

Time Tunnel

By Archie Prescott

As we descend from the end of the tunnel I'm instantly aware of the coldness of the weather. I'm standing outside a football stadium and everywhere I look there are mounds of snow piled high. Quickly I take my place in a long line at the ticket window, and then buy a paper from a passing newsboy. Looking at the front page I see why we're here. Fielding Yost and his Michigan team are to battle with Minnesota's "Giants of the North." We're in Minneapolis on November 20, 1909.

This is the second season that has seen Michigan out of the Western Conference in a dispute over their alleged lack of faculty control of the athletic program. Michigan is coming into the game with a 5-1 record and, in the undefeated Minnesota team of Coach Henry Williams, they are facing the 1909 Western Conference champions. This is also the first meeting between the two powerhouse schools since the 6-6 tie game of 1903.

The game has generated tremendous enthusiasm in Minneapolis and as I take my place inside Northrup Field I notice the stadium is jam-packed with 25,000 fans, and people are standing in every available spot. Yost has been drilling his team hard for the "revenge" game, and a victory over the Gophers would establish Michigan as one of the top teams in the West. While

Minnesota pounded through its first six opponents, the Gophers have not yet faced a line that could match-up to theirs. Michigan has such a line, and Yost has devised a defense to frustrate the Gopher attack. Plus it is rumored Michigan has an offense which features numerous trick formations and has no less than 120 plays. Despite this, most of the betting favors Minnesota by two touchdowns.

Just before two o'clock Captain Johnny McGovern, an All-America candidate, leads the Gophers onto the field as the stadium explodes with deafening cheers. Shortly after, Dave Allerdice leads the Michigan team into the stadium, and surprisingly they also have a large contingent of noisy fans. The field had been kept covered, so despite the eight inches of snow blanketing Minneapolis, the conditions are perfect for the game. Minnesota kicks off and the battle is on.

Midway in the first quarter a bad punt allows Minnesota to stage a short drive to the Michigan six-yard line, but they're stopped and McGovern misses the field goal attempt. Then late in the period Michigan starts a drive from its 43. Magidsohn's 15-yard run is the big play. The drive features sheer power running. Magidsohn finally dives in from the one for the TD and Michigan leads 6-0.

On Minnesota's next possession, starting from midfield, the Gophers pound right back. On the second play of the drive a pass to McCree gains 30 yards and shortly the Gophers are at the 10-yard line. Here they confuse the Michigan defense with a tackle-eligible play, and Pickering passes to Walker for the TD and a 6-6 tie. This touches off an unbelievable scene of celebration as the Gopher rooters raise a deafening roar and the stadium literally rocks from the intense cheering. Shortly halftime comes to give the emotionally exhausted fans a chance to recover.

In the second half Minnesota has an early scoring chance but fails to capitalize. Late in the third quarter Minnesota takes possession on its own 25-yard line, and on the first play Pickering drops back to pass. He fires it toward Rademacher on the sideline, but Magidsohn makes a leaping interception and sprints 35 yards into the endzone for a 12-6 Michigan lead.

The teams continue to battle back and forth, but the tremendous punting of Allerdice repeatedly keeps Minnesota bottle up. Late in the game Allerdice booms a field goal from the 42-yard line, and shortly after the game ends with Michigan a 15-6 winner. Michigan had outplayed the Gophers in every department, and its line was more than a match for the "Giants of the North." Walter Eckersall will call this "the best and cleanest game of football seen in the west" in 1909.

Standing amidst the mounds of snow outside the stadium, I watch a crowd of small boys eagerly pelting departing fans with snowballs until a cop puts a stop to it. The fans hurrying home through the cold and snow don't know that Michigan will remain out of the conference till 1917, nor can they imagine the many great battles for the "Little Brown Jug" that lie ahead. With a last look at snowy Northrup Field I pull my collar up against the wind. We turn and head back up the tunnel.