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Lessons of a Scrambled Football Season

Success Depends on Forward
Pass, the Lesson

By **HERBERT REED**

(Right Wing)



Light, Pennsylvania U.



Davis, Pittsburgh.



Erwig, Syracuse.



Cannell, Dartmouth.



*Rodgers,
West Virginia.*



*Hastings,
Pittsburgh.*

FORWARD passing dominated eastern intercollegiate football to a degree unprecedented in the history of the game, in the season that has just become history, with the result that it has been most unsatisfactory to those whose hearts are set upon "championships." There is no "championship" in the east. Even if one were to arrange a series of games between two of the best elevens in the east there would be no guarantee that the team which won the first game would get away with the second, or that either eleven would be, in the course of the second game, within fifty per cent of the form displayed in the first.



*Ackley,
Syracuse.*

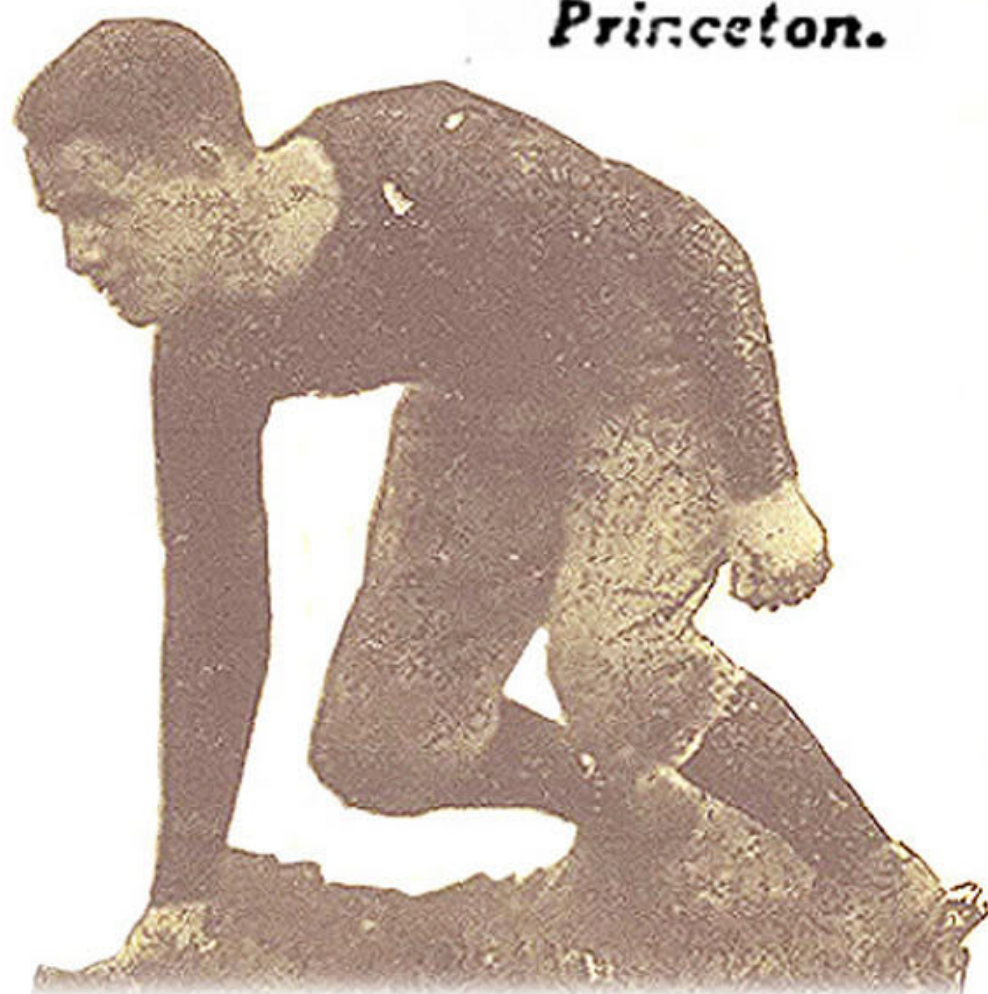
This is largely due to the great awakening of interest in and the vast use made of the forward pass, as a threat, a ground gainer, or a scorer. Almost without exception the teams of such colleges as Pennsylvania State, West Virginia, Colgate, and indeed of all the so-called small institutions that have boasted of a high-class season, have been blessed with much veteran material. Almost without exception these teams have had a tried, true and proved system of forward passing that dated back before the war.

Without offering an alibi for the larger colleges and universities, the fact remains that the material in most cases very

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*Trimble,
Princeton.*



largely was green. It required a lot of time to drive in the fundamentals of individual football finesse and of team play, with the result that proficiency in the forward pass and in the defense against it came much more slowly. In the case of Princeton, which concluded one of the most successful seasons in many years, the real defense against the pass was not in evidence until the Yale game. Prior to that contest the Tigers had faced remarkable forward passing by West Virginia and very good forward passing by Colgate. Yale's forward passing was poor and was not in the class of better attacks the Orange and Black already had met, so was easy to circumvent.

From the very beginning of the season the Tigers were committed to the use of the pass both from close and from kick formation. When they rounded out this offense with spread formations borrowed from Colgate, and supplemented the aerial attack with line plugging and tackle running, supported by the famous "end out" and roving interfeerer, they had an attack that earned them a tie in one of their objectives, the Harvard game, and victory in the other, the Yale game.

Princeton was perhaps the season's best example of the building up of a real football eleven from green material, through the fire of adversity. Defeats by Colgate and West Virginia and a narrow escape at the hands of Lafayette led the public to underestimate the real strength of the Orange and Black. It may be added that the leadership of Captain McGraw was a big factor in the making of the Princeton team. This fine player had been a member of the A. E. F., and, as a result, played throughout the season with a crippled hand.

Almost every eleven, east and west, had its quota of ex-service men, and in one game, that between Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania State, every member of both elevens had been either in the Army or the Navy, and not a few of these had been overseas.

WEST Virginia took a defeat at the hands of Warner's Pitt eleven early in the season, on a soggy field, and minus mud cleats. This gave the general public a poor idea of the real ability of

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the Morgantown men. There is no alibi here. But the West Virginians undoubtedly were not poorer as a team by 26 points than Pittsburgh. Later, Centre College, of Kentucky, another fine team, of which little appeared in the press of the north and east, disposed of West Virginia. In every case the forward pass was dominant. Not even West Virginia was perfect in defense against it, for after all, against this play, when well executed, a team is at one time or another in the hands of individuals. An individual slip in defense, or a little added individual excellence in attack, means the difference between having the pass beaten down or intercepted and having it go for a long gain, perhaps a touchdown. Before the war, Sol Metzger, I do not hesitate to say, was the best forward pass coach in the country. With his forward pass, plus a sound foundation in general football, he put West Virginia on the map. And there West Virginia has remained, because it "stuck to the dope."

Colgate, with a host of veterans such as Anderson, Gillo, West, and a few others, and with Larry Bankhart, a splendid coach, got busy with the forward pass early, and with a nice adjustment of passing to powerful plunging, looked like a champion until the encounter with Dartmouth. Even in that encounter, Colgate retained her championship promise up to the last moment, when Youngstrom blocked a kick for a touchdown, which, with West's goal, tied the score. On the strength of that tie, Dartmouth expects to be rated with Colgate,



**Robertson,
Dartmouth.**

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but I cannot see it. Unquestionably Dartmouth and Syracuse are rivals for the reputation of being the fastest eleven in the country, the team with the best timed running attack. Dartmouth and Syracuse probably got within striking distance, with the aid of fast backs on long runs and the good running back of kicks by Cannell and Ackley, more times than any other eastern teams. That, in itself, is a remarkable achievement. But Dartmouth was not a well-rounded team. The Green's own forward passing was poorly devised, without deception, and with little accuracy. The defense against it was better.

An intercepted forward pass gave Dartmouth the victory by a point over Pennsylvania. This was a game



in which individual errors and individual achievements were paramount. Pennsylvania worked its way to three touchdowns directly through the brilliant use of the pass, and lost one touchdown to Dartmouth through failing to cover its own pass. Dartmouth used the old Minnesota shift in the running game, with variations, and timed it beautifully. This shift went with a double "hip." It was a two-position affair and included a starting signal that occasionally drew the defense offside. Whether that was a matter of design or accident is problematical. In the case of Dartmouth it was ruled legitimate on the same day that it was ruled illegitimate in the Navy. Undoubtedly the matter will come before the annual meeting of the Rules Committee.

ONE of the best games of the season was won by Pennsylvania State from Pennsylvania, in the mud. Each team made an opening down near the goal line through the recovery of a fumbled kick. State put the ball over, and Pennsylvania did not. But the added three points for State, a field goal, came as the direct result of forward passing to Higgins, perhaps the best end in the country, down the "middle alley." This brought the ball into position for a field goal. Against this pass the Quakers did not play a loose center. They learned the lesson so well that when they faced Dartmouth they not only played the center loose, but played the first defensive back beside him instead of in tandem. Pennsylvania had learned, as other teams must learn, that you cannot beat the forward pass without playing a loose center. Coach Bezdek deserves great credit for the well-rounded football of this fine State team, even though he was blessed with splendid material, and despite the close defeat by Dartmouth, which was partly due to bad generalship.

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Syracuse developed one of the strongest elevens of the year. Not only was the material good, but it was equipped with fine football instruction furnished by Buck O'Neill, Bill Horr and their assistants. Syracuse had both speed and power. The backfield work was daring at times, and the Orange did what many a team has sought to do for years—stop Pittsburgh and score in the first few minutes of play. No one would believe Warner when he said his line this year was not up to the mark. He had wonderful backs in Hastings, DeHart, Morrow and Davies. They were expected to get away for sweeping runs for which Pittsburgh teams are famous. But to get almost the whole line into the play, as Warner does, requires a great deal of drilling, and the Pittsburghers had not had enough of this when they tackled Syracuse.

The Salt City team was at its best that day, as it was when it defeated Colgate, and it put on one of the best and most versatile attacks of the year. Further, it must be said of Syracuse that its defense throughout the year was as good as its attack. One could learn more all-round football, and the nice adjustment between power and open play, by watching Syracuse than by watching any other eleven. It had in the backfield in Erwig, Ackley and Abbott three stars, although Ackley fell down badly in his goal kicking.

Of the few elevens using the lateral pass, which helped Princeton tie Harvard used as it should be used, in attacking territory, and which defeated Yale used as it should not have been in defensive territory, Syracuse was the only team which used it in its perfection—in combination with the forward pass threat which could be turned into the actual pass for a long gain and perhaps a touchdown, with Schwartzner free, well down the field. Syracuse, also, was one of the very few elevens that crossed its ends occasionally, when making the forward pass.

YALE apparently neglected the forward pass, all through the season. The Blue had a rugged line, with some experienced men, and it worked almost entirely on the power plays, the sole deception being the delayed pass in close slants to the short side of the unbalanced line. Even under the ten-yard rule, power and power plays are desirable. They require any amount of drill to perfect, but they are always in the nature of terrorizers. The purpose is, at some time or other, to "whip" the opposing line.

Harvard proceeded, to a lesser degree, along the same line of preparation. But Harvard had gone further and developed the pass coincidentally with the power plays. Thus it was possible to tie Princeton. The power was a big help, but the pass, made surer because of the previous

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battering application of power, was what finally did the business. Whatever the result of the Yale season, one thing is certain: that as exhibited up to and including the Princeton game the Yale defense against the forward pass, as seen at its best, was practically non-existent. Princeton was allowed all the way from three to five seconds in which to get away her passes and, had the field been dry, undoubtedly would have completed at least two deep passes for considerably more havoc. Yale played the waiting end, which is a style dear to hoary tradition at New Haven, and is incorrect to the last degree in the modern game. A great burden was put upon the tackles, especially as they had to stand up against the crashing Tiger ends. They played well, in their own peculiar style, but could not last through.

There are certain features of the Eli play that are fundamentally wrong. Yale cannot win with just fair material, such as Princeton has. Under her present system she will win when she can find wonderful individual players.

ONE of the best features of the forward pass, well brought out by Princeton, Colgate, Penn State, West Virginia, Williams and a few others, was the "hidden man." This play is old, as is most everything in football. If memory serves, Fielding Yost invented it. But it is good. It is the use of one eligible hidden behind the middle of the line, who waits, peering through, until he sees the middle defense man carried out to cover a wider flung eligible. He then goes through into the "middle alley" and takes the pass. His is one of the best reasons for the use of a loose center and the first defensive back laterally behind the scrimmage line. It always leaves one man on guard.

Throughout the season Gilmour Dobie at Annapolis used one of the best defenses against both the forward pass and the running game. His two front men in the secondary were less than four yards from the line, while his halfbacks were less than eight yards back. This closed things up pretty thoroughly. The trouble with this formation, however, was that it left his eleven open to quick kicking from close to the line. This was the very thing that Georgetown did, with the result that the midshipmen were beaten. It will be seen, therefore, that there is no perfect defense against all types of play, which is just what the rule makers intended when they put the forward pass in the game.

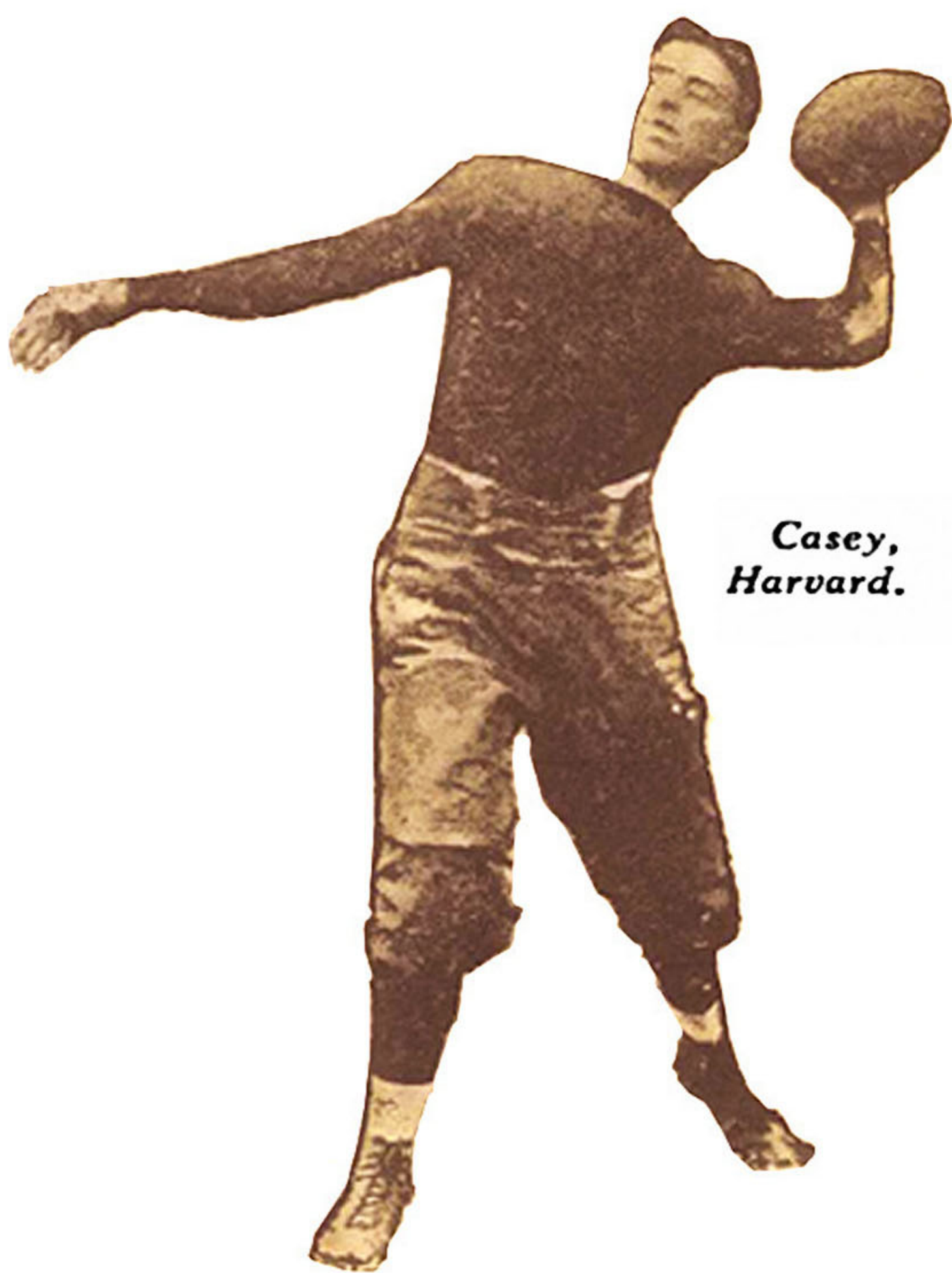
This season the attack was ahead of the defense in most cases. But with another year's experience it is hardly likely that any team will "run wild" with the pass, as did Notre Dame against West Point, Colgate against Cornell, West Virginia against Princeton and other cases too numerous to mention.

The situation in the west was about

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the same as in the east, except that the so-called "upsets" were fewer, leaving Ohio State and Illinois to fight it out for a real championship, Illinois winning. The gulf between western and eastern football has been bridged. The game has reached a standard type all over the country, with just a few modifications due to individual preferences in coaching and to the outstanding superiority of certain stars like Rodgers of West Virginia, Trimble of Princeton, Boynton of Williams, Harley of Ohio State, not to mention Stinchcomb, whom many who played service football will remember, Hastings, Davies and De Hart of Pittsburgh, Light of Pennsylvania, Casey of Harvard, Cannell and Robertson of Dartmouth, and Ackley of Syracuse, about any of whom a coach might care to build the main tructure of his attack.

Without the forward pass, well worked out and well played, both on attack and defense, there can be no high class football today. That's the big lesson of the season.



*Casey,
Harvard.*

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