

“Out of the Quietness, a Clamor: ‘We Want Football!’” The California State Colleges, Educational Opportunity, and Athletics

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The president assembled the students shortly before they were to leave for winter break. He had a major announcement to make. Earlier that fall, the students had petitioned the president to develop an intercollegiate football program, and he had appointed a faculty and student committee to study the matter. He now was prepared to tell the gathered students whether he agreed to lead his college fully into athletics. He started slowly and told the students that their college was only six years old, much had been accomplished in that time, and many were tired and now hoping to “lie down on the new lawn under one of those new trees out there and bask in the glory that is Sacramento State College.” The president, however, was more amused than tired, as he continued. “But no! The dust blew and the rains came and then the fog! And out of the quietness and the thickness of the fog—a shout—a clamor: *We want football!*” The college already had an athletic program, and he tried to understand why the students would clamor for more. But, the fact remained that they had asked for football, and he now had to tell them what would become of their petition.¹

On this day in early December 1953, President Guy West told the students gathered before him that he would not stand in the way of football. West was not the only college leader in the postwar years to yield to such demands for football and athletics. The race to compete in intercollegiate athletics consumed college and university officials increasingly in the decades following World War II.² The pressure for

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¹“Statement Concerning the Initiation of Football Presented to the Student Assembly on December 1, 1953, by Guy A. West, President,” folder 12, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

²See, for example, John Thelin, *Games Colleges Play: Scandal and Reform in Intercollegiate Athletics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); John Sayle Watterson, *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy* (Baltimore: The Johns

strong athletic programs was particularly acute on the campuses of the nation's state colleges, including Sacramento State, where administrators and faculty hoped to build thriving public institutions. These public colleges did not have the reputations of the nation's emerging research universities and land grant institutions, such as the University of California or the University of Wisconsin. They were smaller and often seen as less prestigious, and usually did not offer doctoral degrees or more than a few masters programs. Some, such as Sacramento State, were only a few years old. Others had started as teachers colleges or normal schools, agricultural schools, and business colleges in the nineteenth century. In part due to increased demand for a college education in the decades following World War II, which the GI Bill helped to spur, and in part due to institutional ambition, these state colleges were growing and expanding, and hoping to become multipurpose, comprehensive institutions with four-year undergraduate programs and a handful of graduate courses.

In this context of growth and expansion, state college officials embraced intercollegiate athletics as instrumental to their futures. President West and his colleagues believed that athletic programs—and, even better, winning ones—would signal that they were no longer teachers colleges or agricultural schools but comprehensive four-year colleges that were growing and doing exciting things, and that deserved public support as places where students would want to get a degree. In the absence of a long history as a comprehensive college, a winning team could be crucial to crafting a strong reputation, establishing school traditions and spirit, and building alumni support. Increasingly, these colleges also discovered that sports teams provided meaningful opportunities to reach beyond the borders of their campuses and engage the surrounding communities in the development of a regional identity. If properly constructed and maintained, athletics additionally might contribute to and reflect these colleges' educational purpose and mission. Athletics was only one part of the transition to comprehensive institutions, but, overall, college officials assumed that athletics would help them strengthen their institutions and develop solid reputations. Athletics and sports were not marginal players tucked out on the edges of the college mission or tacked on as part of an extra-curriculum. They were central to these institutions' developing identities and ambitions; they were star players as these colleges grew and expanded educational opportunity in the postwar years.

The historiography on higher education in the postwar years is strong and admirably captures, among other themes, the remarkable

growth of higher education in the United States and the consequent expansion of educational opportunity. There also is a growing and compelling body of research on athletics and higher education. However, this literature looks primarily at the emerging research universities, elite institutions, or higher education broadly.³ This article builds on this work by focusing on the evolving state colleges and their embrace of athletics in the 1950s. It looks specifically at the state colleges in California as a way to explore the connection between athletics and educational expansion and to understand the role of athletics generally in higher education as it transitioned in the postwar years from elite to mass education.⁴ California public officials were keenly aware of the growing demand for a college education and established policies to guide the growth of higher education in the state. As a result, California's state college presidents worked closely together and, while they could be competitive on and off the field, they also coordinated athletic guidelines to assist them in this expansion. They were ahead of the game in marshaling sports as a comprehensive part of a state college mission, but their peer institutions throughout the country followed in their tracks by the 1960s. Thus, these institutions provide a strong case study of collegiate expansion, athletics, and the meaning of higher education in the postwar years. The allure of sports, and the hope that alumni support, student loyalty, and public dollars would follow winning teams proved irresistible to many state colleges in California and across the nation. Not surprisingly, then, Sacramento's president agreed with his

³See, for example, Roger Geiger, *Research and Relevant Knowledge: American Research Universities since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Hugh Graham and Nancy Diamond, *The Rise of American Research Universities: Elites and Challengers in the Postwar Era* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Arthur M. Cohen, *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998); Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945–1965* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly & the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*; Watterson, *College Football*.

⁴As is the case with state colleges in general, the state colleges in California were comprised of former teachers colleges and normal schools, as well as new four-year institutions. Unlike the emerging research universities in the state and nation—such as the University of California—these California state colleges were to focus primarily on undergraduate teaching, with an emphasis on teacher education and liberal/general education. According to the state's various educational reports and studies in the 1940s and 1950s, the state colleges were to leave much of the research function and graduate education to the state's research universities. These state colleges eventually became part of the California State Colleges and then today's California State University. For more information on the California state colleges, their growth and function, and the role of the Master Plan, see Donald R. Gerth, *The People's University: A History of the California State University* (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Public Policy Press, 2010).

students and chose the road that, they all hoped, would lead to gridiron glories.

Athletics and Collegiate Expansion

President West led his college toward athletics during a period of rapid expansion and transition in higher education. While Sacramento State was only six years old in the early 1950s, other state colleges in California had longer histories stretching back to the nineteenth century. All were part of an expansion in higher education and educational opportunity that marked the postwar years and that reflected increased demand among Americans for access to college. As historians have argued, Americans had grand hopes for the future. These hopes included the expectation, as the president of San Francisco State put it, that the nation's young would have "a greater opportunity for economic success and for a type of position which carries greater social prestige than the positions held by their parents."⁵ A college education increasingly offered a popular route to such prestige. Indeed, as early as the first half of the twentieth century and as the nation developed technologically and industrially, a college degree—or even some college education—provided a valuable credential for access to professional jobs and positions. This trend only increased in the postwar years, and college became even more important as one ready source of professional standing and expertise.⁶

The state colleges played a crucial role in fulfilling these expectations and hopes. As J. Paul Leonard, San Francisco's president, explained, the state colleges, "strategically located" in communities throughout the state and subsidized by public funds, made higher education easily available and accessible and "thus provided educational opportunities to many youth in California who otherwise would have

⁵J. Paul Leonard, "College Enrollment: Forecast, Facts and Figures, July 8, 1954," folder 216, box 13, J. Paul Leonard Papers, San Francisco State University Archives.

⁶James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); David K. Brown, *Degrees of Control: A Sociology of Educational Expansion and Occupational Credentialism* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1995); Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915–1940* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 19–21; William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105–10, 118; Daniel A. Clark, "'The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Joe Veteran.' The G.I. Bill, College Education, and Postwar American Culture," *History of Education Quarterly* 38 (Summer 1998): 174–78; Daniel A. Clark, *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood, 1890–1915* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 18–21, 80–81, 84–89, 94.

been unable to attend college.”⁷ At the same time, by training an abundant supply of skilled and professional workers and thus ensuring that more Americans had access to well-paying positions, the expansion of the nation’s state colleges and of higher education broadly led to greater economic equality among Americans and, as Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz have explained, contributed to the nation’s overall economic prosperity.⁸ In many ways then, higher education was replacing the high school as the route to the American Dream, a dream marked by the promise that hard work and initiative would lead to economic security.

Consequently, college enrollments throughout the 1950s and 1960s shot up. In 1950, enrollment in public and private colleges (two and four years) was around 2.5 million, but was about 8 million by 1970, with nearly 6.5 million in four-year institutions. This context of growth and expansion was true across higher education but particularly affected the emerging state colleges. Sacramento State was an exception as a new campus, but many states found it easier to enlarge existing institutions to meet demand. Expanding teachers colleges and other single-purpose institutions beyond their original focus to include a full range of baccalaureate degrees, and some graduate programs, was often more cost-efficient than building entirely new campuses.⁹ Many of these emerging colleges in California and elsewhere embraced these opportunities to extend their missions and become integral to the changing political, social, and economic contexts of postwar American society. As a result, by the 1970s, state colleges and universities enrolled around 25 to 30 percent of the nation’s college students. Average fall enrollment in the California state colleges, for example, increased from just over 31,000 in 1950 to 54,612 in 1955 and then jumped to over 95,000 in 1960. By 1970, enrollment was above 240,000 on twenty campuses, fourteen of which had been built since the end of World War II.¹⁰

⁷J. Paul Leonard, “Purposes and Accomplishments of the State Colleges,” folder 379, box 22, J. Paul Leonard Papers, San Francisco State University Archives.

⁸Goldin and Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology*; Brown, *Degrees of Control*; William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos, and Michael S. McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁹As Christine Ogren explains, this “mission creep” among the former teachers colleges started prior to the 1950s. See Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: “An Instrument of Great Good”* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 201–09.

¹⁰“Statistical Abstract to July 1983,” folder 2039, box 8, California State University Reports Collection, CSU System Archives, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives; W. John Minter and Howard R. Bowen, *Preserving America’s Investment in Human Capital: A Study of Public Higher Education* (Washington, DC: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1980), 2; American Council on Education,

By the 1950s, these students increasingly demanded strong athletic programs to accompany this educational expansion. Sacramento's students were concerned enough about their college's limited athletic program that over 600 of them petitioned the president to expand the program by instituting football. Throughout the country in the years ahead, students in other state colleges flooded their presidents' offices with similar calls and petitions, but Sacramento's students did not just demand that the president take responsibility for building a football team. They agreed to play a key role in ensuring the success of the program by supporting it partially through student association fees and, crucially, by selling enough season tickets to make it financially viable.¹¹

Why would these students willingly agree to sell tickets for a team they would never play on, and why did the college readily expand its athletic program, given the athletic scandals then plaguing other colleges? In his response at the student assembly, President West suggested that he was amused or perplexed by the students' petition, but in reality he was fully aware of the forces propelling students and colleges toward football and athletics.¹² By 1953, when the students lodged their petition, his college was firmly established, in part because of veterans on the GI Bill. These veterans helped facilitate an educational transformation in the postwar years that contributed to the growth of the California state colleges. The sheer number of veterans who utilized the GI Bill for college education—some 2.2 million by the mid-1950s—pushed campuses to grow and expand to meet demand, while also instilling in the public a greater awareness that a college education did not exist solely for the upper classes. Sacramento and the other state colleges capitalized on this shift in public perception to welcome more students to their campuses. Many of these veterans, moreover, played college athletics—with veterans on average making up 50 percent of most college football teams between 1945 and 1950—and helped solidify a public belief that colleges and athletics went hand in hand. The students

Higher Education in the United States (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1965), 26–27; Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, 261; Arthur M. Cohen, with Carrie B. Kisker, *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2010), 202.

¹¹“Statement Concerning the Initiation of Football Presented to the Student Assembly on December 1, 1953, by Guy A. West, President”; Guy A. West to Lysle D. Leach, 13 November 1953, folder 11, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives; “Present Status of the Development of the Football Issue at SSC, November 19, 1953,” folder 12, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives; “Minutes of the Student Council Meeting, December 2, 1953,” folder 2, box 4, Student Affairs, Sacramento State University Archives.

¹²“Present Status of the Development of the Football Issue at SSC, November 19, 1953.”

who came to Sacramento after the veterans in the early to mid-1950s similarly saw such a connection and expected the amenities—especially athletics—that students enjoyed on other campuses. They wanted a winning football team or athletic program as a source for instilling loyalty and pride, and gaining recognition for their college. For students, the public, administrators, and, somewhat reluctantly, faculty, football and athletics had become the ultimate marker of collegiate status.¹³

This prominent role for college football and sports reflected a twentieth century fascination with athletics. As San Diego's president recognized in the 1950s, "the public interest in sports is great," and it had been for decades.¹⁴ Football and sports in general were popular spectacles that had become intertwined in public culture and that retained enormous public support throughout the century. Athletics and sports were a winning combination of competition and physical prowess, and star players, especially those who triumphed against deep odds, came to embody American notions of heroism and success. In this way, sporting contests provided compelling stories that captured public attention. Newspapers and radio stations—and eventually television networks—benefited from and perpetuated this public preoccupation with athletics and reaped profits from reporting on and broadcasting athletic contests.¹⁵

This fascination carried over to college sports teams, especially in the southern and western regions of the country where fewer professional teams captured public attention. For many students, as well as parents, alumni, and community members, college sports, as part of a larger sports culture, offered welcome moments of entertainment and conquest, and football coaches and athletes were becoming cultural heroes on college campuses. Consequently, it was difficult for these spectators, as well as college administrators, to conceive of college—especially a public college—without athletics. It was nearly impossible, as President West was discovering, for the California colleges to develop their campuses without a stadium or playing fields, without fans

¹³Gerth, *The People's University*, 38, 42; Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 68, 367; David D. Henry, *Challenges Past, Challenges Present: An Analysis of American Higher Education since 1930* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975), 62–63, 66–67, 101; Goldin and Katz, *The Race between Education and Technology*, 247; Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7; Oriard, *King Football*, 116; Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 218; Clark, "The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Joe Veteran," 167–68, 174–78.

¹⁴"Intercollegiate Athletics at San Diego State College, April 15, 1953," folder 314, box 18, J. Paul Leonard Papers, San Francisco State University Archives.

¹⁵Brian M. Ingrassia, "Public Influence Inside the College Walls: Progressive Era Universities, Social Scientists, and Intercollegiate Football Reform," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10 (January 2011): 61; Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 5–12, 91; Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, 208–11; Watterson, *College Football*, 266–67; Oriard, *King Football*, 11–13.

streaming across campus for athletic contests, and without footballs slicing through the fall air as the public cheered.¹⁶

As the director of the alumni association at San Jose State College explained, collegiate athletics represented the heart of American society and its hopes and aspirations. Such sports, he argued, “reflect in a large measure the American Way. For here we find all the elements of success seeking, intense competition and gravitation towards bigness. Because of this, big time, colorful, championship athletics teams are very much a part of our culture and are no less desirable than their counterparts in our society.”¹⁷ As part of the American Way, sporting events reflected a meritocratic ideal that individuals—regardless of background—would find success through hard work, ambition, and competition. On the athletic fields and courts, as historians have argued, Americans could play out their hopes and dreams, and be rewarded for success against adversity, all while affirming their faith in American democracy.¹⁸

In this context, athletics and state colleges were an ideal combination. By opening their doors to more students, state colleges similarly promised success for those with discipline, courage, and strength. They relied primarily on state tax dollars to offer a free or heavily subsidized education to more students, and they held out the ideal that all could succeed based on merit rather than on one’s family wealth or background. Sacramento State symbolized this trend. In the mid-1950s, between forty and forty-five percent of its students came from homes where the father was employed in positions in skilled, semiprofessional, semiskilled, agricultural, and clerical fields, while only about twenty percent were in professional and managerial positions. Through these state colleges, higher education was broadening and ensuring access to greater numbers of students.¹⁹ President John T. Wahlquist of San Jose State likely spoke for the other college presidents when he stated

¹⁶Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 5–9, 68–100, 122; Pamela Grundy, *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth Century North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 202–03, 297–301; Ingrassia, “Public Influence Inside the College Walls,” 61–62, 69–72; Watterson, *College Football*, xi–xii, 1–4, 241–42, 271–72, 285–87; Oriard, *King Football*, 143, 365–66.

¹⁷“Your Stake in Higher Education and Athletics,” *Spartan Review*, February–March, 1957, book 1, box 36, series VI, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San Jose State University Archives.

¹⁸Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 68–72, 98–100; Watterson, *College Football*, xi–xii, 1–4, 241–42, 271–72, 285–87; Grundy, 5–6, 202–03, 297–301; Oriard, *King Football*, 19, 163–64, 225–28.

¹⁹“Statistical Report of Regular Students, Spring Semester 1955 Compared with Fall Semester 1954–55,” folder 12, box 4, Student Affairs, Sacramento State University Archives; “A First Partial Report on Student Demographic Characteristics and Financial Aid, October 1967,” folder 8, box 4, Student Affairs, Sacramento State University Archives.

that one objective of his institution was “to overcome the usual discriminatory practices in higher education, and to admit young people of intellectual promise regardless of religion, race, economic or social status.”²⁰

With this access to higher education through merit also came the promise of social and economic mobility, which the state colleges tapped into as they expanded their campuses. Athletic programs were a visible representation of this promise. Success on the fields and courts reflected the skills students would need to thrive in their professional careers: sportsmanship exemplified through self control, perseverance, and strength in the face of adversity, as well as hard work, loyalty, and teamwork. But, while the athletes were on the fields honing these skills, other students were in the stands cheering them on, writing about them in the campus newspapers, and marching along the sidelines in their band uniforms. They too were participating in an athletic tradition that, while new for some of the state colleges, built loyalty among students and highlighted a shared culture of hard work, sacrifice, and teamwork. As students at Sacramento asserted in their report urging the president to embrace football, “The values [of athletics] include the development of a sense of pride in the athletic phase of the total educational program, the development of tradition and school spirit, sportsmanship, and loyalty.”²¹

For these students, and the athletes they cheered on, football and other sports signified that the state colleges were part of a larger academic tradition where students gained the status and character they would need to successfully climb the socioeconomic ladder. By embracing athletics, the students at Sacramento State—and at other state colleges in California and the nation—further hoped to emphasize that they were as capable and deserving of success as were students in the nation’s best universities and colleges. The state colleges were open to all based on merit, but they also promised status, culture, and upward mobility. Athletics represented both the opening of opportunity and the privilege that such opportunity afforded. Thus, state colleges, together with their athletic programs, literally and figuratively represented an expansion of the American Dream to greater numbers of Americans.

²⁰John T. Wahlquist, “The Objectives of the San Jose State College,” n.d., [1953?], volume 1, box 36, series VI, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives.

²¹“Policies Governing Intercollegiate Athletics at Sacramento State College, Formulated Spring, 1953,” folder 9, box 1, Coordinating Executive and Faculty Council, Sacramento State University Archives; Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 120; Oriard, *King Football*, 13–14, 67, 84; Watterson, *College Football*, 416.

Athletics and sports were not adjuncts to these colleges; they were central to their purpose and mission.²²

Athletics gave all students—whether athletes or not—an opportunity to express their allegiances to a college and to signal that they had strong character and the ability to succeed. Thus, athletic rivalries and traditions took on added importance, so much so that students in the emerging state colleges began to manufacture the traditions associated with more established teams. In 1956, the student association at Sacramento State hoped to build a rivalry with the student body at nearby University of California-Davis. “During the few short years that Sacramento State College has been in existence there has developed an intense friendly rivalry between it and the University of California at Davis,” as one student put it. “This rivalry has grown especially in intensity since Sacramento State fielded a football team.” The students wanted to encourage and promote this rivalry. To that end, they sought to create a new tradition by finding “some appropriate symbol” that would “be passed back and forth between the colleges in the manner of a perpetual trophy for the winner of the annual football game.” They channeled their more established peers in hoping for a symbol that would have the same cachet “as the Stanford-California Axe, the Little Brown Jug, the U.C.L.A.-University of Southern California Bell, and other similar traditional symbols.” By 1959, they had their symbol: “a surrey without a fringe on top,” donated by a community member “who has taken an active interest in school activities.” And with that surrey, they built a rivalry that inspired student support and loyalty and that highlighted shared traditions with UCLA, the University of California at Davis, and Stanford.²³

While the students were celebrating their new rivalry and all that it represented, President West and his colleagues sought to use these traditions and college athletic programs—especially winning ones—to gain public attention and build their institutions’ reputations. They recognized the potential for intercollegiate athletics to lead to greater public exposure and a fuller embrace of their campuses. As San Diego State officials declared, “the effect [of athletics] on the morale, spirit, and

²²Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 19, 114, 118–20, 133–34; Oriard, *King Football*, 13–14, 19, 143, 163–64, 226–28; Clark, “The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Joe Veteran,” 174–78, 189; Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 14, 18–21, 80–89, 94–97, 100–102, 109, 116–17.

²³James H. Morrow to Jeré Strizek, 6 June 1956, folder 3, box 4, Student Affairs, Sacramento State University Archives; “Trophy Arrives on Campus,” folder 5, box 4, Student Affairs, Sacramento State University Archives; Oriard, *King Football*, 13–14, 84; for more information on college life and the development of loyalty and spirit, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 119.

loyalty of students, alumni, and other members of the school and community must be recognized.”²⁴ College officials did not always know how sports might build such loyalty or achieve these goals. Still, they trusted that athletics would be an effective way to establish an identity and reputation and promote their institutions, since intercollegiate sports easily garnered a significant share of the public attention given to American colleges. For example, in November and December 1952, there were nearly 1,000 stories in local newspapers about San Francisco State, but over 400 of them focused on athletics.²⁵ Consequently, the state college presidents pushed forward in the expectation that their campuses would flourish as athletics flourished.

As early as 1952 and 1953 when the college presidents and other officials were discussing the feasibility of an athletic conference of state colleges, they had an eye toward public relations and publicity. Ferron Losee, the chairman of the division of physical education at Los Angeles State College, proposed calling this new affiliation the California College Conference. He found ready support for this name, especially since “‘Three C’ or ‘Triple C’ would have special appeal for publicity purposes.” This conference never came into existence, but these officials recognized that such a name easily would be remembered and provide a ready marketing and branding outlet for the conference and for the state colleges as a whole.²⁶ At a time when sports entranced the public and college players were becoming cultural icons, a catchy slogan or title to brand a conference could be a successful way to tap into that fascination and gain public recognition.

President West keenly understood the benefits to be gained from a strong, well-coordinated athletic program. As he worked to build the program on his campus, he nurtured relationships with the public and athletic boosters. In one instance, after being berated by “a very staunch supporter,” he encouraged his athletic director to visit the booster and “chat with him.” After all, as President West put it, this supporter employed “some of our boys from time to time,” and it was in the college’s interest to maintain friendly relations with him. President West also recognized that the booster was getting older and that he was “pretty well situated financially.” Sending the athletic director out to chat with an old man was little price to pay for boosting a citizen’s spirits, keeping some of the college’s athletes employed, and possibly reaping larger

²⁴“Intercollegiate Athletics at San Diego State College, April 15, 1953.”

²⁵“Basis for Budget Request,” no date, folder 52, box 3, J. Paul Leonard Papers, San Francisco State University Archives; Oriard, *King Football*, 67–70.

²⁶“Meeting of the State College Athletic Committee, March 13 and 14, 1952,” folder 11, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

financial rewards later.²⁷ Such attention to detail suggested a president attuned to sports and athletics on his campus and their potential for building public support.

President West further grasped that well-coordinated and controlled athletic programs could lead to letters such as the one he received in 1962 from an official of the Sacramento City-County Chamber of Commerce. This official had just returned from watching Sacramento State's basketball team win a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) divisional tournament. He applauded the president for having a championship team that made him "extremely proud to be from Sacramento," and he concluded by claiming that "Sacramento State made thousands for friends from coast to coast [with this team], something money can't buy."²⁸ Such letters were better than the athletic scandals that also could land on presidents' desks, and these missives often had the effect of spurring the state colleges toward bigger and bigger athletic programs. The presidents were learning that the benefits could be significant.

State Colleges and Athletic Control

However, athletics and sports, along with student traditions and rivalries, could easily take on lives of their own and force the colleges to play along. The California state colleges struggled to develop a model that would harness the benefits of intercollegiate athletics while shielding their campuses from the abuses and scandals that could result from college athletic programs. When he agreed to the students' demand for football, President West issued a warning: "For the good of our college, for the good of all of us, and for the good of football as an intercollegiate sport, let's all keep it clean and decent. Even if we lose the games, we can grow in spirit and we can still bask in the glory that is Sacramento State College. For we have shown through six years that there are other values in higher education that are important, too. Let's not lose sight of them when some one shouts: 'We want football!'"²⁹

He only had to look at his colleagues in the more established universities to see that athletics could get out of hand and detract from the core educational mission. In the early 1950s, as West and the other state college presidents began to debate athletics on their campuses,

²⁷Guy A. West to John Baker, 20 November 1957, folder 12, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

²⁸Robert C. Wood to Guy A. West, 20 March 1962, folder 15, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

²⁹"Statement Concerning the Initiation of Football Presented to the Student Assembly on December 1, 1953, by Guy A. West, President."

universities were caught in point-shaving scandals. Athletic directors and coaches also repeatedly altered grades and transcripts to get students into colleges and on athletic teams. These and other scandals, at places like William and Mary, the second oldest university in the nation, the University of Kentucky, and the United States Military Academy, led to calls to reform athletics. The American Council on Education, a group of university and college presidents, organized a committee to study intercollegiate athletics and recommend options for reducing the turmoil that plagued sports on these and other campuses.³⁰

This committee saw the problem in the increasingly militaristic terms of an evolving Cold War. "Certainly the abuses and suspicion of abuse now associated with the conduct of intercollegiate athletics foster moral apathy and cynicism in our students—those young men and women who increasingly share responsibility for this country's strength and freedom." The committee called for reform of intercollegiate athletics for the health and moral well-being of the nation's young and, indeed, the country as a whole. "In the last analysis, the strength of our free society depends not only upon armaments but also upon the integrity of our institutions and our people." Sports and colleges had so permeated the American psyche that any scandals or hints of scandal, in the rhetorical tones of the Cold War, threatened the moral fabric of the nation.³¹

The report placed the blame for these scandals squarely on external pressures. "The rewards in money and publicity held out to winning teams, particularly in football and basketball, and the desire of alumni, civic bodies, and other groups to see the institutions in which they are interested reap such rewards, have had a powerful influence on many colleges and universities." To combat this situation, the ACE committee made a number of recommendations, including curtailing booster groups and their role in providing incentives and subsidies to students and potential recruits, ending postseason play, establishing coaching salaries in line with faculty salaries, and reasserting faculty control, which it saw as having been decimated at the hands of booster clubs and civic groups. It also proposed that regional accrediting agencies should monitor and control athletics. This proposed reform essentially would have tied college accreditation to athletic policy.³²

The ACE called on all colleges and universities to embrace these reforms and to do so before the public lost patience with and faith in

³⁰Watterson, *College Football*, 219–27; Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 100–107.

³¹"Report of the Special Committee on Athletic Policy of the American Council on Education," folder 13, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives, 1.

³²"Report of the Special Committee on Athletic Policy of the American Council on Education," 1.

higher education. What the committee may have forgotten, however, was that the public pushed for winning athletic programs and often saw these teams as the public face of a college. The balance between athletics and academics was tilting in favor of athletics, and the ACE's calls for reform, even couched in moral terms, were not going to measurably change that reality. Indeed, the NCAA quickly went on the defensive and argued against the need for regional accrediting organizations to be involved in college athletics. It essentially recommended self-policing, and the ACE committee, made up of presidents facing NCAA pressures and significant public expectations, never mustered the courage, conviction, or strength to push resolutely against strident opposition to its reforms.³³

It was in this context of scandal and proposed reforms that California's state colleges debated a role for athletics. Many college administrators feared that scandals would engulf their campuses if they moved fully toward sports and athletics, but they also knew that athletics might help them grow and expand. They struggled to build athletic programs that would remain amateur in nature and would adhere to the spirit of the ACE reforms. For many college officials, the best way for athletics to accomplish this mission was to conceptualize sports as a key part of "the total educational service of the institution."³⁴ As San Diego State asserted in 1953, "The athletics program is a valid part of education only as it contributes to the total education of youth," and an important part of this total growth, the presidents collectively affirmed, was a focus on "the development of democratic attitudes and practices."³⁵ In tones that echoed statements from other college presidents in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they argued that athletics would develop graduates—whether players or spectators—with strong moral character, leadership skills, and the ability to live productively in a democracy.³⁶ Moreover, athletics would educate students and the public to appreciate hard work, cooperation and teamwork, and initiative.

To ensure that athletics supported this goal, the state colleges developed layers of control and supervision that, in reality, created

³³"Report of the Special Committee on Athletic Policy of the American Council on Education"; Watterson, *College Football*, 227–40; Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 107–16.

³⁴"Minutes of State College Presidents Conference, April 23 and 24, 1952," Folder 6786, box COU001, California State University Executive Council Meeting Minutes, CSU System Archives, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives.

³⁵"Intercollegiate Athletics at San Diego State College, April 15, 1953"; "Statement of Functions of the California State Colleges, November 10, 1953," folder 6796, box COU001, California State University Executive Council Meeting Minutes, CSU System Archives, California State University, Dominguez Hills Archives.

³⁶See Grundy, *Learning to Win*, 5–7, 13, 18–21; Clark, *Creating the College Man*; Watterson, *College Football*; Ingrassia, "Public Influence Inside the College Walls."

a convoluted authority structure. As was similar on other state college campuses, Sacramento State funded much of its athletic program through student fees and the student body's governing council, which had the authority to determine how these fees would be disbursed and spent. This practice meant that the student body, through its elected representatives, expected to have some authority over athletics. However, faculty refused to cede control over this crucial aspect of the college and demanded mechanisms for athletic oversight. In practice, this usually meant some sort of joint student-faculty advisory board, in addition to the normal oversights and structures associated with college departments and programs. It was not always clear who was in control.³⁷ Not surprisingly then, as President West of Sacramento State recognized, athletic scandals inevitably would land on the president's desk. "Wherever football has led to embarrassment," he said, and he could have included most sports here, "it has been primarily the administration rather than the students or faculty that has had to face the public." Students, alumni, and the public pushed colleges and universities to embrace athletics, but Sacramento's president understood that he would be responsible for dealing with problems and scandals.³⁸

It was in the presidents' interests, then, to develop safeguards to keep athletics from deteriorating into a scandal-prone division of the college. Conceptualizing athletics as part of the overall educational program would not be enough, and key to additional efforts was the creation of an athletic conference of the California state colleges in 1952. The presidents promoted this conference to ensure that the state colleges played only against each other and against teams with similar educational goals and missions. They failed to create such a conference, in part because the state colleges included newer institutions with weaker teams that feared having to compete against the larger state colleges and their better athletic programs.³⁹

Even though they struggled with their conference aspirations, the state college presidents embraced many of the proposed ACE reforms and agreed to certain stipulations in the development of their athletic programs. Principally, athletics would be part of the "regular instructional program" and would be housed in colleges of education and

³⁷ See, for example, "Sacramento State College, Policies for Intercollegiate Athletics," folder 314, box 18, J. Paul Leonard Papers, San Francisco State University Archives; "Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, June 4, 1958," folder 11, box 1, Executive Council, Sacramento State University Archives; and "Sacramento State College, Division of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, June 4, 1958," folder 11, box 1, Executive Council, Sacramento State University Archives.

³⁸ Guy A. West to Jim Warren and Gene Jensen, 12 June 1953, folder 14, box 1, Faculty Council, Sacramento State University Archives.

³⁹ "Minutes of State College Presidents Conference, April 23 and 24, 1952."

physical education departments. As members of these departments, coaches would be “teacher-coaches” and would not have their salaries supplemented by alumni booster clubs or any outside sources, as was common among big league university athletic programs. As Sacramento State’s president declared, these faculty-coaches further would not be judged by their win-loss records. They would be members of the regular instructional staff and have similar salaries, tenure opportunities, and privileges.⁴⁰ The state colleges also claimed that athletics would be open to all and that any enrolled student would be eligible to play on a college’s athletic teams. Finally, seasons would be regulated to fit within the colleges’ regular academic terms, and no team would be allowed to participate in postseason bowl games.⁴¹

Moreover, as San Diego State asserted, in no way were coaches to be active scouts who would compete for the best high school or junior college athletes by holding out the promise of special offers and privileges in financial aid or housing.⁴² Scholarships and other aid would be granted only according to criteria established for all students, and no athlete would receive any special considerations or privileges. Outside gifts to athletes or athletic teams from alumni or other athletic boosters would not be allowed.⁴³ President West and his ACE counterparts understood that such gifts and privileges had been “the first step down the path to very undesirable football conditions elsewhere.”⁴⁴

This stipulation hindered the colleges’ abilities to recruit promising athletes. However, in practice, some state colleges worked around this requirement and provided “work aid,” or guaranteed job opportunities on and off campus for athletes. Public boosters were essential to ensuring that the colleges could provide athletes with such opportunities. The key factor, these colleges announced, was that athletes would be working legitimate jobs and would only be paid for the work they actually did. While these colleges technically may not have been violating the ban on outside gifts or special consideration for athletes, they were increasingly engaging in creative options for getting around these

⁴⁰“Sacramento State College, Policies for Intercollegiate Athletics”; see also “Intercollegiate Athletics at San Diego State College, April 15, 1953.”

⁴¹“Minutes of State College Presidents Conference, April 23 and 24, 1952”; “Athletic Committee Report of Council of State College Presidents, May 27–28, 1952,” folder 9, box 1, Coordinating Executive and Faculty Council, Sacramento State University Archives; “Meeting of the State College Athletic Committee, March 13 and 14, 1952.”

⁴²“Intercollegiate Athletics at San Diego State College, April 15, 1953.”

⁴³“Minutes of State College Presidents Conference, April 23 and 24, 1952”; “Athletic Committee Report of Council of State College Presidents, May 27–28, 1952”; “Meeting of the State College Athletic Committee, March 13 and 14, 1952.”

⁴⁴Guy A. West to F. Eugene Jensen, 20 November 1953, folder 12, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

bans.⁴⁵ Even Sacramento State interpreted these stipulations loosely. As the chairman of the division housing athletics stated, "All of the coaches and I have put in lots of time developing channels and contacts leading to part-time [off-campus] jobs for athletes."⁴⁶

These colleges were striving to fit athletics within their educational mission, while also reaping the rewards from successful athletic programs. It was a delicate balance. They wanted good sports programs that would build pride and loyalty, and they hoped to encourage student and public involvement while avoiding the scandals of big-time athletics. Increasingly, they found it difficult to maintain such a balance. For much of the 1950s, the state colleges lived within the boundaries stipulated by the state college presidents, but as they developed their athletic programs, they quickly understood that alumni and boosters were rarely happy with these regulations. In California and elsewhere, alumni associations and public groups pushed the colleges to shed onerous requirements, build stronger programs, and pursue ever more favorable win-loss records.

Alumni Unrest and the Emergence of Big-Time Football

San Jose State, in particular, chafed against the state college restrictions, and its president was buffeted by frustrated alumni and citizens who demanded successful athletic programs. These frustrations helped precipitate a crisis in 1957 that marked the emergence of big-time athletics for this college. Tracing its history back to 1857, the college had an established athletic program with a loyal following of alumni and community citizens, but these supporters, once treated to football glories, came to expect and demand success. Colleges throughout the country used athletics to build support, but boosters could get out of hand, as San Jose's president discovered. Vocal citizens in the San Jose area feared that the caliber of athletics was declining on campus, and they demanded change.

San Jose's president found himself challenged in ways that his peers across the country certainly understood. The self-styled "Citizens Committee for a Progressive San Jose State College" expected the president to commit the college to strengthening the program that already existed and live up to its history of success in athletics. "Composed of individuals representing varied interest groups," this committee had, it stated, "but one objective in mind—to help our college through this

⁴⁵H. J. McCormick to President West, 8 January 1957, folder 14, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

difficult period of rapid growth,” as it made the transition to a comprehensive college. Specifically, it focused on football, which it saw as the cornerstone of a successful athletic program and a strong university. “Sports in general, and football in particular,” the committee stated, “is the one activity emanating from the campus which commands the most notoriety and publicity. For, after all, football is the ‘show case’ of the college.” It argued that San Jose had lost its way and had disgraced its earlier tradition of success. Throughout the 1930s, prior to World War II, the college had a strong athletic program, with the football team enjoying an undefeated season in 1939. Those were the glory days, and “for all intent and purpose,” the committee declared, “San Jose State was ‘on its way.’”⁴⁷

That situation remained the case until 1952, the committee argued, when the president retired and John Wahlquist moved into the president’s office. For the committee, the problem was that the new president was not fully committed to athletics and specifically to the heavy recruitment of and subsidies to star players that would be necessary to field a winning football team. President Wahlquist argued that he had to abide by the new state college rules that expressly prohibited such subsidies. As a result, the team’s win-loss record—for the committee, the only thing that really mattered—tilted ominously toward the loss column. From 1946 to 1951, the team won thirty-seven games, lost ten, and tied two. From 1952 to 1957, they remained a winning team, although they won only twenty-six games, while losing twenty-three and tying three. “Obviously,” the committee concluded, “San Jose State is not now ‘on its way.’”⁴⁸ The team was suffering, and since the committee tied the team’s fortunes to its own, the college and the community were suffering.

The president’s sin, his accusers charged, was to adhere to these constraints on recruitment, training, and subsidies while also scheduling big-time opponents. Such restrictions might have been tenable had San Jose also not had to play against stronger teams—such as Arizona State University and Iowa State University—that provided scholarships and additional subsidies. In contrast, the committee claimed, “the coaching staff [at San Jose] can offer *only* the possibility of a job on the campus,” which created a recruiting imbalance that hindered San Jose from having a realistic chance of beating its big-league opponents. The committee wanted the president to unshackle San Jose from these rules, and, after seeking an opinion from the state’s attorney general and the board

⁴⁷“Citizens Committee for a Progressive San Jose State College, November 7, 1957,” folder 14, unprocessed collection, Office of the President (Guy West), Sacramento State University Archives.

⁴⁸Ibid.

of education, the committee argued that San Jose did not legally have to adhere to the state college regulations. It demanded that the college move toward big-time athletics with tuition payments and subsidies that matched its elite peers.⁴⁹

The alumni foundation fully supported this campaign and any move toward stronger athletic programs. For this group, a college's reputation was essential to the opportunities available to alumni. It was not enough simply to get an education or to gain "basic knowledge and training," as the president of the alumni association put it. Graduates deserved more and those additional benefits depended on the stature of the college. "Our investment," he wrote, "should provide the ultimate in economic and social opportunity. No door should remain closed because of the lack of sufficient educational stature, real or imagined." Students attended college in the hope that they would gain a credential that would unlock professional doors, allow them to move higher on the socioeconomic ladder, or, at least, retain the standing of their parents. Unfortunately, the alumni president concluded, San Jose graduates were not getting all that they should from their education, and the only way to gain more from their diploma was to improve the reputation of the institution. As others had argued, including the students at Sacramento, athletics was the answer. A thriving athletic program—in particular football—would help San Jose State establish a solid reputation that would distinguish it from the other colleges in the state. In turn, this reputation would benefit graduates looking for jobs. San Jose's alumni and supporters, however, feared that the college's standing was deteriorating with every football defeat. Consequently, the alumni association supported calls for a stronger, more robust, and more successful athletic program, and increased the pressures on President Wahlquist. The stakes were high both on and off the field.⁵⁰

During a meeting to discuss the future of athletics at San Jose State, one alumni—also a member of the citizens committee pushing for a stronger football program—argued that successful football programs not only enhanced a college's reputation and opportunities for graduates but also united alumni and students, and gave them purpose, hope, and identity. As this former student put it, "We are the poor people. We [at San Jose State] have the greatest inferiority complex of any institution of higher learning" in California. But, he continued, football

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Your Stake in Higher Education and Athletics"; Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 19, 114, 118–20, 133–34; Oriard, *King Football*, 13–14, 19, 143, 163–64, 226–28; Clark, "The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Joe Veteran," 174–78, 189; Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 14, 18–21, 80–81, 84–89, 94–97, 100–102, 109, 116–17. For a discussion of changes in the college degree in the 1950s, see Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 187–92.

and athletics had given the college important traditions, as well as hope for improvement in standing and stature. "I guarantee you," he said, "the day that every Alumni in San Jose State College rejoiced was the day that San Jose beat Stanford. Why? Because we said, for a day, for a weekend, for a week, until next year, we have lost our feeling of inferiority." The future for the college, he believed, rested on improving the football situation. It was one of the few traditions that alumni "can hang their hats onto." Athletics, he concluded, was the "heart" of the college. "If you take the heart, the spirit, the essence out of this institution, then you have killed it for all time."⁵¹

San Jose beat Stanford and, by doing so, gained credibility and, alumni hoped, some of the prestige associated with Stanford. For alumni and students, a victory against Stanford was a way to signal that San Jose was no longer a sleepy teachers college but a strong and legitimate university that deserved to be seen among the nation's better colleges and universities. Athletics was not simply a game for San Jose's alumni. It was a serious factor in the development and identity of the college and, by extension, the students and alumni. Their standing and their identity rested on their college and its success on the gridiron.⁵²

This emphasis on the role of athletics in creating alumni and community pride underscored the importance of these colleges to their communities. As they wrestled with what it meant to be new—in the case of Sacramento—or in transition from teachers colleges to comprehensive institutions—in the case of San Jose and San Francisco—they emphasized their role in their communities. This focus on regional needs had long been part of higher education and had pushed public universities toward outreach and extension activities—perhaps most readily exemplified by the Wisconsin Idea at the turn of the twentieth century. The state colleges sought to continue and further these outreach efforts as they made the transition to comprehensive colleges.⁵³ As public institutions where students received a heavily subsidized

⁵¹ "Presentation of Mr. E. F. De Vilbiss, spokesman for the SJSC Alumni Association and member of the 'Citizens Committee for a Progressive San Jose State College,' before a community hearing on November 12, 1957," folder—Athletic Controversy, 1957, box 14, series 1, Presidential Office Administrative Records, San José State University Archives.

⁵² For a discussion of athletics and identity, see Grundy, *Learning to Win*, 5–9; Watterson, *College Football*, 416; Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration*, 19, 114, 118–20, 133–34; Oriard, *King Football*, 13–14, 19, 143, 163–64, 226–28; Clark, "The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Joe Veteran," 174–78, 189; Clark, *Creating the College Man*, 14, 18–21, 80–81, 84–89, 94–97, 100–102, 109, 116–17; Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 218.

⁵³ Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 104–11; Thelin, *History of American Higher Education*, 137–38.

education at taxpayer expense and as relatively young institutions that did not command the prestige or have the standing of the state's flagship institutions, the state colleges felt an overriding responsibility in this area.

As the state colleges collectively affirmed in 1953, "each college has special responsibilities as an institution serving the educational needs of its region," and this responsibility meant, for example, focusing on the needs of area citizens, assisting school systems, and serving "businesses and other interests in the region."⁵⁴ Many did so by developing strong cultural programs and off-campus courses for community citizens. But, one of the best ways to reach the larger public and fulfill an outreach mission was to create a strong sense of regional unity and identity. The preferred way to accomplish this goal, they believed, was to concentrate the community's energies on the college campus and to instill pride and loyalty in the campus through a winning athletic program. In theory, athletics fulfilled many regional needs and hopes by providing leisure opportunities for fans, building connections between college and high school coaches, supplying teachers and coaches for the lower schools, and giving businesses a reason to cheer as athletics brought money to the area. Crucially, for alumni and others, athletics solidified a focus for community energies and enthusiasm.

The San Jose citizens committee increasingly recognized this outreach role. Community demands, the committee argued, must be valued, and this committee wanted a winning football team as a basis for community identity and pride. "Each of the state colleges is a community college," the committee stated. "Each should cater to the needs of that community," and it condemned the president for not acting "in the best interests of the community" when it came to athletics and football.⁵⁵ The problem for the committee was Wahlquist's adherence to the state college code for athletics, which essentially obligated each state college president to adhere to a broad set of principles, regardless of the size of the institution, its ambitions, its athletic aspirations, or its community needs. The committee pushed Wahlquist to ignore the code in favor of building a strong football program for the benefit of the community. As the state college presidents had hoped, their institutions were becoming regional colleges that boosted community pride and identity, but, in this case, that pride threatened the authority of the president.

Wahlquist understood the powerful role that athletics and community pride could play in the development of his campus. He too wanted

⁵⁴"Statement of Functions of the California State Colleges, November 10, 1953."

⁵⁵"Citizens Committee for a Progressive San Jose State College, November 7, 1957."

a stronger program and wished to abandon or, at least, loosen the state college code and facilitate athletic growth. He pushed for greater flexibility that would allow San Jose State to recruit and subsidize players and be more in line with the athletic conference he hoped to join. But, the state college presidents consistently rebuffed such efforts, and Wahlquist argued therefore that he was bound to adhere to the state college athletic code.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, Wahlquist hoped to build a strong football program as a way to separate his college from the other state colleges, which were continuing to grow and compete with San Jose for students and public support. The state opened new campuses and proposed new ones throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. While demand was great for spots on these campuses, Wahlquist was concerned with his institution's standing and ability to recruit top students, and he sought to strengthen his institution's standing and reputation. Building a better football and athletic program, without the constraints of the state college code, he believed, would assist in these efforts. Joining the more prestigious Pacific Coast Conference would further distinguish his institution.

He concluded that this conference and its teams were more in line with San Jose State's goals and aspirations. As the oldest public college in the state, he argued that his institution "in terms of enrollments and facilities" was "more than comparable with most of the colleges in the P.C.C.," such as the University of Washington, the University of Oregon, and the University of California campuses in Los Angeles and Berkeley.⁵⁷ As was the case among other state colleges throughout the nation, Wahlquist angled to use conference affiliation to stress his campus's aspirations. Joining a larger conference with better teams from prestigious universities, especially those from outside the state, would distinguish his institution from California's state colleges and give San Jose an identity as a major player, which, in turn, would appease the alumni.

The faculty agreed. "Recognizing the rapid growth and academic achievements of San Jose State," the faculty recommended "that every attempt be made to affiliate with a major athletic conference so that competition in all sports will be with schools of similar size and achievements."⁵⁸ San Jose State would remain part of the California

⁵⁶"Frank Leahy Recognizes San Jose State Bid to Reach Football 'Big Time,'" *San Jose Evening News*, 25 November 1955, box 20, series III, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives.

⁵⁷John T. Wahlquist to Victor Schmidt, 8 February 1957, book 1, box 36, series VI, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives.

⁵⁸Faculty recommendation quoted in "Sparta Goes Major League," *Spartan Review*, April–May 1957, box 1, series 1, University Archives Publications Collection, San José State University Archives.

system of state colleges, but it also would work diligently to be at the top of the state colleges and be comparable to the larger public universities throughout the western states. Competition on the football field among the California colleges carried over to competition in general for students, stature, and identity.⁵⁹ San Jose's alumni were correct in recognizing the potential role of athletics, and Wahlquist worked to ensure that they lost their "feeling of inferiority" and could be proud of their alma mater.

However, Wahlquist disliked the citizens committee and its threat to his leadership and control of the campus and athletics. This citizens group was becoming the type of booster club that the ACE and the state college presidents had warned against in the early 1950s, and Wahlquist feared a vocal alumni association and booster group that sought to dictate college athletic policy. Therefore, he had to maneuver carefully through these demands, but he used this discontent to his advantage as he pushed for greater flexibility for his campus's athletic program. He did not protest when the citizens committee petitioned the state to release San Jose from the state college athletic stipulations. The group essentially argued that San Jose could not be held accountable to such policies since the state college presidents had no authority as an informal group to develop policies for all state colleges. Wahlquist used this pressure similarly to push the state to release his college.

Through his repeated efforts and the fervor of alumni and citizens, the state eventually released San Jose State from the restrictions of the state college code. By this time, the Pacific Coast Conference was embroiled in multiple scandals and close to collapsing, but it had not been receptive to Wahlquist's earlier inquiries on membership.⁶⁰ He may have hoped to affiliate with this conference but that did not mean that the conference wanted to accept him or his institution. Consequently, he pushed his campus toward the West Coast Athletic Conference, which encouraged the kind of tuition payments and other subsidies that Wahlquist hoped would allow the college to compete effectively against larger and better teams as a big-time football player.⁶¹ The college had firmly embraced athletics and now increased that drive and focus to

⁵⁹"A Case of Sour Grapes," *Spartan Daily*, 14 May 1957, book 1, box 36, series VI, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives; "Sparta Goes Major League."

⁶⁰Thelin, *Games Colleges Play*, 129–47, Watterson, *College Football*, 281–83.

⁶¹"SJS Athletic Meet Tonight," n.d. and no publication name, box 31, series V, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives; "Dan Caputo President of SJS Foundation," *San Jose Mercury*, 16 January 1958, box 31, series V, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives.

improve the football team and, by extension, he and alumni hoped, the college and region as a whole.⁶²

Once it had started to play the game, San Jose State found that it could not easily step off the field. Its only choice was to play even harder and more aggressively in response to student, alumni, and public demands. To assist in these efforts, the college supported the development of an athletic foundation to raise funds for the football program and athletics generally. The college needed these efforts to be successful so that it could afford to provide tuition and other subsidies to players in an effort to recruit stronger athletes for its big-time program.⁶³ San Jose was moving quickly toward the policies and programs that President West in Sacramento had warned against when he granted the students' wish for football. Wahlquist found that, if he wanted to compete in the big leagues, he had to embrace the very booster groups that the state college presidents had argued were detrimental and that had caused conflict on other campuses throughout the nation. He was setting his institution on a path toward big-time athletics, but that also meant that the threat of scandals, turmoil, and conflict would be even greater.

Conclusion

Wahlquist and many alumni and community citizens wanted a better football program. They all argued that big-time football would increase the college's reputation and allow the institution to better meet the needs of greater numbers of students as it continued its progress toward being a comprehensive institution. The allure was too strong to resist. The college determined that it could only be a big league school if it competed in big-time athletics, but San Jose's experiences were a cautionary tale for Sacramento and the other colleges that were building athletic programs and traditions. These programs, while encouraging community interest and support, could quickly become dominated by those community expectations and by a public that was accustomed to and demanded winning seasons. As San Jose State learned, alumni and citizens zealously guarded a football program's reputation.

Once San Jose and the other state colleges had gained a reputation on the field, they had to maintain that or face the wrath of their supporters. These colleges had an opportunity to develop a new model of athletics and academics, and they had tried to follow the recommendations of the ACE committee as they sought to build strong

⁶²“Frank Leahy Recognizes San Jose State Bid to Reach Football ‘Big Time.’”

⁶³“Dan Caputo President of SJS Foundation”; “Spartan Foundation,” *Campus Digest*, 14 February 1958, box 33, series VI, Office of the President, John T. Wahlquist, San José State University Archives.

athletic programs that also contributed to institutional goals and aspirations. Rather than crafting a new approach, however, they further enshrined athletics as part of American colleges and popular culture, and promoted the notion that athletics and college were synonymous. Once that happened, it was almost inevitable that state colleges would move toward ever more successful athletic programs and push against policies that threatened success. Once they had started to play the game, the state colleges had to continue playing it, and the stakes increased every season. Once President West granted the students' petition for football, it was difficult for him and the other college presidents to stop and objectively examine what athletics really could accomplish. From the first kickoff on Sacramento's new campus, the institution and its peers were committed to a game they could not afford to lose.