

# WALTER CAMP

1859-1925

**W**ALTER CAMP, more than any other one man, made American football what it is today.

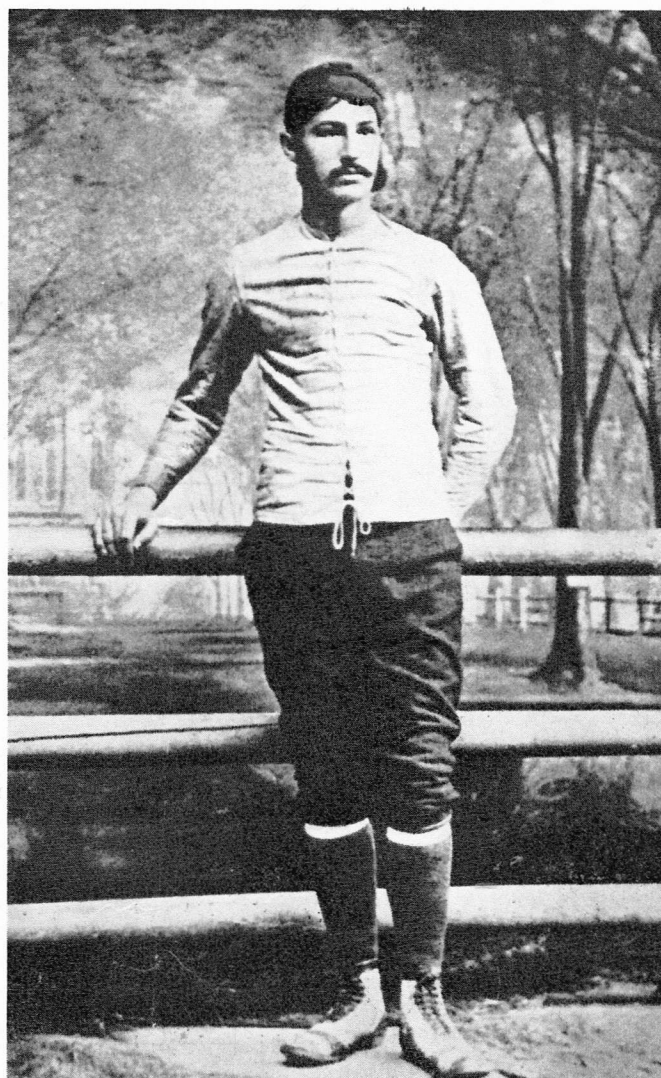
Throughout his whole life, from the days when he engaged as a boy in the semi-rugby scrambles on New Haven vacant lots until the time when he sat as the oldest and most respected member of the Football Rules Committee, Camp's career was closely linked with the most spectacular of American games.

## THE PLAYER

Born in New Haven April 17, 1859, the youth entered Yale College in 1876. In his first year he made the class crew, the Varsity track team, and was captain of both baseball and football teams. He evolved the present method of running hurdles instead of jumping them, and won several five-mile swimming races.

In November, 1876, the first American intercollegiate football game under revised (American) rugby rules was played between Yale and Princeton at the fashionable St. George's Cricket Grounds in Hoboken, N. J. Barely a score of spectators paid twenty-five cents apiece to see Walter Camp and Eugene Baker get away for long runs to win for Yale.

But if less than two hundred men and boys watched Walter Camp shine that day against Princeton, he was a star of the first magnitude nevertheless. His feet were sure and his pace evasive. He could get away his punts for good distance, and



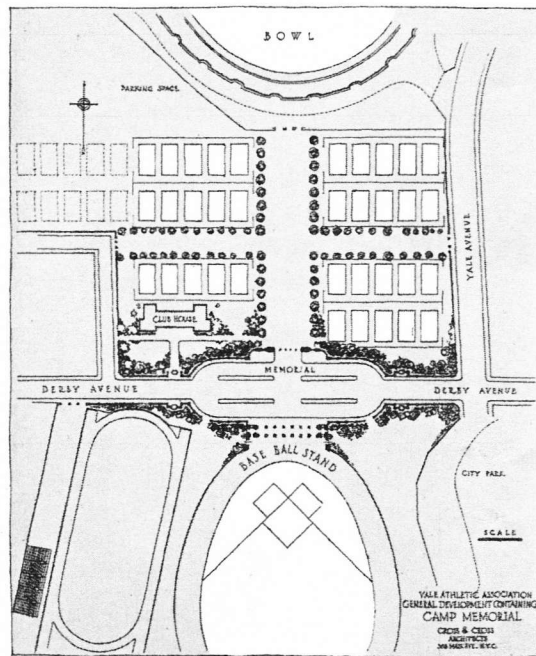
## FIFTY YEARS AGO

*Walter Camp in 1876, when he played in the first game of American Football.*

his drop and place kicks seldom went wide. His personality was magnetic—all his qualities combined to make him captain of the team only two years after he entered Yale.

## THE COACH

Camp graduated in 1880, entering Yale Medical School. Two years later he took a position in New York City, and in 1888 definitely made his home in New Haven again. From that time on he divided his time between his business and amateur sport, chiefly football.



**THE CAMP FIELDS**  
*The memorial in relation to the athletic fields.*

Upon his return to New Haven, Camp became unofficial graduate advisor to the Yale football team, and eventually became the first officially recognized head coach. Although chief coach, he did not coach from the field. Instead, he studied his opponent's style of play, worked out strategy and tactics that would beat it and then explained his plan of attack and defense to the young graduate coach, captain and players around his library table. A firm believer in placing responsibility upon captain and team, he left it strictly up to the captain, who was in charge, and the graduate coach to get concrete results from the schemes he laid out. In this way he developed initiative and self-reliance in the men and built up a system truly unique both for its success upon the gridiron and its high morale.

Camp, as the first director of athletics at Yale and treasurer of the athletic union, brought order out of chaos. Such was the confidence in his integrity and ability that there was never a question asked when he began the practice of dropping the surplus each year from the statement of profit and loss. His purpose was revealed at the

psychological moment, when he calmly announced the existence of a large sinking fund for a program of expansion. This fund was the nucleus for the building of the Yale Bowl.

#### THE RULESMAKER

But as a player, even as a coach and director of athletics, Camp's influence was negligible beside that which he wielded as a member of the football rules committees. Even before he was out of college the game had been changed as a result of his suggestions. During the last two decades of his life, while he sat on that august board in whose collective hands the destinies of the game of American football lie, he initiated and fought through to a successful conclusion more measures for the improvement of the game as a spectacle and a sport than any other single individual. When he entered Yale in 1876, the annual football game with Harvard was played under the English rugby rules; the season before he died the classic was as different from rugby as baseball is from the leisurely British game of cricket from which it sprang.

Walter Camp is responsible for the following features of the American game today:

Eleven men on a side, instead of the rugby "fifteen."

The "scrimmage," giving one side the possession of the ball with the right to put it in play.

The "safety" as a scoring play.

The "quarterback" as a field general.

The "downs and yards to go" statute, abolishing the old rule allowing a team to keep the ball indefinitely without making any progress.

The marking of gridirons with white five-yard lines.

The right to tackle below the waist. (Resulted in present close line and back-field formation.)

Partly due to Camp's agitation to decrease the hazards of the game, against which public criticism was severe, the old Intercollegiate Athletic Association broke

up in 1896. The situation became so bad that President Roosevelt, a Harvard man, personally took a hand in it, but it was not until 1905 that twenty-eight institutions formed the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Walter Camp served on the rules committee of this body from the time it was established until the very day of his death, nineteen years later. He was easily its most valuable and respected member; his insight into the probable results of new rules was almost uncanny.

#### THE AUTHOR

In 1889 Camp began the publication of the first of his "All-America" articles, long a feature of one of the nation's leading weeklies. To make Walter Camp's mythical eleven was the highest thing any college football man could hope for. But this son of Yale was versatile; novels, fiction for boys, books on auction bridge, golf, health, were added to his works on football tactics.

#### IN CALIFORNIA

In 1892, Stanford secured Walter Camp to coach the Cardinal for its second

game with California on December 17. Lee McClung, another Yale man, coached California. Both men officiated at the game, which ended in a 10-10 tie.

It was not until 1923 that Walter Camp made another "official" appearance at a Stanford-California Big Game. Then, as the honor guest of the two universities, he sat upon the coaches' bench during the first game in the California Memorial Stadium. His simple declaration, "The Stanford-California Big Game is the greatest football spectacle in America," was flashed over the wires to a thousand sport editors who were waiting for a "quote."

#### FINIS

On the morning of March 14, 1925, Walter Camp, dean of the football rules committee, did not attend the meeting of that body, then in session in New York City. W. R. Roper, head coach at Princeton, went to call him at his room and found him dead. His heart had stopped during the night, and the next day the nation knew that the "Father of American Football" had completed his work on earth.

