

WILLIAM STEIG

Gridiron G-Man

By Richard L. Neuberger

The young athlete from U.C.L.A. was identified by knife scars on his back. He had, in addition, three complete sets of names. All this was irregular, and Ted Key was ruled ineligible. This incident, together with a few score more, made the professors (who run football on the West Coast) uneasy. They hired G-man Edwin N. Atherton to look into irregularities. Mr. Atherton is now at work, and apprehension among alumni everywhere is acute



Enthusiastic alumni have always done their share in maintaining the "gravy train" for the athletes

ALONG the sundown rim of America, where eight football teams are locked in a tense struggle for the championship of the Pacific Coast Conference and an invitation to the Rose Bowl, mention of Edwin N. Atherton makes fervent alumni shudder and hard-boiled coaches blench. His arrival in any college town on the Pacific seaboard sets 200-pound fullbacks to mopping their foreheads and hiding in the closet, and starts football fans wondering what might take the place of their favorite sport these crisp Saturday afternoons.

Yet the name of Edwin N. Atherton appears in neither football programs nor newspaper line-ups. Multitudes never rise to hurrah his achievements on the gridiron.

This leads to the conclusion that Atherton must occupy a unique position indeed. He does. He is the first Federal Bureau of Investigation graduate ever assigned to ferret out the low-down on college football proselyting. And he has official sanction for the job. The faculties of the Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Athletic Conference have hired him to discover how and why behemoth young men suddenly appear at their colleges, perform mightily on the gridiron and do not become ill-fed, ill-housed or ill-clothed during the process.

In simpler language: Where do the heroes get their money? The professors want to know. They have commissioned Atherton to find out. So right from the beginning he has a different status than anyone

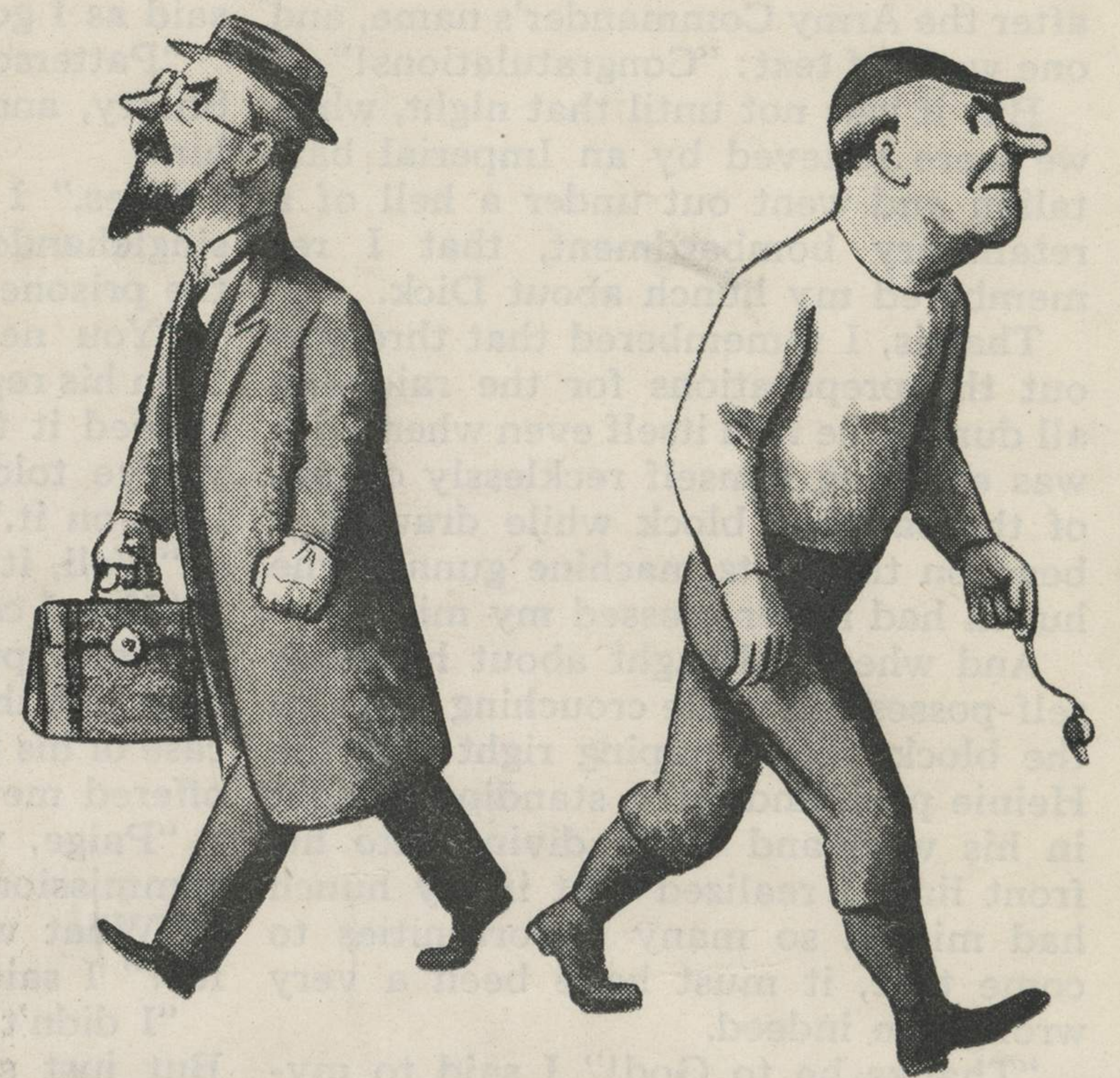
else who ever pried into intercollegiate football. Previous muckraking of the athletes' financial affairs has had to be conducted from the outside. Much of it has been on the sly. The investigators have had to resort to snooping. Atherton, however, can arrive on a campus as conspicuously as he pleases. No keyhole sleuthing for him. His task has faculty approval. Any nimble halfback or colossal guard who refuses to reveal to him the source of the money that pays for T-bone steaks, corduroy trousers, college tuition and tickets to the junior prom may find himself nervously holding down the carpet in the dean's office.

On the Trail of the Gravy Train

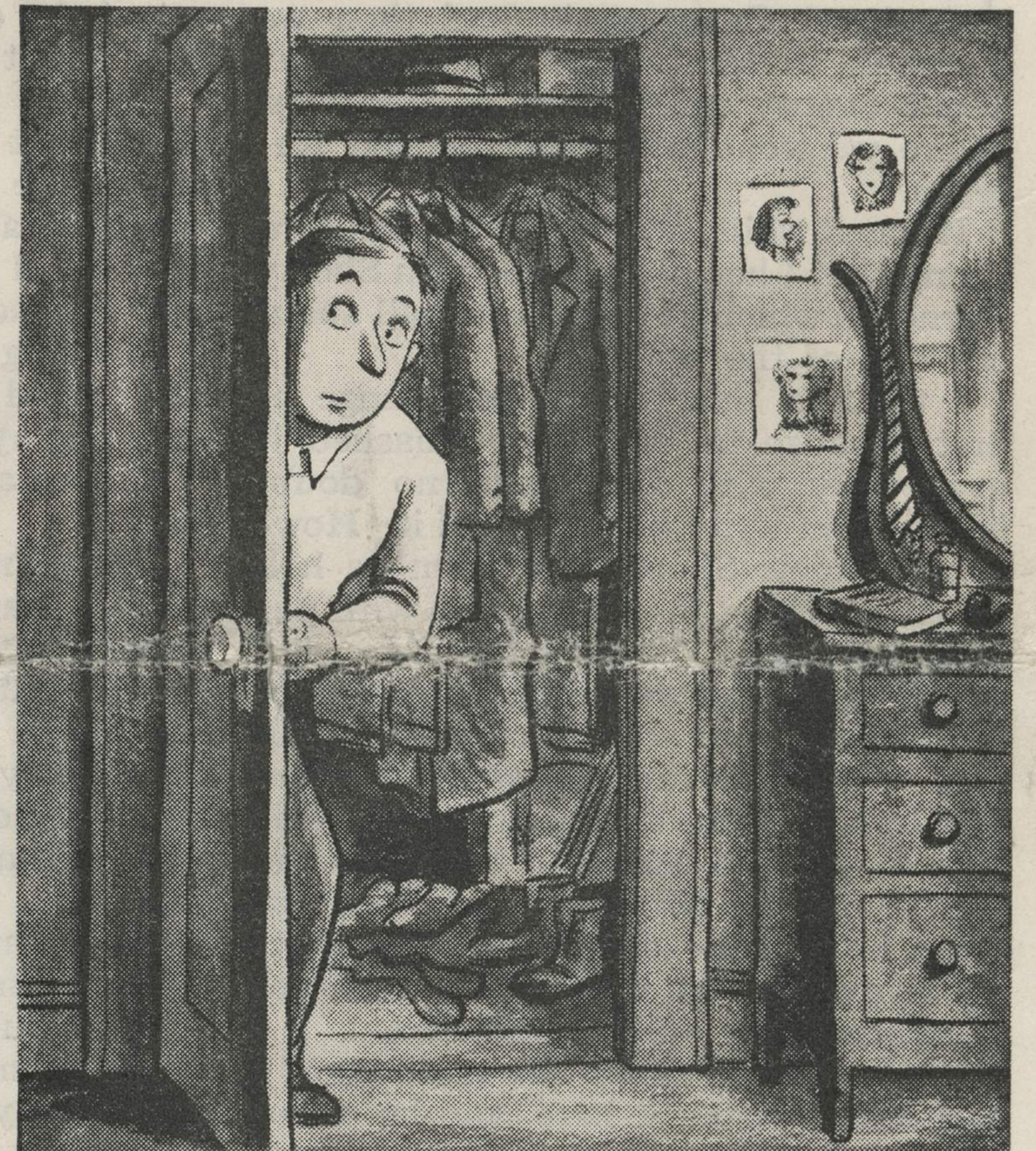
The inquiry into the finances of the gridiron heroes was authorized late last December at the 1937 meeting of the Pacific Coast Conference. The "gravy train" is the way some cynics refer to the practice of bestowing slight emoluments on young men of football prowess, and the gravy train formed the meeting's No. 1 topic of discussion.

Edwin N. Atherton, after being in charge of the F. B. I. offices in San Francisco and Los Angeles, had resigned to go into the investigating business for himself. He had just made a sensational report on graft in the San Francisco police force and he was the chief investigator for the Better Business Bureau of Los Angeles. Here was the fellow to do the job. The professors would put a veteran of the G-men on the trail.

Can a boy of 21 go through a hard football season, hold down a job, and still find time for classes? Mr. Atherton would like to know



Professors grow sternest when they compare the football coaches' salaries to their own



Investigation of subsidized athletes has caused some uneasiness on certain West Coast campuses

What better way to find out who was financing what athletes, and why, when, where and how?

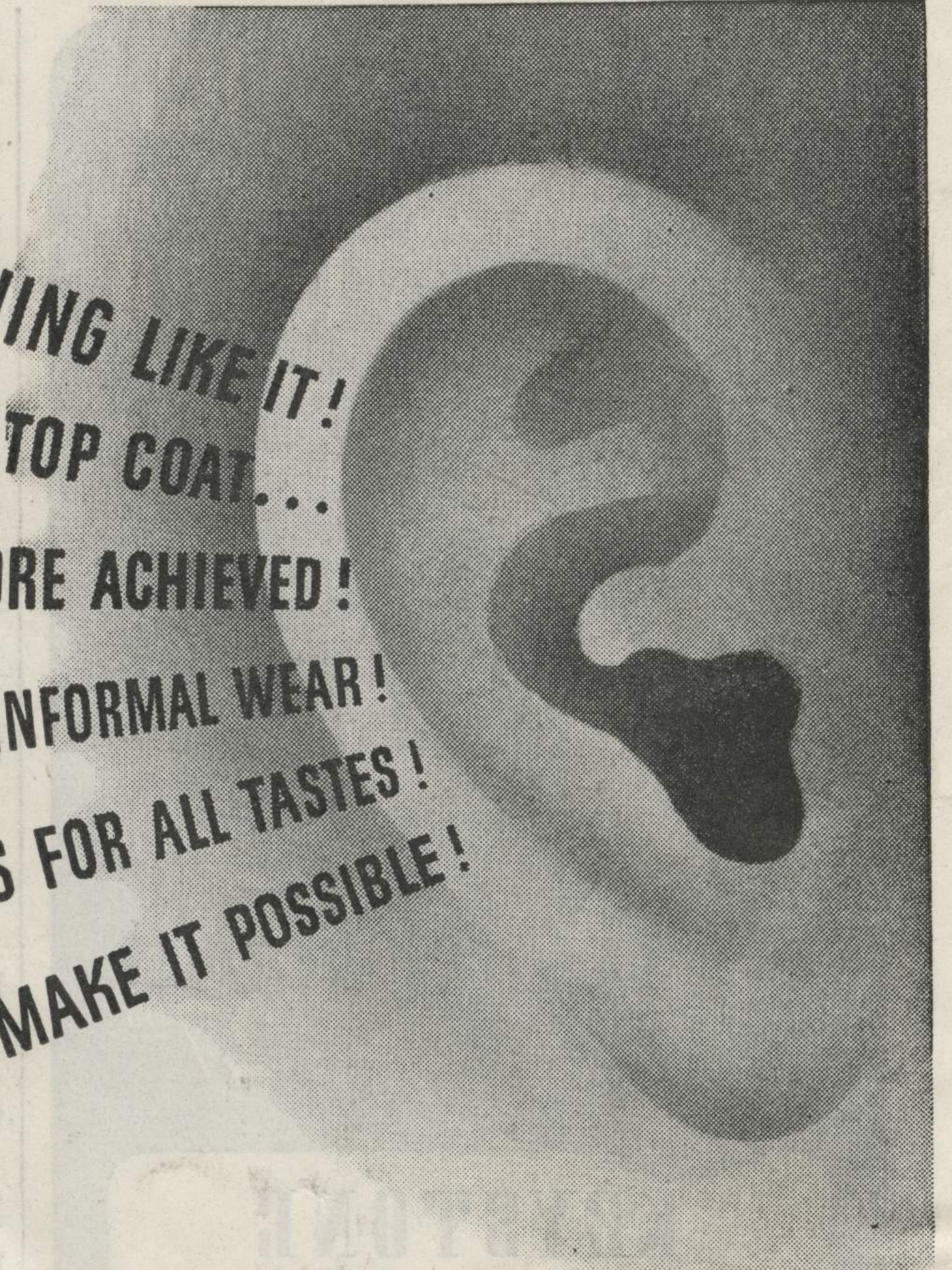
To understand these occurrences, certain circumstances must be explained. The Pacific Coast Conference is governed not by coaches and athletic directors, to the intense disgust of those individuals, but by professors. One professor represents each of the ten schools in the conference. The schools are University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles, Stanford University, University of California, Oregon State College, University of Washington, University of Idaho and University of Montana. The last two institutions, however, do not compete for the football championship.

The whole probe has the coaches in such a funk that Atherton repeatedly assures them his information will not be used to declare ineligible the athletes performing at present. Whatever he uncovers will apply only to future situations.

"My investigation," said he not long ago, "is for research purposes and not to dig up evidence of professionalism that will disqualify from amateur sports any player now competing in the conference."

Atherton, who is forty-two years old and who spent eleven of those years in the service of Uncle Sam, is about halfway through the prowl of the Western athletic scene. He has been surveying conference sports since January. The task will be completed late next spring, when he will present to the professors

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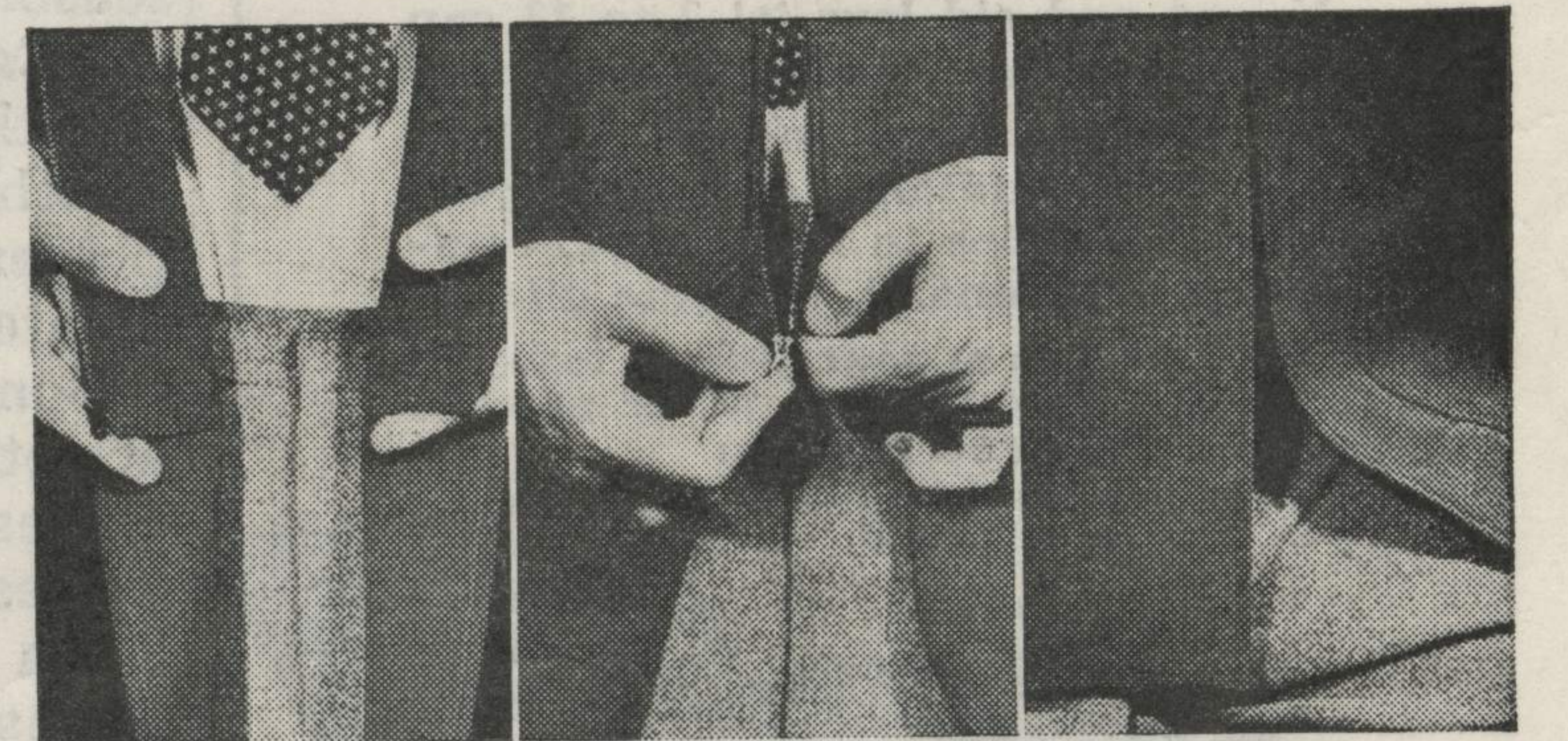
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what they hope will prove to be the most detailed and authentic report ever compiled on the financing of college football players. The report will be presented in secret, but it unquestionably will require Grenadier Guards to keep every newspaperman west of the Rockies from listening at the keyhole. Each college town is morally certain that the most scandalous portions of the report will concern its bitterest athletic rival.

The general trend of the questions has seeped out, and the public has gathered at least an inkling of what the inquisitive professors seek to know about the gravy train.

The Players' Catechism

Here are some of the questions, as passed on by the athletes who have had to answer them:

How did you happen to go to this particular college?

Did you pay your own transportation here? Were any special inducements made to you by alumni?

Why did you select the courses you are taking? Did anyone connected with athletics tell you to register for easy subjects? What were your average grades in high school as compared with your grades in college? Do you have a tutor? Who pays him?

Have you a job on the campus? Who got it for you? Do you actually have to work at it?

Where do you get the money for your college tuition? For your board and room? For your clothes and other incidentals? What special favors are shown you because you play football?

How many complimentary tickets do you get for each game? Do you sell them? To whom? What do you average each Saturday from the sale of these tickets?

Have you a job in the summer? Who got it for you? Would it be taken away if you no longer played football?

What is the total amount of assistance you receive each month in the college year from any source whatsoever? Do you get a scholarship from the college? Is this help entirely contingent on your participation in football?

Atherton resorts neither to threats nor bombast in getting replies, although some of the coaches and athletic directors think the specter of faculty disapproval is threat enough. He merely makes it plain that his next move will be to check the truth of the answers.

What is the cause of all this? What made the professors start talking about the gravy train at that conference meeting last December on Del Monte's sun-bright shore? Why is the Far West the scene of the country's first faculty-sponsored, detective-conducted investigation of football proselyting? What started the whole rumpus?

Tempting, indeed, are the rewards of football success on the Pacific Coast. The team annexing the conference championship automatically represents the region in the Rose Bowl. This usually adds about \$85,000 to the athletic coffers of the college that gets the bid. Then there are all sorts of other post-season games—and the weather is balmy in California when New England is sheathed with ice. There also are gold watches and movie jobs for winning players, and fatter pay checks and greater glory for winning coaches.

Some of the Pacific Coast Conference athletic departments have whopping incomes from football. Numerous big games attract as many as 70,000 people. Even in the frontier Northwest, the teams of Oregon and Washington usually meet before a crowd of 35,000. And always at the end of the gridiron trail the treasure-trove of the Rose Bowl awaits the conference conqueror.

None of this money goes to the athletes whose performances bring it in at

the turnstiles. They get help from other sources. Some of them are given preference at actual jobs, such as mowing campus lawns, waiting on dormitory and fraternity tables, sweeping out buildings and stacking books in the school library. Usually college towns reserve as many public pay-roll spots as possible for the lads who roll up touchdowns.

Private jobs are also set aside for the football heroes. Captain Butch Morse of Oregon got a choice assignment taking charge of a busy service station. Mitchell Frankovich, a triple-threat U. C. L. A. quarterback, was chauffeur for a while for Joe E. Brown, the wide-mouthed movie comedian. A mighty youth named Stanley Kostka followed Doc Spears from Minnesota to Oregon. He washed dishes for a while in the Far West. Then Spears quit as coach at Oregon. Kostka turned back toward the rising sun, and ended up in his home town as an All-Big Ten fullback for the Minnesota Gophers.

In most conference colleges, athletic scholarship funds augment the money from jobs. The word "scholarship," of course, refers exclusively to capacity on the gridiron rather than in the classroom. In some instances the "scholarships" are paid directly to the players. At other times they are applied in the form of vouchers against such routine expenses as campus tuition, fraternity dues and dormitory bills. The scholarship funds are obtained not out of football gate receipts, but are solicited from patriotic alumni and fervent sports fans. The University of Oregon Webfoots recently tried to get proselyting money by asking graduates to "give a buck for a Duck." Alumni were canvassed with regular subscription blanks. Many of the athletic scholarship funds are thus financed with five- and ten-dollar dribbles.

Occasionally wealthy "angels" pour in a whole golden stream at once. A few weeks ago several prominent industrialists added \$2,700 in a single chunk to the gravy-train coffers of a conference team.

All along the Pacific seaboard, particular colleges are reputed to have individual angels who are more than generous in keeping nimble athletes off the WPA. The Doheny oil family has been partisan to the football success of Southern California, and Joe E. Brown is a zealous enthusiast for U. C. L. A. An important oil magnate near Long Beach is reputed to have considerable to do with the number of California boys scoring touchdowns for Oregon State.

A Way to Eliminate Hypocrisy

And so the story goes. This is the background of the situation into which the professors have intruded Atherton and his investigation of athletic proselyting.

There is one group of football fans in the Far West who look at Atherton's survey with considerable optimism. They think it may be the means of eliminating hypocrisy from intercollegiate football. Once all the facts about the gravy train are known, they believe an effort will be made to adopt uniform standards for assistance to football players. This would do away with the camouflage of giving financial aid in the form of soft jobs and outright donations. The fans who take this position insist that some sort of help is necessary if a boy is to play football and keep up in his studies and at the same time meet the expenses of an education. Why not the same amount of assistance at each college? Why let the size of a school's gravy train determine the quality of its football team? If Atherton's peek into the proselyting problem does something about this situation, one group of fans, at least, will regard his enterprise as a success.

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The fruits of failure are not so alluring. In the rough-and-ready jamboree of Pacific Coast athletics, character-building and ivy-covered traditions do not compensate for 21-0 pastings. The coach who loses soon finds himself with walking papers stuffed into his reluctant hands. No jobs as movie grid-iron heroes await players over whose prostrate forms touchdowns are scored. Unsuccessful teams stock no college treasures, and neither do they build stadiums, basketball pavilions or tennis courts.

So the pressure to win is terrific. That means plenty of pressure and competition in the gentle practice of inducing young men with broad shoulders and sinewy muscles to matriculate at Dear Old This-'n'-That.

The New Wild West

In the past five or six years, the scramble among the conference colleges for star prep-school athletes has been about as grim and savage as were the old wars on the coast between cavalry dragoons and hostile Indians. From their cloistered classrooms, the professors have watched in horror as rival coaches, athletic directors and alumni have fought over ace halfbacks like starved wolves at a caribou feast.

This melee over prize football material is not necessarily confined to such near-by colleges as Oregon and Washington. Frequently it extends vast distances into the Far West.

The greatest high-school athlete in Portland's history was Bobby Grayson. He was heralded as the boy who would make Oregon State the conference champion, for surely he would go to the campus where his brother had been before him.

But Stanford, 700 miles away, was not unmindful of the unstoppable quality of Bobby's line smashes. Stanford alumni in the Portland area scur-

ried about busily. Oregon State saw its dream of football conquest fade. Pretty soon Bobby turned up at Palo Alto—and his family, too! Needless to remark, when he came back to Portland as an All-America and rammed Oregon State around like a locomotive nudging empty boxcars, boos and hisses were plentifully mingled with the other noises of the trouncing.

In 1933 the University of Oregon had a hard-driving team that tied for the conference championship. Then some prying professor noticed that of the eleven varsity performers, both tackles, both halfbacks and a guard were from California, a guard and the fullback were from Minnesota and an end was from South Dakota. This left three players from the state of Oregon. And the beards of several scholarly professors trembled perceptibly when it was discovered that the football players from afar had been spared the out-of-state tuition fees required of other students.

Eligibility squabbles rock every football circuit, but those in the Pacific Coast Conference have been especially volcanic. They have had all the tumult of the frontier West and none of the restraint of the genteel East.

Not so long ago a line-pulverizing fullback for U. C. L. A. was found to have played football elsewhere under two different names before he began performing in the Pacific Coast Conference. The other nine colleges raised a din of protest that sounded from the Mexican border to British Columbia, and the professors ruled ineligible one Ted Key, alias William Gelhausen, alias Tex Maness. The affair assumed a bizarre and garish tinge when Professor J. Earle Miller of U. C. L. A. established identification by scars on Key's back from knife wounds suffered when he was a deputy sheriff in Texas. With Key rolling majestically through opposing forwards, U. C. L. A. had gone through

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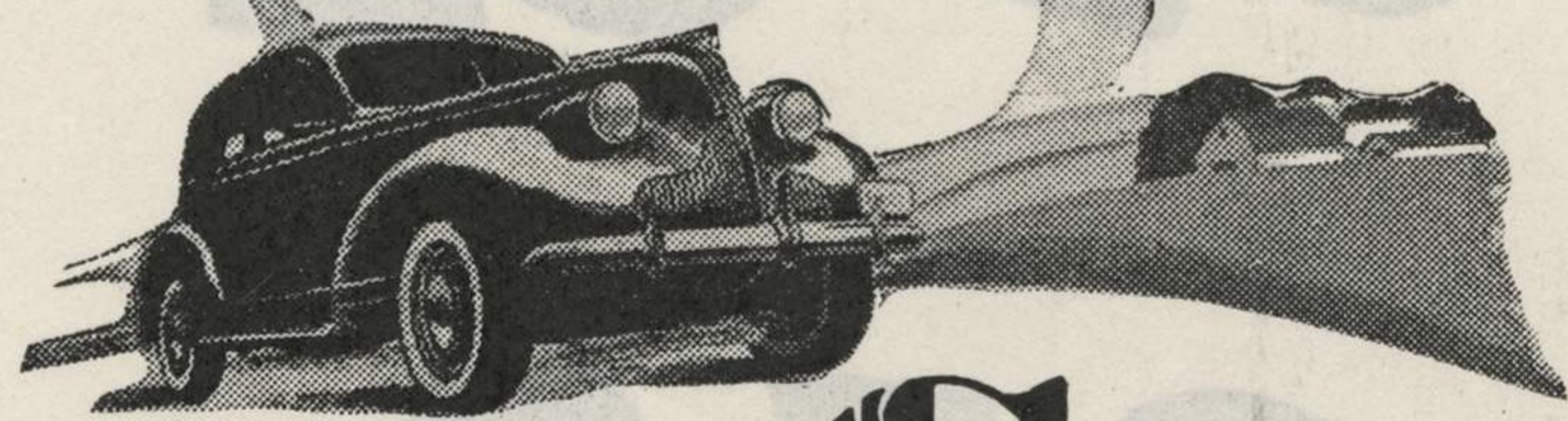
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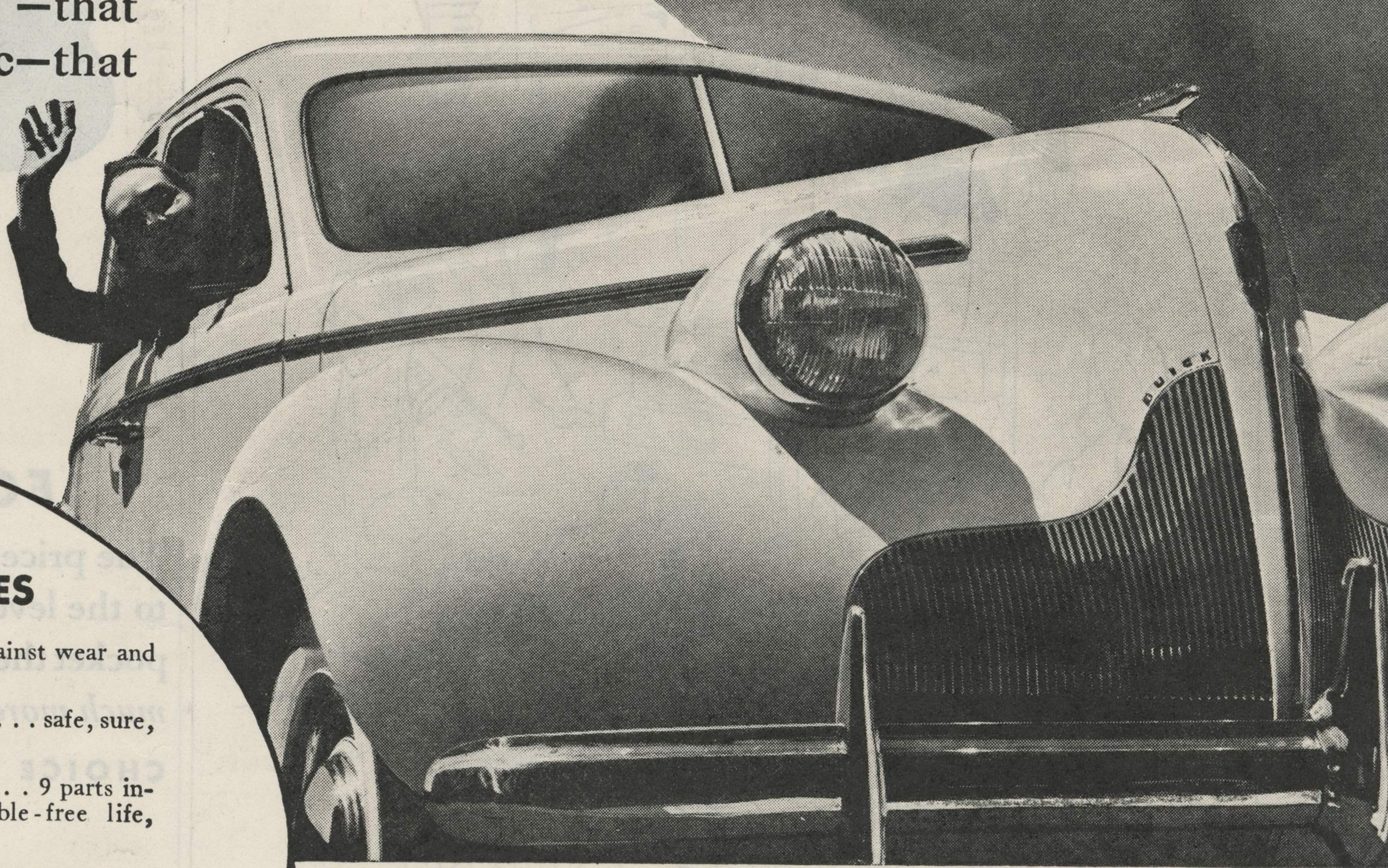
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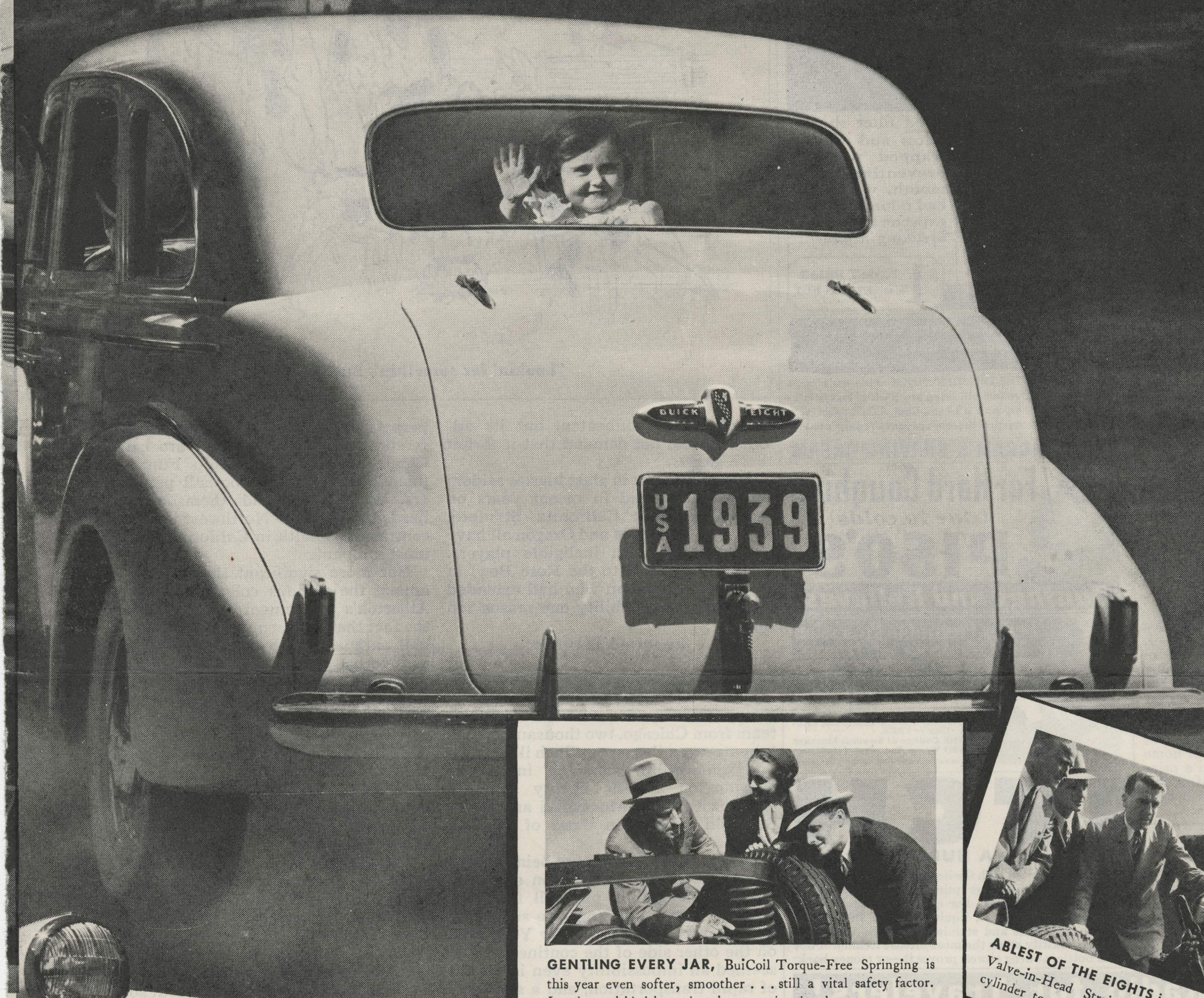
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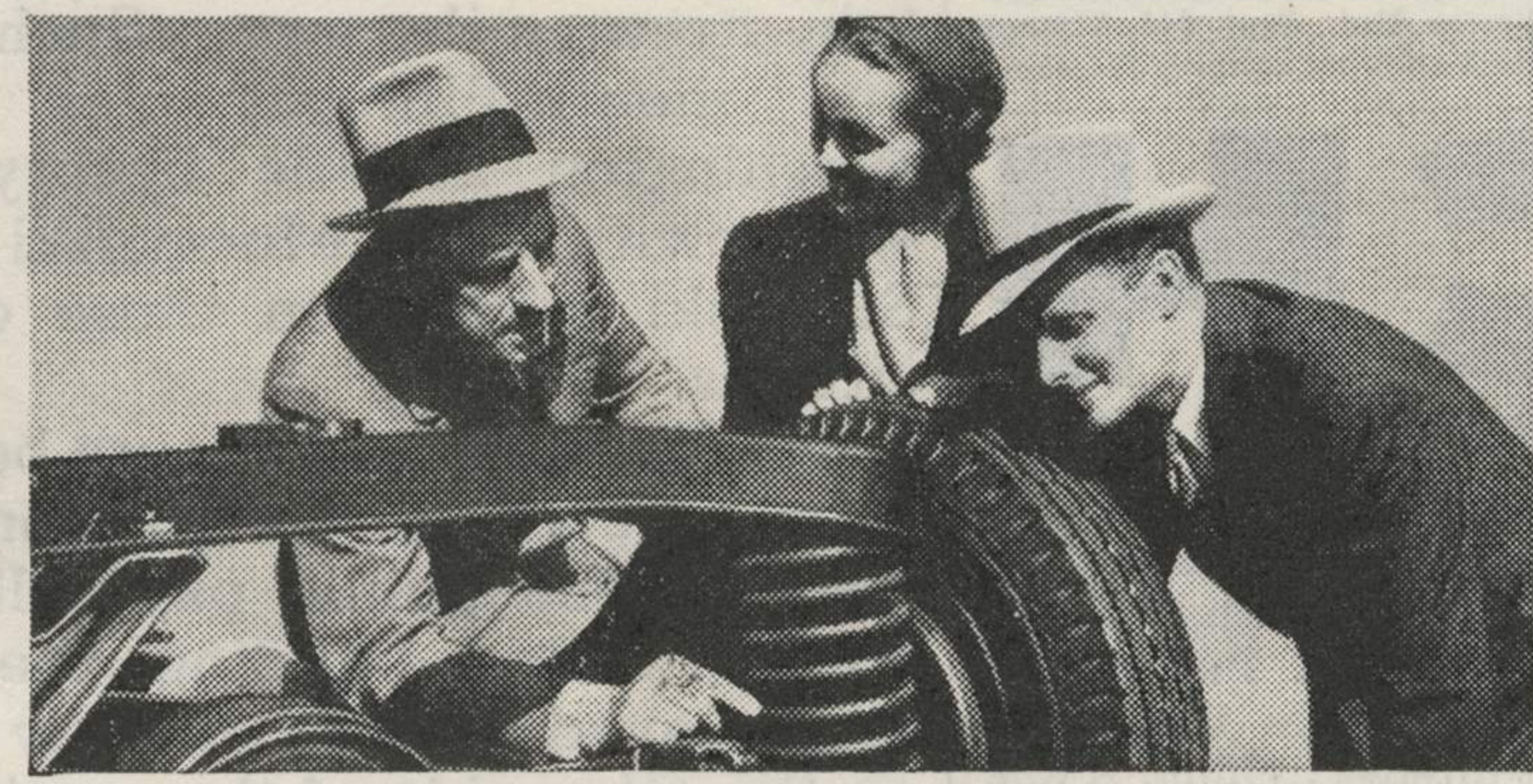
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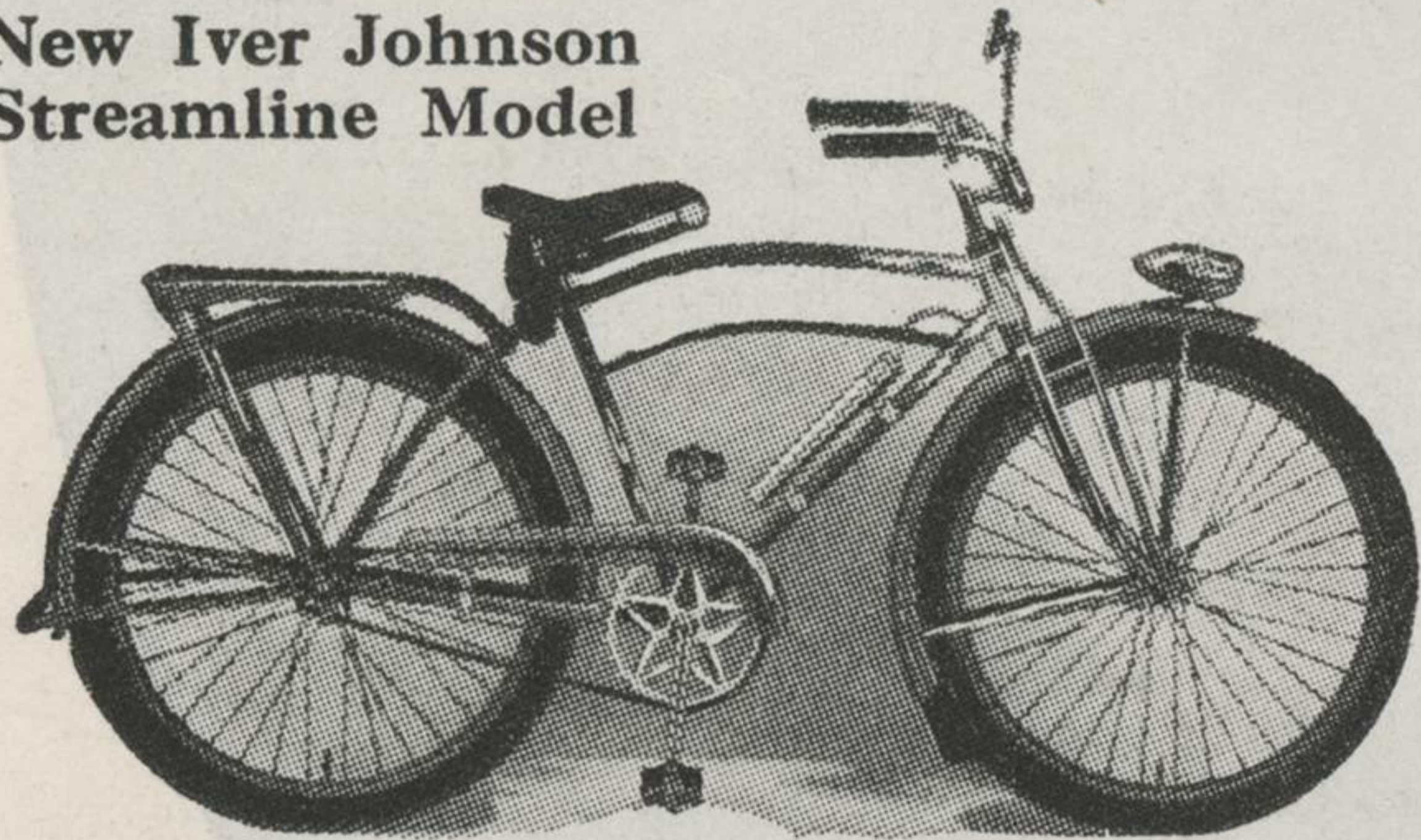
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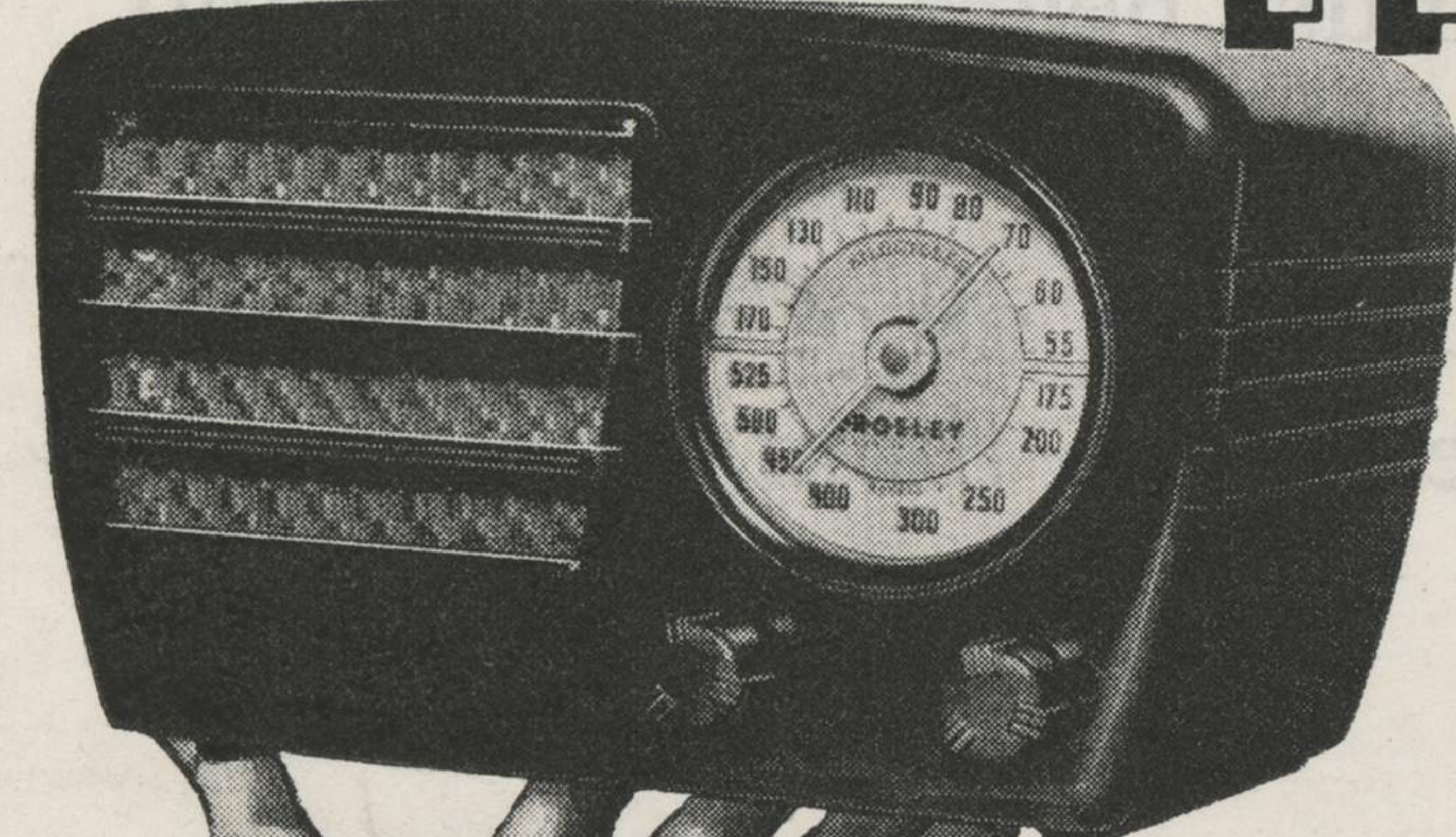
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"Lookin' fer somethin', Bud?"

PAUL BROWN

the conference unbeaten, but its adversaries did not demand that it forfeit those games.

Football teams in glass houses seldom throw stones, and in recent years on the Pacific slope California, Stanford, Southern California and Oregon all have won victories with ineligible players. Stanford marched to the Rose Bowl in 1934 with a lineman who had extended his years of ineligibility one season too far.

Imported Elevens

Washington, in its turn, has been the target for catcalls and hoots because of the numerous young men on its football team from Chicago, two thousand mountain-strewn miles away. Such illustrious and mouth-filling names in recent Washington athletic history as Fritz Waskowitz, Matt Muczynski and Steve Slivinski have been those of Chicago citizens.

Oregon State had its turn being roared at when some of its gridiron stalwarts were on the public pay roll for work done in college buildings the same day they played football in New York City on the other side of the continent. This seemed an impossibility even in an era of rapid transportation, and a state political administration wobbled perilously for a little while.

The enlisting of Atherton to get to the bottom of the proselyting system came as the climax to this long series of developments. There have been a multitude of conjectures as to why the professors from all the colleges agreed to have him pry into the heretofore undivulged secrets of the gravy train.

One possible reason for the unanimity with which the former G-man was added to the conference pay roll is that the rubbish in the other fellow's yard always seems dirtier. Another is that teams such as Southern California and Stanford, located near large centers of population, have watched their adversaries from the outpost Northwest roam afield like explorers in search of football players. Coaches of the Oregon and Washington teams hover hopefully around the gridirons of California's numerous junior colleges, waiting to corral or ambush potential All-Americans.

There, hint the California partisans, is something to get at! And the conference members in the Northwest wilderness have long had the notion that in the California cities the money spigots of the athletic departments discharge a

perpetual golden flow. Many of the conference colleges have what are called Commonwealth Scholarship Funds to finance hard-pressed football performers. When these funds themselves are hard pressed in the Northwest visions of contrasting wealth in California are the most rampant.

But more significant than jealousies among the various colleges, so far as Atherton's assignment is concerned, is the fact that between faculties and football enthusiasts no enormous quantity of love has ever been lost. Professors' faces are sternest when they compare coaches' salaries with their own, or when they learn that swift quarterbacks and gigantic tackles get favors and privileges not granted Phi Beta Kappas and scholarly thesis writers. On one conference campus dissension sprouted out of the fact that the football coach got \$12,000 a year and the dean of the law school \$3,600.

This lack of affection between classroom and gridiron had a unique manifestation at the University of Oregon a few years ago. Athletics at the Pacific Coast Conference colleges are managed not by the colleges themselves, but by separate entities known as Associated Student corporations. Not without some faculty advice, several undergraduates in the law school suddenly contended that it was illegal to compel students to pay dues into these corporations.

A Jolt for the Conference

The athletic department, not to be thus confounded, hurried to the legislature and got a law passed making it legal. The law students, also not to be confounded, drafted referendum petitions to put the law on the ballot. Faculty members gleefully chipped in fifty-cent pieces and dollar bills to help pay for the printing. A state-wide campaign ensued. In mournful tones, the athletic department warned the people that if the law did not pass the University of Oregon might have to evaporate from the football scene. On election day the law got 50,971 votes, but 163,191 were cast against it. In the university town it lost by a margin of almost 6 to 1. A significant point was it got scarcely any votes in the precincts where the professors voted.

The rest of the conference looked at the Oregon election returns and gave a collective shiver. Was that what the voters thought of intercollegiate foot-

ball on the Pacific Coast? Would the Oregon incident spread elsewhere? This fear seemed valid, for similar legal proceedings have just been brought by budding young lawyers against the Associated Student corporation at the University of Washington. Not since the voters canceled the Associated Student dues has Oregon's football team been in the first division. And the professors, prior to hiring Atherton, implied that the whole episode was a hint to do something about the gravy train.

Will the investigation result in that something being done? Probably all the big colleges in America will watch intently for the answer to this question, because Atherton himself maintains, "The Pacific Coast Conference is not faced with any peculiar problems of its own but is confronted with the same difficulties which beset college athletics all over the country." The one-time F. B. I. agent makes it clear that although the gravy train may be diluted, it most certainly will not be emptied out. He believes that most of the lads who play football must earn their way through college.

Making the Gravy Train Legal

How, he asks, can they do both these things and also keep up in their studies? Intercollegiate football is a rigorous game. It requires intensive practice and rigid conditioning. Trips are long and games give hard knocks. Can a boy, twenty-one or twenty-two years old, go through all this and still hold down a job and go to classes? Atherton thinks such a schedule would impose a strain on the constitution of an African elephant.

"The results of my survey," the former G-man says, "will be carefully analyzed by the faculty men and from this analysis the conference hopes to be able to establish definite and reasonable rules concerning legitimate financial aid to athletes. These rules will be enforced by an organization set up by the conference for this purpose."

Such words are reassuring, but the coaches and athletic directors are holding their breaths and waiting to see what happens. Some of them are not so sure that an incident that occurred a short time ago might not have been the culminating event in persuading the professors to hire Atherton.

Reed College is a completely academic little institution in Oregon, from which its young president, Dexter M. Keezer, likes to take pot shots at big-time football and condemn the conference schools for being "immersed in commercialized athletics." One day he was scheduled to address an alumni meeting. He had no particular message to impart, so he addressed them humorously—or at least he thought it was humorously.

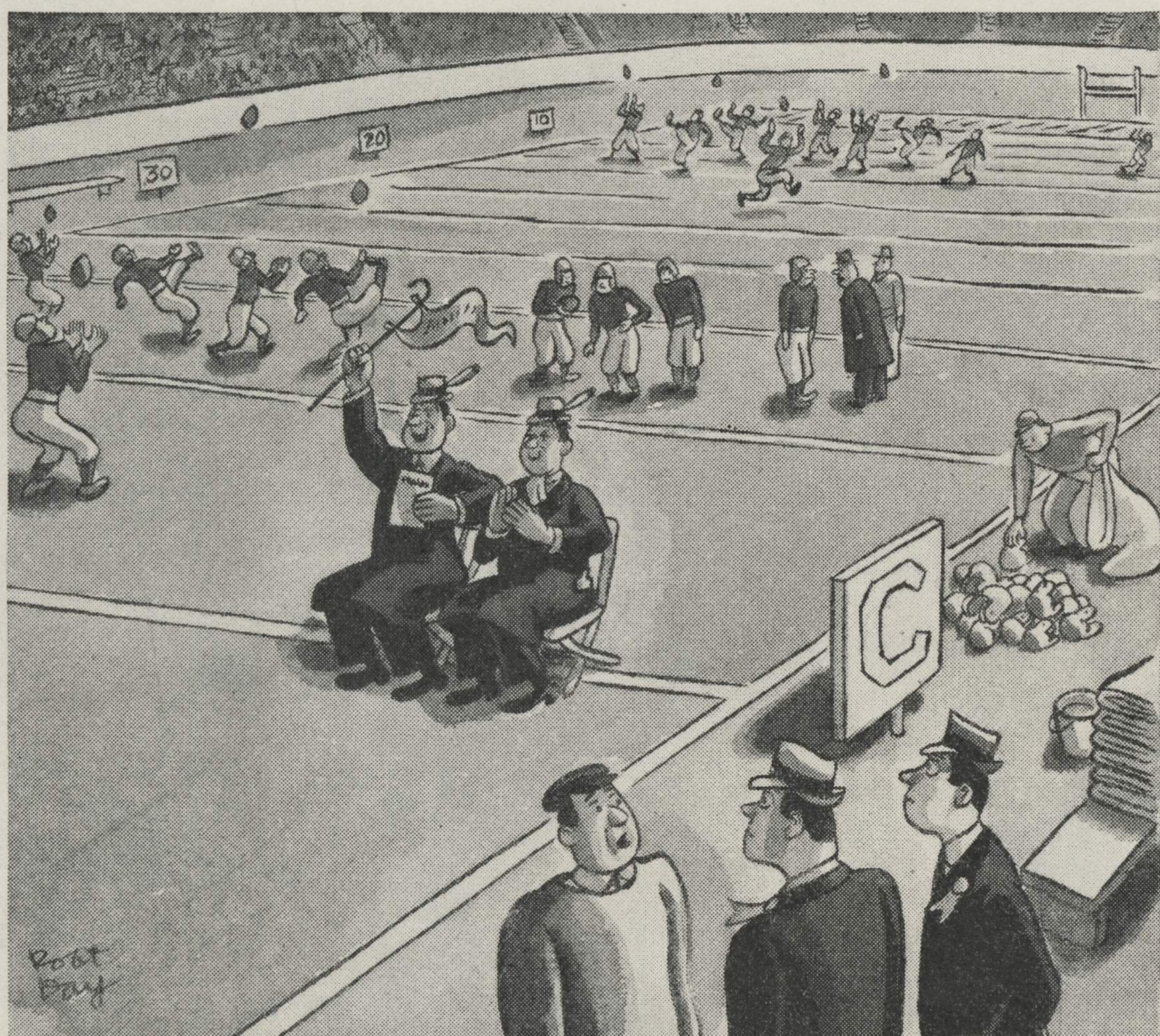
He said Reed College had stayed out of big-time football long enough. The situation would be remedied by hiring the best team in the country. Players would be paid a going wage for their services, getting from \$70 to \$100 a month. There also would be a special faculty solely concerned with the duty of doing the players' lessons for them. As an added inducement to the athletes, the profits from football games would be divided on a 50-50 basis, with half going to the college and half to the players. The athletes' share of the gate receipts would be impounded in a trust fund, with each player getting his cut on graduation day. The boys would be rewarded in direct proportion to their value to the team. A touchdown would net so much money, a tackle so much, a completed pass so much, and right on down the list. Keezer expressed the hope that this would result in a do-or-die spirit and a will to win never before seen on a football field.

These words were duly reported in the press.

The next day the Reed College gymnasium swarmed with brawny young men. They jammed the place to the doors. All wanted positions on the wonder team of the age. Hundreds of letters came from coaches desiring to lead this super-aggregation. In the early morning hours Keezer was dragged out of bed by an urgent long-distance telephone call.

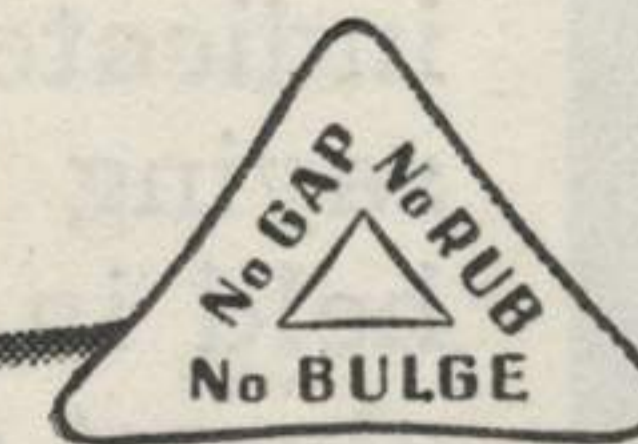
"Say, is this Doc Keezer?" asked the voice of a football coach of some fame in the Far West. "That idea of yours is great stuff. It'll have all this other two-for-a-nickel business beat a mile. Let me coach 'at team of yours and we can lick our weight in mountain lions. Any kid who gets \$100 a touchdown is gonna score. 'At's all—he's gonna score!"

Keezer hung up the phone sadly and went back to bed.



"They say they bought tickets on the fifty-yard line and they're going to sit on the fifty-yard line" ROBERT DAY

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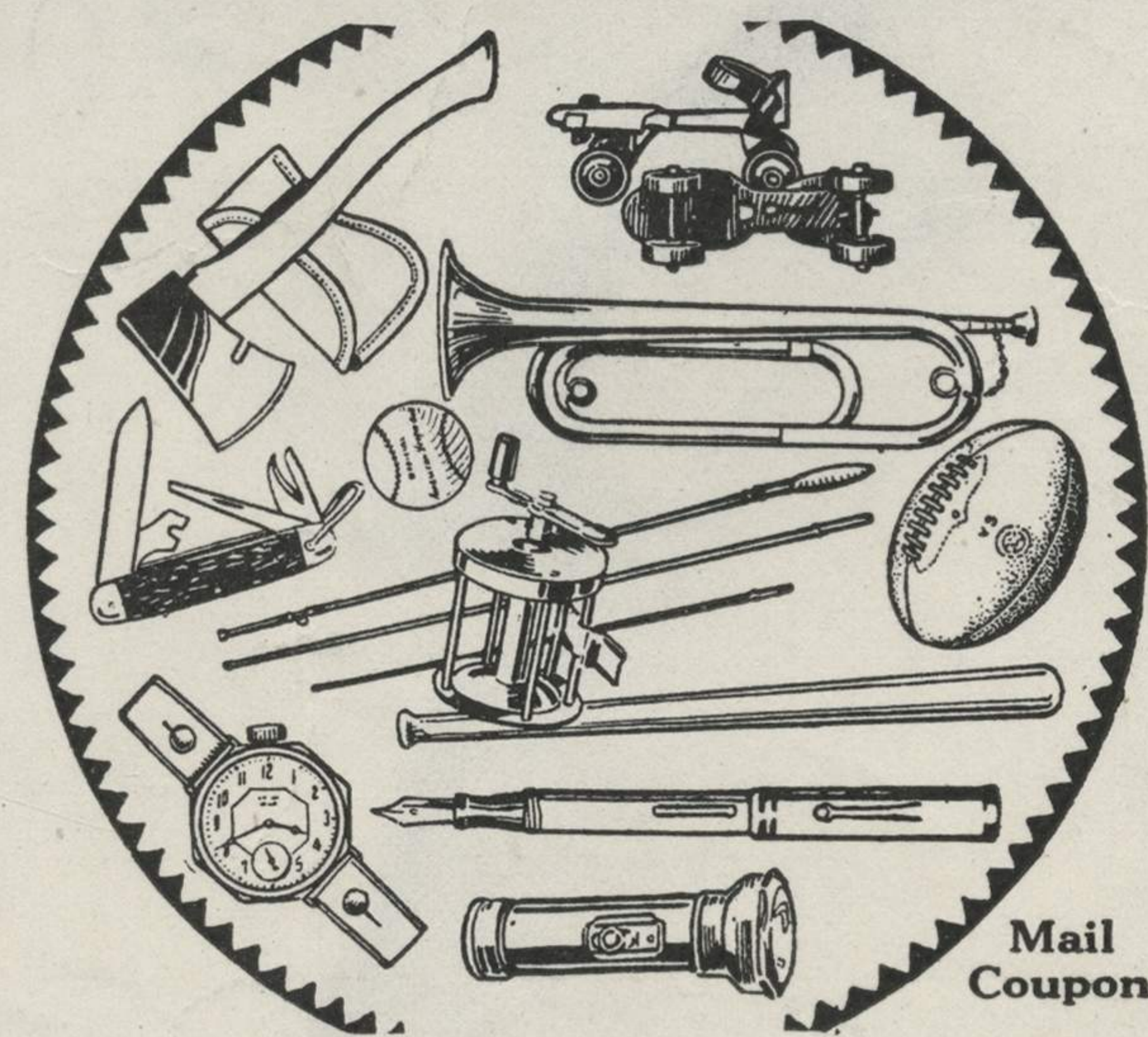
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