

Avery Brundage: Chicago Businessman

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After moving from Detroit to Chicago with his family in 1892 at age six, Avery Brundage began a career which saw him become one of Chicago's leading businessmen. His introduction to the construction world business came the summer after his sophomore year at the University of Illinois when he served as assistant superintendent for the construction of publisher Victor Lawson's mansion.

Upon graduating with his civil engineering degree in 1909, Avery started as a building inspector and construction superintendent for the architectural firm Holabird and Roche. He quit his job with Holabird and Roche to compete in the 1912 Olympics. Upon his return from the Stockholm Games he gamed a position with John Griffith and Sons Contractors.

In 1915 he formed the Avery Brundage Company, using both his uncle's political ties and his own fame as an athlete to acquire contracts. The Avery Brundage Company became one of Chicago's leading builders of large structures, specializing in apartment buildings and hotels. Brundage did not seek public works contracts because of "irregularities" he encountered in an early experiment with such building endeavors. By 1927 Brundage was a wealthy man, but the stock market crash of 1929 brought an end to his prosperity.

During the depression Avery chaired the Committee for the Protection of First Mortgage Bonds sold by H. O. Stone and Company. He asserted that the depression forced the building industry to eliminate wastefulness. His recovery from the depression was enabled because he "kept his head and refused to admit he was ruined." He was also helped by buying into the hotel and real estate business at depression prices. During and after the Second World War Brundage increased his property holdings, expanding outside of the Chicago area, even to California. By 1960 his fortune was estimated at twenty-five million dollars.

The 1920s have been called the "Golden Age" of sports because of figures such as Red Grange, Babe Ruth, and Bobby Jones. From an examination of Brundage's business career, this paper argues that Avery Brundage should join Col. Robert R. McCormick and Philip K. Wrigley as being equally important to sports stars in making the 1920s the "Golden Age."