

# THE STEM-CELL QUARTERBACK

By James L. Clark: ©2004

It was the last day of spring practice and Head Coach Jubal Cornhusk paced the sidelines during the final intra-squad game, wondering if he had a football team or a gang that couldn't shoot straight even in the locker room, much less in a stadium where 68,000 people could watch its horrendous miscues, come the fall. He had been hired away two months before from one of the National Football League teams, where he was an assistant to the assistant quarterback coach; but, his main duties had been to keep track of which player's turn it was to feign an injury so that extra TV commercials could be shown while he was receiving attention on the field, and to make sure everybody watching the games on television saw the Gatorade sign on the barrel at the end of the bench and the Nike swoosh – or swish or whatever – on the backs of the players' warm-up jackets. He watched the location of the cameras and threw the jackets on the players when they came out of a game no matter if it was ninety in the shade. He had been cursed at roundly for this by the players, and had almost been fired once when one of them threw a jacket at him but missed and flung it into one of the huge fans that blew cold air the length of the bench to cool the players. Not only had the jacket been shredded and the fan been ruined, but the ripped-off swish logo – or swoosh or whatever – had been caught on-camera slamming into the mouth of a cheerleader busily flashing her navel at the crowd instead of keeping her mind on the game, thus cutting off her breathing and delaying the game while an ambulance rolled out on the field to take her to the emergency room. Other cameras had been on three players drinking Gatorade when the whole thing happened and caught them puking all over the Gatorade logo when they saw the grisly sight of the swash – or swish or swoosh or whatever – wrapped around the cheerleader's tonsils.

The university had won only four games in the previous two seasons, and in the Southeastern Conference this meant that its toughness and ability had been judged to be roughly somewhere between the women's volleyball team and the fraternity touch-football league. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the final authority in college sports, had been investigating the school for rules infractions of most every kind. Supposedly poverty-stricken players drove nice cars around the city (and often were picked up for driving under the influence or on an occasional rape charge), dressed to the nines for all the parties and took flights to watering holes such as Hawaii and Cancun during the holidays. The NCAA, itself examined occasionally by some federal court or other, had sent representatives to rummage through practically non-existent records, spy on the players and coaches and even search the library to see if a player actually could be found studying there. Cornhusk himself didn't know where the library was, but assured the investigators that players could be found there and, when they had inquired about its location, had hurriedly sent five tight ends to the library, who, unhappily became a bit tighter at the nearest bar and never made it to the seat of learning.

The evidence was overwhelming, and, as much as it hated to do anything, the NCAA had decided to crack down. It was discovered that the university's coaches were paying high school coaches to send their best players to Kentucky. This was not unusual in the conference, known as the most *redneck* in the nation, but the local coaches had been so dumb that they couldn't cover up their actions. Indeed, the rumor was that a "football slave market" was operated in Memphis. High school coaches there, on a certain night in a rural roadhouse known only to coaches and athletic directors (actually on the Arkansas side of the Mississippi), submitted the names of their best players and showed videos of their skills, whereupon the university coaches and/or other officials (even one university president, rumored to be from Tennessee) would bid for the player, the high school coach pocketing the money, with the promise, never kept, that the boy's family would get a cut. The market also featured such enticements as a raffle for a Jamaican holiday with a partner of choice (or one furnished by a local massage parlor), girlie shows and all the alcohol anyone could consume. The coaches had been accused of paying fees for high school players to attend summer football camps at the university, a no-no according to the NCAA, which demanded that the kids pay their own way regardless of their financial situation, even though the camps were mostly just fun and games, with a lot of girls around. The coaches had long ago discovered that campus tours and a look at the players' dorms meant nothing to the high school prospects; but, girls...well, that was a different story. Actually, some of the assistant coaches had hit up well-heeled alumni and businessmen for the fees, but then pocketed them and let the players in free. High school coaches visiting the camp or acting as instructors were ensconced at the plushiest hotels and allowed to run up booze bills into the hundreds of dollars.

There had also been cheating on the SAT and ACT college-entrance tests, at both the high schools and the university. Players who couldn't pass the test in high school – or whose coaches couldn't rig the scores – routinely took the test again at the university, where a monitor could easily be convinced, usually with a bit of cash, to look

the other way when a player was accompanied by one of the resident-student nerds to the test site. The nerds were carefully chosen, since they had to know how to make the score good enough, but not too good, lest an unusually high score indicate test hanky-panky. Keeping the players eligible academically had been a problem and had necessitated up to three tutors for each player, much of the cost surreptitiously borne by alumni, as were the costs of clothes, cars, vacations and the like. This was normal procedure at all SEC schools, but at Kentucky the coaches had been too dumb to maintain a proper cover-up. The NCAA had been alerted to the Kentucky situation when a player signed his credit card with an X, and had been carefully examining transcripts, scores and nerds for months. The tutoring process had come under fire, also, when four coed tutors became pregnant and their clients had flunked out. Although the pregnancies were regrettable, as the AD told the coaching staff, the loss of four starters was intolerable, and he wondered if something besides tutoring had been the main activity. Replacing coeds with male tutors had been accomplished, but the National Organization of Women and the American Civil Liberties Union had brought a discrimination suit, the upshot being that all tutoring henceforth would be done in the open in the cafeterias or the library lounge. The noise in both places did not help the learning process, but the university was too uptight about losing federal entitlements to make a fight.

The upshot of the whole matter was that the previous head coach had been given two Cadillacs, a condo in Florida, and paid a million dollars to quit, not an uncommon practice in SEC schools, where winning was the only thing that mattered and professors were considered a dime a dozen and not worth much more than that. The coach hadn't been fired outright because he claimed no knowledge of what he had told his assistants to do and had threatened a lawsuit which would have incriminated the AD, four trustees, a NCAA official, and forced some nerds to testify. Most of the assistant coaches were fired, with severance pay of \$75,000 apiece and a new 4X4 pickup, which was what they requested when asked about their favorite thing in life. The university advertised for a head coach, who would pick his staff once he was on the scene. There were no applicants, so the AD, about the only one left standing when the NCAA made its preliminary report, since he had been smart enough to cover all his tracks (as any athletic director worth his salt should be), contacted a friend who contacted a friend who knew about Cornhusk's terrible blunder with the warm-up jackets and the cheerleader, a professional stripper who successfully sued the team for a million dollars, though she had suffered no physical impairments. She was awarded the judgment because of alleged defamation of character when she appeared fully clothed – and therefore out of costume – in a picture shown all over the country, and (at least suspected by some) because she knew the judge *very* well. Since NFL coaches and general managers get all the proceeds from endorsements, and since Nike and Gatorade had sued the coaches, general manager, team president, the TV station and even the team mascot for recovery of payments, as well as damages to their reputations, Cornhusk had begun to suspect that his neck might be on a swish and a splatter (football jargon for the guillotine), so he jumped at the chance offered by the AD to come to Kentucky and *turn the program around* (football jargon for finally winning a game against a conference team, any team, including Vanderbilt, where players are required to know the location of the library and attend class, but win few conference games...or any games, for that matter.).

Cornhusk had been a so-so player in a county high school in West Virginia and had taken only five years to graduate. The last game of his senior year was the only game he ever started, ostensibly because all the tight ends were injured, at least according to his coach (though Jubal was a linebacker by trade), but his father had winked when he gave the coach \$500 *for the good of the program*, which funds never found their way into any school fund. Jubal weighed in at 160 and stood six-four, so his bones were too near the outside world not to be broken once in a while when an opposing player slammed him to the ground. His mother never attended a game, and always suspected Jubal played only because his father wouldn't let him use the car if he didn't. She had given her mild-mannered son the name of Jubal, after the character in the Book of Genesis known as the *father of all who play the harp and the flute*, hoping he would become a great musician like her girlhood idol, Elvis Presley. She bought him three guitars and an expensive amp and paid for his lessons, administered by a weekend saloon player who was also the town's guitar guru, with whom Jubal played pinochle three times a week, but hardly touched a string. The guru finally pronounced him good enough, after a token *gift* from Jubal's mother, to play one song at the county fair during the summer after his second junior year, but the last straw was strewn when he hooked up his amp to the wrong circuit and blew out all the lights in the fairground, stopped all the amusement-park rides, singed the hair of the people in the first two rows and nearly electrocuted the guitar guru. This was the end of his music career.

At the beginning of the second semester of his senior year, his old coach was replaced by a new guy from New Jersey who invited all the football players to work out every afternoon in the weight room. Jubal hung out at all the sessions even though he would soon graduate. He figured it was better than working...in fact, he figured most anything was better than working. He noticed the new coach (who pronounced his state *Noo Joisey*) slipping what appeared to be pills of some kind to the players in the locker room, and was told by his buddies that the coach said they were vitamin tablets and would do wonders for their game...make them stronger and faster and

tougher..if they would work out in the weight room, which had hardly ever been used. Jubal figured the pills might help him, too, since he planned to work at the cement plant hustling hundred-pound bags of the stuff after his graduation and therefore could use some extra strength. He had hoped to work at the Kroger bagging groceries, since the store was air-conditioned and the bags were not heavy, but that idea was exploded when, as a part-timer, he had run a string of carts he was pushing over a little old blue-haired lady in a pink jogging suit and broken one of her legs and four of the carts. He noticed the labels on the bottles in the coach's office during January while everyone was out in the weight room one afternoon, as well as what appeared to be an Internet address scribbled on one of them. One of his buddies brought up the Web site on his home computer and Jubal used the family credit card to purchase a virtual pharmacy of steroids, which he began taking as the spirit moved him.. and the spirit moved him to take quite a few. Since his friends spent all their spare time in the weight room, Jubal joined in, and then bought some equipment for himself. It didn't hurt any that the girls, who had always laughed at him, began to flirt as he filled out, making sure to wear short-sleeve shirts so that his biceps could be easily seen. By the time of graduation, he had bulked up to 195 and counting. At the end of June, he passed 215 and was throwing cement bags around like they were pillows.

While he was working one afternoon in early July, a friend of his boss came by. The two had played football together at the state university some years before, and the friend was an assistant coach at the University of Alabama. When he saw what Jubal could do with a hundred-pound bag of cement and found out he had played football in high school, he became interested. He was also impressed by the fact that Jubal had picked up the front end of an old Volkswagen on a dare, and had actually pushed the car ten yards. When Jubal's boss told his former teammate about Jubal's rage in the Main Street poolroom one day, when Jubal had stomped a couple of pool sharks (actually two of his best friends) and then thrown them bodily into the street, the Alabama assistant knew the boy was on steroids, but figured he could get the dosage right if he could lure the lad to Alabama. Besides bulking-up players, steroids also had the added advantage of changing a person's personality from mild-mannered to machismo-mannered (even malicious-mannered, in some cases)..a personality absolutely vital to football success, since coaches' salaries, endorsements and other perks depended on winning at all costs, and winning usually depended on how much physical damage could be administered to an opposing team.

There was a problem, as the visiting coach discovered when he checked Jubal's academic credentials. Along with most of his class and actually under threat of car-denial from his father, Jubal had taken the ACT and made a score of twelve. Since a score of fifteen was necessary to satisfy the NCAA requirements for playerhood, though that score could usually be reached by most students able to simply spell their middle names, something would have to be done. This would be no problem at Alabama, which had the reputation of changing ordinary, semi-literate football players into budding geniuses practically overnight. In fact, this assistant coach had once made a successful bid of \$100,000 for a Memphis high-school running-back at the slave-market, and had thrown in an SUV to the boy's head-coach, as well..so, a little thing like fixing an ACT score was a simple matter. The high-school coach's assistant, infuriated because he was totally cut out of the above-mentioned deal, reported his superior to the principal, with the result that the head coach was forced to cut in both the assistant and the principal for \$25,000 apiece to keep the affair from going any farther, but got to keep the SUV.

Jubal's father had contacted the University of Nebraska about his son, since he felt the name *Cornhusk* would combine with the boy's statistics to make him a shoo-in at a school whose football team was called the *Cornhuskers*, but nothing ever came of the overture; so, to make a long story short, Jubal reported to football camp in Alabama in August, re-took the ACT with a nerd at each side, and came up with a score of seventeen, the nerds having designed the answer sheet for the proper score and simply smuggling it into the test-room, where Jubal sat for two hours sipping Pepsis and popping pills, then signed it. The Alabama assistant adjusted the kind and dosage of pills, knowing that if Jubal kept up his own regimen he might attack almost anybody and do almost anything.

Three tutors worked with Jubal, but he was still red-shirted his first year while, as the assistant coach delicately put it, he learned his way around the campus. He played in every game during his last four years and graduated, though he seldom went to class. Grades were no problem, since the well-organized alumni made sure the right professors drove Porsches, vacationed in the Alps and had attractive investments. Though he lacked in the academic area, Cornhusk, however, did develop a keen sense for the game and was nobody's fool when it came to fundamentals and strategy. He was put in the lineup sparingly, since his only responsibility was to run over people from his linebacker's position and maim whatever opposing player the head coach pointed out. He topped out at a fast 260 pounds of solid muscle and was usually assigned to maim the opposing quarterback early in most games. He could have played a lot more, but the coach had to be careful of referees (most of whom could not be bribed) who got to looking too closely – some of Jubal's licks were not altogether gentlemanly, especially when administered at the bottom of a pile of players – when *all* the players he hit were slow to get up, especially in the away games, where it was not known what arrangements the opposing coach had made. In the Southeastern

Conference, anything was possible. During his final season, he gave concussions to four quarterbacks, broke the leg of a wide receiver, tore a number of various and assorted ligaments and cartilages, and managed six broken collarbones of people who just happened to get in the way, one of whom was a TV cameraman running alongside the action twenty yards from the play. Jubal mistook him for an opposing back and fell on the camera when it hit the ground..the only time, smirkingly reported the sportswriters, when anyone had recovered a fumbled camera.

Jubal's record made him an attractive prospect for the NFL, in which mayhem had risen to new heights of importance with the advent of TV and the resulting humongous salaries paid to grown men to pummel each other every Sunday, sort of the equivalent of the old gladiators in ancient Rome. Those who could wreak the most physical havoc on others were the best paid, and games and championships were often decided on the basis of how many of a team's players were on crutches or in the hospital and how many were still able to run. The size and speed of defensive players were important, but the main consideration was what the scouts called the MQ, the Maim Quotient. Jubal's MQ was high and he was chosen early in the NFL draft after his fifth and final year of eligibility. He spent ten years in the NFL before a Cornhusk clone on another team broke his leg and three ribs, and forced his retirement. The main problem was that Jubal, never good at figures, had been unlucky with agents, and by the time he was finished in the NFL had no bank account. The sharpies had taken him for almost everything but his pickup. Upon his retirement, he stayed with the team as the assistant to the assistant quarterback coach, though he had never thrown a pass in his entire career – not even tossing the jacket in the unfortunate affair with the warm-up jacket – until his acceptance of the Kentucky job.

Kentucky had never been a powerhouse in football – at least not since the years immediately following WWII. The main sport in the state – besides cockfighting – was basketball. Indeed, basketball was so good at the university that three or four of its players on one of its teams had once been able to control the point-spread in their games (not lose, but just win at a certain threshold) in order to satisfy the requirements of the ever-present odds-makers, who enjoyed huge windfalls of sucker-money and presumably passed some of it on to the players – nothing on paper, of course, though they were eventually caught and became to college basketball what the Chicago “Black Sox” of 1919 became to professional baseball. The practice of point-shaving was not uncommon, of course, but no other outfit had come close to that team in its success. It was common knowledge that prizefights were thrown routinely, and doctoring horses to win or lose races was a common practice. Fixing the outcome was easy when only one athlete was involved, but doing it successfully in team sports was much more difficult.

The school had had sporadic success in football through the years, however, and some of the citizens actually had begun clamoring for a winning season once in a while. The AD had held press conferences in which he had praised Cornhusk's abilities, first as a standout player in the NFL, and then as part of a successful coaching staff, and had promised that the new coach would *turn things around, probably go to a bowl within a few years*. He was careful not to mention Jubal's experience that precipitated the lawsuits and his arrival at Kentucky. So, Jubal felt that he was under the gun, learned quickly that recruitment of the best players in the country – or even in the state – was out of the question, since the school would soon be facing tough NCAA sanctions and consequently not participating in any bowl games soon, even if in the unlikely event it should become good enough. As he watched his outfit finish the intra-squad game, he shook his head and muttered to himself that *he would have to find an angle somewhere if he expected to last one season*.

Coaches at Division I schools are paid to coach, whereas coaches at many schools in other divisions are also required to teach classes as well as coach. Even though much is made of the coaches' responsibilities in making recruiting trips, viewing films, etc., Division I coaches have a lot of time when summer training camp, the season and spring practice are not in session, so they can arrange their time to do such things as play golf, hunt, fish and take vacations. On an afternoon soon after the end of spring practice, Cornhusk was in a golf foursome at the city's most exclusive course with another coach, the AD and a professor doing research at the university in embryology, among other things having to do with genetics. During the round, the professor related some of the amazing things that scientists in his field were able to do and also explained some of the reasons that legislatures were attempting to make laws governing what they could and could not do, such as activities in stem-cell research. Cornhusk was not particularly interested, but listened politely. Though the professor was brilliant in his field, he was not a good golfer, much to his dismay, and, noticing that Cornhusk was very good at golf, as he was at everything from table tennis to Chinese checkers, he watched the coach closely and asked a number of questions about the proper swing, foot placement, etc. Jubal was happy to oblige, especially since helping the professor gave him a feeling of being superior in something, at least. He and the Chinese professor, Dr. Eicue Hai (pronounced eye-cue high), played regularly the next few weeks, and the professor's game improved dramatically with Jubal's coaching.

Summer training camp began at the end of July, and Cornhusk realized anew that unless something drastic was done he was in for a long season. Bobby Don Blankhead, his quarterback couldn't throw accurately, even at the

unusual times he figured out where to throw. His receivers constantly ran over each other trying to get to where they thought Blankhead might throw the ball if and when he decided to throw it. His running backs had trouble finding the right hole in the line to run through when they didn't fumble the handoff from Blankhead. His defense formed the classic definition of a sieve, being full of holes and usually gummed up somewhere. In the sweltering *dog days* of August, he hoped to see some improvement, but became increasingly convinced that, barring a miracle, the team would be lucky to score a touchdown against anybody – even Vanderbilt – or keep its opponents from spending the entire game in its end zone. He declared an “off-day” on the second Saturday of August, hoping the rest might do some good, and met Professor Hai for a round of golf. As they played, he bemoaned his situation to the scientist, all the while offering helpful hints as to how Hai might improve his game. The professor expressed his sympathy, but admitted that he had no expertise in football. When Jubal mentioned that he would be happy if his quarterback could just throw with some accuracy and strength, Hai looked thoughtful for a moment, then, continued with the round, though his mind seemed to be elsewhere.

The first game, against cross-state rival Louisville on the first Saturday in September, was almost a complete disaster. Cornhusk was lucky to get out with losing by only six touchdowns, though Louisville wasn't exactly a world-beater itself. In a rebuilding program, Louisville, too, had paid a coach a million dollars not long before to quit, go invest his easy money, and settle down for a life away from the game..perhaps on the beach at Fort Lauderdale. After all, it was just taxpayer money..easy come, eas y go. Buying out coaches whose teams didn't win half their games was not unusual throughout the SEC. Indeed, Kentucky had paid the coach before Cornhusk's immediate predecessor \$600,000 to quit, and he had gone on to become a highly paid TV sports commentator, banking his six-hundred thou for a rainy day. In fact, Jubal had been contemplating all through August what *he* might accept to quit. On the last play of that first game, Bobby Don pulled the almost impossible by completing a scoring pass to an end who was supposed to be on the other side of the field, if anywhere, at the time he threw it. Actually, all three of Louisville's linebackers were chasing the hapless quarterback toward his own goal line, yelling “concussion bait,” when out of sheer desperation he threw the ball as hard as he could. The end who caught the ball was all by himself because the defensive back, staring at a cheerleader as he loped down the sideline, had run off the field and tripped over his own bench. The end who caught Blankhead's pass was in the end zone only because he was trying to beat everyone else to the showers and was headed for the locker room. The crowd had begun running on the field, so the refs actually had no way of knowing if the player was even supposed to be in the game. But, it was counted, and Jubal was thankful for a score..any score.

On Sunday morning, Cornhusk met Dr. Eicue Hai for another round of golf. The professor had been to the game and, while he didn't understand much about it, *did* understand that Jubal had been rather well (or badly) embarrassed. He suggested that he might be able to help Jubal, explaining that he had a colleague at the Cincinnati zoo who was attempting to mate a gorilla with a chimpanzee, by fertilizing the chimp egg in a petri dish with the gorilla sperm. He explained that the chimp had been rescued from a carnival, where it was used to throw balls of all sizes through holes in a tarp that were only slightly larger than the balls. Its owner invited bets from the onlookers that the chimp couldn't do it, but the chimp, which the owner said practiced five hours a day in the Congo throwing coconuts at any object that moved in a 100-yard radius (out of sheer meanness), never missed. The chimp's owner was making a small fortune when the animal rights people complained about his alleged abuse of the chimp to a congressman from Massachusetts and a senator from California, whereupon the chimp, which, far from being abused, was treated better than most *people* in the troupe, was taken away and placed in the zoo. The gorilla had been picked out for the project because of its strength, which it had demonstrated one day by throwing one of its keepers over a twelve-foot-high fence and three cars parked nearby. The zoo biologist, who was working for the U.S. Army, was hoping to come up with a *chimpanzilla* that could throw a hand grenade accurately three thousand yards, roughly the length of thirty football fields, or fling a nine millimeter bullet through a bullet-proof vest at a hundred feet. Having such animals in the military – if they could be trained – could save many lives..human, that is. Hai went into a dissertation about stem cells that Cornhusk didn't understand, but he grabbed the coach's attention when he said he might have a plan to help poor Blankhead, who the professor, having been at Tiennamen Square in 1989, thought was running for his life all afternoon the day before. Jubal said he would try anything.

The next day, Hai made a trip to the Cincinnati zoo, where he observed the work of the renowned zoo biologist, Igor N. Smart, a former department head at the famous Moscow zoo who was banned from the zoo in the mid-eighties when he crossed a bear with a Siberian husky to produce an animal with inordinate size and speed and produced a dog so fast, strong and vicious that it chased down the car of a member of the Politburo and ate his chauffeur. The hapless, disgraced biologist emigrated to the United States and changed his last name from Smartovokoskiy. He and Hai shared a hatred of communism as a result of their experiences and had built their friendship on both their common interest – science – and that hatred. Smart was a bit apprehensive about Hai's plan

but agreed to give the professor some stem cells from the now-divided cell produced in the petri-dish union of the chimp's egg with the gorilla's sperm.

Hai contacted Cornhusk upon his return later that evening to the campus and indicated that he thought he had a medical procedure that would help his quarterback and had nothing to do with drugs, but was more like a potent vitamin. The next morning, a Tuesday, Jubal brought Bobby Don to Hai's laboratory, where the professor had concocted a mixture of the stem cells with a number of other elements and molded the whole nine yards into tablets, one of which Bobby Don took on the spot. Hai knew that an injection or the direct infusion of the cells to the desired location was the proper procedure, but was sure that he had perfected the *pill procedure* – better, even, than an outpatient method – and indeed was preparing a patent application for it. Besides, if the tablet worked, there would have to be adjustments made with the dosage, if necessary and possible, and this could be more easily managed externally than internally. Cornhusk, of course, knew all about what certain pills could do for an athlete.

In practice that afternoon, Blankhead began throwing the ball as never before. He usually started each practice by throwing the football at a movable bulls-eye, the center of which he could hit at ten yards or less. As the target was moved away from him, his accuracy diminished correspondingly, and at thirty yards he rarely hit even the outermost circle. Today, he was hitting the bulls-eye at fifty yards, though he had never before been able to throw the ball that far on a reasonable trajectory, much less hit anything with it. His biggest problem was that he threw the ball so hard that he ripped up four targets in ten minutes and knocked one of the target managers down when he threw too soon once. The poor guy had to go to the locker room and put ice on his shoulder. Jubal was jubilant when he saw the change, and the AD, who was watching, began adding up the dollars worth of endorsements a quarterback like Blankhead could command if he could just perform like that in a game. His question was answered later during the scrimmage session, when Blankhead hit every target, moving or otherwise, at which he aimed, though most of the time he picked the wrong receiver because he had never quite gotten the playbook in his mind. The players were all puzzled at the change and figured it out early that they had better not be looking the other way any time Bobby Don threw the ball anywhere. One tight end was hit on his head and knocked out when he didn't see the quarterback throwing to him because he wasn't supposed to catch the ball on that particular play. Two wide receivers sprained their arms trying to catch the ball and had to be helped to the locker room. One end was standing flat-footed in the end zone to receive Blankhead's pass and was knocked down when the ball hit him squarely in the chest. At this point, Cornhusk called off the passing drill and made a mental note to see Dr. Eicue Hai immediately after practice. The AD put in a call to Nike and Reebok and asked them to send representatives, and called the university president to suggest building new bleachers in both end zones and some VIP boxes all around the top tier of the stadium.

When Jubal told Hai what had happened, the professor said that one of two things had to happen: either Blankhead had to harness his power, or some adjustment would have to be made physically. He promised to call Igor N. Smart for some expert advice and have an answer the next day, and said that in the meantime he would make sure no one else gained access to the pills he had formulated. By practice the next afternoon, Bobby Don was strutting around like he thought he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. He had been told by Jubal to mention the pills to no one and was smart enough to obey, since even he realized that he would be dead meat if an opponent ever got the same ability that he had. Hai had checked with Smart and discovered that the biologist didn't know if Bobby Don's powers would wear off, since his petri-dish embryo had not yet developed, of course, and wouldn't be developed for some months. After lunch, Cornhusk and Hai met with the quarterback and coached him into throwing with the right amount of strength. His accuracy was not in the least diminished by this, and Jubal and the professor breathed more easily. Jubal knew that the main problem would lie in whether or not Blankhead remembered to temper his amazing new powers, but had about given up hope that the quarterback would ever memorize the plays.

The opponent on the following Saturday was supposed to be a breather with a smaller Division I-A school, and Cornhusk hoped his team might actually eke out a win. Blankhead had been the only bright spot during the practices all week, but his unpredictability meant that anything could happen...and probably would. Jubal had prepared a written list of the most-used plays and taped one copy to Bobby Don's wrist and another to the inside of his helmet. Kentucky was the home team, so the players were wearing their white jerseys. Both teams had on the same color of blue pants, however, and the visiting team was wearing light-blue jerseys. In the first half, Bobby Don didn't get off a pass because the defense crashed through his line so easily and tracked him down so quickly that he spent all his time scrambling, eating dirt and swearing at his linemen. The other team scored four touchdowns and managed to control the ball most of the time. Jubal made a mental note that either the linemen would have to be made to work at it or he would have to do something drastic to increase Blankhead's speed so he could outrun his tormentors and get his passes away before they could grind him into the ground. The quarterback did have a problem with speed...something like the problem he had with remembering the plays...kinda slow.

In the second half, Bobby Don got a break when three of the biggest and meanest defensive linemen on the other team ran into each other while chasing him toward his own goal line and knocked each other out. When that happened, in the third quarter, he actually got off a pass to a wide receiver who had been threatened bodily harm by two defensive backs and in sheer panic outran them to the end zone where they couldn't legally touch him. When he looked up, Bobby Don's pass was floating in from seventy yards away and he stopped shaking long enough to catch it for a score. The fans went wild and Bobby Don went into one of those popular, pelvic-pulsating celebration dances, throwing his crotch out of socket, and had to leave the game. He also beat his breast, much like a gorilla would in a Tarzan movie after kidnapping Jane, and the fans went wilder, while Jubal wondered what else could happen. The referee penalized the team for what he called Blankhead's taunting, and Jubal was beside himself with fury. In fact, he was so mad that in the middle of the fourth quarter he jerked the hapless quarterback off the bench so hard that his crotch flipped back into joint, and Jubal sent him back in. In the meantime, Blankhead had drunk too much water and started wobbling around and seeing stars before his eyes when he returned to the huddle. He forgot about his play-list and his instructions concerning his passes, not, as it turned out, that it mattered. On the first play, he dizzily mistook a light blue jersey of an opponent for a white one, forgot his strength adjustment exercises and threw an interception to a defensive back that, when it lodged under the player's shoulder pads, lifted the player off the ground and floated him over the goal post, dropping him on top of the AD who was trying to beat everybody out so he could avoid the press and beat the deadly traffic jam that always attended the end of a game. The opposing coach became infuriated when the referee signaled no interception, since the interceptor landed out of bounds on the running track on the AD, and a humongous fight ensued. The game was never finished, and the opposing coach, accusing Blankhead of assault (his player had three broken ribs and a broken collarbone), lodged a formal protest with the NCAA the next day, claiming that Blankhead would have had to be on steroids to pull a stunt like that.

Jubal was notified of this action on the Monday following the game and informed that his player would be required to be tested that day. Remembering his own experience with steroids, though there was nothing in the rules about them when he played, not that it mattered (since at Alabama anything short of murder was allowed in football), Jubal contacted Dr. Eicue Hai, and the two met for lunch at noon, two hours before the testing was to take place. Hai assured Cornhusk that steroids were not a part of the DNA mixture that Blankhead had ingested and that there was nothing to worry about. The conversation then turned to measures that might be taken to make Blankhead faster, bigger and smarter...without the use of steroids, of course, use of which was against the rules, although players routinely used them anyway, especially in the SEC, where not even the discovery of a cancer vaccine would be as important as winning a football game. Jubal explained that he couldn't use pills like those swallowed by Blankhead on the other players because they might kill each other and, worse, they might talk. He also wondered if Blankhead's breast-beating could be a side-effect of the pill, since gorillas – not people – usually did that sort of thing, not that it mattered much, since winning was all that *did* matter. He told Hai that he had no hope for a decent offensive line to protect the quarterback, so he needed for Blankhead to be able to fend for himself...fast enough to outrun his pursuers, big enough to scare the hell out of them, and smart enough to outwit them in the first place. The professor said he would look into the matter and get back to him. Later that day, Blankhead was tested by NCAA officials and found to be clean of steroids. Jubal breathed a sigh of relief, especially since it had become more difficult every year to hide the use of the drugs.

After practice later, at which sports reporters outnumbered the players and constantly took pictures of the preening Blankhead (who had been warned by Jubal not to say one word to them, and obeyed, though it was against his nature to keep his mouth shut), the AD took the coach aside and gave him hell for the Saturday debacle, reminding him that Jubal, as well as he, would be in for a lot of endorsement cash if he could just straighten out Bobby Don and win a game...or at least make sure Bobby Don did great things, whether a game was won or not. He reminded Jubal that the important thing was not about either winning or how the game was played, but how the endorsements were played, then, stalked off, hesitated, and turned back long enough to tell Cornhusk that he didn't like it a damn bit that that player landed on him Saturday just when he was about to beat the traffic.

Jubal and his assistants spent hours each day and night – nearly all the time they weren't on the practice field or haranguing the players about getting into the weight room or meeting with their tutors – watching game films of teams Kentucky was scheduled to play. The films watched most during the week were of Louisiana State, the enemy on the upcoming Saturday, and the game would be in Baton Rouge. It was rumored that the Tigers were stronger than ever, and that the coach had gotten all his players academically eligible (prompting smart-alecky columns by the sportswriters), as well as three of them out of jail for the game. Cornhusk's afternoon practices and scrimmages were as disappointing as ever during the remainder of the week, except for the show put on by Blankhead. His passing accuracy was phenomenal, though he still threw the ball to anyone he saw open, whether or not the player was supposed to be the receiver. Occasionally, he forgot about his strength and had to be warned by

Jubal. One of his passes ripped the shoulder pads off a tight end and scared the kid so badly that he was still shaking when the scrimmage was over. Jubal worried a little when Bobby Don jumped up and grabbed the horizontal bar on the goalpost and started swinging on it, whooping and hollering like some kind of beast. Then, he remembered the Tarzan yell he'd heard in the movies when he was young, and worried some more, though he told himself that his young quarterback was just hyped up for the game and knew he was good enough to hit any receiver any time and was just letting off steam. *If he was just as fast on his feet as he is on the bar*, he thought as he headed for the locker room, *I wouldn't be constantly worrying about some one-ton tackle rearranging his bones and vital organs.*

The game at LSU was played at night during a driving rainstorm. Actually, Jubal was glad for the weather, since he felt sure the slippery field conditions and impaired vision of the players would combine to make it a low-scoring affair. He was right. His team lost by only four touchdowns, but he worried that some NCAA officials might be in the stands – more probably in the press box – and notice what happened when a 300-pound LSU tackle was about to throw Blankhead for yet another muddy trip in the mud. When he was about seven yards from tackling the slow-moving and sliding quarterback, Bobby Don hauled off and threw the football right at the top of his helmet so hard that the impact, besides bursting the football, gave the huge tackle a concussion. Cornhusk pulled his quarterback out of the game, eased him toward the locker room and told him to walk slowly and say nothing to anybody. The LSU coach was livid. He had seen the whole thing because it happened in front of the LSU bench. Later, he was quoted in the papers as saying Blankhead was a danger to himself and all civilized people, and that anyone who could throw a ball that hard ought to be banned from the game.

On the following Monday, Cornhusk and Hai had another special session with Bobby Don to warn him about the use – or misuse – of his strength, and Jubal gave him a stern lecture about those *jungle noises*, explaining that the refs wouldn't stand for any taunting, since it had gotten out of hand the year before. Two Tennessee players were celebrating a completed pass against Florida by doing the rapper-run toward each other and bumped together so hard, for instance, that one of them suffered a cracked sternum. In the same game, a Florida player was doing a celebratory crotch/squat/side-legged hop after making a first down, when the unusual strain of the antic caused his jock strap to break and snap against his vital parts and doubled up the player with such pain that he had to go directly to the locker room and place ice on the spot where the sun never shines. Jubal also reminded his quarterback about the pain he, too, had suffered when he threw his own crotch out in the second game. Bobby Don remembered and thanked Jubal again for correcting the problem in the fourth quarter. When the quarterback was gone, Professor Hai told Jubal he thought Bobby Don's size was okay, since the young man was strong enough to discourage an attacker whenever he had the presence of mind to do so and could instill tremendous fear with a simple straight-arm to the helmet or a quick backhand to an opposing player's neck, or a swift knee to the groin when in a crowd too dense for the ref to notice. The truth was that he knew how to enlarge the quarterback, using stem cells from a newborn pig, but was afraid to try for fear he might create a monster, since he couldn't determine the proper dosage. He also said he might have at least a partial solution to Bobby Don's speed problem, and told him to bring the quarterback to his lab the next morning. During practice that afternoon, Jubal learned that Bobby Don had eaten fourteen bananas for lunch, and figured the size problem would take care of itself anyway. If he had known that the quarterback had also been climbing trees and hanging from limbs by one arm, he might have put two and two together. As it was, the coeds thought it was cool, and Bobby Don had become a Big Man On Campus.

Dr. Eicue Hai had made some friends who were owners of horse farms and were big-time operators in the racing industry, which was third in state gross product only to the making of booze and cigarettes, Kentucky's main contributions to society, and he was often invited out to the farms on social occasions. In the spring, he had been on one of the farms to attend a party, when a mare foaled and he had helped in the difficult delivery of the colt. Always on the lookout for stem-cell material, he captured some tissue from the birthing process and froze it as soon as he returned to his lab. He had been working on ways to use the material since then and had found that he could double a turtle's speed in negotiating a maze, even though the turtle was not helped in solving the maze. In fact, he had set up a classic example of what research could do when he medicated a turtle with the horse stem cells for a race against a rabbit, and the turtle won handily. The racehorse genes, he had learned, were transferable. He had also gained a rudimentary knowledge of how to regulate the dosage, and had put the stem-cell material in tablet form, using his soon-to-be-patented-he-hoped method.

The next morning, Jubal and Bobby Don appeared at the professor's lab, and Hai explained that he had a *new vitamin* prepared for the quarterback. He had carefully prepared the tablet and was sure he had just the right amount of stem-cell material in the tablet. Blankhead took the pill and headed off to class. The professor assured Jubal that the outcome would be just right, and that there was nothing to worry about. In the afternoon practice, there seemed to be little change...mediocrity reigned, as usual. Bobby Don's passing – unlike his unpredictable choice of targets – was as accurate as ever, and he was about as slow as ever – something on the order of molasses at twenty below zero. He threw the ball the length of the field with ease and could hit the bulls-eye with an accuracy

that was unbelievable. Jubal stopped the long passes, figuring a NCAA official might be spying and thinking about steroids again.

It was not until Friday, the day before the home game with Georgia, that Jubal noticed the change. In the scrimmage, when the opposing linemen went after Bobby Don and kept him from passing half the time, as usual, the quarterback started running away from them so fast that they couldn't catch him. Indeed, he started having so much fun outrunning them and everybody else from one side of the field to the other that he forgot to throw the ball, even though all of his receivers were open, since the defensive backs had also joined the chase. In fact, he decided to simply run down the field a couple of times himself, outran everybody and scored. A couple of times, however, after he spent a full two minutes at his new game – a version of the playground game *keepaway* – he forgot which way he was supposed to be headed and ran into his own end zone. Jubal didn't know whether to be sad or glad, since he now had a quarterback who was strong, accurate and fast, but whose elevator still didn't reach the top floor. Though Jubal had tried to keep anyone not belonging to the football program from the practice, a number of Georgia players, who had flown in that morning on their chartered jet, slipped by the guards and could hardly believe their eyes...the fastest man they had ever seen. When they reported what they had seen to their coaches and teammates, nobody believed them. Bobby Don had never liked coconut-flavored anything before, but had developed a craze for the flavor since the infusion of the zoo-related genes and amazed his teammates during dinner by eating three coconut-crème pies and a half-dozen chocolate/coconut-filled candy bars.

Georgia had had a great winning season the year before, culminated by winning a bowl game, but the president of the university, thought by ninety-nine percent of the fans, redneck and otherwise, to totally misunderstand the game, fired the coach. Instead of paying the coach to quit, always the way it was done in Kentucky and in most other southern states, he paid the coach to be fired. Insiders knew his declared motive was to show that academics came first at Georgia and the best way to prove that to be the case to the faculty was to fire a successful coach. Farther-in insiders knew he did it so he could give the job to a longtime friend. In any case, Georgia still had a strong team, with a lot of seniors returning instead of jumping to the NFL, which is what the best players did as soon as the signing bonus was considered by their agents to be big enough for the agent's rake-off to be enough to buy a condo on the beach in Miami and always fly first-class with a jigger of whiskey in hand instead of back in the cheap seats, with everybody constantly walking up and down the aisle to the bathroom and babies crying most of the time they weren't upchucking over the back of the seat.

It didn't take the Georgia coach long to realize that Bobby Don was not reachable, the behemoths in his defensive line and his 255-pound linebackers no match for the speedy quarterback. He ran them ragged in the first half, and they didn't lay a hand on him until he either took a dive or they encircled him on the sideline and gang-tackled him or knocked him out of bounds. The Georgia coach simply sent in his fastest defensive backs, who covered Cornhusk's mediocre receivers so well that Blankhead never found anybody open, even when he was looking, which he was not doing most of the time anyway. He was having his own fun, sometimes keeping the chase in his backfield going on for a minute or more on each down. He actually managed a few first downs on his own to help keep the ball away from the deadly Georgia offense. In the meantime, Georgia racked up four touchdowns in the first half.

In the locker room at halftime, Cornhusk put in a new play, explaining that when the ball was snapped everyone was to fall back and form a circle around the quarterback and, as near as possible, let the would-be tacklers get near Bobby Don one at a time. Then, he took Bobby Don aside and told him the time had come to use the strength that he had always had, along with his speed. As the tacklers got to him, he was told to straight-arm them not too gently. When he had disposed of a couple or three, he could either run the ball himself or look for a receiver to get behind the linebackers, who would be forced to join the hunt when the linemen went down from the straight-arms to the head. Beginning the second half, Georgia carried out a ninety-yard, time-consuming, six-minute drive and scored. On Kentucky's first play after the Georgia kickoff, the team did as it was told, and Bobby Don quickly straight-armed two men to the ground (the whacks being heard clearly in the Goodyear blimp overhead), up from which they did not rise. As the linebackers poured through to stop the carnage, Blankhead spotted a receiver running through the spots they had left and Bobby Don threw him a perfect strike. The two Georgia linemen were carried off the field and replaced. This procedure was carried out five more times, six more Bulldogs were carried from the field, one with a shattered helmet and another with a broken collarbone, and Kentucky scored. Bobby Don started to do his Tarzan gyrations and jungle-calls, but was quickly quieted by his running back, whom Jubal had told to slap Bobby Don across the mouth when he started, and then run like hell to the bench while the quarterback figured out what had happened.

Georgia scored on its next possession, but so did Kentucky, using Cornhusk's new and totally uncomplicated play. By the time Kentucky had scored, three more Bulldogs had been carried off the field, one on a stretcher, and the Georgia coach gathered the referees around him to complain about roughness. Since the straight-

arm was a perfectly legal maneuver, the refs could do nothing to help the coach, who seriously considered calling it quits, but, instead, called a timeout and told his troops to pick off Blankhead's defenders one at a time without charging the quarterback, then, when a gang-tackle was possible to go after Bobby Don. This meant that some plays took as long as three minutes and the teams simply matched scores the rest of the way, Kentucky losing by four touchdowns but running up a score of its own, if a losing one at that. Bobby Don forgot his passing strength only once, when one of his passes was caught by his favorite tight end, a 250-pounder who, desperately hanging on to the ball, was lifted into the second row of the bleachers. Georgia lost only two more players to Bobby Don's deadly straight-arm, but the Georgia coach was glad to settle for that and made a mental note to lodge a protest with the NCAA. He was sure Bobby Don was on mega-steroids.

The next morning, Jubal and Hai had another golf date, and during the round the coach complained that it was hard to win, even now, with a quarterback that was as dumb as a gourd. He used the game the night before as an example, explaining that Bobby Don often called audibles at the line of scrimmage to change the play designated in the huddle, that not only made no sense, but also did so in spite of the fact that audibles had been sternly prohibited by Jubal. The quarterback's excuse, explained, Jubal, was that he simply forgot, not that it mattered much, he went on, since Bobby Don rarely remembered what to do on the plays that were called in the huddle, usually sent in by Jubal. Hai indicated that he would see if there was something he could do, and was already contemplating what an attempt at improving intelligence through stem-cell usage might entail. Meanwhile, Blankhead slept late, then, awed everybody in the lunchroom by eating a dozen bowls of oatmeal – something he had always detested – made from the popular cereal Quaker Oats.

The professor knew, of course, that stem cells from most anyone – and probably even from some animals – would, if successfully administered, make Blankhead smarter. However, he figured that if he was willing to take the time and make the effort to carry out stem-cell-intelligence-enhancement research he might as well make it as effective as possible. This posed a problem, since he was faced with the task of discovering the most intelligent being he could and then devising a method to secure stem cells therefrom for a petri dish, or from fetal tissue. Adult tissue could be used, but it was the least effective, he knew, and involved too much hassle, especially in tampering with the head/brain; and, he also knew that determining the IQ of a fetus or whatever he might concoct in a petri dish would be impossible. He finally decided on fetal tissue, but only if treated with DNA from a person of superior intelligence and engineered to make certain that the brain gene was found, isolated, and made dominant in the tissue. Finding a fetus was easy, since well over a million abortions were performed each year in the United States. Finding the DNA donor might be harder, though he knew the university or some other entity probably had records of the IQ of most of its faculty and students.

Cornhusk was notified the next morning of the academic status of each player. Most of the players were passing, though many of them were in the borderline/failure category, not unusual in SEC schools. The tutors made the difference. Also, the demands on scholarship athletes to be about the business of athletics rather than studies meant that student-athletes were at a constant disadvantage. SEC schools considered time in the weight room and the film room far superior to time in the library. Indeed, the athletes were treated more as employees of the schools than as students. Athletic directors and coaches often considered them to be the expendable sources of whatever personal revenue they could generate. Administrators often considered them to be the expendable sources of whatever institutional revenue they could generate. In addition to the regular afternoon workouts, the basketball coach sometimes held practices at six a.m., particularly when he was angry about something... poor foul-shooting, for instance, or maybe just mad at his wife. Confronted with situations like that, athletes could not be reasonably expected to do well in studies, especially if the whole situation was compounded by the fact that many, if not most, of them were in school for the purpose of making it to the pros, not for actually getting an education. It was always assumed by everyone that less than fifty percent would ever actually graduate... except at Vanderbilt, of course, where they graduated at about the same rate as all other students. In any case, Cornhusk learned that Blankhead was failing and that, barring some quick improvement, would soon be in danger of becoming academically ineligible. When he received this word, he nearly panicked and called in the four tutors assigned to Bobby Don, finding that two of them had never met him and that the other two could rarely find him.

Two weeks later, Jubal was officially told that his quarterback was officially ineligible, could continue to practice with the team, but could not play in games until he passed the proper test, which would be given two weeks hence. By that time, Cornhusk had lost two more games, though not by scores as lopsided as in the first three games. He fumed because his quarterback had been given powers no football player had ever had, but managed to mess up because he wouldn't buckle down and learn something about the game, though he had to admit that Bobby Don must have been behind the door when the brains were passed out. The quarterback had also suffered a huge attack of egoism, and had played his own game within a game, trying to make everybody but himself look bad by comparison with him. Jubal had had to warn him again and again about the proper use of his strength, especially

since he had been tested again after the Georgia game. In a way, the young quarterback reminded him of himself in his days at Alabama, having broken two collarbones and administered another concussion in the last two games. With Bobby Don out, he had no hope for the next two games, and, in fact, he had no hope for the rest of the season, since he knew just how dense his quarterback was (though he suspected that he was a lot smarter than he led people to believe), and had just about resigned himself to the fact that Bobby Don would not get through the year.

The day before, a Sunday, he had played a round of golf with Dr. Eicue Hai, and the professor had mentioned that he might be close to a remedy for Blankhead's IQ problem. Hai didn't explain what he had done, but said he thought it would work. He had gone to a physician friend in another state who specialized in legal abortions and had obtained some fetal tissue, which he immediately froze. He had discovered, by looking at all the records he could find, that he (Hai) had the highest IQ on the campus – 200 – a measurement he had already known; but, he felt he should not choose a donor – if it was possible to convince one, in the first place – until he had made sure he had found the highest possible IQ around. He could certainly choose himself. He had scraped some moisture from the inside of his mouth and arranged the substance in the best way to structure the DNA, had made sure of the proper element used for thinking, and had put together a concoction that he molded into a pill, using his own process. He had tried out the substance on rats and found no change in their mental capacity, deducing that human tissue would have no effect on animals, probably because they operated on instinct rather than reason. The thought that his DNA simply was not up to the job of improving even a rat was too frightful even to contemplate. He would have to consider Blankhead his first experiment. That worried him some, but he was so anxious to complete his experiment that his enthusiasm overwhelmed his questions about the propriety of his effort. Besides, he reasoned, nothing could make the quarterback any less intelligent than he already was. *Even the chimp at Cincinnati would probably be an improvement*, he thought to himself, as he phoned Cornhusk on the following Thursday and asked the coach to bring Bobby Don in the next morning for another *vitamin pill*.

On Friday morning, Jubal and Bobby Don arrived at Hai's lab, and the quarterback was more than happy to take another *vitamin pill*, considering what the other two had done for him. Bobby Don had not shown enough remorse at being declared ineligible to suit Cornhusk, and the coach wondered if maybe a pro scout might have noticed the ineligibility item in the newspaper and surreptitiously contacted Blankhead. Jubal had forced Bobby Don to meet with his tutors during every waking hour when he wasn't on the practice field, and had placed a guard at his dorm room to enforce the order. He had even put the weight room off-limits to the quarterback in the interest of his weight-lifting time being used to study. Since coaches demanded that their players – in all sports, even women's volleyball – bulk up in the weight room at the exclusion of all other activities, Jubal's action was indicative of the near-panic he felt. It was not unheard of for coaches to send their managers to campus libraries to roust out their players and order them to the weight room. Posters appeared in some locker rooms, poking fun at the *nerd herds* found in libraries. Seven-foot-tall basketball players were routinely sent to the weight room to put both muscle and weight on their string-bean bodies – the better to enable them to hammer opposing players under the basket and *get respect* – with the result that the added weight both slowed them down and caused their leg bones to crack. Kentucky had faced this problem, but the verdict had always been *to hell with the risk...all that matters is winning*. Coaches could red-shirt injured players while they healed and get an extra year out of them, a year when they would be more mature and more valuable. Graduation was not all that important, anyway, so losing a year didn't bother most players.

Since Bobby Don could continue practicing with the team, Cornhusk watched to see if the new pill would do him any good. He noticed nothing that day, but figured it was too soon to expect results. He had to get after his quarterback, however, for taunting in practice. Bobby Don would run circles around his teammates until they dropped from exhaustion, then, calmly *walk* into the end zone. He had the stamina of a gorilla, of course, and the speed of a thoroughbred. His passing was brilliant, and, at least for the most part, he kept it under control, not hitting his receivers with the ball so hard that they suffered more than the usual bruises. However, Cornhusk had to bar all coeds from practice at all times. As soon as Bobby Don noticed girls anywhere near, he would start showing off, running the length of the field in eight seconds or less, for instance. Sometimes, when the girls were around, he would throw the ball a hundred-twenty yards, or he would throw it so hard to a receiver that it would knock the breath out of the poor soul. The next day, the team lost miserably to South Carolina, and throughout the game Cornhusk didn't even call a timeout in order to get the rout over with as soon as possible.

Nothing changed materially until the following Wednesday, when Blankhead gave notice in practice that he actually remembered what he was supposed to do on most plays by doing what he was supposed to do, or throwing the ball to the receiver who was supposed to catch it. This meant that all the other receivers could concentrate on their blocking assignments when they weren't supposed to be looking for the ball..in self-defense. His apparent new-found knowledge of the plays was especially effective on roll-out plays, since he could easily outrun defenders toward the sideline, then, throw the ball all the way across the field to a player left uncovered by a defender who had

to join the chase, lest Blankhead head downfield for long gainers. Cornhusk couldn't believe his eyes. He also couldn't believe it when Bobby Don told errant players exactly what they had done wrong when, where, and why. Hai had been coming to the practices to make observations and was so pleased that he actually let out a *whoopee!* on occasion, something he would never have dreamed of before. On the way into the locker room, Bobby Don, who had come to practice directly from a session with his English tutor, recited the entire poem "Thanatopsis" by William Cullen Bryant, the nation's first great poet, and recited Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" and Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" while in the shower. While dressing, he overheard two math majors (walk-ons, not scholarship athletes) discussing how to find the square root of a number without using a computer, whereupon he told them in great detail exactly how to do it. Cornhusk met Hai in the coach's office, and the coach asked the professor if the spell would last. The professor thought it would and suggested that Cornhusk see to it that Bobby Don spent every free hour with the tutors. Jubal thought he could see some light at the end of the tunnel, but he still worried about the possibility of a pro scout getting near his man. That evening, Bobby Don gorged on Chinese food in a local restaurant, though he had never been able to stomach the spicy food before.

As Bobby Don improved in practice, the team experienced a new exhilaration, though his teammates knew he might not get to play again. Cornhusk noticed that he didn't have to remind the quarterback not to misuse his strength anymore, since Bobby Don seemed to realize this fact. During practice, the quarterback developed the strange habit in the huddle, before calling the play, of saying "Confucius say." Everyone thought this was strange, but marked it down to the quarterback's effort to get everyone to relax by hearing something different. In any case, the practices the rest of the week were the best of the season, and Cornhusk actually allowed himself to dream of a win over Vanderbilt on Saturday, though, of course, Blankhead could not play. As it turned out, his team did a creditable job – the best game all year – but wound up losing by a single touchdown. On the sideline, Bobby Don suggested plays to Cornhusk that were almost invariably successful. Once, when the referees couldn't make up their minds about a penalty, he stepped in and figured out their problem, the result being damaging to Cornhusk's team, but the coach accepted it gracefully. At times, Bobby Don held conversations on the sideline with the university president, two trustees and three bioengineering professors. They were astounded at his knowledge. Once, he whipped out a slide rule and figured the odds on a fourth-and-short situation, calculating the weights of the players, their degree of fatigue and the speed of the quarterback..all in thirty seconds. Cornhusk took his recommendation, and the gamble paid off. Kentucky went on to score.

The test for eligibility was scheduled for Wednesday of the next week. By the weekend, Bobby Don was busy teaching his tutors, so that their grades were rising. He didn't let Cornhusk know this because he was sure the coach would send him back to the most sacred place on the campus for football players – the weight room – if he did. Jubal and Dr. Hai played another round of golf on Sunday, during which the coach expressed his surprise and delight to the professor. He noted, however, that Bobby Don had picked up some strange habits/tastes and wondered if the *vitamin pills* had anything to do with it. The quarterback's fondness for bananas, coconut bars and peanuts had become legendary. Along with great quantities of oats, he had started to nibble on apples and carrots throughout the day and had once raced a horse in a morning warmup out at Keeneland, the local racetrack. He lost, of course, since the horse had four legs to his two, but he made it interesting for a while, according to the onlookers, who had never seen anything like it. Jubal also mentioned the strange huddle conduct, and the noticeable change in Bobby Don's West Virginia dialect. He didn't mention it, but he gathered that the professor knew that Blankhead was beginning to have a sort of hillbilly/Chinese accent. The professor said little, but suggested, though lamely, that the superficial aspects of Bobby Don's various conversions would probably pass. He didn't mention the volume of material he had been gathering on his work with Bobby Don and the stem cells. He knew, however, that he wouldn't be able to publish it until he was sure that what he was doing was not illegal. To his knowledge, neither Congress nor any legislature had acted on the stem-cell matter, but he didn't want to take a chance.

On Monday, Cornhusk snoopied around the test site, wondering if there was any way he could get a copy of the test. He remembered that it was a common thing when he was at Alabama to get a copy of any test. He halfway wanted to ask somebody if there was a chance he could just get a look at a test, mentioning, of course, that it was simply so that he could give a player an idea of what the test was all about. He knew that this was done all the time with all the students and their advisors, but was afraid, especially after what the football program was going through, to do even that. Even with all the changes he had seen and heard about regarding Bobby Don, he couldn't believe his quarterback had a chance. He figured nobody could go from sheer ignorance to proficiency, and he still felt panicky. Bobby Don, besides gaining intelligence exponentially, had actually developed a thirst for knowledge, and had spent much of Sunday night reading the "A" book of the encyclopedia he had smuggled out of the library. During practice that afternoon, he was quieter than usual, as if he was there..but not there. Instead of remembering or silently reciting a poem or something like Lincoln's 1863 Gettysburg speech or mulling over a chemistry formula, he was mentally writing something of his own. He was writing a new playbook just for the Alabama game that

would be played at home on Saturday. Later, he put the plays into the usual diagrams with the Xs and Os, the arrows, etc., and showed them to Cornhusk, mentioning that they would be plays Alabama had never seen on a game film because they had never been used. Cornhusk was tempted to tell him to just be sure he knew the plays already in the book, but when he looked more closely he realized that Bobby Don had come up with some of the most unusual blocking assignments, passing lanes, and alternatives off the run-option he had ever seen and that he might actually have something. Blankhead mentioned that he had analyzed the Alabama defense in the game films and knew where the weaknesses were in the line and the backfield. He also mentioned that he had some ideas about how to stop the Alabama offense.

On Wednesday morning, Bobby Don not only aced the eligibility test..he slew it..made the highest score on it that had ever been made. In fact, the score was so high that questions arose immediately among the faculty as to how the quarterback could have learned so much in such a short time. Plainly, the professors, who knew chapter and verse on Blankhead's academic record, believed Cornhusk and maybe the AD, too, had contrived a way to make Bobby Don eligible, and demanded an immediate hearing with the president, claiming that such a thing would damage student morale, not to mention incur more wrath from the NCAA, not that they actually cared one way or the other about that. It was axiomatic that professors hated coaches and most sports, mostly because of the huge differential in salaries and perks that the coaches enjoyed. When Jubal became aware of what was happening, he wished he had thought to caution Bobby Don about making a high score..truth was – he just didn't think his quarterback could pass the test, in the first place. The president set up a meeting with all the coaches, the athletic director (who had blasted Cornhusk for not making sure Bobby Don answered just enough questions to get by), the faculty representatives, and the trustee representatives for Thursday morning, at which time the only agenda item would be to determine whether or not Bobby Don or anyone else had cheated. The news was leaked to a reporter by a disgruntled professor, and the press demanded to sit in on the meeting, but was turned down because personnel matters could be handled in closed session, according to state law. The professor and the reporter were livid, but the reporter made sure the NCAA was notified of the affair, feeling confident that he was about to get the scoop of the year. The local paper had helped deep-six the basketball program a few years before and was always on the scent for fresh blood.

The president opened the meeting the next morning and announced its purpose, launched into a short speech praising the football program as probably the most important – or at least the highest-profile – facet of university endeavor in the minds of most Kentuckians, and, therefore, especially in light of recent happenings, required to be kept spotless, then invited Bobby Don to explain how he prepared for the test, if he cared to, and indicated that after that statement was made all participants would have the opportunity to ask questions and make their own statements. The participants were seated around a large conference table. A faculty representative, also Blankhead's English professor, suggested that the quarterback's academic record be made a matter of record, and mentioned that Blankhead rarely made it to class. The president acquiesced, then nodded to Bobby Don to proceed, whereupon Bobby Don suggested that any discussion of his method of study would not be useful, since there probably are as many methods of study as there are people; therefore, it wouldn't make any difference how he prepared. He asked the president how many eligibility tests were in existence for determining the grade of a student at this stage of his college career. The president asked the faculty representative, who also didn't know. Since nobody around the table knew, the president asked his executive secretary, the official record-keeper of the meeting, and she told him there were fifteen. Bobby Don proposed that one of the fourteen that had not been chosen for his test be brought in – enough copies so that everyone in the room could take the test along with him, have them graded and the participants ranked according to their scores. He made the point that in this way – and only in this way – could an accurate judgment of his capability be made, and that anyone who was too chicken to participate should not take part in judging his credentials. Jubal remembered how he had passed the ACT all those years ago at Alabama, and said that since he didn't have any doubt as to his quarterback's abilities or honesty he would simply bow out and leave the whole exercise to wiser heads. The rest of the coaches indicated that they joined in this decision, and Jubal asked that they be excused, hesitated, then suggested that the AD would be the likely test-taker anyway, since he was the head of the entire sports department. The AD was about to suggest that he join his coaches for the same reasons Jubal had expressed, but was cut off by the president, who said that what Jubal suggested made sense, whereupon the AD gave Cornhusk one of those *I'll get you, you bastard* looks, and Cornhusk grinned across the table at him.

The president polled the remaining participants, and the trustees indicated that they would just as soon leave the whole business to the AD and the academic representatives. Realizing that he was caught on the horns of a dilemma, since he knew about his own chances of looking – more especially, not looking – good on the test, the president declared that there was no need for his participation for the same reason as that of the trustees, whereupon he asked the faculty representatives if they had any objection to Bobby Don's plan, which seemed reasonable to

him. *Didn't want to fool with this damn thing, anyway, he thought, they did the complaining...let them do the heavy lifting.* The hapless professors had been painted – or had painted themselves – into a corner, but one weakly suggested that at least a question/answer period was in order before such drastic action be taken. Bobby Don quickly suggested that the professors be given the privilege of asking him anything they desired relating to his college work up to the current point. The professor countered that he meant that the questions be asked on the subject of contrivance, not academic material, whereupon the president asked him if he had any evidence of wrongdoing, whereupon the professor admitted he didn't, whereupon the president said they were wasting time and asked the professors what they wanted to do – ask questions on academic material or join in taking the test with Bobby Don, whereupon the professors got in an argument and asked for a recess. The president said he would allow the recess and that everyone must be back in the room in fifteen minutes.

Everyone left the room but the professors, who were left to make up their minds as to the course of action. Bobby Don loped out to the track and did a half-mile run in a minute and forty-five seconds and then joined the others in the hallway outside the conference room. While munching on a banana and a bag of peanuts, he discussed the Civil War battle at Perryville, Ky., with the president, who was a Civil War buff, mentioning the names of all the generals, the locations of their troops on the battlefield, the number of casualties, and explained that the whole thing was an accident precipitated by both armies desperately searching for water in the unusually hot October of 1862. Then, he recited sayings of Confucius to no one in particular, and explained a sure-fire method of winning at Chinese checkers. Meanwhile, the professors, each confident of vying with Bobby Don in his own field, had serious reservations about taking a test on general subject matter. They finally decided that each of the four would question Bobby Don in his own field until satisfied that the quarterback was proficient (eligible) or dumb (ineligible), and made their decision known when the meeting was reconvened.

The mathematics professor went first and handed Bobby Don an analytic geometry book with two difficult problems marked for his solution, and handed him pencil and paper. The quarterback looked at the problems briefly and, without using pencil and paper, described the complete solutions to the professor, as well as how to arrive at the solutions. He then asked the professor to do the same for him on the next problem, using any method he chose. The professor huffily answered that he was not there to do the answering and told Blankhead to solve it, too, whereupon Bobby Don did so immediately, then, gave a thirty-minute presentation on the life of Rene DesCartes, the French mathematician whom many consider the father of modern philosophy. The president asked if the professor was satisfied, or if he needed to do further testing. All the other participants were twisting in their seats, obviously impatient to leave. The physics professor asked Bobby Don to explain as well as he could Einstein's theory of relativity, whereupon the quarterback spent forty minutes on the subject, then, asked the professor to discuss Newton's law with him. The professor indicated that enough time had been spent on the subject and turned to the chemistry professor, who told Bobby Don to catalogue all the elements and give their molecular makeup, etc., whereupon the quarterback spent an hour in doing so. By this time, everyone was antsy, so a bathroom break was observed. Bobby Don used the time to eat three chocolate/coconut bars. Reconvened, the political science professor whipped out a book, chuckled and asked pointed questions about the breakup of the Soviet Union, the countries which had declared their independence at its dissolution, the presidents and prime ministers of each of those countries, the longitude and latitude of their capitals, and their gross national product. This took another hour, and Bobby Don asked the professor if he could name the president of Afghanistan, whereupon the professor said he was not there to answer questions. Finally, the English professor asked for a complete description of the second act of Shakespeare's "Othello," whereupon Blankhead recited the whole act. By this time, noon had long since passed, and there was near mutiny in the crowd. The president indicated that he would leave the decision up to the professors, and, with everyone looking daggers through them, the professors agreed that Bobby Don was indeed eligible. On the way out, the quarterback told the next-to-last questioner that *Afghanistan actually had no president at the present time*, and received an icy stare for his trouble.

That afternoon, Cornhusk kept the team, except the place-kickers, inside, where he and Bobby Don introduced a whole new set of plays, the ones Bobby Don had worked out in his head the day before. The coach demanded total silence as the plays were explained, along with a simple new system designed to call them in the huddle. The next afternoon, the day before the big game with Alabama, Cornhusk made doubly sure that no unauthorized personnel got anywhere near the field. The offensive team spent the entire practice working on the new plays. Cornhusk and Blankhead also worked with the defensive outfit, explaining the new defenses the quarterback had devised, and the teams practiced until nearly dark, but only in sweat-suits. This was unheard of as the accepted routine for the day before a game.

The stadium was packed the next afternoon. Not even standing-room-only space was available. The largest contingent of fans from out of state was from Memphis. This was true because half the Alabama players had been bought for hundreds of thousands of alumni dollars at the Memphis Slave Market on the Arkansas side of the

Mississippi. It was obvious from the beginning that Cornhusk's defense, even with the new configuration, would not be able to contain what might have been the best offense in the country. However, with Blankhead back at quarterback and smart as well as inordinately strong, fast, and accurate, Alabama's vaunted defense, which had averaged giving up only one touchdown per game, was hard-pressed to hold Jubal's new offense. There was no score at the end of the first quarter, though each team had been within field-goal range twice, and had failed twice to convert. Cornhusk's deadly straight-arm had forced Alabama to replace its two toughest tackles, each being temporarily stunned. Using his speed, he had pushed Alabama's heavy linemen (averaging 275 per man) to the limit as they chased him back and forth, and the Alabama coach had had to substitute more than usual, though he had plenty of good players and could maintain stiff resistance.

In the second quarter, the Crimson Tide began to roll, mixing running and passing plays brilliantly. It took six minutes, but the Tide managed a scoring drive and led 7-0. The running back who dived into the end zone did a bump-and-grind victory-writhe worthy of the best stripper in town (believed by some to be taught by a nude-bar-owning alumna, and accompanied by a few bars of a Bama-band rendition of – what else – ‘Basin Street Blues’), and did four jumping chest-bangers with teammates before leaving the scene of battle with a collarbone dislocated by one chest-banger too many. Bobby Don suggested to Cornhusk that he might be able, using both speed and strength, to return the kickoff enough yards to put Kentucky in good field position. None of the new plays were planned for use until the second half, so that the Alabama coach couldn't devise a defense for them at halftime. But good field position might give Kentucky a chance for at least a field goal. Bobby Don took the kickoff on his goal line and started up the middle of the field sort of like a horse in the backstretch jockeying for position, then, shot out toward the right sideline so fast in a sort of homestretch dash that two defenders tripped just trying to change directions. He stopped a third with a vicious straight-arm that caromed off his helmet and tore loose his shoulder pad as he crumpled up. Blankhead, sensing that every Bama player was now chasing him, abruptly reversed his field, causing another close defender to simply trip and fall. Another loomed directly in his path and Bobby Don, to the crowd's delight and astonishment, simply leaped over him with a foot and a half to spare. After that, it was a cakewalk – or cake-run – as Blankhead turned up the speed a notch, and the Kentucky track-and-field coach, who was in the stands, couldn't believe what he saw. He instinctively whipped out his stopwatch and clocked Bobby Don at 3.2 seconds for the last forty yards, something known to be humanly impossible. *Only a horse could do that*, he muttered to himself. The half ended 7-7. During the intermission, Blankhead consumed a half-dozen oat/chocolate/coconut/peanut/banana/chop-suey bars and discussed all major league batting averages of 1938 with a reporter.

Even with the new plays, Kentucky couldn't get anything going in the third quarter, though it did march down the field and kill a lot of time, while Alabama scored another touchdown, finding that Kentucky's new defense worked remarkably well. Toward the end of the quarter, Blankhead decided to try the old trick of luring all the defenders in for the opportunity of giving Kentucky a massive loss. He took the snap on the Bama forty-five and began running at top speed back and forth and backing up until he was on his own ten-yard line and the whole Bama team was chasing him, at which time one receiver headed for the Bama end zone, whereupon Bobby Don fired him a perfect 90-yard strike, and the score was tied at 14 all. The fans went wild, even the ones from Memphis, who had never seen anything like that. NCAA officials in the stands agreed that another drug test would have to be done.. this time right after the game.

Blankhead suggested a new tactic to Cornhusk for the final quarter.. let him play defense, too. With the score tied and Bama's defenders having been run into the ground and consequently greatly slowed by Bobby Don, the quarterback figured the opposing coach to go to the air and whispered a way to lure him into a trap. Timeout was called, and Bobby Don explained that the defensive backs, whom he would join, would cover like a blanket all the Bama receivers but one when the opposing quarterback dropped back to pass. When he threw to the open man, Bobby Don, with his speed would outrun the ball to the open receiver, where he would simultaneously catch the ball and knock the receiver into the middle of next week.. perfectly legal since both would be trying for the catch. The plan worked to perfection, with the intended receiver landing in the first row of the stands and Bobby Don streaking eighty yards for the score, knocking one would-be tackler ten feet in the air and outrunning everyone else. After this, there was no starch left in the Crimson Tide. Indeed, no one wanted to get near Blankhead, who stayed on defense and manhandled any ball carrier and blocker within ten yards of him. The game ended with a Kentucky victory. In the press box, the AD began dickering with representatives from five sporting goods companies, speaking in terms of millions of dollars, most of which he had already figured a way to cheat the coaches and the university out of. On his way out, he ordered a Rolls Royce from an auto-dealer friend, and a 60-foot yacht from another. In the locker room, three grim-faced NCAA officials were waiting when the jubilant, celebrating Jubal and his team arrived. They were there for urine samples, blood samples, skin samples, tissue samples, stool samples, perspiration samples, stomach-ingredients samples, and even had a breathalyzer they had borrowed from the police

department. It took three hours of sample-taking and inhaling before Bobby Don could join the celebrations. It was the only game the team had won all season, but it might as well have been the championship.

Kentucky won its remaining games, including a hard-fought affair with Tennessee, its most hated and seldom-beaten rival. All the tests made after the Alabama game had turned out to be negative, and Jubal was luxuriating in his office at the end of the season in the fact that his quarterback had one more year of eligibility left, when Bobby Don walked in and announced that he was through with football forever..even in the pros, to which he could jump then if he wanted to do so. After Cornhusk picked himself up from the floor, to which he had crumbled upon hearing that news, he asked why. Bobby Don simply explained that with his newly found intelligence, which Hai had assured him was always there but just needed activating, he had concluded that he should lead a more serious life, one that, besides having a tough mental side, would allow him to use his considerable physical prowess, both its strength and dexterity, in an effort to help other people. He explained that he was presently considering entering either a Catholic or Buddhist monastery, but that he was also mulling over other options. The last time Cornhusk saw his quarterback, Blankhead was jumping an eight-foot fence and running off the campus eating one of his patented Choco/oat/coconut/peanut/banana/chop-suey breakfast bars and carrying a set of encyclopedias, a desk, a computer, and a football, which, upon turning around, he threw 140 yards right through Cornhusk's open window.

Later in the morning, the AD came by with news of the endorsements. When Cornhusk relayed the news of Bobby Don's departure, the AD, after swearing at him for fifteen minutes, offered a million-dollar payment to Cornhusk if he would quit. Jubal thought he had died and gone to the Football Hall of Fame.