EXERCISE 32/33-1  The comma and unnecessary commas: Guided practice

Edit the following essay by adding commas where they are needed and removing unnecessary commas. The numbers in the margin refer to appropriate rules in sections 32 and 33 of The Bedford Handbook, Seventh Edition. The first revision has been done for you, and answers to this exercise appear in the back of the book.

If a boy wanted to join the football team at Carlisle Indian School, he had to go through a difficult test. Any boy who wanted to be on the team had to stand at one of the goal lines; all the first-string players stood around the field. When the ball was punted to the new boy, he had to catch it and try to get all the way to the other end zone with it. The team members tried to stop him before he could get very far. Only a few players had ever gotten as far as the fifty-yard line so “Pop” Warner, coach at the Carlisle Indian School considered it a good test.

One day a quiet Indian boy surprised Pop. The boy caught the ball, started running, wheeled away from the first players who tried to stop him, shook off the others and ran the ball all the way to the opposite goal line. Convinced that the player’s success was an accident, the coach ordered him to run the play again. Brusquely, the coach spoke to the players, and reminded them that this workout was supposed to be tackling practice. Jim, the nineteen-year-old six-footer, simply said “Nobody tackles Jim.” Then he ran the ball to the goal line a second time.

Well, almost no one tackled Jim Thorpe successfully for many years. Life itself got him down and made him fumble more often than his football opponents did, but, he was usually able to recover and go on. The first blow was the death of his twin brother while the two boys were still in grade school. This tragedy was followed by others: by the time Jim was twenty-five, he had lost his brother, his mother, and his father to death. They left him a Native American heritage: His father was half Irish and half Native American and his mother was the granddaughter of a famous Indian warrior named Chief Black Hawk.