

# The Importance of People

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*The braincolt entered in this month's race, according to its owner, Colonel Catt of the Air Staff and Command School, "was sired by Saber-Tooth Curriculum and mothered by Woods School." Whether any military substitutes for tequila served as an analgesic during delivery, however, is not a proper topic for civilian editorial comment. As the most dramatic if not the most creatively taught branch of American college study thunders to its annual climax, this baffling parable cannot be dismissed lightly by praising it with faint damns. Either it conveys a profoundly disturbing truth to all of us who teach the solid academic subjects, or else it is a new and dastardly attack on what this editor holds most dear in the tradition of scholarly instruction.*

Harold Benjamin

## Die or Do for Old P. U.

ONCE UPON A TIME, at a small college called Polytechnic University, the football coach left suddenly just as the season began. A history teacher, who had played football in his college days, was selected to serve as coach. The squad consisted of about fifty men, all of whom had previously played football either in college or high school. The history teacher had never coached but was a very successful teacher. He knew that he was successful because he had been told by others that he was. He knew it, too, because many of his former students had become historians, writers and teachers of history. He decided that the process of coaching football was fundamentally no different from teaching history. He had been very successful in his history classes by lecturing to students. He decided, therefore, to teach football by lecturing.

He told the squad about the origin of football in classical antiquity. He described a game played by the Greeks. They called it *Episkuros*, he said, and the students repeated after him in unison, "*Episkuros*." He related the evolution of the game into soccer and English Rugby. He described how Rug-

by changed in this country into our game of football. He told of the freshman-sophomore "scrimmages" beginning at Yale in 1840. He reminded the students of a very important event; that is, the first inter-collegiate football game played by Princeton and Rutgers on November 6, 1869. He told them the history of the game from the period of Walter Camp and Pudge Heffelfinger, down through the days of Jim Thorpe, Red Grange, the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame, Davis and Blanchard, and up to the time of Doak Walker, "Choo-Choo" Justice and Dick Kazmaier. He explained how the game changed through the years and why these changes took place. He described the rules of the game; in fact, he had the students memorize the rules. He had them memorize the names of all the men who made the "All-America" teams in the past 10 years. He had them memorize the "All-Time-All-America."

## Group Dynamics

The new coach realized that he must give special attention to special needs, so he divided the squad into small groups on the basis of the positions

they played. For example, he told the ends about the skills of such famous players as Frank Hinkey, Brick Muller, Benny Oosterbaan, Don Hutson, Larry Kelley, Gaynell Tinsley, and Art Wein- nar. He inspired the quarterbacks by stories of the signal-calling of Walt Eckersall, Frank Carideo, Angelo Bertelli, Johnny Lujack, and Arnold Tucker. He did similar jobs for the tackles, the centers, the guards, the fullbacks, and the halfbacks. He singled out his punters and described some of the great kicking of Carideo, Chickerneo, Olson and Justice. He inspired his passers with tales of the great feats of Sammy Baugh, Marshall Goldberg, Cecil Isbell, and Johnny Lujack. He had some little fellows on the squad so he encouraged them with stories of Cotton Warburton, Davy O'Brien, Alby Booth, Eddie Le-Baron, and other 150-pounders who made good in the big-time.

The coach even made some concessions to the more modern teaching aids. He showed many movies and slow-motion shots of great plays of games of recent years. He diagrammed and described these plays in detail.

He did not have much trouble with that great bugaboo of the teacher, *motivation*. His students were intensely interested in their subject. Of course, he did have minor difficulty with some of the more experienced players. They thought they should go out on the field and *practice*. But he refused to let that bother him; no student could tell him how to teach.

### Evaluation

The day before the first game he gave the students a test, a very up-to-date, objective, short-answer kind of test, naturally. He had the answer sheets scored on an IBM machine and selected for the starting line-up the eleven men who

made the highest marks. Before the game he gave the team an inspiring pep-talk of the Knute Rockne type and sent them out to do or die for old P. U.

What was the result? Well, the 1951 game between Alabama and Delta State was close compared to this one. (If you don't recall that contest, Alabama beat Delta State 89 to 0.)

The results of the first game upset the coach so much that he almost lost faith in his ability to teach. However, he was an intelligent man; he did a little reflective thinking. He recalled some of the things he had been taught in teachers college and some of the things discussed by professors of the School of Education during faculty meetings. He remembered that learning is an *active* process. He needed more student participation. He decided that the difficulty was that he was using the wrong method. His solution was to create more student activity by using discussion techniques.

The next week the students discussed their plays, and the rules of the game. The coach gave them problem situations and had them figure out the answers. He had the players do outside reading on how the great players did it and come in and report to the group. They analyzed some of the great upset victories of football history and found out what plays and tactics were used. They planned strategy for hypothetical games. They even groped after group-dynamics solutions of their morale problems.

### Application

To heighten learning, the coach had the students write themes. They wrote on such topics as the advantages of the T-formation over the single-wing, the strengths and weaknesses of the double wing, the differences between the wing-

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T and the split-T offense, when and how to use the rolling block, the merits of the 5-3-2-1 defense, how to elude a defensive back, and where the 7-diamond defense should be used. The coach showed the squad more films and they discussed them. The football class hummed with activity. Here was creative teaching at its zenith.

The next game came around. The coach was confident that his players now knew football. To his chagrin, the team was massacred again.

The coach became a bit desperate. Somehow he was failing in his task of teaching. However, his course of action seemed clear. He had to get still more activity into his instruction. He even began to believe that perhaps there was something to this learning-by-doing philosophy.

The next week he had the squad go out on the practice field. The centers centered the ball, the passers passed, the ends caught passes, and the kickers kicked. He had all of the players block and tackle. He lined up teams and had them practice their plays and their ball-handling. He even had the teams scrimmage against one another.

Of course, the students lost their next game. However, it was not such a complete rout. The P. U. players began to look and act like a team. They were considerably more definite in their actions. They even scored a touchdown. Apparently the coach had finally found at least the beginnings of the correct method.

Obviously this story is ridiculous. There is no Polytechnic University—Harold J. Catt, Lt. Col. USAF, Chief Academic Instructor Division, Air Command and Staff School, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

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