

TIGERS IN MEXICO

Back in the wild days
of 1896, Mizzou and
Texas gave the game a
rough introduction
south of the border.

Charles Seitz, B.J. '49, editor of the Alcalde, University of Texas alumni magazine, and Eddie Hughes are co-authors of the following article, which is reprinted from the Alcalde:

The first meeting of Mexico and football, vis-a-vis, was conducted by two early proponents of the game, the Texas Longhorns and the Missouri Tigers, in 1896.

In fact, the introduction was accomplished with such gusto and pure enthusiasm that it might be credited with setting back the game some 30 years in the land of the sombrero and serape.

The brawny cast of characters who played the first football games on Mexican soil gave heart and soul to every play.

But, this switches the cart before the horse. The games were actually the idea of an excursion agent of the Mexican National Railroad, George A. Hill.

In 1896 Texas' Longhorns had posted a pretty fair season record and the team from Missouri State University (now the University of Missouri) came to Austin looking for revenge from a previous season's beating. At that time, Missouri was playing the big boys of a northeastern league and Texas' opponents were not generally credited with being as tough.

Nevertheless, when the Longhorns held Missouri to a 10-0 win, Hill figured he had the ideal answer to a complicated problem.

He had already proposed a special excursion to Mexico City via Monterrey, which would see the Texas team play a collection of southwestern "stars." That would mean a big job of choosing, then rounding up the boys after the selections had been made. With the Missouri team already in Texas, all he needed was their willingness to accompany the Longhorns and play Foot Ball. (It was two separate words in 1896.)

Ignoring the fact that they were supposed to return to school, the Missouri team signed up and Hill wired Mexico's President Porfirio Diaz of the project.

President Diaz' personal invitation to both teams and the excursionists clicked into the Austin telegraph office and football was on its way to Mexico.

It was time for the Christmas vacations and in *The Alcalde* of that day, Hill exhorted students and Austinites to spend the holidays in tropic Mexico . . .

far from winter Northers, and have a "jolly trip to a foreign land for a very small price."

The price was small. He offered a round trip for only \$25.50. Lodgings and meals off the train were extra. About 150 *touristas*, football fans and inveterate party-goers plunked down their money and joined the Mexico-bound teams.

On December 24, in Austin, the Orange and White of Texas, and the Gold and Black of Missouri boarded the excursion cars of the International and Great Northern Railroad, and jolted merrily to Laredo where the group changed to the Mexican National line, and another "first." To mark the occasion, the Mexican National had added a dining car. The Austin newspapers couldn't have been more impressed if the National had announced it had wings. There was no doubt about it; the excursionists were going first class. No Mexican railroad had ever pulled a dining car for regular passengers.

Despite the holiday spirit, the teams survived Christmas Eve and turned out for the first game on Christmas Day in Monterrey.

There is no known record of what caused the very large amount of dissent between opposing players, players and referees, or coaches and referees that day. The record does say that nearly every decision was questioned . . . that is, both teams came close to dispensing with the referees in a most ungentlemanly fashion. After all, there were always more referees, and the Mexicans didn't know the rules anyway.

Foot Ball 1896 style, somewhat resembled pushball, except there were fewer players and the quarterback called signals.

Ordinarily, the fullback who had the most men behind him pushing the hardest made the most yardage. This maneuver, of course, required a very durable fullback. In the heat of Monterey's mid-afternoon sun, following a convivial evening, it may be imagined that the repeated battering-ram plunges of the fullback may have been met by a fistfull of fingers, sundry elbows and knees, and the extremely hard heads of opposing linemen. There may have been good cause for argument.

In any event, the side called "Missouri" pushed the hardest, and took the first game 18-4.

But this brings up another point. A Missouri

player named Adam Hill, (no relation to promoter George A. Hill) wrote R. A. Montague of Houston, that "we played as a mixed team. During the games we would interchange players; and even the coaches, Harry Robinson of Texas and Olly Patterson of Missouri, joined in and played."

Nevertheless, the player-swapping seems to have done little to dampen the glee of this out-and-out Donnybrook.

Back into traveling clothes, the teams and fans packed aboard the train again, and the excursion chugged (with the aid of a second engine) up the Sierra Madres to Mexico City.

At 9:20 on the Sunday morning of December 27, the train wheeled into the station where it was met by a brass band bravely attempting the Star-Spangled Banner, while a good-sized crowd cheered the soot-bespeckled visitors from the States.

The excursionists responded good-naturedly in kind, and then someone in the Texas crowd yelled, "Let's give them the old college yell! Everybody!"

This was not an order to be taken lightly. Here was a chance to place before the populace of another nation the uninhibited enthusiasm of the combined forces of the Universities of Texas and Missouri, and more vocal encouragement from loyal excursionists.

Beginning with something akin to the modern "locomotive" yells, the tempo increased and the roar got louder. Somewhat overwhelmed by the outburst, the crowd backed away, then stood in amazement as the visitors made their strange and violent incantations.

Happily, it lasted only for a few moments, and the party was escorted through the streets to the Humboldt Hotel.

That afternoon, the first football game in Mexico City's history and the second of the series was played, but there was competition. On the other side of the city, a bull fight was held, and while the bull fight pulled 10,000 fans, the football game drew only 3,000. And President Diaz went to the bull fight.

It seems, though, that the players couldn't have cared less whether there was an audience or not. This, again, was another hammer-and-tong affair. So much so, that some well-meaning spectator summoned the police who charged out on the field ready to break up an apparent riot. Actually, the Missouri team had just pulled their "revolving tandem" play, and the end result did resemble unrestrained mayhem.

The play began with the line and the backfield jumping into an oval formation after the ball was snapped. Thereupon, every man spun around in place, causing no end of confusion to the opponents. If the ball carrier got away, all was fine. But, if he were trapped, the net result was a great ball of players piled on one another . . . quite like a riot.

The carnage from this kind of play was not light, either. Helmets were practically unknown and padding consisted mostly of moleskin pants, canvas jackets, and shin guards. The nose guard of the day

was under debate as to whether it was a help or a dangerous weapon.

Nevertheless, Missouri won again, 12-6.

The third game of the series finally saw the Longhorns break even with a 0-0 tie. The lack of scoring by both sides was blamed on Mexico City's high attitude.

New Year's eve was spent on the train while it headed back to Laredo with its cargo of still-celebrating excursionists.

According to a newspaper report of the return trip, Texas' Coach Robinson played the violin for dancing, while the Mexican National clipped along 40 miles an hour. The newspaper also said that dancing while the Mexican National whooped down the mountains was "a novelty that one is liable never to experience again."

Certainly the excursionists, players, and all had a fine time, but from the Mexican point of view, the game of Foot Ball was far too brutal.

Said the Mexican Herald in an editorial, "It is not likely that so violent and muscular a game will be introduced here . . . football will probably remain an exotic as far as Mexico is concerned."

They had heard about Foot Ball; they had seen the game, themselves, and it was a plain case of, "No, thank you. We'll stick with our bull fights."

Football tickets on sale

Football of a variety vastly different from that recalled in the foregoing article will be on display at Memorial Stadium this fall. Season tickets have been placed on sale by the Athletic Ticket Office, Rothwell Gymnasium, and indications are that attendance will pick up for two excellent reasons: a terrific home schedule of five games, and a new coaching regime which the fans will want to follow closely.

Head Coach Frank Broyles and his assistants will have their work cut out for them in preparing for these ten games: At home—Sept. 28, Arizona; Oct. 5, Texas A & M; Oct. 26 (Homecoming) Nebraska; Nov. 9, Oklahoma; and Nov. 16, Kansas State.

Games away—Sept. 21, Vanderbilt (night); Oct. 11, S.M.U. (night); Oct. 19, Iowa State; Nov. 2, Colorado; and Nov. 23, Kansas.

The final intra-squad game at the close of spring training indicated that defense will get more emphasis under Coach Broyles as a score of 7 to 6 decided the outcome.

Los Angeles alumni meet

The University Alumni Association of Southern California held its summer meeting June 7 at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Holt in Pasadena. About forty members were present. Colored movies of the Holts' trip through Italy and Switzerland were shown. Secretary Vera Pealer reports the next meeting will be in October.