

The Football Game That

BY ALEXANDER M. SOLORZANO

I wondered, “Who are these guys, and what am I feeling?”

Growing up in California, I had some Latter-day Saint friends but knew little about the Church. In those days my devotion was reserved for the local professional sports teams. All I really knew about the religion of my LDS friends was that these otherwise normal teenagers engaged in one extraordinarily abnormal behavior: rising early each weekday morning to attend some type of church meeting.

A few years after graduating from high school, I received a telephone call one Thanksgiving morning from a former high school football teammate. He invited me to play in a game of football later that morning with some friends. Anxious to prove that my athletic prowess had not diminished, I eagerly accepted the invitation.

When I arrived at the field where the game would be played, I was dismayed to see that rain the day before had left the field a muddy quagmire. In addition, I recognized only a handful of the two dozen young men on the field. I was chagrined that I would not be able to impress as many of my former teammates as I had hoped.

Throughout the course of the game, I noticed several things about the other guys. They were all pretty good football players. They could block, pass, catch, and run with the best of them. It was a hard-fought game. But I also noticed a far more interesting fact, a characteristic that shone brightly through the mud despite the spirited competition. There was no cursing, no fighting, no angry exchanges. When a player tackled

someone, he would always lend a hand to help his opponent up off the ground. Whenever a player made a good play, compliments of “nice block,” “good hit,” or “nice tackle” were given, even from the opposing team.

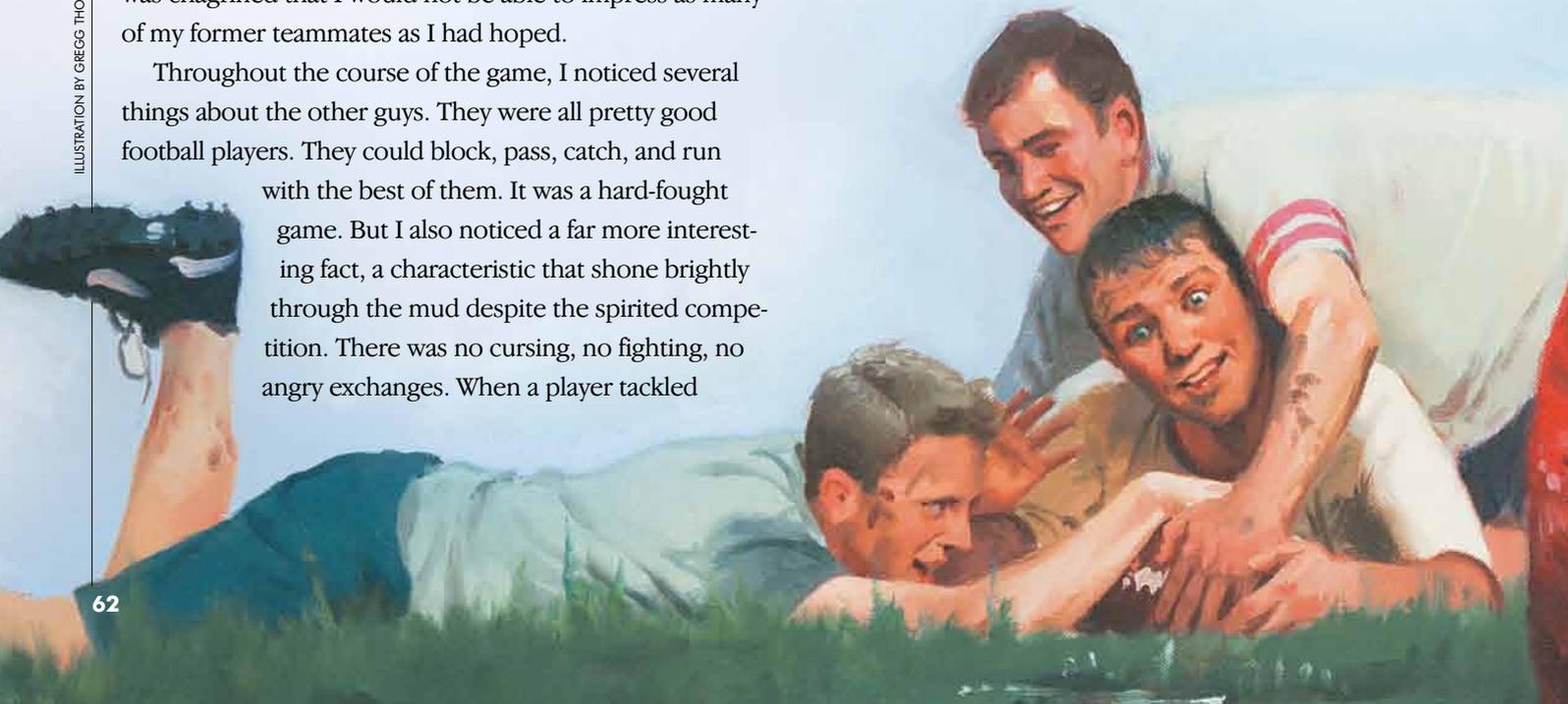
I had never been with a group of football players who seemed to respect and enjoy each other as much as they did the game. Before long, I began to feel something very special about this game and the people participating in it.

When the game ended, after scraping the mud from my hair and shaking muddy hands with my new friends, I pulled my old teammate to the side.

“Who are these guys?” I asked. “What am I feeling?”

I learned that all the young men in the game were members of the Church. I gathered my courage and timidly asked my new friends if they could tell me more about their church. I had no idea how happy these returned missionaries would be to oblige. They shared their testimonies with me and later set up meetings with the missionaries. Those meetings were the beginning of a conversion process that included sleepless nights, numerous discussions, and a great many good influences in my life. I joined the Church a few years later.

In the years since that Thanksgiving football game,



Changed My Life

many spiritual blessings have affected me deeply. But few have affected me more than that football game 20 years ago. Every year at Thanksgiving I remember the football game that changed my life forever, and I remember those first whisperings of the Spirit I felt. Those memories are part of my personal Thanksgiving celebration. I continue to appreciate the power of friendship and example in carrying out the Lord's work among His children.

Several years ago, when our ward elders quorum president mentioned that the quorum was going to schedule a ward football game, I know he did not fully understand the smile that crossed my face. ■

