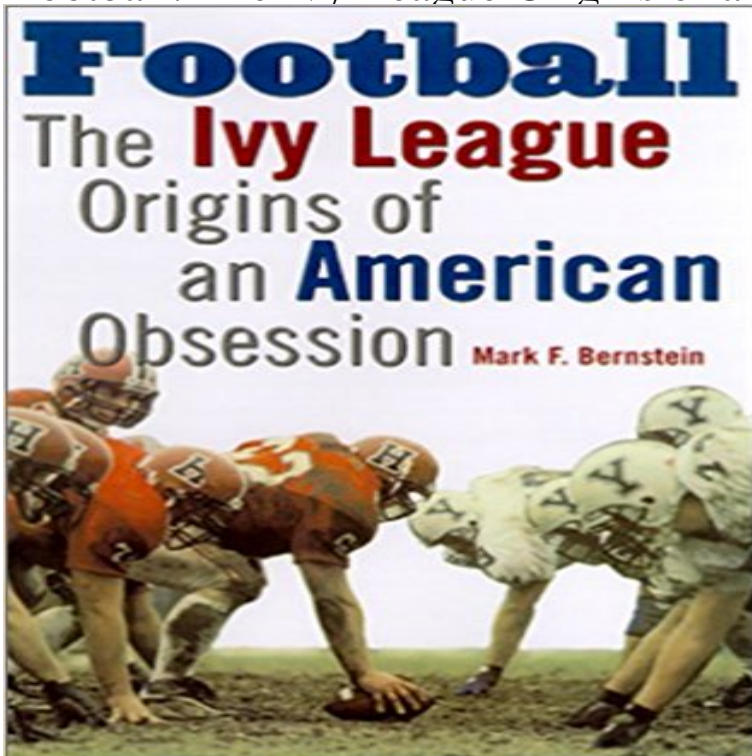


Football: The Ivy League Origins of an American Obsession



Every autumn American football fans pack large college stadiums or crowd around grassy fields to root for their favorite teams. Most are unaware that this most popular American sport was created by the teams that now make up the Ivy League. From the day Princeton played the first intercollegiate game in 1869, these major schools of the northeast—Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Yale—shaped football as we now know it. Almost every facet of the game still bears their imprint: they created the All-America team, produced the first coaches, devised the basic rules, invented many of the strategies, developed much of the equipment, and even named the positions. Both the Heisman and Outland trophies are named for Ivy League players. Crowds of 80,000 no longer attend Ivy League games as they did seventy years ago, and Ivy teams are not the powerhouses they once were, but at times they can still be a step ahead of the rest of football, as in 1973 when Brown and Penn started the first black quarterbacks to face each other in major college history. In this rich history, Bernstein shows that much of the culture that surrounds American football, both good and bad, has its roots in the Ivy League. The college fight song is an Ivy League creation (Yale was written by Cole Porter), as are the marching bands that play them. With their long winning streaks and impressive victories, Ivy teams started a national obsession with football in the first decades of the twentieth century that remains alive today. But football was almost abolished early on because of violence in Ivy games, and it took President Theodore Roosevelt to mediate disagreements about rough play in order for football to remain a college sport. Gambling and ticket scalping were as commonplace then as now, as well as payoffs and recruiting abuses, fueled by the

tremendous amount of money generated by the games, revenue that was oftentimes greater than that collected by the rest of the university. But the Ivy teams confronted those abuses, and in so doing helped develop our ideals about the role of athletics in college life. Although Ivy League football and its ancient rivalries have disappeared from big-time sports by their own accord, their legacy remains with every snap of the ball.

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