

# American Intercollegiate Football via Inductive Reasoning: the Case Study of Intercollegiate Football at the University of Chicago

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John D. Rockefeller's new Baptist university opened in 1892 with the original "captain of erudition" at the helm, nine former college or seminary presidents on staff, and ten "authentic leaders of the several disciplines." The new university of Dewey, Veblen, and Michelson also opened complete with Associate Professor Amos Alonzo Stagg, appointed by his former Yale professor President William Rainey Harper to lead the Department of Physical Culture (with the largest graduation requirement of any department) and the football team.

American intercollegiate football commenced its life at the University of Chicago by working out its athletic model of the survival of the fittest. Football was superbly fitted for the job: it grew out of a congeries of disorderly campus activities such as hazing; it was intrinsically engrossing as a physically taxing and precarious exercise; its blending of rugged individualism with the need for a militaristic, unified, efficient effort assured it met the need for liberty, purpose and order in American life; it served as a basis for simple comparisons of complex academic institutions; and its highly competitive, meritocratic, Darwinian nature reassured those who insisted the American collegiate sporting scene should be freed from the class-ridden, inequitable British models. Chicago football developed into the western leader by 1905 principally through three strands: the rise of the spectator, the coach, and the player. Located in the nation's second most populous city (1900 census), the Chicago Maroons could count on many spectators and players; and the leading exemplar of muscular Christianity, Coach Stagg, was the perfect athletic entrepreneur to match President Harper's academic entrepreneurial movements. And Chicago was unsparing in its application of the athletics of Darwinism to all three strands.

Although Chicago had started after the major eastern universities and could be said to have been a Yale football gospel frontier outpost it soon became a national leader in football; then, too, the major state universities of the midwest and Notre Dame followed Chicago in challenging the eastern leaders and together they accomplished cultural equality by the mid-teens. It only remained for the regional cultural reversal of football to occur by the mid-1920's when non-eastern players dominated the All-American elevens and their coaches invented playing systems which carried the day.

Coach Stagg became so important to the public image of the university that the institution could be properly styled, "Stagg's University," from about 1905 to 1924. Chicago's last Intercollegiate Conference championship was won in 1924 and the years 1925-1939 constituted the decline and fall of Chicago football. Although Chicago had been a national leader like Yale, it would join the early eastern leaders in a permanent state of comparative ineptitude. In ironic fact, Chicago had been the leader in creating the attitudes and forces in American intercollegiate athletics which would erode the university's own position swiftly, moreover, the retirement of Stagg and the coming of President Robert Hutchins, and academic iconoclast, would prompt a unique conclusion to our story.

The transmogrification of the student-athlete into the athlete-student had gone unwept on most American campuses; the Hutchins University took notice, and action, over the change. But even at Chicago it required an unusual combination of factors to abolish the sport; it took an unusual president, a series of disastrous seasons and a mythical view of the purity of Chicago's athletic past under the sainted Stagg to carry a sufficient number of University constituencies along with the decision. Most institutions dealt with different constituencies from Chicago's - the president of Notre Dame admitted publicly he had advised Hutchins that if Chicago could rid itself of the sport, it should do so. The president of Notre Dame and most other American university leaders would never have the opportunity.