

Brian M. Ingrassia, *The Rise of Gridiron University: Higher Education's Uneasy Alliance with Big-Time Football*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. Pp. 336.

*The Rise of Gridiron University* by Brian Ingrassia is an exceptionally in depth analysis and history of the lengthy and very dynamic relationship that American Football has had with higher education here in the states during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Ample historical background is also given allowing for readers to understand themes and beliefs which are discussed, and though there is quite a lot of information being presented, it is all necessary for the greater understanding of the topic at hand. The book focuses a great deal on the lesser appreciated aspects of the sport such as its social, political, and most importantly financial consequences for those universities looking to adopt it, or those who already have. The book is divided into seven key chapters (and an epilogue), each of which is dedicated to the individual analysis of the chapter's given topic, from the coaches and stadiums to the culture and attitudes surrounding higher education in the late nineteenth century. Besides just discussing the way higher education viewed football, the defining role of the public through their perceptions and involvement with the sport also is made clear throughout the chapters.

The enthusiasm for and popularization of physical culture was done so originally out of the desire of students attending antebellum colleges post civil war. Physical culture acted as both a foil and relief from the much more demanding workloads found at these universities; soon, these same universities would tap into sports as potential for improving their students' academics by not overtaxing the mind. Football, unsurprisingly, was a useful tool for universities to promote physical culture, however, it did come at a cost as the nature of the contact heavy sport was quickly called into question by the public who found the likes of prizefighting to be more tame. This perception of the sport creates the main argument of the book, reappearing in every

chapter, the idea of entertainment versus education. Especially prevalent in the early chapters, Ingrassia argues that the violent spectacle provided by these football games acted as a double edged sword for these universities, leading to the sports less than stellar reputation. Ironically, the fact it was entertaining was the issue at hand, as it was seen as on par with a circus or sideshow, however the large crowds of spectators not only created a monetary incentive but further spread the names of said universities (though not always in a positive light). Coaches were no exception to this debate either, with Ingrassia highlighting how these early coaches presented themselves as “experts of physical education and discipline” rather than what they truly were, agents of entertainment (whether they intended to be or not). Eventually, by the turn of the twentieth century, the “bad reputation” of the sport wasn’t nearly as prevalent an issue as the sport would go through numerous reforms in order to make it a more “rational” game, appropriate for university campuses.

Thorough yet equally as overbearing, *The Rise of Gridiron University* was an intriguing piece regarding the social, political, and cultural beliefs and consequences of football at major universities during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Much of the information provided, though useful, was structured in ways that could potentially confuse the audience of who or what is exactly being discussed. The main argument of the book, this whole ordeal regarding entertainment, education, the general public, and reputation was done so quite well, primarily due to how the chapters were each built around a separate aspect or factor which contributed to the main argument. This is also due to the extensive use of sources which drastically improved the author's key arguments. By far the weakest aspect of the book would have to be the chosen tone and language of the author which doesn’t aid in the reader's desire to continue on, at times even feeling as if they were sitting through a lecture. Overall, *The Rise of*

*Gridiron University* is quite an interesting book that does provide ample information regarding cultural and social developments alongside the attitudes found regarding college football at the time. When it comes to who really needs to read this book, its intended audience would have to be sociologists, sports historians, American history buffs (especially those who favor the gilded age), and anyone who dabbles in psychology.

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