

AMATEURISM

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Gentlemanly Sportsmanship and the Athletic Spirit: William L. Dudley, Southern Football, and the Hegemonic Authority of the Amateur Ideology

William L. Dudley was one of the leading educators in the South during the Progressive period. He fought with unbridled zeal to raise academic standards, both at Vanderbilt University and within southern higher education as a whole. He was also a leading figure in southern intercollegiate athletics. As chairman of the Vanderbilt Athletic Association, Dudley helped make that school's football program a powerful force in the South for three decades, and as founder and chairman of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (SIAA), he guided the early attempts to establish regulatory control over intercollegiate athletics in the South. Following the lead of many American cultural arbiters and social theorists, Dudley considered amateur athletics to be a dynamic moral force that possessed the power to shape the values and mold the character of elite young men. He believed that a well-regulated program of athletics dovetailed with academic advancement to form a strategy for bringing southern higher education into line with national standards.

Dudley's efforts to reform and regulate southern intercollegiate athletics place him within the mainstream of American Progressivism. From the early 1890s until his retirement in 1914, he sought to rationalize, standardize, and bureaucratize the chronically chaotic world of southern intercollegiate athletics, especially football. During the late 1880s and early 1890s Dudley believed that students should exercise preponderant control over athletic administration. However, the disorganized nature of student-managed athletics offended his sometimes-obsessive need to impose order and propriety wherever he thought it was necessary. He gradually transformed his position as head of the Vanderbilt Athletic Association into that of *de facto* athletic director. Like countless other white, male, upper-middle-class professionals of his era, he placed a premium on the qualities of efficiency and orderliness. The nearly total control that he exercised over Vanderbilt athletics from the turn of the century until 1914 reflect this quintessentially Progressive mentality. One theme in this paper is the examination of Dudley's efforts within the context of the Progressive ideology.

It also explores Dudley's ideological commitment to amateurism and especially a 1903 recruitment scandal involving Tennessee's Cumberland University. This revealed

Dudley's dogged and self-righteous desire to enforce his highly restrictive and elitist vision of amateurism throughout southern intercollegiate athletics. Combining Star Chamber tactics with the obsessive perseverance of Inspector Javert, Dudley worked for two years to brand the Cumberland administration and several of its football players as morally deficient and unworthy of inclusion in the world of gentlemanly athletics.

While it was difficult to enforce the standards of athletic amateurism within the insular and affluent world of elite northeastern universities, it was virtually impossible in the impoverished and underdeveloped world of southern higher education. Many southern 'universities,' including Cumberland, had less than one hundred students, tiny budgets, lower academic standards than many northern high schools, and recruited many students from impoverished families. Nevertheless, Dudley, like most of the men who controlled southern intercollegiate athletics, remained firmly committed to the amateur ideal. They eagerly submitted to the hegemonic authority of standards that originated within the Victorian English upper class and were popularized in the United States by cultural arbiters such as Caspar Whitney.

Within a national and international context, Dudley was neither an original thinker nor a pioneering sports administrator. His successful efforts to wrest control of intercollegiate athletics from students was part of a national trend begun on northeastern campuses. His promotion of the amateur sporting ideology involved a restatement of ideas that originated among the English upper class and were modified somewhat for American consumption by elite northeasterners. Dudley used his social standing within the South to popularize the mythology of the Victorian amateur ideal there and made it more palatable to southerners by linking it with their own idealized aristocratic tradition. The rapt allegiance that Dudley felt toward the ideals and values of the sporting ideology of the Anglo-American elite is a testament to the social and cultural authority that group exercised.