

Fighting Coach

By Joe Archibald

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press

Also By Joe Archibald

Aviation Cadet
Backfield Commando
Backfield Twins
Baseball
Baseball Talk for Beginners
Big League Busher
Billy Martin Story
Block That Kick
Bonus Kid
Catcher's Choice
Centerfield Rival
Circus Catch
Commanders of the Flying Tigers
Crazy Legs McBain
Double Play Rookie
Easy Out
Falcons to the Fight
Fast Break Fury
Fifth Base
Fight, Team, Fight
First Base Hustler
Full Count
Fullback Fury
Go Navy, Go
Hard-nosed Halfback
Hold That Line!
Inside Tackle
Jet Flier
The Long Pass
Mr. Slingshot
Mitt Maverick
Old Iron Glove
Outfield Orphan
Payoff Pitch
Phantom Blitz
Powerback

Pro Coach
Quarterback & Son
Rebel Halfback
Red-dog Center
Right Field Rookie
Right Field Runt
Scrambler
Shortstop on Wheels
Smoke Eaters
Southpaw Speed
Special Forces Trooper
Three-point Hero
Touchdown Glory
Two Time Rookie
West Point Wingback
Windmill Pilot

Print book originally published by
Macrae Smith Company, 1954
eBook formatting © 2011 Bethlehem Books

Slightly revised by Publisher
All Rights Reserved

Bethlehem Books • Ignatius Press
10194 Garfield Street South
Bathgate, ND 58216
www.bethlehembooks.com

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.

America is symbolized by the whirl of a lathe, the rustle of wheat in a field, and the roar of a jet plane in the sky. Her voice is in the scratch of an artist's pen, in a riveter's hammer, and is most clearly heard in thousands of football stadiums on autumn afternoons. It is our sincere hope that all the boys in America will play football for what it is worth—the building of character and sportsmanship—for if the game is measured in terms of dollars and cents, it no longer has its purpose.

Contents

Publisher's Note	v
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	10
Chapter 3	17
Chapter 4	28
Chapter 5	34
Chapter 6	42
Chapter 7	49
Chapter 8	57
Chapter 9	63
Chapter 10	72
Chapter 11	79
Chapter 12	89
Chapter 13	97
Chapter 14	105
Chapter 15	111
Chapter 16	118
Chapter 17	127
Chapter 18	133
About the Author	138

Chapter 1

DAVE BURNELL, the Sanborn coach, hunkered down in front of a line of white helmets and watched his underdog team line up on the Dakota Aggies' forty-eight-yard line. All season, including this afternoon, the Purple had been going nowhere, and now Burnell was taking his own time out to wonder if he could make a reasonable living selling refrigerators or insurance. The scoreboard was a thing of beauty to the home crowd; it said, Aggies 27, Sanborn 6. The third quarter was fading away and Burnell anxiously watched the big clock.

Burnell got to his feet when the Purple threw what they had left at the strong Dakotans. Eddie Grant—they called him the Little General back on the campus at Great Plains—began the eighty sequence with Nick Fantino, the left half, acting as decoy. Nordlinger, the fullback, was to slip inside tackle on a delayed hand-off from Eddie. When the coach saw the man in motion miss his block on the Aggie end, he knew that the play would be smeared. The opposing tackle was safely smothered, but that wingman roared in and belted Nordlinger down at the line of scrimmage. On the second play Grant faked to Fantino, then cut sharply to his right and threw a screen pass that halfback Ridzic took near the side lines, but the Aggies hit him before he had moved four steps. The officials took a time out and signaled to both benches that four minutes remained in the quarter. Three replacements trotted out from the Dakota bench. Dave Burnell surveyed his own reserves and sent in three linemen and two backs to strengthen the offense. He said to Ollie Humber, the substitute wing, "Grab one, Ollie. Be the first today." He walked up and down, chewing on his gum, and knew that the Sanborn alumni would sharpen the hatchets on Monday morning.

The Dakotans threw up their pass defense; Eddie Grant took the ball from Moose Crowder and faded back to the Sanborn forty-five, where he discovered that his protection had been smashed. He ran to the right, found himself boxed in by two Aggie tacklers, reversed his field, and ran with the ball. At mid-field, he was piled up and Dave Burnell watched the Little General get up slowly and fire the ball at the referee as if he never wanted to see the thing

again. Benny Timberg, the Sanborn guard, had to be helped to his feet, and a few moments later came limping off.

The coach went to meet Benny, a big emptiness in his stomach. Timberg was half the Sanborn line, the best guard ever to wear the purple. He also had the greatest sense of humor that had ever needed a professor. Benny weighed nearly two hundred pounds and had hands so big the stitches at his pockets were always torn. His hair was as black as ink, and despite his twenty-one years, he hadn't grown fuzz enough on his face to warrant the purchase of a razor.

"I quit, Dave," Benny said with a grin. "The debating team is much easier on the noggin. There are sounds inside my head, Coach, and I know bees don't swarm this time of year."

"Sit down," Burnell told him. "You're through until Tuesday afternoon." He turned to watch Jim Kasta, in for Nordlinger, boot out-of-bounds on the Aggie twenty-seven, and stood immobile for the next three minutes while the Aggies pounded to mid-field.

A casual observer would have guessed Burnell's age at that moment to be slightly over thirty years. Actually the coach was nearing twenty-eight. Three years of frustration at Sanborn had marred the surface of his rugged, prepossessing countenance. Sanborn College had called him from Elon Prep in Iowa, where he'd had two championship teams. On the day the news had broken, the papers had reviewed Dave Burnell's days as a tackle with Thurman, the power team of the Little Five. They said that Sanborn had at last acquired a coach worthy of the name and predicted that the Purple would soon come roaring back to the heights from which it had tumbled ten years before. Burnell had signed a three-year contract.

Now Dave Burnell abstractedly watched the action inside Sanborn's forty-yard line. The Aggie quarterback was versatile and a shrewd conniver. On a half spinner he flipped the ball to a fast back, who slammed inside tackle and penetrated deep into the secondary, where Kasta brought him down for the Purple. Burnell drew the collar of his coat up over his ears. The sun was dropping quickly, and the crisp wind was rouging his prominent cheekbones and half shutting his sharp, hazel eyes. His third year was dying as swiftly as was this game. Only yesterday, it seemed, an influential alumnus had said to him, "We don't expect too much the first year,

Dave. You have to rebuild. Naturally a championship team can't be expected the next year, but after that—"

The roar of the partisan crowd hit the coach's ears. They screamed for another touchdown when the big Aggie fullback reached the Sanborn seventeen on a jaunt around the right side. Dave Burnell paced slowly during the time out called by his embattled Purples. The time comes when alibis, even legitimate, are wasted on an impatient alumnus. It was the material, not the system. True, he had expected the kids to do better than they had been doing this year, but the defeatist attitude at Sanborn had grown until it had become a canker even in the vitals of the student body. Proselytism was taboo, and a minimum of bait was dangled in front of the star athletes at the high and prep schools of the deep west. Those with ambitions for the spotlight went elsewhere—to Tulare, for instance, a college that had been wiping its feet on Sanborn for many years.

Suddenly Dave Burnell's shoulders straightened. The pass by the Aggie quarterback, a touchdown bid on the Purple fourteen, was picked out of the air by Sanborn's alert back, Fantino. He took off from his five-yard line with three blockers tumbling the clawing Aggie tacklers and was in the clear at mid-field. Fantino was a track star at Sanborn, and he went all the way for the twelfth point for the Purple. Burnell dropped to one knee and watched Kasta kick the extra point. When his team surged down-field to kick to the Aggies, he saw that they had come alive. The clock said eight more minutes.

"Come on, guys," Burnell said under his breath. "Make me look a little better. Coaches get hungry like human beings."

Kasta's kick was high and far, and the Aggie's scatback, Fondy, seeing that it could go out on the seven, made a lunge for it on the first bounce. The ball kicked off his shoulder, and he lashed out wildly, but only got the tips of his fingers on it. A dozen players scrambled for the ball as it bounced back from the Aggie goal line. Burnell held his breath as purple and green and gold jerseys extricated themselves from the pileup. The last man to get up was Samalman, the Sanborn right tackle. He rolled over and tossed the ball to an official.

For the first time that afternoon Dave Burnell's grin was genuine. He clapped his hands together and paced back and forth again.

The gods of football were smiling. On Kasta, on Fantino! Give them Donder and Blitzen! The ball was on the Aggie eleven-yard line.

The Dakotans threw up a seven-man defensive line, and Eddie Grant looked it over for a moment when he had his team on the line. Kasta took the hand-off from Eddie, spun over guard, and fought his way to the six. Second down and five to go. The Aggies taunted Burnell's bunch when they got set for another thrust. Eddie faked beautifully, and Fantino crashed into the line. Burnell stopped breathing when he saw Eddie run to the left, his right arm cocked. Ollie Humber was in the Aggie end zone with two Aggies crowding him. Eddie threw and Humber went into the air with the Aggie defenders, caught it, and held on. The Purple players rose from the bench and yelled like the Sioux at Big Horn. Dave Burnell peeled the wrappings off a fresh stick of gum and remembered what the writers had said. The Aggies by four touchdowns.

The Dakotans, too eager to spoil that extra point, were offside. Kasta's boot went wide of the uprights, but the penalty gave him a second shot. Kasta kicked it through, and the scoreboard read: Aggies 27, Sanborn 20.

The Aggies, in possession a few moments later, tried to roll for the insurance touchdown. They battered the inspired Purple team to mid-field, and there they took to the air. With less than four minutes left in the game, the Sanborn defense stiffened on the thirty-two. A penalty against the desperate Aggies for unnecessary roughness took the ball back to the forty-seven, and their booter put Dave Burnell's team back on the nineteen.

"Now," Burnell said, "show me that you love me, you guys!" The hope within him was mighty forlorn, he admitted. Only about three minutes left and a score eighty-one yards away. The Aggie line was reinforced and their best pass-defending backs were ready for work. Eddie Grant connected with a buttonhook pass for eight yards. The Little General looked toward the bench just before he called the signals for the next play, and the coach seemed to hear his quarterback say, "Relax, Coach. We'll take it through."

Eddie crossed the embattled Aggies. He got more than a first down with another short pass over the line. The Aggie backs came in closer and the Sanborn quarterback faded back and cocked his good right arm. Aggie tacklers swarmed over him, but he was laughing as

he went down. Dave Burnell threw clenched fists high into the air when the fleet Nick Fantino swept around the Dakota left side with blockers forming around him. The Little General had snatched one out of the moth-eaten hat, the Statue of Liberty play, and for a few seconds the Aggies were caught with their defenses down.

They moved in to decimate Fantino's blockers, but boulders of concussion in purple jerseys had the jump and were convoying the fast halfback across the mid-field stripe before the massed groan could get loose from thousands of throats. Two Aggies were left between Fantino and the end zone, and one of these was an All-Conference back named Jagady. The man drove in, split two Sanborn blockers apart, and got enough of Fantino's foot to send the carrier sprawling on the Aggie thirty-one.

Dave Burnell tried to hold back the clock's big hand when his team lined up again. And then he was shown the team's potential as Nordlinger, Fantino, and a rangy second-string back, Philbrick, ripped and tore at the flagged Aggie line like men possessed. They ate it off in short bites. Six yards. Four—three—seven. The clock said two minutes when Kasta, hand fighting through tackle, reached the Aggie eleven. From here the ground attack continued, but the Aggie eight-man line held the Sanborn team to three yards in two tries.

Dave Burnell, during a Dakota time out, sent in Frank Oberle, 210-pound second-string back, to replace Fantino. The Aggie coach will figure he's only a decoy, Burnell thought. We've got to pass here. He had said, "Let 'em have it, Frank," to Oberle. The clock said less than a minute and a half.

"Watch that pass!" a leather-lunged spectator yelled.

Eddie wheeled the Purple from the huddle and up to the battle line. They shifted into a plausible pass formation, and then the Little General handed off to Oberle and cut to the right. The Aggie forward wall, charging in, seemed uncertain for a fleeting second, and the defending backs had one eye on eligible Sanborn pass receivers. Too late they concentrated on the burly ball carrier who split through inside tackle and carried three Aggies on his back to the three-yard line.

"Eddie," Dave Burnell bit out, "I love you."

The Aggies dug in with the eight-man line and waited for the power back to hit them again. Oberle smashed up the middle and