

Charles Paddock: Catalyst to the AAU-NCAA Feuding in the 1920's

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Charley Paddock was the track and field personality of the 1920's. Following impressive victories in the 1919 Inter-Allied Games, he became the leading American point producer in the 1920 Olympic Games. He also competed in the 1924 Olympics in Paris and the 1928 Games in Amsterdam. Paddock won several AAU championships and either tied or broke ninety-four world records. On several occasions he shattered as many as five world records in one day.

The major focus of this paper will be the role Charley Paddock played in the dispute between the AAU and the NCAA in the 1920's. Paddock was an irritant to the AAU hierarchy throughout his running career. In no fewer than seven separate episodes with that body, he caused action to be taken concerning his amateur status. These included a trip to Paris in 1923 to compete at a world collegiate meet. The trip was in direct conflict with a regulation the AAU passed in early 1923 forbidding foreign competition for American athletes in the year before the Olympics.

The second episode the paper will detail occurred in 1928. In this incident, Paddock had his amateur status questioned as a result of his promotional tour for a movie titled, "The Olympic Hero." Paddock also had a major part in that silent movie.

The question of Paddock's amateur status received a great deal of publicity during the deliberations over those two issues. Because of the two major issues and several of lesser importance, Paddock was instrumental in widening the schism between the AAU and the Palmer Pierce led NCAA.

In addition to Paddock's world-renowned running skill and his affinity for controversy, he also had an ambience that was flamboyant. It was the latter characteristic that made him a colorful figure of the 1920's. Additionally, it helped place him in a position in which he was on the offensive with the AAU when the opposite would have been expected.

In conclusion, Charley Paddock was greatly responsible for the increased power the NCAA would have relative to college athletes. His actions also set several precedents that weakened the grip the AAU had on amateur athletics.



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