FOOTBALL—LOOKING BACKWARD

By Charles Evans

"Why has a moral deterioration set in among us that brings corruption, loose behavior, dulled principals, subverted morals, easy expediencies, sharp practices? ..... What has taken away the capacity for indignation that used to rise like a mighty wave and engulf corruptors—corruptors of public office, of business, of youth, of sports?"

Engaging in a bit of reminiscence, I told a story to the Associate Editor of The Chronicles, Miss Muriel H. Wright, of my experiences as an educator in the Oklahoma country, on football as I found it through a period of forty-five years. As all story tellers do, I wound up with a boast that I was the only man living who as president of a college in Oklahoma saw his football team in 1916 defeat the University of Oklahoma team and also that of Oklahoma A. and M. College within ten days.

Miss Wright said to me, "Would it not be well for you to tell something of football and the sports in the schools of Oklahoma in connection with the article 'Gridiron Pioneers at Henry Kendall College' by Robert Rutland?" Taking the suggestion, I offer a few paragraphs here that may turn out either a song or a sermon.

Football in America in the month of August, 1951, pushed even the Korean War and the Investigating Committee off the front pages of American newspapers as ninety young Americans were sent out of West Point for cribbing on examinations. It seemed that millions of Americans were not so concerned about the 2400 or more West Point cadets that held fast to the age-old code of honor, as that the number of ninety expelled included the Captain and many members of the 1951 football team.

As a student of Kentucky University in 1888, I was one of a very small group observing a football game between the Roughnecks of Lexington and the Kentucky State team. Football was not well received in that day in institutions of learning in the South. It was looked upon as a sport where muscle was substituted for mind. As Superintendent of Schools in the "Gay 90's" in Kentucky, I found football did not appear in the city schools in that state to any large degree.

Upon my coming to Ardmore in 1905 as Superintendent of Schools I found a ragged team with no uniforms and no guidance or coaching except from the fellow who could shout the loudest and had seen a game or two in his life. All played for fun. It was a game that attracted small crowds and was either scouted or ignored

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1 Louis B. Seltzer, Editor of the Cleveland Press, in Time magazine for August 27, 1951.
by the steady worth-while. This condition obtained in the public schools over the territories, and a few years after statehood.

My observation of this group of boys engaged in this sport developed into this line of reasoning: All life is a contest, therefore, the worth of football or any other sport valuable to youth must be refined, clean and noble. Football can be ennobled by making it an integral part of the schools. This can only be done when all sports shall be incorporated in the curriculum and the whole student body and faculty embrace them as a very part of the school system. Then it follows as the night the day that the head of the institution must recognize it and protect it as he would any other part of the curriculum. No scholastic contest must grow too important. All sports must live in, by and for the spirit and honor of the school.

Football grew in Ardmore. In 1907 the Board reluctantly allotted enough money for placing a coach for football in the schools and the salary was something like $1,200 annually. (Basketball was unknown in Oklahoma at this time). The credentials of an applicant from Michigan pleased the Superintendent most. His name was Harry Meade. Harry was as handsome a young man as could be found and he was as genuine, honest and capable as he was good looking. Ardmore did not know it, but it was a new and a larger day for its schools when Harry Meade arrived as its athletic coach. Harry taught me many lessons. He believed that the football world should not be too much over-rated, but he felt that the power and influence of a coach could contribute greatly to the development of youth. The men under Jackson and Sheridan were never more willing and finer followers of their leaders than the young men of the football team at Ardmore as they followed Harry Meade on the athletic field. In 1909 he took four boys, Buddy Neilson, Phillip Neilson, George Anderson and Walter Pittman to the Annual Meet at the University of Oklahoma and they brought back first honors and a trophy cup from a large field. He did the same thing in 1910 and the momentum of the sterling character of Harry Meade was prolonged through 1911 when Ardmore won the cup for the third time, and it now rests in the trophy hall in Ardmore High School.

But football was subordinate to the course of study and the general good of the city school system. One morning the report came out that there were several on the high school football team that were in arrears both in credits and in examinations. A great game, a contest between Ardmore and Norman high schools, was just around the corner. After deliberation, the incompetents in the departments of Ardmore High School were thrown out and the football team was severely crippled, and in the eyes of many destroyed. Perhaps bitterness and near rebellion can not be better experienced than to be part of a movement wherein members of a football team are removed at the top of a victorious season. My
popularity sank to almost zero when I authorized Meade to drop the several delinquent members of the team. The whole High School at the next assembly sat morose, rebellious, glowing and almost mob-like. Strange to say, girlhood displayed this spirit to a higher degree than boyhood. Ardmore citizenship had grown in interest and pride over their achievements on the athletic fields, and they joined with the student body in sending messages of advice and abuse to the Superintendent. The only way to meet this sort of thing is for the superintendent or the chief executive of a system—not the coach to take over and meet the situation head-on. He may delegate to the coach or the Athletic Committee certain lines of action, but it must be known that they are speaking for him, and that he speaks for something larger than the coach and larger than himself—the honest spirit of a system of education. When properly used, this kind of action always wins. The Superintendent presented the case as one of honor, not of mere victory. And as American youth has ever done, the majority saw it was not a matter of football but that the honor of the High School came first.

There was no evidence of centralized, deified football in Oklahoma until the middle teens of the second decade (1915). Everyone played every game for fun and they played home talent as far as the schools were concerned. Athletics received a new accent about 1906 and 1907 when the University established its Annual Meet. This big athletic awakening was not so forceful or compelling as a certain character in athletic leadership which it introduced to all the Oklahoma Territory. President Boyd of the University, a magnetic leader of men and a discerning educator brought down from Kansas a young man by the name of Benjamin Owen and made him Football Coach and Director of Athletics at the University. From that time until even this day there has been an athletic development and honor which held to the highest standards, and these all fashioned into an incentive that made the University of Oklahoma feared, respected and above criticism. It might be called the Owen influence.

In 1911, in taking the presidency of Central College at Edmond, I found our athletics had entered the circle of university and collegiate sports. The management of the football team at that time in Central consisted of strange parts. The coach seemed to consider each contest as a sort of "lark". These loose ways were enlivened and enriched by eating, drinking and making merry. This reduced the state of athletics to almost zero, and of course the honor and name of Central to a point not very much higher. I asked Benny Owen to send me three young men from whom I could select a leader in athletics. I did not send to him because he was a coach at the University of Oklahoma, but because his name had become a by-word for honor and dignity in the sports world. Three came, and realizing that I was going to select a member of the faculty that would
exercise more influence on the student body than, perhaps, any two other members of the faculty combined, I carefully chose, after looking into his family life, his married life, his church life, and finally his athletic record, Charles W. Wantland, who remained at Central for twenty years and exercised the same influence on the character of the young men who entered that institution that Owen had at the University. Wantland, later said to me with his taciturn smile, "You almost knocked me off my feet as I came here as Athletic Director when you said, "Wantland, I expect from you as good leadership in the church and the Y.M.C.A. as on the athletic field." It must be said that he met this demand in the highest measure.

In 1912, the leading coaches of the State felt the time had come to set up an athletic code and cleanse the athletic field of some dishonorable practices often used. Roughing, clipping, fighting, frequent use of football "ringers" (players imported from outside the school), interference by observers, and many other such practices were too common.

So, a State Athletic Association, after thorough discussion by the leading coaches of the State, was organized, and an athletic code was adopted. The first serious test of this association and its code of honor and tactics was presented by the Central State College at Edmond in 1913. It was noised abroad that one of the teachers' colleges had been using "ringers" for several seasons. As the Central football team was about to start for its contest with this team, the president called Coach Wantland and the team before him and said, "Wantland, the one big thing before you is to ascertain whether 'ringers' are played. Get names, grades, qualifications of the whole team. If outside and irregular players are used, notify the president of the college to either take them out or that you will present the case before the State Athletic Association."

The game was played, Mr. Wantland performed his duties, the "ringers" were used on the opposing team and the case was presented to the State Athletic Association. It decided that this state teachers' college using the "ringers" could not compete in football within the State for two years. This decision and strict adherence to it, began a new era of athletic honor in the State.

There was a need in the year of 1914 for a change in the chairmanship in the Advanced Standing Committee of Central. The position called for a man of probity, warm sympathy and reputation throughout the college, known over the whole field of higher educational institutions in the State for such values. As president, I called Charles Wantland to this position. As far as my observations and experiences have run over fifty years, it was the first time that a football coach or athletic director had been put in charge of this type of committee in a collegiate institution. This was done to prove that football and basketball and other sports should be led by a man
who has as high a standing and as broad a field of action as any member of the faculty. This had a tremendous influence on all athletic life at Central and it penetrated the scholastic and athletic life of the whole State.

In October 1950, there was celebrated a “Wantland Day” and four-hundred men from all parts of the United States came to gather around the banquet board in Edmond to pay tribute to their coach of former days, Charles W. Wantland, for his twenty years of service. Many of them paid tribute and analyzed their association with their beloved football leader; everyone of them made it clear that he won their respect and their fighting spirit by his stern devotion to Christian character. It was always a fight of honor, not a mere matter of lose or win.

In a little while, the Board of Trustees of Kendall College of Tulsa, asked me to take its presidency. In 1916 Tulsa was attracting the attention of entire America for it was fast becoming the oil center of the world. It was perhaps richer per capita in wealth from oil than any city of similar size on earth. Believing that a Vanderbilt or a Tulane could grow out of the old, ancient and honorable rootage of Kendall College located in such a city, the call was accepted. Although a small college, Kendall had achieved more than an average position and power in the football field of the State because its team had conquered on many hard-fought football fields and in 1915, had lacked only two points of defeating the University.

Then, there appeared another leader of athletics, a football coach whose superior I have never seen—Francis Schmidt. He had been called from a school in Kansas to take charge of the Kendall team. Handsome, magnetic and refined, he radiated in every action a poise and dignity that could not be challenged.

In talking this day with Coach Ray (“Bear”) Wolf of Tulane University, he said to me, “It was the privilege of my life to be assistant coach with Francis Schmidt at Texas Christian University. For some twenty years I have been in the coaching field of football, but I have never approached the strength and power of Francis Schmidt.” Schmidt went on to Ohio State and led the “Big Ten” for many years with his football genius.

The year of 1916 found the Kendall team with a challenging schedule of football contests. It included Haskell, Emporia State, Oklahoma A. and M. College and the University of Oklahoma, as well as several others of real power. Schmidt told me at the beginning of the season that he had a team that he believed would defeat any team on his schedule. Of course the compelling apex was the burning desire to defeat the University. Up to that time, the football team of the University, coached by Benny Owen, had not been defeated except in its very earliest days when it was a struggling and un-
developed team. Benny Owen was now at the height of his power and his team had been victorious over the State and throughout the states round-about. On November 16, 1916, the football team of Kendall, along with some 200 citizens of Tulsa, entrained to Norman to witness the battle between Kendall College and the University. The result was a victory for Kendall with a score of 16 to 0. I asked President Brooks and Benny Owen how they could explain it. Owen replied, "That is an easy thing to do. Kendall had the better team." On the Saturday following, Kendall met the second greatest power in the State and defeated Oklahoma A. and M. College, at Stillwater, 14 to 11. The season closed with 566 winning points for Schmidt's team and some 15 for his adversaries. The New York Times paid Kendall great tribute calling its team the equal of any in America. There was talk, of course, that Kendall found its victory in devious ways. That is always said by those who do not take to defeat readily and especially from smaller and supposedly weaker adversaries. No man who knew Francis Schmidt dared to make such a comment.1

The result of his leadership paid off. On the day before the football banquet in Tulsa after the last game in November, 1916, Mr. E. P. Harwell, one of the trustees of the College Board and a wealthy stockholder of McMann Oil Company asked me to enter his car and drive over to the college. He remarked on the way that Kendall had enjoyed a very large year. I replied, "Yes, the enrollment has doubled, the graduating class has been greatly increased, a $500,000 endowment has been raised and the record is very good indeed." He said, "The best thing that has been done is that Kendall defeated the University in football." I agreed that that was not bad. He said, "You have no athletic field house, have you?" I replied, "No, the boys are compelled to do their dressing, bathing, etc., in some corner of the buildings or grounds." He said, "Tonight when you offer the footballs and trophies to the team you may announce that you have $100,000 for a field house." That shook me, and with set jaws I asked him who would give it. He replied that it mattered not, it would be forthcoming. I explained that I should know because the Tulsa World would be asking questions and the people would also want to know. He paused a while and then said, "Then announce that I shall give it." So, that evening at the banquet I announced that Mr. E. P. Harwell was giving $100,000 to Kendall for a field house and for equipment and that the school would hold a merry holiday the next day.

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1 An article appearing in The Tulsa World as The Chronicles goes to press reveals the spirit of the football team in 1916. Ivan H. Grove, a member of this football team, won renown throughout the United States as quarter-back. For the story in The Tulsa World and his place as a football coach today, see Appendix B at the end of this article.
I tell this story in honor of Francis Schmidt who as a coach put his college first, his membership in the college faculty second, his team third and his Christian fidelity above all.

In the beginning of this article I stated that it might turn out a song or it might turn out a sermon. Whether it be either, the genuine excuse for these views growing out of my experiences of some fifty years with athletics in the educational world can be stated that such sports as football and basketball in the year 1951 made history by dropping to such a low ebb of honor and integrity as to shock the whole nation. On this very day, the 27th day in the month of August 1951, a committee of leading figures of the American Congress for the first time in American history is taking up and giving closest investigation of the conditions now existing in American athletics.

Senator Fulbright of Arkansas is quoted in The Daily Oklahoman of August 4, 1951, as saying: "I guess that this violation of the honor code at West Point was first instigated by those who were primarily interested in playing football and were not there for any other purpose." It would be well for any self-centered or victory-at-any-price-coach or educator in authority to listen to that statement.

In an editorial in The Daily Oklahoman of August 6, 1951, under the heading of "What Shall It Profit Us?" this paragraph is found:

"The sorest need of the country just now is not better football teams or a greater degree of immunity for football offenders. The paramount need is a complete reassessment of moral values. There seems to have been a moral let-down in every stratum of American society—from the highest plane to the very lowest. Charges of cheating and graft and peculation are heard in every corridor of our national life. Now that charge is heard on the campus at West Point where the future leaders of our national defense are receiving their training."

APPENDIX B

From Tulsa Daily World, Sunday, September 23, 1951, p. 6, Cols. 1-4, Sports section:

"MANY GRID MENTORS GET BIG YAK ABOUT CHARACTER BUILDING BUT IVAN GROVE IS COACH WHO MADE IT PAY"

"(Editor's Note: Colleges contemplating de-emphasizing football and yet wanting to keep the sport, may get some pointers from the following story about Ivan H. Grove, coach and athletic director of Hendrix College of Arkansas. Grove was one of the great Tulsa University football players under the late Sam Mc Birney and Francis Schmidt and has many Tulsa friends.—B.A.B.)"

"By Carl Bell"

"Conway, Ark., Sept. 22 (AP)—Ivan H. Grove practices what he preaches about character building through athletics.

"He has made it pay in a profession that has virtually no job security. Grove has held a coaching job at one college through 28 years and his future tenure doesn't depend on his won-lost record."
“At little Hendrix, where he coaches football, directs athletics and teaches sociology, developing character comes ahead of victory on the field.

“On the eve of another campaign, the bald scholarly dean of Arkansas coaches was asked what his goal had been throughout his career.

‘It is NOT hard to state my philosophy as a coach,’ he replied. ‘Everyone wants a four-square life—intellectual, moral, physical and spiritual. Athletics, physical education and recreation are a means of implementing the aims in life.

‘I think the average boy or girl will find an avenue for a release of energy which could be dissipated in wrong channels. Therefore, I coach to try to teach every boy and girl, individually and collectively, to master themselves.’ ”

“And Grove thinks he can accomplish these aims through competitive sports because they provide a better appreciation of the total pattern of life and the educational scheme; a desire for clean living with a respect for wise discipline and authority; a bulwark against situations which might throw a person later in life and are a ‘great laboratory method of developing good citizenship and an appreciation of the ideals of sportsmanship, qualities of cooperation, courage, unselfishness and self-control.’

“He regards his long tenure at Hendrix, a Methodist school, as his greatest achievement. He has no thoughts of retiring, even though football has been further de-emphasized. No longer do the Warriors compete for the gridiron championship in their state conference. They play a few old foes and round out the schedule with out-of-state schools in their class.

“Hendrix discontinued the practice of giving financial aid to athletes several years ago and since then the Methodists, while giving a good account of themselves, haven't been able to annex any major conference championships.

“Before de-emphasis, Grove turned out champions in football, basketball and track.

“The support Grove receives is unique. Hendrix officials and alumni stick with him in defeat as well as in victory. In 1948, when his team lost seven games and won only two, they staged an ‘Ivan Grove Day’ and gave him an automobile.

“That same year he was named ‘Arkansan of the Year’ in the Arkansas Democrat's annual poll.

“Grove says the late Francis A. Schmidt was the greatest coach he ever knew and ‘gave me the great chance in this (coaching) field.’

“Grove first played under Schmidt at Arkansas City, Kan., high school and followed him to Henry Kendall college (now Tulsa University).

“He was a four-sports athlete at Kendall in 1914-15-16-19. He earned national recognition as a football back in 1916 when he set a collegiate record by kicking 61 points after touchdown. Grove scored 126 points that season.

“When the U. S. entered the first world war, Grove interrupted his college education to enlist in the Rainbow Division and serve overseas. He returned to finish his work and in 1920 launched his coaching career at Oklahoma Baptist University.”

“Grove rejoined Schmidt when the latter became head coach at the University of Arkansas in 1922. Grove was freshman coach at the
An* for the best athlete he ever coached he says 'all my boys rate a spot in my little black book.'

"In 1923, he parted company with Schmidt to take the Hendrix job he's had ever since. Schmidt later was head coach at Texas Christian University and Ohio State.

"In addition to coaching and teaching at Hendrix, Grove has been a leader in all amateur athletics of the state, serving for years as president of the Arkansas Association of the Amateur Athletic Union. He also has been active in civic and Methodist church affairs and dabbles a little in politics—on the Democrat side.

"Once 'Grovie'—as most of his athletes affectionately call him—said: 'I have NO favorite sport. I love 'em all.'

"But, in 1947, when he decided to reduce his work load, he turned the basketball coaching over to one of his former athletes, Morton Hutto. He continued to direct football and track.

"Grove was born in Denver Aug. 18, 1894, the son of a railway conductor. Early in his youth, he and his family moved to Kansas. Now Grove calls himself a 'full-blooded Arkansan.'

"He married the former Miss Zepha Freeze of Jonesboro in 1927, a year after she graduated from Hendrix. They have a daughter Martha Lou."