

THE REACTIVATION OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL

IN THE CITY OF MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA

by

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A professional paper submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

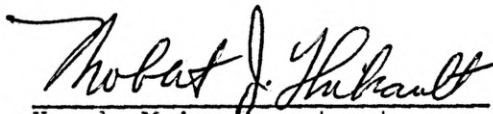
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The city of Medicine Hat, Alberta has a present population of 25,000 people. It is located in the southeast corner of Alberta, 180 miles east of Calgary, Alberta, 130 miles north of Havre, Montana and 180 miles west of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. During the high school year 1962-63 football was dropped from the Medicine Hat High School athletic program. The writer began teaching at Medicine Hat High School during the 1966-67 school year and was disappointed to find that football was not a part of the school program. The writer began a campaign in the fall of 1966 to reactivate football. This paper is the result of this campaign.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the steps necessary in reactivating high school football in the city of Medicine Hat, Alberta.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Philosophy of High School Athletics in Medicine Hat

The athletic program in Medicine Hat differs greatly from the average high school athletic program in most Montana communities. In Medicine Hat the school administrators agree that the athletic program is a necessary part of the total school program, but it should not be the dominating area of the school program.

The coaching staffs of the schools in Medicine Hat are on a voluntary basis. An individual is hired to teach in his qualified field if possible, and if the individual feels that he has the time or is interested in a particular extracurricular activity he may volunteer his services. A physical education instructor is hired for his teaching ability first and his coaching ability second. Because physical education are working in the field of athletics it is assumed that they will be willing to be the organizers for athletics for their respective schools, but it need not be so. The physical education instructor may have the same working hours as an English or social studies instructor. If the coach has a poor season, he does not have to worry about his job or his future. It is a relaxed approach to coaching, win or lose the instructor knows he will still have his teaching job for the next year and if he wants it, his coaching job.

The question arises as to remuneration for coaching. In Medicine Hat the coaches are not paid extra for their time spent in coaching, but

the wage structure in Medicine Hat is much higher than in Montana which compensates for the extra money that coaches receive in Montana. Most coaches in Medicine Hat high schools receive released time to compensate for the time spent in coaching duties.

The Student Union, made up of elected student representatives, finance the entire interscholastic program of their respective high schools. The larger the school the more money available through fees, the larger the athletic budget. At Medicine Hat High School the average athletic budget is three thousand dollars. This includes such activities as football, volleyball, basketball, badminton, soccer, track and field. Uniforms, player equipment, travel expenses, and officials fees account for most of the budget. The sources of revenue are limited to student activity tickets and fund raising functions. Gate receipts add a little but most spectators are students from the high school. A few adults attend school functions, but it is the general feeling of the adults that the functions belong to the students and the adults should stay out.

The general attitude towards interschool athletics in Medicine Hat is scaled down considerably when compared with the state of Montana. The administration, instructors, and students believe it is an important part of the total educational program, but it should not dominate the program. Having a winning team is fine, but the goal in athletics is to develop good citizens and a winning team is a secondary consideration.

During the school year 1962-63 the football program at Medicine Hat High School was dropped. It should be stated at this time that this was a decision by the principal of the high school and not a school board policy statement. There were a number of reasons for this decision.

The reasons will be discussed, but not set in any order of importance because the writer feels that none of the reasons alone is sufficient justification for cancellation of the program.

The reasons why football was cancelled were: 1) poor equipment, 2) lack of sufficient equipment, 3) injuries, 4) lack of interest by coaches, 5) disciplinary problems, and 6) lack of sufficient competition.

Poor Equipment

The equipment that was still in existence at Medicine Hat High School when the writer began teaching was obsolete and of poor quality. The helmets had not been looked after as to cleaning and repair. The same quality shoulder pads as used in previous years are now being used by bantam football teams (boys 11-14 years of age), therefore they could not be expected to stand the strain of high school football. Also many of the helmets and shoulder pads were hand-me-downs sent to the school by the professional football team in Calgary in hopes that football would continue if there was equipment available. The other items of equipment such as hip and kidney pads, thigh pads and knee pads were also hand-me-downs. The uniforms were also supplied by the professional teams and the sizing was not suitable for high school boys. The pants ranged from sizes 34 to 46, much too big for high school boys. The sweaters were also large, usually faded, torn or just worn out. Boys 15 to 18 years of age were expected to wear this hapless array of equipment and still feel proud that they played football.

Lack of Equipment

In conjunction with poor equipment, many of the boys who could not find adequate protection in existing equipment and could afford it, bought their own. This created three problems. First, in many cases it limited the number of boys who wanted to play football. Secondly, when a boy left school he usually took his equipment with him. Thirdly, the boys usually bought the cheapest quality of football equipment so that after one or two years the equipment could not be repaired to be resold.

Injuries

Due to the lack of properly fitted equipment and poor equipment it was logical that injuries would increase over the years. The last year that football was played in Medicine Hat there were the following injuries: three collar bones broken due to poor shoulder pads, three rib injuries due to the lack of proper blocking pads, two minor concussions and two severe concussions due to poor helmets, plus a number of minor injuries. These injuries discouraged many parents from allowing their sons to participate in football.

Lack of Interest

The people responsible for athletics at Medicine Hat High School devoted most of their time to other areas. The situation became so serious that the boys were coaching themselves. Boys of this age cannot be expected to look after themselves adequately in areas such as conditioning, training, discipline and injuries. This

lack of interest carried over to the student body and the attendance at games became very small.

Disciplinary Problems

Competition prior to the cancellation of football was with Lethbridge, Alberta and Havre, Montana. Games were played on Friday evenings or Saturday afternoons, necessitating overnight trips. Discipline became a major problem on road trips, which in turn became a problem at Medicine Hat High School. The administration and public soon became concerned with this problem which produced another reason for the abandonment of the football program.

Lack of Sufficient Competition

During the time immediately prior to the cancellation of football at Medicine Hat High School the only school participating in the sport in the general area of Medicine Hat was Lethbridge Collegiate Institute of Lethbridge, Alberta. Also included was Havre High School of Havre, Montana. The cost of transportation lodging and meals became a major concern. The Student Union of Medicine Hat High School felt that the money could be better spent on some other projects. Gate receipts were very low due to a lack of interest by the student population brought about by the combination of reasons listed above.

In addition to the above reasons for cancellation of football at Medicine Hat High School there were two other reasons not directly associated with the problem at school, although they were additional factors in the decision by the administration. The two reasons were

soccer and the neglect of the high school to communicate information concerning high school activities to the local newspaper, radio and television.

Medicine Hat has a large segment of the population that cling to European games and traditions. Soccer is the primary participation and spectator sport of Europe. The cost of uniforms and equipment is low as compared to football. The poor coaching and promotion of football gave way to aggressive soccer promoters. The administration felt that this sport still allowed boys to be active in the fall.

Cooperation between high school and news media was at a low ebb. The writer feels that in order to promote any activity a good relationship must be maintained with the news media in order to let the public know what is happening in the schools.

The combination of all the above reasons led to the cancellation of the football program at Medicine Hat High School.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN OF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TO MEDICINE HAT, ALBERTA

The campaign to return high school football to Medicine Hat began in the fall of 1966 and continued until the fall of 1968, at which time the Eastern Nine Football League was organized and began league play. The league was made up of the following schools: Medicine Hat High School, Crescent Heights High School, McCoy High School, all from Medicine Hat and the fourth team from Brooks, Alberta. Brooks is located 60 miles west of Medicine Hat.

There were now three high schools in the city of Medicine Hat each capable of supporting one football team. The people responsible for interscholastic activities in the three high schools were very interested in reactivating a football program. In the fall of 1966 the three physical education instructors met informally a number of times to discuss the possibility of reactivating football in the city high schools.

In April, 1967 the writer corresponded with Mr. George Hansen, Minor Football Co-ordinator of the Calgary Stampeders Football Club, one of nine professional teams who had offered their services in assisting new areas and areas such as Medicine Hat in starting and developing a football program. A meeting with Mr. Hansen was held late in May, 1967. At this meeting Mr. Hansen offered several suggestions as to the methods possible for reactivating and promoting football in Medicine Hat and the surrounding area.

In June, 1967 the physical education instructors submitted a written proposal requesting the return of high school football to the principals of the three high schools in Medicine Hat. This initial proposal included the type of football to be played, suggested personnel for coaching positions and possible solutions to the problems of injuries, conditioning, equipment, competition, and transportation. Other schools districts were contacted regarding information concerning their own football programs in order to have a complete picture of the high school football program in the province of Alberta. All information from other centers was used wherever possible in the report to build a strong case for the return of high school football to the city of Medicine Hat. The principals were in full agreement that football should be part of the total high school program. It was suggested by the principals that the report should now be presented to the respective school boards and school superintendents. The superintendents recommended that the proposal be tabled until fall, when a more detailed study could be made of the possibility of having high school football returned to the school program.

During the summer of 1967 a group of students from the three high schools began their own program for returning high school football. A petition was drawn up stating that the students names appearing on the petition supported the return of football and would in every way possible support the program once it began. Over one thousand, six hundred signatures appeared on the petition. This represented eighty percent of the high school students enrolled in the three city high schools. The petition was presented to the Public School Board Superintendent on the first day

of the 1967-68 school year.

In September, 1967 as a result of due consideration of the proposal submitted by the physical education instructors and the petition submitted by the students, the two school boards set up a special committee to consider in more detail the pertinent factors involved and to subsequently report to the school boards. The personnel on this committee included the following from the two school systems concerned: the physical education instructors, the three principals or their designates, and the two superintendents. The important items discussed were: the merits of high school football, students views, cost of the program, and the operation of the program.

The Merits of High School Football

Some of the factors which seemed to support the reactivation of high school football into the three high schools included the following:

1. Football would begin immediately when the school year opened and would involve more students both as spectators and players than any other interscholastic activity presently did.
2. It would give the physically and mentally gifted individual a chance to develop his talent to the optimum. Interaction with other gifted people would make him try harder. It would challenge his ability.
3. Football develops a boy socially, physically and mentally in such ways as teaching respect for others, creating

lasting friendships, building sportsmanship, and developing responsibilities, but most of all it was a very satisfying and rewarding experience.

4. The game had a carry over value to later life particularly from a vicarious point of view. That is to say for spectators in later life, the game would be understood and appreciated more if the spectator had some previous playing experience.
5. There was wide public interest in the game in view of the national competition taking place each fall. A good measure of public support for the game locally could be expected due to the exposure of the game through television.
6. The game would, no doubt, be of help in further developing good school spirit and high student morale.
7. Nearly all of the large high schools in the province of Alberta had accepted football as a desirable form of interscholastic competition.

Student Views

A questionnaire to determine student interest in football was developed by the Student Union officers of the three high schools with the assistance of the physical education personnel. Copies were distributed to the students in the three high schools with the request that they complete the questionn-

aires and return them to the Student Union officers concerned. The percentage of returns from the total student bodies was ninety-seven percent.

The president of the Crescent Heights High School Student Union prepared the following summary statement based on the tabulated results of the student football interest survey.

"During the past month of September, 1967, the Students Unions of the city of Medicine Hat high schools have been attempting to gauge student reaction to the return of high school football. In this respect, all of the high school students in Public and Separate schools were asked to complete a survey, the results of which are contained in this statement as well as some general comments of the Students Unions concerned.

The results of the survey showed a marked preference of the students for football over soccer. Ninety percent of the students indicated they would participate in football in some manner if it returned, one third as players, two thirds as spectators. Forty percent of the students indicated they would support just football, ten percent just soccer, and forty percent both sports.

Sixty percent of the students indicated they preferred to watch football to soccer, twenty percent liked both and only fifteen percent preferred soccer. In addition if football returned, thirty percent of the students stated their parents would also support the sport by attending games.

Eighty percent of the students felt that football would help create more school spirit, since it begins early in the year. The carry over of this initial boost in school spirit would also affect attendance at other school functions and athletic events. At present, spirit is not generally stimulated until the volleyball season, commencing late in October.

In conclusion, both the students and the Student Unions feel that the return of high school football would prove a benefit for all concerned."¹

Further information concerning student interests in football

¹ Football Committee, Report re Introduction of Football in Medicine High Schools, November, 1967, pp. 3

may be obtained by examining the tabulated summary in Appendix A.

Staff Views

An attempt was made to obtain the views of staff members in the three city high schools. These views were summarized by the principals from the schools concerned and appear below.

Favor the return of football	49%
Opposed to the return of football	25%
Unconcerned	23%
Undecided	3%

Figure 1. Staff Opinions On Football

Only those opposed to the reactivation of football submitted their comments on paper. It may be that those supporting the reactivation of the sport felt their interests were being sufficiently promoted by the physical education instructors of the three high schools. It should be noted that the Football Committee made comments under several views expressed by the school staff members in Appendix B.

Cost of the Program

The data noted below provides information respecting the cost of reactivating football in the city high schools and the cost of continuing the program each year.

Expenditures:	Medicine Hat	Crescent Heights	McCoy
Player equipment (30 sets, \$50 each)	1500.00	1500.00	1500.00
Officials fees	35.00	35.00	35.00
Field equipment	<u>300.00</u>	<u>500.00</u>	<u>500.00</u>
Total	<u>1835.00</u>	<u>2035.00</u>	<u>2035.00</u>
Revenue:			
Estimated gate receipt	125.00	125.00	125.00
Student Union assistance	200.00	200.00	200.00
Alberta Amateur Football Association assistance	150.00	150.00	150.00
School Board contribution	<u>1360.00</u>	<u>1560.00</u>	<u>1560.00</u>
Total	<u>1835.00</u>	<u>2035.00</u>	<u>2035.00</u>

Figure 2. Estimated Costs for First Year of Operation

Expenditures:	Medicine Hat	Crescent Heights	McCoy
Equipment replacement for five players per team	250.00	250.00	250.00
Officials fees	35.00	35.00	35.00
Field equipment	<u>165.00</u>	<u>165.00</u>	<u>165.00</u>
Total	<u>450.00</u>	<u>450.00</u>	<u>450.00</u>
Revenue:			
Estimated gate receipts	150.00	150.00	150.00
Student Union assistance	200.00	200.00	200.00
School board contribution	<u>100.00</u>	<u>100.00</u>	<u>100.00</u>
Total	<u>450.00</u>	<u>450.00</u>	<u>450.00</u>

Figure 3. Estimated cost for Subsequent Years of Operation

Operation of the Program

A football league was to be organized from the city high schools and the high school at Brooks, Alberta. Operation of the league was to begin in the fall of 1968. The games were to be played on Friday evenings at Athletic Park in Medicine Hat. There would be two games per night with each team playing the other teams twice in the season, making a six game schedule. The top two teams at the end of the league play would participate in a playoff game which would decide the league championship.

In preparing for the football season, three phases of activity were to receive attention.

- a. Orientation. One week during the spring season was to be devoted to informing prospective players as to the conditioning program which they would be expected to follow during the summer months.
- b. Pre-Season training and conditioning. It was expected that the training and conditioning program would begin during the last week of August and continue until the first league game which would be on the third Friday in September. The physical education personnel felt that this would allow ample time to condition and teach basic fundamentals.
- c. Practice sessions. The conditioning and teaching program would continue during the regular season

During the total program involving both preparation and team playing activities, every effort would be made to develop, as a primary objective, attitudes of good sportsmanship on the part of the players in particular

and the student generally. Every effort would also be made to develop other objectives commonly associated with a good physical education program.

1968 Football Season

The Eastern Nine Football League began operation on Friday, September 20, 1968. The weatherman was not at all cooperative. It began to rain on Thursday evening and was still raining hard at 4:00 p.m., Friday when a decision had to be made whether the games should be called off or played. Opening ceremonies were postponed but after consultation with the district weather range office it was decided to go on with the games. The games were played on the outfield of a baseball park at Athletic Park. The city parks department had not the time to move in portable bleachers for spectators so that the nine hundred spectators had to stand on the sidelines in the driving rain, during the two games. The players themselves were so keyed up that the rain-storm did not upset them at all. All of the coaches were convinced that football was here to stay when the crowd exceeded their wildest expectations under the inclement weather conditions.

The opening game ceremony was held the following Friday. The Mayor of the City of Medicine Hat spoke on behalf of the city and its citizens and the Superintendent of the Public School Board spoke on behalf of the two school systems and the students. The official kick-off was handled by the Chairman of the Recreation Commission, the Recreation Director, and a long time successful football coach in the city, now retired.

At the completion of the regular season McCoy High School and Medicine Hat High School each had identical records of five wins and one loss, with each team defeating each other team once during the season. These two schools had become arch rivals during the season and the championship game was a natural climax to a very exciting and enjoyable season. During the regular season the average game attendance was over one thousand spectators. This figure exceeded by far the expectations of the administrators, physical education instructors, student union officials and the general public.

The championship game began under poor weather conditions. A dense fog covered the entire park for nearly half the game. During the first half McCoy High School scored two touchdowns but did not convert them for the extra points. In the second half the fog dissipated and Medicine Hat High School scored two unconverted touchdowns to tie the game with three minutes of playing time remaining in the game. Fortune smiled on the Medicine Hat High School Mohawks who scored a safety touch for two points to win the first Eastern Nine Football League Championship by a score of fourteen to twelve. Over two thousand spectators were in attendance at this final game of the 1968 season.

One of the most important reasons for the success of the football season was the promotion of the sport by the three city high schools. Printed posters were distributed to business establishments through out the city. Programs were printed and sold at the games. School pennants, beanies and booster buttons were available through the Student Unions.

Excellent cooperation was achieved with the news media. The local

newspaper wrote excellent accounts of the pre-season practices and league games and accompanied each account with pictures. The radio and television personnel held weekly interviews with coaching staffs and advertised the upcoming games and the results of the games played. The publicity by the news media was obtained at no charge.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The city of Medicine Hat, Alberta has a population of 25,000 people, and is located in the southeast corner of Alberta. During the school year 1962-63, football was dropped from the athletic program at Medicine Hat High School. In 1966 a campaign was initiated to return the football program to the city high schools.

The athletic program in Medicine Hat differs greatly from the average high school athletic program in most Montana communities. The coaching staffs of the schools in Medicine Hat are on a voluntary basis. An individual is first hired to teach in the qualified area, if possible and secondly to coach, if interested. The high school athletic program in Medicine Hat is financed through the Student Union fees. The larger the school the more money available for athletics. The administrators, instructors, and students believe athletics is an important part of the total educational program but it should not dominate the program.

The football program was cancelled in the 1962-63 school year because of the following reasons: 1) poor equipment, 2) lack of sufficient equipment, 3) injuries, 4) lack of interest by coaches, 5) disciplinary problems, and 6) lack of sufficient competition.

In 1966 when the campaign was initiated to return football to the city of Medicine Hat there were three high schools, each one

capable of supporting one football team. Contact was made with the Calgary Stampeders Football Club for assistance in initiating the campaign. As a result, the physical education instructors in co-operation with their principals submitted a written proposal to their respective superintendents. In September, 1967 the two school boards appointed a special committee to investigate the proposal. Topics considered by the committee were: 1) the merits of high school football, 2) student views, 3) cost of the program, and 4) the operation of the program.

The Eastern Nine Football League began operation on Friday, September 20, 1968. The average attendance during the regular season was over one thousand spectators per game and for the championship game, two thousand spectators were in attendance.

The Future of High School Football in Medicine Hat

Football is here to stay, the ground work has been accomplished by the people involved, the enthusiasm is present in the student bodies of the three high schools as well as in the lower grade schools. The exposure of football by the news media will continue to stimulate interest and the problems that caused cancellation of the football program have been resolved. The feeling is present that if any of the three physical education instructors leave, the program can be carried on by others who come to take their place. Today's physical education graduates have an adequate background in all of the popular high school team sports so that they may carry on a program without much difficulty.

When sufficient background of the sport has been taught to the players, expansion of the football league is planned. The new league might well include the Eastern Nine Football League and the three city high schools from Lethbridge, Alberta.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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High Schools, November 20, 1967, pp. 3.

APPENDIX

Appendix A
Student Football Survey

Student Football Survey

Directions: Answer all questions; check only one answer.

1. In the event that high school football returns to the Medicine Hat high schools would you support it as

- 30% (a) a player
- 60% (b) a spectator
- 4% (c) a cheerleader
- 6% (d) none of these

2. Who should finance football?

- 4% (a) students
- 36% (b) school boards
- 60% (c) both

3. Would your parents support football by attending games?

- 30% (a) yes
- 70% (b) no

4. In the event that football returns would you support

- 40% (a) football
- 10% (b) soccer
- 40% (c) both
- 10% (d) neither

5. Do you think football would create school spirit?

- 80% (a) yes
- 3% (b) no
- 17% (c) no opinion

6. As a spectator, which would you prefer to watch?

- 15% (a) soccer
- 60% (b) football
- 20% (c) both
- 5% (d) neither

7. Did you attend any high school soccer games last year?

- 53% (a) yes
- 47% (b) no

8. Do you feel that there are capable football coaches in the school system at the present time?

- 45% (a) yes
- 5% (b) no
- 50% (c) do not know

9. If a football dance were to follow the games, would you attend

- 4% (a) the dance
- 24% (b) the game
- 65% (c) both
- 7% (d) neither

10. Who won the 1966 Grey Cup game?

- 2% (a) Toronto Argonauts
- 92% (b) Saskatchewan Roughriders
- 6% (c) Hamilton Tigercats

General Comments:

Appendix B
Staff Views Opposing Football

Staff Views Opposing Football

These are noted as submitted without additional comments.

1. The philosophy of Physical Education in a school system is often set down as follows:

- a) Classroom instruction followed by intramurals and lastly interscholastic competition.

- b) Physical Education should be for the masses rather than the select.

2. Although all aspects of Physical Education are important, time and equipment should not be directed entirely toward interschool teams.

Committee Comment:

The word entirely seems out of place in the above statement. Attention is given to all aspects of Physical Education.

3. Can football be justified at \$100.00 per player when there is not enough teaching equipment in the classroom.
4. To prevent injuries, football players must be in top form. How do you do this unless training begins in August?
5. Soccer is considerably less costly, equipment is already on hand, teams are operant. The cost to the School Boards will be no more than those provided for currently.

Committee Comment:

It is not proposed to eliminate soccer.

6. Soccer has more appeal from the point of view of student interest and participation as well as spectator interest.

Committee Comment:

This does not seem to agree with student views.

7. Would there be a supervisory body to supervise the coaches? Coaches as individuals and groups tend to become too involved with presenting victorious teams so that good judgement is not exercised in relationship to the welfare of the players and the objectives of athletics.

Committee Comment:

The physical education instructors and principals have agreed that the overriding concern of football competition should not be to develop and maintain victorious teams. Rather the primary objective should be to develop an attitude of good sportsmanship on the part of the players and spectators alike. Other objectives commonly related to a good physical education program must also be borne in mind.

8. There is a serious problem of overlapping activities. Generally it is the same pupils who take part in athletic activities. A number of these activities overlap seasonally requiring students to practice two or more times per day. This practice is harmful to students physically and academically.

Committee Comment:

The Medicine Hat Coaches Association is proposing the following bylaw which will come into effect during the fall of 1968: No boy will be allowed to play in two major sports, football and volleyball, volleyball and basketball, at the same time.