

Before running even one yard further with this review I should confess that I know practically nothing about football and have less than zero interest in the sport. Yet that only makes the immense charm of "Something in the Game: An All-American Musical" more of an achievement. For in spinning the tale of Knute Rockne, the legendary Notre Dame football coach from 1918 to 1931, and his prize athlete, George Gipp ("The Gipper"), the creators of this terrific show, which is now receiving a rousing production at Northwestern University's Josephine Louis Theater, have tapped into much grander themes than the nature of intensely competitive college football.

At the fiercely beating heart of this show is an exploration of father-son relationships and marital tensions, the nature of furious ambition, and the complex ways in which talent and self-destructive impulses are often intertwined.

A sharply penned book by Buddy Farmer, wonderfully varied music by the multitalented Michael Mahler, lyrics by Mahler and David H. Bell, and dynamic direction and ingenious choreography by Bell, is being exuberantly performed by a cast of 24.

The beauty of the show is how its more than 20 songs – with their smart, emotionally driven lyrics, and melodies that range from fervent ballads to rah-rah football chants and jazzy, 1920s dance hall numbers – capture the essence of the characters with such insight and flair.

No wonder Rockne's guiding principle was, as the song title puts it, "Go, Go, Go." That should also be the motto for this "All-American" musical.

HEDY WEISS: THEATER REVIEWS
WTTW TV Chicago