

# Calling the Tough Ones

## Over the Fence Was Out to Jim Masker in 1910

[This is the first of a series of articles by officials in various sports on the difficult decisions they have had to make during their careers.]

BY JAMES C. MASKER.

[As told to Charles Bartlett.]

[James C. Masker is the dean of Western conference officials. He completed his thirty-fifth year of football officiating last season. A native of Salina, Kas., he is a graduate of Northwestern university, where he played end and half back. He has worked scores of important games all over the country, and in one stretch of four games in 1931 traveled 11,000 miles.]

THE hardest decision I ever had to make—and one of the quickest of them all—was not called in a Western conference game, but in a battle which decided the Missouri Valley championship.

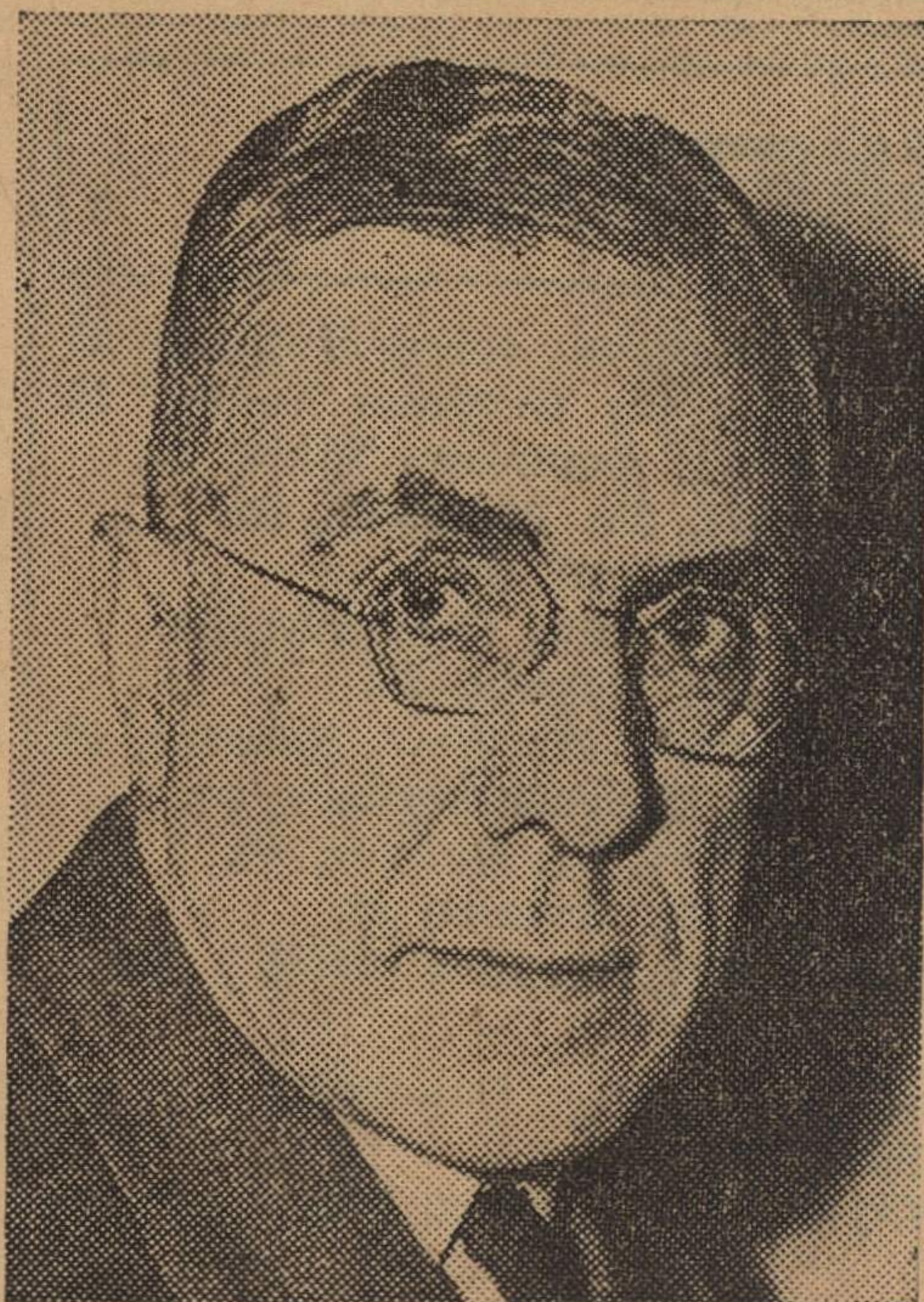
The officials in a present day game have no such difficulty as I encountered that afternoon. At the time of this instance there was no such huge structures as we find enclosing gridirons of today. There was on that day—Nov. 5, 1910—just old McCook field, the home grounds of the University of Kansas eleven at Lawrence, Kas.

The Jayhawkers were meeting the Cornhuskers of the University of Nebraska. Today the feud is one of the oldest in the game, but it wasn't exactly in its infancy then, for the two had begun battling in 1892. And that was the way the game went throughout the first half, which saw Nebraska take a 6 to 0 lead on Owen Frank's touchdown.

### **One Bound and Over the Fence Into Open Country.**

Kansas kicked off at the start of the second half, the ball heading toward Frank. There was nothing remarkable about that, unless you knew the topography of McCook field and the manner in which the ball hit. Close behind the goal posts was a fence running the width of the field. More important, however, was the fact that a creek ran along back of the fence, a stream bordered by jagged rock formation.

There was no provision for ground rules in the football code at that time, and the ball was a free ball until recovered by one side or the other. The kickoff in question struck in front of Frank and then bounced high as he touched it and continued on over the fence. Realizing he had to recover it, the Nebraska back acted quickly and ran straight for the fence.



JAMES MASKER.

being played within the limits of McCook field, not within those of Douglas county. The game eventually ended with Nebraska winning, 6 to 0, by its first half touchdown, but in the minds of Kansas fans who had wagered on the game, it was a 6 to 6 tie. My decision later was upheld by such authorities as Walter Camp and A. A. Stagg, and the following year officials were empowered to make ground rules to fit such situations.