

OUTRAGED FANS RUINED FOOTBALL GAME IN 1898

By Ellen Knight¹

Since 1891, the football field has been the scene of a rivalry between Winchester and Woburn. On the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 1898, teams from these two towns played perhaps one of the rowdiest games in their history.

With headlines about rough play, spectators rushing onto the field, players unable to control a mob, and great commotion in the street after the game, the *Boston Globe* reported that “The game today between the Woburn high school association team and the Winchester athletic club resulted in a free fight.”²

The game was played in Woburn.

“Trouble commenced in the second half, when Place, one of the Winchester guards, struck Dodge across the eyes with his nose guard, laying him out. This stopped the game for a few moments, and the crowd of spectators rushed into the field and immediately took sides, the friends of both being about evenly divided. There were peace-makers in each team and they soon got the upper hands of the hot-headed combatants, and the game was resumed.

“Shortly afterwards Dodge, after being downed, was kicked in the head.

“This caused another uproar, and again it looked as though there would be a clash between the Woburn and Winchester spectators, but it was averted by the players, who lined up again. Near the end of the game the man playing opposite Fowle, before the ball was put at play, rushed forward and struck Fowle with his fist in the chest. The reason for this was evidently because Fowle had tackled him hard a few plays before. All the spectators seeing this, and anticipating a fight, again rushed on the field.

“This time the players could not control the crowd, and the partisans of each side came together. Some blows were struck. The Woburn contingent tried to get hold of the two players who had slugged Dodge and Fowle, but the Winchester crowd kept them from danger.

“There were numerous side-show fights on a small scale. Finally the players again lined up, but it was impossible to continue the game with any success on account of the temper of the spectators. Winchester won, 6 to 0, the score being made in the first half.

“The Winchester players first left the field amid hoots and hisses. They were accompanied by their friends. When the party reached Bow st. it divided, a portion taking to Montvale av. The others following Salem st. The latter got entangled with a crowd of Woburn people and there was a general show of hard feeling.

“The other portion asked the Woburn people who accompanied them for expenses. This being refused there was more trouble and one of the visitors carried away a black eye. When the party reached Main st., it caused such a commotion and blockade of the sidewalks that the police interfered and drove them away.”

Woburn and Winchester played again during the fall of 1899 (prior to November). Able to play to the end, Woburn won 5-0.

COACH COMMENDS THE SPORT

Appointed in 1899, Coach Ernest Collins wrote “Some Facts about Football,” for *The High School Recorder* of December 1899. Some excerpts show how he viewed the game as more than rough play.

“True football in no way resembles a bull-fight or a prize-ring, as some comic papers would have us believe. Brute force is not the most important factor and, as has been proved, intellectuality is an absolute essential.”

“Football seeks to develop every faculty of body and mind. ... Parents are waking up to the idea that it is developing the boy and not making a tough of him.”

“That football is a rough game is not denied, but it is this fact that commends it to our attention. A boy is not going to have an easy time throughout his life and if he learns early how to receive hard knocks without complaint he has learned better how to receive the harder knocks which will come in the struggle with humanity as a whole. Good training in football will teach the boy how to endure any hardship which the world may present.”

“But, someone says, football is a dangerous game.... In schools where competent coaches and trainers are maintained a serious accident is seldom known. ... Many a man owes his magnificent physique and manly power to football.”

“There is another feature of the game that is seldom noticed. That is its tendency to good morals.... Every boy who hopes to be successful in football must break off every habit which would hinder his physical growth and development. Moreover, he is aided in this by his companions who are striving for the same end with himself.”

“In many schools a boy is allowed to represent the school on the football field only so long as his scholarship allows him to be a good representative of the work of the college or school. ... Not for a minute is the boy allowed to forget the aim of the institution with which he is connected. Football is a means to an end and not the end.”

