

A Historical Perspective of the Governing Bylaws and Subsequent Programs of the Amateur Fencers League of America

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The Amateur Fencers League of America (AFLA) is one of the oldest national governing bodies of a sport in the United States. It was founded in 1891 by a group of fencers in New York City representing the New York Athletic Club, New York Fencers Club, Central Turn Verein Club, Manhattan Athletic Club, and Columbia College Fencers Club. During its long history and many years of experience the AFLA has failed to produce an internationally competitive contingent of fencers to represent the United States in the Olympics or other world class competitions.

The original purpose of the League was simply to promote fencing and establish rules and regulations for competitions. However, by the late twenties its purposes and goals soon expanded to include fund raising, development of coaches and officials, increase membership, and to produce international caliber fencers.

The AFLA, now known as the United States Fencing Association, has meet some of its objectives fully, i.e. membership has increased and funds available are greater; some of the objectives have been meet partially, i.e. development of coaches; but the goal of producing world class fencers has not yet been achieved.

Through investigation of the AFLA archives including minutes of meetings, memorandums, and other historical records this presentation will examine the development of the AFLA governing bylaws, the policies affecting competitive development, and the reason for the AFLA's failure to produce internationally competitive athletes.

The historical evolvment of the Bylaws and governing policies of the League provide insight to the weaknesses of the organization which hinder athlete development. Because of the nature of the bylaws the League has been unable to consistently provide grass roots programs, support services, and until very recently there has been no attempt to develop coaches. The structure of the AFLA has never been and is not now conducive to meeting its own goal of producing fencers who have the ability to win medals at the international level.