

# THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events

VOL. XXV.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, NOVEMBER 23, 1905

No. 8

## American Football From the Spectator's Standpoint

By A. J. MacKenzie

The spectator should not be the most important personage in a game; if it is to serve its purpose, its advantages and attractions should be for the player primarily; the spectator is an incidental, and the more important he becomes the more the player comes to occupy the role of a professional entertainer; nevertheless we must admit that the spectator has acquired a dominant influence in many of our games, and can now justly demand consideration in the determination of the style of the play. The game must "draw" or it is not a success; it has appealed for the support of a public which was at first present only on sufferance and which is now the governing factor.

That a game may be appreciated and supported by the public certain qualities are necessary in the game itself and in the style of the contests; the object to be attained by the players must be readily apparent and the means by which it is attained not too hard to understand; the more it approaches an elemental trial of strength, speed and skill, the more it will appeal to the ordinary uncultivated public, and the greater will be its popularity.

Looked at from this standpoint one would not predict popularity for American football; to the uninitiated it is a game of sheer force, consisting in the pulling and pushing about of the players rather than the advancing of the ball, and the stratagem and tactics are too involved to be readily appreciated, the movements are slow and frequently apparently objectless, and as far from the transparent manoeuvres of baseball and hockey as can well be imagined. And still the game is popular as is attested by the crowds of many thousands who attend the matches, but the reason for this varies according as the spectator is one who knows nothing about the game or one who does. To the first class the features that appeal are the love of a contest, the importance of the matches which one does not wish to miss even if he does not enjoy, the college affiliations and local spirit, the social eclat attaching to the big teams, and the advertising, gratuitous and otherwise which they receive. To those who have played Rugby football or followed it closely, the game appeals from an entirely different standpoint, the perfect training of the participants, the accuracy of their play and movements, the beauty of combined and sustained effort here brought to the highest pitch and the cleverness of the tactics and the means of meeting them make

the whole game such a fascinating problem that one does not miss the more dazzling features of lacrosse or the transparency of the association game.

A big American game is a most interesting spectacle. Reaching the grounds is like going to the Derby, crowded special trains, long strings of equipages, the streets congested with pedestrians all hurrying toward the field arouse expectation to the highest degree. Around the grounds is a great fair, peanut men, lunch stands, fakirs, vendors of flags, flowers and buttons, makers of pools and speculators in seats all do a rushing business. Inside the perfect surface of the "grid-iron" marked with white ten-yard lines is surrounded on all four sides by tiers of seats running to a great height, and filled to the furthest corner with the thirty thousand or more spectators, the majority of whom wear ribbons or flowers and wave pennants showing their allegiance to one or other side. In the centre of each side opposite each other are the "rooters," the students of either college, armed with canes, horns and megaphones, and with a band in the centre, while in front occupying elevated stands are the leaders under one general conductor, who, armed with baton and megaphone, directs the ceremony. This consists of the varied college yells, popular airs and topical songs, in which their opponents are ridiculed and their own heroes lauded. When the teams appear on the field they are greeted with a deafening fanfare, while favorites receive special ovation as they are recognized. At the Yale-Princeton match two years ago, which the writer attended, the whole multitude was a color scheme in blue and orange, while the air everywhere was heavy with the perfume of violets and chrysanthemums. The excitement aroused by these means can easily be imagined and made the experience a memorable one apart from the game itself.

On this occasion the game did not lack in interest; the teams were well matched, though Yale's powerful and ponderous line with their constantly changing mode of attack gradually wore down their lighter opponents, as down after down marked a gain easily apparent on the field-lines, with the ball almost constantly in their possession. Hogan, the Yale captain, a magnificent and powerful athlete, whose name is almost a household word across the line, kept his team always on the offensive, and were it not for the combination of chance and the genius of Dewitt,