

# Philippine Sport: Pre and Post Independence

JANICE A. BERAN

Iowa State University

Jose Rizal, martyred in 1899 during the shortlived Philippine revolt against the Spanish regime, was an ardent sportsman. He served as an inspiration to his compatriots and latter day Filipinos through both sports and his martyrdom. The United States was eventually deeded the Philippines and the Americans capitalized on Rizal's intellectual ability and athletic prowess.

In 1901 the Americans proclaimed sovereignty over the Philippines and quickly instituted a public school system. At the turn of the century American education was viewed as being successful in bringing the many immigrants into national life and culture. Thus, it was likewise viewed as a means to initiate the Filipinos into the democratic or American way.

Soon after the capture of Manila seven schools were established in the city. Additional schools were founded in other cities and provinces utilizing selected military personnel and their dependents as teachers to spread the ideals of democracy. These were joined by Filipino teachers and in 1901 the education system was augmented by the arrival of 1400 American teachers. Because many of these had been athletes in school they organized their own baseball teams and introduced it as well as track and field and somewhat later, basketball.

The leading programs of American school athletics served as models for Philippine education and physical education became an integral part of the education program. An elaborate system with local, regional and national competition eventually developed. The American Director of Education's report praised the program and stated that no other country had such a carefully worked out program to make athletics national in scope. By 1919, 4,500 out of 4,702 schools had physical training.

The private schools established by Protestant mission groups likewise implemented athletic programs and sports and recreation became somewhat of an evangelistic tool. Athletics were seen as a desirable substitute for the favorite sport of cockfighting. The gambling associated with this sport caused much misery.

The period of American occupation, 1901-1935, came to be known as the Golden Age of Sport in the Philippines. The YMCA contributed much leadership in the formation of sport organizations and the Philippine Track and Field Association, Basketball Association of the Philippines, and the Far Eastern Games Federation. They also built the first swimming pools and contributed to physical, social and religious aspects of Philippine life.

Since Philippine independence in 1946, sports has continued despite problems. The early start in Western type sports contributed to creditable performances in international sport, however, that lead has been narrowed, and problems in sports administration, lack of equipment, shortage of personnel and technical expertise have hampered programs. The proclamation of martial law resulted in more attention to military preparation. Nevertheless, President Marcos had given support for sport development recognizing it as a viable vehicle for national integration and an effective means of focusing attention and energies toward constructive and relatively apolitical goals.

While some historians of Philippine life have viewed the period of American rule in the Philippines negatively, most would agree with Filipino statesman, Carlos P. Romulo as he declared, "For institutions of learning the gymnasium is as important as the library, and for our society, the stadium possesses as central a function as the concert hall or the art gallery."