“And We’re Dropping Them?”: Managing Transitions in Intercollegiate Football at Bowdoin College, 1946–1964

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In the fall of 1963, the University of Texas was named consensus college football national champions by dint of their 10-0 record. As the Southwestern Conference champion, the Longhorns received a bid to the Cotton Bowl in Dallas on New Year’s Day 1964, where they defeated the #2-ranked United States Naval Academy (Navy) and Heisman Trophy winner (and future National Football League star) Roger Staubach, 28-6. The win gave Texas its first-ever national title, one they would repeat at the end of the decade with the last all-White squad to lay claim the mythical title. Navy had to settle for winning the Lambert Trophy, awarded by vote to the top team in the East.¹

Elsewhere in the college football landscape, other changes were in evidence. Instant replay technology debuted during the broadcast of the Army-Navy game in December. Several weeks before, in the rural and forested State of Maine, two other football rivals were preparing for a gridiron showdown of their own. Bowdoin College and the University of Maine were set to battle at Alumni Field on Maine’s campus in Orono, with the winner claiming the “State Series” title, the de facto college football championship of the Pine Tree State. Four Maine schools—Bates College (in Lewiston), Colby College (in Waterville), Bowdoin (in Brunswick) and Maine—competed in a round-robin schedule, the State Series, with the team with the best record among the four awarded the crown. Both Bowdoin and Maine entered the season finale undefeated in State Series play. Bowdoin had beaten Bates at home 14-7 the previous week on a late touchdown, and had edged Colby in Waterville 21-13 two weeks earlier. Maine had soundly beaten both Bates (49-0) and Colby (55-12) to set up the November 9 showdown. The Bowdoin student newspaper, the Orient, gave this succinct preview of the game: “The final verdict of the 1963 State Series will be, as predicted, handed down at Orono tomorrow . . . Maine’s combined scoring in the two series games of 104 points indicates that the Bowdoin defense is about to face its stiffest test to date.”²

But this highly anticipated contest was not merely a season-ending battle between two regional grid rivals. The game would be the penultimate one in the series, which began in 1893. The previous April, Bowdoin’s Governing Boards

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Committee on Physical Education had voted not to play Maine in football after the 1964 season. According to Bowdoin Athletic Director Malcolm “Mal” Morrell, since “the Bowdoin-Maine football game always seemed to be the highlight of the athletic year for both institutions . . . (it was) extremely difficult for Bowdoin to take action to end the football series, even though such action seemed to be in the best interests of the undergraduates.”

This research investigates how an individual institution, specifically Bowdoin—a private, academically selective, all-male liberal arts college in southern Maine, with an enrollment of well under a thousand—experienced and responded to shifts in the competitive landscape of intercollegiate athletics in the management of its football program in the period from 1946, when the College resumed the program following the end of World War II, until the mid-1960s. This research examines how the evolution of intercollegiate athletics and football and the unique organizational and managerial elements peculiar to American higher education influenced operation of Bowdoin’s football program, with a specific focus on the management of stakeholder expectations in the context of the cessation of the annual matchup with Maine that had existed for 71 years.

**Intercollegiate Athletics:**
**Managing Stakeholder Perceptions**

From even before the very first contest between teams from separate institutions, the appropriate role of athletics in higher education has been actively debated. While students first initiated and organized athletic programs for health and fitness benefits, the focus quickly shifted away from participation-based programs toward institution-maintained programs that sought to achieve primacy over rival institutions. Proponents of the development of “big-time” athletic programs, as embodied today by those at many National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) Division I institutions, cite the ability of these programs to create a sense of community among campus constituencies and to promote the institution in general, while critics note that academic integrity is often sacrificed in the pursuit of athletic success, and that institutional resources are misdirected away from academics to support athletics. Intercollegiate athletics in the United States has evolved to mean different things to different stakeholder groups, which include students, faculty, administrators, coaches, parents, boosters, alumni, and the general public. These varied collections seek a variety of outcomes from intercollegiate athletics, including entertainment, a way to create bonds with the institution, a chance for physical activity, and, for some, an opportunity for professional advancement.

**Football at Bowdoin:**
**From Inception to World War II**

Bowdoin College, founded in 1794, was among the grouping of American institutions that first developed intercollegiate athletic programs, initiating these programs in the late 19th century. At that point, Bowdoin’s athletic schedules included many of the better-known and academically respected institutions in the Northeast, including Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale, as well as more similarly situ-