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## ***A Coach's Son: Growing Up in the Ethos of Muscular Christianity and Amateur Athletics in Detroit***

The son of a Methodist lay preacher, a friend of Amos Alonzo Stagg, and a man who knew most of the athletic directors in the United States in his time, David L. Holmes lettered in three sports at Oklahoma State University from 1904-1908. He was captain of most of these teams and is reputed to have been the first American to exceed 25 feet in the long jump. What does seem indisputable is that he was one of the best long jumpers in the US in this period.

In 1918, Holmes was hired by the new City College of Detroit (later renamed Wayne State University) to serve as its first director of athletics and as coach of all sports. All reports indicate that the job was viewed as a plum and that he believed the new institution would become an athletic power. But that was never to be. City College remained a working-class inner-city school that put all its limited resources into academics. Partially because of the lack of financial support and partially because Holmes' own values were entirely supportive of amateurism, City College remained a bastion of amateurism.

Within this amateur context, however, Holmes' teams did remarkably well. His football teams were known for their *esprit de corps* and derring-do. On a recycled high-school track, working with athletes that Big Ten schools had passed over, Holmes produced Olympians, national champions, and mile-relay record holders. A pioneer in integration, a coach whom others constantly said could have been first in the nation if he had the facilities or talent, a coach who (amazingly) had the genuine respect of the New Deal faculty at the university, he became a minor legend in Detroit. A son who bears his name is still asked: "Any relation to Coach Holmes at Wayne?"

This paper is based on interviews conducted with several dozen of Coach Holmes' former athletes (including one who was ninety years old), and papers and scrapbooks in Wayne State's library. The paper deals only peripherally with athletics. What I am most interested in exploring is the ethos of amateurism and muscular Christianity in which Coach Holmes existed. The paper explores Holmes' outlook on a number of issues. These are the purpose of college athletics, the philosophy that should guide them, the relationship between athletics and academics, the role of the coach, the opinions of such fellow coaches as Stagg, Knute Rockne and Fielding Yost, and the views of college athletic conferences. In addition, the paper looks at Holmes' reading, racial views, views of Jews in athletics, politics, hobbies and daily routine. The result is an interesting mix of idealism, late Victorian values, and 'middle' America.

In an era of big-time athletics and big-time coaches, there still exists in some smaller colleges the old “Mr. Chips” kind of amateur coach. These coaches tend to measure their achievements not by win-loss records but rather by character and by what their athletes achieve in life. I grew up in this ethos and though, like many sons I rebelled against it, its heritage was remarkable. And lest that ethos dies, I would like to focus on it in this paper.