

## ROLE OF SPORT IN PROMOTION OF EDUCATION AT CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME IN SOUTH BEND, USA <sup>1 2</sup>

UDK: 796.333.7(73)

378.4(73)

DOI: 10.5937/snp13-1-45418

**Dragica Luković Jablanović<sup>3</sup>**

College of Sports and Health, Belgrade, Serbia

---

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the value of the Notre Dame University football<sup>4</sup> program for its educational marketing and finances. A strong interdependence between economy, politics, mass media, and sport caused an exceptional popularity of football in the USA. The University of Notre Dame, Indiana was one of the first to adjust to this trend by revitalising its football program which was established as a part of its developmental strategy as early as in 1887. A hypothesis that the popularity of football was successfully used not just for the promotion of education, but also for the further development of the University of Notre Dame has been analysed through the case study methodology. This analysis concludes that the University of Notre Dame boosted its prestige by using its football program as a promotional tool to become one of the highest-ranking research institutions on the national level. On the other hand, this case study confirms that there is no conflict between religious dogma and evidence-based science if they walk together toward the progress, i.e. if their common goal is to set people free.

**Keywords:** *education, sport, Catholic Church, University of Notre Dame, football*

---

### INTRODUCTION

Intellectual and spiritual freedoms have always varied among people, but in general, they have historically increased with higher levels of education. Education through an institution that is primarily spiritual frees a person from extreme materialism. As in other areas of life, the quote “You will go most safely by the middle course” (lat. *Medio tutissimus ibis*) is applicable in this case<sup>5</sup>. Over time, the University of Notre Dame has grown into a crossroad of spirituality and practical experimental science. The inclusion of football in the development strategy of the University of Notre Dame (ND) has greatly contributed to its academic and religious recognition.

The relationship between religion (spiritual) and science (secular) has traditionally been delicate in various historical circumstances. On the other hand, the beginnings of modern education appeared precisely in church schools of the Middle Ages. In the 18th and 19th centuries, religion and science were still seen as opposing spheres. In the 20th and 21st centuries, a significant change took place, when enough space was created for religion and science to coexist successfully. Over time, the Catholic University of Notre Dame has managed to pro-

---

<sup>1</sup> The paper was received on July 10, 2023, edited on July 17, 2023, accepted for publication on July 19, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The paper was presented under the same title at the 5th International Scientific Conference “Sport, Recreation, Health”, organized by the College of Sports and Health from Belgrade on May 19, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> ✉ dragica.lukovic@vss.edu.rs

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the following text, the term "football" refers to American football.

<sup>5</sup> Roman poet Ovid.

mote education and experimental science through the values of the Catholic religion and thus bring them closer to both local and federal economy and politics, which has contributed to the overall development of the society.

The current scientific interest of the investigated topic of the paper is, on the one hand, the observation of the cause-and-effect relationship between football as the most successful segment of the university sports program of Notre Dame and the promotion of holistic education at this institution. On the other hand, the paper looks into the impact of the development of the economy of the city of South Bend in the 19th century on the development of university education at ND, as well as the contribution of the University's football program to the economic development of the city.

## METHOD

Using a comparative analysis, the paper addresses the importance of the football team “Fighting Irish” not only for the holistic development of the University of ND, but also for the economic development of the city of South Bend. Using the method of case study and content analysis, it was shown how, due to the interaction of religion, sports, economics, and politics, the University grew into a highly ranked national educational institution.

On the other hand, the paper analyses how much the establishment of the football program contributed to the growth of this private, Catholic University. Through its football team “Fighting Irish”, among other things, this institution was promoted, its income grew, the infrastructure was expanded mainly through private donations, its political ties were strengthened especially during the term of President John Kennedy, a Catholic and of Irish descent, and the city of South Bend benefited economically.

### *Research questions*

The most important results in the study were achieved by simultaneously following these three research questions:

1. What was the impact of the economy of the city of South Bend on the development of the University of Notre Dame and vice versa?
2. What enabled the Catholic Church to develop an efficient system of higher education in South Bend, Indiana, on the long run?
3. What was the contribution of football to the development of the University of Notre Dame?

## RESULTS

### **1. The impact of the economy of the city of South Bend on the development of the University of Notre Dame and vice versa**

The roots of the economic history of the city of South Bend go back a long way. More than 2000 years before Europeans came to that area, it was inhabited by natives (*Potawatomi* and *Sauk*). They used several regional waterways through which they traded with tribes from the Mississippi River Basin to the Gulf of Mexico. As the white people arrived, “many native Americans welcomed the new trading partners, but distrust and anger developed when the new arrivals soon began to claim the land as their own” (Palmer, 2003, p. 19). In the 19th century, the economy of South Bend developed rapidly thanks to, among other things, the abundance of raw materials and new technologies that the families of the first industrialists, mostly immigrants from Europe, applied in America.

For example, in 1835, a group of investors from New York obtained permission to dam the river, which made it possible to build an industrial-scale grain mill and sawmill. Then, the enterprising German Baptist Studebaker Family founded a factory of pioneer wagons in South Bend in 1852, as shown Figure 1<sup>6</sup>.

Thanks to the exceptional craftsmanship, they received the first military contracts after the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, and later began the production of Studebaker cars and military trucks. Immediately after the great Chicago fire of 1871, the *Oliver Company* of South Bend bought up all the steel poles in the burned part of the city,

<sup>6</sup> Pioneer wagons were initially used by the pioneers traveling westward seeking to settle on the native Indian land.

to manufacture ploughs and stands for Singer sewing machines (Palmer, 2003). In 1870, South Bend had a population of 7,209, as well as 237 businesses and industries and 5 railroads and 3 banks (Idem). The Studebaker company transformed itself in 1902 when it began producing automobiles. It was the only carriage manufacturer that managed to transition into the new automobile industry. Studebaker's success and prosperity led to the sponsorship of several building programs in South Bend and surrounding areas for commercial, residential, and religious purposes among others (“Studebaker Family”, 2023).

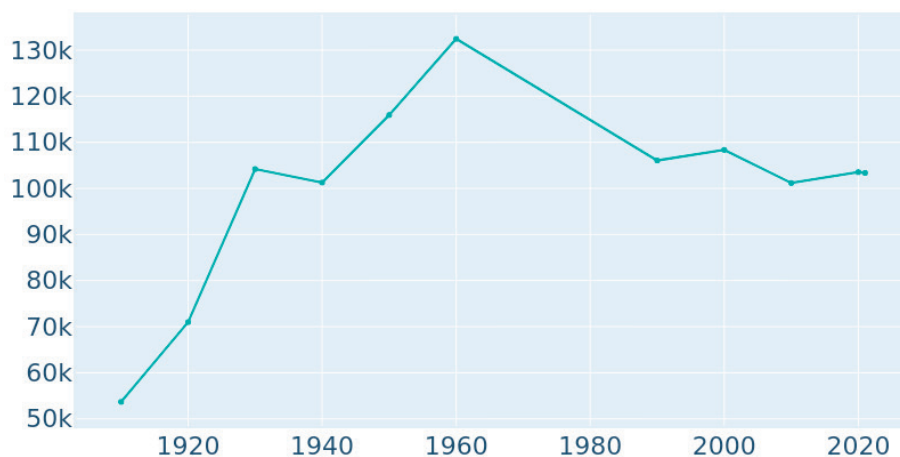
**Figure 1. Studebaker: The Car that Made South Bend**



Source: Dunlop Richter, 2022.

On the other hand, the ND football team boosted the economy of the city of South Bend. Hundreds of thousands of fans flocked to the city every football season. Special trains arrived from Chicago with hundreds of fans for Notre Dame football games. In 1921, there were 21 hotels in South Bend, while by 1931 the number went up to 31. “Every restaurant, cigar store, clothing store, barber shop, beauty shop, peanut store, bank, and other business in South Bend has prospered thanks to Rockne's successful teams” (Palmer, 2003, p. 122). Every home game beginning with the last two games in 1964 was a sell-out except for one - the 1973 Thanksgiving game against Air Force One. Notre Dame has played 449 games at Notre Dame Stadium (“Notre Dame Stadium”, 2023).

**Graph 1. South Bend Population by Year**



Source: “South Bend, Indiana Population History 1910–2021”, 2023

In 1939, the city of South Bend received more federal contracts (\$12,984,846 in value) than any other city in Indiana (Palmer, 2003). Studebaker and Bendix Aviation Co. have switched to the production of aircraft parts. Oliver

continued the production of tractors and ploughs because agriculture was of national importance to victory. It should be mentioned that during World War II, ND offered its facilities to the US armed forces. Despite everything, the city's economy developed rapidly, which led to the growth of the population, which reached its peak in 1960 with 132,445 inhabitants (Graph 1). At that time however, there was a decline in the production of the entire American auto industry. In December 1963, Studebaker closed its South Bend plant, ending production of its cars and trucks in America (History.com Editors, 2021). The shutdown of this company in the 1960s left 7% of the city's workforce on the street.

In 1849, there were only 56 students at Notre Dame, while in 1865 there were 505. Then, in 1920, the number of students soared to 2,075. In 1930, two years after the founding of the Fighting Irish football team, the number of students increased to 3,176. The positive trend was interrupted by the Great Depression and the Second World War. Since the 1950s, the number of students has been growing again (Table 1):

**Table 1.** Increase in the number of students at the University of Notre Dame 1950-2021

Year	Number of students
1950	5,052
1960	6,467
1970	8,156
1980	8,925
1990	10,132
2000	10,899
2011	12,004
2021	13,139

Adapted according to: Hickey, 2014

To this day, Notre Dame football events bring high revenues to the local economy, as they are generators of visitor spending in many ways. For example, in 2015, the average number of flights from South Bend Regional Airport increased by 41.8% during the month in which football games were played. Also, in the same period, the number of nights spent in hotels increased by 26.0% (Appleseed, 2017).

On the other hand, the economy of South Bend has always had an impact on the development of ND. One example is that "in September 2015, ND and the city announced that they are joining a partnership called the MetroLab Network, a national consortium of 34 university-city partnerships aimed at using technology and data analytics to develop innovative solutions to improve infrastructure, city services and other priorities of the public sector. ND and the city of South Bend have established four projects for the first year of the partnership" (Appleseed, 2017, p. 34).

## 2. What enabled the Catholic Church to develop a long-term effective system of higher education in South Bend?

One of the confirmations of the successful coexistence of religion and science, as two significant spheres of human existence, came through the University of Notre Dame du Lac which was built about 2 miles away from the city of South Bend (Indiana). In 1842, several missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Cross (lat. *Congregatio a Sancta Cruce* - CSC) arrived in the city, headed by Father Edward F. Sorin, with the aim of establishing a school<sup>7</sup>. "This college will be one of the most powerful means for doing good in this country" — declared Rev. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., founder of the University of Notre Dame du Lac (Congregation of Holy Cross, 2023). In the first few years, the future of the University was uncertain. Money was scarce, "typhoid fever killed many students and priests, and several fires almost destroyed the University" (Palmer, 2003, p. 61; "Hot Havoc", 1879). The expansion

<sup>7</sup> Only in 1857 did Rome accept the first constitutions of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. It was during the pontificate of Pope Pius IX, the last ruler of the so-called Papal States that disintegrated after the fall of Napoleon and became part of united Italy. After 1870, the political power of the Holy See (lat. *Sancta Sedes*) declined drastically and its functions as the governing body of the Catholic Church without its own territory. Since then, the so-called *Roman Question*: 1870-1929, remains unresolved. The Vatican did not recognize Italy as a country for six decades. Pius IX declared himself a "prisoner" in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, de facto - a ruler without a state. Also, he proclaimed the dogma on the infallibility of the Pope (Luković Jablanović, 2022).

of the University was hindered by the Civil War and the economic crisis. Father Sorin was the first president of the University of ND between 1842 and 1865. "He often gave free tuition for students who would help construct buildings" (Palmer, 2003, p. 72).

The presidents of ND are traditionally members of the Congregation of the Holy Cross. Their job description includes attracting new students, then donations from prominent business leaders as well as soliciting endorsements from top national politicians<sup>8</sup>. As the presidents of the University were not only responsible for finances, for the promotion of the institution and for academic leadership, they were also tirelessly uniting Catholic dogma with the progress of modern science. In a word, they involved Notre Dame in many important events of religious, educational, economic, political, or cultural nature. German American social psychologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm suggests that we should evaluate the fruits of any religious teaching by its outcome: "If religious teaching contributes to the growth, strength, freedom and happiness of believers, we see the fruits of love. If it contributes to the narrowing of human possibilities, dissatisfaction, and lack of productivity, they could not be the fruits of love, regardless of what dogma intends to convey to them" (From, 2015, p. 58).

The United States of America is often described as a *melting pot* of numerous nationalities, their cultures, and religions. Although the confessional Evangelicalism and Protestantism dominate the religious scene in the USA, the liberal branch of Catholicism has traditionally had its firm foothold there<sup>9</sup>. Thanks to this branch, the University of Notre Dame developed its specific ideological and academic program, within which, since 1887, the football program was also formed. A few decades later, the University permanently included experimental research in its scientific programs.

In the period 1919 - 1922, the president of the University was Father James Aloysius Burns. As a chemistry professor with a keen sense for research science, this Catholic leader was instrumental in transforming Notre Dame into a national research university and founding the Catholic Education Association. Some of the presidents of Notre Dame have publicly expressed their political views as well as their Christian values during difficult times. For example, Father Walsh (Matthew J. Walsh), president of the University from 1922 to 1928 was arrested in 1924, along with his 8 students and the mayor, during the "Notre Dame Riot". University students took to the streets that day and dispersed a parade of Ku Klux Klan members<sup>10</sup>.

Catholic priest and academic Theodore M. Hesburgh presided over the University for thirty-five years (1952–1987). At that time, ND (then long known for its football program) broke out into the top of the respective American Catholic universities and achieved rapid development. Hesburgh was very socially and politically engaged and held positions on various government commissions, including the National Science Board and the Commission on Immigration Reform. Then, he was a permanent representative of the Holy See at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, as well as a member of the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1983. Pope Paul VI appointed Hesburgh as head of the Vatican delegation attending the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights in Tehran, Iran, and as a member of the Holy See's delegation to the UN in 1974 (The Catholic Sun, 2013). Prestigious recognition of the University of ND - Laetare Medal was awarded to President Kennedy in 1961 (Figure 2), and the award was presented to him by the President of the University, Father Theodore Hesburgh<sup>11</sup>. Although the Presidents of the University are still elected from the Congregation of the Holy Cross (CHC), since 1967 the management of Notre Dame has included lay people in the Board of Directors (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023).

There is no doubt that the Catholic Church developed an effective long-term system of higher education at the University of Notre Dame (which attracted more Catholic students than any other American university). This development was made possible especially in the period of industrialization, due to the increased need for highly educated personnel capable of applying their knowledge and skills in practice, as well as to increase the efficiency of production through innovation. Finally, the accelerated development of modern science at Notre Dame fit well with the ideology of the liberal fraction of North American Catholicism.

---

<sup>8</sup> Inviting the current president of the United States to speak at the graduation ceremony is a tradition at the University of ND.

<sup>9</sup> Although Protestantism as a religious trend originated in Europe, today its main stronghold is in the USA, spread under different denominations (Lutherans, Baptists, Anglicans, and others).

<sup>10</sup> In 1924, the Ku Klux Klan gained control of the Indiana Republican Party. Klan members had anti-Catholic, anti-African American, anti-immigrant, anti-Jewish sentiment.

<sup>11</sup> Each year, the University of Notre Dame awards the Laetare Medal to the most outstanding American Catholic layperson. Since 1883, it has been generally accepted that in that category this award is considered "traditional and generally accepted, the most honorable and most distinguished in the USA".

**Figure 2.** *President Kennedy receiving the Laetare Medal in 1961*

Source: Abramson, 2015

An important link in the promotion of Notre Dame, which ushered it into the national scene as an educational and sports giant, was - football. It is important to note that it was mainly through college football that Americans of Catholic origin became equal to the majority Protestant population in the field of education. In that process, for many, especially for Americans of Irish origin, football became "more than a game"<sup>12</sup>. The discrimination faced by Irish immigrants in America in the mid-19th century is illustrated by the message that ended many job advertisements at the time: No Irish need apply (Bulik, 2015).

On the other hand, these circumstances, that is, the needs of the time, gave rise to the enthusiastic and visionary involvement of the University President. Part of their engagement was the introduction of the sports program into the University's development strategy. It can be concluded that all the above-mentioned factors complemented each other and as a result of their synergy, a long-term successful system of Catholic higher education at the national level was created.

### **3. What was the contribution of football to the development of the University of Notre Dame?**

There is no doubt that experimental science and sports helped the development of the Catholic University of ND. The University of Notre Dame has expanded its athletic program over the years. However, the most pre-meditated investment was made in one of the most popular sports in the USA - football, in which the University achieved the most success. The football team of the University of ND, nicknamed the "Fighting Irish", which was formed in 1928, was composed of players of 17 different nationalities, mostly Europeans<sup>13</sup>. The Notre Dame team built its national reputation in intercollegiate football in the 1920s, led by legendary coach Knute Rockne (Figure 3). In the period 1918-1930 he had 105 wins (88.1% winning percentage), 12 losses and 5 draws. On the other hand, the popular Notre Dame football coach was employed part-time as a sales promotion manager for the Studebaker Corporation, until his tragic death in 1931 (Palmer, 2003)<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> In Ireland, in the middle of the 19th century, due to a fungal infection of potatoes, there was a period of the Great Hunger. This social-economic crisis caused that in the period 1845-1855, about 1 million people died of hunger, and about 2 million emigrated, mostly to England and America. The Irish, as economic emigrants, were exposed to almost the same kind of discrimination as African-Americans upon their arrival to America. Already in the first decade of the 20th century, there was a gradual cessation of the segregation of the Irish, mainly due to their economic strengthening. Starting from Boston on the East Coast to the West, the Irish began to occupy significant positions in the economic and political milieu of the United States. As early as 1914, the mayor of Boston, James Michael Curley, was of Irish descent. Gradually, the Irish begin to educate their children in prestigious universities, preferring the best Catholic university - Notre Dame.

<sup>13</sup> The nickname "Fighting Irish" came from the time of the American Civil War when Irish immigrants fought on the Union side as part of the Irish Brigade.

<sup>14</sup> In 1940, Warner Brothers began showing the film "Knute Rockne, All American" (Pat O'Brien, Ronald Reagan). The three-day official premiere was seen by 150,000 people, and the euphoria in the city lasted for several months. About 1 million dollars of the money of that time was spent.

**Figure 3.** *Knute Rockne - the most famous Notre Dame football coach*



Source: Studebaker National Museum, n.d.

Most presidents of the University of ND (of the Roman Catholic denomination by the rule) in addition to obtaining financial resources, expanding capacities, and organizing new departments, also consciously invested in experimental science, thus working to reconcile the old, dogmatic Catholicism with the new achievements of modern science. The presidents of this institution were actively involved in all important events not only of an educational and religious origin, but also of a social, cultural, and political nature. Every historical challenge that the University has faced since its founding required different responses from its presidents, who raised the reputation of the University and increased the number of students.

The football program was founded by Father Thomas E. Walsh, who presided over the University from 1881 to 1893. On the other hand, the climate of the local economy was favourable at the time. Namely, the city of South Bend had the most products per capita in the USA in 1890. There were the largest factories in the world for: ploughs, carriages, sewing machines, for separating clover, as well as a steel plant for ploughs. The first tram also arrived (Palmer, 2003). Circumstances were quite different when Father John W. Cavanaugh led Notre Dame, during the difficult times just before and during World War I (Cavanaugh, n.d.). He managed to attract renowned scientists to the University, including numerous war refugees. Football, in particular, was developing strongly during that period, but not without a certain amount of apprehension on Cavanaugh's part that Notre Dame would become primarily known as a football school (Figure 4). Additionally, by 1913 the University's football program was operating at a loss.

**Figure 4.** *Notre Dame's 1909 football team*



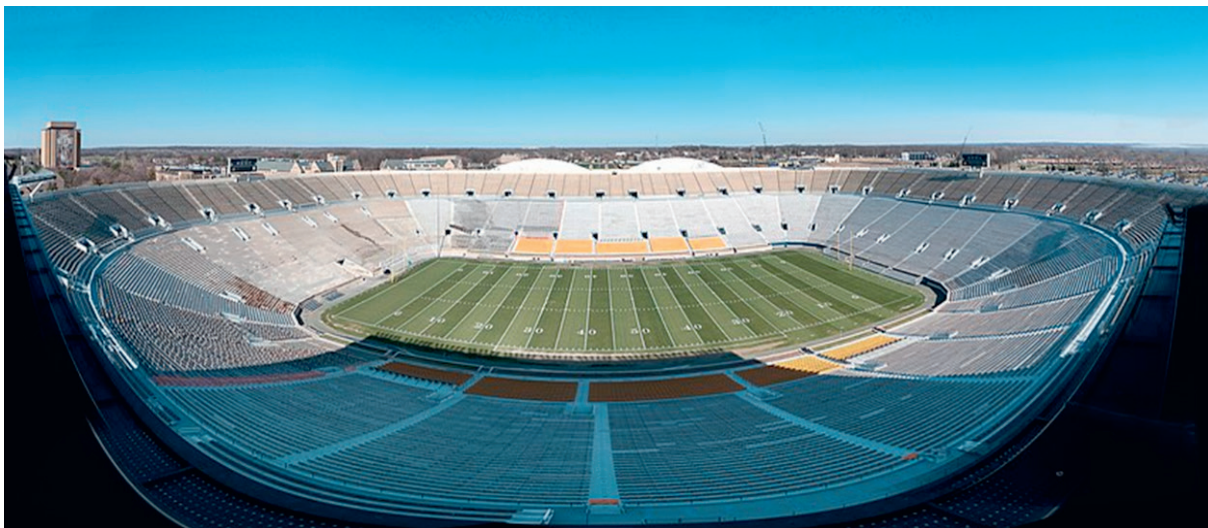
Source: O'Shaughnessy, 2023

Notre Dame's academic inventiveness was also reflected in sports. A turning point in the history and popularization of college football occurred in 1913 while Rockne was a player (Bohn, 2013). Although the ND team did not invent the forward pass, their attack was characterized by an attractiveness of play based on accurate and fast running and passing, which had never been seen before in a big team game (“Notre Dame Football 1913”, 2013).

The popularity of this sport kept growing. Another significant year in the history of football at the University is 1914, when Knute Rockne was hired as an assistant coach and became the head coach in 1918. During the Great Depression, he promoted the idea of building a bigger Notre Dame stadium, believing that people from all over America would come to watch the games, that is, that sports in a time of crisis can replace what people don't have. A revolutionary concept at the time. His idea of building a stadium was supported and implemented in 1929 by the then president of Notre Dame, Father Charles L. O'Donnell.

At a time when games were played before just a few hundred fans, Rockne passionately advocated for the 60,000-seat Notre Dame Stadium to be built (“Notre Dame Stadium”, 2023)<sup>15</sup>. “Never mind that Notre Dame had 3,000 students and that the community had a population of less than 80,000, Rockne’s concern was that 60,000 seats wouldn’t be nearly big enough and had plans to cantilever the stadium to seat 100,000. Visionary or romantic – or both?” (Stephen & Krause, 1993, p. 3). Notre Dame Stadium (Figure 5) is today a very impressive building in the world of sports.

**Figure 5.** *The Notre Dame Stadium 2009*



Source: “Notre Dame Stadium Panorama.jpg”, 2016

On the other hand, trying to capture a wider market with a lower price and avoid the negative effects of the Great Depression, Studebaker introduced a smaller companion car called the *Rockne*, named after the legendary University of Notre Dame football coach. The economic crisis was so great, that even cheap cars like "the Rockne" were not sold. It was only produced for two years in 1932 and 1933 (Rothermel, 2023). The perception of Father John Francis O'Hara, who led the University from 1934 to 1939, is interesting. He saw in the “Fighting Irish” football team (Figure 6) the potential to introduce the public to the ideals that dominate Notre Dame. In a word, that even when playing the most difficult games, the football team should provide an inspiring example of spiritual life (“John Cardinal O’Hara”, 2023).

Thanks to philanthropists, the University received two impressive sports centres in the first decade of the 21st century: Guglielmino Athletics Complex and The LaBar Practice Complex - includes a project worth 2.5 million dollars. The 95,000 SF Guglielmino Athletic Complex (“Goog”) is home to the legendary Fighting Irish football team and represents the University of Notre Dame's continued commitment to elite sports (The University of Notre Dame, 2023). The complex is designed to serve about 800 Notre Dame student-athletes. Estimated number of total non-local visitors to ND home football games by type of visitors, 2015-16 football season is 314,363. On the other hand, in the fall of 2015, a total of 12,292 students were enrolled at Notre Dame (Appleseed, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Until the 1996 season, Notre Dame Stadium held 59,075 fans. After its expansion it holds 80,795 seats.



**Figure 6.** *The helmets of the “Fighting Irish” and the Golden Dome of the Basilica*



Source: adapted by author

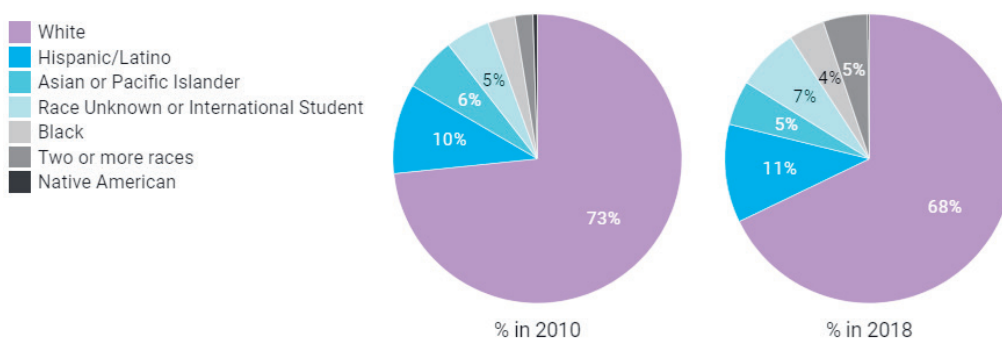
According to the edition of Best Colleges and National Universities for 2022-2023, the University of ND is ranked 18th out of 443 national universities (U.S. News & World Report, 2023)<sup>16</sup>. This premiership can thank in part to its most successful sports program - men's football. The quality of Notre Dame's football team is illustrated by the fact that it won 11 - *NCAA football championships* and had the best players in seven championships - *Heisman trophy* (College Weekends, 2022).

## DISCUSSION

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the differences in personality traits between athletes and There is no doubt that ND is a place where different traditions meet and are respected. Its students come from all 50 US states, as well as from over 100 countries around the world. It is present on all continents through its programs, projects and established relationships. About 10% of the University's students and scientists come from outside the USA. The policy of admitting students exclusively based on academic criteria has its roots since the founding of Notre Dame, when Father Sorin opened the doors of that institution to Protestants and Jews. Although the number of non-Catholics never exceeded 20% of students, their attendance contributed financially to the school and built positive religious relations in the region. This kind of ecumenical approach (atypical for many Catholic institutions) later enabled Knute Rockne the Protestant, their football coach with the most trophies, to be educated there (Sperber, 2002). Racial and ethnic diversity within the University is its additional quality (Graph 2).

**Graph 2.** *Student Racial and Ethnic Diversity at Notre Dame 2010-2018*

Between 2010 and 2018, the racial demographics of the University stayed fairly consistent.



Source: Smith et al., 2020

<sup>16</sup> The first three places are taken by: Princeton University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Harvard University.

The total number of students enrolled in the fall of 2021 is 13,139. According to *The Insider's Guide to the Colleges*, in 2010, about 80% of ND students identified themselves as Catholic. In the generation of students in 2023, there were 81.5% Catholics (The Observer, 2023).

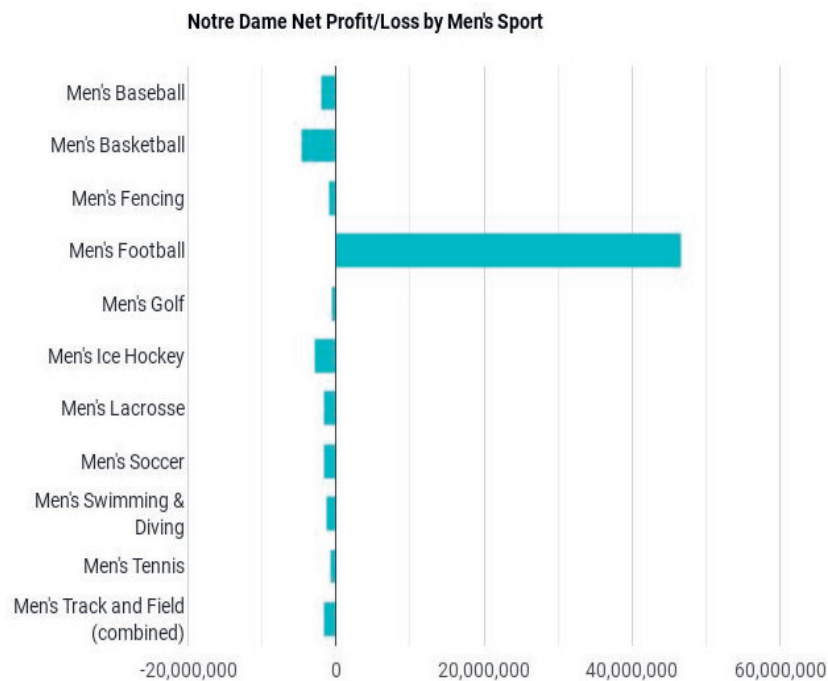
Notre Dame is one of the most prestigious and demanding academic institutions in the US. It has eight different faculties, departments, and programs for undergraduate and graduate students. It is ranked 11th by the U.S. News for best undergraduate teaching, with a graduation rate of 96.9% (U.S. News & World Report, 2023). The University of Notre Dame is not only one of the top general education institutions, but one of the leaders in national research and financial aid to its students. Aerodynamics of glider flight, wireless message transmission, and formulas for synthetic rubber were pioneered at the University. Today, researchers are making advances in astrophysics, radiation chemistry, and environmental science, research of tropical disease transmission, peace studies, cancer research, robotics, and nanoelectronics. Notre Dame believes that commitment to religion and science is not only compatible, but even complementary and mutually beneficial.

This University has grown into a recognized research institution—outpacing others in research expenditures by 160% since 1990 and achieving the University's all-time high in research awards. Research spending nearly doubled from 2010 to 2018; it grew from \$110,360,000 to \$220,000,000. External research funding increased by 52% from \$118,845,047 in 2010 to \$180,628,753 in 2019 (Smith et al., 2020). Since 2007, research funds received from the University have increased by 194%. In recent years, Notre Dame has received tens of millions of dollars to research mosquito-borne diseases, improve educational outcomes globally, and establish the Labs for Industry Futures and Transformation (LIFT Network) in the South Bend-Elkhart region (The Observer, 2023). The Association of American Universities (AAU) announced in May 2023 that the University of Notre Dame was one of six newly selected to join the AAU. This is a very prestigious organization of leading research universities that was founded in 1900. Membership of the AAU (71 institutions in total) is by invitation only and is based on an extensive set of quantitative indicators that assess the breadth and quality of research and education at universities (Association of American Universities, 2023). "Our mission at Notre Dame is to be a preeminent research university, provide an unsurpassed undergraduate education and to have all we do informed by our Catholic mission", said Notre Dame University President Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C. (Nietzel, 2023).

The paper used a comparative analysis of the development of the city of South Bend and the University of Notre Dame - which was methodologically treated as a case study. The economic development of the city of South Bend began with the appropriation of native territory and the use of hydropower and an abundance of other natural resources. That development was then accelerated through the use of electricity, technological innovations, especially in transportation, contracts with the US government during the Civil War and both world wars; then, through using secondary raw materials after the great Chicago fire, and by stimulating immigration to South Bend to obtain cheap labour force. On the other hand, such an influx of population and the economy of the city were prerequisites for a significant development of higher education, which was already organized earlier by the Roman Catholic Church within the University of Notre Dame. A further stimulus to its development came from within - from a liberal form of Catholicism that reconciled Christian dogma with experimental science and in this sense, they were pioneers. European lecturers-immigrants hired during the world wars brought a special quality to this institution.

The analysis of the content of the available literature confirmed that the progressive, liberal faction of the Roman Catholic Church was successfully involved in the economic (helped by the elite business of the time, especially the forerunners of the automobile and metal industry), political (especially through the Irish-Catholic Kennedy family) and scientific-educational life (judging by the ranking and national prestige of the University of Notre Dame). The introduction of the football program in 1887 significantly contributed to the promotion of both the educational and ideological basis of the University of ND as an institution of higher education. From the beginning, the football program was profiled in proportion to its popularity with the American public. Notre Dame's success came largely from its commitment to excellence on and off the athletic field. Accordingly, the football team has had several legendary coaches, then plenty of good players, and its particular strength is a passionate and loyal fan base.

**Graph 3.** ND Net profit/loss by men's Sport in \$ U.S., 2023



Source: College Data Analytics Team, 2023

The popularity of football in the US is still many times higher than the popularity of other sports. The football program turned a profit, i.e. making \$46,557,448 for the school (Graph 3). However, both the football program and the academic-research status of the institution are still important for the University's reputation. This is evidenced by recent capital investments in the sports program, as well as in the development of new academic programs and research. Between the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2015, total enrolment at Notre Dame grew by 7.7 percent. In fiscal year 2016, research spending at Notre Dame totalled \$202.2 million - an increase of nearly 157 percent in ten years (Appleseed, 2017).

In the modern stage of the University's development, when ND represents a recognized scientific and research institution and at the same time has a high-quality football program, their parallel development serves further promotion of the University. To confirm this claim, most of the income from football flows into research and development, as well as into grants for students. In addition, for major projects and the development of new programs, the University relies on donations<sup>17</sup>. An illustration of the financial power, but also the discipline of this Catholic University, is the fact that its leaders do not start a single capital investment, or a single large project, without securing 100% of the funds. Television rights to the "Fighting Irish" games are a significant part of that financial security ("2023 Blue-Gold Game: Full Broadcast", 2023). "Notre Dame signed a multi-year agreement with NBC in 1991 to nationally broadcast all of its home games, the only such deal at the time. That deal, which now runs through 2025, has brought millions of dollars of revenue to the institution and ensures the financial stability of its athletics program for years to come" (Belzer, n.d.).

Over time, the university became so prestigious that it no longer had to spend as much money on attracting students any more. Thus, all income from football (TV rights, advertisements, tickets, sales items with the logo of the football team, etc.) could be directed to academic activities and research, including the awarding of scholarships. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the situation was reversed, the football program even brought losses, but it was kept in order to attract new students.

<sup>17</sup> The Nanovic Foundation financed the construction of the building that houses the newly founded Nanovic Institute for European Studies, whose mission is to explore the ideas of culture, tradition, religion, moral challenges, and institutions that formed Europe. That is the whole program of Mr. Nanovic's philanthropic vision of connecting Europe and America. Notre Dame was chosen for its academic reputation and status as an open, liberal private educational institution (Nanovic Institute for European Studies, 2023).

At any rate, the management of the University was ahead of its time in realizing that it had to make a conscious and systematic effort to ensure that the school was constantly in the focus of the nation's attention. Thus, ND built one of the most famous brands in the world, relying on three pillars that have largely remained intact for almost a century:

- 1) *Markets have no borders*. For decades, the Notre Dame team organized games across the country and became "America's Team".
- 2) *Differentiation through Independence*. "The more clearly defined and unique the brand, the greater the passions associated with it" – says current Notre Dame athletics director Jack Swarbrick.
- 3) *Stay True To Your Culture At All Costs*. The "Fighting Irish" are a popular brand; therefore, their popularity inevitably brings pressure and criticism from the media and the masses, which the University successfully resists.

In continuously adapting sports to the demands of the audience, Notre Dame has always remained itself and, among other things - faithful to its Catholic tradition.

## CONCLUSIONS

Due to the strong interconnection of mass media, politics, economics and sports, football has become one of the most popular pastimes in the United States of America. As an indispensable part of the entertainment industry and popular culture, sport is subject to all the laws of the global economy, including the laws of mass production and mass consumption. Even though the football of the University of Notre Dame is part of that modern sports matrix, it is necessary to make a distinction and point out the exceptional way of distributing the profits of this educational institution, which does not neglect spiritual values.

The University of Notre Dame football team, worth \$101 million, is the most valuable team in college football. Unlike programs at other universities, Notre Dame's athletic department is not run as a separate entity, but it operates under the umbrella of the University. As a result, most of the profits are retained for academic use. This is precisely the greatest value of the sports program, and at the same time, what sets it apart from others. Therefore, the auxiliary hypothesis (which supplements the primary) was that the main goal of founding the University of Notre Dame Fighting Irish was not profit *per se*, but to popularize and qualitatively improve academic education and sports. This was verified based on an analysis of the total revenue distribution of the "Fighting Irish" football team for the 2006-2007 season, when \$21.1 million went to the academic programs of the university based on the Catholic tradition<sup>18</sup>. By way of comparison, the next 5 most profitable teams, belonging to institutions with a secular orientation, gave their universities the same amount of money combined (Schwartz, 2007). The pedagogical dimension of religion and sports is a thread that runs through the educational strategy of the University of Notre Dame. The product of their mutual encouragement is the common good. Pope Francis, the current Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, has great respect for sports (he played soccer as a youth in his homeland Argentina). In an interview with "La Gazzetta dello Sport" in 2021, he emphasized, among other things, that "sacrifice is an expression that connects sport and religion". He underlines: "Yes, simply dreaming of success isn't enough; you have to wake up and work hard. That's why sport is full of people who, with sweat dripping from their brow, have competed with those who were born with natural talent" (Informativna Katolička Agencija, 2021).

The summarized data of this multidisciplinary paper show that the implementation of football as the most popular sports program significantly contributed to the promotion of the University and its overall development. In a word, Notre Dame is an example that the mass can still carry quality with it. On the other hand, this university successfully combined science, economics, politics, religion, and sports. The practical needs of the city of South Bend amid the industrial revolution in America and the process of liberalization of the Catholic religion expressed in this case through holistic education were the key factors that enabled the convergence of the spiritual and secular spheres at the University of Notre Dame. For the city of South Bend, Notre Dame games remain the most attractive events ("Full Game: Notre Dame's Double Overtime Thriller vs Clemson", 2020). At the same time, they confirm that the "Fighting Irish" football team is a part of the social and cultural national history. Finally, the establishment of specifically profiled sports programs and university teams can be a recommendation for other institutions of higher education.

<sup>18</sup> The largest part of the income was generated from the rights to TV broadcasts of their matches.

## REFERENCES

1. *2023 Blue-Gold Game: Full Broadcast*. (2023, May 8). Fighting Irish.com. <https://und.com/2023-blue-gold-game-full-broadcast/>
2. Abramson, K. (2015, March 31). *Remembering Fr. Theodore M. "Ted" Hesburgh and the 1961 Notre Dame Lactare Medal*. Archivaly Speaking: An Inside Look at the JFK Library Archive. <https://archiveblog.jfklibrary.org/2015/03/remembering-fr-theodore-m-ted-hesburgh-and-the-1961-notre-dame-lactare-medal/>
3. Appleseed. (July 2017). *The Economic Impact of the University of Notre Dame*. [https://publicaffairs.nd.edu/assets/243633/2016\\_economic\\_impact\\_report.pdf](https://publicaffairs.nd.edu/assets/243633/2016_economic_impact_report.pdf)
4. Association of American Universities. (2023, May 31). *Six Leading Research Universities Join the Association of American Universities*. <https://www.aau.edu/newsroom/press-releases/six-leading-research-universities-join-association-american-universities>
5. Belzer, J. (n.d.). *What Notre Dame Athletics Teaches Us About Creating Enduring Brands*. ADU. <https://athleticdirector.com/articles/what-notre-dame-athletics-teaches-us-about-creating-enduring-brands/>
6. Bohn, M. K. (2013, October 30). *Notre Dame vs. Army: The game that changed college football 100 years ago*. Indystar. <https://www.indystar.com/story/sports/college/2013/10/30/notre-dame-vs-army-the-game-that-changed-college-football-100-years-ago/3313083/>
7. Bulik, M. (2015, September 8). *1854: No Irish Need Apply*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/insider/1854-no-irish-need-apply.html>
8. Cavanaugh, J. W. (n.d.). *John W. Cavanaugh Papers, 1865-1955*. University of Notre Dame Archives. <https://archives.nd.edu/findaids/ead/xml/jwc.xml>
9. College Data Analytics Team. (2023). *University of Notre Dame Sports Information*. College Factual. <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-of-notre-dame/student-life/sports/>
10. College Weekends. (2022, November 11). *Exploring South Bend and Notre Dame*. <https://collegeweekends.com/exploring-south-bend-and-notre-dame/#/>
11. Congregation of Holy Cross. (2023). *A Family Serving Families*. <https://www.holycrossusa.org/about-us/history-spirituality/>
12. Dunlop Richter, E. (2022, January 29). *Studebaker: The Car that Made South Bend*. Classic Chicago Magazine. <https://classicchicagomagazine.com/studebaker-the-car-that-made-south-bend/>
13. From, E. (2015). *Psihoanaliza i religija*. Beograd – Podgorica: Nova knjiga.
14. *Full Game: Notre Dame's Double Overtime Thriller vs Clemson*. (2020). Notre Dame Fighting Irish. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=JQff-434kyM&feature=youtu.be>
15. Hickey, J. P. (2014, November 11). *University of Notre Dame student enrollment 1849-2011*. Looking back: Notre Dame and South Bend. <http://notredamestoriesandstuff.blogspot.com/2014/11/university-of-notre-dame-student.html>
16. History.com Editors. (2021, March 16). *Studebaker goes bankrupt*. History. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/studebaker-goes-bankrupt>
17. *Hot Havoc*. (1879, May 10). Notre Dame Scholastic, XII(35), 539-547. [https://archives.nd.edu/Scholastic/VOL\\_0012/VOL\\_0012\\_ISSUE\\_0035.pdf](https://archives.nd.edu/Scholastic/VOL_0012/VOL_0012_ISSUE_0035.pdf)
18. Informativna Katolička Agencija. (3. januar 2021). *Papa Franjo: Žrtva je izraz koji povezuje sport i religiju*. <https://ika.hkm.hr/papa-franjo/papa-franjo-zrtva-je-izraz-koji-sport-povezuje-s-religijom/>
19. *John Cardinal O'Hara*. (2023). University of Notre Dame de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture. <https://ethicscenter.nd.edu/about/inspire/great-figures/john-cardinal-ohara-1888-1960/>
20. Luković Jablanović, D. (2022). *Papa Franja i Latinska Amerika: Nove dimenzije socijalno-ekonomskog i religijskog dijaloga*. Beograd: Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu.
21. Nanovic Institute for European Studies. (2023). University of Notre Dame. <https://nanovic.nd.edu/about/>
22. Nietzel, M. T. (2023, June 1). *Six Institutions Invited To Join Association Of American Universities*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2023/06/01/six-institutions-invited-to-join-association-of-american-universities/?sh=b3a50b04e6d2>
23. *Notre Dame Football 1913*. (2013, November 1). University of Notre Dame Archives. <https://sites.nd.edu/ndarchives/tag/sports/>
24. *Notre Dame Stadium*. (2023). Fighting Irish.com. <https://fightingirish.com/facilities-3/notre-dame-stadium/>

25. *Notre Dame Stadium Panorama. jpg.* (2009, April 19). Wikimedia Commons. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Notre\\_Dame\\_Stadium\\_Panorama.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Notre_Dame_Stadium_Panorama.jpg)
26. O'Shaughnessy, B. (2023). *What's in a Name: How Notre Dame became the Fighting Irish.* University of Notre Dame Stories. <https://www.nd.edu/stories/whats-in-a-name/>
27. Palmer, J. (2003). *South Bend: Crossroads of commerce.* Charleston: Arcadia Publishing.
28. Rothermel, B. (2023). *Studebaker – an Historical Retrospective 1852-1966.* Classic Car Club of America. <https://www.classiccarclub.org/info-garage/studebaker>
29. Schwartz, P. J. (2007, November 19). *The Most Valuable College Football Teams.* Notre Dame News. <https://news.nd.edu/news/the-most-valuable-college-football-teams/>
30. Smith, K., Weber, N., Bernard, M., & Steurer, M. (2020, January 15). *A decade of data: Notre Dame's 2010s by the numbers.* The Observer. <https://ndsmcobserver.com/2020/01/a-decade-of-data-notre-dames-2010s-by-the-numbers/>
31. *South Bend, Indiana Population History 1910 – 2021.* (2023). <https://www.biggestuscities.com/city/south-bend-indiana>
32. Sperber, M. A. (2002). *Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football.* Indiana University Press.
33. Stephen, E., & Krause, M. (1993). *Notre Dame's Greatest Coaches: Rockne, Leahy, Parseghian, Holtz.* Pocket Books.
34. *Studebaker Family.* (2023). Building South Bend: Past, Present and Future. University of Notre Dame. <https://buildingsouthbend.nd.edu/history/studebaker-family/>
35. Studebaker National Museum. (n.d.). <https://www.studebakermuseum.org/archives-and-education/the-studebaker-history/>
36. The Catholic Sun. (2013, May 24). *World record holder celebrates 70 years of priestly ministry.* <https://www.catholicsun.org/2013/05/24/world-record-holder-celebrates-70-years-of-priestly-ministry/>
37. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2023). *University of Notre Dame.* Britannica. Preuzeto 4. juna 2023. sa <https://www.britannica.com/topic/University-of-Notre-Dame>
38. The Observer. (2023, June 2). *Notre Dame added to national consortium of research universities.* <https://ndsmcobserver.com/2023/06/notre-dame-added-to-national-consortium-of-research-universities/>
39. U.S. News & World Report. (2023). *Best National University Rankings.* <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>