

A Football "HUDDLE" By FRANCIS WALLACE

Here is the opening chapter of "Huddle," the true-to-life, true-to-story serial story.

By FRANCIS WALLACE

CHAPTER I
Ted Wynne's decision to leave the steel mill and go to college had caused a minor sensation in the small town of Bellport.

His father was stoutly opposed: "I got you a good job in the mill; better than the youngest foreman there—and you want to quit, and be an educated fool; one of them white-collared guys too good to do a honest day's work with their hands. The mill is good enough for me, and it's good enough for you. If you leave you'll get no help from me."

His mother did understand, but she was sympathetic.

"All I want is for you to make a man of yourself, boy. It's up to you. If you think you should, do this I have confidence in you."

She talked to her husband. "He'll have a better chance, John. He's a smart boy and a good boy. Think of all the hard work you've done; long hours; hot weather; night turns—and you never leave the house that I'm not afraid you'll get hurt."

Barb Roth had laughed. "It's a break for me. I was wondering how I'd ever get rid of you."

"You're holding up fine," he had answered. "I was afraid you'd have a crying woman on my hands."

"So long, ambitious. If I send you any candy—"

"I'll look for arsenic."

Barb was 17, a high school senior, financially and spiritually independent. Their brief friendship had been founded on dancing and fived on wise cracks; but knowing Barb had sent Ted Wynne to college.

He had been thinking of going; thinking of it; but it might never have happened had he not met Barb. Behind their levity he had serious thoughts; thoughts of marriage and family. He could not see a future in the steel business.

"If you can get out, do it while you're young," Henry McCardle, the general foreman, had told him. "Practical fellows never get behind these jobs; the corporation bringing young engineers out of college and training them to become executives. There won't be any more Farrells."

Den Hazeltine, his superintendent, had spoken frankly.

"Ted, you weren't fashioned for a mill man. Don't mistake me; you would always do a good job; but it doesn't consume you. If you are fixed to go to college, do it. If you take engineering you can come back without your conscientiousness of service being broken."

But Ted was technically minded. When a roll broke he would

find a comfortable spot and lie down; or write letters; while the thing for a foreman to do—if he wanted to impress—was to fuss around the mill-wrights or roll hands who were making repairs. On a hot day when men were scarce and it became a problem for the wits to keep the wheels running, Ted loved the excitement; and he did a swell job; but ordinarily he gripped about the long hours and night shifts every other week. And when Barb happened, he couldn't imagine her as the wife of a rolling mill man.

Barb was fragile; pastel—not the type for packing dinner buckets or washing the crystalline sweat out of heavy flannel shirts. She hadn't been brought up to it and she couldn't come down to it. Her father had practiced law until a fortunate purchase of coal land had made him wealthy. The money was a subtle barrier and challenge to Ted. He had no assurance that Barb would ever feel for him as he did for her; but there was plenty of time; and if she did, he would bring her something more than a steel mill job.

Tom Stone had helped. Stone had been kicked out of two prep schools but had finally managed to get enough credits to enter New Dominion. He was something of a football player and wanted to play for the famous Barney Mack and his Blue Comets. Stone was so high-handedly arrogant about things that it was generally assumed around the gang that he would immediately become a regular and eventually an All-American.

The girls were terrifiedly impressed and Barb was silly as any. So, in the midst of a Tom Stone rally, Ted had calmly announced that he, also, was going to New Dominion, and might play football.

He had had his big moment, of course, and had gone into the mill after leaving high school and was generally thought to have a good job and a pleasant future there. He had been a fair high school football player, but too tight; his years in the mill, however, had given him sufficient weight.

Having made his announcement Ted was suddenly abashed; but Barb's jeering, Stone's insolence and the general assumption that he couldn't make the grade angered him, gave him the urge to inaugurate the necessary preliminaries—there was nothing left, after that, but to go through with it. They thought him brazen; privately, he was inclined to agree; but when he was definitely accepted by the registrar, Ted was glad things had happened. There were things he wanted to know; places he wanted to go; as a college man he seemed lifted to a sphere previously forbidden; the

fact that a little rashness had opened the door, surprised and illuminated his mind. Ted Wynne felt that he belonged on the upper floor of life.

So he had gone off to college with his head swimming. Things to do; people to show; the world beckoning him on yet warning him that he was fighting his own battle and must not whine if he lost.

Ted was contented. He had \$700 of his own money in his pocket; with vacation jobs and work at school it would have to last him for four years. Fair enough; all he asked was his health.

His mother had cried. So had Ted. He had sat on his trunk in the back of a truck and watched her wiping her eyes with an apron corner and waving goodbye like a little girl—until the truck turned a corner.

His football pretensions had not been serious—they had based mostly on his dislike of Stone. Knowing that Tom would come back during vacations to be fawned over, Ted went out for freshman football hoping to make a creditable showing—and was surprised to discover that he could cope with the others on equal terms. Ted had always been a good kicker, and his extra weight, all of it solid stuff, made it possible for him to stand the gauntlet.

Twice, while the frosh were scrimmaging the varsity, he nailed Jim Davis back of the line.

Who is that freshman playing in the varsity backfield? Barney Mack asked sarcastically. On the next play the varsity men gave Ted a beating as he came in; when he went down under the play he got a knee in the ribs and a fist in his face.

The varsity men said nothing; for more; was surprised to find neither did Ted; but he came back that he liked it.

"Atta baby, freshman," Barney Mack had said. Ted flushed under his headgear. Two weeks out of the mill and Barney Mack had praised him. This football was tough stuff but it was big stuff; he might make the grade and win a letter, anyhow.

But after another week Ted had to give up football.

"Finally shook you off, did I?" Stone commented.

"Unless you want to pay my bills," Ted replied. "But I'll be hanging around."

Then Barney Mack sent for him. "Why did you quit, Wynne? You were doing pretty good out there."

"I'm out here on my own, Mr. Mack; and the only job I could find was working in a grocery from 3 to 6 in the afternoon."

"So you had to give up football. Well, your studies are the important thing; and you have to live. Barney toyed with his own present cigar. "You looked pretty good out there, Wynne; suppose we give you a job out here that would help take care of your expenses?"

"Great," Ted answered, "what would I have to do?"

"Oh, this and that—we can find a job after you come out. You give up your room downtown, and go see the registrar and he'll get a room for you on the campus."

CHAPTER II
Barney looked at his watch; the interview was over; Ted hesitated. His heart was leaping but his mind was troubled.

"About what would I have to do, Mr. Mack?"

Barney was annoyed. "You've got to work, you know. We're not giving education away just for football services."

"That's just it, Mr. Mack—"

"Say, young fellow," Barney interrupted, "you're getting the break of a lifetime. Take it or leave it; and make up your mind quick."

Ted saw opportunity slipping; they said that if Barney ever got down on a fellow he was washed up. It was time for plain talk.

"I appreciate what you've offered me, Mr. Mack; and I'm willing to work; but I want to make sure I have a job at regular student rates."

Barney's eyes opened wide. He twisted his cigar like a pinwheel. "So that's it."

"Yes, sir; I gave up a lot when I quit work and came to college; I think a boy who beats school make money from both is entitled to a free education; but the law of the colleges says it's bootlegging."

"Play things safe, don't you, Wynne?"

"I play the percentage, Mr. Mack."

"How did you happen to come here?" Barney asked.

Ted told his story, Barney punctuated it with quick questions, in the manner of a physician listening to a patient's symptoms.

"You quit a good job to come to college and work in a grocery store, eh? Play safe on little things and take chances on big ones? Give up football to work in a store? Play the percentage. Handled men, have you? How old are you?"

"How much do you weigh?"

"One seventy-six."

"All right, Wynne. You move out here and I'll see that you get five hundred dollars off at regular student rates. Tomorrow you go out for football again; but you switch to quarterback."

"Quarterback?"

"Yes. Study the system we use here. Be cocky. The quarterback is a leader here, Wynne. I don't give a damn whether they like you or not—make them respect you; be smarter in class; on the field think ahead of the mob. You can do it, Wynne, you've got the right stuff."

"Thank you."

"And Wynne—most boys would say you were a fool saying what you did. Keep on being that kind of a fool, Wynne. You're right about football; there are things I don't approve of either; but it's too big now, and in the meantime we'll just go along with things as we find them."

Barney smiled; his face opened up until it became as round and jovial as that of the man in the moon; that was the smile the boys said made you forget every unpleasant thing he had ever said to you.

Ted walked down the path with



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his head somewhere near the gold-domed dome that topped the administration building.

Barney Mack had picked him out; and they said that when Barney started to work on a fellow he was as good as made. Barney seldom made mistakes in picking his men.

What a world. His mother and Barney Mack believed in him.

The next afternoon Ted went in to call signals for Stone's backfield.

"Still following me around," Stone commented.

"Ordering you around," Ted corrected.

Life was opening up beautifully; if Barb would show some sign of interest it would be perfect.

But Barb hadn't come to the station to see him off; she had written one scraggly note, fearfully composed.

He loved even her imperfections.

Ted liked living on the campus; rushing with the mob to the dining hall three times each day; wearing sweaters, corduroys and heavy shoes; chucking a book under an arm and hurrying off to class in a building two hundred yards away; dropping in on other boys in their rooms—boys from California to Boston; and the thing he liked about it most was that you couldn't look at a boy and tell who he was or what he had; democracy was a fact at New Dominion; regular fellows who lived in the expensive halls were almost apologetic.

At New Dominion a fellow got by on what he could do; not who he was. At home in Bellport Ted was a level below Stone socially—he always had the feeling that he was crashing an upper flight at Barb's parties. At New Dominion Ted was Stone's equal. He liked that; liked everything about his new life but the loneliness which grew more poignant each day; at night, when the excitement of the football season had ended and Christmas vacation was drawing near, he got to dreaming about home; and waking to the rude

shock of the morning bell. Sometimes it seemed that Bellport, his mother, the mill, Barb, were all part of a dream.

Exams. Before coming to college Ted had wondered if, after two years of work, he could pick up and keep pace with the others who went on from high school; he seemed to be doing it in class—particularly in philosophy which filled that void in his mind; gave him the answer, or provided the means to an answer, of what it was all about. He studied psychology and logic with a dictionary at hand; applied his experience in the mill to economics; battled with the irregular verbs of Spanish, and relaxed on English and history.

When quarterly exams came he rewrote doggedly; punished his eyes; walked around and took his notes; quizzing himself.

When they came he was ready; dressed in his best clothes, like a bridegroom; calmly he wrote his answers.

Stone had prepared elaborate notes; others had their favorite examination stunts; a flowing flannel shirt which could carry notes-books easily; information neatly typed on toilet paper which could be wound about a forefinger; dates pasted on the inside of a watch—two glasses at the paper of the chair in the next chair; whispered queries from the twisted sides of ventriloquist mouths.

Pur five looks. Bootlegging knowledge.

When the marks were posted a few days later the name of Ted Wynne was near the top in everything but Spanish—and at the top in philosophy. He felt respect after that. Barney met him on the campus.

"That's the way to knock them over," he said, "don't give a damn whether they like you—make them respect you."

Ted sent his marks home to his mother.

And a startling deduction blazed across his mind: College was very much an accident of birth; many of the sons of millionaires should

be driving ice wagons; many boys he knew in the mill and shops and mines at home were of far better material for leadership.

Ted realized he had always looked up to the ruling class of such; had ascribed to them quality per se; being among them, competing with them, had changed his slant.

It was always the individual rather than the class.

Home. Ted did a dance in the empty B.&O. station, chilly and forbidding as a tomb at 5 in the morning; juggled his bag down the long flight of rickety wooden stairs.

Whom would he see first? The dark shadows of the cavernous street caressed him; the slimy fog was perfume.

His town? Just a burg to others; but home to him. The face of the town bum thrilled him.

"Have a cup of coffee, Pumeley." "Sure."

The waiter at the all-night restaurant was mopping the floor; he was a new waiter—George had probably been caught tapping the till at last. Pumeley added ham and eggs to the coffee while Ted chatted with the people and the town.

Men hurried in with dinner baskets on their arms, hands buried in pockets, caps pulled over ears; bought stogies, cigarettes or chewing tobacco for the long day's pull and went back to the street, heads hunched in cold collars.

Going to the mill like condemned figures in the gloom; but he knew they considered themselves important entities—each a lord to his family, a peer of his fellows.

It was better that way; somebody had to do the mule work and contend with an armor against what might be painful thought. A life only took so long, after all; and contentment was the big thing.

Big Red, night sergeant at the police station, was hungry for information—inside stuff about Barney Mack and New Dominion. Big Red had been a football player himself. Ted talked awhile about Barney and then Big Red dropped him at home in the police patrol—distinguished citizens received such attention in Bellport. Chapter III on page 4 in today's Statesman.

Local Tomatoes Are Being Packed Now in Grand Island Plant

GRAND ISLAND, Sept. 29.—Dale Fowler is operating his cannery this week, caring for his home grown tomatoes. Louis Will, former process man for the Grand Island Cooperative Canning company, is employed in the Fowler cannery this season.

UMBANHOOR IMPROVING GRAND ISLAND, Sept. 29.—William Umhanhour is slowly improving from a severe stomach cold which has kept him confined to his bed for the past week. His son Albert, wife and little daughter Clara Jean, of Hope, are moving in with his people this week in order that Albert may assist his father in the farm work.

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