

The First Football at San Diego State

Student sports were in their infancy in 1900 at San Diego Normal School but the college we know today as San Diego State University was eager to launch competitive sports. From its campus on Park Blvd. in University Heights, the one-year-old school was ready for football.

To support its program the college organized the “Athletic Association of the State Normal School of San Diego.” Every male at the school—students and faculty members alike--were members. Many of the professors, in fact, would compete in sports alongside their students. A writer for the school’s 1902 yearbook, *White and Gold*, explained that faculty “mingling with the students in their athletic sports” was a feature of the school, “of which we have been duly proud.”

A few “mingling” faculty members were enthusiastic enough to advance funds to buy “football regalia” for the school’s first team. Prof. A. E. Graham was the football team manager. A 25-year-old biology professor, Arthur W. Greeley, would quarterback the team.

On September 27 the *San Diego Union* announced that team practices had begun. “It will not be long before the football yell is heard on the streets.” The newspaper announced that a series of games would be played with Russ High School (San Diego High) and would conclude with a Thanksgiving Day contest on November 29 to determine the “interscholastic championship of San Diego County.”

But first, Manager Graham scheduled a contest with Escondido High School. The first game went badly for the “Normals.” The *White and Gold* recounted the loss: “We had gone up happy, expectant and confident. We came home a sorry, silent set.”

Optimism returned when sailors from the battleship USS *Iowa* agreed to a match. The Navy eleven outweighed the Normals by thirty pounds per man but in “a contest between science and weight”--science won. With college president Samuel T. Black leading cheers from the sidelines, students and faculty yelled themselves hoarse in a tight game won when quarterback (and professor) Arthur Greeley ran for a winning touchdown.

The eagerly anticipated Thanksgiving Day game with Russ High was scheduled for Bay View Park in Logan Heights near the intersection of present-day Beardsley Street and National Avenue. On Wednesday evening the City Guard Band paraded through city streets and “discoursed music as an advertisement” for Thursday’s big game. Russ High students marched alongside the band and practiced their game yells.

The next day the crowds came early for the afternoon game. Streetcars headed toward the park were crowded from 1:00 on. The grandstand was soon packed with an estimated one thousand fans. Most wore ribbons with their team colors: blue for Russ High and white and gold for the Normals.

A close, defensive game followed the 2:45 kickoff. Punts and fumbles kept the scoring low and long delays were frequent--“mostly by the players laid out.” But there were exciting runs of 25, 40, and 60 yards by the Normals’ Roy Stover.

“The most spectacular game ever played upon the local gridiron,” according to the *White and Gold*, was “characterized by brilliant individual playing on both sides.” The game lasted for hours, much of it under moonlight. When the game was finally called by darkness the Normals had scored three touchdowns (five points each) but missed the extra points. The high schoolers had scored twice and made their kicks but lost the game 15-12.

The three-game season of San Diego Normal School was formally closed with a banquet at the opulent Hotel Brewster at 4th and C Streets, “given to our boys by their proud and appreciative manager and faculty.”



San Diego Normal School's football champions of 1900.

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