

The Literary Digest for September 21, 1929  
**SOLVING THE FALL'S BIG  
GRIDIRON MYSTERY**

**I**F SHERLOCK HOLMES DOES NOT LIKE football, he can have his Saturday afternoons off this fall. He will not be needed to explain the mysteries of the gridiron game to puzzled fans who have paid their money to sit in the cold and wonder what has happened every time a whistle blows or there is a scrimmage or long run. Football officials, realizing



CLIPPING, ROUGHING, OR  
PILING ON

that much of the play is so much animated Greek to the spectators, have taken a leaf from the book of the Signal Corps and have devised a wig-wag system that should make every detail as plain as day. No longer need there be doubts as to interference, safety, holding, or touchbacks. Part of the signals are pictured on this and following pages, posed by W. H. Alexander, coach at Georgia Tech. They are explained thus by the *New York Evening Journal*:

Arms crossed before the body, palms down, denotes an incomplete pass or missed goal. Both arms extended forward means interference. Both arms raised over head, palms forward, means touch-down. Right arm raised, first two fingers opened, indicates a safety. Right arm extended to the side and extended upward from elbow, with fist closed, means penalty for clipping, roughing, or piling on. Right arm raised in saluting position signals penalty declined. Arms raised over head and crossed at wrist means a touchback. Both arms raised over head with tips of fingers touching, palms down, denotes foul by both sides. Both arms extended shoulder high, right hand grasping left wrist, signals holding. Right arm raised over head, palm forward, means dead ball. One arm extended with index finger pointing to the offender, means offside.

This is indeed an age of wonders, exclaims the *New York World*, commenting thus on the signal system:

Radio and talking-pictures, heavier than air flying-machines, and boats that race under the waters long since have ceased to be things of mystery to the innocent bystander. But in the process of these things becoming commonplace, football, America's favorite autumn sport, has remained, even to the most ardent student of the game, mystic, wonderful.



GIVING THE HIGH SIGN

Coach Alexander, of Georgia Tech demonstrating the "incomplete-pass or missed-goal" signal.

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### *First Hand Signals*

knew what it was all about.

Now all this is changed. No more will the football fan need a Sherlock Holmes or a Sam Lloyd to elucidate for him what is going on in the game.

Football officials finally have decided that the man (or woman) in the stands has laid his admission money on the line for something more than sitting out in the open on a chilly afternoon. The fan wants to know what it is all about. He has always wanted to know what it is all about, but the officials have only just discovered that if the game is to keep on growing, the plays must not be kept secret to the officials and the coaches.

Hence a system of signals has been devised whereby the officials on the field can let the people in the stand know what is what. A gesture of the arm by the field official will immediately telegraph to the stands that Whoozis College's penalty was for plugging. Another wave will inform the inquisitive public that forward pass was incomplete by being grounded.

The signal system is complete, and takes in every possible detail that might be of interest to the onlooker.

As we write, the players whose actions are to be explained by these signals are getting down to business. On one page of an early September copy of the *New York Times*, we find reports of the doings of the squads of Columbia, Villanova, Pennsylvania, Fordham, Rutgers, Navy, Dartmouth, and New York University. And by the time this is read this amount of activity will seem trifling. To "Tad" Jones, the veteran coach and member of the All-America Football Board, in a copyrighted article in *The World*, it seems



that this season will be interesting. Mr. Jones speaks in some detail of the Southern elevens. Mentioning the late successes of Georgia Tech, he continues:

This excellence is not confined to the Southeastern colleges, by any means. Southern Methodist, Texas Aggies, and many others in the Southwest, are capable of putting on an attack that will bend, if not break, the most carefully coached defense. There may be many reasons for the rise of the South to a position of eminence in the game of football, but I am inclined to the belief that the rise is a most natural one. To any one who has followed football, even in the East alone, a star from the South is hardly an object of animated curiosity.

On Yale's 1923 football team, Captain Mallory was from Tennessee. The quarterback Richeson was from Louisiana, one tackle, Blair, was from Texas, and Diller, one of the guards, was also from the Lone Star State. The only regret that most



*~a 1930 image that has nothing to do with the subject of this article*



*First Hand Signals*

INTERFERENCE

Eastern coaches have is that too many Southerners stay in the South. With the wide-spread interest in the game, both in the preparatory schools and the colleges, and with better playing facilities in the way of equipment and fields, and better coaching as well, it would be surprizing if the South did not produce elevens capable of holding their own in any company.

From another direction, Champaign, Illinois, seat of the university of that State, via the Associated Press, come further indirect evidences of good prospects. Coach Zuppke is worrying about Illini chances again and, according to this dispatch, "When Zuppke starts to worry, just watch out for Illinois," one coach remarked last fall." Says the Associated Press further:

Coach Robert Zuppke, who dotes on bear stories when talking about his University of Illinois football team, is at it again.

"Zupp" arrived on the campus unexpectedly, and before he was through talking he had convinced his eager listeners that the Illini would have a terrible time winning their third straight Big Ten football championship.

First, he announced that "Frosty" Peters, Illinois quarter-back and drop-kicking ace, would not return to school this fall because of a sinus operation. Then, to spread more gloom, he called attention to the recent faculty rule whereby any player can be declared ineligible from competition in the middle of the season at Illinois.

"It looks like a tough fight," the little Dutchman said. "We will have our hands full winning a game, I guess."

But "Zupp" has been spreading bear stories about the Illini so long and then turning out winning teams that rival coaches won't read about his gloom any longer.

In the midst of this chorus of enthusiasm and optimistic prophecy, however, Edwin B. Dooley, in the *New York Sun*, strikes a different note. "Football," he says in agnostic vein, "is full of myths and exaggerations, just as history is." Expressing doubt whether the famous deeds of Terry of Yale, Bailey of Maine, Dillon of Carlisle, and De Hart of Pitt were as brilliant as they have been painted, the dissenting Mr. Dooley says:

Unconsciously the gridiron game lends itself to hyperbole. Take the names of some of the present-day teams. They ring with the bloody episodes of the primitive plains and resound with the thunder of the ancient conqueror's marching legions.



*First Hand Signals*

TOUCHBACK

Down in the balmy country of Florida where the warm gulf breezes weave an atmosphere of subtle enchantment, one hears of the "Fighting 'Gators," the aggressive eleven that represents Florida University. In the Middle West the mighty "Wolverines" ravage the football world, or the "Thundering Herd" trample its foes underfoot. And wherever the game is played it's the same way. Down in Georgia and up in Connecticut we hear of the "Bulldogs"; in the North country the "Indian" is on the war-path, and the "Crimson Avalanche" is rolling thing under. At Purdue the "Boilermakers" are



FOUL BY BOTH SIDES

hammering things into shape, while the "Golden Tornado" is stirring up a terrible lot of dust. At Bethany we hear of the "Bisons" and in sunny California the "Golden Bears." At Lafayette it's the "Leopards," and at Pittit's the "Panthers." Princeton has its "Tigers" and Penn State its "Lions."

The average account of a football game outdoes in melodramatic metaphors the narrative of the Gallic Wars of Cæsar, or the detailed accounts of the battles of the World War. Backs crash the line with abandoned fury, and bring the foe down with a thundering tackle that rocks the very rafters of the stadium. If the truth were written, the tackler probably stuck his arm out sheepishly and managed to trip the runner so that he fell on his face. Linemen are reported as "charging like bulls infuriated by the tantalizing gestures of the matador," or "battling like a pair of en-



### *First Hand Signals*

raged Hercules," or "struggling to the death like a pair of Frankenstein's monsters." In fact, there is no end or limit to the liberal use of adjectives employed by ardent scribes during the football season. Old-timers are bedecked in the purple of the immortals, and no tribute to their prowess is too good for them.

Even before the season is in full swing, the writers are warming up to the task. When Furman's squad prepared to take the field for its initial practise session recently, the following statement heralded the advent of the candidates. "The thundering herd! 6,995 pounds of beef and brawn will trample the sod of Charles M. Manly Field beneath the specially constructed cleats of forty ambitious gridmen, when the Hurricane varsity candidates check their bag and baggage at Dr. McGlothlin's hotel across the hill and report to Mentor Dad Amis and his muscle-mauling staff for the first football practise of the year—that tendon-bruising period that precedes the opening of the season." The mere contemplation of the pastime of football is positively breath-taking.

Critics take a lot for granted when they discuss football. They reflect the attitude of the spectators, polished up so that it will not seem second-hand. How often is a strong backfield runner credited with a mighty straight-arm, when in truth he never learned how to employ that valuable defensive weapon. One great back out of ten, and that is a liberal proportion, may know how to use a straight-arm. And yet, year after year, every back who carries a ball with any success at all is invariably credited with a dangerous straight-arm. It's part of football parlance to refer to it, just as it is to speak of hip-shifting, another glorious and elusive myth.



SAFETY

You hear of so-and-so, a veritable hip-shifting fool, who can weave his way through any broken field. All of which means nothing. Any man who can shift his hips on a football field, especially while on the run, should be in a circus. Football players are told repeatedly that when tackling a man in the open field they should fasten their eyes on a spot between his hip-bones. That portion of his body moves least of all, despite his maneuvers. When he swerves gracefully he creates the illusion in the minds of the spectators that he is shifting his hips, but it is his entire body that he is moving, and his hips least of all.

The football season was under way early south of the Rio Grande, and on September 8 President Emilio Portes Gil saw his first intercollegiate game, as a Mexico City dispatch to the *New York Times* tells us:



### *First Hand Signals*

He looked on beamingly while the Yale-coached University of Mexico eleven ran up and down the field against the club, Deportivo, last year's champion in Mexico.

After the game President Portes Gil congratulated Reginald Root, tackle on the Yale 1924-25 elevens, who is now coach at the University of Mexico. The University of Mexico won the game, 19 to 6.

"This sport has marvelous lessons for Mexican youth," said the President. "It calls for discipline and control over tempers, cooperation and valor. I have enjoyed the contest hugely. It was a great struggle. I hope to see other games of this virile sport."

The President asked Coach Root to arrange a game with an American college for the inauguration of the great National



PENALTY DECLINED

Athletic Field on the outskirts of the capital, November 20. Root promised to do this. The President said he would stand for the expenses. Then he cited Root to come to the National Palace on Tuesday to discuss the development of football in Mexico.

Dofia Carmen Garcia de Portes accompanied her husband to the game. She expressed her feelings with the ecstatic phrase, "Qué emoción!" (how thrilling).

The university eleven showed the effects of four weeks of training. The squad played at times with machinelike precision, overwhelming the Deportivo tackles.

The university scored in three periods. The Deportivo touch-down followed a successful forward pass and was made against the university substitutes. Miranda, university half-back, played brilliantly.

Mexican football in general leads W. O. McGeehan, in his New York *Herald Tribune* sports column, to these speculations and prophecies:

The University of Mexico has invited Louisiana College to send its football team to Mexico City to play the Mexican team. It seems that intercollegiate football has moved south of the Rio Grande.

The manager of Louisiana is trying to find an open date, and announces that if it can be arranged he will take his team to Mexico City from Brownsville by airplanes. This is an idea that Mr. Knute Rockne, of Notre Dame, might consider. The Notre Dame team does considerable travel in the course of the season and it might be an economical step to keep a number of planes on hand for the football team.

Just what type of football the University of Mexico will put up, nobody knows. From what I know of the Mexicans they



*First Hand Signals*

should play a strong and fast game. Much will depend on this international game of football. If the Mexican team turns out to be what it might be, the zone of proselyting will be extended south of the Rio Grande, and old grads from various colleges in this country will be crossing into Mexico prospecting for football material.

It is my notion that there is plenty of it. The Mexicans could take to the game with considerable earnestness. It may not be so long before the University of Mexico will be on the schedule of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton.



TOUCH-DOWN OR GOAL



SAFETY

