

# The Service Football Program of World War I: Its Impact on the Popularity of the Game

by James Mennell

Historians are aware of the great increase in sports activity during the 1920s; in fact it is so well-known that it has come to be called the Golden Age of Sport.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that the football rule changes from 1906 to 1912, which made football a faster-paced and more exciting game, were at least partly responsible for this increased interest in the sport. Another factor which may have contributed just as much as the rule changes to the popularity of football in the 1920s has been largely ignored. This was the sports program introduced into military training and leisure time activities for draftees during World War I. Even a historian specializing in the social aspects of the war was unaware of the impact service sports had had on American life.<sup>2</sup> Right up to the present time historians of World War I continue to miss this development.<sup>3</sup>

In 1973, however, Guy Lewis revived awareness of the World War I sports training program by asserting that it was more important than any other factor in the appearance of widespread interest in sports during the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Nine years later Timothy O'Hanlon developed Lewis' thesis a step further. He showed that the wartime emphasis on sports in military training stimulated post-war high school sports programs.<sup>5</sup>

Lewis' thesis is pivotal to better understanding the great expansion of sports activities during the 1920s and needs further exploration. We need to examine the service sports program thoroughly to learn the extent of its impact on Americans, civilians as well as draftees. Although the service sports program had a great impact on boxing,<sup>6</sup> it also influenced American interest, civilian as

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1. Typical of the heightened interest in sport during the Golden Age was the fact that football attendance doubled during the 1920s. Deobold B. Van Dalen, et al., *A World History of Physical Education*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1953), pp. 439-440.

2. Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900-1925*, Vol. V: *Over Here 1914-1918* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), pp. 320-336. Frederick Palmer, a biographer of one of the indirect creators of the military sports program, was also unaware of its importance thirteen years after the war: Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, 2 vols. (New York: Dodd, Meade, 1931) 1: 297-310.

3. Edward M. Coffman, *The War To End All Wars: The American Military Experience In World War I*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967); David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War And American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Daniel R. Beaver, *Newton D. Baker And The American War Effort: 1917-1919* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966).

4. Guy Lewis, "World War 1 and the Emergence of Sports for the Masses," *Maryland Historian* 4 (Fall, 1973): 109-22.

5. Timothy P. O'Hanlon, "School Sports as Social Training: The Case of Athletics and the Crisis of World War 1," *Journal of Sport History* 9 (Spring, 1982): 5-29.

6. Lewis was able to show that as a result of the service boxing program a group was formed after the war to

well as military, in football. Consequently, a study of the World War I sports training program as it applied to football could help to explain the background of the Golden Age of Sport.

That project is made difficult, however, by the problem of verification, since the rule changes occurred very close in time to service football. By 1912, only five years before service football began, all the rule changes had been made which transformed football into basically the game we know today. Therefore the evidence to show that service football popularized the game must be clearly delineated from evidence proving that the rule changes popularized the game.

There is evidence which seems to point to service football as a greater popularizer of football than were the rule changes. For example, although criticism of the game dramatically declined after the 1912 rule changes,<sup>7</sup> reports of attendance do not indicate a dramatic rise in the period 1912-1918 (except for Yale which had built a large stadium in 1914). Although attendance reports are scarce,<sup>8</sup> those that exist indicate comparatively low attendance figures for college games during World War I, especially for games not involving service teams. For example, a crowd of 25,000 watched Harvard play a service team in October, 1917.<sup>9</sup> By contrast Penn drew only 18,000 for its last game of the season when a victory over powerful Michigan would have enabled Penn to claim the "national championship."<sup>10</sup> One may gain some perspective on these figures by comparing them to the 110,802 English soccer fans who attended the

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promote boxing. Guy Lewis, "World War I and the Emergence of Sports for the Masses," p. 120. And boxing was thought to be more important than football by those in charge of the military sports program because it supposedly was an effective means of preparing for bayonet fighting. Memo, Fosdick to camp commanders, August 17, 1917, War Department Files, Record Group 165, file 7, National Archives (hereafter cited as N.A.).

7. The following data from the *New York Times* give some idea of the impact the rule changes had on the image of football in the New York area. The terms "negative report" used here means an article that states 01 implies that there was something fundamentally wrong with collegiate football:

1905-Negative reports (23 players killed that year)	20
1906-Negative reports before the rule changes	10
Negative reports after the rule changes	4
1907-Negative reports	6
1908-Negative reports	3
1909-Negative reports (26 players killed that year)	19
1910-Negative reports	16
1911-Negative reports	6
1912-Negative reports	1
1913—negative reports	1

8. Unfortunately, newspapers reported attendance figures only when they were unusual. Robin Lester, "The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Intercollegiate Football at the University of Chicago, 1890-1940" (Ph.D. diss. University of Chicago, 1974), noted a few attendance figures for the University of Chicago in the 1920s but not before that. Guy Lewis, "The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle, 1869-1917" (Ph.D. diss. University of Maryland, 1964), made eight references to attendance figures before World War I. They are as follows:

- p. 207: 20,000 Michigan-Minnesota, 1903
- p. 217: 8,000 Washington-California, 1904
- p. 230: 25,791 Chicago-Michigan, 1905 (championship game)
- p. 233: 43,000 Yale-Harvard, 1905
- p. 264: 15,000 Kansas-Missouri, 1908
- p. 272: 16,000 Texas-Texas A and M, 1911
- p. 286: 80,000 Harvard-Yale, 1915.

In 1915 the Southwest Conference's biggest games attracted 11,000, 8,000 and two games drew 7,000 spectators (p. 281).

9. *New York Times*. October 28, 1917.

10. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1917.

cup final in 1906, only eighteen years after the founding of the professional Football League. In addition, only two schools, Penn and Brown, were reportedly considering new stadiums between 1914 and 1918.<sup>11</sup> Nor did any college football program make profits large enough to attract the attention of the *New York Times* during those same years (although it must be admitted that no sport did well during the war).

After the war the situation seemed to change dramatically. The *New York Times* reported several schools making comparatively big profits since the war.<sup>12</sup> This suggests that attendance did not rise quickly and dramatically after the rule changes, while in the period 1919-1921 there was a dramatic expansion of college football programs and attendance at games. Thirteen colleges took up varsity football in these first three years after the war. This was a noteworthy increase over the period 1912-1918 just after the rule changes when only three schools adopted varsity football. And while only three new stadiums were considered in the six years immediately after the rule changes, fourteen were considered in the three year period right after the war.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the sudden dramatic expansion of college football programs immediately after the war seems to suggest that the service football program had significantly stimulated interest in collegiate football.

Unfortunately, the evidence just cited does not conclusively prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it was only service football which made football popular during the 1920s. The great increase in attendance after the war may have been partly due to the time lag (from 1912 to 1919) necessary for the public to realize how exciting the "New Football" had become. The great increase in stadium building after the war may have resulted at least partly from the great difficulties of successful fund raising for stadiums during the war in competition with Liberty Bond drives. Finally, the war drained colleges of young men, making it much less likely that colleges would take up varsity football until the young men returned from the war. One is therefore forced to conclude that it is impossible to distinguish clearly the cause or causes of the increased popularity of football just after World War I. The two developments, rule changes and service football, occurred too close together in time to be able to distinguish evidence for one from evidence for the other. Even attendance figures for football games played during or after World War I, and they are few and far between, are not useful evidence since there is no way of separating increased attendance because of service football from increased attendance due to the time lag in appreciating the rule changes. In fact, it is difficult to imagine any evidence which would be sufficient proof short of an opinion poll asking every spectator who attended a college game after the war if he came because of service football or the rule changes.

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11. *New York Times*, February 24, 1916 and January 28, 1917.

12. *Ibid.*, October 28, November 24, December 10, 18, and 25, 1920.

13. *New York Times*; and Christy Walsh ed., *College Football and All America Review*, (Hollywood, California: House Warren, 1951), pp. 19-29. This book records the score of every collegiate football game played up to 1950.

Nevertheless, it seems unreasonable to conclude that until definitive evidence of its precise role in the history of football is found, service football is a subject of study which can shed no light on the process by which college football became very popular during the Golden Age of Sport. Service football deserves to be acknowledged as a contributing force of some degree in popularizing football. Therefore the rest of this paper will be a description of the World War I service football program and the response to it by some sports-writers.

The immediate origins of sports competition in military training which would lead to the creation of the service football program can be traced to a military sex scandal during 1916. In that year Pancho Villa invaded American territory and General Pershing was ordered to protect American territory and capture Villa. Consequently, young National Guardsmen were concentrated at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, to help police the border. Reports filtered into Washington, D.C. that these young Guardsmen, with nothing to occupy their free time, swarmed into the nearby camp towns to look for fun, but found venereal disease and cheap alcohol instead.

Secretary of War Newton D. Baker appointed a well-known young lawyer and urban reformer, Raymond Fosdick, to tour the towns associated with army camps and report on what he found. Fosdick confirmed that the Guardsmen, starved for amusement, were fast learning all the vices available in the camp towns. Almost as an afterthought Fosdick suggested the germ of a revolutionary approach to managing soldiers in their leisure time activities. He noted that in one instance the soldiers' problem of having nothing to do had been easily solved with sports equipment donated by a local YMCA.<sup>14</sup>

As American involvement in the World War grew increasingly likely, the possibility of millions of young American males being drafted into the military also grew. If those young men found the camp town to be their only recreational outlet, the war effort might be hindered, and the resulting scandal would seriously hurt President Woodrow Wilson's administration. Aware of this, Secretary Baker attempted to thrash out with Fosdick a solution to the problem of vice around military installations. As a result of their talks Baker was able to summarize their conclusions to President Wilson on April 2, 1917: the answer to the problem was for the military to provide organized recreation in the camps. Wilson apparently approved because soon afterwards Baker created the Commission on Training Camp Activities to supervise leisure time activities, including sports, for the National Army about to be created. He then appointed Fosdick as chairman of the organization. Soon after, Josephus Daniels, Secre-

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14. C. M. Cramer, *Newton D. Baker: A Biography* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1961), p. 101; Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, pp. 297-299. In a letter to Wilson, Baker claimed the credit for the idea of using team sports in army training. He expressed his concern "whether a part of the discipline of the Army ought not to be the regular provision of wholesome recreation so as pleasantly and, if possible, profitably to occupy the leisure hours of soldiers in camp." Baker to Wilson, April 2, 1917, Arthur S. Linked., *The Wilson Papers*, Vol. 40, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 153-154. Baker indirectly admitted that it was Fosdick's idea to establish a board to deal with leisure time in military camps in a letter to Major General Frederick Funston on August 12, 1916: "Mr. Fosdick's suggestion that the subject should be studied by a competent board deals of course rather with future conditions. . ." Quoted in Palmer, *Newton D. Baker*, p. 302.

tary of the Navy, appointed a similar commission with Fosdick again as its chairman.

Fosdick then appointed Walter Camp, the highly respected football authority, to be Athletic Director for the Navy. The comparable position for the Army went to Joseph Raycroft, a professor of physical education at Princeton. These two men in turn appointed athletic directors for each camp, one of whose assignments was to find coaches for whatever athletic teams they deemed proper. Fortunately, so many athletes joined the military or were drafted that each camp usually had well-known coaches or players to lead its teams.<sup>15</sup>

A service football program, i.e. football leagues at all military levels plus camp-wide teams playing colleges and other camp teams, was never a major goal of the Army Athletic Divisions of the C.T.C.A.<sup>16</sup> In a 24-page history of the Army Athletic Division which Joseph Raycroft wrote in 1919, the author clearly does not regard the service football program as an important achievement of his organization. Indeed, he does not even mention it.<sup>17</sup>

Raycroft did not openly oppose service football, but he strongly believed that boxing was the sport to emphasize, based on the training program that the British had developed, and he stressed boxing with enthusiasm.<sup>18</sup> War Department Bulletin No. 50<sup>19</sup> informed the athletic directors of basic policy: "Experience at the front has shown that knowledge of boxing is an important factor in the development of skillful aggression in bayonet fighting." Other sports were to be utilized in army camps only as morale builders. No effort was made by the Athletic Division to hire football coaches or to form football leagues. The only sports specialist designated by both the Athletic Division to assist the athletic directors in each camp was to be a "skilled boxer."<sup>20</sup>

Since boxing was not a sport that had been previously taught to large numbers at one time, the Athletic Division had to devote a great deal of attention to training professional boxers to teach boxing. Bulletin No. 50 also detailed the procedure to begin teaching the various boxing maneuvers. Other teaching material on boxing followed including a three reel film designed to help boxing instructors to teach soldiers the sport.<sup>21</sup>

There was also a practical reason for the Athletic Division not encouraging a

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15. A good general description of what happened is found in Coffman, *The War To End All Wars*, p. 77. Because Daniels gave Fosdick authority to form a similar committee for the Navy, technically Fosdick was chairman of two commissions (Navy and Army), but for simplicity's sake they will be referred to as one commission. The organization established to create a nationwide military sports program was an impressive undertaking and a memo from Fosdick to the camp commanders reveals that it was a product of the Commission on Training Camp Activities. War Department Files, Record Group 165, file 7, N.A.

16. To avoid confusion reference will be made to the Army Athletic Division. The Navy Athletic Division generally followed the same policy, unless otherwise indicated.

17. Joseph E. Raycroft, "A History of Athletic Division, War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities, April 1917-January 1919," unpublished typescript, Raycroft Papers, Princeton University.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

19. The Athletic Division circulated among the camp athletic directors occasional informational bulletins which are today housed in the War Department Files, RG 165, file 35, N.A. All Bulletins cited henceforth in this paper are from this source.

20. War Department Bulletin No. 50, no date.

21. Raycroft. "History of Athletic Division," p. 11

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major emphasis on an organized service football program. It was expensive to provide football pads for all the soldiers who would play and the C . T . C . A. was entirely dependent upon voluntary donations at first. Of all the sports listed in an early plan to assist the camp athletic directors to organize sports activities, only football was prefaced with the comment: "If a company can afford to outfit [the] men."<sup>22</sup> It is also well to remember that athletic training and recreation on the scale that the Athletic Division was attempting was quite new. It had a great deal of organizing and overseeing to do and was pressed to accomplish its goals as quickly as possible.<sup>23</sup> As a result, except for passing on the experiences of the camp athletic directors through the Bulletins, the Athletic Division established their commitment to boxing and left the development of recreational sports to the athletic directors themselves. Thus, there was no official policy guideline from the Athletic Division to create a football program.

If a service football program were to emerge, therefore, it had to develop in the camps themselves, and that is just what happened. The service football program began because football showed itself to be an already well-established sport with a body of skilled coaches and officials readily available and willing to help. It also began because of an impressive degree of enthusiasm among soldiers and sailors to play the game (perhaps as a result of the rule changes). And finally, it began because of favorable opportunities to schedule games with colleges and other camps in major stadiums. It is remarkable how quickly camp teams became organized, equipped and scheduled to play a full season of football. The lack of enough football pads did not turn out to be a problem after all. From the beginning every camp seemed able to field at least a camp-wide team and even a few regimental teams. And, by contrast to boxing, there was no shortage of men capable of organizing football programs without further training. Despite the failure of the Athletic Division to recruit college football coaches, a ready cadre of such men were already in the camps among the draftees themselves, as the Athletic Division quickly realized:" . . . a great deal of very valuable assistance can be obtained by discovering the men in the camp who have had previous experience as competitors or coaches in athletics."<sup>24</sup> Newspapers helped by raising funds and calling for donations of new and used equipment to local camps. The Central Board of Football Officials volunteered to provide officials for camp games.<sup>25</sup>

The result was that while other programs may or may not have gotten started, football usually had. This can be seen in the reports of athletic directors. For example, Frank Bergin, athletic director at Pelham, New York Naval Training Camp commented:

Last October there was a football team representing Pelham. A squad of about

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22. Bulletin No. 2, October 18, 1917.

23. There were problems of reimbursing, housing, clothing and feeding the athletic directors, ironing out lines of authority with the Y.M.C.A. camp representatives, and obtaining funding, for example. Raycroft, "History of Athletic Division," pp. 3-10.

24. Bulletin No. 2, October 18, 1917.

25. Bulletin No. 1, September 27, 1917 and Raycroft to Camp, October 4, 1917, Camp Papers, Yale University.

thirty men playing football represented the total of athletic activity in camp. A schedule of games was played with camps in this vicinity with fair success.

And A. Trautman of Camp Sheridan reported that "Football teams have formed all over the camp."<sup>26</sup>

Walter Camp, the Athletic Director of the Navy, was under the same constraints as Raycroft and his program for the Navy Athletic Division was not essentially different from Raycroft's Army Athletic Division. But it would appear that Camp more actively encouraged the service football program than did Raycroft. It will be remembered that Raycroft did not mention football in his history of the Athletic Division. By contrast Camp, also writing just after the war, claimed in his book, *Athletes All*, that he had been interested in "outside competition" for naval station teams very early in the war:

... we needed play and recreation. With this must come the interest and excitement of competition. We needed regimental teams to foster this. We needed [naval] station teams to increase it, because then outside competition at weekends and holidays would be possible.<sup>27</sup>

This claim by Camp to have developed outside competition is supported by a particular action he took during the 1917 season. Military teams had begun to play "outside" games with colleges and other camps. But each service played only teams from the same service. Camp realized that service football competition could be taken one step further: the natural rivalry between soldiers and sailors might be used to create an attractive football game (similar to the Army-Navy game) between army camp teams and naval station teams.

Camp's attempt to arrange such a game (in this case between the Newport Naval Station and the Maine Heavy Field Artillery) illustrates the perseverance camp athletic directors around the country had to possess in scheduling games. First, he began on October 25, 1917 by writing to obtain Raycroft's approval for the Army team to play. Then he selected the teams and arrange for disposal of the profits. Then it was necessary to find a suitable football stadium with an open date (the Yale Bowl had openings on November 3 and 10, 1917); and finally, he had to publicize the game within only days of its being played. Having reserved the Yale Bowl, Camp had the tickets printed and urged sportswriters to publicize the game, only to have a dispute between the team representatives break out over which charity was to receive the gate receipts.<sup>28</sup>

The hectic pace Camp forced upon himself to make the game a success can be felt in this letter to Raycroft only days before the game was to be played:

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26. The Bergin report is an undated, handwritten letter, presumably an end of year summation of activities. The Trautman report is from Bulletin No. 1, September 27, 1917. Several other reports of spontaneous enthusiasm at Army camps for organizing football teams were also included in this Bulletin.

27. Walter Camp, *Athletes All* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 9.

28. Camp to Raycroft, October 25 and October 30 (first letter of that date in the file), 1917, Raycroft Papers. Scheduling games with other service teams was difficult enough, but scheduling games with colleges could have been impossible in 1917 since the college schedule for that year had already been arranged by the time the camp teams were organized. Fortunately, colleges at that time customarily left an open date in their football schedules which, in 1917, permitted inserting games with service teams. Had there been no such open dates it would have been nearly impossible for service teams to have scheduled any college games.

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We are making every effort here [at Yale University] for publicity and I would ask you to see that it is posted in the Princeton Club [Raycroft was a professor at Princeton] with plenty of urging to the men to come up, and will you also use every other source of notice for it possible. Meanwhile, I will take it up with all the New York reporters and also with the Yale Club. The time is very short and we will have to make every effort to get the crowd to turn out, but as it is the first really big Army-Navy game and as the teams have several All America players on them it ought to be a football feast.<sup>29</sup>

When the camp teams began to compete successfully with established college football programs, service football made a major contribution to the game. Service teams demonstrated that all-star teams playing together over a full season could provide superb entertainment. This quality of play had not been expected when the season began. It was assumed that the collections of all-star players on the service teams would not become as smooth-working as college teams for a year or more, and few believed in mid-1917 that the war would last until the 1918 season. Therefore service football's entertainment value was expected to be limited largely to seeing many individual stars on the field at one time. This apparently had limited spectator appeal because at first crowds were small at service games.<sup>30</sup>

It was not long, however, before the service teams began to work well together. When that happened sportswriters began to see these teams as the best ever assembled. The public became so enthralled by the best service teams that the highest attendance figure in America for the 1917 season involved a service eleven against Harvard.

Not only was service football winning new civilian fans for football, but it also had a significant impact on thousands of soldiers and sailors. During the 1917 season some sportswriters noticed this impact which they felt fell into two categories: soldier participation in football play (and all other sports for that matter, but especially football), and participation in the activities surrounding the game, like cheering, singing and half-time activities.

Sportswriters' appreciation of the significance of soldier participation in football grew rapidly during the 1917 season. Early in the season a writer for the Butler (Pennsylvania) *Eagle* had a more limited idea of the impact service football would have on America than did other sportswriters later in the season. He took it for granted that every American boy knew how to play football or baseball and that he played them regularly. Thus the service football program was seen as an Americanizing process for the many new immigrants in America.<sup>31</sup> But Jack Velock, a syndicated writer in New York City, saw something more significant in service football. He believed that in spite of the prevailing myth that all Americans knew the quintessentially American games of baseball and football, many young Americans had not actually had the opportunity to play football until they reached the army training camps. He saw the impact that this would have: "By the time the season ends football will have

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29. Camp to Raycroft, October 30 (second letter of that date in the file), 1917, Raycroft Papers.

30. Harrisburg (Pa.) *Patriot*, October 10 and 11, 1917.

31. Butler (Pa.) *Eagk*, October 24, 1917.

won thousands of devotees who never knew its thrills before."<sup>32</sup> A writer for the Philadelphia *Inquirer* also felt that service football was an opportunity for native Americans to play the game.<sup>33</sup>

Two weeks after the regular football season ended on Thanksgiving Day, an article by H.C. Hamilton summarized the importance of service sports. Although he did not mention football in particular, Hamilton wrote so soon after the football season ended that presumably he was influenced in what he said by the impact service football had made on him. He acknowledged that because of the service teams the number of participants in sports activities was the greatest in American history. This led Hamilton to gauge the phenomenon's impact: "After the war ends sports should have such a firm grip on the youth of the land that it should enjoy the greatest patronage it ever saw." Hamilton went on to suggest reasons why service sports had made such an impact. So many sports stars, both college and professional, played on service teams that soldiers had been able to see sports competition at its finest and would want to see more after the war. Second, the soldier athletes were receiving the finest coaching available and would be better athletes for it. Finally, the military sports activity was healthy as well as fun. Hamilton concluded by reasserting his optimistic forecast: "Sports is being elevated to a place in the national life it never enjoyed. And when it comes back from war it will-literally-be all over the place. Get set for it."<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the strongest, most characteristic element of the service football phenomenon in World War I was the attempt of its participants and supporters to copy the activities associated with college football: the cheering and singing, the marching bands, and the colorful clothing. Perhaps this emphasis on college-type football activities resulted from the fact that service football had a strong connection to college football in that many of the teams, even down to the regimental and battalion level, included ex-college players.<sup>35</sup> Or perhaps there was no real competition from professional football since the professional game was still almost a "sandlot" game played without an established league.<sup>36</sup>

Sportswriters cooperated with and encouraged bringing the glamor of college football into service games. Newspaper references to "college glamor" in describing service football activities occurred too often to escape this connection of service football to college football. As early in the season as October 27, 1917, the Philadelphia *Inquirer* described the football scene at Camp Dix, New Jersey. Plans had been made to mass the regimental bands into a camp marching band of 250 pieces to play at half-time during regimental games at Camp Dix. Thousands of visitors, "equal to the crowds which flock to intercollegiate

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32. Oil City (Pa.) Derrick, October 25, 1917.

33. Philadelphia *Inquirer*, October 27, 1917.

34. Butler Eagle, December 13, 1917.

35. Even the line-up of the 305th Ammunition Train, a battalion-level team which played Allegheny College during 1917, included a former all-America player from Brown. Allegheny College Campus, December 10, 1917.

36. Detroit Free Press, November 7, 1917. Camp Custer played a game with the Detroit Herald, "the best 'pro' football team Detroit has ever sponsored." The writer's description of the Herald's seems to imply that professional football was more like what would be termed "semi-pro" today.

games,” were expected to attend. Lt. Bob Crawford, an old Princeton track athlete now stationed at Camp Dix, was to give instruction in college-type cheering and singing. The soldiers and their visitors were clearly being taught to enjoy the college football experience. This seems confirmed when the Baltimore *American* commented on the scene at a Camp Meade, Maryland football game: “Each Company had a band, and so did the regiments thus making it especially easy to duplicate academic football.”<sup>37</sup>

A writer for the *Great Lakes Recruit* in 1918 felt that the Regimental Football League was the biggest educating factor created at Great Lakes:

Thousands of youths who had never before known the thrills of the gridiron game are now enthusiasts. They march to the games behind their band, and they yell themselves hoarse in encouraging their campmates to win. All that one needs to become a rabid football fan is to be inoculated with the initial interest. The rest is a mere matter of time.<sup>38</sup>

By November 9, 1917 the New Castle, Pennsylvania News went so far as to publish, presumably for the many new football fans, an article on how to show good football manners. Because the make-up of football crowds was different from baseball, better manners were to be expected from football fans: “Football is a college and school game, mostly amateur. Baseball is the general public’s game, mostly professional. And therein lies the difference.”<sup>39</sup>

The writer of “Old Sport’s Musings,” a regular but unsigned column in the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, seems to have thought a good deal about the future implications of service football. He not only saw the impact of service football on the future popularity of sports, but he also believed that the service teams were taking football in a new direction:

Surely the war-time is doing something for football and football is returning that with interest. No longer does the game have to depend upon the college glamour, by which it is surrounded, for its popularity. The soldier boys have given it new impetus, and it is pleasing to note that big military games are being arranged for various parts of the country as a grand finale of the football season.<sup>40</sup>

The writer moved on to explain why football was growing in popularity across the country. The rule changes had opened the game up to such an extent that it was now entertaining. This in turn had led the spectators to learn more about the game and their interest had increased accordingly. But he acknowledged the contribution of service football, since the post-season games played by service teams were extending the length of the season. “That shows that the game is well liked and that the army teams have added a touch this year that was not enjoyed in the past.” He did not feel that the glamor of college football was responsible for the growing popularity of football:

There was a time when the game, if robbed of its college glamour, would have

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37. Baltimore, Maryland *American*, November 4, 1917.

38. *Great Lakes Recruit*, December, 1918. This magazine is available at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Waukegan, Illinois. The issues for 1917 have been lost.

39. New Castle (Pa.) News, November 9, 1917.

40. Philadelphia *Inquirer*, November 12, 1917.

been forgotten entirely [i.e., before the rule changes]. New interest is such that it no longer requires a college setting to be interesting and enjoyable to the sport lovers.

In spite of this hostility to college glamor, on December 3, 1917 the same writer inadvertently reinforced the argument that college-like glamor was a factor in the rise in popularity of service football. He described the half-time activities at a big end-of-season service game he had witnessed at Franklin Field, Philadelphia on Thanksgiving Day:

To some it may have seemed that the spectacular stunt of forming the [soldiers] up in a hollow square and cheering and singing, seemed absurd, with the cheer leader soldiers jumping around and performing all the antics of the college boy.

Nevertheless, he called the exhibition good military training. The writer seems to have been a football purist who felt that "college boy antics" detracted from the game. But it is obvious that his dismay reflects what a strong emphasis on college glamor there had been at the game he had witnessed.<sup>41</sup>

As the 1917 football season came to a close it was becoming evident that the war was not likely to end before the 1918 football season began.<sup>42</sup> It was also evident that interest in camp games had grown so much that service teams clearly rivalled collegiate teams in sharing the interest of sportswriters. Given this new situation it was unclear how football would be organized in 1918. An unsigned syndicated article datelined Chicago suggested collegiate football in 1918 would be "an unimportant part of the game." The writer suggested that service football was so exciting that it would be "a professional attraction next season."<sup>43</sup> It is possible that service football provided the impetus to form a professional football league after the war based on the same entertaining foundation of service football: i.e., a team of all-stars who play together for the entire season. This idea was not mentioned again so it is dangerous to place too much weight upon it. But certainly the writer's views were an endorsement of service football for 1918 and attest to the impact it had had in 1917.

The 1918 service football season no doubt continued to develop popular interest in football in the same way the 1917 season had: by involving even more draftees in organized play with all the glamor that attached to it. Presumably family and friends supported the teams representing the draftees.

The relationship between the colleges and the service teams was not cordial in 1918 apparently because many of the service teams were so powerful they threatened to damage college reputations. This seems evident from the 1918 schedule of games. Six leading service teams (Camps Grant, Taylor and Dodge, Great Lakes, Cleveland Naval Station, and the U.S. Army Balloon School) were able to schedule only six of their total of twenty-seven games with

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41. *Ibid.*, December 3, 1917.

42. *Harrisburg Patriot*, November 24, 1917. By this time Russia was divided by revolution and was unable to continue the war and the British and French offensives of 1917 had all failed.

43. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 24, 1917.

colleges; and four of them were the first game of the season when the all-star type service teams would not yet be working well together.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, the most dramatic game of the 1918 season occurred when “national champion” Pitt agreed to play a powerful service team, the Cleveland Naval Reserve, in a post-season showdown between service and college teams. In 1917 Pitt had been regarded by many observers as the “national champion,” but had refused to play a post-season game with a strong service team. In 1918 the situation was different with Pitt stronger than ever, having defeated unbeaten and highly touted Georgia Tech. Yet service football had such a strong reputation that Pitt agreed to play the Cleveland Naval Reserve in a special game on November 30, 1918. Cleveland won the game 10 to 9 amid charges by Pitt that the referee had called the game over after only ten minutes of the final quarter (there were no scoreboard clocks) after Pitt had reached the Cleveland one-yard line.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from this triumph in the final service team game of World War I, the season was anticlimatic for service football. Its rise during 1917 had been one of the most dramatic developments ever in American football. But that could not be repeated in 1918 because the service teams were known to be powerful before the season began. Nor was there the inherent romance of the cream of the nation’s youth learning football so that they could test themselves in a more serious contest with the Germans. By the 1918 football season the new draftees were not surrounded by such romance because the Germans were already showing signs of defeat when the 1918 football season began and they agreed to an armistice just as the season was reaching its peak. In addition the Spanish influenza epidemic swept the country at the beginning of the football season. So many Americans died that public gatherings were sometimes cancelled to avoid contagion. People walked around in gauze masks to avoid breathing contaminated air.<sup>46</sup> This had an effect on football attendance until the end of the season and even caused the cancellation of a number of games.<sup>47</sup> Even the final victory over Pitt was not quite a triumph.

Nevertheless, service football quickened the popularization of collegiate football significantly. It did so in three ways: first, service football opened up the number of participants in organized football, thus familiarizing them with a game most had not played in an organized manner before. Second, it gave non-playing soldiers a chance to experience the music, color and spirit of the game, formerly limited largely to college people. Third, service football gave friends and neighbors of the draftees new exposure to the game when they supported service teams representing their soldiers, thus feeling a sense of belonging at

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44. New York Times, October 13, 1918.

45. Ibid., December 2, 1918. Symbolic of the separation, amounting almost to hostility, of college and service football was Walter Camp’s decision to name both collegiate and service team all-America squads for 1918. New York Times, December 31, 1918.

46. Allen Churchill, *Over Here!* (New York: Dodd, Meade, 1968), p. 305.

47. New York Times, October 20, 1918.

the games. We can therefore conclude that although the exact impact on the popularity of football in the 1920s cannot be accurately measured in comparison to the rule changes, it seems evident from the foregoing description that service football did have a significant impact on the growing popularity of collegiate football.