

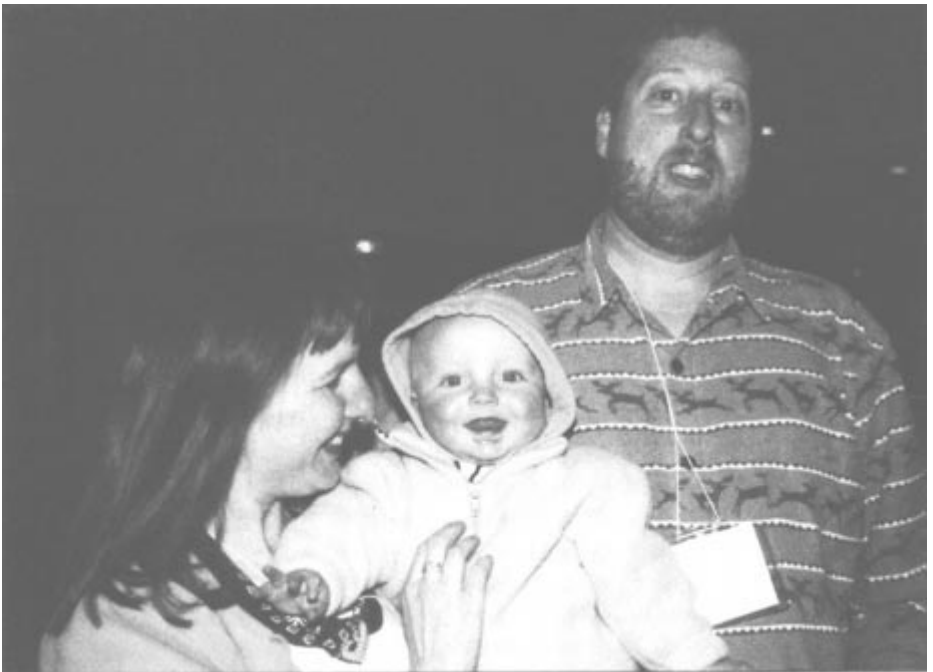
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Making a Sporting Legend: **Pat O’Dea and University of Wisconsin** **Football in the 1890s and 1930s**

Australian Pat O’Dea (1872-1962) played fullback for the University of Wisconsin between 1896 and 1899 after a brief stint for the Melbourne Football Club in the Victorian Football Association (Australian Rules Football). He was widely touted for his long kicking abilities both in Australia and at Wisconsin. In the USA the press gave him the nickname “The Kangaroo Kicker” because of his long legs, kicking abilities and his relative exoticism as an Australian. After his playing days, O’Dea went on to coach briefly at Notre Dame and Missouri before settling in California. In 1917 O’Dea disappeared under an assumed name then in 1934 made a dramatic return to Wisconsin as the homecoming guest of honour and numerous stories were written re-telling his exploits as a player.

This paper draws on work by Michael Oriard in *Reading Football*, and Steve Hardy in ‘Performance, Memory and History: The Making of American Hockey at St. Paul’s School, 1860-1915’. It examines the ways that events are written both contemporaneously and historically through an analysis of the press coverage of O’Dea during his 1896-99 career and then the representation of O’Dea’s achievements some thirty-five years after his playing days. Much of what has been written subsequently draws upon the 1930s retelling rather than a close of exploration of game reports from the 1890s. After his death in 1962, O’Dea has been mentioned in subsequent histories of football and in occasional newspaper features, but he is not well known in Australia, being left out

of both editions of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*. The paper thus works on one level to ‘recover’ the career of O’Dea, one of the early international footballing stars, and to historically reconstruct it. In addition, I analyze the practices of contemporary news reporting and the rise of football in the Midwest and the historicizing that has frequently taken place in the making of sports history.



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