Looking Back

A short history of Field Day

By Bob Harvis

"He who shuns the dust and heat of the acqua will not joy the cool shade of the olive branch of victory"; so proclaimed the victory cup of the original Tech Field Day back in 1901. This first Field Day was a re- placement for Cane Rush, in which the frosh were given a cane and were supposed to defend it from the sophomores. After fifteen minutes, a pistol was fired as a signal to end hostilities. The winning class was the one whose members had the most hands on the cane.

Freshmen killed in '01

At the last Cane Rush in 1901, an unfortunate incident occurred in which one freshman was fatally injured and another was carried from the field with a hemorrhage of both eyes and a heart injury not recoverable fully.

Obviously, a substitute event or events which would be just as popular but would call for the display of skill rather than brute force was necessary. President Henry Pritchett, the Advisory Council on Athletics, and two undergraduate committees finally developed the idea of Field Day.

In the years following World War I, Field Day lasted two days, beginning with the famous Tech Night opening festivities, in which a small fight would usually begin in a locked room and end throughout the streets of Boston and Cambridge. "Theatrical" authorities caused the discontinuance of the Sophomore Banquet introduced from 1923 to 1926, the Sophomore Banquet replaced Cane Rush. The primary aim of the Sophomore class was to change the proceedings of the banquet as completely as possible. Despite the Sophomore Banquet, the Frosh was soon to take over as the main event.

The following editorial appeared in the Boston Post after this "riot": "A crowd of young men from the tenement districts of Boston, let us say, had invaded the Back Bay on Thursday night, smashing windows, wrecking dance halls, raiding automobiles, burning up subway station gates and ending by raising havoc with burned cars. The police would have been called out for riot duty and the disturbers would have been chased into the streets by the public; would have corrected terminally the equipment of unhallowed hooligans. That the police did just those things happened to be accidents; students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology makes no less hoodlums - mom so, if anything, since they are supposed to have a rather high position to maintain. The natural progression produces an ancient feeling of "Noblesse oblige.

Glove fight main event

It was then decided that a replacement for such activities was needed, and following the Tech Riot, the Glove Fight became the main event of Field Day.

In the period from 1926 to 1934, the classes went to the center of their enthusiasm by throwing various kinds of refuse at detractors. Unfortunately, the thrower's aim was usually poor, and this practice was also discontinued by the Institute.

During the '30's Field Day took on a new and practical significance for the freshman class. The Frosh had to follow three "Froshmen Rules":

1. All freshmen shall wear regulation ties, four-in-hand, with a bowknot and at a right angle with the breast pocket of the coat. The ties were sold, of course, by the Student Store.

2. Froshmen are expected to be neat in their appearance generally and to tip their hats to the President of the Institute and the Dean.

3. Froshmen should not bother the Main Lobby or sit upon the benches in the lobby.

Since the introduction of Field Day as we know it today, numerous experiments in warfare have been tried. In one year, during Frosh Rush, one class added an extension to its end of the rope, and then tied this extension to a nearby telephone pole. The judges evidently did not notice, and as a result the rope was used to entangle opponents across the line.

In 1926 the sophomores held a Maple Grove in which no one was consumed by the sophomores was an unsanctioned secret weapon - a skunk! These activities continued until the secret weapon was used, in 1900. Athletic events once common to Field Day, in addition to the traditional Glove Fight and tug-of-war, Field Day featured athletic events such as tackle football, crew races, and swimming meets. In 1907 the Athletic Association discontinued Field Day because it felt that these activities were injurious to varsity athletics.

The following year, Field Day was reinstated under the direction of Roger Keyes, the Junior Class Honoray Society. In its present form, Field Day is a series of events designed to test the classes' ingenuity, organization, and participation.

The major events of the present Field Day are tug-of-war, such as boat races on the Charles, town pole races, and personnel races. Mystery events have led to a follow three "Froshmen Rules":

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Food on Sunday

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