

# THE BASEBALL MAGAZINE

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# Inventions in Football

By J. W. Heisman

*Coach of Georgia School of Technology*

Illustration from Photograph

NO single individual ever perfected, alone and unaided, any science or any art, and no one man in the history of the game of football is to be credited with all its discoveries and improvements.

Until recent years it was, however, quite customary in the East to regard all new plays and formations as having originated there. This was almost as great an error as to assume that they were all hit upon by one man. True, Yale was the author of the "Tackle Over" formation, and Princeton of the "Revolving Wedge," and Harvard of the "Flying Wedge," and Pennsylvania of the "Guards Back," and flying interference, but Stagg at Chicago, Williams at Minnesota, Yost at Michigan and hosts of other Western and Southern coaches were the original inventors of a great many improvements, some of major and some of minor importance, that the East seldom had a chance to learn about; because, firstly, Eastern experts had few opportunities to observe football outside their own sections, and, secondly, they took no interest in Western and Southern football even if they had the opportunity to observe.

I have been asked to detail what my specific share has been in the work of advancing and developing the present great college game,—it being assumed, I imagine, that after five years of active Varsity playing and sixteen consecutive years of coaching at five different institutions in four different states, I must have been something of an originator or I could not have hoped for such success as to warrant my being willing, or even allowed, to continue in the pro-

fession for so long. Certain it is, at any rate, that to continue holding good positions as a football coach one must win, and to win one must have originality, ability to invent, and to adapt one's team and game to new rules and changing conditions as readily and as rapidly as they appear.

## THE DOUBLE PASS

The Oberlin College team of 1892 was the first I ever coached, and though we won every game played, including one with Michigan, I cannot claim credit for anything for that year except a double pass from tackle to half-back. If anywhere else this form of play had ever been sprung before then, I had neither seen nor heard of it. Previous to that time the only double pass used had been from half-back to half-back.

## THE DIRECT SNAP-UP IN 1893

While I, in common with all coaches of long experience, have invented and experimented with scores of plays that could be recalled I have no space to treat, or even mention any, except those that have not merely stood the test of time, but which have also been adopted by practically all teams.

In 1893 while coaching Buchtel College I hit upon the idea of having the center rush snap or toss the ball directly up to the quarter, instead of rolling it back on the ground on its lacing or snapping it end over end, as was the method employed throughout the East—even in 1894 yet. My method of putting the ball in play has been universally adopted as incontrovertibly the best.

At this time, too, the idea of the center-

rush making a fake snap and holding the ball under him, tight up in his crotch, first occurred to me. The quarter would fake to receive it from the center and fake to pass it to the backs, who would fake out to the open field, while in reality the guard would take the ball out of the center's hands by reaching down behind and under him, then hand it slyly to the end-rush who would shoot down the boundary line after the opponents had all been drawn away from it to the open field by following after the fake interference.

This play was freely copied, and was the direct forerunner of Pennsylvania's famous Delayed Pass near the boundary line in 1896, which play has been the forefather of all the present forms of delayed passes.

#### THE HIDDEN BALL

The hidden-ball trick which the Carlisle Indians played successfully on Harvard about 1898 or 1899 first originated with me, I believe; though I take no great pride in the matter as I used the play but one year, coming to the conclusion that it was a play open to question from the standpoint of pure and clean sportsmanship.

I played it, however, in 1895 with my Alabama Polytechnic Institute team, and remember that we scored a touchdown with it against Vanderbilt University. I could trace its appearance at Carlisle but it would be uninteresting and is unnecessary.

#### THE FULL BACKING UP ON DEFENSE

Until so late as 1894 no one had ever heard of a man playing any different position on defense from what he



J. W. HEISMAN

played on offense: if he was a half-back on offense that's what he played on defense, and that ended it. But in that year, while coaching at Oberlin College again, I became impressed with the senselessness of my left half-back, a very fast but very light man, battering himself to pieces helping to repel the heavy onslaughts while my full-back—a big, strong, husky fellow stood away back practically doing nothing for nearly all the time that opponents had the ball. So I put the little

fellow at full-back's place and rested him up whenever we lost the ball, and had my big full-back come up close and help back up the line. The plan worked like a charm and spread like Mohammedanism in the eighth century—only that as it was the quarter-back who was usually the lightest man on a team; it was and is usually he who trades places with the full-back on defense.

#### THE ON-SIDE KICK

I have often been credited with being the original discoverer of the on-side kick and the forward pass.

I do not think there is any dispute as to my having been the first to suggest the forward pass as a means of opening up the game, but I distinctly am not the man who first thought of an on-side kick. That honor belongs to George Woodruff, who brought out the play about 1893. As he played it then, and as many teams played it for years afterwards, the kick was made by the quarter-back, standing in his usual position, and the regular backs—all on-side—were the ones deputed to recover it.

What I did—and that not till several years later—was to invent a new way

of performing the play, and my way is probably the father of the many new and complex ways in which the play is performed today.

My method consisted of the quarter passing the ball to a half-back as usual, who with the full ran across to the opposite side and transferred the ball to the other half-back as he passed him; then kept on going. This latter half-back, standing still in his tracks, kicked the ball in the opposite direction from the way the full and first half were going, and the end and quarter recovered it—they having run back of the kicker then out to the side while the pass was being made. This was in effect a "delayed kick," and was a vast improvement over the old quarter-back kick in that it pulled opponents after the fake interference and away from the spot where the ball was eventually to land.

The play opened up a much wider vista as to the strategic possibilities of the on-side kick, which have since been developed to the full.

#### THE FORWARD PASS

It was in 1901, 1902 and 1903 that

the cry for a more open style of play began to become prolonged and insistent. All sorts of suggestions to open up the game appeared in print, some good, some bad. In 1903 after the season I wrote Mr. Walter Camp of the Rules Committee and suggested, that if the committee really wished to open up the game no easier or more certain way of doing it could be devised than by allowing forward passing. This opinion I also confided at the time to several of my friends and other football experts.

Nothing came of it that year and the "howl" grew louder. In December, 1904, I wrote Mr. Camp again and to the same effect. In December, 1905, I wrote him again and to the same effect—and then came the forward pass. It came with limitations and governing conditions, of course, whereas my suggestion was general only. I meant it merely as a hint, and the hint Mr. Camp was broad enough to grasp, and when he brought forth the "proposition" it was evident to me he had been giving my general suggestion much careful detailed consideration.

