

# SPORT AND EDUCATION

## Amos Alonzo Stagg , Promoter of College Football

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Although Amos Alonzo Stagg is most widely-known for his winning football record and for his efforts to raise the game to a higher moral level, few are aware of his early activities to promote college football. Indeed, after accepting the invitation to become the first football coach at the newly founded University of Chicago in 1892, his biggest challenge was not to win football games, but to gain the support and loyalty of the people of Chicago, most of whom had never seen a football game. Stagg himself reported that his mission in Chicago was, “to spread the gospel of football throughout the land, to make the matter so plain that even a child can understand it.” To achieve this goal, Stagg devised a number of promotional activities to introduce the public to football, and entice them to see a football game and even support a team. Of all his efforts to promote football, none was as visionary or exciting as the 6,200 mile tour Stagg arranged for his Chicago football team to take to the west coast in 1894. As a result, Stagg not only brought attention to the game of football, but also exhibited a fine sense of showmanship and business acumen. This ability to seize opportunity and then achieve success expressed certain fundamental truths about the American character at this time, and illustrates, in part, the source of Stagg’s popularity. With the western trip as its primary example, this paper will explore and consider the elements of Stagg’s popularity, especially as they related to a culture which took pride in and rewarded initiative and aggressive individualism. Further, the paper will also place football in a larger cultural and historical context to explain its special appeal and growing popularity in a rapidly changing American society.