

FROM GATOR TO GONE IN FOUR YEARS

By Frank A. Parsons
Fortnightly Club, February 17, 1984

Robert Frost offered some useful advice:

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

BACK IN 1954 — it will be thirty years ago this summer — Washington and Lee University came to a divergence in the road it was traveling in college sports. A hard choice was made, a path less traveled by. And it has made a difference.

Washington and Lee's road was, at the time, so little traveled that it often seemed that the university was blazing a trail through a perilous jungle filled with head-hunting adversaries. There are controversies aplenty in the university's long history, and the index remains open on this listing. Few issues, however, have drawn

the initial storm of reaction that the abrupt change in athletic policy did in 1954. Few have seen unrest and disgruntlement growl on for as long as the debate continued in the aftermath of that policy change.

In 1954 the Washington and Lee trustees canceled that year's football schedule, permanently discontinued further athletic grants-in-aid, and set the university on a new "simon pure" athletic policy. Those astonishing moves touched off a storm of controversy that raged for months, then rumbled ominously for several years, and now have become only an infrequent and faint flash in the background as the tempest fades into the past.

Today, with the university engaged in debate and study of another issue that divides alumni opinion,ⁱ memories of the football crisis return and comparisons are drawn. I have reminded President John Wilson that the handful of critics who impugn his motives for raising the coeducation question are weak sisters indeed in contrast to those in 1954 who raged against President Francis P. Gaines, Dean James G. Leyburn, and Dean Frank J. Gilliam.ⁱⁱ (It might be noted that two or three of President Wilson's critics are some of the same folks, their vitriol perhaps somewhat diluted with age. And they promised then we'd never hear from them again!)

Well, what was the football crisis?

First, let me say that I'm here tonight because of that crisis. When Washington and Lee gave up major college football in 1954, the university's director of publicity quit in protest over the decision. There were only a few short weeks until the start of a new school year, and the university found itself desperate enough to hire a recent graduate, then working on practically the world's smallest daily newspaper, to take his place. I've been here ever since.

Now, a bit of background on the evolution of football at Washington and Lee. Early records are scarce. The school traces its football origins to 1873 and a series of games against VMI and a few other opponents over the next two decades. The student newspaper, its very name — *Ring-tum Phi* — derived from a football cheer, first appeared in 1897, and it is possible to reconstruct the seasons from then on from the sports pages.

Over the first sixty-nine seasons there were slightly more victories than defeats. Washington and Lee was able, occasionally, to smite the mighty Kentuckys and Alabamas and the prestigious Harvards. The Golden Years came in 1912–15

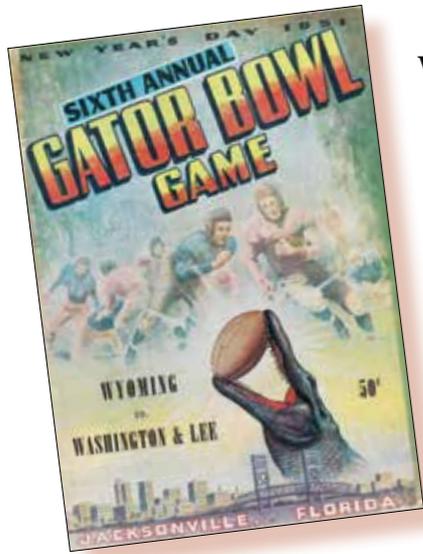
Frank Parsons had a broad array of titles and responsibilities at Washington and Lee in the second half of the 20th century, as this article and others in the "Epilogues" series show. In short, he was responsible for the architectural and editorial character of the university and was a key adviser to three presidents (and, in effect, chief of staff to two).

i Undergraduate coeducation

ii James Graham Leyburn was the dean of the university, essentially the chief academic officer, and Frank Gilliam was the long-time and universally revered dean of students.

when the legendary Cy Youngⁱ helped W&L to a football record of thirty-two wins, three losses and a single tie, a Southern Conference championship in 1934 under Coach W. E. “Tex” Tilson,

Hard times followed that championship season in 1934, with a series of losing years, culminating in 1942, when Coach Jerry Holstein took what was left of the university’s war-decimated enrollment and managed only one win in nine games. There were no football teams at W&L for three years, and envious alumni read about the exploits of Glen Davis and Doc Blanchard of Army and Angelo Bertelli and Johnny Lujack of Notre Dame, among others. If such things could happen at West Point and in South Bend, why not Lexington?



Eventually they did, up to a point. Perhaps the crest was reached in the early '50's, when the Generals capped an 8–2 season with a Gator Bowl appearance on January 1, 1951, and then handed a great University of Virginia team its only loss the following season by a memorable 42–14 score.

At the start of that run, Art Lewis had signed on as coach, and with great energy and persuasive powers, he made life in Lexington look good indeed to strapping youngsters from McKeesport and Swoyersville, Steubenville and Massilon, Beckley, Wheeling, and Charleston. Of such men was the team fashioned

when in 1949 Lewis moved on to greener pastures, or perhaps richer coal dust, in Morgantown.

Coach George Barclay inherited a richly talented team, whose two best players were a sleight-of-hand magician named Gil Bocetti and a tree-trunk linebacker and fullback named Walt Michaels. If God had intended for Washington and Lee to be a big-time football power, he wouldn't have struck down Michaels with appendicitis the week before the Gator Bowl. And so it is that W&L's great moment in the national spotlight is remembered as an “appearance” in the Gator Bowl, not a victory. Wyoming won, 20–7.

Barclay was a better coach than he was a recruiter. After a 6–4 season in 1951, he was hired away by North Carolina, his alma mater. His best assistant, Carl Wise, became the Generals' head coach. The big talents and gratifying wins were suddenly in scarce supply. The team was undermanned and over-scheduled, and elsewhere

ⁱ Harry K. Young, W&L class of 1917, unimaginably gifted W&L athlete: captain of all four major sports teams, leading football and baseball scorer for four years, basketball All American. Young later became W&L's alumni director.

on the campus there was growing concern over the condition of football at W&L and the direction it was heading.

In the post-War period the athletic enterprise at Washington and Lee was a strange hybrid, an evolutionary mix of intercollegiate sports and physical education devised under the leadership of a truly wonderful man, Cap'n Dick Smith.ⁱⁱ Football, basketball, wrestling and baseball were called major sports; all the rest were minor. There was even a design difference in the varsity letters awarded the athletes.

Football was the cash crop, expected to provide funds to support the rest of the intercollegiate program. Its coaches were employees of the Athletic Association and they didn't have to teach physical education. Neither did the basketball coach, but he was expected to double as the baseball coach. All the other coaches were physical education instructors as well.

If football produced the money, then it got first claim on it. A little was shared with basketball, assumed to be capable of generating a little on its own. The rest of the sports shared a pittance. If you played any sport other than football or basketball, chances are you had to buy your own shoes, your own lacrosse stick, your own tennis balls, and whatever meals you might want while on the road.

Even when the Wilson Field stadium was filled to capacity, playing in Lexington didn't yield a lot of income. The big bucks were in playing on the road at schools like Georgia Tech, Tennessee, West Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, or in meeting state opponents in Richmond or Lynchburg. Even so, Washington and Lee hardly dictated the terms of the contracts, and if it rained on game day in Nashville, well, Washington and Lee lost out before Vanderbilt did.

To keep up with the fast company dictated by the “money games,” there had to be players, and no one played in the early '50s who didn't receive a football scholarship. The arrangement agreed upon in the post-war football renewal involved tuition and fee waivers by the university for football recruits as its contribution. Room and board and incidental expenses, including occasional coats and ties for some heretofore disadvantaged recruits, were to be supported by alumni contributions through a special “Generals' Fund” set up for just this purpose. Equipment, travel, and recruiting expenses were to be covered by guarantees and gate receipts, as were



Richard A. Smith: Cap'n Dick.

ⁱⁱ Richard A. Smith, W&L class of 1913, was the university's longtime baseball coach and the athletic director from 1921 until 1954,

the salaries of football coaches and the basketball coach, who was often pressed into service as a game scout for football.

Admissions then was a one-man affair. Frank Gilliam was both dean of students and director of admissions, and he was excellent in both capacities. Under his direction Washington and Lee became, in 1950, the first college in the South to require the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests of entering students. Yet there was an understanding with the athletic department not to worry. Many of the football recruits were indeed what Dean Leyburn referred to as "calculated academic risks."

Thus it was in 1952 and 1953 that Washington and Lee's football program was finding it more and more difficult to sustain itself financially and provide support for other sports. At the same time, increasing competition for gifted players was forcing recruiters to bring in players who were less and less well-prepared to handle a curriculum that provided no easy path toward assured eligibility. In 1952-53, the Athletic Department asked the university to pay \$8,000 in outstanding bills it could not cover from revenues; in 1953-54, the deficit approached \$22,000. Not big money as we measure it today, but in 1954, \$22,000 bought the services of four full professors. Or perhaps a good football coach.

Even so, finances alone didn't precipitate the summer crisis of 1954. People did. Or, more precisely, the lack of people.

The 1953 football season ended on a good note: consecutive victories over Virginia, Davidson and William & Mary, a 4-6 season overall, definitely looking up. At November's end, it looked like thirty-eight players would be returning in 1954, and the customary fifteen-scholarship recruiting class would be newly eligible for immediate varsity play.

Then catastrophe struck.

BY JUNE 1954, twenty-one of the thirty-eight veteran players had left school. Nine flunked out and twelve others left under the cloud of a major, organized violation of the revered Honor System.

I was a senior that year, house manager of my fraternity, Phi Kappa Psi, concerned but not alarmed over the constant arrears in which the half-dozen or so subsidized athletes in our house seemed to find themselves. The exam period then covered the better part of two weeks, and I'd taken all but one early and gone home to Clifton Forge for a long weekend. I returned on a Sunday afternoon to prepare for my last exam. When I walked into the fraternity house I found the living room

filled with unsmiling, silent friends who greeted the sound of my arrival with anxious eyes until they recognized who it was.

The reason? Six times that day, members of the Executive Committee, the student judiciary, had come to our house and taken away brothers who, it was revealed, had been charged with honor violations. Each man subsequently confessed to involvement in a widespread cheating syndicate and elected to withdraw immediately from the university.

The so-called syndicate had been uncovered by the student leaders some six weeks earlier. Two football players had turned in identical, extraordinarily accurate and perceptive quiz papers in a geology course that had been giving them a good bit of trouble. (That in itself says something about the intelligence level of the athletes we were recruiting.) The student judiciary, known as the Executive Committee, was asked to investigate, and under questioning the accused students not only admitted their collaborative cheating on the quiz, but they decided that they might as well blow the whistle on a few others.

Those disclosures inspired a secret inquiry by the Executive Committee members that led to what became known in our fraternity as Black Sunday. In all, fifteen students — all but one of them athletes — withdrew in the face of the evidence against them.

In a special student body assembly called in the final days of the exam period, the Executive Committee president told a jammed Lee Chapel the sordid details of how the syndicate worked, a story of master keys that unlocked professors' offices and the central duplicating office where quizzes were typed and stored, of a cooperative student wife who worked in that duplicating office, and a night watchman who looked the other way for a price. For what he said about what had been done, the students in Lee Chapel gave him and his fellow committeemen a prolonged standing ovation.

The effect of the attrition among football players was immediate. The coaching staff counted heads and found that, at best, they would have only thirty-two players with whom to meet a nine-game schedule that included West Virginia, Vanderbilt, Virginia and Pennsylvania (before Penn grew Ivy). President Gaines informed the university's trustees on June 15 that it appeared possible that W&L might have to cancel its 1954 season. He wrote:

"Please read this statement with utmost care. It implies the possibility of a drastic decision. And there are elements of great urgency . . .

“The local athletic committee, with the concurrence of our athletic officials, have recommended to me that we abandon football immediately. My administrative colleagues agree . . .

“It is not easy to abandon football. We have commitments to other colleges . . . to our staff . . . to our students.

“I am advised that if we are to abandon football, the decision should be made and announced as quickly as possible.

“I fear bitter disagreement. Fervently do I wish that all who love the University could move in harmony of conviction about this matter. But I know the Trustees will do what they deem right . . .”

He went on to call a meeting of the board’s executive committee and its athletic committee for July 7.

The trustees were not exactly taken by surprise. As early as January 1952, there had been concern expressed within the board about the costs, both academic and financial, of maintaining a commitment to major college football. In January 1954, the board had heard that football was anticipating a \$20,000 deficit by June, and the trustees had instructed the president to “explore a group of colleges with prestige and with some relationship to Washington and Lee willing to organize an athletic program on a non-subsidized basis.”

The meeting on July 7 involved members of the trustee executive committee, campus athletic committee and athletic staff as well as alumni representatives. After some three hours of discussion, the trustees went into executive session, where they formulated these conclusions:

“That the University feels honorably committed to its 1954 schedule and will undertake to fulfill it, subject to some modification. (This is to say we shall ask some of the more powerful teams if they can replace us on their schedules.)

“The Trustee [executive] committee records its conviction

that football of some sort or another is an important factor in the life of college boys and should be continued.

“The committee will recommend to the full Board that subsidization as such be stopped as soon as possible and that college sports on this campus be placed on an amateur basis.”

In a memo to all trustees, President Gaines went on to say that academic considerations were the primary motivation for these assertions. “We do not consider it wise to have two programs of educational life on this campus, one for the athletes and one for the students.” He went on to note the considerable financial deficit, now calculated at \$25,000, and the fallacy of scheduling only two or three home games in order to permit at least four “money games” to be played away.

The press reported in full on the outcome of the executive committee meeting in Lexington. The recommendation on an end to subsidization was softened in the press statement as a call for gradual de-emphasis. Dr. Gaines looked forward to a full board discussion in October, but the need for a special meeting of the full board was quickly recommended by its executive arm.

On July 15, President Gaines was writing the trustees again. He had been called upon by the football coaching staff with what amounted to an ultimatum. The coaches had developed second thoughts about their ability to meet the 1954 schedule with the players anticipated. Unless they were permitted to bring the number of scholarship players immediately to fifty, they would resign. Dr. Gaines prevailed upon Carl Wise, the head coach, to withhold his resignation pending the outcome of the special meeting, now scheduled for July 23 in Washington, D.C.

The morning papers of July 24 carried a shocker, news big enough in Virginia to make the front pages. Choose your awful metaphor: The trustees had bitten the bullet, they had come to a fork in the road, they had stepped off down an uncertain path, whistling bravely. Their six-point statement said:

W. & L. Drops Football And Athletic Subsidies

LEXINGTON, Va., July 23 (AP)—Washington and Lee University today canceled its 1954 football schedule and President Francis P. Gaines announced the university was through with subsidized athletics.

The Generals, who had been playing intercollegiate football since 1890, were to have opened a nine-game schedule against West Virginia University, Southern Conference champion, on Sept. 25.

Dr. Gaines made the announcement by telephone from Washington, where he attended a meeting of the university's

New York Times, July 24, 1954.

Washington And Lee Gives Up Football

LEXINGTON, Va., July 24 (AP) Washington and Lee, a charter member of the Southern Conference and football king of the circuit in 1934 and 1950, has abandoned intercollegiate football until such a time as it can be re-established on "an amateur basis" with schools of a like mind.

Cancellation of the Generals' 1954 football schedule and an end to athletic subsidization were announced late yesterday by W&L President Francis P. Gaines after a meeting of the school's board of trustees in Washington.

Toledo Blade, July 25, 1954.

1954 Football Schedule Cancelled

Dr. Gaines Says W&L Through With Subsidized Athletics

(Continued from Page One)

ALL SCHOOLS on the 1954 schedule were notified of the University's action via special delivery letter. They were also notified that the University intends to carry out its schedules in all sports other than football.

Wiped out by the action was this nine-game schedule:

Sept. 25, West Virginia at Charleston, W. Va.

Oct. 2, William and Mary at Norfolk; 8, Virginia Tech. here; 16, Pennsylvania at Philadelphia; 23, Richmond at Richmond; 30, Davidson at Davidson.

Nov. 6, Virginia at Charlottesville; 12, George Washington here; 20, Vanderbilt at Nashville, Tenn.

The board of trustees' resolution from Washington said that consideration will be given to "the possibility of re-establishing intercollegiate football upon an amateur basis" provided other schools can be found who are willing to join in an effort to restore football to an unsubsidized status.

The board said further that no more athletic scholarships will be awarded other than those already granted.

The text of the board's resolution yesterday:

"1. That with regret Washington and Lee University suspends intercollegiate football for the time being and cancels all scheduled games; that the president of Washington and Lee informed the presidents of the institutions with which football games have been scheduled of the reasons which have impelled this decision.

"2. That all obligations other than the playing of football games scheduled heretofore incurred in connection with the prior program of Washington and Lee be faithfully carried.

"3. That intramural football be further encouraged.

"4. That consideration be given to the possibility of re-establishing intercollegiate football upon an amateur basis by, among other things, endeavoring to find other educational institutions to which modern subsidization is unacceptable which will join in an effort to re-establish intercollegiate football as an unsubsidized sport.

"5. That no other athletic scholarships be awarded beyond those already committed.

"6. That the university endeavor to expand its total athletic program, both intercollegiate and intramural, in such a way as to interest and enlist the participation of the largest number of students."

Roanoke Times coverage of the initial decision.

“With regret, W&L suspends intercollegiate football for the time being and cancels all scheduled games. [The president was to explain to the presidents of the affected schools.]

“All other obligations of the W&L sports program, except the playing of football games, are to be carried out faithfully and fully.

“Intramural football is to be further encouraged.

“Consideration is to be given to the possibility of re-establishing intercollegiate football on an amateur basis, by, among other things, trying to find other schools of a similar mind for a joint effort toward unsubsidized college football.

“No other athletic scholarships will be offered beyond those already committed.

“The University will seek to expand its intercollegiate and intramural athletic program so as to interest and enlist participation of the largest number of students possible.”

Washington and Lee Sets an Example

Washington and Lee University has won its greatest football victory. It has kicked out the game as it is played in most major colleges throughout the United States today.

The trustees have voted to drop intercollegiate football entirely for the coming season. They hope that later the school can resume intercollegiate competition, but on a strictly amateur basis.

“Athletic scholarships” are at the root of the hypocritical, dishonest, overemphasized college football system. Washington and Lee will carry out its commitments under scholarship already granted, but will issue no more.

Richmond Times-Dispatch editorial, July 26, 1964.

But if the sports pages in general were saying bad things about W&L’s decision, the editorial pages found the trustees’ action praiseworthy. There are clippings from papers across the nation who were moved to editorial comment. I’ll mention only one, *The Louisville Courier-Journal*, which said: “Football needs Washington and Lee far more than Washington and Lee needs football. W&L will continue in its proud tradition as a place of culture and learning.”

An electric fan helps create a scatological image of what happened next. Cries of anger and frustration from alumni as individuals and in organized chapters. Bitter condemnation from most sports editors and columnists — most, but, in fairness, not all. Chauncey Durden at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* was among those who chose not to join the shrill chorus of critics. Instead, he wrote in his column of July 25: “Friday’s action will not affect Washington and Lee as a university. Even its football-minded alumni will come to know there was no alternative as college football is operated today.” He predicted that Washington and Lee would return to football with schools on its schedule like Sewanee and Centre, two other colleges, with heroic football histories, that had come to the fork in the road ahead of W&L.

W&L Athletic Council Member Blasts Football Move

Rouse Charges ‘Faculty Clique’ Out To Replace Well Rounded Students With Breed Of Phi Betas

RICHMOND, July 26 (AP)—The Times-Dispatch tonight quoted a member of the Washington and Lee Athletic Council as saying the university’s abolition of football and subsidized athletics resulted from a campaign by a “faculty clique” made up of “pseudo-intellectuals.”

RANDOLPH ROUSE, of Falls Church, who also is president of the “General Club,” an organization that has solicited money from alumni for athletic scholarships at W&L, told the newspaper: “The abolition of football at Washington and Lee, tragic in itself, is an indication of an even greater loss—the loss of proper perspective and balance.”

Describing football as “a balancing factor” in college life, Rouse said the “faculty clique” was determined “to replace the well-rounded Washington and Lee man of the past with a breed of Phi Beta Kappas.”

The W&L board of trustees last Friday canceled the university’s 1954 football schedule and announced an end to subsidization of athletics. It held out the possibility that W&L might try fielding a strictly amateur football team within a year or two.

Rouse, one of the more active members of the W&L Alumni Association, was quoted as saying the “faculty clique” at W&L was led by Dr. James G. Leyburn, dean of the university since 1947.

IN LEXINGTON, Dr. Leyburn, told of Rouse’s statement, said: “I’m not against football. I’m against subsidization. . . I wouldn’t presume to speak for other schools.”

Rouse’s formal statement, dictated to the Times-Dispatch said: “The abolition of football at Washington and Lee, tragic in itself, is an indication of an even greater loss, the loss of proper perspective and balance. The pseudo-intellectuals who have gained strength in recent years have seemingly now gained control. It is regrettable that Dr. Gaines (Dr. Francis P. Gaines, W&L, president)

and the board of trustees have bought this philosophy.”

Rouse later enlarged on the formal statement, naming Dr. Leyburn as spearhead of the “clique” he said included faculty members brought in by Leyburn since 1947.

Rouse recently endowed an athletic scholarship at W&L in memory of his brother, Dashiell Rouse, a Korean war casualty. Rouse said a July 7 meeting of the board of trustees’ athletic committee, which called for “gradual de-emphasis” of football at W&L but for playing out the 1954 schedule, produced a statement that 80 per cent of the faculty was opposed to football.

THE STATEMENT, made during the closed session of the committee, “sounded like academic war,” Rouse declared. Rouse said he believes the abolition of football at W&L “will hurt enrollment in two or three years. When I say I oppose it, I know I speak for the great body of Washington and Lee alumni. I believe Dr. Gaines will find that out.”

Roanoke Times, July 27, 1954.

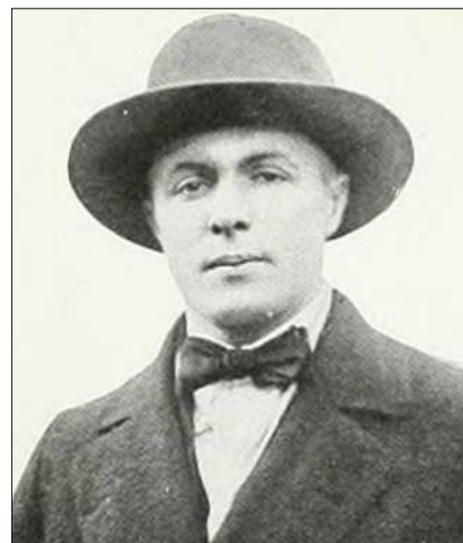
FOR SOME of the more vocal alumni critics, however, there was too much culture and learning at W&L already. The loudest voice of protest belonged to Randolph D. Rouse, class of 1939, a Falls Church real estate developer. Randy Rouse was a member of the faculty-student-alumni University Committee on Athletics, and he had been the president of the Generals’ Fund, the fund-raising arm of the athletic department. He quit both posts immediately, so that he might “speak out for the alumni.” Rouse told a fire-breathing meeting of Roanoke area alumni that “No one in Lexington can, nor can afford to, speak out against the present situation at W&L.” What’s more, he knew whom to blame: “a faculty clique made up of pseudo-intellectuals” under the domination of Dean James G. Leyburn. In letters to the state’s major newspapers, Rouse declared that “The abolition of football at W&L, tragic in itself, is an indication of an even greater loss, the loss of proper perspective and balance. The pseudo-intellectuals have gained control and Gaines and the Trustees have bought this philosophy.”

An eminent sociologist at Yale, Leyburn came to W&L in 1947 as dean of the university. Subsequently, he presented the faculty a comprehensive evaluation of the goals and tactics that he believed the university should pursue as an important center of learning. This so-called “Leyburn Plan” became a guiding philosophy in the development of Washington and Lee’s academic programs over the years that followed. In his remarks to the faculty, Dean Leyburn suggested several topics that should be debated within the faculty in the months ahead. The first of those was “The means of inculcating in our students the feeling that the primary goal of college life is intellectual stimulation and achievement, that all extracurricular activities are secondary to this goal, and that Washington and Lee’s reputation should not in any sense rest upon the achievement of its football team, the success of its Fancy Dress balls, or” — now this is a little hard to visualize today! — “the luxury of its fraternity houses.” Add a reference or two to “substandard students” brought in

to play football, at best “calculated academic risks,” and as far as Randy Rouse was concerned, them was fightin’ words!

At the Roanoke meeting, W. C. “Bill” Raftery, who had coached three winning football teams at W&L in the early ’20’s and who helped found the national leadership society Omicron Delta Kappa a few years earlier, claimed there was an “ax group” at the university out to end football. W. J. Driver, of the class of 1925, who had worked with Randy Rouse in running the Generals’ Fund, complained that “the days of the average student are gone.” All agreed with Rouse that Dean Leyburn and his like were determined “to replace the well-rounded Washington and Lee man of the past with a breed of Phi Beta Kappas.” What’s more, Rouse reminded members of the Generals’ Fund, that they had contributed \$16,000 that year (substantially short of their goal) and that the general alumni fund had received \$45,000. Would this kind of alumni support continue, he asked. “I think not,” he answered.

After an hour’s diatribe by Rouse (it was indeed a diatribe, for I was there, a silent fly on the wall, so to speak; I had already committed to work for the villains Gaines, Leyburn and Gilliam), the Roanoke alumni passed a formal resolution “deploring” the football decision, deploring the failure to seek alumni counsel and asking for a “modest, middle-of-the-road” athletic subsidization program that would bring back intercollegiate football as soon as possible. The *Roanoke Times* said the resolution was passed unanimously by all those present. Actually, it was passed without dissent. Discretion, not valor, was called for, I rationalized as I drove back to Clifton Forge, pondering the absolutely terrible things I had heard said about W&L’s administration. I mean *awful* things! There were jagged edges to many of the well-rounded W&L gentlemen there that night.



Cy Young, athletic legend — and alumni secretary during the maelstrom

The Roanoke action was only the first of a number of formal protests to come from organized alumni groups. From Jacksonville, Charlotte, the Upper Potomac, and Augusta–Rockingham in Virginia came news of concerted protest.

In lonely contrast, a telegram arrived from New Orleans, signed by the executive committee of the alumni chapter there, proclaiming faith in the board of trustees to act wisely, endorsing what it said others called “Leyburnism,” and urging a football schedule that included Sewanee, Amherst, Williams, Swarthmore and Haverford. Those in New Orleans didn’t speak for one alumnus in Alexandria, Louisiana. He wrote to alumni secre-

tary Cy Young “The traditions and spirit of Washington and Lee must be forgotten things. No one could knock a loser, but by the same token, it is going to be hard to support a quitter. . . . I cannot imagine any alumni being proud of W&L anymore.”

It’s difficult to look at the records of 1954 without feeling sympathy for Cy Young. No figure in W&L sports history stands taller. His exploits — sixteen varsity letters in football, basketball, track, and baseball and the captaincy of each team in his final year — won recognition in Ripley’s “Believe It Or Not.” He is one of two Washington and Lee men in the College Football Hall of Fame. He coached W&L’s basketball team in the early 1930s and won two Southern Conference titles. His “Beat Those Damn Wahoos!” performances at pep rallies were legendary. He’d been W&L’s alumni secretary since 1929, and his friends were legion. His replies to alumni letters are especially poignant, as he tried to temper his own disappointments, avoid fanning alumni discontent, and remain faithful to his university and his responsibilities. To an alumnus in St. Louis, he wrote: “Friend, I don’t mind telling you it is making it tough on the Alumni Secretary.”

And so it was in September 1954. Football was gone when the students returned. Controversy was not. The first issue of the *Ring-tum Phi* had football news and comment on every page. Coach Carl Wise had been granted a three-month leave of absence to coach in the new Canadian professional league. Boyd Williams, a Lexington insurance man and former assistant coach at VMI and Richmond, was named interim coach to help “keep the spark of football alive.” Later that fall, about 45 students, most of them freshmen and sophomores, but including a handful of the few remaining scholarship players, played a four-game schedule against Hargrave Military Academy and jayvee teams from Emory & Henry, Hampden-Sydney and Bridgewater. Most of the grant-in-aid upperclassmen and those expected as freshmen had opted to go elsewhere.



The first *Ring-tum Phi* of the year: Dean Leyburn expresses “amazement” at the charges leveled against him.

one win in fifteen games, even patient alumni were getting a little restless. Randy Rouse raved on. The student government launched a fact-finding study whose leadership group included Lacey Putney,ⁱ then a senior law student. A *Ring-tum Phi* “extra” in December 1956 announced the study’s recommendations: a return to limited subsidization with fifty athletic grants-in-aid, subject to need and administered by a faculty committee. Fraternities would be asked to provide free board for these athletes.

When the board of trustees met on January 16, 1957, the student recommendations were on its agenda, along with communications from the Interfraternity Council and alumni chapter presidents. No one expressed satisfaction with the way things had gone so far. The trustees expressed thanks for such keen interest, but reaffirmed their 1954 position. The minutes of that meeting also record this entry:

“On motion, the appointment of William A. Chipley, head coach of football, was extended to cover the present academic year.”

What in the world did that mean? The next day, President Gaines called in his publicity man and tried to explain. Dr. Gaines said he had gone to the Board to recommend that Bill Chipley be given another year. Two years were not a fair test in Gaines opinion, he told me. But trustees’ ears had been sought by others, among them former football players who thought they knew a well-coached team when they saw one. In the 1955 and 1956 Generals they hadn’t. According to Dr. Gaines, there was nothing he could do to avoid the trustees’ insistence that Chipley be relieved of his coaching position.

It put Dr. Gaines squarely on the spot, personally in his close relationship with Chipley, and officially as the head of a college that said so loudly, “Hey, we’re playing for fun! No pressure to win! We’re not like these other schools!”

On January 29, 1957, Dr. Gaines wrote to Bill Chipley this way: “In its session last Saturday, the Board of Trustees extended your present appointment to cover this academic session of 1956-57, and thus brought that appointment in line with the usual appointments for limited periods. With best wishes always . . .”

Dr. Gaines told me to sit tight until he had a response from Coach Chipley. Every few days I’d check back with the President on my need to deal with the press, and he’d say he hadn’t heard from Bill.

It wasn’t until February 25, nearly a month later, that Chipley figured out he’d been fired. When he finally appeared in Dr. Gaines’ office for an explanation of the situation, he was told that the board found him an ineffective teacher of football, but nonetheless hoped that he would stay on and help teach physical education. An

angry and bitter man went back to Doremus gymnasium and wrote Dr. Gaines a letter that wasn’t at all difficult to understand. Chipley said he would remain only as long as it took him to find another job or until September 1, whichever came first. “I have tried my best to make the program succeed. I am sorry the Board saw fit to allow only two years for our efforts.”

The sports press had a good time with the news of Chipley’s dismissal as head football coach. He pulled no punches in his comments to the press. From where I sat, the situation never looked darker. Where would we find another coach who’d be willing to come here under such clouded circumstances?

Well, to bring this to a quick and happy ending, let me say that a new coach was found. Lee M. McLaughlin, the very successful head coach and athletic director at Episcopal High School in Alexandria, had strong Rockbridge County ties. Moreover, he felt he could succeed. He came, and after two seasons his record was worse than Chipley’s. The Generals had won only one game in sixteen tries. But things had changed, for the better.

WALTER MITTY lives within me. On fall mornings in 1959 I’d let my mind wander as I made ready for work. My favorite scenario involved some new names on the W&L roster — Steve Suttle, Ned Hobbs, Tommy Goodwin, Terry Fohs, Jim Hickey . . . Barton Dick. Not this year, but maybe next, or the one after that, we’d go undefeated. *Sports Illustrated* would come and write us up. We’d be the best small college team of all! We’d show Randy Rouse and all those doomsayers!

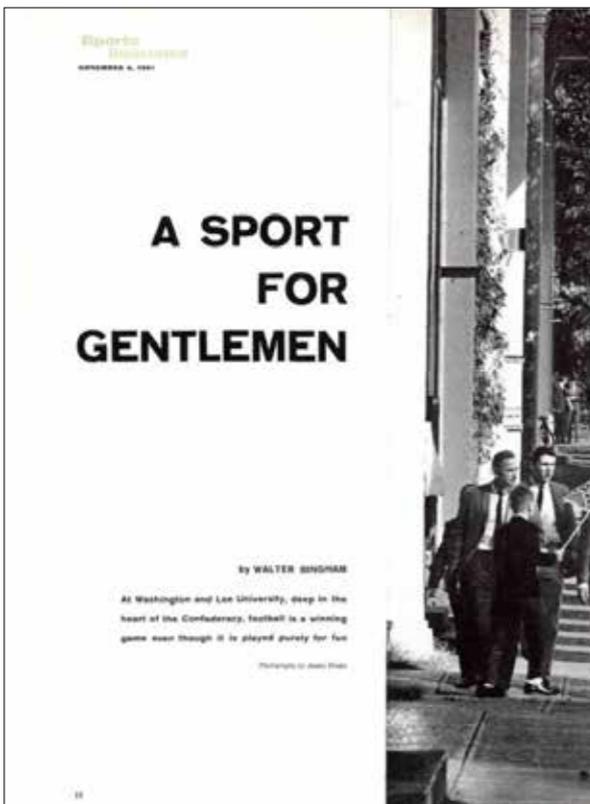
In 1961, my impossible dream became reality.ⁱⁱ But perhaps someone else will say something about that.

I’ve left much out in this narrative. Dean Leyburn resigned as dean in 1956 but stayed on to teach. Dr. Gaines quit the presidency in 1959, the last five of his twenty-nine years sorely troubled by the athletic furor.

[Frank Parsons stayed at W&L in administrative leadership roles until 1999 – forty-five years after he was hired, as he wryly said, to clean up the football mess.]

i Putney went on to become an influential Virginia legislator, serving for 52 years.

ii In the form of a lyrical article in *Sports Illustrated* engineered by the author in 1961, reproduced on the next two pages.



Winning football on an unsubsidized basis can be as much fun to play and as exciting to watch as any football anywhere.

— *Sports Illustrated*, “A Sport for Gentlemen,” November 6, 1961

“I’ve gotten used to it now. Recruiting is like selling insurance. If you see a thousand boys, maybe you get 10.” — Coach Lee McLaughlin, quoted in *Sports Illustrated*

“It was lonely in the press box. Just the P.A. announcer, a statistician and me.” — Frank Parsons, reflecting on the 1955 season to *Sports Illustrated*

The resurgence of football has created a new worry among university officials. At the close of last season there were a few moments when it looked as if the school might lose McLaughlin. [It didn’t.] — *Sports Illustrated*

