

## HOLD THAT LINE

By Steve Brody

When Gene Ferrio, Granada High's football coach, learned that I was a rookie teacher and had been assigned gate duty for the first time, he hustled me into his office for a briefing.

"We've got four positions of spectator access here at Granada Stadium," he explained. "Gate I is the main gate and draws a lot of traffic, but if you think you can handle it, I'll put you there."

I told him I thought I could handle it.

He then drew an S, signifying the student body, a V for visiting students, and an A for adults.

"The S's here," he continued, "they go for two bits a head. The V's pay half-a-buck, and the A's, we charge them all a buck. There'll be a lot of deadbeats trying to get in gratis. Tell them you got strict orders from Coach Ferrio that everybody pays, including the Governor."

"There's apt to be a few wise guys who'll try to sneak through. In a situation of this sort, defense is important. Now let's take a typical situation. You're standing over here. Along comes Mr. Deadbeat trying to crash the gate. You give him this." He demonstrated a shoulder block. "Or this." He threw a knee into my path. "Now you try it, sonny."

I positioned myself at the door while Coach Ferrio came charging in from the outside. I threw him a wicked shoulder block. He backed off, then came at me again, as I aimed my knee at his groin.

"There," he said, "I think you've got it down pretty well. This is going to be a big game, sonny. There oughta be a crowd. Moola-wise, you should go over the top." He shoved the cashbox, containing \$10 in change and three rolls of tickets, into my midriff.

"Good luck," said Coach Ferrio, patting me on the fanny as I left.

A line was already beginning to form as I took my position at Gate I. A skinny youngster with glasses wriggled through without offering to buy a ticket.

"Okay, fresh kid, that'll be 25 cents," I said, applying the knee.

"I'm selling potato chips," he flinched.

"Too bad. Everybody pays. Even the Governor."

He squinted hard through his glasses. "I'm selling potato chips for the Student Council, to raise money for an electric scoreboard. I am donating my valuable time."

The youngster persisted as the crowd in line grew impatient. Faced with a mob scheme, I made a crucial decision. "Okay, enter this time, but don't let it happen again."

Next in line was a freckle-faced girl with a pony tail. She hurried by me without pausing to purchase a ticket. I grabbed her by the pony tail, wondering whether Coach Ferris would approve of such a defensive maneuver.

“I’m in the band,” she snapped.

“Everybody pays,” I insisted. “Even the Governor.”

She squared around and placed her hands on her hips. “Permit me to clarify. I’m in the band. I play first trombone. I hate football. I never even watch.”

The crowd became restless again and began shouting catcalls.

“Whaddaya wanna do, break up the band?”

It was obvious that I would have to render another important decision. “Okay, miss, I’ll make an exception in your case, but don’t let it happen again.”

Next came a grinning, rather corpulent fellow in his late thirties. Folds of fat hung around his midriff. The prospect of racking up a big A sales made me forget my previous humiliations. But out of the corner of my eye I spotted a youngster jumping over the fence. He landed hard, then took off for the stands.

I left Gate I and shot out after the rascal. He ran onto the field and headed for the end zone. I pursued him doggedly and at the five-yard line I brought him down with a flying tackle.

I arose to a standing ovation and took a deep bow. My trousers had torn and my shirt was caked with dirt, but I was sublimely happy. I had captured the culprit and I would make him pay.

I dragged him back to Gate I. The long line was surging through, and, by the time I arrived, it had dwindled to nothing. My chances of going over the top moola-wise had vanished.

“Okay, fresh kid. Pay me 25 cents,” I demanded.

“Wait’ll my father hears about this. He’s the school superintendent.

“He’s what?”

“Dr. Fairchild is my father. I’ll tell him you tackled me ... illegally.”

I put my arm around the kid. “How would you like to see a football game? As my guest?”

I handed him a quarter from the cashbox. “Buy yourself some potato chips.”

I made a quick audit of Gate I’s financial status. It was minus 25 cents.

Granada beat a strong Rye team that afternoon. When I went to check in my gate receipts, Coach Ferrio was busy accepting congratulations. I placed the cashbox and unused tickets on his desk and tried to duck out. Coach nabbed me before I could slip away.

“Whatta mob, eh? I’ll bet Gate I went over the top moola-wise.”

“What’s the top for Gate I?” I asked.

“For the title game two years ago Gate I took in \$582.50.”

“I, I’m sorry to report that Gate I went \$582.75 under the record.”