Ross-Ade

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Published by Purdue University Press

Kriebel, Robert C.
Ross-Ade: Their Purdue Stories, Stadium, and Legacies.
Purdue University Press, 2019.
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Part II
Ross-Ade: Their Stadium
A time for reflection

It was a time for reflection, celebration, progress, pride, and controversy. Lafayette turned 100 years old. Purdue started on its second fifty. West Lafayette ventured into its second year as a city instead of a town. Ross-Ade Stadium remained a topic of pride. So did Harry Leslie. On January 7, 1925, the Republicans in the Indiana Legislature elected State Representative Leslie as their presiding officer—Speaker of the House.

Then in a speech in early April, Edward Mahin, a professor of analytical chemistry at Purdue, stunned a conference audience in Ohio and the college football world. He said:

Intercollegiate sport is now on a professional basis. The homecoming football game is the occasion for liquor drinking debauches. The present system of college football is a detriment to the health and physical soundness of many of its players and even to their lives.

One of the principles of the Western [Big Ten] Conference is that control of athletics shall be in the hands of the faculties. I venture to say that if the principle was really enforced literally and in spirit the conference would no longer be known as the Big Ten. It would be the Big Zero.

The only practicable solution for this momentous problem of higher education is to be found in the absolute divorcement of the
college from this enterprise of intercollegiate athletics. The few outstanding coaches demand and receive salaries that are absurdly out of proportion to those paid real teaching and research geniuses in the scientific and research fields. Under these circumstances it remains for the college that can obtain large athletic funds to get and to keep these coaches, and it is these schools that are, in the long run, able to win high places in the championship tables...

The championship business revolves itself into the matching of the wits and skill of the coaches and the wits and the purses of the alumni and the sporting public, each college against the other...

And we have the stadium with us. No college today is complete without it. When the decision is given by a certain college not to be outdone in the stadium race, a drive for funds must be organized. There is a commonly held notion that students are back of these athletics 100 percent. This is a fallacy. (Lafayette Journal and Courier, September 2, 1978)

Fourteen weeks after his tirade, Mahin left Purdue for another job he described as being “in the heart of an industrial district where training students in metals testing and in the investigation of research problems are of the highest importance. It affords a broader field for my research work.” The name of the “industrial district”? South Bend, Indiana. The place? Notre Dame.

On August 9, Harry Leslie took over as General Secretary of the Purdue Alumni Association. By that time, the long-awaited Purdue history, Fifty Years of Progress, 203 pages written by Hepburn and Sears, hit the bookshelves. Part of the book read:

The character of alumni appointments to the [Purdue Board of Trustees] already has [in 1925] more than vindicated the [new state] law of 1921. Franklin F. Chandler, Lafayette, chief engineer of Ross Gear and Tool Co., Class of 1889, was joined by Perry
Howard Crane, of Zionsville, Class of 1909, a dairy farmer and cattle breeder, and David Edward Ross of Lafayette, Class of 1893.

Ross will be remembered in the gratitude of all succeeding generations at Purdue as the donor, with George Ade, of the Ross-Ade Field. He has been one of the heaviest contributors to the Purdue Memorial Union Building and as chairman of the building committee has rendered an invaluable service. Less spectacular, but of equal value, are his quiet contributions to the procedure of the Board. His sound judgment as a businessman is of the utmost usefulness to a body whose concerns in last analysis are chiefly those of business. (Hepburn and Sears, 138)

Certain of the book’s comments pointedly countered Professor Mahin’s anti-football diatribe:

Toward athletics the alumni of Purdue as of other institutions feel a special patronage. In respect [to] football, for reasons not necessary to recount, this solicitude has become increasingly tender. A special jinx has seemed to take the team in charge and the utmost efforts of team members and their coaches, of students and alumni, and of friendly “boosters” have seemed unequal to dislodging him. Only with the coming of Coach James M. Phelan, formerly of Notre Dame and an exponent of that institution’s technique, has a new day seemed to dawn. With new hope among the men there came material encouragement besides in the gift to Purdue of sixty-five acres of land lying west and north of Stuart Field.

This tract of land...was strategic for university expansion. Its acquisition releases Stuart Field [space] for eventual development on other lines, and makes the power plant the center of the future university. [The stadium] represented a most generous gift from two of the university’s progressive and most loyal alumni, David
Throughout 1925, George Ade mostly wrote articles for *Hearst’s International* magazine. Among them—rare for Ade—were autobiographical pieces like “For the First Time in My Life I’m Going to Talk about Myself,” “George Ade Remembers the Good Old Days When One Might Have a Big Night for 45 Cents,” and “To Get Along, Keep on Being a Country Boy.” *Liberty* magazine printed Ade’s story titled “The Persecuted Wife.”

On the night of October 21, 1925, the noted entertainer Paul White-man and his orchestra played a concert for about 500 patrons in Purdue’s Memorial Gymnasium. Less than two weeks after that, John Phillip Sousa’s military band played two shows in the Purdue Armory.

On November 21, one year after the triumphant dedication game in Ross-Ade Stadium, Purdue visited Indiana University for football in Bloomington. At that point, the 1925 Purdue team under Coach Jimmy Phelan had won three games and lost four. On its new Ross-Ade Stadium field, the team had lost to Wabash thirteen to seven, then had beaten DePauw thirty-nine to nothing, Rose Polytechnic forty-four to nothing, and Franklin twenty to nothing, then lost to Northwestern thirteen to nine.

In Bloomington, George Ade, who had just written the screenplay and titles for the silent movie *Old Home Week*, stood for Purdue alumni in a halftime ceremony. Harry Kurrie, president of the Monon Railroad, represented IU alumni. The men shook hands, then unveiled an “old oaken bucket” trophy. About 25,000 fans saw the teams play to a scoreless tie for the first honor of possessing the bucket. The bucket was said to have come from a well on a farm near North Vernon, Indiana. Legend held that Confederate
John Hunt Morgan’s thirsty forces from Kentucky drank well water from that bucket during their Civil War raid through southern Indiana and Ohio in July 1863.

A chain bolted to the rescued bucket would display shiny new metal “P” or “I” links to be added each fall. The links would show which team won each annual game. In the case of 1925, though, an “IP” would need to be crafted to reflect the tie game. In this situation, the schools each would display the bucket in their trophy cases for six months. The next “bucket game” would take place in Ross-Ade Stadium on November 20, 1926.