

# Beginnings of Modern Football

By Tom Benjey

Major rule changes were made after the deaths of numerous college football players in 1905. Under the old rules brute force, clean or otherwise, ruled because a team only had to make five yards in three downs, something that was readily achieved by teams that outweighed or were stronger than their opponents. It was a wonder that little Carlisle, often giving up ten or more pounds per man, ever defeated the powerhouses, but they did. Football's old guard opposed the rule changes. Amos Alonzo Stagg (Chicago) said the rules would turn football into a "parlor game," while Walter Camp (Yale) found the rules "so radical that they would practically make a new game." And Hurryup Yost vowed that Michigan would never throw a forward pass.

Camp was right; it was a new game. The new rules ushered in the modern football era. Speed and deception immediately became important factors, offsetting bulk and strength to a significant degree. The changes that had the greatest influence on the nature of the game were:

- 1) requiring a team to gain ten yards in three downs to make a first down,
- 2) restricting a team to a minimum of six men on the line of scrimmage,
- 3) legalizing the forward pass provided it is thrown by a back and did not cross the line of scrimmage within five yards of the center.

While most coaches rehashed old offensive schemes, such as the T formation, adjusting them to accommodate the rule changes, Glenn "Pop" Warner developed an entirely new system to take advantage of the new rules. Although in the third year of a three-year contract with his alma mater, Cornell, Warner spent the first week of September 1906 teaching his new offense - one that Walter Camp would dub "the Carlisle System" - to the Carlisle Indian School team as well as its coaches and former stars, Bemus Pierce and Frank Hudson. Warner's new system exploited the Indians' speed and they used it effectively in the opening game against the much heavier Villa Nova squad on September 26. Press accounts, however, gave Villa Nova the edge in proficiency with the forward pass in what was called the first important game played under the new rules. One writer thought the game more closely resembled basketball. Press accounts by the third game of the season would note that Carlisle had improved its passing game.

Three months earlier the school newspaper - The Arrow - had announced that "the Carlisle Indian football management has decided to have its eleven directly coached by full-blooded redskins of intelligence. This was done largely because the Indian will work harder for an Indian coach than for the average college expert trainer." Leaving himself an out, the writer goes on to say, "Coach Glenn S. Warner is undoubtedly the only white man who has ever been able to hold fast the attention of the redskinned footballist and teach him better things." Then, immediately after the close of the 1906 season, Warner resigned his Cornell position and announced that he was returning to the Carlisle Indian School. Although Warner had turned around the Cornell program, problems, including one with a petulant star player, led him to return to Carlisle. The decision was made early in the season but he and the Carlisle management kept it quiet until both teams' schedules were over.

Warner arrived in Carlisle in January 1907 not just as football coach, but also as athletic director in charge of all sports. One of the first things he did was to write a school song -- something Carlisle lacked - set to the tune of "Maryland, My Maryland." Being very familiar with the 1906 Carlisle team, Coach Warner expected to find a considerable amount of talent when he arrived and he wasn't disappointed. It was this talented group of players and their tactician coach that would create modern football from the new rules and Warner's nascent offensive scheme. The

Carlisle field would see the single-wing formation launch the Indians into football immortality.

Dillon, Hunt, Laroque and Libby were gone from 1906, but stars such as Albert Exendine, Frank Mt. Pleasant, Antonio Lubo, E. Hauser (Wauseka), George Gardner, Little Boy, Shouchuk and Fritz Hendricks returned. They were joined by some excellent former reserves and a few new students, most notably Pete Hauser, Wauseka's brother (there were also three Hauser sisters at Carlisle at this time). Warner brought line coach Bill Newman with him from Cornell and enlisted former Carlisle great and All-American James Johnson as backfield coach. Mt. Pleasant was the fastest player Warner had in his tenure at Carlisle. In addition, he was a deadly place kicker and could throw a spiral pass 50 yards with accuracy, and Mt. Pleasant was the triple-threat type of player for which the single wing was designed. Jim Thorpe's first year on the varsity was spent learning the game as understudy for Hendricks at right halfback, although he would also get into a game occasionally at left halfback to spell Payne.

Coach Warner started each season with a few home games. Generally these were warm-ups with lesser teams to give the Indians practice in game situations, and although money-losers these home games provided students, faculty, staff and townspeople the opportunity to see the team in action. Carlisle opened the 1907 campaign on Saturday, September 21 against Lebanon Valley College. Just before the game the Dutchmen's coach implored his players, "Now, poys, I vant you to show dose Indians dat you are yoost as good as dey are. Vatch vat dey do to you and den you do de same ting to dem, only harder." His pep talk had little effect as his overmatched charges were on the short end of a 40 to 0 shellacking from Carlisle. Warner substituted liberally to get a look at his backups in game conditions, which also allowed the starters to get out of the rain and mud as the game was played in a downpour. The silver lining for Carlisle supporters was that, after fans were severely drenched, Major Mercer ordered a roof to be built over the bleachers for the Villa Nova game the next Saturday as he wanted a good turnout.

The Major was not disappointed. A crowd of 3,000 or 8,000 - depending on which is correct as reported in The Arrow headline or the text of the article -- attended the game, creating the largest crowd to attend a game on Carlisle's field to that time. The partisan crowd was not disappointed. Villa Nova played well but couldn't overcome Carlisle's speed and passing game, losing 10 to 0 after Pete Hauser scored a touchdown and kicked a field goal. The game was not as close as the score implies because the Indians gave up the ball on downs to Villa Nova's goal-line defense within the three yard line on two occasions.

The following Wednesday Carlisle hosted Susquehanna University. The Arrow headline said it

all, "Susquehanna Scalped." The second team and scrubs got lots of playing time in this 91-0 drubbing because the starters were needed for Saturday's game at Williamsport against Pennsylvania State College. Penn State started fast and scored on a 60-yard run to take a 5 to 4 lead after Hauser had kicked a field goal early in the game. Before the first half was over, Exendine found the end zone after receiving a forward pass from Mt. Pleasant to put the Indians ahead to stay. The day's experience ended on a sour note when a petty thief stole the game ball at the train depot, depriving the Indians' trophy case of this artifact from their 18 to 5 victory.

The next Saturday found the Carlisle team farther from home in Buffalo, New York, playing a strong Syracuse eleven, and the Indians prevailed 14 to 6 over two 25 minute halves (teams negotiated game lengths in those days) in front of a crowd of 12,000. The game's location made it possible for a large contingent of indians from Canada and the Cattaraugus Reservation to attend, and they congregated along the sideline to create a gauntlet for Carlisle subs to pass through when entering the game. Both sides executed forward passes with abnormal frequency and accuracy in this hard-fought game, yet the Syracuse players were often confused by Warner's formations. A shining example was a Mt. Pleasant pass from punt formation to Gardner that resulted in a 30-yard gain. Hauser accounted for all Carlisle's points on two field goals and a five-yard touchdown plunge.

The Indians then played Bucknell in the last home game of the season at Carlisle. October 19 was late in the season for the Indians to be playing at home because they were usually on road trips to the large cities by this time of the year. Warner and press agent Hugh Miller arranged a picture day at the school the day before the game, and photographers representing newspapers in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago attended. A number of starters, including Mt. Pleasant, sat out the game because of injuries, and Island, filling in at quarterback, was limited to a playbook of three plays. With Jim Thorpe getting most of the carries, the Indians prevailed 15 to 0. This game marked seven years in which no visiting opponent had been able to score a touchdown on Carlisle's home field - remarkable considering that their home schedule often included teams like Bucknell and Villa Nova.

Then, in front of 22,000 people at Franklin Field in Philadelphia, Carlisle played its best game of the year to that point and vanquished Pennsylvania 26 to 6. The Philadelphia Press lamented: "Never has Pennsylvania lost a football game that created greater surprise. Surprise, not so much at the defeat itself, as at the completeness of it. Had the margin of Carlisle's victory been a few points only the shock would have been severe enough to the Quakers. But to be completely outplayed and outfought; to be beaten in every department of the game from start to finish; to not be in the running at all; to be left scarcely a crumb of redeeming feature - there lies the sting. The gloom that the shadows of dusk cast upon the cut and cleatmarked gridiron was not as deep as that which ladened the hearts of those loyal sons of Penn."

Bill Hollenback, a defensive back for Penn, related later to Warner, "I'd see the ball coming in my direction and at the same time came a thundering of what appeared to be a tribe of Indians racing at full tilt in my direction. When this gang hit you, they simply wiped you out and you lost all other interest in the football contest." The ball Hollenback referred to was a pass from Mt Pleasant - as the ball spiraled its way to an eligible receiver, the rest of the team would run downfield and mow down any defenders who happened to be in the way. As a reaction to this strategy, the 1908 rules would be changed to include a penalty for offensive pass interference.

November 2, 1907 found the Indians in New York City to play their old nemesis, Princeton, the team they would never beat, and the elements and circumstances conspired against them. The Tigers were smarting over a loss to Cornell the week before and were hungry for a victory. The Indians seldom played well in the rain and mud, and their new passing offense proved to be a

liability when the ball was wet. The swelled heads of the Carlisle players, inflated by reading the press clippings from the Penn game, proved to be another liability-- the result was a sobering 16 to 0 loss for the Indians.

It was a team with a different attitude that traveled to Boston the next week to take on Harvard. A Boston dispatch summed it up: "After 12 years of desperate effort, the Carlisle Indians at last succeeded in defeating Harvard's football team on Soldiers' Field. Today, outplayed, outmanoevred (sic) at every turn and all but overwhelmed by Glenn Warner's band of brilliant players with more power in their game than they have ever shown on this football field, the Crimson went down to defeat 23 to 15." The Indians were led by Mt. Pleasant, who broke loose for a 75-yard touchdown run and completed several long passes, while Hauser scored a pair of touchdowns. Not only was this Carlisle's first victory over mighty Harvard, it was the first time they would defeat two of the Big Four schools in the same year. The next week's Arrow would blare, "The Big Four is Now the Big Five." That night boys from the school entertained the townspeople of Carlisle with a victory parade that included the school band and a stretcher carrying the corpse of defeated Harvard; followed by hundreds of boys in nightshirts. When the band played, the boys would dance and do serpentine to the delight of onlookers.

Neither Warner nor the players had time to gloat as they were scheduled to go on the road to play Minnesota, the defending champions of the West, on the next Saturday. The game was a contest between old and new, as Minnesota employed old-style formations while Carlisle ran the single wing and threw forward passes. Minnesota jumped out to an early lead thanks to Carlisle mistakes,

but the Indians bounced back to prevail 12 to 10 as Mt. Pleasant threw touchdown passes to Lubo and Gardner. During the trip the Carlisle players were treated to an excursion to Minnehaha Falls by automobile, two years before Henry Ford introduced the Model T to the public.

(Authors Note: Today a sports memorabilia collector has copies of two very different Carlisle line-ups for the 1907 Minnesota game on display at his business, neither of which accurately depicts the starting team for the game. The "Official Line-Up" has Thorpe starting; but by all accounts he did not play. The other unofficial line-up had Lone Star Dietz starting at right tackle. There is no mention of Dietz having played in a varsity game for Carlisle before 1909, however, Warner may have circulated that line-up to increase the gate as Dietz was known in the Twin Cities. Or, it may have been a psychological trick because Hauser (misspelled Houser) was the only regular starter listed for the backfield.)

The game the following Saturday was against the University of Chicago, which would be regarded as the year's champion of the West, in Chicago. Rather than return home and travel back to the Midwest in the same week, Warner sequestered his charges in the far-north suburb

of Lake Forest - away from the prying eyes of sportswriters and University of Chicago spies. Chicago sportswriters attempted some humor at Carlisle's expense by making fun of Warner's efforts at finding some seclusion for his team, and the injuries Mt. Pleasant had suffered in the Minnesota game: "The coach was even willing to admit that two or three of his braves would be able to start in the Maroon game."

This game provided perhaps the most satisfying victory of Warner's career, as Chicago coach Amos Alonzo Stagg considered his undefeated Maroons team led by Walter Steffen to be his best. Sportswriters gave Carlisle, beaten up from the Minnesota game, no chance of winning - Steffen being expected to have a field day against this battered Indian bunch - and Stagg even predicted victory. One Chicago writer ridiculed the Carlisle passing attack: "Most of the Indian passes are high and to no one in particular, three or four men being sent down in an effort to get the ball. Steffen makes the throw directly to one man, who is far down the field waiting for it."

On game day Mt. Pleasant was unable to play because of a broken thumb and a sore kicking leg, but Island and Balenti filled in at quarterback and gave the ball to Pete Hauser two-thirds of the time. Hauser was a one-man wrecking crew, accounting for all of Carlisle's scores, kicking three field goals and the extra point after Exendine's touchdown that was scored on a pass thrown by Hauser. Steffen did manage one field goal to keep Chicago from being shut out, as Carlisle rolled to an 18 to 4 victory. The Indians returned home for Thanksgiving savoring their most successful season to date as they finished with a record of 10-1-0.

Despite Warner considering this team nearly perfect with balance and depth at every position, Walter Camp snubbed Frank Mt. Pleasant for his All-America team after the 1907 season because of his perceived lack of ruggedness for missing the Chicago game due to injuries. Exendine, Hauser, and Gardner were also overlooked. Yet the Carlisle Indian athletes and Warner's revolutionary single-wingback formation made this truly the first modern offensive football team - one that mixed running and passing plays, many of which are still in use today.

## OF ABSENT FRIENDS

Parker Hall: One of the best tailbacks of the 1930s while at the University of Mississippi, Mr Hall passed away at Vicksburg on February 8, 2005. Hall played football at Ole Miss in the seasons of 1936-38, a stint that featured a 9-2-0 record in 1938. That season was the best in Hall's personal career as he led the nation in six statistical categories, including scoring (U touchdowns and 73 points), and All-Purpose Running per game with a 129.1 yard average. For 1938 he was named to First Team All-America halfback spots by Associated Press, New York Sun, United Press, and World-Telegram. An all-around athlete, Mr Hall also won letters at Ole Miss for baseball, basketball, and track, and received the school's prestigious Norris Trophy in 1939 for athletic excellence. He was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1991

Cliff Montgomery: A signal-calling quarterback at Columbia for the seasons of 1931-1933, Mr Montgomery passed away at Mineola, New York, on April 21, 2005, at age 94. Throughout his life he was remembered primarily for calling and executing the famous "KF-79" hidden-ball play that produced the only touchdown of the 1934 Rose Bowl as Columbia handed vaunted Stanford a stunning 7-0 defeat. Montgomery received plenty of All-America mention in his junior and senior seasons that included Second Team berths in 1932 from Associated Press, NANA, and INS, and in 1933 from United Press, Hearst, and All-Players. After one season with the Brooklyn Dodgers his career was ended by an injury, and during WW-II Montgomery served as a Navy lieutenant commander for which he was awarded the Silver Star after the action at Okinawa. He then spent 25 years as a sales executive for McGraw-Hill and also served nearly 30 years as