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The Football Crisis of 1909-1910: The Response of the Eastern "Big Three"

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The 1909-10 crisis in college football has not received the attention given to the preceding events in 1905-06. Unlike the earlier episode, there was no dramatic intervention by a public leader such as President Theodore Roosevelt in the fall of 1905 nor changes as revolutionary as the introduction of the forward pass and the ten yard rule. By 1909, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association (soon to be known as the National Collegiate Athletic Association) was already operating as a vehicle for football reform. In 1905-06, the problem of safety had been frequently coupled with criticisms of football's role in higher education; in the later crisis the concern was centered more directly on the issue of injuries in intercollegiate play.

Yet the attacks on football in 1909-10 generated anxieties that were as intense as those in the earlier crisis. The apparent failure of the previous reforms to solve the problem of serious injuries had created a mood of alarm and mistrust. The notoriety resulting from several well-publicized fatalities led some college officials and rulesmakers to conclude that the game was in jeopardy. As in 1905-06, it was feared that if action were not taken the result might be radical reforms or even abolition of intercollegiate competition. Such fears led to an extensive discussion by the national rules committee, out of which a series of reforms emerged. These changes ushered out the remnants of older and cruder elements of football and nearly completed the process of revamping the game.[1]

While this crisis was building, the presidents of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton embarked on their own project to reform the sport and forestall possible radical changes. Earlier, in the 1905-06 crisis, the "Big Three" had not

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attempted to cooperate in the movement for reform. Although their representatives had influenced the new rules, the three institutions had chosen to remain outside the new Intercollegiate Athletic Association which had given rise to the changes. This tendency to keep one foot outside the mainstream of football reform would undermine the attempts of the presidents in 1909-10 to act collectively. In order to maximize their influence, the "Big Three" and their representatives would have to present a unified front and act within some framework of athletic reform. With their past histories of bickering and their isolation from reform-minded institutions, it would prove difficult for the "Big Three" to accomplish this task. Ironically, the futile attempt to exercise a role that had been diminished as a result of changes in 1905-06 represented the beginning of presidential collaboration that led eventually to the Ivy League arrangements.

Previous to these crises, the sport of college football had survived more than two decades of periodic censure and pressures for reform. Criticism of football had initially begun in response to the roughness of play in the early 1880's. The dangers of playing the game were associated in the public mind with the mass plays, in which players shoved, pulled, or otherwise conveyed the ball carrier through the line as well as the momentum play in which a wedge of players were set in motion before the snap of the ball. Harvard's flying wedge, abolished in 1894, was only the most notorious of numerous wedge formations and mass plays. The spectacular open field maneuvers of rugby and of American football in the early 1880's had deteriorated into a less exciting game of sheer bulk and muscle. Despite the periodic criticisms, football commanded a sizeable following in the east and midwest. Slugging, piling on, and numerous injuries to unprotected skulls only served to whet the appetites of the football crowd.[2]

In 1894. the unsystematic rulesmaking in college football had come under the management of the Intercollegiate Football Rules Committee. Drawn largely from the dominant eastern football powers, the committee provided a uniform code for the growing pastime. Lacking the final authority to legislate for the colleges, the committee's effectiveness depended on support by football coaches and partisans, and this was partially insured by the prestige and influence of rulesmakers from institutions such as Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Pennsylvania. The most prominent member of the committee was Walter Camp, known as the "father of American football." A New Haven businessman, Camp was widely respected for his early contributions to the rules of football, his record as the graduate adviser to the Yale team, and of his prolific writings on football. His All-American selections, begun in 1889, had become an annual ritual of the gridiron game. In addition to his frequent articles in magazines and newspapers, Camp's willingness to respond to inquiries

from all parts of the country and his judicious defense of football made him the game's chief arbiter.[3]

The Rules Committee on which Camp served had made periodic modifications in the game. Never enough to satisfy the severest critics, such changes allowed the intercollegiate game to survive with only slight modifications. By the early 1900's, football had attained an uneasy state of equilibrium. Periodic injuries and fatalities set off waves of alarm and criticism often resulting in unsuccessful attempts to ban the sport. National critics such as President Charles Eliot of Harvard continued to attack football. Among former players and coaches, there were some who advocated rules changes that would promote a more open game. Such adjustments, it was said, would encourage more individual play resulting in a safer and more interesting spectacle.[4]

With the movement for Progressive reform in the early 1900's, matters involving safety or welfare suddenly gained more urgency. The concern became proportionately greater in problems affecting the middle class, youth, or those unable to protect themselves. So, when Teddy Roosevelt denounced football for its brutal, unsportsmanlike play, he touched a reformist conscience already sensitive to similar abuses. As injuries mounted during the fall of 1905, denunciations of football suddenly exploded from the press, pulpit, and from the institutions themselves. Even college faculties, heretofore judicious in their criticisms, lashed out at the sport. Their objections going beyond the problem of injuries, encompassed the role of football in academic life. Reformers such as Professor Frederick Jackson Turner of the University of Wisconsin raised issues such as the preoccupation of students with football and the use of paid, professional coaches. A vocal minority of college presidents including President James Angell of Michigan joined the chorus of protest and helped to provide leadership for reform. In December, 1905, following the death of a Union College player in a game with New York University, Chancellor Henry McCracken of NYU issued a call for a national intercollegiate conference. Known at first as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, the convocation set up permanent machinery to serve as a vehicle for football reform. Of the dominant powers of the early 1900's, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton were conspicuously missing from the list of those institutions forming the new organization.[5]

By January, 1906, the Intercollegiate Football Rules Committee had agreed to combine with the rulesmaking body set up by the December conference. After lengthy deliberations, the joint committee resolved upon a series of rules changes designed to establish a safer and more open game. These changes included the so-called ''ten-yard rule,'' which required a team to gain ten yards (rather than five as before) in three downs to keep possession of the ball—a proposal that Walter Camp had championed. Against Camp's opposi-

tion, the rulesmakers also introduced the forward pass, but in a form so hedged with restrictions as to ensure its infrequent use. A neutral zone was carved out on the line of scrimmage to allow the officials more opportunity to watch for infractions. Moreover, a central board of referees was instituted in response to the repeated criticism of poor or inadequate officiating. Other than efforts to limit the mass or momentum plays through the ten yard rule, no specific restrictions were placed upon the use of such plays, a shortcoming that contributed to the succeeding crisis of 1909-10.[6]

Satisfied that reforms had been attempted, most institutions were willing to give the new rules a trial in the fall. Indeed, the apparent progress in reducing injuries during the next few seasons placated the critics and silenced the football muckrakers. From a high figure of twenty-four fatalities in 1905, deaths dropped in successive years to 14, 15, and 10 (although the number of serious injuries fluctuated inconclusively). The intercollegiate sport, it seemed, had once again been restored to the equilibrium that it had enjoyed since the mid-nineties. While a few schools had dropped football or switched to English rugby, most stayed with the reformed version of the American game. One conference, the mid-western Big Nine, had attempted to address problems growing out of intercollegiate contests, such as coaching, eligibility, admission to games, and the length of the season. The vast majority of schools did not go this far, yet few complaints were heard during the next three seasons.[7]

In the fall of 1909, a series of highly-publicized injuries and fatalities abruptly shattered this brief calm. In a game with Harvard, Captain Eugene Byrne of the U. S. Military Academy eleven was fatally injured. Soon afterward, Midshipman Wilson of the Naval Academy suffered paralysis after being hit by a flying tackle. Then on November 13, 1909, University of Virginia halfback, Archer Christian, died from head injuries suffered in a line-bucking momentum play in a game with Georgetown. Both colleges called off the remainder of their seasons, and Georgetown contemplated abolishing the intercollegiate sport. Not long afterwards, the public school system in Washington, D.C. banned football, and the New York City schools would later follow suit. Such unlikely critics as General John Mosby, the old Confederate raider, castigated college fooball.[8] Even the college coaches and advisers like Camp viewed the uproar with growing uneasiness. Amos Alonzo Stagg, coach at the University of Chicago and former Yale player, wrote to his mentor, Walter Camp: “We have certainly got to do something, Walter, for the season has been a mighty bad one for a number of individuals as well as for the game.”[9] William Reid, former coach at Harvard, wrote from California that local sentiment favored replacing American football with the rugby version.[10]

Once again the brunt of the problem rested, as it had in 1905-06, with the presidents of the colleges and universities. Increasingly during the late nineteenth century, the college presidents had become public figures respected for

their wisdom and moral probity. Most presidents had welcomed the growth of football as a healthy substitute for the mayhem practiced by earlier generations of undergraduates. Students enthusiastically followed the intercollegiate games, and football helped to sustain the loyalties of far-flung alumni on whom the institution relied for various types of assistance. As a result, the heightened concern over football injuries created special problems for the presidents. Some such as Angell and McCracken had become disillusioned with the rulesmaking mechanism and had aided the insurgency movement in 1905 against the old committee. As spokesmen for public morality and guardians of their students' welfare, they had to address these problems so directly related to the reputation of their institutions and the image of higher education generally.[11]

Most of the presidents still wished to retain the existing game of intercollegiate football if the dangers could be reduced. Yet a few such as David Starr Jordan of Stanford outspokenly opposed football. Jordan termed the crisis of 1909 "the heaviest burden yet borne by higher education in America."[12] Referring to football as "Rugby's American pervert," Jordan condemned the practice of allowing interference in front of the ball carrier which had led to "manhandling" as he called the rough play.[13] He also complained of a rules system that allowed such questionable practices as professional coaching. He urged that "the farce of 'football reform' of five years before should not be repeated.''[14]

Even among those who had supported the game, critics often took football to task for its excesses. Chancellor James Day of Syracuse University, describing himself as a "friend of football," emphasized that the colleges could not "afford to have their men killed and maimed in a game that serves only an exceedingly small proportion of college men."[15] Other presidents such as Edwin Alderman of the University of Virginia echoed these criticisms, though Alderman pointed to the difficulty of eradicating the practice of rough play so firmly rooted in the American character. During the winter of 1910, the presidents of four eastern Jesuit schools met to consider whether to take action against the intercollegiate sport. Between two of them, the presidents of Georgetown and Fordham, there was strong sentiment for permanently abolishing the sport.[16]

In contrast to these officials, the president of Yale University, Arthur Hadley, remained a staunch supporter of football. Yale's success on the gridiron made it difficult to entertain the notion of radically altering the game. The Yale teams, masterminded by Walter Camp, regularly defeated their major opponents, including Harvard. By 1912, Yale had compiled the astounding record of losing only twenty-one times in 366 contests during a thirty year period. The Yale Athletic Union, of which Camp was the treasurer, had accumulated

a huge surplus, largely from football receipts. Walter Camp had even served on the search committee that had chosen Hadley as president of Yale. Predictably, Hadley continued to praise the game as healthy and democratic, even as the indignation over football injuries mounted in the fall of 1909. It was true, he acknowledged, that the game might receive too much attention in some quarters, but it was still safer than such reckless pastimes as automobiling and boating. "It may be that these evils [of football] will compel the colleges to forego the good derived from football," he mused, "but I am quite certain that they do not want its indiscriminate condemnation."[17] His counterpart at Princeton, Woodrow Wilson, who had led cheers and assisted in coaching while a young professor, commented that "football is too fine a game to abolish offhand."[18]

During the crisis of 1905-06, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton had not even considered the possibility of a joint policy on football reform. Persistent ill feelings between Harvard and Yale had been exacerbated by an article in the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine* calling upon Harvard to break off athletic relations with Yale. The article had decried the dominance of athletics at Yale and questioned the quality of its academic offerings. Even without this publication, any cooperation between the presidents would have proved difficult. Charles Eliot, the longtime president of Harvard, so heartily despised football that he refused to support efforts to reform the game.[19]

In the fall of 1909, Eliot retired and was succeeded by A. Lawrence Lowell, whose approach to athletics was more in line with that of Yale. On November 28, as the protests grew in intensity, Hadley wrote to Lowell suggesting an informal conference between the two presidents to discuss the football problem. The meeting was also to be attended by the respective coaches, Walter Camp of Yale and Percy Haughton of Harvard. When the two presidents met at Cambridge on December 7, they conceded that their responsibility extended to fatalities or serious injuries occurring in games between their respective schools. Beyond this formal definition of responsibility, Hadley and Lowell contemplated a more ambitious scope of action—the formation of a committee drawn from schools in the east which would investigate and offer recommendations on the question of football injuries. That this committee might overlap with the American Intercollegiate Rules Committee did not deter the two officials. Perhaps influenced by Camp, Hadley already distrusted the leadership of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association and feared the direction that reform might take under its aegis.[20]

The two presidents were particularly looking at a meeting of the New England college presidents in which they planned to take part. Hadley hoped that it would provide an opportunity to sponsor reforms. If Yale and Harvard proposed moderate changes, the other colleges might be willing to follow their

lead. Given the number of times that New England colleges had been humbled by Yale or Harvard, those institutions probably entertained a grudging respect for Hadley, Camp, and their football proteges from Harvard. Support from the regional colleges would lend a respectability to what might otherwise seem a self-interested gambit by the two football powers.

As it turned out, the conference gave its tentative approval by authorizing Yale and Harvard to establish a committee for the investigation of football injuries. However, the other presidents warned that the game of football was on probation and that unless the injuries were reduced, intercollegiate competition would not continue. They also reserved the right to accept or reject the proposals drawn up by the projected committee. Despite these limitations, Hadley now had a vehicle through which to undertake safe and appropriate reforms—ones that would address the causes of injury without drastically altering the nature of the game.

Initially, Hadley envisioned a committee that would include a number of colleges, presumably ones in New England. However, during his meeting with Lowell, the two presidents discussed the possibility of including Princeton in their plans. On the day before their meeting, Lowell received an unexpected letter from Woodrow Wilson, the president of Princeton. Wilson confided that he had long toyed with the notion of joint action by the "Big Three," and a recent article in *Harper's Weekly* had prompted him to write. As timely as Wilson's letter was, there is no evidence that he knew in advance of the Cambridge meeting, and when he learned of their parley, Wilson wrote to Lowell apologizing for his intrusion. Far from resenting Wilson's overtures, Lowell and Hadley seized the opportunity to bring their sister institution into the reform combine. Hadley enthusiastically made plans to meet with Wilson at their earliest opportunity.

At his conference with Wilson, Hadley was surprised to find that his colleague took a different, more alarmist view of the situation. According to the Yale president, Wilson seemed upset or "emotional" about the injury problems, though Hadley reported that he was "steadied" by the knowledge that Hadley and Lowell were not acutely worried by the number of football injuries during the 1909 season.[23] In Hadley's view, Wilson wanted to make sweeping demands concerning safety and threatened to abolish the game if such demands were not met. This approach was far removed from the moderate course that Hadley had contemplated. As it turned out, much of Wilson's immediate reaction had no effect on the plans to form a committee. Soon after his return to Princeton, Wilson entered their reform partnership. In the long run, however the addition of Princeton proved damaging to Hadley's designs, since it introduced an element of hostility toward Yale and undermined Hadley's ability to control the reform process.

In charting a course of controlled reform, Hadley was implicitly acknowledging a self-interest at odds with the majority of institutions in the I.A.A. In order to control the reform process, Hadley needed the support of Lowell and Wilson, for it would be necessary to rely upon the collective prestige of their institutions. Academically, Harvard followed by Yale and Princeton stood at the forefront of American education. President Charles Eliot of Harvard, Lowell's predecessor, had gained renown for himself and his institution by introducing the system of electives into higher education. Woodrow Wilson had recently attracted sympathy in his struggle against the eating clubs at Princeton. Even William Graham Sumner of Yale, Walter Camp's brother-in-law, was widely known for his Social Darwinist ideas. In short, the three institutions and their personnel had national reputations at a time when most colleges remained limited in their scope and outlook.

Athletically, the "Big Three" had long dominated intercollegiate football. In certain respects, the means of exploiting this gridiron prestige had been removed as a result of the crisis of 1905-06. Most of the schools engaged in college football had joined the Intercollegiate Athletic Association, whereas Harvard, Yale, and Princeton remained aloof. As a result of combining the old with the new rules committees, their representatives kept a measure of personal influence in the deliberative process, though the original committee had been diluted by the addition of the new members. Even this role had its drawbacks, for members of the old committee, especially Walter Camp, were identified with the old football and as a result regarded by some with suspicion.

As the rules controversy deepened, President Hadley viewed with growing alarm the dangers of uncontrolled reform or even abolition. Not long after his meeting with Lowell, Hadley declared himself in favor of moderate changes in college football. Like the heads of other institutions, Hadley felt the public pressure to reduce injuries. Unlike David Starr Jordan of Stanford or Chancellor James Day of Syracuse, he lacked a strong personal commitment to reform football. In December and January of 1909-10, his concern was dictated by immediate worries. If the rulesmakers did not find a solution, he was concerned that the blame might fall upon the presidents, "whether they had anything to do with it or not."[27] At the same time, Hadley was disturbed by the prospect of radical and irrational reforms. In January, 1910, writing to Walter Camp, he prided himself that they had "worked" public opinion around to the point where rational revisions would have adequate support. Yet he also reminded Camp that the key to their reform plan remained joint action with Harvard. It was essential to have the support of their sister school, "so that if the big committee [the American Intercollegiate Rules Committee] insists on irrational revision, we can go our own way and carry our undergraduates with us."[28]

Certainly Hadley had gained a stalwart ally in A. Lawrence Lowell, whose viewpoint differed so drastically from his predecessor and seemed to mirror that of Hadley . "Personally, I have never been so frightened at the risk of death," the Harvard President confided, ". . . as by the number of injuries and the fact that they take place in the presence of vast masses of spectators, which has in my mind a demoralizing influence.''[29] Whether Lowell any more than Eliot spoke for Harvard was another question. In December, Lowell revealed offhandedly to Hadley that the Harvard Corporation had decided to join the Intercollegiate Athletic Association and planned to send a representative to the upcoming meeting. According to Lowell, he had been unaware of the Corporation's intent, but doubted that it would interfere with their plans for sponsoring a committee to investigate injuries.[30]

More awkward for Hadley was the indpendent course of Princeton and its ambitious president, Woodrow Wilson. Not long after their meeting in New York, Wilson indicated that he viewed the committee as including only their three schools rather than other eastern institutions as Hadley and Lowell had intended. After the conference of New England colleges, however, it had become clear that the committee would indeed comprise only representatives of the Big Three. In the efforts to draw up a charge to the committee of three, major differences loomed up between Hadley and Wilson. The Princetonian declared that the preoccupation with injuries in the initial draft appeared ''technical and microscopic.'' Instead he proposed a broader mandate involving the abolition of mass play and creation of a game that was "more attractive.''[31]

Hadley responded to Wilson's proposals with barely-disguised irritation. Obviously, his colleague had not understood the purpose of their plans for a joint committee, which was to address specific sources of injury. Anything that deviated from that course of action, he warned, would fall outside the sphere defined by the Yale Corporation. Privately Hadley worried that Yale would be forced to break off negotiations with Princeton. This climate of suspicion extended to the committee members, who beside Camp included Percy Haughton of Harvard and Howard Houston Henry of Princeton. The Princeton representative, Henry, refused to take part until Walter Camp had given assurances that he would abide by the committee's decisions.[32] This atmosphere of distrust was magnified by the emotional burden that Wilson was carrying. During these months, Wilson was engaged in a desperate struggle over the location of the graduate school at Princeton. According to Arthur Link, "it had been evident since December 1909 that Wilson was suffering from severe nervous strain.''[33] Hadley's problems with the participation of Princeton may have been complicated by these external factors, some of which would lead to Wilson's resignation in 1910 and entry into New Jersey politics.

Facing such major obstacles, the joint committee might never have materialized. On February 5, 1910, as the national rules committee was going into session, the rudderless "Big Three" committee still had not met. The mercurial Arthur Hadley, who had originated the project, now showed little interest in its outcome. Repeated delays in completing the committee's charge finally led Woodrow Wilson to grow impatient and declare himself agreeable to whatever Hadley and Lowell should decide. At length, in early March, Lowell politely asked the Yale President if it were not time for their committee to begin its work. After all, Lowell reminded him, the other colleges still looked to them for guidance.[34]

Ironically, the reverse was more nearly the case. The joint committee of the "Big Three" would look for guidance to the national committee as the latter groped its way toward a solution of the rules' controversy. Although the committee was largely eastern, it showed no intention of waiting upon the "Big Three" for leadership. What did happen, however, was that members of the joint committee individually played an active role in the reforms—in particular Percy Haughton—by working with other members of the committee. As the discussions proceeded, two of the members of the joint committee, Haughton and Henry, were lined up directly opposite to the third, Walter Camp, on issues of the utmost concern. In the end, this division carried over to the joint committee, reducing the possibility that it would have any impact.

At the outset, the national rules committee had to confront a welter of conflicting ideas on the best way to revise the rules. To some of the rulesmakers, the injury problem seemed to grow out of mass or momentum plays. Others held the contrary view that the difficulties had arisen from open field features of the game, among them the flying tackle, exposed pass receivers, and unprotected punt catchers. Less obvious points singled out for attention included the length of the game and the rule that kept the players taken out of the game from reappearing. Anyone suffering from exhaustion or injuries who continued to play might be more susceptible to serious mishaps. On the subject of mass play, evidence offered to the group pointed to no easy resolution of the rules' controversy. Of the nine deaths on which information was available, four had occurred in "close play" and five on the open field.[35]

Despite the sentiments of a few rulesmakers, the committee did not attempt to determine whether play had become more hazardous during the previous season. Later, Arthur Hadley would seize upon the lack of a full inquiry into injuries as a reason for rejecting the committee's work. Instead, the rulesmakers set forth twenty sources of danger out of which came a profusion of suggestions. Some of these involved abolition or modification of the changes in 1906 such as the forward pass and neutral zone. Others included the abolition of the kickoff, elimination of the onside kick, division of the game into quar-

ters as well as plans to bunch the linemen five yards on each side of center or to separate each by five yards in order to extend the line of scrimmage. To simplify these choices, the various ideas were grouped together and voted upon by the committee, thereby paring down the initial offerings to a manageable number.

As their choices narrowed, the rulesmakers tended to favor changes in the rules governing the pass, outlawing of the tandem plays, and modification of the yardage to be gained for a first down to eight, twelve, or fifteen yards, perhaps with less yardage required inside the twenty-five yard line.There was also a general concern for improved physical conditioning of the players as well as better supervision and pay of the officials. The forward pass proved the main obstacle to agreement as some members led by Walter Camp wanted to confine it behind the line of scrimmage and others favored the removal of restrictions from it. Temporarily deadlocked, the committee adjourned with two sets of proposals containing opposite approaches to this controversial question. On May 3, the committee sided with the opponents of the pass by voting to limit it to the area behind the line. During the interim between meetings, the advocates of the pass mounted a concerted effort to rescue it from oblivion. A third set of proposals was framed by a subcommittee which included Haughton and Henry as well as William Roper of Princeton and Crawford Blagden of Harvard. What emerged from their report became the basis of the final changes enacted by the full committee at their next meetings. Significantly, this Harvard-dominated ‘‘Blagden Committee’’ report reinstated the forward pass and removed many of the restrictions from its use.[36]

In theory, the joint committee of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton still existed, although its makeup had become virtually indistinguishable from the larger committee. Both Percy Haughton and Howard Henry as alternates on the national committee were playing a central role in the reform process. Moreover, the distance between them and Walter Camp was considerable, and in the end Camp refused to sign the joint committee's report. This report, as Arthur Hadley complained, was little more than an endorsement of the rules changes enacted by the larger committee. At the same time, it accepted the rules that Camp had opposed such as the forward pass and the ban on the flying tackle. As such, the brief report was redundant and had no effect on the rules process.

Given the role that Haughton and Henry had played in the national deliberations, their approval of the rules changes would have been expected. Moreover, William Roper, the coach at Princeton and member of the Blagden committee, complained that Walter Camp had undermined the efforts to reform football. According to Roper, Camp was, only interested in safeguarding Yale's vested interest in the old intercollegiate game and that Hadley was strongly influenced by Camp.[37]

I think, if you pardon me for saying so, that President Hadley gets most of his information on football from Mr. Camp. Mr. Camp is violently opposed to the new rules for one single reason, because Yale's style of play is practically destroyed, there being no further pulling or pushing of the runner allowed. As this practically eliminates the old bucking game, at which Yale has been so proficient, and which to my mind is the dangerous part of football, naturally Camp is opposed to the rules as changed, not on the score of safety, but because his style of play will be greatly weakened.[38]

From the meeting of Wilson and Hadley in December, the relationship between Yale and Princeton had verged on open disagreement. It was true, as Roper pointed out, that the new rules would alter the style of play that Yale— and other members of the "Big Three"— had for more than two decades so expertly used. These changes included the abolition of mass formations or "bucking" along with removal of some restrictions from the forward pass and running by the quarterback. Seven men were now required on the line of scrimmage, and crawling by the downed ball carrier as well as the flying tackle were prohibited.[39]

It is not as clear, however, that either Camp or Hadley sought to obstruct these reforms. Other than his distaste for the forward pass, Camp was willing to accept reasonable changes that would diminish the opposition to football. In fact, he complained to Hadley that the rulesmakers had neither eliminated interlocking interference nor significantly opened up the game. Like Camp, Arthur Hadley remained dissatisfied with the rules' changes, both those by the national committee and the similar recommendations by Haughton and Henry. He objected that such changes did not deal satisfactorily with the cause of injuries. Woodrow Wilson also doubted the effectiveness of the new rules, but was willing to give them a trial. Lowell, in contrast, was optimistic, based on field trials at Harvard, and felt that the new rules would result in improvement. Even Walter Camp, somewhat contrary to William Roper's view, saw potential improvement in the changes, though he considered them inadequate to produce much open field running.[40]

Ironically, Hadley who had begun by advocating a moderate approach now professed to fear the results of inadequate measures. His criticisms of the Haughton-Henry report indicated that he anticipated a recurrence of the difficulties in 1909. To Percy Haughton, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the product of the joint committee's deliberations. It did not seem as if Haughton "quite appreciated the seriousness of the situation and the definiteness of the responsibility which Mr. Lowell and Mr. Wilson and myself incurred."[41] Hadley wanted a report, he claimed, that dealt specifically with the cause of accidents. If any fatalities occurred that fall, as he expected, the absence of such a report would be a serious handicap. It would frustrate him and Lowell in their attempts "to retain the game of football in the face of public clamor for its abolition."[42]

The mounting concern of Hadley represented a variation of the responsibility felt by most college presidents. As Hadley noted, their prominent position made it incumbent upon the presidents to respond to public and institutional criticisms. Many schools, such as Princeton and Yale, were less than a generation removed from being administered by clergymen. As a result of heightened moral expectations during the Progressive Era, the presidents also had an implied duty to confront the issues raised by intercollegiate football. In the case of Hadley, he had initially attempted to respond to the public concern without jeopardizing Yale's vested interest in the game. The fear of "irrational" changes or even abolition had resulted in attempts to control the process of change. However, the declining collective influence of the "Big Three" and especially the loss of influence by Yale preordained its failure. As the national crisis diminished, Hadley's anxiety grew more acute. Doubting that the new rules would prevent injuries, he anticipated another crisis that fall. He blamed the joint committee for failing to pinpoint the causes of accidents and for acquiescing in the inadequate measures of the national committee.

Viewed from the perspective of his earlier actions, Hadley's fears appear sometimes puzzling and inconsistent. After downplaying the gravity of the injury problem, the Yale president had calmly pushed for an investigation of the accidents only to lose interest and then to re-emerge with genuine concern after the rules were formulated. In part, this inconstancy may be attributed to Hadley himself. According to one author, he often displayed vagueness on "questions of purpose" taking pride "in a lack of consistent planning."[43] Though inconsistent, Hadley was not unintelligent, and his anxiety in the summer of 1910 represented a belated awareness of the dangers inherent in the football situation. The attempts at collective action had failed to influence the committee proceedings. By the end of the deliberations, a gap in policy divided Yale from her sister institutions whose representatives had supported the successful rules changes. The isolation of Yale—its lack of enthusiasm for the new rules and determination to remain outside the Intercollegiate Athletic Association—threatened to nullify its dwindling influence. Lacking a consistent policy, Hadley sought to safeguard his own reputation and that of the university. An investigation of accidents, even if on a "technical and microscopic'' scale, provided a buffer against the uncomfortable reality that neither Hadley or Yale had much interest in changing football nor the ability to shape the rules process.

Despite Hadley's forebodings, reduction of injuries in 1910 quieted the uproar over football. On the one hand, the new football was duller, lacking the scoring and usual excitement. Despite fewer restrictions, the forward pass was not widely used by eastern schools. Wilson's injunction to create a more attractive game—so irritating at the time to Hadley—had only been partially

accomplished. Later, as indicated by Notre Dame's dramatic use of the forward pass against Army in 1913, a new game had begun to emerge, one that more closely approximated Wilson's criteria. As the sport evolved, Yale's mastery vanished, and Percy Haughton's Harvard team dominated the eastern gridiron in the years before World War I. The rhetoric of abolition also disappeared. The memory of the football crisis of 1909-10 became dim, although the fears that it generated had been sufficient to prod the football establishment into what turned out to be far-reaching changes.[44]

The failure of the Big Three's joint committee reflected the impossibility of recreating a structure or a situation such as that embodied in the old pre-1906 committee. Despite periodic bickering, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton had enjoyed a virtual monopoly on making the rules before the crisis of 1905-06. Along with a few other eastern schools, they had basked in the charisma which only founding fathers are capable of engendering. In 1905-06, however, their collective power had been reduced by the rebellion against the rules' committee and formation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association. In 1909-10, Hadley and Lowell had convinced themselves that a larger measure remained than was actually the case and that the "Big Three" could close ranks on the reform question. In the end, their attempt to operate independently of the majority had a negligible effect, even though it was a harbinger of changes after the world wars. Ironically, Hadley's joint committee represented an incohoate version of what later emerged as the Ivy League. Such arrangements evolved out of agreements between the presidents of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, of whom Lowell was one. It is possible to see the abortive efforts of 1909-10 as the precursor of those later collaborations. Unable to control the national rules' process, the "Big Three" moved toward creating their own self-contained system, in which isolation could at last become a virtue.[45]

That football was in imminent danger of abolition or emasculation in 1909-10 as some evidently feared, appears unlikely. Yet this crisis caused an extraordinary stir, demonstrated by the time and effort devoted by the three presidents, their representatives, and the national rulesmakers to the problem of football reform. The threat of radical remedies—even abolition—had convinced administrators and rulesmakers alike that change was inevitable. The result was reflected in a series of reforms that ushered out the cruder elements of nineteenth century football and created a safer, sleeker, more interesting game. Elimination of the mass or line-bucking play and removal of some restrictions from the forward pass, coupled with the innovations in 1906 and several changes in 1912, completed the process of sanitizing football. The version that emerged from these crises was palpably more wholesome and acceptable to the public. The growing respectability of the "new football"

enabled the gridiron game, despite periodic backsliding, to maintain and enlarge its preeminence as the dominant collegiate sport.

Notes

1. The crisis of 1905-06 has received more attention, chiefly as a result of an article by Guy M. Lewis regarding President Theodore Roosevelt's role in that earlier series of events. Although the 1909 episode has received some attention in other writings of Lewis and John Hammond Moore, it has not been examined in as much detail. John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith in their excellent text, *Saga of American Sport,* do not mention the crisis of 1909-10, indicating an absence of secondary material on this episode. Guy M. Lewis, "Theodore Roosevelt's Role in the 1905 Football Controversy," *Research Quarterly,* 40 (December, 1969): 717-724. John Hammond Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913," *The Smithsonian Journal of History,* 2 (Fall, 1967): 49-63. John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith, *Saga of American Sport* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1978), pp. 229-249.

2. Guy M. Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle, 1869-1917" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: University of Maryland, 1964), pp. 75-80. Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913." Lucas and Smith, *Saga of American Sport,* pp. 239-242.

3. Hartford W. H. Powel, *Walter Camp, the Father of American Football: an Authorized Biography* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1926). J. H. Martin, "Walter Camp and His Gridiron Game," *American Heritage,* 12: 4 (October, 1961), pp. 50-55. Alexander Weyand, *The Saga of American Football (New* York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), pp. 18-28.

4. Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913," 51. Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle, 1869-1917," pp. 56-59. In January, 1902, such a bill to ban football was introduced in the South Dakota legislature following the death of a Sioux Falls Baptist College player in a game with the University of South Dakota.

5. Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913," 59-60. Lewis, "Theodore Roosevelt's Role in the 1905 Football Controversy," 723-724. Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle," pp. 251-254. John S. Watterson, "Institutionalizing Violence: College Football in the Progressive Era," paper presented at the Missouri Valley History Conference, Omaha, Nebraska, March 9, 1979.

6. Weyand, *The Saga of American Football,* pp. 82-83. Parke Davis, *Football, The American Collegiate Game* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), pp. 111-113. There were also rules against unnecessary roughness, reducing the playing time from seventy to sixty minutes and a requirement of six men on the line of scrimmage for the team with the ball.

7. "Minutes of the Conference of College Representatives," January 19, 1906, James B. Angell Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. The casualties in football during these years tend to vary according to the sources. See an article on fatalities in The Washington *Post,* November 14, 1909.

8. Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913." See Washington *Post,* November 14, 1909, for details of Archer Christian's death. For the banning of football in New York, see *New* York *Daily Tribune,* December 29, 1909. Mosby's tirade against football can be found in Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913," 63.

9. Amos Alonzo Stagg to Walter Camp, November 20, 1909, Walter Camp Papers, Yale University Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

10 W. T. Reid to Camp, January 28, 1910, Camp Papers.

11. Barton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism, the Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976), pp. 129-202. Bledstein discusses the ideals and social norms that led to the rise of the college presidents as arbiters of culture and morals. Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 276-277, 308, 411.

12. David Starr Jordan to Charles Van Hise, February 1, 1910, Football, Georgetown University Archives. Copies of this letter were widely circulated.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. Chicago *Evening Telegram,* December 30, 1909; Scrapbooks, Amos Alonzo Stagg Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Joseph Regenstein Library, Chicago, Illinois.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Arthur T. Hadley to Edward D. Page, November 16, 1909, Arthur T. Hadley Papers, Yale University Archives. Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle," pp. 66-68, 78.

18. The Chicago *Post,* November 19, 1909; Scrapbooks, Amos Alonzo Stagg Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Joseph Regenstein Library.

19. The *Harvard Graduates' Magazine,* 14 (December, 1905), pp. 216-223.

20. Hadley to Lowell, November 30, 1909; *Ibid.,* December 1, 1909, A. Lawrence Lowell Papers, Harvard University Archives. Hadley to Lowell, December 19, 1909, Arthur T. Hadley Papers, Yale University Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

21. Hadley to Lowell, December 8, 1909, Lowell Papers. Hadley to Lowell, December 19, 1909, Hadley Papers. There are indications that Hadley had misgivings about the meeting of eastern college presidents. Hadley to Camp, December 20, 1909, Hadley Papers.

22. Hadley to Woodrow Wilson, December 11, 1909, Arthur S. Link (ed.), *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (31 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966-79), XIX, p. 602. Woodrow Wilson to Lowell, December 6, 1909, Lowell Papers. Hadley had planned to visit William Howard Taft in Washington in return for a visit that the President had made at Yale; Hadley declined the opportunity to stop at Princeton on his return, fearing that something might happen at Yale before he got home that would alter the nature of the reform program.

23. Hadley to Lowell, December 23, 1909, Hadley Papers.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. For the astounding winning percentages of the Big Three, see Football Scrapbook, 1912, Harvard University Archives. Hadley to Lowell, December 19, 1909, Lowell Papers.

27. Hadley to Camp, November 30, 1909, Lowell Papers.

28. Hadley to Camp, January 4, 1910, Hadley Papers.

29. Lowell to George Harris, December 1, 1909, Lowell Papers.

30. Lowell to Hadley, December 21, 1909, Hadley Papers.

31. Wilson to Hadley, January 1, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers,* XIX, p. 699.

32. Hadley to Wilson, January 3, 1910, Hadley Papers. Lowell tended to agree with Wilson that the charge on injuries to the committee should not be specific, but did not want to include anything about making the game more attractive. Lowell to Hadley, January 13, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers,* XX, p. 12. Howard Houston Henry to Wilson, January 2, 1910, *Wilson Papers,* XIX, pp. 704-705.

33. Hadley to Lowell, January 27, 1910, Hadley Papers. The reference to spinal injuries was not included in the final draft of the charge or commission to the committee. Arthur S. Link, *Wilson, The Road to the White House* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 74.

34. Lowell to Hadley, March 7, 1910, Hadley Papers. The commission had taken an inordinately long time to complete. Lowell had agreed with Hadley in a January letter that "it is not well to hurry the Committee in a way that in their opinion would prevent their reaching a satisfactory result." Later, Hadley wrote to Wilson apologizing for a misunderstanding between Hadley and Lowell on the matter of preparing the commission. Hadley and Lowell had met on January 28, 1910, but there was no conference of the three presidents. For the final draft of the commission, see Lowell, Hadley, and Wilson to Camp, Haughton, and Henry, February 1, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers,* p. 72. The final draft did include a reference to spinal injuries.

35. "Records of the meetings of the American Intercollegiate Rules Committee," Camp Papers. The rules-makers adopted the approach of grouping their proposals and then voting on alternate sets of reforms.

36. *Ibid.,* pp. 27-30. Percy Haughton also appealed to Amos Alonzo Stagg for western support of their position, a factor that may have helped to save the forward pass. "To my mind," Haughton stated, "unless we retain the forward pass, it will be death to the game of football. . . ." He also urged Stagg to make certain that western members of the committee attended the next meeting. Percy Haughton to Amos Alonzo Stagg. May 7, 1910, Stagg Papers. Another factor in the eventual decision to retain the pass was the realization that the game might be less attractive and appealing to the spectator without it.

37. Howard Houston Henry to Wilson, July 5, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers, XX,* p. 547. For the involvement of Haughton and Henry as alternates on the national committee, see "Records of the Meeting of the American Intercollegiate Football Rules Committee," February 5 and 6, 1910, pp. 32, 55. The report of the joint committee was in the form of a brief letter from Haughton and Henry to Arthur Hadley, no date, Hadley Papers. An accompanying cover letter from Walter Camp to Arthur Hadley is dated June 17, 1910 and may be found in the Hadley Papers.

38. William W. Roper to Wilson, June 28, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers,* XX, p. 547. Camp also opposed the attempts to prohibit the flying tackle because he said it would be too difficult to enforce. There is no official indication that he opposed the efforts to do away with the pushing and pulling involved in "line bucking."

39. Weyand, *The Saga of American Football,* p. 94. Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle, 1869-1917," pp. 251-254. Camp and Haughton were appointed to a committee to amplify and codify the changes that the committee had agreed upon. "Records of the American Intercollegiate Football Rules Committee," pp. 58-59. Camp was simply referred to as "the editor" since he edited previous publications of the rules.

40. Camp to Hadley, June 21, 1910, Hadley Papers. Hadley to Haughton, June 23, 1910, Hadley Papers. Wilson to Haughton, June 23, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers,* XX, p. 540. Lowell to Hadley, August 26, 1910, Hadley Papers. Walter Camp also felt that the rules should be given a field trial and had attempted to see that such a trial was staged in the South and Midwest during the early spring. Hadley had earlier entertained a similar notion, but does not seem to have pushed it, perhaps because Camp was doing the same. "Interlocking interference" refers to players clasping each other. Camp tried to abolish such interference in working with Haughton and Carl Williams in the committee for codification. If the final version of the rules reflect his efforts, he apparently succeeded.

41. Hadley to Haughton, June 23, 1910, Hadley Papers. In fairness to Hadley, although he wavered on the issue of safety, he did at times appreciate its importance. After the 1909 season, according to Hadley, he had informed the football manager that any scheduling for the following year was subject to cancellation in case "the rules did not provide for increased safety." Despite his objections to the new rules, the games for 1910 were not cancelled. Hadley to Lowell, March 8, 1910, Hadley Papers.

42. Hadley to Haughton, June 23, 1910, Hadley Papers.

43. Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University,* p. 236. Veysey also emphasizes the importance of the presidential role in maintaining peace, unity, and the reputation of the institutions. *Ibid.,* pp. 308, 411. For a similar view of Hadley and his erratic leadership, see Marcia G. Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door, Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), pp. 126-127.

44. Moore, ''Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913,'' 62-63. In 1911, at the rules committee meeting, there was general satisfaction with the rules changes for 1910. New York *Sun,* February 4, 1911. At the rules meeting in 1912, this satisfaction was not as evident because it was felt that the game had become unbalanced and the offense needed to be strengthened, which would be accomplished at that meeting. "Meeting of the Foot Ball Rules Committee held at the Holland House. New York City. February 2nd, 1912." Camp Papers. Until about 1920, there were scattered complaints about the new rules and some talk of returning to the old rules, especially doing away with the forward pass. As a distinctly minority viewpoint, such sentiment was not formed into any organized movement. Hadley, and Wilson to Camp, Haughton, and Henry, February 1, 1910, Link (ed.), *Wilson Papers.*

45. The idea of the 1909-10 meeting as an early step in the evolution of the Ivy League arrangements is touched upon by Marcia G. Synnott, "The 'Big Three' and the Harvard-Princeton Football Break, 1926-1934," *Journal of Sport History,* 3: 2 (Summer, 1976), 189.