

The opinion of a French journalist

UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS DO NOT CONSTITUTE PROFESSIONALISM BUT
THEY OFFER THE ATHLETE AN OPPORTUNITY TO RISE
IN THE SOCIAL SCALE

A report by *Michel Clare* (published by *L'Equipe*, Paris.)

If one wishes to gain some idea of the fertility of American athletics, one must go to its very foundations, get to know the way of life of the universities, watch their training sessions, talk with the champions and with their coaches, so that one learns how an original élite, which has been sifted from the high-schools can be made to produce its finest elements by means of the incomparable University system. All the first class champions realize, in fact, that they will have a chance to go to University by virtue of a very simple system, whose main features are summarized below.

APRIL... THE *scouts* ARE ON THE LOOK OUT

At the beginning of every season, in other words at the first sign of spring in the trees, namely in April and May, *mass athletics meetings* and *Relays Carnivals* are held throughout the United States. These sports meetings spring up everywhere. According

to established traditions, there are relays held in Florida., Ohio, Arkansas, Texas, Kansas, California, the West Coast, as well as the *Drake Relays* and the *Penns Relays*. These relays are the great proving - ground for the first appearance of American athletes, for, it is here that each of the great number of school champions has a chance to excell and to attract the attention of a selector sent on behalf of one of the big Universities. The relay meetings offer new talent and it is here that the *scouts*, as the selectors are called in America, usually make their best catches.

The best known of these relays is the series organized by the University of Pennsylvania. They are, moreover, of an international character, since invitations are sent out to various foreign teams. This event is a real athletic orgy, a mass championship with a record number of participants. Normally, there are some 3,500 competitors drawn chiefly from the high-schools. This

is the great Spring festival and the blossoming of American athletics. A full week-end is necessary for the running-off of some hundred events, with heats and finals, even with ten teams of four runners in each event.

The *Penns Relays* stem from a long tradition which was started in 1895 (20th April) by the Director of Athletics of the University, Frank B. Ellis, who was looking for - and indeed found - a spectacle which would be out of the ordinary, in order to inaugurate a newly completed stadium. These relays, held at the beginning of the season, offer an opportunity to judge the quality of the work carried out at the high-schools, and one can easily see that numerous discoveries are made in this way. All the great stars in the American field of athletics have gained some measure of recognition by the general public through relays. It is both an obvious and well known fact that these relays compell the athlete both to surpass himself and help to bring him to the notice of the general public.

At this point, the *scout*, the *missi dominici* of the University, makes its appearance. He prepares his report, makes note of a name and record some brief observations. Normally, the *scouts in athletics* has a fairly simple part to play, one that is far simpler than the task of the scout responsible for the recruiting of football or baseball players, who has to reckon with the personal aspect of the selection. The selector has noted a name, and he will follow the athlete during his subsequent meetings, he will compare his observations with information from other sources, will also interview the athlete's high-school coach. Often, he has even received precise directions, since the trainer in the University which has sent him, may prefer middle-distance runners or sprinters, or because there is a shortage of athletes for throwing events, or of a 400 metres hurdler to strengthen a weakness in the main team that will take part in the Inter-University matches.

These methods are not, as a matter of fact, peculiar to America only, for French athletics has its professional selectors or scouts and school championships are also organized in France. But there is one feature which distinguishes the selector from the scout. The latter has more substantial benefits to offer the selected youth, namely a four-year scholarship at the University where he will have the opportunity both to prepare for graduation in a branch of study as well as carry out his athletic training under the supervision of the most reputed coaches, and this under the most favourable conditions.

This is the moment to clear up a misunderstanding :

ONE SOMETIMES HEARS THE RUMOUR THAT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY ATHLETE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A DISGUISED PROFESSIONAL, THIS ALLEGATION IS UNTRUE.

Certainly excesses do exist, but they are more evident in team sports than in athletics, and in any case they are not the fault of the system. These scholarship awards are in themselves a tradition, whilst university studies are generally rather expensive. A student living a modest type of existence would spend some 1,500 dollars per year to cover all his expenses. Fortunately, there are all manner of scholarships ; from a 600 page book on the subject, mothers are told the ways their sons can win a scholarship, and more than fifty per cent of students hold scholarships, the remainder, if they have no private means, manage as best they can by earning at the same time than they study at the university.

THE STUDENTS ARE MASTERS OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS

There is, among others, the athletic scholarship, which is awarded by the Students Council of the University, or at least by its sports section. The Universities have maintained their corporate traditions and the students themselves, through their associations have control, with very few exceptions, of all sport. These Associations are very well organized. They have their own offices, their own staff, their own press service, and their own public relations department. They form and train their own teams and pay their coaches as well as purchasing the necessary equipment and materials. Usually they are very rich, since they enjoy the receipts from their various sportive events. In addition they receive donations from their old members, which are increased by the fact that the donor pays no taxes on sums donated in this manner.

It is therefore easier to understand why it is in the interest of the Association to offer such scholarships. They are indeed to its own advantage. Not only does the champion bring publicity to the Association, whose name, emblazoned on his vest, is transmitted everywhere by means of the press, radio and TV, but also through his personal prestige he makes his contribution to the Association by drawing the public who will increase the funds of the Association. Thus, he makes a definite contribution to the public good, since he definitely earns far more than he costs. Here, once more, one must take into consideration, when examining the problem of sport, the fact that America is an economic Democracy and that the Universities' sports system corresponds with the economic system of the nation.

Every athlete, whom I met, had been awarded a scholarship of this sort, and exceptions to this rule are very rare. The scholarship covers the expenses of studies, board and lodgings at the University, as well as the expenses in connection with books and stationery. A further 15 dollars per

month for laundry. In certain cases the athlete is provided with a job at the University which brings him a gain of some 150 dollars per month, and in such cases the financial situation of his family is taken into consideration.

There was a great deal of talk just before the end of the scholastic year about the secret payments made to certain footballers. The very publicity given to this affair seems to me to be a direct indication of the prevalent honesty in this question of scholarships. The University of Los Angeles was very heavily fined because it had made an allowance of 40 dollars per month for laundry expenses instead of the customary 15 dollars allocated by the Universities. The offence was not in the least serious, but a rule had been broken, and an extraordinary meeting of the Universities was called according to the regulation of the Universities who hold themselves responsible for their own system. They also have the power to demand that accounts should be shown. If one University can prove that there has been a case of fraudulent recruiting in another University, it can have the latter debarred from the competitions. Of course some frauds and cheating do arise, for such a thing as a perfect system does not exist, and this system in particular, seems to us to be one of the least imperfect. Scandals have come to light, particularly the cases of gratuities made to players or bribery payments in order to make them play badly because of bets that had been placed, but these have nothing whatsoever to do with the University organizations or Associations. These were cases of transactions between private parties for one cannot always find a cure for human weakness and cupidity. The measures taken by the Universities proved the degree of importance that they laid upon the conservation of their healthy traditions.

As far as athletics are concerned, they are beyond all suspicion. The contacts which I made convinced me that the athlete of outstanding quality is a sincere student, who has been given his chance through sport and who intends to make the most of it. He is also aware of the fact that his value as a sportsman will be of little use to him when it comes to earning his own living. I had some quite long discussions with Sime, Morrow, Sowell, Courtney, etc., in order to find out their point of view. Dave Sime, whose father is a modest night-watchman, confided in me the following: 'I am fond of running and I will continue to race until the end of my University career. I have a baseball scholarship which makes it possible for me to study medicine. I was also offered a football scholarship, but I chose baseball because it is a Summer sport, and I can study better in Winter. After my time at the University I shall become a baseball professional and at the same time I intend to specialize in medicine. With my baseball earnings I hope to buy a practice... That is the language of wisdom, and it is also the language of the American athlete. Sometimes in a University of 15,000 students, as many as 300 scholarships are awarded for sport.

Once a high-school athlete has been picked out by a scout, a representative of the University is sent to visit the family in order to endeavour to obtain its consent. Often the family is approached by several Universities. As a general rule, they will choose the one which enjoys the highest academic reputation. And it is too bad for the sports champion if he does not reach the required standard at the end of the first year of study (whose standard by the way does not, in any way, compare with that of our own faculties). According to a rule whose application is every bit as general, the student will be sent to study elsewhere.