

John A. Lucas  
Pennsylvania State University

# **The Ascendancy of the Amateur Athletic Concept in the United States (1889-1917) and the Role of Its Premier Standard Bearer, Caspar W. Whitney**

Nowhere in the world, not even in Canada, were the concepts and differing ideologies of amateur sporting pastimes versus professional “pay for play” athletics debated more vociferously and more often than in the United States between 1889 and 1917 (the year of USA’s entry into World War I). Without a single rival in terms of words written on this subject during this nearly thirty-year period was Caspar W. Whitney (1861-1929). He was not the first to trumpet the “glory” of sport entirely for its own sake, as compared to the other kind of organized physical activity, done primarily for money. However, Whitney was read by millions of upper-middle class and wealthy men who enjoyed his niagara of essays in *Harper’s Weekly* from 1889 to 1900, in *Outing* magazine, 1900-1909, and in *Collier’s* from 1909 through 1911. His twelve published books between 1895 and 1928, mostly on his extraordinary hunting expeditions in the Arctic, in South America and Southeast Asian jungles, were read for two generations by a very large and influential affluent male population in the United States. This researcher may have compiled a complete list of all Whitney-published books, essays, pamphlets, booklets, newspaper by-lines, and correspondences. The total of his unceasing outpourings was 4,613 pages and 2,241,525 words.

North American sport historians, regardless of specialized interests, need updated and therefore continuously revised perceptions of the history and ideology and influences of the continent’s origin and directions of amateur sport and professional athletics. This research effort is yet another effort in this direction. The concept of amateurism is widespread. It originated in late eighteenth-century Great Britain, crossed the Atlantic in the next century, and the USA-version then returned to the European continent and infused itself into most sporting cultures throughout the world.