

IU football team had to conquer campus opposition

"And most plain people uninitiated in these matters firmly believe that football is made too furious and too absorbing and too dangerous and that this whole thing has monopolized too large a part of the student's thought and ambition."

— Amzi Atwater, Indiana University professor, in the *Bloomington Evening World*, April 13, 1905.

It was Professor A.B. Woodford who brought the game of football to Indiana University in 1886. Today's readers will smile at its modest introduction at IU. According to IU historian Thomas Clark, "Two players were added to the first line-up of the baseball team, and on trips this combination engaged in both baseball and football."

However the new sport began, students took to it with gusto, alarming some of their professors.



Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

It was Atwater who reasoned that some kind of balance between studying and physical exertion was, perhaps, a good thing, rather than a bad one.

Commented Atwater in the *Evening World*, the rise of college athletics "has largely stopped the unhealthy bending over books for eighteen hours of the twenty-four, as Tighlman H. Mallow did who, though he won high scholarship, destroyed his own life in so doing."

But there were problems. The

new game of football was wild and wooly, because there were few, if any, guidelines agreed upon by all concerned. Indiana colleges had not taken up the game for long before there were charges of "professionalism" and the luring of good players from one school to another. Injuries were common, because protective clothing had not evolved from experience.

At IU football as well as baseball was informally supported by the Athletic Association organized in 1891. Its general purpose seems to have been to pressure the university into building a proper gymnasium, but the organization was no less enthusiastic about upholding IU's athletic reputation among colleges in the state. In spite of charges that football (and baseball, for that matter) distracted students from their primary goal of study, some of

the faculty, at least, also endorsed the university's participation.

By February of 1906, the state of Indiana in general had taken notice of intercollegiate athletics in the form of a "Conference." The *Bloomington Courier* of Feb. 25 noted, "Indiana University will play football next fall, and the games will be according to the rules and regulations made by the Conference. At a meeting of the faculty Friday afternoon, the action of the Big Nine was endorsed and thus the national college sport was saved."

Continued the *Courier*, "While the old game with all its objectionable features is dead and buried, the action of the faculty in endorsing the new game as created by the Conference Committee, insures an article of football that will closely follow college standards and college

methods and will be removed from all taints of professionalism."

According to the *Courier*, it was IU Professor M.W. Sampson who championed the cause of football as an intercollegiate sport. In fact, the newspaper went one step farther in praise of the professor, "It is to Professor Sampson then that credit is due for the absolute salvation of football to the American public."

The *Courier* added a little postscript to its article about the endorsement of the game and its new rules — a statement that proved to be a prophetic one: "But there are certain complications yet to be dealt with." That was also an understatement.

Next week: IU football team goes on strike.