

Backfield Twins



Joe Archibald



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By Joe Archibald

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Also By Joe Archibald

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Publisher's Note

The Golden Age of Football

Readers of the sports books by Joe Archibald may note several differences, in his portrayal of the game of football, from the playing-style of the modern era. The period following the end of the Second World War ushered in a new era of prosperity in America, with a direct side effect of increased college enrollment and a greater focus and emphasis on college athletics. Collegiate football in the 1950's and 60's, in particular, was an evolving game. While many teams still relied on a smash-mouth, run the ball approach to playing—traditional methods considered foundational to football—speedy players and high-powered passing offenses were beginning to look less like gimmicks and more like valuable weapons. As a result, modern readers of Mr. Archibald's tales may find unfamiliar concepts like the triple option running game, quick kicks on third down and players playing both offense and defense in the single platoon system. However, they will also recognize themes that resonate with the modern game as well: fanatical fans, packed stadiums, unethical alumni and, most importantly, rival teams battling on the gridiron for school glory.

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Chapter 1

THE VISITORS' dressing room at West Grove University was too quiet. Here and there a cleat scraped the concrete floor as forty-two Bushnell players glumly undressed and headed for the refreshing showers. They'd come off the field trailing 7-6, shocked by the resistance they had encountered at the hands of the West Grove underdogs during that first half.

Coach Jack Rymer and his assistant, Augie Muntz, moved along between the two rows of benches telling the disgusted and edgy players to hurry out of their uniforms before they got the sniffles. "Into the showers, all of you, as fast as you can!" he ordered. "Afterward you can begin feeling sorry for yourselves again."

Neil Kilbourn, first-string right halfback, began to undo the straps of his shoulder pads. He looked around the room for his twin brother, Ray, although he knew Number 33 would be with Steve Yorde and Bernie Neff. They were Alpha Zetas; they stuck together. Neff was sitting in front of a locker, the ragged remains of his jersey on the bench beside him. On the way in he had furiously torn it off his back. Neil caught Ray's glance. His brother grinned at him, letting him know that he was all right after that last bruising tackle just before the half ended. Four West Grove linemen had hit him and knocked all the wind out of him.

"They want all-out war, they'll get it," Neff said after he had peeled off his tight red football pants and headed for the shower room. "We'll show them how tough they are!"

Rymer heard. He yelled at the big tackle, "They played good ball and played it clean. Put a lot of hot water on your sore head, Neff! And you keep your hands where they belong when you go back out there or I'll have you sitting on them for the rest of the afternoon!" There was a wintry bleakness in his eyes as they swept the entire room. "That goes for all of you!"

Neil grinned as he moved toward the showers with Hal Converse, Willie Bogardus and Duke Talbot. All around him there was the hiss of taps turned on full strength. Willie yelled above the roar, "My ma said there'd be days like this!"

The right halfback applied plenty of soap to his stiffening muscles. The heat of the water felt good against the lumps the West

Grove tacklers had inflicted on various portions of his anatomy. He stood next to Willie Bogardus. Willie kept shouting at him, but most of what the second-string fullback said was drowned out. He did catch one of Willie's remarks. "If you see an arm around anywhere, it belongs to me!"

A few minutes later Frank Belltower, the trainer, saw that all the players had their wounds patched or soothed with his potions. He could do nothing with the squad's state of mind. That was Rymer's responsibility.

The Bushnell Pioneers waited for the coach's blast as they slowly pulled on fresh underclothing and socks.

"There isn't much I can say to you," the coach said. "You can win this one if you want it badly enough. We outgained that bunch four yards to one in the first half, but statistics don't win football games. Just play the way you've been playing and you'll wear them down." He looked at Mike Salvatore, the left tackle. Belltower had just finished bandaging Mike's ankle. The trainer shook his head. "He can't go any more today, Jack."

Rymer, ignoring Salvatore's protests, stabbed a finger at a big blond kid named Shagrowitz, "You start the next half at left tackle, Irv."

An uncomplimentary sound came from a group of players in a far corner of the dressing room. Rymer swung around, his mouth set in a tight line. "I'm sorry you Zetes don't approve! I know, Yorde, he doesn't belong to your union, but this isn't a closed shop. You remember that!" He walked into a small office and shut the door behind him.

Neil pulled a fresh white jersey over his head, hiding his grin. He wore the big red numerals 35. Ray's number was 33. It was a kind of strategy on Rymer's part. After wallowing in the dirt for a while it was difficult for opposing players to tell one twin from the other. Before pulling on his shoes he walked over to Ray. "Say, I just happened to remember," he told his twin, "Got a letter from Dad late yesterday. He's sending us a twenty-dollar check in the next mail."

"You keep it," Ray said.

"Bighearted, the old man," Bernie Neff said. "Chicken feed."

"Hold it, Bernie," Ray Kilbourn snapped. "You hold it right there!"

The grin faded from the big tackle's face. "Sorry if I hurt your feelings, feller," he said. "But it seemed funny after you took Yorde for all that dough in gin rummy last night."

"Sure, Neil," Ray said laughing, "the Zetes are maybe the worst gin players I ever saw. So I really don't need half of that twenty."

The Kilbourn twins were two proverbial peas in a pod, the image of each other from their dark brown crew-cuts to the tips of their toes. They were the same height, an inch over six feet, and they had the same widely-spaced greenish-brown eyes and long, straight nose. Their strong chins and resolute mouths were identical. There was one big difference, the quality of their smiles. People who had been closest to them over the years eventually learned that this was about the only way one could be distinguished from the other. Members of the faculty at Bushnell and the great majority of the students on the campus were still confused by the Kilbourns.

It has been said that Nature never creates any two things exactly alike, that there has to be a difference somewhere, even if it is not a tangible one. In the Kilbourn twins the real difference was in their thinking. Their minds traveled in grooves miles apart.

"Well, okay," Neil finally said. When he went back to where Duke Talbot, his roommate, sat he knew he would have to get those small doubts out of his mind before going out there again. A man needed a clear head against West Grove or he stood a good chance of losing it. Ray was a big boy now. He ought to know what he was doing.

Duke asked him if the Zetes had slipped him another application blank and he laughed.

Rymer came out of the small office and called his quarterbacks, Kenny DeMan and Sammy Felsh. The coach was a compactly built man well on his way to forty, with a blocky face and disarmingly mild eyes. Rymer had played three years of pro football. He had been wounded in Korea, and at times walked with a slight limp.

Football means close contact off the field as well as on and a player's conception of those around him quickly sharpens and fills out. The characters of his teammates were very clear by this time in Neil Kilbourn's mind. Willie Bogardus took everything in stride. Life was a ball to Willie. Duke Talbot was as methodical in his blocking as with his textbooks, and seldom showed emotion, never griping at reverses or reaching for alibies. Ty Morton—the

big reserve tackle over there, sitting apart from the rest—Ty was first and last a country boy, unused to crowds and somewhat in awe of the Zetes. His clothes were seldom pressed and he was awkward with a knife and fork.

Arch Whittier, a guard, was talking now with Augie Muntz. Arch was the last student at Bushnell Neil had thought would ever go out for football. He had the nice profile of a leading man in a romantic drama, and manners to match.

Bernie Neff . . . The man had no gentleness about him. Sympathy was never a part of him. He was authoritative and overbearing. Neff always seemed to have plenty of money to spend, but there was not a man on the Bushnell campus who had ever seen the big tackle cash a check. Steve Yorde, the big center, and Bob Pike, the left end, were much like Neff. They were the “wheels” at Alpha Zeta. These were the men Ray chose to throw in with.

There were five minutes of rest left. The sounds from the grandstand seeped through the walls of the West Grove gym. When Rymer came out of the visiting coach’s cubicle, Bernie Neff yelled, “How long has it been since Bushnell had an undefeated season, Coach?”

“Never. But we’ve won one game already,” Rymer said, a small grin playing around his mouth.

“This will be the year,” the tackle said. “You owe it to me, Coach. I could’ve gone to Minnesota.”

Ray Kilbourn said laughingly, “Bernie, you’re not as dumb as you look. The pro scouts have found a lot of talent in the back woods.”

“First you have to graduate—a minor detail, Bernie,” Arch Whittier said, and Neff’s mouth became a thin, pencil line. “From what I hear you’re no Rhodes scholar.”

“Want to bet a hundred bucks on that, big mouth?” the husky tackle snapped.

“Yours is no slot in a parking meter,” Whittier countered. Rymer was about to move in on the argument when the door opened and a voice said, “It’s just about that time!”

“Okay. Everybody up,” Rymer said. “Let’s have a happy ride home.”

The rain had stopped, but a raw wind cut diagonally across the field. West Grove kicked off to begin the second half. Neil got the

ball on the first hop on his eleven and swerved to the right to pick up blockers. Duke Talbot and Yorde clawed out a path for him on the sixteen and then they were swept aside and he slashed his way on his own to the twenty-eight, where three green shirts racked him up and deposited him into the mud with a violence that made him gasp.

Kenny DeMarr turned the burden over to the other big twin. Ray hit inside tackle for three yards. On the next play, after DeMarr had faked to Neil, the fullback got the hand-off and gouged four more yards through West Grove's middle. The next play had to be a good one or the Pioneers would have to give up the ball.

"The bread and butter reverse," Kenny DeMarr said in the huddle.

Neil lined up in the slot position between right tackle and right end. Duke Talbot took the hand-off from DeMarr and began a sweep to the right, drawing the West Grove Mustang defense to that side. Neil Kilbourn turned and headed back to his left, in turn taking the hand-off from Talbot. He circled West Grove's left end with DeMarr and his two big guards leading interference, and got to his own forty before he was hauled down.

DeMarr wiped his hands on the towel hanging from Yorde's belt and got to work again. A draw made seven yards. A pitchout to Ray Kilbourn made another first down. The ball rested on West Grove's forty-two. The Mustangs called for a time out.

The Bushnell team crowded together at midfield, grateful for the breather. The rain had started again. Neil had a cut inside his mouth and he'd swallowed some blood. He felt tired, almost too tired to lift his muddy shoes. Neff ripped some tape off the back of his hand, laying bare a raw wound. During the time out, Rymer sent a guard and a tackle in. When the clock started again, a dry ball was put into play. Kenny DeMarr took advantage of it. He took the ball from under Yorde and rolled out to his right. The Mustangs broke through his protection and he had to cut the other way and fade back another ten yards. West Grove rooters yelled, "Make him eat the ball!" just as he spotted Bob Pike in the open on West Grove's twenty-five. He fired just as two tacklers hit him.

The left end gathered in the slippery ball just inside the boundary and was immediately picked up and slammed down.