

Pennsylvania were doing as well. Sometimes he is too sparse in his coverage, failing to mention how Wallie McCornack turned Dartmouth into a winner during 1901 and 1902. He fully covers these teams when they reached the top rank, as Pennsylvania did in the late 1890s.

Bernstein points out that generally most “everyone else was cannon fodder for the Big Three, and stresses that Yale, Harvard, and Princeton were the only good teams in the country in the early decades of the game. Beginning in the 1920s however, the Ivy League programs began an extended decline into second rank status. By the post-World War II years, only Pennsylvania was engaged in big-time college football, and that did not last long. The Ivy schools’ diminished status was formalized in 1982 when they moved down to Division I-AA.

As the Ivy League schools become less important, the author’s history evolves into a narrow league history, but a league history that touches on important issues that have always confronted college football, most particularly the issue of governance, whereby he discusses the gradual evolution of the schools to the gradual joining together into a league through various agreements, mainly by the Big Three.

Bernstein has explored the archives of all eight members of the Ivy League, drawn from an extensive library of secondary literature, and made full use of an array of metropolitan newspapers, student newspapers, and alumni magazines. The book includes the requisite scholarly apparatus—end notes, bibliography, and an index—plus a photo section of 25 far-too-small images. Appendices provide listings of all the head coaches of each of the Ivy schools, school win-loss cumulative and league records, Ivy League champions, and Ivy school nominal national champions.

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SOLTAU’S 1948 KICKOFF WHIFF

By Jim Quirk

The Golden Gopher teams that coach Bernie Bierman put together between 1946 and 1949 at the University of Minnesota developed one of the great lines in the history of college football. Among the stars were Bud Grant and Gordy Soltau at ends, Leo Nomellini and Buster Mealey at tackles, Warren Beson and Floyd Jaszewski at guards, plus Clayton Tonnemaker and Howie Brennan at center, backed up by a youngster named Wayne Robinson. This Gopher aggregation didn’t manage to win the national championships that Bernie’s 1934, 1935, 1936, 1940, and 1941 teams had, but the line at least ranks with the best of those teams, as indicated by the sterling pro careers of so many of the 1949 Gopher linemen.

Movies of the games of the post-war Bierman teams which were taken by trainer Phil Brain are still available in the Archives of the University of Minnesota. The movie of the 1948 Minnesota-Purdue game has one of those plays that comes up once in a lifetime. Late in the first half, after the Gophers had scored a touchdown to put the game on ice, 27-7, Billy Bye, the Gopher halfback was the holder for Gordy Soltau’s following kickoff. The film (silent of course) shows Gordy taking his usual full leg kick, with the rest of the Gopher team running downfield with him. But as the Gophers are running, they are turning this way and that, trying to find the ball, and the Boilermaker defenders are obviously as puzzled as the Minnesota players. Meanwhile, back on the 40 yard line, Billy Bye is scrunched up and lying all by himself. As it turns out, Bye has the ball, which never got kicked. The referee, Jay Berwanger of University of Chicago fame, huddled with the other officials and finally called a penalty on the Gophers for delay of game.

After the five yard penalty, Soltau kicked off again, and the half ended a couple of plays later.

The newspaper reports of the incident said that, "Soltau missed the ball on the first try when the ball fell out of Bye's hands," but that wasn't what really happened. In an interview with Billy Bye in 1997 in Edina, Minnesota, at the financial services firm he owns, Billy told the true story of what really occurred: "I was going to keep it a secret and I did for about 25 years. I was the holder and Gordy was the kicker, one of the most serious and nicest guys you would ever hope to meet. You know there are certain pressures on you so far as playing and winning goes in a game, and then when you know you're going to win there's a kind of euphoria or a let down when you say to yourself, 'we've won,' and now it's 'we're having a good time.'"

"Well, in this game it was just before halftime and we had the game won. Gordy was going to kick off, and I was the holder. I looked at him and he was so serious I almost had to laugh. And, as he approached the ball, I pulled it away. If I had been facing our bench, I couldn't have done it, but I was facing away from Bernie. I can't tell you to this day why I did this, because it was serious business out there. It was serious to Bernie—you didn't smile for two days before a game. But I did it, I pulled the ball away and it was a wonderful thing. I felt as though I controlled the whole world. The band started to play—they didn't see the ball, the offensive team had its job to do, the defense the same. They moved down the field, expecting to see the ball caught and run back. The only two guys on the field who weren't moving were the safety waiting to receive the ball, and me.

"Halsey Hall (on WCCO radio) was trying to call the kick, and he can't see the ball. Everybody on the field is utterly confused. Then things just ground to a halt. I had the ball between my legs and everybody kind of milled around and then some Purdue player saw the ball and sort of jumped on top of me. The officials conferred because they didn't know what to do. Jay Berwanger, the referee, came over to me with a puzzled look on his face, sort of grinned, and said, 'There must be some penalty for this,' and finally decided to call us for a delay of game. So Gordy comes to me and he says, 'What happened?', and I said, 'You flat out missed it—you whiffed it.' He gave me a funny look and kicked off, and I thought to myself, 'What in the world did I do?', because in thirty seconds I would be off the field and having to answer to Bernie.

"I went into the dressing room at halftime and I thought I'd hide. So I went to the bathroom, closed the door, and I thought I could hide out during the whole halftime. Then there came that familiar voice from the other side of the door: 'Billy, what happened on the kickoff?' Now there's a time to tell the truth and a time not to tell the truth, so I said, 'He missed it, coach.' Bernie paused for awhile and then said, 'Oh.'

"I decided I'd never say anything about this to anyone. Then in about 1963, I was business manager of the Minnesota Vikings of the NFL. Clayt Tonnemaker was doing the TV for the Vikings, and we were in San Francisco playing the 49ers, and Gordy Soltau was doing radio commentary for the 49ers. Clayt and I were together and reminiscing about old times, and I told Clayt, 'I know something you don't know and nobody knows. I'll tell you the story if you promise not to tell anybody.' So he says, 'Sure.' So I told him the story of the kickoff. Then Gordy walks in, and Clayt turns to him and says, 'Gordy, you won't believe this story.' So the story finally got out and it's been around in one version or another, but this is what really happened."