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College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era

By Kurt Edward Kemper. Published in 2009 by University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago (265 pages)

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College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era is a historical account of the college football world and its relationship to the greater issues taking place in Wartime and Post War America. Issues of the day such as segregation, anti communism and patriotism, and university governance and its impact and role on college football dominate this well written fascinating account of sport life during these times. In fact, I consider myself a diehard college football and Ohio State fan, but had no idea of the decisions being made on college campuses regarding the Rose Bowl until this book by Kurt Edward Kemper.

Kemper sets the foundation for understanding the cultural significance that postwar college football represented to American life by analyzing its genesis during World War I and World War II. Most diehard college football fans have no concept that the military and specifically Douglas MacArthur were in part responsible for sport and specifically football participation being synonymous with patriotism and creating honorable Americans. For instance, the importance of the Army/Navy football game rose to a fever pitch during these times due to this association of American life, sport, and patriotism. These specific yet entertaining facts are prevalent throughout the book. Kemper uses this style to build the readers knowledge and lead them into an analysis of postwar football specifically concentrating on four universities: Ohio State, Louisiana State, Alabama, and UCLA.

In the first chapter, *Pasadena: The Terms of Postwar Football*, Kemper delves into the Cold War's impact on college football. During these times the threat of Soviet influence created a policy of containment not one of confrontation and aggression used to win the great wars. Thus, football served as a natural outlet for Americans to exhibit their "evidence of superiority" (p.18) that was lacking in their foreign policy. Kemper is able to delineate the connection of college football's continued growth and popularity in the American culture with this containment philosophy and the resulting blow to America's fragile psyche during these times. He is able to

show that college football was the sport that demonstrated our “ambitions, technological superiority, and material affluence” (p. 21) that was missing in society. The book uses this foundation to then look into the selection of the participants of the 1962 Rose Bowl and the resulting chaos at Ohio State.

In the second chapter, *Columbus: Struggling for the Soul of the Cold War University*, Kemper deftly describes a situation where faculty at Ohio State declined an invitation to participate in the Rose Bowl. Essentially, this decision was a result of the faculty wanting more control over athletics and more emphasis on academic rigor, federally sponsored research, and graduate education. Kemper is able to use historical facts from the Western Conference and then the Big Ten Conference and their member schools to highlight why this decision was made and the resulting chaos and political turmoil it caused in the Ohio State and Big Ten Community. The relationship to the Cold War is also made evident due to the community and media’s support of college football and its association as patriotic and American. When the faculty then challenged football at Ohio State in their own attempt to improve America’s quality of student, it was seen as anti-American and an attack on our way of life. Kemper is able to shed light on the complex relationships existing at the time between the Cold War, faculty, the community, and college football at Ohio State and its resulting impact on Louisiana State and Alabama.

In the third and fourth chapters Kemper details the racial tensions at LSU and Alabama and the resulting impacts on the college football teams and the Rose Bowl of 1962. Regarding LSU, the Louisiana legislature passed a law prohibiting all interracial athletic participation and directed that spectators use segregated seating. The ramifications and historical precedent of this decision is then chronicled throughout the chapter eventually leading to a detailed explanation of the impact on LSU’s athletic program. Essentially, the Tigers and the LSU community limited their Bowl participation possibilities with their adherence to these segregationist policies and culture existing at the time. Kemper then shows that LSU and the state of Louisiana actually changed their view of playing against integrated teams primarily to try to secure a bid to the Rose Bowl and to be seen as celebrating “American distinctiveness and unity” (p. 115). However, LSU eventually accepted an Orange Bowl bid defeating an integrated Colorado team. Alabama on the other hand was undefeated and in a better position to receive the Rose Bowl bid due to the fact they openly played integrated teams. College football was used to form a common bond with other states and universities in the nation which was needed considering Alabama fielded a white only team. Kemper is able to illustrate how Alabama’s football culture was used to combat a growing discontent in the Media against Alabama being selected to the 1962 Rose Bowl. He also unravels the racial tensions that this discontent evolved from and the UCLA student protests that led Alabama to select the Sugar Bowl not the Rose Bowl as their postseason contest.

The fifth chapter, *Westwood: College Football and Cold War Dissent*, reveals UCLA as embracing a culture of student activism and Western Exceptionalism. This driving engine of anti segregation, equality and opportunity seen at UCLA was in part responsible for the Bruins integrated athletic teams. Kemper delves into the relationships existing between love of Bruin Football, student free speech and activism, and the possibility of playing a segregated Alabama team in the 1962 Rose Bowl. Essentially UCLA students were successful at defining their cause

to the administration and greater community in such a manner that resulted in the eventual selection of Minnesota, not LSU or Alabama as the 1962 Rose Bowl participant.

Overall, *College Football and American Culture in the Cold War Era* is a fact filled account of how the political and social climate of the Cold War era impacted the selection of the participants of the 1962 Rose Bowl game. Kurt Edward Kemper deftly identifies prominent issues such as segregation, student governance and activism, and patriotism and their role in defining collegiate football policy. The book is written in a precise and factual manner that flows well from topic to topic that will please both the sport history crowd and the college football fanatic.