

Making Men Mentally Fit for Football: Gridiron Battles Depend Only in ...

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Making Men Mentally Fit for Football

Gridiron Battles Depend Only in Part Upon Physical Condition, as Is Shown

by These Anecdotes of Some Famous Coaches

By CHARLES E. PARKER.

TAKE the case of Al Sharpe— That is rather an abrupt way to launch an article having to do with psychology. Perhaps the subject more properly could be introduced by enlarging upon the words of Noah Webster, who defines psychology as "the science of the mind," or by turning to the treatise on that science by Professor William James, who wrote:

"Psychology is the science of mental life, both of its phenomena and of their functions; the phenomena are such things as we call feelings, desires, cognitions, reasonings, decisions and the like, and, superficially considered, their variety and complexity leave a chaotic impression upon the observer."

In neither definition, however, does its author indicate the application or possible application of the science of psychology to the college sport which just now is attracting hundreds of thousands to the football arenas of our institutions of learning. Such being the object of this article, why not—

Take the case of Al Sharpe?

If you have followed football at all you know of Al Sharpe. He played football at Yale some years ago; coached football there and elsewhere, and now is coaching it there again.

The incident in mind occurred while he was coaching football elsewhere—to be specific, at Cornell University. To be more specific, it was while Al Sharpe was coaching the Cornell football team of 1913—the first Cornell team Al Sharpe ever coached. And, to be still more specific, it was on the eve of the

foreign territory, spent the afternoon of the day of its arrival in testing the Franklin Field gridiron, and after this testing and a light workout the men repaired to the hotel for their evening meal and, as they supposed, an early tumble into hotel beds.

For three months the early retiring schedule had been in effect with the men of the Cornell squad. As with most football squads, everything had been subordinated to football and football conditioning. The food they ate, both in kind and



Paul Thompson.
Dr. Albert H. Sharpe. Head
Coach, Cornell.

quantity, had been selected by their trainer. Their social activities had been ordered by their coach. Their goings and comings from morning until night, and even through the night, had been of other than their own choosing.

As this particular night approached they felt keenly their hardships. Only once in twenty years had Cornell men been able to enter with the proper spirit upon a "night after" celebration of the Pennsylvania game, and rather than be denied their fun Cornell graduates and undergraduates had formed a habit of celebrating on the night before. Consequently, every one of the restriction-enveloped football squad coveted the enjoyment that that evening would bring to all Cornell men but themselves.

They listened without any show of interest to the announcement of Coach Sharpe calling all members of the squad to report to him in the lobby immediately after dinner.

Imagine their sensation when, upon ascertaining all were present, Al Sharpe addressed them substantially as follows: "Men, I want every one of you to chase out of this hotel. Go to the theatres. Do anything you fancy will entertain you. And don't dare to show your heads in here before midnight if you expect to get into tomorrow's game."

There were wild protests from some of the graduates. It is recorded that some of the players, despite their natural desire to gain immediate freedom from three-months-old restrictions, believed they owed it to their Alma Mater to follow the customary procedure of retiring early, of thinking only of the approaching game, of going over and over



International
Film Service.

Walter Wesley,
Half Back of
the Columbia
Eleven, Kicking
a High One.

again the signals or the plays which were to be used. All looked askance upon the coach.

Al Sharpe, so the story goes, broke in upon their protests.

"See here," he commanded. "If you want Cornell to lick Pennsy tomorrow, don't question my tactics. Cornell has been whipped too often. I've seen Cornell teams—far better teams in every respect than the Pennsy teams they have met—and I've seen them licked to a standstill by those Pennsy aggregations. Cornell teams have formed the habit of worrying and brooding over the Pennsylvania game. They start worrying when they start the season. I've noticed it in this team. The men have been thinking of that long string of beatings. I propose to stop that. This team can lick Penn, and I'm going to make sure it doesn't worry that victory away before it takes the field tomorrow. So beat it and enjoy yourselves."

A few minutes later, if you had been a patron of any of the lively musical shows staged that night in Philadelphia theatres, you might have observed, scattered through the audience, members of the 1913 Cornell football squad. Later in the evening, if you had chanced to stroll the downtown streets of that city, your attention might have been drawn to a group or two of husky individuals rollicking through some Cornell football song. An unconfirmed rumor had it that one or two of the number indulged in a glass of beer. In any event, it was not until the wee sma' hours of the following morning that they began drifting back to the hotel and their neglected beds.

As might be expected, the members of the Cornell football squad slept long and late on the morning of the game. In fact, they awakened only in time to consume a very late breakfast before departing for Franklin Field and their game of games. The nervous, draggy hours that had furnished other Cornell teams with nothing but worries and doubts concerning their ability to defeat the oft-conquering Pennsylvania teams had passed, and before such doubts could

formulate in their minds the game had begun.

Cornell won. Cornell, under Al Sharpe, won the 1914 game from Pennsylvania, also, and the 1915 game as well, and, incidentally, in the last-named year, won a clean-cut victory over Harvard, a university Cornell never before had defeated on the gridiron.

Thus did Al Sharpe demonstrate the value of gridiron psychology.

Since that incident in 1913 it has become quite the custom of college football coaches to furnish their charges with opportunity for entertainment immediately preceding important contests.

Just how many football patrons appreciate the tremendously important part psychology plays in the game of football is uncertain. It can be safely ventured that in that great host which, on each Autumnal Saturday, peoples the stadiums and stands of our colleges and universities, only a very meagre percentage grant the psychology of the game a second thought. With the majority this popular pastime has but two contributing factors—the physical and the strategical. Yet every football coach recognizes psychology's great value, and even now is striving to develop in his players a mental attitude that will make for the success of his team. The more successful of the coaches place mind conditioning on an equal footing with the physical and strategical. In some instances they grant it a superior place.

Just what will be the more striking instances of the successful application of football psychology this season will only be known as the season progresses. Intimate football history—the football history known to those who work behind the scenes—abounds with examples such as that already set forth.

Percy Haughton, the far-famed Harvard coach, was a staunch believer in the psychological, and repeatedly during his most successful régime at Cambridge he strove to produce psychological effects that would make for the success of his elevens. Perhaps no more telling innovation was introduced than that of sending the "Varsity" players to observe the Yale-Princeton game, while Harvard substitutes represented the Crimson in the annual game with Brown University; for, while the Harvard men very often gained but little information, it brought to them a realization that, by the experience, they possessed something Yale men were denied, and, in turn, made Yale men uncertain whether the plays that had worked successfully against Princeton would be equally effective in the Harvard game now that the Harvard players had witnessed their operation.

Coach Robert Fisher, who has succeeded Haughton as Harvard's coach, already has announced his intention of adopting in full the Haughton tactics,

and Al Sharpe, who is handling the Yale eleven, will surely develop some offsetting psychological effect.

Some years ago the cry of "Take him out," rang across the United States Military Academy football field at West Point. A football game was in progress. The Cadets were engaging the Yale eleven in a battle which has come down in history as one of the greatest football games ever waged. The cry of "Take him out" emanated from the Yale section of the stands. When first noticed it was the cry of a single individual. Then several voices joined in. In the space of a few moments, it seemed as if the entire Yale side of the field chorused it in unison.

There was no mistaking against whom the cry was directed. The young athlete playing the quarterback position on the Yale eleven, and charged with handling opposing kicks, had been misjudging or fumbling every booted ball that came his way. One, two, three, and then a fourth fumble or misjudgment had come early in the game, each placing the Yale team at a decided disadvantage. Then came a fifth fumble which resulted in a West Point touchdown and, after that, a sixth, which might have led to still another Army score had not the referee's whistle sounded the ending of the first half of the contest.

As the perspiring, well-nigh exhausted Yale team tramped toward the dressing rooms at the ending of the first half, Coach Owsley singled out the Yale quarterback, threw an arm across his shoulders, and fell into step at his side. Without glancing into his face he knew that tears were coursing down the quarterback's cheeks, and that a determined chin was quivering with emotion.

"That's all right, boy," the coach remarked. "Just keep trying. The fault is not with you. You've been looking at the ball against the sky, when you've been accustomed to seeing it against the dark background at Yale Field. That makes a big difference until you're used to it. You'll do better next half."

Much to the surprise of the crowd in the Yale stands, as well as to that in the Cadet section, the self-same Yale quarterback took the field with his team when it lined up for the second half. During that half this quarterback did not fumble or misjudge a punt. As a matter of fact, he became the outstanding star of the contest, leading his team in most brilliant fashion, and, when occasions developed, exhibiting individual prowess. He led that Yale team to victory. He was unanimously the selection of football experts for the All-America team that year, and continued to hold that favor throughout his remaining years in college. That fumbling quarterback was Tad Jones, whom Al Sharpe has succeeded as head coach of Yale.

In the Syracuse University game, in the Fall of 1915, with the Dartmouth eleven opposing the Orange, Syracuse outweighed Dartmouth by several pounds to the man, and was such a top-heavy favorite in the wagering that the most staunch supporters of Dartmouth had faint hope their team would be able to hold Syracuse to anything like a small score.

Just before the game, however, Frank Cavanaugh, the wily Dartmouth coach, casually mentioned to the Dartmouth players that Wilkinson, the most brilliant backfield man on the Syracuse team, had been accused of violating college eligibility rules by playing on the Akron, Ohio, professional team. He followed this by remarking on the trip to the Pacific Coast that had been arranged for the 1915 Syracuse team, and how anxiously every Syracuse player would be to make that trip.

A few minutes later, if you had happened to be an official or were near the side lines, you might have heard a Dartmouth player remark to a Syracuse halfback, as the teams lined up for the first scrimmage, "Do you think by playing against you I will lose my amateur standing?"

A play or two later, if you had been within earshot, you might have heard remarks of this nature:



International Film Service.
Dr. (Buck) Wharton, Coach of the University of Pennsylvania, Showing How to Tackle. Little, the "Quakers" Right Tackle, Is the Object of His Attack.

"What a cute fullback, and what dainty ankles he has! Wouldn't it be a shame if one of them was hurt and he lost out on the trip to the coast?"

Then, down the length of the scrimmage line, you might have noted Dartmouth men seriously cautioning their opponents in this manner: "Be careful now, old man. This play is coming right at you, and the boy who's coming hits the line hard. Remember, it's the hospital and no 8,000-mile trip if he ever hits you."

The first period of the game was not

far along its course before the supposedly inferior Dartmouth eleven was demonstrating a pronounced superiority over the powerful Syracuse team. As the game progressed this Dartmouth superiority continued.

An article on football psychology would be incomplete without some mention of the late Mike Murphy, coach and trainer of University of Pennsylvania teams for many years, and one of the outstanding figures in college athletic history. Year after year, as the fatal ailment which was to end his ca-

reer made its inroad upon his none-too-powerful frame, he stirred his teams to their utmost by reminding them that each might prove the last team he would coach.

The Pennsylvania football team of 1905 was at odds with Harvard, where the assertion had been made that Pennsylvania was playing men on its football team in violation of the spirit of inter-collegiate eligibility rules. Pennsylvania felt the criticism to be unjust.

The Harvard eleven outweighed that of Pennsylvania. The first half of the contest ended with the score 6 to 6, but Harvard's play had been more impressive, and all believed Pennsylvania would be swept off its feet in the second half and that Harvard would win the victory by a considerable margin.

Between the halves, while the rubbers were working over the Pennsylvania players, Mike Murphy stepped to the centre of the dressing room and began to talk to his men. He told them he knew they were fighting against great odds, and that they had done splendidly to hold Harvard to a tie score. Then he paused dramatically, with forefinger upraised.

"Boys," he said, "when you go back on that field, fight. If you have a sweetheart, fight for your sweetheart. If you have a sister, fight for your sister. If you have a mother, fight for your mother. And if you have neither sweetheart, nor sister, nor mother, then just go out there and fight for Mike. This game may be the last I shall ever see. I haven't long to live, boys—so fight for me."

"Time's up," came the call of the referee.

As the team lined up for the second half the Pennsylvania Captain turned to his men.

"Now for Mike and old Penn," he said. Pennsylvania won, 12 to 6.



International Film Service.
William Roper, Princeton Coach, Who Is Whipping His Gridiron Men Into Shape.

most important football game on the 1913 Cornell schedule—the annual contest with Cornell's traditional rival, the University of Pennsylvania.

Twenty times in the twenty years prior to the then approaching battle the teams of these two great universities had met on the football gridiron, and only once had Cornell scored a victory. "Going to Philadelphia for the annual slaughter," was the parting shot of the Ithaca villagers each year.

Then Al Sharpe took hold.

During the season of 1913 he developed a fair Cornell team, but not one generally believed capable of routing the Pennsylvania hoodoo. In the latter respect Al Sharpe disagreed with the general belief. In due time the Cornell team and its retinue arrived at the Philadelphia hotel in which it was to make its headquarters over the night preceding the game. The football squad, as is the custom of all football squads about to engage a foe on