

The First Game

by Lester Chadwick

Silence followed what was probably the most remarkable scene that had ever taken place at chapel in the history of Randall. A deep, heart-felt silence, which was almost as impressive as the unexpected singing had been. Some of the students were fairly panting from the emotion which had racked them, for they had been stirred as they seldom were before.

Slowly Dr. Churchill arose from the chair, and again approached the edge of the platform. His voice broke as he spoke a few words.

“Men of Randall, I thank you,” he said impressively and simply. “You may rest assured that nothing will be left undone to save the old college, which has no more loyal supporters than yourselves, and, I may add, than the gentlemen associated with me on the faculty.”

He paused a moment, as if he would say more, and then, with a motion of his hand, dismissed the assemblage. In silence the students filed out, and it was not until they were some distance away from the chapel, broken up into little groups, that they began discussing the situation. Even then it was in hushed voices, as if the enemies of Randall might be hiding about, listening for something of which they could take advantage.

“Wallops wasn’t far out,” remarked Tom, who, with Phil, Sid and some other friends, was walking slowly along.

“No,” came from the quarter-back, “but wouldn’t it get your Angora, though? To think of there being a flaw in the title all these years, and someone only just now taking advantage of it!”

“I wonder what can have become of the missing quit-claim deed?” ventured Sid.

“No telling,” remarked Holly Cross.

“Prexy said it was given by a Simon Hess,” went on Tom. “I’ve heard that name before, somewhere, but I can’t recall it.”

“I was telling you about our chair having been in the Hess family,” explained Sid. “Don’t you remember, I said it was one of the Hess heirlooms when we bought it of Hatterly, the Senior.”

“That’s right,” agreed Tom. “Fancy that now! Maybe next they’ll be accusing us of having the missing deed, because we have some of the Hess property.”

“We *haven’t* got it, you mean,” put in Phil. “Our chair is still in a state of *non est*.”

“Haven’t you located that venerable piece of architecture yet?” asked Dutch Housenlager, with a sly putting forth of his foot, in an effort to trip Tom. Dutch was always up to some horse-play.

“No, we haven’t found it, and I guess we’re not likely to,” went on the end, as he spoiled the efforts of Dutch by hitting him a playful blow in the side. “The mystery of the clock is still

unexplained. Our offer to trade back hasn't had any takers."

"Oh, you fellows make me tired, always talking about your old relics!" broke in Kindlings. "You had much better be considering some new football plays, or how to help Randall out of the hole she's in."

"Out of the hole some rascally lawyers *got* her in, you'd better say," corrected Holly Cross. "This trouble never would have developed, if it hadn't been that some legal sharps stirred it up, for the hope of a fat fee, I presume."

"And Langridge's father, of all lawyers!" put in Sid. "You'd have thought that since his son once went here, he'd have had the decency not to appear in the case, and would have left it for some one else."

"Maybe he's doing it on purpose, just because his son had to leave here," suggested Tom.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," agreed Captain Woodhouse. "But, say, don't let this trouble get on your minds, fellows, so that you can't play football. We're going up against Newkirk day after tomorrow, you know, and while we'll probably roll up a big score against 'em, we can't take any chances. Hard practice this afternoon. We want to wipe up the field with the scrub."

"We'll be on hand, captain!" promised Phil, and the other players shouted their assents. The students went to their various studies, still talking over the scene of the morning, and what it portended.

It was learned, later in the day, that the best legal talent possible had been engaged to fight the claim of the Hess heirs for the Randall land, and that a vigorous search would be made for the missing quit-claim deed, without which the college could not prove a clear title to the property.

It also was hinted that Mr. Langridge was not altogether actuated by purely legal motives in prosecuting the claim against the college. When it became known that the father of Garvey Gerhart was associated with him in the law business, there were few students who did not believe that the two men were acting as much out of revenge because their sons had been forced from Randall, as from any other motive.

"But it will take some time to get the land away from the college trustees, even if they lose the case," explained Frank Simpson, "so there won't be any football games cancelled."

He was in his uniform, and was walking out on the field with Tom and the others to the practice.

"I only wish he was going to be in the game with us against Newkirk instead of the Snail," mused Tom, as the scrub and 'varsity lined up. "We'd stand a better chance to pile up a big score."

But Sam Looper seemed to do better that afternoon, and was complimented by the coach for some good tackles he made, as well as for his ability in breaking through the scrub line.

"Oh, maybe he won't be so bad," conceded the captain, hopefully.

The practice was hard and gruelling, but it brought out a number of weak spots, which were impressed upon the players, that they might avoid them. Also some faults in plays were discovered, and

measures taken to correct them.

There was more hard practice the following day, when the scrub, mainly through the fine playing of the new member, Frank Simpson, came perilously near scoring, which they had been prevented from doing of late. The big Californian was showing up wonderfully well, and he was making more friends by his sterling character.

At last came the time for the first regular 'varsity game of the season, and though Newkirk was considered a sort of second-rate rival, there had been a marked improvement in her playing of late, so that the Randallites understood they were to have no walkover.

The grandstands were filled with a motley crowd of students, men and women spectators and pretty girls galore, for nearly all the feminine contingent of Fairview Institute was on hand, shrilly cheering, or singing for their favorite team, and waving the colors of their own college, intermingled with those of Randall or Newkirk. It is no exaggeration to say that the yellow and maroon of Randall predominated, and when Tom, Phil and Sid looked toward a certain section of grandstand A, which location had previously been brought to their attention, they saw three particularly pretty girls, waving the colors that meant so much to them.

"Madge, Ruth and Mabel are there," announced Tom, as he followed his mates into the dressing room.

"Glad of it," remarked Phil. "It sort of makes you feel as if you could play better when——"

"Your sister is looking on—or some one's else sister, eh?" broke in Sid.

"Oh, dry up!" exclaimed Phil, as he looked to the shoulder pads on his canvas jacket.

Out on the gridiron trotted the Newkirk players, to be received with a salvo of cheers from the contingent of supporters who had accompanied them to the Randall grounds.

Then the home team followed, and Bean Perkins leaped to his feet, wildly brandishing a cane with the college colors streaming from it, while he led the cheering, and then added his powerful voice, as the students broke into the song: "We're Going to Wallop 'Em Now!"

It was announced that the game would be played in two halves, and when Captain Woodhouse had conferred with Billy Bardeen, who ran the Newkirk team, they tossed for choice. Dan won, and elected to defend the north goal, which gave him and his men the advantage of a little wind. Newkirk was to kick off, and when Bardeen had teed the ball on a little mound of dirt in the centre of the field, he gave a glance to see if his men were ready. He gave the signal to the referee, and that official, after a confirmatory nod from Captain Woodhouse, blew his whistle.

With a little run, Bardeen planted his toe in the pigskin, which, straight and true, sailed to Randall's ten-yard line, being caught by Sid Henderson, who rushed it back fifteen yards before he was downed by a fierce tackle by Ed Denton. There was wild cheering by Perkins and his mates at this, for it seemed to indicate that Newkirk was not as strong as she had been rated.

Sid slowly arose and planted his foot on the ball until Holly Cross came up.

“Line up!” yelled Phil, stooping down behind the big centre, and then he began calling the signal: “Fourteen—eighty-seven—one hundred and six—forty-two——”

He snapped his hands, and the ball came back to him. Like a flash it was passed to Joe Jackson, who hit the line for all he was worth, and tore through for two yards, the Newkirk players seeming to crumple to pieces under the smashing attack. There were more cheers at this, and when Sid Henderson tore off three yards more around left end, the Randall crowd went wild.

“Walk it up for a touchdown!” yelled Bean Perkins.

It did look as though the ball might be steadily advanced up the field for the coveted point, especially when Pete Backus managed to wiggle through between left guard and tackle for three yards more.

But then Newkirk took a brace, and held against the rushing tactics of her rival, so that, after getting the ball to within ten yards of the goal line, Randall tried for a field goal, and lost because the pigskin struck the post.

Once more Randall, after some scrimmages during one of which Tom got the ball, began the rushing tactics, and this time with such fierceness and energy that inside of five minutes his mates had shoved Sid Henderson over the line for the first touchdown. Holly Cross kicked the goal, and there was a wild riot of cheers.

“That’s the way to do it; eh, Kindlings?” cried Tom, capering about in delight.

“We’d ought to have done it twice over in this time,” was the somewhat unsatisfactory response. “If we don’t look out, they’ll score on us.”

But there was no danger of that in the first half, when Randall got another touchdown and goal, and ended up with a field goal. Then indeed did Bean Perkins and his cohorts let loose, singing wildly, though they did not give the “Conquer or Die” song. There seemed to be no need for it.

Newkirk was downcast, but would not give up. When the second half was resumed, with some new players lining up against Randall, there was a moment when it seemed as if her rivals might menace her goal line, for they rushed the ball up with disheartening speed. The gains were mostly made through the unfortunate Sam Looper, who could not seem to hold, and Bert Bascome, his tackle, was not playing at his best.

“Put in Simpson,” suggested Tom to Kindlings, during the time taken out to enable the Newkirk players to try to get some wind back into their plucky quarter-back.

“I don’t like to put him in over the heads of men who have been on the scrub all season,” objected the captain.

“It will be worth while,” insisted Tom.

“Well, we’ll see,” promised Dan, and then play was resumed. Once more there was a gain through Sam, and partly because of a fear that his team would be scored upon, and partly in exasperation, Dan signalled for Frank to jump in.

There was a joyful look on the face of the big Californian as he took his place in the line, and the Snail rather ruefully retired.

“I guess I need more practice, or—something,” he admitted.

“Principally ‘something,’” agreed one or two of the scrub players.

Randall did not exactly need new life, for she practically had the fight won, but the advent of Simpson was good. He was a powerful player, knew the game and its tactics to perfection, and tore open great holes in the other line, through which the Randall backs plunged for substantial gains.

It looked to be easy sailing from now on, and when several more points had been scored for Randall, Captain Woodhouse gave orders for easier playing, as he wanted to save his men. It nearly cost them something, however, for Joe Jackson made a fumble, and the ball went to Newkirk. Then, wild to score, those players tore things loose, and shoved back the Randallites until it looked as if their goal line would be crossed.

There were many anxious hearts when the ball was on the twenty-yard mark, and when a trial for a field goal was made by Newkirk, there were prayers that it would fail. It did, and then the leather was quickly booted far enough away to preclude the possibility of further danger. Before Newkirk could rush it back five yards, the final whistle blew, and the first game of the season was over, with a score of thirty-two to nothing, in favor of Randall.

Source:

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