

# Mr. Integrity — Amos Alonzo Stagg

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Amos Alonzo Stagg, one of football's greatest coaches, lived to be almost 103 years old. When one examines his life, it soon becomes apparent that the one consistent thread in the tapestry of Stagg's character was his unbelievable commitment to honesty and fair play. Even though he won many awards for his illustrious football career, he more importantly, was accorded many many honors due to his high ideals and his devotion to integrity.

Stagg was born into a poor family on August 16, 1862 in West Orange, New Jersey. After graduation from Orange High School, he received a scholarship to Phillips Exeter Academy where he excelled as a baseball player. Intent on being a minister, he turned down a baseball scholarship to Dartmouth College to enter Yale University as a predivinity student. Here, also, he excelled at baseball and also played football, and was named to Camp's first All-American team in 1889. Spurning an offer from the New York Giants to play baseball, he entered the Divinity School after graduation from Yale in 1888. He soon discovered that he was not a good speaker, so he decided to become a physical educator and enrolled at the YMCA Training School at Springfield, Massachusetts, where he was both a graduate student and faculty member from 1890-1892. He also coached the football and baseball teams.

In 1892, when Stagg was 30 years old, a former professor of his at Yale became President of the new college, the University of Chicago, and offered Stagg the position of Associate Professor and Director of Physical Culture and Athletics at the institution. Stagg accepted and became the first coach to have academic status (he was promoted to Professor in 1900). He remained there until the mandatory retirement age of 70 in 1932. In his 40 years there his contributions to athletics in general and football in particular may never be matched by another person. In athletics, due to his faculty status, he was Chicago's representative to the Big Ten for 15 years and was most influential in the formation and early growth of that organization. He was also involved in many other organizations where he was renowned for his honesty. This trust is illustrated succinctly by a portion of the dedication to him in a book on the Big Ten which states that he "provided an example, without parallel, of what is right and fitting in college sports." And in football some authorities claim he was and is the greatest name in football history. Known as the "Grand Old Man," he was credited with being the most prolific inventor and master strategist of the game.

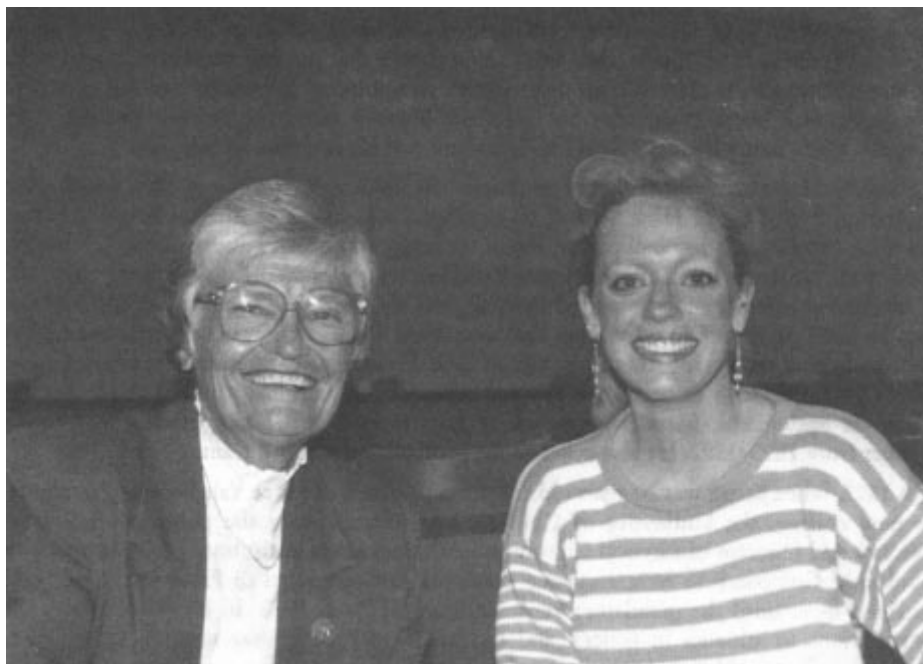
Not content to retire after Chicago, he coached for the next 14 years at the College of the Pacific. He did so well there that in 1943, when he was 81 years old, in tribute to his team winning 7 games against major opponents, he was selected as Coach of the Year. In 1946 he stepped down as head coach at the College of the Pacific but became for the next 6 years assistant coach to one of his sons at Susquehanna College in Pennsylvania.

Since his wife was ailing and a warmer climate was better for her health, Stagg returned to the West Coast where for six more years he was kicking coach at Stockton Jr. College. Finally, at 98 years of age, after 71 years of coaching, he retired, having been an active football coach longer than any other person in the games history.

As mentioned previously, Stagg received many prestigious awards during his long career. He was significantly recognized when in 1914 the University of Chicago renamed the football field, Stagg Field, the first football coach to have a field named in his honor. He received three honorary degrees, and in 1939 the Football Coaches Association began presenting the Stagg

Award to a person that advances football and perpetuates the example and influence of Stagg. In 1958, at the age of 96, he was inducted into the National Football Hall of Fame as a coach and player, the only person ever honored in both categories, and his picture appeared on the cover of *Time* that same year.

Stagg spent the last few years of his life at a nursing home in Stockton, suffering from Parkinson's disease and cataracts. The Dean of Coaches died at 102 years, probably having contributed more to football than any other coach in history. As one authority stated, "A. A. Stagg did not invent football, it only seems that way." No one contributed more to the evolution of the game and moreover, the "Grand Old Man" epitomized all that was fine and decent in intercollegiate athletics.



Jody Davenport and Erin McCarthy, Stagg scholars.