

Sports in American Life

A History

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Cover illustration:
Joe DiMaggio, in a classic batting stroke, unleashes his second home run of the game on June 28, 1939, in Philadelphia, against Connie Mack's Athletics. The powerful New York Yankees hit eight home runs in this game, and five more in the second game of a double header. Both numbers remain in the record books.



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7 "An Evil to be Endured"

Sports on Campus, 1920-50

From the time he assumed the presidency of the University of Chicago in 1929 at the age of 28, Robert Maynard Hutchins was skeptical about the value of athletic programs as part of the American system of higher education. After a decade-long dialogue over the merits of this elite private institution fielding a football team in the Western Conference (Big Ten), in 1939 Hutchins convinced his board of trustees to drop the sport. Despite his many qualms about the negative aspects of college football, however, Hutchins was able to take this drastic step only after a long and contentious dialogue. He made his decision at a propitious time: after humiliating 61-0 defeats administered by Ohio State and Harvard, and an 85-0 pasting by Michigan. These lopsided losses contributed to the school's 15th consecutive losing season.

As expected, Hutchins was widely criticized by many male alumni, football fans, and sports journalists, but he also received widespread praise. Despite accolades from academics for placing educational values above athletics, no other major football institution followed his lead. Hutchins explained that his presidential peers "could not stand the pressure" that fans, coaches, boosters, alumni, legislators, and the sports media created on behalf of the game.¹ Hutchins believed that "education is primarily concerned with the training of the mind, and athletics and social life, though they may contribute to it, are not the heart of it and cannot be permitted to interfere with it." He once quipped, "A college racing stable makes as much sense as college football. The jockey could carry the college colors; the students could cheer; the alumni could bet; and the horse wouldn't have to pass a history test."² Hutchins took heart when University of Missouri professor W. E. Gwatkin wrote him a letter of congratulations and pointed out that most university presidents had to tolerate football "as an evil to be endured for the sake of a rather vaguely defined greater good."³

The Essential Myth of Big-Time College Athletics

The template for intercollegiate athletics was established before the Great War. As they built their intercollegiate empires, coaches and athletic administrators embraced the English model of amateurism, while university presidents preached the gospel that athletics helped mold good character and moral habits while providing a strong complement to their institution's academic mission. Both rationales were at best wishful thinking, at worst hypocritical. Although the amateur idea was widely presumed the basis for American intercollegiate sports, in fact those schools which played "big-time" football or basketball schedules opted for a professional sports model that placed the highest priority upon winning.

When administrators took control of athletics away from the students between 1890 and 1910, they insisted that athletics had to be funded outside of the regular institutional budget. They hired professional coaches who replaced elected student "captains," their job being to produce winning teams and sell tickets. They also hired "business managers" — the precursor to today's entrepreneurial athletic directors — whose role it was to oversee the athletic programs and to help raise the funds necessary to produce winning teams. The arrival on campus of the paid professional coach and the athletic director ended any pretext that the college programs were to be run on the English amateur model.

Instead, the working model was that of American capitalism. The principles that underpinned the rise of the intercollegiate sports were the same that guided the American system of capitalism: rugged competition and the primacy of profits. The British concept of amateurism had grown out of a stratified society in which the elite were born to their status and could exclude themselves from significant social interaction with lesser groups. Their social stature was assured by birth, and so the English elite did not have to prove themselves. In egalitarian America, where there was no royalty, where society selected its leaders based upon performance and merit, and where freedom of opportunity and competition were exalted, the amateur model made little connection. Only in a society where an hereditary upper class existed could the English amateur system work. But it served the narrow purposes of American college coaches and athletic directors extraordinarily well.⁴

Thus in the highly competitive economic environment of the United States, intercollegiate sports naturally reflected the nation's basic capitalistic creed. Rivalries were established between similar institutions, often through conference affiliation; tickets were sold; team boosters were solicited for large donations; athletes were granted tuition and fee waivers (in effect "paid") in return for their athletic performance; special facilities were provided for the exclusive use of athletes; a training table was established to provide the best nutrition; tutors were hired to help athletes meet modest eligibility standards; extensive recruiting programs sought out skilled athletes; and professional head coaches ran the business. Despite all of these examples of raw professionalism, colleges and universities continued to insist that they were engaged in amateurism. Thus the underlying dilemma, as sports historian Ronald A. Smith has aptly noted:

If a college had truly amateur sport, it would lose contests and thus prestige. If a college acknowledged outright professional sport it would lose respectability. ... Be amateur and lose athletically to those who were less amateur: be outright professional and lose social esteem.⁵

These policies were established without much, if any, discussion of the long-term implications. There was no comparable model that university presidents could study, and there was no national coordinating organization to provide guidelines. Although the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) maintained a national office, its scope of authority was severely limited. It would not be until the 1950s that the NCAA began implementing policies that produced the powerful body it is today. Prior to that time its responsibilities were restricted largely to producing rules for the playing of games and providing a national forum for discussion of topics of mutual interest among member institutions. Even the regional athletic conferences – just coming into their own in the 1920s as effective bodies – lacked adequate jurisdiction over their members in supervising recruiting, enforcing eligibility standards, and monitoring the financial subsidy of athletes. In effect, supervision and regulation of the college sports enterprise was left up to individual institutions, which were expected to supervise themselves. In this curious *laissez faire* environment, independent athletic departments naturally distanced themselves as far as possible from the academic side of the institutions they represented, essentially marching to the special beat of their own drummer. By 1920, faculties had largely given up any hope of abolishing big-time football, and had only dim hopes of effectively regulating their campus program. University presidents, who came to their responsibilities from a traditional academic background, were either caught up in the assumption that a winning team was essential for institutional well-being and/or lacked the ability to understand and therefore control the athletic department. Eight decades later, as the twenty-first century dawned, critics of big-time college athletics would continue to lament the same lack of “institutional control” by central administrations over intercollegiate athletic programs that they had decried in the 1920s and the 1930s.

Using the arcane process of academic accreditation as a guideline, wherein regional accrediting organizations interact with institutions on the basis of a common set of ethical standards and self-governance, the guiding assumption of college athletic conferences was that each campus would be guided solely by high standards of ethical behavior and academic integrity, and would operate internally to achieve those worthy objectives. As per the amateur code, the college athlete was presumed to be a student engaged in a serious process of intellectual development. The games he played were believed to provide an important activity according to the Greek ideal of the fusion of body and mind.⁶

The blatant hypocrisy of this system, however, was exposed on every campus where major college football programs existed. Financial incentives to lure athletes to campus – a major deviation from the amateur ideal – were crucial to the building of a successful program. Few big-time college athletes were willing to

play simply for the joy of competition. A true amateur did not require professional coaching, but on the campuses the coach not only held a prestigious position, but also commanded a salary far beyond what was paid top professors (occasionally earning a salary higher than that of the president of the institution). According to the professional model, the more successful coaches expected ever-larger salary and benefit packages, and if these were not forthcoming, they felt impelled to move to another school eager to provide them. Unlike college faculty members, who usually spent an entire career on one or two campuses, football coaches often came and went with regularity – staying in one place about five to seven years.

Another important part of the amateur myth was that the athlete was a student first and an athlete second, devoting time to his sport only after his academic work was completed. Faculty oversight committees required that athletes had to be in good academic standing to represent their institution. In fact, however, faced with the expectation of producing winning teams, coaches were forced to recruit the best athletes they could find with only secondary attention paid to their academic interests or abilities; although the “tramp” athlete of the prewar era – the player who moved from campus to campus each year to play football and then just as suddenly disappeared when the season ended – disappeared during the 1920s, academic dishonesty remained a major problem that was never adequately addressed. Fabricated admissions documents, the funneling of players into special classes in which a professor was known to look kindly upon athletes, ghost-written term papers, the maintenance of test files, and other fraudulent academic schemes abounded. In direct contradiction of the amateur code, boosters provided illegal financial assistance in the form of easy campus and summer jobs, compliant campus administrators reserved top-paying on-campus jobs for athletes, coaches operated slush funds from which cash gifts were made to encourage a recruit to commit to an institution, and secret payments made once he arrived. Recruiting and academic scandals were more common than not. In 1929, a special study funded by the Carnegie Foundation revealed that serious academic integrity issues existed in at least three-fourths of the 130 institutions it had examined.

During the early years of the twentieth century, several faculties attempted to abolish football – most notably at the University of Wisconsin under the leadership of prominent history professor Frederick Jackson Turner (on one notable evening in 1906, an angry mob of students surrounded his house and threatened his lynching in response to his effort to shut down Badger football). Except at the University of Chicago, these faculty efforts came a cropper because the game had too many important friends. Off campus, boosters and alumni were vociferous in their support, and on campus many non-athletes supported football because a wide range of campus social activities were connected to the game. The team fueled a campus-wide unity and a sense of identity, frequently identified as “school spirit.” When Lawrence Lowell became president of Harvard in 1909, replacing anti-football crusader Charles W. Eliot, he conceded that football and other sports had their rightful place on campus because “such contests offer to students the one common interest, the only striking occasion for a display of college solidarity.” University of Wisconsin faculty member J. F. A. Pyre, wrote in 1920

that sports provided "a tradition that fuses together all the forces of an institution in enthusiastic social consent." He continued:

It is a mistake to suppose that the extravagant enthusiasm lavished upon athletes by students and the alumni implies a proportionate over-estimate of their intrinsic worth. It is a mistake that arises from a puritanic failure to appreciate the significance of a ritual. That "esprit de corps" amongst the undergraduates and graduates of a school that we call "school spirit" requires a rallying point or occasion for demonstration. Athletic contests and rivalries are convenient and pleasurable occasions for its manifestations.⁷

As Professor Pyre argued, college athletics – and football in particular – had become the one special conduit whereby strong connections could be made between the campus and the general public.

Football: Driving the Bus

Early in the twenty-first century, a new cliché entered the lexicon of sportswriters and athletic directors. Football, they said, "drives the bus." The bus in question was the large sports enterprise that most major universities felt compelled to offer for both women and men athletes, and income derived from football produced the bulk of the revenue that made it all possible. By the 1920s, football had already assumed the role of propelling the athletic department financial bus. During that decade, attendance more than doubled, and to accommodate the growing number of spectators eager to pay good money for a ticket, universities moved boldly to construct large stadiums in which teams could be showcased to large crowds of ticket-buying spectators. Seizing upon the patriotic fervor left over from the war, institutions encouraged wealthy alumni and state legislatures to cough up large sums to build "memorials" in the form of football stadiums to honor the 63,000 Americans who had lost their lives in the trenches of France. What they could not generate from legislative appropriations or private donations, they covered with the sale of revenue bonds. Yale had shown the way when the gigantic Yale Bowl was completed in 1914. By 1930, seven additional stadiums with seating capacity above 70,000 had made their appearance on campuses, and nearly all institutions with serious football aspirations boasted of stadiums with seating for 30,000 or more. In 1926, an American Association of University Professors committee condemned the stadium mania to no effect: "The sheer physical size of the stadium dwarfs the significance of the library, laboratory, and lecture hall."⁸

A tour of universities today reveals the centrality of football on the campus 80 years ago; nearly all the edifices constructed in the 1920s remain in use (expanded and modernized) and stand near the center of the campus, massive monuments of brick and concrete to the "golden age" of college football. In 1924, coach Amos Alonzo Stagg convinced the University of Chicago board of trustees to permit the doubling of the Stagg Stadium seating to 60,000, obviously envisioning days of pigskin glory to come. Ironically, 1924 would be the year of Chicago's last winning

season. A planned second deck (to take the capacity to 80,000) was never added, and after the university dropped football in 1939, in what some observers have commented was a fitting epitaph for the stadium given the heavy military symbolism surrounding the game of football, the locker rooms underneath the stadium were converted to become the location of the nation's first nuclear pile. It was there in 1942 that the first self-sustaining nuclear reaction occurred, a decisive step toward the making of the atomic bomb that ended the Second World War.⁹

Football's Golden Age: the Twenties

The excitement that teams provided during the 1920s seemed to justify the construction of these huge facilities. Major rules changes produced a much more exciting game than Walter Camp ever envisioned. The day of boring mass play at the line of scrimmage was now history, and wide-open offenses were encouraged by rules changes. Most teams operated out of single-wing formations designed to produce long gains. These formations featured a direct snap of the ball to a fleet-footed halfback who usually ran or passed the ball. The wing formations also included the use of deceptive "spinner" plays in which the ball carrier would turn ("spin" sometimes a full 360 degrees) and either hand off the ball to another back or conceal it from defenders and run himself. The quarterback seldom touched the ball but was used as a lead blocker. The single-wing required intricate timing, precise blocking, and careful ball-handling, which made possible tricky misdirection plays, forward passes, sneaky reverses, open-field laterals, and exciting end sweeps. Fans now thrilled to open-field runs and long pass plays that occasionally produced a dramatic last-minute come-from-behind victory. Better-trained athletes and improved coaching contributed to the exciting action. What the coaches of the 1920s would only reluctantly admit, however, is that they had adopted a new style of play in response to spectator demand for a more wide-open, exciting brand of football. Even the rules of the game, it seemed, were prompted by financial incentives.

The most spectacular player of this era was unquestionably Harold "Red" Grange, a whirling dervish of a running back at the University of Illinois. At Wheaton High School he had set many state records while earning 16 letters in football, basketball, baseball, and track. Grange worked summers delivering large blocks of ice for a local company, a demanding task that helped build his physique in a day before athletes routinely engaged in off-season weight training. During his sophomore year he captured national attention when he scored three touchdowns and gained over 200 yards in his initial game against the University of Nebraska. He subsequently scored the winning touchdowns in close games against Ohio State, Wisconsin, and Chicago as he led the Fighting Illini to an undefeated season and the conference co-championship. He was named an All-American.¹⁰

Fans were enthralled by Grange's ability to break runs for long gains, twisting and turning sharply in the open field to avoid tacklers. His amazing display of speed and balance introduced the term "broken field runner" into the football



11 The Galloping Red Grange, is loose after five touchdowns against Illinois against the Michigan in his was the first game in the 67,000-capacity Memorial Stadium on the University of Illinois campus. His speed and deception play that became a career day. Taking the opening kickoff at the five-yard line, he swivelled his way through the Wolverines for a 95-yard return touchdown, and before the first quarter had ended he had scored on runs from scrimmage of 67, 56, and 44 yards. After sitting out the second quarter, he ran for a fifth touchdown in the second half and passed

the lexicon. One sportswriter was compelled to note that he "picks his way through the line with infinite care," and another noted after one spectacular performance, "They knew he was coming; they saw him start; he made no secret of his direction; he was in their midst, and he was gone." One such performance came on October 18, 1924, when Grange helped inaugurate the 67,000-seat Memorial Stadium, dedicated to the students of the University of Illinois who had not returned from France. The opponent was Michigan, which came into the game with a three-year unbeaten record and with its venerable coach, Fielding "Hurricane" Yost, boldly proclaiming that his team would "stop Grange cold." Unfortunately for the Wolverines, Red Grange had what is now termed "a career day." Taking the opening kickoff at the five-yard line, he swivelled his way through the Wolverines for a 95-yard return touchdown, and before the first quarter had ended he had scored on runs from scrimmage of 67, 56, and 44 yards. After sitting out the second quarter, he ran for a fifth touchdown in the second half and passed

for yet another. He amassed 402 yards rushing and another 60 passing in an unprecedented individual performance. The hyperbolic wordsmith, sportswriter Grantland Rice, proclaimed him "The Galloping Ghost." Even this performance, however, did not satisfy skeptics in the East, where doubts still lingered about the quality of "Western" football. In Philadelphia, early in his senior season of 1925, Grange answered the unconvinced as he ran for 369 yards and three touchdowns while leading his team to a decisive 24-2 walloping of the pride of the East, a University of Pennsylvania team that had enjoyed an undefeated season in 1924.¹¹

Media attention was overwhelming as the nation now had a new star who for a time came close to rivaling even the popularity of Babe Ruth. Unlike the voracious Babe, however, the fans saw in Grange the traditional qualities long esteemed by Americans – a strong work ethic, abstinence from tobacco and drink, a wholehearted determination to overcome financial disadvantages, and an "aw shucks" response to praise of his athletic accomplishments. Although few football fans had the opportunity to see Grange confound tacklers in person, millions thrilled to his darting runs on the weekly newsreels now being shown in motion picture theaters. The primitive film technology of the day – producing somewhat jerky-jerky images as the black and white film flickered onto the screen – made Grange's runs seem even faster and more daring than they were in real life. Few fans doubted the verdict handed down in 1925 by Grantland Rice:

A streak of fire, a breath of flame
Eluding all who reach and clutch;
A gray ghost thrown into the game
That rival hands may never touch;
A rubber bounding, blasting soul
Whose destination is the goal.¹²

Public adulation turned to public disappointment, however, when he turned professional immediately after his final college game and well before graduation. After leading Illinois to a hard-fought 14-9 victory over Ohio State at Columbus before a record 85,000 fans, he announced that he had already agreed to a lucrative contract with the professional Chicago Bears. Advised by a shrewd agent, C. C. ("Cash and Carry") Pyle, Grange had agreed to drop out of college and embark immediately upon a nationwide barnstorming tour in which he would receive half of the gate receipts. At a time when most sports purists considered professional football a "dirty little business run by rogues and bargain-basement entrepreneurs," Grange had broken with the myth of amateur college sports. A college degree apparently meant little to this young All-American. His comments to the press did not help: "I'm out to get the money and I don't care who knows it." When critics denounced Pyle as "a notorious money-hungry promoter" who had misled the nation's collegiate hero, Grange retorted that his agent had merely followed his instructions and "was one of the finest people he had ever known."¹³

Fans nonetheless flocked to see Grange play professionally for the Bears during the winter months when, according to convention, he should have been completing his college studies. His professional career continued until 1935, but

a series of injuries slowed his running ability. A spectacular catch of a touchdown pass while lying flat on his back in the 1932 NFL championship game against the Portsmouth (Ohio) Spartans added to his storied legend, and in 1933 he made a last-minute open-field tackle to preserve another championship for the Bears. Red Grange moved on to a lucrative post-playing career as a businessman and radio and television football commentator. His years of glory, however, were those at Illinois when he demonstrated the excitement that a college football star could generate. More than any other individual, Red Grange established the importance of big-time college football in American popular culture.

Grange might have exemplified the role of campus football hero, but the game had become the province of the professional coach. The head coach had the services of several assistants who taught specialized skills to running backs, linemen, kickers, and other position players. During the off-season, the coaching staff concentrated on recruiting a new crop of talented players and also supervised off-season fitness programs and spring practices. Head coaches established networks among alumni and boosters to provide tips on talented high-school players and employed scouts to watch upcoming opponents' games and report on their style of play and personnel so that an effective game strategy could be concocted. The intent of the coaching staff was to put a team on the field that would perform according to carefully designed plans. Just as American corporations were attacking their competitors with finely tuned strategies and well-oiled operations, so too were football teams reflecting the same commitment. Little wonder that football became a special passion of many male business executives.

One point of contention among faculty was the salaries paid to the head coach. His salary was typically substantially higher than the best-paid professors, and his contacts in the community often provided additional remuneration. But unlike the tenured faculty, his status was tenuous, subject to his won-lost record and the whims of boosters and college administrators. For those who produced winning teams year after year, however, the enterprise could be rewarding indeed. The success of coaches such as Yost at Michigan, Stagg at Chicago, Glenn "Pop" Warner at Carlisle Indian School, Dana X. Bible at Texas, John Heisman at Georgia Tech, and Bob Zuppke at Illinois, were the stuff of campus lore. The coach who made the greatest contribution to the development of the game was Warner, who began his coaching career at Iowa State Agricultural College in 1894 after a successful playing career at Cornell. He went on to Georgia in 1896 and turned a humdrum team into an undefeated team in two seasons. After producing powerful teams at Carlisle between 1898 and 1914 (where he tutored the great Jim Thorpe), Warner's Pittsburgh Panthers teams won 33 straight games and laid claim to three national championships. During the 1920s and the early 1930s, he led Stanford to three Rose Bowl victories, and capped off his lengthy career with strong teams at Temple. Warner was considered the most creative among the coaching fraternity of the period and is credited with such innovations as the practice blocking dummies and the development of the spiral punt, the screen pass, and several other innovative offensive plays. Warner has also been credited with having major input into the

development of such protective equipment as shoulder pads and helmets. To help spectators identify individual players, he placed numbers on the back of jerseys.

Knute Rockne and the Making of Notre Dame Football

Although Pop Warner's name would become a permanent part of football lore when a youth program was created in 1929 that still carries his name, he was upstaged by Knute Rockne of Notre Dame. Rockne's 13 years at the helm of the Fighting Irish set the stage for the fabled football tradition at the private university located 75 miles east of Chicago. He brought to his role the traits that helped produce an engaging public personality that featured a flair for the dramatic, a quick wit, and innovation (he introduced pre-game choreographed calisthenics and created the Notre Dame shift and box backfield formation). At Notre Dame, he almost single-handedly devised what Murray Sperber has called "the unique formula" that has enabled Notre Dame to reign supreme atop big-time college football for over three-quarters of a century.¹⁴ Even on those infrequent occasions when the Irish have endured losing seasons, football fans everywhere have remained in awe of the mystique that encompasses Notre Dame football. The formula that Rockne produced during the 1920s would never quite be duplicated elsewhere. Rockne grew a national fan base that included not only former students, but also the so-called "subway alumni," dedicated fans who had neither attended the university nor even set foot on its campus. Because the institution shrewdly permitted radio stations free access to its game broadcasts, millions of fans across the country became hooked on Notre Dame football.

At the heart of the Rockne's fame was the fact that he lived the American Dream, beginning with his arrival in the United States at age 5 from his native Norway. At age 22, having saved some money from a job in the post office, he decided to enroll at the small college in South Bend, Indiana. Founded in 1844 by a small French religious order, the Congregation of the Holy Cross, the liberal arts curriculum attracted a few hundred students who were largely of Catholic immigrant stock. When Rockne arrived in 1910, Notre Dame had a modest academic reputation and was better known for the quality of its baseball teams than football. Rockne earned a degree with a major in chemistry, and played end on the football team while excelling as a middle distance runner in track.

One particular game began the Rockne mystique. During the summer before his senior year of 1913, while working at the Lake Erie resort at Cedar Point in Ohio, he and quarterback Gus Dorias practiced the forward pass on the resort's vast expanse of sandy beach. This helped Notre Dame confound a heavily favored Army team that autumn with a refined passing attack. The Irish pulled-off a 35-13 upset win over the baffled Army defenders who had seldom seen a forward-pass play before. Dorias rifled a first-half 40-yard pass to Rockne, who scampered into the end zone untouched, and by day's end, Dorias had completed 13 of 17 passes for more than two hundred yards. The next day the *New York Times* headlined the

game story with "Notre Dame Open Play Amazes Army!" The lead sentence told it all: "Football men marveled at this startling display of open football, as the West-erners flashed the most sensational football ever seen in the East." It should have come as no surprise to the Army, however, because Notre Dame had utilized the forward pass since head coach Jesse Harper arrived from Wabash College in 1912. Several teams had experimented with its use ever since it was first legalized in 1906; the first forward passes were most likely thrown in 1906 by Marietta College and St. Louis University. By 1913, the forward pass was no secret, as was later implied by Rockne myth makers.¹⁵

After graduation, Rockne assumed an assistant coaching position at Notre Dame, and for a time taught freshman chemistry laboratories and picked up spending money playing semi-pro football. In 1916, he got his first taste of being a head coach when Harper came down with a heavy chest cold; Rockne rose to the occasion when he fabricated a story that the opposing Wabash College team – certainly no powerhouse – had been strengthened with several mercenaries and, besides, harbored anti-Catholic sentiments. He concluded this: the first of a long series of pre-game histrionics, by shouting an apt metaphor befitting a religious institution: "Now get out there and crucify them!"¹⁶ And indeed they did, to the tune of 60-0. In 1918, Rockne accepted the position of head coach of the Irish and quickly implemented his system, which emphasized guile, speed, and agility over sheer brawn. He had the pick of the best Catholic players throughout the Midwest, who naturally gravitated to what was rapidly becoming a football power. By the mid-1920s, building upon his team's success, he operated a recruiting system that utilized an informal national network of Catholic churches and organizations as well as the efforts of members of the Irish subway alumni.

Rockne shrewdly promoted Rockne. He found himself much in demand as an after-dinner speaker, and spent off-seasons traveling extensively to speak to church and alumni groups, always fusing his commitment to a winning football program with his university president's dream of making Notre Dame "the Yale of the West." By playing a national schedule – creating traditional rivalries with the Army in the East and Southern California in the West – he built not only Notre Dame's football reputation but also its national fan base. During Rockne's first three years, his star player was George Gipp, whose daring-do on the field pleased the fans but whose behavior off it dismayed faculty and administrators. After he led Notre Dame to a 9-0 record in 1919, the All-American team captain was expelled for his lack of interest in the classroom. Dismayed Irish fans learned that the mercenary Gipp was about to depart to play for arch rival Michigan, where "Hurry Up" Yost was eagerly awaiting his arrival, or perhaps even worse, to West Point, where recruitment of football "tramps" was the norm. Ultimately, Notre Dame president Father James Burns reinstated Gipp in time for his senior season in response to plaintive appeals from the business community of South Bend, which had become convinced that Notre Dame football was essential to the health of the local economy.¹⁷

Gipp rewarded his supporters as he led the Irish to an undefeated season in 1920. He played little in the final two games, however, because he became infected with



the respiratory illness that would kill him shortly before Christmas. The 1920 season firmly established Notre Dame as a football giant, and its fans reveled in a national championship. That year the Irish had played before 90,000 fans, despite the limited capacity of Carter Field (replaced in 1930 with the stadium that lies in the center of campus today).

Year after year, Rockne's teams rolled to victory. His 1924 squad trampled its opposition by a combined score of 258-44. Among the most significant victories was a hard-fought 13-7 win at the Polo Grounds in New York City over the Army. This victory on a dark and dreary November day set the stage one of the most memorable moments in Notre Dame football history. Journalist Grantland Rice, was driven to hyperbolic heights when he began his game report with the most famous passage ever written by a sportswriter:

Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore, they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and

Figure 7.2 The Notre Dame backfield of (left to right) Don Miller, Elmer Layden, Jim Crowley, and Harry Stuhldreher, pose as the Four Horsemen after their big victory over Army in 1924. This famed backfield, immortalized by journalist Grantland Rice's florid prose, averaged barely 160 pounds. © Bettmann/CORBIS.

Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley, and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds this afternoon as 50,000 spectators peered down upon the bewildering panorama spread out upon the green plain below.¹⁸

These few words etched forever in the memories of football fans everywhere the legend of Notre Dame football. In reality, the exploits of the "Four Horsemen" were nothing spectacular — they were good but hardly great athletes — and their size (they averaged 160 pounds each) was relatively small even for this period of college football. There have been many backfields at South Bend more talented than the 1924-25 quartet, but Grantland Rice placed the Four Horsemen in a special identity that Professor Sperber says "floats through American sports history, assuming a mystified reality."¹⁹

Sports journalists became enamored with Notre Dame because of its success on the field, but also because of the accessibility of the affable head coach, who was always ready with a humorous quip or a compelling story to fill tomorrow's column. Among the most memorable tale, of course, was the 1928 pep talk that Rockne gave to his team before they took the field against an undefeated Army team. Rockne reportedly recalled the last words of George Gipp, who died of influenza in December 1920. Lying on his deathbed, as Rockne recalled, "He turned to me. 'I've got to go, Rock. It's all right. I'm not afraid.'" Rockne continued,

His eyes brightened in a frame of pallor. "Some time, Rock, when the team's up against it; when things are going wrong and the breaks are beating the boys — tell them to go in there with all they've got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock. But I'll know about it, and I'll be happy."

There is absolutely no evidence that Gipp — whose career at Notre Dame was distinguished by heavy gambling, drinking and a lackadaisical academic effort that ended far short of graduation — ever said anything approaching what Rockne relayed to his team in the locker room eight years later. One of his star players, Jim Crowley, kept a long list of fabrications and half-truths that the dramatic Rockne presented to his teams in order to stimulate their enthusiasm for the task at hand. "They were all lies, blatant lies," Crowley later said. "The Jesuits call it mental reservation, but he had it in abundance." Whatever, following the Gipper talk, the aroused Irish stopped the Cadets on the one foot-line as the game expired, preserving a 12-6 upset victory, and adding to the Notre Dame legend. Two weeks after the game, a ghost-written article about the pre-game oration appeared in *Collier's Magazine*, and it was reprinted in Rockne's posthumous autobiography in 1931. In 1940, this story of dubious origins took on even greater mythological proportions when young actor Ronald Reagan portrayed the Gipper in a popular motion picture that produced many a tear among sellout audiences during the deathbed scene. Of such fiction was the reality of Notre Dame football constructed.²⁰

Even Knute Rockne's sudden death at age 43 in an airplane crash in 1931 added to the Notre Dame saga. Although it was later said he was on a trip to "help his boys" when the commercial airplane crashed in a snowstorm in western Kansas,

in fact Rockne was en route to the West Coast to make lucrative personal appearances for a sporting-goods chain and to finalize a \$75,000 motion picture contract deal with Universal Pictures, which planned to make a movie of his life. Rockne was the first American celebrity to die in a commercial airplane crash, and news of his death stunned a depression-mired nation. The ensuing mourning was truly a national event, and his funeral in the Notre Dame chapel added to the football legacy as the university choir ended the service by singing the fight song that had become familiar to millions of Americans, the "Notre Dame Victory March." Rockne's won-lost record of 105-12-5 would never be equaled. That record, coupled with his flair for public relations, enabled him to escape the criticisms that would have damaged mere mortals: his unwillingness to discipline outstanding players for their drinking, gambling, and carousing; his casual interest in academics; his frequent flirtations with other institutions to become their head coach as a means to obtain substantial salary increases; and his use of his position to earn large sums from speaking engagements and product endorsements that saw his highest university salary of \$10,000 — extraordinary for the 1920s — eclipsed by the large sums that he earned externally (the greatest slice coming from promoting the South Bend-based Studebaker Automobile Company).

More than three-quarters of a century after his death, Rockne remains one of the nation's most famous football coaches. It was he, more than anyone else, who established the template for future generations of big-time college coaches. By his example, as John Thein concludes, the many sides of Knute Rockne

demonstrated that the big-time college football coach had drifted from the company of professors. . . . The activities of recruiting, promoting, and public speaking, along with the lures of endorsements, indicated that by the 1930s the role of the big-time college coach had evolved very differently from that of university faculty.²¹

The Second Challenge to Big-Time Football

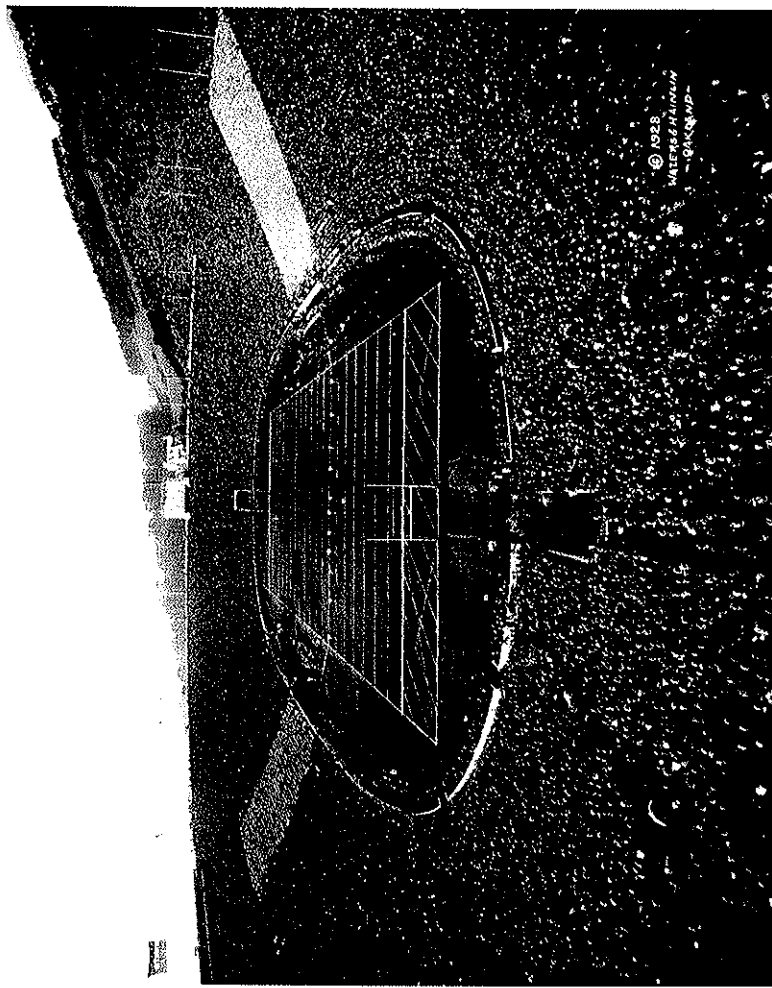
Not even the vast public enthusiasm for football and the leadership of public luminaries such as Rockne could stanch the criticisms that the enterprise regularly generated. The game had escaped virtually unscathed from the crisis of 1905, but again in 1929 it encountered serious criticism. Even during the glory days of the 1920s, on the campus many faculty and administrators remained skeptical about the game's impact on academic quality and institutional integrity. They had a substantial number of allies in the world of journalism and business. With abolition no longer a realistic option, the focus was on broad-based reform. Thus in 1926, the Carnegie Foundation decided to fund an extensive three-year study that culminated in the publication in 1929 of a scorching indictment of big-time college football. The commission's findings were succinctly summarized in one blunt sentence: "Apparently the ethical bearing of intercollegiate football contests and their scholastic aspects are of secondary importance to the winning of victories and financial success."²²

The person behind this investigation was the head of the Carnegie Foundation.

the former president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr Henry Pritchett. Although the Foundation supported many causes, its focus under Pritchett was the elevation of the standards of higher education, especially in the emerging professional schools of engineering, law, and medicine. Pritchett was no anti-football fanatic, but he saw the college game being used by many institutions to emphasize non-academic programs as a means of improving enrollment figures, thereby reducing the quality of intellectual pursuits. He was aware of many abuses, including the amount of time and effort demanded of college football players that precluded "any serious intellectual effort" on their part. Although his criticisms were similar to those made earlier by Harvard president Charles Eliot, Pritchett did not present them in a context of a morality play. Instead, reflecting his engineering profession, he expressed concern about educational efficiency and academic quality.

Although the Foundation had earlier sponsored a small study of football at a select number of Southern institutions and another of sports at British universities, the board was reluctant to support the large-scale study Pritchett desired. That reluctance, however, melted before a series of events in 1925, among them the revelation of Red Grange's abandonment of his education for the professional game the very same day that he played his final college contest. Shortly before the 1925 season began, a syndicated article appeared in many newspapers across the country, written by an anonymous "graduate manager" of football who claimed to be working at a big-time Eastern school. His story carried too many plausible accusations for it to be dismissed outright, although football's defenders made a determined effort. The author told of a large well-funded alumni-booster organization that assisted the football program, beginning with paying a large network of scouts to identify potential recruits and bring them to campus for a lavish visit. Once the recruits were enrolled, the graduate manager oversaw their registration, provided tutors, hired handlers to make certain they attended classes, encouraged faculty friendly to football to permit their enrollment in snap classes, and especially, looked out after their financial well-being. In a day before the introduction of formally recognized "athletic scholarships," the manager would see that tuition and living costs were taken care of, often by the creation of non-work jobs that required the player only to show up to receive a pay check. Cushy summer jobs were also part of the financial subsidy scenario. The author even discussed a program to hide top recruits at remote summer camps as counselors, so that rival institutions could not entice them to their campus at the last minute.²³

While football critics were mulling over the revelations of this insider expose, they also focused on the replication of William Rainey Harper's strategy of using football to gain instant recognition for the recently opened University of Chicago. Ironically, the new example was Northwestern University, located just a few miles north of downtown Chicago. President Walter S. Dill, a former college football player himself, launched an effort to make his institution a national power in football as a quick method of obtaining immediate national recognition. He funded a successful team, which he then used as a means of gaining access to big donors to support his dream of building an elite academic institution. Dill not only built the



enormous Dyche Stadium but also many academic buildings, created endowed faculty chairs, and established an impressive array of professional colleges on Chicago's affluent North Side. In 1925, the "Fighting Methodists" tied for the Western Conference (Big Ten) title, which was capped by an improbable 3-2 victory over Michigan in a game played before 100,000 spectators in Soldier Field. Suddenly the University of Chicago, which had long dominated the football scene in the Windy City, had a powerful local competitor, both academically and athletically. Chicago coach Stagg took particular umbrage over a new football endowment at Northwestern that would fund 50 part-time scouts to procure the top talent available; without a hint of the irony his words conveyed, Stagg wrote a letter to Fielding Yost of Michigan, "I am satisfied that Northwestern at the present is loaded with athletes who have been induced to go there by the offer of free tuition and in certain cases something additional."²⁴

Figure 7.3 Seventy-three thousand fans jam Memorial Stadium at the University of California in Berkeley for the Big Game against Stanford in 1928 as the teams line up for the opening kickoff. Clearly visible are the student "card sections" located along the 50-yard line, popular at the time; on cue, participating students would flash spirited messages and images to the other side. © CORBIS.

Such examples as those witnessed in the graduate manager's story, and the heavy emphasis on football programs at institutions such as Northwestern, encouraged Pritchett to put the prestige of one of the nation's largest foundations behind a thorough and careful study. Although the scope of the project was intended to survey all of collegiate athletics, football naturally emerged as its central focus. During 1926-29, social scientist Howard Savage led a team of researchers in an intensive study of the athletic programs of 130 colleges and universities. They did not rely simply on documents submitted by the institutions, but visited each of the campuses for intensive interviews. Although the final report, issued during the midst of the 1929 football season, encompassed 12 chapters and 347 pages, the chapters on recruiting and financial aid to athletes received the greatest attention. Writing more than 20 years later, Savage took satisfaction in his accomplishment, calling it "encyclopedic in scope" and "unprejudiced in method." He noted that "its chief faults were its length and its detail and yet without sufficient preponderance of evidence it would have failed of its purpose altogether."²⁵

The report contained few surprises as it documented the complex system that college football had become. In many respects, the report illustrated that the current system had merely evolved and expanded from that which was in place in the 1890s. What the Carnegie researchers discovered was that even at institutions that played football at a modest level, a sophisticated system of recruitment and financial subsidy was in place. Only a handful of schools were reported as operating completely clean programs - Tufts, Wooster, MIT, Reed - which only served to emphasize the extent of deception that occurred at such big-time football schools that were included in the study: Wisconsin, Northwestern, Illinois, and the Army. Even colleges that never dreamed of national recognition were singled out for improper practices - Lafayette, Rutgers, Lehigh, Grove City, Lebanon Valley, Carnegie Institute of Technology.

Perhaps the most sensational new revelation was that most institutions had quietly, with substantial subterfuge, created a new form of assistance that was considered at the time highly unethical - the athletic scholarship. Not that it was so identified. Instead students were given free tuition and fees through scholarship funds labeled under such nebulous categories as "student leadership." Up until this point, colleges had maintained that only athletes whose academic abilities were high could receive scholarships on a competitive basis with other students. Additionally, it was learned that many athletes also received "loans" from campus funds or from alumni and boosters, with the implicit understanding that the loans need not be repaid. Many schools also had in place a formal campus employment office that controlled many on-campus jobs, with higher pay rates for athletes than available to other student workers. A standard practice was for athletes to be given jobs on campus (waiting tables, handing out towels in the gym, lifeguarding, doing routine janitorial work) or working in the businesses of alumni. Many of these "jobs" were make-work positions requiring little or no actual work. The report also uncovered several secret slush-fund operations, usually controlled by the head coach or athletic director, which were used to pay players directly.

These subsidies, of course, were directly related to the recruitment process. All football programs recruited in one way or another. Networks of alumni were formed to recommend talent to the coach. Recruiting was the lifeline of all football programs, and coaches pursued it with efficiency, often with one assistant coach being designated as the "recruiting coordinator." At the heart of the system was the fact that recruits would be promised various types of financial incentives to take part in a program that all the institutions claimed was based upon the precepts of amateurism.

The vociferous denials and protests from coaches and presidents of institutions identified with slimy practices served to confirm the accuracy of the report. Interestingly, the report identified four prestigious private Eastern institutions - Pennsylvania, Columbia, Brown, and Dartmouth - as conducting recruiting and under-the-table financial assistance in a manner no different from the most egregious of the practices it found at such public institutions as Michigan, Wisconsin, and Washington State. The report rightfully identified the professional coach as one glaring manifestation of the problem, but it also focused attention on the failure of campus presidents to insist on a clean program. Many coaches claimed they had been deceived by the visiting researchers. Presidents went on record denying they knew of the alleged practices, while others had made it clear that they did not want to know the facts. The report concluded that the presidents were unable or unwilling to challenge wealthy alumni, boosters with open checkbooks, college trustees, and powerful politicians who wanted a winning football team. The collective behavior of the presidents seemed to confirm one of the conclusions of the Carnegie study that the academic reputation of an institution had become secondary to the winning of football games.

Not surprisingly, however, after a brief flurry of media accounts and public discussion, the coaches went about their work with business as usual, knowing full well that if they did not produce a winning team their president would not hesitate to terminate their employment. In a telling commentary, Knute Rockne told a Buffalo audience in 1930 that the Carnegie Commission had got it all wrong: the problem with college football was that it was not commercial enough.²⁶ In the years that followed, despite the economic crisis, college football continued to expand upon the same *modus operandi* as before, while the Carnegie report collected dust on library shelves.

"Playing Nice": the Demise of Women's Athletics

While athletic programs for men gained in size and prestige on the campus during the 1920s, the opposite was the case for women's programs. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the dominant philosophy of women physical education professors and coaches prior to the 1970s is surprising in the extreme. Although most colleges sponsored intercollegiate programs for women between the 1890s and the First World War, during the 1920s leading women educators led a concerted attack upon competitive programs to the point where most were abolished

by the early 1930s. At the same time, most interscholastic programs for high-school girls also were axed. Neither would be re-established for almost a half-century.

The reasons for this movement against competitive athletics for women are complex and need be understood within the context of the times. At the heart of the issue lay a set of social values and attitudes that were central to nineteenth-century ideas about the different roles of men and women within American society.

The male was expected to be "manly" in thought and action. The dogma of "muscular Christianity" prescribed a regimen of physical activity that would enable him to develop his body while simultaneously restraining his natural sexual desires until marriage. The male was expected to maintain self-control and to follow an impeccable set of behavioral traits in his personal and business affairs. Women, however, were viewed as frail and unable to engage in vigorous exercise. The "cult of domesticity" restricted the "weaker sex" to the role of homemaker. Thus young women were largely denied access to higher education; reform-minded Oberlin College was the first to admit women in 1831, but few other institutions followed suit until a half century later. Only after 1880 were most colleges and universities opened to women, albeit grudgingly.²⁷

These attitudes greatly influenced thinking about exercise and athletic competition for women. Physical culturalists generally prescribed a regimen of light to moderate exercise that would not overburden the female reproductive system, taking due notice of popular perceptions that women suffered chronic fatigue, wide mood swings, and dizziness that were assumed to be the product of the menstrual cycle. This line of analysis even led to a widely accepted theory that the human body possessed a set amount of energy and that the mental exertion required by a rigorous higher-education program would diminish a female's capacity for physical strength. Thus the denial of access to higher education and vigorous exercise was believed to protect young women from the possibility that they would not achieve "true womanhood." This outlook provided a clever rationale for men's desire to maintain social control and dominance by using traditional medical and scientific theories to rationalize and maintain traditional sex roles in a rapidly changing social order.

Such nonsense, of course, would not stand in the long run. But its influence was felt in the sphere of American sports well into the second half of the twentieth century. As early as the 1830s, the pioneering feminist Catherine Beecher drew skeptical attention with her call for rigorous exercise for women, and in 1861 the innovative and reform-minded philanthropist Matthew Vassar established a women's college that featured a rigorous physical-education program at the heart of its curriculum. The initial planning document for Vassar College emphasized that "good health is essential to the successful prosecution of study, and to the vigorous development of either mental or moral powers." One of the first buildings constructed on the Poughkeepsie, New York, campus was the "Calisthenium," where physical education and recreational activities could take place. It also housed the School of Physical Training, where faculty implemented Matthew Vassar's vision of fusing rigorous physical and intellectual activity for women students.²⁸

Slowly Vassar's ideas were replicated elsewhere, especially in Boston at the

Sargent School and the Normal School of Gymnastics beginning in the 1880s. Graduates of these two pioneering programs greatly influenced the development of women's athletic and physical-education programs throughout the expanding world of higher education. Although appreciative of the importance of physical activity, these women educators nonetheless were greatly influenced by Victorian standards, so they emphasized the importance of "moderation" in their curricula. It was also crucial that female students should reflect the "proper behavior" expected of ladies and not engage in activities "in excess," which might encourage "manly" attributes. It was widely believed and taught that excessive exercise would produce undesirable unfeminine traits and appearance. Fears of "muscle-bound women" abounded. This cautious philosophy was implemented through routinized calisthenics and dancing classes; the playing of games such as badminton, croquet, bowling, tennis, and golf, and such activities as horseback-riding, boating, and skating. Weight lifting, long-distance running, and aggressive games definitely were not permissible. Females were expected to "play nice."²⁹

The theory of moderation came under special challenge when the wildly popular new game of basketball swept the nation in the 1890s. High-school girls and college women took to the game with the same exuberance as their male counterparts. The response of educators to the vigorous level of play was predictable as they denounced the tendency toward rough play. Observers noted the "mad play," as participants often became "bitter in feeling and lose self-control." Senda Berenson, a physical-education professor at Smith College, took careful note of the lack of restraint. Writing in 1903, she expressed concern about the "rough and vicious play" that "seems worse in women than in men. A certain amount of roughness is deemed necessary to bring out manliness in our young men. Surely rough play can have no possible excuse in our young women." Because the game seemed to make the young women "rough, loud-voiced and bold," and prompted them to play with aggressive abandon, many institutions made their games off-limits to gawking male spectators.³⁰

A leading physical educator, Berenson emerged as the major critic of spirited play by women on the basketball court. Her mantra was "sport for the good of all," which placed emphasis upon participation and enjoyment rather than the pursuit of victory. She expressed fears that lack of proper decorum on the basketball court would erode desirable feminine qualities. Reflecting popular assumptions about women's nature, Berenson wrote,

It is a well known fact that women abandon themselves more readily to an impulse than men. . . . This shows us that unless we guard our athletics carefully in the beginning many objectionable elements will come in. It also shows us that unless a game as exciting as basketball is carefully guided by such rules as will eliminate roughness, the great desire to win and the excitement of the game will make our women do sadly unwomanly things.³¹

Berenson introduced what became widely known as the "Smith Rules" for women's basketball. Members of the six-player teams were restricted to three separate

areas on the court, physical contact was forbidden, and a player could dribble the ball only once. Defenders could neither "snatch" the ball from an opponent nor attempt to prevent an opponent from shooting for a goal. Although many girls' teams continued to play the five-person "boys' rules," the Berenson model stifled the development of rigorous female basketball. Berenson's leadership thus set the tone for a growing movement by leading women physical educators and coaches to abolish the competitiveness of women's sports on the campus. Fears about encouraging masculine traits and damaging reproductive organs were not the only factors influencing the thinking of college administrators. Adding to concerns about intercollegiate play was the recognition that the teams would have to travel, thereby raising concerns about proper chaperoning.

Women educators' emphasis upon "sports for all" led initially to the popularity in the 1920s of the "play day" movement. Instead of providing competitive athletic contests between rival schools, young women from several campuses would meet for a day of games and activities, without the benefit of prior practice or instruction in the games to be played. As Berenson explained, "The greatest element of evil in the spirit of athletics in this country is the idea that one must win at any cost — that defeat is an unspeakable disgrace." Certainly the "win at any cost" syndrome was corrupting men's programs, especially football, and women educators did not want to encourage its replication in their programs. The play day concept neatly fused the traditional — but declining — Victorian image of proper womanhood with prevailing medical theories on female physiology and a growing disgust over the reputation of college football. As Berenson said, "We [women] can profit by the experience of our brothers and therefore save ourselves from allowing those objectionable features to creep into our athletics." Thus the view prevailed that women were different both physiologically as well as morally from men.³²

Play day precluded teams competing under their own school colors. Instead, teams were created that mingled students from the participating institutions and a day was spent playing basketball, softball, soccer, field hockey, volleyball, and tennis, perhaps even including track and field events in which individuals would indeed be winners and losers. The emphasis, however, was upon participation rather than competition. The concept of teamwork, training, practice, planning, and the implementation of strategies was downgraded in favor of enhancing the individuality of the participants. Play day was thus both anti-competition and anti-varsity; it was formalized in the 1923 Platform adopted by the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation at a Conference on Athletics and Physical Recreation for Women and Girls, which emphasized the objective of "a sport for every girl and every girl in a sport."³³

Although the great majority of women coaches and physical educators were firmly committed to this anti-competitive model, there were naturally some dissidents. The leader of this minority group was Ina Gittings, a physical education professor at the University of Arizona. "Play days," she wrote in 1931

are extremely weak and offer little or none of the joy and values of real games played skillfully, willingly, intelligently, and eagerly by well-matched teams. I picture

the girls in a Play Day as sheep, huddled and bleating in their little Play meadow, whereas they should be young mustangs exultantly racing together across vast prairies.³⁴

Gittings definitely presented the minority view among women physical educators during this time, but her strong critique of the anti-competitive model would resonate loud and clear in the 1970s when the women's rights movement discovered the great inequities in the college athletic experience:

Have we not postponed this legitimate phase of physical activity and recreation long enough? There is nothing wrong with the games, competition, the girls, or travel, but there is something wrong with the Directors, who have phobias at the thought of making the same mistakes in intercollegiate (sic) as men have made. And there is something wrong with the physical education instructors who cannot coach and conduct such activities without letting them get beyond control. Why not graciously concede and be in on the inevitable — the return of intercollegiate competition for women?³⁵

Thus, much to Ina Gittings' dismay, but largely at the behest of women physical education professionals, all across the United States colleges and public schools dropped competitive athletic programs for women and girls; they would not return for nearly a half century amid much controversy and conflict that required the firm intervention of the federal government.

Hoop Dreams

During the 1930s, men's college basketball enjoyed substantial growth in popularity. Most teams played their games in cramped gymnasiums designed primarily for physical-education classes. The game was played conservatively, with an emphasis on zone defenses, slow-moving patterned offenses, with most field-goal attempts being of the two-handed "set shot" variety; coaching theories mandated that free throws be released underhanded. Until 1937, when a basket was scored the teams would return to center court for a jump ball. Scoring was limited, with games ending in the twenties being commonplace.

Interest in the college game resulted in large part from the effort of Madison Square Garden officials in New York City to generate revenues during the Depression years. Impressed by the enthusiastic standing-room-only crowds he often encountered at games held in small on-campus gymnasiums, a young reporter for the *New York World Telegram* proposed to Madison Square Garden officials that he promote college games in a double-header format that matched local teams against top teams from around the country. But even Ned Irish was surprised when more than 16,000 fans turned out on the evening of December 29, 1934, to witness New York University defeat Notre Dame and tiny Westminster College from Pennsylvania upset St. Johns. Irish soon thereafter abandoned sportswriting and became the full-time director of basketball for the Garden.

Coaches and athletic directors of aspiring teams from around the country

eagerly solicited invitations from Ned Irish to come to the Big Apple, seeking both the national spotlight and a hefty payday. Sometimes Irish even put on triple-headers when top teams were available. In 1938, he invited 16 teams to compete in a new tournament that he called the National Invitational Tournament (Temple defeated Colorado 60-36 in the final), and it would be the premier college basketball event for more than a decade. The following year, the NCAA responded by creating its own tournament, but it did not overcome the NIT as the premier postseason tournament until the 1950s.

It was during one of Irish's inter-sectional games in December 1936 that basketball would be forever changed. The game featured the nationally ranked Blackbirds of Long Island University, who came into the game with a 43-game winning streak. The opponent was Pacific Coast Conference defending champion Stanford University. In this game, 6' 3" Stanford forward Angelo "Hank" Luisetti stunned basketball-savvy New Yorkers with a revolutionary one-handed shot, launched from 15 feet from the basket while jumping. Traditionalists, familiar only with shots being launched two-handed with the feet firmly planted, gasped in shock. Luisetti scored 15 points against the befuddled Blackbird defenders, who had never encountered the jump shot before; even the thousands of disappointed LIU fans rose in a standing ovation when he left the floor. Players everywhere, to the exasperation of their hidebound coaches, began to experiment with variations of the Luisetti one-hander. Soon the two-handed set shot was history, and the same fate befell the once-ubiquitous underhand free throw. Innovative coaches began to experiment with a much more rapid-paced game, including full-court pressing defenses and the fast-break offense.

The Second World War proved to be a boon for college basketball. Whereas colleges had to cut back on football due to the loss of players to the military and restrictions on travel by large groups, it was not difficult for ten-man basketball squads and their coach to get permission to travel. The military also had a height restriction on recruits that worked to basketball's distinct advantage. Based on the standard size of military beds and uniforms, anyone who stood over 6' 6" was automatically exempt from military duty. Thus some of the best players remained in school, including the top basketball player of the first half of the century, the high-scoring 6' 10" De Paul center George Mikan. College basketball actually thrived during the war years by filling a void left when most football schedules were either canceled or sharply curtailed.³⁶

Thanks to Ned Irish's efforts, college basketball became closely identified with New York City. Irish added stops in Buffalo and Philadelphia to his promotions and offered teams a three-game swing through the East. After the war, he was promoting about 25 events a season and attracting more than a quarter-million spectators. Irish drew large crowds by featuring local teams, such as New York University, City College of New York, Long Island University, Manhattan College, and Brooklyn College. Many urban Catholic universities that had shied away from football because of its high costs were not far behind in developing their own programs: De Paul and Loyola in Chicago, St. Louis University, Xavier in Cincinnati, Villanova and La Salle in Philadelphia, Duquesne in Pittsburgh, St. Bonaventure,

Niagra and Canisius near Buffalo, and Fordham, St. Johns, and Seton Hall in the New York City area were among the top-notch college basketball programs of this era. Thanks to the lure of Madison Square Garden and the promotions of Ned Irish, New York reigned as the basketball capital of America, and area teams often rested atop the national rankings.³⁷

Out in the Midwest, where the high school game had become a way of life in small farming communities, three public universities rose to prominence due to the presence of charismatic coaches who dedicated themselves to a long-term career at one institution. One of the first coaches to gain national visibility was Forest "Phog" Allen of Kansas University. He had the unique opportunity of replacing the "father of basketball" as the Jayhawks' coach when Dr. James Naismith stepped down from coaching in 1907. Allen had played for Naismith and took over the University of Kansas team for two years, then returned in 1920 and coached the Jayhawks until his retirement in 1956. Possessed of a booming "foghorn" voice, which led a Kansas City journalist to coin the nickname "Phog," Allen turned out teams year after year that dominated its opposition. He prided himself on his ability to mold Kansas farm boys into powerful teams, and they helped him compile a career won-lost record of 591-219. One of the few exceptions he made to his philosophy of recruiting players primarily from Kansas and nearby farm states was when he lured the high school phenomenon, 7' 2" Wilt Chamberlain from Philadelphia to Lawrence in 1955.

One of Allen's perennial competitors was Hank Iba, who began coaching at Oklahoma A&M in 1934. Known for a deliberate style of play that featured a weaving "swinging gate" offense and a tenacious man-to-man defense, Iba won back-to-back NCAA championships in 1945-46 using the shot-blocking talents of 7-foot center Bob "Foothills" Kurland. Although his slow-down style largely went out of style in the 1950s, Iba remained at Oklahoma State until 1970, when he retired with a 767-338 career record. The nation's growing number of basketball fans also admired the strong, up-tempo teams produced at the University of Kentucky by one of Phog Allen's former players, Adolph Rupp went to Kentucky in 1930 and immediately turned the state into a hotbed for college basketball. More than 80 percent of his players came from within the state. During his 42 years at Kentucky, the "Baron of the Bluegrass" captured 27 Southeast Conference championships and four NCAA titles en route to winning 875 games. Rupp's teams dominated the Southeastern Conference at a time when many of its football-happy members did not take basketball seriously, but nonetheless his teams became nationally famous for their use of a high-powered offense that featured a pioneering form of the fast break.

These basketball coaching giants in the nation's midsection, however, were dwarfed in the national basketball spotlight by the teams and famous coaches who operated out of the national media capital of New York City. Clair Bee not only won several national titles and produced incredible won-lost records at Long Island University, but he also established himself as the intellectual leader of the game by writing 21 books on coaching and conducting coaching clinics around the country. He also published for the teenage market 23 popular novels that featured

a clean-living, multi-sport athlete named Chip Hilton who managed to overcome various adversities to help his team win championships fair and square against unsportsmanlike opponents. Bee had to share the New York spotlight with Nat Holman, an egocentric former professional star and longtime college coach who was called "Mr Basketball" by fawning sports journalists. Holman had learned the game on the streets of New York City and was the much-proclaimed star scorer and passing wizard of the first popular professional team, the New York Original Celtics of the 1920s, who had played before packed audiences of 4,000 in a city opera house. In addition to playing professionally, Holman began coaching the Beavers of City College of New York (CCNY) in 1919, where he taught a tough street-smart style he called "the city game." He introduced the concept of the pivot player and created the switching man-to-man defense; throughout the 1930s and the 1940s, his teams battled Long Island University for local bragging rights while also contending for national honors. In 1950 Holman reached the height of his profession when his team won both the NCAA and the National Invitational tournaments.³⁸

Hoop Nightmares

The careers of several of these renowned coaches intersected in the early 1950s during the revelations of a massive gambling scandal that threatened to destroy, or at least greatly slow, the growth of major college basketball. On January 18, 1951, the *New York Journal American* broke a front-page story that District Attorney Frank Hogan was about to indict several top college basketball players for "controlling" the outcome of games by "shaving points." Within two months, his investigation had revealed solid evidence that some 49 games had been tampered with by gamblers who gave bribes to 32 college players from seven different universities. Insiders believed that far more games and athletes were actually involved and that the investigation was terminated prematurely under intense political pressure. What came to light, however, was that the attraction of major college basketball in the urban areas, and in New York City in particular, was not simply the high quality of play; many of the spectators at Madison Square Garden came to watch teams upon which they had placed bets. Although the scandal was centered in New York, its tentacles reached into the nation's heartland as players were implicated at Toledo, Bradley, and most shocking of all, Adolph Rupp's vaunted Kentucky.

The scandal broke in 1951, but it had been building for more than a decade. As early as 1945, Phog Allen had received headlines when he warned of the influence of gamblers at the Garden, but his warnings were ignored, even made light of by his fellow coaches. Betting on college football had become established during the 1920s. In the large cities of the Northeast and Midwest illegal bookies offered odds on college football and professional baseball, often in the form of "pool" cards that offered bad odds to fans who had to pick several winning teams in order to win. New York City's gambling chieftains naturally took note of the Madison Square Garden games promoted by Ned Irish and developed a flourishing trade during the 1930s. Although no solid evidence exists to that effect, the respected journal-

ist-historian Charley Rosen insists that games were fixed by gamblers well before the Second World War. The attractiveness of basketball to corrupt gamblers was greatly intensified during the war years when Chicago bookmaker Charles McNeil introduced a new approach to betting on team sports – the "points spread" – in which the favorite team had to win by more than the number of points set by the bookmaker. By 1950, the points spread system had been widely adopted for betting on football and basketball. As one bookie told journalist Rosen, by replacing the awkward odds system, the points spread had generated much more "action" on games. This appreciative bookie considered the new betting format "the greatest discovery since the zipper."³⁹

While the points spread made business more lucrative for the bookmaker, it created new headaches for coaches and athletic administrators. Under the odds system, unscrupulous gamblers had to bribe players to lose a contest; now they merely had to get them to win a game by less than the points spread. It was now possible to convince a college basketball player that he could earn several hundred or even a few thousand dollars by making a few misplays so as to keep the final score differential below the spread while still helping his team win the game. In February 1951, New York District Attorney Hogan announced the arrest of three of Nat Holman's top CCNY players and the *Sporting News* "College Player of the Year," LIU All-American center Sherman White for "shaving points." Hogan's investigation shocked the nation, especially when he subsequently indicted three players from the 1948 and 1949 national championship University of Kentucky Wildcats team. When news of the scandal first broke, the imperious Kentucky coach, Adolph "Baron" Rupp, arrogantly told the press, "Gamblers couldn't touch my boys with a ten foot pole." A few weeks later, he was stunned when two popular All-Americans, guard Ralph Beard and center Alex Groza, along with high-scoring forward Dale Barnstable, admitted taking bribes from gamblers throughout their college careers. Beard and Groza, who had led the 1948 United States Olympic team to a gold medal, even confessed to throwing a game in the 1949 National Invitational Tournament. At the time of their indictments, they were playing professionally for the Indianapolis Olympians in the National Basketball Association, from which they were summarily banned.⁴⁰

Most of the players involved agreed to plea bargains or were convicted in New York Federal Court on charges of bribery, conspiracy, and illegal gambling. One of the several CCNY players involved, Norm Mager, recalled his participation more than 40 years after the fact:

We were just dumb, naive kids, 19, 20 years old. We didn't know of any law that said you shouldn't shave points – we weren't throwing games, after all. And we thought, hell, the money looked pretty good. Even if it wasn't a lot, it seemed a lot to us, since we had almost nothing.⁴¹

Although a few players served short jail sentences, most received suspended sentences while a few took an option to serve in the military in lieu of jail. The major perpetrator of the fixes, however, New York City gambler Salvatore Sollazzo, ended

up doing 12 years of hard time in Sing Sing, and his associate, former LIU guard Eddie Gard, served three years.

Apologists for college sports argued that the scandal involved only a small number of athletes and that the system itself was sound. However, the federal district judge who presided at several of the trials saw much more than the moral failure of a few young athletes. In a scorching commentary, Judge Saul Streit laid the blame for the scandals at the feet of the culture of big-time college athletics, which he charged was infused with "a moral debasement." Streit called for fundamental reform of "this evil system of commercialism and overemphasis." The critics of college sports seemed to get a second wind from the scandals. Some asked a simple question: if colleges could pay players to *make* baskets, why would players not also take payments to *miss* them? Even the humbled Clair Bee understood: "Something must be done before all sports are discredited," he wrote in a national magazine. Echoing the words of the Carnegie Commission in 1929 and anticipating the criticism of future critics, he concluded, "Nothing will be accomplished until college presidents take aggressive action in cracking down on irregularities in their athletic departments."¹²

Thus the irony: while football had dominated the college sports scene from the inception of intercollegiate athletic programs and had been a continuing target of criticism, it would be a lesser sport that would illuminate the corruption that lay at the foundation of big-time intercollegiate athletics. Just as the headlines began to fade on the basketball point-shaving scandal during the summer of 1951, however, football once again gained the front pages when it was revealed that a widespread academic cheating scandal had been uncovered in one of the premier big time football programs. Shortly before the opening of fall practice, West Point, poised to make a run at a national championship under head coach Earl "Red" Blaik, dismissed 90 cadets for academic dishonesty under the Academy's strict honor code. Nearly half of the disgraced cadets were members of the vaunted Black Knights football squad. Once again the integrity of college athletics was on the front pages of the newspapers. President Harry S. Truman ordered a thorough investigation, and several US senators demanded the abolition of sports programs at the two military service academies. Newspaper columnists and editorial writers said all the obvious things as they pointed toward the obsession with victory that college athletics had become. Could it be, they collectively asked, that contrary to popular myth, sports did not build young men of good character but rather existed in an environment in which college administrators, coaches, and players were required to live a shameful deception? Could it be that the pressures to win actually imbued college athletes with negative values?

8 Sports in an Age of Ballyhoo, Depression, and War, 1920-45

Bounded by two world wars, the decades of the 1920s and the 1930s constitute a pivotal period in twentieth-century American history. However, the two decades have little in common and stand out for their sharp contrast with each other. The "Roaring Twenties" saw the emergence of both a consumer and a celebrity culture in which mass marketing, the growth of specialized professions, the routinization of work, and the introduction of myriad new products and services helped produce a significant rise in disposable income among an expanding middle class. This was the time when both radio and motion pictures came of age. By 1927, two national radio networks, NBC and CBS, were broadcasting the same profitable combination of drama, comedy, news, and music coast to coast.

The American people were thrust, willingly and eagerly, into a new age of mass production and mass consumption hyped by the mass media. A rapidly expanding economy lifted many boats, putting disposable income into far more hands than ever before. Chain stores, such as A & P grocery stores, Rexall Drugs, J. C. Penney and Sears Roebuck, invaded towns large and small, threatening the viability of local merchants. The urban department store, offering everything from cosmetics and clothing to refrigerators and wristwatches, became the Mecca of a nation of dedicated shoppers. The new automobile age, symbolized by the ubiquitous Model-T Ford, gave the American people a new sense of independence and freedom as distant places became readily accessible.

The Roaring Twenties, however, ended not with a loud roar but a dull thud. The crash of the stock market in October 1929 was prelude to the Great Depression. It shook the foundations of America's basic economic and political institutions. By 1932, the stock market had lost over 80 percent of its value, giving back all of the Dow Jones average gains made since 1910. When Franklin D. Roosevelt took

7 "An Evil to be Endured": Sports on Campus, 1920-50

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