

# Theodore Roosevelt's Role in the Evolution of American Football

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There are two sides to every story, and football is no different. Like anything else in life, football has its controversies. Its supporters claim that it is a sport that teaches life lessons, discipline, and good sportsmanship, and that it builds character. Its opponents assert that it is a dangerous game with implications that can result in severe injury and even death. In the late 19th century, when intercollegiate football began, the game was played with unnecessary roughness, vigor, and aggression that led to severe injuries. Many, including Theodore Roosevelt, liked the game of football despite its flaws. The future president loved the sport and believed that the sport needed to be in America. However, as the game evolved, football became a death trap, and many pushed for the termination of the sport. Roosevelt, still believing in the virtues of the game, fought against the opponents of the sport and for the reformation of the rules of football.

Although Roosevelt loved the game, he did very little to save it. His role throughout the crisis of football was minimal. Roosevelt stood up to the opponents of football but did nothing in helping the game become safer to play. Even though some historians say that Roosevelt did play a role in saving football, Roosevelt did not help save football, due to his 1905 intervention being a failure, and due to his not having a role in the 1906 and 1910 interventions that helped reform the rules of the game.

The first game of football ever played occurred on November 6, 1869, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The two competing teams were the College of Rutgers vs. College of New Jersey, officially renamed Princeton in 1896. The College of Rutgers won the first official football game, but the rules of the game were completely different from what we see today. This game played was under a modification of the London Football Association rules. With twenty-five men on each side, no running with the ball allowed, and the only advancement of the ball could come by the foot, head, or shoulder, these two teams played a game of soccer. These soccer rules stayed in the game for a couple of years and then

transitioned to rugby rules. The rugby rules were around for only a couple of years. However, they were changed at the annual convention of the Intercollegiate Football Association (IFA) in 1880 with help from an essential figure of the game of football, Walter Camp.

Camp, also known as the father of American football, helped move the game away from its rugby-like play by proposing new sets of rules. Delegates attending the 1880 IFA convention adopted Walter Camp's eleven-player proposal.<sup>1</sup> He also suggested in 1880 to discard the English formation of the scrum from football. The scrum, found in rugby, happens after the player carrying the ball is downed, and the referee resumes play by tossing the ball into a tangle of interlocking players. The two teams begin to push against one another for possession of the ball. To Camp, this rule was not rational and needed to be gone.

Camp introduced many more new aspects of football that are still used today, including the position of the quarterback, the T-formation offense, linemen, fullbacks, and halfbacks. In 1882, he created the concepts of "downs," where if the offense did not advance the ball at least five yards in three plays, then it relinquished possession of the ball to the opposing side.<sup>2</sup> The last of his proposals came in 1885, when he convinced the committee of new scoring procedures. The general structure of the game was now in place.

Within a matter of years, however, the game turned into a "bloodbath." Coaches began to create mass play formations that increased the dangers and brutality of football. Lorin Deland introduced the "flying wedge" in 1892. This play functioned as a gridiron self-destruction weapon forged by human bodies.<sup>3</sup> A group of five more massive players started in motion; then a group of four lighter players started in motion, and eventually, the two groups met at midfield and converged together, forming a "giant wedge" for the ballcarrier to follow toward the goal.<sup>4</sup> The two groups converging explicitly aimed at one man on the opposing line and exerted all their force on him time and time again. "What a grand play!" wrote the *New York Times*; "a half-ton of bone

<sup>1</sup> Des Julie Jardins, *Walter Camp: Football and the Modern Man*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle,*

*Controversy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*.

and muscle coming into collision with a man weighing 160 or 170 pounds." However, the *Times* warned, "A surgeon is called upon to attend the wounded player, and the game continues with renewed brutality."<sup>5</sup>

These mass-momentum plays were responsible for many injuries and deaths before being banned from play at the end of the 1893 football season. While these new momentum plays were a grand play to football enthusiasts, the growing critics of football used these plays as evidence to try to get the game abolished. The abolitionists would have a tough fight ahead of them.

Roosevelt was born on October 27, 1858. He was born into wealth and described as "a pale, scrawny boy with thin legs, a sunken chest, knobby knees, scant sandy hair, protruding teeth, and a speech defect."<sup>6</sup> He also had asthma and could not see very well until he received glasses later in his childhood. Though he suffered from this chronic respiratory disease and was not the best built young man, he did not allow these barriers to stop him from living the strenuous life that he loved to live. Roosevelt sought to personify the heroic virtues found in the soldier, the cowboy, and the prizefighter.

Roosevelt enjoyed what he called the "strenuous" life, which included activities such as boxing, weightlifting, and hunting. He enjoyed being outdoors and doing anything that would get his blood flowing. On April 10, 1899, he gave his famous *The Strenuous Life* speech to the Hamilton Club in Chicago. Roosevelt argued that through hard work, anyone could overcome their difficulties. By working hard and overcoming difficulties, anyone can be successful in America. However, most of Roosevelt's points were referring only to men, not to women. His main points argue that the strenuous life gives men more confidence, makes men better husbands and fathers, and helps overcome the fear of failure and criticism. Roosevelt stated in his speech: "A mere life of ease is not, in the end, a very satisfactory life, and, above all, it is a life which ultimately unfits those who follow it for serious work in the world."<sup>7</sup> Not living a satisfying life was an idea that Roosevelt never had. He was going to live the life that he wanted, no matter what the obstacle in front of him may be.

Roosevelt joined William McKinley on the Republican ticket in the presidential election of 1900. Roosevelt believed that a term as vice president would propel him to the presidency in 1904. Between 1902 and 1904, U.S. newspapers described the forty-four-year-old President of the United States as "strenuous" more than ten thousand times.<sup>8</sup>

He was strenuous in his speeches, his policymaking, and everything else he did throughout his life.

This is why Roosevelt loved the game of football so much. Although he never played football, he enjoyed all the masculine aspects of the game. In a period when there was less of a frontier, the nation's masculine force began to withdraw from active involvement in the world to a more "cloistered life" of ease and sloth. "Mollycoddle" is the word that President Roosevelt would use to describe this type of a man. Any male who rejected Roosevelt's "strenuous life" was, in his opinion, a milksop, a sissy, a pampered weakling, and unprepared to lead in the modern age.<sup>9</sup> President Roosevelt saw this coming true in his nation and did not like it. In football, he saw a game that embodied the "strenuous life" and could stop the physical and moral decline of the nation. Roosevelt insisted that as one of the few rugged activities still available to urban boys, football had to have its place, as the nation's future leadership depended on it.<sup>10</sup>

Roosevelt was an avid watcher of football. He attended many games throughout his life. However, Roosevelt transformed from an avid watcher to an engaged parent when both of his sons decided to try out for their respective institutions' football teams, one at the collegiate level and the other at the high school level. Roosevelt loved their decision and supported them, but as their father, he still worried about their safety.

In the fall of 1905, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., the President's firstborn son, earned a spot on the Harvard College freshman football team. His son's participation led the President to pay much closer attention to the game. On September 16, 1905, fresh from ending the Russo-Japanese war, Roosevelt received a letter. The letter was from Endicott Peabody, an old college friend and founder and headmaster of Groton School for Boys. Both Roosevelt boys, Theodore Jr. and Kermit, studied at the school. Peabody wrote: "The teaching of football at the universities is dishonest. It encourages trickery and cheating and therefore threatens to instill the wrong lessons. You and I believe in the game, and its beneficial effects upon boys and young men when it is carried on fairly."<sup>11</sup> Peabody concluded his letter by urging Roosevelt to spark "a complete revolution" of the game of football. After reading the letter, Roosevelt responded immediately: "I agree with you absolutely."<sup>12</sup>

To begin his revolution of football, Roosevelt hosted a football summit at the White House on October 9, 1905. "Today I see the football men of Harvard, Yale, and

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<sup>5</sup> Scott A. McQuilkin and Ronald A. Smith, "The Rise and Fall of the Flying Wedge: Football's Most Controversial Play," *Journal of Sport History* 20, no. 1 (1993): 59.

<sup>6</sup> Ryan A. Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete* (New York, NY: Diversion Books, 2019), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Letters and Speeches* (Library of America: 154. Library of America, 2004), 765.

<sup>8</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Jardins, *Walter Camp: Football and the Modern Man*, xi.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> John J. Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 184.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

Princeton," Roosevelt wrote to his youngest son, Kermit. The aim, he wrote, was "to try to get them to come to a gentleman's agreement not to have mucker play."<sup>13</sup> The six representatives included Walter Camp and John Owsley of Yale, Bill Reid and Edward Nichols of Harvard, and John Fine and Arthur Hildebrand of Princeton.<sup>14</sup>

Roosevelt began the meeting by stating: "Football is on trial. Because I believe in the game, I want to do all I can to save it. Thus, I have called you all down here to see whether you will not all agree to abide by both the letter and spirit of the rules, for that will help."<sup>15</sup> He then began providing examples of unsportsmanlike conduct that each team had committed. He also discussed cases of coaches urging their players to commit fouls when referees could not see them.<sup>16</sup> The members of Yale and Princeton denied these allegations. According to Bill Reid, head coach at Harvard, "Walter Camp made some considerable talk but was very slippery and did not allow himself to be pinned down to anything."<sup>17</sup> Roosevelt had to leave the meeting to take care of national business. The members from the institutions sat outside on the White House porch and waited for his return.

Upon Roosevelt's return, he issued a mandate to the meeting's attendees. He wanted the men to draw up an agreement to end mucker play and honor the rules that were already in the game. The six men left the White House that afternoon and worked on the agreement on the train ride home. Upon completion, all six men drafted a statement declaring that from now on, they would "carry out in letter and in spirit the rules of the game of football related to roughness, holding and foul play."<sup>18</sup> Walter Camp sent President Roosevelt the statement, anticipating his approval. Roosevelt trusted the leaders of football and happily approved the statement. In his reply to Camp, Roosevelt wrote, "I cannot tell you how pleased I am at the way you have taken hold. Now that the matter is in your hands, I am more than content to abide by whatever you do."<sup>19</sup> Camp released the statement to the press, and the 1905 football season continued.

This attempt failed at reforming the rules and the safety of football. Later in the season, on November 11th, Harvard traveled to Pennsylvania to play the Quakers. The Quakers tried to give their team an advantage by soaking the field with water the day before the game. The Penn players had shoes with oversized cleats that helped them gain traction in the mud. As the game went along, the Harvard players, already upset about the field conditions, became infuriated

when the Penn players kept provoking them. The Harvard center, provoked by a Penn player who kept kneeling him persistently, slugged the Penn player in the face and was ejected from the game.<sup>20</sup> This incident was a small bump in the road compared to what was coming at the end of the 1905 season.

As was this incident, two weeks later, on November 25th, when Harvard and Yale squared off. Francis Burr, a Harvard freshman, attempted to field a punt. After calling for a fair catch, two Yale players ran into Burr illegally. Jim Quill, one of the Yale players, struck Burr in the face with his hand, breaking his nose, while the other player delivered a body blow with his feet, which knocked Burr unconscious for a moment.<sup>21</sup> The official, Paul Dashiell, refused to call a penalty and allowed the Yale players to remain in the game. Tensions were very high throughout the rest of the game.

On the same day, two smaller schools were playing in New York. New York University was playing Union College in Manhattan. NYU was moving the ball at will. Harold Moore, a Union College defender, tried to tackle NYU's ball carrier around the shoulders. His unprotected head was struck by the knee of a teammate, also looking to make the tackle. Moore failed to get back on his feet and got rushed to Fordham hospital. Moore died of a cerebral hemorrhage later that night.<sup>22</sup>

This incident showed that Roosevelt had accomplished nothing at his intervention to reform football, and the turning point of the reform of football was now beginning without him. Less than eight weeks after publishing the statement, two of three teams that signed it were involved in unnecessary mucker play. Precisely what they stated they would not do, they did, indicating that the first intervention had been a complete failure. The game of football was under fire and extreme criticism. Opponents of the sport, such as Charles Eliot, used these events as evidence in their case against the game.

Eliot, the president of Harvard, was one of the foremost leaders in the anti-football movement. From its earliest days, he had fought for the abolition of the sport. To Eliot, football "messes with your moral qualities," and the game had grave evils within it. The grave evils, Eliot stated, are "an immoderate desire to win, frequent collisions with masses which make foul play invisible, profit from violations of rules, and misleading assimilation of the game to war as

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<sup>13</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 155.

<sup>14</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> Jardins, *Walter Camp: Football and the Modern Man*, 180.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Reid and Ronald A. Smith, *Big-Time Football at Harvard, 1905: the Diary of Coach Bill Reid* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 193-194.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 157.

<sup>19</sup> Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football*, 190.

<sup>20</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 70.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> J.S. Watterson, "The Gridiron Crisis of 1905: Was It Really a Crisis?" *Journal of Sport History* 27, no. 2 (2000): 293.

regards its strategy and its ethics.”<sup>23</sup> These four “evils” are what drove Eliot to fight so hard to see the sport terminated.

The majority of the Harvard Corporation Board, most of the faculty, and an influential group of alumni supported Eliot in ridding Harvard of football.<sup>24</sup> Roosevelt fought against the opponents of the sport triumphantly and had done so since the 1890s. “What fools they are at Harvard to try to abolish football,” Roosevelt wrote to his friend Owen Wister in 1895.<sup>25</sup>

Roosevelt could not believe that his alma mater was making such an effort. To Roosevelt, football served to revitalize an effete population physically and mentally unprepared to defend themselves or take their place on the world stage.<sup>26</sup> Getting rid of the game would hurt the young men of the nation and make them more feminine. President Roosevelt believed he had an obligation to defend any activity that preserved the “masculinity” of the American male, so he continued his praises of anything strenuous, especially football. “Of all games, I personally like football the best, and I would rather see my boys play it than see them play any other,” Roosevelt stated in a letter to Walter Camp.<sup>27</sup> A meeting in December 1905 would become the second intervention of reforming the rules of football, an intervention that received no guidance from Theodore Roosevelt in any way.

On the day that Harold Moore died, Henry MacCracken, the NYU chancellor, wrote to Charles Eliot asking him to call a meeting to reform the game of football forever. Eliot refused to call the meeting. Eliot believed that just by reforming the rules, nothing would change, and the actual problem, the sport itself, needed to be abolished. After receiving Eliot's rejection, MacCracken jumped into action and called his own meeting. MacCracken sent out nineteen invitations to colleges that had played for football at least a decade, and thirteen of them responded. On December 8, 1905, thirteen colleges met at New York University to discuss the future of football.<sup>28</sup> The second intervention was under way.

Among the thirteen colleges that attended the meeting, none of the participants came from the three major programs that had gathered at the White House with Theodore Roosevelt in 1905. Nevertheless, the institutions that attended had their own stature. The schools included Columbia, a first-rate university, and Rutgers, which had played in the first-ever intercollegiate football game. The meeting began with a bang as Columbia proposed that “the

present game of football as played under existing rules be abolished.”<sup>29</sup> Five of the colleges voted in favor of the proposal, while the other eight voted to reform the sport. The supporters of reforming football won by a slim margin but were happy with the outcome. Understanding that they did not have enough authority to reform the rules, the thirteen colleges wanted to meet with all of the other football-playing institutions to discuss putting new rules into the sport. The meeting adjourned shortly after their decision. The colleges agreed to meet again in late December to discuss specific reformations of the sport. However, the second meeting would be far more significant than the first.

On December 28, 1905, the second meeting convened at the Murray Mill Hotel in New York. More than sixty colleges attended the meeting. Once again, none of the colleges that had convened at the White House were at this meeting. Walter Camp, the founder of American football and the leader of the rules committee, believed in the rules already in the sport and did not want them to change. Although most of the delegates came from smaller schools, some more prominent institutions attended the second meeting looking to help save the game. Some of the more prominent institutions included the University of Texas, the University of Minnesota, and both U.S. military academies (Army and Navy).

After meeting for nine hours, the colleges attending the meeting agreed to make their own rules committee and called for its merger with Camp's committee. The new committee chose Palmer Pierce of the U.S. Military Academy as president. At the end of the meeting, led by Pierce, the conference passed a series of “West Point” resolutions calling for combining with Camp's committee. If this proved impossible, then the new committee would establish a separate set of rules that would make football a more open game and cut down on violence.<sup>30</sup>

Although standoffish at first, all the members of Camp's committee joined the new committee. Camp fought hard to preserve his authority in the rule-making of the sport. However, his time of being in charge of the rules had come to an end. After the groups agreed to merge, they appointed officers, with Bill Reid winding up as the secretary and Walter Camp just an ordinary member. With the two groups finally merged, the new organization called itself the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States or the ICAA.

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<sup>23</sup> Charles W. Eliot, *The Man and His Beliefs* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1926), 119.

<sup>24</sup> Frederick John, “The Time Teddy Roosevelt Went to War with Dr. Charles Eliot and Saved the Day for Football,” *Yankee* 37, no. 11 (1973): 117.

<sup>25</sup> Owen Wister, *Roosevelt: The Story of a Friendship, 1880-1919* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 39.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses*

(New York: Century, 1900), 163.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football*, 150.

<sup>28</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 168.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 200.

<sup>30</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 78.

Over several meetings in January and February of 1906, the ICAA slowly worked out the proposed changes for the sport. Finally, on March 31, 1906, the ICAA announced its changes to the sport. The new rules mandated a neutral zone between the offensive and defensive lines before the snap of the ball, six offense linemen on the line of scrimmage, ten yards for a first down (in three downs), and the introduction of the forward pass.<sup>31</sup> Along with these changes, the reformers also passed changes purposely for cutting down on injuries and foul play.

These changes included reducing the length of the game from seventy to sixty minutes to cut down on fatigue-related injuries. Next, an extra referee was added to bring an extra pair of eyes to the officiating. And finally, the new rules prohibited hurdling to prevent head and neck injuries when players boosted ball-carriers into the air in desperate bids to gain a couple of yards.<sup>32</sup> The new changes opened up the action of the game and limited the mass-momentum collisions. Of all the new rules put into play, the forward pass opened up the game more than any other. However, it came with many restrictions at first.

The forward pass opened up the sport by making the defenders have to play the run and the pass. We see this exceptionally well in the sport today. Nevertheless, when the forward pass came in 1906, the coaches did not receive it very well and rarely used it. In football today, when the offense throws an incomplete pass, the offense retains possession of the ball and moves to the next down. One of the significant reasons why the pass did not get actively used at first was because an incomplete pass turned the ball over to the other team at the spot of the pass. Furthermore, a pass play could not cross the goal line for a touchdown, and the ball had to be thrown five yards from behind the line of scrimmage, as well as thrown a minimum of five yards to the left or right of the center. These restrictions hurt the new rule drastically and made it hard to use. However, the restrictions would not stick around the sport for long.

With the new reforms in football, many coaches and teams did not know what to think of the new rules and changes. As football season neared, in September 1906, more than one hundred schools sent representatives to New York for special instruction of the new rules.<sup>33</sup> This conference gave the skeptics a chance to voice publicly their distrust in the new rules. When the conference adjourned, everyone had a better understanding of the new rules, and the season was ready to begin for the “new” and “safer” game.

As the 1906 season came and ended, the new rules were a success. All the reforms, especially the forward pass,

made spectator interest grow and seemed to make the public forget about severe injuries and deaths.<sup>34</sup> At the end of the 1906 season, the *New York Times* listed eleven football players who had died in the sport at all levels, which was down from eighteen deaths the year before. Also, the one hundred and four players who suffered severe injuries under the new rules marked a reduction of nearly thirty-five percent from the previous year.<sup>35</sup> It certainly looked as if football had been saved. The sport had a sense of peace through the 1906, 1907, and 1908 seasons. The deaths and injuries were down from the chaotic 1905 season, and everything seemed as if it was going to be all right.

The football intervention of 1906 was the first step in the right direction for the sport. The reformers of football were delighted as they witnessed the severe injuries and deaths decline. Although it did not solve all the problems in football, the intervention took the heat off of the game and its members. For someone who “loved the game” and wanted to see it saved, Roosevelt had no role in this intervention. The ICAA members are the ones who created the new reforms and put them in the game. For Roosevelt, as far as the 1906 intervention was concerned, the only role that he played was cheering for the reformed rules through Bill Reid and Paul Dashiell. Though Reid and Dashiell appreciated the support, Roosevelt still did not have a role during the second intervention. His cheers had nothing to do with football becoming a safer game. With his White House intervention being a failure and now lacking a crucial role in the second intervention, Roosevelt would have only one more opportunity to help save the game.

After several years of peace, football suffered another setback in the 1909 season. Early in the season, on October 19, 1909, quarterback Edwin Wilson of Navy was seriously injured in a game against Villanova. The injury left Wilson paralyzed. He died during the following off-season. Two weeks later, Harvard played Army. Harvard kept pounding the ball at Army's left tackle, Eugene Byrne, and he looked so rough that the referee urged Army's coach to send in a substitute.<sup>36</sup> However, Byrne stayed in the game. A few minutes later, he was knocked unconscious. Byrne died later that night. One month later, the University of Virginia halfback Archer Christian fell during a game against Georgetown and slipped into a coma. He died of a brain hemorrhage early the next morning. All three of these men's deaths made the front page of newspapers. The *New York Times* called for an immediate suspension of football “before the next boy gets killed.”<sup>37</sup> In total, twenty-six players died in

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<sup>31</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 169.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football*, 209.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>34</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*,

108.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football*, 215.

<sup>37</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 112.

1909, and the clamor for reform began to sound once again.<sup>38</sup> The criticism of football returned with a vengeance. Following the death of Arthur Christian, Charles Eliot pushed one more time to try to get football abolished. Eliot wrote to Virginia's president, Edwin Alderman, urging him to speak out against the sport. "Men are killed and wounded" in many sports, Eliot said, but football was unique because its risks were "deliberately planned and deliberately maintained."<sup>39</sup> Alderman received Eliot's message and had to choose either to end football at Virginia or keep the sport.

Alderman chose to keep football at Virginia. He had supported the game in its past and wanted to support it now during its new crisis. He also believed that the rule committee members, which included Virginia's Dr. William Lambeth, worked for the best interest of the colleges.<sup>40</sup> Alderman wanted to see the rules of football reformed, again, and the rule-makers address all the dangers of football. In December 1909, the ICAA would meet again with hopes of accomplishing exactly this. The third and final intervention was under way. And just as the second intervention of 1906, the third and final intervention of 1910 would also receive no guidance from Theodore Roosevelt.

Seventy colleges gathered at the ICAA meetings this time. Throughout the winter of 1910, the committee members argued and haggled among one another. After long, lengthy sessions in February, March, and April, the committee adopted five specific rule changes. The rule changes consisted of the flying tackle being made illegal and the prohibition of pushing or pulling of the ball carrier by teammates. The division of playing time was divided into four fifteen-minute periods instead of two thirty-minute periods; seven men (instead of six) had to be on the line of scrimmage for every play, and finally an on-side kick had to travel at least twenty yards instead of ten.<sup>41</sup> At a later meeting, the ICAA passed another rule permitting only a single player in the offensive backfield to go in motion before the snap of the ball. All of these reforms helped make football a safer game. However, the most critical reform was to come.

On May 13, 1910, the ICAA met once again at New York's Hotel Cumberland. At this meeting, the rules committee lifted the restrictions off of the forward pass.<sup>42</sup> When the forward pass came into the sport in 1906, it came with many restrictions. If the offense threw a pass and it fell incomplete, then the defending team would take over where the offense was and start their drive. The forward pass also could not be scored for a touchdown and had to be thrown five yards to the left or right of the center. These strict

restrictions made the play hard to use. After some thinking and discussion, the ICAA members decided to remove the restrictions. A pass play now could be thrown to any part of the field, could be thrown as long as possible, and would count for touchdowns now. It also made defensive players slow down and see what type of play was being executed. With all the new reforms set, the 1910 season was ready to begin.

As the 1910 season went along, the fans were enjoying the "new" football. Football fan and newly elected Governor of New Jersey Woodrow Wilson commented on the new game. In a pep talk to Princeton's football team, Wilson stated,

The new game of football seems far more enjoyable than the old. The new rules are doing much to bring football to a high level as a sport, for its brutal measures are being done away and better elements retained. The absence of grinding mass plays makes the game vastly more interesting to the spectators, and at the same time, it is rendered more desirable for the participants. The opportunity for unsportsmanlike play is greatly reduced, and hence it is now a game in which gentlemen can successfully engage.<sup>43</sup>

The new rules successfully had done their job.

Following the 1910 season, fatalities and serious injuries dropped dramatically from the year before. Football was in a quality place, with the modern shape of the game created. Later in 1910, the ICAA changed their name to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, what we know today as the NCAA.<sup>44</sup> Football would never have another attack on it as it did through the early 1900s. The sport of football was finally safe.

The 1910 intervention was the last crucial intervention to help save football. Supporters of the game fought valiantly for the sport and the rules, except for Theodore Roosevelt. His role in the 1910 intervention was non-existent. The most "powerful supporter" of football was no longer in the presidential office at the time of the intervention and had not been for quite a while. He was not even in the United States when the meetings of reforming the rules began. Shortly after William Howard Taft, the new President of the United States, was inaugurated into office, Roosevelt left the country to go hunting in Africa and remained abroad for over a year. Claiming that Roosevelt

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<sup>38</sup> Tony Collins, *How Football Began: A Global History of How the World's Football Codes Were Born* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 150.

<sup>39</sup> Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>41</sup> John Hammond Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913,"

*Smithsonian Journal of History* 2, no.3 (1967): 64.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *The Big Scrum: How Teddy Roosevelt Saved Football*, 217-218.

<sup>44</sup> Swanson, *The Strenuous Life: Theodore Roosevelt and the Making of the American Athlete*, 170.

helped save football is false because he had no role in the new reforms put into football after the 1910 intervention and had nothing to do with the quality place that football was at.

After already playing a minor role in the 1906 intervention, Roosevelt completely missed the 1910 intervention. The interventions of 1906 and 1910 pushed football in the right direction and made the game safer to play. Although the new rules put into football after the 1906 intervention worked for only three years, football saw fewer injuries and deaths on the gridiron in those three years than it had before. After the death toll rose again following the 1909 season, the members of the ICAA gathered once again and made new reforms to help make football a safer sport. The reformed rules that occurred due to these two interventions made the game safer to play and, overall, helped save football. Roosevelt's role during both of these interventions, as stated before, was non-existent.

The new rules that got put into the game after the 1906 and 1910 interventions helped widen the game and made football safer. Although some of the reforms did not work at first, in the end, the game was safer and more enjoyable. The forward pass made the defensive players have to slow down and watch where the ball was going. They could no longer just rush at the offensive players in every play. After the restrictions of the forward pass got lifted, more and more teams began to use the play more effectively. The new "neutral zone" rule made defenses line up onside and gave both the offense and defense equal opportunity each play. Moving the first-down markers from five to ten yards made the defense branch out and cover more space. It also helped stop the massive pile-ups. These reforms made football safer and are still used in the NCAA today.

Theodore Roosevelt did not help save football. The new rules put into the game that made it safer to play were put in by the members of the NCAA. Although Roosevelt did not help save football, according to historian Guy M. Lewis, "Theodore Roosevelt should be properly viewed as one of the founding fathers of the National Collegiate Athletic Association."<sup>45</sup> By pushing and cheering on Bill Reid throughout football's crisis, Roosevelt helped Reid decide on being the first member of Walter Camp's committee to leave and join the new committee. Eventually, all the members of Camp's committee left and joined the new committee. The new combined committee called themselves the ICAA at first, then changed their name to the NCAA in 1910.

Since its founding, the NCAA has grown into a multi-billion-dollar organization. The non-profit organization allows players, male and female, to continue to play the sport that they love at the collegiate level. With different levels of competition, such as Division I, Division II, and Division III, athletes have many different colleges to choose from

throughout the United States. Today's athletes have these opportunities in front of them because Bill Reid left Camp's committee and joined the new committee. When the rest of Camp's committee, including Camp himself, also left and joined the new committee, the NCAA was born. Roosevelt's pushing and cheering helped Reid decide on leaving Camp's committee, thus taking the right step in the creation of the NCAA.

Even though some historians say Theodore Roosevelt did play a role in saving football, Roosevelt did not help save football, due to his 1905 intervention being a failure, and due to his not having a role in the 1906 and 1910 interventions that helped reform the rules of the game. The White House summit that Roosevelt called proved to be a complete failure. The coaches' statement drafted at the end of the meeting did not get taken seriously, and two of the teams that signed it broke its rules. His role in the 1906 intervention had nothing to do with the reformed rules that were put into football after this meeting concluded. Lastly, at the last intervention of 1910, Roosevelt was not even in the United States when the intervention began and ended. The reformed rules that came out of this meeting made football safer and are still used in the game today. Roosevelt's little cheers that he gave had nothing to do with football becoming a safer game. Therefore, he did not help save football. Football was saved by the members of the newly formed group, the NCAA, working together, and finding ways to make the rules of the gridiron a safer place. The group did this successfully among themselves and had their colleagues, not Theodore Roosevelt, to thank.

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<sup>45</sup> Guy M. Lewis, "Theodore Roosevelt's Role in the 1905 Football Controversy," *The Research Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1969): 724.

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