Manufacturing “Football Realism” in the Studio Era

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Abstract

Drawing upon material from the Warner Bros. Archives, this article examines the production, marketing and reception of football films released during the classical Hollywood era – specifically focusing on efforts by the studio to create and market “realistic” football action. First, the paper briefly discusses the marketing and reception of two typical football movies from the period, *College Coach* and *Over the Goal*, to argue that the public expected football scenes to resemble live games and that the studio acknowledged this desire by attempting to market their football sequences as “realistic.” Then, the paper examines two of the most well-known football movies from the period, *Knute Rockne, All American* and *Jim Thorpe – All-American*, and documents how the films’ producers attempted to ensure the movies met these standards for “football realism,” whether that meant casting college football players as extras, enlisting a football-savvy crew, or using newsreel footage during gameplay sequences.

As Hollywood entered what came to be known as “The Golden Age of Cinema,” America was simultaneously coming into what might now be referred to as “The Golden Age of Football.”¹ As Michael Oriard writes in *King Football*, America was falling in love with college football in the 1920s and 1930s, transforming the sport from a “phenomenon” into something “utterly familiar.” It is not surprising then, that football began to work its way into the nation’s movie theaters in a major way. As Oriard details, football games had been covered by newsreels since the turn of the century, but they truly came to dominate the medium after the advent of sound. He writes, “Over the 1930s football in the fall ... eventually accounted for 20 to 25 percent of newsreel footage.” And newsreels were not the only way to see football in theaters. In the 1930s alone, 48 full-length football films were produced. On top of that astonishing figure, Oriard adds that in “an additional 28 nonfootball films in the 1930s, the heroes were introduced as football stars or former stars ... or football figured in some other incidental way.” Looking beyond the ‘30s, Oriard finds that there were a total of 120 football movies produced between 1920 and 1960. In the words of Harvey Marc Zucker and Lawrence J. Babich, football films were being “grinded out by the dozen.”²

Thus far, academic work on the subject of these “Golden Era” football films has primarily focused on narrative. Murray Sperber, for instance, has described at length how the films’ narratives played fast and loose with historical facts, attempting instead to construct plots that aligned with the norms of classical Hollywood cinema. However, little has yet been written on how these films were produced, marketed and received. Moreover, not much attention has been paid to the football scenes that undergirded these football films. This article, then, turns its attention to the production, marketing and reception of several football films released by Warner Bros., an active studio in this genre. In examining these Warner Bros. films, particularly the hits

Knute Rockne, All American (1940) and *Jim Thorpe – All-American* (1951), this paper will argue that while the narratives of these films may have ventured far from historical reality, filmmakers were heavily concerned with producing “realistic” football scenes and marketing them as such.

“Football Realism”

As Sperber documents throughout his book *Shake Down the Thunder*, the Warner Bros. blockbuster biopic *Knute Rockne, All American* – perhaps the most well-known football film of the era – did not have the most direct relationship with historical truth. The movie, he writes, “is a fantasy” full of “inaccuracies and fictions.”³ Not only are complex figures like Rockne and George Gipp turned into unrecognizable saints, but the movie also completely fabricates any number of events and characters. According to Sperber, this whitewashing of Rockne’s time at Notre Dame arose out of many factors, most notably the power of Rockne’s widow to dictate the studio’s depiction of the famous coach. Also important, though, were the contemporary norms of Hollywood filmmaking. In *Onward to Victory*, Sperber draws on film scholars like Thomas Schatz to note that classical Hollywood cinema tended to rely on certain narrative conventions, including unambiguous conclusions and the reaffirmation of dominant social values. Thus, Gipp, once known for spending more time gambling than attending class, is deliberately transformed into a model student-athlete for the big screen. And, as Sperber notes, this type of change was not unique to *Knute Rockne*, as most football films produced during the classical era followed the same rules and also centered around larger-than-life football heroes who reinforced social norms.⁴

Sperber’s work in mind, it is tempting to immediately declare films like *Knute Rockne* “unrealistic.” However, “realism” has continually been one of the more complicated notions

within film studies, with theoreticians long debating what exactly the term entails. As John Ellis argues in his seminal work *Visible Fictions*, “realism” means many things to many people, with every media consumer carrying a different expectation of what “reality” is and how it should be represented. Moreover, he argues that notions of “realism” are very much historically contingent, with audiences carrying different expectations over time. “Hence,” he writes, “there is no realism, but there are realisms.”⁵

According to film scholars such as Schatz and Rick Altman, genre has long been one of the key determinants in shaping the expectations that audiences bring with them into theaters – including expectations of how a film’s particular “reality” may unfold. As Altman suggests, genres develop their own systems of normality that diverge from cultural norms in particular ways. “To accept the premises of a genre,” he writes, “is to agree to play within a special set of rules.”⁶ In *Genre and Hollywood*, Steve Neale explains how exactly these rules are formed and how audiences come to expect different “realities” across different genres. According to Neale, each film genre comes with unique “regimes of verisimilitude.”⁷ In musicals, for example, audiences find it plausible that characters will spontaneously burst into song, while in mysteries it is considered appropriate for every crime to have a perfectly tidy solution. Furthermore, Neale writes that different genres strike different balances in constructing their systems of expectations – each one uniquely weighing the dueling notions of “generic and sociocultural verisimilitude.”⁸ Gangster films, for instance, carry with them certain generic conventions that defy “deviations from the norms of sense and logic” – as in the symmetrical rise and fall of the larger-than-life protagonist – but they also draw on and quote “‘authentic’ (or authenticating) discourses, artefacts, and texts: maps, newspaper headlines, memoirs, archival documents, and so on.”⁹ Again, then, we see that “realism” is, in the words of Ellis, “not a simple given.”¹⁰ Rather, it is a

historically and generically contingent concept. The work of these film scholars in mind, we might consider Sperber's equation of "realism" with a particular type of historical accuracy and narrative logic to be just one of many ways of defining "realism" – an equation he implicitly acknowledges in emphasizing the role of classical Hollywood norms in shaping *Knute Rockne's* narrative structure and the role of the "biopic" genre in influencing viewers' flexible conceptions of historical accuracy.¹¹

Given the pluralistic nature of filmic "realism," it should not be surprising that material from the Warner Bros. archives indicates that the producers of films like *Knute Rockne* were very much concerned with creating "realistic" products, even if the films are now largely viewed as anything but. However, as Ellis and Neale might predict, these producers were working with their own notions of "realism" – ones that meshed with contemporary expectations and generic norms and, as a result, privileged particular conceptions of historical accuracy and verisimilitude. This article, though, will not focus on narrative and attempts by filmmakers to construct "realistic" stories, but instead document how filmmakers labored to present their films as offering "realistic" football – a "realism" given great weight because of audience expectations that the genre would offer them high-quality football content. More specifically, the following sections will show how producers worked to ensure that the films' football details were historically accurate and that the films offered plausible gameplay. In order to better define both audience expectations and studios' efforts to placate them with "football realism," this article will first turn its attention to the marketing and reception of two Warner Bros. films that tried and failed in these efforts, *College Coach* (1933) and *Over the Goal* (1937). In observing this failure of marketing and reception, we can observe a clear definition of the era's demand for "football realism." This definition, then, will provide context for understanding the production, marketing

and reception of the more successful *Knute Rockne, All American* and *Jim Thorpe – All-American*.

Marketing “Football Realism”

Warner Bros. was as involved as any other studio in the production of football movies during the studio system era, pumping out a number of films that featured football to one degree or another, including *White Flannels* (1927), *The Time, The Place, and the Girl* (1929), *Maybe It's Love* (1930), *The Cowboy Quarterback* (1939) and *Trouble Along the Way* (1953).

However, for the purpose of spotlighting the ways such films were marketed and received, this portion of the article will focus on just two of the studio's football films from the 1930s: *College Coach* and *Over the Goal*.

The William Wellman-directed *College Coach* stars Pat O'Brien as an unscrupulous college football coach who holds no reservations about paying players or playing dirty. The film begins with his hiring by Calvert University, which hopes that his crooked methods will dramatically improve Calvert's woeful football team and, in the process, fill the school's stadium and its coffers. With the help of two star half-backs, played by Dick Powell and Lyle Talbot, O'Brien's character manages to succeed in short order – even after he is forced to give up some of his amoral methods. While *College Coach*'s plot is perhaps overly simple, *Over the Goal*'s is perhaps overly convoluted. Directed by Noel Smith, the film features William Hopper as a star football player at Carlton University torn in many directions over whether or not to play in a big game. However, things do not simply fall into place once he finally commits to playing, as he is summarily kidnapped by thugs and prevented from making it to the stadium. Ultimately, though, Hopper is able to get free and arrives to the game in time to play in the second half.

Unsurprisingly, he also manages to lead his team to victory.

Although the films were released four years apart and have their share of differences – *College Coach*, for instance, was clearly closer to being an “A” film than *Over the Goal* – the marketing strategies used to promote the two movies were very much alike, especially in the almost identical hawking of the films’ supposedly realistic football action. For example, press releases for *College Coach* mention “the scenes on the gridiron are about as spectacular and as exciting as watching the Army and Navy game” and that the football action on the field is “authentic.”¹² Similarly, the advertising campaign plan for *Over the Goal* exclaims, “No phony football sequences engage your attention in this movie.”¹³

The claims for the movies’ “football realism,” though, were not always so vague and the studio’s marketers used several specific strategies to hype the films. Perhaps the most important of these tactics was to emphasize the football experience possessed by the films’ casts and to highlight the actors’ unique abilities to accurately depict football players. For each film, this meant discussing both the stars and the football-playing extras. For example, press releases for *College Coach* called attention to Pat O’Brien’s years of playing quarterback for Marquette University. One press release even included an anecdote about O’Brien drawing up a football play after director William Wellman discovered that the script did not mention any specifics for how a crucial football scene should be shot. The release reads, “‘I’ll show you the play, Bill’ [O’Brien] exclaimed, rubbing his hands enthusiastically. ‘Just let me handle this.’ With that, O’Brien called the two scrimmaging teams together, lined them up in formation and stepped through the play, showing exactly how the ball-carrier’s interference should cut down the secondary defense.”¹⁴ Similarly, a press release for *Over the Goal* noted, “Two football-playing actors were required, so the son of De Wolf Hopper, six-foot-two, 190-pound, dark ‘n’ handsome

William Hopper, became Our Hero ... and even taller, bigger blonde Willard Parker the other ball packer.”¹⁵ The same press release also explained that the filmmakers would not let actor Gordon Oliver play football in the film because he was too small to convincingly depict a college athlete. Thus, “Gordon had to play a villain instead.” The release emphasized that these decisions were made because the filmmakers “were determined on realism.”

As much as the studio was intent on demonstrating that the films’ stars were capable football players, it was perhaps even more interested in highlighting the fact that the films’ respective football scenes had been shot using actual college football players. A press release for *College Coach* bragged, “Never before has a football picture been able to boast of such a lineup of gridiron stars,” before noting that the picture’s football scenes were filmed using “seventy-seven men, all stalwarts from the universities of California,” including stars like Cotton Warburton and Homer Griffith of USC.¹⁶ The release also quoted O’Brien as saying, “With this squad of gridiron battlers, I could whip any football team in the country, and that goes for the national champion Trojans, the Rambling Irish of Notre Dame, Northwestern, Bucknell, West Point and the rest of the crack outfits.” The materials for *Over the Goal* were just as enthusiastic about the football extras recruited for the film. As one press release boasted, “The gridiron incidents are altogether true to life. They ought to be. They are played by a couple of teams chosen from the leading members of the varsity squad of the celebrated Trojans – the University of Southern California team, who rate in national standings up along with Notre Dame, Minnesota and Northwestern.”¹⁷

While the films’ casts were definitely the emphasis in the studio’s marketing efforts, the promotional material for both films also stressed the football locations used for shooting. For *College Coach*, this meant pointing out that football action was shot “at the historic Rose Bowl

in Pasadena.”¹⁸ For *Over the Goal*, this entailed calling attention to the fact that “much of the action was filmed on USC’s famous Bovard Field and at the famous LA Coliseum.”¹⁹

Furthermore, the fact that *Over the Goal* had enlisted its extras from the USC football team meant this use of the university’s “home fields” carried some additional poignancy.²⁰

Evaluating “Football Realism”

As demonstrated both by the sheer quantity of football films and Warner Bros.’ strident efforts to sell its football movies as “authentic,” there was clearly a belief that audiences possessed a strong desire to see football action on the big screen and that the studio should address this demand. However, audiences were not indifferent consumers willing to embrace just any film that included football scenes. Rather, they had certain expectations and preferred the football they saw on screen to match the college football they saw in person or in the newsreels. In short, they wanted the football to appear “realistic.” Evidence of this fastidiousness is abundant in the reviews of both *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* – reviews that indicate the films were unable to follow through with the many promises of “realism” made during the marketing process.

That actual college football was a measuring stick for these films is clear in the critics’ notes on *College Coach*, which consistently expressed skepticism that the fictional Calvert University team could somehow be more impressive than even the most powerful of college football’s powerhouses. For example, *The New York Times* remarked, “The representatives of old Calvert rush the ball across the last white line with a dash and facility that would make Michigan’s famed point-a-minute team look like centenarians.”²¹ Furthermore, the review questions the fact that the team was able to “overcome a 20-0 handicap in the last four minutes

without losing their apple-cheeked composure.” This, too, was not just an issue of a team being presented as unbelievably dominant, but also of poorly choreographed gameplay, with the review adding, “The gaps in the opposing line, generous enough to permit G.A.R to march through sixteen abreast, would make a hard-working tackle blush.” The *Times*, though, was not just critical of the football gameplay, but also of the casting. It was observed, for instance, that star Dick Powell’s “resemblance to a football player is less than striking.”

The reviewer for *The Evening Post* was no kinder to *College Coach* and opined, “If you like your football stories straight you will squirm, of course, at the titanic scoring power of old Calvert’s eleven when the boys finally bestir themselves.”²² Again, the reviewer had a problem with the way the film’s football gameplay stacked up against actual college football gameplay, noting the improbability of the team’s incredible offensive firepower as well as the sheer awfulness of the opponents. “The great Notre Dame teams of the ‘Four Horsemen,’” he wrote, “could never have produced an attack more devastating nor would the most inexpert of small-college teams ever have develop so amazing a weakness in defense in the shadow of the goal-line.”

Reviews for *Over the Goal*, meanwhile, were harsh enough to make the comments about *College Coach* appear almost complimentary. A particular target for the *Over the Goal* reviewers was the sloppy football gameplay. *The Morning Telegraph*, for instance, complained, “Of all the screwy football that has been played in a college football picture, the football in *Over the Goal* takes the cake.”²³ Continuing, the reviewer took aim at the heavily promoted USC extras and commented, “If the playing in *Over the Goal* is any sample of the prowess of the University of Southern California football men, it’s no wonder they have been ringing up such a poor record.” The review from *The Herald Tribune* echoed much of this sentiment, with the

writer declaring, “One wouldn’t so much mind all the fatuous heroics which go for dear old Carlton in *Over the Goal* if the new football film had some good shots of football. As it is, the show is as bad when it gets down on the gridiron as it is in cooking up what passes for a plot.”²⁴ Again, too, the USC extras become the butt of a joke: “Members of the USC squad are supposed to be involved in the touchdown marches that are shown, but they have apparently forgotten even the rudiments of the game in the flush of acting.”

If it was not already obvious from the negative *College Coach* reviews, then these harsh criticisms of *Over the Goal* make it clear that movie audiences in the studio era both had a heavy appetite for football and certain expectations for how that football should be depicted – demanding that the football action match what they saw during actual college games. It should come as no surprise, then, that when it came time to produce *Knute Rockne, All American* a few years later, that “football realism” was very much on the minds of studio executives. If audiences were quick to condemn the football within a “B” film like *Over the Goal*, there was every reason to believe they would be even more unforgiving when it came to a major picture like *Knute Rockne, All American*.

Knute Rockne, All American

A Monumental Subject

Of all of the Warner Bros. football films produced in the classic Hollywood era, the biopic *Knute Rockne, All American* is probably the most well-remembered, with Oriard declaring it “the most popular football movie of the era” and Zucker and Babich even going so far as to pick it as “the most famous football film of all time.”²⁵ Sperber, meanwhile, has also documented the lasting legacy of the film, detailing, for example, how 16mm copies of the film

proliferated throughout the country in the postwar era and how the film became a fixture in schools and churches. “Of all Hollywood products about college sports,” he asserts, “the Rockne film lived longest and multiplied most fruitfully.”²⁶ Of course, too, the film became a major part of the national consciousness in the 1980s as one of the film’s stars, Ronald Reagan, entered the White House.

While the Warner executives might have been surprised by *Knute Rockne, All American*’s enduring popularity – after all, few would have predicted Reagan’s role as George Gipp would become part of presidential history – they had definitely been aware that the film had major box office potential, especially due to Rockne’s near-mythical status amongst the American public. In fact, memos between Warner Bros. personnel indicate they were probably just as reverential when it came to the deceased Notre Dame coach as any other collection of Americans. For example, producer Robert Fellows’s request to Hal Wallis to be assigned the Rockne picture included the line “Rockne was a great American and his influence was as great in his sphere as was Pasteur and Zola. I think you have in this story another *Boys’ Town* on a far bigger scale.”²⁷ Several months later, when Pat O’Brien was handed the role of Rockne, he wrote a telegram to the film’s writer Robert Buckner claiming, “It is indeed the greatest tribute ever paid me in my theatrical career to be so honored.”²⁸ He continued, “It would have pleased my dad no end had he lived to realize this fulfillment.”

While there is a temptation to read the studio communications as self-aggrandizing hyperbole, there is certainly no insincerity in the letters sent to the studio from Notre Dame alumni interested in the picture, including one who noted “the grip Rockne’s name has on the youngsters of the day.”²⁹ Buckner even remarked in one letter that he had “had enumerable calls from old Notre Dame men” and that “a great many people ... I have never heard of have sent in

suggestions, clippings, photographs, etc., all of which confirms our original suspicion that that there was a tremendous popular interest in Rockne and in the picture.”³⁰ Furthermore, there is certainly no hollowness in the letters to the studio from the Notre Dame officials who would eventually become involved in the film’s production. For instance, the university’s athletics business manager, J. Arthur Haley, wrote to Jack Warner that Rockne “belonged not only to Notre Dame, but to the nation.”³¹

Because Rockne had been such a public figure and had also been widely respected by much of the American populace, it evidently became a priority for the studio personnel to make sure they told his story with a certain level of “realism.” For example, a memo from Buckner to Warner executive Walter MacEwen early in the production timeline included the comment, “In preparing this picture both the studio and the writer have a very definite responsibility to a fine sportsman’s memory, to a great game, to Notre Dame University and to the public at large.”³² He then continued by emphasizing that the subject matter deserved “a measure of dignified, un-phoney development.” Later, Buckner visited Notre Dame to gather research and became even more determined to correctly tell Rockne’s story. In a letter sent to MacEwen during the visit, Buckner wrote, “We’ve got something really big here, Walter, and we’ve got to do it right.”³³ Buckner also noted that he let everyone at the university know of his “seriousness of purpose in making this a just and realistic portrayal of Rockne.”

As mentioned above, Sperber has documented at length how the final product eventually veered far from historical facts – a result of various forces, including Rockne’s widow, offering their own idealized versions of Rockne’s life, as well as unstable notions of what exactly a “realistic portrayal” of the coach’s life might entail. As the previous section noted, “realism” is an inherently flexible idea, so in accordance with the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema

and the biopic genre, Buckner's desire to craft a "just and realistic" portrayal may not necessarily have meant a completely faithful relationship to history, but rather one that emphasized Rockne's positive qualities. But, also as mentioned above, the pluralistic nature of the "realism" label necessitates a conception of "realism" that encompasses more than the degree to which the film's narrative aligned with historical facts. More specifically, it is useful to detach the desire to "responsibly" retell Rockne's life from an accompanying desire to produce "football realism," as spelled out in the previous section. Indeed, it appears the filmmakers were very much concerned with "football realism," agreeing that it was of the utmost importance for the production to carefully attend to the film's football action – and for good reason. As studio documents details, the pressure to properly execute the football portions of the film was immense due to the heavy scrutiny that the film would receive from sports journalists upon its release. A memo to Wallis ominously explained, "There is intense interest in this production on the part of the sports press fraternity."³⁴ And previously, Joe Petritz, the Sports Publicity Director for Notre Dame, had warned Buckner of "encyclopedic-minded sports writers" waiting to pounce.³⁵ Thus, not only did the studio have to please the casual football fan, whom it has already been shown could be quite critical, but also incredibly knowledgeable football experts.

Producing and Marketing "Football Realism"

From the start, *Knute Rockne, All American* was faced with an extra task that football movies like *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* did not have to worry about: accurately replicating the sport's history. Thus, there was a tremendous amount of pressure on the film's script to be relatively accurate in capturing several major football moments from the past. Accordingly, the studio had to worry about getting football scores correct, locations exact, rivalries right and much more. Faced with this situation, the studio took several actions to help

ensure the script would be relatively safe from criticism.

First and foremost, the studio made heavy use of its research department. Research memos indicate the department investigated all sorts of minutiae, paying particular attention to scores and locations of games. Just as an example of the department's attentiveness, one memo from research head Herman Lissauer to Fellows did nothing but single out the erroneousness of a scene calling for an exterior of Nebraska Stadium in 1923, even though the stadium was not fully constructed until the 1924-1925 season.³⁶ Second, the studio developed an extremely strong relationship with the University of Notre Dame. While the university's approval of the script was required by the studio's contract with Rockne's widow, Bonnie Rockne, the connection between the studio and the university definitely went above and beyond what was formally required.³⁷ Letters between university officials and the studio team, including Buckner, Wallis, Bryan Foy and others, were numerous and spoke to the friendships the men had developed during the film's production. Not only did the letters discuss the film, but also family members, vacations and other matters unrelated to the production process.

The intimate relationship with the university shaped the film's football scenes in several ways. For one, Notre Dame offered strong opinions regarding which football rivalries should be highlighted in the film. Originally, Buckner's script called for a key game to be played against the University of Nebraska. However, multiple letters from Notre Dame officials asserted Nebraska was not a significant rival for Notre Dame and any climatic moment involving those two teams would ring untrue – a suggestion perhaps fueled by the anti-Catholic incidents that had led to Notre Dame breaking off its football relationship with Nebraska in the 1920s, as documented by Sperber in *Shake Down the Thunder*.³⁸ Instead of a Nebraska game, then, university officials suggested a game against Army should be featured in this key moment and

even mentioned a specific game that might match the scene's emotional tone. In fact, both Bonnie Rockne and Notre Dame President Hugh O'Donnell got involved in this matter. O'Donnell wrote, "It is desired to have the Army rather than Nebraska beat Notre Dame. The Army has been a traditional rival for the past twenty-six years."³⁹ Bonnie Rockne was more sentimental, commenting, "The most wonderful rivalry in football is between Notre Dame and the Army, and Notre Dame men do not feel badly when defeated by the Army. If Notre Dame must be defeated, it must be by the Army. This would be a more popular defeat by all spectators, too, with the exception of the Nebraska alumni. Let's have the national alumni applauding for Army."⁴⁰ Buckner proceeded to make this change.

The university was also able to provide the studio with assistance when it came to the football gameplay that should be showcased in the film. Notre Dame backfield coach DC Grant, for example, offered a number of comments on the script regarding Rockne's use of football tactics like the forward pass and the shift. Furthermore, the studio also helped with any number of football-related details. To that point, university officials caught several scoring and location inaccuracies in the script, though Sperber points out that Notre Dame also permitted a number of "script errors concerning specific football games and seasons" so as "to help the writer."⁴¹ Additionally, Notre Dame was also available for specific research requests, as when Notre Dame's Sports Publicity Director Joseph Petritz provided the studio with a quarter-by-quarter score breakdown of a Notre Dame-Georgia Tech game when the research department was unable to find the correct information.⁴²

Although significant energy had gone into the process of ensuring the script for *Knute Rockne, All American* would escape criticism, the studio's work was not done; "football realism" was hardly just a matter of scores and locations. Thus, the studio moved onto assembling a cast

and crew able to provide the film with a certain air of football legitimacy. In a few ways, the studio's strategies here resembled the efforts underlying the marketing for the two previously discussed films, *College Coach* and *Over the Goal*. For instance, it was again important to cast stars with football connections and then heavily promote that feat. Although Spencer Tracy was the first choice for Rockne, eventual selection Pat O'Brien did have the advantage of coming with the previously-mentioned football background. As with *College Coach* before, Warner jumped at the opportunity to promote O'Brien's football past. As one press release suggested, O'Brien "is better qualified than most movie stars for this kind of action. He was a pretty good varsity player during his college days at Marquette, and saw some service against the Irish of Notre Dame."⁴³ In addition, studio executives worked behind the scenes to ensure O'Brien actually resembled the football player he once was by pushing him to get in shape. Fellows was the first to suggest the importance of this work, writing Wallis ahead of the film's shooting, "Wouldn't it be feasible to get O'Brien in a trainer's hands – take him off liquor and make a man out of him for the part? If he would be willing to cooperate, and I am sure he would, I know we could get those double chins off and knock ten or fifteen years off his looks."⁴⁴ Wallis then seems to have taken up the issue with O'Brien explicitly, for a few weeks after the memo from Fellows, Wallis sent O'Brien a reminder about his recent "promise to start training and tapering so that when you do the Rockne picture and open up as Rockne entering Notre Dame, you will really look like a Boy Scout."⁴⁵ Wallis continued, "There will be a lot of physical work for you to do in the picture – work on the football field, running around with the men etc., and I do want you to really look the part and I know you too are anxious that this one be right."

However, O'Brien was not the only *Rockne* star with a football connection – a fact that the studio's press notes made clear. One notice in the film's press packet claimed that there were

three All-Americans and “10 other Grid Stars” amongst the seventeen principal and subordinate male roles.⁴⁶ Several press notes went on to give the football background for each of these 13 former players. Reagan, for instance, was described in one document as “a backfield star in high school” and, in a different document, as a “running guard and end at Eureka College in Illinois.”⁴⁷

Again, too, the film employed football players – some notable, some not – as extras to shoot football sequences. And, again, many of these players were drawn from past and present USC teams, including stars like Oliver Day and Don McNeill, as well as from other California schools. The press book exclaimed, “Trojans or Bruins ... they're all top-notch gridders” able to “delight the heart of any football coach.”⁴⁸ The film also made use of a tactic employed by other football films of the era, seemingly designed to lend films some degree of football legitimacy: cameos. Jim Thorpe, for example, had a small part in the film as a Notre Dame assistant coach. Another story from the pressbook, meanwhile, spotlighted the small roles in the film for “four of American’s most famous grid coaches”: Howard Jones, Bill Spaulding, Amos Alonzo Stagg and Pop Warner.

One area in which *Knute Rockne, All American* differed from *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* involved the makeup of the crew. While the earlier two films seemed content to focus on casting and then promoting actors and extras with football connections, the production team behind *Knute Rockne, All American* extolled their own football backgrounds and associations. This touting began early in the filmmaking process, for as Buckner began corresponding with MacEwen in the first phases of pre-production, he stressed how his football background made him uniquely qualified to write the film. As he told MacEwen, “You’ve got to know football to write this picture.” Buckner, though, was hardly the crewmember with the most impressive

football experience; that title might have gone to the film's first assistant director, former USC star Jesse Hibbs. Unsurprisingly, the studio was more than happy to promote Hibb's notable football background and how it contributed to the film's "authenticity." One press release read, "Helping to assure that the football stuff will be authentic is the presence of Jesse Hibbs on the staff as first assistant director. Football fans may recall Hibbs as a USC All-American of the late twenties."⁴⁹ If other press notes are to be believed, the presence of Thorpe on the set was also significant, for he is said to have acted as an "authority for the early day football style."⁵⁰

Notably, the crew for *Knute Rockne, All American* also included a position not seen in the two films mentioned previously: "technical advisor." Serving in this role was Nick Lukats, a former Notre Dame halfback who had played under Rockne. While it is hard to determine the exact extent of Lukats's role in the production, his technical advisor position was showcased in the film's opening credits and multiple press releases highlighted Lukats's involvement in bringing the "Notre Dame style of play" to the screen.⁵¹ Summarizing the involvement of figures like Hibbs, Thorpe and Lukats, one release remarked, "Football technical supervision was plentiful, and expert."⁵²

In review, the studio had done substantial work to ensure its script would escape criticism from sharp-eyed sports journalists. Furthermore, it had made sure to fill its cast and crew with current and former football players. However, the reviews for *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* indicated that when it came time to film, suitable football personnel could only carry a film so far – the football itself had to look right. To some degree, *Knute Rockne, All American* addressed this concern by paying careful attention to production design. Again, the research department was busy, looking into period-appropriate scoreboard designs, uniforms and field dimensions. Again, too, the relationship between Notre Dame and Warner Bros. was important. For example,

Lissauer asked for help obtaining pictures of Notre Dame's old football field as well as old Notre Dame uniforms. "Naturally," he wrote to the university, "we desire to make the Knute Rockne picture as authentic as possible in all of its details."⁵³

However, a greater challenge than making sure the uniforms were period-appropriate was avoiding the type of "screwy" football gameplay that marred *Over the Goal*. To get around this problem, the Warner team devised a novel solution: to interweave newly shot football sequences with actual game footage – a decision likely facilitated by the heavy coverage that Notre Dame had long received from the major newsreel providers and, accordingly, the large supply of archived material featuring previous Notre Dame teams.⁵⁴ Thus, the film's producers appear to have worked deals with several of these newsreel companies, including Hearst, Paramount and Pathé.⁵⁵ While the studio was apparently quite concerned with potential legal issues that might result from including this footage without getting releases from the players involved, a substantial amount of newsreel footage made it into the final cut – though the studio did eliminate close-ups as a result of the legal concerns.⁵⁶ As Sperber suggests, *Knute Rockne's* original audiences would not have been jarred by the mixture of newsreel footage and newly filmed scenes. Instead, he argues that the "newsreels of Notre Dame game action enhanced viewer identification with Knute Rockne and his Fighting Irish."⁵⁷ Sperber expands on this thought in describing WWII films, noting, "To media-savvy 1990s viewers, the authentic material in many war movies – too disparate from the Hollywood soundstage footage – seems intrusive; however, to visually unsophisticated 1940s moviegoers, the newsreels added to their sense of being there."⁵⁸ While Sperber's description of 1940s audiences as "visually unsophisticated" could stand to be further interrogated, the point remains – newsreels were a novel way to include believable gameplay.

A Winning Reception

By all indications, the *Knute Rockne* formula for “football realism” was successful, as most reviewers gushed about the picture and its “realism” – including the football action. The reviewer for the *Chicago Daily News* was perhaps the most enthusiastic, writing, “This film should be preserved forever in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art, New York – custodian of historical films – for this one reason of truthfully and vividly recording a current phenomenon and sporting life.”⁵⁹ *The New York Times*, though, was not far behind the *Chicago Daily News* in its enthusiasm and reviewer Bosley Crowther made special mention of the satisfaction football fans would receive from the picture. Crowther wrote, “For dyed-in-the-wool football fans and alumni of Notre Dame, whether they be of the genuine or just plain ‘subway’ variety, this glowing, heroic account of the great coach’s life and noble works will be much more than entertainment. It will be an effective inspiration.”⁶⁰ *Variety* also raved about the film and its football scenes, even commenting that the newsreel footage was “defly intercut.”⁶¹ And, reminiscent of the *Chicago Daily News* review, there was a sense that film had a certain archival authenticity to it, though the reviewer went a bit further with that thought and concluded that *Knute Rockne* is “more than a historical document of football during the past three decades – it’s an inspirational reminder of what this country stands for.” By all accounts, then, that the film had succeeded where *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* had fallen short.

Jim Thorpe – All American

In many ways, *Jim Thorpe – All-American* is a very different picture from *Knute Rockne*, *All American*. While the Rockne film is unabashed hero worship, the Thorpe biopic is grimmer – charting Thorpe’s painful rise and fall. Of course, this was part of a larger Hollywood trend.

As Drew Casper notes in *Postwar Hollywood*, postwar biopics “often forsook the classical hagiographical approach, finding more interest in the private drama behind, or in place of, the public achievement.”⁶² Therefore, the biographee is depicted “wrestling with his/her demons – the more sordid, the better.”⁶³ Sperber describes how exactly this shift extended into football films, detailing how they “began to move from the sunny and self-satisfied mode of *Knute Rockne – All American* and its heirs toward cynical worldviews” – a move that included *Jim Thorpe – All-American*.⁶⁴ While the tone of the two films may have differed, Sperber argues that *Jim Thorpe* still managed to share *Knute Rockne*’s willingness to depart from “the historical facts,” as in the “Hollywood whitewash” of Thorpe’s college coach, Pop Warner – a “metamorphosis” also noted by Oriard in *King Football*.⁶⁵ However, it is again necessary to complicate the idea of “realism” by separating out “football realism.” In doing so, it is once more apparent that the quest for this mode of “realism” remained a priority for the studio – as evidenced through the now familiar attempts to create an acceptable screenplay, employ a football-savvy cast and crew and, finally, present high-quality gameplay.

Returning to the “Football Realism” Playbook

As was the case with *Knute Rockne, All American*, the studio’s first efforts toward creating “realistic” football in *Jim Thorpe – All-American* congealed around the film’s script – again an important task given the similar need to recount the sport’s history. For the writers Douglas Morrow and Everett Freeman, it was particularly important that their screenplay captured the appropriate atmosphere surrounding college football at the turn of the century. For example, discussing one scene early in the film – depicting Thorpe’s first college game – Freeman explained his desire to reproduce the “whole color and mood of football as it was

played in 1907.”⁶⁶ Again, the studio’s research department played a key role in ensuring that this vision emerged on the pages – checking rosters, dates, scores, rules, etc.⁶⁷

When it came time to assemble a cast and crew for *Jim Thorpe – All-American*, the producers seemed determined to follow the same course set by the *Knute Rockne, All American* team. Key roles, then, were filled with athletically capable figures – preferably ones with football backgrounds. Most noticeably, Burt Lancaster, cast as Thorpe, was already well known for his athleticism. And even though Lancaster did not have much football experience prior to the film, studio press materials tried to argue he could have been a star running back if only he had wanted to. One press release quoted trainer Jess Hill as saying, “That man’s a real athlete, no fooling ... If Burt didn’t have his mind set on acting, I’d get him an athletic scholarship at USC.”⁶⁸ However, Lancaster was not necessarily the clearest example of how the producers were trying to build their cast. Instead, a look at the casting for Little Boy, Thorpe’s college roommate and teammate, is instructive. In trying to cast the character, the producers explained, “We need somebody big for the role and preferably someone who can play football.”⁶⁹ To that end, they considered screen testing Notre Dame’s Heisman Trophy-winning lineman Leon Hart for the role. Eventually, though, the part went to Jack Bighead, a Native American football player who starred at Pepperdine and would later go on to have a short NFL career. In addition to filling the principal cast with athletically capable actors, the filmmakers also ensured that the football scenes were – like the previously mentioned films – shot using extras with college football experience. One press release noted the involvement of “former football players from neighboring universities such as USC and UCLA.”⁷⁰ Additionally, according to one press release, the players were specifically chosen for their bulkiness so as to replicate the more physical style of football of the early 1900s.

As was the case with *Knute Rockne, All American* eleven years before, there also existed a strong desire to put together a crew with a football background. As an indication of their intent, it might be noted that the producers originally wanted *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) director Allan Dwan to direct the film, mostly because of his football background. A memo from Freeman to Jack Warner explained that Dwan had the unique experience of playing football against the Carlisle Indians and added, “The man who handles the reins on this picture must know football and be able to function with a sure hand in a difficult background. I believe Alan [sic] Dwan is that man.”⁷¹ While Hungarian immigrant Michael Curtiz was eventually picked as director instead of Dwan, the producers did manage to assemble a large football advising team to surround Curtiz. This team included not just Thorpe, who was kept on payroll during the filming of the movie and supposedly “helped in re-creating plays,” but also ex-UCLA football coach Bill Spaulding and one-time USC football stars Jess Hill and Mickey McCardle. McCardle was given special emphasis in the film’s press materials, which described him as “a film specialist on football scenes” in charge of studying “early century gridiron rules and plays to help Curtiz make the football contests historically accurate.”⁷² That McCardle’s involvement in the film was far from ornamental was evidenced in a memo sent from Freeman to Steve Trilling in an attempt to get McCardle on set as quickly as possible. The memo read: “Mickey McCardle, who is going to work out the football sequences for us, is still at Columbia, and I need him back here now. I have no need to tell you of the tremendous amount of work and organization in the football sequences.”⁷³

As mentioned in the previous section, an accurate screenplay and a football-savvy cast and crew might only get a film so far; the football on screen also had to somewhat resemble an actual game of football if the studio wanted to avoid having fans “squirm.” Much as was the

case with *Knute Rockne, All American*, then, production design was an important consideration in the filming of *Jim Thorpe – All-American*. Evidence of this consideration can be seen in research memos showing that the studio’s research department hunted for obscure items, such as pictures of early Harvard football uniforms and the University of Pennsylvania’s Franklin Field circa 1911.⁷⁴ Such research paid off, for these sorts of pictures helped the *Jim Thorpe – All-American* production team discover outdated football procedures, like the once-standard checkerboard field markings. Ultimately, this was a much-discussed detail that made its way into the film.⁷⁵ The following memo from Freeman to the costume department also tells of how much attention was paid to production design: “I should like to make our Harvard games as authentic as possible in helmet and uniforms ... please see to it that the headgear used by the Harvard players is an exact replica of those used in 1908.”⁷⁶

But as important as production design was in creating “authentic” football scenes, it paled in comparison to the significance of devising and filming convincing football gameplay. As previously mentioned, the *Knute Rockne, All American* team largely navigated around the challenge of filming believable football scenes by relying heavily upon stock footage. By all indications, the *Jim Thorpe – All-American* producers wanted to go in the same direction. However, requests for newsreel footage of college football games “around 1910 to 1915” were met with reports that little footage existed for such an early period.⁷⁷

Only able to use stock footage for a few of the professional football sequences later in the film, the *Jim Thorpe – All-American* team found themselves forced to re-create Thorpe’s college highlights, including a particularly lengthy sequence showcasing a legendary game between Thorpe’s Carlisle team and a dominant University of Pennsylvania squad. This in mind, it is probably not surprising that the coaching staff for the film was so large and treated with such

importance. It is also not surprising, then, that the press materials for *Jim Thorpe – All-American* went to great lengths to highlight the work it took to properly shoot the film's football sequences. Some of this marketing has already been mentioned, such as the attention called to the film's coaching staff and Lancaster's athleticism. However, those mentions only scratch the surface of the film's "football realism" marketing push.

Looking through all of the film's press releases, it is particularly notable just how much attention was paid to the supposed injuries that occurred while filming the football sequences. For instance, there is an entire press release devoted to the fact former college and pro football star Bill Radovich, who had been enlisted to play on the fictional Penn team, had torn a tendon while filming.⁷⁸ And then there are the multiple releases detailing Lancaster's injuries. While one such release played up the need to take a break in filming to allow Lancaster to recover from his football wounds, another claimed the studio had taken out insurance on his legs because he had already "turned his knee twice" and "torn a thigh muscle."⁷⁹ In addition, there is an entire cavalcade of material hyping the studio's efforts to make the film's turn-of-the-century football sequences historically accurate. One release, for example, mentioned Lancaster's need to study old photographs of football action, while another detailed the problems the football extras had trying to pass and kick the "pumpkin-size pigskin of Jim Thorpe's early century era."⁸⁰ Perhaps most amusing of all, though, is the press release that detailed the problems the extras had with the period-appropriate uniforms: "Local pigskin players ... asked for more padding in their 1907-period gridiron uniforms provided by Warner Bros. Some wanted to insert their own pads for protection till the studio stressed that early-century he-men, except for thin felt lining on hips, shoulders and knees, played the game without falsies."⁸¹ The release continued with some dialogue: "'What! No padding!' they chorused. 'Who do you think we are, stunt men?'"

Another Winning Reception

Once again, the arduous quest for “football realism” seems to have paid off, for *Jim Thorpe – All-American*’s football scenes were received favorably. In an extremely positive review of the film, *Variety* remarked, “The pic has re-created a number of events from sports history, and has done it with a relish and consistency with fact.”⁸² In particular, the review points to the “sensational” re-creation of the Penn-Carlisle matchup. The review also complimented the “neatly directed sequences of Thorpe as a professional grid star” and the casting of Lancaster by commenting, “There are few actors who could be as believable as Lancaster from a physical standpoint.” The review in *The New York Times* was almost identical, praising the film both for the sports re-enactments, particularly the Penn-Carlisle game, and for the casting of Lancaster. On the athletic sequences: “Sportsfans ... should find little with which to quarrel in the re-enactment of such memorable events as Thorpe’s superhuman (and factual) victories in the 1912 Olympic games when he ran off with both the Pentathlon and the Decathlon. They also should find thrilling the noted Carlisle-Pennsylvania football classic.”⁸³ Of Lancaster, it is written, “The Warner Brothers, it should be noted forthwith, could not have assigned a better man to the title role than Burt Lancaster. He is equipped physically and, what is more important, professionally, for the job of depicting the storied athlete. Mr. Lancaster looks as though he might place in the Olympics, if not win.” These glowing words in mind, it seems that *Jim Thorpe – All-American* had, like *Knute Rockne, All American*, succeeded in the areas where *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* had failed.

Wrapping Up

In his book *Genre and Hollywood*, Steve Neale calls upon film scholars to turn closer

attention to genres that have largely escaped critical attention – especially those genres outside the familiar, “well-recognized” categories like the western and the romantic comedy – in the hope of providing a more complete “picture both of the industry and its output.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, Neale urges scholars to ground such scholarship in detailed historical research that pays heed to industrial concerns, arguing such work would be “likely to generate much more knowledge than we possess at the moment about the array of generic calculations at stake in film production, distribution and exhibition, about the construction of generic images in and through the industry’s relay, and about the generic expectations and terms in circulation in the process of reception.”⁸⁵ Neale’s latter remark is an extremely relevant concern for sport historians, too, for as Gary Osmond and Murray Phillips have argued, the field of sport history has most commonly studied film by way of textual analysis, thus leaving a need for more scholarship that goes beyond “analyses of on-screen representations” – a gap that certainly includes an attention to both the industry and the audience.⁸⁶

This article has attempted to respond to these calls by using material from the Warner Bros. archives to shed new light on the production, marketing and reception of films within the football genre – a major genre during the studio era that has nevertheless escaped much attention from film scholars. While previous scholarship from sport historians has documented how, in following the norms of classical Hollywood cinema, the narratives of “Golden Age” football movies radically departed from historical fact, this article has relied on archival material to suggest that the “realism” of football films was, in fact, a major concern for filmmakers, marketers and audiences.

More specifically, the marketing and reception for *College Coach* and *Over the Goal* demonstrated that movie audiences in the studio system era longed for “realistic” football

sequences, hoping to see footage that matched up with the college football heroics they either observed in-person or in newsreels. Faced with this delicate situation – and also having to deal with the added pressure of accurately bringing American legends to life – the production and marketing teams for *Knute Rockne*, *All American* and *Jim Thorpe – All-American* put significant work into creating and then selling “realistic” football. Moreover, the teams behind the films made use of similar strategies in this process – starting by producing scripts attentive to football details, then putting together a credentialed cast and crew, and then giving careful attention to the football gameplay to be included in the film. Although it is impossible to know exactly what the American everyman thought of these films, the positive reviews in the press indicate that this set of tactics was largely successful.

While this paper has been able to document the generic expectations for the football genre and show how the industry incorporated these expectations into the production and marketing of football films, it remains unknown whether the processes at work in the football genre were unique. According to Aaron Baker, sport films have consistently deployed a “realist style” featuring “footage of actual contests or set in stadiums filled with crowds of extra, employing authentic uniforms and equipment and often real athletes” – details exactly of the sort mentioned in this article – in order to emphasize how the past achievements of star athletes directly contributed to their personal successes.⁸⁷ Baker’s analysis in mind, it would seem unlikely the football genre stands alone in manufacturing “realistic” sport content. However, it is an open question how exactly this process unfolded across the industry and whether the production, marketing and reception of football films is indicative of the expectations at work in the other sports genres that thrived during the studio era, such as the automobile racing, baseball, boxing and horse racing genres. Like the football films discussed in this paper, the films in these

genres would have been facing audiences expecting both a classical Hollywood narrative as well as sporting sequences that would align with what they had seen in person and in newsreels. It is quite possible, then, that filmmakers operating within these genres dealt with the competing pressures by making similar calculations as the teams behind the football films cited here – strategically manufacturing “realisms” able to satisfy discerning sports fans. If so, this would raise new possibilities for treating the sports film as a unified generic category operating not just with shared set of narrative content, but also with a shared set of industrial strategies. Definitive answers, though, will require heeding Neale’s call and returning to the archives, searching for more insight into the industrial processes of the studio era.

¹ Michael Oriard, *King Football: Sport and Spectacle in the Golden Age of Radio and Newsreels, Movies and Magazines, the Weekly and the Daily Press* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 11.

² Harvey Marc Zucker and Babich, Lawrence J., *Sports Films: A Complete Reference* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co. Inc., 1987), 145.

³ Murray Sperber, *Shake Down The Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1993), 37, 497.

⁴ According to Aaron Baker, this fixation on the achievements of individual athletes applies to sport films, more generally. Baker even highlights *Knute Rockne, All American* – arguing that its tale of personal success glosses over the “selective nature” of the American Dream mythology. For more on the ideological ramifications of the focus on individual athletic achievement, see Aaron Baker, *Contesting Identities: Sports in American Film* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁵ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 8.

⁶ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 159.

⁷ Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000), 36.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ While Sperber is the focus here because of his work on *Knute Rockne, All American* and other football films, it should be noted that Sperber is likely not alone in making such distinctions. As other sports historians have noted, there is a long line of historical scholarship that has studied sport films largely by way of highlighting factual inaccuracies. Writing on this phenomenon, Jaime Schultz explained in this journal that “historical films rarely satisfy academic historians.” Understandably, she writes, films that show evidence of a “blatant disregard for the historical record” can generate subsequent desires to set the record straight. For more on this tendency, see Jaime Schultz, “The Truth about Historical Sports Films,” *Journal of Sport History*, 41.1 (2014): 29-45, as well as Murray G. Phillips, Mark E. O’Neill and Gary Osmond, “Broadening Horizons in Sport History: Films, Photographs, and Monuments,” *Journal of Sport History*, 34.2 (2007): 271-293, and Malcolm MacLean, “Truth and Reality in Screening Sports’ Pasts: Sports Films, Public History, and Truthfulness,” *Journal of Sport History*, 41.1 (2014): 47-54.

¹² Press release, *College Coach* file, Warner Bros Archives, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles (hereafter WBA).

¹³ Campaign plan, *Over the Goal* file, WBA.

¹⁴ Press release, *College Coach* file, WBA.

¹⁵ Press release, *Over the Goal* file, WBA.

¹⁶ Press release, *College Coach* file, WBA.

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- ¹⁷ Press release, *Over the Goal* file, WBA.
- ¹⁸ Press release, *College Coach* file, WBA.
- ¹⁹ Press release, *Over the Goal* file, WBA.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Press clipping, *College Coach* file, WBA.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Press clipping, *Over the Goal* file, WBA.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Oriard, *King Football*, 138; and Zucker and Babich, *Sports Films*, 167.
- ²⁶ Murray Sperber, *Onward to Victory: The Creation of Modern College Sports*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998), 271.
- ²⁷ Memorandum from Robert Fellows to Hal Wallis, 14 April 1939, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 5 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.
- ²⁸ Telegram from Pat O'Brien to Robert Buckner, 13 February 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.
- ²⁹ Letter from JJ Greeley to Pat O'Brien, 29 January 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.
- ³⁰ Letter from Robert Buckner to J. Arthur Haley, 11 April 1939, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 5 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.
- ³¹ Letter from J. Arthur Haley to Jack Warner, 13 January 1939, Story File Folder 2 of 3, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.
- ³² Memorandum from Robert Buckner to Walter MacEwen, 1 February 1939, Story File Folder 2 of 3, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³³ Letter from Robert Buckner to Walter MacEwen, 19 February 1939, Story Dept.

Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³⁴ Memorandum to Hal Wallis, 27 May 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 1 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³⁵ Letter from Joe Petritz to Robert Buckner, 24 May 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 1 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³⁶ Memorandum from Herman Lissauer to Robert Fellows, 28 February 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³⁷ Memorandum from RJ Obringer to Hal Wallis, 13 February 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

³⁸ Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 200-203.

³⁹ Letter from Hugh O'Donnell to RJ Obringer, 2 February 1941, Story File Folder 3 of 3, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁰ Letter from Vitus Jones, 16 February 1940, Story File Folder 2 of 3, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴¹ Letter from Joe Petritz to Robert Buckner, 24 May 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 1 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA; and Sperber, *Shake Down the Thunder*, 475.

⁴² Letter from Joe Petritz, 9 May 1940, General Research Folder 1 of 2, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴³ Press release by Bill Rice, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁴ Memorandum from Robert Fellows to Hal Wallis, 23 January 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁵ Memorandum from Hal Wallis to Pat O'Brien, 2 February 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 4 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁶ Press book, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁷ "Vital Statistics" press release issued by Robert S. Taplinger, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA; and Press book, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁸ Press book, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁴⁹ Press release by Bill Rice, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁵⁰ "Vital Statistics" press release issued by Robert S. Taplinger, Synopsis & Press Releases Folder, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Letter from Herman Lissauer to J. Arthur Haley, 19 February 1940, General Research Folder 1 of 2, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁵⁴ Oriard, *King Football*, 51.

⁵⁵ Memorandum from De Leon Anthony to Robert Fellows, 22 March 1940, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 3 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁵⁶ Memorandum from RJ Obringer to Espinosa, 14 May 1940, Story File Folder 2 of 3, *Knute Rockne, All American* file, WBA.

⁵⁷ Sperber, *Onward to Victory*, 127.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁹ Review, 15 October 1941, Story Dept. Correspondence Folder 1 of 6, *Knute Rockne, All*

American file, WBA.

⁶⁰ Bosley Crowther, "Knut Rockne, All American," *The New York Times*, 19 October 1940.

⁶¹ "Knut Rockne, All American," *Variety*, 9 October 1940.

⁶² Drew Casper, *Postwar Hollywood: 1946-1962*, 1st ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 171.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Sperber, *Onward to Victory*, 412.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 425-426; and Oriard, *King Football*, 151. This "metamorphosis" appears particularly problematic in light of Mark Rubinfeld's critique of the decision to use "Pop" Warner as the film's "narrator, sage and co-lead" with "all of the film's major events ... consistently framed through this white man's eyes" rather than Thorpe's. For further ideological analysis of the film, see Mark Rubinfeld, "The mythical Jim Thorpe: Re/presenting the twentieth century American Indian," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23:2 (2006): 167-189.

⁶⁶ Memorandum from Everett Freeman to Douglas Morrow, 1 July 1949, Story Memos Folder 3 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁶⁷ Research notes, Research II Folder, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁶⁸ Press release, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁶⁹ Memorandum, 28 March 1950, Story Memos Folder 4 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁰ Press release, Gray Folder, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷¹ Memorandum from Everett Freeman to Jack Warner, 25 May 1950, Story Memos Folder 4 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷² "Advance Production Notes" press release, Gray Folder, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file,

WBA.

⁷³ Memorandum from Everett Freeman to Steve Trilling, 19 July 1950, Story Memos Folder 3 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁴ Research notes, Research Folder, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁵ Memorandum, 14 July 1950, Story Memos Folder 3 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁶ Memo from Everett Freeman to Vic Vallejo, 16 September 1950, Story Memos Folder 3 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁷ Letter from Everett Freeman to William Guthrie, 22 September 1949, Story Memos Folder 4 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA; and Letter from Pathé, 31 October 1949, Story Memos Folder 2 of 4, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁸ Press release, Gray Folder, *Jim Thorpe – All American* file, WBA.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “Jim Thorpe -- All American,” *Variety*, 20 June 1951.

⁸³ “The Screen in Review: ‘Jim Thorpe -- All American’,” *The New York Times*, 25 August 1951.

⁸⁴ Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 240.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 241.

⁸⁶ Gary Osmond and Murray G. Phillips, "Reading *Salute*: Filmic Representations of Sports History," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28.10 (2011): 1464.

⁸⁷ Baker, *Contesting Identities*, 13. As mentioned in a previous footnote, Baker greatly expands on the ideological consequences of this fixation on individual athletic performance throughout his book.