

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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the underlying issues remain essentially what they were a century ago. Over the years, critics and reformers have sought to eliminate, or at least reduce in scope and influence, intercollegiate athletic programs. With rare exceptions, however, these efforts have been repulsed. Although a wide range of sports has become part of the intercollegiate athletic scene, at the heart of the enterprise is the uniquely American game of football.

4 The Formative Years of College Football

The American system of higher education is unique for its commitment to athletic competition. In no other country does anything even approach the massive sports enterprise that is supported by America's colleges and universities. Intercollegiate sports for those institutions competing at the highest levels of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) command high visibility in the public eye. It is very big business, with individual campus budgets supporting a few hundred "student-athletes" reaching astronomical sums. Many major university athletic programs now have annual budgets that easily exceed \$50 million.

Every March, American sports fans become fixated upon the annual NCAA basketball tournament, a made-for-television bonanza that annually produces in excess of \$600 million in broadcasting rights, millions of dollars in ticket sales and ancillary enterprises, and generates an estimated \$100 million in office bracket pools and in wagers placed with neighborhood bookies, and Nevada sports books. The Christmas and New Year's season has become a time for the playing of 25 college football bowl games – the culmination of a five-month season in which teams play an increasingly longer schedule – each of which generates millions of dollars for participating teams and their conferences. In addition to the 119 institutions that play football and the 327 that compete in basketball at the highest level (Division I-A), there are some 3,000 community colleges, four-year liberal arts colleges, and universities that field athletic teams for men and women athletes who compete throughout the academic year at lower classifications.

For more than a century, intercollegiate athletics have been an integral part of the life of American colleges and universities. In the process, college athletics have become intricately intertwined within the very fabric of American society. From their earliest days, intercollegiate athletics sparked widespread controversy, and it does so yet today. Although the size and scope of programs has grown enormously,

The Early Years of College Athletics

The earliest intercollegiate competition did not occur on a football field. Rather, the first instances of competition emerged among elite northeastern colleges that tested each other's mettle in rowing. Crew races became popular before the Civil War as rowing clubs were formed on several northeastern campuses. A highly publicized race between the rowing clubs of Yale and Harvard held on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire in 1852 drew a crowd of over one thousand spectators, including presidential candidate Franklin Pierce. By the end of the decade, the College Regatta Association had been formed, complete with written rules and regulations to guide its member institutions. Several of its regattas held in the late 1850s drew crowds estimated as high as 20,000.

College track and field teams were also organized, and spring meets became widespread during the post-Civil War decades. College men also competed in the nation's most popular team sport, baseball. The first recorded college baseball game was played in 1859 between Amherst and Williams, with the better-trained Amherst team (it actually held practices before the contest) recording a victory by the improbable score of 73–32. For much of the latter part of the nineteenth century, baseball was the most widely played game on American campuses until it was eclipsed by football. Baseball never caught on as a major college spectator sport because the game is best played in summer, a time when college classes have historically been suspended; thus, most nineteenth-century college teams played a modest spring schedule with their best players joining various amateur and semi-professional teams during the summer recess.

One of the striking characteristics of the early stages of intercollegiate sports was that they were organized and operated by the students with little if any interference or guidance from faculty or administrators. College sports grew out of campus competitions held between classes. Because most male students enrolled as freshman and graduated in four years, the symbolic importance of each class was great. For many decades, students had engaged in informal intramural games that casually mixed the rules of rugby and soccer. Upon occasion, these games turned into rugged physical contests that resembled more a barroom brawl than an athletic contest. These interclass contests were often held as part of the annual fall hazing of freshmen by upperclassmen during the so-called "rush" week preceding a new academic year.

When the game of football began to attract interest between 1875 to 1895, contests between classes were initiated, out of which slowly emerged the concept of

college campus in time for the fall season, then quietly disappear after the final game. "Proselytizing" (recruiting with financial inducements) of top players produced many a controversy. Occasionally, some itinerant athletes actually played for more than one school in the same season. Professors and deans questioned the dismal academic records of this migrant class of athletes, while also bemoaning the fact that many students exhibited far more interest in the games than they did in their studies.

The violent nature of the game — played initially without protective padding, governed by rules (or the lack thereof) that encouraged physical mayhem, and often poorly officiated by untrained referees — contributed to several highly publicized deaths and a long list of serious injuries each autumn. These highly publicized casualties predictably produced demands that the rules be modified to make the game safer, while others, often distraught professors, demanded the game be abolished. As an example, for many years one permissive rule stipulated that a player could be disqualified from a game *only after* he had slugged an opponent three times with his fist.

The new college game also had its legions of supporters. Some college administrators were pleased that the game was so physical in nature, a fact they believed helped dispel the widespread myth current at the time that male college students lacked adequate masculine attributes, that as a group they were sissified, effeminate souls who shunned physical challenges and cowered behind their books. At a time when the dominant Victorian culture was emphasizing the importance of "muscular Christianity" — a fusion of high levels of physical activity and religious devotion — football seemed to its advocates an obvious way to counter the notion that college men were not real men. Football demonstrated that its players were indeed men strong of body, fearless in the face of physical danger, and heroically willing to risk limb (and even life) on the football field for the glory of their alma mater.

College administrators also recognized that journalists devoted considerable attention to the game, providing a means of getting an institution's name before the general public on a regular basis. Journalists were pleased to provide that coverage because the game filled a major sports void after the baseball season ended in early fall. Campus administrators also recognized that a strong football team brought many benefits to their institutions, among them the ability to attract financial contributions from non-alumni (a practice elevated to a high art form by the University of Notre Dame) and a means of encouraging the continued loyalty and cash gifts from proud alumni.

On campus, the impact of football was palpable — at least to the game's supporters. The existence of a football team tended to decrease the often troublesome conflicts between classes because it created a common focus for all students. Campus leaders — students, faculty, and administrators alike — now stressed the importance of encouraging "school spirit." Administrators also noted the positive impact on student behavior; the rioting and drunkenness that had for so long plagued college campuses seemed to taper off during the football season (although later generations of deans of student life, confronted with the phenomenon of tailgating, would strongly disagree with this assessment).

the student body (and not the college administration) fielding a team to challenge nearby rival schools. Today's sports fans are accustomed to the dominant role played in college sports by the professional coach. The phenomenon of "coachers", as they were originally called, evolved slowly out of the growth of the college sports enterprise between 1880 and 1920. Originally, however, college teams were student-financed and operated affairs with an experienced student captain running the show. Elected by his teammates, the captain's responsibilities combined those of today's coach and athletic director, and included organizing the team, arranging a schedule, selecting team members, supervising drills and practices, and providing leadership during games.

It was under this informal, student-dominated structure that football made its appearance during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. According to most accounts, the first intercollegiate football game was played on November 6, 1869, when a group of Princeton students visited the College of Rutgers in New Brunswick. To ascribe to this event an important historical first as many historians have done, however, is a stretch. The game played that day scarcely resembled anything akin to today's American game of football, and the informality and lack of competitive zeal was a far cry from the emotion-laden spectacles of contemporary college contests. Instead, what transpired was merely a friendly game somewhat resembling a modern-day soccer match. Each side placed on the field 25 players who were cheered on by a few hundred spectators standing along the sidelines. The final score was 6-4 in favor of the home team; a banquet followed as each team toasted the other in a wholesome display of sportsmanship. Within three decades of the Princeton-Rutgers contest, however, this informal activity had evolved into a major spectator sport that trailed only horse racing and baseball in public appeal.

Football American Style

Following the Rutgers-Princeton encounter, during the next decade various forms of "foot ball" appeared irregularly on several college campuses, especially those of elite private colleges in the Northeast. Rules varied widely and were subject to constant revision. The game became increasingly physical, resembling today's game in which players use their hands to hold the ball and impede the progress of their opponents. Scoring systems changed frequently, but initially the largest number of points was awarded for drop-kicking the ball, somewhat oblong inflated ball through a goalpost, not by advancing it across the goal line for a "touch down."

From the beginning, the game stimulated controversy. Many of the issues about the college game today are not dissimilar from those of a century ago. As the game became increasingly physical, concerned administrators and faculty members sought its abolition because of the serious injuries absorbed by participants. Because of the lack of formal governing boards or conferences, player eligibility was left up to individual schools, leading to many flagrant abuses. It did not take long for skilled, physically adept "tramp" athletes to appear magically on a

For these and other reasons, by the 1890s many leaders of higher education had embraced football as a positive force on their campuses. When the founding president of the new University of Chicago set up shop in 1891, one of his first decisions was to hire Amos Alonzo Stagg, a former star end for the powerful Yale teams of the late 1880s, with the charge of building a winning team that would attract favorable publicity to the new institution. When it came to college athletic programs, President William Rainey Harper was enthusiastic: "I am most heartily in favor of them," he said. He assured Stagg that he would provide him with the physical and financial resources to build a powerful team. In return, Harper wanted immediate national recognition, something that normally takes decades to achieve if the emphasis is strictly upon the academic accomplishments of faculty and students.

At the same time, in a much different and more modest academic setting, the individual hired away from Ohio Wesleyan University to lead the small, struggling University of Nevada in Reno similarly turned to sports as a means of publicizing his remote institution. Early in his tenure, President Joseph Stubbs established a football team complete with a professional coach to help attract attention to the isolated campus. The editor of the student newspaper embraced Stubbs's vision, noting optimistically that it would soon be possible to send Nevada's teams to "Berkeley and Stanford to demonstrate our athletic supremacy." What presidents Harper and Stubbs perceived as a convenient strategy to help establish the foundation of a new university — fielding a powerful football team — provided a formula that would often be emulated by ambitious college presidents in the decades to come.

Yale and the Creation of Football

Today, the Yale Bulldogs play a modest Division I-AA football schedule in the Ivy League. The few thousand spectators who show up for games rattle around the mammoth Yale Bowl with its seating capacity of 65,000. Completed in 1914, this was the first football mega stadium to be constructed. During the 1920s, similar monuments to the importance of football appeared on college campuses as football mania swept the nation. The construction of the Yale Bowl capped an incredible era of football domination at the New Haven campus beginning in 1876, during which time Yale's teams enjoyed several undefeated seasons and won over 95 percent of their games.

The primary factor in Yale's domination of the early college football scene was one man, rightly acknowledged as the "Father of American football." Walter Chauncey Camp's influence was not limited to his various roles at Yale as an outstanding athlete, team advisor, sometimes coach, and informal director of athletics. His influence extended to creating a set of rules that clearly distinguished the American game of "foot ball" from the English games of soccer and rugby. As had occurred during the formative years of baseball, the spirit of American nationalism militated the creation of a game unique to the United States. Beyond Camp's contributions to creating an unquestioned Americanized game, he helped to pop-

ularize the new sport by writing several books on how to play and coach the game. He also stimulated general public interest by writing some 250 articles on college football published in such widely circulated national magazines as *Harper's Weekly* and *Outlook*. As but one example of his flair for public relations, in 1888 Camp personally selected and publicized nationally the first "All-American" team and did so each year until his death in 1925. That initial team was comprised of 11 players that he considered to be the best in the nation (all of whom played for Princeton, Harvard, Columbia, and Yale), but by the early 1900s Camp's annual selections included the top players from Midwestern powerhouses such as Chicago, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota.

Born to middle-class parents and raised in New Haven, Camp was already well known locally as a skilled teenage rugby and baseball player before he first took the field for Yale in 1876. By the time that he was a junior, he had been elected football captain and immediately began to implement concepts of play that he would continue to develop and refine throughout his lifetime. Essentially, Camp sought ways to encourage synchronized team play over individual skills and the spontaneous action that occurred in free-flowing games of soccer and rugby. Over the years, as captain, team advisor (never officially "coach"), rules maker, author, and lecturer, Camp spearheaded the transformation of English-style rugby into the uniquely American game of football in which the players became pawns controlled by the coach. It was Camp's influence that essentially made American football more of a coach's game than a player's game.

Camp became a successful business executive as manager of a New Haven clock factory, and was an unabashed admirer of the "time-and-motion" theories of scientific management and production analysis being preached by engineering/manufacturing guru Frederick Winslow Taylor. Just as Camp utilized the efficiency concepts of "Taylorism" in his clock factory, he also applied them to the game of football. As he wrote in his *The Book of Football*,

the object must be to use each man to the full extent of his capacity without exhausting any. To do this scientifically involves placing men in such position in the field that each may perform the work for which he is best fitted, and yet not be forced to do any of the work toward which his qualifications and training do not point.¹

Throughout his career, Camp emphasized such telling phrases as "scientific planning" and "strategy and tactics." Essentially, he wanted to create a game in which chance and spontaneity were sharply reduced by rules requiring team discipline and organized patterns of play. This was what he liked to refer to as "scientific football." As Camp influenced the evolving structure of the game, athletes came to be viewed merely as cogs in an organized human machine, doing what industrial manager Camp like to call the "work" of football.²

After his playing days ended, Camp continued to advise the team even as he developed his business career. He never held a position analogous to that of today's professional "coach." Instead, he served as an informal advisor to the team captain, occasionally showing up at team practices, but more often relying upon his

running plays around the end of the line because such a technique would greatly reduce the ability of agile runners to avoid being brought down in the open field. With tackling below the waist in effect, what little "wide-open" play that existed gave way to a careful, methodical (many bored fans said "dull") game that placed primary emphasis upon what was called "mass momentum play" — which meant a heavy concentration of struggling and slugging players at the inevitable point of attack in center of the line. In an effort to grind out the necessary five yards in three attempts without fumbling, teams tended to concentrate upon moving the ball forward by sheer brute force. Players closed ranks, often interlocking their arms, and pushed and pulled the ball carrier forward through similarly massed defensive players.⁵

"Mass momentum" play reached its apex in 1892, when Harvard introduced the "flying wedge" formation against a surprised Yale team. The play was designed so that the offensive players lined up several yards behind the line of scrimmage in a V-shaped formation and simultaneously rushed toward one stationary defense lineman. When this mass of closely knit players neared the line of scrimmage, the center snapped the ball to a running back inside the wedge. The resulting collision with a stationary, isolated lineman produced many a concussion, broken bone, or worse. "What a grand play!" a *New York Times* reporter enthused. "A half ton of bone and muscle coming into collision with a man weighing 160 or 170 pounds."⁶ The flying wedge lasted only two years before the outcry against its brutality led to its being declared illegal by Camp's rules committee in 1894. Nonetheless, for the growing band of critics of the game, the short-lived flying wedge became a convenient symbol of the high level of violence that the game had achieved. Although many criticized the brutal play, others found it to be reassuring; the new urban male was up to the challenge of rugged physical combat. Some saw the game as a reassertion of the "Anglo-Saxon" traits of bravery and strength in battle. In an age when Social Darwinism, with its emphasis upon "survival of the fittest," was influencing public policy and academic inquiry, the game became a symbol of a resurgent national strength and virility. One close observer of football said the game "furnishes good ideals of courageous manhood." Or, as the president of Notre Dame, John Cavanaugh, commented, he would rather see his students suffer "a broken collar bone occasionally than to see them dedicated to croquet." After the University of Pennsylvania won a hard-fought Thanksgiving Day game against Columbia played in a cold rain and a driving wind that made the field "a quagmire of ice-cold mud," the team physician was effusive in his praise: "Those frozen eleven, purple, shivering, chattering players, were to be praised because 'every one of them loves manliness and courage.'"⁷

Thus even with the abolition of the flying wedge, the game remained particularly dangerous. Newspapers printed a "hospital list" of major injuries as part of their game reports. Concussions became routine as players collided at full speed without benefit of helmet or padding; most players took to letting their hair grow long as a means of providing some natural protection, but it was a sign of one's manliness not to wear a leather "head harness" after they were introduced at the turn of the twentieth century. (Curiously, it was not until 1939 that NCAA rules

wife to report the practice results to him. He regularly met with team leaders in the evening, during which time he suggested practice drills and strategies for an upcoming game. Between 1876, when he led Yale to its first football victory as a running back, and 1909 when he stepped away from his advisory coaching position due to demands of business (and his declining influence within the game), Yale lost only 14 games.⁸

Although Camp was the primary force behind the creation of a powerful football dynasty at Yale, his lasting influence on the game was as rules maker. Either as chair or merely the first among equals on the self-perpetuating Intercollegiate Football Rules Committee, Camp dominated the evolution of the game during its formative years. His concepts were often insightful, if not brilliant. For a quarter century, his ideas controlled the way the game was played. As he often said, his emphasis was upon "method not men," by which he meant that the game was best played when each member of the team carried out specific responsibilities as part of a larger whole. His views mirrored the transformation occurring within the American economy, in which highly structured and carefully planned systems of manufacturing and distribution were implemented by an hierarchical structure within corporations and the factories they operated, just as the captains of industry wanted to leave nothing to chance in their factories and mills, in which each worker had a specific assignment in the production process, so too did Camp seek to reduce the spontaneity of the game and the uncertainty of free (or "open") play so that the coach could effectively control the flow of the game.

Even during his playing days, Camp was thinking about the larger issues of the game. As team captain in 1878, he first proposed the reduction in team size from 15 to 11, a reform that was implemented by other schools two years later. In 1880, his proposal to eliminate the rugby-type "scrum" was adopted. Instead of teams gaining possession after the referee tossed the ball into a frenzied melee of both teams who then attempted to kick it free to a teammate, Camp introduced the concept of the kick-off and line of scrimmage. The team in possession of the ball retained it unless the ball was fumbled, punted away, or the opponent's goal penetrated by a field goal or touchdown; after a fiasco in the 1881 Princeton-Yale game, when each team merely downed the ball throughout the entire two halves (both teams believed that a 0-0 tie would give them the championship), Camp introduced the premise that a team could retain possession only if it advanced the ball five yards in three "fairs" (a term later changed to "down"). This fundamental change in the rules led naturally to the necessity of marking the field with white lime at five-yard intervals, leading to comments that the playing field looked like a "gridiron."⁹

These innovations produced precisely what Camp sought — a much less spontaneous and more controlled, predictable game in which players became instruments for carrying out their coach's strategies. Consequently, there soon emerged the revolutionary concept of written, scripted plays in which each player on offense had a particular role to play. In 1888, Camp introduced a rules change that proved to be of major import. His new rule made it permissible to tackle the ball carrier below the waist, a change that Camp correctly believed would reduce wide-open

actually required the wearing of a helmet.)⁸ Although athletes of a century ago were well conditioned, they were much smaller than today's gargantuan players. Seldom did even the largest of linemen weigh over 180 pounds, and most running backs weighed between 130 and 160 pounds. Walter Eckersall, the famed All-American quarterback at Chicago who completed his eligibility in 1905, played at 135 pounds, and even as late as the 1924 season no member of the famed Notre Dame "Four Horsemen" backfield weighed over 160 pounds.

Walter Camp's emphasis on mass play thus resulted in a game in which injuries were more or less commonplace and deaths not all that uncommon. The president of Cornell University, Andrew Dickson White, denounced the game as a "vestige of barbarity," and Harvard President Charles Eliot caustically identified the problem as being "deliberately planned and deliberately maintained" — that is, deaths and injuries resulted not by accident but from young men playing a violent game according to the rules. By permitting tackling below the waist, unprotected heads were thrust into hard-pumping knees. With the rules permitting teammates to push, pull, or even catapult running backs through or over the massed defense, the emphasis upon raw strength was magnified and the potential for serious injury high.⁹

By the mid-1890s, as the game spread rapidly across the country, several college and high-school players died each year. These deaths were widely reported in the media, producing a national controversy over the merits of the game that lasted for more than a decade. Although the rules permitted rough play, critics were also correct in their assertion that referees (often poorly trained for their task) were reluctant to issue penalties. With 22 players concentrated at the line of scrimmage, shugging, biting, kneeling, and gouging opponents was commonplace.

Fistfights often disrupted play, and it was not unusual for police to have to intervene during a game to restore order. Football clearly was no place for the faint of heart, and many coaches reputedly taught tactics to "take out" opposing players. In 1893, President Grover Cleveland, having studied a report on the injury list at the two military academies leading to missed class days, called off the 1893 Army-Navy game. Throughout the 1890s and well into the new century, the ongoing debate over the violence inherent in the game waxed and waned, depending upon the annual death rate.¹⁰

From the earliest days, it was evident that the game was played by young men intent upon one goal: victory. Critics wondered why, if the game supposedly built character and encouraged clean play and good sportsmanship as its advocates said, referees were required. If the game was played by fair-minded sportsmen, why were rules necessary to prohibit kicking, biting, or even choking the windpipe of one's opponent? Harvard President Charles Eliot, one of the game's consistent critics, never received an adequate response to his 1892 comments that the very nature of the game encouraged devious and dirty play, or as he elegantly put it, the use of "tricks, surprises and habitual violations of the rules . . . [that are] inordinate and excessive" in "an unwholesome desire of victory by whatever means." Three years later, Eliot was even less charitable to a game that he believed perverted the essential mission of his university. In a commentary to his alumni on "the evils of

intercollegiate sports," he singled out football because it "grows worse and worse as regards foul and violent play, and the number and gravity of injuries the players suffer."¹¹

Football Moves West

Despite its critics on and off the campus, football continued to grow in popularity. During the 1890s, it spread rapidly to colleges throughout the Midwest and the South. Even in the sparsely populated Far West, the game caught on at such small institutions as the state universities of Idaho, Montana, Arizona, Oregon, and Nevada. Two Bay Area schools, Stanford and California, were recognized as the strongest football powers in the distant Far West. Colleges large and small took up the game, in part as a means of identifying with the prestigious Eastern institutions and in part in response to student demands for the creation of teams, apparently resulting from the enthusiasm for the sport generated by the national press. By early in the twentieth century the dominance of the Eastern elite schools was being threatened by powerful "Western" teams, namely the Universities of Michigan, Minnesota, and Chicago.

There is a timeless joke told by college presidents that their primary goal is to build an academic reputation at their school worthy of the stature of the football team. That wry comment's origins undoubtedly rest with the University of Chicago and its ambitious founding president, William Rainey Harper. As a Yale professor of religious studies, Harper had watched Amos Alonzo Stagg perform as a star end for the undefeated Yale 11 of 1888. Harper also came to know Stagg as a deeply religious individual, someone who seriously considered a career in the ministry. Deciding against that option, the pious Stagg became an instructor and coach at the YMCA school in Massachusetts, where students were trained to spread evangelical Christianity through the medium of sports. The handsome, muscular Stagg — named by Camp to his inaugural All-American team — was the epitome of the "muscular Christian."¹² This hard-driving young man became one of the first professional college football coaches, and incredibly he worked continuously at his profession as a head coach until he was 83 years old, and then as an assistant until his mid-90s.

In order to secure Stagg's services away from other schools vying for his services (Pennsylvania, Johns Hopkins), Harper hired his new coach at a salary comparable to or even higher than that offered to the top professors he was luring to his new university (with the help of a heavy infusion of John D. Rockefeller's money). He also granted him an associate professorship with academic tenure before he ever set foot on campus. In making this appointment, Harper showed his fellow presidents the way to circumvent student control of athletics: he created the Department of Physical Culture and Athletics, one of the first of its kind in American higher education, and named Stagg as departmental director. This decision gave the struggling infant discipline of physical education the legitimate academic stature that it had heretofore lacked and simultaneously created a friendly academic environment to which Stagg could recruit top-flight prospective players.



Harper believed that a great university required a great football team. "The University of Chicago believes in football," he said with emphasis in 1895. "We shall encourage it here." Writing to his new coach, Harper told Stagg, "I want you to develop teams which we can send around the country and knock out all the colleges," and in a prescient comment about the importance of financial and other incentives necessary to attract to the Chicago campus the quality of athlete necessary to accomplish that objective, he added, "We will give them a palace car and a vacation too."¹³

Although Stagg was theoretically under the control of a student-athletic control board, he operated much like Camp had done as athletic advisor at Yale — he made the decisions and implemented them with little interference from his athletic control board, or even from the president's office. It did not take Stagg long to assemble the powerful football team that his president envisioned. From the beginning, some faculty carpentered about the dubious academic qualifications of his athletes, many of whom took their courses in the Department of Physical Culture. As

Director of Physical Culture, Stagg determined their eligibility to play football, and he wielded absolute control over his academic department and its budget. Whenever his authority or his program was challenged, he successfully appealed to Harper for support; after Harper's premature death in 1905, Stagg used his many connections with alumni, boosters, and wealthy Chicago businessmen — such as the legendary meat-packer Walter Swift and department store magnate Marshall Field — to beat back repeated faculty efforts that threatened his empire.

It did not take the aggressive, innovative young coach long to demonstrate the public-relations potential that a big-time football program possessed. At the end of his second season, Stagg created a stir throughout the Windy City when he brought in the famed University of Michigan team to play his Maroons on Thanksgiving Day. The "big game" had arrived in Chicago. President Harper seized upon this opportunity to invite many prestigious citizens (and potential donors) to be his guests at the game. A series of receptions and dinners was arranged around the spectacle. "For the last week nothing but football has been discussed at the University on the South Side," one newspaper commented.¹⁴ Michigan, coached by Fielding Yost, a brash football empire-builder in his own right, proved to be the dominant team in the West as it trounced Stagg's inexperienced squad 28–10. But that loss did nothing to dampen football spirit in Chicago; it only served to create increased interest, upon which Stagg capitalized. The following year, Chicago fielded a powerful team that capped a successful season with a much-publicized train trip to the West Coast that included the use of an elegantly appointed palace railroad car (as Harper had promised). The Maroons played Stanford on New Year's Day in Los Angeles, thereby suggesting the potential inherent in the concept of the post-season New Year's bowl game.

Stagg relentlessly built his program. He received a donation of land from Chicago mercantile giant Marshall Field upon which there arose a 25,000-seat stadium of bricks and mortar. President Harper's dream of football putting his young institution on the front pages of Chicago newspapers culminated in 1905. On Thanksgiving Day, two undefeated teams met at Marshall Field before an overflow crowd of 27,000. Fielding Yost's Michigan Wolverines came into the game reputed to be the top team west of the Appalachian Mountains, but Stagg's well-trained team led by shifty All-American quarterback Walter Eckersall, fought them to a standstill, ultimately winning the game 2–0 on a fourth-quarter safety.

For the next two decades, Stagg continued to produce powerful teams, but ultimately his program fell on hard times in the late 1920s. As late as 1924, Stagg seemed to be on top of his game; the Maroons tied Illinois 21–21 in an epic contest that featured the exciting play of Illinois running back George "Red" Grange, the famed "Galloping Ghost" of All-American fame, and captured the Western Conference (Big Ten) championship. Stagg took satisfaction in that attendance records had been set and net ticket revenue had never been higher. The future of football at the University of Chicago seemed incredibly bright. However, his program soon fell into a swift and sure decline. Faculty criticism of the academic quality of his players had intensified, ultimately resulting in the elimination of the academic program in physical culture; several competing college football programs in the

Cochran Amos addressed the University of Chicago in 1915, and he enjoyed three winning seasons. President Robert Stagg stunned the school in 1939 when he led the football team to a record of 15 wins and 15 losses.

Chicago area (Illinois, Northwestern, Notre Dame) drew away fans, as did the popular new professional team, the Chicago Bears; perhaps most telling was that the faculty and a much-less sympathetic administration imposed more stringent entrance and eligibility requirements that made it increasingly difficult for Stagg to attract a sufficient number of top athletes.¹⁵

The result was a depressing series of losing seasons that began in 1925. Each year the number of lopsided losses mounted. Stagg recognized that the university's youthful new president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, was unenthusiastic about, perhaps even hostile toward, football. Burdened with nine consecutive losing seasons, and embarrassed by defeats to conference teams he had once dominated, in 1933 the 71-year-old Stagg resigned and moved to the College of the Pacific in Stockton, California, where he coached for 12 more years, producing several winning seasons. In 1939, in the wake of an embarrassing 85-0 pasting by Michigan, the upstart school that had become one of the nation's first football powerhouses stunned the sports world when President Hutchins announced that the University of Chicago was dropping football as an intercollegiate sport.

Football as Spectacle

During the first decade of college football, relatively few spectators bothered to watch the contests, but by 1890 the game had definitely begun to attract larger attendance. This interest soon stimulated the enclosure of fields, the construction of permanent seating, and (naturally) the selling of tickets. By the mid-1890s, attendance at important games between powerful Eastern rivals attracted crowds ranging between 20,000 and 40,000. The reason for this enormous growth in public interest can be attributed primarily to the changing nature of the newspaper business. With literacy rates increasing, profit-minded newspaper owners and editors sought dramatic stories that would sell newspapers and enable them to outpace their competitors. When horse-racing and baseball seasons ended in September, editors lacked much in the way of sports news. Thus they turned to the new sport of college football. To read accounts of the games of this period is to be transported into a romanticized world of heroic players, brilliant coaches, and superhuman accomplishment. Large headlines proclaimed the amazing deeds of bigger-than-life players, and reporters wrote breathtaking accounts of epic gridiron battles. Important games between major rivals were reported on the front pages of the newspapers, complete with pen drawings depicting some of the action. Literature professor Michael Oriard observes in his study of the early years of football that "by the mid-1890s, both the quantity and quality of the football coverage in the daily papers in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston were staggering: front-page, full-page, several-page accounts of the big games, accompanied by sometimes dozens of sensationalized illustrations." Oriard concludes, "The late nineteenth-century daily newspaper 'created' college football to an even greater degree [than television during the 1950s], transforming an extracurricular activity into a national spectacle."¹⁶

Newspapers also paid considerable attention to the social aspects of the game, reporting on famous persons in attendance, even describing the clothes worn by socially prominent ladies at the exclusive receptions and parties they attended before and after the game. Hard-charging rival newspaper publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst created separate sports sections for their New York newspapers, the *World* and the *Journal*, and staffed them with specialized reporters and columnists in a furious drive to expand readership with a brash and sensational form of journalism. The extensive coverage of football stimulated increased newspaper sales, which boosted attendance, which in turn created a demand for even more newspaper coverage. Well before 1900, football had become more than a game played by a few college students. It was now one of the nation's most popular spectator sports. Surrounding it there coalesced a public spectacle and social scene that gave football high public visibility and widespread acceptance.

The ripple effect was staggering. Almost overnight, important traditions were established. Organized student cheering sections were formed, and cleverly scripted cheers rang out along the sidelines. Sometimes students were coerced into participation. Prior to a big game with Indiana in 1901, the *South Bend Tribune* reported that on the Notre Dame campus "rooter preparations are on a strong scale. Every student will be there whether he likes it or not and take part in organized cheering."¹⁷ To be elected a "cheer leader" became a mark of distinction, almost as important as being a star player on the varsity. At some institutions, separate seating sections were established for men and women; on many campuses, only men could be elected to the cheer squad (a tradition that only slowly broke down in the decades following the First World War). Pep bands added to the festivities, and soon each school had its own "fight song"; such widely recognizable songs as "On Wisconsin," "Across the Field" (Ohio State), "Hail to the Victors" (Michigan), and "The Notre Dame Victory March," are among many such memorable pep tunes written during football's formative years.

The tradition of homecoming was also established during this period. Fearing a slender turnout for the big game against arch rival Kansas University scheduled in the small college town of Columbia, coach C. L. Brewer of the University of Missouri in 1911 issued an urgent public invitation to all alumni to "come back home. Tigers" to help cheer on his team against the Jayhawks. Much to his surprise, a record-setting overflow crowd of 10,000 showed up to watch a hard-fought 3-3 tie game. Shortly thereafter, the Missouri alumni director reported on the benefits of the event to a convention of his peers, and within a few years homecoming had become a signal autumn event on campuses across the country. Elaborate week-long "homecoming" events were held, including parades, dances, banquets, receptions, song-fests, fraternity and sorority parties, decorated dormitories, and bonfire rallies. All of these events were capped off with the Saturday afternoon football game. Campus leaders had discovered that the football homecoming week provided an effective way to maintain sentimental connections between alumni and their alma maters.¹⁸ It also helped if the home team won the homecoming game.

Football thus became much more than a game, providing an important connection between students, alumni, community leaders, and the university. For prominent businessmen and politicians, it was considered advantageous to become recognized as a prominent "booster" of the local university team (no matter if one was an alumnus or not), a supporter who contributed generously to the athletic fund and bought a block of tickets to distribute to business or political associates. For their wives, it was important to be seen at games and to host pre- and post-game social events. For students, it provided an exciting diversion from studies and a focal point for many student social events.

Other parts of the unfolding spectacle naturally fell into place. For example, there was the simple matter of the color of uniforms that would distinguish one team from another. Student bodies held contests to select school colors for team uniforms, nearly all of which have remained unchanged to the present day. Similarly, students adopted various mascots or nicknames by which their team would be known. Ferocious animals were among the most popular (the Tigers of Missouri, Louisiana State, and Princeton; the Bulldogs of Georgia, Yale, and Mississippi State; the Wildcats of Kentucky, Northwestern, and Arizona; the Bears of Maine, Baylor, and California). Other schools sought to establish an identity with their state's heritage (the Tennessee Volunteers; the Ohio State Buckeyes; the Virginia Cavaliers; the Tar Heels of North Carolina; the Indiana Hoosiers; the Texas Longhorns; the Sooners of Oklahoma; the Rebels of Ole Miss; the Mountaineers of West Virginia; the Florida Gators). Less-imaginative team monikers were derived from school colors: The Syracuse Orangemen, Alabama's Crimson Tide, the Green Wave of Tulane, and the Crimson of Harvard.

Conversely, some mascots were simply puzzling or even humorous: the Ephs of Williams College named after its founder Ephraim Williams; the Sage Brushers and/or Sage Hens of Nevada (changed to a more ferocious Wolf Pack by a student vote in 1921, although no wolves lived in the desert state); the Blue Hens of Delaware; the Golden Gophers of Minnesota; the Bug Eaters of the University of Nebraska (later renamed Cornhuskers in a nod to the state's dominant agricultural economy). Several land grant institutions with prominent agricultural colleges naturally became the Aggies (Texas A&M, New Mexico State, Oklahoma State College, University of California, Davis). As a reflection of the widely accepted racial stereotypes popular at the time, many student bodies opted for scalp-taking Native Americans: Miami (Ohio) Redskins, Fighting Illini of Illinois, Fighting Sioux of North Dakota, Running Utes of Utah, Marquette Warriors, St. Johns Redmen, and more simply, the Stanford Indians. Other racial or ethnic stereotypes also were employed, the most famous being the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame, a name that only gained acceptance during the 1920s after an often-critical press corps had conjured up many different names, some of them reflecting searing anti-Catholic prejudice.¹⁹ During the 1990s, these racial images produced significant backlash and many were changed, often over the strenuous opposition of tradition-bound alumni. More benign, politically correct names were now in vogue — Miami became the Redhawks, St. Johns the Red Storm, and Stanford the Cardinal (the color not the bird) with a generic tree as its curious environmentally sensitive

mascot. The decision at Illinois to keep the "Fighting Illini" moniker reached epic emotional proportions in 2003 as a band of reformist students battled unsuccessfully with determined tradition-bound alumni over "Chief Illiniwek," brought to life by a white male student dressed in stereotypical Native American garb who did war dances at midfield before games. In 2005, the NCAA responded to critics and informed 21 member institutions with various North American related mascots believed to be insensitive that they would not be permitted to participate in future post-season play unless they changed their traditional mascot symbols, most of which had been in place for over a century.

Football in Crisis

In 1884, a New York reporter included this vivid description of the Yale-Princeton game staged at the Polo Grounds: "The elevens hurl themselves together and build themselves in kicking, writhing heaps." Spectators cheered as they witnessed

a general vision of threatening attitudes, fists shaken before noses, dartings hither and thither, throttling, wrestling and the pitching of individuals headlong to earth. . . . They saw real fighting, savage blows that drew blood, and falls that seemed as if they must crack all the bones and drive the life from those who sustained them.

Finally, there "came a crush about midway of the field. All the maddened giants of both teams were in it, and they lay there heaped, choking, kicking, gouging and howling."²⁰

Given the level of violence that characterized early play, it is surprising that football managed to survive as a college sport. Clearly, the socializing forces described above helped the game survive a major crisis that threatened its very existence when the matter became a national issue in 1905-06. As the game became increasingly popular among students and alumni during the final decade of the nineteenth century, it simultaneously attracted an increasing number of critics. Some wanted the game abolished, but the majority were content to demand widespread reforms on two fronts: first, changing (and enforcing) the rules to eliminate the dangerous mass momentum style of play, and, second, establishing rigorous controls on the process of player recruitment and the assurance that only bona fide students took part.

The most prominent person to step forward was the distinguished president of Harvard, Charles Eliot. He was both deeply concerned about the violent nature of football and fearful that the heavy emphasis upon victory threatened the integrity of higher education. In his crusade to abolish the game, Eliot found many allies among his own faculty and elsewhere, but he was ultimately thwarted by a combination of student support for the football program and pressures from prominent alumni and the general public. Twice between 1886 and 1906, the Harvard faculty succeeded in abolishing the sport for single seasons, but the game's popularity eventually overcame on-campus opposition. One of the primary reasons Harvard

eventually opted for reform and not abolition was that two of its major competitors, Yale and Princeton, continued to encourage the game's development and in so doing attracted to themselves considerable public support and the dedicated loyalty of wealthy contributors.

At Princeton, a popular political science professor and faculty leader, soon to become president of the university, used his considerable prestige on campus to promote the game. A devout Presbyterian who enthusiastically embraced the doctrines of muscular Christianity, Professor Woodrow Wilson firmly believed that the game built character by teaching players important lessons about discipline, teamwork, perseverance, and dealing with adversity and pressure. In a telling comment about the repeated failure of Harvard to defeat Yale or Princeton, he once causitically observed that Harvard had instituted an academic program built around elective courses, which he said implied a lack of rigor, organization, and discipline — particular ingredients he believed important to a successful football program. As Princeton's president between 1902 and 1910, Wilson was known upon occasion to leap out of the stands to lead cheers during games; as one historian has written of the man who would become President of the United States, "Wilson glorified victory, lambasted those who failed to support athletics, criticized the team's failures, and carped about victorious rivals."²¹

Eliot, who built Harvard into a major academic powerhouse during his long tenure as president between 1875 and 1909, was dedicated to the premise that the university was a place where academic values must be paramount. In his drive to make Harvard into the nation's preeminent private institution, he repeatedly confronted the negative influence of football, whose values he believed were a denial of all that his academic reform agenda sought to accomplish. In a highly publicized report released in late 1894, Eliot condemned the concept of an institution of higher learning becoming engaged in entertaining the public. "The evils of the intercollegiate sports . . . continue without real redress and diminution," he said,

In particular the game of football grows worse and worse as regards foul and violent play, and the number and gravity of injuries which the players suffer. It has become perfectly clear that the game as now played is unfit for college use. . . . The state of mind of the spectators at a hard-fought football match at Springfield, New York, or Philadelphia cannot but suggest the query how far these assemblages differ at heart from the throngs which enjoy the prize-fight, cock-fight, or bull-fight, or which in other centuries delighted in the sports of the Roman arena.²²

Eliot's perspective was that of an academic elitist who viewed athletics through a prism that emphasized amateurism, fair play, sportsmanship, and character building. That football teams (and their professional "coaches") routinely sought dubious ways to win games — relying as he said upon "tricks, surprises and habitual violation of the rules" — indicated to him that the game did not build good character but actually produced the opposite effect. Noting that some reformers wanted to increase the number of officials on the field from the current one or two, he sniffed:

It is often said that by employing more men to watch the players, with authority to punish instantly infractions of the rules, foul and vicious playing could be stopped. The sufficient answer to this suggestion is that a game which needs to be so watched is not fit for genuine sportsmen.

And in a comment about the integrity or competence of game officials that would routinely resonate throughout the years to come, Eliot noted that "experience indicates that it would be hard to find trustworthy watchers."²³ Ultimately, Eliot came to focus his critique upon what he perceived to be an excessive emphasis upon winning at all costs. Not only did football present a misleading impression to the public about the nature of university life, it also diverted students from their primary role as scholars.²⁴

Although many faculty emphasized the baleful impact of the game upon the academic mission, the general public focused upon the media reports detailing serious injuries and the occasional death. Eliot was of course appalled as well, especially when they occurred even when the rules were enforced:

The rules of the game are at present such as to cause inevitably a large number of broken bones, sprains, and wrenches, even during trial or practice games played legitimately, and they also permit those who play with reckless violence or with shrewd violations of the rules to gain thereby great advantages.²⁵

This is not to say that Eliot was opposed to all sports. He supported the playing of games for their own sake in a manner that would enhance the academic atmosphere of the Harvard campus — for fun, physical health, and the joy of participation. Reflective of a widespread perception of the time, Eliot also believed that healthy exercise and sports competition offered the college man "a new and effective motive for resisting all sins which weaken or corrupt the body" — that is, premarital sex.²⁶

President Eliot's reform efforts in 1894 failed to produce tangible results, but public discussion of the issues he raised grew in intensity during the next decade. Despite mounting criticism, football continued to grow in popularity, its proponents greatly outnumbering the opponents. University administrators, taking due note of the gate receipts being collected by student sponsors and aware of the public-relations benefits that could accrue in terms of student recruitment, alumni relations, and fund raising, began to take over control of the programs, hiring professional coaches, creating new departments of athletics, inserting physical education courses into the curriculum to help ease the academic burden of players, and making the football season an important aspect of campus social life.

In 1905, the long-simmering debate over rough play came to a head. That year three college players and 18 high-school or sandlot players died in highly publicized football accidents, and 167 collegians suffered serious injuries. A leading University of Chicago professor of divinity, Shailer Mathews, summarized the criticism as well as any when he denounced the game as "a social obsession — a boy-killing, education-prostituting, gladiatorial sport."²⁷ Despite a decade of

mounting criticism, everyone recognized that the game had changed very little. It remained as violent as ever since the notorious heyday of the flying wedge. It was not without significance that one of the players who sustained a painful injury that season was the son of the President of the United States. Theodore Roosevelt Jr. "Teedie," who at 5'7" and less than 150 pounds played on the line for the Harvard junior varsity, received a severely broken nose during a hard-fought game with Yale that required reconstructive surgery. Spectators reported that the Blues concentrated their attack on the president's son, who bravely held his ground; some said the Bulldogs massed their attack at Teedie because of his famous father, while others simply noted that he was the smallest man on the Harvard line.²⁸

Whatever, this particular shattered nose helped focus the President's attention on the issue of rough play. The game of football – with its rigorous physical and psychological demands – naturally appealed to this rambunctious president who often spoke glowingly of those brave men who chose to demonstrate their mettle in the "arena." What seems to have bothered Roosevelt most about the state of the game were persistent reports of unsportsmanlike play by "muckers." The President never had anything but praise for the rugged nature of the game; his concern was that it be properly played by gentlemen and good sports, and that it be played by the rules.²⁹

Roosevelt had little argument with the style of hard-hitting line play championed by his friend Walter Camp. His political conversations and correspondence were often punctuated with comments about "hitting the line hard" on behalf of a particular issue. Although it was widely believed that Roosevelt threatened to abolish the game if substantive reform did not occur, there is no evidence to support that contention. He had, in fact, no direct authority to force its abolition. What he did was to capitalize on public concerns and called a conference at the White House on October 9, 1905, to which he invited representatives from three major football schools – Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. The coaches present agreed to work to see that the rules against illegal play were enforced and expressed interest in pursuing some limited rule changes. Roosevelt declared himself satisfied and considered the matter closed. At no time did Roosevelt suggest that he wanted the game abolished; in fact, his efforts seem primarily motivated by his concern that reformers would succeed in abolishing the game.³⁰

The following year, the major football schools created the Inter-Collegiate Athletic Association (ICAA), the name changed in 1910 to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and charged it specifically with revamping the rules to greatly reduce mass momentum play. Many coaches, especially those in the Midwest, were anxious to create a more exciting brand of football in order to attract more spectators. They advocated a more "open" game, that is the use of offensive plays other than the power run into the middle of the line. The result was that the new rule book made it illegal for teammates to push or pull the ball carrier through the defense, required the offense to begin each play with a minimum of seven men on the line of scrimmage (to eliminate linemen from lining up several yards behind the line of scrimmage and gaining momentum before crashing into a defensive player), and eliminated the use of interlocking of arms by blockers.

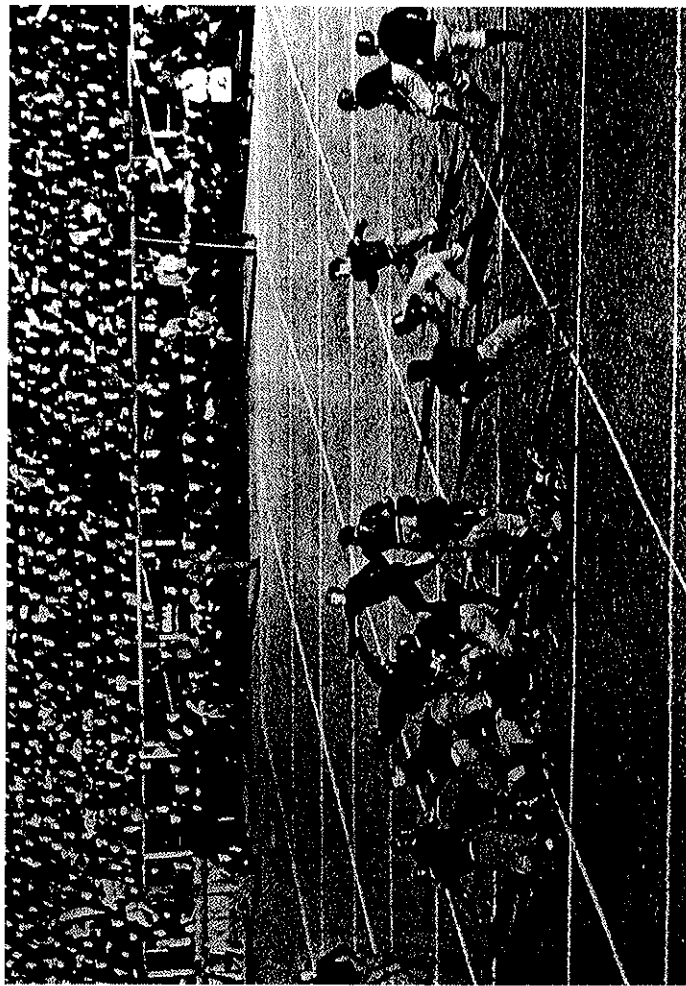


Figure 4.2 Harvard and Yale play on the "gridiron" marked by lime about 1910. For many years forward passes had to be thrown downfield within the narrow vertical lines. Note that only a few players have elected to wear helmets, use of which was widely derided at the times by the more "manly" players. © Oscar White/CORBIS.

To encourage the use of running plays around the end of the line in the open field, they lengthened the distance required to make a first down from five to ten yards. Most significantly, the committee introduced the forward pass as a means of reducing the emphasis upon mass momentum play at the line of scrimmage. Two years later, as but another means of encouraging the forward pass, the committee required that the ball be "tightly inflated" and changed its shape to make it more elongated so it could be thrown further and with greater accuracy. The committee also outlawed one of the major sources of excessive violence: the pushing or pulling of a ball carrier through the line by teammates. The ball carrier would now have to rely upon his teammates' skill as blockers.³¹

A new and exciting era was at hand. The emphasis of the game was now moving toward an emphasis upon speed, deception, timing, and well-designed, well-executed plays designed to make long yardage; the traditional line plunge, emphasis upon brute strength, and the tactics of the crude brawler were substantially diminished, although definitely not eliminated. Changes in the rules continued during the nineteen teens: the length of the field was established at 100 yards, with 10-yard

end zones added (to encourage passes into touchdown territory), the value of a touchdown was increased to six points, and the one-point extra-point kick after a touchdown was introduced. Protective head gear and shoulder padding were added to team uniforms, and officiating became more standardized with major conferences requiring training, rules testing, and evaluation of the performance of game officials.

A most conservative lot, the coaches approached the new rules gingerly. They were reluctant to abandon time-tested techniques, but innovative younger coaches forced their hand, making their strategies obsolete with new formations and strategies. The impact of the new rules was forcefully made clear in 1913, when the obscure University of Notre Dame from South Bend, Indiana, traveled east to stun the football world when it upset a powerful Army team 35-13 by using the forward pass combination of quarterback Gus Dorias and end Knute Rockne to befuddle the Cadets. These two athletes had spent the previous summer working at Cedar Point resort along Lake Erie and had perfected their pass-and-catch timing on the wide expanse of sandy beach. In the wake of this startling upset, coaches began to incorporate the forward pass into their offenses, and fans responded enthusiastically. The potentials of a completed forward pass or a long run around end for a long gain produced a new level of excitement at games: touchdowns could be made on any play from any place on the field. Stories of entire games spent with both teams slogging away in the middle of the line became a thing of the past.

Despite the rules changes, the game remained a game of controlled violence. But the crisis was over. When eight college players died in 1909, no concerted effort to abolish football emerged. Between 1910 and 1950, more than five hundred high school and college players died from injuries sustained playing football, but the existence of the game was not again seriously threatened. By the time the United States entered the Great War in 1917, football was firmly entrenched on the campuses of American colleges. A few Western schools that had abandoned football for rugby under the misconception that it was a less dangerous game (Stanford, California, Oregon, Nevada) reinstated football. Within little more than a quarter-century, an indigenous American game that had great spectator appeal had become an important part of the popular culture. The stage was thus set for the rapid growth of the game during the 1920s when big-time college football became the focus of enormous public interest and spectator enthusiasm.

5 Sports and the Emergence of Modern America 1865-1920

Organized sports became an increasingly important part of American life during the late nineteenth century. Urban living created a need for new forms of physical exercise, and spectator sports provided new forms of public entertainment. Employers found in sports a subtle means of controlling worker behavior, and politicians and social workers believed organized play a useful tool to help "Americanize" immigrant children. Religious leaders encouraged sports that provided wholesome outlets for unmarried urban males, and a powerful evangelical movement called Muscular Christianity accelerated the acceptance of sports. Spectator sports became an important part of the urban popular culture, and heavy coverage of baseball, boxing, and football by newspapers and magazines fanned that interest. Affluent urbanites were attracted to new private clubs that offered gymnasiums and swimming pools, as well as to country clubs built on the urban fringe that offered golf, tennis, swimming, and equestrian activities.

Between 1860 and 1920, the United States embraced the modern age. Driven by heavy immigration from Europe and Asia, the population increased from 31 million to 120 million. Major technological advances in manufacturing and transportation contributed to the spectacular growth of cities. By 1920, over 51 percent of the American people lived in urban areas. On the farm, major advances in mechanization as well as breakthroughs in crop and animal science meant that the average farmer produced 15 times the amount of food or fiber in 1920 than his predecessor did 50 years earlier. This agricultural revolution drove marginal farmers off the land and into the towns and cities in search of new forms of employment. Those who remained on the land found themselves inextricably caught up in a complex and ruthless economic system of distant banks, commodities exchanges, foreign competition, and national railroad systems. America had left

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