

Pressure on Kennedy Mounts

THERE is a sense in which politics is like football and in that sense the pressure on Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts is now becoming severe.

The analogy is simple. Considered as a football team, the Democratic Party is not moving the ball. Quarterback Edmund Muskie is losing ground; McGovern, Lindsay, Jackson have not done as well as he. The crowd is yelling for Kennedy, who has been on the bench for two years with an injury once considered serious. The question is whether or not he is fit to play.

The crowd seems to think so. Matched against Richard Nixon, Muskie has fallen six points in the polls while Mr. Nixon has gained three. The comparable figures for Kennedy are Kennedy, up one; Mr. Nixon, down three.

"It's a funny thing," said Larry O'Brien, chairman of the Democratic Party, the other day here in Washington. "I will assume Kennedy is going to run; we don't even talk about it anymore. But every time I get

but into the country, the first question I am asked is, 'What about Teddy?'"

MEANTIME, political life for Edward Kennedy must be more than political life has ever been. Note the Kennedy benches of the last few weeks. First, he pointed out that President Nixon was willing to go 9,000 miles to China but was doing nothing to normalize relations with Cuba, 90 miles away.

Next, he complimented Mr. Nixon for his willingness to use television to demonstrate his leadership and asked why he didn't appear on television when the country really needed leadership — as when it was confused about whether to back one China or two.

When Mr. Nixon broached the names of the inevitable six for the Supreme Court, Kennedy said, "Let me be blunt. The men who are involved in the selection of Supreme Court nominees, Richard Nixon, John Mitchell, and [unnamed] and John Connelly, and the of the people who used to put 'Im-

perch Earl Warren' signs on highways."

One week he says the American Medical Association is more interested in keeping the supply of doctors low than it is in a good health program; another week he says the President is responsible for the defeat of foreign aid because he was busy taking cheap shots at the United Nations. Kennedy gets to say all the sharp things that candidates like McGovern are also saying. But Kennedy winds up with his picture on page one.

THE MOMENT he becomes a candidate, television cameras will cease to follow him; his brightest lines will appear, as McGovern's and Muskie's do, on page 32, and the injury which sidelined him two years ago will be discussed with less compassion. Up to a point, men will not speak ill of the injured. The point has been passed when the injured run for President.

Can Kennedy take it? Can the Democratic Party take it? Is the answer to that

question is, "No," then they must refuse to heed polls which show him the most popular of Democrats and the only one moving against Mr. Nixon. Shall they leave it to time and hope that Ed Muskie, or George McGovern can do better? What if they don't?

Edward Kennedy has the best staff in the Senate. Kennedys always do. It is not a national staff. It contains no well known delegate hunters. But it is issue-oriented, and when the senator wants to know about health, crime or transportation, he has instant expertise. Perhaps that is the way it will all end — with Kennedy brightly pointing out weaknesses from the sidelines, while somebody else tries to move the ball.

But the political history of the last few weeks suggests that the time may come when the pressure is irresistible, when a party about to lose an election looks down its bench, and says, so to speak, "Injured or not, let's put in the first team."

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