"THIRD AND LONG"

The Allure of College Football in the Great Depression

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INTRODUCTION

"The struggle on the gridiron keeps the spectators in a high emotional intensity, for anything may happen at any time in a football game. A long run, a successful forward pass, a fumble--and a sure loser may be converted into a winner."[1] The remarks of *New York Times* writer George Copeland on September 27, 1931, seemed an unfitting discussion in the overwhelming hardship of the early 1930s, a period that stood witness to the sudden and dramatic degeneration of the American economic structure, the suspension of almost 3,000 banks, and the unemployment of over 4 million Americans. The nation found itself immersed in the depths of what would become known as the Great Depression. It has been called by historians "the saddest proletarian episode in American history," characterized by a "panoply of disruption with the erosion of families, loss of homes, transience, apathy."[2] For many, such a sporting event as college football was the least of their interests or concerns. Yet Copeland's remarks about the collegiate sport, and similarly those of many other sport journalists and commentators of the period, remained printed in the widely read newspaper. There was no mistake about it—a growing faction of the American populace wanted to hear the latest news from the gridiron, and newspaper reporters and college writers responded accordingly. Unbeknownst to the writers, their words foreshadowed a phenomenon that was about to occur in the arena of spectator sports.

Though attendance at college football games, and for that matter most spectator sports, fell in the first years of the Depression, with a few colleges even proceeding to

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[1] George Copeland, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," *New York Times*, September 27, 1931.

[2] Catherine Covert and John Stevens, ed., *Mass Media Between the Wars: Perceptions of Cultural Tension, 1918-1941* (Syracuse University Press, 1984), 162.

drop the sport, estimates in 1937 placed total fandom at 20 million, a figure twice as high as that of 1930.[3] College football was not only able to withstand the difficulties of the Depression, but was actually able to increase its appeal and overall spectator attendance from pre-Depression years. Was this the simple result of what sport historian Benjamin Rader concluded was the college game's ability to attract higher income groups who withstood the rigors of the Depression more successfully than did baseball's fans,[4] or was there something more driving this surge of interest? How did the unique circumstances of the Great Depression, including mass unemployment and nation-wide economic anxieties, influence the economic and social makeup of college football's spectators? What was it about the grueling gridiron that appealed to the vulnerable national mentality?

While the field of sport history is a fairly recent arrival to scholarly historical study, in the past few decades sport historians have managed to perform extensive research on what spectators value, both in the game of college football and in the wider arena of sports and leisure. As displayed in our modern popular culture, from extravagant costumes and tailgating rituals to the loyal road-game caravans that follow their alma maters to the farthest venue possible, college football fandom is in itself a unique way of life. In one explanation provided by sport historians, college football's appeal is largely due to the game's ability to evoke community pride and preserve vulnerable local identities among lesser-known communities of spectators. They note its ability to promote kinship among the student body, to bind together local college communities who faced unprecedented threats to local identity in the early 20th century, a

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[3] Benjamin Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2004), 188.
[4] Ibid.

critical juncture in the centuries-long transformation of this country from a rural, frontier, decentralized, producerist, farm and village society—the older America—into the modern commercialized, consumerist, and mechanized mass society of the metropolis.[5] Other studies instead depict the wide-ranging impact of educational institutions on the rise of college football, as certain college presidents openly sought to build their institutions through a successful football team's publicity.[6] Colleges used the sport's exposure in the national media to build their universities' reputation and attempt to secure a profitable following of boosters and alumni. In the 1920s, for example, colleges across the country built colossal stadiums of steel and concrete for their institutions' football programs, which ultimately resulted in a doubling of attendance at college games and a remarkable tripling of gate receipts.[7] These endeavors of elite universities and local colleges have thus been cited among the multiple sources contributing to the expansion of the swelling fan base in the early 20th century.

In examining the meaning of college football to spectators, researchers have also unsurprisingly provided a fair amount of analysis on the spectators' opportunity to have a shared American experience in the stadiums, and most especially, how men have found the means to assert their recurrently threatened sense of masculinity through watching the gridiron. Historians note that from its very birth in the late 19th century, college football readily appealed to young men. A "manly game played by gentlemen" and representing the highest ideals of Theodore Roosevelt's Strenuous Life philosophy, the gridiron was often used by eager boys to recover and reassert their own manhood. Sport historians

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[5] Michael Oriard, *King Football* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 67.
[6] Ibid. 82.
[7] Rader, *American Sports*, 188.

have performed in-depth examinations and frequently revisited the complex origins of college football's allure; however, this research is far from comprehensive, as existing studies explaining the sport's overall evolution in early 20th century America do not completely account for the sharp rise in attendance that occurred within the distinctive circumstances of the Depression.

From 1933 to 1937, in the heart of the country's efforts to recover from the sudden onset of the Great Depression, college football did more for Americans than act solely as a mechanism for boosting community identity or asserting what seemed to be a constantly threatened sense of masculinity. Rather, the sport embodied a country of individuals who had experienced an abrupt reversal in both national identity and a lifestyle they once believed to be on the rise and completely untouchable. In their increasing reviews of gridiron culture, sport commentators and journalists of the mid-1930s frequently used metaphors and symbolic images regarding the triumph of overcoming adversity. The greatest and most often read stories produced by sport journalists were those that told of a winless, substandard team that in the midst of its demise was somehow able to rise from its lowly status and emerge victorious over a seemingly superior rival. Heroic players and coaches combined merits of muscle and physical brawniness with moral fortitude and endurance. Beyond overarching motivations often attributed to the rise of college football, spectators in the Great Depression found that through the sport they were able to live out their economic tensions and social anxieties. Most importantly, spectators were given hope that they too would eventually prevail over their hardships. This paper will attempt to assert this idea by examining the language and images of the period's popular media, with particular

analysis of two major national periodicals—the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*—and intercollegiate campus papers—Berkeley's *The Daily Californian* and UCLA's *California Daily Bruin*. College football allowed spectators the rare opportunity to vicariously experience an intense and grueling fight that could ultimately lead to a victory over what seemed to be an impenetrable front line. A resilient opposing team was an obstacle that for spectators in the 1930s symbolized their plight and economic turmoil. The sport offered spectators a venue through which they could symbolically overcome the great national crisis they were dealt, to engage a wounded sense of masculinity and to individually contend with a distinctively altered lifestyle. It was only on the gridiron where Americans could, both literally and metaphorically, tackle their insecurities and misfortunes and look forward to the chance of a new, confident beginning.

"The Golden Age" of College Gridiron

College football's unexpected surge in popularity in the 1930s was due primarily to emotions and ideologies developed as a result of the Depression; however, in order to understand these distinct ideologies, it is important to recognize the factors that played into college football's growing popularity and success by the end of the 1920s. The prosperous and generally comfortable period of the 1920s is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of sports. It was a time when industry and spectator alike would evolve their everyday pastime interests in extracurricular activity toward a national enthrallment with organized sports. Some have asserted that the "Golden" characterization of the period from 1919 to 1930 is due to a rise of the greatest collection of stars, involving both skill and color, that sport has ever known since "the first cave man tackled the mammoth

and the aurorchs bull."[8] Whatever the cause, there is no denying that sports rose to dramatic new heights in popularity and social value in the years of the 1920s.

College football did not escape these advances, and before the onset of the nation's economic crisis, the sport was in a steady and dynamic process of developing a dedicated and active fan base by the end of the 1920s. American sportswriter Allison Danzig vividly described this early state of college football audiences in his general review of 1920s sports, what is often referred to as its "Golden Age":

> In the years between the end of the war and the collapse of the stock market, October 29, 1929—overlapping slightly at either end—[college football] burst its bonds and became an all-engrossing sport and business. People who had learned to love it before the war now demanded to see it weekly. They battled each other for tickets. They neglected their businesses to talk about it in the office. They remembered academic loyalties they had almost forgotten and started taking on interest in the old U., its gridiron successes and failures.[9]

As Danzig reveals, the close of the 1920s saw the beginning stages of a growing populace of college football spectators. With generally less concern over financial security and confidence in the nation's future prospects, spectators were drawn to the sport simply as an enjoyable form of lively entertainment.

College football came of age in the 1920s, when it was widely recognized as America's greatest sporting spectacle.[10] While a few of the major Eastern and Mid-Western colleges financed some public exhibitions for their gridiron teams before the period, the time soon came when every campus harboring a respectable football team would erect grand concrete stadiums to boast of their team's greatness. Scouting for potential talent became preseason custom, coaches were met with paychecks that

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[8] Allison Danzig, ed., *Sport's Golden Age: A Close-up of the Fabulous Twenties* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1948), 112.
[9] Ibid., 1.
[10] *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, s.v. "college football."

exceeded those of even the university presidents, and "before you could say John Roosevelt Robinson, the game had taken its place in the Golden Age of Sports."[11] It is important to recognize that before the onset of the Great Depression, college football did gain popularity as fans found social intimacy with the sport; however, this connection was distinctive. It did not entail a means by which fans used to uplift their otherwise humbled spirits or reassert masculine dominance over rising feminine independence, as was the case in the unique circumstances of the 1930s. Rather, what fans were drawn to at the end of the 1920s was the simple pleasure of enjoying an action-packed sport. The unexpected upsurge in attendance in the midst of the Great Depression was unique to the social conditions of the period, and the development of college football prior to the period owed itself to the uncomplicated, spirited appeals of spectator interest.

Before being cloaked in the financial disarray and widespread desperation of the 1930s, the nation could enjoy its extracurricular activities without the underlying sense of hopelessness that preoccupied the minds of American citizens in the Depression. The American lifestyle of the 1920s was generally defined by a tremendous degree of security. In the particular case of college football events, students could simply freely engage in an innocent and spirited venture with their fellow classmates. "Collegians enjoyed sport because it was exciting, promoted community among the student body, and operated independently of adult supervision."[12] Students appreciated any and all opportunities to revel in festivity and partake in interactive social environments. Football's primary role in college life lay in fostering school spirit. "While an athletic victory certainly expressed the urge to competition on the campus, it was above all the

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[11] Danzig, ed., *Sport's Golden Age*, 112.

[12] Steven A. Riess. *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports (Sport and Society)*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991, 55.

symbol of group cohesion and thus first among peer activities."[13] In another way, the nation's recent involvement in World War I provided as much stimulus to spectator interest than any other motivating factor. Walter Camp, for example, helped to organize a service-football program that introduced the game to thousands of young men. And as declared in a 1919 *New York Times* editorial, football owed more to the war in the way of the spread of the spirit of the game than did "to ten or twenty years of development in the period before the war." [14] It would not be until the Depression era that spectators would find a more meaningful, albeit wholly complex, significance in their presence at the college gridiron.

"This Ain't the Pros"

While one could easily argue that football spectators in our modern day are divided between devotees of the professional National Football League and longtime followers of the college game, many fans in fact lovers of both arenas, such was not the case at the turn of the century. An examination of college football spectators rather than those following the professional league is much more pertinent and valuable to understanding American culture in that period. As professional football players and coaches possessed largely disreputable statuses, college football was a sport that was closer to its fans. College games seemed less preoccupied with game technicalities and more characterized by its relationship to its spectators, garnering greater widespread popularity and identification from sport audiences.

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[13] Oriard, *King Football*, 168.
[14] Ibid., 3.

Spectators connected to college football in a way that could not be achieved by the professional league. As will be discussed later in further depth, communal identification with a local college football team was an indispensable factor in the overall growth of the sport in the early 20th century. In fact, few Americans thought about professional football at all until the mid-1920s. And while pro teams in industrial towns in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and a few other places had their followers, the "football law of local-rootedness ruled absolutely."[15] Even small-college—those enrollments running from 500 to 2,000 students—contests receive more than 7,000,000 American spectators year after year by a conservative estimate.[16] In the same way, many young players of the Depression era who appealed to the sport of football admired the distinct features of the college gridiron, and dismissed any thought of entering the professional arena. None of the first five Heisman Trophy winners pursued careers in pro football, and in the years leading up to World War II, "professional football was not yet every boy's—or even every football player's—dream."[17]

In the first half of the century, college football was undeniably more popular than its professional counterpart, attracting more public attention, luring in more fans, and financing its activities with much more diligence than professional teams. As sport historian Michael Oriard revealed in *King Football*, college football was a game that was, as opposed to professional football, for the "common fan, not the expert, for innocent enjoyment rather than self-flattering expertise."[18] Professional football was also a sport constantly at the mercy of criticism produced by media commentaries and public

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[15] Oriard, *King Football*, 202.
[16] John McCallum and Charles H. Pearson, *College Football USA: 1869...1971* (Hall of Fame Publishing, 1971), 227.
[17] Oriard, *King Football*, 202.
[18] Ibid., 200.

officials. Condemnations of the National Football League existed since the organization's very beginnings, and about the only professional football news worth reporting in the early century was provided by official denunciations or scandals. [19] Considering the passion and interest demonstrated by spectators for college gridiron events and their simultaneous disregard for information on the happenings of the professional game, it is to be sure a much more valuable endeavor to examine the unique place of college football in the lives of spectators in the 1930s.

AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY

While most researchers of sport history have emphasized the period from 1850 to 1920, with a growing number examining the post-World War II era, the time of great tension and ideological transformation in the Great Depression has received relatively little attention. From Black Tuesday and the Stock Market Crash of 1929 to the nation's formal entry into World War II, millions of Americans were forced to face extreme financial instability and psychological anxiety. Attendance and overall profitability of most mass spectator sports experienced dramatic downturns as the nation struggled to comprehend their newfound Depression. Sport historians' neglect of this period constitutes a major barrier to understanding the progression of spectator sports in the 20th century, and has overlooked a means by which we may better understand the social and cultural complexities of the American sport spectator in the Great Depression.

In what little has been studied of spectator sports in the Great Depression, there has been even less regard for the subject of college football. With baseball and prizefighting constituting most of the published scholarly work and with the exception of

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[19] Oriard, *King Football*, 203.

the work of Michael Oriard, references to college football have generally glossed over the Depression period in an overall analysis of the development of the sport. In such historical research, many historians have chosen to examine the evolution of the impact of the game on spectator identity and what characteristics have succeeded in luring more and more fans to the colossal gridiron stadiums. This research is essential to understanding spectator interest in the Great Depression.

"College-Building"

A certain selection of sport historians has chosen to ascribe the lure of spectators to the gridiron to the promotion and vast funding of educational institutions and their alumni. "In a nation in which colleges and universities engaged in keen competition for students and public support, football victories, especially victories in intersectional games, could call local and national attention to hitherto obscure and little-known colleges."[20] Colleges managed to gain status as a result of prominent football programs, and college authorities believed that the sport aided in the recruitment of students, increased support for the institution by local business and community leaders, deepened the bonds of alumni loyalty, and, if a publicly supported institution, might increase appropriations from state legislatures.[21] Additionally, college alumni faithfully played their roles in building these programs not only with financial contributions to their alma mater, but also in their simple dedicated following and attendance at the games. Alums of the Northeastern elite schools, who were scattered across the country, avidly followed the football exploits of their alma maters, and at the turn of the century the world wars played

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[20] Rader, *American Sports,* 192.
[21] Ibid. 192.

an essential role in supplying large fan constituencies for the two service academies that produced one of the most profitable and highly anticipated games of the season—Army vs. Navy.[22] *New York Times*' Copeland commented on the symbolic meaning college football had for loyal alumni revisiting the games, asserting, "The graduate is renewing his youth as he does when he comes back for reunion, even if this time he retains a little more dignity."[23]

By the 1920s, as an influx of veterans from World War I looked to carry on their college careers and prosperity made it possible for larger numbers of young people to attend college, enrollments grew rapidly. This increase in enrollments was accompanied by an increase in gridiron aspirations, and a new era of subsidized football appeared.

Profitable Yet Pricey

While these contributions hold merit for the overall structural and social development of the game, the spike in attendance at college football games in the mid-1930s cannot be credited to these events alone. College authorities in the Depression often dealt with much controversy and criticism over the management of their football programs and could not always provide the programs with the unbridled support that games are given today. The concern over a loss of amateurism in college football in the early 20th century is a subject extensively studied in the field of sport history. Beginning in the 1920s, many institutions faced criticism for what was considered a disreputable flouting of professionalism in colleges' subsidization of players and recruiting practices.

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[22] Rader, *American Sports*, 191.

[23] George Copeland, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," *New York Times*, September 27, 1931.

Academic research on this controversy is almost never without reference to the Carnegie Foundation's *Bulletin Number Twenty-Three*, which detailed the "unethical practices uncovered by the Carnegie investigators [including] recruiting, payments to athletes in the forms of 'athletic scholarships,' campus jobs, and 'slush funds'—that is, financial aid for athletic rather than academic ability."[24] In his publication entitled *College Football*, historian John Watterson described prevailing sentiments among the game's opponents and the persistent belief among many college officials and faculty in amateur athletic. Watterson asserted, "Increasingly, opponents of semi-professionalism tried to define the scope of amateur athletics and the point at which amateurs became professionals. Not surprisingly, advocates of strict amateurism rejected assistance to athletes not open to non-athletes."[25]

Even the most prominent gridiron universities could not escape speculations that players were provided with excessive incomes as a result of socially unacceptable contributions from alumni and boosters. These antagonisms were further underscored in the economic desperation of the Depression era, where financial security was a privilege requiring some sort of justification. For example, in discussing maneuvers employed by the athletic departments at the University of Pittsburgh, Watterson pointedly contrasted controversial player salaries with the meager means of the common worker in the 1930s. While players were comfortably situated with a healthy profit, "By contrast, a worker in a blast furnace around Pittsburgh would have received slightly more than one hundred dollars each week at the low point of the Depression but would have toiled between fifty

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[24] Oriard, *King Football*, 106.

[25] John Watterson, *College Football* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 185.

and sixty hours each week in backbreaking labor."[26] In the unique economic circumstances of the 1930s, the lavish spending of major gridiron contributors was undoubtedly enough reason for many to question the integrity of intercollegiate institutions.

Educational leaders faced a certain dilemma when it came to the game of the gridiron. While they were drawn to the success and popularity that football could provide their institutions, their ability to advertise and promote the sport was often hampered by widespread critiques of the game's violation of educational and sport ethics. In 1933, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the glaring charges being made across the nation against college football hypocrisy. In its description of University of Pennsylvania football coach Harvey Harman, the newspaper article provides valuable insight as to the imperiled state of college authorities over the issue. Harman had recently suggested a means to resolve the dilemma by dividing colleges in the United States into two groups, amateur and professional, according to how football is conducted at each. As reported by the newspaper clipping:

> Declaring such a move would stamp out the 'hypocrisy' he said exists in some colleges. 'Harman said he would like to see every college president in the United States make an 'honest' statement as to how football is conducted at his institution. The statements…should include how many scholarships are given out, how many players are subsidized, what other help football players receive, and how many hours they practice.[27]

The periodical would years later reiterate the continuing public criticisms of college gridiron recruiting practices in their annual summation of major sports trends. In 1935, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that high among the year's developments "were the

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[26] Watterson, *College Football*, 180.

[27] "Football Hypocrisy Charged," *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 25, 1933.

movement for frankness in bringing college football subsidization into the open, the spread of gambling in all sports, especially in football and racing; a tendency toward a more open game in football and the rise of Negro athletes to national prominence"[28] Responding to condemnations against recruiting and subsidizing while balancing the demands of a lucrative entertainment business was indeed a problematical situation for institutional figureheads.

In addition to addressing these critiques, college authorities were met with another brand of hostility when public commentators and educational leaders delivered harsh criticism over what was considered disreputable spectator actions and events at games. In December of 1935, American sports leaders launched a drive to curb drunkenness, rowdyism and vandalism at college football games, warning that these evils tended to encourage lawlessness and mob spirit."[29] The presence of immorality seemed to be infecting the gridiron, not only in campus headquarters but also within the sport's very stadium walls. Historical research into the evolution of spectator culture in college football frequently examines criticism of the game's influence in leading spectators to commit moral infractions or, as a result of increased extracurricular activities, remove themselves from their educational pursuits. As Watterson asserted, "In its season football had a priority over sex, at least in male dormitory rooms, and it continued to stand in the way of serious academic endeavor, a problem that caught the attention of educational reformers."[30]

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[28] Associated Press, "Return of $1,000,000 Boxing Gate Pointed Sports Trend During Year," *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 1935.

[29] "Fans Worry Grid Heads," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 27, 1935.

[30] Ibid., 158.

College authorities were responsible, as per the expectations of the American public, for presenting a well-mannered and morally upright student body to younger generations. Administrators and sports governing bodies were often forced to realize this endowed authority, including the need for promotion of honesty and sportsmanship in secondary schools to set an example to the young in high school[31]. Such an ethical responsibility proved difficult to reconcile with institutional aims of using football as a means to promote and renovate their instructional establishments. On the whole, the rise in popularity of the sport in the 1930's was not a direct result of the college building practices of institutions, as any efforts to promote these sport programs were often hampered by increasing hostility among aggravated educational officials.

A Shared National Mindset

As was the case with many mass popular followings in the United States, gridiron spectators in the Depression came in many variations and from diverse backgrounds. Yet through distinct disparities there appeared a very clearly shared commonality—that is, all were in some way touched by the dramatically altered social and cultural landscape of the nation. There was little escape from the country's constant longing for the secure, thriving times of the 1920s. Though each American was affected uniquely in his or her own individual circumstances, every person was also undoubtedly receptive or connected to a common emotional state. As Warren Susman once described, during the Depression, as the social and economic order seemed rapidly disintegrating, "the sharing of common experience" or search for an "American Way of Life" became a preoccupation.[32]

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[31] "Fans Are Better Behaved and Imbibe Less At Football Games," *New York Times,* Nov. 25, 1936.
[32] Oriard, *King Football*, 171.

Spectators who found solace in the happenings of a college football game were consequently drawn to the arena from a common background.

While there is relatively little historical analysis on college football specific to the period of the Great Depression, what does exist in such analysis is clear evidence of an extensive, widespread decline in attendance at college football games until 1933, as well as an unexpected boom in attendance figures thereafter. "Football attendance, which had skyrocketed in the 1920s now fell by 25 percent between 1929 and 1933.... In 1933, after college football hit rock bottom in attendance, it began to reverse itself as the economy stabilized."[33] Major period publications, such as the *New York Times*, frequently recorded the increase in attendance at college football spectacles, and article titles such as "Football Crowds Again Increased," "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," and "20,000,000 Saw College Games As Football Scaled New Heights,"[34] became commonplace to the American public. In an article published by the *New York Times* on October 8, 1939, author L.H. Robbins illustrates the stimulus of interest in college football that infected spectators nationwide. With an almost lyrical style of declaration, Robbins described:

> All over the peaceful land on Autumn days the whistles blow, the booted leather rises, and untold thousands of Americans settle down to watch football games. We pay a price for it over and above the price of our tickets. We pay in hope and fear, in ecstasy and despondency, in the elation of triumph and the heartache of defeat. We come away as near to exhaustion as the players; we, too, have given our all for dear old Whoosis.'[35]

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[33] Oriard, *King Football*, 177, 181.

[34] *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1934, Sept. 27, 1931, Dec. 26, 1937.

[35] Oriard, *King Football*, 200.

There were many components that served the cause of football's vast increase in audience members; however, the gridiron craze was in no way exclusive to any particular faction of the nation's citizenry.

Localism

"As early as the 1890s, the game helped bind together local college communities of students, professors, alumni, and townspeople. It continued to do so throughout the twentieth century."[36] This sort of facility to bond and unite communities of people described by prominent sport historian Benjamin Rader has been attributed as the primary cause behind the rise in attendance at college football games, and for that matter most organized and spectator sports, in the early 20th century. By the 1920s and 1930s, "a national consumer culture, a nationalization of sights and sounds via the media, the growth of a new white-collar class that thought of itself in national rather than local terms, the shocking behavior of youth, the growing ethnic, racial, and religious pluralism of the big cities, and a growing secularization of American life--all seemed to threaten those who grounded their identities in their local communities."[37] Football, as discussed by multiple historians, served as a way of combating these threats to small community identity and localism. In an extensive evaluation of football's evolutional path from the 1920s to the 1950s, Oriard asserts that "one of football's deepest functions was to provide millions of Americans with moments of an emotionally satisfying reconciliation of their conflicting desires for local connection and a place in the modern world."[38]

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[36] Rader, *American Sports*, 190.
[37] Ibid., 190.
[38] Oriard, *King Football*, 68.

Football has often been noted for its capacity to promote collectivity and community among spectators, for in contrast to more individualized sports as baseball whereby a player pitches the ball, a second bats it, a third fields and throws it, and a fourth catches it and tags a base, football consists of a sequence of *collective* acts where every one of the twenty-two players on the field always plays as part of a group.[39] In addition to noting cooperative spirit among players on the field, historians place primary emphasis on the kinship experienced by spectators in the stands. Rader, for example, continued on in his work to discuss the importance college football has played in defining the vulnerable identities of small American communities. "Citizens in states without a conspicuously significant history, great civic monuments, or remarkable physical scenery not only frequently formed powerful emotional bonds to their state university's football team but also found in the team an important source of personal identity."[40] Rader's work is further evaluated in the research of sport historian Steven Riess, who noted football's ability to control the tempo of life in smaller urban areas where there was little else to do on Friday nights. "Citizens in cities like Canton and Massillon, Ohio, regarded the football team as the community's most important representative to the outside world and strongly supported the local boys."[41] While the potential of college football to unite and empower small local communities is an accurate and very crucial element to the development of the sport, it does not fully explain the sharp rise in attendance that managed to occur in the unique economic conditions of the Depression.

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[39] Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and Basketball, and What They See When They Do* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2004), 123-124.
[40] Rader, *American Sports*, 190.
[41] Riess, *City Games*, 155.

To be sure, language regarding values of community and kinship was regularly expressed in major sporting publications and college newspapers of the period. One of the most illustrative examples of fervent community ties to local gridiron men lies in a 1936 publication of the University of California, Los Angeles' college newspaper, *The California Daily Bruin*. On October 16 of that year, businesses and esteemed members of the Los Angeles community combined their efforts to produce a full-page accolade dedicated to the achievements of the college football team (Fig. 1). Messages of encouragement and unity painted the intricate periodical spread. Establishments such as *Quality Bootery*, a local shoe repair store, and *Campbell's Bookstore At the Village Gate* congratulated the team on their recent victories and reaffirmed the community's loyalty to their gridiron team, hailing, "Congratulations, Bruins! For the Swell Game You Played Against Stanford," and later, "…mere words cannot express the feelings of all loyal supporters over this great victory." Even individuals would find themselves propelled to purchase ad space and insert their own personal dedications to the team, such as a Mr. Geo K. Manus who declared in this publication, "Bruin Eleven—We're Backing You to Finish First."

Communal appeals, rather than acting as the primary motivating factors behind college football's attendance spike in the Depression, serve to demonstrate above all the spectator's intimacy with the game. The culture surrounding gridiron audiences transformed spectators from mere observers to people emotionally and psychologically linked with both the triumphs and the trials of their team. These connections were fluid, continually adapting to the unique cultural circumstances that characterized the period which spectators inhabited. There is a predominantly greater sense in the journalistic

writing of the Depression era that college football served a larger purpose in providing spectators with a mechanism to combat and survive their severe circumstances.

Spectator Hodgepodge

Some historians, such as the previously mentioned Rader, have attributed the Depression's sharp rise in attendance to the fact that spectators of college football were of a wealthier class status and thus enabled the sport to better withstand rigors of the Depression. Sport historians have often characterized gridiron spectators as a generally affluent grouping in the sport's initial growth stages of the late 19th century. "Intercollegiate sport had originated at elite eastern universities, and the sons of the elite were among the most prominent amateur athletes of the late nineteenth century."[42] Furthermore, historians provide extensive explanation regarding the motivations of young upper-class men to connect with collegiate sport in the 19th century, as upper- and upper-middle-class urban youth were drawn to the violent and masculine sport that stood for honorable values in stark contrast to the corruption, greed, and materialism of the Gilded Age.[43] While these events did not constitute the exact circumstances of the specified timeframe of the mid-1930s, it often remains first instinct to depict college football spectators in the early 20th century as privileged peoples. In Murray Sperber's historical analysis of the beginning of college football at the University of Notre Dame, an organization which no other team in the 1920s or 1930s could have surpassed in its capacity to build a national following or an unwavering base of fervent fan support, Sperber illustrates the type of spectators that frequented college games:

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[42] Riess, *City Games*, 55.
[43] Ibid., 55-56.

> Westbrook Pegler observed that the 1932 'crowd was one of those New York football opera gatherings which…adorn the Notre-Dame Army games with big names, the trappings of wealth and moral and financial appreciation. There were automobiles in the lots and streets around as far as the eye could glare, most of them in the upper brackets in price, and there was enough mink and sable in the park this afternoon to patch a hole a mile square.'[44]

Though many spectators of the college game were certainly born of a privileged economic class, as the opportunity to attend college in the early 20th century was a venture for the wealthy, college football spectators were by no means exclusive to the upper class. For example, though attempting to illustrate the wealthy that attracted to the college game, Sperber actually depicted the wide range of conditions that existed among possible sport spectators in the Depression. He discusses the remarks of one writer who noted that on game day, "'on the way to Yankee Stadium, you passed apple vendors on street corners and bread lines were strung out all over town.' Yet the match was a sellout and scalpers got $50 for a pair of 'ducats.'"[45] Sperber portrayed the extremes of wealth and poverty that existed all over the country. Upon close examination of historical sources, one will find no definite consensus on the makeup of college football audiences in the Great Depression.

It is first necessary to recognize that spectators of the college gridiron comprised of many individuals who could have had little or no affiliation at all with the representing university. Large state university teams, in coming to be seen as representing the entire state, even earned the loyalty of people who had never attended the institution. Writer Michael Mandelbaum described how this trend was particularly evident in the South, where pride in teams reached great heights and "success in football became a form of

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[44] Murray Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 393.
[45] Ibid., 393.

symbolic self-assertion in a part of the country that, in the early decades of the twentieth century, was poor and still bore the psychological scars of defeat in the Civil War."[46] One must then come to realize the wide range of opinions that existed among the sport's wealthier spectators in the early 20th century concerning the very nature of the gridiron's appeal. "For Love of the Game" was a term that was not yet necessarily commonly shared or even fully comprehended by college campuses in the beginning of the Depression era, and dissent among observers of the game was at hand. This was illustrated in the print of a December, 1932 *Los Angeles Times* article entitled, "Is Football Flunking?", whereby journalists offered readers a glimpse into a world of college professors at odds over the increasing popularity of the game. With great detail, the periodical described the dissimilarity of opinions regarding the worth of such a sport. As one Columbia professor admitted he never saw a football game that was worth 50 cents and another condemned the sport as a narcotic, deadening the student to important issues, yet another said he believed football as played appeared to be a brilliantly intellectual procedure.[47] Though this evidence may appear trivial in a sport characterized by large fan bases of youth, it is significant in its illustration of two major notions regarding the early college gridiron: (1) that even among wealthier classes, spectators did not necessarily express exclusively favorable regard for this rather brute form of entertainment, and (2) that discussion of and interest in the game of football had permeated all levels of peoples even within a particular social subset of the country.

While most privileged people were certainly capable of withstanding the demands of the Depression, varied historical studies prove that college football succeeded in

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[46] Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 153.
[47] "Is Football Flunking?" *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 8, 1932.

drawing spectators from all economic levels. First, historical research reveals the satisfaction that different social classes find from sporting events as a whole. In Max Lerner's analysis of the culture of American civilization, Lerner illustrates the value of sport to people of all economic statuses at the turn of the century when he asserts, "...Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, at the turn of the century, spoke of sports as an upper-class obsession.... The fact is that the gladiatorial arts have become more necessary to the middle and lower classes than to the rich."[48] He continues to describe a spectator's need in the game for exhilaration and vicarious experience: "As the lower and middle classes got money and leisure they used it on entertainment to get a direct or vicarious sense of bodily prowess. What they want in a spectator game is action, excitement, speed, and power."[49] While mass spectator sports were perhaps only regularly available to the upper classes of American spectators, they were valued and appreciated by spectators of all economic and social backgrounds.

Moreover, in Riess' evaluation of the evolution of American urban society and the rise of sports, Riess illustrates the appeal of sports to lower classes in the particular period of the 1930's, declaring, "Football was a big draw in large cities during the Depression, when it provided a much-needed source of cheap mass entertainment."[50] In another example, Randy Roberts describes college football as a sport both played and made a spectacle by the working classes in his research on the history of Pittsburgh sports, for as he states, "Based in towns throughout Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, semi-pro and erstwhile pro football was played by working class men before

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[48] Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 814.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Riess, *City Games*, 155.

working-class fans…the success of college ball created a deep pool of players eager to continue to play and fans who wanted to see them perform."[51] Consequently, while some historians may attribute the mid-1930's phenomenon of the sharp rise in attendance to college football games to the enduring wealth of upper class spectators, this study must in fact look for something beyond a one-dimensional study of the appeal of affluent spectators in the Depression.

Recognizing that attendance figures decreased in the early 1930s and subsequently sharply increased by mid-decade on an extensive, wide-ranging basis is essential to understanding the primary claim of this thesis. In a 1935 article titled, "After Seasons of Depression, the Sport Takes Its Old Place in the Stadium," *New York Times*' Shepard Stone reported on the game's sweeping evolution in the nation through the Depression era (Fig. 2). Illustrating the sport's initial decline in the beginning of the decade, Stone described that while "boys played the game…crowds couldn't afford the $3.30 or $4.40 per ticket. Even alumni, worrying about their own private affairs, had little time to go around finding good material for next year's freshman team." The writer primarily worked, however, to headline the status of the game as it was then presented to spectators in 1935, as "Hundreds of thousands of men, women, children--especially students and alumni—[were] jammed together around the gridirons Saturday afternoons."[52] Though not everyone experienced the period on equal measures, the doubling of pre-Depression attendance was due to a shared national frame of mind directly resulting from the Depression's circumstances.

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[51] Randy Roberts, ed., *Pittsburgh Sports* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 251.

[52] Shepard Stone, "After Seasons of Depression, the Sport Takes Its Old Place in the Stadium," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 1935.

At the beginning of the 1930s, generally wealthy college spectators of the 1920s found themselves pressed for finances right along with those worse off, and consequently withdrew their participation in stadia events. "In the gloom of the Depression big-time football for a time reduced its lavish subsidies, and students and alumni, who had to cut back on expenses, attended fewer games."[53] In 1932, the Associated Press noted a "choosier" attitude by American sports fans as the leading development of the year, which compelled promoters to produce better entertainment for less money[54]. These events did not happen only with those sports mainly frequented by lower and middle classes, but among all sports attended by Americans in the Depression. As one mid-Western sports editor expressed, "The fans today no longer are lured only by the announcement of 'fight tonight' or 'football today.' He must be assured a real show for his money. The real shows alone drew big money in the recent football season.'"[55]

In the early years of the Depression, gridiron game attendance drastically fell and some colleges even proceeded to drop the sport altogether. Though this may come as no surprise, a remarkable event was certainly in the making, as estimates in 1937 placed total fandom at 20 million, a figure twice that of 1930.[56] This increase was, to be sure, not specific to any segment or social grouping of the country. As described in a 1934 *New York Times* article, entitled "Football Crowds Again Increased," "The increase was not so great as a whole, nor were any individual gains as large this year as in 1933, but it was general and not confined to any one section."[57] Gridiron spectators were a diverse,

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[53] John Watterson, *College Football* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 177.

[54] Associated Press, "'A Better Show for Less Money' Is Cry of Fans Today, Poll Shows," *New York Times*, December 24, 1932.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Rader, *American Sports*, 188.

[57] Associated Press, "Football Crowds Again Increased," *New York Times*, December 7, 1934.

multifaceted grouping of people, unique in every dimension of life from economic privilege to cultural temperament. Even those spectators who could afford the financial burden of a college education in the Depression could easily witness a diversity among their fellow classmates on their ritual journeys to the gridiron game:

> Tally ho! In the yellow glare of the eastern sun in the beating heat of noon-day Sol; and under the silvery sheen of an early moon some twenty five hundred hilarious UCLA rooters will make pilgrimage to the wilds of eastern Palo Alto to verbally drag their team to victory over Stanford university tomorrow afternoon. Tall tales are told of the two pre-med students whoa re taking their books along; the several moneyed folk who will make the jaunt in two hours and seven minutes by air; and the equally far-fetched yarn of the grizzly youths on their way in a model T.[58]

While a vast social and economic array of spectators may appear to complicate the issue, the language of the period's popular media continually conveys one overarching image of college football fans: that though each experienced the tumultuous times of the Depression in a unique and distinctive way, spectators of the gridiron were all connected to a shared national frame of mind. As Kyvig illustrated in his examination of the nation's transformative era from the 1920-1930s, "By 1933, Americans overall had 54% as much income as in 1929. Furthermore, almost everyone knew of someone who had been rendered completely destitute. The immensity of the Great Depression caused virtually every American to feel personally vulnerable."[59] In a period when the American people occupied a most desperate and insecure state, where "the average sports fan now [wanted] more for his dollar than ever before,"[60] college football stadiums managed to pack in the stands at greater levels than existed in the prosperous "Roaring 1920s." No matter their individual circumstances, spectators collectively looked to the game to

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[58] "Hopeful Bruins Depart on Stanford Pilgrimage Today," *California Daily Bruin*, October 10, 1935.
[59] David Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939* (Greenwood Press: Westport, 2002), 177.
[60] Associated Press, "'A Better Show for Less Money…," *NY Times*, Dec. 24, 1932

vicariously live through the players on the field, to take part in their grueling battle for redemption and hopefully experience a long-sought sense of recovery and success.

"BE THE BALL…" BATTLE ON THE GRIDIRON

It is well known that journalists are often all too ready to deliver, in what can appear to be a mundane or unappealing world, news of the times by appealing to readers through elaborate descriptions and glittering generalities. Never was this more apparent than in the metaphors and language used by sports writers at the turn of the century. As many have termed the period of the 1920s the "Golden Age" of sports, this description has been applied to not only the decade's emergence of an exceptionally skilled group of athletes but also to its beginnings of a vibrant and ostentatious industry of sport journalism. The 1920s brought into being a new kind of newspaper in the tabloid. This simple and more convenient half-page periodical quickly became notorious for sensationalism, pictorial excess, for abandoning news in favor of crass entertainment, and for exploiting the ill-educated masses, and would largely shape the fundamental nature of sports coverage thenceforth. As Oriard described the significance sports coverage played in the success of an early major periodical, "The [*Daily*] *News*…taught the rest of the newspaper world the value of graphic material, bold headlines, and lively, personalized writing in the sports section."[61]

What is important to realize, however, is that while extravagant and profuse, each wisely chosen catch-phrase and impulsive note reflected an underlying state of mind that preoccupied the depression-ridden country. Journalists of the 1930s, especially those

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[61] Oriard, *King Football*, 26.

dedicated to addressing the fan bases of college communities, were bound to a cause far larger than the sale of a five-cent newspaper. With their reports, journalists held the power both to reflect and to affect the social mindset of readers. A newspaper's informative function was being subordinated to a greater purpose, as most of the papers were trying to make their readers "confident again and abolish the depression by printing very little news about it."[62] In their second sociological case study of the small Indiana city of Middletown in the 1930s, for example, researchers Robert and Helen Lynd found: "The papers did not stress the depression. Hopeful statements by local bankers and industrialists, increases in work forces, and similar items tended to make the front page, while…unhappy news commanded small space on inside pages or were omitted entirely."[63] It is through an understanding of journalistic intentions and representations that we may more fully understand how spectators of the college gridiron would, over the course of the 1930s, progressively turn to the stadiums to experience a psychological release from the binds of the depression.

"Somebody Stop Me!!"

The front page of a 1934 October issue of Berkeley's *The Daily Californian* donned many expected storylines leading the presses, including reports on a socialist rebellion in Spain that would eventually transform into the nation's great civil war. But no images of dictators or international wars would capture the attention of readers that day. Situated perfectly center and bolded of the paper's front page was a headline that read, "Gaels Fumble, Score! Bears Lose Christie as Gaels Win." Beneath this leading title

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[62] Covert and Stevens, ed., *Mass Media Between the Wars*, 162.
[63] Robert and Helen Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (Harcourt, 1937)

was a photograph of the notorious play from the school's recent gridiron spectacle featuring a fumbled football recovered by the opposing team, a play that would eventually lead to victory for the opposition. Publishing authorities did not mistakenly transfer stories generally suited for the paper's isolated sports section to the front page. On the contrary, *The Daily Californian*'s authors had made a calculated effort to illustrate the hard-fought, ultimately momentous battle waged by the California Bears. Why front such a seemingly trivial thing as this, when the threat of an impending totalitarian dictator loomed in Germany and unemployment continued to stifle the lives of the American public?

College football did not provide a physical means of protection from international dangers, nor did it offer any financial relief for its spectators. In fact, many spectators made a deliberate decision to sacrifice other daily needs in order to attend the gridiron spectacle. As the front page of Berkeley's widely read newspaper illustrates, however, football did succeed in bringing to spectators another valuable form of defense: the chance to experience a sense of excitement and exhilaration that was otherwise lost in ongoing endeavors of the Great Depression. The action of these gridiron exhibitions epitomized the dynamic extremes that spectators were forced to undergo during the 1930s, and teams able to achieve victory on the field after experiencing multiple losses frequently constituted the major headlines of sport pieces.

Beyond discussing the simple event of the non-favored team's victory, sports writers, whether with purpose or unconsciously, would frequently characterize teams as archetypes of "spirit" and "hope". The language of sports writers was not apathetic and indirect, but abounded with rich style and symbolic expression. Such writing was

apparent in a 1935 article published by *The Daily Californian*, which in many ways demonstrates the typical lyrical prose that journalists delivered to their readers of the Depression era. In "20 to 0", Berkeley writers relayed that the Bears' great development and varsity fight and spirit was what California needed to win their upcoming Saturday game. They then proclaimed with great flair, ""IT CAN BE DONE! But can any team rise week after week to meet reams of the caliber of those which California meets? Sometime there will come the let down. It will take a mighty stout hearted team and just as stout hearted a student body to put the blue and gold…"[64]

The writers would moreover essentially illustrate through their journalistic pieces the major tenets of a spectator's fascination. In an article published on October 7, 1935 by UC Berkeley's *The Daily Californian*, for example, a large bolded title proclaimed, "Bears Gain New Spirit in Triumph". The author went on to provide a vivid depiction of how, against all realistic probability and substantial doubt of fans, the mighty Bears went on to prevail over their heavily favored opposition:

> "Underdogs by two to one odds up till game time Saturday, the Bears kicked the dope bucket far out of the stadium, dominating the play for 50 minutes of the game and never in real danger. Supposedly inferior in kicking, the Bears outkicked the Madigan men. Given only an outside chance to stop the hard running Gael backs, the California line stopped them cold. With hope in their hearts the experts said the Bears might knock down the daring needlelike passes thrown by Groux, Kellogg, and Shrieber and the Bear ends so harried the passers and covered the receivers that 12 fell incomplete and four were intercepted of 20 thrown."[65]

Reporters maintained a definite preoccupation with reporting on the trials and tribulations of "lost cause" teams. The struggle against a determined line of men of cast-iron brawn, the conquest of a seemingly unreachable third down marker, a desperate final sprint

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[64] "20 to 0," *The Daily Californian*, October 19, 1935

[65] "Bears Gain New Spirit in Triumph," *The Daily Californian*, October 7, 1935.

toward a distant gold line—these actions and encounters took place far from spectators seated safely in the concrete stands. Yet audiences did not turn away from these violent clashes on the field. Rather, they embraced them. In a more generalized review of American civilization, Max Lerner spoke to a people's need for "barbarism," which he declared Americans expressed "in their gladiatorial arts—in acting as spectators and psychic participants while other men fight, wrestle, and race with one another, break through human walls to make a goal in football..."[66] More importantly, however, Lerner asserted the psychological and deeper cultural meanings that he understood to be behind such displays. He states, "Sports...let the populace take part in a crucial ritual that binds them to one another and to the culture. Every people, no matter how civilized, must have a chance to yell for blood." Beyond any need for barbarism, however, there is a much deeper cultural implication to reveal behind the spike in attendance at college football games in the 1930s.

Conflicts and internal strife were unchanging fixtures in a spectator's daily routine outside of the stadium walls. "Daily life went on…but the reality of the hard times cast a shadow few could escape. Because it was so unexpected, the economic collapse at the end of the 1920s left almost all Americans feeling insecure."[67] The college gridiron was the place where spectators could, through identifying with the conflict and struggle played out on the field, find that their endeavors might actually result with a favorable outcome. No matter the overwhelming degree of hardship that spectators continued to face day in and day out, these same spectators in attending one day of a simple, unadulterated pigskin brawl, could find a small, yet entirely vital, sense of relief.

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[66] Lerner, *America as a Civilization*, 812-813.

[67] David Kyvig, *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939* (Greenwood Press: Westport, 2002), 177.

The road of a winless, second-rate college team was in many ways a familiar story to spectators. This intimacy between team record and spectator lifestyle meant that an unexpected win by such a substandard team was all the more influential to the spectator's mentality. "…'rivalry games' offer a focus of attention for fans and players other than a team's overall record. Victory in this game, like heroic statistical achievement by an individual player on an otherwise unsuccessful baseball team, can compensate for the disappointment of a losing season."[68]

The grueling endeavors of substandard gridiron teams did not always meet with a fairytale victory. Though readers would not commonly find stories of defeat looming over the covers of their daily publications, failure to "take the field" by less-talented college teams was certainly commonplace. When sports journalists did manage to report these incidents of loss, however, the writers' metaphorical language and expressed frustrations continued to illustrate a spectator's unique appeal to the gridiron in the Depression.

UCLA journalist Bob Reeder provided a clear-cut example of this in an article published on October 3, 1935, for his "Sports Whirled" section of *The Daily Bruin*. Reeder spoke directly and in fact called attention to the ability of major college gridiron teams to crush mediocre opponents. The beginning of his talk boldly proclaimed, "And this was to have been the year in which the little fellows of the gridiron were to rise up and slap the big boys over with persistent regularity! Sad, indeed, for said little fellows were battered, bruised, and on the whole rather effectively stymied in last Saturday's rounds." To be sure, this story seemed rather misguided considering the efforts of writers

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[68] Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 155.

wishing to appeal to spectators with words of inspiration. Reeder continued to press the issue with specific accounts of teams who, "imbued with that once-in-a-lifetime spirit, [fought] their hearts out for two quarters against a bigger, huskier team," only to find themselves riddled with injuries and lacking adequate substitutes to seal a victory. Though Reeder's statements appear to contradict what spectators of the Depression era appealed to in the college gridiron, his words actually evidence the underlying emotional and psychological factors that drew spectators to the game in the 1930s. Take, for example, this stirring appeal Reeder provided for his readers at the conclusion of the article:

> If such practice is allowed to continue, there can be little hope for the smaller universities building upon major league gridiron squads, little hope of them fostering the sport in big time style, and little hope of the wearied fan being relieved of these 'lamb-to-the-slaughter' epochs. Move over, boys, and make room for the little fellows.

With these statements, Reeder in essence attested to the ideals and values of the common college football spectator of the 1930s, a spectator who yearned for the success of the lesser-advantaged team and found relief with victory achieved after a hard-fought battle. Even in describing defeat, writers succeeded in demonstrating the period spectators' absolute longing for hope through the gridiron.

Yet another enticement to college football that was unique to the period of the 1930s was the game's potential to provide a certain therapeutic enrichment. Not only offering spectators an enjoyable practice of wishful thinking or general avenue for hope that was otherwise unattainable, the sport often allowed spectators a method by which they could work to substantially realize the enduring realities of the Depression era. In witnessing drudgery and defeat in their preferred teams, many spectators were given an

opportunity to come to terms with the overwhelming prevalence of failure and anxiety in their own lives.

Why would spectators willingly choose to indulge in writing that in many ways mirrored their destitute circumstances outside of the stadium? Consider, for example, the dismal perceptions presented in a 1934 article published by Berkeley's *The Daily Californian*. The commentary's opening lines, declaring, "The bottom has been reached," certainly appear incongruous to a period of sports media language overwhelmingly characterized by hope and endurance. As a reader of *The Daily Californian* continued into the article, however, he would find a style of writing that conveyed a primary foundational step in an individual's process of disengaging from past expectations and looking toward new beginnings. The author continued, "We either stay there or start on the upswing. If there is going to be a cycle, why not make it a cycle that curves up instead of farther down?....We have nothing more to lose, and everything to gain."[69] Though a hopeful tone still persists within the author's words, there is a considerable degree of assertion that spectators should first accept a truth of failure. In the same way, though many American citizens were mired in disbelief at the start of the Depression, recovery and revitalization required an initial acceptance of circumstances. The gridiron field offered spectators a comforting, yet exhilarating, way of taking this significant first step.

Though an infrequent feature, the necessity for acknowledging defeat was indeed at times expressed in sports periodicals of the 1930s. In one illuminating article seemingly contradictory in nature to the more spirited and optimistic publications of the Depression era, UCLA's *California Daily Bruin* reported with vivid illustration of an

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[69] Roger Johnson, "To Those Who Scream," *The Daily Californian*, October 16, 1934.

"inspired Westwood team" upsetting Stanford's gridiron men in a 1935 Palo Alto Brawl. The article recounted a quiet, post-game Stanford dressing room occupied by "weary youths [drawing] off sweat-soaked garments, and sympathizers huddled around, whispering consolation, and rehashing hopeless speculations." While it was a scene in some ways analogous to the mournful atmosphere of a memorial wake, the author would ultimately impress upon his readers a valuable line of reasoning. The article began to center around the words of Stanford coach Tiny Thornill, who after producing a glum smile and uttering "his reactions to the unexpected," pronounced, "'It was just one of those things'…'We outgained 'em on every place but on the scoreboard, and that's what counts.'…Team members were disconsolate."[70] Though the atmosphere of the Stanford dressing room was pervaded with distress, sports journalists still felt the need to include this event in their publication. The *California Daily Bruin*, like any other periodical, directly responded to the interests and desires of its readers, and in this particular situation, sports journalists recognized the emotional union between spectators and their football teams. Depression era audiences could certainly identify with an acute sense of loss. By attending gridiron games and observing teams not only in victory but also in their experiences of defeat, spectators could simultaneously work to cope with their own defeats in the national economic realm. As concluded in the Berkeley periodical, "There's no use screaming and ranting now—that's only shutting the stable door after the horse has galloped away. Take the poison out of the air—you're only cutting your own throats by leaving it there."[71]

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[70] "Inspired Westwood Team Upsets Stanford Pigskin Eleven in Palo Alto Brawl," *California Daily Bruin*, Oct. 14, 1935.

[71] Johnson, "To Those Who Scream," Oct. 16, 1934.

Sports journalists did not limit their prose to simplified reports of success and defeat, but would go so far as to admonish and criticize teams that did not represent the values and ideals cherished by Depression spectators. It was apparent among many discussions of sports writers, for example, that a college gridiron team could not find itself a worthy competitor without ongoing, open displays of solidarity. In a 1934 publication of *The Daily Californian*, author Roger Johnson clearly asserted the California gridiron team's dire need for camaraderie. He stressed the reality of circumstances that the mighty Bears would have to face when tackling an opponent, declaring, "…the team cannot rise beyond the level of the opposition far enough to establish itself as a superior eleven because there is no unity of effort, no guiding light that binds the bears together as a spirited entity capable of surmounting comparatively trivial odds and making of themselves the great football team that they should rightfully be."[72] Johnson clearly recognized an existing thematic undertone of college football games in the 1930s, asserting not only a team's need for cooperative spirit but also its need to endeavor and triumph over opposition. He would again echo the indispensable value of teamwork in a later edition of the paper, this time nearly castigating the university team for what apparently seemed a continuous cycle of self-centered exhibitions by the team's players. Johnson assailed the team and emphatically called for a show of "SPIRIT!". He asserted, "California does NOT, as yet, possess a football 'TEAM'…it is the TRUTH. Every Saturday Ingram has put eleven men on the field who, instead of working as a team, seemingly work individually. Why is this?"[73]

As a football team, offensive players have four chances, or *downs*, to further their

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[72] Johnson, "To Those Who Scream," Oct. 16, 1934.

[73] Roger Johnson, "Lee Emerson," *The Daily Californian*, November 6, 1934.

progression toward the goal line before they must surrender control of the ball to the opposing team. In fact, if the team has not succeeded in reaching its objective by covering a particular number of yards by the fourth down, it is likely that the ball will be relinquished. In the 1930s, spectators were constantly contending with what is referred to in gridiron terminology as a "third and long." Every goal seemed unreachable, and every decision was weighted with the consistent pressures of anxiety and economic instability. In the proceedings of a college gridiron game, however, spectators could foresee the possibility of actually achieving some measure of success. Unlike the reality they were forced to face outside of the stadium, the "third and long" of the college sport could be met with victory and accordingly a new set of chances to progress to an even greater status. As conveyed through various writing styles and strategies of 1930s sports journalism, college football did more than provide basic entertainment. The college gridiron was, in short, a singular opportunity for spectators to envision their lives anew.

"He's My Hero..."

College football's most dedicated fans have consistently recognized a respectable and often admirable value in the game's players and coaches. At certain times, many would even look to the game's actors with a great degree of veneration, as these sport figures could even be seen as heroes of those fans for whom football provided much more than a Friday-night extracurricular activity. Spectators could indulge in these admirations not only through their spectatorship, but also most especially through discussion and digestion of sports coverage as presented by the media. In the daily reports of their local periodicals, spectators could learn of player injuries, a coach's alterations to defensive strategy, and other newsworthy updates to their team's general

condition. On another level, spectators could also turn to the products of sports journalism for a more personal glimpse into a distinct collection America's unsung heroes. "What seemingly interested readers was simply a sense of intimacy with their football heroes through knowing what they were 'really' like."[74] Major national periodicals and college newspapers essentially worked to encourage fans to develop a more dedicated and cherished relationship between themselves and their college football idols.

In the young college gridiron men of the Depression era, spectators saw not the ignorance of youth that we may use to look upon young players today, but instead envisioned quintessential paradigms of American virtue. As evident by submissions of the period writing, what spectators most revered in their beloved football icons were demonstrations of great physical and mental fortitude. Speed, courageousness, and colossal strength were truly desirable features in a decade characterized by extreme insecurity. On any given day, fans could discover the latest postings of their local gridiron man's awesome abilities. From Berkeley player "Hurricane" Hollman's sheer velocity in running 100 yards in 9.7 seconds[75] to gridder George Cornell's 10 to 15 yard longer pigskin punts past the fifty-yard mark[76], player statistics cascaded over the pages of sports periodicals. While spectators may not have had the full capacity to express these qualities themselves given their surrounding arduous circumstances, they could certainly turn to gridiron players for a vicarious sensation of personal fulfillment.

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[74] Oriard, *King Football*, 137.

[75] Martin Hill, "Bear, Gael Game to Feature Powerful Lines; Slip Madigan Hopes Speed Will Decide Tilt," *The Daily Californian*, October 4, 1935.

[76] Len Feldheym, "Cornell Becomes Improved Gridder Since Breaking His Hand by Practicing Daily on Punting," *The Daily Californian*, October 22, 1935.

Consider the very terminology we bestow upon the most outstanding of college football amateurs. Players are not simply sportsmen, but are our nation's "All-Americans". While Walter Camp, original architect of the nation's first "All-America" team in the 1890s, initially agonized over the impropriety of discerning the eleven top college football players of the year as a violation of football's essential team spirit, football fans still loved the idea of "All-Americans".[77] For spectators, the young men of the college football teams were more than sportsmen, but were worthy of representing the very heritage and ideals of the nation in its entirety. In this way, by examining the depiction of players through public illustration at various points in our nation's history, we possess one method by which we may evaluate the country's cultural evolution.

The individual attributes of a spectator's ideal "All-American" player of the Depression era stood in contrast to qualities that were highlighted in other periods of time. For example, in Oriard's dialogue regarding All-America teams of the 1920s, he recounts that similar to the features of celebrity profiles, these portraits did not display moral lessons nor did any single temperament trump all others. "A football star could be a cocky, fun-loving quarterback like Frankie Albert, who performed masterfully with the situation demanded, or a temperamental Yankee running back like Frankie Sinkwich, who won over the locals to become the most popular student on the University of Georgia campus."[78] While this type of character variation certainly did exist in similar analysis presented in the Depression, spectators of the 1930s were generally equipped with much more precise notions of the ideal gridiron man.

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[77] Oriard, *King Football*, 137.
[78] Ibid.

To be an idolized football player in the 1930s was to be a man who, with brute force and determination, could withstand the pressures of a vigorous opponent and still emerge victorious. "Victory…on the football field requires physical courage—the willingness to behave in ways that bring with them vulnerability to physical harm."[79] Though certainly a cliché characterization, it was in fact what most appealed to an overwhelmingly unconfident and anxious fan base. As Berkeley's "Ambling Al' Nichelini's" spurts could transform defeat to victory on several occasions and would lead the highly-rated back to all-American honors in the 1935 season[80], teammate Jim Carolyn could steal the show with his elusive running, racing through opposition for substantial gains and advancing great distances without much assistance.[81] The value of a resilient player went beyond the notice of only local publications and was in fact regarded on a far-reaching national level. This is demonstrated by the writings of renowned *New York Times* writer Allizon Danzig, who would hail in 1936 that no player stood out as vividly did Yale's "captain of lost causes." He would again reiterate the merit of player fortitude in proclaiming that while there were perhaps stronger defensive ends than Kelley in the college ranks, it was the captain's "transcendent leadership in inspiring an average team to rise to unassailable heights" that placed him far above the crowd.[82]

It should not be forgotten that beyond their individual capabilities, college players were also responsible to the dynamic demands of their dedicated spectators as they bore the burden of achieving victory as a collective team. Throughout every stage of the

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[79] Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 136.

[80] Martin Hill, "Bear, Gael Game to Feature Powerful Lines; Slip Madigan Hopes Speed Will Decide Tilt," *The Daily Californian*, October 4, 1935.

[81] Bill Collins, "Bear Coaches Impressed by Varsity Work," *The Daily Californian*, Oct. 17, 1934.

[82] Allizon Danzig, "Attendance, Minnesota and Kelley Were Football's Headliners of 1936," *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1936.

season, spectators continued to maintain close surveillance of how players were either serving to advance or encumber the progress of their team. *Is the quarterback really worthy of his prominent standing on the field? Will the defensive line hold up against the visiting team's smash mouth offense this Friday?* These questions were typical to discussions that regularly circulated local watering hole gossip. When Roger Johnson reflected on Berkeley's unfortunate dearth of left halfbacks by midseason in 1934, informing his readers that player Arleigh Wiliams would have to carry most of the ball handling responsibility by himself and disclosing the problematic condition of Don Fowler's leg,[83] one can be certain that readers were instantly ill at ease and anxious for recovery. Even with such faultfinding analysis, however, the spectators' longing for emotional encouragement was always at their deepest core. Spectators maintained a consistent, intimate observation of their young gridiron men and, as evidenced by the numerous newspaper articles addressing the issue, appreciated team displays of progress and positive reinforcement.

For example, in reading the weekly editorial piece of Berkeley's sports journalist Roger Johnson, fans would have been glad to find that even in the safe haven of practice scrimmages, Berkeley's Bears were "greatly improved." As indicated by unanimous opinion of the coaching staff, the team was a "permanently rejuvenated eleven" who, in their dedication and effort, replaced sluggishness in both offense and defense with "spirit and fire." What is perhaps the most illuminating segment of information to take from Johnson's commentary was his particular choice of descriptive phrases to depict what this team was accomplishing. The young football players were not just enhancing their

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[83] Roger Johnson, "Sidelines," *The Daily Californian*, November 9, 1934.

performance, but were engaged in a "supreme effort to 'get tough'."[84] Once again, an article of the period media evidences that spectators were indeed drawn to examples of resilience and physical might, qualities that were altogether fairly scarce in the circumstances of the Depression. While spectators could, and in truth often did, critically examine the merit and dependability of their team's players, nothing could replace the feeling of satisfaction gained from indulging in optimistic stories of their gridiron heroes, from their most basic indications of improvement to displays of their seemingly superhuman skill.

"It's Showtime!"

College football enticements in the Depression era were not confined between the lines of the grassy playing field. It was not just the play of the game and its emblematic figures, but a dynamic crowd spirit and sporting culture that meant for many spectators an escape from an all too desperate reality. Spectators were drawn to the sport's "spirit of youth", to an avenue through which they could find the means to cope with their unique circumstances. As Oriard declared, "In the context of 1920s hedonism, college spirit meant innocent pleasure. In the context of 1930s unemployment and poverty, it meant relief from such dispiriting conditions."[85]

The fervent spirit of football spectators, even at the earliest stages of the depression, was eloquently captured by *New York Times* author George Copeland in his 1931 editorial piece, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas":

> The struggle on the gridiron keeps the spectators in a high emotional intensity, for anything may happen at any time in a football game. A long run, a successful

[84] Johnson, "Sidelines," October 16, 1934.
[85] Oriard, *King Football*, 169.

> forward pass, a fumble--and a sure loser may be converted into a winner. It is only when the contest is over, when those last five minutes of desperate attempts to score against the team that is leading--the latter playing 'safe' against the stopwatch--are over that your fan can relax. Only then does he realize that his emotion has sapped his strength and made him feel like a wet rage, as though he himself had been one of those furious warriors. When he at last comes back to earth, he knows he has lived a day of high adventure.[86]

Lively interactions between crowd members at gridiron events and the intensified action of the game itself gradually worked to shape a unique spectator culture that would draw back recently disaffected spectators of the Depression era. As explained in Michael Oriard's *King Football*, football would have seemed an ideal American celebration of triumph and innocent pleasure against the grim news of the 1930s, with card sections, mascots, and above all the collective enthusiasm of stalwart athletes, youthful cheerleaders, and the great American public represented by the crowd.[87] College football reached an immense audience of millions who responded to it as "a gaudy festival of virile action and youthful enthusiasm, and for whom spectatorship meant active participation in that enchanting world."[88]

The intoxicating experience of a gridiron spectacle was evidenced not only by the descriptions of enthusiastic sports journalists, but also in close examination of reports of backlash against this youthful enterprise by administrators and higher education officials. For example, in an article published by the *Los Angeles Times* during the Christmas season of 1935 entitled "Fans Worry Grid Heads," educational authorities provided stern admonishment of the spirited crowd activities so valued by the sport's spectators. Under the subheading "Evil Increasing," *Los Angeles Times* author reported, "Unfortunately,

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[86] George Copeland, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," *New York Times*, September 27, 1931.
[87] Oriard, *King Football*, 170.
[88] Ibid., 167.

President Lewis emphasized, there is far more drinking and rowdyism at college football games than at any other sport or entertainment--and widely publicized gridiron events of the 1935 season indicated that these alcoholic evils are increasing on all fronts." The paper went on to recount the events of the recent "twelfth man incident" at a Princeton-Dartmouth game and other wild episodes in which spectators swarmed down onto the fields and tore down the goal posts before games were finished.[89] It was no secret that college football games could spur its fervent spectators to an unruly and nearly uncontrollable level, a truth that both rightly characterized and contributed to the sport's exceptional rise in popularity during the Great Depression.

"The spirit of youth is there in the football crowd. There is a zest, a buoyancy, a care-free atmosphere that pierces the thickest armor of sophistication."[90] The exhilaration of observing a college gridiron game, of witnessing the intensity of high-spirited brawls and magnificent sportsmanship, was irresistible to the eager minds of the Depression. It should be acknowledged that interest and intrigue with the game existed for much of the sport's history, and that from its earliest stages spectators were drawn to the sport's unique fusion of physicality and spectacle. Undeniably, perhaps the game's most significant appeal is its flare for the dramatic. As journalist George Copeland remarked during the nation's early introduction to the Depression, even an outsider to the game, "no matter how no matter how cynical, can seldom sit through the spectacle with unmoved spirit. He may not be able to catch the words of the rollicking song 'Care shall be forgotten, All our troubles thrown away' but he gets the mood all right, and he obeys

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[89] "Fans Worry Grid Heads," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 27, 1935.
[90] Copeland, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," 1931.

it."[91] With new purpose and interest in the underlying enticements of gridiron spectatorship, college football fans gradually grew in numbers and would ultimately swell to an unforeseeable sum by the end of the Depression era.

"I'm a Man...A Manly, Manly Man" The Hunt for Masculinity in the Gridiron

The desire of male spectators to affirm or embolden their cultural domains of masculine virtue by witnessing and at times even partaking in gridiron events has accompanied the game since its very inception. Notions of masculinity constantly fluctuated throughout the twentieth century. Consumerism in the 1920s, declining wages and unemployment in the 1930s, and the grinding routines of the 'rat race' in the 1950s successfully challenged the reigning assumptions about masculinity and expectations for men. While football's cultural importance was at its lowest during World War II, throughout the rest of the period it provided an arena in which traditional ideas about masculinity were both affirmed and adapted to changing conditions.[92] Though perhaps not as significant as in other major periods of gridiron history, the threatened sense of masculinity felt by spectators of the Great Depression was unique to the period's distinct social phenomena. Understanding this period masculine impetus is vital for our purposes of evaluating the remarkable success of college football in the mid-1930s.

It is first necessary to note that football audiences in the early century were primarily composed of male spectators. The gridiron was the quintessential place where a man could prove his manliness. Almost all sports journalism was therefore implicitly addressed to male readers, while women played a key role in defining the center and

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[91] Copeland, "Crowds That Rock the Sports Arenas," 1931.
[92] Oriard, *King Football*, 227.

enhancing the masculinity of football players by contrast. As cheerleaders, majorettes, and adoring female fans, the female's role was to admire male prowess and confirm its importance beyond the football field.[93] Female observers were a minor presence at gridiron spectacles, and primarily made their existence known not through attendance figures but in the ways in which they encouraged masculine virtue. For example, under the leading headline, "Oh the Happy Life of a Football Player," the *California Daily Bruin* pictured a group of "hard working Bruin pigskin boys" quick to impress a lovely and, more expressively, adoring female fan (Fig. 3). This fan essentially illustrated the way in which a woman was socially expected to associate with the gridiron—that is, not as a socially equivalent spectator but as a distant observer responsible for boosting a vulnerable sense of masculinity.

Tension surrounding gender boundaries and expectations during the nation's great economic crisis is a subject that has long been studied by cultural historians. As men were obliged to restrain themselves in ways that were uncharacteristic from their once very social and financially uninhibited lifestyles, many women were alongside forced to abandon their traditional roles as homemakers for positions as the primary caregivers of the nuclear family. In the later half of the 1930s, tension surrounding a woman's earning her own living and developing a sense of identity through work rather than marriage became commonplace in American society. "The subtext of many marriage manuals was that the financial difficulties of the Depression created a crisis in confidence for men that could only be assuaged by women assuming an emotionally supportive stance as stay-at-home wives. In so doing, women could contribute to rebuilding the collective male ego

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[93] Oriard, *King Football*, 352.

that had been crushed by the setbacks of the previous years."[94] In situations where women could not afford to maintain their customary positions in the home, however, men certainly did not acquiescently submit to such transformations in the established gender culture.

Far from the reality, men often set about determined efforts to prevent the dissolution of the status quo. For example, with a pointed interest in preserving and maintaining male dominance in the middle-class, male students and administrators on coeducational college campuses with mostly white student bodies erected policies that barred women from entering certain buildings or attaining positions of power. White male students of the period also created a steady stream of 'humorous' articles that denigrated female students and reminded them that they were outsiders on the college campus.[95] For whatever gains these efforts accomplished, male citizens of the Depression era required more action than imposing restrictions on the female populace. Young men faced significant challenges to their masculinity, "threatened by their lack of physical fitness because of sedentary life style, fearful of the overcivilizing effects of the feminization of culture, uncertain of their sexual potency, and concerned about their ability to measure up to their courageous fathers, uncles, and older brothers who had been tested in combat."[96] Accordingly, they looked to an avenue through which they could work to firmly reassert a then fading sense of fortitude, physical brawn, and magnificent valor—attributes necessary to an idyllic manhood.

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[94] Mary McComb, *Great Depression and the Middle Class*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 128.
[95] Ibid., 23.
[96] Riess, *City Games*, 56.

Yard Lines and Battlefields

During the Depression era, a major outlet used by male Americans to display tenets of masculine virtue and virility was beyond their reach—that is, masculinity as expressed through struggle and combat in wartime. In this modern era, the American people have continually exemplified a tendency to identify themselves with their country's military forces in times of war. In so doing, the nation would fight its wars not as disconnected observers of distant military action but as an entire "nation at arms" united behind a joint military effort. As such, football teams continue to "draw on the enthusiasm of those who do not play but who identify, sometimes passionately, with them."[97] In the 1930s, while the country unknowingly awaited the eruption of another devastating world war that would claim the lives of millions of American soldiers, it still maintained no direct involvement in such an overseas conflict. As a result, male spectators in the nation could only hope to the find a means to sustain their very threatened sense of masculinity through an alternative form of combat—gridiron games.

Since the turn of the century, warfare has maintained an intimate affinity with the game of football. Consider, for example, the very rhetoric borrowed from armed conflict used during games. Military terminology abounds in the football spectrum in characterizing common maneuvers, players, and strategic schemes. "A pass far downfield is a 'long bomb.' The offensive and defensive lines, like the infantry on the western front in World War I, operate 'in the trenches.' The quarterback, whose signals initiate the play and who regularly handles and distributes the ball, is the 'field general.'"[98] The exhibition of two combative lines of warriors competing for greater position on field, all within the

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[97] Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*, 140.
[98] Ibid., 134.

protected confines of college stadium walls, was irresistibly inseparable from the real-life realm of militaristic engagement.

Sports rhetoric of the 1930s reveal how football players would work to prove their masculinity by displaying virtues of a martial life in what was a "moral equivalent of war."[99] For example, in their review of gridiron coach Allison's strategic approach to a verbal challenge offered by Santa Clara College, Berkeley writers characterized the mighty Bears using a range of military terminology. The Berkeley players not only formed rudimentary offensive and defensive lines, but were ultimately part of a "battle formation" behind which Allison determined to throw in a "backfield of 'shock troops'." Again conveying the merit of a team's enduring resilience, Allison would go on to assert that the backfield "units" would be maintained at "maximum strength throughout."[100] Players and spectators welcomed the opportunity to portray their sport in militaristic terms, as it could affirm and actually enhance their sense of masculinity.

"Tough Times Never Last...Tough People Do"

A man's unique appeal to the gridiron game in the Depression era is continually illustrated in the opinions and proposals made by period journalists. In one particularly revealing example, a 1935 news article published by the *Los Angeles Times* spoke directly to the use of college football for the purposes of masculinization. The article announced the findings of a medical spokesman, who had proposed modification of college football play, in the wake of recent concerns over the increasing injuries and deaths due to the sport. "'We must admit the fact that our boys are not of the tough fiber

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[99] Riess, *City Games*, 56.
[100] "Allison to Use Strategy; Holds Underdog Spot," *The Daily Californian*, October 18, 1935.

of those of two or three decades ago. Automobiles, cocktail parties, late hours and idleness are softening them up, and that is why we find more boys of foreign parentage on our teams."[101] Here, Dr. Allen not only was able to project for the public media what many men quietly feared in their own personal lives, but he more importantly evidenced how many spectators worked to cope with the "softening" of their everyday life. A man's performance in a game of football could determine the very merit of his manliness. "A 'sissy' was an effeminate, unmanly male, and football was valued as one place in modern life where no sissy could survive....Football was 'one of the last masculine touches left in college life.'"[102]

In the 1930s, a man of the gridiron was always ultimately measured by his exhibition of sheer physical fortitude. Spectators and sportswriters alike demanded that teams were, above all other virtues—tough. They would often distinguish the merit of their chosen team by basing their endorsements exclusively on the team's ability to put forth a hardy, resilient image, both on and off the field. To be tough was to possess a masculine quality that was at the core of spectators' appeals to the game of college football. For example, in the small community of Bellaire, California, representatives of the 15,000 residents boasted of more college football players to the square inch than any other municipality in the country in 1932. Townsfolk professed that the reason for this center of excellence lay in the fact that Bellaire was an industrial center with "sidelines of coal mines and railroads, and 'the boys grow physically tough."[103] Toughness was not only a mark of pride, but was in fact was often considered a necessity to any noteworthy

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[101] "Gridiron Stars Urged to Bar Pro Football," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1935.
[102] Oriard, *King Football*, 332.
[103] "Producing Grid Stars Town's Leading Industry," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 4, 1932.

team. For many observers, toughness defined the only essential quality to assuring victory in a gridiron battle. This was certainly illustrated in the proclamations of *The Daily Californian* one Friday morning, when the paper's writers declared to intrigued readers, "…you can safely bet that California will win tomorrow's game. PROVIDING THE BEARS GET TOUGH!" Journalist Roger Johnson went on to invoke the raw physical demands that awaited the Bears in their upcoming confrontation, asserting, "It's going to be a case of dog eat dog, a battle of brawn of the first magnitude….As we see it, the facts favor the Bears. BUT NOTWITHSTANDING THE FACTS, THE BEARS WILL HAVE TO BE TOUGH TO WIN—SO LET'S GET GOING!"[104]

In fact, the grueling challenge and underlying nature of a hard-fought, physical battle was frequently discussed among the pages of sports periodicals. These discussions also often included analysis of an individual player's ability to physically engage in such a challenge. In their first Conference Contest with Oregon's varsity team, for example, Berkeley sports reporters were sure to include a detailed report matching up the opposing team members' physical potential. After comparing the University of Oregon's line average of 195 lbs. to Berkeley Bears' 186 lb. average, the writers also proceeded to include what in their minds may have been commonplace epithets, but which today actually work to reveal much about the characteristics most valued in a football player of the Depression era. Oregon's fullback Frank Michek, for example, was considered a "big gun" of the Oregon attack, a "hard-plunging" player who worked alongside passer Bob Braddock, a "tricky safety man and chief ground gainer."[105] The value of a strapping young football player was also made evident in a December 1935 article published by the

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[104] Roger Johnson, "Sidelines", *The Daily Californian*, October 5, 1934.

[105] "Varsity Rated Over Oregon in First Conference Contest," *The Daily Californian*, Volume LXXXXVII

Los Angeles Times. Writers touched upon a sensitive issue with this piece by essentially criticizing homegrown American boys' lack of physicality and praising the tougher qualities of sons of foreign-born parents. It detailed the prescriptions of Kansas Athletic Head, Dr. Forrest Allen, who asserted that the foreign-born player enjoyed "physical contact and a chance to test his strength." He added, 'When such boys meet their greeting usually is, 'let's wrestle,' but when our so-called 'upper crust' boys meet it usually is, 'let's have a party'."[106] To go so far as to distinguish the varying degrees of toughness among American boys signified how highly men valued display of unyielding physicality.

CONCLUSION

For a sporting spectacle to nearly double in attendance figures and actually rise to an unprecedented level of popularity during the nation's most depressed economic state is a remarkable event. As conveyed through past historical research, it is easy to first attribute such a marvel to more generalized factors accompanying college football's gradual development throughout history. Some, for example, have examined the efforts of educational institutions to attract spectators by practices of "college-building." Much historical research cites the institutional efforts of recruiting and subsidizing exciting new players, as well as administrators' decisions to channel considerable amounts of funding away from academic instruction for gridiron costs. Others, on the other hand, may consider how localism centered on a community team generated large and dedicated fan bases of gridiron enthusiasts. Though each of these reasoning is a creditable claim, the spike in college football attendance figures in the 1930s was not isolated to wealthy

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[106] "Gridiron Stars Urged to Bar Pro Football," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1935.

universities or local venues. Previous scholarly work has been unsuccessful in completely addressing the extensive condition of this sporting singularity.

It is impossible to account for the college gridiron's sudden growth without considering the exceptionality of circumstances that occupied the American public in the Depression era. In fact, it is the very nature of this period that regards the sport's advancement so momentous in the first place. The 1930s was characterized by a tremendous degree of financial instability and psychological anxiety. Unemployment stifled the lives of the general American public, many worn down by the emotional toll of poverty and insecurity. Every American, whether wealthy or poor, was in some way influenced by this dramatically altered social and cultural landscape.

College football upheld a responsibility in this time period of providing spectators with a mechanism to combat and ultimately survive their desolate circumstances. Spectators of the gridiron were transformed from mere observers to a people emotionally and psychologically linked to the endeavors of their favorite team. Journalistic contributions of the 1930s reflected this underlying state of mind that preoccupied the depression-ridden country. To vicariously live through the players on the field and partake in their grueling battle was to engage in a hopeful endeavor for a long-sought sense of relief. Spectators maintained an especial intimacy with the journeys of substandard, winless teams that in many ways represented a familiar walk of life. Gridiron players and coaches were considered the heroic figures of the day, idyllic representations of accomplishment and masculinity that stood in contrast to the insecure characterizations of male spectators. Consequently, many spectators used writings of gridiron journalism to indulge in an essentially forgotten optimism.

As the "Third and Long" culture epitomized the American way of life in the Depression era, what exactly could come next was the question that continued to entice more and more spectators back to the stands. Would the ball be hurled across the field for a 60-yard reception, or would the team be penalized for a loss of yards? Would the quarterback recover in time for the final Friday night conference game? Would a team who had not seen victory for seven straight games finally find their way to unite and prevail over their undefeated rival? For spectators, the college gridiron in the 1930s was not a simple social outing or leisurely activity, but a fundamental way of existence. Though the sport represented many things to the people who attended its games—an exhilarating release from reality, a mechanism of perseverance, and an outlet for masculine exhibition—it was, above all, a venue for fostering confident aspirations, invulnerable to the troubles of the modern world and open to each new spectator wishing for revival.

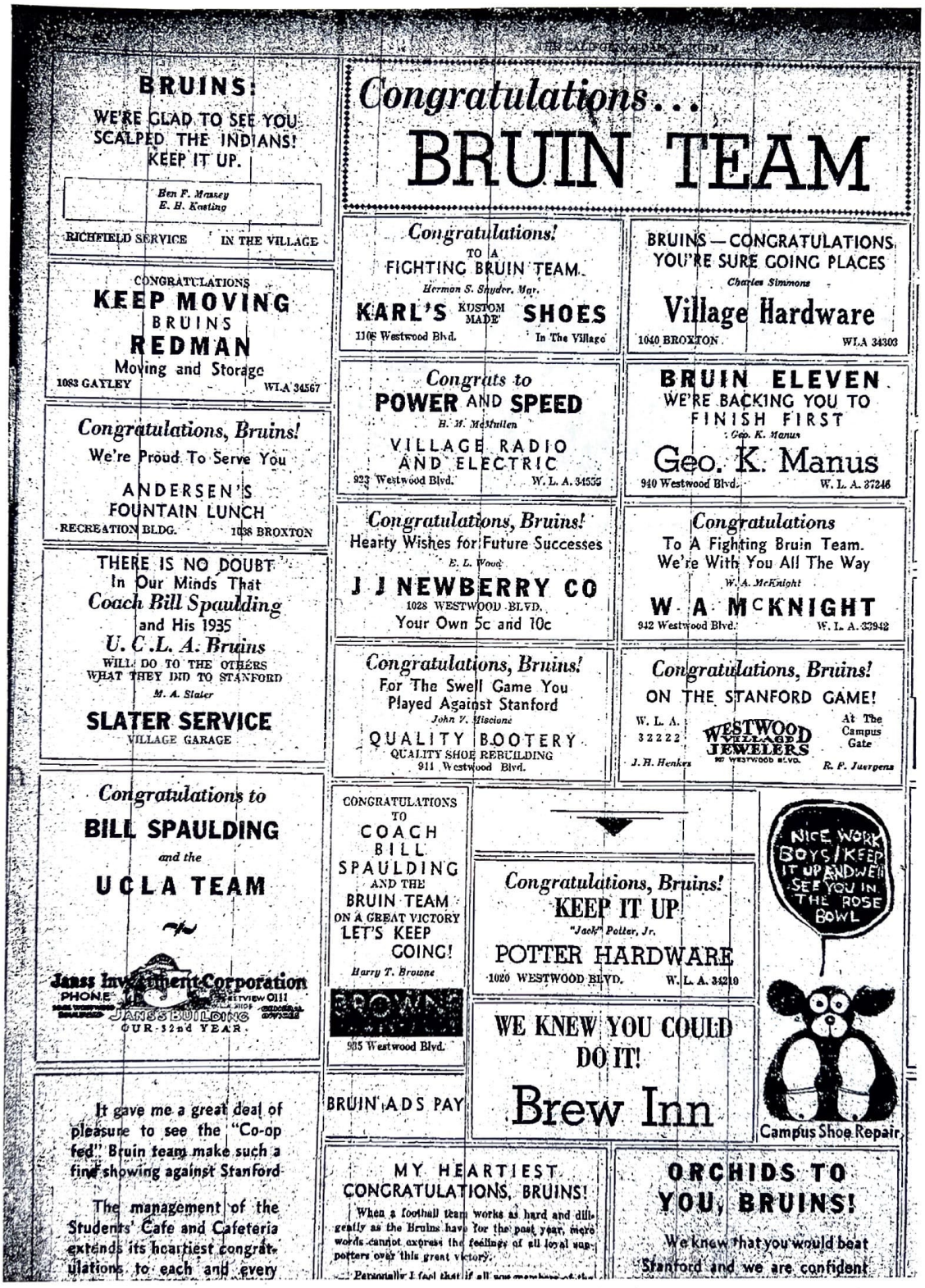
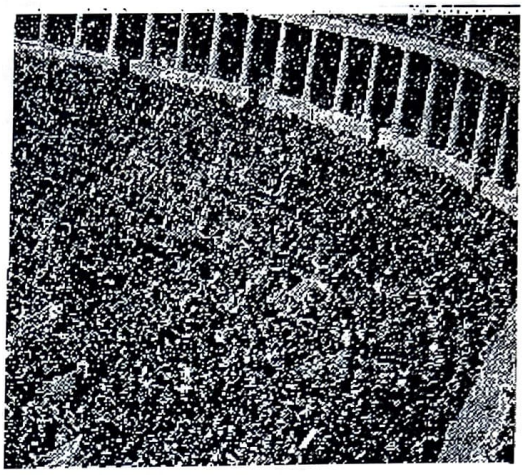


Fig. 1. Newspaper Advertisement, *California Daily Bruin*, October 16, 1936.

AT THE BIG SATURDAY SHOW



A Crowded Corner of a Football Stadium.

Pictorial

After Seasons of Depression, the Sport Takes Its Old Place in the Stadium

GRIDIRON managers are beaming back confidently these Autumn days—football is drawing the old crowds. Hundreds of thousands of men, women, children — especially students and alumni—are jammed together around the gridirons these Saturday afternoons; gate receipts are improving. The football business is definitely on the upgrade.

For a few years during the depression football was in the doldrums. The boys played the game, but the crowds couldn't afford the $3.30 or $4.40 per ticket. Even alumni, worrying about their own private affairs, had little time to go around finding good material for next year's freshman team. Talk of overemphasis of the game dwindled. The depression, more than the Carnegie report and the zeal of college administrators, seemed to have killed "overemphasis."

With "overemphasis" on the run football became increasingly democratic. Though students still followed their varsity teams they themselves jumped in larger numbers from the sidelines on to the gridiron and played the game. Dormitory, fraternity, club and class contests excited students; intramural games grew in importance. Even a Saturday afternoon varsity game consisted the big event of the week, it no longer was the only football attraction.

The Pendulum Swings.

Tournaments are still popular; at the same time the pendulum is swinging toward the direction of "overemphasis." Old excesses are appearing again. But this year those who believe that college football should be a sport, not a big business, are quiet. Somehow they have lost interest. Charges that football players are on state payrolls, that good high school halfbacks are being poached, only arouse a shrug among the majority of citizens. "What of it?" seems to be the general feeling. A victorious team is the only thing that most people care about.

Two items in the news recently indicated which way the football wind is blowing. In Ohio Governor Martin L. Davey, aroused by a squabble with politicians and university officials, declared sarcastically that "football has become the supreme purpose of higher education." "Most of the football played" at Ohio State University, he asserted, was on the "state payroll." Football followers alluded the Governor for raising such an issue. It is arranged. A dozen or two high school or prep school football captains and stars sometimes enter the freshman class of a single institution. This is not just a coincidence; football makes it happen.

Dr. John J. Tigert, president of the University of Florida, has said that he knows "where and how to get a Rose Bowl team." He has pointed to various Southern institutions which have demonstrated that it can be done. But he prefers to get along without Rose Bowl teams.

These excesses do not take place in all colleges. In most universally officials have little to do with the matter. The alumni are respectable. It is also true that many good football players go to a certain college because of independent choice or of family tradition.

Newspapers and radio disclose the importance of football in this country. College football practice is watched with an eagle eye; football forecasters predict—usually wrongly—the outcome of Saturday's intersectional games. And the teams themselves attract more publicity than the colleges represented could ever hope to attain in any other way. That is why some college officials want winning football teams.

The ills of the great autumnal game have not gone completely unnoticed. In a report made this year to the Association of American Colleges, Charles J. Turck, chairman of its committee on student recruiting and president of Center College, wrote:

"We have no desire to affix the blame for the present deplorable situation in the recruiting of athletes and their subsidization, nor do we intend to go on a muck-raking exposition to discover individual offenders. We appeal to presidents, faculty members, coaches, athletic directors, students and alumni, to observe in letter and in spirit the lofty standards of college sport, and to resist, no matter what the pressure, the temptation to professionalize college football and other sports. We admit our inability thus far to control the situation, but we refuse to haul down our banner."

The Aim Admitted.

Such talk, however, does not seem to stop alumni and athletic directors interested in winning teams. They go ahead, frankly admitting what they are after; they also honestly feel that there is no harm in subsidized athletics.

Many college undergraduates deplore the results of "overemphasis." Editors of undergraduate dailies at some of our most prominent institutions attack [illegible]

Fig. 2. Shepard Stone, Newspaper Article, *New York Times*, November 10, 1935.


California Daily Bruin

Fig. 3. Newspaper Article, *California Daily Bruin*, October 22, 1935.

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