

Planning for Tomorrow's Sport Historiography Today: Developing Information Resources for the Next Generation of Researchers

Wayne Wilson

Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles

Historians spend much of their time looking backward. The search for documents published in the past is central to the process of historical research. Sport historians who are committed to the continued development of their discipline, however, have a responsibility to plan for the future to ensure that the next generation of sport historians have the information resources required to do research.

In one sense, the information revolution of the past twenty years guarantees that tomorrow's sport historians will find research to be more efficient than did pioneers in the field. Secondary and primary sources that sometimes took days or weeks to locate can now be retrieved in their entirety in minutes. In the next twenty years, the trend toward computer-based information sources will become even more pronounced. Yet, as improved information technology has made the location and retrieval of documents more efficient, it simultaneously has made the production of information easier thereby increasing the volume of material being produced.

These parallel developments have significant implications for future sport researchers. Primarily through the creation of automated databases, librarians and other information specialists have developed remarkable mechanisms for cataloging and indexing sport documents which will be valuable to future researchers. However, because of the sheer volume of information being produced, there is a wide array of "fugitive" materials which escape "capture" and processing by most libraries, archives, database producers and indexing services. These resources include newsletters, media guides, pamphlets, news releases, market surveys, directories, annual reports, clippings services, calendars, and bulletins which remain unknown to most scholars and librarians. Often transitory in nature and intended for small audiences of readers in the sports industry, such materials contain some of the best financial, demographic and biographical data currently being published. They will become particularly valuable to historians interested in the economics of sport, the corporate cultures of sport organizations, and the relationship among sport, media, and advertising.

The danger, of course, is that if the fugitive literature of sport is not systematically identified and collected now, it will be difficult for sport historians to obtain later. Scholars and information professionals interested in sport must begin now to develop strategies for the identification, acquisition, storage and preservation of those documents that fall through the cracks of mainstream bibliographic acquisition and processing efforts.