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## “Foot Ball Seems To Be Usurping the Place of Base Ball.” Football in Kansas, 1856–1891

Mark E. Eberle  
Fort Hays State University, [meberle@fhsu.edu](mailto:meberle@fhsu.edu)

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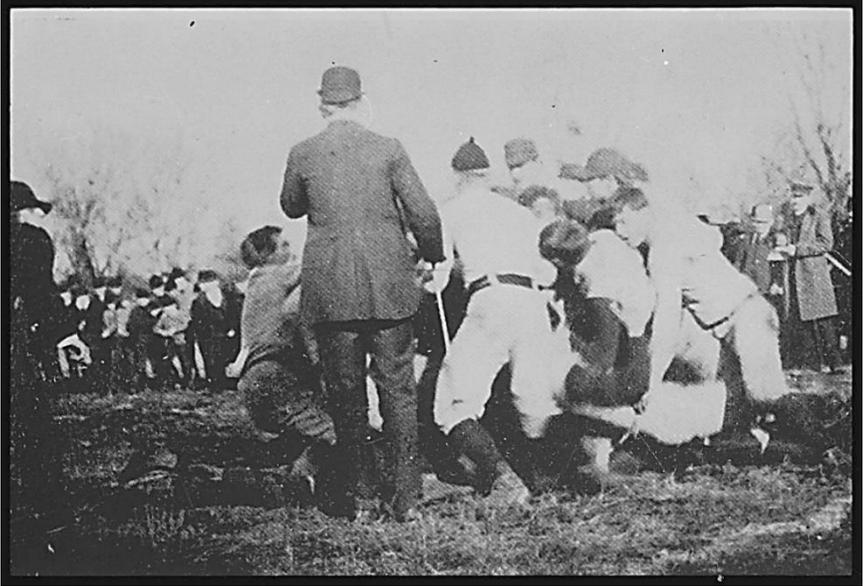
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Football in Kansas, 1856–1891



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# “Foot Ball Seems To Be Usurping the Place of Base Ball.” Football in Kansas, 1856–1891

Mark E. Eberle

Following the US Civil War, the sport of baseball spread across the young state of Kansas nearly as fast as new towns were established. It quickly supplanted cricket,<sup>1</sup> but what of the other potential competitor in team sports—football?

Early ball-and-stick games evolved into the game we now recognize as baseball during the mid-1800s.<sup>2</sup> This same period also saw the evolution of the sport known as football in Great Britain. Initially, each team had its own version of the rules. To facilitate interscholastic competition, the first written rules were compiled in Cambridge in 1848 by a group of private schools that included Eton, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, and Winchester. Teams outside the educational system continued to use different rules, so another meeting was held in London in 1863, with the goal of establishing universal rules for football. Two factions were represented. One preferred the style of play that involved carrying and kicking the ball, as in rugby. The other wanted to limit the game to kicking, as in soccer (association football).<sup>\*</sup> Being unable to resolve their differences, the two sports went their separate ways.<sup>3</sup>

The evolution of football continued through the nineteenth century in Great Britain and in the northeastern United States. In the early 1800s, football contests at colleges such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale followed their own rules and were more of a bloody melee than a sport. Harvard and Yale both banned the activity in 1860. However, in 1862, a group of prep school students in Boston organized the Oneida Football Club. They developed a hybrid game that included aspects of rugby and soccer—the “Boston Game.” However, running the ball was restricted, so the game more closely resembled soccer.<sup>4</sup>

Following the Civil War, colleges in the northeastern states began to play versions of soccer. In 1869, the year the Cincinnati Red Stockings became the first professional baseball club, Rutgers challenged nearby Princeton to a three-game series. Each school had its own variation of the rules, so the home team’s rules would apply. Rutgers won the first game, 6–4, under their rules on November 6. Although this is now celebrated as the first intercollegiate football game in the United States, it was actually more similar to soccer. Princeton won the second game, 8–0, on their home field a week later. Only two games were played, perhaps because no agreement could be reached on what rules to use in the third game. A few intercollegiate games were played the next few years, but the challenges imposed by variations in the rules at each school led to a meeting in October

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<sup>\*</sup> As football rules underwent changes, the names of the sport did likewise. For simplicity’s sake, the names used here are those used today for the three principal sports—soccer (association football; the “kicking game”), rugby (the “carrying game”), and American football (American rugby football, American collegiate football; the “ball possession game”) (Smith 2008). The name “foot ball” was initially two words, as was base ball. The one-word name is used here, except in quotes, because it is familiar to modern readers.

1873 to facilitate competition with a uniform set of rules. Representatives from Columbia, Princeton, Rutgers, and Yale agreed to a simple set of 12 rules. Rule number five clearly identified the sport as soccer—“No player shall throw or carry the ball.”<sup>5</sup>

Harvard was absent from this meeting. They had adopted the Boston Game, which allowed for limited running with the ball. In 1874, McGill University in Montreal, Canada challenged Harvard to a pair of games, both to be played in Massachusetts. In the first game on May 14—the Boston Game rules—Harvard won, 3–0. In the second game, which followed rugby rules, the two teams played to a scoreless tie. The following autumn, Harvard traveled to Montreal and won the contest with McGill, 3–0. McGill used a variation of the rugby rules that allowed touchdowns to count for one point, which accounted for all three of Harvard’s scores. In November 1875, Harvard challenged Yale to a game, in which each side compromised on their rules. Harvard gave up points for touchdowns (they simply granted the team the opportunity to score a kicked goal). Yale agreed to teams of 15 players, instead of the 11 players they preferred. Harvard won the game 4–0, but Yale liked this version of rugby enough to take it up. Players from Princeton were spectators at the game, and they, too, became proponents of rugby over soccer.<sup>6</sup>

In November 1876, Princeton organized a meeting with Harvard, Yale, and Columbia in Springfield, Massachusetts to discuss rules for rugby to be used in their intercollegiate contests. In general, the schools adopted the Rugby Union Code used in England, but there were two suggested changes. Princeton and Harvard wanted touchdowns to count as scores, which was not true of rugby. Yale wanted teams to have only 11 players, not 15 (or the 20 players used by Princeton in their version of soccer). On the first point, the schools agreed to a modification to the rugby rules that awarded points for touchdowns. “A match shall be decided by a majority of touchdowns. A goal shall be equal to four touchdowns, but in the case of a tie, a goal kicked [following] a touchdown shall take precedence over four touchdowns.” On the second point, the number of players would be 15—less than Princeton’s 20 and more than Yale’s 11. Based on these agreements, Columbia, Harvard, and Princeton organized the American Intercollegiate (Football) Association. Yale opted to remain independent and play with 11 men whenever possible until 1879.<sup>7</sup> Additional modifications to the rugby rules were made during the late 1870s and early 1880s, and these changes adopted at the annual meetings of the American Intercollegiate Association often codified what was already being done during practices and games.<sup>8</sup>

It was also during the autumn of 1876 that Walter Camp enrolled at Yale and soon became the school’s star athlete, excelling in baseball as a pitcher and in football (modified rugby) as a halfback, among other sports. Not only was he gifted physically, he was noted for thinking about football. Camp played for Yale through his graduation in the spring of 1880 and continued playing while he was enrolled as a medical student. (Eligibility was not limited to four years as it is today.) Many players contributed to the changes that led to the evolution of rugby into American football, but Walter Camp is credited with important leadership in the process. At the association meetings among Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Columbia, Camp and others representing Yale continued to press for

teams of 11 players. That proposal was finally accepted in October 1880. However, a second and arguably more important change was also adopted at that convention.<sup>9</sup>

In the rugby scrum, the players from both sides locked in opposing formations and fought to control the ball within the human mass. The objective in rugby was to kick the ball forward, toward the opponent's goal. At the outset of the scrum, neither side knew if it would soon be on offense or defense, which allowed little opportunity for planning and executing plays. What was codified at the 1880 intercollegiate convention would bring some order to this uncertainty.<sup>10</sup>

A scrimmage takes place when the holder of the ball puts it on the ground in front of him, and puts it in play when on side[,] either by kicking or snapping it back. The man who first receives the ball from the snap-back shall be called the quarter back, and shall not then rush forward with the ball, under penalty of foul.<sup>11</sup>

Kicking the ball backward toward a player closer to his team's own goal, instead of forward toward the opponent's goal, was an important step in the transition from rugby to American football. The process of getting the ball to the quarterback was modified in 1889, when the Yale center hiked the ball between his legs to the quarterback, who stood a few yards back. With this change and the reduction to 11 players, teams began experimenting with various formations based on six or seven linemen, a quarterback, and three to four halfbacks and fullbacks. The names of the backs were based on their distances from the scrimmage line. However, there was a serious drawback to this initial system. A team in the lead could retain possession of the ball indefinitely, which made for an extremely boring game. These were referred to as "block" games. In 1882, Camp proposed a new rule to correct this problem.<sup>12</sup>

If in three consecutive *fairs* and *downs* a team shall not have advanced the ball *five yards* or lost *ten*, they must give up the ball to the opposite side at the spot where the *fourth down* is made.<sup>13</sup>

Although block games were a serious problem, there was much opposition to the proposed rule at a meeting of the football association. However, Harvard's Billy Manning supported Camp's proposal and it was successfully used on a trial basis that autumn. The downs-and-distance rule gave more importance to every play and led to careful planning by the teams, which increased spectator interest. The yardage was gained primarily by running with the ball and sometimes by kicking it. Lateral passes were allowed, but the forward pass was not permitted until 1906. Rules regarding the forward pass were modified through the next several years, as football progressed to its modern form.<sup>14</sup>

Camp also led a wholesale revision of the rules at the 1882 convention. Up to this point, the rules had been based on modifications of the Rugby Union Code. Now, in addition to the modifications for American football, the number of rules was reduced from 64 to 38, and their sequence was reorganized. The title page of the resulting publication read, "Foot-Ball Rules. Revised by Walter Chauncey Camp. Authorized and Adopted by the American Intercollegiate Association. November, 1882. For the Season of 1883. Copyright 1883, by

Walter C. Camp.” It was published by Wright and Ditson of Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>15</sup> As with baseball, American football was not created through a single step. It was a progression over several years. However, the three-down rule and thorough revision of the rules in 1882 could be viewed as the “birth year” of American football.<sup>16</sup>

In 1883 and 1884, there were important changes to the scoring system. Previously, the numbers of goals, touchdowns, and safeties were reported. It was cumbersome and not fan-friendly. With a point system, the outcomes of games could be simplified to a single score for each team, as in baseball. Initially, the values were one point for a safety, two points for a touchdown, four points for a goal after a touchdown, and five points for a goal from the field. This was soon changed to place more importance on the touchdown—two points for a safety, four for a touchdown, two for a goal after a touchdown, and five for a goal from the field.\* These points were used until 1897.<sup>17</sup>

Walter Camp continued to compile the rules for collegiate football until his death in 1925. In 1890, publication of the rules moved from Wright and Ditson to A.G. Spalding, the sporting goods magnate, whose company had long published the rules for baseball. This likely improved the spread of American football rules across the country, and the number of colleges playing football increased dramatically during the 1890s.<sup>18</sup> In 1905–1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was founded by colleges around the country and took on the role of modifying the rules. In 1910, the organization’s name became the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).<sup>19</sup>

It is from this historical perspective that the early history of football in Kansas is recounted from the early days of the territory through the state’s first intercollegiate games in 1890 and 1891.

## Football in Kansas

The first known reference to “football” in Kansas was published in June 1856 as part of a city ordinance in Leavenworth. The ordinance listed activities prohibited in the city on Sundays. Penalties for those convicted of violating the ordinance differed for people who were free and those who were slaves.

**Ordinance No. 37.** *An Ordinance in relation to violations of the Sabbath.* Sec. 1st. Be it ordained by the Mayor and board of councilmen of the City of Leavenworth, That no person shall fight cocks, or play bandy, cards, football, marbles, deal faro, ro[u]lette, open chuckluck bank, or any other games, on the first day of each week, commonly called Sunday, within the city, under the penalty of a fine of not more than fifty dollars, if a white person, or free person of color, or receiving ten lashes, if a slave.<sup>20</sup>

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\* Walter Camp wrote an article in *Outing* magazine published in October 1887 that described American football and the changes made in the original rugby rules. He also included three summaries of the rules: 1) the 1876 “Original Rugby Union Laws of the Game” on which early intercollegiate play was based, 2) the 1882 “Intercollegiate Football Rules,” and 3) the “Foot Ball Rules for the Season of 1887” (Camp 1887).

Most of the early mentions of football in Kansas newspapers referred to metaphorical political footballs. The first mention of an exhibition of the sport was in 1865, when it was announced that the Atchison “Circle of the Fenian Brotherhood” planned to hold a picnic, during which, “our citizens will have an opportunity to see, with other amusements, *hurling* and *foot ball*, two of the national games of the Irish people, played.” The picnic was held on September 7 “to raise funds to aid in the liberation of Ireland,” but no description of the football game was published.<sup>21</sup> Five years later, the Hibernian Benevolent Society in Leavenworth held a picnic at the Arsenal Grounds of Fort Leavenworth on July 4. The activities were to include a “regular genuine ‘Irish Foot Ball’” game after a reading of the Declaration of Independence. As in Atchison, no description of the game was published.<sup>22</sup>

Newspaper reports of football in Kansas during the 1870s and 1880s were mostly brief statements about football being all the rage or a team being organized. Nearly all of the contests were apparently between local teams, usually picked from among those present. Often, the groups consisted only of young boys, but there were exceptions. For example, a Troy newspaper in 1877 reported, “Foot ball is all the go. Old men, young men, small boys and children, take a chance. It is good exercise.” Two years earlier, an Ottawa newspaper had added another demographic to the list of players. “The foot-ball season is upon us, and the youths of our town are having glorious fun. Even the school marms have been indulging in the sport.” Likewise, a Marysville newspaper reported in 1883 “even the girls have commenced kicking.”<sup>23</sup> Most teams mentioned in newspapers were likely composed of white players. However, in 1876, there was a rare newspaper report that, “The youthful colored population [of Topeka] have turned their attention to football.”<sup>24</sup>

Descriptions of games were virtually nonexistent, although they would have been some version of soccer or rugby rather than American football into the early 1880s. The type of football played at an 1880 game in Salina might be guessed from the name of one of the teams. In this contest, the Clippers played the Rugbys.<sup>25</sup> With no single set of published rules to guide them, teams in Kansas probably played different versions of football with local variations in the rules, as was the case elsewhere in the country.

The number of players on a side also varied, even more so than among the early collegiate teams in the Northeast. For example, in December 1874, a notice was published in which “the best twenty of the North Topeka foot ball club challenge an equal number from all the other wards of the city.”<sup>26</sup> A crowded game identified as rugby was played in Russell Springs in 1887. “Last evening the boys and men too, indulged in an old fashioned game of foot ball, Rugby rules. There were about 30 on a side.”<sup>27</sup> In Europe, the number of rugby players on a side dropped from 20 to 15 during the 1870s.<sup>28</sup>

Football games, especially those played by young boys, often took place on the unpaved city streets in the business district, where windows were broken and pedestrians and horses were at risk of injury.<sup>29</sup> These street games led to city ordinances forbidding the activity. For example, in 1888, Larned passed Ordinance Number 78, which prohibited playing baseball and football (or the throwing, catching, or kicking of balls) on streets or public places, except in blocks where there were no buildings or other improvements. The maximum fine was five dollars.<sup>30</sup>

Other sites for games included vacant lots, groves outside the city, fairgrounds, and baseball fields. These grounds were often used during celebrations, such as Decoration Day (Memorial Day), Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.<sup>31</sup>

In a few cities and small towns, football games with players on skates were a featured entertainment offered to paying spectators at skating rinks during the mid-1880s. In February 1883, the *Topeka Capital* reported, “Something new—game of foot-ball at the rink.” The rink team of eight players defeated a picked eight, “and it was quite difficult to tell which touched the floor most, Geo. Butts or the foot ball.” In Wichita, each team consisted of only three players. In January 1885, the opposing teams in Topeka were actual football clubs, one representing the Santa Fe Railroad and the other from Washburn College. “This will take up only a short time. Plenty of time for general skating.” On each occasion, a local band provided music. For the two teams playing at the rink in Osborne, the team that won two of three games would be awarded the football, a relatively expensive item at the time.<sup>32</sup>

The cost of football equipment included the purchase of either a spherical ball for soccer or an oblong ball for rugby or American football. In 1889, the team in Humboldt ordered “an American Association ball—a bladder of the finest rubber, covered with leather, and [it] is a daisy.” The balls were often special ordered while the teams anxiously waited to begin practice. In Marysville, the male teachers and boys pooled their money to purchase a “fine foot ball” for \$4.50 in 1884. Six years later, the team in Tribune asked donors for contributions to purchase a \$7.00 football. As the sports gained in popularity, local stores began to carry footballs. In 1887, a Leavenworth business advertised “Rugby and American foot balls, all sizes.”<sup>33</sup> As in early baseball, winning teams sometimes claimed the valuable game ball. For example, on Decoration Day in 1883, the “country boys” defeated the boys of Severy, winning a \$5 prize and a football.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to purchasing a ball, goal posts with a crossbar or rope were set up in fields for games played by organized teams, something that was not possible for pick-up games in the street. The ball was kicked under the crossbar in soccer and over the crossbar in rugby and American football. Of course, balls could be damaged or lost, but the high school in Sterling encountered an unexpected theft. “The Foot Ball Club request the person who took the goal posts from the ground to return the same.”<sup>35</sup>

In November 1878, “interest in the application of the electric light to social uses was strikingly apparent ... in Sheffield, England, when nearly 30,000 people gathered ... to witness a foot ball match by means of electric light. The electric light was thrown on the grounds from four lamps thirty feet from the ground.” Meanwhile, in Kansas, football was being played on moonlit nights during the winter, when the sun set early. For example, in the mining town of Galena, “Foot ball by moonlight [was] the boss game” in early December 1878 (the moon was full on December 9).<sup>36</sup> Perhaps their employment underground made it easier for the miners to play in dim light.

Injuries were common in football matches, as would be expected for teams composed of amateur athletes playing a sport in which contact with other players was frequent and violent—sometimes accidental, sometimes intentional. As noted by a Harper newspaper, “The looked for foot ball has come at last, and now the boys enjoy violent exercise almost

every afternoon.” Cuts, sprains, and broken noses or bones were the most common injuries reported, and being kicked in the shin (“hacked”) by an opponent was common. A Severy newspaper suggested those suffering from football discomfort would “find ready relief in Clark’s Foot-Ball liniment.” However, some injuries were more serious. In Wichita, “Master Fred Baldwin was seriously hurt in the groin, in playing foot ball on last Monday, and has been confined to his bed.” In Topeka, 19-year-old Ed Gunn was tripped while chasing the ball, and he hit “his head with such violence as to produce unconsciousness.” He was still “insensible” the next day.<sup>37</sup>

Although games among local players were fine for a diversion, only a sport in which towns competed against each other was likely to draw sustained interest from the community. This was a foundation of baseball’s early success in Kansas.<sup>38</sup> This sort of competition in football did not begin until the late 1880s, and some of the earliest matches were between teams of immigrants from Britain and elsewhere in Europe.

One such competition centered on teams from the mining communities in southeastern Kansas. Many of the mineworkers were immigrants from Great Britain and other parts of Europe. The competition began in March 1888, when the “miners at No. 4 coal shaft (Chicopee) and at Frontenac” scheduled “a match game of foot ball at Frontenac.” The game was probably soccer, but this is not certain. The Frontenac Thistles, Chicopee Pioneers, and elevens from other nearby towns played through the summer, even though “little is known in this part of the country about foot ball.”<sup>39</sup>

During a winter break from football, tragedy struck the mining community in November, when there was an explosion at Frontenac Shaft No. 2. The “most terrible holocaust that ever occurred in this mining district” struck at dusk as the shift was about to end. In a snow and sleet storm, families and other miners rushed to the mine entrance, where doctors from every nearby community joined them. A makeshift hospital was set up in the blacksmith shop, and large fires were built to keep the gathering crowd warm. Initial rescue attempts were hampered by debris and toxic air. Forty-eight miners died, and many others were injured. Football matches for Frontenac, Chicopee, and the other mining communities did not resume until the following spring.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, there were football matches in Wichita and nearby towns that featured the Runnymede Wanderers in 1890. Runnymede was a community of gentlemen farmers and ranchers from England, Scotland, and Ireland about 40 miles southwest of Wichita. The name of their team was perhaps borrowed from the Wanderers Football Club of London, which was the first influential soccer (association football) team between 1859 and 1887. On 4 January 1890, the Runnymede Wanderers played a rugby match between their English and Irish members inside the oval at the driving park (racetrack) in Harper. About 300 spectators watched as the Irish team won with one goal and five tries (touchdowns but no kicked goals) to one goal for the English team. Four days later, the Wanderers played at the Riverside Park baseball grounds in Wichita. This time, two games were played, one under “Association rules” (soccer) won by the Englishmen, 3–0, and one under “Rugby rules” won by the Irishmen, 2 goals and 2 tries to none. Descriptions of the games in Wichita newspapers were unusually detailed, and they included the rosters and

positions of each player. On February 22, the Wanderers played a rugby match against a team from Wichita, which ended in a scoreless tie. As before, the newspaper accounts were relatively detailed. That was the last mention of rugby or soccer games played by the Runnymede Wanderers, and the town was largely abandoned in 1892.<sup>41</sup>

A few Kansas town teams were organized with the intention of playing teams from other towns, as was common among early baseball clubs. Of the intercity football games actually played through the 1880s, none was part of a sustained competition. Which version of football was played is uncertain in most of these games.<sup>42</sup>

Among the intercity competitions was a home-and-home series between Lyndon and Melvern in the summer of 1889. The limited descriptions of the games make it uncertain which version of football was played, but there was mention of the changing rules during the late 1880s and the referral of a rules dispute to “Spaulding [sic], of Chicago,” so it might have been American football. The first attempt to initiate the competition was on July 4, when Lyndon traveled to Melvern, about 7½ miles south. However, there was apparently miscommunication, and Lyndon “could not be accommodated.” Earlier, Melvern had indicated they were “very anxious to have a trial with our [Lyndon High] Kickers, assuring us that if our boys won they should have the new ball.” Instead, Melvern traveled to Lyndon on July 20, and the first match ended in a draw.<sup>43</sup> The circumstances were unusual.

It was nearly sun-down before the game was called, and while the clubs did good work, it was the work of green hands. Mr. Rice was chosen umpire and ——— Murphy, (who was released from the Co[unty] jail that morning for burglarizing the Melvern depot) was made referee and there is where the trouble arose. The ref had learned foot ball rules of 86 and 87, but knew nothing of the revised rules of 1889. The most of the time was taken up in discussing rules, much to the disappointment of the hundreds who went out to witness the game. The game was decided a tie.... We think our Melvern friends laid themselves open to the charge of using their power of wrestling too much, as our little fellows were unable to stand the “shoulder and hip” tactics of some of our visitors.<sup>44</sup>

The return match was played in Melvern on August 3 in front of another “large crowd.” The game started at 6:30 and ended about 8:00 that evening. “There was a great deal of interest and excitement manifested by the friends of both sides, and some little betting was indulged in.” Lyndon was awarded a 4–2 victory, but the lack of knowledge of the rules was again raised, “the game being a new one in this locality. We would suggest to our boys to read up until they become as familiar with foot ball rules as they are with base ball.” The Lyndon players once again felt that some of the Melvern players were more physical than allowed. (“Elmore Simmons got knocked out in the first round during the foot ball game.”) This dispute ended the series.<sup>45</sup>

A few months earlier, the town of Ellsworth was also involved in an intercity game on 27 December 1888. It was possibly the first intercity game of American football reported in Kansas. Some form of football had been played in Ellsworth for at least five years. In 1883, “W.Z. Smith, and D.A. Burns, [were] the champion foot-ball kickers of this city. They

can kick higher, miss the ball oftener, and fall harder than any other two men 'on the job.'" Nevertheless, interest in football persisted. Their opponent in 1888 was Salina, about 35 miles to the east, who traveled to Ellsworth's football field in Hodgden's pasture just outside town. The rosters for the teams were published in an Ellsworth newspaper and consisted of 11 players—seven "forwards," a quarterback, two halfbacks, and a fullback. "The majority of the players were novices," but Ellsworth dominated the 90-minute contest, winning 38–0. It was apparently the only intercity football game for the Ellsworth town team, although they tried to arrange additional games for two years without success. In 1889, it was reported that, "The Ellsworth foot ball club are in a peck of trouble, because they can not [sic] find any in the country to play against them." The Ellsworth Foot Ball Team even advertised in the *Wichita Eagle* on 28 December 1890, challenging "any Kansas foot ball team to a game or a series of games, for the championship of the state."<sup>46</sup> Thus, it fell to the state's colleges to bring American football to the forefront and take it beyond intramural exercise.

## Intercollegiate Football in Kansas

Information about collegiate football teams, players, and selected games in Kansas from 1885 through 1940 was summarized by Harold Evans.<sup>47</sup> The emphasis in this section is on the early attempts to organize collegiate football teams during the 1870s and 1880s, when the opportunities to play peer institutions did not exist. The first games among the state's colleges and the first intercollegiate conference arose in 1890 and 1891.

College students played intramural football beginning in the early 1870s. Through the 1880s, school teams were proposed or organized at the College of Emporia (closed in 1974), Cooper College (Sterling College), Haskell Institute (Haskell Indian Nations University), Ottawa University, Southwest Kansas Conference College (Southwestern College), and other small colleges, normal schools (teachers' school), and academies. Few games were described, but in 1885, the college team in Emporia "resolved to be governed by Rugby rules." A pair of games was played on Thanksgiving Day 1889, in which the Cooper College team in Sterling defeated a town team in both American football and rugby. Because of the difficulty faced by the college teams in finding opponents among their peers, they typically played the local high school or a team from the community, perhaps assembled just for the game. Nevertheless, having a team to represent the school was viewed as important by most colleges.<sup>48</sup>

Three colleges in close proximity to each other eventually initiated intercollegiate football in Kansas, but only after several failed attempts. Baker University in Baldwin City is 15 miles south of the State University in Lawrence.\* Washburn College in Topeka is 25 miles west of Lawrence. In addition, Topeka is only about 60 miles west of Kansas City, Missouri, while Baldwin City and Lawrence are less than 40 miles from Kansas City. Given the travel options of the late nineteenth century, these short distances made it possible for

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\* What was known as the State University or K.S.U. during the period described here is now the University of Kansas (KU). Initially, the current KSU (Kansas State University) in Manhattan was referred to as the State Agricultural College.

people to arrange day trips to sporting events, with Kansas City providing the largest potential audience.

Students at the State University played informal intramural football games at least as early as 1873, and these contests continued into the 1880s, sometimes as competitions between the freshmen and sophomores or the juniors and seniors. However, even these intramural efforts were sporadic through the years. As noted in October 1882, “Foot ball does not seem to awaken much enthusiasm. But little real work has been done in that line this fall.” Football teams were also active periodically at Washburn College.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 1884, students at the State University organized an Athletic Association. The first three sports to be supported were “boating [rowing], base-ball, and foot-ball.” By April, “Uniforms [had] been ordered for [the] foot ball and base ball teams, and boats [were] being contracted for.” Efforts were also underway to arrange for the development of athletic grounds on campus. There was even talk of a game against Baker University. Yet, by May, the school newspaper wondered, “What has become of the foot ball eleven and their [striped] penitentiary suits?” After the summer break, the football team accepted a challenge from Washburn College for a game on November 1. A week later, the *University Courier* in Lawrence reported, “The foot ball game with Washburn failed to materialize. Come boys, don’t give up so easily.”<sup>50</sup>

Early and sustained organization of college teams was hampered by the lack of reliable college competitors. This was due in large part to intermittent interest among the students, who were primarily responsible for organizing the teams. The plight of Washburn College illustrates the difficulties intercollegiate football faced during the 1880s. In the autumn of 1884, Washburn organized a team, as did the high school in Topeka and the “younger portion” of the men who worked in the Santa Fe Railroad offices. The high school and Santa Fe teams played the first match among the three clubs on the “State House grounds.” Washburn then hosted the Santa Fe team. Games continued through November, and Washburn proved to be the best of the three, while the Santa Fe team bested the high school. It was the “Washburn team No. 2” that played the high school. In December, a Topeka newspaper reported, “The [State] University foot-ball club evidently have not much confidence in themselves, as they refuse to play both the Santa Fe and Washburn clubs.”<sup>51</sup>

At the end of September 1885, the *University Courier* in Lawrence agitated for a football team at the State University. “Why don’t the boys play foot-ball any more? It is a good game, splendid exercise. ’86 and ’87 both have foot balls. Bring ’em out.” A month later, the newspaper offered the following item. “It Is Rumored ... That the girls have organized a foot-ball team.” The chiding had no effect.<sup>52</sup> Washburn once again organized a football team, with white uniforms accented by red caps and stockings, but there were still no opponents at other colleges. In February 1886, Washburn planned to “challenge any football team west of the Missouri river, inter-collegiate rules to be used.”\* The State

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\* The *Topeka State Journal* published a photograph in October 1935 of the first Washburn College football team dated 1885, which was included in a 1978 summary of the school’s early history of football (Mack 1978). The ball in the photograph looks like a spherical “association football”

University accepted the challenge, and a game was scheduled for March 12. Washburn surveyed the football field and set up goal posts in anticipation of the game. However, the State University withdrew from the agreement due to a lack of practice blamed on poor weather. The *University Courier* had confessed, "If our foot ball team isn't beaten by the Washburn outfit on the 12th, it wont [sic] be our fault. While the Washburn boys are putting in their best licks, our team is practicing scarcely at all." The Washburn Athletic Association also established a committee to contact other colleges in the state, asking them to send delegates to a meeting to consider a "State Inter-Collegiate Organization." That effort also failed. In the end, the Santa Fe employees decided to reorganize a team in the spring of 1886 to play Washburn before the weather became too warm.<sup>53</sup>

In the autumn of 1886, there was again talk of a game between Washburn College and the State University. However, the *Washburn Argo* reported, "The new foot ball is a 'daisy.' We regret, however, that we are unable to chronicle the fact that Washburn has a foot ball team." Meanwhile, a football team was being organized at the State University, but it needed a new football. Ottawa University, 24 miles south of Lawrence, also organized a football team, and they hoped to challenge Baker University, midway between Lawrence and Ottawa. However, mention of games in local newspapers was sparse at all four campuses that winter.<sup>54</sup> The same was true for the following winters, although the *Washburn Reporter* expressed a desire to see "Some college foot-ball team of Kansas, which dares to accept Washburn's standing challenge."<sup>55</sup>

Talk of intercollegiate football began to increase in late 1889. That December, students and faculty at the State University met to organize the Unified Athletic Association, with representatives from tennis, baseball, and football. In February 1890, the State Inter-collegiate Athletic Association was organized. Its members included Baker University, Ottawa University, the State Agricultural College (Kansas State University), the State Normal School (Emporia State University), the State University (University of Kansas), and Washburn College (Washburn University). Unfortunately, nothing came of the association.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the failure of the State Inter-collegiate Athletic Association, intercollegiate football finally came to Kansas in the autumn of 1890. Given the lethargy of the previous years, the new activity rose rather suddenly. Baker University organized its football team in September and challenged the State University and Ottawa University, its two nearest neighbors. Washburn College also issued challenges. The seriousness of the season was evident in November, when the Athletic Association at the State University arranged "to have an expert player come and coach the eleven for a short time."<sup>57</sup>

The first game of intercollegiate football between Baker University and the State University in Baldwin City was scheduled for November 15, but it was postponed a week because of rain. The failures of earlier years to follow through with games would not be

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(soccer ball) rather than an elliptical rugby football. Thus, it is uncertain which version of football was played during the 1884-1885 academic year. However, information reported during the 1885-1886 academic year clearly indicated the team played American football.

repeated, however. The weather the following week was “bright, clear and just warm enough to not be uncomfortable,” with no wind to hamper the kickers. Nevertheless, both teams had trouble kicking goals after their touchdowns, which were scored behind “heavy pushes.” The State University held a slim lead at halftime, 9–8, on a touchdown (4 points) and field goal (5 points) to Baker’s two touchdowns. Baker dominated the second half, scoring three touchdowns and finally making one “try” after the third touchdown to add 2 points for a 22–9 victory. Stories in the *Baker Beacon* and *University Courier* describing “the first foot ball match of any importance ever played between two Kansas colleges” were extensive and included the rosters and positions of the players.<sup>58</sup>

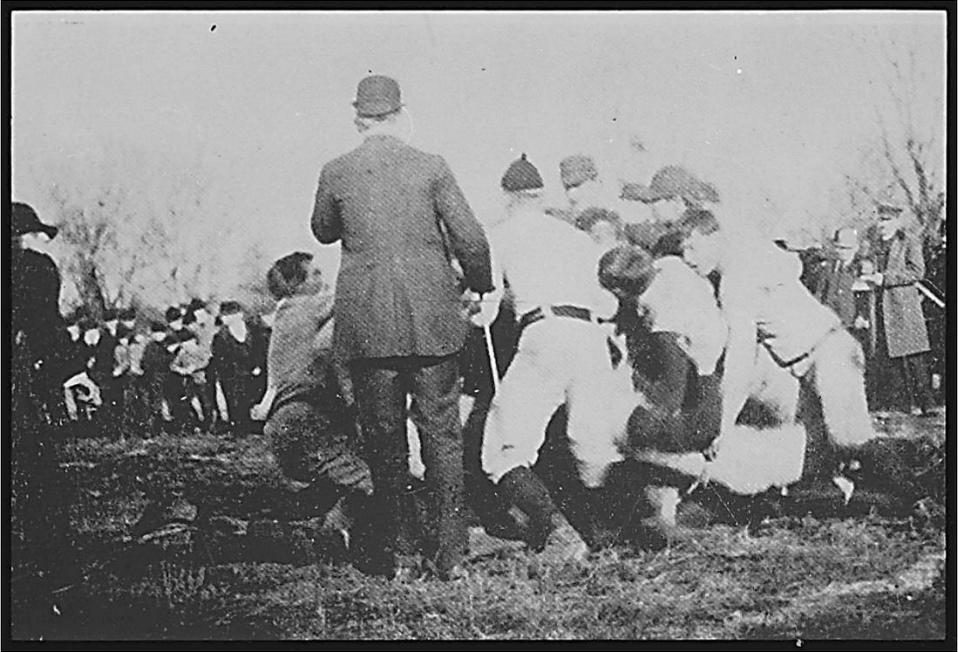
On Thanksgiving Day, the State University traveled to Kansas City to play the local YMCA team in the “first game played here under the American-Rugby rules,” which “awakened a latent love for foot ball.” The crowd was estimated to be “fully 3,000 people.” The YMCA team won, 18–10. The following day, Baker University easily defeated Washburn College in Topeka, 32–0. The *Baker Beacon* and *Washburn Reporter* published detailed accounts of the game.<sup>59</sup>

The second game between Baker University and the State University was played in Lawrence on December 8. Two days earlier, the *Lawrence Journal* published a description of how “modern college foot-ball” was played for the benefit of its readers. The newspaper stories describing the game in local newspapers were again extensive but contradictory. The official score was 12–10 in favor of Baker, but the State University claimed it should have been 14–12 in their favor. The dispute arose over a call by Dr. William H. Carruth, a poet and language arts professor at the State University, who acted as umpire. The other official was J.L. Morehead of Baker. Independent officials were not yet part of the game in Kansas. As time was about to expire, the State University scored a touchdown, which would give them 4 points and the victory. However, Carruth had whistled for play to stop to discuss a matter of the game, which Morehead confirmed after the game. The circumstances giving rise to the time out vary with the accounts. Nevertheless, the touchdown was disallowed, giving Baker the victory by only 2 points.<sup>60</sup>

The final game of consequence was between Baker University and the YMCA team in Kansas City on December 13. The teams played to a 6–6 tie.<sup>61</sup> In the end, Baker could legitimately claim the collegiate championship of Kansas for 1890. However, the arrangements for competition were rather haphazard. A more orderly competition would offer more legitimacy to championship claims.

In April 1891, a smaller intercollegiate athletic association known as the Triangular League was organized. It included only Baker University, the State University, and Washburn College. A schedule of base ball games was set for that spring, each team playing the other teams twice—a home-and-home series. That autumn, the same arrangements were made for tennis and football.<sup>62</sup> The games in 1890 had paved the way for intercollegiate football in Kansas, but it was the Triangular League that truly ushered in organized intercollegiate competition in the state.

The first intercollegiate game of the 1891 season was not between two Kansas schools. Instead, the State University of Kansas played the University of Missouri in Kansas City



A “heavy push” during a football game in Lawrence, Kansas between the State University (now the University of Kansas) and Baker University on 8 December 1890. Image RG 66/14 courtesy of the University Archives, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas. Used with permission.

in a much-anticipated contest on October 31. To help the fans understand the new sport of collegiate football, the *Kansas City Star* published a detailed explanation on October 28, as the *Lawrence Journal* had done for its readers the previous year. The score at halftime was 14–4 in favor of Kansas, who went on to win the game 22–8. “The work of Herbert Doggett, as umpire, and George Devol, as referee, [both of Kansas City,] was very satisfactory.” About 3,000 spectators attended the game, and the State University Athletic Association cleared about \$200. The train from Kansas City arrived in Lawrence at 10 o’clock that evening, and a bonfire celebration was held in South Park. The mayor had requested it be moved farther away from the business district because “the city had no fire protection.”<sup>63</sup>

Over the next three weekends in November, Washburn College lost three games. The first loss was to Baker University, 28–18, followed by two against the State University, 32–10 and 38–10. Then came the first match between Baker and the State University in Baldwin City on November 28. This time, there were no disputes, and the State University easily won, 18–4.<sup>64</sup>

On December 5, the State University returned to Kansas City to play another interstate contest against the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa). It was a seesaw game, which ended in Iowa’s favor on a disputed play. With Kansas taking the lead on a

touchdown, 14–12, Iowa ran a play following the failed “try” for 2 points that took them 10 yards away from a touchdown of their own.<sup>65</sup>

The crowd that had been kept back very well flocked on the field to see the trial for a goal [by Kansas]. The goal was missed; Larrabee [of Iowa] grabbed the ball, and running across the field behind the onlookers, and making a pretense of kicking off at the twenty-five yard line, he went tearing down the field. There were so many people on the field that he could not be seen by more than a very few of the Kansas players. Frederick [of Kansas] saw him, however, and although a stern chase is a long chase, he caught the Iowa full back ten yards from goal. K.S.U. objected, but the referee [Dave Holbrook of Iowa] allowed the run and the Kansas boys left the field.<sup>66</sup>

Larrabee’s run had occurred before the teams had lined up, and umpire Will Bloss of Topeka stated after the game that it was an “off-side play.” He would have insisted that the teams line up again at the 25-yard line if the Kansas team had not left the field in protest. This allowed Iowa to score an unopposed touchdown and extra points to claim the win, 18–14.<sup>67</sup>

While the State University played in Kansas City, Baker University again defeated Washburn College, 46–0, leaving Washburn with a disappointing record of four losses and no wins. However, Washburn did manage to defeat the YMCA team in Kansas City, 6–2. The second game between Baker and the State University the following week was postponed from Monday to Thursday because student Harry Hall, who had played in the junior–senior foot ball game at the State University on Saturday, had passed away that evening, although he had suffered no apparent injury during the game. When game day finally arrived, the crowd was estimated to be about 2,000 people, and they saw the State University defeat Baker, 8–0. The inaugural football season of a collegiate league in Kansas had been successfully completed, and the State University was the undisputed champion.<sup>68</sup> They had also initiated a 120-year football rivalry with the University of Missouri that ended in 2011.<sup>69</sup>

## Football versus Baseball in Kansas

With regard to the 1871 quote in the title of this monograph—“Foot ball seems to be usurping the place of base ball”<sup>70</sup>—it did not. However, similar statements were occasionally published through the 1880s. “Base ball didn’t pan out well in Wellington last summer. Suppose we take a new deal this season and try a rubber at foot ball.” “Will the Ottawa base ball club reorganize for this season? Or will foot ball be ‘kicked,’ as a substitute for the National game.” “Foot ball seems to have taken the place of base ball in this city.”<sup>71</sup>

Why was baseball more widespread than football in Kansas during the nineteenth century? The primary reason is the later development of American football. Colleges, mostly in the Northeast, began by playing association football (soccer) and adopted rugby at the organization of the American Intercollegiate Association in 1876. These two sports were British games, where the rules were set by British organizations—the Rugby

Football Union and the Football Association. Modifications to the rugby rules made by the American colleges beginning in the late 1870s did not result in a more distinctly American game until the early 1880s, well after baseball had been established in cities and towns across Kansas.

Organized baseball began with gentlemen's clubs and developed into a professional sport of organized leagues shortly after the Civil War.<sup>72</sup> The National League traces its history to 1876, the same year the collegiate teams in the northeastern United States were first altering rugby. The first known professional football players were not active until the 1890s, and openly professional teams debuted in 1896 around Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. As in baseball, regional football leagues were organized and folded through the First World War. On 20 August 1920, professional football clubs in Ohio met in Canton and organized the American Professional Football Conference. The name was changed to the American Professional Football Association a month later. The Ohio teams were joined that season by clubs from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and western New York. The association was reorganized in 1921 and renamed the National Football League in June 1922.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to football's late start, it needed time to develop into a sport that would attract spectators. American youths, including those in Kansas as early as the 1850s, enjoyed kicking a ball around as members of teams who followed whatever set of rules they chose. Yet, organized sports that would attract fans who understood the fundamentals of the game could not be sustained until teams at colleges or in cities (including high school teams) followed a universal set of rules that facilitated intercity competition. The rules adopted in the United States for football would also have to suit American tastes, just as American baseball was preferred to English cricket.<sup>74</sup>

One aspect of the appeal of football to American spectators was the orderly transition between offense and defense not found in rugby or soccer. This transition of roles provided for the development of offensive and defensive tactics that would be reasonably clear to the fans. In addition, modern football is unique among team sports, such as soccer, rugby, basketball, and hockey, in how the offense and defense are organized. In the beginning, football was like other team sports in that players were expected to play on both offense and defense, unlike today, when players specialize as members of the offense, defense, or special teams.

To appeal to American fans, there also had to be a reasonable pace of action, as shown by the implementation of the downs-and-distance rule in football. In discreet units of effort, every player was actively involved in the play, which was planned and practiced in advance and reviewed in retrospect, not just by the players and coaches, but also by the fans. Fans could also spend the time between plays anticipating what might happen, rather than simply reacting to what happened.

One of the other challenges faced by early football was its reputation for violence. There were certainly injuries and deaths associated with baseball among players and spectators.<sup>75</sup> Yet the nature of violent contact between players and the expectation of injuries hurt football's early reputation. Mass plays (as pictured in the photograph of the game between the State University and Baker University) made it nearly impossible for

the officials to control fouls and increased the likelihood of injuries. In large part, the creation of the NCAA was stimulated, with a push from President Theodore Roosevelt, to deal with the injuries and deaths occurring in football games.<sup>76</sup> The addition of the forward pass in 1906 and the spreading of players across the field greatly reduced the use of mass plays.

As football began to overcome its late start and its reputation for violence, the question of competition with baseball was periodically raised, but the question soon became irrelevant. Instead of competing, the two sports partitioned the seasons. For example, in Russell the February observation was, “The game of foot-ball promises to drive base ball out of sight.” In April, “Base-ball is beginning to loom up again.”<sup>77</sup> However, this partitioning of the seasons was a gradual process. In Junction City in June 1882, “Base ball interspersed now and [then] with foot ball seems to be all the [rage] now.” In Dodge City in May 1884, “It is hard telling which is in the lead,—base-ball or foot-ball. We are furnished with plenty of amusement from both games.” The following March in Dodge City, “A lively game of foot ball or base ball may be seen most any day on the public square.” The same was true in Alma in July 1885. “Base ball and foot ball are all the go here in town now among the boys and young men.”<sup>78</sup>

Playing soccer or baseball during the heat of summer was not a problem, but American football was better suited to cooler seasons, as noted in Topeka in October 1885. “Now that the cold weather has come, base ball has given way to foot ball.” The following May, the view was reversed. “On account of the warm weather, the [football] club will not play more than two or three games.” A similar choice was made at Newton High School in April 1887. “The weather for most of the week was so hot that foot-ball playing has been given up entirely until cooler weather.”<sup>79</sup>

Given that football was a contact sport, the uniforms could be substantial. Early football uniforms during the period described here did not include pads or helmets, although pads and nose guards started to come into use during the 1890s. Shin protection also might be worn. Jerseys were typically made of canvas, and the pants were quilted. Wool sweaters were often worn under the jersey, some of which were sleeveless. These features of the early uniforms are illustrated in the photograph of the 1895 team from Washburn College on the next page.

Thus, a natural partition of the seasons occurred between baseball and football. Baseball was better suited to the warm spring and summer. Football was better suited to the cool autumn. With regard to outdoor sports, especially during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the effect of the weather on the paying spectators resulted in the general absence of team sports during the winter. In the northern hemisphere, the coldest months are December, January and February. Current baseball and football seasons have been extended as a means of generating additional revenue, but the early baseball season ran from April or May through September or October, while the football season typically ran from October through December. That left the heart of the winter for hot-stove discussions about what had been and what might be in both sports.



The 1895 football team at Washburn College, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Memory ([kansasmemory.org](http://kansasmemory.org)). Used with permission. Copy and reuse restrictions apply.

The partition of the baseball and football seasons also allowed some players to be members of both the baseball and football teams. This mostly occurred at colleges and high schools, but it also involved town teams, as reported in Emporia in December 1886. “A football team composed of these renowned kickers has been organized in this city. ... As will be seen, the team is mostly composed of the Maroon [base] ball club.” The Emporia Maroons became a minor league baseball team in 1887 (Kansas State League).<sup>80</sup>

Thus, football did not usurp the place of baseball, nor is it likely to do so. Although there was early competition, each sport developed its own seasonal niche, thereby avoiding direct competition. They are distinct sports—distinct businesses—and their future successes or failures will be independent events.

## Acknowledgements

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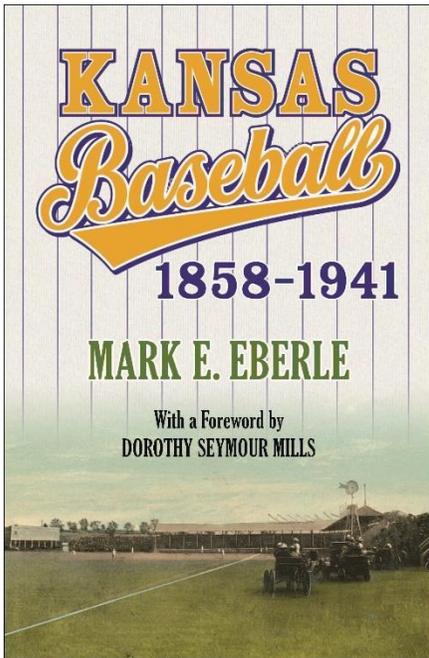
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- <sup>73</sup> Pro Football Hall of Fame, *Chronology of Professional Football*, <https://www.profootballhof.com/football-history/chronology-of-professional-football/> (accessed 29 November 2019).
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You can learn about the early history of baseball played by teams throughout Kansas in the book *Kansas Baseball, 1858–1941*, published in 2017 by the University Press of Kansas and available in paperback or e-book through bookstores and online retailers.

The book explores the early game played by hundreds of town teams composed of white males, as well as teams of women, African Americans, American Indians, and Mexican Americans. Also described are the regional minor leagues and major league tours, along with the histories of towns still playing baseball in the state's oldest ballparks constructed between 1924 and 1940.