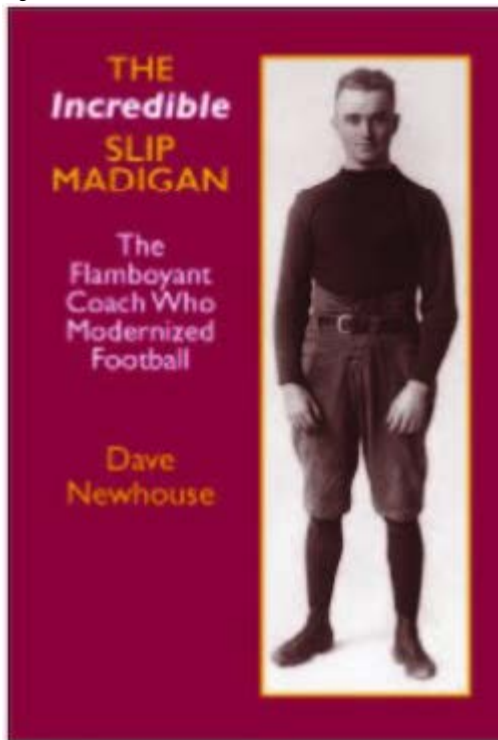


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## Edward 'Slip' Madigan - an innovative figure from Moraga's football past

By John T. Miller



In his recent book, "The Incredible Slip Madigan," Oakland writer Dave Newhouse resurrects an almost forgotten figure from Moraga's past, chronicling the achievements of one of the most innovative football coaches and raconteurs of the game's early history.

In his 19 years of coaching at Saint Mary's College from 1921-39, Madigan compiled a record of 117-45-12. More importantly, however, Madigan was primarily responsible for relocating the college from Oakland, where it was known as "The Brickpile," with a student body of 60 students, to the bucolic fields of Moraga in 1928. His ability to get SMC on the national map helped transform the small time college into a nationally known powerhouse and attracted some of the nation's top college recruits.

Madigan played for Knute Rockne at Notre Dame and was a teammate of the famous George ("Win one for the Gipper") Gipp. In the season before Madigan took over at SMC, the team lost to Cal by a score of 127-0. The next year Madigan's team lost by only 21-0, shaving 106 points off the deficit. This presaged many years of competitive football against some of the top teams in the country.

Madigan was an innovator, essentially inventing the "chalk talk," spring ball, and the training table. He was the first coach to travel cross-country by train, playing and defeating national powerhouse Fordham University in their first of many encounters. Later, he was the first

to travel to Hawaii - by ship - to play military teams on the island before it was a state. In addition, he was flashy, dressing the team in silk rather than the customary khaki.

Before signing his contract with Saint Mary's, Madigan astutely stipulated that he would get 10 percent of the gate at the football games. This amounted to far more than his salary, and provided a healthy income for the family - even during the Depression.

In addition to his great success on the gridiron, the indefatigable Madigan also coached basketball, baseball, and - eventually - boxing, while carrying a full-time teaching load. While he never lived in the Lamorinda area, Newhouse notes that Madigan must have had plenty of sleepovers in Moraga due to his long hours and the difficult ride home to Oakland, since the Caldecott Tunnel hadn't been built yet.

After he was fired from his coaching job at SMC, Madigan's joint degree in law and architecture from Notre Dame served him well, as he built a million dollar business building homes in central Contra Costa County.

According to Newhouse, one of the pleasures in writing the book was to discover the many phenomenal athletes of the day. "I had never heard the names of some of these players who were the super stars of their day. They would be truly remarkable in any era."

Newhouse's research into the book was aided by access to the family's exhaustive collection of scrapbooks detailing the team's records and accomplishments. Slip Madigan's son, Edward, who lives in the same Oakland house he grew up in, was instrumental in providing the information.

While Madigan's body is buried at nearby St. Mary's Cemetery in Oakland, the book provides details that his spirit is still very much felt on campus. One chapter late in the book chronicles many sightings of Madigan's ghostly presence. Also mentioned is a story of a major remodeling project in the administration offices, where the door to the huge safe had to be removed during construction. When crews returned the following morning, the door was back on and locked, and none of the combinations on record would work until an older Brother suggested they try Madigan's old combination. It worked.

Newhouse, a retired sports writer who worked primarily for the Oakland Tribune, also spent a couple years at the Contra Costa Times during the Dean Leshner era. He has written about many sports figures from the

past.

One of Newhouse's goals, especially in this one, is to bring back to life great contributors from the past who may be lost to succeeding generations. "While working on this story, hardly anyone I spoke to had any knowledge of Slip Madigan," he says.

There are plenty of houses that Madigan built in the Central Contra Costa County, but none of them were as enduring or substantial as Saint Mary's College, which Madigan is credited as helping to create, also architecturally, in Moraga.

Although SMC at times seems to present an identity separated from the town, back in the day when Slip Madigan held sway, the name of Moraga traveled across the country with the fame of the Gaels football team, earning a reputation as fabled as the coach himself.

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