

SPORTS HISTORY? SPORTS ARCHIVES!

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The scarcity of professional literature about sports archives confirms what I have noticed since I entered the world of sports through the International Olympic Committee and its Olympic Museum, both located in Lausanne, Switzerland. The awareness of the richness that sports and Olympic archives can bring to an institution, a sports club or an amateur organizing committee is only emerging nowadays, with all the gaps and losses it implies. The concept of “archival obscurity” that Richard Fagan uses for Australia can be applied to many countries in that respect: “trying to compile information on sports archives is somewhat akin to hitting the metaphorical wall of the marathon runner¹.”

Relatively few sporting organizations have established archival programs; the personal records of individuals involved with sport do not appear to have a high priority among collecting institutions; records of government sport administrative bodies seem to be scarcely represented, or mixed with other subjects, in governmental archival repositories. It is an area of society, maybe because of its connotation of “leisure and recreation”, that has not been adequately documented. The tendency is reversing now, with highly professional sportsmen and women becoming incredibly media-conscious, but records usually focus on only the most popular athletes and sports. Broadcasting and archiving images of sporting events has, contrary to administrative records, become a powerful money-maker. Specialised institutions have therefore developed these recent years to collect and diffuse still and moving images to the world, with copyright attached to them.

What can we do, as “paper” archivist working in small and large sports institutions, to improve the situation of records and give a fair access of the available material to an ever-growing number of sports historians?

- Create a network of sports archival repositories
- Exchange information, inventories, microfilms
- Implement archival programs

Without archives, there is no history. Partial archives create partial history. Let us create a network of repositories containing sports related records, in order to complement each other and know which archives have what records.

Students, scholars and historians will then be able to concentrate on a repository, and receive information on where else to continue their search.

As the archivist of the historical records of the IOC, which hold more than a century of documents concerning the renovation of the Olympic Games and the implementation of sports activities throughout the world, I suggest we start this network by filling the form separately attached to this Journal. All the information about sports/Olympic related records you have come across as a historian, a sports administrator or an archivist should be described in a few

words: Fonds, repository name, inclusive dates, state of indexing if known. This data will be compiled and redistributed in a second phase.

The International Council on Archives has agreed to support an Initiative Committee for Olympic and Sport Archives Section, officially created in 1996, of which the IOC archivist is part. Its mission is to “overcome the important obstacle of information among the world of archives and of sports, and to collect information both from the public and from the private sector.”

Please let me know your interest as a representative of sports archives; the new section needs people with experience and ideas. It will take part in the project of network.

Once the information is compiled and the network established, it would be interesting to exchange information

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through the usual archival means like published inventories and microfilms, but also through new and quicker means like Internet.

Let it be clear that the idea is not to centralize all the records in one place. How could the IOC, just to give you an example, absorb more than 20,000 boxes of archival material related to the Olympic Games of Los Angeles in 1984? Without even evoking legal problems, it is much more interesting to know that they were well-organized at the time by a joint group of people from the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee and from the Special Collections of the University of California Los Angeles Library, where they are deposited now. A detailed inventory was completed two years after the Games, and will soon be put on the Net. This is the kind of information we have to gather to enrich the pool of information about sports related records.

Finally, ideally, strong sports institutions should help smaller ones implement an archival program. Every organization, be it of three or two hundred people, produces its own original records: application and lists of membership, results of competition, selection of representatives, insurance, drug testing, accreditation, sponsorship, ephemeral, etc. Staff should be trained and given advice in appraising and keeping meaningful sport related records.

The archivist of the Sports Archives of Finland explains what kind of solution his country has found². Since its creation in 1985, this specialized sports archives has the support of government, sports organizations and the archival administration. Not only does it keep the records of all Finnish central sports federations, local sports clubs and sportsmen, but one of its main goals is to educate sports organization in archival matters.

For the moment, help us create a general raising of awareness among both the archival community and the sporting community by combining our knowledge on sports related records: thank you in advance for filling the attached form and sending it back to the mentioned address.

Comprehensive sports history equals a network of sports archives.

Notes:

1. Richard Fagan, "Acquisition and Appraisal of Sports Archives", in Australian Society for Sports History, Bulletin No. 16, April 1992, pp. 36-47.
2. Kenth Sjöblom, "Taking care of Sports Archives - Whose Responsibility?", in Canadian Journal of History of Sport Vol. XXIV, No. 2, December 1993, pp. 91-93.
