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Financial Sponsorship of Olympic Sports, 1908-1956

Some scholars have denied that amateurism existed and contend that financial and social gain have been the dominant motives for participation in sports. Professional sports have provided powerful behavioral models and monetary rewards for participation and achievement. However, amateurism and professionalism have coexisted on a continuum. At one end, sports became a primary source of income for a few talented individuals. At the other end, millions of Americans enjoyed sports as a recreational activity and were motivated by their enjoyment of the personal satisfaction provided by athletic competition. Financial support, or sponsorship, was a major factor in both amateur and professional sports.

In 1908, the American Olympic Committee's secretary, James E. Sullivan, raised funds for the Olympic trials and the American team's attendance at the London games. This process was repeated to raise about \$90,000 for the Stockholm games of 1912. In 1920, the committee reorganized and enlisted the support of nineteen local fund-raising committees. With modifications, this decentralized campaign procedure was continued in 1924, 1928, 1932, 1936, 1948, 1952, and 1956. For these ten Olympiads the committee "passed the hat" to organizations and individuals who provided the primary financial support for the international sports competitions. The results were reported in quadrennial reports of the Olympic committee. The American Athletic Union's (AAU) regional associations, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) members, and sports associations were major supporters as were many individuals. Since 1960, the United State Olympic Committee has relied to an increasing extent on television broadcast contracts, advertising and governmental support.

The AAU and the NCAA assumed the major roles in the development of amateur sports and the Olympic movement. Commercial, governmental, charitable, and religious organizations promoted both adult and children's sports. Incidental revenue came from admission fees, and program and fence advertising. Secondary schools also played a leading role in the organization and popularization of sports. Founded in 1905, the NCAA was based on the American public school system. Both of these scholarly communities realized that sports provided publicity and contacts with sources of funding. Professional coaches and administrators, and facilities for spectators supplied the infrastructure for Olympic competition.

Between 1908 and 1956, fund raising for amateur Olympic athletes followed a consistent pattern. The Olympic committee solicited and received financial support from local associations and committees, sports organizations, governmental agencies, persons attending meets and trials, and private donors. This paper analyses this system of financial

support. It identifies contributors, motivations and trends and explores the relationships with community and school sports, which provided the constituencies for the AAU and the NCAA. Before major advertisers, television networks and congressional legislation, sponsorship based upon contributions by sports associations, schools, corporations, civic organizations, military departments and individuals was an accurate representation of the diversity of the sporting public.