

For University of Michigan "This I Remember" series
in 1965 football program

By Gerald R. Ford

The Minnesota battle-cry was "Mangle Michigan!" The unbeaten Gophers of Minnesota, on their way to a championship, were out to break a jinx of 41 years. A hardy band of Wolverines with a record of _____ victories and _____ defeats stood in the path.

On Friday afternoon, after a long overnight train ride from Ann Arbor to Memorial Stadium we worked out enthusiastically. With Head Coach Harry Kipke exhorting us to forget the early-season misfortune, we showed little outward apprehension of Minnesota's reputation as a bone-crushing steam-roller. Respect, yes. Fear, no. Admittedly, we had high regard for the somewhat awesome football abilities of All-Americans Bill Bevan, Butch Larson, Pug Lund and the others on the star-studded squad. But, we were undaunted by the predicted prospects of what could happen to us the following day before a record-breaking homecoming crowd of 60,000 fans.

That 1934 University of Michigan team had something going for it. We intended to keep it that way. Minnesota had failed to defeat a Wolverine club at home since 1892, and had not scored on Michigan since 1929.

Coach Bernie Bierman was reported as fearful of Michigan, despite the poor record we had piled up. He told the press he remembered Michigan as always playing heads-up football ready to take advantage of any break.

Most assuredly we were not over-confident with a bad record early in the season. But, we hoped to live up to Bernie Bierman's description of what had happened to previous Minnesota ball clubs when playing Michigan.

There were pre-game predictions that our fullback Cedric Sweet and I at center would have a busy afternoon backing up the Michigan line. How true. We faced the job of stopping the rushes of Minnesota's fullback Beise, who made All-American in 1935, and Kostka, a sophomore replacement of great talent, and the sweeping runs of Lund and right-half Alphonse. I don't know about Sweet, but I didn't sleep too well the night before the game.

When we ran out to go through the pre-game drills before the mighty hometown crowd in Memorial Stadium Saturday afternoon, our spirits were bolstered by the sight and sound of Michigan's famous "Fighting 100" Varsity Band. We had high hopes the musicians could play "The Victors" with real meaning when the game ended.

The first half was a bitter surprise for the Minnesota fans and a bright beginning for the Wolverines. Not only were the Gophers out-played by a wide margin, but they almost were scored on early in the game.

Johnny Regeczi, our right halfback with a talented punting foot, threw a pass to right-end Willis Ward, the great football and track star from Detroit. Ward was wide open on the play that came off a fake place kick. Left-end Matt Pattenelli had set up the situation by blocking a Minnesota punt and recovering the pigskin on their 16-yard line.

Our hopes for scoring first sailed away on the pass that Regeczi overthrew to Ward, who made a gallant and unsuccessful attempt to catch it.

If Regeczi failed to make the grade on that play, he more than made

up for it with his fabulous punting. Thanks to John's booming boots, Minnesota spent most of the first half in its own territory. As line-backers, Ced Sweet and I had a rugged time meeting the crushing offensive runs of Minnesota's fleet and powerful backfield.

When the half ended, a rapidly-rising team trooped to the dressing room. But, our spirits were high and we could see a possible victory--or tie--in sight. It's a good thing one can't see accurately into the future!

Early in the second half the Gophers really turned on the power. The first assault was stopped at the 18-yard line and Regeczi punted 35 yards to give us a temporary safety margin. Then the steamroller went into action. Minnesota moved with calculated speed to score with Pug Lund doing most of the work behind a hard-charging line. One pass completed the drive. The scoreboard was to get busier as the afternoon wore on.

Minnesota's second touchdown was the result of a slashing, dazzling 76-yard run by Alphonse on the second play after kick-off. The swift-footed Minnesota back wheeled around left end, cut back, eluded the secondary. Ward almost caught him from behind.

The third touchdown was set up when Lund pinpointed a punt that went out on the one-yard line. We couldn't get rolling and Regeczi from behind our goal line whopped one out to our 34-yard stripe. Lund flipped a bullet pass 33 yards to Maurice Johnson, a substitute end, who slipped in to score. At that point in the ballgame Minnesota had a perfect passing performance--four for four.

With Lund on the bench taking a break, his replacement Roscoe raced 51 yards around right end scoring Minnesota's fourth touchdown after Clarkson had advanced the ball toward our goal-line to midfield on a 28-yard scamper. Clarkson was stopped by our quarterback Ferris Jennings, who made a vicious, bone-jarring tackle, one of many great plays he made during that disastrous second half. What Jennings lacked in weight--140 pounds--he more than made up in spirit, courage and determination. On one play he tackled big Stan Kostha so hard the sophomore star player had to be taken from the game.

Using straight, grind-'em-out football, with the regulars on the bench and the reserves getting a baptism of fire, Minnesota stomped on us moving 60 yards to score the fifth touchdown on a short 4-yard run.

The scoreboard told part of the story of what happened that afternoon in Memorial Stadium. Minnesota's 34 to 0 victory ended the 41-year jinx. And a Michigan team had been scored on by the Gophers for the first time since 1929.

Even the statistics failed to tell the whole story of Michigan's defeat. We were outrushed 314 to 17 yards. While Minnesota completed four pass attempts for 82 yards, Michigan tossers connected twice in seven tries for 65 yards. The cold figures showed, however, the effectiveness of Regeczi's effective punting. He averaged 46 yards a boot!

What the scoreboard and statistics failed to reveal was the determination of my team-mates-----big Matt Pattenelli playing his finest at left-end; John Viergiver at one tackle taking a shellacking yet dishing it out; Bill Hildebrand plugging the gaps at left guard; Bill Borgman

doing the same on the other side of the line; Captain Tom Austin holding his team together and playing his heart out in the right tackle slot; Willis Ward on pass patterns frequently slipping away from the Minnesota defense; stout little Ferris Jennings tackling with great courage and calling the plays; Whitey Aug slamming through play after play at lefthalf; Regeczi calmly punting us out of danger; and Sweet red-dogging all afternoon.

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The Wolverine forward wall was tired out in the second half, as the sports reporters said. But we were still trying despite the overwhelming odds, which is one of the reasons this particular game is one I remember.

Although we learned many lessons playing football, the Minnesota game was the final exam. A proud, but battered Michigan team passed it with flying colors. We demonstrated that we had learned what our coaches had tried to teach us-----never stop trying, and don't be afraid of tackling a job with the odds against you.

Harry Kipke, coach of the 1934 team, best described the lesson we demonstrated at Minnesota, "Give all you have, but give it within the letter--and within the spirit--of the rules."

Recalling this game, I remember how the Michigan students and Ann Arbor townspeople met the team at the train Sunday afternoon. There was a rousing and spirited parade to the Union building headed by the Michigan Band. It was a meaningful tribute to the fight the Wolverines had put up against the

powerful Minnesota Gophers---a team that finished an undefeated season with a national championship crown. It also was a demonstration of loyalty that I'm sure none of us through the years has forgotten.

Since graduating from Michigan, while coaching at Yale and finishing law school, during my Navy service in World War II, and during 16 years in the rough-and-tumble world of politics I often thought of the experiences before, during and after that game in 1934. Recalling them has helped me many times to face a tough situation, take action and make every effort possible despite adverse odds.

Thanks to my football experience, I know the value of team-play. It is, I believe, one of the most important lessons to be learned and practiced in our lives.

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Have it retyped with several
extra copies for our files
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