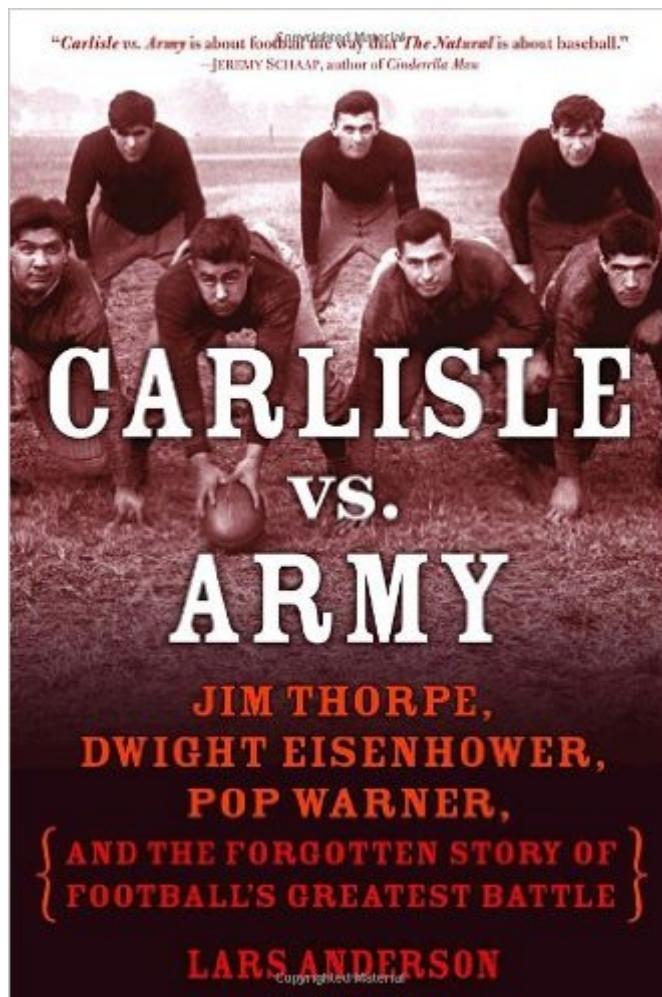


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Carlisle Vs. Army: Jim Thorpe, Dwight Eisenhower, Pop Warner, And The Forgotten Story Of Football's Greatest Battle



Synopsis

A stunning work of narrative nonfiction, *Carlisle vs. Army* recounts the fateful 1912 gridiron clash that pitted one of America's finest athletes, Jim Thorpe, against the man who would become one of the nation's greatest heroes, Dwight D. Eisenhower. But beyond telling the tale of this momentous event, Lars Anderson also reveals the broader social and historical context of the match, lending it his unique perspectives on sports and culture at the dawn of the twentieth century. This story begins with the infamous massacre of the Sioux at Wounded Knee, in 1890, then moves to rural Pennsylvania and the Carlisle Indian School, an institution designed to "elevate" Indians by uprooting their youths and immersing them in the white man's ways. Foremost among those ways was the burgeoning sport of football. In 1903 came the man who would mold the Carlisle Indians into a juggernaut: Glenn "Pop" Warner, the son of a former Union Army captain. Guided by Warner, a tireless innovator and skilled manager, the Carlisle eleven barnstormed the country, using superior team speed, disciplined play, and tactical mastery to humiliate such traditional powerhouses as Harvard, Yale, Michigan, and Wisconsin "and to, along the way, lay waste American prejudices against Indians. When a troubled young Sac and Fox Indian from Oklahoma named Jim Thorpe arrived at Carlisle, Warner sensed that he was in the presence of greatness. While still in his teens, Thorpe dazzled his opponents and gained fans across the nation. In 1912 the coach and the Carlisle team could feel the national championship within their grasp. Among the obstacles in Carlisle's path to dominance were the Cadets of Army, led by a hardnosed Kansan back named Dwight Eisenhower. In Thorpe, Eisenhower saw a legitimate target; knocking the Carlisle great out of the game would bring glory both to the Cadets and to Eisenhower. The symbolism of this matchup was lost on neither Carlisle's footballers nor on Indians across the country who followed their exploits. Less than a quarter century after Wounded Knee, the Indians would confront, on the playing field, an emblem of the very institution that had slaughtered their ancestors on the field of battle and, in defeating them, possibly regain a measure of lost honor. Filled with colorful period detail and fascinating insights into American history and popular culture, *Carlisle vs. Army* gives a thrilling, authoritative account of the events of an epic afternoon whose reverberations would be felt for generations. "Carlisle vs. Army is about football the way that *The Natural* is about baseball." —Jeremy Schaap, author of *I*

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Customer Reviews

In 1912, one of the classic American football games was played--between Carlisle and mighty Army. A book published in 2007 covers much of the same territory, "The Real All Americans: The Team That Changed a Game, a People, a Nation" by Sally Jenkins--and covers it well. But Lars Anderson's book, approaching the issues differently, likewise has created a wonderful examination of that game and events leading up to it. The structure of Anderson's book weaves the story of three people together, culminating in that 1912 context. First, legendary coach Pop Warner; second, the great Indian athlete, Jim Thorpe; third, a gritty undersized football player and future military leader, Dwight Eisenhower. What was at stake in the Carlisle-Army game might be summarized by a segment of the pep talk Warner gave his team just before the contest began: "Remember it was their fathers and grandfathers who destroyed your way of life. Remember Wounded Knee. Remember all of this on every play. Let's go." And so the Indian team from Carlisle took on the Army team with those words ringing in their ears. How did we get to this point? The book describes the arc of Warner's life, his childhood, his becoming an attorney, and the strange voyage leading him into coaching. Early on, he was a vagabond, moving from team to team (even leaving the position at Carlisle a bit before returning). He was an innovator and could inspire his team. Then there was Thorpe, from the American Southwest. Growing up, he was always restless, would run away from school routinely. He ended up at Carlisle, but ran away from that institution, too. The book illustrates his foray into professional baseball during one such hiatus (which, of course, was to come back to haunt him).

As much as I appreciate the need for a book like this, and as much as I wanted to like it, I felt let down by the sloppy research into the game of football which Lars Anderson conducted. Anderson

writes this:"In the huddle, Gus Welch told the Indians that they were finally going to use their secret weapon. Carlisle broke the huddle. At first the Indians settled into their standard power formation with two halfbacks and a fullback lined up behind the quarterback. But then Welch called out a signal, prompting the players to shift into the double-wing formation. Thorpe, who was at left halfback, moved closer to the line and crouched in a three-point stance to the outside of the left offensive tackle. The right halfback, Alex Arcasa, did the same thing and aligned himself to the outside of the right offensive tackle. A nervous chatter rose from the crowd as the Indian players shifted into new positions. No one was sure what Carlisle was doing or what Warner, the great football magician, was up to."This is simply wrong in several ways. First, a double wing formation has two wingbacks aligned outside the offensive ENDS, not tackles. Next, the "standard power formation" which Anderson describes was, of course, the T formation which all teams had used up to 1905. However, Glenn Scobey "Pop" Warner had been using variations of the single wing formation since 1906, and had forsaken the T completely by 1910, according to an interview he gave that year to a Philadelphia newspaper. It is true that Warner unveiled the double wing against Army; but his standard formation by 1912 was the single wing, and shifting one back to the weakside of the single wing to create the double wing formation was hardly the gasp-inducing tactic that Anderson describes.

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