

# Hoya, Saxe, Rah! Rah! Intercollegiate Athletics and Catholic Higher Education The Perils of Modernization

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Georgetown University, as was the case with so many other American Universities during the second half of the nineteenth century, found the path from club and class sports to intercollegiate athletics a compelling one. The process at Georgetown was driven by a mix of motives common to many other institutions, as well as by elements unique to its Roman Catholic and Jesuit character. These motives were elucidated best in the *Georgetown College Journal*, the student monthly, and the correspondence of President J. Haven Richards, S.J., under whose term as Rector, Georgetown rose to prominence in the athletic world of the 1890s.

Prior to the Civil War at Georgetown some form of baseball, football, handball, and ice skating had been popular student activities. After the war these sports along with boating continued to attract student attention, while a “college nine” was playing baseball games with Washington clubs. The first intercollegiate baseball game was played with Columbian University in 1870.

Success for baseball in the 1870s and early 80s led to the organization of a football team in 1883. By the end of the 80s off-campus intercollegiate competition was common, and a rationale for an emphasis on intercollegiate athletics was in the process of formation, by both students and administrators. Among the more compelling motives were the use of sport as a recruiting tool for the university, and the vast popularity of intercollegiate sports in colleges across the country.

In the first half of the 1890s Georgetown moved to national baseball prominence by offering scholarships and recruiting players, and by a late season tour of the Northeast. The scholarship issue produced some controversy within the Jesuit community and a rationale for scholarships was developed by the University President. Extended road trips also led to controversy within the Jesuit community which reached the highest level when the Father General in Rome placed a ban on travel by the athletes. The exchanges between President Richards and the Father General on this subject illuminate the motives for intercollegiate Sport.

In addition Georgetown as a Catholic institution saw intercollegiate athletics as a means to recognition and acceptance within the Protestant American world. The religious prejudices within American society were on the minds of those boosting athletics, including alumni. The power of athletics to overcome these narrow views were an important part of the justification for Georgetown's pursuit of glory on the diamond, the gridiron, and the track.



The session on Intercollegiate Athletics was chaired by Dave Zang and included speakers Ron Smith, Alan Hall, Earle Ziegler, and Dick Crepeau.