

The Singing Fullback

Howard's Singing beats Dartmouth 21-20

Dartmouth Leads 20-0 at Half time, but Howard Sings and Wins (Concluding Installment)

SYNOPSIS OF SINGING FULLBACK

Barney Reid and Duke Hart are rivals, both in love and on the gridiron. Both go to Howard University, and both fall in love with Sally Martin, a member of Duke's class. Barney has had to work in an iron mill for a year, and so is one class behind Hart in school.

Barney, at first unable to play football because of the necessity of working his way through college, finally finds a job singing in a chorus. This enables him to go out and make the freshman team. Later he tried for the varsity. Hart, regular varsity fullback, is injured, and Barney gets first call for that position. But his father, the Rev. Mr. Reid, dies, and Barney is left in financial straits.

Just before the game with Lincoln, Hart kills a gambler, visits Barney and offers him a thousand dollars to throw the game. Although he refuses, he is tempted. The next day he receives a note saying that the offer is still open.

But Barney decides to play the game fairly. He goes in to win, but his best efforts are not quite good enough. After scoring a touchdown, he fails to kick the extra point, and Lincoln wins by a score of 1-0. Duke Hart finds the note which Eliza has sent Barney, and shows it to him after the game. He proposes to keep the matter quiet, if Barney will stop going out with Sally. Barney is forced to promise that he will forget the girl in order to keep the incriminating note from being made public.

Then comes a post-season charity game with Dartmouth College. The whole Howard aggregation is nervous and overworked as this encounter begins; every player makes some sort of error, and in the first half Dartmouth runs up a score of 20-0 against Howard.

CHAPTER XIII

The half ended finally, and Howard's eleven players walked dejectedly up to their dressing room in the gym. Everything had gone wrong. They were tired; weary of football and everything connected with it; nervous and short-tempered.

Most of them jumped on Bryant, first thing about that kickoff he had muffed. "Right in his arms, too! How could anybody be so dumb? He might at least have tried to catch it. If that score hadn't gone over..."

Moss got his share of the raspberries next. Moss was captain, but that hadn't stopped him from fumbling. The fact only made his error the more glaring. "How on earth can we do anything when you throw away points like that? What you think this is, anyway?"

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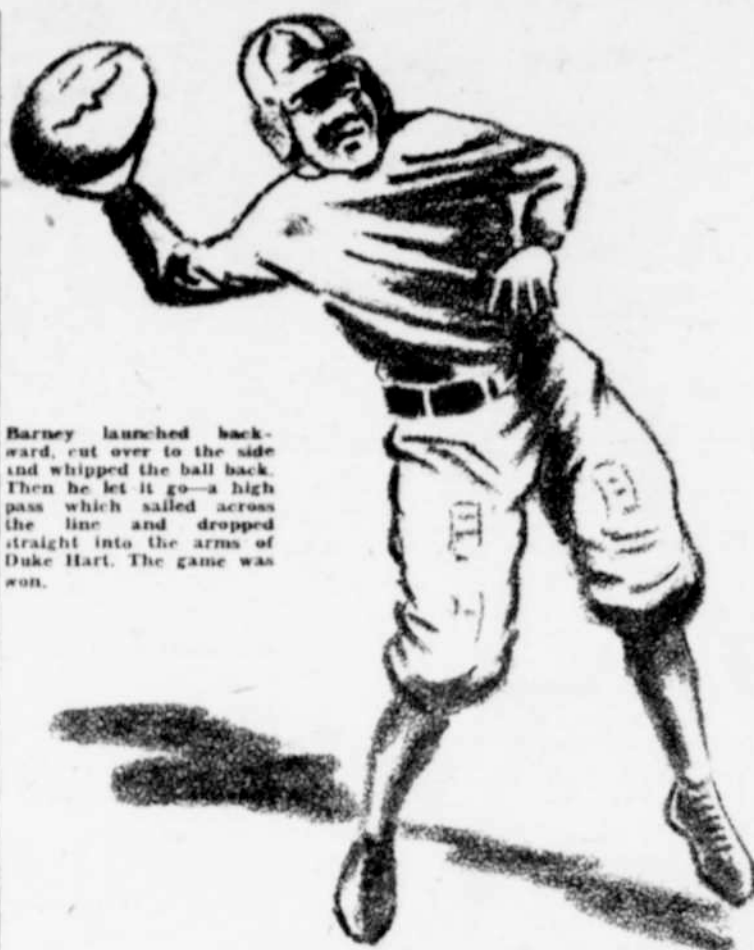
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Barney launched backward, cut over to the side and whipped the ball back. Then he let it go—a high pass which sailed across the line and dropped straight into the arms of Duke Hart. The game was won.

The quarterback was ridden. "What's the big idea of calling for a forward on a fourth down with fifteen to go, huh? What kind of football do you call that?"

Caustic comments snapped like streaks of lightning across the crowded, sweat-soaked room. Everybody blamed everybody else—aloud. Inwardly, every one of the players was not a little disgusted with his own failure.

Coach Verdell talked to them a few minutes later. He reminded them that it wasn't a regular game—it didn't really mean anything. He begged them not to take it so hard.

"I want you fellows to go back in there and play your best," he concluded. "Maybe you won't win. Somebody's got to lose, and Dartmouth has a mighty good team. It won't be any disgrace to lose to them. But at least let me see you go in there and put up a game scrap until it's all over. Let's see you act like men, not babies. Let's see you go in there and fight to the final gun."

Finally he stopped talking. The players sat about glumly, dreading to go back upon the field. The coach announced a few changes in the lineup, but they were in the line. The backfield remained intact.

Still grumblings arose from the weary players. Accusations once again began to fly thick and fast. Some one had the temerity to call Moss, the team's captain, a "dumb cluck." Moss was riled; ready to fight. Two men had to hold him back.

Trouble was brewing in the Bison camp. Barney lay back upon one of the rubbing tables and saw what was happening. He realized that if something were not done soon, the team would go to pieces entirely. Time was growing short, soon they would be called back to the field.

Barney took the situation in at a glance. He saw that every man was wrought up over nothing, saw that their accusations were being hurled only to save themselves from being accused. He thought a moment. As it appeared to him, it was a question of fixing the guilt for the slump of the team. Every one was guilty, equally so. There was no question about that. Yet what could he do?

His thoughts raced ahead for a moment, only to be interrupted by a call from the door. "Let's go, you fellows! Back on the field."

The fellows started to file out slowly. Barney got up and called to them. "Wait a minute!" He held up his hand for silence.

The players turned sullenly and regarded him. He stood on the rubbing table and stared down into their glowering faces.

Barney waited until they were all looking at him.

"Fellows," he said then. "I've got something I want to tell you. Maybe it'll clear a few things up."

"Go ahead," one of the fellows said. "We haven't got all day." "It's this—there's been something wrong with the team all this week, and nobody knows what the trouble is. Every one of you guys thinks that somebody else is the cause of it. You're all arguing and squabbling among yourselves for no reason at all. It ain't right."

"Horsefeathers!" one of the players remarked sarcastically. Barney went on, heedless of the interruption.

"I want you all to get this straight. None of you fellows is responsible for the team's slump. Every error that's been made today—I made it. Bryant missed that kickoff—yes—but I could have gotten it if I had been where I should have been. Moss fumbled, sure, but it was my fault. I didn't fall on it quick enough. The quarter may have called the wrong signals once or twice—you can't blame him for that. And even that was my fault. I told him what to play, and he took my advice."

"So you see, it's nobody's fault but my own. All the rest of you were playing great ball. I guess I'm the goat. I don't care. But I do want to see you get out there now and put some heart into the game." He started a spiritual, one or two joined in, finally the whole squad was singing and the gym's rafters shook—"Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho, and the Walls Come Atumblin' Down." They hummed as they came out on the field.

Somehow, there was a different spirit about the team. Somehow, this game had taken on the seriousness of a crusade. Each man was a Joshua. He only had to try hard enough and the walls would come tumbling down.

CHAPTER XIV

Howard had the kickoff this time, and the ball sailed straight and true, landing far back in her opponent's territory. One of the Green backs took it and started up the field. He was downed on the twenty-yard line by a savage tackle by Moss. Things looked better. There was spirit in that tackle. The battle of Jericho was on.

Two line plunges were stopped dead by the Bison team. A forward pass was knocked down by Hart, and the visitors were forced to punt.

Barney took the ball as it spiraled downward, shook off a couple of Dartmouth ends who attempted to tackle, and started down the field. Twisting, squirming, straight-arming, swiftly he sped through that broken field until at last, with two men dragging on his heels, he was forced to the ground.

He got up quickly. The ball was on the Green's twelve-yard line. He ran about wildly, shouting encouragement, patting his men on the back. The whole team was fighting the battle of Jericho.

"Get in there, now! Get in there and—fight!"

The ball was snapped back. Moss took it through the line. Five yards. Again it came, this time to Hart. Hart skirted right end, but was forced out with a gain of only two yards. Then Barney was given the oval. He looked about quickly as the teams collided on the line of scrimmage. Hart had smashed into right tackle. There was a hole there as big as a house. He lowered his head and dived in. Clawing fingers reached upward to hold him back, but still he scrambled on. Then he was loose. The field shrank was clear. He staggered up, started forward, and before being dragged down again, had crossed that last white line. A roar of approval broke forth from the Howard stands, so long silent.

The kick was made. It sailed between the goal posts easily. Seven points for Howard.

The whole team had caught the spirit now. During time-out, everybody was humming "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho." The Greens

could be beaten. Two more like that. ... But how remote the possibility still seemed.

Howard played her hardest those next few moments. There was new vigor, new strength in the team. Substitutions were thrown in for the exhausted ofay boys, but still the Blue and White team continued its march down the field.

Dartmouth managed three first downs after the kickoff, but that was all. Howard got the ball on her forty-yard line and started down the field. A buck through center netted three yards. An off-tackle rush gained five. A long, flat pass, Moss to Hart, put the ball well into the Greens' territory. Another, this time to Barney, sent the oval across. And the kick for point was good! 14-20!

The Bison team, under the delusion that they were warriors of Israel, were aroused into a frenzy. And now it was Dartmouth's men who became disgusted with themselves. They called time out and sat in a huddle, plainly arguing. Quarter time was called. The team changed goals.

The visitors came back for the last quarter. Resolved to hold on to that precious six-point lead, they clung tenaciously to the oval, playing safe. Their flash was gone. But in its place had come a grim determination. After all, they were still champions of the East.

Howard managed to get the ball twice during the early minutes of play, but each time lost it on downs. Her passing attack failed as the Green team got wise to her plays. What to do? The Bisons played hard.

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