

THE BIG-TIME BOYS

The Ohio State Story: Win Football Games Or Else

Robert Shaplen
Sports Illustrated

A big-time football coach is a lonely man. Just how lonely these pressured men are we never realized until reading this article about Woody Hayes, football coach at Ohio State.

Caught in a system where winning is the only virtue, Coach Hayes must—every Saturday in the season—either win a game or be pushed one step out of his job.

As this article from Sports Illustrated magazine says: "If he should fail two years in a row to win more games than he loses, he will automatically be a flop as a coach and a foolish fellow to boot. That's how it is in these fickle flatlands, and that's how it will be, with Hayes simply a Frankenstein of the system, until football ceases to be a vast profit-making amusement enterprise with amateur dressing."

(Such is the picture at Ohio State, where they win games. We leave it to the reader's own campus observations to realize what the situation is here, where we are losing games. For here, too, there are lonely men who lack security, and pressures which say: "Win or else."—Editors.)

EVERY SATURDAY AFTERNOON during the football season, while a scarlet-jerseyed quarterback of Ohio State University barks signals on the field, \$25,000 additional quarterbacks in Columbus and another \$ million throughout the state are sure to think, at some point during the game, that each of them could do a better job. By Monday morning, the traditional time for quarterback sniping, these millions of signal callers will have replayed the game several times over in their own minds, and will then start replaying it in groups, along about Wednesday or Thursday the coming Saturday's game will come up for discussion, and all of Ohio will decide in advance just how that one ought to be played.

To a certain degree this sort of thing goes on all over the country, but in Ohio football is super serious business. Few are the games at Ohio Stadium, rain or shine, that are not attended by capacity crowds of 82,000 screaming, back-pounding, bottle-sipping, pigskin-pixilated customers. The rest of the quarterbacks in the state—those who couldn't get tickets—do their second guessing on radio or TV (a half dozen radio stations make sure the game is brought into every home). And if OSU loses, the separate and collective wraath of these millions of proprietary partisans will be leveled against the man behind the quarterback—the Coach.

Big Brother To All

Big Brother to everybody when he's on top, but candidate of candidates for the salt mines when he's not, a head football coach at OSU has been described as having next to the Presidency, the toughest job in the United States. Not only does he have to direct the fortunes of his squad, but he is at the constant beck and call of all the quarterback organizations in Ohio, to whom he must make full accountings. The Coach's postgame confessions of sins are regularly delivered in a manner reminiscent of a defendant at a Soviet trial. "I was wrong there," he will say, hanging his head abjectly. "I shouldn't do that." The fact he may have been right, or that the point in question is at least debatable, makes no difference. The boys in the back room want blood.

The man on trial this week (for losing 20-14 to Duke) is oddly woundup individual named Wayne Woodrow (Woody) Hayes, who is both a charming and frightening product of what, in these years of postwar prosperity, is more of a bountiful big business and a mass hysteria than it ever was before. In many respects Hayes is the perfect man for the job. Beyond replaying the game cozily with the manifold quarterbacks in mufti, he is bumptiously tough and is far from a hypocrite. Hayes is completely, in fact devastatingly, aware that in the struggle for survival he must produce a winning team or lose his \$15,000-a-year position and, even more important, his prestige as a big-time coach, which happens to be Woody's total raison d'être.

"I love football," Hayes says, with his slight lisp and almost with tears in his eyes. "I think it's the most wonderful game in the world, and I despise to lose. I've hated to lose ever since I was a kid and threw away the marbles when I lost at croquet."

This perhaps unadmirable trait has the unalterable approval of every man Buckeye, but Hayes gets no points for mere enthusiasm. Each week of the season brings on a public reincarnation of himself, in the image of hero or villain. If, as usual, there are nine games to the schedule, he lives nine unpredictable, breathtaking, spine-tingling lives. Depending on how much of a winning edge he has at the end of November, the reincarnations can be terminated in one tremendous, popularly applied postseason kick-after-lack-of-touchdowns—OUT!

So far, Hayes has hung on, but it's been close. He is now in his fifth season and until last year he was more often a bumbling devil incarnate than a grid-iron Galahad. But in 1954 he dismayed his most ardent detractors by producing an unbeaten team of national champions. For the moment at least, all the angry and frustrated Walter Mittys in Ohio had to stay on the bench.

By the end of this season, Hayes may be in for fresh trouble. But

if he doesn't talk too much, a habit he's had considerable difficulty controlling in the past (last winter at a Cleveland alumni meeting he couldn't resist asking, "How many of you were here last year?" and demanding a show of hands), the consensus is that he earned himself enough insurance in '54 to survive a likely so-so '55 record.

The Fickle Flatlands

In four and a half years at OSU, Hayes has won 28, lost 11 and tied two. If he should fail two years in a row to win more games than he loses, he will automatically be a flop as a coach and a foolish fellow to boot. That's how it is in these fickle flatlands, and that's how it will be, with Hayes simply a Frankenstein of the system, until football ceases to be a vast profit-making amusement enterprise with amateur dressing.

There unquestionably is a great demand for this kind of game. The demand isn't hard to diagnose. Ohio is a heavily populated state but, unlike New York or California, it has comparatively little outlet for the hungry and abundant entertainment dollar. Since OSU now claims to have the biggest single campus enrollment in the country, more than 21,000 students, it seems only natural to Ohioans that it also ought to have the best football team, year in and year out; that, in the immortal words of one college president, repeated tongue-in-cheek by OSU's President Howard L. Bevis, "We should have a university of which the football team can be proud." Not only do the alumni demand perpetual gridiron greatness, but so does everyone else, which is where things get blurred. When the barber, the cab driver and the waitress all express themselves firmly on the matter, they are doing more than getting a vicarious thrill out of identifying themselves with the university they were never able to attend. They are helping form what is obviously a professional atmosphere—and it is the atmosphere and the attitudes that are important—in which Dem Bucks (and dem bucks) play a role highly similar in the mass mind to Dem Bums in Brooklyn.

"If football is a plaything for the community and nothing more, if we can't prove that the program is three fourths education and one fourth circus, then we should cut it out," says Dick Larkins, the university's personable and efficient athletic director. "But we think we can steer the ship in such a way that we have a fair measure of success and still uphold the best principles of academic life." Somewhat defensively, Larkins adds: "I don't know of any football player who doesn't go to class."

Jack Fullen, the alumni secretary, who is an outspoken opponent of big-time football, turns the argument around. "The football tail is wagging the college dog," he maintains. "Larkins has to meet an \$800,000-a-year budget in the athletic department. If he doesn't fill the stadium every Saturday, he won't be able to make ends meet. Like Woody, Dick is a creature of the system. Little by little his ideals are disintegrating as he has to use football receipts to pay off the bond issue on the new field house. We'll never be off the hook until we stop worrying about attendance."

Since attendance depends on the quality of the football, both Larkins and Hayes are staunch defenders of the recruiting methods that each year bring two or three dozen of Ohio's best high school players to the university. Says Larkins: "If athletics are forced to pay the freight for a program that ought to be defrayed by the state, then you've got to produce a winning team for the community as well as for the alumni." To which Hayes adds: "The only way we can justify college football is to see that the kids get their due educationally, that they get A here and then stay here."

If a high school football star does meet OSU's academic requirements, he can get himself a state scholarship of a few hundred dollars a year and either a part-time state office job, paying about \$60 a month or a considerably better one working for such wealthy alumni as John Galbreath, the real estate man and sportsman, or Leo Yassenoff, a Columbus contractor.

Galbreath and Yassenoff are probably the two best-known members of the Frontliners, an organization comprising some hundred alumni in the state whose prime function it is to recruit young high school stars. Ironically, the Frontliners were organized eight years ago by Fullen, who figured if he couldn't beat the system he'd string along with it and at least "try to sell OSU to players instead of trying to purchase them."

The fact that there have been abuses of the system of encouraging and supporting players is essentially the public's fault, Fullen feels. Because football is a state-wide institution, with everybody getting in on the act or wanting to, the opportunities for evil begin back in the lower echelons. "What we've got in Ohio is the guaranteed annual B for high school football stars," Fullen says. "Can he run, can he pass, can he punt?—that is the question. If he can, the wherewithal and the consciences can be easily provided and appeased."

Fullen may exaggerate, but a couple of recent, celebrated cases would seem to prove his point, and perhaps as an axiom—that abuses are inevitable once the goal (real touchdown) is established in the image of a constantly victorious football machine. The first concerns a young man with the odd name of Hubert Bobo, a handsome, Atlas-type fullback who came from the tough little town of Chauncey, Ohio. There, according to Fullen's research, he seldom went to classes more than three days a week and was awarded his high school diploma by the school board over the protests of the principal because Bobo promised to put Chauncey on the map. At OSU he was a terror, both on the field and off. A tremendous blocker and an astonishingly fast, helter-skelter runner for a big lad, he played a big role in OSU's great '54 record. He also openly boasted of having four tutors ("modern indoor record"), and he got involved in a paternity suit. Bobo finally flunked himself out, and since he's turned down some good Canadian pro and southern college offers, today he has a job and Hayes, sore beset as he is, would be delighted to welcome a reformed Bobo back to OSU.

The other case has to do with Russ Bowermaster, a young end from Hamilton, Ohio. Bowermaster played fine freshman football at OSU last year but then he too flunked out. This past summer he failed a make-up course, so he wasn't available this fall. While he would hardly seem to be meeting the academic standards Dick Larkins and Hayes proclaim, patience is called for because, as Woody says, "This kid's a helluva football player." Now, like Bobo, Bowermaster is expected back when he finally catches that elusive academic pass.

Classes Too

Despite the Bobos and the Bowermasters, many gridmen do attend classes, and some of them, Hopalong Cassidy included, get better than average marks. Hayes particularly seeks quarterbacks with straight-A averages so he at least won't have to worry about

their flunking out. "Woody is refreshing in his frankness," Fullen adds, "but his conscience, like that of all the others involved in this mess, is caught in the compulsions of survival. 'Don't give me any of that character building business,' he's told me. 'I could build all the characters in the world and lose enough games, and I'd be out of here, but fast.'"

In recruiting, Hayes gets some help from his wife and some from the frank expenditure of the approximately \$4,000 a year he earns doing a TV stint in Columbus. The Hayeses often entertain prospects in their home. (Big Ten rules forbid coaches to recruit outside.) Once signed, a recruit can count on some financial help from Hayes if he is "in need." Woody insists that he never forks up for a luxury—another narrow line—but it's certainly also true that he makes sure he won't lose any valuable men by financial default.

Hayes has all the respect in the world for the bona fide bird dogs in Ohio. His trouble springs from the fact that so many of them turn into wolves. Actually, the wolves were prowling at his doorstep the moment he talked himself into the job his best friends warned him not to take.

He came into a climate that was anything but congenial. A powerful alumni faction had demanded the return of Paul Brown, who had coached at OSU before going off to the Navy and subsequently a pro coach—and if Brown wasn't available another big-time coach was wanted. Hayes, these alumni contended, was pretty small potatoes when you looked at his record.

Who, indeed, was Hayes?

At least, he was unadulterated Ohio. Born in Clifton in 1913, he grew up in Newcomerstown, where his self-educated father was superintendent of schools. Both his parents were adamant, as far back as Woody can remember, about his getting a college education. As a pair of husky country boys, Hayes and brother Ike were naturally interested in more robust pursuits. Stemming from a line of tough mountaineer fighters, they carried on the tradition. One evening Superintendent Hayes went out to deliver a speech and found himself in an empty meeting hall. He was told about "the big fight" going on, and rushed over to discover that his competition was his two sons, putting on a bout under assumed names.

Woody went to Denison University in Granville, where he majored in English and History—he was a top-grade history student—and played varsity football as a tackle and varsity baseball as an outfielder. After graduating from Denison, Hayes spent a year as assistant football coach at Mingo Junction High School and then took a similar job at New Philadelphia. The head coach there was John Brickels, whom Hayes credits with teaching him more than anyone else about the game.

"Woody was always subject to temperamental outbursts," Brickels recalls. "Maybe it's because he was smart, quick and a perfectionist. I'd let him know what I wanted done and he'd do it, pronto. He lacked patience. I tried to tell him that when he corrected a kid he shouldn't make an enemy of the boy, but Woody had a hard time controlling himself and he drove the kids too hard. He'd swear a lot, and I also told him he was the last guy who should, that it didn't fit his personality, what with that little lisp of his. He kept improving, though, and when I left I recommended him for the top job."

Through 1938 and 1939 Hayes won 18, lost one and tied one at New Philadelphia. In 1940 he won only once though, and got into trouble with the superintendent over his harsh methods. At the end of the season he went into the Navy.

During the war Hayes commanded a patrol chaser and a destroyer escort. When he was discharged, as a lieutenant commander, he got the football coaching job at his alma mater, Denison, and after a poor first season his teams won 19 games in a row over two years.

Hayes still had his troubles though. His nerves were strung together with football laces. On more than one occasion his assistant coach, Rex Yard, and his close friend, Mike Gregory, a local hardware man, had to intervene to maintain harmony between him and his players.

"The secret of his success has always been that he sticks to what he believes is right, even if he's wrong. He never stopped thinking football. One afternoon he caught me reading. 'What the hell'd you mean, reading a book during football season?' he shouted."

In 1949 Hayes moved on to Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he won five and lost four. "Woody will have trouble in his first year wherever he goes," his friends say. "It takes time to get to know him and his ways." The next season seemed to prove the point. Miami won eight out of nine and climaxed the season with a Salad Bowl victory over Arizona State.

As far back as Denison, Hayes had his cap set on OSU. "In 1951, when the job was open, I spent an hour and a half trying to dissuade him, telling him about the wolves," Mike Gregory says. "But he wouldn't listen. It was a challenge."

After 71 days of deliberation, the OSU trustees were won over by Hayes's oratory (later Hayes said: "Before I went to see them, I didn't think I had a chance, but after talking to them for three hours I knew I had the job").

He started building up public confidence in himself at once. "We may not win'em all, but we'll show you the fightingest team you've ever seen," he said in the first of many speeches. "I promise you we'll never be outconditioned."

How To Be Sure

That last was an understatement. Hayes's obsession for condition and discipline almost ruined his first year's team. While he continued to treat the Frontliners and the others with kid gloves (more than one subdued wolf was heard to mutter, "If he can coach like he can talk, maybe he will be our man"), he drove his squad mercilessly. The players came to hate him.

"I believe in overlearning," Hayes maintained. "That way you're sure." One of his favorite gimmicks was "gassers," six or more laps around the field at the end of each grueling practice session. "The fellows don't think too much of all this running," Woody joked at one of the downtown alumni gatherings, "but they'll thank me for it once the season starts." During one drill one hot afternoon, far from thanking him, three men collapsed from heat exhaustion.

When he wasn't running them ragged, Hayes was talking his players deaf. "We set a record for meetings," Tackle Dick Logan

said later. "We had meetings about meetings, and in a meeting we were out running some more. We had a meeting about that too."

The bitter feeling between Hayes and his players, an impasse that they locked him out of the dressing room in the Illinois game, then went out and played the game 0-0 tie. Another tie, four victories and three losses in a season of dissension. Quarterback Tony Carella, a winger, having been awkwardly switched to Hayes's side, said: "He had me so fouled up I didn't know what to do. I passed, he jerked me out and said run. If I ran, he said pass. You couldn't call the right play," Hallock added: "I'd rather be playing jayvee ball. How many with 82,000 fans screaming at you while you were and the Bull (Hayes) ranting and raving at you and off it?"

After archival Michigan clipped the Bucks "Woody" banners were flying over Columbus and the wolf pack were talking about raising \$250,000 to buy Hayes's contract. One wolf kept calling the Bucks every day. Mrs. Hayes would answer the phone. "I'll say goodby," he'd say. "We're not going anywhere." "Oh, yes, you are," the wolf would persist.

The next season didn't start off much better. In a room between the halves of one game, a halfback socked at Hayes, missed him and crashed his fist on the locker. Maybe it was then that Hayes began to lose. In any rate, he calmed down. Wins over Illinois and the end of the season saved his job, giving him a record of three losses.

But in '53 the clock was set back, even though record was the same. The team suffered from fumble that drives Hayes out of his mind ("It's just plain, he insists. 'It's antisocial'). One practice episode was disastrous. Freshmen Fullback Don Viece had been gains through the varsity line. As he ripped off a vicious tackle made him drop the ball.

In front of Larkins and several businessmen who were watching, Hayes blew his top. "Get out of the room. We don't stand for fumbling on our team. Stay out until you learn how to hold the ball." Viece never a reply but Hayes raged on and finally reached for his helmet and tossed it in Hayes's direction. He tore off his helmet and tossed it in Hayes's direction. He renewed the attack. "Get up, Viece," he yelled. "What lie down?" Viece was ready to quit OSU that night. Coach Ernie Godfrey, who tries to maintain a home atmosphere not unlike that of his famous radio and TV intervened. Viece

Hayes's home, where patched up. Today's best fullback.

At the end of Michigan 20-0, OSU erably and it looked was through. But others rallied to Hayes. Larkins won't admit started Woody in by talking to him. He uncle about temper sideline gymnastics punts and passes in and by arranging for one of the finest coaches in the country to OSU (he had been 1947 to 1950 but Minnesota with Wes Fesler, Woody's predecessor).

For the first time in his life, Hayes began delegating not only to Clark but also to others on his staff. With candor, Hayes is the first to admit his faults. "I never was a big-time coach, so I naturally grew accustomed to thing myself," he says. "It's taken me a long time. I've still got a long way to go. But I'm getting there."

As an offensive specialist in a rushing game—his ground plays—Hayes's delegation of authority to defense is especially important. The difference in technique to the naked eye in '54, as it has been this season, was for Cassidy, who is one of Hayes's strongest admirers not only depth but concomitant talent. Cassidy, a star in anyone's book, calls Hayes "the best coach I've ever seen but there are few others on the squad who would play a par with Bud Wilkinson of Oklahoma or Ivy Williams, cousin as a player's pal.

Hayes is still criticized for working his men too hard, loss to Stanford, in the second game of this season, was to overwork—and the self-styled quarterbacks in lower brackets far too many meetings and tends to leave his blackboard. "He underestimates the intelligence of the one. 'His intensity doesn't allow him to get a good problem.'"

His dedication to football to the exclusion of other has made Hayes a lonely man. He has no more than close friends and he doesn't see them very often. In contradictions that he can charm an audience at a bad social mixer. "He hasn't got time for both football," says one of those who knows him well. "But if his friend, he'll do anything for you, and so will you for him."

Hayes's wife is a football widow—she calls her "Blocking back"—and his son Steve, now 11, is virtually away all day during preseason practice sessions—he into the dorms with his players—Hayes will spend every night during the season in his office, studying the day's game. On Sunday, with the whole coaching staff there's a re-run of the movies, and Monday starts the grind.

With his fat season behind him, Hayes is a more today even though the wolves are still around and the pulsions remain. But instead of being defensive, Woody is more like an absent-minded professor.

When a visitor spoke with him two weeks ago, in a fine mood. He had just come from a luncheon at Club, another of the countless quarterback groups, for President Eisenhower's quick recovery were blessed for an OSU victory the next day over Illinois. It was Hayes had already decided that his team was fit and it proved to be the next afternoon. Strolling in his shorts he stripped down to his shorts and undershirt, talking

Suddenly he stopped and, with a sheepish grin on his head, "What the hell am I getting undressed for?" he said. "No practice today."

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