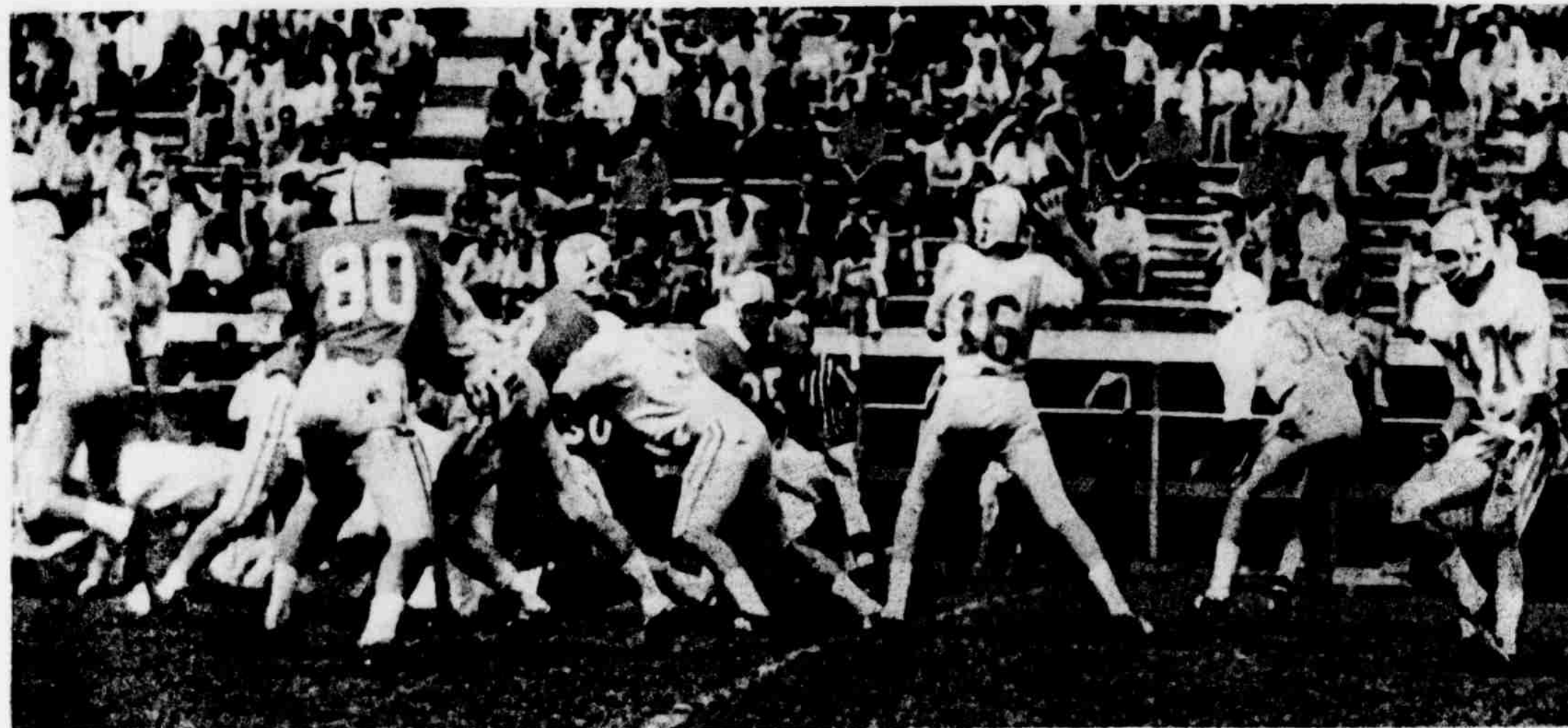


I WAS ONLY A PAPER VOL!



—Colorphoto by Bill Preston Sr.; Photo at right by Terry Moore
The Good One: Our Man Preston (wearing Dewey Warren's immortalized No. 16) fades back for a pass to Kenny DeLong. In photo at right, DeLong runs for a six yard gain.

By BILL PRESTON JR.

KNOXVILLE — The 10 helmeted, padded and brawny young men listened intently to the likewise helmeted, padded, but somewhat smaller quarterback:

"Eight-right, 24-counter on quick set . . . break!"

The huddle dissolved with 11 voices shouting "break" in unison and the University of Tennessee Volunteers offensive team moved to the line of scrimmage and the waiting UT defensive unit.

The quarterback, wearing jersey number "16," stepped up behind the crouching center, looked left and then right, placed his hands to receive the snap and shouted the word which would send his teammates into cataclysmic action: "set!"

THE EVENTS which put me behind the center, calling that play as quarterback of the White Team in the annual UT Orange and White intrasquad football game, began in January while I was flying to Miami to cover the UT-Oklahoma clash at the Orange Bowl.

Faced with about a 30-minute airport delay, I bought a book entitled "Paper Lion" by George Plimpton.

In essence, Plimpton had trained with the Detroit Lions of the National Football League and had played five plays at quarterback in a Lion scrimmage at Pontiac, Mich.

I read Plimpton's description of his bumbling and frustrating moments as the Lions' quarterback and after watching UT's valiant comeback effort against Oklahoma fall by only two points,

I vowed that I would try to make a similar debut with the UT Vols and survive the experience long enough to write a story for THE TENNESSEAN.

Warm Handshake

THE 1967-68 Southeastern Conference "Coach-of-the-Year" gave me a warm handshake when I arrived for the first of many talks with Douglas Adair Dickey. Dickey is a big man. His office, his football teams and his successes reflect that stature.

I felt exceptionally small when I cleared my throat to ask him for permission to write the story. The words, which had been running over and over in my mind for some time, had begun to sound a little ridiculous.

"Coach Dickey," I began, "I'm a reporter for THE NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN and I would like to work out with the team during spring practice and run two plays at quarterback during the Orange and White game. And, I would hope to write a story about my experiences for my paper."

I had said it. It did sound ridiculous. Dickey's eyes widened slightly, and he sat back in his chair.

"Well, Bill, have you ever played any football before?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, I played tackle at Overton High School in Nashville and quite a bit of touch football during the time I've been a student at UT," I added.

Again the eyes widened and Dickey thought for a few silent moments.

"I don't see why we can't work you into the

game," he said, "so go see Coach Cafego and Coach Dunn this afternoon and draw your equipment."

Cafego a Legend

GEORGE CAFEGO, an All-American back for UT in 1939, is something of a legend among Tennessee football faithful. He has served on the UT staff for 16 years, longer than any other active member. Cafego sized me up, shook his head and dutifully introduced me to Jimmy Dunn, UT's offensive backfield coach. And the man whose job it would be to transform a 180-pound former high school tackle into a college quarterback—at least for two plays.

Dunn escorted me to the UT locker room, complete with "Big Orange" carpets, and helped me draw my gear—the white helmet emblazoned with a single orange stripe down the center and an orange "T" on each side, shoulder pads, hip pads, thigh and knee pads, socks, shoes and other assorted devices.

The jersey had the large number "16" on the front and back. Dewey Warren, the Georgia "swamp rat," had worn that number for the previous three years while he broke every UT passing record and led the Vols to three consecutive post-season bowl games.

Dunn told me to dress quickly so I could attend the backfield meeting before the afternoon practice.

When I entered the small projection room where the backfield meeting would be held, the other backs were lounging on chairs, waiting for Dunn's arrival.

Mike Jones, a former All-City quarterback at Nashville's Stratford High School, and I had known each other for some time. He glanced casually over his shoulder at the late arrival, sat bolt upright and yelled:

"Preston! What in the world are you doing here?"

I explained to the players what I intended to do and added that I would appreciate their help.

"Man, that is really wild," Jones said, sliding back down into his chair.

The backfield meeting consisted mostly of reviewing the films of the past Saturday's scrimmage at Neyland Stadium.

I had always been under the impression that football—for the backs—was a game of taking the ball, letting the linemen do all the work, and running to a touchdown and a glorious write-up in the morning paper. But Dunn's comments were concerned with various backs taking one step too many before cutting into the line, or hesitating an instant too long before releasing the pass.

Torture Before

FOOTBALL PRACTICE had always been nothing short of torture for me during those hot, dusty afternoons in high school. However, I was surprised with how little time UT spent on conditioning exercises, and I asked one of the coaches why the players were not given more strenuous exercises.

"In high school, the coaches have to turn 'mama's boys' into football players," he said. "But by the time a boy gets to college, only the men can play football. Our players stay in excellent condition the year round."

During my first day at practice, I participated in one of the passing drills. Simply, the end races downfield for about 25-yards and the quarterback throws him the ball. After watching

Bubba Wyche, Mike Jones, Bobby Scott, John Rippetoe and Bubba Dudley make perfect strikes, I tried my arm.

My pass looked not unlike a water-logged duck that had been hit by a load of hot buckshot. When the end looked over his shoulder for the ball, seeing it was badly underthrown, he almost went head-over-heels in trying to back up to catch it.

Shortly after my less than stupendous debut as a passer, Dickey walked over and asked me if I wanted to pass with him for a few minutes. For about 10-minutes, Dickey—who had been a quarterback at the University of Florida—gave me an in-depth lecture on the fact that I was not squaring my shoulders to the target, not placing my hand correctly on the ball's laces and not releasing the ball correctly for a spiral pass.

After Dickey had demonstrated my faults, I tried the passing drill again. Miraculously, my passes began to have a reasonable facsimile of the "zip" which was so characteristic of the other quarterbacks' passes.

Later in the day, after I had gone through a series of agility drills with the rest of the backs and successfully rubbed a huge blister on my left foot, I was kneeling, blue in the face and trying desperately to get my breath, when Dickey walked by and said cheerfully: "Now don't have a heart attack on us, Bill."

Ready To Try Plays

On Thursday before Saturday's game, Coach Dunn decided that I was ready to try my two game plays for the first time. The day before, I had taken my first snafu from center, dropped back to pass and promptly collapsed when my cleats slipped in the mud.

"I think we are going to need pretty good field positions before we can put you into the game," Dunn told me while I was getting up off the ground.

Dunn explained the first of my game plays. The play would be called "Eight-right," (designating the offensive formation) 24-counter (designating the back to carry the ball and the line's blocking) on quick set (designating the snap count).

There is a terrible feeling of nakedness when a quarterback stands behind the center, waiting to call the snap. As a tackle in high school, I was lined down between the guard and the end and, therefore, if I made a mistake—as I often did—it would be hidden from general public view. But not so for the quarterbacks. They must stand there—alone—in full view of everyone. I called the snap: "set!"

The ball came back into my hands. I completed a full circle to my left—turning my back to the grunts, groans and smashing sounds of the linemen colliding with each other—and stuck the ball out with my left hand. In a blur of orange, the fullback and the ball were gone, charging headlong into that no-man's land of those snarling 250-pound linemen.

The coach's whistle sounded the end of the play and both offensive and defensive players

cheered my accomplishment. I had actually completed my first college play—one of the most basic in football.

Smiling, I walked back to the huddle to run my second play.

"This is a play we designed especially for you," Dunn said. "We call it 'eight-right, 69 special on quick set.' No, for the sake of optimism," he said, "let's call it 'eight-right, DeLong special on quick set.'"

The play—a pass—was simple, requiring me to take one step backward with my right foot and throw the ball some three yards to the right end, Kenny DeLong.

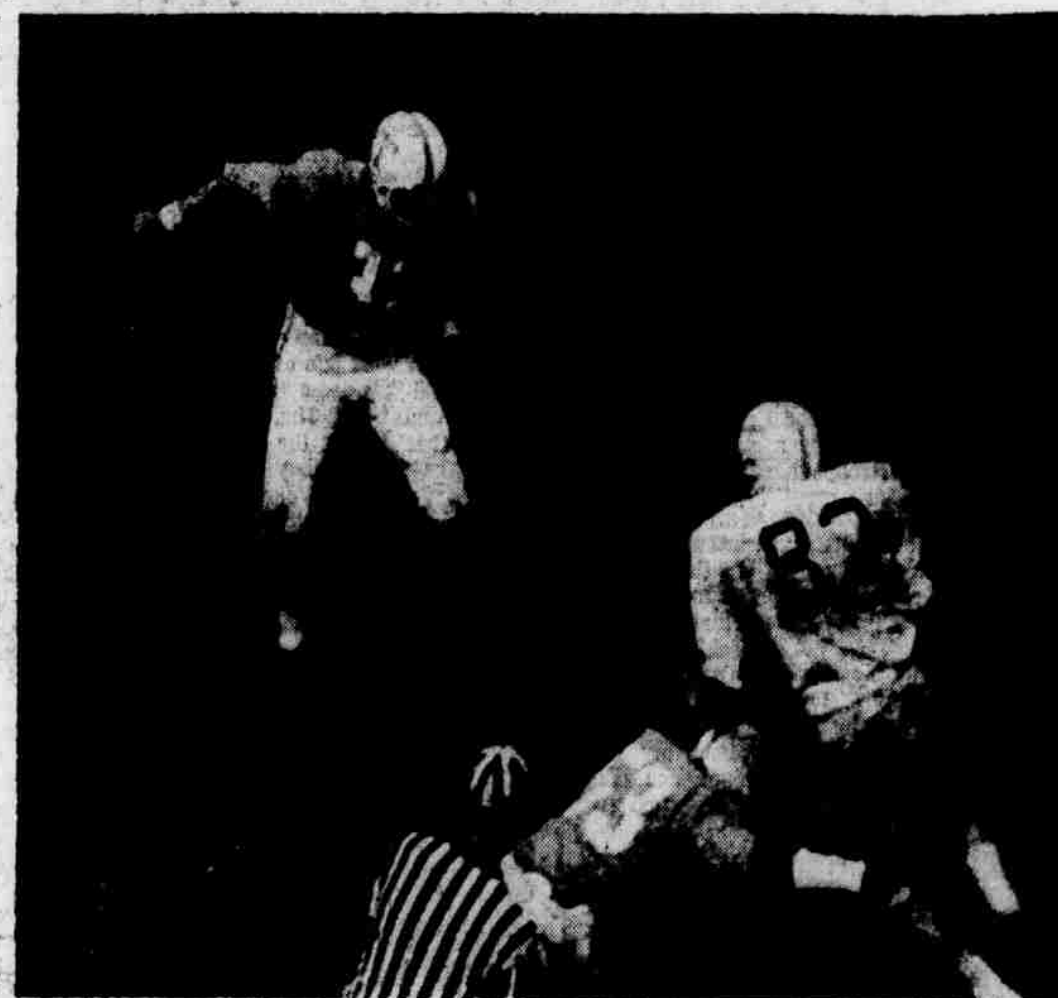
Again the ball came into my hands. I took one step back and threw. DeLong caught the pass and again the cheers rose. If I had just completed a 99-yard touchdown pass while lying flat on my back to beat Alabama by one point with the final gun sounding, I could not have felt any better.

Skeptics Abound

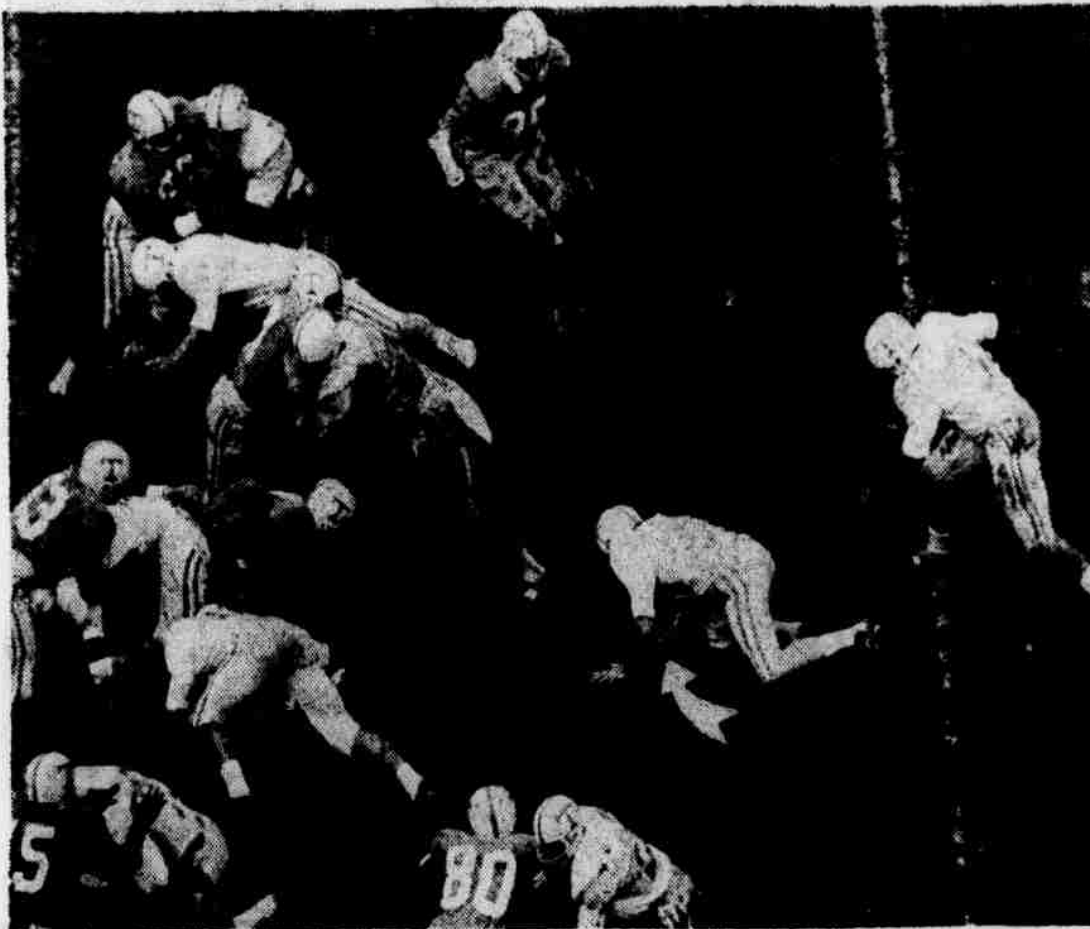
There were those skeptics, however, who were not so confident of my newly-developed prowess as a quarterback.

Mrs. Joe S. McCampbell of Knoxville, whose daughter I had been dating for more than a year, was positive that I would need medical attention after the game.

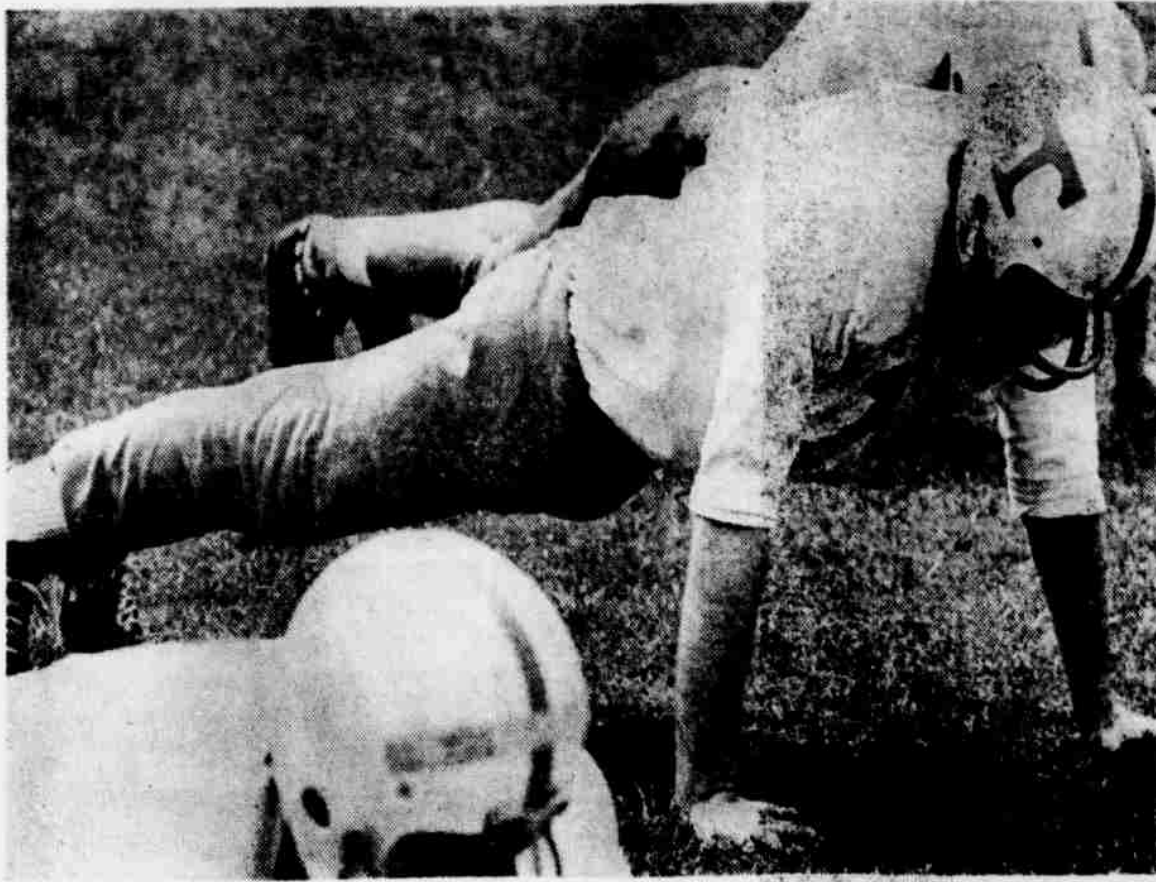
Lying outside my apartment door one afternoon before the game when I returned from class



—Staff Photos by Tom Raymond
 The life of a quarterback, even when he's one for just one day and sitting on the bench to boot, is filled with anxieties.



—Photo by Terry Moore
The Bad One: Bill Preston's first play as a Paper Vol: A fumble! He's the one falling on the ball.



Getting in condition, Preston found this part not so onerous as in high school.



—Photos by Tom Raymond
Coach Doug Dickey, right, watches Our Man try a pass. At left is Lance Alworth of the San Diego Chargers.

was a cigar box with a label on top reading: "Football player's first aid kit, for Bill Preston Jr., UT Quarterback."

Mrs. McCampbell is known affectionately by her eight children as "The Mad Marg," because she thrives on practical jokes. I was not sure, however, whether the first aid kit was a joke or a precaution. The box contained a used tube of pain-killing ointment, a patented "non-stick" bandage, some adhesive tape, a tongue depressor—which seemed to have once been a stick for a cherry popsicle and a prescription for "nerves."

The "prescription" held only one pill, which was at least an inch and one-half long, and as big around as my thumb.

Mrs. McCampbell called me later that night to see whether or not I had needed any of the medication. When I asked her about the pill, she told me it was an excellent remedy for calves that are troubled with diarrhea.

Experience With Pros

My first experience with the press came when a sportswriter for the Knoxville News-Sentinel called me at 7:20 a.m. Friday.

I was unaware that my reputation had grown so fast, but he said he had heard that I was to play in the Orange and White game and wanted to ask me some questions about my participation.

After asking about my weight, height, previous football experience and my duties with The Tennessean, he asked the inevitable question:

"Well Bill, what position are you going to play?"

"I'll be playing quarterback."

"Uh, huh," he said, sounding like he may have misunderstood me, "And you played what position in high school?"

"I was a tackle."

"And you say you are going to play quarterback?"

"Yes sir, that's correct."

"How many plays will you run?"

"Two," I said.

"Would you mind telling me what the plays will be?"

"Well, I'd really rather not divulge that information," I said, hoping that he would not think I was trying to manage the news or to strike a blow against freedom of the press. "You understand that when you only know two plays, you have to maintain all the secrecy you can get."

"Uh, huh," he said, still not seeming to be quite sure he was not wasting his time with some kind of nut. "And you will be Bubba Wyche's back-up man on the white team at quarterback?"

I had the insane urge to tell him that Bubba Wyche would be my back-up at quarterback, but I managed to say "yes sir" to his question. I did not want him to wake Coach Dickey at 7:30 a.m. to find out why the entire Tennessee coaching staff had gone out of its mind.

GAME day dawned cold and damp. But by the time I was scheduled to arrive at Stokely Athletic Center to dress for the game, the sun was shining brightly.

I was at first embarrassed while walking from the dressing room to the stadium some two blocks away. But after noticing that most of the fans were watching me in awe—unaware of who I really was—and after one of the children nearby asked his father, "Daddy, is that Dewey Warren?" I began to enjoy their stares.

The teams worked out briefly on the field to warm up before going to the respective dressing rooms for last minute briefings.

The coaches told the players to stay calm, stay "loose" and not to make any mistakes. Contrary to popular belief, there were no ringing cries to "go out and get one for the Gipper," but rather the air of calm determination and preparation.

While filing out of the dressing room to the field, I overheard someone behind me say, "I sure hope that newspaper reporter has been saying his prayers to St. Jude."

I was not certain at the time just exactly what that comment was supposed to mean, but later one of my Catholic friends told me that St. Jude was the "patron saint of hopeless causes."

The coach did not call for me to play until late in the second half, by which time my team was being soundly defeated by our Orange opponents.

While waiting on the bench, I had the odd—and unpleasant—sensation that the American Butterfly Association was holding its national convention in my stomach. The feeling had not been eased while I watched Bubba Wyche taking his lumps from the defense.

Moment of Truth

Jimmy Dunn's voice brought me to my moment of truth: "Preston, get warmed up. You'll be going in after this kickoff." I took three snaps from center Wayne Smith, a former star at Nashville's Glenciff high school, and walked to Dunn's side.

"Do you remember your plays?"

"Yes sir," I said, glad that I had taken the precaution of writing both plays on the palm of my left hand, because at that moment, I did not have the vaguest notion of what I was supposed to call.

"Go get 'em," Dunn said, and I ran onto the field.

Looks Both Ways

After glancing at my palm in the huddle, I called my first play—the handoff to the fullback—and the team trotted to the line of scrimmage. I remember that my pro football hero, Bart Starr of the Green Bay Packers, had always looked first to his right and then to his left before starting a play.

I remember that I looked both ways, too, but I cannot recall whether or not I actually saw anything. All I can remember is seeing the defensive linebacker—with blood on his nose—taking little choppy steps on the other side of the line and staring me right in the eyes.

The only sound I was supposed to make was "set" to begin the play. I was afraid to even clear my throat for fear of starting the play prematurely. Since it was now or never—and 16,000 spectators were watching me—I yelled "set" and the ball hit my hands.

It hung there for only a split second. To my horror, I looked down and the ball was bouncing between my feet. I had daydreamed earlier that week that if a fumble occurred, I would quickly scoop up the ball and bull into the line, perhaps for a first down, or even—if luck would have it—a touchdown.

Seeing that ball bouncing around on the grass, all my heroic dreams were forgotten. I took a realistic attitude, fell on the ball, and hoped that there would not be much of a pile on top me.

Little did I know then that my father—a photographer for The Tennessean who had been as-

signed to photograph the game—had delivered the kiss of death that very morning. "I really hope that Bill will fumble his first play," he had told a friend. "It will make a much better picture."

I called the second play and the team again moved to the line of scrimmage. I knew that my college football career was now doomed. If I could not complete a simple handoff—my best play—how could I hope to complete the much more difficult pass?

Again the jumping linebacker stared me down as I yelled "set" and stepped back from the surging linemen. Suddenly, there was Delong, fighting his way past three defenders. I do not even remember releasing the ball, but I do remember Delong cradling the pass in his arms when the defenders tackled him after a six-yard gain.

As Bubba Dudley, another Glenciff graduate, replaced me at quarterback, Delong and I trotted off the field. "Great pass," Delong said. I think if it had not seemed unmanly, to say nothing of being conduct unbecoming to a football player, I would have kissed him.

I was feeling very grand after I returned to the bench, content to let the clock run out and happy that I had survived my two plays, when defensive Coach George McKinney said "Coach Dunn, why don't we give Preston a taste of defense?"

Dunn agreed, and told me to go into the game at defensive safety—the last player between the offense and the defensive goal.

My first play at safety was uneventful, as I took Dunn at his word and lined up about 25 yards behind the line of scrimmage. Glancing over at the bench after the play was over, I saw the coaches frantically motioning me to move up.

I moved up to the safety's correct position, 11-yards from the ball. The second play, a run to my left, began, and I was content to move toward it just fast enough to appear that I was interested in helping out on the tackle and just slow enough to avoid being there in time to do so.

But Ben Bass, a 247-pound tackle on the Orange Team from Nashville's Hillsboro High School, had other ideas. Bass, and an offensive end whom I never even saw, hit me with a double-team block that almost drove me into the ground like a fence post.

One of the referees who happened to run by while I was untangling myself from Bass and the end slapped me on the leg and said, "Son, these big boys are treating you kinda rough aren't they?"

Later in the locker room, Bass confessed that he did not know I was playing safety. "If I had known it was you, I would've hit you so damn hard," he said. "But I had never seen a safety moving that slow before. It was just too good to resist."

Autograph Pleas

Walking back to the locker room after the game, one of the many young boys who flock around the players, pleading for autographs, helmet chin straps and other memorabilia ran up to me and cried:

"Hi, you're Bubba Wyche aren't you? You sure played a great game. Can I have your chin strap . . . please?"

Truly flattered by his mistake, I thanked him, gave him my chin strap and he ran away to show his prize to a friend.