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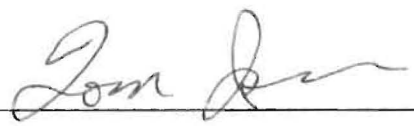
Abstract approved: 

Small-town high schools in Kansas, as well as those across the plains, had difficulty sustaining conventional eleven-man football programs, although the contests of the local team were an important aspect of community life. As the small towns depopulated, due to the economic situation of the 1920s and 1930s, football programs were yet harder to maintain. Thus with the aid of local businessmen, who wanted to revitalize community life, many school administrators had lights installed on their football fields, so more people could attend the games. This raised additional revenues, not only for school budgets, but also for the local businessmen as well. Smaller-town schools, which could not safely play eleven-man football due to a lack of mature boys, needed further innovations in the form of

six-man and later eight-man football. These adaptations were reminiscent of the historiography of Walter P. Webb, who believed that people on the plains often had to make innovations in practices that came from the east, in this case football, to fit them to the conditions of the plains. Only massive school consolidation would have produced enrollments comparable to those in the eastern United States, and this massive consolidation would have produced prohibitive costs, not only to school budgets but also to the quality of life of the students involved. These conditions resembled those described by Carl F. Kraenzel in what he termed "yonland" communities. Kraenzel called on educators in the plains to explore other possibilities besides massive consolidation to solve their problems. Six-man and eight-man football were examples of such possibilities.

# THE EVOLUTION OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL IN SMALL-TOWN KANSAS

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Christopher H. Lee

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This acknowledgment would be incomplete without mentioning a final group, my family. Their encouragement to excel throughout my educational career helped me through many tough times, as did my wife, Luanne, whose love and support has been more than equal to our wedding vows.

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## INTRODUCTION

> Slap! Two masses of humanity would come together with a sound like the cracking of the bones of a tasty hot bird between the teeth of some hungry giant. Legs and arms and heads and feet would be apparently inextricably intermingled, until it looked as if not even the fondest mother would be able to sort out the right parts of her one and only son. The whistle of the referee would blow sharply, and the lot of legs and arms and hands and heads would sort themselves out once more, and there would be something like the sixteen or eighteen of the boys that seemed to be human beings once more, with all the members of their bodies intact.
>
> The rest of the men that had been in the collision lay prone on the field and Drs. Josh Hartwell and Boviard would rush on the field, followed by assistants with packages of sticking plaster, buckets of water, and cases of surgical instruments. A big gap in someone's head would be patched together with plaster, another man's leg would be pulled back until it assumed its normal shape, sprained wrists would be bandaged, and wrenched ankles bound up. Then the crowd would yell itself hoarse with the rival cries of the colleges, possibly because no one had been killed outright.[1]

So a New York Times reporter described the scene of the Yale-Princeton game of 1895. Football in this era was a brutal but still a popular sport to most people, although calls for reform were already growing. This hysteria had even found a foothold on the plains of Kansas, where football was also experienced in this primitive form. Some Kansans embraced the sport and participated in its evolution, while others called for its abolition. This was typical of football throughout the United States in its chaotic early days.

Football was first played in Kansas in 1883 at Wamego, although even this first game captivated some while it disgusted others. The superintendent of schools there, P. H. Pierce, had taught some high school students the rules and they played their first game during a morning recess and another one before afternoon classes. According to the Wamego Times, this "attracted an astonished and interested crowd," which included school board members, so the afternoon classes were cancelled. This initial contest ended abruptly, however, when the ball bounced into a neighboring yard, and an "enraged lady" punctured the pigskin.[2]

With this sport already having attained popularity in the Ivy League schools of the east, football soon made its way to Kansas colleges. Washburn "definitely" had a team in 1885, according to a Kansas sports historian, although the first intercollegiate contest was not until November 22, 1890, when contingents from Baker University and Kansas University got together. Baker won 22 to 9, under a system of scoring wherein touchdowns were worth four points, subsequent tries for points were worth two points, and field goals counted for five points.[3]

Even officials of the day were somewhat confused by the game. A return contest in December between Baker and Kansas ended in confusion when the men from Baldwin thought a timeout was called, while one of the members of the team from Lawrence picked up the ball and crossed the goal line late in the game. Each team claimed victory. The umpire

was Kansas University professor William Herbert Carruth who, at the time, ruled in Baker's favor. Later he revealed he probably had ruled incorrectly. Coaching prerequisites were lax too. Professor E. M. Hopkins, a Princeton alumnus, was the Jayhawks' coach simply because he was the only person on the Lawrence campus who had seen a game of football played.[4]

Early high school teams were also loosely organized. In many places development of these teams seemed to follow the model noted in Glenn Avon Walker's master's thesis written in 1935 while at the University of Wichita. In the initial stage of this model students formed their own teams and competed intramurally within the individual schools. Little has been written about this stage, but evidently rules and technicalities were enforced only in a general way. In the second stage came the involvement of the townspeople, with one of them serving as coach. It was not unusual for these older men to play, too. At this point squads were as much town teams as school teams. In the final stage school authorities stepped in, with the help of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, to restore order to the games. According to Walker, "Allowing outsiders to play on the teams, in some cases grown men, was dangerous as well as unfair to the high school boys who were much younger and inexperienced." Interscholastic games were to include only high school boys.[5]

The development of Colby High School's team was a good example of this model. In 1900 the first squad was

organized, while the school purchased twenty pairs of white canvas pants. Several boys even bought their own elkskin shoes and had the local cobbler nail cleats to their footwear. At the first intramural game Floyd Smith suffered a broken leg. The boys' mothers almost caused football operations to be ceased after this first intramural game. Football as a sport did return in 1901, although only practices were held. In these early years "there was no coach except for the occasional townsman who stopped by to watch and offer suggestions," according to local historian W. G. Warner. These teams had no official coach until 1914.[6]

Colby played its first intermural game in 1902 and was undefeated until 1906. This was an era of virtual town teams. As Warner wrote,

> from 1902 until 1913 there were no eligibility rules for players on high school teams. . . . If a boy was admitted to the high school any time in the fall and attended classes, he was eligible to play football. And there was no age limit. Two of my brothers were excused from school one afternoon so they could go vote and get back in time for football practice.[7]

Other aspects than the rules were primitive in Colby in those days. Equipment consisted of shoulder pads that cautious mothers sewed to the jerseys of their boys. These were made of cotton packs or pads. There were no such things as hip pads or even headgear until 1910, and even then most boys did not wear the headgear, which was made of soft leather and lined with felt. Travel was rugged, too, with the squad using a livery team until 1910. Warner recalled one of their trips: "We got up at 5:00 a.m. and drove to

Atwood, arriving just in time for dinner. We played the game, lost, and returned to Colby, arriving home about 9:00 p.m."[8]

Even the facilities required a pioneering spirit. Water had to be carried to the playing field until 1910, when water lines were installed in Colby. A shower for the team was set up in 1913, although it, too, was primitive. According to Warner,

> There were no shower stalls or curtains, but the boys could take a shower. Regular visitors in the shower were black water puppies which entered from the cess-pool drainpipe. There were still no real dressing rooms or lockers. Clothes and football suits were hung from pegs on the basement wall.[9]

Other teams seemed to skip the intramural phase; they started out as town teams, and were later honed into high school squads. This was apparently what happened at Smith Center. Town-native Otis Burgess, a Spanish-American war veteran, learned football from some recruits from the eastern United States while he was in the service. Shortly after he returned home he instructed others on how to play this sport and set up an exhibition game with Phillipsburg in 1899. This instruction included practice with a tackling dummy made of a gunny sack filled with leaves hanging from the limb of a tree. Several of these dummies were destroyed during tackling and blocking practice. Uniforms for this team consisted of knee-length pants, pull-over sweaters, and stocking caps. The only equipment furnished by the team was a football that was purchased by taking up a collection and

sending off to a mail order house. Burgess became the high school's first football coach in 1905.[10]

Abilene had its first team in 1893, although three of the players of this squad, which had a 16-0 record, were not high school lads. In 1894 the high school principal coached the team, but the team still may not have been truly a school squad. Abilene did not have a team from 1895 to 1903, but when football was resumed, local fans coached the team until 1915, when the manual arts teacher took over the coaching reins. Who Abilene played in this era was largely lost to the records, but this school did play and beat Hays College in 1918.[11]

Other high schools played early games with local colleges, as Topeka High did with Washburn in 1893 and Emporia High with the Kansas Normal School in 1898.[12] Hutchinson High School in 1902 had a schedule which included Cooper College of Sterling and the Hutchinson National Guard, as well as Kingman, Sterling, Newton, Lyons, and Wichita. It was hard to say whether the latter squads represented their high schools or towns, according to Dr. R. E. Padfield, who played for Hutchinson. Frequently encountered, he said, were ineligible players with heavy beards, which betrayed their age.[13]

Padfield also recalled, in a Wichita Evening Eagle article, how rough these games were. Teammate Bob Brown had his scalp "lacerated so badly it hung down over his ear. We put some bandages on it and he was going to play that way

when some humane Wichita player offered him a headgear. We called it 'leather head-harness.'" The boy was expected to continue to play, for "every man was a 70-minute man," which was the duration of the game. Even being a spectator was difficult, Padfield said, since "we pulled and hauled in the middle of the line and people on the sidelines couldn't see who had the ball."[14]

Eureka High's team also experienced these rough and tumble days. According to a local humor columnist, one boy in 1901 played half a game with a torn and bleeding eyelid, again because there was little substituting. This writer went to a game and observed that he

> did not see anything brutish in the game. It seems to bring every muscle into play while a fellow is on his feet, and when he's down he gets a thorough massage treatment by the other players, which no doubt makes him feel a good deal better when he gets up.[15]

It was understandable why some wanted football altered or even banned outright. William Allen White in 1895 was opposed to football played at the local colleges. In the Emporia Gazette he wrote,

> Emporia's football players are supposed to be very lucky. Yet within the past year there have been: two arms broken; two spines strained; one concussion of the brain; one hand smashed; one shoulder sprained; five faces cut; seven eyes injured. In Kansas since football became a fad there have been: five deaths; one leg lost; one face bone broken; nine arms broken; two legs broken; three ribs broken. It costs too much. It's a brutal game. The best people in Kansas are against it.[16]

White called for its prohibition.

Cries for reform and abolition of the sport became commonplace even around the hotbed of football, the Ivy

League schools. From 1893 to 1913, which John Hammond Moore dubbed "football's Ugly Decades," debate raged over what was to be done with the sport. Nation's Edward L. Godkin fired some of the initial salvos at football. Godkin charged that many collegiate football players were professionals in the guise of students. "Debt, drink, [and] debauchery" surrounded football contests, which might scare away "the plain people," who were already in financial difficulties trying to send their kids to school. The author wondered if "crazes" were a weakness of the American people, since they had already suffered through "the greenback craze, and the silver craze, and the granger craze, and the cholera craze, and now there is the athletic craze." He further compared the college campuses to "huge training-grounds for young gladiators, around whom nearly as many spectators roar as roared in the Flavian amphitheatre."[17] Godkin in earlier editorials also had deplored the roughness of the game, which in his eyes allowed anything but slugging above the belt.

Defenders soon pointed to the flying wedge and other mass formations as the cause of brutal play. (A flying wedge was formed when nine players withdrew about twenty yards and on a given signal converged at a point directly ahead of the ball carrier.) Other defenders such as Woodrow Wilson said football stressed the virtues of cooperation and subordination.[18] Charles Francis Adams, son of Abraham Lincoln's minister to Great Britain, said it was a "more

potent influence in forming great nations and peoples than genius." He further believed "that even death on the play ground was cheap if it educated boys in those characteristics that had made the Anglo-Saxon race pre-eminent in history."[19]

Under pressure which ranged from Civil Service Commissioner Theodore Roosevelt to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, which was considering an anti-football bill, the flying wedge was outlawed and playing time was cut from ninety to seventy minutes.[20] Godkin was still scornful of "the new football," which he compared to the new Tammany Hall. What especially alarmed him was the 1894 contest between Yale and Harvard, in which nearly 33 percent of the starters received injuries, which included a concussion, a broken nose, and a broken collarbone. This percentage of casualties was even higher than the Union's losses at Cold Harbor, the bloodiest battle in American history. The collarbone incident was the most outrageous to Godkin: "Wrightington fell, and, as he lay on the ground, Hinkley, captain of the Yale men, jumped on him with both knees, breaking his collarbone."[21]

In 1895 football at the eastern colleges was in peril. Indiana's college presidents prohibited intercollegiate contests. Harvard president Charles W. Eliot said, "a game which needs to be so watched is not fit for genuine sportsmen." He declared it was "unfit for college use," and even criticized the crowds. He compared these groups to "the

throngs which enjoy the prize-fight, cock-fight, or bull-fight, or which in other centuries delighted in the sports of the Roman arena."[22]

The year 1897 was again a dim one for football. The Syracuse-Colgate contest ended in a wild exchange of punches, and the University of Georgia's Richard Von Gamman was accidentally killed when he was tripped while making a tackle. The Georgia state legislature passed a bill banning football, although through parliamentary maneuvering the bill was killed.[23] A New York Times editorial attributed the legislative action in Georgia to a Populist element which disliked the "aristocratic" university. This columnist asserted that football should not "be made a sedentary pursuit, like dominoes or hullgull. . . . But that mayhem and monicide should become its familiar accompaniments will not be permitted." He urged college faculties to restore the game to its proper place and make it a safer form of physical exercise.[24]

The situation did not improve immediately after the turn of the century. Casper Whitney of Outing called for reforms which de-emphasized brute force; otherwise the game would lose its popularity. He cited a particular incident: "I saw a Yale man throttle--literally throttle--Kernan, so that he dropped the ball." Whitney claimed it was in plain view for all to see--except the umpire. He further added that this kind of behavior was a disgrace to any university that allowed it, and he called on participants to play like

gentlemen or not at all.[25] Dr. Andrew S. Draper, Superintendent of Public Instruction in New York, charged in 1904 that football induced professionalism, encouraged battle rather than open manliness, was too expensive, and bred undesirable behavior such as loafing, gaming, and drinking.[26]

The 1904 season had numerous casualties, which included twenty-one deaths and more than 200 injured. After President Theodore Roosevelt saw pictures of a mangled lineman in 1905, he threatened to abolish the game forever. After the president met with Walter Camp and other football leaders in October at the White House, they issued a statement which called for all university coaches to do their utmost to uphold the spirit and the letter of football rules. In November Roosevelt, who still called himself a loyal fan, called for stricter rules and a simple eligibility code. Under this pressure the "Big Nine" agreed to a five-game schedule, outlawed training tables, and limited varsity competition to undergraduates who had been in residence for at least six months. The Midwestern conference went a step further and stressed faculty control of athletics; professors should control the finances of the sport and regularly employed staff members, not professionals, should be coaches.[27]

Football continued to have its defenders even in this dark era, including notables such as William Howard Taft, Charles Evans Hughes, Groton's Endicott Peabody, and Brown's William Faunce. Peabody compared dropping a sport

because some of its players were dishonest to removing political economy from the curriculum because some students cheated on their exams in that subject.[28] Faunce maintained that every college should have a "rough" sport, so football must not go as far as making it "as innocuous as dominoes or authors." He said that the true evils were the fraud and deceit of professionalism. With the rise of collegiate athletics, "the old drinking and carousing of a generation ago, the smashing of window panes and the destruction of property characteristic of that time, are forgotten."[29]

True reform came in 1906. An official was added, so four were to be on the field. Playing time was reduced to sixty minutes, since many injuries occurred late in the game. Hurdling and mass plays were prohibited, and to open the game up further, ten yards were required for a first down instead of five, with the offense given only three downs to cover this yardage, not four. Line plunges usually would not gain this kind of ground.[30]

The action that eventually helped football the most, however, was the legalization of the forward pass. Although still risky at this juncture--an incomplete pass was a fifteen-yard penalty or loss of possession of the ball--the rules were eventually liberalized to make the pass a viable alternative. Casper Whitney praised the new rules. He believed they eliminated brutality, provided for the penalizing of foul play, and with the forward pass and on-side kick, opened up strategic possibilities. He noted that

deaths in college football had been reduced from eighteen in 1905 to three in 1906. Football still had some trying times, though. In 1909, for example, thirty players, eight of them college men, were killed and 216 participants were injured.[31] But as the pass and other plays slowly opened up the game, with other rule improvements against dangerous actions, football was saved.

In 1913 Notre Dame proved to the Army's team and to the entire country that passing the pigskin could be profitable, when the Irish defeated the Cadets 35 to 13. The Fighting Irish threw the ball seventeen times, with only four incompletions, for 243 yards. Charles "Gus" Dorais, Notre Dame's quarterback, "shot forward passes into the outstretched arms of his ends, Capt. Rockne and Gushurst, as they stood poised for the ball, often as far as 35 yards away." One of the officials remarked after the game that he believed passing was possible under the new rules, but he had never seen it developed to such a state of perfection.[32]

The pass play had developed considerably since its initial try in a football game, which took place in 1905 in Wichita. The Christmas day game was played for two reasons, first, to try out some new rules that were debated at the 1905 White House conference, and second, to make money. The latter was not a success, in that little profit remained after expenses were paid.[33] But the innovations that Roosevelt had called for in his White House conference were a beacon to football in those dark days. Rule changes

included: ten yards to be gained in three downs, instead of five yards; forward passes to be allowed from behind the line of scrimmage; field goals' values to be scored according to the yardage of the kick; and disqualification to be levied for slugging, plus loss of the ball if the foul was committed by a member of the offensive team.[34] The last rule appeared to have succeeded in curbing roughness, since no one was injured.[35]

Partisans subsequently disputed who threw the first pass; both Washburn and Fairmount alumni contended that their team did it. According to the Washburn quarterback that day, Hugh Hope, he threw the first pass to Glenn Millice, who regularly was a half-back but had lined up as the left tackle on that play. It was set up to look like a conventional buck play, but after a fake, Hope "took the ball by the nose and threw it one-handed, end over end." Millice caught the ball and gained ten yards. Bliss Isely, who was a Fairmount lineman on that day, remembered the first pass this way:

> Art Solter, Fairmount right end, drifted to the right sideline to set up a sleeper play. There he fussed with his shoelaces. As Charlie Burton, Fairmount captain and center, moved to fullback, ostensibly to punt. Perk Baktes, fullback and brother of the coach, moved to right tackle and I went to center. There I snapped the ball to [William] Davis. Washburn rushed in to block a punt. Then Davis passed to Solter.

Davis recalled how he threw the pass: "I gripped the ball with my right fingers on the lace and threw underhand, spiraling the ball." Solter was tackled after making ten yards.[36]

The game ended in a 0-0 tie, with all in agreement that ten yards was too much to attain in three tries. The ten-yard rule eliminated mass plays almost entirely, though, with only four being attempted. Both teams mainly used end runs. "The usual run of the game was two runs and a punt. The ball changed hands 40 times," according to Isely.[37] Reaction to this outcome was varied, but its impact in the development of football was undeniable. "Today, the forward pass and other rule changes which had their beginning in Kansas," wrote Jim Reid in Kanhistique, "are as much a part of modern football as the egg-shaped ball itself. They helped to clear the way to a cleaner, more open and infinitely more popular game."[38]

Even with the innovations of football in the pace-setting game, its high school counterparts still had their critics to contend with. In a Kansas Magazine article in 1910, M. C. Martin predicted football would "soon rest in the cemetery of dead sports, where sleep its brutal ancestors of the past." Martin felt football belonged in the same sports family as gladiatorial combats, bullfights, prize fights, and wrestling matches. He further asserted that new rules did not prevent 1909 from becoming the most deadly year in football history.[39] A. H. Maurer wrote, "football is an excellent game for well-seasoned and trained athletes," but "is too dangerous for boys." He also thought that football was not worth the time and energy invested and that it created a passion for warfare, lowered moral standards, and

caused girls to become "crazed." He added that not all athletics should be dropped, or boys would play outside of school, "and worse conditions would result."[40]

Kansas high school football survived these blasts as it became more organized. Leagues came into being no later than 1914, when Abilene, Herrington, Ellsworth, Salina, and Lindsborg banded together to form the Solomon Valley League. Abilene jumped to the Central Kansas League in 1920, which then also included Chapman, Salina, Ellsworth, Minneapolis, and Saint John's Military Academy.[41] The Southeast Kansas League, composed of Columbus, Cherokee, Pittsburg, College High, Girard, Parsons, and Fort Scott, was formed in 1922. The Northeast Kansas League, which included Atchison, Argentine, Kansas City, Horton, Topeka, and Leavenworth was organized in 1918, although it may not have played football until 1925. By this date Argentine was dropped, while Olathe and Lawrence were added. The situation was similar in the Verdigris Valley League, which was formed in 1919 but may not have played football until 1925. Schools in this group included Cherryvale, Coffeyville, Independence, Neodosha, Fredonia, Altamont, Caney, and Oswego. By 1928 leagues were also formed by the Big Seven schools of the northeastern part of the state, the Cottonwood Valley schools in the east-central part of the state, and the North Central League schools.[42]

A state-wide organization that was instrumental in the institutionalization of football was the Kansas High

School Athletic Association, formed by the principal's section of the Kansas State Teachers Association in 1910. The KSHSAA set up eligibility requirements and staged a district basketball tournament and a state track meet in 1911.[43] By 1923, 545 schools were members of the association; forty-eight more joined in 1924 and forty-seven in the following year. Of this number 380 played football in 1925, with 6,000 boys participating in more than 1,000 games played before a half-million spectators. According to an early KSHSAA journal, schools that were members were afforded

> the privilege of clean, wholesome athletic participation with 634 of the best high schools of Kansas with a guarantee of good faith in the matter of eligibility and rules and a means of redress for violations. . . . The association maintains a means of hearing cases, settling disputes and instigating investigations for the better management of athletic contests in the state.

Approximately sixty cases were judged by the Board of Control in all sports in 1925. By 1926, 375 schools played football, and the number jumped to more than 400 in 1927. The latter year was also the first the association registered and certified officials, who numbered more than 500. Twenty schools of instruction were held to increase mastery of the rules of the game and to make it a more uniform sport in general.[44]

The growth in numbers and in importance of football and other extra-curricular activities was spurred on by the educational attitudes of the times. Articles in The Kansas Teacher and Western School Journal urged schools to get their students involved in activities. An article by a director of

a playground athletic league was in this vein. He wrote that democracy required discipline, duty, and sacrifice, and that "Physical education is teaching this on the playground to the child, on the athletic field to the youth." A principal in the Kansas City area observed that students had approximately eight hours for leisure and recreation, since household chores took up less time than they had for their parents. He considered student activities "infinitely worthwhile." He charged high schools to "assume a great deal of responsibility for occupational and recreational employment of the leisure time of our pupils." A third article, by the Director of the National Physical Education Service, quoted Dr. Thomas D. Wood of Columbia University as finding that seventy-five percent of American school children had physical defects which were detrimental to health and school work. Wood added that most of these defects were remedial. This director called for a well-rounded physical education program, which would build not only health but also character. His closing statement was, "You can teach the boy on the football team more ethics and sound citizenship by getting him to obey the rules and to work as a member of a team than by preaching the gospel from the pulpit." A survey of rural high schools in Kansas concluded that many activities, especially football, interfered with school work, but almost all of the participants involved in this study felt these disruptions were worthwhile in the overall scheme of things.[45]

There were still those who opposed this trend, however. A survey of seventy-seven school superintendents by G. H. Marshall, then Superintendent of Schools in Augusta, found that twenty-six respondents admitted that their pupils "bet on games," and twenty-two reported that a winning team was to be attained "at all costs." Other findings in this study included a situation that was "most irritating" to many respondents. These superintendents complained of "bidding" for certain men to officiate, especially for the big games. A bill in the 1926 state legislature proposed that state funds be cut off for any school engaged in interschool athletic contests. These contests, according to William Allen White, were the "bane of American education." White saw nothing wrong with intraschool play, but with "interschool contests arose the contentious, combative, partisan instincts so deeply that other instincts and interests take second place." He charged that at least one-half of the children in Emporia had their minds not on studies but on interschool sports.[46]

Not even William Allen White could convince the state legislature to abolish football, however, which was by then a virtual institution with the formation of leagues and the KSHSAA. Football had not always been so secure as an organized sport; the brutality of its early days is well documented. But Kansans and others continued to play the game until adequate reform had come about, with some of the necessary evolutionary play taking place in Kansas. By 1930

football was in Kansas to stay, although it still continued to evolve. The addition of night football, six-man, and later eight-man football helped the sport remain strong in the small towns of the state, which would have struggled with conventional eleven-man football.

## Notes to Chapter 1

[1]New York Times, 24 November 1895, p. 2.

[2]Wamego Times, 9 December 1929, p. 1.

[3]Harold C. Evans, "College Football in Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly 9 (August 1940): 285-286.

[4]Ibid., pp. 287-288.

[5]Glenn Avon Walker, "The Administration of Athletics in the Small High School" (M.A. thesis, University of Wichita, 1935), pp. 11-13.

[6]W. G. Warner, "Colby High School Plays First Football Game in 1900; Remains Unbeaten 5 Years, Thomas County, Yesterday and Today 10 (October 1960): 2.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., pp. 2-4.

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[10]I. E. Burgess, "Turn-of-the-Century Football," Kanhistique 8 (October 1982): 1, 3.

[11]Harry L. Stromgren, "An Educational Biography of Coaches and the History of Interscholastic Athletics at Abilene High School, Abilene, Kansas" (M.S. report, Kansas State University, 1965), pp. 6-7.

[12]Topeka State Journal, 7 November 1953, in "Ball Games," Vol. 2, Kansas State Historical Society clippings collection; Robert Wayne Wilson, "Development of Interscholastic Athletics at Emporia Senior High School" (M.S. thesis, Kanas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1958), p. 24.

[13]Joe Stone, "Wichitan to Join Teammates at Reunion of Hutchinson Team," Wichita Evening Eagle, 3 November 1952, in "Ball Games," Vol. 1, Kansas State Historical Society clippings collection.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Helen Peterson-Wood, ed., "Uncle Johnnie, Honey Creek Correspondent, 1895-1903," Kansas History 3 (Spring 1980): 136.

[16]Bernard A. Taylor, "History of Athletics at Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas" (M.S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, 1947), pp. 6-7.

[17]"The Athletic Craze," Nation, 7 December 1893: 422-423.

[18]John Hammond Moore, "Football's Ugly Decades, 1893-1913," The Smithsonian Journal of History 2 (Fall 1967): 49-50.

[19]New York Times, 8 February 1894, p. 6.

[20]Moore, p. 50.

[21]"The New Football," Nation, 29 November 1894, p. 399.

[22]Nation, 7 February 1895, p. 101.

[23]Moore, pp. 52-53.

[24]New York Times, 10 November 1897, p. 6.

[25]Casper Whitney, "The Sportsman's View-Point," Outing 41 (January 1903): 499-500.

[26]New York Times, 26 November 1904, p. 6.

[27]Moore, pp. 59-60.

[28]Ibid., p. 60.

[29]"The Value of College Athletics," Outlook 82 (January 1907): 152.

[30]Moore, p. 61.

[31]"The View-Point," Outing 49 (January 1907): 534-535; "The Abolition of Football," Independent, 23 December 1909, p. 1463.

[32]New York Times, 2 November 1913, p. 4.

[33]Bliss Isely, "Kansas Teams Pioneered Football's Forward Pass," Topeka Daily Capital, 28 October 1956, in "Ball Games," Vol. 2, Kansas State Historical Society clippings collection.

[34]Evans, "College Football in Kansas," pp. 294-295.

[35]Pete Lightner, "'05 Shockers were Pioneers in Grid-Rules," Wichita Eagle Magazine, 21 February 1954, in "Ball Games," Vol. 2, Kansas State Historical Society clippings collection.

[36]Isely, clippings collection.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Jim Reid, "Football's First Forward Pass," Kanhistique 9 (October 1983): 4.

[39]M. C. Martin, "The Passing of Football," Kansas Magazine 3 (February 1910): 33-35.

[40]A. H. Maurer, "Football in the High School," Educational Review 40 (September 1910): 132-137.

[41]Stromgren, pp. 3-4.

[42]First Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1925, pp. 117, 122-123; Second Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1926, p. 129; Topeka Daily Capital, 9 December 1928, p. 10B.

[43]A strenuous effort by this author failed to discover the "'dear and precious book' which contains the complete official records of the association for the first twelve years of its existence," so a detailed impact of the association in these early years is difficult. "The Kansas State High School Athletic Association," Kansas Teacher and Western School Journal 25 (October 1927): 21.

[44]Second Annual Yearbook, pp. 87-89; Third Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1927, p. 58; Fourth Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1928, pp. 23, 33.

[45]William Burdick, "Character Building Through Physical Education," Kansas Teacher and Western School Journal 26 (November 1927): 17; J. F. Wellemeyer, "The Administration of Student Activities in the Modern High School," Ibid. 27 (May 1928): 11, 14; James E. Rogers, "Is American Physique Slipping," Ibid. 29 (June-July 1929): 9; Benjamin Philip Bowman, "The Place Extra-Curricular Activities Have in the Rural High Schools of Kansas," Ibid. 27 (October 1928): 17.

[46]G. H. Marshall, "The Status of High-School Athletics in Kansas," School Review 35 (February 1927): 113-120.

# CHAPTER 2

## NIGHT FOOTBALL

If any two schoolmen with a stake in their football teams struck up a conversation in the late 1920s or early 1930s, especially in the fall, installing lights on football fields was a likely topic. The proponent of night football would point out that lighted fields brought greater crowds and more revenue, which could support the entire athletic program, including intramurals. These larger throngs were due to the fact that night games eliminated scheduling conflicts with local colleges, allowing many parents the opportunity to see their sons play when in other circumstances they could not. Besides, in the early fall, the evenings were much more comfortable than the hot afternoons. Schools encouraged attendance at their events anyhow, so why not enhance these possibilities with lights? His adversary would respond that the game was played for the students and not for the spectators. Besides, most larger schools had no trouble financing sports, and if smaller schools had trouble with this, they should pare down their athletic programs.

The lighting opponent might next charge that night football took up too much of the students' time, anyway. When was he supposed to study if he practiced and played football in the evenings? After sitting in classrooms all

day he would not study after school. The proponent would reply that night football games took up no more time than the winter basketball games played at the same time; the boys could practice football after school, just as they did during basketball season.

Each man then would stiffen his resolve. The proponent would add that it was easier for a crowd to see a night game, with no sun in their eyes. A well-lit field had no shadows, either, and the colors and contrast of the action were vivid. This picturesque quality could be transferred to many activities, including pageants for the girls' physical education department and even commencement exercises. The opponent would respond that they were leaving the main point, which was football. If you tinkered with football, which was an ideal team sport, some of its values might be lost. The game of football was for the boy; it gave him an opportunity to let off surplus energy, created an objective in making the team, took care of the leisure time period between after-school and dinner, and gave him exercise in the open with fresh air and sunshine, so essential to a growing boy.[1]

Such conversations were typical during the growth of night football; some schools found it fitted their needs, while others were reluctant to change. This reluctance was overcome in some places, however, by the intervention of businessmen who were interested in bringing people into town, not only to boost community spirit but also to bring more potential customers to their shops. Communities needed this

boost, too, as lights were installed on many fields during the difficult years of the Great Depression.

The idea of playing football after sunset on a lighted field was by no means new. Fairmount University of Wichita's innovative 1905 team played a game with Cooper College of Sterling on October 6th under the illumination of gasoline-mantle lights provided by W. C. Coleman. Apparently a few Wichita enthusiasts had already seen football successfully played by gaslight in Des Moines, Iowa, and Richmond, Indiana. A Wichita Eagle writer the next day called the contest, which Fairmount won 24-0, "a decided success," although the middle of the field was not lit well enough for spectators to see the action in this area. Team manager R. J. Kirk thought that lights could be suspended from wires hung across the field to take care of this problem. The lighting system, which included twenty-eight lights along the sidelines and two at each end of the field, was deemed insufficient by one of the game's participants, Bliss Isely of Fairmount. In a Wichita Eagle Magazine article forty-nine years later, he recalled "that the crowd was meager, the lights just as meager and punts were lost above the glow," even though a white-painted ball was used. Night football in Kansas had to await the development of large-scale electric lighting before it would be acceptable.[2]

By 1929 this technology was readily available, as Haskell Institute (in the college ranks) and Wellington High School began their seasons by hosting night football.

Apparently play on illuminated fields was not novel at the college level; Brian Bell of the Associated Press wrote in October, 1929, that teams "have practiced under artificial lights for years and it was only a step to playing games under these conditions. Night football has been played in the Middle West for three seasons, although never before reaching the proportions to be seen this year." At the college level lights allowed smaller schools, such as Haskell, to play at times when they would not be competing directly for fan support with larger schools, such as the University of Kansas, which was also located in Lawrence. According to Kansas sports historian Harold C. Evans, this was to be the motivation for many small Kansas schools to install lights; they did not wish to be playing at the same time as local Big Six conference schools.

For high school teams such as Wellington, the reasons for playing night football were a little more complex. Games played then also drew a bigger crowd, but for a different reason. High schools often played on Friday afternoons, which meant that many patrons could not attend games. By playing at night, many more parents and even students could attend the games. At whatever level, this meant more revenue.[3]

On September 18, Wellington High gave its twelve-pole, twenty-reflector, 40,000-watt system a test when it held a scrimmage with another local school team. The Wellington Daily News reported that "The game could be seen and followed

as easily, if not more easily, than in daylight. Wellington and Oxford teams scrimmaged for almost an hour, and as the time passed, its night beginning (7:30) was hardly noted." This test set the stage for Wellington to be "the first high school in the world to play night football under its own installation and it will be a feature which will long mark the city." This same newspaper added that while night football was new to this area, it had been used "in the eastern colleges" earlier.[4]

The formal debut of night football for Kansas high schools was September 20, in a game which Wellington lost to Blackwell, Oklahoma, 33-0. The game itself, however, was overshadowed by the spectacle of the event. According to the Winfield Daily Courier, a crowd of approximately 4,200 people, with some coming more than 200 miles, from places as far away as Wichita, Winfield, Newton, and northern Oklahoma, viewed the game. Although the field was "as light as day," this paper reported that not all in attendance approved of the game. Coach Bill Monypeny of Southwestern College said several coaches who saw the game were not pleased with this development, although he did not elaborate on this polling.[5]

E. A. Thomas, executive secretary of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association (KSHSAA) and umpire of this game, admitted the lighting on the ends of the field was dim, but he added that this was correctable. He also said the tan ball was hard to see at times, but it was used only because one of the teams wore white jerseys. He thought that

a white football would be easier to see, otherwise. The evening starting time also made it comfortable for people in the stands, although it was a little warm for the players. Overall, Thomas gave his qualified approval to this innovation, writing that "football on a clear and pleasant September evening is a success according to our testimony."[6]

Another interested party that night was coach R. B. McCarroll from Hutchinson. Dubbed by the Hutchinson Herald, "an ardent advocate" of night football, he led a push for lights to be used by the local high school and junior college. Another supporter was the sports editor of that paper, Frederick Mendell. In his "Sportorials," he pointed out several advantages of night football. According to Mendell, every place the Giant Company had installed lights, they had been paid for in the first night of use. This was due not only to the novelty of the game, but also to the fact that more fans could attend. After the first game, the increased revenues could support the school's athletic program. The game itself was more spectacular under lights, too, resembling a theatre. "From a spectator's standpoint, a night football game appears as a drama, with illuminated field the stage, and the players the characters. But the thrill still exists uncurtailed." An informal poll of the local businessmen also found that there were many more advantages of night football in Hutchinson.[7]

With the installation of lights, the Hutchinson field was "the best illuminated in Kansas, and the best lighted

high school field in America," according to the Hutchinson Herald. The poles for the lights, twenty-eight in all, were sixty feet tall. They were placed eight feet in the ground, but still towered nearly five feet above any in the state. Each pole supported a 2,000-watt projector, which gave the system a capability of 56,000 watts for illuminating the field. This was 8,000 watts more than the capacity of the Haskell set-up and 14,000 watts more than Wellington's system.[8]

The lights were first used for a game which pitted the junior college team against the Chilocco Indians. Although the game was marred by an "intermittent though persistent rain," an estimated 2,500 people attended. The rain by no means dampened the spirits of the Hutchinson Herald reporter who covered the game:

> Proof of the success of the lights and the unparalleled interest of the game is seen in the fact that not a car was cranked and no patron left while it was in progress. Everyone stayed and was soaked braving the weather to see a dispute over a hide that once had been the outer cover of a grunting pig.[9]

The "very progressive" town of Wamego also installed lights in 1929. Selling points used in articles of the Wamego Times were similar to those used by other communities, although this paper claimed that "In many cases the crowds have more than equalled the population of the town" when football was played at night. The Times also emphasized the versatility of the town's system; in 1929 it would be used in the Armistice Day celebration as well as for "many other

occasions." The 24,000-watt set-up was used when the local team defeated Alta Vista 26-0 before the largest crowd that had ever attended a football game in Wamego. A week later this record was broken at another night game with Alma. The Wamego Reporter wrote that glare was no problem, with the players and the white football being a nice contrast to the dark background. This paper also said the snappy weather and enthusiastic crowd put "verve" in both teams, who had no trouble fielding passes and punts.[10]

The new facility was a source of community pride for Wamego, as well as in other towns. The Reporter said 100 cars came from nearby towns for the Alta Vista game. This crowd was so large, in fact, that many who attended the game did so gratis. The Reporter also stressed versatility, writing that the lights could be used during the summer as well as during skating season. An article in this same paper a month later even went so far as to say the lighting system "has attracted quite some state attention."[11]

Night football even worked at schools that had definite attendance problems. St. Benedict College installed lights late in the 1929 season. Its coach, R. W. Schmidt, responded to this news simply by saying, "Our crowds can't be much worse." Saturday afternoon games just did not draw well in Atchison. St. Benedict's first night game changed this somewhat, as "the size of the crowd justified the innovation." According to the Atchison Globe, the crowd was also more alert, with its attention riveted to the field.[12]

Coach Otto Unruh of Bethel College faced the same plight as Schmidt had. According to Unruh, support of the Bethel and Newton High School football programs was "poor," and attendance at games was "very poor." As he explained it, "During that time everybody worked 6 days a week, including Saturdays, consequently not very many people could get off and attend." To rectify this situation, this college and high school negotiated a deal where a wooden stadium and lights were installed on a field in 1930. "Interest in football just boomeranged," Unruh said. "Our crowds were good and football improved. Soon other towns put in night football and football became a well established sport in Kansas."[13]

The success of night football thus caught the attention of many across the state. Leslie E. Edmonds of the Topeka Daily Capital reported in 1929 that in Salina an independent promoter was setting up lights for that town for a fee of thirty percent of the gate receipts. Edmonds said he would gladly buy stock in any company that would install lights on every college and big-city high school football field for the same schedule of returns.[14] The KSHSAA noted that several high schools were converting to night football in 1929, not only for the larger crowds but also for the advantage of eliminating interruptions during the school day. This same article said some smaller schools were finding it more difficult to finance football.[15]

The 1930 season saw more light poles planted around Kansas football fields, with no less than eighteen high

schools playing night football. Again it generally met with success, and for a variety of reasons. At Emporia lights were installed at Kansas State Teachers College, so the town's two colleges (KSTC and the College of Emporia) could play on the same day without conflict. Emporia High School also used the lighted field, moving an early season game with Cottonwood Falls from a Saturday afternoon to a Tuesday night. An Emporia Daily Gazette sports columnist wrote that although "nocturnal games are solving the complications of conflicting schedules," they also pushed conclusion times back closer to deadline times, which "made a workhouse out of our former rather-delightful jobs."[16]

Fort Scott's high school partisans came to night games in record numbers this same year, when only four years earlier attendance at games was woefully inadequate, according to a local historian. In fact 1930 was the first time in the school's history the Fort Scott football team came out on top financially.[17]

After lights were installed in Clay Center in 1930, an advertisement in the Clay Center Times charged fans with "no excuse for not attending the games. . . . An exceptional schedule of football games has been arranged for this year meriting the patronage and backing of every citizen in the district." Although this probably did not come about, record numbers did attend Clay Center games that fall. School spirit was not the sole beneficiary, however. The

businessmen of the town, who were the underwriters of the project, also came out nicely financially, according to the Times.[18]

Osborne was also initiated into the night football ranks in 1930, with crowds of nearly 1,500 people witnessing games under their 42,000 watt system. An Osborne County Farmer writer went so far as to say that night football was more successfully played than night baseball.[19]

Lighted fields were widely utilized not only in Kansas, but also in the mid-east and eastern parts of the country as well. The Literary Digest said, "Night football, like night baseball, bids fair to become an important part of American sports life. . . . Whatever night football's absolute merits or demerits may be, it is certainly a picturesque spectacle." Within this same November 8, 1930, article a mini-debate was staged, with different New York newspapermen giving their views on the quality of lighted fields. Coach W. W. Roper of Princeton University opposed night football for health reasons; it put a strain on players' eyes, he said, and upset their daily routine. "They must postpone their dinner until after the game, and go to bed on top of a heavy meal, with the result that they do not enjoy a restful sleep." Bert Bell, Temple University's football coach, questioned Roper's conclusions. He asked which was better for a player, a night game which was played when it was cool and comfortable, or a scorching afternoon battle where the sizzling sun boiled seven to twelve pounds out of a man?

All were in agreement, however, that November games were best played in daylight.[20]

Illinois schoolmen also staged their own debate on night football in a 1930 issue of the Illinois Teacher. E. O. May, principal of Robinson Township High School offered most of the arguments against night football. In summary, he charged that night games interrupted proven routines, reduced the quality of the event, and philosophically were not justified for use by high schools.

Concerning routines, May said "real" school should be held only five days a week. A Friday night game interrupted school that day, since the boys would be thinking about the upcoming game and not studies. Saturday night games extended the school week for students and employees alike. Night games also required night practice, which not only disrupted study and sleep time but also was inconvenient for boys who lived far away from school. This type of scheduling required travel at night, too, which put all at greater risk. Travel during the day was proven to be safer. Another contributor added that young people traveling at night might start touring the countryside after the game, adding unnecessary risks.

Secondly, May wondered if the quality of the event itself would be reduced. Poorly lit fields would allow for trickery and unfair practices to go undetected, making the referees' job tougher. The fans would also be at a disadvantage: the spectacle of the game--the bands, the teams, the colors, and the cheerleaders, would all appear somewhat

removed; the chill of the autumn evening would make fans uncomfortable and could cause illness; and fans' eyes and heads might ache after facing the strong lights. Even leaving after the game would be more difficult, since crowd and automobile traffic were harder to control at night.

The defenders of night football had arguments to rebutt most of these points. First of all, Friday night games at least allowed for school to be held for five days; day games interrupted school during the week or added duties on weekends. Most also believed night practice was rarely needed, and some schools practiced at night during basketball season anyway. Quality lighting also remedied some of May's objections; eyestrain, trickery, and reduced spectacle were not found to be problems where quality lights were used. Some defenders even averred that the contrast between light and dark enhanced colors and the spectacle. Finally, cost should not be a consideration, since the lights frequently brought in revenue that quickly paid for the expenditure, and the lights could be used for a variety of other school and community uses, not just football.[21]

Eventually the debate subsided as communities and especially their businessmen realized the benefit of having football games at night. In fact in many places the businessmen financed the equipping of fields for night football. At Lebanon no school funds were needed when lights were added to the football field in 1931. The Kansas Power company provided part of the equipment and labor, with the

local businessmen picking up the rest of the tab.[22] At Oakley the Lions Club, with the help of the city council, put up a lighting system in 1931. According to the Oakley Graphic, the added attendance expected there would help get the athletic program at the school out of the red, "resulting of course in the saving of the tax payers money."[23] Osage City claimed to have the first lighted field in Osage County in 1934, when the local chamber of commerce and the businessmen of the town paid the bill for the necessary equipment. The Journal-Free Press of this town said, "The Osage field will be one of the best if not the best lighted high school field in the state."[24]

The cost of equipping the local field with lights was not cheap either. In a survey of sixteen communities that had installed lights by 1931, the Kansas Athlete found that Oakley had spent the least on its 40,000 watt system, since all the labor had been donated. The cost there had been $750. Wyandotte had spent the most on its 63,000 watt system, which cost $4,700. Wattage at the listed facilities ranged from 28,000 at Wamego to 72,000 at Norton.[25]

Why were these communities willing to invest this kind of money? One reason was the spectacle of the event, with the corresponding prestige. People at Oakley claimed they were the first to host a night football game in northwestern Kansas. The Oakley Graphic described the first night game as "a pretty football picture, with the big crowd, the purple and white uniformed band and their music, the two

teams down in their lines and the huge flood lights making the whole field, the cars and the crowd light as day."[26]

Describing Lebanon's newly remodeled football facility, the Lebanon Times said,

> Plenty of space is provided along the sides for cars, and a plank seat will accommodate those who wish a seat along the sidelines. Excitable fans who can't sit still will be allowed to rush to and fro in a space behind the plank seats.

The half-time show on the refurbished field was also noteworthy:

> A group of girls wearing white dresses with red sashes and tams marched on the football field Friday night during the half and formed the letter "L" while the band played the Stein song. This feature added brillancy to the game.[27]

With the installation of lights in 1933, the Ellsworth Messenger claimed the local field "is said to be one of the best lighted fields in the state."[28] Coach Dean Dillon of Alton High School believed it was the smallest high school to have lights when they were installed in 1934. When Downs added lights to its field that same year, the Osborne County Farmer bragged that the county had three lighted facilities.[29] The Bird City Times said, "Bird City can rightfully be called the 'Playground of Northwest Kansas,'" with the installation of floodlights at the local field in 1932. This same article added that during the softball season "Some nights a thousand people come to see the games. . . . the farmers make the grounds a good place to visit their neighbors and to see the games."[30]

Thus not only were towns seeking prestige with night ball, but they were also wanting folks to come to town more often. This possibility naturally interested businessmen, who during the 1930s were facing the hard times of the Depression. These times were especially difficult for smaller towns, who were already coming to grips with the fact that people were leaving these rural areas. Proof of this appeared in the writings of Kansas historian Floyd R. Souders: "The United States census shows that most Kansas counties have declined in population since 1920. Some started losing people after 1910 while others did not begin their decline until the 1930s or the depression era."[30] Young people were leaving these counties, especially rural ones, to find some type of economic opportunity.

These economic opportunities were leaving many small towns for a variety of interwoven reasons. Economic centers were becoming more and more concentrated, due to new, improved roadways, which allowed producers to take their goods to places farther away. This development had further impact since farmers had been forced by consumers' desire for higher quality products and more stringent government regulations to cease producing a variety of products such as cream and eggs; they instead concentrated on just one or two products. These products, in a much larger volume, were then taken to the nearest transportation hub, not the local small town, which probably did not have the necessary facilities, to be sold.

These developments almost eliminated the old tradition of going to the local town for Saturday night, where farmers and their families sold their products and bought needed goods and services. This purchasing instead took place at the larger economic centers, while the importance of the local town was reduced. Businessmen in these small towns realized this movement, along with the ongoing economic stagnation of the depression, and found that night football games were a method of bringing folks back to town. In many places night football was readily accepted, too, because it also provided a local recreation outlet for people in hard times. Thus in several ways, night football was a timely adaptation to new conditions in small Kansas towns.

Eventually night football became an institution, as advocates of the use of lights found allies in local businessmen, who not only wanted to see the games themselves but also wanted to enhance community spirit and their pocketbooks as well. Night football had its opponents, especially among traditionalists, but night football became a "life saver," according to the KSHSAA. It gave schools the opportunity to bring in more revenue to save their athletic programs, possibly as well to save the school.[32] This "life saver" aspect could also be applied to community life in general, but the smaller towns would need another innovation to save their high schools. As the smaller towns declined in population, traditional eleven-man football required more players than

the local high school could muster. The answer was the shift to the six-man game.

## Notes to Chapter 2

[1]W. J. Barnett and Paul F. Hagen, "Night Football in High Schools," Journal of Health and Physical Education 3 (October 1932): 30-31, 56-57.

[2]Harold C. Evans, "Addenda to 'College Football in Kansas,'" Kansas Historical Quarterly 9 (August 1940): 407-408; Pete Lightner, "'05 Shockers Were Pioneers in Grid Rules," Wichita Eagle Magazine, 21 February 1954, in "Ball Games," Vol. 2, Kansas State Historical Society clippings collection.

[3]Leslie E. Edmonds, "Just As It Seems to Me," Topeka Daily Capital, 1 September 1929, p. 9B; Brian Bell, "On the Sidelines," Topeka Daily Capital, 7 October 1929, p. 7; Evans, "College Football in Kansas," p. 308.

[4]Wellington Daily News, 6 September 1929, p. 4A; Ibid., 19 September 1929, p. 5; Ibid., 12 September 1929, p. 4.

[5]Winfield Daily Courier, 21 September 1929, p. 8.

[6]E. A. Thomas, "State High School Athletics," Topeka Daily Capital, 23 September 1929, p. 7.

[7]Hutchinson Herald, 21 September 1929, p. 3; Ibid., 8 October 1929, p. 3; Frederick Mendell, "Sportorial," Ibid., 6 October 1929, p. 2; Ibid., 9 October 1929, p. 3.

[8]Hutchinson Herald, 15 October 1929, p. 3.

[9]Ibid., 19 October 1929, p. 2.

[10]Wamego Times, 30 September 1929, p. 1; Ibid., 24 October 1929, p. 1; Wamego Reporter, 7 November 1929, p. 4; Ibid., 14 November 1929, p. 1.

[11]Wamego Reporter, 7 November 1929, p. 4; Ibid., 14 November 1929, p. 1; Ibid., 5 December 1929, p. 1.

[12]Topeka Daily Capital, 1 November 1929, p. 16; Leslie E. Edmonds, "Just As It Seems to Me," Topeka Daily Capital, 6 November 1929, p. 8.

[13]Otto D. Unruh, letter to author, Goessel, KS, 5 May 1987.

[14]Leslie E. Edmonds, "Just As It Seems to Me," Topeka Daily Capital, 3 October 1929, p. 8.

[15]The Sixth Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1930, p. 27.

[16]"Night Football," The Kansas Athlete 1 (October 1930): 2; Emporia Daily Gazette, 3 October 1930, p. 14; Ibid., 10 October 1930, p. 14.

[17]Clifford H. Lyman, compiler, "Fifty Years of High School Football at Fort Scott, Kansas," produced for the Fort Scott Letterman's Club, in possession of the Kansas State Historical Society.

[18]Clay Center Times, 25 September 1930, p. 2; Ibid., 2 October 1930, p. 1; Ibid., 9 October 1930, p. 1.

[19]Osborne County Farmer, 30 October 1930, p. 1; Ibid., 16 October 1930, p. 1.

[20]"Floodlight Football: A New Thrill for the Campus," Literary Digest 8 November 1930, pp. 36-37.

[21]R. C. Moore, "Anent Night Football--A Symposium," Illinois Teacher 19 (December 1930): 122, 146.

[22]Lebanon Times, 9 October 1931, p. 1.

[23]Oakley Graphic, 25 September 1931, p. 1.

[24][Osage City] Journal-Free Press, 12 September 1934, p. 1; Ibid., 19 September 1934, p. 1.

[25]"Cost of Night Equipment," The Kansas Athlete 3 (November 1931): 3.

[26]Oakley Graphic, 16 October 1931, p. 1.

[27]Lebanon Times, 24 September 1931, p. 1; Ibid., 1 October 1931, p. 1.

[28]Ellsworth Messenger, 5 October 1933, p. 1.

[29]Osborne County Farmer 20 September 1934, p.1; Ibid., 11 October 1934, p. 1.

[30]Bird City Times, 11 October 1934, p. 1.

[31]Floyd R. Souders, "The Small Town and Its Future," Kansas Historical Quarterly 35 (Spring 1969): 1.

[32]The Thirteenth Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1937, p. 25; The Eighth Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1932, p. 25.

# CHAPTER 3

## SIX-MAN

Prior to the middle 1930s, small Kansas high schools, like those across the plains, faced the problem of what sports their athletic programs were to offer in the fall. Eleven-man football presented several problems, the most difficult being that it required at least twenty able-bodied players. Interest in fall baseball or softball tended to wane, especially after the World Series. These sports often were played in the spring, anyway. Starting basketball early also seemed seasonally inappropriate--it was a winter sport which was out of place in the fall. Sporting events at the local high school were important events in small-town community life, so small schools often ended up competing in a sport which either was not suitable or was not in season; a few did without, usually to the chagrin of school patrons.[1]

Another alternative was developed in 1934 by Stephen E. Epler while he was at Chester, Nebraska. By eliminating the guards and tackles, and with a few other modifications, he discovered that football could still be played with only six players. Epler had taken a popular sport that had its origins in the eastern parts of the United States and adapted it to the conditions of the plains. This game was ideal for small plains-states high schools, which needed a fall sport.

Some coaches recognized the superior qualities of this game fairly soon, while others did not try six-man until after World War II. Mahaska became the first school in Kansas to play six-man when it joined the Little Blue League, of which Chester and three other Nebraska schools were members, in 1935. After Mahaska's fifth six-man game the Belleville Telescope reported that a "large crowd" had turned out to watch Mahaska, on its home field, defeat Chester 60 to 25. The Kansas Athlete, a publication of the KSHSSA, confirmed that Mahaska had initiated the six-man game in Kansas. In the same article, published in December of 1935, the journal also pointed out that eight-man "is played considerably by small high schools in Illinois."[2]

When other Kansas schools started playing six-man was difficult to gauge, as reports varied. The football coach at Hudson in 1953 returned a questionnaire to Ray Max Lundstrom, a graduate student at the Kansas State Teachers College of Pittsburg, who compiled a series of questionnaires by six-man coaches. The coach reported that Hudson had played six-man in 1928. Lundstrom wrote that his questions "might have been misunderstood," although it was possible this school may have been "playing a form of football using less than eleven men before the game (six-man), as it is known today, was introduced."[3] Even the originality of six-man with Epler was uncertain. In a September, 1937, article in the Athletic Journal, Brantford B. Benton claimed to have been playing six-man football in intramurals in 1930. Benton did give

credit to Epler, though, for making the game and its rules widespread. This included the authorship, distributed by the American Boy in 1937, of booklets on the rules and methods of playing six-man. Later this same periodical even developed an All-American six-man football team.[4]

Berryton, Bloom, Esbon, and Dwight were the next Kansas schools after Mahaska to play six-man, according to Dale A. Pennybaker, a graduate student at the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, who wrote a thesis based on questionnaires returned from six-man coaches in 1955.[5] Johnson High School organized its first football team in 1937. It played six-man intramurally, although a year later the school was able to find some intermural competition. An enthusiastic Johnson Pioneer reporter called six-man "the small school game that is sweeping the country. . . . Fans like six-man football. Like basketball, it keeps the crowd on its toes because the scoring goes on all through the game."[6]

Johnson and several other communities in southwestern Kansas--Satanta, Kismet, and Ulysses--formed an informal six-man league in 1938. Bakersburg High School of Eureka, Oklahoma, was also a member. The Hutchinson Herald reported that six-man was officially initiated in this part of the state on September 29, when Ulysses overwhelmed Kismet 40-0. Describing the game, a Herald reporter wrote, "The bantam football had all the thrills of a big game and about twice the speed, due both to the wide-open style of playing and to

the fast moving Ulysses squad." A week later this same newspaper proclaimed six-man was already "popular with fans of the Southwest territory." J. C. Witter, the principal of Kismet high school at this time, attributed this fan interest to the game's high-powered offenses. He said, "a team must be fast to be able to hold its own. Passing and end runs are the best ground gainers." The game was more fun to watch, too, since "The entire functioning of plays can be seen by the crowd." The merchants of Johnson became caught up in the six-man fervor, purchasing the gate for over 350 fans in a mid-October clash between the local high school and Kismet. Satanta also embraced the new game, although this school faced grooming problems on its field. "One of the biggest problems was gathering the cactus pads which would hurt players if they fell on them," according to the Satanta Chief. The Ulysses News also waxed botanical when discussing six-man, saying it had "taken root and grown like the proverbial beanstalk." It added, "Athletic journals both national and state are carrying numerous articles about the six-man football."[7]

By 1936 six-man had already started receiving national attention in the Athletic Journal. Epler, in an article entitled "A New Deal for Football," demonstrated the need for a type of football other than eleven-man. In polling the secretaries of forty-five state high school athletic associations (Arkansas, California, and Massachusetts were not included), he found that there were more than 10,000 high schools out of a total of almost 18,000 that did not play

football. Of this 18,000 almost 17,000 played basketball, however. To Epler this meant there were many high schools, mostly small ones, across the nation who probably wanted to play football but could not. As he sized it up,

> In the fall, football permeates the air. College and high school teams are practicing, younger boys are playing on vacant lots, and older men in barbershops and elsewhere are talking football. . . . Football holds a thrill for young and old, for girls cheering in the stands as well as the boys playing on the field. Love may capture the young man's fancy in spring, but in the fall it is football.

Epler speculated that cost and the threat of injury, especially at small schools, where younger boys would have to play in an eleven-man scheme, were the main reasons that most of these 10,000-plus schools were not playing football. He proposed that these schools try his six-man, which was quite similar to eleven-man. After all, he explained,

> Blocking and tackling are not tampered with. The eleven-man rules are the constitution in the six-man realm, too. However, nine amendments were affixed to the constitution so the forgotten boy could have 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of' football.

These changes reduced the size of the field, since fewer players were used, and opened up the game, thus making it safer. Epler also noted that the game was already played by 156 schools, or by one of every forty-eight which played football. Six of the ten states in which six-man was played were the plains states of Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming.[8]

J. H. Morrison, a college physical education instructor in South Dakota, described the evolution of a six-man

league in North Dakota in the same issue of the Athletic Journal. Morrison stated first that many small North Dakota schools could only have one sport, basketball, since spring was too short for a full-fledged track program and eleven-man football in the fall either required too many players or was too costly. In the fall of 1934, however, a number of the principals of Barnes County decided to try six-man as a demonstration sport, although most of these administrators "were skeptical about the game." They were generally impressed by the game in 1934, so they decided to form a league the next fall. Skepticism was next displayed by the boys, who were afraid it would be a "sissy" game like touch football which they had already experienced, or that schools with large boys would dominate the game. They were wrong on both counts. The coaches who used their "tonnage" at the start of the schedule "learned the error of their ways in a hurry when some of the smaller shifty backs on opposing teams began to 'go places' in a hurry." The boys were as happy as the administrators, who found out that this game had strong spectator appeal. As Morrison said,

> The game is open. It is easier to see just what is going on. The deception, timing, and color of a finely coached offense, and the determination, headiness, and gameness of an unyielding defense make for a spectator-appeal equal to, if not greater than, that of the eleven-man game.

Morrison added that six-man seemed to fill the needs of many small schools in North Dakota, and that it was so popular that a state championship for this game was to be held in

1936. Even though these schools had played the game before Epler had publicized it, Morrison said that "too much thanks cannot be given" to him as "the originator of this type of football."[9]

Nation's Schools also lauded six-man in 1936, since it satisfied the three parties to the game--administrators, players, and spectators. "Those handling the game are convinced that it is an excellent autumn game for the small school," said the journal. "The players are enthusiastic since it gives them an outlet for their football interest. The spectators are manifesting their approval by coming out to the games in ever increasing numbers. It satisfies even the most rabid football fan." The author, F. L. Showacy, complimented the work of Epler and listed the Little Blue League, where high school enrollments ranged from thirty-five to 100, as one of the nation's first six-man leagues.[10]

Six-man continued to receive coverage in 1937, as the Athletic Journal ran a trilogy of articles on it. This coverage was easy to justify, since, as the introduction to the first article said, "six-man football has in the past year swept across the country like a prairie fire." A. W. Larson of Sykeston, North Dakota, said that six-man "provides on a smaller scale all the thrills, fun and excitement of the regular game. It provides the boy in the small high school with a chance to try his skill at football and will, in many cases, unearth future college stars." In the development of skills, he said, six-man did not take a back-seat to

eleven-man: it was just as strenuous, just as demanding in blocking and tackling, and perhaps more clean-cut, since most of the action took place on the open field in a man-to-man style. The other two articles, by Judson A. Timm of the Pennsylvania Military College and by Benton of New Jersey, said six-man had a variety of applications. Both coaches used six-man to give their little-used reserves a chance to practice fundamentals in game-like situations. Benton went so far as to simulate games, using his injured front-line players as referees, as preliminaries to eleven-man varsity contests. At both locations lesser-skilled players gained experience and felt as though they were more a part of the team as a result of the use of six-man football.[11]

Larson published another article in the same journal in 1938. He then wondered if six-man was "perhaps a child of the depression. Expenses had to be kept down; cutting down the number of players cut down expenses. Perhaps it came with the sudden demand for things on a small scale like miniature golf, table tennis and parlor baseball." He said, "It is a great game for the spectators. They see more of the plays than they ever saw before in the regular game." The plays could involve any player catching and carrying the ball, and thus "the six-man offense is tricky and colorful, the defense must be resourceful and alert." Larson thought these qualities could be enhanced further, since the game was still in its formative stages. He insisted, however, that the game be kept as close to the eleven-man game as possible.[12]

The costs of eleven-man had caused a few schools to drop the sport in Kansas, according to the KSHSAA. In 1937 this association reported that a "number of the smallest schools have discontinued the game because of the expense of equipping a team and the lack of gate receipts to meet the expense." The next year, however, the new Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA), which had replaced the old Athletic Association, set up coaching programs for six-man football; thus many schools had the opportunity to resume football and spend less money by switching to six-man. This allowed them to save the sport and possibly their schools as well. The Board of Control of the KSHSAA even permitted schools in 1938 to practice six-man football in the spring, as a trial for the game.[13] Thus desire to save money may have added to the growth of six-man, although the size of the school was probably still more of a deciding factor. As a KSHSAA journal said of six-man in 1937, "In many of the smaller schools they do not have enough boys to provide eleven players and a sufficient number of substitutes and yet there is a desire on the part of the boys to play football and athletic supporters like to see the game," thus six-man was receiving official backing.[14]

With the national media and state institutions noticing six-man, more schools were attracted to the sport. Thirty-three schools in Kansas played six-man in 1938.[15] Northeast and north-central Kansas had schools playing the game and receiving much local media attention. The Jackson

County Signal, in an article on the first six-man game played in Mayetta, noted, "The game is much faster than eleven-man." The Courier-Tribune of Seneca touted the game's offense: "teams average from six to eight yards to play and there is plenty of razzle dazzle." The Bogue Messenger also lauded this aspect of the game: "featured by long, twisting runs, forward and lateral passes, the game is even more interesting to watch than eleven-man football." Other towns had trouble adapting to the new game. The student newspaper section of the Bern Gazette urged supporters to keep an open mind. "Since this is a new and strange venture to our boys, instead of laughing lets come out and give them a great big hand." A later article in the same newspaper hinted at the ignorance some had concerning the new game: "If you have heard several different scores please lay it to the newness of the game. The scoring is somewhat different than eleven man football." The Sabetha Star reported that officiating might be easier, however. "Hargis and Wilson of Sabetha officiated the game and claim it is more of an open game, easy to see what is taking place."[16]

Some towns welcomed the game and its spectacle. In Bogue and Burr Oak most of the town's businessmen closed their shops so they could attend the games. Burr Oak made its first game an event, electing cheerleaders and scheduling a preliminary softball game between the local girls and those from Ionia. Soon the game gook on all the trappings of other established sports. After its team had won eight straight

games, the Havensville Review declared the local team was the "Northeast Kansas champions, and ranks them high in the state for 6-man football." A year later the Bogue Messenger boasted, "Although this is only their second year to play football, our 6-man football team is showing the world just how the game is played." Leagues were quickly formed. In 1938 the Jewell County league for six-man football was formed by Burr Oak, Ionia, Jewell, Esbon, Randall, Webber, and Athens. The Big Seven six-man league came into being in 1939, with its membership including Beattie, Wetmore, Goff, Mayetta, Soldier, Havensville, and Bern.[17]

East-central Kansas was also involved in six-man football in 1938. Although not enough local teams could be found to form a league, Pomona and Quenemo were able to put together a legitimate schedule by playing, in addition to each other, Lamont, Saffordville (Toledo Township), and Roosevelt (Emporia). An Ottawa Herald reporter described six-man in the following manner:

> The ball is passed around the backfield somewhat in the nature of basketball, and the scarcity of players on the field makes long runs not only possible but probable. . . . It showed possibilities of being a highly entertaining contest with plenty of scoring."

The Emporia Daily Gazette predicted, "it probably will be only a year or two until most of the small schools hereabouts will be having a fall football season. The 6-man game is attractive to the small school because it requires less capital, less equipment and reduced manpower." Roosevelt

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High School, coached by Everett "Gus" Fish and a staff of college student assistants, was undefeated in 1938 and 1939.[18]

Further south another group of small schools huddled together to make their own six-man schedules. In 1938 Bluff City played Viola, Hardtner, and Gore, Oklahoma, in six-man football. By 1939 other schools in this part of the state that played this variety of ball included Cheney, Milton, Cullison, and Argonia. Wakita, Oklahoma, also played this group of towns. With football becoming established in Bluff City, this school was able to have a homecoming ceremony, complete with a king and queen, while the high school band provided the music. As the Bluff City News said, "Six-man football is ideal for small schools. It retains the basic features of 11-man football and at the same time enables a small school to have a football team when otherwise it would be almost impossible."[19]

Rule-makers for six-man purposely made these "basic features" as close to those of eleven-man as possible. The 1940 interscholastic football guide put six-man rules in the text only where they differed from eleven-man rules--there was no separate rulebook for six-man. The first difference a fan might notice was in the length of the field. Since there were fewer players, the field was reduced to 80 yards long by 120 feet wide. This eliminated 20 yards from the length and 40 feet from the width of an eleven-man field. Scoring was slightly different, too, with a field goal through widened goal post zones counting for four points, while

points after touchdown were good for two points if kicked, only one if run. The other differences were meant to limit the offense, which had the advantage in six-man. Before the ball could be advanced across the line of scrimmage, a clear pass had to be thrown by the player receiving the center's snap. This was also to prevent dangerous pile-ups from line plunges. To attain a first down, an offense had to gain fifteen yards instead of ten in the standard four-play series. Other rule changes, such as that only three men had to be on the line of scrimmage instead of seven, as in eleven-man, were also put in the rulebook, but these were mainly just common sense changes. Otherwise the rules of the two games were essentially similar.

The development of six-man even attracted national attention from publications which normally did not cover small-town football. Nation's Business in 1938 said, "business must realize that six-man football is having an effect on the buying habits of villagers and farmers. It is creating new markets, reviving and enlarging old ones." Referring to new markets, the magazine said that approximately 2,000 high schools which never before had been in the market for football equipment bought some 20,000 outfits in 1938. As for reviving old markets, the comments of a small-town superintendent in this article pretty much summed it up:

> The playing of six-man football has a tendency to hold people in our community rather than for them to go elsewhere for their entertainment and shopping. Local business, especially, is enthusiastic about the game. Our games are important events in the community life.

Thus six-man had a community-wide impact in some places, bringing back the old tradition of coming to town on Saturday. "Yes, 'Saturday Night,' that grand institution once dissipated by the motor car, has been returned to the small town. Pied Piper football is leading farmers back to small-town buying."[21]

Stanley Frank of the American Magazine also noted the implications of six-man to the small town and its schools. Quoting statistics similar to Epler's, he said that of the 18,000 schools registered in state athletic associations in the country, fifty percent had enrollments of less than 100 boys and girls, while 75 percent had fewer than 200 students. And although 94 percent of all registered high schools were represented by basketball teams--requiring only five boys and a minimum of equipment--only 42 percent were able to support football teams. This meant that there was a large potential clientele of schools for six-man. Frank saw nothing wrong with having only six men on a side, since football had started with twenty-five on a side in 1869. This number had been reduced to fifteen and later to eleven. Walter Camp, the father of American football, "did not regard eleven as a sacred number." As he wrote in his Book of College Sports,

> I have known it to happen on the varsity field--that there are not enough players to make up eleven to a side. Many times the sport is not undertaken because it is not possible to be sure of twenty-two men. Now, this is a great mistake.

Frank also provided statistics concerning safety: The Wisconsin Board of Control, in a study issued in September,

1935, covering 17,000 high school football players, revealed that boys of fourteen comprised only 7 percent of the group but suffered 24 percent of the injuries. The nineteen-year-olds, 12 percent of the group, suffered only 4 percent of the injuries. Frank believed six-man could reduce this problem.

> In small schools where 11-man football is played, available material is so scarce that boys of all ages are thrown into rugged competition. Six-man football tends to correct this danger by making it possible for schools to divide the players into more homogeneous groups.[22]

Reader's Digest also listed these statistics, but added others concerning deaths. It noted that while college football was free of life-ending injuries in 1937, high school was not so fortunate, with thirteen boys being killed. In an unspecified five-year period, it added, 44 percent of all deaths while playing football were among high school players. Six-man offered a safer solution for concerned coaches, since it "spares the community the possible tragedy of crippling injuries or deaths in the name of sport. From all over the country reports of six-man football teams playing a whole season with no greater casualty than one sprained ankle or a broken collarbone." Newsweek joined the chorus praising six-man's safety. It said that while in 1937 580 high schools in twenty-seven states played 6,000 six-man games--about as many as the number of eleven-man games between colleges--not a single boy was killed in play. In fact, not a single fatality had occurred since Epler had started the six-man sport in Nebraska.[23]

Lewis B. Funke of the New York Times Magazine even noticed the "palace revolution" in football and the implications for small towns. He called six-man

> the answer to the needs of thousands of small schools throughout the country, the reply to how to make football safer and the 'emanicpation proclamation' of unsung linemen who have always partaken of the gridiron's drudgery without the side-dish of glory.

Linemen could know the glory of catching a touchdown pass, since all players were eligible to receive aerials. With these changes and the clear-pass rule, line plunges were not as profitable, and the danger of these mass assaults was limited. The most important factor, however, was the game's "adaptability to small schools and limited budgets." As Funke pointed out, a six-man team could be outfitted for about $100, while metropolitan high schools generally spent $1,000 to meet overhead expenses. This adaptability allowed the small schools the opportunity to play football, even if they did not have enough boys to play eleven-man football. Funke wrote that "of the 23,237 public high schools reporting to the United States Office of Education forty-six percent, or more than 10,000 high schools, had enrollments of 100 or less; seventy percent had less than 200." In other words, a high percentage of schools needed this type of adaptability.[24]

Nowhere were there proportionately more of these smaller schools than on the plains. According to Lundstrom, the plains states of Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, and Oklahoma each had more than 60 percent of its high schools with enrollments of fewer than 100 pupils in 1949, which was nine

years later than Funke's statistics. Kansas ranked forty-fourth among states with high schools having fewer than 100 pupils--almost 70 percent of its schools fell into this category. Kansas was prime territory for the development of six-man football.[25]

This development of six-man in Kansas began to skyrocket in 1939, sparking a renaissance for high school football overall. A KSHSAA sports participation survey stated, "With 73 schools reporting six-man football teams, the number of schools playing football jumped to 391, an increase of 24 over the preceding year and the highest number participating in the gridiron sport since 1931-32." With 1,127 boys playing six-man, as well as 10,631 playing eleven-man, participation records were shattered. "The combined total of 11,758 was the largest number of individual football participants since records have been kept and was a hike of more than 700 over last year." With sixteen more teams adding six-man in 1940, as well as twenty-six new eleven-man teams, participation records were again smashed in 1940. Six-man was boosting football in the face of the waning depression.[26]

With more teams playing six-man, more leagues developed. The Little Six league, which included Ensign, Bloom, Montezuma, Satanta, Kismet, and Ingalls, was formed in 1939. The South Central Kansas League split up for football in 1940, with the northern half--Elk City, Grenola, Havana, and Altoona--forming their own six-man league. In 1944 this

entire league, which then also included Mound Valley, Peru, and Longton, played six-man. Other six-man leagues in 1944 included the Pioneer, with Codell, Bogue, Woodston, Logan, Kirwin, and Long Island; the Quivera, with Holyrood, Bushton, Dorrance, Alden, Raymond, and Lorraine; and the South 50-Six, with Lewis, Zook, and Belpre.[27]

With the proliferation of six-man teams, strategy for this game also began to receive more attention. This was appreciated by many six-man coaches, who were almost starting from scratch, since the game was so new. Two long-time Kansas football coaches, Otto Unruh and Everett Gouldie, agreed that starting a six-man program required imagination, since most coaches received no instruction on the game while in college. As Unruh said, "During the Depression era young men did practically anything to get ahold of a job. At that time there were no experts on six-man football." Lundstrom's studies, based on questionnaires filled out by Kansas six-man coaches of the early 1950s, corroborated Unruh's statement. Lundstrom reported that only 6 percent, or five coaches, received six-man training in college, while 94 percent, or eighty-five of the respondents said they had not been trained to coach six-man.[28]

Unruh approached coaching this game in a pragmatic manner: "What we did was to find out what kind of material we had. If we had a fast runner and a good passer, we started there. Develop one receiver and now we had the start of a running and passing attack as the nucleus of an

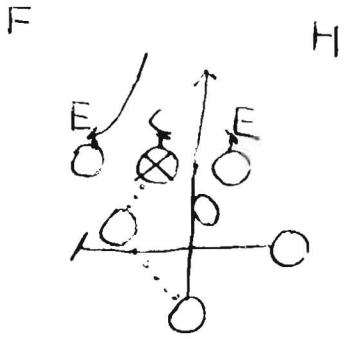
offense." Unruh would not always have this type of talent, however, so he would switch the emphasis of his attack.

> If we had big boys primarily, then we worked in a driving power football with emphasis on blocking and ball control. Remember there were no particular styles or types of six man football, so we would concentrate on a type of football we knew and reduce the team by five players (from eleven-man). I found that this was the best way to work out some system.[29]

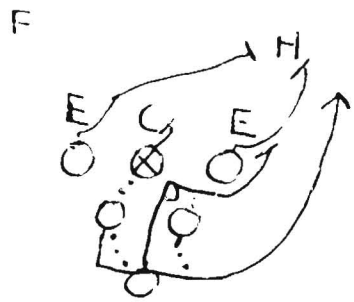
Gouldie agreed that coaches tended to look for talented individuals and build their offenses around them.

> If you had one speed merchant he could run all over the place. Also, if you had a fast receiver he could get open and run, run, run. Lots of points were usually scored. . . . A big disadvantage (for defenses) was covering all the receivers on passes and playing defense against the run. This was much tougher than in 11 man or even 8 man.[30]

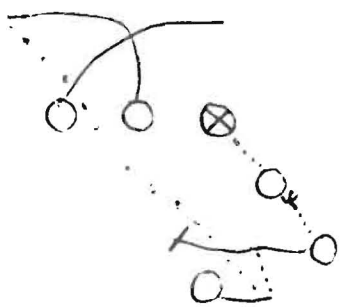
Other than booklets by Epler, some of the first national attention given to six-man strategy was provided by Benton in 1937. In his Athletic Journal article he diagrammed several different offenses, which included a single-wing, a double-wing, an unbalanced line, a spread formation, and a punt formation, as well as defensive formations, which included a 3-2-1, a 3-1-2, a 4-2, a 4-1-1, and a 2-2-1-1 (see Figures 1-3). Fish, of Roosevelt High School and the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, provided eight offenses and six defenses for a KSHSAA journal in 1939 (see Figures 4-5). Both Benton and Fish described play from these formations which would result in power runs, passes, or trickery to fool defenses. Each defense also had a brief explanation of its strengths.[31]




Single wing formation. Ball goes from quarterback to fullback who starts towards the line, spins, fakes to halfback and continues run.



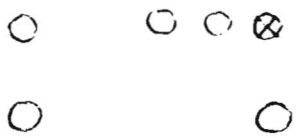

Double wing-back formation, wide reverse. The ball goes from center to quarterback, to fullback who does spin, to fullback, and back to quarterback who runs around end.



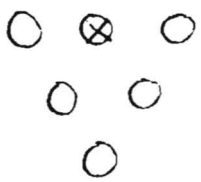
Unbalanced line, forward pass. Under Epler's rules, all linemen are eligible for passes.

Figure 1. Six-man football plays sketched by Brantford B. Benton, 1937.

Source: Athletic Journal 18 (September 1937): 17.



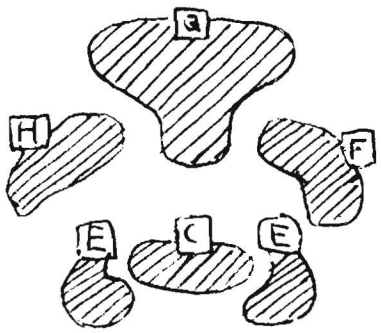
Spread Formation



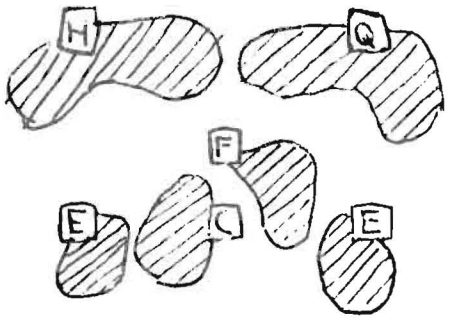
Punt Formation

Figure 2. Special formations for six-man football sketched by Brantford B. Benton, 1937.

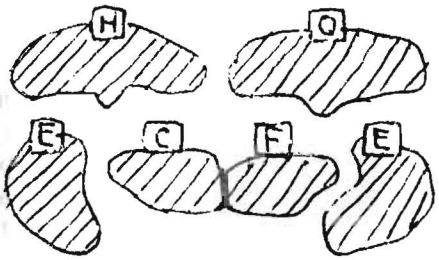
Source: Athletic Journal 18 (September 1937): 17.



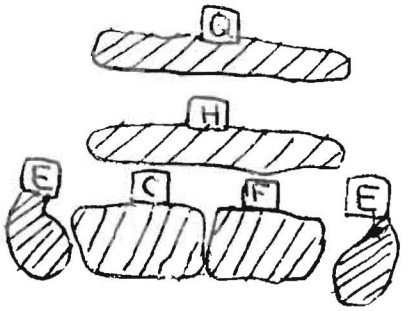

3-2-1



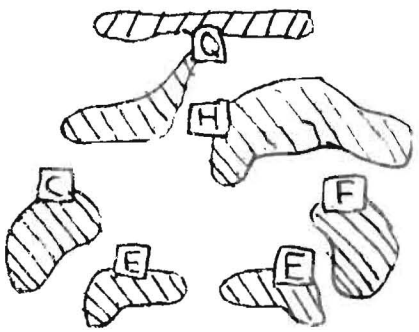

3-1-2




4-2



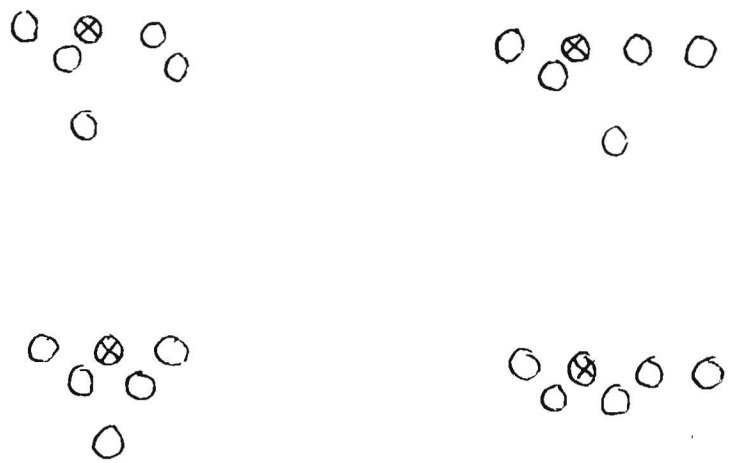

4-1-1




2-2-1-1

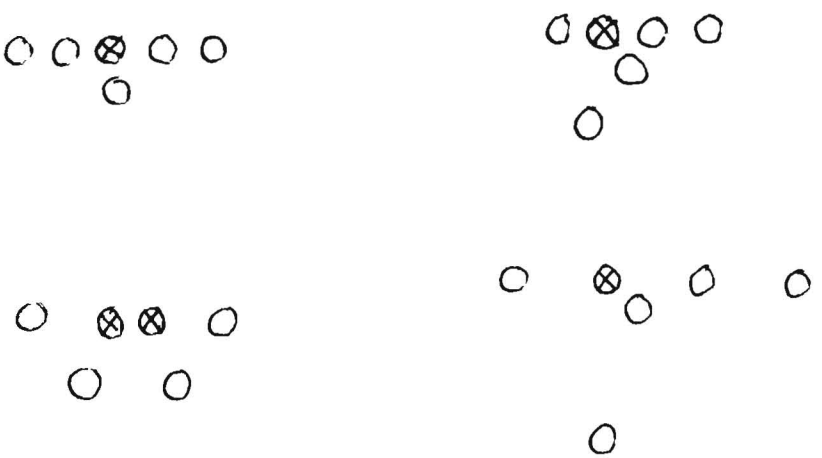
Figure 3. Six-man defensive formations sketched by Brantford B. Benton, 1937. (Shaded areas indicate territory for which player is responsible.)

Source: Athletic Journal 18 (September 1937) : 17.



Routine Formations

Formations 1-4: Linemen should be spaced two yards apart, making it possible to double team block, trap or cross block. Wingbacks should be about a yard and a half back of line. Quarterbacks should be within one yard of center so as to speed up running plays.



Formations 5-8: Spread formations, which can produce more spectacular plays.

Figure 4. Six-man offensive formations sketched by Everett D. Fish, 1939.

Source: Kansas High School Activities Journal 2 (October 1939): 2.

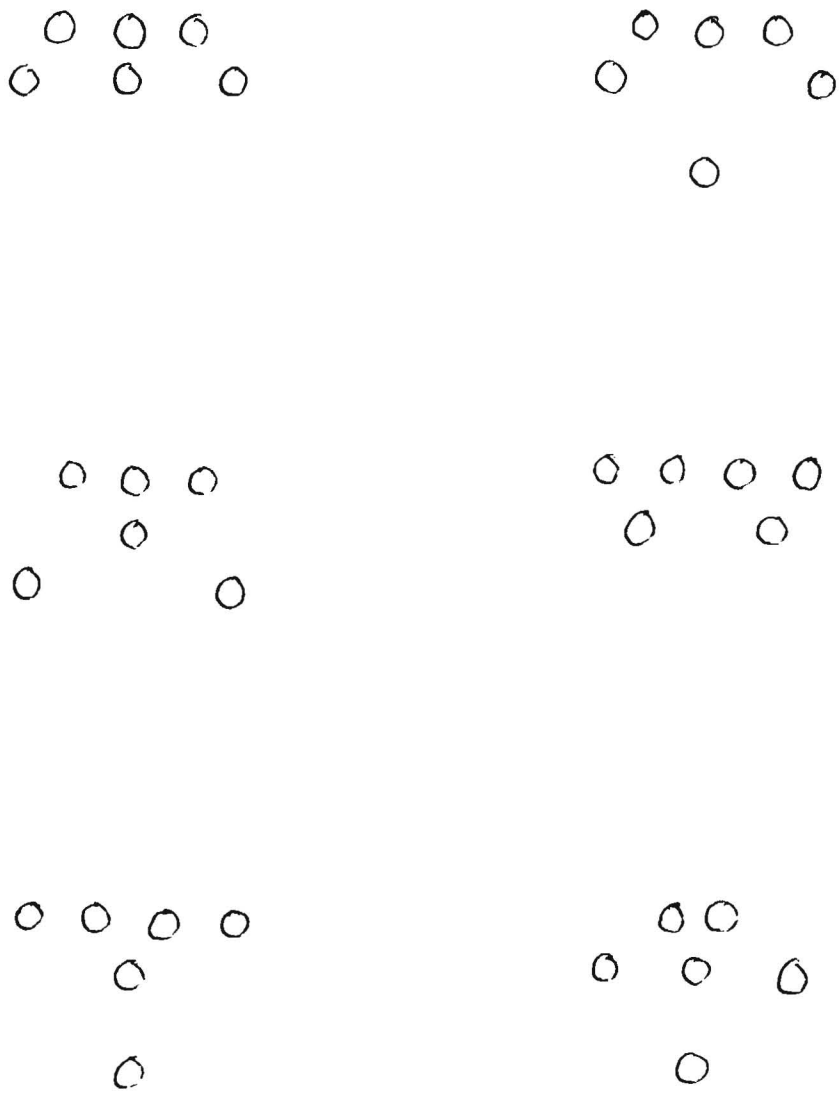


Figure 5. Six-man defensive formations sketched by Everett D. Fish, 1939.

Source: Kansas High School Activities Journal 2 (October 1939): 2.

World War II brought a slight curtailment to the development of six-man, although different formations and plays again appeared in the Athletic Journal in 1946. C. J. O'Conner of Maryland then published a few of his more successful plays and defenses, using some of the same formations Benton and Fish had in addition to a T formation (see Figures 6-7). Since a clear pass had to be thrown, which, according to the Official Six-Man Football Rules, was defined as "one which starts and ends behind the line of scrimmage and travels a clearly visible distance in flight after leaving the hand of the possessor of the snap, and which touches a player other than the passer," quarterback sneaks were prohibited. The clear pass rule only applied to rushing plays, so throwing the football downfield used many of the same strategies used in eleven-man. Not all the passing rules were the same, however. Any forward pass which was incomplete behind the line of scrimmage was treated as a backward pass, and thus was a fumble if incomplete. With all this in mind, it was little wonder that O'Conner wrote, "It would be a mistake to say that six-man is exactly like eleven-man, or that the offensive and defensive formations, the plays and strategy, are exactly alike."[32]

A participant of the game, Robert Kilgore, class of 1952 of Mullinville, agreed that six-man's offense was different than eleven-man's. He wrote, "it's different in the sense that each individual is such a key in the success of the play you are running. If one person misses his

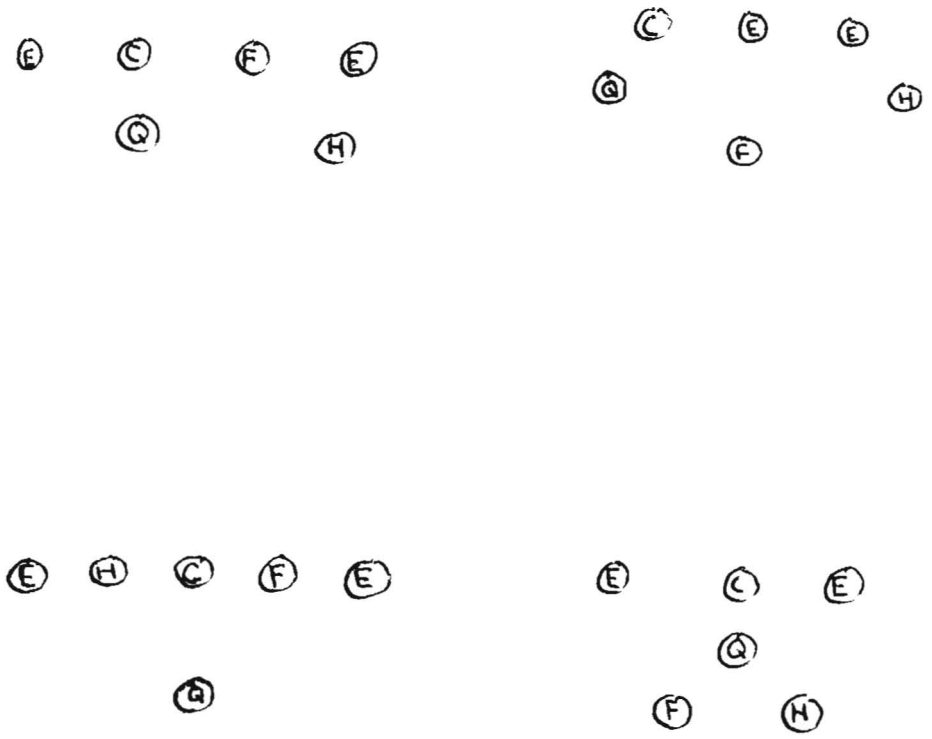
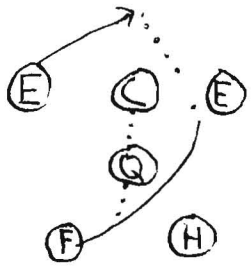
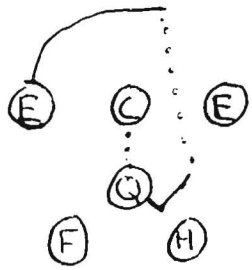



Figure 6. Six-man offensive formations sketched by C. J. O'Conner, 1946.

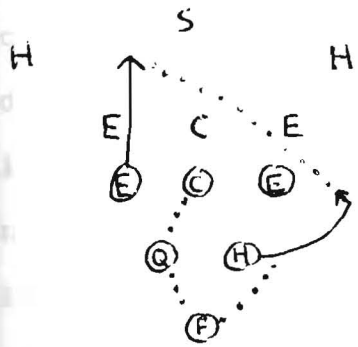
Source: Athletic Journal 27 (June 1946): 15-16, 46-47.



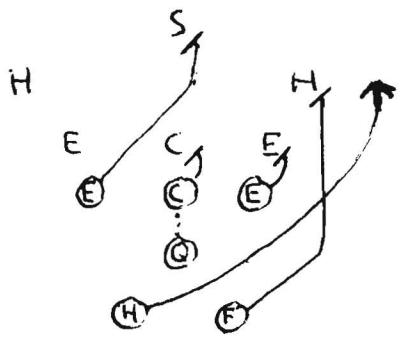

Fake line plunge, pass. May be thrown like two-handed basketball pass.



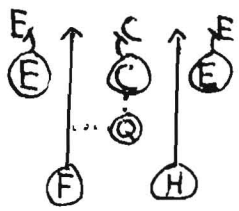

Quick pass. Will slow quick rushes from defensive center.




Double forward pass. Six-man rules allow for multiple forward passes.




Basis running play. End runs may be strongest running plays in six-man.




Quick line plunge. Only for occasional use. Notice clear pass to fullback.

Figure 7. Six-man plays sketched by C. J. O'Connor, 1946.

Source: Athletic Journal 27 (June 1946): 15-16, 46-47.

assignment the play usually breaks down." Thus the execution of the play was even more important in the six-man offense than in eleven-man.[33]

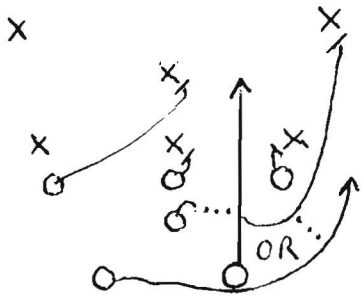
Aspects of six-man football continued to draw coverage from the Athletic Journal into the late 1940s and early 1950s. M. L. Rafferty, Jr., of Trona, California, contributed an article on the importance of conditioning in six-man in 1948. Although traditional areas of conditioning, including the abilities to play a maximum number of minutes and to absorb punishment, were not to be overlooked, Rafferty called on six-man coaches to emphasize the ability to react. "In no other body contact team sport is speedy reaction so vital. The fortunes of war change with bewildering rapidity in six-man football." Interceptions and recovered fumbles, which could be advanced by anyone in six-man rules, had a deadly effect, since so few players were on the field. Rafferty prescribed a variety of sprints, longer-distance runs, and calisthenics for six-man players. "Remember, the ball will cover almost four times as much territory in a six-man game as it will in an average eleven-man game," he wrote. He also advocated frequent, hard scrimmages, since dangerous "massed interference" is rarely used in six-man, unlike eleven-man.[34]

Louis Hanson, of Basile High School in Louisiana, spoke in different terms as he described six-man as "real football." He emphasized that "Good blocking, tackling, passing, and running are just as necessary to this game as to

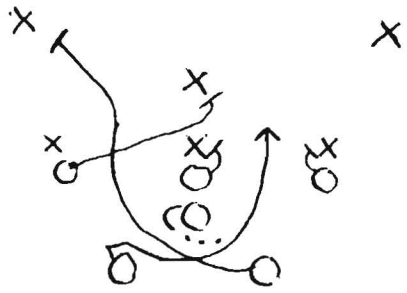
the regular game." This did not mean that six-man strategy was the same, however. "Six-man will take a great step forward when coaches begin to explore its ultimate possibilities rather than use it as a stepping stone to the eleven-man game or to better positions for themselves." He shared some of his more successful plays as examples of his work (see Figure 8).[35]

This "stepping stone" problem was accentuated by the fact that most six-man coaches were inexperienced concerning the game. Not only had many not played the game before, but most six-man coaches had not been in the profession for long. Lundstrom's studies found that 28 percent of six-man coaches in Kansas had been in coaching only one year in 1953. These coaches generally had to rely on articles that appeared in athletic journals and trial-and-error for knowledge in developing their boys. Few had been taught six-man fundamentals in college. Getting a program started at these small schools required a pioneering spirit, too. As Raymond Stewart, who started the six-man program in 1939 at Courtland, where he still lives, wrote:

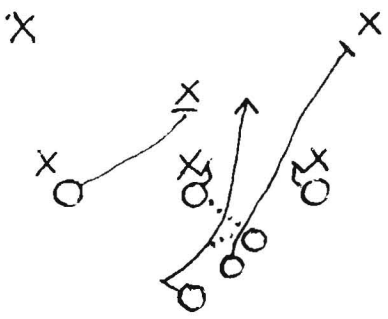
> My school board was very luke-warm on the whole thing so [it] only gave me $100.00 to start the activity. With this great sum of money I outfitted 12 boys with pants, jerseys, shoulder pads and helmets, and had a little left over to buy 2 footballs and some first aid supplies. Most of the boy's equipment came from small sizes of discarded items from the University of Kansas, that had found its way into the stock of Lowe and Campbell Athletic Company. We were able to schedule 4 games that first year and we won 2 of them.



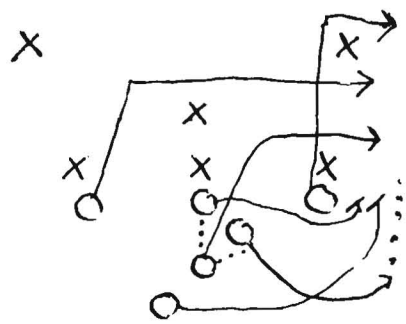

Option right out of T formation.



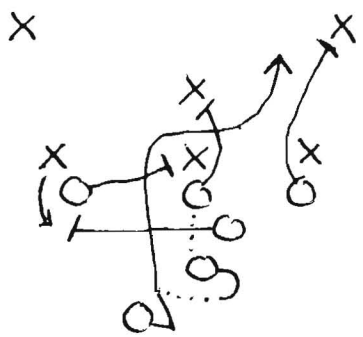
Cross back play.



Strong inside play. Snap goes to short man who makes clear pass to tailback.



Hanson's best passing play.



Weak-side play. Center man receives snap, who goes right and makes spinner move. Tailback fakes right, then gets pitch going towards left side of line.

Figure 8. Six-man plays sketched by Louis Hanson, 1950.

Source: Athletic Journal 30 (March 1950): 30, 47.

Thus at some schools these inexperienced coaches faced basic problems other than just the x's and o's of the game.[36]

This did not prohibit the game from continued popularity after World War II, however. The KSHSAA listed eighty-one schools as playing six-man in 1945. League development continued, too. In 1948 the South 50-Six league expanded by adding Trousdale, Garfield, Pawnee Rock, and Radium. The Pike Trail league, composed of Randall, Scandia, Jamestown, Courtland, Burr Oak, Jewell, and Simpson, was formed prior to the 1948 season. By 1950 the R.C.M. league, which included Riley, Wakefield, Longford, White City, Enterprise, Randolph, and Leonardville, was playing six-man. The Phillips and Rooks County league was playing six-man by 1953. It included Codell, Agra, Woodston, Bogue, Damar, and Long Island.[37]

The development of leagues compelled more schools to go to six-man, since they had to play the same type of game as others in their area were playing. As Lundstrom noted, several coaches went to six-man simply because of "difficulty in scheduling games, other league teams playing six-man ball, [and] to form a six-man league." This was not to say that large schools went to six-man; Lundstrom reported that 74 percent of the responding coaches said the enrollment of their school ranged from twenty-six to seventy-five students. It was certain, however, that the actions of area schools and limitations in travel did influence some schools to go six-man.[38] The scheduling quandary even caused some schools to

play both six- and eleven-man. Ransom did so in 1948, without a single penalty being called on them during eight games. In 1954 Lamont played five six-man games and then played two eleven-man games, to round out its schedule.[39]

Six-man was popular enough at some schools to pay for itself. Lundstrom reported that 38 percent of his responding coaches had programs that were self supporting with gate receipts. The percentage was much higher if schools used lighted fields, according to Pennybaker. Of the forty-seven six-man schools which had lighted fields, thirty-nine or 83 percent, were self-supporting. Night football not only allowed more folks to attend games, but also eliminated an interruption of the school day. Six-man thus was popular to local fans, who wanted to see their schools succeed and continue to function.[40]

Six-man probably reached its peak in the early to mid-1950s, as the school consolidation movement was eliminating only the smallest schools. The KSHSAA listed in its journal more six-man leagues (seven) for the 1955 season than ever before. Included were the Phillips and Rooks County League, the Skyline League (Mullinville, Wilmore, Haviland, Coats, Byers, Cullison), the Ja-Ne-Po League (Seneca, Emmett, Circleville, Havensville, Bern, Corning, Soldier), the Reno County League (Turon, Langdon, Partridge), the Jefferson County League (McLouth, Perry, Valley Falls, Winchester, Oskaloosa), the Three County League (Norwich, Bentley, Argonia, Bluff City, Grenola, Milton), and the Tri-County

League (Easton, Piper, Basehor, Lansing, Linwood). The 1956 list had only the Skyline League remaining the same. The Ja-Ne-Po became the Jackpot League, with Seneca and Bern being dropped while Denison was added. The Reno County League added Alden, Sylvia, and Arlington while it dropped Langdon. Leagues not listed before included the Republican Valley (Agenda, Concordia Catholic, Cuba, Narka, Republic), the Tri-Y (Wakefield, Randolph, Riley, Longford, Morganville, Green), and the 50-50 (Burdett, Windhorst, Rozel, Spearville, Hanston, Offerle). These changes reflected the volatile nature of the development of six-man. Enrollment patterns tended to dictate what schools would do concerning football. If several schools gained boys, they might switch to eleven-man. If they lost enrollment they might decide to play six-man.[41]

School consolidation affected the size, as well as the number, of schools playing football; thus it also affected what type of football was played throughout the state. When six-man first appeared in Kansas, there were 732 accredited high schools in the state. By this time Kansas schools were feeling the effects of people moving from rural to urban areas. This meant that small rural schools, the type that were attracted to six-man, were in danger of elimination. By the 1959-60 school year, there were only 616 accredited high schools in the state. Of this number, only 175 had an enrollment of less than fifty-one and only 292 had an enrollment of less than seventy-six. This number continued to drop in the 1960s as more small schools became consolidated.[42]

This movement produced a different football clientele --schools which in many cases still were not large enough to play eleven-man, but wanted a game with qualities similar to it. Not all coaches liked six-man, since line play was de-emphasized, so many schools turned to eight-man, a game which had been developed in Illinois. Eight-man became the game which was best adapted to the new conditions on the plains.

Eight-man was probably first played in Kansas in 1956 by Windom High School. As in the development of six-man, eight-man did not immediately sweep across the state. Many schools played both games in this transitional era, while some leagues clung to six-man. In 1957 the 86 Leage (Bluff City, Argonia, Grenola, Milton, Norwich, Viola, Udall, Milan), the East Central League (Berryton, Lecompton, Harveyville, Maple Hill, Auburn, Dover), and the Twin Valley League (Tescott, Bennington, Beverly, Vesper, Barnard, Culver) all played six-man while the McPherson County League (Windom, Walton, Canton, Galva, Roxbury, Bentley) played eight-man. Successive KSHSAA lists contained six-man leagues through the 1960 season, although eight-man leagues were on the rise. According to another source, schedules listed in the Topeka Daily Capital's annual "Football Previews," there were eighty-one six-man schools listed in 1958, sixty-three in 1959, fifty in 1960, thirty-three in 1961, and only ten in 1962. By this same guide, there were forty-eight eight-man schools in 1958, sixty-nine in 1959, ninety-seven in 1960, 102 in 1961, and 114 in 1962. Although these lists, as well

as those of the KSHSAA, were not all-inclusive, they clearly showed trends, and eight-man by this era was increasing.[43]

Thus many people had a new game, sometimes at a new consolidated school, to cheer. Eight-man was, by the 1960s, the game best adapted to the needs of Kansas schools, although six-man has not entirely died out on the plains, or even in Kansas, as of the 1987 season. Herndon High School, with only nine boys able to play football, and with twelve in the school, decided to join seven Nebraska teams in the Southern Frontier League, according to its coach, George Loofe. Herndon also had a non-league game with a school in Colorado. The school planned to continue to play six-man in 1988.

Herndon plays six-man for some of the same reasons as schools did in the past. Their numbers are limited, but folks want to have a game to cheer, and to keep their school open. As Loofe wrote, "Having the opportunity to participate and field a team is the main concern of the athletes and community. They feel that if football is discontinued the school may fold because the kids that want to play will transfer in order to play."[44]

Six-man football was the answer for Herndon, as it was for many small Kansas high schools in the 1930s-1960s. This variety of football was an example of the ability of small towns of the plains to adapt social practices that came from the eastern part of the country to their local conditions. Eleven-man football, which was developed originally

by the Ivy League schools, could not be played in the small-town high schools of Kansas. The cost and the threat of injury to younger, smaller boys who were forced to play to fill out rosters made eleven-man unacceptable. Other sports played in the fall, such as baseball and basketball, did not seem appropriate. Thus six-man was warmly embraced as an alternative to make life on the plains more like that of their eastern neighbors. Later, as school consolidations closed down many of the state's smaller schools, a new adaptation had to be made. Eight-man then slowly replaced six-man as the fall activity best suited for small-town Kansas high schools.

## Notes to Chapter 3

[1]Ray Max Lundstrom, "The Status of Six-Man Football for Smaller Kansas High School" (Research Problems 390B, Kansas State Teachers College of Pittsburg, 1955), p. 1.

[2]Belleville Telescope, 26 September 1935, p. 4; Ibid., 24 October 1935, p. 5; "Six-Man Football," Kansas Athlete 7 (December 1935): 3.

[3]Lundstrom, p. 14.

[4]A. W. Larson, Judson A. Timm, and Brantford B. Benton, "Six-Man Football," Athletic Journal 18 (September 1937): 16; Mark L. Haas, "Six Man Football Revives the Village," Nation's Business 26 (November 1938): 27.

[5]Dale A. Pennybaker, "The Status of Six-Man Football as an Organized Sport in Kansas High Schools" (M.S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1955), p. 11. A search of the newspaper from the four towns mentioned does not verify Pennybaker's findings. In fact, Dwight and Esbon played baseball in the fall of 1936. Berryton played football, but against teams that apparently did not play six-man football at this time. The coaches who filled out Pennybaker's questionnaires must have been mistaken.

[6]Johnson Pioneer, 22 September 1937, p. 1; Ibid., 15 September 1938, p. 1.

[7]Hutchinson Herald, 22 September 1938, p. 2; Ibid., 3 October 1938, p. 2; Ibid., 9 October 1938, p. 3; Ibid., 17 October 1938, p. 2; Satanta Chief, 15 September 1938, p. 1; Ulysses News, 22 September 1938, p. 1.

[8]Stephen E. Epler, "A New Deal for Football," Athletic Journal 7 (October 1936): 507, 519-520.

[9]J. H. Morrison, "Six-Man Football in North Dakota," Athletic Journal 7 (October 1936): 502-503, 531.

[10]F. L. Showacy, "Six-Man Football," Nation's Schools 18 (July 1936): 26.

[11]Larson, Timm, and Benton, pp. 16-17, 40-46.

[12]A. W. Larson, "Six-Man Football," Athletic Journal 18 (June 1983): 40.

[13]Thirteenth Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Athletic Association, 1937, p. 25; First Annual Yearbook of the Kansas State High School Activities Association, 1938, p. 37; "Six-Man Football," Kansas Athlete and Activities Bulletin 9 (March-April 1938): 5.

[14]"Six-Man Football," Kansas Athlete and Activities Bulletin 9 (October 1937): 4.

[15]"Six-Man Football Started," Kansas High School Activities Journal 1 (October 1938): 5.

[16]Jackson County Signal, 5 October 1938, p. 2; [Seneca] Courier-Tribune, 3 October 1938, p. 2; Bern Gazette, 22 September 1938, p. 2; Ibid., 6 October 1938, p. 1; Sabetha Star, 6 October 1938, p. 2.

[17]Bogue Messenger, 6 October 1938, p. 1; Ibid., 5 October 1939, p. 1; Burr Oak Herald, 22 September 1938, p. 1; Ibid., 29 September 1938, p. 7; Bern Gazette, 21 September 1939, p. 1.

[18]Ottawa Herald, 17 September 1938, p. 6; Ibid., 1 October 1938, p. 6; Emporia Daily Gazette, 9 September 1938, p. 5; Ibid., 29 September 1939, p. 5; Ibid., 17 November 1939, p. 7.

[19]Bluff City News, 22 September 1938, p. 3; Ibid., 6 October 1938, p. 3; Ibid., 26 September 1938, p. 4; Ibid., 28 September 1938, p. 4; Wichita Eagle, 26 September 1939, p. 6.

[20]"The Official Six-Man Football Rules," Kansas High School Activities Journal 2 (May 1940): 4; Pennybaker, pp. 13-14.

[21]Haas, p. 27.

[22]Stanley Frank, "Six Men in Sneakers," American Magazine 126 (September 1938): 41, 117.

[23]"Six-Man Football," Reader's Digest 33 (November 1938): 64; "Six-Man Football: From Nebraska, Epler's Game Sweeps Across the Nation," Newsweek, 24 October 1938, pp. 35-36.

[24]Lewis B. Funke, "Six-Man Football," New York Times Magazine, 24 November 1940, p. 13.

[25]Lundstrom, p. 21.

[26]"Nine Sports Participation Records Broken," Kansas High School Activities Journal 3 (January 1941): 17; Ibid., 4 (January 1942): 14.

[27]Satanta Chief, 14 September 1939, p. 1; "Final Football Standings," Kansas High School Activities Journal 3 (December 1940): 5; "Final Football League Standings," Ibid. 4 (December 1941): 3.

[28]Otto D. Unruh, letter to author, Goessel, KS, 5 May 1987; Everett Gouldie, letter to author, Agra, KS, 18 August 1987; Lundstrom, p. 36.

[29]Unruh letter.

[30]Gouldie letter.

[31]Larson, Timm, and Benton, p. 17; "Six-Man Football Formations," Kansas High School Activities Journal 2 (October 1939): 2.

[32]C. J. O'Conner, "Let's Have More Six Man Football," Athletic Journal 26 (June 1946): 15-16, 46-47.

[33]Robert Kilgore, letter to author, Greensburg, KS, 2 November 1987.

[34]M. L. Rafferty, Jr., "Conditioning in Six Man," Athletic Journal 28 (April 1948): 32, 34, 65.

[35]Louis Hanson, "Six-Man Is Real Football," Athletic Journal 30 (March 1950): 30, 47.

[36]Lundstrom, p. 38; Raymond Stewart, letter to author, Courtland, KS, 9 April 1987.

[37]"Schools Playing 6-Man Football," Kansas High School Activities Journal 8 (October 1945): 8; "Final Football League Standings," Ibid. 11 (December 1948): 5; Ibid. 13 (March 1951): 3; Ibid. 16 (February 1954): 12. This and other lists of six-man leagues reflects only those specifically listed as "six-man." Other leagues, when reporting to the KSHSAA, may not have designated themselves as "six-man."

[38]Lundstrom, pp. 16, 21.

[39]"What a Record!" Kansas High School Activities Journal 10 (January 1948): 15; Topeka Daily Capital, 5 November 1954, p. 14.

[40]Lundstrom, p. 31; Pennybaker, p. 55.

[41]"Football League Standings," Kansas High School Activities Journal 18 (January 1956): 18-19; Ibid. 19 (January 1957): 22-23.

[42]W. T. Markham, Thirty-First Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Topeka: State Department of Public Instruction, 1938), p. 26; Adel F. Throckmorton, Education in Kansas: A Progress Report (Topeka: State Department of Public Instruction, 1961), pp. 11, 12.

[43]Hutchinson News, 27 September 1957 (makes reference to a game played in 1956), p. 2; "New 6-Man Football League Organized," Kansas High School Activities Journal 19 (May 1957): 3; "Football League Standings," Ibid. 19 (January 1958): 19-20; Topeka Daily Capital, 15 September 1958; Ibid., 15 September 1959; Ibid., 14 September 1960; Ibid., 13 September 1961; Ibid., 12 September 1962.

[44]George Loofe, letter to author, Herndon, KS, 21 September 1987.

# CHAPTER 4

# EIGHT-MAN

Administrators of small town high schools in Kansas reassessed their football programs during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Six-man had been the game for many of them, but not all patrons and players were satisfied with it. The very aspects that attracted some people brought criticism from others. Because of the four-point field goal and the two-point kicked conversion--through wider goal posts--there seemed to be too much emphasis on the kicking game. Further, with every player on the field eligible to catch a pass and the fifteen-yard first down, six-man had become, as one student of the game put it in 1955, "a passing and end-running affair."[1]

These differences caused serious difficulties for its participants. The athlete who was capable of playing collegiate football would have to re-adjust when he graduated from high school and six-man ball. At the other extreme, the slower or heavier athlete was disadvantaged in six-man because the game was more of a wide-open, one-on-one affair. Eight-man football, another option introduced in Kansas during the 1950s, offered a good compromise to the two types of football already being played. Its rules were much closer to eleven-man than to six-man, and the number of participants

it required were available at many schools. Eight-man football allowed Kansans and other plainsmen to play a game similar to eleven-man but better adapted to the conditions of the plains.

The overall origins of eight-man football are obscure, but contests of the variety date back at least to 1935 in Illinois. Thus the eight-man game's origins were in the Midwest, but it soon was to migrate out and flourish upon the Great Plains. By 1956 Minnesota led all states with 125 high schools playing eight-man, but eight-man was proliferating in the Great Plains as well. Nebraska, with 97 schools participating, was second. Other plains states playing this game by 1956 were Colorado, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.[2]

The year 1956 was also the first year Kansas experimented with eight-man, when Windom High School gave it a try.[3] E. A. Thomas, commissioner of the KSHSAA at that time, also indicated that "it is possible that a few schools along the northern Kansas border will enter an eight-man football league this fall (1956), along with some schools in Nebraska that are close to the Kansas line."[4] In 1957 the first confirmed eight-man league was formed by Windom, Walton, Canton, Galva, Roxbury, and Bentley. They called themselves the McPherson County League.[5] The 50-50 League also played eight-man in extreme western Kansas.[6] Other schools that independently experimented with this form of football in 1957

included Dwight, Strong City, Burns, Auburn, Westphalia, Rolla, and Johnson.[7]

Dwight coach Norton Hartsook, whose team had played six-man, became a "rabid booster" of eight-man after his team played two games of it in 1957, according to a Topeka Daily Capital writer. "I think eight-man is the thing for small schools," Hartsook told the reporter. "Any team that can play six can play eight-man. Those two more men give you a place to use a couple of big men who might otherwise sit on the bench. And it makes it more like the 11-man game."[8] Coach Glen Gayer of Walton had similar views, as recorded in a Hutchinson News article. He predicted eight-man would soon replace six-man throughout the state. "We like it much better," he said, "mostly because it permits better line play and makes for a closer and more entertaining game."[9]

Six-man football was on the decline both in Kansas and nationally, while eight-man was growing. Between 1950 and 1956, the number of schools that played eight-man nationally increased from ninety to 460. Of these schools, 350, or 80 percent, had previously played six-man football.[10] One high school that switched was located in Marcellus, Michigan. Coach John Wild in 1953 was not satisfied with six-man, because "the team with the best passer was almost certain to win. This advantage, possessed by the passer, who might pass to any of the other five players, made the game an aerial tag match or a puppet show with the smart thrower pulling the strings."[11] Such trends and sentiments were part

of the climate fostering eight-man football's germination in Kansas.

By 1958 at least forty-eight schools in Kansas played eight-man.[12] One of the schools who tried it out for the first time in that year was Williamsburg High School, coached by Louis Coppac. As Hartsook had done, he adapted his offense from eleven-man formations by dropping two linemen and a back. Neither man had ever seen an eight-man game played before he coached his first game of it, and publications on the game were scarce, according to both men.

Coppac's "concocted" offense employed an unbalanced line, with three men on the right side of the ball and one on the left side (see Figure 9). The right side was just like eleven-man football, Coppac said, in that "you've got an end, tackle, and a guard. This allows you to use eleven-man concepts on that side of the line." The quarterback lined up right behind the center, with a running back about four yards behind him. The upback lined up on the right side a little to the right and behind guard or below the end. This unbalanced formation often confused opposing defenses initially. When Coppac's team passed, its patterns were "pretty much like 11-man," he said.[13]

Hartsook's offense operated behind a balanced line with "very small splits in the line," and the backfield generally formed a "T" (see Figure 10). For a variation, he occasionally lined up a back split out wide, which made defenses vulnerable to slant patterns.[14] Although these were

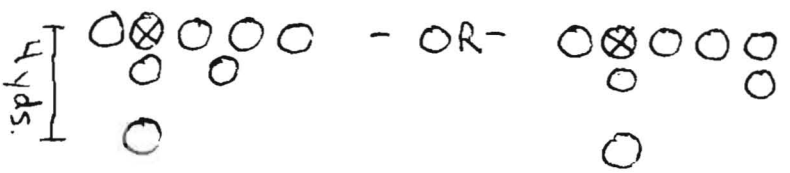



Figure 9: Coppac's (Williamsburg) "concocted" offense

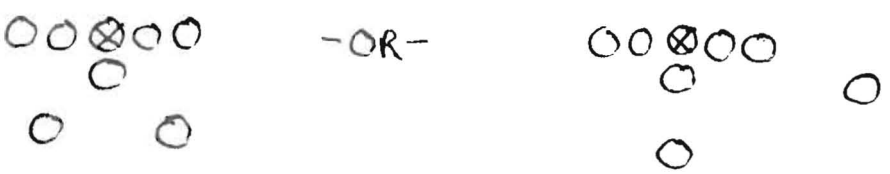



Figure 10: Hartsook's (Dwight) "T" offense

by no means the only offenses utilized across the state, both coaches enjoyed success. They were both undefeated in their initial seasons of eight-man football, and Coppac's 1964 squad was the top-rated eight-man football team in the state of Kansas, according to the Wichita Eagle.

Dissatisfaction with six-man football was not the only reason schools switched to eight-man, though. Administrators and coaches not only had to deal with fluctuations in school enrollment, but also had to find other area schools who played the same brand of football. The scattered nature of Kansas towns and their limited budgets would not allow individual schools to choose unilaterally what variety of football they would sanction; other area schools had to be consulted.

This led to a proliferation of eight-man leagues in Kansas in 1958. Williamsburg and fellow Franklin County League members Quenemo, Pomona, and Melvern decided to go to eight-man, while other league members--Appanoose, Lane, Richmond, and Rantoul--played fall baseball. Williamsburg also played Welda, Kincaid, and Westphalia in non-conference eight-man games. Westphalia was a member of the Anderson County League.[15] Dwight joined Luckey of Manhattan, Wakefield, Langford, Enterprise, White City, Randolph, Riley, and St. Xavier of Junction City to form the Central League Conference.[16] Other leagues across the state who played eight-man included the Jackpot in the northeast, the Santa Fe

Trail in the southwest, and the Marmaton Valley in the southeast.[17]

Not all teams, though, played a strictly eight-man schedule in this transitional era. Quenemo and Williamsburg played two six-man games in 1958, while Pomona played three of this variety. Pomona coach Karl Anderson was concerned that this situation "might cause confusion for the boys, but I feel eventually they'll adjust to playing both games."[18] Luckey and other area teams also played both games, which caused concern for Manhattan Mercury writer Dick Fensler. "This means the players are going to have to remember two sets of rules," he observed, "and somewhere along the line a boy is going to be thinking six-man while playing eight-man, and vice versa."[19]

But six-man football was slowly disappearing in Kansas. Not only did school consolidations eliminate some of the smaller schools, but eight-man also continued to win more converts. Schedules published in the Topeka Daily Capital football special editions showed that at least 97 teams played eight-man in 1960, 102 did the same in 1961, and 114 played eight-man in 1962. These figures reflected only the schools that reported their schedules, so there may have been many more trying this new game.

A school that went from six- to eight-man in 1961 was Alton, where the squad was piloted by veteran coach Everett Gouldie. Although he coached the first eight-man game he ever witnessed, Gouldie's Wildcats ran off the longest

winning streak in Kansas high school football history, fifty-one games from September, 1962, to the mid-portion of the 1968 season. Gouldie, who coached six-, eight-, and eleven-man football in different campaigns from 1929 to 1983 (with the exception of three seasons while he was in the Army Air Force and four seasons while he coached cross country at Osborne) naturally became a proponent of eight-man. "Eight-man, in my opinion, is the best football game there is," he asserted. "The players like it much better than six or eleven man." The reason for this, he said, is that there is more action in eight-man. Wide-open play, including end runs and an abundance of passes, causes more scoring, "and this more nearly satisfies them. There aren't many plays for 3 yards and a cloud of dust like in 11 man." The fans like it better, too, because it is easier to see what is going on with six fewer players on a field which is smaller than that used by eleven-man teams, he added. Gouldie diagrammed two of his more "famous" plays (see Figure 11). The key to their success, he said, was the blocking techniques employed by his players, some of which have since been banned, much to Gouldie's disappointment. Techniques he listed included one-on-one shoulder blocks; two-on-two shoulder blocks; two-on-one running shoulder blocks; body blocks using the hips, ribs, thighs, and the full length of the legs; crab blocks in close line play, with the blocker throwing a low body block; and wedge blocks going three-on-two, four-on-three shoulder-to-shoulder, or five-on-four shoulder-to-shoulder. Gouldie

added that in his fifty-one-game winning streak, not a single Alton opponent was hurt by his players' blocks.

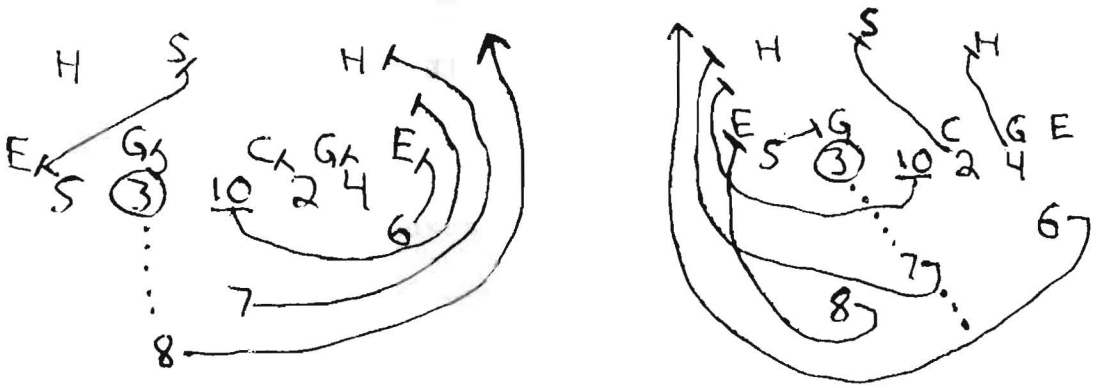



Figure 11: Gouldie's X86 end run and counter play, X Roll 7-67

Regardless of the blocking rules, Gouldie's advocacy of the game remained unshaken. As he retrospectively told Topeka Capital-Journal sports writer Kevin Haskin, "Eight-man was more fun to me. . . . To me, when I got out of coaching, 11-man looked slow. It wasn't interesting." Although six-man was a quicker game, which he also enjoyed, he termed eight-man "a natural replacement" for six-man.[20]

Eight-man football in the 1950s was winning over new schools not only from six-man but also from eleven-man. According to Coppac, some eleven-man coaches were reluctant to switch to eight-man because they were unfamiliar with it and they felt it might be a step down in quality. But "once they started to play it, and they found out it was still football, they changed their minds a little bit," Coppac explained. For the smaller schools

> the chances are much greater that you'll have enough people to fill the positions with quality people. . . . In eleven man, if you're short of people, it means that you'll fill positions with people that aren't quite ready. It allows you to protect your little kids. . . . I personally felt the quality of the game went up.[21]

Coppac was not alone in this view. Dale H. Halverson, who in 1956 was a coach at Riverside, Illinois, wrote:

> Since there are six fewer players on the field in eight-man football, mistakes made by interior linemen are easily observed from the bench. A tired or injured player is usually spotted very quickly. Injuries are not common in eight-man since fewer players are involved in fewer pile-ups. It is an ideal contact game for the small school where the enrollment and the budget will not allow the eleven-man game to be played.[22]

Wild of Michigan also found advantages in this switch:

> With three less men on a team a much needed substitute strength is provided. It is not out of proportion with the eleven-man game in any way, and possibly it is faster. For this reason a boy competing in eight-man football should have as good a chance as anyone to make a college team.[23]

Coppac also held this view, stating that the players in skill positions "have to be equal to those in eleven man. . . . Fundamentals have to be stronger, man for man, because if a ball carrier can break one tackle, chances are he'll make a lot of yards."[24]

The rules of eight-man and eleven-man were also similar. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA) 1955 Official Football Rules Handbook: "Eleven-man rules are used except only five players must be on the line at the snap and only four in the free-kick defensive zone. Also, only three players are ineligible for a forward pass and for forward handling."[25]

The regulation field was also smaller. In eight-man the field was eighty by forty yards, whereas an eleven-man field was one hundred by fifty-three yards, one foot.[26]

Eight-man football even attracted some unexpected fans to see this different brand of football. Hartsook commented that people from Council Grove, which played the established eleven-man game, often drove up to see Dwight play. At Williamsburg this also occurred, with people coming over from Ottawa to see the eight-man game played. As Coppac explained, "it is very difficult to defense eight-man football. That's one thing that creates fan interest--a lot of action." High scores were common in eight-man.[27]

Soon eight-man became entrenched in Kansas as well as in many other plains states of the nation. A NFSHSA national sports participation survey revealed that in 1970-71, 657 schools with 14,593 participants played eight-man.[28] In 1969, when the KSHSAA developed a state play-off system for football, an eight-man division was included. Nashville-Zenda defeated Lucas 54 to 18 in the first championship game before 1,500 spectators in Russell.[29]

Since being institutionalized by the KSHSAA, eight-man has added several schools to its roster. An example is Midway-Denton. In 1981 this school switched from eleven-man to eight-man because other area schools its size were going the same direction, and Midway did not wish to compete with other, larger schools in eleven-man. Midway's coach at the time, Mark Juhl, was not pleased with the decision to switch;

he thought it was "second-rate football." Juhl did not realize that nearly a third of the state's 361 schools that participated in football played eight-man. He soon changed his mind, however. After he viewed tapes from the coach of Turpin, Oklahoma, who used a distinctive offense, Juhl developed his own offense which featured a running game with well-practiced multiple fakes (see Figure 12). Opposing defenses rarely knew who had the ball until substantial gains were made; the offense had three points of attack, which tended to spread the defense. Athletic Director Jim Leatherman, who at one time helped coach the team, said that the fakes were only partially responsible for the success of the "Midway" offense:

> However--I want to emphasize this--the misdirection and deception in the backfield help, but it's the blocking that makes the offense go. We have different rules for every defense (I.E. 4-2, 4-1, 4-3, 5-1, 5-2, 3-2, 3-3, 3-4, 6-2, etc.). We always look for, not only good athletes, but also good students, in selecting linemen. Much practice time is spent daily on covering blocking assignments in a variety of defenses.

Midway-Denton, now coached by Mark Martin, has continued its mastery over opponents, winning state eight-man championships in 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987.[30]

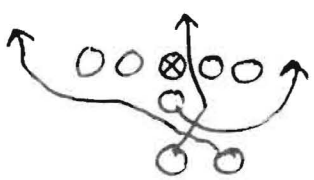


Figure 12: Juhl's "Midway" Offense

Other 1A (a class designation for the smallest high schools) schools were forced to make the same decision in 1983 that Midway had made in 1981: whether to switch to eight-man or play larger schools. The KSHSAA in 1983 eliminated 1A football play-offs but divided eight-man into two divisions. This has aided the growth of this game during an era of decline in the number of schools in Kansas, due to consolidation and loss of enrollment, according to Kaye B. Pierce of the KSHSAA. He stated that the number of schools playing eight-man has increased since 1983.[31]

The statement by Pierce, although casual, was accurate. In 1969 only 45 of 390 high schools in Kansas played eight-man football. In 1987, 111 of 362 played eight-man (see Table 1). Another trend obvious through the same period of years has been geographic: at first the eight-man game was largely confined to the central part of the state, where it still remains popular, but it also has spread east and west (see Figures 13 and 14). The evident logic behind this is that consolidation of tiny schools in western Kansas has moved them up from six-man to eight-man, while rural population loss in school districts in eastern Kansas has moved them down from eleven-man to eight-man. A third trend has been for the eight-man game to proliferate west of old Highway 81, the traditional demarcation between eastern and western Kansas. This has been true of the simple numbers of schools playing eight-man football but more so in the percentage of schools doing so.[32]

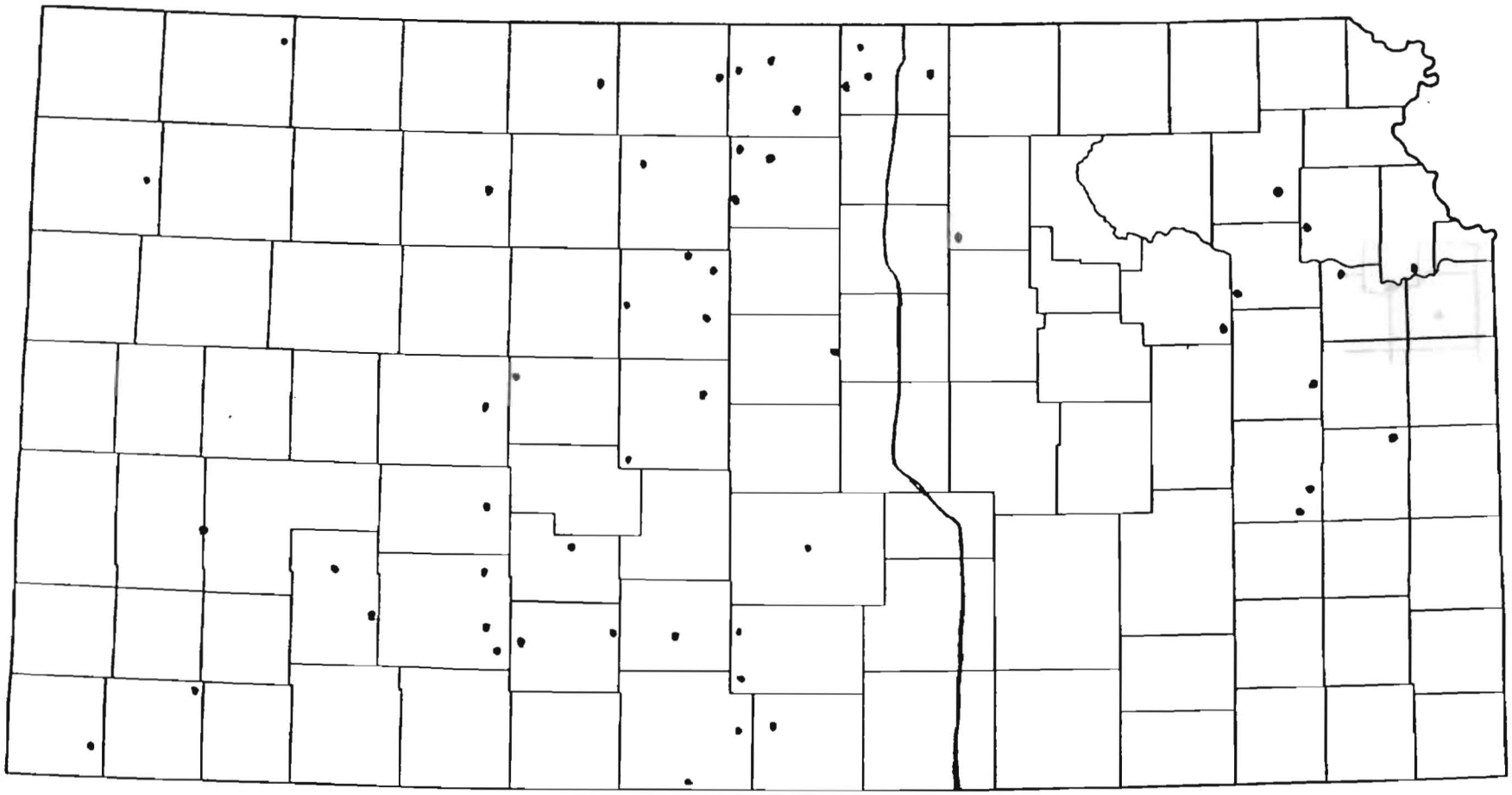
Table 1

High Schools Playing Eight-Man Football, 1969 and 1987

| Year | East of U.S. Highway 81 No. | % | West of U.S. Highway 81 No. | % | Statewide No. | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1969 | 12/213* | 6 | 43/177 | 24 | 35/390 | 14 |
| 1987 | 36/207 | 17 | 75/155 | 48 | 111/362 | 31 |

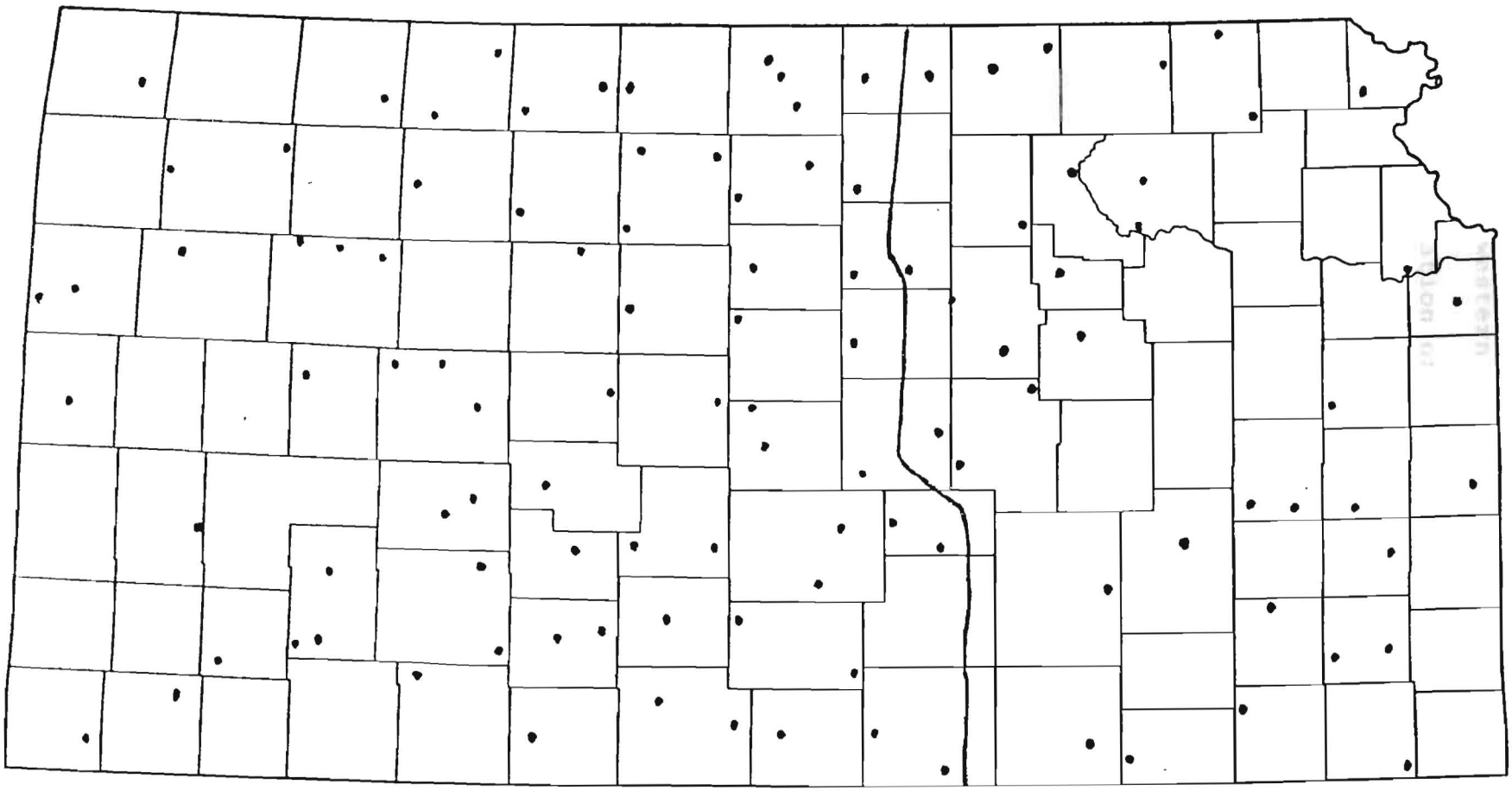
* 12/213 means 12 out of a total of 213 schools

Figure 13. High Schools Playing Eight-Man Football, 1969



Highway 81

Figure 14. High Schools Playing Eight-Man Football, 1987



Highway 81

The schools of western Kansas have taken the lead in further institutionalization of the game through the formation of the Kansas Eight-Man Football Association (KEMFA), which is composed predominately of schools from this part of the state. Formed in 1986, after interested eight-man coaches had met in Salina and Hays and had consulted with similar organizations in Nebraska and Oklahoma, the goals of the KEMFA are:

> 1. To promote an Eight-Man All-Star Football Game for graduating seniors; to give deserving recognition to the football players that play the 8-man game, and enhance their possibilities as college prospects.
> 2. To acknowledge the top 8-man coaches of the year through the selection process of coaching the All-Star Teams.
> 3. To create a unified effort in the affairs dealing with 8-man football. We will vote yearly on making recommendations to the KSHSAA, and promote the existence of 8-man Football Clinics.
> 4. To provide an informative newsletter to provide 8-man coaches with information on issues, clinics, and the All-Star Game. We plan to provide several newsletters a year.

The staging of the all-star games, the first of which took place in 1986, has taken on many of the trappings of the more publicized Shrine Bowl game (for eleven-man players) held in the eastern part of the state. The athletes are brought to Beloit, the site of these eight-man all-star contests, a week before the big game for practice and for red-carpet treatment, including banquets and media coverage. Cheerleaders for each squad are elected by eight-man coaches, so recognition is spread to the vocal supporters of the game. The 1987 contest, which drew 1,700

fans, saw a quick and determined South squad defeat the large North team 36-22.

With the work of the KEMFA and the natural need for eight-man in Kansas, past-president Gary L. Johnson in 1987 predicted continued growth of the game:

> I would bet that in the next five to ten years, that the number of 8-man schools in Kansas will increase from the 110 schools at present to close to 140 or 150. I feel that the numbers of small communities trying to hang on to their schools and with the decrease in enrollment at those schools, 8-man has become the only feasible way to maintain a football program in those schools. Also, due to the numbers problem, there have been several borderline schools that have gone to 8-man football in order to play a schedule closer to home rather than travel clear across the state to play someone their own size.[33]

Although it would not have had to travel clear across the state for similar-sized schools to play, Williamsburg returned to eight-man in 1987 so it could limit distance of travel and for other familiar reasons. According to Coach Charles Lee, several other similar-sized area and league schools have gone to eight-man, and he does not wish to play the larger area schools. "On a good year we will have twenty-five players on our football team opposed to thirty-five to forty-five on the larger schools," he explained. The switch to eight-man will also allow his school to play a junior-varsity schedule and have more depth to substitute. If Williamsburg had continued to play eleven-man, they would have had "to travel long distances to fill [their] schedule," Lee concluded. "There was only one real wise decision to make."[34]

Thus in 1987 eight-man appeared destined to increase in popularity for the same reasons it was first adopted. Eight-man was an ideal sport for small high schools that wanted a game like eleven-man but did not have enough boys to make a full squad and play safely. Often the move to eight-man was accelerated by other area schools; schools had to play the same variety of football as other area teams their size played; travel costs had to be considered. Six-man was no longer necessary, since consolidation had eliminated the smallest high schools. Small town patrons and participants wanted a game more like eleven-man, and eight-man was the answer to their needs. Eight-man football was the game best adapted to the new conditions of small high schools in the state of Kansas, as it was across the plains as well.

## Notes to Chapter 4

[1]Dale A. Pennybaker, "The Status of Six Man Football as an Organized Sport in Kansas High Schools" (M.S. thesis, Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia, 1955), pp. 13-15.

[2]John Bernard Hodapp, "Suggested Rules for Eight-Man Football for High Schools" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 1957), pp. 20, 23.

[3]Hutchinson News, 27 September 1957 (makes reference to a game in 1956), p. 2.

[4]Hodapp, p. 26.

[5]"All Victorious Football Teams," Kansas High School Activities Journal 19 (January 1958): 19-20.

[6]Topeka Daily Capital, 12 September 1957, p. 12.

[7]Council Grove Republican, 9 September 1957, p. 1; Topeka Daily Capital, 18 September 1957; Hutchinson News, 22 September 1957, p. 17.

[8]Topeka Daily Capital, 9 November 1957, p. 17.

[9]Hutchinson News, 21 September 1957, p. 2.

[10]Hodapp, p. 119.

[11]John Wild, "Eight-Man Football," The Athletic Journal 33 (February 1953): 36.

[12]"1958 Football Preview," Topeka Daily Capital, 15 September 1958, p. 22.

[13]Louis Coppac, interview with author, Williamsburg, KS, 31 October 1986.

[14]Norton Hartsook, letter to author, Ozark, AR, 18 November 1986.

[15]Ottawa Herald, various articles on 8, 11, and 13 September and 16 October 1958.

[16]Council Grove Republican, 15 September 1958.

[17]"1958 Football Preview," Topeka Daily Capital.

[18]"Quenemo to Play 8 Games," 11 September 1957, "18 Turn Out at Williamsburg," 13 September 1957, and "Pomona May be Grid Standout," 15 September 1957, all in Ottawa Herald.

[19]Dick Fensler, "Sunday Sports Rantings," Manhattan Mercury, 14 September 1958, p. 11.

[20]Everett Gouldie, letter to author, Agra, KS, 18 August 1987; Kevin Haskin, "Gouldie's Legacy Covers Basketball, Too," Topeka Capital-Journal, 9 August 1987, p. 13.

[21]Coppac interview.

[22]Dale H. Halverson, "Winning Attack for Eight-Man," The Athletic Journal 37 (September 1956): 30.

[23]Wild, p. 36.

[24]Coppac interview.

[25]NFSHSA Handbook (in possession of Hodapp), p. 4.

[26]Jo-Ann Barnes, "8-Man Football: It's Still Intense, Just with Fewer Players," Kansas City Star, 11 September 1986, pp. 1B, 5B.

[27]Coppac interview.

[28]"Sports Participation Survey," received from Assistant Director Dick Schindler of NFSHSA, 13 November 1986.

[29]Topeka Daily Capital, 30 November 1969, p. 24.

[30]Barnes, pp. 1B, 5B; Jim Leatherman, letter to author, Denton, KS, 16 September 1987; Topeka Capital-Journal, 29 November 1987, p. 15.

[31]Kaye B. Pierce, Administrative Assistant of the KSHSAA, telephone conversation with the author, 17 November 1986.

[32]"1969 Football Preview," Topeka Capital-Journal, 13 September 1969, p. 40; Kansas Educational Directory, 1969-70, issued by the Kansas State Department of Education; KSHSAA news release on football classifications for 1987 season; Kansas Educational Directory, 1986-87, issued by the Kansas State Department of Education.

[33]Gary L. Johnson, letter to author, Mankato, KS, 9 September 1987; Beloit Daily Call, various articles in July, 1987; Clipping from Kansas Eight-Man All-Star Football Game Program, sent to author by Beloit Daily Call staff member, 21 August 1987.

[34]Charles Lee, letter to author, Ottawa, KS, 17 November 1986.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

Is there anything more appealing to the average high school boy than being the star on the local high school football team? Numerous studies have found that being an athlete is one of the best ways to attain popularity, according to high school students themselves. Specific examples of this attitude were found in the studies of James S. Coleman (1961) and D. Stanley Eitzen (1976). They found that among the adolescents they studied, "being in the leading crowd" was the only other desirable quality that was close to "being an athlete" in attaining popularity. Other possible criteria, such as "leader in activities," "high grades--honor roll," and "come from [the] right family," were not nearly as important. After all, what could be more masculine or impressive than being a football athlete?[1]

High school football is attractive not only to its participants but also to the local community, especially in small towns. Evidence of this can be found by visiting a small-town football game. A large proportion of the town's population goes to the local game. Often these patrons brave the cold in late October or November in Kansas and other areas further to the north, pacing up and down the sidelines behind a restraining wire, following the action.

After the game and for the next few days, the performance of the local athletes is scrutinized by the men of the community, especially those who played football in their younger days. These men recall with pride "when I usta play" to compare their efforts with those of the current participants who bear the colors. As sociologists Elden E. Snyder and Elmer Spreitzer wrote in their book, Social Aspects of Sport,

> The phenomenon of sport has emerged in the last half of the twentieth century to become one of the pervasive social institutions in contemporary societies. . . . The centrality of sport is evident in the play of children, in our public schools, and in institutions of higher education.[2]

Football, which has become one of America's most popular sports, was not developed in Kansas or even in the midwest, however. It has a long and fabled history which began in the last four decades of the nineteenth century with its development in the eastern part of the United States. In this era many leading Americans advocated victory as a desirable goal morally, and nowhere was this more prominent than on its athletic fields. As sports historian Donald J. Mrozek wrote:

> Numerous political leaders, particularly those emerging from the genteel tradition, and a growing cadre of Army and Navy officers were captivated by the psychology of victory; and they linked sport to a general program for renewing their society and reordering world affairs. They included the likes of [Henry Cabot] Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt, secretaries of war such as Elihu Root, Army Chief of Staff Leonard Wood, and Rear Admiral R. D. Evans who commanded the North Atlantic Fleet--men who placed great emphasis on personal commitment as the cornerstone of public achievement.

Leaders such as these actively promoted sport, even "lending the dignity of their offices to sports such as football and boxing that had once been the realm of children and ruffians. Thus they helped to change the climate in which sport could emerge to prominence." They gave their support to these sports because they believed they developed desirable qualities in people. As Mrozek described the theme of Lodge's speech to the alumni at Harvard in 1896,

> the role of athletic competition in shaping character was practical and not metaphorical. Sport did not imitate other experiences that yielded values which the society favored; it actually produced them by means that occasionally resembled activities other than athletics, although the resemblance was only incidental. Training and competition in sport were taken to create a pattern of conduct and to shape a habit of success; and the conscious pursuit of sport had the effect of producing an unconscious but deep commitment to victory.[3]

With the endorsement of such important leaders, sports and particularly football soon found a niche in the extra-curricular activities of high schools. According to John R. Betts, one of the first high school leagues, the New York Public Schools Athletic League, was founded in 1903 and was soon copied by other major metropolitan areas across the country. Another study by Betts from the years 1904-05 reported further growth. Of the 555 American cities he polled, 432 had football, 360 had baseball, 213 had basketball, and 161 had track teams. This growth was even taking place on the plains. A 1909 study by Betts found that of the seventy-five largest Nebraska high schools, 95 percent had interscholastic athletic teams and competitions.[4]

Athletics and the importance of sports continued to grow in the twentieth century, as gauged by the studies of several sociologists in different eras. Robert and Helen Lynd, by comparison of the annuals of Middletown High School from the 1890s to those of the 1920s, found this to be the case. They discovered that in the 1920s the faculty, whose numbers were twelve times larger than in the 1890s, occupied only half as much space in these books. As quoted in Social Aspects of Sport, they wrote:

> The whole spontaneous life of the immediate generation that clusters about the formal nucleus of school studies becomes focused and articulate, and even rendered important in the eyes of adults through the medium of the school athletic teams--the "Bearcats."

They further reported that "the highest honor a senior boy can have is captaincy of the football or basketball team."[5]

This trend continued into the 1930s and 1940s. Willard Waller, in The Sociology of Teaching, studied the culture of high schools and concluded:

> Of all activities athletics is the chief and most satisfactory. It is the most flourishing and most revered culture pattern. It has been elaborated in more detail than any other culture pattern. Competitive athletics has many forms. At the head of the list stands football.

Waller found nothing wrong with this, since sports could teach important "lessons of life," except that he felt too much pressure was exerted on players and coaches to win games. A. B. Hollingshead, in a study of youth in a midwestern community, also found that winning was over-emphasized. He added that "greater public support and school interest were centered on the football and basketball teams than on

all the other extra-curricular activities combined. The school athletic program served as a collective representation of the school and community."[6]

Nowhere was this more true than in the small-town high schools of Kansas. But unlike their eastern and metropolitan neighbors, they required adaptations to bring football before cheering crowds. Especially with the advent of the depression and the erosion of the rural population, the football team, the school it represented, and the town itself were in danger of withering away. Action was necessary.

The first adaptation utilized by small and large towns as well was night football, which businessmen hoped would keep people coming into their establishments. This was especially true in small towns located in what sociologist Carl F. Kraenzel, in his book The Great Plains in Transition, termed "the yonland." Towns in these areas were losing jobs and eventually people to towns in "the sutland." The sutland towns contained "the main arteries for wholesaling, business, industrial, educational, health, governmental, and social function" in a given area. Yonlands were "'in-between' areas," which relied on sutlands for the movement of goods and the availability of services. Thus facilities were limited in towns in the yonlands. This differentiation usually began when certain towns continued to have rail service while others lost theirs, or when a major highway went through certain towns and by-passed

others.[7] As this situation developed, it was only natural for yonland towns to try to maintain some type of autonomy and dignity, as well as for businessmen in these areas to fight harder to stay solvent.

So local businessmen gladly sought out ways of bringing more people to town. This had not been so difficult before the development of the main transportation arteries that created sutlands and yonlands. The local town had been the center of activity for a rural area, as Penny Clark has pointed out in her Heritage of the Great Plains article, "Saturday Night in Alta Vista." Clark used Alta Vista as a case study of what happened to many small towns on the plains in the early to middle twentieth century on the way to becoming yonland communities. The ritual of going to town on Saturday was significant to Alta Vista because it meant entertainment, social contact, and an opportunity to trade for people from outlying areas. Farm kids could see friends, eat ice cream, see a movie, or do a variety of things once they helped their parents unload their cargo of cream and eggs to be sold. Parents had to sell their produce, as well as buy needed goods, go to the tavern for a beer and conversation, get a haircut, or join their kids in watching a movie. Businessmen in Alta Vista looked forward to this opportunity to sell their wares, and generally stayed open as long as potential customers were around.

All this changed as Alta Vista became a yonland community. The new highway through town was the avenue for this change. With the development of the automobile and trucks, goods were shipped on the road rather than on the rail. Better transportation also meant people could shop elsewhere at sutland stores, which had many advantages. Farm families also began concentrating on one or two products rather than trying to produce a variety of products, such as eggs and cream. Government and consumers began to demand better quality, and small-town merchants could not compete by buying eggs and cream from the locals. Alta Vista devolved to where only limited services were offered; a big blow to community identity came with the closing of the high school in 1969.[8]

The local night football game not only brought people to town and enhanced community spirit, but was also a recreational event. It was another place to meet people, as the Bird City Times article in Chapter 2 described it. As Great Plains historian Thomas D. Isern has pointed out, "people on the plains have developed the ability to make mental order and create a time and a place for recreation even within their evidently inhospitable landscape." In this era people on the plains were in need of recreation more than ever; people in agricultural areas had already suffered financially in the 1920s before the rest of the country did so in the 1930s. As Isern put it, "People cannot find recreation by traipsing off into pointlessness;

rather they seek ordered activity that will reassure them as they go through familiar, but not demanding, routines." What could be a more classic example than folks parking their cars "around a carefully chalk-lined field, there to honk their horns at any aspect of the action that pleases them?" By 1935 at least eighty-six Kansas towns could host a night football game, which facilitated these human needs, at a time when people could attend.[9]

Night football alone did not save small-town schools and their football programs. Further adaptation was necessary, because many of these schools could not field conventional eleven-man football teams. Thus six-man, and later eight-man football, were adopted by these schools to save their athletic programs and their towns' recreational outlets as well.

Six-man was developed and later publicized by Stephen F. Epler in the 1930s. It was quickly utilized by some coaches, while others did not adopt the game until the 1940s. This adaptation, as well as eight-man, was reminiscent of Walter P. Webb's contribution to Great Plains historiography, The Great Plains, because it was an example of his classic thesis of taking an eastern institution, in this case eleven-man football, and adapting it to the conditions of the scattered towns of the plains, in this case Kansas.

Six-man, and later eight-man from the 1950s to the present era, allowed smaller high schools to continue to

exist and offer interscholastic athletics without massive consolidation. This massive consolidation would have given schools the numbers necessary to have eleven-man squads, but would have been too costly not only to school budgets but also to the quality of life of the students involved, as Kraenzel pointed out. Kraenzel called for educational institutions in the region to develop innovative alternatives to massive consolidation. Six-man and eight-man were such innovations.

Besides, Kansans love their small towns too much to allow consolidation at a level needed to bring their school enrollments up to the standards of the eastern United States. Their schools and their athletic teams have given these towns not only an identity but also a comforting ritual during trying times. Rural Kansans have had to deal with chronic agricultural stagnation since the 1920s, so preservation of their way of life in any form has been desperately desired. Other forms of human ritual have been suppressed by mechanization and the mass media. In football and other school activities, rural Kansans can go through "familiar and comforting motions in common with other folk," as Isern put it. These motions include "fall practice, pep rallies, chalking the field, staged entrances onto the field, coin tosses, half-time pep talks in the locker rooms, and of course, Monday's definitive post-mortem at the barbershop."[10]

It is no wonder small-town Kansans have developed and embraced the innovations necessary to keep their

small-town high schools open and playing football. Attempts to mimic the ways larger schools operated would have been disastrous, while doing nothing would have curtailed community life.

## Notes to Chapter 5

[1]Eldon E. Snyder and Elmer Spreitzer, Social Aspects of Sport (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978), pp. 46-47.

[2]Ibid., p. 2.

[3]Donald J. Mrozek, Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), p. 2.

[4]Snyder and Spreitzer, p. 44.

[5]Ibid., pp. 44-45.

[6]Ibid., p. 45.

[7]Carl F. Kraenzel, The Great Plains in Transition (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), pp. 195-197.

[8]Penny Clark, "Saturday Night in Alta Vista," Heritage of the Great Plains 18 (Spring 1980): 17-24.

[9]Thomas D. Isern, "Introduction to 'Recreation on the Plains,'" Ibid., pp. 1-3.

[10]Isern, Lecture notes for AH 522, "History of American Education," Emporia State University, 1986.

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