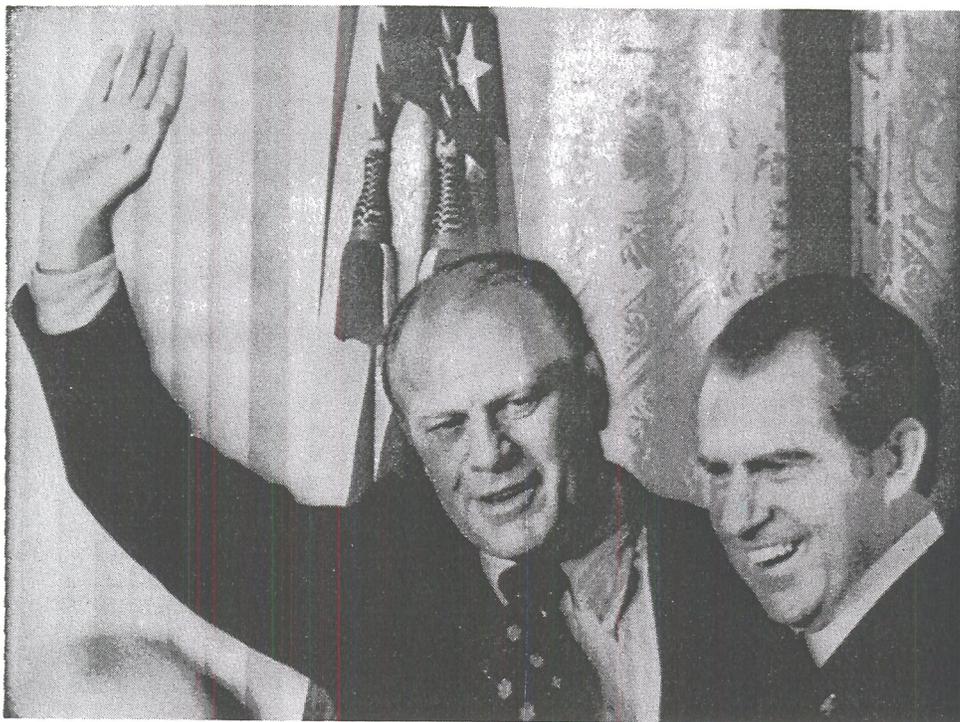


A Good Lineman for the Quarterback



NIXON PRESENTS NOMINEE GERALD FORD IN THE EAST ROOM



DICK HALSTED

A bountiful bundle of Republican politicians were staying close to the phone early that evening. Richard Nixon was due to announce his choice for Vice President to replace Spiro Agnew and, artfully building the suspense, had let it be known that 1) he was not going to notify his man until shortly before TV time and 2) the selection "might be a name that does not leap readily to mind." That meant that almost any Republican leader worth his ambition could be struck by the lightning; it was, all things considered, not a bad night to be at home.

One of those at home was House Minority Leader Gerald Rudolph Ford, 60, keeping his cool in his suburban Virginia home with a 20-minute swim. He had just climbed out of the pool, the dinner steaks were on the burner, when the telephone rang. It was the President. Puckishly, almost as though he were a secretary, he said: "Jerry, Al Haig has a message for you." The White House chief of staff came on the line and said: "I've got good news for you. The President wants you to be Vice President." Haig suggested that Ford might want to get his wife Betty on the line to hear the good news. Ford did, but in one of those small diversions that can deflect the noblest moments, she turned out to be talking on the Fords' other phone to one of their sons at school, using the only house line with an extension outlet. So Haig hung up, Ford got Betty to hang up, and Haig called back on Betty's line and repeated the glad tidings. There was never any discussion about

whether Ford would accept—all hands properly took that as given.

The choice of Ford ended three days of frenetic speculation that all but paralyzed Washington with rumor and anticipation. It also culminated a notable Nixon effort to give Republicans at least the illusion of participation in the first replacement of a Vice President in the nation's history. No sooner had Agnew delivered his letters of resignation (see following story) than the President launched a nationwide canvass of party sentiment for a successor. One of the first persons he called into the Oval Office was Counsellor Anne Armstrong. "He asked me to get on the phone and sound out opinion all around the country," she said. And he added: "It may not come to mind, but you tell them I want the names of qualified women as well as men." Counsellors Bryce Harlow and Mel Laird were summoned and given the same instructions, and soon messages to Republican Governors, national committeemen and women and other key party pros were winging from the White House.

Ford and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott were asked by Nixon personally to gather ballots from all the Republicans in Congress; and ballots were exactly what he wanted: a list of each Republican's top three choices for the new No. 2, in order of preference. All were to be in to him by 6 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 11, and he promised that no one would see them except himself and his trusted personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, who would sort and tabulate them. Nixon also provided a little guidance, giving his criteria for the man or woman he wanted: 1) a strong individual capable of leading the country; 2) someone who generally shares his views, particularly on foreign policy and national security; and 3) a nominee who could be confirmed expeditiously by the Congress without a rancorous fight.

Window Dressing. Some Republicans felt that the mass solicitation of views was only window dressing. They recalled that he went through a similar exercise at the 1968 Republican National Convention when he had already decided on Agnew as his running mate. Nonetheless, by the deadline hundreds of suggestions had poured into the White House to be tabulated by Miss Woods. Nixon flew with the assembled list aboard Marine One, his personal helicopter, to the mountaintop solitude of Camp David. There he dined alone in Aspen Lodge and, by the time he went to bed at 11:30 p.m., had winnowed the list to five names: Ford, John Connally, Ronald Reagan, Nelson Rockefeller and Elliot Richardson, even though Richardson had taken himself out of the running. He had quite properly argued

the impropriety of the man most directly responsible for prosecuting Agnew benefiting from his downfall by succeeding him.

Shortly after Nixon awoke at 6:30 a.m. Friday morning, he made his final decision: the next Vice President was to be his old friend and stalwart supporter Jerry Ford.

Upon returning to the Oval Office in Washington at 8:30, he told only Haig and Press Secretary Ron Ziegler of his decision and outlined his plan of action. Loving surprises the way most politicians love parades, he would unveil his nominee with the same kind of full dress performance in the East Room that he had played effectively when he sprung the nomination of Warren Burger as his Chief Justice.

In retrospect, Ford admits that if he had been a "little smarter," he would have realized that Nixon had dropped him teasing hints. At a meeting of congressional leaders to discuss procedures to be followed in making his nomination, Nixon joshed: "I'd like to be in the shape with the American public that Jerry Ford is." At another, this time private, meeting with the President on V.P. Day, Nixon called in the White House photographer and ordered: "Take this picture. It may be historic." Still, Ford claims he had no inkling that he was the choice until the phone rang.

When the time came to announce his nominee, Nixon was through being coy. In fact, the ceremony in the East Room of the White House had all the atmosphere of a mini-political convention. There was the man-who speech by Nixon, arms uplifted in triumph and a roar of approval from the audience—members of Congress, presidential aides and representatives from the diplomatic corps (the Supreme Court Justices decided that their presence would be improper and declined to attend). It was an oddly exuberant happening, considering its origin in Agnew's tragedy, and some Republicans considered the performance vulgar. Said Oregon Governor Tom McCall: "It looked like a hoedown, a shivaree." In the Blue Room after the announcement, while guests bear-hugged Jerry and kissed Betty Ford, Nixon chatted enthusiastically with those in the receiving line.

No Beginning. Nixon's choice was safe and unimaginative, if not quite justifying the rhetoric of a "new beginning" for the nation he called for in announcing it. Ford would not readily leap to mind as the Republican most capable of leading the nation were Nixon not to finish his term, but he admirably meets Nixon's second and third tests of fidelity of views and acceptability by Congress. In his own straitened circumstances, Nixon doubtless felt that Ford was all he could afford.

He clearly would have preferred former Treasury Secretary John Connally. In fact, the Texan had expected to get the nomination. But Democrats in the House and Senate mounted a vociferous

lobbying campaign against Connally, saying they would not vote for the man—whom they described as a fat cat, wheeler-dealer and turncoat—under any circumstances. Even some Republicans sent word to Nixon that they would not vote to approve Connally. Declared Massachusetts Representative Silvio Conte: "I will accept anyone the President sends up except Connally." Conte went so far as to work the cloakrooms against Connally, reminding Northern Congressmen of the oil shortage that their constituents are about to experience. "How can you in the Northeast vote for him?—and a turncoat!" he exclaimed. To avoid a fight he might not win, Nixon scratched Connally's name off the list.

Richardson was off too, and that left, besides Ford, only Governors Ronald Reagan of California and Nelson Rockefeller of New York. In opposite wings of the party, both Reagan and Rockefeller might have won confirmation with little difficulty, but Nixon rightly judged that choosing either would give him a head start toward the 1976 nomination that both crave and thus sunder an already Watergate-weakened minority party. That problem does not exist with Ford. After his selection, the minority leader declared: "I have no intention of being a candidate for President or Vice President in 1976." He may change his mind, but his current plan is to retire from public life when his term expires.

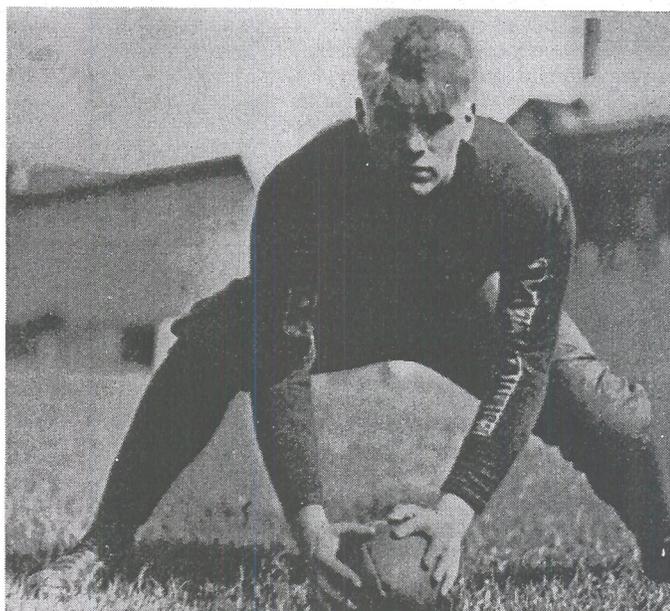
Ford's colleagues in Congress were jubilant over his selection. He had, in fact, been the man most often recommended for the job to the President by Congressmen, including House Speaker Carl Albert. Illinois Republican Senator Charles Percy called the nominee "an exceptional man"; South Carolina Republican Senator Strom Thurmond said he was "extremely pleased." Democratic Senator Walter Mondale declared: "The President is to be congratulated." Thus, Ford is expected to be confirmed with little delay, though not before examination by House and Senate committees. Ford says he wants a full investigation—by the FBI, Internal Revenue Service and Government Accounting Office as well as by Senators and Congressmen. He is even willing to turn over his income tax returns to investigators. But he is extremely popular with both Republicans and Democrats and respected for his personal probity, and it seems doubtful that the examining committees will detain him very long.

So swiftly did Nixon choose Ford that Congress had not yet decided how

to handle the nomination. It took two days of wrangling to work out the procedure, which will start with hearings by the House Judiciary Committee within two weeks.

Until confirmed, Ford will continue his duties as minority leader. Afterward, he expects his assignment as Vice President to be to shepherd Administration bills through Congress. He explains: "Working with Democrats and Republicans, I want to try to build a bridge of friendship, a bridge of understanding, a bridge of faith. I think I have an excellent rapport with my colleagues."

Ford has been good at rapport all his life. He was born in Omaha and christened Leslie King. Two years later his parents were divorced, and his mother took him back to her home town, Grand Rapids, Mich. There she married Paint Manufacturer Gerald Rudolph Ford, who adopted her son and renamed him. For pocket money in high



FORD AS STAR CENTER FOR MICHIGAN (1934)
"We'll huddle on that."

school, the young Ford waited on tables in a Greek restaurant. A strapping 6 ft. 197 lbs. when he entered college, he played center on the University of Michigan's undefeated national-championship football teams of 1932 and 1933. Along the way he worked as a summer forest ranger. His job: to hold a gun on the bears while tourists fed them.

After turning down offers from the Detroit Lions and the Green Bay Packers, he worked his way through Yale Law School as an assistant varsity-football coach and freshman boxing coach. Among his football players were Senators Robert Taft Jr. of Ohio and William Proxmire of Wisconsin. With a friend, Ford set up a law practice in Grand Rapids in 1941, helped elect a reform slate of Republican candidates for local office, and then entered the Navy. When the war ended, Ford returned home to his law practice.

In 1948, at the urging of the late Sen-

ator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Ford ran for Congress. He upset the incumbent, Isolationist Bartel J. Jonkman, by 2 to 1 in the primary and rolled to an easy victory in the election. He received 60.5% of the vote—to be his lowest tally in 13 elections to the House. He soon established himself among his colleagues as a hard-working, team-playing conservative, particularly for his work on the House Appropriations Committee where he specialized in the military budget and foreign aid. Then, in 1959, he helped engineer the removal of Massachusetts' venerable Joe Martin Jr. as G.O.P. leader. Six years later he overthrew and replaced Martin's successor, Indiana's Charles Halleck, promising to be more of an activist as minority leader.

To that end, Ford organized a series of task forces and committees to offer Republican alternatives to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Among the Ford-inspired proposals were local revenue sharing, Social Security increases and modifications of the War on Poverty. As part of the Ev Dirksen-Jerry Ford show, which weekly explained to reporters the latest G.O.P. positions, he won Johnson's enmity—and occasionally was the target of cruel presidential gibes. Referring to Ford, Johnson once tapped his head in mock sorrow and said: "Too bad, too bad—that's what happens when you play football without a helmet."

In Congress, Ford is respected by both Republicans and Democrats as a clever fighter but also as one who prefers reaching a consensus to twisting arms. He explains: "You have to give a little, take a little, to get what you really want, but you don't give up your principles." When driven to the wall in scraps over legislation, he can flare in anger but he harbors no grudges or resentments. Unlike many Congressmen, he has poured out help to his colleagues. By his own count, he has made more than 200 speeches a year, most for the benefit of fellow Congressmen—a reason he has special popularity among them. His speeches are forceful but not eloquent.

Most Loyal. Ford and Nixon first met as junior Congressmen when both were members of the Chowder and Marching Club, a band of like-minded young Congressmen. They have been close friends ever since. Like Nixon but with better credentials, Ford frequently uses football jargon ("He's a team player"; "We'll huddle on that"). He turned up at the 1960 Republican Convention wearing a "Ford for Vice President" button, was mentioned as a possible run-

ning mate for Goldwater in 1964, and was again available in 1968 when he served as chairman of the Republican National Convention.

After the election, Ford became Nixon's most loyal supporter in Congress, even on the most controversial issues, such as the nominations of Clement Haynsworth and G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court. "The President and I always have had a high identity philosophically," Ford told TIME Correspondent Neil MacNeil the night of his selection. He favored the SST, opposed busing to integrate schools, refused to cut defense spending and was generally hawkish on the Viet Nam War. In 1970 he led the losing crusade

Republican headquarters in Washington, which funneled the same amount back to two Ford reelection committees. But he defended his handling of his financial reports as "within the law," insisting that he did not know where the two committees received their money.

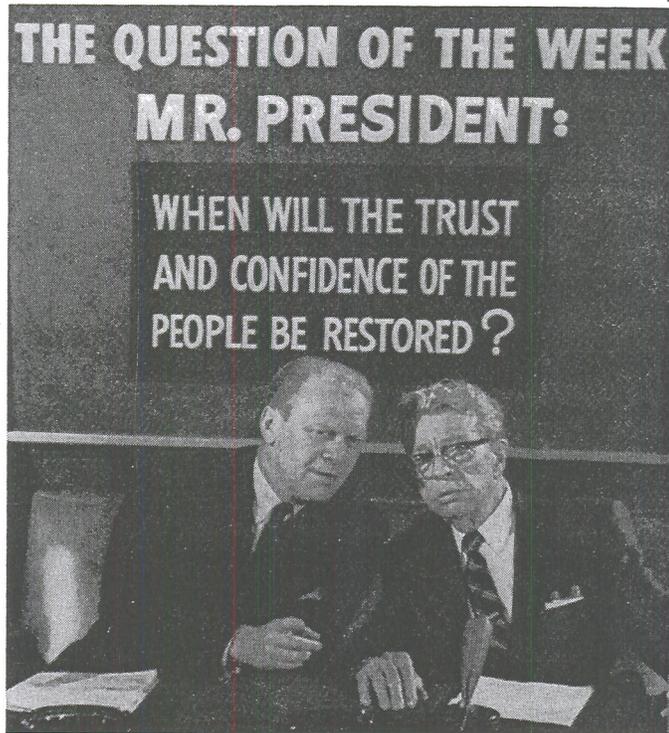
Still in Shape. Ford also was accused by former Washington Lobbyist Robert N. Winter-Berger, in his book *The Washington Payoff*, of being involved in some small stock deals having to do with his membership on the board of the Old Kent Bank and Trust Co. of Grand Rapids. Winter-Berger also claims that Ford did unspecified favors for an unnamed client in return for \$50,000 donated to Republican candi-

dates—but not Ford—in 1970. The minority leader has denied both accusations, and almost no one takes them seriously.

Square-jawed and still in shape, Ford jogs, skis and daily swims laps in the heated pool behind his modest brick and clapboard house in Alexandria, Va. Betty Ford once danced with the Martha Graham troupe and worked as a Powers model in New York City before her marriage. She shuns politicking, concentrating instead on their three sons and one daughter, and once proudly described the family as "squares." Ford's closest friends tend to be other Republican leaders, among them Nixon's domestic adviser, Mel Laird.

After the festivities at the White House, Ford and his wife returned home in the limousine he is entitled to as minority leader. Outside their house, neighbors waiting on the sidewalks and lawn burst into applause under the bright lights of the TV camera crews. A Secret Service detail had already established a command post on the front lawn, inspected the property, and pronounced it satisfactory for security. Typically, Mrs. Ford offered to let the agents use a vacant bedroom. They declined, one adding: "Just go on as if we weren't here."

That was impossible: Ford was not yet accustomed to his new status. Congratulatory telephone calls poured in, including one from former Vice President Agnew, who offered his "affection and best wishes." One telephone was tied up—Ford's wildly excited teen-age daughter, Susan, who had bet her mother \$5 that her father was Nixon's choice, was glued to it, telling friends about what had happened. "Tell her to get off the phone," Ford said to an aide. Then he thought for a moment and laughed. "Tell her the Vice President told her to get off. That's the only way to impress a 16-year-old."



THE EV & JERRY SHOW (1966)
Winning L.B.J.'s enmity.

to expel Justice William O. Douglas from the Supreme Court through impeachment. Ford spent ten days in Communist China last year but returned more convinced than ever that the U.S. must keep up a strong military establishment. In this year's session, Ford has supported Nixon's positions on Watergate and concentrated on holding together a coalition of Republicans and Democrats to protect the President's vetoes of Democrats' bills. In doing so, he has stayed out of the limelight. He explains: "I'm an old lineman. I've tried to be a good blocker and tackler for the running back who carries the ball."

The brush of possible scandal has touched him only lightly and not very convincingly. After the 1970 campaign, Ford was accused of failing to report at least \$11,500 in contributions made in 1969 by stockbrokers, bankers, conservative physicians and the Boilermakers and Blacksmiths Union of Kansas City, Kan. The checks were sent to Repub-