

# Needed: A New Ball and Widened Field

By Edward B. Cochems

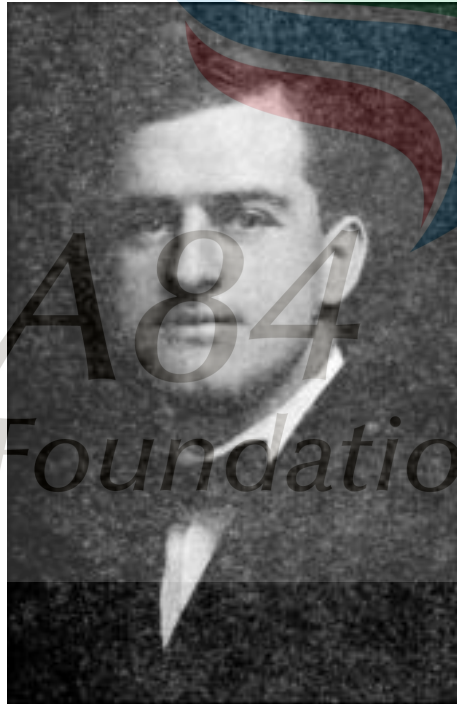
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WHEN first the ten-yard rule was suggested by Walter Camp of Yale, there were many skeptics in the football fraternity who claimed that it could not be made possible. Moreover, when they further suggested that the five big center men, who usually occupy the position of tackles, guards and center, were not to be permitted to carry the ball, except that they were back five yards from the line of scrimmage, and that six men must be on the line of scrimmage, and the man drawn back must have both feet outside of the foot of the end man, most men who were in authority claimed that it would be impossible to make the ten yards successfully, and that the great contests or match games of the country would necessarily result in a tie or be won by a mere chance. The Rules Committee, in order to make the game more open, and to debrutalize it, were compelled to increase the number of yards from five to ten, in order that the team in possession of the ball would be compelled to resort

to more chances of running wide end runs, trick plays, and, in fact, all styles of open attack. Moreover, it would compel the defense to disintegrate its usually compact formations.

The Rules Committee, in order to make these new conditions possible, were forced to make a number of concessions to the offense or the attacking team. The most radical of these concessions was the permission of the forward pass, that is, the team in possession had a right to throw the ball forward, not backward as formerly, and any distance to the two men at the end of the line, or to any man back of the scrimmage line, so long as the ball crossed the line of scrimmage five yards out from the point at which it started. However,

they limited the use of this pass and made it very hazardous by the rule that if the ball struck the ground before touching a man on either side it belonged to the opponents at the spot where it was passed from. In fact, this made the forward pass to the offense so speculative and so dangerous that most coaches in



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the country were afraid to make use of the same. Indeed, the use of the forward pass inside one's own thirty-yard line, is extremely hazardous, since, if not successful, it would go back to the spot where it was passed from, and at once gives the opponents, especially if they had a good drop-kicker or placement-kicker, a chance for a field goal, whether they were able to make the necessary ten yards or not by straight football. In this respect the forward pass certainly is no concession, or at best, a very slight advantage to the offensive team in this territory.

The second concession to the offense, is the rule which allows the team to gain possession of the ball on a kick the moment it touches the ground. Formerly the kicking side was never "on side," or had a right to the possession of the ball unless it had a man or two behind the ball when it was kicked, or unless it struck an opponent and he fumbled it, which gave them equal opportunity to gain possession. The rule stands now that the entire kicking team is put "on side" the moment the ball touches an opponent or hits the ground. This kick was used more than the forward pass by the coaches throughout the country, because it was less hazardous, since even if the kicking side did not obtain possession of the ball, at least, they gained the distance that the ball traveled, whereas in the case of the forward pass they did not gain the length of the throw, but the ball would be taken from them and placed back where it started from.

Another concession to the offense was the change in regard to the rule governing tackling. A player, not one of those in the line of scrimmage, was not allowed to tackle below the knees. Of course, if the player could not tackle below the knees, a big man would not go down as easily as formerly when tackled, and consequently could carry the player with him for some extra yards. However, this was practically a dead letter during the past two seasons, as few officials enforced the rule.

Another concession was in regard to the matter of hurdling. A man could not hurdle in the line, and could not jump over a player in the open if he were standing up.

These concessions to the offense I believe, after two years' practical experience with them at St. Louis University, St. Louis, Mo., have proved to my satisfaction that the ten yards can be made more easily than the five yards under the old rules; also that it has in a great degree lessened the chance of numerous, although not acute, and fatal injuries to the game. It likewise has been the means of saving the game to the people of the country by making it more open and spectacular, and enlivening it every once and while with the brilliance of a forward pass that brings the bleachers to its feet. However, I do not believe that the "on side" kick is a good concession since at the best it makes nothing more or less than a scramble for the ball, and is based upon chance conditions.

With all the advantages, that have been gained through the foresight of the Rules Committee in adopting these new rules, I believe that they have overlooked one very important condition that makes these concessions a matter of chance, dependent upon weather conditions. The use of the forward pass and the "on side" kick are absolutely useless, or practically so, on a muddy field in the rain, snow or under high wind conditions. Under this state of affairs, ten yards is harder to gain than five yards would have been under the old rules, or ten yards would have been under the old rules. Why? Simply because in order to make ten yards most of the original enterprising coaches of the country have developed a brilliant versatility of attack, dependent mostly upon fake and trick plays, end runs, open play of all kinds, in which quick turning, accurate and deceptive passing is absolutely necessary. It can be easily seen that sharp turning, fast and accurate passing, and the open style of attack would lose half its force with a wet and slippery ball. Secondly, the Rules Committee has disallowed the use of the five big center men, who formerly could have been pulled back of the line, and on a sloppy field, have massed their combined weight against the opposing team. Any one knows that a light, active man is not in his element in such conditions, and thus it can be seen that the ten yards under bad weather conditions have made

it practically impossible to gain them, and that even five yards would be harder to gain with all these concessions than they were formerly.

The Chicago-Minnesota 1906 game, in a drizzling rain, ended four to two in favor of Minnesota, not because Stagg's team was not superior, but simply because Minnesota had a heavier team. The entire year's work and labor of Coach Stagg was thus marred by weather conditions, over which he had no control.

Now what remedies can be offered in order to keep the great Rugby game in its present state? Very few coaches in the country but are in favor of the game, simply because it has developed the golden mien between too much open work, as we find in the Socker and LaCrosse game, or too heavy and close, as in the old mass play of former years. As was said by the leading Socker player of St. Louis, Mr. Cavanaugh—and St. Louis had gone wild over this game.—"You have taken the crowds from our parks because you have opened up a game, made it brilliant and spectacular, and just rough and close enough to attract the people's attention."

How can we maintain this game? I believe the first improvement should be made in the shape and size of the ball itself. The pig-skin, under present conditions, is so large that in order to properly encircle it for a perfect forward pass, only few hands are large enough. This should be remedied at once, since if the forward pass is to continue, it ought to be possible for any ordinary hand to encircle it, in order that the pass can be made accurately. Under wet weather conditions, or a high wind, even the largest hand at the present time is unable to make the pass with any degree of accuracy or success, and consequently it can be easily seen that this concession to the offense is absolutely lacking, while the ten yards to be gained remains. The "on side" kick likewise cannot be successfully executed when the ball is slippery, because that demands a degree of nicety.

I would suggest, and have already done so, to Alonzo A. Stagg of Chicago, a member of the Rules Committee, and he has promised to bring it to the notice

of the Rules Committee, and says it is a most excellent idea, that the ball be changed in shape and weight and size. I believe, although experimentation will alone prove, that the ball should be made slimmer—narrower through its short diameter and longer through its long; that two extra stitches should be added to the lacing, since successful performance and execution of the forward pass depends on this part of the ball. By adding the two stitches to the lacing, any player would be able to properly encircle the ball with his fingers, and under any condition accurately pass the ball. Thus it can be seen that although slightly handicapped under any improvements of the ball, nevertheless it would make the forward pass possible, and to a successful degree accurate. The ball, for kicking purposes, should have a slight protuberance at its middle point, and the leather somewhat heavier here, in order that the ball would accurately fit the foot, making it possible for a kicker to send spirals eighty or eighty-five yards instead of at present, forty-five or fifty. Moreover, the extra weight of the ball and its spindle shape would make it possible for the forward passer to send it seventy or seventy-five yards, instead of at present, thirty or thirty-five, or as the record we made at St. Louis University, sixty-seven yards. This extra distance in throwing the ball would make a great game, since the man with the ball could rush back towards his goal while his colleagues were rushing towards the opponents' goal, and then still have the power and opportunity to make up the intervening distance by the extra length of the throw. Indeed, I believe it would make a most brilliant spectacle, to see a ball shooting through the air either by kick or pass for that distance. I likewise believe that the ball being a bit narrower and longer, would be less apt to be fumbled since it could be held firmly, and would make it possible for the runner to obtain greater speed, because of the fact that the present ball is so short that the arm holding it necessarily is cramped and cannot freely swing in order to obtain the co-ordinate motion necessary for rapid locomotion. The lengthened ball would bring the arm out further and allow of a longer swing, and a freer one, since it

would be less dangerous to hold it safely. Any one knows that in muddy conditions fumbles are very frequent, and as distance is more difficult to obtain, more fatal to the success of the team. By making the ball slimmer and longer this would increase the possibility of holding the ball, and thus taking out another chance condition from this game. There are many other reasons why a ball of this kind would be a distinct advantage, namely the execution of in and out curves, both by kick and pass, but in this brief article I will not further enlarge.

The next important change I believe should be a widening of the field, in order that end runs or wide swinging plays would have more freedom. At the present time the field is so narrow that if a man like Eckersall or Steffens of Chicago, or Acker of St. Louis University, whom I believe to be the greatest half-back on the American gridiron, are often handicapped by the play bearing too close to the side lines. Many are the runs made by men of such calibre that would result in touch downs or in material gains, where now they are cut short by the side line, if they had a wider field.

Moreover, the "on side" kick and the forward pass are handicapped by too nar-

row a field, and if the new ball that I suggest should be adopted the field would naturally have to be made wider.

There are some gridirons of this country where it would be impossible to widen them more than ten yards, but games could be played under those conditions, even though the rules stated that the field should be ten or twenty yards wider. Mr. Stagg also has approved of this idea.

The result of the new rules has been the means of testing out the actual value of the coaching ability of many of the football preceptors of this country. They could not follow the Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, or other styles of defense and attack and hope that the old style would be successful. A great many of them tried this, and it was fatal to their success. Moreover, they do not believe in handicapping their athletic chances by making rules that Eastern schools do not adhere to, and thus receiving defeats, as it was shown in two cases in the Middle West. In other words, they do not believe in so much red tape, but more faith and the legitimate and sane advancement of athletics as a regular department of the institution's work.



FOOTBALL CAPTAIN "CHICK" KIRK OF IOWA  
AND BEAR MASCOT, "BURCH"