The Sewanee football narrative: Christianity, southern honor, and intercollegiate football at the University of the South, 1890--1899

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Abstract
By the turn of the twentieth century, intercollegiate football had developed a loyal following throughout the United States; however, since the game originated and rose to prominence in New England, national attention generally remained focused on the Northeast. As a consequence, historians of early collegiate sport have almost exclusively focused upon Yale, Harvard, and a handful of Northeastern colleges, and have promulgated the idea that football in the nineteenth century supported the ideals of northern industrialism. This limited view fails to recognize the fact that as a cultural text, football told a story that was interpreted by many different groups, each creating their own distinct narrative of the game. Drawn more from the traditions of Victorian amateurism than the prevailing understanding of American gamesmanship, the Sewanee narrative provides a decidedly southern interpretation of football and in so doing it reveals intricate connections between Christianity and honor culture in the South.

Keywords
History, United States, Education, History of, Religion, General

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THE SEWANEE FOOTBALL NARRATIVE:
Christianity, Southern Honor, and Intercollegiate Football
at the University of the South, 1890-1899

BY

J. W. Bozzi
B.A., The University of the South, 2002

THESIS

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This thesis has been examined and approved.

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July 28, 2009
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ABSTRACT

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University of New Hampshire, September, 2009

By the turn of the twentieth century, intercollegiate football had developed a loyal following throughout the United States; however, since the game originated and rose to prominence in New England, national attention generally remained focused on the Northeast. As a consequence, historians of early collegiate sport have almost exclusively focused upon Yale, Harvard, and a handful of Northeastern colleges, and have promulgated the idea that football in the nineteenth century supported the ideals of northern industrialism. This limited view fails to recognize the fact that as a cultural text, football told a story that was interpreted by many different groups, each creating its own distinct narrative of the game. Drawn more from the traditions of Victorian amateurism than the prevailing understanding of American gamesmanship, the Sewanee narrative provides a decidedly southern interpretation of football and in so doing it reveals intricate connections between Christianity and honor culture in the South.
INTRODUCTION

In 1856, Leonidas Polk, the Episcopal Bishop of the Southwest and future major general in the Confederate Army, expressed the "urgent need, in the Southern States, of a University of high order, under the distinct sanctions of the Christian faith."\(^1\) Polk had become distraught about the rising educational and ecclesiastical influence of the North and, in a letter to Bishop Stephen Elliott, expressed his fear "of the Northern domination in our schools and pulpits." The sons of the South, the Bishop insisted, "should, while being protected from the taint of northern fanaticism have access to the highest educational advantages."\(^2\) To address this need, Polk reached out to the ten bishops of the Southern dioceses to found a distinctly southern university under the auspices of the Episcopal Church.

The first meeting of the Board of Trustees was convened on July 4, 1857, and in October of 1860 the cornerstone of the University of the South was laid in Sewanee, Tennessee. Though the Civil War delayed the opening of the university and took the life of its founder, Bishop Charles T. Quintard took up Polk's cause, and, as his biographer Arthur Noll wrote, "reclaimed [Sewanee] for the King of Kings and for the cause of Christian education."\(^3\) In rebuilding Sewanee, Quintard insisted that the "influence of God's holy Church must be the all-pervading, all-controlling and governing power by which discipline

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2 Polk to Bishop Stephen Elliott, 20 August 1856 (typescript), Leonidas Polk Letters.

shall be maintained, and the whole school-life be ordered.” Second only to its Christian identity was Sewanee’s distinctively southern character. The University’s first faculty included four former Confederate generals; the student body claimed the sons of numerous Confederate officers and the grandson of famed South Carolina Congressman, Preston Brooks. Born of Episcopal bishops and Confederate generals, Sewanee was built upon the twin pillars of Christian virtue and Old South tradition, and by the late nineteenth century, this Episcopal and Confederate heritage had become firmly established as the core of the university’s identity.5

By 1890, American intercollegiate football had become popular across the United States. As many as 40,000 spectators viewed big games in New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Boston and Philadelphia. The New York social elite had made the Thanksgiving Day intercollegiate championship game—replete with banquets, parties, and parades along Fifth Avenue—the first event of the winter season. Box seats regularly sold for ten times the cost of a major league baseball ticket and were hard to obtain. By the mid-1890s, it was estimated that, between high schools, colleges, and athletic clubs, each year over 120,000 men annually competed in over 5,000 Thanksgiving Day games.6

Sewanee fielded its first intercollegiate football team in 1891, and by 1892 the campus and community—students and faculty alike—had become dedicated followers and

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5 The founding of the University and the establishment of its Old South and Christian identities is discussed in Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 144-51.

avid supporters of the university's ventures on the gridiron. Though by this time football had weathered initial crises and had attained a position of social prominence in New England, many southerners were skeptical of the Yankee import. Despite its eventual standing as an important southern institution, intercollegiate football was initially considered an agent of northern progressivism, linked to the New South movement, through which northern values were being introduced and disseminated throughout the post-Reconstruction South. Historian Andrew Doyle has investigated the initial southern opposition to football, finding objections from evangelical Christians who found the game and its accompanying mores irredeemably sinful and from political conservatives wary of the nationalizing trends of the New South boosters. Doyle argues that only later did southern schools invent football traditions to tie in to a chivalric vision of the Old South. This earliest opposition was, therefore, founded upon the same combination of Christian and Old South virtues that formed the core of the Sewanee identity. Yet, at Sewanee, where students were just as "southern" as those who opposed football and were equally, if not more, enveloped in a Lost Cause understanding of the South, football was an immediate success.

Over the course of the 1890s, Sewanee developed the early connection between Christianity and football that has become such an important part of college football in the South. The university's southern identity was never compromised by this Yankee institution, nor was its Christian identity challenged by what some southern evangelicals considered to be the evils of football. Instead, Sewanee men connected football to elements of both Christianity and a southern honor culture, and as a result Sewanee football found great

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success and considerable support, all while maintaining the university’s position as “the last stronghold of the Old South” and its mission of producing Christian gentlemen.  

As football spread around the country it became the subject of multiple narratives and took on many meanings. In Reading Football, Michael Oriard’s cultural study of the game, he argues that, while the game of football itself was a “primary” cultural text, the secondary texts—the various reports, articles, and accounts of the game—created a wide range of football narratives, depending on how different groups understood the game and themselves. Thus, football, according to Oriard, held distinct meanings for different populations.  

While southern Baptists and Methodists denounced intercollegiate football as both immoral and an agent of the progressive national culture of northern industrialism, Sewanee’s combination of theological liberalism and social conservatism enabled the Episcopal institution to support the game, while the university’s southern identity encouraged football at Sewanee to develop cultural implications distinct from those that had prevailed among northern colleges. Football at Sewanee thus became a middle ground where Christianity and primal honor found simultaneous expression.  

Historian Ted Ownby, who has investigated the relationship between southern honor and evangelical piety, argued that the two were irreconcilable. The sinfulness of southern honor culture stood in direct opposition to the piety of evangelical Christianity. While men could freely move between these two worlds, they remained distinct cultural

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spheres. It seems that football would have contradicted Sewanee’s twin pillars of Christian virtue and southern honor, but in fact, the narrative of football at the University became an expression of both of these ideals. Sewanee students and faculty, clergy and laity, expressed their Christian and Confederate beliefs through football, thus remaining true to those ideals which led Charles Reagan Wilson to call the University of the South the “most potent Lost Cause institution.”

With its dual Christian and Confederate identity, the University of the South seems like the last place in which football would flourish. After all, Sewanee was, as John B. Boles claimed, one of the “citadels of conservative Confederate mythology,” and, as Wilson observed, a “major component of the Lost Cause religion.” Nevertheless, football at the university did not meet the religious opposition that Doyle found at other institutions, nor did it result in the sharp distinction between Christian observance and masculine recreation that Ownby saw in hunting or gambling. Instead, the narrative of football at Sewanee came to be seen as an expression of the University’s founding principles. The University Chapel contains shrines to football records and Confederate soldiers; the faculty was comprised of bishops turned generals, priests turned soldiers, and soldiers turned scholars; and football rosters contained the sons of Confederate generals and future bishops of the South. Contrary to the prevailing trends in the late-nineteenth century South, the Sewanee football narrative provided a common link between southern honor and Christian virtue.


It is a difficult task to compare the Sewanee football narrative with wider southern attitudes about the game because there is a paucity of scholarly sources about intercollegiate football in the nineteenth-century South. With the exception of Doyle, historians have written very little about southern intercollegiate football before 1925. While there have been a few articles about early sport in the South, little of that is specific to football; the larger works about the history of football provide only cursory glances at the early South. Ronald A. Smith’s *Sports and Freedom*, for example, examines the rise of “big-time” intercollegiate athletics from the second half of the nineteenth century to the formation of the NCAA in 1906, but he barely addresses sport in the South. Rather, Smith reinforces the idea of the centrality of Harvard and Yale to intercollegiate sport, making only occasional mention of football outside of the Northeast. When he does, it is most often to assert the influence of Walter Camp and eastern intercollegiate forms. Similarly, in *College Football*, John Sayle Watterson recognizes the southern game only after Alabama’s victory in the 1926 Rose Bowl launched the team, and thus the region, into national prominence. With such a dearth of material on southern football in the nineteenth century, Doyle’s studies of evangelical opposition to the sport stand out in a nearly empty field. Nevertheless, the attitudes that provide essential context for the Sewanee football narrative—the unique combinations of Christianity and honor culture—have been thoroughly examined by historians.

Southern honor was a central aspect of the Sewanee football narrative. In *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash examined the ways in which notions of southern honor created rituals out of disputes, physical combat, drinking, and gambling, fostering a society that pursued rough-and-tumble recreations while simultaneously striving to maintain an air of aristocracy. Cash sought to strike down the idea of separate Old and New Souths, claiming instead the
unity and continuity of the southern mind, or more accurately, the southern temperament, epitomized in an ideal type he referred to as the “Man at the Center.” According to Cash, the “Man at the Center” exhibited simultaneously the qualities of both the English squire and the rustic backwoodsman. While the English aristocracy provided a model for proper behavior and pursuits, the Man at the Center, marked by the rough and intense individualism of the frontier, was far removed from the strictures of an actual aristocracy. Still, Cash argued that while their culture “was essentially simpler, less formal and highly finished,” and that “often the homespun of the frontier showed through”; it, nevertheless, “did capture much of the beautiful courtesy and dignity and gesturing grace of its exemplar.”13

Bertram Wyatt-Brown built upon Cash, claiming that southern honor juxtaposed gentility and “primal” honor. Drawn from the English, Christian tradition, gentility was a highly refined form of honor that combined moral uprightness with high social position. The southern understanding of gentility claimed sociability, learning and piety, as required traits. While genteel notions were a common component of southern honor, the strict tenets of gentility were tempered by the visceral precepts of primal honor—a tradition immortalized in the personal valor, valiant action, ferocity of will, and romantic characteristics of Cash’s Man at the Center.14

According to Wyatt-Brown, the Southern sense of honor dictated that reputation, identity and self-worth were based upon the opinions of others. Reputation, and thus honor, was revealed through hospitality, gambling, and the duel—each interaction allowing a man to exhibit his mastery over another. “Each ritual encounter in this sequence was more


antagonistic than the previous one, but all three helped Southerners determine community standing and reaffirm their membership in the immediate circle to which they belonged.\textsuperscript{15} Elliott J. Gorn examined the particularly gruesome forms of ritualized combat practiced by the lower classes who had little interest in the more aristocratic tests of honor. “Eye gouging,” Gorn argued, “was the poor and middling whites’ own version of a historical southern tendency to consider personal violence socially useful—indeed, ethically essential.”\textsuperscript{16} By the turn of the nineteenth century the planter class had generally sought to distinguish themselves from backcountry brawlers by adopting the forms of the English aristocracy. Regardless of class, however, southerners maintained a common reverence for various forms of competition that allowed participants to demonstrate their prowess to one another. It seems reasonable to think that intercollegiate football would be in line with the forms of ritualistic combat described by Gorn, Cash, and Wyatt-Brown.

In \textit{Honor and Slavery}, Kenneth S. Greenberg argued that mastery and the resistance to submission were key elements of the honor culture that distinguished white men from slaves. Claiming that the duel was the “central ritual of antebellum life,” he argued that the \textit{code duello} embodied “many core values of white society,” reflecting images of domination and subordination, as well as mastery over death. This desire to master death supported the martial attributes of southern society. Mastery, Greenberg argued, was a critical component of honor culture, and men of honor drank, gambled, hunted, fought, and even exchanged

\textsuperscript{15} Wyatt-Brown, \textit{Southern Honor}, 339.

\textsuperscript{16} Elliott J. Gorn, “‘Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch’: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 90 (February 1985), 42, 21-3.
gifts as exhibitions of mastery—whether mastery over death, over chance, or over another individual. Here too, football seems to fit.

The relationship of honor to southern religion has been interpreted differently by these historians. Cash argued that, while the Episcopal church was prevalent among the old colonial aristocrats of the seaboard districts, High Church intellectualism failed to resonate with the romanticism of the frontier. “What our Southerner required,” Cash argued, “was a faith as simple and emotional as himself... a God whose representatives were not silken priests but preachers risen from the people themselves.” Thus Cash linked the spread of southern evangelicalism to the common sense of romanticism originating on the frontier. Wyatt-Brown, however, observed that the Anglicanism of the colonial era was fully compatible with blood sports, drinking and other pastimes of the Man at the Center. In Subduing Satan, his work on post-Civil War southern culture, Ted Ownby argued that it was evangelicalism that distanced religion from the violent impulses that had previously spurred masculine recreation. “Southern honor,” Ownby argued, “demanded self-assertiveness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness. While home life was generally quiet and peaceful, male culture was often loud and exciting.” In his examination of the relationship between the “fighting white South and the religious white South,” Ownby argued that evangelical Christianity simultaneously strengthened and stifled the rough-and-tumble recreations, that, according to Cash and Wyatt-Brown, characterized antebellum men of honor. Functioning


18 Cash, The Mind of the South, 58.

19 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 101; Ownby, Subduing Satan, 12.
as polar opposites, "aggressive, fun-loving male impulses and a deep evangelical piety worked to intensify each other." 20

While Ownby claimed that, in the South, the irreconcilable natures of Christianity and honor culture strengthened each in opposition to the other, Clifford Putney showed that, from 1880-1920, the ideas of "muscular Christianity" forged a close bond between evangelism and athletics. 21 Putney argues that "muscular" Christians were fearful of the effeminizing effects of the "cult of domesticity" (the same values that Ownby identified with home life) and thus sought to instill their evangelism with masculine imagery and the principles of the strenuous life. Putney maintained that while muscular Christianity made significant headway in the North, the movement was slow to catch on in the South, as Methodists and Baptists clung to the teachings of St. Paul who warned that "bodily exercise profiteth little." 22 Andrew Doyle too, claims that this Pauline doctrine was a cornerstone of the early southern opposition to intercollegiate football.

According to Doyle, football "survived intense evangelical opposition because many of its strongest partisans were cosmopolitan members of the urban business elite and middle class who were eager to break what they saw as the oppressive and reactionary influence of religion on southern life." To Doyle, the increasing popularity of southern intercollegiate football in the twentieth century was a result of the "growing secularization and liberalization of southern culture." 23 While this may very well be an accurate analysis of the responses of Methodists and Baptists at Auburn or Alabama, Sewanee's unique mixture of Broad Church

20 Ownby, Subduing Satan, ix, 1.
22 1 Timothy 4:8 (AV).
23 Andrew Doyle, "Foolish and Useless Sport: The Southern Evangelical Crusade Against Intercollegiate Football," Journal of Sport History 24 (Fall 1997), 335.
evangelism and High Church intellectualism created an atmosphere in which intercollegiate football found significant ecclesiastical support. The fact that the evangelicals at Auburn and Episcopalians at Sewanee understood football in different ways supports Oriard’s argument that various narratives of football reflected a wide range of understandings of the game.

The Sewanee football narrative provides new insight into the origins of intercollegiate football in the South and also shows how a decidedly Christian and southern institution reinterpreted a northern cultural form and made it compatible with its own understanding of the world. Historians of football have mostly eschewed the nascent years of the southern game and by focusing so prominently on northern schools as source material, they have generally agreed with Walter Camp that football was a staging ground on which the future captains of industry would hone managerial skills and internalize the precepts of Social Darwinism. Such an interpretation of the game is far too limited. The primary text of intercollegiate football was a common event that captured the imagination of nineteenth-century America, but there was no single, comprehensive understanding of the game. The Sewanee football narrative reveals that in a one corner of the South, football meant something very different. Football was embraced by former Confederates and clergy at the University of the South, not because of a liberalization or secularization of southern culture, nor in emulation of northern mores, but rather because they saw it as a legitimate expression of antebellum values. The Sewanee football narrative rejected the prevailing Yankee understanding of the game, and in doing so made football an acceptable pursuit for Christians, for southerners, and for a university that remained “the stronghold of Southern aristocracy.”

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24 Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 145.
"The games of our college days and sports of our manhood are too often viewed in light of mere athletic spectacles, where victory is the sole desideratum. Those who give the subject a little serious consideration, however, recognize the lessons of the play-ground as having most lasting and most beneficial effects." —Caspar Whitney, 1895

CHAPTER I

THE PURSUIT OF VICTORY: GAMESMANSHIP, SPORTSMANSHIP, AND THE SEWANEE FOOTBALL NARRATIVE

By the 1890s, three major narratives shaped the way Americans thought about intercollegiate football. Caspar Whitney, the preeminent sports journalist of fin de siècle America, claimed the English concept of gentlemanly amateurism as the proper sporting model; Harvard president Charles W. Eliot cited an earlier construction of Victorian amateurism as the best course. The dominant model, however, was that of Yale player, coach and “father of American football,” Walter Camp. By the close of the nineteenth century, most football programs ascribed to Camp’s understanding of football as a scientific struggle in which competing teams engaged in a single-minded pursuit of victory. While winning through science generally took precedent over sport through chance—a distinction that historian Ronald A. Smith cites as the difference between British sportsmanship and American gamesmanship—Sewanee aligned itself more closely with the traditions of English amateurism than with the dominant American ideology.


2 New York Herald, 28 November 1887, 6.

While the November 6, 1869 match between New Jersey rivals Princeton and Rutgers is generally recognized as the first intercollegiate football contest, that game bore little semblance to what we now know as American football. This earliest incarnation of American intercollegiate football was strictly a kicking game, played by two sides of twenty-five, on a field 500 feet long by 300 feet wide. Players were prohibited from throwing or carrying the ball, and blocking and tackling were forbidden. From this first match in 1869 to the mid 1870s, American colleges favored association football or, as it is more commonly known in the United States, soccer. This changed in the mid 1870s when Harvard, after a pair of contests with McGill University in 1874, discovered a preference for rugby. The Crimson later played the first American intercollegiate rugby match against Tufts University on June 5, 1875, and a pair of matches with Yale in 1875 and 1876 convinced their New Haven counterpart to adopt the running and tacking game of rugby.

American football rules remained consistent with those of rugby until the 1880 Intercollegiate Football Association Rules Committee meeting. The committee adopted two changes that had been proposed by Yale’s Walter Camp the previous year. The following year teams would play with the now familiar eleven men on a side, and a fixed line of scrimmage replaced the somewhat more haphazard rugby scrum, thus allowing a team to retain possession after the ball-carrier had been brought down and allowing set plays and organized tactics to emerge out of the disorder that Camp had found in rugby. As a result


of this, offenses became highly conservative after teams realized that they could retain possession throughout the half and, at worst, secure a scoreless tie. Using what was known as the "block game strategy" or "closed game," offenses typically refused to do anything that might cost them possession of the ball. To address this problem the committee established the rules of down and distance in 1882, declaring that the offense must surrender the ball if it failed to advance five yards over three consecutive tries. Down and distance changed not only football strategy, but also the way in which American sportsmen understood the game. Having eliminated an element of risk that made rugby a more free-flowing game, in the 1880s teams and coaches bent on victory sought to advance the ball the required five yards in the safest, most conservative way possible.

The popularity of the closed game among players and coaches was inextricably linked to the rising tide of professionalism in American sports. Though Camp's role as Yale's coach was largely informal and unpaid (he worked as a salesman and eventually became president of the New Haven Clock Company), his success at Yale became a model for subsequent teams, and soon after the Victorian understanding of competition gave way to the single pursuit of victory. By reducing, as much as possible, the element of chance, Camp and Yale ushered in an era of "scientific football," in which teams advanced the ball by concentrating the maximum possible force on the single weakest point on the opponent's line. The scientific football of the closed-game era was an exercise in mass and momentum.

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6 In addition to Nelson, John Sayle Watterson examines the problems with the block game strategy in the first chapter of College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

7 In 1905 the yardage for a first down was increased from five yards to ten, in 1906 the forward pass was legalized, and in 1912 the rules committee added a fourth down. Nelson, Anatomy of a Game; Smith, Sports and Freedom, chapter VII: "The Americanization of Rugby Football." and Baker, Sports in the Western World, 129-33.

8 While occasionally in reference to individuals who either received payment for play, or instances of "tramp players," in this thesis, the use of "professional" or "professionalism" more often refers to the quality of individuals engaging in the behavior that would be expected of a professional, most frequently the single-minded pursuit of victory.
Outside runs became unnecessary risks, and, since the game was now primarily played between the tackles, size was at a premium. In “Foolish and Useless Sport,” historian Andrew Doyle examined the “intense hostility” with which a generation of pious southerners approached this “scientific” version of intercollegiate football. Beginning in 1892 and lasting almost forty years, Doyle argued, southern evangelicals denounced the violence, brutality, and unchristian nature of the game.

Sewanee was able to avoid such disapproval because it never fully adopted the predominant northern construction of football. Though incorporating elements of the three major narratives, Sewanee’s image as the “Stronghold of Southern aristocracy,” its adherence to the classical curriculum, and close ties with the Anglican Church and English university tradition, all kept Sewanee more closely linked to the more British ideals of Caspar Whitney and gentlemanly amateurism.

Football began at Sewanee in 1891, in much the same way that it first emerged at Harvard and Yale, evolving out of traditional play, and for no purpose other than an enjoyment of the game. The university was founded in 1858, and from its earliest days, Sewanee students regularly played games of association football, in which a round ball was kicked at a goal. The Sewanee students used the old Hardee baseball field, which had been used by the Sewanee nine in its first intercollegiate competition in 1875, and played against themselves by a haphazard set of rules that tended to change with every match. After one such match in the fall of 1891, after most of the players returned to campus, a group of eight or ten students remained on the field, eager to continue play but left without a ball. Ellwood

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Wilson and Alex Shepherd, who had played football at the Lawrenceville School in Princeton, New Jersey, offered to teach the group a new game.\textsuperscript{11} Though learning the game in Princeton's back yard, Shepherd and Wilson were hardly football evangelists. Shepherd had been at Sewanee for a full year, and Wilson four years, before introducing the game, and it seems that neither had seen any considerable playing time as schoolboys. The university annual, the \textit{Cap and Gown}, noted that with the exception of their captain, Shepherd, “who had played a little in a Northern preparatory school,” Sewanee had no experience with the game.\textsuperscript{12}

Nevertheless, Shepherd and Wilson improvised a ball from a small piece of a weathered tree limb and began to instruct the core of the first Sewanee eleven in the rules of the game. They practiced the snap back from center and ran through some basic plays, and the students quickly developed a preference for the running and tackling game. The next day, using a round soccer ball, a larger group of students scrimmaged on the University campus. The game was well received, and over the next few weeks players bought their own uniforms—close-fitting white canvas jackets that laced up the front and were emblazoned with a purple “S” on the left chest, lightly padded white canvas pants, and high purple socks—and attached leather cleats to their shoes in preparation for Sewanee’s first intercollegiate game on November 7, 1891 against Vanderbilt University.\textsuperscript{13}

Vanderbilt had played their first game the previous year, a 40-0 drubbing of the University of Nashville, and their experience was evident as they handily defeated Sewanee, 22-0. Despite the loss, Sewanee remained optimistic, and two weeks later they faced another


\textsuperscript{12} 1892 \textit{Cap and Gown}, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{13} Chitty, \textit{Sewanee Sampler}, 90.
upstart team, the University of Tennessee. After handing the Knoxville team their first loss, 26-0, Sewanee faced Vanderbilt once more, losing 26-4 on Thanksgiving Day. Despite their 1-2 performance, the Sewanee team remained optimistic. At years’ end, the *Cap and Gown* recalled that the football season, “while perhaps not so gratifying as one could wish, will nevertheless show many grounds of encouragement. In the first place a foot ball team was organized last fall, and though only one game out of three was won, nevertheless a start was made, and the new game is firmly established, the mountain [as they often called Sewanee] taking kindly to it at once.” Encouraged by Sewanee’s performance in its inaugural season, the yearbook claimed, “Experience is all that is now needed.”

**Gamesmanship and Sportsmanship**

Early collegiate sport in America initially drew upon the system established at the British public schools, and the traditions of Oxford and Cambridge in the Victorian era. Yale and Harvard were quick to adopt from these British sources the Victorian conception of competition. Historian Richard Holt has identified three main characteristics of the Victorian construction of competition: fair play, gentlemanly ease, and the ability to win or lose with grace. Relegating victory to secondary importance, Victorians were more concerned with the character development that they closely linked to athletic competition. As British headmasters in the 1830s and 40s began to turn away from their earlier rejection of rough games and integrate athletics into the regular school curriculum, sports began to emerge as the testing ground of character.  


amateurism, character was most significant in the Victorian understanding of fair play. To the Victorians, Holt argued, “fair play meant not only respecting the written rules of the game, but abiding by what was generally understood to be the spirit of the game.” In *Sports and Freedom*, Ronald A. Smith identified a similar understanding of competition in the English rugby ethic, which asserted that the “spirit of the rules was as important as the rules themselves.” With attention focused less on results than on how the game was played, proper amateurs competed in an honest and straightforward manner.\(^{16}\)

Smith described the British sporting model of Oxford and Cambridge as one “where a gentlemanly game of enjoyable competition transcended ‘victory at all costs.’” This view of competition was well in line with the genteel notion of gentlemanly ease. Holt has maintained that, for the Victorians, “hard training was bad form,” and “practising too much undermined natural grace and talent. For amateurs were above all gentlemen, and gentlemen were not supposed to toil and sweat for their laurels.”\(^{17}\) Though this indifference toward victory was indicative of Oxbridge sporting attitudes in the 1840s and 50s, according to historian J. A. Mangan, such ideals were no longer a feature of English amateurism in the late Victorian era. In *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, Mangan revealed the brutal nature of athletic competition in the English public schools. However, even in the midst of violent competition, British amateurs maintained the values of sportsmanship, which placed supreme importance on adhering to both the letter and spirit of rules, over those of gamesmanship, which emphasized the use and manipulation of the rules to one’s advantage. Athletes in the English public schools regularly gave their blood and sweat in a pursuit of victory, but still held fair play and honest competition in higher regard than simply


winning or losing. Ultimately, English amateurism did not render winning unimportant, but rather maintained that it was preferable to give a noble effort and fall short of victory than to compromise gentlemanly ideals for the sake of victory.\textsuperscript{18}

While American intercollegiate competition was founded on the earlier Victorian model, college football developed and rose to prominence under the tutelage of Walter Camp and his revised understanding of competition. Yale football in the Camp era experienced a level of dominance unequaled in American intercollegiate sport, because, as player, captain, advisor, and coach, Camp struck down the vestiges of Victorian amateurism and organized his program around the understanding of American gamesmanship that made victory the primary goal. Though he would often acknowledge the importance of elements of character-building and publicly espoused an amateur code in football, Camp, nevertheless, advised his players to “make it your sport to win.”\textsuperscript{19} In supplanting gentlemanly ease with hard work and sacrifice, Camp was more concerned with victory than the creation of virtue.\textsuperscript{20}

By the 1890s Yale and Camp had come to serve as the model for a successful football program. Over the course of Camp’s thirty-four years with Yale football, the Elis won over ninety-five percent of their games and were defeated only fourteen times in over three hundred games, a record that Smith calls “the greatest record in intercollegiate history.”\textsuperscript{21} As Yale experienced an unparalleled dominance over intercollegiate football in the 1880s and 1890s, programs around the nation sought to emulate Camp’s pattern for

\textsuperscript{18} Mangan, \textit{Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School}, 196-205; Smith, \textit{Sports and Freedom}, 41.


\textsuperscript{21} Smith, \textit{Sport and Freedom}, 84.
success. For example, Princeton, a perennial rival, sought to emulate Yale after the Elis handed them a 32-0 drubbing in the 1890 game.\textsuperscript{22}

Perhaps the most vocal opponent of the changing nature of the game was Harvard president Charles W. Eliot, who clung to the early-Victorian understanding of amateurism. He worried that, with the spread of professional attitudes, football would continue to “become brutal and brutalizing [as] is the natural tendency of all sports which involve violent personal collision between the players.”\textsuperscript{23} Eliot never supported the win-at-all-costs attitude that, in the wake of Yale’s success, had become the standard in American intercollegiate football. In his own days as a rower for the Crimson, he had written to his fiancée, “I had rather win than not, but this is a mighty little matter whether we beat or are beaten—rowing is not my profession, neither is it my love—it is only recreation, fun, and health.”\textsuperscript{24}

In his 1892, 1893, and 1894 reports to the Harvard trustees, Eliot argued that, as the narrow pursuit of victory supplanted the ideals of proper sportsmen, intercollegiate football was becoming susceptible to increasing “evils.” The Harvard president maintained that “the game of foot-ball grows worse and worse as regards foul and violent play, and the number and gravity of the injuries which the players suffer.” Eliot insisted that the game had degenerated into a loosely-controlled brawl in which foul play was obscured by the massive


\textsuperscript{23} \textit{New York Evening Post}, February 2, 1894.

convergence of opposing teams that ignored the principles of gentlemanly conduct and
looked for opportunities to benefit from the outright violation of rules.  

Eliot argued that the single-minded pursuit of victory “made [football] more and
more dangerous, without making it more skillful or more entertaining.” According to Eliot,
the closed game damaged the body, and the sheer size needed to conduct such a game had a
negative effect on players’ intellectual ability. “Foot-ball,” he insisted, “cultivates strength
and skill kept in play by all the combative instincts, whereas the strength most serviceable to
civilized society is the strength which is associated with gentleness and courtesy.” Thus
football, in Eliot’s estimation, was damaging to the body, the intellect, and personal
character.  

Though renowned for his preference for “sport for sport’s sake,” Caspar Whitney
shared neither Eliot’s concerns about the potential brutalizing effects of football, nor his
indifference about winning.  

Throughout the 1890s, as Campian science replaced sport, Whitney called for a return to the ideals of English sportsmanship. Michael Oriard has
written, “Whitney’s model of proper British sport was that played at Oxford and
Cambridge… [played] for pleasure, with no great concern for winning,” but Oriard
overstates in this interpretation of Whitney’s understanding of the principles of amateurism.

Whitney’s calls for “sport for sport’s sake” did not render the final outcome irrelevant,

1892-93,” Annual Reports of the President and Treasurer of Harvard College 1892-93, (Cambridge: Harvard University,
1894), 14.


27  Whitney, A Sporting Pilgrimage, 209.

28  Oriard, Reading Football, 156.
but rather placed it in a proper context. In his 1895 account of British sporting culture, *A Sporting Pilgrimage*, Whitney insisted that the English university athlete did not go into a game “indifferent as to whether he wins or not. Quite the contrary; he is keen enough, and runs himself to a standstill against his opponent, or pulls his oar through until he drops... but in his inter-college games the mere winning does not become so much to him as the sport of it all and the general development it portends.”

While Whitney commended the manner in which American athletes committed themselves wholeheartedly to their athletic pursuits, he opposed the “business” of American sport that surrounded athletic contests. The primary difference between the football scientist and the true amateur was that, while both exerted their maximum effort in the pursuit of victory, the outcome itself was of far greater consequence to the scientist. Whitney encouraged the pursuit of victory, but his greater concern was over the way in which professional attitudes forced victory take precedent over the game itself. “We are doing college sport a great injury,” Whitney claimed, “by making it so much of a business venture.”

In fact, by the mid-1890s, professionalism was so thoroughly ingrained in American intercollegiate football that, Ronald A. Smith insists, any claims of amateurism were disingenuous at best. Smith writes that true amateurism was impossible in American colleges because, “if a college has truly amateur sport, it [would] lose prestige as it loses contests; if a college acknowledges outright professional sport, the college [would] lose

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30 Ibid., 112.
respectability as a middle-class or upper-class institution." The solution, he argues, was that institutions would claim amateurism while seeking out success through professionalism.

Smith provides eight categories to measure professionalism in nineteenth-century American intercollegiate sport:

1. competition for valuable, non-cash prizes;
2. competition for money prizes;
3. competition against professionals;
4. charging money at the gate;
5. costs of a training table not borne by the athlete;
6. payment of athletic tutors by other than the athlete;
7. recruitment and payment of athletes; and
8. payment of a professional coach.

Smith points out that defining what precisely constitutes an amateur has always been a difficult task. After all, even Eliot and Whitney had significantly different understandings of amateurism. According to Smith, the root of the problem is that amateurism has most often been defined as a negative. Thus, amateurs had been identified as individuals who, for example, do not compete for money, do not compete with professionals, or who do not pursue athletics as a source of livelihood. Furthermore, Smith claimed, the most common positive definition of an amateur, one who competes for the love of the sport, or as Whitney put it, "sport for sport's sake," is inherently flawed because "external judges can never prove the motives, the state of mind or attitude, of the amateur."

If we accept Smith's categories of professionalism it is clear that football at Sewanee was by no means purely amateur. The team experimented with professional coaches, was partially funded by gate receipts, and, by 1899, had begun to recruit student-athletes.

Nevertheless, a comparison of Camp and Whitney’s understandings of competition shows distinct attitudes about the nature of competition that are more important than the allocation and dispersal of funds. It seems reasonable to distinguish these as more professional and more amateur. Though adopting certain features of professionalism, Sewanee’s avoidance of a Campian, win-at-all-costs attitude separated the university from trends evident in the North. While the professional understanding focused exclusively on victory, the amateur construction of competition placed greater emphasis on the nature of competition than the final result. Sewanee’s understanding of competition was a more genuine reflection of English amateurism.

**English Ideals and the Sewanee Narrative**

As football at the University of the South developed in the 1890s, the Sewanee football narrative closely resembled the English sporting ideals of the late Victorian era that balanced hard work and valiant effort with an unwavering respect for gentlemanly conduct. As late as 1899, the editors of the student newspaper, the *Sewanee Purple*, preserved the belief that victory was not the sole aim of competition, claiming that “triumphs boasted of rob them of their virtue.” Nevertheless, the Campian work ethic was not without its place at Sewanee, where teams, coaches, and the student press all espoused the value of hard work in athletic pursuits. An 1896 article in the *Purple* argued that “there is great danger in relying on natural ability to pilot one through the intricate reefs of a college career. Those who succeed in college and in the world are men who work hard....” This principle, the *Purple* warned, was equally applicable to football. “Our past successes in football,” the newspaper claimed, “are due to hard work and not to the ‘star plays’ of a half back, or the brilliant dash of an

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34 “Football,” *Sewanee Purple*, 12 September 1899, 1.
The inherent value of hard training and team play were appreciated at Sewanee, and the football team even managed to use the university’s unique schedule to their benefit. Designed to take advantage of Sewanee’s comparatively temperate summer climate, the scholastic year was divided between the Lent term, which began in the middle of March and went through the end of July, and the Trinity term, which began in mid-August and lasted through December. As a result, Sewanee football teams were able to begin practices as soon as baseball season had ended in late spring, rather than waiting until the middle of September, as was the custom among the other teams.

With limited diversions on the Mountain, Sewanee students developed a keen interest in the composition of their eleven, as well as their training and conduct in practices. An 1895 report on preseason practices charged the players to remain diligent. “Training should be stuck to assiduously this season,” the Purple argued, “if the team expects to put up a winning game on Thanksgiving.” Students clearly recognized, in theory, the value of hard work and sacrifice; in practice, however, Sewanee men reflected the early Victorian understanding of gentlemanly ease. In 1893 the editors of the Sewanee Times (the predecessor of the Sewanee Purple) noted the “slackness and indifference” that the varsity had shown in their training, and an 1899 article in Outing noted Sewanee’s “knack of rounding out a championship team from seemingly indifferent material.” These observations are consistent with an earlier criticism of southern practices that appeared in the magazine. In an 1894 report on southern football, Lovick Pierce Miles criticized southern training methods, noting that “the daily practice most often adopted consists of thirty minutes’

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34 “The Gridiron,” Sewanee Purple, 21 September 1895, 1.
passing, punting and falling on the ball... and then comes an hour and a half or two hours of play with the scrub.” While northern teams spent upwards of four hours in training, the southern practices that Lovick described more genuinely reflect those of the Victorian public schools that eschewed organized practices in favor of intramural “house” matches. While Sewanee men understood the value of hard work, the reality was far closer to Caspar Whitney’s principles of gentlemanly amateurism.

This disregard for northern training methods is consistent with what historian C. Vann Woodward claimed was a distinctively southern code, with leisure as a viable and significant ethic. While the Puritan North condemned these qualities as laziness, leisure, Woodward argued, was praised as a “redeeming quality of the Southern way that sets it off against the antlike and grubby materialism of the Northern way.” While players would certainly give their all on gameday, Sewanee did not fully subscribe to Campian ideals. Victory was not the most important goal, as Sewanee valued victory only from worthy opponents, and by gentlemanly means. The student press asserted the importance of a winning team, the University lauded victories, and the Vice Chancellor regularly reported athletic successes to the board of trustees, but honorable conduct was sine qua non, and it was not uncommon for Sewanee to recognize an honorable defeat. In an article about the 1894 Vanderbilt game, a 12-0 loss, the Purple commented, “we have met the enemy and we have fought them well.” Sewanee was still able to take pride in their effort and conduct.

38 Lovick Pierce Miles, “Football in the South,” Outing 25, (December 1894), 258; Mangan, Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School, chapter 7.


40 “The Game,” Sewanee Purple, 5 December 1894, 2.
Additionally, fans, though eager for victory, appreciated valiant play and honorable deportment. Despite a 30-0 loss in 1892 to the University of Virginia that was “hard to bear,” the Sewanee Times asserted that “We are satisfied with our team’s play and every student and friend of the University feels indebted to them for their valiant work... no matter what success our men met with the whole University should turn out to-morrow and give them a royal welcome.” In its opposition to the professional understanding of competition, the Sewanee football narrative emphasized English amateur ideals, particularly the value of honorable conduct above the narrow pursuit of victory.

As Sewanee teams were able to take pride in an honorable defeat, they also recognized instances of ignoble victory that had become increasingly common in American sport. National observers lamented the emergence of this trend in American sport. In an 1889 article in Atlantic Monthly, Nathaniel S. Schaler commented on the “debasing spirit” that accompanied American gamesmanship, claiming that the great difficulty with intercollegiate athletics “is that the winning is almost certain to become dearer to the contestants than the action which leads to it.” The result, he argued, “is a temptation to resort to subterfuge in order to secure success.” Similarly, the editor of The Nation observed that the primary focus of American men and boys, in both business and sport, “is to win, to ‘get there’ by fair means or foul’ and [the] lack of moral scruple which pervades the struggles of the business world meets with temptations equally irresistible in the miniature contests of the football field.”

Charles W. Eliot was particularly concerned with the emerging disregard for the rules of the game and argued that “an unwholesome desire for victory, by whatever means,

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41 “Virginia 30, Sewanee 0,” Sewanee Times, 2 November 1892, 1.


in intercollegiate foot-ball has perverted the judgment of the players and the college public concerning the propriety of ‘tricks,’ surprises, and habitual violations of the rules of the game as a means of winning a victory.” As the principles of American gamesmanship justified the bending, and even breaking, of rules in the pursuit of victory, gentlemanly conduct became a vestige of a bygone era in intercollegiate athletics.

In contrast, the Sewanee narrative maintained that it was preferable to suffer a loss through valiant and honorable play than to gain victory through ungentlemanly means. While rough play was accepted as a part of the game, there was a sharp distinction between rough and dirty play. In an era in which the tenets of gamesmanship condoned the circumvention of rules, and the willing exchange of a penalty for a particularly vicious illegal hit, the Sewanee teams upheld their position as sportsmen and gentlemen, taking pride in proper conduct and regretting those moments when they fell short of such ideals. In an article about an 1892 victory over Washington and Lee, the Sewanee Times asserted the superiority of Sewanee’s clean and straightforward manner of play; “Washington and Lee’s idea of football is very different from ours,” the author commented, “for constant pushing and ‘nagging’ characterized their play on the line-ups. That our method is the better we think was demonstrated by the score 22 to 16 in our favor, for in other respects the teams were nearly equal.” Rarely would Sewanee players drop to the level of those teams whose lines, when obscured from the referee or umpire’s view, would routinely engage in fistfights, blind hits, and brutal, illegal contact. Ultimately, Sewanee showed “absolutely no sympathy with dirty football.” While reformers sought either to rid intercollegiate football of such practices, or to abolish the game altogether, the Sewanee Purple insisted that, when properly


45 “Washington and Lee Game 22 to 16,” Sewanee Times, 10 November 1892, 1.
played, football was "devoid of every vestige of brutality and calculated to bring out the best
that is in a man." The editors maintained that, "not only can a football player be a
gentleman, in the highest sense of the word, he must be, if the game is to remain a
permanent feature of American college life."46

Just as dirty play was the wrong way for a gentleman to win, on-field coaching was
considered bad form. Though teams, Sewanee included, regularly employed professional
coaches, as soon as the game started their role was to be limited to that of an interested
observer. The rationale was that the game ought to be a contest between amateur athletes,
not professional coaches. After an 1895 contest, the editors of the Sewanee Purple accused the
University of Georgia of engaging in "dirty tactics and unfair football." Central to these
accusations was the conduct of Georgia's first-year head coach Glenn "Pop" Warner, whose
"insistent coaching of the Georgia team" provided a continuous distraction for the men on
the field.47

Another advantage linked to coaching was the use of trick plays. The Sewanee Purple
attributed an 1896 loss to Auburn to the chicanery of legendary coach John W. Heisman.
"During the past two years, tricky football has by many colleges, Sewanee included, been
largely discarded; and on this account our men seem to have taken it for granted that it was
unnecessary to look out for such playing from our opponents."48 Sewanee's understanding
of the game, and the principles of gentlemanly amateurism, dictated that teams should face
one another on a fair and even field of battle to decide the better team. The professional
impulse, on the other hand, altered the rubric so that teams would look to exploit any

46 "Footpad Tactics in Football," Sewanee Purple, 5 December 1894, 2.
47 "22-0," Sewanee Purple, 23 November 1895, 1.
advantage that might lead them to victory. As soon as risk-reward analyses replaced English sporting ideals, the closed game became the preferred strategy of coaches who were unwilling to chance defeat.

By altering the focus of athletic competition in America, Yale football proved an important point: violent play, intense preparation, and a rough, determined plan resulted in victory. By the mid-1880s, this type of play and ideology of competition had become a hallmark of Yale football and a pattern for nation-wide emulation. While the majority of teams and coaches recognized the Camp model as the standard formula for success, some critics and spectators began to clamor for a return, in some measure, to the older “outside” game. Cornell University President J. G. Schurman, for example, argued that “the ‘flying wedge’ and other modifications of the play, which have lessened the relative importance of running, kicking, and catching, have transformed the game into a contest not merely rough, but dangerous to life and limb, brutal in itself, revolting to look upon, and degrading to the humanity of both participants and beholders.” Whitney himself criticized contemporary methods, “but solely, because the hammer-and-tongs style of game now in vogue is taking the fun out of it for the players.” By the 1890s, critics had also grown concerned with the brutal nature of the game, and many objected to dirty play and a general abrogation of gentlemanly conduct.

Spectators, for their part, were beginning to grow bored with the conservative inside game; they wanted long runs, high scores, and upset victories. While football science had developed the safest and surest way to advance the ball, the result for the spectator was the ebb and flow of an indistinguishable phalanx of humanity. One critic of the closed game 49

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lamented that "foot-ball [had] become too much a game of mere massed force, exerted—as in the wedge—upon antagonists who have no real chance to resist" and as a result, "those who look on are beginning to lament the absence of kicking and great runs."\(^{50}\) Whitney argued that the teams of the "scientific game" relied merely upon brute strength, advancing the ball by a "crude process of hammering the tackle, or some other man in the opposing line, into helplessness."\(^{51}\) Only an open game, Whitney claimed, could save it, for, in addition to danger to the body that came with the unrelenting pounding of the closed game, the latter also sacrificed speed and skill for brute strength. Though the colliding phalanxes could slowly, but surely perambulate over the turf, there was nothing sporting about it; football of the Walter Camp era had degenerated into a war of attrition in which victory was the sole aim, and defeat unacceptable.\(^{52}\) Meanwhile, critics of the game argued that football had grown too violent. All semblance of rules, order, and gentlemanly conduct were ignored as the clash of lines was reduced to a collection of prizefights.\(^{53}\)

Sewanee shared a similar opposition to Camp's understanding of football science. With relatively small, but fast, teams, Sewanee never embraced the battering ram style of football that had become the standard among northern teams. Though frequently undersized—the *New York Times* referred to the 1894 team as "a lighter one"—Sewanee

\(^{50}\) D. B. St. John Roosa, "Are Foot-Ball Games Educative or Brutalizing?," *Forum* 16 (January 1894), 640.


\(^{52}\) This was a recurring theme in Whitney's writings, particularly his column "The Sportsman's View-Point," which appeared regularly in the sporting magazine *Outing*. In the January 1902 "Sportsman's View-Point," Whitney claimed that the closed game would be the 'finish of football' in America, and repeated the same cries for an open game into the early 1900s.

\(^{53}\) Lewis, *The American Intercollegiate Football Spectacle, 1869-1917*, 171. For the critical opposition to football's brutality, see chapter V, "New York's 'Fashionable Set' and Newspapers Aid the Spectacle, 1888-1895."
teams found that “skill and regular teamwork count for more than mere mass.”\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Outing} recognized Sewanee’s W. D. Cleveland as “the swiftest half-back in the South,” and by 1899 the magazine noted that Sewanee’s play had become “characterized by fast work with light material.”\textsuperscript{55} As a result, Sewanee failed to see the science in Walter Camp’s scientific game. While Sewanee’s eleven would attempt inside runs and employ the flying-wedge, the \textit{Sewanee Purple} observed, “our end runs and quick openings were apparently our most effective plays.” Even the Vice Chancellor, B. Lawton Wiggins, found Vanderbilt’s endless “succession of ‘V’s’” tactically inferior. Ultimately, Sewanee found the purest form of football in the dashing, outside runs of the open game.\textsuperscript{56}

The closed game was slow, pounding, and methodical. “It takes too long,” complained the \textit{Sewanee Times} in 1893. “We should have made about five touchdowns while they [Vanderbilt] were making one.” After the 1892 win over Vanderbilt, the game report commented that “Vanderbilt did not show the slightest sense of science. She simply made her V’s and shoved toward the goal, but it’s an old football axiom that brute strength is no good against trained muscle and science.”\textsuperscript{57} Nevertheless, the majority of teams and coaches recognized the benefits of the closed game and preferred victory to competition. The widespread use of mass plays signaled the supremacy of American gamesmanship over British sportsmanship.


\textsuperscript{56} “Sewanee Wins,” \textit{Sewanee Purple}, 22 October 1898, 1; B. Lawton Wiggins, “Diaries Kept by the Office of the Vice Chancellor, 1893” (28 October 1893), The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee.

Michael Oriard has observed that Eliot, Camp, and Whitney understood football through strikingly different “conceptions of the American university, and different student populations, during a period of transformation.” Whitney considered the university to be the exclusive domain and training ground of the social and economic elite. It was natural that Whitney would interpret intercollegiate football as a gentlemanly game, to be played in a properly amateur spirit. After all, as Whitney observed, “if you cannot depend on the word of a university and the honor of its athletic representatives, do as you would in private life—have nothing further to do with them.” Whitney understood both football and the university in terms of a bygone era; his university was the place where the sons of the elite prepared for a predetermined position, where the classical curriculum taught young men to be proper gentlemen, where honor was essential.

A pious intellectual, Eliot saw the university as a place to bring culture to diligent students. This was reflected in his understanding of athletics as a potentially healthy pursuit, but only in moderation. His opposition to intercollegiate football was in line with his understanding that “the college or university is primarily a place for training men for honorable, generous, and efficient service to the community at large.” Camp, on the other hand, understood the university as a place to prepare the emerging professional class in an industrializing America, and thus sought to solidify the principles of management, teamwork, and competition on the gridiron. As colleges and universities abandoned the classical

58 Oriard, Reading Football, 161.


curriculum in favor of elective courses (ironically enough, the idea of Charles W. Eliot) and professional programs to draw in the middle class, Camp sought to teach, through football, the principles of organization needed to win in a world of cutthroat competition. It made perfect sense, to Camp, that the future captains of industry should play a scientific game with machine-like efficiency and clockwork precision.61

Of the three models, Sewanee most closely resembled that of Caspar Whitney. It is only fitting that a southern Episcopal school modeled after Oxford and Cambridge adopted the same English sporting ideals that Whitney espoused. Regarding itself as the “Oxford of America,” Sewanee looked to the great English universities as inspiration for organization, traditions, and even architecture.62 With such connections, real and imagined, to both the old southern and English aristocracies, it made sense that the Sewanee football narrative reflected a gentlemanly approach to football.

This feeling was, in part, the result of simple elitism. Many at Sewanee believed that intercollegiate football should be limited to college amateurs. Smith maintains that because America lacked entrenched social classes, the “British amateur attitude... would never flourish.” He insisted that there was “too much competition, too strong a belief in merit over heredity, too abundant an ideology of freedom of opportunity for the amateur ideal to succeed.”63 Nevertheless, those elitist attitudes, for better or worse, were reflected in Sewanee’s understanding of intercollegiate competition. In 1896 the editors of the Sewanee Purple argued that “if college athletics are to live they must be pure. So long as professionalism is allowed even to the smallest degree—where there is the shadow of a

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61 For a more thorough discussion of the Camp ad Whitney narratives of football, see chapters 2 and 3 of Oriard, Reading Football.


doubt about the right some man has to play on the team—just so long will the college suffer.”

It was a common concern at Sewanee that, “once the game is carried beyond the campus, it and everything connected with it, will soon become the property of the rabble, and the butcher-boy, and the hostler will discuss the tactics of the game and the qualifications of the players with the glibness, if not the knowledge of a senior.” While egalitarian principles helped to maintain professionalism at other institutions, Sewanee’s sense of class and status helped to bolster its belief in amateurism.

This “aristocratic” character was also evident in the way the men of Sewanee viewed some of their opponents. Sewanee not only refused to accept the professional win-at-all-costs attitude, but also disapproved of true professional athletes. “Sewanee is wasting her time and money playing athletic clubs,” claimed the Sewanee Times. Rather, they maintained, the proper purpose of intercollegiate competition was “to bring the universities into closer contact with each other and to try the strength of their respective teams.”

Contrary to Smith’s dilemma of amateurism, Sewanee cared more about honest competition against social equals than amassing wins.

At the same time, Sewanee’s opinion of athletic clubs was more complex than simple elitism. It was closely connected to Sewanee’s understanding of competition. While professionals were compelled to play for money, thus placing a premium on winning by any means necessary, the amateur was free to “play for the glory.” Like Whitney, Sewanee

64 “Athletics,” Sewanee Purple, 5 September 1896, 2.

65 “Professional Football,” Sewanee Purple, 22 September 1894, 2; Smith referred to amateurism as an “elitist attitude contrived to keep the lower classes from mixing with their social superiors on the athletic field.” Sports and Freedom, 162. See also Sports and Freedom, chapter XII: “Amateur College Sport.”

66 Sewanee Times, 9 November 1893, 1

67 Ibid.
students and faculty feared the degenerative tendencies of professionalism. In an editorial for *Outing*, Whitney questioned, “where is the gentleman in all this heart-breaking exhibition of boorishness? Does football arouse the dormant mucker who ordinarily lurks undisclosed within us?” For both Whitney and Sewanee, the preservation of gentlemanly conduct was as important as victory. Sewanee sought to uphold the honor and reputation of the University, and, while for some schools, that was achieved through winning and winning alone, for Sewanee, such laurels were reached by gaining victory through gentlemanly means.  

Sewanee held itself, or so it believed, to a standard distinct from that of the northern colleges, and, as a result, rarely experienced the problems that were common at other schools throughout the country. In his 1906 report to the board of trustees, Sewanee Vice Chancellor B. Lawton Wiggins proudly reported to the board of trustees that honor-bound Sewanee was free from problems that plague Northern game. 

President Eliot, of Harvard, in his last annual report, brings a serious indictment against the American game of football, preferring eight specific objections against the game as now played. He claims that it is wholly unfit for colleges and schools, and that it is childish to suppose that the athletic authorities which have permitted football to become a brutal, cheating, demoralizing game, can be trusted to reform it. The evils of which President Eliot complains are not present here at Sewanee. In recent years no one has ever questioned the eligibility of our players, nor the purity of our athletics. Serious injuries are unknown, and minor injuries comparatively few. Our teams have maintained their usual high standard of excellence. In football we lost only two games, and in baseball we won every series except the one with Vanderbilt, with whom, in baseball parlance, 'we split even.'

In his study of southern intercollegiate football, Andrew Doyle argued that, “if southerners had taken seriously their professed devotion to the aristocratic ideal, they would have rallied to Whitney’s clarion call. Instead,” he claimed, “southerners reflexively accepted

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Camp's interpretation of the cultural meaning of football without significant debate."  
Sewanee football, however, was drawn from a different tradition. Emulating not the American universities of the northeast, but rather the English models of Oxford and Cambridge, the University of the South maintained the classical curriculum, upheld the Christian values of its founders, preserved its academic integrity, and built one of the South's most dominant football programs of the late-nineteenth century. The northern cultural norms that raised the ire of southern educators were inextricably linked to Walter Camp's understanding of competition, the university, and his subsequent narrative of football. When southern conservatives worried that intercollegiate football acted as a Trojan horse through which northern cultural values were being disseminated throughout the South, they feared the spread of a Campian understanding that never took root at the University of the South. Football experienced enthusiastic and near universal support at Sewanee precisely because the University refused to succumb to the dominant northern trend, and maintained its adherence to the English sporting ideals and the principles of gentlemanly amateurism.

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Chapter II.

A SOUTHERN NARRATIVE FOR A NORTHERN GAME: SEWANEE FOOTBALL AND ANTEBELLUM HONOR CULTURE

Long before college football became so thoroughly ingrained in the southern psyche, before Bear Bryant, War Eagle, the Ramblin’ Wreck, and Rocky Top, religious and social conservatives denounced its spread into Dixie as a harbinger of an invasion by the progressive national culture of the North. These southern conservatives considered intercollegiate football a facet of the New South movement, through which northern values were introduced and disseminated through the post-Reconstruction South. While hostility toward a hegemonic New England elite was a key component of conservative southern opposition to the game, football was able to thrive at Sewanee because the connections between northern values and intercollegiate football were in no way inherent in the game.\footnote{ Leo Andrew Doyle, “Causes Won Not Lost: Football and Southern Culture, 1892-1983,” (Doctoral Dissertation, Emory University, 1998), 35. Doyle claimed that “the nationwide diffusion of college football demonstrates the hegemonic power of the northeastern elite which created the sport and touted it as a means of improving the social and moral character of the nation.”} As Michael Oriard has argued, football, as a cultural text, is open to many different interpretations; it tells a story that is read differently by different groups, each

\footnote{Susan Dabney Smedes, “Life in Sewanee from a Resident’s Point of View,” \emph{Cap and Gown}, 1900, 201.}
offering up its own understanding of the game. In its distinct understanding of football, Sewanee eschewed the predominant American version of competition in favor of English sporting ideals. Similarly, Sewanee’s narrative of football distanced itself from the prevailing Yankee cultural understanding of the game and reflected a connection to southern traditions of honor. From its first season in 1891, football became a legitimate expression of Sewanee’s attachment to the southern tradition of antebellum honor culture.

With its martial character and faithful emulation of the precepts of antebellum honor, the Sewanee football narrative embodied the ideals of the Lost Cause—a tradition through which Southerners preserved a distinct regional identity against the nationalizing impulses of the New South movement, and, as historian Charles Reagan Wilson suggested, preserved the culture of the antebellum South. In *Baptized in Blood*, Wilson argued that after the defeat in the Civil War ended the effort for a separate southern political identity, this effort was replaced by seeking a distinct southern cultural identity. Confederate heroes, lauded as symbols of southern virtue, became a focal point of the Lost Cause religion. Proponents of the Lost Cause claimed that the “Yankee monster had challenged the moral basis of society,” and in light of that threat, the “greatest danger to traditional values was seen as coming from the increase in commercial and industrial economic activity in the South.”

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southern ministers warned their congregations of the threat that northern industrial and commercial society posed to traditional Christian-Confederate virtues.

While the “New South” took root in the relatively few industrial centers that arose after the Civil War, historian Clement Eaton argued that in the small towns and villages, where the majority of southerners lived, the myth of the Lost Cause allowed the “Spirit of the Old South” to persist into the twentieth century.  

Deeply isolated, and consequently less affected by the Civil War than much of the South, Sewanee was, according to university historian Arthur Ben Chitty, only minimally affected by Reconstruction, and thus was able to preserve much of its antebellum character: “The only essential changes [since the end of the Civil War] have been the substitution of filling stations for the blacksmith shop, the general increase in sales, and the addition of a University-owned supply store on the central campus.”

In describing life in Sewanee in 1900, lifelong resident Sarah Barnwell Elliott, the daughter of Bishop Stephen Elliott, spoke of the pride with which Sewanee viewed its isolation and its traditions. She observed,

For a long time we were shut away here unheeded and unheeding. We liked ourselves, we enjoyed associating with ourselves; we were sorry for people who did not understand and appreciate Sewanee—for to understand was to appreciate—and we resented criticism. We had our traditions, we had our ideals, we had our hopes, we had an absolute and unswerving faith, and prided ourselves on being “different.”

A community founded and populated by Confederate generals and Episcopal bishops, Sewanee was, not surprisingly, thoroughly absorbed in a Lost Cause vision.

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of the Old South. As Chitty remarked, "one thinks immediately of a four-star
general (Kirby-Smith) teaching mathematics, Lee’s chief of ordnance (Gorgas)
teaching engineering, a brigadier (Shoup) teaching metaphysics, and the chaplain
(DuBose) who missed election as Bishop of South Carolina narrowly." From its
very beginning the university drew high-ranking Confederates into its ranks, and
even invited Jefferson Davis to serve as the first Vice Chancellor. In this thoroughly
unreconstructed community, intercollegiate football reflected Sewanee’s attachment
to the Old South.

**Football at Sewanee**

The typical season of the 1890s was six or seven games, usually opening on
the first Saturday in October and ending with the much-anticipated Thanksgiving
Day game against Vanderbilt. While Vandy was Sewanee’s most heated rivalry (they
played ten times from 1891-1899, the Commodores winning seven), the Tigers could
usually count on games against Georgia, Alabama, Auburn, and North Carolina.
Sewanee also usually played one or two athletic clubs, often from Nashville or
Louisville. Over the course of the 1890s, Sewanee compiled a 34-18-3 record. They
were Southern Champions in 1898, and, in 1899, sportswriter Tony Barnhart has
argued, fielded the single greatest team in the history of southern intercollegiate
football.

Over a span of six days in 1899, Sewanee beat Texas, Texas A&M, Tulane,
LSU, and Ole Miss; on the seventh day, according to legend, they rested. If winning

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8 Chitty, *Sewanee Sampler*, 49

five games in six days was not enough of a feat, the Tigers played every game on the
road and did not allow a single point to be scored against them. This epic, 2,700-
mile journey, the work of student manager Luke Lea (who would later represent
Tennessee in the U.S. Senate), began on Tuesday, November 7 in nearby Cowan,
Tennessee, where the twenty-five players, Lea, and their coach, Billy Suter, boarded a
Pullman sleeper and embarked on the two-day trip to Austin, Texas.

On Thursday, November 10 the Tigers dispatched Texas 12-0, boarded their
train, and made the overnight trek to Houston, where on the 11th they bested Texas
A&M, 10-0. Following the contest against the Aggies, Sewanee endured another
350-mile overnight train trip, this time to New Orleans. After beating Tulane 23-0
on Saturday, the Sewanee men observed the Sabbath, and on the following morning
proceeded to Baton Rouge and defeated LSU 34-0. The final leg of the trip, a
contest against Ole Miss played in Memphis, was a close call for the weary Tigers,
but touchdowns in the waning seconds of each half secured the 12-0 win and
Sewanee's position as undisputed Southern Champions. A subsequent article in
Outing commented:

The Sewanee football team has monopolized interest in Southern football
for November, not only by having a great team, playing a consistent game
at all times, but also by undertaking a tour of the South, involving twenty-
seven hundred miles of travel, playing five games with teams considered in
her class, winning them all—in five days—and playing the last game with
more dash and spirit than the first.10

Quarterback William Blackburn "Warbler" Wilson and end Bartlett et Ultimus Sims
were named to Outing's "All-Southern Football Team" for 1899, and teammates

(January 1900), 427.
Ormond Simpkins at fullback, halfback Henry “Ditty” Seibels, and lineman William Henry Poole earned All-Southern honors the following year. At the turn of the century, Sewanee had emerged as a formidable power in the South, enjoying twenty-one consecutive winning seasons from 1898-1919. By 1899, football was firmly established as an import facet of life at Sewanee, and an analysis of the university’s student newspaper reveals that students had a sound knowledge of and healthy interest in football, and a strong preference for their team and the southern game.

The *Sewanee Purple* differed from most “provincial” newspapers of the 1890s in that it paid scant attention to the “Big Time” eastern programs. While Oriard observed that Yale and Harvard frequently received top billing in newspapers as far removed as Portland’s *Oregonian*, the Ivy League and other northern powerhouses were relegated to the *Purple’s* back pages. As the following table indicates, Sewanee readers were clearly more interested in their team, than in the Yankee schools.

<table>
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<th>Region of Coverage</th>
<th>% of Total N</th>
<th>Total Size in Column Inches</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>703.5</td>
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SOURCE: Random sample of Trinity term editions of the *Sewanee Purple* from 1892 to 1899. “Local Teams” refers to Southern teams, frequently Sewanee opponents, and articles classified as “National Coverage” were about Northern, Mid-Western, or West Coast teams. These are distinct from the “General” articles that addressed issues about football not pertaining to any specific team or region.

Articles about football outside of the region were typically shorter than coverage about Sewanee; usually they were comprised of small paragraphs about a handful of

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northeastern teams, under headings such as "Football on Foreign Fields" or "Football Elsewhere." Though the game may have been imparted with the trimmings of northern cultural values, the Purple exhibits a near exclusive preference for the southern game.

Contrary to the tendencies of the major Eastern newspapers, football reporting in the Sewanee Purple made scant use of pictures and rarely discussed aspects of spectacle surrounding the games. While southern football is now noted for its fans' extensive interest in tailgating and festival, a set of traditions that Barnhart referred to as the "cornerstone of college football in the South," such festivities received minimal attention in the Sewanee narrative. In his analysis, historian Andrew Doyle observed that "Southern football fans appreciated the pageantry and rituals far more than they did the confusion and downright dullness of the mass play that characterized the 'closed game' tactics of the late 1890s." As a result of this, the southern press "focused a disproportionate amount of attention on sponsors, college cheers, outlandish garb, and bands." Though college football in the fin de siècle South did have its fair share of pomp and revelry—the New York Times reported a crowd of 3,000 in Nashville for the 1893 Sewanee-Vanderbilt contest—the fact that the Sewanee Purple eschewed reports of these festivities indicates the importance that the editors and students placed on the game itself. The Purple's straight reporting and the breadth of subjects discussed within football articles indicates a readership with a solid understanding of the game. While the eastern dailies pandered to a wide

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13 Barnhart, Southern Fried Football, 151.
14 Doyle, "Causes Won Not Lost," 155-56.
audience unfamiliar with the intricacies of the game, the Purple rarely included the
descriptions of grounds, fans, colors, and celebrations designed to captivate the
attention of the football-illiterate. Rather than observations about society men and
ladies cheering on the warriors of the gridiron, the Purple simply reported that “our
end runs and quick openings were... our most effective plays, and only once during
the game did Sewanee lose the ball on downs.”

Football was clearly an important part of life at Sewanee, but this
appreciation for the sport did not become the all-encompassing mania that critics
feared. Whether in game reports, season previews, or analyses of coaches, players,
and schedules, the Sewanee Purple consistently revealed an intricate understanding of
the game, a thorough knowledge of the Sewanee team, and a burgeoning narrative of
football that reflected an understanding of the game in the terms of antebellum
honor.

**Equivalents of War**

As football spread among southern universities, advocates of the New South
claimed that the fervor for the game served as a public declaration that the South was
indeed “refashioning itself in the image of the North.” Arguments about the
Yankee influences in intercollegiate football stemmed from the proselytizing of the
great football evangelist Walter Camp of Yale. It makes sense that conservative
southerners feared football’s Yankee influence, as Camp regularly promoted
intercollegiate football as a way for young men to learn the values of order and

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16 "Sewanee Wins," Sewanee Purple, 22 October 1898, 1. For further discussion of the popular press,
see Oriard, Reading Football, chapter 2 “Football Narrative and the Daily Press.”

teamwork necessary for success in an industrialized society. In an 1891 article in *Harper's Weekly*, Camp proclaimed, “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 football.” Consequently, historians have consistently argued that intercollegiate football was an expression of “Yankee” values. For example, in his examination of the rise of the intercollegiate football spectacle, Guy Maxton Lewis argued that “Yale’s values composed the only true and accepted intercollegiate football philosophy.” Ronald A. Smith likewise discusses the systemization of football in emulation of industrial mass production, and even Michael Oriard, who argued that football had distinct meanings for different groups, focuses almost exclusively, upon the specifics of the prevailing Yankee understanding of football. Furthermore, Andrew Doyle claims that the South could fully accept football only after southerners had ceased to recognize the precepts of its traditional honor culture.\(^1\)

While historians have routinely pointed out the northeastern influence on the forms of intercollegiate football, few have addressed the meanings of that influence. In one essay Patrick B. Miller has argued that “a traditional notion of southern honor had been extended and reinforced with the advent of intercollegiate sports,” but he still emphasized the common experience of national trends, claiming that “as much as these symbols and spectacles reflected loyalty to a specific college and community,

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they also marked the assimilation of many institutions in the region to a national intercollegiate culture.” 20 According to Doyle, this tendency to accept national ideals shows that New South proponents and northern football evangelists sought to legitimize Yankee cultural models with spurious connections to the Cavalier Myth, thus providing a “veneer of southern sectional legitimacy.” 21

In his classic, The Mind of the South, W. J. Cash argued that a distinct antebellum southern identity survived into the early twentieth century. A foundation of honor, chivalry, and the gentlemanly ideal, he claimed, combined with the rugged individualism of the frontier to create a concept of southern honor, built upon rituals of combat, drinking, and gambling and fostering a society that pursued rough-and-tumble recreations while simultaneously striving to maintain an air of aristocracy. According to Cash, the typical Southerner—an ideal type he referred to as the “Man at the Center”—simultaneously exhibited the qualities of the English squire and the rustic backwoodsman.

The whole difference can be summed up in this: that, though he galloped to hounds in pursuit of the fox precisely as the squire did, it was for quite other reasons.... It was simply and primarily for the same reason that, in his youth and often into late manhood, he ran spontaneous and unpremeditated foot-races, wrestled, drank gargantuan quantities of raw whisky, let off wild yells, and hunted the possum: because the thing was already in his mores when he emerged from the backwoods, because on the frontier it was the obvious thing to do, because he was a hot, stout fellow, full of blood and reared to outdoor activity, because of a primitive and naïve zest for the pursuit in hand. 22

20 Patrick B. Miller, “The Manly, the Moral, and the Proficient: College Sport in the New South,” Journal of Sport History 24 (Fall 1997), 308, 290.


The “Man at the Center” displayed a proclivity for the extravagant and the dashing. According to Cash, he was measured not by wealth or status, but rather by his ability “to stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whisky at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night, to bite off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to fight harder and love harder than the next man.” While this more aptly describes the aspects of primal honor that historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown found at the foundation of southern honor, and the lower-class practices of brawling and eye-gouging that Elliott J. Gorn examined, similar rhetoric was not without its place at Sewanee. Though the Sewanee version of honor tilts toward the upper-class understanding of gentility rather than the more directly violent forms of “rough-and-tumbling” employed by the lower classes, these traditions of frontier violence and romantic swagger found regular expression in the way students and faculty thought and wrote about football at Sewanee. Reflecting images of what Gorn called the “wild ways of the old,” the 1898 yearbook, the Cap and Gown, described the Sewanee athlete as one who “can rise smiling and bloodstained from the bottom of the hottest football scrimmage perfectly able to continue the game to the end.”

Competition against rivals, Vanderbilt in particular, took center stage in accounts and analyses of Sewanee football. As articles and editorials in the student press urged the necessity of vanquishing Vanderbilt, the University “Banquet Song,” sung by students and faculty before, during, and after football contests, toasted the team, the university, and a hearty drink:

23 Cash, The Mind of the South, 73.

Here's to Sewanee,
Drink her down!
Here's to Sewanee,
Drink her down!
Here's to Sewanee and that good old 'Varsity!
Drink her down, drink her down,
Drink her Down! 25

Though similar songs were commonly sung on northern campuses, they
nevertheless reflected the very practices that Cash ascribed as integral to the “Man at
the Center.” Just as Cash identified drinking and competition as quintessential
southern tendencies, football at Sewanee provided an outlet for those impulses that
Cash found at the center of southern honor culture.

Cash’s analysis was updated and refined in the work of Wyatt-Brown. In
_Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South_, Wyatt-Brown argued that “above all
else, white Southerners adhered to a moral code that may be summarized as the rule
of honor.” Drawing from a tradition of “primal” honor, the antebellum code
dictated that reputation, and thus honor, were revealed through a series of
increasingly antagonistic interactions, culminating in the duel, that allowed men to
exhibit mastery over one another. With competition as a core value of honor culture,
Gorn, Cash, and Wyatt-Brown agreed southern men held a special reverence for
sport, hunting, and games of chance that allowed participants to demonstrate their
prowess to one another. Football, consistent with this southern sporting tradition,
became a legitimate expression of such values. 26

As the highest demonstration of prowess, the duel, historian Kenneth S.
Greenberg argued, was the “central ritual” for antebellum men. In _Honor and Slavery,

26 Wyatt-Brown, _Southern Honor_, 1, 339.
he claimed that the code duello reflected images of domination and subordination, as well as mastery over death. This desire to master death supported the martial attributes of southern society; the most honorable death for a southern man, Greenberg claimed, was on the battlefield. While this is common in many cultures, such a death, according to Greenberg, had special meaning in a slave society, as it signified resistance to submission. Whether through mastery over death, over chance, or over another man, men upheld their honor by refusing to submit to outside conditions, by accepting any and all challenges.  

Following Greenberg’s analysis of honor and baseball, Doyle argued that intercollegiate football was incompatible with the old southern code. Since “the social privilege possessed by the scions of the elite did not guarantee their success,” he concluded, the game was a pursuit ill-suited for men of honor. While Greenberg argued that baseball embodied a set of values at odds with the honor culture of the antebellum South, baseball and football are very different games. In fact, Greenberg’s description of the significance of the hunt—the sporting pursuit that he claimed best expressed the “core values of Southern men of honor”—shows many of the essential characteristics of intercollegiate football. According to Greenberg, gentlemen preferred sport hunting, the fox hunt in particular, to baseball because while baseball was a common recreation, the hunt was the domain of the elite. As a predominantly collegiate sport, football shared an aristocratic bias with


29 Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 124.
hunting. Unlike baseball or prizefighting, football in the South was still played almost exclusively by colleges and universities. Though by the turn of the century a number of athletic clubs had begun to play football, collegians generally looked down upon such teams. “Men as a rule who play on Athletic teams,” the Sewanee Times charged in 1893, “are not the best class of fellows; they can not always play for the glory, like college men, because they have to work for a living.” Thus, Sewanee could still maintain an aristocratic bias in its football endeavors.\textsuperscript{30}

Greenberg also charged that baseball ran counter to the precepts of southern honor because it reinforced urban, middle-class values. Unlike the recreational activities of Cash’s Man at the Center, “baseball (in its middle-class, urban form) did not involve gambling, public drinking, or bloodshed.”\textsuperscript{31} By 1890, opponents of intercollegiate football charged that football was a corrupting influence, and sought to eradicate the excessive violence, intoxication and gambling that surrounded the sport. Thus the three defining recreations of Cash’s Man at the Center were all present enough in the world of intercollegiate football to draw criticism from opponents of the game.

Additionally, according to Greenberg, men of honor preferred the hunt to baseball because, while the master-subject relationship was clearly defined in the hunt, in baseball the relationship would alter with every third out. Greenberg claimed that a man of honor could accept forced reversals of status and fortune, but such changes in fortune were “always caused—by loss in some confrontation, or by the manifestation of a flawed character trait.” Though drastic changes in roles

\textsuperscript{30} Sewanee Times, 9 November 1893, 1.

\textsuperscript{31} Greenberg, \textit{Honor and Slavery}, 124.
seemed arbitrary in baseball—an active subject at the bat quickly becomes a passive object on the base paths—in football, shifts from offense to defense were always forced. An offense either fumbled the ball or failed to progress toward its goal—possession was always lost through confrontation. Though Walter Camp's system of downs and distance might seem arbitrary, the principle behind it is far more organic than the rules of baseball. In military terms, for example, an offense that fails to progress toward the goal is compelled to retreat and attempt to force its opponent to take position on less favorable ground. Though less natural than such changes in rugby, role changes in football were neither as constant nor seemingly arbitrary as in baseball. While Greenberg claimed that "masters did not whip and expect to be whipped in return," this argument contradicts the established tradition of competition between social equals. Masters certainly did not expect their subordinates to strike back, but no man entered a fight, duel, or any other competition without acknowledging the chance that he might not emerge unscathed.32

Regardless of the nature of the change, Greenberg claimed, men of honor would have qualms about the very nature of baseball. While a hunter stood his ground against a fearsome beast, the baseball player, contrary to the precepts of honor, always ran for the safety of the bases. According to Greenberg, "men of honor did not run from anything.… Men of honor 'stood their ground.' Men of honor did not 'run away' from dueling encounters. They faced their opponents in an open, forthright and steady manner."33 But, unlike baseball, football was a constant

32 Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 123.
and clearly defined fight between two opposing sides. Football players were always on the attack. Even the defense is an active agent, as a good football defense is just as active and aggressive as an offense. Like the duel, football consists of subjects simultaneously attempting to impose their wills upon the other. Doyle concluded that football and baseball were equally incongruous with the precepts of honor culture, but his analysis neglected to recognize the fundamental differences between football and baseball. While baseball may have run counter to the “values of the Old South,” the same virtues that Greenberg, Cash, and Wyatt-Brown identify in gambling, hunting, and the duel were an integral part of intercollegiate football. 34

The pursuits of Cash’s Man at the Center all involved some form of mastery, and for Cash, as for Greenberg, whether in the hunt or the duel, men sought the opportunity to prove their mastery over death. Wyatt-Brown agreed that, while war was the ultimate proving ground for honor, bravery and courage, in the absence of war, drinking and gambling had served as “moral equivalents of war.” Without the opportunity to face death undaunted, such competitions provided men of honor a chance to “express the relative worthiness of those who took the punishment and gained the winnings over their rivals.” Football, perhaps more genuinely than hunting or gambling, embodied the same values that men of honor ascribed to their traditional “equivalents of war.” While northerners also saw football in the light of warfare, this common feature of distinct narratives only serves to legitimate the martial characteristics of the game. 35

34 Doyle, “Causes Won Not Lost,” 39.

35 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 41, 339; Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 135-46.
The better to exalt hunting as an equivalent for war, hunters frequently created legends about the abilities of their “enemy.” Since honorable hunters did not want to pit their skills against unworthy opponents, Greenberg argued, they boasted of the sly and wily fox or noble stag; “men of honor avoided hunting creatures that were not arrogant, greedy, cunning, brave, lustful, heroic, ferocious, noble, or dangerous.” Additionally, men of honor insisted that their foe have every opportunity to avoid death, as there was no honor in the slaughter of helpless prey. Thus, in order to preserve the connection to war, hunters created legends of danger and conquest, turning a deer, fox, or turkey into a noble and dangerous adversary.\textsuperscript{36}

The idea of honorable competition became a recurring theme in the Sewanee football narrative, and rightly so, as southern men had traditionally demonstrated their honor through competition. When the 1896 Sewanee team narrowly defeated Centre College, a team many had considered to be vastly inferior, the Sewanee Purple lashed out against those who sought to use “unfavorable circumstances” to excuse bad play. While the author acknowledged that some thought that the Sewanee eleven were vastly superior to their opponents—that bad luck and excessive fumbling made the game far closer than it ought to have been—the Purple refused to make excuses for the varsity. “Not wishing to allow its sanguineness to obscure its judgment,” the Purple claimed it was “forced to the conclusion that the fumbling in last Saturday’s game was undeniably a species of rotten playing, and that such an excuse for failing to make a larger score is untenable.”\textsuperscript{37} While victory was important, the Sewanee narrative reinforced the idea of a proper sort of victory.

\textsuperscript{36} Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 128-9, 130.

\textsuperscript{37} “Another Victory,” Sewanee Purple, 31 October 1896, 1.
Concern about the worthiness of an opponent was common throughout discussions of football at the University of the South. In response to an 1893 game against the Louisville Athletic Club, an article in the Sewanee Times observed that, “It is no honor to defeat a lot of non-collegians and the students take no interest in a victory.” While a treed bear, fox, or turkey posed a minimal threat to an armed hunter, the clashes in football were real; the competition was real because it pitted twenty-two reasonably evenly-matched adversaries in a struggle for supremacy. Though the Louisville Athletic Club lacked Sewanee’s social standing, neither side possessed an advantage as lopsided as that of the hunter’s rifle. There were in fact far greater risks to life and limb—and a more legitimate chance to face and master death—in football than fox hunting. In fact, by 1894, critics had begun to question whether the benefits of intercollegiate football outweighed the increasingly dangerous nature of the game. In that year, the Harvard faculty, concerned with the rising degree of brutality in football, voted to cancel the following season, and President Grover Cleveland abolished the Army-Navy game after the 1893 contest resulted in an unacceptable number of injuries. Free from the rationalizations

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38 Sewanee Times, 9 November 1893, 1.
39 This rise of opposition was mostly a result of the widespread incorporation of the flying wedge, a mass-momentum play in which blockers linked arms and charged downfield while the ball carrier ducked in behind them. Though successful, the flying wedge was highly dangerous and was outlawed after the 1894 season. While some Sewanee faculty, in response to the 1894 football controversy, sought to limit football to intramural play, these concerns failed to appear in the Trustees’ proceedings or the Vice Chancellor’s reports. One commentator in the Sewanee Purple claimed that, in the absence of football, university men may as well “buy some tiddledy-winks, subscribe to the Ladies Home Journal, and wrap ourselves in the livery of our provincialism.” (“Outdoor Practice,” Sewanee Purple, 15 September 1894, 1). Ultimately, the Purple editors opposed the increasing brutality in intercollegiate football but also maintained that it was not an inherent feature of the game. Though certainly rough, football did not have to be brutal. “We have absolutely no sympathy for dirty football,” the editors wrote, “Football, properly played, is devoid of every vestige of brutality and calculated to bring out the best that is in a man.” (Footpad Tactics in Football,” Sewanee Purple, 5 December 1894, 2).
needed to qualify the hunt, the even competition and genuine danger of football more closely resembled the most important ritual of honor culture, the duel.

Both Greenberg and Wyatt-Brown consider the duel the highest culmination of ritual encounters by which men of honor exerted their power, influence and standing among one another. According to Wyatt-Brown, the duel “gave meaning to life and strength to reputation,” and thus “was particularly suited to the Southern ethos.” In order to distinguish the duel from common violence, the code duello followed a specific set of rules. Most often a duel originated with a point of honor—and only between men of comparable social status. The offended parties exchanged letters explaining their injuries, and only then was the dispute settled in public ritual combat.40

Though, by 1890, the Sewanee campus had not witnessed a duel in over a decade, the practice was not unknown to the university. An edict from the Board of Trustees in 1871 declared that “any person who shall give, accept, or knowingly carry a challenge to fight a duel, or who shall publish or post another person as a coward, or use opprobrious language for not accepting a challenge, shall be fined not less than fifty dollars.”41 While the trustees disapproved of dueling, the University apparently failed to consider it a serious enough offense to warrant more than a monetary fine. Nevertheless, as dueling became less common, Sewanee men found other ways to exert their mastery, namely gambling, hunting, and drinking. While

40 Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 331, 350-57; Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 135-46, 7-10.

41 Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the University of the South, 1871, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 58-59
these pursuits developed out of the same tradition as the duel, they were far from faithful reproductions of the practice.

Despite its position as the preeminent expression of primal honor, even the duel was by no means a perfect substitute for war. Noting that the vast majority of duels never led to an exchange of pistol shots, and even fewer resulted in fatalities, Greenberg described the duel as a "theatrical display for public consumption."

Football, on the other hand, followed a similar pattern of declaration, exchange, immortalizing of valor in a public spectacle, competition between social equals, and a sense of mastery over death. Thus, intercollegiate football, at least at Sewanee, was in some ways a more genuine reflection of honor culture than the duel. After all, as Wyatt-Brown claimed, "dueling served essentially the same purpose as the lowliest eye-gouging battle among Tennessee hog-drivers." Football not only served the same purpose as the duel, but, through the Sewanee narrative of the game, also reflected the forms of the *code duello*.  

Like the duel, football determined superiority through combat, but more importantly, the public nature of the event, the exchanges between student newspapers, the taking of sides and the settling of scores in a public forum all harken back to the duel. In their first season of football coverage, the *Sewanee Times* lambasted the Vanderbilt *Hustler* for contriving excuses for Sewanee's victory. The Sewanee editors charged that the *Hustler* made unfair excuses for Vanderbilt's defeat, "never once seeming to realize the fact or be[ing] magnanimous enough to admit that we knew more football than they did and were just naturally the best players."

As both newspapers exchanged declarations of their offenses, the sense of

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importance of the next year’s Sewanee-Vanderbilt game exceeded the usual tone of the rivalry.  

Following a particularly poor week of practice, and especially in light of the previous year’s point of honor, the Sewanee editors warned that if the team did not resume proper training, then “the taunts and jeers which [Sewanee] inflicted last year will be turned against us by our ancient enemy.” Even the literary section of the newspaper adopted a martial tone when describing an impending clash with Vanderbilt. An anonymous poet proclaimed before the 1893 contest with the rivals from Nashville:

This week Sewanee and Vanderbilt
On Sewanee grounds will take a tilt,
And its likely that some will get kilt,
For the Sewanee team is toughly built.

The *Sewanee Times* frequently described impending football contests in warlike terms. It was not uncommon to find articles claiming that “this is the time when Sewanee must do or die. To uphold the reputation won with such laurels is the task before us,” or that “every man will play as if his life depended on it.” Of particular significance is the expression of the need to defend the honor of the university. Just as the duel had served as the highest defense of reputation, football came to be understood as a similar act in which the honor of the university was publicly asserted and defended.

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43 “Vanderbilt’s Excuses,” *Sewanee Times*, 2 November 2 1892, 1.

44 *Sewanee Times*, 12 October 1893, 1.


46 “Saturday’s Game,” *Sewanee Times*, 26 December 1893, 1.
This sort of martial tone was also present in the university yearbook, the *Cap and Gown*. Contributors remembered football games as epic struggles with an ancient foe. In a section of short stories and essays in the 1896 annual, one author penned a piece entitled “Football in Ancient Greece” in which he gave an account of the Peloponnesian War as a football game. Thus, he described an Athenian advance: “They take the ball from Sparta on downs, and quickly forming a wedge devised by Archimedes, they move irresistibly down the field and tie the score amidst the wildest enthusiasm.” It is not surprising that the Sewanee editors thought of football in warlike terms because football, with the possible exception of boxing, was the most warlike of popular sports. While the other major college sports of the era—rowing, baseball, and track—fostered competitive ideals, the extent of the separation between competitors in these sports rendered any warlike comparisons spurious at best. With the extensive contact between competitors that was a necessary aspect of football, the nature of the game allowed for a more genuine reflection of martial attributes. By its third season, the Sewanee-Vanderbilt rivalry had begun to reflect the rules and traditions of ritualized violence that governed interactions between men of honor.

As the Vanderbilt rivalry intensified, every game brought up a rehashing of previous offenses and provided an annual opportunity to settle old scores. Eventually, the football team was called to defend the honor of the school in much the same way that the duelist often fought for the honor of his family. As the *Sewanee Purple* urged students to descend upon Nashville for the 1895 contest, the

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editors proclaimed, “a team never plays so well as when it knows that there are two or three hundred of its own kith and kin watching its movements.”

Though it was certainly of Yankee origin, football was by no means a foreign game at Sewanee, because the game itself did not reflect values specific to any one region. Football was just as valid a representation of southern chivalry as it was a reflection of northern industry. The Sewanee narrative rejected the predominant northern construction of the game and made it compatible with the traditions of antebellum honor culture. Though historians have identified the 1920s as the point at which football had become an accepted feature of southern culture, Sewanee had forged that connection from the very beginning. By virtue of the genuine connection between football and the traditions of antebellum honor, the game was able to take root and flourish at Sewanee. Thus, since the inception of intercollegiate football in 1891, the Sewanee football narrative neither challenged, nor was impeded by, the decidedly southern and Christian identity of the University of the South, but rather served as a faithful emulation of the precepts of antebellum honor and the ideals of the Lost Cause.


"In the East, college football is a cultural exercise.  
On the West Coast, it is a tourist attraction.  
In the Midwest, it is cannibalism.  
But in the South it is religion.  
And Saturday is the holy day."
—Marino Casem, Southern University

CHAPTER III.

DOWN WITH THE HEATHENS, UP WITH THE CHURCH:  
CHRISTIANITY AND THE SEWANEE FOOTBALL NARRATIVE

In much the same way that the Sewanee narrative linked football with southern cultural traditions, it also linked Sewanee’s pursuits on the gridiron with the university’s Christian identity. This early association between football and Christianity at Sewanee was at odds with the prevailing southern evangelical ideology and foreshadowed the connection that would emerge in the 1920s South, and prevails to this day. While historian Ted Ownby has found that violent masculine recreation was irreconcilable with evangelical Christianity and Andrew Doyle emphasized conservative Christian opposition to the game, football and Christianity existed harmoniously at Sewanee, each finding expression in and strengthening the other. Unlike the evangelical Methodists and Baptists, whose hostility toward football lasted into the twentieth century, Sewanee’s religious leaders were avid supporters of the football team from its first season in 1891. Sewanee theologians were an integral aspect of the football program, and the University’s priests and bishops regularly followed Sewanee’s efforts on the field. Despite the prevailing

tendencies of the 1890s South, Sewanee football found great success and considerable support while the university maintained its mission of producing Christian gentlemen.²

By the mid-nineteenth century evangelical Protestantism, in its various manifestations, had become the dominant American religion. Throughout the South, the evangelical or Low Church branch of the Episcopal Church reflected this religious tide. By the start of the Civil War, evangelical Episcopalianism had become the religion of many Confederate leaders, including Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Sewanee's founder, Leonidas Polk.³ The evangelical branch believed that “salvation came through a born-again experience in which one would turn away from sins and follow Jesus’ call to service, moral purity, and ‘heart-felt’ spirituality.”⁴ While sharing similarities with evangelical Methodism, Sewanee's evangelical Episcopalian tendencies were tempered by High Church intellectualism.

High Church Episcopalians, who still “emphasized the role of church and sacraments to prepare the soul for salvation,” were willing to allow additional prayer meetings; at the same time, however, they rigidly maintained the sanctity of the liturgy and disapproved of extemporaneous prayer, believing it to be, as historian Diana Butler claims, “a sure course to Methodism and fanaticism.” Though evangelical Episcopalians supported movements for temperance, modesty, and

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⁴ Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind*, x.
strictures against “drinking, dancing, gambling, and breaking the Sabbath,” their High Church counterparts maintained a thorough “disdain of evangelical reforming crusades.” According to Bishop Thomas Gailor, who served as Sewanee’s chaplain, Vice-Chancellor, and eventually Chancellor, the Episcopal Church “trusts more to sober training in religion than to passionate upheavals.” As the established religion of the southern elite, evangelical Episcopalians “preserved antebellum values through ritual and institutions,” and one such institution, according to Butler, was the University of the South. In addition to maintaining antebellum tradition, Sewanee’s Episcopalianism mitigated against the fanaticism and reforming crusades that were prevalent among Baptists and Methodists and that spurred their attacks on southern intercollegiate football.

In “Foolish and Useless Sport: The Evangelical Crusade Against Intercollegiate Football,” Andrew Doyle used Methodist newspapers, particularly the Alabama Christian Advocate, the Wesleyan Christian Advocate, and the Nashville Christian Advocate, as evidence of southern evangelical Protestants’ “intense hostility” toward intercollegiate football. He traced evangelical opposition to “conservative southern religious leaders” who argued that “football was of questionable morality because it exalted the body rather than the spirit.” Southern conservatives were dismayed by the sinfulness that surrounded the game and by football’s corrupting influence over a generation of students.

5 Butler, Standing Against the Whirlwind, 36, 33, 147.


7 Butler, Standing Against the Whirlwind, 234-35.
With the rise of football, evangelical leaders were concerned that the traditional rhetorical, debate, and literary societies would lose their prominence and be relegated to the periphery of campus life. Conservative Baptists and Methodists argued that this corruption of the mind and the spirit was unacceptable and that the precepts of muscular Christianity that helped to spread competitive sport in the North were in direct violation of St. Paul's admonitions against artificial forms of physical exercise. Similarly, in *Subduing Satan*, Ownby, referencing studies of the more violent aspects of honor culture by W. J. Cash and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, claimed that the rough-and-tumble recreations popular among antebellum men of honor were in irreconcilable conflict with evangelical behavior. "Where evangelicalism demanded self-control, humility in manner, and harmony in personal relations," he asserted, "Southern honor demanded self-assertiveness, aggressiveness, and competitiveness," and "those who participated in the emotional fervor of revival meetings were rarely the same people who enjoyed the hot-blooded competitions of male gatherings." In the Victorian era, Protestantism had become dominated by the cult of domesticity, favoring the feminine virtues of warmth and compassion. As women began to play a more central role in religious life, evangelicals found sinfulness in masculine recreation and life outside the home.

In response to the belief that men were inherently more sinful than women, an idea that Ownby argued was central to white Southern culture, muscular Christians sought to combat the effeminizing effects of Victorian Protestantism. Muscular Christianity originated in the 1850s with the works of Thomas Hughes and

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9 Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 12, ix, 1, 14.
Charles Kingsley who sought to remedy the weakness and effeminacy that had spread throughout the Anglican Church. According to Clifford Putney it emerged as a middle ground between the reinvigorated sense of Christianity of the Social Gospel movement and the “Cult of the Strenuous Life.” It emphasized “duty, bodily vigor, action over reflection, experience over ‘book learning,’ and pragmatic idealism over romantic sentimentality.”

Inspiring men, contrary to the teachings of St. Paul, to “glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s,” muscular Christianity was a predominantly northeastern trend popular among liberal, Protestant denominations, including High Church Episcopalians, and only gained favor with southern conservatives after the turn of the century. Fundamentalists opposed this masculinized form of Christianity because, as Ownby argued, they were fearful of male influences and masculine sinfulness, and held women up as exemplars of virtue.

W. J. Cash, however, described a symbiotic relationship between the two aspects of southern culture. In *The Mind of the South*, Cash described the hedonistic and evangelical South as “two streams [that] could and would flow side by side, and with a minimum of conflict.”

Cash’s interpretation of the relationship more accurately describes Sewanee’s place in the South than either Doyle’s or Ownby’s. To Cash, the Puritanism of the Man at the Center, “was no mere mask put on from cold calculation, but as essential a part of him as his hedonism.” Similarly, Wyatt-Brown noted that, although by the late antebellum period evangelical Christianity

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11 1 Corinthians 6:20 (AV); Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 4-12.

had “altered the characteristics that defined the ideal Southern gentleman,” the two were not mutually exclusive. Thus, the attributes of the fighting white South also inspired the fervor of the revival movement, while those of the praying white South helped to temper the vice that stemmed from the pursuit of primal honor. In short, evangelical behavior and honor culture could ultimately strengthen one another.¹³

Given Sewanee’s forebears it makes sense that an Anglican image of muscular Christians would take root there. Putney notes that the “Anglican clergy were laudable for their manliness,” and by the 1890s, Sewanee students had come to value the benefits of the strenuous life.¹⁴ In the 1895 Cap and Gown, Sarah Barnwell Elliott commented that “we have seen students come to Sewanee with as many trunks as girls would have, and with muscles soft as mush. The following year they would be catching behind the bat, or stripped for the sports.” In 1898, the editors of the annual wrote of the typical underclassman: “you can never tell what he is going to do or be. He may come pale and weak and develop into a brawny football player.”¹⁵

With both High Church intellectuals and evangelical Episcopalians among the university’s founders, trustees, and faculty, the University of the South occupied a middle ground between the two Church parties. Guided by Charles T. Quintard in

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¹⁴ Putney, Muscular Christianity, 21.

¹⁵ Sarah Barnwell Elliott, Cap and Gown, 1895, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 129; Cap and Gown, 1898, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 29.
its nascent years, the “High Church Mystic” kept the University decidedly southern. Quintard refused to appeal to northern bishops in his fundraising efforts and focused exclusively on the southern, and predominantly evangelical, dioceses. With this combination of High and Low Church influences, Sewanee occupied a unique position in the Christian South. In the absence of overbearing evangelical influences, the university was able to actively pursue athletics without compromising its Christian identity. While the intense strictures of evangelicalism led some southern conservatives to vilify intercollegiate football, High Church opposition to Methodism and fanaticism tempered their opposition to the game. Sewanee’s Episcopal roots, particularly the combination of High Church intellectualism and Low Church evangelism, created an environment in which football and Christianity found simultaneous expression, where male culture and evangelical culture could dwell together in unity.

Throughout the 1890s, the Sewanee vice chancellor (whom the student body had traditionally appointed to serve on the University’s Athletic Executive Committee) and Board of Trustees regularly expressed an interest in the benefits of exercise and athletics. In their annual reports to the trustees, Vice Chancellor Gailor and his successor, B. Lawton Wiggins, consistently supported the efforts of the university football team, lauded its victories, and lamented its defeats. In their personal papers, both Bishop Quintard—who became University Chancellor in 1892—and Wiggins recorded the details of the football season alongside university and ecclesiastical affairs. In this institution of the Episcopal Church and, as University historian George R. Fairbanks claimed, “the only distinctively church

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16 Wilson, Baptized in Blood, 147.
University in this country,” this institutional support for football was especially significant. The founding bishops of the University of the South established that the university would be “under the sole and perpetual direction of the Protestant Episcopal Church,” which was represented through a board of trustees comprised of the bishops of the Southern dioceses, plus one clergyman and two laymen from each diocese, and they consistently reaffirmed the essential nature of Sewanee’s Christian identity. Thus, support for football at Sewanee, an institution of the Episcopal Church, reflected wider ecclesiastical support.

While Sewanee men had a long tradition of intramural games and sports, physical culture did not become an official fixture at the university until 1891. In that year the vice chancellor, Bishop Gailor, eliminated compulsory military drill and hired an “instructor in physical culture,” who, according to the university catalogue for 1891-92, would be “ready at any time to devote his services to the students.” Gailor observed an increased use of the university’s athletic facilities and found that the students “have profited greatly in consequence.” Having witnessed the benefits of athletics, the trustees commented in their 1891 proceedings that a permanent gymnasium should be built as soon as sufficient funds were available. Furthermore,

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19 “Calendar for 1891-92,” University of the South Papers, Series B, No. 66, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 43. At this time, physical culture typically meant a system of gymnastics, calisthenics, or strength training with apparatus. At some northern institutions, Harvard in particular, directors of physical culture opposed intercollegiate athletics. It was not until the early 20th century that these instructors generally began to embrace sports.

when the Trustees proposed altering the university’s long vacation from winter to summer, bringing Sewanee into conformity with the majority of American universities, the Committee on Constitution and Statutes, (consisting of a bishop, two priests, and two laymen), heartily objected. Reaffirming the importance of manly pursuits, the committee asserted that “for the South the proper vacation of an university is the winter... when [a student] can engage in the sports which make him a true Southern man, hunting, shooting, riding.”

Athletics quickly filled the void left by the removal of military drill, and by November of 1891, Sewanee fielded its first football team. While Baptists and Methodists raised objections to football at the University of Alabama and the University of Georgia, the Episcopalians at the University of the South never perceived the game as a threat. Neither the vice chancellor nor the trustees questioned the morality of the game; Bishop Quintard was a regular follower of the football team, and Bishop Gailor not only attended the varsity games, but also was frequently one of the “wearers of the royal purple” at the junior varsity, or “scrub,” games. Following its inaugural season, the football team was recognized in the university catalogue, which by the following year included a section devoted to “Physical Culture,” complete with coverage of the football team.

When the trustees requested in their 1894 proceedings that the vice chancellor “furnish [the] board with any information he may have in reference to athletics as practiced” at Sewanee, Wiggins responded that he was “decidedly of the

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opinion that the results of intercollegiate athletics are enormously on the side of good, and the evils incident are capable of amelioration by a proper system of restraint and supervision."\textsuperscript{23} By this time, athletics in general, and football in particular, had become a fixture at the university. By the fall of 1898, gymnasium courses, described by Wiggins as "productive of most excellent results," had been made compulsory for all underclassmen and grammar school students. At the close of the nineteenth century, athletics had assumed a more significant role in the life of the university than ever before; nevertheless, the progress of the athletic department was never seen to contradict the Christian character of the University, as was typical throughout much of the South. By the fall of 1900, Wiggins could boast to the trustees that, in the legendary 1899 season, "we were victorious in every one of the twelve games played with the twelve leading Southern colleges, and in only a single game were we even scored against," while still presiding over a university dedicated to "the promotion of sound learning, social order, civil justice, and Christian truth."\textsuperscript{24}

In his 1899 report to the trustees, Wiggins repeatedly presented reports on athletics in conjunction with those on religious matters. Addressing the noteworthy successes of the previous year, Wiggins reported "the esteem in which our University is held by the General Convention of the Church" and quoted the convention's report of the General Committee on Christian education, which praised Sewanee’s

\textsuperscript{23} B. Lawton Wiggins, "Report of the Vice Chancellor to the Trustees of the University of the South, Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the University of the South, 1894, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 33; Fairbanks, History of the University of the South, 316. While the trustees' proceedings do not directly reference the wider 1894 intercollegiate football controversy, their request was, most likely, in reference to the rising tide of opposition to the game.

\textsuperscript{24} B. Lawton Wiggins, "Report of the Vice Chancellor to the Trustees of the University of the South," Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the University of the South, 1900, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 85; B. Lawton Wiggins, "Report of the Vice Chancellor to the Trustees of the University of the South, Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the University of the South, 1901, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 72.
work in “training men for leadership, who shall carry into their service not only the strength of sound scholarship, but the spirit of the Master Church.” Almost immediately following this report on Sewanee’s contributions to muscular Christianity, Wiggins noted the success of the undefeated football team and relayed Caspar Whitney’s declaration of Sewanee as the “strongest purely amateur college football team in the South.” In a similar juxtaposition of reports on religious and athletic life, Wiggins commented on the need for both a more suitable chapel “as a center for the religious and community life of the University,” and for a proper gymnasium, athletic field, and track. Thus, in 1899, after the University of the South had assumed its place as a southern football power, and even after the legendary six-day trip of the Iron Men had forever secured Sewanee’s place in the annals of southern football lore, Sewanee’s Christian mission remained as viable and essential as it was when Leonidas Polk first brought the bishops of the southern diocese to the Mountain in 1857.  

If the university’s official support for the football team reflected a general sense of ecclesiastical approval, the personal papers of Bishop Quintard, the university’s second founder, first vice chancellor, and Bishop of Tennessee, reveal his deep interest in the game. On November 13, 1892, Quintard recorded in his diary, “on the grounds of Vanderbilt University there was a notable game of foot-ball between the Sewanee team and Vanderbilt’s.” This was the Bishop’s first mention of the Sewanee football team, then in its second season, but he would continue to

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record scores, notes and observations about the team through the end of the 1896 season, when his failing health prevented him from attending games.

Though unable to attend the Vanderbilt game in 1892 because of ecclesiastical commitments, Quintard observed in his diary that “the game excites deep interests.” When the Bishop received a telegram from team captain Alex Shepherd informing him of Sewanee’s 28-14 win over their Methodist rivals, Quintard wrote that he was “immensely delighted” and went on to add that “this is the second time this season in which the Sewanees have come off victorious against the Vanderbilts. Up to this date they have played six games and have been beaten in five.” The following day, the Bishop caught an early train from Columbia to Nashville to have breakfast with the victorious team. On their return to Sewanee, Quintard sat with starting left tackle Henry Soaper, who spent the better part of the train ride from Nashville to Monteagle instructing the Bishop in “all the particulars of the game.” His interest sparked by Sewanee’s recent success, Quintard became a regular follower of the university’s pursuits on the gridiron.

Though the diary is primarily a record of the Bishop’s ecclesiastical work—sermons, confirmations, weddings, baptisms, funerals, and myriad services he either attended or presided over—it also served as a scrapbook with newspaper clippings.

26 While conservative Methodist leaders strongly disapproved of football at Vanderbilt, the university relied on donations from the Vanderbilt family, as well as philanthropic institutions funded by Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller. In “Foolish and Useless Sport,” Andrew Doyle argued that this “huge infusion of northeastern money,” as well as the “progressive vision” of Vanderbilt chancellor, James Kirkland, “inexorably moved Vanderbilt away from its conservative moorings,” and thus allowed football to gain acceptance at the Methodist university. Doyle, “Foolish and Useless Sport,” 334.

about himself, the Episcopal Church, and, of course, the university.  

One clipping, an article from September 1894 titled, “Built by Apostles: Bishop Quintard Defends the Episcopal Church against Other Protestant Denominations,” noted Quintard’s argument that the Episcopal Church was the “true branch established by Christ. Her ministry has come in direct succession from the Apostles themselves. Her sacrament of the Lord’s supper and baptism are those established by Christ. Her creed is that of the early church. Her Gospel is the pure word of Jesus.”  

Similar articles reflecting Quintard’s devotion to Christ and the Episcopal Church were regularly interspersed with telegrams, reports, and articles about the football team.  

One example, an 1892 clipping about the Sewanee football team’s trip to Virginia, began with the bold headline, “THEY PLAY FOOTBALL: Eighteen Sewanee University Players in Atlanta Want to be CHAMPIONS OF THE SOUTH.” The article called the Sewanee team, “a fine set of college boys, who have been well drilled in the art of playing foot-ball,” and noted that “the boys belong to the best families in the south.”  

The football team was clearly a source of pride for Quintard, who regularly referred to “our boys” or “our team.” He not only kept up with the schedule and scores, but also understood the details of the game. The Bishop followed the team closely enough to know that a scoreless tie against a University of North Carolina team that had beaten Vanderbilt was a particularly

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28 The diary contains a great number of newspaper clippings, however very few of them contain the sources of the articles.

29 Charles T. Quintard, source unknown, from “Quintard Diary,” September 1894.

30 Source unknown, from “Quintard Diary” November 1892. This was, most likely, an Atlanta newspaper, as the author recorded the team’s stop in Atlanta on their way to Richmond for games against the University of Virginia and Washington & Lee. Nevertheless, the exact date and newspaper remains unknown.
“good game for our boys,” since the “North Carolina men averaged sixteen lbs more than our men.”31

The most evocative illustration of the Bishop’s support for the team can be found in a faded sepia photograph of the team of 1896. Hovering almost ethereally above the sturdy young men of the Sewanee team, the bespectacled bishop, in clerical collar and academic gown, props himself against the ivy-covered sandstone archway that frames an otherwise nondescript team portrait. Though visibly frail, Quintard still bears a wry smile and prideful disposition bordering on smugness; a visible reminder of the University’s history and the mission of the founders, his presence connects the football team to Leonidas Polk’s original vision of a decidedly Christian and southern university. Whether recording his own observations about the team, saving newspaper articles about Sewanee’s success on the gridiron, or posing with the Varsity on an autumn afternoon, Bishop Quintard clearly exhibits the connection between the university’s Episcopalian beliefs and its mission of producing Christian gentlemen.

Both Vice Chancellor Wiggins’s and Bishop Quintard’s support for football mirrored that of the student body who expressed no qualms about linking the University’s Christian and emerging athletic traditions. In fact, the Cap and Gown regularly identified the students in the theological department, or “theologs,” as they were known at the university, as some of Sewanee’s top athletes. The 1895 edition claimed of the theologs, who were always held in high academic as well as social esteem, that “there is no branch of college life where their talents are not respected, where their influence is not felt.” Though the home of the theological department,

31 Quintard, “Quintard Diary,” October 29, 1895.
St. Luke’s Hall, was known as the “skull that contains the brains of Sewanee,” the theologs were also an integral component of the athletic program. 32 The 1896 Cap and Gown asserted that the department, in addition to their intellectual prominence, “by no means lacks the other essential of manhood, brawn.” Over half of the second team and three of the starters on the 1896 football roster were “future dispensers of the Gospel,” as were two of the 1899 Iron Men, and the department boasted that it could field an intramural team “that will put the ‘Varsity to shame.” The theological student was not merely an academic or a cleric, but also “wields the mystic gavels of the fraternities… is a crack pitcher on the baseball team, and one of the gods of the gridiron.” Clearly, intercollegiate football was never seen as an

32 Cap and Gown, 1895, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 37.
impediment to the training of men, but rather as a contribution to the character of those who would become the future priests and bishops of the Episcopal Church.\textsuperscript{33}

A palpable connection between Sewanee’s athletic prowess and Christian identity was forged in 1894, when fans devised a popular cheer, a modified form of which can still be heard on the same field where it was first shouted over a century earlier. After every touchdown, the \textit{Cap and Gown} recalled, the “old ‘Varsity yell burst, crashing from throats that had often conquered the whole population of Nashville in a trial of lungs.”\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{quote}
Vanderbilt, Vanderbilt,
Left in the lurch!
Down with the Methodists,
Up with the Church!\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Though the cheer has since been modified to

\begin{quote}
Tigers, Tigers,
Leave ‘em in the lurch,
Down with the heathens,
Up with the Church! Yea, Sewanee’s Right!
\end{quote}

for over a hundred years the basic message has remained the same, as students, asserting, in one breath, both their martial and spiritual superiority, made support for their football team an expression of their Christian beliefs.

This connection between Sewanee’s athletic pride and Christian beliefs should come as no surprise, as Sewanee students had a vested interest in the Episcopal Church. While a study of the \textit{Sewanee Purple} reveals the prominence of football reporting, the newspaper was far from a mouthpiece for the varsity eleven,

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Cap and Gown}, 1896, 27; \textit{Cap and Gown}, 1898, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 35.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Cap and Gown}, 1898, 140.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Cap and Gown}, 1895, 224.
and interest in the game was balanced with other concerns and pursuits. Though stories of the gridiron typically made up the majority of the front page in the Trinity semester, and there were more editorials about football than any other subject, the average football article was no longer than those about academic and student life, and shorter than the typical articles about religious and ecclesiastical affairs.\textsuperscript{36}

Articles about religion varied from short items, debating the necessity of compulsory chapel or discussing a recent sermon, to intricate essays examining the question of celibacy in the Episcopal priesthood. Throughout the 1890s, the most substantial articles about religious affairs were typically reports on the annual convention of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew, an Episcopalian order dedicated to bringing men to Christianity.\textsuperscript{37} In 1894 the editors reserved nearly half of the front page of the October 20 issue for a report on the Brotherhood's Washington, D.C. convention by Sewanee chaplain William Alexander Guerry. Guerry reported that "the greatest impression one takes away is the effect produced by the sight of so many men, mostly young men, banded together in the cause of spreading Christ's kingdom among young men." Guerry praised the "manly, straight-forward way" in which the

\textsuperscript{36} J.W. Bozzi, \textit{Football, Christianity, & the University of the South: The Sewanee Purple, 1892-1899.} Unpublished paper, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, 2007. On average, items about religion received the most space per item, averaging just over twelve column inches per item. While football articles were among the longest, averaging just under nine column inches per item, the great length of the game reports and season previews (often over forty column inches in length) was offset by the high frequency of exceptionally short items. Articles about religious and ecclesiastical affairs, though less frequent, were on the longer side. Over 70\% of these articles were in the top two quintiles for article length. Thus, while football received the most consistent and widespread attention, it did not have the regular degree of depth granted to social and religious pursuits.

graduates, exemplars of muscular Christianity, delivered their plea for “men to do God's work.”

The article about the 1895 convention focused on similar themes. The author began with a description of the “high and manly tone” set by Sewanee Chancellor, Bishop Dudley's opening address at the St. Andrew’s convention. The article extolled Christian virtue and the contributions of young laymen to the proceedings, asserting, “it is at once a revelation and an inspiration to the average Christian man to find himself in the midst of five hundred men... to testify in no uncertain voice to the faith in and allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.” The author continued, “it breaks every canon of the half-hearted Christianity that is current over the land,” when one sees such prominent men “stand up and plead for the cause of Christ more eloquently than one often hears it from the pulpit.” The articles about both the 1894 and 1895 conventions were given more space than the football articles immediately preceding them. Sharing the front page, the articles show that Sewanee’s Christian identity was not compromised by what some evangelicals considered to be the evils of football, but was rather bolstered by the precepts of muscular Christianity.

In his examination of anti-football jeremiads, Andrew Doyle found that the southern evangelical Baptist and Methodist press portrayed football as a violent, dangerous and frivolous pursuit that led to drunkenness, Godlessness, and vice, and many argued that intercollegiate football would cause the “downfall of the traditional

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39 “St. Andrew’s Brotherhood,” Sewanee Purple, 5 October 1895, 1.
system of education.” Though Sewanee’s Episcopalian roots kept the university outside of that evangelical tradition, the school nevertheless maintained the very virtues that evangelicals claimed were threatened by intercollegiate football. Indeed, in 1900, Vice Chancellor B. Lawton Wiggins argued that football was a necessary diversion that preserved the moral character of his students. “We must always bear in mind,” the vice chancellor warned, “that our students have none of the diversifying amusements of city life, and unless we furnish them legitimate amusements they are apt to seek the illegitimate.” Football at Sewanee was neither a Trojan horse used to disseminate Yankee traditions, nor did it result in the abandonment of pious instruction and traditional curriculum. At Sewanee, football was a natural part of the decidedly southern and Christian institution, where the potential negative effects of football were seen as ancillary conditions to be avoided, not an inherent part of the game.

In 1900, Wiggins reported to the Sewanee trustees that, “despite the disadvantages of intercollegiate athletics, they are undoubtedly beneficial.” Rather than making brutes of men, as the Baptist and Methodist detractors had claimed, Wiggins maintained that intercollegiate football helped “large numbers of men to pass safely the critical years of young manhood; they develop self-restraint, self-discipline, courage, staying power, and many of the qualities that tell powerfully in the battle of life.” In light of such benefits, the vice chancellor informed the trustees

41 Wiggins, 1900 Report to Trustees, 86.
that “the influence of the University will be thrown as strongly as possible in favor of accenting in every way the amateur character of all athletic competitions.”

While traditionalists objected to the sort of professionalism that surrounded northern intercollegiate football and found the sport incongruous with the proper mission of a university, the nature of Sewanee football allowed the University to experience the benefits of intercollegiate competition without the deleterious side effects. Furthermore, contrary to claims that football gained acceptance at southern colleges only after they, like Northern colleges, abandoned the classical curriculum in favor of the elective system catering to the emerging professional class, Sewanee’s required curriculum in 1899 remained virtually unchanged from that of 1875, requiring proficiency in Latin, Greek, mathematics, ethics, history, politics, and sciences.

In 1896, the university’s hebdomadal board, a group of ten to twelve professors that acted as an advisory council for the trustees, passed the first academic eligibility regulations for its athletes. This action grabbed the attention of sportswriter Caspar Whitney, who lauded the decision in an article in Harper’s Weekly. Whitney approved of the logic behind Sewanee’s decision, agreeing with the university that the loss of an athlete who lacked the capacity to succeed in his studies was, in actuality, hardly a loss at all. “In our opinion,” he claimed, “it would be a good riddance.” Whitney offered it as an example for “some of our Northern colleges” and maintained that “this is the spirit that we recommend to the editors of

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43 Wiggins, 1900 Report to Trustees, 86-7.

all university papers.” Along with the faculty, the student body “heartily indorsed” the University’s position that “membership on athletic teams need not be disastrous to a student from a scholastic point of view.” After all, the students had regularly included the vice chancellor on the athletic committee, so that he could serve as a guiding influence to “check the abuses and develop the good points in college athletics.” While the Sewanee football narrative was concerned with athletic success, the pursuit of victory was not a valid reason to abandon their ideals.45

The Sewanee example belies Doyle’s claim that “football would have been strikingly out of place in a university whose primary educational mission focused on providing a classical education to statesmen, orators, and divines.”46 By the close of the nineteenth century, football was just as integral a part of Sewanee as the literary and debating societies, yet it remained, as Leonidas Polk had intended, a “university of high order, under the direct sanctions of the Christian faith.”47 Sewanee was able to maintain its standards because it insisted that the university’s moral and educational standards were more important than football success. By virtue of Sewanee’s dedication to curbing the negative aspects of intercollegiate athletics, football thrived and the University maintained its adherence to a rigorous classical curriculum and moral education.

Today, college football and religion are inextricably linked as essential facets of southern life. While sportswriter Tony Barnhart has written, “nothing is more

45 Caspar Whitney, as quoted in, Wiggins, 1897 Report to the Board of Trustees, 78; Wiggins, 1900 Report to Trustees, 86.

46 Doyle, “Foolish and Useless Sport,” 324.

ingrained in the Southern psyche than the love of Southern college football,” that seemingly timeless connection ran counter to the prevailing ideology of the 1890s. Nevertheless, the Sewanee example shows no inherent conflict between southern traditions and football. While Doyle claimed that the rising popularity of southern intercollegiate football in the early-twentieth century was a result of the “growing secularization and liberalization of southern culture,” at Sewanee, football and Christianity had existed harmoniously since 1891, well before this secularizing trend. Football at Sewanee did not flourish in the absence or slackening of Christian values, but rather at a university that placed, at its forefront, the values of Christian education. As Sewanee’s sense of High Church intellectualism tempered the reforming impulse common to evangelical crusaders, the University’s clerical leaders were able to understand football as a natural part of collegiate life. With the support of Sewanee’s priests and bishops, the theological students made significant contributions to the varsity eleven because they understood that the negative aspects that drew the opposition of religious conservatives were not fundamental features of the game, but rather conditions that could be avoided. While conservative evangelicals insisted that intercollegiate football was a sinful pursuit, emblematic of Yankee hegemony, at Sewanee, the students and faculty understood the game as a legitimate expression of denominational pride and traditions of honor.

48 Bamhart, Southern Fried Football, 1.

49 Doyle, “Foolish and Useless Sport,” 335.
Conclusion

As a center of Lost Cause thought, Sewanee's dual Christian and Confederate identity found regular expression in the Sewanee football narrative. In reference to the university's theological department, the students and faculty of which had consistently supported football at Sewanee, the 1895 Cap and Gown observed that "even on the field of battle, in the gore and carnage of the gridiron, the sturdy soldiers of the Lord... perform for the honor of the purple standard."50 Sewanee authors offered similar praise for the university's most revered professor, General Edmund Kirby-Smith, a man whom all Sewanee regarded as "splendid example of heroic courage, self consecration to duty, and of all those qualities which adorn the true Christian soldier and gentleman."51 Kirby-Smith stood not only as an exemplar of southern virtue and heroism, but also as the proud father of two starters on Sewanee's 1895 football team. Just as the Lost Cause sought to preserve the Christian virtue and honorable conduct of the antebellum South, the narrative of football at Sewanee connected students, faculty and clergy to the legends of the Old South.

In The Creation of Confederate Nationalism, Drew Gilpin Faust declared that in the study of southern nationalism, historians “must abandon the notions of ‘genuine’ or ‘spurious,’ of ‘myth’ or ‘reality.’” Regardless of the “genuineness” of a myth, Faust maintained that “ideas are social actions... and they must be treated in this way as facts, analogous to any other historical data. Southern historians should be the first to recognize that myths and realities often amount, in practice, to the same

50 Cap and Gown, 1895, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 37.
51 Proceedings of the Board of Trustees of the University of the South, 1893, The University Archives, Sewanee, Tennessee, 55-6.
thing.” Historians of sport can benefit from this insight. Thus, even if the Old South and Confederate trappings were fabricated to meet social needs, the ideals they represented were still significant. In any case, these connections were far from artificial veneers, they were rather important interpretations of a cultural text—a distinct reading by a new audience, and in Sewanee’s case, an audience thoroughly entrenched in an Old South vision of itself. With football’s martial character, competitiveness, and aristocratic bias, the game was fully compatible with the precepts of honor culture, a logical expression of the Lost Cause and cavalier myths, and an outlet for the romantic, chivalric, and bellicose impulses of the antebellum Southerner. When Sewanee writers and readers discussed football in the terms of honor culture, they were not attempting to market the game in more acceptable packaging, but rather interpreting an event in terms that they understood, that were central to their way of life, and genuinely reflected the nature and features of the game.

With its predilection for the principles of English amateurism and reflection of southern honor, the narrative of football at Sewanee was distinct from both the northern construction of the game and the predominant understanding of southern evangelical. From its inception, Sewanee was dedicated to the training of Christian gentlemen in a decidedly southern atmosphere, and as the university progressed into the twentieth century it still maintained its founding principles. While most

52 Drew Gilpin Faust, The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 6. Similarly, in Cavalier and Yankee (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) William R. Taylor argued that as early as 1850, Southerners, “obsessed by feelings of social decline,” invoked the plantation legend and cavalier myth as they “grasped for symbols of stability and order to stem their feelings of drift and uncertainty and to quiet their uneasiness about the inequities within southern society” (146). Southerners had claimed similar connections to the same institutions with which they had identified themselves for the better part of the nineteenth century.
evangelicals may have seen football as contrary to southern principles, the Sewanee football narrative saw the game as a legitimate expression of its Christian and Confederate character. In his 1899 address to the board of trustees, B. Lawton Wiggins commented: "The University of the South differs from its neighbors in the North, in that it stands without a rival in its community... It is a power in the shaping of the new South, for which we have reason to be grateful. It is training men for leadership, who shall carry into their service not only the strength of sound scholarship, but the spirit of the Master of the Church." 53 As Sewanee embarked on a new century, the university remained, as Wiggins observed, a university "full of aspiration, and full of hope, with a high determination to strive with all its power to realize... the conception of [its] ten Southern Bishops in 1856, a University 'for the promotion of sound learning, social order, civil justice, and Christian truth.'" 54 In an era when evangelicals asserted the brutal and unchristian nature of intercollegiate football, the Sewanee football narrative forged a connection between the gospel and the gridiron that not only persists to this day, but also has emerged as the accepted understanding of college football in the South.

53 Wiggins, Report to the Board of Trustees, 1899, 68.

54 Wiggins, Report to the Board of Trustees, 1901, 72.
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