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A Year Unlike Any Other

By early 1918, the Great War was impossible to ignore. Young American men by the hundreds of thousands answered the call to serve their country, either training at a U.S. base or fighting on the European front lines. Around the country, citizens were inundated with posters of a finger-pointing portrait of Uncle Sam proclaiming, “I Want You.” Entertainment celebrities such as Hollywood’s Douglas Fairbanks, starlet Mary Pickford, international opera star Enrico Caruso, and vaudevillian Al Jolson led coast-to-coast Liberty Loan rallies to help finance the war effort, aided by sports idols Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. In South Bend, Liberty Loan parade participants included Coaches Rockne and Harper and the Knights of Columbus. Wherever held, these rallies drew large crowds; employees were even given time off to attend. Rockne watched the war unfold and affect his personal and professional life in a way he could not have envisioned even a year earlier. Married, and a father, the 30-year-old Rockne was not part of the front-line military effort; yet so many of friends and compatriots were.

His former passing-combo partner Gus Dorais had entered the Third Officers Training Camp at Fort Dodge, Iowa, where old pal Grover Ma-

lone was also stationed. Rupe Mills, the all-around athlete who had gone on to play first base for the Newark Feds, was in Officers Training at Camp McClellan in Alabama. Charlie Bachman, who had been coaching track and swimming and assisting with football at DePauw University, enlisted in the Navy and was sent to Great Lakes Training Station just north of Chicago. The Station sent out a publicity release, noting that Bachman “weight in the Navy at 205 pounds, and expected to put on a little more as soon as he gets going in the work. (His supervising ensign) has made Charlie the master-at-arms of his company—a bouncer in the Navy—and predicts that no trouble will start for a few days at least.” Chet Grant, backup quarterback for the 1917 Irish, distinguished himself at the same position for the Camp Shelby team at Hattiesburg, Mississippi and quickly rose from private to a first lieutenant. Joe Gargan, Rockne’s old corner man in boxing, was also a lieutenant, among several Notre Dame men who ate Christmas dinner in France. Joe Byrne, one of Rockne’s closest friends, was now Sgt. Byrne, also headed to France. Joe Pliska, his old backfield mate, was in Officers Training at Fort Sheridan near Chicago.

Although the departure of friends brought its own sense of loss, the reality of young men dying was all too real for those at Our Lady’s University. The first Notre Dame man killed in service to his country was Joseph Archer Smith, who died in an automobile accident while on duty at Camp Dodge. And it was not only the war effort that brought sadness. Students, and especially football and baseball players on campus, were stunned upon their returned from Christmas vacation in January 1918 to learn of the death of Tom Spalding and his cousin Mary Simms, a student at St. Mary’s. Spalding, a popular student of “cheery disposition and quiet humor” and member of the football and baseball teams, was returning to his home in Springfield, Kentucky, and was traveling with Mary on the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, when he lost his life in a horrible train wreck in Shepherdsville, Kentucky, that killed more than 50 people on December 20. “Expressions of sorrow and regret on the lips of students returning to the University showed how warmly they loved him and how keenly they feel his loss,” the *Scholastic* reported.

Rockne, the son of an immigrant, had learned at an early age that life brought triumph and defeat, sadness and joy. Yet his life was a testament to optimism for the future. His theatrical background provided just the

spark needed to help lift campus spirits. Basil Stanley, a former player, was suffering from football injuries and needed financial assistance to cover daily living expenses. So Rockne organized a Stanley Benefit Vaudeville night on campus, featuring numerous athletes and other students. It raised more than \$400 for the fund and provided a brief respite from the current world problems. Comedians, acrobats, singers, dancers—everyone did what they could, and “the performance was a scream from first to last.” Rockne himself, ever the performer, took a turn in a sketch called “Boys Will Be Boys.”

As the conflict intensified, the War Department used college campuses to recruit men for the air service. It sent press articles depicting the high level of man needed for flying, and the *Scholastic*, similar to most college publications, dutifully published them in prominent positions:

College men are needed for the Air Service. There, of all places, they are best suited to serve. There they can use the education and the physique that their peculiar advantages have given them; there they can express their own individuality and be their own directing general...Warfare in the clouds has become as specialized in the last four months as that on land. It is fought in different strata by different planes....The one greatest of all places for real airmen is in the colleges. There indeed is the flower of the country, men who have received much, owe much.

By commencement in 1918, nearly 300 Notre Dame men who had been enrolled in the 1916-17 and 1917-18 school years had enlisted in the military; many alumni were also serving. The *Scholastic* helped tell their stories, publishing intact letters sent by former students back to priests and other professors at Notre Dame, under the heading “Letters from Camp.” Former footballer Ray Miller was now Lieutenant-Adjutant of the 135th Machine Gun Battalion at Camp Shelby in Alabama. He wrote of his amazement when the camp’s new chaplain reported to him:

A few days ago...a tall man in the olive drab overcoat and barracks cap whom only at second glance I recognized as none other than Father Walsh, our vice president at old N.D. walked into the office to say: ‘Here I am, your chaplain—where are you

going to put me?

Can you imagine me, who used to come shivering into Father Walsh's room for permission to 'go to the dentist'—in reality to go to the Orpheum—being now his superior officer? Can you imagine Father Walsh now coming to me for permission to go to town? Can you imagine Ray Miller, who 'subbed it' on the football team when 'Eich' was a whirlwind, now being the superior officer of the vice president of Notre Dame, with authority to give or refuse him 'per.'

Miller added this about the service of his fellow Fighting Irish: "I have come to the conclusion that it is the loyalty and patriotism Notre Dame instills into her students that has caused them to respond so numerous and so enthusiastically to the country's call."

Stan Cofall, the star back of the 1917 football squad, wrote from the 330 Battalion Light Tank Corps from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: "Many times have I wished that I could be taken back four years so that I might live over again those four years at Notre Dame. Now we are engaged in something mighty serious; the thought of it rather takes the liveliness out of a fellow. Anyhow, we have that privilege of looking back to those happy days." And Joe Gargan sent back long, detailed letters describing the action on the front lines in France. Commanding a detail of six Americans and six Frenchmen crawling out well beyond their "wire" into no man's land at night, when it was impossible to distinguish anything in the darkness; encountering and "knocking off" Germans, finding out later that they had planned a raid on Gargan's location; trenches that were filled with "mud up to our knees" and thousands of rats "running in all directions and squealing frightfully."

Gargan, like many, wrote wistfully of the Notre Dame days, noting that "I long to be back again where I could go in and bounce a big nickel off the plate glass at Hullie and Mike's and, if there was a crowd around, ask for 'Naturals' and have them slip me a pack of 'Favorites.'"

But, as great a contrast as many made between the sylvan campus and the locales of the world's conflagration, there was also a special link between the discipline and development of young men at an institution committed to developing strong, intelligent men such as Notre Dame,

and the service needed by the United States. Charles Call, one of the mainstays of Rockne's make-do track squads, penned an eloquent ode to the Notre Dame athlete-soldier a few weeks before his graduation:

This world war has proved a number of things but none more emphatically than that intercollegiate athletics, often as they have been questioned in time of peace, have made sinewy and adroit the arm of a nation hastening to the conflict of battle. Greater than that of any other group of athletes has been the service of the college-bred athlete since the United States entered this war last April. Not having learned to capitalize his skill or strength as his professional brethren, he was the first to rush to the colors when Uncle Sam assumed the gigantic task of warring with the Kaiser. In the pink of condition, just entering that decade in a young man's life when mind and muscle coordinate for the highest efficiency, he hurried to his biggest game. Taught many a time the value of a good beginning in any athletic event he got away with a flying start, and set the pace for the representatives of other bodies of men who followed after him.

As a corollary of the prominent part intercollegiate athletics in general have taken in this game of games, Notre Dame athletes have more than held their own with the competitors of their college days. Endowed physically better than most men, coached to do big things in a big way, accustomed to accomplish the thing they set out to do, the brawny Notre Dame men promptly packed away with the camphor balls their monograms and put on the khaki tendered them by Uncle Sam. Their fitness was soon recognized. The first officers' reserve camps were no sooner history than a large number of Notre Dame men were lieutenants. Brilliant service, and steady promotion have marked their careers thus far, but no one can but believe that these men habituated to fight hard till the whistle blows are just preparing for far greater work to come.

Military men have often commented upon the readiness and eagerness of the Notre Dame man for the difficult tasks in the

service. They were not petted or privileged while in school; they ask no particular favors now. Used to discipline throughout their years in college, they find army regulations no great burden now. Fed on competition during their years at school, they welcome the chance to spar for position with their fellowmen in the army today. Above all they fight, fight with that relentlessness that asks no quarter and gives none, fight with that good old Celtic dash that made them the wonders of the athletic world, fight because they like to fight, fight because it is their duty to fight.

Go on, men of Notre Dame, Uncle Sam has greater honors in store for you.

From his study of ancient culture, Rockne knew that physical preparedness was more than simply an individual expression; the Greeks valued physical development as a civic duty, at least in part as it related to defending one's country. Rockne recognized a real Notre Dame man, a fully developed Notre Dame man—be he on the front lines in Europe, at a military training camp in some distant state, or still on the campus—had all the attributes of physical and mental toughness needed for any kind of skirmish, on a battlefield, gridiron, or cinder track. Athletics, the coach reasoned, could be used as a means to call out and develop a man's full potential.

Summer brought a mixture of emotions for Rockne. Bonnie, pregnant and anticipating an August delivery of their second child, understood Knute's need to fulfill his patriotic duties. She would miss his help with the daily household chores as well as watching the joy he exhibited playing with young Billy. For Rockne's military service tour, he would serve as director of athletics at Fort Sheridan, just north of Chicago. His task was to keep the servicemen in shape and physically ready for battle. It was an obvious setting for a man who had written his civil service exam on the topic of increased need for naval defense after the 1905 Russo-Japanese war and who had also spent the last eight years strengthening the physical condition of America's youth.

The 1918 football schedule, announced in early spring, offered what ap-

peared to be an appealing slate of games, even as war left an uncertainty to anything, including football. The high point would be the November 2 contest at West Point. The Irish would again travel to Nebraska, on October 19; host the Great Lakes Training Station team on November 9; and finish the season November 23 by renewing their rivalry with Purdue, which had been on hiatus since 1907 due to the Western Conference boycott of the Fighting Irish. Other key battles included Washington & Jefferson at home, and Michigan Agricultural at Lansing. Yet, he wondered just how the influence of war would impact the type of squad he would send out on the gridiron in his first year as head coach.

But there was precious little time to speculate; the war's impact continued to swirl around the young men of Notre Dame, and indeed, all citizens of the nation, as they hoped and prayed for a speedy resolution to the hostilities. The summer of 1918 saw one of Notre Dame's most promising athletes back home in Calumet, Michigan playing pool and high-stakes poker, and a little town-team baseball. George Gipp's ankle had healed, and he was starting to feel like himself again. With his military deferment expiring, life back at college held a certain appeal. But with a return trip to Notre Dame apparent, he wanted some familiar company. "Why don't you come down to Notre Dame and play football," Gipp suggested to his old pal, Fred "Ojay" Larson. "If we don't kill you by the time the season is over, then join the Army."

Larson agreed, and together, he, Gipp, and Dolly Gray approached another former Calumet high teammate, Heartley "Hunk" Anderson. They were armed with the current *Dome* yearbook, and when Anderson flipped through its pages, he noticed a large number of Roman collars.

"Is this place Catholic?" Hunk asked, knowing full well it was.

"Yep," replied Gipp. "Just remember—when in Rome, do as the Romans do."

Anderson protested that he wouldn't have the money to attend college, but Gipp assured him that Rockne would help him secure a campus job. Hunk's dad, William J. Anderson, was a Canadian native who worked his entire career for railroads. He had been a yardmaster in Ontario when he was transferred to Calumet to work as a brakeman. It was a chance to establish a home, and he took the job. The family had its financial hardships, as did many in the area. Every once in a while, the elder Anderson

would bring home some discarded railroad ties he got from the section foreman. Father and son would cut them up, each on one end of a cross-cut saw; the wood provided heat for the simple frame house on Tamarack Hill, and for cooking all winter.

The thought of attending a prestigious college such as Notre Dame was beyond Hunk's imagination. He hoped some college was possible, especially after he was named to Michigan's all-state team as a senior at Calumet. His sister was enrolled at Marquette Normal, studying to become a teacher, and any financial assistance the parents could afford would first go to her. Hunk had doubts whether his father, a dedicated Mason whose family belonged to the Presbyterian Church in Calumet, would accept his son attending a Catholic university. But that worry appeared to be unfounded. "I don't care if you come back a priest," said his father. "Just get an education."

Gipp and Larson traveled to Notre Dame a few days before the semester began. Anderson was working in Houghton, chauffeuring for wealthy businessman Skif Sheldon, who owned a 12-cylinder Packard and a Pierce Arrow. Hunk had just finished a shift when a telegram arrived from Gipp. "Come on down, everything's OK—Gipp." Hunk let out a war hoop. He was on his way to college. When Anderson arrived at the Grand Trunk station in downtown South Bend, Gipp and Larson were waiting. Rockne, said Gipp, was finishing lunch at Hulle and Mike's, and would be by in a minute. When the coach appeared, Gipp said, "Coach, this is Hunk Anderson, the fellow I was telling you about." Rockne rolled his cigar to the side of his mouth and eyed Anderson carefully.

"What position do you play?" the coach inquired.

"Fullback?" came the response. "We don't need fullbacks. We need guards."

"Well, coach," Anderson said, thinking quickly. "You're looking at the best guard you'll ever see."

"I hope so," said Rockne. "Of course, if you have the natural ability that George says you have, we can teach you."

Rockne seemed pleased with the exchange, winked at Gipp and said, "See ya on campus."

Gipp and Larson helped Hunk with his huge trunk, wrestling it into a cab for the ride to campus. It was then Gipp offered Hunk this advice,

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which always stuck with Anderson: “Hunk, you may have a lot of friends here, but remember, they’re after the same job. Anytime you have that uniform on and somebody is in front of you, knock ’em down on their fanny...and if they get up, knock ’em down again.”

The heavy toll of the war weighed upon Father Cavanaugh as he addressed the student body in his sermon at the welcoming Mass for students and staff in September 1918. “Never before has the University taken up its work in such disturbed and bewildering conditions,” he said. “Behold how are the times changed and out of joint. The University transformed into a barracks; the gentle masters become pedagogues of war; the University ideal no longer the scholar, but the soldier! No more do poets write their radiant dreams and apocalyptic visions in letters of fire and in words of measured music, but, like the deathless Joyce Kilmer, they dramatize them by shedding their blood on the battlefields of France.” Cavanaugh blamed the war on the modernism that was creeping into Western Civilization as evident by the “paganism and irreligion rampant in the press, in literature and in societies was nowhere so rampant as in the Universities. In a word, Christianity had ceased to be a vital force in the lives of millions of people, in nearly every country of Christendom. Then came this brutal, barbarous war, originating in the sins and lusts, the plottings and the tyrannies of so called Christian men.”

He cautioned the young men, as he had two days earlier in a general session, to avoid the temptations of misconduct, whether it be on the streetcars, in downtown South Bend, or about campus. Cavanaugh concluded by recounting the letter he had received from one Notre Dame man who said that every time he shot a bullet into the heart of an enemy he whispered a prayer for that soldier, “because there are no enemies after death.”

The next day, students began their routine of studies and athletics—which now included the Student Army Training Corp, now firmly entrenched on Notre Dame’s campus. Some cynics called it “Safe At The College.” Anderson’s campus job, similar to those of other freshman athletes, consisted of serving in the mess hall and pushing carts full of food. The SATC training corps drilled its members in military tradition, science,

and tactics. It was a grueling routine; students rose at 5:30 a.m. and drilled for 90 minutes before breakfast. After a few sessions, with the start of football approaching, Gipp took his chances and dropped out of the program. Larson and Anderson continued on.

That September, Knute Rockne assumed his position as head football coach at Notre Dame, beginning fall workouts 11 days in advance of the opening game. If ever Rockne had allowed himself the luxury of thinking ahead to what the first days of head coaching would be like, surely what was playing out in front of him was not part of that dream. Camp, Stagg, Harper; had any of them really faced such a challenge? Now, there were no assistant coaches; Rockne would assume every role, including that of equipment manager, giving each man his suit. As trainer, Rockne would travel with a roll of tape and bottle of iodine in his pocket. Would there be sufficient time to train and develop the physical and mental conditioning of the young men in his charge, he wondered?

Without a line coach, Rockne was quick to develop Hunk Anderson's potential. Rockne came up to him to demonstrate how to execute a certain blocking technique. He then instructed Hunk to give it a try; Rockne would stand in as the opponent. Don't worry, Rockne advised; in fact, he told Anderson to go the drill at full speed. Hunk complied, and knocked Rockne onto his backside. The coach insisted Hunk do it five more times, and each play had the same result. A first-year player from the U.P. had won a starting guard position. A head coach demonstrated that developing a young player's skills and confidence was more important than the coach's physical comfort. The rosters—made thin by the war effort—consisted in large part of first-year men. Notre Dame joined other colleges in taking advantage of relaxed freshmen eligibility rules for campuses which hosted the SATC. As all the men were in the service of the military through SATC, it followed that all should be given equal standing to represent their school in varsity play. Among those newly arrived for Rockne's opening scrimmage on September 19 were a handful of first years who, by one account, "made themselves felt in the scrimmage and attracted Rockne's notice." They included yet another player from the Upper Peninsula, a lineman from Ironwood, Michigan, named Romanus "Peaches" Nadolney, and a back from Green Bay, Wisconsin by the name of Earl "Curly" Lambeau.

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As if player shortages weren't enough to cause headaches for a new coach, scheduling woes soon surfaced. It was announced that the game with Washington & Jefferson was dropped, "owing to the government request to cancel all long trips." A possible replacement game might be scheduled with Camp Custer near Kalamazoo. The team was still allowed to make the trip to Cleveland for the September 28 opener with Case Tech, where Rockne fielded a team that was the greenest and lightest in anyone's memory at Notre Dame.

After Case took an early 6-0 lead, Gipp and Pete Bahan started to take control of the game. They drove the Irish deep into Case territory, where Lambeau crashed over the line to tie the game. In the third quarter, Gipp scored twice, and Notre Dame cruised to a 26-6 victory. "The team as a whole was ragged," Rockne said after the game. "Nevertheless, this team, despite its light weight has all the spirit and fight that any of the older and heavier teams had. The great asset of this year's team is its fighting spirit, which never lagged all during the game Saturday."

But any momentum from the opening victory was short-lived. By the first week of October, the football season was in turmoil. "Never before at Notre Dame have athletics been at such a standstill," one report noted. There were problems and delays getting Notre Dame students successfully into the SATC. The transfer orders from each man's home draft board to the one in South Bend were so slow in arriving that "most of the fellows have to look on while a comparatively small number are assigned quarters and given military drill. They hang around the gymnasium and Corby hall in the hope of getting word from their home boards," reported the *News-Times*.

The football schedule was also disintegrating. In addition to Washington & Jefferson, the trip to West Point was now canceled, owing again to the government's request to cancel all games in which overnight travel was involved. The Nebraska game was still on the schedule; only one morning drill would be missed by those traveling, and Rockne arranged to replace that session by giving a two-hour presentation on the train, describing his summer experiences at Fort Sheridan. Later in the week, Kalamazoo College canceled its scheduled October 5 game at Notre Dame, as it was suffering similar delays in getting its men into the SATC. Rockne was now in a full scramble, hoping to find a military team to come to campus on

October 12. Years of preparation and diligent service as a student-athlete, captain, and assistant coach had put Rockne into the position of guiding Notre Dame's entire athletic operation. Now, just weeks into his tenure, it had become something of a nightmare. The specter of war and death overwhelmed any sense of play on campus. And there was more darkness to come.

Throughout 1918, a somber mood had overtaken the campus with the reports of the deaths of students and alumni in the Great War. In the fall, indications that the fighting might soon abate were reason for optimism. Yet the idea of celebration was short lived, as the impact of the nationwide epidemic of Spanish influenza reached the South Bend area by mid-October. It sometimes seemed as though one could not unwind the sorrow from the two events. As much as the agony of the war and the flu epidemic seemed linked, so too, was the cause and effect of one upon the other. In 1918, the Public Health Service had just begun to require state and local health departments to provide reports about diseases in their communities. The problem? Influenza wasn't a reportable disease. But in early March 1918, officials in Haskell County Kansas sent a worrisome report to the Public Health Service. Although these officials knew that influenza was not a reportable disease, they wanted the federal government to know that "18 cases of influenza of a severe type" had been reported there. During that time a young soldier named Dean Nilson came home to Haskell County from Camp Funston, part of the Fort Riley, Kansas military camp. Little did Nilson know that on March 4, 1918, a private at Funston—a cook—reported ill with influenza. Within three weeks more than 1,100 soldiers were sick enough to be hospitalized; 38 died. As Funston fed a constant stream of men to other American bases and to Europe, the killer virus began its trek around the world.

By October 1918, public gatherings in South Bend were banned for three weeks, schools were closed, and the influenza fatality lists were published daily in the *South Bend Tribune*. Before the epidemic slowed, more than 200 Notre Dame students would be afflicted; classes were canceled for days and at least nine students died. So serious was the epidemic at Notre Dame that Cavanaugh described its impact on the campus in a let-

ter to a friend 10 months later as “the death of all human joy.” South Bend was no different than other communities. Quarantines were imposed to prevent the spread of the disease. As the bodies mounted, funerals were held outdoors to protect mourners against the spread of the disease. The Great War claimed an estimated 16 million lives. The global influenza epidemic that began in 1918 killed an estimated 50 million people, approximately 650,000 in the United States.

Young John Boyer, the former bicycle delivery boy, South Bend resident, and student at Notre Dame, had his schooling interrupted when he registered for service in the Navy. He was stationed at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Chicago working as an orderly. He would later recount that when he reported for his shift, his sole task was to pull sheets over the bodies of the young boys who had died from the flu. It was an experience that would have profound impact on him. Upon his graduation from Notre Dame in 1920, Boyer would enter medical school in hopes of serving his fellow man.

On Thursday, October 10, Dr. Emil G. Freyermuth, head of the South Bend health department, ordered all churches, schools, theatres, and other public places of amusements closed, and prohibited public gatherings of any nature, including club meetings, lodge gatherings, and public dances effective midnight that night. In adjacent Mishawaka, it was reported that “any person to have a cold or cough or to be sick in any way, will not under any circumstances be allowed to congregate in any public place, moving picture shows, or schools. It is especially urged that any person who had a cold or any indication of influenza should remain at home.” Almost daily, students and faculty at Notre Dame were being asked to pray for the repose of the soul of a victim of war or disease. LeGrande Hammond, who graduated with Rockne in 1913, died in Decatur, Michigan of influenza at age 27. Lt. George J. Ryan died in October of wounds received in France. Great sadness at the death of Carroll Hall resident Robert Corrigan was expressed after his death from pneumonia; Father Cavanaugh preached at the solemn requiem Mass. On campus, tamping down reports of influenza became a major endeavor. Father Cavanaugh took to the pages of the *Scholastic* with a letter to “check any wild rumors about sickness at the University.” In it he said the deaths of two students at St. Joseph’s Hospital on October 22 were not related to the illness of

the 50 listed as sick on campus, whether those 50 were in the Infirmary, the Minims, or the SATC Hospital:

At the present time there are just three very sick boys...we have had very little evidence of the presence of the so-called Spanish Influenza. This may be due to the fact that the Notre Dame boy, as a rule, is in exceptionally good shape physically...We have had four deaths this year out of a population of 1500 students. One was little "Bobbie" Corrigan. He was constitutionally weak and all of us knew he would never get through his youth. The others were Lester Burrill, William Conway and George Guilfoyle. Guilfoyle and Conway died this morning. They have been fighting a battle with pneumonia all week. I make this statement so as to prevent ignorance and malicious people from frightening the public needlessly and also, to clip the wings of sensation mongers.

Less than two weeks later, Father Cavanaugh was at his only sister's bedside in Leetonia, Ohio on November 5 as she succumbed to pneumonia. This came two days after the news of the death of Mary Farrell, wife of history Professor N.E. Farrell on November 3 at St. Joseph's Hospital of pneumonia. It was noted that influenza had set in days earlier.

The same Thursday that Dr. Freyermuth announced the closing of public buildings, Rockne released a revised football schedule that met the latest government requirements, which stated that no college teams could make any trips during October, and they could make no more than two trips in November. The Irish would host military teams from Municipal Pier October 19; Camp Custer, October 26; and Great Lakes, November 9. The Michigan Aggies would visit Cartier Field November 16, and away games were to be at Nebraska November 2 and Purdue November 23.

One report in the *South Bend News-Tribune* noted that the team "is getting better every day. Considering the disturbance of the daily schedule caused by the SATC and also the fact that Rockne has had a hard attack of gripe, which he is only now wearing off, wonders have been accomplished by him and the team." But that same week, the paper quoted

Rockne as wailing after a scrimmage: “They don’t think. They don’t think, and they can’t learn signals.” And, the paper noted, “old fans know what Rockne, of all coaches, thinks of a man who can’t or won’t think.” Rockne and his men were greatly disappointed when the Municipal Pier game was canceled the week of the game, but vowed to go forward, determined to be in shape for the next opponent—whoever it might be. Eventually, the Camp Custer game would also fall to the travel restrictions, and the Nebraska game moved to Thanksgiving Day, November 28.

Rockne never ceased trying to secure opponents, and with just several days notice, he convinced Wabash College to agree to a game on November 2. At 5 a.m. that Saturday, a group of Fighting Irish boarded a train for Wabash, as the trip had to be completed within a single day. The game itself was no contest, Notre Dame winning 67-7. Gipp ran wild before taking himself out of the game for the second half. Meanwhile, signs were pointing to a possible end to the war. Headlines screamed, “Now Within Grasp of Allies Armies; Both Kaisers Ready to Go” and “German Army May Soon Hear Emperor Has Quit.”

Next up was the game with Great Lakes Training Station. Rockne proclaimed that “the game will positively be played if they have to battle behind closed gates, although everything now indicates that the ban will be lifted and the public allowed to see this contest.” Great Lakes would bring a team featuring several former college stars, including George Halas of Illinois, John “Paddy” Driscoll of Northwestern, Con Ecklund of Minnesota, and three familiar faces across the line—Notre Dame’s own Charlie Bachman at center, and Emmet Keefe and “Deak” Jones at the guards. Before a large, boisterous crowd at Cartier Field, delighted to be watching football again and hopeful that the rumored end of the Great War was near, Gipp led the Irish on a long first-quarter drive and broke through off tackle for a touchdown. The lead held up until a 35-yard touchdown run by Driscoll in the third quarter. The game ended at 7-7, considered an excellent showing by Notre Dame against a more experienced, heavier eleven. “I am satisfied with the game,” Rockne told reporters. “We went into the game like underdogs and gave them a good fight. The game shows we have as good a team as any in the west.”

And the following Monday, November 11, thousands gathered in the streets of South Bend—as they did in city centers across the country—to

celebrate the Armistice, making the downtown district “a living mass of laughing, singing, shouting noisemakers.” A large gathering at Leeper Park enjoyed a huge bonfire, while bands played among the cheering crowd. All day long, impromptu parades of vehicles and pedestrians filled Main and Michigan streets, with celebrators waving flags and blowing horns and whistles. It would be the last mass gathering of 1918 in the area, as the Great Lakes game would be the final home football game of Notre Dame’s abbreviated season. After the two games against military teams were canceled, Rockne attempted to convince the Michigan Aggies to visit Cartier Field, but to no avail. So he took his squad up to Lansing on November 16. In a hard-fought game played on a muddy field, the Irish fell, 13-7, with both Bahan and Gipp suffering injuries. Young Norman Barry took over in Gipp’s spot, and one report called him “a lighter man, but wonderfully fast.”

While Notre Dame prepared to visit Purdue the next Saturday, Rockne continued to try to set up another game for December 6, but again was unsuccessful. His squad went to Lafayette and whipped the Boilers, 26-6. Gipp led the way with 137 yards on 19 carries, his strongest game to date. Reports called him “a tower of strength in Notre Dame’s offense, as he tore holes through the Purdue line.” On a soft field in Lincoln on Thanksgiving Day, the Fighting Irish and Nebraska struggled to a scoreless tie. “Nebraska fought with the single idea of keeping the visitors from the home goal with the realization that the odds were against it. Nebraska on the whole was playing not so much to score as to keep the other team from scoring.” Gipp and Barry did most of the ground-gaining for the Irish.

Mercifully, a football season, and an autumn unlike any other was finished. The Great War ended, the influenza pandemic tamed. For someone who was adept at flexibility and change, 1918 presented the first-year coach with challenges unlike anything he had expected. For now Knute Rockne would celebrate the health of his family and surviving the season; both were worth savoring.