



Fight Fiercely

Harvard and Yale Create the First Great Football Rivalry

Gentlemen, you are now going to play football against Harvard. Never again in your life will you do anything as important. (Yale Coach Tad Jones, November 1923)

When he arrived on the Harvard campus in the fall of 1876, 18-year-old Theodore Roosevelt would have given most anything to become a member of the football team. But he was still a gangly youngster whose physical development had been slowed by childhood illnesses. The vigorous and robust man – cowboy, military hero, and outdoorsman – that Americans would admire as their 26th president had yet to emerge. Slender and awkward, slow afoot, and afflicted with severe myopia that required eyeglasses, young Roosevelt was definitely not football material. That November, however, he accompanied classmates to New Haven to cheer on the Crimson in the second football game ever played against Yale. What he witnessed was a hard-fought game, resembling English rugby, that was dominated by the Blues. Keenly disappointed by the loss, he wrote his parents, “I am sorry to say we were beaten, principally because our opponents played very foul.”

Perhaps memories of that game – when the Yale men “played very foul” – were in the back of his mind in 1905, when he summoned the football coaches from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton – college football’s indisputable “Big Three” at the time – to the White House to discuss the issue of excessive violence that had contributed to innumerable injuries and several deaths. Roosevelt had often contemplated the issue of unsportsmanlike behavior by football players and the high number of serious injuries. Even though the dangerous “flying wedge” formation had been made illegal in 1894 after just two years of mayhem, the “mass momentum” strategies that had become popular during football’s formative

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years remained in vogue. Players competed in a crude game where slugging, biting, kicking, and other forms of raw violence were commonplace and helmets and protective padding were not commonly worn. Newspaper accounts of college games often included a “hospital report.” It was no surprise that many college administrators and faculty advocated abolishing the game. In 1893, President Grover Cleveland banned the game at the two military academies due to excessive numbers of injuries that kept cadets and midshipmen from drill and class.

The more Roosevelt learned about the game, however, the more conflicted he seemed. He was, after all, among the enthusiastic advocates of “muscular Christianity,” a set of religious and social teachings that sought to create future male leaders by emphasizing programs that would test their courage, build physical strength, and develop high moral character. As one of the movement’s prominent early proponents, Henry Ward Beecher, put it, “Give to the young men in our cities the means to physical vigor and health, separated from the temptations of vice.”

Roosevelt believed a vigorous life was important in developing young men for future leadership roles. As a frail teenager, he had “built his body” with a stout regimen of weightlifting, calisthenics, boxing, and long hikes in the outdoors. That experience led him in 1902 to publish an article entitled “The American Boy” in which he urged parents to emphasize both the physical and moral development of their youngsters by providing opportunities for exercise and the playing of games in which they would be challenged physically and psychologically. “Now, the chances are he won’t be much of a man unless he is a good deal of a boy. He must not be a coward or a weakling, a bully, a shirk, or a prig. He must work hard and play hard. He must be clean-minded and clean-lived, and able to hold his own under all circumstances and against all comers.” With an eye to the development of America’s future soldiers, statesmen, and business executives, he wrote, “A boy needs both physical and moral courage,” that would prepare him for the challenges of adulthood when he would be “in the arena.” What better way to accomplish this than on the football field? “In short, in life, as in a foot-ball game, the fundamental principle is, Hit the line hard; don’t foul and don’t shirk, but hit the line hard.”

A persistent myth grew out of that October White House meeting in 1905, to which President Roosevelt summoned, among others, William Reid and Walter Camp, the head football men from Harvard and Yale. It was widely perceived – and the myth has endured in some quarters – that Roosevelt threatened to abolish football unless ways were found to

reduce the number of serious injuries. That widely held view, however, could not have been further from the truth. Rather, Roosevelt was fearful that unless substantial reforms were introduced to reduce violent mass momentum play, college administrators and faculty would ban the game from their campuses. TR knew that prominent university faculty members were advocating abolition, including the distinguished University of Chicago professor Shailer Mathews, who had condemned the game as “a social obsession – this boy-killing, man-mutilating, education-prostituting, gladiatorial sport.” For years, Roosevelt had fretted that the president of his own alma mater, Charles Eliot, would succeed in his campaign to convince the Board of Overseers to abolish football. Having learned of many instances of unsportsmanlike tactics, Roosevelt wanted to save the good by getting rid of the bad – in this case, by eliminating the foul play of the “muckers.”

Two broken noses during that pivotal season helped focus the president’s attention. The first belonged to his son Theodore, Jr, who, at a mere 150 pounds, had bravely held his position at the center of the Harvard junior varsity line against a larger and stronger Yale team in a very physical contest. In return for his courageous play “Teedie” received a powerful blow to the face that required reconstructive nose surgery. Harvard rooters felt that the Bulldogs had singled out the president’s son for special treatment, but standard strategy at the time was to concentrate powerful attacks upon the weakest spot along the opponent’s line. At 150 pounds, the president’s son seemed an inviting target. In November, during what had already become known simply as “The Game,” Yale’s James Quill flew through the air and smacked Harvard freshman Francis Burr in the face with a vicious forearm just as he was about to catch a punt. Most of the 43,000 fans who witnessed this blow in the open field were shocked as a torrent of blood spurted in the air from a shattered nose. The ensuing media coverage was heavy.

These events led to a major national conference in December at which representatives of more than 100 universities discussed the problems that threatened college football. The eventual result was a series of rules changes and administrative reforms that promised to reduce Saturday afternoon mayhem. Among the innovations announced was legalization of the forward pass (with several limiting conditions that would slowly be eliminated over the next two decades), and changes in blocking and tackling rules designed to encourage the use of deceptive running plays that moved the game away from pushing and shoving (and slugging) in the middle

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of the line. Behind Roosevelt's involvement in this effort, there undoubtedly remained lingering memories of his undergraduate days when Yale played "foul."

Yale and the Invention of Football

Up to this point, Yale had dominated college football. The Blues also enjoyed a lopsided 23–4 advantage in the annual contest with Harvard. This was a depressing statistic that good Harvard men could not abide. The Harvard–Yale football rivalry had grown naturally: the two universities had viewed each other as academic rivals for two centuries. Harvard was founded in 1636 to prepare ministers for the Massachusetts theocracy that the Bay Colony's early settlers envisioned, but doctrinal disputes within the New England faithful led to the creation of Yale in 1701 with a mission to educate Congregational ministers who would not be influenced by the unsettling "liberal" tendencies critics believed were being taught at Harvard. It was only fitting that these two educational rivals would meet in the first known intercollegiate athletic contest in August of 1852. This historic event, however, was not football, but rather a crew race held on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. The Harvard eight-oar shell defeated two Yale crews, with presidential candidate Franklin Pierce among the spectators.

Nineteenth-century college students engaged in many hazing and interclass competitions that were often violent. One of these activities included kicking and running with an inflated ball. Despite the bruises and bloodletting, these activities grew in popularity, and by the early 1870s Harvard students had taken to playing an informal game not much different from today's rugby. Yale students, however, favored a different game that was akin to today's soccer, in which the ball could be kicked, but not carried. Yale students created an informal association to play teams from Princeton, Rutgers, and Columbia, and for several years they invited Harvard to join in the competition. Disputes over acceptable rules precluded such an event. Harvard, exhibiting certitude (Yale students called it arrogance) that its rules were superior, insisted that Yale adopt its rules. Consequently, Harvard's first intercollegiate games played under the "Boston Rules" – that featured running with the ball and tackling – were with McGill and Tufts. Eventually the Yale students agreed to meet on Harvard's terms (a concession duly interpreted as a victory in Cambridge)

and on November 13, 1875, the two teams squared off at Hamilton Park in New Haven. An estimated crowd of 2,000 curious onlookers watched the Yale team, outfitted in blue shirts, attempting to adapt their play to unfamiliar rules. Wearing crimson shirts and brown knee breeches, the Harvard team dominated by a lopsided 4–0 score. The points were scored when a drop-kick after a touchdown went through the uprights (touchdowns during the early years did not register points, but merely permitted a team the opportunity to kick a one point goal) and three field goals that also counted for one point.

This initial game, informal and experimental as it was, nonetheless was a pivotal moment in the history of American sports. Observers from the several colleges that had initially opted for a free-flowing soccer-style format now decided that the more physical Harvard game was preferable. The following year, teams from Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia formed the Intercollegiate Football Association, and a major American sports institution was born.

Harvard students probably regretted their determination to require any contest be played by their rules because the Blues quickly adjusted and put together a juggernaut that became the preeminent college football program in America for the next three decades. Yale's domination of a game devised on the Harvard campus was virtually complete. Central to this remarkable period was Walter Camp. He grew up near the Yale campus and enrolled in the fall of 1876 at a time when Yale men were still smarting from their initial loss to Harvard. An all-round athlete, Camp became a big man on campus, pitching for the baseball team, rowing in the Yale shell, and running the hurdles on the track. He earned a position on the football team as a halfback and, at a time before eligibility limits were imposed, played for six years (four as an undergraduate and two as a medical student). He remained directly involved in Yale football until 1909 and, more than any other individual, exerted enormous influence not only upon Yale football, but also upon the structure of the game itself.

Camp's informal title of "Father of American Football" is not overstated. During this 34-year period, Yale won 95 percent of its games, losing only 14 times. After his playing days ended, Camp served as an advisor to the elected team captains who actually ran practices and supervised the team during games. Camp was the driving force behind Yale's domination of the game, and he also provided a formal structure to a complex game with his concisely written rules. A Harvard professor close to the game at the time is quoted by college football's leading historian, Ronald A.

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Smith, as saying: “I knew him as a master of football, whose advice – if the Yale captain would listen to it – meant inevitable defeat to the college I loved best.”

Elected team captain for his junior year, Camp became heavily involved in the annual negotiations with other representatives of the Big Three – from Princeton and Harvard – over the rapidly evolving rules by which the game was being played. Within a short period of time he emerged as a veritable czar of football rules and dominated this important endeavor until pushed aside in 1906 by a new generation of football coaches. In 1880, for reasons that remain unclear, he convinced the others to reduce the number of players from 15 to 11 and in that same year persuaded other schools to adopt a radical reform that would set American football apart from similar games.

Under existing rules, the ball was put in play by a “scrum” in which the ball was tossed into a melee of players who struggled to gain possession and then attempted to advance it toward the goal. The resulting helter-skelter nature of the game offended Camp’s sense of order and discipline, and he proposed that a team should gain possession after a kickoff, punt, or recovered fumble, and that each play would begin with the ball being put in play by a player positioned on the line of “scrimmage.” Initially, a lineman would tap the ball with his foot backward to a “quarterback,” but within a few years the snap of the ball between the legs was introduced. When the 1881 game between Yale and Princeton curiously deteriorated into each team holding the ball for each half by simply downing it after the snap (both teams believing that by earning a 0–0 tie they would win the mythical national championship), Camp introduced the “down and distance” concept; to retain possession of the ball, the team was required to gain five yards in three “fairs” (attempts to advance the ball, soon to be called “downs”). The “down and distance” concept required that the field be lined, thus prompting an observer to suggest that the field of play looked like a “gridiron.”

Camp’s influence was also seen in making the scoring system more accurately reflect the nature of the new game. Initially the game emphasized scoring by kicking the ball through the uprights, but in 1883 his reformed scoring system was implemented, which awarded four points for advancing the ball across the goal line, with a safety counting two points, and a goal kicked after a touchdown two points. A goal kicked from the field (today’s field goal) was credited with five points but the number of points subsequently was reduced to three over the next 20 years.

By the mid-1880s, Camp's leadership had produced a set of rules that established the foundation for today's American game of football, a game substantially different from the English games of soccer and rugby. The result was a much more controlled, less spontaneous, game than rugby or soccer. Spectators responded enthusiastically, and crowds upwards of 20,000 for "big games" became commonplace.

As early as 1879, Camp had introduced into the Yale system the running of interference (blocking) for the ball carrier, and, with the establishment of a line of "scrimmage," Camp began scripting offensive plays. Calling of signals soon followed. Camp assigned each offensive player a specific task on every play, with all 11 men expected to perform them in synchronized fashion – the correlation with the emerging assembly-line manufacturing system was not missed by sharp observers. Camp's changes fundamentally shaped the structure of the game, producing in effect a replication of innovations taking place in American industry in which organization, cooperation, specialization, and integration of many workers into the steady flow of the manufacturing process were being implemented in accordance with the ideas of manufacturing efficiency guru Frederick Winslow Taylor. In his public lectures and writings on football, Camp was given to using such business-like terms as "scientific football," "strategy and tactics," and "scientific planning." His objective was to create a game in which spontaneity and chance were reduced while emphasis was placed upon discipline and organized patterns of play. His game inevitably made the head coach central to the organization and strategies employed by a team, somewhat analogous to the duties of a corporate executive. It is not surprising that Camp's day job was as a manager of a New Haven clock factory (he had discovered medicine was not his calling) and that he often referred to the "work" that constituted the playing of Yale football. It was his ability to organize, plan, and implement his concepts that enabled Yale to operate one of the most efficient and successful football machines in the history of the game. Under Camp, college football became a metaphor for the emerging American industrial system of large factories and complex distribution systems.

When Camp pushed through the legalization of tackling below the waist in 1888, he did so with the specific intent of reducing the ability of ball carriers to evade tackles in open field, thereby encouraging the use of hard-hitting plays directed into the middle of the line. This led to intense hand-to-hand combat along the line of scrimmage. The ball carrier might be pushed through the line or even tossed over it by teammates.

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In order to gain the necessary five yards, conventional strategy dictated the use of brute force at the point of attack in the line, and the game became one in which players often interlocked arms to provide protection for the ball carrier. This was the heyday of brutal “mass momentum” football, and Yale was its most accomplished practitioner.

Thanks to Camp’s attention to detail, the annual game with Harvard became a one-sided affair, with the Blues winning consecutive games from 1880 until Harvard finally broke the tide with a 12–6 victory in 1890. In that memorable game, Harvard double-teamed Yale’s great lineman “Pudge” Heffelfinger on every play. The game was marked by ferocious play at the line of scrimmage. Yale’s 6’3”, 210 pound behemoth was so exhausted at game’s end that he had to be helped from the field of battle. Heffelfinger later said, “We went out there and murdered one another for 60 minutes. . . . The slaughter had been so fierce that it was a wonder any of us came out alive.” Harvard’s long-suffering fans thus thrilled to their team’s first undefeated 11–0 record, which more than a half-century later prompted the Helms Foundation to formally award the Crimson the 1890 national championship.

Over the next three years, Harvard went into The Game with impressive winning records – twice undefeated – only to lose in hard-fought, close games. Adding to the frustration of Harvard supporters was the fact that the Crimson failed to score a single point against the Blues during that span. Spearheading the Yale team was a diminutive fireball, 140 pound Frank Hinkey. He and his teammates were the beneficiaries of Walter Camp’s heavy emphasis on physical conditioning, and they blocked, tackled, and ran with intensity and proficiency. Hinkey was a quiet, reserved loner off the field, known to his teammates as “Silent Frank,” but when on the gridiron he became a fiery cauldron of hostility. He asked for and gave no quarter. As one sportswriter observed of Hinkey, “When he tackled ’em, they stayed tackled,” and “when he hit ’em on his blocking assignments, they stayed hit.” Walter Camp’s 1892 team, led by Frank Hinkey, was probably his best. That year, Yale enjoyed a season of superlatives, as the Bulldogs went undefeated, untied, and unscored against, overwhelming opponents by a combined score of 435–0.

Even Harvard’s surprise unveiling of football’s most fearsome play in 1892 could not prevent domination by Hinkey and the powerful Yale Eleven. The famous (or infamous) flying wedge play was designed by businessman and Harvard booster Lorin Deland, whose interest in military history had led to a fascination with Napoleon’s strategy of concentrating

force upon a single point of the enemy's defense. Deland devised a play that capitalized on a rule, then current, that permitted the kickoff team to tap the ball backward and take possession. Harvard practiced the play in secret throughout the fall, saving it to surprise Yale. With the score tied 0–0 as the second half began, Harvard faked a kick-off, and the kicker tapped the ball backward as two groups of linemen, starting 20 yards behind the fake kicker, began running at full speed to form a V-shaped formation, not unlike a flock of geese. The ball was tossed backwards to a running back as the wedge slammed into an isolated Yale defender. The play, which sparked enormous comment, only gained 20 yards because, as game reports indicated, a determined Frank Hinkey brought down the runner. The flying wedge failed to turn the tide of the lopsided series in Harvard's favor, as Yale went on to win the game 6–0, but its sheer brutal nature overshadowed the game's outcome. "What a grand play!" a *New York Times* writer exclaimed. "A half-ton of bone and muscle coming into collision with a man weighing 160 or 170 pounds!" The following season, most teams ran their own variation of the flying wedge, often beginning with the linemen starting their charge from several yards behind the line of scrimmage with the ball carrier surrounded by his teammates' human wedge.

Mayhem on the Gridiron: Football Imperiled

The flying wedge symbolized to the growing band of football critics the brutality of the game. Even the most ardent advocate of mass momentum play, Walter Camp, had to agree and the play was eliminated after just two seasons when he inserted a new rule for the 1894 season that required seven linemen to be set within a yard of the line of scrimmage before the snap. This negated the opportunity for blockers to pick up steam before reaching the line of scrimmage. That same year, the rules committee also made illegal the wearing of special belts outfitted with handles that running backs could grasp to be pulled forward by stout blockers.

The abolition of the flying wedge, however, failed to deter the growing level of violence that had come to characterize the Yale–Harvard game. That November, The Game was once again played at Hampden Field in Springfield, Massachusetts, a railroad center that provided a convenient destination for fans of both teams. Twenty-five thousand spectators,

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many waving crimson or blue pennants, braved bitter weather to witness what became known as the “Springfield Massacre.” After the teams swapped touchdowns, the game deteriorated into little more than a semi-organized brawl. A Harvard lineman jabbed his finger into the eye of Frank Butterworth, producing blood and obscuring his vision. In retaliation, Frank Hinkey reportedly jumped on the back of downed Harvard punt returner Edgar Wrightington, knees first, breaking a collarbone. The game official, Alex Moffat, was unable to keep the game under even a modicum of control, and injuries piled up on both sides as Yale played cautiously in the final minutes, protecting a 12–4 lead. The score of the game, however, was not the biggest story of the day, but rather the slugfest that unfolded. At one point, Yale tackle Fred Murphy struck Bob Hallowell after a play had ended, producing a bloody broken nose. The Crimson thereupon piled on the perpetrator, who was carried unconscious off the field on a stretcher and dumped unceremoniously along the sidelines. Other players were assisted off the field, wobbling from blows they had received to their unprotected heads. Several players were ejected and the “hospital list” after the game revealed the carnage: Harvard had lost three players to broken bones – Charlie Brewer’s leg, Wrightington’s collar bone, and Hallowell’s nose – while Yale had several men sent to the hospital for concussions, including Murphy who remained in a coma for several hours, to the point that false rumors floated around town that he had died.

Recriminations flew, insults were swapped, and newspapers published sensational accounts of the brutality of the game with an emphasis on unsportsmanlike play by both sides. Harvard officials demanded that Yale apologize for Hinkey’s illegal hit, but received no satisfaction, and Crimson fans took out their frustrations in letters-to-the-editor regarding referee Alex Moffat’s perceived incompetence. There was another casualty of the “Bloodbath of Hampden Field” – the administrations at both schools decided that the time had come to let emotions cool. It was agreed that all athletic contests between the schools be suspended and that The Game would not resume until two seasons had passed.

The “Springfield Massacre” gave Harvard President Charles Eliot renewed incentive to pursue his campaign to abolish football. Denouncing the game as “unfit for colleges and schools,” he fumed that football had become “a spectacle more brutalizing than prize fighting, cock fighting or bull fighting” because it “sets up the wrong kind of hero – the man who uses his strength brutally, with a reckless disregard both of

the injuries he may suffer and of the injuries he may inflict on others.” Despite his contention that “the game of foot-ball grows worse and worse as regards foul and violent play,” Eliot was unsuccessful in persuading the Harvard Board of Overseers to abolish the game. That fact pleased Harvard alumnus Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote Walter Camp that he had become “utterly disgusted” with Eliot’s anti-football crusade. Football, he maintained, taught young men that they had to be “manly” in order to succeed in the world after college. “I would a hundred fold rather keep the game as it is now, with the brutality, than give it up.” At Yale, however, where victorious seasons were commonplace and the game was firmly entrenched in the campus culture, abolishing the sport was never given serious contemplation.

And so the Harvard–Yale football rivalry survived the crisis of 1894. Despite modest reforms and the introduction of protective padding, including a leather “head harness” that players could opt to wear (most initially refused as a demonstration of their manliness), the game remained a particularly violent one. In 1904, newspapers reported that 18 high school and college players had died from injuries. The controversial hit in *The Game* in November of 1905 by Yale’s James Quill that leveled Francis Burr resulted in renewed furor over the game’s ethics and rules. The result was that Walter Camp’s obstinate opposition to opening up the game, including legalizing the forward pass, was overcome by a younger group of coaches who recognized that reform was essential to quiet those who would abolish the game as well as to make it more exciting for spectators.

Thus in 1906, the game took on a new look. A few innovative teams attempted forward passes, and players no longer could push, pull, or throw a ball carrier through or over would-be tacklers. The neutral zone was established, and the team in possession had to advance the ball ten yards to retain possession instead of five, thereby encouraging more creative plays away from the center of the line that might produce long gains. The game was evolving into one where speed, skill, and deception began to replace reliance upon sheer physical force. Fans were thrilled, and coaches responded by opening up their offenses with all sorts of new wrinkles.

Simultaneously, a vanguard of paid professional coaches now took control of the game away from the students – yet another nod to the managerial revolution that was reshaping American business. Walter Camp remained a national icon, but his influence had been diminished as the

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game moved away from his mass momentum style to one that was more open and dynamic – and definitely more exciting.

Camp's influence at Yale, however, remained strong. Throughout most of his tenure at Yale, he had exerted his authority by consulting with the team captains as an informal advisor, often dispatching his wife to practices to provide him with a direct report. In 1909, however, with his power on the rules committee stripped away and his business responsibilities increasing, Camp ended his active role as team advisor. He remained close to the game, however, by continuing to write extensively about football in prominent magazines and newspapers as well as selecting his annual All-American team, a practice he had begun in 1889. He remained active in this capacity until his death in 1925.

During his long association with the Yale football program, Camp also applied his business acumen to his role as Treasurer of the Yale Financial Union that oversaw the funding of all Yale athletic programs. He managed to quietly squirrel away monies that paid for the construction of the Yale Bowl, which opened in 1914 with a seating capacity of 70,000. The Yale Bowl, constructed with innovative engineering techniques utilizing structural steel and reinforced concrete, had more than twice the seating capacity of the neo-classical Harvard Stadium that had opened to public acclaim in 1903. The Yale Bowl, functional and enormous, established the template for construction of the many football stadiums that were built during the 1920s. Massive structures with permanent seating for 50,000 or more spectators appeared on flagship university campuses across the nation. These monuments to football as mass spectacle ironically led to the decline of Harvard and Yale as national honors contenders. The growing professionalism of this alleged amateur sport – which placed coaches under enormous pressure to produce winning teams in order to fill the new stadiums – can be traced to Walter Camp's pervasive influence in transforming what was once a simple game organized and played by college men into a highly structured economic enterprise of considerable size and influence.

Harvard as Football Factory

For a time, despite the size of their stadiums, with the attendant emphasis on winning teams, both Harvard and Yale administrators attempted to maintain a patina of innocent amateurism by resisting the hiring of

professional coaches, adhering instead to the system of elected team captains operating the program. Out west, however, former Yale All-American end (1889) Amos Alonzo Stagg had established the prototype of the professional coach when he was named head coach and Director of the Department of Physical Culture at the newly established University of Chicago in 1892. In appointing Stagg, President William Rainey Harper established a pattern that would become all too familiar when he offered Stagg a lucrative position that included a tenured associate professorship and a lofty salary of \$2,500. This munificent pay package exceeded those of most deans and senior professors. Harper believed that a great university required a winning football team. "The University of Chicago believes in football," he said. "We shall encourage it here." And Stagg delivered, developing a powerful team that enjoyed two decades near the top of the nation's college football heap between 1905 and 1925.

The idea of employing a professional coach was not part of the amateur athlete ethos that existed at elite eastern football schools. But the desire to maintain a winning program forced a change. By tradition, squad members elected an experienced senior to the position of captain who ran the team, sometimes receiving advice from a volunteer advisor who was a former player – someone like Camp – who desired to continue his involvement with the game. By the onset of the new century, however, the concept of paid professional coaches was catching on. The early success that Stagg enjoyed at Chicago, capped off in 1905, before 27,000 enthusiastic Chicago spectators, with a stirring 2–0 victory over the powerful Michigan team coached by another innovative professional coach, Fielding "Hurry Up" Yost, had gotten everyone's attention. Other professional coaches were also making their mark: Glenn "Pop" Warner at Cornell and the Carlisle Indian School, John Heisman at Georgia Tech, and Foster Sanford at Columbia and Rutgers.

A growing recognition that the complexity of football required more experience and technical knowledge than an elected senior captain might provide, even if assisted by alumni advisors, prompted disgruntled Harvard boosters – tired of enduring the annual embarrassment to Yale – to dig into their pocketbooks to fund the hiring of the Crimson's first professional coach in 1908. Percy Haughton had been named to Walter Camp's All-American second team in 1898 as a Harvard tackle, and, after coaching briefly at Cornell, had settled into a business career that returned him to Boston where he became a volunteer Harvard advisor-coach. When he accepted an offer to assume a full-time position as coach, it had

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become clear that Harvard was taking its football seriously. During his first season in 1908, Haughton established himself as a skilled tactician and strict disciplinarian. He whipped his charges into exceptional physical condition and introduced new formations and plays that challenged conventional coaching wisdom. He also developed the prototype of a corporate-style organization for a college football program, with himself as CEO. He built a staff of several assistants who specialized in different aspects of the game. Because his teams initially lacked the size of their opponents, Haughton relied upon speed and guile, introducing such innovations as a roving middle linebacker and the “mousetrap” block that permitted a defensive lineman to penetrate the line only to be leveled by a blocker from his blindside, thereby opening up a gaping hole in the defensive line. He put his backs in motion, used unbalanced offensive lines to confuse defenses, and introduced a five man defensive front (instead of the standard seven) with three or four linebackers. He even placed the quarterback under center to take a direct snap (in anticipation of the T formation), often faking in one direction before handing the ball off to a running back running a counter-trap play. One sports writer concluded, “Rivals chase will-o’-the-wisps, only to discover somebody else has the ball.” Although Haughton had a reputation for stoic aloofness, before the first Yale game he fired up his team by wringing the neck of a stuffed toy bulldog during a pre-game oration, leading to widespread but unfounded rumors that he had actually strangled a live pooch. Such was the emotion generated by *The Game*.

After throttling the stuffed bulldog, Haughton demonstrated that he was not a conventional football man. At a time when substitutions were rare (a player who left the game could not return), he sent into the fray a left-footed drop-kicker, Vic Kennard, who had not appeared in a game before. Kennard’s game-winning drop kick from the 25 yard line sailed through the uprights when the onrushing Yale linemen missed blocking the attempt as they threw themselves toward Kennard’s right side. At a time when field goals counted four points, Haughton’s deceptive play ended a six game losing streak to give Harvard a glorious upset victory.

Harvard football never enjoyed a greater span of time than the nine years Percy Haughton coached the Crimson. His teams went undefeated between 1911 and 1915, with only a scoreless tie with Yale in 1911 to tarnish the slate. Four straight wins (1912–15) over Yale created considerable buzz on the Harvard Yard and this streak included two lopsided

routs: 36–0 in the Crimson’s first visit to the Yale Bowl in 1914, and the worst defeat in Yale history the following year, a glorious 41–0 thumping at Harvard Stadium. That blowout prompted a *Boston Globe* reporter to gush, “Never before in a big game has the winning team played the better football in every department of the game or the loser been so hapless to stave off an overwhelming defeat.” Haughton departed for military service in 1917, and following the war he returned to the business world briefly before taking the head coaching position at Columbia in 1923. Harvard fans were aghast that their former coach would sign on to coach a competitor, until they heard the details. The Lions, having endured many a losing season, agreed to pay Haughton a whopping \$20,000. Unfortunately, Percy Haughton did not live long enough to enjoy his lofty salary, dying of a heart attack at the age of 48 in 1924.

Standoff: Yale and Harvard in an Era of Parity

After Walter Camp moved away from his role as football advisor in 1909, Yale continued for a time with the captain/voluntary field coach system, but the turnaround produced by Percy Haughton at Harvard demanded an equivalent response, leading to the appointment of Yale’s first paid coach in 1913. The choice was Howard Jones, a star running back of the undefeated 1905–7 Yale teams that compiled a combined 28–0–2 record and claimed a national championship in 1907. Jones served as the unpaid graduate advisor in 1909 when Yale powered its way to a 12–1 record and another national championship (including a rare victory over Haughton, 8–0). However, Jones spent only one season on the Yale payroll: his team played through a lackluster 6–3–1 season, and he departed for the University of Iowa. Jones’ departure indicated that the football pendulum was beginning to swing westward to large public universities that had plenty of money, were constructing large stadiums, and had ready access to large recruiting pools in which high academic achievement was not a major consideration. Jones ultimately ended up at the University of Southern California in 1926, where he coached until 1941, winning seven Pacific Coast Conference championships and five Rose Bowl contests, while laying claim to four national championships.

In 1916, Yale hired his brother Thomas “Tad” Jones, the All-American quarterback of the undefeated 1905–7 teams. After serving in the Great War, Tad Jones returned to New Haven in 1920 where he

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coached until 1927. His teams enjoyed undefeated seasons in 1923 and 1924, and he compiled an impressive career record of 60–15–4. His teams defeated Harvard in six of nine games, including a stirring 6–3 victory over the Crimson in 1916 before an overflow crowd estimated at 80,000 in the Yale Bowl. They watched James Neville score on a short run, which was the only touchdown the Bulldogs managed against a Haughton-coached team during his nine years at Cambridge.

Tad Jones also coached his team to one of the most memorable Yale victories in The Game. In 1923, his undefeated team traveled to Cambridge in hopes of capping an undefeated season, but a torrential downpour that began early on Friday continued throughout Saturday afternoon. One reporter said the field had become “two inches of slime,” while legendary sports writer Grantland Rice called the field “a gridiron of seventeen lakes, five quagmires, and a water hazard.” The game was highlighted by numerous fumbles and much slipping and sliding – and an astounding 54 punts. Yale sealed another national championship when the appropriately named Raymond “Ducky” Pond scooped up a first-quarter fumble and slogged his way 63 yards for a touchdown.

For any rivalry to be sustained over a long period of time, both teams have to win their share of the games. Following the hiatus created by the First World War, the Harvard–Yale game took on increasing significance because the contests between two of the nation’s oldest and most prestigious universities were usually hard-fought, close affairs. That both schools ended their season with this special game meant that bragging rights derived from a big win resonated wherever alumni from the two schools interacted until the next autumn adventure. The proximity of the two campuses added to the mix, as did the continued competition in all things academic. Success of alumni – in business, the professions, cultural affairs, and politics – meant that good-natured joshing and bragging about The Game occurred whenever Yale and Harvard alumni encountered each other. Over the years, important annual alumni events were built around The Game, and proud Blues and Crimsoners routinely set aside the third Saturday in November on their calendars to renew their campus ties. Traditional game week luncheons, banquets, and receptions became part of the social scene, and with the advent of tailgating in the latter decades of the 20th century, game day outdoor parties near the stadium – with elaborate food, drink and festive decorations – took on an importance that made more than one observer conclude that the football game existed only as an excuse for elaborate and enthusiastic socializing.

The Pleasant Reality of De-Emphasis

In some respects, The Game took on even greater significance after both schools made the decision to abandon any pretense of fielding nationally competitive teams by agreeing to membership in the Ivy League. The realization that neither school could maintain both their lofty academic reputations and a nationally competitive football program began to settle in during the 1930s when both teams fell upon relatively hard times. Yale claimed a disputed national championship in 1927 with a 7–1 record, but neither university ever came close again. Between 1880 and 1927, however, Yale won the mythical national championship a resounding 15 times, while Harvard claimed a not-so-inconsequential eight. Harvard played in the only postseason game – the 1920 Rose Bowl, defeating Oregon 7–6 – but three years later both schools announced that they would no longer accept postseason bowl invitations. During the 1920s and 1930s the football spotlight moved away from the private eastern universities, never to return.

By the end of the 1920s, the stature of eastern football had greatly diminished, as the game became ever more important in the South, Midwest, and West. Private eastern schools continued playing a schedule not unlike they had always played, seldom moving beyond the narrow band of seaboard states from Maryland to Massachusetts to find opponents. The closest they came to playing nationally ranked teams would be the two military academies at West Point and Annapolis. New national powers, such as Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State, Louisiana State, and California never replaced such traditional opponents as Cornell, Dartmouth, Northeastern, Tufts, Maine, Connecticut, and Wesleyan on the Yale and Harvard autumn slates. Yale's last moment in the national football spotlight occurred when end Larry Kelley and running back Cliff Frank captured back-to-back Heisman trophies in 1936 and 1937, but the domination of the national media by New York City journalists and the preponderance of east coast voters likely skewed the selection process. Yale's other top player of that era typified the downward trajectory of the competitive quality of the program, when the talented but slightly built back Albie Booth, who weighed a mere 140 pounds, was the team's standout player between 1929 and 1931. In his final game, the popular "Little Boy Blue" became an instant campus hero when he drop-kicked a field goal in the waning minutes to beat Harvard 3–0.

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The Great Depression had little discernable impact on the popularity of college football. Unlike professional baseball, once the economy bottomed out in 1933, good attendance not only returned, but also increased until the Second World War. Despite many outspoken critics who argued that football had lost its innocence due to recruiting scandals and academic dishonesty, by the mid-1930s the game seemed to be gaining in popularity. Many universities sought to become “big time” by hiring famous coaches and arming them with large budgets. A wave of new postseason bowl games designed to promote tourism added to the mix – the Orange, Cotton, and Sugar became the best known along with the older Rose, but several other fruit, flower, vegetable, and climate games were added to the postseason bowl mix, including the Celery, Salad, Flower, Grape, Orchid, Pineapple, and Sun. These were further supplemented by the East–West and North–South all-star games. The result was that during the 1930s many universities decided to make the leap into the ranks of nationally competitive football programs, although many would opt out of big time football during and shortly after World War II. For Yale, Harvard, and other eastern private schools with relatively small enrollments and traditionally high football expectations, the costs of continuing to compete with major state universities – with their much larger enrollments and aggressive booster organizations – became financially and philosophically too great to stay in the hunt for national gridiron honors.

In 1935, the Southeastern Conference decided to quit disguising its payments to athletes under such subterfuges as “leadership grants” and “general activity scholarships,” and announced it would offer tuition, board and room stipends strictly on the basis of athletic ability. Although other conferences, such as the Southwest, Big Ten, and Pacific Coast, expressed shock at such a flouting of the amateur ideal, they knew full well that they were engaged in similar forms of subterfuge to funnel monies to football players. Many schools had long provided “jobs” on campus for athletes which were the butt of jokes: Governor Martin L. Davey of Ohio created a brief sensation in 1935 when he candidly noted that most members of the Ohio State football team – heralded as a preseason favorite for the national championship – were on the payroll of the Ohio Highway Department. In 1929, the Carnegie Report had exposed the ethical shortcomings of college football, and throughout the 1930s such prominent journalists as John Tunis and Paul Gallico wrote extensively of

academic and financial dishonesty in college football programs. Following the Second World War, academic reformers sought to bring this era of excess to a close, but the so-called Sanity Code established by the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1948 that attempted to eliminate all financial support for athletic participation lasted for less than two years before it was scuttled. Attendance boomed with the postwar economy – a record 104,000 attended the 1947 game between Southern California and Notre Dame in the Los Angeles Coliseum – and many teams routinely played before more than 70,000 spectators. The introduction in the early 1950s of two-platoon football added to the quality of play because players could now concentrate on developing only those skills required of their specialized positions. Unlimited substitution, however, meant that teams now had to field separate teams for offense, defense, and kicking, which consequently mandated the necessity of funding much larger squads – and budgets to support them.

All of these factors led to long and serious discussions about the viability of big-time football on many campuses. In 1939, the once-powerful University of Chicago had stunned the sports world when it dropped football, and, after the Second World War, many private institutions – including San Francisco, Villanova, Fordham, Washington University, Georgetown, and Western Reserve – dropped the game for financial reasons. This trend greatly affected the thinking on the campuses in Cambridge and New Haven. Several years of discussions led to the signing of the Ivy Group Accord in 1945 by eight prestigious private eastern institutions. The Accord affirmed the primacy of academic integrity and the importance of strictly controlling the cost and influence of football programs. Of this group, seven institutions made the decision to abandon any pretense of competing for national football honors – Dartmouth, Brown, Princeton, Columbia, Cornell, Yale, and Harvard; for a brief time, the University of Pennsylvania attempted to continue its effort to mount a nationally competitive program, but pressure from the other seven, and a power play in 1952 by the NCAA forced Penn to forgo a lucrative television contract with the DuMont network. The fighting Quakers had no choice but to fall into line. By 1956, the Ivy League had been formalized. It was no small thing for these fiercely independent private institutions to agree to bend to an external authority such as an athletic conference, but now they did so with gusto, agreeing to abolish spring football practice, curtail the size of coaching staffs, eliminate all financial

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aid based on athletic abilities, require the same admission standards for potential athletes as for non-athletes, forbid wealthy alumni to “sponsor” a needy student who could make tackles or throw the deep pass, and prohibit postseason bowl appearances.

For Yale and Harvard, the days of national football glory were over. Although there were the expected complaints, within a few years for the vast majority of students, faculty, and alumni, the new orientation provided a source of unique pride that a Nebraska or Alabama fan could scarcely comprehend. Football, still played with enthusiasm and at a respectable level, remained a part of campus life, but it was now merely one small part of a comprehensive educational experience. Winning seasons and conference championships remained worthwhile goals, but football was but one of many extracurricular activities that were open to the student body. In the long run, de-emphasizing football meant that a wide spectrum of intercollegiate sports was made available to students. When women students were admitted at a time that coincided with the advent of Title IX and the establishment of competitive women’s sports programs, the Ivy institutions were in the forefront of sponsoring a large number of women’s athletic programs. With their athletic budgets folded into the overall institutional budgets, Harvard and Yale offered a wide range of intercollegiate sports that numbered about 30, far more than many institutions compelled to allocate the bulk of their athletic budget to maintaining a Division I-A football program.

During his undergraduate years in the late 1940s, Harvard mathematics major Tom Lehrer aptly captured the spirit of the new approach to Harvard football with his enormously popular satirical song “Fight Fiercely, Harvard,” which became a popular parody extolling the new Ivy League ethos.

Although administrators felt the sharp sting of alumni carping, over the years those sour notes dissipated and the institutions proceeded to retrofit their athletic programs. Costs were contained, the much-maligned term of “student-athlete” took on special meaning, and campus presidents were assured that their institutions would not be embarrassed by a recruiting or academic fraud scandal such as those that had long bedeviled administrators. Very quickly, a new spirit of competition among the eight Ivy schools emerged, and for more than half a century the same eight schools have competed on a more-or-less even playing field, with the level of competition remaining high but with the win-at-all-costs mentality absent.

“The Game” Flourishes

This new direction and philosophy meshed well with the continued quest for academic leadership that characterized Yale and Harvard between 1945 and the present. The restructuring of their football programs, if anything, served to intensify the rivalry between the two elite institutions. Significantly, almost eerily, the number of wins and losses has remained almost equal, and both schools have benefitted from long tenures by distinguished coaches. The quality of players has been evenly distributed, and a few have even enjoyed outstanding careers in the National Football League – running backs Chuck Mercein and Calvin Hill of Yale and end/punter Pat McNally and center Matt Birk of Harvard. Rather than talking about national rankings, bowl appearances, and the number of players drafted by the NFL, sports publicists have been able to report some of the nation’s highest graduation rates and write about the number of players who moved on to outstanding careers in medicine, business, law, government, and other professions.

It is a difficult task to pick the single most compelling game from the more than 120 games that have been played in college football’s longest running and most colorful rivalry. Harvard traditionalists might point to the big upset of 1908 that new Coach Percy Haughton engineered or perhaps the recent stirring comeback of 2005 when the Crimson rallied from an 18 point deficit in the third quarter to win a heart-thumping 30–24 victory that required three overtime periods. That distinction, however, has to belong to the 1968 game played before a raucous overflow Harvard Stadium crowd. The pre-game hype was extensive as both teams came into The Game undefeated and untied, a delightful situation that had not existed since the 1920s. The Game would decide the Ivy League championship.

Experts handicapped the game as one of contrasting strengths. Under head coach Carmen Cozza, Yale operated a potent offense that was led by two of its greatest offensive players of all time, running back Calvin Hill and quarterback Brian Dowling. Hill would go on to a distinguished professional career with the Dallas Cowboys, but it was Dowling who was the star performer. He had turned down scholarship offers from Ohio State and Notre Dame (and an estimated 100 other schools) to attend Yale. He had never lost a game as quarterback since the seventh grade. His sensational exploits in leading Yale to two previous undefeated



Figure 1.1 Many leading US figures played in the Harvard–Yale series. On a snowy November day in 1955, a future senator, tight end Ted Kennedy, is unable to haul in an overthrown pass in the end zone during his team’s 21–7 loss to Yale. © Bettmann/CORBIS

seasons – running, passing, play-calling, improvising on broken plays – had resulted in his becoming a larger-than-life icon on the New Haven campus. The game was played as one of the most turbulent years in the nation’s history was winding down. The stunning Tet Offensive by Ho Chi Minh’s forces in Vietnam, the shocking retirement announcement by President Lyndon Johnson, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr, and Robert F. Kennedy, massive anti-war protests, violence on the streets of Chicago during the Democratic convention, sustained angry demonstrations on college campuses, and a close presidential election had all contributed to a national mood of fear, anger and uncertainty. The mood on both campuses in 1968 was consumed by the times. At Yale, many students found a modicum of relief by following the daring exploits of Brian Dowling and rallying behind the Bulldogs. Dowling was even prominently featured in a cartoon strip in the *Yale Daily News* drawn by undergraduate Gary Trudeau (’70). “B. D.” first appeared as a gangly quarterback barking signals in the huddle wearing jersey number 10 in a cartoon series entitled “Bull Tales.” Later on, “B. D.” would become a central figure in Trudeau’s nationally syndicated *Doonesbury* cartoon strip, first as a hard-nosed political conservative with a football helmet firmly implanted on his head, later as a college football coach at academically anemic Walden University, and finally as a tragic and vulnerable American soldier who lost a leg in a roadside bombing in Iraq.

As the 1968 Big Game approached, it was clear that Harvard’s offense was no match for the potent Bulldogs; it had sputtered and wheezed for much of the year. Coach John Yovicsin’s strong defense, however, had frustrated opponents all season long, and it provided a formidable foil to the explosive Yale offense. Dubbed the “Boston Stranglers” by the media, a stout defense was clearly the strength of the Harvard team.

It was thus a scintillating offense against a stifling defense in The Game played on a crisp and clear New England day in mid-November. More than 40,000 spectators squeezed into Harvard Stadium. Scalpers had a field day and game officials estimated they could have sold 100,000 tickets for the match that would decide the Ivy championship. This was beyond question the biggest Big Game in decades, indicative of the new spirit that had coalesced around the Ivy League commitment to true amateur athletics.

From the opening kickoff it seemed as if the handicappers, who made Yale a seven point favorite, were right on the money. Dowling more than lived up to his reputation, leading Yale to a comfortable 22–6 lead



Figure 1.2 “B. D.” is on the loose! Star Yale quarterback Brian Dowling (10) takes off on an option play against Harvard during the final quarter of his last game as a senior. In the forefront is overlooked receiver, Calvin Hill (30). Yale football experts believe Dowling and Hill to be the two best players ever to wear the Blue and White of the Bulldogs. Reproduced by permission of Sabby Frinzi and Yale University Athletic Department

heading in to half-time. Late in the first half, though, Yovicsin had removed quarterback George Lolich because the offense had gained only six yards. He inserted junior Frank Champi, who had taken only a few snaps all season. It seemed to be (and probably was) a desperate gamble, but it paid off. Champi immediately led Harvard on a long drive that ended with his first touchdown pass, but the extra point failed on a mishandled snap.

Midway through the third quarter, Champi engineered another touchdown drive, but Dowling rallied the Bulldogs to a seemingly commanding 29–13 lead when he scored on a 15 yard dash around end. Late in the fourth quarter, Dowling seemed poised to put the game away when

he drove the Bulldogs deep into Harvard territory, but a fumble at the 14 yard line gave Harvard a slim glimmer of hope. Two timely Yale penalties, a 26 yard gain when Champi flipped a lateral in desperation to a tackle, a Champi touchdown pass to end Bruce Freeman, and a successful two point conversion (made on a second attempt thanks to a facemask penalty) pulled Harvard within eight points, 29–21. Just 42 seconds remained on the scoreboard clock. As if following a Hollywood script, Yale mishandled the onside kick, and Champi moved his team toward the end zone, aided by another facemask penalty. From the 20 yard line he threw two incomplete passes, but a draw play moved the ball to the six yard line. Champi was sacked on the next play but managed to call time out with three seconds left on the clock. A ferocious Yale rush spoiled the play sent in from Yovicsin, but a desperately improvising Champi managed to elude several pass rushers and found Vic Gatto open in the corner of the end zone: Yale 29, Harvard 27. On the extra point attempt, Champi again eluded the furious Yale rush, looked in vain for an open receiver, and finally threw a strike to end Pete Varney. Ecstatic Harvard fans swarmed the field and, as the *Harvard Alumni Magazine* later reported, “Strangers embraced, full professors danced, and the Yale people put their handkerchiefs to the use for which they were intended.”

On Monday morning, the *Harvard Crimson* unveiled its most memorable headline: “Harvard Beats Yale, 29–29!”

Yale’s dream of an undefeated season ended in shock. Brian Dowling’s personal streak of 67 games without a loss extending back to his junior high school days in Cleveland came to a bitter end in his last collegiate game. Yale center Fred Morris later recalled, “We couldn’t believe that it just happened. . . . We saw the Harvard fans going nuts. It was a stunning, speechless moment.” Harvard coach John Yovicsin was equally shocked: “Never in my lifetime will I ever see another ending like that one,” he gasped. “It just doesn’t happen.”

Even ten years later, at a reunion that brought the two teams together on the eve of another Big Game, Yale head coach Carmen Cozza could still not smile, telling the evening’s master of ceremonies, broadcaster Curt Gowdy, “The score read 29–29, but I admit it was the worst loss of my career.”