

Time Tunnel

By Archie Prescott

As the clouds begin to part at the end of the Tunnel, we find ourselves standing on a street corner in a very large, old-time city. Quickly we find a newstand, buy a paper and see that we're in New York City on October 28, 1899.

Turning to the sports page we learn why we're here. This afternoon the legendary football team of Yale is coming to add Columbia to their list of victims. The Blues of Yale, one of the "Big Four", has carried on a reign of terror in Eastern football almost since time began. From 1890-1898 Yale has compiled a record of 109-5-4 and, while the 1899 squad is not of legendary proportions, they are still coming into today's game with a 5-0 record.

Columbia, on the other hand, has had a checkered football past. This was in fact Columbia's first year of playing college football again after not fielding a Varsity team from 1892-1898. Coach George Sanford has managed to get some big linemen to attend Columbia and, with a pair of speedy freshmen running backs named Bill Morley and Harold Weekes there's a possibility football affairs might be looking up for the school on Morningside Heights. Despite Columbia's 4-1 record coming into today's game, and the fact that the team has been looking very good in practice, the sporting crowd of New York is expecting the Yales to crush the young upstarts.

We ride the elevated train up to Manhattan Field and join the crowd of about 5,000 fans awaiting the kickoff. Looking around we see an even larger number of fans standing on the railroad viaducts and the bluffs that surround the field. The bleachers on one side of the field are completely filled with the loud-cheering Columbia students who have brought along large blue and white banners. When the Yale team takes the field there is only a scattered amount of applause for the "Monsters of Eli", but when the Columbia team is led out by their brawny linemen the stadium erupts in a long and noisy welcome.

Yale wins the toss and elects to receive the kickoff and so the game begins.

Surprisingly the Columbia team, by use of a tough defense and a strong kicking game, is keeping Yale backed up in its own end of the field. When on offense the giant Columbia linemen are completely overpowering Yale, as time and again Jack Wright, Miller and Smythe open large holes for the slashing, hurdling runs of Weekes and Morley. When it becomes necessary for Columbia to punt, their speedy end Slocovitch is always downfield to prevent a Yale runback. Late in the first half Weekes breaks off a long punt return to the Yale 35 yard line, causing cheers that literally echo off the bluffs surrounding the field. Columbia can't capitalize on the scoring threat and so the scoreless first half ends. As the teams file off the field the Columbia fans have to be happy since they "had no idea that their team was so good. Yale men had never dreamed of it as a possibility."

Yale comes out for the second half and staggers Columbia with a fierce running attack. But this salvo is stopped, and Columbia immediately re-establishes its dominating offensive line play as Weekes and Morley drive the ball deep into Eli territory, and thus bottle up Yale in their own end again. A short time later a booming punt is fumbled by Sharpe of Yale and Slocovitch recovers it for Columbia on the Eli ten yard line. Two plays later Morley blasts in for the TD, but in the midst of the bedlam the referee rules that the ball carrier had been "downed" at the one yard line. On the next play the ball is fumbled into the end-zone where Yale recovers it for a touchback and the threat is ended.

Then with six minutes left in the game Yale punts to Weekes, and he quickly skirts around the defensive men and heads down the sideline. At the 20 Chadwick of Yale misses a diving tackle and the Columbia speedster roars into the end-zone to cap off the 50 yard TD run as the stadium erupts. Trailing 5-0 Yale comes back with a vengeance but to no avail, and so the game ends in "one of the most disastrous defeats Yale has ever experienced".

Long after the game most of the fans, unable to believe what has happened, are still in and around the stadium. As the Columbia team leaves its dressing quarters and boards horse-drawn coaches, the fanatical students unhitch the horses and disappear toward the campus pulling the coaches themselves, as they sing and shout in celebration of the victory.

As we look at the happy crowd we know that somewhere here is the legendary Columbia fan Charles Mapes. Years later he will write of this moment: "Columbia had beaten Yale! Tears running down my cheeks, shaken by emotion, I couldn't speak, let alone cheer. My best gal was with me. She gave one quick half-frightened glance and I believe almost realized all I felt. She was all gold... God! why has life so few such moments?"

I could find Mr Mapes and tell him of other great moments to come in Columbia football; like the great win over Stanford in the 1934 Rose Bowl, the outstanding 1945 team or the great 1947 upset over Army. But then I'd also have to tell him about Columbia football of the 1980's. Much better that he always remembers it like this. We turn and head back up the tunnel.

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