

# Replay

by RALPH KEYES

## TINY MAXWELL CUT A WIDE SWATH AS A FOOTBALL PLAYER, REF AND WRITER

The year was 1905, and the occasion was a football game between Penn and Swarthmore College at Philadelphia's Franklin Field. By game's end, as legend has it, the face of American football had been changed forever.

The Quakers, led by All-America quarterback Vince Stevenson, were a recognized power. Swarthmore was a small college, growing bigger, whose team was paced by a 6' 4", 240-pound guard named Robert W. (Tiny) Maxwell. Under the rules of those days, Maxwell not only blocked and tackled but also often carried the ball.

Penn's game plan was to put Maxwell out of action as quickly as possible. Swarthmore hoped to do the same to Stevenson. Later, Maxwell, who died in 1922, recalled that, while on defense, he was struggling to get his battered body off the ground: "Just as I was getting up, Stevie came over and said, 'Tiny, you're great. You've played the greatest game I ever saw in my life. You've been the whole line. I'm going to lay off you.' I believed him, and when I got into the line I didn't get set up very strong. That sonuvagun yelled out, 'No signals, fellows. I'll take the ball right through that big slob Maxwell.'

"Stevenson went through me as if I was paper, and he socked me on the jaw, too, as he went through."

By the end of the game Maxwell's nose was broken, his eyes were swollen nearly shut and his face resembled steak tartare. According to some gridiron histories, a newspaper photo of his face shocked President Theodore Roosevelt. Two days later, in a meeting with major college representatives, the President demanded that they clean up football or he'd ban the game outright. Whether T.R. in fact saw a photo of Maxwell is doubtful, but there's no question the meeting was held—almost certainly because T.R. had become increasingly distressed by the extreme brutality in the sport—and several others shortly after it. Three months later the rules were changed to double the

yardage required for a first down from five to 10, reduce playing time from 70 minutes to 60, add restrictions against roughing, establish a neutral zone on the line of scrimmage the length of the ball and legalize the forward pass. The result was football pretty much as we know it today.

With Maxwell, legend is so intertwined with fact that the two are hard to separate. Did he write the words to *Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl* and sell them to Edgar Smith, the song's credited lyricist, for \$25? The late Gene Kelly—onetime Voice of the Phillies—reported this as fact. Did Maxwell spend his spare time in college playing cards in the back room of a local pharmacy while waiting to be summoned to practice by coach George Brooke? One of Brooke's successors, Lew Elverson, says that's the way he heard it.

A native of Chicago, Maxwell began playing college football at the University of Chicago in 1902 for Amos Alonzo Stagg. He also boxed and set school hammer-throwing and shotputting records. "When Tiny put the shot," humorist Arthur (Bugs) Baer observed, "the shot stayed put."

Throughout his life Maxwell was the target of good-natured ribbing because of his size (by his mid-30s, he not only towered over the average man but, at 300-plus pounds, also weighed twice as much) and his stuttering. But Maxwell's struggle with a speech impediment made his physical presence less intimidating and in fact increased his popularity. It's said that after he transferred to Swarthmore in 1904, Maxwell got permission from Brooke to go the 11 miles into Philadelphia one night on condition that he return by 1 a.m. On his way back to his room, Maxwell happened to awaken Brooke. "What time is it?" demanded the coach.

"A little before wuh, wuh, one," said Maxwell.

At that point a clock struck five.

"Either you're a liar," responded Brooke, "or that clock stutters as badly as you do."

The most frequently repeated Maxwell tale involved a Georgetown-SMU game he's said to have officiated. (Or was it Notre Dame-Harvard? Or Villanova-Haverford?) As the story goes, a lineman for the Catholic institution bit the finger of one of the players from the non-Cath-

olic school. When the bitten player complained, Maxwell replied, "I'll tell you what to do. Next year schedule the game on a Friday because they d-d-d-don't eat meat then."

Maxwell's career as a referee began when he filled in at the last minute for an official who didn't show up. This followed a brief postgraduate course of play for such teams as the Massillon Tigers and Canton Bulldogs. Because of his tremendous size, quickness and knowledge of the rules, Maxwell was soon in demand for such games as Harvard-Yale and Army-Navy. "He plays a roving game," Ring Lardner once remarked of Maxwell's officiating style, "swaying from side to side like a chained hippo. When any trouble arises, Tiny just falls on it and irons it out."

At a time when football refs wore street clothes, Maxwell was hard to miss. And he brought a sense of humor to his duties. According to one story, after Maxwell had followed a Pittsburgh runner for the length of the field in a breakaway play against Penn State, the Nittany Lions' captain insisted that Pitt's back had stepped out of bounds at his own 10-yard line. If Tiny could only come back there with him, he'd point out the cleat mark.

"Young man," Maxwell is said to have panted, "If y-you want me to go back and look at that cleat mark, you'll have to hire me a t-taxi."

During a Yale-Harvard game (some say Yale-Princeton) Maxwell obstructed a Crimson tackler, preventing him from bringing down an Eli ball carrier. As Yale's players celebrated the resulting big gain, Maxwell told them, "Gentlemen of Yale, I fully expect to be invited to your annual b-banquet and be awarded my v-arsity 'Y.' I have j-just turned in the best Yale play of the day."

In time Maxwell's role as an official was to influence football considerably. Walter Camp said Maxwell set the standard for fairness and competence. Maxwell's apartment near City Hall in Philadelphia became a gathering place for fellow officials. Out of these meetings grew the East's first formal association of football officials.

Maxwell also became one of the rare football players to make the leap from the field to press box. In 1914, after a journalistic apprenticeship in Chicago as a reporter for the *Record-Herald*, he be-

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gan writing a sports column for Philadelphia's *Public Ledger*. Two years later Maxwell became sports editor of the *Evening Public Ledger*, a position he held until he died. Maxwell's column was stylish and good humored. After a Princeton loss to Navy in 1921 he reported, "Newby, a halfback, caressed a Navy man on the jaw with his closed fist, and for that act of kindness was allowed to witness the battle from the sidelines."

Following an upset of Harvard by Kentucky's Centre College that he had also refereed in 1921, Maxwell wrote that "the Colonels had thousands of [friends] on the field. I remember this because every time a penalty was given against them the crowd would breathe hard and make sibilant sounds like one suffering with the asthma."

Early in the summer of '22, Maxwell and some friends went for a drive in the countryside north of Philadelphia. As they were returning that night, Maxwell noticed a car stopped directly in front of him on the road. Fearing a holdup, he speeded up to go around the car—and ran head-on into a truck taking Boy Scouts home from a picnic. Nan Pollock, now 85, one of those in Maxwell's party, recalls seeing him pinned beneath the wreckage. "Help the others!" he kept repeating. "Help the others! I can wait."

Maxwell spent the next few days in a Norristown, Pa. hospital, having suffered seven broken ribs, a punctured lung and a dislocated hip. Pneumonia developed, and delirium followed. Late on the night of June 29, Maxwell was visited by his neighbor and close friend, Charles Heeb. Emerging from his delirium he talked of packing his bags and going home. "Take two hours' sleep, and I'll go with you," Heeb told him.

"All right kid," replied Maxwell. "I'll go to sleep." And he did. Tiny was 37 when he died.

In 1937, the Maxwell Memorial Football Club was founded in Philadelphia to award trophies in his name and promote football safety. A dwindling few members recall the man himself.

"He was the salt of the earth," wrote Damon Runyon after Maxwell died. "A grand fellow. We wish we had the power to tell you what a wonderful chap he was, to make you understand what he meant to us and all his other friends. He was, physically, a tremendous man. Nature had to make provision for the housing of his great heart."

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