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A Story of the Football Gridiron

By **FRED L. YOUNG**
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One morning Elmer Ward, a freshman in Vernon college, was called up before the president, who thus addressed him:

"Mr. Ward, last night you were caught in one of those deceptions which of late have been throwing discredit on the university. Peter Barber's grocery store was entered and liquors and cigars taken. Barber, who lives over his store, hearing a noise below, put his head out of the window and saw several young men running away. He recognized you as one of them. If you will give me the names of the others your punishment will be far lighter."

"Last night," replied the accused man, "I was in my room from 8 o'clock till 7 in the morning, never once leaving it."

"That you would undoubtedly be able to prove by your fellow students but not to the satisfaction of the faculty. You may consider your connection with the college severed."

Elmer, after an interview with Barber, during which the latter maintained stoutly that he had seen the student running away from his store, saw no way to prove his innocence and, making a virtue of necessity, left the university. There was no legal prosecution for burglary since the matter was considered one of those indiscretions common among college students.

The hardest part of the young man's college leaving was saying goodbye to Della Trevor, the daughter of Professor Trevor. The two had been playmates, and Elmer had chosen Vernon college because she was there. They were neither of them quite of an age, certainly not in a position to pretend to any thing more than friendship, but there was an undercurrent of feeling that was liable to burst forth at any moment. This trouble which had overtaken the young man brought it all out. Together they talked over the situation as a matter of supreme interest to both, and the plan that Della proposed was carried out to the letter. It was in substance that Elmer should not be deprived of a college education. When he left this was not only understood between them, but that the current of their lives should be one.

Though Elmer had been in college but a few months, his expulsion was received by the students with marked disapprobation. The spirit of rebellion ran so high that the president was burned in effigy on the campus. The freshman was not only the most popular man in his class, but was looked up to as the athlete Moses who had fair to lead his fellow students out of the wilderness of defeat in which they had been wandering for several years. He stood six feet two in his stockings, and was a Hercules for strength. And now that he had been expelled the expectation of great things he would do for the college was crushed in the bud. Interest in the annual football match for the next year died out, and it was supposed that Kendall university, which had downed Vernon so often, would do it again. And so it turned out, not only that year, but the next and the next.

When the autumn of the third year came around the Vernon undergraduates felt that something must be done to break this chain of defeats. A good man, Tom Muir, was selected for captain, and he worked hard to get together an efficient team. He succeeded far better than was to have been hoped; but, after all, the team as a whole was too light.

Muir during the early part of October succeeded in replacing four players with better men and one of the freshmen in the scientific school was discovered to be not only very strong and very heavy, but remarkably quick. In this way Muir brought the team up to a state of efficiency that began to awaken an interest in the annual game. A week before it was to come off so great had been the change that the betting, which had been five to one on Kendall, became five to four on Vernon.

But alas for human hopes! One of Muir's best men was injured in practice so far as to be eliminated for that year at least from the team. Another crack player was taken ill. A third was called home on account of a family affliction. It was too late to replace these men with equally efficient ones even if it could have been done at all. The Vernon money was all up on the game and could not be withdrawn. All hope of breaking in upon the victories of Kendall was abandoned.

The day before the match Muir asserted that two of his substitutes had turned out to be stammers and he felt encouraged. Vernon plucked up courage. A more hopeful feeling was waxing when the very afternoon before the match, while practicing, the man from the scientific school, who had been relied upon for the principal tackle and runner as well, emerged from a scrimmage with a broken leg. That finished the rising anticipation of Vernon, and the game was given up for lost.

Nevertheless the next afternoon there was a big crowd on the oval to

witness Vernon's defeat. Captain Muir was walking across the gridiron with his head hanging in despondency when a man stepped up to him and accented for football and said:

"I'd like to be in this game."

"Do you know football?"

"Yes."

"You're big and strong enough apparently to do good work. It's pretty late, but I think I can take you on—that is, if you're really in college. I never saw you before, and I can't accept you without proof that you're in college and not a professional."

"Go ask the registrar. He's over there in the west stand."

Muir did as was suggested, came back satisfied and accepted the newcomer, placing him in the position of right tackle.

This happened not ten minutes before the teams lined up. When the game began there were not a dozen persons on the ground that knew the Vernon team had got an accession. A man appeared in their line half a hour above most of his fellows whom no one recognized. He attracted little attention, however, for every one knows that bigness is a great football player. Those most intimate with the personnel of the team noticed him as he took his position in the line and wondered where he had come from. Not one of them knew him. A member of the senior class said that his face was familiar to him, but he couldn't place him. Some felt a suspicion that he was a semi-professional who had been shoved through the exams for some special course for this special occasion. But even if there had been time for this supposition to take root the unimpeachable character of Captain Muir would have prevented.

The game commenced with the hitting of two wedges. The newcomer was seen in the center of the Vernon wedge apparently dragging half a dozen men with him as he advanced at a snail's pace. Then again the game became more open every one was surprised at the elasticity of his river body and his remarkable quickness.

The end of the first half is an interval of importance in football. Up to that point the game is developing. The comparative ability of the teams and of the individual players is being noted. No great interchange of views among those present is taking place. Every one is intent on the game, looking especially for scores. But the moment the half is called there is a hubbub as to what has taken place. One team or the other is marked for the better one. Some one player has shown especial ability as a tackler, a passer of the ball or a runner. One of whom great things was expected has failed lamentably. In this Vernon-Kendall match when the teams had lined up for the kick off a few feet were being made of 5 to 1 on Kendall. When they broke their formations, though Kendall had scored once and Vernon not at all, Vernon backers offered even money on their team. There being no takers, odds were given.

This change of feeling had been brought about mainly by the big man who had come into the game at the last moment. Twice by his own effort he had got the ball within six yards of goal but for want of support had lost the ground he had gained. Once he had by a quick move got on the enemy's right and could have carried it to goal but for the same reason—the failure of his team to assist him. And now no one knew what he might succeed in doing unaided in the second half. Bettors are timid, and nunny began to hedge.

As soon as the second half opened this change in sentiment became a revolution. The new man entered the fight as if the fate of Vernon depended on him. He had been seen during the interval to speak to one of the most popular young ladies belonging to the college coterie. She had smiled upon him, and when he had left her he had walked back on to the gridiron with a determination in his face and in his very gait that brooded no good to the Kendall team. And now that the game had recommenced—more open than before—his great frame was seen flitting about like a featherweight. Within ten minutes he had run through a succession of tacklers, dodging and ducking, finally carrying the ball to a touchdown. Later while on the touch-down right the ball was passed to him, and he made one of those famous runs with it to goal that never fail to electrify spectators. His last feat was to carry half a dozen men who were clinging to him and the ball as well for five yards and plant it over the line.

The half ended with this feat, while Vernon rosters went wild with shouting. Their college had won and had won through the personal effort of one man.

The moment the game was ended he left the field.

The next morning in chapel the president made the following announcement:

"Three years ago a great injustice was done a student of this university, Elmer Ward, a member of the present senior class, after being in college but a few months, was expelled for entering a store and taking away supplies. Recently a man who much resembled Ward has been convicted of another offense and confessed that Ward had been mistaken for him. The party that entered the store were not students, as was supposed. Mr. Ward, who has continued his studies with tutors, has been again received among us and will henceforth be considered a member of his class."

Then it was known that Ward and the football hero were the same person. It was also soon known that he was the betrothed of Miss Trevor and that she had inspired him to gain a victory for his alma mater.

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