

# The Big Ten's Struggle Over Faculty Control of Athletics

John D. Stevens

University of Michigan

Although by the start of this century, college football was second only to major league baseball in popularity and was a profit center for many schools, there were academicians who fretted about devoting so much attention, time and money to producing spectacles, featuring recruited gladiators, coached by professionals, to battle for the glory of institutions, with whom most of the fans (and even some of the players) had little connection.

Nowhere was football frenzy higher than in Ann Arbor, where from 1901-1905, Fielding Yost's Michigan teams won 57 games (including the first Rose Bowl), lost one and tied one. One Ann Arborite who did not share the fervor was James B. Angell. President of the University of Michigan since 1871 and a supporter of the Big Ten since its founding in 1895, Angell believed that in order to clean up sports the conference must insist that each member school assert faculty control. He was wary of power shifting to the new hued athletic administrators. Angell complained that football disrupted the entire fall term and promoted false ideals.

At the behest of Angell. Western Conference schools met in Chicago in January, 1906. Since others already were at work on modifying the rules to reduce injuries, the conferees agreed to concentrate on other evils. While they differed on some points, they all wanted faculty control. They were less certain what that meant. They voted to phase out paid seasonal coaches.

Almost immediately, faculties at Northwestern and Wisconsin voted to suspend football, but after alumni protests, Wisconsin relented.

Michigan alumni and students were outraged, convinced the rules had been framed to discriminate against Yost as coach and against their football captain.

Initially, there was less concern about how the conference would interpret "faculty control." On Michigan's athletic board, faculty members were outnumbered by alumni and students.

After a financially disappointing 1906 season, Michigan pleaded for changes in the policies, and when the other schools refused, Michigan withdrew.

The alumni on the athletic board assumed that, as independents, the Wolverines would be able to schedule several conference teams-but the Big Ten instead adopted a formal boycott against Michigan in all sports.

Crowds for home games fell. Tired of watching teams like South Dakota State, Mount Union and Wabash, some alumni arranged a secret meeting between conference and Michigan officials in November, 1912, but the meeting came to nothing, but in February, 1913, confer-

ence assured Michigan it would be readmitted as soon as the school's president certified the athletic board was in faculty control. This effort failed when the Regents, the athletic board, and the faculty senate could not agree on who should send the formal request.

The 10-year dispute ended with a whimper, not a bang, when two years later, the Regents quietly restructured the athletic board. The faculty now would directly elect the athletic board majority, and they selected new members who were openly pro-conference. So were the new student members.

With "faculty control" established at last, the conference welcomed back the Wolverines on November 20, 1917.