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Big Ten Marching Bands

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Dustin Krause

A with Honors Project- Big Ten Marching Bands

MUS 123 Professor Trauth

Some of the biggest stadiums in the country are found here. Some of the most rabid fan bases live and die with how their teams do each Saturday. Tents, RVs, and barbeque grills fill the parking lots hours before the game begins as little kids toss around a football, dreaming about their heroes that they will watch later that day. Some of the most recognized fight songs in the country can be heard as the bands march closer and closer to the stadium. This atmosphere can be seen all around the Midwest on any given Saturday in the Big Ten Conference. I was lucky enough to grow up just minutes away from the University of Illinois, making it easy for me to catch a game whenever I pleased. In addition, my father and his whole family hail from Michigan, all attending Michigan State University at some point, raising me as a Spartan fan since I can remember. And although everything about a Big Ten football Saturday is special to me, something that always stuck out was the marching bands. While my family or friends were still out tailgating in the parking lot, I would sneak into the stadium a few minutes early to watch the band performed. I always had to stay and sing the fight song when the game was over and sometimes even got lucky enough to see the band play an extra show after that game had finished. I've always thought the Big Ten was home to some great, tradition rich marching bands and after doing the research for this project, I've discovered I am not the only one.

The general marching band was military-driven. There is no exact record on who the first people were to march to music or who invented it, but there are records that date back centuries.

The modern college marching bands like the ones discussed in this paper usually started forming

in the late 19th century. For the most part, these bands were formed as military bands who would later become involved with the athletic teams. Instrumentation and involvement varied greatly over time and still is not identical throughout the country. A separate paper could probably be written on these differences. When discussing the marching bands of the Big Ten, they resemble your traditional college marching band. The bands range from roughly 150-300 members. All of the band members represent their respective universities' colors and logos on uniforms that must be exactly fit to requirements, which again, could be an entirely separate paper. Like previously mentioned, instrumentation and involvement varies. To be basic, each college marching band will feature a brass and percussion section of the band. The former featuring trumpets, horns, sousaphones, and trombones. The latter typically includes snare, bass, and tenor drums as well as cymbals. Some bands will also have a woodwind section, consisting of flutes, clarinets, and different types of saxophones. The bands are usually led by a drum major, or several, and will also feature a color guard as well as twirlers for entertainment aspects of the pregame and halftime shows. The bands in the Big Ten Conference work diligently to perfect all of these aspects that go into a college marching band. For this reason, they are highly regarded throughout the country as some of the nation's best.

My research began with the band just minutes away from my home- the University of Illinois Marching Illini. Turns out, the Marching Illini began the marching band tradition in the Big Ten Conference with records dating all the way back to 1872 (when the university was known as the Illinois Industrial Institute) to support this. As so many other bands were, the Marching Illini was originally a military band. Later on, they would begin playing for the baseball team and finally football in 1890. Albert Austin Harding, the first director of bands who served for 43 years, led the Marching Illini who was the first collegiate marching band to play a

halftime show in a game against the University of Chicago in 1907. Harding also had a close relationship with John Phillip Sousa, a highly influential musician that I studied in my current *Introduction to American Music* course.

Director Harding also exhibited a great admiration for the “March King” John Philip Sousa, and history shows that, from the bandleader’s perspective, the admiration was mutual. Sousa composed the “University of Illinois March” for Harding in 1929 and recognized the University of Illinois Band as the “world’s greatest college band.” In fact, Sousa was so impressed with Harding’s organization of the band library at Illinois that the composer’s family bequeathed his personal library of band music to the University Bands. It arrived in 1932 in 39 wooden trunks and two boxes, weighing over 9,170 pounds! (University of Illinois)

It is obvious that music has played a large role with this university. In 1926, Ray Dvorak was given the duties of the football band from Harding and is credited with the creation of Chief Illiniwek, a nationally recognized symbol for the university until it was retired in 2007. Other accolades for the Marching Illini include performing at the second inaugural parade for Dwight D. Eisenhower, receiving the Sudler Trophy in 1983, and becoming the first college marching band to have a performance released on compact disc in 1986. The Marching Illini is made up of nearly 330 members, including the Flag Team, precision dance corps, staff members, and three drum majors (University of Illinois).

The Michigan State University Spartan Marching Band, or SMB, was founded very similarly to the Marching Illini. In an interview with current director of the marching band, John

T. Madden, he stated that the band was formed in 1870 by just ten members, all of whom were veterans of the Civil War. The band was student run for nearly 30 years and was an all-male band until 1972. Madden discussed something that I had also found while researching the Marching Illini: as the marching band grew, there became a need for a separate director who focused solely on the marching band for football games (Spartanband.net). The SMB currently represents everything that so many of the Big Ten Conference bands are known for: music excellence achieved by extreme work ethic. In the 300 member band, just ten percent are music majors. This means that the band achieves greatness by an incredible amount of practice time. The band, who had to turn away over 100 applicants in 2007, meets every day during the week for at least an hour and a half, including two practices on Monday. This concludes with a two hour game day rehearsal on Saturdays before they head to the football stadium (Byer 111). The Spartan Marching Band has played for five United States Presidents, as well as received the prestigious Sudler Trophy in 1988 (Spartanband.net). As I previously mentioned, I grew up as a Spartan fan thanks to a significant amount of family ties to the university. Seeing the band perform on countless occasions truly is a fond memory that will stay with me forever.

What is this Sudler Trophy I keep mentioning? “The purpose of the Sudler Trophy is to identify and recognize collegiate marching bands of particular excellence that have made outstanding contributions to the American way of life” (Sousa Foundation). The Sudler Trophy was first awarded in 1982, to be given to a marching band every year that demonstrated excellence towards music and displayed innovative marching styles. In 2007, the award was changed and is now given out biannually (Sousa Foundation). In my opinion, this change was made to preserve the integrity of the trophy. Because a band cannot win the award twice, the list of recipients has gotten fairly long in 2011. I would not be surprised to see the time between

winner extended again in the near future, to further ensure the Sudler Trophy remains a prestigious honor. As you can imagine, the Big Ten is highly recognized amongst this list of Sudler Trophy winners. In fact, nine of the eleven bands in the conference have received the award, an overwhelming 81 percent. The Big Ten bands make up nearly 1/3 of the entire list of Sudler Trophy winners, which nearly doubles any other conference's involvement. The first three winners were bands from the Big Ten, as well as seven of the first fourteen.

The first recipient of the Sudler Trophy was the University of Michigan Marching Band in 1982. There are many reasons why this band received this prestigious honor. First formed in 1896, the Michigan Marching Band, or MMB, was the first band to do the "Script Ohio" at a football game against Ohio State in 1932. This is now the main staple of the Ohio State Marching Band, as well as one of the most widely recognized traditions in college football. The MMB earned the nickname "The Transcontinental Band" in 1950 when they performed in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California and Yankee Stadium in New York in the same season. This band was also the first Big Ten band to perform at the NFL Super Bowl football game in 1973 (University of Michigan).

The previously mentioned Ohio State University Marching Band is known throughout the country. "Their identity as a marching band in our current culture of band competitions, props, set design, electronics, and visual stimuli stands alone" (Byer 33). One of the most famous traditions in college football is the "Script Ohio" and the "dotting of the I" performed by the marching band. Led by the drum major, the band spells out a script Ohio on the field, carefully weaving in and out of lines while maintaining perfect rhythm and march. After "Ohio" has been spelled, a sousaphone player high struts his way out to "dot the I" and the band concurrently begins playing the school's fight song.



Matthew Emmens, US Presswire

The band achieves this success by extremely strong work ethic from its members. Not only practicing the famous pregame routine, they must also master the music they plan to perform at the halftime show. Each band member must go through a music memorization check every Friday and are not allowed to play in the band for a whole week if they do not pass! Should they fail, they may have a second chance to perform in front of their music director (Byer 37-38). These extreme requirements indicate just how seriously Ohio State University takes its marching band. OSU is one of the only schools in the country that houses the band facilities inside the football stadium. These state of the art facilities attract some of the best players in the country who wish to take part in a marching band that is nationally recognized. The Ohio State Marching Band was awarded the Sudler Trophy in 1984, over a century after its formation in 1878 as a fife and drum corps (Ohio State University).

The University of Iowa Hawkeye Marching Band was formed in 1881, again, as a military band. By the year 1929, the same time Iowa's current football stadium had been built, a distinction had been made for the marching band. Then, like all of the other bands in the conference, the Hawkeye Marching Band began playing more public events and concerts. By the 1970's, the band had added flag twirlers to accompany the feature twirler, giving the band its current look and one similar to the rest of the Big Ten. The Hawkeye Marching Band received the prestigious Sudler Trophy in 1990 (University of Iowa).

Consisting of just 11 members, the University of Wisconsin Band was formed in 1885. It, too, began as a military band and features a cloudy history in the first few decades of its existence, undergoing several name changes and organizational shakeups. Then in 1934, the Assistant Band Director and leader of the Marching Illini, Ray Dvorak, was hired to lead the Wisconsin Band. It was after Dvorak's hiring that the band became known on the national level.

Dvorak created many of the traditions and composed many of the songs you would hear at a Wisconsin football game today. Then in 1948, the train he was riding was hit broadside by a truck carrying a load of sand. Severely burned and without a right arm, the future of the band was very questionable. Mike Lecrone would arrive in 1969 and revive the enthusiasm and interest of the band, which was at an all-time low (Badgerband.net). The Wisconsin Marching Band is thriving today, nationally known as one of the more enthusiastic bands. From watching clips of the band and seeing them on television, I believe they play at a faster tempo than most and put a higher concentration on interacting and involving the student body at the football games.

Although they cannot claim to be the first recipient of the Sudler Trophy like the Michigan Marching Band, The Purdue University All-American Marching Band boasts an impressive list of accomplishments nonetheless. The All-American Band began in 1886 as a drum corps and by the early 1900's it was known as one of the best bands in the country. 1907, the same year the Marching Illini were the first to perform a halftime show, the All-American Band is credited with performing the first formation, the block P, of any collegiate marching band in the country. They were also the first band to carry flags with all of the colors of the opposing teams in the conference, as well as honoring the visiting school by performing their fight song before the game. This is a tradition that has been picked up by every other band in the conference and is a tradition unique only to the Big Ten. Among some of the other things the Purdue All-American Band is known for: creating what is still considered "The World's Largest Bass Drum," which stands over ten feet tall, as well as being the first band to send an alumni to the Moon- Neil Armstrong. The All-American Band was recognized with the Sudler Trophy in 1995 (Purdue University).

Originally made up of 29 members, the University of Minnesota Marching Band got its roots in 1892 as the University Cadet Band. By 1910, the “Pride of Minnesota” was performing halftime shows and marching in formations, following the precedent set by other Big Ten bands. Women were intergraded in the marching band during World War II, and would later form their own band known as the “Women’s Division.” 1972 would bring women back into the marching band. Today’s band is made up of 315 members (University of Minnesota). Today, the band is getting used to their beautiful new facilities. In 2009, the university opened a brand new outdoor football stadium. This removed the football team, as well as the band, from its previous home in the Metrodome, an off-campus facility they had to share with professional football and baseball teams. Along with the new home for the team came a new home for the band. The 20,000 square foot facility for the band made it, along with Ohio State, one of the few in the country that has its facilities inside the football stadium (University of Minnesota). As they become more familiar with their new home, I fully expect the “Pride of Minnesota” to continue to grow and excel.

The tradition of Indiana University’s Marching Hundred dates back to the late 19th century, also. It began as a 22-piece band in 1896. It was formed to provide recreation for the students, but it also has a history with the military like so many of the other Big Ten bands. The band played for General Pershing’s American Expeditionary Force in Mexico in 1916. The size of the band had doubled by this time and was receiving national attention by the mid-1920s. The band was given many accolades and among them was “Indiana’s Famous and Marching Hundred,” a name that has stuck with the band for decades. The Marching Hundred is a recent recipient of the Sudler Trophy, as they were recognized in 2007 (Indiana University).

The Pennsylvania State University Blue Band began as a six member drum and bugle corps in 1899. Andrew Carnegie, philanthropist and important figure in United State’s history,

was a member College Board of Trustees and gave a donation to the band in 1901 that made it possible to incorporate a brass section. In the mid 1920s, some of the band members received blue uniforms as replacements to the brown military style uniforms that were in use. These blue uniforms were given out to members with high ability and rank. They would become known as the “Blue Band,” a name that has stuck with the band ever since. In 2005, during Fashion Week in New York City, the Penn State Blue Band became the first college marching band to perform at such an event. In this same year, the band was given the Sudler Trophy (Pennsylvania State University).

The Northwestern University Marching Band does not share some of the common beginnings of the rest of the Big Ten bands. It was not formed until a little later than most, in 1911. This band was one of the few that were not a military band at its creation. The Northwestern University Marching Band was formed simply to add extra excitement at its football games, likely following the lead set by so many of its neighboring schools in the Big Ten. Back in the early parts of the 20th century, females joined the band due to low personnel during World War II. In 1945, however, the band was disbanded because personnel had gotten so low. In 1947, following the return of director Glenn Cliffe Bainum from the war, the band was revived. Today, the band consists of 147 members which still make it the smallest band in the conference by far. Yet, like so many of its conference members, the NUMB is highly regarded among college marching bands. The Sudler Trophy was awarded to the band in 1992. With Evanston, the city where Northwestern University is located, being closely located to Chicago, the NUMB occasionally makes special performances at Chicago Bears football and Chicago Cubs baseball games (Northwestern University).

All of these bands came from humble beginnings with just a handful of members. Now, they are all known throughout the nation as some of the greatest marching bands in college football. They all feature their own tradition rich histories and play in front of hundreds of thousands of people every fall. I fully expect the University of Wisconsin and University of Minnesota marching bands to be recognized with the Sudler Trophy in the near future. As a diehard football fan of the conference, one of the things I would like to do before my life is over is attend a game at every football stadium. Not just for the football, but to see and hear a performance from each of these legendary bands. I cannot help but get goose bumps every time I see a new clip on YouTube of one of these legendary bands performing a unique tradition in front of the roaring crowd. I cannot imagine what that feeling will be like in person.

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