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# Summer Baseball—A Turn of the Century Crisis in College Athletics

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Around 1880 the cream of America's college baseball players began vacationing as paid performers under assumed names for the entertainment of resort area guests. They created the issue of "summer baseball," a conflict between amateur and professional ideologies which plagued college athletic authorities for forty years and burned for ten years as one of the most intense problems facing the new National Collegiate Athletic Association. Though the NCAA ultimately failed in its attempts to resolve this conflict, baseball's later decline in popularity on campus and the predominance of new problems combined to make summer baseball an issue of little concern by 1930. The problem began, however, when baseball was an important part of college life.

College baseball competed favorably, both in the quality of play and in attracting the interest of spectators, with the major leagues at the turn of the century. Talented collegians found opportunities to peddle their skills for pay while retaining their amateur status, and they did so. All-Americans and team captains joined college regulars on summer "nines" in resort areas. From its White Mountain, New Hampshire beginnings, summer baseball spread nationwide. There were resort teams in the Green Mountains, fast prairie teams around Chicago, town teams in the Carolinas, and clubs in the Appalachians. Managers of the summer teams solicited the collegians with guarantees that "the right man will find seventy-five per (month) in his jeans, and he can wonder as long as he likes how it got there."

The commercialized, highly competitive sport which was developing in America was at great odds with the amateur ideal of English sport—a spirit deemed by most college faculties to be proper to an educational setting. Summer baseball was an embarrassingly visible affront to amateurism, and early college administrative bodies sought to abolish

the “play for pay” problem. In 1898 a meeting of seven Eastern colleges at Brown led to the “Providence Rules” which barred students from accepting any form of compensation for athletic services. At its first annual meeting in 1906, the NCAA also adopted amateur guidelines but left their implementation to the individual schools. The players, however, viewed the ruse as an innocent pastime, and they gloried in the evasion of eligibility rules.

Over the next ten years the NCAA was unsuccessful in repeated attempts to control summer baseball. Most outspoken in decrying the evils of summer ball were Captain Palmer Pierce, NCAA president; Amos Alonzo Stagg; and sportswriter Hugh Fullerton. The latter, in fact, in 1913 proposed a professional summer league of collegians which he felt would cut through the pretense of amateurism in the universities. The proposal was never realized.

After 1915 the NCAA dropped from its by-laws the elaboration of suggested eligibility rules. Summer baseball remained a topic of discussion for another fifteen years, but its impact as an issue faded, primarily because college baseball suffered a great decline in popularity. Football became the most important spectator sport on campus while baseball struggled vainly to compete with golf, tennis, lacrosse, and the automobile.

In addition, commercialism so engulfed amateur sports in the early twentieth century that summer baseball became just another nagging puzzle for athletic authorities who were trying to deal with recruiting abuses, scholarship requirements, training tables, freshman rules, certification of officials, and professional coaches. The fact that many of these problems are still present in college sport attests to the reality that in trying to define the amateur spirit and instill it in their athletes, college authorities at the turn of the century had made a mistake which many persons involved with American sport have made. They greatly underestimated the importance of winning.

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