



Football: Battle or Sport?

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"For as concerning footeball playing, I protest unto you that it maie rather bee called a friendly kinde of fight than a plaie or recreation—a bloudie and murtherying practice than a fellolis sporte or pastyme."

(Phillip Stubbs; *Anatomy of Abuses*; about 1550.)

IN November, 1905, in *The Woman's Home Companion*, President Eliot of Harvard published a short article full of meat and without a waste word entitled "The Evils of Football." At that time these evils had risen to a very high pitch. The academic authorities in many institutions had lost all control of intercollegiate athletics, normal athletic effort within the colleges had largely disappeared, and expressions of disgust with the game, and with the way it was managed, were heard in every college. It was clear that the game must be purified, moderated, reformed or else that it must be abolished. And the abandonment of the game involved tremendous difficulties so thoroughly was it entrenched by alliance with financial interests outside.

The evils of the game as then played and as then managed were classified by President Eliot as follows:

As lesser objections he gives its publicity, the large proportion of injuries, the obsession of the student-body in the one idea of victory at football, and the disproportionate exaltation of the football hero, who is subjected to "crude and vociferous blame and praise," both "having no relation to rational standards of public approval or disapproval." Another lesser evil is "the state of mental distrust and hostility between colleges, which all too frequently occurs," destroying the value of the broader acquaintance with men, the deprovincializing of college life which is one of the normal virtues of intercollegiate matches. "The carrying into elaborate and highly artificial practice the enfeebling theory that no team can do its best except in the presence of hosts of applauding friends is still one of the lesser evils of football. Worse preparation for the real struggles and contests of life can hardly be imagined. The orator, advocate, preacher, surgeon, engineer, banker, tradesman, crafts-

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man, admiral, general or statesman who cannot do his best except in the presence of a sympathetic crowd is distinctly a second-class man."

Among other minor evils, not mentioned by Dr. Eliot, was the essential stupidity of the game in its most prominent feature, the line-bucking. Its interest lay in the struggle between contending groups of excited students who had no part in the game except as spectators. If one is interested in neither side, no game is more tedious to witness. Almost every time the ball touches the ground the game stops, the masses of armored legs are disentangled and time is given for those who have lost their breath to rise to their feet again. Once in a while a brilliant run stands out as a marked exception, but the interference which makes the run possible is often invisible to spectators. Of course if football were a true sport, this would be no objection, for a sport has its value in the delight of the players themselves and in their improved physical development. That which is played for the benefit of spectators is a spectacle, not a sport. And no man lives who would play the American game of football for pure sport, knowing that nobody would ever be on the bleachers and that neither his name nor that of his adversaries would resound among his fellows or appear in headlines in the newspapers. I honor the scrubs, those who play day after day that the first team may grow strong by running over them. This is the true college spirit, but there is no scrub who would play the American game for fun.

For the American game has never been a sport, but a battle, and the great objections to it are the moral ones which spring from this fact. Mr. Eliot says:

"The game is played under established and recognized rules; but the uniform enforcement of these rules is impossible, and violations of the rules are in many respects highly profitable toward victory. Thus, coaching from the side-lines, off-side play, holding and disabling opponents by kneeling and kicking, and by heavy blows on the head, and particularly about eyes, nose and jaw, are unquestionably profitable toward victory; and no means have been found of preventing these violations of rules by both coaches and players. Some players, to be sure, are never guilty of them, and some

are only guilty when they lose their tempers, but others are habitually guilty of them. The rules forbid unnecessary roughness in play, but there is wide latitude in the construction of unnecessary roughness. To strike a player with the clenched fist is unnecessary roughness; to give him a blow equally severe with the base of the open hand is not unnecessary roughness.

"The common justification offered for these hateful conditions is that football is a fight, and that its strategy and ethics are those of war. One may therefore resort in football to every ruse, stratagem and deceit which would be justifiable in actual fighting. They always try to discover the weakest man in the opponent's line, as for example, the man most recently injured, and attack him again and again. If a man, by repeated blows about the head and particularly on the jaw, has been visibly dazed, he is the man to attack at the next onset. If in the last encounter a player has been obviously lamed in leg or arm or shoulder, the brunt of an early attack should fall on him. As a corollary to this principle, it is justifiable for a player, who is in good order, to pretend that he is seriously hurt, in order that he may draw the opponent's attack to the wrong place. These rules of action are all justifiable, and even necessary, in the consummate savagery called war, in which the immediate object is to kill and disable as many of the enemy as possible. To surprise, ambush and deceive the enemy, and invariably to overwhelm a smaller force by a greater one, are the expected methods of war. But there is no justification for such methods in a manly game or sport between friends.

"The general public that witnesses with delight these combats can seldom see or understand these concealed and subtle evils of the game. They witness with pleasurable excitement a combat which displays courage, fortitude and a spirit of self-sacrificing co-operation in the players. The college public, adherents of the contending teams, is stirred profoundly by the sentiment of devotion to the institutions, because they believe that success in football is for the advantage of the institution. All parties welcome the chance to see a strenuous combat, as their ancestors have for unnumbered generations. The respectable people who attend football games—collegians, graduates and others—do not prefer to witness injuries, violations of rules, quarrels and penalties. On the contrary, they always prefer to see skilful, vigorous playing, uninterrupted by such repulsive incidents. The responsible

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A Line-Out. Stanford vs. California.

heads of secondary schools do not wish to have their pupils taught by college athletes that skill in breaking the rules without being detected is essential to success in playing football. The average college player had much rather play fair than foul. The players have not devised or enjoyed the stupid methods of training which impair the physical condition of most of them before the important game takes place. What then are the sources of the great evils in this sport? They are: (1) The immoderate desire to win intercollegiate games; (2) The frequent collisions in masses which make foul play invisible; (3) The profit from violation of rules; (4) The misleading assimilation of the game to war as regards its strategy and its ethics."

Another objection, not mentioned by President Eliot, is the total unfitness of the game for the use of the secondary schools. The high school boys are too young for such fierce exercise; they have no adequate training, no power to enforce standards, no competent umpires. It is rarely possible for them to play an honest game against honest competitors, and the death rate in these games is appalling. It is criminal, and the crime lies with the public which permits and encourages these dangerous and harmful exercises. The death rate and the list of injuries on college teams is relatively far smaller. This means that the greater age and costly training and rubbing has made them relatively immune to injuries. Quite as likely it means that all athletic youths with fragile bones or weak hearts have been disabled and put out of the running before they reach the college. It is again in the high school or secondary school that the evil of "proselyting" reaches its climax.

Another great evil, only hinted at by President Eliot, is the presence of the professional coach, the promoter of public athletics, who makes his living through winning victories and who goes as far in securing them as a relaxed public opinion in town and in university will let him. The self-respect of the colleges demands a declaration of independence in this regard. A rule that should be adopted, if we must have paid coaches, is that each coach must have been student or alumnus in the institution he represents, and that the academic life of a paid coach like that of an athlete shall be limited to four years.

Still another related evil lies in the immense gate receipts from popular games, and the expenditure of these sums by untied collegians surrounded by the pressure of sympathy and the cold machinations of graft.

The most discreditable feature of the game as it was played in 1905 are set forth in a series of papers entitled "Buying Football Victories," published in *Collier's Magazine* in November and December, 1905, by Edward S. Jordan, of Kenosha, a recent alumnus of the University of Wisconsin. In this paper the demoralization of the student-body by the anything-to-win policy on the part of coaches, and the laxity and apathy of college faculties is vigorously set forth.

The net result of these and many other similar criticisms has been the New Football of 1906. The most important feature of the revised football has been the attempt to clean up the game, to free it from the gross abuses and to conduct the game on the basis of gentlemanly relations. As the worst offenders in the past were such mainly be-

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cause the students and alumni demanded a winning team and the faculty acquiesced through the suspension of ordinary tests of scholarship in favor of athletic heroes, the change of popular feeling met with a ready response on the part of successful coaches. But the cleaning up has not nearly reached the end of the line and the old moral evils still exist in many colleges and secondary schools.

Besides the moral uplift which in the nature of things cannot be universal nor permanent, certain changes in the game itself were enforced by public opinion. These are, in brief, making the game more interesting by making it more open for observation and by giving greater play to the individual skill, especially that shown in a scattered field. Again, the attacking line is weakened through requiring ten yards' gain instead of five in three downs. This change has made mass play less successful and hence more likely to be set aside in favor of more open plays. At the same time mass play remains the ordinary way of putting the ball in action, however useless it may be with evenly matched teams, while its value for the purpose of breaking down an individual opponent is perhaps relatively enhanced. With this, two additional hazards not germane to the game were introduced. One is the forward pass, perhaps suggested by the passing by the backs in the Rugby football, but under different rules. The other is the onside

kick. Both of these are open to the criticism that they do not naturally rise from the nature of the game. On the other hand they serve as a relief from the line-bucking, a perversion of the Rugby scrum, which by a curious inversion of ideas has come to be known to the public as "straight football."

The new rules have made the game more open, more of a sport, considerably safer and on the whole notably cleaner and more interesting. Shall we be satisfied with this? Is the balance from the academic standpoint in favor of the game or do the evils pointed out by President Eliot and recognized by every college man still outweigh the advantages? If so, are there other modifications still to be made which shall outbalance these evils, and leave a residue in favor of the game as a means of promoting manliness, physical development, courage, quickness of action and the spirit of co-operation?

The writer believes that at present the balance is against the game, a conclusion which he has reached reluctantly, for his natural sympathies are with the struggling athletes. He believes also that most of the present evils would disappear by going back to the British Rugby game of football, a game from which the so-called American game was some thirty years ago gradually modified. If this is true, a change to a better game is an experiment to be preferred to the out-and-out abandonment of intercollegiate football. This is probably the only real



The Ball Being Heeled Out of the Scrum, Stanford Freshmen vs. California Freshmen.

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alternative, and outright abolition may be necessary in any event, if the colleges are to maintain their responsibility to the public.

If we test the present revised American game by its relation to the evils enumerated by President Eliot, what do we find?

Taking these criticisms in order, the evils of publicity remain the same. The injuries seem to have been reduced by about ten per cent. It may be noted in passing that many injuries which seem trivial may be of a serious character. In the *Journal of the American Academy of Medicine* it is estimated that in football injuries to the nervous system predominate, these arising mainly from mass plays, and from fierce tackling after long runs. Next come internal injuries, especially to stomach and intestines, arising largely from illegal kicking and "kneeing". Injuries to eyes and head often come from intentional blows, and all these are far more dangerous than the occasional fracture of an arm or leg, which is likely in any strenuous sport. In proportion to the openness of the game, the evils of intentional manslaughter are reduced. But many of the great games and perhaps most of the little ones show that this evil is not abolished. The noise and obsession remain the same. A recent writer claims that football victories cannot be won by institutions in which the student-body does not go wild over it. Harvard is told that she can never win over her traditional opponent so long as the student-body of the former university can endure victory or defeat with equanimity. The evils of artificial training, of dependence on noise, have not been reduced by the change in the rules as to the space to be gained in three downs, nor by the adoption of the forward pass. The coaches do not wish this changed, and curiously enough, while the American game of football has no existence except as an interacademic function, its control has been largely in the hands of unacademic men, who depend on the game for prominence as well as livelihood. To this we may ascribe the mechanizing of the game—the making of the game a matter of "certainty," depending chiefly not on the skill of the men who play, but on the skill of the coaches in arranging their quasi-puppets, and utilizing their muscular strength and their occasional fleetness of foot and accuracy of kicking. The great evils mentioned by Dr. Eliot have been in large degree mini-

mized by closer rules as to eligibility and a greater insistence by college faculties on tests of scholarship. The forward pass gives play for individual skill, for which reason the professional coach, who wants everything certain beforehand, looks on it with disfavor. The players in a losing cause sometimes try it, to increase chances. Being an uncertain element, good luck or quick action may bring its chances in their direction. The essence of a true sport is to offer many chances with victory to the team which has most men ready to seize those chances or to back up their colleagues who have done so.

It is plain, admitting as we may the improvement of the "New Football" of 1906 and 1907 over the old game, its greater interest as a sport, its more rigid limitation as to eligibility and its diminution of danger to life, the greater part of the old count still remains. The evils enumerated by President Eliot are still inherent and with a little less firmness on the part of college faculties the former conditions will again obtain. The balance is against the game. On academic grounds, the only grounds colleges have the right to consider, President Butler is, I think, fully justified in the abolition of football in Columbia University.

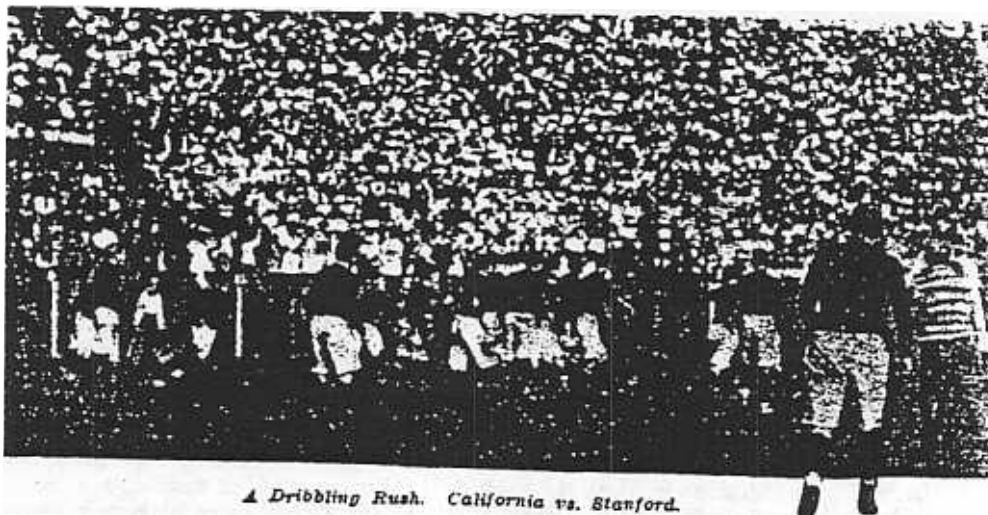
It may be remembered that the present American game of football is a modification of the British game of Rugby football, introduced into our colleges by Walter Camp and others in 1876. The chief differences in the two games arise from the legalizing in America of "off-side play," called by us "interference," which is forbidden by the rules of Rugby. In the latter game no player may run ahead of the player on his side who carries the ball. In legalizing interference any number of men on the attacking side may run ahead of the ball, consequently as many of the defense as can be spared must stand in opposition. Hence arises mass play, the ungraceful and unsportsmanlike element, now called "straight football." Secret signals and the fact that the whole attacking side may buck the line together give the attack a marked advantage over the defense. Hence the necessity of holding the ball by the attacking side. In Rugby, when a man is down with the ball the ball is still in play. Only the man who falls is out of the play. The rest goes on. In the American game the play is stopped for him and all the others who may be piled

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upon him to rise. The held ball renders impossible the particular play which is the glory of Rugby and the prettiest as well as the most sportsmanlike feature of any football game, the passing of the ball from one to another of the "backs," in a scattered field. In the American game, any such passing of the ball involves the too great risk of losing it. In Rugby, a lost ball may be regained by alertness and speed. In Rugby every man plays his own game; each of the backs is "his own quarterback." For these reasons the game is throughout open. The ball can be followed by the spectators; rough play, if present, can be seen by every one. Better still, it is a true sport, not an array of

people on earth, and those of the West are not quite happy unless they play the same games as are played in colleges in the East. This is the only real objection to the restoration of Rugby which the California universities have encountered.

The use of Rugby as an intercollegiate game will doubtless yield evils of its own, as well as repeat some of the evils of its American derivative. The worst possibility is that it will fall into the hands of coaches who will stifle its freedom of play and develop the mechanical battle-like game in which, as now, players would abandon their individuality under the direction of coaches. Foul play in Rugby is plainly visible to



A Dribbling Rush. California vs. Stanford.

battle. As matters are, how does the Rugby game stand related to the evils we have named above? The matters of publicity, of "crude and vociferous public praise and blame" will not be much altered. The huge gate receipts will remain the same. But these invite attack from another quarter. We may make the game free—accessible only on invitation—and an army of evils vanishes at once. But this requires courage and effort and a psychological moment.

There is danger in every manly sport, and there are worse things than physical danger to be faced in college. But the players generally enjoy the Rugby game for its own sake. The student-body enjoys it also for its spectacular qualities and beautiful plays. Boys are, however, the most conservative

spectators, moreover it is ineffective and would lose the game oftener than win it. There is no mass play in Rugby, and a savage tackle is bad play, for to throw the runner and to fall oneself with him does not stop the ball, which has been thrown to some other player. The punting is about the same in the two games, but every man in Rugby must be able to kick quickly and accurately. Punting is not a personal specialty of two or three of the backs as in the American game.

In the two great universities of California, the Rugby game, played under varying but fundamentally identical rules throughout Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the northern half of Australia, has been substituted for the American game. The initia-

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tive in this matter was due to President Wheeler of the University of California and to Professor Frank Angell, chairman of the committee on athletics of Stanford. The present writer was an early convert to the wisdom of this action. Mr. James Lanagan, the Stanford coach, was a later convert, but a very enthusiastic one. The game has been played for two seasons and with very fair success.

Experience shows that the accidents in Rugby football are much less frequent, less severe, and mainly confined to the limbs. Injuries to the legs are almost as frequent as in the American game. The fact that the game is played in cotton drawers instead of padded coats of mail, indicates at once a

a coach. The most he can do is to give form to individual players. In New Zealand, the especial home of clean, swift, strenuous sport, every player is his own coach, and professionalism of coaches as well as of players, though not unknown, is condemned by universal popular opinion.

To be sure the Rugby game never gives the thrill that follows the shock when masses of men throw themselves against each other. But this sort of thrill is not a thing to encourage. It is psychologically and doubtless ethically bad. At any rate our laws look critically on the value of prizefighting, which shares this feature in common with American football. The obsession and hysteria of the student-bodies are much less



A California Player Breaking Out of the Scrum. Stanford Freshmen vs. California Freshmen.

great difference. The Rugby football is a far swifter game, involving adroitness and co-operation rather than great strength. The giant has the advantage even in Rugby, but he must be a giant whose head and whose feet move quickly. As there are thirty players in a game of Rugby instead of twenty-two, and as it is a sport which men will play even though there is no possible hope of making any team, its introduction tends to revive the life of athletics within the colleges, which the American battle game has done so much to destroy. Men can play Rugby football and carry full work in the class room as well. It is a rare man who can do this and play the American game even as a scrub.

The game of Rugby cannot be planned by

in the Rugby game. It is a sport, not a battle, and the fine play of both sides appeals to the higher instincts of the youth.

For these reasons, the various attendant evils, the building up of a team by proselytizing, the immoderate desire to win, and the machinery of intercollegiate war are less likely to arise with Rugby. These evils are wanting in England, in Canada, in New Zealand, in Sydney and Brisbane, and our people in America are of the same nature, the same blood, the same ethics, the same love of sport as these. Doubtless the general adoption of the Rugby game would lead to material modifications. The abolition of interference in the American game, carrying with it the abolition of the held ball and the mass play, would approximate it to Rugby, and a fur-

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ther revision in this direction would perhaps make the game acceptable to college authorities. The outside professional coach should be eliminated in either game. To make him a member of the faculty does not affect the situation. On the other hand, the school-boyish "scrum" of the Rugby game is sure to be modified in American hands, though not, I trust, by the substitution for it of line-bucking plays. As to these and other matters I am permitted to quote from a personal letter of Walter Camp of Yale, the "Father of American Football," and I do this with the greater pleasure because its expressions are in some degree at variance with opinions I have expressed above. Mr. Camp says:

"Let me correct at once an impression that you seem to have that I am endeavoring to push out Rugby with the American game. If you follow the history of Rugby you will find that wherever it has been transplanted from the home country to one of the colonies, it has undergone some changes and has developed a character of its own. It has never stood still. As you probably know, we ourselves adopted the Rugby Union rules word for word in 1876. It was not long before we came to an *impasse* because the Rugby rule for the scrummage directed that 'each side should endeavor by pushing and kicking to drive the ball in the direction of the opponent's goal.' We soon found that it was a disadvantage to kick the ball through and hence neither side would kick or drive the ball in the direction of the opponent's goal. It was necessary for us to get some outlet and we then began to heel out. At that time I had a very animated discussion through the columns of one of the English papers with Rugby Unionists because I said I thought the final development of their scrummage would be to heel out.

"When I was over in England this Spring I casually remarked to a Rugby man, whom I knew, upon their heeling out. He was greatly astonished when, on looking it up, he found that heeling out had not always prevailed in Rugby. So you see the Englishman changes, but changes more slowly.

"One of the greatest authorities on English football in an article in either *Sportsman* or *Badminton* comes out flatly and says that both heeling out and wheeling the scrum are illegal under the rules, but that no team would stand a chance unless they practiced them. They have seven different kinds of rules in Canada, and, as you are aware, in

other places like Australia, they have other varieties.

"Furthermore, the New Zealanders have developed in their own Rugby more of the definiteness of play that characterizes the American game. That is, they have certain planned-out methods of attack.

"I had not in any way intentionally advocated the American style at the expense of the Rugby style. In fact, I had brought a team of Englishmen up here to play Rugby with our men in the hope that some good would come of it. . . . I see that the very thing which I objected to has naturally come to pass, and that is, that those who like Rugby seem to believe that it must be built up at the expense of the American game. I doubt if that is necessary. Certainly you are in exactly the same position that I was in 1876—you have adopted the Rugby game. The history of the sport shows that it develops and we have only reached one stage in its development while you are beginning another, and I certainly shall be glad to see how it comes along. I think you, with the greater number of English and Scotch out there on the Coast, can have more of the benefits of Rugby.

"I am sure you magnify the element of certainty in the American game. You speak of Rugby being a game in contrast to it where a man is trained to seize chances as they arise and to back up his associates who may do the same. There is hardly an instant in the running game of football, whether it be called Rugby, American, Australian or any other name, where this is not necessary. The only measure of definiteness being that in the American game when the ball is put in play, the side in possession has an opportunity to start on some definite plan. The carrying out of it is another matter, and if you have personally witnessed the game under the rules of the last two years, you must have been convinced that there is plenty of opportunity for independent action.

"I no more believe in endeavoring to lay up an opponent by repeated attacks than do you, and I am sure that such methods are not only bad, but silly. You had an opportunity to see my methods at Stanford and I have not changed. Even those who advocate such a method on the theory that football is like war, must realize that in war if an annihilated battery meant a temporary cessation of hostilities until that battery could be replaced by a new and fresh one, the method would be ineffective.

"As far back as 1894 I advocated the ten-

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yard rule to bring about just the condition of things which you approve and which I approve. Some four years ago you will remember that I brought up this as the way to correct the evils of our game and set it on the right road. I fought for it as hard as I could, and if you saw clippings from the papers at that time you will probably remember that I was called all over the country 'Ten-Yard Camp' on account of my advocacy of this opening of the game. And yet within a little less than two years they came to it, and it did the work."

I may close this discussion in President Eliot's words, which I am sure will carry the approval of Mr. Camp, and of every other lover of clean and strenuous sport: "If a college or university is primarily a place for training men for honorable, gener-

ous and efficient service to the community at large, there ought not to be more than one opinion on the question whether a game, played under the actual conditions of football, and with the barbarous ethics of warfare, can be a useful element in the training of young men for such high service. The essential thing for the youth of our colleges and universities to learn is the difference between practicing generously a liberal art and driving a trade or winning a fight, no matter how. Civilization has been long in possession of much higher ethics than those of war, and experience has abundantly proved that the highest efficiency for service and the finest sort of courage in individual men may be accompanied by, and indeed spring from, unvarying generosity, gentleness and good will."



▲ *Dribbling Rush. Stanford Freshmen vs. St. Mary's College.*