

Football as Social Entertainment Comes to Oregon State University

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Football on the campuses of American colleges and universities evolved from the British game of rugby and the playful American college student's ball kicking games during the 1800's. The game became popular over the objections and resistance of most college faculty members and college presidents. Intercollegiate football came to Oregon State University campus in 1893 with the enthusiastic support of Corvallis citizens, Oregon State University students and faculty, and University President J.M. Bloss. The newly installed President Bloss brought his administrative talent and the game of football to the Corvallis campus from Purdue University where he had previously served on the faculty.

Not only were the Corvallis fans introduced to intercollegiate football, they were treated with parades, social gatherings, and entertainment apart from the field. While other campuses may have seen football and intercollegiate athletics as "educational experiences", the response of the Oregon State University students and the Corvallis townspeople to the events attending the games was all that was necessary for the establishment of football as social entertainment.

The football entertainment included parades through Corvallis to attract people to the game site on the campus, dinners for the competing teams in the homes of local social and political leaders, and "football entertainment and socials" held at the college chapel in the evening following the afternoon games. The entertainment opened with remarks by the competing college presidents, followed by musical solos, and magic lantern shows by popular faculty members with slides consisting of views of departmental work, college buildings, sketches of the football captain, and a portrait of the Oregon State University mascot, a well-known coyote. After the lantern exhibition, a general social time occurred, allowing many new friendships to be formed and old ones cultivated.

Although earlier Oregon State University presidents had balked at the introduction of intercollegiate athletics, the success of the 1893 football team and the success of the social entertainment attending the games set the tone for the role of intercollegiate athletics to the present. It was recognized "that athletic events have, and are, fulfilling some social need, or they would not be supported to the extent they have been and are being supported. We conclude that the principle benefit of intercollegiate athletics to the university community is a means of communicating with the general public. Accordingly, it is logical to evaluate the program primarily in terms of its contribution to university relations rather than in terms of the accomplishment of educational objectives. The administration of the program should reflect this fact".¹

¹*Report to the President of Oregon State University from the Commission on University Goals.* Corvallis, Oregon, August, 1970, pp. 150-151.