

= Roy Riegels =

Roy " Wrong Way " Riegels (April 4 , 1908 ? March 26 , 1993) played for the University of California , Berkeley football team from 1927 to 1929 . His wrong @-@ way run in the 1929 Rose Bowl is often cited as the worst blunder in the history of college football . That one play overshadowed Riegels ' football talents , since he earned first team All @-@ America honors and served as team captain for the Bears in 1929 . Riegels ' notability has been shared by motivational speakers who use his life as an example of overcoming setbacks .

= = Background = =

The 1920s saw the first golden age of California football , as the Golden Bears went 50 straight games without a defeat from 1920 to 1925 , with a record of 46 wins and 4 ties . As of 2010 , this is the 3rd longest unbeaten (not to be confused with winning) streak in NCAA history . The 1920 ? 1924 squads were so dominant that they were nicknamed " The Wonder Teams , " and were coached by Andy Smith . One of the stars during this era was Brick Muller and the University later established a freshman leadership group called the Brick Muller Society . Cal won four Pacific Coast Conference championships and made three trips to the Rose Bowl during this decade , in 1921 (28 ? 0 win over Ohio State) , 1922 (0 ? 0 tie with Washington & Jefferson) , and 1929 (8 ? 7 loss to Georgia Tech) .

Riegels played center on the 1928 University of California football team which had 6 ? 1 ? 2 record going into the Rose Bowl game . Riegels led the Golden Bears in conference minutes played that season , and he was voted onto the All @-@ Coast team . He was a good blocker , but his strength was playing " roving center " on defense , similar to present day middle linebacker position . Cal 's coach Nibs Price gave credit to Riegels as the smartest player he ever coached . Cal 's Rose Bowl opponent was undefeated and had outscored its opponents 213 points to 40 after nine games played . The Rose Bowl game was broadcast nationally by radio during this time .

= = The game = =

On January 1 , 1929 , the Golden Bears faced the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena , California , USA . Midway through the second quarter , Riegels , who played center on both offensive and defensive lines and who was then playing in a role similar to that of the modern defensive nose guard or nose tackle , picked up a fumble by Tech 's Jack " Stumpy " Thomason . Just 30 yards away from the Yellow Jackets ' end zone , Riegels was somehow turned around and ran 69 yards in the wrong direction . The following describes what transpired from Riegels perspective :

I was running toward the sidelines when I picked up the ball , " Riegels told The Associated Press . " I started to turn to my left toward Tech 's goal . Somebody shoved me and I bounded right off into a tackler . In pivoting to get away from him , I completely lost my bearings .

Teammate and quarterback Benny Lom chased Riegels , screaming at him to stop . Known for his speed , Lom finally caught up with Riegels at California 's 3 @-@ yard line and tried to turn him around , but he was immediately hit by a wave of Tech players and tackled back to the 1 @-@ yard line . The Bears chose to punt rather than risk a play so close to their own end zone , but Tech 's Vance Maree blocked Lom 's punt for a safety , giving Georgia Tech a 2 ? 0 lead .

During Roy 's wrong way run , Georgia Tech 's coach Bill Alexander said to his excited players who were jumping up and down near the Tech bench : " Sit down . Sit down . He 's just running the wrong way . Every step he takes is to our advantage " Broadcaster Graham McNamee , who was calling the game on the radio , said during Roy 's wrong way run : " What am I seeing ? What 's wrong with me ? Am I crazy ? Am I crazy ? Am I crazy ? " After the play , Riegels was so distraught that he had to be talked into returning to the game by coach Nibs Price for the second half . Roy said " Coach , I can 't do it . I 've ruined you , I 've ruined myself , I 've ruined the University of California . I couldn 't face that crowd to save my life . " Coach Price responded by saying " Roy , get

up and go back out there ? the game is only half over . "

Riegels did play , and he turned in a stellar second half performance , including blocking a Tech punt . In addition , Lom passed for a touchdown and kicked the extra point , but that was not enough . Tech would ultimately win the game and their second national championship 8 ? 7 . Georgia Tech 's safety score after the wrong way run made the difference in the outcome of the game , which increased the significance of Roy 's mistake . In spite of the loss , the example of how the distraught Riegels was persuaded to pick himself up , return to the field and play so hard during the second half is sometimes used by motivational speakers to illustrate overcoming setbacks .

= = Aftermath = =

After the game , coach Nibs Price defended Riegels , saying " It was an accident that might have happened to anyone . " That one play overshadowed Riegels ' football talents . Georgia Tech center and captain Peter Pund said Riegels was " the best center I have played against all year . He 's a battler , and he never quit . " Riegels would take his spot as team captain during his senior year , earning All @-@ America honors , and he helped the Bears to a 7 ? 1 ? 1 record during the following season . Later , the NCAA football rules committee would pass a rule barring a player from advancing a recovered fumble once it hits the ground , which remained in place for several decades . According to one contemporary article , there were approximately 4 @,@ 500 stories totaling an estimated 250 @,@ 000 column inches written about Riegels ' wrong way run in newspapers across the United States .

Riegels gained notoriety from his wrong way run , but he was able to capitalize on his blunder , parodying his famous run in vaudeville acts . The opening sequence of the 1929 Frank Capra movie *Flight* is based on Riegels and uses photographs of him . In 1965 , the movie *John Goldfarb , Please Come Home* was released and the lead character performs a similar blunder in his college years , earning the name " Wrong Way " Goldfarb . In 2011 , a picture book written by Dan Gutman was published with title " *The Day Roy Riegels Ran the Wrong Way* , " which provides play @-@ by @-@ play description of this moment in sports history .

Looking back on the play years later , Regiels said " I was embarrassed when I realized what I had done . I wanted a hole to open in the ground so I could jump in it . But that soon passed , and I reached a stage when mention of it would cause me to bristle . Soon that passed and it has never really bothered me since , except in cases when people tried to exploit it . " Riegels was reminded of his mistake throughout his life . Riegels once said : " All the times I 've run across or heard people saying ' wrong way , ' even though they weren 't referring to me , I immediately turned around to see if they were speaking about me . I still don 't understand how I did it . " Riegels dealt with his situation by laughing about what happened . Riegels once joked " If I had to do it again , I 'd still run in the same direction , for I surely thought I was going the right way . " Riegels also said " You run the wrong way with a football in front of 60 @,@ 000 people , and it 's pretty hard to lie out of it . " When presented his membership card into the Georgia Tech Lettermen 's Club 42 years later , Riegels quipped , " Believe me , I feel I 've earned this . "

Riegels sent letters to athletes who made similar mistakes . For example , Riegels sent a letter to Paramount High School 's Jan Bandringa in 1957 , who had intercepted a pass only to run it 55 yards into his own end zone , resulting in a safety for Centennial High , who won the game 9 ? 7 . Riegels wrote in the letter : " For many years I 've had to go along and laugh whenever my wrong @-@ way run was brought up , even though I 've grown tired listening and reading about it . But it certainly wasn 't the most serious thing in the world . I regretted doing it , even as you do , but you 'll get over it . " In addition , during an NFL game in 1964 between the Minnesota Vikings and San Francisco 49ers , Minnesota defensive end Jim Marshall ran a recovered fumble 66 yards into his own end zone (resulting in a safety , but the Vikings won 27 ? 22) . Riegels reportedly later sent Marshall a letter reading " Welcome to the club " .

In later years , Riegels said his blunder made him a better person . " I gained true understanding of life from my Rose Bowl mistake , " he said in an interview with the *Pasadena Star* . " I learned you can bounce back from misfortune and view it as just something adverse that happened to you . "

In 1991 , Riegels was inducted into the Rose Bowl Hall of Fame . He was posthumously elected to Cal 's Hall of Fame in 1998 . In 2003 , a panel from the College Football Hall of Fame and CBS Sports chose Riegels ' " Wrong way run in the Rose Bowl " one of six " Most Memorable Moments of the Century . "

= = Family and personal life = =

Riegels was born to Max Jakob Andreas Riegels and Beda Helena Nilsson . His father was from Denmark and his mother was from Sweden . Riegels had a sister named Dora . He was married to Barbara Bailey (1916 ? 1985) . Riegels had four children : David , Richard , Alexa Richmond , and Helen Mackey .

Riegels graduated from University of California in 1931 with a degree in agriculture . Riegels became a teacher and coached football at California and at the high school and junior college levels . He served as an officer in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II and later worked in the agriculture field and as a cannery executive . In 1955 Riegels started his own agricultural chemicals business in Woodland , California (Roy Riegels Chemicals) , earning plaudits for his contributions to California farming from the state legislature and governor . Riegels sold the company and retired in 1976 . He died in March 1993 in his sleep at his home at the age of 84 due to complications from Parkinson 's disease .