Ross-Ade

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Maybe sports news could calm the growing Depression jitters. In Lafayette, the American Legion and other sponsors in January 1930 launched the first annual Golden Gloves boxing tournament. Amateurs from thirty-five miles away could enter. Their nightly bouts ran until February in the National Guard Armory. The first-year champions included four students from Purdue. They were flyweight Bernard Silverman, middleweight J. E. Campbell, light heavyweight Lin Harvey, and heavyweight Sig Grecius.

Purdue’s basketball team won the Big Ten crown in March mere months after Coach Phelan’s team had claimed the 1929 conference football title. On April 10, 1930, the Purdue Trustees, hearing from so many hopeful fans, voted to add 10,000 bleacher seats to the bowl-shaped but empty north end of Ross-Ade Stadium, install a radio broadcasting booth, and move the press box from the west to the east grandstands.

Workmen poured concrete and bolted in seats where, since 1924, only the terraced earth had held football end zone standees. The men moved the playing field fifteen yards further north. The new seats raised stadium capacity to 23,074, and there was space left at the upper rim of the bowl for more standing room or extra seats or both.

That summer the Purdue Trustees voted to give a name to the old mechanical engineering building. It had been built, had been burned in a natural gas explosion, and was then rebuilt in the 1890s. Now “Heavilon Hall” would honor the structure’s chief do-
nor, Amos Heavilon. He was a benevolent Purdue man who farmed in Clinton County, Indiana.

On May 9, 1930, federal census takers totaled up 57,535 residents in steadily growing Tippecanoe County. Blue-collar Lafayette with its factory chimneys now contained 26,240, and prosperous West Lafayette 5,095. By the time Purdue’s classes began in September, the red brick campus enrollment reached a record 5,750.

The Federal Radio Commission authorized a Purdue experimental television station in the School of Electrical Engineering. A week after that Purdue dedicated a new Pharmacy Building. An eighteen-hole public golf course opened north of Lindbergh Road outside West Lafayette. Twenty-year-old Joe Pottlitzer assumed duties as the course professional. In Washington, D.C., the venerable Dr. Harvey W. Wiley died at eighty-six. A member of the first Purdue faculty in 1874, Wiley had left Purdue for Washington and risen to fame as a leader in federal pure food and drug tests and laws. A commemorative postage stamp in Wiley’s honor already was being planned.

During the summer of 1930, Purdue—again with the help of Captain Aretz and his Shambaugh Field equipment—became the first American University to offer flight training for college credit. The aviator Amelia Earhart took office as the first president of the Ninety-Nines, a women pilots’ group, and joined the new Ludington Airlines in Philadelphia as a vice president. She set a women’s speed record of more than 181 miles per hour over a three-kilometer course in July and acquired a transport pilot license in October.

In Hazelden at age sixty-four, George Ade touched up one of his old campus-football plays—The College Widow. Ade’s new script served as the blueprint for a motion picture. The film played in theaters both as Maybe It’s Love and Eleven Men and a Girl.
Because he had invested in land, the economic hard times never quite reached Ade. He did experience difficulty in selling his writing. He did keep a hand in his craft by writing piles of letters. He reminisced in print and with cronies about happier days. There were winter sojourns to Miami Beach, Rotary luncheons, fellowship dinners, and occasional attacks on Democrats. The liberal, old newspaperman became increasingly conservative as he watched the changes of the century, but he also stoically followed his established routines (Tobin, 145).

Ade also wrote revealing answers to an inquiry from a Lafayette salesman friend and one-time Indiana Governor candidate, James Kirby Risk:

I can hardly find time to tell you all of the things I have done around Purdue. When the Memorial Gym was planned and Purdue had to raise a certain sum to meet an appropriation by the state, the university fund was still short $2,500 on the last day. I chipped in with the amount required. I helped out on the Harlequin shows for a number of years and bought the boys about $2,000 worth of scenery, including the plush drop curtain still in use. I directed the building of the Sigma Chi house and spent about $25,000. Also I handled the alumni magazine for a number of years.

Dave Ross discovered the site for the stadium and showed me the layout. We bought sixty-five acres of land and later matched up contributions made by alumni so that our total contribution to the project was somewhere between $60,000 and $70,000. I have no accurate record of the amount we spent.

It is not my desire to blow about the things I have done for Purdue because I derived a real pleasure from getting in on such large and worthy enterprises. You must remember that Dave Ross and I are old bachelors. Every person who begins to grow old must adopt something. Old maids adopt cats and canaries. Dave Ross and I adopted Purdue.
It is only fair to add that Dave has done much more for the University than I have done. The amount of work he has given to the school and the amount of money he has given, without many people knowing about it, entitle him to first place among the alumni and I want it distinctly understood that I am not presuming to put myself in his class as a Purdue benefactor. (Tobin, 147-148)

Ade contributed an essay titled “Purdue” for the April 1930 issue of College Humor magazine. He wrote four “At Long Range” commentaries in The Purdue Alumnus for January, April, May, and June 1930. For The Purdue Engineer of October 1930, he penned “Trying to Get Along without Juice.”

The economic tough times persisted. With an eye on their sinking profits, in September 1930 the Ross Gear and Tool Company directors reduced quarterly stock dividends from seventy-five to fifty cents per share.

Coach Noble Kizer’s first Purdue football team won six games and lost two in the fall of 1930. In the expanded Ross-Ade Stadium this team topped Baylor twenty to seven before 11,000 fans, beat Wisconsin seven to six in front of 25,000, and drubbed Butler thirty-three to nothing. Another standing room only crowd saw Indiana win the Old Oaken Bucket seven to six in Ross-Ade on November 22.

However, a week later a certain gloom tried to set in. Football season revenue at Purdue showed a deficit of $97,000. President Elliott, Ross, and R. B. Stewart set forth to control and oversee Purdue’s athletic finances for a while. The three decided to suspend baseball, track, and other minor sports and keep only the moneymaking football and basketball teams (Freehafer, 39). But they rescinded those decisions after deciding that the Ross-Ade
Foundation could help. For seven years, the concept of the Ross-Ade Foundation had, in fact, spurred high-level thinking about financing for, and cooperation with, Indiana industry, too. Ross, who some friends swore “had a new idea every morning,” (Freehafer, 35) led that thinking.

Ross liked the way Hoosier farmers could come to Purdue for advice about seeds, plant varieties, fertilizer, insecticides, planting, cultivating, machinery, harvesting, or crop storage, or to learn about any other new research. Ross thought the same should be true of industry. To that end, he and Elliott had hosted the one conference of industrial leaders in 1926. Ross and Dean Potter had visited research labs and paid special attention to the Mellon Institute in Pittsburgh and the Wisconsin Alumni Foundation. In 1928, Elliott and Ross had created that Purdue Department of Research Relations with Industry. Henry Ford had come to look things over and to praise. However, it became obvious—at least to Ross—that the University could not readily manage the protecting and assigning of patents, the shielding of students and staff from exploitation, or the handling of money received from grants and trusts. So the team of astute minds embodied in Elliott, Stewart, Ross, and the other Trustees replaced the Department of Research Relations. The bill for legal counsel in setting up a new structure—nearly a three-year effort—came from Lafayette attorney Alison Stuart marked “no charge.” Then announcement was made on December 30, 1930 of the incorporation of a Purdue Research Foundation or PRF.

Modeled after the Ross-Ade Foundation, the founders said that PRF’s purpose would be “to assist in financing of research, and to handle matters pertaining to patenting inventions for the benefit of the university, the State of Indiana, and U.S. industry.” Elliott supplied presidential clout, Stewart the financial acumen, Stuart the legal mind, yet Ross quietly received honors by common consent for having “invented” PRF.