

## Athletics

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# Athletics

By JOHN M. STALNAKER

## *Faculty Attitudes toward Intercollegiate Athletics*

SPRING practice and an occasional football article on the sport page suggest that the usual controversy concerning the over-emphasis of football and its place in a university will again command attention. No doubt some well-known educator will proclaim to the country at large, possibly even to his own university in particular, a panacea for the ills which have attended college athletics. Magazine articles will sparkle with wit in showing the absurdity or the immeasurable value of them. Comparisons of the attention and interest which the students give to athletics and to letters will reach the editorial page of an occasional newspaper. Reformers will again urge that highly paid coaches be done away with, that the management of the game be returned to the students, that gate receipts be abolished, that the season be shortened, that the newspaper publicity be curtailed, that starring of the individual be prevented, that athletic participation be recognized by academic marks and credit, that intersectional games be abandoned, that charity games be discouraged, that participation in football be limited to Juniors and Seniors, that intercollegiate athletics be replaced by "purely" amateur interclass

or intramural games, that the athletes be allowed to participate in only one major sport, that the amateur rules be revised, that the athletes be required to attain a prohibitively high scholastic standard, that intercollegiate athletics be returned to a strictly amateur basis by preventing subsidizing and recruiting, that intercollegiate athletics be completely abolished, and so on *ad nauseam*.

A general discussion of the situation of college athletics, a presentation of facts showing what must be done or what cannot be done, is of value. There is, however, another aspect of the matter which may be worthy of some thought. I refer to a consideration of what the people concerned with college football want. What are their wishes in the matter, their desires, their attitudes?

A tabulation, however thoroughly done, of the expressed opinions of these people cannot show what should be done; but it may show what it is possible to do. Particularly in view of the chaotic state of the aims, purposes, and functions of a university and of the demonstrable value of any subject, even football, in attaining any ends, it is perhaps logical to turn to a tabulation of opinions of the subject.

A clear differentiation between fact

and opinion is essential. Let us suppose that by one method or another it is found that most people who concern themselves with football believe that the athletes are subsidized, and their attitude is that this is all right. This does not prove that the athletes are subsidized, nor does it establish the fact that the subsidizing of athletes is a harmless thing. It may be assumed, however, that the prevalence of such beliefs will make it difficult to enforce legislation which strictly prohibits subsidizing. If by some means it can be established that subsidizing is harmful, then an educational or propagandistic program ought to be entered into to show the people the error of their belief. Perhaps wise legislation should be a step in advance of prevailing opinion, but it cannot be too far in advance if it is to be enforced successfully.

OF ONE group of people concerned with college activities, the college faculty, the attitude toward intercollegiate athletics has been determined by surveys conducted at the University of Minnesota and at the University of Chicago. Although these two groups may not be typical of college faculties, more complete data are available concerning their attitudes than concerning those of any other faculty.

The technique of measurement of attitudes employed in both surveys was that developed by Mr. L. L. Thurstone.<sup>1</sup> This method makes it possible to represent, in the form of a frequency distribution, the distribu-

tion of the attitudes of a group on a specific issue.

The base line represents ideally the whole range of opinions from those at one end who are most strongly in favor of the issue to those at the other end of the scale who are as strongly against it. Somewhere between the two extremes on the base line will be a neutral zone representing indifferent attitudes on the issue in question. The ordinates on the frequency distribution will represent the relative popularity of each attitude. . . . The measurement is effected by the indorsement or rejection of statements of opinion. The opinions [statements] are allocated to different positions on the base line in accordance with the attitudes which they express . . . The center of the whole problem lies in the definition of a unit of measurement for the base line. The scale is so constructed that two opinions separated by a unit distance on the base line seem to differ as much in the attitude variable involved as any other two opinions on the scale which are also separated by a unit distance.<sup>2</sup>

Legitimate criticism may be made of the method of measurement used in these studies, although both the faculties were measured by the same instrument, since the scale dealt with intercollegiate athletics and not specifically with football. Several of the faculty members expressed difficulty in thinking of the various branches of intercollegiate athletics as parts of an integral thing. Football looms as the one big part of intercollegiate athletics overbalancing all other intercollegiate sports. The experience gained through the Minnesota survey suggests the advisability of a separate consideration of football. To secure comparable

<sup>1</sup> Thurstone, L. L. "Theory of Attitude Measurement," *Psychological Review*, XXXVI (May, 1929), pp. 222-41.

<sup>2</sup> Thurstone, L. L. "Attitudes Can Be Measured," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXXIII (January, 1928), pp. 529-30.

results, however, the same scale was used with the Chicago faculty. In all probability, most of the people answering questions about intercollegiate athletics think only of football.

The attitude scales were supplemented by questionnaire material. The Minnesota faculty study was carried out as a section of a survey of attitudes toward intercollegiate athletics, made at the request of a special committee

TABLE I  
THE DATA ON THE FACULTY ATTITUDES  
TOWARD INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

RANK	PER CENT RESPONDING		MEAN RESULTS	
	Chi- cago	Minne- sota	Chi- cago	Minne- sota
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Professor . . .	72	92	3.94	5.66
Associate Pro- fessor . . .	72	92	4.50	6.19
Assistant Pro- fessor . . .	62	88	5.03	6.27
Instructor . . .	66	82	4.69	6.06
Miscellany . . .	63	79	5.00	6.70
Total . . .	69	85	4.43	6.10

on physical education and athletics appointed by President Coffman. The report of the committee, which includes a report of the attitudes found, will eventually be published.<sup>a</sup> The Chicago faculty study, on the other hand, was carried out as a personal project at the suggestion of a few interested faculty members. While it did not have official support, the administrative officers expressed interest in the project.

In the case of both faculties the atti-

<sup>a</sup> Stalnaker, John M. "The Individual and Intercollegiate Athletics," *Provision for the Individual in College Education*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932, pp. 221-33; and "Attitudes toward Intercollegiate Athletics," to appear soon in *School and Society*.

tude scales and the questionnaire material were mailed to the members. President Coffman of the University of Minnesota urged his faculty to co-operate, and assured them of complete anonymity in the results. "Follow-up" letters were used. Approximately 85 per cent of the 1,039 members of the Minnesota faculty responded. Only one letter was sent to the Chicago group; 70 per cent of the 440 faculty members circularized responded. As a tabulation of the first 50 per cent of the returns from the Minnesota faculty did not show a distribution of attitude which differed significantly from that of the last 35 per cent, no effort was made to urge the members of the Chicago faculty who did not express themselves immediately to change their minds.

THE results show that the faculty of the University of Minnesota is much more favorable in its attitude toward intercollegiate athletics than is the faculty of the University of Chicago. The difference between the two groups is, in fact, striking, as may be seen from the accompanying table. The mean results of the attitude scale are given in Columns 4 and 5 of Table I. The higher the attitude score, the more favorable is the attitude toward intercollegiate athletics. A score of less than 5.5 indicates an unfavorable or opposed attitude; 5.5 represents neutrality or indifference; over 5.5 indicates a favorable attitude.

The average attitude of the Minnesota faculty is decidedly favorable toward intercollegiate athletics, while that of the Chicago faculty is equally unfavorable. Indeed, the average

attitude of the Chicago faculty would be an extreme attitude among the Minnesota faculty. The faculty members of professorial rank in both universities are the group most opposed to intercollegiate athletics, but again the Chicago professors are significantly more opposed than are those at Minnesota.

A recent report by a faculty committee of the University of Wisconsin included the statement that "intercollegiate athletics have a justifiable place in the University's educational and recreational program." Over 92 per cent of the University of Minnesota faculty who participated in this survey indorsed the statement that intercollegiate athletics have a legitimate place in a college or university. Forty per cent of the entire faculty and 51 per cent of the ranking professors (of those who participated in this survey) at the University of Chicago said they would like to see football abolished at the University of Chicago.

This radical attitude of the Chicago

faculty is particularly interesting in view of the fact that Mr. Stagg, their director of athletics and coach of football for the past forty years, is widely recognized, in the words of Major Griffith, as "one of the finest, most capable, and most honest athletic directors and football coaches of any college in the country." Although the University of Chicago has lately had publicity for her poor football teams, her athletic success over the past forty years compares favorably with that of any conference university.

To those who view the college athletic situation more rationally than emotionally, this method of measuring attitudes toward football may suggest a means of discovering a large institution where the faculty, the students, the alumni, the trustees, and the public would tolerate experimentation with intercollegiate athletics. Through experimentation, rather than argumentation, the values and the bad features of the present system might more clearly be established.

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