

# CHAPTER FIVE

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## AMERICAN FOOTBALL

*There were not a lot of rules in football. It's probably because of what happened at Carlisle that many of the rules exist today.— Barbara Landis*

## ORIGINS OF FOOTBALL

American football, the most popular college sport in the United States, can trace its origins back to **soccer** and **rugby**, games first played in England.

Soccer is called football everywhere except in North America. With the exception of throwing the ball in from out of bounds, only one player, the goalie, is allowed to touch the ball with his hands. But in 1823, school boys in England began to modify the rule of the game; picking up the ball and carrying it. The new game was named “rugby” after the **Rugby School**, one of the oldest of England’s private schools, where it was first played.



*First Football Game at Brown University, 1878*

BROWN UNIVERSITY

The evolution of rugby-style football in the United States was chaotic. An 1869 game between Rutgers and Princeton was the first documented contest between two American colleges, in which players carried the ball and actually called their game “football” rather than rugby.

Because the game was developing in different places at the same time, problems soon arose. Each college made up its own rules, making it difficult to organize intercollegiate games. To make it possible for clubs and schools to play each other, it became necessary to standardize the rules.

Thus it was that in 1876, representatives from the athletic departments of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Princeton Universities met and created the **Intercollegiate Football Association** to regulate the game. American football was officially born.



*Yale Football Champions, 1881*  
YALE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

## WALTER CAMP – FATHER OF AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Present at the birth was a Yale student named **Walter Camp**, who would become a central figure in the development of the sport. Camp loved the new game of football. In 1888, just six years after he graduated from Yale, he became head football coach and eventually its athletic director.

Camp edited every American Football rulebook until his death in 1925. Among the **innovations** that he contributed to the game were the establishment of a line of scrimmage separating the two teams before each play, the quarterback and center positions, snapping the ball with the hands, the forward pass, eleven-man teams instead of fifteen, the scoring system, down and distance rules, tackling below the waist, the neutral zone and the penalty system.

## JIM THORPE’S FAMOUS COACH

Jim Thorpe’s coach, **Glenn Scobey Warner** (a.k.a. “Pop”) was another important innovator and strategist of the game. He trained for a career in law at Cornell University but gave it up to become a coach.

Warner ran the sports program at Carlisle from 1899-1903 and from 1907-1914. He invented the reverse play, the single wing, the double wing, the three-point stance, and a variety of blocking schemes still in use today. He is also famous for plays and tricks that were soon outlawed. They included sewing a football-shaped leather patch to the front of players’ uniforms to make it hard to tell who had the ball, running off the field behind the opposing team’s bench and then coming back on to catch a pass downfield, and a play called the “hunchback,” in which the ball was shoved inside the ball carrier’s shirt.



*Warner's Blocking and Tackling Techniques*  
FOOTBALL FOR PLAYERS AND COACHES BY GLENN S. WARNER

## FOOTBALL NEARLY BANNED

During Pop's first years as coach at Carlisle, football was an incredibly violent game. Mass formations such as the *Flying Wedge* (which was later banned) led to brutal collisions that sometimes resulted in fatalities. Records indicate that there were either eighteen or nineteen deaths in college football in 1905. President Theodore Roosevelt publicly voiced his opinion that the game should be banned unless changes were made. As a result 62 schools joined to form the *Intercollegiate Athletic Association* to devise rules and practices that would make the game safer. Later the Association was renamed the *National Collegiate Athletic Association* (the NCAA) which survives to this day.

American college football rapidly gained in popularity. The first college football league, a precursor to the Big Ten, was founded in 1895. In 1902, the first post-season game, the *Rose Bowl*, was played, in which Michigan beat Stanford 49-0. *Soldiers' Field* in Boston the largest sports stadium in the United States, was built in 1903. The arena, which seated 30,000 people, was home to the *Harvard Crimson*, one of the most formidable college football teams in that early era.

## THE AMATEUR IDEA

All competitive college sports were classified as amateur. At its most basic level, this meant that college athletes not be paid money to play sports. To do so would have been considered "unsporting."

The concept of amateurism came from Victorian England and was a reflection of its rigid class distinctions. The upper class, the British aristocracy, wished to protect sport from contamination by the working classes. The British Amateur Rowing Association

banned lower-class competitors, stating that no person could be an amateur who "is or ever has been by trade a mechanic, artisan, or engaged in any menial duty." The London Amateur Athletic Club stated that the only true amateur was "a gentleman," and that "the only way to keep sport pure from the element of corruption" was to ban participation by "the average workman," who "has no idea of sport for its own sake."

Though the British concept of amateurism ran counter to American democratic ideal of equal opportunity for all, American colleges made amateur status a requirement for all intercollegiate competition. But who really was an amateur? Could it only be a student rich enough to pay his own way? Could an athlete ever receive payment of any kind?

## THE AMATEUR ATHLETIC UNION

In the United States, rules governing amateur competition were established with the founding of the *Amateur Athletic Union (AAU)* in 1888. American colleges came to accept the AAU as the supreme arbiter of all the major events in track and field. Only athletes "sanctioned" as amateurs by the AAU could take part in its events. Though working men were not barred from competition, anyone paid to engage in sports was ineligible. In 1898 the Intercollegiate Athletics Associations stipulated that "no student should be paid for his athletics." Furthermore, it declared that "The practice of assisting young men through college in order that they may strengthen athletic teams is degrading to amateur sports."

Such was the power of the AAU that in 1913, Jim Thorpe was stripped of his Olympic medals at the insistence of its president, James Sullivan. The Inter-

national Olympic Committee, which regulated the Olympic Games, was not eager to disqualify Thorpe, but Sullivan's AAU pre-empted the chance for the IOC to make a decision.

### JAMES SULLIVAN

A former runner and boxer, Sullivan was a key figure in the promotion of amateur sports in the United States. Working as a sports journalist for his own publication, *Athletic News*, and then the *New York Sporting News*, Sullivan realized that there was considerable profit to be made in controlling athletic events. While athletes were not allowed to be paid, there was nothing to stop "sponsors" and promoters from raking in huge sums of money from ticket sales.

### THE PROFIT MOTIVE

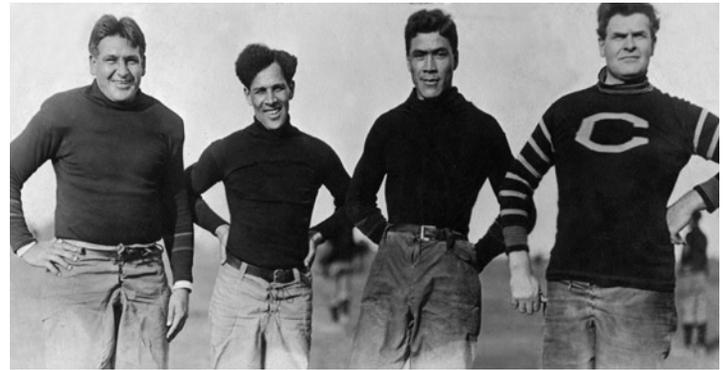
Paradoxically, the lure of money gradually changed the culture of college sports. Schools hired professional staff to train and take care of the student athletes. The practices of recruiting top players by giving them gifts, cash bribes, and guarantees of good grades became common. College football was already big business by the time Jim Thorpe first played for the Carlisle Indians in 1907.

At Carlisle, all of Pop Warner's "athletic boys" were given special housing and meals that were much better than those served to ordinary students. In addition, they received expense accounts, clothing, and generous "loan" and "expense money," in proportion to their success on the playing fields.



*Carlisle Boys in Dorm Room*  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Pop himself was a master publicist. The more people who knew about Carlisle, the greater was the money to be made from ticket sales. Warner built a well-oiled public relations machine. His agents, such as Hugh Miller, a letter-shop operator, wrote and sent out articles about Carlisle's sports to a syndicate of over 150 newspapers. E.L. Martin, the editor of the town of Carlisle's *Evening Herald*, was paid by Warner to place items about the Carlisle teams in the paper, to distribute placards and flyers, and to take team portraits and game pictures.



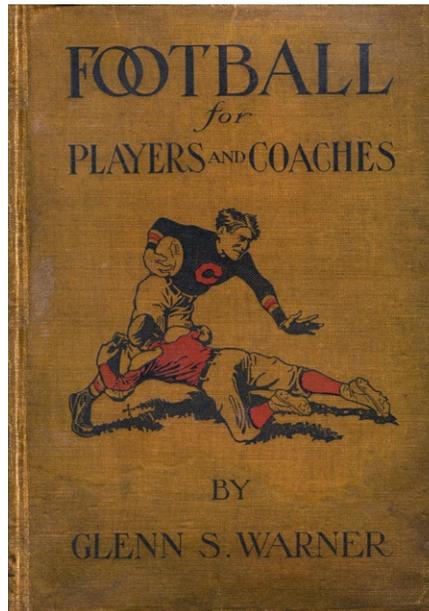
*Pop Warner (Right) With Players*  
CUMBERLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### SPALDING, SULLIVAN, AND WARNER

Sullivan, the head of the Amateur Athletic Union, also cultivated connections with powerful commercial benefactors. One of these was **Albert Goodwill Spalding**, the co-founder with his brother of the world's largest sporting goods business. Spalding had been a successful pitcher for the Chicago White Stockings before retiring from baseball at the age of 28 in 1877. In 1876, even before the end of his playing days, Spalding opened a sports emporium in Chicago to sell "all kinds of baseball goods." He then started publishing ***Spalding's Official Baseball Guide***, officially approved and endorsed by the major league teams. By 1882, at the age of thirty-two, Spalding became the president of the Chicago White Stockings. In 1892, he created the ***American Sports Publishing Company*** to bring out books by such leading sports figures as Pop Warner. James Sullivan was hired by Spalding to manage his publications and the entire advertising budget for the company. As a result Sullivan was, at one and

the same time, a powerful force for the commercialization of college sport while presiding over an organization, the AAU, dedicated to defending and regulating amateurism.

Meanwhile Pop Warner was developing his own relationship with Spalding, the king of sporting goods. He designed various types of protective padding for football players that Spalding's company produced. Spalding also published Warner's book *Football for Coaches and Players*, (1913), one of the first important publications on football strategy.



*Book Cover*

*FOOTBALL FOR PLAYERS AND COACHES BY GLENN S. WARNER*

Pop's connections with the Spalding Company brought him into contact with James Sullivan, who directly oversaw the publication of Pop's book. Both men were skilled at turning a profit from sport events, and they were natural allies. This may explain why, when Sullivan demanded the erasure of Jim Thorpe from Olympic records, Warner went along. No doubt he believed in his protégé and might have supported his case in other circumstances. But Warner had too much at stake to risk alienating Sullivan and his powerful Amateur Athletic Union.



# COLLEGE SPORTS

## Concepts and Discussion

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students learn about the history of college sports, in particular American football, the development of the idea of amateurism, the creation of the Amateur Athletic Union and the troubled link between business and amateur athletics.

### TEACHER'S QUICK REFERENCE

#### *Origins of football*

- Evolution from soccer and rugby in England
- Early intercollegiate games in the United States
- 1876 Convention to standardize rules of the game
- Walter Camp, father of American football
- Glenn Scobey Warner, Thorpe's famous coach
- Football criticized because of injuries and deaths
- Growing popularity of the game

#### *Amateurism*

- The idea of amateurism
- British concept: Sports are for gentlemen only.
- Amateur Athletic Union founded to regulate amateur sports.
- James Edward Sullivan

#### *Profit Motive*

- Profit motive changes college sports
- Albert Caldwell Spalding
- American Sports Publishing Company
- Pop Warner's links to Sullivan and Spalding

### KEY CONTENT

- The development of football from the British games of soccer and rugby
- The first intercollegiate competitions in football and football's early problems
- Walter Camp and Pop Warner as early football pioneers
- The development of amateur athletics and the narrow definition of an amateur
- The growth of businesses that depended on amateur sports for their revenue and the roles played by James Sullivan, Walter Spalding, and Pop Warner

### CONTENT REVIEW

- How is American football similar to the games of rugby and soccer, and how is it different?
- What role did Walter Camp play in the development of American football?

- What were the ideas that shaped the early definition of amateurism in the United States? How were these ideas at odds with American ideals of democracy?
- Who was James Sullivan, and what was his relationship to the AAU, Pop Warner, and the Spalding Company?
- In what ways did Pop Warner benefit financially from amateur sports?
- Why did Pop Warner want his Indian athletes to compete in the Olympics?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Look closely at the role that team sports play in American culture today. Consider how that role may be different from one nation or one culture to another and discuss why sports seem to be so important to human beings.
- Consider and discuss the idea of amateurism as it was first defined in the United States. How has that idea changed from then to now, and why is that so?
- Does it make sense for others to make money from college sports while the athletes themselves are not paid? Have a debate on the pros and cons of being “paid to play.” Consider in your discussion such things as college athletic scholarships and other perks that athletes receive as well as the huge salaries now paid to successful college coaches.
- What were the problems implicit in the relationship between Sullivan, Warner, and Spalding? Have things changed from then until now in terms of the relationship between coaches, amateur athletic organizations (including the Olympics) and sports businesses such as Spalding, Nike, etc.?

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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