Historian Brian M. Ingrassia opens his most recent work, *The Rise of Gridiron University: Higher Education’s Uneasy Alliance with Big-Time Football* by establishing a solid foundation of historical and cultural details. Throughout the book, he brings readers along with him on a historical voyage through the early stages of college football’s development, and utilizes his elite research capabilities not to tell, but to completely immerse the reader within the culture of that time period. He takes readers back to the late 1800s to show how universities began to welcome the sport’s presence as a way to get the public interested in higher forms of education. Ingrassia continues on throughout his work to show how football’s immediate popularity overwhelmed campuses and eventually helped turn a simple game into a source of abundant income. He argues that the triumphs and pitfalls associated with contemporary college athletics did not just appear out of the blue, but they have been hidden within these schools’ athletics programs since the very beginning of their storied histories.

Ingrassia stresses the significant cultural value placed on forms of higher education between the late 1800s and early 1900s. He proves that during this time, a college education was typically reserved only for the nation’s affluent society. Before athletics were introduced to the collegiate landscape, the prime objective of higher learning was to offer elite individuals the opportunity to gain knowledge and kick-start their professional careers upon graduation. However, Ingrassia continues on to show the critical events that eventually led to the institution of athletics programs in various schools throughout the country. Ingrassia utilizes football as the primary focus of the movement, in the hopes of generating buzz throughout the general population.

With the hope of distancing themselves from their elitist reputations, major universities began to reap the benefits of football’s popularity by establishing football programs within their respective schools as means to sell the idea of higher education to the general population. At the end of the 1800s, football was introduced at some of the elite universities around the country. While genuine innovative reformers envisioned the game as a way to attract the middle-class into the exclusivity of higher learning, businessmen saw dollar signs. They envisioned football becoming wildly popular throughout American society, and sought the necessary infrastructure and administration to both accommodate, and eventually develop, the game. Ultimately, Ingrassia shows how these capitalists have turned the game into the national financial powerhouse that it has become today.

Over the course of his work, it is clear that Ingrassia sought to write *The Rise of Gridiron University* as more than just a recollection of American sports history. He extensively researched the history and background of not only American college football, but the social details of American culture as well. In addition to introducing the reader to the esteemed histories of various big-time college football institutions such as Michigan, Ohio State, Stanford, and Notre Dame, Ingrassia incorporates a social aspect within his analysis, one that carries strong ties to many major universities. He places the esteemed histories of these major universities within the context of Progressive Era culture by utilizing various sources of analysis, including interviews with distinguished coaches like...
Georgia Tech’s John Heisman, and also discusses some historical social reforms that emerged out of incidents such as a section of grandstands collapsing at the University of Chicago.

Although Ingrassia’s work is very well researched, it is somewhat dry at times. He succeeded in offering a detailed, insightful account of the origins of college football in America, but the writing style tends to make the book seem to be more of a lecture. The book should have a very strong appeal among American studies and sports history students as well as diehard college football fans, but as a whole Ingrassia’s audience is somewhat limited.