
The Non-Adult Participation Program in Detroit, 1928- 1931

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During the early decades of the twentieth century there was a gradual shift from educational sports as a forum for non-risk individual participation to team and coach centered endeavors where an emphasis on winning existed. That shift merely reflected an identical transition in American society. For with the end of American innocence in a social and political sense, American society itself became much more structured and organized for efficiency during the 1920's and 1930's.

In the 1920's, the Detroit school system, under the direction of Vaughn Blanchard, introduced a program of non-adult participation in athletic events. That is, during an athletic

contest, students organized, played and managed the event. No adult was allowed to participate in any phase of the contest except officiating. The attempt to implement the non-adult rule in Detroit demonstrates the efforts of Blanchard and other reformers to return the control of athletic events to the students.

Yet, the idealistic program failed in Detroit, after a four-year trial. The public was not prepared for nor did they desire such an innovative concept. Also detrimental was Blanchard's inability to communicate the rationale for the program to the athletic consumers. Had that plan worked so that students would have entered the mainstream of decision-making by controlling their own affairs, the opposite of what was taking place in the wider culture, it would have indicated in this particular instance that the program of inter-school athletics was not a social agent transmitting cultural values, but was actually averse to much of the business-oriented culture surrounding it. Yet, the program was rejected, indicating that interscholastic athletics was an agency for the integration of the whole of the culture.