



Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics (Sports and History)

Ronald A. Smith

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Perhaps more than any other two colleges, Harvard and Yale gave form to American intercollegiate athletics--a form that was inspired by the Oxford-Cambridge rivalry overseas, and that was imitated by colleges and universities throughout the United States. Focusing on the influence of these prestigious eastern institutions, this fascinating study traces the origins and development of intercollegiate athletics in America from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. Smith begins with a historical overview of intercollegiate athletics and details the evolution of individual sports--crew, baseball, track and field, and especially football. Then, skillfully setting various sports events in their broader social and cultural contexts, Smith goes on to discuss many important issues that are still relevant today: student-faculty competition for institutional athletic control; the impact of the professional coach on big-time athletics; the false concept of amateurism in college athletics; and controversies over eligibility rules. He also reveals how the debates over brutality and ethics created the need for a central organizing body, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, which still runs college sports today. Sprinkled throughout with spicy sports anecdotes, from the Thanksgiving Day Princeton-Yale football game that drew record crowds in the 1890s to a meeting with President Theodore Roosevelt on football violence, this lively, in-depth investigation will appeal to serious sports buffs as well as to anyone interested in American social and cultural history.

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