to think. He scarcely heard the signal. He was temporarily useless.

Bender might have been smart enough to dope this out, because he called a signal in which Hogan had no active part. He sent Blake through on a quarter-back sneak for a six inch gain. Maybe Bender believed the sacrifice was worth it. Maybe he figured Hogan needed a small time to pull himself together. He glanced at Hogan in the next huddle. The dazed look on Hogan's face had left. His eyes were glittering like a Broadway sign. Bender said: "Okay, Gil. Try L-41."

It was a tricky play, calling for the sharpest timing—a fake reverse, followed by a short lateral. The lateral would come to Hogan who was then supposed to find his way off tackle.

The ball handling was a little sluggish, coming from the Rocs' involuntary knowledge that Hogan was the key man in the play. Nevertheless, there was a hole of sorts. Bender went in through the hole like a battering ram, and took out a Tank backfield man. Gil Hogan, then, was on his own.

It seemed incredible, how cool he felt. He was moving like forked lightning, but he had no sense of hurry. The whole play seemed like something in slow motion.

It was the Tanks' first bewildering experience with Hogan's amazing legs. Once more they did things that no normal legs were built for. The Tank backfield gave a

fine imitation of a bunch of farm boys trying to grab a greased pig at a county fair. Hogan simply seemed to ooze through them.

They finally herded him to the side line, and brought him down. Not, however, before Hogan had slithered through for eighteen yards. The Tanks promptly called time out to discuss this new phenomenon, and the Rocs began to look at Hogan as if they'd never seen him before.

When the play got under way, however, there was a difference in the Rocs. They acted, at first, like men who had just awakened from an awful nightmare, but they pulled themselves together fast. They began to stiffen at the seams. A new power even came miraculously into the line. The Roc fans, all grudge forgotten, began to bawl Gil Hogan's name.

Chuck Bender grabbed the moment like a master showman. Using the new flame in the Roc backfield as a blow torch, he scorched a blistering path toward the Tanks' goal line.

The Tanks couldn't stand the heat. Bender foxed them at the end by setting up a perfect spot for Hogan to dance his way across from the six yard line. The trick was that Hogan didn't even touch the ball. He faked an off-tackle slash. The Tanks ganged up to meet him, while Bender flipped a touchdown pass to Brick Hodge in the end zone. Then Bender kicked the extra point to make the score 10-7.

It wasn't in the books for an outfit like the Tanks to take that sort of a drubbing lying down. They had brains as well as brawn. They proved this promptly by studying Hogan's style and meeting it.

The Rocs gave no more impersonations of a juggernaut, but the difference from their first-half play was marked. They were aggressive now, dangerous, a constant threat. They were welded into a vicious, coordinated fighting unit. The added touch of power in the backfield turned the trick.

Gil Hogan, playing with a calm, cool fury, had never been happier in his life. It seemed that he had attained everything he wanted. The impression stayed until the minutes of the last quarter began to tick away. Then he knew he wanted something else. He wanted a victory for the Rocs, wanted to give the roaring fans the thing that they were yelling for.

It began to look, however, as if the Tanks would hold their three-point lead. They seemed content, now, to accomplish this. They poured in their fresh reserves, while Linton had to use his sparingly.

FIVE minutes left to go. The Rocs, obviously, were weakening. Seeing this, the Tanks got cocky with the urge to make the licking sounder than it was. They heaved a short pass from the Roc forty-four yard line. Gil Hogan had a hunch and played it. He hung back and snared the pass. He brought it back through an open field, dodging and twisting like a hunting bat. He even passed the safety man, but he lacked the sustained speed to carry him to the goal line. Hack Boocher hauled him down from behind on the twenty-six yard stripe.

The unexpected break acted on the Rocs like a shot in the arm. A new zip found its way into their weary muscles. They stiffened, slashed hard at the Tank line, and sent Chuck Bender through for twelve more yards.

With the ball on the fourteen yard line, Bender tried to shake Gil Hogan loose for an end-around. It almost worked—not quite. A Tank back came out of nowhere, and smeared Hogan at the line of scrimmage.

Bender passed on the next down, but a Tank back knocked it down. The Tanks, with their backs to the wall, were holding desperately. The overhead route seemed the only possible method of attack.

Bender gave it another try on the third down. It was sickeningly close, but Boocher was too tall. He could jump too high. He slapped it down in the end zone.

Time left for another pass. The Rocs expected one. So did the Tanks. But in the huddle, Bender snapped, "L-22! Fast now!"

His control of the men showed to advantage now—so did rigid discipline. They flushed from the huddle promptly, their faces set, showing no surprise.

Gil Hogan, for an instant, thought his heart was going to quit on him. L-22 was not a pass. It was Hogan's signal, a cut-back, smack into the opposing line.

Yet Hogan, to his own surprise, moved now. Discipline again. The ball was

snapped to Bender in the deep spot. He pretended to hunt for a receiver. The act was good, and the Tanks fell for it. They scattered wide to block the pass.

Bender waited until the Tank line came plowing through. Then faking panic, he started to carry the ball himself. They ganged on him, but at the final instant he flipped the pigskin back, and far over to the side.

Gil Hogan took it on the run. He whipped in toward the line of scrimmage. It was full of gaps. He found one and started through. There were still plenty of Tank tacklers left, recovering fast from their surprise.

Then figures like vindictive thunderbolts seemed to materialize from nowhere. Roc blockers, flashing in to carve a path for Hogan. It was cooperation at its highest, magnificent and self-less. These guys were giving everything they had to help him—and Hogan did the rest.

He ran as he had never run before. His legs did things a rabbit could have envied. He felt the heavy slap of many hands upon his legs, but all of them slid off. One hand clutched his jersey, and Hogan left a portion of the jersey in that hand.

He'd never known that fourteen yards could be so long. The double stripe seemed miles away. It was closer now! If his legs would just hold out—

A body crashed into his back. Arms closed about his legs like grappling irons. He gave a final desperate lunge—and broke clear. No chance to regain his feet, so he used his last momentum in a dive. He saw the goal line pass beneath him before he landed heavily.

He didn't get up right away. He didn't want to. He preferred the feel of the ball just then, and the sweaty, acrid odor of the pig-skin. He preferred to enjoy the moment, while he could, because he knew, at last, that he had everything he wanted.

Hogan kicked the extra point, and the game was over shortly after that. When they left the bedlam of the gridiron, Hogan was glad to get away. He found himself walking with Chuck Bender. He didn't know how it had come about, and he didn't care. He merely knew that that was how it *should* be.

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RUNBACK RODEO

by DAVID BRANDT

The shortest path to shoulder bars, Private Howell figured, was hurdling ten other guys with a pigskin cradled in your arms. Only trouble was Sgt. Gripes Hoolihan made a specialty of deflating headline hellions.

THERE wasn't much anyone could do about the great Chris Howell.

He simply took over one September afternoon at Camp Allegiance football

field after paying Deferment Jones, the laziest man in Company M, three bucks to take over his KP.

He had also taken on some fifty-odd



football hopefuls arriving for early practice for the regimental team tryouts.

Chris walked over to one group and stated coolly, "I'm Chris Howell. Played a little with the Rams in New York last season. Maybe I can show you fellows how to knock off the post championship."

Chris hadn't meant to be so cocky about it. It was just his way. Thirty-eight thousand fans at the Polo Grounds had given him a brand new car before the game with the Dodgers—a token of their pride in him as a glory player.

Chris had shown his appreciation by romping through the Flatbush Bums for three tallies, knocking them out of first place.

His reception on a dusty field at Allegiance was less appreciated. He got the frozen stare.

Chris tried to grin. "Well, now," he said. "I figured maybe you guys wouldn't mind a little boost. It takes plenty to make a winning team. I think I know how—with a little cooperation."

A thin wiry soldier who had played semi-pro on the West Coast tossed the pigskin he had been juggling to Chris.

"Okay, Howell," he cracked. "Suppose we start with lesson one." His tight little features crinkled with sly amusement. "Personally, I've never had the price to see big league stuff in action. It must be wonderful."

In his eagerness to make himself solid with this gang, Chris missed the bite in those words. This was his chance after eight miserable weeks trying to get used to army life.

His reputation as top hole man in the National League last season had preceded him to Camp Allegiance. There had been reporters and flash bulbs and publicity. It was all part of the football game to Chris after two seasons in the big money. But the impression had left his future gun-mates cold. The fact that Chris had tried too hard to make himself one of them. He spent money liberally; and talked too much—about football.

It didn't go where down-to-earth reality measured a man's ability to dish it out and take it on a soldier-to-soldier basis.

So Chris stepped into his new role with confidence.

"Okay, you guys," he told the grinning

group around him, "The first thing you've got to learn is how to handle this hunk of pigskin. Here!" He singled out the wiry semi-pro, Jumper Peters. "Start running down field."

"Right," Jumper said.

He winked at the others as he started trotting out into the sun-baked waste of the converted gridiron.

Keeping one eye on th him, Chris talked rapidly. "Just as in war, you've got to take to the air to win. Ground gains alone won't do it. Every one of you guys looking for a backfield berth has got to be able to peg 'em dead center when they count the most. Like this!"

Chris, watching Jumper fan out from the group to a distance of forty yards, drew back his arm and then with a powerful downward twist of his arm in coordination with his broad shoulder, sent the ball whizzing down the alley. There was plenty of zip behind that peg. Jumper saw it coming, but not fast enough. The pigskin smacked him shoulder high and bounced free.

It was neat pegging and there were a few murmurs of admiration.

"Just a sample of what you fellows can do with a little practice," Chris explained.

Chris was beginning to warm up now. He talked long and enthusiastically, outlining the vital factors in handling the pigskin. He had almost forgotten that he was wearing o.d.

THAT was about the time First Sergeant Gripes Hoolihan the toughest topkick in the regiment, came striding toward the group with blood in his eye.

And it was about the same time that a slim officer stepped from a parked blitz buggy at the edge of the field where he had been watching Chris take over *his* job. The officer wore two silver shoulder bars and walked with a limp. He had been at the breakthrough at El Guetar Pass in Tunisia.

His name was Tracy Mason and he had received a dose of tracer bullets and a twist of metal. On rest furlough, he had been assigned to Camp Allegiance on detached service to take over football for the next two months.

Gripes Hoolihan reached the group first. The classic scowl on his bulldog features

magnified to ferocious proportions as he spotted the quest of a personal thirty minute search.

It was unfortunate that he stepped in the way of a bullet pass Chris heaved at a lanky Texan who had hopes of grabbing a back position.

The ball struck Gripes in the head, knocking off his service cap.

There was a shuddering silence as Gripes very carefully retrieved his cap from the dust, slapped it against his thigh, then jammed it back on his head.

He surveyed the group silently then let out a bandsaw snarl, "HOWELL!"

Chris grinned cheerfully. "Have an accident, Sergeant?"

Gripes held his temper, but beads of angry sweat dripped from his bullish forehead. "I've wasted half an hour trying to find you, Howell," he spat. "Captain Trevor told me to bring you in dead or alive!" He paused and glanced at the others as a snicker went up. "Frankly, I'm not particular which one it is."

The grin faded from Chris' face. "Brother, if this is what I think it is, all is forgiven."

"All is NOT forgiven," Gripes disagreed. "Or have you forgotten, this is the army, Mister Jones! In the first place, you don't duck KP at three bucks per. In the second place I'll have a special job just for your remarkable talents. In the third place—after the Captain is finished with you."

Chris shook his head sadly. "Sergeant, I'd give a month's pay to have you in a football uniform on the opposing team for just one teeny weeny quarter."

Gripes' classic scowl, dripping from ear to ear, appeared again. "I'm afraid, sweetheart, that you'll never get the chance—or the time!"

Chris sighed. He turned to the little group. "Well, fellows, duty calls, I guess. Business before pleasure. But I'll be back."

"We can hardly wait," Peters cracked.

Hoolihan's voice, snapping the group to attention broke in. Captain Tracy Mason came limping over. He returned the salute Gripes gave him for the group and said, "All right, carry on, men." To Chris he added, "Your demonstration was quite interesting, soldier. I'd like to see a little

more some time if you don't mind."

"Don't worry, sir, you will," Chris replied.

Mason raised a thin eyebrow. Now that he had a closeup of Chris, the ex-Ram star looked vaguely familiar.

Although puzzled over the identity of the silver bars, Chris was anxious to keep that appointment with Captain Trevor. It meant a lot to him.

Captain Tom Trevor was West Point and strictly army. He was in a court martial-mood when Chris entered his office. The private executed a fairly sloppy salute, and said, "Private Howell reporting sir."

"We'll try that again, Howell!" he snapped.

Chris almost snapped his arm repeating the salute. Then he waited stiffly erect for Trevor to call the signals.

The stocky West Pointer let him sweat it out at attention. He glanced at several official communications on the desk re: one Private Christopher Howell, then picking up one imposing document bearing the red border of the War Department's inner sanctum, said, "I have here a letter from Washington stating that certain influential friends have been trying to acquire a commission for you, Howell."

Chris' eyes lighted for an instant. Then spotting the coldly unemotional expression on Trevor's face, stiffened.

"It might interest you to know, Howell," Trevor continued, "that in this man's army it is not customary to go over the head of your immediate superior."

"It has not been my intention to go over your head, sir," Chris said steadily, sensing his air castles were dangerously imperilled if not already crumbling. "In civilian life, sir, it is good common sense to make the best of a situation and get the most out of it. Action was started to help me obtain my commission months before I was inducted. Surely, sir, it is not my fault if the results of that action have just come to the attention of the proper authorities."

Trevor played with a pencil for a moment then said slowly, "In the army a fellow doesn't hold out for—say, a better contract—for the season. Now let me get a few things over to you. This isn't pro football down here, Howell. And we

don't pay off monthly in four figures. I saw you play with the Rams when I was in New York last fall. You were plenty good, Howell. But if you think you can ride into a commission on the strength of sports headlines and a pair of husky shoulders to smash the opposition to its knees, take another guess, mister."

Chris felt sick inside. It was pretty clear that Trevor, like everyone else, had taken the wrong slant about him. But there was no sense trying to smash that barrier with words. If that was the way they wanted things—okey—he could get just as tough.

"Maybe I didn't get you right, sir," Chris said in a hard voice. "That last statement of yours, Captain. Meaning exactly what, sir?"

The captain never batted an eye although he itched to smack a few teeth down this big fellow's throat. West Point hadn't trained him to carry a chip on his shoulder.

"Meaning, Private Howell," he said pleasantly, "that you're going to get your chance at a commission the hard way! You're no better than the next fellow and you've got to prove it to me! And that is the advice handed down to you from Division Headquarters."

Chris' world stood still for a moment. He rode that rude shock with all the sudden fierce anger he had displayed in that last Ram game when Tubby Myers of the Pirates had tried to stop his touchdown gallop in the waning minutes of the final championship quarter.

"With your permission, sir," he said softly, "I'd like to take a crack at it—the hard way!"

Trevor smiled faintly for the first time. "That," he said, "should be quite interesting to watch."

Chris took a deep breath. It helped him to control his breaking temper. Two months ago he would have snapped this little guy with twin silver bars in two like a match stick between his powerful fingers. At this moment, Private Chris Howell figured it would be very bad politics.

"With your permission, sir," he said steadily, "I have about three dollars' worth of KP to make up."

Trevor returned the crisp salute and with thoughtful expression watched the

perfect about-face and broad back walking out of his office.

First Sergeant Gripes Hoolihan popped in several minutes later.

"Well, sir," he said eagerly, "do I toss the book at him?"

Trevor shook his head. "I'd prefer to watch him write it, Hoolihan."

Gripes scratched his head. He had four hash marks on his sleeve and liked his orders direct—when they made sense.

"Maybe, Captain, I can add a couple of chapters to that book, you're figuring on," he said. "You see, Captain, I traveled in pretty fast football company at Fort Sill last year." And added modestly, "I ain't half bad, either."

A BIG fellow, topping Chris' five ten by two inches, was whistling through his teeth and squatting on a flour barrel peeling spuds when Chris banged through the screen door of the company mess hall. His whistling stopped abruptly.

"Looks like your aces back to back lost out, pal," he said. "I been saving a sink fulla pots ever since Gripes barged in here looking for you an hour ago."

"Thanks, Jones," Chris snapped. "Just what the doc ordered."

Deferment Jones started to whistle again, broke off abruptly. "About that three skins, pal," he said. "There's no rebate. Fact is," he added, "I got the bee put on me by the mess sergeant. He has a date in town tonight. Promised me a rain check on my next KP. 'Sides, I can't keep in trim for football with dishpan mitts."

Chris looked at the hundred and ninety pound soldier from Chicago with fresh interest.

"Football, eh?"

Deferment nodded. "Coached the outfit at the plant where I worked. Nice side meat. Got three deferments because of it." He sighed. "Draft board finally promoted me to 1-A."

"Well," Chris said, "maybe things won't be so dull around here after all."

Deferment, squinting through the kitchen screen door, chuckled.

"You can say that again, pal. Here comes Gripes Hoolihan, and pal, he looks loaded for bear."

On Monday morning following a week-end of KP and a thousand barracks win-

dows that suddenly required special washing, Chris requested permission to attend afternoon football practice. He was actually amazed when Gripes gave it to him.

"Wouldn't have you miss it for anything, sweetheart," Gripes said, mysteriously.

Capt. Trevor was nobody's fool, either. Chris hadn't fooled him for a second. He had figured out that in Chris' shoes he would have done the same thing, try to grab for the brass ring with his best weapon, football.

If Chris Howell expected to cause a sensation on the regimental football field, he got a big shock.

After that first grandstand play the other day, they were all waiting for him.

Chris discovered that the officer with the limp was the famous Tracy Mason of Army's unbeatable backfield of '42. "Believe you played a bit of pro, didn't you, Howell?" he asked when Chris reported to him.

Trevor had taken the trouble to tip off Mason.

Chris went on the defensive. "We took the league title last year," he said angrily.

Mason grinned. "You should be a big help around here," he said smoothly.

Chris swore under his breath. He'd make Mason eat those words before long.

There were other surprises for Chris. One of them was Gripes Hoolihan—in football togs. He was playing guard position on a trial first team.

Chris didn't discover it until the tail end of afternoon practice. Smarting under the insult of being shoved on a tentative second team for a brief scrimmage, he took a bad pass from center, and from his position at left half, drove right for a hole between tackle and guard. His cleated shoes chopped vicious gouts of dirt from beneath them as he dug in, head lowered, and went smashing for a tangle of arms and legs.

He never quite got started. A flying chunk of dynamite exploded against his thighs and he went down, smacking into the dirt with a jarring impact that tingled the entire length of his spine. He finally rolled over and looked up at the grinning, sweaty features of Gripes Hoolihan.

"What was that crack about giving a month's pay to have me on the opposing

team for one teeny weeny quarter, sweetheart?" Gripes inquired.

Chris shook himself loose and got to his feet. He could feel his temper hitting a new high. "I never figured you'd take me up on that Sergeant," he said solwly. "The pleasure, I'm afraid, is going to be all mine."

Gripes roared with delight but Chris cut him short.

"I'm sending a package your way on the next delivery."

Chris' teammates gave him plenty of opportunity to carry the groceries. Their dislike for him was subordinate to the pleasure and half hope of actually seeing Hoolihan get a pasting. There were very few of them that hadn't come in contact with the four striper's stern discipline.

The pass from center was near perfect. Chris felt a savage delight as he rammed the ball close to him and went ramrodding for the line. Flesh smacked him and fell away as clutching fingers failed to hold eight pent-up weeks of fury. It was dig . . . dig . . . dig . . . with the tops in physical perfection cracking a path through willing but soft flesh.

Gripes was waiting for the one man steamroller in a half crouch, ready to lunge at Chris. He was just as anxious to smack down the cocky buck private. But with all his army football, he was no match for the tough, experienced pro.

Chris didn't pull his punches. He drove savagely at the leering topkick, beating Gripes to the draw. His left shoulder hit Gripes hard enough to crack a rib. He could almost feel the shudder run through the topkick. He kept driving and digging. Gripes' body performed a half arc as he went over and smashed flat on his back. Chris stepped hard on his stomach as he went on over his victim, right through to the last man, whom he knocked sprawling with a vicious straight arm blow. Trotting a few steps into the clear, he pulled up. Half turning, he saw Mason who had come over to watch the scrimmage. Chris deliberately tossed him the pigskin with a contemptuous underhand twist.

"Not much of a workout, sir," he said, hardly a trace of short breath in his voice.

Tracy Mason's face was stony, almost unfriendly, as he snapped back, "I'm hoping we can provide sufficient opposition for

you, Howell, by the time the season starts rolling." And added, "You're much too good for the local competition."

Chris sensed the old challenge. He realized, too, that here as well as everywhere else, he had gotten off to a bad start. It was too late for him to pull in his horns, however. This was his show and he had to carry through with it.

Gripes was just getting to his feet when Chris went back to his side of the scrimmage line. Gripes was having a hard time breathing and looked somewhat battered. He had an ugly scowl for Chris.

"Not bad, soldier," he spat. "You're really as tough as you sounded off about."

Chris thought he detected a slight glint of respect in the admission.

"I take and give a lot of punishment, Sergeant," he replied.

"Might be able to do something about that, too," Gripes snapped.

Chris shrugged. He had just about reached the point where he was ready for anything the army could dish out. But he could feel the hostile antagonism of his team mates. That wasn't so good. Chris hadn't figured on that.

He discovered in the next few days that he had but one friend on the field, big, lazy, good natured Deferment Jones who came out for football the following afternoon.

As a fullback he was anything but lazy. Chris found that out fast enough.

He had been transferred to the first string. Deferment was backing up the second string defense when Chris came charging through on a line plunge. He knocked aside an ambitious tackle, was on his way for a nice gain, when a hundred and ninety pounds of granite smacked him thigh-high and dumped him with a savage, twisting motion. Chris felt that terrific jar as he hit dirt. Then he rolled over and found Deferment unwrapping himself from the ex-star.

"Not bad," Chris grunted. "You didn't learn that in a sandlot."

Deferment grinned modestly. "I once figured I'd become a big shot like you, Howell," he said. "The money looked good and the hours weren't bad." He sighed. "Gave it up, though. Too much wear and tear and no trade-in value."

Chris grinned back. "Say Deferment,

how about a movie tonight?" he suggested.

Deferment shook his head. "No soap. No dough."

Chris started to offer a treat, backtracked in a hurry.

"Loan you a buck till pay day," he said.

Deferment's face brightened. "Sold American!"

Chris started to feel good. He was cracking the ice.

Gripes' sour voice dragged him back to the dusty football field.

"Drag it, sweetheart," he called. "I got a sergeant's meeting in an hour and the tea is getting cold."

Chris sighed. Since he had landed on first string, he had lost further opportunity to test the endurance of Gripes. But he had to admit that Gripes played hard, rough football that would be worth plenty of yardage once the scheduled started.

II

FOR some strange reason, Gripes Hoolihan became almost human during the next two weeks. Chris drew no extra-curricular duties.

Chris was suspicious. But he had no time to speculate on the odd behavior of Gripes. Nor did he suspect that Trevor had had something to do with it as well. He had promised Chris the same break as anyone else.

When Chris wasn't on the machine gun range or toddling through the countryside with full field pack, he was listening to the curt orders of Tracy Mason trying to whip a team in shape with the opener against the Engineers in a few days.

And he and Deferment hit it off pretty well. Deferment could see the really good points in Chris and in his own quiet way suspected that companionship was what Chris wanted most.

But Chris stuck to his original role. He was good and made no bones about it. He knew he was heartily disliked for his superior attitude on the football field but he could feel, too, their grudging respect for his pro background and the chances it gave them of taking the Division title and maybe a crack at the all-Army playoffs in New York.

Almost the entire division turned out for the opening game. Chris had KP de-

tail that Saturday morning. Gripes took his name off the duty roster.

"I don't get it, this change of heart, Sergeant," Chris said. "Especially knowing of your fond devotion for my welfare."

Gripes scowled. "Look, pal, I'm not ladling it out with a silver spoon because Gripes Hoolihan loves you. It's this way. Comes football, comes the great Chris Howell puffing and blowing and snorting how damned good he is. Pal, I'm giving you every break. And I certainly don't figure on no alibi muffs because I'll be in there slugging and waiting to see how you stack up under real fire."

Chris nodded. "What I said before still goes, Hoolihan. I'd make it two months' salary if you could swap sides this afternoon. Just to prove how good I am—and ram it down your throat!"

Gripes tapped lightly against the sergeant stripes sewn to his left sleeve.

"These, Butch," he declared, "cut you down to knee length britches. I aim to see you wear 'em for quite some time to come. A football game doesn't last forever, you know."

Chris grinned mockingly. He intended to do a little cutting down himself when his chance came. But right now he had more important business. He had accepted Trevor's challenge to grab a pair of gold bars the hard way.

The Engineers looked just as big and tough as their reputation. While Chris spiraled lazy passes to Deferment to limber up, he eyed them with interest. There was Big Mike Ganella from Pitt . . . '42; Johnny Reed who had sparkplugged Western Tech in '41 to an intersectional title; Bugs Prentiss who had been high school coaching after the famous Notre Dame backfield combine of '41 had been broken up; and lastly, Avalanche Dean with whom Chris had tangled for two seasons in national league competition. A tough, seasoned backbone this outfit had. The guy who had grabbed off that gang from Belvoir Reception Center had done a sweet job of hijacking.

Chris was a little worried about his own chances. The infantry eleven was going to be pretty shabby in high class ball. A guy couldn't knock off a set of gold bars without ten more to help open the holes for him to go through.

A sizzling pass bounced off his chest. He came back to earth with a grunt. Deferment was laughing at him.

"Hey, wake up," he chided. "You'd think this was going to be a funeral or something."

"It has all the makings—for us," Chris said, walking over to pick up the ball.

Pink Carter, the 207 pound center Tracy Mason had pried loose from surgical technician duties at the regimental medical detachment, caught the remark.

"If it's a funeral you want, Howell," he snapped, "I hope I'll have the pleasure of burying you." He was sizzling. Chris had made a few cracks about his lumbering style of play the second afternoon of practice. Pink didn't look like the kind of a guy who had turned down an offer from big league money two years ago. Pink had decided it would be more fun to help coach the local high school team when he wasn't busy running the town's weekly newspaper.

A MIGHTY roar went up from the great crowd of khaki clad spectators lining either side of the white chalked field as the two teams went out to positions. No college spectacle ever received a more enthusiastic welcome. The division band blared out familiar football songs as Gripes Hoolihan, top-holing for the Infantry Blues, went forward to meet the Engineers' captain.

The Ditch Diggers won the toss and elected to kick. The Blues fanned out over their own territory and waited for the whistle.

A yell went up from ten thousand throats as Big Mike Ganzella got off a pretty end-over-end boot that went down to the Blues' zero stripe. Chris took the ball in a perfect catch and went high-tailing for pay dirt.

The Engineers covered fast. They cracked the Blues defense zone and made a clean break-through. Chris stiff-armed a tackler and cut for the sidelines. Deferment mashed out another. Then a horde of Engineers literally trampled Gripes Hoolihan and two more Infantrymen and swept in to trap Chris on his own thirty. It was Avalanche Dean, a hundred and eighty pound steel-framed bolt of hell, who knocked him sprawling after Chris had batted off a shoestring swipe at him and was

making a powerful bid to crack the trap.

Chris smacked hard with half a dozen forms piling on top. He was grinning, however, when the referee plowed him free and took the ball.

"Still the old murderer, eh, Avalanche?" Chris mocked.

The former Prate back helped him to his feet. "Hi ya, Chris," he greeted. "Long time no see. Looks like an interesting afternoon ahead."

"I still owe you one for that busted rib," he said cheerfully. "That was one of my bad days."

Avalanche spat on his hands and rubbed them together. He had lost two front teeth three plays before he had cracked Chris' rib in that wild melee of a final game at the Polo Grounds two years back.

Jumper Peters, who had snagged the quarterback post, was calling signals for the Blues. In the huddle, Chris saw Pink Carter give him the eye, then glance over at Chris.

Jumper's helmeted head bobbed slightly.

Chris was suspicious. Something was stirring. But there was no time to worry about it yet.

The line was back in position now. Carter, humped over the ball, waited for Jumper's number sequence and then with a snap of his wrists, bulletted the pigskin to Chris.

Sweep around left end.

The Engineers tried to crack the front wall. One man got through. But Hoolihan went after him with savage delight, crushing him flat with the weight of his lunge. It gave Chris a chance to get his feet moving. He cut around end with Jumper and Deferment paving the way. Two Engineers smacked a hole in tackle, however, burst through, and took the interference out of the play with speed and dispatch. Chris saw that end sweep starting to bottle up, cut in fast to ram through tackle. His shoulder smashed aside a lunging form. Then he was twisting and weaving for a break through the covering secondary. Reed and Bugs Prentiss were waiting for him. He was easy prey without interference and went down hard after he had picked up four yards on the play.

Chris came up hot and angry.

"The interference around here smells," he snarled at Deferment.

Deferment merely grinned lazily. "I thought we did pretty good," he said.

Gripes had his classic scowl back with him. "Stop squawking and play ball, sweetheart," he growled. "I lost an inch of skin off my jaw. What more do you want?"

Jumper mixed the signals. Then Pink's pass from center was low. The play was Chris again. He scooped up the ball, juggled a second, and hunching his head deep against his shoulders, dug in for an off tackle smash.

There was no deception. It was straight, hard football. Tracy Mason hadn't expected a wonder team in three and a half weeks. But unexpectedly, the infantry front wall folded. The Engineers swarmed through the gaps. They closed in for the kill. It looked easy only they hadn't figured on Chris. The ex-Ram hit with everything he had, driving . . . driving . . . fighting to smash into the wedge he was cracking. He kept battering his way foot by foot until four red jerseyed tacklers finally dragged him down.

The play was good for six yards. And the Division sell-out yelled a mighty approbation. Chris had made it look good.

He pushed Avalanche Dean on his face. Avalanche rubbed a bruised knee for a second then grunted, "Still playing for keeps, eh, fella?"

Chris, watching the linemen dragging out the chain to measure for a first down, said coolly, "Better stay clear, guy. I got me a ball game to win."

Jumper growled at Pink, "I love that personal touch, don't you?"

In the huddle, Hoolihan said, "It's thirty-six through that right tackle. I'm carrying." He half glanced at Chris. "Can't do any worse than you, wonder boy."

Chris spat, "Maybe you know how to drum up a little interference!"

Hoolihan actually grinned. "Football doesn't last twenty-four hours a day," he reminded grimly.

HE got enough good interference to crack through tackle. He battered his way in—and ran into trouble when the Ditch Digger secondary crowded over to bottle him up: Before they could smack him down, Chris lunged through the breach and crashed savagely into Bugs Prentiss

and Johnny Reed seconds before they tried to smash Hoolihan flat. The fury of Chris' head-on block hit the jackpot sending his two victims slashing into the dirt. Deferment skidded out from behind Hoolihan to flatten another tackler. Hoolihan, quick to utilize the advantage drove a few more pounds of pressure into his pistoning legs and went into payload stride, sweeping out around the shattered secondary defense of the Engineers. With the crowd yelling for a touchdown, he picked up huge gouts of yardage, broke across the mid-stripe, and bit fourteen yards into enemy territory.

It looked like a clear break-through, but Avalanche Dean who had cut over fast from left defense made a desperate shoe-string tackle on the Engineers' thirty-four. Once he got his fingers into infantry flesh, he hung on, half twisted his body for vicious leverage, and brought Hoolihan crashing into the dirt.

On the sidelines, Mason grinned with modest pride. It was a nice piece of broken field running. But he hadn't kidded himself any. He had also seen the nice blocking Chris and Deferment had pulled off to make that gain possible.

The Blues were jubilant and Hoolihan got plenty of encouragement from his team mates. Chris found himself out in the cold. Not that he cared right now. He had sense enough to realize he needed ten other guys to help him grab a pair of gold bars.

The sergeant was smugly pleased with himself. Although he realized that Chris had a lot more on the ball than he did, and it did him good to go the ex-Ram star one better.

Chris took the ball on a reverse from Jumper on the next play but was stopped cold. His interference had been slapped down hard before he even got moving. It was a three yard loss.

Chris held an angry silence. He thought he had things figured out pretty well. There was no open rebellion being shown but they were laying down all along the line every time he carried the ball. It was the old squeeze play, with the funnel opening slowly, in the direction of the bench. Chris had seen it work before in the pro loop.

The Engineers held for two more stone-

wall attempts to pierce their outer fortifications. And those two plays decided Chris' plan of action. Jumper had made four yards through tackle behind plenty of willing interference. Chris himself had been nailed again when Bugs Prentiss and Avalanche Dean cracked through the Blues line in plenty of time to drop him cold.

Deferment, backing up for kick formation, grunted, "Well, Chris, guess I gotta go to work again."

The ball had hardly left Pink's fingers when a swarm of linemen plowed through. This time nothing could have held back the Engineers. Deferment tried a hurried boot. His heavy leg swung back but before he could connect squarely with the pigskin three pairs of outstretched hands knocked down the ball. It rolled crazily along the ground.

Out of the welter of diving figures, Big Mike Ganella, cracking the line for the first time while Johnny Reed covered safety, fell on it. Chris, trying to recover for the Blues, was a second late. Big Mike's shoulder knocked him sprawling as he dove for the ball.

The Engineers wasted little time. With Reed snapping the signals, their backfield moved into position. Prentiss took the ball on a spinner, crashed ahead after a three man interference spearhead through a gaping hole between right tackle and guard, and advanced five yards before Chris banged away the blockers and let Hoolihan and Deferment nab the carrier. Deferment got there first. There was nothing lazy about the way he seemed to curl his long arms around the thick thighs of the former Notre Dame chunk of dynamite and then pour on the power that yanked him flat.

Deferment came up grinning.

"Never let it be said that I left the dirty work to the first sergeant," he called over to Hoolihan.

"Remind me about it tomorrow," Gripes said, "when I start handing out the medals."

The Engineers came back fighting. Reed took the ball on a bullet pass from center, faded to his own thirty five, and promptly rifled the pigskin to Dean, loping for the east sidelines. Avalanche took it on a dead run, cut around an anxious tackler, and went on to the forty-nine. Jumper Peters

almost got him. But Dean's twenty pound advantage weathered the flanking lunge that couldn't hold on. A vicious stiff arm blow knocked it loose.

With ten thousand soldiers screaming for blood, Avalanche picked up his heels, outdistanced two frantic Blues linemen, and went galloping for pay dirt.

Chris picked himself off the ground about the same time Avalanche removed the goose egg from the Engineers' tally sheet. Three of the Diggers had hit him simultaneously to remove his threat of upsetting their carefully planned tally move.

The Blues were pretty glum as they trotted down to the dividend stripe for conversion.

Chris was just beginning to get fighting mad. The best in him always came out when the odds were tilted.

Big Mike Ganella was going to try the kick.

Chris timed the pass from the Digger center to perfection. He was in motion, lunging hard and low, a fraction of a second after the ball took off. Chris knifed through left tackle, cracked a crouching figure out of his way, and leaped high in the air just as Mike's toe sent the pigskin on a goal post ride. Chris barely touched the ball—just enough to help it over the bar and through the uprights!

Big Mike grinned at him. "Thanks, pal. Nothing like helping a buddy."

"Nice miss," Deferment consoled.

Chris spat a trickle of blood from between split lips.

"Hell!" he cried, "if I got a little help I'd show you how football is really played."

"Listen to him," Jumper cracked. "You'd think he was paying off in golden eggs."

"That's enough!" Gripes interrupted angrily. "Either you guys cut this damned petticoat slapping or you're kindergarten bound." He turned on Chris. "What's ailing you? You've done nothing but yap ever since you donned them fancy pants. This is the army, pal, and you'll play army style and like it. The grandstand is out."

"You can say that again," Pink echoed.

Chris swallowed his tongue but his fingers were itching for trouble. He had certainly bitten off a tough chunk when he had told Trevor he was going to climb the ladder—the hard way!

Deferment came over and slapped Chris

across the back. "I once got my fingers caught in the old man's private stock," he said placidly. "I sure learned a lot of horse sense when Pop set me straight."

The friendly hint beat against the steel shutters of Chris' ears. He had always been the stubborn kind.

III

BIG MIKE GANELLA made the kick-off. It was a pretty coffin-corner boot. Common sense would have permitted the pigskin to crash out of bounds but Chris had flung caution to the wind. He came over from his position to the left of the goal posts and yelled out, "I'll take it!"

Hoolihan, who had deliberately stepped out of the way of that end-twisting oval, tried to stop him. Chris shouldered him aside, lost track of the ball for a precious second, then tried to grab the punt as it came down twisting erratically. It struck his fingers and bounced free!

The crowd roared. Their tempo of excitement increased as Chris lunged after the ball, scooped it up on the one yard line and started a wild run back.

He eluded two anxious tacklers, twisted free from a third, and suddenly reversing his field, made a bid for open territory. Five . . . ten . . . fifteen . . . twenty yards . . . he was still going. Twisting, dodging, stiff-arming the Ditch Diggers with ferocious fury. Deferment Jones, pacing the sensational drive, threw the full weight of his lunge at Bugs Prentiss who was trying to crack interference for the tackle; smacked him dead center and rolled over and away from him from the terrific impact. Bugs stayed down.

Chris was hitting full stride now. His experience in cracking tough pro adversaries made a shambles of the green Engineers. He went on up the field fighting every inch of the way. Avalanche Dean finally nailed him with a bruising hip tackle on the Engineers' forty-one.

Chris actually enjoyed that spine tingling contact as he went down. It was big league stuff.

Soldiers cohorts of the Blues were yelling for a touchdown. In the infantry huddle, Chris snapped, "How about it, Hoolihan? Do I get a little team work?"

Gripes scowled. "Why, you concited lug! What do you want, a couple of 155's? This ain't big time, sonny. You're getting plenty of help."

Chris almost reached out to bang a little light into Gripes. Why, the dumb palooka didn't even have the sense to know when this outfit was laying down on him when Chris lugged the leather!

And Jumper was smart enough to keep it that way. He deliberately called the play at Chris. Giving him plenty of exercise and no alibis!

Chris left a badly battered Engineer tackle gasping for breath as he slammed into the line in a futile effort to crack the opposition. Reed and Ganella mowed him down after two yards.

Chris got up from the tangle, limping. He had banged his right knee pretty hard. Hoolihan called time out.

He used the breather to shape a fresh offensive. The extent of Chris' injury appeared not to worry him.

"We take to the air," he said. "Howell, I want a few samples of that million dollar arm you've been tossing around."

"Suits me," Chris grunted. "Can't do any worse."

But his mind was busy planning. Once they moved down into paydirt, he intended to collect the first installment on a pair of gold bars.

Pink's pass from center couldn't have been better. Chris grabbed the leather, faded, then deliberately made a feint for a sweep around left end. The Ditch Diggers were sucked in. Before they could swing back to frontal attack, Chris spun and raced back far behind the line of scrimmage.

The surprise play gave Gottlieb, stocky left end who had played one season at Syracuse, plenty of time to cut out into the open. Chris ducked a tackler, took his own time, then slammed a hard one far down the field at Gottlieb. It was a forty-yard peg.

Gottlieb had to stretch for it but no one was near enough to spoil the completion. He dug in and started on a touchdown gallop, trying to stretch that peg into six points. But a two-year layoff in a Brooklyn law office had cut his speed. Ganella, backing up the line, chopped away that yardage spread and with lumbering seven

league boots, overtook the badly winded end to slam him earthward on the Engineers' twenty-three.

It was the first infantry break through into real scoring territory.

Chris got set. He knew that Jumper would drop his number like a sizzling coal now.

He guessed right.

Jumper signaled for a lateral, Hoolihan to Deferment with a feint at the left wall to draw in the Engineers' secondary.

The play might have clicked—except for Chris. Hoolihan snagged the center pass, went through the motions of a line buck, then half twisting his body, spun the ball over to Deferment hulking it for right end. But Chris, who had purposely hung back from the play, leaped up and intercepted the lateral. Pulling the pigskin to his stomach, he spun away from a single tackler and dashed through a wide gap at dead center. It was neat timing with the Digger secondary being sucked into proper defense position for the orthodox play.

The soldier crowd saw this startling maneuver. Chris went through standing up, seemed to shudder to a second's stop as Big Mike Ganella cut back desperately to snare him, swiveled around the lunging form, then raced on through and into the open.

With another ten yards to go, Johnny Reed might have nailed Chris from his safety position. His long diving tackle groped empty air as Chris evaded outflung fingers and went six more yards to a touchdown.

The blast of the whistle ended the quarter almost immediately

CHRIS was grinning as khaki spectators howled themselves hoarse. He had come into his own at last. The payoff sounded mighty sweet to him.

For once the sergeant had no crack to make. Six points were six points regardless of how they were gotten.

Chris' other teammates displayed a grudging respect for the way he had pulled off the play.

Deferment alone was vociferous. "Nice going, pal. Now we're cooking with something besides kerosene."

"Thanks," Chris replied. "It was time

someone gambled on a pair of loaded dice." He looked over at Pink.

The big center shot back at him, "Thanks for the six skins, Howell. The guys certainly appreciate it."

Chris laughed. "If you'll sing real pretty, Fat Boy, I'll add another birthday candle."

Hoolihan gave him the chance. He had secretly piled every dime the outfit would loan him on the victory peg. An artillery top striper had given him five to three odds.

With Hoolihan snarling encouragement, the line settled down to the business of holding back the Engineers long enough for the conversion. Pink evidently had dropped his personal animosity for the moment. They needed that precious point.

The pass to Jumper, holding the ball, was a perfect bullet spiral.

The Engineers never got near Chris. He took two steps swung a hard right toe, and sent the pigskin squarely between the posts to tangle up the score at 7-all.

Chris played like a madman the entire second quarter. The Blues were held to nearly fifteen minutes of grueling defense. Two costly fumbles put their backs to the wall but they held tenaciously with Hoolihan snarling and biting out acid sarcasm that stiffened their morale and made them grim with the desire to cram the whole patter down the topkick's hoarse throat.

Deferment unexpectedly came into his own. An inspired boot sent the ball safely out of danger four times after the Diggers had lost scoring footholds in futile attempts to crack the wavering Blues line.

During half time Tracy Mason had little to say.

"You're not doing bad," he told them. "I don't expect miracles. Just play the breaks when they come your way. I think you can take this outfit."

Chris, listening quietly, half smiled. He knew as well as Mason did that a green team with barely enough practice to harden soft muscles, would start cracking before sixty minutes of play were over. Only the vigorous army routine had kept them alive out there.

The second half was a furious onslaught of power versus guts. The Engineers threw their backfield veterans relentlessly against the stubborn but slowly yielding wall of Blue defenders. Trouble started with a vengeance.

Deferment got off a strong boot into the enemy ten yard zone. Johnny Reed made the catch and behind strong interference swept upfield. Four unsuccessful attempts were made by the infantry to smash through to knock the quick-footed ball toter off his feet. Finally Pink Carter, lumbering headlong into the trio of surviving interference, broke through to flatten Reed on his own forty stripe with a bone crushing tackle.

The Ditch Diggers took to the air on the first play. A short bullet pass from Reed to the left end carried to the infantry thirty five. Chris saw another coming from the familiar pattern of backfield maneuvers with Reed fading back after a fake reverse.

Chris' instinct carried him to the right flank. His guess was correct. Reed sailed one at the dodging end. The man leaped high, made a circus catch, juggled the ball a moment, then was thrown savagely to the ground as Chris hurled his full weight into the tackle.

The referee blasted his whistle. Penalty coming up. Interference with the receiver! Chris almost forgot the two silver bars the referee wore and started after him to bat his ears in. Deferment had to pull him away.

"Easy, guy," Deferment urged. "You can't fight city hall."

The referee grinned friendly-like at Chris. "Sorry we disagree, soldier," he said, "but the penalty still goes."

Chris was raging. His face was hot and flushed. He had made many a tackle like that with the Rams, timing the tackle perfectly when there was no chance of batting down the ball.

The Engineers made a mistake of trying to ram a power shove through him on the next play. Chris used his shoulders to batter aside the interference pouring through the gap between left guard and tackle. Avalanche Dean was lugging. Chris hit him knee high, giving an extra spurt of power with a digging cleat as he hurtled against his lighter opponent. The force of that tackle not only sent Avalanche reeling back, but knocked over two linemen crowding behind him.

Avalanche was in no hurry to get off the seat of his pants. That spine jarring tackle had hurt plenty. It was Chris who jerked him erect.

"Game's getting stale!" he snapped. "Let's try another in the same place. It felt good."

The ex-pro grinned at Chris gamely. "Remind me to give you the brush off next time," he replied.

For the next twelve minutes, Chris seemed to forget about his lust for a starry crown studded with gold bars. A desire to smash and keep smashing at flesh and bone gripped him—an outlet for his stored up bitterness of three long months. He was all over the line snarling encouragement at wavering defenses and cracking through with sheer savagery that completely upset the ground ambitions of the Engineers.

After a fierce play that spun the Diggers back for a five yard loss, Chris helped Hoolihan to his feet. The topkick had been in there beside Chris to help nip a tricky spinner play.

"Thanks, sweetheart," Hoolihan gasped. "Maybe you're not all goldbrick at that."

Chris spat out a mouthful of dirt. "I mad up slowly, pal," he said, grimly. "Maybe we'll see things eye to eye before this game is over."

"Maybe," Hoolihan replied. But he was grinning faintly.

The Engineers took to the air again. But Chris and Hoolihan and Deferment were playing inspired defense and discouraged seven desperate attempts to connect by the sky lanes.

And so it went into the final quarter at 7-7 deadlock.

Tracy Mason made four replacements in the front wall. The Ditch Diggers matched man for man. Fresh strength was pitted against each other.

The soldiers kept yelling for a score.

On the sidelines Mason watched amazed at the miracle of three weeks training. The Engineers had been training for five. But only twenty-one players knew that a madman in infantry blue was snarling and biting and whipping the jaded road plodders into putting up a real scrap.

THE break came unexpectedly in the last four minutes of play. A long boot by Deferment from his own thirty bounced out of the hands of too-eager Big Mike Ganella. The pigskin rolled to the Diggers fourteen where Bugs Prentiss scooped it

up, took five steps and was smothered by six aroused infantrymen!

The Engineers called for time out.

Then Johnny Reed tried a brilliant strategy, unorthodox and workable, except for one thing, Chris!

The ex-star's big time experience had smelled out a pass, ripe for a time like this. He was waiting for it.

Johnny Reed took the ball from center on his five, half spun, and tossed back to Dean who had cut around behind him. Dean hadn't heaved one all afternoon. The Engineer right end was already sprinting madly for a wide sweep around the Blue secondary when Dean drew back his arm to make the heave. He never quite completed that forward snapping motion.

A blur of dynamite rocketed through left tackle and exploded with furious devastation against the tosser. Dean went down like a ten pin with the ball flying out of his grip.

He didn't hear the wild yells as Jumper Peters, twisting into the turmoil, flung himself on top of the bounding pikskin.

Avalanche Dean was out cold when Chris rolled off him.

Four pill rollers and a stretcher took him off the field.

In the brief lull Chris wasted few words. "This calls for a special delivery and brother, I am to carry the mail." He looked steadily at Hoolihan.

The topkick nodded. "Sounds good to me." And added, "I got a date with some artillery after the game."

Pink Carter broke in angrily, "It stinks for my dough. Just what do you expect to get out of all this glory hogging, Howell?" he demanded. "You've been playing gallery all afternoon. You're good, and we all know it. But in this outfit, pal, we got eleven guys to split the honors on a share basis."

"Aw, layoff," Deferment interrupted. "I'm tired and I wanna go home. What's the difference who takes the punishment as long as we hit the jackpot?"

"Say, wait a minute, you lugs," Hoolihan growled. "I'm still head guy out here. I've listened to this dope until I'm fed up. Howell is taking the ball. We need six points. Or are you guys too dumb to let it sink in?"

Chris looked around at the sweaty, un-

smiling features of the others for a quick second. Then he said, "Got a better idea, Sarge. That gang over there will be laying for me with everything but bowie knives. How about Jones? He's been playing blocking back all afternoon."

"Uh-h," Deferment said quickly. "I get nervous when I lug that thing around. This is no time for experiments."

Hoolihan shook his head. "You're it, mister. I like the idea."

Jumper Peters said, "I don't get the angle, Howell?"

Chris shrugged. "I got a fistful of brass rings. And I still got plenty of smart football savvy."

Gottlieb, the stocky end, grunted, "You're getting almost human, Howell."

Hoolihan wasted no time setting the stage. He played the line close, pointing to a break-through between right tackle and guard. Chris' assignment was to fake, spin, and race to the left sidelines. The whole strategy was laid out carefully.

But with the sudden snap of the ball into Deferment's hands, the entire line went slashing into action. Deferment hurtled forward about to crack that weak spot in the flank Hoolihan was softening up as he crashed through. It was all very proper—except that Deferment Jones suddenly pulled the biggest upset of the game! He had gotten away with it once before in his brief football career.

Almost to the line of scrimmage he suddenly straightened his lunging body and with a fierce yell of, "Chris!" sidearmed a perfect lateral across to him.

Chris half huddled as he ran to fake the supposed deception, saw the ball coming at him. It was as complete a surprise to him as the rest of the team.

Instinctively his hands went up over his head. He felt the ball smack sweaty flesh, hung on somehow. Then half spinning, went streaking for pay dirt with the screams of the crowd in his ears.

By rights it should have been a perfect touchdown gallop but Bugs Prentiss, playing deep defense, caught the play and came racing over fast. The clop-clop of Chris' cleats as they dug in chopped precious yardage off that fourteen-stretch. Down to the nine, then the eight . . . seven . . . with time and the determined figure of Prentiss cutting in to trap him.

On the five, Prentiss threw everything he had into the tackle. Chris felt the impact of that hard body striking him. Then he was falling forward, twisting and squirming and fighting to bridge that precious gap to victory.

A ton of flesh poured down on him seconds later.

The khaki spectators were silent as the referee dug into that tangled riot. It was going to be close.

Ten thousand throats echoed a disappointed roar! Chris had missed by a yard.

The Engineers called time out.

Chris sprawled gratefully with his back to the hard ground. The disappointment of that muff to a six point gallop bit deep, but now a new, strange feeling was gripping him. He rolled over on his stomach. Deferment was a few yards away chewing lazily on a blade of grass.

"A sweet play, fella," Chris said. "Thanks for the chance."

Deferment grinned back. "Aw shucks," he replied, "I kinda hated to see you lose out. But we still got three more tries coming up. A guy like you can't miss two in a row."

Chris frowned a little. He saw that the rest of the team were listening.

"I don't get it," he said. "You get a chance to grab a bouquet—and drop it in the lap of . . . a glory hogger."

Deferment shook his head. "Look, fella. In every game, some guys gotta feed. I'm one of those work horses, I guess. Never was cut out to grab the spotlight. I ain't kicking, though. You're a natural, and I'd be a sap if I didn't ride the bandwagon with you holding the reins."

Chris gulped. A lot of little things started to make sense now. For the first time he was beginning to see the wise guy—the smart money sticking out all over him. Something for nothing—the brass ring—the easy way. Not that he had meant to take the army in stride that way. The big money and headlines and the back slappers, quick to applaud the winner, had made him that way.

In the huddle he was grim. "The party's over, boys," he said. "This is it. We're going on through and I'm leading the parade."

"We expected that!" Pink snapped.

"I'm plowing right through tackle," Chris said fiercely. "And Deferment will be right behind me lugging that ball!"

The explosion of a hand grenade couldn't have been more effective.

With Pink's pass from center ramrodded into Deferment's stomach, Chris went on through a gaping hole the line had ripped open. He smashed aside a blocking form, felt the cringe of resisting flesh, kept going ahead, driving hard and smashing and fighting until Big Mike Ganella and Bugs Prentiss smashed him flat.

He felt another form smack on top of him. At the same instant, pandemonium broke loose from either side of the field.

The form on top of Chris rolled off. It was Deferment, grinning and looking pretty happy about the whole thing.

Chris discovered that they were resting on the ground less than a foot from the goal posts themselves.

"Not a bad start," Pink said.

And Chris knew he meant it.

It made him feel pretty good all over.

The rest of the game didn't matter. Chris booted the extra point with Defer-

ment holding. The whole gang had insisted.

Coming out of a cold shower Chris bumped into Hoolihan. It was the first Chris had seen of him since the end of the game. Gripes had lost his usual scowl.

"You look almost human, Sarge," Chris said pleasantly. "What's cooking?"

Gripes actually grinned. "I should sqawk at a time like this? I made myself a hundred skins because you had me believing you were as good as you crowed about." Gripes hesitated. "Drop in the PX tonight. I'll buy you a beer." And added quickly, "Not that I'm getting soft or anything, sweetheart. Don't get any fancy ideas because we lug a football now and then. And incidentally, you're up for guard detail tomorrow."

Chris laughed. "I'll accept both invitations—with pleasure."

He was beginning to discover that this man's army wasn't half bad—even if a guy had to take it—the hard way.

Chris figured he'd have to take plenty to convince Trevor. But he wouldn't be doing all of it with a football.

Not now.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
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PIGSKIN PAYOFF

By J. B. THORNTON

The silver spoon was still in his mouth when he pranced onto the gridiron. And there wasn't a guy at Carlton U. who didn't try to stuff it down the throat of hapless Larry Doyle.

THEY had a new name for the team. Once they were called the Wildcats, but now they were the Tractors—Doyle's Tractors, so dubbed because the Doyle millions had gone into the little school up in the hills. John Doyle had built the new stadium; John Doyle, Carlton College alumnus, had hired a big time football coach; he'd put Carlton on the girdiron map.

"Okay, Plushbottom," Tip McAfee, Carlton quarterback snapped. "See what you can do on No. 10."

Larry Doyle, heir to the Doyle fortune, spat on the grass. He stood in the huddle, hands on knees, a tall rangy man with a lean face and the bitterness showing in his pale blue eyes.

"Get fresh," he rasped, "and I'll scatter your teeth on the ground." He was getting tired of it—the eternal harping on the one theme. They didn't like him because his father had practically rebuilt the school. The Doyle fortune had even gone into the full-grown trees transplanted to the Carlton campus. Football players avoided even the shade of the trees.

McAfee, small, stocky, sandy-haired, straightened up and clapped his hands. He laughed harshly as the Carlton line, resplendent in the orange and black outfits John Doyle had provided, wheeled up to the forty yard stripe.

Larry Doyle crouched at the left half position. He moved over behind the center on the shift. He saw the faces of the Carlton backfield men and the anger boiled through him.

John Doyle of the Tractor "Doyle's," had stepped in when Carlton was at rock bottom. He'd paid the debts, re-hired the faculty, built an enormous stone and marble gym, and then sent for his son to take over.

"I've always had a feeling for the school," the father had said. "We'll be

living in the east, Larry. It'll be more convenient all around. You can visit us on week-ends; you know how mother is."

"Sure," Larry agreed. He was a freshman at West Coast U.—the big school on the coast, but the Doyle's had moved to the east when John Doyle opened the export department of the Doyle Tractor Company.

"I can arrange the transfer," Mr. Doyle had said. "You can play football next fall if you go in now, Larry."

"You're the boss," Larry grinned. "You give the orders, pop." They got along without any trouble. It didn't make a great deal of difference going to West Coast or Carlton. Had they lived in the east originally, Larry would have gone to Carlton at the beginning.

The Carlton football team didn't understand that. John Doyle had sent for his son, the "crown prince." The newspapers referred to the time-honored Wildcat team as the Tractors. It was good advertising for the company even though John Doyle vigorously objected.

"This has nothing to do with business," the father told the son. "Carlton is my old school and I've always loved it. It's been run down and I have the money to build it up. Why shouldn't I help?"

"You tell them," Larry said bitterly. "They're the wise guys."

The father had stared at him then. John Doyle didn't know much about that first winter at Carlton. The new name for the school had done the trick. When Larry's train came in, they were down in a body. They had a horse and carriage waiting for him—an old white nag drawing. The carriage was rigged up like a throne.

Larry had grinned until he got a closer look at their faces. It wasn't a job, it was plain to see. The millionaire's son had come to the school Doyle built and

In a desperate try Larry sprinted forward, leaped high, hands outstretched.



they were paying him sardonic obeisance.

They had two banners down at the station that afternoon. One was the black and orange of Carlton with the old Wildcat rampant. But it was a sad and forlorn wildcat sitting on its own coffin, the tears streaming from feline eyes. The other banner was a gorgeous orange and black "tractor," surrounded with dollar signs.

Larry got the implication. He rode back in the carriage but he didn't say much. He knew then that he had a battle on his hands. The thing got worse as the months wore on.

THE Carlton center shot the ball back and Larry took it on the run. He moved to the left and he followed fullback, Tom Shepherd. They cut out wide and then smashed in.

The Bonham U. right end was boxed in neatly. Larry got over the forty-five before two Bonham secondaries knocked him down. He knew he could have gone further with a little more help, but the Tractors weren't killing themselves for Larry Doyle. They played the game, but they didn't go all-out when he ran.

McAfee fed it to Shepherd, and the big fullback with the hatchet-chin smashed through for a first down on the Bonham forty-three.

Larry walked into the huddle. This Carlton team was good—better than anything turned out in the school in the past three decades. They had material and they had a coach in Buck Flynn. They might even get a bid to the Bowl game—a thing unheard of in past years. Carlton campus leaders had been booming the Bowl invitation since the opening game when the Tractors had swamped a usually tough Creighton eleven by a 49 to 7 score.

"We have a football team here," Buck Flynn grinned at them after the Creighton debacle. "We'll go places if we stick together." Flynn was big and blond with a ruddy complexion. He'd handled a top-notch Tech team before Doyle money had gotten him to Carlton.

"We take this ball right over the goal line," Tip McAfee said in the huddle. "We'll run it into the stands."

It was 21 to 0 for Carlton in the third quarter and Buck Flynn had been using

second string backs almost half the time.

The more we win," Shepherd said, "the closer we are to the Bowl."

"I heard," left end Alden grinned, "that John Doyle just bought the Bowl."

Larry laughed harshly. "This sounds like a vaudeville act," he snapped. "How about a play, McAfee?"

"You want to run?" Tip grinned. "You want to be a hero, Doyle?"

The referee blew on the whistle and penalized them five yards for too much time in the huddle.

"Keep talking," Larry snapped, "and we'll be behind our own goal line."

"No. 14-M," McAfee rasped. "Plush-bottom running."

Larry smashed over left guard. He found an opening and went through. The Bonham secondaries closed in to knock him down. Out of sheer fury, he added five more yards by slicing in between two of them, head down.

He saw the handwriting on the wall. Buck Flynn wouldn't be able to use him much longer as first string back. The Carlton team didn't pull together when he was in the lineup. They'd be running against tougher teams all the time and the slightest dissension would weaken the structure.

McAfee gave the ball to Jeff Rice, right half back, and Rice made the distance for a first down. They were moving all the time, driving out of the tricky formations Buck Flynn had concocted.

From the twenty-five, Tom Shepherd pounded to the ten. McAfee flipped a pass over the middle and Alden caught it in the end zone for another score. It was 28 to 0 when Flynn removed the first string backs.

Larry walked from the field, the anger boiling inside of him. He felt Flynn's Irish eyes on him as he picked a spot at the end of the bench. Shepherd, McAfee and Rice sat together.

John Doyle's booming voice drifted across the field from the box directly behind the Carlton bench. Larry listened and grimaced. He glanced back to smile at the invalid mother. Mrs. Doyle had been ill for the past two years and the father wanted the son to be near her.

Carlton scored another touchdown before it was all over. They had four

straight wins and the team hadn't been extended. Buck Flynn had been fortunate walking into a situation with a wealth of material and only a guiding hand needed to show them the way.

JOHN DOYLE came into the dressing room with a big smile and a slap on the back for Buck Flynn. Larry stood under the shower and watched him through the door. There was no affection in the father. The advertising he received through the Carlton football team meant nothing. Larry realized the Doyle Tractors would sell whether Carlton won or lost. They had always sold before.

"Maybe," Tip McAfee said after the rich man had left, "we'll declare a dividend on the Doyle Tractor profits. This free advertising—"

Larry came in on the last part of it. He stepped through the shower room door with a towel around his waist. McAfee was the shorter man but he had a reputation through the school. The Carlton quarter never turned his back on a fight.

"You got a big mouth," Larry observed coldly. "You know all about everything."

"I got eyes," McAfee snapped. "I see what's going on. Your father takes us all around the country; we get into the Bowl and we're advertised as Doyle's Tractors."

"He didn't ask for it," Larry rasped. "He didn't make up the Carlton schedule. He's even been threatening the newspapers with lawsuits for using the name 'Tractors.'"

"Sure," McAfee smiled coldly. "Every thing for old alma mammy."

Larry hit the quarterback squarely on the jaw with his left hand. McAfee fell back against the tile wall. Tight-lipped, he came back with a round house right which Larry ducked under.

"You're lookin' for it," McAfee smiled.

Larry jabbed at him with a left. He was getting tired of all this. During the past winter and early fall, he'd had three fights on the campus—all because of the Doyle millions.

McAfee hit him on the side of the face with a right and then he clipped the shorter man with a left hook and McAfee sat down. The football men stood around in a silent circle.

Tom Shepherd calmly placed his towel on the bench and stepped forward.

"You got some of that for me, Doyle?" he asked.

"Plenty," Larry retorted. "For you and for anybody else who asks for it." He remembered that Shepherd and McAfee were boon companions on the campus.

"You're taking on a big order," Shepherd grinned. He came forward clenched fists against his chest.

Larry jabbed at the fullback with his left hand and stepped back. Shepherd started a round house right which missed. He threw another left and Larry tried to jump back. His right foot skidded on the damp floor outside the shower room. Shepherd's fist smashed his jaw and he went down.

"Sorry," the fullback said. "I couldn't stop it, Doyle."

The rich man's son stood up, jaws tight. "Stop some of this," he said tersely. He went into Shepherd, arms pumping like pistons. The fullback blocked some of them. Other blows got through.

Still grinning, Shepherd lashed out with ponderous fists. He packed twenty-five pounds more in his frame, and the greater weight pushed the left half back against the wall.

Shepherd's left dazed him. A right caught him high on the head. He broke away and came in low with a wild left to the body. Shepherd blocked it with his elbow and brought up the right. Larry sat down abruptly, blood streaming from a cut lip.

"That's enough for today," Shepherd said quietly.

"Not for me," Larry told him. He climbed groggily to his feet.

"It's enough for me," the fullback said. "Go peddle some stock."

Buck Flynn came in through the door. Larry ducked low and stepped back inside the shower room. He wash the blood from his face before coming out. Flynn regarded him curiously. The crowd had broken up.

"Stop in the office on the way out, Doyle," the Carlton coach said quietly.

Larry nodded. He knew what it was going to be about. Flynn had eyes and he could see what was going on during

the game. The Carlton team had no use for the left halfback.

"You see the spot I'm in," Flynn began when Larry sat down. The player was fully dressed and he could feel the pain in the lip.

"I have to turn out a football team," the Carlton coach said. "I want to put the best team on the field all the time."

"Sure," Larry nodded.

Buck rubbed his jaw and looked out the window.

"And these guys won't play ball with me," Larry told him. "There's too much dissension when I'm on the field. It hurts the team."

"You got it," Flynn said slowly. "It's tough, kid. I know it's not your fault and it's not the fault of your father. There never was a better guy."

"I can quit," Larry blurted out. "I can take up badminton the next two years." He knew how much he wanted to play—amateur, pro, anything.

Flynn grinned at him. "It's not as bad as that, Larry," the coach said. "But I'm taking you off the first team for a while. Maybe things will work out better. I've seen it happen. A little breeze can blow away a lot of trouble."

"Not this," Larry said quietly. "This kind of thing gets worse."

"What are you going to do?" Flynn asked.

"I'll tell my old man," Larry muttered. "He'll fire you and the whole school; he'll tear it down piece by piece and build it up around his son." He laughed grimly. "At least that's how they think around here."

Flynn shook his head. "Stick to your guns, kid," he advised. "I'll try to help all I can."

"Thanks," Larry nodded. He realized Flynn's hands were tied. The Carlton coach had to win his ball games and he couldn't force the team to play with Larry Doyle. It was something that had to be worked out among themselves.

John Doyle was waiting in the big car when he got outside. They were to drive up to the week-end home. The chauffeur sat stiffly at the wheel. Half a dozen students sauntered by. Larry walked around them and got into the car. He

heard the soft laugh as he was closing the door.

That night he found an old "Wildcat" sticker pasted on the trunk of the car.

"How are things at the school?" John Doyle wanted to know. He looked at the split lip.

"Picking up," the son told him.

"Those Bonham boys were so rough," Mrs. Doyle commented.

"They're not the only ones," Larry grinned.

He was on the practice field Tuesday afternoon as Buck Flynn worked out the new backfield. They had a senior from the second team filling in at left half.

LARRY DOYLE sat on the bench during scrimmage. After a while he stood up and walked out to Buck Flynn. He wasn't used to watching the game from the hardwood. At West Coast he'd starred with the freshman team. He would have made the varsity with the big California eleven.

"Give me a chance out there," he said quietly. "Let me work with the scrubs, Mr. Flynn."

"Scrubs?" Buck Flynn's eyes widened.

"Anything," Larry said grimly.

"Okay," Flynn grinned. "You got it."

Larry picked up a helmet and walked out to the position. The regulars stared at him from across the line of scrimmage. McAfee scratched his chin. They worked a play through the line on his side and he knocked down Al Rice.

"What's this?" Rice asked. "You get demoted?"

"What do you think?" Larry snapped. They were still getting over their surprise at Coach Flynn's change in the line-up.

Tom Shepherd smashed over the middle on a straight buck and Larry hit him around the knees. The blood started to leak from the swollen lip. Before the afternoon was over, he was black and blue in a dozen different places, but he felt better.

He knew the team respected him more when the day was over, but Tip McAfee promptly squelched it.

"Wait'll the papers hear that Doyle has been switched to the second team," the quarterback said. "Has Carlton College no gratitude?"

"You looking for more?" Larry asked him.

"You didn't do so bad yourself," McAfee observed. "You can't fight this whole team, Doyle."

"I can try," Larry snapped, "one, or two at a time."

"Nuts," McAfee said laconically. "The guy's out of his mind."

They took on Spring Valley the following Saturday and again the "Tractor" Stadium was filled to capacity. Carlton College was riding toward a Bowl invitation, and the loyal citizens from fifty miles around flocked to cheer them on.

Larry sat on the bench at the kick-off. It was the first time since the opening game. He felt John Doyle's eyes boring into his back from the rear box.

With Avery, the senior, at left half, the Carlton backfield functioned flawlessly. Buck Flynn nodded in a satisfied manner. They came out of the huddles and snapped into position. McAfee and Rice did most of the blocking. Shepherd and Avery carried the ball and they moved down the field.

After the second touchdown, Larry sat back and pulled the big fleece-lined coat around his neck. The expensive jackets were presented to the football team by John Doyle of Doyle Tractors.

Flynn sent him into the game half way through the second quarter. He went in with the second team. Carlton led by a 21-to-0 score. It was a duplication of last Saturday's tilt with Bonham. Carlton packed too many guns.

Larry broke loose from the Carlton forty-one on the second play and ran all the way to the goal line. He went over standing up and they gave him a big hand. The Carlton student body, however, was noticeably quiet.

Flynn stared at him quizzically when he came in to the bench at the end of the half. Besides the long touchdown run, he'd carried the ball eight times and averaged five yards per attempt. It was good running.

"We could use that yardage," Flynn said to him, "against the tougher teams later in the season. Avery doesn't have half your speed, kid."

John Doyle hustled around the locker room between the halves. He looked at

his son queerly. Larry knew what he was thinking. Why had Flynn benched him?

Assistant coach, Art Bigby, one of Carlton's brighter stars of ten years back, paused beside Larry as the back bent over the water cooler. Bigby was a lean lantern-jawed man with a tanned face like a Texan, and steady gray eyes.

"If it was me," Bigby told him, "you wouldn't be sitting on the bench, kid. If these guys don't want to play ball with you, the hell with 'em. I'd bench *them!*"

"You can't break up a good team," Larry said slowly. "Flynn knows his game."

They scored two more touchdowns the next half while Spring Valley managed to kick a lone field goal. Larry got in again the fourth quarter with the seconds. He broke loose once for thirty-five yards, but it was tough running with the inexperienced backfield. They got in his way and they hindered instead of helped.

The elder Doyle spoke to Buck Flynn that night after the game. Larry watched the two of them in a huddle near the door. The tractor chief was nodding his head in agreement. Undoubtedly, Flynn had explained as best he could the reason for Larry being benched. Flynn wouldn't say it was John Doyle's fault.

"What did you tell him?" Larry asked the coach a few minutes later.

Flynn was mopping the perspiration from his face with a handkerchief. He shook his head at the rich man's son.

"It wasn't easy, kid," the coach said grimly. "He wasn't asking anything for you and he never tries to interfere with me. It's just that he likes to get into things."

"What did you tell him?" Larry persisted.

"I said Avery worked better with the first-string backfield, and that you were needed to keep the seconds moving."

Larry nodded. The father had never interceded for him before. As a matter of fact, in prep school John Doyle had asked the football coach to put the son in his proper place.

"Money is a dangerous thing, Larry."

Larry laughed bitterly at the thought now. The tractor man didn't know the half of it.

He walked down the hall with the coach

and he noted the high flush on Flynn's red face. Buck was usually highly excited at each game. He worked hard out on the side lines.

"I get tired feelings," Flynn confessed. "Maybe it's the worry. Don't ever coach a football team, Larry."

"Better see an M.D.," Larry told him. "It doesn't pay to fool around, Mr. Flynn."

Carlton knocked over Eastern and then the Richardson Teachers in short order. The schedule was not too tough but the manner of winning commanded respect. Carlton averaged thirty-five points per game, against four scored against them.

WEEKLY, Larry Doyle sat on the bench, filling in only occasionally for Avery at the left half position. It was galling, though, to wait until Carlton had clinched the ball game before going onto the field.

"You're a sophomore," Flynn said one time. "You'll have two years of football after this season. Shepherd and Avery will be gone. Most of the line will graduate in the spring."

Larry nodded. Some of them would be gone, but the others would remain. Tip McAfee was a sophomore; Rice a junior. Alden would be around for two more years. Ken Porter, ponderous Carlton center, would be leading the attack again next fall. Things wouldn't be much better.

"I'm not quitting," Larry said quietly. "Don't worry about that, Mr. Flynn."

Flynn smiled. "For a rich guy," he said, "you got guts, Doyle." He paused. "I'll take that back. You just got guts."

It was a shock the following Tuesday afternoon. Larry came out of the locker room and trotted across the field. Most of the squad ignored him during practice, but today it was different. He heard the catcalls. They were standing around in little groups watching him, faces tight.

Again it was McAfee who broke the silence.

"It was a nice piece of work," the Carlton quarterback said slowly. "They ought to give you a medal, Doyle."

"I don't get it," Larry snapped. He had felt good coming out on the field. Even playing with men who didn't like

him was a pleasure. Now they were kicking up again.

"Play dumb," McAfee sneered. "We lose the best coach in the business on account of you. It was pretty small, Doyle."

Assistant coach Art Bigby came out on the field and blew a whistle. The team gathered in a big circle. Larry listened, open-mouthed. It was a full minute before he got the implication.

"Mr. Flynn," Bigby was saying, "regrets that he couldn't say good-bye personally. Due to ill health, he's had to give up coaching indefinitely. I'm sure the Carlton team will keep up the high standard of play while I take charge the remainder of the season."

Bigby was well-liked among the players. They remembered his record at Carlton.

McAfee said it from the back row.

"What was the matter with Mr. Flynn?"

Larry clenched his fists. He knew how healthy the big coach always looked, but he remembered the afternoon Flynn had complained about the tired feelings.

"Mr. Flynn has a bad heart murmur," Bigby explained. "He's been forbidden to attend football games for the time being. I believe Mr. Doyle has sent him to Florida."

Someone laughed in the background and Bigby reddened. Larry Doyle balled his fists. They were implying that his father had kicked Flynn out of his job because the Carlton coach had benched his son. The tractor king had hired Flynn and he could send him packing whenever he wanted to.

"Let's go," Bigby told them. "We take Harwood U. next Saturday."

Before the afternoon was up, Bigby had Larry back with the first team. McAfee looked at him.

"So you made it," the quarterback sneered. "It was a hard pull, Doyle."

Larry stood in the huddle. Tom Shepherd was looking at the ground. Rice rubbed his nose.

"If anybody broke Buck Flynn," Shepherd said quietly, "it was a rotten thing."

"He wasn't broken," Larry snarled. "My father doesn't know anything about it." He'd have to call up as soon as he got back to the dormitory, but he was

positive John Doyle had nothing to do with Flynn's leaving.

"It doesn't matter," McAfee said, "how it was done. You're here, Doyle. Now make the most of it."

There was a noticeable lack of pep in the backfield. Art Bigby watched grimly. The Carlton team wouldn't lay down on the field; they'd play football, but it wouldn't be the brand they were capable of playing.

"You need eleven single minds," Flynn had said. "If there's any difference, the machine won't run."

Bigby didn't see it that way. He had a stubborn streak.

"I put the eleven best men on the first team," the assistant coach told Larry Doyle. "If they don't like it, they can lump it."

John Doyle answered the phone when Larry called late that night. Buck Flynn had been out to see him.

"It's true," the tractor man said regretfully. "Buck is heart broken. He didn't even want to say good-bye to the team."

"He has a bad heart?" Larry asked. "How bad?"

"For a while," John Doyle said, "there'll be no football whatever. He might get over it in a few years with plenty of rest and no excitement."

"They say you helped him out," the son continued. There was a pause.

"Buck is a decent sort," the tractor king said quietly. "He has three children. I sent them all to Florida. Why, son?"

"Nothing," Larry told him. "I just heard it." He hung up after awhile and went to his room. The die was cast. Flynn was gone and Flynn had looked healthy. The student body at Carlton believed Mr. Doyle had arranged to get rid of Flynn because his son had been benched.

Harwood U. came up with a fairly tough outfit. They had lost the first two games of the season and then came on to win steadily.

Larry stood on the goal line and waited for the kick-off. He realized what one defeat would do for Carlton. They had to win them all to get that invitation to the Bowl. The competition was stiff this year.

Rice took the kick and ran it up to the twenty-three. The speedy right half

nearly broke through the green-clad Harwood team. He stumbled over Larry's foot as the blockers swerved to the right. A Harwood man hit the runner before he could recover.

Rice stared at him coldly. "Which side you on. Doyle?" he snapped. "Pick up your feet."

Larry returned the stare. They both knew it was an accident but Rice was thinking of Buck Flynn.

McAfee looked at Larry Doyle.

"Your public wants you to run, Doyle," the quarterback snapped. "No. 18-B."

Furiously, Larry shot around the right end. He outran his blockers and he moved too wide. He didn't want anything from these guys.

Two Harwood backs hit him on the far side of the field. They knocked him out of bounds at the line of scrimmage. No gain.

"Can't wait?" McAfee sneered. "This is a one-man team."

"Shut up," Doyle snarled. He could see the pattern of this game being designed. This game, and the ones to follow. There would be bickering and fighting all the way. Carlton would win most of them, but they'd run into snags when they hit the big teams—teams like State, competitors for that Bowl bid.

"You can't play football with ten men," Buck Flynn had intimated, "and an outsider."

THEY ran the ball down into Harwood territory and then lost it on downs at the twenty-three. Shepherd's line smash was short by inches. The previous play McAfee had whipped a pass to Doyle. It was fast and hard to handle. Larry glared at the little quarterback. McAfee, when he wanted to, could hang that ball in the air. He could make it float down as light as a feather.

Harwood caught them by surprise with a quick kick which carried down to the Carlton eighteen. Rice scooted after the ball, picked it up, and then was hit by three men in green. The Carlton right half lost the ball and a Harwood man fell on it. They scored two minutes later on a wide end sweep.

Larry saw the disgust in the faces of the Carlton men. They should take a team

like Harwood. There should be no particular trouble. With Buck Flynn handling things from the bench, and Avery at left half, it would be as smooth as silk.

Bigby sent in his second-string backfield to start the second quarter with the score 7 to 0 for Harwood. The seconds ran over a surprise touchdown putting them in a tie.

The third quarter, the starting team floundered on the field for ten minutes before Rice broke loose on a forty-yard dash to score again. It was a trick naked reverse and Rice was away before the Harwood seconds sighted him.

They did no more scoring that afternoon. It was still 14 to 7 when the teams walked from the field at dusk. Carlton looked more like the losers.

Larry walked behind them, the sheepskin coat slung over his arm, his right eye swollen shut. He saw his father sitting in the box, a quizzical expression on his face. This wasn't the old Carlton team.

"What happened, Larry?" his father asked that night. They were at home in the library with the soft light pervading the room. Larry sat in a dark corner.

"We didn't click," the son told him quietly. He knew they wouldn't be hitting on all fours till Avery was back in the line-up. Bigby was honest, but he lacked tact. You couldn't force men to play with a man they disliked.

"I'm asking to be put back with the second team," Larry told the coach the following week.

Bigby's jaws snapped shut. "I run this team, kid," he said tersely.

Larry shrugged. "Thanks, Mr. Bigby," he said quietly, "but it's either that or I resign altogether."

Art Bigby stared at him curiously. "It's as bad as that?" he asked.

"What do you think?" Larry asked bitterly. "This team has a chance to go to the Bowl. They won't get there with me."

"You put me on the spot," the Carlton coach said. "I don't have much choice."

They had Avery back with the first string when Rockford U. kicked off the following Saturday. Larry sat on the bench, wrapped in the big coat. He listened to the roar from the stands as

the ball tumbled up into the air.

McAfee ran it back to the forty, twisting and squirming. There was new life in the Carlton eleven. They snapped out of the huddles and moved up the field with Shepherd blasting holes in the Rockford line and Rice and Avery hitting at the ends.

Larry looked at the ground. They had a team out there and he wasn't part of it. He went in with Carlton leading 17 to 0 and he ran mechanically, conscious of the fact that he no longer enjoyed football.

The final score was 35 to 12 for Carlton and hope again ran high on the Carlton camps. If they could get past State next week, the Bowl Committee couldn't overlook them. They'd be in.

John Doyle showed his disappointment.

"It's too bad," the tractor king said, "that you don't work in with the regulars, Larry."

Larry nodded gloomily. He wondered how much the father knew or suspected. If John Doyle knew that his son's football career had been ruined on account of himself, he would never be able to sleep nights.

"Things might be better next year," the father said. "We'll wait for the breaks, son."

Larry Doyle thought about next year. He wouldn't be waiting that long. If it was possible, he'd take the first pro offer and let the college education take care of itself. It would be a shock to the parents though.

"A fellow can quit," the tractor king said quietly, "when things go bad. Or he can carry on. I've always found the latter the better policy."

"Okay," Larry said. "See if I run."

He sat on the bench the following Wednesday afternoon as Art Bigby put the regulars through their paces. State was the big game and Bigby worked for it.

Avery came around the end on the No. 7-F play. Scrub backs swept in to get him. The scrubs were hitting viciously.

Tom Shepherd went down in a block and Avery tried to get around him. The scrub right half dived across Shepherd's prostrate body. He caught Avery around the knees and bent him backward. The play was near the Carlton bench and Larry Doyle saw the expression on Avery's face.

He stood up as the left half hit the turf. Art Bigby raced over. Avery was writhing on the ground, face white and taut. He'd been bent backward and the ankle was badly twisted.

"Take him to the locker room," Bigby said slowly. He looked at Larry Doyle.

"All right, Doyle," Bigby said. "Take over." He meant for good. With a twisted ankle, Avery would be out for weeks. He'd be out of the Bowl game if Carlton got in.

"Let's go," McAfee said grimly. "Here goes trouble."

Stolidly, Larry Doyle finished the workout. Again, it was sloppy with frequent fumbles and misplays. Bigby told them off in the dressing room and they listened in silence.

Tom Shepherd finally cleared his throat. We're trying, Mr. Bigby," he said slowly. "We'll do our best Saturday."

The Carlton coach shook his head hopelessly. He went out the door.

"There wouldn't have been any trouble this season," McAfee said, "if it weren't for one guy."

Larry Doyle threw a cleat into the locker with a bang. They looked at him.

"Stop the dramatics," McAfee advised. "Save that stuff for the Doyle estate."

Larry came toward him, fists clenched. Alden, the end, grabbed at him as he went by. He threw the man off.

McAfee grinned and threw the first punch. "This is like a World Series," the quarterback smiled coldly. "Four out of seven wins."

Larry took McAfee's punch on the side of the face and shook it off. He swung his left and McAfee ducked under it. He rushed the smaller man across the slippery floor and against a locker.

Tom Shepherd and Rice yelled. They caught him by the arms and tried to hold him off. He threw Rice to the floor. Shepherd had a headlock and was pulling him back.

Larry twisted away. Shepherd in his bare feet, slipped on the floor and went down with a thud. Larry heard the sharp exclamation of pain. Shepherd lay on the floor looking at his right wrist. It seemed to be twisted out of shape.

"Damn!" Shepherd whispered. His face was gray with the pain.

HEY! QUIT SHOVIN'!

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They watched him as he stood up and walked to the water sink. He held the wrist under the cold water for several minutes. Larry walked after him. Shepherd didn't look up.

"Probably a slight fracture," he said quietly. "We'll not tell Bigby about it. I'm playing ball Saturday." The wrist was swelling up badly.

"I'm sorry, Shepherd," Larry mumbled.

"Okay," the fullback smiled wryly. "Maybe it's our fault, kid."

THEY watched him during the next two days practice. Shepherd managed to conceal the bad wrist. Twice he fumbled during a scrimmage session. Larry saw the pain in the big man's face whenever he hit the ground. Shepherd fell gingerly and Coach Bigby stared.

The papers were already hailing the winner of the State-Carlton game as the Bowl contender. Neither team had been defeated nor tied. State had swamped all opposition.

"You'll find them tough," Bigby said in the dressing room, "but we're no easy marks ourselves." Outside, they heard the roar as State went out on the field for practice.

Larry sat in the corner and watched Tom Shepherd. The big fullback was probably bowing out today and he wanted to make it his best game. The injured wrist would decrease his effectiveness by fifty per cent.

If Carlton lost this one, they could lay it to Larry. The rich man's son smiled grimly. Not only did he cause trouble in the backfield, but he'd put out of commission Carlton's most powerful runner. If Shepherd went down on that arm hard, he'd probably be through for the afternoon. And State had a reputation. They wanted that Bowl invitation.

They went out on the field and they saw the scarlet and white uniforms of State at the other end. State had a tremendous squad. The little school seemed to be going out of its class.

Larry glanced toward the box. His father was waving a Carlton orange and black flag. Mr. Doyle had pulled the strings to get this State game. Carlton usually had an easy schedule, playing teams in its own class.

"If we can take State," the tractor king grinned, "they have to let us into the bowl." He winked at his son. "I could build my own Bowl," he said slyly.

Larry grimaced. "Perish the thought," he said.

Carlton won the toss and elected to receive. They trotted toward the other end of the field. The four backs spread out along the goal line. Larry Doyle glanced around. He saw the hardness in the face of McAfee. He knew how much Carlton wanted this ball game.

The sun shone directly in their eyes and the yellow pigskin tumbled down toward them. Larry shaded his eyes and then picked out the ball. He stepped back two steps and took it against his chest.

Shepherd came over from the right and Al Rice swept in from the left. They went up the middle. Larry stared at the big number "4" on Shepherd's back. If anything went wrong with the fullback today, the brunt of the ball carrying would be on his shoulders, with Rice helping.

Shepherd suddenly disappeared and Larry saw the hole. He went through head down and staggered up to the twenty-eight. The crimson jerseyed men were tearing at him from all sides. The turf came up and hit him in the face.

In the huddle, he saw Shepherd's face. Pain was written in the tight lines around the mouth.

"Let's move," McAfee snapped. "No. 22. Take it, Al."

Rice tried the State line and bounced off. They could feel the power. The men in crimson outweighed the smaller Carlton line by about fifteen pounds per man.

Tip McAfee rubbed his jaw in the huddle. He stared at Tom Shepherd and then at Larry Doyle. The left half back saw the accusation in the smaller man's eyes. They would need Shepherd's drive today and McAfee was afraid to use the big man. They intended to save Shepherd for the goal line drives.

"No. 6, Doyle," McAfee said quietly. "Give us ground." There was no sarcasm today—no joking. McAfee wanted to win.

Larry hit for right end and then pounded through the gap at the tackle spot. He found the hole but it closed up as he came through. Two red jerseys caught him in mid-air and hurled him backward.

He tossed the ball to the referee and climbed to his feet. There had been no gain. He realized they were in for a tough afternoon.

McAfee tried a long surprise pass down the field, but a State back knocked it down. Shepherd booted out of bounds on the State twenty-eight.

Larry walked to his position. He saw Shepherd waiting behind the line of scrimmage. The fullback's jersey was pulled low over his wrist and Larry saw the tell-tale bump of a wrist guard.

The red jerseyed backs started to pour through the Carlton line. They came in short dashes, running from the "T", and they always gained ground. Shepherd hit them as they came through. Larry edged over and helped out on the tackles. He saw Shepherd's face as the State backs worked the ball over the middle of the field. They'd played five minutes and Shepherd was finished. He'd gone down on the wrist several times.

McAfee came over to talk with him but Shepherd shook his head doggedly. The State fullback, two hundred and twenty-five pounds of beef, hit over the middle on a straight buck. Shepherd was there to meet him. Larry Doyle leaped over a blocker to get in on the play.

Shepherd was unable to hold on. The State runner tore away from him and made a first down before Rice knocked him down.

Shepherd threw up his hands. He walked silently toward the Carlton bench. The fullback realized he was becoming a handicap to the team. A man with one arm can't hold off hard-driving runners.

"There goes a man with guts," McAfee said aloud. The Carlton crowd watched in amazement. Shepherd was usually a sixty minute man. Now he was quitting with the game just getting under way.

Bigby spoke to him a moment and then sent out Ted Brewster, utility back. Brewster was rather light, and notably weak on the defense.

McAfee looked at the ground. When Shepherd went out of the game, it was the custom to switch the left half over to the fullback position on the defense. Larry Doyle walked to his new position. He saw the grins on the faces of the State players.

Carlton lineman turned around to look

at him. The referee blew the whistle and the ball was in play. State came through left guard. They drove through the fighting Carlton line and Larry made the tackle.

He felt the knees driving into him but he clung to the runner. He caught another one coming through right guard. Rice came in to help on some of the tackles. Center, Pollock, ranged beside him on the defense, but he had to take most of it.

State pushed them back to the thirty and then the twenty. With a fourth and a foot to go, the big team in red pounded the middle. Larry came in high, reaching for the runner's head in the mêlée. He caught the man but they piled on top of him. He felt the breath leave his body. An elbow smashed into his face and the blood poured from his nose.

State made the distance. They called time out and McAfee stared at Larry Doyle lying on the ground. It took a while to stop the blood. He climbed to his feet slowly.

The rest of that first touchdown drive was a nightmare. State ran the ball all the way. They went through the middle and they shot off the tackle positions.

After each play, Larry Doyle picked himself from the ground. The nose still leaked blood, and he'd cut the inside of his lip. He tasted the salt in his mouth, scarcely realizing he was swallowing blood. It made him sick.

They were on the ten and then the five. Two more bucks and they were on the one.

"Hold 'em," Tip McAfee screamed. The little quarterback was waiting behind the line of scrimmage.

THE play came down the middle with the fullback carrying. He hit over dead center and the red line pushed. The four Carlton backs managed to get in on the play but they were knocked back.

Larry saw the runner's knees and he plunged in. He felt the jolt and the left side of his face was numb from the shock. The fullback's knee had collided with his cheekbone. They were over for the touchdown.

Alden sneaked through to block the extra point kick. It was 6 to 0 for State. Larry walked out to the goal line and waited for the next kick. He glanced toward the Doyle box and he saw a strange

figure sitting with his father. Buck Flynn had come home!

McAfee took the kick-off and raced like a bullet up the side line. A State tackler picked the little man up and threw him out of bounds on the twenty-five. McAfee picked himself up and staggered into the huddle.

They tried to get a drive started but it failed. Larry Doyle hit at the ends and they smashed him to the earth. They missed Shepherd's blocking today. They needed the big man's weight against the heavier State eleven.

In the second quarter State again drove toward the Carlton goal line. They got to the twenty-five and fumbled. Larry sat down on the grass. He stared dully at the stands. It was wavering.

On the first play, he tried the middle and they nearly tore him apart.

"We'll throw," McAfee said miserably. Carlton had no ground attack today. Rice had been able to make no headway. McAfee himself was too light against this line.

"Let me try it," Larry said quietly. "Give me that left end."

McAfee glanced at him. His face was puffed out of shape but the fire was still in his eyes.

He went around left end on a wide run and he got away—ten—fifteen yards, fighting through the crimson horde. He heard the yell from the Carlton stands. It was the first real gain made by a Carlton back.

He got away again a few minutes later, taking a short pass from McAfee. He made eleven yards on the play. He saw the surprise in the eyes of the State players. They had thought he was washed up. Even McAfee was watching him curiously. He was the rich man's son, but he wasn't asking special privileges today.

State took the ball away from them on the thirty-eight and started another drive. They were down on the fifteen when the gun went off ending the half. A State field goal had fallen short of the mark. It was 6 to 0 for State.

Larry reeled into the bench and picked up his coat. Tom Shepherd slapped his back and mumbled something. Larry turned toward the Doyle box. He saw Buck Flynn standing up. Then Buck started to rock. He was shimmering back and forth. Larry blinked. He saw the

ground coming up at him with a rush.

Tom Shepherd was standing over him. Bigby and Buck Flynn looked down from a far distance. He was lying on the dressing room table.

"He must have swallowed a lot of blood and made himself sick," Flynn was saying. "Then he took a terrific pounding around the head. There might be a fracture of that cheekbone."

Larry lifted his head. He saw the Carlton players sitting around quietly, listening. He tried to smile at Flynn.

"Art wrote to me," Flynn explained. "I heard the situation was pretty well messed up. I came down to clear it." He paused. "My plane was two hours late and I missed the kickoff."

Larry looked up at the ceiling. "I don't need anyone to fight for me," he said flatly.

Flynn ignored him. "Some of you boys don't know it," he said quietly, "but it's tough being rich. You don't get any breaks. Mr. John Doyle told me what his kid had to go through in prep school. They gave him the works because his father was a millionaire." He grinned coldly. "They talk about a guy being born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Sometimes that spoon gags him."

The Carlton players shifted uneasily. "John Doyle," Flynn went on slowly, "told me how to handle his son. He said I shouldn't spare the punches. I had to bench his kid, not because he wasn't good enough for this team, but because the Carlton players wouldn't work with him."

The trainer washed Larry's face with a wet sponge. He held the smelling salts under the player's nose.

"Let's forget about it," Larry snapped.

"Mr. Doyle," Flynn went on, "don't hold it against me. On the contrary when the doctors stated my heart was on the bum, he came forward and loaned me enough money to go to Florida. He's been the same way in everything else at Carlton. Just because newspaper men take the wrong slant and write up the Tractors, is no reason why you should believe them. John Doyle is a true sportsman; he's never had any privileges himself and he asks none for his son."

Buck Flynn started for the door. "Your team, Art," he said grimly.

They heard the door close behind the

big ex-coach. Tom Shepherd stepped forward.

"I can do a little blocking with this wrist," he told Bigby. "Let me in there, coach."

"They have one touchdown on us," Bigby said. "We want that back." He looked down at Larry Doyle. The left half saw the doubt in the man's eyes.

"I'm in," he said briefly.

They went back on the field and Buck Flynn was in the Doyle box. Tom Shepherd kicked off and State brought it back to the forty.

"We stop this," Shepherd said.

The State backs began to hammer through. Larry worked beside Tom Shepherd. They knocked down the runners and then grinned at each other. Tip McAfee screamed encouragement from the safety position. Al Rice bounced in to help.

State made ground but it took them longer. They were stopped dead on the Carlton forty-five and had to kick. The ball went out of bounds on the one foot line.

Tip McAfee picked it up and shook his head helplessly. They needed a touchdown but they couldn't start running from here. Shepherd kicked out of the end zone and the ball zoomed down to the State forty. Shepherd didn't need his wrist to kick.

Again State started a drive for the Carlton goal line. Larry crossed the field once to splice through the State blockers for the tackle. Tom Shepherd piled up a State drive over the middle. He stood up and his right hand hung limp. They'd stopped State again.

The next kick McAfee ran up to the twenty-eight. They were in a position to move. It was still the third quarter.

The little quarterback crossed them with a first down pass to Larry. The rangy left half took the ball on the side line and sprinted. They smashed into him at mid-field near the Doyle box. He rolled out of bounds and knocked down the fifty yard sign marker.

JOHN DOYLE stood up to look down at him. The son saw the expression on the father's face. He yelled something but Larry couldn't hear it in the uproar. He had an idea what it was. John Doyle didn't want his son to stay there. A Doyle



LOST

Where'll I eat?

Where'll I Sleep?

Where's my girl?

Last week on KP I kept thinking, "When I get to New York on my fur-lough, that'll be the day!"

So here I am, only I don't know my way around any more'n the Man From Mars. Can't even find my girl in this whale of a station.

Tell me: what's a guy to do?

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We'll even help you find your girl, who's probably hovering around this minute, looking for you.

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certainly didn't belong on the ground. lock was too slow to cover the other points. didn't belong on the ground.

They were moving again. Shepherd, with his right hand close to his side, splintered through left tackle for a first down. Larry Doyle went around right end on a naked reverse and picked up seven.

McAfee gave it to Al Rice and the right half danced through for another first down to the State twenty-five.

The quarter ended with the Carlton side of the field delirious. Larry Doyle saw the doubt in the faces of the State players. The smaller team had found new life. They were hitting from all sides. Even the line had bucked up and were holding their own.

Again McAfee fooled them with a trick pass down the middle. Larry went high into the air and came down with the ball against his chest. They hit him before he touched the ground but he held the ball tightly. First down!

Shepherd piled through for six. Rice took it to the State three yard marker. In the huddle Tip McAfee stared at Doyle.

"We owe you this one, kid," he said. "Take it over."

State waited for the line play and Larry cut for the end. He went out on a wide slant with Shepherd, Rice and McAfee in front of him. They ran for the corner and they smashed into the crimson jerseys. The orange and black went over the line.

Larry lay on the ground with the ball against his chest. He saw the grin on McAfee's face.

"Tell your old man," the quarterback said grimly, "that I'm kicking this point for him."

They lined up with the score 6 to 6 and the State team crouching tensely. The little Carlton quarterback calmly stepped forward and booted the ball. It cut the bar in the middle.

Tom Shepherd had to leave half way through the fourth period. The fullback was playing on sheer nerve with a fractured wrist. Again Larry Doyle moved up behind the line of scrimmage.

State had about eight minutes to score. They sent in reserves to begin the drive

for the Carlton goal line. Larry waited with every bone in his body aching. The lip had started to bleed and he spat out the blood.

State took the kickoff up to the thirty-five. They came through the tiring Carlton line. Rice tried to help. Pollock placed his bulk in front of every direct smash, but Pollock was too slow to cover the other points. Larry had to cross and recross the field.

State went over the middle. They got to the thirty-five and then the twenty-five.

"Hold 'em!" McAfee yelled.

Two straight smashes gave State eleven more yards to the fourteen. They worked the ball toward the middle for a kick. Larry Doyle caught the big fullback driving over right guard. He stopped his man with a yard gain. It was third and nine. State didn't have much time.

Another drive put it on the ten yard marker. They had to kick. The ball was directly in the center of the field. An experienced kicker couldn't miss.

"Block it!" they roared from the stands.

Larry waited. He stepped back two steps. The State fullback had dropped back to make the attempt.

As the ball spun, Larry sprinted forward. He went up high, hands outstretched. He didn't see the ball but he felt it smash his forehead. The sting was sweet.

Half-conscious, he sat on the ground. Alden, the end, had recovered the ball for Carlton.

"If anybody asked me," McAfee was saying, "that one knocked the silver spoon from this guy's mouth."

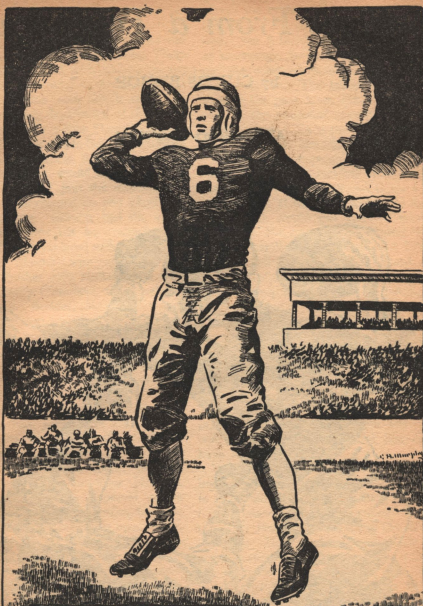
A matter of seconds and the gun went off. Larry Doyle turned around. He walked toward the bench. Tom Shepherd was running toward him. A portly man was climbing from the Doyle box. He had one foot over when he paused. They were roaring something from the Carlton stands.

John Doyle listened. Then he withdrew his foot and sat down next to his smiling wife.

"Our boy," the tractor king grinned.

They were cheering and it was clear as a bell.

"It's a good name," John Doyle said.



REFUGEE FROM A TOUCHDOWN

By CURTIS BISHOP

Refugee From a Touchdown

by CURTIS BISHOP

All-American's Long Novel





IT was the first day out for Staunton's Blue Wave, but already they were hitting the blocking dummy. They stretched out in a long uneven line from the blocking pit almost the full width of the field, their practice jerseys already sweat-streaked and begrimed; and, as his turn came, each man crouched, tore across turf at top speed and flung himself upon the elusive, defiant dummy. Slowness of foot, or gingeriness of impact, brought immediate criticism from head coach Tom Holland, who watched each man with narrow speculating eyes.

Jim Sheldon, Staunton's famous grid mentor, was gone, was somewhere in the Pacific wearing a colonel's eagle, but this was the Staunton Blue Wave and the Sheldon system still prevailed. You could almost hear Sheldon's spirit, grim and unyielding, screaming out: "Block! Block! Block!" Halfbacks and quarterbacks hit the dummy just like the linemen, as often and as hard. Sheldon always claimed the blocks downfield meant the difference between defeat and victory; and Tom Holland, turned down by the Army because of a punctured ear drum, who was taking over one of football's biggest coaching jobs though little older than the boys he was coaching, was an apt Sheldon pupil. They would work like fury on their passing and punting, but in the blocking pit they would be miserable slaves.

Young Tom Holland, like his predecessor, didn't believe in soft words. You knew it would be rough before you came out, so if you couldn't take it, you stayed away. This wasn't a tea party. This was Staunton's Blue Wave and you were expected to be tough—tough and good.

"Carter!" Holland's voice barked, and a husky blond-haired chap charged simultaneously. Perhaps the voice wavered, perhaps it didn't. Anyhow, Tom Holland's lean young face didn't noticeably change expression.

But the boys waiting in line whispered among themselves.

"He has his nerve," growled tackle Bob Cartwright to center Snake Carruthers. "He's about as welcome around here as a rattlesnake."

Carruthers nodded. Other boys who heard nodded. They all felt the same way about Eddie Carter, the boy who was just

then picking himself up out of the sand and looking inquisitively at Coach Holland.

"You left your feet too soon, Carter," Holland said crisply, impersonally.

"Yes, sir," Carter murmured respectfully, brushing the sand off his jersey as he went to the end of the line.

Other boys who earned the coach's criticism received whispered taunts and chuckles when they came back into the line, but no one looked at Carter. There were furtive conversations carried on around him, but no word was addressed directly to him. He was a nice-looking youth with curly light hair, pale blue eyes and a frank, good-natured face. There was no attempt made to conceal their resentment but Eddie pretended that he wasn't aware of their feelings. He even had a friendly grin for the man ahead of him in line, wingman Toby Millner.

"The Boy' is cracking down early, isn't he?" he panted.

Jim Sheldon had been nick-named "The Man" years before by students and alumni, and spoken of in no other manner except on formal occasions; so young Tom Holland, the backfield coach entrusted with the job for the duration, had already been nick-named "The Boy."

Millner gave him an empty stare and looked off coldly. Eddie Carter's lips tightened, but he showed no other reaction to this cruel snub. He had known it would be like this.

After another half-hour of blocking Tom Holland called for the squad to split—linemen to the south end of the field, backs and ends to stay where they were. Then Eddie Carter left the line and approached the grim-faced young coach.

"Coach?"

"Yes, Carter?" was the even return. You wouldn't guess from Tom Holland's expression and eyes that he was burning to take a punch at the youth before him.

"I've been looking over the squad and I believe guard is your biggest problem," Eddie murmured. "I played guard some in high school, suppose I shift there."

"Okay," Tom Holland shrugged.

Eddie thanked him and raced after the tackles, guards and centers going downfield to where line coach Bully Mahan was waiting for them with all sorts of schemes in mind for these broad-shouldered huskies

who tipped the scales at 190 pounds up. For nearly all of the Blue Wave were U. S. Naval Reserves, sent back to school to complete their degree requirements after a summer in training camp, and material wasn't scarce. Staunton wouldn't be three-deep at every post as in Jim Sheldon's hey-dey, but young Tom Holland had no cause for complaint; the grid gods had dealt gently with him in his debut as a head coach.

Take the line, for instance. There were Bob Cartwright and Hobe Allen at tackle, starters in 1942; Snake Carruthers at center, a crack line-backer; and Stuff Stewart at left guard, one of the South's best a year ago. Behind them were reserves from last year's team and a handful of freshmen. Only at right guard was the Blue forward wall weak and, with other colleges stripped of material by draft and reserve calls, no tears could be shed for a single gap. Eddie Carter, waiting for the line coach to call his name and send him floundering over the turf in that maneuver Mahan had invented himself, was determined to play that right guard.

Eddie's previous experience with the Staunton varsity had been at fullback, and he had done well enough for a sophomore, but it was the line for him this year, for two reasons: first, he was needed there; second, it would be easier to crash the starting lineup at that spot.

Mahan's workouts for guards and tackles were torture, something that might have been part of the Spanish inquisition. You were supposed to use your brains in the Staunton line, and to use all kinds of feints in your blocking. Bully taught you to dive one way but actually to throw your weight another, and to be able to shift your beef in mid-air so a nimble opponent wouldn't suck you out, then go around you to block a punt or rush a passer. They got this workout the very first day. They would get it every other day. They would flounder through it before every game as a warmup. If you met your man squarely, and checked him there, you were supposed to be on your feet in a flash and headed downfield. A Staunton play wasn't ever a Staunton play, theoretically at least, until the goal line was reached. What started out to be a simple plunge through center might be the 80-yard touchdown sprint.

On every play you assumed that the Blue Wave was going over pay dirt.

EDDIE was built well for the right guard's job. He was a stocky boy with thick shoulders and legs, not over five-ten in height and weighing about 190 pounds. The right guard in the Staunton system went charging through out of the five-man line while the left guard fell back to become the third line-backer in the 5-3-2-1 defensive pattern the Blue used almost exclusively. At right guard you just had to be rough, fast and tough.

That was on the defense. On the offense the right guard worked his heart out play after play. The right guard swooped out of the line to lead interference on wide plays and reverses and faded back to protect the passers when the triple-wing spread was called. It took two right guards for the Blue varsity, one wasn't enough. Consider that the guard outran a halfback on every running play, in addition to jarring work on the defense, and you can see why there had to be two of them at all times, and why a third one would earn his varsity letter if he could stand the gaff.

There were Eddie Carter, a chap named Skippy Flanagan who had been shifted from end; Freddie Warren, a made-over center whose 175 pounds weren't enough for 60-minute duty; and two freshmen, Joe Hamberger and Tom Cunningham.

Before that first workout was over, Mahan had named his men. Warren and Flanagan were the first string alternates, Carter and Hamberger on the second squad. Usually the Blue lineup was set in spring training and all ready for head-knocking when autumn rolled around, but the U. S. Marines had picked off two right guards to upset Bully's schedule.

But not for long. The watchword was hurry, and they couldn't wait on made-over right guards to become acclimated. They would scrimmage the next afternoon, and the guards would be gotten ready the hard way, would be hammered into shape by a varsity which wouldn't hold its punches.

Especially not against Eddie Carter!

He changed clothes in silence in the dressing room, vowing that he would be damned if he would speak pleasantly to another soul and run the risk of being

ignored. A cut over his right eye had to be dabbed with monkey blood and he was among the last to leave the dressing room.

Outside, he found several of the boys waiting for him, their faces grim and threatening. He started by without a greeting but one of them caught his shoulder.

"I want to talk to you," one of them rasped.

Eddie nodded. "All right, Holland," he said calmly.

This was Bob Holland, the coach's young brother. The experts were picking Bob for a great season at fullback this year. As a sophomore, he and Eddie had split time at the job.

"I heard you tell the coach you wanted to try guard," Holland said accusingly. "Were you insinuating anything by that?"

"Insinuating what?"

"Were you insinuating that you didn't think you would get a square deal at fullback because I'm the coach's brother?"

Bob Holland was furious and ready for action. Eddie smiled faintly. For two years dark-faced Bob Holland had carried that chip on his shoulder. His brother was backfield coach, but so what; his brother wouldn't show him any favoritism and he didn't want any. Now with Tom Holland as a head coach, evidently it was worse.

"No," Eddie answered quietly, "I didn't intend any insinuations."

"It's a good thing," Bob Holland sneered. "You make any trouble on this team and I'll attend to you personally."

They were about the same weight but the coach's brother had the advantage in reach. However, Eddie Carter didn't flinch. He couldn't fight back at snubs and turned-away heads, but this was something different.

"Are you sure," he snapped, "that you're big enough?"

Bob Holland's answer came with an explosive crack, a right to the chin which staggered Eddie momentarily. Before the blond youth could rush in a voice came out of the shadows: !

"Break it up, break it up."

There stood Tom Holland, anger on his young grim face.

"One more stunt like that," he said to his young brother with a cold impersonal tone that left no doubt of his sincerity, "and you're off the squad."

To the other boys: "I'm ashamed of you men," he snapped. "You know how I feel about fighting. Were you just going to stand there and let this develop into a battle?"

There were mutters of protest but no direct reply. The boys turned away uncomfortably and started toward Sheldon Hall for dinner.

Tom Holland turned upon Eddie. The young coach's lips fought to say something, but no words came from his mouth. Then, after a moment of uncomfortable silence, the mentor said quietly:

"That's all, Carter."

Eddie turned in another direction. He wasn't staying in Sheldon Hall this year with the other boys. He had moved out of Sheldon Hall the year before when he had quit the varsity in mid-season, just before the Southern Methodist game. Eddie wasn't one of the boys to whom the "Sheldon Plan," meaning board, room, tuition and \$10-per-month, was extended. This year he was on his own.

II

THE varsity's ambition was obvious; they were out to murder Eddie Carter. The blond boy took his place at right guard in the "B" lineup, relieving Joe Hamberger after 20 minutes of their first regulation-length scrimmage game. They didn't taunt him with words; they just looked at him, whispered together in the huddle, and he knew what was coming. Fullback Bob Holland carried the ball on a straight-ahead thrust. Blocking back Steve Fisher, a junior college transfer from Texas whose powerhouse plunges had already won him a varsity berth, pointed the play, but first, Bob Cartwright and Stuffy Stewart took a swipe at Carter. That was in the books and he had no kick about it; on a power play the tackle and guard teamed up on the guard and, if they didn't get him, there was Fisher to take a lunge. But Cartwright and Stewart got him. They high-lowed him, and when he went down Cartwright stepped in his face and the cleats left a trail of blue and red that was to be there for weeks. Bob Holland thundered right over him, spinning away into the open field with Fisher still in front of him. That made the score 34-0 in favor of the varsity,

and the handful of fans in the stands cheered. The coach's kid brother was looking like the real McCoy. This made the third time he had smashed his way into the clear.

Eddie Carter picked himself up slowly and gingerly. Those cleat marks hurt and he was burning clear through. It could have been accidental, of course, but he had his own ideas about that. Bob Cartwright was a veteran and belonged to that clique which had taken it upon themselves to move Eddie out of Sheldon Hall the year before. He had come back to the dormitory after a trip downtown to find all of his personal effects on the sidewalk in front of the dormitory and a note on the screen door which read: "Carter, stay out!"

He had stayed out, of course. He had picked up his belongings and gone to a boarding house. He hadn't felt like fighting back then. Now, almost a year later, he wasn't going to be walked on any more. He would have to take the snubs, hard looks and insults murmured behind his back, but they weren't going to run roughshod over him.

The varsity kicked the point and the scrubs received. This wasn't a usual Staunton second-string. In other years the "B" team didn't ask any quarter of the regulars and gave 'em a close game. But there was a good back or two on the second string, and an end who played in the varsity's class, and Eddie Carter, burning with indignation; the rest were far below the varsity in weight, speed and experience.

Tom Holland, like famous Jim Sheldon, was a "system" coach. Backfield men had to fit specifications, and one of them was that the tailback had to be a triple-threat man. Consequently sophomore Skeeter Martin wasn't on the first-team. Skeeter was just a ball carrier, a little rough on the edges. He could run like blue blazes and had power for a 186-pounder, but he ran like a scared rabbit, without regard for interference or signals; and that didn't go in the closely-knit Staunton offense.

Skeeter was writhing under the injustice of it all. In high school he had been touted as another Red Grange, but here the coaches were looking everywhere but at him.

He took the ball and started wide, running like an antelope, depending on pure

speed. He didn't have shiftiness; he just ran wide and hard. The Blue-clad varsity had been busting him all afternoon but, on this play, something happened. Bob Holland, playing the left halfback on defense, came up to the line of scrimmage as end Toby Millner faded out with Martin, turning him in. Holland had the tackle practically made until somebody bobbed up and plastered the coach's brother all over the grass. Skeeter cut through the gap like a tornado. The left line-backer was also there, but Skeeter plummeted through grasping fingers and kept going. The safety man should have had him but the ball carrier was fast, very fast. Tailback Frank Kerke didn't get anywhere near him and the scrubs scored.

Eddie Carter had thrown the block on Bob Holland, a wobbly block, hitting the fullback too high and on one side, but effective, nevertheless.

The varsity took the ball and they talked in the huddle, looking toward Carter with angry eyes. They came out of the huddle and Stuffey Stewart crouched in front of Eddie and glared at him.

"You'll get it, Carter," Stuffey said softly.

Eddie was new to some of the guard fundamentals but he had been a line-backer in high school and he could handle himself on the defense. He shifted, left to right. Stewart followed him. In the process Stewart's hips lifted too high. Eddie slammed into him, rising like a plane on the takeoff, and dumped Stuffey on the turf. Then he slithered through a mass of blue and took on a chance on the right pair of legs, diving at 'em and rolling to the ground with the impact. He was right; ball carrier Bob Holland was dumped behind the line of scrimmage.

Eddie wanted to scream out that this was his answer to their ganging tactics, but he held his tongue. He dropped on his knees and did nothing worse than grin at Stewart.

Eddie sensed another line play but didn't figure this one would come right over him. He thought they would be smart enough not to tip their hand to Coach Holland. He jerked himself backward as the ball was snapped and hipped Stewart to the ground, helping with his open palm, and flung himself to the left. The motion got him out of the way of Cartwright's charge just in

time; in fact, the varsity left tackle rolled to the turf with him as he met ball carrier Derby Chambers on the line of scrimmage. It was one of those famous reverses out of the modified "triple-wing." Chambers, the wingback, playing a couple of steps back of the right tackle and very close to the tailback, took the handoff and went over center. It was a good play. Chambers could hit hard. Eddie's shoulder ached from a lightning-driven knee, but he picked himself up and chuckled out loud. He wasn't doing bad against first string.

HE watched them talk in the huddle. They didn't realize they were tipping themselves off. They were shaking their heads as tailback Jack Evers talked and Eddie guessed they were protesting the play. Evers was calling for football and they wanted to carry on their dirty work. Evers got his way and so Eddie knew the play wasn't coming over him. Eddie sensed it would be a wide reverse and, with the snap, leaped away from Stewart's lunge and raced to his left, hurdling a tangle of linemen. Eddie had been shifted from guard to fullback in high school because he was so fast. He ran even with ball-carrier Evers. The scrub left end played Evers nicely enough, turning the tailback at the sidelines. Eddie smacked into him hard and they went down in blur of blue and grey.

Evers didn't get up for a few minutes. The wind was knocked out of him. Eddie sprawled out of the grass and waited for the varsity to start something else.

The varsity had to kick. There was no use trying to break through to block a punt against the Blue cup-shaped defense, center and tackle fading back to protect the kicker, so Eddie drifted backward to help Skeeter Martin cover the punt. Skeeter took it and ran smack into a handful of varsity boys, went down squirming and twisting. But the return was good for 25 yards and they were at midfield.

Skeeter almost scored again as the scrubs kept the varsity handcuffed for the rest of the game. The 34-6 margin didn't look too bad, not for Martin and Carter. The railbirds started raving about Martin immediately.

Eddie dressed and walked away rapidly, so stiff and weary that he had to drive his

short thick legs to make them function. Yet he was grinning with satisfaction. He cut through the densely foliated campus to an isolated spot behind the Woman's Building, where there was a stone bench and a fish pond and a thick ligustrum hedge.

A girl sat on the bench waiting for him. Eddie sat down beside her and slipped his arm around her and she laid her brown curly head against his shoulder.

"How was it today?" she asked sympathetically.

"Rough," he grimaced. "They got a good team. They take a guy they don't like and bounce him around."

"Did you play well?" she asked after a moment.

"Pretty fair," he admitted modestly. Then, more confidently: "I don't see how they can keep me off the varsity long. 'The Boy' hasn't many good guards. I'm heads and shoulders above some of those dopes."

"It will take him a while," was the girl's retort, "but he'll be fair in the long run. He's hard-headed but fair."

"I hope so," Eddie sighed. He searched in his pockets and brought out a slip of paper. "Here's the check already endorsed."

"I'll send it off tonight," the girl promised.

Then she looked at her wrist watch. "You had better hurry," she said regretfully. "You have 30 minutes to eat and get to work."

He nodded, then reached over and kissed her lightly.

"You'll be here tomorrow afternoon?"

"Of course," she smiled.

Eddie went walking off. Somehow his muscles didn't seem so weary and stiff.

The girl took another trail, but also walking hastily. She had to be speedy or she would be late. Another absence from dinner call might produce an investigation; Already Bob was teasing her, threatening to put a detective on her trail. It wouldn't do for Bob and Tom Holland to learn that their sister waited every afternoon until Eddie Carter came from practice. It wouldn't do at all—not yet.

First, Eddie Carter had to live down their bitterness, and Tommy Holland, Jr., a three-year-old youngster who was his dad's pride and joy, the mascot of the

Staunton football team and the innocent cause of that bitterness, had to go East for an expensive operation on his spine. If and when Tommy was well, could wriggle his toes and wave his tiny arms, then Ruth Holland could face her brothers with the truth—that she loved Eddie Carter, that she wore his fraternity pin, that she intended to marry him when he graduated.

Had she known he was *that* Eddie Carter the night they met, it would have been different. She would have turned on her heel and walked away without another word. But they had met at a summer resort in the Rocky Mountains, and it had not occurred to her that this good-looking blond youth was the same Eddie Carter whose roadster had struck down her small nephew, leaving Tommy a hopeless paralytic unless a surgeon's magic could induce the child's spinal column to function again.

Later, when she did learn, she had already become very fond of him and when he falteringly told his side of the story, she felt sorry for him.

The Staunton campus had not dealt kindly with Eddie Carter after that accident. Perhaps he didn't deserve it; for he came there an arrogant junior college transfer with a big prep school reputation as a fullback, a long low-swung convertible, a wardrobe of flashy clothes and an extravagant allowance. Rich boys were not unknown to Staunton, but few of them carried their showiness onto the football squad. Eddie was conceited and ostentatious but he could play football. In his first year he pushed sophomore Bob Holland, 'The Boy's' brother, right out of the starting lineup.

There had been talk of Eddie's dissipation before that rainy night when his car had skidded onto the sidewalk and crushed small Tommy Holland. There had been insinuations in the papers that one of Jim Sheldon's stars made the night spots regularly, spending money like it was water. When the dazed Eddie picked up the unconscious boy and faced the police, he smelled like a brewery, and investigation showed he had been out at a nearby tavern drinking beer.

That was only two days before their game with Texas Southern for the conference title, and Bob Holland was on

the bench with an injured ankle. They had to revamp a left halfback for this crucial game, and that didn't work at all; Texas Southern won 13-7.

For Eddie couldn't face the storm of criticism and bitterness as Tommy Holland lay hovering between life and death.

He quit the squad and left school. Probably Jim Sheldon would have dismissed him anyhow. Sheldon didn't stand for his players, stars or substitutes, hanging around taverns. So Eddie just bundled his expensive clothes into his convertible and fled. No one tried to find him, figuring it was a good riddance.

III

TOM HOLLAND had a good team. Whether Staunton's Blue was good enough to rank with the super-great teams of Jim Sheldon's hey-day remained to be seen, but the Wave swept over Pacific State 34-0 in its opening game and the experts warned the nation to watch out for Staunton.

The varsity played only a quarter and then the substitutes took over. The score was 14-0 in Staunton's favor when the second team, including Carter at right guard and Skeeter Martin at tailback, raced out.

The first play was a wide one, and Skeeter juggled the ball alarmingly in his race around the left wing. Eddie Carter pulled out to lead the interference on the play. He wheeled out of the line with the snap and was a step in front of Skeeter when the halfback cut for the line of scrimmage.

The play was supposed to go wide but Skeeter couldn't remember such details when he had the ball under his arm. He was a frightened deer breaking for the open. He saw a chance to cut inside the fading defensive wingman and he cut. Eddie should have busted the end under the Sheldon system, but, sensing that Skeeter had cut too sharply, he left the end alone, rushed across in the ball carrier's wake and sent the Pacific State linebacker sprawling. That left only the halfback between Skeeter and the goal. The Staunton flyer dug his cleats into the turf and cut for the coffin corner. The halfback was caught by surprise with his sudden burst of speed and

stayed a step behind all the way, downing Skeeter just at the last white line with a desperate lunge which sent them both sprawling into the end zone.

That was the most sensational run of the game and the Staunton fans showed their enthusiasm with a prolonged cheer. Skeeter beamed from ear to ear as he joined the huddle. He slapped Eddie on the shoulder.

"That, son, was blocking," he chortled.

Nobody spoke, and Skeeter reddened. He knew how the boys felt about Eddie for he had felt the same way—until today.

"Thanks," Eddie murmured.

They converted the extra point and it was 21-0. Pacific State had to punt right back to them and Skeeter took up his marching again. The stocky towhead ran all over the field and the crowd loved it. Skeeter marked up two more touchdowns in the second and third periods before the second-string came out and the third team went in, and the Sunday papers hailed him as the most sensational running back the Southwest had seen since Jack Crain was at Texas.

The sports writers even dared to ask Holland at his Monday press conference if he was considering moving Martin up to the first string in place of Kirke. Tom Holland shook his head.

"Martin can run," he conceded, "but he breaks up team play. Kirke stays at left halfback."

One of the scribes murmured that football games were won by touchdowns, but it brought no retort.

In practice the varsity continued to work on Carter. There was no banter between them, only hard looks, and hard blows. The varsity were holdovers, except for the blocking back, and they remembered well Eddie's boastfulness of the season before, his walking out on them before the Texas Southern game. They knew all about the crippled youngster. Tommy had been the squad's mascot. Every night they went by to see him, some of them carrying him a football, an ice-cream cone, talking with him about the day he would be able to run and play again.

But the new varsity blocking back didn't know about all this. He was a transfer, a big grinning chap who didn't miss many blocks. The boys called Steve Fisher an

"indifferent cuss" and wondered how good he would be if he was ever stirred up. He made the varsity hands down. He weighed 210 and he could hit like a General Sherman tank.

He hit Eddie often, of course; on those quick-opening line thrusts which featured the Staunton attack, which sent the short man into the line out of a double-wing, he went after the right guard, using a shoulder rather than leaving the ground. They used plenty of shoulder blocks in the Staunton line, for a Blue back had to have speed to be out there and they gave him just a split second to get through the hole. A shoulder block, then down the field to help wipe out the secondary, to prevent a fleetier opponent from running down their ball carrier from behind . . . except when Steve Fisher bumped against Eddie Carter he didn't always get downfield, sometimes he stayed where he was, sprawled flat on his face.

A mild amiable sort, Steve; willing to take lots of punishment, slow to dish it out. It was two weeks before he protested.

"Say, buddy," he drawled to Eddie after particular rough treatment on an off-tackle play, "we ain't trying to kill each other. This is just scrimmage."

A glare was Eddie's only answer, so Fisher tightened his lips and talked to Kirke in the huddle.

"That Carter guy is getting frisky. Let's use No. 81 and lemme teach him some manners."

No. 81 was a reverse. Kirke started off with the ball, then it went to Bob Holland cutting around from the left wingback. It was a trap play and there was nobody at all to stop Carter when he came busting through. The blond guard got into the secondary and was all set to twist fullback's Bob's neck when—WHAM!

HE had no chance against Steve Fisher, none at all. Steve cut over from the right wingback. That was the play, for the right guard to be trapped in the backfield, wiped out by Steve's lunge from the side, and then the fullback to cut sharply through the hole left when the overzealous lineman came charging through. Bob Holland slashed through the hole while Carter lay on his face and heard a brief symphony

in which birds sang the lead and harps furnished the background.

Then he felt himself being picked up and somebody shaking him. The music faded out and Eddie saw Fisher bending over him solicitously.

"Didn't hurt you, did I, big boy?" asked the Texan.

"Just the wind," Eddie whispered. "Your shoulder got me."

"Let that be a lesson to you not to start trouble," Fisher advised his victim. The big blocking back's grin took all the sting out of his words. "I'm new around here and I don't like to be drawn into these feuds."

Eddie stood up painfully. "I'll remember that, Fisher," he murmured pleasantly. "This *will* be a lesson to me."

He limped back into place but Tom Holland stopped the scrimmage.

"You looked like a schoolboy, Carter," he said coldly. "I suppose you didn't hear me Monday afternoon when I warned all guards to watch out for those trap plays."

So the young coach had warned them. Their scouts had reported that the Rice team used a very vicious "trap" play, and that when a guard was caught napping it was apt to be a touchdown.

The mentor's tone seemed to be colder than was absolutely necessary. A reprimand was all right, but Tom Holland actually seemed to enjoy delivering this reproof.

A titter went up from the boys. Carter's face crimsoned.

"Yes, sir," he said respectfully.

But the rage Eddie felt in his heart just then was nothing compared to how he felt when he read in Bill Beck's column the next morning:

"Eddie Carter, the former slashing fullback, who shifted to guard this Autumn when he realized he couldn't beat speedy Bob Holland out of a starting job, is showing up fairly well in some respects, poorly in others. Carter seems to have plenty of aggressiveness and power but lacks finesse and the fundamental grey matter. Even with the second string warned to be on the lookout for trap plays as the Blue-clad boys get ready for Rice's Owls, Carter is caught napping time after time. . . ."

Eddie knew Beck by sight. The sports writer seldom came out to the practice field and it was a well-known fact that he got most of his material from visiting the grid-

iron boys in Sheldon Hall after dinner.

Eddie raged to his sympathetic roommate, to Ruth and to the empty walls of his room but he presented the same calm front to the team that afternoon in the dressing room. The subject wasn't brought up until big Fisher, knowing of the feud but with a careless indifference to it, boomed out:

"This guy Beck dealt you out a raw one, Carter. If I remember right that was the only time we trapped you all afternoon."

"Oh, well," Eddie murmured, "sports writers are never supposed to be right," and let it go at that for the moment.

As the team trooped out of the dressing room, he caught Fisher's shoulder. "I'm the original Peck's bad boy, Fisher. You'll find it isn't a good idea to take my part around here!"

Steve Fisher looked down at him and chuckled. "Oh, I don't mind being in the minority," he murmured. "I come from Texas, you know, and down there we don't care much about a man's past. You play a nice brand of football, kiddo, and don't let this situation get you down."

"It won't," Eddie promised. "And thanks a lot."

It was childish to feel so thrilled over just one kind word from a teammate, but Eddie felt that way. Kind words and kind looks were few and far between these days.

HE did not start against Rice. Neither did Skeeter Martin. The Blue Wave roared to a touchdown in a slash-bang manner via routine plays, then settled down to protect a 6-0 lead. That relapse was a mistake for Rice came slashing back. Perhaps the varsity guards had been invincible to trap plays in practice all week but they fell for the Owl spinners, stumbling over each other in frantic efforts to reach the ball carrier behind the line of scrimmage, then watching from a prone position while Rice backs Cuthbert and Anderson tore into the secondary time after time. A long forward pass put Rice in a position to score, and the Owls went through the heart of the Staunton line for a touchdown. A conversion put the Blue Wave behind 7-6 as the quarter ended.

"The Boy" did just what "The Man" would have done—sent in the second team. That was traditional of Staunton—two full

clubs, substitutions of entire fresh elevens. But this was war and many of the boys had gone marching off and college teams didn't have two and three full teams any more.

The Blue second-string couldn't make it. Rice, on the other hand, rested boys in pairs and threes, taking advantage of the unlimited substitution rule. In a pressure moment, on a third and two or after two or three first downs in a row, the Owl first string was always back in there to quell any threats.

But the second-string made 'em hustle. They had Skeeter Martin tearing around the wings. Not many people in the stands noticed a broad-shouldered low-swung guard maneuvering in front of the slippery halfback, giving ground when he did, going forward when he did, reversing field with him. Guards pulling out of the line to lead interference on wide plays don't grab off much glory. Eddie Carter was just another blue jersey, Skeeter was the fair-haired boy. Skeeter didn't go across but he reeled off two long runs that kept Staunton in the ball game during the second half.

Still trailing 7-6, the first team returned to the field and took to the air. The Owls were set for passing and they picked off one of Bob Holland's heaves and there was another touchdown before you could say "Jack Robinson," a 45-yard gallop through an open field with the younger Holland in frantic pursuit. The try for point was missed and it was 13-6.

Skeeter went in at the close of the period with the first string, Evers coming out. That left them without a field general but Tom Holland ran two wingbacks in and out often enough to keep the squad following orders from the bench. Jim Sheldon wouldn't have done that but Tom Holland was coaching his second varsity game and was worried frantic. The athletic council had not raised Tom's salary but had hinted of a bonus if he did a good job. That meant winning games like this one; he could get by losing to Texas Southern but never to Rice. And a bonus meant special treatment for Tommy Holland, the brave-faced little cripple.

The boys tried. Skeeter tried. He took the pigskin and tore from one side of the field to the other and kept the crowd in

an uproar but always there was a solid Rice wall in front of him when he tried to go forward and the Staunton boys couldn't give him protection. The Blue blockers went for their assignments but, when they got there, more than likely they would look up and there would be Skeeter bobbing across the field, completely ignoring his interference. He was highly excitable, deaf to all instructions and signals. He could take the ball and try to dodge the other side and that was all.

Skippy Flanagan came out at right guard, so weary he could hardly trot, and Ben Warren went in. Then, in a pileup, Ben was the last man up and he clutched his knee as he went bravely back into the huddle. Tom Holland motioned to Eddie Carter. There were only four minutes left.

There was no cheer from the Blue section as Eddie raced out. Perhaps, if the sounds could have been analyzed, there were more boos and catcalls than anything else. But two hands clutched his shoulder in the huddle, Martin's and the big right paw of Steve Fisher. Eddie beamed at them.

Another substitute came out immediately, Evers in for a play at fullback to give them instructions.

"Coach says work Skeeter," Evers told them.

Kirk was calling signals and nodded. They did work Skeeter. They sent the little chap around right end and he got up for eight yards. Eddie didn't figure in that play; he didn't pull out on them all. Steve Fisher did the mopping up and a grand job it was.

Then Bob Holland was back in for Evers and they had three blockers and Skeeter.

"No. 85," Bob said.

That was the handoff to Skeeter. First Bob Holland had the ball, then Kirke. Then Kirke lateralled it back and wide to Skeeter and they hoped the Rice wingman would be fooled. Eddie was supposed to hold off the guard on that one, brush him aside and then go for the left halfback. But he didn't feel any confidence in that Rice wing being fooled. Rice seemed to have their plays well-scouted; the wings had not been trapped all afternoon.

Eddie had a hunch that the guard, curly-haired Sandy Thomas, was figuring on pull-

ing back; so, with the snap, he abandoned his original assignment and tore laterally along the line of scrimmage, almost stumbling over his own tackle. The ball went from Holland to Kirke to Martin. The Rice left wing faded swiftly as Skeeter started wide. Eddie left the ground in a desperate block and could have wept with joy as he felt the solid impact of shoulder meeting hip, and then the thud as the Owl hit the ground and he went tumbling over him.

That should have been Fisher's man. Steve was going at the wing when Eddie cut in ahead of him; swiftly regaining his balance, the big Texan cut ahead of the fleet Skeeter. He forced Martin to slow down. Skeeter had to barely trot along the sidelines to keep from running over his own teammate.

But football-wise Steve Fisher knew what he was doing. He had his ball-carrier between his broad shoulders and the sidelines, and the Rice boys were angling toward him. He could brush 'em off like they were flies and he swept two of them to the turf that way. That brought Skeeter to the 40 and in sight of pay dirt. The safety man was there waiting and Steve couldn't regain his balance to keep the quarterback from cutting around in front of him.

But that didn't matter; the burly blocking back had done his job well. All Skeeter had to do was to veer to his left and keep running. The wild-eyed boy put on steam and there was just a blue streak visible to the untrained eye as he cut loose.

There was a sensational block on the 20 as Bob Holland cut the legs from under a pursuing Owl but that didn't matter; Skeeter was on the beam all by himself.

Now the extra point. Bob Holland swung a short sturdy leg and the pigskin went tumbling between the uprights and the score was tied 13-13.

It ended that way.

The crowd poured out of the stands and carried Skeeter off the field on their shoulders. Eddie watched from afar with a rueful grin. Then he shrugged his shoulders and pushed his way through the fans into the dressing room.

Oh, well, that was a guard's life.

Nobody spoke to him but Steve Fisher.

The big Texan came over as he was taking his shower and nudged his ribs.

"Offhand," whispered Steve, "I would say we did a pretty pert job."

"Offhand, so would I," Eddie agreed happily.

IV

STEVE FISHER was another member of the squad who did not live in Sheldon Hall, the football dormitory. The big blocking back seemed to be a typical "lone wolf"; he showed up for practice and then left without revealing his residence, means of support or circle of friends. His relations with his teammates were amiable but distant and he discouraged any attempts to be friendly.

But there was no "black past" behind Steve as in the case of Eddie Carter, the other "lone wolf." Steve was simply that sort, a boy from a small Texas town who had never known close friendships and didn't want them. He had a pleasant grin and word for everybody, but that was all. He liked to be by himself when he walked around the campus or when he studied and read. He lived alone in a small garage apartment back of a private residence and he had no intentions of exchanging the privacy of this retreat for the noisy corridors of Sheldon Hall.

On one occasion he ventured into a small restaurant on a down-town side street, studied the menu carelessly, and ordered a steak. Waiting for it, he leaned back in his chair and looked around. There was always a twinkle in Steve's eyes as if he enjoyed every scene—even this, the marble machine in the corner, the dingy walls and low dark ceiling, the spotted tablecloths, the roughly-dressed men at the counter washing their food down with beer and shouting rough jokes at each other. All this Steve took in without surprise or comment. Then, quite suddenly, his eyes lost their sleepy expression and he started. A waiter serving the tables across the room looked very familiar.

He strained his eyes to see through the dim light.

Eddie Carter!

The waiter brought his water and silverware but Steve motioned him aside.

"Think I'll take my steak over on the other side of the room," he said.

Steve sat down at a table just across from the one Eddie was serving. The blond-haired guard recognized him and came over.

"What can I do for you, Steve?" he asked pleasantly. "If you want beer, drink it out of a bottle. But leave the food and the glasses alone."

"I got a steak ordred," Steve shrugged, "and I'm not very squeamish."

"It will be steak," Eddie smiled. "How old the cow was when it was slaughtered, I can't say."

Steve looked around him, then back to Carter. "Not a very nice place to work, is it?" he murmured.

"Not very," Eddie agreed.

Steve studied him through sleepy narrow eyes. "Thought you were a rich boy, Carter," he said. "The guys on the team told me you had a convertible and plenty of cash."

"I work down here for the atmosphere," Eddie said curtly. "It's so refining."

Steve looked toward the counter. A frowsy blonde woman was threatening to demolish one of the waiters with a beer bottle unless he hurried with her sandwich.

"Probably educational, too," Steve murmured.

"Very," Eddie agreed.

Steve lapsed into silence and Eddie went after the steak. It was ready and, surprisingly enough, not too tough.

As he ate Steve meditated. Why was Carter waiting on tables in this dingy restaurant? Talk on the squad was that Eddie received a check for \$250 every month from a trust fund left by his grandmother. They said that the season before Eddie had drunk champagne at some of the roadhouses and the sorority girls whispered that he had given this one a platinum bracelet and that one a watch-loomet that cost plenty.

He didn't make dough like that down here, Steve mused. The whole place didn't gross enough to pay for one tin bracelet.

Then Steve shrugged his shoulders and asked himself: "Fisher, why don't you attend to your own knitting?"

Steve Fisher, who liked privacy himself, preferably the open silent spaces of Texas, reproached himself for having trespassed

onto the domain of another man's private business.

HE asked no more questions. He did some more thinking about it naturally, particularly as Staunton eked out a 7-6 win over North Carolina and Tom Holland began to tear the starting lineup apart and experiment. They won that game with a wobbly pass good for fifty yards and a score, the luckiest kind of a scoring play. Actually their offense was so weak that the sports writers and fans were screaming for action.

Even Skeeter Martin had not gained. "The Boy" tried Skeeter in the first quarter and he fumbled on the 14-yard stripe, giving North Carolina their touchdown setup. Skeeter's yardage was definitely in the minus column throughout the afternoon and there were three other costly fumbles, all of them by the same jittery tailback.

Fisher played indifferent ball himself. The squad seemed to be lifeless, and Steve didn't care much for smashing out opposing wings and tackles only to look up and find that his ball carrier had been dropped behind the line of scrimmage by a lineman who had charged through from the other side. That was the trouble with the Sheldon system; there had to be speed in the backfield. The shoulder blocks in the line gave them just a second and if they weren't through in a flash they would be dropped.

Bob Holland could hit hard and fast, but the Tar Heels knew how to play the coach's kid brother. North Carolina outsmarted the Blue from start to finish, jamming the center of the line on the early downs, spreading out for the third and fourth.

And the line wouldn't charge through. They "floated" instead, playing a zone line defense, letting the Staunton backs hand the ball around behind the line of scrimmage, waiting gleefully for the final ball handler to come forward, where they met him with much gusto. Given the breaks, North Carolina would have turned in a grid upset that would have looked very bad on Holland's record. Gosh, Staunton was supposed to wallop North Carolina by several touchdowns!

"The Boy," squirming unhappily on the bench, did not substitute whole teams in this game, so that Eddie Carter played only

a few minutes. Skeeter wasn't in the lineup at the time and the two did not get an opportunity to work hand in hand with big Steve. Skippy Flanagan played nearly all the right guard with Freddie Warren seeing about as much service as Eddie. There was no fault to find with Skippy on the defense; he was a pillar of strength against a North Carolina club which outgained Staunton in every department of the game.

It was easy to see that Staunton had to develop something else to help Bob Holland on those quick-opening line plays. From now on every team would take a tip from the Tar Heels and jam the middle until strength was developed on end plays and forward passing. Skeeter had the speed for the wide runs but he couldn't pass. If Tom Holland replaced either Evers or Kirke with Skeeter, who would do the passing? Neither Bob Holland, the fullback, nor Derby Chambers, the wingback, could peg 'em. Besides, this was Staunton, where the Sheldon tradition was firmly established, and in the Blue backfield it was the tailback who did the passing and punting.

They floundered through three or four practice sessions with Skeeter, Evers and Kirke all working at the vital left halfback's job; then, just before dark Thursday afternoon, Steve presented a solution to the problem.

"I used to pass a little, Coach," he murmured apologetically to Tom Holland. Steve looked as if he expected to be soundly reprimanded for thrusting his nose into something that wasn't his own worry.

"Yeah, but you're a blocking back," Tom Holland said unhappily.

That night the young Staunton mentor tossed restlessly on his bed. Fisher's words lingered in his thoughts. It was typical of the way Steve was regarded by both boys and coach that it did not enter Tom Holland's mind to question Steve's ability as a passer; if Steve said he could pass then Steve could undoubtedly pass. Steve could do far more than he would admit he could. In fact, young coach Tom Holland had already worried through many a sleepless night on how to arouse the big Texan to a fighting pitch.

A frontback passing! Tom could see his formation as he lay in bed. They used a modified triple-wing at Staunton.

The frontback was usually just back of the guard, as far over as the tackle on some plays; the tailback was squarely back of the center, anywhere from three to eight steps; the fullback was closer to the line of scrimmage, between the guard and center, the wingback was as far out as the end or tackle. The tailback would have to take the pass from center. On every play in the Staunton system the tailback took the snap. Thus the tailback couldn't be a jittery sort like Skeeter Martin.

What would happen if the frontback faded back, took a handoff from the tailback, swept further back and threw a forward pass? If the frontback could do the passing, he would put Skeeter into the backfield. No, he couldn't; Skeeter would have to handle that handoff and Skeeter held the ball like it was a hot potato.

Tom Holland slipped noiselessly out of bed and sought the cool of the porch. He lit his pipe and smoked thoughtfully. Thus far it had never entered his head to change the pattern of play left him by Jim Sheldon, but now he was toying with the idea. Though unbeaten, the Blue Wave's record was far from impressive. And much had been expected at the start of the season; if the team floundered everybody would say it was because Jim Sheldon was off to war and young Tom Holland just didn't have it.

What Tom was thinking about was shifting Bob to the tailback spot, putting Skeeter in Bob's old job and using Steve to throw long passes—not often, but enough to keep the other team from jamming the middle too tight. They wouldn't have to use this weird formation all the time, just enough for the other eleven to learn that when Bob Holland was the back man in the formation, anything could happen. Bob wasn't a speedster but he could run fairly well and they wouldn't lose too much effectiveness on the into-the-line stuff. Right now Tom was using wingback Derby Chambers as the man-in-motion; he would have to make Steve Fisher the one backfield man eligible to be moving before the ball was snapped. That wasn't so fantastic; frequently teams used the power blocker as the man-in-motion. Steve could feint that hanoff from Bob, then wheel into the muck of the line on a running play and tear a defense apart.

Tom was sitting in the swing and the swing was hidden from the street by vines. Thus a couple wandering slowly up the sidewalk, then turning in, had no way of seeing him. It was past 12 o'clock and usually the young coach was in bed by this time. Ruth Holland took no precautions whatsoever; she led her boy friend right up to the porch steps and stood there talking to him not realizing that her older brother was sitting only an arm's length away, hidden by the vines and the darkness.

The boy talked too and Tom Holland recognized that voice. The coach wanted to shout out his presence but he couldn't move; he just sat there and gripped the swing until his knuckles ached.

His kid sis out with Eddie Carter! And kissing him goodnight!

Ruth turned to open the door as Eddie started off but Tom stopped her.

"Ruth," he said in a low dull voice.

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed.

"That was Carter, wasn't it?"

"Yes," the girl answered with a sigh, "it was."

Tom waited a moment, fighting to gain control of himself. "How long has this been going on?" he demanded.

"Since last Summer," was the defiant retort.

"How serious is it?"

"Pretty serious," Ruth said firmly.

Tom sighed and stood up. "Of course, he can't come back here," he muttered, hoping against hope that he could keep himself under control. "I can't tell you not to see him, I suppose, but he can't come back here."

"Then I'll have to leave, Tom," the girl said, her tone as low and even as his.

The young coach shrugged his broad shoulders. "That's up to you," he said curtly.

Ruth nodded and turned inside again. Once more her brother stopped her.

"I had rather you wouldn't say anything about it to Cora," Tom murmured. "Not until after the operation. And not to Bob until the season is over. There are enough complications as it is."

Ruth nodded again. She thought, then held out her hand. "We'll call a truce until both are over," she proposed, her tone

light but her intent serious. "No Eddie Carter until after that."

"That's decent of you, Ruthie," the coach whispered, and pressed her hand tightly.

V

TO test the soundness of his experiment, Tom Holland moved both Steve Fisher and Skeeter Martin back to the second-string for a few days of scrimmage, and put his young brother to work at the tailback spot. This looked like madness to the railbirds and the sports scribes and both said so; chunky Bob Holland was anything but a tailback and Fisher was the battering ram of the backfield, heads and shoulders above any of the other blocking backs. But Tom kept them there until Thursday without divulging his reason; even the entire squad didn't know the reason for the experiment until, in a furious "head knocking" session, Steve Fisher took a handoff from Skeeter, working at full-back and ball-handler, and faded far back, ball under his arm.

Even the end, Toby Millner, wasn't prepared for the identity of the passer nor the nature of the pass. Toby could maneuver well and fast down-field, and he was thirty yards away from the line of scrimmage looking back for Evers or Kirke to shoot the ball to him when the pass came toward him. Once in the clear, Toby had slowed down; he wasn't used to tailbacks who could keep him hustling all the way down.

Thus the pass went five yards beyond him. Toby came back to the huddle shaking his head.

"My fault," he muttered. "Let's try it again."

But Steve, suddenly entrusted with the additional responsibility of calling signals, shook his head. Instead the big Texan called another pass formation, with Toby as the feint and wingback Derby Chambers as the boy downfield.

"And get down there," Steve told Derby. "Keep going. I'll get the ball there."

Derby had learned a lesson from Toby. The wingback shot for the sidelines and kept running at top-speed. The pass hit him squarely in his stomach; he wrestled with it for a second, lost his stride momen-

tarily, and got to the second string's ten before being dropped.

Tom Holland, watching from the sidelines, permitted himself the luxury of a fleeting smile. Was there anything on a football field this giant *couldn't* do?

The sports writers were not "in" on the revamped Blue backfield. In the first place, Holland couldn't afford to carry his experiment too far until he had seen how it would work. It was dynamite to tamper with the firmly established Sheldon system.

But the starting secondary against Texas Christian was Bob Holland, Skeeter Martin, Derby Chambers and Steve Fisher.

First, they tried to shake Skeeter loose; the Fisher surprise could come later. Skeeter knew the fullback signals letter-perfect—in practice; on a field, with eleven would-be tacklers in front of him, he flunked. Each time they attempted a handoff, Skeeter gummied up the play. He just wasn't cool enough to fake one way and hand the ball another. Bob Holland fitted the tailback's slot better; the coach's kid brother could almost conceal the ball in his big hands. Finally Tom Holland sent Kirke into the game with instructions to open up their passing. By then it was the second quarter and the young mentor was becoming a nervous wreck.

Eddie Carter watched glumly from the bench. He knew why Skeeter couldn't penetrate the T.C.U. defense or circle the wings. Skeeter had to have a blocker in front of him who would maneuver with him, give ground with him, reverse a field with him. Skippy Flanagan and Freddie Warren, alternating at the right guard, were performing mechanical assignments but they weren't giving Skeeter the play he needed. Eddie wanted to grab the coach's arm and remind him that the speedy halfback ran for touchdowns when he and Steve Fisher were both in there, but he held himself back. Such an outburst would only result in more enmity. He had concealed closely his resentment against Holland's favoritism but he didn't know how long he could hold it down.

Then he forgot his own troubles for a moment in a delirium of excitement. Big Steve Fisher had catapulted into the air, whipped a bullet-like pass to Chambers, and the speedy wingback had shot down to

the T.C.U. 10-yard stripe before being chased out of bounds.

The Frogs didn't like this sudden turn of events. They wanted to keep jamming the middle so as to stop Bob Holland's quick-starting thrusts, but they called time out, talked over this phenomenon of a blocking back throwing a perfect pass, and decided to fall into a 5-3-2-1 defense. That was fatal. For the alert Steve shot Bob into the center of the Purple line and the kid slammed his way down to the Horned Frog four.

That was a break for the T.C.U. defense; they could go back to their six-man line without fear of the overhead game, and watch the middle. Surely Staunton would try to go through the center with their great fullback.

It did look that way. Holland was the back man in the formation and Kirke moved to the wing. A shift to the right and into a single wing—a tipoff that a power play was coming. The center passed the ball back to Bob Holland and he ducked his head and . . .

It was the famous old Sheldon bootleg! Single wing to the right, unbalanced line to the right! But the ball carrier struck out to his own *left*, not a blocker in front of him, not a man to help him.

T.C.U. fell for the bait and overshifted! The dazed Frog right wing tried to recover but was unsteady on his feet and Holland cut in hard and low and tumbled across the goal line. The coach's brother converted and the Blue Wave led 7-0.

The game ended that way, and the papers next day praised young Tom Holland for a cleverly-planned victory, for deviating from the time-tested Sheldon system to strike with his blocking back and a fullback in the tailback's spot. That, raved the critics, was coaching wisdom.

AT his Monday press conference "The Boy" announced that he was moving Kirke into the first-string lineup as tailback to replace Skeeter Martin, that Bob Holland and Steve Fisher would alternate at fullback and blocking back, and that more passes could be expected from now on.

Eddie was dressing for practice the next Monday afternoon when Skeeter came over to him.

"I suppose you know I'm back on the

second string," the tailback said ruefully.

"So I noticed," Eddie admitted. "Tough luck."

Skeeter eyed him furtively. "It isn't luck at all," he blurted out after a moment's silence. "It's because the coach isn't playing the best blocker at right guard."

"I wouldn't say that," Eddie demurred cautiously. It wouldn't do for him to take a defiant attitude.

"Well, I will," Skeeter declared. "And I'm going to tell some other people about it."

Eddie shrugged his shoulders and continued dressing. Secretly he was delighted. It was nice to have one champion. Well, two. Ruth had explained the reason there must be no more dates until the season ended. Though the nights were lonely, Eddie agreed it was the wise thing to do.

Eddie was back on the "cannon fodder" squad, and Skeeter joined him there. In other years freshmen had performed this dirty job—wearing odd-colored jerseys, quickly learning the formations and plays of the team the varsity was to meet the next Saturday, taking long hours of punishment as the Blue Wave drilled on its offense. But this was war-time and freshmen were eligible for varsity competition and there was no first-year squad to work with the regulars. Freshmen dominated the "suicide squad" but there were upperclassmen, too—Eddie, Skeeter, an end named Brick McCollum who couldn't keep from slashing in and was consequently sucked in and circled when he came up against tough competition.

Eddie didn't mind. He liked carrying on his feud with Snake Carruthers and Bob Holland and Derby Chambers, the ring-leaders in the varsity. He liked also that mutual respect when he and Steve Fisher bumped against each other. And, with Skeeter back to block for, he enjoyed pulling out of the line.

For he and the jittery tailback could really work together. He seemed to sense when Skeeter was going to reverse directions. And Skeeter, writhing under the injustice of his demotion, made no attempt to keep his feelings a secret. He could run when he had Carter to block for him, and he set out to prove it. The first day he reeled off a 65-yard touchdown sprint. It was a new formation to them—Southern

Methodist's box formation—but the "suicide" squad was supposed to learn new plays and formations in a single day.

There were no more attempts by the varsity to gang Eddie Carter and put him out of action. The season was too far along, and the grid hysteria too great in spite of the emphasis on war news in the papers, for them to worry too much about one third-string guard.

Besides, this third-string guard had dealt out some punishment of his own. He had limped around a week on a bad knee and there was a scar on his cheek, but Snake Carruthers had missed a game, Toby Millner had nursed a knock-down shoulder and Derby Chambers still had to regain his old-time speed after a bruising block which had spun him around on a bad ankle, and onto the bench for the North Carolina game.

Skeeter raged and tore through their defense all during the week without avail. Tom Holland still had Kirke in the starting lineup and Evers as next man out against Southern Methodist.

They beat S.M.U. on passes, Steve Fisher's passes. The final score was 20-14 and the experts marvelled at the way the Blue Wave kept moving along. Ahead were tougher games but Tom Holland had come through half of his schedule unbeaten with only a tie to mar his record.

HOWEVER, Tom Holland had his worries. The element of surprise had aided them against T.C.U. and Southern Methodist but from now on teams would be watching the big blocking back. Staunton still had to develop all-around ground-gaining ability. Bob Holland could crack the line and Steve Fisher could throw occasional long passes but a team could gang the center to stop Bob with astute line-backers fading swiftly back on those rare plays when Steve took the handoff and faded back, ball tucked under his arm. More and more, the coach came to depend upon big Steve. He was field general, blocking back, line-backer and the passer.

Tom tried to get close to the big fellow, to inspire him as Sheldon had done many an indifferent youngster, but all attempts failed. Steve listened with an amused twinkle in his eyes, declined invitations to dinner and to strategy councils.

The boys took a cue from their coach and tried to drag Steve into their bull sessions but he shunned them, not insolently, but with an air of finality.

Thus Holland was somewhat stunned when Steve came up to him after a particularly torrid practice session and murmured awkwardly:

"How about joining me for a steak tonight, Coach?"

The coach started to decline; there was company coming for dinner at the Holland household, there was Tommy waiting for a talk with his father, there were letters to write. But Tom sensed there was a motive behind Steve's invitation.

"I'll be glad to, Steve. Where shall I meet you?"

"At the corner of Seventh and Congress," the back suggested.

Tom hurried home to make his peace with his family and change clothes, then rushed to his assignment with the big chap who held the future of the Blue Wave in his big brawny hands. There was no use for the coach to kid himself; Steve Fisher was carrying that club.

Steve was waiting, carelessly dressed with shirt open at the throat, no tie, black hair askew.

"Let's hurry," the Texan grinned. "I could eat a horse."

"Where to?"

"There is a place over here on a side street that serves very good steaks," Steve proposed.

Tom followed. The coach did not protest, though he raised his eyebrows, when Steve led him to the small dingy restaurant where Eddie Carter worked.

They took a table at the back and Steve maneuvered the coach so that he faced the front of the cafe. Eddie was not in sight at the moment and another waiter took their order. Steve was disappointed.

Tom wanted to talk football. What did Steve think they should do against Southwestern? Did Steve have a passing play in mind that might shake either Millner or Chambers into the clear? Was that alternate responsibility of Holland and Kirke at fullback and tailback respectively working out?

Steve answered automatically. The big fellow waited patiently.

Eddie came in sight, loaded down with

armloads of dishes. The guard was serving a table across the room. Steve caught the coach's arm.

"That's Carter," he interrupted.

Tom looked up quickly, surveyed the restaurant blankly.

"Where?"

"Over there. Waiting on that table in the corner."

Tom looked and his lips tightened. "So it is," he agreed tonelessly.

"Been working there all fall," Steve murmured.

"Has he?" Tom asked impersonally. Then, dismissing Eddie with a shrug: "How about this formation, Steve? Toby feints the halfback out of position and Derby cuts laterally behind the line of scrimmage, takes a short underhanded pass and picks up his blockers here. We could have Flanagan charge out and hit the wing from this side and Derby cut in. . . ."

"Carter could handle that play better," Steve interrupted. "That boy can really polish off an end."

"Too erratic," the coach frowned.

"And maybe too personal," Steve suggested softly.

"What do you mean by that?" Tom demanded.

"Think it over," Steve shrugged.

Tom's eyes flashed. "Hadn't you better leave the personnel of the team to me, Fisher?" he demanded.

Steve shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's your team," he agreed. "I just play on it. Maybe you're right."

Tom dropped the subject but he wasn't satisfied. That wasn't how he wanted Steve to feel at all. Priming this big boy to an inspired performance was the No. 1 item on Tom Holland's schedule right then, and you didn't prime a boy this way.

But yet Tom couldn't pursue the subject further. Steve had cut under his guard with that suggestion he was discriminating against Eddie Carter for personal reasons. Tom wouldn't get very far as a coach if stories like that were spread about him.

VI

BUSY with his first team, worried frantic by the nearness of Tommy's operation, Tom had not thought very much about Carter's performance at right guard.

Other coaches made such a mistake, he knew. He had seen Jim Sheldon, the standard by which all college mentors should be judged, overlook a boy who staged remarkable improvement. College football was played in a hurry and a coach didn't have too much time to ponder over the improved performance of a substitute whom he had dismissed from his consideration at the start of the season. Tom had been convinced Carter could not take it and had let it go at that. But, come to think of it, this was November and the blond guard was still dishing out punishment to the varsity.

Tom said nothing more to Steve but the next afternoon he watched Eddie more closely. He saw the stocky guard tear through the varsity's defense consistently, playing every bit as well on the defense as Skippy Flanagan and Freddie Warren, the two boys above him at that position. He watched closely when the "suicide squad" was on the offense, and he saw how crisply and dependably Eddie blocked. The maneuvering in front of Skeeter Martin did not escape the young coach's notice.

Auburn was the next opponent for the Blue Wave, and the Plainsmen had a puzzling attack which the Staunton scouts had reported as dynamite. There was a guard in the Auburn lineup who could pull out of the line and throw a mean forward pass. Their scout had seen Auburn beat Tulane 14-12 with this fake play, and had it charted exactly.

At Staunton the scout coached the "suicide squad," and they threw everything they knew about Auburn formations into the scrimmage sessions. They even used that guard play. Bully Mahan, the line coach who doubled as scout in these days of a reduced staff, sketched the play to them before their Wednesday "head knocking" session. They liked it. Eddie Carter liked it especially. Eddie had rated the call over Bob Holland as fullback in their sophomore season principally because of his passing. He was no Steve Fisher, but he could outpass any of the other varsity backs.

They used that. It was a cleverly planned play, and the "suicide squad" executed it well. They usually did for that matter; just about the only thrills they

got out of college football were those rare moments when they took another team's "fuzz" and made the varsity look silly.

Evers was in the sub backfield at the time and he could hand off a ball well. He took the pass from center and feinted cleverly to Skeeter Martin, who tore around end as if on a simple handoff. The varsity tackle and end faded out to cover Skeeter. Then Evers feinted to the fullback, and Jim Prince slashed into the line, there to be tackled by the varsity linebacker.

Finally, Eddie was given the ball. He took a few steps back and threw up his arm.

The varsity realized too late that this was the Auburn pet play. Seeing Skeeter didn't have the ball, the blue-clad secondary had forgotten about him, and the tow-head was running down the field wide open. Eddie hit him with a pass that was a little wobbly but which traversed the distance, and Skeeter kept running while the "suicide squad" danced up and down in glee.

There was no praise for the cannon fodder, of course; the "suicide squad" was never praised. When they worked a play, it was because of the varsity's listlessness, not their own ability. Tom Holland promptly flailed out at his regulars who had seen this play sketched on the blackboard but had not recognized it.

Bully Mahan, beaming from ear to ear, called the scrubs around him for another conference. They listened attentively, and beamed. They liked this sort of stuff. That night, at the dinner table, they would razz the varsity and the regulars would grow red-faced. No varsity man could take kidding from the "suicide squad."

The next afternoon they launched apparently the same play again, the same feints, the same eventual handoff to Eddie. But, instead of fading back for a pass, Eddie cut sharply into the line of scrimmage, found a hole there, reversed field away from the halfback and broke for the side lines. The varsity safety came up fast and trapped him at the chalk mark. Wriggling to escape the clutching hands, Eddie looked around, saw Skeeter racing up, lateralled to Skeeter who caught it without losing stride and went on for another touchdown.

That made a good story in the papers: SCRUBS USE AUBURN PLAYS TO SCORE ON VARSITY. Tom Holland liked it, for the odds on Staunton dropped and the varsity became suddenly attentive to the Plainsmen formations.

The Staunton routine was never varied. On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons the Blue scrimmaged against the plays to be used by their next opponent, concentrating on defense rather than their own ground-gaining plays. On Thursdays the Blue was on the offense altogether, with the coach experimenting with possible changes in the lineup.

ON Thursday, then, Tom Holland made his first changes in the first string in three weeks.

First, there had been a conversation with his kid sister. He had found her defiant at first, unwilling to talk about Eddie.

"Why can't we let that go as we agreed?" Ruth demanded when he broached the subject. "I'm keeping my promise to you."

"Why is he working at that restaurant?" Tom persisted.

"He needs the money."

"What happened to his income?" the coach demanded.

Ruth hesitated, then shook her head. "I don't know," she murmured. She *did* know, but she also knew her older brother. There were no stiffer necks and backs made than those of the Hollands—Tom and Bob.

Tom eyed her closely. "I never knew you to drink," he murmured. "I never knew you to run around with wild boys. What do you see in Carter anyhow?"

"Look," Ruth said angrily, "this is just going to lead to trouble. That's my business."

"I'm not trying to argue with you," Tom snapped. "I am merely asking for information. Carter looks like a different chap to me and I just want to find out if I can depend on him to play football. Or will he get drunk the night before a game and get into trouble again?"

"He won't get drunk; I'll promise you that," Ruth answered eagerly.

"Can you promise that?"

"I'll promise that," the girl repeated. "Oh, Tom, you *know* he deserves a chance.

He has worked his heart out all Autumn and hasn't even played enough to earn a letter."

Tom looked off a moment. "It's hard to do, sis," he murmured. "Tommy means so much; I guess I just can't ever look at Carter impartially. But he has played lots of good football. I'm going to play him some Saturday."

"Not start him?"

"Maybe," Tom smiled. "However, it isn't so simple as it sounds. I have to play eleven men, you know, and there are some boys on the squad who think as little of Eddie as I do. Bob, for instance. Bob would like nothing better than to stomp him into the ground."

"I know," Ruth admitted sorrowfully.

"But he'll get a chance," Tom promised. "If he can deliver, and the boys don't..."

"Don't what?" Ruth demanded.

"I don't know," the young coach shrugged. "I have my problems with them, Ruth. I was just a backfield coach when they knew me, just one of the boys. They are used to calling me by my first name and playing bridge with me on the trains and joking in front of me about their girls. There has to be a certain aloofness between a coach and a squad, and that aloofness isn't there. Jim Sheldon is still their coach and I'm just giving orders while "The Man" is away. I can't dominate them like he could. If they don't want Carter, they won't have him and there isn't much I can do about it."

"But you'll try?"

"I'll try," Tom promised. "I hate to, but I'll try."

True to his word, Tom sent Carter into the Auburn game. The first quarter was half over when the young coach left his canvas-backed chair, motioned to Eddie and Skeeter, and sent them in. The score was 0-0 at the time but the Blue Wave was holding an edge over the Plainsmen and the crowd was satisfied.

That gave Tom the backfield he wanted—Skeeter and Bob Holland alternating at the tailback, Steve Fisher at frontback. On the first play they used their handoff-forward pass, Steve going far back, stumbling awkwardly around but evading tacklers while he looked for an eligible receiver. Neither Derby Chambers nor Toby Millner were clear as Auburn's alert secondary,

wise to this off-pattern play, covered the ace receivers like a blanket. Skeeter shot into the open just beyond the line of scrimmage, however, and Steve pegged a perfect pass to the speedy halfback. Skeeter took it in full stride but, instead of catching it to his bosom, juggled it in his hands.

It was lucky that Eddie was waiting right there. When an Auburn secondary tore up to make a tackle Eddie shouldered him away, then set out down the field with Skeeter at his heels. Martin still juggled the ball, fighting to gain control of it. Finally he clutched it to his jersey, and was right on top of Eddie's jersey as they reached the 40.

The two Plainsmen who had been fading back to cover Chambers and Millner cut over frantically, running almost together. They weren't so close that Eddie could hit them both with a single block, so he threw his short legs forward, his shoulders to the side, and both had to veer aside to keep from running into him. Neither went to the turf but they were thrown off balance and that was enough for Skeeter. The ball carrier sped into the open and raced for paydirt. Several Auburn men were close to him but nobody ever caught Martin in an open field. Bob Holland converted the extra point and the score was 7-0.

Skeeter was a front runner; when he had confidence in himself he could do almost anything. That touchdown run on his first play soothed his nervousness, and from then on he was a touchdown tornado. Three more times he raced into the clear, aided by good blocking, and by the middle of the second quarter the score read 27-0. The Blue first team was on the bench and the delighted fans were acclaiming the most sensational ball carrying they had ever seen.

Eddie was among the boys going to the bench for a rest, but also among those going back in at the half. Holland tried to keep the score down and his backfield regulars saw no more action, but Eddie played throughout the entire second half. The game ended 27-6 with nobody begrudging the Plainsmen their lone tally.

THE following Monday Tom Holland calmly announced to his press conference that he was moving Carter into the

first-string lineup. Skeeter, of course, was returned to the regular tailback's spot. Holland put the changes into effect in practice that very afternoon.

There was a murmur from the squad when he announced it, but not until walking home from practice with his brother did Tom know of any direct rebellion.

"Are you sure it's a good idea to put Carter on the first team?" Bob asked hesitantly. It wasn't cricket to question the coach's decisions at any time, especially when the coach was your own brother. Bob and Tom religiously avoided direct talk of the team when together.

"I think he deserves it," Tom said mildly.

Bob hesitated again, then, defiantly: "Tommy goes to New York for his operation Thursday, doesn't he?"

Tom nodded.

"The boys are wild about Tommy," Bob pointed out. "They talk about that operation every day and they've taken up money to send him flowers and toys at the hospital. They haven't forgiven Carter for it."

"If I can forget it, they should," the coach snapped.

"How can you?" Bob demanded. "We won't know how it comes out until next week. While we're playing Southwestern, we'll be thinking about Tommy. You'll be worried sick and you know it. Having Carter in sight won't make it any easier."

Tom smiled grimly to himself. What would his firebrand of a brother do if he knew that Ruth, the younger sister he adored, was in love with Eddie Carter?

"Maybe we've been too bitter, Bob," the coach argued. "Eddie seems to have reformed."

"You just haven't heard all of it," Bob sniffed. "His kind can't change. A leopard can't throw off his spots, can he?"

"Eddie was just a kid," Tom said patiently. "He is older now."

"Okay," Bob shrugged, realizing the futility of remonstrating further. Tom was usually calm and soft-spoken, but once his mind made up, as stubborn as any Holland.

Then, changing the subject: "How about the dough?" he asked anxiously. "Have you fixed it up?"

"The specialist lowered his price," Tom

explained. "About four months ago he notified me he would treat Tommy for as much as I could afford to pay. He let me set the price myself."

"Damn generous of him."

"Magnificent," Tom said, a strange gleam in his eyes. "I sent him a check for a thousand dollars and he sent me five hundred of that back and said that would be enough. Of course the train trip up, and Cora's expenses, will be something else, but that won't hurt us too much. We haven't any money to throw around these days, but we're all right."

"That's great," Bob said happily. "The boys will be glad to know that. They were talking about trying to raise dough to help you out. Some of them had already written their dads."

"They're a swell bunch," Tom murmured. "Thank 'em for me, but tell 'em we're all right."

"Yeah, they're swell," Bob echoed. Then, a stern note in his voice: "But they're not going to like this Carter business. They figure they have come this far without him, and that they can go on the rest of the season."

"They can't," Tom denied.

"We haven't been licked yet," Bob shot back.

They had reached the Holland cottage by then and Bob was ready to turn back . . . the fullback, like all of the boys but Steve Fisher and Eddie Carter, lived in Sheldon Hall. Tom gripped his brother's shoulder.

"Tell the boys I appreciate their loyalty and thoughtfulness," the coach said softly, "but that I'm starting Eddie Carter at right guard Saturday and that he will stay on the first string the rest of the season."

"I'll tell them," Bob promised sorrowfully, "but you're making a mistake."

"I would be making a mistake to give in to them," Tom snapped. "I'm afraid I've let the boys get by with too much already, Bob. After all, I'm coaching this team. Personalities and personal tragedies shouldn't enter into it."

"Ordinarily, yes," Bob protested. "But this case is different."

"No different," Tom shrugged. "See you tomorrow, Bob."

The stocky fullback walked slowly back to the dormitory. He hated like the dick-

ens to break the news to the boys that his brother was insistent on Eddie Carter being on the first team. His brother didn't stay in Sheldon Hall and didn't realize that this hatred of the blond guard hadn't abated one bit. They were right on the threshold of a great season and, the way Bob figured it, no guard was worth creating dissension over. They had only to beat Southwestern and Texas Southern for an unbeaten season, a bowl bid, and a great record for Tom Holland in his first year as a head coach. Perhaps Carter was a little better than Flanagan—none of them denied that—but was the difference enough to warrant an out-and-out rebellion?

They were a hot-tempered lot, this Blue squad. They had thrown Carter's personal effects out of the athletic dormitory a year ago and they didn't want him back. They had suffered his presence on the squad as long as he had been on the reserve team, but they wouldn't accept him as a member of the starting lineup.

Bob made his report. They met in Snake Carruthers' room, nearly all of them. Snake was captain and presided over the meeting. Wise Jim Sheldon was one coach who had maintained the dignity and responsibility of the captain's job. A captain at Staunton not only trotted out on the field ahead of the squad but he was responsible for squad morale, and had considerable authority in the dormitory. Sheldon Hall belonged to the boys, the coaches seldom came there.

Bob finished his account of his conversation with his brother and then looked the boys over. He saw in each face what he had feared he would find, sullen resentment.

"Well, I got a date," he said awkwardly. "I have to run. You boys do what you want to."

At the door he turned back. "But *don't* tell me what you decide," he snapped.

At times it was plain unadulterated hell to be the kid brother of the head coach.

The boys had asked Steve Fisher to attend their meeting but the big back failed to make an appearance. That left three members unaccounted for. A fourth excused himself as soon as discussion started—Skeeter Martin.

"I don't think I belong in here," Skeeter said hotly, jumping to his feet. "You boys

have never accepted me and that's all right; I've made the varsity anyhow. And every one of you know *who* made me look good. Every one of you can figure out that it is more than just coincidence that when Eddie Carter and I were in the game at the same time, that I made plenty of yards. As soon as he went out, I didn't make an inch. I'm not accusing any of you of lying down, but I do know that Carter is a better football player than anybody present, including me."

They let Skeeter go without further protest. The boy could run, no doubt about that, but he wasn't a team type of ball player; he ran all by himself, crossing up signals. Some of them had an idea Skeeter was a grand-stander, a headline hunter, a glory grabber. They figured they could get along without Skeeter, too. They hadn't missed out on one factor which the speedy tailback had not mentioned—that Skeeter was predominately a front runner. When it was close, and the play hard, Skeeter fumbled the ball all over the field. The boys had an explanation for that type of ball playing, an unpleasant explanation. It wasn't true in this instance but they didn't realize it—not then.

They reached their decision. They didn't talk about it except to themselves. The second-stringers, denied the thrill of sitting in with such an august body as the starting lineup, wondered what the decision was. Bob Holland wondered. Skeeter Martin wondered. Tom Holland wondered.

Eddie and Steve, who had no idea that such a subject had been discussed, went on their merry way, working their hearts out in practice, looking better and better to the fanatics who watched practice sessions every afternoon. It looked as if Big Steve was losing some of his casualness and whipping himself up for the great game everybody knew he could play.

Or did Steve know what was going on? Not many things escaped the notice of Fisher's lazy amiable eyes!

VII

SOUTHWESTERN'S Pirates would be tough; they had expected that. Both the Pirates and Texas Southern, their final opponent, had been beaten in confer-

ence play, but in a tough round-robin schedule it wasn't often that even the eventual champion didn't take it on the chin once or twice. Southwestern and Texas Southern had each been beaten once and Staunton had been tied, so an upset would drop the Blue Wave out of first place and leave the conference race jumbled. In Jim Sheldon's long years of coaching great teams—clubs that usually ranked among the top four of the nation—he had brought only three elevens through the conference schedule unbeaten. It was just that close.

Southwestern always brought a power team to Staunton, and the Blue Wave, predominately a scoring club, had trouble with the Pirates year after year. This season Southwestern had a great kicker and a giant fullback who ripped the center to shreds; they set back and waited for breaks, utilizing Jim Booth's booming punts; and then, given a scoring setup, they turned Bill Murray loose on the guards and center. Murray weighed over 200 pounds and was being compared to Bronk Nagurski, the Minnesota crusher.

The Pirates won the toss but elected to kick. Right away there was trouble for the Blue. Booth sent the ball tumbling deep into the end zone. Wingback Derby Chambers backed up to receive it, but just as it was settling in his hands, Derby was catapulted to the ground by a jarring impact and the ball tumbled free. Starting his first game in a month, nervous as a jumpy cat, Skeeter Martin had raced over to receive the kickoff and, without looking, had collided with his teammate.

The elusive pigskin went weaving, ducking and bobbing. Skeeter miraculously kept his feet and pursued the ball. He picked it up finally and turned upfield. But there were no blue-jerseyed blockers to protect him. Some of the Pirate had worked through and they were on top of Skeeter in a flash. One of them caught the tailback behind the goal line but, with a Herculean effort, he twisted free and fought his way back into the playing field. He was downed at the 4-yard stripe and the Southwestern fans howled in triumph! So this was the Blue Wave which as headed for an unbeaten season!

Chambers and Skeeter argued in the huddle and that made matters worse. The

whole team took it up and they were penalized to the one for taking too much time. Chambers punted but almost missed the ball with his foot and the pigskin scooted out of bounds on the 20-yard stripe.

Southwestern gleefully turned it over to Bill Murray, and the big battering ram went into action. How that monster could wreck a line! Shoulders low and broad, he hurtled his 200-odd pounds forward. Four yards, three yards, five yards! The Pirates operated out of an unbalanced line and a single wing, utilizing every possible ounce of beef. It wasn't pretty but it was effective. Until Bill Murray was beaten down, slowed up, crushed, there would be no stopping this attack. And it was hard to manhandle a guy so big and powerful.

In just five plays Murray smashed down to the six. There was no effort at deception. The Wave knew who would carry the ball and they could see where the play was coming. Line-backer Steve Fisher made most of the tackles after Murray had shaken off some of the linemen but not even Steve was big and powerful enough to hurl Murray back. The Southwestern fullback could inch forward another step with Fisher's arms locked tightly around his legs.

Then, on the six, Southwestern scored with a pet Staunton play. Unbalanced line to the right, single wing, Bill Murray a couple of steps back of the center. The battered Staunton line shifted, too; took a deep breath and prepared to hurl their bruised bodies against the crushing weight of this juggernaut.

That impact didn't come. Murray took the snap from center, took a step to his right and forward, then pivoted sharply and cut out around his left wing. He wasn't a speedster, but the execution of the play had been clever and the choice astute. Not a Staunton man could reach him. He went over standing up and the Pirates led 6-0. The scoreboard remained the same when the try for extra point was wild.

The Staunton club seemed dazed. For a full quarter it floundered, getting nowhere. Another type of opponent might have capitalized upon the confusion and built up a strong lead with forward passes and tricky maneuvers, but the same slash-

ing power that made Southwestern a sure threat from the 20 held the margin down. The Pirates played old-fashioned football and held a definite edge throughout the first half but the score was 6-0 at the end of the period.

JUST as he walked into the dressing room, his face haggard and worried, Tom Holland was handed a telegram. The words leaped up at him from the yellow paper:

TOMMY OPERATED ON EARLY THIS MORNING. RESULT STILL UNKNOWN. LOVE. CORA.

The young coach sighed. It was hard to think about a football game when there was a frail youngster sleeping under the influence of a powerful anesthetic while hooded nurses and physicians watched him closely. He would be waking soon . . . might be awake even now . . . and they would know whether he would ever walk again.

He stuffed the telegram in his pocket and looked at his boys. They lay on the benches, on the concrete floor, sat with backs to the wall. He breathed deep of the smell of perspiration, of monkey-blood, of dirt. He looked at them and his lips tightened.

"Well?" he murmured, his eyes roving from face to face.

Captain Snake Carruthers stirred uneasily beneath that calm level gaze.

"I could make a suggestion, coach."

"Go ahead," Tom invited.

"Let's try our old lineup," Snake urged. "Give us Kirke or Evers at tailback and Flanagan or Warren at right guard."

"Why?" the coach asked quietly.

"We're used to each other," Snake argued. "We would work better together. We aren't clicking on all four."

Tom looked from face to face. All of them were solidly behind their captain, that was obvious. His eyes came to Eddie Carter, went by, came back.

"What about that, Carter?" he asked quietly.

"Perhaps Carruthers is right. There is something wrong, Coach."

"Would you say that some of the boys were deliberately lying down, Carter?" the coach questioned softly.

"I didn't say that," Eddie answered

quickly. "I merely said we weren't clicking."

"I'll say it!" Skeeter Martin put in from across the room. "They hatched this plot last Tuesday night, Coach. As long as you keep Carter and me in there, they'll lie down."

"That isn't so," claimed Snake. "At least, not just like that."

"Then how is it, Snake?" Tom Holland demanded.

Carruthers didn't answer. Tom nodded. "I see," he mused.

He looked around the room again, then set down on the bench in front of the lockers.

"We'll start a new lineup," he said crisply. "Hendrix and Stone at ends, Cunningham and Wilson at tackles, Carter and Donaldson at guards, Andricks at Center, Martin at tailback, Burgess at wingback, Fisher at blocking back and . . ."

His voice fell off a moment as he looked directly at his brother.

". . . Bob at fullback," he continued crisply.

Snake left his feet in a leap. "Coach, you can't do that!" he stormed. "You can't bench a whole team on account of one guy."

"Can't I?" Tom returned.

Snake sat down without answering, suddenly sensing that Holland could.

Not another word was spoken throughout the intermission. The silence that ensued was not broken until Tom looked at his watch and said curtly:

"Time to be getting back."

They received the kickoff again, this time their choice. The ball came to Skeeter without contest, and he wriggled back to the 35. Then Steve Fisher whipped a 14-yard pass to left end Hendrix. Skeeter tried to circle the end but was felled for a loss. A pass was incomplete and they faced third and eleven.

Another pass, also batted down to the ground. Ten yards past the line of scrimmage a blue-jerseyed figure lay prone on the turf as the referee recalled the ball to the point of the pass. Tom Holland left his chair hurriedly.

The injured boy was Eddie Carter! Tom turned the boy over, feeling his pulse. Eddie's eyes were closed but there was no indication of serious injury.

"Just got the breath knocked out of him," Tom decided, and the trainer, following closely on his heels, echoed the diagnosis. Two teammates carried Eddie to the bench where, after a moment, he revived, thrust off the trainer and lay down on the grass.

Tom walked back to the bench and looked up and down at the yearning faces of his regulars.

"Okay, go on in," he snapped, and returned to his canvas chair.

He couldn't help breathing a prayer for the intervention of the football gods. He had shown the boys they could not run his team for him. He would have sat still and quiet and watched the "suicide squad" lose 33-00 rather than give in; a coach couldn't let the boys overrule him on the starting lineup. But he was tickled pink that Eddie had been knocked out of action without receiving serious injury. Now his regulars were back in the game and they would make sure to acquit themselves well. They had "blown off their steam," too.

But they had trouble getting started. Southwestern had scented victory and wasn't to be overrun. It took the greatest of Steve Fisher's passing exhibitions to start them on the road to victory, and even then it was the middle of the fourth quarter before they scored. Steve whipped a prodigious throw to Derby Chambers and the wingback ran over the goal line to tie the score. Bob Holland's try for point was wide and low and it was 6-6 with about seven minutes left to play.

A fumble helped them; Terry Millner pounced on the elusive ball on the Southwestern 40 and before the Pirates could recover their composure Steve shot a pass to Skeeter that was good to the 20. Bob Holland picked up five but Skeeter was stopped cold and a touchdown try from Steve to Toby was futile. That made it fourth and five and, with only four minutes left. There was no doubt as to what play Steve would call.

Bob went back eight steps, Derby bent over to receive the pass from center and hold the ball, Steve and Skeeter spread out to man the flanks. Before the play was underway, Kirke replaced Martin. This was good strategy; Skeeter wasn't worth his salt as a blocker.

Bob calmly took his time, swung his right foot at the center of the ball, held his breath for a long, long second as the pigskin seem to float lazily upward, barely clearing the outstretched arms of a Southwestern tackle. Bob didn't watch it all the way. He took one look at the pigskin tumbling over and over and knew where it would go; he turned and trotted calmly up the field.

The referee's hands went up over his head and the blue-jerseyed boys rushed after Bob to almost crush him in their bear hugs of delight. The score was 9-6, and they could hold Southwestern the rest of the way. Let Bill Murray rip forward a few yards. Who cared!

The blue-clad boys on the bench turned handsprings, beat on each other's shoulders, jumped up and down. Tom Holland broke the tradition of a Staunton coach; he did more than merely smile. For, with the seconds ticking by and Southwestern obviously stopped cold, that kick meant Staunton had cinched at least a tie for the conference championship!

And one more victory meant an unbeaten season!

There was one boy on the Staunton bench who didn't joint in the celebration. Eddie Carter watched from his reclining position with a queer quirk to the corners of his mouth and a dull look in his blue eyes. Then, as he listened to the uproar, something hot splashed down his cheek and he reached up to wipe it away.

Somebody noticed him, and slapped his shoulder.

"Okay now, Carter?"

"Okay," he answered gruffly.

The quirk deepened. Not a Pirate had touched Eddie on that play in which he had been supposedly injured, but no one seemed to suspicion it. Evidently he had done a good job of faking.

IT was Sunday night when Ruth told him that Tommy's operation had been successful and they could expect a complete cure within a year. It would take time, and treatment at a sanitarium in the South, but eventually the youngster would bear no trace of the automobile accident. The girl kept her promise to her brother; she told Eddie the grand news by telephone.

In Monday afternoon's workout, Eddie ran first string guard again and Skeeter Martin at the tailback. Tom Holland, looking ten years younger, would not compromise with his squad. Nor, it seemed, would they give in to him. They stormed in their secret meetings that the coach was throwing away an unbeaten season. They had beaten Southwestern with Carter on the bench, they protested. They tried to get Bob to express their arguments to his brother but he refused.

"I'm just playing football," the fullback shrugged. "He would just as soon kick me off the squad as any of you."

Through Tuesday and Wednesday the civil war continued. There was no dissension on Thursday, for when the boys trooped into the dressing room to pull on their uniforms, there was no Eddie Carter.

Tight-lipped Tom Holland offered no explanation, but the story soon got around. It went:

On Wednesday night the Staunton police station had received a call from a roadhouse just south of the campus. They had found a gang fight in progress with Eddie Carter right in the middle of it. The proprietor had excitedly accused Carter of being one of the two boys who started the trouble. The other, the proprietor said, was a football player also, but Eddie denied this and claimed it was just an acquaintance. Eddie had been taken to jail and fined \$10 for disturbing the peace. An account of the brawl was carried in the Thursday afternoon papers.

Tom Holland announced his decision to the newspapermen calling him and acquainting him with the facts.

Eddie Carter was dismissed from the squad!

The boys said I told you so.

"Funny how history repeats itself," murmured Snake Carruthers. "It was just about a year ago that Carter got into that other jam."

"This time maybe we're through with him," grumbled Toby Millner.

Also missing from that Thursday workout was Steve Fisher, but no one was alarmed over that. Several times that season the big chap had taken French leave without a word of explanation to Coach

Holland when he returned. Tom had thought over the advisability of enforcing the usual squad rules, then had decided to make an exception in Fisher's case. There was something about the big chap's manner that plainly warned Tom this was no usual football player, and the usual discipline wouldn't work. Sensing this, the boys had never commented on Fisher's absence except in the sanctity of their dormitory. It never occurred to them to resent Steve. They were as grateful to the big Texan as Tom Holland. They were just another ball club until he bobbed up out of nowhere, unsolicited and unsung, and transformed them into a championship threat. Like their coach, they knew that when the moment came and they had to play inspired football, it would have to be Steve Fisher rising up to superman heights. None of the others had the physical possibilities.

And Steve always returned. He was back Friday afternoon, humming a Spanish tune as he pulled on his uniform.

Their last workout was a gruesome one, with several near-fights breaking up the routine. The pressure was getting them. One more game and they had an unbeaten season, the first for Staunton since 1940. One more game and they could relax, could break training, could stay out with their dates until past midnight, could read the sports pages without laying the paper down and trying to peer into the future.

It is never easy for an unbeaten club to approach that final game. Texas Southern was a tough opponent and they would have to be primed. For months now they had been afraid of a letup or the breaks going against them. There would be little sleep among them that night. They would be looking to tomorrow, and worrying. They could easily lose this game and they knew it. Yet it was the one game they couldn't afford to lose. They could remember Boston College losing to Holy Cross and Georgia falling before Auburn and Texas dropping that memorable '41 upset to T.C.U. They knew that a pitfall awaits every unbeaten team which slows down, gets overconfident and excited. Yet, with so much at stake, how could they remain calm and well-poised!

The only one of them who wasn't shaking like a leaf at the kickoff was Steve

Fisher. To Steve it was just another ball game. He was a little quieter than usual, seemingly completely absorbed with his own thoughts. He stood a little off from the rest of them during the warmup and didn't join in the frantic huddle and hand-shaking just before the whistle. That didn't surprise them either; Steve was always unconcerned.

VIII

TEXAS SOUTHERN had a passing club, a hell-for-leather passing club. The Trojans took the ball and started firing right off the bat. The Trojan tailback, southpaw Cliff Shaw, hit two receivers in a row to put Texas Southern down to their 20. The wave held tight, batting down four passes, but the very nature of that defense upset their morale. They could watch those long passes sail through the air and figure: "One wrong guess, one mistake, and it's a touchdown." The Trojans were a formidable opponent for such a crucial test. They gambled against long odds and the Staunton club wasn't in a gambling mood.

Kirke was calling signals and Kirke was very cautious. He wouldn't risk a Skeeter play because he was afraid of a fumble. He kept thinking: "One fumble, a long pass, and there we are." He sent Bob churning into the line time and again. That was a mistake. For Texas Southern knew how to handle those quick-opening plays. It was easy—just jam the middle, play a floating line, don't fall for the hand-offs.

After two unsuccessful series of downs, Kirke did use Steve on a long pass. The big chap faded back and shot a perfect toss to Toby Millner but the end was nervous as cat and his usually sure fingers shook like leaves in a high wind. The ball went right through his hands and a fine scoring opportunity was gone.

Sensing their plight, and pitying them, remembering his own pressure days on Jim Sheldon's teams, Tom Holland rushed in substitute after substitute. The replacements were no better. The clock ticked on with Texas Southern getting the upper hand. The faithful Staunton crowd became alarmed. So did Tom Holland. So did Snake Carruthers. Only Steve Fisher

remained calm and efficient. Steve roved from one side of the field to the other, single-handedly stemming the Trojan running attack, doing more than his share in breaking up passes. Press box experts who wrote syndicated columns and picked All-American selections nodded approvingly. All season they had been hearing rumors of this boy who didn't carry the ball, but who did everything else. Here with the heat on, the hottest kind of heat, he was certainly living up to his headlines.

Skeeter Martin, the ball carrier de luxe, wasn't, but nobody was surprised at that. All of the wise boys had told them that Skeeter couldn't produce with the chips on the line. The ball club was Fisher.

But Steve couldn't do everything. He couldn't go back forty yards to knock down bullet-like passes, and one of them nestled into the hands of Chubby Cox, the great Texas Southern end, and the Trojan receiver got all the way to the 12 before the fleet Skeeter pulled him down from behind. Kirks went over to the tailback spot and Evers came in for Skeeter. Tom Holland shook his head. The coach had known about Skeeter's weakness against passes, of course, but had been reluctant to jerk the fleet back. When pulled for a mistake, Skeeter was worthless the rest of a game. He had to start off good and go good all the way. But what else was Tom to do?

They were down to the 12 and the Trojan fullback, Spot Chandler, picked up five yards over center. Then Shaw shot a pass out into the flat that was over the end zone. Jack Evers raced out to cover the play and was there by a half-step; he could reach up and slap the flying pigskin. He did, and the stands suddenly groaned and Tom Holland's heart stood still for a moment and big Snake Carruthers, also covering the play, lay down on the grass and swore.

The pass had been thrown off-line. Evers had tipped it just enough to deflect it into the waiting hands of the Texas Southern receiver, who promptly touched the pigskin to the ground and danced a delighted jig back into the Trojan huddle.

They felt like lying down and crying. This was what they had been afraid of. They had been lucky themselves in some tight spots and they knew they couldn't

get the breaks forever. But why did it have to come in this game! Why couldn't they have lost a game by a fluke in September or October, when they would have had a chance to bounce back!

The score 7-0 as the kick was true. But they were beaten. Something like this took the hearts out of them. The half ended shortly thereafter and they stumbled off the field toward the dressing room . . . discouraged, through!

Tom Holland, walking slowly in their wake, knew it and tried to shrug his shoulders philosophically. He yearned for Sheldon's miraculous return, for one of those blistering between-half orations for which the Staunton coach was famous. But "The Man" was gone and only "The Boy" was there. As far as a situation like this was concerned, Tom Holland was a "boy" indeed.

He went into the dressing room and he couldn't take charge. He licked his lips and tried to think of something to say. It depended on him, and he knew it. Still he hesitated, and when somebody else stood up and started talking, he was grateful for it. He was glad to surrender the prerogative to this blue-jerseyed player who didn't ask for it, who just took it as his natural right, who looked around him with angry eyes and started talking with a bite to his voice that jerked them out of their stupor. Tom Holland was happy to hear that voice. Whatever the guy was saying, it was the right thing.

Like the rest of them, like Snake Carruthers and Bob Holland and Derby Chambers and the rest, he sat down and looked at and listened to . . .

Steve Fisher!

"IT seems to me," big Steve said slowly, "that I'm the guy who does the work for this ball club, and that maybe I ought do the talking for a change."

Nobody challenged him. They could close their eyes and see Steve piling up a play on the line of scrimmage with a ferocious shoe-string tackle, then racing back on the next to batter down a forward pass, and know the big chap was right; he *was* doing the work.

"I haven't had much to say all year," the blocking back continued slowly. "I was a new man and, besides, I'm not much

of a hand to butt in on somebody else's business. I didn't go around asking questions and what I learned about you boys I just picked up by accident.

"It was all right with me that you fellows had a feud on with Carter. I figured the guy could take care of himself, and he could. When I saw the coach was drawn into that feud and wasn't giving Carter just treatment, I did a little hinting; and Coach Holland was man enough to realize his mistake and to put Carter back on the first string."

There was a murmur of protest from Snake Carruthers; Steve Fisher silenced it with a glare. Somehow the blocking back seemed bigger than ever as he stood over them, seemed of Herculean proportions.

"I know all about that business last year," Steve went on. "I know that the boy got a little drunk and ran over the coach's kid and you boys tossed his things out of the dormitory and he left school right before the Texas Southern game. I'm not doubting a bit that the Eddie Carter you knew last year was pretty much of a heel and deserved everything he got."

Steve took a deep breath; he wasn't used to such long speeches.

"But that was last year," he continued slowly. "I took the guy from scratch and I found out he is plenty white. I've heard you talk about that \$250-a-month trust fund he has. Do any of you guys know why he has to work in a dirty restaurant downtown for his meals and then cleans up the rooms at his rooming house for his bed?"

Nobody answered. Nobody knew, of course.

"Because he is paying that two-fifty to the specialist who operated on Tommy Holland last Saturday," Steve Fisher thundered. "Coach Holland there thinks that the specialist got soft-hearted and cut the price so he could pay it himself. Well, he didn't, Coach Holland. The hospital expenses and the cost of that operation totalled just about five grand, and Carter had to sign away his inheritance for the next 18 months to pay the difference between what the actual cost was and what the specialist charged *you*."

Tom Holland stirred uncomfortably and

started to speak but Steve waved him to silence.

"That guy came back here and started out as a right guard, a new position to him, because he wanted to fill the one job that the coach didn't have a letterman for," Steve rasped. "How many of you guys have that much team spirit? Well, I haven't. If Coach Holland told me to give up the frontback's job, where I *knew* I could make the starting lineup, and try out for tackle, I'd say nuts to him and quit the team first. But Eddie Carter did that of his own volition. He figured Bob Holland could play fullback okay and, with his blocking at right guard, we would have a sure-fire running attack."

"And we would have," the big fellow snapped. "Ask Skeeter Martin who cleared the way for him on his runs. You guys know it as well as I do. Eddie Carter made Skeeter a great running back. He could take Skeeter and shake him loose right through you when we had scrimmages. But, when we got in a game, you threw him down. That was just last Saturday. Coach Holland had moved him up to the first string and he had his chance at least. He cleared his men out but the rest of you were lying down. You weren't going to play football until the coach pulled him out of there. So what did he do? He pretended like he was hurt and got himself benched. Then you fellows perked up and pulled one out of the fire. You talk about your spirit and your loyalty! I say nuts to you, and I mean nuts."

He glared at them a moment, then turned to Tom Holland, who was watching and listening quietly.

"There is something else, Coach," he said in a milder tone. "I was the guy who started that fight at that roadhouse. I got my draft notice last Wednesday morning, and I'm due to report for my first physical in Texas next Tuesday. That upset me a lot and I got off-base. I have to do that every now and then. Eddie Carter heard I was out there raising hell and he came out and tried to take me home. I took a punch at him. He didn't hit back but some other guys took a hand. When the cops came Eddie made me slip out the back door. He told me the team needed *me*, and that he was under obligations to

you. I listened to him and let him take the rap for it. Maybe I should have taken my medicine before, but the guy wanted you to win this ball game. I did, too."

His ovoice fell off. His clenched hands dropped to his side and he shook his big shaggy head.

"I don't do the work for these guys any more, Coach, not without Carter. I don't go back in until Carter is in there."

YOU could have heard a pin drop. Every startled eye leaped to Tom Holland's face. Behind a touchdown and Steve Fisher out!

The young coach was studying the tips of his shoes and did not look up for a full moment. When he did raise his eyes there was a suggestion of a smile hovering around the corners of his mouth. He looked past Steve to an assistant manager who had stopped sponging Toby Millner's face when the blocking back began his oration.

"See if Carter is dressed, Frankie," the coach said quietly.

Fisher's eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

"Carter was under instructions to report at the half, suited out and ready to go," Tom Holland explained crisply. "I discovered last night the true story of that roadhouse incident. He would have started this quarter even if Steve hadn't delivered us that little talk."

He hesitated for a second, then looked them over with a snap in his eyes and said in a crisp voice: "Gentlemen, I suggest we dedicate this last half to making Eddie Carter look like a ball player."

And the tone of his voice brought back memories . . . memories of a man with grey hair and snapping eyes. Jim Sheldon!

Just then the assistant manager came back with Eddie Carter. The official warning them to be on the field in three minutes broke the awkward silence, for which they all were glad.

As they filed out, Steve caught Holland's shoulder. "Don't worry about it, coach," he smiled. "Just you sit back in that canvas chair and relax. This is in the bag."

Tom Holland had to smile.

It was their ball. Derby Chambers came back to the 35 and they gathered in

the huddle with plenty of snap in their movements. Steve Fisher looked down at them and his eyes twinkled.

"No. 99," the big chap ordered.

They showed their surprise. "That's the Auburn play," Steve explained. "You remember; Eddie comes out of the line and throws it."

They nodded and swaggered up to the line of scrimmage. They had their poise back. They were the Blue Wave and they were unbeaten. This was just another ball game and those seven points on the scoreboard to Texas Southern's credit had been the wildest kind of luck.

There was the handing-off in the backfield. Bob Holland faked to Skeeter Martin, then to Steve, who finally tucked the ball in Eddie's hands. The stocky guard raced backward and, all too late, the Trojan secondary caught on to the play. There was Toby Millner way down the field and Eddie laid the ball right in his hands, and the lanky end fell to the ground with it on the Trojan 40.

They gathered in the huddle again, Steve murmured "the same play; this time he carries it," and they went back up to the line, cocksure and determined. Eddie took the same handoff but the Trojan end who swarmed up to rush him got the surprise of his life. The blue-jerseyed boy cut sharply into the line and, running like a buffalo, tore down to the 20-yard stripe before the panic-stricken Trojan secondary pulled him to the earth.

The stands were in an uproar. Who was this guard who was going into the backfield, running, and throwing the ball? They remembered the name—"Eddie Carter." At first they were loath to give him their cheers. There had been some kind of a scandal about him! How quickly the public can forget? One more foray, this time to the 10, and they were taking him as their new hero and the past was behind both of them. A football crowd doesn't hold grudges long.

On the ten! Steve Fisher looked over the Trojan defensive setup. They were jamming the middle as he had expected, looking for Bob Holland to come bolting forward. There was that same motion from Bob toward Skeeter Martin just after the ball was snapped, but this time Skeeter had it and was running wide like a fright-

ened antelope. In front of him streaked a stocky guard with head low, legs moving like pistons. The Trojan end shot up but a hoarse voice shouted "got him" and the guard let the end go and shot after the halfback. Steve himself wiped out the end with one of the sweetest blocks of his career. Skeeter suddenly slowed down and trotted forward. Why not? The end was gone, the halfback was gone, the line-backer was gone, the safety man trapped! It was just that simple when every man executed his assignment.

BOB HOLLAND waited, tense and still. The ball floated back to Derby Chambers; the wingback slapped it to the turf; the coach's kid brother swung his right foot; the pigskin went tumbling between the uprights. It was tied 7-7.

The Trojans cut loose with that desperate passing attack again but this time the Staunton secondary was in a hell-for-leather mood. They did some guessing as to the identity of the intended receiver and they guessed right. Bob snatched the third pass off and brought it back to mid-field.

There was nothing to it. Skeeter Martin had the ball, and now the jittery tailback was as calm and efficient as a robot. He drifted behind his interference for 10 yards, then cut sharply to his left and was out in the open. The only Trojan to get close enough for a tackle found a stocky blue-jerseyed thunderbolt ripping his legs out from under him and Skeeter was gone. Eddie Carter picked himself up and rejoined his teammates. They slapped him on the shoulders and, face beaming happily, he helped hold off the Texas Southern line while sure-footed Bob kicked the extra point that put them ahead 14-7.

Seven minutes gone. The kickoff came floating down to the Trojan halfback, Jim Emmons, and when he tried to come up-field he was swarmed and the ball bounded crazily away from him and Toby Millner covered it on the 15. Steve Fisher's choice was quick and positive. He took the ball himself, faded back, saw Chambers in the clear and laid the ball in the wingback's hands. Again the dependable Bob converted and it was 21-7.

Tom Holland beckoned to the second string; then changed his mind and sat down. After all, this was the last game. They had gotten here by scratching and clawing for every point; they deserved to glory in these moments of greatness when they had everything—passing, speed, deception, blocking and cooperation.

The Trojans had to kick back right away and then, after Skeeter had circled the left wing for 14 yards, they fell into a 5-3-2-1 defense, spreading wide to stop these end sweeps and passes. Steve chuckled, whispered a number to his teammates, and there was Bob Holland tearing through the middle, picking up momentum as he lurched into the clear. There were blue jerseys everywhere as he bobbed into the open and he just kept going.

But, at the 10, he did a strange thing. He slowed down and looked around. A blue jersey was a few steps behind him. Bob Holland reached out and lobbed the ball toward his teammate, who juggled it momentarily, and then went on over the goal line, clutching it to his bosom.

Eddie Carter touched the ball to the ground and looked at Bob with eyes that could barely see.

"That was a swell thing to do, Bob," he whispered.

"Forget it, forget it," the coach's brother growled.

Then Bob went back to kick his fourth consecutive point, and this time Tom Holland stood up and stayed up until eleven boys had been called and had left the bench, pulling on their helmets and waving to the referee. Then Tom sat down again and leaned back and permitted himself the luxury of a smile as eleven other blue-clad youngsters came toward the sidelines, broad grins on their faces, while from high above came a hysterical roar of approval and teletypes clattered out the story that the Blue Wave had come to the end of an unbeaten season.

He spoke to only one of the boys . . . at Staunton a coach didn't go into ecstasy over a winning team; it was expected. However, he motioned to one of the boys and when that boy came closer, he said:

"You might drop over to the house for dinner tonight, Eddie. You may not believe it, but Ruth can cook, too."

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