

# John Hannah and the Growth of Big-Time Intercollegiate Athletics at Michigan State University

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Intercollegiate athletics in American colleges and universities have existed for more than 130 years. During the mid-nineteenth century informal sporting activities were found on most college campuses, yet by the turn of the century competitive intercollegiate athletics had significantly influenced the social character of institutions of higher education.<sup>1</sup> By 1880, college athletics on many campuses had been professionalized as some schools engaged in the recruitment of athletes and the hiring of professional coaches and players.<sup>2</sup> Professionalization in football was accompanied by violence on the field and rowdiness and gambling off field which, at Harvard, resulted in a short-lived ban on football in 1884.<sup>3</sup>

Concern with the overemphasis on intercollegiate athletics is not merely a recent phenomenon. Between 1886 and 1906 numerous regulatory agencies were created to rationalize and control college athletics.<sup>4</sup> But the existence of regulatory agencies such as the infant National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) did not curb abuses within intercollegiate athletics. In a 1929 report funded by Carnegie Foundation, Howard Savage blamed the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics on increased intercollegiate competition, unwise alumni, increased media coverage of athletic events, and the reluctance of faculty to assume control over intercollegiate athletics.<sup>5</sup>

Hal Lawson and Alan Ingham compared the different philosophies and practices of two presidents of the University of Chicago: William Rainey Harper, Chicago's first president who believed that athletes were an essential part of the University; and Robert Maynard Hutchins, who abolished football at the University because he believed that it signified excessive commercialism and trivialized the University's primary mission.<sup>6</sup> John Hannah, President of

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1. John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith, *Saga of American Sport* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1978), pp. 191-193.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 210-214; John R. Betts, *America's Sporting Heritage, 1850-1950* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1974), p. 211.

3. Peter McIntosh, *Fair Play: Ethics in Sport and Education* (London: Heinemann, 1979), pp. 77-74.

4. George H. Hanford, "Controversies in College Sports," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 445 (1979), 66-68.

5. Howard J. Savage, *American College Athletics* (N.Y.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1929), p. xx.

6. Hal A. Lawson and Alan G. Ingham, "Conflicting Ideologies Concerning the University and Intercolle-

Michigan State University (MSU) from 1941 to 1969, used intercollegiate athletics to promote the University. This study will examine the Hannah influence on the growth of big-time intercollegiate athletics at MSU.

### *The Early Years*

Despite popular perceptions, big-time intercollegiate athletics is a fairly recent phenomenon at Michigan State. Prior to the late 1880's, the educational and training requirements of Michigan Agricultural College (MAC)<sup>7</sup> resulted in little available time for athletic training and competition. MAC's manual labor program persisted long after most other colleges had abolished similar programs.<sup>8</sup> All students were required to work a minimum of three hours per day on the College Farms, and the College was not in session during the winter months which limited practice and training opportunities for spring sport.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Board of Agriculture, MAC's legal governing body, was opposed to collegiate sports and games.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the students at MAC, much like their counterparts at other colleges, continued to push for both campus and intercollegiate athletic activities. By the early 1890's, students competed in both baseball and track and field, and MAC was a member of the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association.<sup>11</sup>

Even though the College's athletic teams enjoyed some success in the early days, the "modern era" of intercollegiate athletics did not reach East Lansing until the 1920's when the College's stagnating enrollments concerned the Board of Agriculture. L. Whitney Watkins, a member of the Board, believed that enrollments were low because the College had such poor athletic facilities.<sup>12</sup> The Governor of Michigan, A. J. Groesbeck, proposed that the State lend the College the money required to build a new stadium because he believed "that the inability to schedule strong teams at home was perpetuating the tradition of cow college."<sup>13</sup> The Legislature lent MAC \$160,000 in 1923 for a stadium which was completed by the start of the 1923 football season.

Ralph Young was hired as athletic director in 1923. According to Fred Stabley, the College's growth "and that of the athletic establishment were as one, and Ralph Young was an integral part of it all."<sup>14</sup> Young's public relations skills enabled him both to improve the College's athletic schedule and to hire a coaching staff of the quality necessary to bring the College "into the big time." For example, Jim Crowley, one of Notre Dame's Four Horsemen, was

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giate Athletics: Harper and Hutchins at Chicago, 1892-1940," *Journal of Sport History*, 7:3(Winter 1980), 37-65.

7. From 1857-1925, Michigan State University was called Michigan Agricultural College. May 13, 1925 the name was changed to Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Science and in 1955, the name was changed to Michigan State University.

8. Madison Kuhn, *Michigan State: the First Hundred Years* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955), p. 97.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Fred Stabley, *The Spartans* (Huntsville, AL: Strode Publishing, 1975), p. 57.

13. Kuhn, p. 329.

14. Stabley, p. 57

hired as head football coach in 1929. Crowley brought to Michigan State both a winning tradition and a number of problems.

Since Crowley believed that a strong athletic program could never be developed through traditional academic or need-based scholarship channels, he organized a booster club to help recruit and finance talented athletes. In 1933, the North Central Association, of which Michigan State College (MSC) was a member, investigated the College's intercollegiate athletic program and ruled that "there was an over-emphasis on intercollegiate athletics" that resulted in athletes being granted high grades and an inordinantly high percentage of loan money and campus jobs.<sup>15</sup>

### *John Hannah and the Growth of Michigan State University*

John Hannah was appointed the College's Secretary to the Board of Agriculture in 1935. Taking advantage of President Shaw's unique idea of the private financing of new dormitories, and of the Public Works Administration and Works Progress Administration funds for capital projects, Hannah planned the construction of many new campus buildings and a vastly improved athletic plant. The stadium was enlarged to 29,000 seats, a new cinder track was constructed, Jenison Gymnasium and Fieldhouse was built, and a baseball pre-season practice field was developed. Besides allowing for a greatly improved intercollegiate athletic program, these new facilities encouraged the development of an expanded physical education program for all students.<sup>16</sup>

In the late 1930's, Fred Jenison, a local insurance executive, died and willed a half million dollars to the College. John Hannah, as Secretary to the Board of Agriculture, was named administrator of the estate and decided to put the money to what he "believed a legitimate and practical use by the establishment of athletic scholarships."<sup>17</sup> Hannah believed it better to be open and above board with athletic scholarships, having them under the direct control of the College's scholarship office rather than in the form of an uncontrollable slush fund. The Jenison Scholarship covered tuition, books, room, and board. Athletes were granted this aid regardless of financial need, but they were required to maintain at least a "C" average to retain the scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1935 and 1941 Hannah conceived and executed a six million dollar building program; he stimulated the effort to bring higher quality students to campus; he supervised the integration of the athletic program into the mainstream of the College; he pushed for higher faculty salaries; he successfully lobbied the state legislature for the equitable allocation of higher education funds; and he instituted a pension system for all College employees.<sup>19</sup>

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15. North Central Association of College and Secondary Schools, "Report on Athletes at Michigan State College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences." (Chicago 1933), p. 4.

16. Kuhn, pp. 351-367.

17. Tommy Devine, "the Michigan State Construction Job," *Sport Magazine* (December 1953), p. 16.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Kuhn, p. 401.

In 1941, when the nation was preparing for war, John Hannah became president of M.S.C. The College, in spite of its ambitious building program, was still a small agricultural college with less than 6,000 students and an annual budget of \$4 million. It consisted of six divisions and had fewer than 50 departments. By the time Hannah retired in 1969, the College had grown into a mega-university of more than 40,000 students, with an annual budget of more than \$100 million and consisted of 15 colleges and more than 250 academic programs.

Hannah's desire to build the College into a major university was grounded in his basic philosophy of the role of public education in democratic societies. He believed that education, freedom, and democracy were inseparable and that Michigan State should present to the world a model of both equality and quality.<sup>20</sup>

To accomplish his goal of building Michigan State into a university of major importance, Hannah instituted a multifaceted plan that included the initiation of international agricultural research and development programs, the affiliation of the College with quality institutions such as those in the Big Ten, and the development of a big-time, successful, intercollegiate athletic program. Hannah believed that the first two programs would provide Michigan State with the kind of respectability it needed.<sup>21</sup> And much like Chicago's William Harper, John Hannah also believed that Michigan State's local and national reputation could be improved with a strong intercollegiate athletic program.<sup>22</sup> Hannah expressed this to Charlie Bachman, head football coach at State from 1933-1946, when they lived next door to one another during the 1930's. They became close friends and Bachman recalled Hannah saying to him that, "Michigan State is a diamond in the rough; all it needs is a football victory over Michigan-no, two victories-so people will not say it was a fluke, and the College will become a great educational institution."<sup>23</sup> According to Bachman, Hannah realized the value Notre Dame and the University of Michigan received from "free" football advertising and "he chose that path to polish the diamond."<sup>24</sup>

Hannah's own recollection of why he encouraged the growth of intercollegiate athletics does not support Bachman's statement. In both his memoirs and in an interview, Hannah stated that he had no idea that a strong football program would benefit the College in any way.<sup>25</sup> Yet, in a 1946 speech before the NCAA and in nearly every speech before an athletic group after that, Hannah indicated that he believed intercollegiate athletics to be a positive influence on college campuses because he believed competitive sport unified the

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20. John A Hannah, "Speech to the Birmingham Alumni Meeting." Birmingham, Michigan, April 26, 1944. In John A. Hannah Papers Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collection, East Lansing.

21. Hannah, *A Memoir* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1980), p. 118.

22. For discussion of Harper and the University of Chicago see Lawson and Ingham.

23. Charles Bachman, "The Athletic Side of John Hannah." p. 1. In Charles W. Bachman Papers, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, East Lansing.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

25. Hannah, *A Memoir* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1980), p. 116; Interview with John Hannah, March 10, 1981.

students, faculty, townspeople, and alumni in a way no other activity can.<sup>26</sup> But he also believed that athletics would neither add to nor detract from the quality of an institution's academic programs even though many colleges were so judged.<sup>27</sup>

Hannah believed that universities achieved certain political and social benefits from a successful intercollegiate athletic program. First, football and all competitive athletics provided a natural outlet for the enthusiasm and energy of both athletes and spectators and an escape from the pressures of daily life for alumni and fans.<sup>28</sup> Second, intercollegiate athletics provided a natural rallying point for the entire community. Third, sport provided both participants and spectators with an example of democracy and racial equality in its purest form:

(it) offers repeated object lessons for all to see of democracy at work. The size of a father's pocketbook or mother's position on the social register, nor the color of one's skin nor his religion mean anything at all when competing with others for places on a team, or against teams from other colleges.<sup>29</sup> Here only skill and intelligence and willingness to work hard (are important).

To further promote both the College and its athletic program, Hannah approached the Big Ten asking to be considered for membership in 1942 after the University of Chicago withdrew from the Conference.<sup>30</sup> Hannah believed that membership in the Big Ten would provide the College with the kind of respectability he felt it needed. But the responses from the Presidents of the member universities were not encouraging. In a 1942 *Detroit News* column, it was suggested that Michigan State would not be admitted to the Big Ten because its stadium was too small and its geographic location was such that gate receipts for home games would be too small.<sup>31</sup> Hannah argued that the stadium's seating capacity could be increased to 60,000 and that the largest portion of Michigan's population lived within an 80 mile radius of the campus.<sup>32</sup>

By the Spring of 1943, it was apparent that all intercollegiate sport would have to be suspended for the duration of World War II because too few civilian men were on campus to comprise the teams. As soon as World War II ended, Hannah renewed his quest for Big Ten membership. In January, 1946, he formally requested admission to the Big Ten.<sup>33</sup> But opposition was still quite strong.

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26. Hannah, "Speech Before the National Collegiate Athletic Association (Annual Meeting)," St Louis, Missouri, January 9, 1946, p. 2, Hannah Papers.

27. Hannah, "Speech Before the 1965 Football Bust, East Lansing, November 23, 1965." Hannah Papers.

28. Hannah, "Speech Before the East Lansing High School Football Banquet, East Lansing, November 17, 1959." Hannah Papers.

29. Hannah, "Speech Before the Detroit Football Burt. Detroit. November 26, 1957." Hannah Papers.

30. Letters dated December 15, 1942 from John A Hannah to H. L. Bevis (Ohio State), W. C. Coffey (Minnesota), C. A. Dykstra (Wisconsin), Virgil Hancher (Iowa), F. B. Snyder (Northwestern), H. B. Wells (Indiana), and A. C. Willard (Illinois) and their subsequent responses are in the Hannah Papers.

31. H. G. Salsinger, "The Umpire." Clipping from *Detroit News*, December 13, 1942. Hannah Papers

32. "60,000 Seats Could Be Offered Patrons." Clipping from *Detroit News*, January 27, 1943. Hannah Papers.

33. John A. Hannah to K. L. (Tug) Wilson, Commissioner of the Big Ten, January 1946. Hannah Papers.

Opposition to Michigan State's admission came from two fronts. First, the University of Michigan (UM) vehemently opposed Big Ten membership for Michigan State because it did not want to be forced to compete with Michigan State for the best high school athletes or for Saturday afternoon football attendance." Second, most of the Big Ten schools were opposed to Michigan State's athletic scholarship program. On May 29, 1947, President Hannah appeared before the athletic directors and faculty representatives of the Big Ten to describe the operation of the Jenison Scholarship program. He indicated that while Michigan State was a firm believer in athletic scholarships that were closely controlled, they would abolish the program voluntarily to comply with NCAA and Big Ten standards.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of UM's opposition, Michigan State was officially invited to become a member of the Big Ten on December 12, 1948.<sup>36</sup> The stadium had been enlarged, the Jenison scholarships had been abolished, and the University of Michigan's opposition had been neutralized.<sup>37</sup> The press predicted that Michigan State's athletic program would reap tremendous benefits from participation in the Big Ten such as increased athletic prestige and increased gate receipts.<sup>38</sup> But for Hannah, Big Ten membership meant that Michigan State would be welcomed as an equal to the academic committees of the Conference such as the Committee on Interinstitutional Cooperation (CIC) and the Council of Ten.<sup>39</sup>

### *John Hannah and the Reform of Intercollegiate Athletics*

At the same time that John Hannah was building Michigan State athletics into a nationally ranked, top flight program, he was also concerned with the abuses that were prevalent within intercollegiate sport, such as recruiting violations and academic cheating. He saw no apparent contradiction between growth and reform because he believed that the abuses could be curbed without deemphasizing intercollegiate competition. All Hannah believed was necessary was a commitment to honesty on the part of college presidents and coaches.<sup>40</sup>

Hannah's outspokenness on abuses within intercollegiate athletics while, at the same time, encouraging its growth is reminiscent of the role played by many industrialists during the Progressive Era in the early part of the twentieth century. A number of industrialists and financiers believed that the social and economic instability caused by laissez-faire capitalism and uncontrolled economic growth threatened the fabric of American capitalism. They lobbied

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34. Stanley Frank, "Big Ten's Surprise Package." *Saturday Evening Post* (October 14, 1950), p. 31.

35. Devine, "Junking of Grants Aided MSC Cause," *Detroit Free Press* (December 14, 1948), p. 18.

36. Ron Linton and Andy Anderson, "Wilson Voices Invitation," *Michigan State News* (December 12, 1948), p. 1.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Devine, "By Ten A Real Exclusive Club," *Detroit Free Press* (December 15, 1948, p. 28; Frank, p. 30.

39. Hannah, A Memoir p. 118. The CIC is composed of the provost of the Big Ten Universities. The Council of Ten is composed of the Presidents of Big Ten Universities.

40. Hannah. "Speech Before the National Collegiate Athletic Association," p. 7-8, Hannah Papers.

for the rationalization of the economy through reform and regulation to achieve stability, predictability, and security and their eventual success reaped tremendous financial rewards.<sup>41</sup> In the same vein, Hannah did not want intercollegiate athletics abolished or de-emphasized because it brought too many benefits to institutions such as Michigan State. Rather, he wanted intercollegiate athletics reformed and regulated so that its benefits would be maximized. To Hannah, football was a “show window” through which the public might view the University and he didn’t want the product being sold (i.e., the University) to be misrepresented.<sup>42</sup>

In 1951, the American Council on Education (ACE), concerned with abuses within intercollegiate athletics, appointed a Special Committee on Athletic Policy, with John Hannah as its chair, to develop recommendations. The consensus of this committee was that abuses existed because of excessive pressures to win which were motivated by a desire for prestige and/or profit.<sup>43</sup> Many committee members also believed that the national recognition caused by intercollegiate athletics placed undue pressure on coaches and athletes to win.<sup>44</sup>

As a result of these concerns, the Special Committee developed some recommendations on the academic status of athletic departments and coaches. The report recommended that departments of intercollegiate athletics be subjected to the same academic and budgetary policies as other college departments and that coaches be granted the same rights and responsibilities as other faculty.<sup>45</sup>

During Hannah’s tenure at Michigan State, coaches and assistant coaches were hired in the tenure stream and received all of the rights and responsibilities associated with faculty status. Hannah implemented these ACE recommendations because he believed coaches performed important educational functions and were entitled to faculty rights and privileges such as protection from undue outside pressure and university backing when faced with unjustified criticism.<sup>46</sup> He believed that faculty status would remove the “win-at-all-costs” mentality that plagued intercollegiate athletics. While MSU’s coaches were not fearful of losing their jobs, they nevertheless could be moved from coaching to another position within the University. So for those coaches to whom coaching was more than a job, the threat of losing still loomed large.

### *Hannah’s Instrumental Use of Intercollegiate Athletics*

John Hannah was a masterful politician and used intercollegiate athletics to

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41. William Appleman Williams, *Contours of American History* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), pp. 332-333; 354-356; Gabriel Kolko, *Triumph of Conservatism* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1963), p. 3.

42. Frank, p. 193.

43. American Council on Education, *Special Committee on Athletic Policy. Working Papers* (Washington, D.C.: 1951), p. 1.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

45. American Council on Education, *Special Committee on Athletic Policy. Report*. Washington, D.C.: 1952).

46. Hannah, “Speech Before the 1958 Football Banquet, East Lansing, November 24, 1958,” Hannah Papers.

promote Michigan State University. Athletic events became a wonderful excuse for showing off the institution, and he used them as devices to get politicians and industrialists to come and see for themselves that Michigan State was, as he put it, “a quality institution.”<sup>47</sup>

For each home football game, President Hannah invited a select number of individuals to a pre-game brunch and to be his guests in the President’s Box at the stadium. The guest lists read like a “who’s who of Michigan.” It was not unusual for the Governor and Congressman Gerald Ford to be invited, but businessmen clearly dominated the lists: Edward Cole, General Manager of Chevrolet; George Romney, President of American Motors; Howard Stoddard, President of Michigan National Bank; Arthur Fushman, President of Manufacturers National Bank; William Mayberry, Chairman of the Board, American Bank and Trust; Malcolm Ferguson, President of Bendix Corporation; Henry Bodman, President of the National Bank of Detroit; Frederick Eckley, President and General Manager of Michigan Bell Telephone; Ray Eppert, Burroughs Corporation; Charles Stewart Mott, Board of Directors of General Motors Corporation; Dan Gerber, President of Gerber Baby Foods; Arjay Miller, President of Ford Motor Company; Jack Wolfram, General Manager of Oldsmobile, and Leland Doan, Chairman of the Board, Dow Chemical Corporation.<sup>48</sup> According to Hannah, aggressive solicitation of funds was not conducted at these events. Rather, Hannah used them as a means of establishing personal, friendly relationships with the State’s corporate leadership.<sup>49</sup> This tradition of entertaining influential persons at athletic events remains to this day, but the events are more explicitly conducted for fundraising.<sup>50</sup>

In a secondary way, athletic events also presented Hannah with many opportunities to speak with alumni and capture the attention of the press. He was a very popular banquet speaker and on consecutive evenings, Hannah might speak at the Economic Club of Detroit and then at a poultry plucking contest. But a large number of his speeches were delivered to alumni gatherings that occurred at athletic events or post-season banquets to honor the athletes. It was at these events that he continually re-emphasized his philosophy of both education and sport. Without a moderately successful football team, he believed, many opportunities to reach the University’s alumni would be lost. Michigan State’s successful athletic program also gave John Hannah and the University significant exposure in the national press. Very few articles on Michigan State or Hannah appeared in national publications prior to Hannah’s involvement with the ACE’s Special Committee on Athletic Policy.<sup>51</sup> Hannah

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47. Interview with John Hannah, March 10, 1981.

48. Football guest lists were included in the Hannah Papers.

49. Interview with John Hannah, March 10, 1981.

50. Nancy Crawley, “M. Cecil Mackey: Controversy and Conflict for Michigan State’s New President.” *Change* (November/December 1980): p. 47.

51. This was determined by searching *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* between 1941 and 1960. A noticeable increase in the number of articles indexed about Michigan State or John Hannah occurred once the Special Committee on Athletic Policy’s report was released in 1952.

received far more press coverage as Chair of that Committee than he had for his work with the War Department during World War II.

### *Hannah and the Integration of MSU Athletics*

John Hannah believed that athletics presented positive object lessons with respect to race relations. With Biggie Munn as football coach and then as Athletic Director, Michigan State gradually integrated all athletic teams while Hannah was President. By 1950, 10% of the football team was black and by 1960, 20% of the basketball team.<sup>52</sup> But inequities still remained.

In 1960, Professor Walter Adams, a member of the Athletic Council, discovered that the baseball team had difficulty locating intergrated accommodations for its spring break, southern road trip. John Kobs, the baseball coach, believed that he had only two alternatives: ask the black athletes to accept segregated facilities; or ask the black athletes not to make the trip.<sup>53</sup> Adams was outraged by this situation because he believed that “no member of an MSU athletic team should be confronted with this kind of Hobson’s choice.”<sup>54</sup> Consequently, he proposed that the Athletic Council endorse the following resolutions to prevent Michigan State from tacitly agreeing to segregation in any form:

1. That no Michigan State University Athletic team shall take part in a contest where any athlete is barred from participation because of race, religion or national origin;
2. That no Michigan State University athletic team shall accept engagements in any area where a Michigan State University team member may be barred from equal access to housing or team facilities by virtue of his race, religion or national origin; and
3. That no Michigan State University athlete shall participate in any contest where participation is denied to others because of race, religion, or national origin.<sup>55</sup>

Not only did the Athletic Council defeat these proposals (“for fear of stirring things up”), but they also struck all mention of the resolutions from the minutes of the Athletic Council meeting.<sup>56</sup> Adams wrote to President Hannah, asking him to intercede. Hannah consulted with Clarence “Biggie” Munn, the Athletic Director, and then informed Adams that Munn “assures me that it is the intention of the athletic department to essentially follow the procedures outlined in your resolutions.”<sup>57</sup> From that time forward, the spirit of Adams’ resolutions was followed although Hannah never confronted the Athletic Council for its lack of action. Adams attributed Hannah’s less than courageous stand to his ultimately pragmatic approach to problem solving. As long

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52. Beth J. Shapiro, “Intercollegiate Athletics and Big-Time Sport at Michigan State University: Or ‘The Difference Between Good and Great is a Little Extra Effort.’” (Ph.D. Dissertation. Michigan State University.), 1982), pp. 144-147.

53. Walter Adams to John Hannah. January 17, 1961. Hannah Papers.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. John A. Hannah to Walter Adams. January 18, 1961. Hannah Papers

as the University unofficially followed the policies outlined in the Adams resolution, Hannah saw no point in publicizing past actions or in publicly embarrassing other institutions for their lack of action against racism.<sup>58</sup>

Between 1967 and 1969, athletic departments throughout the United States experienced athletic boycotts and protests by black athletes who believed blacks in intercollegiate athletics were exploited. Much of Harry Edwards' *Revolt of the Black Athlete* was devoted to descriptions of such conflicts.<sup>59</sup> Michigan State was not to experience conflicts as severe as some, but they were, nevertheless, emotionally charged. On April 25, 1968, thirty-eight black athletes at MSU called a boycott of all athletic events and practices to protest what they believed were discriminatory practices of the Athletic Department.<sup>60</sup> All freshmen, sophomore and junior black athletes participated.

This demonstration belied the widespread impression that Michigan State was a "good place" for blacks. At the time of the boycott, Michigan State led the nation in athletic scholarships for blacks and provided twice the number of scholarships to black athletes as any other Big Ten university.<sup>61</sup> But the Athletic Department's record for employing black coaches, assistants, trainers, doctors, and laborers was poor. In addition to voicing concerns about the hiring practices of the Athletic Department, the black athletes also complained that no black cheerleaders had ever been selected and that academic advising was designed to keep athletes eligible not to foster educational attainment.

While Hannah was displeased with the protest, he publically displayed sympathy with the athletes' "demands" and indicated the University would move as rapidly as possible to respond to their concerns. Shortly after this protest, a black assistant football coach, a black assistant track coach, and a black academic advisor were hired by the Athletic Department.

In spite of Hannah's support, many white alumni and university supporters were angered by the boycott and by what they perceived to be the University's capitulation to the black athletes' demands. Hannah stood by the athletes:

The University was already committed to taking several of the steps they listed among their so-called 'demands', such as the employment of Negro coaches in the major sports. Then I must dispute your assertion that black athletes are the 'privileged few'. Most of them are indeed poor, and could not hope for a college education if they did not have athletic ability. So they were in a real sense offering to sacrifice their hopes for the future to accomplish what they believed to be right.<sup>62</sup>

### *Principles and Pragmatism*

In spite of stating that athletes should be considered no different from other students on campus, some University officials believed that John Hannah frequently did not take a strong enough stand with the Athletic Department when

58. Interview with Walter Adams, November 2, 1981, East Lansing.

59. Harry Edwards, *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* (N.Y.: Free Press, 1969).

60. Joe Mitch, "Negro Athletes Call Boycott," *Michigan State News*, April 26, 1968, p. 1.

61. *Ibid.*

62. John A. Hannah to Edward Soergel, May 22, 1968. Hannah papers.

it came to academic matters. Harold Tukey, who served as Faculty Representative from 1956-59, was involved in numerous confrontations with the Athletic Department. At times, these confrontations found their way into the press. Tukey was a dedicated "faculty representative" and believed that Hannah operated two codes of ethics, "one which dealt with athletics and one which dealt with life."<sup>63</sup> Tukey stated that the existence of grade fixing, drug use, and slush funds were well known by the administration but were overlooked as long as the University didn't get caught.<sup>64</sup>

Proving Tukey's allegations about athletic irregularities involving Hannah is difficult. Nevertheless, some evidence demonstrates Hannah did not always stand by his publicly stated principles. Correspondence between John Hannah, Gordon Sabine (the Dean of Admissions) and "Duffy" Daugherty in 1961 is revealing. Daugherty regularly tried to get athletes admitted to Michigan State who did not meet the University's minimum admissions requirements. One such example concerned a high school student who had earned a 1.3 grade point average in high school. In a memorandum from Gordon Sabine to John Hannah, the efforts of the football coaching staff to get this student admitted were outlined.<sup>65</sup> In June of 1960, the student's high school principal, believing the student's admission to MSU was merely a formality in spite of his poor academic record, forwarded the student's application to Michigan State's Admissions Office with a bitter comment about the "unusual circumstances" surrounding the student's admission. The student was eventually refused admission because of his grades and poor test scores and, during the following year, he was retested and again failed. The football department was upset with the decision of the Admissions Office; Sabine, however, tried to hold his ground:

Seems to me we can't admit the boy because to do so would be patently dishonest to the young man, would expose us to all sorts of criticism in a crucial area of the state, would bring the Big Ten investigators in pronto.<sup>66</sup>

Daugherty complained bitterly to Hannah about the problems he encountered with the Admissions Office. He believed that Michigan State's admissions standards were too high for athletes and that these tough admissions requirements were hurting the quality of State's athletic programs.<sup>67</sup> Hannah evidently intervened in this case on the side of the Athletic Department since this student was eventually admitted to Michigan State and became a star football player both in the collegiate and professional ranks.

Hannah became disgruntled about having to mediate between the Athletic Department and the Admissions Office over the admission of athletes. He finally suggested to Sabine that athletic admissions be mediated by the Athletic

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63. Harold B. Tukey, "Reminiscences on My Relationship with John Hannah and the Athletic Program at Michigan State University" (1971) p. 3. In Harold B. Tukey Papers, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, East Lansing.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

65. Gordon Sabine to John A. Hannah, March 17, 1961, Hannah Papers.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Duffy Daugherty to John A. Hannah. April 3, 1961, Hannah Papers.

Council, a recommendation that was never implemented.<sup>68</sup> Sabine continued to pursue the issue of admissions irregularities when he accused Daugherty and his coaches of consistently misrepresenting both student's academic records and the admissions action of other institutions."<sup>69</sup>

Daugherty continued to blame his recruiting problems on the Admissions Office, but Sabine maintained that Daugherty was blaming him for Daugherty's own failures in administration and recruiting.<sup>70</sup> In retrospect, Sabine's concern about the academic success of many athletes who might be admitted with grades and test scores well below the minimum requirements was well-founded. The graduation rates for athletes, specifically football and basketball players, admitted to Michigan State during the 1960's dropped from those admitted during the 1950's. For example, during the 1950's, 71% of the football players and 88% of the basketball players graduated from college. But for athletes admitted during the 1960's, only 67% of the football players and 69% of the basketball players graduated."<sup>71</sup>

*Life in the Big-Time: Overemphasis or Not?*

Even though John Hannah firmly believed that big-time intercollegiate athletic programs could exist without abuses, and even though he took steps to see that many reforms were implemented, Michigan State University's intercollegiate athletic program nevertheless experienced a number of confrontations with the Big Ten and the NCAA over rule violations. Shortly after becoming a full-fledged member of the Big Ten, Michigan State was faced with its first confrontation over the administration of the Athletic Department. In May of 1952, Tug Wilson, Commissioner of the Big Ten, notified Hannah that his preliminary investigation of charges made against the University uncovered certain irregularities that could result in punitive action being taken by the Conference.<sup>72</sup>

The most serious charges concerned the operation of an organization that was not formally associated with the College: The Spartan Foundation. This booster club of alumni and community supporters allegedly disbursed illegal funds to athletes. According to the official reporting documents, Michigan State and John Hannah fully cooperated with the Big Ten investigators. Even so, the Conference demanded access to the financial records of the Foundation which the Foundation's Board of Directors refused to provide. While the investigation was underway, the Foundation disbanded and its remaining funds were donated to the College's scholarship office for proper disbursement to eligible students. The investigators never succeeded in locating even one ath-

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68. John Hannah to Gordon Sabine, April 5, 1961. Hannah Papers.

69. Gordon Sabine to John Hannah, April 9, 1961. Hannah Papers.

70. Gordon Sabine to John Hannah, May 2, 1961. Hannah Papers.

71. Shapiro, pp. 102-103.

72. Tug Wilson to John Hannah, May 17, 1952. Hannah Papers.

lete who had received funds illegally from the Foundation.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, Tug Wilson placed Michigan State College on probation for one year.<sup>74</sup>

At that time, John Hannah was Chair of the ACE's Special Committee on Athletic Policy and that Committee's recommendations for reforming intercollegiate athletics had just been released. Therefore, Wilson's allegations against Michigan State were an acute source of embarrassment to Hannah. In addition, he was outraged by the methods used by the Big Ten since no proof of the College's guilt or complicity was ever proven. Hannah requested a hearing on the charges asking the Conference to prove Michigan State's guilt. Wilson responded that it was up to Michigan State to prove its innocence.<sup>75</sup>

Many of Michigan State's supporters believed that these charges had been leveled against the College because of Hannah's vocal stand for intercollegiate athletic reform and because of jealousy over Michigan State's remarkable gridiron success between 1947 and 1952.<sup>76</sup> John Hannah decided to tight the charges and in a letter to all Big Ten Presidents, he presented Michigan State's case stating that Michigan State had been subjected to "high handed proceedings."<sup>77</sup> Hannah and Biggie Munn also suspected that the University of Michigan was behind the allegations as a means of discrediting Hannah and the College.<sup>78</sup>

Michigan State's other confrontations with the Big Ten's enforcement division followed similar patterns. In 1962, an assistant coach at the University of Colorado contacted the NCAA about Michigan State's alleged violations of NCAA regulations. Most of these charges concerned an illegal slush fund administered by the Athletic Department.<sup>79</sup> After investigations by the University administration, the Athletic Council, and the Big Ten, the existence of the slush fund was verified.<sup>80</sup> Duffy Daugherty had initiated the slush fund in 1953 when he was still an assistant football coach. He borrowed \$3,000 to pay the tuition of several football players who were not eligible to receive institutional scholarship assistance.<sup>81</sup> Daugherty then enlisted the assistance of three supporters to help him pay back the loan. This practice continued throughout the 1950's and was quasi-institutionalized once Daugherty became head football coach. Each year the original three supporters plus several other business people, collected money for this "fund" and turned the money over to Daugherty who in turn disbursed the money to athletes for tuition. Dau-

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73. Lloyd Emmons, Transcript of a speech before the Faculty Representatives of the Intercollegiate Conference, no date, p. 14. In Biggie Munn Papers, Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collections, East Lansing.

74. Tug Wilson to John Hannah, May 27, 1952. Hannah Papers.

75. Emmons, p. 13.

76. *Ibid.*

77. John A Hannah to all Big Ten Presidents, June 6, 1952. Hannah Papers.

78. Biggie Munn to John A. Hannah, March 6, 1953. Hannah Papers: John A. Hannah to J. L. Morrill, undated, handwritten note, Hannah Papers; John A. Hannah to H. B. Wells, June 9, 1952, Hannah Papers.

79. "Official Inquiry from the NCAA Committee on Infractions to the Chief Executive Officer of Michigan State University, September 13, 1963," Hannah Papers.

80. The following discussion is a summary of the information provided in: "Michigan State University. "Infractions Response to Specific NCAA Inquiries," Hannah Papers.

81. *Ibid.*

gherty administered the fund for two years and insisted the money be disbursed only for tuition.<sup>82</sup>

In 1955, Daugherty asked Everett "Sonny" Grandelius, an assistant football coach, to assume responsibility for the fund. Grandelius was to inform the "benefactors" of the amount of money required, receive the funds, and disburse the money to needy athletes. Grandelius administered the fund until 1959, when he accepted a head coaching position at the University of Colorado. Daugherty then asked two other assistant coaches to assume responsibility for the fund. They refused to administer the slush fund and complained to Daugherty.<sup>83</sup> Evidently, Grandelius had never informed any of the other assistant coaches of the existence of this fund, and the only athletes who received this special assistance were those Grandelius had recruited personally. This gave Grandelius a recruiting advantage over the other assistant coaches. In addition, he had used the funds to provide the athletes with services other than tuition. Daugherty discontinued the fund at the end of the 1959 academic year.<sup>84</sup>

The Big Ten chose not to take any action against Michigan State in spite of the flagrant violation of its rules. According to William Reed, Commissioner of the Big Ten, he established a cut-off date on the prosecution of violations for incidents that occurred prior to his taking office to allow all schools to put their houses in order. Since the Michigan State incidents occurred prior to the cut-off date, he decided not to prosecute. In addition, the Big-Ten's enforcement program was designed to reward schools for taking corrective action on their own, which Michigan State had done.<sup>85</sup>

Nevertheless the NCAA did penalize Michigan State, and the University was placed on suspended probation for three years with the provision that the probation would be reinstated should Michigan State violate any rules during the probationary periods.<sup>86</sup> As a result of the slush fund incident, Hannah sent a memorandum to the Chair of the MSU Athletic Council, to the Director of Athletics, and to all athletic staff members which stated that any staff member found to be circumventing the athletic grants-in-aid rules and regulations would be fired.<sup>87</sup>

Alleged irregularities with Michigan State's football program surfaced once again during 1968. In an article appearing in the University of Michigan's student paper. Michigan State was accused of recruiting violations, such as promising recruits summer jobs and illegal dinner invitations, and other violations of Big Ten rules such as special grill passes for free snacks, discount cards for movies and shopping in East Lansing, and illegal free football tick-

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82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. William Reed to A. J. Bergstrom, Assistant Director, NCAA, October 27, 1964, Hannah Papers.

86. Robert Ray, President of the NCAA, to John A. Hannah, November 4, 1964, Hannah Papers.

87. John Hannah to Dean John Fuzak, Chairman, Athletic Council, C. L. Munn, Director of Athletics, Athletic Staff Members, July 24, 1964, Hannah Papers.

ets.<sup>88</sup> Daugherty vehemently denied the allegations, and a subsequent investigation by the Big Ten cleared the Athletic Department of willful violations.<sup>89</sup>

In spite of John Hannah's desire to develop an athletic program that was free from scandal, Michigan State's experiences nevertheless parallel the experiences of many other schools.<sup>90</sup> Nor did the situation improve under Hannah's successor, as Michigan State was once again embroiled in a major controversy involving recruiting violations in the mid-1970's.<sup>91</sup> A key question that comes to mind is why did Michigan State's athletic program experience the abuses of rules violations that seem to accompany an overemphasis on intercollegiate athletics when its President seemed to want to prevent such abuses from occurring? According to Duffy Daugherty, filling the stadium is of paramount importance and to do that, a coach must win but not get caught cheating.<sup>92</sup> But the desire to win is often as strong in small programs as it is in big-time athletic programs. The difference is that the stakes are higher with big-time intercollegiate programs. For example, the football stadium at Michigan State University seats 77,000 people. In 1979, the year after Michigan State won the Big Ten championship, average home attendance was 76,689; and in 1982, after two losing seasons and in the midst of a third, average home attendance dropped to 64,185.<sup>93</sup> With ticket prices at \$11, this resulted in a net revenue loss of \$137,544. The pressure to win in order to fill the stadium may be a big enough incentive to circumvent the rules.

### Conclusion

John Hannah not only encouraged the growth and development of intercollegiate athletics at Michigan State, he was also actively involved with it. Unlike Robert Hutchins of Chicago, Hannah promoted intercollegiate athletics because he believed it would provide the University with both political and social benefits. His bottom line was whether or not the University would benefit. Consequently, his inconsistent adherence to stated philosophical principles on the role of athletics within educational institutions reflected a consistently pragmatic approach to the administration of Michigan State University. Perhaps the following statement, which has been attributed to John Hannah, most closely explains his behavior: "If it meant the betterment of Michigan State, our football team would play any eleven gorillas from Barnum and Bailey any Saturday. "

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88. Joel Block. "The Sporting Life at Michigan State," *Michigan Daily*, February 11, 1968, pp. 1-2.

89. William Reed, Commissioner of the Big Ten, to Conference Directors of Athletics, August 2, 1968, pp. 1-6. Biggie Munn Papers.

90. John Underwood, "The Writing is on the Wall," *Sports Illustrated*, 52 (May 19, 1980), pp. 36-44, 47-72.

91. In April 1975, the NCAA filed charges against MSU for 90 alleged recruiting violations. On January 25, 1976, the University was placed on a three year probation for 21 infractions.

92. Duffy Daugherty, *Duffy* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1974), p. 68.

93. Attendance figures were provided by the MSU Office of Sports Information.