

At the Century of Progress

By Ray Schmidt

In the summer of 1933 Chicago was playing host to a World's Fair called The Century of Progress. In conjunction with the Fair, College Football had been enlisted to stage an East/West All-Star Game, to be played at Soldiers Field on the lakefront.

By 1933 all-star games were nothing new in college football, but the Century of Progress game was shaping up as more than just another exhibition game. During the season of 1932 Southern Cal and Michigan had waged a spirited battle for the national title, with all football fans eagerly waiting for their battle in the Rose Bowl. When the Bowl Committee skipped over Michigan the question of which team was really best was destined to remain a matter of conjecture for all-time.

For the Century game Coach Howard Jones of the West was bringing six USC stars from his great 1931-32 teams, plus the famous Trojan Morley Drury. While Coach Dick Hanley of Northwestern was countering with stars like Pug Rentner, Wes Fesler and Don Zimmerman, the hopes of the East rested mainly on the great quarterback Harry Newman of Michigan.

The night of August 24th finally arrived and the game promoters were stunned as 45,000 fans stormed the gates of Soldiers Field.

On the third play of the game the West's Tay Brown of USC blocked Fesler's punt and the West took over at the East 22. The East held off that threat, but a few minutes later the East's Roy Horstmann of Purdue tried a quick kick which was also blocked. Gaius Shaver's pass was then intercepted by Jim Purvis of the East to stop this threat. Late in the first period the East started a drive from the West 26, and led by the passing of Gil Berry from Illinois, the East drove for the first TD on Horstmann's five yard run.

The second period settled into a defensive struggle until near half-time when Dave Nesbit of Washington came in and blocked a Fesler punt, scooped up the bouncing ball and dashed the 15 yards for the West TD and a 7-7 tie.

Late in the third period Newman, as he had done all during the 1932 season, took charge of the game. Within a space of minutes Newman returned punts for 43 yards and 36 yards, almost scoring both times. Then late in the fourth quarter Purvis intercepted a pass on the West 34. After Newman had run for 11 yards on a fake pass, he went back and fired a pass to Gene Ronzani of Marquette, who raced down the right sideline for the TD and the 13-7 victory for the East All-Stars.

Had the game proved, as many historians believe, that Harry Newman would have found a way to win the Rose Bowl matchup for Michigan against USC? Had it proved, as the Literary Digest asked, "anything about the relative merits of Western and Eastern football?" What it did provide was a true Classic game for us in the annals of college football.