

Fred Bowen

DOUBLE REVERSE

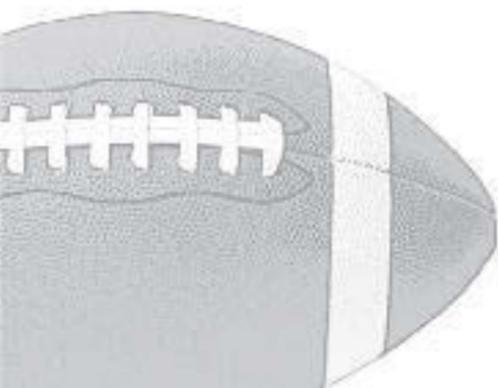


FRED BOWEN
SPORTS STORY



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Summary: Although he knows all the plays, freshman wide receiver Jesse is reluctant to try out for quarterback until his brother, a college player, is asked to switch from quarterback to safety and the two make a deal that will force them, and Savannah, the new kicker on Jesse's team, to conquer their own and others' expectations.

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For Clare Elizabeth Bowen.

Welcome.



Chapter 1

Ready...set...hut one!" Jesse Wagner and his older brother Jay were running pass patterns at Hobbs Park, just as they had a thousand times before. Jesse was always the wide receiver and Jay was always the quarterback.

Jay crouched as if he was taking the ball from the center.

Jesse bolted from the line of scrimmage and dashed straight downfield. His sweat-stained T-shirt and baggy gym shorts flapped in the hot summer breeze.

Jesse counted in his head. At the count of three, he faked left, dug his cleat into the dry playground dirt, and broke sharply to the right. The football was already spinning

toward him. He reached up and snagged the perfect spiral with two hands, then stutter-stepped to keep both feet inside the faded chalk sideline.

“First down!” Jay called out, thrusting his hand downfield like a referee. “Nice catch.”

Jesse turned and jogged back. He snapped off a quick pass as he ran. “Good pass,” he said, stopping on the line of scrimmage. “It was in the perfect spot—to the outside, away from the defender.”

Jay crouched down again. “Let’s run the same deep-out pattern a few more times. I need to practice that one.”

Jesse set up at his wide-receiver position with his hands on his hips. He looked over at his brother.

Jay was standing on an empty field in the steamy August sun wearing shorts and a T-shirt. But gripping the football in front of him, he still looked every inch a quarterback. Jay was taller than Jesse, almost six foot two, and much stronger. He was four years older, and in a few days, he’d be

heading off for his freshman year at Dartmouth College.

“Ready...set...hut one!”

The two brothers practiced the deep-out pattern over and over. Sweat poured down Jesse’s face and he could feel the salt stinging his eyes.

Finally Jay declared that he’d had enough. He and Jesse walked to the sideline, splashed water on their faces, and wiped them dry with ragged towels.

“You’re looking good today,” Jesse said. “I wish I could throw like that.”

Jay shrugged. “My hands are kind of sweaty. I couldn’t get a good grip on some of the deep-out passes.”

“They looked all right to me.”

The empty field simmered in the sun. Jay spun the football in his hands. “I’ve got to put more zip on the ball,” he said, his voice taking on a serious tone. “The college game is a lot faster. And the defensive backs are much better than the guys I played against in high school.”

“So practice starts Monday?” Jesse asked.

“Yeah. Mom and Dad are driving me up Sunday morning.”

“But classes don’t start for a week or two?”

“Right. We have a heavy practice schedule for a while. This college football thing is pretty serious.”

“You’ll show ’em,” Jesse said. “You were the best quarterback Franklin High School ever had. No way those other college guys are as good as you. You were All-Conference twice. You set records for passing yards and touchdown passes—”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa, little bro!” Jay laughed. “Maybe you should write the coach. Tell him you’ve been running pass patterns for me for years and I’m the best quarterback you’ve ever seen.”

“It’s true. Where’s my phone? I’ll text him right now.”

“That was just high school,” Jay said, waving Jesse off. “Believe me, a lot of college players were big shots in high school. I’ll be starting all over again.” Jay tossed Jesse a short pass. “Come on, let’s get out of here.”

They headed toward the gate on the other side of the park. “When does football start for you?” Jay asked.

“In a couple of weeks.”

“Who’s coaching the freshman team this year?”

“Mr. Butler.”

“Oh yeah, he was an assistant with the junior varsity when I started out.” Jay slapped Jesse in the stomach with the back of his hand. “He’s a good coach. He’ll get you in shape.”

“Hey! I *am* in shape,” Jesse protested, tightening his stomach muscles. “From running all those pass patterns for you.”

“You’ll find out if you are soon enough,” Jay said.

“I wonder if they’ll change any of the plays in the playbook.”

“Probably not. The varsity, JV, and freshman teams run pretty much the same stuff,” Jay said and then dropped back three quick steps. “Quick fly!”

Jesse darted downfield, and Jay flipped him a pass that hit him in stride. Jesse

tucked the ball under his arm and sprinted away.

“Touchdown!” Jay ran down the field after his brother. “At least you won’t have to spend any time learning the plays,” he said as Jesse tossed the ball back. “You already know them all.”

Jesse fell into step with his brother. “I used to quiz you on them all the time,” he said. “Remember?”

Jay nodded, then faked a handoff and faded back. Jesse flared out to the right and Jay tossed him a soft pass.

The brothers talked and tossed the football back and forth in the late summer heat, just as they’d done so many times before.

“So have you decided what position you’re going to try out for?” Jay asked.

“Wide receiver.”

“You’ll make a good one.”

Jesse thought about the Franklin High School freshman team. “I just hope I have a quarterback who’s half as good as you.”