
A Journalist Smells a Rat.

"High-powered press agency has entered the field of intercollegiate athletics. - The 1931 season that has just concluded witnessed a marked decline in gridiron gate receipts and thousands of seats have been vacant in the big stadiums on many Saturdays in striking contrast to the sell-outs of other years. - And the directors of athletic publicity at the big colleges are being called upon to utilize their cunning to fill those empty seats next fall.

"During football's "Golden Era," from 1924 through 1930, the athletic publicity posts have been easy chair jobs. The directors have had little to do other than supervise the distribution of passes and give out a certain amount of information about the team at the college for which they work to the football reporters. For years the standing room only sign has been out at all the big football games. In fact tickets have been sold out weeks before the actual conflict. The gentlemen who controlled the purse strings of the athletic association treasuries regarded the cost of athletic publicity as a sort of necessary evil in the pre-depression era.

"Today these same gentlemen look to their publicity men to keep receipts at the gate near the peak. College publicity directors who have maintained a dictatorial attitude toward newspapermen have suddenly become friendly. The football team that takes a trip nowadays is accompanied by a publicity man. He visits the newspapers in the city where the game is to be played and distributes photos of the players, information about every player from captain to lowly scrub. A mass of publicity copy about the merits of the team the P.A. represents is also left in his wake.

"Because of the widespread interest in football the newspapers undoubtedly will use a large portion of the material whereas if it pertained to any other form of amusement the press sheets would find their way to the wastebasket without further ado. John Public becomes convinced that Saturday's game is going to be a whale of an affair with a wonder team playing at the local stadium. The public turns out and the team the press agent represents (if it happens to be playing on percentage) gets a large cut out of the receipts for its end. If the visiting team is playing for a guarantee, the home school benefits and will be anxious to book the visitors for an appearance at more money the following year.

"The early games of the 1931 season indicated that attendance would not be up to the "Golden Era" figures. With the big games approaching, the college press agents racked their brains for ideas to interest the public. A few that smacked of the press agent flavor follow:

"The Old Oaken Bucket, symbolic of football supremacy between Purdue and Indiana, was reported stolen. It was recovered in time for the game. - Anonymous letters were received by players on the Minnesota football team offering them \$1500 for "throwing" the game to Wisconsin. No trace of the author of the letters was ever discovered. - The Little Brown Jug, the trophy Michigan and Minnesota fight for on the gridiron, was also reported stolen and the story received columns of publicity. - All of these incidents were recorded by newspapers throughout the nation. The stories naturally aroused interest and it is likely that the gate receipts were boosted by the activities of the press agent clan.

"There was a time when theatrical press agents encountered little difficulty in getting "puffs" into the public prints. The paid publicity brigade became more and more bold in its schemes and the newspapers gradually became wary about what entered the news columns. Apparently football is passing through the same cycle. Public interest in the game, it is agreed, reached the peak in 1929. The big stadiums were constructed to accommodate peak crowds and extraordinary efforts are likely to be made to keep the seats filled during the 1932 season." -- The Pontiac (Mich.) Daily Press.