

BRICK MULLER

By John C. Hibner

Dr. Harold P. "Brick" Muller is the man who is credited with putting California football on the map as he was the first Golden Bear to earn first team All-America honors on Walter Camp's mythical eleven in 1921 and 1922. But he also had great success in track and field while attending Berkeley.

It was in the fall of 1920 that Coach Andy Smith welcomed his new squad only 10 days before the first game of the season, on September 25 against the Olympic Club of San Francisco. Smith came to Cal in 1916 after coaching at Purdue University from 1913-15. California, which had been playing rugby for nine years, had returned to playing football in 1915. In 1916 John Stroud, graduate manager of athletics, after a thorough search, hired Smith. His record at Cal was 24-13-3 for the first four seasons, but in the 1919 season there had been talk of his dismissal because of losses to Washington (7-0) and Washington State (14-0).

Smith told reporters at this first day of practice that in 1920 Cal should have one of its best teams in the history of the school. He talked about the 1919 freshmen team (10-1-0 with their only loss to the University of Nevada varsity 13-12), and mentioned the names of some players: Bob Berky, Stan Barnes, Dan McMullan Jr, Harold Muller, Charlie Erb Jr, and James "Duke" Morrison. One of the players was to become the leader of the Golden Bears for the next three years; his name was Harold Muller, nicknamed "Brick" because of his flaming red hair.

Muller was born in Dunsmuir, California on June 12, 1901, and was an all-around athlete in football, track and field, and baseball. He was six feet tall, 193 pounds, and had very large hands and powerful arms. He could throw and catch a football, which was much bigger then, as if it were a baseball. It has been said of him in high school that he could throw a ball as far as 60-70 yards with just a 12-foot trajectory. He was also considered a fast and tough tackler, and was an exceptional blocker. When Clarence "Nibs" Price was hired by Smith as one of his Cal assistants, he encouraged his San Diego High School players to accompany him to Berkeley, and one of them was Brick Muller, who had a desire to become an orthopedic surgeon.

Much has been written about Muller's football ability, but he was also very good in track; good enough in the eyes of Cal coach Walter Christy that he entered Muller into an Olympic track and field preliminary meet in Pasadena. Muller eventually made the U.S. Olympic team as one of the high jumpers. The 1920 Olympic Games were held in Antwerp, Belgium, and on August 17 the high jump competition was won by Richmond "Dick" Landon of Yale. Muller and Bo Ekelund of Sweden were tied for second place as both cleared 6 feet, 2 3/4 inches, and in a jump-off Muller won the silver medal.

The 1920 Cal football season opened against the Olympic Club, and the Bears really didn't look that good, but after a scoreless first period, the Bears went on to win 21-0. Smith wasn't pleased, and the Cal practices became extremely tough. The Bears seemed to get their act together, and nothing was going to stop them as they ran over the Mare Island Marines 88-0; then destroyed St Mary's 127-0, and two days later a completely demoralized Gael team abandoned football for the season. Nevada fell next 79-7, Utah was crushed 63-0, but the Oregon Aggies gave the Bears a better game in the mud at Corvallis before losing 17-7. Then the Cougars of Washington State came to Berkeley and were beaten 49-0, with arch-rival Stanford getting trampled 38-0 at Cal Stadium before a crowd of 27,700 fans.

Clinton R. "Brick" Morse of the San Francisco Call newspaper had followed the Bears all season and he gave the team the title of "The Wonder team". Cal had a record of 9-0-0, and had scored 482 points to their opponents mere 14. The team was ranked by the Helm's Athletic Foundation as the best team in the country, and Walter Camp named Brick Muller to his All-America Third Team. Two days after the 1920 Big Game, Cal was honored with an invitation to the Rose Bowl to play Ohio State, champions

of the Western Conference with a true All-America back in Gaylord "Pete" Stinchcomb. Eastern sportswriters were really not impressed by Cal, and they thought that Ohio State was a much better team. But overlooked were the recent upsets in Rose Bowl history as when Washington State beat Brown in 1916, and then Oregon did the same to Penn in 1917. Harvard had just squeaked past Oregon 7-6 in 1920, but for reasons unknown Easterners still did not respect Pacific Coast football.

So on New Years Day, 1921 Ohio State was favored to beat the Bears by 6-10 points. But the overconfident Buckeyes were behind 7-0 in a matter of minutes. Stinchcomb, when tackled by Muller on an end run, fumbled and the ball was recovered by George "Fats" Latham on the 28 yard line. A 13-yard pass to Muller from Al "Pesky" Sprott, a 10-yard run by Sprott, and then Sprott was in for the touchdown and the Bears were ahead.

The Buckeyes mounted only two serious drives in the game, and both times the Bears were forced to hold in the shadows of their goal posts. The first drive was stopped at the Cal 8 when Muller forced a fumble on a tackle and then made the recovery. In the second quarter Stinchcomb led the Buckeyes down to the Cal six yard line again. Hoge Workman fired a pass into the end-zone to Stinchcomb, but as he fell the ball popped from his hands and Sprott fell on it for the touchback.

Then came one of the most famous plays in Rose Bowl history. Faking an injury, Archie Nisbet of Cal lay on the ground for a few moments while the rest of the Bears were getting set up for a trick play that they had practiced many times. Nisbet got up slowly and stood near the ball, and was talking to the other players on the front line. The three Cal backs stood with their hands on their hips, and Muller stood off to the left of them. Then without warning, Nisbet leaped to his feet and centered the ball to Sprott, who in turn lateraled deep to Muller. Erb and Toomey had decoyed as pass receivers, while Howard "Brodie" Stephens, the right end and intended receiver, went downfield.

Muller retreated to his 47 yard line and threw a pass that looked more like a catcher's throw to second base, as it was no more than 10 feet off the ground. Stephens caught the ball at the goal line and scored. The 42,000 fans were stunned momentarily before breaking out with a thunderous ovation. That famous pass neatly wrapped up the decision for the Bears. They scored again when Sprott raced around right end for six yards to a TD, and it was 21-0 at halftime. Karl Deeds, a reserve halfback, scored on a one-yard run in the fourth quarter, climaxing a 51-yard drive to make the final score 28-0.

Brick Muller's performance against Ohio State was so great that he was voted the Most Valuable Player of the game. He had caught two passes for 33 yards, recovered three fumbles, completed two other passes besides the Stephens touchdown, and had made several key tackles against Stinchcomb. One could say that this was the game that made Midwest and Eastern teams take notice of Pacific Coast college football.

For the 1921 season the only men not returning were right guard Cort Majors and right halfback Pesky Sprott. Cal opened the season on Sept. 24 against St Mary's, which had suffered such a tremendous loss the year before, and the Bears scored their tenth consecutive victory by the score of 21-0. Then the Olympic Club fell 14-0, but the Wolfpack of Nevada did manage to score six points as they were destroyed 51-6. The highly touted Pacific Fleet team came to Berkeley led by former All-American Bill Ingram, star of the Navy team of years before, and 12,000 fans showed up to see Cal win easily 21-10.

In the rain and mud, 20,000 came to watch a very strong Oregon team play Cal. But the Ducks just couldn't stop the charging Bears and lost 39-0. Then the Bears journeyed to Multnomah Field in Portland to face a tough Washington State team which played a very respectable game and lost only 14-0. The Bears then buried Southern California 38-7, and destroyed the Washington Huskies 72-3; ending up the season by downing arch-rival Stanford at their new stadium by the score of 42-7.

The 1921 Cal team had a record of 9-0-0 and had scored 312 points to their opponent's 33, and the Golden Bears had won their second straight PCC championship. Muller was selected to Walter Camp's First Team All-America at his end position, and he was also selected on the Helm's Foundation All-America team. Two other Bears were selected to Camp's Third Team, Howard Stephens at end and Dan McMillan at tackle.

Once again California was invited to represent the West at the Rose Bowl on New Years Day. Their opponents would be Washington and Jefferson; selected after Cornell, Lafayette, Penn State, and Centre College of Kentucky had declined bids. The odds were 3-1 in favor of Cal and points were being given freely. Many easterners felt that the Presidents were very underrated, as their record was 10-0-0, which included victories over Syracuse, West Virginia, and Pittsburgh. They came to Pasadena with only 19 players, plus head coach Earle "Greasy" Neale and his assistant John Kellison.

Several days before the game was to be played heavy rains left the field a virtual swampland, but it was decided to play the game as scheduled, regardless of the conditions. Led by All-America tackle Russ Stein who was all over the field, W&J allowed California only two first downs, both by rushing, and a total of 49 yards against the Presidents' 114 yards rushing and 23 passing. Muller had been bothered all year with a leg infection, but actually played a good game and tried several passes which were dropped by intended receivers. In the third quarter a W&J touchdown was called back due to an offside penalty, but the thing that really kept the Presidents from scoring was Archie Nisbet's toe. On 13 punts he averaged 39.7 yards per try, while the Presidents could only average 27.1 on 15 kicks. The score ended up 0-0.

The 1922 season opened up with bright prospects. True, Latham, Barnes, Stephens, McMillan and Toomey were gone, but Smith had able replacements for them. Again Muller and Erb were the leaders of the team that ripped almost every opponent that they faced. The Bears defeated Santa Clara 45-14, Mare Island Marines 88-0, St Mary's 41-0, Olympic Club 25-0, Southern California 12-0, Washington State 61-0, Washington 45-7, and Nevada 61-13.

On November 25, the Golden Bears traveled down to Palo Alto to play Stanford. This would be the last game of Muller's college career, and his performance again was brilliant. He scored the first touchdown of the game on a 25-yard pass-run play from Don Nichols. California easily defeated Stanford 28-0, and Coach Smith didn't substitute for any of the seniors; he let them play out their final game together. Muller played three seasons at Cal, and the team's record was 27-0-1 during his career at Berkeley. Again in 1922 Muller was named to Walter Camp's All-America First Team at end. One could say that he had a remarkable college career.

Muller was also a member of the California track and field team under Coach Christy. The Bears won the ICAAAA championships in 1921, '22, and '23, and also won the second NCAA championships, which were held in Stagg Field at the University of Chicago on June 16-17, 1922. Muller placed second in the Broad Jump, third in the High Jump, and fourth in the Discuss Throw.

Before his graduation, Muller applied to, and was accepted, to the Cal Medical School, and his ambition

was to become an orthopedic surgeon. To help supplement his income while in medical school, Coach Smith hired Muller to coach the ends on the Cal varsity. While in school Muller coached from 1923-25, until Smith died from pneumonia on January 8, 1926.

After he had become a physician, there would be another challenge for Muller. Captain Jack Spaulding, US Navy retired, had come up with the idea of having an All-Star football game to be played in San Francisco. The purpose of the game would be to raise money for the Shriners' Hospitals, and it would be called the East-West Shrine Game. Spaulding was given the task of organizing and recruiting for the West team, and naturally he turned to members of the Cal Wonder Teams". Muller, Erb, and Nesbet of the 1922 team were asked to play and all accepted.

The first East-West Shrine Game was played on December 26, 1925 at Ewing Field at the foot of Lone Mountain in San Francisco. The game was played before a stadium record crowd of 25,000 at the historic old ballpark. After a scoreless first half suddenly the crowd was on its feet, as Muller had just caught a 27-yard pass from Talma "Tut" Imlay (Calif.) and dragged one of the East players across the goal line. Pat Frayne of the San Francisco Call wrote "He should have been called Ton O' Brick Muller the way he blocked and landed on them". Ed R. Hughes of the San Francisco Chronicle wrote in his column: "Remember Muller has been out of college for three years, but right now he is by far the greatest end in the West, and probably one of the best that ever played!!"

In 1926 the newly formed Pacific Coast Professional Football League started playing, and Muller was immediately signed by the Los Angeles Buccaneers. After the league disbanded, Cal's new coach, Nibs Price, hired Muller to be an assistant coach, which he did from 1927-29. During World War II Muller served with the Army Medical School with the rank of Major, and in 1956 he served as the Head Team Physician for the United States Olympic Team. Dr Muller received many honors before his death on May 17, 1962. Foremost among them came in the late 1940's, when Colliers Magazine senior editor James N. Young, who had compiled All-America data for almost half a century, chose Muller on his All-Time, All-America eleven.

Other all-time mythical All-America awards for Muller included: in 1924 by Joe Godfrey in All-Sports magazine; 1928 by Grantland Rice in Colliers; 1932 in Illustrated Football Annual by John Heisman; 1940 by Harry Stuhldeher; 1942 by Jim Thorpe for the Associated Press; and the Helm's Athletic Foundation All-Time All-America team named in 1946. Harold "Brick" Muller was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 1951.

FOR SALE

The West Point Military Academy Gift Shop is offering for sale a pair of outstanding VHS videotapes that deal with Army football, at a very reasonable price. The tapes sell for \$25 EACH (postpaid). The first video covers the Army football seasons of 1945-47 with Davis and Blanchard and this is historical footage that is a must-have. Included is coverage of the legendary 1946 Army vs Notre Dame game, along with Johnny Lujack's famous ankle tackle of Doc Blanchard. The second video covers the first 100 years of Army football and is also a very good tape. Each tape runs for about one hour. Send check or money order payable to the West Point Gift Shop to:

West Point Gift Shop Building # 2107 (Attn: Sue) US Military Acd. West Point, NY 10996

Greenwood Publishing Group recently issued the next volume in its series edited by Prof. David Porter of William Penn College, titled Biographical Dictionary of American Sports (1992-1995 Supplement). This sixth volume in the series includes biographies of 616 athletes from various sports, including 181 football players. For ordering information call 1-800-225-5800