

The Last Obstacle

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I WAS a high school football player and, like most of them, I had some experiences on the gridiron which I am sure I shall never forget. The most memorable of these was the final game of my senior year.

One could sense the tension in the dressing room as Howe prepared to meet arch-rival Tech in the opening game of the 1955 season, our senior year. When the game was over and Howe had won, we knew that this was going to be our year. Gradually, the season progressed, and Howe continued to grind out victory after victory. Finally, early in November, there remained only one hurdle blocking the way to the city championship.

The opposition was Washington High. It was a cold night, and the field was frozen. For three quarters the game was at a standstill; both sides threatened, but neither could muster enough force to push over a touchdown. Then, with only seconds remaining in the fourth quarter, it happened. From my defensive halfback spot I saw, as Washington lined up to run a play, the opposing halfback glance quickly to his right and very slightly point his feet in that direction. Even before the ball was snapped, I began to move. I knew the play was going to be an end run to the right, and I was going to stop it for a loss. I put every ounce of my remaining strength into that mad dash. I was almost upon the little halfback when, suddenly, he stopped. In an instant I realized what had happened. I glanced downfield about thirty yards at the waiting end who had cut across behind me. The forward pass, a lethal weapon in football, had completely slipped my mind.

My mind saw many things as I watched the ball float lazily through the air. I saw a muddy practice field where, day after day for four years, sweat-soaked bodies had crashed together, pointing for the moment when the city title would be theirs. I saw the bloody noses, the split lips, and the twisted ankles suffered by my teammates in preparation for this victory. I remembered the practices in the snow, the wind, the rain. I remembered the skull sessions and the summer workouts. As I watched the Washington end gather in the ball on the goal line, my heart dropped into the pit of my stomach. For the first time in the game I felt tired, for the first time I felt the stinging cold of the November night, for the first time I felt the bumps and the bruises, the aches and the pains, the sickening bitter taste of defeat and failure.