

Winning One for the Gipper:
An Analysis of Football's Impact on the Identity of the University of Notre Dame

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History Senior Thesis
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April 21, 2017

Abstract

For my senior thesis, I will be discussing the early history of football at the University of Notre Dame between the years, 1913 and 1924. During this period, the football team climbed from the ranks of a little known program in South Bend, Indiana to a national powerhouse. Spawning from the success of the football team, the University's self-identification gradually changed over eleven-year time period, from that of an institution, lamenting its own inferiority to one that had an unmatched sense of pride in its football program.

To find these change in attitude within the Notre Dame community, I used primary sources made available in the University's digital collection, such as the *Scholastic Magazine* and *Notre Dame Football Review*. These publications served as an incredible launching point for research, never ceasing to make definitive statements about the identity of the University, whether that was how the endowment lacked sufficient scholarship funds, how the athletic department was collectively insulted following being snubbed of entry by the Western Conference multiple times, or how the national championship of 1924 was a reflection of the environment created by the Notre Dame community. While many sources regarding this era at Notre Dame discuss the success of the football team, how it helped the University ascend to national prominence for the first time, and the subsequent legends that were created revolving around these early years, I seek to discuss how Notre Dame itself reacted to these successes, while also providing larger context to justify these reactions.

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Introduction

Problem

For my senior thesis I will be studying the university of Notre Dame during the period of the 1910's to early 1920's and how the success of the football program shaped the identity of the university community during this time period. Since the mid 20th century, Notre Dame has been perceived as a, if not the premier Catholic university in the United States. While a select few Catholic institutions may claim to be its peer academically, no university, Catholic or secular shares the romanticized, legendary history of Notre Dame's football program. However, as I will show in my thesis, the unmatched mythical status of the university and football program were both results of deliberate efforts by Notre Dame to promote its football program as well as reactions to its newfound success. The beginnings of these legendary traditions are undeniably linked to Knute Rockne, both as a coach and player for Notre Dame. Given this reality, I will examine the pivotal moments in the history of the program between 1913 and 1924, most notably, the 1913 matchup against West Point, the death of George Gipp, and the national championship of 1924, examining how they impacted the University's self-perception, nationwide interest in the team and university, and how those two concepts were intertwined.

Field

In approaching my thesis, I will be studying the cultural history of the United States during this time period as it pertained to American Football played at colleges and universities, as well as anti-Catholicism as it pertained to higher education during this time period. From my research in the field, I will show how the University of Notre Dame's community developed a new sense of self-worth due to the success of their football program and how football, during the

1910's and 1920's was gaining rapid traction nationally, developing into America's passion in the realm of amateur athletics. I will then show that while retroactively Notre Dame was shown as an upholder high moral, athletic, and academic standards, that it was met with mixed reception during the football program's initial rise. Even at the height of their success in 1924, the university was abhorred by many due to the perceived inferiority of Catholic culture.

Sources

With regards to primary sources, I utilized the *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine* as well as the *Notre Dame Football Review*, made available online through the digital archives of the University of Notre Dame. As my two major primary sources, the *Scholastic Magazine* served as a resource providing information regarding the state of academics, politics, and more generally, reactions to the social climate of Notre Dame and the United States in a larger sense in the 1910's and 1920's. With regard to the *Football Review*, this magazine, not only served to discuss the raw statistics and accomplishments of the season, but also discussed how the success of the team was received by the Notre Dame community, while also incorporating the quotes and cartoons of journalists from across the country.

Other primary sources used during this research process included the *Notre Dame Daily*, a student run newspaper, examining the coverage of specifically the 1924 Ku Klux Klan demonstration in South Bend. Another major source I used was the *Chicago Tribune*, pertaining to its coverage of George Gipp's 1920 All-American season.

As pertaining to the secondary source material, I primarily used four written sources to provide the adequate background information: *The Gipper* by Jack Cavanaugh, providing information regarding the life of George Gipp as well as the state of amateur athletics in the early

1920's, *King Football*, by Mike Oriard, providing a context for the function of football in American society in the 1920's, *Rockne of Notre Dame*, by Ray Robinson, illustrating Notre Dame's relationship to the sport of football under head coach Knute Rockne, and *Notre Dame vs The Klan*, by Todd Tucker, discussing how the University community reacted to the marching of the Ku Klux Klan onto Notre Dame's campus in May of 1924. Additionally, I examined the documentary: *A History of Notre Dame Football*, in search of more general knowledge on the subjects of Rockne, George Gipp, etc. Finally, I analyzed the reception of the legends of Knute Rockne and George Gipp some twenty years after the fact in the film, *Knute Rockne, All American*.

Section I: The Notre Dame Inferiority Complex

Origins of Notre Dame and its Early Academic Voids

From its founding in 1842, the University of Notre Dame existed in a state of obscurity during its first eight years. As stated in *Rockne of Notre Dame*, Notre Dame and Catholic universities across the United States were placed on the margins of American high society. According to the author of *Rockne*, Ray Robinson, Catholic institutions were “generally not up to the academic standards of non-Catholic schools,” had little to no admissions standards, and non-existent endowments.¹ While existing on the fringes, Notre Dame catered largely to the immigrant community, taking in many Irish immigrants in the second half of the 19th century. As was retold by Christopher Dawson in his work, *The Crisis of Western Education*, Catholics had limited cultural and intellectual contributions prior to the mid-20th century due to the group being an “underprivileged minority,”² with many coming from peasant backgrounds in places such as Ireland and Poland. From these circumstances, many Catholic institutions such as Notre Dame inherited a cycle of poverty. Lacking in “economic opportunity,” went hand in hand with a lack of “[high] cultural tradition.”³ This sense of inferiority as a Catholic institution in comparison to other more cultured and well-endowed universities, greatly shaped the attitude of the Notre Dame in the years prior to the rise of its football program.

In such Notre Dame sources as the *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine* and *Notre Dame Course Bulletin*, administrators and professors at the University made clear of how this sense of academic void was felt into the 1910’s and early 1920’s. As late as the year 1914, Notre Dame’s

¹ Ray Robinson, *Rockne of Notre Dame*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

² Dawson, Christopher, and Glenn W. Olsen. "Catholic Education and Culture in America." In *The Crisis of Western Education (The Works of Christopher Dawson)*, 71. Catholic University of America Press, 1961.

³ Ibid, 74.

Course Bulletin made it clear how greatly lacking the University was both regarding admissions standards as well as monetary endowment. When discussing admissions standards for the University, the bulletin states that “students who have completed a four year course in High School”⁴ would be immediately placed into a college level course without having to be examined. If an individual did not attend high school, only then was there a need for an admissions test. In the same written publication, the administrators at the University lamented its lack of endowment, longing for an enhanced education for their students, but lacking the funds to do so. When discussing the scholarship funding at Notre Dame, the pamphlet states that “the University has at present only five foundations which yield revenues for the support and tuition of four students annually.” In displaying the existence of these funds, the University was also greatly aware of their relative lack of scholarship resources, expressing that “It is a matter of great regret that the lack of endowment makes it impossible for the University to give [assistance] to a greater number of deserving students.”⁵ While the University struggled to cover operating costs, requiring nearly every student to pay their share full tuition expenses, the community also expressed a need for improved infrastructure, but also lacked the funds. In discussing for Notre Dame’s College of Architecture, the pamphlet describes a gap in the amount of equipment required versus the amount of equipment the University had supplied, stating “the collection needs to be increased faster than the resources of the University will permit.”⁶ By expressing its inferiorities in its own course bulletin, Notre Dame showed its self-awareness of being far from an elite institution, being placed in the cycle of both lacking students and funding to enhance the experience of its community, as well as its national prestige.

⁴ “Regulation Governing Admission to the Colleges,” *Bulletin of the University of Notre Dame: General Catalogue*, April 1914, 20.

⁵ “St. Joseph’s Hall,” *Bulletin of Notre Dame*, April 1914, 18.

⁶ “Equipment,” *Bulletin of Notre Dame*, April 1914, 97.

Notre Dame Sees its Own Academic Potential

By 1920, these issues of inferiority due to a gap in resources were still at the forefront of Notre Dame's self-awareness. In an article from an October 1920 addition, the author highlights how the United States has the potential to be a "Mecca" for higher education following the fall of Germany in the Great War. This article, "A Constructive Policy for Catholic Higher Education," placed in the *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, was the replica of a speech read by Father James Burns, Priest of the Holy Cross, the religious congregation of priests that founded the University of Notre Dame at a Catholic educational summit in New York. In the eyes of this resident Notre Dame priest, in order for Notre Dame and other Catholic schools to be a part of this new world order of education, many challenges must be overcome. For Father Burns, the lack of top students and comprehensive curriculums to complement these young men's scholarship was an issue that needed to take priority in being resolved. In his speech, he stated that "many of [the Catholic universities in the United States] have no medical department"⁷ and that few institutions are committed to building an engineering program. He cites that due to the lack of funding at Notre Dame, the engineering program's development has been a "forty -year process." Another concern is the lack of scholarship produced by the students of the university. Here, he cites the "excellent results" of the scholarship done by Princeton undergraduates, while many at Catholic universities appeared to be a "proportion of young men devoid of intellectual ambition or purpose."⁸ In order to attract more students, the issue of funding was once again a motif, as Burns suggested that scholarship funds should be in place such that any Catholic man who desired to attend a Catholic institution would be given the opportunity.

⁷ James Burns. "A Constructive Policy for Catholic Higher Education." *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, September 1920, 6.

⁸ Ibid, 7.

While there was a conviction by many in the University community that the Catholic style of education was superior to public schooling, Catholic universities across the country lacked critical resources but also the social capital. For instance, the Burns expressed a need for a “Catholic art” to be displayed in contrast to the high culture of protestant America. He believed that stronger academia could lead to this sense of Catholic high culture.⁹ In creating this Catholic high culture, universities such as Notre Dame, the author believed that the United States would be able to secure its place as the leader among education in the western world. In having this sense of identity, Burns acknowledged that Notre Dame and other Catholic universities had the potential to become not only part of America’s mainstream culture but worth of renown across the globe.

Such sentiments regarding the university were not exclusive to the Notre Dame community itself. As claimed by Indiana native Elizabeth Denehie in the *Indiana Magazine of History* in 1916, “who will deny that “complete living” necessitates a thorough knowledge of religion, ethics, and morality as well as purely secular training.”¹⁰ For Denehie, Catholic education provided the perfect space for such an experience, and proceeded to praise Notre Dame as being one of the best places in Indiana, if not “America”¹¹ to provide this educational experience. Similar to the ideas expressed by Burns, the Indiana native was aware of both the humble beginnings of Notre Dame, citing its 1842 endowment as “\$1,500.”¹² In complement to this meager statistic, she also discussed the potential of Notre Dame, bringing to light its

⁹ James Burns. “A Constructive Policy for Catholic Higher Education.” *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, September 1920, 9.

¹⁰ Denehie, Elizabeth. "Catholic Education in Indiana; Past and Present." *Indiana Magazine of History* 12, no. 4 (1916): 337. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27785763>.

¹¹ Ibid, 348.

¹² Ibid, 347

“progress [made] in the arts, letters, science, engineering, architecture...”¹³ over the last few decades.

While lacking the resources, the academic community of Notre Dame held strong convictions in the Catholic education, believing that men of Notre Dame had the potential and moral imperative to become leaders in American society. In the words of senior Walter Clements in an October 1914 editorial, “the false ideals of the day work havoc on men.” For her and others, the concept of a Catholic education implied a well-roundedness. In the eyes of the author, following the principles of “utilitarianism” had led to a society that has valued “expediency over morality,” worshipping a false “spirit” in the process.¹⁴ If the worship of these false gods of ideology persisted, Clements believed that American society would become like that of Rome, who abandoned their principles, indulging instead in “vice and luxury.”¹⁵ Due to these circumstances, he believed that men who graduated Notre Dame and other Catholic universities would be able to “remedy” these societal ills by “upholding the dignity and rights of every man” as made clear in the “Gospel of Christ.”¹⁶

This sense of mission of the Catholic university was also on full display in the editorials, reflecting upon the inaugural year of the University’s College of Journalism, 1914. These freshmen being addressed in these speeches, would, in three years be the first graduating class of this newly endowed college. In this moment, each orator discussed the importance of journalism, as it pertained to Western society. For C.N. Fasset, from the *South Bend News*, a true journalist is

¹³ Denehie, Elizabeth. "Catholic Education in Indiana; Past and Present." *Indiana Magazine of History* 12, no. 4 (1916): 337-50. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27785763>.

¹⁴ “The Catholic College Man in Modern Life.” *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, 9 October 1914, 50.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid, 52.

a “messenger sent to the heathen lands of darkness to bring them to the feet of Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

This attitude was also reflected in by a freshman in the College of Journalism, Harry E. Scott, who claimed that as a “recorder of the world’s work,” a journalist must possess “character – good staunch, loyal Christian character.”¹⁸ For this freshman in the journalism program on its maiden voyage, there was “no better place to accomplish [improving one’s journalistic character] than at Notre Dame.”¹⁹ In the articles published by the University during the 1910’s and 1920’s there existed an overwhelming sentiment that Notre Dame was capable of standing out as torch-bearer for Western Civilization by displaying Christian principles.

Even in this state of singing praises for the potential of the University’s aspiring journalists, there was still sense of self-consciousness regarding the inferiority of the University’s facilities. As proclaimed by Professor John M. Cooney, the two main facets of journalism education are “training and equipment.”²⁰ For the professor, Notre Dame valued training over the quality of equipment. With the knowledge that the University lacked an adequate endowment, these statements signified how Notre Dame sought to compensate for its infrastructural shortcomings by proclaiming the peerless quality of a Catholic education. For Cooney and others, if Notre Dame were training broad jumpers then using a “wet spot in the road”²¹ would suffice equally to using a sandpit. While Notre Dame could not provide the facilities of its peer institutions, the academic community of the University supposed that its graduates would gain a know-how possessed only by history’s most noble and notable leaders.

¹⁷ C.N. Fasset. “Journalism and the Colleges.” *Bulletin of the University of Notre Dame: School of Journalism*, July 1913, 20.

¹⁸ Ibid, 22.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John M. Cooney. “School at Notre Dame.” *Bulletin of the University of Notre Dame: School of Journalism*, July 1913, 30.

²¹ Ibid, 31.

Undoubtedly, there was a firm belief that Catholic teachings were conducive to leading society in a moral direction as Notre Dame saw. However, in the published articles of the University, there was also a self-awareness of how their value system was compared to that of American culture, one that was shifting towards the secularism and utilitarianism previously described. A desire to display Catholic culture as being conducive to producing ideal Americans can be traced once again to the Burns' 1920 address. Here, the notion that Catholic education leads to a stronger sense of American citizenship is alluded to, with an author stating that these schools provide "character-training, through-religious and moral instruction, and-guidance."²² These scholastic traits, in his mind, were what "American parents will always want . . . for their children."

While this priest of Notre Dame discussed how a Catholic education was pivotal to producing ideal Americans, the Notre Dame community discussed how the institution specifically fit into the greater American cultural trends of the time. For example, Notre Dame's *Scholastic Magazine* discussed the idea that Catholic education could serve as the vanguard to ideal Christian American values is also displayed with regard to such issues as Christmas, where the author believes that the "The sons of Notre Dame know well the meaning of Christmas . . . Perhaps in this they are not thoroughly "Americanized," perhaps they are just a little closer to Heaven." In these statements, the author displays how Notre Dame is not only an upholder of Christian values, but also transcendent of values held by Americans, upholding spirituality over materialism, human dignity over utilitarianism, and bringing forth the truth in a world of questionable journalism.

²² James Burns. "A Constructive Policy for Catholic Higher Education." *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, September 1920, 5.

Notre Dame's Immigrant Identity

While the University was aware of its identity as a place with the potential to rise, it also greatly acknowledged its immigrant roots. For example, in discussing politics of the time, a University student penned an opinion editorial in opposition to the League of Nations. In this piece, the write exclaims how the League is a “preservation to all English conquests,” because “England doesn’t gamble. She makes sure of her bets.” Here, the author expresses his concern that the English are devious, refusing to give freedom to Ireland under this new deal.²³ In this statement, the University student highlights how many Notre Dame students expressed a concern for their fellow Catholics in Ireland before they considered how the League of Nations would affect the United States.

This sentiment of feeling solidarity for the plight of Catholics worldwide was also felt, quite literally, close to home. In October of 1920, the State of Michigan was “set to ballot” on the outlawing of parochial education in the state. Here, the author of the *Notre Dame Scholastic* article expressed his disgust for the idea that such a law would be tolerated in the United States, claiming that with the making of the Constitution, he thought Americans were of the “understanding that such issues were closed forever.”²⁴ In these sentiments, the author appeals to the concept that religious toleration is American, while, on the contrary intolerance was a characteristic of “prejudiced citizens who have disregarded authority, rights and reason.” From this fear for existence, there was a desire among Catholic institutions to become mainstream,

²³John Dempsey. “Harding or Cox: The Republican Argument.” *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, October 1920, 50.

²⁴“Muddling in Michigan.” *Notre Dame Scholastic Magazine*, October 1920, 40.

enabled to carry on their traditions, while at the same time have their traditions be considered American.

The Presence of Football

For many students at the University of Notre Dame, the presence of American football on campus contributed greatly to the extracurricular culture of the University. Throughout the early 1900s, as shown in the *Notre Dame Football Review*, there existed not only football at the varsity and freshmen level, but also football competitions among dorms. According to Mike Oriard's account, *King Football*, which discussed the role of media in promoting the game of football during the early 1900's, the sport was popularized at elite American universities at the turn of the twentieth century. For the participants in these new intramural and intercollegiate competitions, the game was upheld as a mechanism for character building. Due to the Anglo-American culture in which the game was developed, football would maintain a status as the preferred game of the educated class, centered around amateur men sacrificing their bodies for the glory of their alma mater, in a sport that was both team-oriented and violent at its core. In having ubiquitous football participation, the University displayed a fondness for the cultural tendencies shared by the likes of Harvard and Yale.

In complement to the playing of football, Notre Dame also displayed an awareness for the need for football to be a "spectacle." As Oriard also points out in *King Football*, spectatorship was considered to be an equally important aspect to the game itself. From its inception, college football teams had received support from fraternities and other student organizations that would turn out to games and cheer.²⁵ This desire for an active cheering section

²⁵ Oriard, Michael. *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 167.

was reflected in a 1914 piece in the *Notre Dame Scholastic*. Written by an unnamed student editor, the author voices his concern for the lack of proper enthusiasm for the varsity squad, claiming that “there ensued only a feeble clapping of the hands” and how “not a single concerted cheer was hear throughout the game.” In this thought piece, the author displayed how the University community was also behind par in its culture of displaying school spirit. While fraternity men organized stable cheer leading sections at other universities, Notre Dame was left lamenting for its lack of “cheerleaders.”

In these moments of perceived inferiority, whether it was regarding gridiron support or academic facilities, the University displayed how it lacked both the financial means, and, at times, student culture to be considered a nationally recognized institution. While the state of Notre Dame could be quantified in such statistics as football participation or endowment, the desire by the University to become a more prestigious institution could also be inferred by the opinions published by the students and faculty of the community. While not explicitly stated, the underlying question of Notre Dame’s status in early 1900’s American society persisted in school-based publications.

Section II: Methods of Promotion, the Creation of Legends

Introduction to the Legend of Knute Rockne

In the 1940 Warner Brothers film, *Knute Rockne: All American*, the director traces the early origins of this great football mind back to his hometown in Norway. Here, a young Knute is seen standing beside his father, as the older Rockne tells his friends of his aspirations to

immigrate to America, describing it as “a land where every child is on an equal playing field.”²⁶ In a subsequent scene, Knute, having recently immigrated with his family to Chicago is shown walking along the road, running an errand when he stumbles upon young boys playing a game of football. After asking if he can play, the young Rockne is told to jump into the game at left end and is immediately a natural. While having thoroughly enjoyed the game, the young Rockne arrives at his home late for dinner to the dismay of his father who begins scolding him in Norwegian. In explaining why he was late for dinner, Knute speaks glowingly about his new favorite sport, football. The young boy then turns to his father, asking him to “speak American,” proclaiming “we are all American now. I play left end.”²⁷ This series of scenes, culminating in this interaction between Knute and his father, show the imagined relationship between football and Americanization in a microcosm. Partaking in the country’s newly found passion was, therefore, quintessentially American. Success at such a game, while also upholding the values of amateurism, gave one a chance to join society’s pantheon.

The entirety of the iconic *Knute Rockne: All American* serves to show various processes of evolution: for its legendary coach, an evolution involving his transition from being an immigrant boy into being an “all-American” man. For the game of football, it captures how the game was constantly innovated, placing Rockne and Notre Dame at the center of this ingenuity, revolutionizing the forward pass and box formation backfield. For the University itself, the film shows Notre Dame catapulted into the National spotlight in football, outwitting opponents on the field, while outclassing society in display of character off the field.

²⁶ *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

²⁷ *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

For many in 1940's America such sentiments regarding Notre Dame appear to be commonplace. By 1940, Notre Dame football established itself as a perpetual contender for national titles with a brief but storied history of legendary stars. However, these legends of Knute Rockne and others, as shown in the film, were part of a concerted effort by the university to manufacture its own reputation. During these early years of questioning the identity of the University, one fact was undeniable: the success of the football team would enable Notre Dame to take steps towards the elusive legitimacy it was seeking. Throughout these earliest glimpse of football success, the specific image of the football program proved to be vital, with University publications constantly invoking the masculinity of the football program, while also displaying how the program held true to the ideals of producing respectable American citizens in the process.

A Search for Football Recognition: The Forward Pass

While Notre Dame as a whole struggled to attain any form monetary or social capital, the football program was also not immune to the University's uphill battle of achieving recognition. In each football review prior to the year 1912, the *Football Review* displayed a common motif: Notre Dame football was unwanted in the Western Conference. The conference, that would become the Big Ten in subsequent years, was formed in 1896 and included many of Notre Dame's regular foes such as the University of Michigan and Northwestern. This sense of exclusion was exacerbated by the general lack of respect that Eastern football powers gave to their "Western" (Midwestern) counterparts. To show their dismay, student contributors took to using acrostic poems to show how they felt "undesirable"²⁸ and created cartoons showing Notre

²⁸ Editorial Staff. "The Immortals." *Notre Dame Football Review*, December 7, 1912

Dame being left out of the metaphorical “party” that was the Western Conference.²⁹ As seen in the *Chicago Tribune*, Western football programs were unable to obtain recognition from men such as Walter Camp who determined All-Americans. To offset these snubs, the *Tribune* annually named an All-Western team, singing the praises of the unnoticed Western football players. While the Notre Dame athletes began to regularly attain these honors,³⁰ along with being considered “champions of the West” on multiple occasions throughout the 1910s, the lack of conference membership was felt as an ultimate insult, offsetting any of these accolades. In spite of the success, the institution was still widely regarded as below the “plane”³¹ of institutions that made up what would become the Big Ten Conference.

Unable to find validation in insular world of Midwestern college football, Notre Dame looked eastward, challenging Army to a game in 1912. While Notre Dame was successful on the field, the impact of their victory was felt off the gridiron as well, with journalists from New York and Chicago singing the praises of the Notre Dame eleven. For the journalists, Notre Dame displayed a mystique: no team executed the newly used forward pass better than they, no successful football program had a smaller population than that of Notre Dame. Retroactively, this moment of victory against West Point may have been considered the seminal moment in the history of Notre Dame Football. Not only did the squad defeat Army in their first ever trip to the east coast but also, the eleven successfully executed the forward pass in route to victory, a tactic underutilized until this game. This first moment of Notre Dame appearing in the national consciousness is memorialized in *Knute Rockne All American* as teammates Knute Rockne and

²⁹ Carlson. Unnamed Cartoon. *Notre Dame Football Review*, December 13, 1913, 383.

³⁰ Cotter, William E. "The Season Just Closed." *Notre Dame Football Review*, December 13, 1913, 375.

³¹ "Turning 'Em Down." *Notre Dame Football Review*. December 13, 1913, 383. This satire article was originally published in the *Indianapolis Star*, depicting an imaginary meeting of representatives of the universities in the Western Conference. Here, the representative of Ohio State scoffs at the idea of Notre Dame and other perceivably inferior institutions joining the conference “until these colleges reach our plane.”

Gus Dorais sit on the shores of Lake Erie, anticipating the game against West Point in the summer of 1913. Here, the film portrays the two practicing the forward pass, all while exclaiming how this would be “the greatest chance Notre Dame ever had.”³² Like many Notre Dame legends, this iconic moment has since taken on a life of its own, with the “birthplace of the forward pass” being memorialized at Cedar Point Beach in Ohio in July of 2013.

For one writer, understanding the forces behind Notre Dame’s success could be found from a quick visit to the campus. Here, as Sullivan of the *Chicago Daily News* wrote, “A boarding school, every class and every "hall," as the various dormitories are called, has its own eleven and it is small wonder that out of all this material the coaches develop good players.” For many Universities, football, as *King Football* illuminates served as a complement to studies in the classroom. Such a notion can be traced back to fierce intramural competitions of Britain’s exclusive “public schools.” The sentiment of the era towards school sanctions sports embodied itself most famously in the words Duke of Wellington, once quoted saying “the battlefield of Waterloo was won on the playing field of Eton.” From this attributed quote, one gathers multitude of meanings: the general, just defeating Napoleon had participated in sports, preparing Wellington many years’ prior for one of the most decisive victories in British military history. Implied also in this statement was how playing sports were essential to an elite education, such as the one received by an Eton. For this reason, the elites of the United States, seeking to emulate their fellow mother country’s culture, always valued intramural and amateur sports, when forming the curriculum during the nineteenth century at the likes of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.³³ Sports in their purest form were a part of the greater whole of forming men of

³² Knute Rockne, *all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

³³ Oriard, Michael. *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 260.

character. It can be argued that football, for many of the programs at elite universities were a display of their academic prowess. Notre Dame, still struggling to find an academic identity, sought to skip a step.

The Legend of George Gipp

In these early years, the football program would display its superiority by promoting the success of its star players, claiming them as ideal Notre Dame men: valiant on the field and moral off the field. The first, and, arguably the most famous example of this promotion was in the form of halfback George Gipp. To this day, the University places him in its collective lure through such moments as Coach Knute Rockne's "Win one for the Gipper" speech. In this speech, the Gipper was forever immortalized in sports lore as making a deathbed wish, while dying of tuberculosis during his senior season. In a quote remembered by all who admire the Fighting Irish, he asked to Rockne to tell his team one day to "win one, just one, for the Gipper."³⁴ However, to understand why the myth of George Gipp is relevant, I examine how this immortalized persona was brought about.

George Gipp had come to attend Notre Dame on a baseball scholarship in 1917, but was of extraordinary athletic talent. According to legends, this talent had not gone unnoticed by Knute Rockne, who saw the 21-year old freshman drop kicking fields, hitting the ball through the uprights from 70 yards out. In this alleged encounter, Rockne proclaimed that he would turn Gipp into a football player. While at Notre Dame, Gipp rose to stardom, averaging eight yards per carry his senior season, a record that holds at the University.³⁵ While regarded in South Bend

³⁴ *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

³⁵ "George Gipp." Notre Dame Football :: UND.COM :: The Official Site of Notre Dame Athletics.. <http://www.und.com/sports/m-footbl/archive/allambios/nd-m-footbl-gipp.html>.

as the key component on the undefeated teams of 1919 and 1920, the halfback finally garnered national recognition, being named to Walter Camp's All-American team in 1920.

While Gipp was portrayed as a dominant force in college football in 1919 and 1920s by both the media of Notre Dame as well as media across the country, his modern legacy of being a man of great gambling habits, was seldom discussed in the process. For Gipp, these habits were likely more out of necessity than of a particular vice. The player, in need of extra money to pay his room and board tuition, used his skills on the billiard table to sustain an income.³⁶ In a world of the 1920's where football was largely associated with amateurism, with its highest form being men playing under the banner of their university.³⁷ For that reason, a portrayal of Gipp as a gambler was both morally reprehensible to some, was well as perceived as a habit of the lower classes. According to Jack Cavanaugh's *The Gipper*, Rockne had close ties with the Chicago media, making sure that Gipp's image would not be tarnished in spite of the player's habits to stay up until the wee hours of the morning gambling on games of pool.³⁸ The results of these connections are apparent in the Chicago Tribune, who wrote daily articles about the Notre Dame Football team during this era of rising success: not once are Gipp's pool playing habits mentioned until his obituary is written in which it stated that the Gipper was a "known billiards player in the Chicago area."

In contrast to this questionable legacy of professionalism and gambling, Notre Dame opted to promote Gipp as both an exemplary football player, and posthumous ambassador to the University. As stated in the football review's memorial of Gipp in 1921, "He has become a

³⁶ Jack Cavanaugh. *The Gipper: George Gipp, Knute Rockne, and the dramatic rise of Notre Dame football*. (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 9.

³⁷Ibid, 43.

³⁸ Jack Cavanaugh. *The Gipper: George Gipp, Knute Rockne, and the dramatic rise of Notre Dame football*. (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 44.

legend at Notre Dame and cannot be forgotten. George Gipp was a true gentleman and friend, of splendid character and high ideals.” In summing up the character of Gipp, the article proceeded to state how “He was a Notre Dame man.”³⁹ From these professions, the author of the article displays the University’s desire to show Gipp as epitomizing the institution as a whole. This legacy of Gipp was once again eulogized in the 1922 addition of the *Football Review*. Here, two years after his death, Gipp was portrayed in the image of a man sitting on his grave stone, with a laurel wreath about his head. Below, the legendary player is eulogized through a poem written specifically for Gipp. In these verses, the author describes the dead young man as meeting the Virgin Mary in the afterlife, “Where all her knights are met in heaven's joys.”⁴⁰ The author continued this theme of a righteous knight, meeting his divine reward, in the verses “They have laid by the mail of many a field. . . To you, newcomer, welcome place they yield Among your peers.” For the poet, George Gipp was a special kind of noble warrior, donning the colors of his alma mater, Notre Dame (Mary) stating that Gipp wore “her amour, battling in her name.” To conclude, the authors assured the lasting legacy of the deceased halfback, writing “But Honor lies immortal in this death.”⁴¹ In these eulogies of Gipp, the University asserted that the young man was a martyr to the cause of playing football for Notre Dame.

The legends regarding George Gipp are particularly fascinating, considering the dramatic contradictions between how he was presented by community members and fans of Notre Dame in 1920 as well as in films such as 1940’s *Knute Rockne, All American* versus how he has been memorialized in years that are more recent in works such as *The Gipper*. In the biopic film about Knute Rockne and the rise of Notre Dame Football under the legendary coach, Ronald

³⁹ “In Memoriam.” *Notre Dame Football Review*, 1921, 30.

⁴⁰ Unnamed Poem. *Notre Dame Football Review*, 1922, 316.

⁴¹ Unnamed Poem. *Notre Dame Football Review*, 1922, 316.

Reagan solidified the legend of Gipp as the ideal American man, a level-minded star with a team-first attitude. While many may never have seen the film, the deathbed wish by Reagan's character to "win one for the Gipper" became so engrained in the American consciousness that Reagan himself used it during his 1980 campaign for the presidency. Gipp's the famous last words were even satirized in the 1980's comedy film, *Airplane!*

Rockne: All American expanded upon of the memory of Gipp laid down by Rockne himself some thirteen years earlier. Rockne himself was famous for perpetuating legends. Following the personal accounts of former players on the 1927 team, Coach Rockne's call to "win one for the Gipper" took place during their annual game against Army. At the time, the team had found themselves in the midst of a relatively disappointing season, already having suffered two losses, placing them out of contention for national title accolades. To motivate his team going into the second half of the game against the Cadets, Rockne summoned his players and asked rhetorically "does anybody know who George Gipp was?" To which the coach received a resounding "yes" from his team of players who grew up admiring the star. In proceeding to recount the beside request of the late Gipp, who had passed away seven years earlier, Rockne may have motivated his Fighting Irish to topple the Cadets by a score of 12-6, there is a distinct possibility that Rockne had formulated the story out of convenience for the moment. According to the film *A History of Notre Dame Football*, coach would regularly tell stories in the locker room prior to games of young boys he had met in the hospital, sick, sometimes deathly ill, who wished only for Notre Dame to win. While "win one for the Gipper" may very well have been derived from a farcical story, Rockne showed once again of his need to perpetuate the team-first, strong character image of Notre Dame's first football legend.

Maintenance of the Image of Notre Dame Football

The identity that Notre Dame was forming for itself on the football field, when few were watching served as a foundation for the moments when the program and university would become fully engrained in the national consciousness. While few may have known of the personal traits of Rockne or George Gipp in 1920, their depiction in *Knute Rockne: All-American* memorialized how the university brought about its own rise through, not only success on the football field, but in the molding of men through a balanced education. The dynamic between coach and player is best described in the dialogue between Bonnie Rockne and George Gipp at the home of the coach. In this exchange, Bonnie exclaims how Rockne admires Gipp's "poise, confidence, and character." Gipp humbly replies back how he is a product of the environment created by the coach, man who "teaches not only about football, but to be good men."⁴² While Gipp's emerging stardom did not receive the sustained fame and notoriety that other Notre Dame players such as the Four Horsemen received, the Warner Brothers production retroactively depict Gipp as the first and central legend of the Notre Dame community: "they'll only be but one Gipper."⁴³

However, no amount of connections to journalists nor retelling of old legends could save the legacy of Gipp from being tarnished in the modern day, with the motif of the gambling Gipper becoming more and more prominent in recent literature. This playboy side of the Gipper legend can be seen in the documentary: *A History of Notre Dame Football*, where the narrator describes how "Gipp was a coach's dream on the field . . . but off the field, he was a coach's nightmare." In *Rockne of Notre Dame* as well as *The Gipper*, these double sided sentiments

⁴² *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

⁴³ *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

towards Gipp are also shown. As Robinson illuminates, “Gipp was football’s first playboy athlete.” In modern accounts, the Gipper at times is romanticized as an athlete, who, in spite of his gambling habits, succeeded as one of Notre Dame’s greatest stars. According one legend, the article by Ray Robinson, “The Elusive Gipper,” Gipp would regularly bet on games, and would usually elevate his level of play based upon how much he had placed on the games.

The contradictory image of Notre Dame football did not begin or end at its first legendary player. The great pioneer, Knute Rockne himself was not immune to similar hobbies of Gipp. While not a gambler, Rockne, according to Cavanaugh would coach multiple semi-professional football teams in his spare time.⁴⁴ However, no such coaching jobs were ever mentioned by Rockne to the public, even if local sources were aware of the football legend’s hobbies. There is a distinct scene in the 1940 Warner Brothers *Knute Rockne* film, summarizing the perceived image of Notre Dame. Following one of the many victories in 1924, Knute Rockne was seen interviewing with various journalists, when a strange man walks into the door, claiming that he has bet three thousand dollars on the Irish for their next game. Upon hearing this Rockne immediately dismisses him, claiming that “gambling has no place in our sport...it has ruined horse racing, boxing, and baseball, but our sport is clean.”⁴⁵ In this moment, the movie served as an example of how the legend of Notre Dame Football had been received twenty years after the fact: the football program and the University as a whole was one that held itself to a standard of promoting amateurism, character and sportsmanship.

To achieve the positive reception from Warner Brothers in 1940, Notre Dame laid the groundwork in the early 1920’s, with the University promoting a message of itself being an

⁴⁴ Jack Cavanaugh. *The Gipper: George Gipp, Knute Rockne, and the dramatic rise of Notre Dame football*. (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 44.

⁴⁵ *Knute Rockne, all American*. Directed by Lloyd Bacon. 1940. DVD.

athletic powerhouse of upstanding principles. An author in the 1922 *Football Review* stated “Colleges and universities have nothing to fear from football prosperity, however, so long as the right standards of sportsmanship are maintained and so long as professionalism- and proselytism are crushed.”⁴⁶ In these declarations, the author both discussed the profitability of football, previously citing the large and growing crowds of the college game, as well as the potential for this institution to go astray if non-amateur elements seep into the nature of the sport. For authors of the *Football Review*, athletes as a whole also served as ambassadors to the school, as well as the star players. In the mind of another 1922 *Review* contributor, “it is certain that [an athlete] is a better man in his field than any spectator, and better able to represent Notre Dame.”⁴⁷

While football prowess was important in bringing the Notre Dame eleven into the spotlight, the University’s insistence upon upholding an image of itself as one that emphasized amateurism was equally important. West Point, at the time that Notre Dame had begun playing them was known for attracting top players from around the country. In fact, many of the athletes that joined the Cadet’s football roster had already played for another university, with some even playing for a full three seasons prior their stint at Army. As Jack Cavanaugh illuminates, this practice of bringing in new players, regardless of their background at other universities was a common practice in the absence of a football governing body. Without such a body, there was instead a form of self-regulation among top universities and their football programs. While the West Point squads were known for their quality of play on the field, their yearly lineup of opponents left much to be desired, having attained the status of a football pariah due to their

⁴⁶ “Football Popularity.” *Notre Dame Football Review*, 1922, 319.

⁴⁷ “What’s In a Cheer?” *Notre Dame Football Review*, 1922, 318.

recruiting practices.⁴⁸ Since Notre Dame also suffered from exclusion in their journey out of obscurity, the potential for a matchup against the infamous Cadets team served not only as a showcase of the competence of Notre Dame football, but also served as a showcase of how the University's squad was able to triumph over Army, despite being at both a size disadvantage and recruiting disadvantage. In defeating West Point, Notre Dame showed the American public how it was able to succeed in football, following the rules, maintaining homegrown stars who were competent in the classroom while also representing the University on the field. If unable to bring the most talented players to their roster, Notre Dame made up for it in strategy, instilling a culture of outsmarting opponents on the field.

However, to truly understand the state of affairs at Notre Dame, one must acknowledge that these manufactured legends of men like Knute Rockne and George Gipp gained traction in the national spotlight years after the legends were prevalent at the university themselves. Notre Dame, for the writers of the time, was first a football phenomenon. Instead of discussing the . In discussing the topic of the origins of these football legends, and their relationship to the perception of the Notre Dame renaissance men seen in *Knute Rockne, All-American*, one must consider the timeline of football and academic identity at the university. While Notre Dame was gaining more recognition in the national spotlight for its success on the football field, these acclaims coincided with a previously illuminated inferiority complex regarding Notre Dame as an academic institution. When the forward pass executed by Dorais and Rockne had become a national phenomenon in 1913, Notre Dame struggled to grant more than five academic scholarships. In 1913, as previously stated, the University was aware of its inferiority, also

⁴⁸ Jack Cavanaugh. *The Gipper: George Gipp, Knute Rockne, and the dramatic rise of Notre Dame football*. (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 12.

lacking the funding for an adequate architecture building. When Gipp propelled himself and his teammates into the national spotlight in 1920 for his stellar game against West Point and his prolific season of averaging 8.0 yards per carry, Notre Dame struggled to attain national academic recognition, struggling with its fellow Catholic universities to attract the top students their institutions.

Section III: Ascension into National Prominence

The Four Horsemen and the Establishment of the Notre Dame Phenomenon

While the legends of George Gipp and the forward pass gained recognition largely after the fact, by 1924, the Notre Dame eleven had garnered enough success to justify the collective respect and amazement from the American public that followed football. Nothing written encapsulated this newly found awe more than the words of Grantland Rice, following Notre Dame's victory over West Point at the Polo Grounds:

“Outlined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden. They formed the crest of the South Bend cyclone before which another fighting Army football team was swept over the precipice at the Polo Grounds yesterday afternoon as 55,000 spectators peered down on the bewildering panorama spread on the green plain below.”⁴⁹

What became undeniable by 1924 was the national phenomenon Notre Dame football had become. From a university perspective, these moments of acclaim showed that Notre Dame did not simply have the potential to become a university recognized for bringing forth “Christian

⁴⁹ “The Four Horsemen.” *New York Herald Tribune*, October 18, 1924.

manhood” and “American citizenship.” Instead, through the success of the 1924 season, a measurable display of university vitality, Notre Dame had become the institution it had only once dreamed of becoming.

A Background in Notre Dame’s Changing Sense of Identity

By 1924, the success of the football team lead the university to display a major shift in its own American identity. While in 1920, the university was greatly aware of the continued marginalization of Catholics in the United States. As previously noted, in the *Notre Dame Scholastic* when writers for the publication express concern for the state of Catholic education in the state of Michigan.⁵⁰ In 1920, the legislature in that state called for a referendum on the legality of parochial education, method of education that, for the community of Notre Dame appeared to be theoretically a strong idea, but in practice, appeared to be lacking. Furthermore, prior to 1924, there was also an awareness of the Notre Dame immigrant identity. In the 1922 football review, these sentiments can still be seen in statements such as referring Notre Dame students as “Swedes, Italians, Germans, or Irish”⁵¹ and referring to Coach Knute Rockne as “the Irish chieftain.”⁵²

By 1924, however, these sentiment regarding immigrant identity nearly dissipated. For example, the visit from the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant Ku Klux Klan is greatly downplayed by the University’s publications in May of 1924. According to the *Notre Dame Daily*, on May 17th, 1924, President Father Matthew Walsh of the University issued an official statement regarding the Klan convening in nearby South Bend. He stated that Notre Dame students should not demonstrate

⁵⁰ “Muddling in Michigan,” *Notre Dame Scholastic*, 54 (1920): 40.

⁵¹ Frank Wallace, “The Rest of the Cantos,” *Notre Dame Scholastic Football Review*, 56 (1922): 297.

⁵² *Notre Dame Scholastic Football Review*, 56 (1922): 309.

against the Klan, expressing that “young blood and thoughtlessness may consider it a duty to show what a real American thinks of the Klan.” In these words, the priest demonstrated a common sentiment among Notre Dame students of the period: how did their own conduct reflect or not reflect an American identity. While according author Todd Tucker, the students of Notre Dame had “grown up hearing lies about their faith,” Walsh proceeded to persuade these students by appealing to a different form of patriotism. The article wasted no time to show how once again, Notre Dame should serve as an example for other University students. While other groups of young men may have attempted to combat the Klan, turning their rally into a “riotous situation,” there was, instead “one duty that presents itself to Notre Dame men under these circumstances . . . to ignore the demonstrations.” While students had adamantly protested the convening of the Klan, taking to the streets upon their arrival, the university once again was aware of its perceived image during this time period. As Ray Robinson elaborates, inciting violence against the Klan would be used as a source of “propaganda,” with the Klan being able to claim that the Notre Dame students “were barbarians who had no control over their emotions.”

These concerns became a reality during the second day of demonstrations from the Klan. After two days of growing and escalated violence between the two parties, Walsh was called into a meeting with the mayor of South Bend, Eli Seebert. In this meeting, the Chief of Police of South bend claimed that the riots were not a surprise “given their history of boorish behavior in our community.”⁵³ According to Todd Tucker in his book, *Notre Dame vs. the Klan*, Walsh’s attempts to defend the actions of the students proved to be futile, with those in the meeting seeking to “further the notion that Notre Dame men had tempers.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Tucker, Todd. *Notre Dame vs. the Klan: how the fighting Irish defeated the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004) 173.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 173.

In order to appease the student protestors, football was used in this regard as a rallying point of the university. Father Walsh called upon no other than Knute Rockne to address the student body. The coach proclaimed “You cannot expect to win a game of football unless the players follow the signals of the quarterback. . . Father Walsh is your quarterback.”⁵⁵ According to Tucker, the speech, which covered the topics of “the virtues of religion, fair play, sportsmanship, and good manners,”⁵⁶ was met with a joyous reception by students. In such a moment, the University reflected its change in attitude with regard to both self-identification and football. While university officials and publications previously displayed a disconnect between the success of the football team and the identity of the community as a whole, Notre Dame used Rockne’s success to help recalibrate student’s sentiments in a time of crisis. Moreover, this moment proved to be a definitive litmus test in the self-identification of Notre Dame. While the Klan was in South Bend to deliberately intimidate the small Catholic university, officials believed that the greatest threat came not from the prospect of physical harm done to students, but, instead to the reputation of the University.

Winning the National Title

While leaders in the Notre Dame community feared that the reputation of the University was in peril during this pivotal moment in 1924, these questions regarding the perception and identity of the university were possibly temporarily silenced during the 1924 football season. This season proved to break records in multiple respects.

Within the *Football Review* of 1924, the most prominent article regarding Notre Dame’s shift in personal identification following the nationally title was certainly, “The ‘Kick’ in Notre

⁵⁵ Ibid, 174.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Dame,” written by a Notre Dame English lecturer, Charles Phillips (M.A.). The specific article is of importance due to the definitive statements it makes regarding the University’s American identity and the moment in which it was written. In this apex of Notre Dame football’s 1924 national championship-winning season, Phillips argues that the title is the result of University Notre Dame upholding values essential to “American Manhood.”⁵⁷

The article begins with the author acknowledging the triumph of the 1924 Notre Dame team, claiming that of the ten million people who attended a college game that year, “9,999,999 of these talked with . . . admiration, exultation, fear, wonder – of Rockne . . . of Notre Dame.” In this declaration, the author is displaying how the Fighting Irish have become a revered program in one of America’s most popular sports: college football. The author then proceeds to question the implication of this success on the gridiron and heightened popularity of the team across the country: “what does it all mean anyway?” For the author this team is so admirable because victory on the football field implies not only physical prowess, but also moral prowess. He states that a team’s success in football is admired because “it means men; it means character.” These traits, in the eyes of the author, are brought about through “sacrifice of time and strength” as well as “practice in self-control.”⁵⁸ For Phillips, these habits which bring about ideal American attributes can be practiced and harnessed at Notre Dame. In these statements, the author preludes his next section, a segment in which he discussed why Notre Dame is the ideal breeding ground for practicing, and ultimately displaying the masculinity and character, so admired on the gridiron and by America at large.

⁵⁷ Charles Phillips, “The ‘Kick in Notre Dame,’ *Notre Dame Football Review*, (1924): 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid

In the second half of this short essay, Phillips elaborated on how the University enables not only its football team, but also its student body to epitomize the aforementioned ideals. For the author, Notre Dame is at the vanguard of American manhood because of the inherent traits of the university. As Philips states, “with forty-five of the forty-eight states in the union represented, Notre Dame has become a sort of America in miniature.” In Notre Dame being a microcosm of its country, it also possesses the “youth, young blood, ideals and aspirations” of the United States. In gaining popularity through football, the author explains how the rest of the country now looks to the university as a symbol of “American manhood.” In the eyes of the author, the University can be seen by all as a confirmation that the United States “still produces the brain and brawn of the sound old stock.” These students not only can be successful in facets of life, but can also “pray to Heaven for its victories,” invoking the “old stock” American idea of sustained faith in God. The author proceeds to expand upon his point in the final paragraph, proclaiming Notre Dame to be a “training camp for men, for American citizenship, for Christian manhood.” He then brings his praise back to specifically the football team for his final point, elaborating that the squad members are a “representative of an ideal that works. . . like a strong leaven in our national soul.” He then specifies that the football team and an ideal American would embody the ideals of “manliness, sportsmanship, chivalry . . . based on the solid foundation of Christian living.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the author seeks to display that Notre Dame not only is a phenomenon of immense popularity, but also one that derived its success by upholding values held dear by Americans.

From a research standpoint, I find this document most fascinating due to the author’s statements about identity. For the author, the success in football has far greater implications than athletic prowess. Instead, the team’s success is a statement of identity for the university. While

⁵⁹ Charles Phillips, “The ‘Kick in Notre Dame,’ *Notre Dame Football Review*, (1924): 50.

other sources may require the use of inference or circumstantial evidence to justify the claim that Notre Dame sought to advertise itself as an ideal American university through its success in football, the author in this article makes those ideas obvious. Not only does he reveal how the University likely identifies itself, but he also portrays a cause and effect: the football team's success has propelled Notre Dame into the national consciousness, but an entire university's culture is responsible for this success.

The significance of this document is also derived from the time in which it was written. As can be seen from the statements made by the author, it was written following the Notre Dame football team's national championship, seen by the University as a collective victory. The article, therefore, can be seen as a culmination of events at the University during the previous years, both relating to and independent of the football team. By the year 1920, the University's Scholastic magazine was very aware of the potential for Catholic educational institutions to become leading universities in the country and around the world. With Germany's defeat in the Great War, the magazine proclaimed that the United States, and, possibly, American Catholic universities could be the torchbearer of education in the Western world.⁶⁰ While four years earlier, the university was aware of what it could become, by 1924, the University was able to advertise what it had become as a result of success in football.

A Mixed Success

However, while Notre Dame may have won the support of many fans for their success on the field, the perception of Notre Dame's inferior academics plagued them still. To finish the 1924 season, the Rose Bowl almost did not come to fruition. Instead, their opponent Stanford University

⁶⁰ Rev. James A. Burns, "A Constructive Policy for Catholic Higher Education," *Notre Dame Scholastic*, 54 (1920): 5.

believed that Notre Dame's academic standards were not up to par with either Stanford or the other schools in the Pacific Coast Conference. However, what became undeniable was the reality that Notre Dame had garnered a national following by 1924, and passing on this opportunity to play such a popular team would be to pass on a large pay-out for participating in the bowl game. With profits for both Notre Dame and Stanford at stake, the game was played on January 1st, 1925 in front of a record audience of 55,000.

Prospects of profit did not attract the Big Nine from inviting Notre Dame. In 1926, in attempting to bid for a spot in the conference looking to expand, the Fighting Irish were snubbed for a second time. Similar to the attempt to keep Notre Dame out of the Rose Bowl game, the universities of the Big Nine did not want to admit a University that fell below conference's high academic standards. However, according to multiple sources, these were seen by Father O'Hara as coded anti-Catholic rhetoric, accusing the conference of holding the belief that a catholic education was inferior to traditional Protestant schooling at flagship state and top private universities.⁶¹

This paradox of being both marginalized, while, at the same time mainstream was undoubtedly reflected in the publications outside of Notre Dame football at the time. In the December addition of the 1924 Scholastic Magazine, where there are moments of jubilation for the success of the football team, there were also countless statements regarding what constituted someone as being "American." For example, even at its 1924 apex, Notre Dame community members acknowledged while there existed a "national body of Notre Dame admirers," and "competent critics" that proclaimed the Irish to be national champions, "The proud and the

⁶¹ Sperber, Murray. *Shake Down The Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football*. (Bloomginton, Indiana University Press: 2002).

prejudiced are singing the praises of Pennsylvania, Yale, Dartmouth, Centre, and the other confined champions.”

While the university undoubtedly identified with the success of the football team, with the 1924 scholastic saying, “Beyond the football interests, which is similar to saying 'outside of space',”⁶² several community members still grappled with what it meant for Notre Dame to be a respected, main stream American institution. The news editor of the magazine, John F. Stoeckly, lamented that “Nowadays most children know the Santa Claus myth much better than the reality of the Christ Child” due to the “irreligious tendency in America.” While several individuals within Notre Dame deeply desired mainstream acceptance, there certainly existed backlash, with Stoeckly questionng “Perhaps in [understanding the Christian aspect of Christmas] they are not thoroughly “Americanized,” perhaps they are just a little closer to Heaven.”⁶³

However, within the same magazine volume, there also existed several strong sentiments regarding how America should conduct itself internationally as well as treat immigrants. While in previous publications, there was a greater sense of solidarity with fellow catholic immigrants, the University, in this moment showed its interest in fitting into the mold making assimilation possible as expressed in the “Kick in Notre Dame.” Disillusioned by the internationalism prior to and following the Great War, student Harry McGuire expressed a longing for policies that best suited the interests of Americans rather than foreign interests. To this degree, he stated “And after contemplating the state of the nations of the earth, and observing their tendencies and characters and ambitions, it is difficult to see any wisdom in discarding the red, white, and blue of nationalism.” With the American government protecting itself and citizens from international

⁶² “The Week.” *Notre Dame Scholastic*, December 1924, 261.

⁶³ “Another Side of Christmas.” *Notre Dame Scholastic*, December 1924, 303.

interests, he also believed its citizens would assimilate best without international conflicts. Otherwise, he worried that “the Italian blood in America would ciy for Italy, the English blood for England, and the French blood for France.” United under one banner, McGuire believed that “America [could] remain American.”⁶⁴ In this piece, a great irony persists: while the student longed for a time when Americans could eliminate their previous identities and unite, the University, in this time period met adversity to this assimilation by both official organizations as well as underground ones.

The ascension to prominence for Notre Dame, was therefore a complicated one. While over time, the University community developed a new sense of self worth derived from the success of the football team, and several sports writers and fans alike witnessed and admired this Fighting Irish phenomenon, respect was not earned in all circles.

Conclusion

The 11-year span from 1913 until 1924 proved to be pivotal in shaping Notre Dame’s sense of self-worth and self-identification. In this time period, the play of football proved to become synonymous with the identity of Notre Dame. Success on the gridiron, playing a sport of

⁶⁴ Harry McGuire. “Peace Through Independence.” *Notre Dame Scholastic*, December 1924, 304.

rapidly increasing popularity, proved to be pivotal, casting a little-known university in northern Indiana into the national consciousness.

In the specific football moments I discuss most prominently in the thesis, each show how the team was received in a different fashion, with each successive moment pointing the university's community away from a sense of inferiority, and toward a newfound sense of validated pride. The success of the forward pass as executed by Gus Dorais and Knute Rockne in 1913 proved to be the first moment of national acclaim for the ingenuity of Notre Dame's play. However, such acclaim soon proved to be overshadowed by the university's sense of inferiority, both with regard to their academics, lacking the funds to incentivize top students to attend the University and athletics, still lacking the respect from the Western Conference to be allowed entry.

By 1920, the death of George Gipp was not overshadowed in the same fashion. While the Gipper was still alive, he proved to perfectly execute the role of Notre Dame's first superstar, with Knute Rockne helping to maintain this image of the half back as a man of "poise, confidence, and character." The untimely death of Notre Dame's first All-American half back proved to be memorialized in university publications in the years after the event, always discussing how Gipp served as an example for other students at the university, and how all of Notre Dame was grateful for the "glory" Gipp had brought to the university. This sense of optimism was also encapsulated in the publications of the university, refraining from discussing the negative attributes and adversity faced by Notre Dame at the time, instead opting to proclaim the potential of an institution on the rise. Every Notre Dame man had the chance to follow in the steps of the great George Gipp, and the University had an infinite potential to becoming a leading academic institution.

Perhaps the climactic moment in this eleven-year history was the achievement of a national championship, the first in the history of the program, in 1924. For Notre Dame, the reception of this accomplishment by its community showed the woven self-identification that had been established between football and the university as a whole. When Notre Dame had garnered the honor of this undisputed title, the football team was seen as a product of the environment created by Notre Dame students. In spite of the Ku Klux Klan attempting to expose the barbarity of the students, Stanford's near refusal to play Notre Dame due to its poor academics, and no invitation of entry from the Western Conference, the University's sense of self-worth had been elevated. No longer was there discussion of what Notre Dame did not have or what Notre Dame could become, but instead proclamation of what Notre Dame "is."

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