

# War bound to bowl bound

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As LSU and Alabama square off for the national college football championship, even the most rabid Tiger or Tide fan might not realize the influence that the US military had in the widespread appeal of football. According to a new study in the journal *Armed Forces & Society* (AFS), published by SAGE, college football can credit the military for bringing the sport to the masses. Additionally, the study explores how the impact of World Wars helped bring about issues such as payment of college athletes, which are still being debated.

In the article "America and the Garrison Stadium: How the US [Armed Forces](#) Shaped College Football," researcher Joseph Paul Vasquez, University of Central Florida, looked at the effects of the [US military](#) on football and came up with many relationships that helped shape the sport over the years.

"Having evolved from roots on the campuses of several elite Northeastern institutions, college football was not always big business or a broadly appreciated pastime, nor was its origin accidental," wrote Vasquez.

Taking the sport from those elite college roots to the most popular sport in America took the impact of the military and most notably the First World War. Troops were in need not only of recreation, but also physical activity that would help them in their military training. Football became a favorite activity to meet both of these needs and thereby exposed more Americans to the sport than ever before. Competitions between military camps were widely followed and helped perpetuate the popularity of the

sport.

"Military institutions and their advocates promoted football around the dawn of the twentieth century by incorporating the game into [military](#) life with the college game—its most prominent manifestation at the time—being the major beneficiary," wrote Vasquez. "Thus, surging, broad-based interest in football resulted from the effect of militaries as total institutions and authoritative innovator."

World War II also served its own role in the popularity of [college football](#). As with the First World War, troops were using the sport as recreation and physical activity which meant more men were playing football in some form than had played the sport before. After World War II, the establishment of the GI bill pushed these athletes to flood the universities and some were heavily recruited by football programs.

"One former collegiate star in the Navy was courted by twenty-five schools before going back to his alma mater, where he was reportedly paid as much as \$5,000 a year," wrote Vasquez. The case and more like it prompted the NCAA to set up regulations on scholarships and restrictions of payment of athletes.

**More information:** The article entitled "America and the Garrison Stadium: How the US Armed Forces Shaped College Football" from Armed Forces & Society (AFS) is available free for a limited time at: [afs.sagepub.com/content/early/.../426255.full.pdf+html](https://afs.sagepub.com/content/early/.../426255.full.pdf+html)

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