"AUNTIE GOPHER"

Lorena Hickok Tackles College Football

DAVID KASZUBA

Agriculture has long been a major part of life in Minnesota. Even in the Roaring Twenties—that decade when America's city dwellers were swigging bathtub gin and dancing the Charleston—the *Minneapolis Tribune*, Minnesota's leading urban paper, devoted almost as much space to reporting wheat prices and butter production as it did to stories about rum-runners and flappers.[1]

Yet as important as crops and cattle were, the real sacred cow in Minnesota during the 1920s was college football. With no major-league professional sports teams in the state, Minnesotans turned to college football—along with baseball's minor-league Saints and Millers—as a favorite source of entertainment. Rooters who followed the Gophers gridiron squad in the pages of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, however, got a regular dose of their football news from an unlikely source: a woman. Lorena A. Hickok, who would later gain notoriety as an employee of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration and a confidant of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, covered the University of Minnesota football team from 1924 to 1926—and in the process established herself as a pioneer among American female sportswriters.[2]

Although Hickok's sports-writing contributions have been largely overlooked by historians who focus on her link to the Roosevelts, her sports journalism career was nothing short of groundbreaking.[3] Dubbed "Auntie Gopher" because of her association with the Minnesota football squad, Hickok evolved into a college-football beat writer. As such, she challenged the period's newspaper traditions, which held that reporting on male sports was strictly the work of male journalists. Even in cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., the few women who had forayed into sports writing by covering female athletics or dishing news about celebrities attending prizefights had not crossed over to the realm of male team sports. Clearly, Hickok was blazing new ground.[4]

Examining Hickok's sports writing for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, meanwhile, is like opening a time capsule holding some of the Gopher football team's most memorable seasons and personalities. She covered such important gridiron moments as the first game in the school's Memorial Stadium in 1924 as well as the Gophers' bid for a conference championship in 1925, when the team's title hopes came down to the last day of the season. She also reported on the exploits of many college football legends, from Minnesota's own "Golden Tornado" Herb Joesting to rival players such as Illinois's "Galloping Ghost" Red Grange and opposing coaches such as Notre Dame's Knute Rockne. Along the way, Hickok introduced a new style of sports writing to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, using quotes and anecdotes to let readers see players and coaches in ways that transcended statistics and won-lost records.

Lorena Hickok, 1930s, after her pioneering stint as a sportswriter for the Minneapolis Tribune*; Gopher football in the University of Minnesota's Memorial Stadium, about 1926.*

Lorena Hickok spent the first 33 years of her life in the Midwest. Born on March 7, 1893, in East Troy, Wisconsin, she was the eldest daughter of Addison Hickok, a buttermaker, and Anna Waite Hickok, a dressmaker. Lorena grew up in Wisconsin and Illinois before moving with her parents and two younger sisters to South Dakota; there, at the age of 13, she lost her mother to a sudden stroke. Lorena's ill-tempered and abusive father, who had regularly moved his family because of difficulty in finding and keeping work, continued to uproot his daughters in search of employment. At 14, Lorena left the family and continued her own vagabond existence, working for the next two years as a live-in maid for nine different families scattered across South Dakota. In 1909 she went to live with her mother's cousin in Battle Creek, Michigan, where she finished high school three years later.[5]

Despite her difficult and unstable upbringing, Hickok did well in school. Her classmates predicted, in the high-school yearbook, that she would find fame as a suffrage orator, correctly suggesting that she had the mettle to challenge gender restrictions of the day. And while she did not ultimately make her mark as a suffragist, Hickok did quickly prove that she would not allow herself to be intimidated by men or the notion of gender-appropriate roles. Not long after high school, for instance, she served a short stint as an auxiliary policewoman responsible for separating girls from sailors at a Navy pier—hardly the kind of job then considered "ladylike."[6]

Dr. Kaszuba, a former journalist and public relations professional, is an assistant professor of communications at Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. His research focuses on sports journalism of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, with a particular emphasis on women's emergence in that field.

Leaving college after one year, Hickok in 1913 became involved in journalism. Having used her childhood love of reading to develop a knack for writing and storytelling, she landed stints at a few newspapers in Michigan and Wisconsin. Because she was not fond of the wedding announcements and "society" news to which she and other female journalists were typically assigned, Hickok aggressively inserted herself into situations where she could learn the kind of news reporting traditionally reserved for men but beginning to open to women. "I'm going out and make a name for myself in the world!" she proclaimed with some frustration at her restricted sphere. During the year she spent as society editor at the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, she frequented the back room of a coffee shop where she could listen to the police reporters and City Hall beat writers talk shop. Inspired, she lobbied the *Sentinel* city editor in 1915 to assign her to stories that transcended the "women's news" she considered so trite.[7]

Perhaps to quiet her, or perhaps to test her desire, the city editor finally assigned Hickok to interview opera star Geraldine Farrar, who—unbeknownst to Hickok—had a policy against granting interviews. With blissful ignorance, Hickok went to visit her subject at the private railroad car that had brought the singer into town, only to be rebuffed. Dejected but not defeated, Hickok returned to write a humorous story about the way she had been turned away by the "prima donna" singer. The story incorporated a few terse comments by the opera star as well as anecdotes about the way Farrar's hairdresser—and even her dog—kept the writer at bay. In the end, Hickok provided readers a tongue-in-cheek "interview" with Farrar's dog, a story that effectively exposed the singer's haughty nature, perhaps better than an actual interview would have.[8]

The story, which earned a place on page one, reflected Hickok's tough, "never let obstacles get in the way" attitude. Of more immediate consequence, however, it also earned her additional news assignments at the *Milwaukee Sentinel* and propelled her in 1917 to a job with the *Minneapolis Tribune*. There, her unpretentious manner—accented by her rolled-up blouse sleeves and dark, plain skirts—helped Hickok win over hard-boiled editor-in-chief Tom Dillon, who was reputed to have thrown his own city editor into a wastebasket when he was a reporter. Having first put Hickok through stints at night rewrite and copyediting, Dillon eventually removed her from the copydesk and returned her to the kind of news and feature assignments that she had begun to win in Milwaukee. This time, however, her role as reporter grew to include a steadier output of material, much of which resulted in "Lorena Hickok" bylines on page one.[9] This, in turn, provided the springboard for her foray into sports writing a few years later.

Tom Dillon, Minneapolis Tribune *editor-in-chief who gambled that a woman could report on sports*

Although her skill as a writer was clearly evident, it is reasonable to expect that Dillon took careful measure of Hickok's personality before allowing her to report on college football. After all, this virtually unheard-of assignment would not only require a good writer but a unique and strong individual who would be undeterred by the negative reaction that the experiment could elicit. There was no telling how much resistance a female football reporter might face from coaches, players, and even male sportswriters. Similarly, and perhaps most importantly, there was no way to predict how readers would react. Accustomed to male sportswriters, readers might have been expected to reject a female journalist, especially if she could not produce stories that met their standards for entertainment, insight, and detail.

Indeed, it was with his readers that editor Dillon was taking the biggest gamble. Like many midwesterners, Minnesotans in the 1920s were becoming increasingly passionate about college football. For decades, match-ups between the Ivy League schools of the East had stirred great interest. Then, in the 1920s, with the famed "Four Horsemen" running amok on the Notre Dame gridiron and "Galloping Ghost" Red Grange earning national acclaim with his dazzling touchdown runs at the University of Illinois, college football found greater popularity than ever in the heartland. And why not? The sport, after all, embodied the physical toughness and dogged determination that midwesterners associated with their settlement of the prairies and frontiers. As one observer told Hickok, "The descendents of the finest stock in the United States are . . . out there on the field. Their grandfathers were the pioneers . . . who built up this middle west, and from them these boys, playing football . . . have inherited the finest athletic spirit there is in this country."[10]

Such reverence for college football was regularly reflected in the *Minneapolis Tribune*. Even minor developments that occurred off the field or out of season garnered headlines. The newspaper, for example, was wont to supply readers with mind-numbing minutiae about the 45 miles of adhesive tape ordered by the University of Minnesota team. Or about the summer road-crew employment of a U of M star. A period of cool temperatures was enough to spark a headline proclaiming that the "first faint whiff of football weather" was in the air.[11] Clearly, Minnesota football was important business; its coverage could not be entrusted to just anyone.

New, horseshoe-shaped Memorial Stadium nearing completion, 1924

Dillon's decision to tab Hickok as a football reporter, then, was an obvious testament to his faith in her as a writer. Perhaps just as important, though, Hickok's personality suggested that she was unlikely to be intimidated in a scene populated exclusively by male journalists, coaches, players, and training staffs. As Dillon no doubt noticed, Hickok had a streak of feminism. She demonstrated this by using some of her news stories to highlight the growing professional accomplishments women had made on the heels of their wartime contributions and suffrage victory. Typical was the time she covered a national astronomers' convention near Minneapolis: She took note of the many male scientists in attendance, then wrote with feigned incredulity, "And here at the meeting are two full-fledged women astronomers—Dr. Anne S. Young, director of the observatory at Mount Holyoke college, and Dr. Alice Farnsworth of Yerkes observatory, at Lake Geneva, Wis.—who speak the mysterious argot of the planets and the stars as a Chinaman speaks Chinese."[12]

Besides being able to gauge Hickok's personality and attitudes from her writing, editor Dillon got to know the reporter away from the newsroom. He sometimes shared drinks with "Hick"—as she became known among her peers—at an establishment across the street from the newspaper offices. There, he came to see firsthand how

comfortably Hickok, a husky-voiced chain smoker, could interact with a crusty newspaperman like himself.[13]

Although no other women at the time were covering football regularly, some had begun to dabble in sports reporting. The emergence of radio and the growth of magazines during the 1920s had caused newspapers across the country to seek new ways to retain and attract readers. Using female reporters to supplement male-driven sports coverage was one increasingly popular tactic. However, unlike newspapers that used women to deliver fawning "feminine" perspectives on a much-ballyhooed prizefight or horse race, the *Tribune* relied on Hickok less as a gimmick and more as a steady, significant contributor. Granted, many of Hickok's football reports did appear on page one instead of in the sports section. Perhaps the *Tribune* was using her byline to generate sales among the pedestrians who scanned the front pages of papers being hawked at newsstands and by street-corner newsboys. Hick did use more stylized, entertaining language than her male colleagues, further indicating that her sports reports may indeed have been intended to grab attention and lure casual readers. Or, Hickok's presence on page one may have shown that the *Tribune* simply felt that the sports section was still the privileged domain of male writers.

Whatever the reason for the placement of Hickok's stories, her role as a football writer expanded steadily between 1924 and 1926. She gained additional gridiron assignments each season and infused her stories with a conversational writing style that was a departure for *Tribune* sports stories then, although it is common in sports sections today. She was, in short, a key contributor to the newspaper's otherwise male-dominated football coverage.

Hickok's football-writing debut came on Sunday, October 5, 1924, when the University of Minnesota opened its season—and its new football stadium—with a tight victory over North Dakota. Christened Memorial Stadium, the facility was dedicated to the 3,527 university workers and graduates who had served in World War I. Some 16,000 fans paid $1 each to attend the inaugural game at the horseshoe-shaped stadium.[14] Its grandeur, together with the overall excitement of the day, prompted the 31-year-old Hickok to compare it to the Roman Coliseum, a metaphor she also used in assessing the quality of play by Coach Bill Spaulding's Minnesota team.

> Fans journeyed over to Minneapolis's new Roman circus Saturday afternoon to see North Dakota thrown to the lions–but the lions weren't biting very well. They did wake up enough, in the salad and dessert courses, to nip a 14 to 0 score out of the hides of their victims, but they never got down to the bones at all, and there's at least one fan in Minneapolis who has a hunch that Keeper Bill Spaulding is going to put 'em through a good stiff course of treatments before they tackle the Haskell red meat next Saturday.[15]

Although Hickok skipped the contest against Haskell the following week, she did go on to cover three more home games that season. Every one of her stories appeared on page one. By continuing to infuse her reports with metaphors and other clever turns of phrase, Hickok produced stories that perfectly complemented the football coverage offered in the *Tribune*'s sports section, where George A. Barton covered the Gophers games in a more straightforward manner.

Hickok's ability to serve as Barton's foil was perhaps best illustrated that season on the day of the Minnesota-Illinois clash, when preview stories by both writers were published. While each focused on star halfback Red Grange, Barton's story featured a no-frills lead, followed by some bland hype about the desire among Minnesota football fans "to see Grange do his stuff."[16]

Minneapolis Tribune *newsboys, about 1925*

Eager fans crowd the grounds before the first game played in the new Memorial Stadium, October 1924.

Hickok, meanwhile, redefined the pre-game story as *Tribune* readers knew it. Unlike Barton, she mined an angle that brought Grange to life, unseating him from his mythic perch to paint him as an ordinary fellow. She did this in the simplest way: she revealed that "Red" Grange, whose name rolled off the tongue in a way that befit a hero, was really Harold Grange—and that even his coaches and teammates called him by his given name. The first several lines of her story show off Hickok's unusual conversational style: "Percy, don't you ever let 'em kid you again. And all you Clarences and Algernons take notice. For that young gentleman whom somebody . . . has christened 'Red' Grange isn't called 'Red' by his own gang at all. From Coach Bob Zuppke down to the subbiest young sub, he's 'Harold,' that's what he is. Harold, doggone it, is the boy's real name."[17]

After Grange failed to lead his Illinois team past Minnesota, Hickok reached into early-nineteenth-century American history to pull out a story lead that evoked War of 1812 hero Oliver Hazard Perry: "We have met the enemy," Hickok wrote of Grange, "and he is ours." Continuing to use first-person plural to refer to the Minnesota team, she went on to paint Grange thusly: "On his shield, with injuries that may put him out of the game for the rest of the season, we sent him back to Illinois Saturday night—'Red' Grange the Incomparable, football's hero of heroes."[18]

Red Grange, aka Harold, about 1925

A week later, when Minnesota hosted Vanderbilt, Hickok continued to show off her impressive writing style. Giving the story a North-South spin, she cast the Tennesseans as "young gentlemen" who had come North to "exchange courtesies" with Minnesota before politely administering the Gophers a 16–0 defeat—all "without ever getting ruffled [and] without ever forgetting their manners."[19]

Taking stock of Hickok's contributions in the 1924 football season—four games and one preview—it is evident that, while not yet a prolific sports scribe, she was bringing a new style to sports writing, at least at the *Minneapolis Tribune*. While some of her metaphors may have been overdrawn—more appropriate perhaps, for the East Coast sportswriters whose writing often oozed drama—she had certainly done what editor-in-chief Dillon had asked: injected excitement into the *Tribune* front page, especially on Sundays.[20]

Having succeeded with her limited football coverage in 1924, Hickok was back to writing about the sport even before the next season started. When the University of Minnesota appointed Dr. Clarence W. Spears as its new football coach in July 1925, the *Tribune* ran three stories. While sports editor Barton provided the straightforward account of the hiring process and sports staffer Hubert Dustin wrote about the new practice techniques that Spears planned to employ, Hickok took a decidedly different approach by playfully seizing on the new coach's girth. With the delicate touch that the subject matter required, Hickok got Spears—whom she had presumably just met—to talk about his 260-pound, hulking frame: "'Sure, go ahead and write me up as a fat man,'" she quoted, "'but look out for my wife.'" Hickok followed that with some conversational editorializing that was becoming her hallmark, advising readers: "And, sure, go right ahead and call him 'Fat' Spears too—if you carry plenty of accident insurance." She then wrote about the new coach's family, their search for a house, and his reputation as an innovator with football equipment. Of the three stories, only Hickok's allowed readers to get to know the new coach beyond his previous won-lost records or plans for fall scrimmages.[21]

When the 1925 season finally kicked off, Hickok was busy covering news features for the *Tribune*. However, by the time the season shifted into high gear in week four, Hick was back to covering football. The assignment this time was especially prime; not only was it homecoming

Gopher football coaches (from left): 260-pound Clarence "Doc" Spears, Bob Baxton, Sherman Finger, Major Ray Hill, and Sig Harris, 1925

for the Gophers, but the opponent, Notre Dame, was coming off an upset loss to Army—a development that stoked the victory hopes of an already buoyant Minnesota squad. The excitement throughout the state was at such a fever pitch that sports editor Barton suggested public interest in a Gophers football game had not been so great since the memorable 1903 Minnesota-Michigan duel.[22] For Hickok to draw such an assignment was indeed impressive.

Hickok spun some catchy phrases in writing about the Notre Dame game, which drew 52,000 fans to Memorial Stadium. She referred to Coach Knute Rockne's team as "Rock and his pebbles" and likened the hometown Gopher offense to a "Minnesota prairie fire" when it suddenly swept down the field to score before eventually losing the game, 19–7.[23]

Meanwhile, other stories in the newspaper that same weekend helped show just how remarkable it was for Hickok to be covering a male team sport. One item in the sports section, for example, ridiculed a female baseball fan who surmised that a pitcher was spitting on the ball for luck when, of course, he was applying saliva to enhance the movement of his pitches. The woman's mistake brought such laughter from the rooters seated around her that it took several minutes before "quiet was restored." The underlying message: women were out of their league when it came to understanding sports. This message was further emphasized by an article in the society section that detailed the "gay entertainments" sororities had planned as part of a post-football game celebration, implying that women were more interested in the festivities than the game itself.[24]

Coach Knute Rockne (in topcoat) and players on sidelines during Minnesota-Notre Dame game, Memorial Stadium, 1925

Hickok was no doubt aware that society still subscribed to the stereotype that women, if interested in sports at all, were casual and uninformed fans at best. Hick defied the stereotype. Assigned to cover the next three Minnesota football games—home wins against rival Wisconsin, pushover Butler, and powerhouse Iowa—she continued to prove that a woman could capably cover football. As was her wont, she spiced her reports with breezy writing and snappy sentences without sacrificing important game details.[25]

This trademark conversational, engaging writing—coupled with Minnesota's string of victories—put both team and writer in an unaccustomed position leading up to the final game of the 1925 season: Minnesota would be playing rival Michigan not only for the Little Brown Jug but for the conference championship as well. And Hickok, for the first time in her two seasons of covering football, would be traveling outside Minneapolis to report on a game. Being assigned to a road game suggested that she had climbed an important rung on the ladder of respect and acceptance, an assessment furthered by her designation as a "star" reporter in a *Tribune* advertisement. Hyped as "The Supreme Thrill of the Football Season," the Minnesota-Michigan game was the biggest sports story Hickok had ever been asked to cover. Minneapolis had made extensive preparations for the contest. For fans who could not travel to Michigan, radio announcer H. A. Bellows, "The WCCO Man," would be receiving a "detailed story of the game by a direct telephone connection from Ferry Field, Ann Arbor" and then relaying the news "into the microphone" for the listening audience. Fans who wanted a visual depiction of the game, meanwhile, were invited to the University of Minnesota Armory, where "two men, adorned with ear phones," would literally draw pictures "of the plays, almost simultaneously as they were being executed" in Michigan.[26]

When it came time to report the game's outcome—Minnesota was crushed 35–0—sports editor Barton called the outcome "decisive," anointed Michigan "one of the greatest football teams that ever strode a western

gridiron," and duly went about dissecting the game. Unlike Barton, who spoke authoritatively *to* the reader, Hickok spoke *with* the reader in a style more casual than reportorial, an approach she continued to perfect:

> Michigan won the war, 35 to 0, on Ferry Field this afternoon. To the victor goes the championship. Also the Little Brown Jug and all the compliments in the sports page vocabulary. About all we can think of to say on this inauspicious occasion, kind friends, is this: If you had seen that Michigan team in action . . . you wouldn't feel quite so bad about it. Which may be scant comfort, but you'll have to take it if you take anything at all. It's all there is. There isn't any more. Poor old Michigan, as they say when they want to be funny. There may have been some football stuff she did not have out there on Ferry Field this afternoon. If there was, the telescope of this humble astronomer failed to find it.[27]

With that assessment, Hickok ended her coverage of the 1925 season. She had moved up to cover more than half of the Gophers' contests that year, including her first road assignment.

When Hick took up reporting on Gopher football again in 1926, her gridiron coverage expanded even further. This time, she was assigned to report on the entire eight-game schedule. Her stories continued to complement articles written by male counterparts Barton and Dustin.

This ascension to a full-fledged football beat certainly owed much to Hickok's distinctive writing style. But her personality cannot be discounted as a factor. As the paper's week-in, week-out college football feature writer in 1926, Hickok had to hit the road three times, for games in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa. By all accounts, Hickok on these occasions shared the team's special train, stayed at the same hotel as the team, and mixed easily with the coaches, players, and male journalists.[28]

The professional nature of these associations notwithstanding, Hickok would have needed a special temperament to earn acceptance among the men of the traveling party. Mixed travel by men and women was not casually accepted in the mid-1920s. In the Midwest, schools such as the University of Minnesota made a strict practice of assigning chaperones to trains and buses that carried both female and male students to "away" football games. Female students were also required to register with the dean of women days in advance of the trip. Even adults, at times, resisted or rejected travel that put men and women in close quarters; for example, the Pennsylvania Railroad operated "stag sleepers" to accommodate male passengers who refused to share a night train with women.[29]

Hickok not only flouted the taboos associated with mixed travel, but she also seemed particularly suited to the challenge. Because she was easygoing and sarcastic rather than prim and proper, she likely gained acceptance more readily than a traditionally feminine reporter would have. Hick, who would sometimes trade her Pall Malls for a pipe or cigar, was known to use profanity and take an interest in poker. While she was not a heavy drinker, she was not a teetotaler either. And, now in her 30s, she certainly was not short on confidence. She knew how to assert herself in the male-dominated world of sports journalism.[30]

During the 1926 season, in fact, Hickok used several of her weekly previews to poke fun at coaches who superstitiously downplayed their teams' ability. With Minnesota set to take on Notre Dame in week two, Hickok presented a picture of two coaches, each desperately trying to paint his own team as the underdog: "It's going to be an awfully pathetic affair, really. Both teams are going to get licked. Both coaches say so," she wrote playfully. Repeatedly, she referred to Rockne as

Some 3,000 fans flocked to the U of M Armory to see the crucial Minnesota-Michigan game, relayed live from Ann Arbor, depicted on a blackboard.

“Gloomy Knute,” finally concluding that the Notre Dame coach was more outwardly pessimistic than Minnesota’s Coach Spears, who himself was spinning a prediction of doom and gloom for the Gophers.[31]

As the season progressed, this “woe is me” attitude favored by most coaches continued to amuse Hickok as overdone and pointless. About the Michigan coach’s “mournful” assessment of his team’s chances, Hickok quipped, “Original, isn’t he?” Iowa coach Burt Ingwersen was so pessimistic that Hickok sarcastically referred to him in print as “Sunshine” Ingwersen and the “Pollyanna of the cornfields.” She wrote that he “would have draped the stands around the Iowa field with crepe for this game tomorrow, if he could have got an appropriation out of the athletic funds to buy the crepe.” Relaying Ingwersen’s concerns about his team’s backfield, Hickok even took it upon herself to snidely supplement the coach’s sob story: “The Iowa cheer leaders have all got laryngitis, too, and there’s a hole in the big bass drum.”[32]

Whatever fun Hickok had in seizing upon the opposing coaches’ idiosyncrasies, she was just as likely to take a good-natured jab at some player on the Minnesota squad. Once, when she wished to give fans a glimpse into the everyday, off-the-field life of star fullback Herb Joesting, Hickok illuminated his character by joking about the dilapidated car he drove to practice each day. “Along about 4 P.M. every weekday except Saturday, all the infants in southeast Minneapolis are awakened from their afternoon naps by a loud noise traveling down University Avenue. It sounds like an army tank with the whooping cough on the Fourth of July,” Hickok wrote. Joesting, she explained, was “the only man on the Minnesota football squad who comes out to practice in an automobile.” At least that was the case a few days ago, she added, noting that it would still be true only “if the pieces of clothesline that hold together what was a collegiate flivver back sometime before the war haven’t given out.”[33]

Hickok’s story gave the impression that Joesting—on his way to becoming just the third two-time All-American in University of Minnesota football history—thought that a car and flashy clothes were status symbols that separated him from his teammates.[34] Yet he could not afford a respectable automobile and, on top of that, apparently lacked fashion sense—as well as the good sense to dress for the weather. And so Joesting, Hickok suggested, became a parody of himself.

> Bare-headed and bare-handed, in a lumberjack shirt of one-inch green and yellow checks, he sat bolt upright behind the wheel of one of the funniest-looking flivvers that ever spouted steam like a teakettle on a cold day. It didn’t have any top, nor any hood. The ice-coated radiator was sending out great puffs of steam. The stuffing was trailing out of the seats, and bits of rubber were flying in all directions from the tires. Closer inspection revealed that it had no floor. From the wheel you could look right down past the rusty engine to the ground.[35]

Star fullback Herb Joesting, a two-time All American and Minnesota’s “Golden Tornado”

Hickok then took direct aim at Joesting’s attire: “This year he has gone in for flannel shirts. . . . And from wearing the kind of felt hat that you’d expect to see on his father, Herb has taken this year to cowboy headgear. That is—until it got cold. Then he started going bareheaded.”

As unflattering a portrait as this was, Hickok apparently felt that she was within her bounds; after all, the story was not meant to be malicious. And Hick, by that time, had cultivated a good relationship with the players. To them, she was “Miss Goofer”—a mispronounced variant of the “Miss Gopher” nickname that she had been given earlier that season.[36]

It would seem that Hickok had indeed earned acceptance by 1926. Not only did she go by “Miss Goofer” but, unlike her male colleagues, she liberally assigned herself an array of other nicknames—names that seemed to suggest she was a part of the team, or, at the very least, a loyal mascot. She referred to herself in print by monikers that

ranged from "the Gophers' auntie" (probably the most frequent) to "the Gophers' poet laureate," "the Gophers' war orphan," "the Gophers' chaperone and social secretary," and even "the Gophers' press agent."[37]

By the time Minnesota capped its season a few weeks later—with a heartbreaking loss to Michigan—Hickok portrayed herself as more of a rooter than ever: "The Gophers' Auntie," she wrote, "is going to buy herself a pair of galoshes and a gun this week and hike out into the vicinity of Gopher Prairie. When she returns she is going to have enough rabbits' feet to make for each member of next year's Gopher football squad a necklace like those mufflers of bear claws the Indians used to wear. For it seems that that is the only way Minnesota is ever going to beat Michigan."[38]

Such writing, although biased by today's newspaper standards, was tolerated—and likely encouraged—for two reasons. First, Hickok's football coverage was merely an extension of the "folksy" formula the *Tribune* already employed. The population of Minneapolis was less than 500,000, and the *Tribune*, while a large-city paper, was not so large that it had to sacrifice the hometown feel of a smaller news sheet. It routinely both sponsored and reported on events such as its annual Dog Derby, in which children mushed teams of dogs around a snowy city track, and a "Matching Twins" contest that enticed more than 20,000 readers to try to select 23 sets of twins from 46 photos that the paper had published.[39] In much the same way, Hick's football coverage allowed the *Tribune*'s news section to give a lighter treatment to a topic usually treated with near reverence on the sports pages.

Yet Hickok's reporting never became so light or folksy that it overlooked key elements of the games. Even in 1926, when the frequent Auntie Gopher and Miss Goofer observations stretched the bounds of objectivity beyond anything Hickok had done previously, her writing still demanded the respect of serious-minded fans. She did not short shrift readers when it came to giving them insight about the plays and momentum shifts that shaped a game's outcome. Nor was she above second-guessing coaching strategy or leveling criticism.[40]

Despite having become an accomplished football reporter in just three seasons, Hickok's sportswriting career came to an abrupt end when, in late 1926, ill health prompted her to move West. Together with her friend Ella Morse, the 33-year-old, diabetes-stricken Hickok left Minneapolis for San Francisco, where she traded in the deadline pressure of the newspaper business to work on a novel. Within a year, Hickok was frustrated by her literary attempts and Morse had eloped. Hick thus decided to leave the West Coast for New York City, where she briefly wrote for the *New York Mirror* before joining the Associated Press at the age of 35. As an AP writer, Hickok gained national recognition for her coverage of stories such as the 1928 sinking of the steamship *Vestris* and the 1932 Lindbergh baby kidnapping. Her coverage of the *Vestris* disaster was so impressive that it earned Hickok the distinction of being the first woman to have her name atop a page-one story in the *New York Times*. She later went on to work in the Franklin Roosevelt administration, writing internal reports about public welfare programs while also becoming an intimate friend of the first lady.[41]

Long-time Minneapolis Tribune *sports writer and editor George Barton, 1938*

These achievements and associations that followed Hickok's tenure at the *Minneapolis Tribune* have constituted her legacy. But as an examination of her sports writing for the Minneapolis paper shows, she should also be recognized as a pioneer in the field of sports journalism. Although Hickok's coverage of the University of Minnesota football program lasted just three years, her contribution to the history of women in sports journalism is profound. While most women who covered sports in the 1920s either wrote strictly about

female athletes or produced occasional stories from a superficial "woman's angle," Hickok's regularly appearing sports features appealed to male and female readers alike. She was the only female beat writer, it appears, to cover a male team sport as far back as the 1920s.[42]

Moreover, Hickok pioneered this role at a time when, despite the increasing acceptance of women in nontraditional roles, the challenge of traveling with an all-male athletic squad and gaining acceptance among coaches, players, and male sportswriters could not be overstated. In the face of all obstacles, Hickok distinguished herself. Using Minnesota as her proving ground, she succeeded in producing quality stories that fed the college-football mania gripping the Midwest, while also bringing a new, conversational style of sports journalism to the pages of the *Minneapolis Tribune*—a style that is widely mirrored in sports sections today. ◘

Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok in Puerto Rico, 1934

Notes

1. For circulation figures, see the 1920s editions of *American Newspaper Annual and Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son). For a sampling of the *Tribune*'s agricultural news, see: "Natural Corn Husking Title Won by Iowan," Nov. 18, 1926, p. 15; "Single Bean Grown in Minneapolis Provides Meal for Five Persons," Oct. 5, 1923, p. 4; "Jamestown Will Observe Alfalfa Day Next Week," Nov. 16, 1926, p. 5; "Dairy Congress Is Welcomed to Syracuse Show," Oct. 6, 1923, p. 1; and "Inventor of Butterfat Test Celebrates Eightieth Birthday," Oct. 28, 1923, sec. 6, p. 4.

2. Some scholars have suggested a sexual relationship between Hickok and the First Lady, which is irrelevant to this article. See Rodger Streitmatter, ed., *Empty Without You: The Intimate Letters of Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

3. The only full-length biography of Hickok, Doris Faber's *The Life of Lorena Hickok: E.R.'s Friend* (New York: William Morrow, 1980), focuses on Hickok's association with the Roosevelts and devotes just two pages to her football writing. Other sources that comment on Hickok's careers with little, if any, focus on sports writing include Maurine Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Maurine Beasley and Richard Lowitt, eds., *One-Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); and Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 1* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

4. Conclusions based on examination of various metropolitan newspaper sports sections of the 1920s. On the dominance of men in sports journalism, see, for example, Stanley Woodward, *Sports Page* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949); Jerome Holtzman, *No Cheering in the Press Box*, 1st rev. ed. (New York: Henry Holt, 1995).

Many newspapers assigned women to cover prizefights and other major sporting events from a "woman's angle," which involved writing about celebrities in attendance and the fashions that were popular among fans. For more on women's restricted contributions to the era's sports pages, see Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press* (New York: Harper, 1936). David Kaszuba, *They Are Women, Hear Them Roar: Female Sportswriters of the Roaring Twenties* (Ph.D. diss., Penn State University, 2003) and Pamela Creedon, ed., *Women, Media and Sport* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 67–108, also address this topic while providing an overview of female sports journalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Those who wrote about women's athletics during the 1920s included Margaret Goss at the *New York Herald Tribune* and Dorothy Greene at the *Washington Post*.

5. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 13–43. See also Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media*, 26–27; Beasley and Lowitt, *One-Third of a Nation*, xxv–xxvi; Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 480–84.

6. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 54, 57. Opportunities for women in police work were widening at this time, however; by 1925, 200 U.S. cities had female police officers. See *New York Herald Tribune*, Mar. 14, 1924, sec. 1, p. 7; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 31, 1925, sec. 1, p. 9.

7. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 46–51 (quote, p. 48); Beasley and Lowitt, *One-Third of a Nation*, xxvi.

8. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 51–53; Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 485. For Hickok's story, see Lorena Lawrence, "Geraldine Proves She's Prima Donna," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Nov. 19, 1915, p. 1. Why a pen name was used—and whether the editor or Hickok herself chose it—is unclear.

9. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 59–60. Hickok's relationship with Dillon, whom she affectionately called "The Old Man," is also addressed in Beasley, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media*, 27, and Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 486.

10. Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 30, 1926, p. 2.

11. *Tribune*, Aug. 22, 1925, p. 1, Sept. 3, 1925, p. 22, Oct. 25, 1926, p. 9.

12. *Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1925, sec. 1, p. 16. On the overall mood of the 1920s as it relates to women, see Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression, 1920–1941* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).

13. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 59–60.

14. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 66, erroneously asserts that Hickok's "first try" at a football story was November 16, 1924.

The University of Minnesota football team played its last season at Memorial Stadium in 1981 and then moved to Minneapolis's Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome; Jeff Keiser and Shane Sandersfeld, eds., *Minnesota Football '05* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005), 162–63. The 2006 Minnesota legislature approved funds for a new, on-campus football stadium.

15. *Tribune*, Oct. 5, 1924, sec. 1, p. 1.

16. *Tribune*, Nov. 15, 1924, p. 29.

17. *Tribune*, Nov. 15, 1924, p. 26. Grange was a three-time All-American at Illinois and is among the most famous college football athletes in history. He played professionally with the Chicago Bears and is widely credited with increasing the popularity of professional football. See John M. Carroll, *Red Grange and the Rise of Modern Football* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

18. *Tribune*, Nov. 16, 1924, sec. 1, p. 1.

19. *Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1924, sec. 1, p. 1.

20. Fanciful prose and highly stylized writing were typical of 1920s sports reporting at large metropolitan newspapers in the East, contributing to the decade's designation as the "golden age" of sports journalism. See Robert Lipsyte, *Sportsworld: An American Dreamland* (New York: Quadrangle, 1975), 170–72; Mark Inabinett, *Grantland Rice and His Heroes: The Sportswriter as Mythmaker in the 1920s* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

21. *Tribune*, July 4, 1925, p. 9, July 23, 1925, p. 1, 14.

22. *Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1925, p. 31.

23. *Tribune*, Oct. 24, 1925, p. 1, Oct. 25, 1925, sec. 1, p. 1–2. Rockne coached Notre Dame for 13 years, leading the Irish to five unbeaten seasons.

24. *Tribune*, Oct. 25, 1925, sec. 3, p. 8, sec. 6, p. 3. Another suggestion that women and sports were an unnatural mix appeared in "Oh! Margy!" a regular *Tribune* feature that often poked fun at the "modern" woman. One cartoon depicted a football player hugging Margy, who wondered "why a football man should be penalized for holding"; *Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1925, p. 18.

25. I uncovered no criticism directed toward Hickok or the newspaper because of her football coverage. This may well be a testament to her writing skill, which *Tribune* readers knew from her news and human-interest stories.

26. *Tribune*, Nov. 20, 1925, p. 1, Nov. 22, 1925, sec. 4, p. 2, 5. Approximately 3,000 fans took advantage of the illustrated broadcast. The tradition of the Little Brown Jug dates to 1903 when Minnesota scored a late touchdown to earn a 6–6 tie with Coach Fielding Yost's Michigan team. Michigan forgot to take its earthenware water jug home, and when Yost asked Minnesota to return it, he was told, "If you want it, you'll have to win it." Since then, the jug has gone to the winner of the schools' annual rivalry. See Keiser and Sandersfeld, *Minnesota Football '05*, 172.

27. *Tribune*, Nov. 22, 1925, sec. 1, p. 1, sec. 4, p. 1.

28. Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 207; Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 67. Even though Hickok made these inroads, it's uncertain whether she covered any games from the press box, a male bastion of the day. Faber suggests that Hickok was forced to work from the grandstand, but some of Hickok's stories—particularly in 1926—hint at her presence along the sidelines and in the press box. See, for example, *Tribune*, Oct. 3, sec. 1, p. 1, Oct. 10, sec. 1, p. 2, Oct. 24, sec. 1, p. 2, Nov. 14, sec. 1, p. 1, and Nov. 21, sec. 1, p. 1—all 1926.

29. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 28, 1926, p. 12; *New York Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1924, p. 1.

30. Ross, *Ladies of the Press*, 207; Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 58–60, 67. Smoking was not readily accepted as "ladylike" in the 1920s. On female students and female prison inmates smoking see, for example, *Tribune*, Nov. 27, 1925, p. 9; editorial, *New York Evening Telegram*, Oct. 3, 1923, p. 8.

Although extremely confident about her journalistic ability, Hickok did seem to lack self-esteem, a recurring point in Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*. Characterization of Hickok based on Faber's book as well as Hickok's reporting style. In addition, Ishbel Ross, a journalist during the same era as Hickok, says Hick "was treated exactly as a man" by her peers at the *Minneapolis Tribune* (*Ladies of the Press*, 207).

31. *Tribune*, Oct. 9, 1926, p. 1. Notre Dame won the game; *Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1926, p. 1.

32. *Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1926, p. 1, Nov. 6, 1926, p. 1.

33. *Tribune*, Nov. 16, 1926, p. 1.

34. Keiser and Sandersfeld, *Minnesota Football '05*, 183.

35. Here and below, *Tribune*, Nov. 16, 1926, p. 2.

36. There are conflicting stories about the origin of the nickname. Although Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 67, suggests that a member of Minnesota's backfield bestowed the name after Hick ran into the end zone to celebrate a Gopher touchdown, Hickok herself stated that Michigan coach Fielding Yost assigned her the moniker; *Tribune*, Oct. 16, 1926, p. 1.

37. See *Tribune*, Oct. 15, p. 1, Oct. 24, sec. 1, p. 1, Oct. 30, p. 1, Nov. 6, p. 1, and Nov. 10, p. 23—all 1926.

38. *Tribune*, Nov. 21, 1926, sec. 1, p. 1. While this article in no way purports to be a psychoanalytic study, Hickok's almost familial attachment to the team is an interesting counter to her childhood, which was marked by loss, abuse, and separation; see Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 13–57.

39. *Tribune*, editorial, Nov. 18, 1926, p. 14, Jan. 24, 1925, p. 1, Aug. 23, 1925, sec. 1, p. 1, Oct. 12, 1925, p. 1. The paper's circulation in the mid-1920s was approximately 132,000 daily and 175,000 on Sundays; *Tribune*, Jan. 25, 1925, sec. 8, p. 7.

40. Two Hickok stories that particularly reflect her insights are "New Idol Climbs to Pedestal in Gopher Football Pantheon," *Tribune*, Oct. 3, 1926, sec. 1, p. 1, and "Flanagan's Flying Circus Goes Barnstorming All Over Minnesota in 20 to 7 Victory," Oct. 10, 1926, sec. 1, p. 1. For examples of her critical abilities, see *Tribune*, Oct. 17, sec. 1, p. 2, Oct. 24, sec. 1, p. 1, and Oct. 31, sec. 1, p. 1—all 1926.

41. Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 69–71. The *Times* chose Hickok's account over copy by its own staff. Her "first" comes with one qualifier, however: at the insistence of the AP, she shared the byline with a male passenger she had interviewed. See Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 81; *New York Times*, Nov. 15, 1928.

The most extensive treatment of Hickok's work for the FDR administration is Beasley and Lowitt's *One-Third of a Nation;* see also Faber, *Life of Lorena Hickok*, 91–325.

42. The contention is based on the author's extensive review of primary and secondary sources, including 1920s-era metropolitan newspapers, biographical dictionaries and memoirs of newspaper reporters from the period, books and articles on the history of sports journalism and on female journalists, anthologies of sports writing, and instructional texts.

The pictures of Hickok on p. 100 by Tenschert Studio, Washington, D.C., and p. 111 are courtesy the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library; p. 109 is courtesy University of Minnesota Athletic Department. All other images are in MHS collections.

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