

Transcribed Excerpts from "The Life and Legacy of Jack Trice" Essay from *The Annals of Iowa*, 2010

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In its early years, football was “a violent endeavor.” “The equipment was still cloth padding, leather helmets did little to protect against head injuries and strategy formations invited mayhem.” By 1905, college football had become so “ferocious” that 18 players were killed in games and 159 players suffered serious injuries. For African American players, the game was especially dangerous. As Jessica Schultz has pointed out, black players were often targeted by opponents for “especially vicious hits”; sometimes the black players’ own teammates would not provide adequate blocking or interference,” resulting in injury. According to James Watterson, “African Americans who played for predominantly white institutions faced extraordinary hazards and abuse.” Watterson adds that both on and off the field, black athletes led “a marginal existence, suffering from racial slurs, brutality and segregation ...

By 1922, at least seven African Americans, including Robert “Bobby” Marshall, who played for the University of Minnesota between 1902 and 1906, had already played football at other mid-western schools. Marshall, whom Arthur Ashe described as being “stellar” on the field, was named a Second Team All-American on two occasions. George A. Flippin was an even earlier pioneer black player when he joined the University of Nebraska team in 1891. Flippin, like other pioneer black football players, “encountered racial hostility from the stands and extra violence on the field.” In 1892 Nebraska was scheduled to play the University of Missouri. When Missouri officials realized that Nebraska’s team included “star half black” Flippin, they demanded that Flippin be left at home. When Nebraska refused, Missouri forfeited the game. Conference officials then adopted a new rule, imposing a \$50 fine on teams forfeiting a match. In 1893 and 1894, Missouri “reluctantly” played Nebraska but at a neutral site in Kansas City.

The University of Iowa also played Missouri several times in the years before 1920. In 1895, when the African American Frank “Kinney” Holbrook played for Iowa, the game between the two schools was played “without protest,” with Missouri the victor. The second game, however, was a totally different affair. Missouri officials objected strenuously to Holbrook’s presence on the field, but Iowa officials stood their ground, insisting that he would play. The game, described as “a wild affair,” “extremely rough,” and resulting in many penalties, ended early. In the second half, the “disgusted” Missouri players walked off the field to protest an official’s decision, but not before a Missouri player had “slugged” a referee, an Iowa faculty member ...

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WHEN JACK TRICE ARRIVED at Iowa State in the fall of 1922, he entered a world with few other African Americans. Just 20 or so black students were enrolled at ISC, a college of around 4,500 students. The city of Ames had 6,240 residents (not including ISC students), with a total of 34 African Americans. The entire state included just over 19,000 African Americans, less than one percent of the state's total population. Trice also entered a world where blacks faced many restrictions. For example, African American students at ISC were not allowed to live in a school dormitory. From the school's inception, ISC was open to all races, but housing was another matter. Although not formalized in writing, the school had an "unofficial policy that barred students of color from living with white students." As President Raymond Pearson wrote in 1910, "Negro students are entirely welcome at this institution; they have no discourtesy shown them by fellow students or others." On the other hand, he admitted, "it is not always easy for a Negro student to find rooming and boarding accommodations except where there are enough to room and board together, as is the case with Filipinos and with students of other nationalities ...

Housing was not the only area of discrimination Jack Trice and other African Americans faced in Ames and other parts of the state. In the 1920s blacks and whites lived mostly separate lives. Legal barriers such as political disenfranchisement and exclusion of black children from public schools had been eliminated by 1900, but economic and social barriers remained ...

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IOWA STATE'S FIRST OPPONENT for the 1923-24 season was Simpson College, a much smaller school than ISC and not regarded as a serious threat. The big game, however, the second one on ISC's 1923-34 schedule, was at the University of Minnesota and was considered the first major college of the season for the Iowa State squad.

In Minneapolis the Iowa State team stayed at the Curtis Hotel. Apparently Jack stayed in the same hotel with his teammates, although there is some confusion about where he ate his meals. The night before the game, Jack sat down to record his thoughts about the next day's big event. He would be the only black player on the field. He was a big man for the time, described as six feet tall and weighing about 200 pounds, and he had four years of high school football and one year of freshman football behind him. But Minnesota was known as a powerful football team, far more successful than Iowa State. Given his situation, Jack must have been apprehensive about the game. That night he wrote,

To whom it may concern: My thoughts just before the first real college game of my life. The honor of my race, family, & self are at stake. Everyone is expecting me to do big things. I will! My whole body & and soul are to be thrown recklessly about on the field tomorrow. Every time the ball is snapped I will be trying to do more than my part. On all defensive plays I must break thru the opponents line and stop the play in their territory. Beware of mass interference, fight low with your eyes open and toward the play. Roll block the interference. Watch out for crossbucks and reverse end runs. Be on your toes minute if you expect to make good.

During the hard-fought game, Jack suffered a shoulder injury in the first half but continued to play; it was later discovered that he had broken his collarbone. At half-time, the score was tied, 7-7. Teammates later indicated that midway through the third quarter, Jack implemented what was described as "a rolling block," throwing himself in front of an oncoming rush of Minnesota players running "a crossbuck with heavy interference." Jack ended up on his back, rather than on his stomach, which was the intended position. Apparently, the coach had discouraged this play because it was too dangerous, and in later years the play was outlawed. During the play, Jack was trampled by Minnesota players. He was helped from the field as Minnesota fans chanted, "We're sorry Ames, we're sorry." Jack was immediately taken to a Minneapolis hospital, where doctors determined that he could make the trip back to Ames. Minnesota won the game, 20-17.

Arriving home on Sunday, Jack was admitted to the student hospital. College physicians believed that Jack was improving, but in late afternoon he began to experience "shallow and irregular" breathing. A Des Moines specialist, Dr. Oliver Fay, was called to Ames. According to the Ames Tribune, Dr. Fay was one of the "best known specialists in stomach troubles in the country." Dr. Fay's diagnosis: an operation was too frisky, given Jack's condition. At 3 p.m. on Monday, October 8, Jack died. A letter dated October 16, 1923, addressed to Coach Willaman, listed the cause of Jack's death: "Traumatic Peritonitis, following injury to abdomen in football game, October 6, 1923. (Autopsy [sic] showed severe contusion of intestines upper portion of abdomen. This caused stasis or paralysis of intestines followed by peritonitis.)" The letter was signed: "Dr. James R. Edwards, Professor [of] Hygiene ...