



Reminiscences of a Football Coach

What Constitutes a Good Coach—My Experiences at
Carlisle and Elsewhere—A Word on the
Great College Game

By GLEN WARNER

Coach of the Carlisle Indian Football Team

Glen Warner has for years been one of the leading coaches in the football world. His remarkable success at Carlisle has stamped him as one of the greatest generals the game has known. The brilliant offense which that team has characteristically displayed is largely due to the resourceful originality and ingenuity of "Pop" Warner, as he is known to the students of that famous institute.

In the following article Mr. Warner presents his idea of a coach's duties

and various sage conclusions on almost every department of football, which have been gleaned from his many years of experience.

THE work of the football coach is a complicated task. He is a teacher, he is an athlete and he is a general—all in one. Duties so widely different and yet so important are not easy to perform.

It has been my pleasure for many years to coach the football team at the Carlisle Indian School. This institution has received a great deal of notoriety, much, I imagine, because it is the greatest government school in the United States for the education of the Indian. Anything which concerns the native Red Man is of peculiar interest to the public. And Athletics plays an important part in the work of the Indian in these great industrial schools of which Carlisle is the leader.

The coach, as I have said, is first of all a teacher. There was a time when athletics was an "outsider" in the average college course. Its presence was at best tolerated and certainly not encouraged. Now all that is past. Athletics occupies as important a part in the training of the up-to-date college as any other course. Mental training is all well enough and the young man who has ambition to-day aspires to a college education, but it is now generally recognized that mental training without corresponding physical training is largely wasted effort. A well trained mind in a poorly equipped body is of doubtful benefit. This fact accounts for the tremendous crusade which has been waged in recent years along the lines of physical culture. In this way, it has come about that the athletic life of the university is by long odds its more conspicuous life and the part played by athletics has steadily risen to a position of prominence in the public esteem. Since athletics had come to be a permanent part of college life the athletic trainer has followed as an inevitable result. In our leading universities the man at the head of the athletic department is generally a man of sound intelligence, wide training and knowledge of his subject.

Thus it happens that the coach is first of all a teacher. It is his business to instruct the men who are given to his

charge, and in football, which is the most popular and most widely known if not the most important of athletic sports, he is particularly important.

In some ways the coach as a teacher has an easier time than if he were identified with another department of instruction. The pupils who come to him invariably come voluntarily and with great eagerness to succeed. He does not have to drag them along by main strength to keep them interested in his subject, for they are already interested. Of course, like all other teachers, he has his worries and they are important worries.

In no other branch of learning is a teacher of more consequence than a coach to a football team. In ordinary learning there are pupils who are naturally bright and who learn with ease just as there are others who are naturally dull and slow of comprehension. In football this applies to some extent, but not in my opinion to any such degree. There have been football players who seemed to play the game instinctively, but they have been very rare and their so called aptitude, in my opinion, was by no means as great as it appeared. The successful football player must have a proper build in the first place and some degree of intelligence but that is about all. I believe that practically all his efficiency, so far as he has efficiency is due to his course of training.

Thorpe is a wonderful player. He probably has the greatest natural talent of any man on the gridiron, but it took Thorpe time to learn the game. He did not make good his first season any more than any other star makes good his first season. Football is more than a game, much more, it is a whole course of study and, as I have already mentioned, the coach is the teacher.

Second, I have said that the coach should be an athlete. This is not absolutely necessary were it possible for a man to have a complete mastery of the game without having played it, but I do not believe this is possible. I cannot consider that a man is competent to coach a football team who has not played the

game himself for there are lessons to be learned from practical experience which can be learned in no other way. It is true that an instructor may be a fair success without practical experience, but in football a coach is almost universally appointed from the ranks of the players and is a man who thoroughly understands the game both from study and experience.

Third, a coach, as I have said, should be a good general. In the first place he should always know how to handle his men. This is not, by any means, the easiest task which falls to his lot. Athletes are often headstrong and hard to handle, and a coach frequently needs all his tact to get the best results. Again, a football game is much like a battlefield and the coach is at all times a general. It is he who has planned out the campaign before the contest, who has mapped out his own line of attack and the probable defence of the opposing team. And just as a general directs every move on the battlefield, so the coach directs the moves on the gridiron.

In these three fields the coach is very important. There are, of course, a great many minor details which enter into his work and which are all interesting, at least to him. Every institution of learning has its own peculiar problem to solve, and my work at Carlisle has brought me face to face with some conditions which of course do not exist anywhere else.

I have been asked if in my opinion the Indian is a better natural athlete than the white man. On the whole I do not think he is. It is true the Indian has lived an outdoor life for generations, and to that extent is favored in his athletic career. But if a white man lived the same way, I believe he would be fully equal, perhaps superior. When Tewanima came to Carlisle he was one of a group of eleven Hopi Indians. This particular tribe had lived for generations in the desert country of the southwest. They were a nation of runners and were supposed to be unrivalled in long distance running. They had a reputation when they entered the school and it was conceded that they would make a great showing in their own particular branch of athletics. But on the first opportu-



James Thorpe

nity which offered when there was a cross country run for the Carlisle Indians, these delegates from the Hopis did not loom up at all strong and not a man of them finished in the first ten. Tewanima afterwards developed after careful training into one of the greatest long distance runners I have known, but he did



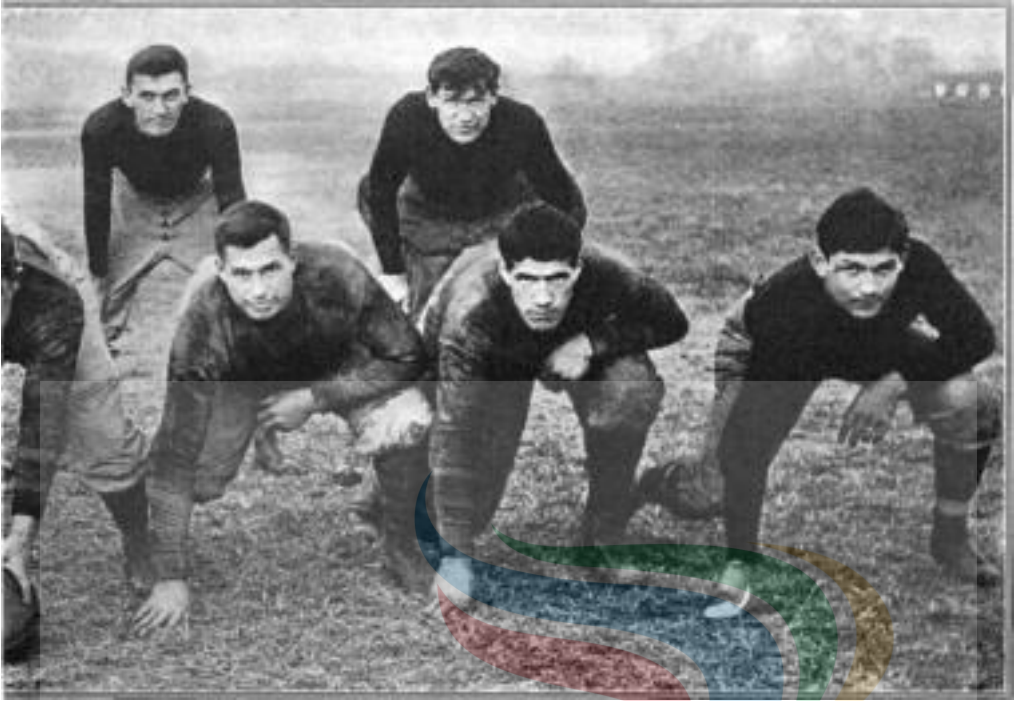
THE FORMIDABLE CARLISLE FOOTBALL TEAM. THIS REMARKABLE GREATEST SCORING MACHINES IN THE HISTORY OF THE GAME.

not look the part when he came here and he was the only one of the tribe to distinguish himself. I do not think heredity amounts to so much in athletics as training.

Football will never be a great national game, for a variety of reasons. The season is shorter, not so many games are possible as in baseball, for instance; and the game is not so open or spectacular. But, in my opinion, one of the main reasons why it will never be a popular professional sport, is the fact that it depends too much upon careful coaching. The best football player in the world needs to be trained and educated in the game before he is of any value to his team. So, I say without hesitation that a coach is far more valuable to a football team than a manager is to a baseball team. It is perfectly possible to collect a group of great ball players and have them beat any other team even though they have no manager at all. It is possible because baseball allows a good player to show for his full value without much, if any, coaching. But football admits of no such arrangement. Even trained foot-

ball players taken from different colleges could not play together without long and careful coaching. In the first place they must understand their signals. This is a hard lesson for the average football player to master. But it is necessary that he know his signals so well that he can act upon them instantly without making a mistake which might be fatal to the game. This mastery of signals comes only through long and patient drilling. Again, the players in a football squad are bunched together and must get together if the team as a whole is to be effective. In baseball the individuals develop enough team play of their own to win the victory without any coaching, if they are stars, but it is not so in football. The men must be played together and have a good deal of careful coaching before they are a well organized team. Too little depends upon the individual and too much upon the coach to make football a great professional sport.

In England football is a professional sport and draws immense crowds but that is no parallel case. The game is so much different that what applies to one



GROUP OF INDIAN ATHLETES HAS PROVED TO BE ONE OF THE THEIR FINE RECORD IS A GRAND TRIBUTE TO GLEN WARNER'S SKILL

case does not by any means apply to the other. The English type of football allows an individual star to loom up very strong and a team of stars hastily gathered together playing that type of football can do themselves justice without practice just as a team of all star baseball players can do. But you cannot accomplish results in the American type of the game without a great deal of important work on the part of the coach.

I have outlined in a general way what I consider the main work of the coach in his three departments of teacher, athlete and general. The qualifications which a coach should have are not so easy to define.

A good coach in my opinion must be a man of brains first of all. It needs a strong type of mind able to grapple with difficult problems at a moment's notice and able to carry out a line of campaign without wavering. The successful coach is almost always a man of strong character and unswerving will power. He must be in order to handle his men. As I have said, football players are not always the easiest people in the world to

handle. A coach must be tactful but firm and he must have original ideas. There is no general line to be followed. The coach who is not capable of devising new plays is not going to make a success. Originality of work is as important in the coaching line as in any other field.

Whatever success I may have had at Carlisle has been built upon experience. I have endeavored to profit by lessons gained from my past work, in adapting my methods to new ideas. Athletics is a great study in itself and the coach must study his own field just as any expert in any department of science or business studies his field. A coach has many cares, but he has some compensations for his worry. In my case it has been a great satisfaction that I have been instrumental in bringing out an athlete who has won worldwide distinction. James Thorpe at the Olympic games won both of those events which test to the full a man's all around athletic ability and he won them by a wide margin in competition with the greatest athletes in the world. It is a great satisfaction to me to have one of my own students in

whose career I have taken genuine interest do so well especially in an event of this international importance, and it is all the more a satisfaction since America has been accused particularly in foreign circles of specializing in athletics.

The ideal athlete in my mind is the man who while he may be beaten by some one else in practically every event, nevertheless, strong in everything. Thorpe is distinctly that kind of a man. Probably the most pleasant incident in my years of work as a coach was furnished at the recent Olympic games when two students from Carlisle scored a total of eight points, Thorpe with six to his credit and Tewanima with two. This was a better showing than that made by the representatives of any other educational institution in the country.

A football team properly built up is equally effective in both offensive and defensive work. I do not know that one is any more important than the other. Personally, I have spent more time on offensive work, and I believe it has shown in the record made by Carlisle. It has even been said that the Carlisle team was brilliant on the offensive side but weak on the defense. That, in a measure, is true, and I believe I can explain the reason. The Indian, as I have known him, is capable of playing as strong a defensive game as anyone, but he becomes careless in the average contest. He is thinking too much of how many yards he is going to gain on an end run to pay proper attention to the mere details of the game. When the opposing side is punting, the Indian can catch a punt as well as the white man, but he is oftentimes ragged in this department of the game for the reason I have tried to outline. While he is waiting for the punt to descend into his arms he is thinking of how far he will be able to carry the ball before he is dropped by the opposing tackle and more often than it ought to be, he fumbles the ball altogether. It is this type of mind more than anything else which makes the Indian great on offensive work and careless and ragged oftentimes on the defense. The Indian also takes big chances. He seldom likes to play a conservative game. I have noticed in watch-

ing some of the big contests such as those between Yale and Princeton and the like, that the games were played generally with few errors on either side. There was a lack of the mistakes made by the Indian, but the whole policy of attack and defense seemed different. The white men were content with small consistent gains. They refused to take chances, and their offense was not particularly brilliant. Their whole game was conservative. The Indian, on the other hand, is always plotting how he can make a seventy yard run or kick a field goal from the forty-three yard line and as long as he is scoring heavily himself he doesn't guard as carefully as he should against the score the opposing team is piling up on him. I have endeavored to adapt my system of coaching to the material in hand and recognizing the strong talents of the Indian along his own special line, I have worked to bring out those capabilities of his to their fullest extent. And this, I suppose, accounts in part for the general opinions current about Carlisle.

The Carlisle Institute is in no sense of the word a rival of the great university football teams. These teams, such as Harvard, have in the past looked upon the Carlisle game in the nature of a strong practice contest. But when the Carlisle teams grew too strong to furnish mere practice and were likely to win in turn, the big universities viewed them rather skeptically.

I have often been accused of favoring peculiar formations. I do not do so intentionally. I merely aim to use formations which give every man a chance to be of service in every play. It is only in this way that the plays will be effective.

No matter how spectacular the play may be, it is not liable to succeed unless it brings out in full measure the strength of the players involved. In my opinion a good deal of the coach's effectiveness lies in his ability to dope out new plays. I know I work a good deal of my spare time plotting out plays on paper and studying different formations and how they can be made effective. These paper campaigns are as valuable to a coach as maps are to the general of an army. When I have studied out a play in this way and decided that it has possi-

bilities, I try it out on the field. It is in this way that Carlisle has had considerable success with unusual methods of attack.

Every coach is, of course, interested in the new rules. It is impossible for any committee to formulate a set of rules which will please everybody. I think the rules are in the main very fair. Perhaps the committee has gone a little too far in one direction and made it a bit too easy to score by placing a premium on the possession of the ball. The introduction of a fourth down was felt necessary, no doubt, to overcome the lack of ground gaining opportunity last season. It tends, however, to a more conservative offense.

The football world is roughly divided into two parts and there is a good deal of discussion nowadays about the comparative strength of eastern football teams as compared to those in the west. I do not think there is much difference in these two sections of the country. Football has grown greatly in the West in recent years and the frequent changes in the rules have deprived the eastern football team of much of the advantage which it might have had through a full use of its traditional methods.

Every discussion of football leads generally to a comparison of that game with baseball. Naturally, I am more interested in football of the two and perhaps it is partly owing to prejudice that I consider football the greatest game we have. To me football seems superior for the following reasons. In the first place in football every man in the team takes part in every play. In baseball this is by no means the case. In football there must be absolute harmony of play or all chance of victory is lost. In baseball it is true that team play is necessary, but, as I have said, it is perfectly possible for a team of star baseball players to do brilliant work independent of any system. In football in my opinion there is more room for the use of brains and strategy. Strategy in particular enters into every telling play to a far greater extent than it does in baseball where mere skill is of the utmost importance. Again, football requires absolutely no implements as a requisite part of the game except a ball.

Every fall there is a good deal of space

given in the papers to the dangers of football. Many people seem to have the idea that the man who plays the game is always risking his neck. In my experience, which is rather long and varied, there is little justification for this annual crusade. No one who has played the game or knows anything about it takes any part in such knocking. The game as now played is rough but not dangerous. The people who are responsible for this hostile attitude and general misrepresentation are, in my opinion, mostly aesthetic college professors, old maids and mollycoddles.

The coach has a constant problem to sort out a suitable team from the jumbled mass of material which presents itself. The war of the candidates for a position on the first team is being waged always before his eyes. It rests with the coach to pick out from this mass of students those men who are fitted for the various positions of the team. It follows, then, that he must be fairly apt in recognizing those qualifications which go to make up a good football player. In my opinion these qualifications are much as follows: The football star must first of all have speed. This does not apply so much to certain positions in the line, but it certainly does apply to the back-field and the ends. Second, the player must have strength. Football, as I have said, is a rough game and it demands muscular vigor. Third, the player must have stamina. Football is a game which demands endurance as much as strength. Fourth, a football player must have brains. Nothing will take its place. Fifth, and most important of all, a player must have nerve. A player cannot be a star who does not possess this most important of qualifications.

No discussion of football is ever complete without a word on the oldtime players. There is a certain distinction in ancient events which throws a glamour around the star of thirty or forty years ago and makes his deeds stand out in strong contrast as against those of the present. As I was fortunate in knowing some of these old time stars as well as some of the best performers of the present, I can say that in my opinion there is not much difference between them in actual ability.