

1940 BOSTON vs GEORGETOWN

By Mark Purcell

Officially the Boston College-Georgetown game played on November 16, 1940 at Boston, concerned possible berths in the Sugar and Orange Bowl games. But there was also a subplot concerning who finally got to coach at Notre Dame in 1941.

In today's football histories, the 1940 games with the most technical impact are considered to be the two T-formation games: the Chicago Bears' 73-0 NFL title game win over Washington, and then Stanford's defeat of Nebraska in the post-season Rose Bowl game. But before these two late-season games, those eminent drama critics, the big-city football writers of 1940, would probably have given the BC-Georgetown game the season's top rating. Grantland Rice wrote that this game forecast football techniques of the next 10-15 years, and Amos A. Stagg, even more knowledgeable about football than Rice, told the press that it was a very unusual example of a major pressure game where the Coaches went all out and did not handcuff their own teams from using experimental plays. On the simpler fan level, the game featured tremendous line hitting, the final result was decided by a single point, and the key play was a spectacular open-field feat by a legitimate All-American candidate

backfield man.

The crowd of eminent observers, of whom Rice and Stagg were only two, was produced on game-day by some clever scheduling as to the date of the contest. Then as now, the fourth Saturday of November was usually reserved for the big end of season traditional games. This usually made the previous Saturday (November 16 in 1940) a traditional weekend for a lot of soft warmup games for the major powers. Therefore there was really no serious big-game competition in 1940 for the Boston-Georgetown matchup, and hence the prestigious audience of football people. The game also involved two unbeaten major teams, both with good depth and tremendous size for 1940, and both were still basically untested, since they had simply overpowered most of their previous foes. Boston had played one game where their AA candidate back, little Charlie O'Rourke, never threw a pass (60-0 over Idaho), and another where only one aerial was attempted (25-0 over Manhattan).

This team physicality of BC was due to the tremendous linemen and blocking backs recruited either by young coach Frank Leahy, or by his predecessor Gil Dobie. His center Gladchuck went at a listed official weight of 232, which observers privately upgraded to 250. Against Gladchuck and his fellow bruisers, Georgetown's Coach Jack Haggerty was bringing into Boston people like Augie Lio (senior), his guard and placekicker; and most visibly of all big Al Blozis at tackle, his scale-breaker. A partial list of the future NFL starters on the field would include O'Rourke, BC fullback Mike Holovak, Lio, Blozis, and the Georgetown fullback Jim Castiglia.

The pre-game 1940 team records read as follows:

Boston College	Georgetown
40-0 Centre	66-0 Roanoke
27-7 Tulane	14-0 Temple
33-20 Temple	26-12 Waynesburg
60-0 Idaho	46-4 VPI
55-0 St Anselm	26-0 New York U.
25-0 Manhattan	28-6 Syracuse
21-0 Boston U.	41-0 Maryland

As the schedules indicate, both teams were rising Catholic powers ambitious to reach the same top level as held in 1940 by such dynasties as Fordham, Santa Clara in California, and Notre Dame. As a matter of fact, Notre Dame in 1940 was going 7-2 against a rather weak schedule and was running out the final year on the contract of Coach Elmer Layden. As was the custom with most prewar Catholic colleges, both BC and Haggerty's Georgetown were loyal to the standard Rockne single wing. Leahy, though, was already feeding in T-formation plays for his squad off what his scouting information reported from the well publicized Stanford season exploits.

The single wing formation permitted three legitimate offensive backs: tailback-fullback-wingback. Georgetown's backfield was Koshlap the passer, Castiglia and Ghecos. One sub, Doolan, was a quick runner who got good playing time. Leahy had more legitimate two-unit depth at BC, an important factor in prewar football; but against Georgetown he would sacrifice this depth to play his star O'Rourke for 60 minutes with no backup. BC started Holovak at fullback, Frank Maznicki at wingback, and Toczylasky at blocking back/linebacker; all legitimate All-East candidates at each position. The most notable sub for BC was the 169-pound wingback, Lou Montgomery. Montgomery could not start in either 1939 or 1940, less because of his size than because he was an Afro-American. (Technically, Lou did start several BC games, but I refer here to his official position on the BC team roster.)

Statistically, O'Rourke was the best passer on the field and Goodreault (BC end) was the pass interceptor. BC had the better team offensive stats, well over 200 yards a game rushing and over 300 passing. The key receiver was Maznicki at wingback. (His sub Montgomery was used more as a straight runner, though we shall see that Leahy had a surprise use for him saved up for Georgetown) Georgetown's best season runner was actually the official sub Doolan; GU also had the best place-kicker in Augie Lio, but it wasn't quite the edge in 1940 that it would have been in the 1990's. But as big a statistic as any was line size, matched pound for pound by the two teams. The publicity stories offered several different average sizes, but the consensus weights equalled a little under 210 for both lines. Neither line, before they ran into each other, had been seriously tested. From the cynic's viewpoint, a very dull defensive standoff game might have been forecast, something like the scoreless ties played by Pitt and Fordham 1935-37.

THE GAME: The "will they ever score?" issue was settled early. Georgetown got the ball at midfield, picked up a couple first downs and then settled for Lio's 25-yard field goal. Boston College, in bad field position from the next kickoff, called for a quick kick by triple-threat O'Rourke. It was blocked out of bounds on the BC 10 yard line. With the giant lines battling each other, Koshlap made it over from the one, and Lio's PAT put Georgetown up ten points by the expenditure of no more than about 35 yards of total offense.

Boston then started the first real long drive in the game from its 25 yard line. With the ball moved to the Georgetown 22, O'Rourke lateraled to Montgomery, scouted by the Hoyas as a pure runner. Instead, Montgomery rolled out and passed to end Woronicz for the score to put BC on the board and make it a 10-6 score.

The rest of the first half, the two lines neutralized each other until BC got the big favoring official call the homefield team seems to get at least once a game in the big pressure contests. This time it was a pass interference call on one of O'Rourke's attempts, which put the ball on the GU one yard line, and in effect handed Boston its second touchdown. Holovak smashed over, this time Maznicki kicked the point, and Boston had the 13-10 halftime advantage.

In the second half, Georgetown started from their 10 yard line. Passing only once, Blozis, Lio and company moved the big Boston line back play by play for 90 yards; until quarterback McFadden carried it in on a six-yard play. Another missed kick, which would turn out to be an important mishap for the Hoyas, but they still led 16-13.

Boston retaliated by passing, and once again O'Rourke tossed to his blocker Toczy to get the ball into Georgetown territory. Then BC's standard passing combination clicked for a big play; O'Rourke to Maznicki for 43 yards and a touchdown, and Boston only needed to hang on for a three-point win.

Boston stopped the final Hoya drive at their 24, but then the mighty Georgetown defensive line smashed the BC offense back to their own nine yard line. This put O'Rourke in his own end zone in punt formation, but now comes the most quizzical bit of the reporting of this famous game. This is the claim that the Georgetown line "hesitated" in going after the punter, until they finally realized that Charley planned to hold the ball and take an intentional safety; so Boston could free-kick out from

the twenty, still with a one-point lead and the game almost over.

Why? The Georgetown line had already blocked one O'Rourke punt in very similar field position and generally the Blozis-Lio gang had given a tremendous physical performance. At any rate, when they did recognize that O'Rourke was simply holding the ball on them, they did move in on him Charley began scooting around the end zone in a clock-killing safety play which became the symbol of this game in all the news accounts. Georgetown did get the ball back in time for a few passes after the following safety kick but they were not a quick-scoring outfit, and Boston College was a 19-18 winner.

BC ran out its season with two more wins, and was rewarded with the Sugar Bowl invitation which had been waiting for them, depending on their squeezing by Georgetown. At the bowl game, and without being able to play Montgomery at wingback, Leahy beat one of Robert Neyland's most admired Tennessee teams 20-13. The Georgetown and Tennessee wins combined to put Leahy into the coaching job at Notre Dame, as the hot new Catholic college coach. Enconced at South Bend, Leahy became, with Paul Brown, the dominant coach of the next decade.

Georgetown went to the Orange Bowl to face the second best team in the SEC, Mississippi State (9-0-1). Once again, Georgetown's offense could not overcome the big officiating call against them and so lost 14-7. Historically, this loss knocks Georgetown down in the rankings, maybe just out of the top ten.

The newspaper statistics for the game do not quite reflect what so excited expert observers at the time, such as Grantland Rice and A.A. Stagg. With Georgetown in particular, after the early field goal and turnover touchdown that produced the ten point lead, the Hoya offense only really moved the ball once the remainder of the game. The flashier BC plays would be Coach Leahy's gut reaction to being down ten points early. Passing-wise, Boston threw everything they had, and O'Rourke's own pass credits for the day were 11 of 19 attempts for 187 yards, plus 13 more yards on that important interference call.

Nobody ran the ball on either of those two tremendous lines consistently. The lead rushing statistics included figures like Holovak with 29 yards and O'Rourke with 24 for Boston; while Koshlap ran for 38 and Castiglia had 26 for Georgetown. GU's Koshlap only completed four passes for a total of 51 yards, while tossing three interceptions.

CFHS Journal articles signed by this author incline to be dismissive about most hooks on old college football, as they tend to be quite worthless the moment the reader starts asking for the nitty-gritty type of specific facts and details that are taken for granted in most baseball books. Frank Leahy's later prominence at Notre Dame has resulted in this game receiving better than usual treatment in the available books, since this game played such a major role on his future career.

As usual, the real gold lies in the old newspapers. This article makes use of what the Boston Evening Transcript and the New York Times had to say about the game, but the straight play-by-play account, which is what the football researcher doing old football always wants to see, lies in the Nov 17, 1940 Washington Post. Readers should be warned that there was some inflation of the both the official team and player statistics for the game. O'Rourke sometimes got credit for all the BC passing, including Montgomery's TD pass. Corrected team rushing figures are 38 carries for 79 net yards by Boston, and Georgetown with 36 attempts for 75 net yards; not the higher totals in particular credited to Boston runners in post-game stories.

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