

The Graduate Magazine

of the University of Kansas

Volume 9

May, 1911

Number 8

COMMERCIALISM IN SPORTS*

By commercialism is meant the paying of those who take part in athletics of any kind, either in money or in rewards which have a money value. The subject is not an easy one to handle for it is far from being settled. There is not a governing body of athletics today but would be glad of information leading to a solution of the problem in such a way as to advance the interests of the athletes and the sports.

The question is one of more than local interest, for since athletics is common to all the civilized nations, and they meet on a common basis in international contests, it is important that there be some common ground on which these nations can compete. It is therefore necessary for each community so to arrange its code that at any time there will be this common basis. If any of our athletes, for example, were to represent America in the next Olympic games, they would need to be able to measure up to the standard which would be acceptable to the other nations. Not only is it of international importance, but it is also of importance for future time as well as for the present. The students of the last decade sacrificed their advantages for the benefit of the present student body. It would be poor policy, to say the least, for us to surrender that for which they sacrificed and from which we are now reaping benefits, for there are few indeed who will not concede that the present status of athletics at the University of Kansas as well

*The substance of an address by Dr. James Naismith, physical director at the University of Kansas.

as at other institutions is far and away ahead of the condition in the nineties. Indeed it would savor of ingratitude for us to permit a backward step at this time. It is for us to add to the sum of progress rather than to stand still.

I suppose that no one could be orthodox in athletics who did not hark back to the time of the Greek athletes. And on a subject of this kind, to consider their work is not only permissible, but extremely pertinent as they met these same questions and found the same difficulties that we are experiencing today. A work by E. Norman Gardner on the subject of "Greek Athletics and Festivals," gives us many valuable lessons from their experience. In the time of Homer there were no stated meets, but the sports were spontaneous activities of the leisure class and were celebrated chiefly at the funerals of great men. The rewards at this time were given in memory of the dead, rather than for the reward of the victor, and were given to the losing contestants as well as to the winners. The worth of the prizes indicated the amount of honor to the dead and these gifts were in many cases of great value.

During the first few Olympiads valuable prizes were given, but at the seventh the reward was a wreath of wild olives and any further rewards that were given to the victor were given by his townspeople or friends. These however, increased in value until in the sixth century, B. C., "the popularity of athletics, the growth of competition, and the rewards lavished on successful athletes completely changed the character of sport. The events, remained the same, but a change came over the attitude of the performers and the spectators. The standard of the performance was raised and athletics ceased to be recreation and there soon appeared the evil of overcompetition."

As the standard was raised, long and strenuous training was required and hence arose a class of professional trainers. It was not long until there arose also a class of professional athletes. Gardiner says that "before the close of the fifth century, B. C., the word for athlete had already come to denote the professional athlete as opposed to the amateur. And Euripides says of the athletes of that time: 'In youth they strut about in splendour the pride of their city, but when bitter old age comes upon them they are cast aside like threadbare garments.' It is not the athletes themselves but the nation that is to blame for such results."

The next step in the degradation of athletics came when contestants began to sell victories, as is illustrated by the act of Eupolis in the ninety-eighth Olympiad when he bribed his opponents to give him the victory. When this was discovered the giver and the taker of the bribe were heavily fined. Again in a later Olympiad, Callippus bribed his opponent in the pentathlon. Again quoting from Gardiner, "When corruption was possible at Olympia we may be sure that it was rife elsewhere. A class of useless athletes, an unathletic nation of spectators a corrupt and degraded sport—such were the results which we find in Greece within a century of the glorious seventy-sixth Olympiad which celebrated the freedom of that nation."

The training of that time was of the most distorted type, serving to specialize the athlete for his individual event. Thus we have exaggerated types of athletes, distorted for the sake of winning. It is said that the diet of Milo of Crotona consisted of eighteen pounds of meat, eighteen pounds of bread, and fifteen pints of wine a day. So great were the excesses of the athletes of this time that Galen, the great physician, said that the life of an Olympic victor was five years. Schaible says that "Greek athletics which in former days had rendered the Hellene a perfect being, physically, morally, and aesthetically, and had given rise to immortal works, perished ignominiously. Greediness after reward and the cravings of ambition were now become the incentive and frequently the athletes fought with vindictive rage contrary to all the established rules of the time."

A casual glance at the athletics of our own day will reveal some of the evils that wrecked the ancient games. From the wreath to the gift of the freedom of a city was not the transition of a day, but a gradual development step by step. It is this same insidious growth of commercialism that makes the man who is interested in the whole realm of sport so anxious that it be kept absolutely free from the slightest taint of that which would destroy one of the greatest forces of education.

The introduction of the distinction between amateurs and professionals was brought before the American public in connection with rowing. At the close of the Civil War, rowing was the national sport. There were three hundred and fifty rowing clubs and each club had its own standard; but the sport was fast approaching the stage of dissolution when William Curtiss issued a pamphlet entitled "Who is the Amateur?"

About the same time a pamphlet by James Watson entitled "What is an Amateur?" appeared. These were widely circulated. Mr. Curtiss issued a call for a convention which should, among other things, establish a national definition of an amateur. Twenty-seven clubs responded and sent representatives to the first meeting in New York.

The result was the organization of the National Association of Amateur Oarsmen with an executive committee of nine men who were to pass on the eligibility of the men and to hold a regatta each year. A definition adopted at that meeting was: "An amateur is one who does not enter into open competition for a stake or admission money or compete against a professional for a prize, or who has never taught, pursued or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises as a means of livelihood or who has not been employed in or about boats or on the water."

This definition caused a separation between the sixteen clubs who joined the association and the others who refused to be bound by the definition. It seemed at first that the association was bound to fail, but the backing of a few men who believed that it was a movement in the right direction kept the spirit alive until men all over the country began to see the true import of the amateur movement. By 1874 it was said that the whole country was buying boats. There was another class of men who were, under a guise, meeting the requirements of the rule, but were in spirit professionals. A clause was added to the rules whereby any pecuniary advantage directly or indirectly rendered by a club made an individual ineligible. This cut out many of the pseudo amateurs.

A further clause was added in 1884, after President Garfield had made his report, requiring that an amateur must be one "Who rows for pleasure or recreation only, and during his leisure hours, and who does not abandon or neglect his usual business or occupation for the purpose of training." This, it was said, was for the purpose of getting rid of those who made money rowing in the summer.

It has been suggested that baseball is in a different class from any of the other sports. But here we see that it is in almost the identical position in which rowing was during these years. Whatever might be said in favor of professional or semi-professional baseball might be said of rowing. The great effort was to cut out of competition with the business man the one who made his living by the same kind of work. But it did not stop at that point, for it eliminated the man who got any pecun-

iary advantage from the event.

The question that is pertinent at the present time is this: Is it necessary or best to make this distinction? We may be sure that when a rule is universal there must be some good reason for its being in force. An artificial distinction can not long exist.

It needs no seer to foretell the result of commercializing athletics. The man who steals a little time from his study or his business to perfect his skill is met by the man who steals just a little more, and he in turn is defeated by the man who appropriates more still. This is an endless evil that defeats itself only after it has slain its victims.

Let us look at the arguments in favor of commercializing sport.

First, there is an opportunity for some men to make a legitimate living. Baseball is essentially a professional game and every summer there are a great many men who make the main part of their livelihood by playing ball. In regard to this vocation there is no reason why men should not pursue it any more than there is objection to an actor's making a business of entertaining.

Second, any man who has the ability ought to be permitted to turn skill into coin, even if he does not make a business of sport. In many cases this money is put to a good use, e. g., paying the expenses of a college course.

Third, every man has a right to represent his institution regardless of his past record in making a living in a certain way. This is a legal side of the question and one that has not been brought prominently to the front.

Fourth, the distinction between amateur and professional tends to induce men to perjure themselves in order that they may play in the game desired.

Fifth, the abolition of the distinction would result in developing ball-playing in colleges and athletic clubs, and the standard would be raised.

Sixth, it would give some young men a chance to develop into specialists in the game.

Seventh, it would hold out hope of the time when skill would be a source of income, not a means of livelihood. It would encourage the spread of athletic ability and its consequent health and virility.

The arguments for a distinction between the man who makes sport a source of gain and the man who does not are:

First, play is instinctive and of decided advantage to the participant; it is a means of developing the individual, and for this reason it should be universal and of the nature of recreation.

Second, commercializing sport puts it in a wrong perspective for the individual who is preparing himself for his life work. Sport should be a means, not an end.

Third, it tends to over-specialization and leads to over-training.

Fourth, it makes work of sport, for the fundamental distinction between play and work is that we pay for the privilege of playing; but when we are paid for doing the same thing it becomes work.

Fifth, it puts too much stress on the winning of the game and too little on the subjective benefits of the sport. This leads to the practice of open violation of rules.

Sixth, it leads to a worship of the dollar in the field of athletics where recreation and development should be the end sought.

Seventh, it stimulates betting; for the man who is taxed to pay for the players feels that he has a right to get back the money which he has invested in the team. This leads to a wrong attitude towards the team for it becomes a means of making money.

Eighth, commercialism leads to a class distinction, for when a man is paid for his services in athletics he is on a different level from the man who buys him. He is under obligation to the man who pays him. Every man who puts a dollar into the treasury considers himself the athlete's master.

Ninth, it makes sport a spectacle rather than a source of recreation.

Tenth, it destroys class spirit and college loyalty. A common question becomes: "What is there in it?" The value of a suit far outweighs loyalty to an institution. Loyalty is fostered by sacrifice not by remuneration.

Eleventh, the study body of the nineties sacrificed that they might give us a clean sport and today we are reaping the benefits of their sacrifice. We ought to sacrifice for the good of the future students of the University.

Twelfth, commercialism narrows the field of sport, for no man will participate in any form of sport in which he is so far behind as to be laughed at. We insist on such a high standard of sport that few can please.

Thirteenth, we have no right to ask any man to do those things for which he may later be sorry. The charge of professionalism bars many a man from taking part in events later in his career. One of the qualifications for joining the good athletic clubs of the country is that of amateur standing.

Fourteenth, athletics have an educational value and this should be their aim in an educational institution. Skill in athletics brings confidence—and a sense of power.

Fifteenth, athletics may be a great moral factor. This phase of the subject is leading to the playground movement. Athletics and the playgrounds furnish the laboratory in which the great moral lessons of fair play and the square deal are being taught to children.

Sixteenth, the college student is the hero of the high-school boy. It is the duty of every student to align himself with the highest and the most advanced ideals of sport as well as of everything else. The Amateur Athletic Union has stood for clean sport, and it is their boast that but for them sport would have perished. The Union has come to the point where they are willing to recognize the amateur standing of the colleges and their code of eligibility. We cannot at this time make a backward movement.

These are the arguments urged for and against the commercializing of athletics and it would not be just for any man to make up his mind on this subject without considering these and giving them their full value.

HALF-CADENCES

Titans there are, that from the mountain peaks
Shout with a glad strong cry that shakes the stars
And fills the echoing chambers of the world
With the wild splendor of terrific song
Forever. Such the shout of Pelides
As high he tossed his vengeful spear that dripped
Wet with the blood of Hector on that morn
When Priam stretched his trembling hands from Troy,
With Hecuba, toward those white limbs that lay
All pitiful upon the war-worn plain;
So through all time resounds that triumph still,—
Voice from the deathless peaks that breast the sun!

Thine first to walk the summits; up to thee