



## Whatever Happened To The Toppled Top?

By Dr. James King (BS Optom '55)

The class of 1955 of The Ohio State University School of Optometry graduated on June 10, 1955. Eleven days later, on June 21, 1955, the Four Lads, a male quartet, recorded *Moments to Remember*. It became one of the most popular songs of the decade. Words and music were by Al Stillman and Robert Allen. In case you forgot the words, it started:

The New Years' Eve, we did the town, the day we  
tore the goal posts down.  
We will have these moments to remember.

I was one of the 32 people in the class of '55 who probably remembers receiving sheepskins on that 10th of June. But I was also one of six people who harbors a much more vivid pigskin moment to remember on November 20, 1954. Let me explain:

In the fall of 1954, the football outlook for the Buckeyes was not rosy. They were rated as #20 by the preseason forecasters and not expected to finish in the top ten. But when the season started, and footballs were substituted for crystal balls, the Buckeyes didn't blink. The gridiron god must have smiled on Coach Woody Hayes.

Woody had a legendary dislike for Michigan. It was so intense that he could not even bring himself to utter the M word. He only referred to them as "the team up north". No one in 1954 would have predicted that Woody's coaching career at OSU would last for another

24 years. OSU had been known as a football coaches' graveyard, having buried 5 coaches in 10 years.

Though almost sacrilegious, I must confess that I never did learn the words to our alma mater. I followed the lead of others and sang:

Oh come let's sing Ohio's Praise,  
And say goodbye to Woody Hayes.

And then, I would pseudo lip-sync the rest. But, I digress.

The 1954 season began with a series of wins over Indiana, California, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Northwestern, Pittsburgh, and Purdue. That set the stage on November 20, 1954, for the mother of all rivalries: OSU vs. MICHIGAN. OSU was rated #1 and Michigan #12. An undefeated season, a Big Ten title, and a Rose Bowl bid all hung in the balance. Michigan struck first. A pass interception by Jack Gibbs helped the Buckeyes tie it up 7-7 by halftime. In the third quarter, the Wolverines had a first down on Ohio's three. But a great goal-line stand held for four downs. The Bucks then drove for 99 yards to score. Another OSU touchdown in the fourth quarter cemented the win at 21-7. A rendition of, "We don't give a damn for the whole state of Michigan" joined the clamorous ringing of the new victory bell.

As one of the greatest teams in Ohio State history left the field, other groups of people arrived. One group formed a snake dance at mid-field; another was attracted to the goal posts like ants to a jelly jar. Technically speaking, the process they initiated is called toppling.

Toppling occurs when a group of people assemble in the end zone and collaborate one with the other with the singleness of purpose of changing the orientation of the poles from vertical to horizontal. Initially, the goal posts in question had been in a formation resembling the capital letter H. The process of toppling is to have someone shinny up one post until he is able to stand on the cross bar. Then a back and forth rhythmic swing begins, until the force of gravity on the top overpowers its footing on the ground and the pole begins to fall.

The next challenge is to free the pole from its crossbar, a process that requires much pushing and pulling, and twisting, and jerking. Luckily there was an abundance of jerks available, and the pole was soon liberated from its crossbar. Among great cheering, the left goal post was lifted triumphantly upon the shoulders of the victorious fans and was marched out of the stadium like a medieval battering ram poised to attack a castle.

Alphabetically, senior optometry students, **Richard Ball (BS Optom'55)**, **Richard Britton (BS Optom'55)**, **Lowell Hone (BS Optom'55)**, **James King (BS Optom'55)**, and **Will Stamp (BS Optom'55)** who were curious bystanders during the demolition process, became peripheral participants as the entourage approached High Street, turned right, and headed toward downtown Columbus.

A goal post is made of steel and is heavy. In due time, some of the original pole bearers became weary and dropped out. Seeing an opportunity to be helpful, the optometry quintet gradually infiltrated the parade. As the goal post passed Long's Book Store and approached 12th street on the edge of campus, it occurred to someone on the optometry team that the five, if not a majority, represented a controlling interest in the activity.

Soon, a 90-degree change in direction to the east was made down an alley and the goal post almost magically appeared in the back parking lot of the Epsilon Psi Epsilon fraternity house at 58 East 12th Avenue.

Dick Britton disappeared momentarily and then suddenly reappeared with a hacksaw. Soon, the round,

globe-like adornment at the end of the post was detached. A brief conference with the non-optometric contingency produced a compromise agreement, allocating the entire pole to them while the eye-ballers would take possession of the minuscule top. In harmony, the non-optometry contingent repositioned the goal post on their shoulders, back-tracked down the alley toward High Street and presumably continued their victory march downtown.

Our spoil, the top of the goal post of perhaps one of the most important games of the century, sat amidst some intramural athletic awards on the mantle of the fireplace in the living room of the E Psi E house at least until graduation day, June 10, 1955.

On subsequent optometry alumni weekends, when members of the class of '55 would return like lemmings to the old fraternity house, we would peruse the mantle but there was no globe. There were the remnants of the refracting room and the bar we built in the basement, but no toppled top.

So, the thought occurs, "Whatever happened to the toppled top?" Does it sit inconspicuously in some OD's recreation room among scarlet and grey pom poms and banners that say, "Go Bucks?" Or was it cherished for a while and then discarded by an uninformed spouse who got tired of dusting "that thing"? Or, if it still exists, perhaps it should be donated to a sports' hall of fame or somewhere else, so more Buckeyes could have a moment to remember.



*Postscript. In later years, due to the high costs of goal post replacement, student injuries and deaths, the activity of goal post toppling has been degraded from a recognized school spirit tradition to an act of vandalism, and is therefore discouraged by most college officials.*