

THRILLING FOOTBALL

15¢

FALL
ISSUE

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A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

THIS
IS THE *Navy*
An Exciting
Football Novelet
WILLIAM J. O'SULLIVAN

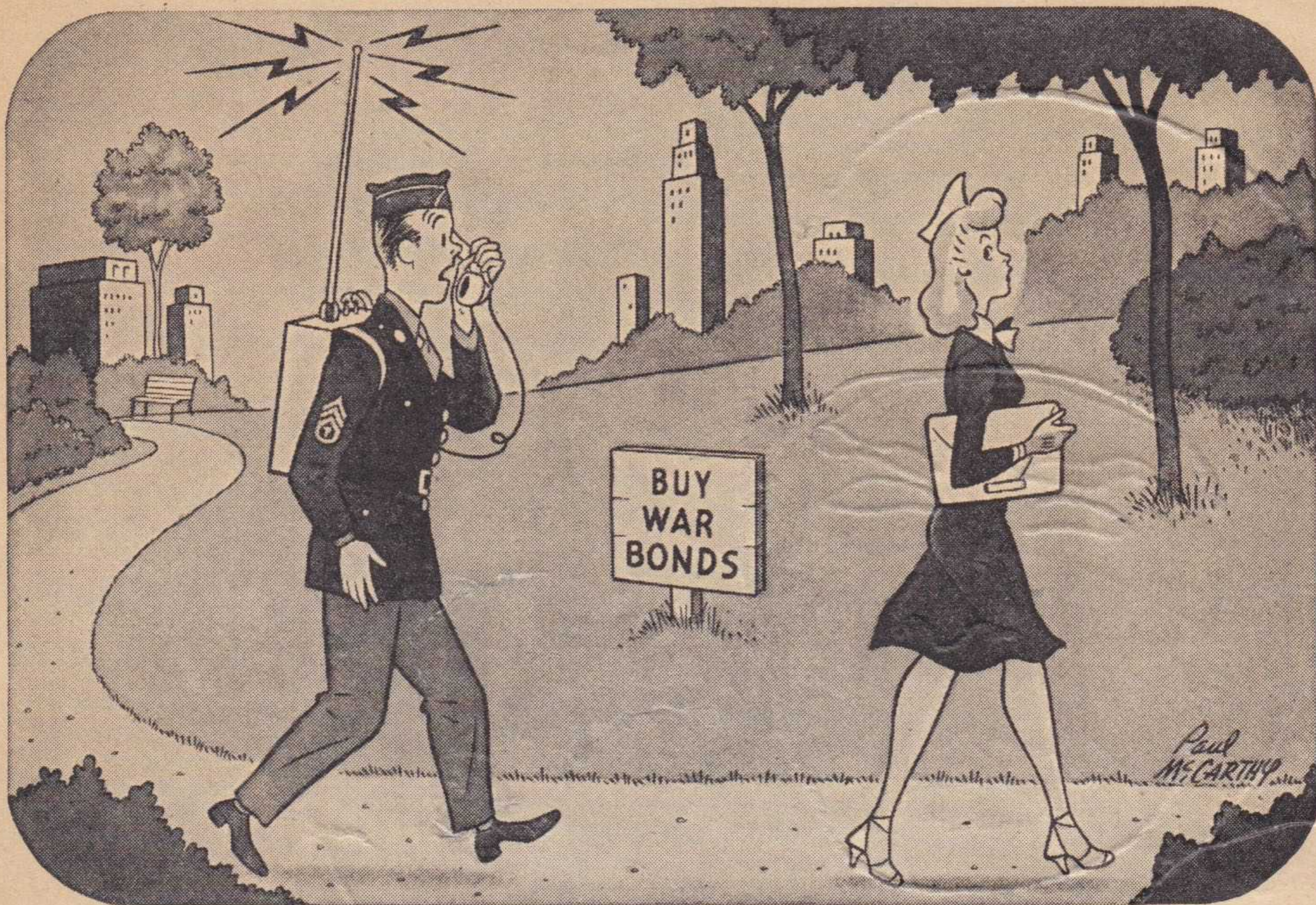
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THRILLING FOOTBALL

VOL. 5, No. 1

"Every Story Brand-New"

FALL, 1945



Featured Football Novelet

THIS IS THE NAVY

By

WILLIAM J. O'SULLIVAN

Gunner McTurk and Dutch Holtz were a couple of hard-fighting Marines from the South Pacific—but they faced a different type of tough competition at the Annapolis Naval Academy!.....11

Two Other Gridiron Novelets

BUSH TOWN BOUNCERS.....William Heuman 32

The members of the Cougar Football Club gave ex-star Johnny Bell the brush-off, but they forgot that he had once been a Marine!

FRONT LINES OF AUTUMN.....Joe Archibald 63

Honey Trent could carry the mail—but it took time to learn he needed the help of a farm boy named Cravath before he could really go to town!

Thrilling Short Stories

BACKFIELD BRUISER.....Nelson A. Hutto 47

Some of Jim Stafford's teammates thought him a heel

ELEVEN THROUGH CENTER.....Richard Brister 55

Skip Davis aims to prove he can make good with any team, except—

WINGS OVER THE GRIDIRON.....Robert Sidney Bowen 77

Freddy Tabor of the Jersey Tigers had his own private war to win

And

THRILLS IN FOOTBALL.....Jack Kofoed 8

Exciting gridiron highlights described by a famous sports writer

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PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

October, 1945, issue



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Exciting Highlights of the Gridiron

By JACK KOFOED

Famous Sports Commentator

LEON WHITTOCK HURLS A PASS AND FORCES A TIE

IN THOSE days both Temple and Bucknell had first rate teams. They were knocking on the door of greatness. And, there was a bitter rivalry between them. To each it meant something to beat the other.

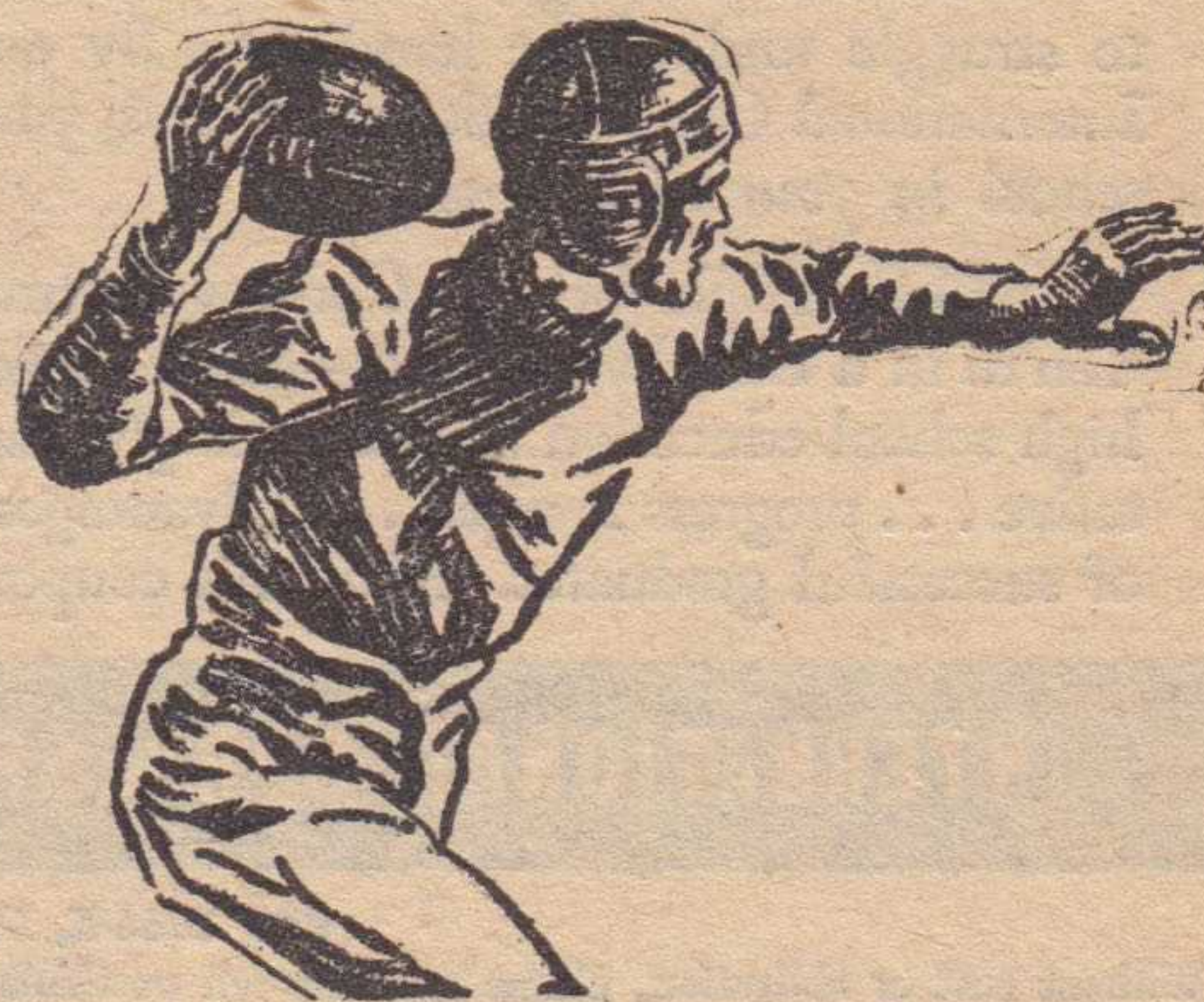
The top man for Bucknell that year was Clark Hinkle. He was tremendous. For a good many years after he left college, he was one of the best professionals in the land. Temple had no one player to match him. But, in little Leon Whittock, the quarterback, they had a smarty pants who knew what it was all about.

The field was soggy with rain. The ball was wet and hard to handle. At the very start it seemed probable Temple would win. Corny Bonner took the kickoff, and raced to Bucknell's forty-two. He was on his way to a touchdown, and would have made it if he hadn't lost his footing on the slippery grass.

A little later Zahnow took a punt on his own five-yard line. Racing and dodging and straight-arming, he went all the way to Bucknell's nine where Hevdrich nailed him from behind in a last, despairing effort.

Then, the tide turned. Spearheaded by Hinkle, the Bucknell boys smashed their way into scoring positions, only to be stopped by the fighting Owls. Whittock was the spark plug of the defense. He was everywhere. He roamed behind the line slapping the backs of his men, talking continually in his shrill voice. He was small but tough as hickory, and a fighting fool. He never quit, no matter what the odds.

In the last half Bucknell really began to get tough. The men drove on toward the gaunt goal posts that beckoned so enticingly. Burly Hinkle hit the line with terrific power. The Temple forward wall, bruised and shaken, stood up to the assault like heroes.



Behind them, Whittock and the other backs fought hard and well.

Yard by yard, though, they were driven back. The game was fading into its dying moments. Neither side had scored, but now Bucknell was in full stride. Still, against that stubborn resistance, they could not quite make it. On the twenty-two-yard line they were stopped cold. Fourth down, four to go. Even a smash by the redoubtable Hinkle might not be enough. Yet the big

(Continued on page 86)



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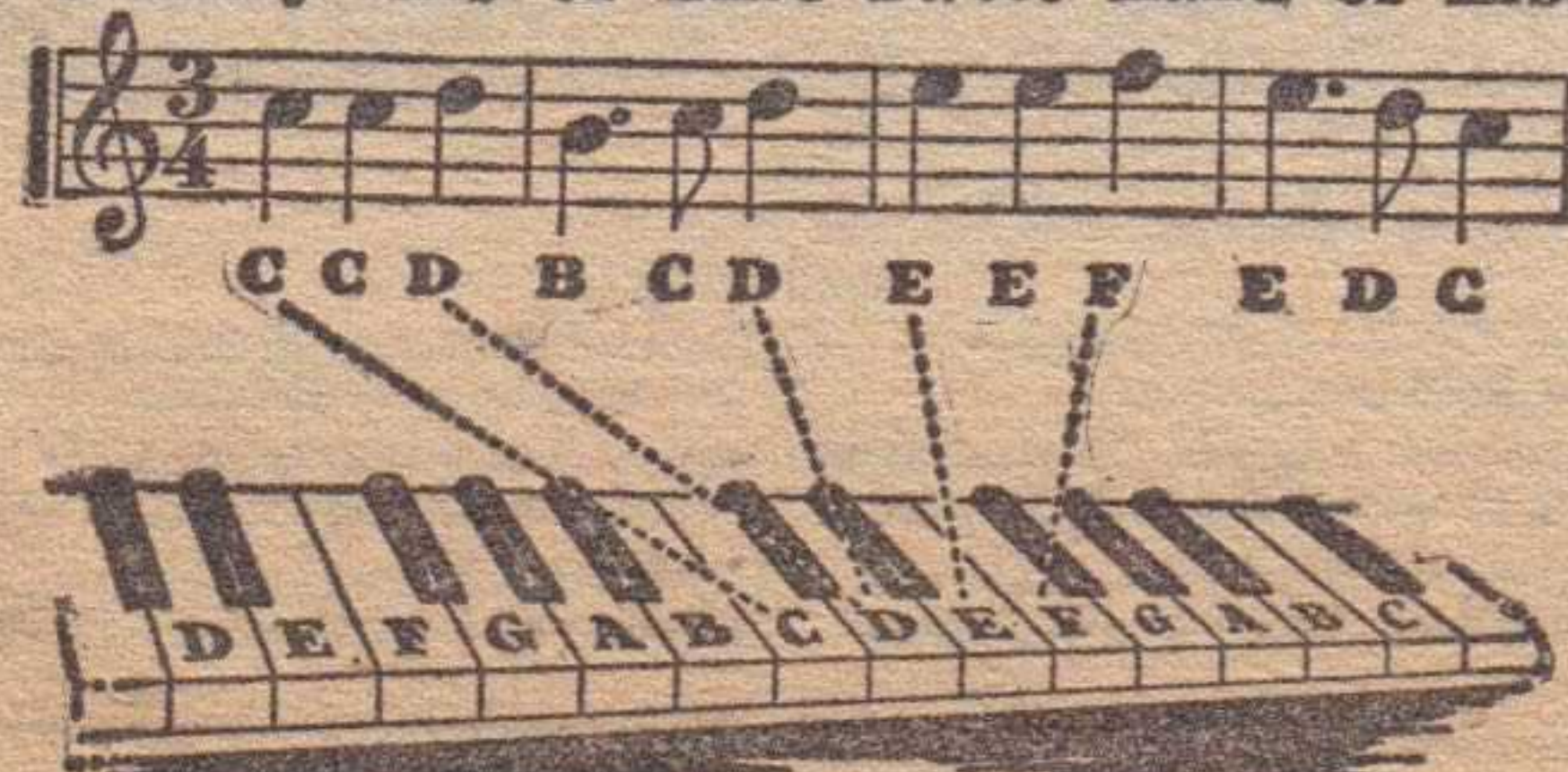


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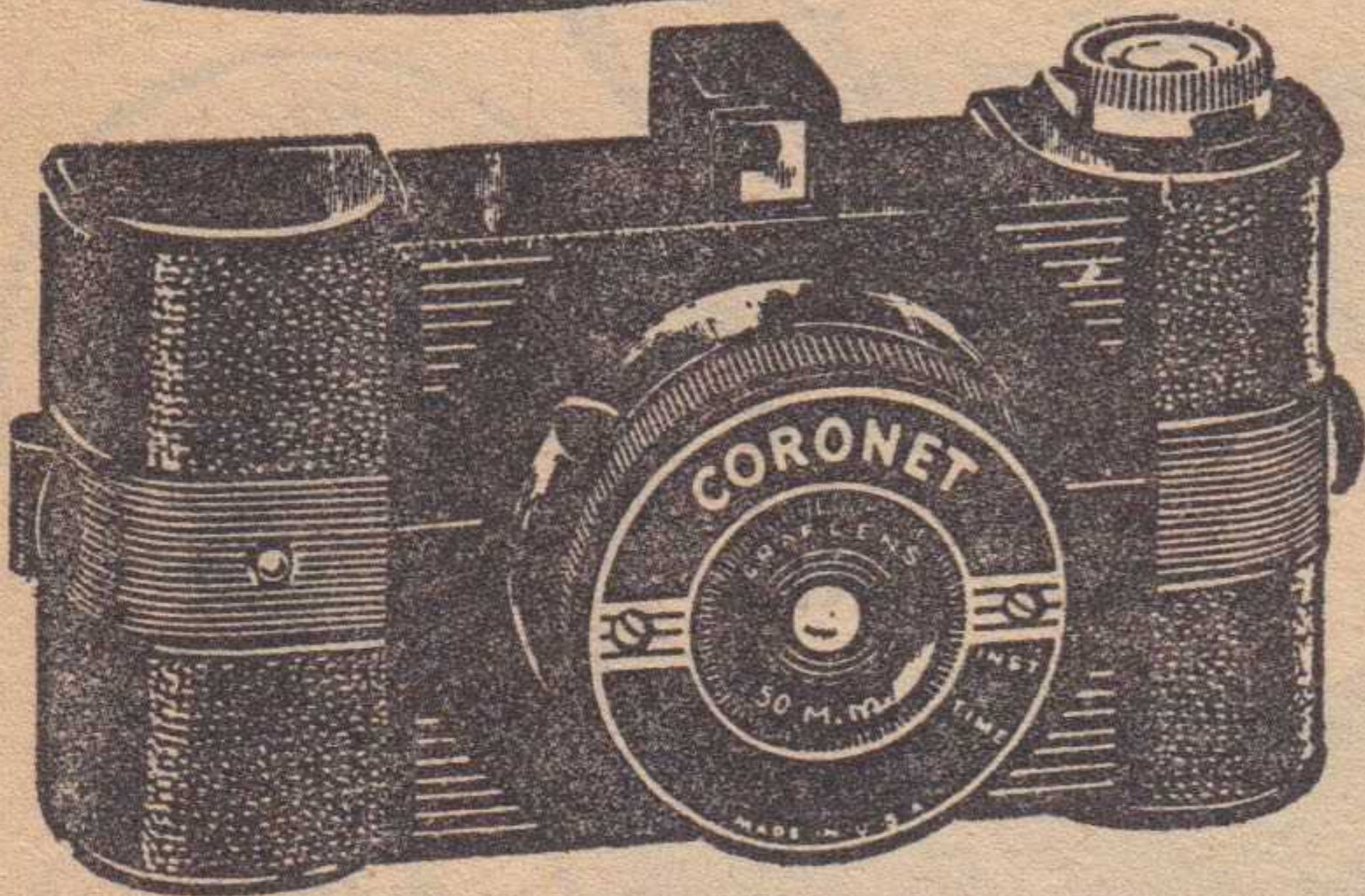
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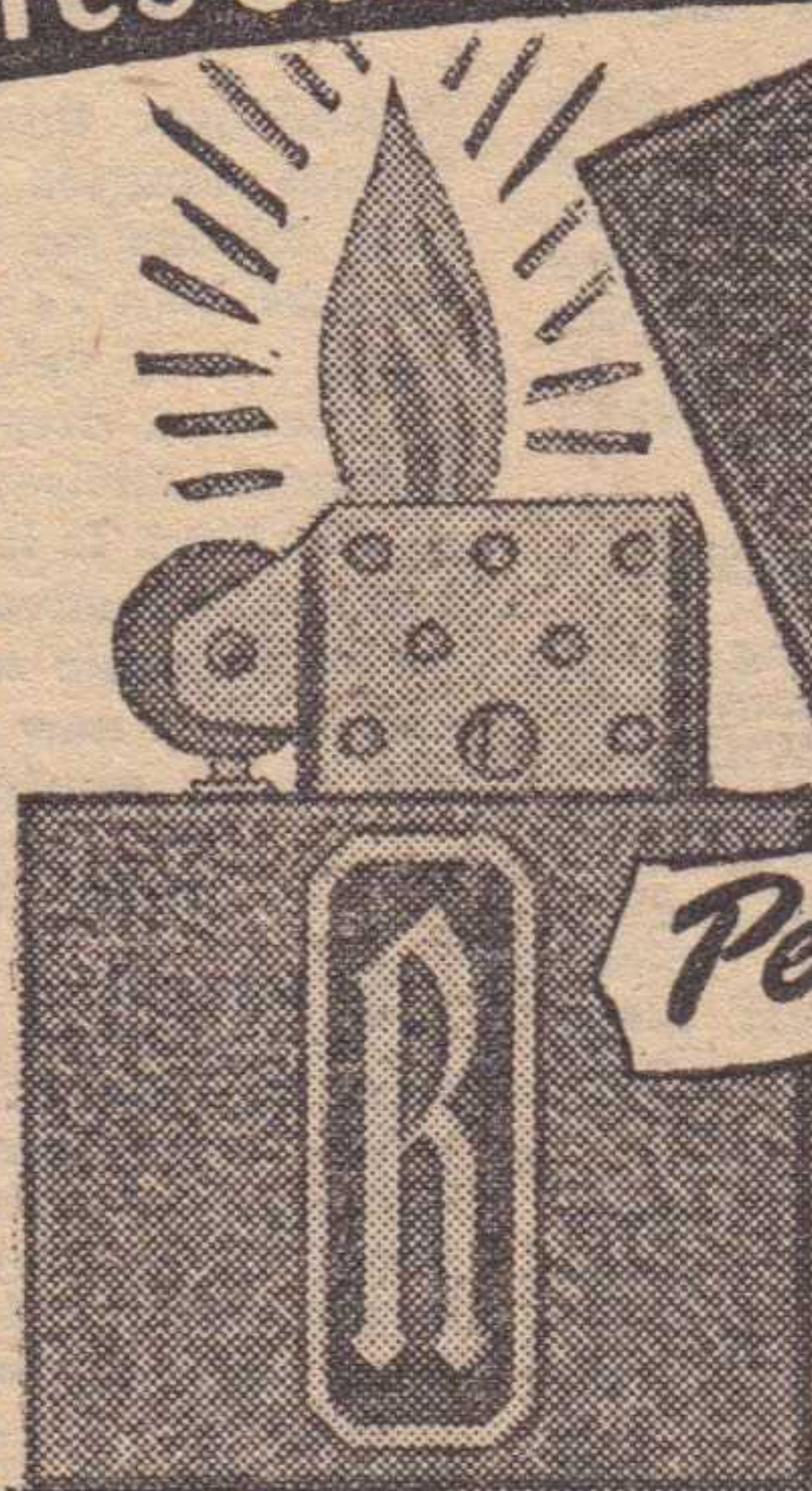
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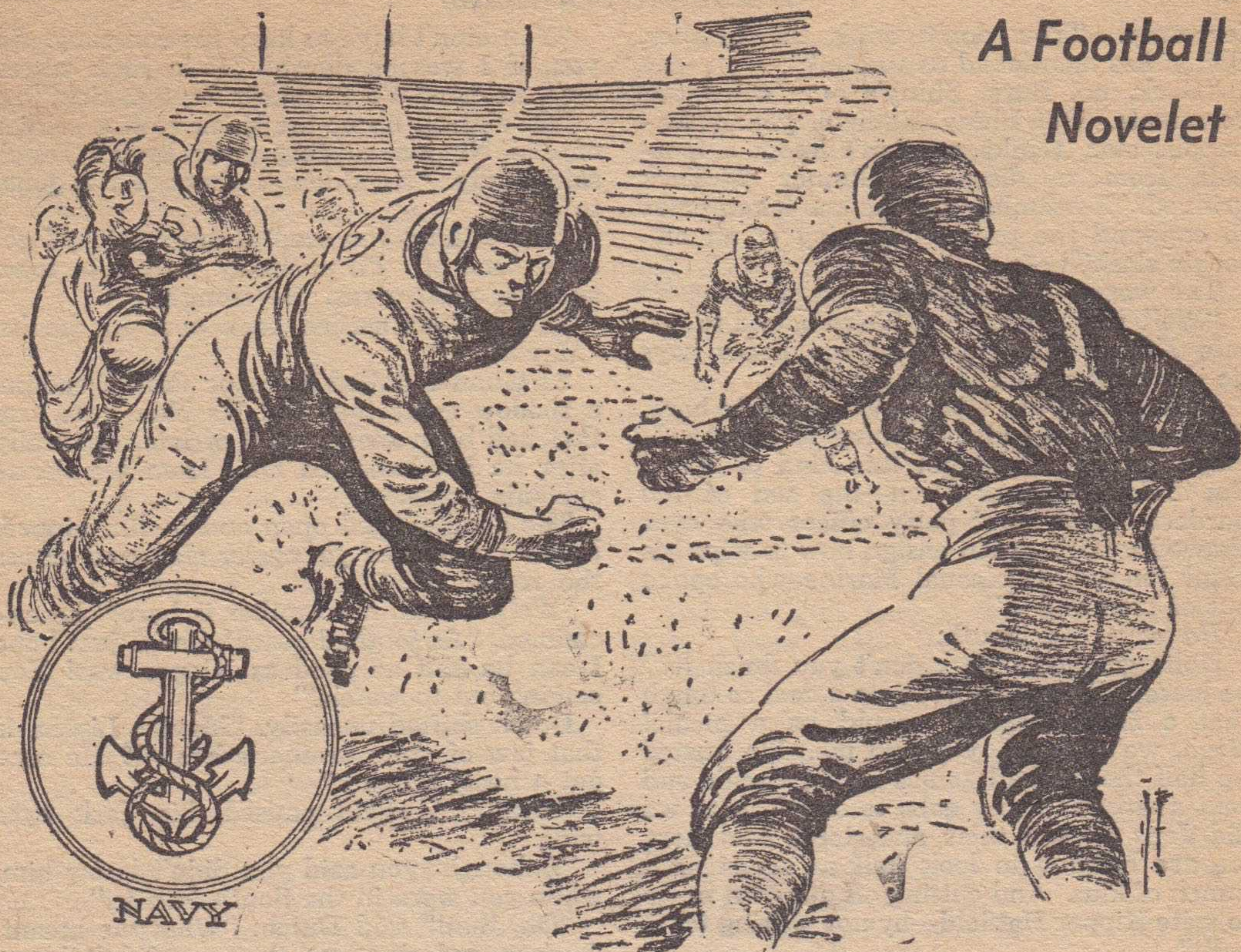
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A Football Novelet



Gunner headed for Dutch as the ball-carrier started through

THIS IS THE NAVY

By WILLIAM J. O'SULLIVAN

Gunner McTurk and Dutch Holtz were a couple of hard-fighting Marines from the South Pacific—but they faced a different type of tough competition at the Annapolis Naval Academy!

CHAPTER I

The Backsliders

FROM THE window of the room for three, high up in Bancroft Hall, he could slant his eyes down onto the Naval Academy's practise grounds, Farragut Field. Squinting his eyes against the dappled pattern that the September sun painted on wind-chopped Chesapeake Bay, he saw some sweat-shirted midshipmen passing and kicking a football.

At a small desk inside the room, a husky youngster with short-cropped blond hair stared moodily at a headline of the *Baltimore Sun*: MARINE HERO HERE TO COACH NAVY

He rubbed his jaw reflectively.

"You suppose he knows we are here, Gunner?"

The redhead at the window didn't answer.

"Gunner! Hey, McTurk! Snap out of it, will you?"

"Gunner" McTurk turned from the window. "I heard you the first time, Dutch," he said. "Look—it's been two years now. You think all Major Hatfield has to do is say, 'Well, Gunner McTurk and Dutch Holtz are checking into the Academy. . . . Now they're cramming, trying to get through Plebe Year. . . . Now they're up to their ears in Steam Engineering and Wrestling and Ordnance and Crew! Heck, he's forgot us!'"

"Dutch" Holtz grunted. "We hope!" he said

ferverently. "You don't think his brother, Shiny, has mentioned us to him?"

"Heck, no! Sure, Shiny's our 'wife,' our roommate. But Shiny Hatfield, young Annapolis star, thinks we don't know a football from a discus." Gunner McTurk grinned. "Remember how he has taken pains to expound the proper breaking of an off-tackle slash?"

The worry in Dutch's face eased.

"Well, what do we do? We're bound to run into Kipper Hatfield. And the paper says he is a lieutenant-colonel now!"

Gunner McTurk's face was suddenly hard. "This wasn't my idea—coming to the Academy! I'm Navy, but not this kind of Navy! I'm Baldy McTurk's son—the son of the hardest-boiled chief petty officer who ever showed a paint-green ensign how to wipe his chin! I'm a Guadalcanal Marine who spoke out of turn and—"

He shut his mouth.

Holtz grinned. "Why don't you finish it?" he jeered. "—got shafted into a deal so tough that a Banzai charge would be a picnic! Yeah, we're tough, you and me. We busted up half the football games in the Pacific and sent nearly as many gobs to sick-bay as we did Japs to join their ancestors! And here we are battling to look half as smart as a bunch of kids. And cutting off our own noses to spite Kipper Hatfield—by not playing football!"

GUNNER picked up his blue blouse and shrugged it on over his shoulders.

"We haven't been playing football for two reasons," he said flatly. "One, we think that's what Hatfield foxed us into taking those exams for; two, we haven't had time to get our noses out of books long enough to watch a punt get run back, let alone play. So what are we going to do?"

Dutch shrugged. "We're going to salute and say 'Aye, aye, sir!' We're going to hope that Kipper Hatfield has forgot that going-over we gave him at Honolulu when we took on the Officers Team. And we're going to try and forget that time you hooked one to his jaw in that scrimmage!"

"He clipped me, in that play," Gunner said. "I—er—sort of missed a straight-arm, next play."

"He didn't," Dutch said dryly. "And he didn't miss baiting you with that hook you swallowed—that you wouldn't last three scrimmages at the Academy, provided you had intelligence enough to pass the entrance exams, provided anyone was goofy enough to recommend you, provided the recommendation would get past the Shore Police, let alone the Navy Department!"

Gunner buttoned his blouse and clapped his cap on his head.

"You didn't have to keep me company, did you, if I was so dumb? Heck, look where we'd be now! I'd probably be top-kick!"

"Or staring up at the skies with a soldier of Dai Nippon carving your liver," Dutch said mildly. "No kidding, what are you going to do?"

"Same thing you are," Gunner said. "I got some time off. I'll probably walk into town and see what gives. Be along?"

Dutch Holtz settled back over his books. "Maybe."

As Gunner pulled the door shut after him, a shadow came into Dutch's blue eyes, one that had been there much of late, especially after he had received mail from his Pennsylvania home.

The door banged open and a slim-hipped, broad-shouldered youngster slammed across the room.

"Well, Dutch, my brother is here!" he exclaimed. "As football coach! Gee, I just hope I can be half as good as Kipper was! You coming out to watch?"

Dutch shifted uneasily. "Maybe. Listen, is that jaw of your brother's healed? He sure got a nasty wound."

"Shiny" Hatfield paused, his dark eyes wide.

"I thought you said you didn't know him, when you were in the South Pacific!"

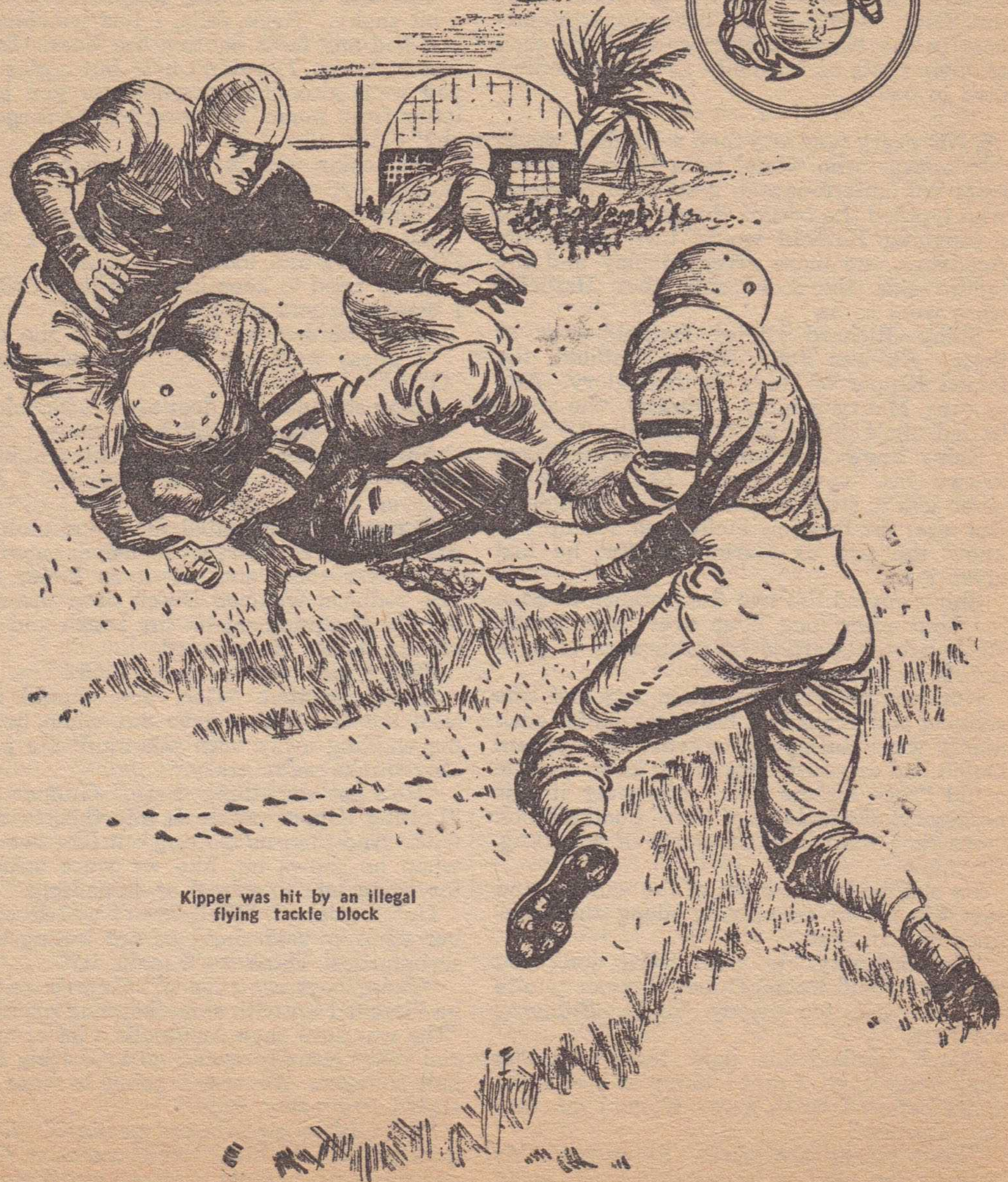
"Oh, that!" said Dutch. "What we meant, Gunner and me, was that we didn't know him social-like. I guess maybe we misunderstood you. Sure, we know your brother when we see him."

Shiny Hatfield passed a hand over the shiny-black hair that had given him his nickname, and considered how little he knew of these two husky, close-mouthed men who roomed with him.

He knew they were Marines appointed to the Academy from the Fleet. They had been at Guadalcanal, New Guinea, Hawaii. And they had nodded noncommittally when he mentioned his brother, the ex-Academy great, "Kipper" Hatfield. Shiny knew, too, that Gunner's father was a Navy man, and he had heard that gobs tread in fear of the elder McTurk, that junior officers consulted him, and that senior officers always put on a big grin whenever the name McTurk was mentioned.

Of Holtz, Shiny knew even less. He knew that Holtz avoided all talk of the War in Europe and that, when excited—which usually was only when Gunner was ribbing him or wrestling with him in the huge gym of Macdonough Hall—that Dutch would say "Jah!" and sometimes "Himmel!" He suspected that the nickname "Dutch" was misleading.

Shiny Hatfield did know that McTurk and Holtz kept almost strictly to themselves, shut



Kipper was hit by an illegal
flying tackle block

up like clams when talk of the war in the Pacific was in progress in student breeze sessions, and that if talk of Germany started, Holtz would quietly disappear, and Gunner took no part in it.

He knew that their academic life didn't come easy, as it did with chaps like Shiny himself, who had prepped for the Academy, with the Navy the eventual goal.

That had been the tradition of the Hatfields since there had been an Academy, back in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Hatfields studded the roster of Admirals of the Fleet. Hatfields had been Superintendents of the Naval Academy. Hatfields died at their posts as normally as other families died in bed.

AND every now and then a Hatfield would appear who would be a little different from the lantern-jawed, gray-eyed Hatfields who typified the breed. Every now and then a laughing Hatfield would turn up at the Academy, one more given to play and the lighter side, the social side, than Hatfields were wont to be.

Shiny—Richard Kipley Hatfield—was of these. As was John Kipley Hatfield, the famed Kipper of Navy football glory. And as was Maury Kipley, Admiral, the celebrated uncle of the football stars.

Shiny knew that perhaps he would have known his "wives" better had they been given less to study and more to social doings. But after the first few ineffectual attempts to know the two ex-Marines better, he had given it up.

Shiny envied the two their ability to bone for hour after long hour over their tomes. He had been warned by professors to perk up his own marks.

Nor was he far away when mischief was cooking and exploding. His demerits for such doings were perhaps twice what Gunner and Dutch had amassed. But Shiny knew that he could "turn on the heat" whenever it was necessary. He had lots of time. Football took more time than, say, the sport of wrestling. Or track.

He slanted his gaze out of the window and saw the crowd assembling along the sidelines of Farragut.

"Got to hurry," he said. "Why don't you stick along and watch, Dutch? I mean, you're sort of—well, too moody, lately. Studying too hard."

Dutch blinked his light blue eyes. "It don't come easy. I quit looking at books two years before I came here. When I got into the Marines."

"Your marks are swell," Shiny said, his eyes on the man as he put his books away and changed into his whites. "It's as if you had other things on your mind. Look, Dutch

—your folks aren't in this, on the other side, are they?"

The blood rose into the husky blond's face as he stared at Shiny. The silence in the room became oppressive. Shiny watched Dutch, puzzled.

"What's wrong, Dutch?" he asked. "I mean, the way you are staring?"

Dutch's voice was rough and hoarse when he said:

"How's for minding your own business for a change, Shiny?"

The dark-haired Shiny laughed, but it was a bit shaky. "Heck, fella, I just wondered if you had any folks fighting the Nazis. In the Dutch Army. I couldn't help but notice that you went glum lately, whenever you got a letter from home. I'm sorry. Let's forget it, eh?"

The color slowly ebbed from Dutch's cheeks.

"Yah, it is better that way," he said flatly. "Just forget about all that. Well, I guess I'll go along and look for Gunner."

Shiny tried to keep his voice light. "Guess I won't see you until chow time."

Dutch blinked as he turned to the door. "I guess we'll see you," he said slowly. "G'by."

Shiny stared at the door after it had closed.

"That's a queer pair," he muttered. "And if I'm not crazy, there's as much trouble in those two as in a keg of dynamite! I hope I never touch it off. . . ."

Gunner was in cleated shoes and moleskin pants and sweat shirt when Dutch came into the locker room and sat down beside him. The redhead watched Dutch drop the small bundle of equipment on the bench and kick off his shoes. He grinned.

"What took you so long, Dutch?"

Dutch grunted. "Gee, you should have seen the look Shiny gave me, when he saw me walking away with this stuff! He probably thinks we're crazy."

"He's got something there," Gunner said. "Letting Kipper psych us into this, to begin with. And then us trotting out like two kids when he shows up, like we were ashamed for being late to school or something."

Dutch grinned. "Well, aren't we? Remember what he said about us not lasting three scrimmages! Think we'll make it?"

"Those boys are rugged," Gunner said, as he loosened up with some bending exercises. "The war sure gave Annapolis a lot of material that normally would go to the big football colleges. We aren't going to have any strawberry party, fella!"

"Who likes strawberry parties?" Dutch grinned back at him. "Well, come on, Gunner! Let's us backsliders creep out there and make like we just heard about this game called football!"

CHAPTER II

Three Scrimmages

THE tentative Varsity was slick in blue pants, heavy sweaters, and gold headguards, and was packed four-deep in every position. Just now, they were broken into three teams that squatted low along the sidelines, and erupted against an imaginary foe.

Across the field, the scrub team coach was singling out men, getting a starting line together.

"You, Creeson! Right tackle. . . . Hey, Jenkins? Left-half. . . . Oh, Carmean? Full-back! . . . What's your name, you?"

"Holtz and McTurk, sir," Dutch said. "We—er—just thought we'd come out."

"What are you, Siamese twins?" The coach's eyes were busy with the tree-trunk legs, the sloping arms, the bullet-necks. "You got two names?"

"Name of Holtz," Dutch said, his mouth going stubborn. "This here is McTurk. Like I said, we just thought we'd come out and scrimmage."

"Maybe three scrimmages," Gunner said. "If we last."

The scrub mentor laughed. "Holtz and McTurk for three scrimmages!" he mockingly intoned.

He didn't notice the sudden attention he had from the tight-knit group near the bench. Where the new head coach and his staff were checking off names.

"Any particular positions you want to play?" he asked.

"I sorta like to play right tackle," Dutch said seriously. "But Fred Creeson already has that, so you can put me at guard, or center. Unless you would like me to play left tackle?"

"Chub" Malone, the scrub coach, stared at the powerful blond.

"You sure you wouldn't like to play quarterback, maybe?"

Dutch held the coach's eyes. "Never tried that, Mr. Malone. But Gunner here has, a coupla times. But he likes right half best."

"Oh, he does!" Malone shifted his gaze to Gunner. "Do your pal's plans suit you, McTurk? Or would you like to coach the team?"

Gunner's eyes were twin pools of merriment, but his face was sober.

"I haven't tried any coaching since I coached the Third Fleet's team at Pearl, sir," he murmured. "But I'll be glad to help you, sir."

"Right tackle—right half," Malone choked.

When the two had trotted off the scrub mentor walked over to the coaching staff.

"I guess that'll rack me back for a few minutes," he said. "Two greenhorns show up and just about offer to run my team for me. For three scrimmages! How do you like it?"

"I was noticing them," Lieutenant-Colonel Kip Hatfield murmured. "Seems to me I've seen them before. . . . Well, Chub, you plan to show me the Varsity stuff right off?"

Chub Malone shrugged. "Let's let the Varsity warm up by taking the ball away from the scrubs, then you can watch them go through their repertory. Okay?"

Kipper Hatfield touched a finger to the red scar that forked from his jaw down to the left side of his throat.

"Ummm," he said. "It's a bit early for a hard work-out, don't you think?"

Malone grinned. "What hard work-out? Against my scrubs? I wish we could have a hard work-out. With North Carolina Pre-Flight coming up in our first game, we need one!"

"It's Roger with me," Kipper Hatfield murmured. "I don't want to start right off telling you what to do and when to do it. Not until I have had a chance to see how you have developed, anyway."

"Right, Skipper," Malone paused. "Anything else?"

"How about the first team starting with the ball?" Kipper asked.

Malone veiled his eyes. "Aye, aye, sir. Is that an order?"

"Look, Chub," Kipper said. "You run this just as though I wasn't here. But if things don't go the way you want, remember it was your idea."

Malone nodded and walked briskly away, blowing on his whistle. He mumbled to "Spider" Hope, his weazened, pinch-faced general helper:

"The old Kipper isn't what he used to be!"

"Ah says he ain't," the Southern assistant agreed. "That wound, huh?"

Malone grunted. "Way he talks, maybe he got that wound in the only place it won't hurt him. The Kipper has rocks in his head, for my dough! Okay, Spider—line 'em up in mid-field. Scrubs have the ball. We'll get under way!"

The scrub quarterback got his men around him in the huddle.

"Well try and catch them off balance with a quick pass," he said. "Me to right end. Hit them hard and try to hold them!"

"Look, Slip," Gunner said. "Let's try a buck or two, first. I don't want to tell you your business, but why not throw a smash between right guard and tackle? I'll block for you."

"Yeah, sure," the others chorused. "You fake a pass, Slip," one of them said eagerly, "we'll try them. Heck, it'll be the only running plays we'll have all day, the way Chub

lets the Varsity hang onto the ball once they get it. Come on!"

"The ayes have it." Slip Maginn shrugged. "Okay, gang, let's break out of it."

THE play broke slowly, with the quarterback faking a pass, then galloping half-heartedly to his right. He barked his surprise when something seemed to go wrong with the left side of Navy's big line. A couple of first stringers were down.

"Come on, Slip!" Gunner McTurk was yelling. "What are you waiting for?"

Maginn went. But the hole was closing. He went nine yards, then a burly first stringer spilled him hard. When he got to his feet, his eyes were wide, but amused.

"Brother, they were asleep!" he chortled. "We darn near got a first-down! Let's try that pass now, hey?"

"Heck, no!" he was overruled. "Let's try for that one yard to a first down! Gee, imagine running over the Varsity for a first down! Boy!"

Maginn opened his hands when he saw the eager faces that ringed him in.

"Okay. But they won't be asleep again, I'm warning you!"

This time, Maginn was stepping fast behind his interference, but had time to see a bullet-headed form in his own right side of the line sweep two first stringers aside and throw a crashing block on another. The right end was cutting in hard, was slamming a would-be tackler aside.

And then Gunner McTurk was charging hard and low and straightening, spinning, teetering, managing to hold his balance as another Varsity man ricocheted off the big ex-Marine. Frantically, Slip Maginn scudded hard after his blocker. And slipped!

When he got to his feet, the scrub quarterback was chagrined. Then he looked at a sideline marker.

"Chee!" he said, awed. "We we got it! A first down to the thirty-yard line! Holy cow! That will click for sure, now! I feel it!"

"You'll feel my fist, lug, if you don't try it again!" Carmean growled. "I don't know what it is—but the left side of the big team has buckled like a wet paper bag. Let's hit 'em again! Hey, wait! Someone was hurt on the play!"

Navy's left tackle was down, and the trainer was bent over him. The left end was limping around, one arm over a trainer's shoulder. Then the tackle was being half-carried toward the wide doors of Macdougall.

Dutch and Gunner stood side by side, watching. Then Dutch found the eyes of the new head coach on him. He tried a feeble grin, shrugged, and looked away. Gunner caught Shiny Hatfield's eyes—eyes that were grim and unbelieving. The first stringers

were standing in a puzzled, awkward group. "Swede" Nelson, then right guard and captain of the first team, was nursing a bruised nose.

Then a substitute tackle was there, and they were lining up again. But Gunner held things up a minute by trotting near the coaches' bench.

"Sir?" His eyes found those of Harper Massey, Navy line coach. "Don't you think that Meldrum ought to be yanked? I mean his ankle may buckle."

"Just try that play again, Bub," Lieutenant Massey said. "Just try it!"

Gunner nodded slowly. "We will, sir," he said. "We've got to. If we find a weak spot, we've been taught to hit it. We—well, I just don't want to see Hash Meldrum get hurt. If it can be helped."

Massey looked at Kipper.

"I'm still a spectator, understand?" Kipper said. "Unless you fellows want me to help you?"

"Okay, let's play ball!" Massey snapped. "Get going!" To Kipper, he said, "How do you like that! What does that fellow think he is?"

Kipper smiled slightly. "Maybe he knows what he is! Maybe he knows he is a Marine in there punching against heavy odds! Want to pull Meldrum, Harper?"

"Not after that crack! This is the Navy, not a bunch of high-school boys! They just caught Hash off balance."

Kipper sighed, as he settled back to watch. "It sure is the Navy! Okay, Harper—I hope you know what you are doing."

In the huddle, Maginn said:

"I'm just about run off my feet. Let Hap Cooley carry it, from left half. But same play, otherwise, except we hit off left tackle, this time. Right?"

"Slip," Dutch said, "they've got a cold starter at left tackle, and they've got a left end with a bum foot. What's the matter—don't you want to go? If they want to leave Hash in there with a bum foot—well, so much the better for us!"

"Isn't that cold-blooded?" asked Bill Deeter, the scrub left end.

"What?" Dutch asked harshly. "Leaving a man in when he is shot? Or being smart enough to hit the weakest spot? Listen, they expect us to try it again. Well, let's not disappoint them!"

The first stringers did expect that smash again. But they had to watch for a quick bucketed pass that might turn a man loose around left end, or for a surprise pass that might set up a score.

From center, the ball snapped back to Slip Maginn. Slip did a neat half-pivot, passing the ball to Cooley. Then the scrub quarter faked a fade-back for a pass, his

arm cocked.

Meanwhile, action was unfolding on the right side of the scrub line. Dutch Holtz slashed hard into the left side of the first string line, flattening two men, then swung hard to his right and went on a straight line for the end. Gunner surged up, took the left tackle's smash on his shoulder, and rocked the man back out of the way of the play.

There were startled shouts from the sidelines, almost drowned in the crash of bodies meeting with terrific impact. A cry of pain knifed through it, then was lost in the roar of delight when three men were through that big forward wall and hitting hard down field.

Maginn, scudding low, took out a defensive back with a savage lunge. Gunner McTurk flattened a would-be tackler. Shiny Hatfield!

Then Hatfield was trying to make it to his feet, his face crimson with embarrassment. But the play was well past him.

A growing roar came from the watching midshipmen when Gunner raced hard ahead for the Navy fullback. Right on his heels panted "Hap" Cooley.

"Get him, Gunner," Cooley cried, his breath a half-sob. "Get him and we score!"

Gunner got him—with a bone-rattling block that flattened the husky fullback. Cooley scored, standing up.

In three scrimmages.

A rolling wave of laughter from the sidelines swept up the field. The first stringers, those who were back on their feet, were looking from one to another in dazed disbelief. The trainers were bent over two still forms—Meldrum, and "Tug" Carney, the fullback.

Chub Malone came back from watching the men bent over "Hash" Meldrum.

"They want an X-ray," he said. "Looks like a break. Possibly a Pott's fracture. Tug Carney is still hearing the birdies chirp!" He paused, his eyes going round. "And in three scrimmages! Holy smoke!"

CHAPTER III

The Banzai Charge

WHILE things were being talked up at the coaches' bench, Gunner McTurk signed to Dutch Holtz and the two begrimed and sweat-stained men walked slowly over near the new Navy coach. Some of Kipper Hatfield's assistants looked them over with frank curiosity. Then Lieutenant-Colonel Hatfield seemed to notice them for the first time.

The two new scrub players snapped to attention and saluted in unison.

"Glad to see you aboard, sir!" Gunner said, with a grin. But his eyes watchful, questioning. "You look fine, sir!"

"Me, too!" Dutch blurted. "Captain, sir. Er—I mean, Colonel, sir!"

Kipper Hatfield laughed, and returned the salute.

"Carry on, men," he said, and reached out a big hand to shake with each. "Glad to be aboard, boys. Well, well, well! So here you are at the Academy!"

"We made it, sir," Gunner said.

"Just barely, sir," Dutch said.

"Fine!" Kipper looked at them, then at the faces of his assistants. "And you lasted three scrimmages, just. Two Marines landed and the situation is well in hand." His eyes became bleaker. "Is there anything you want to say, boys?"

Dutch cleared his throat. "We're glad to see you aboard, sir."

"So you said before, Holtz. Anything else?"

Gunner shifted on his feet. "We haven't been playing any football, sir, because we have been working, you know."

"Think the wrestling team will be any good this year?" Kipper asked. "And the crew?"

Dutch was silent, his eyes defeated.

"We room with your brother, Shiny sir," Gunner said. "He is a very fine player. We—we saw him, last year."

"Glad to hear it," Kipper said dryly. "So far, today, I haven't had much chance to make up my mind about him. And I'm too worried over several of my best men being laid out—one of them for the season, perhaps."

Gunner and Dutch seemed to find the seascape beyond the field of absorbing interest. Chub Malone broke the silence.

"Well, you two! You've had your three scrimmages. Whatever that's all about! What are you doing—walking out now?"

Gunner and Dutch looked from the scrub mentor to Kipper, who just watched them, his eyes steady.

"Sir?" Gunner said. "Is there anything further you want of us?"

"Not a thing in the world," Kipper said softly. "Is there anything you want to say to me?"

Chub Malone was about to speak, but an almost imperceptible movement of Kipper's hand stopped him. After a long silence, Dutch asked:

"May we go now, sir?"

"Any time you wish," Kipper said pleasantly. "Nice of you to come out just to greet me, boys! You don't know how much this has done to make my first day on the

job a happy one!" His face was beaming, but his eyes were flashing. "I'll be seeing you!"

The two looked at Malone, but he just waved a hand toward Macdougall Hall.

"Glad to have had you boys out for a workout," he said. "Come again, some time!"

"Right," Gunner echoed hollowly. "Sir!"

They started across the field, eyes straight ahead.

"I guess you can't blame them, the way we threw that Banzai charge at them!" Gunner said. "Gee, I—"

He paused when some voices of the scrubs, raised in argument, reached them.

"Hey, where are they going?" one of them demanded. "We'll murder the first-stringers now! Get them back!"

"Let them go!" Gunner heard Bill Deeter say. "Where do they get that stuff, making out for a whole year that they don't play football, then coming out and powdering the gang with roughneck tactics! For my dough, that Dutchman ain't a Dutchman. He's a Nazi! You all heard him! 'Go get Hash Meldrum, now that he's crippled!' Brother, that's Nazi stuff!"

Dutch stopped in his tracks, as if he had been struck. Gunner grabbed at his arm.

"None of that, Dutch!" he snapped. "Come on, we're going in! Come on!"

Dutch went, but his face was white and his hands were fists. . . .

At his office desk in Macdougall, Kipper Hatfield watched the faces of the men in front of him and said:

"Well, let's not kid ourselves. It isn't a good setting. With Meldrum's ankle definitely broken, and with Tug Carney out with a concussion, we are up against it for the opening game."

"Yeah," Malone said. "But Dutch Holtz! There's a tackle!"

"He hasn't come out for the team," Kipper said. "And I'm not asking him to. Let him do his own asking. Gunner, too."

Harper Massey eyed his chief shrewdly.

"What's the story, Boss?"

KIPPER fired up a cigarette, blew a puff of smoke and watched it.

"The story," he said, "begins with Pearl Harbor. After the sneak attack, I was sent there to take over a company of Marines. As a captain. Part of my program was to pep up morale and physical condition with football games. I got up a team of officers, practically all of them Annapolis grads, and we played some pretty good ball against various Army units.

"Suddenly we began to hear about an enlisted team that was going great guns. I knew some of my own fellows were on it, but I was so busy I didn't get to watch it. Then the first thing I knew we had a Navy-

Marine Officers Team lined up to play against this enlisted gang—Navy, Marines and some Army men.

"Well—we played them. On the second play of the game, an up-and-coming blocking back of the e.m.'s threw an illegal flying tackle block at me. I taught him a lesson by giving him as neat a clip as ever missed a referee's eyes.

"On the third play of the game, I got sort of straight-armed. But good! The sort of straight-arm that Jack Dempsey used to feature. I got to play again in the closing quarter."

"McTurk?" Malone asked, softly.

"Gunner McTurk. You've seen his old man? They're cut out of the same slab of granite. I came back into the game, and spent a busy ten minutes getting to Gunner—but they had to tell me about it later. His pal, Dutch, took me out with a legal but murderous block that ended with him on top of me. I left the game again. Gunner's gang won by a fourteen-six count."

Massey grunted. "That the last you saw of them, until now?"

"I'll say not," Kipper said softly. "And thank God for that! They were in my company. I used to coach them, show them tricks. They caught on fast. Then I started talking the Academy to them. But I might as well have been talking to two posts.

"Gunner? He's Navy, but he thinks, out of loyalty to old Baldy, his father, that he should be a enlisted man for keeps, I guess. Dutch? I would have sworn Dutch would never follow Gunner, as close as they were. There's something—funny, but I don't know what it is. Dutch is furtive, mysterious almost. So I just about gave up. Then along came Guadalcanal."

The listeners stirred, but none interrupted.

"You know what we were up against there?" Kipper looked soberly at earnest faces. "Heavy guns, land and sea stuff all day. Bombing all night. And sniping, and rain, and mosquitos, and malaria. We took the airfield and dug in. And then came those crazy Banzai charges, with the Nips screaming and coming in at us, wave after wave.

"Something has to give, if such things keep up. Enough infiltration and enough Banzaiing, and you are liable to crack. Especially if you have been losing men and sleep and hard-won positions. Well—it gave with me, one night. I grabbed my rifle, climbed out of my shelter and decided to wipe out the Nippos then and there."

"Sweet Joe!" Malone breathed. "Alone?"

"I thought I was," Kipper said. "But something hit me, and hard. I was down, trying to get a pin out of a grenade, but a slam I got on the head decided that. When I woke up, two of my men were digging a

foxhole. Gunner and Dutch. They'd been the ones who had downed me."

"Brother, you must have been mad!" Massey breathed.

"But not as mad as they were," Kipper said. "Gunner told me off first. For the rah-rah stuff, he termed it. And Dutch put in his piece. They said plenty, in between bursts of killing Nips, and not all of it was nice. I said plenty, too. But we held the position, and the next day I got it. In the face. I was invalided back, with the medics saying I was a goner. My company held services for me, I heard later.

"I never heard of McTurk or Holtz again, until Shiny wrote me he had two hard-boiled Marine eggs for 'wives,' that they did not play football, and were called Gunner McTurk and Dutch Holtz!"

Massey frowned. "What do you suppose made them come here?"

Kipper grinned. "Maybe because I told them they were so dumb they couldn't even get jobs as Jollylegs—as guards—here. Maybe because they had that Marine urge to show me even if I had to be shown all the way to the Pearly Gates. Maybe, too, because they may have wondered if all I'd said about Annapolis was true. 'That trade school on the Severn,' as they called it. Well—they made it. And here we are."

Malone yawned. "A touching story. But I'm wondering what the story will be for the team. I vote we draft those two lugs for what they did to the team!"

"Navy—the Marines—don't beg for favors!" Kipper said flatly. "Understand that? So far as I am concerned, Gunner and Dutch don't exist. Until they come around and ask about things. And that's an order!"

"Aye, aye, sir," Chub Malone said, unhappily. . . .

THE next morning Shiny got his brother aside, his eyes furious.

"Those two lugs are in wrong with everybody," he declared. "And I'm moving. I won't room with men like that!"

Kipper smiled. "Like what?" he asked mildly.

"Well, they're sneaks. They never told me they played football. And to deliberately cripple the team!"

"You will stay right where you are," Kipper said. "They didn't do anything illegal. It was hard, but it was clean. If anyone was wrong, it was Massey. He wouldn't yank Hash. Dutch and Gunner were right. They know—because I taught them—that you hit an enemy where he is weakest. Now, what are you really so burned up about? Out with it!"

Shiny flushed. "Well, I used to try to interest them in football. I guess I said plenty!"

Kipper's grave face broke in laughter.

"Gunner and Dutch played high school football in Pennsylvania, before they came into the Marines. They played rock 'em-sock 'em tactics against coal miners big enough to dwarf the statue of Tecumseh! They played the same brand of it with the Marines. With proper coaching, those two would be good!"

"Would be?" Shiny snorted. "They are plenty hot right now." He groaned. "To think I used to draw them little diagrams showing plays! And brother, to see them pull that Banzai charge stuff!"

"That was no Banzai charge," Kipper said. "That was a Marine charge, fella! Now—you want some orders?"

"Shoot," his younger brother said.

"Okay. Just act as you always have. Which is probably to let them alone. They stay alone, don't they? Don't even mention football to them. Understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir." Shiny thought for a moment. "Look, do you think that Dutch is—well, Dutch? Some of the boys are talking sort of—otherwise."

"This is a free country," Kipper said, "where we don't ask anything personal about good citizens. Why don't you ask Dutch, himself?"

Shiny grinned. "I don't think it would be a good idea."

Kipper grinned.

But he was not grinning when he sat alone later, moodily contemplating his desk top. Kipper Hatfield had smelled trouble when he'd first taken notice of Dutch Holtz as a raw "boot."

And unless he misread the man, Kipper detected something sulphuric in the big blond who was now a midshipman.

CHAPTER IV

Situation Well in Hand

AN ALMOST imperceptible change was in the attitude of the midshipmen toward Gunner and Dutch. With the rapid growth of the Academy during war, and with the compressed three-year program curtailing the usual summer cruises and social activities, most midshipmen knew only those men who were in their battalion. A man's close friends would be the men rooming with him, near him, and on whatever teams he might perform. Even with a radical change in feeling toward a man, it would be evidenced only in a surface ripple.

So the story of the shredding of the vaunted first string line was received, by and

large, with some amusement, some resentment. But in their own immediate group, Gunner and Dutch received instant attention.

Shiny Hatfield's first reaction was one of embarrassed aloofness. It rankled that these two quiet Marines had let him shoot his face off about the beauties of football, when they could have told him a few things about the game.

But this attitude changed to cold resentment when Bill Deeter and "Hippo" Hansen, the first string center, opined that Gunner and Dutch were taking an enlisted man's revenge of the team that represented the officer class of the U. S. Navy.

"We've all heard that line of Gunner's about 'My father is the backbone of the Navy, the man who sees that orders are executed properly!'" Deeter said, in a breeze session.

"Sure," Hansen agreed. "Gunner is just naturally against us. And Dutch? Well, he's a Nazi for my dough! He busted Hash Meldrum's leg for the sheer Nazi fun of it!"

"Let's take it easy," Shiny cautioned. "In the first place, they didn't have to come to the Academy. And you've got to admit that Gunner asked for Hash to be taken out."

"A neat alibi!" Deeter scoffed. "This is the Navy, man! We don't pull our horns in for anybody on earth! So Gunner was able to claim he'd warned us, but still they were able to wreck Hash. And our season, maybe! I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm their two-striper, their company commander, and they'd better watch their step around me!"

And Deeter was not being just conversational.

Gunner got racked back for some mythical dust under his bunk, at inspection. Dutch was ordered to shave again; and a third time. And a fourth. And in the class formations that marched across the Yard, Deeter was constantly there, watching the proudly erect ex-Marines for the slightest misstep.

Punishment was passed out for the slightest relapses. Gunner and Dutch pacing a tour in front of Bancroft Hall with bayoneted rifles and in full uniform became a common sight, in the next five days.

The ex-Marines tried to take it in stride, but finally Dutch began to gripe.

"Brother, if this only was Japs, we could hit back!"

"Aw, pay them no mind." Gunner grinned, but it was a taut grin. "Just take it like it was boot camp and forget it."

"This on top of everything else!" Dutch muttered, his eyes hard on the floor. "In combat, I could forget, sort of. But here? How can I keep my mind on what the square-root of six-and-seven-eighths weighs, and what

color is it in the winter, if any—and have this sniping going on all the time!"

"We go out for the football team, and take out our steam in physical work," Gunner reasoned. "It's as simple as that." He watched Dutch closely. "What's so worrying you anyway, Dutch?"

Dutch shot him a quick look.

"Oh—things," he said. "Skip it."

They debated what to do Saturday of the opening game of the season, against North Carolina Pre-Flight. The Tarheel embryo pilots were said to have a star-studded aggregation, but still not rated in Navy's class.

"Can't make it, Dutch," Gunner said stubbornly. "I got too much to bone up on. Besides, Navy will take them. They don't need us there to yell."

But North Carolina won, 21-14. It was a stunning upset.

"We got to do it, Dutch," Gunner muttered, as they talked it over later. "Climb into your brace, mister, and follow me. . . ."

Kipper Hatfield listened, his face grave, then considered the two men in front of him.

"Any midshipman in good academic standing can come out for the team," he told them tersely. "Why come to me about it?"

They said, "Aye, aye, sir," and "Thank you, sir," and saluted, took two steps back, and did a neat about-face. They were at the door when Kipper's voice halted them.

"Why are you two men doing this, at this late date?" he asked. "You don't feel sorry for Navy, do you?"

GUNNER opened his mouth, but Dutch was ahead of him.

"Is it necessary, sir, for a midshipman to state the motives behind his coming out for a team?"

"It isn't," Kipper said, the ghost of a smile on his face. "Nor is it necessary for the coach to state motives behind the rejection of any material coming out for his team."

Again Gunner was about to speak, but again Dutch was ahead of him.

"Thank you, sir!"

Outside, Gunner said, "You bull-headed ape! Sometimes I think you'd make a better Prussian officer than a Yank officer!" He sighed. "Kipper is one of us, remember?"

Dutch stood in front of his roommate, his face white and his hands clenched.

"Gunner, don't you ever say a thing like that to me again! You hear me?"

Gunner frowned. "Listen, fella, don't go blowing your top at me. By Joe, you're acting strange lately, and I don't know what it's all about! But if you threaten me, you can hook your skates on and get going! And not my way! Good-by!"

After evening chow Dutch came to stand

in front of Gunner, his eyes sad, his head bowed.

"Forget it, Gunner? Please! I—I'm sorry, fella. I'm worried about—things. At home. Understand?"

Gunner laughed and swung a playful fist at Dutch's head, and ended by clapping the man's cap on his head.

"Aw, shut up, you big lug, and let's take in the movies. You and me, we're pals! Nothing will ever come between us, Dutch! So quit trying to work up a sweat!"

"Okay!" Dutch breathed. "Gee, Gunner, it's good to have a friend like you, who is patient, who understands!"

Gunner wouldn't even consider tossing for the movies. He paid. And for the sodas later. He felt slightly ashamed. . . .

When practise started Monday afternoon, Dutch and Gunner were there, and Scrub Coach Malone lined them up for some scrimmage plays.

"Okay," he said then. "First string material. Speak to Colonel Hatfield. Maybe he can use you."

Colonel Hatfield threw them into the second string against some first string scrimmaging. Shiny Hatfield knifed off tackle for a small gain, with half the Navy ahead of him. But Dutch, his nose bleeding and his eyes hard, smeared the next attempt.

Kipper nodded. "Nice going, Dutch. Now we'll line you up with the first string. Same play. Let's see if you can open a hole like you close one."

Dutch's eyes turned to Gunner. His roommate stood relaxed, hands on hips, in the second string.

"Snap into it, Holtz!" Kipper blared.

Puzzled, Dutch lined up. Since high school, he had never played a game without Gunner in there with him. Now Gunner was against him. Kipper saw to that.

"No. Left tackle, Dutch. Opposite the right side of the second string line. McTurk, block that play when it comes through! Let's go!"

The ball was snapped, the lines surged together, then Dutch was through, running like a mad bull, head low, shoulders hunched, squinted eyes roving for an obstacle to bowl over. Not for a breath did he hesitate when he found that obstacle, and it was Gunner.

But the powerful redhead saw the berserk charge of his mate, sized up the problem.

"Hit for the ball carrier, Leo!" he yelled. "I'll take Dutch out!"

Leo, a short, shifty quarterback with a fast-working brain and an acute sense of timing, laughed and yelped:

"Wow! This should be good!"

It was.

The swift thud of heavy, cleated feet speeded up, then was lost in the smash with which the two men came together. But Gunner had got his shoulder slightly lower than Dutch's, was still surging ahead in his powerful drive. Dutch's head snapped up, he did a half-loop, and landed spreadeagled on the turf. Gunner stood rubbing his shoulder and staring down at Dutch with flinty eyes.

"What you got there, lug? A pile of rocks? My shoulder feels like it was busted!"

Dutch scrambled to his feet, his face red. "Jah? Just wait! Next time I plow right through you!"

"Hey, Chief!" Gunner yelled. "How's for that play again?"

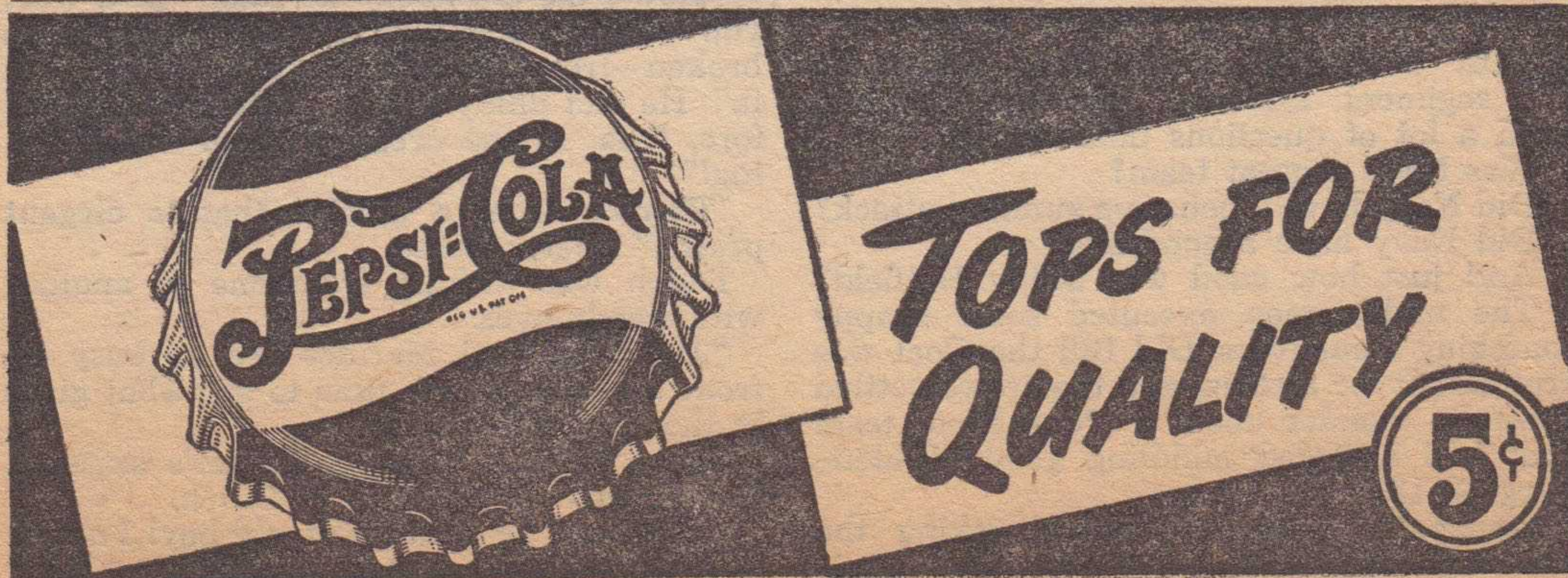
He got it.

DUTCH, head low and charging hard, hauled himself to an all but back-breaking stop as Gunner came in. Gunner saw it too late to save himself, was caught off-balance. Then Dutch hit him.

Gunner was a parabola of flying arms and legs and his headguard went spinning.

"Oof!" someone on the sidelines said. "Even I could feel that! Say, they're supposed to be pals!"

[Turn page]



"You're getting a preview of what football will be like for a few years after the war," Kipper said soberly. "The killer tactics we teach the boys will stick with them, to that degree. Give these boys another try."

For three more plays, Gunner and Dutch rocked together, and each time they came away with a new lesson learned, with new cunning for the next go. At length, Hatfield called it off.

"I think you boys will do, with a lot of hard work," he said, his face grave, but his eyes amused. He eyed the bruised faces and Dutch's swelling eye. "Looks like this life is softening you fellows up. Better join the training table and burn some calories out of your flesh. Turn in, now, and report to my office for diagrams of our plays. And study them!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

They started away at a walk.

"Come on, you beefy boot!" Gunner whispered. "Let's not let the Marines down! Let's go off the field under full power!"

They broke into a mad sprint for Macdougall.

"Toughest hombres I've ever seen!" Chub Malone murmured.

"Then you've never seen Baldy McTurk, Gunner's old man!" Hatfield grunted.

Malone stared at his chief. "You weren't, by any chance, letting each of those lads do a job on the other for your own satisfaction?"

Kipper laughed. "Not altogether. Don't you think the other boys have gathered that Dutch and Gunner play just as hard against one another as they do against—Hash Meldrum, for instance?"

Chub chuckled. "What I gather is, 'Two Marines have landed and the situation is well out-of-hand!' Well, well! This may be a good season, after all!"

CHAPTER V

Navy Steams on

FOR the game against Penn State, the regiment marched into the Stadium with a lot of questions unanswered.

Was Navy a great team?

Did Navy have a cohesive running attack?

Did Navy have a good line?

And just how good was Shiny Hatfield?

The midshipmen executed some snappy marching maneuvers, Old Bill the Goat was trotted out for a romp, and the crowd settled down to wonder about a Penn State team that had mangled middling good Muhlenberg 58-13.

Annapolis received, Hatfield taking the low-trajectory kick deep in Navy terri-

tory, and a roar started as Shiny picked up his interference and Navy thundered upfield.

Ahead of him, Dutch Holtz thundered, like a battlewagon prowling a way for a squadron of destroyers. Three Penn Staters were flattened before Dutch went down under the impact of two more defenders.

Near midfield, Tug Carney ripped a hole in a wall of five stalwart Penn Staters, and through it Gunner McTurk sped, with Shiny close on his heels.

On the Penn State ten, a last defensive back had his chance. He made a slashing cut at the ball carrier. But Gunner was there ahead of him. He took the Penn State safety man out with a savage, hip-high block.

Shiny Hatfield went over standing up, for the score.

Navy settled down to a parade of touchdowns. From punt formation, pass formation, Modified-T formation. And it was Hatfield, Hatfield, Hatfield.

Navy showed a powerful, slashing line headed by Holtz, left tackle, a line that gouged great holes in the Penn State forwards. And Navy showed a hard-running, hard-blocking back in Gunner McTurk, right halfback.

Two new heroes were crowned on that cleat-torn turf of Navy Stadium that afternoon. Both were named Hatfield—Hatfield, the coach, and Hatfield, the star back.

The final score was 55-14.

There was jubilation that night as the midshipmen celebrated the game. A gang was in Shiny's room when Gunner and Dutch came in from a walk. The merriment died and the talk became stilted.

"Aren't you two going to congratulate Shiny on his great show?" Bill Deeter at length asked the ex-Marines. "A few more like this and he's a cinch for All-America!"

"Don't tell them that, Bill," Hash Meldrum said, "or they'll quit pushing up front!"

Gunner snapped a warning glance at Dutch, looked down at Hash's foot that was in a cast.

"How's the old hoof," he said. "In a way, you're lucky! I've seen Japs with their backs broken—from Dutch's shoving, as you call it." He met Shiny's eyes. "Like we said before, fella, in the dressing room—swell going!"

"Coming from a Marine that is elegant praise!" Deeter jeered.

Dutch was looking from one to another with steady eyes.

"Jah! You bet! Marines are so busy up front they don't have time to see what gives in the rear of the lines!"

Shiny led the laugh at Deeter's expense. Deeter was staring hard at Dutch.

"You must be a bit upset, old boy! I notice that when you are, you always say, 'Jah.'"

Isn't that right—Dutch?"

Dutch forced a grin.

"Jah, I say Jah." But his eyes weren't pretty.

Shiny yawned and broke it up.

"Okay, mob. I'm going to hit the hay. Be seein' you!"

As Shiny undressed, he talked about the game, about his desire to make good for his brother, about the particular beauties of today's initial touchdown run.

Dutch yawned and looked at him owlshly. "Why don't you draw us a diagram, Shiny? Like you used to."

There was a tense moment, then Shiny was grinning.

"Boy! I guess I won't need to get new headgear issued so long as I have you two around to take my head down! What I meant was, it felt so—good! There we were in the dumps, then of a sudden—we were going to town! Well, good night. . . ."

IN a classroom, the next week, trouble reared its head again.

The instructor, called to Headquarters, put Bill Deeter in charge, as the ranking midshipman present.

"Informal discussions, Mr. Deeter," he instructed. "Until I return."

Deeter called on Gunner.

"Mr. McTurk, I would like a five-minute dissertation on how the Navy is better than the Marine Corps."

Gunner jumped to his feet. "Sir, I would prefer to argue that the world is flat. I would have a better chance of making my point, sir. Have I your permission, sir?"

Deeter nodded gravely. "Proceed, Mr. McTurk. I am all ears."

"Oh, sir!" Gunner grimaced. "Must we discuss that, too, sir? It is so obvious, sir!"

Deeter grinned at the laughter that was directed at his generously inclined ears.

"You may resume your seat, Mr. McTurk—and prove to us that the world is flat."

Gunner sat down, placed his watch on the desk in front of him, and soberly began reciting:

"The world is flat, the world is flat, the world is flat." For five minutes.

"I think you have a good argument there, Mr. McTurk," Deeter decided judicially. "Certainly the most convincing one you have yet delivered within these hallowed walls. Mr.—er—Dutch Holtz?"

"Yes, sir?" Dutch snapped to his feet.

"Let us hear your ideas for the extermination of every living German in the world. You may have—er—one minute should do for that." When Dutch stood rooted in his tracks, his face white and his eyes tragic, Deeter rapped the desk. "Come, Mr. Holtz! Don't you understand the question?"

Dutch stood at stiff attention.

"Midshipmen are enjoined from becoming involved in political discussions of any sort whatever!" he snapped. "I regret my inability to assist you, sir."

Deeter's eyes were hard. "Ah, I see. You are truly loyal to your orders, Mr. Holtz. Perhaps we can remove this from the realm of discussion. Repeat after me, 'All Germans are Nazis. All Nazis are vile, ruthless mad dogs. All mad dogs should be exterminated. Without exception!' Repeat that, Mr. Holtz."

A leaden silence fell as Dutch stood rooted in his shoes, his face pale, his hands twitching. His breathing became audible, drawn, painful. Beads of perspiration broke over his face.

"Tut, tut, sir!" Deeter said. "Surely, after what the Nazis did to your beloved ancestral country, Holland, you do not object to my philosophy of extermination of—every—living—German! Do you, sir?"

Dutch choked. "I do not wish to discuss—this, sir." He sat down.

"On your feet, Mister!" Deeter snapped. "I am in charge here!"

Dutch stayed seated, but some others rose. Shiny, and Hippo Hansen, and Gunner.

"Resume your seat, McTurk!" Deeter snapped. "Instantly!"

"You cut out your monkey shines, Deeter," Shiny said. "And if you don't like it—come and get it!"

Deeter's eyes sought among the others for backing.

"Don't look at me," Hash Meldrum growled. "Maybe I don't cotton to Dutch and Gunner, but this stuff smells."

Deeter nodded slowly. "Okay. I just wanted to show all you fellows that Dutch is not Dutch, but German. And there isn't a good German on earth! He won't say it, because he is a German!"

Dutch came to his feet now, with a roar and a lunge for the platform.

"Liar!" he snarled. "I am not Dutch, no—nor German, no! I am American. But my people were German, and they were good Germans! Just as their relatives who now live in Germany are good Germans!"

Gunner stepped in and slugged Dutch hard. "Snap out of it, Dutch! Hear me? Or I'll really crank up on you! Now sit down!"

The professor was suddenly back in the room, taking in the tableau.

"Mr. McTurk! Mr. Holtz! What is the meaning of this?"

The room fell silent.

"Mr. McTurk, did you strike Mr. Holtz?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Holtz, did Mr. McTurk strike you?"

"Yes, sir."

The instructor turned to Deeter. "Do you have any statement to make, Mr. Deeter?"

Slowly, Deeter's eyes traveled over the desks, touching on each occupant in turn.

"My two older brothers were killed by the Germans," he said slowly. "By the Nazis. It's the same thing."

The instructor stared. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Deeter? Did you hear my question? Have you a statement to make regarding the conduct of these gentlemen?"

Deeter met the instructor's eyes squarely. "None, sir."

"That is all for today."

OUTSIDE, Shiny came to Dutch and Gunner.

"Which of you is to challenge Deeter?"

"Neither of us," Gunner said. "Thanks, Shiny, anyway."

Shiny stared, "But you've got to! You have no choice."

"Oh, yes, we have," Gunner said flatly.

Shiny's eyes were hard. "What are you afraid of?"

Gunner laughed. "Of killing Deeter and not being around to make sure you get enough holes opened up so you'll be an All-America."

Shiny swung on a heel and walked away. . . .

The Duke game came around, and Navy was slow starting.

The backfield was afflicted with fumbleitis, for one thing. For another, Duke had an aggregation that had dropped a one-touch-down decision to North Carolina Pre-Flight the week previous. And, the blocking of Gunner McTurk seemed to be suffering from bad timing.

Shiny put on a punting exhibition with Duke's stellar back. And at the half, it was a 0-0 deadlock.

Kipper Hatfield went among his charges with an encouraging word here and there. He stopped in front of Gunner.

"Feeling okay, Gunner?"

The blocking back met the coach's eyes squarely. "Okay, sir."

"You have no complaint?"

"None, sir."

Kipper's eyes were somewhat harder when he left.

Dutch went over to Gunner.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Something with your left arm?"

"Shut up," Gunner grated. He looked around. "That first block I threw didn't come off so well. I wrenched my shoulder, and my left arm is numb. But if I let them yank me, we'll probably be handicapped, because I know how Shiny runs, and whoever took my place wouldn't shake him loose for a gallop. If he gets off for a gallop! So keep your mouth shut."

The break came in the closing minutes of

the game, with Dutch seeming to wake up for the first time, and tearing a hole through right guard. Gunner saw the smash, and steered Shiny for it, slamming into the breach.

Three tacklers were thrust aside, then Gunner was taking out the safety man with a crash that brought a grunt from the spectators and a cry of pain from Gunner himself.

But Shiny had seen. And Shiny had scored.

Navy took a 7-0 victory out of that fiery brawl. It was a close one.

But there was a backwash of talk, to the effect that Gunner McTurk wasn't going to break his neck making the road too easy for Shiny Hatfield.

CHAPTER VI

Demerits

ON Monday, Gunner and Dutch were summoned to the office of the Superintendent. There, the sober-faced, hard-bitten Admiral who presided over the destinies of three thousand future Officers in the Line of the U. S. Navy told them:

"Stand easy, gentlemen."

As if they could, while the old sea-dog read to them a terse report of misconduct in classroom during the absence of the instructor!

"Well, gentlemen?"

"No excuse, sir," they said in unison.

"There certainly is not," the Admiral said, his eyes riveted on them from under bristling white eyebrows. "Men with Service records like yours! It isn't as if you came here as undisciplined schoolboys. Not," he hastened to add, "that there would be any difference in treatment. But men of your records—winners of the Purple Heart, the Silver Star, two Presidential citations, the Navy Cross. . . What is the matter with you two?"

"Sir," Gunner said crisply, "the Admiral is in error. Neither Midshipman Holtz nor Midshipman McTurk were awarded Navy Crosses!"

The Admiral consulted a sheaf of papers.

"Yes, I was wrong. But I sometimes think we should require the wearing of medals and decorations here, to remind the wearers of their—er—dignity. You are being assigned a number of demerits, gentlemen. How many, you shall be informed in due course. But it is only fair to warn you that there is not any margin left for a repetition of this, or for any other offense. You may go, gentlemen."

Two steps back, two salutes, two about-

faces, two men marching like automatons through the door, wheeling in timed cadence, going out of sight. . . .

The demerits would be posted on the board. And it was just a question of time before Deeter would ride them so hard there would be another slip. Then—curtains.

As they went across the Yard, Gunner made a wry face.

"My old man will beat my britches off me, if I bilge out!" he said. "Brother, I'd rather face Tojo's House Guards!"

"Jah!" Dutch looked around, at midshipmen swinging past the statue of Tecumseh, at the golden dome of the chapel. "I sorta like it, here, too."

But their eyes were steady and their chins up when they trotted out of Macdougall for the Georgia Tech practise.

Kipper gathered his men for a hard pep talk.

"Tech is a smart team, if light," he told them. "Besides, we play them on their home grounds. At Atlanta. We'll have to be at top form." His eyes paused on Gunner's face. "Let's not pull our punches, men, in practise, or in games. Let's go!"

Gunner's face was flushed when he trotted out.

"Why don't you show your arm and shoulder, Gunner?" Dutch said. "Let him see why you were off your stride in the Duke game."

"And why were you off, Dutch?" Gunner grunted. "No, I'm keeping my mouth as tight shut as you do. Anyway, I don't want Shiny to think I might be trying to get out of blocking for him."

The coach broke the first stringers into two even squads and sent them against one another in a hard drill. Gunner's face was tight with pain when he left the field.

He was still bruised and sore when the team entrained. At Atlanta, they climbed down into heat that was twenty degrees warmer than Annapolis, and by game time the squad had lost its edge.

But by sheer power alone, they carried the fight to Tech and rolled down the field, bucking, slashing and running the ends like furies—only to slow down in the pay-off ten-yard markers, or fumble, or lose the ball on a pass.

Tech, outweighed, outmanned, outgunned, fought brilliantly and the seesaw game had the home-town crowd wild. Time after time, Navy threw Shiny and its other hard-running backs hard at the left side of Tech's line, only to have Tech stiffen, and Navy—or Gunner McTurk—soften. Not perceptibly to the stands, but to the men who were used to that coldly calculated drive that cleared men from in front of him like ten-pins.

The final quarter saw Navy surge ahead, 15-14, saw Tech fight back gallantly to score

a field goal that put them out in front 17-15. Then came Navy's thrilling march down the field.

A first down around left end. A smash at right guard that picked up eight yards. An off-tackle slant through Dutch's position that covered another first down.

HARDER and harder punched Navy, with Tech giving ground grudgingly. Then it was first and goal on the three-yard stripe.

Once, twice, three times, Navy smashed through the right-tackle slot, but it was stopped up when the ball carrier got there. Then came that last despairing smash that carried to the goal, seemed to go over, as Gunner and Dutch bucked hard at that tight-knit Yellowjacket wall.

But when the players had been pulled off the ball, it was inches to go, and Tech's ball.

And the gun barked the ending of the game! Navy, with its greatest season in prospect, had lost its second start out of four!

It was a grim-faced crew that trooped into the dressing room. Kipper Hatfield was the grimmest. He held up a hand, and said:

"You are a team, and this is a game. But you are still Navy, and you are still under orders! You all know you are under orders to report any injuries, any illnesses . . . McTurk! Front and center!"

Gunner stepped slowly forward, his face still etched with pain.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Strip off your sweater!" When Gunner didn't move, Kipper roared; "That's an order! Strip it off!"

Gunner tried to get his left arm up, but he couldn't. He shook his head slowly.

"I—can't, sir!"

Hippo Hansen caught the blocking back as he slid to the floor, carried him gently to a rubbing table. The trainer cut the sweater away and laid back the shoulder pad.

Kipper cursed with feeling. Shiny said, "Gee!" Hippo yelped, "Any of you want to get your noggins knocked in, just make another crack about Gunner holding out on Shiny! On Navy! The trouble with Gunner is, he has too much nerve!"

Kipper looked at the black-and-blue chest, the swollen shoulder and arm, and shook his head.

"And too little sense," he murmured. Then he told his men: "Now get this order! Any injury that you men hide will be considered as NLD. Not in line of duty! It will be regarded as self-inflicted, and you'll face the consequences. We like nerve, but our job is to make Navy officers, not cripple men in games! I don't care if we lose every game we ever play, if we turn out first-class Navy officers. And anyone I catch trying to cripple my men will get it from me, even if it is the

injured man himself."

But the trainer had some cheerful news after he saw the X-ray plates.

"Gunner will be back in the line-up in time for the Notre Dame game in two weeks. If nothing else develops. . . ."

The Pennsylvania U. game was a 26-0 victory for the Jacktars.

Dutch felt like a fish out of water, playing without Gunner in back of him. But his mates, as if sensing the big fellow's gloom, fell to with a rush that piled up plenty of points.

"You see?" Dutch chuckled, when he saw Gunner later, "We don't need you!"

Gunner grinned. "You'd better keep out of my way, the next time we buck through your position. I'll boot a goal with you!"

But if there was a thawing in the manner of their other mates, the ex-Marines still got their share of attention from Bill Deeter. Neither Shiny nor Hippo missed that. They talked it over with Gunner and Dutch.

"We can't pressure Deeter," Shiny said, embarrassed. "He ranks us, and his word is law when we are off the field."

Gunner shrugged. "We're not asking for help."

Dutch eyed Shiny shrewdly. "You are only a stripe under him, and with graduations coming in mid-year, you may go up over him."

Shiny nodded. "If I don't pick up any more demerits. But—that would be too late to try and work on Bill. He's okay, but he's the type who thinks the whole weight of the Navy rests on his shoulders. He'll play it that way if it kills him." He eyed Dutch. "His two brothers were killed. He can't help hating the Germans."

"You mean, Nazis?" Dutch put in quickly.

"Let's not get into that again," Gunner growled. "Thanks—both of you. Dutch and I will watch our steps. And you"—he gave Shiny a slow wink—"watch yours."

Shiny colored. Several times, he had overstayed a pass, or had been mixed up in hazing pranks.

Dutch grinned. "Deeter would be just as tough with you, Shiny. Or tougher! You are in line for the job he wants."

"I'll watch it," Shiny promised. . . .

THE Notre Dame game at the Baltimore Stadium was a sell-out.

Gunner nodded confidently to Shiny when they trotted out on the field for the kick-off.

"Get ready to run, boy," he said. "I feel like going!"

"Me, too!" Dutch chuckled.

It was Navy all the way, with Gunner Mc-Turk slashing savagely in his best blocking-back technique, and with Dutch cutting down the Indiana line like ripe wheat.

The Navy stands went mad as their gold-helmeted charges piled up a 32-13 decision against the game South Benders. The goal posts went down and Navy hopes for beating Army went up, and the midshipmen made a mad dance down on the field.

Kipper told the team:

"You did a great job, boys. But Army wasn't bad, either. They beat Villanova. Eighty-three to nothing." He let that sink in. "Well, Cornell is to be our next port of call."

Cornell was another Hatfield track meet, Navy piling up a 48-0 verdict. The jubilation was dampened, somewhat, when the Army-Notre Dame score was posted:

West Point, 59—Notre Dame, 0.

Navy hitched its belt, and slammed into tough Purdue. 32-0. Navy spirits soared again. Until the Army-Pennsylvania score was in:

Army, 62—Penn, 7.

Gunner and Dutch talked it over while they waited for their mail. Then, after a quick look at a letter, Dutch barked, "Himmel!" and paled.

"Speak English!" snapped Deeter, who was standing near and glowering at them.

"What gives, Dutch?" asked Gunner.

The big blond looked up, his eyes heavy. "I—oh, nothing that you can help with. I'll see you later." He walked slowly away, his eyes unseeing.

Above deck, Gunner walked almost noiselessly into his room, and surprised a gasp from Shiny, who stood near his bunk, stripped to the waist, a roll of wide adhesive in his hands. An ugly blue puff of flesh under his right armpit was threaded with tell-tale red lines.

"Broken?" Gunner asked.

Shiny nodded.

"It was in the last quarter."

"Well," Gunner said, "you heard what Kipper said about reporting it."

Anger flared in Shiny's eyes. "The devil with Kipper! I'm not going to get washed out of the Army game." He eyed Gunner suspiciously. "What are you going to do?"

The blocking-back grinned. "This won't be the first time I thumbed my nose at your brother's orders. I'm going to take that tape and build a cast around your chest."

"But don't tell a soul, Gunner! Not even Dutch!"

"Not even Dutch. Come on downtown and we'll get the plaster and bandages. Heck, I'll spend my declining years in Portsmouth Stockade yet!" He sighed. "If Deeter could only catch me!"

CHAPTER VII

Dutch Leave

DUTCH continued in his deep gloom the next day and into the next. Gunner had never seen him so upset, but asked no questions.

In formations, Dutch would plod along, miss a command, then make an awkward recovery. And the ever-watchful Deeter would explode.

"Get your head out, Mister! Gently take hold of your ears and lift your head out of the morass!"

Into the great drill shed that was Dahlgren Hall they marched, gloved hands swinging, eyes straight ahead, bayonets flashing atop shouldered rifles. In a column front, then breaking into a company front.

"Company. . . . HALT!"

The feet—one, two! The rifles—snap, snap, rest. That was the way of it. With gloved hands slapping a smart, measured cadence as the rifles came down with silent precision.

And this was now the way of it. The feet—one, two! The rifles, snap, snap—CRASH!

Gunner's eyes widened in horror at the unheard-of miscue of dropping a piece. His eyes went wider yet when he realized who had done it.

Marching in the ranks, on the pretext of sharpening the men up, was Shiny Hatfield, but with the real reason of trying to stay out of sight of Bill Deeter, whose sharp eyes might discover the cast Gunner had devised.

It was Shiny Hatfield, awkward because of the cast, who had dropped his piece, bayonet and all, smack on the floor of Dahlgren Hall!

Gunner swifted his own rifle into Shiny's relaxed hand.

"Grab that and shut up!" he whispered fiercely. "If Deeter checks you, he's sure to uncover that cast! Shut up, now! I can get by!"

Then Deeter was there, his eyes outraged and accusing, watching Gunner coolly step forward, retrieve the piece, and step back into line.

"A bit of Marine Drill Manual, Mister?" the company commander asked icily.

"It's a trick I picked up since I came into the Navy, sir," Gunner said softly.

There were a few appreciative snickers, and Deeter glared. But his eyes were puzzled.

"How did that piece land in front of Mr. Hatfield?" he demanded.

"Shall I demonstrate, sir?" Gunner asked innocently. Deeter whipped out his notebook and wrote in it at some length. When he had finished, he said:

"Your ineptitude, plus your impertinence, should earn you the flattering attention of the Superintendent. Unless I am mistaken, Mister, your draft board should be actively interested in you before the week is up."

He stepped back a few paces.

"Company—DISMISSED!"

Men gathered around Gunner and Shiny, and not a few of them were wise-eyed.

"What's the deal?" Dutch asked, forgetting his blue funk. "Shiny can take the rap better than you, Gunner."

Gunner grinned and quoted a laugh line the Marines had picked up from a movie.

"'Umbriago! That's my boy!' Isn't that what us Marines are supposed to say when we counter-attack a Banzai charge, Dutch?"

The big blonde frowned. "That bad?"

"Looks like the bust-up." Gunner's eyes were grim. "Now, look, Dutch. You've been acting like an apple-knocker at a strip-tease show, and I haven't asked any questions. Well, don't you ask any questions. But you got a right to know I think it is the bust up of our lodge, pal . . . Well, I'm off for chow. . . ."

It was on the Wednesday before the Army game that the call for Dutch Holtz came, in Steam Engineering. The big fellow got to his feet, looked with frightened eyes at Gunner, and made his way slowly to the door and out.

As soon as he was able—two hours later—Gunner raced to the room. There was a terse note from Dutch.

On emergency leave home. Probably won't be back. All the luck in the world to you. And the others. Thanks for being so patient.

Dutch.

Gunner raced to Kipper Hatfield's office. After the coach had read the note, he asked:

"Any idea what the trouble is?"

"Some. But I promised Dutch I wouldn't talk."

"Don't you think the time has come to say something?"

Gunner considered. "I don't know. How long do you suppose the leave is, and why do you suppose Dutch says he won't be back?"

KIPPER reached for the telephone and asked for the Superintendent's office. He talked for a few minutes, hung up, and told Gunner: "Twenty-four hours. Right now, that's tops."

Gunner shrugged. "If he went right home and back, just getting on one train after he got off the other, he couldn't make it. Is it his mother?"

"I don't know." Kipper stared at Gunner. "That was a ripe one you pulled. I guess

you are through, too."

"I don't care about that," Gunner grated. "I mean, I care, but something more important is involved. Dutch."

Kipper was watching him narrowly. "You don't mean Dutch at all. You can't lie to me, Gunner. Your eyes give you away."

"I'm not talking."

"No?" Kipper twisted his head. "Baldy! Come in and take this squirt over your knee!"

Gunner gasped, as the door at Kipper's right opened, and out he came. "Baldy" McTurk. The man referred to by the Navy as the Sleeve, for the dazzling array of stripes and devices he sported on his left sleeve. On the other arm, wound stripes from both World Wars. And on his chest, enough service ribbons and decorations to stock a Navy Sea Stores display.

"Pop!" Gunner shouted, springing forward. "Pop!"

"I'll pop you, you young devil!" Baldy McTurk barked. But his gray eyes were beaming from a nest of grinning wrinkles. "They sent for me to come all the way here to see you—and what do I find? That you got no more sense than you had when I was fanning your pants twice a day!"

Gunner rescued his hand from his father's iron grip, and stared.

"Who sent for you? Why?"

"Baldy means," Kipper cut in smoothly, "that they sent for him to report here for TD. Temporary Duty. But it is rugged for him to find this mess you are in." Kipper's eyes were dead serious. "Well—are you still not talking?"

Gunner chewed his lip. "All I want to talk about is Dutch. He can't pull a ripe one like this."

"You pull ripe ones," Kipper said. "And don't explain."

"But Dutch isn't covering up for anyone. I mean—"

Kipper was on him like a terrier after a rat. "Who you covering up for? Answer me!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm—not talking."

Kipper looked at the elder McTurk. "Baldy—make him!"

Baldy McTurk slanted a look at the Marine officer.

"I just about broke your uncle into his didies," he said softly. "I worked for his father before him. I served a tour with you, and with the Superintendent. I have never refused or disobeyed a properly given order yet—but you'd hate me for the rest of your life if I made this spalpeen talk when another man is concerned. So cut out needling me and use your head." He added, after a moment, "Sir!"

Kipper thought a moment, then reached for

the telephone and snapped an order.

"Midshipman Hatfield to report at once."

When the door opened to admit Shiny, Shiny's brother came straight to the point.

"Kid, there's more than another Navy football game at stake. Your two 'wives' are in trouble. Gunner, you know about. Dutch—well, he has decided to take some extra time the Navy can't see its way clear to giving him. We can't do anything about Dutch until he has actually gone A. W. O. L. But I have a feeling that Gunner is covering up someone."

Shiny Hatfield met Kipper's stare without flinching.

"Why are you standing that way?" Kipper demanded. "What's that bulge under your blouse?" When no answer came: "Take that blouse off—now!"

With a sigh, Shiny did. Kipper felt under his arms, his face going hard. Then he helped Shiny get the shirt off, and whistled when he saw the cast.

"So that's the story!" He looked at Gunner. "Your work? No, let me guess! You dropped the rifle, eh, Shiny? And Galahad McTurk saved you for posterity and the Navy by taking the blame?"

"Any son of mine who dropped his rifle would drop his pants right after them!" Baldy blared. "A Marine son of mine, especially!"

"So this is the Navy!" Kipper grated. "I give an order that any man who is injured is to report the injury. And what happens? My own brother, and one of my own old boys, set out to make a monkey out of me!"

BALDY'S chuckle grew to a roar.

"This is the Navy, right enough!" he yelped. "And Colonel, you'd hate it if it wasn't this way! Well"—the veteran sobered—"it may ruin Shiny for being a Four-Striper. But maybe not. I guess it is your ball, boy!"

"Aye, aye, sir," Shiny said simply. "I'm glad. If it doesn't keep me out of the game."

Kipper looked startled. "Er—we needn't discuss that with anyone else," he said hurriedly. "Not that I condone this, but we've got to be practical. Okay, Gunner—this will fix you. Now, how about Dutch? Can you get him back in time?"

"Can you get me a Navy plane to fly to Harrisburg after him?"

"I can," Baldy said blandly. "My old pal Joe—er, the Superintendent—will fix it. Gimme that phone!"

Gunner grinned. "I think I can bring Dutch back. It shouldn't be too hard to—ah—persuade him."

"By parade time tomorrow?" Kipper asked.

Gunner raised his eyebrows. "A parade

tomorrow? How come?"

"Special orders," Kipper said.

"Okay. But you better have some arnica and raw beefsteak handy. Dutch is a bit stubborn."

CHAPTER VIII

This Is the Navy

BLINKING, the driver of the Staff car that met the Navy transport stared at the bruised and swollen faces of the Marines he was to pick up. But he shrugged, slid the gears, and stepped on it. At the end of the trip, when he made a turn in the Yard, Gunner said:

"Hey! That's the wrong way! We want off at Bancroft."

"Orders," the driver said. "The Superintendent."

They were ushered into the Superintendent's office, and managed to not stare at the assembled party, and to salute the Admiral.

"The door, please." The Superintendent smiled at his orderly. Then: "I presume we are all acquainted?"

The ex-Marines looked. Kipper. Baldy McTurk. Shiny Hatfield. Bill Deeter. And the Regimental Four-Striper.

"Yes, sir."

"Carry on!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

Gunner and Dutch assumed positions of "at ease." Dutch investigated a mouse under his left eye, and Gunner a scuffed jaw and ear ruefully.

"Mr. Holtz?" The Admiral was kindly, apologetic. "The War Department appraised us of the full facts. Anything you care to add?"

"They're—dead, sir. All three of them. I was afraid Mother would take it harder than she did. So I—" He shrugged. "You know the story, sir?"

"May I recite it, and you correct me? Good. Well"—the Admiral addressed the others—"young Holtz has a father and two brothers—er, had a father and two brothers—who were Germans. Holtz, Senior, was born in Germany. The boys were all born in Pennsylvania. Relatives remained in Germany. In World War One, Mr. Holtz served with distinction on this side of the Atlantic, because he had been born in Germany. In World War Two, Mr. Holtz and his two sons served with distinction on the other side—in Germany—because he had been born in Germany, and because the Holtz family that remained in Germany believed as they did about the Nazis."

Dutch sniffled a bit, then his eyes went steady.

"Midshipman Holtz's father and two brothers had been in Germany for four years, as members of Army Intelligence," the Admiral went on. "Their work was to return to Germany, ostensibly as good Nazis, and to organize an Underground in France, Belgium, Holland—Germany itself, to a lesser degree. So that when Germany was invaded—as it now has been—our troops might be able to avail themselves of bridges that the Underground would contrive to save. Other such invaluable help that would save thousands of American lives.

"Gentlemen, their work was successful. But the Nazis found them out and have executed them. The family they left at home have borne a terrific burden of worry for their loved ones, of enforced silence in the face of criticism leveled at them because of the very secrecy of the task involved. That dreadful onus is over for them—though we know they wish it were not. May their dead rest in peace with other great American heroes. Gentlemen, a salute!"

It was a solemn group that saluted. Bill Deeter was frankly moved, smiling a plea for understanding to Dutch.

"Now, Regimental Commander? Your instructions to these men who are to be decorated with Navy Crosses at today's parade?"

Gunner gaped. Dutch blinked.

"A belated recognition of services rendered your company commander at Guadalcanal, I believe," the Superintendent said to them. "Your full decorations and medals, of course. That will be all for now."

The ex-Marines were in such a daze they had to be herded out. . . .

The full regiment was drawn up in dress uniforms. The band's brasses stilled and the Four-Striper saluted the Superintendent and Staff, then about-faced.

"Officers and persons to be decorated—front and center!"

The designated men stepped mechanically forward.

"March!"

The band struck up a march, stopped it when the line of uniformed men had come to a halt and saluted. Gunner and Dutch stepped forward at a sign from the Four-Striper, facing the Adjutant.

"... For exceptional courage and high skill of arms in the face of enemy fire, in that he did advance at the risk of his life and take up a forward position to assist his commanding officer, a position which he subsequently assisted in maintaining until reinforcements were able to move up. . . ."

Gunner and Dutch again moved mechanically, with their new medals added to those they had already been awarded, shook hands

with the Superintendent, then moved into place at his side, facing the Regiment.

"Pass—in—review! First battalion right turn!"

The band struck up "Anchors Aweigh." But Gunner and Dutch never knew it. . . .

* * *

THE Baltimore Stadium where once Army Kaydets and Navy midshipmen had gathered to see the Game of the Century was a madhouse of hoarse, wild-eyed humanity.

Army's vaunted line had looked all it was advertised to be. But Navy had taken the bit in its teeth with the first scrimmage and was beating Army to the punch.

Army's backs, ten deep, had roared out onto the field, fought it out against Navy's handful of supermen, and had come straggling back to the bench, spent, weary, but still full of fight.

It was the third quarter, and Army was up 9-to-7. A placement or a drop-kick would put Navy a point in the lead. But on Navy's bench, grim recognition of facts was taking its toll. Kipper Hatfield was sitting forward, elbows on knees, chin in hands, speechless. His coaching staff sat in similar poses, like so many wooden men.

On the end of the long bench, Baldy Mc-Turk sat with his eyes riveted on the action, eyes that had seen the tide of battle ebb and flow. Here they were seeing it ebb and flow again.

On the field, Gunner tried to hide the limp that he had acquired in a bruising play. His face was dirt-smeared, one eye was swollen almost shut, and his sweater could have been a battle-marked rag.

Dutch Holtz stood near him, and Hippo Hansen, Tug Carney and Shiny were nearby. It was time out for Army, with a Kaydet lineman lying motionless on the ground.

A substitute came galloping in—Bill Deeter. After he had reported, he trotted up and clapped them all on their backs.

"It isn't too bad!" he yelped. "Three points does it!"

No one said anything. Deeter looked at Gunner.

"How about it, fella? We'll take 'em, won't we?"

"I had ten friends, down in New Britain," Gunner said, "who were holding a pocket against the Japs while we rushed up reinforcements. They were so fixed that the Japs couldn't get them except by frontal assault. And the Japs could only get ten of their men at a time in there against them. Our ten were better than any ten Japs. But there were too many tens-of-Japs. You know the rest of the story, don't you?"

"Defeatist talk!" Deeter said.

But while on the bench he had seen Navy slam back the Army line, flatten the backs, and he had seen new Army linemen go tearing in, new Army backs pour into the attack.

"A Navy man can lick any ten Army men going!" he said.

Dutch grinned crookedly, "Jah! But the trouble is, there are eleven Army men!"

On the bench, Kipper passed a hand over his eyes and cursed with feeling.

"Look!" he said. "Getting their spines slugged out of their bodies, and still they find something to laugh about! What a gang!"

"This isn't a gang, this is the Navy!" Old Baldy had moved closer to Kipper. "Sure, it's only a game. But Navy played one at Pearl Harbor, and came back to play again at Coral Sea, at Midway, at Leyte! We'd like to have this an' that, but Pearl Harbor or Midway or Leyte—or there in front of us!—Navy plays with what it's got. And the others know they've been places, when the game is over . . . Well—there goes the play!"

Army's man in motion suddenly speeded up, cut in. The ball snapped. There was a crushing play at the left side of Navy's line, and it seemed to hold. Then it burst open like a paper bag and Army backs were charging through, Army linemen were sweeping in. A bone-cracking tackle stopped the play at the midfield marker and the whistle blew. A Navy man was down.

"Salsich for Detter!" Kipper ordered. "No! Hold it! He's up again!"

Again Army smashed. Again the Navy line gave. And the Kaydets were screaming and cheering and howling. Army's big backs were starting to move again. This time, clear to the goal line.

"Deeter is down again!" Chub Malone saw. "How about it, Chief?"

"He'll get up," Kipper said evenly. "It isn't Deeter's fault they scored. Give him one more play. He'll make it."

Baldy nodded. "He'll make a good man, but he has a lot of seasoning coming to him. I hope I get him aboard my ship."

Kipper grinned. "I know bull-necked captains who would hide under their bunks to avoid that . . . Hey! They made it! That's quite a bunch Army is fielding out their today."

AND it was "quite a bunch" Navy was fielding out there.

Through the third quarter, the lines fought, the backs hammered, the ends raced. Through the third and into the final, with the tackles vicious and the blocking hard and ruthless.

Army was riding high and tough. Navy stood hard-eyed, watchful, and fought back.

But human flesh can stand only so much.

Human spirit may be determined, but flesh and the brawn and nerves must carry that spirit forward.

Army had slyly let up in its attack on that rock-ribbed defense that Dutch Holtz and Gunner McTurk had shown, as a canny fighter will divert his attack, from a sore spot for a deceiving instant.

It was that way now, with Navy's right side.

Then Army suddenly had veered back and was driving relentlessly, with pile-driver blows. Once, twice, three times, Army hurled its crushing reserve power at that erstwhile strong wall. And Navy gave. But it was stingy giving. A yard. A half-yard. Two yards.

In the line, Dutch twisted his head to look back. Gunner met the look and smiled. Dutch's face split in a painful grin.

"This is it, pal. Here's where we get the brass ring! Hey, you big slob! Are you cryin'?"

Gunner laughed. "Heck, no! I'm trying to laugh, but those men have punched my grin clean up into my eyes!"

"But brother," Dutch yelled, "wait until next year!"

The play came, with Dutch slamming an Army blocker aside, and hurling his bulk at another. He got his man, but the ball carrier was stepping high over Dutch's prostrate body, was swinging back to pick up another interferer. Gunner licked his split lips as he started forward.

The stands gasped when that block was thrown, a savage, hopeless charge of a dirt-smeared, spent man. But it took the fresh Army interferer and dropped him, hard.

Gunner tried to keep his feet under him, but it was no go. He dropped beside the

Army man he had taken out, then slowly slid over onto his face.

"Well, looks like it will be twenty-three-seven any second now," Kipper said. "Okay, Chub—Talmann for McTurk, Lampriner for Holtz. Better get some help out for those two."

"All they need is someone to steer them," Malone said. "Look! They're up, but going the wrong way!"

Gunner was trying to help Dutch. And Dutch was trying to help Gunner. And the two of them were hobbling off toward the Army stands and bench. Then Gunner saw.

"Hey!" he said. "Bum navigation, matey! Look!"

The Army cheering section was a solid wall of gray that rose as the two spent Navy men came slowly off the field. And the men in gray were singing:

No Navy in the world can beat the Army's
fight, fight, FIGHT!

But somehow they had the words mixed up. Because what came out of that gray wall to rocket across the field was:

No Army in the world can beat the Navy's
fight, fight, FIGHT!

The Army stands roared and cheered and waved at the two bewildered and weary men who stood peering up at them. Then the Gunner was turning Dutch around, was steering for the Navy lines.

"You ain't just saying that, boys," he muttered. "As you will learn next year. We'll get 'em, eh, Dutch?"

"Jah!" Dutch croaked, his eyes alive in a sea of dirt and bruises. "We'll get 'em. This is the Navy!"



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Johnny Bell took McCole's spin-back and his toe met it squarely, but a Cougar man's chest was in the way, deflecting the kick



*A Gridiron
Novelet*

BUSH TOWN

CHAPTER I

Break in the Sticks

HE sat in this luxurious waiting room of the Cougar Football Club and he thought about the days when the office had been a little loft over on the west side of town. They had some of the old pictures on the wall—the '29 Cougars, before his time, and then some of his old crew in '33, '34, and '35. He saw himself sitting next to "Ly" Conners, Cougar coach, and he held a foot-

ball in his hands with the words "National League Champions—1935." It looked good. There were several luxurious chairs in this anteroom, with a heavy maroon rug, indirect lighting, and a red-haired girl behind a glass partition, handling the switchboard.

"Mr. Groton will see you now, Mr. Bell," she said finally.

Johnny Bell, former Cougar fullback, former Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, stood up, hat in his hands. He'd been sitting in one of the hard chairs because that was easier on his back. At the Base Hospital they'd told

The Cougars Gave Ex-Star Johnny Bell the



BOUNCERS

By WILLIAM
HEUMAN

him that in time he would be as good as new.

The surgeon at the field hospital told him they'd taken a square piece of steel the size of a dollar bill from his back. It had done some damage to the vertebra and they'd grafted in bone and flesh. That surgeon, a little man with a mustache and a bald head, had given him some excellent advice.

"This will put you back in civilians," he stated quietly. "I've just come back from the States. Don't let it get you."

"What?" Johnny asked.

"Whatever you run up against," the sur-

geon said. "Some of the boys have done pretty well for themselves while you've been gone."

Walking down the corridor toward Bob Groton's office, Johnny Bell thought about this. Groton was one of them. The Cougar owner had been junior partner when Johnny enlisted in '41, but he was now full-time owner, Fred Johnson having sold out to him.

Groton had a long cigar in his mouth when Johnny came in. He sat behind a bulky mahogany desk, heavy body filling out the upholstered leather chair. Groton had thin,

Brush-off, but Forgot He'd Been a Marine!

black hair covering the bald spot in the center of his dome. Heavy jowls hung down over the white shirt collar.

He was grinning.

"How's it, Johnny?" Groton asked as the ex-fullback leaned over in order to shake his hand.

"Glad to see you," Johnny told him, and he wondered if he was. He hadn't known Groton very well in the old days, but he knew this heavy-set man in his forties had a shrewd business head. He'd been handling the business end for Fred Johnson, but the likeable Fred had had the contacts with the players.

Another man was in this room, standing by the window, a cigarette in his lips. He was nattily dressed, thin-faced, his chin coming almost to a point. Rust-colored hair was slicked back from a receding brow.

"Long time, no see," Leo Feeney chuckled.

"You know where I was," Johnny said without emotion. He knew where Feeney was also, playing with the Cougars, a 4-F with a perforated ear drum, getting himself in solid with Bob Groton, and taking over the coaching job when Ly Conners resigned to accept a commission in the Navy. Leo no longer played quarterback for the Cougars, but he was reputed to be drawing down a salary which would make Johnny Bell blink, and he'd been the highest paid Cougar on the roster in the old days.

"You look the same, kid," Feeney told him. "Heard you were shot up a bit."

"A little," Johnny said. He'd been two hundred and five when he cracked enemy lines for the Cougars, and he was an even two hundred now, well set-up, the hair still as black as ever despite the fact that he was thirty-five and washed up as a big league football player.

"I got your letters," Groton said. "Didn't think you'd be in town so soon." He didn't seem enthused at seeing him.

Johnny found a seat. Leo Feeney continued to stand by the window. He'd been a smart quarterback, who knew how to keep out of trouble. Very seldom, Johnny recalled, did Leo Feeney get the seat of his pants dirty, but it had paid well!

"What's on your mind?" Groton asked bluntly.

Johnny smiled, gray eyes very steady. "Not a thing, Bob," he said. "Thought I owed you boys a visit."

"Sure," Groton said, a little relieved, and Johnny took the cue. He wasn't wanted with this club, and Groton thought he'd come back from the wars looking for a job. Possibly, Groton remembered that both Fred Johnson and Ly Conners had had Johnny Bell in mind for the head coaching job.

"How are the prospects this year, Leo?" Johnny asked Feeney.

THE new coach spoke hastily.

"We're all filled up, kid."

"I didn't ask that," Johnny said. The pros were scratching to put eleven men on the gridiron when the season opened two months from now.

"We're pretty well filled-up in the back-field," Feeney said, and Johnny knew that he lied because it was the backfield which would be the Cougar's chief weakness next fall.

"We got two boys out scouting high school games," Bob Groton said. "It won't pay much, Johnny, but ———."

"I'm not asking for a job," Johnny Bell said quietly, and he saw the relief come into the big man's face. "I was in town. Thought I'd pay you boys a visit."

"Sure," Groton grinned. "Anything we can do, kid? I'll fix you up with a season pass if you're staying."

Johnny Bell smiled. He'd spent nine years of his career with the Cougars and they were giving him a season pass as a reward!

"If you need a hundred," Groton said lamely.

"I saved up a little," Johnny said. He had a little over five thousand in a local bank which had been deposited before he left the club.

The talk drifted to other things, and Johnny learned that Fred Johnson was out on the Coast with his family, and that Ly Conners had last been heard of in the Philippines. Johnny got up to go after a half hour, knowing that it had been a mistake even stopping in.

"Best of luck, kid," Groton said.

Johnny Bell went out, pushing his hat back on his head, a small smile around the corners of his mouth. That surgeon in the Pacific had said a mouthful. He'd also said that there were plenty of opportunities for a guy with his eyes open.

"You boys aren't afraid to plunge any more," he'd smiled down at Johnny. "Be careful and you'll end up behind the eight-ball."

They'd learned to take chances in the service, and that was something the boys back home had missed.

In the lobby of the hotel, going back to his room, he ran across Sid Carter, newsman for the local *Clarion*.

"Johnny!" Sid yelled. "When in heck—"

"Just got in," Johnny grinned. He shook hands with the little man. Carter had the reputation of being one of the smartest sports men in the game. He was small, almost frail, with blond hair and spectacles.

"Going with the Cougars?" Sid wanted to know.

"Groton's filled up," Johnny said. "He offered me a job scouting high-school kids, and he wanted to give me a season pass."

Carter's thin lips tightened.

"You're the first guy home," he grated. "I'm thinking a lot of the others will be getting the same treatment." He paused. "How are you fixed, kid?"

"Tell me what to do with five grand," Johnny said.

"That's easy, kid," Carter said softly. "Take the next train to Frankton."

"Frankton?" Johnny smiled. "Never heard of it."

"You heard of Green Bay, Wisconsin. Frankton is as big as Green Bay and just as football crazy."

"The Packers are in the big loop," Johnny pointed out. "What league this team in?"

"The Bulldogs are an independent club," Carter explained. "You might call them minor leagues. I found out yesterday that Tom Rand wants to sell out."

"Why?" Johnny asked bluntly, "if it's a good bet?"

"Rand is sick," Carter told him. "He's going south."

"Rand goes south, and Fred Johnson goes west," Johnny said. "Must be a lot of headaches owning a football team."

"Besides the dough you rake in," Carter said. "Frankton is a gold mine for the guy who buys in. It's ten thousand."

"I have five," Johnny said.

"There's a guy in Frankton by the name of Jack O'Neil," Carter said, "has the other five. He coaches the Frankton club and he's a smart coach."

"So he's in the sticks," Johnny Bell said.

"He's not a college guy," Carter explained, "and nobody's heard about him, but he knows football from the ground up. I've seen his boys work. He takes them from the steel mills and the coal mines around Frankton and he teaches them high-class football."

Johnny Bell's eyes widened.

"Steel mills, coal mines," he murmured. "That sounds like something, Sid." From experience he remembered chaps in college and the pro loop who had come from that belt in Pennsylvania.

"That's how Green Bay began," Carter was saying enthusiastically, "a small town with the football bug and a guy who had courage."

"I look up this O'Neil?" Johnny asked. His eyes were beginning to shine. He would either blow the five thousand, or build it up to a fortune. It had been done in Green Bay.

"Right now," Carter went on, "you're playing small-time football—town team against town team—with an occasional exhibition against the bigger clubs. Make a name for yourself and something might happen. Show something down in Frankton and I'll push you to the limit, kid."

Johnny Bell nodded.

"I appreciate this break, Sid," he said.

The newspaper man smiled.

"I figured a guy who went across deserved something, Johnny."

CHAPTER II

The Bulldogs

JOHNNY Bell stepped off the train at the Frankton station at eleven o'clock the next morning. For two hours he'd been riding through mining territory and small steel mill towns. Frankton was a pleasant change. The station was a block off the main street, and Johnny walked, his bag in his hand. There were cabs at the station, but he wanted to look around a little before contacting O'Neil.

It was August and very hot. At the first corner drug store, he turned in for a soda, but stopped when a printed poster in the window caught his eyes. He read it twice, and then smiled. The notice read:

"FRANKTON BULLDOGS
special practice sessions every Saturday
afternoon. Tryouts for new men. Call Jack
O'Neil, Frankton 1212."

Johnny sat down at the counter, letting this sink in. Even the big time pros didn't start practice for another few weeks, and here was this O'Neil already working, looking for material. He had an idea he was going to get along with the Frankton coach.

A tow-headed kid behind the counter brought him a soda.

"How do the Bulldogs line up this fall?" Johnny said.

The boy was about fourteen and his face had been glum, but it lighted up now. He'd seen Johnny come in with the bag, and now he noticed the width of the ex-fullback's shoulders.

"You tryin' out, mister?" he breathed.

Johnny laughed. He looked at himself in a mirror behind the counter. He didn't look thirty-five. It was a compliment.

"I'm interested in the Bulldogs," Johnny said casually. Sid Carter had called up O'Neil long distance, and the coach was waiting impatiently for Johnny to show up.

Another man at the counter a few seats away turned his head and studied Johnny carefully. This man was middle-aged, and seemed like a solid citizen.

"Last year," he said quietly, "the Bulldogs were as good as half the clubs in the big time."

"That's good news," Johnny said. The fact that these two—man and boy—were stand-

ing up for the club was even better news. When the solid citizenry back a football team, it means that team has support.

"What is O'Neil using for material these days?" Johnny asked the man at the counter.

"He's got his troubles," the stranger said, "but we do get some high school graduates and a lot of chaps from the defense plants. They work all week and play football on Sundays."

"Kind of tough," Johnny said.

"Those boys are tough," the man smiled. "Sunday's game is a holiday."

Johnny got O'Neil's address from this man. His house was like the others on the street, a few blocks off the main avenue. There was a little grass plat in front of it with a border of flowers. A hammock swung on the porch, and there were children's toys scattered about, along with a copy of the morning newspaper.

Johnny's eyes widened. This O'Neil was a family man.

The door opened as Johnny knocked on it, and a girl stood in front of him, eyeing his bag.

"Mr. O'Neil in?" Johnny asked.

She was in her twenties, nice to look at, brown hair, and hazel eyes. She had an apron around her waist and it was spotless. It was only then that Johnny realized he'd walked right into meal time at the O'Neil house. He could see the dinner table set in the next room and three small children around it, making a lot of noise.

"I'll call Dad," this girl said.

"I didn't mean to barge in on your dinner," Johnny apologized.

He saw a little fat man coming out from the parlor then, face wreathed in smiles.

"Mr. Bell?" he asked.

"That's right," Johnny said. O'Neil was a man in his forties, short, stout, with smiling blue eyes and a stub of a nose.

"You're in time for dinner," O'Neill grinned. "That is, if you can stand the noise."

Johnny wanted to back out, but O'Neil literally forced him into the room, and the three kids immediately became quiet. They were all under eight, two boys and a girl—Elsa, the oldest, and the twins, George and Chuck, aged four apiece. The older daughter was Susan, and she nodded to Johnny as she brought in the food.

There was one empty chair at the table, and Jack O'Neil offered it to the football player. Momentarily, the smile had gone from his face.

"Mother passed away three years ago," O'Neil explained. "Susan is taking her place." That was all, but Johnny realized how hard hit they'd been by the death. This was a close little family, and one of them had gone on.

JACK O'Neil started to talk football with his mouth full of food, and his oldest daughter had to caution him once when he choked. Johnny grinned at her, liking the way she handled her father. The little man was a bug on football.

"We have a dozen good boys out from last year's team," O'Neil said. "We lost a good gang to the services. I watch all the local high schools, and I usually manage to persuade some of the big fellows in the mills to make a stab at it. Those chaps can go sixty minutes without calling time."

Johnny was interested in the weekly attendance, the size of the Frankton Park, and the schedule O'Neil was arranging for the fall. As he asked questions he saw Susan O'Neil watching him, and he knew that she was sizing him up. Her father was undoubtedly a poor business man although he understood football from the ground up, and the daughter intended to see to it that Jack O'Neil didn't toss his little bankroll away.

"We play in the ball park outside of town," O'Neil said. "It holds about five thousand, but every week we have to turn away a big crowd."

"No other field in town?" Johnny Bell asked. He had ideas about the solid citizens of this town. If they wanted football badly enough and backed the Bulldogs to the limit, there was no reason why they shouldn't be taken into the business. Tom Rand and O'Neil didn't have sufficient vision to see what could be done in a football town with a tough club.

"The ball park is the only field," O'Neil explained. He looked at Johnny queerly. "Of course we don't play league ball," he said. "The boys just put on a game on Sunday afternoons and we get whoever will come to Frankton."

"Sid Carter tells me you played a tie with the Hawks last year," Johnny said. The Hawks had landed fourth place in the big loop.

"The Hawks came down here with only a few of the regulars," O'Neil said modestly, "and my boys were pointing for that one."

"We might try to get them again for a pre-season game," Johnny Bell said. "A little publicity won't hurt us." He was anxious to see this gang Jack O'Neil worked with because on them everything depended. If they were just big and rough, he had to be content to stay where he was, build up a bigger audience and attempt to bring better clubs to Frankton.

However, if O'Neil had really developed these tough miners and steel men into a coordinated unit, the possibilities were unlimited. A new league was being organized in the Middle West, and it might be possible to work Frankton into it.

"You really want to come in on this thing," Jack O'Neil said quietly.

"It sounds good to me," Johnny told him. He saw the swift glance pass between the Frankton coach and his daughter.

"We'll have a look at my boys tomorrow afternoon, Bell," O'Neil murmured, "and then if you still want to, we'll draw up the contract."

Johnny Bell smiled, knowing the reason for O'Neil's hesitancy. The older man wanted to talk it over with his daughter before doing anything. Beyond a doubt she had made him promise not to do anything until she'd had a look at the new partner.

"Stay with us while you're in town," O'Neil said. "We have a spare room upstairs."

Listening to O'Neil that afternoon, Johnny realized why Carter called him one of the smartest coaches in the game. O'Neil had a library of books on football written by all the leading authorities. He'd never gone to college, but he'd played a lot of football in the first professional league opened around the time of the other war.

O'Neil spoke of defensive and offensive systems. He'd experimented with all of them, and he'd had his Bulldogs using a modified "T" even before the Chicago Bears made it famous.

Susan O'Neil got a chance to speak with Johnny on the side that afternoon.

"I suppose it's not necessary to tell you," she said, "why I'm concerned about my father's business. Once before he tried to own his team and he went into the red so deeply that it took him years to pay back what he owed. I don't want to see it happen again."

"From what I can see," Johnny assured her, "he can't go wrong in this case."

"I hope not," Susan murmured.

Johnny Bell grimaced.

"I'll be careful," he told the girl.

HE WAS out on the meadow the next afternoon when the Frankton football squad assembled. They couldn't use the semi-pro ball park for practice because the baseball season was still on.

Johnny watched a half dozen big, tough-looking fellows with caps and sweaters pile out of an old jalopy. A few others came up on motorcycles with their football togs strapped on behind them.

Others hopped off trucks along the road adjoining the meadow, having hitch-hiked their way to Frankton. Wide-eyed, Johnny Bell saw them squat down on the grass and slip on their football cleats. This was a new environment for the game, one that he'd never suspected. He'd come from State where football was played strictly according to the rules and conventions. These fellows didn't even have a locker or shower room!

There was something nice in the way they greeted Jack O'Neil, and Johnny could see the respect in their eyes when they spoke with the coach. It hadn't always been that way in college football when players suspected the coaches of playing favorites.

"A nice gang," O'Neil grinned. He had three footballs with him, and he let the gang warm up by themselves. "Most of them just left the plant, and the others have to go on the night shift after practice."

Standing on the sidelines, Johnny felt the old urge creeping over him. It had been a long time since he'd handled a football.

"Did you figure on working with the club?" O'Neil asked suddenly. "We sure could use a steady man in the backfield. We have two or three high school players I have slated for positions, but they need an older man to work with them."

"I hadn't thought of playing," Johnny said, but he took off his coat now and rolled up the cuffs of his trousers. O'Neil found an old pair of cleats in the trunk of his car which served as the official locker for the club.

"Take it easy," O'Neil warned.

Johnny went up the field and practiced a few punts. He'd done the kicking for the Cougars and he'd been rated pretty high in the league. The first three or four went awry, but the fifth he lifted out into the air very nicely, spiralling it against a slight breeze. The ball went twenty yards farther than any of the kicks made by the others.

"Hey!" one fellow yelled. "Who's that?"

Johnny grinned as he trotted down the field. He'd been favoring the back since coming out of the hospital even though the doctors had assured him that it wasn't necessary. Now, loosening up, he scarcely knew anything had been wrong.

O'Neil worked him at the fullback slot in warm-up maneuvers, and he discovered that he tired very easily, and that his wind was bad.

"In two months," O'Neil said enthusiastically, "you'll be in tip-top shape."

Johnny Bell scratched his chin dubiously.

Susan O'Neil came down later in the afternoon with the kids and sat on the grass watching them. They had fourteen men working out, and O'Neil said there were at least ten more would be out the following Saturday.

It was the Bulldog line which impressed Johnny. They didn't do any scrimmaging, but he liked the way they charged, he liked the bulk of them.

He spoke with the center, a powerful six-foot, three chap, by the name of George McCole.

"Never had a football in my hands till three years ago," McCole chuckled. He was

red-headed, quiet blue eyes, and a tremendous pair of hands. "Jack taught me everything I know about this game." He spun the ball back from center beautifully and with surprising accuracy.

"You do a very good job," Johnny assured him.

McCole looked at him curiously.

"You the same chap used to play fullback for the Cougars in the big league?"

"I played with the Cougars," Johnny admitted.

"Well," McCole said, "this must look like kid stuff to you."

"You'd be surprised," Johnny Bell said. That night he signed the contract with Jack O'Neil, and they took over the Frankton club from Tom Rand.

"Any ideas you have," O'Neil said, "we'll try to work them out. You're a college guy and you can figure things out better than I can."

"I want to see what they can do first," Johnny said. Their first game was in early September, a Sunday when the semi-pro baseball club was out of town. It was many weeks before the big league teams opened up.

Each Saturday Johnny worked out with the Bulldogs, doing plenty of gym work in between. He began to build up muscles he hadn't used in several years. They were scrimmaging now, and he backed up the line for O'Neil on the defense.

Other men showed up the following Saturdays, including an irrepressible little chap by the name of Jeff O'Brian who did the quarterbacking for O'Neil. The little Irishman had played with Jack's club for a half dozen years and he certainly knew the "T" thoroughly.

"Jeff hopped off a freight train one afternoon and found us in the meadow," O'Neil explained. "He left school in the seventh grade and never went back. Never had seen a real football game, and he fell for it, hook, line and sinker. He hung around here every Saturday, getting handouts in town, until I let him play. He's as smart as a whip, and I've never seen him fumble a ball."

Johnny nodded. Men like Jeff O'Brian came along once in a lifetime. They were naturals, taking to the game like ducks to water. O'Brian could pass and could run with the ball on occasions. He was another amazing tribute to the Frankton coach's skill in developing players.

Filling out the Bulldog backfield were two boys from the local high school, and at the sight of them Johnny Bell's eyes glistened. They were light, under one hundred and seventy, but tremendously fast, and they'd be taking on weight all the time, making them harder to stop out in the open.

CHAPTER III

Triumph and Treachery

THEY had an eleven from Irontown for that first encounter, and Johnny Bell watched the crowds trooping out of town to the ball park that first Sunday afternoon. It was still too hot for the game, typical baseball weather, with a hot sun and cloudless sky.

O'Neil started his first string backfield with Johnny in the fullback slot. He wondered what Bob Groton and Leo Feeney would have thought if they'd seen him in this rather loud black and orange outfit with the bright orange helmet.

Mentally, Johnny decided to introduce a more subdued uniform once the season got under way. He'd already put out feelers in the direction of the new Midwest League which was to open this fall, and he'd been invited to speak with the league officials.

They had five thousand in the ball park at the opening kickoff, with O'Neil turning many more away. They'd done practically no advertising!

The Irontown club was fully as big as the Bulldogs, but not in the same class. In the first quarter the Frankton team scored three times, the two kid halfbacks going over once apiece, and O'Brian tossing a short pass to a Bulldog end for the third score.

Johnny worked at the fullback slot, blocking out for the runners, and he had to step to keep up with them. Jeff O'Brian didn't waste a second handling the ball, and he could fake beautifully.

Jack O'Neil's plays were sound, and not too intricate for a club that could practice but once a week. Still there was enough deception in some of the plays to evoke howls of joy from the stands.

The Irontown team could do nothing with the tough Bulldog line. McCole was a tower of strength in the center, and O'Neil had two big boys at the tackle positions, a sandy-haired man by the name of Craig, and a squat, barrel-chested chap, a coal miner, by the name of Rivers. These two had played with O'Neil a long time, and they'd been drilled in the fundamentals of tackle play.

Johnny remembered hearing a coach say one time that a great club could be built around two great tackles. Craig and Tommy Rivers nearly approached greatness without knowing it!

Johnny came out of the game in the second period with the score 30 to 0 for the Bulldogs and watched the Frankton line operate. The

opposition was not too good today, but he was sure these boys would look good anywhere.

"What do you think?" Jack O'Neil asked quietly.

Johnny Bell watched young Chuck De Grasse, the kid halfback, sprint around right end behind beautiful blocking and race seventy yards to another touchdown.

"This park," Johnny said, "is too small for us, Jack."

"With some cash," O'Neil murmured, "we could probably go ahead and build us a good-sized park."

"We'll get the cash," Johnny said in confident tones.

"Not from the banks," O'Neil smiled. "Tom Rand tried that. They think football is too risky."

"We won't go to the banks," Johnny murmured. "We don't have to."

O'Neil stared at him, but didn't say any more on the subject. The final score of the Irontown game was 73 to 6. Johnny went back in the second half and got off one beautiful seventy-five-yard punt which made the Frankton fans gasp.

"They ain't never seen good kickin'," Jeff O'Brian chuckled. "You show 'em how, boss." O'Brian was a short man in his twenties, pepper-colored hair, a pugnacious Irish nose, and light, baby-blue eyes. Aside from his passing and quarterbacking, the ex-hobo had been running beautifully this afternoon, a half dozen times slipping through the center on quarterback sneaks and picking up plenty of yardage.

"Save some of that stuff for the big boys," Johnny Bell advised him.

"What big boys?" O'Brian asked him.

"You'll be seeing them soon enough," Johnny said mysteriously. He got in touch with the local Frankton paper that night and put a big ad in it, after first consulting with Jack O'Neil.

"We need dough to build a park," Johnny explained patiently, "so we incorporate the club and put out our own stock. When we sell the stock we'll have enough money to put up a good-sized stadium. We draw big crowds, and we pay dividends after awhile. Of course you and I retain fifty-one percent of the shares."

"I don't know much about business," O'Neil admitted, "but you go ahead, kid. You got a head on your shoulders." He asked then, "Who buys these shares?"

"The citizens of Frankton," Johnny said. "The guys who sit up in the seats and cheer their heads off for the Bulldogs. They'll be glad to invest five or ten dollars apiece in the club, and that will bring them out because they'll consider the Bulldogs their team—their investment."

SUSAN O'Neil listened in on the conversation as they sat in the parlor talking.

"What do you think of it, Susan?" Johnny asked. "We going over our heads?" He'd learned to respect the opinions of this quiet brown-haired girl.

"It sounds like good business," Susan admitted. "It does seem as though you could accommodate much larger crowds."

"We've done no advertising," Johnny pointed out. "We'll ballyhoo the Bulldog games in every town within thirty miles of Frankton. We'll have the bus lines run special coaches. We'll build up a following—"

"Hey!" Jack O'Neil grinned. "Take it easy."

Johnny Bell smiled at Susan O'Neil, and she smiled back. The more he saw of Frankton, the better he liked it. The local papers had given him some publicity, and they were behind him one hundred percent in the Bulldog venture. The fans had given him a big hand when he came out on the field for that first game with the Irontown club.

"We have the Wilksboro Eagles for next Sunday," Jack O'Neil said. "Keep your feet on the ground, Johnny."

"We're flying from now on," Johnny Bell chuckled.

In a week's time he had rented a small office on the main street, had hired a lawyer to handle the legal aspects of the business and was selling shares steadily.

Jack O'Neil stepped in one afternoon, going past the line-up out in the hall. He was greeted with enthusiastic yells. Men waved bills and checks at him, asking if the Bulldogs were going into the big league.

The fat coach sat down in a chair across from Johnny Bell as the co-owner took down subscriptions.

"Never thought I'd see this day," he muttered.

"I have an architect drawing up plans for Frankton Field," Johnny said. "We're taking a lease on that big meadow off Route 7-A, just outside of town."

"How—how much we take in already?" O'Neil wanted to know.

"It's up to twenty thousand dollars," Johnny told him. He saw the sweat break out on Jack O'Neil's face.

"Twenty grand!" the coach mumbled. "Hope nothing goes wrong, kid."

"You teach those guys how to play football," Johnny Bell grinned. "I'll handle the rest."

They took the Wilksboro Eagles by a 51 to 0 score the following Sunday with an enthused Frankton audience jamming every available inch of the little ball park.

"We're making this new park large enough to hold twenty thousand," Johnny said, "with enough space for another ten thousand seats

if necessary."

He'd already been assured by the officials of the new Midwestern League that Frankton would be welcome to enter.

"Twenty—thirty thousand seats!" Jack O'Neil gulped. "That's all most of the big league clubs draw."

"After we fill it," Johnny grinned, "we'll tear it down and build a real one."

Jack O'Neil didn't say any more on the subject, but on Johnny's suggestion he increased the salary of every player, with the promise of a real contract when they moved into the big stadium.

Men like Jeff O'Brian, who had been playing for the fun of it, found themselves with seventy-five dollars in their pockets when the game was over. Big George McCole informed Johnny after the Eagle game that he intended to buy a house for his rather large family now, and pay it off on installments.

Sid Carter came down to Frankton and dropped in at the Bulldog office.

"Lot of rumors coming out of this town, Johnny," he grinned. "What about them?"

"What do you mean?" Johnny asked.

"The big Eastern League is drawing up its schedule now," Sid Carter said casually, "and Harristown is thinking of dropping out. They can't get players and they lost a lot of dough last fall."

"What does that mean to us?" Johnny asked.

"How good are the Bulldogs?" Carter asked bluntly.

"I think," Johnny said, "they can take some of the big league clubs. Maybe not the Cougars or the Bears, but with a little building up here and there—"

"That's all I want to know," Carter said. "Take my advice, kid. Don't sign up with this Midwestern League until you hear from me."

"Why?" Johnny asked.

"Because," Sid grinned, "I think the Bulldogs will be playing in the big-time this fall."

"What can this gang do against big league clubs?" O'Neil protested. "You're the only fellow had any real coaching in college."

"I'd have been a better player," Johnny Bell said quietly, "if I'd had you coaching me from the beginning, Jack. These boys don't know how lucky they are."

"Heck," Jack O'Neil mumbled.

JOHNNY walked over to the big meadow that evening with Susan O'Neil. They were already rolling the field, and the steel framework was going up. For two weeks Johnny had put in fourteen and fifteen hours a day dickering with contractors, conferring with the club lawyer.

"This will be a monument to you," the girl

said quietly. "You're putting Frankton on the map, Johnny."

"No," Johnny Bell told her. "I was just lucky in finding this team and your father. He's a football genius, and with a little publicity, he'd be making thirty thousand dollars a year coaching one of the big colleges. I know."

"It's nice of you to say it," Susan said.

"It's the truth," Johnny Bell smiled.

He received a long distance call from Sid Carter two days later, the newspaper man requesting him to come to New York to attend a league meeting. Johnny left on a Thursday morning and came back the following Friday night.

"We open against the Steers the Sunday after next at their field," he told Jack O'Neil.

The Frankton coach nearly fell out of his chair.

"The big league Steers?" he yelled.

"We're in the league," Johnny said. "Harristown dropped out, and they just put our name in on the schedule. I paid the entrance fee and we're in."

"The big league!" Jack O'Neil said again, a note of awe in his voice.

"Let's hope everything works out all right, Johnny," Susan O'Neil said slowly.

"We have the club," Johnny said, "and we have the backing. This town will go all out when it hears we're in the biggest pro football league in the country."

"I hope," Jack O'Neil said quietly, "this doesn't affect the boys. They're liable to get stage fright traveling to a big city and playing before a city crowd."

"We have the Cougars the following Sunday down here," Johnny said. "I've already explained that we'll have to play that one at the ball park until our own field is finished."

"That'll be a comedown for the Cougars," O'Neil grinned.

"It'll be a real comedown," Johnny Bell said, "when we take them over."

They had headlines in the local papers the next morning, and the telephone calls swamped the Frankton office as stockholders rang up to congratulate the Bulldog bosses.

"Next fall," O'Neil said, "you run for mayor, Johnny. It'll be a cinch."

Johnny looked at the faces of the Bulldog players when they showed up for that Saturday's practice session. They'd read the papers and discovered that they were big league football players.

"Kind of a big jump," George McCole muttered.

"We'll make it," Johnny assured him. "I only wish we could get more workouts."

In preparation for the Steer game, O'Neil managed to get the squad out two afternoons at five o'clock, and he worked them till it became too dark to see the ball.

The next morning the two kid halfbacks, Chuck DeGrasse and Harry Baxter, stood before Johnny in the office. Plainly, they were embarrassed.

"Let's have it," Johnny grinned.

DeGrasse, a dark-haired, good-looking kid, handed him a yellow telegram slip. Then he looked at the floor while Johnny read it. The note was signed by Leo Feeney, coach of the Cougars, and it requested DeGrasse to report for practice on the morrow. Baxter had a similar telegram in his hand.

Johnny stared at the paper, lips tightening.

"What does it mean, kid?" he asked.

"Call us rats," DeGrasse said miserably, "but after that Irontown game, a Cougar scout signed us up. We didn't hear any more from them so we almost forgot about it."

"At that time," young Baxter put in, "we didn't think the Bulldogs were going anywhere, and we had a chance to step up."

Johnny nodded grimly.

"I don't blame you," he said. He knew why Leo Feeney had suddenly decided to call up the two kids from the bushes. Feeney was a little afraid of this dark-horse outfit stepping into the league at the last minute.

CHAPTER IV

Taking A Licking

JOHNNY stared at the two boys before him. Both of them looked considerably older than they actually were because they'd had to get out and hustle since they were very young. Both came from poor families.

"That Cougar scout give you a check for signing?" Johnny asked.

"No," DeGrasse said. "We just signed the papers."

Johnny Bell saw a light.

"You signed the papers yourselves?" he asked excitedly.

Both boys nodded, and Johnny headed for the door.

"That scout thought you were both twenty-one," he chuckled. "He should have had your parents sign it."

Hustling the two into the car, Johnny raced out to their home town eight miles from Frankton, and hurriedly had the parents sign a Bulldog contract he drew up.

"What are we supposed to do about these telegrams?" DeGrasse asked.

"Let me worry about them," Johnny smiled. He sent a telegram immediately to Leo Feeney, stating that both men were under age when they signed with the Cougars, thus making the contracts null and void.

Feeney came back with another telegram that evening with the announcement that he was turning the matter over to the league president for a decision.

Jack O'Neil saw this telegram when it came through, and he looked at Johnny's face.

"Has he got us, kid?" he asked.

"No," Johnny grated, "but it means these two kids won't be able to play in the Steer game. There must be an investigation and that will take a little time. Feeney figured that."

O'Neil shook his head.

"Those two kids were doing most of the ball carrying," he growled. "This hits us very hard, Johnny."

Johnny Bell nodded quietly. The Bulldogs didn't have many replacements.

"I'll have to fill in Peluso and Nat Healy," O'Neil muttered.

They had a practice session the next afternoon, and Jeff O'Brian didn't show up.

"Jeff had a bad cold this morning," Craig said. "It must have gotten worse."

Johnny and Jack O'Neil went over to O'Brian's quarters immediately after practice. They found O'Brian flat on his back in bed with his landlady looking after him. The quarterback had been very close to pneumonia and was forbidden to get out of bed for a few days.

"Came quick," O'Brian mumbled. "I hate to miss that first one, Bell."

"We'll miss you," Johnny said slowly. He looked at O'Neil and saw the sweat on the man's face. On the way home the Frankton coach spoke quietly.

"I wanted to make that first one good. It won't look so nice if we get a bad drubbing in the opener. Maybe the league officials will start thinking, Johnny."

"We didn't lose it yet," Johnny said. He was thinking of that tough Bulldog line. They were all intact so far.

"You'll have to do some ball carrying, Johnny," O'Neil said.

Johnny Bell nodded. He was in good shape now. He had his wind and legs, but the speed had left them. He didn't know whether he'd have any power when he hit the line.

He still wasn't sure two days later when he stood on the five-yard line, waiting for the Steers kick off. The Bulldogs had discarded the old orange and black outfits, and were arrayed in blue, with white helmets.

They had thirty thousand at the Steer park for this league opener with the Steer crowd curious to see what this new club had to offer. With Sid Carter setting the pace, other sports writers had taken up the torch for the Bulldogs, and they were becoming the most talked-of club in the circuit. Jack O'Neil was getting publicity for the first time in his life. Sports writers were asking if a

man needed a college diploma before he could play pro football?

The ex-veteran, Johnny Bell, was praised to the sky for his courage in going down to the bushes after the Cougars had turned him down. They were rating him as one of the smartest football magnates in the country.

Johnny waited for the kick-off now, with three substitute backs working with him. The Steer eleven poised on the forty yard stripe, big men in red and white outfits, college-trained, confident.

When the ball rose into the air, they swept forward as one man. Johnny Bell retreated to the goal line and took the ball against his stomach. He picked up McCole and Rivers, the tackle, and came up the left alley.

HE SAW George McCole drive forward at the two hundred-and-forty-pound Steer center, and he heard the sound of that collision. He tried to go to Rivers' left, but two Steers were bearing down on him.

Head lowered, he plunged forward in an attempt to drive a wedge between them and keep going. One of the Steer tacklers cut in the same direction, coming up with his knee into Johnny's face.

There was an explosion, and he thought the whole stadium had fallen down on his head. He heard bone crackling in his face, and he knew that his nose was gone. He'd never had a broken nose before, but there was no mistaking this thing.

The shock of it dazed him and he lay on the ground with the ball under his chest. He could see the blood staining the grass as it dripped from his nostrils. There was no strength in his body, and they had to lift him up and turn him around.

"Looks like it's broke," Rivers was saying.

A physician came out on the field and made a brief examination, and then two Bulldog players were leading him toward the bench. He had no power to resist them. He saw Jack O'Neil waiting for him on the sidelines, and he saw from the expression on the coach's face that O'Neil was more worried about him, personally, than the loss to the team. That was a nice thing.

"Get him into the dressing room," O'Neil ordered. "See if you can straighten out that nose, Doc."

Johnny didn't see the first half, but he was in the dressing room when the Bulldogs came in. His nose was bandaged with strips of white adhesive tape across it, holding it in position. He was still as weak as a cat.

"How's the score?" he mumbled.

"They got forty-one points," O'Neil stated tersely.

"What about us?" Johnny asked.

"Nothing," O'Neil said. "We lost George

McCole on that kickoff also. He twisted his shoulder. Rivers was put out of the game on the third play for swinging at a Steer player. There's nobody in the middle and the Steers have been piling through there all afternoon."

"Forty-one to nothing?" Johnny whispered, "the first half!"

He looked around the room at the beaten Bulldogs. They were dazed at this thing.

"Maybe they got a little stage fright, too," O'Neil mumbled. "The line is falling apart, and we have no runners. We didn't make a yard that first half."

"They might get going the next half," Johnny Bell said. He wanted to get in himself, but he knew he couldn't do it today.

He sat on the bench the second half, wrapped in a big Bulldog coat, and he watched the Steers pile up the score. It was sickening, with the crowd laughing now, feeling sorry for him. The simplest plays completely fooled the dazed Bulldog line this afternoon.

The final was 79 to 0 for the Steers, the worst score in the history of the pro league. There was no talk in the Bulldog dressing room. They changed to street clothes and went back to the railroad station.

Jack O'Neil sat next to the window, looking out into the darkness as the train sped back toward Frankton. Johnny saw that the heart had gone out of the man. O'Neil was thinking of that big stadium, only partly-finished, and the enormous expense involved. He was afraid of what the sports writers were going to say in the morning papers.

"We could alibi," O'Neil said tersely. "We could say that our whole backfield was out of the game, and that the line was damaged with McCole and Rivers out the first two minutes."

"We won't alibi," Johnny said. "This one we'll take full on the chin."

"You got it," O'Neil muttered, "full on the nose, kid."

They walked into the O'Neil home at eleven o'clock that night, and Susan was waiting for them. She'd heard the game on the radio, and she looked at Johnny's face quickly.

"Is it bad?" she asked.

"Just cracked up," Johnny said. "That's the least." He added cheerily, "Next Sunday the Cougars come here. We'll get them."

O'NEIL didn't say anything, but Johnny Bell could read his mind. O'Neil knew the damage that had been done to the Bulldogs, psychologically. That terrific beating would affect their playing the following Sunday and many Sundays after that.

The Tuesday after the Steer game Johnny received a lengthy letter from the league president. In it he released Baxter and De

Grasse, making it possible for them to sign up with the Bulldogs, and he suggested that if the Frankton team didn't make a better showing against the Cougars the following Sunday that they seriously consider dropping out of the league.

Already, several other clubs had requested that the Bulldogs voluntarily withdraw their franchise. It was contended that every club facing them would lose money on that particular game, and that the Bulldogs themselves would go bankrupt before the season was over.

Johnny Bell showed the letter to Jack O'Neil, and he saw the life go out of the little man. Once before O'Neil had gone into the red, but that had been nothing in comparison to the present situation.

"We won't worry about this," Johnny said. They had a practice session late that afternoon, and O'Neil was starting work for the Cougar contest.

"Looks like we'll be going back to semi-pro football," the Frankton coach muttered. He didn't add that they'd be going back with a big stadium which would become a "white elephant," and a terrific debt on their shoulders.

"You think we climbed too high?" Johnny asked slowly.

"No," O'Neil said, "but we didn't get any breaks, kid."

Jeff O'Brian turned up at the practice session that afternoon, but didn't play. Johnny Bell picked up a nose guard and wore it in the session. He watched the Bulldogs closely. They were only going through the motions. This team was beaten before it took the field against the Cougars.

Jack O'Neil tried to bring them around, but it didn't work. He gave them a short talk when the session was over and he tried to make light of the Steer defeat.

"Every club has a bad day," he joked. "We've had ours. Now it's over."

They didn't take it that way. They'd been awed by the way the Steers ran roughshod over them, and they were looking for the same kind of thing the following Sunday.

During the week citizen stockholders of Frankton dropped in at the office and spoke with Johnny. They weren't worried so much about losing money because none of them had invested heavily. Johnny had stipulated in the beginning that no rooter could purchase more than three shares. He and Jack O'Neil stood to lose all if the Bulldogs folded up.

"Those chaps so much better than our boys, Johnny?" one man asked. "You used to play with 'em."

"We're looking for a different story on Sunday," Johnny gave the stock answer. "Root the boys home."

By Saturday, Jeff O'Brian was back in the lineup, as well as George McCole. Johnny's nose was feeling better, and he'd decided to start the game with the nose guard.

They had a gray day Sunday, with the definite hint of rain in the air. By one o'clock the baseball park was filled with another thousand or two standing behind ropes out on the field.

Leo Feeney came across to the Bulldog bench a few minutes before the game started and caught up with Johnny Bell.

"No hard feelings about those two kids, Johnny," the Cougar coach chuckled. "We just thought we were entitled to 'em."

"Okay," Johnny Bell said tersely. "You didn't get them." He walked away before Feeney could say any more. He wanted to hit the ex-quarterback in the face when he thought of the debacle the previous Sunday.

The loyal Frankton rooters gave their club a terrific hand just before the kickoff, and Johnny Bell stared down the field, adjusted the bulky nose guard, and rubbed his hands thoughtfully. He'd never played football for this type of fan before. This was more like the old college games with winning or losing becoming a matter of life or death to the spectators.

Palmer, powerful Cougar fullback, came forward and swung his right toe, lifting the ball into the air. It fell out of a leaden sky, and Jeff O'Brian took it on the three-yard stripe.

Johnny cut across, moving in front of him. Baxter and DeGrasse swung over also, and they went up the left alley with O'Brian moving very fast. He was a tricky runner, the ex-tramp, seeming to loaf as he ran, but was actually going at a terrific rate of speed.

Cougar linemen smashed through the blue defense and headed for the runner. Johnny cut down Hap Madison, the Cougar tackle, getting him across the knees with a flying block, legal in the pro game.

Madison's feet went up into the air and the crowd roared in the stands. O'Brian got to the twenty-eight before he was spilled by two Cougar tacklers.

CHAPTER V

Make 'em Eat Mud

THEY lined up very fast, O'Brian calling for a left end run by Harry Baxter. The kid cut out wide on the play, taking the ball from O'Brian. Johnny Bell went with him, seeing out of the corner of his eye the men in gray streaming through toward him. The Bulldog line wasn't holding.

Johnny blocked out one man, but big Palmer burst through like a tornado and spilled Baxter for a three-yard loss at the far side of the field.

In the huddle, Johnny could see the tense faces of the linemen. Jeff O'Brian was the only man on the club who seemed as cool as if he were playing against a semi-pro club. He asked for a plunge by DeGrasse over right guard.

DeGrasse bit his lips and fumbled the ball as he went through. It was recovered by a Cougar on the twenty-one-yard stripe. In four plays, the Cougars banged over the goal line for a score, Palmer crossing the line from the six on a buck over tackle.

"That's one!" an elated Cougar lineman yelled. "We're going to make it an even dozen!"

Johnny watched the gray-jerseyed Cougars retreating up the field for another kickoff.

"Let's get 'em," he said. "They're just eleven other guys."

He hoped the ball wouldn't come down to Chuck DeGrasse because the kid was unnerved by the fumble. The cagey Palmer deliberately booted to DeGrasse's corner of the field, and Chuck had to take it.

Johnny saw him fumble the pigskin and pick it up, only to drop it again. Ken Meadows, Cougar end, shot through to nail the ex-high school kid with a bonecrushing tackle on the six-yard-line. DeGrasse was thrown back to the three. He held the ball this time.

"Better kick it," O'Brian said in the huddle. "We don't want to fool around down here."

Johnny Bell stood in the end zone waiting for the passback by McCole, and he prayed the Bulldog line would give him time to get the ball off.

He took McCole's spinback, shoulder high, and his toe met it squarely, but a Cougar man's chest was in the way, deflecting the kick toward the far corner of the field. It was recovered by the alert Ken Meadows for another score.

"Two!" a Cougar man yelped.

"We better kick off," Jeff O'Brian whispered, "until the boys get settled."

Johnny nodded. The Frankton fans were watching quietly, surprised at the power these Cougars seemed to pack.

"Let's dig in now," Johnny called sharply. "Hit 'em hard."

He went through himself on the kickoff, plunging between two Cougar blockers to get Palmer around the knees. He could feel that one because the Cougar fullback had been coming headon.

Getting up from the turf, he shook his head two or three times and trotted to his position. It was beginning to work inside of him now—

this feeling that the Bulldogs had to win today. He'd put Jack O'Neil on the spot with his wild schemes. But neither O'Neil, nor his daughter, blamed him for the debacle. That was the nice thing.

The Cougars sent the fast-running Joe Sanchez, left half, into the line, and Johnny came in fast for him. He was playing up close to the line of scrimmage, and when the hole opened up, he plunged into it, meeting Sanchez halfway through, and pushing him back for a loss.

When he got up, twisting the nose guard into place, he heard Jeff O'Brian speak tersely,

"That's big league ball, gang. Get in there."

Big George McCole spat on his hands and squatted at the center position, rocking gently. The next play came over left guard, and this time McCole burst through, going very high, to grab his man around the neck and sling him to the turf for a yard loss.

Johnny Bell heard the noise from the stands now and felt a little thrill go through him. It went away a moment later when Sanchez shot a pass to midfield, getting it beyond Harry Baxter's reach.

The Cougar right end plucked the ball out of the air and raced fifty more yards to the Bulldog goal line. It was 20 to 0. They missed the point.

It started to rain then, coming down lightly at first, and then harder, making the field a morass.

Johnny Bell roamed the Bulldog line, making his tackle, turning in two minutes to an unrecognizable figure. The mud even got inside the nose guard, making the plaster bandage over his broken nose as dirty as his jersey. He saw the runners coming through and nailed them, getting up mechanically to do it all over again.

Twice the Cougars got down to the Bulldog ten, but couldn't get any farther. Their passing attack was broken up because of the slippery ball, but they had hard runners like Palmer and Sanchez who could run through swamp water.

WITH three minutes of the first half remaining, Jack O'Neil called Johnny out of the game. It was still 20 to 0 for the Cougars. Johnny stumbled toward the sidelines, spitting out mud, wiping it from his face. He heard a lot of noise in the stands, and he saw umbrellas out in the bleachers, but none of the Frankton fans had left.

Jack O'Neil threw an arm over Johnny's shoulder as he came in.

"Get into the dressing room," he advised. "Clean yourself up a little, kid." He spoke in a husky voice. "I never saw a better exhibition of defensive football, Johnny," he added.

"You made more than half the tackles out there."

Johnny Bell nodded dumbly. He knew he'd been in a lot of the plays because he was playing this one for the O'Neil's—fine people.

Muddled figures stumbled into the locker room minutes later, and Johnny could scarcely recognize them.

"We need three touchdowns," one man grated, and Johnny recognized him only by his voice. It was Jeff O'Brian.

"The rain stopped," George McCole mumbled. "We ought to go now."

Jack O'Neil came in and sat down beside Johnny on the bench. He began to speak after the boys had cleaned up some of the mud from their bodies.

"This guy," he nodded toward Johnny Bell, "came out of the service, honorably discharged. He had a couple of thousand dollars and he wanted to invest it. The Cougars turned him down because they thought he was washed up. You know what he's done for this town since he came here. Give him a break."

"Look," Johnny muttered. "I don't want anything. I'm staying in Frankton whether we play big league ball or not. If we lose out here we'll go back to the semi-pro game."

"Who said we're losin' out?" Jeff O'Brian asked quietly. "We got thirty minutes of football the next half."

"Seems like a lot of time," Rivers growled. "Let's push these guys off the map."

"They don't look so hot when you dig in," Craig added.

Jack O'Neil slapped Johnny's shoulder and walked away. As he stood on the other side of the room, Johnny could see the little smile on his face.

They went out on the field again, and O'Neil started his regulars. Johnny Bell kicked off, Sanchez taking the ball on the three. The Cougars had changed to dry uniforms between periods, but the Bulldogs had one outfit, and that was caked with mud.

On the ten-yard-stripe a squat little man smashed through Cougar blockers to pick Sanchez up and hurl him back to the five. Johnny Bell saw little Rivers, the tackle, coming to his feet after that one. Rivers had gone down the field like a cyclone.

The Cougars tried an end run, but Dick Plunkett, Bulldog end, pushed the runner in toward the center, where Craig hit him for a two yard loss. They were making more noise in the stands, but Johnny Bell scarcely heard it.

He went through a squad of interferers on the next play, coming toward his side of the field, and he got big Palmer around the waist, taking the man's elbow in the face as he did so. Palmer lost a yard on the play.

The Cougars kicked, and Baxter raced the

ball back to midfield, stumbling and splashing through the mud, fighting like a demon for yards. In the huddle Johnny Bell spoke quietly.

"Let me run a few, Jeff."

"It's yours," O'Brian told him. "Twelve B."

Johnny rammed the center, running behind George McCole. The Bulldog line gave him a beautiful hole and he spun through it, plunged into a Cougar line-backer, and wrenched himself free to go another five yards for a fifteen-yard gain.

Jeff O'Brian was grinning in the next huddle. He let DeGrasse take it around the end, and the right half ran as if he were skating on ice. He got past the line of scrimmage and headed down the sideline with Johnny Bell and O'Brian going with him.

On the eight-yard stripe he was knocked out of bounds. The Frankton fans were going crazy.

Jeff O'Brian faked a pass, faked a run himself, then tossed a lateral to Baxter who went down to the one.

O'Brian called Johnny's play, and he banged the middle, surprised to find that there was no one in front of him. The Bulldog line had surged forward on that one, moving like one man. It was a score.

"These guys will dig for you," O'Brian whispered. "I'm giving it to you more often, Johnny."

"Okay," Johnny Bell muttered.

THEY scored another touchdown five minutes later with DeGrasse and Baxter alternating, slashing at the line, picking up yards. Down on the Cougar five, O'Brian called Johnny's play and he ran straight on, finding the way clear across the goal line. It was amazing the way the enemy line melted when the Bulldog forwards piled through.

"One more," O'Brian roared. They were going in the fourth period now with the score twenty to fourteen for the Cougars.

They recovered a Cougar fumble on the eighteen-yard stripe, and in three plays hit to the five.

"This is it," O'Brian snapped in the huddle. "All yours, Johnny." He called Seven-A—a fake to Baxter—with the ball going to Johnny over right guard.

O'Brian bent to take it from McCole, and then spun around to fake to Baxter. Johnny Bell started to move at the same time, and then something happened.

Young Baxter, in his excitement, snatched at the ball, thinking it was his play. O'Brian tried to get it away from him, and fumbled. Johnny grabbed at thin air as he went by.

There was a lot of noise after that, and he wasn't sure what happened till he was able to straighten himself out on the other side

of the goal line. Ken Meadows, the Cougar end, had scooped up that loose ball and raced ninety yards to the other end of the field for a Cougar score. "That makes two we need," Jeff O'Brian said quietly.

They got one five minutes later, Baxter taking a short pass over the center of the line and eluding three Cougar tacklers to race sixty yards for a touchdown. The kid made up for his misplay on the goal line.

Time was running out when the Bulldogs took the ball on their own twelve-yard stripe, two minutes later. The Cougars were able to do nothing now with the fighting Bulldog line.

Play after play was squashed.

"Make 'em eat mud," Jeff O'Brian grinned. He fed it to Johnny Bell and Johnny hit through for eight yards to the twenty. O'Brian faked that pass to Baxter and went through himself for another first down to the thirty-one.

Johnny Bell chalked off five more yards, and then DeGrasse cut off right tackle, leaped over a tackler, and sped twenty-two yards into Cougar territory.

"They can't stop us," O'Brian yelled. "We're the original tough babies from the other side of the tracks!"

They made three and then two, and then DeGrasse hit through for eight to the twenty-nine. Johnny Bell lowered his head, shot forward and kept digging till he was down

to the fourteen. It was only then that he realized why he'd been able to go that far. Bulldog linemen had gone through with him, bowling over Cougar linebackers after taking out their own men!

Two more plays, and they were on the five. The Cougars held twice, stopping Johnny for no gain and then holding Harry Baxter to a yard. It was fourth and three on the four-yard stripe.

"All together for dear old Frankton U!" O'Brian said in the huddle. It was DeGrasse carrying around the right end, far to the other side of the field, with Johnny Bell, Baxter and O'Brian running in front of him.

Johnny hit big Palmer across the knees and went down on his face in the mud. He got a mouthful of it, and it was in his eyes, but lifting his head he saw Baxter racing across the goal line in the coffin corner.

Nonchalantly, Jeff O'Brian kicked the extra point which gave the Bulldogs a 27 to 26 win.

Johnny Bell sat in the Bulldog dressing room ten minutes later, no strength left in his body, the mud still caked to his uniform.

"What a club!" he said to Jack O'Neil. There was nothing else to say.

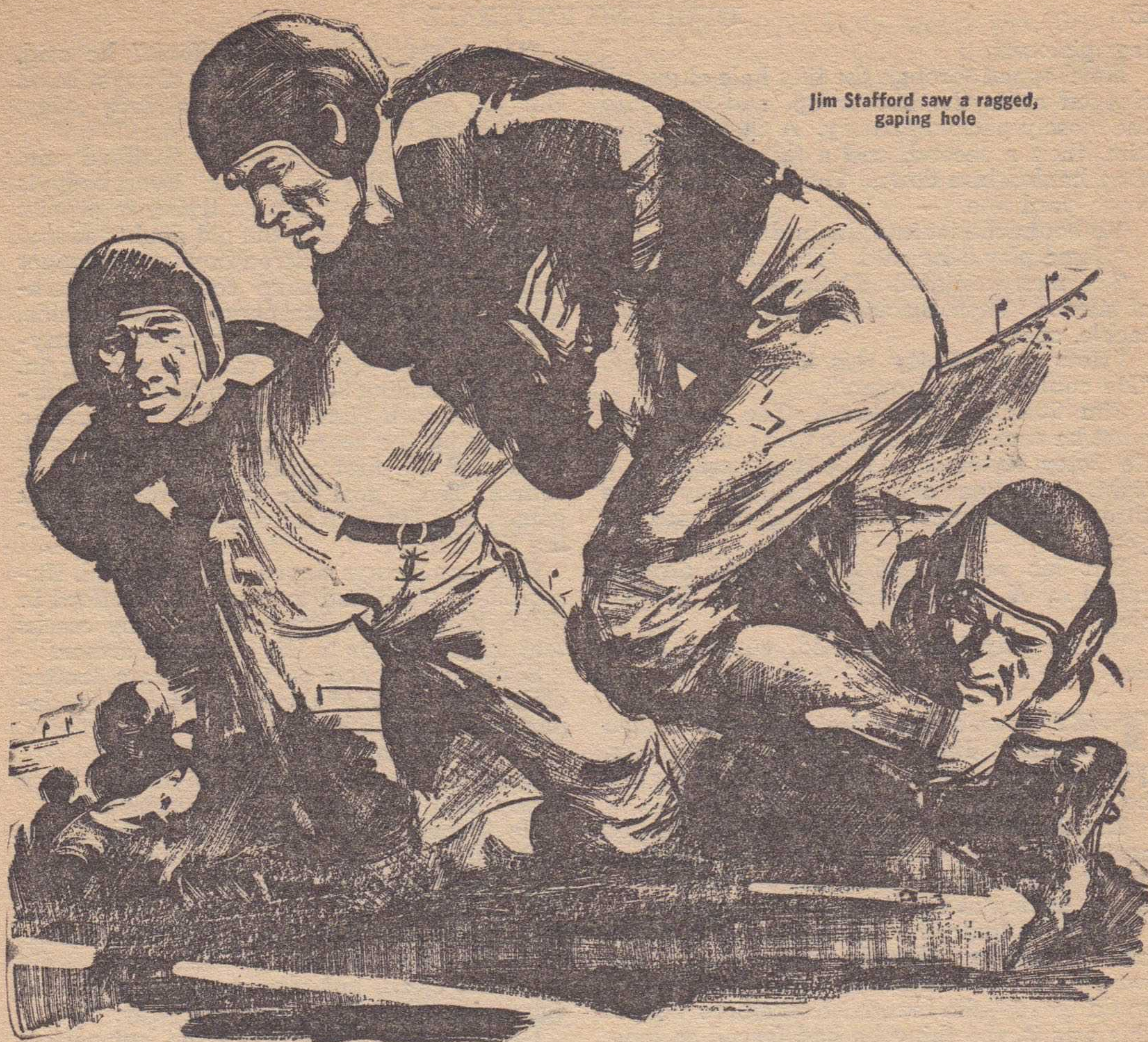
"Frankton," O'Neil murmured, "is still in the league." He added, "My daughter says to bring you back to supper tonight, kid, win, lose or draw."

"It's a date," Johnny Bell grinned.

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Jim Stafford saw a ragged,
gaping hole

BACKFIELD BRUISER

By NELSON A. HUTTO

Rough, tough Jim Stafford was the greatest kind of a star on the field—but some of his teammates thought him a heel!

JIM STAFFORD towered above the circle of Tech players, studying the State defense with calm, slate-gray eyes. Then he ducked into the huddle.

"They're worried about a pass," he said. "We'll give 'em twenty-two—and knock 'em dizzy!"

It was third down and seven, on the State fifteen—not exactly the spot for twenty-two, which was a line buck. But nobody protested. Stolidly, they paced into the single wing.

Jim Stafford would carry the ball. Stafford chose to carry on about three plays out of five—which was only one of the reasons why these gold-shirted men of Tech disliked him so heartily.

The other reasons, rooted in the past, went much deeper.

Stafford took the snap and drove inside tackle. He was a big man, in a bony, angular fashion, too tall and lean for a plunger. But he ran with terrific power, knees high, long

legs pistoning.

He chopped through the tiny hole at guard, slapped aside the backer-up, and tore into the closely packed tertiary. A State man hit him, then a second, and a third. Together, they hauled him down. The ball was on the three-yard line.

He bounded fast into the huddle.

"Same play," he said. "For the tally!"

The men hesitated. There was a moment of silence. Then Blackie Bogan, hulking left tackle, spoke.

"How about Petey this time?" he asked. "He could carry it over."

Jim Stafford considered. The score was what he wanted, no matter who made it. Little Petey Kyler wasn't built for cracking a tight, goal-line defense. Still, they have three more chances if Petey didn't make it good.

But his mouth tightened. He'd already called it. A quarterback had to run his ball club.

"Same play," he repeated, without emotion.

THEY moved into position with sullen slowness. Jim Stafford called numbers. The ball came to him, and he lunged for the hole.

But there was no hole. State jerseys surged against the Tech line, broke through. Stafford crashed a swirling tide of tacklers, went down, buried at the line of scrimmage.

In the huddle, his cold blue eyes swept his teammates. Nobody looked up. They were very quiet, strangely grim. Jim Stafford could feel it—the breath of rebellion. Maybe this was it, the thing he had feared so long.

"Petey—on thirty-six!" he said.

They ran the play. Stafford joined Cal Echols who came out from a guard position. They took the State left end for a rough ride. Other blockers cleared a wide swath, and Petey Kyler, fleet and agile tailback, cut in with beautiful precision and scampered over, untouched.

Petey gave the ball to the referee and looked at Jim Stafford.

"Thanks," he said coolly. "It was a nice block."

"A pleasure, kid," Stafford said, and Petey turned away, red-faced.

He was really a nice little fellow, Jim Stafford thought. He felt at times that Petey wanted to bury the grudge over what had happened on that unlucky day, nearly a year ago. But there was Petey's pride, and the humiliation Petey couldn't forget. And, above all, there was the bitterness nursed by his teammates.

They booted the extra point and started back for the kickoff. Cal Echols, who was captain, turned to Jim Stafford.

"Don't get us wrong, Stafford," he said. "We'll string along, like we always have. But you had four touchdowns already today. We wanted Petey to have that one."

"So he got his touchdown," Stafford said. "And we got the six points. Everybody is happy." He spoke casually, trying to dismiss the whole matter. But the old doubts stirred within him. He wondered how much longer this strange relationship could last—teammates on the field, strangers on the outside.

Tech kicked and held State on the twenty-five, and then the subs came streaming in. Tech was leading 34-0, late in the third quarter, and Coach Harry Neal didn't believe in running up the score on a beaten opponent. A few of the first string would remain, of course. Tech's goal line was uncrossed in six games, and Harry Neal was carefully guarding that record.

One man always stayed—Jim Stafford. Unscored-on Tech had to have Jim Stafford in there, backing the line, chinking any cracks that might appear in the defensive armor.

Stafford watched as the regulars trotted off, all but three of them. Foots Ansley, departing, waved a hand.

"Hold 'em, pal," he called.

None of the others said anything. They rarely said anything to Jim Stafford.

He turned back to the job at hand. He still had a full quarter's work ahead, plugging the holes in that second-string line. Not that he minded that part. He played football because he loved the game, every jarring, spine-tingling minute of the sixty. He played it clean, but also rough, because his aggressive spirit knew no other way.

He got plenty of action in the last period. State knew they couldn't win, but they still had a shot at glory—a chance to be the first ball club to score on Tech that season.

They balked the Tech offense and carried the attack all the way. They lacked speed and finesse, but they had power backs, and they bludgeoned the Tech line without letup. Three times they broke into scoring territory. And three times, Jim Stafford, charging up and down behind the faltering subs—rallying, coaxing, making three tackles out of four—stopped them.

It was quite a chore, and when it was over Stafford slumped in the dressing room, a little more tired than he cared to admit. He sat apart from the gay talk that filled the room.

"Another push-over," Blackie Bogan's voice boomed above the chatter. "Some day maybe we'll hit a ball club that'll give us a real workout!"

"You can sing that last verse again, sonny!"

Jim Stafford looked up. It was Foots Ansley, the rangy right end, speaking. Foots

was a Navy trainee like himself. He and close-mouthed Goober Bryant, the center, were transfers, and not a part of the old Tech clan.

"We'll get worse than a workout if some of you birds don't pull in your chest a notch," Foots said.

Blackie laughed. He was big and dark featured, more handsome than a tackle was supposed to be.

Foots didn't laugh.

"Another thing, Bogan, you and the rest," he said. "None of 'em are push-overs when you stay in there till the gun and do the work of three men. Try it some time, and you'll know what Stafford means to this team."

A dead silence fell. Stafford hoped Foots would drop it. But the tall end was warmed up.

"Stafford has made this ball club what it is," he went on, "and he gets less thanks than the water boy. He furnishes the power and the punch and the brains. And everybody knows it—except his own team."

Cal Echols stepped forward.

"We know it, Foots," he said quietly. "Stafford is quite a ball player. On the field we're with him. We promised each other that, for Harry Neal's sake. We also know other things. And as long as we don't talk about 'em, you shouldn't let it worry you."

FOOTS turned away with a snort, and that ended it. But it didn't blot out the memories for Jim Stafford. He could see it all again—the scene that had been a nightmare for months afterwards. . . .

It was the Hawton-Tech game of the previous year, the season final for both teams. Jim Stafford, a rugged, leggy seventeen year old, was the freshman sensation of the Hawton Crimson Wave, playing quarterback on offense and right end on defense.

The game had been pitifully uneven from the start. Tech, once a power on the gridiron, had sunk to the bottom in the wartime shuffle of manpower.

Going into the second half, the score was 28-0. Then Tech, unwilling to concede defeat, bravely launched a barrage of passes. Petey Kyler was doing the throwing. The sheer audacity of it—passes on almost every play—caught Hawton off balance. And then Jim Stafford started doing something about it.

He quit backing into the flat. He began rushing from his right end, charging the passer. He was in there so fast no blocker touched him. Twice he smothered Petey Kyler, and Tech lost twenty yards.

That was the way it went that last half. Tech bombed from the air constantly. A few connected, but most of the time Stafford was

back there, slamming Kyler with cold ferocity. The punishment was terrific. Stafford began to feel pity, wishing he could hit the little man gently, but it was against his instinct to pull his punches.

Once he picked up Petey as he would a child and laid him on the ground, and he knew at once it had been the wrong thing. Petey came up, face flaming with humiliation. Cal Echols brushed by Jim Stafford.

"Go ahead and kill the fellow, Stafford," he said. "But you don't have to shame him before the crowd."

Each time Hawton took the ball, they tallied. Jim Stafford had no special desire to pile up the count on this hapless team, but it worked out that way. He simply called the plays, and everything clicked. Hawton could do nothing wrong. The score mounted into the forties, the fifties. Finally, it became 61-0.

And then, in the waning moments, it happened. Tech had the ball after a kickoff. Stafford, seeing Petey Kyler shift to wing-back, had a hunch. It was to be one last effort, a pass to Petey in the flat, to shake the fast kid loose for one face-saving touchdown.

This time Stafford didn't charge. He reversed quickly, covering Petey. His hunch had been correct. The ball came sailing, and he grabbed it. He took a stride, tried to get a straight-arm out, and then Petey and Blackie Bogan hit him at the same instant. There was a crunching impact, and the three of them went down in a heap.

And when Jim Stafford arose, head spinning a little, he saw Petey crouching on one knee. There was something wrong with Petey's face. And then Stafford knew. Petey's jaw was horribly broken!

Tech men gathered, grim and stony-eyed. Blackie stared at Petey, almost tearful. The big tackle turned on Jim Stafford.

"You tried hard enough all day, Stafford, and you finally did it. I saw you swing that fist."

Echols reached suddenly. He held Stafford's hand, palm down. The skin across the knuckles was broken.

Jim Stafford stared at the knuckles dazedly. He remembered vaguely someone's shoe raking his hand a few moments ago as he'd thrown a block. He opened his mouth to speak. He saw the hatred on the faces of the players. Words, he knew then, would be futile. . . .

It all seemed but yesterday. Yet a lot of things had happened in a hurry to Jim Stafford since that day. He'd finished the term at Hawton and had joined the Navy. Then, just as he was expecting shipment for sea duty, he'd suddenly been sent back for specialized college study, in the program re-

placing V-12. And by an incredible jest of fate, the college was—Tech.

Harry Neal, Tech's overworked coach, was glad to get an experienced signal caller. He was a mild-natured man who seemed to consider last year's episode as one of the accidents of the game.

Jim Stafford hoped the team, by now, would hold the same view. But he saw at once their feeling hadn't changed. They accepted him, after a time, but only as a cog in their football machine. He wondered if it would work, and he was surprised when it did.

The backfield was versatile on the attack. Petey Kyler, who had sipped his meals through a straw for many weeks, was fully mended. Petey was a neat break-away runner and could pass with the best of them. Stafford in the bucking slot gave them straightaway power. The line was good enough, amazingly stubborn on defense.

They moved down the schedule, and now in seven games they had tallied a hundred and sixty-eight points and held the opposition scoreless. Stafford was beginning to marvel how it could be—that in all this time, no dissension had appeared.

That is, not until today. Again he felt that nagging fear that the whole setup was loaded with dynamite.

HE FINISHED dressing and walked out alone. He heard a queer, hopping footstep behind him and turned. It was a little dough-faced fellow who walked with a slight limp.

"A nice game, Stafford," the man said.

"It was okay," Jim Stafford answered coolly. He knew this man. Rickey Manton was a small-time hanger-on who haunted the practice field.

"You stopped them without a score again," Manton grinned. "I won me a hundred on that today."

Stafford didn't care for these characters who loafed on the fringe of the game and made a business of gambling.

"It was a bum bet, Manton," he said. "You were lucky."

And he walked away.

That night Stafford met Blackie Bogan in the hall of the dorm.

"You and Manton were having a talk, I noticed," Bogan said.

"You notice a lot, don't you, pal?" Stafford answered.

Blackie Bogan's eyes narrowed.

"I wouldn't chum with that punk if I were you, Stafford."

"Thanks for the warning," Stafford said very solemnly. "I was just going to invite the drip out to dinner."

The next week's practice did nothing to al-

lay Jim Stafford's worry. There was a certain tension which hadn't existed before. In scrimmage the team's play lacked its usual precision. Men grew touchy about minor things.

Jim tried to think it was just one of those things, a natural reaction from the long grind of the season. But the truth was too evident. The well-meaning Foots, in his locker room lecture, had stirred the old resentment. The thing which had been thus far held in check was breaking through.

That Friday night Stafford was leaving the library after a heavy study session. Study was his main job here, and he was giving plenty of hours to it. Football, as far as the Navy was concerned, was merely his own choice of leisure.

He was crossing the street, which led through the middle of the campus, when he saw a small figure detach itself from the bordering shrubbery.

"Hello, Stafford."

Jim Stafford squinted.

"Hi, Manton," he answered, and kept walking.

Rickey Manton fell in with him.

"Figure to take Calvert tomorrow?"

"Maybe," Jim Stafford said.

"By twenty-six points, I'd say," Manton observed. "In fact, some of us boys are putting out a little twenty-six point money. And those Calvert lugs are crazy enough to grab it."

Jim Stafford said nothing.

"There's only one fly in the soup," Manton went on. "Neal is a soft-hearted fellow. Never runs up a score on anybody, and his old friend Doc Keefer coaches at Calvert. Neal will probably let up if you boys get about twenty points on Doc's team."

Stafford wanted to tell Manton to go roll his hoop. "So what?" he said. "Your talk doesn't concern me."

Manton laughed lightly. "You see to it that Tech wins by twenty-six points," he pointed out. "You're the boy who can do it. Keep the pressure on all the way. You'll get something for your trouble—say a hundred bucks."

Jim Stafford felt quick anger. He stopped.

"Even if I could do it, Manton," he said.

"I wouldn't have your rotten dough. Maybe we will beat 'em by twenty-six points. If we do, I *won't* be seeing you. Except maybe to punch you in the jaw—which I ought to do now."

Manton backed a step.

"Take it easy, kid. It ain't no crime to ask a man to win, is it? You wouldn't be doing anything wrong."

"Beat it!" Stafford snapped. And Manton did.

Jim Stafford reached the dormitory. He

saw two men lounging near the steps, backs turned now. Bogan and Echols. He went on in, wondering how much they'd seen. He wondered why they'd happened to be there at all.

THE TEAM made the short trip to Calvert Saturday morning. They had a couple of hours to themselves, and Stafford walked aimlessly, trying to put his mind on trifles in shop windows. There was nothing to worry about today, he kept telling himself. Calvert was an easy spot on the schedule. A mere breather before the final tough one against Hawton.

But five minutes after the kickoff, Stafford knew there was some reason for his concern. The pressure had been on Tech, week after week. And now the inevitable let down had struck.

Tech had given the ball away after two futile plays, and notoriously weak Calvert was coming right down the field. They were now on the Tech twelve yard line, first down.

Calvert sent a stocky little speedster named Cheaney around Hewitt's end. Cheaney was the spark of the Calvert offense. He got outside and raced for the corner. Lewellyn slowed him, and Jim Stafford pitched him out of bounds. The ball was on the four.

Cheaney tried it again, but flopped without gain. Calvert hit the line twice then, trying to get that first down on the two. Each time the hole was there, but so was Jim Stafford. He made two crushing tackles, and the ball was still on the four.

Tech huddled under the goal posts. Stafford saw the pale, scared look in their faces. His teammates were thinking, he knew, how narrowly they had averted a touchdown—the first against them this year.

Stafford wished they didn't have that record. A thing like that was too much strain on a ball club. He remembered a high school team he'd played with. They'd gone five games without being scored on, and then one day a team had tallied quickly on them and they'd gone to pieces.

He also thought of what it might mean in the Hawton game a week hence. Tech would be better off if they went against Hawton with that record smashed and forgotten.

Tech kicked out, and Calvert came again. They kept Tech in a hole for almost two quarters. Then, finally, one of Calvert's punts sliced short, and Tech had it at mid-field.

They scored from there, though not impressively. Stafford took it over.

That was all for the half. Tech scored two against a hard-fighting Calvert in the third quarter, and early in the fourth Petey got loose for a brilliant seventy yard run to add

another, and the score was 27-0. And Harry Neal pulled out the power.

Jim Stafford stayed, and for ten minutes Calvert, still trying valiantly, made it interesting. Then Tech took over on their own eighteen, and only a minute or so remained. Stafford ran one time-killing play, then decided to let the subs try something. They never got much fun out of the game.

He named it, the optional fullback plunge or lateral. If it got away just right, they might tally. He took the ball, faked his run at tackle, and turned to pass. Johnny Farr, the sub tailback, was there, but so was Calvert's fleet Cheaney.

Stafford acted on a sudden impulse. To throw a pass was to risk an interception. In the back of his mind was the picture of his team's near-panic back there early in the game—their stunned fear over the idea of being scored on. If there was an interception and score now it would hurt nobody. And it might avert a crisis next week.

He threw the ball.

Farr tried to get it, but Cheaney was quicker, faster. He seized the leather in mid-air and streaked to the end zone, only fifteen yards away.

Stafford felt a moment of sick regret. It hit him, seeing that goal line crossed by an enemy.

The feeling passed, and his cooler judgment told him it was better in the long run. If Hawton scored first next week, as they well might, Tech would feel no paralyzing shock.

But Tech took it harder than he expected. They went in a few minutes later, and the room was full of gloom.

"There goes our season's record, pals," Blackie Bogan said. "Tossed down the drain by one dumb play."

"That game is over, Blackie, and we won it," Harry Neal said sharply. "We start thinking about Hawton now."

"I guess I do owe an explanation, Coach," Stafford got up. "It must have looked pretty terrible, chucking the ball right into the fellow's hands."

"Forget it, pal," Foots said. "You pulled a boner, and so what? Anybody's entitled to one boner a season."

BUT IN the next two workouts nothing went right. Plays were flubbed, assignments forgotten. And once when Meers had blocked a man wrong, right into his path, the wingback spoke up: "Sorry, pal," he said. "We all make mistakes. Sometimes big mistakes."

Stafford understood. Another man would have been forgiven one misstep, but not Jim Stafford. He'd held their grudging respect only because they could find no fault with

him on the field. Now he had blundered.

But there was something else he didn't understand—the bitter hostility which they showed in the Wednesday scrimmage. Yesterday, their attitude had been sneering. Today, it was darkly ominous. The workout was a miserable farce.

Jim Stafford decided he'd speak his piece.

"It don't make sense," he told them. "The biggest game of the year coming up, and you act like a bunch of spoiled kids. If there's something on your mind, let's have it out."

"All right, Stafford," Blackie Bogan snarled. "You tell us who gave you a better proposition than Manton."

Cal Echols grabbed Bogan and pulled him back.

"Easy, Blackie." He faced Jim Stafford. "There's no proof, Stafford. We'll give you a chance to explain."

"You do the explaining, pal," Stafford said coldly to Echols.

"Rickey Manton offered you a price to hike the score on Calvert, if you could," Echols said. "Rickey and his chums were giving twenty-six points."

Stafford's eyes narrowed. So Echols and Bogan had been checking up on him that night.

"And I told Manton to run along," Stafford said. "What next?"

"The story came to us last night that you got a better bid from Calvert takers—to keep the margin below twenty-six. Probably untrue, but you gotta admit that play looked funny."

Stafford took a step, fists closing.

"It won't do you any good to hit me, Stafford." Echols stood his ground. "I been telling 'em it was a lie, but maybe they'd feel better if you explained. The story is you met a bookie over there Saturday morning. Tell us what you were doing those two hours, and I'll be satisfied."

Jim Stafford was stunned. He knew who'd started the "story" of course. He'd lost a lot of money for Manton's bunch. This was their way of striking back.

Then the hot rage came back to Stafford.

"You can believe what you like, pals," he said. "If that's the way you feel about it, nothing I'd say would change your minds."

It was rash and unreasonable, he realized later, leaving them in the taut, silent locker room. It would have been rather simple to tell them of his walk about town that Saturday morning, to suggest that they trace the origin of the story. But the opportunity had passed, and he couldn't bring himself to go begging for their confidence.

Hawton was one of those schools which made a business of football, even in war times. They combed half the country for 4-F's. There might be a trick knee here and

a bum eye there, but there was also a couple of tons of prize football talent.

Jim Stafford looked them over now as they galloped on the field, resplendent in crimson jerseys. He picked out a few figures—Fred Shibell and Joe Noska, the bone-crushing backfield pair—Beef Crowdus, gargantuan tackle—Sam Kornegay, brawny end.

And his own team was not ready. So here it was—what might be his last game of football. He'd wanted it to be something to remember. More likely, he thought grimly, it would be a thing to forget.

Tech won the toss and chose to receive. Hawton stopped them cold on two plays, and Petey punted out on the Hawton thirty-five.

And then it started. Noska pounding through center. Shibell slashing into tackle. A quick spot pass to Kornegay. Noska, the sledge—Shibell, the rapier—hammering, knifing off the yards.

The Tech line was being swept back, cut apart. Only Jim Stafford and Goober Bryant staved off a rout. They made the enemy pay for every yard. But Stafford was wondering how long he could keep it up.

Hawton came on, like a tide, to the eight-yard line. And then Noska bulled through, and Stafford hit him with an impact that thousands could hear. The ball slithered from Noska's grasp, and Echols covered it, and the Tech stands roared.

But Tech could only kick out, and it began all over again. Then back inside the ten, Shibell calmly pitched a pass into the end zone, and Kornegay's big hands closed on the ball. Hawton kicked, and it was 7-0.

Tech received again and Petey managed to break to the sideline and scat to the forty.

"The only thing they lack is speed," Jim Stafford said. "We gotta shake men wide and get around 'em."

THEY started with thirty-six. For a moment it looked good, and then Noska was suddenly there, slamming Petey very flat. They tried Meers on a reverse and netted a scant yard. Petey faded to pass, and the giant Crowdus was all over him, pinning him to the ground before he could throw.

"We shoulda passed on second down!" Blackie growled.

There was grumbling assent. Jim Stafford called the kick with tight-lipped calm.

Petey punted neatly, out on the Hawton fifteen. But Hawton hacked the line for five—four—six—right back toward the Tech goal.

It began to get a little hazy to Jim Stafford. A nightmare filled with two fearsome figures—Shibell and Noska. It seemed he stopped them a thousand times.

Tech's own offense became non-existent. Each time they got the ball, it was so near

the goal they could do nothing but kick.

Then they had it out on their twenty, and the time was about gone.

"We gonna keep givin' it to 'em all day?" Davy Meers rasped, his weary eyes hard upon Jim Stafford. "Let's try something!"

"We will, Davy," Stafford said patiently. "A pass to you in the flat."

Petey got it off, an instant ahead of Crowdus' charge. Meers' straining fingers tipped it, and Noska pulled it in. Meers and Bogan hit him at once, and the three men tumbled. Noska and Bogan got up. Meers didn't.

Jim Stafford stood there, staring absently. It flashed across his mind like a blaze of light—what had really happened the day Petey Kyler was hurt. His clouded brain hadn't been sure then—but now he knew!

The doctor worked a while and shook his head. Meers was out cold. They carried him from the field.

Tech had time for a pass, but nobody stopped Crowdus' rush. Petey's throw wobbled to the ground, and the gun sounded.

As the Tech team started in, Stafford turned and saw Blackie Bogan. The tackle looked away quickly, flushing oddly, and Stafford smiled a little bitterly and walked on.

Stafford lay on a bench, grateful for the quiet, letting strength flow back into his tortured muscles.

There was a minor commotion, then Harry Neal's voice, asking for their attention. Jim Stafford raised up.

The coach was holding a sheet of yellow paper.

"This telegram was a little late arriving," Neal said. "But maybe not too late." He handed the paper to Echols. "Read it to 'em, Captain."

Echols read it aloud.

"Have checked every possible bookie and gambler. Can state positively none has ever contacted Stafford or any Tech player."

"From an old friend of mine," Neal explained. "Sort of private detective who knows all the characters."

Jim Stafford looked at him. So Neal had been working on it all along, this quiet little man nobody thought was so smart.

Men stirred uneasily. Cal Echols finally found his voice again.

"I guess that calls for some apologies," he said.

Blackie Bogan was on his feet.

"Just a minute!" The big, handsome man's face was pale and drawn, his voice hoarse. "There's another matter to settle. It's been waiting a long time."

He looked at Petey Kyler.

"That play last year, when you were hurt, Petey," he went on. "The same thing happened a while ago, exactly—when Meers and

me tackled Noska. Only Meers was hit on the head." His voice broke a little. "When we hit Stafford, my shoulder pad smashed your jaw, Petey. I was kinda groggy then—I really thought it was Stafford."

There was a long silence.

"I suppose anything we'd say would be too little," Echols said then.

Petey was looking at Jim Stafford. "You knew," he said, "and you weren't talking."

"It all happened a long time ago." Stafford got up. "Let's forget it and go take those Hawton birds."

"Seven measly points," Foots said. "We'll get 'em back in no time!"

But it wasn't that easy. Hawton had pushed Tech all over the field and had scored only one touchdown. Hawton was incensed about it. They took the kickoff and struck with savage ferocity. They rolled past mid-field, down to the thirty, and there lank Bucky Lain, subbing for Meers, contested Kornegay for a pass and came down with the ball.

"We'll loosen 'em up with passes," Jim said. "Hold off that Crowdus, and Petey will take us to town."

Petey flipped one right by Crowdus' flailing arm, and Foots took it for ten. Jim Stafford hit the line. He wedged through a mass of struggling flesh and fought out five hard-won yards. Tech turned back to the air. But Crowdus was coming through like a truck. Petey's throws were hurried, the second one almost intercepted. They had to kick.

The Tech line did gallant work. They recovered their old defensive cunning. Hawton was stopped, short of a first down.

Pudge Lawson grinned at Stafford. "We're helping you a little now, pal," he said.

"You're terrific," Jim Stafford told him. "Keep it up."

Petey took the punt on the twenty-five. He escaped Kornegay with a nimble change of pace and opened the throttle. Tacklers closed in. Stafford's long body struck, and two of them toppled. Petey cut back and found himself a narrow lane. He was through like a whisking torpedo, and then he was clear, running away—for the end zone and the score.

Then, moments later, as the crowd stood howling crazily, Petey's kick hit an upright and bounded off. Hawton was still ahead 7-6.

Petey stared bleakly.

"A tie is nobody's ball game, kid," Stafford said. "We want this one for ours."

But as the fourth quarter arrived and wore toward its finish, he was gravely wondering how it could be done. Hawton's attack had waned. Twice they'd battered inside the twenty, only to be halted. They settled back to protect their precious one point.

It appeared Hawton might succeed. They smothered Tech's passes by rushing. Crowdus was a raging bull, charging Petey with merciless fury. Hawton always punted out of bounds, giving the little man no more chances to run it back.

Stafford considered it, as Tech, owning the ball on their thirty, huddled and the clock moved past the four-minute mark. He named the pass play, and as they broke, he spoke to Echols.

"Take Kornegay," he said. "I'm gonna see what can be done about Crowdus." He didn't wish to shame Echols. But somebody had to stop Crowdus. Echols hadn't been able to do it.

They ran it. Crowdus came prodding through. Jim Stafford waited for the right instant, then struck. Crowdus grunted and hung there, like a steer on a limb. Stafford heard the cheers. He looked up in time to see Fouts legging it far down the field with the ball.

"We do it again," he ordered.

They did it. They moved down field through the air. Some of the throws were short, some incomplete. But they kept going. And Crowdus did not get through to Petey. He raged and swore softly. He used clubby hands, a knee now and then. Stafford, too numbed to know pain any longer, blocked him off. And Petey pitched.

Then Fouts went up in the midst of a surge of crimson jerseys and brought the ball down on the one-yard line. It was fourth down, goal to go. And the ball game would be over in thirty seconds.

"You brought us a long way," Jim Stafford said to Petey. "Carry it over on thirty-six."

Petey shook his head.

"This score is yours, Jim," he protested. "You've given it to us, every step of the way. Take it across."

"Over me!" Blackie said, fiercely.

"A quarterback has to run his ball club," Stafford said.

"Hike!" Echols barked. They sprang into formation.

Jim Stafford saw the ball coming to him, despite his orders to the contrary. He saw Blackie's broad shoulders, and he lunged. Then he saw a ragged, gaping hole, and he was through it and over the white line.

Strong hands lifted him, and the faces of friends crowded close.

"We didn't have time to argue with you, pal," Echols said. "The gun went off just as you hit the dirt."

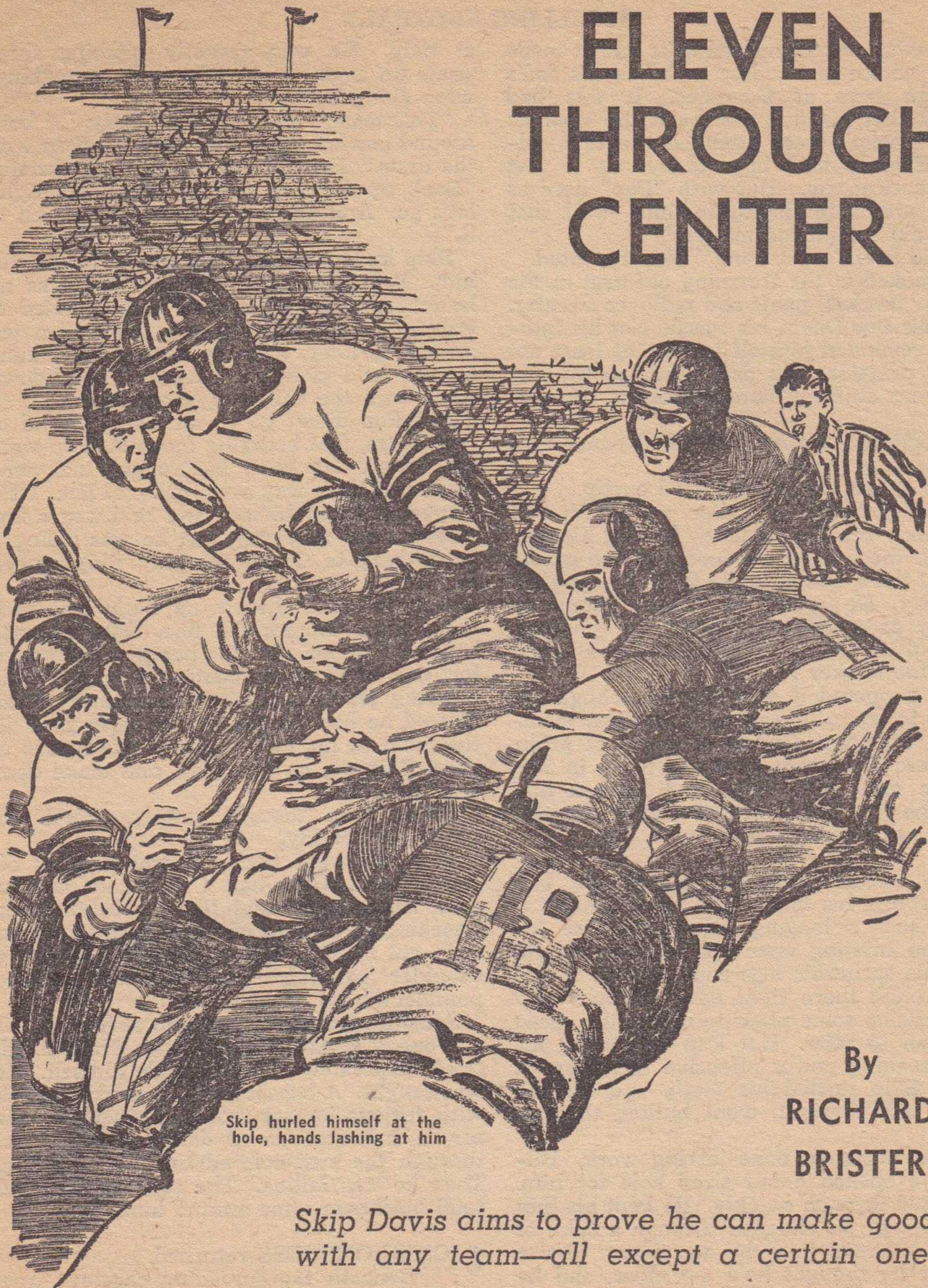
Jim Stafford smiled through puffed, blood-streaked lips. They were a great bunch of fellows.

It had been a good game—something nice to remember.

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ELEVEN THROUGH CENTER



Skip hurled himself at the hole, hands lashing at him

By
**RICHARD
BRISTER**

Skip Davis aims to prove he can make good with any team—all except a certain one!

SKIP took the spiral from center, lowered his head, and bored into the scrub line like a bantam bulldozer. His thin legs churned at the turf, driving his slight body through a momentary foot-wide hole.

Three scrub backs leaped on him, bearlike, and rode him to earth. He waited philosophically for the blanket of scrubs to dis-

entangle themselves, then stood up stiffly, amazed that none of his bones had been broken.

"Should've made first down on that one," an impatient voice behind him said. "If you'd keep those legs driving—"

"But I did keep 'em driving." Skip turned wearily toward the speaker.

Sometimes he wondered if he hadn't made a poor choice in deciding to follow his dad's footsteps here at Dorrance. It was bad enough that his dad had been the greatest fullback who'd ever attended the tiny college. Skip couldn't hope to live up to that All-American rep. But with "Pop" here as coach, with Skip playing for him—well, that really did complicate matters!

"I did keep 'em driving," Skip repeated.

He looked at the frowning old man in the familiar baseball pants and pullover sweater. This was Pop Davis, his coach. Not his father, he reminded himself grimly, at least not during practice. His dad didn't go for any father-son stuff out here in front of the others.

Pop hitched the tired baseball pants high on his heavy hips.

"Try it again," he suggested curtly.

Skip sighed gently under his breath and went back out. He could try bulling his way through the line all afternoon, if Pop insisted. But there was no sense to it. He weighed one-sixty. He needed forty more pounds to develop as a really efficient line plunger. Pop couldn't see it. He had been an all-time great line buckler himself.

Skip supposed it was natural enough for fathers to try to shape their sons after themselves. That was largely a matter of pride, and there was more stubborn pride in Pop than in most men. Skip had learned that from the first day's practice, and was still getting regular doses of it.

BOB BILLINGSGATE flipped the ball through his lanky legs. Skip caught it deftly, shot a longing glance sidewise toward an inviting open space around right end. His sprinter's legs could rip off a nice gain around there right now, if Pop would only develop some plays to utilize the speed Skip had to offer. But Pop was using his slow-breaking power offensive this year, as usual. Skip gritted his teeth, and for the fourth time straight, went bulling through center.

It was slogging, bone-jarring work. Billingsgate opened a fair-sized hole for him. He darted through quickly. He kept his thin legs driving. He chugged through a maze of clutching hands into the secondary. For a moment he thought he'd get clear, and be able to use the speed and deception he'd learned at prep school the year before.

"Buzz" Munger was backing the line for the scrubs. He slammed into Skip like a pile-driver. He weighed two-ten, and it was all beef and gristle. Skip hit the hard turf and bounced, even with Buzz's full weight atop him.

Pop blew a blast on his whistle, yanked it from between his lips, and stared morosely

at Skip. He was absently hitching those pants up again, a habit he had when things were going badly.

"This team," he announced flatly, "is built around power. Buzz, take over for Skip with the firsts." His gray eyes met Skip's briefly. "Back up for the scrubs, Skip. All right, let's go. And all of you, put some punch in it."

Skip knew that last was meant mostly for him. Put some punch in it. That was all he'd been doing since he'd first reported to Pop as a backfield hopeful. He was a ten second sprinter, a tricky broken field runner, as he'd proved on many a touchdown romp with the Bulldogs last season.

But Pop didn't go in for Skip's brand of wide open, fast breaking football. Pop went for power. He liked big rugged men who could bull their way over that goal line. He'd played that way himself and he'd won a few league titles that way, but he was riding a good thing to death, the way Skip looked at it.

Skip fell into the roving back spot with the scrubs. Across the line, Buzz Munger crouched in the slot, his heavy arms poised for the catch from center, a smug smile creasing his heavy face. Apparently, Buzz figured he had Skip's varsity berth right in the palm of his meaty hands. He meant to show Skip up, on this play, and make dead certain of it.

Okay, Skip thought grimly. We'll see about that, buddy.

The ball went back. It was a slant off right guard. Buzz had a nice hole, and he came chugging through like a two-ton truck, knocking scrubs out of his path like tenpins. Skip got right in front of him and drove a shoulder squarely into the two-hundred pounder's hard stomach.

Something came flashing up at his face. It was one of Buzz's driving knees. He blinked, tried desperately to disentangle himself. He was caught. A baseball bat seemed to smack with furious impact against his temple. He saw a kaleidoscope of dancing lights dart through the rust-colored turf beneath him. Then he was falling. The sun eclipsed and total blackness came around him. . . .

CONSCIOUSNESS returned.

"Beneath the spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands." The remembered lines from Skip's boyhood kept dinning inanely at him.

His imagination provided pictures to fit the words. It seemed to Skip that the blacksmith was wielding the sledge against his throbbing forehead. It came down crashing, crashing, with each pulsing heartbeat.

He pried his eyes open. He was flat on his back in the fieldhouse, on the rubbing table.

Pop stood framed in a pale haze above him.

Pop looked concerned, and also infinitely disappointed in a son who'd get knocked out in scrimmage. "You all right?" he asked.

"Sure," Skip said. That sledge was still banging away at his forehead. "Just feel like I been through a meat-grinder." He didn't like talking that way to his dad. But right now, he felt vicious.

"I dunno, boy." Pop looked sort of beaten. "Guess you're just not built for football. You're more like your mother. The Davises always bred big husky fellows. I remember my grandfather." His gray eyes shone with brief pride. "Boy, what a man that was! Big as a barn!"

"Good gosh, Pop," Skip protested. "Anyone'd think, to hear you talk, there never was a good small player. I know you've always gone in for big teams. But speed and deception are pretty good too, don't forget."

Pop's gray eyes hardened.

"For some others, maybe," he said. "But that's not my system. I've been here twenty-two seasons. Almost every team I ever put on a field has been built around power. I've won eight league titles."

"And the last was in 1940," Skip said pointedly. "The razzle-dazzle boys have run circles around your big teams since then. That stuff's here to stay. I know you don't like it, but—"

"Forget it," Pop growled.

He had been moody and snappish ever since Skip joined the squad. Probably, Skip thought bleakly, because I've failed to live up to expectations. Pop wanted to be proud, and instead, I've shamed him.

The thought gave him a sick sensation inside. He had looked forward so eagerly to this one season of college football before the draft called him. He'd never been really pals with Pop, and he'd hoped his playing might win Pop over to a higher opinion of him. He'd made a chump of himself out there, and Pop, who prided himself on his ability to judge men by the way they played football, was disgusted with him.

"What's the use, Pop?" Skip sighed hopelessly. "I'll never fit in with your power offense. I'm too light for bucking the line, and too brittle. I'm built for end runs, pass plays. Give me that ball in a broken field, and—"

"You seem to forget there's the line of scrimmage to pass, before you get there. That takes power, good blocking."

"End runs could do it, Pop. So could passes. Trouble with the end runs and passes we do try is that you've built up such a beef trust. The players are big, but they're slow as molasses. If you'd use a couple of your fast men—say Hodges and Milbank, from the scrubs—"

"Those midgets! A couple good tackles'd bust 'em in half." Pop shook his gray head. "I'll stick to power."

Skip shrugged wearily.

"It's your team, Pop."

His dad came close and gave Skip an embarrassed tap on the shoulder.

"I guess you were trying hard enough, boy," he said. "It's just—" His hurt pride was weighing heavily on him. "Well, darn it, you can't expect me to change my whole system over to suit you. If you're okay now, I—uh—I'd better get out there."

"I'm okay," Skip said bleakly. "Go ahead."

He watched the door click shut behind Pop. His headache was better, but he still felt bum. He'd always looked up to Pop, and shared Pop's total absorption in football. Skip was an only son, and he and Pop used to talk about football for hours, during the long winter evenings.

Lately, a subtle coldness had developed between them, and that hurt. Skip wanted to finish out this first college year and go off to service with everything right between himself and Pop. The whole trouble centered around his poor playing. It was ironical, that Pop's coaching method was causing the breach between them.

Skip cudged his brains for an answer to the crazy set-up, but could come up with nothing. He did think of one goofy scheme, but dismissed it abruptly, as too weird.

BUT something happened that night that made the wild plan seem a lot more worth trying. He'd been to the movies downtown, and was riding up the lane on his bike, when he heard Pop's voice floating querulously out through the open living room window.

"I've done my level best to make a man of him," Pop was saying. "He's just—"

"Oh, be reasonable," came Mom's loyal defense. "Skip's a fine boy. There's more to the world than just football."

Pop grunted.

"Martha, you don't understand," he said. "If you'd seen him make a fool of himself today in that scrimmage, like I did, you'd understand what I'm saying."

"I still—"

"If I were just any alumnus," Pop broke in gruffly, "it wouldn't matter. The thing is—I'm coach here. It makes things darned awkward, having Skip stumble all over the field like a half-baked schoolboy."

Skip felt his cheeks catching afire, felt hot shame climb through him. He got his bike rolling down toward the garage, unwilling to hear any more of it. He propped his bike up against the garage and sat on the grass, his head in his hands, feeling utterly useless, unwanted.

He remembered that wild idea he'd thought of that afternoon. He stood up suddenly and walked fast toward the house, not wanting to lose his nerve before he found Pop and broached it.

Pop was alone by the open fire. He yanked his cigar out of his mouth and gaped as Skip explained his idea.

"Transfer to State! Darn it all, boy, have you gone plain crazy?"

Skip sat down and put his hands on his legs to keep his hands from trembling.

"I'm no good to your squad," he said. "I proved that this after. State goes in for the fast wide-open offense I'm used to. The school year hasn't started. So there's still time to put through a transfer. It'll be just this one year, Pop. Next year, I'll be drafted. When the war's over, I'll finish at Dorrance, like you did. But—"

Pop was in a bad mood.

"It won't look good," he blurted. "My own son, transferring to State, to play against me. Not that State has much chance to beat us."

"It's not that I want to run out on you, Pop," Skip said. "Honest. It's just—well, this *could* be my last season of football. State plays my kind of game. I think I could play varsity up there."

"Frankly"—Pop jerked an angry hand at him—"I don't think you've got what it takes for the college game. You went good in prep last year, but the college game's rougher. Guess you learned that today, when Munger kayoed you."

That was certainly rubbing it in, Skip thought.

"Playing for State, I just might fool you," he said, a bit testily. "And State *could* beat you, this year. I still think the faster game's got it over power."

Pop grunted.

"If State beats me this year, I'm a monkey's uncle!"

Skip sighed. This was getting him nowhere, in nothing flat.

"How about it, though, Pop?" he asked. "Do I have your permission to transfer up there? Or—don't I?"

Pop looked harrassed.

"Oh, all right, all right," he muttered, and jerked his heavy shoulders impatiently. "You've got that bee in your bonnet. I suppose there'd be no living with you until I gave you the go-ahead on it."

"Gee," Skip said, "thanks." He didn't feel particularly happy about it. He felt glum, sort of homesick just at the prospect. "It's swell of you to ta—"

"Forget it," Pop said. "You've been no good to my squad. We're both grown-ups now, so we might's well face it. Maybe the Davis'll come out in you, up there!"

HE STOOD on the sideline with Bert Wallis, watching the State first and second squads scrimmage. The tiny State coach puffed on his cigarette, and his eyes squinted over his narrow nose at Skip.

"You've had a lot of publicity, the last two days, Davis. Couldn't walk out on your pop and transfer up here to my team without causing some stir, I don't guess. Frankly, I don't like to use you. Especially not against Pop, next weekend."

Skip's heart did a flipflop.

"But—if I'm eligible to play. And—"

"I'm concerned with the ethics of it," Wallis pointed out. "Three days ago, you were playing for Pop. You know all his plays."

"Pop doesn't go in much for tricks or deception," Skip said quickly. "That's no great advantage. If that's your only reason—"

"It isn't," the youngish coach said, and tapped a fresh cigarette on his thumbnail. "Don't like to say this, but there's naturally some doubt about which way you'll pull hardest, once you get in there against your dad's bunch."

Skip sucked air through his teeth. He was sore, just for a moment.

"It is kind of a screwy set-up," he said quietly then. "I can see how folks might wonder. But I give you my word of honor, Mr. Wallis—with me a football game will always mean football—the best that's in me."

"Glad you said that," Bert Wallis said. He looked greatly relieved. "Have you studied those plays I gave you yesterday, young fellow?"

Skip said he had.

"Get out there for Douglas then. If you're as good as your prep record indicates, I'll be darned glad to use you!"

He went out there. He knew this team still took a lukewarm view of him. They distrusted a man who'd quit on his dad, go over to the opposing camp after the season had started. Not knowing his reason, they were far from sold on him. But now was his chance to sell himself to them.

Danny Thomas, the stocky redhead who was quarterbacking, looked at him.

"Number 19," he said. "You know the play, Davis?"

Skip nodded. They broke. He went back and the ball came spiraling to him. He pulled it in, tucked it neatly. He pivoted, raced hard around the scrub's left end. Bart Kennedy, the slender halfback, was supposed to block out the scrub end. He made a half-hearted stab at the man, missed him. The end hit Skip hard in the hips, sent him sprawling in back of the line of scrimmage.

In the huddle, Skip kept his mouth shut. It was to be him again. Danny Thomas called for a slant off tackle. This time it was redhead Thomas himself who failed to do a

complete job of blocking. Skip stumbled over him, and went down the second time straight for no gain.

Skip bounced up first.

He leaned, hoisted the quarterback up by the back of his pants.

"What is this, Thomas?" he asked. "The old heave-o?"

The carrot-topped quarterback looked blandly at him.

"You can't work in this plant, Davis," he said. "Closed shop, and you're not in the union."

Skip frowned.

"I want to join that union."

Danny Thomas shook his red head.

"You're Pop Davis' son," he said. "He coaches Dorrance. Dorrance game's Saturday. We can't take any chances. After that one game, maybe—"

"Give me that ball once more," Skip said hotly and determinedly. "I'll write my own union ticket!"

Danny Thomas stared gravely at him.

"You look Irish when you're burned up, Davis," he said. "Go ahead. No harm trying. But don't expect much help on it."

He called 21. A good man, this Dan Thomas. He led Skip's way around end, knocking two scrub tacklers looping, before a halfback finally upset him and sluiced past him at Skip.

But Skip was loose now. He turned on a hot burst of speed, cutting hard for the sideline. This was the thing he excelled at, and he knew the importance of the moment. He used his hips and his shoulders, feinted the would-be tacklers off balance. He stopped once, turned like an about-facing soldier, and laced out down the middle.

He went over the mid-stripe, over their forty. The scrub safety loomed before him. Skip put a long arm out, and the clubbing impact of the straightarm poled the man over. From there it was a footrace, plain and simple, to the goal line. He showed them some running. He showed them a fine view of his flashing cleats as he crossed, standing up.

"Men, this is Skip Davis, our new left half," Danny Thomas said in the huddle for point-try. "Better try to get used to his pugnosed pan. Looks like he's gonna be workin' for us."

Skip felt a wad of fluff in his throat. He was tremendously happy.

Bart Kennedy ran it over for point. On the way back the field, Skip loped alongside Danny Thomas.

"Thanks for the union card, Danny," he said.

"Think nothin' of it." The redhead grinned. "Always room in this plant for real workers!"

IT WAS odd, riding down Dorrance's Main Street, Friday, in a bus crowded with his new State teammates. He saw Bob Billingsgate in front of Williams' drugstore, and yelled to him, waving. The gangling center stared at him queerly, but didn't wave back.

Skip flushed, feeling all eyes in that crowded bus focused on him. He was the enemy, here at Dorrance, until after the game tomorrow. He should not have forgotten.

Memory of the incident was hard to shake off. It oppressed him so much that he stayed with the State bunch in their gymnasium quarters that night, unwilling to show himself in town till after the game.

Next day, Bert Wallis, chain-smoking as usual, gave them a brief talking-to just before they went out.

"The papers don't give us much chance against Dorrance," he admitted frankly. "They're saying Pop Davis outweighs us too much."

"The papers are wrong." The coach dragged on his smoke, dropped it, and twisted his heel around on it. "We've got a fast-breaking offense that should net us some tallies. Pop will come up with his usual power plays through the line. With plenty of drive, and quick play-spotting, we can hold this gang. They're big, sure. But they're slow and they're clumsy. All right, that's it. And remember to drive. Drive, drive, drive every minute!"

They were sober, going out. Danny Thomas flipped a coin with Buzz Munger. Danny won, and elected to receive. Seconds later, the ball sailed off Billingsgate's cleated toe, riding high and far toward where Skip was standing.

Skip took it. He flashed a quick look around to see where his interference proposed to lead him. Danny and Bart took position at either side of him, moved straight up the field. Skip stayed with them ten yards. They went down under the Dorrance wing. Skip walked alone, à la Sinatra.

Not for long. He got snared in a pocket. He dodged and scurried in a frantic attempt to get out. Someone got hold of his jersey from behind, and hung on for life. Bob Billingsgate leaped on him high, and began to ride him down roughly. Buzz Munger hit him just as he fell, and it was as if a building fell on him.

Three more Dorrance men added their crushing weight to the pile-up. Skip felt a cleat gouge his ribs. Someone's hand seemed intent upon burying his face in the ground.

He stood up, boiling with anger. Billingsgate stared at him blandly. Buzz Munger wore a faintly smug smile. The others ignored him. He saw he had made fifteen yards on the runback, and he swore to himself gently.

"You all right?" Danny asked, in the huddle.

"I'll live, Danny."

Danny grinned crookedly at him.

"Could be your old teammates don't like you." His gray eyes met Skip's squarely. "Wanta try twenty-one?"

"You bet," Skip told him. "You're dog-gone tootin'!"

The ball zipped back to him. Danny got the right wing, went down sprawling. Skip was off fast, his lean legs driving. But Pop's lineup of giants came through at him like rushing water. They poured through Bert Wallis' lighter men without the least hesitation.

Skip found himself boxed, before he got fairly started. They rode him to earth again, and it was as if the last time had been merely a dress rehearsal. Five of them, this time, and they weren't particular about their elbows.

A knee jabbed Skip's ribs. The impact had him squirming, gagging for breath. He stood up. He saw Buzz Munger smiling.

"Maybe you call it football," Skip said. "I call it rotten."

Munger laughed harshly.

"That's hot, that is. You calling things rotten!" He moved away.

Skip went back to the huddle. There it was. The old gang hated his heart. He was a traitor, in their eyes. All they knew was what they had seen, and he'd quit the same day Munger took over his first string position. It did look rotten, on the surface of it. They meant to nail him today. They'd try to crucify him!

They couldn't guess he was here only to try to make Pop proud of him. And he couldn't tell them.

Danny wanted a pass play. Bart Kennedy stood well back. The ball zipped to him. Skip ran wide, near the sideline, cut in hard, and looked around for it. The ball had his tag on it, coming high and hard. Munger was near him, but Skip ignored him, tried to give all his thought to that ball.

He went into a stretching leap, got his mitts on it. And then Buzz swung into him like a sledge hammer, as if determined to break him in half. Skip hung onto the ball. He went crashing onto the half-frozen turf.

He stood up, feeling bruised all over. He tried not to show it. He even managed to grin in Buzz's teeth. State had made first down on the play. They were up near the mid-stripe!

Skip went back to the huddle. He was excited now.

"Get me loose once, Dan," he said. "Break me away from those bulls in the line, and—"

He saw a flash of color off to one side. He gulped with dismay. It was Douglas, the

scrub back, racing on to replace him. He loped to the bench and straight up to Bert Wallis.

"Holy smoke, Coach! Why—"

"They'd cripple you, son, if I left you in. They're not kidding out there. No decent coach could sit here and see you manhandled. If this were a Bowl game, I still wouldn't risk it."

Skip pleaded, argued. Wallis kept shaking his tiny head. Skip sat down glumly and watched from the bench.

STATE lost possession on downs. Pop's gang took over. They kept driving away at the line, trying to get a power drive started. They were strong, but slow. A child could see where each play was pointing. But what State lacked in size, they made up in alertness, good judgment. They met Buzz Munger's bull-like rushes at the line of scrimmage, bowled him down by sheer weight of numbers.

In the second quarter, Danny Thomas took a long punt on the run, and caught Pop's behemoths flat-footed. He went racing wildly up field, dodging right and left, making the most of his interference.

The crowd rose, roaring, as Danny crossed into Dorrance territory. And still he kept going. Munger almost got a hand on him. Danny feinted the big man off balance, romped down the sideline for the game's first touchdown.

Buzz knocked down Bart Kennedy's attempted pass for the point. It was 6-0, favor State. Skip wondered what Pop was thinking over there on the Dorrance bench. What good was the Dorrance team's bulk, when Danny romped past them? Skip wished he could have been the one making that romp to the goal line. That would have changed Pop's opinion of him!

Pop must have given his gang a tongue-lashing, during the half. They came back with more pepper and drive than they'd shown since Skip had been benched. His own presence out there, Skip thought sourly, had given the Dorrance gang something to hate, had helped them whip up some real fighting spirit.

He'd been more hindrance than help to State, for that reason. And he'd meant to make Pop eat crow, to prove he could make good with any team but the one Pop was coaching!

Maybe Pop was right, Skip thought, gulping. Maybe he just wasn't cut out for football. His morale struck rock bottom. Until today, his confidence in himself had sustained him. Now he could feel pride slowly crumbling.

Dorrance started a typical bulldozer drive up the field. They moved along with the

crushing force of a ten-ton truck, crushing all resistance before them. There was something actually dull in the way they finally went over the line for a touchdown. Buzz Munger simply grabbed the pill, and pounded through center.

They made the kick for point good, and the bored crowd found its voice, suddenly aware that this was Dorrance's game now, at 7-6.

It stayed that way into the final quarter, the teams seesawing, unable to add to their single touchdowns. Skip kept watching the time. His chance to show Pop was running out fast. He *had* to get in there! He kept glancing hopefully toward Wallis. The coach couldn't ignore him forever.

"Got it bad, haven't you, son? How come you're so all-fired anxious?"

"I'm fresh," Skip reminded him. "I just *might* get loose. Heck, it *could* mean the ball game!"

"Dorrance'll still be gunning for you."

"Crabapples to those guys!"

Wallis stared at him for a long moment, frowning.

"All right," he sighed at last. "Get going!"

Skip got. But fast.

"Break me loose on one, Danny," he said, in the huddle. "I'm fresh as a daisy. Those big bulls're tired."

"Not since they saw you," Danny said. "They're perking up. They'll murder you, son."

"The time, Danny," Bart Kennedy said nervously.

Danny called number 30, Skip to run. Danny and Bart stood on the ends of the T. The ball came back. Skip grabbed it, went lashing out hard to his right. Danny and Bart got a couple of linemen. The others sluiced in like free-running water over a dam.

Skip got sore. He straightarmed Pollick, dropped him. He put Sulzman on the seat of his pants with a pretty feint. Then he turned up the speed and really lammed out.

He turned, when he finally could, and ripped off five in half a second, before they piled on him. It was rough, but it didn't kill him. He was too sore to get hurt, he told himself grimly. The gazebos had no real reason to hate him.

"Again, Danny," he said. They went to work on it. He slammed around the other side, zoomed hard for the sideline, then cut back for another good seven before they nailed him. First down, on Dorrance's forty.

"Good, good," Danny said excitedly. "Take it, boy. Number eighteen!"

Skip went out in the flat, and scooped the soft lateral from Danny. He couldn't go forward. Three of the enemy were driving in at him on the dead run. He went back ten. He got his hips swiveling. He went up again, cutting forward, sidewise, to elude the eager hands. They were the hands of lumbering oxen. He was hot. They couldn't get to him.

HANDS slapped at his legs. His hips swung. His legs weren't there. He moved to the scrimmage line. He saw Buzz Munger coming in viciously at him. He gave Buzz the arm, right over the eyes.

Skip did a fadeaway turn, went scooting sideward. He lanced forward once more. He made it all the way up to their twelve, before he finally was dragged to the turf.

He could hear the din as he walked back to huddle. It was a thunder like nothing else in the world. It increased the hot excitement within him. He thought: That'll show Pop. The old speed and deception. Self respect was back in him, proud and strong. Who said he couldn't play college football?

"Good, good," Danny said gaily. "Once more and over. Number twenty-one."

Skip took it, went lashing out and around right end. They were all there waiting for him. They were charging faster now, breaking things up before Skip could get started. It was the goal line stand. It was the game, if he got loose again, and well Pop's men knew it.

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These men hated his eyes. They had him pegged for a traitor.

Skip tried the left end. They knocked him down on the fifteen, for a three yard loss. Bart tried one off tackle, made up the three Skip had lost, plus one for good measure.

Danny called time. He swore in a monotone at the bad luck that plagued them.

"One more down coming. Eleven to the goal. And time running out like a soldier's furlough!"

"Maybe a field goal," Skip said, then frowned at the futility of it. It was too sharp an angle. "Listen, maybe a slam right through center—"

Danny gaped.

"You goin' crazy?" he demanded.

"They'll go crazy. The surprise'll kill 'em. We haven't tried more'n five all day. They'll look for a pass. They'll set themselves wide—and—heck, Dan, we gotta try somethin'!"

Dan nodded soberly. He grinned at Bart.

"You an' me, Bart," he said. "Let's build a nice big vacuum for Skip here."

Skip went back, lifted his hands. It looked like a pass, the way they'd deployed. Pop's gang was spread out all over. The ball came. Skip took it. Dan hit Bob Billingsgate in the stomach, sent him sprawling. Bart shouldered the guard out, then jerked aside, leaving a clear path behind him.

Skip hurled himself at the hole. His legs pounded like pistons. Hands lashed at him from every side. He felt someone grab his knee. He tripped, caught his balance. He kept grinding forward.

He was almost clear, three yards past the line, when Buzz Munger loomed like a threatening cloud.

There was no room for deception. Skip lowered his head, and drove straight at the big man's midsection. He felt the shock of their coming-together all the way through

his neck and along his spine. He heard Buzz gasping, felt the big man go lax before him.

Skip got free with a thrust of the leg Buzz still hung onto. He lurched drunkenly over the goal line, and stood there, his head spinning, drinking in the ovation that floated down from the stands all around him.

Bart muffed his kick for the point. What of it? The game was over for all practical purposes. It was 12-7, favor State!

Skip went up to Pop's office, soon as he'd dressed. Pop didn't look as disgusted as you might expect, after losing to a team he had pegged for set-ups.

"One game doesn't ruin a season," he told Skip blandly. "Matter of fact, it was almost worth it. I learned something, losing this one: Power's still the important thing. But nowadays you've got to mix it up. Change pace a little. If I'd worked in more pass plays, and tried a few more end runs, I'd've won hands down. Whatta you think?"

Skip chuckled inside. Here was Pop, blandly airing the very thoughts Skip had told him not two weeks past. How human that was! Pop honestly believed he'd made this discovery all by himself.

"Right," Skip said, very seriously. "You work on that, and you'll romp through this year's schedule." He tried to avoid any I-told-you-so tone. "I went pretty fair on the end runs and passes. That sort of bears out what you're saying."

"The devil!" Pop said gruffly. "What really beat me was your plunge through center. You'd never've made it, either, if I hadn't forced you to learn how to buck a line. So actually, I licked myself."

"Did you, Pop?" Skip grinned impishly at him.

"We-ell," Pop chuckled gently, "there might be a bit more to the story. Main thing though is: you're a Davis!"

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Front Lines of Autumn

By JOE ARCHIBALD

Honey Trent could really carry the mail—but it took him a long time to learn he needed a farm boy named Carvath up front to break through the lines before he could go to town!

CHAPTER I

Blocking Stooge

NEAL CARVATH lay on a cot in the emergency hospital on Leyte not far from the forward command post and gritted his teeth while a corpsman poked at his injured leg. The contents of a morphine syrette had not entirely worn itself out in his rawboned frame, and the last forty-eight hours were still something of a nightmare.

He remembered himself yelling, telling the guys to hit the line and hit it hard. He

guessed it was foolish the way he had clutched the little gold football in his left hand as he waded through the hell-torn waters. But a guy had a lucky charm or he did not. Anything would do; a pebble picked up from the front yard back home, a boy scout medal—anything.

They'd hit the beach and swarmed up and over the Jap forward wall. The tanks came in, and overhead a couple of planes flew. Carvath grinned up at them.

"We'll show the way, you big shots. Like always." He had to think of Trent then. Going deeper into Leyte, they hit some

strong Jap pillboxes and swarmed over them to get to the small airstrip. Shrapnel laid Carvath flat in front of a Mitsubishi that never got away.

It was dusk on the island, and the sounds of battle drifted out of the jungle and washed over Carvath. Voices came into the place and one was too familiar to be real. He guessed he was dreaming. But the voice came nearer. "Yeah," it said, "the name is Carvath. Neal Carvath. I've searched for him since Tarawa. I've even looked at the crosses. He's a Marine—"

Carvath lifted himself up the best he could. He saw him then. Honey Trent was here. Honey looked big in his uniform. Trent looked as important and as great as ever. He wore a captain's bars.

"'Honey' Trent!" Carvath cried out, "I'm over here—"

Captain Honey Trent grabbed Carvath's hand when he got to the side of the cot.

"How'y, 'Farmer'? Time out, huh?"

"Yeah, Honey! Those mortar shells are hard to block out," Carvath grinned.

"I see you're still trying to become a hero the hard way, Farmer," Trent said. "You got yourself a spot where you're sure to get plenty of lumps."

"Sure, Trent. If it wa'n't for us, you high-flying shots wouldn't ever get to set down on these places."

The airman grinned.

"Like old times, Farmer."

"Like old times," Carvath agreed. He turned the gold football with his thumb and forefinger, and Trent stared at it. "I'll never forget those last two big games, Farmer," he said. "Against Ohio Southern and State. I'll never forget that day."

Carvath knew the day Trent meant. It was the day Kenyon University played Ohio Southern, the day when a great shining star like Honey Trent nearly fell and crashed forever.

"That was teamwork," Trent said. "Like a few hours ago here, Farmer. It seems so long ago since—when you look back."

"Sure, Trent. But it's pretty nice to go back."

"Wonder what became of the dame, Farmer. She won't ever turn up here as a war nurse—like they do in a movie—not that babe."

The dusk over the island was deepening and the battle noises still swept down from the hills, but these two men were hearing sounds from other and brighter days—the great roar of forty-five thousand people in the stadium at Kenyon close to the Ohio River. The Kenyon band was playing—a guy could hear the staccato voice of Pumps Nagle, quarterback, rip through the crisp autumn air. . . .

KENTUCKY A & M, with three freshmen in the line, dug in their cleats and waited for Kenyon to begin rolling on their own forty-eight-yard line. The Kenyon team was attacking on third down with very little yardage to make.

They were leading the Mountaineers 14-0. Kaintuck had been unable to stop Honey Trent and Farmer Carvath. No other team had been doing it that fall. The ball was snapped and it changed hands three times behind the line before Trent was running hard with the ball tucked under his arm.

He followed Carvath through a big hole in Kaintuck's weak side and made a first down. Carvath helped Honey Trent up as always.

"You were a little slow, Farmer," Trent said. "Get the lead out of your seat."

Neal Carvath nodded.

"Yeah, I slipped goin' through." The other Kenyon players would not have been surprised had he said: "Yes, sir." The farmer from Indiana was a perfect foil for Honey Trent. Carvath was a hero worshipper, who considered self-effacement one of the virtues. Carvath had come to Kenyon green from the farm, and he was shy and awkward.

Honey Trent's father was a Chicago millionaire. The running back was lord of the campus, the guiding light of Kenyon's exclusive fraternity, Lambda Phi. Trent kept a sleek eight cylinder car in a garage in town and he had fourteen suits hanging up in his closet.

Neal Carvath had three dollars to spend every week and three hand-me-downs to see him through the college year. Trent was the star and Carvath was the satellite.

Whitey Ormiston had recognized the football potentialities in Carvath's gangly frame the moment he had laid eyes on him but it had nearly required the entire faculty, a team of horses and a bull whip to get the farmer out onto the playing field.

For the first few days, Carvath had suffered from stage fright for the thought of his being closely associated with Honey Trent was overwhelming. Under Whitey's tutelage, Carvath had developed into the real reason for the superlatives used in connection with Trent's name in the sports pages of the big dailies.

With Kenyon on Kentucky's fourteen-yard line near the close of the third period, the Mountaineer coach threw a fresh guard into the line. The guy was big and determined, and he knifed through Kenyon's line to smear the next play for a three-yard loss. Honey Trent got up, a little dazed. He rested on one knee for a moment and finally singled out Carvath.

"You oversleep, Farmer Boy? Don't forget the cows need milkin'."



"I'll never forget those last two big games, Farmer," said Carvath, turning the gold football with his thumb and forefinger

Carvath flushed and for a moment the other players thought the farmer was going to let go.

"You forget sometimes a line gives way, Trent," Carvath said. "I got knocked off stride. We can't be perfect all the time. Let's go."

Up in the stands, a slightly bibulous fan turned to a man he did not know.

"I told you, didn't I? That Trent ain't no better'n that blockin' back wants him t' be. Remember Britton who ran interference for Grange? Grange wa'n't so hot in pro ball without Britton. Yeah, that hot-shot, Trent—"

"Look," the other man yelled. "An end around with that farmer leading the way. He'll score. Trent'll—ugh, he was hit hard. It's close to bein' over, though—"

"It's Trent again," the announcer in the lofty radio booth babbled into his mike. "It's always that big guy. Two yards from a touchdown. Wait—Carvath isn't getting up."

DOWN on the field, the Kenyon players crowded about the farmer. The trainer and the water boy ran in from the side-lines. Whitey Ormiston felt a cold spot in his stomach. Carvath was a main cog in his plans for Kenyon's first unbeaten season in almost twenty years.

Trent's face wore an anxious look. He bit his lip and knelt down.

"Git up, Farmer. They couldn't keep you out."

The trainer worked on the farmer swiftly. "Kick those legs, Farmer. Sit up and flex those arms. Good, you'll be okay."

"Just some wind knocked outa me, Coach," Carvath said. "Sorry—"

"He's sorry!" Pumps Nagle said and shook his head.

Trent breathed a sigh of relief.

"Take all the time you need, Farmer," he said. "They been givin' you a goin' over."

"Yeah?" Neal Carvath snapped. The other players wondered if they were hearing things when Carvath said, "Try my job for a couple minutes, Trent!"

The running back seemed stunned. Suddenly the farmer was himself again and seemed abashed at his popping off.

"Sorry, Trent. Let's take that ball over."

A big guard shook his head as he took his place in the offensive wall.

"He'll get wise to himself some day. He'll get sick of being a doormat with the welcome sign marked on it. But I hope he don't jump too far the other way."

The crowd yelled madly for a score. Backed up against their goal line, the Kaintucks braced. Three times, Ormiston's bruising backs smashed at the Scarlet forward wall, and the ball was still inches

away from the promised land. On fourth down, with that all-important distance to pick up, Tiny Huffner, the Kenyon full-back, pushed himself over by dint of brute strength alone.

Kentucky blocked the try for the extra point.

Kenyon kicked off, and the Mountaineers' quarterback, addled by the last block he had absorbed, let the pigskin slip out of his fingers. Carvath dove for the loose ball and snatched it up and rolled to Kaintuck's seventeen-yard line.

Trent fidgeted like a racehorse going to the post. He wanted to make this touchdown. He would be even on points scored with Jackman of Ohio Southern. The ball came to him on a direct pass from center—and bounded loose from his fingers.

The Scarlet forwards were driving in fast, but it was Carvath who grabbed the elusive ball on the first hop and pivoted on a dime. He eluded three tacklers and smashed his way to the Kaintuck three before he was smothered.

The crowd started to leave. There were only two minutes left, and A & M was going nowhere. Fans suddenly froze in the runways when they sensed something amiss down on the field.

Honey Trent was griping. He asked Kip Collembine if he had been knocked cross-eyed by a previous play.

"I couldn't have held that pass with a basket, Fatso," he snapped.

"You can't score on every play, hotshot," the bulky center retorted. "Like you, we can't all be perfect. Let's play football."

"I would appreciate it if you would," Honey said acidly, and Carvath touched him on the arm.

"Forget it, Trent," the farmer said.

"Yeah? Why, I thought you was listening to all the cheers you just got, Farmer!"

The ref picked the ball up and put it back five yards. Tiny Huffner growled.

"I'll take that ball over on the next play!" Trent said.

CHAPTER II

One Alone

THE quarterback figured all of the back-field men in his scheme of things. He called for a play that sent big Huffner through the Kaintuck tackle for the touchdown. The crowd was swarming to the exits.

The fans were thinking of the next big game to come—not the one the following

week which was a breather for Ormiston, but the one after that with Ohio Southern. Kenyon had to get by Southern, a powerful outfit that could easily ruin a perfect season for Whitey Ormiston.

The Kenyon coach leaned forward on the bench, and his mind was troubled. All the way from the previous year, his backfield combination had seemed perfect. Trent, the prototype of the Merriwells, and Carvath who was satisfied with the glory of making Honey great.

For the past few weeks, however, Whitey, a keen judge of character, had witnessed a slow metamorphosis coming over the farmer boy. On these scarred fields of autumn, men really found themselves, and Neal Carvath, it seemed, had detected traces of clay in the feel of an idol.

In the dressing room, Neal Carvath touched Trent on the arm just as the running back was pulling off his sweat-soaked jersey.

"Hope you'll forget what I said out there, Trent," he said apologetically. "I lost my head. You looked good out there today."

Honey Trent grinned smugly.

"Forget it, Farmer. You weren't too bad yourself." Abruptly he turned his back and yelled at the others, "They call that a line? We should've beat 'em fifty to nothing. Ohio Southern only took that bunch by two touchdowns."

Ormiston's voice lashed through the locker room.

"You don't say, Trent! Did it ever occur to you that Southern is saving itself for the likes of you? Maybe you forget that there are teams and players that are not out to just run up a score. What went out there, Trent?"

"It was my fault, Coach," Carvath said. "I guess I got a little thick when things didn't go just right."

Whitey felt like kissing the farmer and at the same time itched to wring his neck. But that would be killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. The success of the team depended upon his keeping Carvath from realizing that himself, and he knew Honey Trent would help him. It was a psychology both necessary and distasteful to Whitey Ormiston, but a coach is judged by the victories he hangs up.

"Whatever gripes you have, put them away," Ormiston concluded. "Until after we've beaten Ohio Southern—and State."

State! A silence fell over the Kenyon squad. Powerful State—no team from Kenyon had ever beaten the Big Green. No other team but this one boasting of Carvath, Trent, Nagle and Huffner had ever been conceded a chance.

Whitey Ormiston grinned.

"Kind of takes the beans out of you, huh?"

Well, we're going to beat State. We're going to knuckle down and think of nothing else when you leave your classes. Some of you have been careless with the training rules I've set down."

He glanced hard at Honey Trent, and the running back straightened from tying the laces of a pair of twenty-dollar shoes and met the coach's eyes. Pumps Nagle coughed significantly, and Trent's eyes got a little stormy.

"And you keep away from the women too, Farmer," Tiny Huffner said, and a gale of laughter swept the locker room.

The farmer flushed. His face was even redder than it was the day he visited Pumps Nagle's room and saw the pin-up on the wall. The farmer had no way at all with the opposite sex.

"Remember this," Ormiston said. "I'll drop the first man who breaks any rules from now on. It won't matter to me who it is."

Honey Trent bent over his shoes again and his lips twisted. Sure, you could take Ormiston at his word. Whitey would throw away an unbeaten season to keep discipline. Honey Trent would have to watch his every step.

CARVATH had heard stories about Miriam Lacelle, but they had made little impression on him, for she was a part of a world that had always seemed unreal to him. He only knew she was a cigarette girl and dancer in Kenyon's only night club, and his folks had made it quite plain when he became old enough to be told, that all stage people were fast and were to be avoided.

Despite the fact that one Tony Sabo had more than a slight interest in the girl, Carvath had seen her several times riding with Honey Trent in the sport coupé. It was the only thing about Honey he did not like.

The farmer had met Miriam Lacelle in the drugstore just off the campus one day. He had gone in for some aspirin after a tussle with Kant and Freud and she had called him by name. She was a tall girl with high cheek bones like Hepburn, and she wore her hair like the movie star. Lacelle's mouth was full-lipped and smeared with dark lipstick, and her eyebrows were thin arcs above her brownish-green eyes.

"You're the farmer boy?" she'd said. "You're the big boy who makes Trent look so good. I want you to help me out here."

The farmer had walked over, frightened out of his wits. The girl held some perfume under his nose.

"'Dangerous Moonlight,'" she said. "Would it be right for me?"

"I don't know nothin' about that stuff," Neal Carvath had mumbled. "I—I—excuse me." He'd hurried out of there frightened

out of his headache. Her laughter had followed him across the street.

They said the girl was after Honey and the Trent millions. They also said Honey had been a little too smart for her and that Miriam Lacelle's crush on the running back had gone in reverse. They said a lot of things.

Neal Carvath dressed slowly.

"We start working on Monday for Ohio Southern and State," Whitey Ormiston said. "I want every man in the skull room at exactly three-thirty. That's all. Look out from here in. We're heading for booby traps like they've got over in Europe. We'll plant some of our own."

"We'll be in it soon," Huffner said. "I'd like to get a crack at the lousy Nazis."

"The Spitfires," Trent said. "They'll be for me."

"Sure," Pumps grinned. "Always wantin' to be above the crowd, Honey. Old Spotlight himself."

"Uh-huh, you little runt," Honey said. He struck a pose that drew the attention of all. "If the populace marched in file, 'twere my signal to break from the ranks; if a thousand generations did things thus and so, 'twere my cue to do otherwise."

"Mouthwash!" Huffner said and threw a wet towel at Trent.

Whitey Ormiston drove his squad hard the next few days. There was grumbling in the ranks. Honey Trent worked out with a trace of pique on his photogenic face. The writers had raved about Carvath's playing in the A & M game. They had given Honey Trent second billing.

Trent lined up with the first team and studied the offensive setup of the doughty scrubs. Nagle called for a play he knew well. From a double wingback, the big team launched its attack.

Neal Carvath shot toward right tackle, rode the guard out with his rump and bored into the secondary. He heard Ormiston's whistle shriek, and when he got up he saw that Trent was over toward the sidelines tearing himself free of a bunch of scrubs. He romped over there. Whitey Ormiston's face was white.

"Take over, Trent. You coach the rest of the season and I'll go fishing. You knew that play. Why didn't you follow your interference?"

"Something went wrong," the running back said.

Ormiston nodded and walked away. He knew Trent's pride had taken a worse beating than his body on that play, and Honey's pride was something that should not be assailed. He wished Honey Trent had circled that scrub end and gone all the way to score. He stopped in his tracks and blew his whistle.

"Enough for today," he snapped. "Trot around the field, grab a shower and report to the skull room. I have got some plays to go over with you."

FOR almost two hours, the Kenyon players studied the intricate plays limned on the big blackboard by Whitey Ormiston. They went over them again and again.

"Copy them off," the coach said, "and study them every chance you get. They're for Ohio Southern and they might work against State. You'll notice I've concentrated on reverse plays. Harmsworth," he barked quickly at his heavy left guard. "On number ninety-four, what is your assignment?"

Harmsworth thought hard and pulled a crock and Ormiston shook his head.

"Be sure you can tell me tomorrow, Mister," he said. "No man leaves here until he has taken those plays down. We'll need perfection against Ohio Southern. All of you regulars will start against Vail. You won't have to stay in there long."

Trent bit his lips. Southern had let Jackman stay in against Vail until he had scored himself three touchdowns. He crumpled up a piece of paper and slammed it against the floor.

"What's the matter, Honey?" Ormiston yelled. "Maybe you could use a secretary."

"A blonde," Huffner said.

The ensuing laughter maddened Trent.

"Lay off me, Coach!" he bit out.

"I was only kidding, Trent," Ormiston said.

"It's okay," the running back said and began copying those plays down on a fresh sheet of paper.

"I'm putting you guys on your honor," Ormiston said. "Condition is going to mean a lot against Southern and State. You'll need every ounce of moxie in your systems. If there are any grievances to be ironed out between us here, let's do it now. Who goes first?"

"Why should there be any, Coach?" Neal Carvath said. "We—We'll beat Ohio Southern and we'll lick State. We're all workin' for Kenyon and not—"

Whitey Ormiston grinned at Carvath.

"All right," he said. "When you're through taking those plays down, get out of here and don't let me see your ugly faces until Thursday afternoon."

Just outside the gym, Carvath caught up with Honey Trent.

"If there's anythin' I've done, Trent—"

"Oh, brother!" Honey said testily. "You just can't be true, Farmer."

Honey Trent got in his bed at one o'clock the morning of the game with little Vail. He had driven out to a place forty miles from the Kenyon campus with Miriam Lacelle and

had taken a little too much beer and more than enough needling from the girl.

She'd reminded him that he was being carried along. Everybody knew it. Everybody said so. He was no better than a farmer boy wanted him to be.

"Watch me on Saturday, Baby," he'd said.

"I'll be watching," the girl had replied. "I'm getting a chill, Honey. Lend me your topcoat, please."

Before his starting eleven trotted out to the field to receive the kickoff from Vail, Ormiston took full measure of the puffiness around Trent's eyes. Honey Trent had been unduly silent during warmup. Ormiston felt a presentiment of unpleasant things to come.

Nagle picked up the ball on his eighteen and weaved his way through the Vail team to the thirty-nine before he was downed. Here Ormiston's powerful machine took off. Huffner bulled his way through the middle for nine big yards. The farmer led Honey Trent to a first down on the Vail forty-six, and the home crowd started whooping it up.

Carvath bowled over Vail's left end and gave the Kenyon interferers a chance to blanket Trent on his way to Vail's thirty. Picking himself up, Trent heard a great cheer go up for the farmer. He did not need Carvath. This was the time to prove to Ormiston just who was tops on his Kenyon team.

Nagle took the ball and fed it to Honey Trent. The farmer boy knew the old routine, and he shot toward the weak side of Vail's defense, split a guard and tackle wide apart and lifted a Vail secondary off his feet with a beautiful block.

But the fans were groaning. He got up and turned and saw Nagle lashing Trent back on Vail's thirty-three.

"Grandstand stuff!" the little quarterback howled. "Want to win it personally, Trent? Carvath had a hole big enough for you to come through with a truck. But you hit the other side of the line just where a two-hundred-and-six-pound guard—"

"Don't talk to me you little punk!" Trent said.

CHAPTER III

Off the Team

ORMISTON settled back and ground his teeth hard. Kenyon lined up again. Pumps Nagle took the ball and faked it to Huffner and then sneaked through Vail's center for seven yards. Pumps faded back on the next play and passed, and Ormiston's big end, Gaylord, took it on the last stripe

and simply stepped over.

Honey Trent's kickoff was a hard low drive that shackled Vail's best halfback. He chased it to his five before he picked it up and then was driven to the two by a big Kenyon tackler. Vail kicked and just got the ball away. Trent took it on the Vail twenty-six and lugged it back fourteen yards. From a box formation, Honey Trent and Carvath sifted through Vail's center to the seven-yard line.

Vail took time out. Their coach put three new men in the line. They weren't enough. With the farmer leading the way, Honey Trent went over standing up. He was grinning when the team lined up for the try for point. Carvath split the uprights, and Kenyon's big team trotted to their forty to kick off once more.

Whitey Ormiston left the team in. There were things he had to see. During the next five minutes his worst fears were realized. Trent was playing his own game. Once he ran into the farmer and let the ball dribble loose. Vail recovered on Kenyon's thirty-six. Here, the Vail quarterback threw the works.

On first down he fired a long pass that Carvath nearly messed up. But the ball bounced off the tip of his fingers and into the eager hands of Vail's receiver. He went the rest of the way.

Ormiston got up off the bench and kicked a divot out onto the playing field. Kenyon's rooters lost their voices for several moments. The Vail players were dancing around and slapping their long lean end on the back. They had scored against Kenyon.

The farmer looked at Honey Trent and seemed about to step out of character. "You handed it to them on a platter and all garnished with parsley," Pumps Nagle said. "Do you think they'll count that score you made for Vail?"

"The dumb farmer knocked it into their hands," Honey Trent said. "Put the blame where it belongs!"

"Come on, let's wear ourselves out for the Ohio Southern game!" Pumps Nagle snapped. He looked toward the bench and saw Whitey Ormiston sitting there like a graven image. Not a single Kenyon reserve was warming up.

Honey Trent, his face white, tried to bull his way through the laughing Vail forward wall on the first play following the kickoff without help from the farmer. He was knocked cold after gaining a yard. He saw a reserve back named Frohm trot in when he was lifted to his feet.

"Go back and tell Ormiston I'm staying in," Honey yelled. "Nobody can make a bum out of me!"

"Only yourself, Honey!" Tiny Huffner cracked. "Better go away like a nice boy."

Sit down and watch the farmer lead Frohm along."

Honey Trent finally trotted off, and a lot of boos swept out of the stands.

"Go to the dressing room, Trent," Whitey Ormiston said. "You're finished here today. We'll talk it over later!"

"There isn't anything to talk over, Ormiston," Trent ripped out. "You've just licked yourself good. Without me, let me see you beat Ohio Southern. You'll go up to State just for the ride."

"You know you're wrong, Trent," Ormiston said quietly. "Go and think it over."

"I take no more orders from you," Honey Trent snapped as he walked off the field. A sickening silence dropped over the stadium for several moments. It broke a little when Carvath convoyed Frohm to a first down on the next play.

As the ball was carried relentlessly toward Vail's citadel, the coach made many important observations. Frohm was not quite fast enough to keep up with the farmer. Neal Carvath had to slow up a little lest the opposing players he had bumped clear of Frohm's path would reform and hold the yardage down.

THE farmer was not as good a running back as Trent. He had been blocking too long to be converted in just a week or ten days. Frohm would have to assume the burden if Trent walked out on the team. Frohm was just an average back.

No team could lick Ohio S. or State with average backs. The farmer knew Honey Trent's speed and so his timing on those offensive plays had been perfect. Carvath would have to adjust himself to Frohm and that would take precious time that was not to be had.

Without Trent, Kenyon walked off the field with a 33-6 victory over Vail. In the dressing room, Whitey Ormiston waited until the players were washed and refreshed and dressed and then he spoke.

"There's a chance Trent won't be with us the rest of the way. You got a chance to show me you can beat Ohio Southern and State without him. The school and the game are bigger than Honey Trent and all his father's millions.

"I've got my own pride, you understand? I run this team or Trent runs it. I get paid for running it so I must be the one who gives the orders. I'll have discipline before I'll take victories. I hope I make myself clear."

"I know Trent'll stick with us, Coach," Carvath said. "If you think it'll do any good, I'll talk to him."

"You're a fool for punishment, Farmer," Whitey said.

Carvath searched high and low for Trent.

He finally caught up with the star back in the lobby of the Kenyon Inn. Trent was talking with Tony Sabo, a bulky man wearing sharp clothes. The farmer slipped into the small hallway connecting the lobby and cocktail lounge and listened to the talk. Sabo's voice was brittle.

". . . nobody kids around with her and gets away with it, college boy. I figured she was makin' a play for a wad of dough so I been holdin' off, but now I'm in there looking out for my end. If you think you've made a monkey out of that babe—"

"I figured she knew all the answers, Sabo," Trent retorted.

"You'll wish you'd stood in bed, big shot," Sabo said.

"Look, I want to be a pal, Tony. If you think I owe you something, I can pay off. Bet your last dime on Ohio Southern and State against Kenyon. You'll have the kind of dough Miriam likes to see."

"Why are you so sure?" Sabo asked.

"You'll find out tomorrow," Trent said. "I got to get going. Tell Miriam no hard feelings."

Carvath trailed Honey Trent and called to him in front of the Lambda Phi House.

"I heard you and Sabo," the farmer said. His voice was strained. "You bettin' against us, Trent?"

"Whitey's white-haired boy," Honey sneered. "A stool pigeon."

"I don't like that kind of talk," Carvath said. "You seemed sure we'd lose the big games. I don't like to think—"

"You seldom do," Honey grinned. "Without me, Ormiston can't take the title and you know it, Farmer."

"You've quit?"

"Say that again," Trent said.

It was on Wednesday afternoon that Honey Trent appeared at the field house. He put on his uniform without much conversation and the coach tactfully conveyed the word to the others that the star back had repented.

"I've been tipped off that the bets are heavily against us," the coach said. "Sabo's crowd is laying it on the line—and early. Huck Carmody isn't sitting too pretty at Ohio Southern and he'll win this one any way he can. He's not my kind of coach, guys. You've heard of his methods. Watch for his spies."

"I don't see how he's lasted as long as he has," Huffner remarked. "He doesn't belong in this conference."

"It's up to us to help bounce him out," Ormiston said. "If we beat his ears off—"

The coach drove his players until they were bone and muscle weary. The scrubs were a sorry lot as they dragged their heavy stumps to the showers. Trent and the farmer boy had torn them apart over and over again.

Trent seemed to have forgotten his claim to number one billing. Ormiston plied the whip all the next day and when it was over, he nodded.

"It looks like you've learned your lessons well, students. We leave tomorrow at ten o'clock. We'll rest at the country club outside Shayneville and have a light workout the morning of the game."

"I don't have the right clothes for a country club," the farmer said.

"I'll lend you a sport coat," Trent grinned. "One of my loudest horse blankets. We're a team, aren't we, Farmer?"

CHAPTER IV

Signals Over

THE stadium at Ohio Southern was jammed to capacity when the whistle shrilled. Carmody's team had won the toss and elected to kick. Their giant fullback, Krakasek, kicked it high, end over end. The wind booted it along.

Carvath got it on his seven-yard line and headed for the sidelines. His interference was riddled and a big green tackler came in and dumped the farmer out of bounds on the fourteen.

Kenyon lined up fifteen yards in. Nagle called for a feint at Ohio's left end. Carvath and Honey Trent drove forward with the ball slapping against Nagle's hands. The farmer swept around and Ohio's left side seemed to be falling for the ruse.

Trent struck hard at the Ohio center with Huffner in front of him, but they both smashed into Krakasek. Trent got up, shook his head to get the buzzing out of it. Krakasek grinned at him.

"They figured it perfect, Honey," the farmer said, as he walked into the huddle.

Ormiston settled back to the bench and watched a spinner make but three yards. The Ohio Southern line looked very big and tough. Honey Trent went back and kicked on third down and it was a good kick that landed on the Ohio forty-nine-yard line.

First down, Ohio Southern—Krakasek smashed between guard and tackle for six yards and Ormiston fidgeted on the bench. On the next play Jackman, Carmody's spark plug, swept the Kenyon end for first down on the Kenyon forty-one. The old cry for a touchdown came from Ohio's faithful.

Ormiston sent in a new tackle. He took Huffner out and replaced him with a defensive back. Ohio Southern took to the air and Jackman's bullet pass over the line was good for another first down on Kenyon's twenty-six.

Krakasek and Jackman punched through for two and three yards respectively and then the offensive machine elected to pass again. It was a touchdown pass thrown by Jackman and it was intercepted by a Kenyon guard a foot from the goal line. He was thrown heavily as he tried to cut away and Kenyon was in a hole on their own one-and-a-half-yard line.

Trent immediately kicked from his end zone and a tall Ohio tackle seemed to rise up like a great bird and block it. The ball bounded crazily around and a green-jersey husky covered it for six points for Ohio Southern.

Jackman kicked the extra point and Ohio Southern was leading after eight minutes of play 7-0. Honey Trent heard the great crowd roaring a name other than his own.

"We'll make it up, Trent," the farmer called to him. "They were pretty lucky."

Kenyon spread out to receive again. Nagle got the kick on his twenty and slashed his way upfield to the Kenyon forty-one before he was thrown. Kenyon began to move. The farmer started convoying nicely and Honey Trent carried in three tries to Ohio's forty-two.

Usman, in for Huffner, threw a pass to Dreher, the right end, that was good for eleven yards. Ohio's rooters implored the Green line to hold. Trent sifted to the Ohio's twenty-nine and here, after a time out for the Green, Pumps Nagle called for one of the plays out of the bag.

Usman took it, cut sharply to his left and slapped it into Trent's hands. Trent reversed, started on a wide sweep around Ohio's left end, but Green tacklers met him before he had reached the scrimmage line. The farmer had been swept off his feet. Honey Trent was tackled hard and the ball squirted from his fingers. Ohio Southern's center was on it like a cat.

Ormiston was on his feet. Something was wrong. Ohio Southern had already anticipated two of his plays, plays that had required hours of study and practise. Carmody's defense against them had been too perfect. Carmody—had those ugly rumors that had followed him from half a dozen colleges been true? Making his last stand as a big time coach, had he connived to—but how?

On the field, there were tears of rage in Neal Carvath's eyes.

"Find out where Carmody really scouted those plays, Mister!" he yelled at Jackman. "We never used 'em against Vail or Kentucky."

"I don't get you, Carvath," Jackman clipped.

"You will," the farmer said.

Ormiston watched until the half was nearly

over. He watched Ohio Southern smear three of his five intricate plays in as many minutes. He watched Honey Trent slip and fall on Ohio's twenty-nine when it seemed he'd break loose and score. He took Trent out and the big guy was so frustrated that the tears were in his eyes.

"They know everything we're going to do on those plays before we start, Coach."

Ormiston nodded and chewed quickly on his gum.

"We'll throw them away the next half," he said. "We've got to go along on what we've used up to today, Trent. Against Kentucky and Indiana Teachers and Vail—it's got to be enough."

The half was running out. Ohio Southern was attacking on Kenyon's forty-eight when Neal Carvath spilled Jackman on a try for first down.

"No scout could dope out a team's plays as good as you guys are doing it, Jackman," he said. "Like I said, we never used them—something is rotten, pal."

KRAKASEK heard and wanted fight and the farmer was ready to hand it out when Jackman took over.

"You guys know what each of you has got to do against those plays," Carvath yelled. "It's too pat. Find out where Carmody really got the dope, Jackman."

"Maybe that Kenyon guy is right," Jackman said. "We'll get the truth out of Carmody if we have to beat it out of him. He said he had a spotter at the last three Kenyon games. But that back said they never used—"

Krakasek growled as he took his position. He tried to get a long pass loose but was driven back to midfield, where he threw the ball away. Here the half ended.

Whitey Ormiston, looking much older than he had at game time, stood by the door of the locker room and watched his battered players file in. The trainer went to work with the towel. The Doc moved around asking about old and new injuries. Assistant managers brought hot tea in paper cups. And still Ormiston did not appear.

"You never looked worse, Honey," Tiny Huffner said. "You played like a high school sub."

"I got bad breaks," Trent flared. "Of all the days I had to get off the beam, this was the one."

"There was a leak somewhere," a big reserve back ground out. "Somebody got wise to those plays of—"

Ormiston stepped in and shut the door behind him as if it had been attached to a tomb.

"There certainly was a leak," the coach said. "Now, I'm calling in all those plays

you guys copied down from that blackboard. You gave me your word that they'd never leave your persons.

"There should be thirty-seven sets to turn in. Your names are on each one. Dig them up, every one of you. There was no scouting on Carmody's part and you all know it."

In less than five minutes, every player on the squad had produced the copied diagrams—with the exception of Honey Trent. Honey came away from his locker, a lot of unhealthy white around his mouth.

"Where are they, Trent?" Ormiston asked in an even voice.

"Coach, I haven't bothered to check on them for the last week. I got a good memory and learned them by heart. I had them in my topcoat there—"

Somebody coughed nervously and an uncomfortable silence gripped the weary Kenyon team. Tiny Huffner slammed a helmet against a bench.

"A hot-headed guy can pull a raw one and then get sorry he did it the next second—but the milk was spilled—"

"That'll be all, Huffner," Ormiston snapped, but there was a hollow ring in his usually powerful voice. "Trent, bring me those plays after the game. You better find them."

"And if I can't?" Honey Trent searched the faces all around him, studied many pairs of eyes. He remembered the costly mistakes he had made out on the field and he knew the other players were thinking of them too. He looked at Neal Carvath and saw the blocking back sitting there staring at the floor.

"Okay, Coach." He began to peel off. "These guys won't want me out there."

"You start the second half, Trent!" Ormiston said and fire blazed in his eyes. "Kenyon is losing. Get that in your thick head and ask yourself if that means anything to you!"

Trent pulled his jersey back in place. He smiled icily and thrust out his jaw.

"I'll show you some football, Whitey. I'll even that score if I'm carried out on a shutter."

"We will, Trent," Pumps Nagle corrected. "This is not a one-man show. I'll run things out there while I'm in and if you pull any more prima donna stuff, I'll be the first to slug you!"

Ormiston looked over his players. There never had been an angrier bunch on any field. He knew they were not sure of Honey Trent. He knew every one of them would play a better game than was really in him to pull Kenyon out of a booby trap.

They filed out slowly, but all broke into a run when they hit the concrete ramp. The blocking back, Carvath, felt a tug at his

sleeve. He held back and looked into Honey Trent's sombre face.

"You know the spot I'm in, Farmer," Honey said, almost pleading. "I'll need all the help you can give me."

An unusual brightness appeared in the farmer boy's eyes. This was what he had been seeking for a long time. A vote of confidence from this man he had always looked up to.

"You'll get it, Trent. We're a team—one's not so hot without the other."

"I can't produce those plays, Farmer. I know now what Tony Sabo meant when—the night I took her riding—she asked for my topcoat," Honey Trent said as they ran along. "I can't ever prove it."

"I believe you, Trent," Carvath said.

"Only a dumb farmer would." Honey Trent put on speed and the crowd's great roar met him. The roar that was meat and drink to him—when they roared for him.

OHIO SOUTHERN kicked off. Whitey Ormiston, a fresh wad of gum in his mouth, sat very still and waited to be shown. He saw Honey Trent pick up Jackman's boot on his twelve and then fight his way to his own thirty-nine. An Ohio Southern tackler did not get up for awhile.

Kenyon came out of the huddle quickly and Pumps Nagle sent Huffner between tackle and guard for six yards. From a fake pass formation, Honey Trent, with a madman from a farm opening up the right side of Ohio's line, smashed across the midfield stripe with two tacklers hanging on. Kenyon's starved rooters began to turn on the heat.

Ormiston suddenly realized that Carmody was not on Ohio Southern's bench. The man walking up and down over there was the Ohio line coach. He hoped the Ohio Southern players would talk out there. When he pulled one of his players, maybe he could find out something.

After an Ohio Southern time out, Kenyon got set for the attack. Pumps Nagle was conserving his big guns with consummate skill. He sent Huffner's two hundred pounds on an off-tackle play that picked up four yards. Slowly, Ohio Southern was moving back.

On the next play, the team shifted to the right, but it was Trent hitting at the same spot softened up by Huffner. He made a first down and the Kenyon rooters started going crazy.

Pumps Nagle took the pass from center, faked it to Huffner, who went roaring through tackle. Honey Trent cut past Nagle and took the ball and followed Carvath, who plowed like a mad bull through the Ohio Southern defense. They were not stopped

until they reached Ohio's eight-yard line.

Krakasek and Carvath tumbled out of bounds together. Krakasek was on top of the farmer and as Carvath pushed him away, the Ohio back grinned.

"We fixed Carmody. We put it to him straight—we flattened him and frisked him, Carvath—here, stow this somewhere in your pants."

It happened very quickly. Krakasek stuffed a wad of paper under the blocking back's jersey and then got to his feet and trotted out onto the field. Trent reached down.

"You hurt, Farmer?"

"Never felt better in my life," Carvath said. "Let's take it over."

"I haven't seen the Ohio coach," Trent told the other players when they huddled. "Carmody hasn't been out since the half started—"

"Jackman had a cut over his nose when he came out for the half," Pumps Nagle said. "There wasn't a mark on him when he walked off at—"

The ref set Kenyon back five yards for too much time in the huddle.

Ormiston squirmed on the bench. Trent carried on the first play and the farmer led him to Ohio's three-yard line after bowling over three green-shirted giants. From the three, Tiny Huffner catapulted over the farmer's rump and fell in the end zone. Kenyon had scored after a steady bruising march straight from the kickoff.

Kenyon lined up. Pumps Nagle held the ball for the try for the all-important extra point. Trent kicked and the ball was blocked and Ohio's banked stands roared their approval. Honey kicked at the sod and the tears came into his eyes.

"What's a point?" Carvath yelled. "What good is a tie? We haven't started playing yet."

It was Ohio's turn to roll. Their quarterback ran the kickoff back eleven yards to his own twenty-six. Here Jackman and Krakasek and a scatback named Rigman tried to smash through Kenyon's line. Jackman and Krakasek picked up just a yard and a half between them.

Rigman on the third try knifed through for seven yards and was lifted high into the air by Carvath and brought to earth with a thud. As the farmer gave him a hand, the scatback grinned.

"Why didn't you go to Ohio, Kid? Tell Ormiston Carmody's on a train heading east."

"Thanks, pal," Carvath said. "It isn't going to be as sweet licking you guys as we thought. It took sand to do what you guys did."

"Teamwork," Jackman grinned and trotted off.

The crowd kept getting to their feet for the rest of that quarter. Time after time, Honey Trent and Carvath tore into and through Ohio's vaunted forward wall. A fumble stopped Kenyon on Ohio's eight just as the quarter ended and Honey Trent dropped to the ground and beat his fists against the churned sod. There was a cut on his cheek. Half of his jersey was ripped away. "We got another fifteen minutes, Trent," Pumps Nagle said. "Don't blow your top!"

Ormiston's blocking back dropped down beside Honey Trent. "Here, Honey," the farmer said. "Plant this on you—quick." He handed Trent the wad of paper. "You'll want to turn it in to the coach after the game."

Honey Trent's mouth popped open. "You mean it—it's—"

"It sure is," the farmer grinned.

"How?"

"Teamwork all around, Honey."

CHAPTER V

Teamwork

OHIO SOUTHERN, buoyed up by the break in the game, lined up quickly when play was resumed. Jackman and Krakasek found no openings in a stubborn Kenyon line. Jackman dropped back and sent a long booming punt to Kenyon's forty-yard stripe. Ohio had a point to preserve. They were taking no chances of a fumble deep in their territory.

It was then that Honey Trent and his blocking back really went to work. Carvath operated with a fury that stunned both rooting sections. He was tearing out the openings in the Green line for Honey Trent to slip through. Trent carried twenty-two yards in three straight plays.

Huffner eased Honey Trent's burden and went through a tiring Ohio line for four big yards. On the next play, Neal Carvath tore the Green opposition to shreds and shook Honey Trent loose in the Ohio secondary.

Trent displayed to all concerned what he could really do on his own as he galloped the rest of the way. Two tacklers got him on the five but he dragged them over into pay dirt with him. Kenyon was out in front 12-7, and a sickening stillness gripped the home side of the great stadium.

Carvath was still down. The trainer came out and looked the farmer over. He waved to Whitey Ormiston. Frohm came in for Kenyon. Usman took Trent's place. Usman had done some nice kicking for Kenyon. This time the ball glanced off his toe and

the score remained the same.

Ohio Southern was not through. Jackman, after running the kickoff up to his thirty-six, crossed Kenyon with a first down pass that was caught by Ohio's crack wingman on Kenyon's forty. Huffner finally brought the end down on Kenyon's twenty-seven and the stadium rocked. Ormiston and Honey Trent squirmed on the bench.

"I feel okay, Coach," Carvath said. "I got a lot of stuff left. We've got to—"

"Easy," Ormiston said. He looked at the clock. Nine minutes to go.

Krakasek picked up three yards. Jackman faded back and shot a low pass to his right end. It clicked beautifully and Ohio Southern was on the Kenyon thirteen. Kenyon took time out.

"Go in and stop it, Honey," Ormiston said. "Go in, Carvath."

Pumps Nagle pounded his linemen on their rumps. "We can hold!" he yelled.

Jackman, however, did not want a try at the Kenyon line. He faded back and, on his thirty, fired into the end zone. An Ohio player leaped high, caught the ball and fell into the turf with six more points for Southern.

Kenyon, fighting mad, lined up and rushed the try for point. The ball caromed off the kicker's toe and went wide.

"We've got to do it all over again, Farmer," Honey Trent said.

"We've got time," Carvath ground out.

Jackman kicked off. It was high and by the time Trent caught it on his own nineteen the big Green tacklers were swarming around him. But there were a few Kenyon huskies in there and one was called the farmer boy.

He rode a big Ohio player out of Honey's path, catapulted him into another. The hole made was big enough for Honey Trent to knife through. He got up to the thirty-yard line, cut for the sidelines and stepped along to midfield before he was swarmed over by five Ohio tacklers.

The farmer limped when he took his position. There was blood on his nose. He breathed short and hard! But he was grinning wide. Pumps Nagle gave Huffner a shot at Ohio's weak side and the power back made himself three-and-a-half yards. Huffner went to work again, assuming the white man's burden until Trent and Carvath got a little moxie back. He only made a yard. Time was running out.

It was third down. It had to be Honey Trent and his blocking back. Pumps aimed a beautiful cross-buck just inside Captain Eddie Lund's position and Carvath led Honey through a gap to a first down on Ohio Southern's thirty-eight. Again the farmer got up. There was fog in his head.

"You can have it, Honey," he said to Trent. "All the help you need from—"

Up in the stands they said the farmer boy was through. Ormiston should have his head examined for leaving him in. But it was Carvath two plays later, hammering and bulling and clawing his way through tiring Green linesmen with Honey riding along close to his rump to the twenty-four-yard line.

The ball was twenty yards in and Pumps Nagle called for a try around Ohio Southern's end. He called it from a fake pass formation. Here was the spot for a pass. Ohio Southern defended against the pass. There were only three minutes left.

The thousands in the stands rose to their feet when they saw that Kenyon was not going to pass. Honey Trent was booming around Ohio Southern's left side with a screen of Kenyon blockers before him, with the farmer roaring out in front.

Carvath rode two big Green men out of his path and Honey Trent cut in only ten yards from the sidelines, ran over the blocker and fought his way right up to the Ohio Southern one-foot marker.

The farmer did not hear the great roar that came out of Kenyon rooters' throats. He was finished for that afternoon.

THEY helped Carvath off the field and Honey Trent stood and listened to fifty thousand people shout the farmer's name. If they hadn't, he would have run over and into the stands and found out why.

Tiny Huffner pawed at the turf like a mad bull. It was time for his bulk to take over—a foot to go through a desperate Ohio Southern line.

"Glue that ball to you, Tiny," Honey Trent said. "You got four tries."

"We win," Huffner said.

Neal Carvath sat beside Ormiston, tired and battered.

"That Honey Trent! What a ball carrier. He set it up for Huffner."

"He'll miss you, Farmer," Ormiston said. "It will be tough for him when college is over. Trent is the kind of guy—"

The great roar of sound welled up from the stadium when Huffner catapulted through Ohio Southern's stubborn defense and pushed the ball over. The score went up. Kenyon 18-Ohio Southern 13. There were less than a minute and a half to play.

"Coach," Carvath said. "Something happened in the Ohio locker room. Carmody is on the train going east."

"I heard," Whitey said and a great big grin wreathed his face. He lost it when he saw Honey Trent make it nineteen points for Kenyon a few minutes later.

"But that doesn't alter the fact that—" He

clamped his jaw tight and got ready to leave the bench. The big crowd was leaving the stadium when a dejected Ohio team spread out to receive the kickoff.

Jackman took Usman's low kick on his twenty-five and fought like a tiger to his forty-one. Ohio Southern lined up and Jackman faded back. He threw a long long pass that was far beyond the reach of a speeding Green wingman. And then the gun went off.

Kenyon's victorious team piled into the locker room. They mauled the farmer. They told Honey Trent they thought he played a whale of a football game, but there was a reservation in their actions that was significant. Honey Trent went to his locker and then came back to where Ormiston sat.

"Here, Coach. I found the plays," he said.

Breaths were quickly sucked in—and held. Whitey Ormiston's sighed out first. He took the wad of paper from his running back and spread it open.

"Yeah, Honey," he said. "They are yours."

He quickly shoved them into his pocket, wiped a hand on the front of his sweatshirt. He glanced at the farmer. Carvath was not looking at him. He was getting a gash on his leg touched up.

"Teamwork," Ormiston said. "All around. It's what counts everywhere. We had it today—all around. Can we beat State?"

Honey Trent called at the Commons Club to see the farmer that evening.

"You sure put me over this afternoon, Kid. You beat your brains out for me. I—"

Carvath flushed and squirmed in his chair.

"I did the job I was cut out for, Trent," he said. "I wasn't ever cut out to put myself up front. Some of us have to work in the background so that guys like you—"

"Yeah," Honey said. "Kid, I got to admit it. I like to shine. I like to be where they'll notice me. I don't think I'll ever change. But one thing, Farmer. You got more real stuff than I'll ever have."

"You were the best man out there today and they told you plainly. I'll be glad when it's over here at Kenyon. I've been losing top billing fast. In some other line, I'll—"

The door opened and Whitey Ormiston came in. He sat down and rubbed his nose.

"You are a lucky guy, Trent. Nobody else noticed that the wad of paper was covered with sweat when you gave it to me. That topcoat of yours sure sweated that last score in."

"If you still think Honey sold out, I'll tell you what I'll do, Coach," Neal Carvath said.

"I'll go over and see that Sabo and slap the truth out of him. I'll go right now."

Ormiston was aghast. Trent spoke in a small tight voice.

"He'd do it, too, Coach. You'd do that for

me, Farmer?"

"It's up to you Mr. Ormiston," Carvath said.

"I've figured it the same way, Trent," Ormiston said. "But I've been thinking how many other guys on this team would believe it. Those Ohio Southern guys helped you out a lot this afternoon. The story is out.

"The team he coached nearly tore Carmody in a hundred pieces. Jackman beat it out of him. It's nice to think about, isn't it, guys? When people pull together like that to get rid of a rotten setup—"

"That's why a war is coming at us," Honey Trent said. "I'll go for those Spitfires."

"Always top man," Ormiston said. "But you'll still need a guy like the farmer to smooth your way a little. You think we'll beat State?"

THE inscription on the gold football said Kenyon 20-State 9, 1941. Then there were the initials N.L.C. Honey Trent looked out through the opening in the canvas tent and saw the backwash of the battle the farmer and his bunch had fought.

They were burying Japs the big guy and the other leathernecks had blocked out. Trent could hear an airplane turning over high in the sky and it had an American sound. The field over there beyond the ruins of Jap installations was Uncle Sam's.

"It was teamwork, Farmer," Captain Trent of the Air Corps said, "like Whitey Ormiston never saw. Where is he now?"

The marine bit his teeth when the pain got a little tough.

"Didn't you know? On a flat-top with Halsey's gang. Somehow he sneaked in. Sure, we opened the way for you highflying big shots. Now start carrying the ball to Tokio."

The pilot laid a hand gently on Carvath's shoulder.

"We make a team, don't we, Kid? Nothing can stop us."

Carvath smiled up at Honey Trent.

"You said 'us' Honey. Maybe that good ear of mine isn't working too well."

"Yeah, I did, didn't I, Farmer? I must be losing my grip. I better go back to the field and read some of the clippings they sent me from home. I got to keep up my morale.

Stick with it, Farmer. They never could keep you down."

"Thanks, Captain. Say, who is leading knocking off Jap aerials in your outfit?"

"Need you ask, Farmer?" Captain Honey Trent got up and thrust his chest out a little when a tired but still pretty nurse came to look at Carvath. She said, "You must go now, Captain."

"Sure, Baby. But I'll be back. It must have been pretty lonesome for you here—up to now."

"Pretty sure of himself," the nurse said, when Honey had gone. "He loves him very much."

"A top man," Carvath said. "I wish I had his stuff. I don't want to see him change. When we were trained for this war we kept our real selves and that's why we're winning, Nurse. The other guys were told not to think and they're losing fast. Their coaches can't do their thinking for them when the chips are down. How long am I goin' to be kept on the sidelines?"

"Maybe two or three weeks."

The stuff the nurse gave the farmer began to work. Carvath slipped away and he mumbled, "Look, tell Whitey I can be in there tomorrow. Nobody else can show Trent the way—"

Later, a doctor spoke to the nurse.

"Sure, Carvath. One of the best football players Kenyon ever had. I saw him play against Ohio Southern. A blocking back—"

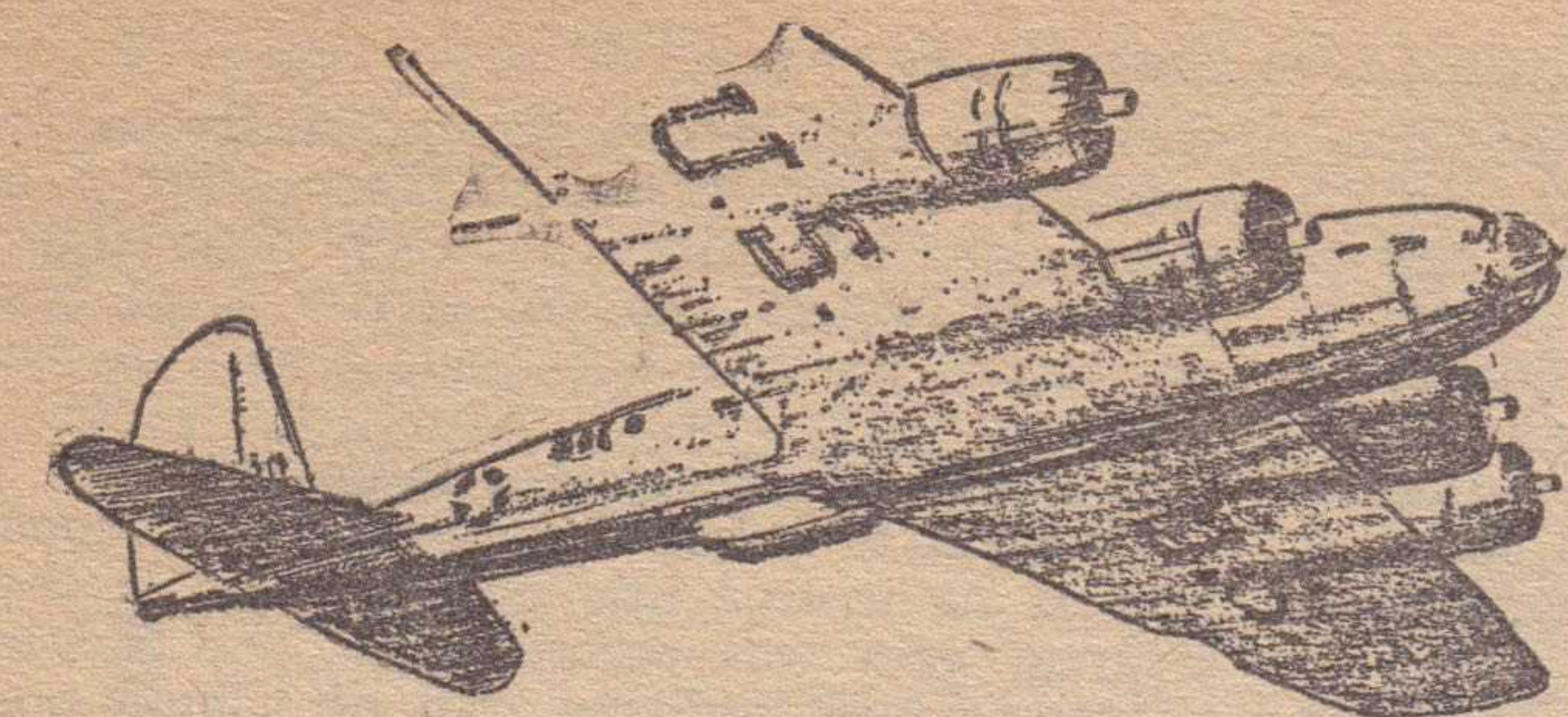
The nurse had seen plenty of football games back in Iowa. She thought of Honey Trent when she looked down at the sleeping leatherneck.

"That's right, Doctor," she said. "They're doing a good job here."

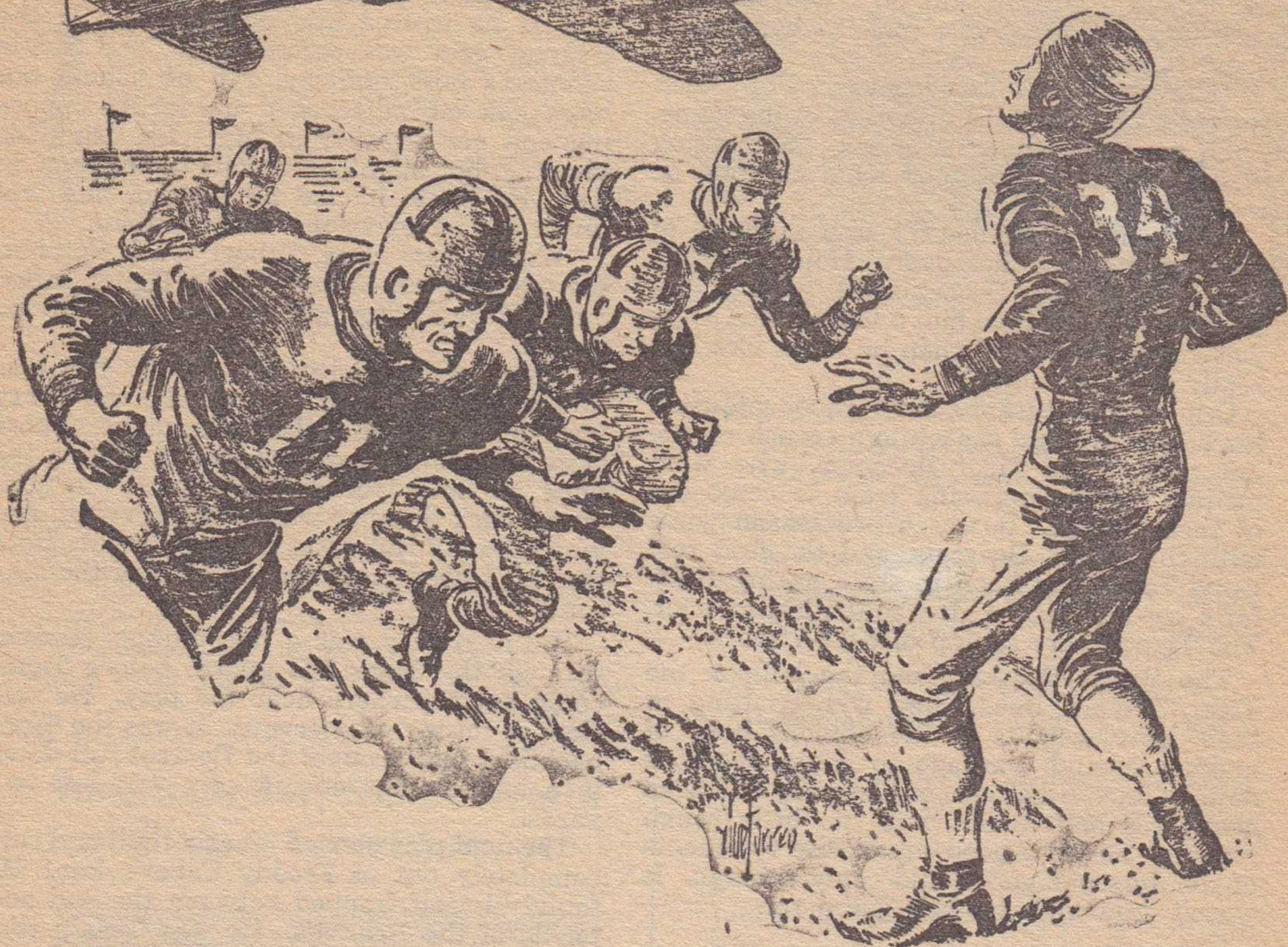
She picked up the little gold football and turned it over and over with her fingers. Here was the answer to it all, the relentless rolling of the juggernaut toward Japan. It represented millions of American kids who had learned teamwork—learned it the American way.

Her eyes were moist when she put the football down. After the war, when she got married and if she had a son, he would play football. She looked down at Carvath before she walked out of there. And she hoped the kid would go to Kenyon and be a blocking back.

GRIDIRON GAMBLE, a Complete Football Novelet by William Heuman—PILE DRIVER, a Gridiron Novelet by Sam Merwin, Jr.—and other Headliners in the Fall issue of Exciting Sports—10c Everywhere!



There above them winged the
Fortress, which seemed to go
out of control



Wings Over the Gridiron

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Freddy Tabor of the Jersey Tigers had his own little private war to win—and it took his mind off the game!

DANNY HOLTZ, manager of the Jersey Tigers, glanced down the players' bench and let his eyes come to rest on a freckle-faced redhead.

"Go play left end, Tabor," he said.

The redhead didn't appear to hear. He sat there as one transfixed, his eyes fixed on a Flying Fortress circling about in the blue sky a mile away.

Holtz scowled and compressed his lips.

"Tabor!" he barked. "You want to try out for this team, or do you want to join the Air Forces? Go play left end!"

The redhead jumped. His face went the same color as his hair. He grabbed up his headguard and nodded violently.

"Yes, sir!" He went bounding out to the gridiron.

"A queer bird, that kid," commented "Pop" Allen, the team's trainer, who sat next to Holtz on the bench. "A sleep-walker half of the time. Where'd you get him?"

"I didn't," the manager said. "He just came to the field a couple of weeks ago and asked for a chance to try out. He's got a good build. He looked a likeable kid, so I said okay. A man has got to take a look at everything these days."

"The war won't last forever," Pop Allen grunted, returning his attention to the game. Then, as an afterthought, he said, "Something about the kid I like, too. Kind of hope he makes it."

"He won't, if he doesn't stop gawking at every plane that flies over," Holtz growled. "He's worse than Gomez used to be in the Yankee box. I'll give him a fair chance, anyway. Every now and then he looks like he's really got something."

Out on the turf, Freddy Tabor adjusted his headguard and sank into a crouch on the left end of the Tiger linesmen, who were waiting for the opposing team to come out of their huddle. It was a pre-season game with the Bronx Bearcats, and the first real game Tabor had been in since asking Holtz for a try-out chance. It was the last quarter. The Tigers were on top of a 14-7 score.

The Bronx Bearcats had the ball on the Tiger 30-yard line. They were putting in their heavyweights in the obvious hope of making enough yardage to drive over the double-line. All afternoon the going had been heavy for both teams, with no little rough playing. Given a good break, the opponents of the Jersey Tigers could come through. It wasn't anybody's football game yet.

TABOR flexed his knees, rubbed dirt on his hands, adjusted his headguard again. He was trying to shut his ears to the droning roar of the four engines of the Flying Fortress in the distance. He shivered slightly, cussed under his breath and watched the Bearcats come bounding from their huddle to line up.

The play was a fake run around Tabor's end. He accepted it for the real thing. He quickly figured that the Bearcats were counting on him being cold and easy. He lunged forward, between the opposing end and tackle, bent on stopping their quarterback behind the line. But the Bearcat quarterback moved only a few paces, halted, then passed.

It was a short, low throw that went right over Tabor's head. He heard the alarmed cries of his teammates. He had let the Bearcat end loose without cover. Tabor whirled in desperation. He was just in time to see the Bearcat end leap into the air and snare the pass.

Tabor was too late to do anything now but

watch the foe, whom he was supposed to cover, go racing off toward the sideline at a steep slant into Tiger territory. The Tiger halfbacks brought the ball-carrier down, but not before the man had made a gain of ten yards.

"First down," the referee called out.

The eyes of Tabor's teammates were upon him as he trotted into position. While the Bearcat gain was certainly not the rookie redhead's fault entirely, still he should not have gone off half-cocked and let the opposing end get away from him. By using his savvy, Tabor might have done better than he had. He knew it, and he felt hot and wet under his jersey in the afternoon sun.

"Watch them close, Tabor!" Jack Spinner, the quarterback captain of the Tigers, called out. "Forget any girl you've got in the stands."

Tabor had no girl in the stands. Nor was he thinking of the spectators, who were very few this hot September afternoon. There were newspapermen in the seats, getting the dope on both teams. They were the ones whom Jack Spinner was thinking about, and whom Danny Holtz was thinking about. Both wanted a good press for the start of the season.

The next play was a line plunge, straight through the Tiger left guard, before Tabor could get anywhere near the play. He was slow in getting off, nervous. It was the Tiger backfield that brought the Bearcat full down in a tangle. The enemy gain was but two yards.

The next play started off as a right end run, completely out of Freddy Tabor's ken. He found himself trapped between the end and tackle of the Bearcats. He was certain that he was out of the play when he went down. Had he been thinking more sharply, he might have grasped a special significance in the hard manner in which his opponents hit him. But as that right-end run of the Bearcat halfback started, Tabor had heard a sudden increase in the roaring of the distant Flying Fortress engines. He knew the plane was fast approaching the field as he struggled to get up from the hard blocking of the opposing end and tackle.

Tabor's eyes lifted skyward.

There the Fortress was above the end of the gridiron, coming around in a tight turn. For an instant, it seemed to drop like a winged rock, and go out of control.

Freddy Tabor was unaware of the shouts of his fellow players. Cold fear was clutching his heart. A stifled cry broke from his lips. Then, in the next instant, something hit him a stunning blow in the midsection, and he went down like a ton of brick, with a husky Bearcat attacker on top of him.

His wind knocked out of him, his chest and

legs numb, Tabor saw the Bearcat quarter leaping past him, following the interference of two players. The Bearcat play had been a cross that fooled the Tigers. The opposing ball runner was around Tabor's end and going strong for the Tiger goal line. Tabor rolled over on the earth, arms clutching his midriff, sick at heart and pained in body.

He never saw the Tiger fullback pull the Bearcat quarter down just over the goal line.

Again Tabor had failed, this time miserably. As his breath came in short gasps, several players ran up to him and kneeled.

"Just his wind knocked out," the Tiger left tackle said. "He's not hurt."

"Of all the dumb things I ever saw," another Tiger player remarked. "Where did Danny Holtz pick up this tenderfoot?"

"He cost us that touchdown," another said. "Here comes Jones to take his place."

Tabor didn't have to be told to give up his end. He climbed to his legs and started off the gridiron. He had lasted but three plays. He had cost the Tigers a touchdown. Now the score would be tied. Perhaps his chance at professional football was gone.

What a record! Three plays, and he was out!

The walk to the players' bench was miles long for the redhead. When he got there, he was set for a blast from Danny Holtz.

No blast came. Holtz wasn't that kind of a manager. He simply gave the redhead a long expressionless look, then immediately turned his attention to the point-kick being made by the Bearcats.

A shout went up from the bench and the stands.

The Bearcats missed the kick. The score wasn't tied. It was 14-13.

None of the players spoke to Freddy Tabor about this lucky break. They did with looks and twists of the mouth what words could have done. Tabor just sat on the bench, sore at himself, and desperately unhappy inside.

It was a relief when the final whistle blew, and the practice game was over, with the Tigers on top, by one point.

WITH the game over, Tabor trudged glum of face into the dressing rooms under the stands. Nobody said anything to him. Holtz ducked into his little office and disappeared.

The redhead dressed slowly, waiting for the manager to come out and say his say. But Holtz didn't come out.

Finally, as Tabor, fully dressed, was walking toward the street door, Pop Allen stepped over to him and spoke kindly.

"Forget it, Tabor," the old trainer said. "Everybody boots one once. Just don't do it twice. Keep your mind on the game, no matter what."

"If he gives me another chance," the redhead said with a look at Holtz's office door. Pop Allen didn't say anything to that. He just hunched one shoulder.

Tabor hesitated a moment, then went out to the street.

He was half-way to the bus stop when an Army Air Forces car drew up alongside the curb and stopped.

"Get in, Tabor. I'm going your way."

The redhead stopped abruptly, turned sharply at the sound of the voice of the uniformed man behind the wheel. He was a major, old enough to be Tabor's father. The redhead grinned, leaned over and swung the door open.

"Hello, sir," Tabor said, getting in. "Thanks. What are you doing over here?"

Major Banks shifted gears and moved the car away from the curb. He gave the redhead a quick searching side-glance, then looked ahead.

"Watching a football game," the officer said quietly. "I told you I'd be over one of these days."

Tabor felt the blood burn the skin of his face. He bit his lip and swallowed.

"Then I guess you saw," he said in a dull voice.

"So what?" the major asked without looking at him. "It takes time, Tabor. That's all been explained to you. It just takes time. You don't lick troubles like yours in a day or a month."

Tabor didn't say anything for several moments. He sat slumped in the front seat staring unseeing as the major weaved the car through traffic. Suddenly the redhead made sounds deep in his throat.

"That blasted Fortress pilot!" Tabor burst out savagely. "He would have to be kicking that thing around at just that time. But it probably would have been at some other time. I can't forget it, Major. I try, but I can't. Every time I see a Fortress, it comes back."

The redhead let his voice trail off in a groan. His face was drawn and strained. He looked ten years older than he was.

The officer behind the wheel gave him a side-glance, but didn't speak. He went on driving the car, silently and patiently waiting for the flood of words that had to come out. Major Banks had not been attached to an Air Forces Rehabilitation Center for nothing. He knew a whole lot about the bloodless wounds of war. He waited silently, and then, presently, the flood of words did come.

"I just can't forget it, no matter what I do!" Tabor said in bitter agony. "It was the twenty-fifth raid for both of us. The last one before going home. They wanted to break in that new waist-gunner with us in the *Lilly-Lou*. So they put him in Garry's slot, and

Garry went out with the *Dixie Lass*.

"They said it would be a milk-run, but they were wrong. It was black with flak, and Jerry fighters, too. But the *Lilly-Lou* and the *Dixie Lass* were lucky going out. It happened coming back. The Nazi fighters jumped us thick. Our fighters drove them off, but a couple got through.

"I saw the Jerry ship wheeling in, and I let him have it. But I missed. He crossed over the *Lilly-Lou* so close I could have spit in his eye. Then his guns, and those orange tracers were going into the *Dixie Lass*. Jerry got that chance all because I'd missed. And then right in front of my eyes!"

Tabor stopped talking and shuddered. Beads of sweat were on his face. They grew too heavy and trickled down his skin. His fingers interlaced with one another were bleach-white at the knuckles.

"And then there was nothing but chunks of the *Dixie Lass* going down through the smoke," he went on speaking in a hoarse voice. "I didn't see a single 'chute open. None of the crew did, either. Me, letting that Messerschmitt get by to whack at Garry in the *Dixie Lass*. Garry should by rights, have been along with me in the *Lilly-Lou*. A pilot just can't forget a thing like that, sir. It's no use."

"Well what, Tabor?" Major Banks asked quietly as the redhead stumbled over his words and fell silent.

"I don't mean I don't appreciate what you and the others have done for me at the Center, sir," Tabor blurted out. "I must have been something when I arrived from overseas. I was all shot, as if I'd stopped a whole flak-burst. After what I'd seen happen, all I wanted to do was go up to ten thousand and bail out with no 'chute. You saw what I was like. And it was you who helped me the most. Got me sort of straightened out."

THE redhead let the rest go with a heavy sigh and a shake of his head. The major spoke without looking at him.

"Would you rather come back to the Center and have a try at something else?" the officer asked quietly. "Now that you've tried it, maybe pro football isn't really what you want most."

"No, I still want most to play, sir," Tabor answered quickly. "And I know I'm good enough for Holtz's team, if I could only forget. Funny, but it's just seeing a Fortress that gets me. Any other type of plane doesn't bother me at all. But that one today, it started to flop over as I saw the *Dixie Lass* do, before there was nothing but smoke and chunks. It got me. I couldn't help myself. I expected Holtz to toss me out for good. He didn't say a thing, though, but he must think I'm a quitter."

"Perhaps if you told him your story," Major Banks suggested.

"No," Tabor said almost viciously. "I don't want it that way. I don't want any of them to know I was over there and did my twenty-five missions. They'd beat me with questions. I don't want to talk about it. I'm practically a civilian now. I *am* a civilian. If only I could get the feeling that Garry got out of the *Dixie Lass* and is okay!"

"I've told you that the chances are he did, and that he's probably a prisoner somewhere," the major said calmly. "The way all Germany is now, it's more difficult than ever for the Red Cross to check on prisoners."

"But, it's as I told you, sir," Tabor broke in. "It wasn't over Jerry territory. We were well over our own lines, almost to the Channel, when the *Dixie Lass* caught it. I've tried to tell myself that, but it's no go. If Garry got out, I'd know it by now. Somebody would let me know, his folks or one of the gang still over there."

Major Banks opened his mouth to speak, but decided against it. A few minutes later he tooled the car into the curb in front of the house where Tabor had a room.

Killing the engine, the major turned in the seat and looked at the redhead. A great deep sympathy showed in his eyes, but his voice was quite matter-of-fact.

"It's something that only you can lick, Tabor," he said. "Only you can get that memory out of your mind. And you've got to do that. Your whole life is before you. You're sound of body and mind. It's just something that you keep building up in your imagination. Something that you'll have to lick and can. Your type of case isn't new to me. There have been others. They licked it in time. But as I said—"

The officer left it a half-spoken question. Tabor shook his head.

"No, I'll stick it as long as Holtz will let me," the redhead said grimly. "Play pro football is what I've always wanted to do most. Maybe one day I'll suddenly be okay, if Holtz lets me stay around that long. No, Major, at least I won't quit until Holtz makes me."

"Good going," the officer said, and he smiled. "When is the next exhibition game?"

The redhead thought for a moment, then a shadow crossed his strained face.

"Friday," he said. "And it's going to be tough, if Holtz does give me a chance to play. I don't mean the game. I mean me. We play the Standard Aircraft team over at their Long Island plant."

The major looked puzzled, then his face cleared.

"Oh, I see," he murmured. "Standard manufactures hydro controls for The Fortress."

"Yes," Tabor said, and he licked his lips. "There should be plenty of them buzzing around on test. It's going to make me think, whether I'm on the bench or out in line. But it'll probably be the bench after that one today."

"Well, don't count on the bench," the major said mysteriously. He reached for the ignition key. "And, Tabor, try keeping this thought in your head. Garry Adams was your closest buddy. No matter what happened to him, he'd want you to go on and make the grade at whatever you are doing. You'd feel that way about him, wouldn't you?"

"Sure I would!" the redhead exclaimed. "Garry was the very best."

The officer switched on the engine, and paused long enough to rest a hand on Tabor's knee.

"Then don't let him down, boy," Major Banks said softly. "He wouldn't like it, wherever he is. I'll be seeing you again."

"So long, sir, and thanks," the redhead said as he got out of the car.

ON HIS way back to the Rehabilitation Center Major Banks stopped at a drug store and made a phone call. As a result of that call he did not arrive back at the Center until close to midnight.

At about that time, Freddy Tabor was tossing and turning in his bed, wide awake yet dog-tired both physically and mentally. Eventually he did slip off into a half-sleep, but only to dream of countless Flying Fortresses going down in flames, while Danny Holtz circled crazily about in a Messerschmitt fighter.

At dawn, the redhead was more exhausted than when he had climbed into bed.

A queer sense of dread seeped through his bones. For a while, he debated even showing up at the Tiger field for the daily session. He felt sure that today Holtz would say and do the things that he had not said and done yesterday.

Eventually, though, he argued himself out of the mood and went out to the field.

Nothing happened, much to his puzzled amazement. With the other members of the squad he went through the usual setting-up routine, and later played left end for a period between the A and B teams.

He didn't do badly, nor did he do well, either. And several times, when he caught Holtz's expressionless eyes fixed on him, he was sure that this was it. But it wasn't.

Holtz didn't make a single mention of his playing against the Bearcats the day before. The manager seemed to have forgotten Tabor's boner completely.

As for the other members of the squad, none of them said anything, either. But that was to be expected, because each man was

too occupied with clinching himself a place on the team payroll to waste time making comments on a rookie's blunder.

As a result of it, the end of the day found Tabor's hopes and spirits soaring upward once more. But not too high, because there was the game to be played two days hence with the Standard Aircraft team. For him, it would be the one and final test.

If Tabor could concentrate every bit of his attention on the game, and succeed in ignoring the Fortresses that were bound to be roaring overhead on test flights, he knew that he would be able to show Holtz enough of his playing ability to cause the manager to keep him on.

The player-limit date was drawing close. The axe was beginning to fall on the necks of those who didn't interest Holtz.

But could Tabor concentrate every bit of his attention on the game? The words flew through his head as he climbed into bed the night before the game. A wry smile twisted his lips in the darkness, a little, aching lump formed in his chest.

Concentrate on the game from the bench, or from the field? His common sense told him that it would not be from the field. The Standard outfit had a good team. Four of its members were former professionals who had gone into war work. Holtz would want to win this one bad, so the chances were that Tabor wouldn't so much as set a foot on the gridiron.

Feeling that way, though desperately not wanting to, the redhead was all the more surprised when arriving at the Standard field, he learned that he was down for left end in Holtz's starting line-up.

So great was Tabor's surprise that for the first quarter he actually did succeed in being blind to everything save what was taking place on the gridiron. Of course, that could have been due to the fact that not a single Fortress took off from the factory test-strip a few miles away.

At any rate, for the first quarter Tabor performed as well as could be expected of anybody. He had speed, savvy and no little courage. In high school he had run up quite a reputation for himself as a pass man. He had the long leap of a basketball player. After snaring the pigskin in the sky with sure fingers, he could land running. He was also good at getting away from cover.

Twice, Tabor nailed the oval from out of the clouds. Twice, he gained excellent yardage for the Tigers when it was most needed. And on the defensive, he was squirming through the opposition and pegging the Standard ball-runner so fast that it soon became apparent to the rival team that Tabor's end was no go.

As the teams traded sides for the second

quarter, Freddy Tabor was thinking and acting football with every brain cell and nerve in his hardened frame. Danny Holtz was leaving him in the game. The redhead forgot the manager. He was concentrating on stopping the Standard eleven until the Tigers could get the ball.

And then, as though at a signal from an evil mind, the Flying Fortresses started roaring on the nearby field. They came thundering up for altitude on a course that took them directly over the gridiron and drowned out the shouts of the Saturday afternoon crowd in the stands.

The old clammy-horror came back to Tabor, stronger than ever. He tried desperately not to look up at the huge bomber roaring above, but the plane was a powerful magnet that his eyes could not resist.

"Come on, Tabor," Jack Spinner shouted. "Forget those ships. Watch this next play. It might be pass instead of a kick."

"I'm watching," the redhead called back, digging his cleats into the turf.

But Tabor wasn't watching. The Standard play was not a kick. Jack Spinner had called it correctly. It was a pass. It was scheduled for the Standard right end, who broke clean away from Tabor and went racing at a slant into Tiger territory. Tabor found himself plunging in to block the fake kick, despite the fact that Spinner had warned him. The roar of the big plane's motors was in Tabor's ears. He saw the Standard quarterback catch the ball from center, step backward, then whirl and make his pass.

The pigskin spun over Tabor's head as the Tigers shouted at him. Tabor halted, turned, trying to follow the flight of the football with his eyes. But he was still thinking of the Fortress overhead. He was seeing the *Lilly-Lou* go down in flames in France, and not the pass that spun into the arms of the Standard end, who went racing on down the field for a touchdown.

A FRESH Tiger player came running out to the field, spoke to the referee, then went over to Freddy Tabor and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Too bad, kid," the newcomer said. "I'm relieving you."

Danny Holtz was not going to let Freddy Tabor remain in the game to boot two more plays, as Tabor had done against the Bearcats.

"Holtz must suspect," Tabor said to himself as he trotted off the playing field.

But when the redhead took the bench, Holtz didn't look at him. It was just a repetition of what had happened during the game with the Bearcats.

When the redhead's eyes sought the manager and Pop Allen, the trainer, the pair were

looking the other way. So were the substitute players. It was no comfort to Tabor that the new left end didn't cover himself with glory. The Standard eleven kicked the goal and the game began again.

But Tabor's mind was on the test flights of the Fortresses. He couldn't keep his eyes away. He couldn't watch the plays. He was only dimly conscious of the fact that the Tigers came through in the second half of the game with four touchdowns, breaking the aircraft company players into pieces.

Danny Holtz never put Freddy Tabor back into play, never spoke to him in the dressing room. And there was no consoling word from Pop Allen as the redhead left the field. No automobile with Major Banks to drive him home.

That night, Tabor seriously considered getting in touch with Major Banks, and going back to the Center for reassignment to training for some kind of manual or office work where memories would not be such a hindrance. But he had no idea what he wanted to do. Before enlisting he had been driving a department store delivery truck. He certainly didn't want to go back to that.

Frankly, Tabor didn't want to do anything except what he was doing now. Play pro football. It had been the dream of all his years. And so, as hopeless as it seemed to him, he doggedly chose to stick it out until Danny Holtz nodded and the axe did fall.

To his increasing amazement the Tigers' manager did not nod, and the axe did not fall. The days passed by, totaling a week, and Holtz still didn't do anything about Tabor. The redhead was treated exactly the same as any other member of the squad.

He even played a period in a couple of games. It so happened that on both days not a single Flying Fortress crossed the blue sky. And so on those days he was able to keep memories battened down tight and show more of what he really had in him than in all the other times put together.

But at last the so-called day of days finally arrived. The day of the last game before the squad would be cut to the regulation player limit. It was a game with the Boston Blues at the Tigers' home field, and every man on the squad knew that, come nightfall, seven of them would be packing their bags and buying bus or railroad tickets for places elsewhere.

During morning practice something happened that left Freddy Tabor with a sense of impending doom. A hedge-hopping Flying Fortress came in so low over the park that the prop-wash made the park flags flutter out. Tabor was catching passes at the time, and he sweated so after the thunderous roar had passed on that the pigskin tore through his fingers.

By game time he had regained some of his calm, but not any great amount of it. As a matter of fact, when he learned that he was not down for the starting line-up, he took it as the hand-writing on the wall, though all of him fought bitterly against the thought.

At the start of play, he sat on the bench with some of the others, still wildly hopeful, but with doubt and increasing certainty gnawing at his vitals.

The park was filled. A whole section right in back of the Tiger bench was jammed to capacity with service men let in free with the compliments of the Tiger front office. Not way out in the bleachers, like at some parks, but right in the middle of the home team's sideline.

The roars of approval they let loose at any and every move by a Tiger player clearly expressed their winning hopes and the appreciation of the courtesy extended them. Their noise drifted down to Tabor, and a strange sort of home sickness welled up in him. He rid himself of the feeling, though, and shut his ears to the exuberance of the boys in khaki.

WITH every man's job more or less hanging on his play, the Tigers flew at the visiting team and gave out with everything they had. However, the Blues were major leaguers. For the first quarter, the Tiger efforts were not just quite enough. They did collect a drop kick, but the Boston Blues pounded across the Tiger goal line and then made the kick, so that at the end of the period the score stood 7-3, in favor of the visitors.

Freddy Tabor, like all the others warming the bench, glanced hopefully at Holtz sitting beside Pop Allen. A few times one of the players got the nod, but by the start of the second half Holtz's eyes hadn't so much as come to rest on Tabor's face once. Certainty did seem certainty to him, now. A moment later, Tabor suddenly saw a winging Flying Fortress come across high from the direction of Long Island. A harsh laugh started up in his throat. It was suddenly choked off, though, when he heard his name called.

"Tabor!"

He jerked his head around, not believing his ears. It was true, though. Danny Holtz's eyes were on him and the manager was speaking.

"Warm up, Tabor," the manager was saying. "You're going in for Jones."

Tabor blinked hard, like a man suddenly jerked out of a deep sleep. And in a way he felt like that, too. He suddenly had no recollection of the past few minutes. He had no idea where his thoughts had been. His jaw almost dropped when he looked out at the playing field and saw that the Tigers had the ball in Blue territory, and that the score-

board showed 14-10 in favor of the visitors at the start of the last quarter.

"Snap out of it, Tabor!" Holtz barked. "Show me this time."

The redhead gulped, nodded and scooped up a headguard as he leaped from the bench. The whole park was in a sudden uproar as the Tiger halfback tore around the Blue end and was pegged down. Tabor danced as if skipping rope to get his legs loose. He ran down the sideline and came back fast, dodging the shadows. And as he flexed his knees near Danny Holtz, a clear and strong voice called to him from the stand.

"Tabor! Freddy Tabor! Hey, Freddy!"

Every muscle in him froze stiff, save his eyes. They flew toward the khaki packed section behind the bench. They flew there and fastened on an Air Forces sergeant dancing up and down right next to the guard railing, and waving both arms like crazy. One look at that waving wildman and the game suddenly became something that didn't even exist for Tabor. He let out a matching yell and tore over to the railing.

"Garry!" he bellowed. "Garry Adams! You!"

The words choked up in his throat and wouldn't come out as he joyfully pounded the Air Forces sergeant on the back, and got pounded on his own back in return. Then the words spilled from his mouth in a flood.

"Garry, you're dead! I saw that ME get the *Dixie Lass*. I saw it come apart. I tried for that German, Garry, but I missed. But, hey, what happened? You got out?"

"Sure, we got out, all of us!" Adams cried. "Always said I'd never catch one, didn't I? But, you're nuts. You got that ME, fellow! It was him exploding you saw, not us. But we caught flak at just about the same time. Blew us apart but didn't hurt anybody. We all came down in a French village. Didn't know where we were, and got separated."

"The Jerries weren't all cleaned out in that area, so we had to duck into hiding. Three months, it took us to get out of there. I tried to locate you in England, but I was sent to a hospital, and didn't return to the old field. I and some others just landed yesterday. Back for keeps, boy. Some USO man offers us this game for free, so here I am. Boy, when I suddenly saw you, I had no idea that you were with this team. Knew you wanted to try for ball after you got back. But, how did you—"

Sergeant Adams didn't have the chance to finish the question. At that moment a heavy hand fell on Tabor's shoulder and a bull voice roared in his ears.

"Get out there and play, or go buy a ticket and sit where you should."

Tabor spun around to meet the glaring eyes of Danny Holtz. Memory of the game in-



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stantly returned. The redhead jerked his eyes back to Garry Adams and stabbed a forefinger at him.

"Stay put, right there!" Tabor shouted above the roar of the stands. "I'll be seeing you right after the game. Don't move. I'll meet you right here."

By then Holtz's mouth was open again, but Tabor didn't give him a chance to say anything. The redhead sprinted across the grid-iron toward the referee, who was watching the Blue team come out of its huddle. The air was filled with the cries of the spectators now, but Tabor didn't hear them. His hand seemed to be filled with clanging bells and fire whistles.

Panting for breath, he spoke to the referee, then bounded to relieve Jones at left end.

TAKING his crouch, he waited for the ball to be snapped to the Boston Blue back-field. There was a Fortress overhead, but Tabor didn't even know it. He was thinking of football, of his chance to make the pro league, of showing what kind of stuff he had to his old Army buddies. He tensed as he watched the Blue end and the Blue back-field. And suddenly the play was on!

It was a run around Tabor's end, with the Blue halfback carrying the oval and with the opposing quarterback and full leading the ball-carrier for interference. Tabor lunged to get past the Blue end, who hurled himself at the redhead. But Tabor was on dancing feet. He spun past the man and into the path of Blue interference. With a dive, Tabor avoided the blocking of the Blue fullback, and then the redhead knifed through the rival halfback and sprang upon the Blue ball-carrier. They went down fighting, with a loss of three yards for the Boston Blues.

The stands were in an uproar. The Blues had to kick. Tabor sprang through the line to block the next play. And his speed made the Blue kicker boot one away too fast.

It was the Tiger quarterback, Jack Spinner, who caught the kick and ran it back to the middle of the field. And then the Tiger march started on the Blue goal line. This was pro football, not high-school weight and tactics. It was tough playing, hard playing, driving at the lines, pounding away with everything a man had.

Soon Jack Spinner was sending his half-backs around Tabor's end, for the redhead was spilling the Blue end and tackle. Soon it was apparent to every member of the team that their game was being built around one man, a fast man, a man with skill and courage, who fought like a tiger and played with his head. That man was Freddy Tabor, not "Rookie" Tabor, the former high-school end.

Ten yards by ten yards, the Tigers drove

deep into Blue territory, with the howls of the stands in their ears. And those service men were cheering for Tabor. They were rooting for a buddy. Their spirit carried the Tigers on. And Jack Spinner took his chance even when the Fortresses droned overhead.

"Pass to Tabor," the Tiger quarterback said in the huddle.

On the play, Tabor broke clear, shaking off his cover like a fox pursued by hounds. He moved fast, head twisted back over his shoulder. And when Jack Spinner hurled the oval, it looked as if it were going far beyond the redhead. But Tabor had speed. He sprinted and he leaped, nailing the pigskin in the clouds. Down he came on churning feet, dodged, whirled, and was in the clear running for a touchdown.

It was what the stands wanted. And as the thunder of the crowd rolled back and across the gridiron, the newspapermen up in stand box were bending over their typewriters, pounding out the story of the game, a story about a high-school rookie built up in strength and weight by the Army, who had come back home to boost the old veterans and the 4F's out of the lot.

When Freddy Tabor touched the ball behind the Blue posts, he turned and looked skyward at a circling Fortress. And then, to the stands, he did a strange thing. He deliberately put his thumb to his nose and twiggled his fingers at the plane.

It was a strange gesture to all but perhaps one man who sat on the players' bench with a sheepish grin on his tanned face. That person was Danny Holtz. The man's grin changed into a big smile, and then Holtz chuckled deep in his throat.

A great load was off Holtz's mind now. Two loads, as a matter of fact. The manager of the Tigers now had the kind of a left end that he needed badly. Young Tabor need never know that Major Banks had come to Holtz and had told him the whole story in secret. Nor that Holtz, thinking of his own boy in the Southwest Pacific, had assured the major that he would keep Tabor with the Tigers until the kid had won his own private little war, or all possible hope of winning had fled.

One of those tricks of fortune or fate, or whatever you want to call it, had won Freddy Tabor's battle for him. But that fact didn't make Danny Holtz one wit less pleased, or relieved.

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THRILLS IN FOOTBALL

(Continued from page 8)

back was an excellent drop kicker, and the three points of a field goal would assure victory just as much as a touchdown. Temple knew this. Temple knew what to expect.

Whittock ranged up and down, calling upon his men, urging them to charge hard and fast, get through and block that kick. They must block it.

Hinkle dropped back. He was cool and ready. The ball smacked against his palms. His toe dug deep into the leather. But—glory be! Whittock saw he'd missed! Missed by an inch! But an inch is as good as a mile.

Temple had the ball on her own twenty-yard-line. There was less than a minute to go. Ground plays were useless. If each one made ten yards, there would not be time to chalk up a touchdown. That deep in their own territory, passing would be dangerous.

But, Leon Whittock was an all-or-nothing player. A tie didn't mean anything. It was a flat and tasteless thing. He would rather take a chance of winning, even if defeat resulted because of the try.

Temple had a play which had worked before. Jack Driebe would take the ball from center, pass laterally to Whittock, who would unleash a long pass to giant Len Gudd, the end. If Gudd got away, there was the ball game. It would be worth trying. Sure, they'd try it.

The ball came back to Driebe. The big Bucknell forwards were clawing at the line, trying to get through. The ball was wet, and nerves tense. Jack was hurried out of his usual poise. His lateral to Whittock went wild, and the leather bounced across the goal line.

Leon Whittock's heart was in his throat as he went after the ball. His strategy had gone haywire because of bad execution. Instead of possible victory, here was almost certain defeat. If one of the Bisons got it, there was a touchdown. If he was nailed in the end zone with the ball, there was a safety. Either way they would be beaten.

Two Bucknell men were almost on top of him. The ball was wet and hard to handle, but he couldn't throw himself on it. He was licked that way. So moving like a streak of light, Whittock reached down. His cold fingers gripped the clammy leather. Straightening up, he sidestepped the tacklers. His arm went back, and he hurled a pass.

There wasn't a chance in a million of anyone getting it—and no one did, but the Bucknell people were robbed of either touchdown or safety. They were also robbed of victory, because Leon Whittock had a quick mind and sure hands.

A moment later the game ended. It ended in a tie, but much as Whittock disliked that, even the Temple quarterback had to admit it was better than being beaten.

ROY RIEGELS RUNS THE WRONG WAY AT THE ROSE BOWL

THE ROSE BOWL to any football player is the world's championship. There can be no higher gridiron fame than to star on the gridiron at Pasadena. That's the way Roy Riegels felt. He was the crack center and captain of the California eleven, and California was facing Georgia Tech in the Bowl.

The Southerners had a great football team. They numbered among their legions Pund and Mizell, "Stumpy" Thomason, "Father" Lumpkin and Maree. Good? They were terrific. But, California was the best on the Pacific coast. This was a battle of giants.

It was a hard, tough battle under a brilliant sky, with 80,000 people sending their cheers racketing across the greensward. Roy Riegels played his heart out. There was nothing in the world he wanted so much as for California to win—nothing he would not honestly do to gain victory for her.

There was no score in the first period. The teams were evenly matched. In the second

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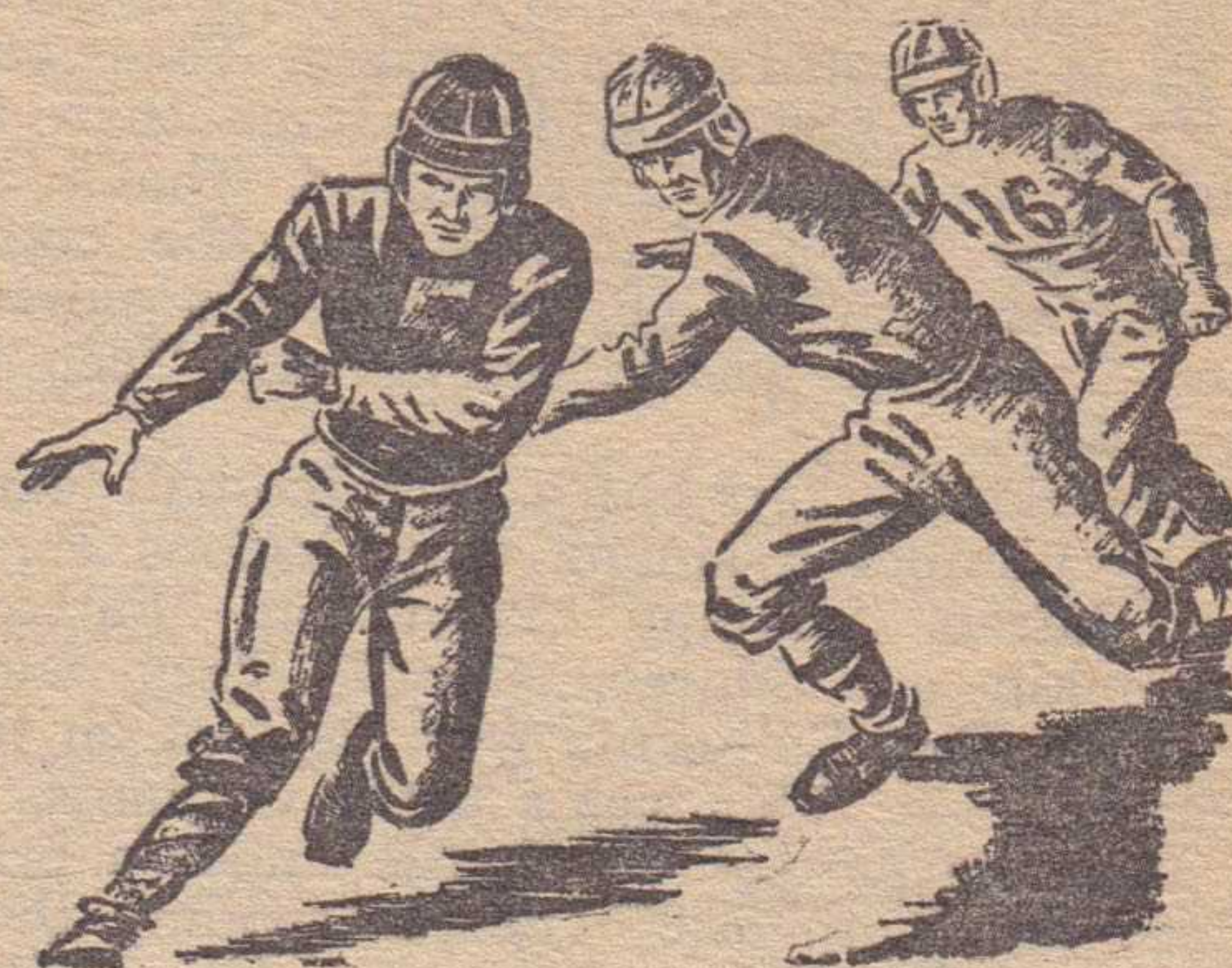
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Riegels took quite a hammering. Lumpkin and Thomason banged at the California line, and Riegels was in every play.

Georgia Tech had the ball on her own twenty-five. Stumpy Thomason took it. He was short, thick and as powerful as a bulldozer. He hit the sweaty line like a bulldozer, too. This time, as he was tackled, the pigskin skittered from his hands.



Riegels saw his opportunity, and took it. He whipped the ball up, his heart a sudden welter of mad happiness. Fate had pointed the way for him to win the greatest game of the year for the Golden Bears.

A Georgian swung into him, hard, but he bounced away. He pivoted from another intended tackler. The field spun around in circles. He was dizzy from the pounding he had taken, but caught himself, and started to run.

He ran as he never had before. There was no one in front of him. This time it was a touchdown, sure, and centers don't often have the chance to make touchdowns.

But, Captain—oh, my Captain! What are you doing? You're running the wrong way! You're headed for your own goal line!

After Riegels sprinted Benny Lom, the fastest man on the California team. Yard by yard he caught up on the speeding man. With panting breath, he yelled, "Roy—Roy—stop!" he yelled. "You're going the wrong way!"

If Riegels wouldn't have been dazed and shaken he might have known he was running a long distance, considering that the ball had been on Tech's twenty-five yard line. But, he was caught up in his own exhaustion and effort and enthusiasm.

Benny's high pitched voice suddenly pierced the deep throated bellow of the crowd and Roy's own intense concentration. Suddenly it came to him what he was doing. Probably no other football player ever lived through such a moment of concentrated torture. It was impossible. This couldn't

happen to him! His knees weakened.

Lom caught Riegels, and spun him around. He was on his own three-yard line, only a stride away from handing George Tech a safety. The rest of the players had poured down after them. Riegels started back from whence he came. Benny tried to run interference for him, but the Georgians were as thick as flies at a sugar pot. Three of them dove at Riegels, and brought him to earth.

Just a few minutes before California had been in a fine, safe spot. Now, she was jammed against her own goal line, just a yard from it. Riegels took off his helmet, and wiped his clammy brow. The posts towered behind him like spires of doom. He felt physically sick.

There was just one chance. If Lom could get off a long punt, they might be saved. They must be saved.

The teams lined up. Riegels, legs spread wide, his hands on the ball, waited. Breckinridge called the signals in a high pitched voice. But, Riegels' nervous fingers were not accurate. The pass was poor. Benny, shaken by the experience, didn't handle it well, either. The Georgians poured through, and Maree, leaping high, blocked the kick. The ball skittered back into the end zone, where Breckinridge fell on it—and Georgia led, 2 to 0.

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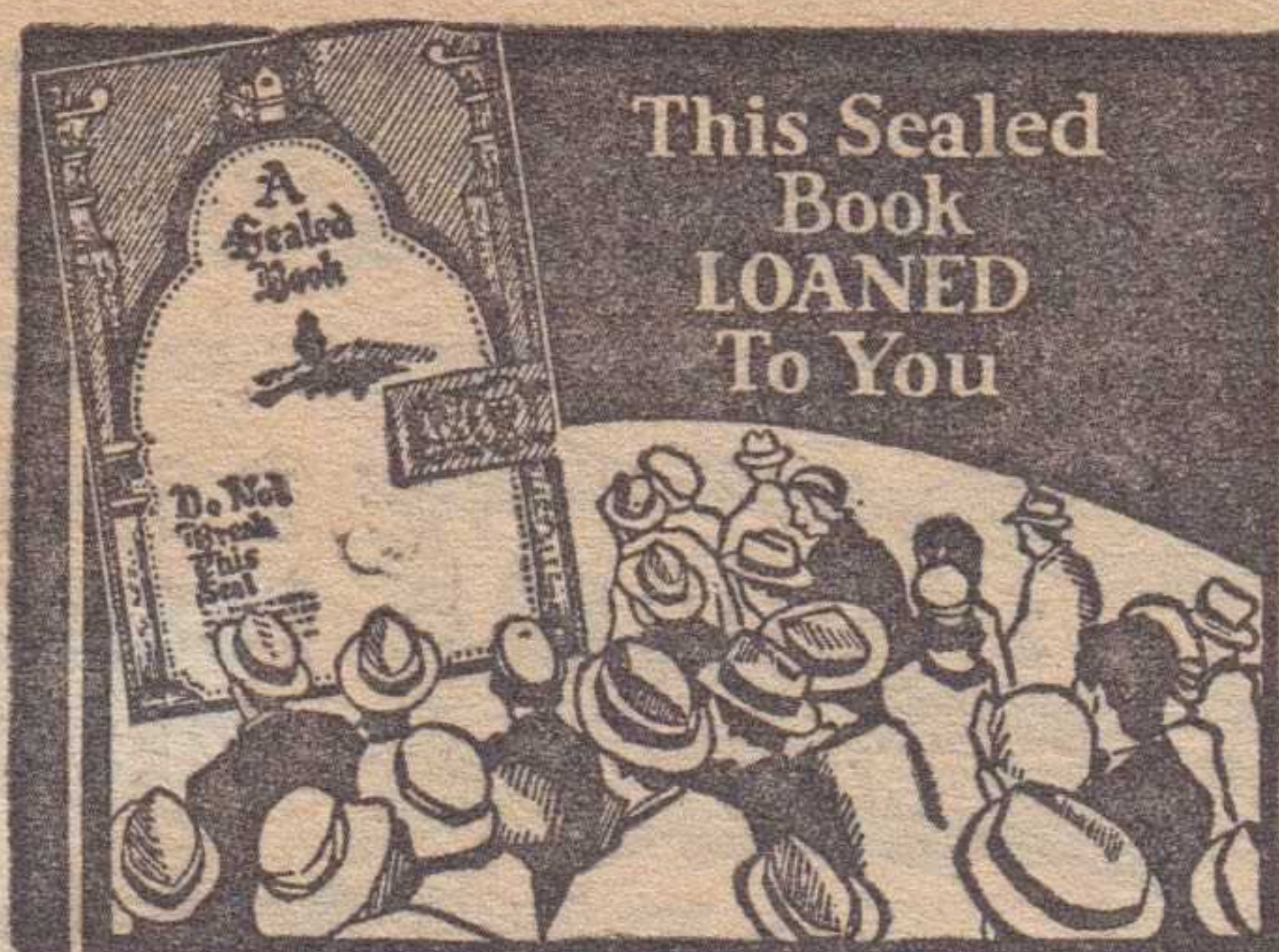
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Riegels looked toward the sidelines with tears in his eyes. At that moment he felt as though his life were irretrievably ruined. Coach Nibs Price sent out a substitute, and the football captain walked off the field, his shoulders sagging. It was the bitterest day he had ever known.

When he came back again, Roy Riegels played with inspiration and power. He was one of the best men on the field. He spent himself with a prodigal hand in an effort to make up for his mistake—but it was too late. Georgia Tech won 8 to 7, and their margin of victory was the distance Roy Riegels had run in the wrong direction.

It is something he will never forget no matter how many years he lives upon this earth.

AL LASSMAN'S GRID CAREER AN EPIC OF COURAGE

IT HAS been a long time since New York University has had a football team that was anything but a pushover. But, go back eighteen years. Go back to 1927. What a squad they had, with Ken Strong sparking the backfield, and giant Al Lassman in the line.

Al Lassman was six feet three inches tall, and weighed 230 pounds. He was not only big and powerfully muscled, but fast as a sprinter, and had more courage than any man could be expected to have. In 1927, though, some of the speed had vanished. A broken leg had failed to heal properly, and the linemen who had taken a beating from Lassman began to pay him back.

On three successive Saturdays the big man suffered mild concussions of the brain. Chick Meehan, the coach, did not know how badly Lassman had been hurt, or he would not have allowed him to play. Everyone wants to win—but not that much. Not enough to allow a gallant fellow to be crippled.

The Violets went to Pittsburgh to play Carnegie Tech. The Tartans had a fine eleven, with All America Rosenzweig at end, and the superb Harpster at quarterback. It promised to be a battle of giants, and it was.

Almost at the start Harpster called for an ends-around play, with Rosenzweig carrying the ball through Lassman. Through? Not at all. Lassman cracked up the interference and threw the great end for a loss. But, if that didn't work, other things did. Carnegie battered New York back step by step, with Lassman fighting like a madman, though his poor brain was stunned and foggy. He was still the Captain Courageous.

The tide turned. The Violets took the offensive, and went to Tech's forty-five-yard line. Then came the decisive play. From kick formation, Strong went off tackle back of Lassman. The big man was galvanized into a fury of effort. He knocked over the end with a thrust of his shoulder that left the end gasping in agony. Wheeling, in stride, he took out the center, and bowled over a guard.

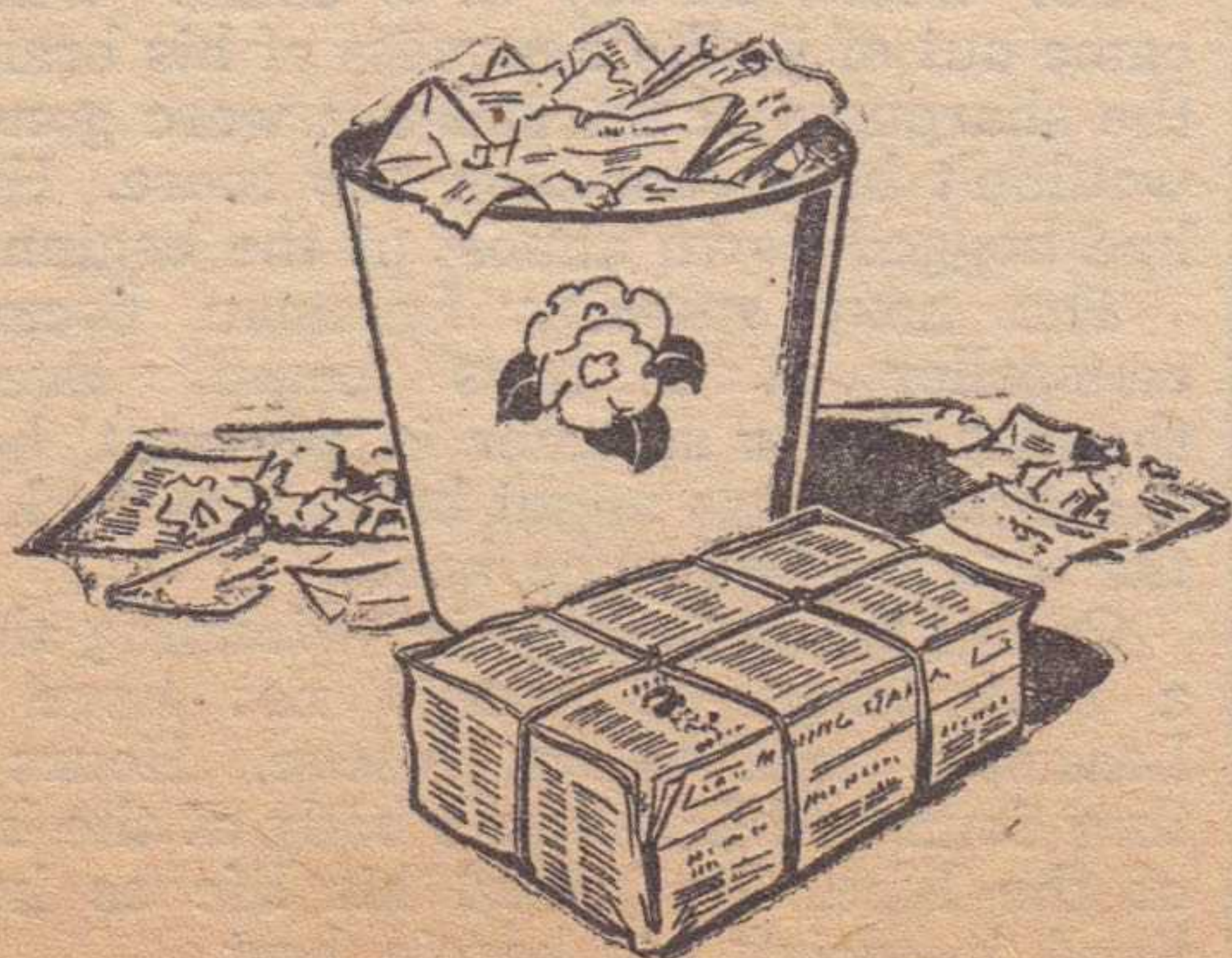
The fleet Strong was at his heels. The Carnegie defensive halfback charged in. Somehow Lassman spun around, and hurled himself forward. The two went to the ground together, but miraculously Lassman came, catlike, to his feet, and went on, with Strong a stride behind. It was all instinctive. He didn't know what he was doing, or how he did it, so fogged was he.

Ahead was Harpster, the best quarterback in the land. Harpster came in, cool and calculating, but no one could evade Lassman. He put the quarterback out of the play, and Strong raced on for a touchdown.

That one play broke Carnegie into shards and rubble. They had nothing left, and New York University rolled on to an overwhelming victory. Lassman should have been taken out. He should never have been in there in the first place. Chick Meehan called for a

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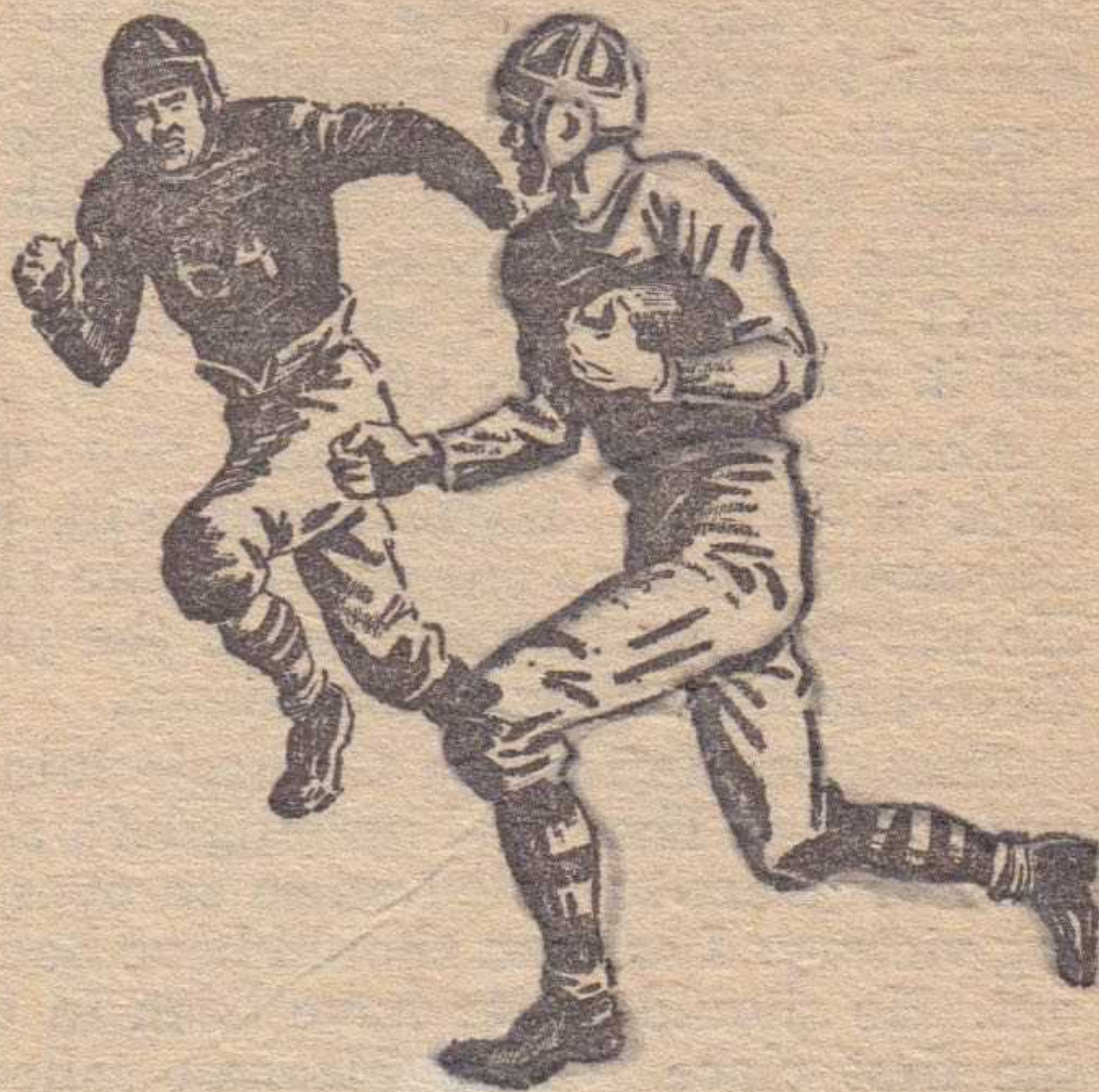
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substitute. The man was warming up when the collapse occurred.

Strong again took the ball behind Lassman, but this time Lassman was through. He went down under the rolling tide. Men charged him. A cleated shoe struck him squarely on the head.

The captain pulled himself to his knees. He couldn't get up. They carried him out of his last football game. His skull had been



split from above the eye to back of the ear. No one knew it until the doctors had a look.

The game went on. How could anyone on the field or in the stands know what had really happened. One of the great linesmen of all time had been knocked out. Well, those things happen in football, no matter how big and strong a fellow is. Al Lassman would be back again. They couldn't keep him out of it.

That's what they thought, but that is not the way it was. Lassman was through—through with football at which he had been so great—through also with the boxing at which no less an expert than Gene Tunney thought he would become a champion.

For weeks he lay in a coma. When he came out of it, the keenness of his brain and the sharpness of his reflexes were gone. He wouldn't be a champion any more. His life had bogged down almost at the beginning.

The next summer Lassman became a counsellor at a boys' camp. Everyone thought that a summer in pleasant, healthful surroundings might bring him back to be the man he had once been.

One of the boys went in swimming alone at a time when he should not have gone. Lassman went to his rescue. Hours later they found Al Lassman's body at the bottom of the lake. He ended his life as he had lived it—doing his heroic best.

The record of Al Lassman—like George Gipp, of Notre Dame—was one of the great tragedies of football. How brave he was, and how strong and able, is proved by the magnificent game he played the last time he was on a football field.

He was All America in more ways than one.

PENNSYLVANIA AND DARTMOUTH HAVE A TOUGH TUSSLE

THIS sort of thing is likely to happen when the war with Japan is over.

In 1919 both the Pennsylvania and Dartmouth teams were largely made up of youngsters who had served in the Army or Navy. They had come back to college much more mature than when they left.

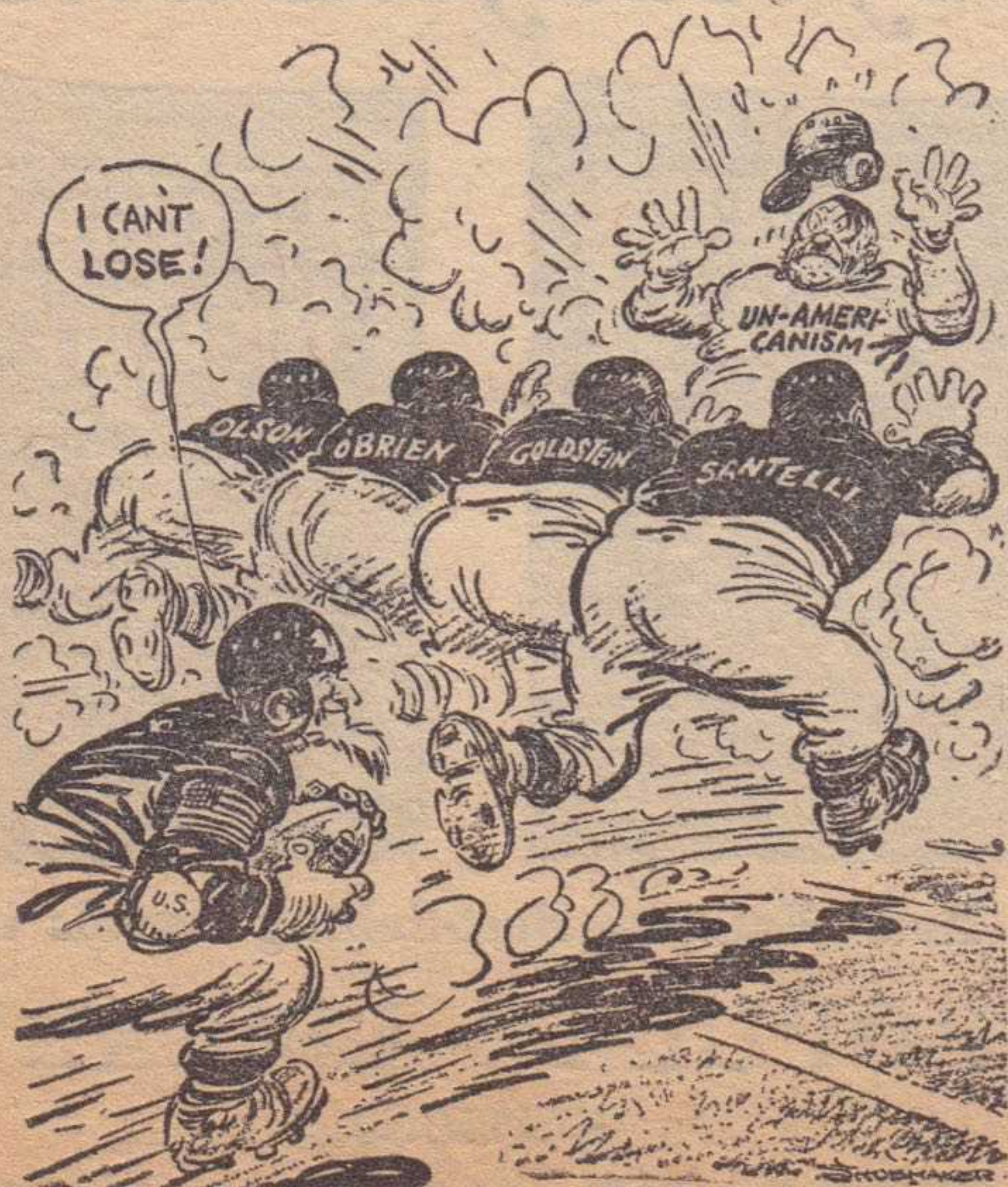
The Green had men like Bill Cunningham, Gus Sonnenberg, Jackson Cannell, and the famous Holbrook brothers. The Red-and-Blue boasted Heine Miller, Lou Little, Lud Wray, "Bots" Brunner, Bert Bell and Hobe Light.

The thrills began early in the game. One of the Holbrook boys was sent through tackle on a line play. He fumbled—there was a joyous bellow from the stands—but the ball rebounded into his hands. Quick as a cat, he slipped through an opening, and raced forty-five yards for a touchdown.

The fighting Pennsylvanians were not discouraged. They began a drive that carried them half way the length of the field. That drive was climaxed by a pass from Light to Brunner that was good for a score, but the point after touchdown was missed, and Dartmouth led, 7 to 6.

[Turn page]

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The Quakers were in full cry now. They cut and slashed at the powerful Green line. They passed and skirted the ends. They were full of fire and fight. Again they countered—and again Heine Miller missed the point. It didn't seem so terribly important then, for they were ahead 12 to 7.

However, Coach Bob Folwell groaned in spirit. This was the kind of game where any-

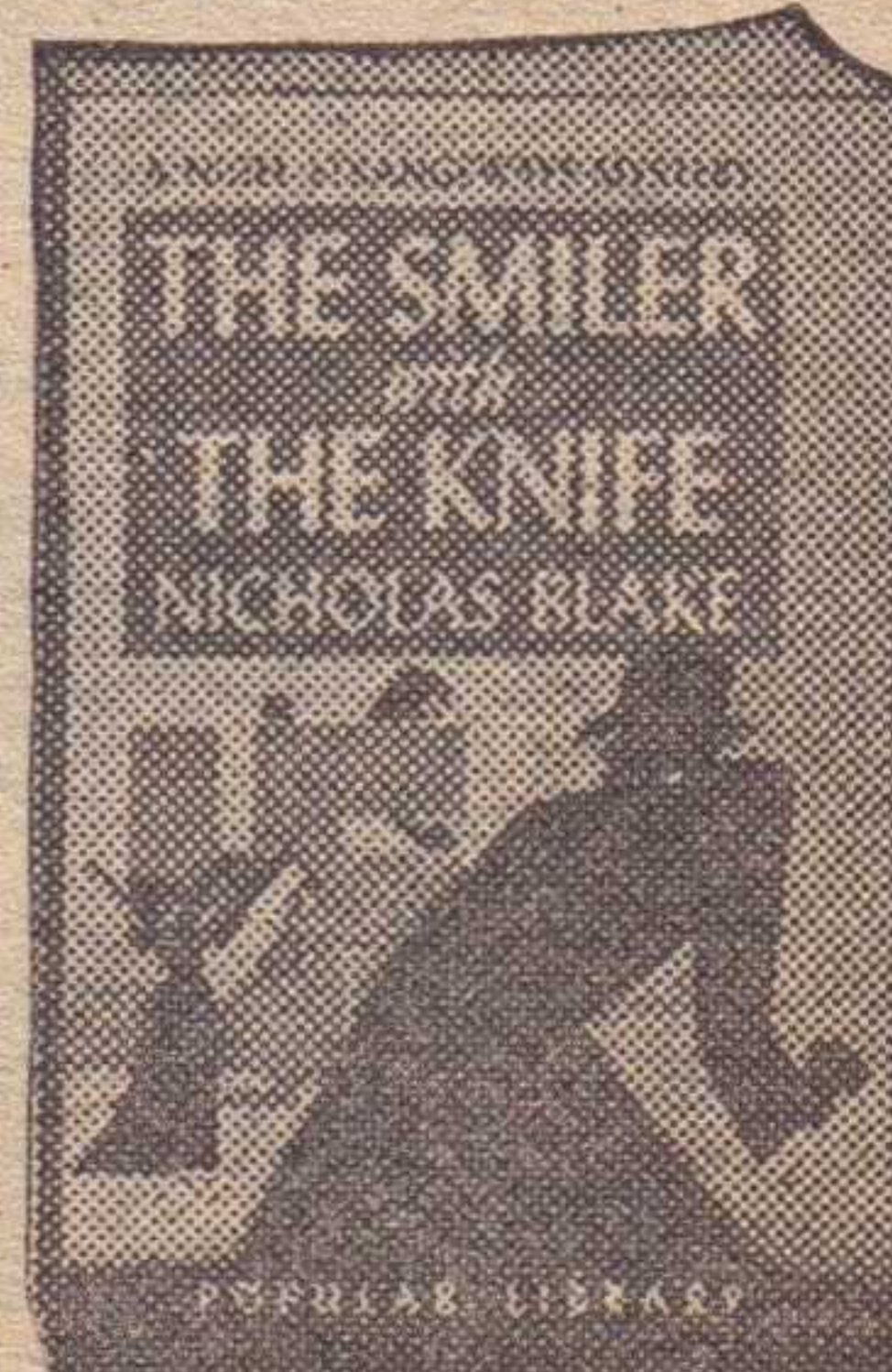
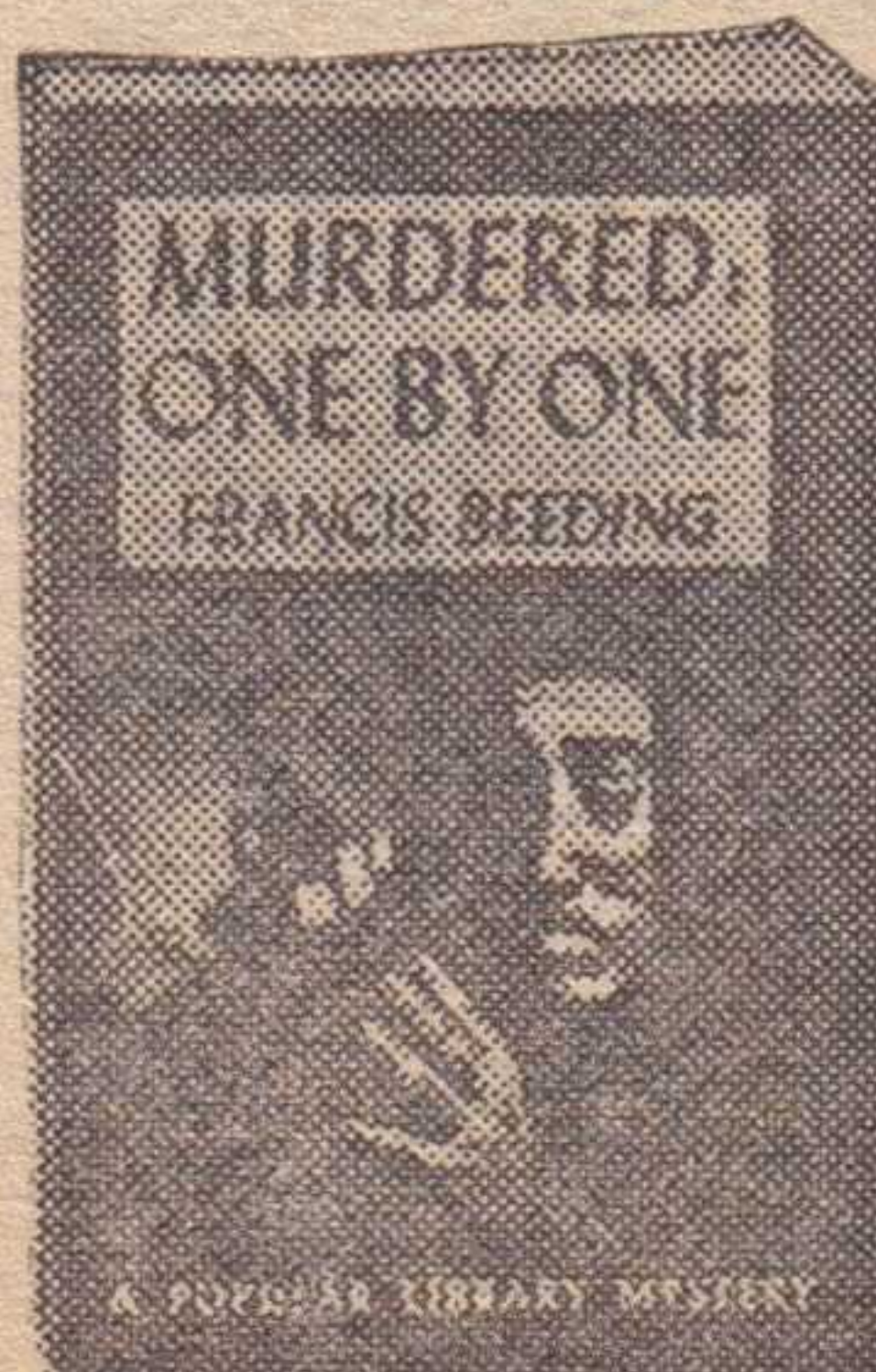


thing could happen, where the tide could turn in the twinkling of an eye.

It did turn. Dartmouth came out in a rampaging fury. They smashed their way to the ten-yard line. There the Quaker stalwarts held. This was Verdun—and the watchword, "They shall not pass!"

On the last down, though, the officials called an off-side. First down and five to go. That was enough to crack the heart of a giant, but Folwell's men were not ordinary

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football players. It took Dartmouth three downs to make three yards. But, then, Holbrook behind the dynamic charge of Cunningham and Sonnenberg crashed over.

A little later Jordan intercepted a forward pass, and raced 65 yards for another. Now, it really looked hopeless. Dartmouth 20, Penn 12.

But, those Pennsylvanians were rugged. They didn't know how to quit. The breaks turned for them. Hobey Light, taking the kickoff, wriggled and squirmed his way to his forty-five. Then came a fifteen-yard penalty for holding, and the campaign moved into Dartmouth's territory.

Time was fleeting. The teams lined up. Bots Brunner faded back. Heine Miller was waiting near pay dirt. The pigskin sailed in a high arc against the autumn sky. The defense clouded around the star end. Miller leaped high in the air. There was an exultant shriek from the Penn stands, but it died in a groan of anguish. Miller had dropped it.

But, the officials declared there had been interference, and the Red-and-Blue had the ball on the five-yard line!

[Turn page]

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