

## The great mix-up of 1922

By Bob Royce

New York University pulled off the upset of the year on Oct. 21, 1922, by beating Columbia 7-6 on the Lions' home turf in Morningside Heights. As disappointing as the outcome was for Columbia fans, it proved to be downright embarrassing for William N. Morice who refereed the game and was the central figure in the mix-up that followed.

The game was a natural "crosstown rivalry." Exclusive of a S.A.T.C. match in 1918, the two schools had played one another six times, each claiming three victories. The 1922 game, however, figured to be no contest for pre-season assessments rated Columbia's line as one of the heaviest and strongest in the East. Furthermore, the backfield was led by sophomore sensation Bill Koppisch, who was so talented that he had been elected captain. His wide end

sweeps, cleverly mixed with inside runs by Lou Gehrig and Ben Roderick, had already crushed three opponents by the combined score of 111-19.

N.Y.U., on the other hand, had won only one game and was considered a "breather" on the Lions' schedule. In fact, Columbia coach Frank J. (Buck') O'Neill was so confident of victory that he delegated his duties to assistant Joe Brooks while he attended the Colgate-Cornell game to scout both future opponents. What followed proved that he had grossly underestimated his former line coach and the Violet team.

Tom Thorp, the N.Y.U. coach, had developed a surprisingly strong defensive team which caused frustration among the Columbia backs early in the game. After five minutes of play, Gehrig was ejected for slugging, and Columbia seemed unable to move the ball in the right direction. Pinned down inside their own 10-yard line, the Lions tried to punt their way out of trouble, but N.Y.U.'s right tackle, Al Naggie, slipped through the line and blocked the kick. The ball bounced off his chest into the endzone seats and back toward the goal line, where N.Y.U. halfback Toorock fell on the ball.

Reporters who thought that N.Y.U. had just scored a safety were surprised to see referee Morice signal a touchdown. Weatherdon, the N.Y.U. fullback, converted to give the Violet a 7-0 lead. Although Columbia moved the ball it couldn't get within scoring range, for N.Y.U. displayed what the NEW YORK TIMES described as "a fighting spirit that was invincible." It was not until late in the fourth quarter that the Columbia team could produce an offensive drive that gave its fans reason to cheer.

Bob Burt was shifted to halfback, Blundell took his place at quarterback, and the Lion offense took charge of the game. After failing for more than three quarters to prove their superiority up front, the Lions stopped trying to crash the line and began to run the ball wide. Spreading and confusing the N.Y.U. defense, Burt and Koppisch steadily moved the ball into scoring territory, and Burt picked up six points on an end run.

Excitement mounted as Roderick, Columbia fullback, went back to try the extra point. A successful kick would tie the game and give Columbia another three minutes to regain possession and produce another score. Ed Berkwit, N.Y.U.'s left tackle, dashed these hopes by blocking the kick, and sending the ball back to midfield. Columbia's desperate passing attack in the final seconds of the game failed to produce a score, and the stunned crowd went home aware that it had witnessed a monumental upset. The mix-up was yet to come.

N.Y.U.'s victory was sweetened by Morice's comments in the locker room after the game. "I wish our Penn team had half the fight in them that yours has," he was quoted as saying. Sunday's game accounts mixed similar praise with criticism of the Columbia game plan and the change in strategy that came too late. There was no hint of a problem with the score until Monday, when several New York newspapers pointed out the flaw that threatened to rob Tom Thorp of his greatest victory. Unless special ground rules were in effect, they said, N.Y.U.'s score should have been a safety, because the blocked kick had sent the ball into the stands among the spectators. Fans who checked their rule books confirmed the claim. Morice, obviously, had muffed the call for no special rules applied.

As controversy grew, spokesmen from both universities sought to bring calm. Columbia issued a statement that it "would not take advantage of a technicality" to protest the final score. N.Y.U. said it would honor whatever final decision might be made. Back in Philadelphia, Morice was stunned by the furor. On Wednesday he issued a written statement, saying, "In justice to Columbia,

I feel that I must publicly admit my error and reverse my decision on the play in question, so that the final official score should have been 6 to 2 in favor of Columbia." He sought to assuage both teams by adding: "I wish to express regret to both teams, to Columbia for depriving them of a victory ... and to N.Y.U. for having to reverse my decision at this late date, but as it was not a question of judgement, but of the rules themselves, I feel that I cannot do otherwise."

A quick poll of football officials by the Associated Press added a new dimension to the controversy. A consensus, the AP said, indicated general approval of Morice's reversal. It was "the right and manly thing to do," was the general verdict. A few officials, however, said he had no right to reverse the decision. "The referee's jurisdiction over the contest ended," they said, "when he left the field at the close of the game."

Despite the aforementioned statements from the two colleges, coaches O'Neill and Thorp both claimed victory. O'Neill publicly accepted Morise's statement, and the polled officials, approval, as a change in the score to 6-2, in Columbia's favor. Thorp stormed back, "Those who were at the game know that we outplayed them ... and ... we won't allow anyone to question it. Mr. Morice has made a serious error if he has reversed (his) decision ... Rule 27, Section 2 of the official rules states that the referee's (game) decision is final." The burning question he and N.Y.U. supporters asked was, "Where does Referee Morice get his authority, three days after the game, to change his decision?"

Now Morice found himself questioned on not just one rule but two. What made his plight particularly embarrassing was that he was one of three officials serving on the advisory committee to the Rules Committee. A subsequent letter, obviously meant to mend fences with Thorp, suggested that his statements had been meant merely to admit his error, rather than to change the outcome of the game, "You will notice," he wrote, "that I said the official score 'should have been'." He also added that he had passed the buck on to Walter Camp and E.K. Hall, then secretary and chairman of the Rules Committee, respectively, asking for an official ruling.

Research so far has shown no indication of either Camp's or Hall's interest in becoming involved in the controversy. Sixty-six years have passed without any official ruling as to the final score. N.Y.U. still claims a 7-6 upset victory, and the mix-up is still reflected in Columbia's records, which show the score as 6-2.