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Too Long In Coming

In 1892, two years after its founding by John D. Rockefeller, the University of Chicago hired Amos Alonzo Stagg as its inaugural football coach. He was brought in by the school's first president William Rainey Harper, Stagg's former divinity professor at Yale. He came with full tenure as well as rent, heat and light in Snell House, reputedly the first ever tenured college appointment in a department of physical education or "physical culture" as it was then known as well as the first tenured position for a college athletics coach. By way of comparison, some years later, universities around the country were outraged when Michigan had a professional coach, one who worked for pay, rather than room, board, and a university appointment that ostensibly included teaching.

In July before his first upcoming season, Stagg exclaimed: "We expect great things in athletic lines at the University of Chicago." It was reported the high school where he previously coached in Springfield, Mass., a small school of only forty boys, put a team on the field that had quote, "many Eastern colleges bite the dust." Yes, great things were expected.

Stagg came to Chicago with a national reputation. At Yale he was part of the first ever "All American" team in 1889. At the new university on the midway he wasted little time commandeering the intent to provide a physical work culture program, required of all U of C students, bending this altruistic effort to his own desires - that of intercollegiate athletics. Football was by far at the head of Stagg's list of athletic pursuits that would fulfill the physical work culture requirement. For Stagg's purposes, it was a perfect recruiting ground. He also benefitted by being able to lead by example. For in that first season, he played halfback. Against Illinois he scored the winning touchdown in a ten to four victory. Four points scored for a touchdown and two points for what is known today as the "extra point."

In contrast to the Eastern universities, Stagg was quoted as saying: "We will not hire men to come to the university because they are athletes nor will we pay their expenses because they are athletes." Perhaps this was true, perhaps not. At the very start in 1892 the University compiled an incredible first season recording two wins, two ties and four defeats with two closely contested games against well regarded Northwestern, who had six wins, four losses, and two ties, and with wins against both Illinois and Michigan. "Two ties" – ahhh, remember the good old days when two teams could produce a tied score and the game ended there?

I must digress if kind listeners will allow. One year, number one in the nation was to play number two in the nation, a widely anticipated game between Notre Dame and Michigan State, billed as "the game of the century." The two polls, United Press International or UPI and Associated Press or AP, couldn't decide who was number one as Notre Dame was ranked first in one and Michigan State was ranked first in the other. As both teams had used their one allotted nationally televised game, television coverage was on tape delay, imagine that! Legendary Notre Dame coach Ara Parseghian was criticized after the game for conservative play at the end that resulted in a tie, ten to ten. He was quoted as

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saying, “We'd fought hard to come back and tie it up. After all that, I didn't want to risk giving it to them cheap. They get reckless and it could cost them the game. I wasn't going to do a jackass thing like that at this point.” Imagine that, a TIE! How the populace would howl today with an end like that. Imagine the New York Giants and New England Patriots ending their Super Bowl this year in a 17 to 17 tie! It should be added somewhat shamelessly though that as early as 1922 college coaches were offering plans for ending tie games during rules discussions at the annual American Football Coaches' Association meeting. This was the year John Heisman, retired Penn coach, became the association's president.

My digression is now ended.

Why football for this nascent university? The theory held by most at this juncture just prior to the great World's Columbian Exposition, was, in the words of the student newspaper: “The best colleges are...the leaders in athletic games.” There was considerable support from the community for football and Marshall Field, the dry goods merchant, donated land to build the stadium, which opened in 1893 as “Marshall Field” - nice pun.

By the season of 1894 it was more than clear University of Chicago football had reached the big time. Revenues were manufactured by demanding a ten year schedule where 90% of opponents had to come to Chicago if they wanted to play the Monsters of the Midway. Games were played at home in front of loyal and rabid Chicago fans. And were they ever fans, so much so they coined a cheer honoring the great benefactor who made possible their delight in the stands:

Who's the feller, Who's the feller, Rockefeller, Rockefeller, Zip boom bah, Rah, Rah, Rah.

A nineteen game season ensued with the erection of a 2,000 seat grandstand completed two days before what later became the annual Turkey bowl against Michigan. The season ended with a 6,200 mile road trip to the west coast where matters of filling the financial coffers were utmost judging by the mono-focus portended by several telegrams between Stagg and Walter Camp of Stanford. This match-up, played on New Year's Day in a warm climate, predicted the era of the bowl game. Actually, once wasn't enough, they played Stanford twice, back-to-back. Well, the season didn't quite end at that point. Stagg arranged a stopover in Salt Lake City where they befuddled the Y.M.C.A. team, made up of professionals, what few there were in Utah at that time, fifty-two to zero. I'm sure he figured if he was traveling back from California why not make a little money along the journey home?

Football in this time was a rough and crude sport, rife with very serious injuries - it was brutal. An article as early as 1894 in the medical journal *Lancet*, voiced alarm at the number of horrific injuries on the gridiron. The same year, after a game between Yale and Harvard that became remembered as the “Hampden Park Bloodbath,” Harvard President Charles Eliot denounced football as quote, “unfit for colleges and schools” and “more brutalizing than prizefighting, cockfighting and bullfighting.” At year end the

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Indiana College of Presidents voted to ban the sport. While Dr. Harper of Chicago stated his university would “always encourage and support football,” Dr. Rogers of Northwestern said that while he was in favor of football, “great evils exist in the game as it is played at present.” But Harper knew what he was talking about as it was well noted the atmosphere around campus had improved markedly with the winning football program and its recent victory over Wisconsin. Such a change in attitude on campus is not unlike what is found today. After Northwestern went to the Rose Bowl some years back applications for enrollment jumped twenty percent.

A *Chicago Tribune* article in November 1895, in discussing the upcoming game between Chicago and Northwestern blared, “It Will Be a Battle to the Death.”

You may be surprised to learn that the College of Physicians and Surgeons, which later affiliated with the University of Illinois, fielded a football team that was at most times competitive. However, trouble was only a short time span away. The Committee on Athletics closed their report to the Executive Faculty by saying, “Your committee is fully convinced that the maintenance of athletics in medical colleges, while it is a medium of advertising and a means of engendering the college spirit, is, as at present conducted, detrimental to the interests of medical education.” No kidding? Perhaps they were going to acquire patients for practicing medical techniques from places other than their own football field? The team was disbanded in 1900.

Although the flying wedge was outlawed in 1894, rules changes came slowly and generally dealt with enrollment and banning professional players. Some players who attended a school for a year or two and then transferred to Chicago would be eligible for another four years. However an important change was made that a transferee had to sit out one year, which served to stop the practice of bribing players to come to a school to play football. Of course this didn’t stop the bribing of high school seniors. Bribes were probably in order and a good inducement given the terror of the college sport.

The *New York State Journal of Medicine* published a study by Robert Coughlin showing the ten year span between 1901 and 1910 included 183 deaths from football. In the English newspaper *Westminster Gazette*, Harvard’s Dr. Eliot in 1905 “uttered an eloquent protest against the methods employed in college football.” Dr. Eliot stated that the enforcement of established rules was “impossible” to maintain. Players did their best to disable opponents, especially by gouging the eyes. His summary of the source of the disgusting conditions in football was: “the immoderate desire to win intercollegiate games; the frequent collisions in masses which make foul play invisible; the profit from violations of rules, and the misleading assimilation of the game to war as regards its strategy and ethics.”

Two years earlier State Representative Underwood of McLeansboro, Illinois, introduced a bill to prohibit football in the state university and other institutions of learning supported wholly or in part by the state. His emphasis was obviously on “learning.” He was also abhorred by the death toll. Predictably, the response by university officials was that the bill was foolish.

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In 1905 alone there were some twenty-eight deaths. In October that year Teddy Roosevelt convened a meeting of college presidents with threats to abolish the sport. Perhaps this was a bit of grandstanding as the sentiment was clearly in that direction. On November 27, 1905, the *Chicago Tribune* published a front page story about recommendations to make the game safer with interviews and quotes from university presidents around the country, including Harvard, Penn, Columbia, NYU, Minnesota, Cornell, Notre Dame, Cal Berkeley, Northwestern, Iowa, Brown, Indiana, Nebraska, Williams, a host of smaller schools, and of course several spokesmen for Chicago.

However, even after Stagg announced in the newspaper the new game was “never safer” and two years after significant rules changes that included the legalization of the forward pass thereby reducing “scrums” on every play and spreading the offense, which avoided large masses of bodies pounding atop each other, there were thirty-three deaths in 1911. The cacophony of mayhem included deaths by the following maladies: fracture of the skull, internal injuries, septic wounds from large gashes, spinal injury and brain hemorrhage. U of C President Harper had once said: “We may grant that limbs are broken and lives lost; but we must remember that there is no form of life's activity which is not attended with risk.” Possibly in the day of being run over by horse and carriage or a trolley car in mud soaked, crowded and utterly disorganized streets, he had a point.

That football was important and the athletes special was evident with the institutionalization of the players. The best twenty moved into Snell Hall, set aside in 1897 for their graces, replete with a special training table for joint meals, a real separation of players from the remainder of the students, not unlike Division One living conditions today. The Hall, too, was a place for special academic tutoring and general watching over. Such practices as steeling “their nerves with narcotics or stimulants” was henceforth banned at the hall. Rise at dawn, to bed by nine-thirty was the regimen.

The home field advantage Chicago had pried from its opponents leveled somewhat in 1899 when Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois banded together to boycott Chicago insisting on return games and equal divisions of the gate receipts. However, the demand to play Chicago was such that the boycotted games could have been readily replaced as the following year the university fielded a request from two of the strongest professional teams in the country for a matchup; a request that was declined lest professionalism creep into the sacred college game. It's a pretty interesting concept to think that these three powerhouse schools had previously been willing to come only to Chicago to play and to leave nevertheless the poorer for having precious little of the revenues.

That same year Notre Dame charged Chicago with fielding professional athletes. Even then the search for amateurism was active. While those who played baseball professionally in the Midwest were allowed to play football, those in the East were barred from competition. There had from the start been questions of professionalism in the sport and Chicago was not immune from either questioning or downright disease. Chicago policeman J. R. McDonald had suited up for the team in 1900 ostensibly as a medical student who had yet to matriculate. Stagg's response to vocal criticism against McDonald

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was that there was plenty of time to investigate his “amateur standing.” This search for amateurism really came about with the advent of the modern Olympic Games in 1892. Great Britain had the strongest impact on this definition as their upper classes refused to compete with the lower classes, many of whom earned their living from sport. They foisted the concept of the Olympic ideal as gentlemanly amateur contests; a completely farcical notion as it is well studied today that ancient Greek athletes were paid handsomely, bet upon, and rewarded with untold riches for their victorious exploits. Author Paul Weiss said of amateurism, “By and large the line between amateur and professional is mainly a line between the unpaid members of the privileged class and the paid members of the underprivileged class.”

Like the Greeks, Chicago residents had a fervor for sport and football was chief among them. Poaching the Maroon’s fan base was a capital idea. In 1901, Michigan and Iowa scheduled a Thanksgiving Day game, not in Ann Arbor, nor in Iowa City, but in Chicago. Stagg’s response to this was to move the time of the Chicago - Wisconsin match-up that day to kick off at the exact same time. All’s fair in football and business. A year later Michigan made some requests, or demands if you will, for fairness in revenue splits, all of which were rejected by the University of Chicago’s Athletic Board. They finally patched up their differences for the 1902 season, fortuitous for both as events would soon show. Holiday games were later banned by the council of deans at Chicago. Naturally Stagg disliked the plan. But, the concept had taken hold in the east with Harvard and Yale before it made its way west.

By 1905, the university garnered a national championship secured with the last game of the season against Michigan, a two to zero win. In those days only eleven men played football, working on both offense and defense. This championship team included two first-team All-Americans and two second-team members. Of course now, as then, with championships come the riches of recruits. Only one month after this program coronation, the university announced seven prized athletes, sought by every team in the nation, had registered with the school for the winter/spring quarters beginning in January.

Being located in the second largest metropolitan area in the country, with a geographically concentrated populous, assured a ready audience of paying fans, which favored the football budget immensely. To this budgetary end, easy opponents were scheduled early in the season to guarantee a winning campaign and whip up the interest of fans, a practice that exists yet today with such notable recent match-ups as Alabama versus Kent State and Nebraska versus Chattanooga.

Rockefeller, the ultimate Capitalist of the day, would have been proud of the fiscal accomplishments of the football program. In the championship year these profits yielded such an enormous sum as to pay for the budgets of all other university athletic endeavors. Football had come of age at the University of Chicago in thirteen short years.

To engender comradely, a sense of achievement, and on campus fame, Stagg instituted the Order of the C, a letter club whose admittance was based on service to university athletics.

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Around this time heavy recruitment of prep athletes became institutionalized through the efforts of none other than university president Harper and his wholesale enlistment of some 6,000 alumni in Chicago and the surrounding environs. The job was to find football talent for their beloved school and bring them in. Efforts were strengthened by Stagg who devised a university sponsored track meet for high school athletes around the Midwest to find the biggest and fastest future football stars. Then as now the Chicago metropolitan area was fertile ground for athletic prowess and a number of Western Conference schools actively recruited here. Not only were the athletes courted but the fans as well. Trying to do his best at creating the illusion that playing football at Chicago was the most important part of a teenager's life, Stagg invited fifteen thousand high school students for the 1903 matchup with the Haskell Indians. Literally American Indians, Haskell football teams in the early 1900's to the 1930's were legendary. Stagg once tracked down future star Walter Eckersall at the train station in route to Ann Arbor and erroneously told him the Michigan coach had cancelled the visit. Stagg subsequently took young Walter out for a night on the town. Competition to secure budding football prodigies was so intense at times that players were on the active roster before they had secured their high school diploma. This was an era of academic scheming to maintain team eligibility. Doesn't that sound familiar? Appeals to President Harper were not uncommon and athletes were watched over carefully with the errant grade being supplanted by a test retaken or some nefarious waving of an ambiguous requirement.

The epitome of academic absurdity came with the successful enrollment of instant all-American Walter Eckersall. While at Hyde Park High School he had led his team to a 105 to zero dismemberment of Brooklyn Tech the best Eastern high school team. That he also posted a ten seconds flat 100 yard dash, a record that stood for over twenty-years, only served to heighten the surety of stardom and the fervor to recruit him.

After his stardom was assured by results for Chicago, including the 1905 championship, it was a revelation that his time in the hundred yard dash, ten seconds, was about equivalent to his time in the classroom. Upon completion of his four year eligibility in 1906, after being named all-American three years straight, he had completed only a year of required coursework. It was the magic of football that kept him enrolled. Eckersall went on to a career as a columnist, publicist and football referee before his untimely death in 1930. At 83rd and Yates sits his namesake stadium and park. It was really only some time later that courses such as rocks for jocks and introduction to communications were instituted at schools to make their course of study easy. The year Tennessee won a national championship in 1998 only twenty-five percent of the team went on to graduate. One student athlete said he had "majored in eligibility, with a minor in beating the system."

It wasn't just Chicago who sought to win by rules bending. McClure's magazine rendered a scathing review of college football in 1905. They noted Andrew Smith at Penn who was allowed a fifth year to play football, after expiring his four years already played and eligible. Justification was sought for extending the eligibility of Jim Thorp who had not been enrolled at Manhattan while playing for their team. The magazine noted one only

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need visit prep schools Exeter and Andover to find “the evils of college athletics cropping out.”

The post-1905 season reforms in football within the Western Conference, which became the Big Ten, were significant. One of the most notable and longest lasting changes was the requirement of one full year student residency prior to participation in intercollegiate activity; freshmen were no longer eligible to play football.

The need for control was exerted by university faculty who sought to legitimize the student athlete concept, but also to make the game safer. New restrictions were implemented such as the requirement of meeting academic standards for admittance to a member school. Such a rule was relatively fair for all in the conference as Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Northwestern held generally high academic standards. While admittance to a college of agriculture or animal husbandry would have lowered such standards this potential loophole was resolved by holding forth entrance to the college of liberal arts and sciences as the unified benchmark.

Gone too were the segregated training tables and residences, a move that would last many decades before creeping back into college football. Scholarships also came into question wherein a student was supposed to perform work in exchange for tuition, not just service on the gridiron. However this issue was not addressed so aggressively as the others. In retrospect, there were several months at the end of 1905 and the beginning of 1906 where it looked as convincing football would be abolished as not. In February, Chicago and Wisconsin faculty voted to abolish football for two years to clean up the mess. They deferred to the Conference and all awaited the outcome of resolutions by each of its member schools. At Chicago the matter was taken to the senate where the two-thirds majority needed to drop the game was not mustered. It was let out that then acting university president Harry Pratt Judson was not in favor of ending the program, which swayed much of the opposition.

The Chicago faculty, unsuccessful at disbanding football, then proposed along with faculties at Wisconsin and Michigan, to end their big games, or at least have a hiatus until the fervor of such rivalries could settle down. Chicago and Wisconsin didn't play again until 1908 and the game against Michigan didn't resume until 1918. Gone too were the ten to twelve game schedules. In 1906, and 1907, Chicago played only five games. The number of games was limited after that to only seven until well into the 1920s.

A subject of much debate in the last few decades has been the money involved in college football. This issue is not a new one by any means. It was reported by Stagg, in 1909, receipts were the highest ever, and while all of the university sports lost money, the football program was able to bring the entire athletic department into the black in addition to a sizeable donation to the library. Again, many of the issues we think of today in the sport as relatively recent have in fact been ingrained in college football from its early beginnings.

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It was clear by this time the changes sought by the academics had taken hold. Several players were deemed on the “ragged edge” academically as the season opened in 1911. Stagg had sent letters to every member of the squad to make “peace with the deans” or risk not playing.

In the teens, prior to the United States entering World War I, all was relatively quiet on the football field. Stagg Field had become the new name of the stadium in 1913 and games outside of the conference had been banned by the athletic board the same year. The Chicago gridiron team compiled a record of 22 wins, 16 losses and two ties from 1913 to the war’s end in 1918. The stats are somewhat skewed by the undefeated year of the name change and honor to their twenty-year coach, and the winless season in 1918. Newspapers recount the team was particularly hard struck by the call to service of able bodied men.

Post war, the game was back to normal as the Maroons pasted or “massacred,” as the *Tribune* noted, the men from Great Lakes 123 to nothing, scoring eighteen times at an average rate of two points a minute.

By 1922, Stagg had lifted his men back up to pre-war prominence with first place in the Big Ten. Two years later the University of Illinois came to town with legendary leader Robert C. Zuppke, who went on to coach the Illini for twenty-nine years. They had finished the 1923 season undefeated with eight wins and were once again fielding a powerhouse team. This was a contest everyone had been anticipating. The Illini team featured what some say was the greatest football player of all time, Red Grange. Three weeks earlier Grange had garnered national celebrity as a result of his performance against Michigan. That game was the opening for the new Memorial Stadium in Champaign, built as a tribute to the University of Illinois students and alumni who had served in World War I. A stadium that Chicago Literary Club member John Carlson’s parents helped to build. His father was Chairman and mother co-Chairman of the fund raising for its construction. While they were not married at the time, they came to be known as “Mr. & Mrs. Stadium.”

Against Michigan, Grange had returned the opening kickoff 95-yards for a touchdown and scored three more touchdowns on runs of 67, 56, and 44 yards, all in the first quarter. In the previous two seasons, Michigan had only allowed four touchdowns total! Grange rested in the second quarter and then in the closing half ran eleven yards for a fifth touchdown and passed twenty yards for a sixth. Illinois had just snapped Michigan’s twenty game unbeaten streak.

Yes, this Maroon-Illini matchup was highly anticipated. Thirty-two thousand fans packed the stadium in Chicago. The *Tribune* exclaimed the eyes of the world would be focused on Chicago that afternoon. “Twenty-two players, half Orange and Blue and the other half Maroon will be unleashed at Stagg Field” the newspaper announced. So feared was Grange that one reporter said the mere hearing of his name was likened to the “mention of some ogre who may eat little children.” Grange it was noted had vanquished all. “He

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could run like a deer and change direction while going at top speed.” All of this of course was front page news.

On the first drive by the Maroons they handed the ball to running back Austin McCarty seven times in a row until he scored the opening touchdown. Chicago scored again to make it fourteen-zero. Grange got hold of the ball, passed and ran, until the Fighting Illini made it fourteen-seven. But Stagg’s men stormed back to up their lead twenty-one-seven. Now it was Grange’s turn in this sea-saw battle, score twenty-one-fourteen. Then it happened, Illinois deep in its own territory. Grange takes the ball, “darts round the end.” Maroons lunging at him, then another, and another, Grange “dancing,” “skipping,” and “dodging like a rabbit through the underbrush.” Until twenty-one players “scatter fanwise in his wake, like bees swarming after the queen; and Grange away like an antelope for eighty yards to a touchdown.” “Grange was true to form. He was hailed as the ogre and he ate them alive.” A reporter questioned how many in the crowd could “survive heart failure.” The whistle blew, and the “crowds went mad and flowed down into the field in mighty rivers with mad gesticulations and clamor of delight.”

The teams had battled to a 21-21 tie, a quote “noble magnificent tie.” Grange totaled three hundred yards by passing or running. He was all that was anticipated. Yet the Maroons faced Illinois to a tie. The Chicago team followed this great tie with a flourish to end the season in sole possession of first place. They had also tied mighty Ohio State and Wisconsin, vanquished Northwestern, Purdue, Indiana and powerful Brown, and lost only once in a three to zero game against Missouri. Northwestern’s effort against Chicago that year had earned them a new nickname as *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Wallace Abbey wrote, Chicago encountered a “wall of Purple Wildcats.” It was a season to remember.

There was a murmur for a bigger stadium as three games had been sold out. After all, Yale had built one to seat 70,000. The Maroons were host to 163,000 fans at six home games, the second highest average attendance in the conference. Various ticket schemes were brought forth to try and assuage disgruntled fans. Scalpers, again not much changes from history to the present, were arrested for selling tickets at the stadium. With a winning team comes demand and with that demand comes the scummier side of football. Stagg went so far as to send a letter to the fraternities imploring them to cease betting on the games. Among faculty, the battle raged on between the purpose of the school, academic purity, and a full rounded college experience, that of course included football. The new stadium idea was squashed when the budget called for a much needed building campaign to serve the burgeoning student population with hardly half the funds to fulfill it.

As it turned out 1924 the end to an era. First in the Big Ten conference, arguably one of the strongest teams in the nation, over a quarter million fans seeing them in action at home and away. Having compiled the best record in the Big Ten over a twenty-seven year span, Maroon football was never again to be the same.

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During the following eight years Stagg's teams limped to a record of twenty-five wins against thirty-nine losses. Three times they finished last in the Big Ten, twice finishing eighth, twice seventh and once fifth.

But why did football decline at Chicago as a member of their conference? Most importantly, columnist Westwood Pegler would note, the faculty demanded and gained a provision that any student carrying less than an eighty-five average was ineligible to play. Pegler was later named the first ever columnist to win the Pulitzer Prize.

As enrollment at the growing land grant Big Ten schools expanded, their ability to draw from larger student populations outweighed Chicago heavily. Michigan had so many football players, they scheduled two teams to play eight intercollegiate games each for the 1928 season. Through the preceding years, while recruitment was an important part of building a team, so too was finding talent among the student body. Every year the call would go out for able bodied young men to suit up for the Maroons and every year that call was answered by some thirty men to fill eleven positions. Chicago was in no position to expand its enrollment at the pace of its conference rivals. Academics could put a damper on a football season and Chicago's standards were admittedly more stringent than others. During exam time in 1927, half the team didn't attend practice in order to study for finals during a crucial part of the season.

Stagg reached the mandatory university retirement age of seventy in 1932. "I'm too young to quit," Stagg was quoted as saying, reflecting on his forty-one years as coach from 1892 through 1932. But president Robert Maynard Hutchins had his way and Stagg was out. He accepted a coaching post at the University of the Pacific.

Over the course of his career at Chicago, Stagg had compiled a record of 242 wins; 112 losses, and 27 ties and led the Maroons to seven Big Ten Championships. Today, the Division III national championship game is named the Amos Alonzo Stagg bowl. He was an innovator who brought new ideas to the game. He also coached track, baseball and basketball at Chicago and was a founder of the Big Ten Conference. Almost every down of every pro football play features one of his innovations, the "man in motion." While some college programs today do not sport the athletes name on the jersey, all jerseys do have numbers, another Stagg innovation.

As imagined, he was triumphant out west as well. The 1936 Pacific football season was the most successful in their history when they won the championship of the Far Western Conference, undefeated and unscored upon. He coached there from 1933 to 1946. In 1950 the University of the Pacific named their stadium Amos Alonzo Stagg Memorial field.

His replacement at Chicago, Clark Shaughnessy, fared poorly, compiling a record of seven wins against twenty-five losses in Big Ten competition. There was a small glimmer of radiance however. The Downtown Athletic Club trophy was first awarded in 1935 to Jay Berwanger, star running back of the University of Chicago. It was renamed the "Heisman Trophy" upon the death of former Penn coach, John Heisman, in 1936.

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By this time, squads at schools like the University of Illinois were carrying some eighty players, while Chicago was fortunate to have forty. The issue of football and the Big Ten conference had become an open sore. Editors of the student newspaper, the *Daily Maroon*, were campaigning for the abolition of all intercollegiate athletics on campus. However, less than ten percent of the student body, when polled, agreed with this stance. The following year, in 1938, the provocative editors were at it again, predicting football would be abolished on campus, and making an open gesture in print to George Halas of the Chicago Bears for use of what they felt would be an inactive Stagg Field, replete with cheerleaders, fans, and all.

The 1938 team consisted of a starting eleven who were all new, no holdovers from the previous year's starters. Stagg brought his team from Pacific to play against his old beloved school and showed the Maroons a thirty-two to zero drubbing. Some on-lookers said Stagg schooled his players to go easy on them. The dismal season ended with just one victory against lowly De Pauw of Indiana. The other games were lost by a combined score of 257 to 41.

In December, plans for the annual Chicago Alumni club were being made. The president of the club had contacted the athletic department about bringing a group of interested high school athletes to the banquet. He was informed by an unnamed source there was no interest in such endeavor, as it was unclear if a football team would be fielded in 1939.

The following season, the *Tribune* characterized the pre-season Maroon camp as consisting of "doughty" and "undoubtedly the smallest players in the conference." It was the year of the first television broadcast of a college football game. Little did the organizers know, this was the beginning of REALLY big-time college football where some seventy years later, television contracts would bring untold riches to university athletic departments.

At this point, some pundits began calling the once Monsters of the Midway the Scholars of the Midway. After fielding a roster of thirty-four students, some the *Tribune* found, wryly, were actually athletes, the scholarly Big Ten Conference season ended with losses accumulated in a combined score of zero to three hundred. It was discovered that during the season neither "Latin nor logarithms" were used in their football signals. Pundit Wilfrid Smith blared in a headline: "Maroons Can't Slay Football Goliaths – and Shouldn't Try." The season did feature a win against Wabash College and a win in the battle of the brains against Oberlin. But a sixty-one to zero pasting by Harvard and an eighty-five to zero embarrassment by Michigan made it clear that football had become a liability to the school's excellent academic reputation.

Considerable discussion was held among the students and voiced in the papers as to what to do about the program, how to solidify it, and how it was essential to university life. However, President Hutchins and the board of trustees paid no mind to such arguments, and concluded academics were incongruous with college football, even at the level of a Beloit College, and so disbanded the once storied and proud team with a unanimous vote

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by the board of trustees on December 21, 1939, perfectly timed with when the campus was empty on holiday break. In making the announcement, Hutchins said quote “Except for football, the university will continue to maintain intercollegiate teams in all sports which the conference sponsors. It believes its particular interests and conditions are such that its students now derive no special benefit from intercollegiate football.” Without a conference win in three years, he was probably right. Chicago withdrew from the Big Ten, however, in 1946, replaced by Michigan State.

Historical accounts of Hutchins by university writers note he was an iconoclast. Hutchins once claimed: “thinking is an arduous and painful process, and thinking about education is particularly disagreeable.” Hutchins focused on the highest and loftiest goals: morals, values, the intellect, the “University of Utopia,” the “great conversation,” and the study of metaphysics, while others, he claimed, “preferred to deal with academic housekeeping.” It was astonishingly clear in hindsight, football had no place in the universe much less at the University of Chicago under Hutchins. For him, the shuttering of the program was *too long in coming*.

Coach Stagg lamented: “Intercollegiate football contributes to the growth of young men’s enthusiasm, sentiment, and loyalty toward the student body and brings alumni into closer contact with the school.”

My own feelings, which must be expressed here, are that intercollegiate football is good for the student body, but is a farce today, masquerading as nothing more than a free farm club system for the NFL and demanding untold work for little recompense other than tuition, amounting to less than minimum wage. With all the time dedicated to the sport, a football player could likely do as well flipping burgers. It has lowered academic standards around the country. The students on the campus of esteemed Northwestern know all too well that the football players academically are in general the dullest of the student lot. A game of football attended by students for their simple enjoyment and camaraderie, and nothing more, is an ideal, one that will never be realized.

Dick Schultz former director of the NCAA once spoke about the modern game, quote, “If you ask the average person what his perception of college athletics is, he’ll tell you four things: Colleges make millions of dollars at the expense of the college athlete; all coaches cheat; athletes never graduate; and all athletes are addicted to drugs.” Those scathing remarks haven’t changed for over a hundred years. Witness too what author and columnist Rick Tellander wrote in his book *The Hundred Yard Lie*: “A government report laments the professionalism that has brought ‘discredit upon college sports.’ An American president decries the ‘sensationalism and hysteria’ that afflict intercollegiate athletics. A national education association meeting hears a speech on the ‘serious evils of college athletics.’ A major educational foundation issues a report on the state of American college sports – and finds it troubled. A university president lambasts the ‘injustice, hypocrisy, and fraud’ of big-time football.” All comments we would think recent, however they occurred in 1885, 1905, 1915, 1929, and 1950 respectively.

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The post-script to the question of football at the University of Chicago is found with Walter Hass. While he had no intention of returning to the Big Ten or even Division one, he did have a desire to bring back the sport. His first move was to add a class in football. “The faculty senate responded with a resolution opposing the return of football-ever-as a varsity sport.” In 1962, he successfully organized a club team. The response to this was a sit-in at mid-field in the once hallowed Stagg Stadium by students opposed to football. This resulted in four arrests. Hass persevered, not unmolested, but undeterred. A few years, later the student body changed in character and a resolution with 1,100 signatures was gathered in support of football. The senate, administration and trustees approved it and football returned to the University of Chicago as a Division III varsity sport in 1969. It’s first game in thirty years resulted in a fourteen to zero victory over Marquette University. In the aftermath of the win, jubilant fans tore down the goalposts. For them, football at the University of Chicago was *Too Long in Coming*.

The End