

# This time the South won

By Mark Purcell

All-star games have lost their initial glamor and prestige; and the college games are now likely to be regarded as only exhibition showings for pro scouts. The opposite was true in the '30's when All-star games really exploded on the scene. The players were honored to be picked, and the properly organized and publicized All-star games drew big crowds. In 1939 the two big prestige games were the grand-daddy, the Shrine charity midwinter game in San Francisco, which was treated and respected as a real Bowl, and the fall (late August) Chicago All-Star game. The excitement and uproar was justified in that the old prewar All-star games have definite historical significance. It lay in their access to star players and players from teams which snubbed the Bowls and which snubbed the pros also.

For example, true college fans know, at least as a trivia item, that four of the first five Heisman winners did not go pro and so give us more information on their abilities and style of play. But Berwanger and Kinnick did start in the Chicago All-Star game, and Larry Kelley went to the Shrine game in his senior year.

The upstart North-South game, a Montgomery, Alabama promotion, had problems competing for players with the established Shriner operation it was mimicking. Its artistic success was based on the fact that without the postwar plethora of Bowl games between college teams, there were a lot of good senior players out there quickly available, and furthermore available from conferences like the Big 10 and the (unofficial) Ivy League. As the Shrine game early became a duel basically between the Big 10 and the Pacific Coast star players, the North-South promoters recruited from the East, including many Ivies, for their "North" players, and of course home-region southern stars for the South squad.

But very early, like the prewar NFL incidentally, the promoters realized the safest way to run the old singleging in the late 30's was to get in a senior tailback from what was then labeled the "pass-crazy" South. In 1939, for the second North-South game, they seem to have followed a last-minute tip to invite a Texas Mines kid named Ken Heinemann; at least there is a Dec 13 publicity story inclusively covering the South-team backs which omits Ken, and the actual played game was by then only 17 days away. Whatever, the South coaches were pleased enough with Ken's appearance to make him the starting tailback ahead of Young Bussey of LSU, by comparison a big name. The other deep back, the fullback, was Rotan Shetley of Furman, who was about as well known nationally as Heinemann, ie zilch.

This turned the affair into David-and Goliath, because the North's tailback and fullback were Bill Hutchinson of Dartmouth and Dom Principe of Fordham, who while neither of them real All-Americans, had gotten national publicity consistently, on the wireservices, for three years. Their names could be used to sell tickets, unlike Heinemann's and Shetley's. As you might guess David beat Goliath (Otherwise, why write this article?) when the South posted a 33-20 win. That only makes this 1939 all-star game one in a long line of mild upsets, and anyone familiar with Heinemann's previous college exploits, of which my other article gave only an account of one year, would not even have called the South win an upset.

One newsworthy item about the game is the size of the score. The other

early North-South affairs all have typical prewar counts like 7-0, 14-12, etc, no matter who won. The 1939 game exploded early and was 20-14 at the half, the South leading. The second half, the South controlled the game and was winning 33-14 when Lou Zontini of Notre Dame intercepted a very late South pass, which would not have been thrown at that stage of a close 1939 game, and went 46 yards to the South 3 to set-up a face-saving final TD.

The South earned 211 yards passing with 4 TD's, 331 yards in total offense, and intercepted 5 North passes good for another 145 yards. A North team full of major-level college players who knew how to play defense had been blown off the field. How did the South do it?

Mainly, obviously, Ken Heinemann, with an excellent backup performance by Bussey. Also, the South had the best receiver in the country that year, Ken Kavanaugh of LSU. (How did the Shrine people overlook him?) And the South had a tremendous college pass defender in Bill Schneller of Mississippi, a list quarterback in the Notre Dame single wing system, whose main requirement was really to play pass defense deep.

The TD scoring went: Heinemann passing to Emory Nix (Mississippi State) 40 yards and 28 yards, both apparently flat passes to an open man; Heinemann to Kavanaugh for 19 yards; Bussey to Kavanaugh for 48 yards. And our man on defense, Schneller, picked off a North pass and returned it 62 yards for the TD. The North offense, under Hutchinson, scored enough to have won or tied any other early North-South game. (Hutchinson in 1940 became the immediate star back in a minor pro league that played in New York and New England.) Hutch's backup, Whit Baker of Cornell, threw one TD to Zanavich for 55 yards, and the other two team scores were on short plunges by Baker and Principe.

The game was widely reported on the wireservices but the only individual non-scoring statistics I have below are from the Birmingham News coverage.

I start with the player interceptions, since this was obviously a key game statistic: South-Schneller 1 for 62 yards and a TD; Cox (Alabama) 2; Morgan (Auburn) 1; Nix 1. For the North: Zontini's 46 yard return is the only one reported. Rush yards: South had 120 yards on 34 tries; Shetley the leading rusher with 53 yards on 9 tries. North- Principe had 10 carries for 30 yards and 1 TD; Kiick (Bucknell) had 4 for 22 yards. All four tailbacks were shut down from scrimmage, obviously from being keyed on: Heinemann only 13 yards on 8 carries; Bussey 5 for 5 and Baker 5 for 10 yards. The game story shows all four tailbacks did some effective passing, though of course it was Heinemann who blew the game open.

My basic research source was the December 1939 Birmingham News borrowed on interlibrary microfilm via the Peoria Main Library and IVLS system. Thanks for their continued assistance.

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