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On to Wisconsin

ALMOST AS LONG as there had been a University of Notre Dame, there had been the Notre Dame Band. The first record of the Band shows that it played for the first commencement in 1846, three years after the founding of the school. The Band played as part of the send-off for students from the Main Circle to both the Union and Confederate Armies. It traveled by horse and wagon to Chicago to play a benefit for victims of the Great Fire in 1871.

For one of the few times in its history, the band was headed to a Notre Dame game away from Cartier Field. The 62-piece band, led by its young director Joseph Casasanta, prepared to join the student contingent making its annual away game trip – to Madison for the game against Western Conference stalwart Wisconsin.

The Band was known for its signature pieces – the Notre Dame Victory March, now 15 years since its composition by Rev. Michael Shea, Class of 1904, but only a few years since being played regularly at athletic events; and the Hike song, a more recent composition by Casasanta.

Only one year earlier, the Band was a struggling organization,

its status shaky and its future uncertain. Casasanta, just finishing his undergraduate studies, infused new life into the group. Casasanta attracted new members, and he convinced University officials that the Band was strong and growing. He helped raise funds for impressive new military-style uniforms, which debuted in 1923. The Band earned goodwill for the University by playing benefits, such as the Knights of Columbus concert for St. Joseph's Hospital. In the weeks leading up to the Wisconsin trip, raffle tickets were sold on campus to help raise funds to "send the Band to Madison."

THE MADISON GAME was shaping up as a "second homecoming." Notre Dame alums and fans from across the Midwest – and those simply wanting to see the "Four Horsemen" and their mates – made plans to get to Wisconsin's capital city for the first meeting between the two schools since 1917. For weeks, ticket requests had been pouring into the Wisconsin athletic department for the November 8 game. It was the deepest foray into the West on the Irish schedule and the best chance to see the team that had wowed the East.

"That the crowd at the Notre Dame game will be more evenly divided in support of the two teams than usual is the prediction of Paul F. Hunter director of ticket sales," noted a Madison paper. Notre Dame was expected to fill the entire south half of the east stand with more than 5,000 seats in one block. In addition to the 5,000 tickets sent under registered mail to Notre Dame, several thousands more were sold to Irish followers from the Madison ticket office. Additional bleachers were being constructed, and a record crowd was expected.

"Green Bay is sending down 600 fans to cheer for Crowley," one paper reported. From the Iron Range of Minnesota, a large group was making plans to travel and see Joe Bach play. And Iowans, proud of producing Notre Dame backs Layden and O'Boyle, sent in ticket requests by the hundreds. Wisconsin athletic officials were happy for the sudden wave of business, but realistic about what was drawing the fans' attention.

At the same time, interest was also growing for the Badgers' final two games on the schedule – the Nov. 15 Homecoming clash with Iowa, and the season finale against arch-rival Chicago. On the first day

of ticket sales for the Iowa game, students bought 5,119 ducats, the largest single-day sale in Wisconsin football history. Students camped out in the cold, with occasional fistfights over places in the queue, for the chance to buy Chicago tickets.

PERHAPS WISCONSIN FANS were hoping for a big finish for what had been a difficult, sometimes horrifying, set of circumstances the past several weeks. Jack Ryan had come 90 miles west from inter-state rival Marquette to take the reigns at Madison in 1923. From 1917 through 1921, he guided Marquette to an overall record of 28-5-5, including an unbeaten 1917 campaign in which the Golden Avalanche outscored its opponents 348-7. One of his five overall losses was a 21-7 defeat to Notre Dame in 1921.

Wisconsin had been one of the conference's dominant teams in the first decade of the new century, at one point losing only five games in five seasons. After an unbeaten championship team in 1912, the Badgers had a series of seasons hovering around the .500 mark before a post-war resurgence under Coach J. R. Richards. Ryan's first Badger team in 1923 started strong with three wins, including a 52-0 shellacking of Indiana. Wisconsin then scored just nine points in the final four games to finish 3-3-1.

Several key returning players had hopes riding high for the Badgers in 1924. Shutout victories over North Dakota State, 25-0, and Iowa State, 17-0, had the team and fans feeling optimistic. However, on October 11, little Coe College of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, came to Camp Randall and held Wisconsin to a shocking 7-7 tie. Though outgained, the determined Kohawks held twice within their five-yard-line, including a last-minute stand which left the Badgers a yard short of the Coe goal line on the game's final play. The game "was unanimously voted one of the worst exhibitions seen here in years," noted one Madison reporter. The Badgers played better the following week, holding Minnesota to a 7-7 tie.

ON THE MORNING of Thursday, October 23, just hours before the Badgers were to leave for Michigan, senior backup quarterback Herbert Opitz was attending a laboratory class in senior engineering. The class

was experimenting in “stepping up” currents of electricity when Opitz accidentally grasped a knife-switch with both hands. More than 700 volts of electricity pulsed through his body, badly burning his hands and partially paralyzing him. After the current was turned off, Opitz was rushed to the campus infirmary, where a team of physicians used every possible means to revive him. After an hour, they spotted signs of consciousness and held out hope for recovery. By late afternoon, however, the effects of the electrocution overcame him, and Opitz died.

The stunned, saddened Badgers boarded the train for Jackson, Michigan, the stopover point en route to Ann Arbor for Saturday’s game. Students and townspeople cheered the Badgers on their departure, but the team’s thoughts were naturally with their fallen mate. “We haven’t forgotten Herb,” said one peer. “But we are going to win this football game. We are going to Ann Arbor to play for him as well as the school which we represent.” That same evening, Opitz was posthumously awarded an honorary “W” in recognition of his three seasons on the squad.

The next day brought another setback, though not of life-and-death variety. Ed Williams, the Badgers’ talented quarterback and passing halfback, was ruled ineligible by Major John L. Griffiths, commissioner of the Big Ten conference. Williams, it was determined, had participated in athletics for two school years at Morningside College in his hometown of Sioux City, Iowa, before coming to Madison and playing football in 1923. Even though he played football just one of the two years at Morningside, he played basketball in both, so his first year at Wisconsin was his third and final year of varsity intercollegiate competition.

Shaken by Opitz’ death and missing Williams’ skills, the Badgers provided little opposition to a fired-up Michigan team led by sophomore Benny Friedman and lost to the Wolverines, 21-0. The 2-1-2 season had the feel of a losing campaign. Wisconsin looked forward to having an off date on November 1 and an extra week to prepare for the Irish.

INTERPRETING ALL THE happenings of the Wisconsin football season, as well as the sports world in general, was one of the most

unusual columnists of the time. Joseph “Roundy” Coughlin of *The Wisconsin State Journal* received plenty of newspaper column inches – and extreme latitude with the English language – to chronicle the day’s events. Proper grammar, punctuation and usage were foreign concepts to Roundy, and the paper drew a sizable readership for him by publishing his prose “as is” under the heading “Roundy Says—.”

For instance, he summarized Wisconsin’s long afternoon in Ann Arbor this way:

“In the Michigan game we had no fight or pepper it was a dead outfit and we a gang that won’t go in there and fight no coach in the world can get results. It only takes sixty-minutes on a Saturday afternoon in four big games to fight-fight-fight. Michigan came on the field full of fight that one word made them in this game and it spells f-i-g-h-t. A coach hadn’t ought to tell a team to fight that thing they should do on there own hook and be might proud of doing it.”

In the same column, Roundy displayed a much different take on the Badger coach, when he penned: “The writer is for Ryan win or lose I know the facts much better than the average fan.” Under a subhead reading “Notre Dame,” Roundy sized up the next opponent:

“They never beat a conference team in their lifes. We have played them, they never beat us. They play the Eastern teams and they ain’t in it at all with Western football. If the Wisconsin team can get it in their heads that they got a chance with this South Benders they might pull the unexpected and beat them. You can’t go in there with your daubers down, you got to be on your toes fighting like they do to get their number. If they see your dauber down then a track meet will be a feature of the day.”

It was true. In four previous tries, Notre Dame had not beaten Wisconsin; the Irish had not even scored a point. There were three one-sided shutout losses in 1900, 1904 and 1905, then the scoreless tie in 1917. Always a Badger at heart, Roundy wrote a few days before the game that “I’d give my life away to see Wisconsin beat Notre Dame.”

THE BADGERS TOOK advantage of their off-date of November 1 with an evening of “recreation in the way of a banquet and theatre party” on Thursday, October 30. A local meat firm, Goeden and Kruger, provided a steak dinner at Fred Hicks’ café. The players went to the Orpheum theatre to watch “moving pictures of Knute Rockne’s methods of teaching fundamentals.” The movies were made for use at Rockne’s coaching schools, featuring players demonstrating how the Irish were taught to block, tackle, pass, kick, hold the ball, catch the ball and other movements.

The Badger ranks became further thinned when Austin Straubel, a husky sophomore from Green Bay and a teammate of Crowley’s at East High, was told by doctors his season was over. Straubel suffered an injured finger against Michigan, and his hand became infected. Another regular in the line, center Oscar Teckemeyer, suffered an injury to his nose which severely hampered his breathing. With so many linemen out, Coach Ryan took the unusual move of switching Captain Jack Harris, a backfield veteran, to tackle.

Injuries also vexed Notre Dame’s week of practice when it was announced Tuesday that quarterback Eddie Scherer, who played so well in Stuhldreher’s absence, would be lost for the season with a back injury. If Stuhldreher still could not go against Wisconsin, the job would fall to Red Edwards, with Reese in reserve.

FOR NOTRE DAME, the chance to play a Big Ten opponent other than Purdue and Indiana, who had accounted for 10 of 12 games against conference opponents under Rockne, put an extra shine on the Wisconsin trip. Notre Dame’s relationship with the conference had sometimes been a rocky affair. Notre Dame had sought conference admission as early as the late 1890s but was rejected because of stated reasons that the South Bend school was not big enough or serious enough about intercollegiate athletics. Vague references to player eligibility rules were also cited. When the conference added Indiana and Iowa, Notre Dame applied and again and was rejected in 1908. This time Father Thomas Crumley, vice president and chair of the athletic board, injected a possible theological rather than athletic bias.

ND’s football success in 1913 again sparked conversation about

entry into the Western Conference. The school's growth as an academic institution, its national recognition as a football power, and its tightening of football regulations, including freshmen ineligibility, seemed to counteract any arguments against inclusion into the Big Nine (Michigan had recently withdrawn). However, the conference, led by Chicago and Minnesota representatives, once again denied the application. Student journalists in the Dome editorialized that more than athletics was in play as part of the conference's rejection: "It's easy to understand why Northwestern and Indiana – teams that would end last in our interhall race – objected, but why Chicago and Minnesota, with pretension to Western Championships demurred makes no sense. But the professional prejudices of the conference's 'Academic Men' as well as the growing anti-Catholicism of Midwestern state legislatures were more important factors."

ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE of college football, the first six weeks of the season had weeded out several contenders for top honors. Notre Dame was getting an increasing amount of attention whenever the leaders of the sport got together or otherwise communicated. In the East, Yale and Pennsylvania drew the most interest. In the far west, California, Leland Stanford and Southern California had risen to the top.

Notre Dame had put itself into strong consideration with its 5-0 record. Yet, in the past few years, the Irish and their fans had read and heard about several possible invitations to post-season games that either never materialized, or were declined by the school for a variety of reasons. Early in the week, reports surfaced that Notre Dame would be invited to play in the annual Tournament of Roses game at Pasadena, California. Rockne was quick to tamp down the rumors. "If any such game is being arranged between Notre Dame and a western team, it is news to me," he averred, adding that the report sounded "like the annual bunk." In the next several days, though, the headlines blared: "Fighting Irish Play in California New Year's Day."

On Wednesday night, Gwynn Wilson, graduate manager of the University of Southern California team, announced to the press that his team would meet Notre Dame in the annual Pasadena classic. The

announcement followed long distance telephone conversations between Wilson and Rockne late Wednesday night. By noon Thursday, Notre Dame's faculty board of athletics met and ratified negotiations for the game. Southern Cal already had one "post-season" game scheduled, against Syracuse in Los Angeles on December 6. Scheduling Notre Dame, one report noted, "means the opening of athletic relations with Notre Dame that will see a return contest in 1926 or 1927 either at South Bend or at the Grant Park stadium, Chicago."

On the practice field, there was a new bounce in the Irish's step, as described in the *News-Times*:

"Thirty-six years of football prestige at the school of the Fighting Irish is now preparing to stand validation in one of the greatest football classics of all time. The announcement came with joyous suddenness, but the hugeness and importance of it all is too much for many of the players and students who are still groping through the mist of happy anxiety, hardly daring to trust their senses of sight and hearing and not quite able to reconcile themselves to the fact that the 'wonder team' will be the feature attraction at the Tournament of the Roses. For years the wearers of the Blue and Gold have hoped and waited in vain for the great post-season classic in California. . . . the Tournament of Roses game comes as a fitting finale to the colorful careers of over a score of Notre Dame gridgers who are playing their last year of college football."

Some surmised that relationships formed when Rockne held a coaching clinic at Leland Stanford the past summer played a major role in increased west coast interest in the Irish.

IN MADISON, IT was a week of all sorts of gatherings. On Sunday, November 2, a crowd of several thousand massed at the train station to welcome home favorite son Sen. Robert "Fighting Bob" LaFollette, who was returning to his Maple Bluff home upon completion of his quixotic campaign for president under the Progressive Party banner. Tuesday's election would return President Coolidge to office in a landslide victory over Democratic challenger John Davis. LaFollette would win his home state and garner 17 percent of the popular vote.

On Thursday, Madisonians got a rare treat when Lieut. Com. John Philip Sousa and his band performed two shows at the Parkway Theater. It was billed as “a tribute to the supremacy of Conn instruments” and hosted by Forbes-Meagher Music Company, the local agents for Conn instruments. A matinee offered tickets for 50 cents to \$1.50; the evening show had seats up to \$2. Friday’s *State Journal* summed up the evening show:

“Did you hear Sousa play ‘On, Wisconsin’ Thursday night? Is there anyone in town that couldn’t hear him? No tender prelude there; no soothing, haunting tones or charming melody. When the blare of brass as only Sousa can blare broke into the Badger fighting song, the most famous of college tunes, the roof girders looked uneasily at each other and began to doubt their ability to hang together...Let’s hire him to stay over Saturday and play just once before the game starts. The subs could then beat Notre Dame, and any Phi Beta on the hill tackle ‘Red’ Grange.”

Elsewhere, the paper noted that “seventy years old was Sousa Thursday, yet his band of skilled musicians played with as much colorful fire and vigor as if they were led by the young commander of 40 years ago.”

AT 8:30 FRIDAY morning, the Irish players boarded their train in South Bend. The destination – Beloit, Wisconsin, at the Illinois border. After arriving at 3 p.m., Rockne’s men went through a signal drill with the Beloit College varsity, coached by Tom Mills, who had gotten to know Rockne while attending one of his coaching schools.

Beloit was also the hometown of Irish back Ward “Doc” Connell. He was the fourth of five sons of Dr. D.R. Connell, who was one of the founders of a Beloit hospital. They lived next door to the St. Thomas rectory, and the family was very involved in the church. All four of his brothers attended Beloit College, and one went on to get his degree at Notre Dame. Ward, however, attended Notre Dame’s prep school before continuing at the University. Saturday began with team Mass at St. Thomas, followed by the resumption of the train trip, directly to the gates of Camp Randall by 11:00 a.m.

Or, as Roundy put it: “The whole team will go to church in Beloit

early Saturday morning and then right after come direct to Madison if present plans ain't changed." Roundy's final thoughts on the game were "Ryan has showed the team lots of stuff this week – if the team don't forget it Saturday and will go out and do their stuff with speed and pepper the Wisconsin team in defeat should look rather good. What more could be fairer."

And there was this: "We ain't looking for no win but if this team gets going the way they can and will do it Saturday it should be a darn sight better game than most think."

All day Friday in Madison, football fans arrived by train or automobile and jammed area hotels. Ten special trains carrying Notre Dame alumni and fans were expected from various points in the Midwest. It was reported that "the Wisconsin capital tonight has been brought to the fever point more because of the presence of the Fighting Irish than in hope of a Wisconsin victory."

FIVE HUNDRED NOTRE Dame students, chattering with enthusiasm and laden with "several tons of overcoats and ribbons" and a banner reading "Madison or Bust," boarded the Student Special at 11:30 Friday night in South Bend. Crammed two and three to a sleeping berth, they eventually drifted off to sleep, but awoke to stories of "the brakemen's wanderings of several hours wherein they combed the countryside in search of a new locomotive to replace the crippled engine which headed the caravan at the beginning of the trip."

The trip continued, rolling along the traction line of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, and daylight brought a final ramble along the fields of southern Wisconsin farms, icy white with frost. Upon arrival in Madison, the group had a brisk three-block walk to St. Patrick's church, where Father Carey said Mass. After Mass, the Band led a march of the 500 students, cheering and singing, through the streets of downtown Madison. Around the capital square they marched, oblivious to traffic signs, until they reached the Park Hotel and its enormous banner proclaiming "Notre Dame Headquarters." There cheer leader Eddie Luther took his usual perch, on a third-story balcony, and led the crowd in some boisterous yells and songs before adjourning the mob for a much-anticipated breakfast.

As fans filed into Camp Randall for the 2:00 game, it was obvious this would be a different crowd than the ones that typically filled the stadium. ND blankets and banners and Blue and Gold overwhelmed the Badger fans. The crisp fall weather was perfect for overcoats, with the occasional fur coat worn by Wisconsin coeds and others.

Both teams took the field to loud ovations from the split crowd. Wisconsin won the toss and chose to defend the south goal. O'Boyle kicked off for Notre Dame, and the Irish quickly forced a punt by Wisconsin's Doyle Harmon. Don Miller ran for a first down, then another eight yards on two carries, before the Irish's Bill Cerney punted. Cerney's punt was touched by a Wisconsin player, then corralled by Notre Dame before going out of bounds at the Badger 15. Notre Dame found the going tough from there, but Cerney made a 20-yard place kick for a 3-0 Irish lead.

Trailing, Wisconsin chose to kick off and held the ND backups deep in their end. The Badgers partially blocked a Cerney punt and recovered at their 45-yard line. Harmon advanced the ball to Notre Dame's 45, but the Irish stopped the advance. Twice in the next few minutes, on almost identical plays, Notre Dame broke through the line and blocked place-kick attempts by Harmon from the Irish 45 and 40 – both times Wisconsin recovered the loose football, good for a first down.

On a third-and-four from the ND 41, Harmon hit Steve Pulaski on a 23-yard pass play, giving the Badgers a first down at the 18. A double-pass play gained five more. The Badgers were rolling and ready to strike for an early lead. But Rockne rushed his first team into the game – Layden, Don Miller, Crowley and a rejuvenated Stuhldreher in the backfield; Walsh, Weibel, Bach, Collins and the others into the line. The Notre Dame cheering section let loose a mighty roar as the regulars took their positions.

The Badgers secured a first down at the 7-yard line and pushed for another five yards before Harmon dropped back to the 15 and lofted a dropkick squarely between the uprights, tying the game 3-3. The Wisconsin fans went wild, with hats flying in the air through the stands. The Badgers were tied with the “wonder team” after one quarter of play.

A Wisconsin penalty on Notre Dame's first play of the second quarter started the Irish on a quick drive. Crowley went around left end for five yards, then circled the right side for 15 more. Don Miller added six on an end run, but the center of the Wisconsin line stopped the next rushes. Layden's punt went out of bounds inside the Wisconsin 1-yard-line, burying the Badgers deep within their own end of the field. Harmon immediately punted from deep in his end zone, and Stuhldreher was downed at the 40. A penalty pushed Notre Dame back into its own territory.

Layden fumbled, but a teammate recovered. Another run play failed. A pass from Layden to Miller went incomplete. Now the Wisconsin partisans were delirious with cheering. It was the real "four horsemen" the Badgers were frustrating. Layden rocketed a long punt over the Wisconsin goal line, putting the ball at the 20. The middle of the ND line smothered a pair of Badger runs, and Doyle Harmon was again punting to Stuhldreher. This time, the "little general" took the kick at his own 40, dodged tacklers and spun out of bounds on Wisconsin's 34, a return of 26 yards.

The Badger backs, fighting to prevent the game from turning into a track meet, gave each other some quick encouragement. On first down, Don Miller raced around left end and planted the ball near the Wisconsin 20. Two plays later, following perfect interference from Crowley and Layden, Miller again went around left end, this time for the game's first touchdown. Notre Dame students and alums let out a mighty roar, as Crowley's kick made it 10-3, Irish.

The track meet was on.

Wisconsin tried the field-position strategy of kicking off, but Rip Miller came up with the ball and brought it out to the ND 25. Two runs and a Wisconsin penalty advanced the ball to the Irish 40. Then Stuhldreher hit Miller with a pass to midfield. Miller broke free for 22 yards to the Badger 28. Two plays later, Stuhldreher spotted Crowley crossing over the middle, passed 10 yards to him, and Sleepy Jim took it the rest of the way for another score. He added the kick for a 17-3 lead. The crowd reacted with appreciation of the precision and flow of the Irish attack.

This time Wisconsin received the kickoff, and on the second play,

track star Harry McAndrews tried to circle the end, but was hauled down for a seven-yard loss by Ed Hunsinger. Stuhldreher fielded the ensuing punt at midfield, and a minute later Don Miller was off again on a 25-yard gallop to the Wisconsin 17. This time the drive fizzled, as a fourth-down pass from Crowley to Layden failed. Wisconsin showed a little life before the half ended, with the Harmon brothers – Leo to Doyle connecting on a 20-yard pass. But the Badgers were again forced to punt, and the half ended, 17-3. The halftime show was a lively affair, with both bands taking to the field and joining forces for some numbers, and with the Wisconsin band marching around the playing field. In the stands, there was an air of frivolity as Irish backers gave out chants and cheers.

The Irish took the second-half kickoff and, after two penalties, were back at their 16-yard-line. From there, Crowley danced out of the shift, eluded tacklers and broke into the clear, racing 59 yards to the Wisconsin 25 before Doyle Harmon brought him down. Two plays later, Crowley made another 12 yards to the 8, and Layden plowed over from the 4 for another Irish touchdown. Notre Dame's juggernaut was on display, 24-3.

As one account described, "the wild applause that greeted the performance would beggar description at this point in the game, partisanship was almost forgotten and the Badger supporters as well as their Irish delegation was unanimous in their praise for the Notre Dame scoring machine."

The Badgers were demoralized by the onslaught but never quit. They held Notre Dame to force punts on the next two possessions and controlled the ball at midfield. Wisconsin attempted a pass, but Don Miller intercepted at his own 45 and blew through a maze of Badger defenders for 40 yards, to Wisconsin's 15. Two plays later, Crowley followed Joe Bach's block for 8-yards into the end zone. Layden's kick made it 31-3.

The first team, except for Adam Walsh and Chuck Collins, left the field to wild cheering. The Irish attack was everything advertised. Several of the Notre Dame regulars went to shower, and it was said Crowley spent part of the fourth quarter in the stands with his mother, who had made the trip with the Green Bay contingent. "That Rockne

would send his first team to the showers after a comfortable margin had been secured was cause for wonderment by the fans,” the *News-Times* observed. “Never before had the sporting populace witnessed such an exhibition as was today’s game.”

The remaining minutes belonged to the second and third units, anxious to contribute to the victory. Beloit’s Doc Connell closed out the third quarter with a nifty 25-yard run and opened the fourth quarter with a 30-yard burst. Sophomore Red Hearden, another Green Bay East High graduate, entered the game and reeled off several decent runs. Yet another Wisconsin native, Appleton’s Jack Roach, closed out the scoring with a 13-yard touchdown scamper.

After the final 38-3 score was posted, the Notre Dame Band led the students on a march down the field and through the goal posts, where “hats were tossed up and over in token of the conquest.” A final chorus of the Victory March reverberated among the emptying stands. Then the parade continued toward downtown, where traffic was again stopped and car horns blared triumphantly.

Saturday night, the Crystal Room of the Loraine Hotel was packed for a banquet sponsored by the Knights of Columbus to honor Rockne and his team. Tributes came from Judge “Ikey” Karel, former Wisconsin football star; Badger basketball coach Doc Meanwell, a good friend of Rockne’s; and Notre Dame alums such as Warren Cartier and Willie “Red” Maher, the former Madison high school star who was an Irish teammate of the current players in 1922 and 1923. Rockne and Adam Walsh thanked the local KC Council and praised Wisconsin’s sportsmanship.