

# Endicott Peabody: America's Pioneer Muscular Christian

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To a significant degree, historical research of athletics centers on the examination of contributions made by certain individuals. The point seems especially pertinent when studying the lives of those who, in the latter half of the 19th century, assumed roles which pioneered the advancement of sport. For example, had it not been for Walter Camp's advocacy of a line of scrimmage in football, the game may have taken on a totally different format from what we know today. Had it not been for James Naismith's quest for a suitable indoor game, we might not have basketball as a sport. Less well-known but of equal or greater importance are the contributions of educators to the development of sport.

One who actively engaged himself in rationalizing the existence of sport in schools was Endicott Peabody. Although nationally acclaimed for his lengthy and highly successful directorship of the prestigious Groton School, which he founded in 1884, little has been written about his advocacy of moral training through athletics as grounded in the precepts of Muscular Christianity. In his lifetime, it is doubtful that the Rector, as he was often called, would have expressed an awareness of this concept. Yet the kind of education he received in England, where Muscular Christianity germinated in the 19th century, was reflected in the Groton School objectives. That Peabody was a stout disciple of the principles inherent in this movement is further demonstrated by his views on schoolboy education. Early in his career he wrote that athletics were of "immense importance in establishing righteousness in the school." In his thinking, sports assisted in maintaining a "healthy moral tone." The purpose of athletics was, in part, to enable boys to lose themselves in team effort, to take defeat gracefully and to play honestly under a gentlemanly code of sportsmanship. Throughout his career, his emphasis on the trilogy of developing body, mind and spirit placed Peabody in the front ranks of those who argued for the character-building attributes of athletic participation. In sum, there can be no doubt that, from our present historical vantage point, Endicott Peabody emerges as one of America's foremost Muscular Christians.



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