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In the Beginning Was the Rule

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The *how* is easy:

A scrimmage takes place when the holder of the ball, being in the field of play, puts it down on the ground in front of him and puts it in play with his foot. The man who first receives the ball from the snap-back shall be called the quarter-back, and shall not then rush forward with the ball under penalty of foul.

If on three consecutive fairs and downs a team shall not have advanced the ball five yards or lost ten, they must give up the ball to the other side at the spot where the fourth down was made. Consecutive means without leaving the hands of the side holding it.

The first statement is Amendment #1, adopted on October 12, 1880, by the Intercollegiate Football Association, agreed to by the representatives from Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia, convening to refine the four-year-old game. The second statement is Amendment #1 approved by the same body at the convention of October 14, 1882.¹ Together, these two simple rules created American football.

Football had been played informally for decades on American school grounds (chiefly as an aspect of hazing and interclass rivalry) when students from Princeton and Rutgers met in 1869 in the first intercollegiate contest.² They more or less followed the rules of the London Football Association—as soccer—because it was played in England. This initial contest was followed sporadically over the next five years by others, with all the schools (Columbia, Wesleyan, Yale, Tufts, Trinity, Stevens, and Pennsylvania, as well as the original two, Rutgers and Princeton) playing by soccer rules. With one exception: haughty Harvard stood alone; its “Boston game” allowed running with the ball and tackling, as in the rugby game also played in England. Even

among the majority, however, each school devised its own set of rules, to be negotiated when matches were being arranged. The first attempt by Americans to develop a common code took place in 1873, among Yale, Princeton, Rutgers, and Columbia, but the rules agreed upon served for only that season. In May 1874, McGill University of Montreal visited Cambridge, Massachusetts, for a pair of matches, one by Harvard's rules, the other by the Rugby Union code that the Canadians followed. Afterward, the *Harvard Advocate* declared the rugby game “in much better favor than the somewhat sleepy game now played by our men.”³ The following year, Harvard and Yale met for the first time under a modified rugby code that became known as the “Concessionary Rules,” negotiated by representatives of the two schools. In 1876, after Princeton and Pennsylvania had competed under soccer rules, and Harvard and Yale under the concessionary rugby rules, representatives from Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia met on November 26 to create the Intercollegiate Football Association and finally adopt a common code. Harvard and Yale prevailed in the discussions; having dominated the soccer version of the game since its inception, Princeton agreed to the rugby rules reluctantly. As a sign of the self-interested politicking that has remained a part of intercollegiate football to this day, Yale initially declined membership in the Association but agreed to its rules.

The rules that emerged from this first convention of the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1876 did not vary substantially from the Rugby Union code; the Americans' chief modifications gave greater importance to running and instituted judges and referees.⁴ But within just six years, in the two brief declarations quoted above, the architects of intercollegiate football in the United States transformed English rugby into a very different American game. First the creation of the scrimmage, as a substitute for the rugby scrum-mage (players from both teams massed about the ball, all trying to kick it out to a teammate), gave the ball to one team at a time; then the five-yard rule guaranteed that the team possessing the ball either advanced it or gave it up. Later revisions—rules on scoring, on blocking and tackling, on movement before the ball was snapped, on the number of offensive players allowed behind the line of scrimmage, most crucially on forward passing—were necessary before American football assumed a form in 1912 that we would recognize today as our game. Nonetheless, in the evolution of American football from English rugby, the distance from 1882 to 1993 is less significant than that from 1876 to 1882.

The interesting question is, why these most basic alterations? The evolution of football's rules has left a fascinating record that demands interpretation.

Why Americans' initial preference for the running and tackling rather than the kicking game? Then why our insistence on amending the Rugby Union code once adopted? "American exceptionalism" too often reduces more complex cultural relations, but in this instance a fundamental difference is indisputable. The establishment of officials by the very first rules committee may seem innocuous, but the act has deeply revealing implications. "There shall be two judges," rule #59 stated, "one for each side, and also a referee, to whom disputed points shall be referred, and whose decision shall be final." Parke Davis, an early chronicler of American football, appended an asterisk to this rule, with a note at the bottom of the page: "Entirely new. Under the Rugby Union Code the captains acted as officials."⁵ It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this simple rule-plus-footnote. As Davis noted, in the public-school sporting contests of early Victorian England the opposing captains interpreted and enforced the rules. When a single referee was later instituted, his function was to penalize "ungentlemanly conduct"; later, when new rules defined fouls more precisely, at least some traditionalists were outraged. When the penalty kick in soccer was adopted in 1891, one English gentleman sputtered angrily, "It is a standing insult to sportsmen to have to play under a rule which assumes that players intend to trip, hack and push their opponents and to behave like cads of the most unscrupulous kind. I say that the lines marking the penalty area are a disgrace to the playing field of a public school."⁶ No American in 1891 could have challenged the need for rules and referees; the only question was, how many of each were needed? The institution of judges as advocates for each team, with a referee as final arbiter, led to incessant wrangling that interrupted games for as much as thirty minutes at a time. The wrangling often began long before the football contest, agreeing on a referee was perhaps the single most important decision to be negotiated when matches were arranged. After several ugly controversies the judges were finally eliminated in 1885, conduct of the game left entirely to the referee. When this arrangement proved unworkable, an umpire was added in 1888, then a linesman in 1894, then a second umpire in 1906 (after an earlier unsatisfactory trial) who became a field judge in 1907. (A back judge and a line judge were added in 1955 and 1972 respectively, to complete our current lineup of officials.)

The rules to be enforced changed and expanded with even more unsettling frequency. One coach complained in 1912 that "the rules of the last year required sixty-five pages and fourteen thousand words to make their meaning clear."⁷ To this day, rugby and soccer have relatively few and simple rules and a single referee. American football by now has a small army of officials and

rules so detailed as to dazzle a modern Blackstone. (Baseball and cricket similarly differ.) At different times over the past several years, for example, offensive linemen have been forbidden to use their hands or extend their arms in blocking; they have been allowed to use their closed fists or open hands, to extend their arms momentarily or leave them extended, and to deliver blows only to variously specified parts of the defenseman's body. So, too, with other aspects of blocking, tackling, and defending against passes. Efficiency is obviously one goal, to maintain the delicate balance between offense and defense in order to satisfy the fans. But behind the always-present threat to proper balance lies the open assumption that rules in American sport exist to be exploited as much as followed.

What we take for granted today demanded comment, and evoked concern, during the closing decades of the nineteenth century when Americans were learning how to compete on playing fields. The issue was not outright cheating, as in prizefighting and other sports of disreputable "sporting men" that were notorious for their routine crookedness. Taking advantage of the rules was a different matter. Early baseball, which stood higher on the social scale than prizefighting but lacked full respectability until the 1920s, is full of amusing anecdotes of legal assaults on legality: a manager substituting himself as a foul ball sails toward the dugout, just in time to catch it; a catcher throwing his mask a few feet down the first-base line to trip the runner; an outfielder juggling the ball as he trots toward the infield, preventing a runner from advancing on a sacrifice fly. Buck Ewing, a baseball manager early in the twentieth century, summed up this spirit: "Boys," he told his players during a spring-training session on strategy, "you've heard the rules read. Now the question is: What can we do to beat them?"⁸

Many applauded this attitude. Amateur purists decried such practices, but the typical baseball fan admired the "brainy" coach or player who could dream up new tricks for winning. And college boys played the same games. The history of college football in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a chronicle of rules constantly evolving in large part to outlaw tactics the old rules had inadvertently permitted. Having created a scrimmage line in 1880, the early rule makers found themselves continually forced to redefine it. The original attention was to give one team clear possession, but as long as the scrimmage line passed through the center of the ball, each team technically owned half of the football at the beginning of the play. In 1885, a proposal to separate the rush lines by five yards was defeated. In 1886, a new proposal "that the center rush should be permitted to snap the ball without any interference from opponents" was approved; yet the following year, another rule prohibiting

interference with the center snap was necessary, and as late as 1906 still another.⁹ Similar tinkering was required for the rules on blocking ("interference"), flying wedges and other "mass" plays, scoring, holding, or giving up the ball, and so on. Until a rule made it impossible, a clever team discovered that it could score repeated touchdowns simply by bunting the ball down behind the goal line. The kick to its own man, who then touched the ball down behind the goal line. The rules themselves, and the contemporary reports on them, were laced with comments of this sort: "the object being to prevent teams from deliberately missing goals in order to make another touchdown, which was possible under prior rules"; and "in order to prevent the prevalent stealing of the ball, the referee shall blow his whistle immediately when the forward progress of the ball has been stopped"; and "Note.—There shall be no shifting of men to evade this rule."¹⁰ The basic problem was summed up by Walter Camp in 1894: "The Rugby code was all right for Englishmen who had been brought up upon traditions as old and as binding as the laws themselves. If a point were in dispute it was at once referred to any veteran and his word stood. No innovation would be tolerated, whether it was barred by the rules or not. And here came the difficulties of American collegians. The rules did not cover half the cases that arose, and the printed rule was the only law, as no traditions existed."¹¹ Camp sounds defensive here (the pressing issue at the time was the game's brutality); others saw in the constant manipulation of rules a splendid expression of Yankee ingenuity.

Elsewhere I have argued that this attitude toward rules—a recognition of the letter but not the spirit, a dependence on rules in the absence of tradition yet also a celebration of the national genius for circumventing them—expressed an American democratic ethos, a dialectical sense of "fair play" (embracing both "sportsmanship" and "gamesmanship") that was very different from the aristocratic British version.¹² Here, I am more interested in what this rule making and rule breaking tells us about the relations of culture and power. If no single Creator brought American football into being *ex nihilo*, it was a very small group of young men who had complete authority in creating the game *ex rugby*. Two representatives from Columbia joined those from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton for the inaugural rules convention in 1876; until 1894, only Wesleyan and Penn were admitted to this inner circle. Fewer than a dozen young men, all representing elite universities and relatively privileged classes, controlled the game during these crucial early years of its development. At the rules conventions they resisted changes that would in any way restrict their own schools' preferred style of play (this accounts to a consider-

able degree for the slowness in abolishing the mass-momentum plays that seemed mere brutality to outraged critics). Yet the rules once decreed were repeatedly skirted, even ignored, by the players, forcing further decrees. Later, faculty and college presidents, journalists, legislators, eventually a president of the United States had their say—as did the fans, when the interests of 40,000 spectators at the Thanksgiving Day games began to demand consideration.

In 1893, Walter Camp summed up these conflicting interests within the football community: "The captain usually desires to win that one year, no matter at what expense. The coach sometimes, particularly if he is to continue assisting his college, has the desire to win that year coupled with a hope of developing good material for further victories. The faculty wish the sport to be kept up that it may conduce to the physical and moral well-being of the student. The public, outside of those immediately interested in college affairs, wishes to see an interesting game, and incidentally some of the more public-spirited ones a sport that may make the boys, when they became men of the world, good citizens."¹³ And all the while the players were doing whatever they could to win the game of the moment, competing against the rules as well as their opponents. Football games had overlapping yet different "meanings" for each of these groups, who wielded varying degrees of control over the way the games would be played and understood. The early years of football thus illustrate most concretely the messy relations and complicated distribution of power among "producers" and "consumers" of culture.

The creators of American football seem to have had power but little control, as they revised the rules again and again. Consider, in contrast, the astonishing stability of baseball. The distances of 60' 6" from the pitching mound to home plate and 90' between the bases seem almost magical: what worked in the nineteenth century continues to work in the 1990s, despite major changes in equipment, strategy, technique, even the physical abilities of players. Offense and defense remain finely balanced, assisted by only minor tinkering with the strike zone and the height of the pitcher's mound. Most of the time the throw still barely nips the runner at first base after a ground ball to deep shortstop; despite sliders and screwballs and split-fingered fastballs, batters still hit the ball often enough to keep the game interesting. Football even today experiences more dramatic swings from dominating offense to dominating defense, yet the current game seems rock-solid stable compared to its initial half-century. The chronicle of rules made, broken, amended, circumvented, amended again, abused again, in endless cycle, seems to reveal a game that developed without intention, by simple necessity after an initial accident.

Once the scrimmage line and the five-yard rule were instituted (by young men unable to anticipate the consequences), subsequent revisions were required to guarantee them, then to modify them as they became unworkable.

One could argue that only the first decisive break with the Rugby Union—creating the scrimmage and granting possession of the ball to one team—was truly a freely chosen rule. The five-yard rule became necessary when the Princeton teams of 1880 and 1881 played the notorious “block game.” The Tiger players realized that they could hold the ball an entire half, as the rules permitted, simply by neither kicking nor fumbling, and so allow the more powerful Yale team no opportunity to score. The graver crisis in the 1890s over football’s appalling violence similarly resulted as a matter of course from the addition of legalized “interference” to the possession and five-yard rules, and from a seemingly innocuous rule in 1888 that permitted tackling not just above the waist but also between the waist and the knees. In American football today blockers lead the ball carrier; in rugby, the ball carrier precedes his teammates, tossing the ball back to one of them before he can be downed. Together with forward passing, this legalized blocking most obviously distinguishes the look of American football from rugby. Originally, Americans adopted rugby’s “off-side” rule—prohibiting any offensive player to run ahead of the man with the ball—but they also routinely violated it. The problem was inescapable: once possession of the ball was given to a single team, every time the ball was snapped to the quarterback, the entire rush line was put offside and legally could do nothing to interfere with the defensive players. From this more or less inadvertent interference, the practice of increasingly intentional and sophisticated kinds of interference quickly developed. The rules conventions of the 1880s returned again and again to this problem: decreeing in 1881, for example, that three warnings for “intentional off-side playing” (that is, interference) meant disqualification, then in 1883 allowing an additional infraction before dismissal, then later in 1883 back to two, in 1884 only one, and so on. Finally, after a recommendation in 1889 that “the side which has the ball can interfere with the body only, the side which has not the ball can use hands and arms as heretofore,” interference was at last made legal, and the modern game of blocking emerged. But legalization also meant new possibilities for abuse. For many years blockers were allowed to use their hands against opponents and could push and pull their own ballcarrier. Even more dangerous were flying wedges and other mass-momentum plays (various schemes for attacking a stationary defense with several blockers leading the ballcarrier), which became the dominant offensive strategy in the 1890s, resulting in unprecedented brutality that jeopardized the sport’s survival. This course of development seems

to have been both accidental and inevitable: possession + five-yards-in-three-plays-for-a-first-down + interference = mayhem. The rules conventions of the 1890s and early 1900s could forget about violations of the offside rule but had to wrestle incessantly to alter this new equation.

In contrast to the murky evolution of interference, the legalization of low tackling in 1888 was a single, clearly defined revision of the rules, but with disastrous unforeseen consequences. Walter Camp proposed the low-tackling rule out of a desire to readjust the balance between offense and defense: fast, shifty runners were difficult to drag down when they could be tackled only above the waist. Instead, low tackling virtually eliminated open-field running, led to increasingly brutal (and boring) mass play, altered the very shape of football players by tilting the advantage overwhelmingly toward sheer bulk, and necessitated the development of padded armor to protect the newly vulnerable players. Even the long hair of football players, a tribal mark that amused observers and provoked countless caricatures in the 1890s, was a consequence of this one rule: long hair became an alternative to the various kinds of headgear that began to appear as protections against head injuries. Memory of a glorious “open game” haunted the debates over football brutality in the 1890s: swift, wiry players spread across the field, passing and kicking the ball to each other, then dashing down the field on heroic jaunts into the end zone. Low tackling seemed to have replaced this style with closely packed behemoths pounding each other for a couple of yards of bloody turf. Such, anyway, was the hyperbolic response of many saddened observers. A single rule transformed the game in unwanted ways.¹⁴

Football thus developed as much by accident as by design, and the enhanced narrativity that also resulted from the scrimmage and the five-yard rule was equally accidental. Harvard’s preference for the running-and-tackling game in the years just preceding the formation of the Intercollegiate Football Association in 1876 seems to have been compounded of equal parts of arrogance and desire for wide-open action. Declining to join Yale and Princeton for a rules convention in 1873, Harvard’s captain declared imperiously to the representatives from Yale, “Harvard stands entirely distinctly by herself in the game of football.” But he also deigned to explain a bit more fully: “We cannot but recognize in your [soccer-type] game much but brute force, weight, and especially ‘shin’ element. Our game depends upon running, dodging, and position playing,—i.e., kicking across field into another’s hands. We are perfectly aware of our position in regard to other colleges. I assure you we gave the matter a fair discussion last spring. We even went so far as to practice and try the Yale game. We gave it up at once as hopeless.”¹⁵ A few weeks later, the

contests with McGill confirmed Harvard's preference, only now more in line with English rugby rules.

A simple desire for more open action thus seems to have been the initial impulse; whatever more complex or calculated motives may have contributed are lost to us. And Yale's and Princeton's acquiescing in Harvard's insistence on rugby rules at the formative convention of 1876 seems to have resulted less from preference than from deference to Harvard's preeminence among American colleges, and from a pragmatic view of the possibilities for consensus. Although Yale, not Harvard, became the football powerhouse, Harvard led Yale (and both led Princeton) in the institutional pecking order of the day.¹⁶ All three colleges clung to their athletic independence in various ways throughout this formative period, but Harvard most successfully.

I find no evidence to suggest that the founding fathers of intercollegiate football realized that a nation with little history and less tradition required mythic narratives of national identity, and sensed that football might provide them: the Great American Epic in knickers and canvas jackets. But following the game's nearly haphazard beginnings, these narrative possibilities quickly became evident. It is important to remember that football began as a game to be played, not watched; the initial games drew small crowds from the con-tending college communities. By the mid-1880s, however, crowds of 10,000 and 15,000 were attending the Thanksgiving Day championship, 30,000 and 40,000 by the early 1890s.¹⁷ This growth, too, occurred more by circumstance than by conscious plan, while the experience of spectatorship itself was more determined by those who managed and publicized the games than by those who played them. Initially, the fans ringed the playing area, restrained at most by ropes or simple fences. When their team scored, they poured onto the field to mob the heroes of the moment, disrupting the contest until they could be herded back to the sidelines. The development of facilities and methods for accommodating 30,000 people at Manhattan Field in New York, or Hampden Park in Springfield, Massachusetts, meant a transition from picturesque semi-chaos to orderly spectatorship. The big game became a social event as well as an athletic contest, as Richard Harding Davis noted in describing the crowd at the Yale-Princeton game in 1895:

But if Somebody's Sister in one of the grand stands did not get quite as near to the inwardness of what was going forward as did the ex-player and the coaches along the line, she at least witnessed a spectacle that was worth crossing a continent to see. The majority of the spectators yesterday belonged to the class of the unseeing ones. They came because it was the thing to do, just

as they went to the opera to look at the boxes and not to listen to the music, and their interest in Yale and Princeton was perhaps of the slightest, and their knowledge of the game even less. But that did not interfere with their enjoyment of the day or prevent them from rising in their places and shouting as they had never shouted before.¹⁸

As an activity for a couple dozen young men became a spectacle for thousands, and as the benefits to the universities in both prestige and income became increasingly apparent, those who oversaw the development of the game had to shape it to the desires of viewers as well as participants. Football succeeded as spectacle because the games' own structure made narrative drama possible, but also because these narrative possibilities were exploited by football's promoters.

To trace the emerging consciousness, and exploitation, of football's narrative power I will explore the writings of "the father of American football," Walter Camp, in the remainder of this chapter. Through Camp's writings we have only one man's view of the game during its formative years, but Camp was the man who did most to shape it.

Walter Camp was never an All-American but for thirty-seven years the maker of All-Americans, never a paid coach but the "coach of coaches," never a ruler but the preeminent creator of rules.¹⁹ The son of a middle-class school-teacher in New Haven, Camp was a star running back at Yale for six years and part of a seventh (1876-82), first as an undergraduate, then as a medical student (the limitation on seasons of eligibility came later, after years of wrangling among the rule makers). More important, after he left medicine and Yale for a career in business, first with the Manhattan Watch Company, then for four decades with the New Haven Clock Company (eventually becoming president and board chairman), Camp continued as graduate adviser to Yale captains for nearly thirty years, serving "as Yale's unofficial, unpaid, unquestioned chief mentor and arbiter."²⁰ Richard Harding Davis wrote in 1893, "There is only one man in New Haven of more importance than Walter Camp, and I have forgotten his name. I think he is the president of the university."²¹ Outside New Haven, among football men he was the game's preeminent spokesman and authority, routinely identified in newspapers and magazines with such epithets as "the leading foot-ball expert in the country" or the "father of football at Yale"; on occasion, with touches of gentle irony, as "the King of American football" or "the great high priest of the grid-iron arena."²²

Many of the captains and players Camp advised became coaches elsewhere, carrying with them their mentor's methods and ideas. Most important, from 1878 to his death in 1925, Camp served continuously on football's rules committees, for twenty-eight years as secretary. His views dominated the early committees in particular. The scrimmage rule of 1880, assigning possession to one team at a time, was his idea, as was the five-yard rule of 1882 (years later, Camp wrote that this rule initially "had no adherents save the man who proposed it").²³ He proposed eleven players on a side instead of fifteen, and devised the point-scoring scale, approved in 1883, that with more tinkering became the basis of our modern system. Ironically, though a most gentlemanly sportsman himself, Camp also proposed the legalization of low tackling in 1888, then through the 1890s fought legislation to eliminate the resulting mass-momentum plays that critics blamed for football's shocking brutality. Losing that battle, Camp then resisted legalizing the forward pass in 1906, the ultimate shift from "mass" to "open" play. But if he yielded reluctantly to the later stages of development (motivated privately by Yale's self-interest and publicly by a consistent vision that football was preeminently a team game, not an individual sport), it remains true that American football was to a considerable degree Walter Camp's creation.

Camp also wrote voluminously: nearly thirty books, over 200 magazine articles, countless newspaper commentaries. Included in these writings are his reports on the All-American teams he personally selected from 1889 until his death; beginning in 1898 these were an annual feature in *Collier's Weekly*. Also included, though less well remembered, are numerous treatises on the emerging game, sometimes directed toward would-be coaches and players, sometimes meant to teach an awakening public what they were witnessing on the field and, more important, what lay behind the visible action. These writings provide an invaluable detailed record of Camp's understanding of football's deeper meanings and significance, his own reading of football's cultural text. Appearing in major periodicals (*Century*, *Collier's*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Outing*, *Outlook*, *Independent*), in the most popular juvenile magazines (*St. Nicholas*, *Youth's Companion*, *Boys' Magazine*), in the major New York daily newspapers, and in books by major publishers, Camp's ideas, enhanced by his peerless reputation, had to have a powerful influence on the public's understanding.

Camp's writings reveal no attempt to develop football toward greater nativity, nor even a conscious understanding that such a quality had unintentionally resulted. Yet his writings also reveal that by the late 1880s Camp himself recognized that football, both its brief history and the games on the field, was a cultural text whose meaning he wished to interpret for its grow-

ing audience. Beginning with his earliest essays in *Harper's Weekly* (the era's major middle-class periodical) and *Outing* (its chief monthly devoted to sport and recreation), Camp's own narrative of football's development had a distinct plot: the rationalization and tactical development of the game's action, driven by the object of winning, developed in young men the character and experiences essential for success in America. Camp's master metaphor for football in all his writings was the hierarchically structured, efficiently run industrial corporation, no doubt linked in his own mind with the New Haven Clock Company. That is, in dozens of essays and four major treatises written during football's formative years, Camp consistently interpreted the game's meaning and significance from what is essentially a managerial and technocratic perspective.

This perspective might seem merely self-serving: for Walter Camp, a former three-time captain, then Yale's unofficial coach for a quarter-century, football was a game of tactics and leadership rather than physical achievement. Self-serving or not, Camp expressed a view that continues to distinguish American sports—basketball and baseball, as well as football—from the same or similar games elsewhere. In American basketball and baseball, the games are orchestrated from the sidelines, their outcomes frequently attributed to the winning team's superior "bench coach" or "field manager." When Indiana plays North Carolina in college basketball, it's Bobby Knight vs. Dean Smith; in the World Series it's Billy Martin vs. Tommy Lasorda, Tony LaRussa vs. Roger Craig. The tendency is less strong in professional than in college basketball, in baseball than in football; but in relation to European sport the American emphasis on the coaches is striking. And this emphasis is most pronounced in football, where the importance of teamwork is greatest and the players are drilled to execute, with little improvisation, a game plan devised by the coaching staff. Baseball commentators speak of "the book," the unwritten but universally known traditions that dictate most managers' decisions. There is no "book" in football; tactical styles vary from coach to coach, and at least once a decade some coach's innovation has truly expanded the possibilities in the game. From the original "V-trick" and "flying wedge" of the 1890s, to the single wing and double wing and split-T, to the wishbone and shotgun and run-and-shoot, football coaches have repeatedly reconceived the way their game is played.

Initially, coaching during games was forbidden by the rules taken over from the Rugby Union; once the contest began, all decisions were made by the captain on the field. Moreover, the early coaches were unofficial and unpaid, usually graduates returning to the university to advise the captain and help train

the new eleven. Through its system of volunteer graduate coaches, Yale had dominated the Harvards and Princetons that continued to depend on student leadership. In addition, as more and more schools and athletic clubs took up the game, they needed coaches from outside because they lacked graduates with football experience (Yale initially provided most of these outside coaches). The professional coach originated at western colleges such as Minnesota and Chicago (where Amos Alonzo Stagg was hired in 1891 with a professor's salary). Not by intention but by necessity, the paid coach emerged as a fixture by the early twentieth century, but only after much agonizing and debate over the intrusion of "professionalism" into amateur sport. The success of the great tacticians of the 1890s and early 1900s, men like Stagg at Chicago, George Woodruff at Pennsylvania, and Henry L. Williams at Minnesota, made the value of professional coaches apparent to everyone. Harvard rarely beat Yale until, against internal resistance at even this late date, it hired its first professional coach in 1905. After several unaccustomed losses to Percy Houghton's teams at Harvard, Yale followed suit a decade later.²⁴ Having taught the football world the benefits of coaching, Yale accepted the professional coach with great reluctance.

As paid coaches emerged inevitably with the growing importance of winning for the university's prestige, the rule makers did not willingly surrender the game to coaches. Coaches were expected to help the captains organize their teams, train them, and develop strategy; once the games began, the players were to take over, the coaches to become mere interested spectators. A member of Harvard's faculty athletic committee in 1902 spoke for all advocates of amateur purity when he classed "side line coaching" among the "shady practices" that violated true sport. "When eleven young men appear on the football field," he wrote, "it is commonly understood that they are going to win or lose on their own merits, and not with the assistance of some one on the side lines." But he also acknowledged that, unfortunately, sideline coaching was a common practice, difficult for rule makers to prevent.²⁵

They tried. American collegians began with a ban on coaching, as was traditional in English sport, but as always they immediately began to circumvent it. A rule in 1892 directed the umpire to prevent coaching from the sideline; another in 1900 forbade coaching during the game by substitutes or anyone else not actually playing; another in 1914 prohibited all persons from walking up and down the sidelines. No doubt the most difficult rule to enforce, instituted in 1917, said that substitutes could not communicate with other members of the team until after the first play (thus preventing them from bringing in instructions from the coach). After the offensive huddle became common,

beginning in 1921 when it was introduced by the Illinois team coached by Bob Zuppke, the referee joined the huddle as substitutes entered the game, to assure their silence. Sideline coaching was not officially sanctioned until 1967.²⁶

The early restrictions proved to be minor obstacles in the march toward coaching dominance, however. Substitution rules, one of the chief mechanisms by which coaching strategy could be expanded or contracted, changed thirty times in college football's first 100 years. The current intercollegiate rules allowing unlimited substitution (initially permitted in 1941, then restricted in 1953, then restored in two stages, in 1964 and 1973) have brought football coaches' control to new extremes: not just the two-platoon football first made possible in 1941, then again in 1964, but players shuffled in and out of the game to meet increasingly specialized needs determined by huge coaching staffs with their computer-generated strategies. The quarterback who calls his own plays in either college or professional football has become increasingly rare; the computerized efficiency of the Dallas Cowboys under Tom Landry in the 1970s and the "genius" of the San Francisco 49ers' Bill Walsh in the 1980s are recent contrasts in coaching control. How strange it must seem to Americans watching World Cup soccer matches to see that coaching is still not allowed during the contest.²⁷

One of the narratives we read in football today, then, concerns a contest between what are seemingly rival corporations, and we can look to Walter Camp for the roots of his narrative—but also for the competing narrative that most directly challenges it. In the 1980s, sportswriters debated whether the Super Bowl victories of the 49ers belonged chiefly to Bill Walsh or to quarterback Joe Montana. When writers argued whether Montana was programmed by Walsh, then plugged into an unbeatable system, or made the system unbeatable himself, they restated competing narratives nearly as old as the game. At the same time that Camp was repeatedly explaining the development of American football in terms of rational efficiency, he was annually celebrating the eleven best football players in the land, not the coaches and captains who devised the tactics but the individual heroes who executed and sometimes transcended them. These dual perspectives and differing purposes point to what Camp explicitly described as distinct audiences and desires: the knowing few intimately involved with the teams, and the rapidly expanding audience of casual fans who came to the games for excitement and spectacle. From its infancy, in short, even in the mind of its principal author, football's cultural text has had competing interpretations.

Throughout his published writings Camp's account of football's development consistently evoked a cluster of ideas: unbound by tradition (alternately

a lack or a freedom in Camp's view), and unaided by experienced rugby players who could interpret the rules, the American collegian "took the English rules for a starting-point, and almost immediately proceeded to add and subtract, according to what seemed his pressing needs." The most pressing initial need, according to Camp, was simply for order. The creation of the scrimmage in 1880 meant the elimination of chance (the random exit of the ball from the rugby scrum) and opened up possibilities for greater "skill in the development of brilliant plays and carefully planned maneuvers." In turn, this initial act led naturally to further rationalizing, the division of labor according to distinct positions. "The same man did not always snap the ball back as he does now," Camp explained in 1891, "but any one of the rushers would do it upon occasion. The men did not preserve their relative positions in the line, and any one of the men behind the line would act as a quarter-back [the man who received the ball from the snap-back]. Such a condition of affairs could not, however, last long where intercollegiate rivalry proved such an incentive to the perfection of play, and the positions of center-rush or snap-back and quarter-back became the most distinctive of any upon the field."²⁸

Linking "intercollegiate rivalry" to "the perfection of play" suggests not only that winning mattered more than enjoyment, but also that it contributed to an advance in American achievement. Camp viewed English rugby as chaotic play; he envisioned American football as purposeful work. That is, the model of "perfection" for Camp in late nineteenth-century America was the rationalized, bureaucratic, specialized corporate work force. Rugby distinguished only between rushers and backs. In his writings Camp explained in detail the emergence of end-rushers, tackles, guards, and snap-backs, as well as quarterbacks, halfbacks, and fullbacks, with each position demanding certain skills or qualities: relative degrees of speed, size, strength, agility, and intelligence. And a hierarchy emerged among the positions, a clearly demarcated structure and chain of authority derived from the exigencies of football action, but those exigencies were considerably determined by rules he himself proposed that rewarded organization and tactical skill.

All of the quotations above are from Camp's first book, *American Football* (1891), the first important primer on the new game, but they could as easily have come from his magazine articles earlier and later, or from his other major treatises—*Walter Camp's Book of College Sports* (1893); *Football* (1896), coauthored with Harvard's famous tactician, Lorin F. Deland; and *The Book of Football* (1910)—through which Camp reiterated his fundamental ideas about the development and current qualities of the American game. Camp consistently interpreted football's brief history in terms of an evolution from chaos

and primitive physicality (the "nondescript running and kicking" of rugby) toward reason and order (a "scientific contest"),²⁹ and he cast the current manner of playing the game as the endpoint of that evolution, a reflection of the modern corporate organization. Even in his occasional inconsistency Camp was consistent. Reviewing the season of 1887 for *Outing* magazine, for example, Camp decried the illegal practice of interference (destined "to make great trouble and leave an ugly mark on the American game"), only to embrace it three years later in the same magazine (as "a truly American feature" of the sport) and again the following year (as the essence of team play).³⁰ Similarly, as interference led to mass-momentum plays, Camp defended them against charges of brutality for some twenty years, then in 1912 casually dismissed mass play as a "serious menace to the sport."³¹ Such revisions in detail always served the larger claims of a consistent narrative. Camp belatedly embraced interference because it enhanced team play and increased the coach's tactical options. He defended mass-momentum plays initially because they epitomized highly developed teamwork; as they gave way to "line plunging," the chance of injury was reduced without these options being restricted, so that he could later disdain mass play without sacrificing what he valued most. Football for Camp remained always a game of teamwork and coaching strategy.

On occasion Camp compared football to war, with references to "the football army" and "the kicking or artillery work," and with long discussions of "generalship"—seemingly different qualities from those required for corporate success.³² *Football* (1896) is particularly laden with such rhetoric, although coauthor Deland is likely its chief source (he developed the king of the mass-momentum plays, the flying wedge, after studying Napoleon's campaigns). In any case, football for Camp was not the *moral* but the *tactical* equivalent of war. Camp's interest in military lay not in the physical and psychological demands on soldiers, but in its lessons for command and strategy; "generalship" (on-the-field leadership, as opposed to pregame strategy) was a different quality altogether from Purple Heart courage. Saluting the first Army-Navy football contest in 1890, Camp made the point that football most closely mimics "the art of war"—*art*, not struggle.³³ Whether writing for himself or with Deland, Camp always placed intellectual above physical requirements. Writing at a time when the brutality resulting from mass-momentum plays was provoking outcries against the game from many directions, Camp's explanation of football tactics—pounding the weak point in the opponent's line, winning by endurance and attrition whenever possible—was peculiarly bloodless. Camp emphasized the tactical advantage of mass play, not what was to his mind the incidental brutality. Football's "great lesson," Camp wrote in the

book with Deland, "may be put into a single line: it teaches that brains will always win over muscle!"³⁴

"Brains" did not have to be evenly distributed throughout the team, of course. Those with brains served the important managerial functions; those without them translated ideas into physical action. As "director of the game" on the field,³⁵ the quarterback had to have brains, as did the captain, who in the era before paid coaches became common was principally responsible for selecting, training, and directing the team. Camp also reserved a special place for the "graduate adviser," the unpaid coach who met regularly with the captain to develop training methods and game strategy (as Camp himself did with Yale captains from 1882 to roughly 1910). For Camp, football was fundamentally the strategists' and organizers' game, valuable to the players for its lessons in teamwork. In accounts ranging over almost twenty years, Camp repeatedly defined football's past as an era of individualism, its present as the era of team play; the game, that is, always having recently evolved away from a more primitive past into the modern era. In 1891, Camp predicted that the new season would be marked by "the progress of the game through the medium of qualified teachers and coaches." In 1897, he claimed that "team play has more or less replaced individual superiority." In 1909, he contrasted the "probably unequalled style of team play" of Yale's team in 1900 to "the individual brilliancy, and beyond that the individual independence and football initiative" of the team in 1891. In a contest between the two, the 1900 squad would win.³⁶

First and last, then, football for Camp was a coach's game, whether the coach was a volunteer alumnus or a hired expert.³⁷ In *The Book of Football* (1910), Camp's fourth and final major account of the game's history and present state, he summed up the role of the coach most succinctly, as both an inevitable part of football's evolution and an expression of the American spirit:

But where did the coach come from and why did he come? He was developed by the exigencies of the case, and he came because team play began to take the place of ineffective individual effort. The American loves to plan. It is that trait that has been at the base of his talents for organization. As soon as the American took up Rugby foot-ball he was dissatisfied because the ball would pop out of the scrummage at random. It was too much luck and chance as to where or when it came out, and what man favored by Dame Fortune would get it. So he developed a scrimmage of his own, a center-rusher, or snap-back, a quarter-back, and soon a system of signals. One could no more prevent the American college youth from thus advancing than he could stop their elders with their more important and

gigantic enterprises. But all these things led to team play, at the sacrifice, perhaps, of individual brilliancy, but with far greater effectiveness of the eleven men in what for them was the principal affair of the moment—the securing of goals and touch-downs.³⁸

This passage bristles with loaded phrases: "ineffective individual effort," the American's "talents for organization," the elders' "more important and gigantic enterprises," "the sacrifice . . . of individual brilliancy" for the sake of the team's "greater effectiveness." For Camp, football was a mirror of the corporation, a preparation for corporate success, and itself a corporate activity. Football was work, not play; Camp used such phrases as "the work of the tackle" and "the play of the guard" interchangeably, always to mean the same thing: effort on behalf of a collective purpose, "the principal affair," as he put it, to be "the securing of goals and touch-downs." That goals and touchdowns should be the objective is not self-evident; playing in order to demonstrate one's fitness to assume social and political power granted by birthright is one obvious alternative (this was a primary function of the rugby matches played at British public schools and at Oxford and Cambridge). Or playing for the simple joy of playing, a possibility Camp explicitly rejected in two essays in *Outing* in 1912 and 1913.³⁹

These essays were late affirmations of a position Camp had held for more than two decades. He made explicit the relationship between football and modern business civilization as early as 1891, in the opening sentence of an essay in *Harper's Weekly* titled "Team Play in Football": "If ever a sport offered inducements to the man of executive ability, to the man who can plan, foresee, and manage, it is certainly the modern American foot-ball."⁴⁰ The closest contemporary analogue to football as Camp understood it was not war but the "scientific management" promoted by Frederick Winslow Taylor, whose time-and-motion studies revolutionized American manufacturing. In fact, the parallels between Camp's advocacy of "team work, strategy, and tactics" and of "scientific planning"⁴¹ and Taylor's "principles of scientific management" are strikingly specific. In a famous paper from this period Taylor identified the four elements of scientific management as Science, Harmony, Cooperation, and Maximum Output. Scientific managers, that is, do four things:

First. They develop a science for each element of a man's work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method.

Second. They scientifically select and then train, teach, and develop the workman, whereas in the past he chose his own work and trained himself as best he could.

Third. They heartily cooperate with the men so as to insure all of the work being done in accordance with the principles of the science which has been developed.

Fourth. There is an almost equal division of the work and the responsibility between management and the workmen. The management take over all work for which they are better fitted than the workmen, while in the past almost all of the work and the greater part of the responsibility were thrown upon the men.⁴²

Camp's version of scientific management could be summarized in a parallel list: the devising of plays; the training of players for the positions that suit them; the cooperation of coach, captain, and quarterback with the rest of the players so as to assure common purpose; and the distribution of responsibilities according to position and ability. Taylor made a science of organizing physical labor; so did Camp. Taylor distinguished the needs for brain and for brawn, and assigned them accordingly; so did Camp. In one example Taylor explained that stupidity was necessary for the man handling pig iron in a steel plant; in *The Book of Football*, Camp noted that in the positions of guard and center, football provided "an opportunity not afforded in any other sport for the big, overgrown fat boy."⁴³ Ultimately, Taylor and Camp shared a common vision for the American future.

Camp's condescension toward fat boys was not a careless remark. Later in *The Book of Football*, in the chapter on "General Strategy," he warned captains and coaches that "oftentime it is entirely inadvisable to let the players know what the final outcome of some of the plays is intended to be." As "the material" to be developed by coach and captain, the players as Camp discussed them seem more like equipment than personnel. "The object must be to use each man to the full extent of his capacity without exhausting any. To do this scientifically involves placing the men in such position on the field that each may perform the work for which he is best fitted, and yet not be forced to do any of the work toward which his qualifications and training do not point."⁴⁴ Nowhere in the book is there any suggestion that the players might take over the game themselves. Managers assure productivity; coaches and captains win football games.

The Book of Football includes several accounts of victories by Yale due to the graduate adviser's tactical brilliance. Two decades earlier, in the chapter "Foot-ball in America" from *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports* (1893), Camp illustrated the meaning of "pluck" as the key to football success, with the story of "two little chaps" who once played for Yale, at 125 pounds apiece, "together

a little over the weight of the varsity snap-back." Realizing that the team that year was overconfident and undertrained, the two players took it upon themselves to mold the scrub team into a force that would challenge the varsity men out of their complacency. Without consulting the captain they began organizing and drilling the scrubs, until they were actually outplaying the "overfed, underworked university players." "These two boys began to show them the way to make use of brains against weight and strength" so successfully that the varsity "speedily developed under this experience into one of Yale's strongest teams." The most telling moment in this anecdote just precedes that triumphant line: "How those two ever got such work out of the rabble they had to handle, no one knows to this day." There were two lessons here: the primary principle that "brains will beat brute strength every time if you give them fair play," but also the secondary one that ingenious management can turn "rabble" into an effective work force.⁴⁵

"Rabble" is a remarkable word. Camp's view of the coach-player relationship was always autocratic, as when, in an 1897 essay, he insisted that "no team will keep always extending itself save under the whip and spur of continual, and many times extremely severe, criticism."⁴⁶ The coach, as Camp repeatedly portrayed him, viewed the players from a distance, his outlook shaped by his larger vision and graver responsibilities. As Camp suggested in a 1912 essay, the players in fact constituted the coach's heaviest burden: "I doubt if any really conscientious, capable coach ever reached the end of the second week of fall practice without being pretty well convinced that every big man on his squad was slow and awkward and all the rest were featherweights or too stupid to get a signal even if it were repeated to them twice." As the players develop, credit goes not to them but to the coach: "Meantime the candidates themselves are, if the coaching is good, improving daily in the detail of the work."⁴⁷ But "rabble" goes beyond such suggestions of undevelopment. The members of Yale's scrub team undoubtedly had the same sort of Anglo-Saxon and northern European genealogies as the members of the varsity; yet "rabble" during this period usually referred to the growing urban underclass—Irish, Italian, Jewish, black. At its harshest, then, Camp's interpretation of football's cultural text makes the sport seem a model of social control. More typically, Camp seems conscientiously paternalistic: the players are boys, not men, to be molded by their experienced elders. In either case, success in football depends more on coaches than on players.

Yet Camp was also the creator of All-Americans, the man who selected the season's best players for special recognition. Particularly once *Collier's Weekly* showcased the All-American team as an annual feature, selection by Camp

was the highest accolade to be won in college football. And as the game acquired its own history, Camp periodically measured present heroes against the "giants" of the past, selecting from the annual lists those names deserving of the highest Olympian honor. In the opening paragraph of "Heroes of the Gridiron," written for *Outing* in 1909, Camp's admiration of the game's great players, both past and present, seems obvious. "Were there really giants in those old football days?" Camp asks rhetorically. "To tell the truth, as one looks back, it certainly seems as if some of those moleskin warriors of other days were indeed veritable Goliaths, not only in prowess but in physique as well. Then as in comparison one comes down the long line of memorable players, the men of the later days loom large and one begins to think that perhaps there are just as many prodigies in the present decade as in those that have preceded it."⁴⁸

The interpreter of football in terms of managers and workers was also the troubadour of individual heroes. But not without some uneasiness. Although his early selections reveal no reservations, over time Camp became strikingly self-conscious, even defensive, about singling out individual players for praise. The explanation may be simple: the greater the distance from his own youth and playing days, and the longer his involvement in various aspects of coaching, the less appropriate may have seemed the conferring of greatness on a handful of twenty-year-olds. But All-Americans also presented a more serious challenge to Camp's advocacy of teamwork and managerial control. Camp's awareness of this challenge is apparent in a variety of ways. In selecting his All-Americans of 1897, for example, he explicitly rewarded those players who illustrated his own values, placing the steady and reliable players on the first team, the more individually brilliant but erratic ones on the second.⁴⁹ In this same spirit the essay "Heroes of the Gridiron" concludes by praising "the man who can sacrifice self for the team." Such comments notwithstanding, a contradiction not only emerges from the very notion of All-Americans but also haunts Camp's writings generally. Its source was simply the game itself: for all its tactical possibilities, football also depended then as now on players who executed the game plan and sometimes exceeded its intentions.

This contradiction is played out most fully in Camp's last full-scale account of the sport, *The Book of Football*, in the collisions between its separate chapters (some of which first appeared as essays in *Century* magazine). In "General Strategy," camp reasserted his fundamental values: "But while in American intercollegiate foot-ball, the development of players is of great interest, still more appealing to those who enjoy the sport for its strategic possibilities is the study and development of plays."⁵⁰ The chapter opens with a long anecdote of Yale's season in 1900, in which "the graduate" (Camp himself) per-

suares the captain to adopt a set of plays that he admits will provoke objections among the players and skepticism among observers, but whose success will show by the big games at the end of the season. Indeed, the graduate proves his point: despite a rocky beginning, strategy, together with the players' faith and hard work, ultimately results in lopsided victories over Columbia, Princeton, and Harvard.

The hero of the story, of course, is the brilliant "graduate." But in other chapters Camp concedes more power to the players, singling out numerous star athletes throughout the game's already-rich history. In the chapter "Personality in Football," Camp notes that before 1876 popular interest in the new sport was slight. "Up to that time few besides the players and would-be candidates manifested any desire to witness the games; but in the next decade public interest increased amazingly." Camp's explanation: "The game took on organized methods, individual players became known for their prowess, and the beginnings of marked 'hero-worship' of prominent players could be noted."⁵¹ The simple comma elides the fact that "organized methods" and individual "prowess" refer to radically different accounts of football's meaning. Camp's discussion of star players in this essay is full of defensiveness and reluctant concessions. Athletic heroism is less celebrated than defended, on the grounds that it is not as pernicious as it seems. "So, on the whole, it is not entirely bad that there should be these stars in athletics," Camp wrote, "for most of them acquire their shining qualities through a clean life, practical self-denial, discipline, obedience, un murmuring pluck, and a good deal of patience."⁵² Camp was equally defensive in the book's final chapter, "All-Time, All-America Teams":

To be chosen a member of the All-American team in foot-ball falls to the lot of few men who have not practised certain virtues, and practised them for several seasons. To their elders it may seem a foolish casting of the limelight upon boys whom, in their maturer view of things, they regard as unable to stand the flattering notice. But if these elders could only know these young men as they are known among their intimates, they would speedily be disabused of the delusion that the boys are in danger of being spoiled in any such fashion. Year after year a boy sees the class ahead of him go out into the world and knuckle bravely down to hard knocks and hard work, sees his own turn coming, and gets a fairer perspective of the relation of things than his timorous elders give him credit for.⁵³

Camp's defensiveness is striking. This concluding chapter on All-Americans immediately follows "The Captain and the Coach," where he characteristically approves the sacrifice of "individual brilliancy" for the sake of the "far greater

effectiveness of the eleven men" working together as a team. Rationality, efficiency, and the importance of winning: these, according to Walter Camp, made American football a valuable sport. Yet the public cared more about "individual brilliancy." "The Captain and the Coach" is Camp's penultimate chapter; whether by design or not, he gave the final word to the All-Americans.

Camp thus seems an author who lost control of his text. Besides being the primary force behind rule making and the organization of intercollegiate football, Camp was the game's most tireless proselytizer and publicity agent. But his success in these roles meant a different kind of failure. "Fifteen years ago," Camp wrote in the *Century* in 1894, "when some of the American colleges were endeavoring against great odds to establish the sport of foot-ball, I undertook the then extremely unpleasant task of begging for space in daily papers, weekly periodicals, and magazines in which to exploit the advantages of the sport. It was hard and thankless work, for the real devotees of the game were few in number, and gibes were many. It took the most zealous efforts of those of us who really cared for the sport to persuade editors occasionally to allow a game to be written up by an actual player." Unfortunately, in Camp's view, the discovery by "parents and the general public . . . that the game was not barbarous, brutal, or demoralizing" had an unintended impact on the game: "During the last two or three years it has become over-popular with the public, and this craze has led it to assume an importance and prominence wholly unsought."⁵⁴

Although the occasion for Camp's essay was the widespread criticism of football's brutality, the larger issue concerned the relationship of the game to its popular audience. Camp envisioned football as the ideal training ground for a managerial elite, and for this he campaigned fervently. He wanted the game to become popular, so that its benefits could be widely shared, but without the inevitable consequences of popularity. The more popular the game became, the more its control by a northeastern elite—the students and graduates of Yale, Harvard, and Princeton—eroded. As football became the object of harsh criticism—for brutality, "professionalism," distorted university priorities, financial excess—Camp repeatedly defended the elite universities that initiated intercollegiate competition, casting blame elsewhere. In this spirit he wrote in 1897, during yet another crisis over brutality on the field, "It is the utter disregard of the interests of the sport itself exhibited by athletic club teams and some of the more remote college teams [in the Midwest, that is] that keeps up the agitation against football, and furnishes ammunition for

those who enjoy a shot at anything prominent in the public eye."⁵⁵ The game Camp created, his vision of its place in American life, kept slipping away from him. Having promoted football to an indifferent public, Camp had to come to terms with public desires far from his own. Having once begged for space in the daily papers, Camp came to rue the manner in which the daily papers transformed individual players into celebrities and melodramatized football violence. And having repeatedly insisted that football was a game of teamwork, Camp had to confront the fact that the great majority of spectators cared considerably more about feats of individual prowess.

An ambivalent quarrel with his audience runs through Camp's writings. Without spectators, football could not survive; with spectators, football took a different course from the one Camp envisioned. Through hindsight this course seems inevitable. Once American collegians broke with rugby rules over the random way in which the ball was put in play from the scrum, football developed in the direction of increasing rationalization—toward "scientific" football. What this meant by the early 1890s was flying wedges and other forms of mass-momentum play: by intention, the epitome of "scientific" strategy (the surest way to gain five yards in three downs with minimal risk of fumbling); by accident, the cause of countless injuries. Moreover, though fascinating to the strategist who devised or at least understood the methods for focusing the greatest offensive force on the weakest part of the defense, mass play was uninteresting to anyone lacking "inside" knowledge of the game. In essays such as "A Plea for the Wedge in Football," Camp continued to champion mass-momentum plays because they rewarded the teams with the most brilliant tacticians and the most disciplined training. At the same time the press, claiming to represent the public, called for their abolition because they were both brutal and boring. Boredom seemed the chief threat in 1891, as Camp wrote: "A long run behind a cleverly-moved wedge is by no means unattractive, and it is a play easily understood and appreciated. But close mass work in the centre, crowding down two or three yards at a time, while it may, and sometimes does, entail just as much skill and combined team work, will never appeal in the least to the spectator, and certainly would, if carried to an extreme, disgust him with the game. And the spectator—that is the spectator who has some technical knowledge of the game—is the man whose opinions are likely in the long run to prevail."⁵⁶ By 1893 Camp was acknowledging that brutality had become an additional issue: "The public, as represented by the press, agree with the faculties in desiring the elimination of plays wherein the danger is or may become great, and in addition the public desires the open style of play—the more open the better. Spectators wish to see exactly what

is being done, and in kicks and individual runs therefore lies their principal interest." Camp grudgingly conceded in this case that momentum plays should be altered, though not banned entirely: "That the spectator wishes them abolished does not of itself prove that such action should be taken, although the college spectator ought to be considered next to the player."⁵⁷

The crux of Camp's quarrel with the public was his desire for control: control of the games' outcomes through a style of offensive play that minimized the risk of losing the ball and maximized intelligence and generalship, control of football's place in the university and in the larger society, control in interpreting the sport's meaning. Football in all these aspects escaped his control—not quite Frankenstein's monster berserk in the countryside, but certainly a creation grown more powerful than its creator. The spectators' desire for open play won out, if only after several years of wrangling. The advantages of sheer weight became increasingly obvious, despite Camp's repeated insistence that brain would win over brawn.⁵⁸ Hero-worship prevailed with the greater public, despite Camp's repeated insistence on the value of teamwork. And popularity fed unwelcome "extravagance" and distorted priorities in a variety of other ways. "We want the sport within reasonable bounds," Camp wrote in 1895, "—we want it clean, honest and vigorous, but not spectacular or extravagant."⁵⁹ Yet spectacular and extravagant it was. Even the great Thanksgiving Day football games in New York between Yale and Princeton in the 1880s and early 1890s became something very different from what had been intended. Writing in 1894, when these games seemed to have gotten out of hand (enormous crowds, huge gate receipts, the postgame riotous behavior of students in the Bowery theaters), Camp claimed that the colleges had first chosen Thanksgiving simply for the convenience of students on holiday, New York because it was "the place *par excellence* for a neutral ground and a fair field." That the Thanksgiving Day game in the city became considerably more than an extracurricular activity for the players and their classmates was not the fault of the colleges: "The public have come to regard the game as one of the important 'sporting events' of the year, and have attached to it many attributes in themselves undesirable."⁶⁰

Not always, but often enough, "the public" becomes openly the enemy in Camp's writings on football. In early articles, while still needing to play the promoter, Camp more simply and enthusiastically called attention to the game's growing popularity, and he approved all changes that contributed to "the pleasure of the spectators."⁶¹ But as popularity itself began to change the game, Camp developed a more ambivalent attitude. In a 1910 essay he could invoke the spectators as a "moral force" operating for football's good. But in

1913 he bluntly stated: "With the wave of popularity that has seized upon all forms of athletic sport, the spectator has become a great problem."⁶²

Camp's loss of control over football's cultural meanings was thus part of a larger loss of control over the game itself. In relation to the questions of power raised by cultural theory, the example of Walter Camp challenges any simple model of manipulation from above. Football experienced no simple populist takeover, of course; in calling the spectator the "great problem" Camp failed to name the entrepreneurs and media that developed and profited from football spectatorship. But once constituted as spectators, ordinary people did in fact exert some control over the sport's development, and even more over its meanings. Spectators became a constituency whose desires had to be accommodated, and an audience that read the game according to its own interests.

Camp's writings also remind us that the power of cultural narratives is not shared, whether equally or unequally, by "authors" and "readers" alone; some of it resides in the text itself. That is, at revealing moments in Camp's writings the game of football itself challenges the meanings that he would impose on it. The best example of this is Camp's account of the 1885 Yale-Princeton game, published initially in the popular children's magazine *St. Nicholas* in 1889, then incorporated into *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports* (1893)—a rare extended anecdote in what is primarily a treatise on football with the usual Campian themes. The story opens in this way: "One of the most magnificent dashes ever made on an American foot-ball field was the run made by Lamar, of Princeton, in the game with Yale which was played upon the Yale field, November 21, 1885." Princeton reputedly had the stronger team that season, but the managerial genius of Peters, the Yale captain who "had done wonders with his recruits," was immediately apparent as the game opened. Stunned Princeton with an early goal, Yale continued to hold its lead well into the second forty-five-minute half and seemed "certain of victory" as the clock wound down, confirming Camp's belief that tactics would defeat mere physical superiority. Camp even uncharacteristically interjected a little novelistic coloring at this point, as he described Princeton's plight: "The sun was low in the horizon, nearly forty minutes of the second half were gone, and no one dared to hope such failing fortunes could be retrieved in the few remaining minutes." But then, with Yale in possession of the ball, Peters faced a crucial decision: he could "continue with the running game and thus make scoring against him impossible and victory certain," or he could "send the ball by a kick down in front of his enemy's goal and trust to a fumble to increase his score." Electing to kick, Peters implicitly defied some sixty previous pages of Camp's advice on proper tactics for achieving victory; but Camp now as

storyteller offered no criticism, and he even made what was for him a startling comment: "A kick was surely the more generous play in the eyes of the crowd." Yale's kick was "perfect," but "Lamar, with the true instinct of the born runner," brilliantly eluded two "inexperienced tacklers," broke into the open field, and raced toward the goal line just beyond the grasp of "Peters, a strong, untiring, thoroughly trained runner" and "the captain of a team which but a moment before had been sure of victory." Building dramatic intensity with all of the novelist's devices (rare in his usually flat, prosaic writing), Camp concluded this way:

How he ran! But Lamar—did he not too know full well what the beat of those footsteps behind him meant? The white five-yard lines fairly flew under his feet; past the broad twenty-five-yard line he goes, still with three or four yards to spare. Now he throws his head back with that familiar motion of the sprinter who is almost to the tape, and who will run his heart out in the last few strides, and, almost before one can breathe, he is over the white goal-line and panting on the ground, with the ball under him, a touchdown made, from which a goal was kicked, and the day saved for Princeton. Poor Lamar! He was drowned a few years after graduation, but no name will be better remembered among the foot-ball players of that day than will his.⁶³

There are elements in this remarkable tale that reinforced Camp's managerial master narrative: captain Peters's early success and the vulnerability of inexperienced tacklers most obviously. But what is the reader to make of Lamar's "instinct of the born runner," with its implication of innate physical superiority rather than "pluck" or "brains"? The better team triumphed, not by brains over brawn, but by "instinct," individual brilliance, and the opponent's unwise decision to kick. And what, finally, of Lamar's untimely death, so unexpectedly appended to his moment of heroics? The motif is a familiar one: the fleetingness of fame, the bizarre twists of fate, the athlete dying young. Familiar ideas, but alien to Camp's usually detached, pragmatic analysis of football. Both Lamar's last-second touchdown dash and his shocking death give a romantic conclusion to what began as a lesson in technical efficiency and ingenious leadership.

The contradiction in the essay runs deep. Camp's master narrative of football made a hero of the corporate manager by wedding an older ideal of individual prowess to the requirements of the modern corporation. Camp's exemplary captains and coaches were not bloodless intellectuals but charis-

matic leaders. In the narrative of the Yale-Princeton game that composite heroic figure is separated into Peters and Lamar—the modern and the anti-modern, the corporate manager and the swashbuckling hero—as if the game itself could not sustain the narrative Camp imposed on it by locating all of the necessary virtues in a single figure. Camp complicated matters further when he called Peters's decision to kick a "generous" one. The captain's goal, as reiterated throughout the book's earlier discussion of training and tactics, was to win. The wise captain exploited every opportunity, took every advantage—attacking the defense, for example, at its weakest point. Camp's was a democratic sporting ethic that presupposed success would go to those who earned it. For the "generous" captain, on the other hand, winning was less important than the thrill of competition, the satisfaction of playing well, the high principle of sportsmanship. The lineage of the "generous" captain would go back through aristocrats' sons on English public-school playing fields to Renaissance gentlemen for whom style was all-important. Those aristocratic gentlemen did not need to win because they had already "won" at life by virtue of their birth; how they played mattered most because the correct manner demonstrated a proper use of their birthright. The "generous" captain in Camp's tale, then, ceases to be the managerial hero, the figure of "pluck," becoming instead a companion to Lamar from a premodern, aristocratic past.

The chief author of American football produced conflicting narratives, apparently without intention. Not just the public audience but the game itself exerted pressure on Camp's narrative of managerial control. Lamar's run became legendary, an event evoked frequently by football reporters in the 1890s and early 1900s as the benchmark against which other great runs were measured. It was remembered not just because of spectators' preference for individual prowess but because of the game's capacity to make the heroic possible. The arrangement of the concluding chapters of *The Book of Football* that I noted earlier—"The Captain and the Coach" followed by "All-Time, All-America Teams"—is ultimately appropriate, then. By juxtaposing the managerial and the heroic aspects of football, Camp touched on a dialectic that informed the game from its beginnings. By assigning the final pages to the exploits of football's greatest heroes, intentionally or not he acknowledged the course football would follow into the future. The culture of celebrity, in sport the singling out of individual heroes from their teammates or mass of competitors, would become conspicuous by the 1920s. The irony of this development, toward which Camp's writings point, should not be lost on us. The hunger for heroes in the modern world is a powerful *antimodern* impulse, but one fed by the most advanced technologies of the mass media and the

techniques of promotion they make possible. Camp's writings also lead to another conclusion: even the most powerful authors of cultural narratives have limited control over their texts.

Notes

- Both rules are quoted in the appendix to Parke H. Davis's *Football*, a meeting-by-meeting account of the proceedings of "intercollegiate conventions, conferences, and sessions of rules committees, 1876 to 1911." Davis's book is an invaluable record of the early evolution of American football and is the major secondary source for my discussion.
- The best succinct accounts of the rise of intercollegiate football can be found in Parke H. Davis's book and, among recent histories, in Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, chaps. 6 and 7. It is a remarkable fact that the only full-scale histories of intercollegiate football remain the anecdotal one published in 1956 by sports-writer Allison Danzig, *The History of American Football*, and a more recent year-by-year journal, Tom Perrin's *Football*. Davis in particular is my guide through the following discussion.
- Harvard Advocate*, May 29, 1874, p. 113.
- Davis, *Football*, p. 467.
- Ibid.*
- Quoted in McIntosh, *Fair Play* p. 80.
- Cochem, "Something New in Football," p. 88.
- Quoted in Dizikes, *Sportsmen and Gamesmen*, p. 311. The baseball anecdotes are found in Thorn, *A Century of Baseball Lore*.
- See Davis, *Football*, appendix.
- Ibid.*, pp. 470, 494, 497. The first is from an 1883 convention; a nearly identical rule emerged from an 1887 convention as well (p. 475).
- Camp, "Football of 1893," p. 118.
- I develop this idea in *Sporting with the Gods*, pp. 10-16.
- Camp, "Football of 1893," p. 117.
- On the consequences of low tackling, see Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, p. 90; and Bergin, *The Game*, pp. 35-36.
- Harvard Advocate*, April 3, 1874, p. 58; quoted in Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, p. 74.
- Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, pp. 76-77.
- Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.
- Davis, "How the Great Football Game Was Played," p. 1.
- On Camp's importance to football, see Martin, "Walter Camp and His Gridiron Game"; Smith, "Walter Camp"; and Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, pp. 83-88.
- Martin, "Walter Camp and His Gridiron game," p. 54.
- Davis, "A Day with the Yale Team."

- See *Independent*, March 22, 1900, p. 715; *New York Times*, November 20, 1897, p. 3; and *World*, November 30, 1893, p. 1.
- Camp, "Methods and Development in Tactics and Play," p. 173.
- See chap. 11 of Smith, *Sports and Freedom*.
- Hollis, "Intercollegiate Athletics," pp. 538-39.
- See Davis, "Evolution of American College Football," in Walsh, *Intercollegiate Football*, pp. 477-79; and Waldorf, *NCAA Football Rules Committee*.
- As I write, the dominance of coaches may be waning, for basic economic reasons. In professional sport, the rise in players' salaries now means that most coaches and managers earn considerably less than the star players they are supposed to control. Even in professional football, where this increase in players' salaries has been smaller and slower, we now have teams such as the Miami Dolphins paying star quarterback Dan Marino \$5 million a year and the coach, Don Shula, \$1 million. In college sports, the lure of these huge salaries has increasingly led undergraduates to leave college for the pros before their eligibility expires, with the result that the players' and the coaches' interests at that level are more obviously at odds.
- Camp, *American Football*, pp. 9-11. Camp had been making the same points since at least 1888 in popular magazines. See, for example, "The American Game of Football"; and "The Game and Laws of American Football."
- Camp "The American Game of Football."
- Camp, letter to the "Editor's Open Window"; "Football of 1891"; and "Interference in Football."
- Camp, "The New Football" (Outlook), p. 174.
- Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports*, pp. 99, 117ff.
- Camp, "Football of 1891," p. 155. Similarly, Deland was a chess master; for him as well as Camp, war and football were both contests of strategy.
- Camp and Deland, *Football*, p. iv.
- Camp, *American Football*, p. 81.
- Camp, "Football of 1891"; "Football at the Colleges," p. 1161; and "Great Teams of the Past," p. 281.
- See, for example, Camp, "College Football" (Outing); and "The Football Season."
- Camp, *The Book of Football*, pp. 333-34.
- See Camp, "Making a Football Team"; and "What Are Athletics Good For?"
- Camp, "Team Play in Football."
- Camp, *Book of Football*, pp. 20, 33.
- Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, pp. 36-37.
- Ibid.*, p. 60; Camp, *Book of Football*, p. 88.
- Camp, *Book of Football*, pp. 196, 202, 212-13.
- Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports*, pp. 139-41.
- Camp, "College Football" (*Harper's Weekly*).

47. Camp, "Making a Football Team," p. 141.
48. Camp, "Heroes of the Gridiron," p. 131.
49. Camp, "A Review of College Football."
50. Camp, *Book of Football*, p. 192.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 344.
54. Camp, "The Current Criticism of Foot-ball," p. 633.
55. Camp, "Football Notes."
56. Camp, "Football of 1891," p. 154.
57. Camp, "Football of 1893," p. 117.
58. See, for example, Camp, "Football: Review of the Season of 1896," pp. 26-29; and "Football of '97."
59. Camp, "Football of '95," p. 176. See also "Athletic Extravagance"; and "Some Abuses in Athletics."
60. Camp, "The Current Criticism of Foot-ball."
61. Camp, "The American Game of Foot-ball."
62. Camp, "The New Football" (*Outing*), p. 17; and "What Are Athletics Good For?" p. 270.
63. Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports*, pp. 142-46.

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