

# Beverages, Bicycles, Billiards, Boats, Baseball and Bathing Suits: Early Advertising (1892–1932) on Recreational Sports—The D'Arcy Collection at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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The sheer volume of the material contained in the collection is more encyclopedic than eclectic. There are two million plus items covering the years 1869-1970. The founder of the collection, initiated in 1920, was St. Louis advertising mogul William D'Arcy. His mandate, to his clipping assistants, was to scan a wide array of local, regional and national publications (newspapers and magazines). The unofficial curator of the collection, Diane F. Carothers (the university's communications librarian) has noted that the collection is singular in that it avoided selecting items, and products. There were no restrictions placed on themes, classes, categories or eras. If it was advertised it was snapped up by the D'Arcy team. While large circulation glossy magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were culled so too was *Country Life*, *Collier's*, *Vanity Fair*, *The American Magazine*, *Literary Digest* and *Field and Stream*. Trade publications such as *The Prairie Farmer*, *Refrigerator News*, and *Hardware Age* were also canvassed.

The major problem with the collection was not just identifying but accessing materials relevant to an understanding of the evolution of sports advertising in the first one-third of the century. There are, after all, several hundred reels of film. Preliminary scanning came up with the following sections that merited analysis—bathing suits, billiard tables, bowling, playing cards, fishing equipment, football, golf accessories, equitation tackle, motorcycles and scooters, swimming pools, tennis rackets, bicycles, boats (canoes, motor boats and yachts), camping equipment, firearms, muscle remedies and restoratives, games, golf courses, ice shows, race tracks, sleds and baseball. From this list a final grouping was established (beverages, bicycles, billiards, boats, baseball and bathing suits) and the time period was narrowed to the years 1895-1932. In interpreting such material the work of Fielding, Pitts and Miller proved especially valuable. A number of other relatively recent North American Society for Sport History presentations provided useful facts, information and ancillary details. To gain additional insights on the D'Arcy Collection, as it related to recreational sports advertising in the United States, certain theoretical perspectives were employed from contemporary work in Leisure Studies and American Culture/Popular Culture. In particular *Leisure Studies* (the journal) and the 1990/1991 offerings of the American Culture/Popular Culture meetings (Toronto and San Antonio respectively) were especially valuable in suggesting possible conceptual cues and clues. The single most worthwhile source over the time period, in terms of richness of detail, artistic lay-out, and considerable portions of advertising copy, was the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Five possible analyses are suggested and they each attempt to employ the advertisements themselves as both the primary source and the raw data. The first, entitled "The Rhetoric of Selling

Recreation”, explores the language and vocabulary of advertising copy. The second, “Celebrity Figures in Promotion”, charts the revival of the celebrity persona, for example Babe Ruth and Johnny Weissmuller, as a successful advertising tool. The third analysis takes the Roger Callois classification of play paradigm to see if it applies in the growth of bicycling and bicycling advertisements. A fourth discussion raises questions on the role, status and position of females in advertisements and their influence and impact as consumer clients. A final analysis is labelled “The Athletic Artistic Images of Advertising.”

By the early 1930’s many recreational sports advertisements epitomized up-market sleekness and sophistication. Products were presented as being both alluring and impossible to resist. The images for boats, bicycles and bathing suits was a melange of healthy, handsome, successful and athletic young people enjoying the American dream of economic prosperity in a healthy, out-of-doors setting.