

# The Mudder

*It ran in the Langford family*

By JAMES McNITT



NO DOUBT you've heard of Colonel Maitland, whose horses have borne his black and gold colors into national prominence. He had eight trainers working constantly to keep his charges in trim.

Among them was "Pop" Langford. He was a singular personage if ever there was one. He had the peculiar talent or handicap of being able to train only "mudders," or horses which ran their best in rough weather. Every horse he had ever turned out alone had inevitably become a "mudder." Eventually Colonel Maitland discovered this trait and began turning over his mediocre horses to be made into first-class mudders. These horses were run in dry races just enough to give them the knack of racing and to build up long odds against them. Then they were saved for a rainy day, when they usually romped away to an easy win. Remember Pharaoh III who passed the favorite, Buttercup, on the home stretch in the 1924 Belmont Handicap race to win at odds of forty to one? The muddy track slowed up the favorite considerably. Well, Pharaoh was trained by Langford.

Buddy Langford was a chip off the old block. He was light and wiry, and soon developed into a jockey. Here his father's trait asserted itself. Buddy could ride only mudders. Maitland soon found this out and let Buddy ride Pop's proteges with great success.

But there was another son, who was too heavy for a jockey, and who had no special inclination to follow in his brother's footsteps. Being of no use around the race-tracks, he was left in school.

And what a school! This year there seemed a wonderful chance for a state championship for the scarlet and gold football team of Hampden. Sixteen of the best last-year men were returning, and the promising fledglings were turning out in great numbers. Among them was Johnny Langford, who for no particular reason at all had suddenly acquired a yen for football. He worked long and diligently and the first split found him still on the squad. To tell the truth, it was entirely due to his brainwork, a necessary quality for the quarterback position to which he was aspiring, for he was only a mediocre player. But it seemed that he had picked a poor position as far as chances for a letter went. Dresbach had been on the second all-state team the year before, and Kemp was a heady, capable player. So it was that Langford stayed on the sidelines to watch Hampden trim State College High 27-0; Hampden Heights 49-0; Temple City 37-6; Browning Central 14-0; Hampden Tech 19-0; Hampden Catholic 24-3; Kellogg 41-13; and Browning Eastern 17-0.

It was not until the Nason game that he got his chance. Dresbach appeared rather dazed, having spent the better part of his energy in aiding his teammates to garner twenty points while holding Nason to three. Kemp was confined to bed with a slight attack of influenza. Thus it was that Langford found himself racing across the field to report to the referee. The ball was in Hampden's possession on Nason's 35-yard line.

The next play was a complicated triple pass which functioned perfectly for a gain of seven yards. Courtney slid off tackle for five more. A short pass, Gibson to Beatty, garnered fourteen

yards. The Nason line held and MacLeod was stopped. Then Langford decided to carry the ball, but he was over-eager and fumbled. A Nason linesman scooped it up and carried it to the 25-yard line before he was stopped. Two tries at the line netted only three yards and Nason kicked. The play was hurried and the ball was downed by a Nason man on his own 45-yard line. Langford gained two yards at center. Gibson went around the end for five. Courtney was stopped at the line.

MacLeod dropped back for a kick. It was a pretty spiral, good for 45 yards. The Nason safety man ran it back 15 yards with fine interference. A pass was incomplete, and as usual the Hampden line held for two attempts. Nason kicked a high spiral to the Hampden 20-yard line, where Langford was waiting. It struck his arms and bounced through, rolling to the five-yard line, where a Nason end fell on it.

Two tries at the line failed, and then they released a clever place-kick fake which carried the ball across. The same back who had calmly kicked the field goal earlier in the game, now placed the ball squarely between the posts. The score was Hampden 20, Nason 10.

Nason kicked off to MacLeod, who was downed on the 30-yard line. Courtney made five yards at tackle and Gibson picked up three more at center. On the next play Hampden was offside and received a five-yard penalty. Then Langford dropped back for a pass. He received a perfect center and after waiting his chance, threw a short pass. It was a poor one and sailed wide of its mark straight into the arms of a Nason man. Interference massed about him and he ran along the sidelines, watching the opposing team fall away one by one. Only Langford was between him and the goal. Johnny took a few steps forward, then dived for the Nason runner's feet. The twisting form eluded him and ran for a touchdown. Again Nason made their point, making the score 20 to Nason's 17. By this time Hampden was thoroughly demoralized, and Nason was fighting like tigers. But time was

short, and the game ended with a first down for Nason on Hampden's 25-yard line. On the way to the locker room, Coach Fields touched Langford on the arm. "You won't need to come back next week," he said coldly.

Browning Western was to be the opponent for the following week in the last game of the season. Western had won the city championship of Browning, a thriving metropolis of five public schools, and had held the state championship three times in the last decade. Only a tie in an early game the year before had prevented them from repeating. This year they brought a large, fast team, thoroughly drilled in the art of football. The Kings of North were bringing six hundred students to support their undefeated Purple and White gridders. Hampden had been slight favorites before the last game, but their poor showing, coupled with Western's 23 to 6 defeat of Southern, had switched the odds. Streaming headlines blared forth their usual ballyhoo:

"Kings of North Favored to Remain Supreme."

"Waltham's Form in Southern Defeat Makes Western Easy Favorites."

"Hampden Machine Goes Boom—Western Confident."

"Hampden Will Take Trimming, Say Experts."

But the average sports writer overlooked the fact that the close call of Hampden was due to misplays on the part of Langford; that Hampden had held on virtually every occasion; and that the Hampden backs had ripped through the highly-touted Nason line time after time.

Rain, rain, rain! The Hampden coach growled irritably. Here it was, Thanksgiving day morning, and rain coming down in torrents, rain that would slow up the game considerably. No spectacular passing, no flashy broken-field running, no trick plays, dangerous to operate but great ground-gaining plays. No such plays as those used in preceding games could be hoped for.

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The rain did not seem to have damp-

ened the ardor of the spectators, although their colors were beginning to look bedraggled. Eighteen thousand people were crammed into Hampden Field. The Purple and White Western team was already on the field practicing when the gate opened and the Scarlet and Gold jersied Hampden team poured on the field. A great deep-throated cheer went up and the one hundred-piece Hampden band began, "Hampden, the Conqueror." From the Western stands came the defiant answer, "Gods of the Gridiron."

Down on the field the teams were warming up. Punting, passing and running, the teams prepared for the struggle. Out of the sky came a twirling ball propelled by MacLeod's foot. Gibson set himself to catch it, but before it reached his arms a figure dashed before him, seized the ball and tossed it back to the kicker. From the sidelines came the irritated voice of the coach, "Langford, come here! I thought I told you to stay away from here."

"Sure you did. But you're going to need me today." The youth was calm, debonair.

"Oh, is zat so?" replied the coach, struggling to control himself. But Langford was gone.

When the game started Dresbach was in his usual position, and Langford could scarcely persuade the coach to keep him in the stadium.

We will not dwell on the horrors of that first half. It seemed that the mud in no wise hampered the strong Western team. They pushed over two touchdowns, failing to make the extra points, however.

On the fourth play in the second half Dresbach lost his temper and swung at a Western man whom he accused of rough playing. He was immediately sent from the game. Coach Fields motioned to Kemp, and was about to send him in when he noticed the other's unusual pallor. "Doc, come here a minute," he called. "Doc" Wellant came forward. A look at Kemp and he turned to the coach. "Good heavens, man, Kemp isn't over his influenza. Send

him home, quick!"

While Kemp was being helped from the stadium, the coach turned to the bench. Langford looked up expectantly, but the coach passed him by. "Go on in, Holmes." The sub raced across the field. He was not an especially brilliant player, but he was steady and consistent. The teams seemed to be unable to do much but kick for a while, but soon Western backed Hampden up to within their 20-yard line. MacLeod prepared to kick out of danger. The center was low and before he was fully ready to kick a Westerner had broken through.

Suddenly he went down, stopped by clever blocking on the part of Holmes, and the kick sailed safely away. But back of the line of scrimmage lay Holmes, his leg crumpled queerly beneath him. He was quickly carried from the field, and Freeland went in for him.

But plainly, Freeland was not the man for the position. Errors on his part soon brought the team back within the danger zone. Coach Fields moaned with despair and sent in Langford, first admonishing him not to carry the ball. MacLeod dropped back in kick formation, but Langford received the ball and handed it to Gibson, who tore around end for eight yards. Western stopped the next play. Langford then knifed through center for five yards. MacLeod tossed a short pass to Beatty, who dropped it. Langford took the ball, and behind clever interference scurried thirteen yards. MacLeod threw a pass to Langford good for 28 yards. Gibson was stopped and MacLeod thrown for a three-yard loss in two successive tries. Langford skirted the end for eight yards and Graham, playing at Courtney's position, made first down on the twenty-one-yard line.

Both halfbacks concentrated their efforts at right guard, making a wide hole through which Langford made 11 yards. Graham took the ball to the three-yard line and Langford plunged over. MacLeod plunged for the extra point.

Hampden 7, Western 12. See page 26

## BILL'S SISTER

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decided that the Newport men had taken the hint that he knew.

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"You'll be the school heroine Monday, Joan," teased Bill, when he came home, weary but triumphant, after the game. "Willison told the team and they won't keep it any secret."

"Why, gee! That's awful. Why everyone will know about it!"

And Joan, who had intended to "show everybody," was frantically wondering what to do.

The game had been finished splendidly with a delighted Benton group going homeward to announce a score of 20 to 0, "in favor of Benton, of course!"

A small and discontented group from Newport High were wondering how "that Benton bunch" had found out. The Newport boys had taken the hint when Spencer was held out until the third quarter. They weren't dumb, they told themselves afterwards.

"Somebody spilled it," muttered one, darkly, "and I'd like to know who!"

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Bill's casual, "thank you, kid," meant a lot to Joan. She had been mean, she thought, to be sore at Bill because *she* wasn't noticed. It wasn't his fault; and he wasn't as conceited as she had thought, she decided.

"Well, that's that."

"I hope those Newport fellows know now that we mean business. I guess next year they won't plan any dirty work to win for them."

"No," Joan agreed, "but aren't they apt to go after you on the side?"

"Guess not," Bill said. "Anyhow, you're due to be a greater figure in the history of Benton High. A tradition; a— a—"

"Oh, shut up," ordered Joan, chasing him out of the room.

He returned a few minutes later demanding to know which snapshots she intended to give to the newspaper.

Joan ventured no reply, but went on reading, and Bill gave up with a sigh.

Monday night coming home from

school Joan was the center of a group of eager students. She protested that someone else had told her and wished that Ella had not asked her to promise never to tell.

Joan thereafter was never called Bill's sister—she was Joan Spencer to every one.

"Success," she told herself, "is not always sweet."

## THE MUDDER

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Western kicked. Beatty received the ball and carried it to his own 40-yard line. Calhoun, right end, dropped a 15-yard pass, but the referee ruled interference and the pass was allowed. Hampden tried two more passes but both were incomplete and the customary five-yard penalty was inflicted. Langford was stopped at the line and MacLeod kicked. The Western safety man was beneath it but when the ball fell into his arms he was tackled savagely by Langford and the center McIntyre, with the result that the ball was jolted from his hands. Burgess, Hampden tackle, fell on it, stopping it on the 15-yard line. A Western man intercepted the ball on a short pass and ran to his 40-yard line, but the play was brought back and Western penalized five yards for offside. MacLeod gained four at end, placing the ball on the six-yard line. Graham made three on a triple pass and Gibson carried it over. The kick for point was blocked.

Hampden 13, Western 12.

But Hampden was not content. The wolf, having tasted blood, was returning for more. Western received on their 25, carrying the ball to the 30-yard line. Two tries at the line availed them nothing. Then Waltham, their all-state back, tore through left guard for four. The Western guard suffered so severely that time out was taken, but he continued to play.

Western kicked and Chapin carried it back to the 50-yard line. Langford, seeing the dazed appearance of the left guard, cut through his position for

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## THE MUDDER

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seven yards. MacLeod made three more at the same point. Three more tries netted thirteen yards. Then the Western coach removed the weak guard. His place was effectually filled, and the backfield turned elsewhere. Finally a late pass attack got under way, although Langford seemed the only one capable of catching them. Three out of four such attempts were made, bringing the ball to the 15-yard line. Then Langford started an end run, cut back through the line, evaded the backfield and crossed the last line. MacLeod kicked the extra point.

Hampden 20, Western 12.

Western again received. Hampden held and Western kicked to Langford just as the final gun sounded. Langford ran close to the sidelines for 75 yards to a touchdown. The Western line gave way and Gibson plunged for the extra point.

Hampden 27, Western 12.

As the jubilant crowds poured on the field, Coach Fields rushed to Langford. "Great Scott, Langford! How does it happen you played like that today?"

Langford hesitated a moment then replied, "I guess I'm a 'mudder' just like the horses my father trained and my brother rode."

And to this day he is known as Mudder Langford.

## THE COWARDS LAST LAUGH

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and leaping into the air.

The two gunners in the Rumpler were Bob's wobbling plane when Slim reached the level of the fight.

There was no time to sight his guns on the German. With a sneer Slim flung his Spad at the Rumpler. They'd laugh at him and call him a coward, would they? Well, he'd show them! Slim was laughing like a man gone mad. He was having the last laugh.

With a surprised grunt the pilot of the German plane glanced at the approaching Spad. Too late! With a

sickening crash the German and Slim met head-on. For a moment they hung suspended in mid-air. Then, with a quick, short explosion, both planes burst into flame and started falling. They resembled two huge, fiery pin wheels as they zig-zagged through the sky.

"And we called Slim Nelson a coward," said the Major. There was a queer moisture in the eyes of every man in Flight B. They were unashamed of these tears, for wasn't Slim a member of their own flight? No, not any more. Now he was a member of a Flight far greater and nobler than those engaged in war. Young Bob Hudson safely brought his plane to a landing. There were tears in his eyes, too, as he staggered into his father's arms.

"I guess we called the wrong one a coward," were his only words.

Later a group of flyers were gathered around a freshly covered grave. They stood with their hats off and a reverent gaze on their faces. Before them, engraved on a huge marble slab, were these words:

"Here lies the remains of R. P. Nelson who, though called a coward, proved himself a man by making the supreme sacrifice that his friend might live."

And this is how Slim left the Army.

## SOUTH EXPOSURE

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for next semester—and pretty soon there won't be no more South Exposure. . . . Wonder if basket weaving and meat packing will be offered next spring? . . . If Ray Wilkinson reads over our shoulder and keeps on bothering us, we're going to tap him out. . . . Another few weeks and we'll be ice-skating. All's Quiet on the Northwestern Front—Pop must be in the Session Room. And so it goeth.

### *The Runner*

He, who from room to room,  
Runs through the halls in speedy flight,  
Will surely spend tenth hour  
In his session room tonight.

—Bob Meyer.