

**Victory for the Middle Class: College Football Controversy in
the East and at the University of Michigan, 1890-1909**

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For Mom, Dad, Brad, Sara, and sports fans everywhere

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INTRODUCTION

In 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt decided that an issue in American society carried so much importance to him personally that he felt compelled to intervene directly. The situation in front of Roosevelt did not involve any economic problems or out-of-control businesses, though the U.S. found itself in the midst of the Progressive Era; it did not involve any issues of the infringement of personal or civil rights, though immigrants had been flocking to America for the past half-century; and it did not concern anything related to foreign affairs, though the U.S. had engaged in a multitude of imperialistic overseas campaigns in the previous several decades.¹ Instead, President Roosevelt decided to tackle the rapidly coalescing crisis surrounding college football, the game that the outdoors-obsessed Roosevelt adored above all others. Roosevelt found himself in a complex situation. The President supported football for the manly qualities it encouraged, for the “more virile virtues” the game developed which “go to make up a race of statesmen and soldiers, of pioneers and explorers by land and sea, of bridge-builders and road-makers.”² Yet Roosevelt recognized that the sport had endured so much criticism over its brutal, violent nature, as well as the pervasive commercialism that came to define the game, that he knew football’s future as a large-scale cultural activity could be at risk. As such, Roosevelt took action to save college football by calling a White House summit

¹ For more on the general themes of the Progressive Era, see Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 2003) and Robert E. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

² Theodore Roosevelt, “Value of an Athletic Training,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 December 1893.

of representatives of the leading Eastern football schools, hoping he could implore his guests to reform the game and stave off football's demise.³

Roosevelt certainly possessed a prominent voice in the debate over college football given his stature, but others carried influence as well, including Caspar Whitney. One of the more well known enthusiasts of amateur sport and college football in particular, Whitney had glowingly written about football for years in a weekly column for *Harper's Weekly* magazine, the leading periodical for a national, educated middle-class audience, as well as in other similar publications.⁴ Whitney glorified football for its endearing physical qualities and the joys of competition, yet he, too, found himself in a complicated position. While Whitney loved the game of football, he had become disgusted at the overly violent tendencies of some players and teams, as well as the way that professional tendencies came to strongly mark the supposedly amateur sport. Because of these issues, Whitney came to criticize aspects of college football as much, if not more, than he praised the sport over the later years of the 1890s. The sports enthusiast wrote in 1894 that college football required "drastic treatment" to stop out-of-control violence and professionalism, and that he believed the "business air must be taken out of the game or the game struck out of amateur sport."⁵ Whitney's turn reflected how an air of controversy began to surround college football in the later years of the 19th century.

³ Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 192-194.

⁴ John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 114.

⁵ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 27 October 1894.

Despite the fears at the turn of the 20th century, football has not gone away. In fact, football is the most popular sport in the U.S. today.⁶ But the issues of violence and professionalism in the game that so stimulated figures such as Theodore Roosevelt and Caspar Whitney have not gone away either. In fact, parallel figures in the present day have spoken about the same concerns. President Obama is one of the bigger sports fans to hold the Oval Office since Roosevelt himself, and while Obama has not shown any indications that he will directly intervene in the sports world, as his predecessor did, Obama has made public comments on several occasions about problems in various sports. Most recently, Obama spoke about the violence in football, particularly the professional National Football League, in the wake of the rising concern over the long-term health effects of concussions and other injuries that players sustain. Obama maintained that he wants “to make sure we’re doing everything we can to make the sport safer,” and that “the game’s probably going to evolve a little bit” in order to accomplish that. The President said he felt special concern over youth football players, stretching all the way to the collegiate ranks, since they could not necessarily be expected to understand the risks of football to the same extent as professional players.⁷

College football in particular has increasingly come under fire in recent years from the sports media and government officials. This criticism has focused on the corruption and hypocrisy inherent in the sport’s model as run by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the governing body of college athletics (the forerunner of which

⁶ A poll conducted by the *Washington Post* in 2012 found that 35 percent of respondents named pro football as their favorite sport to watch, nearly three times more than the second sport of baseball. Don Walker, *Survey Says: Football is Nation’s Most Popular Sport*, 5 September 2012, <http://www.jsonline.com/blogs/sports/168595556.html>.

⁷ Valerie Richardson, *Obama: Football Needs Change*, 3 February 2013, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/feb/3/obama-football-needs-change-president-wary-of-conc/?page=all>.

came into existence in the months after Roosevelt's summit). Prominent writer and historian Taylor Branch helped put the issue on the national conscience in his expose in September 2011 for *The Atlantic* magazine. In his piece, Branch describes how certain college sports, notably football, have become intensely commercialized, big-business endeavors, in which the NCAA, corporations, and other entities earn millions of dollars off of the labor of college athletes, who are unpaid due to the philosophy of amateurism that has guided intercollegiate athletics since their founding in the United States in the years after the Civil War. Branch lambasted this state of college athletics, likening it to colonialism or a plantation system in the way that athletes generate unseemly amounts of revenue for outside adults and are barred from retaining any of it.⁸

The same issues that surrounded college football at the turn of the 20th century still resonate today, and examining the debates over violence and commercialism/professionalism from the earlier era illuminates and explains the origins of the current controversy. The growing criticism from alumni, faculty members, and other observers in the 1890s came to a head in the early 1900s, when college authorities at many football-playing schools came together to attempt radical reform that would significantly alter the structure and form of the game, or potentially even lead to college football's abolishment. How, then, did college football survive (and even thrive) until today? How did college football emerge from the conflicts of the early 20th century essentially unscathed, or at least undamaged enough that the sport would still have a cultural mandate to continue to expand?

⁸ Taylor Branch, *The Shame of College Sports*, 7 September 2011, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/10/the-shame-of-college-sports/308643/?single_page=true.

This project has produced a variety of findings that help answer these questions. College football became a popular activity because the society surrounding it—with white middle- and upper-class males holding most of the power—placed high value on violence and physicality. The sport developed as a highly competitive, highly commercialized endeavor because middle-class values of competition and ambition, derived from the rapidly developing large-scale capitalist U.S. economy that encouraged unchecked commercial growth, dominated national culture and university culture. A group of interests, consisting largely of older alumni and university presidents and faculty, began to criticize the character of the sport. Older alumni grew concerned because the nature of college football violated the older, outdated upper-class ideal of amateurism, while university representatives mostly felt that college football had assumed too significant of a place in university and student life. Ultimately, university interests, the group that possessed the power to potentially enact lasting reform, failed to do so because they could not alter the sport's inherent professionalized structure. This failure reflected the ascendancy of the capitalist economy and middle-class values over the older, more genteel values that informed the sport's early development, and the extent to which middle-class values had grown to dominate national culture. Additionally, opposition to football's character reveals the upper class's anxiety over its eroding power in the spheres of national culture and university education.

A variety of secondary literature and its connection to college football's growth help contextualize the above findings. By the early 1890s, the sport had become an institution for students, alumni, and outside observers at all of the leading schools in the East, the region where the game had initially developed in the first half of the century as a

casual, student-centric, somewhat chaotic activity after it arrived from England, the birthplace of all forms of football. After the Civil War, students and graduates devoted more time and interest to the game, developing it into an organized, codified activity. University teams competed against each other in contests that began to attract significant interest among the wider public and national press. Football grew in the other regions of the country, too, albeit at a slower pace (including at the University of Michigan), but by the late 1880s, football had become an important activity in the South, Midwest, and Far West as well.

Bederman has shown that in the second half of the 19th century, the white, male components of the middle and upper classes began to value brute physicality and outdoor activity. This development marked a shift in these groups' previous notions of masculinity that centered on gentility and reservedness. The working classes valued physical exertion and violence, meaning upper/middle-class men considered such values to be beneath them. However, due to several factors, chiefly the changing economy, the middle and upper classes began to co-opt lower-class brute values, making football a perfect game to play.⁹ Additionally, Bledstein's work points to how the U.S.'s development of a large-scale capitalist economy bolstered the size and influence of said middle class, whose competitive values and drive began to dominate the culture at large. This process unfolded in one way through the football teams at universities, as the middle class began to attend institutions of higher learning in greater and greater numbers after the Civil War, bringing their values with them.¹⁰ Thelin has built on this, showing that

⁹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

¹⁰ Jerome Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the*

universities themselves exhibited the same middle-class values during this era, engaging in rapid expansion, growth, and commercial behavior.¹¹

Reflecting the society around it, college football as practiced in the later years of the 19th century assumed an intensely violent character, and players and teams pursued wins with vigor and dedicated significant amounts of time and effort to this end. These characteristics went against the amateur origins of the sport that held that winning should not be a prime concern. Older alumni, members of the press, and university faculty/presidents began to criticize college football at this time. These factions all publically condemned college football, which led the alumni who controlled the teams and intercollegiate competitions to institute moderate reform at various times, always enough to stave off criticism momentarily without any significant lasting change—much in the same way the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the professional National Football League still operate today. Finally, university representatives attempted to take control of college football during the time after Roosevelt’s summit, resulting in the most momentous reform yet. But ultimately, the movement failed to change the character of the game, meaning the win-at-all-costs mentality and its associated practices still permeated college football even after the sport underwent its most significant crisis. The middle-class influences that had made college football a large-scale, violent, commercialized activity had won out, despite the reforms that football leaders instituted. The rest of this project explores this process in more detail.

The story of the development of football at the University of Michigan and the ensuing controversy over its practices follows a similar pattern to that of college football

Development of Higher Education in America (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 27, 42.

¹¹ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*.

in the East. A separate chapter covers this material, serving as an in-depth case study of football conflict at one university, producing an examination of how a particular collegiate football program with one of the most passionate fan bases in the country—Michigan Wolverines football—navigated early, intense growth and withstood attempts to curb the large-scale nature of the sport through reform. College football in the Midwest (referred to as the West in contemporary documents) developed more slowly than in the East, but by the middle of the 1890s, football had become a cultural activity with close to the same level of significance as the sport enjoyed in the East, especially among football heavyweights of the region such as Michigan.

The sport also possessed the same issues as it did in the East, though alumni, writers, and faculty criticized Western football more so for its professionalism than its violence. President James Angell of Michigan headed a movement in the early 1900s that sought to reform the professionalism of Western college football. After much debate, Michigan's football apparatus and faculty decided to leave the conference of reforming schools, choosing to continue pursuing professionalized college football over significant reform. A Michigan case study thus shows that the developments in the East, the sport's locus in this time, also similarly occurred elsewhere in the country; college football's extreme popularity and the failure to reform it went far beyond the boundaries of the East.

Scholars have produced only a small amount of literature that deals explicitly with college football, but this research has treated several different areas within the larger topic. The most significant work, Ronald A. Smith's *Sports and Freedom*, examines college football (and all college sport generally) through the prism of control—the extent

to which students, alumni, and university faculty controlled football teams and the sport generally. Smith argues that the shift in control from students to professional outsiders is responsible for the highly commercialized climate around large college sports today.¹² Oriard's research focuses on the role of newspapers in the growth of college football. In the late 1800s, newspapers simultaneously developed a sensationalistic character and an extensive readership. Oriard argues this style of newspaper coverage created a sensationalistic atmosphere around college football that largely explains the sport's rapid increase in popularity.¹³ As far as the two main points of analysis for this project, violence and commercialism, Watterson's research is the only significant work that has treated either.¹⁴ However, Watterson mostly examined violence, and did not do so in a critical manner but rather in more of a narrative form. Thus, there is a gap in the study of college football, as no major work has focused on the social meanings behind the controversy surrounding it in the early 1900s. The research gap surrounding Michigan football is even more significant. There is an extreme lack of intellectual material devoted to this period of the school's football history, let alone the larger social meanings behind it. The works that have covered this topic are generally non-scholarly and narrative-based. This project should bolster the literature for both college football in general and Michigan football.

This thesis focuses on the general period between 1890 and 1907, with the years before and after these markers also examined for contextual purposes. The paper begins by examining the development of college football into a widely popular cultural activity.

¹² Smith, *Sports and Freedom*.

¹³ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

¹⁴ John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

The initial chapter also discusses the cultural changes that marked this period of American history, as they set up the discussion of the second chapter, which focuses on the backlash that developed against college football in the 1890s. Both of these chapters will center on “national” discussion and issues, but because the Eastern colleges received by far the most “national” public treatment and interest, they will serve as the main subjects of analysis. The third chapter covers the development of football at Michigan and the local controversy that developed on the university’s campus in the wake of attempts by Western faculties to scale back college football in their region, culminating with Michigan’s decision to withdraw from the forerunner of the Big Ten conference, the body leading the reform efforts.

Ideally, this thesis provides the reader with a discussion of a subject rarely before treated in this manner and with this method. It should serve as a way to educate the reader about the nature of a sport that is undeniably significant in society today, exploring the origins of college football’s cultural relevance and what the developments during its initial period of controversy reveal about the stakeholders involved in the sport and the society that first grew to appreciate it. For University of Michigan students, faculty members, and fans, the case study in the third chapter should prove especially illuminating. Additionally, this project should challenge several generally accepted notions about this time period, which is generally associated with the Progressive Era and successful efforts at reform. One way this project accomplishes this is by displaying college football as an example of a reform movement with essentially no influential female participation, even though women participated in and led several reform efforts during this time. Additionally, while scholars have often pointed to the middle class as

constituting the driving force behind several reform campaigns of the early 20th century, the middle class and its values are essentially responsible for the proliferation of the features of college football that drew extensive complaints and criticism. Most significantly, college football serves as an example of one movement from this period in which reformers failed to make lasting change, which is especially noteworthy since the sport held so much cultural importance. In an era often defined by successful attempts to reform out-of-control, far-reaching interests, college football came out of this time period with an even greater impetus for continued growth. The fact that a phenomenon that affected so much of the country emerged from a reforming era with no significant change is striking; the controversy over college football thus stands as a case that potentially threatens the soundness of traditional conclusions that historians have drawn about this time period in American history.



Figure 1: A scrimmage of the Harvard football team in 1902

CHAPTER ONE: The Rise of College Football

At approximately 2:30 p.m. on September 25, 1890, Arthur Cumnock strode onto the grass of Jarvis Field on the grounds of Harvard College. The captain of the school's football team, Cumnock had recently asked for candidates from the student body to come try out for the Crimson "eleven." Faced with the turnout before him, Cumnock could not have been disappointed; upon calling for those interested to officially present themselves, close to 100 men "seemed to pour out" on to the field, more than had ever tried out before. The team did not lack for qualified participants, either—only about four open spots for the squad existed if every member from the 1889 Crimson team once again earned his way on for the 1890 season. But despite the low chances of actually making the team, those students trying out exuded enthusiasm. Cumnock and J.H. Hunt, a junior who had helped coach the freshman team the previous season, supervised as the would-be players went through tackling, blocking, and ball-carrying drills. Each man assuredly had a fair chance to "show (his) worth" to his potential captain and assistant, even if most would leave Jarvis Field disappointed that day.

The scene on Harvard's campus that day indicates that the game of football had attained lofty status in the hearts and minds of the undergraduates by the opening of the 1890s.¹ Indeed, this held true at all of the larger, more hallowed universities of the East by this time, as well as the smaller Eastern schools (students in the Far West, Midwest, and South also took greater interest in college football, rapidly beginning to catch up to their Eastern counterparts). But football had only reached this point after a period of marked growth. In the middle of the 19th century, when university men first began

¹ "Harvard Athletics Booming," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 26 September 1890, p. 5, issue 76, col. C.

practicing the activity that eventually morphed into organized football, the game possessed a much different character, in that it had little organization and few rules and competition did not extend past inter-class games. The growth of college football did not assume an overly complex character, but the sport developed into its eventual 1890s form only due to a variety of forces of wider American society over the second half of the century. These developments included shifting conceptions of masculinity, as the white male-dominated middle and upper classes began to favor strenuous activities; the rise of the large-scale capitalist economy, which promoted new ideals of aggressiveness, competition, and assertiveness in order for men to succeed, and also led to an increase in the size and influence of the middle class; and the escalating influence of middle class culture and values in universities and wider American society. This chapter traces the rise of college football to the moment just before a backlash emerged against the sport in the 1890s and examines how social contexts guided the sport's development.

Football originated in Britain, where it developed most prominently in the elite public schools for upper-class young boys. The philosophy of amateurism, a creation of the English gentry from the previous several centuries, guided the sport's development. Essentially, amateurs believed that sport should be practiced only for its own sake, not for any monetary gain, and not with any serious devotion.² Amateurism also informed football as it began to take hold in America after the game made its way across the Atlantic to the upper-class institutions of the eastern U.S., most notably Harvard College and Yale College. The inception of intercollegiate competition, beginning with a match between Princeton and Rutgers in 1869, challenged the amateur idea that students would play football casually and without an emphasis on winning. As alumni and

² Bliss Perry, *The Amateur Spirit* (New York: Houghton and Mifflin Company, 1904).

undergraduates instituted rule changes and football in the U.S. thus became distinguished from its British cousin, the importance behind the games increased and the stakes surrounding college football grew ever higher over the next two decades.

Football represented the ideal game for young upper- and middle-class white men (and older men of these classes to watch and take interest in) because it perfectly encapsulated the values of later 19th century masculinity, helping to explain the sport's rapidly growing popularity during this time. Moving away from Victorian ideals of moderation and physical reservedness, the typical man of the later 19th century believed in more heightened aggressiveness and greater physical activity. According to Bederman, this marked a response to something approaching a "crisis of masculinity." The end of the Civil War and the close of the frontier meant men had no means of physically challenging themselves in their daily lives. Lower-class workers also rapidly invaded and thus threatened the traditional economic sphere of these men as the industrial, capitalist economy boomed. In response, middle- and upper-class men co-opted the masculine values of the working classes, embracing roughness and physicality.³ Theodore Roosevelt served as the perfect symbol for these changing values. The eventual president became perhaps the most vocal and visible supporter of the "strenuous life," and it thus seems natural that Roosevelt heavily supported college football, especially his alma mater, Harvard.

The importance of white, middle-class masculine values went along with the general rise of that class's influence in American society, especially regarding the class's culture of aspiration. As the economy became more business-capitalist, the middle class grew in size over the course of the 19th century, and its influence correspondingly

³ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

magnified. This meant that general culture began to favor the class's preferred activities, such as college football. Thelin shows that the middle class also looked to the flourishing university movement to aid it in its dreams of bettering itself. An increasing number of young men qualified for and sought a university education over the second half of the 19th century. The number of universities correspondingly grew rapidly in this period, as did the size, scope, and educational capabilities of the schools. The white middle class sent more and more young men to universities, and these students brought with them their ideals of masculinity and culture. Those students at the traditionally upper-class Ivy League schools found themselves joined by more middle-class peers and also began espousing the middle class's competitiveness and intense drive.⁴

College football developed and became a socially popular, influential cultural activity in the midst, and because of, all the change within the United States. The remainder of this chapter explores this in greater detail, beginning with a rough sketch of the actual development of the sport itself and culminating with its crystallization as a subject of mass interest. Newspapers from the three leading Eastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston help relate the story of football's rise most significantly, as does *Harper's Weekly* magazine, specifically the weekly column about amateur sport written by Caspar Whitney. The combination of these sources helps explain the rise of college football in the second half of the 19th century into a widely popular, violent activity with anti-amateur tendencies.

Origins of Football

The origins of the activity that became football in the United States can be found most explicitly in Great Britain, dating back several centuries (though one later observer

⁴ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*.

connected the game all the way back to biblical times, based on descriptions of games in the Old Testament).⁵ In 1314, King Edward II of England made an edict that banned the playing of “foot ball,” which serves as the probable earliest record of a football-like game. The sport took a form in its earliest days in the Middle Ages foreign to its eventual modern manifestation. The game involved entire towns tussling violently over a large leather ball. A town’s sexton would drop the ball in the middle of the market square, at which time the entire population of the town, or close to it, commenced a free-for-all brawl of sorts with the end goal being for one side to carry the ball to the opposite edge of the town, a move that ended the game. The final step involved clearing out the dead and wounded from the square or any other place that the game traveled to as the participants moved in a massive swarm about the town.⁶ The style of this forerunner of college football foreshadowed the violence that denoted the sport once it became a codified activity in the U.S.

Despite King Edward’s edict, the sport did make its way into modernity by the late 18th century, thanks mostly to the British secondary school system. Known as “public schools” (though they would be considered “private” academies in American vernacular), these institutions served as the prime training grounds for upper-class British youth. Young boys went to the schools at an early age for educational and social training that prepared them for leadership roles in the Empire appropriate for their lofty social stature. Physical education represented a key component of this, and football served as the major activity for the boys. The basic structure of the game remained the same at each school. In what more resembled what is known today in the U.S. as soccer, two teams of students

⁵ Parke H. Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911), 3-4.

⁶ “The Game of Football,” *The North American* (Philadelphia), 6 November 1890, p. 5, col. B.

attempted to kick a ball down the field and score in the other team's goal. Each school, though, developed its own twists on the sport, causing small changes in the way teams played depending on the location. The most significant variation came in 1823 at Rugby School, when a boy named William Ward Ellis broke with all conceptions of the sport by picking up the leather ball and running with it.⁷ This spawned the game of rugby, from which American football evolved.

The class stature of the boys at the public schools, the ones responsible for football's early proliferation, is a critical point. The sport grew in Britain through the agency of the upper class, also called the "leisure class." This distinction refers to the nature of the landed aristocracy, in that because its members did not have to actually labor for a living, they could pursue leisure activities as they liked. The gentry saw it beneath them to devote significant physical energy towards improving at one skill or game, since such behavior marked a necessity of the lower classes; workers had to put all their time and effort into their area of vocation in order to earn a living, so they could theoretically only pursue sport if they were being paid to do so (which eventually became the case). In this way, sport could only be respectable if practiced for leisure and not for money. This meant respectable sport belonged firmly to, and could only be practiced by, the upper class. This philosophy did not preclude those participating in games from trying to win their contests; only when individuals put winning above all else, and/or dedicated significant time to training to win, would amateur principles be violated, since a supposed professional athlete—a looked-down-on member of the lower class—based his livelihood

⁷ Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game*, 23-26.

on winning and thus providing a return on the investment which he represented.⁸ The concept of amateurism came from this thinking. The notion of practicing sport solely for sport's sake and not for money, and latter being considered "low-class", originated most directly from the British gentry and aristocracy. These men developed the concept of amateurism because it fit their societal status and levels of wealth. Since amateurism "flourishes" in places with large leisure classes—and thus places with significant class division—it is natural that Britain had parties that associated so closely with amateur ideals.⁹ And since football grew most markedly at schools for upper class boys, young men spread the sport under the influence of amateurism. Football's inherent association with upper class values and amateurism later emerged as a key issue in the U.S., where tensions developed as more and more parties with no strong bias towards these ideals began to practice the sport.

Even though scholars generally accept that football emerged in the United States as a result of inspiration from the British, research has not produced a specific instance or date when the game officially migrated to America. It is known, though, that football initially appeared at the schools in the East that would later become known as the Ivy League. As with Britain, then, football found itself most entrenched at the institutions that harbored the U.S.'s social elite, notably Harvard and Yale (these colleges being elite simply because they represented essentially the only places of higher learning in the still-developing U.S). These colleges' early football prominence also appeared to ensure that amateurism would guide American football. The form of football that college men played in the early years of the 19th century resembled Middle Age British football: mass

⁸ Allen L. Sack and Ellen J. Staurowski, *College Athletes for Hire: The Evolution and Legacy of the NCAA's Amateur Myth* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 12-14.

⁹ Perry, *The Amateur Spirit*, 4,11.

amounts of players, few rules, and extreme violence.¹⁰ The sport became utilized mostly as a vehicle for hazing the freshmen class. Through the 1830s at Harvard and several other colleges, the sophomores, and occasionally the juniors and seniors, engaged the freshmen in a brutal game of football with the main purpose being to inflict violence. Even though the sport gradually developed more order in this period, the soccer-like game allowed the upperclassmen to kick and strike the new class of campus men at will.¹¹

The freshman-sophomore hazing game reached Yale (which eventually became, along with Harvard, one of the behemoths of college football before the turn of the next century) in 1840. In the 1850s, the students who played football began organizing the sport more, gradually giving it more order even though the activity still resembled soccer more than any other game. This process of growth culminated in 1869 with what is recognized as the first intercollegiate football game ever played, as Rutgers College met the College of New Jersey (which later changed its name to Princeton). Three years later, the sport of football became an officially organized and codified activity at each school of the powerful triumvirate of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.¹² Two years later, in 1874, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, and Rutgers organized the Intercollegiate Football Association, marking further consolidation of the sport.¹³ The IFA served as the prime rule-making body for college football for the next 31 years, essentially wielding all power in the sport (even though Harvard never permanently joined, the Crimson generally played by the IFA's rules and competed against the league's members). The participating

¹⁰ Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game*, 33.

¹¹ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 20-22.

¹² Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game*, 37-56.

¹³ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 12 May 1894.

schools still had differing rules at this point, however. Some teams played by rugby rules, some by traditional soccer rules, and some with a hybrid of the two systems. A game between Harvard and McGill University of Canada in 1874, in which the teams played under McGill's favored rugby rules, proved key; the Harvard players liked the rules so much that they fully adopted a rugby style of play.¹⁴ The IFA member schools followed suit in 1876.¹⁵ The schools that constituted the backbone of college football now had a uniform style of play, creating the impetus for substantial intercollegiate competition.

Students and, increasingly, alumni who kept their interest in the sport developed greater changes and innovations to football in the later 1870s and 1880s. These years thus saw the shaping of football into the activity that Americans in the 1890s would be familiar with. Between 1880 and 1884, schools with codified teams adopted a series of new rules, marking perhaps the most important development yet for football. The most significant changes included lowering the number of players on the field to 11, instituting a line of scrimmage, forbidding "slugging" (hitting a player outside the bounds of the game), and creating a new scoring system that awarded points for touchdowns for the first time.¹⁶ The transformation had essentially been completed; over the course of the 19th century, American football progressed from a game characterized by mass chaos and violence, to a more codified endeavor resembling soccer and rugby, to finally the sport called "football" known for its distinct nature compared to other football-derived sports around the world.

¹⁴ Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game*, 62-65.

¹⁵ "The Game of Football, Then and Now," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 9 November 1894, p. 4, issue 113, col. B.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

College football, despite the patent expansion it had already enjoyed, still possessed more growth potential at this time. An observer in 1892, when football still looked very little like it does in the present day, remarked that in 1877, “football was a barbarous and unscientific contest between boots and shins.”¹⁷ In one illustration of this, the Thanksgiving Day game—the championship of the IFA, first played in 1877—did not grow into the New York-based landmark social event that it eventually became until the mid-1880s.¹⁸ In another example, players still wore only flannel suits as uniforms, a far cry from the padded clothes and other safety equipment players adorned by the 1890s.¹⁹ Still, the striking growth and shifting form of the game after the Civil War seemed to indicate that football had a staying presence. In the words of Davis, by the early 1880s, football had become a “well-established college game.”²⁰

Changing Masculinity

College football’s ascended as a popular activity during a time in which masculine ideals shifted. The sport perfectly captured the essence of what white middle- and upper-class American men valued after the Civil War. Earlier in the century, football or any other such strenuous physical activity would have been a foreign concept to men of decent social standing. Bederman explains this by pointing to the economy. After the founding of the U.S. and through the first part of the 19th century, the country operated under a small-scale market economic system. The nature of this economy meant that men found success with consistent, sound work. Risks and other wildly ambitious behavior proved dangerous in the market economy, seeing that as long as one continued to produce

¹⁷ “These Sportful Days,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 July 1892.

¹⁸ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 79.

¹⁹ “The Game of Football, Then and Now.”

²⁰ Davis, *Football: The American Intercollegiate Game*, 78.

quality products, his economic viability and the self-sufficiency of his family unit seemed a safe prospect. Thus, men of middle-to-high social standing believed that the extent to which a man acted with “high-minded self restraint” revealed the degree of his manliness.²¹ Proper masculinity meant for men to always be reserved and in control of their passions. Prevailing belief categorized women as highly emotional, to the point of being dangerous, even, leaving men to balance the marriage with their restrained dispositions and dignified demeanors.²²

The dominant conception of masculinity changed as the economy itself changed over the course of the 19th century. Small-scale capitalism faded after the conclusion of the Civil War and large-scale, corporation-driven, boom-and-bust capitalism replaced it. Men found that the old favored values of gentility and self-restraint proved useless in the new economic environment, which stressed competition, assertiveness, and action. Bederman also argues that the growing numbers and visibility of a developing working class, which consisted heavily of poor immigrants during one of the largest immigration periods in U.S. history, challenged white middle- and upper-class men. The more “respectable” men responded by embracing physical activity and outdoor exercise in an attempt to “revitalize” their manhood, and by co-opting the rougher, more brutish values of the working class for themselves. The new economic system brought a more rigidly defined conception of labor time, bringing greater opportunities for leisure and thus spaces for middle- and upper-class men to explore their new values.²³ *Harper’s Weekly*

²¹ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 12.

²² Michael C.C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 24-25.

²³ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 11-17.

noticed an “athletic revival” as early as 1860 and the physical exercise craze continued to grow even after.²⁴

By the later years of the 19th century, physical exercise held a prominent place in the culture of men of decent or greater wealth, and many espoused the value of exercise and sport, the latter of which encapsulated the importance that new manly culture placed on both competitiveness and physical well being. A writer in *Outing* magazine dedicated an entire article to the importance of sport for the country, arguing that such physical activity benefitted both one’s health and one’s mental well-being, since sport offered a “diversion” from the stresses of life. He also spoke indirectly of the economic changes affecting the culture, observing “as the necessity for physical exertion lessens among us, the artificial incentives to physical exercise increase, and make ever more and more disciples.”²⁵ Caspar Whitney wholeheartedly agreed. The author of a weekly column on amateur sport for *Harper’s Weekly*, the leading middle-class publication of the later 19th century, Whitney supported sport, especially amateur sport, as strongly or perhaps more strongly than any other middle/upper-class cultural personality. Revealing his extreme faith in amateur sport, Whitney once wrote that the rise in interest in amateur sport on the part of the upper classes “is an almost daily recognition of its actual necessity to a healthful and peaceful existence.”²⁶ Echoing these sentiments, a reporter for *The Sun* newspaper in New York City described physical exercise as “flourishing” in 1889, and said emphatically “the programs offered ought to satisfy even the most fastidious lover of

²⁴ In Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport, and American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 184.

²⁵ Price Collier, “Sport’s Place in the Nation’s Well-Being,” *Outing*, April-September 1898, vol. 32.

²⁶ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 26 December 1891.

outdoor exercise.”²⁷ Bederman’s assertion that middle-class men appeared “unusually obsessed with manhood” towards the end of the 19th century appears a valid one, given the preponderance of interest in activities that reinforced said manhood.²⁸

No man better represented the new ideals of masculinity than Theodore Roosevelt. Though he did not become president until right after the turn of the century, Roosevelt assumed a prominent place in public life and culture during the decade or so before due to several other political positions he held and his famous service in the Spanish-American War. Roosevelt thus served as one of the most well known boosters of the “strenuous life,” of the necessity of strong physical exertion for a healthy, masculine, virile existence. Roosevelt effectively symbolized the rugged outdoorsman despite his upper-class upbringing. He received plenty of outdoors time as a sickly boy, since his father emphasized the benefits of being active. At one point in adulthood, Roosevelt moved west and lived on a ranch, which, according to a magazine profile-writer, gave the New York native “a constitution, rugged and without a blemish, and a physique that is superb.”²⁹ In summing up Roosevelt’s nature, the biographer described the man thusly in *McClure’s Magazine*:

Not an athlete but thoroughly athletic. A naturalist before he was a hunter. To him the intimate association with birds, trees, and plants of the forest is as much the joy of hunting as the clever stalking of game and the chance of a difficult shot. A perfectly natural man, whose physique, through persistent effort, has been remarkably developed, enabling him to play to the limit of human endurance the arduous game of life.³⁰

²⁷ *The Sun* (New York), 28 November 1889, p. 5, col. F.

²⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 11.

²⁹ Henry Beach Needham, “Theodore Roosevelt—An Outdoor Man,” *McClure’s Magazine*, January 1906, p. 249, vol. 26, No. 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

Roosevelt derived his ideals of manhood from the closing of the frontier in the period after the Civil War. That left no arena for men to actively engage in rough, virile, masculine-confirming behaviors, such as clearing the frontier in the West and actually engaging in battle. Roosevelt and men of similar thinking worried about what would happen to American manhood with no outlet for physical expression, fearing complacency, weakness, and degradation of men's bodies. Thus, men had to respond by actively seeking to assert their manhood through vigorous outdoor activities. This philosophy, Bederman argues, even informed Roosevelt's foreign policy views as president. He sought to increase the U.S.'s overseas empire in order to stimulate the nation's manly growth by asserting the country's power.³¹ On a smaller, peacetime scale, however, demanding physical exercise and sport satisfied masculine needs in the eyes of Roosevelt and those of similar thinking.

Football, with its inherent roughness, served as the defining game that emerged out of this period. Roosevelt supported the sport staunchly, and interestingly his support carried a class dimension. He once guest-wrote a column in *Harper's Weekly* to defend the game against its attackers when the initial movement against football emerged, arguing that football and other similar sports carried special importance for members of the middle and upper classes since they received no physical stimulation in their non-blue-collar jobs. Beyond the class dynamic, Roosevelt placed his faith in the way that the sport promoted "the more virile virtues" that mostly went unattended in the "peaceful and commercial" United States.³² Reverend Elisha Andrews, then the president of Brown University, joined Roosevelt as a high-profile proponent of football for the way the sport

³¹ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 171-185.

³² Theodore Roosevelt, "Value of an Athletic Training," *Harper's Weekly*, 23 December 1893.

promoted the idealized masculinity. Andrews praised the “danger” of football, since it “developed manhood, quick and cool judgment (better) than any other game I know.”³³ Whitney went so far as to compare one great game between Princeton and Yale to a battle for survival in the mountains and a fierce boxing match.³⁴ These descriptions evoke the way the new masculinity represented a cooption of working class values, since the middle and upper classes associated boxing with the lower classes, and also reveal the masculinity’s association with the type of rugged outdoorsman activities espoused most famously by Roosevelt.

The popularity of rugged masculinity and, by extension, football, even changed certain cultural symbols, at least according to one prominent football man. At a banquet for the famous Yale football booster Walter Camp, a compatriot announced that the stereotype of the idiot, brawny athlete and the frail, “coughing” intellectual had been turned on its head. Not only had the development of athletic ability lost its stigma, but it had reached the point of being encouraged and promoted, reflecting the values of the new masculinity.³⁵ These ideals held a strong position in the culture, too; commenting on the several deaths resulting from a game of cricket—hardly a dangerous sport compared to football—a newspaper reporter lamented the news, but resigned himself to any inherent danger, acknowledging that it was “our way” to play “strenuous” games. The reporter believed that better education of players would be necessary to help avoid such tragedies, but did not entertain the idea of simply not engaging in dangerous physical activities.³⁶

This position signifies the firm establishment of physical culture and the game of

³³ “Football Praised,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 6 October 1894, issue 84, col. E.

³⁴ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 5 December 1891.

³⁵ “Depew on Athletics,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 27 February 1892, issue 50, col. D.

³⁶ “Dangers of Play,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 19 September 1890, p. 8, issue 70, col. F.

football, particularly, among the middle and upper classes by the later years of the 19th century. The new masculinity that had emerged by this time provided the perfect environment to foster the growth of the rough, dangerous, manly sport of football. The thought that such manly features could eventually cause a backlash against the sport did not enter the minds of football's supporters in this early period.

Education and Class

College football developed at a time when the culture surrounding higher education saw marked shifts, in much the same way that masculinity changed in the same period. Before the 19th century, colleges did not very much resemble universities today. In colonial times, colleges served as rigid training grounds for upper-class young men. The curriculum concentrated on classical languages and ancient authors, with no real training for specialized fields. Teachers mostly utilized endless recitations and rote memorization. These practices reflected the ideals that guided colleges at this time. The colonial elite sent their sons there to develop into Christian gentlemen, according to Thelin.³⁷ Student life mirrored this rigidity. Faculty strictly oversaw students' lives, leaving pupils essentially no freedom outside of the classroom. In the 19th century, students began to rebel against this unforgiving educational style by creating their own "extracurricular" activities. Examples of these included literacy societies, debate clubs, fraternities, and athletics, the last of which assumed greater primacy over the course of the century as physical activity in general rose to prominence in the culture.³⁸

By the later years of the century, it seemed that the extracurricular activity of football had surpassed even the actual curriculum in terms of societal importance. One

³⁷ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 18-24.

³⁸ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 15-16.

newspaper observer, noticing how much time football players devoted to their sport, compared the game to an elective class (also a new institution by this time as part of universities' move to liberalize education), and praised such a development since it weeded out studies of "less important" subjects.³⁹ Football became so prominent that the entire college took interest in the sport. College authorities had no choice but to allow students to play the sport even though they had spent time earlier in the century trying to stamp out it and other extracurriculars.⁴⁰ Undergraduates, at the least, certainly welcomed the rise of football. With the development of a more modern educational style in stark contrast to the earlier duller system, Veysey argues that students began to see college as a time to have fun and create friendships, while not caring too much about grades and yet expecting to eventually receive a diploma that that would grant them prestige for the rest of their lives.⁴¹

The shifting demographics of higher education also explains the shift in students' viewpoint. The middle class increasingly penetrated schools' undergraduate populations as the 19th century progressed, to the point that by 1900, universities had student bodies "predominantly" composed of the middle class. Thus, the old upper-class notions of gentlemanly education faded, replaced by the philosophy described above that fit the more carefree middle class.⁴² This held true even at the traditional powers of American higher education—Harvard, Yale, and other old Eastern institutions. In the 19th century, these schools became much less exclusionary and tuition remained relatively low. The

³⁹ "The Football Elective," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 15 June 1891, p. 4, issue 142, col. C.

⁴⁰ "The Status of Athletics in American Colleges," *The Boston Investigator*, 16 July 1890, p. 5, issue 15, col. A.

⁴¹ Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 269-270.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 272.

middle class entered places like Harvard and Yale more than ever before; these schools gradually changed from being places that developed “Christian gentlemen” to places that developed “gentlemen scholars” for the upper and middle classes.⁴³ Importantly, though these colleges became less exclusionary in terms of class, prominent Eastern institutions remained almost exclusively white and male, as did, of course, their football teams.

The infusion of middle-class young men attendance-wise consequently resulted in an infusion of middle-class values into colleges and universities. The economic changes outlined above coincided with parallel changes associated with the middle class in the 19th century, and the very coalescence and ascendance of the middle class represents the most important development. The class grew as a result of the aforementioned transition to large-scale capitalism, which brought with it greater wealth for many involved in business, as well as the creation of new positions.⁴⁴ The values of those in the growing middle class emerged from the economic landscape, according to Bledstein. In an economy based on competition and the drive to accrue more wealth and move up the economic ladder, the middle class possessed a “vertical vision”; men were intensely competitive and believed in “perseverance, independence, commitment, and self-glory,” and at all times strived for ever greater economic position.⁴⁵ This belief in ascendancy permeated the culture of the U.S. at large, and middle-class men brought such ideals with them as they arrived at universities in increasing numbers throughout the 19th century. Competitiveness thus also began to infuse intercollegiate football, and later become a chief feature that drew complaints against the sport, along with the game’s violence.

⁴³ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 69, 92.

⁴⁴ Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27, 42.

The fact that these competitive notions began to dominate American culture resulted in an atmosphere very unfriendly to the philosophy of amateurism, which had guided football's development in Britain and the sport's early growth in the U.S. Though the progenitors of American football generally came from the same social backgrounds and shared the same beliefs as the leisure class in Britain, in truth, the conditions for amateur growth of football in the U.S. could never have been considered ideal. For one, the U.S. did not possess the same type of dramatic class discrepancy as Great Britain. An upper class did exist in the United States, but many more Americans fell in between the extremes, shown in the rise of the middle class. Since amateurism "flourishes" in places with a strong leisure class, it could not flourish as well in the U.S. as in Britain. Also, Americans simply could not see sports as anything but a competitive activity. As Rudolph described it, "Americans lacked a psychology for failure," and this only became truer as middle-class values increased in influence.⁴⁶ These ideas are symbolized by the views of an American amateurist from the period, Bliss Perry, who admitted that one needed to live with the qualities of both amateurs and non-amateurs in order to be useful.⁴⁷ The fact that one of pure amateurism's defenders allowed room for flexibility shows the tenuous ground that amateur belief held in the U.S.

In light of the problematic landscape amateurism faced, even though college football began as a true amateur activity, it seems predictable that this would have changed. It is perhaps impossible to pinpoint at what exact moment or date the sport took on a more professional character, but the game's amateur qualities clearly began to be displaced not long after intercollegiate competition began. The very idea of organized,

⁴⁶ Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1962), 381.

⁴⁷ Perry, *The Amateur Spirit*, 33.

strictly monitored intercollegiate competition, with a league of competing schools and a specific set of rules, indicated something more serious than true amateurism. Caspar Whitney's definition of the concept is illustrative, since the author supported pure amateurism so strongly. He saw a real amateur as "one who pursues sport for sport's sake, and not for remuneration, directly or indirectly."⁴⁸ Merely to assign serious importance to college football in any way violates this definition, since to do so signified that the sport had moved beyond a casual activity, the outcome of which is meant to be irrelevant. Using this logic, Whitney himself fed into the process that gave college football professional tendencies. Whitney often wrote at length about various teams, analyzing their strengths and weaknesses and judging their comparative worth, and wrote about determining the best team in the country.⁴⁹ The writer also became one of the first individuals to select an All-American team, composed of the best player in the country at each position.⁵⁰ These behaviors served as examples of non-amateur behavior.

Whitney can still be categorized as one of the purest amateurs of the period given his views, and the abuses that he crusaded against in the 1890s represented a much worse violation of the amateur spirit than his job did. Still, Whitney's actions help prove that college football quickly assumed a character that could not be labeled truly amateur. By the later 1880s, the sport had reached the point where a high expectation of skill, training,

⁴⁸ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 4 July 1896.

⁴⁹ One example is his "Amateur Sport" column in *Harper's Weekly* on 14 November 1891, when Whitney analyzed the teams of Harvard and Yale in extensive detail, commenting on every single player. Research of his columns between 1890 and 1898 yielded countless examples of similar writing. Research of major Boston, New York, and Philadelphia newspapers in roughly the same period also produced much similar results.

⁵⁰ In "Amateur Sport" in *Harper's Weekly* from 12 December 1891, Whitney lists his All-American team for the 1891 season, as one example.

and development surrounded those students that played.⁵¹ The game had moved far past a casual activity undertaken for less-than-serious purposes. Players, students, and the wider public took intense interest in college football, and the culture around the game demanded that its participants give their all for the sake of winning. One observer labeled undergraduates the “nearest thing American civilization (had) yet evolved to a leisure class,” since they had the time to engage in play.⁵² But the middle-class values that arose to dominate behavior in the U.S. ensured that American college football did not much resemble the sport of the British leisure class that birthed football. Thus, by the time of the final decade of the 19th century, the sport possessed a much different form than that did in the U.S. initially.

State of the Game

December 2, 1889, proved one of the most joyous days ever on the grounds of the College of New Jersey. A wild scene overtook campus as the college community celebrated its big win over Yale in the annual Thanksgiving Day football game, played several days before. One observer said that the celebration resembled “those of large and enthusiastic political demonstrations.” Over six hours, several men gathered up wood, barrels, and boxes with tar and oil into a large pile and finally set it alight; a brass band played lively tunes; banners of orange and black, the school colors, stretched out over the windows of residences and storefronts. In the evening, several faculty members and team members made congratulatory speeches in honor of the team’s first win over Yale in four years.⁵³ Those speaking often made fun of the “Dual League” of Harvard and Yale, both of which Princeton now ruled over in the domain of college football. Most remarkably,

⁵¹ “The Status of Athletics in American Colleges.”

⁵² “The College Boy Begins Again,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 22 October 1892.

⁵³ “All Eagerly Expectant,” *New York Tribune*, 30 November 1893, p. 5, col. B.

this was just the beginning. In the midst of the festivities, those present began making plans for the *official* championship celebration on a later date.⁵⁴

The extreme excitement at Princeton that day points to how college football developed as a sport and as a cultural activity of mass interest from its earliest appearance in the U.S. to the late 1880s. The game looked much different than the unorganized, informal activity of the mid-19th century. By the early 1890s, football had become vital to university communities in the East, both for those on campus and for alumni who kept a watchful eye on their teams from afar. In a country growing obsessed with both universities in general and athletics, football assumed the role of “most prominent of the college sports,” according to an anonymous *Harper’s Weekly* writer.⁵⁵ Students and fans packed their campus playing fields to see their teams play and desperately wanted them to defeat their schools’ hated rivals.⁵⁶ When supporters attended games, they saw a brutal sport. Though much developed from the outright violent activity it began as, football still possessed significant inherent danger. Plays consisted of ball-carriers running right at the line of scrimmage, which became a zone of intense struggle. On top of the character of the game, slugging occurred semi-frequently, though not as regularly as it did towards the later 1890s.⁵⁷ This style of play fell in line with the masculine values of the middle upper classes, however, and at least for the time being, no significant group detested football’s violence, thus aiding the sport’s popularity.

⁵⁴ “Joy in Princeton,” *The Sun* (New York), 3 December 1889, p. 5, col. C.

⁵⁵ “Varsity Veteran,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 12 November 1892.

⁵⁶ Accounts found in *Harper’s Weekly* and New York, Boston, and Philadelphia newspapers routinely reported attendance figures between 20,000-40,000, and even above, for the biggest games every season and the Thanksgiving game in New York by the time of the late 1880s/early 1890s.

⁵⁷ “Football or Prize-Fight,” *The Evening World* (New York), 19 November 1889, p. 3.

Most observers found favor in the physical play and supported the game unabashedly, especially the teams of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. They served as the most prominent teams and thus received more attention nationally than any other, due simply to the fact that they were the “largest and oldest” football schools and at this time had the best teams in the country every year in the view of observers like Whitney.⁵⁸ These schools’ teams especially became subjects of intense interest and scrutiny, as did the major personalities associated with them. In an example that illustrates the aforementioned schools’ prominent place in college football, as well as the popularity of the sport in general, Walter Camp, the Yale football luminary and the central figure on the IFA rules committee, wrote a book about football in 1891 that became a best seller.⁵⁹ Camp even felt the need to update his work with new information due to the game’s growth over the next two years. Entitled *American Football*, the volume served as a mini-encyclopedia on college football up to that point in the sport’s development.⁶⁰ Camp outlined how the game grew out of British rugby football and also explained the rule changes, most notably the line of scrimmage, that distinguished American football from the other forms of the sport.

Camp devoted chapters to each position in football, explaining the role and individual responsibilities for each, and also included sections about signals, training, team play, and information for spectators. The chapter for spectators is especially important, since it indicated that football had become a matter of significant interest for those who did not play the game. In fact, Camp seemed to think that his book would draw interest from even those individuals who possessed essentially no knowledge of the

⁵⁸ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 30 January 1892.

⁵⁹ Advertisement in *Harper’s Weekly*, 21 November 1891.

⁶⁰ Walter Camp, *American Football* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

game; the spectator chapter focused on the most basic principles of football, including an explanation of how teams scored and a description of the length of games. Camp's decision to include such information points to his belief that college football's popularity had been increasing greatly, and that he expected this trend to continue. He even hoped his book would help this process of growth; in the preface, Camp wrote, "Should any of the suggestions herein contained conduce to the further popularity of the game, the object of the writer will be attained." The fact an audience existed for such a book as Camp's helps explain the scope of college football's popularity by the early 1890s, especially for the leading football schools and the personalities associated with them. But supporters did not limit their passion to the biggest-name schools of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton; a group of Cornell students went so far as to burn Caspar Whitney in effigy, simply because they did not like his criticisms of their school's team.⁶¹ This incident, too, helps show that college football had gained a large, avid fan base by the early 1890s.

Along with this significant interest in college football came the expectation of excellence, both on the part of fans and students and the players and teams themselves. Whitney alluded to this development in his analysis of Harvard's team in 1891, casually commenting that though some players lacked experience, they were sure to be good eventually with time and more opportunities to play.⁶² This comment reveals the extent to which competitive ideals became ingrained within college football. If men played, they necessarily had to dedicate significant time and effort towards their individual games and the team, since the culture around football demanded success. The typical day for a college player at one of the major football universities, which Whitney once outlined,

⁶¹ "Personal," *Harper's Weekly*, 5 December 1891.

⁶² Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 28 November 1891.

reinforce this notion. Though the season did not begin in earnest until the games against fellow large schools in mid-November, players began training and practicing as soon as they stepped on campus for the beginning of fall term. On a daily basis, they completed individual practice by themselves at noon before engaging in a full team practice at 3:00. Each night, players met as a team at the training table, where they ate a meal and received medical treatment if necessary.⁶³

To help develop skill to a greater extent, teams began utilizing coaching in 1886, at first by having the previous year's captain stay on after graduation to coach and then by using alumni from several years prior.⁶⁴ Rather quickly, it became expected that the best teams receive "expert" coaching, in the words of Whitney.⁶⁵ Because, too, the management of team affairs became such an involved process, undergraduates very willingly allowed alumni to take over control in that arena as well. According to Rudolph, alumni had gained "dominance" in university athletics by the 1890s.⁶⁶ In appealing to alumni of one school to "use all their influence" to prevent a certain individual being named captain in 1892, Whitney indirectly confirmed the primacy of alumni in college football by this time, a development which added to the potential for teams' success.⁶⁷ This proved a key development, since university faculty and presidents later found it difficult to wrest control of college football from the alumni.

Perhaps no development symbolized the rise of football more than the growth and transformation of the Thanksgiving Day game. The game, which served as the championship for the IFA (though beginning in 1876, Princeton and Yale met in the

⁶³ Caspar Whitney, "A Day With the 'Varsity Eleven,'" *Harper's Weekly*, 19 November 1892.

⁶⁴ J.H. Sears, "Modern Coaching of Modern Football," *Harper's Weekly*, 11 November 1893.

⁶⁵ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 21 November 1891.

⁶⁶ Rudolph, 383.

⁶⁷ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 10 December 1892.

affair for the next 20 straight years), came into existence humbly, with teams playing on campus sites before modest crowds. With interest in college football continuing to grow, the IFA moved the game to New York City in 1880 so that a greater number of spectators could watch.

Interest in the Thanksgiving Game surged in the following decade as college football itself rapidly grew. In fact, the Thanksgiving game became nothing short of a spectacle and one of the most significant social events of the year in the East. One observer declared that Thanksgiving was no longer about a filling meal and seeing relatives; the holiday was about football.⁶⁸ Supporters of the two participating teams practically took over New York in the days leading up to the game each year. The city became awash in blue and orange and black, the school colors of Princeton and Yale, the two most common competitors.⁶⁹ Spectators filled Manhattan Field—the site at which most games came to be played, at the Polo Grounds in upper Manhattan—to the brim for the occasion. In 1891, for example, tickets sold out before sundown on Wednesday night, and attendance numbered close to 40,000 people.⁷⁰ Newspaper coverage constituted a significant element in helping to build interest in the spectacle. The papers had been covering more and more football in the 1880s as interest in the sport increased, and Whitney, previously a skeptic, complimented the quality of the newspapers' analysis in 1893 as a sign of football's development generally.⁷¹ The major papers in the East, especially the New York publications, covered the game and the scene with vigor,

⁶⁸ "Thanks-giving Day in New York Up to Date," *Harper's Weekly*, 28 November 1891.

⁶⁹ Richard Harding Davis, "The Thanks-giving Day Game," *Harper's Weekly*, 9 December 1893.

⁷⁰ "Today's Football Betting Even Between Yale and Princeton," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 26 November 1891, p. 2, issue 127, col. C. and "Blues Beat Tigers," *BDA*, 27 November 1891, p. 8, issue 128, col. C.

⁷¹ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 28 October 1893.

writing sensationally about the pageantry surrounding the event and of the play in the game itself.⁷² In 1891, the New York *Evening World* devoted an entire special section to that year's game, analyzing it from all angles. The paper promised its readers that colored lights would be put on display on the outside of the Pulitzer Building after the game ended so that anyone unlucky enough to be unable to attend could at least know immediately who won.⁷³ College football itself had become a major popular phenomenon by the 1890s, and the Thanksgiving Day game lived at the center of the sport's popularity.

The lofty attendance figures like those at the Thanksgiving Day games meant that teams took in increasingly large amounts of profit from tickets sold, or “gate money” in the language of the day. In keeping with the amateur ideals still supposedly guiding college football, this money did not go directly towards the reimbursement of players. Instead, teams spent it on themselves for development, training, and on the other costs associated with running a program in a sport whose stakes grew ever higher between the 1870s and 1890s. The budget report from Harvard's team for the 1891 season illustrates just how much money came to be involved in big-time college football. The Crimson enjoyed its highest surplus to date in 1891, totaling \$13,196. Expenses totaled \$6,978, and included most notably the training table (free meals for players), travel costs for the Yale game, and uniforms. Season ticket revenue and gate money from the Yale game (teams generally split profits from games so that both home and away teams received money) composed the largest receipts.⁷⁴ Because more money meant more resources and thus a greater chance at developing the best team, these profits became an extremely

⁷² Seen in “Yale's True Blue,” *The Evening World* (New York), 24 November 1888, col. A.

⁷³ Football Extra Edition in *The Evening World* (New York), 26 November 1891.

⁷⁴ “Harvard Football Cost,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 29 January 1892, issue 25, col. C.

valued resource. Yale's behavior after the 1891 Thanksgiving game is evidence of this. The team accused the Manhattan Athletic Club, which managed the game, of altering attendance figures and thus depriving Yale of some amount of gate money. The team felt so angry that it pledged to manage the game itself the next season.⁷⁵ The significant amount of money that began to flow into college football serves as just another indicator of the cultural importance that the sport had assumed by the early 1890s.

By the opening of the 1890s, college football had become extremely popular and the sport's continued growth seemed likely, if not assured. Caspar Whitney announced that "no year has shown greater progress" than 1891 for amateur sport, and for college football especially.⁷⁶ But in reality, the game rested in an unstable place. The growth from truly amateur, casual activity to giant, culturally obsessing game produced unchecked popularity that belied the ways in which the sport's structure would soon prove problematic. To point, just nine months later, Whitney himself predicted a damaging crisis coming to college football, and indeed a significant controversy did develop. The next chapter examines the backlash against college football that coalesced in the 1890s, just when it appeared the sport had reached its zenith.

⁷⁵ "Yale Not Satisfied," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 4 December 1891, p. 5, issue 134, col. E.

⁷⁶ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 2 January 1892.



Figure 2: Football game between Yale and Princeton in 1904

CHAPTER TWO: The Backlash Against College Football in the East

In 1905, years of pressure on college football finally came to a head. The season that year proved the most violent and deadliest yet, and the sport's commercial tendencies remained largely unchecked. It seemed that the chorus of complaints and criticisms brought by the press, university representatives, and older alumni over the previous decade could no longer be ignored in the wake of the most controversial season yet. President Theodore Roosevelt, perhaps the most visible supporter of the manly activity of college football, felt compelled to try and save his beloved sport. Roosevelt called a White House summit, inviting football representatives from the leading football schools of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton in October. There, the President implored his guests to embrace some kind of reform; otherwise, Roosevelt knew full well that college football could soon drift into extinction.¹

The Roosevelt episode showed how much had changed around the status of college football in just a decade and a half. By the 1890s, the sport had reached a state of significant popularity in the East for all of the various stakeholders involved. At the prominent east-coast schools, large crowds willingly paid to see ostensibly amateur athletes compete. The attendance figures magnified for the biggest games, which the teams moved to large cities such as New York and Philadelphia in order to accommodate the larger crowds. Students had fun playing the game and also enjoyed the status they gained on campus as a result of their star-making turns on the field. Alumni liked following the sport because they enjoyed it as undergraduates and because intercollegiate competitions generated pride in and ties to one's college after graduation. General fans of college football, mostly alumni but a group that increasingly included non-partisan

¹ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 192-194.

members of the crystallizing middle class, enjoyed the entertainment, or perhaps appreciated the manly values that the sport developed in participating players. Yet as popular as the game had become, the aforementioned crisis eventually hit. College football had certainly gained significant interest, but as the game and its importance as a cultural activity, especially in the East, grew, so too did a similarly solidifying opposition.

The opposition to college football, especially in the East, centered on two key flashpoints: violence and commercialism. During football's time of expansion and growth after the Civil War, the sport carried an inherently violent nature. The Intercollegiate Football Committee rules committee added institutions like a line of scrimmage, a 10-yard first down, and standardized blocking rules gradually, only in response to outcries against the sport's violence.² This type of roughness fell in line with the values of the middle and middle-upper classes during this time.³ Yet certain parties began to criticize this type of play. The disfavor, mostly originating from the press, older alumni/football supporters, and university representatives, generally concentrated on examples of violence that went above and beyond normal play, when players broke rules for the sole purpose of inflicting violence. These criticisms grew in number throughout the 1890s, until the notorious year of 1905.

The other wave of protest focused on the increasing commercialism of college football, with complaints usually coming from alumni who thought the game ought to remain true to its amateur origins. In the 1890s, college football, which in reality exhibited professional tendencies almost since intercollegiate competition first began in

² Watterson, *College Football*, 23-24.

³ See the discussion of this topic in the first chapter, which comes most prominently from Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

1869, increasingly took on an air of professionalism and commercialism. The large amounts of money earned through paid attendance allowed teams to spend more money on preparation and training. This formed a cycle of winning and investment that bloated the supposedly amateur sport to the point that Caspar Whitney, the prominent football writer of the time, questioned if college football teams existed for the sole purpose of making money. Whitney believed “certainly not,” since teams used gate money almost entirely used for their own purposes and not for explicit profit, “and yet obviously they are,” since such commercial practices had become crucial to maintain a winning college football team.⁴

Several different dimensions and stakeholders characterized the battle over college football. It concerned university policy, with presidents and faculty wary of the role football enjoyed on campus (yet also sometimes recognizing that football success often equated to higher enrollments⁵). The conflict involved different class dynamics, with the more upper-class defenders of amateurism from an earlier cultural era coming into conflict with newer middle-class forces that largely did not share these traditional views. The strife forced supporters of football and the sport’s chief rule-makers to confront growing public opposition to the game and to negotiate the intricacies of the reform process. After developing through the 1890s, these issues culminated in the formation of the forerunner of the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1906. However, though this action ostensibly represented of significant reform, in reality, the elements that created big-time college football—determined students, permissive faculties, enthusiastic alumni, and a professional, winning-based attitude—emerged from

⁴ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport, *Harper’s Weekly*, 27 Oct. 1894.

⁵ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 384.

the episode largely unscathed. Reform had been achieved, but nothing had been done to prevent college football from continuing to grow in the manner that it already had. This outcome reflected the way that middle-class masculine and commercial values had achieved ascendancy in larger American culture; the protests of older alumni represented a cultural group reacting to its loss of power in the new, middle class-dominated United States. The failure of university presidents and faculties to change the structure of college football proved further the extensive establishment of middle-class values in America.

The debate over college football in the East in the 1890s and early 1900s played out mostly in the leading newspapers and magazines of this period, especially in the New York, Boston, and Philadelphia papers because of their central role in reporting on Eastern college football.⁶ Among magazines, *Harper's Weekly* carried the most prominent weight due to its status as the leading publication for the middle class at this time.⁷ These sources shed light on the opposition to college football and the controversy surrounding the sport around the turn of the 20th century, and help explain the ultimate resolution that proved a victory for middle class values.

Violence

College football's successful embodiment of the type of values that typified dominant white, male middle- and upper-class culture in the second half of the 20th century served as a major reason for the sport's popularity. The game featured intense

⁶ Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History: 1690-1860* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962), 434, 443. In the 1890s, such widely read, big-city newspapers began to feature sports more, creating separate sports departments and sometimes even designating some journalists as sports writers. Newspapers also participated in many "crusades" in this period designed to campaign for certain public acts or to criticize the behavior of public institutions, i.e. the college football controversy.

⁷ This is especially true for the college football debate because of the primacy of Caspar Whitney as an influential voice in the press for amateur sports.

contact between large masses of men at close distances, signifying that football required one to possess brute force, strength, and physical durability to find success. The character of the game matched up well with the favored philosophy of maleness adopted by the upper and middle classes, groups which now espoused a rougher male identity formerly associated in a condescending manner with the working classes. The changing ideals of manhood even wrought a change in vocabulary: according to Bederman, “masculinity” signified this new, tougher concept of male values held by the middle and upper classes, while “manliness” denoted the older genteel, reserved traits of Victorian men, a male ideal that fewer and fewer clung to.⁸

“Manliness” still had physical exertion as one of its tenets, just not to the brute extent of the new masculinity, a distinction that could be seen in the popularity of the rough game of football. But as the growing backlash over football’s violence in the 1890s proved, there grew a limit to the acceptance of this violence among some in the press, older supporters of football, and university administrators. Prizefights served as the classic example of the lower-class brute sporting event, and critics often compared the worst examples of football violence to such fights, as in the 1889 game between Princeton and Harvard.⁹ In the eyes of those critics using this analogy, the display put forth in the football game did not match up to the loftier, higher-class expectations of what a sporting event should be. This would be one of the main patterns of opposition to violence in football over the course of the 1890s, though the public took longer to significantly disapprove.

⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 18.

⁹ “Football or Prize-Fight,” *The Evening World* (New York), 19 November 1889, p. 3, col. B.

The most violent tendencies in football first emerged in the 1880s, even though criticism did not coalesce until the following decade. When the Harvard faculty athletic committee watched several football games in the fall of 1886, the body found that overt violence dominated play. This included examples of brutality outside of the rules, such as scattered punches and kicks and full-fledged fistfights. In a particularly egregious example, one player kicked another in the face, a move that in no way could be construed as part of the natural flow of the game.¹⁰ Yet this type of behavior did not lead to immediate cries for change. No significant impetus for reform existed, proven by the fact that Yale's Walter Camp, the head of the IFA rules committee, instituted rule changes in 1888 that only made football more violent (most prominently the legalization of blocking in front of a ball-carrier and the below-the-waist tackle). These changes led to the development of the "flying wedge" by the Harvard team in 1892, a maneuver in which the entire team formed a wedge shape and run forward at full speed in protection of the ball-carrier. The tactic quickly became the most excitable play in football, and also the most controversial because of its brutal nature, but not controversial enough yet to bring any significant opposition.¹¹ Football, then, had a history of violence with little resistance by the early 1890s.

The conditions for greater public outcry soon developed as greater public interest in football continued to grow. The calls against violence increased around the same time that more individuals began to follow college football. In 1891, the football season "opened with a still greater display of general interest than even last year (1890)

¹⁰ Watterson, *College Football*, 23.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

developed,” according to Caspar Whitney.¹² Key here is the word “general,” which signifies public fandom beyond just the staunch supporters of the major Eastern football powers. Thus, more people followed the season of the flying wedge (1892) than ever. As interest continued to grow, naturally so did scrutiny on the play. Opposition nevertheless took time to coalesce. One observer directed his complaint against “slugging” (blatant punching) he saw in a game in 1891 to the referees for not doing their job well enough.¹³ This individual’s evidence is no major critique of the sport itself; it represents opposition to violence, but only because the individual wanted to see play uninhibited by poor refereeing. Brutality had likely become something of a public concern at this point, evidenced by a letter written by one reader of *Harper’s Weekly* requesting that the magazine keep a list of those players that should have been disqualified for “foul play.” But brutality also clearly had not become an overly significant issue yet, given that Caspar Whitney responded by saying that such an undertaking would not be worth doing since the list would not be extensive.¹⁴ Again, too, the reader complained about violent play simply because he wished that offenders receive appropriate punishment, not because the observer had major issue with the game itself. The increase in interest in football brought slightly more opposition to the sport’s violence, but not yet in a significant way.

The issue of violence began to rise in importance for the next two years, mostly as a dimension of class. Whitney insisted that the only way to stop egregiously violent behavior would be to ensure that only “gentlemen” were allowed to play on teams.¹⁵

¹² Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 2 January 1892.

¹³ “Enforce Football Rules,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 17 November 1891, p. 4, issue 119, col. B.

¹⁴ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 January 1892.

¹⁵ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 18 November 1893.

Such traditionalist observers thought that men of similarly lofty values would not lower themselves to the level of “brutes” by engaging in slugging or other similarly violent behavior, according to an anonymous writer in *Harper’s Weekly*.¹⁶ This author blamed the prevalence of illegal foul play on the desire to win, another hallmark of the low-class athlete willing to use all physical means necessary to gain a victory. These types of older men, who subscribed to more traditional amateur views, believed that modern football should have moved more in the direction of the truly amateur, low-stakes game practiced by gentlemen, as it happened in the initial years of the sport’s development.

Men such as Whitney, even though Whitney in later years criticized the violence and professionalism of football more frequently, vociferously defended the sport that they loved against those that deplored it and even questioned whether it should exist, a side that included varied interests. One mother of a player wrote into the *Philadelphia Inquirer* to ask whether “that game should be eliminated from the list of games,” due to “the number of terrible and deforming accidents that take place in football.” The woman lamented football’s nature for causing players to go into games “with fear and trembling, not knowing whether they will come out ruined for life.”¹⁷ Some newspaper editors took it upon themselves to crusade against football as well. Whitney particularly decried E.L. Godkin of the *New York Post* for his “well-developed hysteria” and for “arguing himself an ignoramus” in his campaign against football.¹⁸ Even an alumnus of a prominent football power like Yale found fault with the violence, saying “there are certain undesirable features that must be removed,” particularly the “mass plays.”¹⁹

¹⁶ “Football Ethics,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 18 November 1893.

¹⁷ “To Stop Football,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 December 1893, vol. 129, issue 168, p. 16.

¹⁸ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 16 December 1893.

¹⁹ “Against Rough Football,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 November 1893, vol. 129, issue 146, p. 3.

Other individuals still had few qualms with college football. Teddy Roosevelt, though not yet President, provided a prominent voice still in favor of the game. The staunchly pro-athletics Roosevelt insisted in an article for *Harper's Weekly* that the physical nature of football represented a positive force. The physicality served to train the “more virile virtues” that could not otherwise be developed in a “peaceful and commercial country,” and though outright slugging and blatant examples of foul play should be lessened, the game still had much worth, despite the “noisy crusade” led against it.²⁰ Whitney and other *Harper's Weekly* writers also defended the game itself, while acknowledging that some decrease in roughness would be advisable.²¹ Yet though the opposition to violence had reached the point where football's biggest boosters now felt the need to defend it, the sport seemed to be on stable ground at the end of 1893. No one could deny football's violence—players now resorted to wearing pads to help combat the rough play—but one newspaper reported that “public disfavor” over slugging had been decreasing.²² Whitney also declared the 1893 Thanksgiving championship game between Princeton and Yale, seen by 40,000 rabid spectators, “the greatest contest ever played in America.”²³

However, the level of criticism increased in 1894, beginning early in the year with the release of the annual report of Harvard President Charles Eliot, who opposed football as firmly as Roosevelt supported it. The report focused mostly on the commercial/professional aspects of football, but Eliot did write that the sport should be

²⁰ Theodore Roosevelt, “Value of an Athletic Training,” *Harper's Weekly*, 23 December 1893.

²¹ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper's Weekly*, 30 December 1893.

²² “The Foot-ball World,” *The North American* (Philadelphia), 9 November 1893, p. 4, col. B.

²³ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper's Weekly*, 9 December 1893.

halted until it could be made safer.²⁴ The *Boston Daily Advertiser* reported that graduate authorities at Yale, while not going so far as to call for the complete abolishment of the sport, agreed that the alumni and students in charge of teams needed to make the game less violent.²⁵ Despite the apparent strong feeling in favor of reform, the season that followed may have been the most brutal yet. In 1895, the *Daily Advertiser* wrote that one coach of an unnamed team allegedly actually ordered his players to slug the opponent, bringing “methods of the prize ring among players who are supposed to be gentlemen.”²⁶ The situation deteriorated further because of the brutality present in the annual Harvard-Yale game, deemed one of the most brutal and ugly displays of violence and foul play seen in a football game.²⁷ The behavior by both teams so damaged relations between the two rivals that they did not play each other for four years. The amount of public vitriol against college football increased sharply as a result. The *New York Sun* reported that some questioned whether the annual Yale-Princeton game would still be played; the teams did play, but only after a warning by the police superintendent that he would step in and stop the game if it became too brutal, because he felt football “shouldn’t resemble a prizefight.”²⁸ Several months after the Harvard-Yale game, the Harvard faculty sent a resolution to the athletic committee that football should be banned, though the faculty took no such action since the graduate athletic committee had sole power to regulate athletics.²⁹ Unless teams came together to institute serious reform, newspapers speculated that the very existence of intercollegiate football could come into question, lest the sport

²⁴ “Radical Reforms in College Sports Proposed by Pres. Eliot,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 21 February 1894.

²⁵ “Faint Praise,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 27 February 1894, issue, p. 4, col. G.

²⁶ “Slugging in Football,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 23 November 1894, issue 125, p. 4, col. G.

²⁷ “Discussing Football,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 26 November 1894, issue 127, col. D.

²⁸ “Yale Men are All Right,” *New York Sun*, 28 November 1894, p. 4, col. B.

²⁹ “Football Edict,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 21 February 1895, issue 45, p. 1, col. D.

devolve into the type of fighting affair practiced by low-class sportsmen; a “brutal display of rough and tumble fighting such as may sometimes be seen in the Bowery dives of New York.”³⁰

The alumni in charge of college football’s most powerful teams ensured that the football’s existence did not become a legitimate question for the time being. Hearing the public outcry, and wary of the sport they favored being at risk, the IFA rules committee, comprised of representatives of the leading football schools, came together and agreed on several reforms for 1895 designed to make the game safer. These included such changes as the addition of the fair catch (a punt receiver could not be tackled if he made a signal prior to catching the ball), the banning of multiple players jumping on another if he was already down on the ground, and the addition of another referee. After the 1895 season, Whitney declared by the opening of the 1896 season that the outcry of 1894 had died out, having been “proven false” thanks to the institution of the new rules.³¹ Facing its first hint of crisis because of opposition to violence, college football survived because the men who controlled the sport took just enough action to quiet critics. The alumni representing the powerful Eastern schools proved amenable to changing football, even if it marked a departure from the way they knew. The reforms appeased the upper-class traditionalists who thought football too much resembled the activities practiced by the working classes. The moderate change also temporarily mollified educators such as Eliot who may have thought violent football a menace to university to education. University representatives failed to step in and make reforms themselves, thus keeping football in the hands of the alumni and undergraduates themselves (the latter group apparently did not even want

³⁰ “Rowdyism of Sport,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 27 November 1894, issue 128, vol. 4, col. A.

³¹ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 24 October 1896.

changes made to football's rules, according to the *New York Evening-World*³²). These interests did enough to placate critics in this instance, but football still possessed an intensely violent character, and the issue of violence emerged again in the episode of 1905. The reform of the sport's professionalism followed this same pattern.

Professionalism

On a chilly fall evening in late November 1889, more than 1,000 undergraduate students and alumni of Harvard College gathered on campus for a meeting deemed important and urgent. The meeting would determine whether Harvard should leave the tri-member Intercollegiate Football Association, and it had been called because of the unjustness of IFA cohort Princeton. The Tigers' use of professional players, outlawed by IFA rules and by the general spirit of amateur fair play, finally had become too much to put up with for the men of Cambridge. Harvard's most recent defeat to Princeton served as the final straw, leading to the meeting. The affair took on an air of calmness and reason, though when the football team's captain began reading a collection of letters written by alumni that disavowed Princeton's cheating, a stir went through the room, and emotions ran high, according to the *New York Sun*:

Everything was conducted under strict parliamentary rules, but when it was proposed to cut loose from the present Intercollegiate Football League and form a dual league with Yale, the ringing cheers, three times three, showed the sentiment of the students...it was urged that the college could stamp its disapproval of such (professional) methods at the present time rather than wait until the incidents were forgotten. A wrong had been done, and it should be contested, and that immediately.³³

³² "Trenchard on Football," *New York Evening-World*, 2 April 1894, p. 5, col. D.

³³ "Harvard Will Withdraw," *New York Sun*, 21 November 1889, p. 2, col. E.

On the surface, it appeared that the students, alumni, and football players of Harvard had made an honorable stand against an evil of intercollegiate football. But the Crimson could be considered no less guilty than the rival they decried.

As college football grew from its humble, intra-collegiate origins into the intercollegiate behemoth it became in the East by the late 1880s, the sport acquired a professional character. Winning drove interest in football, which drew money into the game. Teams then used their revenue for various training and maintenance costs. Such desire for victory went directly against the spirit of amateurism that initially fueled the development of football in the U.S. however, and as with football's violence, a backlash emerged against the sport's professional character. Yet it seemed that no amount of regulation could stop the commercial growth of football. The desire to win proved a powerful force, and though the upper-class amateurs who originally fostered football detested what college football had become, these older alumni had little power. The environment around football, now guided by middle-class values of competition and ambition, meant that a principle that valued fairness and sportsmanship over winning had no tenable position.

In the early 1890s, the big Eastern football schools engaged in plenty of examples of illicit, anti-amateur behaviors despite the presence of the supposedly regulatory IFA, all in the hopes of bettering their team's chances on the field. Significantly, while outside forces came to speak against such actions, the players and the younger alumni close to teams cheated with apparent impunity, considering how newspapers and magazines often reported said transgressions. Common practices of teams included using players who had played as paid professionals in the past (thus voiding their amateur status), inducing

players from smaller schools to switch allegiances and play for one of the powers, and using players who had exhausted their eligibility. For example, in 1890, representatives of the University of Pennsylvania offered to pay a “well-known” former college athlete and professional baseball player to play football for them.³⁴ The next year, a “friend” of Harvard offered to pay the tuition of an Irishman who had played for several different colleges in England, if he agreed to play football for the Crimson (the indignation expressed against Princeton in Harvard’s meeting rings more hollow in light of this).³⁵ These teams could not plead ignorance as to their violations of the rules of amateurism, either. Had players and alumni been truly unaware of the association of money with professionalism, there would have been no cases like the Pennsylvania-Princeton game of 1891, when the schools were careful to point out that another grandstand at the field had been erected “with a view for spectator safety and accommodation, not as a money-making venture.”³⁶

For men such as Caspar Whitney, a self-professed “lover of amateurism,” such reckless behavior exhibited for the sole purpose of trying to best rivals was “heart-breaking.” As with much of the opposition to football’s violence, notions of class informed those critics who detested the professionalism and commercialism of the sport. Whitney spoke vociferously about this in one of his columns, remarking that the “better class” of spectators saw “its kind of people” replaced by “crack athletes.” Whitney went

³⁴ “A College Athlete in Demand,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 October 1889, vol. 82, issue 121, p. 6.

³⁵ “Acton Will Play: A Man From England Will Join Harvard’s Eleven,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 3 November 1891, vol. 107, p. 2, col. B.

³⁶ “Pennsylvania-Princeton Game,” *The North American* (Philadelphia), 3 November 1891, p. 5, col. D.

on to say “there are two classes in athletics, just as there are in society...we have no more use for the lower class than it has for us.”³⁷

The upper classes, like their British leisure class counterparts, associated professionalism with the lower classes, meaning that elite men considered the behavior that they witnessed on and around their beloved football teams to be degrading. For these traditionalists, winning held an incidental place, whereas the football teams of the day engaged in attempts to win at all costs, guided by middle-class competitive values. Disfavored behaviors included tactics other than simple rule breaking. The huge crowds that flocked to the biggest football games of the year, especially those held in cities instead of on campus grounds (the Thanksgiving Day game, for example) gave college teams an almost unending supply of money from gate receipts, which they then spent on performance boosters like training tables (free meals for players), extra practice, and preseason practices in the summer and in the period between the time students returned to campus and the season began.³⁸

The rise of coaches represented one of the biggest professional developments for college teams. Originally, teams went without coaching, with the captain filling most duties of a coach. Gradually, teams began to retain the previous year’s captain as designated coach. This practice proliferated until graduates from several years before, who had dedicated themselves to football, took on coaching duties, sometimes even for several years.³⁹ By the end of the decade, teams reached the point of employing full-fledged professional coaches. Winning served as the prime motivation behind each of

³⁷ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 1 October 1892.

³⁸ “Why Football Should Not Be Regarded Only From Commercial Points,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 25 October 1894, p. 3, col. A. and “Football Practice,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 21 July 1894, issue 173, p. 5, col. B.

³⁹ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 14 October 1893.

these repeated, gradual steps; coaching led to better teams, which led to more wins, and more money to invest in the team (and coaches) to ideally lead to even more wins. Undergraduates and most younger alumni saw these practices as tools to help deliver the victories that they so desired. The IFA's rules did not explicitly ban these forms of coaching in the first part of the decade. The detractors of professionalism saw such activities and worried that gate receipts and the increased winning they paid for had grown to supersede friendly competition within football. This development went against the reason that such amateurs thought college football existed and should exist.⁴⁰

Amateurism originated in Britain, and that country's sports still exuded the philosophy during the time when college football had assumed a professional character. When Caspar Whitney took a trip to England in 1894, he found college athletics practiced exactly to his liking. College teams attempted to win games, but they considerably deemphasized winning and losing as compared to the U.S. Players funded the sports themselves, rather than relying on outside, consumer-driven gate receipts. Professional sport existed, but in a separate, distinct sphere from the true amateurs. Whitney's visit led him to detest the commercialism of U.S. college athletics even more; the writer exclaimed that "money, money seems to be the cry, and it will be the curse, if indeed not the downfall, of honest University sport."⁴¹ College men seemingly should have been immune from the evils of professionalism because of the respectability that a university education brought, in Whitney's view. This meant that the professionalism of college football proved especially disappointing for upper-class men who shared

⁴⁰ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 October 1892.

⁴¹ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 28 April 1894.

Whitney's more traditional, now old-fashioned views.⁴² If one hypothetically had been raised in a lower-class environment, the social influence and upward mobility that universities (especially the major Eastern schools) offered allowed him to advance his status. Whitney had previously argued for an essentially separate-but-equal state for upper-class amateurs and lower-class professionals in American athletics, writing that that lower-class men "have their ways and their entertainments. Why spoil theirs and blacken ours by an attempt at affiliation?"⁴³ Yet even Whitney finally admitted that one could be a gentleman "by birth and education...by instinct and nature."⁴⁴ So although Whitney detested the fact that other amateur athletic associations (most often city athletic clubs) practiced professionalism, he felt that he could always rely on colleges to provide a space for respectable amateur sport.⁴⁵

The leading football universities' actions in the 1890s proved that men such as Whitney could not trust that notion of universities acting as safe havens for amateurism. The changing demographics at universities after the Civil War reinforced the faultiness of that idea. By the later years of the 19th century, most undergraduates exhibited intense industry and competitiveness, traits dating to the 1840s, when, according to Bledstein, the American worker became known for a "restless, get-ahead spirit." Students whose values mirrored those of the middle class could be bold, even reckless at times, and fought strenuously against those who did not accept innovation.⁴⁶ These characteristics could just as well have been applied to the increasingly professionalized college football landscape. Indeed, as early as the 1860s, the word "amateurish" came to mean "not as

⁴² Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 21 January 1893.

⁴³ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 October 1892.

⁴⁴ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 18 July 1896.

⁴⁵ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 24 December 1892.

⁴⁶ Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 17, 27.

good,” “less than serious commitment,” or “unskillful,” a far cry from the honorable amateurism that the older upper-class segments of American sport believed in and desired.⁴⁷

The professional behaviors seen in college football by the early 1890s led to an eventual pushback. Like the debates over violence, the undergraduates and especially the alumni who controlled football teams led the ultimate reform over professionalism, rather than universities. Distinct from the violence controversy, however, reform of professionalism had even less impact. Those opposed to professionalism eventually began to blame the undergraduates themselves. Whitney noted in 1896 that his critique of professionalism was “a criticism of the severest kind on the morality of the young men of America,” the young men whom Whitney now realized did not share his ideals.⁴⁸ The reform began in earnest when the IFA instituted the undergraduate rule in 1893, which stipulated that all football players in the league had to be undergraduates pursuing a degree that required at least three years of study. No graduate students or students who had taken classes at other schools could play, and teams had to submit rosters two weeks prior to games so that players’ eligibility could be reviewed.⁴⁹ Even the validity of these reforms could be questioned, however. The IFA enacted the changes mainly in an attempt to end several years of endless squabbles among its members about the dubious eligibility of certain players. The undergraduate rule did constitute reform against behavior that grew out of the intense drive to win, but the rule did not target the drive to win itself, and thus did essentially nothing to change football’s increasing commercialization. The

⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁸ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 November 1895.

⁴⁹ “A Crushing Blow to Pennsylvania,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 October 1893, vol. 129, issue 120, p. 3.

alumni and undergraduates did not seek an end to the craze over winning; they just wanted to ensure that all participants had an equal playing field in their quest for professionalized glory. Ultimately, the undergraduate rule did not even solve the individual issue for which the IFA instituted the stipulation. Teams accepted the new rules on the surface, but they also continued to argue endlessly over the eligibility of certain players.⁵⁰

The limited effect of the reform surrounding the undergraduate rule can be seen in the fact that months after the IFA adopted the provision, Charles Eliot felt the need to denounce football's professionalism in his annual report.⁵¹ The *New York Sun* reported that some football observers called for other reforms, including moving the Yale-Princeton Thanksgiving Day game off that date and out of New York City, but "the almost unanimous opinion of those interested in football matters" held that the game remained in its traditional space.⁵² The undergraduates and most of the alumni did not see the negatives in the growing commercial landscape of college football; it made perfect sense to them given their middle-class values. Whitney desperately questioned the alumni of the leading universities as to whether they could bear all the importance attached to gate receipts and the endless chase for wins those receipts fueled. Whitney insisted that "half-measure will not answer," but his pleas did not find a receptive audience.⁵³ The public apparently agreed; in the midst of the cries against professionalism, one newspaper lamented the "unsatisfactory condition" that Yale and Pennsylvania could not play, since

⁵⁰ "In the Football Field," *New York Tribune*, 21 October 1895, p. 8.

⁵¹ "Radical Reforms in College Sports Proposed by Pres. Eliot," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 21 February 1894

⁵² "All Favor Thanksgiving Day," *New York Sun*, 16 October 1894, p. 5, col. C.

⁵³ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 27 October 1894.

they were clearly the top two teams.⁵⁴ Finding the best team certainly could not concern true amateurs, but that question did assume a high priority for a professionalized culture obsessed with winning.

The alumni in charge of college football teams did go through with more reforms, such as lowering ticket prices, moving more games out of big cities, and shortening the schedule, and by 1899, the calls for reform died down. The public approved of the sport more than it had in years, according to the *New York Tribune*.⁵⁵ But even this reform had limits. For one, individual schools made these changes, not the IFA rules committee, meaning there had been no long-lasting policy reform. Schools played outside of big cities more often, but teams responded by building high-capacity (and thus high-profit) stadiums on their own grounds, such as the one Harvard completed in 1903.⁵⁶ The changes made to the face of the game did not alter its inherent nature. The scale of commercialism may have been temporarily reduced, but the big-money potential and craze for winning remained. The alumni and undergraduates who embraced this anti-amateur style stayed in charge of this aspect of football for the most part, ensuring that professionalism remained, as did the potential for the sport to grow even more commercialized. However, university leadership and faculties that to this point had largely remained silent finally became determined to take action.

Faculty Intervention

The approach of the turn of the century appeared to mark the beginning of an era of good feelings for college football. Critics such as Caspar Whitney, no matter the

⁵⁴ “The Best Football Team,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 October 1895, vol. 133, issue 113, p.6.

⁵⁵ “The Football Season of ’99,” *New York Tribune*, 19 September 1899, p. 1, col. D.

⁵⁶ Ronald A. Smith, “Commercialized Intercollegiate Athletics and the 1903 Harvard Stadium,” *The New England Quarterly* (March 2005): 26-48.

severity of their stances on the sport's incessant brutality and rampant professionalism, thought football again had a promising future thanks to the reforms made, despite their limited nature.⁵⁷ Undergraduates and the general public never really became disinterested in football despite the criticism of traditionalists and university faculty, and their interest continued to increase. Undergraduates adored their teams and saw them as responsible for enhancing and defending the reputation of their schools. In the words of *The New York Tribune*, the football captain became "the idol of the college, the man whom the freshmen gazed upon with silent awe and admiration."⁵⁸ Attendance remained high, which meant teams continued to generate revenue. One report stated that any decent team earned between \$15,000 and \$25,000 in a season. Teams capitalized on public interest to be able to invest in themselves even more.⁵⁹ The available evidence seemed to indicate that college football enjoyed a stable position despite the criticism it endured.

University powers, however, finally became determined to assert their influence. Faculty did not meaningfully participate in the reforms of the 1890s, either due to unwillingness or powerlessness, and the results of the changes to the sport still left them unsatisfied. The place of football in universities and in student life concerned many faculty members dating to the early years of the decade, which Charles Eliot spoke to in his annual report, in addition to violence and professionalism.⁶⁰ Presidents and faculty members naturally thought that universities should emphasize education before any extracurricular activity. The spectacle of college football on campuses shocked administrators' sensibilities and threatened their missions. But due to the power that

⁵⁷ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 10 December 1898.

⁵⁸ "The Foot-ball Captains," *New York Tribune*, 9 October 1898, p. 2, col. A.

⁵⁹ "Ready for Football," *New York Tribune*, 30 September 1900, p. 9, col. E/F.

⁶⁰ "Duncan Edwards—Princeton Representative," *Harper's Weekly*, 1 April 1893.

alumni held over intercollegiate football, faculties had been decidedly powerless to reign in the sport.

In 1900, faculties took their initial action. According to the *New York Sun*, at the beginning of the year, representatives of several universities—reportedly Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia—met in secret and formed a committee to determine how they could work to limit college football, their prime concern being how the sport took away from their educational mission. The representatives proposed manifold changes: a six-game schedule, a limit to the hours in a day that students could practice football, the disallowing of preseason practice, stricter academic requirements, uniform and firm eligibility rules, faculty approval of schedules, and making coaches, trainers, and all other football-related employees answerable to the faculty athletic committee at each school. The secret conference knew the ramifications of its proposals. It expected a firm backlash from undergraduates and alumni.⁶¹

The conference representatives acted hypocritically to some extent in adopting their positions. The committee members had a distaste for college football and for their schools' football teams because of the teams' rapid growth, unabashed commercialism, and unceasing desire for continued prestige and esteem, yet universities themselves behaved in much the same way during this period. After decades of provincial and conservative isolationism among the leading universities, the period from 1880-1910 marked the era of university building, when the “risks and rivalries that defined American business competition of the era were replicated on the American campus,” according to Thelin.⁶² Universities engaged in a campaign of unchecked expansion and increased

⁶¹ “To Restrict Football,” *New York Sun*, 16 February 1900, p. 5, col. A.

⁶² Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 111.

economic viability. Schools constructed more and more buildings, enrolled ever-greater number of students, and continually added more departments and graduate schools as colleges took the form of the modern university as society knows it today. In this way, universities actually embodied and carried out the same type of commercialism seen in the expansion of the football programs that some faculty members so detested.

Although this case falls outside of the East, the founding of the University of Chicago serves as a symbol of this period. Founded in 1893 thanks to funding from industry magnate John D. Rockefeller, the school embarked on an aggressive campaign of growth led by president William Rainey Harper. Harper aggressively sought funds, utilized mass advertising and public relations techniques to attract students, and ruthlessly lured faculty members from other institutions, which themselves had all had been practicing the same methods (Rockefeller surely would have approved of these strategies).⁶³ Prospective students loved college football to the point the sport became a critical part of schools' public relations and enrollment campaigns in this era.⁶⁴ Harper recognized students' designs on attending a university with a good football team. One of his first personnel decisions saw him hiring famed Yale athletic alumnus Amos Alonzo Stagg, a future member of the football rules committee, to lead a "highly commercial athletic department" with the end goal of attracting football-rabid students to enroll at Chicago.⁶⁵ Even as the Eastern faculty, then, began to form a unified opposition to the commercial growth of football, their institutions depended on the professionalized sport for their own expansion.

⁶³ Ibid., 119-121.

⁶⁴ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 271.

⁶⁵ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 121.

The initial attempt by the faculty to restore football to a less prominent place in the university did not succeed, as nothing came of the 1900 committee's rule proposal ideas. This initial movement failed because the faculty still lacked a public mandate. Football enjoyed too much popularity for the alumni and undergraduates to take these new calls for reform seriously. But this condition soon changed, as the problems of the previous decade reemerged in the opening years of the new century. Professionalism, which had never truly abated, once again became a target. Alexander Meiklejohn, the President of Brown University, gave voice to the opposition by calling for the removal of all the outside influences to intercollegiate football that had been driving the commercial character of the game. Meiklejohn insisted that if the undergraduates themselves could not manage their affairs in the way that traditionalists expected, then the game should be abolished completely. He called the emphasis on winning "the evil which is (the) most fundamental, most subtle, most dangerous of all."⁶⁶

The Progressive magazine *McClure's* leveled the most significant attack against professionalism. In the summer of 1905, Henry Beach Needham published a two-part series exposing the professional ills of college football in the vein of the classic Progressive muckraker of the era. Needham detailed many illicit and, at least to traditionalists, offensive examples of ethical abuses in college football. They included: an admission from an anonymous Pennsylvania alumnus that his school matched the cheating of its rivals because the alumni could not stand losing to them; a denunciation of the concept and purpose of professional coaches; details about the recruiting practices of the alumni of the Eastern powers, which traveled to the well-known preparatory schools in the region and attempted to induce athletes to attend their schools to play football; and

⁶⁶ "The Evils of College Athletics," *Harper's Weekly*, 2 December 1905.

respective examples from Yale, Princeton, and Pennsylvania of a football player receiving illegal benefits, a player acting as a paid commercial endorser, and the use of a “tramp” athlete who had played at many schools before.⁶⁷ Needham also wrote at length about common features like training tables and new, on-campus stadiums, and how they violated the ideals of amateurism. The author called the recruiting incidents the “most demoralizing” feature, since they ruined boys’ “chances for normal growth and development,” and gave “false and superficial views of life in the world.”⁶⁸

Professionalism thus sparked controversy, but as had been the case in the previous decade, violence sparked the biggest outcry from critics and brought more impetus for reform. After the concern over injuries and even deaths in football games significantly decreased by the turn of the 20th century, the concerns spiked again after 1900 as a result of another rise in casualties. Newspapers compiled injury and death totals regularly in the wake of the increase in violence. One report in 1904 listed 296 injuries and 13 deaths from football that season,⁶⁹ though it is unclear if this toll is from college games only or if it includes professional and other amateur football).⁷⁰ Teddy Roosevelt, the consummate masculine man and supporter of football, felt the issue serious enough that he once again called for a reduction in roughness and foul play.⁷¹ Evidently, the earlier rule changes of the 1890s, while effective initially, had not been enough to stamp out the possibility of

⁶⁷ Henry Beech Needham, “The College Athlete: How Commercialism is Making Him a Professional. Part I: Recruiting and Subsidizing,” *McClure’s Magazine*, June 1905, Vol. XXV, no. 2.

⁶⁸ Henry Beech Needham, “The College Athlete: His Amateur Code: Its Evasion and Administration: Part II: ‘Summer Ball,’ The Gate-Money Evil, and ‘Unnecessary Roughness’ in Football,” *McClure’s Magazine*, July 1905, Vol. XXV, no. 3.

⁶⁹ “Football Killed,” *New York Tribune*, 26 November 1904, p. 5, col. A.

⁷⁰ The newspaper ambiguously reported it had been the most injuries in one year since the “introduction of the modern college sport”

⁷¹ “Agree on the Need of Football Reform,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 November 1905, vol. 153, issue 145, p. 8.

unnecessary brutality. The football rules committee saw the violence and heard the calls for reform, and when it met in the summer of 1905, as it did annually, the committee did consider proposed rule changes, such as the implementation of the forward pass and the increase of the yards-to-gain from five yards to 10 yards. The committee, though, did not pass any reforms, claiming that “public interest” did not sufficiently favor rule changes. As a result, given the increasing brutality of the preceding years, the *New York Tribune* properly foretold that the 1905 season would be the “most scrutinized ever”⁷² with the failure to make any changes.

The aforementioned intense brutality of the 1905 season, the most violently destructive college football season yet, led to football’s most significant crisis to date and one that eventually confirmed the future direction of the game. Yet the rules committee may have been correct that “public interest” did not find disfavor in the game despite the increasingly alarming violence. In the midst of the troublesome 1905 season, outside interest in college football did not wane, evidenced in advance of the Army-Navy game that season when Princeton (the host of the affair) expected the biggest crowd in its history, complete with a visit by Roosevelt, who now had become President.⁷³ Some clearly did find disfavor in football, including Roosevelt, to the extent that he knew the sport needed to change to satisfy critics. In early October at the White House, Roosevelt held a summit in which he implored Harvard coach Bill Reid, Yale athletics leader Walter Camp, and four other representatives of the leading Eastern football schools to do something to stop the brutality of football so that the game could be saved.⁷⁴ But the

⁷² “Football May Be Just as Brutal This Year as Ever,” *New York Tribune*, 24 September 1905, p. 3.

⁷³ “Big Crowd Expected,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 November 1905, vol. 153, issue 151, p. 11.

⁷⁴ “Taft Backs President,” *New York Tribune*, 9 October 1905, p. 11, col. D.

football teams made no real changes that fall. The brutal violence continued, and university leadership and faculties finally lost their patience as a result.

Late the next month, in November 1905, Charles Eliot, the most powerful administrator of among the leading football schools, intimated that he wanted to try to ban football at Harvard with the faculty's support, convinced there would never be reform that sufficiently guaranteed safer play as long as the alumni and undergraduates controlled the game.⁷⁵ The next week brought a breaking point, when a football player for Union College died as a result of brain injuries sustained in a game played in New York City. In the wake of that death, the 16th fatality since October 9, New York University Chancellor Henry MacCracken, after Eliot rebuffed him when he entreated Eliot to lead football into reform or abolishment, instead called on a group of other, smaller universities to form a new rules committee. This new group proposed that universities themselves would control intercollegiate athletics through this new organization, replacing the old Camp-led committee that consisted of alumni from the leading powers. Those alumni, in the faculties' eyes, had too biased of a position towards football to implement change and rein in the sport's violence and out-of-control professionalism.⁷⁶

The *Evening World* in New York questioned the legitimacy and power of the proposed break from the existing power structure. The new committee consisted of universities with little relative power in the world of college football, institutions such as Syracuse, Rutgers, Army, Fordham, and Columbia, the last of which banned football shortly after MacCracken's call for a meeting.⁷⁷ The newspaper thus argued that no real

⁷⁵ "Harvard Football in Danger," *New York Sun*, 20 November 1905, p. 5, col. A.

⁷⁶ "Move to Oust Camp; New Committee Asked," *New York Tribune*, 27 November 1905, p. 1, col. A.

⁷⁷ "Football Friends Rally," *New York Tribune*, 30 November 1905, p. 7, col. C/D.

reform could be accomplished with such an unimposing group.⁷⁸ The old rules committee, consisting of representatives from football bluebloods Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, as well as Cornell, Chicago, and Lehigh, still held power.⁷⁹ Whether or not this could be said to be true, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (as the delegates to MacCracken's conference in late December 1905 named themselves) had grown determined to assert university control and institute rule changes so that they could reform football properly and make the sport safer, after the member schools voted for reform instead of abolishment. Meanwhile, at the exact same time that the IAA met in New York, the rules committee itself met in the same city, also debating rule changes. The rule committee's key question centered on whether the two rule-making bodies should join or not. Harvard's alumni felt wary of Eliot's possible action should they fail to show real signs of implementing sufficient change, and thus decided to push for amalgamation of the two committees. After a period of diplomatic wrangling, the two groups did in fact join. Over January and February of 1906, the combined committees slowly worked out the proposed changes, finally deciding on several, including most notably the 10-yard line to gain, the introduction of the forward pass (albeit with heavy restrictions), and the prohibition of runners attempting to hurdle over the line.⁸⁰

After all the controversy and the near death of the sport, it appeared compromise between alumni and university leaders had saved college football from radical reform or even abolishment. Even Harvard, whose faculty voted to ban the game in early 1906

⁷⁸ "Only Rules Committee Can Reform Football," *The Evening World* (New York), 7 December 1905, p. 16, col. D/E.

⁷⁹ "Move to Oust Camp; New Committee Asked," *New York Tribune*, 27 November 1905, p. 1, col. A.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 202-207.

unless the reforms made by the two committees had been sufficient, reinstated football.⁸¹ The reforms proved positive as the 1906 season played out. The “thirst for football,” though it never truly left, could be seen widely. Even Eliot commented that he enjoyed a game that he took in and that he did not see any “unnecessary roughness.”⁸² Brutality and injuries decreased thanks to the removal of mass momentum plays. It appeared that the IAA, which later renamed itself the N.C.A.A., had taken control of football from the alumni. This proved untrue, however, for two critical reasons. First, the IAA did not possess a strong mandate. Though the old rules committee schools cooperated with the IAA for rules changes, they did not join the new organization, meaning the still-most powerful football schools operated outside of the body that supposedly controlled intercollegiate athletics. Second, the IAA had no way to enforce its stipulations. Members acted independently, and the envisioned strong university leadership never coalesced.⁸³ Sure enough, just five years later, brutality reemerged, and the IAA had to once again undergo the process of reform.⁸⁴ Beyond the weakness of the new governing body itself, the most critical failing could be found in the insufficient scope of change. While the reformers addressed brutality directly, they largely ignored the issue of professionalism.

Conclusion

Football in the East—the locus of national interest at this time, even as the game began to spread throughout the rest of the country—entered the 1890s as an intensely popular, brutal, professionalized sport. The game came out of the turn of the century as an intensely popular, less brutal, still professionalized sport. An older class of football

⁸¹ “Football at Harvard Wiped Out by Overseers,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 January 1906, vol. 154, issue 16, p. 1.

⁸² “Thirst for Football,” *New York Tribune*, 27 October 1906, p. 10, col. A.

⁸³ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 208.

⁸⁴ Watterson, *College Football*, 120-22.

enthusiasts, used to the truly amateur activity they had enjoyed, led the opposition to the brutal and professional aspects of college football early on. But these men saw their views and influence, which had informed the founding and early spread of the game, rapidly fade. In the 1890s, this process of the weakening of the older controllers' power became consummated. Men such as Caspar Whitney, old lovers of football, watched in despair as a new generation of young men, informed by the masculine, competitive values that the increasingly prevalent middle class espoused, made over the game in their image. They wanted to win, and pursued wins at all costs; it was not in their mentality to play just for play's sake. Football's continued commercialization thus reflected the way the middle class's values came to assume a dominant place in American culture, while an upper class slowly fading in the wake of the rise of the middle class protested in vain. While the older enthusiasts had no power to affect the change they wanted, the university faculties and presidents did have such an opportunity, but did not take full advantage of it. By addressing only the violence in football (and insufficiently at that), the reformers indirectly confirmed the larger-than-life place that the sport had assumed in university and national life. This, too, confirmed middle class values (as did the behavior of universities themselves in the expansion-driven period of university building). With this assured, the sport's professional and commercial tendencies could grow mostly unchecked, as they did. Even if the university powers could eventually take control away from the alumni and undergraduates, college football would be guided by the ambitious, competitive middle-class values of the latter groups, and irrevocably so. The next chapter shows that the same process unfolded in the Midwest and at the University of Michigan specifically, albeit with even less opposition to football's professional tendencies.



Figure 3: The Michigan football team rides on a carriage in the 1902 Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, BL001129

CHAPTER THREE: Football Controversy at the University of Michigan

College football first emerged and grew into an activity of national interest in the East, but the game soon became popular across the rest of the U.S., penetrating the Midwest (often referred to as the West in contemporary documents), the South, and the West (referred to as the Far West). This occurred in each region at slightly different times and with different paces. Of each locality, football in the Midwest/West grew most rapidly, consolidating into the type of brutal, commercialized, mass-interest entity that it became in the East several years before. Indeed, as early as 1892, before any Western team had proven itself capable of closely competing with one of the powerful Eastern teams, noted college football enthusiast Caspar Whitney acknowledged at least the “possibility” a team could soon emerge from the West and compete with the East.¹ Western teams began reaching the competitive levels of the best Eastern teams within a few years of Whitney’s statement.

The University of Michigan soon boasted one of those ultra-competitive teams. After relatively slow initial development, football caught on significantly with Michigan undergraduates by the 1880s, leading to a process of consolidation and organization by the early 1890s.² Football games, at one time sparsely-attended affairs that elicited little interest from the student body, evolved into huge campus events. Undergraduates and alumni alike began investing considerable time and energy into following the fortunes of their University’s “eleven,” devoting themselves to furthering the progress of the team and its place in Michigan college life. At the same time, the players began training more frequently and with the most advanced training techniques, aided by coaches that the

¹ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 30 January 1892.

² Philip Clarkson Pack, *100 Years of Athletics, the University of Michigan: A Review in Word and Pictures Covering the University’s Progress and Prowess, 1837-1937* (Ann Arbor, 1937), 1-6.

team and its athletic management imported from the leading Eastern schools (a move mirrored by all the bigger Western institutions).³ The Michigan football team rapidly became one capable of competing with teams of the East as the 1890s progressed.

Importantly, football in this region also took on a character similar to that of the East in terms of a brutal style of play and an intense commercialism that contradicted the notion of amateurism. However, alumni, faculty, and members of the press, never criticized football's violence in the West to the extent that they did in the East, instead treating professionalism as a more significant problem. As in the East, football in the West began to resemble a spectacle. Large crowds attended the biggest games of the season; admission fees became crucial to teams as a key source of funding; teams held games in big cities to maximize profits, instead of on campuses; teams used professional coaches; players spent extensive amounts of time practicing and traveling for games; schools and members of the press leveled accusations of rival teams cheating in some way, perhaps by using ineligible players, and of the sport growing too large in importance; and, most noteworthy of all, students, alumni, and other supporters of teams developed a craze for winning.⁴ Unsurprisingly, given the supposed amateur nature of college football in the West (as in the East), these characteristics of the sport caused concerned faculty and outside observers informed by amateurism to criticize the nature of football.

The professionalized nature of Western college football and its detractors combined to form a troublesome atmosphere surrounding the game as the 1890s gave way to the early 20th century. Several incidents related to athletic competition between

³ Charles Baird, "A Resume of Michigan's Football History," *Michigan Alumnus*, December 1896, 58.

⁴ Watterson, *College Football*.

the biggest schools served as the most noteworthy public flare-ups. Michigan, as one of the leading institutions of the West, and also boasting one of the most successful and extensive athletic programs in the region (and perhaps the best overall football team), had a significant role in almost all of these public controversies. Michigan also took on a leading role when its president and the presidents of six other leading Western universities formed a conference in 1896 to try and lessen the influence of professionalism by creating an amateurism-informed, unified set of rules and eligibility requirements. The move resembled Eastern football apparatuses' reforming actions in the 1890s. But though a noble step on the part of the Western presidents, such action did not and could not go far enough, as it proved unable to overcome the same type of win-at-all-costs mentality derived from middle class values that ultimately triumphed in the Eastern controversy.

In truth, the Western presidents and faculties fought an uphill battle in trying to restore college football to its status from earlier in the century as a truly amateur endeavor. The reformers faced a more difficult landscape than their Eastern counterparts did, too. The West itself had developed much differently than the East. In the latter, though middle-class values began to take precedence among student populations, there also existed a greater conservative, amateur-leaning element than in the comparably more economically diffuse West. For example, James B. Angell, the President of the University of Michigan from 1871-1909 (covering the time of Michigan's football controversy), saw state universities such as his own as protecting against an aristocracy of wealth.⁵ The West saw its most extensive development at the time that middle-class ideals rose generally in the U.S. Thus, the forces of professionalism could take root much

⁵ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 279.

easier in the West, since many more of the region's inhabitants did not hold the same older values as individuals in the East.

The growth of Michigan football exemplified the greater ease with which professionalism took hold in the West as compared to the East, and no development illustrated this more than the school's hiring of Fielding H. Yost as football coach in 1901. Yost embodied the true professional coach: he saw his job as winning, and he attacked the task vigorously and successfully. Under Yost, Michigan reached its greatest football heights during the coach's first five years of employment. Alongside this success, the team also generated the most intense, spectacle-like football craze of anywhere in the West in the wake of its victories and Yost's unapologetic drive to win, the ultimate anti-amateur pursuit. The situation at Michigan and at its peer institutions from the earlier Western conference, referred to at this point as the "Big Nine" conference after two more schools joined, finally resulted in the most significant reform movement yet. Angell himself, wary of what college football had grown into, called another reform conference in 1906 that would have forced Michigan's athletic leadership and faculty to adopt tighter restrictions in the name of amateurism, calling to mind the university-driven reform movement and creation of the IAA in the East in 1905-06. For Michigan to do so would have meant the crippling of its athletics, especially its football team. The athletic powers and faculty at the institution finally decided that they could not conform to the new rules, thus choosing the pursuit of wins over reform and confirming the triumph of students' and alumni's desired professionalism over the more amateur view of critics and college authorities. The reform movements in the East and at Michigan may have focused more heavily on different issues (violence and

professionalism, respectively), but the final outcome—football continuing in its same widely popular, highly commercialized form—reflected the way that middle-class manly and competitive values had achieved preponderance in the U.S., and the way that football would continue to grow irrespective of region.

In the form of the previous two chapters, this chapter examines the development of big-time football at the University of Michigan, culminating with the decision to leave the Big Nine conference and thus refuse to institute significant reform. The controversy played out most significantly in the pages of the *Michigan Daily* (the student newspaper), while Angell's voice is found most vividly in his President's Reports to the Board of Regents. *Harper's Weekly*, the *Michigan Alumnus* (a monthly alumni magazine), and other supplementary materials offer more evidence about the Michigan football controversy.

Michigan and Angell

The Michigan football team likely could not have developed into the powerful cultural entity it became unless the university it represented similarly became one of the leading schools in the West. Indeed, by the time that Michigan's football team began making waves with its success, the school itself enjoyed a status as one of the most prestigious and highly-attended universities in the country. The University of Michigan, established in Detroit in 1817 and relocated to Ann Arbor in 1837 after the territory had achieved statehood, symbolized two different trends of the time in higher education: the expansion of colleges into full-fledged universities, seen in the East and West, and the increasing proliferation of state-supported universities in the West. The latter development came as a natural result of population growth and migration. Colleges

originally materialized in the East because colonial populations themselves developed in the East, but as Americans continued to move west and settle the frontier, the need for higher education arose. Congress passed the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862 to help spur the growth of colleges in the West, and higher education expanded rapidly from there (though the University of Michigan is not an example of a Land Grant school).⁶

Western higher education developed differently compared to the earlier, more conservative educational structure of established Eastern institutions such as Harvard and Yale. Western colleges came into their own at a time when said Eastern schools already had begun phasing out the old style of education, which centered on the classical languages and rote memorization. As a result, greater liberality marked Western education as it expanded over the second half of the 19th century. The West had a more heterogeneous population than the East, and in turn, Western institutions welcomed more heterogeneous student bodies. State-supported schools in the West strived to achieve a balance of academic excellence and broad accessibility.⁷ Western universities could be described as “practical, popular institutions” which emphasized the values of “frontier democracy” and materialism, according to Rudolph.⁸ In short, the Western university of the second half of the 19th century increasingly became a place defined by opportunity, where any student could go to receive an education that would be earned, not inherited. Bledstein argues that this went along with middle-class values of ambition and upward social mobility.⁹ One Eastern observer, wary of the “radical” idea that universities could be state-supported, nevertheless praised universities of the West for their commitment to

⁶ Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 75.

⁷ Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 100.

⁸ Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 277.

⁹ Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 177.

higher education and their high educational standards.¹⁰ Universities thus became the places that developed middle-class ambitions, a characteristic especially true in the West.

The presidents of universities, the West included, began asserting more and more control over their institutions in this period, another key characteristic of the university-building era.¹¹ Michigan President James Burrill Angell, just as with Charles Eliot of Harvard, typified this development. Angell, who served as his school's chief administrator from 1871 until 1909, is given most of the credit by authors such as Sagendorph for transforming the university into the "cosmopolitan, national institution" it became by 1880.¹² Angell's ascendance to the Michigan presidency capped an interesting life to that point. His family had deep roots in America, as an ancestor helped found the state of Rhode Island along with Roger Williams. In his memoirs, Angell fondly recalled his early years growing up in a small town in Rhode Island, where his family owned a tavern and a farm. Angell credited his experiences at the tavern, with its diverse group of patrons, for giving him the "power of adaptation to the societies of different classes of men," hinting at his later liberal educational philosophy.¹³ His experience working on the family farm for one summer gave him a similar outlook of the life of "the labouring man."¹⁴ Though Angell's family apparently did not hold an elite position in Rhode Island, Angell's parents still sent him to various boarding schools and then the University Grammar School in Providence, where he mostly learned Latin in the traditional educational style the year before he entered Brown at the age of 16. Angell spent his

¹⁰ W.S. Harwood, "A University of the Central-West," *Harper's Weekly*, 25 August 1894.

¹¹ Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University*, 304.

¹² Kent Sagendorph, *Michigan, The Story of the University* (New York: Dutton, 1948), 163.

¹³ James Burrill Angell, *The Reminiscences of James Burrill Angell* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

post-college years traveling the South and Europe before taking a faculty position at Brown and then the presidency at Vermont.¹⁵

The Michigan Board of Regents tried to convince Angell to accept the presidency in Ann Arbor as early as 1869, but Angell refused, due to the lower salary they offered and the lack of adequate presidential lodging on Michigan's campus. Two years later, the Regents increased their salary offer by 500 dollars and agreed to fund a renovation of the president's residence. Angell then agreed to become Michigan's president.¹⁶ As Bledstein notes, "in an increasingly aggressive, pushy, and impersonal society, (college) presidents joined in the pushing," evidenced by Angell's negotiation for greater compensation.¹⁷ This type of behavior ironically fell in line with the type of middle-class commercial ideals that Angell later combated during the football controversy at Michigan.

As president of Michigan, Angell oversaw a plethora of changes that resulted in the university's modernization and ascendance to the country's educational elite. He also strived to develop a particular type of attitude within his students that fell in line with his democratic ideals. Angell early on supported the new, more diverse style of education, dating to his time at Brown.¹⁸ When he arrived in Ann Arbor, Michigan had already begun shifting to this more practical system, which included electives, and Angell continued to expand it over the course of his presidency. In an era of university-building, when colleges continually increased their numbers of faculty, students, departments, and buildings, Angell led Michigan through the process of expansion typical of the period.

Over his first 28 years, Michigan expanded from three departments to seven and from 25

¹⁵ Ibid., 15-20, 40, 70-120.

¹⁶ Shirley Wheeler Smith, *James Burrill Angell: An American Influence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1954), 79-92.

¹⁷ Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 133.

¹⁸ Angell, *The Reminiscences of James Burrill Angell*, 108.

faculty members to 235, and the enrollment of 3,123 students for the 1898-99 school year was three times as large as when Angell arrived in 1871.¹⁹ Expansion went hand-in-hand with fund-raising and advertising, since universities could not grow unless they lured more and more students. Angell thus aggressively publicized Michigan and sought donations from alumni, who had never really considered giving much money to the state-supported university before Angell's entreaties.²⁰ Angell found much success in his campaign of reform and growth. By 1880 and into the next several decades, Michigan had become a leading university. *Harper's Weekly* deemed it "one of the most progressive as well as effective of our great schools of learning," falling in line with the way the West in general could be considered progressive at this time as compared to the East.²¹

Angell also attempted to guide Michigan's growth with his own personal ideals and morals. The president strongly believed in the importance of education and thought that it should be available to all. This democratic ideal defined what he saw as the purpose of higher education. In the mid-1880s, worried by claims that Michigan had become an elite institution, Angell surveyed students about their father's occupations. The findings—45 percent of students' fathers held a job that involved some kind of physical labor, and only 22 percent of fathers worked in professions that required a college education—thrilled Angell, since they helped prove that anyone could indeed attend Michigan.²² Later, in 1901, Angell wrote an article for the alumni magazine about

¹⁹ Sagendorph, *Michigan, The Story of the University*, 170.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-153. Also, Angell's reports to the Board of Regents for almost every year of the 1890s contain large sections about the need for alumni donations, believing Michigan could not achieve greatness without outside funds.

²¹ In Sagendorph, *Michigan, The Story of the University*, 153.

²² *Ibid.*, 165.

the potentially worrisome increases in cost of education. He recognized this development, but argued that the prosperity of the past 30 years meant that parents could still send their children to universities and could even afford to fund comfortable lives for their children there. Most importantly, Angell added, one's wealth would prove irrelevant if he/she possessed good character, since he/she would be respected all the same in that case; Angell strongly believed in 1901 that the "democratic spirit...still survives in full vigor" in universities.²³

In further evidence of his progressive beliefs, Angell also supported coeducation, which began at Michigan in 1870, the year before he assumed the presidency.²⁴ Michigan's admittance of women at this date provides a stark contrast to the more traditional-minded schools of the East. Harvard, for example, did not begin teaching women until 1943, and Yale College did not admit women until 1969.²⁵ The difference between these schools in the area of coeducation represents further evidence of Michigan's and the West's greater belief in opportunity for all, an ideal akin to the middle-class values of the era. The regional disparity could be seen in the racial composition of football teams of the respective regions as well (though in both East and West, players overwhelmingly tended to be white). Yale did not have a black player until the late 1840s.²⁶ Harvard had a black player as early as 1892, but this still came after

²³ James B. Angell, "The Comparative Expenses of College Students Now and in Former Days," *Michigan Alumnus*, October 1901, 1-3.

²⁴ Angell, *The Reminiscences of James Burrill Angell*, 239.

²⁵ Harvard College, *About Harvard College*, <http://www.college.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k61161&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup85886> and Yale University, *Landmarks in Yale's History*, <http://www.yale.edu/timeline/1969/index.html>.

²⁶ Richard Goldstein, *Levi Jackson, A Pioneer at Yale, is Dead at 74*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/29/sports/levi-jackson-a-pioneer-at-yale-is-dead-at-74.html> (December 2000).

George Jewett became the first black man to play for Michigan in 1890 (during Angell's presidency), which is significant since Michigan's team did not emerge as an organized institution until much later than Yale's.²⁷

In addition to his beliefs about socioeconomic status and coeducation, Angell also possessed strong religious convictions. He did not push these ideals on his students, instead emphasizing proper morality. In Angell's year-opening speech in 1891, the president told students that the faculty would not tolerate activities such as gambling and carousing. The president advised his audience not to engage in activities "unbecoming to gentlemen and which lower the dignity of the University."²⁸ The students apparently did not mind this type of morality, even if they did not fully subscribe to it, for Angell was "universally loved and honored" by students, alumni, and faculty alike throughout his time in Ann Arbor.²⁹ By the 1890s, Angell had thus successfully helped Michigan develop into a large, prestigious, bustling university, marked by the typically Western and middle-class trait of opportunity for all. Angell had proven himself somewhat liberal educationally, though perhaps less so for non-academic activities. His view on athletics, which rapidly developed at Michigan during his stint as president, symbolized his complex figure.

²⁷ Bill Littlefield, *First Black All-American College Football Player Honored, Belatedly*, <http://www.wbur.org/2009/12/19/football-fame-lewis> (December 2009) and Bentley Historical Library, *1890 Football Team*, <http://bentley.umich.edu/athdept/football/fbteam/1890fbt.htm> (March 2007). Newspaper coverage also speaks to regional differences in racial attitudes. Research revealed that newspapers in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia in the 1890s commonly labeled African-American players as "black" or "negro," while the *Michigan Daily* never mentioned Jewett's race in articles from his playing days.

²⁸ "President Angell's Talk," *Michigan Daily*, 3 October 1891, vol. 2, issue 4.

²⁹ "James Burrill Angell," *Michigan Alumnus*, May 1897, pp. 167-69.

Athletics/Football Expansion at Michigan

Football and athletics generally followed the same developmental path at Michigan as they did at the Eastern schools.³⁰ These physical activities emerged first on the Michigan campus as casual endeavors marked by little organization and few rules. It is unclear exactly when Michigan students began playing football, but given the parallels with the East, it would be logical that they first did so around the middle of the century, using the game's most primitive form.

The earliest definite date for football at Michigan is 1873, the year students formed the Football Association. This group did not amount to a team and did not offer any kind of strict organization; it simply represented a club that students used to help organize games.³¹ The interest in football and athletics continued to grow, mirroring both the same process unfolding in the East and the larger fascination with physical activity held by the white upper and middle classes in the second half of the century. The first official Michigan football team played in 1878, still controlled completely by students and without extensive organization. The school continued to field a team throughout the 1880s and competed almost exclusively with fellow Western teams. Michigan's team, though, still found itself well behind its Eastern counterparts in terms of both skill and organization, lacking any kind of significant support system from either alumni or faculty.³²

The lack of support behind athletics at Michigan began to change entering the 1890s. By this time, enough interest had accumulated among the student body in fielding

³⁰ Football development in the East is explored in the first chapter.

³¹ Pack, *100 Years of Athletics, the University of Michigan*, 6.

³² Charles Baird, "A Resume of Michigan's Football History," *Michigan Alumnus*, December 1896, 58.

an organized, winning football team and in participation in athletic endeavors generally for students to seek faculty action. The very first issue of the *Michigan Daily*, in fact, made sure to report on the prospects of the football team, indicating the level of interest among the students.³³ The interest did not necessarily reflect the quality of the team as of yet; subsequent issues of the newspaper decried the lack of participation among the students and made repeated calls for any man interested to come out to practice and play for the team.³⁴ Despite the relatively troubling state of the team, from the beginning, it seems that Michigan students had lofty ambitions regarding football. Around this same time, the student paper remarked “if we expect to make a respectable showing in the East, we must play the Eastern game.”³⁵ This competitiveness and desire to beat the best teams, reflective of middle-class competitive ideals, could be seen the rest of the decade as Michigan football began to reach a position in which it could actually compete with the best.

The students thus recognized that their school’s competitive athletic situation, especially the football team, had significant potential but did not yet possess the necessary infrastructure. The faculty answered the students’ call for more resources in two important ways in 1890. First, the faculty assisted the students in forming a permanent athletic association. The students had formed their own such group in 1878, but it fell apart six years later because it became too much for students to manage themselves. The Athletic Association of the University of Michigan, however, enjoyed support from the University. Any student could still join the AA by paying a subscription fee, but the new

³³ “Our Rugby Team,” *Michigan Daily*, 29 September 1890, vol. 1, issue 1.

³⁴ “Some Suggestions on the Foot-Ball Situation,” *Michigan Daily*, 14 October 1890, vol. 1, issue 14. This is one example of an article that called for men to try out. Many more appeared in subsequent months and years.

³⁵ “Waked Up,” *Michigan Daily*, 9 October 1890, vol. 1, issue 10.

organization also contained an Advisory Board made up of three non-Ann Arbor-resident alumni and four professors. The Board did not actually have much power over the AA but it still served a critical function in giving the students legitimacy and stability.³⁶ Michigan athletics, especially the popular football team, now had the means to sustain and invest in itself thanks to the ordered system of fundraising brought by the subscription fees. So long as enough students subscribed, the school's teams could get better and better, setting the stage for professionalized growth. President Angell and the Board of Regents combined to create the second critical step of purchasing land at the south end of campus for an athletic field for general student (and team) use.³⁷ The University even agreed to pay the cost of preparing the field for use, provided the AA assume responsibility for maintenance (the group could keep gate fees from football games for this purpose). Angell fully supported the move, believing the students needed a place for outdoor exercise, an activity whose benefits the president clearly believed in based on the positive tone in his *President's Report* for the year the University began to prepare the athletic field for use.³⁸ Thanks to faculty support, Michigan students now had the means for further athletic participation.

The newfound means for growth and students' desire for rapid advancement led to rapid growth for Michigan football in the early 1890s. Coinciding with this, the program also took on a much greater professional character. In 1892, the team hired a professional coach for the first time in F.E. Barbour, who had spent the past three years as the quarterback for Yale and thus could theoretically help Michigan reach the stature

³⁶ Pack, *100 Years of Athletics, the University of Michigan*, 6.

³⁷ "Athletic Field," *Michigan Daily*, 29 October 1890, vol. 1, issue 29.

³⁸ James Burrill Angell, "President's Report to the Board of Regents for the Year Ending September 30, 1892."

of the Eastern powers.³⁹ The team actually reverted to using paid graduates as coaches for several years later in the decade, but utilizing Barbour nevertheless set a precedent of the team and students wanting the best possible instruction, so that Michigan could win as much as possible. Caspar Whitney recognized the significance of this step, remarking on the immense potential for Western teams such as Michigan now that they had Eastern coaches. Whitney commented that Western football was growing like “Jack’s beanstalk.”⁴⁰

In the next several years, the growth of Michigan football accelerated, in terms of the quality of the team, the interest behind it, and the amount of professional organization and student/alumni support for it. The game appealed to students and alumni at Michigan for the same reasons football appealed to their counterparts in the East. Football had a rough character, but in a positive way, in the eyes of supporters. In fact, the game’s roughness conferred the type of manly benefits that could not be developed through other activities, according to the *University Record*. Authorities did not even mind football, recognizing the “attraction which trials of skill, strength and endurance have for exuberant youth.” The sport represented an outlet for students’ physical energies, leading to a decrease in hazing, which had been a serious problem for universities. The *Record* recognized the need for University leaders to watch the sport’s development carefully to ensure intercollegiate competition did not cause football to assume too significant of a place in colleges, but no overly worrisome problems existed yet.⁴¹ In fact, Michigan’s football development reached a landmark when it made a respectable showing against Cornell in a loss in 1892. The result prompted more donations to the AA than ever

³⁹ “Around the Campus,” *Michigan Daily*, 1 October 1892, vol. 3, issue 1.

⁴⁰ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 17 December 1892.

⁴¹ In “Intercollegiate Athletic Contests,” *Michigan Daily*, 23 February 1892, vol. 2, issue 99.

before. A local newspaper (the *Washtenaw Times*) contributed money, raising the expectation that other local businessmen would donate to the cause of improving Michigan's team.⁴² The aftermath of the Cornell loss serves as more proof of the critical place funding held for Michigan football, even in its formative stages of growth; from this early time, making money to invest back into the team—a distinctly professional action—represented an essential part of the team's continued expansion.

However, the professionalism inherent in the structure of Michigan football, led to one negative incident that threatened to sidetrack the otherwise consistent growth of the team. In 1893, the University faculty found that several ineligible players had been used in a spring sport (different outlets reported it was either on the baseball or track team). The faculty Senate responded by instituting reform to take greater control of athletics. The governing body created a new Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics in December of that year, consisting of five faculty members chosen by the Senate and four undergraduates chosen by the Board of Directors of the AA. The BIC had final say in all matters of rules, management, and eligibility. Whitney lauded this move, interpreting it as Michigan taking a step towards stamping out professionalism completely.⁴³

One might suppose that the students would be upset about such faculty action, but they supported the creation of the BIC. The *Daily* labeled the move “the most important and the most favorable to athletics that has ever been taken in the University.”⁴⁴ The students did not necessarily desire to win without any regard to rules. They, too, did not want to be seen as cheaters. Students supported the creation of the BIC for two critical

⁴² “Boom for Football,” *Michigan Daily*, 30 November 1892, vol. 3, issue 45.

⁴³ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper's Weekly*, 23 December 1893.

⁴⁴ “The Other Four,” *Michigan Daily*, 5 December 1893, vol. 4, issue 53.

reasons: it further strengthened the legitimacy of athletics and football as University-sanctioned activities, and it did nothing to stop students from investing as much as possible to try and give Michigan a winning team, their prime desire. The ineligibility incident did not even trouble Angell very much. In reaction to talk about reforming football in the East, the president remarked that at Michigan “the faculty as a body has not yet considered (reform),” since the sport had not become associated with injuries nor “gambling and intemperance” in the West to the extent that it had in the East.⁴⁵ Thus, Michigan athletics and Michigan football enjoyed significant early growth without much hindrance, despite internal reform.

The effect of Michigan’s successful football development can be seen most explicitly in the team’s victory over Cornell in 1894, its first ever over an Eastern team, two years after the creation of the BIC. *The Daily* remarked that “at last we have a football team such as we have dreamed of,” and wild celebrations went off both in Detroit, the site of the game, and in Ann Arbor upon the team’s return. Angell, speaking at the Ann Arbor celebration, commented positively on the team’s progress of the past two years, and said he “had no fear of any objectionable features of athletics here in the future.”⁴⁶ The triumph illustrated how far Michigan’s football team had come in terms of its skill and the interest and support behind the team. But the path the team had taken and the constant call for financial backing speaks to the professional manner in which football developed at Michigan. Whitney’s remark that the West and Michigan had “ignorance of what amateur sport is” resonates in this instance.⁴⁷

Continued Professionalism

⁴⁵ “Real Football at Michigan,” *Michigan Daily*, 9 December 1893, vol. 4, issue 57.

⁴⁶ “A Jollification,” *Michigan Daily*, 27 November 1894, vol. 5, issue 50.

⁴⁷ Caspar Whitney, “Amateur Sport,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 23 November 1895.

The Michigan football team's growth over the course of the 1890s reached what most thought at the time to be a climax on Thanksgiving Day, 1898. Undefeated Michigan squared off with fellow football titan Chicago in the latter's city to decide the championship of the West. In dramatic fashion, Michigan halfback Charles Widman broke through tacklers for the decisive score late in the affair, ultimately giving Michigan a 12-11 win and the championship in what the *Alumnus* labeled one of the greatest games ever played in the West (the performance inspired one observer to write "The Victors," which became the Michigan fight song).⁴⁸ Whitney called the 10,000 spectators "the most enthusiastic and best-informed crowd" ever in the region.⁴⁹ Six hundred students attended the celebratory bonfire in Ann Arbor the following Monday, which Secretary James Wade of the Board of Regents and his assistants tended to all day in preparation. Local businessmen donated the wood used for tinder.⁵⁰ The affair truly unified the campus and community in jubilation over the football team.

The atmosphere surrounding the 1898 Thanksgiving Day game and the joyous celebration of the big win belied the serious developments at Michigan and in the West in the preceding years. The transformation of Michigan football into a powerful, commercialized program in the early years of the decade generated little controversy, but that changed in the middle of the decade, beginning with the formation of the forerunner of the Big Nine (and ultimately the modern-day Big Ten) conference. This development and other controversies permeated the West as the turn of the century approached, with Michigan's football team and athletic management becoming increasingly and unabashedly professional in character. The continued trend towards professionalism

⁴⁸ "The Thanksgiving Day Game," *Michigan Alumnus*, December 1898, 112-16.

⁴⁹ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 3 December 1898.

⁵⁰ "Victory Celebrated," *Michigan Daily*, 29 November 1898, vol. 9, issue 54.

culminated in the hiring of ultimate professional coach Fielding Yost in 1901 and the several years of football success thereafter.

In late 1894, as outlined above, President Angell did not find reason to be concerned with the nature of football as practiced at Michigan, even though Michigan football undoubtedly began to take the form of a larger-than-life entity at the University, and even though other schools in the region worried about the sport. President James Smart of Purdue University sent Angell a letter in December asking him to call a meeting of the seven leading Western football universities in an effort to form unified regulations and end football abuses. The *Daily* reported that Angell declined Smart's request, telling Smart in response "as far as Michigan is concerned (Angell) has no fault whatever to find with the present control of athletics," as managed by the BIC.⁵¹ The six other schools—Purdue, Wisconsin, Chicago, Minnesota, Illinois, and Northwestern—met anyway in January of 1895, and while insisting they had no hostility towards football, they devised a set of proposed rules and requirements that they hoped would prevent teams from playing professional/non-student athletes. Later, Angell said he did not attend the meeting only because he had been told it had been postponed; whether true or not, Angell did make sure a Michigan representative attended the second conference held the next year, in February 1896.⁵²

In the time between the two conferences, Michigan had been accused by Caspar Whitney of playing two professionals on their football team in Jimmie Baird and James Hooper. Michigan, through its BIC, strongly denied the accusations. A letter to the editor of the *Daily* reveals the true nature of the disagreement, which reflected the regional

⁵¹ "Football All Right," *Michigan Daily*, 8 December 1894, vol. 5, issue 56.

⁵² "Was Misinformed," *Michigan Daily*, 15 January 1895, vol. 5, issue 73 and "Adopted New Rules," *Michigan Daily*, 15 February 1896, vol. 6, issue 94.

differences between East and West. Nobody apparently paid the players while at Michigan, but the two did coach and play baseball for pay in previous summers to help fund their educations. This fit the Easterner Whitney's definition for professionalism, but Michigan deemed Baird and Hooper amateurs because they had not been paid specifically for their collegiate sport.⁵³

Again, the disagreement over Baird's and Hooper's eligibility speaks to the differing natures of East and West. The latter region's alumni, faculty, and observers, from the beginning of Western big-time college football, never subscribed to the strict philosophy of amateurism to the extent that alumni, faculty, and observers in the East did, meaning the West, especially Michigan, did not take issue with some behaviors that outraged men like Whitney. In fact, the *Daily* casually reported in 1895 that Baird had returned from Chicago, enrolled at Michigan as a senior engineering student, and by the next day had assumed his place as the quarterback of the football team.⁵⁴ Western sentiment meant that such behavior had assumed a normal place in the region, while Whitney saw such behavior, as remotely non-amateur as it may have been, as disgusting and indicative of the West's willingness to cheat, due to the "huge disdain for failure...eminently characteristic of Western institutions."⁵⁵ The different scale of ideals helps explain how, despite accusations of professionalism in the interceding year, Michigan could send its representative to the second reform conference with instructions to argue that current students who had accepted money elsewhere, like Baird and Hooper, should not be outlawed from playing. The same phenomenon helps explain the fact that Michigan's BIC adopted the conference's rules but only with exceptions, since the Board

⁵³ "Communication," *Michigan Daily*, 9 January 1896, vol. 6, issue 69.

⁵⁴ "'Jimmie' Baird is Back," *Michigan Daily*, 10 October 1895, vol. 6, issue 10.

⁵⁵ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 7 March 1896.

did not support some measures that hurt Michigan's team such as the rule prohibiting professional school students who had come from other institutions.⁵⁶ Like the alumni-led teams of the East, Michigan's athletic leadership and faculty agreed to reform, but not fully, since they did not want to overly hinder the success of their team, a behavior that Michigan's athletic organization repeated in the later controversy.

The new rules did not much affect student interest in the team. The 1896 season, in fact, saw the most observer support ever, gauged by the number of subscriptions to the AA and attendance at practices and games.⁵⁷ Neither did a series of disagreements Michigan found itself involved in over the next few years, each of which saw some sort of professional-related controversy. In each of these instances, too, Michigan supporters defended the team or abdicated responsibility, making evident just how defiant the school and its football program could be in the wake of on-field success. Michigan also unapologetically engaged in several openly professional behaviors throughout this period, such as when the BIC held a session devoted to determining ways to develop multiple new revenue streams.⁵⁸ Given the necessity of earning profits in order for the sustainment of a successful program, this action certainly is not egregious, but it nevertheless reflects how commercialized football had become at Michigan.

The various squabbles that Michigan entered into with other teams hold even more significance. In March 1898, Michigan, Illinois, and Chicago joined in accusing Wisconsin of using professionals on its track team, leading the former three to cut off relations with the latter.⁵⁹ The schools only reentered relations as a ploy against Chicago

⁵⁶ "New Rules for Athletics," *Michigan Daily*, 27 March 1896, vol. 6, issue 129.

⁵⁷ "Athletics," *Michigan Alumnus*, November 1896, p. 38.

⁵⁸ "Football Prospects," *Michigan Daily*, 14 June 1897, vol. 7, issue 194.

⁵⁹ Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 26 November 1898.

when that university's team refused to split receipts from football games equally or play games away from its home city.⁶⁰ Michigan claimed a just position, arguing the situation to be about fairness and equality; Professor Albert Pattengill, the Chairman of the BIC, wrote in the *Michigan Alumnus* "we feel and feel deeply that we are in no way to blame for this state of affairs." Pattengill went on to say "we believe that Chicago's point of view is wrong—wrong in practice and wrong in principle."⁶¹ While this may or may not have been true, the argument centered on money, meaning there could be no notions of amateurism involved.⁶² In one other telling incident, Oberlin accused Michigan of brutality and unsportsmanlike behavior in the teams' game in 1897. The BIC responded to Oberlin by declaring the allegations unfounded, without even considering an investigation of any kind.⁶³ Angell had clearly grown weary of all the troubling incidents, commenting in his annual report for 1898-99 about his excitement over Michigan's success in oratorical/debating contests, since it helped prove wrong the "false impression of many that athletic contests absorb the entire attention of the American student, to the exclusion of interest in any kind of intellectual achievements."⁶⁴ Michigan thus continued to engage in behavior questionable by amateur standards, without any real remorse or hesitation. University leadership, too, had become more concerned about the increasing role of professionalized football on campus—the same concern upon which the Eastern faculties eventually tried to act.

Yost and the Climax of Professionalism

⁶⁰ "Chicago Boycotted," *Michigan Daily*, 15 March 1899, vol. 9, issue 122.

⁶¹ "Status of the Position of the University of Michigan in Regard to Athletic Sports with the University of Chicago," *Michigan Alumnus*, April 1899, 274-76.

⁶² Caspar Whitney, "Amateur Sport," *Harper's Weekly*, 25 March 1899.

⁶³ "Michigan Replies," *Michigan Daily*, 20 November 1897, vol. 8, issue 45.

⁶⁴ James Burrill Angell, "President's Report to the Board of Regents for the Year Ending September 30, 1899."

Michigan football supporters' sentiment towards winning only strengthened in the later 1890s, despite the growing concern from Angell. Alumni from outside Ann Arbor called a meeting for December 21, 1900, of other alumni, leading students, faculty, and prominent local businessmen to discuss what had been going wrong with the football team (the team went a combined 15-4-1 in 1899 and 1900, performances apparently not successful enough). It would be "one of the most important conferences in the history of University athletics," according to the *Daily*.⁶⁵ The conference discussed a variety of issues, but the most important point of consensus related to coaching. Attendees decided that a full-time, multi-year professional coach would be necessary for Michigan to reach greater heights, instead of the rotating cast of paid alumni and professional coaches which Michigan previously utilized.⁶⁶ Instead of moving towards greater amateurism in the face of several controversies, Michigan desired a shift towards greater professionalism in the form of a full-time coach.

The stated desires came to fruition later that year when the BIC hired Fielding Yost as Michigan's coach. Yost personified the professional college football coach. Born in rural West Virginia, Yost decided to become a lawyer but discovered football while attending West Virginia University's law school. He played for West Virginia, but also several other teams, most notably for Lafayette. After Lafayette defeated his West Virginia team, Yost "transferred" to the victorious school to play in a big game against Penn, then quickly "transferred" back to West Virginia, an incident that serves as a prime example of professional-type behavior.⁶⁷ Yost soon began a career as a professional

⁶⁵ "The 'Athletic Situation,'" *Michigan Daily*, 21 December 1900, vol. 11, issue 74.

⁶⁶ Henry Bates, "Athletic Conference of Ann Arbor," *Michigan Alumnus*, January 1901, 144-49.

⁶⁷ John Behee, *Fielding Yost's Legacy to the University of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ulrich's Books), 17-23.

coach with Ohio Wesleyan in 1897 while simultaneously engaging in business interests in the offseason. The coach moved on to Nebraska in 1898, Kansas in 1899, and Stanford in 1900. After that year, the school decided to return to an alumni system of coaching, forcing Yost to leave Palo Alto.⁶⁸ That allowed Yost to take the job at Michigan in 1901. He received a salary of \$2,300, plus living expenses for the season; all told, the money Yost earned totaled more than two times the \$2,500 salary that a full professor earned at Michigan, making it easy to see why Angell would eventually question the place of football within the university.⁶⁹

Yost, nicknamed “Hurry up!” after his favorite saying, captured the hearts of Michigan football supporters from the very beginning of his tenure. The *Daily* described the school’s new coach on the eve of his first season thusly:

Coach Yost is electrifying the University. His boundless good nature, his ever-ready wit, his straightforwardness and determination all go to make him an object for hero worshippers. The coach has not only won the hearts and convictions of his men, but he is at the same time a hard master. Yost’s rule, though, is the kind that does not gall. He works with his men.⁷⁰

That praise came before Yost promptly led Michigan to one of the most dominant seasons ever seen in college football in 1901. In going undefeated and winning the Big Nine championship, Michigan outscored its opponents 550-0, including a win over Stanford in Pasadena on New Year’s Day in what would later be recognized as the first Rose Bowl. This performance endeared him to Michigan students and alumni, who adored Yost and believed him “one of the greatest coaches in the country.”⁷¹

Interestingly, Yost used his own system of offense and training, one that more closely

⁶⁸ “Yost of Leland Stanford,” *Michigan Daily*, 1 February 1901, vol. 11, issue 96.

⁶⁹ Behee, *Fielding Yost’s Legacy to the University of Michigan*, 26.

⁷⁰ “Regular Practice Begin,” *Michigan Daily*, 24 September 1901, vol. 12, issue 1.

⁷¹ “Coach Yost,” *Michigan Daily*, 3 December 1901, vol. 12, issue 56.

resembled an Eastern style, instead of the Michigan system that had been developed over previous years.⁷² At the athletic conference in 1900, attendees had determined that whatever coach Michigan hired should use the Michigan system; clearly, team supporters valued winning more than any previously declared principles, since they had no complaints about the ultra-successful Yost and his unique system.

Yost unabashedly pursued victories. After his second season as coach, when uncertainty surrounded whether he would return to fulfill the rest of his contract, Yost eventually announced his return at the team banquet, adding that he “did not care to make any definite statement as to the outlook for next year, except this: we are here to win.”⁷³ He desired wins, though, while also retaining morality. Yost once remarked that he would not tolerate swearing or rough conduct on the part of his players, and that “if they can’t be (gentlemen), I don’t want them.”⁷⁴ But this morality did not coincide with any high-minded views of amateurism, as his view on winning (and his very role as a professional coach) indicated. Michigan won, but just as before, it did not do so in amateur fashion, getting involved in more controversies during Yost’s tenure. In November 1903, Whitney again accused Michigan and Yost of using several players who should have been ineligible. The BIC declared that it found no truth to the charges.⁷⁵ That same year, ill feeling developed between Michigan and Minnesota after unsportsmanlike displays during the teams’ game that season. The *Alumnus* spent the larger portion of an article about the incident arguing that Michigan had done nothing wrong. The article stated that Michigan does “not know in what respect” it could be blamed for the poor behavior and

⁷² “Michigan’s Coach and Captains,” *Michigan Alumnus*, November 1901, 56-58.

⁷³ “Yost Announces Return,” *Michigan Daily*, 27 January 1903, vol. 13, issue 89.

⁷⁴ “Yost in New York,” *Michigan Daily*, 1 February 1905, vol. 15, issue 89.

⁷⁵ “Michigan’s Amateurism Questioned,” *Michigan Alumnus*, November 1903.

“our athletes have played clean games” the past two years.⁷⁶ Perhaps there truly had been no wrongdoing on Michigan’s end in these and several other similar incidents, but it is more likely that Michigan played a part somehow. Most importantly, students and alumni did not seem to care, and faculty did not seem to mind too much yet.

Students and alumni ignored any examples of professionalism because they cared more about winning and prestige, and Yost delivered. The coach made Michigan into a nationally famous football team, and he became a national figure in the process.⁷⁷ Athletics in general thrived during this time, evidenced in 1901 when a wealthy alumnus from Detroit named Dexter Ferry donated 17 acres of land adjacent to the athletic field in order to increase the space available to the general student body. “Ferry Field” thus began hosting football games.⁷⁸ But the football team’s performance under Yost still stands as the most noteworthy athletic development, as the team became all that Michigan supporters had desired in the early 1890s. In September 1904, an election year, football interest took such a hold that the *Daily* declared it “made little difference to (a student) who is going to be elected president but the burning question of the hour is ‘What sort of a team are we going to have this year?’”⁷⁹ At the same time, the *Alumnus* essentially argued that professionalism was a necessary evil since the football team depended on gate money to fund itself.⁸⁰ This is what football at Michigan had become by the time of, and through, the beginning of the Yost era: a subject of mass interest and participation,

⁷⁶ “The Right Athletic Spirit,” *Michigan Alumnus*, December 1903, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁷ Behee, *Fielding Yost’s Legacy to the University of Michigan*, 8.

⁷⁸ James Burrill Angell, “President’s Report to the Board of Regents for the Year Ending September 30, 1902.”

⁷⁹ “Team At Work,” *Michigan Daily*, 27 September 1904, vol. 15, issue 1.

⁸⁰ V.H. Lane, “Athletics and Scholarship,” *Michigan Alumnus*, February 1905, 218-224.

but one also inherently professional and commercialized. The combination of the two forces reached its weightiest point by 1905.

Leaving the Conference

On January 10, 1906, just days after Michigan students had returned from the semester winter break, James B. Angell announced one of the most momentous developments of recent times at the University: he had called a conference of the Big Nine in Chicago for the purpose of reforming Western college football, an event “likely to prove of epoch-making importance,” in Angell’s words. The conference would focus especially on football’s professional features, with Angell commenting that faculty members of conference schools had become “in favor of radical and far-reaching changes” since the controversial 1905 football season in the East had ended.⁸¹ The *Daily* reported that Michigan, through Professor Pattengill, the BIC’s representative to the conference, would support these potential radical reforms. Pattengill would supposedly even propose a curtailment of gate receipts, a move that would constitute a severe blow to the sustainment of Michigan’s ultra-successful, commercialized football program.⁸² The Michigan student body could not believe that their beloved President Angell (just the preceding fall, the students had commissioned a portrait of Angell) could be responsible for the movement. Angell actually called the conference at the request of faculty at other schools, who asked him to do so because of his position as “dean of Western college presidents.” And Angell did not attend the conference, with Pattengill serving as Michigan’s representative. Still, Angell wholeheartedly supported the movement, commenting in a letter to the conference that serious reform would be needed to

⁸¹ “President Angell Calls Conference,” *Michigan Daily*, 10 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 72.

⁸² “Football Conference in Session at Chicago,” *Michigan Daily*, 20 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 81.

“preserve what is good in (football) and to remedy all the incidental evils that have gathered about it.”⁸³ Despite the thinking that the BIC supported Michigan football and athletics generally, Pattengill favored serious reform as well, remarking, “it is time that this disproportionate interest in football is checked.”⁸⁴ The students naturally desired no radical reform. The *Daily* offered no apologies for Michigan’s professionalism, defending Yost and his coworkers since “they are merely factors in the great business concern known as the University of Michigan Athletic Association.”⁸⁵ Thus, there existed two clear sides on the matter without any apparent middle ground, even before the conference actually instituted its reforms.

The students’ surprise at the sudden call for radical reform is understandable. Neither Angell nor any other Michigan administrator had made any recent public mention of a significant distaste for football or athletics. But Angell, a supporter of athletics and physical development in general, had been developing a revulsion towards the commercial behemoth that football had become, especially at Michigan. His report to the Board of Regents for the 1904-05 school year addressed the topic more extensively than Angell had in any report previously and in any report that came afterwards as well. Interestingly, while Angell recognized that football had developed into a great spectacle, the president blamed the football-crazy public for its part in the situation. Angell said he disliked that colleges and faculties shouldered almost all of the blame for the state of football. He insisted that they had given “no subject” greater attention in recent years, and that faculties desired normal athletics as part of a college education instead of the bloated role they had taken on. The veracity of Angell’s claim about faculty action the previous

⁸³ “President Angell Scores Football,” *Michigan Daily*, 23 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 83.

⁸⁴ “The Action of Conference Committee,” *Michigan Alumnus*, February 1906, 198-202.

⁸⁵ “Inlander Bitterly Criticizes Athletics,” *Michigan Daily*, 21 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 82.

few years is debatable, at least at Michigan. However, Angell's parting words served as a strong predictor of future action: the president stated that "something remains to be done...and college faculties...are not likely to neglect their duty in the future."⁸⁶ The calling of the Big Nine conference can be construed as faculties finally trying to take demonstrative action, as they did in the East around the same time.

The initial calling of the conference led into two years of further action and discussion, with Michigan's place always tenuous. The most significant resolutions adopted at the conference's initial meeting included a maximum of three years of playing eligibility, the abolition of the training table, a ceiling of \$0.50 for admission fees, and a reduction of the schedule from seven games to five games.⁸⁷ The combination of these rules, as stated previously, would severely handicap Michigan's program, which had risen to football prominence because of its ability to generate funds and interest. The other Western college teams for the most part had not become so large, meaning those schools did not have the same concerns. The most significant rule, though, called for all coaches to come from the University faculty, meaning that Yost theoretically would be barred from coaching Michigan. Pattengill personally approved of the rule, but did not vote for it at the conference because he knew Yost's popularity meant that the rule would be received poorly at Michigan.⁸⁸

Indeed, of all the proposals, the coaching stipulation drew the most ire at Michigan. Students fully favored keeping Yost, which would entail Michigan refusing to pass the proposed rule. Six of the Regents did as well, due to their support of football in

⁸⁶ James Burrill Angell, "President's Report to the Board of Regents for the Year Ending June 30, 1905."

⁸⁷ "Resolutions Adopted by the Conference," *Michigan Daily*, 23 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 83.

⁸⁸ "Professor Pattengill Tells of Conference," *Michigan Daily*, 23 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 83.

general as practiced at Michigan.⁸⁹ The faculty, after first voting 50-19 not to ban football at the University, tabled the coaching issue and adopted the other resolutions, though the three-year rule was adopted without retroaction.⁹⁰ The retroactive feature of the rule touched off anger among pro-football supporters, since it made ineligible several players on the current team who had already played three years. It appears no opposition existed to the three-year rule in general, but only if it would be applied after all current players had matriculated.

Due to a failure among the universities to come to agreement, Angell called another conference for March, where the representatives decided to permit professional coaches—saving the beloved Yost—and made the three-year rule to be not retroactive, while still banning the training table and also making coaching hires subject to approval by individual school governing boards, at modest salaries.⁹¹ This at first proved acceptable to Michigan’s pro-football students and alumni, but after another conference meeting reverted the three-year rule back to being retroactive, supporters began to discuss Michigan possibly leaving the conference.⁹² The *Alumnus* claimed that the results of the 1906 season indicated that Michigan simply could not compete at the same level as before, what with certain players ineligible because of the retroactive three-year rule and the other regulations serving as hindrances to Michigan’s professionalism-derived competitive advantages.⁹³ In December 1906, the conference elected to extend the season back to seven games and once again removed the retroactive feature, giving hope that

⁸⁹ “Regents May Save Football,” *Michigan Daily*, 24 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 84 and “Students Hold Meeting Tonight,” *Michigan Daily*, 25 January 1906, vol. 16, issue 85.

⁹⁰ “Michigan Senate Adopts Resolutions,” *Michigan Daily*, 13 February 1906, vol. 16, issue 92.

⁹¹ “President Angell Calls New Conference,” *Michigan Daily*, 7 March 1906, vol. 16, issue 110.

⁹² “Michigan May Withdraw From Big Nine,” *Michigan Daily*, 5 June 1906, vol. 16, issue 178.

⁹³ “The New Football Rules,” *Michigan Alumnus*, November 1906, 49-50.

Michigan could compete as before. But one month later, the conference promptly and unexpectedly rejected the proposed changes, outraging Michigan's students and alumni.⁹⁴

The student council immediately presented to the Senate its unanimous desire to withdraw from the conference.⁹⁵ Apparently the faculty largely agreed; two months later, the BIC decided in March that it simply would not operate under the Big Nine rules that it disagreed with. The Board stood by its decision when the conference informed it that Michigan would thus not be allowed to play against any member schools, unless the school agreed to play by conference rules.⁹⁶ With this action, Michigan had effectively removed itself from the conference. The University did not compete with any conference schools in any sport in the spring or fall of 1907. In January 1908, after the Big Nine refused once more to change its rules, the BIC officially decided to withdraw from the conference by a 6-3 vote.⁹⁷ Michigan, one of the original members of the Big Nine and the conference's most prestigious academic and athletic university, decided obtaining its best shot at wins to be more important than a friendly membership in a union of the leading Western schools.

Fallout?

Throughout the series of events that culminated in Michigan's withdrawal, President Angell remained silent. He spoke in public about his views on the football controversy for the only time at the Chicago alumni banquet in the spring of 1906. According to the *Chicago Tribune* (as quoted in the *Michigan Alumnus*), in his speech, Angell listed his biggest qualms with the sport:

⁹⁴ "Conference Shows No Mercy to Michigan," *Michigan Daily*, 13 January 1907, vol. 17, issue 77.

⁹⁵ "Student Council Suggests Withdrawal," *Michigan Daily*, 17 January 1907, vol. 17, issue 80.

⁹⁶ "'Stand Pat,' Says Board of Control," *Michigan Daily*, 24 April 1907, vol. 17, issue 156.

⁹⁷ "Michigan Out of the Conference," *Michigan Alumnus*, February 1908, 169-71.

The public had come to consider that the first twelve weeks of college were for football, with an occasional lapse into intellectual pursuits. Other objections to the game had come along with this. The pains which were taken to gather members of the team from all over the country, the training of men as gladiators, and the making of the game a great spectacle for thousands of people have been frowned upon justly. The game came to have a different purpose than that of recreation and healthful strife. The boys in school were becoming infected with a wrong idea of what college life really stood for. The great sums of money involved in carrying on the game were a peril to the students, because there came the fight for the coaches. Every university wanted the best coach and fabulous sums of money were paid for the purpose of attaining this end.

But Angell claimed he had been misunderstood because of his reforming actions. Angell insisted he was “an admirer of the game” ever since he played it in his college days, that he even thought concerns over violence were “excessive,” and that he thought reform necessary “if the game was to be saved at all.”⁹⁸ These remarks add to a history of ambivalence for Angell towards football.

From the evidence gathered, it is difficult to pinpoint Angell’s exact position on football. He clearly did not like it in its bloated, commercialized form at Michigan, yet his actions also indicate an extent of apathy. Angell did not assert his authority nearly as much as he could have. The president did not possess any official power over Michigan’s athletic program, but given Angell’s immense popularity and influence over the University, it seems impossible to think he did all that he could have. If Angell truly cared about amateur reform, why did he not try to ensure that Michigan stayed in the Big Nine, where it would be forced to tone down football? Perhaps Angell simply did not care about the issue to the extent that some of his comments indicated. In evidence of that possibility, his memoir does not reference any of the football strife during his time at Michigan. Or perhaps Angell did not want to go against general sentiment. The students,

⁹⁸ “Dr. Angell on Football,” *Michigan Alumnus*, April 1906, 295-96.

like their football-mad counterparts in the East, overwhelmingly desired that Michigan football continue on its intense path of winning. They saw nothing wrong with the professional manner in which Michigan football operated, indicating the extent to which middle-class values guided young people and the larger culture in general by this time. Clearly, the faculty did not mind the direction of the football team either, given that the Senate never took more forceful action and that three of the five faculty members on the BIC voted to leave the reform-minded Big Nine. In sum, no governing entity at Michigan held the amount of power, or desire, necessary to tone down the professionalized, larger-than-life character of the school's football team.

The pages of the *Michigan Daily* from the fall of 1907 make clear that the Michigan football team's first season playing outside the confines of the Big Nine went off with no less enthusiasm or passion for a successful year. The first issue of the semester remarked optimistically "we can beat Pennsylvania," the big-name Eastern opponent on the schedule in 1907, and reported that the team possessed the "confidence born of determination." Even Fielding Yost met the burgeoning season "with a seriousness quite foreign to the Yost that Michigan students [had] idolized for nearly seven seasons." The article contained no mention of the conference, or of Michigan's relationship to its former co-members.⁹⁹ Michigan football continued to grow; athletic management installed new bleachers at Ferry Field for the season, reflective of the still-strong interest in the team despite a lack of familiar opponents.¹⁰⁰ The unrelenting interest could be found at a pep rally in October, when a graduate guest speaker told the assembled crowd of 3,500 students—already rallying their football team to beat

⁹⁹ "Varsity Begins Signal Practice," *Michigan Daily*, 24 September 1907, vol. 18, issue 1.

¹⁰⁰ "Ferry Field Gets New Bleachers," *Michigan Daily*, 25 September 1907, vol. 18, issue 2.

Pennsylvania, even though the game would not be played for another month—that he “came not to arouse spirit but to be inspired” by the spirit Michigan already exuded, and that the school’s football supporters defied the critics who had said that a worse Michigan team would bring a lack of enthusiasm.¹⁰¹ The inexorable passion for football could also be seen later that month, when Michigan defeated Ohio State. The bleachers at Ferry Field “formed an impressive spectacle,” and “Michigan’s cheering was, as it had to be, far and away better than usual.”¹⁰²

In no way did it appear that the Michigan football community had entered into any kind of malaise about its relegation from the Big Nine, and no significant party offered any indication that it desired to rejoin the conference. In fact, the only step taken by any governing entity at Michigan served to further weaken the university’s relationship with the conference. This action came in October of 1907, when the Board of Regents—a body with little history of interfering with athletics, though most of its members had expressed support for severing Michigan’s relations with the Big Nine when the initial controversy developed—reorganized the BIC and made the body more responsible to faculty control. The *Daily* interpreted the Regents’ reconfiguring as likely to lead to even more significant “estrangement of Michigan from the Conference alliance.”¹⁰³ In its first year of competition after unofficial separation from the Big Nine, Michigan football thus exhibited little change in its operative style (it remained professionalized) and interest behind it (students and alumni remained passionate, involved supporters). Additionally, the school’s athletic and academic leadership still felt

¹⁰¹ “‘We’ll Whip Pennsylvania,’ Assured Simons,” *Michigan Daily*, 17 October 1907, vol. 18, issue 24.

¹⁰² “Michigan Conquers Ohio in Great Game,” *Michigan Daily*, 27 October 1907, vol. 18, issue 34.

¹⁰³ “Athletic Policy Excites Interest,” *Michigan Daily*, 24 October 1907, vol. 18, issue 31.

content to stay isolated from the Big Nine conference and its reform initiative. The result of the much-anticipated Pennsylvania game in 1907 perfectly illustrates the way in which Michigan football kept to its pre-separation character. Michigan lost the game to Pennsylvania, but this did not raise any doubts. Michigan may have been “defeated, but not disgraced”; Michigan lost, but it “[triumphed] in the victory of (Pennsylvania’s) red and blue.” And the *Daily* maintained that though the beloved Fielding Yost fell “for the third team in successive seasons in his biggest game of the schedule, Coach Yost looms up as the result of yesterday’s game as the greatest coach in the country.”¹⁰⁴ The severing of relations with the Big Nine brought change to the Michigan football team’s schedule, but it did not alter the professionalized, commercial, big-time nature of football at Michigan. The institution kept its status as one of great importance—a status it earned because of its professional manner of growth.

In both the East and at Michigan, the newer generations of students’ and alumni’s marked competitive impulses and drive for excellence, evidence of the way the rise of middle-class values informed them, swept up the game of football, the popularity of which reflected the masculinity espoused by the white middle class. In both East and West, after calls for reform from older, more traditional-minded alumni who had once controlled college football, wary faculty tried to act, but in both regions, they essentially failed. Football remained strong after the strife of 1905-07, and it kept its character as well. In the East, this showed the strength of the game’s popularity and the middle-class culture behind it, in that football could overcome opposition in a place with at least some tradition of upper-class amateur beliefs and men who held these beliefs. At Michigan, the

¹⁰⁴ “Pennsylvania Triumphs Over Michigan in Great Contest,” *Michigan Daily*, 17 November 1907, vol. 18, issue 55.

place in the West whose football program most resembled the powerful Eastern ones, football's continued professional growth showed that the newer, more progressive West, lacking in the same type of upper-class amateur tradition, offered even less resistance to the proponents of professionalized football than the East did, despite the successful reform led at Western institutions with weaker football programs. In both places, at Michigan and the East, the continued ascendance of professionalized football, albeit a less-rough version of it, proved that the conflict over football can truly be seen as a conflict over the primacy of rapidly expanding middle-class values. The alumni who challenged college football had no power to enact their desired reforms, thrust out by the newer generation that led football's growth with these values; their criticism of college football represented their anxieties over their declining status in society generally. The faculty and presidents who challenged college football had no mandate to enact their desired reforms, with the culture at large influenced by middle-class values and thus opposed to any action that threatened the new nature of football. All told, the failure of reformers to enact any lasting, radical change in the first significant test of college football's livelihood constitutes more confirmation of the ascendancy of the middle-class values that took hold of the U.S. over the course of the 19th century.



Figure 4: Fans walk towards Michigan Stadium before a football game in September 2010



Figure 5: Inside Michigan Stadium during a football game in November 2011

EPILOGUE

The professionalism and commercialism that pervade college football today, as well as the violence that remains inherent in the sport, indicate the results of reformers' failure to enact significant, lasting changes to the game in the early 20th century. In just about every way, the professional and commercial character of college football has grown unchecked, reaching astronomical financial levels in some instances. The forerunner of the NCAA came about in 1905 after university representatives' calls for reform nearly resulted in a radical restructuring of college football, with some parties even calling for the sport's abolishment. College presidents and faculties created this predecessor of the NCAA because they wanted to both make the game safer and decrease the influence that big-time college football had on campuses and in public culture. These university reformers developed their positions in reaction to features of the sport that included the huge end-of-year championship games in cities such as New York and Chicago, events that became true spectacles and drew upwards of 30-40,000 spectators; the collection of gate money for profit, which contributed to the unchecked growth of teams violated ideals of what reformers thought should be happening at respected educational institutions; and the belief that football took away from the education of students, given that pupils spent so much time and energy on their beloved teams, whether playing on the "elevens" or merely following them.

Today, the NCAA effectively works in partnership with universities and athletic conferences to maximize profits while claiming to maintain the amateur ideal, a concept that has never seemed so fictional or anachronistic. The organization hardly resembles an entity designed to promote and maintain the amateurism of college athletics and athletes,

specifically as it regards college football, the sport that provides more profits to universities than any other game (as it did in the 1890s). College presidents and representatives still control the NCAA, but much of the organization's operations are left to full-time staff members unaffiliated with universities. Said presidents do not seem to mind very much that the NCAA, originally designed to restrict football from growing out of control, has morphed into an exorbitant, profit-seeking body. As Taylor Branch outlines, the organization charges high admission fees at NCAA sporting events, collects large amounts of money from television networks for the right to broadcast said events, and then profits from the licensing and sale of these broadcasts for future use. The television deal between the NCAA and CBS Sports/Turner Broadcasting comes off as the most shockingly profitable. The two networks combined to pay the NCAA \$771 million for the right to broadcast the organization's basketball tournament each year, the event that serves as the main profit source for the governing body. Concerned observers of the 1890s might have considered this arrangement legitimately obscene—many observers today have declared similar sentiments. Branch calls the NCAA a “cartel,” and says the fact that the organization profits from the labor of unpaid, “amateur” athletes means the situation gives off an “unmistakable whiff of the plantation.” The NCAA collects such lofty earnings while somehow enjoying nonprofit status.¹

The athletic conferences behave in much the same way as the NCAA. The latter group looks on as individual conferences—the Big Ten included—collect multi-million dollar television contracts for sports games, most prominently football and basketball. If the NCAA ran college football's postseason, it would likely agree to an even larger deal than it has for basketball. Instead, the group condones the conferences' bowl game

¹ Branch, *The Shame of College Sports*.

system, in which bowl game companies—also officially designated nonprofits—run postseason exhibitions in partnership with corporate sponsors, with both entities profiting from the resulting attendance fees and television money. If the men who originally created the NCAA thought that the New York Thanksgiving games posed a threat to amateur ideals, it is difficult to imagine how they would explain the year-end games today. The NCAA does still enforce eligibility and other rules, but the institution receives constant criticism for doing a poor job in this area, with one example being Yahoo! Sports columnist Dan Wetzel’s disparagement of the organization for its botched handling of the recent infractions case involving the University of Miami football and basketball programs. Wetzel labeled the failed oversight attempt the NCAA’s “latest enforcement gaffe.”² Nobody would question the skill with which the NCAA generates profits, however, income that essentially comes from the labor of unpaid, “amateur” athletes. In this way, the NCAA, with no significant disapproval from presidents and faculties, now resembles a bastardization of what its founding members intended it to be.

The current state of the Big Ten represents the highly commercialized nature of the conferences and the NCAA. The Big Ten originated as a literal “conference” of the presidents of seven leading Midwestern universities, men who came together in an attempt to create a unified set of rules and regulations that would ideally change the professionalized nature of college football in the West and halt its continued commercial growth. Today, like the NCAA, the Big Ten seemingly seeks first and foremost to maximize profits, both for the athletic departments of member schools and for itself. As

² Dan Wetzel, *NCAA’s Mishandling of Miami Case Reason for College Athletes to Get Endorsement Deals*, 23 January 2013, <http://sports.yahoo.com/news/ncaaf--ncaa-s-mishandling-of-miami-case-one-more-reason-college-athletes-should-get-endorsement-deals-224448879.html>.

with the NCAA, even though member presidents still hold power to vote on conference decisions, the conference employs a full-time staff unaffiliated with actual universities, including a commissioner, Jim Delany, who serves as the de facto president of the conference (other conferences around the country use the same model as well). An institution created to be a vehicle for combating the rapidly-developing professional elements in college football now collects \$310 million dollars in revenue annually according to Forbes, most of which comes from the conference's college football television contract with ABC/ESPN.³ Much of the Big Ten's financial clout also comes from its own television network, the Big Ten Network. The Big Ten now actively seeks to generate more revenue by using BTN as a financial vehicle, evidenced by the announcement last fall that the conference would add Maryland and Rutgers to its membership in an expansion movement fueled by the desire to broach the television footprint of the East Coast.⁴ The Big Ten's profit-motivated move to expand perfectly illustrates the extent to which the conference has abandoned its initial mandate as a Midwestern, anti-professionalized-college football reform group.

The present-day University of Michigan athletic operation also exhibits the commercial character seen in the NCAA and Big Ten. One may not be surprised by this fact given that the school first broke relations with the conference for professional-related reasons, but Michigan actually rejoined the group of Western schools relatively quickly. Its reasoning for doing so, however, still portended future professionalism. After

³ Chris Smith, *The Most Valuable Conferences in College Sports*, 16 January 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/chris-smith/2013/01/16/the-most-valuable-conferences-in-college-sports/>.

⁴ Brett McMurphy and Dana O'Neil, *Maryland Accepts Big Ten Invite*, 20 November 2012, http://espn.go.com/college-sports/story/_/id/8651934/maryland-terrapins-join-big-ten-rutgers-scarlet-knights-join-well-sources-say.

separating from the then-Big Nine in 1907 because students and alumni feared that the conference's reforms would inhibit the pursuit of wins, student sentiment gradually reversed as undergraduates began to favor returning to the conference, which eventually occurred in 1917. This change in feeling did not result because students suddenly desired to curb the scale of the football program, or because of some scandal that violated amateur ideals; the students, sick of competing against inferior Western opponents and unable to schedule elite Eastern teams, simply wanted to once again play against the best possible competition.⁵ If anything, despite the previous respective stances of the reform-driven Big Nine and Michigan, the latter's decision to rejoin its former peers can be interpreted as professional in nature, since it reflected that Michigan football's supporters still wanted to challenge the best.

The current manifestation of the Michigan football program, and the school's athletic department in general, operate in a highly professionalized manner. It can perhaps be said that the football players themselves play solely for the "love of the game," since it is against NCAA rules for them to be compensated in any way outside of their athletic scholarships, but players' attempts at winning are central to the business model of the Michigan athletic department. Wins drive fan interest, which increases revenue, which sustains the successful football/athletic programs—the same way Michigan, as well as the Eastern schools, operated in the 1890s. Dating to the events of 1907, the Michigan football program and athletic program have enjoyed an essentially uninhibited process of growth, fueled by the money earned from a supposedly amateur sport in football. This phenomenon is manifest at the corner of Stadium Blvd. and Main St. in Ann Arbor today, where the football team's 107, 501-person capacity stadium sits.

⁵ Pack, *100 Years of Athletics, the University of Michigan*, 12.

The capacity is almost shocking when one considers that 30,000-person crowds alarmed observers a century ago.

The growth of Michigan football and its athletics generally seem unlikely to end anytime soon. Last fall, just two months before the Big Ten made official its own form of expansion, the Michigan athletic department announced a \$250 million dollar, seven-to-ten year project to renovate its entire athletic campus. In stark contrast to the growth of Michigan football, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and the other powerful schools of the East finally did take serious reforming action in 1945, when they created the first “Ivy Group” agreement (essentially forming what later officially became the Ivy League). The agreement created several rules and regulations, none more important than the stipulation that banned non need-based scholarships.⁶ In effect, the new rule finally curtailed the big-time nature of college football on Eastern campuses. Today, Ivy League schools still have football teams, and fans crowd stadiums, but schools’ athletic departments are not so large that winning and losing, and thus the creation of revenue, determine athletics’ viability. The lack of scholarships has essentially reduced the scale of football, and the sport now resembles something much closer to the amateur ideal at places such as Harvard and Yale than it did in the early 20th century at these same places. Yet while these original powers decided to institute serious reform, the rest of the country did not follow suit. Today, there are 120 Division-I, Football Bowl Subdivision college football teams,⁷ meaning there are 120 college football teams that have programs dependent on wins and money, and thus programs foreign to the initial guiding notion of amateurism.

⁶ Ivy League, *History of the Ivy League*, <http://ivyleaguesports.com/history/timeline/index>.

⁷ The NCAA divides its athletic teams into divisions based on school size. D-I FBS football teams are the biggest and best in the country compared to the other divisions.

Instead, these programs are even more informed by later 19th-century middle-class values of competitiveness and ambition than their counterparts in the 1890s.

Controversy once again surrounds college football today, as it first did in the 1890s. The entire issue can essentially be traced to the disconnect between the ideal of amateurism that informed early sport in the Eastern U.S. (and thus sport in general in the U.S.) and the true economic and social nature of America. An amateur-based sporting system in the U.S. at the level of universities, a level subject to mass public interest, likely never could have remained viable, simply because the American social structure would not support it. The American middle class that emerged out of the country's large-scale capitalist economy and that began to dominate the country and its culture simply could not coexist with a philosophical system derived from England's social structure—that is, a structure marked by an upper class distinctly separate from a lower class, with little middle class presence and an economic system that did not necessarily place significant value on social mobility and the competitiveness that comes from it. Football developed at a time in America that proved troublesome to amateur growth; a time before the middle-class driven economy had taken complete ascendancy, and thus before the older values derived from a class that held power in a different economy had completely disappeared. The problem is that this older group initiated football's growth, creating ideals associated with football that could not last unless this rapidly fading class and its values somehow managed to survive, despite the increasingly preponderant ideals of the growing middle class. Perhaps if college football did not emerge until the 1920s or so, when the status of the U.S. economy and middle class had become much firmer, then the

controversy that defines the sport might never have emerged. But this, of course, can never be known.

The middle-class values and the economic system they came from still inform American culture today. The rise-from-the-bottom story remains a classically American phenomenon—it remains the American Dream. Given this, it is only natural that football remains as popular and problematic as ever, with men such as Taylor Branch (in lieu of Caspar Whitney) still trying to expose the game's flaws, and leaders such as President Obama (in lieu of Teddy Roosevelt) cognizant that the game's cultural importance is significant enough to necessitate his input. One need look no further than college football to see just how much the aforementioned middle-class ideals and large-scale capitalism have come to be accepted and even taken for granted in the U.S. today. As evidence, the most significant controversy over the sport has shifted from the very presence of commercial-related tendencies within the game to the complaint that college football players do not receive the deserved amount of compensation (scholarships do not suffice). Critics do not care whether or not the amateur ideal is truly upheld; they just want the NCAA to stop pretending it is at the expense of players' fair compensation. This modern controversy might stand a better chance of being successfully resolved than the original one, if only because the opponent is less a conflicted society and more an inept, misguided organization.

Football is still violent. It is less violent, since the reform of the early 20th century led to the eventual proliferation of the forward pass and a more open game. But the game's inherent violence, the facet that originally made it so appealing to late 19th-century Americans, is still present, and it is a significant reason the game appeals to so

many Americans today. College football is also still a professionalized sport, to an even greater extent than in the early years of the 20th century since the U.S. in general is commercialized to a greater extent. Many critics detest the flawed “amateur” model of the sport, but supporters and detractors alike care deeply about teams’ wins and losses, about the competition and the ambition of the players. Sustained winning is the overarching mission in college football, a principle that goes unquestioned. This condition is antithetical to amateurism, but in reality, amateurism is antithetical to capitalist, middle-class America. The supposed ills of college football remain largely the same today as they did in the late 19th/early 20th centuries because we remain largely the same: fascinated with physicality, driven to be the best, and influenced by the middle-class culture that spawned both of these values. We profess our uneasiness with the violent, professional nature of college football at times, but we cannot change who we are. Hence, the televisions remain tuned in, and the stadiums stay full.

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