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Football Is Born

Football is said to be among the oldest of modern sports. Historians with a deep interest in the sport have claimed that the ancient Greeks played a game called *harpaston* which bore a resemblance to later-day football. By the fourteenth century, English schoolboys had developed a game that was played annually on Shrove Tuesday and involved massive teams and a ball. This sport got out of hand because the schoolboys were joined by townsmen, the excitement mounted, and the noise became unbearable. A royal edict stopped the sport in 1314, but partisans of the game kept it alive. In the fifteenth century, more royal proclamations were issued in an effort to halt football contests, but to no avail. Gradually the popularity of the game overcame the efforts of critics, and by Shakespeare's time dramatic allusions to football were full of meaning to Elizabethan audiences.

Although the practice of playing football on Shrove Tuesday persisted in England until the 1830's, it was in the great English public schools

that football graduated from a modified street fight into a sport for gentlemen. The ball was kicked or pushed toward the opponent's goal until in 1823 a Rugby player introduced the idea of running with the ball. Eton adopted the standard team of eleven players, and former Westminster students introduced the game at Cambridge. The round ball was dropped in favor of an oval-shaped ball. The transition from a schoolboy's game into an organized sport came when the Rugby Football Union was formed in 1871.

Meanwhile, football had been introduced to American students. The eminent football historian, Dr. Louis H. Baker, found evidence that the game — undoubtedly an English version — was played at Harvard in 1827. Games were played at Yale in the 1840's and 1850's, but the roughness of the sport finally brought faculty action banning games at both Harvard and Yale. Following the Civil War, interest in both baseball and football was greatly increased. More refined rules were adopted, football clubs were organized in several cities, and schoolboys and college students had their own sandlot games. Sports history was in the making when Princeton and Rutgers students formed their teams. From Rutgers a challenge was issued and promptly accepted by Princeton. The first intercollegiate football game in America was played on November 6, 1869. Twenty-five players took the field from each college; the rules

were agreed upon, and play began. Rutgers won that first match, six goals to four, and therefore did not have to "die for dear old Rutgers" in order to win.

Interest in college football quickly spread to other eastern centers of learning. Yale and Harvard relaxed their bans early in the 1870's. New York University, Columbia, Wesleyan, Pennsylvania, Amherst, Brown, and Michigan all had teams before the decade ended. Representatives from Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, and Yale met in the Massasoit House in Springfield, Massachusetts, on November 26, 1876, to form the first American intercollegiate football group. This nucleus of the famous Ivy League adopted a set of rules, including one which declared:

A match shall be decided by a majority of touchdowns, a goal shall be equal to four touchdowns, but in case of a tie a goal kicked from a touchdown shall take precedence over four touchdowns.

Further changes in the rules borrowed from the English associations came rapidly, but it was not until 1884 that a definite number of points was assigned to touchdowns, conversions, field goals, and safeties. This first scoring chart set the value of a touchdown at two points, goals after touchdowns at four points, field goals at five points, and safeties at one point. Not until 1912 did the rule makers finally end the periodic alterations in scoring values. Since then, the modern system of

six points for touchdowns, one point for conversions, three for field goals, and two for safeties has prevailed.

As the game evolved the use of college colors and uniforms soon came into vogue. Helmets were spurned by the collegians as "unmanly," but turtle-neck sweaters were almost varsity trademarks. Many of these early games were played in the spring, and on April 28, 1877, Princeton began a controversy over uniforms when the Tiger team met Harvard clad in canvas jackets instead of jerseys. It was difficult for tacklers to hold onto the tight-fitting canvas garments, which had been devised by L. P. Smock, a member of the Princeton squad. Harvard protested but the jackets were not removed. Other teams adopted the style, and the jackets were soon known as "smocks."

During this first decade of organized college football, several notable personages were associated with the game. The most prominent was Walter Camp, who played at Yale from 1876 to 1879, and later coached at his alma mater. Camp has been credited with throwing the first forward pass, in the Yale-Princeton game of November 30, 1876. He became "Mr. Football" through his devotion to the game, and when the *Collier's Weekly* magazine began choosing all-American teams in 1889 the ultimate choice of players was Camp's. Credit for organizing the all-American teams belongs to Caspar Whitney, however. Whitney

started the process by choosing eleven men from Yale, Harvard, and Princeton for the 1889 team.

Among these early gridiron pioneers the stars were A. A. Stagg and William Heffelfinger of Yale, Marshall Newell and Norman Cabot of Harvard, and Phillip King of Princeton. In making his all-American selections, Camp was inclined to regard the eastern teams as the kingpins of college football, as indeed they were during the formative years of the game. It was not until 1909 that Camp placed a "westerner" on his all-American team. John McGovern of Minnesota then entered the company that had been almost an Ivy League monopoly up to that time.

As football grew in popularity with collegians, the public interest in the game was manifested in large crowds of spectators, newspaper coverage of games by sports writers, and the organization of various conferences throughout the country. Governing bodies were found necessary after the rougher aspects of the game, when unchecked, had resulted in several deaths and numerous injuries to players. So intense was the public condemnation of unnecessarily rough football that the game was temporarily under a cloud, with many colleges dropping the sport and even state legislatures threatening to prohibit football contests. When the rules were changed in 1886 to prohibit slugging, which had previously drawn only a warning, the sport was definitely headed for better days.

With the turn of the century college football made rapid strides. In 1903 Harvard completed its famous stadium, which seated 57,000 spectators. Within twenty-five years the accommodations for fans had changed from roped-off sidelines with buggy seats and wooden benches to tremendous plants of concrete and steel. These structures echoed cheers for the exploits of such heroes as Jim Thorpe of Carlisle, Knute Rockne of Notre Dame, and Elmer Oliphant of Army.

In the Midwest, college football had become a well-established part of the campus athletic picture by 1895. The Western Conference was formed in that year by the presidents of Chicago, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Northwestern, and Purdue. Iowa and Indiana were admitted to the conference in 1899, and Ohio State joined in 1912 to complete the group long known as the "Big Ten." Other major conferences were formed bearing geographical titles that described the locale of their membership. At the close of World War I college football rivaled baseball for public interest. The Rose Bowl contest, first played in 1902, became an international sports attraction which had many imitators. Football games crowded other events from newspaper headlines, and more conservative educators scored the emphasis on college football as a regrettable "mania."

From the early 1920's onward the names of

college football heroes were almost household words. Harold "Red" Grange and the vaunted "Four Horsemen of Notre Dame" became symbols of excellence made famous by Saturday afternoon exploits. Radio broadcasting of college games began in 1920, permitting unseen thousands to follow contests through the verbal descriptions of announcers. Although rule changes were frequent, the basic game of college football remained unaltered. The distinctly American features of the game were emphasized during World War II, when American servicemen used spare moments to play football on coral beaches in the Pacific and on soaked turf in the United Kingdom. Our allies could readily appreciate the flavor of American cigarettes and soft drinks, but somehow the mysteries of football baffled them. Unlike baseball and basketball, then, football has remained a game for North Americans.

The American public has clasped college football to its bosom because it has represented youth, color, and excitement in a fascinating form. The value of adequately supervised college football as a game which inculcates in players a keen sense of teamwork and sportsmanship is unquestioned. A review of old football rosters shows the names of Herbert Hoover at Stanford, Franklin D. Roosevelt at Harvard, and Dwight D. Eisenhower at West Point. Now a National Football Hall of Fame has been founded at Rutgers, birthplace of

American college football, to preserve the relics of this sport and to keep alive the finest traditions of the game which Walter Camp believed best instilled the thought —

“Be each, pray God, a gentleman!”

ROBERT RUTLAND

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