

The head coach of Army,
one of the nation's
best, answers a perennial
parent question:

Should Your Boy Play Football?

By PAUL DIETZEL



SHOULD YOUR BOY play football? For that matter, should any boy play football?

I can't honestly say to you: "Yes!" I don't know your boy. But I can say this to you: "Almost every boy who is physically able should play football."

President Kennedy—and President Eisenhower before him—warned the nation's youth that it was becoming soft and sedentary. Wherever possible, boys should be active participants, not side-line spectators. Football, of course, means sweat and labor—and often tears. But it is one of the best tests of personal abilities—including determination and fighting spirit.

On a bronze plaque outside Michie Stadium at West Point is written: "I want an officer for a secret and dangerous mission. I want a West Point football player." That statement was made by Gen. George C. Marshall, then chief of staff of the U.S. Army in World War II.

Another general once told me his only problem with former athletes during the Korean war was that he had to hold them back by the shirt-tail. Many young men who had been brilliant in the classroom were busy looking up the correct procedures when circumstances called for leadership by action. This ability to take over when leadership is needed is an asset constantly nurtured on the field of play.

But will your boy be injured playing football? He might. He might also get hurt driving around

in the family car. Statistics show that in the 15- to 21-year age group automobile deaths lead football fatalities by hundreds to one. The bruises he'll receive playing football can be painful, but there will always be a doctor available, and with present medical and training techniques, most athletic injuries heal completely in less than three months.

Who should play football?

1. Only boys who *want* to play football—not boys whose fathers want them on the field.
2. Only boys physically fit. A doctor should check prospective players.
3. Only boys in good condition. It's not enough to train a week before the season. Conditioning is a year-round necessity.

For pre-teen-agers—boys between seven and 12—contact sports should be supervised. Competition is an essential part of every child's education, but it must be allowed to develop normally, with competition and cooperation as balanced forces in his personality. Athletics need to be as carefully supervised as other parts of his education are.

IN ADDITION, the American Medical Association discourages interschool and intercommunity contact sports for children in the pre-teen group. The pre-teen's excitement should come only from playing—and playing only because he likes to play, not to satisfy desires of adults or to be exploited by them.

As a parent of a football-playing boy, you

have a right to demand certain conditions of his school. Perhaps the most important is that there be a physician as well as a trainer on duty. The best equipment should be provided as well. If your school can't afford the best, your school can't afford football.

Until a few years ago, the first game of the season was scheduled after only a few days' practice. The greatest number of injuries occurred in these early games when players were not properly conditioned. Now a minimum of three weeks' conditioning should precede the first game, with a suitable number of practice periods before the first contact scrimmage.

WHEN ALL the requirements I've mentioned—requirements of boy and school—are met, then I'd say your boy *should* play football. I feel that today's adult world tells youngsters to get by with as little effort as possible, to take care of "No. 1" (yourself) first, to sit back and let the "other guy" do it. Those are unhealthy ideas to carry into adulthood. But if a boy goes out for football and sticks to it, he is not likely to become a selfish slacker. There's no place in football for that kind.

Football can make your boy a champion. If he's willing to be the first guy on the practice field every day and if he works at being the best on the field, if he's willing to learn that the team comes before any personal glory and if he's willing to give any time the team asks, then—win or lose—your boy is a champion!

COVER:

Teen-age actress Hayley Mills has a dazzling film career before her (she plays her first grown-up role in "The Chalk Garden"), and no small credit goes to "The Woman Behind Hayley Mills," page 12.

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