

*Please return to Fr. Keaburgh*

By now, the last whistle has sounded. The cleats are cleaned and stored away. Cartier Field is quiet---no thud of leather hitting leather, only a winter wind howling through the patched fence. Football has bowed from the stage for 1951. And now, this is the summing-up time.

What is left of the season that was? The stadium is there---majestic in its emptiness. Old arguments still fill the air. If you listen closely enough, you will hear recurring phrases like "platoon system", "spring practice", "Bowl games", "subsidies" and "eligibility". But all of these are words, some abstractions, and some standing for realities that can be very good or very bad.

But there is something left after this season that is very much a reality, and I think, a very good reality. Not just a pile of bricks, not just a system or a practice, not just a feeling or an abstraction, but something very real, a person. You might call him the forgotten man, although he is really what remains when all is said and done about football. He is the reason we are here tonight. For want of something better, let's call him the football player.)

He is a person, the son of a father and a mother, somebody's brother. He is generally young and strong and fairly intelligent.

Because he is young, he is impressionable. He can be well or badly trained, bettered or spoiled, inspired or soured, on the game of football, and subsequently, on life in general. Because he is strong, he can be drilled to greater stamina or allowed to get soft and lazy; he can be trained to join skill to strength or can be asked to use strength in a wild unreasoned way like a bull. His strength may be motivated and deepened and disciplined to include strength of character or it can be merely used as the strength of a dumb ox is used---body power without brain power.

Because he is fairly intelligent, the football player is more than a pawn in the hands of unscrupulous people who can use him to represent an educational institution without allowing him to get educated himself. Because he is fairly intelligent, the football player has a right to learn other things besides football---unless his whole life is to have only one meaning---to play football. And when men start treating football players this way---then the word

play and player is badly used and we have the famous example of the coach who chided the wayward, so-called player with the query, "What do you think it is, a game?"

Yes, we've all heard what's wrong with football. They asked one famous coach last week what he considered to be the greatest evil of football—and he answered—"to lose". He was only being facetious but let's remember that in all this talk of what's wrong with football people are dealing in negatives, abuses, and mal-practice. Wouldn't it be easier and simpler to ask: "What's good—not just about football—but what is good about the fellow who makes football, the player?"

If we are right about him, we are right about the game. If we are wrong about him—no game in the whole world can justify what is hurting him, neither can gate receipts, nor TV, nor anything else.

We said the player is a person. Without being philosophical about it, this means that you cannot use persons the way you use puppets to put on an exhibition; it means they can't be bargained for like beef;

it means they can't be used and abused as though they were mechanical gadgets. It means you will get more out of them by developing their heart and spirit than by merely training their reflexes. In a word, football players are to be trained and respected as men, not as circus animals. To say they are persons, is to say that they are more important than anything else in this world.

We have also said that football players are generally young and strong and fairly intelligent persons. Their youth makes them a real trust to those who would deal with them, athletically or otherwise. Their strength makes them a challenge to those who would train them to match this strength with those of equal or even greater strength, and to excel often because of a greater inner strength of heart. Their intelligence really makes them something special, persons, capable of greater emotional heights and depths than any other kind of being; susceptible to the highest inspiration and the lowest degradation. The football player is all this and more. Think about him and you will decide quickly where present day practices are good or bad. Certainly it is bad to buy a player and then to ask him to pose as an amateur for a school; certainly it is bad to ask a player to exemplify a school's spirit, while preventing him from getting a real education by excessive

practice in extra-seasonal activities. On the other hand, the platoon system may not be so bad if it gives more players a chance to play or prevents an injury through exhaustion. In any case, the player ought to get the first consideration in all these matters. Without him there is no football—good or bad.

Last year at this time, our coaches and our players weren't too proud of the season just passed. They committed themselves to a hard road back and took the road this Fall with some very young and inexperienced players.

There was much speculation on what would happen—from the high expectations that followed the Indiana game to the doldrums that attended Michigan State.

Many people took to second guessing the coaches and criticizing the team. I am not saying that our coaching staff or team never makes any mistakes, but I do know that they worked mighty hard this year, that they are very loyal to Notre Dame, and that we don't have thoughts of firing the coaches or repudiating the team the first time that something goes wrong. We think that both the coaching and the team improved as the year wore on. This improvement was most obvious in the climax of

the season against Southern California.

All this brings us to the most important element in football at Notre Dame—the players. When I think of this year's team, I am reminded of Winston Churchill's famous reference to the young fliers in the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain. "Never before did so many owe so much to so few." Never before this year did so many people throughout this country owe to so young a group of players the thrill of seeing a real Notre Dame team play a real Notre Dame game. Especially our student body was proud to see their team exemplify the spirit that has made this school famous. Young people throughout the land learned a new lesson in team play, the will to win, and good sportsmanship. The millions from coast-to-coast who saw the Southern California game through the magic of TV represented the greatest visual audience in the history of the game. In the words of a Los Angeles newspaper, they saw "a very young and inexperienced Irish team win a game they had no right to win, beat a team they had no reason to beat."

We were glad that Southern California played so hard and so well. It gave our players a chance to find their real stride. Everyone thought our team grew up on the muddy field of the Colosseum. Frank Leahy was reflecting the thought of many people when he told the team he had never been prouder of another group of players.

All in all then, it has been a happy task to sum up this season.

Defeats and victories fade away, but we will be many years forgetting the fine spirit of "old men" like Mutscheller, Mazur, Petitbon, and Barrett, Toneff, Burns and Ostrowski. I hope we can see the young men grow up in this same tradition which they have begun to exemplify so well this year.

To Frank Leahy and his coaching staff we say: Well done. May you earn another trip to the shower with all your clothes on at the completion of next year's season.

To Jim Mutscheller and his teammates—we are proud of the way you represented Notre Dame this year. We hope that all of you who come to us as young men will leave us matured in mind and heart and soul as well as in body. We hope that you who come to us strong in body will leave strong in your attachment to the values that matter in life, and that you play it for all you are worth, as you played football here. We hope that all you players find your intelligence growing towards Christian Wisdom during your four years here at Our Lady's University that you leave here better men, prepared to work as hard and intelligently and honestly as you played the game. God bless and keep all of you.