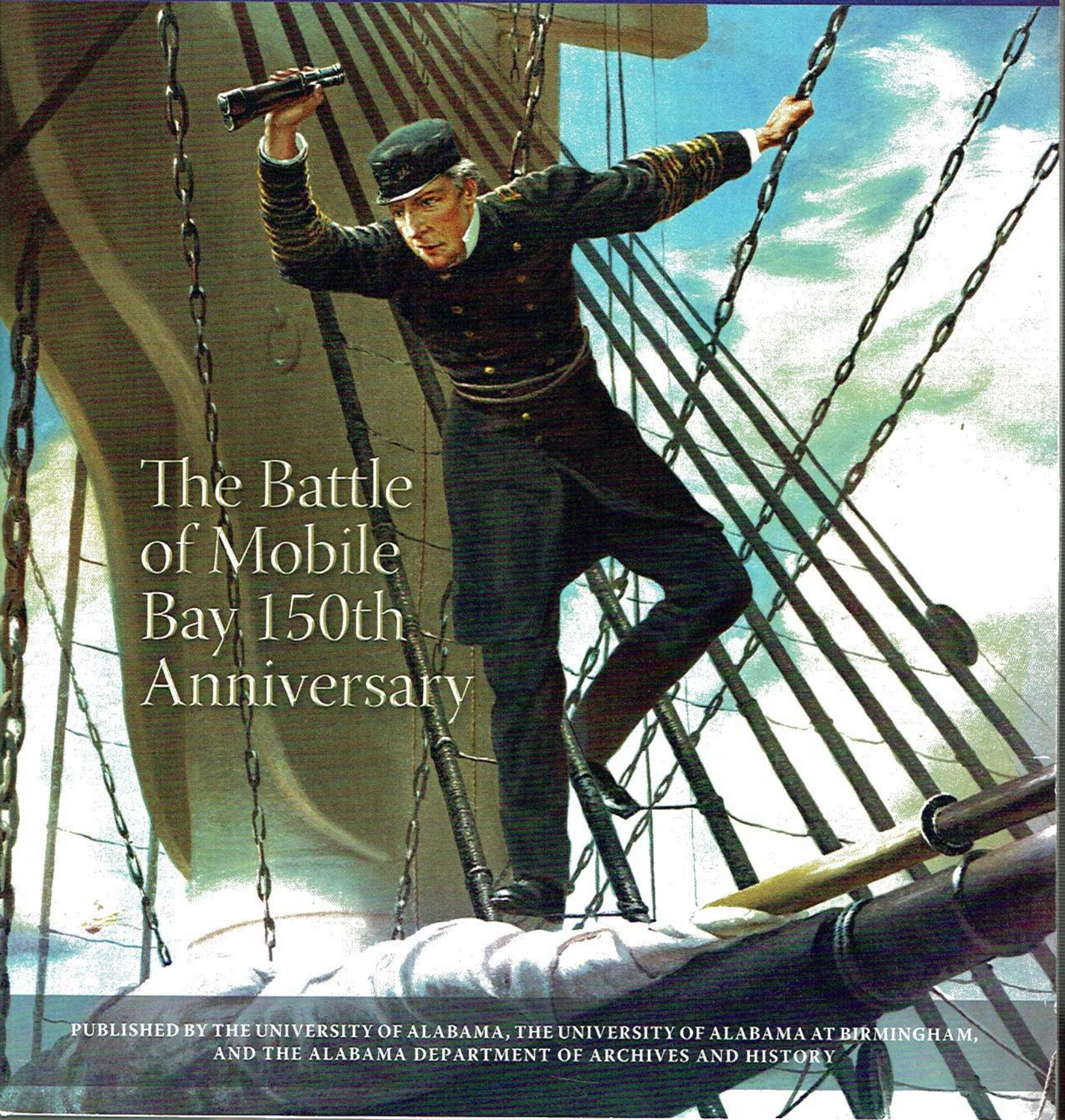


Alabama Heritage



The Battle
of Mobile
Bay 150th
Anniversary

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Football Players Who Practiced Medicine in Alabama

Pigskins to Stethoscopes

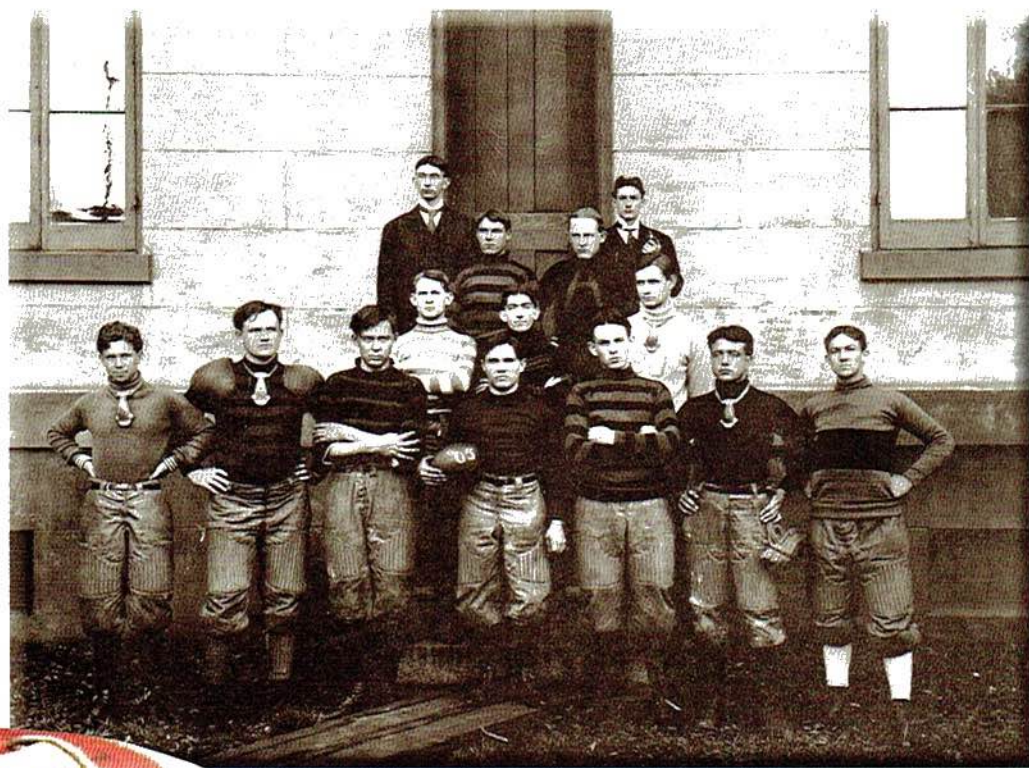
The proliferation of football players-turned-physicians in Alabama suggests a correlation between the discipline, time management skills, and work ethic required from the sport and the profession.

By Tim L. Pennycuff

FOR FOUR YEARS THE STATE OF ALABAMA WAS home to the national champions of the collegiate football world: the Auburn Tigers in 2010 and the Alabama Crimson Tide in 2009, 2011, and 2012. Cotton may have once been king in Alabama, but in the early years of this century, king football arguably reigns supreme. Each fall tens of thousands flock to stadiums around the state to cheer on their favorite team from little leagues through high school, to municipal leagues, colleges, and universities. From the University of South Alabama Jaguars in Mobile to the Alabama A&M Bulldogs in Huntsville, to the University of

RIGHT: The state of Alabama has been producing physician-athletes since the first University of Alabama team in 1892. (Both Wikimedia Commons) OPPOSITE PAGE: The Alabama medical school Medicos first team, fielded in 1905. The team went undefeated, with one win and one tie. The Medicos played only four more seasons. (UAB Archives)





North Alabama Lions in Florence, to the Gamecocks of Jacksonville State, to the Alabama State Hornets in Montgomery, to Birmingham (the “self-proclaimed football capital of the South”) and the Miles College Golden Bears, University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Blazers, Birmingham-Southern Panthers, and Samford Bulldogs, and at schools throughout the state, Alabamians love their football.

For the most part, neither the die-hard nor the casual fan stops to consider the academic endeavors of the young men who strap on helmets and charge onto the playing field. But some student athletes excel both on the field and in the classroom, and the state has a long history of collegiate football players who later entered the practice of medicine. Some are Alabama natives who played football at a home-state school; some were recruited outside the state for their collegiate experience. Some

were born in other parts of the country and moved to Alabama in order to practice medicine.

Alabama's history of physician athletes spans more than 120 years, with the earliest one documented playing on an 1892 team and the most recent having completed his medical degree in 2013. These future doctors played on football teams such as Alabama, Auburn, Clark (Atlanta), Columbia, Duke, East Tennessee State, Kentucky, LSU, Millsaps, Ole Miss, Princeton, Tennessee, Troy, Vanderbilt, and Washing-

ton State. The medical schools these former football players attended include Alabama, Columbia, Cornell, Emory, Johns Hopkins, Meharry, Tennessee, Tulane, UAB, Vanderbilt, and Wisconsin.

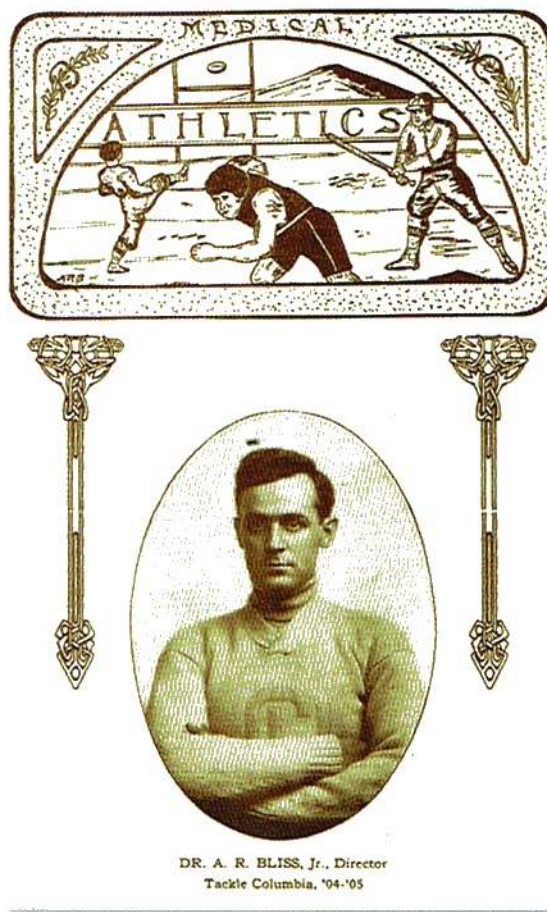
A very early football player who became a physician was Burr Ferguson (1872–1946). A native of Montgomery, Ferguson was a member of the 1892 team at the University of Alabama, the university's inaugural season of collegiate football. Ferguson was also a member of the baseball team and was president of the university's athletic association. He graduated in 1893 and was an 1896 graduate from the medical school at Columbia University. Ferguson returned to Alabama and in 1913 became medical officer at the later-named Lloyd Noland Hospital in Fairfield. Following service in Europe during World War I, Ferguson entered into private practice in Birmingham; he remained there for the rest of his long professional career.

The most recently documented player-turned-physician is Elliot Bishop from Russellville, who was a place kicker and punter for the Princeton Tigers from 2003 until 2005. Bishop graduated in 2013 from the medical school at UAB and is currently completing a surgery internship in Chicago. Bishop was often asked about his years as a Princeton Tiger during interviews for medical school, and he considers the physical requirements of football good training for the demands of a surgeon.

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In the early years of the twentieth century, Alabama had medical schools in Mobile and in Birmingham. The Medical College of Alabama was founded in Mobile in 1859 and had nominally become the medical department of the University of Alabama in 1897. The college was finally incorporated into the administration of the university in 1907 by act of the Alabama legislature. A football team had been organized just prior to this, with the "Medicos" beginning play in Mobile in 1905. The inaugural season resulted in a record of 1-0-1, with a win over the team of Fort Morgan and a tie with the Mobile Athletics. In their second season, the team defeated Spring Hill College but lost to the Marion Military Institute.

By 1908 the school fielded a team of eleven players and offered an athletic advisory board composed of medical faculty, including Dr. Seale Harris (1870-1957), who later became a well-known figure in the medical history of Alabama but was at the time a professor at the school. A game against Southern Mississippi College in 1909 resulted in a zero-to-zero tie when neither team was "able to push the pigskin over the goal." The Medicos did defeat Southern University in Greensboro that same season but the team was soon disbanded, and by 1911 it had disappeared from the pages of the college yearbook. Quarterback Tillman Bridges (1884-1939), from Opp, graduated in 1909 and later practiced medicine in Geneva County for almost thirty years. Bennette Burks (1884-1938), the team captain from Tuscaloosa, would graduate from the school in 1910 and complete



The Birmingham Medical College football team was coached by Dr. Richard Bliss Jr. who had played his college ball at Columbia University. (UAB Archives)

an internship at Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa. He practiced in Tuscaloosa and Jefferson Counties before retiring to Florida.

The Birmingham Medical College (BMC) had an entire athletic department that offered football, baseball, and track teams. The proprietary school, a for-profit entity owned by the physicians and not affiliated with a college or university, was founded in 1894 but was closed in 1915. Just before the school was closed, the BMC football team had twenty-seven members and was coached by Dr. Richard Bliss Jr. (1889-1941), the school's professor of chemistry and pharmacy, who had played tackle for Columbia University in 1904 and 1905. Bliss also served as director of the school's athletic department. Following closure of the college, Bliss took a position out of state but in 1934 was recruited back to Alabama as the dean of the new pharmacy

program at Howard College, the predecessor entity of the McWhorter School of Pharmacy at Samford University.

In 1914 the football team, which was the largest of the Birmingham Medical College's three teams, was led by quarterback Hugh Denson (b. 1891) and manager Dana Collier (1886-1933). Mississippi-native Denson later moved to Louisiana and was coroner of Tensas Parish until his death in the 1930s. Collier practiced medicine in his hometown of Birmingham for many years. He served in World War I, was later on the medical staff for the Veterans Administration, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Clyde Garmon Sr. (1892-1960), who played on the team during his third year of medical school, graduated in 1914, served on

the staff of the Lloyd Noland Hospital in Fairfield, and had a private practice in Bessemer until his retirement.

In contrast to the medical students who played on the two medical school teams, other future physicians played on more traditional collegiate teams before beginning their medical studies. Some of these men were native Alabamians and some only became Alabamians later during their professional careers. They hailed from a wide variety of backgrounds, they played in various positions on the team, and their chosen careers run the gamut of medical specialties. The brief biographical sketches that follow—in a general chronological order—provide a glimpse into the lives and careers of a selected few from more than one hundred documented football playing physicians.

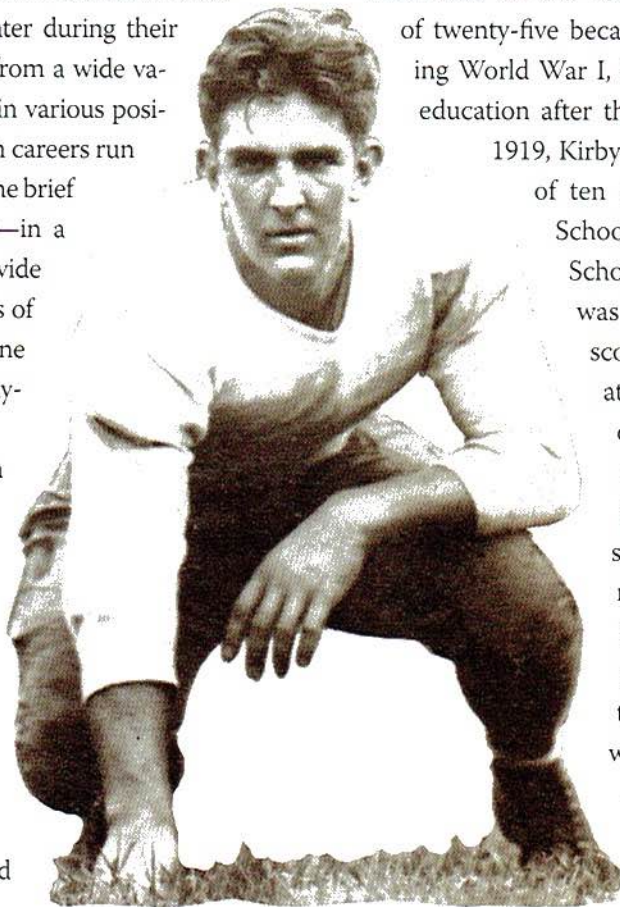
John Rush (1878–1933) from Dallas County was a fullback at Auburn (then Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama) under Coach John Heisman from 1897 to 1898. He was also the vice president of the university's Athletic Advisory Board. Following his time on the plains, Rush attended the medical school in Mobile, where he received a pharmacy degree in 1902 and a medical degree in 1904. Rush completed a residency at Mobile's City Hospital then joined the faculty of the school as a lecturer—and later professor—on urinary diseases. By 1910 Professor Rush was also coach of the Medicos football team. After the medical school was closed in 1920 and moved to the University of Alabama campus in Tuscaloosa, Rush worked in private practice in Mobile for the remainder of his career.

Wesley Earle Drennen (1882–1957) was born in Cullman County and entered the University of Alabama at the age of fifteen. He was captain and quarterback on the 1900 and 1901 teams, lettering during both years. Drennen graduated from the medical school at Columbia University and returned to Alabama to begin practice in Birmingham. He was in the city for the remainder of his professional career except for service in Europe during the First World War. When

the medical school was relocated to Birmingham in 1945, Drennen received an appointment as a clinical professor of surgery. His obituary noted both his distinguished medical career and his athletic abilities.

Lelias Kirby (1895–1977) was born in a log cabin on Sand Mountain. He did not finish high school until the age of twenty-five because he enlisted in the army during World War I, but Kirby resumed his secondary education after the war. During his senior year in 1919, Kirby and his brother Odis scored nine of ten touchdowns as Albertville High School beat Jacksonville State Normal School by a score of 67 to 0. Lelias, who was also serving as the team's coach, scored seven of the touchdowns. He attended the University of Alabama on a football scholarship and was a letterman in 1920 and 1921. Kirby graduated from the medical school at Emory University and returned home to begin work in Birmingham. He delivered over one thousand babies during his thirty-seven years of practice and was eventually one of the founders of East End Hospital. Kirby also found time to serve as a guest columnist for the local newspaper and to author three books, including *How Me and Amos Won World War I* (1975) and *Cotton Pickin' Coon Huntin' Country Boys* (1975).

Robert Berson (1912–1991) was born in Brownsville, Tennessee, and attended Vanderbilt University. Berson, who stood over six feet tall, earned the nickname of "Big Butch" while playing tackle for the Commodores from 1931 until 1933. He graduated from the Vanderbilt medical school and began practice in his hometown. Following service in World War II, Berson joined the faculty at the University of Illinois and began a long career in academic medicine. In 1955 he was recruited to Alabama to serve as the third dean of the University of Alabama's medical school and as the first Vice President for Health Affairs. In Birmingham, Berson earned the nickname of "Boom Boom" for his towering presence and deep, booming voice. Berson remained at



In 1955 Robert Berson became dean of the University of Alabama medical school. (Historical Collections, Eskind Library, Vanderbilt University Archives)

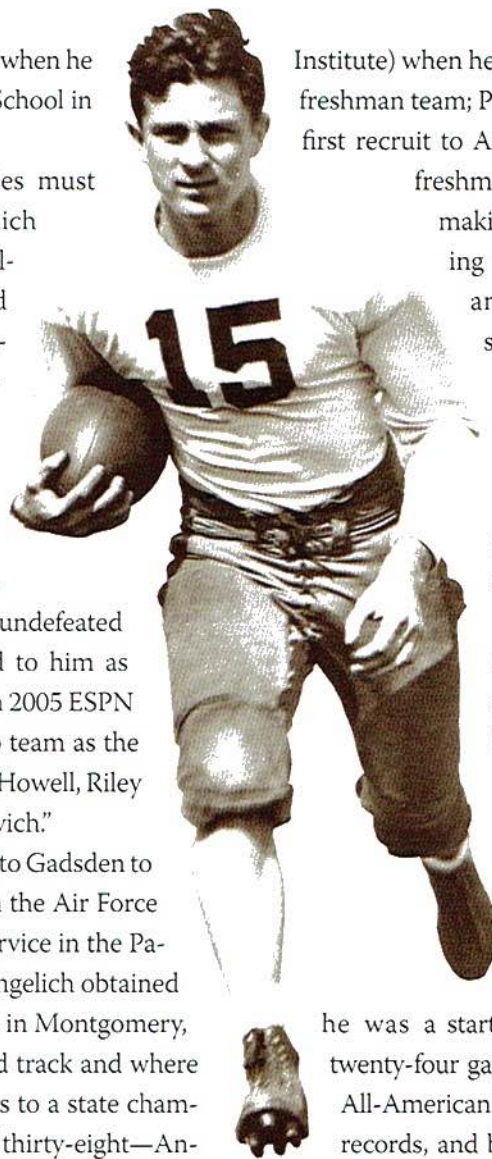
In 1950—at the advanced age of thirty-eight—Angelich enrolled in the medical school in Birmingham and upon graduation began his new career.

the Birmingham medical center until 1962, when he became dean of the South Texas Medical School in San Antonio.

One of the more unusual biographies must surely belong to James “Jimmy” Angelich (1912–1980). A native of Wisconsin, Angelich attended public schools in Indiana and in 1931 enrolled at the University of Alabama. There he was a double-sport athlete, playing both basketball and football; he was a three-time letterman on both teams. Angelich was a teammate of Paul “Bear” Bryant and a member of the 1934 National Championship team that defeated Stanford in the Rose Bowl to end an undefeated season. Contemporary reporters referred to him as the “undertow in the Crimson Tide,” and in 2005 ESPN referred to the stars of that championship team as the “incomparable Rose Bowl quartet of Dixie Howell, Riley Smith, Jimmy Angelich and Joe Demyanovich.”

Angelich graduated in 1936 and moved to Gadsden to begin work at Gulf States Steel. He was in the Air Force during the Second World War and saw service in the Pacific and in North Africa. After the war, Angelich obtained a coaching position at Lanier High School in Montgomery, where he coached football, basketball, and track and where he led both the basketball and track teams to a state championship. In 1950—at the advanced age of thirty-eight—Angelich enrolled in the medical school in Birmingham and upon graduation began his new career at Baptist Hospital. Angelich held a staff appointment at the East End Hospital until his retirement. Coach Bryant, his former teammate, presented the loyal Alabama fan a permanent pass so that Angelich could attend any of the team’s practices.

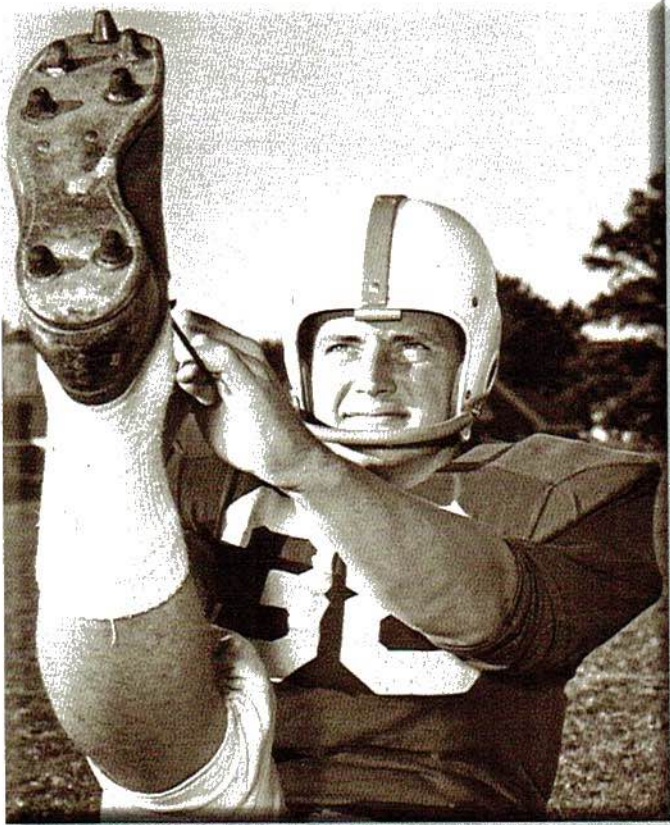
Frank Phillippi (1915–2005) grew up in Camden. He later admitted that he was more involved in athletics and hunting than in academics, though these activities did prove useful. He was a star player on the football and basketball teams at a high school in South Carolina, where he had gone to live with an aunt. Ralph “Shug” Jordan had just accepted a position as an assistant coach at Auburn (then Alabama Polytechnic



Institute) when he recruited Phillippi for the university’s freshman team; Phillippi proudly claimed to be Jordan’s first recruit to Auburn. He played one season on the freshman team, but an injury kept him from making the Tiger varsity squad the following year. Phillippi remained at Auburn and graduated from the veterinary school in 1938. He then began medical school at Tulane. During his first year in New Orleans, Auburn played at Tulane, and upon learning that Phillippi was at the university, Coach Jordan mentioned him to one of Tulane’s assistants. The Tulane staff tried to recruit Phillippi for the team, but his father would not allow it. He graduated in 1943 and practiced medicine in Escambia County until his retirement. Phillippi was president of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama in 1972.

Edmund “Ed” Dyas IV (1939–2011) was born in Mobile and attended Auburn University, where he was a starting fullback on Tiger teams that won twenty-four games in three years. He was named an All-American in 1960, set NCAA and SEC field goal records, and became just the second SEC player to be named the Football Foundation Scholar/Athlete. He was also a finalist for the 1960 Heisman Trophy. Dyas maintained an A-average in pre-med throughout college and turned down offers to play professionally in order to attend medical school. A 1965 graduate from Tulane, Dyas became an orthopedic surgeon in Mobile. He served as head physician for the Senior Bowl and was a member of the Senior Bowl Committee for twenty-six years. Dyas was inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame in 1999 and was named to the College Football Foundation Hall of Fame a decade later.

Patrick “Pat” Trammell (1940–1968), a native of Scottsboro, was the son of a physician and was in the first group of students recruited to Tuscaloosa by Coach Bryant. Trammell

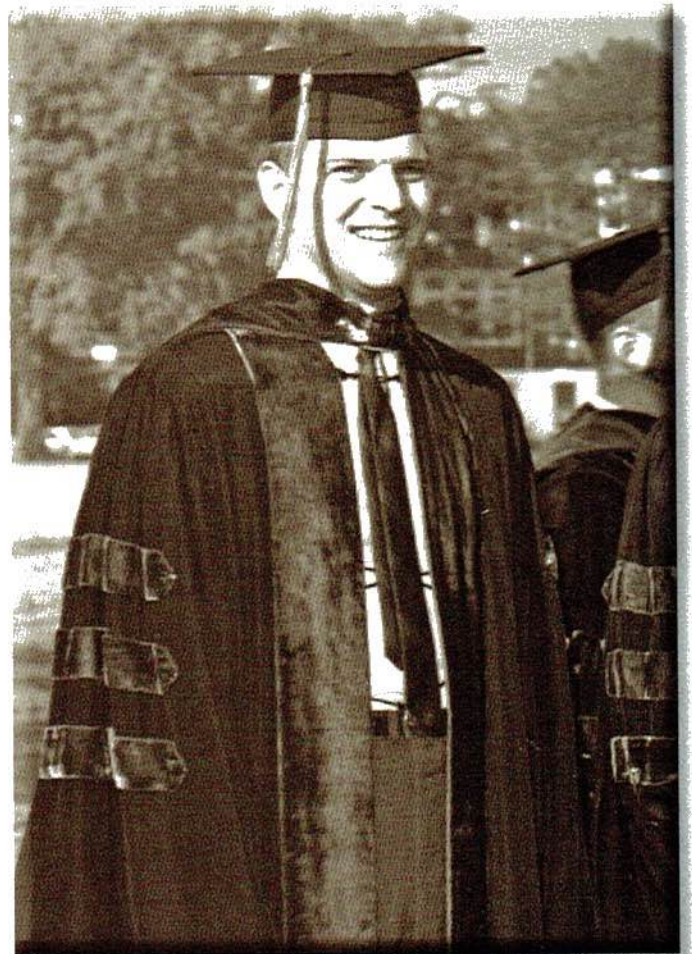


Jimmy Angelich (opposite page) and Pat Trammell (right), shown at his medical school graduation, both played on national championship teams for Alabama. Trammell died tragically of cancer at the age of twenty-eight. (UAB Archives) Auburn fullback Ed Dyas (above) turned down professional football to become an orthopediac surgeon. (Special Collections and Archives, Auburn University)

quarterbacked the Crimson Tide for three years, and his record as a starter is 26–2–4. The Tide's defeat of Arkansas in the Sugar Bowl capped an undefeated 1961 season and gave Bryant his first National Championship. Trammell was a three-time letterman, the 1961 Most Valuable Player of the SEC, an Academic All-American, and All-SEC. He attended the medical school in Birmingham, graduating in 1966, and was in his last year of a dermatology residency at UAB's University Hospital when he succumbed to cancer at the age of twenty-eight. More than three thousand mourners—including Coach Bryant, former teammates, the University Hospital house staff, and Auburn Coach Jordan—attended his funeral in Scottsboro. The Alabama and Auburn athletic departments jointly presented floral wreaths shaped like footballs. In 1975 Trammell was posthumously elected to the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame.

Arnold Diethelm, a native of Baltimore, Maryland, was on an athletic scholarship and was a guard for the Cougars of Washington State for four years. There, he played for future Hall of Fame Coach Forest Evaskhevski. Diethelm received his degree from Cornell Medical College and in 1967 joined the faculty of the surgery department at UAB. He founded the UAB transplant program, currently one of the top transplant centers in the country. Diethelm performed the first transplant in the State of Alabama in 1968 and from 1982 until 1999 was chair of the UAB Department of Surgery. In 1994 he was honored as UAB's Distinguished Faculty Lecturer. He was elected to the Alabama Healthcare Hall of Fame in 2004 and in 2013 received the Samuel Buford Word Award, the highest award presented by the Medical Association of the State of Alabama. Diethelm was named Professor Emeritus when he retired from UAB.

Gaylon McCollough from Enterprise was a star center for the Crimson Tide on the 1964 National Championship team, a team with a 10–0 regular season record and an Orange Bowl appearance against Texas. McCollough and teammate Timothy Davis were both selected to the SEC scholar's team



Many of these players credit the training and discipline required to be both a student and an athlete as a good introduction into the education and training required for their chosen fields.

for the 1963 season, and McCollough was named an All-American in 1964. He was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys but, instead of playing professionally, decided to attend medical school in Birmingham. He graduated in 1969 and completed post-graduate training at UAB and Tulane, as well as in Boston and Beverly Hills. McCollough became one of the first plastic surgeons in the Birmingham area and maintained a successful practice there until relocating his office to Gulf Shores in 1999.

Timothy Davis was born in Columbus, Georgia, and is one of four brothers who attended the University of Alabama, who played for the Crimson Tide, and became either a physician or a dentist. Davis is a three-time letterman and was a kicker on the 1961 National Championship team. In the 1964 Sugar Bowl, he played at Tulane stadium amidst piles of snow from a rare snowstorm the day before. Davis scored all of Alabama's points in the Tide's 12-7 upset of the Ole Miss Rebels, and he was named the bowl's MVP. Following his time on the gridiron, Davis studied medicine in Birmingham and practiced obstetrics/gynecology there until his retirement.

Jay Michaelson, from Foley, is the son of a family practice physician. He was a kicker and tight end for the Louisiana State Tigers from 1969 until 1971. The three-time LSU letterman was selected on the All-SEC team of 1971 and is a member of the LSU Academic Hall of Fame. After graduation, Michaelson returned to Alabama to attend the medical school at UAB. He graduated in 1977 and maintained an obstetrics/gynecology practice first in Birmingham, then in Ba-



Johnny Scott played football for Clark College in Atlanta before earning an MD and PhD and joining the medical faculty at UAB. (UAB Archives)

ton Rouge, Louisiana, and later in the Seattle, Washington, area.

Weymouth Crowell, from Birmingham, played football for the Dartmouth Big Green from 1971 until 1972. Upon graduation in 1973, Crowell returned to Birmingham and began his study of medicine at UAB. Crowell completed an internship at Carraway Hospital and a residency at UAB. He served on the UAB pathology department faculty before accepting a position in Jackson, Mississippi.

Gregg Carr was a two-time All-State high school selection from Birmingham. Carr attended Auburn and was the Tiger's leading tackler for two years. While at Auburn, he was selected to three All-SEC teams and was a four-time Academic All-American. In 1984 the SEC Lineman of the Year was the most honored athlete in the conference. Carr also received Auburn's Shug Jordan Award as

outstanding senior football player and the Cliff-Hare Award as the university's best student-athlete. He was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers, but after four seasons in the NFL he enrolled in the UAB medical school. Carr is an orthopedic surgeon in Birmingham. He was inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame in 2008, and he is a member of the 2010 SEC Legends Class.

So many others could be profiled, including William "Bubber" Baty Jr. (1901-1977), the "diminutive field general" for the Crimson Tide between 1921 and 1923, who was the public health officer for Tuscaloosa County and an Alabama team physician; David Middleton (1933-2007), the Auburn halfback who was drafted by the Detroit Lions, spent six years



The official program for Alabama's November 1968 game against the LSU Tigers highlighted some former Crimson Tiders who were in the health sciences. In front of University Hospital in Birmingham are (left to right): Jimmy Davis, Pat Trammell, Pelham "Butch" Henry, Gaylon McCollough, Jimmy Angelich, Steve Davis, and Gary Phillips. Henry later graduated from the dental school and practiced in Selma, the others were physicians. (UAB Archives)

in the NFL, and graduated from the University of Tennessee medical school; Johnny Scott, who played for the Clark College Panthers in Atlanta before earning both a PhD in chemistry and a MD and joining the faculty at UAB, there serving as the Faculty Athletics Representative; William Edge who played for the Auburn Tigers and who became a surgeon in Jefferson County; Lee England IV, a Tennessee native who played wide receiver for the Tennessee Volunteers, graduated cum laude

from the Meharry medical school, and is a plastic surgeon in Jefferson County; or Scott Kirby, who played for East Tennessee State University and is a cardiologist in Mobile.

Others who have not been discussed are those football players who became dentists, individuals such as Newton Burton, an Academic All-American for the Oklahoma Sooners who is an oral surgeon in Jefferson County; William "Bill" Davis, who played for the Crimson Tide and had a dental practice in Athens; Lloyd Nix, who was the quarterback of the Auburn Tigers 1957 National Championship team and had a practice in Decatur; Jack Smalley Jr., an Alabama linebacker and letterman who has a practice in Tuscaloosa; or Noah Miller, an Alabama player in the 1970s with a practice in Rainbow City, and his son, Marc, who also played for Alabama and has a dental practice in Mobile.

Football players who were once quarterbacks, punters, linemen, or most any other team position have transitioned from the playing field to successful careers as surgeons, orthopedists, obstetricians, family practitioners, and dentists—as well as research scientists, optometrists, therapists, and a wide variety of positions within today's

modern healthcare team. Many of these players credit the training and discipline required to be both a student and an athlete as a good introduction into the education and training required for their chosen fields.

The next time you attend a collegiate football game, think back to Alabama's long, 120-year history of football-playing doctors. That student athlete you see on the gridiron, tackling an opponent, kicking an extra point, or crossing the goal line with the pigskin firmly tucked in hand, may one day see you in a healthcare setting. And he may very well be wearing a lab coat and stethoscope. ah

EDITOR'S NOTE: Do you know of a football player-physician with Alabama ties? The database is always growing, and we'd love to hear about people whose stories we have not yet encountered. To share a story, please complete the form at the UAB archives, available at <http://www.uab.edu/archives/contact>.