

Ursinus; or, The future of football

BY WINIFRED JOHNSTON, '24

URSINUS was a loyal slave until he won the plaudits of the people in the Roman Coliseum. What happened to him afterwards was never told. But there is an old saying regarding the serving of two masters which might have bearing on the question of his future.

Certainly football now ranks with spectacles of old Roman days in power to draw the populace. Exploiters have never been slow in seeking the potential source of gold. The undermining of Ursinus' simple loyalty began some time back. For more years than they might care to say college administrations have had on their hands a giant swollen with thought of public pay and favor.

A recent news story regarding the petite daughter of the French premier Laval evidences a typical foreign reaction to the American enthusiasm for the sport which began as a simple school game. When the Laval daughter landed in America this fall one of her first requests was that she be taken to see a football game. When she found one morning that through a misunderstanding she had missed the opportunity to witness the only game available during her short visit, petite Josette burst into tears. What! Return from America without seeing a football game? As well visit Spain and miss the bullfight!

It is probably true, however, that there is no more united opinion in America regarding the place of football in the national culture than there is in Spain regarding the bullfight. That a natural social evolution is in progress of assigning football a new place in that national culture now seems evident.

Consider for instance a "scene from the future life" witnessed on the campus of our own university, representative of many state-supported schools throughout the South and West. Driving down Brooks street to the library the other day I saw the entire South field lively with students engaged in polo, baseball, and other sports. Tennis courts were colorful with boys and girls. All were enjoying the exhilaration of the crisp air of Okla-

homa autumn. Over on Owen field the team was practising for the Homecoming game. But there was only a scattering of students watching the big boys in red go through their tricks. There were hundreds having fun of their own, participating in the intramural activities so wisely built up in recent years by Ben Owen and his staff.

Football advocates have long defended their preoccupation with the giant by claiming that football "carried" the minor sports. The policy is a fallacious one. It would be interesting to see what these activities could do in the way of supporting themselves—not by appealing to the public, but to the participants; treating the activities, that is, not as spectacles, but as sports for gentlemen.

That football is now more useful to professional producers than to colleges is no news to the student of provincial entertainment. Fairs have always been good indices as to sports and pastimes having current appeal. For some years football has been recognized as one of the best "attractions" on fair programs.

Like horse-racing and bronco-busting, this erstwhile exercise of students has now turned professional entertainer. The Texas State Fair—"plum" of all fair bookings to carnival folks, because of playing annually to more people than any other fair in the United States—is now without a race-track, which in the first forty-three years of its existence was one of its chief features. In 1929 the former track was replaced by a stadium and a bowl seating over 45,000 people. Here football games are presented afternoon and night, eleven games being scheduled in the sixteen days of the fair. The management, which in late years has reported the grandstand attractions "jinxed," here finds a "dollar-jerker" outclassing musical comedies, cycloramas, Bird's exhibits, and championship rodeos.

Ursinus, remembering the dignity of his servitude in academic halls, might be expected to resent being classed with freaks of the midway. But there is often something childlike about the minds encased in giant bodies. The ballyhoo of the barker drowns reflec-

tion. All the shows of the midway are "strictly ed-u-ca-tion-al!" Ursinus is helpless in the hands of the exploiters. Bewildered, but intoxicated with knowledge of muscular power, like his new masters he is apt to find the sound of gold sweet to his ears.

Those with less childlike minds know that Ursinus can not long be both servant of the Christians and a contender in royal butcheries. Football cannot maintain its standing in the schools now that it has won the plaudits of the people and its press.

Signs of the times are all around us. The big stadiums built in the first days of the giant's public favor are already being turned to new uses. Professional competition has caused the dwindling of gate receipts at college games. Increasingly a vociferous public demands that intercollegiate games be played on terms the public sets. No longer is the game the thing. Success and only success is the thing which counts. Teams are rated by their winnings, rather than how well or honestly they played. Premiums are set upon the "fight"—no matter what its cost. Men, coaches, rules; honor, decency, sportsmanship: all are thrown into the arena as sacrifices to the gallery gods.

The corrupting professionalism which threatened the colleges through football under this system was exposed some two years ago in the famous *Carnegie Bulletin Number Twenty-three*. The length to which the public's press will go in attempting to make the college's giant jump to its jig is seen in the recent furor relating to charity games.

The plea of charity makes a powerful weapon. "The greatest of these is love"—particularly to an unthinking public. And it is the great unthinking public which the sportswriters manipulate for their own ends. Two examples may be cited, those of Michigan and of Oklahoma. The Oklahoma situation is too well known to need detailing, but the Michigan story may be of some interest.

Early in the fall of 1930 a newspaper demand was made upon the University of Michigan that a post-season game between the teams of the University of Michigan and the University of Detroit be played in the Michigan stadium for the relief of the Detroit unemployed and other depression sufferers. The fight to this end soon turned against the Western conference rules which outlawed such a game. It was suggested that Michigan take part even though it meant withdrawal from the conference. "So strong was the political combination behind the proposal," says *The Michigan Alumnus*, "that Governor Fred Green, an alumnus of the university and many times proven a sincere and loyal friend, was forced into the combination. Newspaper reports chronicled his efforts to in-

fluence the governors of other western states where Big Ten universities are located."

Wisely and quietly the Board of Control of Athletics at the University of Michigan called the bluff of the powerful Detroit public and press. It declined the offer of the Detroit game but voted that Michigan's share of the big game of its year, that with the University of Chicago, should be turned over to the governor of the state to be allocated by him at his discretion for charitable purposes. It voted also to donate free of charge the use of the Michigan stadium for any game between teams, the aims of which games might be to raise money for charity. Immediately the University of Chicago followed suit by announcing that it also would turn over to charity a certain amount of its receipts from the Michigan-Chicago game.

This neat turning of the tables upon Detroit "sportsmen" is given point in the last paragraphs of the statement by Chairman Aigler of the board of control: "During the campaign statements had been made in Detroit that numerous individuals and organizations would back the game by selling huge blocks of seats. This avenue now is thrown wide open to this type of support. . . . In addition, so many alumni are now pointing out, the way is left open for the University of Detroit, which proposed the game, to make a wonderful donation to charity by taking action similar to that of Michigan, namely, devoting the proceeds from one of its numerous remaining games to the same cause as designated by Michigan."

It is noticeable that the biggest game in the charity racket this year was one arranged by the press. At a convivial party on the St. Regis roof after the big Army-Navy game, Producers Florenz Ziegfeld and Earl Carroll sent "beauteous show girls for each and every player on the two teams" and the ball used in the kickoff was presented to Grover Whalen, political friend of Mayor Jimmy Walker who had followed up Sportswriter Paul Gallico's lead in arranging this bit of extra-curricular activity.

Under the guise of charity many things are possible. But what happens when the mask is torn away? Oklahoma has seen. Under the plea of charity the physical education staff of the University of Oklahoma has been badgered and embarrassed for two years by state sportswriters. Finally, when the athletic board of the university called the bluff by securing permission to waive conference rules in order to meet Oklahoma City university on its terms, the press came to confession. "The charity angle really is secondary to the average red-blooded football enthusiast," Bus

Ham wrote. "It's a game that would pack 'em in, charity or no charity—providing, of course, the schools use their regular lineups."

That at its worst the charity game is a vicious racket is shown by recent reports of the Boston college-Holy Cross football game. This game, supposedly staged for the benefit of the unemployed, resulted in a deficit of \$21,000. Gate receipts grossed approximately \$75,000. The grand total of \$96,000 expenses included \$15,000 rental for a stadium which was not used. Each of the contesting teams was guaranteed \$30,000.

Is it surprising that football has suffered a loss of repute in the academic world? This loss is reflected both in the faculties and in the thinking student body. Faculties and students resent the ruthless exploiting of natural loyalties. Both see the danger in allowing an unfaithful servant the freedom of the house.

The steady demand of faculties already has produced in the greater universities some measure of reform. This year Columbia has appointed a controller of athletics with full power to pass upon and limit the budget of all sports so far as may be consistent with present contract commitments. "The purpose is, as speedily as may be, to bring the expenditures in connection with athletic contests into harmony with the general scale of salaries and expenditures prevailing throughout the university." Last year visitors to this campus from the University of Chicago reported that though little was said regarding the future effect on sports of recent curricular changes in that institution it was thought that football would fade gradually from the picture. So much toward the relegation of football to a proper place in the collegiate world!

Let the public have its football. There is no necessary connection between football and the school.

An eventual solution would seem to be to let football join baseball and wrestling as American professional sports. The suggestion that frank professionalism replace the present system is a step in this direction. But there is no place for professionalism in the school. It is foreign to every ideal for which the name of university stands. Football in the school must take its place with other studies and activities as a preparation for life. If the boys who play it get good enough to earn their living by it—and desire to do so—it is time for them to get out. They as well as the school would profit in dignity if this were possible.

Professional baseball did not destroy the old sandlot. It only left amateurism free of stigma and taint. Professional football should do the same thing. Sportswriters then can earn their money in more legitimate fashion and directors

of physical education can turn to their proper business of guarding the health and developing the physique of the whole student-body.

It is useless to bewail the dying of "school spirit." The ideal of loyalty must be kept clear of poppycock. The removal of compulsion in the buying of student athletic tickets did indeed result in a drop of receipts from \$46,000 to \$13,000. Considering the reason why the state supports the university this is encouraging. School spirit is not dead. But who in this day can take the mumbling protestations of Ursinus seriously?

Students have had long training in seeing football in terms not of the play but of the winnings. The "football fan" is ready at any moment to turn on the makers of the system and rend them limb from limb. That fine loyalty which stands by in time of distress and failure has no place in football as constituted at present. At Oklahoma free food can still bring out the students to yell away a holiday. But the publicity bureau's own stuff long since killed the telling legend of Ursinus' self-sacrifice. Students have a way of knowing such things. Those who enjoy football will pay their money at the turngate now and hereafter. But spare their cheers and tears!

Ursinus has gone into the marketplace. Let him go. This is a servant no Christian can afford to own.



Farmers foiled

Aggies hit on a plan of revenge for O. U.'s possession of their bell-clapper while they were in Norman for the Thanksgiving game. But for the cleverness of Mrs. J. E. Pershing, Pi Kappa Alpha hostess, their plan would have worked and perhaps the bell-clapper, held for more than a year by the Sooner pep club, would have been turned over in exchange for their best beloved treasure.

The day after the game with Stillwater two Aggie Ruf-Nexs appeared at the Pi K. A. house, said they were Eightyniners and that they had been sent to get "Whiskers," the Eighty-niner pet coon mascot. But Mrs. Pershing, remembering that members of the O. U. pep club are wearing beards quite a lot this fall, referred the callers to "Mud" Neptune, keeper of the keys to Whiskers' room in the basement. The alleged Eighty-niners made their exit.



Sigma Alpha Iota, women's national professional music fraternity, announce the pledging of Josephine Patterson, Wewoka; Wilma Klein, Oklahoma City; Addie Lee Davis, McAlester; Margaret Buckley, Tulsa; Marjorie Patterson, Duncan; Gayle McCorkle, Clinton; Margaret Vail, Norman; and Frances Goodloe, Norman.