

You can't go home again."

Old saying.

## Preface

This is a true story about a beautiful and simple time in the lives of my classmates and myself. It was a time when all we had to worry about was getting our homework done, who we were going to play in sports, and what we were going to do that week-end. It was our youth, but it was far from carefree.

From the confusing days of our early teen years to the late pre-adult years of questing for our dreams it was an adventure of growing up and discovery. The adventure is covered here in.

The act of recovering these years to put into this humble tome have not been easy. It has been eye opening to re-live those times, and see them from the perspective of an adult some quarter century later.

This started out to be a simple paper on 8-man football. My friends took me to an Arena Ball game in Reunion Arena and it opened up the memories. It just sort of took off from that. At times it seemed to have a life of it's own, as the memories came flooding back. The more I wrote the more I found to write about. I put this book together from library work in at least 3 different cities, interviews, contemporary notes, yearbooks, films, and a dozen other sources. A lot of the subjects in here have either moved away, passed on, or just refused interviews. Some of those who refused to give interviews simply could not understand why anyone would write a book with them in it. It was their choice.

To protect the privacy of the students and others in here I used made up names or nic-names. If, at a later date, someone wants his or her real name in this history I will gladly go back and put it in. Faculty and staff of Lone Oak Schools I let stand with their real names except in certain incidents where there was no other way to document it and protect their privacy. If anyone wants out of this history, that can be done too.

I met a lot of people and went to a lot of places I hadn't been to in decades. It was a voyage of rediscovery. Retracing old steps opened some old wounds and helped heal some others. People change, and in some cases surprisingly so.

For those that passed away all I could do was collect notes and in rare cases interview family members. I share their loss, for I could remember them all.

I managed to track down quite a few of the ones that moved away. Many more remained out there and un interviewed. Efforts to find them failed and ended in frustration.

For these and other reasons I deeply miss my old friends, my coaches, my old haunts, and the wonderful padding up for practice. I miss hearing a coach bark out commands in a precision drill. I miss hearing the thud of a basketball in the old gym. I miss the fellowship and brotherhood that my buddies and I shared, and their appreciation of my simple line artwork, stories, and the games we made up together.

I especially miss a big ole lisping Texan who was the best friend I ever had, and I miss 4 very beautiful and classy ladies who I shall never forget. Their effects on my life have been profound.

This history is to allow some to see what life was like in that time, spanning a short 6 years. It is just 6% of a small part of the 20th Century. I hope this allows someone to remember their own school days and compare. For that reason I go into such detail into what many consider the mundane. I ask that the holder of this book simply read, remember and think. Best of all, I hope it brings enjoyment.

I have discovered, however, that there are those who loath their school years. Being a teen in the act of growing up can be a difficult time, and being an unpopular one can be doubly so. To them, I ask that they give this read a chance to see that perhaps they were not alone in the hurt feelings and acts of classmate cruelty they endured.

And yet I do not let it stop me from visiting those times again. For me, it was nostalgic and in a way, wonderful.

All the ingredients are here; action adventure, car chases, violence, love, pain, debasement, beauty, hate, disappointment, and glory. Everything in here actually happened just as it is depicted here. It is told as accurately as possible from the sources available.

If my reactions to some of the things in here that were going on around me seem over blown or too severe, remember just about everything that was happening was happening for the very first time to a small, protected, sub-adult who had not been anywhere and done anything prior to these adventures. To gaze upon something seen for the very first time with awe and wonder is a normal response. Often this was done with the added charge of adrenaline and in an environment that promoted strong reactions to stimuli.

This history is not my story, though it is told from my point of view. It is the story of the people I saw, the places I went to, and the things we did. I invite you, dear reader, to share in the adventure we lived. It all stands before you in these pages. It is the spirit of Big Red, as I remember it.

Life is full of adventures. This is just one adventure of many.



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# Big Red

Living the Adventure



By Charles Tarrant

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"Thunder! Thunder!

Thunderation!

We're the

**BUFFALOES**

Generation!

When we fight with

Determination

We create a

Sensation!"

Pep Rally Cheer, 1968

# Big Red

## Living the Adventure

dedicated to

Rickey Graham

Clyde Ross

Bobby Underwood

and

**Coach Jack Brookins**

plus

all of us who wore the Red and White

(version 1.3) Some names have been changed to protect identities

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"Life is as tedious as the twice told tale

Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man."

(King John, William Shakespeare)

## Part One

# Big Red

Prelude

Fall, 1968, Junior High

Pads

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Warm Up

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A Sound of Distant Thunder

Clyde S. Ross

A Hop, a Skip, and a Tanned Hide

High

Quinlan

Winding Down

Field Trips

8th Grade Basketball

End of an Era

The Park

Summer 1970

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"I shall impersonate a man..."

(Man of Lamancha, 1965)

## PRELUDE



Somewhere south of Greenville, Texas.

Greenville School Bus 12 rolled down the road, packed wall to wall with screaming, boisterous kids. It was totally out of control and completely ignored by the bus driver. Placed reluctantly in this mess sat I, a skinny kid with a burr hair cut. I accepted my fate with distaste, totally disliking this environment. All I wanted was to be left alone, but people seemed to delight in bugging me. As for my brother and sister, only my brother was on here and he could care less. My sister was in a car pool riding home with friends. I was on my own.

In my 7 years of life I had experienced nothing like this, and my sheltered life had done nothing to prepare me for it.

Two older, bigger youngsters sat on each side of me, sneering at me.

"Are you gonna play football in school, kid?" one of them jokingly asked.

I was terrified. I didn't look at them. I had no real idea what 'football' was.

"Yeah," I timidly came back.

"What position are you gonna play?"

"I don't know. Guard?" I said, thinking 'guard' sounded military or something.

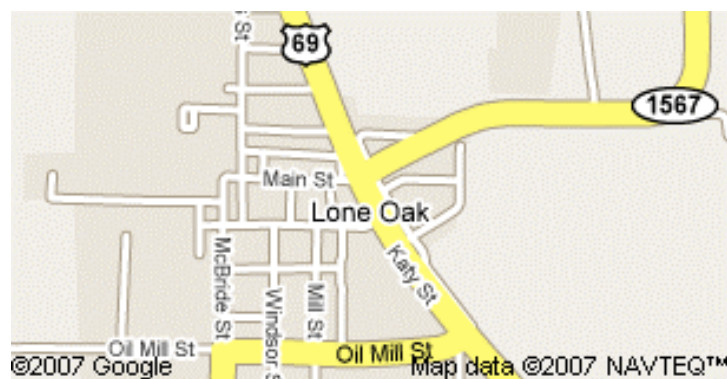
This was met with mocking laughter. My journey had begun.

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"Onward to Glory I go!"

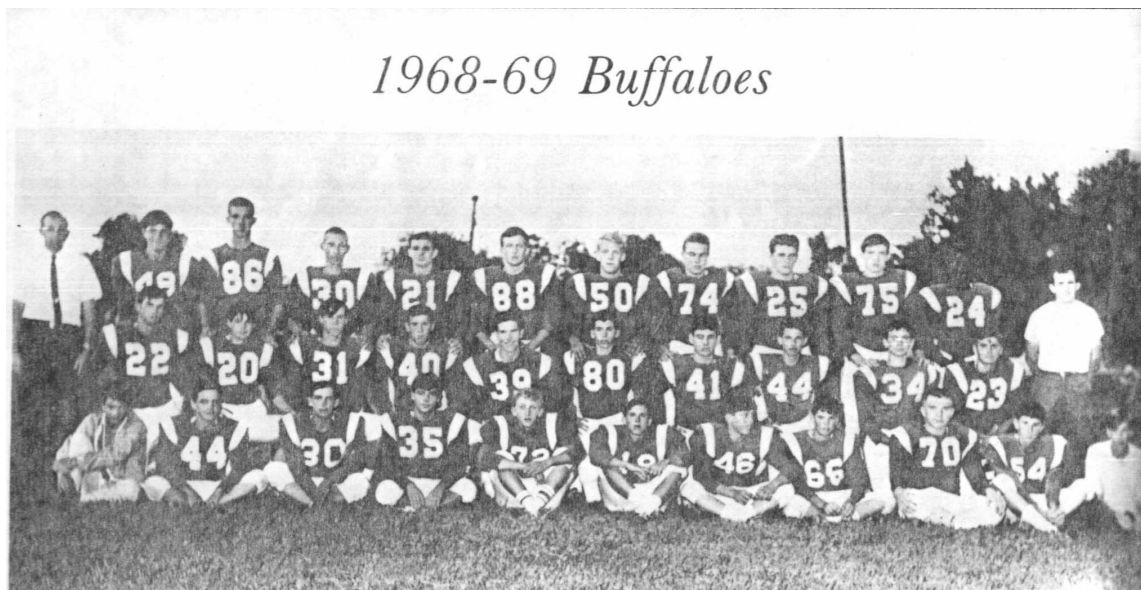
(Man of Lamancha, 1965)

## Fall, 1968, Junior High



Lone Oak is a small East Texas town some 70 odd miles southeast of Dallas. It boasts a steady population of around 500. It was a cotton-town once, having up to 3 cotton gins. It once had a car dealership, a lumberyard, and a railroad station. All of these are gone. They even pulled up the railroad tracks. But Lone Oak itself remained, never growing, never shrinking. Just stagnantly steady. But when the 3 cotton gins closed down in the early 60s the population of Lone Oak fell from 571 to 307. Two things kept the town from dieing. It had a school of good repute with high academic standards, and a football tradition of great discipline and ability. The school was the one thing that kept the old town hanging on. The football team gave the townspeople great pride. The team colors were red and white. They were called

## The Mighty Buffaloes.



***Team of 1968/69. Pictured in this group is #88, Eddie Earl White, who went on to become Superintendent of Lone Oak Schools about 2002 and #74, my Cousin Kenneth Sherwin.***

The school was made of white painted cinderblocks. It had huge banks of windows on all sides to allow ventilation and sunlight in. All of the roofs of the buildings were flat except for the gym and the 8th grade building. The ceilings in the classrooms were originally about 10 feet high, with the lozenge shaped school house lights. Up near the ceiling of each room in the main building were a series of ventilation windows that opened out into the main hall. The doors were wooden. The entrance doors were beautiful wooden portals with panes of glass over half of their length. The floors were of deep dark glossy brown wood, running the length of the grade school and high school and in every room in the main building. The restrooms and breezeway were the only place where the main building's wood floor did not go. In the rest rooms the floors were tiled and concrete and in the breezeway it was sealed concrete.



The breezeway had doors that opened north and south, with sidewalks outside. The south sidewalk led to the gym, and the north sidewalk led to the playground. In the breezeway were where the candy machine was, and a large reach-in ice-cream freezer where selected students sold ice cream to the rest of us. The candy machine sold nickel and dime candybars and one rack usually had the question mark on what was inside. That meant that "you paid your money and ya took ya chances." The Janitor had a closet in the breezeway, by the stairs to the older part of the school.



The breezeway connected the main school building, which was built about 1949, to the remnants of the old school building that was built about 1919. The original building was of red brown brick, and 3 stories high. Only the bottom part remained, converted into a large auditorium with stage, a 7th grade classroom, and the lunchroom. This was partially below ground and the short stairway mentioned above leading down to a connecting intersection of all three areas.

Outside of the south entrance to the breezeway sat the huge and ponderous gym. Painted white on the outside and with a black shingle roof, it was the dominating structure on the south part of campus, and the most beloved building in the school. The barn-like building dated from 1935, when it was built by the depression era Work Projects Administration. There were no steel beams in it anywhere.



Just west of the main complex was the football field. It was a simple grassy area, roped off by steel cable and nothing else. On the north end of the field was a water faucet that was used for drinking. We had been told since grade school that the field was taboo, so we stayed off of it. When the football players were out there practicing we watched on in childhood awe. They were like movie stars, and some of us held them in demi-god status. We knew the names of the quarterbacks and the ball carriers. We wanted to be just like them.

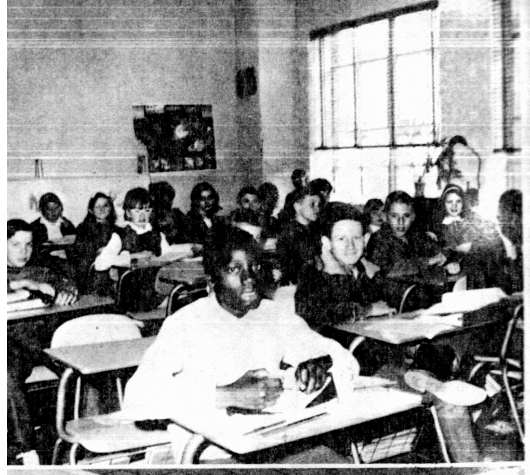
Next to the football field was the baseball fields. We had two that we could play at; one to the southwest and another to the northeast. Both fields had rag tag backstops. The north east field had a home plate. Behind the north east field was a small lot where there was a large telephone pole on the ground. This was used for football practice and for the gradeschoolers to play on.

On the north side of the campus was a large play ground, containing a big slide, a merry go round, a maypole, 2 banks of swings, monkey bars, and a place for see-sawing. This was one of the best-equipped playgrounds in all of Hunt County, and I loved it.

On the south end of campus was the 8th grade room, in a building all it's own. Between the gym and what was the one room all aluminum Remedial Reading shack, and to the southeast was the new Science and Ag shop building. North of this and running the length of the campus was the gravel covered parking lot. Just at the north end of the parking lot was the tin shed that was used for bus maintenance. This was pretty much Lone Oak School in 1968. When I came here and spent my time, Lone Oak and all the area schools around it, were in less than great economic shape overall. Though Lone Oak School was a great school to be at, none of us ever really noticed that at the time.

In 1968 I had achieved a milestone I was very proud of. I was no longer a grade schooler. I was now in Junior High. My comrades and I looked upon being 7th graders with great anticipation. Organized sports were finally coming our way. No longer would we be forced to play only sandlot games during recess. Back in those days if you didn't play YMCA ball before junior high there was no real organized sports to be in.

Our 7<sup>th</sup> Grade homeroom was quite unique. It was located adjacent to the auditorium and across the hall from the lunchroom. This was great! Being separate from the rest of the school made us feel different, a step above from the grade schoolers.



The building was a half-storey made from the old school building, meaning about 4 feet of it was below ground level. It made the windows easy to wash from outside, but we often bounced our skulls off the open window when we did so. They opened out like a big vent and when you washed them on the outside you sometimes forgot they were over your head like a sword of Damocles.

My teacher was Ms. Oney and I was to drive her to distraction with my antics. I was hyper, nervous, I loved to draw, and I had a friend named Herman that I enjoyed talking to at every opportune moment.

MRS. MARTHA ONEY  
Seventh Grade  
M.A. E. T. S. C.



Herman  
Crist

In late 1968 I eagerly volunteered to enter into the greatest tradition of this town; football. As I said, football is one of the things that keeps Lone Oak alive. Since 1900s football has brought fame and an entire hallway full of trophies and memorabilia that some colleges might envy. A few surviving trophies date back to the 1920s.

The type of football played in L.O. back in '68 was eight-man football. This was a wild and crazy type of football much like Arena Ball today. The offense had 2 ends, 2 backs, 2 guards, a center, and a quarterback. The defense had 2 tackles, 2 ends, 2 linebackers, and 2 safeties. We played by common football rules, but on an 80-yard field.

Because I was in the 7th grade this qualified me and my 70 odd pounds to play Junior-High sports. We were issued old high school uniforms, but we didn't care. For the first time in our young lives we wore the red and white of the Lone Oak Buffaloes; BIG RED!

My helmet didn't fit and I wore deckshoes because that's all my family could afford. Yet even in that practice uniform I felt like I was 10 feet tall.

Our coach was one Brian Taylor. He was of average build and very energetic. His optimism and belief in the individual were inspiring. He was also the assistant High School coach.

Our training began when it was still hot. Coach Taylor used a variety of exercises and drills to whip a group of kids into reasonable shape. All of these were based on the same exercises and routines of the high school team. In the late days of August and the early days of September we sweated and ran and screamed our bloodlust at the joy of being on the team.

I looked at the 8th graders and I was awed at how huge they looked. They were like gods. This was the first time most of us had associated with upperclassmen and it was an eye opening experience. They were taller, more mature, bigger, and smarter. At least they seemed that way. They all wore cleats. These guys were way cool and seemed to have it all. Some even shaved!

We did a series of exercises then formed up into the abominable pass drill. I couldn't catch a pass with a basket! After that we practiced plays. Those of us unworthy of being starters and even unable to set up against the starting offense in practice merely sat on the ground and watched. Often, when the A team had learned the plays, we were allowed to replace somebody and take our turn on the practice field.

I was lightweight and nearsighted. I was wearing my very first pair of glasses. In 1968 they didn't have athletic eyeglasses and the horn-rimmed black plastic monsters I wore didn't fit well under my helmet. The brittle plastic frames were also far too fragile to wear on the field and they were unbelievably expensive. I left them in the locker room. That made me somewhat blind when I was in uniform. With my small size, slow speed, and less than cat-like reflexes I was already at a disadvantage against the outstanding athletes I was pitted against. My nearsightedness added to it even more.

My first time in practice I remember well. I was trying out for running back. A tiny, skinny 70 pound running back. I was called over by Coach Taylor and put in the huddle. Philip Andrews called the play. It was a simple dive play where he'd hand off to me and I'd hit the space between the guard and center. Hopefully a hole would be open and I would get a yard or two. I had played sandlot football with most of these fellows before we got into junior high and they had great doubts about my athletic ability. I didn't like their attitude so there was no love lost here.

I got in a three-point stance off to the left in my halfback spot as Philip Andrews called the signals.

"100, 200, 300, set!"

I looked around. Big, tall Jerry McGee of the 8th grade looked at me like a pit bull, and had a huge wolfish grin on his face.



**Jerry McGee**

"Hut one!"

The ball was centered and chaos broke loose. Philip Andrews spun to hand me the ball. As he did so Jerry vaulted over the guard. The ball was rammed into my gut with such force that I went down like I had been pole-axed. I sat in the dirt as the wild scramble for my fumble went on.

Coach Taylor took me out of the practice and I spent the rest of it sitting dejectedly on the ground. Coach Taylor made no negative comments. He wanted to see what would happen with me in the backfield and fortunately he found out. Had this happened in a game the results might have had adverse results on the entire team. As it was things went just as most of my teammates had expected.



One young man I *thought* I truly despised was Danny Bowman. He was one of the quarterbacks, along with Philip Andrews and Jerry McGee. Danny was a big strapping fellow. Like most boys in his position he liked to throw his weight around a little. Several of us smaller fellows were recipients of this weight. To make matters worse he had a huge cousin in the form of Robert Vice who was often in his shadow. Together these two bothered the little guys. I and others like me were not welcome in their vicinity and they often let us know it. Danny would often zip his passes out to me in the pass drills, bouncing it off my shoulder-pads, helmet, or blistering it through my thin arms. I'd then have to chase the ball down before returning to the drill. What I didn't see was that every thing he threw at me either hit my hands or part of my body. It didn't matter if I was 10 yards out or 30. He could pop the ball off me with equal accuracy at any range. I just thought he was throwing it too hard. He was, a little.



Danny's cousin Robert Vice had interesting ways of showing his strength, often by grabbing us by the neck. He would then shake his victim like a chicken. None of the 8th graders did this to us. This was exclusively the pecking order of the 7th grade. Most of us avoided Robert.

These little bits of intimidation, real or imagined, inspired a lot of us to get revenge in little ways during practice.

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## Pads

The best way I can think of to introduce the way we practiced and played in Junior High is to do this in such a way that shows the things we wore, the way we played in games, and what it felt like to be on the field. No found records exist of individual games, but scores exist in some personal notes and in the yearbooks. Our uniform consisted of several items. The first was the helmet with removable chinstrap. It had only two buckles, one for each side. This was common. The buckles were plastic or metal, depending on what you could scrounge. Metal was preferred, the belief being that they stayed fastened better. The helmet was a simple solid color either red or white, With the odd *blue* one showing up here and there. There were no markings, decals, or stripes. Of all the helmets the white helmets were the best.

The white helmets were new, all white, and worn by the high school dudes. None of the junior high B team guys got white helmets but most of the A team guys wore them.

The red and blue helmets were abominations that fit like a large bucket. These things were designed in the 1950s and the school got some of them without face guards. When face guards became more or less mandatory these helmets were retrofitted with the items. It made for some bizarre fittings. On some of these worn out pieces of headgear the faceguard moved up and down. Still, it was much better than nothing.

My helmet was such a lousy fit that I could actually grab my faceguard and turn the helmet 90 degrees to my front and look out the ear-hole. When you made contact with this contraption on your head, like tackling somebody, it left your ears stinging and a sharp pain on the bridge of your nose.

Some of us had the blue helmets. As the school colors were red and white nobody knew what in the world we were doing with blue helmets. Efforts to paint them red resulted in the paint flaking off and the result was an even worse looking helmet. I refused to wear a blue helmet. I disliked them as did most everyone else. They were just as lousy as the red helmets and identical in everything except color. But we were red and white, and that was that. Blue was out.

The real reason we had these blue horrors was that Lone Oak was a poor school. Relentlessly hunting for bargains to stretch the budget and still equip a rather large group of schoolboys, the coaches took everything they could get and they were grateful for it. If we were not as enthusiastic about the gear as we should be it was only because of our not knowing the whole story.

Mouthpieces were coming into wide use in '68 and everybody was mandated to have one. This was form fitted to your upper bridge and some had a strap attached to the front. This, in turn, was attached to your face-guard. Most of the mouthpieces were made from a clear plastic-like material. I suffered no jaw injuries with this protection and I have respect for it. It also gave us bench sitters something to chew on nervously while the game rolled on and on and on. Much like a dog would worry a bone we would gnaw away on the mouthpiece to work off the aggressive energy we had built up. Some guys had chewed on their mouthpieces so much that it was ragged at the corners.

Then there was shoulderpads. These bulky bits of plastic, elastic, nylon, and cloth made a football player look like a football player. They'd fit over our necks and had laces in the front and back. The back was left tied and the front was left loose to enable the player to open the garment enough to put his head through. The front was then tied in a neat bowknot. This padding went almost down to the ends of the shoulder blades and almost of the end of the sternum. It protected both shoulders, covering all the way to the upper arm. Straps went under the arms and snapped on the front. These multi-layered bits of armor could take a remarkably powerful impact. The major drawback of the device was that when the jersey was put on. A player wrestled into the

tight fitting nylon and cotton jersey headfirst. This left the jersey half on. It fit wonderfully in the front but the back was all wadded up behind the neck, on top of the pads.

The only solution was to search for someone that could be trusted to "pull you down in back". The helper would usually untangle the jersey from the shoulder-pads and pull it down in back. Some character would always grab somebody by the pads and pull the player down backwards to the floor as a joke. Under the shoulder-pads and jersey is usually worn a t-shirt. Some guys wore half-tees, having torn or cut off the bottom half of the shirt. The t-shirt prevented chaffing and "strawberry burns" caused by impacts.

Shoulder-pads were never washed and they had a smell all their own.

The pants were a fascinating article if ever there was one. In junior high we had snap in hip pads and a tail pad. This made it impossible to wear the pants without the pads because of the snaps in the waistband. The snaps would cut into the player's waist.

The pants had 4 pockets on the inside front of the legs. These were for the plastic-cored, foam covered thigh pads, on the upper thigh and the foam and cloth kneepads on the lower part. The pants were white, if cleaned properly, and made entirely of an elastic-like material. In front they had a generously large lace-up fly that nobody unlaced. Some pants had a belt and some even had a decorative red stripe up the sides. All pants had a belt like tie up in front.

High school pants had no snap-in pads but had what we called a "girdle" of pads. A-team guys and guys of large girth had the girdle instead of the snap-ins.

Everybody wore a variety of socks, and baseball socks were popular, if hard to get.

Adidas made the finest athletic shoes on earth in 1968. The starters and most of the boys from well-to-do families got these shoes. They were black, with 3 white stripes on the sides. They resembled common athletic running shoes. They came in two types, the "soccer shoe" and the "cleat". The soccer shoe looked just like the cleat except it had a rubber sole and knobs molded onto it. The cleat had a plastic sole and metal studs that cleat-spikes were attached to. I wore beat up deck shoes with no traction at all. This was no big deal because I didn't play much. Cleats were simply too expensive for my parents to buy at this time.

Of interest here is that ends and backfield men tried to get white cleats. Linemen went for black cleats. Even shoelaces were contrasting colors. The thinking was that white shoes made the player go faster. The more realistic and practical reason was that the white shoe blended in with the sideline markings and it could be that small factor that had a reff call a pass complete when in fact the ball carrier might have been on the out-of-bounds line. The backs and ends loved the way this set them apart from the slower and less glamorous linemen.

The uniform as above was commonly worn in practice. Jock straps were known but in junior high not often used. The belief was that they caused an itching rash and didn't protect all that much. We had no idea what a "cup" was and no one ever wore one.

For games the pants were washed shoes polished, and the red jersey worn. The jersey itself was a very attractive garment, made of glossy, thick, red material. The numbers were smaller in the front than in the back. I was number 46 and I loved this jersey so much that I had my school picture made in it. It is the only record of me being on the team.



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## Game Day

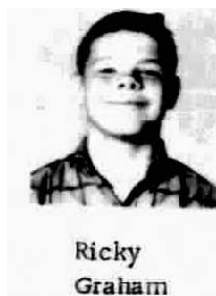
In Junior High we had no pep-rallies. Games were at about 7:00 p.m. or perhaps earlier. The day before a game practice was usually without pads and simple, so nobody had any bruises to nurse. On game day we'd wear our jerseys to school. This was a tradition also carried on by the high school team. It told one and all that you were on the team. It was pure pride about being part of a larger thing and arrogance or hubris had nothing to do with it. It was merely a privilege that we took advantage of. It took a lot of time, sweat, and even blood to wear that simple shirt. I didn't overdo it. I was very happy and proud to have that humble honor. I was one of the Junior High Buffaloes. Therefore I belonged to something very special.

Junior high games were on Thursdays and sometimes on Wednesdays. High School often played on Thursdays to get better Reffs. I'd usually get out of school at 3:30 and had a lot of time to kill before the game. This often consisted of walking to an eatery about a mile or so from the school. I spent too much of my time alone, so I went there alone, ate there alone, and came back to school alone. Once at my destination I'd sit, like a skinny red and white baby bird until I had finished my meal. I usually ate a hamburger and malt, or cola if I didn't have the money for the malt. I disliked the fries. Once back at the school I'd find a place out of the weather and wait for the team to arrive in ones and twos. Some guys had their folks bring them in, some guys had only to walk in. As near as I could figure I was about the only kid who didn't have any form of transport. It didn't bother me too much. I told myself that I enjoyed my privacy.

If it was an away game the school provided us with a bus. Coach Taylor was a qualified bus driver and served as both coach and bus driver in one. I rode these busses on regular days to and from home. I disliked busses. In football it was a little different. There were no screaming brats and chaotic goings on.

In the ride to the game on a bus the Junior High cheerleaders were mixed in with the team. In the school there was a ratio of about 10 guys for every girl. Those of us who had no money and were on the low end of the pecking order did without. Others found the young ladies a more than pleasant distraction from the stress of an upcoming game. We had no pep-squad in junior high. The girls were lucky enough to be with the high school drill team. They did their routines at the high school games.

I was a school nerd and most of the girls avoided me and all like me as if we had the plague. They could pick and choose and they knew it. This is typical of schools everywhere, I've been told. For that reason I spent a lot of my time next to my buddy Rickey Graham. The girls didn't like him too much either. Rickey instilled in me a sense of fanaticism. He loved football and he cultivated in himself what he believed to be the proper Buffalo spirit. Rickey was big, strong, odd, and he was the most loyal buddy I'd ever have at Lone Oak. He was like a brother.



Home game preliminaries were somewhat less interesting. Mostly we'd just sit around, conserving energy. Later on we'd get into our uniforms and wait. Once we had a couple of guys get into a fight. A fellow I'll call Big Bob was this individual who wasn't really well liked by anybody. He was Gunner's brother. His harelip made him the butt of several jokes and he was an outcast. There were also some people on the squad who had no respect for anybody. They'd steal your pads out of your pants when you had them in your locker and you weren't around. This was considered a disaster for who ever it happened to because it was deemed impossible to get new pads except by stealing some yourself.

Some low life stole Big Bob's pads on game day. He got all upset and started yelling at people where we sat near the football field behind the school. He was in tears. He never hurt anybody, he was just a kid who wanted to play football. Now some jerk had stolen his pads and took all that away from him. Nobody knew who the thief was, but Big Bob had his own ideas. Before it got out of hand Coach Taylor arrived and stopped it. Big Bob was so angry and hurt he just took off his stuff and threw it on the ground in front of the whole team. He stomped off and never ever played football again. All this just because some punk took his kneepads.

Once I too was hit by the kneepad thief. I put all my stuff in the pigeon-hole style lockers we had. They had no doors and our gear just lay there in easy reach and open view. All of this talk about Honor, Team Work, and Pride I took to heart so I never suspected anybody would rob me. I came in on a later game day and pulled my gear out of my locker. As I put my uniform on I couldn't find my kneepads. I frantically searched my locker, but they weren't there. I even asked other people. Nobody had seen my kneepads. If I couldn't get my kneepads I couldn't play or even suit up for tonight's game! That hurt and I started crying. It also was a double shock because I couldn't trust my own teammates! If a starter needed my kneepads I would have reluctantly let him have them, all in team spirit.

Coach Taylor saw how upset I was and he took me up into the Varsity locker room, probably the first time I had ever been in the place. Soothing my hurt feelings he patiently took some scissors and cut me some serviceable kneepads out of foam rubber. I was saved! I could suit up for tonight's game and possibly even play. My morale soared, but after that I took to carrying my gear home and writing my name on everything I had with a permanent marker. I never trusted my teammates again in Junior High after that incident. Some of my fellows even had their chinstraps stolen! This was madness!

I used to like to think there's some nut out there that has a collection of kneepads and chin straps and hides them under his bed. I hope he enjoys himself, the two-bit jerk. Thinking back on this incident I believe it was a thinly disguised attempt to run me off the team. It succeeded with Big Bob, but because of a big hearted coach it failed completely with me. I never had my kneepads stolen again, so go figure.

Our home field was, either 80 or 100 yards long marked off by white chalk or sometimes spray paint. It was constructed in the 1910s as a 100 yard field, and in the 1950s became a 6 man field. This shortened it to 80 yards. We didn't practice on it much because it killed the grass. In the end

zones were the goal posts. The goal posts were shaped like an 'H' and were made of steel pipe welded together. The posts were painted blotchy silver, and rust could be seen here and there. They were sturdily anchored in concrete.

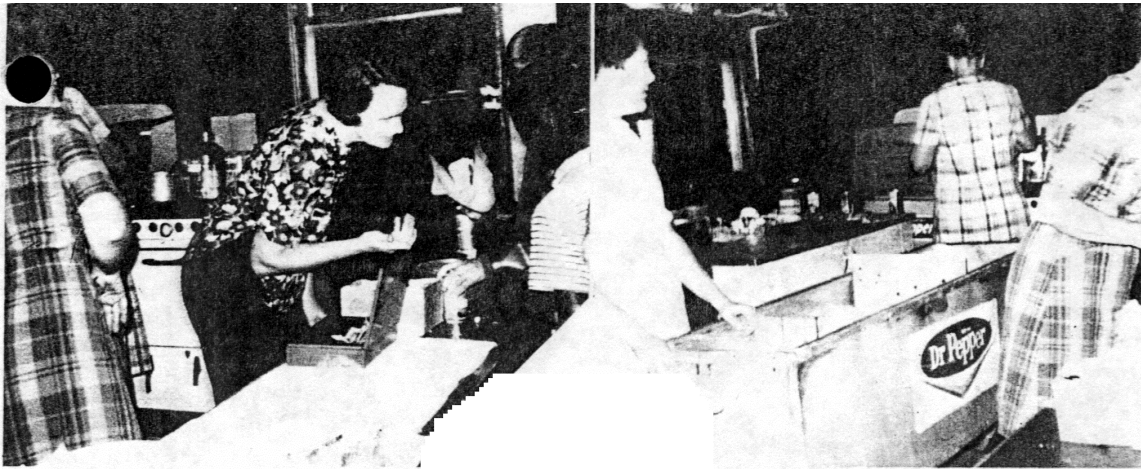
On the home side was the press box. It sat on 4 telephone poles less than 20 feet in the air. This was at the midfield yard line, outside the sidelines of the field. A steel cable roped off the field itself on each side and on the metal posts holding this cable up were the yard markers. As the yard markers were on the fence when the teams were near their benches the markers couldn't be seen.

The home side had tiny bleachers that could hold at most about 30 to 40 people. Folks were allowed to park their cars right up against the fence to watch the games. Until the cables were installed in the 60s spectators stood right on the sidelines with the players.

We had a P.A. system, and a local man named Roy Ohara, who did a splendid job and was once a player here in the '50s, announced some of our games. He never missed a high school game, and I don't think he missed many, if any, Junior High games.

At intervals about the sides of the field were tall poles with the lights on top. These provided the glaring illumination that gives being on the field its own otherworldly quality. These lights were nothing but overgrown incandescent light bulbs, big as volley balls. Bugs would swarm around them in huge clouds.

Attached to the old gym was a large house-like building that served as visitor locker room and refreshment stand. It sold popcorn, cokes, candy and not a lot else. Because I was a player I never went there. This building provided the only rest rooms for the field, too.



Our scoreboard was interesting and somewhat unique. Barley visible at the south end of the field and 8 feet high, it had a platform where one volunteer would sit. On this wooden billboard was painted in black letters on white:

Buffaloes -

Visitors -

Quarter -

A volunteer, usually a student, would put up the score panels on nails on the board. Nobody but the refs kept time, so nobody really knew how much time was left in any given quarter. It was the only manual, non-electric scoreboard I remember ever having seen.



*(Detail of a picture, showing the scoreboard)*

Once I was at a high school game and a fellow named William was on the platform, hanging up the scores as necessary. A friend and I passed by and William said it would cost us a quarter because we were visitors here from Lone Oak.

"See," he said, " Visitors, Quarter."

Being as how he was on the scoreboard and we were on the ground we just called him something unprintable and ran away. William was like that, trying to flim-flam at every opportunity. That's just how things were.

Our field had no name, and I guess it didn't really need one. It was behind the school and the only field in town. If anyone said there was a football game in Lone Oak everyone knew where the field was. To me it seemed like it had been there forever. It had the teams from the early 1900s play on it.



*Two Lone Oak teams from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, names not certain, records forgotten.*

*Courtesy Boots Bowman, 1998.*

Most of us assumed the field would be there forever. After all, why wouldn't it? It was the pitch, the stage. On it many a drama was to be played out. Victories and defeats, pain and glory, all would happen in this little modified cow-pasture. It was nothing more than a simple tract of land, surrounded by lights and marked by lines and bars.

This was the **Field of Honor**.

This is where it happened



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## Warm Up

We would go into the old gym and dress in our locker room located on the southeast side. We stayed there until it was time to make our entry. Over 50 years of tradition were carried on our small shoulders. Winning is what we did and in the most professional manner possible. This meant looking sharp, and if possible, frightening our opponents.

In 1968 a series of bubblegum stickers came out depicting automotive products. These proved very popular. It became noticeable that quite a few of us gave free advertising of such products as STP, Gumout, Fram, etc by putting these emblems on our helmets. At the age of 13 we saw no problem with these decorations. In fact we looked tacky. Even so we felt like we were bad dudes. Not everybody on the team wore them, especially the guys who had white helmets. It did make identifying your own helmet easier for a lot of us.

On our shoes some of us wrote our number or name or even our nickname. My nickname by choice was "Vulture" and I had it written in big letters over the toes of my beat up deck shoes. Football instills a sense of pride and in some cases arrogance about what outsiders think. What my teammates told me to do was one thing; people who didn't know me were something else all together. I wore my ugly shoes with pride, and everyone else could go fish.

Dressed in this "professional" style we literally thundered out on the gridiron when the time came. We came onto the field at the midfield yard line in column. Older guys told us to "hit your pads". This meant to slap the thigh pads as we came onto the field. It made a thundering roar I called the Buffalo Stampede. I don't know of any other team that did this but I think the psychological effect on the opposition was substantial.

If we came on a bus to the game we would start a battle chant of "GO RED, GO!" This was done from the diaphragm and shook the windows of the bus and possibly the nerves of some of the enemy teams. Even at that age we were somewhat fanatic.

Once on the field we would form ranks and do 5 to 15 repetitions of our standard exercises to warm up. It loosened up the muscles, avoiding strains and pulls. It also got the blood pumping and the battle lust up.

After each exercise we'd come up to a pass-blocking stance and run in place. At an arm signal we'd stop and give a loud growl. The animalistic roar was eerie and could send chills up your spine.

After the warm-up exercises came the pass-drills. After that we'd practice a few plays. After each hike of the ball we'd yell as we took off out of our stances.

Philip Andrews would practice kicking a few punts and on rare occasions a field goal or two. Field goal kicking was still an elusive skill back then and most extra points were done on the ground.

Soon it was time. We were ready. All of us came to the sideline near our bench and took off our helmets. Preselected team Captains went out onto the field for the coin toss. The reff told us on the sidelines who had to kick off. Then the Star Spangled Banner played through the P.A. system. This wasn't always the case, but we sometimes did it. Most class B schools had no bands, so we stood there, helmet under our left arms and right hand over our hearts singing the National Anthem. Usually a prayer was offered up, to bless us all and protect us.

After that we'd huddle up around Coach Taylor, putting our hands together in the middle. He'd give a brief speech and we'd break. The Big Red Machine would go out on the field.

It would start.

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## The Game, First Half

Always in the first game or two we'd mess up in little ways. The kicking team might set up on the wrong yard line or we'd have the wrong amount of men on the field at any one time. Every team had it's problems and I believe one of our strong points was the fact that our coach could spot this and get us to overcome these problems through creativity and inspiration.

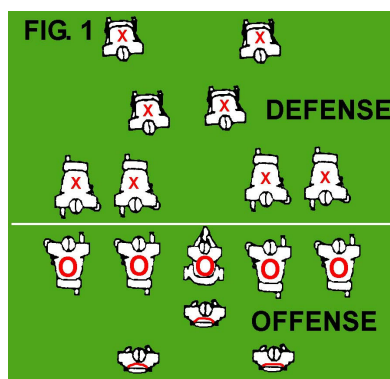
I did not fully understand the game of football in 1968. I didn't know what a first down was or what was pass interference. I didn't even know linemen couldn't go out for passes. This was my own fault. I could have read a rulebook or even the encyclopedia. Coach Taylor had about 20 to 30 boys to deal with and he spent most of his time with the starters for obvious reasons. Even with Coach Brookins' help he was stretched very thin to cover all the fundamentals we had to learn.



***Coach Brookins, and Coach Taylor, two of  
the greatest Coaches in the School's History.***

So I would stand on the sidelines bubbling with enthusiasm and trying badly to figure out what was going on out there in spite of my near-sightedness. I'd scream encouragement, admonitions, and horrible things for the guys to do to the fellows on the other team.

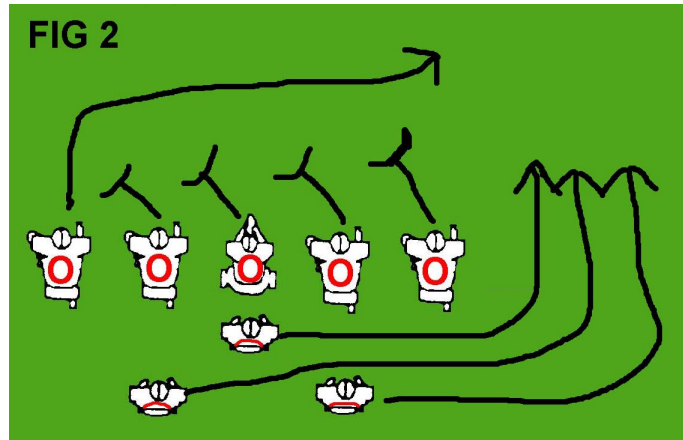
The offense and defense looked like this in figure one:



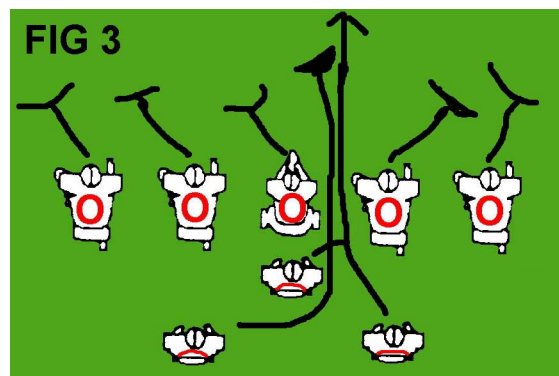
As is traditional for football schematics X is defense and O is offense.

There are literally hundreds of different plays that can be run from this basic formation. In Junior High we kept it as simple as possible.

There were plays called "Sweeps" that could be run to either side. This play is called "Sweep Right". See figure two.

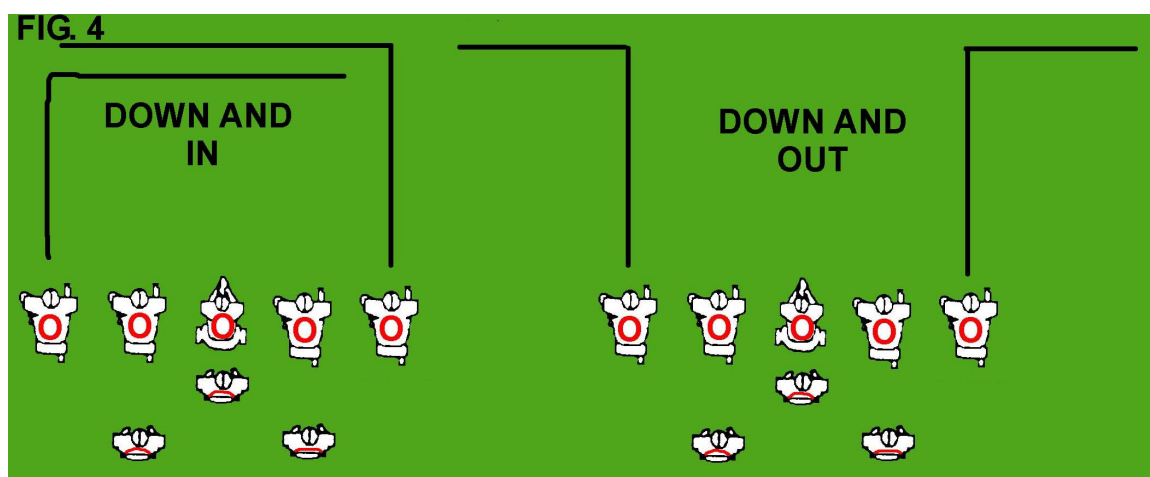


There were also simple dive plays where the ball carrier literally dived into a gap in the line called a "hole". This is "21 Power Dive", in figure 3.



Dive plays were used for short gainers and relied on speed and strength.

Basic pass plays had "Down and In" and "Down and Out", as shown in figure 4.



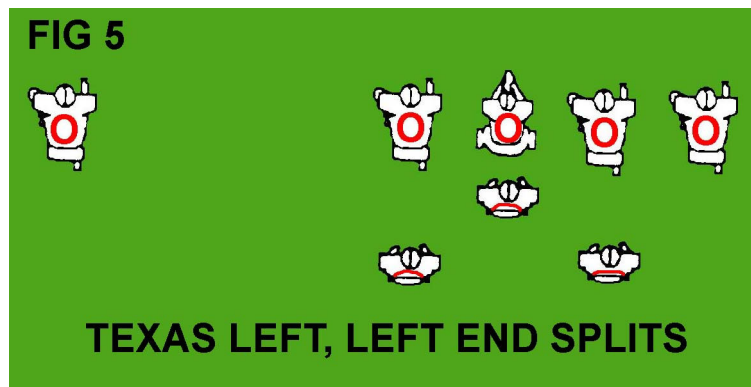
There were numerous variations of the above.

The Quarterback would call the play in the huddle. In a well disciplined group there would be no talking or complaining in the huddle. It was allowed to give spot reports to the Quarterback so he would be alert to some weakness found in the opposition team. This would be done in a sentence or two, and then quiet would come to the huddle. The Quarterback would then call the play, going something like this:

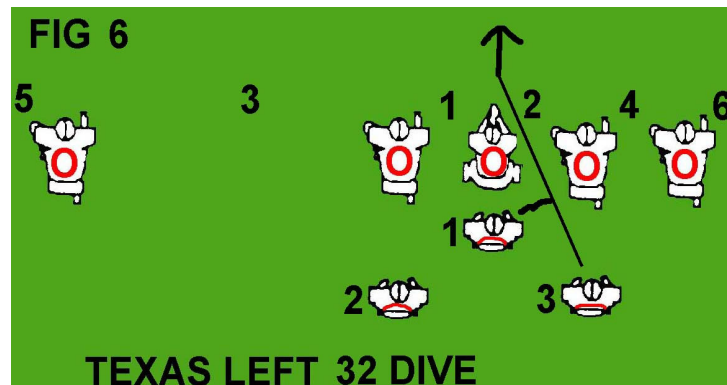
"Texas Left, 32 dive, on two. Ready?"

The entire huddle would respond with "Break!" and go to the line.

Texas Left meant the left end would split on the formation left side, like this shown in figure 5:



"32 Dive" meant the #3 man; one of the halfbacks, would carry the ball between the center and the guard, in the #2 hole as shown in figure 6.



This play is simple in execution and simple to call. Everyone on the team had to know their assignment.

"On two" meant what count the ball would be hiked between the Center's legs to the Quarterback. The Center would come up to the line and take the ball in his hands. The Quarterback would then come up behind the Center and look over the defense and to be sure his players were where they were supposed to be. The other players would get in the "Down" position, stooped over with their elbows resting on their thigh pads. The guys on the defense would already be in their stances, ready for anything.

After his quick look around to be sure all was well in the initial formation the Quarterback would call his audibles.

"Down, 100, 200, 500, set!"

On "500" the end on the left side would split out. On the defense a defensive back would sometimes split out there to cover him. On the call "set" the backs and line would get in their 3-point stance, putting one hand on the ground and looking forward. The split end would remain standing and would look toward the Quarterback. The noise level might be so high that the only way he could tell when the play started would be visually.

The Quarterback would then put his hands under the center to prepare to receive the ball. The hands were placed like a big butterfly, right hand on the top, slightly curved and ready to take the snap. The ball could be sent back with considerable force so a Quarterback had to have sure hands. Sweaty or wet palms could cause a fumble. Most Quarterbacks had a towel handy, either on their belts or tucked into the back of the center's pants. If it was on the center the towel would be flipped up on the center's back, out of the way.

Now everyone on the field is as tense as a coiled spring.

The Quarterback calls "Hut One!"

Nobody moves.

The Quarterback calls "Hut Two!"

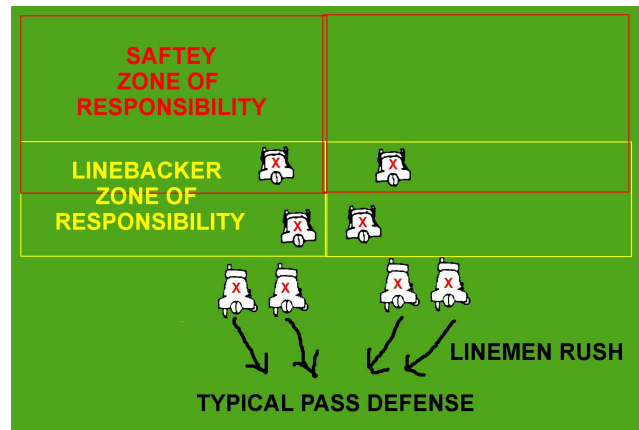
The ball would be moving back to the Quarterback on the Hut, and in his hands by the time he starts the word "two". The entire line would explode forward as one to their assigned blocks. It would be over in seconds. The blocks, the runs, the play itself would all be finished in mere seconds. Bodies would collide, defensive men would flow with the play and try to tackle the ball carrier.

On the sidelines we'd cheer and yell for blood and glory. The coach would call out encouragement and look over how the play went.

The coach was thinking all the time. Every play was mentally graded to see how it did against our foe of the night. If pass plays were succeeding then he'd tell the Quarterback to throw more passes. If the running plays were gaining unusual yardage then he would command it be kept on the ground more. Coach Taylor watched like a hawk for the weakpoint, that Achilles heel that every team has. Once he spotted it he would ruthlessly exploit it.

Likewise with the defense. If the guy over Jerry or Robert was having a rougher time than usual he might command the linebacker over there to blitz. If the defense wasn't working up to par he'd make changes in coverage or modify the set up. Usually we had a basic formation that was modified a time or two in practice.

Pass coverage was something like this, as shown in figure 7:



This was a Zone Defense and it had a few weaknesses. Man to man was harder to play because a linebacker had to pick up, say, a halfback coming out into the zone that the line backer was covering. If the halfback went long for a pass the linebacker would have to decide if he should hand him off to a safety or stay with him through the route. It puts a decision making burden on the man in this area and can lead to disaster if done wrong. The zone was similar but the linebacker had the ability to automatically hand the runner off to the safety once the receiver passed out of his zone. This enabled the linebacker to stay in his zone and be there in case the Quarterback decided to run or hand off to someone else.

Linebackers have a powerful ability that worries the quarterbacks a great deal. It is called the "Blitz" from the German Blitzkrieg of WWII. As every lineman is usually busy battling the man directly across from him, if a linebacker decides to rush he has a good chance to get to the quarterback. This can rattle a quarterback's nerves. Rushing the quarterback in this manner is risky because if the linebacker is blocked by a halfback or gets tangled up with the linemen it leaves a big hole in the pass zones. A quick down and in pass can destroy this blitz, and gain big yardage. It puts a bigger coverage responsibility on the safteys.

It is all part of the gamble that makes football one of the most exciting of team sports.

Those of us on the sidelines watched the goings on out on the field for a variety of reasons. One was survival. If a play developed toward the sidelines and caught a guy by surprise he could be seriously hurt and not even be an active player in the game! We also watched the game because it reflected the proper interest in the game and it might enhance our career. It was also the only interesting thing going on. Horseplay and tomfoolery were simply not allowed to happen.

All of us would be sitting there on the bench and chewing our mouthpieces. Sometimes we actually got bored, especially in a close game where we knew we had no chance to play.

Conduct on the field itself was held to high standards. Fighting was forbidden, totally. Some schools have said that they went out on the field to start a fight. We just went out there to play football, and *beat* them. Discipline was high and peer enforced. The older boys, the 8th graders, showed us how to behave, and led the way.

The 'A' team members played both ways, offense and defense. These gung-ho individuals were the finest athletes we had. They enjoyed what they were doing so much that they disliked coming off the field, and when they did come off to be replaced they came off reluctantly. Even the guys who did a lot of running, such as backs and ends, didn't like to leave the game, though it was policy to regularly relieve them for a play or two. By taking a back or end off the field this enabled the coach to send in plays or make adjustments to the defense.

Linemen routinely slugged it out, often without letup. It was often glamorless and had little fame because they never ran with the ball and scored. The gravy part was when they were on defense and got to the quarterback and sacked him. That got notoriety and cheers. Interceptions and quarterback sacks were what any defensive man lives for.

Our kicking game, mostly punting and kick-offs was just short of awesome. During P. E. or a recess I would get evolved in a game of "back-em-up" where the ball would be punted back and forth by 2 teams of guys until one side is forced into its own end zone. I knew Philip Andrews could kick, and he could kick it far.

Philip Andrews once boomed a punt in a game from about our 20 way down the field. One of our guys named Glenn got under it, kneeled, and caught it. It was called a dead ball, right there. It probably could have rolled another 10 yards, but so what? It had landed on their 30-yard line and after 3 downs of dealing with our tenacious defense they kicked it back to us. We then took the ball on our 30 or 40, so we actually gained a better position in this manner.

Punt from the 20, get it back on the 30. Simple.

We used the ball control tactic a lot. We got about 3 yards or better per play. With accurate and short passes and a huge variety of running plays we could pick apart the opposition. Running the ball on the ground ate up time and if they don't have the ball they can't score.

Coach Taylor set this method of grinding out the clock and demoralizing the enemy. The results were predictable. By half-time we were usually ahead.

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