David Gendell. *Battles at Annapolis: Two Remarkable Football Games in the Army-Navy Rivalry*. Essex, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2025. 326 pages. $26.95 paper.

Although not the oldest rivalry in American Football, the Army-Navy Rivalry is certainly the most watched of all the legendary rivalries drawing a national audience. David Gendell, a native and current resident of Annapolis and a historian of ships and the sea, is well placed for this recounting of two games in the Army-Navy rivalry.

Only three games in the long rivalry were played in Annapolis. The first in 1891, the second in 1893, and the third in 1942. *Battles at Annapolis* deals with the games of 1893 and 1942.

The 1893 game was the first after football was clearly established at the Academy and was the first in which the sense of rivalry was clearly part of the atmosphere. The third game to be played in Annapolis came under very different circumstances as the country was at war. In 1942, the game itself was not the sole focus of the participants and the fans. It was a somber time for all and the sense of celebration that had become part of the rivalry was muted.

Gendell’s focus is on Navy, although he does not neglect the men of West Point. He opens his account with a summary look at the setting of the rivalry and at the historical context of the two games played in Annapolis in 1893 and 1942. Many of the participants in both games recalled fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, who had attended the two academies and had careers in the two services.

Those in the 1893 game had connections to the Civil War and represented both the Union and the Confederacy. In the 1942 game, the connections were to the First World War and the inter-war period. Gendell explores these connections and finds them a significant element in the traditions of both institutions.

In dealing with the 1893 game, Gendell examines the development of the traditions at the academies and within the football culture. One of the most interesting is the Goat as mascot of the Navy team. “Ed Cid” was the first of what became part of the Navy football traditions. Many of the rituals and ceremonies surrounding the game began here, as did the intense interest in the entire community of Annapolis and the entire body of men in both services.

Game day in 1893, and indeed game week, is detailed on a day-to-day basis. Much of this part of the narrative is told from the point of view of individual cadets and midshipmen, largely members of the two football teams. Gendell is able to create the mounting tension and excitement as it builds in the finals days before the contest.

There is a brief account of the course of the 1893 season for the two teams, always keeping an eye on the most important game coming near the end of the season. The account of the big game, the excitement of the day, and the postgame revelry are skillfully described. Gendell’s recreation of this time and place is beautifully rendered.

The postgame revelry and celebration, including fights and rioting were, to say the least, excessive. The aftermath of this Army-Navy Game led to the banning of any future games, a decision rendered at the highest level of the U.S. Military and U.S. government. The ban was short-lived and the rivalry would be renewed in 1899 in Philadelphia following two years of discussion and lobbying.

The continued growth and popularity of football across the nation in the ensuing decades was reflected in the emphasis placed on football at the two academies. The crowds flocked to watch what now was a major football event on the national calendar. Gendell examines these forces and their impact on the end of season Army-Navy game.

In the second part of the book the narrative turns to the buildup to the 1942 game played at Annapolis. Gendell explores the continued growth and development of football at both academies, including the changes in administrative personnel.

As in the first part of the book, there is an emphasis on the cadets and their backgrounds. Connections to previous generations are explored. Demands on the cadets, which are not eased for football players, are stressed. Practice time for football is primarily at the end of the day or early in the morning. Coaches come and go at both institutions. However, the exception was Earl “Red” Blake, who became a coaching legend not only at Army but across the world of college football.

In this section, considerable attention is given to world affairs and their impact on the academies and the cadets. Once the war approaches, the training of the cadets is speeded up. At Navy, the result will be that two classes will graduate together in 1942, and in the following football season there will in effect be no fourth-year class.

The 1942 game is played in a very different atmosphere, and there were those in and outside of the government who questioned whether the game should be played. The decision to play was made at the highest level of the Army, the Navy, and the Federal Government.

The impact on the lives of many of the football players, both during the war and in the postwar world is stressed by Gendell. Heroics on the football field are overshadowed by those in military service. Some of these men died in war while others would make a mark in the decades ahead. Gendell does a very good job in detailing all these stories.

In the end, *Battles at Annapolis* is a very skillful presentation of an important element in the nation’s history and the place of football within the military and the national culture.

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