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University Faculty and Progressivism : **Disunity of Athletic Reform**

“A faculty which will not interest itself in the nobler pleasures of students can hardly ask students to interest themselves in the nobler pleasures of intellectual effort.” (William H. P. Faunce, 1917)

During the formative years of the NCAA, college and university faculty served a central function in the direction and framing of intercollegiate athletic reform. For the faculty, however, prescribing student morality proved problematic. This was true, at least in part, because a collective faculty notion of athletic virtue proved impracticable. Efforts to bring about intercollegiate athletic reform were, at the very least, multifaceted: there were numerous ways to eliminate athletic evils even if, as some countered, they needed

to be eliminated at all. At the close of the NCAA's first decade of operation, the rhetoric of athletic progressives often outpaced the reform measures they implemented.

A cooperative ideal to regulate college athletics was typified by a 1908 editorial. Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and Columbia, still the leading athletic institutions, were summoned to take up the flag of reform. It was assumed that these prestigious schools housed the types of "technically expert" men who were intellectually and socially adroit enough to administer the supervision of athletics and other areas representing the broad educational purposes of the university. They had to be broadly educated, possess a vision of the educational significance of athletic problems, and have at their command a "keen intuitive insight into the social and moral problems in their relation to social life." With the failure of *laissez faire* governance, effective change was thought to be achievable only through a few great and good men. For intercollegiate athletics, those men were considered by many to be the collectively well-intentioned leaders within higher education.

Outside the ranks of academia, however, others were not so convinced of the need for faculty reform, nor of the faculty's reparatory facilities. In an athletic arena of conflicting cultures, where students and faculty each viewed the other as less informed and intuitive, faculty athletic control had come to be viewed by critics in 1915 as "not infrequently, unintelligent repression" rather than empathetic liberation. One primary failing of the reform movement was that faculty spent more time pontificating than regenerating. In the view of Ypsilanti professor W. P. Bowen, faculty discussed, orated, made rules, and then immediately angled to avoid the regulations. Another critic of intercollegiate athletic reform believed that the true intent of reformers was not improving the athletic extracurriculum, but exposing people's ethical warts; not the cleansing of people's habits, but the making of their slippery morals known in a cathartic demonstration of reformist vigilance. While President of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association, William Dudley of Vanderbilt insisted that until the day arrived when all faculty, students, and alumni sympathized with the athletic regulatory spirit, it would be difficult to maintain legislative policies.

The Progressive Era was one of shifting political and social tensions. Improvements were made in the external conditions of society through legislation. However, it was doubtful that men and women could be made to love and pursue goodness by statute. The achievement of fundamental reform demanded changes in character, not only changes in conditions. The NCAA, one of many associations which emerged to induce a collective conscience within its sphere of influence, was unable to impel morality. The creation of an administrative authority seemingly with the ability to dispel conflict added to the Progressive illusion of an harmonious society. This misconception was perhaps the greatest single flaw of the NCAA. Thus, where harmony was thought attainable, dissonance transpired.