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AN APPRECIATION OF

# Clarence A. Forbes

## 1901-2001

by Bruce L. Bennett

Here was a man who would have been at home walking the streets of ancient Athens in the fifth century BC or strolling across the campuses of the University of Nebraska and Ohio State University in the 20th century AD. Clarence Forbes was born in 1901 and passed away in 2001, only a month and a half short of his hundredth birthday. Coming from a farming and snowy background in northern New Hampshire, he entered Bates College in Maine. For his freshman year he registered for five courses in Latin, Greek, German, French, and English, to the consternation of his classmates (who didn't think he could survive such a rigorous schedule). He not only survived, but earned his Phi Beta Kappa key and became enamored of a lovely coed, Florence le Maire, from a French family in Maine. In 1924 they began 63 years of married life, raising five children. Clarence always referred to his wife as "the Best of Maine."

After his marriage, he received his master's degree while studying under William Abbott Oldfather, the distinguished professor of classics at the University of Illinois. Clarence continued his graduate work and earned his PhD four years later. He then took a position in the Classics Department at the University of Nebraska. After twenty years at Nebraska, he moved to Ohio State because he feared that Nebraska was about to make him a dean. As he wrote at the time, "I just wanted to teach!" He remained at Ohio State as a faculty member until his retirement in 1971.

Clarence received many honors and awards for his writing, scholarship, and service to his profession. He served as President of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South. In 1963, he received the Good Teaching Award of the College of Arts and Sciences at Ohio State. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters by the University of Nebraska. His many published works on the early Greeks and Romans firmly established his international reputation as a classical scholar.

My personal relationship with Professor Forbes has continued for the last forty years. His first book, *Greek Physical Education* (1928), a republication of his doctoral dissertation, became a landmark for classical historians. Although American historian Fred E. Leonard had published two short chapters on Greek and Roman sport in the first edition of *A Guide to the History of Physical Education* (1923), the only previous book in English describing Greek sport and physical education was English history professor E.N. Gardiner's *Greek Athletics and Festivals* (1910).

I taught a course at Ohio State on the history of physical education, and it finally dawned on me that Clarence Forbes was on campus—and much better qualified to teach about Greek physical education. I invited him to my class. This first visit was followed by some twenty later visits, and it was the best thing that I ever did for the class. He always wore bright red socks; every lecture was different and stimulating. His presentations centered on physical education in Athens during the Golden Age of the fifth century BC. Students made comments like “Dr. Forbes was a delight. I felt like I was in the presence of an Athenian citizen;” “I especially enjoyed Dr. Forbes’ style;” and “Very good—particularly enjoyed Dr. Forbes’ talks.”

Clarence Forbes was especially pleased to be made an Honorary President of the North American Society for Sport History. He often signed his letters with that title, and took great pride in it. From his days at Illinois, Forbes was a rarity among historians of education due to his devotion to sport and physical education. These were subjects of little or no interest to other general historians. The professional career of Dr. Forbes helped to make sport and physical education a legitimate and increasingly common field of study in the last half of the 20th century. It was this development which made possible the Big Ten Symposium on the History of Physical Education and Sport at Ohio State University in 1971. This event attracted 80 participants from all over the country. Just two years later the North American Society for Sport History was founded, which remains a leading organization for the study of sport and athletics going into the 21st century.

These are the legacies left for us today by Professor Clarence A. Forbes.