

Coaching—Its Effects

Stars of the Gridiron in the Making

By Wilfred Ingram

Scarcely any mere onlooker would attribute forty per cent. of the success or failure of a football team to the work of its coaches, and but sixty per cent. to the innate capabilities of its players. Nevertheless these are the estimates applied to the Harvard and Yale teams by Lorin F. Deland, tactics coach of the Harvard eleven in 1891, 1893 and 1894, in the "Atlantic Monthly" for November; and since thoroughly substantiated by the great reversal of form in the Yale eleven and its tie game against the superior team from Cambridge.

Yale has played Harvard thirty championship matches, of which she has won twenty-three and Harvard four—figures too decisive to be accounted for by mere chance. In these results there has been law mounting to certain effect, and this law, or laws, have been analyzed and set forth in the following excerpts from Mr. Deland's article.

If we could analyze the average football victory of Yale, and trace it back to its responsible causes, I believe the factors which determine a victory, with the percentage of influence which each exerts, would be as follows:

Team (as between Yale and Harvard)	20 per cent.
Captain	15 per cent.
Head coach and assistants	25 per cent.
Coaching of the coaches	40 per cent.

"First, the team. Let us bear in mind that practically the same class of men go to Yale and to Harvard. The preparatory schools send to each university in about equal proportions. Sometimes Yale and Harvard men come from the same family; often they come from the same set or group.

They are all merely potentialities. Perhaps Harvard has the best of the picking at the start, for from 1890 to 1900 it will be recalled that it was the Harvard Freshmen who usually beat the Yale Freshmen. None of these Freshman teams received expert coaching, and this factor eliminated the conflict became one of individual ability, and the men of Harvard usually won. When I put the team at 20 per cent., it is the team at the beginning of the season. What the team is at the end of the season is the result of other factors in the equation. Few well-informed judges of football will deny that if Harvard and Yale swapped squads on September 25, the final result would remain unchanged. Taking these facts into consideration, I think we are setting it high enough when we say that the individual ability of the eleven untaught players is fairly represented as influencing twenty per cent of the result.

"The second factor is the captain. Under this heading I place his qualities of leadership, his command over men, his powers of discipline, his ability to establish and maintain an esprit de corps, his forcefulness, his insight, and finally his common sense. We have had more than one case at Harvard, in the last twenty years, of the choice of an unsuitable captain mainly because he was popular—'a good fellow,' so to speak—one whom every one liked. It is a great mistake. She has made it conspicuously on two occasions, but it is written down that that thing must not happen again. If one can generalize about this question of choosing a captain, I should say that Harvard has chosen her captains for their popularity or personal playing ability. Yale has looked almost wholly at football fibre and leadership. Yale is right, in my opinion.