

Book Reviews

Smith, Ronald A. *Big-Time Football at Harvard, 1905: The Diary of Coach Bill Reid*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Pp. ix, 354. Photographs, appendix, index. \$27.50.

Bill Reid was paid an astonishing seven thousand dollars in 1905 to become the head football coach at Harvard. The mature twenty-six-year-old alumnus developed a rational, highly systematic approach for building a team that could defeat arch-rival and perennial football power, Yale. Yet, despite Reid's copious attention to scheduling, scouting, conditioning, and strategy. Harvard lost to both Pennsylvania and Yale that year. The most enduring significance of Reid's rookie coaching season, however, materialized after the regular season.

Amidst national outrage over football's brutality and the Harvard administration's own ambivalence toward the game itself, Reid headed the Harvard Graduates' Athletic Association, a committee assigned to either reform the game or oversee its abolishment. Just weeks after Reid's committee proposed 19 new rules to reform Harvard football, a national conference was convened with similar directives. The much publicized conference spawned the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (what became the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1910), arguably the pivotal development in intercollegiate athletic history.

The conference signaled the changing of the guard in collegiate football. Reid replaced Yale's Walter Camp who had dominated the committee for a generation as committee secretary. Reid informed his colleagues in no uncertain terms that if they failed to adopt reforms similar to those developed by Harvard, his alma mater would abolish the game and many other schools would follow suit. Reid's foray into athletic statesmanship succeeded. The new 1906 NCAA changes reflected the essence of the reformed Harvard rules.

Reid was retained as coach in 1906. Despite an exemplary career coaching record, Reid regarded his Harvard stint as a failure, due to his team's inability to defeat Yale. He was elected as a Pioneer member to the Football Hall of Fame in 1970, and died six years later at the age of ninety-seven.

The diary is an invaluable primary source for historians seeking to understand turn-of-the-century big-time intercollegiate athletics and the problematical issues of American "amateurism." Its densely detailed, lengthy paragraphs and Spartan prose do not make for easy, leisurely reading. In short, the diary is certainly no page-turner. Editor Ronald Smith kept the diary in its original form, but has provided regular, useful, informative

footnotes that identify individuals, obscure terms, and other miscellaneous textual items. Moreover, the text is neatly packaged between a savvy introduction that draws on Smith's expert knowledge of archival and primary sources pertaining to early collegiate athletics, and an afterword that presents a succinct biographical survey of Reid's life after the 1905 season.

The diary's first 90 pages cover the pre-season. Prior to spring practice, Reid devoted considerable energy to strategically arranging the regular season schedule to Harvard's benefit, with early tune-up games against weaker teams before the rigorous finale with Penn, Dartmouth, and Yale. The most taxing pre-season challenge, though, was monitoring players' academic progress. Why it is that men who are big enough to do their work," Reid wondered, will not do so unless "one keeps everlastingly after them." He was forced to do "more police duty this spring than anyone would have considered possible, and only because it was absolutely necessary," Reid lamented. (12)

The difficulty of academic eligibility was compounded by a limited prospect pool. After less than 40 men reported for spring tryouts, Reid embarked upon a resourceful campus recruiting campaign and established a comprehensive catalogue system that tracked every Harvard student. Reid was clearly ambivalent about the increasingly popular practice of outside recruitment. Hedging his bet on the more gifted student populations at Andover and Exeter, rather than luring prospective players without the intellectual or financial resources to survive at Harvard, he eventually concluded that coaches should only deal with those who had been formally accepted by the college, for to do otherwise approached the "line of illegitimate proselyting." "If we cannot compete successfully on this basis," Reid resolved, "it seems to me that we ought to force our competitors to adopt the same point of view or else choose new ones" (77). Clearly the young coach understood the prospects of negotiating from strength.

The diary provides important insights into the development of sporting goods—what Stephen Hardy characterizes as an essential component in the modern "sport form." Recognizing that Yale's equipment was far superior to Harvard's, Reid secretly journeyed to New Haven to procure the inside dope on uniform suppliers and specifications. Yale continued to have certain items, like shoes, custom-made by small local manufacturers. After purchasing a complete Yale uniform for forty dollars, Reid visited the Spalding Brothers store in New York, where he intercepted a copy of Yale's purchase order with the nation's leading sporting goods company. After careful scrutiny, Reid compared notes with other leading coaches like A. A. Stagg and Fielding Yost, and incorporated his findings into a new uniform to ensure that his team would be not only the best equipped Harvard squad ever, but more importantly, as well clothed as any team in the country. Certainly by the 1910s this information had become standard fare, but Reid's experiences impart thoughtful, candid glimpses into this critical dimension of collegiate sport history.

Reid's daily season record takes the reader through practice drills, game summaries, and his sometimes uneasy relations with the press. Football historians will find the lengthy discussions about fundamentals instructive: generalists might opt for skimming through the passages of line play, backfield coordination, and kicking practice. All readers will benefit from Reid's first-hand account of the famous 1905 White House conference that illuminates not only Theodore Roosevelt's knowledge of the game and its abuses, but Reid's own deep suspicions about Yale and Princeton's questionable sincerity to the spirit of the principles which were drafted on that momentous occasion.

In sum, the University of Illinois Press deserves credit for publishing this diary without obvious marketing prospects. Although the volume will unlikely be adopted for classroom use, it provides specialists with important insights about an American sport at the moment of its institutional development and repudiates any naive view that contemporary controversies are substantively different from those of a century ago.

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