The American Dream Goes to College: The Cinematic Student Athletes of College Football

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WITHIN FILM AND CULTURAL STUDIES THERE HAVE BEEN A WIDE variety of motion picture production trends connected, in one way or another, to the films of 1920s and 1930s America. Rounding up the usual suspects, one can find scholars pointing to prestige pictures, gangster films, musicals, the woman's film, horror films, westerns, screwball comedies, and social problem films, as among the most notable cinematic developments of this time period (Balio; Sarris). What has so far been overlooked, however, is a cycle of films that represent a specific articulation of a classic American genre that flourishes during this time period as it does at no other point in film history. What has been overlooked is that from the end of 1920s until the beginning of World War II, the sports film genre arrives on campus, and the American Dream goes to college.

Powered by a philosophy of self-determination and an ideology of a level playing field, the sports film genre has remained a relatively constant presence in Hollywood cinema throughout the twentieth century. Connected to a history of sporting culture that includes both community-building sports like baseball and "disreputable" sports like bare-knuckle boxing, this genre follows narrative patterns influenced by both newspaper sports sections and juvenile sports fiction, and one does not have to look far to find hundreds of sports films that fit snugly within a general description of the genre. Building upon its foundation in sporting culture, the sports film genre coalesces around underdog-to-champion, hard-work-leads-to-victory narratives that shape sporting

The Journal of Popular Culture, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2010

cinema and help to forge a masculine ideal closely intertwined with an "Athletic American Dream."

In the genre's more optimistic guise, individual athletes become exemplary team players as they compete and triumph against their sporting opponents, against criminal influences, and against all those that do not believe in their potential for athletic greatness and the sanctity of "playing the game." In the sports film's more cynical moments, however, athletes do not manage to beat the odds. Instead they struggle in vain to retain control of their own athletic bodies as they pursue their goal of sporting achievement in a world dominated by professional rather than amateur ideals. Nevertheless, whether the sport is little league baseball or heavyweight boxing, the genre repeatedly engages with a democratizing everyone plays by-the-rules ideology: an ideology that often masks social problems by suggesting that if individuals can gain control over their own bodies they can gain control over their own economic and social destiny.

The sports film consistently exhibits readily identifiable genre characteristics, such as athletic practice fields and climactic "big games," but as is the case with any cultural artifact, it is always sensitive to the contextualizing effects of specific moments of history. When examining the overall history of the sports film genre it is apparent that in one particular instance, Hollywood releases college sports movies at a rate that is far greater than at any other time in cinema history. Between 1926 and 1941, a total of 115 of these college sports motion pictures are produced as compared with only fourteen before 1926, nine from 1942 to 1949, fifteen in the 1950s, six in the 1960s, and eight in the 1970s (Babich and Zucker). In addition, although numerous sports are represented in these films (including basketball, baseball, track and field, and hockey) college football is featured in eighty-nine of these released from 1926 to 1941 (Babich and Zucker). While it is true that a large percentage of these features are B-pictures that have long since been forgotten, the fact that celluloid student athletes put on their pads and take to the gridiron in such large numbers in this particular era beggars the simple question: why? Why does this cycle of films occur during this period of time, and what can it tell us about this cultural moment both in cinema and in American society more generally?

As is usually the case with this type of question there is no straightforward single cause and effect answer, but an examination of these films and some of the discursive structures that surround them

suggests that large numbers of college sports films are produced in this specific moment because of three main factors. First of all, college football is a tremendously popular mass amusement at this point in time, and Hollywood, as usual, attempts to attach itself to the fashionable attraction of the moment. Secondly, university campuses provide an ideal and idealized location in which to construct romantic narratives of attractive young men and women. And finally and most interestingly, these football films repeatedly engage with issues of class movement and conflict against the ever-present background of a new Athletic American Dream made popular in the Roaring Twenties and continuing into the Great Depression Thirties. Together, all of these factors spur the production of college football films that reflect and represent the concerns of this moment in American history.

When College Football was King

To place this time period in context, it is useful to start with some background on the preceding decades. To begin with, it would be a mistake to underestimate the effects of World War I upon American sporting culture. In the years immediately preceding the United States' entry into the war, many Americans began to advocate active participation in sports as the best way to physically prepare young American men for the rigorous demands of the military should they be called into service:

> On the high school level, the war also provided a major boost for physical education and competitive interscholastic athletics. Between 1915 and 1917, educators engaged in a vigorous debate over how to prepare American youth for war if the United States entered the European conflict. One group favored mandatory military training in the nation's high schools whereas another advocated compulsory physical education. By the time America entered the war, the physical education advocates were in the ascendancy and had won the support of most of the nation's military men. The most telling arguments of the physical education faction stressed the fear that the military training in secondary and high schools might foster the kind of "Prussian" militarism against which America was fighting and that the dismal state of fitness among America's youth, as revealed by prewar army medical rejections and the wartime draft physical examinations, could be best corrected by a broad-based physical education program.
>
> (Carroll 34)

This emphasis on physical fitness was also, in part, a reaction to the staggering realization that an estimated thirty to fifty percent of American men had been declared unfit for service during the war years (Carroll 34).

Once in uniform, however, the young men of the armed forces needed protection from themselves, and quickly sporting activities became integral to military operations. Athletics were seen to produce strong bodies, promote good hygiene habits, and raise troop morale. Utilizing the expertise of sporting visionaries like Walter Camp and James Naismith, the military teamed up with the YMCA to provide structured physical exercise for soldiers both at home and abroad. This new relationship between sports and the armed forces culminated with the Interallied Games witnessed by over a half a million spectators in and around Paris, France in 1919. This program of sports and the military provided the spark for the sports culture explosion of the 1920s. As the sports historians Elliot Gorn and Warren Goldstein describe it:

> They brought participation in organized athletics to millions of American men. In so doing, they democratized sport and created a newly powerful constituency for the leisure movement. For the first time, organized athletics and physical education were linked in the minds of leaders and participants to patriotism and military preparedness. By demonstrating the value of mass organized athletics as a builder of bodies and morale, wartime sports laid the groundwork for public schools to adopt sports programs. And finally by providing a mass experience of participant and spectator sports for the troops, the war helped prepare the nation for the sports boom of the 1920s. (181)

The 1920s are a golden age of sports, with professional baseball, boxing, golf, and tennis all rising in popularity and establishing their own media stars such as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Ben Crenshaw, and Bill Tilden. But no sport captured the public imagination of the 1920s and 1930s quite like the one played on university gridirons across the country. College football achieved such a devout following that it was not unusual to hear it described as the era's new religion with "its high priests (prominent coaches) and acolytes (players), its saints (great players and coaches who have passed on), and sanctuaries (stadiums)" (Tunis 743). Intimately connected to football's popularity growth in this era is the accompanying boom in stadium building that sees the Rose Bowl built in 1922, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum in 1923, and Soldier Field in Chicago in 1924. In addition, the development of

an automobile culture supported by a growing and improving national highway system make these stadiums far more accessible to the average fan. As sports film scholar Aaron Baker points out, "college football in the 1920s had become as much of a big money sporting spectacle as baseball and prizefighting . . . attendance doubled and gate receipts tripled during the decade" (Baker 83). And when a first-hand encounter is not possible, radio broadcasts allow an even larger audience to experience the games as they are happening: "In many communities in the 1930s, football was just about the only thing to be found on the radio dial on Saturday afternoons" (Oriard 11).

The growing prominence of college football was also evidenced by an escalation of football-related material found in both the nonfiction and fiction realms of sporting media. As cultural historian Michael Oriard points out, "The newspapers remained the primary source of information about football for the serious football fan, but other media had greater impact in the 1930s in broadening the audience of casual observers . . . football movies reached the largest audiences of all" (11). These football movies were produced in record numbers during this decade, but had been around since the very beginnings of cinema. As early as 1903 actualities like *Chicago–Michigan Football Game* and *Princeton–Yale Football Game* signaled a cinematic interest in the sport, and in years following, motion pictures like *A Football Hero* (1911), *The Half Back* (1917), and *Two Minutes to Go* (1921) are evidence of the motion picture industry's desire to bring together the mass amusements of sport and cinema. That being said, football features are only an occasional occurrence for the first two decades of the twentieth century. It is not until well after the end of World War I that football becomes a Hollywood favorite.

In the mid-1920s two films in particular can be said to be instrumental in the growth of the football feature in the decade that follows. The first film is the Harold Lloyd vehicle, *The Freshman* (1925), which, despite relatively mediocre reviews, is a box-office smash and "an instant sensation around the country" (Carroll 81). Following close on the heels of *The Freshman*, another film, *One Minute to Play* (1926), is also an economic success, but the star of this motion picture is an athlete rather than actor. Red Grange, "perhaps the most revered football player of all time" (Carroll ix), is the protagonist of this film and the primary reason why "the grand-stand scenes and those of the football field, with the panting players are set forth so well that they seem like the real thing" (Hall). Together, these two films (and the continued

success of college football more generally) provoke Hollywood to explore the world of college football with greater regularity.

Coming of Age on Campus

Despite the lack of a large audience that can personally relate to the college experience (as evidenced by the fact that less than sixteen percent of Americans had attended college by 1940), university life is certainly what is being produced, packaged, marketed, and sold by the film industry from the second half of the 1920s until World War II. The advertisements for these college-centered films, for example, do not mask their campus focus, but instead most of these motion pictures, like *The College Hero* (1927), *College Coach* (1933), and *Life Begins in College* (1937), emphasize their college settings and clichés as well as their connections to the foundational iconography of college life as imagined by the cinema. Athletic and attractive young men and women define the celluloid university rather than intellectual students or dedicated scholars. In Hollywood, college is higher education without the education.

The titles of some films like *Spirit of Notre Dame* (1931) and *Rose Bowl* (1936) loudly announce their football connections as well as their college affiliations, and this is clearly another defining element of the cinematic university. As described by *Movies Go To College*, "Team sports, particularly football, have also made a major contribution to the popular conception of the collegiate experience" (Umphlet 27). For this era, it can be argued that football is the centerpiece of the idealized American college campus. In addition to football, however, the titles of sports films like *Win that Girl* (1928), *College Lovers* (1930), and *Hold that Coed* (1938) accentuate the romantic possibilities of college life rather than its sporting aspects. And most often, to no one's surprise, college sports films are marketed using a pattern of advertisement that does its best to combine elements of sport and romance, an advertising strategy that is perfectly in line with the commercial interests of the Hollywood studios and their desire to attract the largest possible audience. But in its efficacy this strategy has significance beyond mere marketing. As much as anything else, it creates the dominant defining image of the university experience in the collective American imagination: "college athletics, particularly as the Hollywood film has interpreted them, have been highly instrumental in indoctrinating and

FIGURE 1. *All American*, campaign book advertisement, 1932; rpt. in Richard Allen and Bruce Hershenson (1996).

conditioning both the general public and college-bound youth to a common understanding (whether fantasized or real) of what the college experience should be like" (Umphlett 31). Academics are not part of the commercial equation; college life is represented by sex and football.

Take for example the campaign book advertisement for the 1932 film *All American* (Figure 1), which offers a combination of both football action and feminine display. Despite this motion picture's obvious

sporting title, images of football activity are relatively small on the movie placard and greater visual prominence is given to the female form by virtue of its large size, vivid color, and revealing blowing skirt. The text of the advertisement, on the other hand, would seem to stress the movie's sporting context:

> The biggest names in football will appear as part of the cast of this great picture! . . . Remember "The Spirit of Notre Dame?" . . . Well, here's one that has even that great attraction lashed to the mast! . . . More love interest, more thrills, more action, more drama, more appeal, MORE EVERYTHING! . . . PLUS that cast that will knock your eyes out . . . WATCH FOR THE ANNOUCEMENT OF THE BIG-TIME FOOTBALL NAMES! . . . and get ready for a smasher!
> (*All American* campaign book ad. 1932, rpt. in Hershenson 185)

Not only does the text emphasize the film's football bona fides with only one mention of "more love interest," but also it does so with a graphic style that clearly highlights "The biggest names in football" by using an underlined font that is larger and bolder than that which follows (*All American* campaign book ad. 1932, rpt. in Hershenson 185). This combination of words and pictures produce an archetypal advertisement that actively promotes Hollywood's vision of college life.

It is not only the genre's marketing that accentuates a wedding of sports and romance, but also the stories as well. The overwhelming majority of the sports films from this time period are structured around a narrative drive toward a traditional boy–girl union that typically expresses itself as an athletic coming-of-age story. This athletic version of the classic storyline differs from the generic version in that successful relationships are intertwined with the achievement of sporting proficiency. As depicted in movies like *The College Boob* (1926) and *The Kick-Off!* (1931), athletic transformations are often driven by the main character's desire to please not just his masculine peers but additionally one very special coed. Take for example this exchange from *The Gladiator* (1938):

> IRIS. Coming from such a family you should be a born gladiator. What's your favorite sport?
> HUGO. Oh, I don't know, I like to watch them all.
> IRIS. Watch them . . . don't you play? Mr. Kip, Webster needs manpower. Mr. Kip, if I asked you to come out? Would you say yes?
> HUGO. When I look at you I say yes.

Protagonists begin college as hicks, rubes, boobs, and milquetoasts, but they leave as lettermen, athletes, and heroes. They matriculate as boys, but they graduate as real men with real girlfriends.

On college campuses it was easy for athletes and coeds to come together because college football, unlike boxing and even early baseball, placed no social barriers against the female fan. Indeed, the university coed, and by extension the larger female community, was fully expected to support her "men" as they competed for her alma mater. For Hollywood, this translates into a rather obvious attempt to attract a multigendered audience to feature films focused on the male-dominated world of sporting culture. In this fashion, the genre constructs a thoroughly idealized representation of college life:

> College itself was remote enough from the average moviegoer's personal life as to appear somewhat romantic and exotic, and this condition was no doubt what motivated many directors and scriptwriters to come up with their peculiar admixture of athletics, social life, and the collegiate experience . . . Whether expressed musically, comically or melodramatically, the college-life movie had wide appeal, particularly for the nation's youth at whom it appeared to be mainly directed."
>
> (Umphlett 73)

Hollywood constructs an ideal vision of the collegiate experience; however, it is a setting still rife with conflict. In particular, it is class conflict that shapes the cinematic university of 1920s–30s America.

The Class Conflicts of College Football

Although *Harpers* magazine may have proclaimed college football as the new religion of the 1930s, one could argue that it was big business that held this position in the previous decade. As Calvin Coolidge proclaims in 1926, "The man who builds a factory, builds a temple . . . the man who works there worships there" (qtd. in Schlesinger 57). Or as *Nations Business* says in 1925, the American businessman holds "a position of leadership which the businessman had never held before" (qtd. in Schlesinger 61). The Great Depression, of course, radically changes the average American's opinion about big business, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt makes this clear in his inaugural address in 1933: "The money changers have fled from their high seats in the

temple of our civilization. There must be an end to a conduct in banking and business which too often has given to a sacred trust the likeness of callous and selfish wrong-doing."

Against this cultural backdrop, it is not surprising to find class issues percolating throughout American society, and this is certainly true of college sporting culture. The 1920s were the golden era of sports which saw the birth of the first mass-mediated sports superstars such as baseball's Babe Ruth, boxing's Jack Dempsey, and football's Red Grange. The athletic and economic success of these larger-than-life figures supported the growth of a new Athletic American Dream in which monetary riches were gained through sporting achievements. College football and by extension all of university life, was also undergoing a transformation during this period caused by an infusion of students from a wider range of class positions. Closer to the turn of the century university sporting culture had been a "gentleman's" pursuit:

> Football was attractive to the youth of the elite because it was exciting, promoted campus community, and, in the beginning at least, it was student-controlled. Beyond that, it was a violent and virile sport for gentlemen who were concerned about their ability to measure up to the past generation that had been tested in combat. (Carroll 25)

But moving further into the twentieth century, the enclave of privilege that had been college football is invaded by an influx of fresh faces located lower down on the social strata:

> Football's most fundamental development from the 1920s to the 1950s was its (incomplete) democratization, its transformation from a predominantly Anglo-Saxon "gentleman's sport" to a multi-ethnic, classless one. This democratization entailed both the spread of big-time college football from a handful of elite northeastern institutions to state universities, land-grant colleges, and immigrant-rich Catholic schools throughout the country, and the popular acceptance of professional football as a legitimate sport rather than an organized brawl staged by hired thugs. College football was democratized by the sons of Polish steel workers and Italian coal miners who transformed the faces, and the names of football lineups. (Oriard 225)

And yet, even as these changes were occurring that reshaped the college game, university life still carried with it many of the trappings and

accoutrements of its upper-class lineage: "As . . . formal wear gave way to more casual attire in the 1920s, football's representative class became the prosperous middle rather than the more narrowly defined elite, but the upscale imagery was still pronounced" (Oriard 229).

For example, the movie poster for *Two Minutes To Play* (1937, Figure 2) balances the likeness of a large kicking football player in his team uniform with the images of two men and one woman in another version of the college uniform, the tuxedos and evening dresses of upper-class society. Even as college football becomes a mass-mediated sport of popular culture, it remains connected to its upper-class roots. The juxtaposition of blue-collar players competing in elite surroundings continually brings forward the unsettled class associations of college football:

> As the twentieth century opened, football alone among the country's major spectator sports was supposedly played by gentleman amateurs, but by the 1920s its "amateurs" were generating millions of dollars in profit from a major entertainment business. The sport opened doors to husky second-generation Polish and Italian immigrants at the very time congress was closing doors to their countrymen; if all the subsidized athletes had been named Adams or smith instead of Brovelli or Pulaski, the context of the debates would have been very different. In short, the narratives of football from the 1920s through the 1950s expressed the general confusion over issues that should not have mattered at all in democratic America but that mattered greatly indeed.
>
> (Oriard 226)

The Cinematic Gridiron and the Athletic American Dream

During the twentieth century, sports present a unique and attractive opportunity to bypass more traditional avenues of class ascension; a "fact" that is "proved" by the rags-to-riches success stories of Ruth, Dempsey, Grange, and others. Thus, stories that comment upon the heroic attempts of athletes to succeed and transcend their class positioning are central to the sports film genre throughout its history. Against the backdrop of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, these stories of sports and class are in full view. Cinematic athletes continue to pursue the Athletic American Dream, and class issues are at the center of the college football film.

FIGURE 2. *Two Minutes to Play*, three-sheet, 1937; rpt. in Richard Allen and Bruce Hershenson (1996).

Frequently the low economic status of the new student football player/hero and an accompanying attempt to reconcile his position with his upper-class teammates and classmates is the framework upon which is mapped out the central dramatic conflicts of the film. For example the 1932 feature *Huddle* tells the familiar story of a working class steel worker from Gary, IN who wins a scholarship to Yale and must overcome both his own athletic hubris and the class prejudices of his wealthier classmates as he strives for success. This class ascension narrative is also a common motif of many of the genre's comedic incarnations such as found in *Pigskin Parade* (1936) wherein thick-headed quarterback Amos Dodd (Stewart Erwin) moves from his hill-billy home to the cultured environs of the college campus.

Although these films, like many others, structure these conflicts around single protagonists, numerous other college sports movies, like *College Lovers* (1930) and *Two Minutes to Play*, structure these conflicts around romantic triangles in which athletic rivals from vastly different economic backgrounds vie for the same girl in much the same way as they compete on the field. In the college sports films of the period, competition crosses romantic, athletic, and class boundaries.

During this time frame, however, these storylines are complicated by the nation's general concern with issues of class, and the specific class issues of college football, concerns that are greatly magnified by the economic distress of a nation as it moves into the Great Depression. Within the sphere of the sports film genre these anxieties play out in two ways. First of all, class relationships (and the friction that results) are represented as the product of anticipated and realized stereotypes rather than simply differences in income. It is not just a question of whether or not our heroes will practice hard enough to win games and fame on the gridiron, but whether or not they will also accept and be accepted by their teammates, classmates, and love-mates (who represent other class positions). Therefore, in these sports films, it is the elimination of class differences (and not simply class ascension) that stands in as the central problematic of the plot.

Secondly, the general public's ambivalent attitudes toward big business seem to be expressed within these films across the amateur/professional conflict that is closely associated with the college football of the period. In and around this sport, there was clearly some anxiety about its overprofessionalism, and the deleterious effects it could have upon university life. It was this concern that prompted a series of

articles in 1925 on the state of college football that appeared in newspapers throughout the United States, and which called for "sweeping investigation and reform as prerequisite to the 'saving' of college football" (qtd. in Carrol 68). Class ascension is acceptable within the framework of the college football sports film, but that movement upwards does not involve any obvious markers of economic accomplishment. The athlete's participation in football (which provides a scholarship in exchange for physical efforts) is not typically represented as an occupation. Rather it is simply an extension of the amateur ideal that is attached to his Athletic American Dream. In college, moving up in class, although it may be attached to a concept of hard work as it applies to athletic practices, is decidedly not the result of manual labor as it applies to economic achievement.

In order to emphasize the amateur status of these college football players, working class athletes must be educated or reminded of the fact that they are not professionals, and therefore they should not worry or care about money. It is not that money is unimportant, but rather that worrying about money is out of place in the idealized world of college football. In *All American*, for example, football star Gary King (Richard Arlen) makes the mistake of quitting school after a successful athletic career without obtaining his degree. King leaves college for the promise of making quick money selling bonds, but his lack of success in his new occupation soon leads him into a downward spiral that results in a life of gambling and cheap women. When Gary King's younger brother Bob, another college football hero, is tempted to follow in Gary's footsteps and pursue some "easy money," the older brother intervenes and thus makes the appropriate correction to both his brother's and his own life.

In *All American* Gary King is punished for his desire to earn money in a fashion that is deemed inappropriate. As a college graduate he would eventually and "naturally" earn a substantial income, but, by leaving early and failing to graduate, it is as if he becomes a professional while still in school. In a similar fashion, star halfback Jim Fowler (Robert Young), the lead character in *Saturday's Millions* (1933), makes the mistake of treating college football like a business rather than a game. His "callous and world-weary" approach to college athletics leads to his entanglement with gamblers and other seedy characters, and only the intervention of his best friends and his best girl enable him to escape a blackmail plot and to see the error of his ways

(*New York Times*, rev. of *Saturday's Millions*). By choosing to act as professionals, these football stars break the social contract that they make as amateur college athletes, and therefore they suffer the consequences.

In another serious look at the sport, *Yesterday's Heroes* (1940), it is not just that there is too much importance placed on winning in college football, but rather that education has been forgotten as athletics have been overemphasized on university campuses. In this film, down-on-his-luck and depressed Duke Wyman (Robert Sterling) looks back on a college career in which he was pushed to choose football over medical school. The college football "industry" is clearly blamed for his failings, and at the movie's conclusion Duke turns his back on football and rededicates his life to his medical career. If college football were truly an amateur pursuit than a student should be able to play the game as well as study medicine, but the professionalization of the college game in *Yesterday's Heroes* makes that impossible.

Saturday's Millions and *Yesterday's Heroes*, however, are not just stories of misguided gridiron stars, but rather they are cynical views of the whole world of college football and the amateur ideal that purports to be at the core of college athletics. This negative critique is common in the sports films during this period and is often evident in the genre's comic incarnations, too. In perhaps the most well known comedic football film, the Marx Brothers approach the subject with their usual anarchic energy, and the resulting film, *Horse Feathers* (1932), is a rollicking parody of the world of college football. In this motion picture, nothing is more important than winning the big game, and professional players are recruited to make sure this happens. More specifically, Baravelli (Chico Marx), nicknamed the "ice man" because he works at a speakeasy (an obvious reference to Red Grange who was known as the "Ice Man of Wheaton, Illinois") and Pinky (Harpo Marx) are hired by college president Quincy Adams Wagstaff (Groucho Marx) to play football, and in so doing these working class stiffs are suddenly enrolled in college. This change in status, however, does not seem to affect these characters, as is typically the case in other college football films. Instead, Baravelli and Pinky wreak havoc on all the rules they encounter as they provide caustic, if humorous, commentary on university life and the college football machine that is at its center. In *Horse Feathers* the value of a college education is summed up by the image of Harpo Marx shoveling books into a roaring fire.

Education is held in the same low regard in *Hold that Coed* a motion picture that revolves around a coach who pays professional wrestlers to

play football and a state governor who supports these indiscretions in order to win re-election. While light-hearted entertainment is clearly the main thrust of a film in which the big game is won by a female place-kicker scoring a touchdown in the middle of tornado-force winds, the comedy of *Hold that Coed* points toward the hypocrisy that results when a big budget college football industry is founded on a philosophy of amateur participation.

In films like *Hold that Coed* and *Horse Feathers*, authenticity typically takes a back seat to comedy, but the exaggerations in these amusing movies still reference issues and concerns that occupy the sports film genre throughout this time period. From its very beginnings, college football had struggled to reconcile its amateur core with the profitable business that grew around it, and the possibilities and perils of athletic professionalism in the 1920s, along with the economic catastrophes of the Great Depression in the 1930s, place the amateur/professional issues of college football in a new light.

In *Touchdown* (1931), Coach Curtis (Richard Arlen) says that, "A football game is just a small version of a war . . . People don't have any use for a loser," but these sentiments are clearly meant to be viewed negatively. As a rival coach in the film says, "There's something pretty fine about college amateur football that I'd rather not see destroyed."

The Clock Runs Out on College Football Cinema

In scores of films from the second half of the 1920s and until the beginning of the 1940s, boys become men, women become girlfriends, and athletes take to the gridiron to display their physical and social prowess, and test the level playing field ideology at the core of the amateur ideal. In other words, with regard to college football, Hollywood discovers a perfect vehicle for the concerns of a nation: "Class feelings were rarely expressed openly, but in the disputes about amateurs and professionals, the debates over subsidization, and the relationships of owner, coaches, and players, football dramatized the struggle of groups competing for the spoils of American success" (Oriard 227).

But the onset of global conflict changed the rules of the game. With young men dying overseas, the idyllic ivy-covered dream world of university campuses no longer found favor in Hollywood. Instead of

several college sports movies being produced every year, it was several college sports films per decade. And after the war, the incredible growth of television (and televised sports), the rise of the African-American athlete, and the ascension of professional sports push forward the transformation of the mediated sports landscape. The college football film would never again regain the popularity that it had from the mid-1920s until the United States entered the war. Although the sports film genre remains based in an underdog to champion master narrative that assumes the erasure of class differences, it never again focuses on class issues and amateurs vs. professionals as it did during this unique moment in cinema history.

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The College Hero. Dir. Walter Lang. Screenplay by Dorothy Howell. Perf. Charles Paddock and Ben Turpin. Columbia Pictures, 1927.

College Humor. Dir. Wesley Ruggles. Screenplay by Claude Binyon and Frank Butler. Perf. Bing Crosby, Jack Oakie, Richard Arlen, Mary Carlisle, George Burns, and Gracie Allen. Paramount Pictures, 1933.

College Lovers. Dir. John Adolfi. Screenplay by Earl Baldwin and Douglas Doty. Perf. Jack Whiting, Marian Nixon, and Frank McHugh. First National Pictures, 1930.

A Football Hero. Essanay Film Manufacturing Company, 1911.

The Freshman. Dir. Fred Newmeyer and Sam Taylor. Screenplay by John Grey and Sam Taylor. Perf. Harold Lloyd, Jobyna Ralston, and Brooks Benedict. Harold Lloyd. Pathé, 1925.

The Gladiator. Dir. Edward Sedgwick. Screenplay by Philip Wylie and James Mulhauser. Perf. Joe E. Brown, Man Mountain Dean, and June Travis. Columbia Pictures, 1938.

The Half Back. Dir. Ben Turbett. Perf. Yale Boss, George Brennan, and Ogden Childe. Edison Co., 1917.

Hold that Coed. Dir. George Marshall. Screenplay by Don Ettlinger, and Karl Tunberg. Perf. John Barrymore, George Murphy, Marjorie Weaver, Joan Davis, and Jack Haley. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1938.

Horse Feathers. Dir. Norman McLeod. Screenplay by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. Perf. Groucho Marx, Harpo Marx, Chico Marx, Zeppo Marx, and Thelma Todd. Paramount Pictures, 1932.

Huddle. Dir. Sam Wood. Screenplay by Elbridge Anderson and Crilly Butler. Perf. Ramon Novarro, Madge Evans, Una Merkel, and Ralph Graves. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1932.

The Kick-Off! Dir. George Stevens. Perf. Mickey Daniels, Grady Sutton, and Gertrude Messinger. Hal Roach Studios, 1931.

Life Begins in College. Dir. William Seiter. Screenplay by Don Ettlinger and Ray Golden. Perf. Al Ritz, Harry Ritz, Jimmy Ritz, Joan Davis, Gloria Stuart, and Nat Pendleton. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1937.

Mr. Doodle Kicks Off. Dir. Leslie Goodwins. Screenplay by Bert Granet and Mark Kelly. Perf. Joe Penner, June Travis, Richard Lane, and Jack Carson. RKO Radio Pictures, 1938.

One Minute to Play. Dir. Sam Wood. Screenplay by Byron Morgan. Perf. Harold 'Red' Grange, Mary McAllister, and Charles Ogle. Robertson-Cole Pictures Corp., 1926.

Pigskin Parade. Dir. David Butler. Screenplay by William Conselman and Mark Kelly. Perf. Stuart Erwin, Patsy Kelly, Jack Haley, Betty Grable, and Judy Garland. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1936.

Princeton–Yale Football Game. Dir. and Prod. Thomas Edison, 1903.

Rose Bowl. Dir. Charles Barton. Screenplay by Marguerite Roberts and Francis Wallace. Perf. Eleanore Whitney, Tom Brown, Buster Crabbe, and William Frawley. Paramount Pictures, 1936.

Saturday's Millions. Dir. Edward Sedgwick. Screenplay by Falkland Cary and Dale Van Every. Perf. Robert Young, Andy Devine, Leila Hyams, and Johnny Mack Brown. Universal Pictures, 1933.

Spirit of Notre Dame. Dir. Russell Mack. Screenplay by Walter DeLeon and Robert Keith. Perf. Lew Ayres, Sally Blane, William Bakewell Andy Devine, and Nat Pendleton. Universal Pictures, 1931.

Touchdown. Dir. Norman McLeod. Screenplay by Grover Jones and William McNutt. Perf. Richard Arlen, Peggy Shannon, and Jack Oakie. Paramount Pictures, 1931.

Two Minutes to Go. Dir. Charles Ray, Screenplay by Richard Andres. Perf. Charles Ray, Mary Anderson, and Lionel Belmore. Charles Ray Productions, 1917.

Two Minutes to Play. Dir. Robert Hill. Screenplay by William Buchanan. Perf. Bruce Bennett, Edward Nugent, and Jeanne Martel. Victory Pictures Corp., 1937.

Win that Girl. Dir. David Butler. Screenplay by Dudley Early and James Hopper. Perf. Sue Carol, Tom Elliott, and David Rollins. Fox Film Corp., 1928.

Yesterday's Heroes. Dir. Herbert Leeds. Screenplay by William Brent and William Conselman. Perf. Jean Rogers, Robert Sterling, and Claude Hammond. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1940.

Andrew C. Miller is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Communication and Media Studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT where he is responsible for courses that cover both the theory and practice of

media production. His published and commissioned works include traditional written scholarship and multimedia productions, and he previously labored as an assistant director in Hollywood on features such as *Of Mice and Men* and television series like *Beverly Hills 90210*. He is currently completing a manuscript on the cultural history of the American sports film genre.