

A vote for the most exciting 'Big Game'

By John C. Hibner

As a young man I was raised in the small town of Palo Alto, and went to many of the football games that were held at Stanford Stadium with my father who was a big college football fan. When I was older and in high school, I got a job during the football season at Stanford helping to park cars, and I saw all of the home games.

Before the 1947 season started Stanford fans and alumni expected great things from the team which had a 6-3-1 record in 1946. But tragedy struck the Indians' hopes when two starters, Dave DeSwarte and Jack Eller, died in accidents. Also, their best back and leading rusher on the 1946 team, Lloyd Merriman, decided to pass up his senior year of eligibility. He then signed a baseball contract with the Cincinnati Reds. Senior tackle Jim Cox missed most of his senior year due to an ankle injury, and running back George Quist broke his ankle early in the season and missed most of the games that year.

The Indians opened the 1947 season losing 19-16 to Idaho which had never beaten Stanford before. Going into the Big Game the Indians were 0-8-0, and averaged only 7 points per game while letting their opponents score an average of 24.

Over at Berkeley, the Golden Bears had no place to go but up. They had just endured their worst season in 64 years under coach Frank Wickhorst with a 2-7-0 record. Brutus Hamilton, athletic director, looked and finally found the person who could "wake up" the sleeping blue and gold giant. Lynn O. "Pappy" Waldorf, who had coached at Oklahoma City, Oklahoma State, Kansas State and Northwestern, accepted the challenge of making things move forward. "Pappy" and his staff turned the hapless Golden Bears of 1946 into "terrors" on the playing field. California went into the 1947 Big Game with a very impressive 8-1-0 record and was favored by 28 points. Nevertheless, a sell-out crowd of 90,000 football fans braved very overcast, chilly weather to watch the 50th game between the two schools.

I was working that day parking cars coming into the stadium area. Several minutes before the kickoff the parking attendants were allowed to leave their posts, enter the stadium and witness the game.

This is when I first saw "Pappy" and the Bears in the flesh, The Bears wore dark blue jerseys with gold numbers, tan pants, and blueish-black helmets. "Pappy" was a sight to behold -- a short man with a sort-of-large stomach, and he wore suspenders to hold up his pants. His white shirt was unbuttoned and his tie untied, and he wore a soiled yellow baseball hat over his gray hair. He wore glasses, and was smoking one of the largest cigars I've ever seen.

In contrast, across the field, Stanford coach Marchmont "Marchy" Schwartz wore a three-piece suit, with hat and overcoat. He always dressed well. And the Indians wore red jerseys with white numerals, white pants and helmets.

The Bears received the kickoff and marched 64 yards in only six plays. With just three and a half minutes gone, Ted Kenfield broke off right tackle and sprinted 30 yards down the sideline to score. Jim "Truck" Cullom added the extra point and Cal led 7-0. It looked like the game was going to be a rout.

But the Indians came back with courage as they drove down to the Bears' 21. Harry Agler stepped the drive when he recovered a fumbled lateral in Stan-

ford's backfield. After holding Cal, the Indians started from their own 35 and moved all the way to Cal's 17 as the first quarter came to an end. The big play in the drive was a 40-yard pass from J. Ainslie Bell to Dan Mervin.

At the start of the second period Stanford faced fourth down and four. Cal was expecting a run and Bell crossed them up by passing to Wayne Erickson in the end zone for the touchdown. Quist missed the conversion and the Tribe had closed the gap to 7-6

The Indians threatened again, but a pass by Bell was dropped in the end zone. The Bears wasted no time in striking back. Bob Celeri passed to Frank Van Deren for 43 yards and to John Cunningham for 11 more. Runs by Bob Dalporte and Jackie Jensen moved Cal to the Indians' one-yard line, and George Fong blasted into the end zone. Cullom added the extra point with only 25 seconds left in the half.

The second half opened with a bang. Celeri's pass on the first play was intercepted by Quist who returned it 42 yards to the Bears' 16. The drive was killed when Bob Hillman intercepted Bell's fourth-down pass in the end zone, and again the Indians came up empty-handed.

Late in the third period a 16-yard pass from Bell to Eugene Martin moved the ball to Cal's 20. A fine block by L.G. Whit Budge gave Erickson daylight around end, and from five yards out he scampered for the touchdown. Quist's attempted conversion was blocked by Ron Sockolov, and the Bears were clinging to a 14-12 lead as the third period came to an end.

Early in the fourth period Jensen was hit hard, fumbled at Stanford's 34-yard line, and Richmond Flatland recovered for the Tribe. Eight plays and 66 yards later the stadium was going crazy. Don Campbell lofted a perfect strike to Bob Anderson in the end zone for the go-ahead TD with five minutes to play. The conversion was missed and Stanford led 18-14.

One minute later the Indians got another break when Quist intercepted his second pass of the day to give the Tribe the ball at Cal's 16. Jubilation turned to disappointment as a nine-yard sack and 15-yard penalty ended the threat. Mike Durkett punted into the end zone, and Cal took over at its own 20. With three minutes to play the Stanford fans were already dancing in the streets of Palo Alto.

Paul Keckley, who had been injured two weeks before the Big Game, wasn't expected to play at all. After checking in with the Cal team doctor, Keckley was sent into the game. On second down, with 80 yards to go, Jensen saw Keckley open at the 35-yard line. Keckley caught the pass and got a great block from L.G. Bobby Dodd, who took out two Stanford players. Keckley broke two tackles at midfield and burst into the open. No one even came close to him as he crossed into the end zone. The Cal rooting section and bench went absolutely wild, while across the field Stanford fans sat in stunned silence. Cullom added the extra point for the final score of 21-18.

Over the years this game has been rated the most exciting in Big Game history. Some have compared it to the 1924 game when the Indians, down 20-6 in the fourth period, rallied for 14 points to tie the game. But my money would be on the 1947 contest for excitement and tension.