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Nationalization and Regionalism in 1920s College Football

Bennett Jeffery Koerber

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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NATIONALIZATION AND REGIONALISM IN 1920s COLLEGE FOOTBALL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of History

by
Bennett J. Koerber
B.A., Louisiana State University, 2012
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Abstract

By illuminating the complexities of 1920s American society, college football serves as a remarkably insightful cultural device. At the commencement of the decade, a national business community – one that had been developing since the late nineteenth century – appeared to have come to fruition. The more connected nature of the country served to homogenize the United States economically, politically, and even socially. Citizens who had once lived autonomously found themselves more interconnected with neighboring regions of the country, and thus increasingly defined by national characteristics. This served as an internal crisis of sorts because regional identity operated as a unique and crucial component of individual Americans' personal identities. In this atmosphere, it makes sense that when college football nationalized in the 1920s the sport would follow the same pattern – a diminishment of regionalism as the sport expanded. However, the opposite occurred as supporters' ties with their regional football communities strengthened when encountered with competition from outside teams.

This study utilizes the Walter Camp All-American football team, the Southern Methodist University football team, and the 1929 Carnegie Report on college athletics to explore the growth and nationalization of the game during the decade. This thesis concludes that, by the end of the 1920s, changes in college football and American society allowed for a more connected national football community as opposed to the regional disassociation that existed prior to the decade, while at the same time reinforcing and even strengthening regional identity by placing it within a competitive national context. What the growth of college football illustrates is not just a simple transition from isolated communities to a homogenous nation, but rather, how regions became more important as the nation unified. This study complicates the traditional notion that diverse localities easily eroded in the face of a more structured and nationalized 1920s American

society. Furthermore, by examining a variety of crucial personal actions associated with 1920s college football, this study demonstrates that individual supporters, not an uncontrollable environment or institutions connected to the game, made regional football communities an integral component of the sport.

Introduction

Prior to a 1924 road game against the University of Minnesota Gophers, Vanderbilt football coach Dan McGugin knew that he needed to seize his team's attention on the task at hand. The contest in Minneapolis presented the southern team with a unique opportunity, and the soft-spoken coach understood this as he gathered his team together prior to the game. Minnesota was fresh off an upset of a highly regarded University of Illinois team, and thus carried a considerable amount of momentum and national publicity into the contest.¹ If McGugin's squad could pull off an unexpected win against the Gophers, Vanderbilt could acquire their own widespread exposure. With the players focused solely on their coach, McGugin began an emotional speech that evoked much more than triumph in a football contest.

Men, those people in the stands out there haven't heard of Southern football. When they think about the South, they think about the Civil War – they think about pain, suffering, and death. Many people have no idea of what Southern manhood is all about. Today we can show them. When your mothers looked on you sleeping in your cradles twenty years ago, they wondered when the time would come when you could bring honor to the South. That time has arrived!

Vanderbilt went on to win the game sixteen to zero.²

The “bring honor to the South” speech proves interesting on many levels. McGugin strays from turning the contest into the Civil War reincarnated – not once, does the coach mention a contentious North. Rather, the speech focuses on the athletes correcting a misinformed narrative about their home and bringing national respect to the South. Vanderbilt transforms from a football team into representatives of their native region determined to prove not only to the spectators in the stands, but also to the nation, that southern football, and thus the South, was relevant and dignified. Of course, a football game served as the primary objective of the meeting,

¹ For national attention of this accomplishment, see: "Comment on Current Events in Sports." *New York Times*, Nov 17, 1924.

² Lawrence Wells, ed. Introduction to *Football Powers of the South* (Oxford, MS: Sports Yearbook Company, 1983), v.

but when Vanderbilt became the South's team, the sport became an instrument to obtain national dignity and respect, while at the same time reinforcing regional pride. Because of sports' competitive nature, becoming part of college football's national conversation did not mean a loss of regional identity, but rather a strengthening of it – the nationalization of collegiate football perpetuated regionalism. This process illustrates the cultural power of college football.

Furthermore, by suggesting that a victory over the Midwest foe would lead to respect, the Vanderbilt coach admits to Southern football lacking national appreciation – a respected power would not need to earn recognition. McGugin was correct in his assessment. Prior to the 1920s, the Northeast possessed a near-monopoly on college football notoriety. The proponents of the sport deemed the Northeastern schools, especially the “Big Three” of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, as the elite class of collegiate football.³ However, at the beginning of the decade a shift began to occur, as teams further west began to receive the attention of Northeast sportswriters, and receive recognition as being on par or better than the East's finest teams. The first chapter of this study demonstrates this homogenization of collegiate football in the 1920s as the result of the individual efforts of coaches, sportswriters, and other institutions rather than the product of uncontrollable factors of American society. Specifically, the chapter analyzes the nationalization of the sport through the Walter Camp All-American team and various intersectional contests between teams from the East and the West Coast.

Of particular interest to the nationalization of the sport was the westward movement of the “frontier” of college football. Prior to the decade, college football supporters deemed teams from the Midwest as “western” opponents, and many of these teams associated themselves with

³ Richard Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History*, 2nd edition, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 47. As Richard Davies notes, as college football appeared on more campuses in the 1890s, “the dominance of Eastern elite schools was being threatened by powerful ‘Western’ teams, namely the Universities of Michigan, Minnesota, and Chicago.” These powerful Midwest football teams were the exception, and the power was still largely held by the teams in the East.

the Western Conference.⁴ By the 1920s, as teams from the Midwest began to play various squads from the West Coast, sportswriters referred to teams such as Notre Dame and Ohio State as representatives of the East.⁵ The subtle change in the headlines of American sports sections illuminates the nationalization of the sport.

Because of college football's coast-to-coast expansion, 1920s intersectional contests, such as the 1924 matchup between Vanderbilt and Minnesota, proved significant.⁶ These highly publicized collegiate contests occurred previously, but in the post-war period, the games became more frequent and developed into an indispensable component of college football. Newspapers took notice of the public's affection for the games and regularly generated headlines endorsing the cross-country affairs.⁷ Football promoters went as far as to call for an "intersectional Saturday" to be played one weekend during every season – four eastern teams would travel west and four teams from the Midwest would go East. According to those advocating the contests, the games would provide a more certain "satisfaction in knowing who are the real leading teams."⁸

The desire to obtain regional pride through college football was not unique to this particular decade, but by the 1920s, the altered state of college football perpetuated regional

⁴ Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 19. Murray Sperber refers to the Big Ten by its former name: the Western Conference.

⁵ For Ohio State as the eastern representative in the 1921 Tournament East-West football game, see: Harry M. Grayson, "California Wins Gridiron Classic," *Oregonian*, Jan 2, 1921.

For Notre Dame referred to as an eastern opponent, see "NOTRE DAME ROUTS STANFORD BY 27-10." *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1925. These headlines display the subtle movement of the "frontier" of college football.

⁶ In the 1920s, Newspapers consistently referred to these contests between teams from different regions of the country as "intersectional." For an example of this, see *The New York Times* article reporting of Vanderbilt's 1924 victory over Minnesota. "Vanderbilt Beats Minnesota, 16-0." *New York Times*, Nov 23, 1924.

⁷ For the "proliferation" of intersectional contests in the 1920s, see Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 7.

⁸ Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930* (Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse Press, 2007), 27-28. Source originally found in an uncredited and undated 1920 newspaper clipping from the Camp Papers, Yale University Archives.

identity.⁹ As college football historian Michael Oriard notes, “Every community had its own football culture, shaped by its own and its region’s history, its resources, its civic aspirations, and countless other factors....” These regional football cultures became an identity for its local supporters, and the various styles of play associated with particular sections yielded a unique characteristic for which a local football community could distinguish itself from other areas of the country.¹⁰ The second chapter of this study explores the creation of a Southwestern football identity through the rise of Southern Methodist University football in the 1920s. With the Dallas community providing ardent support, the SMU football team not only transformed from perennial losers to a nationally recognized power by 1928, but they also directly influenced the growth and respect of Southwest football.

Historian Robert Wiebe describes nineteenth century American society as vaguely connected “island communities.”¹¹ Prior to the 1920s, local college football factions existed much in the same manner. Beside the occasional intersectional matchup, various regional football communities endured with minimal interaction. In part, the disassociation was due to the delayed introduction of the sport to various regions and the sparse population in certain sections of the country, but by the end of World War I, the game’s popularity and skill had spread. However, the sport lacked a core – there was no unifying aspect of collegiate football that could bring the local communities together.¹² In the 1920s, as the game homogenized, the efforts of various regions to garner unbiased notoriety served as an adhesive force. The desire for national

⁹ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 310-315. As Edward Ayers explains in *The Promise of the New South*, team sports, including college football, provided a new source of regional pride for Southerners in the late nineteenth century.

¹⁰ Michael Oriard, *King Football*, 86. Oriard mentions that the Midwest became known “for rock-‘em, sock-‘em power football, the Southwest for wide-open passing, and the South for fierce combativeness.”

¹¹ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), xiii.

¹² Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 12. Wiebe mentions that the United States was a society lacking a “core” in the late nineteenth century.

recognition from collegiate football sportswriters became a common goal. Furthermore, the ambition to become college football's national champion united the disparate regions in a common purpose. Previously, the northeastern champion essentially constituted as college football's national champion and a regional championship served as the ultimate goal for most other teams – in the 1920s a national championship became a possibility for teams from all regions. Through unified objectives, isolated regions became part of a national collegiate football community.

In the 1920s, sectional pride proved to be of the utmost importance – even ranking above fierce intrastate rivalries. Auburn students demonstrated this change in collegiate football as students packed the campus auditorium to cheer on rival Alabama in the Crimson Tide's 1926 Rose Bowl game versus Washington. Since 1907, the two Alabama schools had severed athletic relations, yet regional pride eclipsed the tumultuous relationship between the universities.¹³

The expansive national football community of the 1920s integrated the formerly isolated localities, thus creating a regional crisis. To root for the success of one's school proved the only concern when hope of a conference championship and respect from regional peers was the end goal. As part of a national football community, the supporter's school became one of many across the country and their identity with a region intensified. When a team from a respective region combated a squad from another, the collective regional football identity was at stake. In this sense, the evolution of a more vast football landscape – one played in all sections of the country – served as a heterogeneous force for football regions.¹⁴ It was also in this national college football landscape that the idiosyncrasies of the regional community became most

¹³ Andrew Doyle, "Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism," *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1997): 32. All athletic relations, not just football, had been severed after the 1907 season.

¹⁴ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 133-134. Wiebe mentions the difficult that arose in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as communities had difficulty distinguishing themselves from others in a more homogenized United States.

apparent, as they compared style of play, fan support, and skill to rival regions in order to determine sectional supremacy.¹⁵ Thus, as the individual college football fan in the 1920s became a smaller piece of a larger puzzle, it made sense to support the regional football community vigorously.

Amidst college football's rapid growth, the notion to win at all costs proved truer than ever. The transformative decade witnessed increased efforts of illegal recruiting and athletic subsidies by alumni, boosters, and even university employed athletic administrators in order to gain an advantage on opponents. Following numerous abuses toward the amateur ideals of the college game, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching investigated the game's impact on the academic integrity of America's universities. Through the analysis of various controversies and the 1929 Carnegie Report on athletics, chapter three observes regional football proponents' efforts to endorse their local schools and conferences as "clean" in respect to other sections of the country. Furthermore, the debate surrounding the publication of the report and other controversies displays the attempts of elite, eastern academics to quell their fading significance in an increasingly modern and professional American society.

By the 1920s, everyday life in the United States had come to be characterized by what historian Robert Wiebe defined as "bureaucratic orientation" – "the values of continuity and regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management set the form of problems and outlined their alternate solutions."¹⁶ With actions such as the implementation of time zones, enforcement of the English language in schools, and thriving transcontinental railroad lines, the United States was a more homogenized nation economically, politically, and at times socially.

¹⁵ Edward Ayers and Peter Onuf, introduction to *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, Edward Ayers, Patricia Nelson Limerick, Stephen Nissenbaum, and Peter Onuf. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8. While not particularly discussing college football, Ayers and Onuf are speaking of regions in a general sense.

¹⁶ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 295.

Despite a more connected American society, the rigid ideals of Wiebe's "bureaucratic orientation" failed to permeate a powerful and intimate force: personal identity. In order to cope with the loss of autonomy that arrived with a more plural nation, Americans drew upon that which made them feel unique: regional identity.

In a more homogenous, post-World War I United States, the importance of regional identity did not disappear. This study is evidence that, in the context of college football, regionalism was as important as ever. Local college football fans sought distinction in a national college football landscape and providing regional support propelled unique characteristics of particular localities. Furthermore, the strong desire to equate one's region with superiority explains some of the irrational behavior often associated with college football. Self-pride and bragging rights came with the victory of one's conference or local team, while every loss yielded a sense of inferiority and a diminishment in respect of a local football community. College football supporters' ardent efforts to avoid the latter provide reasoning for the ever-present dangers of commercialism and corruption in the amateur sport.

Considering the public's longstanding fascination with college football, it is quite remarkable that relatively few scholarly works use the game to examine 1920s American society. Moreover, historians who have analyzed the period through the lens of college football often touch upon the issues as part of a multi-decade study. While such scholarship provides wonderful insight, the expansive nature of the works does not allow for analysis of the nuances associated with the sport and American society, culture, and politics during the decade.¹⁷

¹⁷ John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000). Watterson provides an excellent comprehensive study of college football, but the breadth of the study does not allow for close discussion of the important issues of the 1920s, such as the regional identity college football provided the American citizenry.

The few studies that solely examine topics within the 1920s either fail to discuss the affect the local nature of college football had upon American personal identity, or they discuss solely how one region was impacted by the growth of the game during the period.¹⁸ This study intends to accomplish both, as it will examine how the nationalization of 1920s college football affected individual Americans' regional identity in multiple sections of the country, rather than focus on how the game affected teams and other organizations associated with the sport. In order to examine the importance of a local identity to the 1920s American public, agency of the individual supporter, coach, and athlete will take precedence over institutions.

One such study that adequately examines the local nature of college football, albeit from the 1920s through the 1950s, is Michael Oriard's *King Football*. My study does not intend to challenge Oriard's conclusions; rather the objective is to extend the conversation by analyzing the influence of individual action on 1920s college football regionalism.¹⁹ By examining the Walter Camp All-American football team, the rise in prominence of the Southern Methodist football team, and the 1929 Carnegie Report, this study will show that it was individual action that generated the importance of regionalism during the decade. Individual supporters, not an uncontrollable environment or institutions associated with the game, made regional football communities an integral component of the sport.

Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Michael Oriard discusses the 1920s as part of a multi-decade study as well.

¹⁸ Schmidt explores the growth of the game to various regions and the impact this had on the popularity of intersectional games, but the study does not delve into the impact the growth of the game had upon regional identity, as it is focused more upon the transformations ongoing in college football rather than the cultural changes of American society.

Doyle, "Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism," 28-51. Doyle's study explores the Southern progressivism through the context of Alabama's participation in the 1926 Rose Bowl. The historian's focuses on southern history and thus the national impact of regionalism upon all Americans is not explored.

¹⁹ Oriard, *King Football*, 65-100. Oriard's valuable work discusses the manner in which college football fans utilize their local teams to promote regional identity. However, it does not fully describe the force that instigated the strengthening of regionalism in the national football community: the individual citizenry. This is due to the historian exploring the Americanizing role of college football through the media – an institution.

1920s regional football communities were socially constructed territories developed to meet individuals' desire to feel unique amidst a homogenizing nation. On the other hand, universities, athletic conferences, and the media primarily promoted the existence of regional football communities because of the financial opportunities available through intersectional contests. Thus, it is important to credit the prevalence of regionalism in 1920s college football not with institutions such as the media, but rather with the individual efforts of an American public that sought to make local football communities matter in a more national college football landscape.

Chapter One

The Walter Camp All-American Team and the Growth of West Coast Football

At the conclusion of the 1922 collegiate football season, *Berkeley Daily Gazette* sports editor Don Wiley disappointedly gazed at the annual Walter Camp All-American football team. The West Coast sportswriter was somewhat pleased that the squad included “Brick” Muller of his hometown University of California on the first team, but the editor still wrote in the December 26 issue of the *Daily Gazette* with a disdainful tone when commenting on the selections. Wiley sarcastically noted that “despite the fact” Walter Camp – the Yale University coach who selected the team – “has never been able to see very clearly over the Rockies, the famous expert gave California a pretty good deal this year.” He continued with his ridiculing prose, “it would seem that Camp has jazzed things up, by bringing out his binoculars, and taking a good squint at the Coast products.”¹ Wiley was not unique, in the 1920s, one could read the college football commentary of sportswriters all along the Pacific Coast and discover the same unimpressed tone.

Why did Wiley and other supporters of West Coast collegiate football display such an attitude in the decade? Many sports journalists who have commented on the athletic feats of this period have deemed the 1920s the “Golden Age of Sports,” yet Wiley and his western companions seemed to view the situation of college football as far from “golden” in 1922.² However, by the end of the decade, many national college football experts considered the West as on par and perhaps even superior to other regions in football prowess. The collegiate game

¹ Don Wiley, “Sport Talk,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Dec. 26, 1922.

² For the 1920s as the “Golden Age of Sports” see: Grantland Rice, *The Tumult and The Shouting* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1954); Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football: Its Great Teams, Players, and Coaches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956); Alison Danzig, and Peter Brandwein, eds. *Sport’s Golden Age: A Close-Up of the Fabulous Twenties* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948).

had grown drastically, and the respect and notoriety provided to West Coast football by the decade's end demonstrated this development. A close examination of college football in the 1920s displays that the expansion of the sport into a homogenous institution was not an organic event due to the uncontrollable factors of American society, but rather the result of the individual efforts of coaches, sportswriters, and institutions.

Walter Camp selected his first All-American college football team in 1888.³ Though this imaginary squad may seem no more than a side note to the action that took place during the preceding regular season, this could not be further from the truth for the chosen athletes and their schools. A selection to the Walter Camp All-American team provided “the highest accolade to be won” in the college game.⁴ A majority of the sport's experts and fans regarded Camp's team as the authoritative determinant of the finest collegiate football players in the country. After Camp's unexpected death in 1923, the *New York Times* noted that although multiple outlets began choosing their own All-American teams, “Mr. Camp's selections remained the conclusive word on the subject.”⁵

Walter Camp is widely regarded as the “Father of American football,” and the supreme respect entitled upon him by his peers, past and present, largely stems from his success as the coach of Yale University and his influential contribution to the initial rules of the sport. Even more significant for the 1920s, Camp created service-football programs during World War I that

³ John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 21.

Harold Claassen, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Football* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1960), 663. Though Camp is consistently determined as the primary selector, there is some controversy on the subject. Harold Claassen writes in the *Ronald Encyclopedia of Football* that Whitney have selected the All-American teams for the first nine years of its existence. 1897 was the first year in which it can be conclusively determined that Camp solely selected the team and by 1898 he began selecting the team annually for *Collier's* magazine.

⁴ Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 47.

⁵ “Walter Camp Found Dead In Hotel Here...,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1925.

introduced the game to a multitude of young American men.⁶ Camp's annual All-American selections proved equally, perhaps even more, important to universities' athletic programs and football-crazed alumni and fans. A selection on the team, especially the prestigious first-team, brought valuable publicity to a university's football program and legitimated its team and athletes.

Due to Camp's obligations at Yale, he rarely viewed teams and players from outside of the Northeast. In the first couple of decades of the All-American team's existence, this limitation served as a non-issue due to the East Coast monopolization of nearly all reputable collegiate teams and talent, but by the 1920s universities from across the country possessed adequately coached football teams. The one-dimensional selections led to critical reviews and scornful claims that the Yale coach looked no further than out his office window to determine the athletes for his squad.⁷

As universities on the West Coast began to reemphasize college football after World War I, Camp's perceivably biased selections became increasingly controversial. Western football advocates felt the collegiate teams in their region matched the skills of their eastern brethren and suspected Camp's favoritism left deserving athletes from the West off the team. Every time a western player failed to appear on Camp's team, the exclusions served as missed opportunities for notoriety and respect.

There were certainly factors that proved instrumental to the national exclusion of the West Coast game at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to the 1900 census, only four million people inhabited Wyoming, Montana, Colorado, and those states bordering the

⁶ Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

⁷ Charles Fountain, *Sportswriter: The Life and Times of Grantland Rice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 208.

Pacific Ocean.⁸ This scarcity in population undoubtedly inhibited the number of quality athletes west of the Rockies. Furthermore, the California schools unsuccessful experiment with rugby from 1906-1915 served as an unintentional burden for the West Coast institutions. While the West avoided football, eastern institutions enhanced the reputation and popularity of their programs. This western stray from the game proved almost comical to eastern pundits and led to them imposing a sense of inferiority on West Coast football. The University of Washington experienced the humiliation first-hand, as their sixty-four game undefeated stretch from 1908-1916 was never recognized with a national championship due to East Coast perceptions that they played substandard opponents.⁹

By the 1920s, the West Coast believed their alleged inferiority was a problem of the past. The region's larger schools belonged to the nationally recognized Pacific Coast Conference, and the Far West possessed the successful University of California "Wonder Teams," which owned a record of forty-four wins and zero losses from 1920-1924."¹⁰ The taste of success, along with a communal environment experienced by West Coast football, instilled a sense of regional pride that led to a demand for respect in national publications produced by eastern media members. Success in the form of print served as an opportune outlet for the West to garner respect and augment the nationalization of college football.¹¹ West Coast sportswriter Jack James pleaded his regional audience to ignore the national media's misguided opinions. "Don't let them tell you that all the real football played in these United States is centered in and around Cambridge, New

⁸ Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 96-97.

⁹ Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football: Its Great Teams, Players, and Coaches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), 183.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239. See for "California Wonder Teams."

¹¹ The University of California football teams received recognition as National Champions by certain outlets in the 1920, '21, '22, and '23 seasons. Despite their flawless records, they were never close to being undisputed champions. See: Tim Cohane, *Great College Football Coaches of the Twenties and Thirties* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1973), 175-178.

Haven and Princeton – nor yet in the Big Ten territory,” implored James. “It may have been once. But not now or hereafter.”¹²

West Coast football advocates had reason for concern. From 1920-1924, a West Coast player appeared on Camp’s first team only three times. The three athletes selected were from the same school, California, and Cal’s Harold “Brick” Muller appeared twice, in 1921 and 1922.¹³ The lack of Pacific athletes honored by Camp strengthened the perceptions of national football fans, especially eastern fans, that the sport still lagged on the West Coast.

Western football supporters had no trouble voicing their disapproval toward the All-American selections. After the release of Camp’s 1920 team, the *Berkeley Gazette* noted that “once more Walter Camp... comes forward with his selections for mythical first, second, and third All-American eleven. And once more he fails to name a Pacific coast player to his first team.”¹⁴ The article continued by criticizing anyone who deemed this a true national team, sarcastically stating that “Outside of (the) district west of the Rockies” Camp has spread his team geographically. The frustrated member of the western press concluded that Camp seemed “unaware that they play football in this neck of the woods.”¹⁵

Many national pundits agreed with the 1920 assessment made by the *New York Times* that “the mushroom growth of modern football” made the selection process “unbelievably complicated.”¹⁶ A West Coast journalist claimed that Camp’s “selection of an all-America team these days, instead of giving credit where credit is due, is more likely to work an injustice.” From

¹²Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930* (Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse Press, 2007), 16, quoted in Jack James, “California Varsity Is Greatest,” an unattributed newspaper article, Oct. 10, 1920, St. Mary’s Football Scrapbook, 1918-1922, St. Mary’s College Archives.

¹³ Claassen, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Football*, 671. For Muller’s consecutive selection, also see Don Wiley, “Sport Talk,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Dec. 26, 1922.

¹⁴Wiley, “Sport Talk,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Dec. 26, 1922. Note the importance of the first team to the journalist.

¹⁵ “Camp Picks Two California Stars on Second and Third All-Americans,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Dec. 15, 1920.

*From this point forward: If a newspaper citation is not preceded by an author or a new agency then it did not have a credited writer or agency attached to it when the article was read.

¹⁶ “Comment on Current Events In Sports...” *New York Times*, Dec. 13, 1920, 22.

the vantage point of the West, there was no way one man could make worthy selections because an “individual can watch only 16 teams, at most, play a football season.”¹⁷ The western writer’s point was valid. Camp certainly made the decisions to the best of his abilities, but the game had grown larger than an individual could cover and one region could contain. Though unintentional, Camp’s continual decision to select his team without assistance from other knowledgeable football followers stunted the growth of college football.¹⁸

In 1922, the fierce outrage toward the selection process led to the *New York Times*’ refusal to publish Camp’s team, instead replacing it with “a roll of honor” that consisted of graduated football players and their achievements since leaving college. This substitution stemmed largely from “protests... against the practice of selecting players for Camp’s all-American eleven. Western delegates in particular opposed... on the ground that football has developed with such strides and now covers such an immense territory that no individual is qualified to make a representative selection.”¹⁹

New York Times headlines after the release of Camp’s 1920 and 1921 squads surely enhanced Western resentment. The newspaper observed in 1920 that “Eastern college football players still form the backbone of the All-American teams selected by Walter Camp,”²⁰ and in 1921, “Eastern football players are more numerous than those of any other one section.”²¹ Furthermore, Camp saw no issue with his 1923 selections, as in his mind the team showcased, “a particularly powerful aggregation to use under the most advanced methods of today and under

¹⁷ “Sport News and Comment” *Oregonian*, Jan. 8, 1922, 2.

¹⁸ Claassen, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Football*, 664. Claassen notes that “Camp was popularly regarded as the sole originator and sole selector of all the early All-America teams.”

¹⁹ “Record of Prominent Graduates Will Take Place of Camp’s All-Star Team,” *New York Times*, Aug. 13, 1922.

²⁰ Associated Press, “Six Eastern Men On Camp’s Eleven...,” *NYT*, Dec. 16, 1920.

²¹ Associated Press, “Camp Ranges Afar For Gridiron Stars...,” *NYT*, Dec. 21, 1921.

any and all conditions” – the first team included no West Coast athletes that year.²² Many football supporters on the West Coast concluded that the selections made by Camp, a man often attributed with the advancement of college football, stalled the national growth of the sport and the potential recognition of western universities.

Regional proponents of the West Coast college game viewed intersectional contests as a substantial opportunity to counter disrespect from eastern pundits. The most prominent of these regional rivalries was the Tournament East-West football game played annually on New Year’s Day in Pasadena, California. The contest matched an eastern football power versus the champion of the West. In the 1921 edition of the game, the University of California’s 28-0 defeat of Ohio State propelled a sense of pride for many football fans on the Pacific Coast. *Oregonian* sports journalist Harry Grayson likened the victory to that of President Harding a few months earlier, claiming, “Ohio State University’s football eleven now knows just how Governor Cox felt for the landslide to Mr. Harding in November.” In an attempt to detract any naysayers, Grayson added that “Ohio did not have a Chinaman’s chance, and don’t let anyone tell you that the long trip or the bright sunny afternoon had anything to with the result... they took today’s game seriously and prepared carefully.” Grayson displayed particular glee in describing first team All-American halfback Gaylord Stinchcomb’s inability to intercept a long pass thrown by first team snub “Brick” Muller. The journalist’s portrayal had the Ohio State star standing “dumbfounded as the oblong pigskin sailed over his head, whirling after the fashion of a highly charged torpedo.”²³

Later that month, on January 23, fellow *Oregonian* journalist L.H. Gregory declared that after California’s sound defeat of Ohio State, the “East Coast Appears To Be Dodging Western

²² Associated Press, “Walter Camp Picks All-America Teams...,” *NYT*, Dec. 18, 1923.

²³ Harry M. Grayson, “California Wins Gridiron Classic,” *Oregonian*, Jan 2, 1921.

Football.” He claimed western schools attempted to answer eastern critics’ concerns of the geographical fairness of intersectional games by agreeing to face eastern powers in their home region. Gregory reported that all of the teams from the East constructed excuses and he concluded that “it looks as if the east wants no more of Pacific coast football, whether at home or abroad.”²⁴

Contentious reporting was not exclusive to the West Coast. In January of 1920, the *New York Times* proclaimed Harvard’s New Years Day victory over Oregon, as eastern football’s “advantage over that of the Far West.” The writer determined that “At least four college teams of the Atlantic section showed to better advantage than Harvard...Hence it was a case of the West’s best bowing to an opponent that held no such high place in the East. For that reason the victory was all the more gratifying to Eastern followers....”²⁵ Whether they would admit it or not, intersectional games proved just as important for regional pride in the eastern section of the country.

Controversy aside, these intersectional games were extremely popular among a national audience. The choice made by universities, coaches, and journalists to promote the contests, demonstrated important personal decisions toward the national growth of collegiate football. Robert Edgren, known for his nationally syndicated column “Sports through Edgren’s Eyes,” viewed the popularity of the California-Ohio State Rose Bowl clash as an example of the widespread interest in the game.²⁶ In agreement, famed coach John Heisman considered the intersectional contests as “among the greatest boosters that football has” and believed the cross-

²⁴ L.H. Gregory, “East Coast Appears To Be Dodging Western Football,” *Oregonian*, Jan. 23, 1921. Gregory noted that Eastern pundits claimed, “Let California come east next year...we’ll see what effect the climate and long trip have them.” Most East-West matchups were played on the West Coast at the beginning of the decade.

²⁵ “Comment on Current Events in Sports,” *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1920.

²⁶ Robert Edgren, “Sports through Edgren’s Eyes,” *Forth Worth Star-Telegram*, Jan. 6, 1921.

The previously mentioned Tournament East-West Game was used interchangeably with the Rose Bowl and then became more frequently referred to as the Rose Bowl later in the decade.

country affairs tended to make the interest level surrounding college football “national instead of sectional.”²⁷ The coach’s assessment proved accurate, as intersectional games provided teams, media, and fans unbiased evidence to prove regional supremacy. More importantly, the games opened dialogue between formerly disparate regional football communities and served as a unifying force in which media and fans from one section had direct relation with those from another.

Sportswriters of the early 1920s caught on to the local and regional nature of college football and the importance geography had upon their audiences. These intersectional games were contests of regional pride for fans and the decisions made by sportswriters associated with the collegiate sport to enhance the rivalries aided the substantial growth of the game during the decade. For example, the Associated Press began keeping an intersectional scorecard in 1925, and the ensuing headlines at the conclusion of the contests replaced school names with geographical regions, such as “East Carries Grid Honors.”²⁸ In the 1920s, the decision made by sportswriters to act as proponents of this regional rivalry aided in providing western collegiate football the coverage it had lacked, and consequently, their efforts supported the nationalization of the sport.

More so than any other, the 1924 collegiate football season proved significant to the national growth of the sport. In addition to colossal crowds and numerous “big games” during the decade, the rise in popularity of the Notre Dame football team led by coach Knute Rockne proved a significant factor in the revolutionary nature of the season.²⁹ After many impressive teams to begin the decade, the Irish’s 1924 campaign proved its most dominant yet as they went

²⁷ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 37.

²⁸ For regional pride, see Oriard, *King Football*, 7. For intersectional scorecard see Oriard, *King Football*, 66. For headline see “East Carries Grid Honors,” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 1, 1925.

²⁹ For record attendance and big games, see Associated Press, “Many records Set in Football Season...,” *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1924.

undefeated and outscored their opponents 258 to 44.³⁰ After completing a challenging schedule that included East Coast powers Princeton and Army, Rockne's squad was widely considered the nation's best team. In particular, the contest against Army proved important for the national notoriety the team received. It was at the conclusion of Notre Dame's thirteen to seven victory that prominent *New York Herald-Tribune* sportswriter Grantland Rice, who at the time was widely considered America's preeminent sports journalist, penned a lead many deem the most famous in sports history.³¹ In his trademark lyrical prose, Rice vividly described the Notre Dame backfield in masterful fashion:

Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army football team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds yesterday afternoon....³²

By the following week, the Notre Dame backfield was the biggest story in sports, as the metaphor fed the cravings of a nation desiring spectacle - the four horseman reincarnated met this yearning. While the backfield possessed skill and the team proved talented, it was "the Four Horsemen" nickname that led to the national notoriety the Irish yearned. While most sportswriters provided subdued coverage or featured star Illinois halfback Red Grange's five-touchdown performance against Michigan, Rice chose a different story, and his decision to feature Notre Dame enhanced the national recognition of the Irish.³³

At the conclusion of the 1924 season, the now nationally acclaimed Notre Dame brand advantageously affected West Coast football. In a matchup the *New York Times* claimed would

³⁰ Richard Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History*, 2nd edition, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 127.

³¹ For the prominence of Rice in the field of sports journalism see Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 175.

³² Grantland Rice, "Notre Dame's Cyclone Beats Army, 13 to 7," *New York Herald-Tribune*, Oct. 18, 1924.

³³ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 178-179. Grange's performance occurred on the same day as Notre Dame's defeat of Army.

determine “whether or not the Far West is stronger than the East,” the 1925 Rose Bowl game pitted eastern power Notre Dame against West Coast champion Stanford University,³⁴ The colossal matchup saw Notre Dame defeat Stanford 27-10 in front of 52,000 spectators. In its recap of the Irish victory, the *New York Times* continued its focus on the regional aspects of the matchup and consistently referred to Notre Dame and Stanford interchangeably as “East” and “West” respectively.³⁵

Interestingly enough, the match that highlighted the end of the 1924 football season almost did not occur. The Notre Dame administration had always shied away from playing West Coast teams in postseason games because of the professionalization associated with the long travel to the contests, but they looked past the issue in 1924 due to a substantial \$35,000 payday that provided vital funding for a dilapidated university gymnasium. Furthermore, it took an increased payout to convince Stanford to play a school they believed possessed an inferior “scholastic standard.”

Taking advantage of the long voyage to California, Rockne turned the excursion into a western tour that started in Chicago, stopped in New Orleans, Houston, Tucson, and Los Angeles en route to the game, and included pit stops in San Francisco and Denver on the trek home. The stops involved “continuous rounds of luncheons, banquets, and receptions” attended by adoring fans who treated the Irish as celebrities. Moreover, Notre Dame football appeared on the front page of every city they visited and the local newspapers of these cities continued to consider the Irish the pinnacle of their football coverage in subsequent seasons. As college sports historian Murray Sperber notes, the attention provided the Irish “more coverage than any team outside of

³⁴ “3 Football Games on Holiday Card...,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1924.

³⁵ “Notre Dame Routs Stanford by 27-10...,” *NYT*, Jan. 2, 1925.

their own region.”³⁶ Largely due to the success of their western tour, the Irish negotiated to play an annual contest with the University of Southern California beginning in 1926. The matchup proved to be one of the most highly anticipated intersectional matchups of every college football season throughout the 1920s.³⁷ The Notre Dame publicity tour that coincided with the Rose Bowl provided enhanced association between formerly disengaged regional football communities.

Stanford’s Pop Warner, Rockne’s adversary in the 1925 Rose Bowl game, was another coach who brought increased respect to West Coast football. When the California institution hired Warner in 1924 – a man previously deemed the “dean of Eastern football coaches” – the revered football figure brought the high esteem he earned as a successful coach of the Carlisle Indian School and Pittsburgh University to the West.³⁸ In the East, football media, fans, and coaches equated Pop Warner with success and respect, thus Warner’s decision to coach at Stanford further enhanced eastern regard for the school’s football team and the situation of the game on the West Coast. Warner was one of many collegiate coaches who made the move westward during the decade – the cross country treks made by men who eastern football supporters and media respected proved essential in garnering esteem for the West Coast football community.³⁹

Coaches such as Rockne and Warner served as significant figures in the mind of the 1920s football public. While athletes graduated and left the university after four years, fans

³⁶ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 168-170.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

³⁸ For “dean of Eastern football coaches,” see “Comment on Current Events in Sports,” *New York Times*, Jan. 1, 1923. For success in the East, see Cohane, *Great College Football Coaches of the Twenties and Thirties*, 229-234. Stanford hired Warner in 1923 and he served in an advisory role that season before taking over the duties of head coach in 1924.

³⁹ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 23. Schmidt inserts a quote from Columbia coach Charles Crowley discussing how the movement of coaches and exchange of ideas led to more national equality in college football.

became accustomed to the same coach roaming the sidelines season after season. Because of the continuity of the head coach, fans more often associated the success of a team with the man leading them rather than the athletes on the field. College football coaches sought and received substantial rewards for their celebrity status and could earn as much as \$15,000-\$20,000 annually – a salary that exceeded that of many full professors and some university presidents.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the coaches played a larger role than in prior decades. Previously, individuals leading college football teams were alumni volunteers seen more as advisers than anything else, but in the 1920s the coach faced a role similar to the CEOs American society came to revere during the decade – they were expected to organize, lead, and produce advantageous results.

In the 1920s, no coach received greater celebrity status than Knute Rockne of Notre Dame. In his thirteen seasons as the head coach of the Fighting Irish, the school's football team amassed 105 victories opposed to twelve defeats and five ties. Rockne's squads claimed four national championships, scored 2,847 points, and had only 667 scored against them.⁴¹ This success led to immense fame for the Notre Dame coach, and provided him numerous opportunities in corporate America as he transcended the role of football coach and became a celebrated public figure. Though Rockne's salary never exceeded \$11,000, he possessed a substantial personal income from public speaking engagements, written work for various publications, and multiple sponsorship deals.⁴²

In addition to bringing the Irish football team into the limelight, the success of Rockne's teams catapulted the University of Notre Dame out of obscurity as an institution of higher learning. From 1918, Rockne's first season as head coach, to 1927, the enrollment and funds of

⁴⁰ Oriard, *King Football*, 135. For salary figure see Watterson, *History of College Football*, 233.

For salaries exceeding that of professors and presidents, see: Ronald Smith, *Play-by-Play: Radio, Television, and Big-Time College Sport* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 21.

⁴¹ Cohane, *Great College Football Coaches of the Twenties and Thirties*, 160-161.

⁴² Mark Inabinett, *Grantland Rice and His Heroes* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 92.

Notre Dame doubled. At some point every fall, the small, Catholic school in rural South Bend, Indiana possessed space in nearly every sports section across the country, which led to frequent mention of the Irish in the national discussion of college football. Each reference to the Notre Dame football team provided free publicity to the university and thus increased interest from prospective students.

Notre Dame students and fans understood the notoriety Rockne's teams brought to the institution and repaid him with near deity status. In the 1930 edition of Notre Dame's *Official Football Review* – a publication that attempted “to give homage to the fighting men of Notre Dame” – the school's football coach received incredible amounts of praise. A cartoon produced for the publication included a portrait of a jovial Rockne, a heroic Notre Dame football player, and a headless angelic victory statue. An adolescent onlooker comments, “Why not put Rock's head on the winged victory statue?” The artist emphasizes the message of his cartoon by headlining the sketch with the bold proclamation: “ROCKNE MEANS VICTORY.”⁴³ The success Rockne brought to Notre Dame led to an unrelenting reverence from Notre Dame supporters and the rest of the college football world. The manner in which Rockne utilized his fame made him a significant factor for the nationalization of the college game.

Rockne understood the uphill battle fought by West Coast football fans, journalists, and coaches. In 1912, after three of Notre Dame's star players failed to receive recognition on Walter Camp's All-American team, a student writer for the Notre Dame *Scholastic* wrote a satirical poem that mocked Camp's selection process:

My plan is just pick Harvard first
And then pick good ole Yale.

⁴³ *Official Football Review, Notre Dame 1930*, 61: Vanderbilt University-Special Collections & University Archives, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 16. States “Drawn Especially For The Review by Feg Murray” at bottom of cartoon; additionally, the cover of the publication did not have a Notre Dame crest of football player, but rather it was a gold, lifted portrait of Rockne. From this point forward, I will refer to the Vanderbilt Special Collections as VUL.

With five of crimson, six of blue,
It seems the only way,
To pick the best of East and West
For All-Amerikay

One of the three star players excluded from the team was none other than Knute Rockne.⁴⁴

As a coach, Rockne's 1919 Notre Dame team received national championship distinction by some polls after a regular season with nine victories and no losses or ties. Unfortunately, in most national polls, eastern sportswriters deemed the 9-0-1 Harvard Crimson the national champions. The annoyance of sharing a title led Rockne to negotiate an East Coast matchup with the Crimson the following season but Harvard replied, "it would seem to us inadvisable to play Notre Dame next year."⁴⁵ The disrespect from the northeastern football teams and media provoked Rockne's quest to wrestle the monopoly of respect away from the Northeast and thus expand the landscape of college football.

After their prolific 1924 regular season, the prominence Notre Dame acquired could have stayed dormant in South Bend, Indiana, but Rockne took his team's newfound respect on a western tour. During this excursion, the college football community focused on the West Coast. Yes, Notre Dame may have dominated the headlines, but Stanford appeared alongside the Irish as a formidable opponent. Furthermore, after the 1925 season, Rockne negotiated the annual intersectional matchup with the University of Southern California. After the success of Notre Dame's western tour preceding the 1925 Rose Bowl, Rockne understood the potential notoriety that would accompany a biannual West Coast excursion. Furthermore, Notre Dame's presence in

⁴⁴ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 99-101. As Murray Sperber notes, after denying Rockne of a matchup, Harvard preceded to schedule miniscule Valparaiso College, situated seventy-nine miles south of South Bend. An offended Rockne also scheduled Valparaiso and strategically beat the small-school squad 28-3, a greater margin of victory than Harvard's 21-0. This was the only time Notre Dame ever scheduled the school.

this region brought a respectable eastern product to the West Coast.⁴⁶ The anticipation of this annual matchup would place the University of Southern California in national sports headlines and bring notoriety to a West Coast institution who sought the positive ramifications of eastern respect. Notre Dame's presence on the Pacific Coast fused East and West, which led to further homogenization of college football. Rockne could have folded under the pressure of national pundits and the concerns of the Notre Dame administration, but the coach understood the significant national publicity and revenue that western contests offered his team.⁴⁷ The decisions by eastern and western institutions to meet in these matchups, Rockne's strategically constructed western tour and intersectional matchup with USC, and the choices made by national sportswriters and editors to enhance their coverage of intersectional affairs aided in crafting a more homogenous college football landscape in the 1920s.

Though 1924 produced significant factors toward eastern respectability of West Coast football, Walter Camp's 1924 All-American team revealed California center Edwin Horrell as the only Far West player worthy of placement on the first team. The lack of players from the Pacific Coast displayed that the region continued to evoke sentiments of inferiority from eastern pundits. Though advocates of West Coast collegiate football still felt slighted, the 1924 college football season laid important foundations toward the nationalization of the game.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ "NOTRE DAME ROUTS STANFORD BY 27-10." *NYT*, Jan. 2, 1925. In the *New York Times* recap of the contest, the Associated Press sportswriter referred to Notre Dame as a representative of the East rather than the Midwest or the West. This move by sports journalists emphasizes the advancement of the westward movement of the "frontier" of college football.

⁴⁷ Regarding the establishment of the USC-Notre Dame matchup and the benefits of the annual contests for the Irish, see Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 190. This matchup was constructed after the Notre Dame administration followed the lead of the Big Ten Conference and banned post-season play over the fear of professionalizing college football.

⁴⁸ "No Big Three on Camp's Eleven...," *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1924. Despite the lack of western players on the squad, the 1924 team did show improvement concerning the previously mentioned Northeast bias displayed by Camp. For the first time, the first team did not include an athlete from one of the "Big Three" football powers of the Northeast.

The Far West's seemingly desperate craving for respect may seem like excessive whining, but in the 1920s, omission from the countrywide college football conversation excluded a university and its supporters from a national phenomenon. The game's popularity during the decade expanded in large part due to a national emphasis on physical exercise following World War I. The amount of men deemed unfit when the United States entered the conflict proved concerning for the nation's leadership, and American General Leonard Wood proclaimed that of all the men drafted for service, half had been out of shape. This "preparedness crisis" provoked an effort to groom young American men for service through activities of "discipline, courage, teamwork, endurance, and other qualities necessary to soldiers." Football included all of these pertinent aspects and was taught and played by soldiers at military camps throughout the United States. By the end of World War I, the relationship between the game and the military proved so influential that the *New York Times* determined "football owed more to the war in the way of the spread of the spirit of the game than it does to ten or twenty years of development."⁴⁹

The fact that numerous young men matured academically and socially at American universities made the college game a particularly attractive training tool for the nation. A 1922 issue of the *Oregonian* proclaimed that in particular "the pre-eminence of football as a college game is due to the essential manliness of the sport, the physical prowess that it implies, and to the team work which it requires...." The newspaper echoed what many across the country believed, that the game spread beyond solely training for the army, but it also served as "a primary requisite in training for citizenship in a democracy."⁵⁰

If one were to question the American craze toward football in the 1920s, impressive attendance figures erased any doubts. College football attendance increased 119% during the

⁴⁹ Oriard, *King Football*, 3.

⁵⁰ "Sport News and Comment," *Oregonian*, Jan 8, 1922.

decade and exceeded 10 million spectators by 1930.⁵¹ Furthermore, the 1927 intersectional clash between Southern California and Notre Dame, in which an estimated 123,000 patrons filled Chicago's Soldier Field, highlighted a decade in which large crowds at major college football bouts became standard.⁵² Robert Edgren boldly determined that the increased attendance at these contests proved that "football seemed likely to displace baseball as the recognized 'national sport'."⁵³

Following World War I, economic prosperity provided Americans the opportunity to attend these football contests. The real wages of industrial workers in the United States increased by twenty-five-percent, the most the working-class had ever enjoyed up until the decade.⁵⁴ Moreover, wealthier Americans earned their wages working fewer hours. In the 1920s, mechanization of post-war society led to the reduction of the average workweek from sixty hours to an average of forty-eight hours.⁵⁵ American citizens lived in a prosperous nation and could have spent their money on numerous activities, but it was their individual decisions to expend their newfound wealth and free time at college football contests.

Why did Americans choose to spend their money and idle time watching amateur athletics? Simply put, college football was a spectacle. During a game spectators witnessed average males step into primitive, yet regulated, combat. Extravagant parades, supplemented by the pageantry of bands, mascots, and cheerleaders, were present at nearly every contest. Football came to be associated with a festive spirit and with every game the pride of the school's alumni

⁵¹ Oriard, *King Football*, 6.

⁵² See "Sports Highlights of 1927," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 1, 1928. & Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 267-268. Reports by the Tribune immediately following the game reported attendance as 117,000 but later estimates indicate attendance as at least 123,000.

⁵³ Robert Edgren, "Sports through Edgren's Eyes," *Forth Worth Star-Telegram*, Jan. 6, 1921.

⁵⁴ David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 22-23. This prosperity was not shared by all American citizens, as farmers living standards suffered greatly during the decade.

⁵⁵ Inabinett, *Grantland Rice and His Heroes*, 16.

was at stake. As famed sports journalist Grantland Rice sarcastically noted in a 1924 column: “We met an old grad who didn’t care whether you roasted or boosted his college football team...or whether you even mentioned it. It was the first funeral we had attended in years.”⁵⁶

Furthermore, one could claim a school’s colors regardless of whether they had attended the institution. A citizen of Southern California took regional pride in the victory of the Trojans, just as a resident of Pittsburgh relished the triumph of every Panther eleven. The jovial atmosphere of collegiate football contests, complemented by the intimate relationship possessed by citizens with their local teams, led to western football supporters demanding their inclusion into the national conversation of the sport; they wanted to be central to its existence.⁵⁷

On game day, the parade-like atmosphere that engulfed university campuses became a sense of pride for West Coast football supporters, as they believed the western atmosphere superior to any other region of the country. When writing of Walter Camp’s impending visit to view the California-Stanford football match in November of 1924, Phile Rolfe of the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* claimed: “It is a generally accepted fact that eastern football games do not compare with those from the west in organized cheering, rooting stunts and intensity of spirit among the spectators.” The author failed to mention the West’s superior athletes or style of play, rather he believed atmosphere a central component to the superiority of western collegiate football. Rolfe deemed the environment of this particular rivalry game as one that should show the superiority of the western game day experience more so than any other and would leave “Mr. Camp’s opinion of Pacific Coast football” as one that would bring the California Alumni pride.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Rice, *The Tumult and the Shouting*, 204.

⁵⁷ For the regional appeal of college football, see Oriard, *King Football*, 7. For the festive appeal of college football, see Oriard, *King Football*, 15.

⁵⁸ Phile Rolfe, “90,000 Grid Fans Ought To Provide...,” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Nov. 19, 1924.

According to Rolfe, Camp's visit, his first trip to the Far West in thirty years, would prove that West Coast football was superior to the East not due to action on the field, but rather to the exploits of pep squads and the supporters in the stands. The environment surrounding these affairs proved intimate and crucial components to the contest, just as important as the athletes and coaches. Supporters' participation aided their team's effort for victory and, on this particular day, helped bring respect to West Coast football. Thus for some proponents of the game in the West, the carnival-like atmosphere provoked by 1920s football contests served as an instrument to garner respect from the eastern media.

When Camp settled in his seat to witness the 1924 West Coast matchup, he was one of the over 76,000 spectators who filled University of California's Memorial Stadium to watch the home team battle Stanford to a 20-20 tie.⁵⁹ The substantial attendance and interest surrounding the game resembled many collegiate football contests during the decade. Moreover, the large crowds and ticket prices attendees were willing to pay for admittance provoked the construction of larger stadiums. During the 1920s, universities across the country met the demand with the production of fifty-five concrete and brick structures, six of which possessed capacities of greater than 70,000.⁶⁰

A necessity for more seats due to increased attendance was obvious, but this was not the only factor that provoked the construction of new stadiums. The ambition of fan bases and coaches proved equally influential, as the 1920s witnessed a facilities arms race in which universities attempted to out-construct rival institutions. To be at the vanguard of stadium assembly would ensure that the atmosphere surrounding college football games was up to par

⁵⁹ Richard Whittingham, *The Rites of Autumn: The Story of College Football* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 153.

⁶⁰ Oriard, *King Football*, 6.

with the opposition and create the illusion of a prominent program regardless of the product on the field.

Always one to attempt to be at the forefront of college football, Knute Rockne first pressured the Notre Dame administration to construct a new stadium in 1923. A larger stadium would entice “big-time” opponents to play Notre Dame at home – a sign of respect from previously noncomplying East Coast teams.⁶¹ In 1927, after seasons of persistence from Rockne, Notre Dame finally agreed to provide its football team with a new home field. The Notre Dame coach single-handedly planned and oversaw the erection of Notre Dame Stadium, which led to a Notre Dame’s supporter’s proclamation that the stadium contained “a lot more ‘Rock’...than even the builders dreamed.”⁶²

In addition to the spectator, the convenience and opinion of the sports writer weighed heavily on the stadium’s design. After an investigation of the new Notre Dame Stadium press box, *Chicago Herald-Examiner* Sports Editor Warren Brown deemed it “perhaps the crowning glory of the stadium.” The journalist then sarcastically noted that those constructing the stadium determined a new press box necessary, and “since there was no use in having a press box without a stadium, the stadium was built.”⁶³ The apparent philosophy taken by athletic directors was that comfort and respect provided to sports journalists would result in more favorable coverage. Those attempting to improve the significance of their team or region among the national football community understood the significance of having the press in your corner. If one could fall into

⁶¹ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 8.

⁶² Neil C. Hurley, “The Beginning of a New Era,” *1930 Official Review, Notre Dame*, 47: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers Box 16.

⁶³ Warren Brown, “Refreshments – for Newspapermen,” *1930 Official Review, Notre Dame*, 57, 108: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 16.

Of particular interest is that institutions would consult sportswriters when constructing their stadiums. Purdue provided Grantland Rice with medal, which contained an inscription stating: “Awarded To ___ For Loyal Help In Building The Stadium Ross-Ade Field, Purdue University 1924,”: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 16.

favor with an influential sportswriter, the subsequent national coverage could result in considerable popularity and respect from the entire nation. Knute Rockne appreciated the power of the media – especially the New York press, which contained the nation’s most influential sportswriters and publications. Prior to the 1924 season, Rockne noted in correspondence with an associate: “New York is the heart of the matter. That’s the big time. When they start noticing us there, everybody else will fall in line.”⁶⁴

The close relationships developed by coaches and sports journalists proved valuable for both parties. Frequently, sportswriters and coaches shared drinks after the game or traveled together on road trips.⁶⁵ In 1925, Alabama coach Camp Pickens sent a telegram to Grantland Rice in which he invited the prominent sports reporter to travel with the team on its trip to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl.⁶⁶ Moreover, the relationship between coaches and sportswriters went beyond socializing to actual monetary gain and employment. In the mid-1920s, before the practice became discouraged and banned by certain conferences, coaches personally assigned sports journalists to referee their games. The inside information and pay that came with this on-the-field access proved valuable for the reporters and they would often write coaches attempting to officiate the season’s mostly highly anticipated games. In 1921, Harry Costello of the *Detroit News* attempted to persuade Rockne to select him as the referee for the upcoming Notre Dame-Army contest. Costello informed the Notre Dame coach that since Walter Camp would not be in attendance at the Irish’s game, the sports reporter could return the favor by putting in a good word for Notre Dame when he met with the selector of the All-American team a few days

⁶⁴ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 145.

⁶⁵ Oriard, *King Football*, 135 (sharing drinks and travel), 136 (intimate relationship valued).

⁶⁶ “Appreciate your effort...”: Champ Pickens to GR, Nov. 18, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 2.

prior.⁶⁷ Today, many may consider these personal relationships as impeding upon the necessary objectivity of a journalist, but in the 1920s, these close associations allowed the journalist to provide their audience the intimate relationships they craved and supplied coaches the publicity they coveted.

During the 1920s, the increase in newspaper space devoted to athletics propelled sports journalists into this novel and influential role. As opposed to previous decades, in which less than one-percent of coverage was dedicated to sports, the Roaring Twenties saw an average daily newspaper devote at least fifteen-percent of its stories to the subject. Moreover, a 1929 survey in New York City found that one in every four readers bought a newspaper exclusively for the sports section.⁶⁸ In the environment of the decade, newspapers attempted to please the most and offend the least. This led to an attempt to drift away from the hard news stories American readers loathed after continually reading of despair during World War I.⁶⁹ In sports, the emphasis on victory and the association with sensational storylines accomplished this goal. In particular, college football provided a spectacle few other sports could duplicate. Collegiate teams represented and symbolized not only local communities and universities, but also entire regions. In a time before television, college football was local in nature with supporters most often cheering for the hometown and state university. This intimacy associated with the sport increased the passion accompanying the games. The increased influence and audience provided to sport sections allowed sports writers to promote opinions to a national audience.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 114-115. Sports journalists were paid \$50-\$75 to officiate a contest and their travel, food, hotel, and other minor expenses were paid for as well. Sports journalists, on average, made \$50-\$75 per month in the twenties, so refereeing opportunities served financially advantageous as well.

⁶⁸ Oriard, *King Football*, 25.

⁶⁹ Michael Bohn, *Heroes and Ballyhoo: How the Golden Age of the 1920s Transformed American Sports* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, Inc., 2009), 1.

⁷⁰ Oriard, *King Football*, 7, 17, 25-26, 227. Syndicated columnists such as Robert Edgran and Grantland Rice had the ability to reach a national audience. Thus, relationships with syndicated journalists became especially valuable.

On the morning of March 15, 1925, college football fans opened their morning papers to the shocking news that Walter Camp passed away in his New York City hotel room the day prior. After admiration and mourning of the football legend subsided, concerned fans brought forth an anxious inquiry: Who was to pick Camp's prominent All-American team for the upcoming season? *Collier's* magazine decided to place the responsibility upon Grantland Rice.⁷¹ The publication deemed Rice "the best-informed sports authority in America" and the quality of his writing, unrivaled reputation and contacts in the football community made the sports journalist an easy choice.⁷² *Collier's* decision to name Rice as Camp's successor determined that the prominence associated with the team would persist. Furthermore, placing Rice in this prominent position illustrated the ascension of the sportswriter as a central figure in college football.

While *Collier's* displayed confidence in its selection of Rice, Camp's replacement proved hesitant. Rice claimed that when approached to select the All-American team for the 1925 season, "I squawked loudly. I didn't want any part of the job." The journalist's reservation was due to his belief "that it's completely impossible for one man to name the eleven best players in the country – after scouting a handful of games through one pair of eyes."⁷³ Moreover, he witnessed the backlash Camp received, and continued to face, due to his perceived snub of particular regions in the annual selections. In fact, in 1926, the president of the University of Georgia faced extreme difficulty when trying to raise money from southern schools in an effort to build a memorial honoring the deceased coach. The college and universities deemed it

⁷¹ Charles Fountain, *Sportswriter: The Life and Times of Grantland Rice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207-210.

⁷² Fountain, *Sportswriter*, 208.

"The Real All-America," *Collier's*, Nov. 20, 1926, 16.

⁷³ Rice, *The Tumult and the Shouting*, 205-206.

unnecessary to raise funds for an individual they believed proved indifferent and ignorant toward southern football and named far too few southern players to the All-American team.⁷⁴

In early November of 1925, Rice placed his reluctance aside and set out to select his first team. While Camp usually named his All-American team with the aid of “an informal group of friends,” Rice recognized the necessity of a more refined selection process to meet the demands of college football’s national growth.⁷⁵ Aware of his inability to view all the worthy athletes in the country, the sportswriter sent numerous confidential telegrams to coaches, sportswriters, and referees inquiring if they had witnessed any collegiate football players worthy of selection to his squad.⁷⁶ Rice continued this request for commendable All-Americans the following season and acknowledged that he received “no less than eighty-five telegraph messages” prior to carefully selecting his team. During the 1926 season, in addition to sending telegraphs, Rice employed ten of the nation’s most respected collegiate coaches, four of which were from the West Coast, to aid him with the selection process. However, the final decision still rested with Rice.⁷⁷ In 1926, the *New York Herald-Tribune* reporter’s efforts were evident when, for the first time since its inception, the Walter Camp All-American first team included more players from “the other side of the Alleghenies” than from the East.⁷⁸

In an increased effort to depict a truly national representation on the team, Rice added the All-America Advisory Board to the selection process in 1929. The “Collier’s board” would “cover every football section of the country and...standardize the selection in a better way than

⁷⁴ Andrew Doyle, “Turning the Tide: College Football and Southern Progressivism,” *Southern Cultures*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1997), 41.

⁷⁵ Rice, *The Tumult and the Shouting*, 206.

⁷⁶ See for example, “Would appreciate very much...”: GR to Fielding Yost, Nov. 9, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 1.

⁷⁷ *Collier’s*, “The Real All-America,” Nov. 20, 1926, 16. Utilizing the opinion of respected coaches was not new, Camp had also valued the opinions of the nation’s coaches as well, but from observing the Eastern dominated selections, it would appear that he did not value the opinions of the Western contingent nearly as much as Rice.

⁷⁸ “Seven Westerners On All-American Team,” *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1926.

ever it has been done before.” In an effort to cover a “nation-wide canvass,” the group consisted of six reputable sports writers from the Pacific Coast, Missouri Valley, Southwest, Mid-West, East, and South.⁷⁹ While Walter Camp chose a team that he would hypothetically take to the field to challenge opponents, Rice focused more upon recognition of an athlete’s exceptional play during the season.⁸⁰

While Rice always indicated the qualities necessary to be chosen as an All-American, he took a quantitative approach in the selection of the 1929 squad. The All-America Advisory Board graded the nominees on six determinants: schedule difficulties, ball carrying, passing, blocking, tackling, and kicking. Each athlete was given a numerical score out of one-hundred, and in table format, the categorical averages of each player chosen on the first team stood alongside their name. Despite the advisory board’s obvious influence, *Collier’s* made sure to inform the reader that even though the facts and opinions were gathered by the advisory board; the team was still very much under the control of Grantland Rice.⁸¹ The effort taken by Rice and *Collier’s* to modify the decision process, and thus hopefully yield a more balanced and fair All-American team, displayed the importance the selections had to the collegiate sport and its supporters.⁸²

⁷⁹ Grantland Rice, “The All-America Football Team,” *Collier’s*, Dec. 28, 1929, 7.

⁸⁰ For Camp choosing an ideal eleven he would take to the field, see: Walter Camp, “Walter Camp’s All-American Team,” *Collier’s*, Dec. 18, 1920, 8.

⁸¹ Grantland Rice, “The All-America Football Team,” *Collier’s*, Dec. 28, 1929, 7. Quarterback was graded on an additional category, “Generalship.” The All-American selection of the 1929 season, Carideo of Notre Dame, received an average score of 100.

⁸² Confirming this observation was a letter from traveling salesman Ira Sonnenblick. Due to frequent visits to multiple sections of the country, Sonnenblick believed he had the authority to provide Rice with valid opinions of the nation’s most skilled collegiate football players. “The great honor that is yours...”: Ira Sonnenblick to GR, Nov. 17, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 2.

Additionally, the importance of the first-team is evident as Rice’s 1928 and 1929 article announcing the All-American team did not even display the second, third, or honorable mention selections. It solely depicted the first team.

Furthermore, the systematic process utilized by Rice fit well with the scientific efficiency employed by many 1920s American businesses. In accordance with the philosophy of Frederick Taylor, many of the nation's corporate institutions focused on the most efficient manner of production in order to produce the best possible profit. Furthermore, during the decade, the focus on efficiency began to encompass multiple aspects of American life. In order to justify choices that were certain to be controversial in the eyes of the American public, the sportswriter depicted his process as objective and systematic. By making the process transparent and reflective of modern society, the 1929 All-American team introduced a system that not only quelled controversy but also proved more efficient and representative of a national football landscape.⁸³

The telegrams and letters received by Rice from sportswriters, coaches, and fans prior to the selection of his first All-American team exhibited the fact that the geographical fairness of coverage was still a concern of many in 1925. In general, the letters received from the East Coast displayed less length, detail, and passion compared to those received from the Mid West and West Coast. A letter from a Mr. S. Best complimented *Collier's* for naming Rice as a replacement to Camp, but then continued to explain that the Missouri Valley believed the Nebraska football team "never received the attention or credit to which they are entitled." Best felt it was the university's "geographical location that has robbed her great football teams of much deserved recognition."⁸⁴

In October of 1925, *San Francisco Call* sportswriter Edgar "Scoop" Fleeson sent a similar letter to Rice. In comparable fashion to Best, Fleeson first praised *Collier's* for selecting Rice as Camp's successor, and then insisted that Rice consider the quality players of the Pacific Coast for the 1925 team. Fleeson spoke glowingly of the game's growth in the West and

⁸³ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 60.

⁸⁴ "I'm not in the habit of...": S. Best to GR, Nov. 16, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 1.

provided attendance figures of West Coast games to prove his assertion. The San Francisco sports writer was particularly fond of Stanford's 1925 captain: Ernie Nevers.⁸⁵ He not only praised Nevers in the lengthy letter, but also sent a seven-page telegram to Rice the next month commending the halfback for a dominant performance in his final collegiate game versus the University of California.⁸⁶ Agreeing with Fleeson's assessment, Stanford coach Pop Warner sent two telegrams to Rice in November of 1925 applauding his star player. Warner even proclaimed Nevers to be, "without question the best fullback I have ever seen."⁸⁷ Fleeson's and Warner's insistence paid off and the Stanford captain was included on Rice's 1925 team.⁸⁸

The efforts of Best, Fleeson, Warner, and other concerned football supporters displayed their concern over the northeastern bias surrounding college football, and the subsequent action taken by Rice displayed the influence of these letters and telegrams. Moreover, these forms of communication showed that All-America selections still proved valuable in the quest to end the disrespect of West Coast football and other regional football communities. With this favoritism removed, other sections of the country gained the opportunity to receive publicity that could advance the respect of their local football communities and thus accelerate the game's national expansion.

The 1920s saw a significant shift of regional notoriety in college football. In prior decades, the northeastern portion of the United States monopolized the respect of the collegiate game and pundits in the early twenties displayed reluctance in offering West Coast football with the esteem its teams, sports journalists, fans, and coaches craved. Victorious results in

⁸⁵ "I am taking Collier's at its word": Edgar "Scoop" Fleeson to GR, Oct. 28, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 1.

⁸⁶ "Captain Ernie Nevers of Stanford University": Edgar T. Fleeson to GR, Nov. 21, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 1.

⁸⁷ "Best players on Coast Nevers...": G.L. Warner to GR, Nov. 9, 1925: VUL, Grantland Rice Papers, Box 2. This is quite telling, as Warner also coached the great Jim Thorpe.

⁸⁸ Claassen, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Football*, 672.

intersectional matches, more western athletes on All-American teams, and the promotion of West Coast squads by local supporters and journalists proved hard to ignore, and by decade's end Northeast football representatives began to take notice. In his review of the 1927 collegiate season, Columbia Head Coach Charles Crowley admitted that their seemed to be a balance between all sections of the country.⁸⁹ Moreover, in the 1928 season, the USC Trojans earned distinction as national champions.⁹⁰ This honor proved valuable to Southern California, but it also served as a victory for the entire West Coast. When reviewing the same season, Grantland Rice admitted to the dominance of the West and viewed its superiority as a potentially reoccurring trend.⁹¹ The struggle for respect appeared to have nearly subsided, as the West began receiving recognition as a respectable component of the national college football landscape.

While many sports historians have attributed social, cultural, and economic changes in the United States to the national growth of college football in the 1920s, just as important to the homogenization of the game were the efforts of individuals such as Rice, Rockne, and Warner who took advantage of these social changes. Had Rice spurned the requests of coaches, sportswriters, and football supporters in the West, the Northeast bias of the sport would have likely persisted. The construction of larger stadiums, the reports of worthy western athletes, and successful Pacific teams certainly influenced Rice's decision to expand the geographical landscape of the All-American team, but it was still a personal decision that ultimately allowed this imperative change to occur. To generalize the nationalization of college football as the result of an American environment conducive to change, wrestles away agency from the influential

⁸⁹ Charles Crowley, "Crowley Analyzes Football Season," *New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1927.

⁹⁰ Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football: Its Great Teams, Players, and Coaches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), 295.

⁹¹ Grantland Rice, "Coached by the Sun," *Collier's*, Jan. 19, 1929, 19. Despite the praise, Rice deemed the weather and not the coaching and players as the significant factor for western advancement. It seems some were still somewhat reluctant, but progress had surely been made for West Coast football.

actions of many concerned, persistent, and determined individuals. The same holds true for all revolutionary aspects of this culturally transformative decade. The environment of the 1920s situated the decade as progressive, but the efforts of individual Americans allowed the alterations to occur. To ignore this characteristic of the decade would be an egregious error.

Furthermore, supporters of local football communities refused to stand by idly. Western proponents of the sport believed that through intersectional contests and the Walter Camp All-American football team, college football teams in the West could garner the notoriety they deserved and thus illuminate the West Coast football community as equal, or even superior, to the sport in the East. The efforts of college football fans and journalists to advocate for the inclusion of their teams as reputable members of the sport's national conversation demonstrates the importance of regional football communities during the 1920s. Every ounce of respect received from the national college football community yielded a sense of superiority – a consciousness that proved essential, as the stability of local autonomy seemed to be decaying in all aspects of American life. College football served as Americans' last resort – one last chance to promote unique characteristics that appeared to be quickly fading as the United States modernized at an increasingly rapid pace.

Chapter Two

The SMU Mustangs and the Rise of Southwest Football

After two dismal seasons as the inaugural coach of the Southern Methodist University football team, Ray Morrison received notice from the school's president, Robert Stewart Hyer, that "pressures from downtown make it necessary for me to ask for your resignation."¹ While two first-year victories provided some promise, a winless 1916 season, which included a 143-4 loss to the Rice Institute from Houston, evaporated any sense of optimism from the local Dallas, Texas community.² Still celebrated for his All-American playing career at Vanderbilt, the young coach appeared the suitable choice to bring football prestige to SMU, Dallas, and the state of Texas, but the regional and local communities' strong desire for prominence would not tolerate subpar performances.

Opening in 1915, SMU was supposed to fill the void in southern, Methodist education after Vanderbilt severed its relations with the church a decade prior.³ The university intended to serve as a beacon of pride for the Dallas community and all southern Methodists, and as the most visible component of the university, a positive image of the football program proved vital for the school's success. The university's newspaper, *The Campus*, ashamedly noted after Morrison's second year that "Frankly, the season was not a howling success," but mentioned, "Next season, with eight or ten veterans back, there should be a different tale."⁴ Those outside of the university's campus failed to view the future with the same confidence – many concerned supporters believed an underwhelming team revealed an inferior school.

¹ David Whitford, *A Payroll to Meet: A Story of Greed, Corruption, and Football at SMU* (Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 13.

² Gordon Cullum, "Mustangs Progress from Last Place to Contenders for Title," *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Nov. 28, 1923: Student Media Company and Southern Methodist University Central Libraries, DeGolyer Library (SMUL).

³ John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 356. Watterson mentions that SMU "began in 1911." The school was chartered in 1911, but classes did not begin until September of 1915.

⁴ George Griner, "Football Season was Full of Surprise," *The Campus*, Dec. 8, 1916: SMUL.

In October of 1916, the Bursar of SMU, Frank Reedy, received correspondence from a displeased Texas Methodist pastor. The religious man declared himself not to be a “college athletic crank,” yet he despised “to hear of the team I am naturally interested in getting so dreadfully defeated. GET IN THE GAME OR GET OUT.” Moreover, the pastor confessed that to read of the SMU defeats in the newspaper proved “humiliating to an ambitious Methodist...”⁵ As the outside pressure mounted, Reedy grew discouraged. The Bursar confided to a friend the same month that “this football situation, as immaterial loss or victory really is, is hurting our prestige in Dallas immensely. I am getting tired of having Dallas men throw jives at us...before we get money we must have enthusiasm and prestige and we have to get it.”⁶ In order to acquire the desired reputation, it became apparent to Reedy that a coaching change must occur.

Reedy’s fears demonstrate the bilateral relationship between the Dallas community and the SMU football team, and the similar link between the football team and the university, during this period. A successful football team required public support to function financially and a juvenile university needed a prosperous football team for the legitimacy and monetary support that arrived with success. After such a tumultuous two-year relationship, it proved difficult to believe that Morrison and Southern Methodist University would ever rekindle their partnership, but Morrison not only returned four years later to lead the SMU freshman team, he resumed coaching the varsity squad by the 1922 season. By the end of the decade, the previously fired coach had entered SMU, Texas, and Southwestern lore for transforming perennial losers into a championship caliber team. And more importantly, he converted the Southwest into one of the most respected gridiron regions in the country. In the 1920s, the success of the Southern

⁵ “Your Uncle George is not mad...”: G.S. Wyatt to Frank Reedy, Oct. 11, 1916: Heritage Hall Collection of Southern Methodist University Athletics Photographs and Memorabilia, Southern Methodist University Archives, Southern Methodist University (SMUL), Box 13, Folder 3.

⁶ “My dear Moice: I want to know...”: Frank Reedy to Lionel Moice, Oct. 9, 1916: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 3.

Methodist University football team directly influenced the growth and notoriety of collegiate football in the Southwest region of the United States. Moreover, the style of play employed by SMU provided the region with a football identity that proved necessary for its acceptance into the national football community.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the notoriety and respect of Southwestern football shared the same dismal outlook as Ray Morrison's coaching career. Many national collegiate football supporters believed that the game in the Southwest was inferior to other parts of the nation, and future prospects for the region did not look promising. Famed college football coach John Heisman believed that because of scorching temperatures "You'll never have great football played by the Southwestern teams; the climate won't permit it."⁷ Furthermore, All-American selections and national championship contenders lacked any mention of Southwestern athletes or schools, regardless of their performance or record.

The future of Southern Methodist football appeared bleak as well. Morrison's departure failed to generate improvement for the program, and he quietly returned to Southern Methodist as the coach of the freshman football team in 1920.⁸ However, despite five seasons of poor results, SMU supporters displayed optimism ahead of the 1921 campaign. At the start of the season, SMU captain Jimmie Kitts professed, "this looks like our year," and he admitted to the team "pointing our campaign on the Texas Aggie game...."⁹

The contest against the intrastate Aggies had quickly turned into a rivalry game for the young university. The previous season, the Aggies claimed a narrow victory over the Southern Methodist Mustangs, but many SMU supporters believed the 1921 Texas A&M team to be less

⁷ Kern Tips, *Football – Texas Style* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹ "Mustangs Answer Call for Football Practice Tomorrow Afternoon," *Dallas Morning News*, Sept. 11, 1921. Kitts is referring to Texas A&M, though he calls them "Texas."

formidable and the Dallas squad to be much improved. Contributing to the excitement surrounding the game, the contest coincided with the State Fair of Texas – an affair that would display Dallas “to the public of Texas, the Southwest, and the world.” A positive performance proved vital to the city’s residents while under such a grand spotlight.¹⁰

After a win over Howard Payne University to open the 1921 season, the anticipation for the Texas A&M game reached a feverous pitch both on the SMU campus and throughout the city. The university cancelled classes and deemed the day of the game as “Dallas Day.” Furthermore, approximately four hundred students attended yell practices and pep meetings for two weeks leading up to the event. The local community displayed confidence in a Southern Methodist triumph, and the students prepared for a victory that “would place SMU at the head of southwestern football circles.”¹¹ Unfortunately, the optimism proved all for naught as Texas A&M trounced the Mustangs thirteen to zero. Not only did the Aggies win, they humiliated SMU by holding them scoreless in front of eight thousand spectators – a large crowd by 1921 Southwest Conference (SWC) football standards.¹²

Two days after the SMU varsity squad’s humbling performance, Ray Morrison led his freshman team to a sound defeat of Rusk College by the score of seventy-eight to zero. Unlike the varsity, Morrison’s players generated the excitement and success that Southern Methodist supporters craved since the football program’s inception.¹³ Tired of yet another campaign in

¹⁰ For confidence in the Mustangs, see: “Mustangs Answer Call for Football Practice Tomorrow Afternoon,” *Dallas Morning News*, Sept. 11, 1921.

For State Fair of Texas, see: “Programs at Fair Full of Features,” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 7, 1921. Around this time, the SMU football team takes the Mustang as their mascot.

¹¹ “Dope Even Favors Methodist’s Chances,” *The Campus*, Vol. VII, No.3, Oct. 11, 1921: SMUL.

For “Dallas Day,” see advertisement on pg. 17 of *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 12, 1921.

¹² “8,000 See Texas Aggie Defeat Southern Methodist...,” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 13, 1921.

The Southwest Conference was the athletic association with which Southern Methodist sports affiliated themselves.

¹³ “Fish Win 78-0 From Rusk Friday,” *The Campus*, Vol. VII, No. 4, Oct. 18, 1921: SMUL.

which “the Mustang rooting section” proved “the feature of the entire season,” the university once again hired Ray Morrison as the head coach of the Southern Methodist varsity team prior to the 1922 season.¹⁴

The substantial margins of victory and exhilarating passing offense utilized by Morrison’s teams transformed the coach into a catalyst for excitement, and nearly immediately, Morrison rejuvenated the Southern Methodist football program. In the third game of the 1922 season, Morrison’s Mustangs trounced the Tigers of Louisiana State University – the only team to defeat the Texas A&M Aggies in 1921 – by the score of fifty-one to zero. The high-profile victory over the Tigers provided SMU supporters with the signature win they had demanded for the past six seasons. Following the game, *Dallas Morning News* sportswriter William Ruggles prophesized that the Mustang triumph would “cause coaches around the loop to sit up and take notice of the team out on the hill.”¹⁵ The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* supplemented the hype by proclaiming that the victory situated the SMU team “as dangerous contenders for the Southwestern grid title....”¹⁶

Finally, the Dallas community possessed some sense of accomplishment regarding their hometown football program. By no means would one consider the Tigers a national power, but

Unlike present day, football teams in the 1920s were divided into freshman and varsity squads. The freshman were ineligible to participate on the varsity squad their first season on campus.

Morrison recruited ten athletes prior to the 1921 season who many credit with helping turn around the Southern Methodist football program at the beginning of the 1920s. The athletes became known as the “Immortal Ten,” and they were a central component of Morrison’s 1921 freshman team.

¹⁴ For the rooting section as the highlight of the Mustang season, see: “Mustangs Lose to Bears Turkey Day,” *The Campus*, Vol. VII, No. 10, Nov. 30, 1921: SMUL.

For Morrison named coach for 1922 season, see: “Morrison and Freeland will Coach Southern Methodist University,” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 21, 1921.

Ewing Freeland and Morrison were named co-head coaches, but Morrison overshadowed Freeland and Morrison was often the only coach mentioned of the two. The arrangement only lasted a few seasons.

¹⁵ William R. Ruggles, “SMU Attack Sweeps Louisiana Ends Aside...”, *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 15, 1922. Ruggles refers to SMU as the “team out on the hill.” This is in reference to the first and most recognizable building on the SMU campus, Dallas Hall, being situated on a hill.

¹⁶ “Mustangs Beat Tigers 51-0 in Brilliant Game,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Oct. 15, 1922.

LSU was a respected regional opponent that many college football experts expected to defeat the Mustangs. Furthermore, after its first three games, SMU scored one hundred and four more points than it had in the previous season.¹⁷ The dominant manner of these victories became infectious. The respect, notoriety, and success provided by the team revitalized the “college spirit,”¹⁸ and the student newspaper depicted the student body’s high expectations when it published a cartoon of a Mustang player dreaming of a 1922 Southwest Conference Championship.¹⁹

Prior to 1922, rational supporters of SMU never considered that a conference championship was possible, but the early-season success had many believing this to be a legitimate prospect. Anticipation swelled as the team continued to win its subsequent games, and ahead of a highly anticipated bout with a powerful Baylor team, Miss Mildred Harris, the ex-wife of Charlie Chaplin, insisted on observing a SMU practice while in town. “Ever since my arrival in Dallas, I have heard nothing but the coming Thanksgiving game and S.M.U.’s chance to win,” declared Harris. “I am agreeably surprised to see such an excellent brand of football turned out in the South. The S.M.U. men seem determined to win...and I am counting on the Mustangs to more than match the Bears added weight with their fight and grit.”²⁰ Unfortunately, for both SMU and Miss Harris, Southern Methodist proved unsuccessful in matching Baylor’s talent and size, as Morrison’s men lost 24-0. Though the Thanksgiving loss to the Bears

¹⁷ Jordan Ownby, “S.M.U. Has Already Scored 104 Points More Than in 1921” *The Semi-Daily Campus*, Vol. VIII, No.5, Oct. 20, 1922: SMUL. *The SMU newspaper that had been known as *The Campus*, changed its title to *The Semi-Daily Campus* by this time.

¹⁸ “Mustangs Beat Tigers 51-0 in Brilliant Game,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Oct. 15, 1922.

¹⁹ *The Semi-Daily Campus*, Vol. VIII, No.5, Oct. 20, 1922: SMUL. *The Conference that SMU belonged to was the Southwest Conference, which they joined in 1918.

²⁰ “Mustangs Scrimmage for Mildred Harris...” *Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 29, 1922.

disappointed many, the Mustang season introduced an unprecedented, winning brand of football that rejuvenated the Southern Methodist and Dallas communities.²¹

Regrettably, controversy quickly interrupted the city's celebration. At the beginning of the decade, President Hiram Boaz responded to pressure from Dallas businessmen and announced that he planned to emphasize a winning football program at SMU. The scheme provided initial success, as Morrison recruited ten highly skilled athletes – the “immortal ten” – prior to the 1921 season. By 1922, these heralded recruits brought vastly improved skill to the Mustang varsity squad and their contribution to the transformation of the Southern Methodist football program was unquestionable. However, the athletic emphasis yielded embarrassment when officials from the Southwest Conference, the athletic affiliation of the largest Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas colleges and universities, were informed that SMU football players received monetary compensation for jobs not performed, were provided loans that did not require repayment, and were allowed participation on the football team despite poor academic standing. Following this discovery, the Southwest Conference investigation committee recommended suspension, which the Mustangs avoided only after a vote among the member institutions fell short by a single tally.²²

SMU's association with the Southwest Conference was salvaged but controversy persisted. The SWC recommended that Southern Methodist conduct its own internal faculty investigation, and the SMU board of trustees complied by forming a group of five faculty members to prepare a report and “clear the university of the odium attached to them.”

²¹ Horace S. McCoy, “Aggies Beat Longhorns; Bears Blank Mustangs” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 1, 1922.

²² Jeff Herrington and Nancy Lowell, *Quests For Glory: A Chronicle of SMU Athletics* (Fall 1979), pg. 6: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 3.

Ronald Smith, *Pay for Play: A History of Big-time College Athletic Reform* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 171.

The illegal activity surrounding the program was in large part due to the action of Dallas businessmen who created an \$80,000 slush fund to recruit skilled athletes to SMU.

Unfortunately for the board of trustees, the opposite occurred as the faculty report justified nearly all the violations charged to the university. The five faculty members further condemned the football program by suspending two players and indefinitely suspending another until he supplied a proper transcript. Furthermore, the committee recommended Southern Methodist not renew the contract of business manager of athletics Doc Blackwell, who had assisted Morrison in the recruitment of the “immortal ten.” Though Blackwell remained in his position, SMU faculty members accepted the report forty-four votes to twenty-one.²³

The report’s conclusions generated a turbulent relationship between the faculty and the city’s businessmen, even prompting a Dallas jeweler and trustee, H.R. Shuttles, to boldly declare, “that SMU should be run and officered by businessmen while faculty of the university believe that the affairs of the school should be handled by churchmen and the faculty.” Shuttles would eventually resign in fury.²⁴ An incensed Judge Cockrell, chair of the board of trustees, wrote and published an eighty-four-page booklet he entitled “A Review of the Athletic Situation and of the Case of Huff and Smith.” In his attempt to counter the faculty report, Cockrell addressed the book to the “Friends and Enemies of Southern Methodist University, within and without” and distributed 2500 copies to the student body and 500 additional copies for public consumption.²⁵ The efforts of the board of trustees proved the most telling aspect of the controversy.

The extreme nature of these refutes displayed the value Dallas businessmen placed on reputation. When the media relayed news of SMU’s immoral actions to the public, the negativity associated with the crisis created a distasteful perception of the Dallas community. A negative

²³ Darwin Payne, *In Honor of the Mustangs: The Centennial History of SMU Athletics, 1911-2010* (Dallas: DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, 2010), 34-35.

²⁴ Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 81-82.

²⁵ Jeff Herrington and Nancy Lowell, *Quests For Glory*, 6.

For distribution figures, see: Payne, *In Honor of the Mustangs*, 34-35.

civic and regional reputation served as a blemish on the character of those who identified themselves as residents of the city. In 1920s American society, the national reputation of community mattered more than ever. The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the late nineteenth century eradicated the autonomous, local communities that peppered the American landscape throughout much of the country's existence – by the 1920s, Americans inhabited a more connected nation characterized by a widespread association of corporations that served to homogenize the country. In this increasingly impersonal society, citizens of Dallas identified less with their neighborhoods and jobs and more with their city and region – an evolution that proved particularly true for businessmen whose affairs were now conducted on a national level. When Southern Methodist, Dallas's institution of higher learning, acted immorally, the potential conclusions associates from other regions of the country may draw invoked fear amongst the civic community. Businessmen believed a reputable and successful SMU football team improved their personal image. Thus, they felt that the defense of their extended identities must be defended to no end. Fortunately, for the businessman, the controversy surrounding the Mustangs was short-lived, and by the following season focus returned to Morrison's success with the football program.²⁶

On Thanksgiving Day of 1923, the Southern Methodist Mustangs again faced the Baylor Bears with the exciting prospect of the school's first Southwest Conference title on the line. The Mustangs progressed through the season unscathed and excitement reached unprecedented levels ahead of the game. In what had become a recurring challenge, the Mustangs once again found themselves on the wrong end of a substantial size advantage. The SMU student newspaper turned the shortcoming into a rallying cry by proclaiming: "The Bigger They Are the Harder

²⁶ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 3. Wiebe describes the loss of autonomy served as a significant crisis for businessmen. For the diminishing of the controversy the following season, see: Jeff Herrington and Nancy Lowell, *Quests For Glory*, 6.

They Fall!” In the November 21 issue, the paper posted the customary slogan following a list of the Baylor and Southern Methodist player weights, and a snippet of the biblical David and Goliath story supplemented the article. The message was clear: “There’s nobody on our team who is afraid, – there’s nobody on our team who does not feel that what he CAN do will be enough to stop Baylor, enough to out-guess, out-game, out play them.”²⁷ In addition to displaying the students’ relentless belief and support for their team, *The Demi-Weekly Campus* continuously designated the athletes as “our.” A few years prior, many students desired minimal association with the team, but in 1923, the Mustangs were an appreciated component of Southern Methodist University, a symbol of pride for the community. Moreover, the buildup even reached criminal proportions when Baylor students allegedly kidnapped two SMU students a couple of days ahead of the matchup. After the perpetrators branded “B.U.” on the victim’s face, the Southern Methodist supporters were disgracefully released back to their peers.²⁸

Fervent support by the citizens of Dallas accompanied the passionate student body. In the “Beat Baylor” section of *The Dallas Dispatch*, sportswriter George White described the city’s zealous attitude toward the approaching game. White cheerfully professed that “so great has become the enthusiasm of Dallas over the fine prospect of our local Methodist University winning the Southwest Conference championship....The big battle...is the chief topic of conversation all over town, even in homes where sports do not usually receive much attention.” White continued by lauding the local university, stating: ““Beat Baylor’ buttons appear and civic pride, deeply stirred, has made possible this “Beat Baylor” edition as a tribute to what S.M.U. has done to put Dallas on the football map.”²⁹

²⁷ “The Bigger They Are the Harder They Fall,” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. IX, NO. 16, Nov. 21, 1923: SMUL.

²⁸ “No Action Taken On Branding Case” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. IV, No. 20, Dec. 8, 1923: SMUL.

²⁹ George White, “And Give S.M.U. Southwestern Conference Title,” *The Dallas Dispatch*, Vol. XVIII, No. 61, Nov. 27, 1923.

The Mustangs made sure their supporters' enthusiasm did not go unrewarded as they dominated Baylor sixteen to zero in front of 19,000 spectators at Dallas's Fair Park Stadium. Baylor never came within forty-nine yards of the SMU goal line, and the Mustang offense accumulated five hundred yards of offense to Baylor's sixty-five.³⁰ The game capped an impressive, undefeated season that witnessed SMU score two hundred and seven points, while allowing only nine to the opposition. Furthermore, they earned the school's first Southwest Conference Championship and seven Mustang players earned All-Conference honors.³¹

The successful season predicated a "great future" according to Hugh M. Frye, an auditor in the SMU business office. Frye declared that "Dallas will have a population of half a million in fifteen years and S.M.U. will expand in proportion until it becomes the leading University of the Southwest." Frye believed winning the Southwest Conference title "marked the beginning of a school spirit which when developed would be an irresistible force in building up the institution."³² *The Semi-Weekly Campus* determined the relationship between the city and the university firm, as it declared that after the successful and enthusiastic 1923 season, "Dallas has fully recognized that S.M.U. is its university."³³

The Dallas community displayed their appreciation by personally inviting the Mustangs to a banquet at Dallas' Palm Garden Adolphus Hotel to celebrate the 1923 Southwest Conference Title. The invitation declared the occasion to be: "Tendered By The Citizens of Dallas To The Southern Methodist University Football Team and Coaches," and included "A Toast to the Mustangs":

³⁰ "S.M.U. Outclasses Bears 16-0 Here" *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. IX, No. 19, Dec. 5, 1923: SMUL.

³¹ Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football: Its Great Teams, Players, and Coaches* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), 26.

For seven selected for All-Conference, see: Kern Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 35.

³² "Great Future Is Seen for S.M.U." *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. IX, No. 20, Dec. 8, 1923: SMUL.

³³ "Victory" *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. IX, No. 19, Dec. 5, 1923: SMUL.

The Razorbacks fought gallantly;
The Aggies did their best;
The Frogs and Bears strove mightily,
But failed to meet the test.

So, here's to those who conquered,
Bringing S.M.U. great fame;
Here's to the mighty Mustangs –
Champs! All honor to their name!³⁴

In the 1920s, the amicable relationship between the Mustangs and the Dallas business community proved a vital component for the success of the football program. The financial backing of Dallas businessmen, whether legal or illegal, served as essential support for a successful gridiron future. Likewise, the city of Dallas experienced substantial change triggered by the influence of the city's businessmen. Strategically situated at a crossing of the Trinity River, Dallas began as a modest frontier settlement in the 1840s. The city rapidly developed following the construction of two railroads – the Houston & Texas Central and the Texas & Pacific – in the 1870s. The presence of the railroads allowed the community to serve as an important industrial marketplace for the entire Southwest, and the city received direct compensation for its enhanced importance as Dallas's population increased from approximately 3,000 to 10,358 in the 1870s. The next three decades witnessed steady growth until the city's population jumped from 92,104 to 158,976 in the 1910s.

By 1920, Dallas had become a metropolis and an important element of the American economy, but it had yet to produce a single, dominant interest group to initiate civic improvement or establish public institutions. In the subsequent decade, the community's businessmen ascended to this role and situated themselves as the sole influence of civic growth. Under the guidance of new figureheads, the city's population swelled from 158,976 to 260,475 in the 1920s and continued prosperity appeared inevitable. The new leaders began to “manage”

³⁴ Invitation to the “Mustang Banquet” following the 1923 SMU Mustang Football Season: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 8.

all aspects of community action, including Southern Methodist University and its football program.³⁵

The civic growth experienced by Dallas was a national phenomenon. The 1920 census marked the first time that at least half of the American population inhabited cities. The process of urbanization had been continual since the late nineteenth century, and it ushered the American populace from rural localities into industrialized metropolises. Furthermore, the organized and nationalized nature of these urban societies led to the depletion of personal autonomy that individuals enjoyed in a more intimate agrarian setting.³⁶ Americans' personal identities came to be defined more by their city than unique individual traits, and such strong association with urban communities made positive civic perception essential. The exceptional performance of the Southern Methodist football team provided Dallas residents' vital, positive national exposure.

The relation of the Mustang football team to Dallas situated the athletic contests as more than simple games. Southern Methodist provided the city and its citizens a sense of self-importance. Every SMU gridiron triumph appeared in national newspapers and presented the community in a positive manner, thus the nation began to associate Southern Methodist and Dallas with success. If the team wins, the city is victorious and vice versa. From this perspective, one can better understand the passion that becomes associated with college football in the urbanized nature of the United States in the 1920s. The citizens of Dallas felt the reputation of the football team directly reflected their own national standing.

There was no doubt that the Southern Methodist Mustangs were one of the strongest football outfits in the Southwest, but progressive Dallasites desired national notoriety. SMU

³⁵ Patricia Evridge Hill, *Dallas: The Making of a Modern City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), xviii-xxviii.

³⁶ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 11-12. This clarifies, "A Great City Deserves a Great University," the slogan utilized by SMU beginning in the 1920s for its annual fund drive.

possessed yet another undefeated record at the conclusion of the 1924 season, and the Dixie Classic invited the team to participate in its postseason bowl game to be played in Dallas. The contest served as an invaluable opportunity for the Mustangs to test their merit on a national stage against a strong West Virginia Wesleyan squad. The New Year's Day affair presented a hefty challenge, as the eastern opponent possessed two losses to quality opponents and were "one of the strongest of the Atlantic section teams of the year."

Many local residents viewed the contest as a regional clash. "Southwest battles East," proclaimed *Dallas Morning News* sportswriter William Ruggles, who determined the contest to be, "the biggest (game) played on a conference gridiron this year," and even mentioned the generosity and selflessness of the SMU players for "sacrificing their Christmas holidays to earn the university funds for a badly needed gym." The benevolent tone employed by Ruggles displayed how the academic scandal that plagued the program two years prior was nothing more than a distant memory. The national notoriety that would come with victory served as the only concern facing SMU and its supporters.³⁷

Unfortunately, the Southern Methodist football team proved unable to maintain its momentum, as West Virginia Wesleyan defeated the Mustangs by a nine to seven margin.³⁸ The SMU football program accomplished much in a short period, but their recognition extended no further than the Southwest. Expectations for a national championship failed to exist – a season of the highest caliber involved beating all opponents on the schedule and winning a SWC title. Though Ray Morrison's football team, Southern Methodist, and Dallas progressed immensely in a short time, the expectations remained low in regards to their position in the national landscape of college football.

³⁷ William Ruggles, "Southwest Faces East in Stadium Battle Today," *Dallas Morning News*, Jan. 1, 1925.

³⁸ For the record of West Virginia Wesleyan and the score of the Dixie Classic, see: Kenneth M. Plummer, *A History of West Virginia Wesleyan College, 1890-1965* (Buckhannon, WV: West Virginia Wesleyan College Press, 1965), 58.

Despite the minor setback, in 1926, Ray Morrison and his Mustangs persevered and produced arguably their best season to date. SMU again compiled an undefeated campaign and wrapped up the SWC title two weeks prior to the season's end. A crowd of over 19,000 supporters watched the Mustangs clinch the conference championship with a resounding thirty-one to three victory over Baylor – the worst loss the Bears had ever endured in a conference game.³⁹ The win proved so decisive that Milt Saul, the sports editor of *The Dallas Morning News*, declared the contest “the most impressive victory the Red & Blue warriors have won in the history of their institution...and was the finest exhibition of football particularly by the Mustangs ever staged on a Dallas Field.”⁴⁰ SMU had again provided its home city with a sense of satisfaction. Dallas citizens personally invited Mustang players to private parties in their homes and the city's Baker Hotel hosted an extravagant party dubbed “The Football Feed.”⁴¹ Though the success of the 1926 season brought SMU and Dallas unprecedented accolades, the Mustangs were presented with an even more advantageous challenge the following season.

SMU had performed admirably within its own conference but the Missouri Tigers – the 1926 Missouri Valley Champions – served as the Mustangs most daunting challenge yet. The early season opponent possessed national clout for its performances against quality eastern schools and the dominant fashion in which Missouri won their conference the year prior. Temple Howard of *The Semi-Weekly Campus* declared that Coach Morrison must “use every trick in the bag” to defeat such a “worthy foe.” Howard continued by stating that the Missouri Valley squad consisted of “twenty-eight of the best players that have ever played for the Tigers,” but a victory in the contest “would mean probably as much for the Mustangs as winning the Southwestern

³⁹ “31-3 Win Over Baylor Bears Gives Second Flag in Four Years to Frisky Mustangs” *The Semi-Daily Campus*, Vol. XII, No. 14, Nov. 17, 1924: SMUL. The record crowd was for the largest crowd in Dallas football history.

⁴⁰ Milt Saul, “Mustangs Beat Baylor Bears, 31-3; Win Conference Title” *Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 14, 1926.

⁴¹ Invitation to “The Football Feed” and invitations to personal parties received by Logan Ford: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 2.

Conference.” According to the student writer, a Mustang triumph placed the team “in the class with the Eastern and Northern teams.” A victory would mean that “Southern Methodist University would be recognized all over the country as an outstanding school.”⁴² The student body and the Dallas community understood the important national promotion that would come with a SMU victory.

In what *The Dallas Morning News* dubbed, “probably the greatest offensive game ever played in Texas,” SMU easily defeated Missouri 32-9 at Dallas’ Fair Park. The convincing victory dramatically boosted the confidence of the Mustangs’ supporters, as it now seemed comprehensible for Dallasites to promote their team as one of the nation’s finest. Despite the inability of the Mustangs to win the conference title in 1927, the Salesmanship Club of Dallas expressed “its pride of the achievements of the coaching staff of the S.M.U. football team and of the entire team.” They deemed the season a success due to the “distinctly civic achievement in which the entire city takes pride.”⁴³ Once again, the team carried the city of Dallas to glory, but the Salesmanship Club made sure that all knew the Mustang’s performance was the effort of the entire city and not just the athletes on the field.

In part due to SMU’s performance against Missouri, national collegiate football experts began to take note of the quality football present in the Southwest. Princeton coach W.W. Roper revealed that he sent a scout to the Southwest and decided to share the findings since “we have heard little of this section (and) I believe publication of the facts will do much to open the eyes of those in regions where football is older.” According to Roper’s associate, Southwest Conference officials and fans believed 1927 the most successful season for the region to date, and the quarterback of Southern Methodist, Gerald Mann, should receive consideration for first

⁴² Temple Howard, “Coach Morrison Will Use Every Trick in the Bag...” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 7, Oct. 22, 1927: SMUL.

⁴³ “Salesmanship Club Praises Football Team of S.M.U.” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 18, 1927.

team All-American honors. Furthermore, the rapid improvement of quality football in the region and the improving “attendance marks” fascinated the coach.⁴⁴ Roper represented the Northeast, the old establishment of collegiate football, and for the Princeton coach to take notice of the progress ongoing in the Southwest proved substantial. Thus, by the late 1920s Southwest football was receiving its first notions of national respect.

In addition to Roper, the *New York Times* began to take note of Southwest Conference football, and specifically the Southern Methodist Mustangs. At the conclusion of 1927, the paper analyzed the records of college football teams from all regions over the previous five seasons. The *Times* concluded that though “it will come as something of a shock to the ancient gridiron strongholds,” the closest rival to that of the esteemed Notre Dame Fighting Irish was the Southern Methodist Mustangs. When the national publication objectively printed SMU’s record of thirty-four wins, five loses, and seven ties – an eighty-seven percent winning percentage – the publicity received proved invaluable.⁴⁵

Furthermore, at the conclusion of the 1927 season, a high profile transition occurred within the Southwest Conference. John Heisman, who earlier in the decade declared quality football would never occur in the Southwest, retired from coaching after a dreadful three-year tenure at Rice University in Houston. Heisman proved unable to adjust to Southwestern Conference football and posted a record of four wins, eleven loses, and a single tie.⁴⁶ The unbiased report of SMU as the second-best college football team over a five-season period and the failure of Heisman, a representative of the established elite of Eastern football, presented Southern Methodist and Southwest football as a significant participant in the national college football discussion.

⁴⁴ W.W. Roper, “Southwest Shows Grid Talent; Game Being Developed There” *The Times Picayune*, Dec. 4, 1927.

⁴⁵ “Notre Dame Record Is Best For 5 Years” *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1927.

⁴⁶ Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 38.

While the Southern Methodist triumph over Missouri proved significant for Dallas, the post-season East-West Shrine Game in San Francisco served as perhaps the most beneficial promotion for the Southwest football community thus far. While promoters presented the contest as a charity event to raise money for disabled children, the East-West game meant much more than an exhibition for its Texas participants.⁴⁷ The game presented an opportunity for southwestern athletes to display and compare their talents to so-called “superior” athletes from the East.

Taking advantage of the opportunity, the West team convincingly defeated the East sixteen to six. Texans scored fourteen of the West’s points and SMU’s Gerald Mann scored twice – once on an early ten-yard touchdown catch and then a fifteen-yard run later in the game.⁴⁸ *The Semi-Weekly Campus* proclaimed that Mann’s heroics “established an everlasting reputation for S.M.U. and the state of Texas.” The Southern Methodist campus greeted Mann as a hero upon his return to Dallas, providing him with a standing ovation when he entered a campus chapel to recount the West’s victory. During his public appearance, Mann stated “the thing that impressed (him) the most was the part the Texas boys were given in the game. More publicity was given the Texas men than any others.”⁴⁹

Sports journalists proved Mann’s assessment correct, as news outlets from across the country raved about the “four obscure players” from “four obscure Texas colleges” who “stole the thunder of the great football stars of the year, East, West or anywhere.”⁵⁰ *The San Francisco Call* glowingly remarked that, “After all Texas is the place where the West begins. And Texas evidently begins to play football where the others leave off.” The West Coast paper continued by

⁴⁷ “Game at San Francisco Monday Will Write...” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 21, Dec. 20, 1927, SMUL.

⁴⁸ Temple Pouncey, *Mustang Mania: SMU Football* (Dallas: Temple Pouncey, 1981), 58: SMUL.

⁴⁹ “Ovation Given Mann in Chapel” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 22, Jan. 4, 1928: SMUL.

⁵⁰ Robert Sensender, “East-West Football Battle Reveals Genius in Texas End” *The Times-Picayune*, Jan. 10, 1928.

admitting that “The West is deeply indebted to Texas today for having preserved its gridiron dignity yesterday against the greatest aggregation of Eastern star football players to ever invade the Pacific Coast.” The *Call* believed that after the dominant performance of the Texas football players, it would be wise for “some...to get a game with one of those Rio Grande academies for the edification of football hereabouts.”⁵¹

According to Robert Sensender of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, boisterous Texas Christian University end Raymond “Rag” Matthews stole the show. Sensender proclaimed Matthews the most dominant athlete on the field and “not only the greatest end of 1927,” but also “one of the greatest (ends) of all time.” At the conclusion of the contest, the TCU end downplayed his performance, stating he “was just playing mediocre football...you all come down to Texas some time and we’ll show you some real football.”⁵²

The obscurity of these Southwest stars fascinated Sensender. He noted that “The funny thing about these Texas players is that they were as little known here on the Pacific Coast as in the Middle West and East. Texas plays ‘in its own league’.”⁵³ This post-season charity contest opened the eyes of many collegiate football fans. On a national scale, this contest served as the most rewarding moment to date for Southwest college football. Not only was the East expected to win, their star athletes were supposed to dominate. *The New York Times* determined the Eastern squad possessed “some of the finest players developed in the East in years,” yet the West prevailed in dominant fashion.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Coast Sports Scribes Full of Praise...” *The Semi-Daily Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 22, Jan. 4, 1928: SMUL.

⁵² Sensender, “East-West Football battle Reveals Genius in Texas End.”

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ “West Defeats East in Football Battle” *The New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1927. The paper, interestingly enough, briefly mentioned “Rag” Matthews in its recap of the game. However, it did highlight Joel Hunt of Texas A&M and Gerald Mann of SMU as two stars from Texas who “stood out.” The two players were not selected as first team All-Americans at the conclusion of the 1927, but following the East-West game, “they were nominated as the two ‘lost All-Americans’,” according to: Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 42.

The East began to notice Texas football, and the Southwest began to realize that perhaps they belonged at the forefront of national college football commentary. As Mann informed the chapel audience at SMU, “Despite the fact that the Eastern players and games have gotten more publicity than the West, the Southwest Conference is far ahead in the kind of football played. It’s a different kind and I think it’s the kind of football that will eventually be played everywhere.”⁵⁵

Southern Methodist’s wide-open passing attack – the “aerial circus” – was “the kind of football played” to which Mann alluded.⁵⁶ The offensive philosophy became a staple of both Ray Morrison and the Southern Methodist football program, and furthermore, the style of play cultivated national interest for the entire Southwest football community.

The legend goes that when Ray Morrison regained control of the SMU varsity team in 1922, he realized that his undersized squad could not compete with the much heavier defensive fronts they would face during the upcoming season.⁵⁷ The coach possessed a quick team and a quarterback capable of throwing an accurate pass, so Morrison devised an offense he believed would allow his team to compete with superior competition. After observing other teams resort to the forward pass when faced with a deficit late in games, Morrison noticed that the aerial attack frequently yielded immediate success despite the defense expecting the particular style of play. The SMU coach concluded that surely his teams could have success throwing the ball when the opponent was oblivious to the pass. The revelation inspired the coach to develop an offense that featured thirty to forty forward passes per game.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ “Ovation Given Mann in Chapel” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 22, Jan. 4, 1928: SMUL.

⁵⁶ Numerous sportswriters referred to Ray Morrison’s offense at SMU as the “aerial circus.” See Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 30-31.

⁵⁷ “S.M.U.-A&M Ready for Whistle,” *Forth Worth Star-Telegram*, Oct. 21, 1921.

Prior to the SMU- Texas A&M contest that the Mustangs lost during the 1921 season, it was noted in the *Star-Telegram* that the Aggies possessed an “eleven-pound advantage in average weight.”

⁵⁸ Mark Allen Calhoon, unpublished manuscript, 12: SMUL, Box 8, Folder 1.

Furthermore, the aerial attack eliminated the detrimental effects of the hot Southwestern climate. As Southwest sports journalist Kern Tips explained, “a practical reason” for a passing offense “was to beat the heat and humidity of the Southwest’s football season climate.” Tips determined that the “maneuvering” associated with the passing offense “put less premium on juggernauting in the muck of the line that saps stamina and drains desire.”⁵⁹ Morrison’s strategy served to counter a longtime foe of Southwest football teams: the weather.

While the Mustang’s size and the weather certainly factored into Morrison’s choice to implement his famed passing offenses, the tale of the coach inventing the widespread passing attack is exaggerated. Though the celebrated coach contributed to the popularity of the offensive weapon, the forward pass had served as a component of the game since its legalization in 1906. Facing a public relations crisis due to numerous deaths associated to the violent nature of the run-heavy offenses utilized in early college football, the National Collegiate Athletic Association rules committee legalized the overhead pass in hopes of spreading out the players and decreasing the sport’s brutality.⁶⁰ Teams immediately began taking advantage of a new offensive weapon that proved particularly popular among 1920s American society.⁶¹

Prior to the 1920s, football supporters enjoyed the run-heavy offenses employed by many early teams. The struggle and power associated with the ground-and-pound attack situated the sport as both a test of man’s brawn and his character. While gridiron teams never ceased the employment of running plays in their offenses, the 1920s ushered in a more modern society

⁵⁹ Kern Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 31. This offense propelled southwestern teams to an advantage, due to not having to deal with the inopportune snow at any point in the season.

⁶⁰ David Riesman and Reuel Denney, “Football in America: A Study in Culture Diffusion,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Winter, 1951), 321.

⁶¹Richard Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History, 2nd edition*, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 128. In the first season the forward pass became a legitimate option, teams utilized the new alternative. Though Notre Dame completed a very early, publicized forward pass – Marietta College and St. Louis University appear to have been the first teams to complete the pass in 1906. Many claim that Notre Dame presented the first legal forward pass due to Knute Rockne’s association with the play against Army. You can attribute this to the mythological lore often associated with Notre Dame and its coach.

fascinated with the scientific efficiency associated with businessmen such as Henry Ford and Frederick Taylor.⁶² The craft-innovation of a passing offense, the intelligence and efficiency necessary to design and successfully execute such a style of play, satisfied the craving of a more modern American society.⁶³

The forward pass injected excitement and unpredictability into the sport. Former SMU cheerleader Jack Thread recalled, “We were a real drawing card where we went. While teams all over the nation were slugging it out on the ground, people came to see our wide-open passing game.”⁶⁴ When Morrison’s squad lined up for an offensive snap, not only were defenses wondering what was to come, but also audiences sat on the edge of their seat not sure what to expect. The forward pass created the opportunity for touchdowns to occur at any moment and any place on the playing field.⁶⁵ Even the nickname bestowed upon SMU’s offense, “the aerial circus,” implied fans observed something atypical. One attended something greater than a football contest; they were to be entertained in a circus type atmosphere.

Many sportswriters deemed Ray Morrison as the “father of the forward pass” and inventor of the wide-open style of play.⁶⁶ As previously mentioned, while the coach’s offenses did possess an increased use of the forward pass, Morrison’s role in the development of the technique should not be exaggerated. Prior to his tenure at SMU, other teams and regions employed complicated aerial schemes and many aspect of Morrison’s offense were borrowed philosophies. Moreover, depending upon the competition, the Mustang’s game plan occasionally featured more running plays than anything else. However, the media dubbed SMU as the “aerial

⁶² Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 59-60.

⁶³ Reuel Denney and David Riesman. “Football in America,” 322.

⁶⁴ Jeff Herrington and Nancy Lowell, *Quests For Glory*, 7: SMUL.

⁶⁵ Davies, *Sports in American Life*, 59.

⁶⁶ Tips, *Football – Texas Style*.

circus” and Ray Morrison embraced his part in the story.⁶⁷ The excitement and spectacle generated by the narrative attracted more local and national fans to the southwestern collegiate game. Therefore, the passing attack, whether exaggerated or not, of the 1920s SMU Mustangs directly influenced the growth of collegiate football in the Southwest.

Furthermore, the “aerial circus” narrative offered American society something they desperately craved: a distraction. The United States’ economic prosperity during the 1920s certainly provided many citizens an improved standard of living and an increased amount of leisure time. However, this ideal situation created a national sense of complacency, which in turn led to a communal desire for escapism and adventure. Thus, the exciting aerial attack of SMU supplied the superfluous entertainment craved by the American public during the decade.⁶⁸

SMU’s “aerial circus” not only contributed to the growth of football, it provided Ray Morrison a fresh start. When Morrison resumed coaching the Southern Methodist football team, his two unsuccessful seasons – in 1915 and 1916 – went unmentioned. The *Dallas Morning News* stated that Morrison left SMU to enter the Army and assist in its YMCA program.⁶⁹ While the Mustang coach did in fact take the military assignment, he acquired the position only after SMU forced him out. By 1925, the tension between the university and Morrison proved nonexistent. The 1925 edition of the *S.M.U. Athletic Review* declared Morrison the “smartest coach in the Southwest.” The publication continued by deeming him “the most popular man on the campus....He is known as a coach, a star athlete, and a prince of a fellow.”⁷⁰ Morrison

⁶⁷ For the media’s exaggeration of Ray Morrison and SMU as the innovator’s of the passing game, see: Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930* (Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse Press, 2007), 102-105.

⁶⁸ William H. Freeman. 1977. “College Athletics in the Twenties: The Golden Age or Fool’s Gold?” Paper presented at the Pre-Convention Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, Seattle, WA, March 1977.

⁶⁹ “Morrison and Freeland will Coach Southern Methodist University” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 21, 1921.

⁷⁰ *S.M.U. Athletic Review* (1925), 3: SMUL, Box 13, Folder, 10.

became synonymous with success during his second tenure as head coach and compiled an impressive record of eighty-one wins, thirty-one losses, and twenty ties.⁷¹ In addition to this impressive record, Morrison helped supply Southern Methodist University, Dallas, and the Southwest something even more substantial: a college football identity.

As explained by college football historian Michael Oriard, “Every community had its own football culture, shaped by its own and its region’s history, its resources, its civic aspirations, and countless other factors....” Unfortunately, for the Mustangs and the Southwest, a gridiron culture failed to exist at the beginning of the 1920s. This changed as soon as the “aerial circus” mantra began to spread across both the region and the nation. A passing offense, regardless of the frequency it was employed, came to define college football teams in the region, all of whom embraced the label the media placed upon them. By the end of the decade, the Southwest became associated with the aerial style of play.⁷²

Texas and wide-open passing proved a compatible pairing. In an article entitled “S.M.U. Found Moses in Morrison,” a former Southern Methodist player proved exceeding over-the-top when recalling his former coach’s career in the 1920s. The former Mustang recalled that when Morrison began to design his offense, the coach planned “a type of football play that would appeal to these wild Texans....He noticed that the state was large and open and everyone was infected with an unlimited vision that wouldn’t stand orthodox lines or channels.”⁷³

Exaggeration aside, the article proves telling on numerous levels. The former player described the offense and Texas as a predestined match – a perfect fit introduced by a football

⁷¹ Danzig, *History of American Football*, 283.

⁷² Oriard, *King Football*, 86.

Tips, *Football – Texas Style*, 30-31. Tips explains that though Morrison and SMU jumpstarted the aerial offenses, the decade saw numerous SWC teams utilize the forward pass as a central component of their offenses.

⁷³ “S.M.U. Found Moses in Morrison,”: SMUL, Box 8, Folder 1. In football terms, the Southwest region is essentially Texas. Sportswriters utilized Southwest to describe the region Texas teams called home due to their association with the Southwest Conference.

prophet. Furthermore, sportswriters from other sections frequently depicted the SMU overhead attack as a “Wild West shoot-out.”⁷⁴ The article appears to accept this description of the “wild Texan” athletes rather than reject the absurd claim. Because the cowboy imagery provided its participants a unique characteristic found in no other regional football community, southwestern football proponents tended to embrace the title. Moreover, the national media and southwestern football supporters accepted the wide-open passing game as their football culture – their identity. To be defined as a specific football community represented initiation into the national football landscape and it situated the Southwest as a respected and unique piece to an increasingly diverse athletic phenomenon.

In the inclusive regional football community, perception mattered. The notion that SMU reverted to a passing game due to inferior physicality not only displayed disrespect toward the Mustang athletes, but also toward Southern Methodist University, Dallas, and the entire Southwest. The previously mentioned former Mustang player clarified that he did not “mean that Texas can’t take it, to the contrary, they enjoy a good scrap, but it’s not just football in the Southwest Conference – it is comparable to a ‘Kentucky Feud.’”⁷⁵ The fact that the veteran athlete felt the necessity to justify the Southwest Conference’s style of play displays the importance a positive façade was to regional football communities.

In the second game of the 1928 season, the identity of Southern Methodist and the Southwest Conference faced perhaps its toughest and most opportunistic challenge when the Mustangs confronted Army – one of college football’s most tenured powers. According to Princeton Coach W.W. Roper, just the ability of Southern Methodist to appear on the Army

⁷⁴ Oriard, *King Football*, 87.

⁷⁵ “S.M.U. Found Moses in Morrison,”: SMUL, Box 8, Folder 1.

schedule displayed the Southwest Conference's rapid ascent in collegiate football.⁷⁶ If the Mustangs could pull off the upset, the consequences would prove monumental for the entire football community. In agreement with Roper, *The Semi-Weekly Campus* noted that the Army game displayed "S.M.U.'s rise in the collegiate world." The school paper proclaimed, "Southern Methodist University...is rated among the phenomena in the educational world. Established thirteen years ago, it has achieved enrollment of more than 3300 students annually, more than two million in endowment, and a preeminent position in Southwestern football."⁷⁷

The contest against the Cadets from West Point, New York provided SMU the opportunity to challenge itself against the best of the East and expand its aspiration beyond a Southwest Conference title. A victory could potentially place the Mustangs in the conversation for a national championship.⁷⁸ The ability for SMU, a school that began fielding a football team less than fifteen years prior, to be in such a position proved remarkable. Several months prior to the actual contest, the prospect of national notoriety sent the citizens of Dallas into frenzy.

Coach Morrison tried his best to control the overzealous hype surrounding the game. In June of 1928, four months prior to the intersectional battle, he identified the long travel to New York, the inability for the Mustang team to condition during the summer months like Army, and playing in an unfamiliar climate as just some of the "long odds" his squad faced. The coach deemed those who "even indicate now that we should beat or tie the Cadets" as "foolish."⁷⁹ Despite his best efforts, Morrison proved unable to quell the "ballyhoo." "Beat Army" served as the rallying cry during the initial practices of the 1928 season, and Business Manager of

⁷⁶ W.W. Roper, "Southwest Shows Grid Talent; Game Being Developed There" *The Times Picayune*, Dec. 4, 1927.

⁷⁷ "Army Game Regarded as Recognition of S.M.U.'s Rise in Collegiate World" *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Sept. 29, 1928: SMUL.

⁷⁸ George White, "The Sport Broadcast" *Dallas Morning News*, Nov. 7, 1928.

⁷⁹ George White, "The Sport Broadcast" *Dallas Morning News*, June 8, 1928.

Athletics, Doc Blackwell, declared the contest against the “Army football gladiators...the greatest intersectional football game in the history of the Dallas institution.”⁸⁰

Football proponents across the country became intrigued not only about the Mustang team, but also Southern Methodist University and Dallas. Taking advantage of the opportunity to introduce their institution to the nation, the university produced a thirty-seven page pictorial pamphlet in response to the numerous requests for information about the new Texas school.⁸¹ The challenge against the Cadets served as a momentous opportunity to advertise the university to the nation.

With enthusiastic anticipation plentiful, the week of the game finally arrived. To ensure support for the visiting team, Dallas businessman Bill Hitzelberger arranged for four special trains to transport seven hundred and fifty fans from Texas to New York. At first, Southern Methodist refused to encourage travel to the away contest and determined that the classes students missed would not be excusable, but the fervor of the game proved even too overwhelming for the administration. By the week of the contest, SMU announced study hours would occur on the train and credit would be given to all students attending the intersectional affair.⁸²

Everyone involved with Southwest Conference football began to comprehend the national implications of a SMU victory against Army. A positive performance from the Mustangs ensured considerable positive advertisement for the university, city, and region. “New Yorkers take a certain sectional pride in the West Point football team,” declared student

⁸⁰ “Mustangs Open Training for 1928 Football Season” *Dallas Morning News*, Sept. 11, 1928.

⁸¹ Payne, *In Honor of the Mustangs*, 45.

⁸² For Hitzelberger’s efforts see “Young Ladies Permitted to Go S.M.U.-Army Football Game” Advertisement in Sept. 14, 1928 edition of *Dallas Morning News*.

For number of trains and fans traveling to New York, see Michael Oriard, *King Football*, 78.

For SMU administration claiming they will not allow students to make up missed classes due to the trip, see “S.M.U. Refuses To Sponsor Army Trip” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Sept. 22, 1928: SMUL.

journalist William Roach. “In a sense it is ‘their eleven.’ Men who cannot boast college affiliations find a vicarious outlet for their emotions by shouting for West Point. Therefore it will be a game sectionally between the East and the Southwest, but the eyes of the United States will be focused on the game.” Southern Methodist was to perform on their grandest stage yet, as the importance of the contest surpassed any the Mustangs had participated in prior.⁸³

Once the Southern Methodist contingent reached New York City – their stop for the night before heading by boat to West Point the day of the game – the strange Texans mesmerized the Yankees. Upon their arrival, the S.M.U. band blared their rendition of “Dixie” to announce the Southerners arrival, and Mustang supporters gave “one long rebel yell” that “was repeated and revolved into bedlam”⁸⁴ The “thrill-wise” New Yorkers ran from the sidewalks in order to observe the ruckus, and women even “held their babies out of...windows to see a real live Texan.”⁸⁵ The reaction solidified Gerald Mann’s comment from a year prior, “that whenever a Texan goes east or west he attracts attention.”⁸⁶ The SMU supporters displayed pride in their status as an attraction and enjoyed the entertainment they provided to such a vibrant city. Just like their team, they attempted to produce a spectacle.

In an effort to provide support from afar, Western Union issued an ad in the *Dallas Morning News* that encouraged local residents to send messages of encouragement to the team prior to kickoff.⁸⁷ SMU supporters complied and sent numerous telegrams and letters to the southwestern athletes. Team captain, Earl “Ug” Baccus, received telegrams stating everything from “We know you will win, Texas first last and always” to “don’t fail us.” In an extremely

⁸³ William Roach, “S.M.U. To Give Army Points On New Style of Play” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIV, No. 5, Oct. 6, 1928: SMUL.

⁸⁴ Vivian Richardson, “Mustang Band Parades Down Fifth Avenue” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 5, 1928.

⁸⁵ Vivian Richardson, “Texans Leave and New York Grows Quieter” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 8, 1928.

⁸⁶ “Game at San Francisco Monday Will Write...” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIII, No. 21, Dec. 20, 1927: SMUL.

⁸⁷ Advertisement from Western Union on the second page of the Oct. 6, 1928 edition of the *Dallas Morning News*.

passionate two-page letter, M.F. Armstrong – a Texas oil investor – encouraged Baccus to channel the spirit and confidence displayed by “Rag” Matthews in the East-West game. Furthermore, Armstrong attempted to supply additional confidence by declaring the Mustangs “as good as any team in the United States.”⁸⁸ In addition to fan support, players on other Texas teams, and athletic officials representing nearly all the Southwest Conference institutions, encouraged the team to “stay in there and battle for Texas,” and “battle for the prestige” of the Southwest.⁸⁹

The zealous regional support revealed that the contest spread well beyond SMU and Dallas. Southern Methodist depicted the game as “an effort to prove to the country that Southwestern Conference teams are as good as the best,” and boldly proclaimed that the challenge was “not a school undertaking, or a civic undertaking, or a state undertaking but something that the entire Southwestern section of the country will be interested in and supporting.”⁹⁰ The game between the Army Cadets and the Southern Methodist University Mustangs had morphed into a contest for the relevancy of the Southwest football community.

Finally, the sixth of October arrived, and a confident SMU team descended upon West Point on a cool, crisp fall afternoon. The Mustangs ignored the large, boisterous Army rooting section and quickly initiated their razzle-dazzle offense, consisting of a bewildering array of forward passes and multiple laterals. Ray Morrison’s squad shocked the Army team, scoring a quick touchdown in the first five minutes of the game. Remarkably, the SMU offense was not

⁸⁸ For “don’t fail us”, see A.S. Rollins to “Ug” Baccus: “We know you can win...”, Oct. 5, 1928. For “Texas first last and always”, see From Ellison Furniture and Carpet Co. to Earl Baccus: “We know you will win Texas first...”, Oct. 5, 1928. Telegrams found in collection at: SMUL, Box 13, Folder, 13.

⁸⁹ For “battle for the prestige” of the Southwest, see “Sidelights of S.M.U.-Army Game” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 7, 1928.

For hundreds of telegrams from fellow Southwest programs and “stay in there and battle for Texas”, see George White “The Sport Broadcast” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 17, 1928.

⁹⁰ “Information About S.M.U.-Army Game”: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 14.

finished. Morrison's men entered the Army end zone for a second touchdown shortly following their first. The Mustangs found themselves in somewhat of a dreamland – Southern Methodist decisively led the vaunted Army attack thirteen to zero and the Cadets had no answer for the Texans' unorthodox style of play.⁹¹ “The Army knew what was coming and yet they couldn't break up Morrison's passing attack,” observed Grantland Rice. “The “stout” Cadet defense looked “dizzy most of the game.”⁹²

Though they were rattled, Army would not relent and eventually took a 14-13 lead in the second half. In the game's final minutes, the Mustangs found themselves on offense and quickly ascending upon the Army goal line, but time ran out before the squad could properly conclude its Cinderella story.⁹³

The performance of Ray Morrison's team shocked the East and opened the eyes of national football supporters unaware of the Southwest's “football culture.” *The Times-Picayune* noted the amazement of New Yorkers in attendance as they witnessed “passes...that began anywhere and ended in the same place.”⁹⁴ Despite the confusion, the easterners proved exhilarated by what they had witnessed and shocked by the brand of football produced from the Southwest. National sportswriters even felt “compelled to admit there are other sections of” the country “where real football is played.”⁹⁵ Though Morrison's teams did not always employ the aggressive passing attack the media associated them with, against Army, the frequency proved substantial. Regardless of the game plan's intention, the utilization of the wide-open attack was an important display to the Northeast and its influential media market. The coverage of the

⁹¹ George White, “West Point Noses Out Mustangs, 14 to 13” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 7, 1928.

For “diversity of forward passes and single, double, and triple lateral”, see Allison Danzig, *History of American Football*, 45.

⁹² Grantland Rice, “The Spotlight” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 17, 1928.

⁹³ George White, “West Point Noses Out Mustangs, 14 to 13.”

⁹⁴ “West Point Cadets Nose Out Southern Methodists by Single Point” *The Times-Picayune*, Oct. 7, 1928.

⁹⁵ Horace Grant, “The Mustangs Help Themselves to Glory” *Dallas Morning News* Oct. 28, 1928.

contest proved significant in spreading the lore of an aerial Southwest football community: the identity continued to cultivate and flourish.

Despite the loss, the proud Mustang supporters treated their team as victors, and “some fifteen hundred admirers...gathered to pay tribute to the team” when their train returned to Dallas. Local businessman Sol Dreyfus proclaimed that the game “was the most wonderful thing that ever happened in football history...those Mustangs were heroes, every one of them.” In the opinion of another Dallas resident, “our boys won, although they lost. That game which they played was far more valuable than any mere score made by either team.” Mary Hay, Dean of Women at SMU, reiterated the claim, determining that “Our victory over the Army was plainly evidenced to all onlookers of the game. The score figures stood 14 to 13 but we know who were the victors.” William Roach of Southern Methodist’s campus newspaper, *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, determined that the win established the Mustangs “as one of the greatest elevens in the country,” and not many football fans across the United States disagreed.⁹⁶ Three days after SMU’s impressive performance, Secretary of War Dwight Davis managed a quick pit stop in Dallas on a cross-country flight. When asked what he would like to do for his one-hour stay in the city, Davis proclaimed that he wanted “to see the school that could send a football team to West Point and play the Army in a 14-13 game.” He marveled that a “Southwestern university, especially a school so young as S.M.U., had made such a good showing on its first appearance in the East.”⁹⁷

The Mustang’s season proved disappointing by its customary expectations – SMU was unable to claim an undefeated season or a conference championship – but the 1928 Mustangs

⁹⁶ “Ponies Return Amid Applause of 1500 Fans” *The Semi-Weekly Campus*, Vol. XIC, No. 6, Oct. 10, 1928: SMUL.

For Hay’s comment, see “Dean Hay Says Railroad Men Compliment S.M.U. on Trip,” Oct. ’28, Newspaper Source Unidentified: SMUL.

⁹⁷ “War Secretary Seeks Glimpse of S.M.U. Team” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 11, 1928.

accomplished more for Southern Methodist, Dallas, and Southwest football than any team prior. “Until the Mustangs swept up from Texas with their ‘razzle-dazzle’ attack...the elite East and the hard-bitten North hadn’t paid much mind to Southwest football,” declared sports editor of the *Austin American-Statesman* Weldon Hart.⁹⁸ The national coverage and admirable performance of SMU led to national notoriety and acceptance from the national football community. In seven seasons, the Mustangs went from laughing stock to national power. Ray Morrison’s Mustangs were without question part of the nation’s football elite.

The impressive Mustang performance solidified the “aerial circus” offense as the distinct Southwest football identity, but many in the national football community proved suspicious of the innovative offense. Columbia University head coach Charles Crowley claimed that the passing offense had yet to hurt the sport, but he could “foresee that it will grow in usage and there is danger that the game will develop into something far from what football has been.”⁹⁹ The traditional, old school contingent of collegiate football included men aligned with Crowley’s outlook. The unknown developments that could potentially arise from the aerial attack frightened the traditional faction of college football who tended to support the conservative, run-heavy offenses popular in previous decades. The forward pass threatened to revolutionize the sport – a notion traditional coaches were not ready to accept. Replicating 1920s American society’s tension between modernity and traditionalism, the innovative passing game received consistent backlash from proponents of conservative, run-heavy offenses that were employed most frequently by traditional midwestern and eastern football powers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Danzig, *History of American Football*, 45.

⁹⁹ Charles F. Crowley, “Crowley Analyzes Football Season” *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1927.

¹⁰⁰ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 7, 12-13. In addition to these pages, throughout the book, Dumenil mentions the tension between modernist and traditionalist toward societal changes in the 1920s.

Despite their differences in regards to style of play, both parties agreed that the East no longer monopolized the preeminent collegiate football athletes or teams.¹⁰¹ Crowley noted that teams in the East no longer viewed Southwest opponents as merely “good warm-up contests.”¹⁰² By 1929, the region garnered enough prestige that many regarded it “as being one of the outstanding football sections in the country,” and the SMU Mustangs developed into one of “the greatest and most colorful teams in American football.”¹⁰³ The national standing of the Southern Methodist football team and the Southwest football community drastically improved from their dismal reputations at the decade’s beginning.

The notoriety the Mustangs bestowed upon the city of Dallas served as perhaps the most significant development of SMU’s ascendance in the realm of 1920s collegiate football. Reminiscing on the Mustang’s rise from obscurity, Dallas resident Bill McClanahan summarized the city’s gracious attitude: “An athletic team, good and colorful enough to attract national attention, has long been the cherished dream of every town and city...SMU’s Mustangs brought just such national recognition to Dallas.”¹⁰⁴ Similar to the rest of the country, football captivated Dallas and the enthusiasm showed no signs of diminishing in the near future. Collegiate football served as a true national phenomenon. At the conclusion of the 1927 season, Charles Crowley eloquently summarized America’s attitude toward the child’s game. The coach explained that football had become “an institution in the life of American youth. While the season is going on there are times when those of us who have been at it for many years become weary of the

¹⁰¹ Alan J. Gould, “Far West, East Dominate Associated Press All-American” *Times-Picayune*, Dec. 9, 1928.

¹⁰² Charles Crowley, “Upsets a Feature of Football Play” *New York Times*, Oct. 8, 1928.

¹⁰³ For “outstanding football regions in the country,” see: Program for S.M.U. vs Baylor, Nov. 16, 1929: SMUL, Box 56.

For SMU as “greatest and most colorful teams...” see: “Mustangs Have Brilliant Record,” *Tales of the Cornhuskers: Nebraska’s Football Magazine*. Published by “The Department of Athletics, University of Nebraska” for the Southern Methodist-Nebraska game on Oct. 5, 1929: SMUL, Box 13, Folder 16.

¹⁰⁴ Jeff Herrington and Nancy Lowell, *Quests For Glory: A Chronicle of SMU Athletics* (Fall 1979), pg. 3: SMUL.

struggle and the disappointments. When it is all over we feel glad of the rest before us. But, when the Fall comes around again, when the leaves turn brown and when the weather turn cold and crisp, we are eager for another season.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Charles Crowley, “Crowley Analyzes Football Season” *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1927.

Chapter Three

The 1929 Carnegie Report and the De-emphasis of Eastern Academia

In December of 1926, celebrated American author Upton Sinclair penned an article for *The Forum* magazine determined to spark controversy yet again. The same writer who penned *The Jungle*, a muckraking expose of the early twentieth century American meat-packing industry, composed an article condemning what he believed to be one of society's many ills: the state of the American university. Sinclair, a fervent Socialist, related America's institutions of higher education to businesses that had profited off of World War I. The author considered American universities extensions of capitalism's evils, comparable to "a gigantic munition factory" whose sole purpose was to produce "intellectual shells and gas bombs to be used on the plutocratic side of the class war." Furthermore, Sinclair deemed colleges the pawns of financiers and industrialists, who utilized political machines to manipulate their respective alma maters in order "to defend their property system and pass on their property tradition to the future." In this imbalanced world, genuine thought could not occur and thus it was the wish of the alumni "to destroy thinking in colleges." Football served as an instrument in accomplishing this destructive objective.

Sinclair considered college football an exploitive event in which alumni "turn each college into a competing unit, carrying on a miniature war with rival colleges, and diverting the attention of the students to the raptures and agonies of this strife." Alumni commercialized the amateur game to draw large crowds that

drive the gladiators to more and more frenzied efforts and brutal treacheries which cripple their rivals. The young heroes break their heart-valves and poison their kidneys and weaken themselves for the rest of their lives....Already we have a number of colleges which are nothing but honorific appendages to competing football teams, and we have seen football players able to dispense entirely with the academic camouflage and go out

into the capitalist world on equal terms with prize-fighters and motion picture stars and developers of Florida subdivisions.

The author made it perfectly clear that he possessed no qualms with the sport as exercise but rather the game's "status of a business" and "pursuit of false ideals..."¹ Although Sinclair's scathing review of collegiate football was more metaphorical than most, his stance proved representative of many who wanted to reform the collegiate game. From the vantage point of those unhappy with the direction of the sport, college football had become too commercial and professional to the point that it compromised the academic integrity of higher education in the United States. These reformers, consisting primarily of America's educated elite, deemed the lax admission standards given to promising athletes as diluting the intellectual rigor of American colleges. In short, the over-emphasis provided to college football by 1920s society proved injurious to the academic obligation of universities.

In the 1920s, college football's impressive crowds, stadiums, and profits entranced a majority of American society. However, distraught academic traditionalists lamented the mounting attention the sport received and focused their energies upon restructuring the game back to its amateur ideals. Most reformers could not deny that the discipline, fitness, toughness, and teamwork associated with college football provided benefits to the maturation process of young men, but the transformation of college football from a social activity to a highly competitive, commercialized enterprise reflected aspects of American society they despised. The 1920s witnessed Americans growing more concerned with nurturing their bank accounts than their minds – the liberal arts education that academics cherished went to the wayside, as prosperous businessman took center stage. From the vantage point of conservative intellectuals, college football became yet another detrimental aspect of a modern society driven by greed.

¹ Upton Sinclair, "Killers of Thought." *The Forum*, (Dec. 1926): 838-843.

While Sinclair's scathing review certainly affected the efforts of reform-minded football supporters, the article proved much less demeaning than the numerous controversial events that occurred a year prior. In the fall of 1925, the initial shockwave of college football's public relations nightmare appeared in the form of a syndicated column entitled "The Story of a Graduate Manager." On the morning of August 23, 1925, Americans opened their newspapers to the first of a twelve-part piece in which an anonymous graduate manager – the precursor to today's athletic director – revealed the collegiate game's most severe evil: covert networks of student underlings assembled to aid in the illegal recruitment and support of athletes.

Referred to by nicknames associated with their specific tasks, the undergraduate assistants served as pawns of the graduate manager's complex system devised to produce a championship caliber collegiate football team. Students employed as "rats" made sure athletes attended class, a "wet nurse" described a student tutor, and "widows" served as post-graduate advisors who recommended the easiest courses offered and could pretty well predict what material to expect on forthcoming exams.² Furthermore, nearly every team possessed a group of alumni who scouted the most promising high school football players and attempted to sway the boys to their institution with promises of cozy jobs, free tuition, and/or financial stipends.

Students the graduate manager referred to as "uhlahs" proved even more effective than older alumni. Captivating the high schoolers with the rev of an engine and a cloud of dust, these undergraduates frequently visited the high schools of recruits with their loud cars. The "uhlahs" sought to befriend the targeted athletes and transport the teenagers to university campuses where they were introduced to the college experience – pretty girls, fraternities, and parties.³ If all went to plan, the star prospect would be hard-pressed to decline the invitation of a coach when invited

² "The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 4*, August 27, 1925.

³ "The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 5*, August 28, 1925.

to join the team. The competition for star high school prospects became so intense that graduate managers commonly hid their prized recruits at remote summer camps to keep other teams from poaching the boys prior to the start of fall classes.

The clandestine recruiting and athlete support networks came with a hefty price tag, which athletic department's discretely subsidized in their annual report under vague subheadings such as "rubbers" or "miscellaneous." The graduate manager referred to this portion of the report as "no man's land."⁴ Moreover, the highly organized operations were often viewed as charities by the wealthy alumni who funded the athletic support networks. Rather than support the poor and homeless, the businessmen provided money to skilled athletes so that their school would in turn become a successful component of the national college football landscape.

Reaction to the article varied: reformers supported it, progressives questioned its validity, and various regions claimed they were above it. Due to college football's emergence as a national sport played competitively in all sections of the country, every event was measured in comparison to another region – the graduate manager's story proved no different. In reaction to the stench emitted by the syndicated column, the New Orleans based *Times-Picayune* announced to its readers that the newspaper felt no need to print the feature in the South. "We down here in Dixie don't know much of what's going on undercover with Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and other such universities," claimed a staff writer. "But it was because the story looked so overdrawn... (and) because it had absolutely no connection with Southern intercollegiate football that the *Times-Picayune* did not take it seriously." Moreover, the publication boasted further that "in the South, ninety-nine out of a hundred collegians are sent to school to be educated, rather than play football."⁵ The New Orleans sports journalists appeared to ignore the portion of the graduate

⁴ "The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 7*, August 31, 1925.

⁵ "The Football Expose." *Times-Picayune*, Sept. 18, 1925.

manager's tale in which he described civic leaders from "a small southern city" hiring a graduate manager for \$16,500. The hired subsequently setup a vast recruiting network that led to both athletic success and increased athletic subsidies.⁶ The steadfastness displayed by the newspaper proved much more impressive than its reading comprehension.

Demonstrating the same opposition toward the article, supporters of midwestern football tended to lash out at the graduate manager's claims with even more vigor. Walter Eckersall of the *Chicago-Tribune* proclaimed that the immoral activities did not exist in his region, as the "Western Conference or Big Ten is as pure an organization as there is in the country."⁷ On the contrary, the behavior did occur in the Big Ten, and probably in the region more so than any other. But in this overly competitive world, regions strived to appear superior to others. In this regard, Americans treated regionalism similar to college football: a winner and loser were required, and perception mattered.

The article's in-depth analysis of college football's unethical behavior certainly enhanced debates between reformers and progressives, but to most who read the article, the claims were not a surprise. Sports fans proved well aware that institutions paid their football coaches more than tenured professors, that illegal recruiting occurred at a high rate, that alumni interference ran rampant, that athletes placed sports above school, and substantial gate receipts were collected. Plain and simple, a majority of society did not care about the abuses. Reformers could chastise the game all they wanted, but the public's perception of college football was rarely altered.⁸

⁶ "The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 2*, August 25, 1925.

⁷ John Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 161. The Western Conference was the most prominent association of midwestern teams and thus it became synonymous with the region's football community.

⁸ Richard Davies, *Sports in American Life: A History*, 2nd edition, (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 120-121.

Ronald Smith, *Play-by-Play: Radio, Television, and Big-Time College Sport* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 21.

In the 1920s, college football was the most popular intercollegiate sport by a substantial margin. This presented the game as a valuable promotional tool - not only for respective institutions but also entire regions. If a college deterred from these illegal practices, their team failed to compete, and in a decade where spectacle and entertainment reigned supreme, losing was not an option.⁹ Moreover, a winning football team was not cheap and success went hand-in-hand with an athletic department's profits. The more money an athletic department earned and possessed, the more successful their team became.

The economic aspect of the supposedly amateur activity could not be ignored. As historian Richard Davies explains, "The principles that underpinned the rise of intercollegiate sports were the same that guided the American system of capitalism: competition and profits."¹⁰ As the unnamed graduate manager explained, college football programs were now "high-g geared business organizations" in which control was "vested increasingly in alumni and in the community outside the college." Furthermore, the author estimated that it cost \$25,000 to train, equip, and condition an athlete at a big-time football university. In order for this operation to run efficiently, the graduate manager, who could expect to earn a salary of as much as \$18,000, needed to be "a savvy business man" able to "learn the methods of complicating business organizations."¹¹

In a bold close to his narrative, the graduate manager revealed that his "main contention is that the changes which have come about in modern football follow closely the changes which have taken place in general organization of life in America during the last few decades. It is

⁹ Davies, *Sports in American Life*, 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ "The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 1*, August 23, 1925.
"The Inside Story of College Grid Finance." *The Charleston Gazette: Part 3*, August 26, 1925.

inevitable that systems of education should reflect the life of the world around them.” The author proclaimed that while some may deplore these changes to higher education,

in the last century when purely academic was quoted above par, the “humanities,”...were good business; in these high-pressure days, the world rewards and youth wants money and success...Isn’t it the business of an education to equip youth to survive and succeed in his environment as it is, rather than it ought to be? I maintain that the high-gear, competitive system of inter-collegiate athletics, with all its derivatives of high finance, is more effective in preparing boys for life as they will find it than any system which places the emphasis on the cultural rather than the practical...What I want to say is that alumni and coaches and managers...are doing more for (boys) than the professors who are giving them a bogus culture – bogus because it doesn’t deal with life as it is.¹²

In short, according to progressive proponents, a career in business provided a substantially better opportunity for success in 1920s America than the antiquated humanities, and big-time college football provided young men with a better chance to succeed in this business-driven environment. The decade following World War I proved transformative and college football was a both a force and a reaction to the substantial changes in American social values.

Many were skeptical of the article’s sincerity, as the “common sense” approach the graduate manager claimed to utilize seemed more detrimental toward college football than beneficial. Regardless, the message read loud and clear: college football had become big business. In an analysis of the state of the game, *New York Times* reporter Alison Danzig echoed the sentiment: “Football usually foots the bill for everything, and there is no factor like a winning football team to win assistance for an endowment fund drive.”¹³

The contests’ economic motives were strongly influenced by the advertising and fund raising techniques developed just prior to the decade’s commencement. A former college football coach professed his belief that football games were conducted primarily to encourage

¹² “The Inside Story of College Grid Finance.” *The Charleston Gazette: Part 12*, Sept. 5, 1925.

¹³ Allison Danzig, “Football Outgrows Stadiums...” *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 1926.

alumni to pump money into their alma mater – a successful team made this much more likely to occur. Furthermore, he believed the economic component of 1920s college football became widespread due to the replication of the “drive” system employed during WWI fundraising campaigns. The coach explained that universities established “teams, hired press agents, something like Creel’s United States Publicity Bureau, and started out for a bankroll.” The necessity of these positions arose in order to raise and manage the excessive funds the sport generated.¹⁴

Moreover, traditionalists, perturbed with the collegiate game’s over-emphasis, failed to comprehend, and were probably afraid to admit, the main culprit behind the phenomenon: American society desired college football to become the finest spectacle imaginable and were willing to pay top dollar to attend and maintain the show. In the 1920s, American society transcended the businessman’s importance above that of the poet, the linguistic succumbed to the jock, and immorality triumphed over ethics – football simply followed the trend. The prestige associated with winning yielded higher enrollment, increased national branding, and motivated nostalgic alumni to open their wallets on their alma maters’ behalf. The intellectual idealists could gripe all they wanted, but the spectacle of the game infected the nation and a simple remedy was nowhere to be found. Fans sought every opportunity to have their team deemed conference and national champion; honor and sportsmanship be damned.

Moreover, no matter how desperately reformers wanted to look in the rear view mirror to a time when college football served as an amateur pursuit, unaffected by financial incentive, the “good ‘ole days” notion proved inaccurate.¹⁵ In reality, unethical activities existed since the

¹⁴ “Games for the Gate’s Sake.” *The North American Review*, Vol. 227, No. 2 (Feb., 1929): 167-172.

¹⁵ An example of this “good ‘ole days” notion can be found in: James Anderson Hawes, *Twenty years among the twenty year olds; a story of our college today* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1929), 85.

introduction of intercollegiate athletics in the late-nineteenth century. As historian Ronald Smith explains: "...the upper-class amateur ideal of participating for the enjoyment of the contest and for no other motive, including financial considerations could not easily exist in a society whose freedom of opportunity ideology allowed all to seek excellence through ability and hard work." The amateur-professional debate surrounding college sports survived from the inception of American intercollegiate athletics, because while institutions felt the need to use amateur language to protect their athletic programs, the innate American ideal to win and excel persisted. A professional model proved much more ideal for this desire.¹⁶

The strong desire to win at all costs was not unique to the 1920s – it was an innate aspect of American culture. However, the decade proved exclusive in that college football had become widely publicized, played on a much more national scale, and involved many more participants. As the game became more prominent, its controversies were illuminated. The ongoing battle between reformers and progressives served as an ongoing attempt to find the balance between freedom and control in college football – traditionalists sought to contain, while proponents of the game worked vigorously to advance the sport. It appeared that the decade brought an increased divide between the two forces. Moreover, the bickering tended to emulate 1920s American society's persistent dispute between traditionalism and modernity. The struggle over college football's future identity witnessed reformers fight for the tradition of an amateur, academic-friendly game, while progressives sought a more professional and commercialized modern spectacle.¹⁷

An article entitled "Commercialism in College Athletics," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, Vol. 8, No. 6 (October 1922), 62-64 is another example of a reformer claiming athletics to have been cleaner in the past.

¹⁶ Ronald Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 173-174.

¹⁷ For balance between professionalism and amateurism, see Ronald Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, x.

Faculty proved the most vocal advocates for greater control over college football, and had done so well before the transformative nature of the 1920s. In the late nineteenth century, a concerned Oliver S. Jones claimed excessive emphasis surrounding collegiate athletics occurred largely due to influences outside of universities. Jones determined that those foreigners negatively affecting college football served as “the bane of our schools and college to-day.”¹⁸ Moreover, in 1905, Harvard president Charles Eliot stated that he believed “The game of football has become seriously injurious to rational academic life in American schools and colleges, and it is time that the public, especially the educated public, should understand and take into earnest consideration the objections to this game.”¹⁹ At a 1906 University of Wisconsin alumni dinner, respected historian Frederick Jackson Turner brazenly chastised the game, claiming that football “has become a business, carried on too often by professionals, supported by levies on the public, bringing in vast gate receipts, demoralizing student ethics, and confusing the ideals of sport, manliness, and decency.”²⁰ In response to his comments and efforts to disband the Wisconsin football program, an angry mob of football supporters surrounded Jackson’s home in manic protest – reformers and proponents in action!²¹

While reformers lamented the situation, proponents of the sport adamantly advocated the game’s benefits. In a contemporary review of college football, Princeton coach William Roper explained that he was “firmly of the opinion that the more we encourage healthful athletic competition, the better citizens we make” and even claimed that “If prohibition is to be enforced, I seriously believe athletics, and particularly football, can be of real help...Anyone who attempts to play football even moderately well must be in the pink of condition, not only during the actual

¹⁸ Oliver S. Jones, “Morality in College Athletics” *The North American Review*, Vol. 160, No. 462 (May, 1895): 638-640.

¹⁹ Charles Eliot, ed. A.E. Winship, “College Football” *Journal of Education*, Vol. LXI, No. 7, Feb. 16, 1905.

²⁰ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 214.

²¹ Davies, *Sports In American Life*, 121.

playing season but through the entire year....” Differing from reformers who desperately desired to shorten the season, Roper believed the contests should occur “every Saturday during the college year...The college or university undergraduate is not going to spend his entire time in study. Nor do I believe he should. What is he going to do, then, when he is not studying?... Football offers a partial solution.” Furthermore, he disagreed with those who claimed college football’s motives to be solely financial. “The college football game is not run for profits,” claimed Roper, and any money that was made was “managed as carefully as it would be in any big business and applied scientifically to the general athletic needs of the university.”²² Taking a drastically different stance toward American society’s fascination with business, Roper believed the economic component was necessary for college football’s benefits to take effect.

Though Roper appeared to possess unquestioned faith in college football’s positive influence upon young men, his opinion appeared in doubt when college football’s next public relations nightmare of 1925 occurred. On November sixth, George Owen Jr., a former captain, All-American, and recent graduate of Harvard, claimed that most college athletes disliked playing football due to “the terrible grind necessary to keep in the running. The possibility of failure preys so on the mind of the player that his capacity for enjoyment of the game is, in many cases, completely lost.” Owen proved equally repulsed by the attitude of alumni toward the sport. The former Harvard star claimed graduates’ enthusiasm made the games comparable to gladiatorial combat of ancient Rome.²³ Those who supported collegiate football had always professed that amateur athletes played primarily because of their love for the game – Owen’s comments illegitimated this notion. With his statements, the Harvard letterman spoke not only for himself, but claimed that “other players” felt the same way. Furthermore, his criticism of

²² William Roper, *Football, today and tomorrow* (New York: Duffield and Company, 1928), 128-136.

²³ “Harvard’s Great Player Does Not Enjoy Football.” *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 7, 1925.

alumni as the main culprits of players' repulsion toward sport proved equally alarming. The ex-students always professed that they acted as beneficiaries toward young men, but the former All-American's claims argued that the game was no longer in the hands of undergraduates but rather under the control of exploitative older men.

A couple of weeks after Owen's comments, arguably the most glaring controversy occurred when Illinois halfback Red Grange decided to turn professional prior to graduating college. Grange was undoubtedly the most celebrated college football player of the 1920s and his impressive performances on the field presented the "Galloping Ghost" as a household name. Late in the 1925 season, rumors began to circulate that Grange was contemplating a move to the professional ranks, and five minutes following his final game, still clad in his Illinois uniform, Grange met with the media and made supporters' fears a reality. The All-American announced that he would play his first professional game the following week for the professional Chicago Bears. The star athlete stirred the pot further when he stated that players played primarily for their head coach more so than their university. "The institution was impersonal and remote in the affections of the team," claimed Grange.

The situation appeared promising for reformers who had long advocated that college football was being played with the wrong intentions, however, the star halfback's critique of a university degree stung the educational elite as well. In defense of his actions, Grange claimed he was only guilty of taking advantage of his natural athletic abilities in order to secure a more promising future. Furthermore, early in his collegiate career, the halfback confessed that he discovered "an arts degree isn't worth a dime in business...I'm not ashamed of a thing I've done. I think I showed common sense in cashing in on an asset after I have given everything I had to

my university...I don't owe the university a cent." Grange admitted exactly what academia hoped not to hear: a liberal arts degree was not a valued commodity.²⁴

As reporters began to comment on what had become one of the more popular topics in the country, numerous national publications presented opinions on the All-American's decision. Most newspapers supported Grange's decision, claiming that his right to take advantage of his athletic abilities and move to the professional ranks would in no way damage the collegiate game. William Roper took the same stance, claiming that the star halfback's decision was solely due to his enjoyment of the sport: "Football was his game, the breath of life to him and more important than money."²⁵ *Outlook* magazine took a different approach, calling Grange's decision a blessing because it turned "the glaring sunlight on the gross commercialization of college football."²⁶

Perhaps the most troubling observation of these reactions was that they focused solely on how Grange's decision impacted the status of college football – would the game survive or flounder. Many commentators overlooked the fact that Grange decided against earning his college degree. His decision proved much more indicative of universities than the sport of college football, as it brought to light the nation's growing disinterest with the value of higher education. Spectacle, business, and promotion proved substantially more important.

After Ernie Nevers – a Stanford All-American – turned professional at the conclusion of the 1925 season, University of California President W. W. Campbell had enough. Campbell

²⁴ Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919-1930* (Syracuse, NY: University of Syracuse Press, 2007), 74-76. Originally in "Red Grange Runs to Fame in Final Game," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 22, 1925 and "It's Do or Die for Coach, Not School," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 15, 1929. The *Times-Picayune* produced an article following Grange's first professional game stating: "Grange Received \$20,000 for Game." This shows that the game itself possessed little importance in the public's mind; it was the fact that the halfback earned a substantial paycheck as a professional. "Grange Received \$20,000 for Game," *Times-Picayune*, Nov. 28, 1925.

²⁵ Roper, *Football, today and tomorrow*, 108.

²⁶ Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 108.

pledged to do all he could “to prevent the University of California from becoming a prep school for professional football.” He declared that the actions of Grange and Nevers would result in “from the first days of high school, and possibly earlier, a great number of boys will be planning to go to college with the idea of becoming football stars of sufficient magnitude to command salaries in accordance with their dream of sudden wealth. Football will be made for the universities: universities were not made for football.” Campbell fears were a great concern – had the emphasis on football devalued higher education in the United States?²⁷

Major John Griffith was perhaps the individual most concerned with Grange’s actions. Griffith served as the commissioner of the Midwest’s Big Ten athletic conference – also referred to as the Western Conference and more formally as the Intercollegiate Conference. The commissioner’s involvement with college football traced back to the turn of the century, and he proved a logical choice when the Big Ten sought to hire a full-time director of athletics following damaging claims of illegal activities among conference institutions. In 1922, the Big Ten appointed Griffith to clean up midwestern intercollegiate athletics and transform the organization into an entity the region’s citizens could look upon with pride.²⁸

Griffith hit the ground running and immediately began efforts to transform the Big Ten into the nation’s cleanest athletic conference. The commissioner was aware that evils such as illegal recruiting, gambling, and professionalism existed in the conference and needed to be addressed. He commenced an educational campaign informing all those involved with the game (spectators, fans, coaches, administrators, players, etc.) of various acts the Big Ten considered improper. The effort proved substantial, and, in one instance, Griffith sent a memo regarding illegal recruiting to approximately 10,000 high school principals. However, it should be noted,

²⁷ “College First, Football Next, California President says,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1925.

²⁸ Ray Schmidt, “Major John Griffith,” *College Football Historical Society*, Vol. XIII, No. II (Feb. 2000): 1-3.

that the commissioner tended to promote educational awareness rather than pursue more substantive acts such as punishing the guilty parties.²⁹

Despite his recognition of the evils permeating college football, Griffith adamantly believed that athletics served as an important component of university life, and that intellectual pursuits should not serve as the end-all-be-all of collegiate life. In December of 1924, at the annual meeting of the Football Coaches' Association of America, Griffith boldly responded to critics who claimed a dangerous overemphasis existed in college football, labeling them as nothing more than "feminists, destructionists and educational communists." Griffith appeared fearless and ready to take on all the challenges reformers threw at the sport and his conference.

Prior to the 1925 season, Griffith even jovially predicted that the "Western Conference will display a brand of football at least the equal of that of any other group of colleges in America. The Middle West is rich in boy power and it would be difficult to find anywhere in the world a finer group of young men than the 1,000 candidates who have registered for football in the Western Conference."³⁰ In an environment where athletic conferences served as representative of local football communities, any negative action associated with the conference was taken as a slight against the entire region. The actions of Grange, an athlete on a Big Ten team, placed Griffith, the conference, and the region in a troubling position.

In the enhanced debate between college football reformers and progressives during the 1920s, Griffith was not the only individual facing trying circumstances. In his study on the rise of big-time college athletics, sports historian Ronald Smith explains that, "Individually, university presidents have never been able to control intercollegiate athletics" because they are

²⁹ "Dear Sir: Attached please find two bulletins which are being...": John Griffith to George Rightmire, Sept. 7, 1926: The Ohio State University Archives (OSUA), George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, "Athletics, Oct 1925-Dec 1926."

³⁰ "Big Football Year Seen By Griffith," *New York Times*, Sept. 21, 1925.

usually “caught between demands of the faculty on the one hand and the demands of the governing board on the other.”³¹ University presidents found themselves in the cross hairs between intellectual and athletic pursuits on college campuses, and oftentimes, they proved directly responsible for the decline of universities’ intellectual pursuits. Speaking anonymously on the increased commercialization of 1920s college football, a former coach believed university presidents were “no longer representative of a scholarship tradition, rooted in conventionality, idealism, Greek, Latin and three modern languages. College presidents are now chosen because they are handshakers, go-getters and business men who can panhandle endowments.... Such a college president is forced to recognize that it is impossible to build up endowments without athletics to ballast and advertise the appeal for funds.”³² Such was the delicate situation of the university’s leadership – trying to keep everyone happy created a very slippery situation. While academics served as the university’s primary purpose, athletics created publicity, increased enrollment, and generated larger donations from alumni. Colleges found themselves in a similar situation to the rest of American society: they were businesses and needed to be run as such.

One individual confronted with this difficult dilemma was Ohio State University President George Rightmire, who faced a difficult circumstance when he took over as the university’s president in 1926. The Ohio State football team had achieved resounding success the decade prior, but after winning the Big Ten championship in 1916, 1917, and 1920, the team’s record began to steadily decline.³³ The situation proved demeaning for many invested alumni and

³¹ Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 216.

³² “Games for the Gate’s Sake.” *The North American Review*, Vol. 227, No. 2 (Feb., 1929): 167-172.

³³ Joel Sayre, “Frenzied Football,” 110: The Ohio State University Archives (OSUA), Vertical File, “Football: 1890-1979.” It appears that during the championship run, Ohio State illegally offered financial support to football players as evidenced by a letter from prep athlete Wally Butts, who asked for and then received financial support when attending OSU.

Another example of illegal activity at Ohio State occurred when the football team was deemed ineligible for the 1922 season for cheating. See: “Data Concerning Eligibility in Intercollegiate Athletics in 29 Ohio Colleges,” Dec. 1921: OSUA, William Oxley Thompson Papers (3/e), Box 6, “Athletics:, 1921-23.”

local supporters, and Rightmire began receiving numerous letters of grave concern. Following the 1925 season, one such letter sent by the Toledo Ohio State Alumni Association claimed concern regarding the future direction of the Buckeye football program. In order to rectify the situation, the Toledo alumni recommended a meeting between the university's athletic board and representatives of the various Ohio State alumni associations. Surely, Rightmire wanted to keep the alumni pleased because of the financial support they provided, but by all accounts, he seemed to side more with reformers' fear of overemphasis on sport at university campuses. The president appropriately replied that the faculty were content with the direction of the program and believed it misguided to determine success by wins and losses: "Under the present situation that has seemed to be unescapable but the trend of Faculty thought is entirely away from these commercial and professional features."

While Rightmire's defiant stance proved admirable, it ignored the irony of the collegiate game: its emphasis on competition. Recognizing its opportunity, the Toledo alumni responded that although the "universities of the Western Conference take no cognizance of championships, they do in practice, play and claim championships in football and other lives of athletics. Their method of conducting intercollegiate football has aroused the utmost public interest in the game. An interests which, we submit, cannot be ignored by the universities...."³⁴ The Toledo group was correct. By emphasizing a champion at the conclusion of each season, the sport implied that victory does in fact matter. This was the dilemma facing college football in the 1920s, its emphasis on victory and defeat made it much more relatable to the decade's business-influenced

³⁴ "Toledo Ohio State Alumni Association," S.D.L. Jackson to George Rightmire: "Dear Sir: Enclosed find a copy...": Dec. 22, 1925; GR to SJ: "My dear Mr. Jackson: I have the communication...": Jan. 6, 1926; SJ to GR: "We have pleasure in acknowledging...": Jan. 14, 1926; OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, "Athletics, Oct. 1925-Dec. 1926."

desire for profit, growth, and success, rather than an academic community still steeped in traditional liberal arts values.

Following 1925's disturbing episodes, issues of commercialization, professionalization, and over emphasis proved as present as ever.³⁵ The game appeared out of the universities' control and firmly coordinated by the actions of alumni; even worse, the game increasingly took the shape of the business world that served as the antithesis of a liberal arts education. In reaction to the travesties affecting the supposedly amateur game, the National Collegiate Athletic Association asked the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Learning to conduct a national study on the state and influence of athletics in American schools – on January 8, 1926, the organization accepted the athletic governing body's request.³⁶

The Carnegie Foundation served as the nation's leading promoter of higher education reform. Regarding intercollegiate athletics, the organization's stance proved far from cordial, and, in 1924, the foundation had even issued a brief report that designated "commercialism," excessive expenditure of money," and "too great an insistence on turning out a winning team" as the most problematic issues in college sports.³⁷ Furthermore, the organization's president, Henry Pritchett, obstinately sought "elite no-nonsense education" in American universities and college football served as a hindrance to his efforts. Pritchett believed an emphasis on athletics contributed to a rise in lower college admissions standards that "diluted the intellectual integrity of academic life."³⁸

³⁵ "The National Collegiate Athletic Association," Memo to member institutions: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, "Athletics, Oct. 1925-Dec. 1926." Issues of commercialization, professionalization, and over emphasis were placed at the top of the NCAA's agenda at the organization's annual meeting in December of 1925.

³⁶ Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 160.

³⁷ Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993), 183.

³⁸ Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 159-160.

To make matters worse for progressive proponents, Howard Savage – a young social science researcher – was the man selected to lead the team of researchers set to investigate the nation’s athletic programs. Like Pritchett, Savage hailed from the Northeast and was a strong advocate of highbrow education; this, coupled with his ability to conduct a thorough investigation, proved a nightmarish combination for proponents of big-time college football. For the collegiate game, if the Carnegie Foundation was the cemetery and Pritchett its caretaker, Savage certainly possessed the ability to serve as gravedigger.

Initially, Savage handled the study in the same manner as a 1924 investigation of athletics he conducted in Great Britain – the social scientist distributed questionnaires to various institutions inquiring about the inner workings of their respective athletic programs. The feedback proved unfruitful. Concerned with the intent of the investigating committee, many schools were standoffish and created a more difficult effort for the team. In an attempt to improve the situation, Savage decided that he and his four-man group would visit 130 colleges, universities, and a few high schools to personally interview college officials, athletic personnel, students, and alumni for a more effective and “unprejudiced” investigation.³⁹ The Carnegie researchers’ action was evidence that the investigation was one to be taken seriously; university and conference officials took note.

In 1926, a concerned John Griffith acquired various excerpts from Savage’s initial findings and relayed the information to Big Ten member presidents and athletics directors. The discoveries focused mainly on issues of illegal recruiting and concluded that in many instances: “Everybody, including the President and the Deans knows that alumni and business men are subsidizing football players at this university. No objections have been made.” Yet another

³⁹ Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 160. Richard Davies mentions that Savage was a trained social scientist in *Sports in American Life*, 132.

report found that many college administrators determined that the proselyting of athletes was an essential evil because “competition and like practices of other colleges make it absolutely necessary.” Griffith closed his memorandum to Big Ten officials by stating “there will be considerable excitement when this report is made public, especially if the names of the institutions are given. While we may congratulate ourselves that some of the conditions as stated in these reports could not occur in the conference, yet conditions here in this section are not entirely ideal and probably never will be.”⁴⁰

Griffith appeared both confident and cautious. Optimistic that, in comparison to other sections of the country, few wrongdoings occurred in the midwestern football community, yet nervous because the evils that were present needed to be eradicated as quickly as possible. In the wake of the investigation’s findings, the conference went on the offensive in order to defend itself. While the commissioner considered the Big Ten’s recruiting situation improved, after receiving a letter from a conference president informing him of rumors that “recruiting by fraternities and alumni is growing more persistent and active, and the methods used are becoming more questionable,” Griffith called for the Western Conference athletic directors to meet with alumni leaders to fix the issue.⁴¹

Next, Griffith issued an in-house report on the state of recruiting in the Intercollegiate Conference. Generally, the internal investigation yielded positive conclusions for the conference and outlined all the actions taken to rid the organization of the few wrongdoings discovered. Griffith concluded that the Big Ten’s three-year effort to end gambling and recruiting among its

⁴⁰ Memo from John Griffith to The Directors of Athletics of the Western Conference, “If I am to judge by the rumors...”: Sept. 29, 1926: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, “Athletics, Oct. 1925-Dec. 1926.”

⁴¹ Memo from John Griffith to The Directors of Athletics of the Western Conference, “The following excerpt is taken from a letter...”: Oct. 7, 1926: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, “Athletics, Oct. 1925-Dec. 1926.”

affiliated schools proved successful and the “improper proselyting throughout the Conference is at a minimum...”

The report contained extracts from various investigators’ findings in an attempt to legitimate the conclusions, but the publication’s sincerity proved suspicious due to only a single report of illegal recruiting that an examiner declared to have been resolved. Regardless, Griffith presented the report as a triumph for midwestern football, and declared that he felt “safe in stating that every school in the Big Ten has a clear record....I am sure that the Big Ten is looked up to as the cleanest athletic organization of the present day.”⁴² The bold statement placed the conference’s, and the region’s, participants as clean of the illegal activity that tarnished the sport.

Like Griffith, George Rightmire demonstrated a strenuous effort to present his institution in a positive light prior to the release of the Carnegie Report. At the conclusion of the 1926 season, the president of West Virginia Wesleyan claimed that all collegiate football players were subsidized and it was about time that all associated with the game admit to commercialism in the sport. Taking advantage of the confession, *The New York World* sent Rightmire and other university presidents various questions regarding potential subsidizing of athletics at their institutions. Rightmire definitively replied that “We guard against these practices by not engaging in them. President of West Virginia Wesleyans statements may apply to his institution but should be supported by evidence concerning others.”⁴³

Rightmire presented his university as clean to the media, yet the next month, with the Ohio State legislature set to investigate the university’s athletic finances the President sent a message to athletic director L.W. St. John regarding the state of expenditures. He noted that this

⁴² “A Report of Work that has been done to discourage Illegitimate Recruiting of Athletes,” March 7, 1927: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, “Athletics, Jan. 1927-Dec. 1927.”

⁴³ *New York World* to GR: “Charges By President Wark of...”: Dec. 28, 1926; GR to *World*: “Replying to your night letter of December 28th...”: Dec. 29, 1926: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, “Athletics, Oct. 1925-Dec. 1926.”

matter was worthy of conference so that everyone was on the same page. It seemed a stretch to deem Ohio State clean when Rightmire proved “unaware” of the inner workings of his university’s athletic department and demonstrated concern of what state representatives may uncover.⁴⁴

As the concerns of various football regions, conferences, and teams increased, the Carnegie researchers’ investigation persisted. And finally, on October 23, 1929, after three and a half years and a cost of \$100,000, the Carnegie Foundation presented their findings and conclusions to the public in a lengthy 347-page report that found the state of collegiate athletics to be unacceptable.⁴⁵ Savage revealed that ethical behavior and sportsmanship appeared unimportant in comparison to the pursuit of victories and the earnings that came with them. Furthermore, Savage and his team determined that at least three-fourths of the 130 institutions they investigated jeopardized the academic integrity of their institutions due to the recruiting, subsidizing of athletics, over-emphasis, and/or professionalism present at the schools.

Determined to include all of its findings, the report fervently provided in-depth accounts of systematic cheating, extravagantly high coaching salaries, payment of athletes, excessively large stadiums, and the recruitment of high school athletes – issues long known, but generally ignored by an enchanted public. Though the sections on recruiting and the subsidizing of athletics tended to receive the most attention, the publication examined a variety of topics ranging from intramural sports to athletic training to medicine. One of the more fascinating stories involved a coach injecting a player’s injured leg with cocaine so the pain would not deter

⁴⁴ GR to L.W. St. John: “My dear Professor St. John: A movement seems...”: Jan. 24, 1927 OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 5, “Athletics, Jan. 1927-Dec. 1927.”

⁴⁵ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 219.

him from entering an important game. Furthermore, the report focused on football more so than any other sport.⁴⁶

In the report's introduction, Dr. Henry Pritchett claimed that the researchers conducted the study with "no captious or faultfinding spirit," and he referred to the conclusions drawn as a "friendly effort" to find a solution to the present issues plaguing collegiate athletics.⁴⁷ The educational basis of the Carnegie Foundation and the scathing nature of the comments made throughout the report suggested otherwise.

Savage refuted progressives opinion that college sports, and in particular football, proved beneficial in improving a young man's moral character, claiming that "our study of the recruiting and subsidizing of college athletes affords much direct evidence that college athletics can breed, and, in fact, have bred... equivocation and dishonesty, which actual participation has not removed or prevented."⁴⁸ The investigator blamed the negative qualities hampering the sport on the interest of the public at large because they aided the "commercialism, and the special privileges of small groups of alumni" determined to ignore the intellectual components of higher education.⁴⁹

In the 1920s, the commercialism that consumed college football on a weekly basis every fall proved ideal for an American populace obsessed with consistent thrills and spectacles. The Report deemed society's yearnings responsible for provoking those involved with the sport to subsidize athletics and recruit players through networks of organized deception, which in turn

⁴⁶ Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 161, 164-165. Story of player injected with cocaine can be found in: Howard J. Savage, et. al. *American College Athletics* (New York: Carnegie Foundation, 1929), vi. Although Savage had the help of a team when conducting the investigation, other than an introduction from Pritchett, he was the sole author of the report.

⁴⁷ Savage, et. al., *American College Athletics*, vi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

created an atmosphere of “dishonesty, deceit, chicanery, and other undesirable qualities.” Savage deemed this intentional rule breaking as “the darkest single blot upon American college sport.”⁵⁰

The economic motivation of college football’s immoral recruiting networks appeared to trouble Savage the most. According to the report, the solicitation of high school athletes had reached “the proportions of nationwide commerce” and proved “noxious” to “the nature and quality of American higher education.”⁵¹ It appears that what proved equally distasteful was the fact that these networks proved reflective of the nation’s modern business society, with many athletic associations even hiring advertising agents and publicity men to help peddle their football programs. It was under these false pretenses of profit that “all considerations of amateurism vanish under the pressure of commercial or business methods.”⁵² Savage even referred to men who partook in acts of subsidizing athletics and recruiting as “the secret enemies of the social order,” because they taught young athletes, the nation’s next generation of leaders, that successful deception proved a worthy component of character in post-graduate life.⁵³

Dr. Pritchett mourned the fact that “the independent college has not wholly escaped the tendencies of the time,” as institutions of higher learning had been drawn “into the well-nigh universal passion to exploit athletes and to offer courses in journalism or business or salesmanship.” Pritchett expressed his uncertainty if the university, “whose primary purpose is the development of the intellectual life can at the same time serve as an agency to promote business, industry, journalism, salesmanship, and organized athletics on an extensive commercial basis....Can a university teach equally well philosophy and salesmanship?”⁵⁴ Furthermore, the

⁵⁰ Savage, et. al., *American College Athletics*,. 297.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁵⁴ W. H. Cowley, “Athletics in American Colleges” *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (January 1930): 29-35.

Carnegie Foundation appeared most concerned with higher education following college football's path and becoming a commercialized institution. In a tone of desperation, Savage pled for deterrence from an economic mindset:

More than any other force, [commercialism] has tended to distort the values of college life and to increase its emphasis upon the material and the monetary...The argument that commercialism in college athletics is merely a reflection of the commercialism of modern life is specious. It is not the affair of the college or the university to reflect modern life. If the university is to be a socializing agency worthy of its name, it must endeavor to ameliorate the conditions of existence, spiritual as well as physical, and to train the men and women who shall lead the nations out of the bondage of those conditions.⁵⁵

In this particular section of the report, Savage may have appeared to be discussing the state of athletics, but his concerns gravitated above just sports. All of the aspects of the university system, which included football, had been corrupted by modern American society. College campuses no longer served as centers of intellectual pursuit where individuals went to increase their self-worth and fulfillment. Too many young men were utilizing colleges and universities as platforms to jump into a get-rich-quick business world that could care less about Shakespeare and Aristotle.

In his introduction, Pritchett reminisced about America's colleges in the past; founded on the pillars of European education. He scoffs that when observing 1920s college athletics, a European visitor proved confused and dumbfounded at the so-called "amateur" and "educational activities" occurring before him. The men responsible for the Carnegie Report scornfully ridiculed what collegiate athletics, and specifically football, had become: a commercialized and professional pursuit foreign from academic interests. They not only challenged the direction of

⁵⁵ Savage, et. al., *American College Athletics*, 307-308.

college football, but also combatted the state of modern American society in hopes that it could somehow go back to valuing liberal arts.

What was necessary to remedy such a devastating situation? Savage spoke broadly about the necessity for a greater regard for sportsmanship and following college football legislation already in place. Pritchett spoke more specifically and radically, stating:

The paid coach, the gate receipts, the special training tables, the costly sweaters and extensive journeys in special Pullman cars, the recruiting from the high schools, the demoralizing publicity showered on the players, the devotion of an undue portion of time to training, the devices for putting a desirable athlete, but a weak scholar, across the hurdles of examinations – these ought to stop and the inter-college and intramural sports be brought back to a stage in which they can be enjoyed by large numbers of students and where they do not involve an expenditure of time and money wholly at variance with any ideal of honest study.⁵⁶

The Carnegie Report's conclusions proved thorough and straightforward, but Savage fought an uphill battle – American society was fascinated with the spectacle of sport. Even writer John Tunis, a staunch proponent of reforming intercollegiate football, admitted that the findings did not serve much of a purpose because the game had already been entrenched in the fabric of society. Furthermore, in his commentary, Savage blamed the university faculty and presidents for the game's ills. By placing responsibility upon members of academia - potential allies in the forthcoming backlash to the report – the Carnegie Foundation isolated itself.⁵⁷ This served as one of many blunders that made the report largely ineffective.

The Carnegie Report provoked heated discussion for the remainder of the collegiate football season, and, in response to its findings, most commentary proved quite sour. Many individuals chastised the report's conclusions due to Savage specifically naming offenders in the

⁵⁶ Savage's suggestion to fix the evils: Savage, et. al., *American College Athletics*, 12.

Pritchett's suggestion to fix the evils: *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁵⁷ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 228-229. Originally in *Harper's* "The Great God Football," Nov. 1928, 744-754. For placing blame on faculty, see Schmidt, 220-221.

text. Had institutions been omitted from the Carnegie Report the negative reactions would have been minimal. Furthermore, the listing of schools proved shocking and upsetting to many who provided information to the investigators. Professor B.W. Griffith, the graduate manager of athletics at Bucknell University, voiced his frustration to the *New York Times*: “The Carnegie people assured us that specific names would not be mentioned. We gave them our help on that basis...Now they have broken faith.”⁵⁸ Other indicted schools proved equally infuriated with Savage and his team after they had been assured that their athletic programs were clean, yet the Carnegie Report stated otherwise.⁵⁹

Despite the report receiving the largest reception of any that the Carnegie Foundation published previously, the bulletin’s sizeable circulation had more to do with American society’s obsession for sports rather than their concern for higher education. Plain and simple, Americans did not care about Pritchett and Savage’s conclusions.⁶⁰ Relaying the public’s stance, famed American humorist and social commentator Will Rogers stated that though the Carnegie Foundation found their answer regarding commercialism and professionalism in college sports, “The public don’t care how you got to college, it’s how are you going to get from the 40-yard line to over the goal that they are worrying about. We are a ‘get the dough’ people, and our children are born in a commercial age.”⁶¹

Poor timing served as the Carnegie Report’s greatest hindrance, as the release date coincided with the 1929 stock market crash. Public attention was elsewhere, and educators concern for overemphasis on college sports proved secondary to the national crisis.⁶² Though the unfortunate release date proved uncontrollable, the publication’s regrettable formatting was

⁵⁸ “College Sports Tainted by Bounties, Carnegie Fund Finds in Wide Study,” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1929.

⁵⁹ Watterson, 173.

⁶⁰ Oriard, *King Football*, 7-8.

⁶¹ “Will Rogers Decides We Are ‘Get the Dough’ People,” *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 1929.

⁶² Watterson, *College Football: History Sport, Spectacle*, 172.

avoidable. The length and dense nature of the report demonstrated yet another blunder – not many individuals would take the time to thoroughly examine a 347-page document.⁶³

Some individuals and organizations did in fact endorse the report’s findings. For instance, the NCAA unanimously approved the Carnegie Report during its 1929 meeting, and the governing body even contemplated passing a resolution that would force accused member schools to resign if they failed to put forth sincere efforts to remedy their offenses.⁶⁴ However, endorsers of the report found difficulty in promoting their critiques of the college football. While many individuals criticizing the publication had the luxury of presenting their views in widely read, football-friendly magazine and newspapers, the views of those offering criticism toward the game often expressed their beliefs in “journals of opinion and...intellectual monthlies and quarterlies,” all of which were narrowly read.⁶⁵

To make matters worse, the Carnegie Report created a dangerous enemy with its criticism of the newspaper industry. The bulletin placed partial responsibility for college football’s evils on the media – an indictment journalist did not take well. Just as he had done with universities, Savage mentioned guilty publications by name and noted that “the view of college presented in newspapers is distorted through overstressing of athletics.” *The New York Times*, a newspaper noted as increasing “its emphasis upon school and college sport,” defensively refuted the claim and noted that the increase in coverage of sport was in reaction to the national interests of the game – they were only giving the people what they desired. In fact, “most managing editors would welcome the space released from college sports. They would also welcome more

⁶³ Pritchett admitted such in his introduction. Savage, et. al., *American College Athletics*, vii.

⁶⁴ “N.C.A.A. Endorses Carnegie Report,” *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1930.

⁶⁵ Oriard, *King Football*, 108.

substantial news from colleges.”⁶⁶ With its large readership, *The New York Times* was a poor enemy to make when trying to influence public opinion.

However, proponents of the game still faced a crisis – scathing accusations directed toward college football did not serve as ideal commentary. Throughout the 1920s, advocates of the game consistently professed the sport as important to national character and preparing young men for careers in business, while also providing discipline, structure, and the teamwork necessary for maturation.⁶⁷ With these ideals illegitimated due to charges of misplaced priorities, poor sportsmanship, commercialism, and professionalization, many college football proponents began to respond feverously.

University of Nebraska football coach Dana X. Bible responded to critics by claiming it was his belief that the game was underemphasized and should be a required activity for every male student on a college campus. The Cornhusker coach determined that “A successful man in life must possess the virtues which football demands of a player. A college course that does not include football instruction lacks this vital training.”⁶⁸ Notre Dame coach Knute Rockne agreed with Bible and believed those criticizing the sport were part of an American effeminizing trend. In December of 1930, a year after the report’s release, Rockne told an audience in Buffalo, New York that he believed college football was “not commercialized enough” due to the fact that there were “only twenty-five out of a thousand colleges making any real money” off of the game. Furthermore, the famed coach criticized university admissions for not admitting boys based on athletic prowess as they do for academic ability. It was Rockne’s opinion that college admission directors should not discriminate against a “brawny boy because he is not strong in math” or

⁶⁶ “The Press and College Sports.” *New York Times*, Oct. 26, 1929.

⁶⁷ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 211.

⁶⁸ *Independent Helena Montana*, Nov. 7, 1929.

other subjects, because “four years of football are calculated to breed in the average man more ingredients of success in life than almost any academic course he takes.”⁶⁹

Both coaches’ stance on college football sharply diverged from the message the Carnegie Report hoped would reach the public. However, just as newspapers held an advantage in readership, coaches benefitted from a large group of receptive fans. Both Savage and Pritchett mourned the importance and prestige bestowed upon successful head football coaches by universities, and local and national audiences. In a nation attracted to successful individuals such as Charles Lindbergh or Henry Ford, Americans were more willing to listen to and accept the views of a winning football coach instead of obscure educators attempting to reform athletics and education.

Even outside the coaching ranks, criticism of the Carnegie Report rang loud. The *Ohio State Lantern*’s student sports editor agreed with athletes, fans, and coaches that the Carnegie Report was merely “hot air which a bunch of old fogies wanted to get off their chest.” The young collegian was not alone, as a newspaper survey found that a majority of students on university campuses proved relatively disinterested in the Carnegie Report. The remarks of the Ohio State student writer, and the obvious disinterest of most college students, demonstrated the disenchantment of 1920’s youth toward the message of the older, traditional-minded reformers.⁷⁰

Furthermore, angry readers flooded newspapers with letters concerning their displeasure regarding how the Carnegie Report treated their schools. A religious man, who claimed to have been taught Chemistry by Knute Rockne at Notre Dame, referred to the report as a “sensational story” that took “a sling at my Alma Mater which I cannot pass over in silence.” Moreover,

⁶⁹ For effeminizing trend and discrimination of athletic boys, see: Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 304-305; For speech in Buffalo, see: *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷⁰ Biederman, “Side Show,” *Ohio State Lantern*, Jan. 22, 1930: OSUA. For newspaper survey, see: Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 224.

reformers frequently utilized England's University of Oxford as the definition of sincere amateur athletics. In a letter to *The New York Times*, Kingsley Moses of East Hampton, New York took a shot at the celebrated British school: "Gracious! Don't you think the Carnegie Foundation ought to bear down pretty hard on Oxford, where a couple of hundred students a year receive \$2,000 scholarships for – to quote the late Cecil Rhodes – 'physical vigor as shown by interest in outdoor sports.'"⁷¹ A man interviewed by the *Chicago Tribune* stated: "I am a college man and I think the Carnegie Foundation report is a lot of nonsense."⁷²

John Griffith was another individual who believed the Carnegie Reports to be nothing more than rubbish. The Big Ten commissioner's primary concern was a perceived lack of objectivity regarding the researchers' conclusions. According to Griffith, despite Dr. Savage claiming that the committee intended to present both the merits and defects present in college athletics, the fact that the "report deals almost entirely with defects" presented it as a deceptive and ill-motivated study. Furthermore, the commissioner took offense at Dr. Pritchett's stance in the introduction that the university should serve solely as an "intellectual agency." He proclaimed that "Apparently, Dr. Pritchett does not believe that the university which offers courses in business, banking, accounting, transportation, salesmanship, and journalism can teach students to think clearly as well as a university that teaches only the subjects which were offered in the earlier colleges," which proved unfortunate for "the vocational idea of education." Furthermore, he challenged the Carnegie Foundation's agenda by accusing Dr. Savage of posing

⁷¹ Religious man: Letter to the editor from Brother Gilbert C.S.C., "Subsidized Athletics" *Times-Picayune*, Oct. 24, 1929.

Moses: Letter to the editor from Kingsley Moses, "Other Athletic Scholarships" *New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1929.
College man: Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 308-309.

subjective questions and only utilizing the opinions of those whose answers were negative toward college athletics.”⁷³

For Griffith personally, the committee’s findings proved particularly embarrassing, as the investigators cited the Big Ten for numerous rules violations. The commissioner, who had previously proclaimed the Big Ten as the cleanest conference in the country, held his ground and instead blamed the claims on the misinformed research team. “I don’t believe the Carnegie investigators have given a fair picture of Big Ten conditions,” argued Griffith. “We have nothing to be ashamed of. I think that I am better informed of Big Ten athletic conditions than any investigator for the Carnegie Foundation. And I honestly believe that the Western Intercollegiate Conference universities are cleaner in regard to proselyting and subsidizing athletes than any one may name.”⁷⁴

In a memorandum to Western Conference athletic directors and university presidents, Griffith presented his personal commentary alongside excerpts from the Carnegie Report that specifically condemned member schools or the conference as a whole. In a particularly direct statement, Savage deemed the commissioner’s efforts to cleanup the Big Ten as unsuccessful. In the margin of the memorandum sent to the athletic directors and presidents, Griffith curtly responded, “one might enquire whether any attempt to improve human behavior had ever been entirely successful.” In response to yet another passage specifically criticizing the conference’s management of athletic subsidies, Griffith bluntly noted: “This is an asinine statement.”⁷⁵

⁷³ John L. Griffith, “The Carnegie Reports,” *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 1, No. 6 (June 1930): 325-330.

⁷⁴ On the Big Ten’s poor representation in the Carnegie Report, see: Lester Biederman, “Carnegie Report Boon to College Sports – St. John” *Ohio State Lantern*, Oct. 24, 1929: OSUA. Griffith’s comments on conferences poor representation, see: “College Sports Tainted By Bounties, Carnegie Fund Finds in Wide Study.” *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1929.

⁷⁵ Memorandum from John L. Griffith to “The Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference,” Nov. 26, 1929, pg 2,4: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 6a, “Athletics, 1928-1928.”

Of particular interest was the report's distinct reference to the Midwest. Savage not only mentioned Griffith and/or the conference, but he also felt inclined to mention the Big Ten's connection to the Midwest. This notation could be gazed over if it occurred sporadically, but references to region can be found throughout the report. Even more intriguing was the penchant for comparing the football communities of various sections of the country. For example, Savage criticizes the "(Mid-Western) Intercollegiate Conference" for hiring coaches from outside the university to train specific sports rather than having the coaches of all teams performed by members of its regular staff "like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton." The report praises the "Big Three's" practice because it "permits the employment of men with due qualifications of skill and of character without 'a seat on the faculty' to disguise their status as professional athletes."⁷⁶ By specifying that the northeastern schools' behavior were more acceptable than the Big Ten's, Savage imposed inferiority upon the midwestern football community.

In another instance, in response to the Savage's claim that "in the Intercollegiate Conference the cry is 'We've got to have money,'" Griffith proclaimed that in contrast "to the prevailing custom in the East," the conference affiliates charge a low rate of admittance for students into football games.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Griffith conveyed his belief to Big Ten athletic directors and presidents that not only had the investigators begun the report with a preconceived "premise prejudicial to intercollegiate athletics," but also that eastern universities influenced their conclusions.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Memorandum from John L. Griffith to "The Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference," Nov. 26, 1929, pg 2: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 6a, "Athletics, 1928-1928." Savage also notes, in the West, coaches instruct their players to play more aggressive – a strategy he determines is detrimental rather than beneficial. This is yet another example of the comparison of regions by the publication. Found in: Savage, et. al. *American College Athletics*, 186.

⁷⁷ Memorandum from John L. Griffith to "The Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference," Nov. 26, 1929, pg. 1-2: OSUA, George Washington Rightmire Papers (3/f), Box 6a, "Athletics, 1928-1928."

⁷⁸ Schmidt, "Major John Griffith," 3.

Griffith was not the only official critical of the practices of other regions. In 1930, when Savage inquired to various college presidents if they had noticed a change in athletics since the publication's release, Yale President James Angell replied that he had not, but he had been given information "of whose general correctness I find it difficult to doubt, indicating a very unsatisfactory situation in the more important conferences in the Middle West 'showing' the conditions in many of the more important institutions are still far from satisfactory."⁷⁹

Regarding infractions, the Midwest and the East were not the only football regions specifically mentioned. In fact, when providing a list of the 130 schools visited for the report, Savage presented the institutions by region. Cataloguing the schools by section of the country, as opposed to alphabetically, by conference, or random order, demonstrates that region did in fact matter. Furthermore, commentary suggesting that overemphasis of publicity agents occurred "more frequently in the Middle West," or implying that issues of eligibility tended to be more troublesome on the Pacific Coast, instigated comparisons between regional football communities.

Moreover, the Carnegie Report tended to bestow much more praise upon the eastern section of the country in comparison to other regions. Savage even implied blame upon other regions by claiming that the "businesslike procedure" of recruiting athletes, which became commonplace in college football in the 1920s, did not occur until the game spread from the Northeast to other sections of the country.⁸⁰

Why did citizens react so furiously to critiques of their region? Savage commented on this issue when discussing the nature of 1920s journalism:

⁷⁹ Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 231. Originally quoted in: Angell to Savage, Oct. 25, 1930; Savage to Angell, Oct. 28, 1930, Box 26, Folder 283, Angell Papers, Yale University Archives.

⁸⁰ Savage, et. al. *American College Athletics*, 225.

On the whole, however, it is not so much the college as the community in which it is situated that to-day influences a newspaper's policy in the treatment of college athletics, for the community provides the circulation for the newspaper, and circulation is the standard by which the success or failure of a sports-page policy is measured. In the community must be reckoned those alumni whose blind partisanship leads them to protest against friendly references to the teams or the sportsmanship of other universities...Sometimes it is such men, as much as to local pride, and the subservience of the local newspapers to both of these forces, that the commercial setting...is ascribable.

In short, the desire to have one's local team – an extension of personal identity – represented in the most flattering light possible drove the commercial aspect of college football. A school's gridiron performance served as the extension of one's self in the public sphere, so any poor representation of a team was in turn a slight against the individuals of a regional football community.

Some sports historians consider the Carnegie Report's conclusions and commentary as a transformative moment for college football in the twentieth century.⁸¹ The issue with this stance is that it focuses primarily on the institutions themselves rather than the American public – the force that influenced and was responsible for the commercial component of the game. While deemphasizing the report is ill advised, its impact was not overly substantial. The public did not appear to be swayed from their attraction to the sport: illegal recruiting and subsidizing continued and persists today in some form or fashion. Moreover, in subsequent decades, the amateur pursuit grew even more professional and commercial. College Football continued, and has sustained, the status quo. While institutions certainly made efforts to reform, the public did not.

Overall, the Carnegie Report failed at its intention – very little reform occurred in college football. The game that Savage referred to as “Frankenstein Football,” continued its monstrous

⁸¹ Example: Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 216.

ways: larger stadiums, subsidizing athletics, commercialism, etc. The South's Southeastern Conference completely ignored the report's recommendations and began offering athletic scholarships in the 1930s. The amateur game continued to possess an economic component and, in the ensuing decades, grew more professionalized. To the Carnegie Foundation's dismay, a majority of Americans continued to relate colleges more to their football teams than their academic fortitude.

Furthermore, in regards to the aftermath of the Carnegie Report, if winners and losers were assigned, college football reformers came in a decisive second place. Specifically, no significant efforts were taken by athletic conferences and teams to redefine the sport as an amateur pursuit. Broadly, the eastern intellectual elite who compromised a large portion of reformers failed to stall the influence of modernity upon the United States. In the 1920s, eastern academic institutions steadily lost influence upon American society in the wake of an increasingly more modern and professionalized United States. The Carnegie Report served as yet another failed attempt by eastern academic intellectuals to stop the inevitable.

Conclusion

In an article written for *The North American Review*, H.W. Whicker described the immense pressure American society imposed upon college football teams:

The team must win. The American public does not patronize a loser. The American public does not tolerate a loser. If the team does not win, it loses its advertising and publicity value; and the institution itself, its city, and its district fade from the sport sheet and are no longer heard of in national broadcasts.¹

In the 1920s, numerous Americans felt similar to the outcaste football teams Whicker claimed the public chastised – they felt like losers. Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, personal autonomy disappeared due to the bureaucratic orientation that engulfed nearly all aspects of American society. As a more centralized and administrative-minded United States emitted uniformity upon industry, language, and politics – previously diverse aspects of society – national disparity slowly disappeared. While the rigid organization improved the efficiency of everyday life, in this atmosphere of homogeneity, Americans lost distinct characteristics that separated them from others around the country – self-identity diminished.

In an effort to recapture any sense of individuality, citizens grasped for unique qualities that would invoke sentiments of distinction – local college football emerged as an improbable solution to their cause. Because of an increase in reputable teams across the United States, amplified media coverage, and increased interest from fans, college football developed into a truly national sport. Rather than replicating the homogeneity experienced by other aspects of American culture, when college football encountered nationalization in the 1920s, regionalism

¹ H.W. Whicker, "Why Amateur's?" *The North American Review*, Vol. 223, No. 4 (April, 1932): 300-305.

emerged due to the competitive nature of the sport – comparison upon nearly all issues associated with the game became possible.

Due to America's ties to capitalism, the nation proved innately competitive and thus determined to name winners and losers in all aspects of society.² In a homogenous business community, the average American's ability to ascend above fellow citizens proved difficult. However, through the satisfaction of victory, college football provided an opportunity to propel an individual's self-worth above that of their peers.

A sense of superiority was dependent upon the success of one's local football community. As Whicker explained, if a team lost, its national reputation diminished and a sense of personal inferiority resulted. In the 1929 Carnegie Report, Dr. Howard Savage described a similar sentiment: "In many instances the state of mind commonly referred to as an inferiority complex is the root of the desire for athletic notoriety, whether in the individual or in the group."³ Throughout this study it has been shown that Americans' efforts to defend their respective local teams were a direct result of a perceived challenge, whether positive or negative, to the national reputation of one's local football community. When such regional characteristics were threatened, individuals felt as if their personal self-identity was being questioned as well. In short, nationalism perpetuated regionalism and self-identity.

Because of a more connected society in post-World War I America, many assume that regionalism dissipated.⁴ When observing the actions of football supporters during the decade, it

² Ronald Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 172-174.

³ Savage, et. al. *American College Athletics*, 283-284.

⁴ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). Wiebe describes the disintegration of local authority and the disappearance of "island communities. Furthermore, he discusses the rise of a new middle class that intended to transcend rather than preserve the local community. In this context, the reader is provided the notion of a disappearing local community. College football in the 1920s proved otherwise, as regionalism strengthened rather than disappeared under a homogenous nationalizing force.

becomes apparent that the positive promotion of one's regional football community – a heterogeneous action – proved essential. Thus, as is shown through society's reaction to 1920s college football, regionalism did not simply disappear in the face of a more homogenous American society – it was prolonged and became as strong as ever.

Moreover, in the 1920s, the promotion of a successful regional football community transcended above all other concerns associated with the collegiate game. When fans discussed which deserving athletes failed to receive recognition from the Walter Camp All-American team or what schools the media slighted in postseason rankings, rarely was the scholastic standing of the student-athlete ever discussed. Seldom would Grantland Rice receive letters of concern regarding the academic integrity of college football; rather, anguish arose because one's football region did not receive enough respect. When southwestern football fans praised the Southern Methodist Mustang's extraordinary improvement during the 1920s, most cited style of play as the reason for their success. Supporters rarely mentioned the illegal recruiting of athletes, many of whom were academically ineligible, that nearly had the Mustangs booted from the Southwest Conference following the 1922 season. If a region, or college football itself, confronted negative publicity, a majority of the public immediately refuted the accusations and the attacks on the game were usually forgotten as quickly as they had emerged.

In the 1920s, the American public proved infatuated with college football, and anything beside a positive portrayal of the game and its regional football communities was unacceptable. Commercialism and professionalization, two forces the 1929 Carnegie Report concluded had ruined the sport, proved indispensable components of college football during the decade. However, in order for these forces to continue driving the progression of the collegiate game, the amateur nature of the sport and its emphasis on the scholastic component of the university

proved unproductive. Thus, in comparison to rewarding individual athletic accomplishments, such as placement on the Walter Camp All-American team, academic integrity was a distant concern. Educational concerns went to the wayside not because institutions no longer cared, but rather because society aligned more with that which the Carnegie Foundation loathed: a competitive, business-driven environment.

Furthermore, many sports historians commenting on college football focus on institutions. This can serve as a grave mistake. Ultimately, the power of college football as a cultural entity is its ability to illuminate particular aspects of American society and the sentiments of individual citizens. Thus, when studying the history of college football, scholars must attempt to observe how the stories impacted individual players and fans – how did they react to certain situations and what issues proved most important to them. It becomes obvious from letters, newspaper clippings, and various other primary sources, that as 1920s college football nationalized, individual citizens sought to promote that which made them unique from other football fans in a more connected national football community: regional identity.

Moreover, many of college football's athletic achievements celebrated by the public were individual in nature. Coaches such as Knute Rockne and Ray Morrison were revered and athletes like Illinois's Red Grange and Stanford's Ernie Nevers ascended above their respective teams. 1920s American society celebrated individual stars more so than any previous decade and this characteristic can largely be attributed to a craving for autonomy. In an increasingly homogenous nation, self-worth became desirable. And just as citizens utilized positive recognition of their regional football communities for a sense of superiority amongst their peers, they distinguished the athletic figures that transcended the rest of the athletic community. In this environment, it

makes sense that Americans would celebrate, and attempt to replicate, a characteristic they desperately craved: individual success.

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Vita

Bennett Koerber was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, in 1990. Growing up in the heart of Cajun Country, he developed an affinity for unique cultures within the United States and an unwavering passion for LSU football. Earning his Bachelor of Arts in 2008 from Louisiana State University, he continued his studies at the school and will receive his Masters of Arts in history in 2015. He will begin school at Carnegie Mellon University in the fall of 2015 in pursuit of a PhD in history.