

ELEMENTS OF Style

■ THE H-BOMB

Harvard's 1920 Rose Bowl champs, including the author's father, circled.



Fisher, Coach
Havemeier
Ryan
Burnham
Desmond
Nelson
A. Horween
Stegle
Sedgwick
Murray, Capt.
Phinney
Kane
Fellon
Casey
Phibin
Church
Clark
Gratwick
Woode
Belknap, Mgr.
Hubbard
1919

THE BIG GAME

A GRAFFITI-RIDDEN SIDEBOARD IS A HARVARD SON'S LINK TO THE YEAR THE ROSE BOWL WAS CRIMSON

■ Along one wall in our dining room stands a long, narrow table we use as a sideboard. It's so nicked and gouged and scraped, you'd think it were either termite infested or it had been grossly abused by furniture movers. Actually, the scars are the work of generations of Harvard men whittling away with penknives during lectures at Sever Hall, where the table spent the first half of the twentieth century. Most of the graffiti is as dull as the lectures must have been—initials, the results of the Harvard-Yale game and, ominously, the name HITLER etched in block letters. But way down to the left, another carving stands out:

EAST VS. WEST
H 7 OREGON STATE 6
PASADENA 1920

This is why we have it. This was evidence of the Rose Bowl game before the bowl itself was built. My father played for H in that game, the only time Harvard has ever played in one. A big man, six feet four, he was the left tackle on both offense and defense, which he called the "honor position," since it put him at the brunt of the opposing attack. The Rose Bowl game today, of course, is limited to the Pac-10 and the Big Ten. But then, it used to be the Super Bowl of a sport that was played almost entirely on college campuses.

My father loved to talk about the game. I was the last of his six children; he was 55 when I was born. So the game, like the table,

was out of another era. He told me how the geographical loyalties were so fierce that not even Yalies could be persuaded by Oregon coaches to spill the beans about the Harvard attack. On the six-day train ride west, the Harvard squad, to stay in shape, sometimes ran alongside the train (which the engineer presumably slowed down a tad). My father also boxed, and in Los Angeles an eager press agent arranged for a photograph of him with his fists up against Jack Dempsey, then the world heavyweight champion. Douglas Fairbanks gave the Harvard team a tour of his Hollywood compound and in return received a seat on the bench—right beside Charlie Chaplin.

Thirty-two thousand other fans watched Oregon take an early 3-0 lead, then Harvard come back with a touchdown and an extra point—drop-kicked in those days. Twice, Oregon tried a diabolical play in which its quarterback, pretending to be injured, would lie prone on the field until a teammate said, "Are you all right?" That was the signal to hike the ball to a running back who then hightailed it down the field. All to no avail. At the end, when Oregon let fly with a last field-goal attempt for the win, my father actually got down on his knees to pray. And God was a Harvard man that day.

That one game was probably the high point of my father's life. He was only a sophomore, but after a frustrating career as an investment adviser, he never again achieved anything close to his Rose Bowl glory. He acquired the table sometime in the '60s, about a decade before his death in 1976. By then, my half brother Harry had played for a Harvard team, although a far less successful one, winning but one game his senior year. I tried out for the freshman team. Being neither big nor especially fast, I was little more than a tackling dummy and quit after the first day, when a couple of massive pulling guards pounded me into the turf. That's my only personal experience of Harvard football—except when I touch this whittled table that has a tiny piece of history in its grooves.—JOHN SEDGWICK

