

Blaik Might Use An Old Football Tactic When He Reaches Birmingham As 'Envoy'

By AL KUETTNER
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When Earl (Red) Blaik was

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football coach at West Point, his teams never chose to carry the ball on kickoff when they won the toss of the coin.

"You know what your own offense is; it's best to find out what the other fellow has," Blaik would tell his players.

If the Blaik formula is employed when he and former Army Secretary Kenneth C. Royall reach Birmingham as President Kennedy's personal "envoys" in the racial crisis there, they probably will do a lot of listening to folks on all sides of the issue.

The following might be a typical, if hypothetical, question and answer session between the presidential representatives and white and Negro people of Birmingham.

Q. The sign at the airport says "We are glad to have you in Birmingham." What do we have here?
A. People Birmingham has a metropolitan population of about 600,000. Four out of ten are Negroes. Some of the Negroes are well known, like A. G. Gaston. He's a millionaire. Some have good paying jobs and nice homes. Many more still live in row houses. There are some profitable Negro business ventures but Negroes mostly work for the white people.

Q. What provides most of the jobs for working people here?
A. Coal and steel and all the fabricating and processing plants that go along with such industries.

Q. What seems to be the trouble here?
A. People again. Race is the issue that's bringing all the trouble right now, but the root problem is a feeling of fear and lack of a sense of trust and dignity.

It goes through a segment of the Negro population. But a part of the white population also has this feeling of fear and distrust. Most of the trouble involves these two groups, either fighting against each other or fighting outside agencies such as the police.

Q. Then aren't we talking about relatively small percentages of the population of Birmingham?
A. That is correct. Most of the riots and rowdy demonstrations involve no more than 1,000 persons. The highest number has been about 5,000. Of course, this is a sufficient number to be a real menace to law and order.

Q. Are these people connected

with the so-called non-violent movement which has been conducting a desegregation campaign in Birmingham—the Martin Luther King organization?

A. Most are not in King's group. Some were and fell by the wayside. King has told Negroes publicly he will not have them if they are violent. He takes them back when they repent.

Q. After these bombings, Negroes often flock into the streets and start throwing things at the police who are trying to get to the scene. Why is this?
A. This is hard to explain. It goes back to a basic distrust and lack of faith in the police. The Negro element that fights in the streets keep demanding that the police find the bombers. But it goes deeper than that. This group has felt over the years that the policeman is an enemy. Suddenly, these Negroes have become part of a sort of revolution. A change is going on in their lives that they don't even understand yet. They have the notion now that at least they can — well to put it bluntly—stick their tongues out at the cops. It's gone from that to rocks and guns. They are letting loose some long pent-up feelings.

Q. But they are breaking laws. Don't they know this must stop?
A. The people who are breaking the laws in Birmingham have been obedient only through fear of being caught, not respect for law. That fear is gone. When their passions flare now as a result of a bombing, they take out their feelings on anybody who is white.

Q. What do the Negroes want in Birmingham?
A. They say it's freedom. Many don't even know. Their leaders say they want most a sense of dignity, of being part of the white community. It will take a real show of good faith for this to be accomplished.

Q. Where can a start be made?
A. Negroes say they want more meetings of the bi-racial committee with Negroes participating. They want a few first class Negro policemen. They say they want to feel that their interests, homes and self respect are getting the same protection as that of all the white people.

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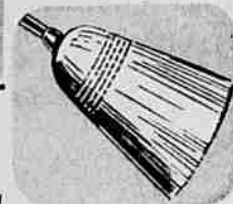
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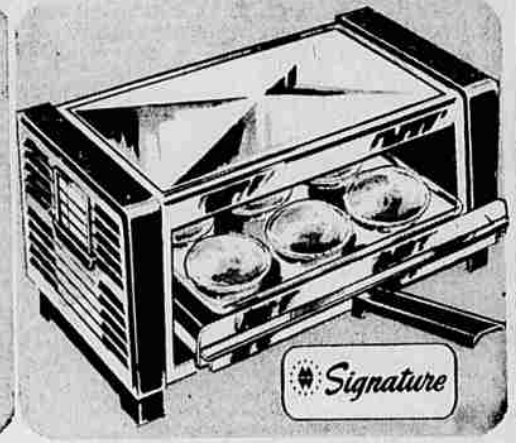
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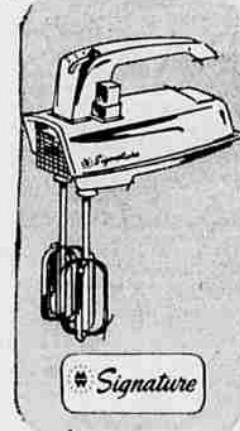
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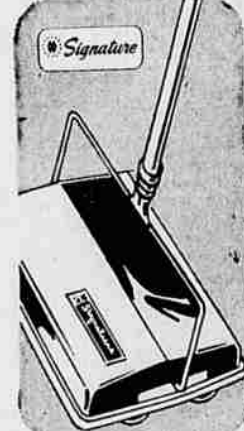
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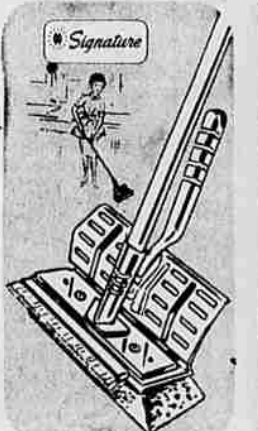
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