

# Intercollegiate Athletics at Duquesne University in Historical Perspective

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Duquesne University opened in October, 1878, as The Pittsburgh Catholic College of the Holy Ghost. The name was changed in 1911 when it achieved university status. It was founded by Irish and German priests of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. Trained in Europe, they believed that physical training and athletics were a vital part of the education of young men.

By 1890 modest facilities were built, and intercollegiate athletic programs were launched. Duquesne did not follow the example of the Protestant liberal arts colleges where the students initiated and controlled the programs. Rather, the administration and faculty took charge. This policy was in keeping with the ethnic, social class, and religious makeup of the school.

During the early period, extending to the 1920s, Duquesne utilized its share of "ringers". Among these were "Cum" Posey, a key figure in Negro professional baseball, and the great Canadian athlete, Lionel Conacher.

By 1920 Duquesne athletic officials had been impressed by the football success of Notre Dame University. That Catholic institution provided the model it was to follow. Elmer Layden, one of the "Four Horsemen", came to the school in 1927 as football coach and athletic director. Under Layden and the Notre Dame men who succeeded him, Duquesne gained national football prominence. They appeared in and won two Orange Bowl games and almost became "the Notre Dame of the East."

But not quite. World War II and the post-war changes which included two platoon football and expanded coaching staffs resulted in the decision to abandon football after the 1950 season. Duquesne did not have the financial resources or facilities to maintain the game.

Thereafter, Duquesne put nearly all its athletic eggs into basketball. It had been successful since "Chick" Davies became coach in 1925, but the heights of prestige were reached when the 1955 team captured the National Invitational Tournament. Duquesne ranked seventh among major college teams for the 1930-1979 period with a .678 percentage.

Duquesne became coeducational in the mid-twenties, but womens' sports languished until the early 1970s. The University has greatly expanded intercollegiate athletics for women in recent years.

The school has had a most colorful athletic history. Athletics occupy an important niche in the life of the school and appear to have fit in with its academic mission reasonably well. However, the lack of a clear University policy concerning athletics is a problem. Planning has begun, and it is likely that the commitment to intercollegiate athletics will continue.