

The 'Big Three' and the Harvard-Princeton Football Break, 1926-1934

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Of all Harvard, Yale, and Princeton football contests, the most important were the last two or three games each season when the "Big Three" played each other. After 1900, Harvard and Yale began regularly to schedule their game last, thus excluding the Tigers from a final "Big Two" contest. Princeton, considering itself co-equal with Yale, resented third place, but was somewhat mollified by its inclusion in the Harvard-Yale-Princeton Athletic Agreements.

The casualties resulting from brutal mass-power plays and tackling at the knees led to the "Big Three" agreements. Following a conference on football, called by President Theodore Roosevelt in October, 1905, the three universities prohibited the inclusion of freshmen on varsity teams and limited player eligibility to three years. But not until June, 1916, did they formally agree to regulate conditions of playing football among themselves. Under the "Triple Agreement" they observed the same eligibility policy through a standing committee of the three athletics chairmen. This agreement was revised in March, 1922, and supplemented in 1923. It principally covered financial assistance, scholarships, "proselytizing in preparatory schools," and intercollegiate games.

Since "Big Three" agreements foreshadowed the "Ivy Group Agreements" of post-World War II, the Harvard-Princeton athletic break may well have delayed the formation of an Ivy League until the early 1950's. It followed a rough football game in November, 1926, in which the Crimson team lost to Princeton for the third consecutive season. For several years their relations had been strained.

Some months earlier, Harvard had decided to play football with the University of Michigan instead of with Princeton, in 1927 and 1928. Harvard was inaugurating a new athletic policy whereby Yale would become its only permanent football rival, while other opponents could be added, dropped, or rotated on its schedule. Understandably, Princetonians were indignant and argued that a Harvard-Michigan game was not permitted under the "Three Presidents' Agreement." Both Princeton's arguments and Yale's mediation persuaded President A. Lawrence Lowell to cancel negotiations with Michigan, although Harvard still intended to proceed with its new policy.

But the *Harvard Lampoon's* satiric, tactless edition of the "Princeton Game" destroyed any possibility of demoting Princeton diplomatically. Undaunted by insults, the Tigers (who would become "Big Three" champions in 1926) shut out Harvard, 12-0. Then fans tore down Crimson goal posts in an unruly demonstration. When Harvard's athletic committee announced its new football policy a few days later, Princeton's athletic board unanimously decided to sever all relations. Beneath charges and countercharges lay unfavorable stereotypes which each university held of the other. Tiger players were accused of "deliberately" trying to injure opponents, while Crimson officials were called "dictatorial and arrogant." To Harvard, Princetonians were country club playboys, descendants of debauched Cavaliers; to Princeton, Harvardians were bespectacled and galoshes-wearing prigs, heirs of bluenosed Puritans.

By 1931, a new generation of undergraduates would urge their athletic associations to

resume competition in all sports, except football. When they again played football in 1934, Princeton won, but sportsmanship prevailed. In October, 1939, the "Big Three" renewed and enlarged the "Three Presidents' Agreement." Six years later, they were joined by Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, and Pennsylvania in the first "Ivy Group Agreement" on football.

Physician Football Coaches

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Physicians have played important roles in the development of American Football. Seventeen physicians have been identified as head coaches in colleges and universities in this country between 1888 and 1964. No new physician coaches have entered the field since the initial appointment of Dr. Marvin A. Stevens at Yale in 1928. Dr. Edward Anderson was the last to retire, from Holy Cross in 1964.

Six of the earliest group were physical educators as well as physicians, so that their roles as football coaches were only part of their overall responsibility for health care and sports supervision for the student body. The remaining eleven became coaches because of their outstanding abilities as former college players. All remained active in medical practice in one form or another and most returned to medical practice on their retirement.

Their composite record (as far as can be ascertained from available records) was 856 wins, 480 losses and 104 ties for a winning percentage of .640. There are only 91 coaches who served 10 seasons or more whose individual winning percentages exceed this mark, so that as a group they may be said to have been very successful. Only two had losing records and these were for one and two seasons.

The game of football presents challenges to those qualities which a physician is apt to possess. During the period when most of these men were active in coaching the private practice of medicine was not nearly as rewarding as today.



Participants at the Seward Staley Address Luncheon