

# All-America Rejects

By Bob Royce

When Paul Robeson died in the mid-1970's, leftists and black activists created the myth that he had been stripped of All-America honors because of his color and his political beliefs. Efforts to correct this misconception are buried in letters to the editors of national publications, so the myth lives.

The truth is that Robeson was a consensus All-America choice as a Rutgers end in 1917 and 1918, and no one has ever denied it. (See All-America by Bernie McCarty.) The myth was created by zealous researchers who found All-America selections that didn't name Robeson; and in the mistaken belief that All-America status was an official honor, used their discovery for their own political agendas.

A thorough search of the history of All-America selections has found only two instances in which major selectors have changed their minds about a player originally named to this honor. Those shifts in thinking were by the two men most closely associated with early All-America teams -- Caspar Whitney and Walter Camp.



**WALTER CAMP**  
DEAN OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL  
1859 ————— 1925

Whitney's change of heart was with Oliver Cutts, everyone's first choice at tackle in 1901. Cutts, a 28-year-old 195-pounder, had been the main thrust of the powerful line that enabled Harvard to win the championship with a 12-0-0 record. The following spring brought forth evidence that Cutts was a professional athlete. While on summer vacation before the 1901 season, Cutts had earned some spending money from a neighbor lady who paid him \$25 to teach her bullied son the "manly art of self defense." As slight a transgression as that might seem now, Whitney considered it an act of treason against the code of amateur athletics. He bounced Cutts off his All-America team, and moved Army's Paul Bunker up from the second team to replace him, and added Yale's George Goss to the second team.

Coincidentally, Camp's change of heart also added an Army tackle to his mythical selection. None of the official records, however, reflect his first-team reversal.

The Walter Camp controversy involved his 1915 All-America team. As soon as it appeared in Collier's, University of Nebraska officials notified him that Vic Halligan, his third-string choice at tackle, hadn't played that year but instead, was an assistant coach. (Some historians suspect that Camp had meant to include Guy Chamberlain rather than Halligan).

Camp quickly acknowledged the error, blaming it on the deadline pressures of the magazine's editors to make his selections before the season was over. Compounding his problems, he added that the final games made Elmer Oliphant of Army his first choice at halfback instead of Bart Macomber, his original pick. Needless to say, Camp's letter raised a hue and cry from fans in the Midwest.

Subsequent versions of Camp's 1915 All-America move Army's Alex Weyand, an honorable mention that year, into Halligan's place on the third team. His original choice of Macomber, however, remains uncorrected.