



AMATEUR ATHLETIC FOUNDATION – A Perfect Research Place for Sport and Olympic Historians

By: Stephan Wassong

In 1930 sports memorabilia collector W.R. “Bill” Schroeders conceived the plan to build an institution where the achievements of athletes are honored and where people could gather to inform themselves about various aspects of sports. Six years later the plan could be realized with the financial support of the L.A. Bakery magnat Paul Helms. A building was owned in downtown Los Angeles and sport books, newspaper collections, archive material and athletic memorabilia were acquired. In order to honor the patron the institution was named Helms Athletic Foundation. The foundations were laid for an institution dedicated to encourage interest and participation in sports of all kinds.

In 1970 the Foundation could no longer exist from the founder’s money. As a new sponsor United Savings and Loan stepped forward and secured the existence of the Helms Athletic Foundation. When United Savings and Loan merged with Citizen Savings in 1973 the name of the institution changed into Citizen Savings Athletic Foundation. In 1981 this organization was adopted by the First Interstate Bank. By the new patron the museum, the reference library as well as athletic activities and the athletic awards program which partly had already been inaugurated by the Helms Athletic Foundation were expanded. The First Interstate Bank – the official bank of the 1984 Olympics – owned the fully restored Britt House and made it the home for the First Interstate Bank Athletic Foundation. This house built in 1909 for the attorney Eugene Britt to reflect his achievements and popularity is a cultural historic monument for Los Angeles. Therefore it is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1985 this elegant place was donated to the Amateur Athletic Foundation (AAF) by the First Interstate Bank. The AAF was created by the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) to manage Southern California’s share of the surplus of the Olympic Games.

It was the result of an agreement in 1979 that 40 percent of the surplus was to stay in Southern California. With an initial capital of \$93 millions – Southern California’s share of the mentioned surplus of the Olympic Games – the AAF has developed to an institution offering various possibilities to engage in (Olympic) sports and physical education. Anita DeFrantz – member of the IOC since 1986 and candidate for the successor to the presidency of the IOC – is the chair of the AAF. DeFrantz herself was a top class athlete in rowing who won the bronze medal at the Olympic Games in 1976 and was a member of 1980 Olympic team. The AAF is located at West Adams Boulevard, Los Angeles.

Since its inception the AAF has financed and organised numerous sports programs for children and adolescents. With programs in track and field, volleyball, soccer, baseball, swimming or softball the AAF successfully compensates the deficit of

organised sports beyond school or university. The chances for pupils and students of only an average athletic talent to become a member of a team are often scarce. It quite often happens that only athletically very gifted pupils and students become team members to improve the chances to win a match or competition. But the addressees of the AAF are the children and young people below this athletic elite. Therefore the sports programs offered are not only competitively orientated. Beginners and athletes with average or low athletic skills should get a chance of joyfully engaging in the respective game. In order to make these programs more attractive for the youth professionals are invited as mentors. The programs are run by coaches having earned their licenses in courses and seminars organised by the AAF in cooperation with Departments of Kinesiology and Coaching Sciences of different universities. Apart from the courses for professional coaches the AAF aims at teaching coaching principles to persons who are not professionally engaged in sports and physical education. Only in the last two years the program directors of the AAF have organized 400 workshops in which the participants were offered a chance to learn the abilities to do both to accompany the sport events of the AAF and to serve youth through sport. On purpose the AAF has integrated workshops in its list of programs by which the integration of children and adolescents from social fringe groups is fostered. These projects in which handicapped, drug addicted or delinquent young people are playing sports with those who are not handicapped, drug addicted or delinquent support the belief of the AAF officials in the educational power of sport.

The AAF Awards Program is also of national and international high regard. Each year the AAF honors more than 1.300 pupils with the “High School Award” for their achievements in baseball, basketball, football, softball and volleyball. The respective young athletes are selected by sports journalists, schools administrators and coaches. The Los Angeles Dodgers continue to host the baseball award. The “World Trophy” is awarded to top athletes in each of the six regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and Latin America. International sports experts are responsible for the nominations and selections. The “Southern California Athletes of The Year Award” goes to the top male and female athletes in Southern California selected by Southern California sports experts. For exceptional performances in 1994 the winners were Eldrick “Tiger” Woods the youngest golfer having ever won the United States Amateur Golf Championship and Lisa Leslie, a gifted basketball player for the University of Southern California. One can go on listing more examples how the AAF tries to serve youth through sport – but this is not the intention of the article. I first and foremost want to draw the reader’s attention to another service of the AAF.

Part of the AAF is also the Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center named after the chair of the LAOOC. The Ziffren Center Library, which was built right next to the Britt House, is the first and only facility of its kind in the nation. Even at the first visit at the AAF's Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center one is convinced of the institution's professionalism. The material and data on physical education, sport and the Olympic Movement stored in this institution can be used by anyone interested in these subjects. By offering this public service it becomes obvious that this research center helps the AAF to act as a forum for the advancement of physical education and the exchange of ideas concerning important issues of the Olympic Movement or the field of sport in general. This study center is not only a perfect place for pupils, students, coaches, teachers and journalists but also for historians wanting to do serious researches in the field of sport and the Olympic Movement. Why this institution can serve the high academic research expectations of sport and Olympic historians can be explained by mentioning both the excellent research facilities and the highlights of the library collection.

Highlights of the library collection include more than 6.000 volumes of archival Olympic publications, the complete Avery Brundage Collection, current subscriptions to more than 350 periodicals covering all areas of sport, the Los Angeles Times sports section dating back to 1930, over 90.000 photographs and a rapidly growing collection of more than 5.000 instructional and historical sport videos. Lately the collection of photographs has been extended by almost 1000 photos showing the participation of athletes of the former GDR in Olympic Games.

Apart from these sources of information one can use a variety of computer-based systems providing textual and graphic information and one has access to hundreds of databases and multimedia workstations. Additionally one can search the online library catalog for rare references and documents. Of course not all of the material being used for a historical research is available at the Ziffren Sports Resource Center. But by using the loan system of the Center it is possible to have the desired material within a few days. Very useful for the research of sport and Olympic historians is also the ambitious project of the AAF's Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center to convert selected scholarly journals on sport science and historically significant Olympic publications from paper to digital format. As Portable Document Format Files (PDF) one can read such periodicals as *Olympic Review*, the *Journal of Olympic History*, *Olympika* or the official reports of the Olympic Games from 1896 to 1984. Additionally one can find from the North American Society for Sport History (NASSH) the *Journal of Sport History*, from the Australian Society of Sports History (ASSH) the periodical *Sporting Traditions: The Journal of the Australian Society for Sports History*, the *NASSH Proceedings*, the *ASSH Bulletin* and the *ASSH Studies in Sports History*. That issues of these journals are now electronically available is of course time saving. But the use of the virtual archive does definitely not replace a studying time at the AAF and its Paul Ziffren Resource Center. By visiting the websides of the AAF (<http://www.aaf.org>) one can get an overview about this organisation and about its Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center. There exist no other research center in and beyond the USA where sport historians can find this amount of



Reading Room of the Paul Ziffren Sports resource Center

documents, data and material about their respective field of research centralized in one space.

Although the Ziffren Center is not a museum visitors can find in the rooms of the library showcases in which sports memorabilia are exhibited. The exhibitions in the library are rotating to meet the different interests of the visitors. Much of the exhibits were inherited from the former Helms Athletic Foundation. In addition to the showcases in the Ziffren Center rare Olympic artifacts are presented in the Britt House itself.

Summarizing one can say that Undoubtedly with the foundation of the AAF and its Paul Ziffren Sports Resource Center the LAOOC succeeded in building up an institutions by which central educational aims of the Olympic idea can be transmitted permanently. For stressing both the reliability of an Olympic education and the importance of serving youth through sports it would be desirable if institutions modelled after the AAF could be established at other towns which made a lot of profit by hosting the Olympic Games

References:

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<http://www.aaf.org>