

# Reaction

by

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Professor Keefe's paper on "Intercollegiate Athletics in the Roaring Twenties" reached me last week, the result of a decision to switch from a previous plan to do a paper on "Search for the real Babe Ruth."

Apparently Prof. Keefe's major historical interest centers about sports events of the 1920's. If so, his switch in topics is not mind-boggling but rather consistent in that both topics are centered in the era.

What makes this work on intercollegiate athletics difficult to evaluate is a lack of usual scholarly apparatus, although read in context the author's use of the 1929 *Carnegie Foundation Report on College Athletics* is a major source and a focal point of his thematic development. Also in context, Prof. Keefe quotes much from Prof. John Betts's, *America's Sporting Heritage, 1850-1950*, a work that covers much of the ground as this paper does.

Clearly the material in this paper is not new, but the paper is written with verve and might be useful as a primer for acquainting a sports student with some of the significant trends of the 1920's sporting history in America. Perhaps it is better to view the paper as a preliminary excursion, as a sort of tour about a promising research site, which when Keefe is ready, will prompt him to sit down and mine the decade for many portentous insights and nuggets that must surely be waiting analysis and assay.

This promise of "Christmas Yet to Come" harbors such possible topics as an in depth study of the dysfunctional impact of commercialized collegiate sports (a continuation of the thrust of the Carnegie Report), on students, players and the embattled and changing concept of the university in America. In its time, Carnegie foundation critics worried that the "life of the mind" function of American universities was losing ground, a prospect that has come to pass now and one that we seem inclined to live with.

With the commercialization of college sports goes other problems like the professionalization of coaches and their placement in academic communities. At cross currents with this trend is the professionalizing of physical educators, recreationists, and today even athletic directors (I note that one can now get a Masters Degree in that art form at U. of Springfield.) With the professionalizing of coaches, of course, goes persisting bones of contention over their duties, ranks, salaries, and power in the community.

Another idea stemming from this era is the supposed ideological boost given collegiate sports by the experiences of America in the First World War. Here Keefe quotes Sec. of War Newton Baker who made the grandiose claim that a serendipital impact of that experience was the diffusal of sports knowledge and skills throughout the land. But surely this is bad social history on Baker's part, since earlier claims were credited to the American Civil War experience. Still, a viable study theme might be the process whereby sports came to be linked with American militarism, a major point sounded by Paul Hoch in his *Ripoff: The Big Game*.

The impact of the sports boom of the Twenties also had profound ideological significance for changing our hero symbols. In the Twenties the rise of football stars, of coaching heroes, and others from sports who would serve as symbolic leaders for the youth of America is an interesting theme, but one that has been dealt with to a considerable extent.

Mayhap the most promising avenue of depth study stemming from Keefe's excursion is in the study of big sports administration, including the problems of getting facilities,

raising funds, determining eligibility of athletes, recruiting the same, scheduling with all its petty intriguing, and the town vs. jock struggle over the power of athletic department fiefdoms, and other related issues, including alumni influence in this area.

This matter is a vital point of debate today, and we need to know the history of the controversy that now almost weekly rages on the Op Ed page of the Sunday *N. Y. Times* Sports Section. Beyond this, the thesis that the Twenties might be the watershed period between the athletic styles of High Sport and Big Sport on college campuses probably deserves consideration. If Keefe's preliminary study could lead to such a depth inquiry, students of American sport would welcome its findings.

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# Intercollegiate Athletics in Ohio During the Depression, 1928-1938

by  
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From 1928 to 1938 the number of intercollegiate athletic teams in Ohio increased from 187 to 210. Economic conditions did affect the patterns of this growth. The number of teams declined between 1930 and 1934 when unemployment was greatest, and increased between 1934 and 1938 when unemployment abated somewhat. The decline in teams, however, was never so severe as the increases in unemployment. Even though the general state of the economy influenced colleges' ability to field teams, enrollment levels had a greater effect on variations in the number of athletic teams. There was a consistent positive correlation between the number of teams and enrollment throughout the depression. In addition, by 1938 both enrollment and the number of teams were far above 1928 levels, while unemployment never reached pre-depression levels.

There were significant differences in the growth patterns of team sports and individual sports. The four sports in which teams were eliminated during the depression were: football, basketball, baseball, and cross-country. Three of the four were team sports. Football and baseball—which declined by eleven teams were eliminated at many schools because of financial problems. In particular, the number of baseball teams showed a strong negative correlation to the unemployment rate. General economic conditions had a stronger adverse effect on team sports than on individual sports. The number of teams in individual sports increased from 71 in 1928 to 107 in 1938. The growth pattern of individual sports shows a positive correlation to enrollment levels. These sports benefitted from increased interest engendered by recreational patterns which developed in the 1920's. Because they could be conducted with little expense, the number of individual sport teams grew as increasing numbers of students wished to participate in them, and these sports were not severely impaired by the general economic conditions. During the depression there was little evidence of varsity intercollegiate competition for women. This was a continuation of a trend begun in the 1920's and the depression seemed to have affected it very little.