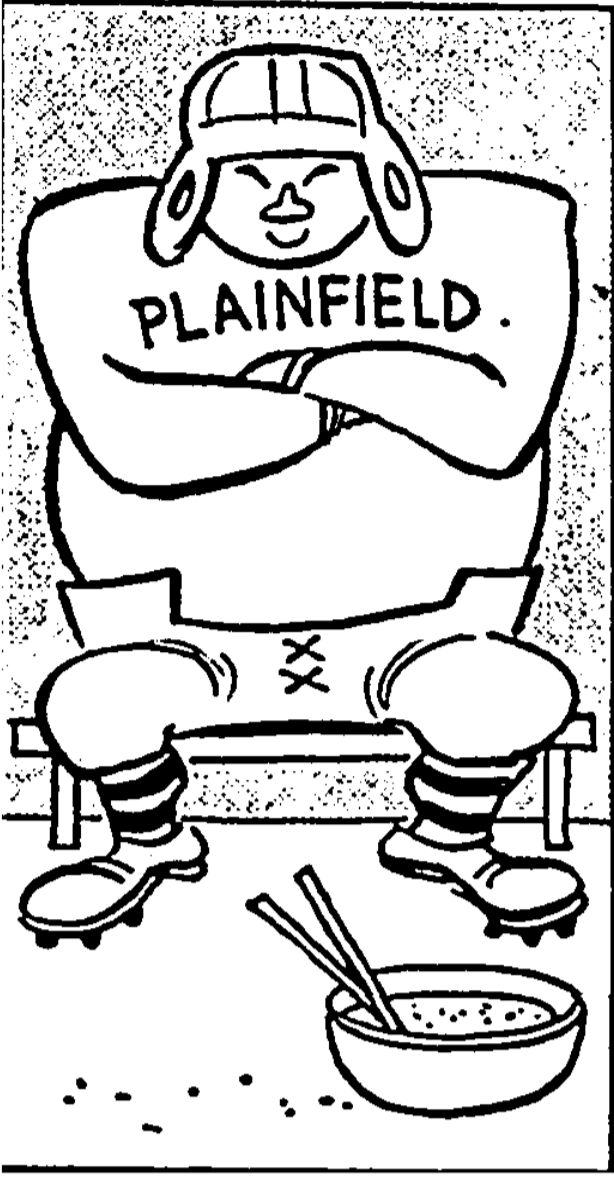


Sports of The Times

The Wild Rice Bowl

By ROBERT LIPSYTE

MORRIS NEWBURGER was born in Philadelphia and was graduated from Harvard in 1926. He joined his father's investment company and later founded his own—Newburger, Loeb & Co. He was an Army Air Force officer in World War II, he belonged to several clubs, he lived on Fifth Avenue. His wife's picture appeared on the society page. Morris Newburger left two sons when he died, earlier this month, at the age of 62. He also left one of the most enduring tales of hoax in the annals of sports.



Johnny Chung Fred Schwab

Morris Newburger was the creator of Plainfield State Teachers College, and John Chung, the Chinese-Hawaiian fullback.

Morris Newburger's first dupe—and now his wittiest chronicler—was Harold Rosenthal, who is on the staff of the American Football League. On Saturday evening, Oct. 15, 1941, Rosenthal was on the harried sports rewrite desk of The New York Herald Tribune. A man called with a small-college football score: Plainfield Teachers 27, Winona 3.

"Plainfield Teachers, that a New Jersey school?"

"Yes," said Morris Newburger.

"It was not uncommon," Rosenthal would write many years later, "for the smallest schools to tele-

phone their scores because of the lack of telegraph facilities. Also there were a good many small schools taking up football and dropping it continually. Teachers colleges were in the van in this respect."

On Sunday morning the announcement of Plainfield Teachers' first victory appeared in The Tribune and in The New York Times.

The Celestial Comet

A Wall Street friend of Newburger recalled yesterday that at their next Monday lunch Morris mentioned that he was quite interested in a small New Jersey college football team. The broker offered to bet \$5 against Newburger's team. Five days later, Plainfield beat Randolph Tech, 35-0. Newburger returned the \$5 and the joke began to spread along Wall Street.

The week before Plainfield met Ingersoll, the letterhead of the Plainfield Teachers Athletic Association appeared over the press releases of one Jerry Croyden, the school's public relations man. He supplied the city's football writers with the scores of the two pre-Winona games (Scott lost, 14-0; St. Joseph's, 6-0), and the secret of Coach Ralph (Hurry-Up) Hoblitzel's W formation. The ends faced the backs.

But Jerry Croyden's greatest energies were directed to breathing life into Johnny Chung, known as the Celestial Comet, who ate wild rice at half-time. Chung scored 69 of Plainfield's 117 points, and was obviously all-America material.

It was now, as Plainfield prepared for its important games against Appalachian Tech and Harmony Teachers, that the joke moved perilously close to becoming something far deeper. By telephone Newburger-Croyden had primed sports writers for Plainfield's unbeaten season and its probable invitation to the Blackboard Bowl. Notes about Plainfield Teachers and Chung began appearing in midweek football columns. Soon there would be ticket requests from newspaper men. Or would Plainfield and Johnny Chung receive the national recognition each deserved, sight unseen?

Season's End

Not everyone on Wall Street thought Newburger a lovable prankster. While broker friends created linemen and assistant coaches and cheerleaders on their own, and old Philadelphia friends began wearing Plainfield Teachers sweatshirts, at least one financial writer found the hoax meaningless and tasteless. According to Newburger's Monday luncheon friends, who asked for anonymity, it was this free-lance financial writer rather than a mix-up on Jerry Croyden's telephone that brought the hoax to the attention of Time magazine.

Time confronted Newburger, who confessed. He asked for a stay to finish the schedule. Time refused, and Hoblitzel, Croyden, Chung and the W were publicly credited to the brain whence they had come. A few weeks later, Pearl Harbor was attacked and all leaves and jokes were deferred.

What inspired Newburger, a highly successful and respected businessman, to play his trick? Rosenthal and the luncheon friend seemed to agree. A sports fan with a sense of humor, Newburger never quite believed all the scores he read in the newspapers. He never believed, for example, that there really was a Slippery Rock State Teachers College.