

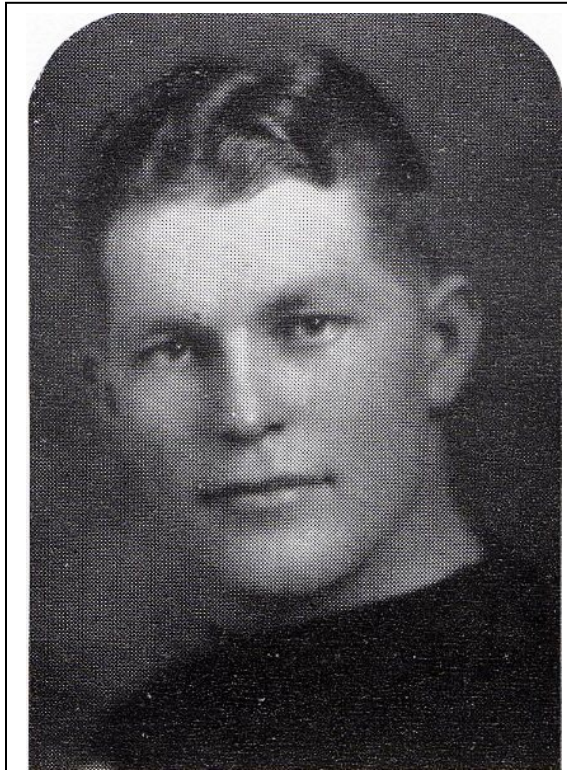
A “Chief” Year for the “Iowa Braves”: Mayes McLain and Native American (Mis)appropriation at the State University of Iowa

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IN CELEBRATORY CHRONICLES, the University of Iowa’s 1928 football season is usually referred to as a year of unexpected announcements, extravagant building projects, long-shot wins over prominent programs, and record-setting attendance during the homecoming game against the University of Minnesota’s Thundering Herd.¹ For that one season, a relatively unknown transfer student from an Indian boarding school, Haskell Institute, became the focus of local media attention in Iowa City. That fall the student newspaper, the *Daily Iowan*, and regional newspapers in Cedar Rapids and Des Moines identified and repeatedly broadcast Mayes McLain’s status as a “racial other” while sportswriters appropriated a Pan-Indian identity for the team and fan base. Racial, historical, and structural power dynamics shaped McLain’s experiences in a dynamic athletic department on the verge of expulsion from the Big Ten Conference. In addition, McLain’s depiction and appropriated identity occurred within a landscape of signification and imagery that reaffirmed racial chauvinism and white supremacy inside and outside of the academy in the 1920s.

THE ANNALS OF IOWA 70 (Spring 2011). © The State Historical Society of Iowa, 2011.

1. Dick Lamb and Bert McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes* (Iowa City, 1964); Larry Perl, *Calm and Secure on the Hill: A Retrospective of the University of Iowa* (Iowa City, 1978); Stow Persons, *The University of Iowa in the Twentieth Century: An Institutional History* (Iowa City, 1990).



Mayes McLain's yearbook picture from The Hawk-eye (1930).

MCLAIN'S ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES were undoubtedly shaped by his racial identity as a member of the Cherokee Nation in his native Oklahoma. His University of Iowa yearbook photograph does not necessarily denote a distinct racial or ethnic heritage; instead, his "redness" was shaped by complex historical and legal forces.² One of the original Five Civilized Tribes, between 1805 and 1838 Cherokees in the southeastern United States began abandoning matrilineal clan kinship as the unifier of political community in exchange for Euro-American ideologies of racial purity. Before the final wave of removal, the Cherokee

2. Sometimes McLain's blond hair was injected as an adjective or as part of his nickname, such as "blond Cherokee Charger." *Des Moines Register*, 10/14/1928.

Nation adopted many Euro-American traditions, including Christianity, African slavery, and racial codification through the cultural construction of blood quantum. Cherokee leaders first believed that race was linked to nation and could help to define them as collective subjects.³ The emphasis on blood quantum became increasingly important as the U.S. government paved the way for Oklahoma statehood. By 1887, the federal government was using nineteenth-century scientific notions of racial purity, social fitness, and blood quantum to dictate strict parameters of Indianness. Between 1899 and 1906 the Dawes Commission compiled membership rolls that the U.S. government used to further deplete and transform a communal land base to a system of allotted parcels. When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, Congress dissolved the Cherokee Nation. In the nineteenth century, then, referring to blood as “a documented biological possession” originally fueled unification through Cherokee nationalism but was used by the U.S. government to dismantle Cherokee sovereignty at the turn of the twentieth century. The Cherokee Nation would not reestablish its own state structure until the 1940s.⁴

McLain’s place of birth is unknown, but he attended high school in Pryor, Oklahoma. When Pryor became a municipality in 1887, Cherokee presence and leadership was the norm in the town’s industry and politics. McLain, a one-eighth-blood Cherokee with an Irish surname, would likely not have been viewed as anomalous in northeastern Oklahoma at the turn of the twentieth century. In the first decades of the twentieth century, many old and new traditions coexisted, particularly in the case of language and spiritual practices. Although the Cherokee Nation used blood quantum to determine its citizenry, an ongoing commitment to kinship took precedence over race at the national and local level. Matrilineal clan kinship dictated that when white men married Indian women who were affiliated with the independent nation, the husband and their children would receive

3. Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 51–58, 221; Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma, 1865–1907* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2000), 4, 6.

4. Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 53, 86, 204.

full tribal citizenship rights, including access to tribal lands. McLain was born in 1905 to Martha and Levi McLain, both enrolled Cherokees. His final roll affiliation as a minor yet certified Cherokee, the biological and cultural bearers associated with blood quantum, and his high school experience on the gridiron afforded him access to a nearby Indian boarding school that had a firmly established football tradition.⁵

After high school, McLain enrolled at Haskell Institute in 1925 when he was 20 years old. Haskell Institute, commissioned in 1882 and named after Congressman Dudley C. Haskell, chair of the Congressional Committee on Indian Affairs, was one of 25 off-reservation schools established by the U.S. government between 1890 and 1920, following the conclusion of the Plains Indian wars, to supplement the existing missionary schools on the reservations. Congressman Haskell successfully argued for a boarding school to be built in Lawrence, Kansas, because of the high concentration of Indians nearby who had already received some education and the supposed ability of local Indians to recruit students.

One of the more prominent off-reservation boarding schools, Carlisle Indian School, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, used sport as a public representation of the school's ability to harness and redirect the supposedly unruly bodily passions of Indians and to publicly promote the institution's success.⁶ In 1882 at the Second Annual Exhibition of Progress in Philadelphia, sports were promoted as a way to instill good conduct and manly character. Demonstrations of military drills and calisthenics as well as before-and-after pictures of disheveled Indian youth and later

5. Raymond Schmidt, "Watt Mayes McLain" in *Native Americans in Sports*, ed. C. Richard King (Armonk, NY, 2004), 209; City of Pryor, "History of Pryor," at www.pryorok.org/cgi-bin/WebObjects/Pryor.woa/wa/room?id=90h05&bid=2037; Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, Land Division, "Index to the Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen, of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Country," 3/4/1907, 447, National Archives, at <http://media.nara.gov/media/images/35/23/35-2216a.gif>; *ibid.*, 352, at <http://media.nara.gov/media/images/35/22/35-2121a.gif>; Wickett, *Contested Territory*, 37; Schmidt, "Watt Mayes McLain," 209; Emmet Starr, *History of the Cherokee Indians and Their Legends and Folk Lore* (Oklahoma City, 1921), 572–73.

6. Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993), 233.

clean-cut, uniformed, rows of reformed native children were a part of this drama.⁷ Carlisle's football team, coached by the famous Glenn Scobey "Pop" Warner (1899–1900, 1907–1914), began as a novelty, but eventually gained prominence through wins, a trickster style of play, half-time shows, and extensive travels. Carlisle was the first school to give indigenous males access to intercollegiate competition, an opportunity usually reserved for privileged whites. Carlisle's most famous athlete, Jim Thorpe (another native Oklahoman), was one of the first American Indian athletes to represent the United States and medal at the modern Olympics (at Stockholm in 1912). Schools such as Carlisle and later Haskell Institute created a pathway for American Indians like McLain to enter non-Indian colleges.⁸

At the turn of the twentieth century 25,712 youth were enrolled in federal boarding schools. By 1918, enrollment at Haskell had increased to 1,130 students. At the heart of Haskell's curriculum was the disciplining of Indian bodies and desires, which began by removing children from their reservations and communities, sometimes forcibly. Administrators demanded that students renounce their cultural origins, religions, and languages, while subjecting them to strict militaristic routines.⁹ Haskell Superintendent Harvey B. Peairs looked to Carlisle Superintendent Richard Henry Pratt for guidance and example. Deviating slightly from the popular ideology of Social Darwinism, Pratt recognized the essential humanity of Indian people and sought to salvage it by denigrating and destroying their cultures. The students' outward appearance, demeanor, hygiene, and posture were as much a concern as their language, worldviews, and thought processes. When students arrived on campus, they were issued gray cashmere uniforms. Males and young females had their hair cropped, and young women were

7. John Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools* (Minneapolis, 2000), 10, 14.

8. Oriard, *Reading Football*, 236–39; Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Lincoln, NE, 1995), 164.

9. Gerald R. Gems, "Negotiating a Native American Identity through Sport: Assimilation, Adaption, and the Role of the Trickster," in *Native Athletes in Sport and Society: A Reader*, ed. C. Richard King (Lincoln, NE, 2005), 2; Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do*, xi; Myriam Vuckovic, *Voices from Haskell: Indian Students Between Two Worlds, 1884–1928* (Lawrence, KS, 2008), 13, 43.

expected to maintain tight hairstyles popular among white middle-class women. As the center of educators' efforts, the body's physical appearance and health were equated with spiritual well-being. The notion of the moral and proficient body at the end of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century dominated public health policy, justified physical education and athletic programs, and spurred green spaces and park development as well as the expansion and creation of YMCAs and groups such as the Boy Scouts. In the early twentieth century former gridder Teddy Roosevelt advocated football as an activity that would protect men from feminization in an increasingly civilized and modern world. Like Pratt, Peairs used athletics and physical education as part of the assimilation model and as a public relations vehicle that "resonated in important ways with the mission of the boarding schools and the relationship among racial ideology, sexuality, and capitalist discipline."¹⁰

Haskell administrators did not always agree on the place of intercollegiate sport, but they did agree that non-native sports such as football would ease the transition from native cultures to assimilated life. Educators' efforts were not always successful, however. American Indians have long used sport to achieve and assert pride, self-esteem, and respect in ways often unrecognized by whites. In Native American folk tales, trickster char-

10. Vuckovic, *Voices from Haskell*, 28, 180, 181; Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1979), 155, 171; Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do*, 1, 5, 9, 32, 114–15. See also Linda Borish, "The Robust Woman and the Muscular Christian: Catharine Beecher, Thomas Higginson, and Their Vision of American Society, Health and Physical Activities," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 4 (1987), 139–54; Susan Cahn, *Coming on Strong: Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 7–30; Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2001), 10–96; Roberta J. Park, "Physiologists, Physicians, and Physical Educators: Nineteenth-Century Biology and Exercise, Hygienic and Educative," *Journal of Sport History* 14 (1987), 28–60; Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007), 47–78; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago, 1995), 42, 176; Axel Bundgaard, *Muscle and Manliness: The Rise of Sport in American Boarding Schools* (Syracuse, NY, 2005), 135–38; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 49–50.

acters represented the Indians' disrupted relationships with the white power structure. Trickster play on the gridiron was also a form of resistance that disrupted the relationship with white competitors through "wit, guile, or deception" just as trickster tales had long undermined white power relationships with Indians.¹¹ American Indian participants and spectators used sport as a space to resist full cultural annihilation and as a vehicle to forge a Pan-Indian identity. For example, the 1926 homecoming celebration at Haskell was marked by a specific commemorative dedication to the indigenous veterans who had enlisted in the military during World War I. The 10,500-seat stadium was a remarkable achievement funded entirely by Haskell alumni who had rallied to raise \$185,000. For four days the school celebrated the homecoming with parades, plays, a powwow that attracted more than 20,000 visitors to a predesigned camp site, and the school's first home football contest of the season against the Bucknell College Bisons from Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Indians used the homecoming in two ways. First, they were able to celebrate their legal admittance and service in the military. Second, the stadium and powwow became a site where diverse tribes could revisit older practices, experiment with new ones, and celebrate and support one Pan-Indian team.¹²

McLain was a key figure in the solidification of Haskell's gridiron legacy. The season before Haskell's Great Homecoming, McLain had scored 111 points and proved himself a valuable punter and power-running fullback. The following season, the 1926 squad represented 13 tribes with a formidable backfield that included McLain and All-American George Levi. That year Haskell played its first major-college schedule, and McLain scored 38 touchdowns and 253 points, garnering college football records for points in a season, average points per game, and rushing

11. Gems, "Negotiating a Native American Identity through Sport," 7, 1-2.

12. I am using John Bloom's framework on Pan-Indian pride and nationalism. Bloom, *To Show What an Indian Can Do*, 5, 54; Oxendine, *Native American Sports Heritage*, 200-201; Benjamin Rader, "'The Greatest Drama in Indian Life': Experiments in Native American Identity and Resistance at the Haskell Institute Homecoming of 1926," *Western Historical Quarterly* 35 (2004), 429-50; Kim Warren, "'All Indian Trails Lead to Lawrence, October 27 to 30, 1926': American Identity and the Dedication of Haskell Institute's Football Stadium," *Kansas History* 30 (2007), 4.

touchdowns.¹³ McLain's stellar season caught the attention of the State University of Iowa's head football coach Burton Ingwerson.

DURING THE 1920s many large universities with football programs had taken a large step away from the Ivy League traditions of Bloody Monday from whence they had originated.¹⁴ Student governance and student coaching disappeared as faculty and administrators began overseeing their schools' programs. The establishment of conferences and associations, the move to paid professional coaches, the formation of rules committees, and an increase in investments for pricey stadium-building projects became common practice in this new era of commercialized spectator sport. Post-season games and exhibitions such as the East-West Game were becoming a recognizable means of achieving school recognition, and conferences like the Big Ten were leading the way in signing lucrative contracts with broadcasting companies. The legacy of the Big Three's football programs (Harvard, Yale, and Princeton) was consistently challenged by schools in the Big Ten and Pacific Coast conferences.¹⁵

Football's golden age in the 1920s coincided with a nationwide increase in college enrollment. Attendance at the State University of Iowa had doubled from 1917 to 1922, producing a swell of active alumni residing in the region.¹⁶ For college athlet-

13. Raymond Schmidt, "Lords of the Prairie: Haskell Indian School Football," *Journal of Sport History* 28 (2001), 415–16; idem, "Watt Mayes McLain," 209.

14. Bloody Monday began at Harvard in 1827 as a hazing ritual on the first Monday of the school year. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton's mass ball games typically involved mobs of both classes, a ball or phalanx, and a great deal of pushing, slugging, kicking, and wrestling in an attempt to move the ball carrier in the center of the scrum through the demarcated goal on campus or in town. Gerald R. Gems, *For Pride, Profit, and Patriarchy: Football and the Incorporation of American Cultural Values* (Lanham, MD, 2000), 12; Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York, 1988), 20–21, 68.

15. Raymond Schmidt, *Shaping College Football: The Transformation of an American Sport, 1919–1930* (Syracuse, NY, 2007), 4; Ronald A. Smith, *Play-By-Play: Radio, Television, and Big-Time College Sport* (Baltimore, 2001), 31. For detailed accounts of student-controlled intercollegiate origins, see Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 3–17; Oriard, *Reading Football*, 24–56; and John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore, 2000), 9–25.

16. Brad Austin, "Protecting Athletics and the American Way: Defenses of Intercollegiate Athletics at Ohio State and across the Big Ten during the Great

ics, increased enrollment led to larger bases of players, gate receipts, and alumni contributions. While budgets of science and humanities departments were being cut, athletic departments continued to flourish at large universities.¹⁷ One demonstration of institutional growth at Iowa was the completion of what was claimed to be the world's largest field house in January 1927. This home to men's physical education and athletics became a popular attraction for proud alumni. Spanning three acres with more than five million square feet of usable area, the field house seated 15,000 in the arenas and up to 3,000 in the natatorium. The "glittering newness of the Field House" faded quickly. Within a year, Iowa's athletic director announced plans to build a 42,500-seat stadium, slated for completion by the 1929 season at a cost of \$350,000.¹⁸

In 1927 McLain entered a university under the control of President Walter Jessup. At that point in Jessup's tenure, he was firmly committed to increasing the size and national prestige of the College of Liberal Arts as well as accommodating a growing student body. Jessup, known by many faculty as more of a businessman than an academic, rarely sought faculty input.¹⁹ After the unexpected resignation of the alumni's beloved athletic director, Howard Jones, in 1924, Jessup hired Paul Belting to replace Jones.²⁰ Belting left his post as a professor in the education department at the University of Illinois to join Iowa's faculty as the head of the division of physical education. Belting's admin-

Depression," *Journal of Sport History* 27 (2000), 250; *University of Iowa News Bulletin* 111, no. 7 (1928), 1; Persons, *The University of Iowa in the Twentieth Century*, 66–71.

17. William J. Baker, *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (Champaign, IL, 2006), 42. For an analysis of football during the Golden Age of Sport, see 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, 2001), 69–161; Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*; John R. Thelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore, 1994), 15–21; and Watterson, *College Football*, 158–77.

18. *Daily Iowan*, 10/27/1928; Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 139.

19. Persons, *The University of Iowa in the Twentieth Century*, 67, 78.

20. Jones had led the team through two undefeated seasons and brought Big Ten titles to Iowa in 1921 and 1922. After eight years, his record was 42-1-17. Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 67–78.

istrative purview included the newly merged division of Men's Physical Education, Women's Physical Education, Student Health, and Athletics.²¹ This administrative coupling further couched the role of the male varsity coach within the academy by providing him the opportunity to teach classes in the off-season.²² Belting immediately hired Burton Ingwerson, a former teammate of Red Grange and the assistant football coach at the University of Illinois, as his football coach.²³ That same year, the faculty-led Athletic Council was reduced to an advisory capacity. Meanwhile, the newly established and alumni-influenced Board of Athletic Control was granted more access to and power over recruiting and subsidizing practices.²⁴

McLain arrived in Iowa City in 1927 and completed his Big Ten residency requirement while enrolled in courses during the fall and spring semesters. McLain's stay in Iowa City was financed by different alumni groups each year. Iowa's athletes from a variety of sports had been subsidized for years, but McLain is one of very few players whose subsidization remains traceable. While living in Iowa City, McLain was paid a monthly stipend of \$60. In 1927 an alumni group from Chicago financed the stipend; in 1928 another group provided the stipend in exchange for McLain completing a real estate survey of Iowa City.²⁵

21. Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 123; Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 182. Both sources cite the unpublished memoir of engineering professor H. G. Higbee, who dedicated an entire section to the slush fund scandal. Memoirs, folder 86, box 134, Presidential Correspondence (Jessup), University of Iowa Archives, Iowa City.

22. *The State University of Iowa Catalogue, 1927–1928*, 158–59; *Bulletin of the State University of Iowa, 1927–1928*, 27–28.

23. Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 36.

24. Memoranda, folder 87, box 150 and folder 87A, box 169, Walter Jessup Correspondence, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.

25. *State University of Iowa Directory, 1927–1928*, 72; *ibid.*, 1928–1929, 82; *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, 8/5/1927; letter from Men's Dean [Robert] Rienow, folder 29, box 143, Jessup Correspondence; Raymond Schmidt, "The 1929 Iowa Football Scandal: Paying Tribute to the Carnegie Report?" *Journal of Sport History* 34 (2007), 346. Two other star players, Bill Glassgow and Oran Pape, were also accused of receiving irregular financial aid, yet they never lost their starting positions even after Iowa was temporarily expelled from the conference. Conference medals were given to athletes who displayed athletic prowess and academic integrity within the conference. Glassgow received the award in 1929, the same year that Iowa was temporarily suspended from the conference.

With McLain on the football team, the University of Iowa's Big Ten Conference standing improved from ninth place in 1927 to a 6–2 record in 1928, earning the team the Big Ten title. The team began its season with six straight wins against highly respected programs such as the Chicago Maroons, Minnesota's Thundering Herd, and the Ohio State Buckeyes. During the program's first victory over the University of Chicago since 1900, McLain carried the ball 22 times, ran for 100 yards, and scored the winning touchdown. Overall, during the 1928 season McLain scored a total of 37 points. In his first Big Ten season, his performance earned him a spot on the second-team backfield of the All–Big Ten squads selected by the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Chicago Sun Times*, and the Associated Press.²⁶

SCHOOL AND REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS are the principal sources for chronicling McLain's presence and experiences at Iowa. Of course, magazines and newspapers were America's primary communication media in the 1920s, media that "cultivated a captive audience of middle class and elite voices" that were by no means race neutral.²⁷ Just as the mainstream media symbolically denigrated African Americans, images of the tribal primitive were evoked when Native American athletes were covered in newspapers, magazines, or radio broadcasts.

By 1896, sports journalists employed the rhetorical device of simplistic and sensationalized racial chauvinism to grapple with "the racial other." In their early years the Carlisle Indians were depicted as frightening, monster-like characters in games against "fair Christians" of East Coast YMCAs. Ideologies of Social Darwinism became evident in comparisons of the "intelligent" white players' competitive efforts to the "brawn" of their red counter-

Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 123–33, 275; John D. McCallum, *Big Ten Football since 1895* (Radnor, PA, 1976), 48; Schmidt, "The 1929 Iowa Football Scandal," 347–48.

26. Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 137–39, 275; Schmidt, "Mayes McLain," 210, 262; Mike Finn and Chad Leistikow, *Hawkeye Legends, Lists, & Lore* (Champaign, IL, 1998), 48; *Daily Iowan*, 10/7/1928, 10/14/1928, 10/21/1928, 10/27/1928, 11/4/1928, 11/11/1928, 11/18/1928, 11/24/1928.

27. Oriard, *King Football*, 7; S. W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876–1926* (New York, 1997), 7; *Daily Iowan*, 10/25/1928, 10/31/1928.

parts. Influential coaches such as Yale's Walter Camp eased white middle-class families' anxieties about the brutality of the early mass-play era through managerial rhetoric and articles published in *Harper's* that emphasized the strategy, calculation, and intellect required to master the scientific game.²⁸

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Carlisle Indians were depicted in a more romantic way as the noble savage of dime novels began appearing in cartoons and articles in the sporting press. In these narratives of civilization and savagery, Indians were depicted as exemplary sportsmen but also as "honorable, uncomplaining, and wholly reconciled" losers who absolved white Americans' guilt over the completion of Manifest Destiny.²⁹

The media continued to evoke and normalize sentiments of white supremacy and white nostalgia in the 1920s and 1930s. Commercial images of Frito Bandito, Red Man chewing tobacco, and Aunt Jemima worked within American culture to signify and sublimate otherness while legitimating white middle-class culture. Sports pages followed the tradition of the dime novel and the early Westerns as cultural sites where "images, fantasies, and myths" of the dominant culture could be carried out.³⁰

The University of Iowa student newspaper, the *Daily Iowan*, participated in this journalistic tradition as it regularly documented the presence and athletic performances of non-white athletes while reflecting the interests and experiences of the student community. McLain was not the only marked man at Iowa in 1928. Iowa runner Ernest N. Iwai of Hawaii made headlines in mid-October 1928 after being issued the smallest pair of shoes on university record. Iwai's size 3½ foot and his potential participation in cross country the following fall were mentioned.³¹

28. Oriard, *Reading Football*, 244, 236–38; Oriard, *King Football*, 283–84.

29. Oriard, *King Football*, 286; Darcy Plymire, "The Legend of the Tarahumara: Tourism, Overcivilization and the White Man's Indian," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23 (2006), 154–56; C. Richard King, "This Is Not an Indian: Situating Claims about Indianness in Sporting Worlds," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28 (2004), 5; Oriard, *Reading Football*, 247.

30. Oriard, *King Football*, 292–94; Jane M. Stangl, "A Unique College Nickname or Another White Man's Indian? George Helgesen Fitch and the Case of Siwash College," *Journal of Sport History* 35 (2008), 203.

31. *Daily Iowan*, 10/12/1928.

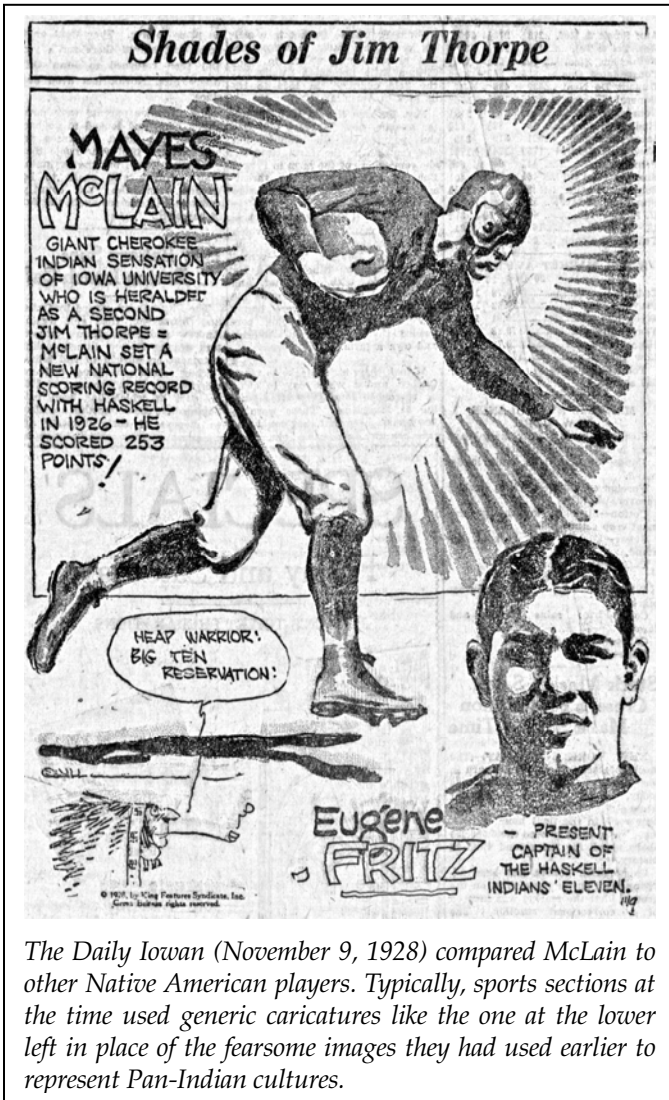
At the turn of the twentieth century Progressive reformers linked social problems like poverty and disease with individual weaknesses and somatic makeup.³² At a time when American eugenicists repeatedly campaigned for the configuration and consolidation of what “good,” normal bodies ought to look like, Iwai’s below-average foot measurement was an example of how certain bodies did not exhibit culturally produced norms. Articles on Pacific Coast Conference punter “Honolulu” Henry Hughes, a Hawaiian student enrolled at Oregon State University, were frequently accompanied by a rendering of the Polynesian athlete punting barefoot. This “barefooted booter” received much more national attention than McLain, particularly after the Oregon State Aggies upset the New York University Violets. Renderings of Hughes were marked by his race, lack of footwear, and often a fierce expression characteristic of depictions of the early Carlisle players.³³

Media coverage of Mayes McLain adopted a similar approach. Descriptors or references to McLain’s Indian heritage occurred in articles related to his performance in practices or games. *Chief*, *Big Chief*, and *Cherokee charger* dominated the 1928 coverage. References to his power and size were also common. The “colorful” or “giant” “Indian line smasher,” “giant Indian battering ram,” or sometimes just “big boy” was compared to Jim Thorpe. Ignorant of McLain’s record-breaking achievements at Haskell, some writers mused as to whether or not he would ever eclipse the legendary Thorpe.³⁴ After McLain’s lackluster opening performance, the *Des Moines Register’s* sports editor wrote of “the highly touted Cherokee charger, who showed occasional signs of being the potential all-American he is cracked up to be but who for the most part might as well have been a

32. Patricia Vertinsky, “Embodying Normalcy: Anthropometry and the Long Arm of William H. Sheldon’s Somatotyping Project,” *Journal of Sport History* 29 (2002), 104.

33. *Daily Iowan*, 10/13/1928, 12/2/1928. Another American Indian, Coquile “Chief Hus-high” Thompson, and “two Negro boys” — Bobbie Robinson and Chuck Williams — also garnered the attention of writers covering the Pacific Coast Conference. *Des Moines Register*, 10/25/1928.

34. *Cedar Rapids Gazette and Republican*, 10/13/1928, 10/14/1928, 10/26/1928, 10/28/1928; *Daily Iowan*, 9/30/1928, 10/13/1928, 10/14/1928, 10/17/1928, 11/8/1928, 11/9/1928, 12/9/1928; *Des Moines Register*, 10/31/1928.



Choctaw chief in a blanket so far as getting results.”³⁵ After a victory at Stagg Field against Chicago, McLain, according to Iowa writers, “eclipsed Hiawatha . . . as the most famous Indian” on campus.³⁶ After the homecoming game against Minne-

35. *Des Moines Register*, 8/7/1928.

36. *Daily Iowan*, 10/13/1928, 10/9/1928.

sota, an interviewer portrayed McLain as a “happy warrior” smiling ear to ear and described the great Iowa spirit that had helped the team score the winning points.³⁷

Daily Iowan headlines in 1928, after McLain had joined the team, vary significantly from those in 1927. Team descriptors were frequently altered to reflect an Indian identity. In October the *Daily Iowan* reported that the “Hawkeyes [Massacred] Ripon.” The “Iowa braves,” the “Iowa Indians,” and “the Hawkeye tribe” became commonplace.³⁸ The most hyperbolic coverage surrounded the 1928 homecoming game against rival Minnesota, when sportswriters assigned appropriated nicknames to other “tribal stars” on the team: Oran Pape, Will Glassgow, and Jim Armil. At the time, Minnesota’s star fullback Bronko “Big Nag” Nagurski and team were described as “Norsemen” invading the Iowa tribe’s territory. In its morning coverage of game day, the *Daily Iowan* reported,

Signal fires burned for the braves last night, and this afternoon, “Big Chief” McLain, “Little Papoose” Glassgow, “Running Deer” Pape, “Charging Bull” Armil, and the rest of the Iowa Indians will sweep onto the Iowa field after eleven blond scalps, and the especially shaggy tuft of Bronco Nagursky [sic]. . . .

Twenty-eight thousand tribesmen-squaws in war paint and feathers, old men, young men and papooses of all sizes, will be on the field ready to do the snake dance of victory if the scalps of the Norsemen hang in the Hawkeyes’ teepees tonight. It will be the largest and wildest assemblage that has ever flooded onto the Iowa field.³⁹

Sportswriters had promoted the McLain-Nagurski rivalry for weeks before the contest. McLain and his Iowa Indians were pitted against Nagurski and his frontier-like Canadian line. Both players — McLain, the assimilated and powerful fullback, and Nagurski, the Northwoods Ukrainian or sometimes “Bohemian” “lumberjack” — were described as raw, powerful, and borderline mythical. Nagurski, an Eastern European immigrant

37. *Ibid.*, 11/21/1928.

38. *Daily Iowan*, 10/17/1928, 11/24/1928, 10/24/1928, 10/27/1928; *Cedar Rapids Gazette and Republican*, 10/21/1928.

39. *Daily Iowan*, 10/27/1928.



The McLain-Nagurski rivalry was the highlight of the 1928 homecoming game against Minnesota's Thundering Herd. From the Daily Iowan, October 27, 1928.

often described with the hyperbole of Paul Bunyan, and McLain, the big happy Indian of unspoken geographic origins, provided the press with numerous platforms to create dramatic conflict and tension with their prose and advertisements for the game. The local and national press discussed McLain and the rest of the Iowa "Indians" as what Kevin Britz calls "untamed physical power controlled by civilized education."⁴⁰

40. *Des Moines Register*, 10/21/1928; Oriard, *Reading Football*, 236; Kevin Britz, "Of Football and Frontiers: The Meaning of Bronko Nagurski," *Journal of Sport History* 20 (1993), 109. Both men played the entire contest despite sustaining injuries — McLain a gashed hand and Nagurski a broken vertebrae. Britz, "Of Football and Frontiers," 106; *Daily Iowan*, 10/31/1928.

Although local newspapers appropriated and dramatized racial narratives of frontier warfare to promote homecoming fervor, they otherwise typically ignored or subjugated coverage of non-white citizens. The *Daily Iowan's* pictures, advertisements, and political cartoons reflect the experiences of an educated, white, heterosexual middle class. Advertisements for white hair-care products, pictures of white women in the Society Section, and invitations to historically segregated fraternity or sorority mixers frequent the pages of the *Daily Iowan* in the fall semesters of 1927 and 1928. One feature story from the 1928 Homecoming Edition featured the various married starters on the team. Advertisements for the Strand Theater's football comedy, *Win that Girl*, featured pictures of white players gallivanting with white flappers and "football girls." During October, print ads appeared for an upcoming production starring Al Jolson, the foremost blackface performer of the 1920s.⁴¹ Non-whites were usually featured only in special-interest stories or as characters in political cartoons or were subjected to degrading roles or depictions. One brief article advertising a Negro spiritual concert was titled "Negro Minstrels to Give Program in West Liberty." The lack of non-white community coverage and the use of the word "minstrel" fits into a pattern of cultural defamation experienced by African Americans into the next decade in other forms of entertainment such as the radio shows *Amos and Andy* and the *Jack Benny Show* and the "Stepin' Fetchit" movies of Lincoln Theodore Perry.⁴²

The University of Iowa's historically black fraternities — Kappa Alpha Psi and Alpha Phi Alpha — were among the few options that African American students could use for housing in the 1920s and '30s and served as unofficial dormitories.⁴³ In 1926 a klavern in the resurging midwestern Ku Klux Klan bribed

41. *Daily Iowan*, 10/12/1928, 10/27/1928, 10/7/1928, 10/12/1928, 10/13/1928; Oriard, *Reading Football*, 263.

42. *Daily Iowan*, 10/16/1928; Jaime Schultz, "'A Wager Concerning a Diplomatic Pig': A Crooked Reading of the Floyd of Rosedale Narrative," *Journal of Sport History* 32 (2005), 9.

43. *Daily Iowan*, 2/25/2000, 11/1/1973; Black Fraternities and Sororities vertical files, University of Iowa Archives; Alpha Phi Alpha vertical file, University of Iowa Archives; Robert E. Reinow to E. A. Gilmore, 3/13/1935, Black Housing Discrimination during 1930s and 40s vertical file, University of Iowa Archives.

Kappa Alpha Psi's landlords to break their lease with the fraternity mid-year. African American law graduate William Edwin Taylor recalled that losing their housing ruined the fraternity and further crystallized racist sentiments against the non-white student body.⁴⁴ Almost a decade later, Dean of Men Robert E. Rienow wrote frankly to President Gilmore that since 1915 he had noticed a worsening on campus of racial intolerance against minorities. Although there was no formal policy excluding African Americans from the official dormitories, Rienow advised that African American and foreign students not register to live in on-campus residence halls to ensure their own security.⁴⁵ It is not possible to know if a blond Cherokee student like McLain would have met with the kind of hostility Rienow feared in the racist and xenophobic climate that persisted in the late twenties. But we do know that in both years that McLain registered for classes he lived in off-campus housing in Iowa City.⁴⁶

UNFORTUNATELY, after just one season, McLain's college football career was cut short at the annual Big Ten conference meeting in Chicago in 1928. Before the meeting, anonymous member institutions within the Big Ten formally expressed a concern about McLain. Members of the eligibility committee would not comment on the origin of the investigation, but some have speculated that intercollegiate animosity towards Iowa's athletic director provoked additional scrutiny.⁴⁷

On December 8, 1928, the Eligibility Committee, a division of the Big Ten Faculty Committee, declared McLain ineligible for future intercollegiate football participation, ruling that his

44. African Americans were not allowed to live in on-campus housing until the 1940s, beginning with the integration of the women's dormitory, Currier Hall. Richard M. Breaux, "Facing Hostility, Finding Housing: African American Students at the University of Iowa, 1920s-1950s," *Palimpsest* 83 (2002), 15; Leamore Goodenow, "My Encounters with the Ku Klux Klan," *Palimpsest* 76 (1995), 52-55; Robert J. Neymeyer, "In the Full Light of Day: The Ku Klux Klan in 1920s Iowa," *Palimpsest* 76 (1995), 62.

45. Reinow to Gilmore, 3/13/1935.

46. McLain's two addresses while residing in Iowa City were on Bridge Road and East College Street. *State University of Iowa Directory, 1927-1928*, 7; *ibid.*, 1928-1929, 82.

47. *Des Moines Register*, 12/7/1928; *Daily Iowan*, 12/8/1928.

two seasons playing at Haskell Institute and his fall season at Iowa constituted three seasons, the maximum afforded to a transfer student in the Big Ten.⁴⁸ The Associated Press maintained that the decision was based on a 1904 conference decision that placed Haskell in athletic equality with other Big Ten institutions. McLain's former affiliation with Haskell likely acted as an additional strike against him because several Big Ten institutions had already protested Haskell's (as well as Army's and other less traditional schools') disregard for the three-year player rule. Iowa coach Ingwerson claimed that he had recruited McLain with the understanding that academically Haskell was a prep school and that McLain would be eligible for three seasons after fulfilling his residency requirement.⁴⁹

According to Thomas G. Smith, the Big Ten continued to demonstrate a lack support for its own minority athletes into the 1930s. African American athletes in particular were further marginalized in the name of prestige and profit as institutions secured opportunities to participate in more tournaments and garner lucrative radio deals.⁵⁰ Although racial minorities competed within predominantly white schools, historically black colleges and universities and Indian boarding schools were not admitted to the NAIA until the 1950s or to the NCAA as member institutions until the 1960s.⁵¹ Furthermore, national and conference-wide selection committees often ignored or did not adequately award proper accolades to athletes from minority in-

48. In 1928 the past practice of home rule dictated that conferences and institutions would set and enforce rules. Until after World War II, the NCAA functioned as merely an advisory body that acted as a moral force rather than as a regulatory agent. Ronald Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York, 1988), 207.

49. *Daily Iowan*, 12/9/1928, 12/8/1928; Schmidt, *Shaping College Football*, 181.

50. Ohio State University benched Bill Bell in a contest against Navy in 1930 and again in 1931 against Vanderbilt University. The University of Iowa held Windy Wallace from play in a 1932 contest against George Washington and Willis Ward from facing Georgia Tech in 1934. Baker, *Jesse Owens*, 35; Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 271; Oriard, *King Football*, 301; Thomas G. Smith, "Outside the Pale: The Exclusion of Blacks from the National Football League, 1934–1946," *Journal of Sport History* 15 (1988), 260.

51. "CIAA History," at www.ciaatournament.org/page/ciaa-history; Roger B. Saylor, "Black College Football: A Brief History, 1930–2004," *College History Historical Society Newsletter* 19 (Nov. 2005), 6.

stitutions.⁵² Although the Big Ten Conference counted McLain's participation at Haskell against his eligibility at Iowa, the NCAA did not recognize his 38-touchdown record. His 1926 performance earned him All-American mention from only a single selection committee — a second-team fullback spot from the All-American Board. McLain's brief presence at Iowa contributed to the squad's improvement from the cellar of the Big Ten Conference in 1927 to a first-place finish in 1928, yet his accolades would not extend beyond the conference level.⁵³

In 1929 the Big Ten conference accused Iowa of a loss of institutional control as evidenced by alumni attempts to remove Belting and Ingwerson in 1927, the incorporation of three permanent positions for alumni on the Board of Athletic Control in 1928, and explicit requests made by Belting to Jessup to allow for more alumni involvement to pad a diminishing slush fund. According to University of Chicago head coach Amos Alonzo Stag, Iowa quickly regained its conference eligibility because of its potential ability to discredit and shame other institutions.⁵⁴

BY 1930, McLain had headed off to New York and California to play professional football before pursuing a successful wrestling career in California and Georgia.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, as Indian removal began to fade from white American memory, the appropriation of Indianness by whites became more commonplace.⁵⁶ In 1926 the University of Illinois created Chief Illiniwek, soon followed by the use of Redskins at Miami University and Tribe at Ripon

52. Ozze Simmons is an even more egregious example of how racial prejudice affected selection committees. Oriard, *King Football*, 302–4, 260; Thomas G. Smith, "Outside the Pale, 260; Jaime Schultz, "'A Wager Concerning a Diplomatic Pig,'" 5.

53. "Mayes McLain," at <http://americanindianathletichalloffame.com/mayesmclain.php>; Schmidt, "Watt Mayes McLain," 209–10, 262; Lamb and McGrane, *75 Years with the Fighting Hawkeyes*, 139, 271.

54. Watterson, *College Football*, 164. After news of the slush fund scandal became public, Belting destroyed most of the records related to recruiting and interactions with athletes and staff.

55. In 1934 the National Football League entered a gentlemen's agreement prohibiting the hiring of African American football players. Smith, "Outside the Pale," 255.

56. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 175; Oriard, *King Football*, 289.

College, and Cleveland's professional baseball team became the Indians in 1928, with Washington, D.C.'s professional football team taking on the Redskins.⁵⁷ Thus, the University of Iowa football team's temporary moniker, the Iowa Braves, fit into the commodification of Indianness as a generic image repackaged for white middle-class consumption.⁵⁸ The mass marketing of an "ahistorical, essentialized, contextless Indian image" further renders individual Indian cultures invisible from mainstream public consciousness and conscience.⁵⁹

In 1928 the media treated McLain's Cherokee heritage with a discourse that marked him as different, or "other." Local sports-writers created further interest in the University of Iowa's football program by deploying exotic and racial representations of athletes within the increasingly commercial and spectacle-oriented sphere of intercollegiate football. Media coverage of McLain is best understood by considering a changing landscape of racial signification that rendered indigenous people and Pan-Indian identities as fetishized, nostalgic, and consumable. As he continued a successful career as a wrestler, "the great big Indian" known as the "Cherokee Charger" exchanged that nickname for the "Iowa Cornhusker."⁶⁰ Strategic or not, when considering the power embedded in racial affiliation, a pastoral, nostalgic notion of whiteness made for a much more desirable moniker than one that was no longer feared but parodied or "honored" for entertainment.⁶¹

57. Oriard, *King Football*, 291; Louise Schang, "Origins of the Redman Name," Ripon College Archives, at www.ripon.edu/library/archives/exhibits/sports/redmen.htm; Stangl, "A Unique College Nickname or Another White Man's Indian?" 205.

58. C. Richard King and Charles Fruehling Springwood, *Beyond the Cheers: Race as Spectacle in College Sport* (Albany, NY, 2001), 2-4, 70-74; Oriard, *Reading Football*, 291; Stangl, "A Unique College Nickname or Another White Man's Indian?" 213.

59. Ellen Staurowsky, "The Cleveland 'Indians': A Case Study in American Indian Cultural Dispossession," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17 (2000), 309. For an analysis of modern Indian and First Nations appropriation, see C. Richard King's guest edited issue "Re/claiming Indianness: Critical Perspectives on Native American Mascots," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 28 (2004).

60. Schmidt, "Watt Mayes McLain," 209.

62. *In Whose Honor?: Native American Mascots in Sport*, DVD, written and produced by Jay Rosenstein (New Day Films, 1997).