

“SOME IRRECOVERABLE FOOTBALL GAME”: THE
LIFE OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S FOOTBALL HERO

By

ALEXANDER TRUNCALE

Master of Arts in English

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

July 2011

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
July, 2011

“SOME IRRECOVERABLE FOOTBALL GAME”: THE
LIFE OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S FOOTBALL HERO

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Edward Walkiewicz

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld

Dr. Jeff Walker

Dr. Mark E. Payton

Dean of the Graduate College

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many people who are deserving of praise and whose support was crucial to my success. First I must acknowledge my parents, Karen and Joe Truncale, who were coaches on the sideline, directing me through life. Second, I would like recognize my undergraduate advisor at Monmouth University, Dr. Stanley S. Blair, who trained me for a 10,000 round fight. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my graduate advisor, Dr. Ed Walkiewicz, and the members of my committee, Dr. Elizabeth Grubgeld and Dr. Jeff Walker. And finally, I am grateful to my extended family and friends, who have acted as a cheering crowd to motivate me through bad times and good.

“SOME IRRECOVERABLE FOOTBALL GAME”: THE LIFE OF FITZGERALD’S
FOOTBALL HERO

I. Introduction

Each year, the National Collegiate Athletic Association bestows the Hobey Baker Award on the best collegiate hockey player in the United States. Akin to the Heisman Trophy in college football, it is arguably the most prestigious individual honor in amateur hockey. What is perhaps most intriguing is that the award’s namesake, Hobey Baker, in addition to gaining notoriety as the first highly skilled American hockey player, was perhaps best known for his prowess as a football player at Princeton University, so much so that, during his senior year as captain of the football team, he was greatly admired by an aspiring writer and football player named F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The fame surrounding Hobey Baker during the 1910s was arguably as intense as the hero worship surrounding superstar athletes today. Emil R. Salvini, author of *Hobey Baker, American Legend*, writes that American sports at the turn of the twentieth century began to have cultural significance: “While American’s golden age of sports would not occur until the 1920s, intercollegiate football took center stage during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century and provided an entertainment-starved public and a hungry press with events like the annual Yale- Harvard game, held on Thanksgiving Day and frequently attended by over 70,000 fans” (5) With the increased interest in athletics came the desire for a dominant athlete who could capture the attention of the American sports fan. According to Salvini, these fans found that athlete in Baker. As Baker began

dominating sports at St. Paul's high school in New Hampshire, "stories began spreading throughout the college world of the talented young man who at fifteen had received the St. Paul award for best athlete, excelling at hockey, football, baseball tennis, swimming and track" (16). Essentially, Baker was the superstar athlete sports fans craved. Because Harvard, Yale and Princeton understood the potential financial impact athletics could have on their schools, the decision of where Baker would attend college drew national interest. The hero worship of superstar athletes, both at a professional and collegiate level, is best exemplified by the celebrity of Hobey Baker during his time at both St. Paul's and Princeton. Fitzgerald, himself, became wrapped up in this hero worship, befriending Baker once he arrived at Princeton, and dedicating himself to sharing the kind of football fame Baker enjoyed. When this dream was dashed, the football hero became an important figure in of three Fitzgerald's works. While the book *Sport, Narrative and Nation in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald* by Jarom Lyle McDonald focuses on Fitzgerald, football and its relation to class, I believe writing about football allowed Fitzgerald not only to reach a more widespread audience, but also to deal with his own football failures¹.

II. Fitzgerald's Football Failures

In the 1920s and 30s, sports was as big a part of American culture as it is today. Sport, particularly collegiate football, skyrocketed in popularity during this time. Historian Richard D. Mandell writes, "Certain sports heroes had millions of fans from coast to coast. College football and the other Ivy League sports were gracefully established at the University of California and at Stanford University" (194). F. Scott Fitzgerald shared this passion for sport, so much so that he included many references to

sport, particularly football, in his novels and short stories. From the time he was a young man until his death, Fitzgerald had a fervor for sport, particularly football. He always desired to be a football hero, and according to Aaron Latham's book *Crazy Sundays*, "Fitzgerald's mind was on football when his heart stopped. Indeed just before he died, he listened on the radio as Princeton beat Yale 10-7" (277). However, one could not classify Fitzgerald's experience with sport as positive; though he was a talented writer, Fitzgerald used his literary treatment of sport as a way of dealing with his own sporting failures as to sports as a young man. Despite his success as a writer, the dream of attaining what he believed to be a high position in society, that of football hero, always eluded him.

The idea of the football hero or sports hero always held a certain allure and a certain mythic place in the American landscape. Wiley Lee Umphlett contends that the literary sports hero, as a result of his success against insurmountable odds, becomes "the perfect modern symbol of American indomitable will" (33). Thus, the sports hero represents the paradigm of success and a separate class of individual, something in which Fitzgerald took an interest. Depending on Fitzgerald's narrative voice, the sports hero is depicted either as a charismatic character or a villain. For Fitzgerald, the attitudes of his characters and his narrators toward football heroes are shaped by his own experiences with the sport. Additionally, all his football-playing characters have different personalities.

Long before *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and before he established himself as a premier name in American literature, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a young writer attempting to win over an audience. While Fitzgerald's narrative structure, tone, and overall effectiveness would improve later in life, the overwhelming desire to publish was

paramount, even at the age of 16. According to Matthew J. Bruccoli, perhaps the most well-known and respected Fitzgerald scholar and author of the definitive biography of Fitzgerald, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (1981), while at the Newman School, Fitzgerald “sought distinction and self-justification through writing” (32). The best way to distinguish himself, Fitzgerald reasoned, was to write about an overwhelmingly popular subject: football. In the Christmas 1912 edition of the Newman School’s literary magazine, the *Newman News*, Fitzgerald’s poem “Football” appeared; to date it is recognized by critics as one of Fitzgerald’s first published works².

But Fitzgerald had other reasons for writing and publishing this poem. While it is true that the poem offered an early opportunity for Fitzgerald to distinguish himself as a writer, Bruccoli also notes this poem was “written after he had disgraced himself on the football field” (32). This “disgrace” Bruccoli describes appears in Fitzgerald’s essay “Author’s House,” in *Afternoon of an Author*, a collection of his essays edited by Arthur Mizener. Of the game that influenced “Football”, Fitzgerald writes, “I remember the desolate ride in the bus back to the train and the desolate ride back to school with everybody thinking I had been yellow on the occasion, when actually I was just distracted and sorry for that opposing end. That’s the truth” (186-87)³. Although the only account of the game that exists is in this essay, we can surmise that it was Fitzgerald who, rightly or wrongly, was largely blamed for the Newman School’s loss. Fitzgerald’s first poem, “Football” not only allowed him to break into a career as a professional writer but also served as a type of apology and a way to seek forgiveness from his Newman classmates, as well as to conceal his failings in that game from his father, who, according to Fitzgerald himself, wanted to view him as the archetypal “football hero.” He writes,

“The point is it inspired me to write a poem for the school paper which made me as big a hit with my father as if I had become a football hero” (*Afternoon of an Author* 186).

“Football” allowed Fitzgerald to live vicariously through his writing to ease the pain of his athletic failures. Failure in athletics, particularly football, both at Newman and, subsequently at Princeton, was something that would haunt Fitzgerald throughout his life. Fitzgerald sums up these failures in a February 1936 essay titled “The Crack-Up”: “As the twenties passed, with my own twenties marching ahead of them, my two juvenile regrets at not being big enough (or good enough) to play football in college and at not getting overseas during the war resolved themselves into childish waking dreams of imaginary heroism that were good enough to go to sleep on in restless nights” (70).

When Fitzgerald chose to attend Princeton, it was not as a result of his love for New Jersey. While the opportunity to join the Triangle Club certainly appealed to Fitzgerald’s desire to become a writer, what ultimately made Fitzgerald choose Princeton, according to Brucoli, was Princeton’s 8-6 triumph over Harvard in November 1911 (33). As a result of what was considered a significant upset of Harvard by Princeton, Brucoli reports that day, Fitzgerald wrote in a scrapbook “Sam White decides me for Princeton” (33). Sam White was the star of that particular game and one of the stars, along with Hobe Baker, of the Princeton football team. For Fitzgerald, the chance to attend Princeton was also a chance to emulate these two athletes. It was also one last chance to become the football star he never was at the Newman School.

The Princeton football team was on Fitzgerald’s mind as soon as he passed his entrance exam. Aaron Latham writes that when news came he would be attending Princeton in September, Fitzgerald sent a telegram to his mother which read

“ADMITTED SEND FOOTBALL PADS AND SHOES IMMEDIATELY” (30).

Clearly, as this brief yet forceful telegram reveals, Fitzgerald’s priority was football when he entered Princeton in the Fall of 1913. In *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, Bruccoli reveals, “His academic situation remained shaky, his Newman School record shows that he failed four courses in two years” (38-39). Bruccoli goes on to comment, “It is normal almost obligatory for literary geniuses to get poor grades in math and science; but Scott did not distinguish himself in his English courses, either” (39). Nor did Fitzgerald emphasize academics when he arrived at Princeton; his first concern was the football team and becoming a football star. Fitzgerald’s dedication to football and to accomplishing his goal ranged from acquiring new football pads and cleats from his mother in Minneapolis to striking up a friendship with the team’s captain, Hobey Baker. However, similar to his experience at the Newman School, Fitzgerald’s attempt to revive his football career came to an abrupt end. As Bruccoli notes, there are conflicting stories about just how this occurred: “According to one report, Fitzgerald wrenched his knee in practice and had to withdraw; another report is that he was cut from the squad on the first day of practice” (44)⁴. Whatever actually happened on that day in 1913, the result was the same: Fitzgerald’s dreams of becoming the archetypal American football hero were dashed.

While he turned to a successful writing career after his service in the United States Army in World War I, Fitzgerald, throughout his life, always envied those who could succeed on the playing field. Even well into his established writing career, he admitted he still had fantasies about winning a pivotal game against Yale, Harvard, or one of Princeton’s other Ivy League rivals. In the 1934 essay, “Sleeping and Waking,”

which also appears in *The Crack-Up*, he writes, “Once upon a time (I tell myself) they needed a quarterback at Princeton, and they had nobody and were in despair. The head coach noticed me kicking and passing on the side of the field, and he cried: ‘Who is *that* man-why haven’t we noticed *him* before?’” (66). This excerpt from “Sleeping and Waking” reveals the extent of Fitzgerald’s desire. Even with the economic successes of *The Great Gatsby* and his short stories, Fitzgerald could never quite accept his experiences with the Newman and Princeton football teams. In three specific works, *The Great Gatsby*, *This Side of Paradise*, and “The Bowl,” Fitzgerald makes football an important part of the narrative. In order to appeal to a broader audience, as well as to attempt to create a fictional world that would allow him to imagine what it would be like to be a football hero, Fitzgerald includes football and a football hero in each of these three works. Drawing on his, albeit limited, football experience, he attempted to create characters who gave the contemporary reader a glimpse into the life of the football hero in the 1920s.

3. Amory Blaine and Tom Buchanan: Football Heroes

In the 1920s and 1930s, sport was on almost everyone’s mind, particularly the children of the aristocratic class. Unlike today, those who participated in football were usually the children of the upper echelon of society, and the sports of the prestigious Ivy League schools were considered to be the best in amateur and collegiate athletics. To excel in sport was a young man’s ticket to popularity, both in high school and at the university. In Fitzgerald’s first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, the protagonist, Amory Blaine, becomes the football hero Fitzgerald never did. While critics do not necessarily consider the novel to be autobiographical, many of the events, triumphs and

disappointments Amory experiences parallel Fitzgerald's experiences. These disappointments, however, do not include athletic failures. Amory's identity as a football hero in secondary school is a departure from Fitzgerald's experience with football.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald uses his character Amory Blaine to openly imagine the life of the football hero. Echoing the experience of his own life, in the opening pages of the novel Fitzgerald writes of Amory that "His chief disadvantage lay in athletics, but as soon as he discovered that it was the touchstone of power and popularity at school" he made "furious and persistent efforts" (9) to surpass others in sports. Like Fitzgerald, Amory is blessed with the knowledge of what it takes to achieve popularity, and like Fitzgerald, as a young boy, his desire was to become a great football player: "Always, after he was in bed, there were voices. . . just outside his window and before he fell asleep he would dream one of his favorite waking dreams, the one about him becoming a great half-back" (19). In the early chapters, the reader sees that Amory is still filled with the hope that he can become a football hero, much the way Fitzgerald was at that age.

While many of the events Amory experiences are similar to Fitzgerald's, Fitzgerald did not possess the incredible football ability bestowed upon Amory. Whereas Fitzgerald had little success in football while at the Newman School, Amory's experience with football at the fictitious St. Regis School is just the opposite. The reader learns that in Amory's first two years at St. Regis "He played football intensely, alternating a reckless brilliancy with a tendency to keep himself as safe from hazard as decency would permit" (30). Later, the reader learns that he was proud to be the "lightest and youngest

man on the football squad” (30), a fact he bombastically relates to his friend Frog Parker upon his return to Minneapolis during the Christmas Break.

It seems as if Fitzgerald attempts to recreate his past in this novel; through Amory Blaine, he imagines what it would be like to be a football star, at least during his preparatory school days. In these football scenes, Amory becomes a larger-than-life character, and his football abilities are demonstrated in the most flattering way. In the section “Heroic in General Tone,” Fitzgerald describes an important game between St. Regis and its rival Groton in which Amory plays quarterback, makes almost every tackle, and establishes himself as a legend, the kind of legend Fitzgerald always desired to be, but never could. For Fitzgerald, this is as close as he could get to the football hero, and he allows Amory, despite all his other negative qualities, to at least be successful in football at St Regis. Unfortunately for Amory, his football career at Princeton comes to an end during his second week of practice when “he wrenched his knee seriously enough to put him out for the rest of the season. This forced him to retire and consider the situation” (48). With his football career over, Amory embarks on a life of mischief and debauchery.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald displays the heroic aspects of the football hero with Amory Blaine at St. Regis. However, in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) the perspective towards the football hero changes, as Fitzgerald shifts from limited third-person narration to the first-person perspective of Nick Carraway. Carraway, perhaps jealous because of his own lack of football prowess, levels the most criticism (other than at Gatsby) at Tom Buchanan, the ex-football player. As viewed through Carraway, the game of football itself becomes an exercise in brute force, rather than a glorious and

noble contest. Those who participated in football, such as Tom Buchanan, are viewed as having relinquished some of their humanity in order to succeed.

Before Carraway introduces the reader to Jay Gatsby, he introduces the reader to his second cousin, Daisy, and her husband, Tom Buchanan. While Carraway dislikes almost all the characters he encounters, his portrayal of Tom, which begins with his introduction, is perhaps the least flattering. Carraway states Buchanan, “among various physical accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven a national figure in a way, one of the men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty one that everything afterward savors of anti-climax” (6). Carraway gives us no indication as to his own football exploits at Yale, and therefore it is safe to presume he did not play. The perspective on the football hero in *The Great Gatsby* is drastically different than in *This Side of Paradise*. Whereas in *This Side of Paradise* the football hero plays football “brilliantly,” Carraway describes Tom as a, “a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax” (6)

In *The Sporting Myth of the American Experience*, Wiley Lee Umphlett writes of Tom Buchanan, “For the star athlete nothing in life can ever again approach the significance of the lost world of the Big Game. Consequently, the experience of encounter for characters like these cannot be realized in life, but only in a game or contest” (117). In this regard, success in sport is like a powerful drug: the sports star gets addicted to the glamour and cannot rid himself of it. Carraway finds it lamentable that Tom, even as a man many years removed from Yale, appears to have a continuing desire for the “dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game” (6). Now that there is

no outlet for this “dramatic turbulence,” Tom must create situations which he can liken to an important, high pressure football game because, arguably, he knows no other life.

Without the “dramatic turbulence,” Tom has become uncomfortable, even in very low risk situations, such as meeting Carraway. Perhaps this is an unforeseen byproduct of the life of a football hero after his career comes to an end.

Fitzgerald’s distaste for Tom is evident when one learns that he went to Yale; on top of reaching great football success, he did so at Princeton’s chief rival. In a manuscript published in, *The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, John B. Chambers reveals Fitzgerald’s jealousy of Yale football, and one of the reasons he chose to attend Princeton: “I think what started my Princeton sympathy was that they always just lost the football championship. Yale always seemed to nose them out in the last quarter by superior ‘stamina’ as the newspapers called it. It was to me a repetition of the story of the foxes and the big animals in the child’s book” (22). Fitzgerald’s type of inferiority complex parallels similar rivalries in contemporary sport culture. Compound Tom’s football success with where he became nationally recognized, as well as Carraway’s description of Tom as a boor, and Fitzgerald has successfully created a character whom Carraway, along with his readers, can easily dislike. Carraway’s overall description of Tom is not only unflattering but also furthers the connection of Tom Buchanan, the football player, and Tom Buchanan, arguably the least appealing character in the novel. Tom represents power, wealth, and the repugnance that it inevitably generates. This is consistent with Michael Cocchiarale’s reading of the novel. He writes that in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses sport to demonstrate “the corruption of the social and economic elite” (xviii). Tom is among those corrupted elite.

However, Robert Emmet Long contends that those who “read *The Great Gatsby* will remember Fitzgerald’s physical description of Buchanan” (146), more so than any other aspect of Tom, including his personality. The reader understands Tom’s past football glory at Yale; but, according to Fitzgerald, what inherently goes with that success is a type of marauding and unrefined lack of dignity attributed to Tom. Fitzgerald uses violent football imagery to convey this and through Carraway, describes Tom as having, “Two shining arrogant eyes” that “had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward” (7). From this, one can conclude that Tom is still waiting for that “irrecoverable football game” (6) and that the football mentality of domination is still very much prevalent in his personality. Punctuating his physical description of Tom, Carraway notes that Tom’s body is “a cruel body” (7).

The physical description of Tom even extends beyond Carraway’s own view, to that of Tom’s wife, Daisy. After she reveals her injured finger to Nick and Jordan, she remarks, “That’s what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a” (12). The terms “hulking” and “brute” are synonymous and consistent with Carraway’s description of Tom. They also fit the caricature of the rough and uncivilized football player. These words do, at least to a point, irk Tom; he responds, “I hate that word hulking, even in kidding” (12). Additionally, Tom shows his brutality when his mistress, Myrtle Wilson, begins to annoy him: “Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. Then there were bloody towels upon the bathroom floor, and women’s voices scolding, and high over the confusion a long broken wail of pain” (37). During the 1920s, football was not as specialized as it is

today. Therefore, many players, like Tom, played both offense and defense. An “end” on offense would be equivalent to a tight end today, while on defense, an “end” might play on the line. Although he played two different positions, Tom’s position of “end” required him to engage in severe physical contact. Perhaps he knows this characterization of him is correct. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald associates the body of an ex-football player with a type of dehumanization; the ex-football player, in exchange for a handful of years of glory on a football field, gives up an opportunity to be a gentlemen. Fitzgerald introduces the reader to a different side of the football hero, reasoning that a career as a football hero may lead someone to become a man like Tom Buchanan.

In addition, Tom has the football mentality to go along with his football body. Long declares “That Buchanan has not developed beyond the stage of the collegiate gridiron is made clear in his ‘defense’ of civilization” (146). Long, of course, refers to Tom’s declaration that “civilization is going to pieces” and his reference to a fictional book (based on an actual one), *The Rise of the Colored Empires*, written by Goddard. James L.W. West III explains: “Tom misremembers the title and author (though Fitzgerald might have changed both deliberately because he was referring to a book published by Charles Scribner’s Sons). Tom has been reading *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* by Lothrop Stoddard, published by Scribners in 1920, with an introduction by Madison Grant” (165-166). Therefore, Tom’s mindset is that he, and his “team,” or race, is under attack from another “team,” or another race, and he must protect them with a type of brute force, similar to the way he played and protected his team at Yale. With Tom Buchanan, Fitzgerald helps further perpetuate a negative

stereotype of the football player; whereas football players were held in high esteem, Fitzgerald, in Tom, wants to demonstrate the drawbacks of the football hero. Similar to the way superstar athletes are often associated with misfortune (either by their own fault or otherwise) the football hero in the 1920s, as evidenced by Tom, and echoed in Umphlett's assessment about the star athlete and the big game, had a difficult time transitioning from the football field to a life of post-athletic glory.

Both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby* give perspective on and insight into the sports world of the early twentieth century. In both novels, Fitzgerald attempts to give one side of the life the football hero leads. In *This Side of Paradise*, the football hero is Amory, and the reader sees his ascension to stardom. In *The Great Gatsby*, the caricature of the football hero is much different, and Fitzgerald, through Tom, demonstrates the descent of the football hero in his inability to transition into a life after football. Despite these insights, neither of these novels is truly a football narrative; instead, they are novels in which football plays some role, the significance of which is certainly debatable. "The Bowl," a narrative which Fitzgerald himself dubbed a football story, is about a character's love and hate for football, as well as the narrative perspective used to describe those feelings. It is also a short story in which, unlike *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald gives a more complete description of football that is both complimentary and cautionary.

4. "The Bowl:" A Container of Mixed Feelings

More than ten years after Fitzgerald left Princeton University, according to Brucoli, "Work on 'The Bowl,' a football story, rekindled Fitzgerald's interest in Princeton football as he made trips to watch practice or attend games" (263). This was

Fitzgerald's first attempt at a truly football-centric story. Fitzgerald, using a first person narrator, describes the up and down fate of Princeton's fictional football star, Dolly Harlan. Ten years after he left Princeton, there is a type of nostalgia emanating from Fitzgerald when it comes to the football hero. However, instead of living the dream of a football hero as he attempted to do with Amory Blaine, Fitzgerald openly explores, through the eyes of Jeff Derring, what it was like to closely observe the life of a football hero, similar to what Fitzgerald experienced at Princeton when he befriended Hobey Baker. Derring, like Carraway, is both an observer and recorder of events, as well as an active participant. But the story itself centers on Dolly, relegating the narrator to a role similar to that of a fan in a stadium.

"The Bowl" is a football story from the point-of-view of the spectator. This is an attempt by Fitzgerald to focus not necessarily on the football hero himself, but rather to view the football hero through the eyes of the fan. The voice of Jeff Derring is the voice of the average football spectator, and he, like other fans, envies a football star. In the second paragraph, Derring comments that he "reveled in football, as audience, amateur statistician and foiled participant" (390). Later, Derring remarks that he would "have given ten years of my life" (399) to be a physical specimen like Dolly. This brief statement from the narrator, which appears as the first sentence of the second paragraph, parallels Fitzgerald's own feelings. Now he could write from a point-of-view with which he was most familiar: that of football spectator.

This is a new narrative technique for Fitzgerald in respect to writing about football and one that is certainly applicable to the common perspective in relation to football. Football is now and has been a spectator sport. The larger football stadiums,

like the Yale Bowl, where part of “The Bowl” is set, holds tens of thousands fans, whereas a single football team fields only between 75 and 90 players. The point-of-view of a football spectator comes more naturally, so much so that Fitzgerald’s editor at *The Saturday Evening Post*, Thomas Costain, commented that when Fitzgerald wrote “The Bowl,” he, “got the real spirit of the game as it has perhaps never been done before” (108). Because so few people have been fortunate enough to have the opportunity to be a football hero, the connection to football a large majority of people have is that of spectator. Therefore, narrating from a perspective as a member of the audience in a stadium makes “The Bowl” more universal; there is a better chance a reader will be able to relate to a football story as a spectator than as a football hero.

Perhaps one of the reasons Costain praised the narration of “The Bowl” was because it was so easily understood. Derring begins his narration with a description of the Yale Bowl stadium, which, even today, is still an iconic venue in college football. Derring describes the overwhelming characteristics of the stadium, not necessarily overwhelming to spectators, but to players. Derring states that in practice, Dolly dropped two punts as a result of his nerves (391). There is a sense of relief from Derring, that he is glad to be in the stands watching the game, rather than having to endure the pressure of playing. This point is accentuated by Derring’s description of Dolly’s actions on the sideline between quarters. According to his narration, Dolly was nervous, pacing back and forth and “wearing that strained stunned expression” (391).

What people sometimes fail to recognize about football (or sports) heroes is what goes into reaching football stardom, and that is something Fitzgerald touches on in “The Bowl.” There is a level of competition in sport at which one’s natural ability is no longer

sufficient. This ability may allow one to reach a certain plateau, but to be successful, or to become a football hero, requires much more that remains unseen from a fan's perspective. Derring describes Dolly's period of training, how Dolly disliked the repetitiveness of practices, and how Dolly's teammates disliked these rituals even more. Derring even contends, "Sometimes he (Dolly) imagined that a man here and there was about to tear off the mask and say, 'Dolly, do you hate this lousy business as much as I do?'" (392). The term "business" could be more slang in this narrative than it would be now, or perhaps Fitzgerald saw college football emerging even then as a business because of its overwhelming popularity. While not as much money was involved in college athletics in 1928 as today, the pressure to succeed, particularly in Ivy League football, was still very much ubiquitous. This pressure reached such a point that Dolly, when he first entered Princeton, swore he would never play football again after a successful career at the St. Regis School (the same fictional school at which Amory Blaine had his football success). But the glory of the gridiron was too powerful, and Derring tells us that Dolly "wandered down to freshman practice one afternoon, feeling oddly lost and dissatisfied, and smelled the turf and smelled the thrilling season" (392). Within two weeks of his change of heart, Dolly was captain of the football team. This see-saw battle within Dolly is perhaps indicative of the kind of dilemma the football hero faces. Certainly the benefits of fame are difficult for any person to resist, but Fitzgerald, through Dolly, does an excellent job of capturing the kind of work ethic one must have in order to reach and remain at a level of football excellence that elevates one to the status of football hero.

The narrative of Dolly's dilemma is interspersed with an account of the Yale-Princeton game that year. Derring discloses all the factors that have led up to this game,

including Dolly's indecision, as well as his oscillating emotions toward the game. But, at this juncture of "The Bowl," Dolly leads Princeton into what is regarded as the biggest game of the year, against an opponent Fitzgerald himself disliked: Yale. The perspective of the narration of the game is Derring's, so it is easy for him to view the game and focus on individual plays as they develop, and the reader can realistically imagine the game in his mind. This is easy for a narrator/author to convey because a football game plays out like a story. The ebb and flow of a game mirrors that of a fictional narrative, and even though what takes place on the field in "The Bowl" is fiction, the events are highly believable. More important, from the perspective of the author, "The Bowl" is easily understood because the experiences Derring describes mirror the perspectives of a fan in the stands. Princeton does win the game, and Derring describes this as an occasion worthy of much celebration: "We all felt a great personal elation. We hadn't beaten Yale for three years and now everything was going to be all right" (394). However, "The Bowl" is not entirely a story about the ebb and flow of a football game, but rather the vacillating emotions of the football hero Dolly as he attempts to choose between football glory and Vienna Thorne.

What Fitzgerald does with the relationship between Vienna and Dolly is to create a conflict; Dolly, a football star, fresh from his success against rival Yale, pairs with a young woman whose brother's death from playing football still haunts her. Dolly enjoys his time with Vienna but knows he will eventually have to choose between her and football. However, that decision is deferred, at least temporarily. Vienna's return to Europe for fifteen months allows Dolly, albeit somewhat unwillingly, to return to football the following September and once again repeat the love/hate cycle with football Derring

describes earlier. As much as Dolly wants to divorce himself from football for Vienna, he simply cannot.

In the summer before his third season at Princeton, Dolly injures his ankle playing tennis. When Derring asks Dolly if he will play football again, Dolly responds “No, I’m not a child any more. I’ve played for two years and I want this year free” (401). Two weeks later, in a letter to Derring, Dolly confirms this decision. But during the week of Princeton’s game against Navy, Dolly returns to football, and does not look back. During that game, Vienna reveals to Jeff that Dolly has chosen football over her: “Dolly’s changed his mind. He prefers football to me” (403). As a result, despite gaining Hollywood actress Daisy Cary, perhaps a byproduct of his status as a football hero, Dolly loses Vienna.

“The Bowl” is a story that combines both the glory of being a football hero with the drawbacks that come with it. Previously, Fitzgerald’s focus on the football hero, in his own life and in *This Side of Paradise*, led his narration to focus only on the glory and nothing else. But, with the character of Tom Buchanan, as well as in “The Bowl,” the reader is given a more in-depth and well-rounded view of what a football hero goes through. The pressures that come with success are, at times, too much for a young man to handle. There is a constant internal debate within Dolly as to whether or not he should continue to play football. Every time he decides he will not play football, the glory of the football field calls to him: “He wandered down to freshman practice one afternoon, feeling oddly lost and dissatisfied, and smelled the turf and smelled the thrilling season. In half an hour he was lacing on a pair of borrowed shoes and two weeks later was captain of the freshman team” (392). But it is more than a choice between playing and

not playing. It is the idea that he hated the practices, yet, for some reason, even when he resolved never to play again, he simply could not stay away. There is also the decision of whether to pursue a relationship with Vienna, to give up something that could last a lifetime for glory that lasts only briefly. The reader can conclude, based on Derring's narration, that Derring desires to be a football star but, at the same time, also recognizes that being one may not be as glorious as others may believe it to be. While there is some jealousy evident on Derring's part, "The Bowl" is a story that gives credence to this belief.

5. Conclusion

In the introduction, in order to illustrate the kind of hero worship of star athletes that was prevalent in the early twentieth century, I offered a brief anecdote about legendary star athlete Hobey Baker and his relation to F. Scott Fitzgerald. I indicated that the interest in his athletic exploits began as far back as Baker's time in secondary school and that his athletic prowess made him overwhelmingly popular. During this time, hero worship of athletes extended to not only football but boxing and baseball as well. The idea of the hero worship of sport figures is not something new, as evidenced by Fitzgerald's own description of the football hero in his writing. In Fitzgerald's work, such adoration is focused mostly on football players, despite the popularity of other sports in the 1920s.

During the 20s and into the 30s, professional football was still in its infancy; the National Football League, founded in 1920, was barely surviving financially, and other professional football leagues and teams were going bankrupt at an almost regular rate. Football's popularity was the result of the exploits of college athletes, specifically those

playing for the Ivy League schools. For Fitzgerald, the idea of a football hero could more realistically exist in a college realm rather than on a professional level because of the elements of school spirit and rivalries among the most prestigious and wealthy schools in the country.

Fitzgerald understood the relationship between football and popularity and crafted three characters, each of whom represents different facets of the prototypical football hero. The first, in *This Side of Paradise*, is Amory Blaine, the football hero Fitzgerald never could be. In specific sections of the novel, Fitzgerald skillfully includes only the details which paint a picture of glory and heroism on the football field. In *The Great Gatsby*, the focus is on the football hero during his post-football days. Rather than displaying the greatness of the football hero, the picture of Tom Buchanan is one of a man who surrenders part of his humanity in order to participate in this most violent game. After his participation in the game and role as a football hero, Tom becomes a man who has great difficulty readjusting to life outside of football. The portrayal of the final character, Dolly Harlan, is the most complete portrait of the football hero. Jeff Derring, like Nick Carraway, is a participatory observer but based on his observations of Harlan's life is able to disclose all the factors that are involved in becoming a football hero. Although being a sports hero is glamorous, there are often many drawbacks to this lifestyle, as Fitzgerald discloses when he changes his perspective in relation to the archetypal football hero.

NOTES

¹.Jarom Lyle McDonald's book largely focuses on sport as a spectator activity rather than a participatory activity and explores the relationship between the class structure of the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. McDonald's study, a published dissertation, focuses on a variety of sports in Fitzgerald's works. This essay here is more biographical in nature, and while it does, like the MacDonald book, discuss some aspects of class, it mainly focuses on the football hero as Fitzgerald's unattainable fantasy.

² According to Brucoli: "There is no file of the *Newman News*. Fitzgerald's contributions are known from the clippings in his scrapbooks" (Brucoli 32).

³ Like the character Tom Buchanan, Fitzgerald also played end during his brief football career.

⁴ In *This Side of Paradise*, Amory Blaine injures his knee during the first week of practice.

WORKS CITED

- Boyle, Thomas E. "Unreliable Narration in *The Great Gatsby*." *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association*. 23.1 (Mar 1969): 21-6. Print.
- Brucoli, Matthew J., ed. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: In His Own Time*. New York: Popular Library, 1971. Print.
- . *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1981. Print.
- Chambers, John B. *The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Print.
- Cocchiarale, Michael. *Upon Further Review: Sports in American Literature*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004. Print.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Crack-Up*. First published 1945. Ed. Edmund Wilson. New York: New Directions, 1993. Print.
- . *The Great Gatsby*. First published 1925. New York: Scribner, 2004. Print.
- . *This Side of Paradise*. First published 1920. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921. Print.
- . *Trimalchio: An Early Version of The Great Gatsby*. Ed. James L.W. West III. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print.
- . "The Bowl." *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Ed. Matthew J. Brucoli. New York: Scribner, 2003. Print.
- . *Afternoon of an Author: A Selection of Uncollected Stories and Essays*

- Ed. Arthur Mizener. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957. Print.
- Latham, Aaron. *Crazy Sundays: F. Scott Fitzgerald in Hollywood*. New York: Viking Press, 1970. Print.
- Long, Robert Emmet. *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 1979. Print.
- Mangum, Bryant. "Distant Idols: Fate and the Work Ethic in 'The Bowl.'" *New Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's Neglected Stories*. Ed. Jackson R. Bryer. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1996. Print.
- Mandell, Richard D. *Sport: A Cultural History*. New York: Columbia U P, 1984. Print.
- McDonald, Jarom Lyle. *Sports Narrative and Nation the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Salvini, Emil R. *Hobey Baker, American Legend*. St. Paul: The Hobey Baker Memorial Foundation, 2005. Print.
- Umphlett, Wiley Lee. *The Sporting Myth and the American Experience*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated UP, 1975. Print.

VITA

ALEXANDER TRUNCALE

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: "SOME IRRECOVERABLE FOOTBALL GAME": THE LIFE OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S FOOTBALL HERO

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Born April 25, 1987, New Brunswick, New Jersey to Karen and Joseph Truncale. Currently resides and works in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in English at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2011.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English at Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey in 2009.

Experience: Graduate Teaching Assistant, Oklahoma State University, 2010-2011
Tutor, Oklahoma State University Writing Center, 2009-2011

Professional Memberships:

Sports Literature Association

Name: Alexander Truncale

Date of Degree: July, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: "SOME IRRECOVERABLE FOOTBALL GAME": THE LIFE OF F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S FOOTBALL HERO.

Pages in Study: 24

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: English

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study is to explore two of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels *The Great Gatsby* and *This Side of Paradise* as well as his short story "The Bowl" in order to explore Fitzgerald's attitude toward football, the archetypal collegiate football hero of the 1920s and 1930s, and how Fitzgerald's own football failings shapes his narration in the above mention narratives. The portrayal of the football hero is different in each of the three above mentioned works. The study is set up as follows: The introduction opens with a brief anecdote, illustrating the hero worship of the football player in the early twentieth century that mirrors the hero worship of sports superstars in contemporary society. The first section continues with an examination of Fitzgerald's own experiences with football, beginning with his first published poem, "Football," written while Fitzgerald was in secondary school. It also covers his brief time as a member of the Princeton football team. The second section delves into the concept of the football hero and into the football-playing characters portrayed in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Great Gatsby*. In the former, Fitzgerald describes football glory whereas in the latter the narration takes a much more negative attitude toward the football player of the story. The third section examines "The Bowl," Fitzgerald's only true football story, and argues that it gives the most complete account of the life of a football hero. The final section, a conclusion, reasserts that, despite Fitzgerald's success as an author, the dream of football always eluded him.

Findings and Conclusions: Based on Matthew J. Bruccoli's definitive biography, Fitzgerald had an overwhelming desire to become a college football hero, almost to the point of obsession. While Fitzgerald had a largely successful career as a writer, and while most his narratives discuss economic class and the plight of the "Lost Generation," football, though only an afterthought in many of his works, captured Fitzgerald's attention in a way that influenced his desires both as an adolescent and as an adult, as well as his authorship. In *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, and "The Bowl," Fitzgerald is able to portray the football hero in a variety of situations and demonstrate how the football hero leads a life that is both similar and dissimilar to that of the average person.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Edward P. Walkiewicz