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**T. V., Bowl Games, and a Big-Time Division I-A
Football Championship**

“T.V., Bowl Games, and a Big-Time Division I-A Football Championship” emphasizes the commercial aspect of Big-Time

intercollegiate football and the yet unconsummated movement toward a playoff system and away from traditional bowl games. Commercialism in men's intercollegiate athletics has existed in America since Harvard and Yale inaugurated contests in the mid-nineteenth century, when a railroad cooperation sponsored a rowing contest at a vacation site in New Hampshire. Radio and television, as commercial entities, created symbiotic relationships with Big-Time intercollegiate athletics nearly from their beginnings in the 1920s and 30s. This paper looks at the influence of television since the 1960s on a movement away from traditional commercial Big-Time bowl games toward an intensified commercial Division I-A football championship. The movement toward a playoff system in Big-Time football began in earnest by an important television executive, Boone Arledge of ABC TV. The research concludes in the 1990s when several important efforts at a playoff system were defeated by the efforts principally of university presidents.

A central theme runs through the paper: College presidents of Big-Time institutions are intensely interested in commercializing their institutions, but are fearful that further commercializing of Big-Time football will jeopardize their own position of power with their institutions relative to the power of football authorities. While presidents are not the only group that questions a playoff system, they have been the most significant in blocking further commercialization of Big-Time football through a playoff. Ironically Division I-A football is the only competitive unit among the National Collegiate Athletic Association's over 80 sponsored divisional sports that does not have a championship playoff. Presidents do not desire to see football coaches and athletic administrators gain even greater recognition, power, and autonomy by sanctioning a Division I-A football playoff. Former long-time Executive Director of the NCAA, Walter Byers, appears to make the point when he states that "it's hard on the ego of a president to be less admired than his football coach." College presidents, even if they have wanted to control the dynamics of Big-Time football, have not been able to turn the clock back to a time when football was less commercial. But they have been able to check the movement to the multi-million dollar playoff into first decade of the twenty-first century.

This paper will trace a Big-Time football playoff to its origin in 1876 with the annual Thanksgiving Day football contest among the Eastern powers, but it will emphasize the call for a national playoff from the 1960s. In it will be discussed the Arledge eight-team playoff proposal and other proposals including those of Management Television Systems, the College Football Association, the NCAA TV Committee, NCAA Council, Nike Corporation, Creative Artists Agency, Walt Disney Company, Home Shopping Network, and ISL, the Swiss marketing agency. More important, however, is an understanding of how television ratings, especially the decline of bowls game ratings, have been seen in relation to the dynamics of the National Football League's success of its playoff and culminating Super Bowl and the NCAA's basketball tournament and its Final Four growth. As college football lagged behind both the NFL and college basketball's championship in Nielsen ratings and thus income, there was increased pressure to move to a Division I-A football playoff. It, however, was not achieved in the twentieth century, even as universities increased their own commercialism in many areas of their operations.
