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Athletics in American Colleges

By W. H. COWLEY

*A Summary of the Recent Report Issued by the
Carnegie Foundation*

THE Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recently published, as Bulletin Number Twenty-three, its third study dealing with the subject of athletics. The first described athletic sports at some twenty American colleges and universities and was published as part of the Twentieth Annual Report of the Foundation in 1925. The second, Bulletin Number Eighteen, issued in 1927, dealt with games and sports at British schools and universities. Both these previous investigations were introductions to the present extensive study carried out by Dr. Howard J. Savage, member of the staff of the Carnegie Foundation.

Dr. Savage's report is so voluminous that the editors of this Journal feel that a summary of its contents may make for a more widespread knowledge of the investigator's findings. Few college administrators and teachers have ready access to the study, and an even smaller number have the leisure at their disposal to give it the attention and the thought it deserves. Newspaper reports have unfortunately been too brief to be of much value, and, moreover, they have tended to be more sensational than inclusive. They have given the general reader an inadequate picture of what the Foundation and its investigators have

sought to accomplish. The following summary is submitted to the college and university public that there may be a wider understanding of the objectives and results of several years of work on the part of the Foundation.

Dr. Henry S. Pritchett, president of the Carnegie Foundation, introduces the report with a long Preface which seeks to put the investigation in perspective. He observes that the investigators sought to answer two fundamental questions: "What relation has this astonishing athletic display to the work of an intellectual agency like a university?" and "How do students, devoted to study, find either the time or the money to stage so costly a performance?" Commenting on the data collected to answer these questions, Dr. Pritchett makes the following general observation which sums up what appears to him to be the most important problem involved. "The question is whether an institution in the social order whose primary purpose is the development of the intellectual life can at the same time serve as an agency to promote business, industry, journalism, salesmanship, and organized athletics on an extensive commercial basis. The question is not so much whether athletics in their present form should be fostered by the university, but how fully can a university that fosters professional ath-

letics discharge its primary function. . . . How far can an agency, whose function is intellectual, go in the development of other causes without danger to its primary purpose? Can a university teach equally well philosophy and salesmanship? Can it both sponsor genuine education and at the same time train raw recruits for minor vocations? Can it concentrate its attention on securing teams that win, without impairing the sincerity and vigor of its intellectual purpose?"

The unfavorable results of athletic development upon students he considers to be the nine following:

1. College athletics have a deleterious effect upon secondary schools.
2. College athletics are too absorbing to allow the athlete really to study.
3. College athletes are given a distorted sense of social values.
4. Coaches have an undesirable cultural influence upon their charges.
5. Competition produces a system of recruiting and subsidizing which "is demoralizing and corrupt."
6. Alumni devices for recruiting winning teams "constitutes the most disgraceful phase of recent intercollegiate athletics."
7. College athletics do not contribute appreciably to the health program of colleges.
8. "The strict organization and the tendency to commercialize has taken the joy out of the game."
9. "The blaze of publicity in which the college athlete lives is a demoralizing influence for the boy himself and no less so for his college."

Carrying the discussion over into educational philosophy Dr. Pritchett observes that "many boys and girls whose usefulness and happiness would be best sought in a commercial or in-

dustrial trade are carried into the college by the mere sweep of the tide. Insensibly but inevitably the intellectual quality of the college is softened in order to meet the capacity of those who must be cared for. . . . But no nation can afford in its educational system to forget that to the great mass of mankind an honest job, performed in good spirit, is the road to moral soundness and to social contentment."²

In answer to the question of what is now to be done about the athletic situation, Dr. Pritchett cites the divergent points of view of Erasmus and Luther viewing "the low state of the church and the university in their day" and infers that there may be "a gradual and peaceful readjustment" or a new educational system may grow out of present perplexities, and that "the need today is to re-examine our educational regime with the determination to attain in greater measure the simplicity, sincerity, and thoroughness that is the life blood of a true university in any country at any age."

THE first four chapters of the body of the report might be called background chapters. The first concerns itself with the history and scope of the investigation, standards, criteria, and definitions. These details are not pertinent to this summary, and no more need be said of them here than that five investigators visited one hundred thirty schools, colleges, and universities, gathering the data used in preparing the report.

Chapter two presents an interesting history of the growth of college athletics. Dr. Savage divides the history

¹ Savage, Howard J. *et al.* *American College Athletics*. New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1929. p. xii. (Bulletin No. 23)

² *Op. cit.*, p. xvii ff.

of athletics into four periods, and in great detail discusses each period as they pertain to intercollegiate contests, extramural matches, and control. His first period is from the beginnings of American collegiate athletics up until 1852. The second which he calls the "Intensification of College Sports" extends from 1853 to 1885; the third, the "Expansion of College Athletics," from 1886 to 1906, and the fourth, the period in which the struggle for control has been dominant, from 1907 until the present time.

Chapter three is concerned with the development of modern amateur status. Herein the author summarizes the history and development of the amateur status in the United States and compares it with the professionalism and amateur points of view in Great Britain and Canada. In chapter four he reviews the status of athletics in American secondary schools and discusses both physical education and athletics and the relationship of the one to the other. It is the conviction of the investigators that American secondary athletics are closely related to and influenced by collegiate athletics, and for that reason this chapter is included. It helps to give the reader a more complete picture of the situation than would be otherwise possible.

The main body of the study begins with chapter five which is entitled "The Administrative Control of American College Athletics." Dr. Savage observes that "aside from the hurried, imitative adoption of a few catchwords and *cliches*, like 'Athletics for all,' or 'Every student a player,' and a very high regard for material equipment, the shaping of a comprehensive administrative policy for ath-

letics has very generally been neglected." He believes "the monetary and material returns from intercollegiate athletics are valued far more highly than their returns in play, sport, and bodily and moral well-being." Furthermore, he asserts that "the present tendency is to look upon faculty control, whether genuine or not, as the panacea of all the ills of athletics. When the criteria which have just been set down lend reality to what is so often a mere subterfuge, certainly true faculty control at its best is to be preferred to control by graduates or coaches."

He submits that because of the hugeness of athletic receipts, there flow certain results which have not yet received the scrutiny that is their due. These he considers to be the luxuries which are lavished upon players, extravagance in special personnel, including budgets for coaches, publicity agents and expenses of newspaper men, and the fictitious exaggeration of the importance of athletics, especially of football. This latter excessive importance has led "to reserving for intercollegiate competition the best and largest athletic facilities, with the consequent impoverishment, and in many cases, the consequent inadequacy of intramural athletics." This same exaggerated importance of athletics has brought about a poor administration of the problem of scholastic eligibility which is being attacked with hardly more than "a mere show of conscientiousness." The suggested panacea of faculty control Dr. Savage considers to be "often a mere subterfuge" although "true faculty control at its best is to be preferred to control by graduates or coaches."

Chapter six is concerned with athletic participation and its results. Herein are discussed the forces and motives which lead men and women to engage in collegiate athletics; the characteristics of these participants; the branches of athletics now prevalent in colleges and universities; the conditions under which students take part; and finally, the immediate and the ultimate or deferred results of their participation. The forces and motives which lead undergraduates to participate in athletics are considered to be: (1) an individual's inheritance of athletic characteristics, (2) the requirements of physical education, (3) the enjoyment of athletics, (4) college opinion which serves as a pressure to urge capable athletes into continuous competition, often to the neglect of their studies and against their personal desires, (5) the advantages that athletic participation has in opening vocational opportunities, and (6) the payment for participation in intercollegiate athletics.

THE study has demonstrated that about 63 per cent of all undergraduates in the one hundred and twelve institutions studied take part in athletics regularly or intermittently. Of these, 18 per cent to 25 per cent engage in intercollegiate athletics, while from 50 per cent to 63 per cent take part in intramural athletics, voluntary or compulsory. These data compared with a study by Professor Sheldon in 1900 indicate that "no great increase has taken place over the past thirty years in the proportion of undergraduates participating in intercollegiate athletics. Over the period, however, participation in some form

of athletic activity among undergraduates has more than doubled, and probably trebled." This same chapter includes considerable detailed information concerning the conditions and results of participation in intercollegiate athletics. These data are too detailed to be summarized here. It is perhaps enough to observe that they give a more adequate picture of the physical and scholastic results of participation than is available in any other place. This one conclusion, however, is significant enough to find a place in this abstract. Reporting upon the academic achievement of athletes as compared to the achievement of non-athletes, Dr. Savage has this to say: "On the one hand, we have youths well endowed physically and mentally who should outdistance their fellows in the race of life; on the other, we find no evidence that the best places in this race have been won by these men, whose tastes and training have led them into intercollegiate athletics. The indicated conclusion is that the American system of intercollegiate athletics is to blame for this situation rather than the body of youth that is subjected to its workings."³

Chapter seven is entitled "The Hygiene of Athletic Training." It is a careful analysis of athletics in relationship to the student's health and current practices judged by participation, physical condition, medical supervision, training, injuries, and the like. Dr. Savage summarizes this part of his investigation by observing that "There can be no doubt that athletics, if well conducted, may be made to contribute significantly to the physical health of students." Certain facts,

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

however, set forth in the text and in the tables "clearly demonstrate that under the present system of conducting athletics too few students receive benefit and too many incur positive harm. Moreover, certain widespread athletic practices mentioned in preceding pages actually jeopardize the physical health of the participants."

"The Coach" is the subject of chapter eight. Such topics are discussed as The Training and Selection of Coaches, The Status and Tenure of Coaches, The Coach's Salary, The Work of the Coach, A Few of the Extramural Relationships of the Coach, The Attitude and Influence of the Coach. A development of recent years has been the appointment of coaches on college faculties. Concerning this practice, Dr. Savage has this to say: "Appointment as a member of a faculty as contrasted with employment on a part-time or seasonal basis confers no mystical assurance that the work of any coach shall succeed in developing habits of honesty, uprightness, courage, or self-reliance among the young men entrusted to his care. Of all the field of higher education, physical education shows the largest number of members with the rank of professor who have only the bachelor's degree or no degree whatever. In short, faculty status of itself guarantees to the institution nothing whatsoever with respect to the ability and character of the coach."⁴ Data dealing with length of tenure are summarized in the report as follows: "All told, the enquiry has dealt with 272 coaches whose service has totaled 948 years in separate institutions. On the average the stay amounted to 3.49 years, while the median tenure was

two years. Of the 82 head football coaches who held their positions at institutions of the study, the total service years at these institutions were 387, with an average of 4.72 years and a median of three years. Such facts as these, and others to follow, indicate that the length of the tenure of the coach, and especially of the head coach at football, is increasing."⁵ Discussing the salary of coaches, he has produced comparative data as follows: "At over one hundred universities and colleges the highest salary paid to a dean was \$15,000, the median \$6,000, the average \$6,409. The highest-paid full professor received a salary of \$12,000, while the median among such professors was \$5,000, and the average \$5,158. Among eighty-three directors of physical education or graduate managers, the highest salary was \$14,000, the lowest \$1,000 for part-time work, the median \$4,800, and the average \$5,095. Of ninety-six head football coaches, the highest paid drew a salary of \$14,000, and the lowest \$1,800, while the median salary was \$6,000, and the average \$6,107."⁶

IN chapter nine, concerned with extramural relationships, such problems as alumni influence upon athletic policy, intercollegiate rivalry, and athletic conferences, are discussed. In this same chapter are summarized and discussed the national athletic bodies which are concerned in one way or another with such problems as faculty control, eligibility, compensation to players, training regulations, summer

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 171-72.

baseball, coaching, and sportsmanship. The significance and effectiveness of these bodies are appraised, and in general the present health of intercollegiate relationships is evaluated. The general inference is that conditions are far from being in the healthy state that they should be.

The chapter in the report which has been the center of newspaper comment is chapter ten, entitled "The Recruiting and Subsidizing of Athletics." While producing data to demonstrate that recruiting on a large scale is actively going on and that subsidizing in some form was found to exist at eighty-one of the one hundred twelve institutions studied, the situation is decidedly improving. In this connection the author observes that "with all due allowance for the tendency to magnify the past in comparison with the present, there can be little doubt that the evils of soliciting and subsidizing athletes have diminished over the last twenty-five, twenty, or even fifteen years. A study of facts and opinions set forth from time to time since 1896 in the publications of various bodies, like the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the National Education Association, by men possessing much knowledge of the conditions involved, makes clear that matters have improved. On the other hand, letters, accounts, and other records indicate that this improvement has been one of degree but not of kind; some of these letters, a sampling of which is printed in the Appendix, might easily, if their dates were altered, do duty under present condition."⁷

The two final chapters are con-

cerned with the press and with the values of athletics. The first of these chapters marshals data to demonstrate the tremendous growth of sporting pages and the unprecedented importance which is being given to college athletics and the college athlete. This growth has led to the charge that newspapers, monthly magazines, and weekly publications are exploiting college athletes for financial gain, and that clearly journalism is guilty of sensationalism and petty graft.

Despite this black picture, Dr. Savage observes that "the traditions of the great names of American journalism—Benjamin Franklin, Greeley, Bolles, Dana, and Pulitzer—have not by any means been submerged in the rising tide of commercialism." In his chapter on "Values in American College Athletics," Dr. Savage attempts to weigh the good points of the present athletic regime against the bad. He considers that among the salutary influence of athletics are their "direct physical effect upon the nation that justifies not alone their continuance but also their encouragement and further development, especially in their intramural phases"; and their socializing influences both in school and college and after graduation. On the score of undesirable influences of athletics he lists (1) the widespread opinion among alumni that college registration depends upon successful athletics teams, an opinion which the investigators found to be unwarranted; (2) the evil effects of recruiting and subsidizing that probably persist into business and professional life; (3) commercialization defined as "that condition which exists when the monetary and material returns from

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

sport are more highly valued than the returns in play, recreation, and bodily and moral well-being; (4) the lack of intellectual challenge to the young and alert mind; (5) the control of athletics by imitative methods rather than through adaptive growth; and (6) the failure of athletics to contribute appreciably to morals and conduct. On this last point Dr. Savage writes that "vociferous proponents of college athletics have claimed for participants far greater benefits than athletics can probably ever yield, and, in attempting to evaluate these supposed benefits, have hailed the shadow as the substance."

Since this chapter is the last of the report the author has herein also stated his general conclusions. Newspaper comment and Dr. Pritchett's Preface have given the impression that the athletic situation is completely black. Dr. Savage, however, does not take that position. He writes that "improvement during the past thirty years have been marked. Let the improvement continue . . . let their [college athletics] physical, moral, and spiritual potentialities in the education of youth be clearly understood and sincerely acted upon, and their value in our national life will be immeasurably enhanced." In an earlier chapter he writes that "there can be no question of abolishing college athletics, nor should there be. What can be looked for is a gradual establishment through concrete action of a few general principles, to which all men would agree in the abstract. Even this slow change

will be impossible without the sanction of an enlightened college and public opinion." To aid in the building up of such a body of opinion has, presumably, been one of the major reasons for undertaking the investigation.

Coming to the last page of the bulletin and facing the problem of what is to be done about present conditions, Dr. Savage writes as follows: "The prime needs of our college athletics are two—one particular and one general. The first is a change of values in a field that is sodden with the commercial and the material and the vested interests that these forces have created. Commercialism in college athletics must be diminished and college sport must rise to a point where it is esteemed primarily and sincerely for the opportunities it affords to mature youth under responsibility, to exercise at once the body and the mind, and to foster habits both of bodily health and of those high qualities of character which, until they are revealed in action, we accept on faith.

"The second need is more fundamental. The American college must renew within itself the force that will challenge the best intellectual capabilities of the undergraduate. Happily, this task is now engaging the attention of numerous college officers and teachers. Better still, the fact is becoming recognized that the granting of opportunity for the fulfillment of intellectual promise need not impair the socializing qualities of college sport."⁸

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 310.