

Twenty-Four Stalwart Men, and A Goliath

An Account of the First Game of Intercollegiate Football, Played Between Princeton and Rutgers, in New Brunswick, on November 6, 1869

From an article by Parke H. Davis '93

ON November 6, 1869, a little steam train, greatly overloaded with Princeton undergraduates, pulled into New Brunswick to be met by almost the entire student body of Rutgers University. The Princetonians had made the seventeen mile trip to give vocal support to twenty-five of their comrades who were about to engage a Scarlet team in the first game of intercollegiate football ever played in this country.

After suffering a 40-2 defeat at the hands of a Tiger baseball team in the spring of 1866, the Rutgers students were anxious to deal the Princetonians a return blow on the field of sport and football was chosen as the proper medium for the avenging engagement. Accordingly, the leading campus players organized and elected William J. Legget '72, as their captain.

A challenge then was framed in the punctilious form of that period and forwarded to Princeton. This defiant but courteous document invited the men of Nassau Hall, for the name Princeton as a university title had made its first appearance only the preceding spring on the shirts of the baseball nine, to play a series of three games, the first at New Brunswick, the second at Princeton and the third also at New Brunswick.

The receipt of this challenge aroused great enthusiasm at Princeton. William S. Gummere '70, one of the leading campus players and a famous fielder on the college nine, was chosen as captain. Fortunately for the history of football Gummere also possessed another qualification which in life's career carried him to the position of Chief Justice of the State of New Jersey—a legal mind. Foreseeing that the first requisite for a game of intercollegiate football was a sound code of rules, he immediately commenced the settlement of these preliminaries with Captain Legget. The only difficulty arose in the disposition of a free kick. At Princeton a player catching the ball on the fly or first bound was entitled to have a space of ten feet cleared before him and without further hindrance to have therefrom a free kick at the goal. At Rutgers no such play was known. This point was adjusted by providing for no free kicks in the game at New Brunswick, but allowing the play in the game at Princeton.

The rules for this contest are interesting, and being the first set of football rules formulated in this country, of course are of great historical importance in the game. They were as follows:

1. Grounds must be 360 feet long and 225 feet wide.
2. Goals must be 8 paces.
3. Each side shall number 25 players.
4. No throwing or running with the

ball; if either it is a foul and the ball then must be thrown perpendicularly in the air by the side causing the foul.

5. No holding the ball or free kicks allowed.

6. A ball passing beyond the limit on the side of the goal shall be kicked on from the boundary by the side who has that goal.

7. A ball passing beyond the limit on the side of the field shall be kicked on horizontally to the boundary by the side which kicked it out.

8. No tripping or holding of players.

9. The winner of the first toss has the choice of position; the winner of the second toss has the first kick-off.

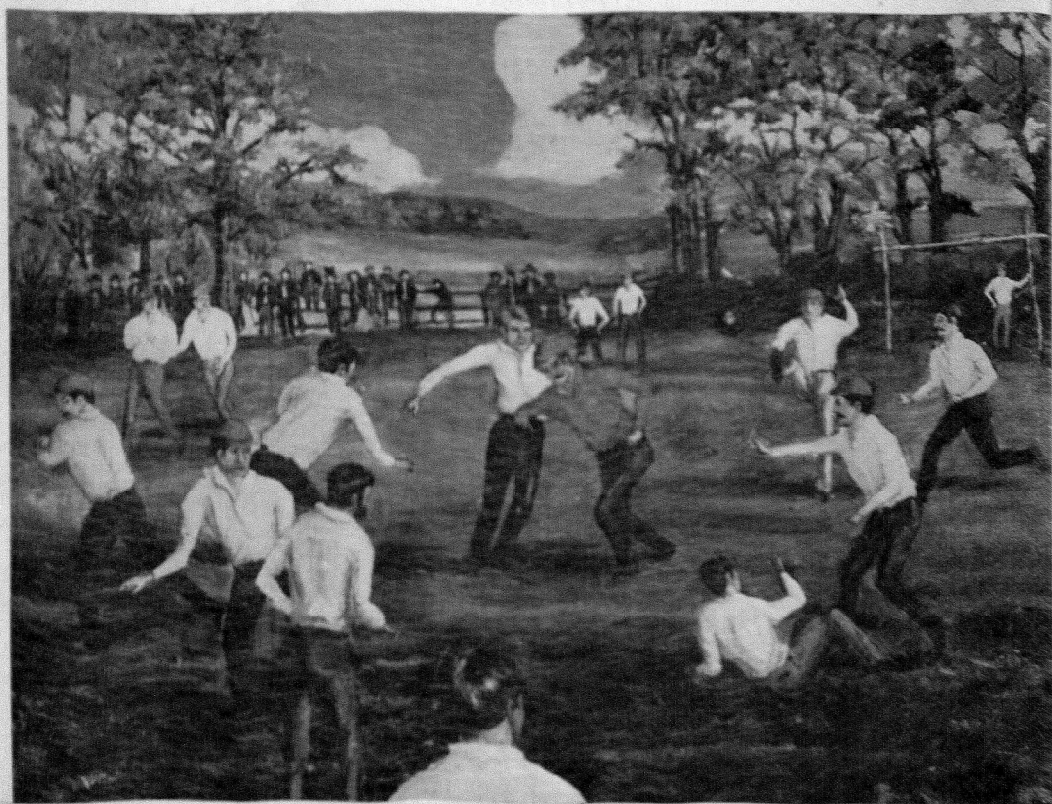
10. There shall be four judges and two referees.

On the day of the first game, the Princeton students who journeyed to New Brunswick were heartily entertained by the Rutgers undergraduates. The game was called in the afternoon at three o'clock. The field selected was part of a vacant lot directly across from the Rutgers campus. The spectators who arrived early appropriated seats upon the top board of a fence which partly surrounded the field, while the others found places on the ground. There was no admission fee, no waving of flags. The famous Orange and Black was antedated by seven years. But there were college songs, and, strange to say, a college cheer, Princeton's booming sky-rocket, hissing and bursting, just as it does today.

The players arrived a few minutes before three and, simply laying aside their hats, coats and vests, stood accoutred for the game. The only touch of costume were the red turbans worn by the Rutgers men, a custom long copied thereafter by other college teams. The Princeton team ap-

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Photograph of painting by W. M. Boyd, Rutgers 1932, giving a conception of the 1869 Rutgers-Princeton football game.



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peared to be much larger and heavier than their opponents. The size of one of the Princeton players, J. E. Michael '71, led "The Daily Fredonian" to refer to the Tiger team as "twenty-four stalwart men, and one Goliath." While the spectators were giving the players some preliminary advice the officials and captains were adjusting an objection to the very small size of the ball provided. When these preliminaries were out of the way, time was called.

The tactical organization of the players was the same on both sides. Two men were selected by each team to play immediately in front of the opponents' goal and were known as "captains of the enemy's goal." These positions for Princeton were filled by H. D. Boughner and G. S. Bilmeyer and for Rutgers by G. R. Dixon and S. G. Gano. The remainder of each team was divided into two sections. The players of one section were assigned to certain tracts of the field, which they were to cover and not to leave. These players were known as the "fielders." The other section was detailed to follow the ball up and down the field. These latter players were called "bull-dozers."

The toss of the coins for advantage gave Princeton the ball and Rutgers the wind. Amid a hush of expectancy among the spectators, Princeton "bucked" or kicked the ball, precisely as it is done today, from a tee of earth. The kick was bad and the ball glanced to one side. The light, agile Rutgers men pounced on it like hounds, and by driving it by short kicks, or "dribbles," the other players surrounding the ball and not permitting the Princeton men to get near it, quickly and craftily forced it down to Old Nassau's goal where Dixon and Gano, Rutgers' captains of the enemy's goal, were waiting, and these latter two sent the ball between the posts amid great applause from the fence top and vicinity.

The first goal had been scored in five minutes of play. During the slight intermission, Captain Gummere instructed Michael, the Princeton giant, to break up Rutgers' massing around the ball. Sides were changed and Rutgers "bucked." In this period the game was more fiercely contested. Time and time again Michael, or "Big Mike," as he was known, charged into Rutgers' primitive mass play and scattered the players like a bundle of broken sticks. On one of these plays Princeton obtained the ball and by a long, accurate kick scored the second goal.

The third goal, or "game," as it was then called, went to Rutgers. Madison Ball, who had been nonplussing the Princeton men throughout the game by running in the same direction with the ball and upon overtaking it stepping over it and kicking the ball behind him, on one of these plays, by a lucky kick, delivered the ball to Dixon, who was standing directly in front of Princeton's goal, and in an instant the ball was through and Rutgers once more was in the lead.

The fourth goal was kicked by Princeton, "Big Mike" again breaking up a mass out of which Gummere gained possession of the ball, and with Princeton massed about him, easily dribbled the ball down and through the Rutgers goal posts, making the score once more a tie.

The fifth goal was kicked by Gano for Rutgers. The sixth goal also went to Rutgers, but the feature of this period of play in the memory of the players after the lapse of 40 years is awarded to "Big Mike." Someone by a random

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WHEN PRINCETON played the first intercollegiate football game in history with Rutgers in 1869, opened its long series with Yale in 1873, and initiated its Harvard relationship in 1877... Brooks Brothers had already passed the half-century mark.

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kick had driven the ball to one side, where it rolled against the fence and stopped. Large, of Rutgers, led the pursuit for the ball, closely followed by Michael. Just as today a play near the side lines sends an unusual thrill among the spectators, so in this ancient game the crowd of students near the ball started to rise to their feet, but at this instant Large and Michael reached the ball and, unable to check their momentum, in a tremendous impact struck the fence, which gave way with a crash and over went its load of yelling students to the ground.

Every college probably has the humorous tradition of some player who, becoming confused in the excitement of

As custom both at Princeton and Rutgers made a total score of six goals the winning mark, both spectators and players were now aroused to great excitement as the close of the match drew near. At this stage Rutgers resorted to that use of craft which has never failed in the history of forty years to turn the tide of every close battle. Captain Legget, of Rutgers, had noticed that Princeton obtained a great advantage from the taller stature of their men, which enabled them to reach above the others and bat the ball in the air in some advantageous direction. This was particularly true of Princeton's leader, Captain Gummere. On resumption of play Rutgers was ordered to keep the ball close to the ground. Following this stratagem, and stimulated by the encouraging shouts of their supporters, the Rutgers men determinedly kicked the ninth and tenth goals, thus winning the match by six goals to four, and with it the historic distinction of a victory in the first game of intercollegiate football played in America.

The second game of the series was played at Princeton the following Saturday, November 13, 1869, the arena being a field across the street from the famous Slidell mansion, later the home of Grover Cleveland. This second contest, however, was played according to Princeton's custom of free kicks from catch on fly or bound. As Princeton had evolved a high form of strategy in kicking the ball from one to another of their side at close distances, thus creating a series of fair catches and free kicks, Rutgers was wholly outclassed and defeated by eight goals to none.

The third game, owing to the objection of the faculties of Princeton and Rutgers on account of the great and distracting interest aroused, was never played.



play, has scored against his own team. This tradition at Rutgers almost dated from the first game, for one of her players in the sixth period started to kick the ball through his own goal posts. The kick was blocked, but Princeton took advantage of the opportunity and soon made the goal. This turn of the game apparently disorganized Rutgers, for Princeton also scored the next goal after a few minutes of play, thus bringing the total up to four all.

As today's game falls on the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the founding of Princeton, Mr. Edward E. Watts Jr. '21, chairman of a special committee of the Bicentennial program, has asked the Princeton Theatre Intime to arrange for a Charter Day pageant between the halves. Featured in the program will be a reenactment of the first intercollegiate football game. Played in New Brunswick on November 6, seventy-seven years ago, this original game between Princeton and Rutgers was won by Rutgers, 6 goals to 4. Elsewhere in the program is a full description of this granddaddy of all intercollegiate football.

In planning the pageant, the Theatre Intime has been greatly assisted by a committee from Rutgers, under the direction of Professor Donald F. Cameron, which has cooperated in all the arrangements. Since the early sport resembled soccer more than present day football, men from the Princeton and Rutgers soccer squads have offered to represent some of the original players. In addition to these and members of the Theatre Intime, those taking part include other undergraduates of Princeton, wives of students, and representatives of the two universities.

We are greatly indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Milburne of Tranquility, N.J., for the use of the opera coach and the road cart, one of which they will drive; and to Mr. Donald W. Griffin '23 for the appearance of the rig, which the owner will drive.

The tandem is used through the courtesy of Frank's Bicycle Shop of Princeton.

The large-wheel bicycle is used through the courtesy of Bowser's Garage, Seabright, N.J.