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# Protecting Athletics and the American War Defenses of Intercollegiate Athletics at Ohio State and Across the Big Ten During the Great Depression

by Brad Austin<sup>†</sup>

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

The Great Depression of the 1930s sparked an ideological struggle among Americans about the role of government and regulation in modern society—a debate that found expression in virtually all aspects of American life. As Americans sought to protect homes, jobs, families, community, and hopes from the hardships of the Depression, political rhetoric and concerns extended well beyond the subject of elections. The politicization of American life that characterized the 1930s intruded into institutions of higher education and intercollegiate athletics. While many intellectuals, reformers, labor leaders, and politicians considered changes in the structure of American society and government as a means of meeting the crises of the depression, athletic officials at Ohio State University and across the Big Ten Conference defended the established order and their position within it. They did so by expanding upon idealized images of competitive, democratic, and successful American athletes as the future leaders of capitalism and the saviors of Western Civilization. Thus, the Great Depression, and the accompanying social conflict, led athletic lead-

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ers to reaffirm and emphasize a positive ideology of competitive sport that tied competitive values to maintaining a laissez-faire capitalist social order. The effect was to politicize athletics, associating America's school sporting culture with leadership and corporate forms, as well as national vigor and strength.

In the eyes of athletic organizers and administrators, competitive sport was especially important as a bulwark against radicalism and disunity in general, and against socialism and communism in particular. Their association of sport with traditional democratic values served to defend school athletics against the reform impulses sparked by the 1929 Carnegie report *American College Athletics* and the economic pressures brought about by the depression. Historians have long understood the importance of this type of ideology to advocates of institutionalized sports. Ronald Smith's *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* offers perhaps the best explanation of how many Americans defended their sporting ventures by claiming physical, social, and spiritual benefits. Smith highlights the attentions devoted to the amateur ideal, based on a British university model. That emphasis on amateurism still echoed during the Depression period examined here. More recently, Steven Pope's *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* illustrates the conscious efforts many Americans made to link their sporting activities with their country's heritage, traditions, and values. This article argues that the rhetoric used and the convictions held in the 1930s built upon those traditions and began to feature explicitly political overtones and arguments that intercollegiate athletics were important tools, not only for continuing the amateur tradition in American life, but for protecting competitive, democratic capitalism itself from its many serious challenges.<sup>1</sup>

Their efforts drew upon a preexisting vision of competitive sport as a crucible of American values. As Mark Dyreson has persuasively argued, "progressive" Americans, living between 1880 and 1920, tried to use athletic programs and team sports to produce "civic virtue and national vitality."<sup>2</sup> This desire to create a "sporting republic" was an attempt by the new middle-class to minimize the problems of industrialization and modernization by teaching Protestant, professional, and republican values through sports. By focusing on the benefits of sound minds and bodies, regulated activity, and the ideals of "fair play" during competition, these idealistic reformers sought to foster social cohesion through sports.<sup>3</sup> Dyreson later expanded this discussion to include the changes wrought by the emergence of a full-blown consumer culture in the 1920s. In this decade, as the wider Progressive movement faded from prominence, the belief that sports could serve as important and powerful social tools deteriorated as well. Citing such commentators as Frederick Lewis Allen and Mary and Charles Beard, Dyreson asserted that in the 1920s, Americans viewed athletics more as a distraction and a leisurely release than as a civilizing educational force, seeing sports more often "as an end and not as a means." Although he conceded that the Progressive mentality persevered in a few places and minds, Dyreson argued that this belief system lost its significance as a social force during the 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

However, the connection between athletic competition and the preferred American way of life was not limited to the minds of aging Progressive reformers. Indeed, throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, the rhetoric of competition helped provide the infrastructure for both political parties' platforms. Despite their disagreements about the proper role

of government in regulating the economy and the social sphere, both the Democrats and the Republicans saw competition as a central component of the American system.<sup>5</sup> Although some of his opponents saw President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a wild-eyed leveler, a “traitor to his class” who wanted to destroy the American capitalist system, he was not. In fact, many New Left historians have since argued the exact opposite point—that Roosevelt served as one of industrial capitalism’s most valuable protector. As several scholars, including John Wong, have pointed out, many of Roosevelt’s programs worked to buttress, not undermine, the American economic system. As part of Roosevelt’s New Deal, the Works Progress Administration (later named the Works Projects Administration) spent over \$1.1 billion on recreation-related projects from 1935 through 1941. Many of these programs were designed to keep the underutilized labor force physically fit, but they were also intended to inculcate the values of hard work, punctuality, discipline, and order into the participants, continuing the work commenced by the industrial recreation leagues of the 1920s.<sup>6</sup> During the 1930s many Americans looked to their national government for assistance; most also expected the government to continue preparing America’s youth for economic revival and for democratic participation. As Wong demonstrated, Roosevelt’s WPA kept alive the progressive model of using athletics and physical activity to teach “proper” American values. During the 1930s, officials at Ohio State and throughout the Big Ten would do likewise, using *laissez-faire* rhetoric to marry competition to the nation’s capitalistic future.



Ohio State Director of Athletics Lynn W. St. John (left) working at his desk in 1934. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

The experiences of Ohio State University and the Big Ten Conference during the 1930s provide an excellent example of this politicization of sport. Before the Depression struck, OSU had built one of the largest and most successful athletic programs in the nation. When the crises of economic collapse mounted, however, the resulting pressures threatened the very continuation of intercollegiate athletics. Ohio State officials, in collaboration with their counterparts in the Big Ten conference, sought to protect sports programs by coupling those programs to the safeguarding of particular values. In a revival and modification of the arguments of a previous generation of progressive reformers, Ohio State Director of Athletics Lynn St. John and his colleagues argued that colleges and universities could and should use intercollegiate athletic programs as tools to produce the business leaders, field generals, and virtuous citizens necessary to secure a safe, democratic and capitalist future for the nation. Their rhetoric was both self-serving and politically charged by the ferment of the Great Depression, and the political associations they made would not disappear as most Americans returned to prosperity, and to a Cold War, in the 1940s, 1950s and beyond.

Ohio State University's commitment to intercollegiate athletics had deep and established roots by the 1930s. After opening its doors in 1873 as the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, the school had a baseball team representing it only seven years later. In 1881, the university's Athletic Association formed and soon had its own athletic grounds. By 1889, football was gaining prominence on campus, leading to the construction of fences and grandstands for spectators. In 1912, the university officially joined the Western Conference (also known as the Big Ten Conference and the Intercollegiate Conference). By 1916, after several very successful seasons, interest in and enthusiasm for Ohio State football was widespread. The University capitalized on this public enthusiasm to finance construction of a new stadium that, when finished, would be one of the nation's largest.<sup>7</sup>

Ohio State boosters put their money where their passions were, and OSU's Athletic Association successfully solicited over \$1 million in public pledges to finance its new stadium, completed in 1922. As expenses inevitably exceeded estimates, the athletic department was forced to transfer more than \$800,000 from football profits to complete the undertaking. The popularity of Ohio State football during the 1920s was not unique. On the contrary, many other schools both in and out of the Big Ten joined in the rush to accommodate fans with new facilities. As Benjamin Rader pointed out, the Twenties witnessed a national boom in stadium construction. In 1920, only one university boasted of a stadium capacity greater than 70,000; by 1930 at least seven could. In addition to Ohio State, both the University of Michigan and the University of Illinois spent over \$1 million in the 1920s to build stadiums capable of seating more than 70,000 fans. Moreover, many of these projects consciously sought to link athletics with patriotism by dedicating the new behemoths to American veterans with the name "Memorial Stadium."<sup>8</sup>

These universities, Ohio State included, did not confine themselves to building only football stadiums during the 1920s. Instead, buoyed by the general optimism of the era and by the financial windfalls provided each autumn by their respective football teams, many institutions sought to provide additional athletic opportunities and facilities for their entire student bodies. In the 1920s Ohio State also committed itself to building a

water sports center, gymnasium, walking tracks, baseball fields, tennis courts, and a golf course. Clearly Ohio State's leaders and those at other universities in the 1920s perceived value in athletic facilities and programs.<sup>9</sup>

Everything seemed to be going quite well at the Ohio State University until, as one university official put it, "Old Man Depression" made his unwelcome debut.<sup>10</sup> By the early 1930s, officials realized that the unabated optimism of the 1920s had been misplaced. A February 1933 report to OSU's alumni pointed out that "University economies, enforced by the depression, tragic as they may have been thus far, are daily growing more serious. The bitter medicine stage has been supplanted by amputation."<sup>11</sup> By 1933, every department of the university had endured budget cuts, and all classifications of university employees had seen the realities of the Depression in their paychecks—or often in their pink slips. Nonetheless, the investments the university had made in the athletic facilities during prosperous times, and the debts still owed on these buildings and playing fields, ensured that the university's officials could neither ignore nor easily abandon OSU's athletic commitments during hard times. Ohio State's officials, then, had to construct sufficient justifications for continued athletic expenditures during the financial crisis.<sup>12</sup>

Justification was sorely needed. The Ohio General Assembly, passing along the general woes of the state's economy to the state's largest public university, greatly reduced appropriations during the first half of the 1930s. In 1930-31, the state legislature slashed over \$3 million from the University's requested budget, allocating \$1.1 million less than the previous two-year budget. Adding insult to injury, the governor issued an executive order cutting an additional seven percent from the university's budget. The Board of Trustees responded to the budgetary crisis by instituting a three-tier system of salary cuts: reducing salaries over \$7,500 by ten percent; those between \$5,000 and \$7,499 by 7.5 percent; and those between \$3,000 and \$4,999 by five percent—at least those salaries not provided by athletic revenues. This exemption was a compromise solution between OSU's Athletic Board and Board of Trustees, and it allowed the men and women working in athletics to protect more of their income than their purely academic counterparts. Moreover, the university eliminated 91 teaching positions, a move that combined with the salary cuts saved the university around \$300,000. The legislature also refused to allocate any money for university libraries, causing university officials to "go to the state emergency board to get emergency appropriations to carry on subscriptions to periodicals."<sup>13</sup> Times, unquestionably, were tough.

Of course, the university did not bear the burdens of the early 1930s alone. As national official unemployment rose to 24 percent in 1932, corresponding declines in disposable income sharply restricted athletic revenues, money needed to pay operating costs and reduce debt expenses. Overall attendance dropped significantly at Ohio State football games, and those people who did attend the games purchased tickets at dramatically reduced prices. For example, in 1933 Ohio State officials boasted that more than 49,000 fans attended the football game with the University of Virginia. However, 42,987 of these bought children's tickets for 10¢, and only 351 bought the \$1.50 box seats. Three years before, OSU had sold only 3,979 out of 136,581 tickets for just 10¢. By 1933, the university clearly needed every dime it could get.<sup>14</sup>

The university's athletic revenue totals provide a better illustration of the effects of the Depression's early years. In the academic year 1929-30, Ohio State athletic programs brought in \$428,947.81, with the football team providing the bulk of the funds. In contrast, in 1932-33, "games and sports" generated only \$129,111.53 for Ohio State, a 70 percent drop in only four years. Further evidence of how the general economic decline affected OSU may be observed by merely looking at the revenue totals from the "big game," the annual football contest against the University of Michigan. Ohio State pocketed over \$88,000 for the 1928 home contest against the Wolverines, and the 1930 game generated only slightly less. However, as the Depression worsened, football receipts reflected the decline. In 1932 the Ohio State-Michigan game produced only \$35,243.38, 40 percent of the 1928 receipt total. This drop-off reflected the fact that of the 50,429 fans at the game, over 48,000 (96 percent) purchased tickets for less than the minimum price offered only four years before.<sup>15</sup>

Profits were not the only things disappearing from the ledger of the Ohio State Athletic Board: athletic programs were as well. Looking to cut costs in late 1931, the Big Ten's athletic directors set restrictions on the numbers of games played and on team sizes for several sports. Thereafter, conference basketball teams could schedule only one non-conference game; baseball teams could take only 13 players with them on road trips, 15 if they played more than one game on the trip. The athletic directors eliminated the entire wrestling schedule except for one conference meet, and they limited gymnastics and fencing squads to six and three participants respectively. Finally, the conference of athletic directors decreed that schools could employ only one umpire for baseball games and could pay him no more than \$20. The conference commissioner also vowed to talk to sporting goods manufacturers about lowering prices to member schools.<sup>16</sup>

These restrictions proved insufficient. In 1932 the OSU Athletic Board felt forced to demote three intercollegiate sports (polo, rifle and pistol, and fencing) from the varsity ranks to intramural activities. A January 1933 report to the university's alumni communicated the dire situation of the Athletic Board and described other cost-cutting measures it deemed necessary, explaining that only basketball and football had previously supported themselves and that football receipts had also been financing all other sports. With football revenues declining, the Board announced cuts in the baseball and other sports' rosters and explained that traveling teams would use a "hitch-hike" plan and private cars instead of buses, and would stay overnight in fraternity houses instead of hotels.<sup>17</sup>

Obviously, the Ohio State administrators valued some sports over others, but they vowed to maintain as many intercollegiate programs as possible. In fact, in 1931 some officials privately stated that, if the need arose, they would request tax money to keep the university's athletic teams on the fields and courts of play. J.L. Morrill, the Junior Dean of Education, expressed his unflinching support by claiming, "the importance of the intercollegiate [athletic] program is distinctly great enough to justify the University in seeking legislative funds for its support, in the event that the program should, due to the Depression or other factors, be no longer able to support itself."<sup>18</sup> Even if the state could not provide enough money for library subscriptions, some administrators believed that it could, and should, find enough tax money for its athletic teams.



If Ohio State officials had faced only budgetary problems during the 1930s, they might not have perceived a widespread threat to the university's and country's values. Instead, the 1930s proved a tumultuous decade on the Columbus campus for students, faculty, and administrators. This general sense of campus crisis and the seemingly constant state of turmoil caused many officials to see almost any questioning of the status quo as a direct challenge to the university's—and the country's—stability and legitimacy. Athletic officials tried to preserve for OSU's male students competitive ideas and programs, designed to teach them the diligence and determination necessary to succeed in a capitalist business environment, while at the same time preserving a vital sense of campus community. This would not be an easy task during the 1930s.

The controversies of the early 1930s prompted one historian of the University to label the academic year 1930-31 “one of turmoil and trouble for the University from without and within.” During that academic year, the student Liberal Club continued a tradition by officially protesting the compulsory military drills required by the University. This led to a faculty vote in favor of optional military drilling and the threat of intercession by the state legislature. During that same year the university administration dismissed a popular professor, Dr. W.D. Miller. Most observers believed that the administration and trustees fired Miller for his “sociological views”—and because he had allowed white Ohio State female students to congregate, eat, and dance with African-American students while visiting Wilberforce College. Miller's dismissal, according to university historian James Pollard, “quickly split the campus, with the faculty ‘liberals’ pitted against the ‘conservatives’ and with the administration strongly criticized for its actions.” Not only did 132 faculty members officially protest Miller's removal, but the American Association of University Professors investigated the matter and sided with Miller's supporters. Academic freedom found itself threatened at Ohio State, even if football did not.<sup>19</sup> Although neither of these incidents was directly related to the Depression, each seriously divided the university community, compounding the financial difficulties of the Depression and contributing to the siege mentality of the university's administrators.

The tumult did not end quickly. Racial issues combined with ideological disputes to further the political turmoil. Although Ohio State's percentage of African American students was very small by modern standards—only 250 African Americans (including Jesse Owens) attended OSU in 1934—their presence greatly offended many of the almost 10,000 white students. In 1937, one year after Owens's Olympic triumphs, the campus YWCA and the Socialist Club endorsed the formation of a campus NAACP chapter. This advocacy inspired the campus Anti-Negro Guild to distribute leaflets across the campus, complete with subtle titles such as “THE KU KLUX KLAN HAD THE RIGHT IDEA!!!” Administrators quickly identified the propagandists and spoke among themselves about the necessity of quick and decisive action. Urging prompt punishment, the Dean of Men, J.A. Park, reminded President Rightmire that “the University has been criticized, however unfairly, for its attitudes towards negroes and the circumstances of this case are widely known,” and another school official wanted to punish the two culprits as a measure to stop the “waves of propaganda and counter-propaganda which beat about our heads con-

stantly on the campus in economic, racial, and religious matters.” The trustees took a different strategy in silencing the propaganda wars raging across the Columbus campus; with only two voicing dissent, they directed the abolition of the university’s twelve-member Marxist Club.<sup>20</sup>

In 1937 athletic directors and administrators across the Big Ten also felt the heat of campus passions as they found themselves confronted with a petition for greater racial equality, at least in athletics. The Northwestern University Inter-racial Committee (including representatives from Northwestern’s Peace Action Committee, YMCA, YWCA, B’nai B’rith Hillel Organization, Socialist Club, and International Relations Club), in conjunction with representatives from student organizations at Ohio State, University of Iowa, Purdue University, the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan, and the University of Chicago, asked the Conference’s athletic directors to “rescind a so-called ‘unwritten law’ prohibiting the participation of Negroes in Big Ten basketball, swimming, and wrestling competition” at their 8 March 1937 meeting. The petitioning students had adopted the strategy of arguing that sports could teach desirable American values, basing their request in the language of competition and on the understanding that the racial discrimination was “inconsistent with aims of the higher education and with the spirit of the Constitution of the United States as well as with the desire of the student body to be represented in athletics by its most qualified members, regardless of race or creed.” The agenda for the 8 March 1937 meeting of the Big Ten’s athletic directors did not include this issue among its ten items for discussion, and Ohio State did not have an African-American athlete in these sports over the next ten years.<sup>21</sup>

“Economic, racial, and religious matters,” as one Ohio State administrator noted, continued to cause controversy on the Columbus campus throughout the Depression. The passions and events surrounding the Ohio State-Notre Dame football series in 1935-36 most clearly illustrate the divisive effects these disputes could have and the uneasiness among officials they caused as they threatened to destroy campus community. Matching two powerful football squads from neighboring states, the series generated tremendous increases in game receipts when Ohio State desperately needed them; however, it also revealed a decidedly unwelcome sectarian split in the Columbus and campus communities. In 1935, the home game against the Fighting Irish attracted a sellout crowd of more than 81,000 and grossed more than \$175,000. As a point of comparison, Ohio State’s next highest home receipt total that year barely exceeded \$60,000. This game was an unqualified success on the field as well as in the ticket office, with Notre Dame rallying from a 13-0 deficit to win on the game’s final play. In 1950, sportswriters recognized this thrilling game as “The Greatest College Football Game of the Half-Century.” Millions across the nation heard the broadcast on CBS, and the next year Ohio State pocketed an additional \$65,000 from another close loss, this one in South Bend.<sup>22</sup>

This clearly was a profitable relationship for Ohio State and for Notre Dame, yet the series ended in 1936, not to resume for decades. One wonders why, in the midst of financial difficulty caused by the Depression and facing a hostile legislature, the Ohio State Athletic Board chose not to pursue this seemingly natural, and certainly lucrative, rivalry. After all, the number of tickets sold, and the high prices paid for them, clearly indicated public interest. Pollard unsatisfactorily noted this odd discontinuance with the simple

statement, “despite the excitement it produced this series was never renewed.” In fact, according to St. John, Ohio State officials chose not to renew the series precisely because of “the excitement” surrounding it.<sup>23</sup>

Ohio was a hotbed of nativist sentiment in the early twentieth century. In the 1920s, many Ohioans had participated in the national revival of the Ku Klux Klan and its anti-Catholicism. In fact, a student organization using hooded robes, scare tactics, and the name “The Klandestine Klan” had even helped to raise money for the football stadium, receiving favorable front-page coverage in the student newspaper for its efforts. During this same period Notre Dame’s student body and football players grew accustomed to the passions their school’s Catholic heritage aroused. Millions of Americans feverishly supported the Fighting Irish in assertion of their own Catholic pride, while perhaps even more despised and jeered them in a prejudiced backlash, amplified, undoubtedly, by jealousy of Notre Dame’s athletic success. According to Murray Sperber, an historian of Notre Dame football, by the mid-1920s Notre Dame had secured the allegiance of most of the nation’s urban Catholics as a result of their gridiron successes. The power of that allegiance, even in Columbus, became readily apparent when Notre Dame visited Ohio State in 1935.<sup>24</sup>

It would have been almost impossible in the week before the game for residents of Columbus not to know that the Buckeyes were going to play an important game against a Catholic foe. By following the buildup to the game, Columbus’s newspaper readers learned that Notre Dame Coach Elmer Layden had requested special police details “to ensure privacy” and quiet; readers also were treated to two separate stories and many pictures concerning the Catholic accommodations provided to the team by a local Catholic college. Another article described to Columbus’s citizens what the Protestant players did while the team said a Hail Mary before the game, “as is customary with Notre Dame



A crowd of more than 80,000 paid top dollar to watch Ohio State’s first game against Notre Dame during the depths of the Depression. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

teams.” The *Columbus Dispatch* reported that twenty-four special trains were necessary to carry all of the interested football fans, including the entire Notre Dame student body. According to Sperber, these trainloads of Notre Dame boosters “encountered extremely hostile crowds and anti-Catholic taunts.” At one point, the football team had an audience of 15,000 anti-Catholics serenading them with jeers.<sup>25</sup> With this reception, one can understand why Notre Dame might have chosen not to play at Ohio State again; however, Notre Dame’s entourage had experienced this sort of reception, and much worse, numerous times before. Ohio State’s officials, on the other hand, were not used to the divided loyalties the visit revealed and the threat to campus cohesion it created. In their eyes, college athletics were supposed to create community, not destroy it.

In 1940, frustrated by the lack of additional contests between the two institutions, one alumnus wrote to St. John and pointed out the seemingly obvious reasons to renew the series. He wrote, “It’s a natural—short distances—neighboring states—outstanding Foot Ball Teams—great universities—Large following (in and out of the university families)—Popular [Institutions?]-Crowd draws—clean athletics—good spirit. etc.” He even goaded St. John, telling him that Chicago’s football fans compared Ohio State with the University of Chicago, a Big Ten school that had recently abolished football. Neither his logical nor his emotional arguments, however, could persuade St. John to renew the series.<sup>26</sup>

St. John’s confidential response to his correspondent reveals a great deal about the important role intercollegiate athletics played in creating community in the 1930s as well as about the depth of prejudices against Catholics many people in central Ohio had during that period. St. John absolved all Protestants and blamed the Catholics themselves for the turmoil surrounding the contest, writing that “the attitude of all the Catholics who attend such a game and who very obviously look upon it as a contest between the Catholic church and other people” was at fault. He cited a friend who explained anti-Catholicism as simply the result of “an inferiority complex that, without justification, gets into the mind of the average Catholic.” St. John bemoaned the fact that while Ohio State had as many Catholics on its squad as did Notre Dame, all of Ohio State’s Catholic faculty members and students rooted for Notre Dame. This was entirely possible, if not probable, considering Ohio State’s demographics in the mid-1930s. During the academic years 1935-36 and 1936-37, Catholics were the third largest religious group on campus, numbering 1178 and 1347 respectively. In both years, the Catholic students constituted just fewer than 10 percent of the entire student population. Finally, St. John wrote that football could be a “rallying point for the spirit of an institution and of a community,” but that the inability of Catholics to put anything above their church made “intercollegiate football under those conditions... a liability and not an asset.”<sup>27</sup>

In 1938, John Griffith, the commissioner of the Big Ten and the president of the NCAA, wrote to St. John asking for his opinion about why the members of the Big Ten had won only 4 football games out of 43 with Notre Dame over the prior 42 years. St. John succinctly explained the problems, as he saw them, of playing against Notre Dame. St. John contended that Notre Dame’s superiority sprang from its ability to use its Catholic heritage to recruit nationally. He also argued that the Notre Dame athletes enjoyed unfair advantages, writing that in South Bend they had “no interference on account of

studies with their daily football work,” and got to live in “what amounts to a big training club.” Still, St. John insisted, Ohio State would have continued playing Notre Dame if the students and faculty had not “place[d] their loyalty to the church over their loyalty to the Ohio State University.” Again, he argued that the Ohio State team had featured “ten or twelve good Catholic boys,” at least four of whom started. The competition with Notre Dame produced a tremendous amount of money, two fantastic games (and two tough Ohio State losses), a great deal of national attention, as well as campus and community division. In this case, arguing that “financial return cannot possibly make up for the breaking down of the unity and solidarity in a university community,” St. John and others decided that three out of four was not good enough.<sup>28</sup>



Clearly, by the late 1930s, even the most isolated athletic official in the nation’s largest conference could not have failed to notice the social upheaval and the challenges to the standard operating procedures of the day, challenges to community rooted in long-term social problems and challenges to the economic and political status quo sparked by the Depression. In the midst of this economic and social disruption, Ohio State University maintained, and even strengthened, its commitment to providing athletic opportunities for its student population. The question, then, is why this emphasis on seemingly extracurricular activities when the core of the university, the academic programs and infrastructures, found themselves under financial siege? One important answer is that the academic and athletic administrators did not regard athletics as extracurricular; instead, they presented the athletic experience as vital to the University’s duty to prepare the competitive leaders of a capitalist nation. With the continuation of men’s intercollegiate athletic programs, OSU’s leaders sought to preserve the political and social systems, not only of the university, but also of the nation, during a time of great unrest. Although Dyreson argues that the belief in sport as a social tool died out in the face of the emergence of a consumption-based mass society during the 1920s, the Ohio State and Big Ten experience during the 1930s suggests that many working in American universities maintained and came to reemphasize their faith in the ability of sports programs to shape the beliefs and habits of individuals to fit into a corporate, laissez-faire capitalist mold, to create a sense of community, and to teach American democratic values through competition. In the 1930s, however, the rhetoric became more politicized, as the officials drew sharp distinctions between an idealized competitive American way of life and socialist and communist alternatives.<sup>29</sup>

In 1931, discussion about the proper place of athletics in institutions of higher learning consumed the time of athletic directors and college presidents across the Midwest. On October 29, 1931, David E. Ross, a member of Purdue University’s Board of Regents, delivered a controversial lecture before the Association of Governing Boards of State Universities and Allied Institutions in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Ross claimed that “while the public apparently demands these [intramural and intercollegiate] contests it may be seriously doubted” that the state legislatures would pay for them if asked. Ross declared that football stadiums “by long odds... [are] the most ineffective expenditure of money made for practical purposes,” and continued to say that the lack of real public interest in minor

sports made them very difficult to finance. Nonetheless, even Ross acknowledged the positive influence intercollegiate athletics could have on a university environment, calling them the best vehicle “for giving character and unity to that vital thing we know as the spirit of an institution.”<sup>30</sup>

Along with that “spirit” and the students’, alumni’s, and the public’s enthusiasm for athletics came difficulties, or as Ross put it “the evils of a Frankenstein which we ourselves have created.” Much as the 1929 Carnegie Foundation’s *American College Athletics* had, Ross saw the stratification of students into athletes and non-athletes, the hordes of students traveling to away games outside the home university’s control, the threat of professionalism, and the temptation of university officials to schedule games based on their profit potential as the prime dangers of intercollegiate athletics. Ross also noticed a troubling propensity of alumni to associate themselves only with the athletic component of their alma maters, writing that “many of them point with pride to the stadiu [sic], gymnasium, field house, etc. as the acme of perfection in their Alma Mater.” The alumni shared with the general public, in Ross’s eyes, the tendency to associate universities with only their sports teams, and to support only the winning teams and universities at that. This unyielding focus on winning could lead, Ross feared, to gambling and to labels of professionalism, something to be avoided at all costs.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Ross lauded the ability of intercollegiate athletics to foster citizenship, and to “inculcate in [athletes] ideas of fairness, sportsmanship, and integrity.” Despite some problems, athletics still appeared to Ross to be essential tools for shaping competitive All-American boys.<sup>32</sup>



George McNeil Troutman, Big Ten Commissioner John L. Griffith, and E. T. Cook at the Ohio Relays at Ohio State, c. 1930. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

None of the above seems very controversial or specifically related to the Depression; in fact, Ross's statements about the virtues of intercollegiate athletics fit neatly into the well-established canon of athletic defenses. However, Ross concluded his speech with a call to remove scheduling from the hands of those interested in gate receipts, and most threatening to some, he asked that "those vested with authority... at least discuss conference pooling of athletic contest funds," so that universities could continue the education of athletes on and off the field without charges of professionalism.<sup>33</sup> These final thoughts did not find receptive ears in the Ohio State University administration's hallways or in the Big Ten Conference headquarters.

Later that same year, J.L. Morrill, OSU's Junior Dean of Education, hastily drafted a response for St. John concerning a questionnaire, distributed by the Big Ten Conference, based on Ross's speech.<sup>34</sup> According to Morrill, Ohio State's athletic programs were "of great value educationally to the members of the teams, the student body and the public, of the moral concept of loyalty to an ideal (represented by the University) and of self sacrifice for the sake of an ideal." Moreover, the emotional appeal of athletics and the creation of public allegiances by them seemed much more effective in generating support and revenue than "any purely intellectual appeal, however worthy."<sup>35</sup>

Morrill defended the athletic administration system in place at Ohio State. He argued that athletics, while treated as any other educational program of the University, received much more supervision and scrutiny than any other program, thus rendering athletics safe from all excess. In other words, it was the same, yet different. He agreed with Ross that football's role as the main revenue-generating sport was "unfortunate" but he declared it easily "defensible." Sidestepping a question about the salaries granted to "highly paid and highly professional" athletic department personnel, Morrill replied that the correct standard of evaluation should be the recipient's character, not his salary. Despite acknowledging the powerful hold athletics had on the general public and on alumni, Morrill denied that the publicity sports programs provided necessarily helped the University. He also mildly dismissed Ross's proposal of rotating schedules to remove the temptation for scheduling "money" games.<sup>36</sup>

Morrill's valuations and defenses of Big Ten intercollegiate athletics fit nicely into a well-established pattern. He saw athletics as a vehicle for moral uplift that certainly belonged in American universities. His words reflected the earlier expressed, and representative, sentiments of the University of Michigan's Fielding Yost. In 1922, Yost argued that university athletics offered much more than mere "technical exhibitions." Yost contended that college athletics had three underlying aims: "to develop and maintain the physical health of all the students; to promote recreation through self-expression, and a wholesome spirit of competition and rivalry; to form habits and inculcate ideals of right living." Similarly, Big Ten Commissioner John L. Griffith defended intercollegiate athletics in 1929 by reasserting the thesis that "the main value of athletics lies in the fact that they serve to develop qualities that cannot be measured by an intelligence or physical efficiency test." Griffith explained that even spectators could learn valuable life lessons from intercollegiate athletics, just as he asserted that games taught participants to play by the rules, a vital skill in a democracy. However, Griffith did not offer in 1929, as he would in the 1930s, an unqualified defense of American democracy; instead, he wrote that some criticized college

athletics merely because of its scale, arguing that “in a democracy such as ours we are apt to place a premium on mediocrity and to be suspicious of men, organizations and activities which are highly successful.” These comments, and numerous others, display a persevering progressive attitude toward sport throughout the 1920s but they do not include the explicit associations between intercollegiate athletics and the preservation of American business and political norms in the face of “radical” alternatives that dominated the correspondence of the 1930s.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, people rarely, if ever, acknowledge their complete range of motivations to themselves, much less to others. The athletic administrators of the 1920s and 1930s must have wanted to protect college athletics, at least in part, to protect their own jobs. Some of Ohio State’s arguments against “collectivism” might have come from the fact that Ohio State, leading the conference in athletic revenue for much of the decade, would have had to share its wealth more than others. Still, pragmatism aside, during the Depression, as they were surrounded by tremendous economic, racial, religious, and political challenges to the status quo, many athletic administrators imbued their work with explicit political implications. While Morrill couched his disapproval of Ross’s rotation idea in very moderate, apolitical terms, OSU Athletic Director Lynn St. John employed starkly political language to convey his disgust. St. John called Ross’ proposal to pool Conference athletic funds a “really wild idea” and “utterly foolish.” According to St. John, that idea, when combined with the rotating schedules plan, “border[ed] somewhat on rank communism of a dangerous type.”<sup>38</sup>

St. John and Morrill were not the only high-ranking athletic officials to defend the status quo during the early 1930s, nor were they the only ones to frame their arguments in politically loaded terms. John Griffith, one of St. John’s very good friends, unsurprisingly shared many of St. John’s views as well as his method of expressing them. In a public response to Ross’s statements, Griffith offered several business analogies, comparing universities’ athletic programs to manufacturers’ production lines. He stated that, just as in a business setting, the unprofitable lines (read: minor sports) might face abolition or at least reduction if the Depression grew much worse. Griffith also denied Ross’s assertions that athletic administrators designed football schedules based on their profit potential, arguing that they emphasized, instead, “traditional games” which coincidentally just happened to produce the greatest revenues. Maintaining these traditional rivalries was essential to maintaining public interest; therefore, rotating schedules would prove counterproductive. Griffith saved his strongest rhetoric for Ross’s proposal that conference members consider pooling the Conferences athletic revenues to ensure all students equal opportunities and to prevent revenue-based schedules. Griffith dismissed this revenue-sharing plan as a “socialistic theory which our manufacturers and business men would not be willing to put into effect in terms of their own business.”<sup>39</sup>What would not be good for General Motors would not, in Griffith’s eyes, be good for the Big Ten.

A University of Minnesota survey claiming to “reflect the attitudes of 10,000 individuals toward athletics in a typical mid-western state university” represents another response to the controversy Ross and the Carnegie Report instigated. The authors of the study, funded not coincidentally from football revenues, suggested only a few minor changes in athletic operations while endorsing the existing system. After selec-

tively citing different groups' responses to different questions, the study ended by claiming that most university presidents "apparently believe in the social philosophy of education," meaning that the social values instilled into men during competition made the activities worthwhile. Not wanting anyone to misinterpret its advocacy of the social philosophy of education with the support of any socialist cause, the report concluded that the "Intercollegiate Conference exemplifies the true spirit of democratic and representative government."<sup>40</sup>

During the early days of the Depression, athletic directors and administrators across the Big Ten further politicized their rhetoric by explicitly connecting Intercollegiate Conference policies and athletics to larger world events, making the debates over the proper values of intercollegiate athletics seem even more important. The correspondence among St. John, Griffith, and other Conference athletic officials throughout the 1930s and the early 1940s highlights a shared vision of politics as well as athletics, highlighting the connections between the two as they traded swipes at Roosevelt and his policies. Griffith constantly included political discussions in his official correspondence with the conference athletic directors. In one 1932 letter, Griffith told St. John about how Iowa's voters had recently voted out a senator who had spent the previous ten years attacking the existing "capitalistic and economic system and by implication at least advocating the redistribution of wealth." He followed that example with an "Exhibit B," the story of an athletic conference removing a commissioner who had been critical of intercollegiate athletics. Griffith concluded his message with the hopeful belief that he and St. John might "witness an era of sanity in which the demagogues and the inveighers against the constructive systems of athletics and wealth will be less prominent than they have been." During the 1930s, as consistent opponents of Franklin Roosevelt and the collectivism that he and the New Deal represented to them, Griffith and St. John would find their search for "sanity" to be a continuous struggle.<sup>41</sup>

No statement better illustrates the connections conference and university officials made between politics and athletics than the following from a confidential memo entitled "Reconstruction" sent by Commissioner Griffith to Ohio State's St. John:

I start by assuming that although the United States is in a temporary slump that she will come out of the slump. If there is a world war between the Orient and the Occident; if the nation's economic structure is destroyed and a new social, economic and political philosophy takes the place of our present national philosophy then it will not be necessary for anyone to give heed to that which we have come to think of as college athletics. Our entire philosophy of athletics is inextricably interwoven into our American philosophy of life.

We are a capitalistic nation and so we believe in champions and championships. We believe, however, that the champions should win by fair means. As President Hoover has pointed out communism would hold the speed of the swiftest to that of the slowest. Is it not clear then that if we continue to hold to the American conception of competition that we are going to continue along familiar and similar lines in athletics?<sup>42</sup>

Griffith continued his analysis by arguing that "wars, business depressions, and athletic problems" resulted directly from "human greed, disregard for the rights of others, arrogance, selfishness and suspicion." So, who were the culprits Griffith singled out in 1932?

They were the Japanese, for invading Manchuria; the bankers, for lending unwisely just to collect interest; and football coaches, for conducting unauthorized practices in violation of Conference rules. Griffith doubted the necessity of adopting “Ghandiism to lessen the chances of war” just as he challenged the need to “follow the Stahlin [sic] principles by way of guaranteeing every man three meals a day.” Instead, he proclaimed, colleges must continue teaching the importance of competition, if not only for the American system, then to prevent young men from abandoning their pure amateur status to find competition and corruption in professional events. “The colleges must go on,” Griffith exhorted, “or others will take their place.”<sup>43</sup>

Or, worse yet, America itself would forget how to compete, relying instead on leaders who were promising Americans, in Griffith’s words, that “they will give us security, that we won’t have to pay for our sins, that they will share the wealth created by others with us, etc. etc.” This was not antiradical rhetoric intended to rouse a crowd and demonize an opponent. Instead, these were private and confidential expressions of deeply held beliefs, as was Griffith’s letter to Colonel G.L. Townsend, a retiring Ohio State athletic official and commandant of the Military Science Department. Griffith wrote, in 1938, “Aside from what you have meant to athletics at Ohio State and in the Conference, I have rejoiced that you were in charge of military affairs at Ohio State. The Pacifists and the crackpots from the lunatic fringe have been very active in recent years and we need men such as you to help preserve an even balance of the ship of state.”<sup>44</sup>

St. John saved many of Griffith’s patriotic and politically charged speeches and articles from the 1930s. St. John’s collection of his friend’s writings included, among many others, an *Athletic Journal* essay in which Griffith argued that “our form of democracy is a glorified athletic game.” Despite having praised the importance Germany and Japan placed on coordinated physical education programs in 1922, the commissioner of America’s most powerful athletic conference stressed in this essay the political importance of competitive college athletics to the United States. He argued that “since most people will agree that the American way is better for Americans than the Communist way, the Nazi way or the Fascist way, we will not discuss that point. Instead we would like to call attention to some similarities between the American way of life and the athletic way.” Quoting Abraham Lincoln on the virtues of competition, Griffith argued that “1) Competition, 2) Rules governing competition, 3) Leveling up process, [and] 4) Courage and the will to carry on” characterized both the American and athletic way of life. He concluded by exhorting his readers to “preserve the American way and let us exemplify it on the playing fields of our country.”<sup>45</sup>

In open letters to all Big Ten coaches, Griffith used much the same rhetoric. Emphasizing the importance of competition, he warned the coaches to take “one look at Europe today [to see] clearly what happens to a people grown soft.... If there are more softies in America than there are fighters, we will go the whole way to state socialism.” That was unthinkable to Griffith, but fortunately he again had a solution. “Through our athletic programs,” Griffith wrote, “we can help to inculcate in our boys the American spirit. We can refuse to be influenced by the soft idealists. We can let the world know where we stand and what we are doing.”<sup>46</sup> To Griffith, this was not a debate over the number of baseball umpires or the intramural status of OSU’s fencing team; the battle over athletic policy was

a fight over the future of the American democracy and economy as he and his colleagues understood them.

The emphasis these athletic officials placed on protecting competition was understandable, considering the resurgences of Socialist and Communist Parties in America and other, less radical, impulses during the early 1930s to restrict competition. When the Communist Party of the USA and the American Socialist Party grew as the Depression worsened, Ellen Schrecker has argued, the Communist Party was “far more influential than its small size and chimerical objectives might suggest.” In Detroit, for example, the Socialist Party tripled its size from 1928 to 1933, and in the presidential election of 1932, the Socialist and Communist Parties together attracted almost one million votes. Although the emergence of the New Deal diminished the possibility of real socialist electoral success, the movement was alive and visible throughout the 1930s. By 1938, the Communist Party had more than 80,000 card-carrying members, a newspaper with a circulation of 100,000, and a strong affiliation with the labor movement—a movement that with New Deal support saw American union membership



Student sympathies did not always match those of the athletic administrators. This 1933 photograph shows two students after a bet on the 1932 election. *Courtesy Ohio State University Photo Archives*

increase almost 500 percent to 14 million members between 1933 and 1945. Although most members of the Communist and Socialist Parties (and certainly most union members) were not doctrinaire Marxists, it was difficult to convince suspicious outside observers.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere in America, prominent management engineer Charles Stevenson argued in his influential 1932 pamphlet *The Way Out* that Americans were "being crucified on the cross of competition." At the same time, other Americans advocated suspending antitrust laws so industries could cooperate with each other, forming cartels. Gerald Swope of General Electric advocated federal oversight and industry-supported workers' compensation, insurance and pension plans, in addition to unemployment benefits. Still others, including two who quickly found positions within the Roosevelt "brain trust," Adolf Berle and Gardiner C. Means, "challenged the traditional veneration of individual entrepreneurs, small enterprises, and vigorous competition," and supported plans to "rationalize" the American economy through state intervention and industrial cooperation. Others, most notably Huey Long and Francis Townsend, pointed out America's wealth inequalities and offered radical solutions for leveling out society.<sup>48</sup> Griffith, St. John, and their colleagues correctly perceived that serious challenges to the god of competition had risen as the country's economy fell.

Athletic officials directly expressed their concern with the potential subversive influence of the political left on American campuses. In November 1934 Griffith asked St. John to tell him if there were "any liberal clubs such as the League for Industrial Democracy at Ohio State." He also desired a confidential report about the numbers involved and the "pedigree" of the leaders. St. John quickly replied with the ominous news that there were three such groups active on the Columbus campus. The groups shared a core of 20 to 30 "very loud and articulate" members. St. John also warned Griffith that "in this nucleus... there is a great majority of Cleveland Jews," and that two of the groups were "quite frankly communistic." In a student body of over 10,000 students, these athletic administrators feared the presence of fewer than 30 students challenging the economic and political systems of the United States.<sup>49</sup>

St. John's files also reveal that the fear of socialism in athletic policy or American governments did not dissipate during the middle years of the decade.<sup>50</sup> Judging from St. John's correspondence, many of his Big Ten contemporaries shared his and Griffith's ideological and political reasons for valuing men's intercollegiate athletics. In late 1936, Glenn Frank, the President of the University of Wisconsin, equated the desires for universal and high standards in intercollegiate athletics with the struggles "enlightened doctors, lawyers, and business men" fought for their own standards. Frank later listed these standards in the form of a creed that labeled losing one's temper as "treason to the team," and he portrayed football as "as effective an instrument of moral and intellectual discipline as any enterprise the American university fosters." That is either a ringing endorsement of athletics or a condemnation of all other university activities; Frank seems to have intended the former. Frank pointed out the need for competition and sportsmanship in the ranks of American business, finance and politics, and he argued that university athletics could be, as the Greek games once were, "a force for democracy, for self-control, for honesty, for patience, and for temperate living."<sup>51</sup>

If one believed everything Frank claimed, he could no longer question the place of athletics on a campus, but he might wonder about the importance of academic education to an institution boasting a properly run athletic program. Still, underneath Frank's hyperbole rests an assumption that many of his colleagues shared: intercollegiate athletics were necessary not only to insure the proper development of mature students but also to safeguard the future of American democracy and society. While few of St. John's letters display such overt political statements, the underlying sentiments emerge nonetheless. For example, a 1934 attempt by the Conference to restrict Ohio State's football practices "peevd" him and caused him to "object strenuously to this sort of thing" at the next meeting. Frank McCormick, his counterpart at the University of Minnesota, expressed similar feelings and demonstrated the comfort Midwestern athletic directors felt about expressing their *laissez-faire* political sentiments, writing that "I don't think it is possible for them to put over such a regulation. If they start making everything fair and on an equal basis, the first thing you will know we will be as socialistic as our present form of government at Washington."<sup>52</sup> It appears that the "domino theory" appeared in American minds long before Eisenhower endorsed it. Once a committee started restricting the length of football practices, Columbus might as well have been a suburb of Moscow—or, perhaps worse, Hyde Park.

The threat of world war did not dissipate this fear. In May 1941, Griffith still worried about the threat of an internal radical revolt more than anything else. He argued that the United States should not challenge Hitler on his own turf, 3,000 miles from home, or in the neutral territory of South America. Concerned by rumors that any Nazi attack on the United States "would be an inside job," Griffith worried about what would happen even if the United States defeated the Nazis in a war. He was afraid that "these people who want collectivism, supervision, and regimentation may gain their wish if we spend one hundred billion dollars or more on a European war, repudiate our debts following the war and perhaps experience some sort of a revolution." "What profit," he inquired, "would it be to us to have licked Hitler" if "the collectivists who wanted regimentation should take over our country." Griffith could not accept a collectivist regime because by his definition, any organization that opposed competition—or college football—was un-American.<sup>53</sup>



During the dark days of the Great Depression, Americans looked for solutions to a myriad of challenges to the status quo. Some advocated socialism or communism; others suggested increased cooperation within a planned economy; others wanted a welfare state; and others wanted nothing other than to be left alone. No matter what Americans wanted, they increasingly saw political undertones in virtually every component of their lives, and the administrators concerned with intercollegiate athletics across the Big Ten shared this tendency. These athletic directors and conference officials justified the existence of intercollegiate athletics with traditional progressive arguments proclaiming sport's social, spiritual, and physical benefits. However, during the Depression they centered their defense around a vision of intercollegiate athletics as the home of competition—the one thing essential to the preservation of the capitalistic and democratic America they knew and loved. In the eyes of these athletic administrators, competitive intercollegiate athletics

could produce the businessmen, entrepreneurs, elected officials, and voters capable of leading the United States back to the promised land of domestic tranquillity and economic prosperity.

1. Howard J. Savage et al., *American College Athletics* (NY: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1929) ["Carnegie Report"]; Ronald Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Steven W. Pope, *Patriotic Games: Sporting Traditions in the American Imagination, 1876-1926* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a good account of the importance of the Carnegie Report to college administrators and their responses to it during the 1930s, see John R. Thelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).
2. Mark Dyreson, "Regulating the Body and the Body Politic: American Sport, Bourgeois Culture, and the Language of Progress, 1880-1920," in *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. Steven W. Pope (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 123.
3. *Ibid.*, 131-37.
4. Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History* 16 (1989): 276.
5. In their 1936 party platform Republicans "pledge[d] [them]selves... to preserve the American system of free enterprise, private competition, and equality of opportunity, and to seek its constant betterment in the all." *National Party Platforms, 1840-1956*, ed. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 366. Likewise, in 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote that "the promotion of wholesome sports is a constructive second to none in the work of upbuilding [sic] the youth of the land, of guaranteeing a sound mind in a sound body." Letter, Franklin D. Roosevelt to Samuel E. Hoyt, 23 Nov. 1938, PPF 4508 Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, quoted in John Wong, "FDR and the New Deal on Sport and Recreation," *Sport History Review* 29 (1998): 184-85.
6. For one of the earliest examples of this argument, see Barton J. Bernstein, "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968). Bernstein wrote that the New Deal was "designed to maintain the American system, liberal activity was directed toward essentially conservative goals," and that Roosevelt "protected the established system: he sapped organizational radicalism of its waning strength and of its potential constituency among the unorganized and discontented." *Ibid.*, 264, 265. Wong, "FDR and the New Deal," 181-85.
7. James E. Pollard, *History of Ohio State University: The Story of the First Seventy-Five Years, 1873-1948* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1952), 405; James E. Pollard, *Ohio State Athletics, 1879-1959* (Columbus: Ohio State University Athletic Department, 1959), 289-90, 5-6, 293, and 218. "The resolution admitting Ohio State University to membership in the Conference was re-affirmed by a unanimous vote and the Secretary was instructed to communicate this fact to the proper authorities of that institution." Minutes of the Meeting of the Intercollegiate Conference, 31 May 1912, Intercollegiate Conference-Athletic Director Correspondence—1912-1956, RG 9/e-1/9, Ohio State University Archives (OSUA).
8. Pollard, *Ohio State Athletics*, 117-21; Herbert Simons, "All Buckeye Sports Permitted by Courtesy of King Football," *Chicago Daily Times*, 30 Jan. 1939; Benjamin Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 182-83; Herbert Simons, "Football Puts \$5,000,000 in Michigan's Till!," *Chicago Daily Times*, 25 Jan. 1939; Herbert Simons, "Football Pays the Freight for Other Sports at Illinois," *Chicago Daily Times*, 29 Jan. 1939.
9. Ralph W. Aigler, Financial Aspects of the University's Athletic Program, Addresses and Articles—1931-1941, Director of Athletics, RG-9/3-1/1; A History of the Major Capital Obligations and

- Expenditures, Budget—Athletic Department—Financial History of—1922-1935 and 1937-1942, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/5; Pollard, *Ohio State Athletics*, 194.
10. "What Will the Legislature Do?" *The Ohio State University Monthly* 23 (1932): 367.
  11. "Klein Committee Makes Report," *The Ohio State University Monthly* 24 (Feb. 1933): 145.
  12. For more information about the university's financial struggles up through 1933, please see "'Bed-Rock Budget,' Says President," *The Ohio State University Monthly* 24 (Feb. 1933): 143-44, 164. OSU President George Rightmire told an alumni meeting that the proposed state budget would "transcend the consideration of reasonable economy and constitute virtually the breaking point of the University." *Ibid.*, 143.
  13. Pollard, *History of Ohio State*, 302, 305. For a fuller discussion of the wrangling over the budget cuts demanded by the Board of Trustees and resisted by the Athletic Board, see Athletic Board Minutes, Director of Athletics, RG 9/3-1/1, 4 Aug. 1931, 20 Aug. 1931, and 23 Nov. 1931; see also Record of Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the Ohio State University, OSUA, 6 Aug. 1931 and 9 Oct. 1931. The 9 November 1931 minutes contain the Trustees' acceptance of the Athletic Boards proposal to follow university salary reduction guidelines only with money derived directly from the university. For example, athletic director St. John was originally budgeted to make \$9,000 in 1931-32, with \$5,500 coming from his salary as a university professor and \$3,500 coming from the Athletic Board for his service as athletic director. Under the accepted salary cuts, the \$3,500 remained untouched, but St. John forfeited 10% of his university salary, leaving him with a total salary of \$8,450. *The Ohio State University Monthly* 23 (1932): 367.
  14. Harvey Green, *The Uncertainty of Everyday Life, 1915-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 74-75; Number of Tickets Sold, Ohio State University Athletic Department Financial Statements, Athletic Board Minutes, 27 Apr. 1936. Monetary figures are as recorded and not adjusted for deflation.
  15. Number of Tickets Sold, Athletic Board Minutes, 27 Apr. 1936; Detail of Football Receipts, Ohio State University Athletic Department Financial Statements, Athletic Board Minutes, 27 Apr. 1936.
  16. Excerpts from Minutes of the Meeting of the Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference, Friday December 4, 1931 at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, Intercollegiate Conference—Athletic Director's Correspondence—1930-1938.
  17. *The Ohio State University Monthly* 24 (1933): 122-23.
  18. J.L. Morrill to L.W. St. John, 11 Dec. 1931, Intercollegiate Conference—Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9.
  19. Pollard, *History of Ohio State*, 299, 300, 303-304. The minutes of OSU's Board of Trustees' meetings do not discuss Miller's firing.
  20. For a detailed—and unflattering—description of race relations and discrimination at Ohio State during the 1930s. see William J. Baker, *Jesse Owens: An American Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 33-42; George Washington Rightmire, "Black Students: Ohio Universities: Statistical Summary of Expressional and Factual Data—1934, RG 3/f/37, OSUA;" George Washington Rightmire, Anti-Negro Guild—Correspondence and Fliers—1937, RG 3/f/45, OSUA; J.A. Park to George W. Rightmire, 8 Jun. 1937; J. D. Morrill to George W. Rightmire, 15 Jun. 1937; Pollard, *History of Ohio State*, 346.
  21. George Baker to the Director of Athletics, 8 Mar. 1937, Intercollegiate Conference—Athletic Director's Correspondence—1930-1938; *id.*, Petition to the Meeting of Western Conference Officials in the City of Chicago, 13 Mar. 1937; *id.*, John Griffith to Lynn St. John, 8 Mar. 1937; *Makio* [Ohio State University yearbook], 1938-1948.
  22. The OSU Athletic Board agreed to play the two games with Notre Dame in its 17 January 1933 meeting. Only one member, Justin Morrill, voted against the two game series. Although neither the Board of Trustees' minutes nor the Athletic Board minutes indicate why Ohio State was interested in inaugurating a series then, one can speculate that the drawing power of Notre Dame and the

- potential revenue the games would generate must have seemed particularly attractive in early 1933. Detail of Football Receipts, Ohio State University Athletic Department Financial Statements; Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 436-437; Athletic Board Minutes—1934-1940, 3 Jun. 1936, Director of Athletics, RG 9e-1/1, 1.
23. Pollard, *Ohio State Athletics*, 281.
  24. “Klandestine Klan Created to Further Stadium Drive,” *The Ohio State Lantern*, 25 Oct. 1925, 1; Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 158-62.
  25. *Columbus Dispatch*, 31 Oct. 1935; *Columbus Dispatch*, 31 Oct. 1935; *Columbus Dispatch*, 1 Nov. 1935; Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 435.
  26. Charles T. Forster to L.W. St. John, 15 Jan. 1940, Notre Dame University—Resumption of the OSU-Notre Dame Football Relations—1940, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/14; Rader, *American Sports*, 187.
  27. L.W. St. John to Charles T. Forster, 31 Jan. 1940, Notre Dame University—Resumption of the OSU-Notre Dame Football Relations—1940, 1-3. For information on Ohio State’s students’ religious affiliations during these years, see Annual Report of the Registrar—1935-36 (Book I), Office of the Registrar, RG 6/f-3/3, OSUA; Annual Report of the Registrar—1936-37, Office of the Registrar, RG 6/f-3/4.
  28. John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 15 Nov. 1938, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1938-Mar. 1939, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10; L.W. St. John to John Griffith, 21 Nov. 1938, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1938-Mar. 1939.
  29. John Griffith recognized exactly what later Dyreson argued—that during the 1920s and 1930s many Americans had abandoned their belief in the formative powers of athletics. Still, Griffith and his colleagues in the nation’s universities did not follow this general trend and, in fact, worked against it. In 1941, Griffith wrote to the “Nation’s Athletic Leaders,” that “there is abundant evidence that our people generally like athletics but they think of sports in terms of entertainment and amusement and not as an essential part of education or of military training either. Can we not take the lead in trying to show them the real value of athletics?” John Griffith to the Nation’s Athletic Leaders, 15 Sep. 1941, Intercollegiate Conference: Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1941-1942, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10.
  30. Herbert S. Atkinson to L.W. St. John, 24 Nov. 1931, Intercollegiate Conference—Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931; id., David E. Ross, Athletics, 29 Oct. 1931, 2-4.
  31. Ross, Athletics, 5, 7. “Professionalism” had a very negative connotation in the context of college athletics, implying corruption of the supposedly pure amateur motivations and sentiments. However, as historian Ronald Smith convincingly argues, American society never had adopted pure, British-style amateur college athletics that emphasized class distinctions and inequality. Practically from the moment of their inception, Smith explains, American intercollegiate sports were professional. “There was too much competition, too strong a belief in merit over heredity, too abundant an ideology of freedom of opportunity for the amateur ideal to succeed... American colleges practiced a type of professionalism, and yet they claimed amateurism.” *Sports and Freedom*, 174.
  32. Ross, Athletics, 9.
  33. Ross, Athletics, 9, 6, 9.
  34. Morrill’s statements feature the buzzwords that captivate students of America’s then-maturing consumer culture. Morrill lauded the ability of group sports to provide outlets for individuals’ personalities while also instilling character. Warren Susman argues that the United States underwent a gradual shift in emphasis from inner-directed “character,” stressing morality, to outer-directed “personality,” emphasizing popularity and admiration. Morrill’s assertion that athletics can instill character is significant because Susman’s review of over two hundred sources reveals that around the turn of the century, the time of Morrill’s education, certain words were most often associated with “character.” According to Susman, these words included “*citizenship duty, democracy, work, building,*

- golden deeds, outdoor life, conquest, honor, reputation, morals, manners, integrity*, and above all, *manhoods*" (emphasis in original). Throughout the 1930s, athletic officials also presented these ideals as products of intercollegiate athletics. Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xii, 273-74.
35. J.L. Morrill to L. W. St. John, 11 Dec. 1931, Intercollegiate Conference—Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931, 1.
  36. *Ibid.*, 2-4.
  37. F.H. Yost to L.W. St. John, 22 Apr. 1922, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith)—1922-1929, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9; *id.*, John Griffith, "Address Before the State Teachers Association," 29 Nov. 1929, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith)—1922-1929, 6, 14.
  38. L.W. St. John to H.S. Atkinson, 26 Dec. 1931, Intercollegiate Conference—Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931, 1. For information about Big Ten Universities' relative athletic revenues for one year during the 1930s, see Herbert Simons, "Football Takes Stand! Big Ten Grid Revenue \$1,898,607 in 1938," *Chicago Daily Times*, 24 Jan. 1939, 28. This article explains that Ohio State led the entire conference in football revenue in the 1938 season. It highlights the fact that after Ohio State, Minnesota, Northwestern, and Michigan, there was a significant drop-off in terms of revenue. For example, while OSU earned \$336,500 from its football team, six of the conference schools did not receive even \$200,000 from their teams.
  39. Some Observations Submitted by John L. Griffith on the Paper Presented by Mr. Ross and on the Proposed Questionnaire to be Sent to Members of Governing Boards of Universities, Intercollegiate Conference—Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931, 4, 5.
  40. Memorandum for Committee on Athletic Policy, Intercollegiate Conference: Board of Regents—Questionnaire—1931, 1, 3 and 4.
  41. For example, Griffith reported in October 1936 that most eastern schools' student bodies were supporting the Republican candidate for president, while the Ohio State students supported Roosevelt. Griffith could not understand why "the middle west still believes in the magic of government and thinks that Hoover ran 59 national trains in addition to ours into the ditch and that Roosevelt has pulled them all out." In his reply, St. John thanked Griffith for keeping him updated on the latest speeches and expressed his sorrow that he was "not in a position to do a more active piece of work in support of the things that you and I both believe." A few weeks later, Griffith discussed the presidential election with St. John: "Well, Saint, we took an awful licking yesterday, didn't we? I was reconciled to a Roosevelt victory but I never dreamed it would be a landslide. Apparently America wittingly or unwittingly sold her vote. Well, if things don't work out well the next four years they can't blame you and me because we did what we could to bring about a change." See John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 20 Oct. 1936, Intercollegiate Conference-Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) and St. John—May 1936 March 1937, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10; *id.*, St. John to Griffith 22 Oct. 1936; *id.*, Griffith to St. John, 4 Nov. 1936. For other examples of the shared beliefs of Griffith and St. John see especially Griffith to St. John, 2 May 1941, Intercollegiate Conference-Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1940-1941, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10; *id.*, St. John to Griffith, 10 May 1941.
  42. John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 3 Feb. 1932, Intercollegiate Conference—Athletic Director's Correspondence—1930-1938; *id.*, Memorandum to the Directors of Athletics of the Intercollegiate Conference, 3 Feb. 1932.
  43. Memorandum to the Directors, 2 and 2-3.
  44. John Griffith to Frank E. Richart (Urbana, IL), 5 Jul. 1939, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1939-1940; John L. Griffith to Colonel G.L. Townsend, 8 Mar. 1938, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith)—1937-38. Townsend had been on active duty at Ohio State for 12 years as a professor of military science and tactics. After leading the "largest R.O.T.C. unit in the country," Townsend became professor emeritus of military science and tactics upon his retirement. See Board of Trustees Minutes, 25 Feb. 1938.

45. "Athletics Exemplify the American Way," Addresses and Articles—1931-1941, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/1, 1; John L. Griffith to Newton Fuesske, 10 Aug. 1922, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith)—1922-1929; "Athletics Exemplify the American Way," 2.
46. George Washington Robnett, ed., "News and Views," no. 62, Addresses and Articles—1931-1941, 1, 2. Judging from a letter to Robnett, this article appeared in 1939. See Griffith to Robnett, 16 Feb. 1939, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1938-March 1939, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10. Griffith also reported to the Big Ten's athletic directors that they had the support of the nation's business community, telling the athletic directors that Americans were regaining confidence after the failure of Roosevelt's court packing plan and the Reorganization Bill, and that several eastern associates had expressed their "highest regard" for the Big Ten "because they felt we were conservative and sane and were keeping athletics on a sound foundation." See John Griffith to Directors of Athletics of the Conference, 27 Jun. 1938, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner, Correspondence (Griffith)—1937-38, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/9.
47. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 8; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 28; James L. Roark et al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 938, 956; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 15; Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 28.
48. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 36-38; Paul K. Conkin, *The New Deal*, 2nd. ed. (Arlington Heights, IL: AHM Publishing, 1975), 59.
49. John Griffith to L.W. St. John, 27 Nov. 1934, Intercollegiate Conference-Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith and St. John)—1934, Director of Athletics, RG 9/e-1/10; id., St. John to Griffith, 6 Dec. 1934. The three groups that St. John identified were a National Student League, a League Against War and Fascism, and a "Social Problems Club." According to St. John, the National Student League and the League Against War and Fascism were the "communistic" ones. In another letter, Griffith asserted that the American Constitution was "based on the principle of private property ownership, inheritance rights, etc." He concluded by arguing that "those who believe in Communism are free to live in Russia and those who believe in the other isms can go where those isms are practiced." See John Griffith to George W. Robnett, 16 Feb. 1939, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1938-March 1939.
50. The athletic directors of the Big Ten were more concerned with "socialism" when the effected revenues were large ones. Being human, they were not always consistent in their advocacy of absolute competition; after all, their universities already worked within conference confines. In the spring of 1935, Ohio State and seven other universities supported a motion to allow a conference-wide broadcasting contract. The June 7, 1935 minutes of the Ohio State Athletic Board include the report char "the Directors and Faculty Representatives went on record as favoring a cooperative broadcasting program for the Conference, although two of the college presidents were opposed to the idea." Athletic Board Minutes—1934-1940, 7 Jun. 1935.
51. Glenn Frank, "Football in the American University," 4 Dec. 1936, Addresses and Articles—1931-1941, 1, 2-3, and 4.
52. L.W. St. John to T. Nelson Metcalf, 26 Mar. 1934, Intercollegiate Conference-Athletic Director's Correspondence—1930-1938; id., Frank G. McCormick to L.W. St. John, 3 Apr. 1934.
53. John Griffith to Mark Sullivan, 6 May 1941, Intercollegiate Conference—Commissioner Correspondence (Griffith) 1940-1941.