

THE IMPOSSIBLE FOOTBALL FIELD

This is a true story about a small number of men who accomplished what to some people seemed an impossibility. A group of men who were willing and able to stick with a project until they had completed it. An unselfish few who worked with their hands, brains and heart and built a Football Plant that became the envy of the entire southern section of a state. This is not a story of people who stationed themselves on street corners, or canvassed the community merchants begging for hand-outs and help. This group got help from the community, the merchants and others, but the help they received was through the honest sweat and labor of many within the community. The entire town learned an invaluable lesson and became a better place in which to live because of a small group of dedicated men.

Several years ago (1950), in a small town in Southern Ohio, Wheelersburg, a Football Boosters Club was formed. This Club was comprised of an interested group of community minded and athleticly oriented men who faced a situation, perhaps not too different from one which many of you have faced. They had a football team, a football coaching staff, high morale and everything that goes along with a good football situation, but they did not have a Football Field! We were being forced to play all away from home games. As coach of this team, I was very much interested in the intent of our Football Boosters Club. After several days of discussion as to how to begin, we just began. Following is the story of the results of the tenacity, determination, work and sweat of this group of unselfish people.

We first had to obtain the land, and this was accomplished more easily than we had hoped, simply by laying our cards on the table and asking a hard working farmer for the use of enough of his land for a suitable football area. He did the logical thing, gave us a hill side that was not suitable for his crop farming. Looking back on this now, I am surprised that we could have become enthused about this gift, because it fell short of being long enough to squeeze a football field onto, but never-the-less we were enthused. When word got around that we had land available, it wasn't long until we were able to entice the township and county to lend us the use of their roadgraders to chisel the hillside into a plateau that eventually became long enough for a football field and a half, end to end. Much of the field was "fill" dirt, but we packed it and "ripped" it so to speak, with donated rail-road ties. Before putting the finishing touch on this phase of our overall project, we advertised that we were looking for volunteers who were willing to donate their time and equipment. An article was put in the local newspaper to the effect that, if we were really going to finish the job we had begun, then men and

equipment were needed. We set a certain week-end as the must date for completing the general outline of the field. I'll never forget what followed. On the dead-line week-end we had the following equipment plus the necessary men - and it was all **gratis**.

Five donated bulldozers with operators, seven donated dump trucks with drivers, two donated end loaders with operators, two donated roadgraders with operators, one gasoline truck for refill compliments of an oil company.

Plus the above, we had women who were willing to provide hot meals and coffee for the working men all Saturday, Saturday night, Sunday, and Sunday night of that dead-line week-end. We rigged up temporary flood lights in the area so that we could work round the clock. The last bulldozer was "escorted" home by the President of the Boosters Club and myself at 4:30 A.M. Monday morning. We had accomplished what seemed to be impossible. A football field had taken shape transformed from an unwanted hillside in a matter of hours.

Later we used donated dried-out turkey manure to fertilize our playing field and along with commercial fertilizer, we were not long in getting a good stand of grass. After the outline of the field was accomplished, we decided that we would erect our own Cyclone fence. In our Boosters Club we had some men who were employees of a near-by steel mill. They were able to obtain fencing for a very nominal cost. We were fortunate enough also, to have a few railroad men who were given permission to pick up boiler flues from old steam engines. These made excellent top rails and up-rights for our Cyclone fence. We spent many hours through the winter months scraping rust off these gifts. When we had the rust off, we painted them and they were excellent for our purpose.

A member of our club brought his tractor to the area and with an attached post hole digger we soon had the basic preparation completed for our fence. The next step was the problem of bleachers. After shaving down the hillside to the plateau area where our football field lay, we had a natural hillside bleacher area. We simply built our own forms and staked them in and mixed our concrete. It wasn't long until we had beautiful concrete bleachers, practically the length of our field on one side. We later made upright bleachers, out of oak lumber for the opposite side of the field. After these bleachers were completed it was a minor job for us to build end-zone oak bleachers for both the visiting band and our own. Lighting proved to be a major hurdle, and at one time we felt that we may be forced to

play only Saturday afternoon games out of economic necessity, but we were wrong. We were lucky enough to hear about Seal-beam lights that might be for sale (cheap) at a Nuclear Plant being constructed about thirty-miles away. Again I approached a farmer friend and obtained one of his trucks to haul back what we might be able to buy. Our club had \$300.00 allocated for lights and we were able to purchase 100 brand new seal-beam lights from the Nuclear Plant for our \$300.00. THREE DOLLARS PER LIGHT! This was the biggest break of all. It wasn't long before we had located eight wooden poles. Members of the club, who were linemen, rigged our lights **gratis**. Now, we had the necessities of a football field and we had reached the point, as a Football Boosters Club, where we would not be satisfied until we had the finest facilities possible, for a community of that size.

We drew up our plans for a Football Field House and pre-fabbed our steel supports. We mixed our own "mud" and, with the help of a few brick layers, and many laymen, we soon had our building. When we had finished our Football Field House we had our squad's locker room, a visiting team locker room, a separate dressing room for the officials, plus a shower room for the officials. We also built into this same building a very nice concession stand plus public toilet facilities for men and women.

Many times I have used the word "**pride**" when talking with a football squad as I'm certain all football coaches do, but the type of pride we generated through the work of a dedicated Football Boosters Club defies description. I will never forget as I pulled the switch, and the area was illuminated for the first time, I saw several men reach for their handkerchiefs to wipe their eyes, and I must admit as I looked into their happy faces that I was doing the same.

A football field that is a credit to a community can be built. Of this I am certain because I was lucky enough to be allowed to become a member of an outstanding Football Booster Club. Incidentally, the farmer that gave us the hill side later sold the rest of his crop farm area to the Board of Education and now a beautiful High School is located on top of the hill that overlooks the "impossible" Football Field.

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