

The Historic Amateur- Professional Dilemma in College Sport

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For over a century American colleges have practiced a form of professionalism in their intercollegiate athletics but have claimed amateurism. The paper probed the background for the infusion of a professional spirit in "amateur" college sport and explored the question: Why have American college athletics accepted the professional model, and why have they, felt the need to justify their actions in the name of amateur athletics? The collegiate dilemma resulted: If a college has truly amateur sport, it will lose contests, and if a college acknowledges outright professional sport, the college will lose respectability as a middle class or higher class institution. Thus the paradoxical or hypocritical solution has been for colleges to claim amateurism to the public while accepting a professional mode of operation.

It was shown that there was more to American intercollegiate sport than amateurism - participation only for the love of sport - from the first crew meet between Yale and Harvard in 1852 when a valuable prize was offered for the victor. The inroads of a professional spirit were shown with eight examples, all existing in the nineteenth century. These documented examples included:

- . . . Competition for valuable, non-money, prizes.
- . . . Competition for money prizes,
- . . . Competition against professionals,
- . . . Charging money at the gate,
- . . . Costs of training tables not borne by the athletes.
- . . . Payment of athletic tutors by others than the athletes.
- . . . Recruitment and payment of athletes, and
- . . . Payment of professional coaches.

The question was raised: Why did the amateur-professional dilemma occur when American colleges often modeled themselves after the English Universities at Oxford and Cambridge, both of whom more closely followed an amateur spirit? The answer appeared to be tied to an American ideology which has rejected the social class basis under which amateurism can exist at the highest levels of performance. Numerous historians have commented on the American ideology of freedom and equality which developed. For instance, J.R. Pole, the British historian, has written that liberty and equality are the "two central commitments of the American Republic." If it is true that America has a belief in freedom of action and equality of opportunity, two aspects of the ideology of freedom and equality, a strong case can be made for that ideology being practiced in intercollegiate athletics in America. Whereas Oxford and Cambridge had a social class monopoly in English higher education, there were no comparable two institutions in America which could so clearly control higher education, not even Harvard and Yale. There was greater freedom and opportunity to found colleges and to develop them to the extent that private, state, or local monies were available. There was no upper class control of higher education.

and there was no upper class control of athletics, with its elite concept of amateurism, as occurred at Oxford and Cambridge. Separate dual competition between Harvard and Yale to attempt to keep themselves socially and athletically above the fray as Oxford and Cambridge did for generations, was to mean that in competitive America, with its freedom of opportunity, both Harvard and Yale would lose athletic esteem and prestige. Strong egalitarian principles and belief in freedom of opportunity prevailed in America, and elitist amateur practices were not upheld, even though the prestigious amateur beliefs were often paid lip service. Achieved status through athletics became the norm while an ascribed status as seen in England's class laden Oxford and Cambridge and their athletics was rejected. An equality-not-opportunity-professionalism won out in practice over an elitist concept of amateurism. The dilemma, however, continued, as amateur status was still claimed for American intercollegiate athletics.