

A.A.U. - N.C.A.A. Politics: Forrest C. “Phog” Allen and America’s First Olympic Basketball Team

Adolph H. Grundman*

In the summer of 1936 nations from around the world sent their athletes to Berlin to compete in the Olympic Games. For Adolf Hitler the Games were a stage upon which he and the Nazi Party would make a powerful propaganda statement on behalf of the Third Reich. For Americans the Berlin Olympics are best remembered as the venue for the remarkable performance of Jesse Owens who almost single-handedly exploded the myth of Aryan supremacy.

Berlin was also the setting for the first Olympic basketball tournament that drew twenty-three nations from four continents. Consistent with International Basketball Federation rules the entire tournament was played on five outdoor courts composed of compressed clay and sand. The United States compiled a perfect 4 - 0 record, including a 19 - 8 victory over Canada in the championship game, a contest marred by a driving rainstorm which turned the court’s surface to mud. The few spectators who watched this game, family and friends of the players, stood around the court huddled under umbrellas. Arthur J. Daley, sports columnist with *The New York Times* found the tournament “far from sensational” artistically but thought it “worthwhile for the missionary effect” it would have on basketball around the world. One of these effects was that the Japanese, scheduled to host the 1940 Olympics, promised to build indoor courts with hardwood floors.¹

The impossible conditions of the final game must have seemed almost inevitable for the American coaches and players who overcame a variety of obstacles to win that first Olympic gold medal in basketball. The bizarre experiences of the 1936 American Olympic basketball team, however, highlighted a theme that reappeared in subsequent Olympic basketball tournaments. Americans, in particular, have been schizophrenic about Olympic basketball and thus never quite satisfied with these competitions. Phil Taylor, in reviewing the performance of Dream Team II, captured some of this in an article which described the 1996 American team as joylessly going through the motions, as they defeated eight teams by an average of 31.8 points to win the gold medal in Atlanta. While Taylor thought the inclusion of more college players might bring back “an element of uncertainty to the competition” he failed to mention that many Americans were aghast when just eight years earlier, the U.S. failed to win the gold.² Moreover, in 1988, Americans were still seething over the controversial loss to the Soviet Union in 1972.³ If Americans found little satisfaction in winning

* Adolph H. Grundman is Professor of History, Metropolitan State College of Denver, Denver, Colorado, U.S.A.

Olympic basketball gold when the U.S. faced weak competition, they were outraged whenever the U.S. suffered defeat.

The American relationship to Olympic basketball is in its second cycle. The first, initiated in 1936, marked a period of American dominance by virtue of the U.S.'s superior knowledge of the game and abundant competitive opportunities. As the world caught up with America's college talent, the second cycle began in 1992 with Dream Team I. By utilizing America's best professional players the U.S. recreated the talent gap that existed in the first twenty years of Olympic basketball. The restoration of American dominance, however, has not been particularly exhilarating for American fans or writers.

The differences between the 1936 Olympic basketball team and Dream Team II are striking. The athletic ability, styles of play, quality of facilities, and net worth of the players have changed significantly over sixty years. One interesting parallel between the present and the past is the continuing debate, mentioned earlier, over the distribution of college and professional players on future U.S. Olympic basketball teams. In 1935-36 there was also controversy surrounding the composition of the first Olympic basketball team, and particularly the selection of its first coach. These debates took place in the context of an environment in which the participants were aware that they were establishing precedents and reputations.

From 1930 until the late 1960s the Amateur Athletic Union of the U.S. (A.A.U.) dominated the membership of the American Olympic Association and governed most of amateur sport, including basketball competition outside the high school and college realms. In the 1920s the National Collegiate Athletic Association (N.C.A.A.) began to challenge the A.A.U.'s authority as custodian of amateur sport in America. In the early 1930s according to historian John Lucas, the tension between the two organizations relaxed largely through the persuasive skills of Avery Brundage, six-time president of the AAU (1928-1933) and later president of the International Olympic Committee (1952-1972).⁴ While the AAU and NCAA tried to avoid public bickering, their differences, according to Lucas, "did not go away. They merely went underground."⁵ Events surrounding the selection of the first Olympic basketball team and its first coach demonstrated how easily this bureaucratic detente could disintegrate.

When basketball was added to the Olympic program, Dr. Forrest C. "Phog" Allen, the legendary basketball coach of the University of Kansas Jayhawks claimed much of the credit for this achievement. By 1936 Allen's teams had already won eighteen conference titles, produced several All-Americans, and trained a number of distinguished coaches, including John Bunn, Arthur "Dutch" Lonberg, and Adolph Rupp. An admiring biographer called Allen America's "first great basketball coach."⁶ Indeed, Allen, born in 1885, grew up with basketball playing at the University of Kansas under James Naismith, who subsequently would be his friend and colleague. One of Allen's fondest possessions was a photograph of Naismith with this inscription: "From the father of basketball to the father of basketball coaching."⁷ Allen was clearly a person with enormous ability and ambition. In 1924 Allen published *My Basket-Ball Bible*, which offered his thoughts on every aspect of basketball from technique, strategy, psychology, and equipment to the treatment of athletic injuries. Three years later he helped to organize the National Association of

Basketball Coaches and served as its first president from 1927 to 1929. It was no surprise that in 1928 he was in the forefront of the American effort to persuade the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to place basketball on the Olympic program of the 1932 games in Los Angeles.

One of the obstacles faced by Allen was the widespread belief that basketball was exclusively an American game. Using information collected by James Naismith to correct this misunderstanding, Allen wrote an article for *The Athletic Journal* entitled "The International Growth of Basketball" which asserted that "eighteen million people from every part of the globe played basketball."⁸ While his evidence impressed Avery Brundage, president of the AAU, and others, they cautioned Allen against expecting a positive response because the IOC was inclined to reduce rather than increase the athletic program in 1932. Since the United States was the host country in 1932, the American Olympic Committee had the authority to place a demonstration sport on the program. Brundage warned Allen that the Los Angeles Olympic Committee (LAOC) would favor the sport likely to produce the most revenue.⁹ The LAOC thwarted Allen's efforts when it chose football as a demonstration sport because of the expectation that it would draw larger crowds.¹⁰

While Americans pressed for Olympic basketball, the Europeans, in 1932, organized the International Federation of Basketball (FIBA). The co-founder and executive secretary of FIBA was R. William Jones, a graduate of Springfield College in Massachusetts, who was born in Rome, Italy. He returned to Europe after earning his college degree. FIBA campaigned for basketball to be placed on the program of the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Given the bureaucracy of international Olympic sport, no singular entity could convincingly make a claim that they were solely responsible for the addition of basketball to the Olympic program. Naismith, Allen, Jones, the AAU, the YMCA and FIBA each made contributions to that goal.¹¹

Once basketball was an official Olympic sport, American athletic officials turned their attention to selecting a team and coaches for the Berlin games. To perform these responsibilities, an Olympic Basketball Committee (OBC) was formed which included six representatives from the AAU, four from the NCAA, two from the American Olympic Association, and one "at large" member. Although basketball was not a marquee international sport, it was a key piece in the fund raising strategy of the American Olympic Committee (AOC). In the midst of the Depression, the AOC worried about raising the money, estimated at \$350,000 by Brundage, to send American athletes to Berlin. The OBC believed that a national basketball tournament would raise anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000 for the Olympic fund.¹² The OBC decided to hold an eight-team tournament in Madison Square Garden to determine the composition of the Olympic Basketball team. After an all day meeting on October 14, 1935 the Olympic Basketball Committee decided to allocate five tournament slots to the colleges, two to the AAU, and one to the YMCA. A number of participants objected to the allocation of one spot to the YMCA, since they considered "Y" teams inferior to those of the colleges or AAU. Following much debate, the YMCA won representation in the tournament as compensation for its work in developing basketball in foreign countries. Colleges received the most representation because of the expectation that their district tournaments to determine the final five would raise

enough money to send the team to Germany. While the AAU wanted four teams, the expectation was that at least one of its teams would make it to the finals.¹³

Allen was deeply interested in these negotiations because he was lobbying to be a part of the basketball enterprise in Berlin. There were different scenarios discussed by Allen and his friends as to how the storied Kansas coach could achieve his goal. Because the OBC decided to use a tournament format rather than select an All-Star team, Allen agreed that the coach of the team that won the tournament in New York deserved to coach the Olympic team. While Allen's Kansas Jayhawks planned to compete in one of the district tournaments, he doubted that his team had the size to survive the competition. Therefore, Allen proposed that the OBC recommend that he serve as the director of the team. Because of his "effort in getting the game included in the Olympic competition," Allen expected some recognition and wanted something more substantive than an honorary position. While the coach handled the players during practices and games, Allen thought the team needed a person to supervise "its conduct and its relationship with the other teams." Allen promised not to use his position to subvert the basketball coach in Berlin.¹⁴ In Allen's mind, he could boost the game, represent the team with officials from other countries, and protect the image of the American team. Allen, it is plausible to argue, wanted to be the U.S.'s basketball ambassador in Berlin.

There was considerable support for Allen on the OBC. Major John L. Griffith, president of the NCAA, supported Allen. Griffith controlled four votes on the OBC. In addition, the National Basketball Coaches Association and the National Basketball Rules Committee endorsed Allen's candidacy.¹⁵ On February 2, 1936 the OBC met and decided to recommend to the United States Olympic Committee that it send eighteen people to Berlin. They included fourteen players, the director of basketball, the head coach from the winner of the Madison Square Garden tournament, an assistant coach from the second place team, and a manager. The OBC recommended that Allen serve as the director of basketball. One of the difficulties faced by this recommendation was that Avery Brundage, President of the American Olympic Committee and chairman of the American Olympic Finance Committee, thought that a party of eighteen was too large to send to Berlin.¹⁶

At this point bureaucratic politics took a back seat to basketball. In March of 1936 AAU basketball teams and fans gathered in Denver, Colorado, for the National AAU basketball tournament. In the late 1930s and 1940s this was the biggest sporting event in Denver and area basketball fans supported it enthusiastically. Because the tournament finalists earned the right to play in the Olympic tournament in Madison Square Garden, the excitement surrounding the event was enormous. The tournament's hosts, eager to promote the event, blended Olympic symbolism and basketball history by inviting Dr. James Naismith to review all the players who would march before him in tribute to the game's inventor. On the official opening night, Governor Ed Johnson and Mayor Ben Stapleton also offered remarks.¹⁷

Experts picked the McPherson Globe Refiners, of McPherson, Kansas, to win the national crown. This team was typical of the AAU independents of this period, when large corporations and small businesses sponsored basketball teams to advertise their products. The McPherson Globe Refiners sponsored its first team in 1934. In 1935 it lost in the championship game of the National AAU tournament to Southern Kansas

Stage Lines. Gene Johnson, McPherson's coach, was one of the most innovative coaches of the era. Before organizing the Globe Refiners, Johnson coached successfully at Wichita University between 1929 and 1933, and also guided the Wichita Henry's to a national AAU title in 1929. Johnson favored fast-breaking offense; and some credited him with introducing the full-court press.¹⁸ Sports writers of the 1930s called it "Fire Brigade" basketball. Just before the Denver tournament, the Globe Refiners traveled to New York City to play the Metropolitan College All Stars coached by Clair Bee. The fast-talking Johnson, a sportswriter's delight, declared that "We have the tallest, wildest team in the world." "Defense," he added, "isn't in our dictionary. We don't worry about the other fellow scoring, because we figure to score a lot more than they will."¹⁹ When asked by sports columnist Arthur J. Daley to compare his team to the best college clubs the cocky Johnson replied, "We could spot either Notre Dame or Purdue 10 or 12 points."²⁰ Daley was particularly impressed by McPherson's "lay-up" drill in which the players "pitched the ball downward into the hoop much like a cafeteria customer dunking a roll in coffee."²¹ McPherson's billing as the tallest team in the world rested on the shoulders of 6'8" "College" Joe Fortenberry and 6'9" Willard Schmidt. The former played collegiately at West Texas Teachers College in Denton, Texas, and made five AAU All-American teams before retiring in 1941. Schmidt, who played at Creighton, served primarily as a rebounder. Francis Johnson, the coach's brother, Jack Ragland, Bill Wheatley, and Tex Gibbons were AAU stars who provided most of the scoring for the Globe Refiners.²² After the Oilers beat the Metropolitan College All-Stars 45 to 43, Arthur Daley called the contest "the most brilliantly played and spectacular game that Madison Square Garden ever has seen." Daley called Francis Johnson, the coach's brother, "the best amateur forward ever seen in New York."²³

Denver's fans hoped their Denver Safeways would win the championship and eventually represent the city in Berlin. Organized by William Haraway, vice-president and Denver divisional manager of the Piggly Wiggly - Safeway stores, the Safeways were playing in their fifth national tournament but had never made it beyond the quarter-final round. The team's floor leader was Jack McCracken, Denver's first legitimate basketball star. As a high school player McCracken led Classen High School of Oklahoma City to a state championship and a second place finish in the University of Chicago's National High School Basketball Tournament. McCracken followed his high school coach, Henry "Hank" Iba, to Northwest Missouri State College, where they led the Bearcats to a perfect 31-0 in the 1929-30 season. In 1932 McCracken made the AAU's All-American team for the first time as the Bearcats fell to the Wichita Henry's, 15-14, in the title game.²⁴ Writers and spectators were particularly impressed with his effortless and expressionless style of play, which prompted one writer to describe him as "something of a mystic figure."²⁵ After the 1932 season, Haraway successfully recruited McCracken, described two years later as "the most versatile player that ever stepped on a local floor... the idol of every Colorado youth, from the rough-and-ready newsie on the street to the pampered lads of private prep school."²⁶ Denver's high scorer was Robert "Ace" Gruenig, a gangly 6'8" center who possessed an excellent hook shot with either hand. While Gruenig set scoring records at Chicago's Crane Tech High School, he never played a game of varsity basketball for a college team. In 1933 and 1934 Gruenig played for

Chicago teams in the national AAU tournament in Kansas City where Haraway discovered his talents and recruited him for the 1934-35 season. The McCracken-Gruenig relationship, one of the most celebrated in Denver sports history, helped to produce three national AAU championships for the Mile High City and won for each of them the honor of election to the National Basketball Hall of Fame.²⁷ Unfortunately for Denver in 1936 the quarter-final jinx struck again when Universal Pictures dropped the Safeways 31 - 30 on a free-throw made without any time left on the clock.²⁸ In the championship game McPherson topped Universal Pictures 47 - 35 as Francis Johnson led all scorers with fifteen points.²⁹

While McPherson and Hollywood prepared for the Olympic tournament, the Olympic dreams of the Safeways unexpectedly were not yet dead. In what *The Denver Post* described as a "magnanimous act" Safeway decided to send the team, all of whose players were YMCA members, to the national YMCA tourney in Peoria, Illinois, the winner of which would also receive a berth in the Olympic tournament.³⁰ A triumph in Peoria would not be easy, however, since another disappointed AAU loser, the powerful Kansas City Philcos, were also in the tournament. The Philcos were led by Chuck Hyatt, one of the great AAU stars of the 1930s. A three-time All-American at the University of Pittsburgh, Hyatt had led the Tulsa D-X Oilers to AAU championships in 1933 and 1934.³¹ In three days the Denver team won four games including a tense 23 - 20 victory over the Philcos and a close 47 - 45 win over the Wilmerding, Pennsylvania YMCA team for the championship.³² Wilmerding was not an average "Y" team. The star of this team was Wes Bennett of Westminster College, who had scored 23 points against St. John's University in 1935 to set a new Madison Square Garden scoring record. Surrounding him were players from the University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania small colleges.³³ Although Denver fans were ecstatic, three days before the first Olympic tournament, the YMCA banned the Denver entry. The national secretary of the YMCA, Dr. John Brown, ruled that Denver had violated a rule which prohibited a team that played in a tournament not sanctioned by the YMCA from playing in a YMCA tourney until ninety days after its previous competition. Thus the Denver team was not a legitimate YMCA team. At this point C. L. "Poss" Parsons, sports editor of *The Denver Post*, national chairman of the AAU basketball committee, and member of the Olympic Basketball Committee, reported that he would fight to overturn the YMCA ruling. Parsons argued that Denver had precedent on its side, since the Piggly Wiggly team had won the 1933 national "Y" title after playing in the National AAU tournament. Since college teams were not excluded from the AAU tournament, Parsons reported that the OBC intended to permit interested AAU teams a second chance to compete for a spot in the Madison Square Garden tournament by allowing them to play in Peoria. Prior to the competition, in order to boost attendance, Peoria newspapers identified the Denver and Kansas City teams as AAU powers. Finally, Parsons thought that dropping Denver required a vote of the entire OBC rather than unilateral "Y" action.³⁴ Despite Parsons's pleas, the OBC decided not to intervene in the squabble. The YMCA ruling prevailed.³⁵

The colleges, meanwhile, were participating in a national tournament to determine the five college teams that would compete in Madison Square Garden. The director of the tournament was Arthur A. Schabinger, athletic director at Creighton

University. The tournament committee divided the United States into ten districts. After the ten district finalists had been determined, the five teams that survived inter-district play would go to New York City. The five inter-district tournaments, however, did not follow an identical format. For example, two districts selected their champion by playing one game, while three districts determined their champion in a best two-of-three series. While there was no explanation for this unusual procedure, a good guess is that promoters saw the extra games as a way of increasing revenue for the American Olympic Committee. For a variety of reasons several outstanding teams chose not to compete in the Olympic tryouts. Long Island University (LIU), coached by Clair Bee, declared that it "would not under any circumstances be represented in Olympic Games held in Germany." LIU had won thirty-three consecutive games, but joined those Americans who favored a boycott of the Berlin Olympics. To participate in the tournament, LIU feared, "would be indirect, if not direct contribution to the raising of funds to finance participation" in the Berlin Olympics. New York University and the City College of New York, like LIU, had a number of Jewish players, many of whom rebelled against playing in the tournament. Notre Dame said that its players could not afford the missed class time, so it did not enter the tournament. The South, which was in District Three, did not hold a tournament because of the expense and conflict with Spring football.³⁶ Only thirty-eight colleges competed for a chance to represent the United States in Berlin. The five college teams that survived this tournament format were Temple University, De Paul University, the University of Arkansas, Utah State, and the University of Washington.³⁷ The Utah State Aggies defeated "Phog" Allen's Kansas Jayhawks in a three-game series played at Convention Hall in Kansas City. Prior to this playoff, KU had won twenty-two consecutive games and the Big Six Conference championship. Nonetheless, Utah State denied the Jayhawks a place in the Olympic tournament.³⁸ KU's failure nullified "Phog" Allen's chances to coach the Olympic basketball team. His chance to go to Berlin rested solely in the hands of the American Olympic Committee.

In early April eight teams gathered at Madison Square Garden to determine the composition of the first U.S. Olympic basketball team. Arthur Daley of *The New York Times* wrote that this tournament would give "local fans their opportunity to view a cross-section of the court game as it is played throughout the country."³⁹ The tournament directors, as in Denver, invited James Naismith to open the tournament. On the first evening of play twelve thousand fans watched as four of the five college teams were eliminated from play. Francis Johnson, described "as the perfect basketball player," led the McPherson Globe Refiners to a 56 to 48 victory over Temple. Sam Balter, one of the two Jewish players for Universal Pictures, scored eleven points to lead his team over Arkansas, 40 - 29. In the biggest surprise of the tournament the Wilmerding, Pennsylvania YMCA team set a Madison Square Garden scoring record when it crushed Utah State, 62 - 48. Equally stunning was Washington's romp over De Paul, 54 - 33, "As a spectacle," Daly wrote, "the affair even surpassed expectation, There was better basketball than ever before in the Garden."⁴⁰ In the semi-finals, before 7000 fans, the Globe Refiners ran the University of Washington off the Garden floor, 48 - 30. In the other game Frank Lubin's 18 points helped to give Universal Pictures a 43 - 29 victory over the Wilmerding YMCA.⁴¹ Although McPherson seemed invincible, it lost the championship to

Universal Pictures, 44 - 43. The Globe Refiners chances suffered a severe blow when they lost Francis Johnson to fouls with only three and one-half minutes gone in the second half.⁴² As a result of the victory, Universal Pictures placed Frank Lubin, Carl Knowles, Art Mollner, Carl Shy, Duane Swanson, Don Piper and Sam Balter on the Olympic team. Sam Balter thus became one of six Jewish Americans on the United States Olympic team.⁴³ Universal's victory also meant that the Olympic Basketball Committee made Jimmy Needles the head coach of the team. Gene Johnson, McPherson's coach, served as the assistant coach and six of his players - Francis Johnson, Joe Fortenberry, Tex Gibbons, Jack Ragland, Bill Wheatley, and Willard Schmidt - were selected for the Olympic team. Ralph Bishop, a center from the University of Washington, was the only college player named to the team.⁴⁴

Revenues from the tournament were below expectation. Madison Square Garden collected gross receipts of \$14,961, rather than the \$60,000 it had anticipated. After paying the travel expenses of the eight teams, the OBC pocketed a disappointing \$6,740.⁴⁵ Instead of the "cash cow" envisioned to enrich the American fund raising effort, the OBC had failed to raise enough money even to send the American basketball team to Berlin.

In addition to financial disappointment, the OBC experienced an embarrassing public relations problem. By the end of April, Forrest "Phog" Allen had decided not to pursue the directorship of the Olympic basketball team and "to give the A.A.U. a good blast and refuse to have anything to do with the outfit."⁴⁶ There were a variety of reasons for Allen's displeasure with the AAU. One was that some of the AAU leaders expressed displeasure with the poor financial showing of the college tournaments. While Major John L. Griffith, President of the NCAA, was surprised that the college games failed to draw, he thought that "The college coaches could have helped by not scheduling such long schedules of college games... as it was, their men were tired of basketball when their college season ended and so many of the teams that should have entered the sectional tournaments did not do so." Avery Brundage was one of these critics, and, according to Griffith, "I sat in his office one day when he spoke his mind very freely and sharply criticized certain of our college men." The combination of the poor "pay out" and the AAU teams "marked superiority over the college team," Griffith wrote Allen, encouraged the AAU to seek more patronage.⁴⁷

In Allen's letter of resignation to Dr. Walter E. Meanwell, chairman of the Olympic Basketball Committee, Allen condemned "the unsportsmanlike attitude of the AAU members of the Olympic Basketball Committee" and "their deceitful political bartering." The Kansas coach described the leaders of the AAU as "Quadrennial Oceanic Hitch-hikers" who "chisel their way across the oceans every four years on the other fellow's money." As evidence, Allen submitted that he "managed and promoted the Kansas - Utah State series in Kansas City which proved to be the financial 'gravy wagon' on which the Olympic Basketball contingent will travel to Berlin." As Allen saw it, he raised \$8,000 for the Olympic basketball team, while the Missouri Valley A.A.U. "grossed less than \$700.00 on three nights thereby showing the difference in public favor between college and independent basketball." Although the National A.A.U. tournament in Denver netted \$6,000, Allen noted that

all the money was spent to pay the administrative expenses of the AAU in New York and Chicago.⁴⁸

Allen also criticized Dr. Joseph A. Reilly, the Athletic Director of the Kansas City Athletic Club, who was named the manager of the Olympic Basketball team. Reilly had directed every national AAU basketball tournament that was held in Kansas City between 1921 and 1934. In the bureaucratic struggle for the appointment of manager of the Olympic team, Reilly had paid his dues, but he was also a beneficiary of the AAU's domination of the Olympic tryout at Madison Square Garden. Reilly was not Allen's first choice as manager, indeed the Kansas coach criticized Reilly for leaving Kansas City to officiate in the Golden Gloves Boxing Tournament in New York City while Kansas and Utah State played their inter-district tournament. The implication was that Reilly was an AAU free-loader.⁴⁹

Dr. Joseph A. Reilly and Avery Brundage responded immediately to Allen's attack. Reilly declared that he had been in New York for two days, but returned to Kansas City "a day before the tournament opened here." While Allen claimed credit for raising \$8,000 for the Olympic team, Reilly charged that Allen was "talking through his hat." Reilly said: "I made the arrangements for the hall, sent Utah State money to get here and took care of other things. Allen didn't do any more managing of the tournament than did Dick Romney, Utah State coach. All they did was bring their teams here to play."⁵⁰ Brundage and J. Lyman Bingham, his assistant and secretary of the Olympic Basketball Committee, found Allen's resignation letter presumptuous, since he had never been appointed director of the U.S. Olympic team. They stressed that Allen's appointment had been merely recommended. They called Allen the real "hitchhiker," since he sought a position as "an extra and unnecessary official." For good measure, Bingham added that "Allen went to the A.A.U. tournament at Denver and deducted his expenses from the money taken in at the Kansas City Olympic tournament." Finally, Bingham reported "that Mr. Brundage, instead of spending Olympic money, paid his own expenses to the winter games at Gannisch-Partenkirchen. I think he would do the same thing again this summer if there is a shortage of money."⁵¹

Allen's letter to Meanwell was disingenuous in three respects. First, Allen stated that he "found satisfaction enough" in getting basketball on the Olympic program "without thought of personal award."⁵² In fact, though, he had lobbied diligently for the position of Director of Olympic Basketball. Second, Allen joined critics of the AAU when he "emphasized how precarious is the position of Olympic Basketball, when left in the hands of technical amateurs but actual semi-professionals." The inspiration for this blast was "The disgraceful - post Olympic Tournament-exhibition game at Topeka, Kansas." On April 10 *The Topeka Daily Capital* reported that the McPherson Globe Refiners defeated Universal Studios 42 - 29 in a "Farcical Contest." Topeka writers scolded the Universals for suiting up only five players and reported that Frank Lubin played until he had eight fouls. Moreover, the Topeka writers and fans charged that the Universals showed little interest in the outcome of the game because the gate, in this case \$800.00, went to the Olympic Committee. Topeka gave the Globe Refiners "a clean bill of health" and attributed the Universals poor play to the handicap of growing up in California where the athlete "expects to be paid."⁵³ By 1936, however, few could see any difference between college and AAU

basketball players. Finally, Allen concluded his resignation letter by stating that he wrote "as an individual and not as a member affiliated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association."⁵⁴ Allen's subsequent attack on the AAU and his close relationship with leaders of NCAA did not make this claim very credible.

Before Allen leveled another broadside against the AAU, he and other Americans followed the results of Eleventh Olympiad in Berlin. In basketball the United States won the gold medal with ease, given its superior talent and knowledge of the game. From the perspective of the late twentieth century, however, the experiences of the first U.S. Olympic team were archaic. One of the consequences of the process of selecting the Olympic team was, in effect, the United States had two Olympic teams: McPherson's Globe Refiners and Hollywood's Universal Pictures. The two teams never practiced together in the United States, and were individually responsible for finding a way to New York City where they boarded the U.S.S. *Manhattan* carrying American athletes to Berlin.

Because Universal Pictures won the Olympic tournament, Olympic officials determined that getting the Californians to Berlin was their first responsibility. One unnamed official said: "Then, if we get enough money, we will add as many players as possible to the squad. If we get more funds we will send an assistant coach."⁵⁵ Nonetheless the players on the Universal team had to get to New York. While they thought Universal Pictures would pay their expenses to New York, Universal dropped its sponsorship of the team because of the treatment of German Jews by the Nazis. To help the Olympians, Braven Dyer, Sr., sports editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, organized a team of college ail-stars to play Universal Pictures at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. Although the Universals lost 22-20, they made enough money to start the trip to New York. Exhibition games along the way made it possible for the Californians to complete the trip.⁵⁶

The McPherson Globe Refiners faced the same predicament as Universal Pictures. In June, Coach Gene Johnson made a personal appeal to the people of McPherson to raise one-thousand dollars through solicitations so that all six of McPherson's players could play in Berlin. He hoped that every basketball fan would contribute anywhere from one to twenty-five dollars.⁵⁷ As late as June 26, Globe players were selling tickets for the "Dollar Donation Fund."⁵⁸ On July 11, 1936, *The McPherson Daily Republic* reported that two cars were driving to New York with Gene Johnson, six players, and two wives. At this late date the *Daily Republic* wondered if the players from Universal Pictures would even make it to New York before the *Manhattan* left for Hamburg, Germany.⁵⁹

All players and coaches did make it to New York in time for the eight-day trip across the Atlantic. There was no place to practice on the *Manhattan*, but the players did run, stretch, and pass the basketball. The voyage also gave the coaches an opportunity to prepare the players for the international rules governing the Olympic tournament. Perhaps most important was a rule allowing each team to dress only seven players for each game. Also, when a player was replaced, he could not return unless a player was injured or fouled out. While the players wanted to compete on their teams, Coach Needles chose to integrate the players of the two teams. Sam Balter reported that the teams were divided into "Sure-Passers," mostly Universal players, and "Wild Men," primarily Globe Refiners, a reference to their pressing and

fast-breaking style of play.⁶⁰ With fourteen men eager to play, one of the most disappointing aspects of the tournament was that the United States drew Spain in the first round. Spain boycotted the Olympics because of the Spanish Civil War. The United States then drew a bye in the third round.⁶¹

There were other annoyances. The International Federation of Basketball adopted the Berg, a German product, as the official game ball of tournament. The Berg was slightly lopsided and smooth so that dust and mud stuck to its surface making it difficult to handle. After the U.S. had crushed Estonia 52-28, the Philippines 56-23, and Mexico 25-10, the International Basketball Federation passed a rule that limited future international competition to players under 6'3". While this rule was never implemented, it was an amusing reaction by other nations to the height of the United States team.⁶² Finally, some Americans complained that the American Olympic Committee had not done enough to honor Dr. James Naismith, who traveled to Berlin on funds raised by the United States Basketball Association, Jim Tobin, a New Yorker who officiated some of the Olympic basketball games, reported that some of Naismith's friends secured a pass for him and then arranged an impromptu ceremony to honor him.⁶³ The event was held in the Hall of German Sports on August 7, the first day of basketball competition. Two hundred spectators watched as the organizers of the event produced a program which included a miniature march of nations, followed by speeches from Naismith and officials of other nations. Basketball's inventor also tossed the jump ball to begin the first Olympic basketball game. As well, Naismith crowned the Americans and the runners-up with oak wreaths at the conclusion of the competition.⁶⁴

As an athletic competition it is difficult to disagree with Sam Balter's conclusion that the Olympic tournament was "a sandlot affair."⁶⁵ This judgement rested mainly on Balter's frustration with the poor playing conditions which made it difficult for the Americans to display their talents. Although Balter thought the Canadians were a worthy opponent, and the Asian teams good ball handlers, he believed the Europeans used outdated strategies and were weak fundamentally. Finally, Balter reported that the officiating lacked uniformity, something which "proved bewildering to the players."⁶⁶ Whatever the frustrations, the American basketball delegation to Berlin made history and helped to move basketball towards becoming the international game it would be.

One of the most interesting international consequences of the Olympic tournament was that it marked the beginning of an exciting three-year odyssey for Frank Lubin, the captain of the U.S. team. Lubin's parents, born in Lithuania, joined their son and his wife, Mary Agnes, for the Berlin Olympics. While on the streets of Berlin a Lithuanian educational official invited the Lubins to Lithuania where they were treated as distinguished guests. The visit evolved into a six month sojourn and Lubin used this time to coach Lithuanian basketball players. In 1938 Lubin and his wife, also a basketball player, returned to Lithuania where they conducted coaching clinics. The following year Lubin coached and played on the Lithuanian national team which, on his last second shot, won the European championship, 36-35. over Latvia. For his contribution as a coach and player, Lubin became known as "The Godfather of Lithuanian Basketball."⁶⁷

Despite superb performances by many athletes and inspiring examples of sportsmanship in the face of international politics, the Berlin Olympics also generated more bickering on the part of American coaches and athletic administrators. The Olympics seemed only to deepen "Phog" Allen's displeasure with the AAU. In a post-Olympic statement, Allen compared AAU administrators to "Chicago racketeers who do not create a business or industry but who step in and tell those who did build up an establishment that they are going to help run it." Allen contended that "NCAA members, coaches and directors of athletics" had more integrity than their AAU counterparts, because they were "paid their annual salaries by their respective schools and they draw no monies from outside sources."⁶⁸ In his indictment of the AAU's conduct of the Olympics, Allen cited the treatment of Naismith, as mentioned above, and Jesse Owens. In the latter's case, the AAU suspended the star of the Berlin Olympics when he failed to complete a post-Olympics barnstorming tour of Europe to raise funds for the American Olympic Committee. While the AAU was exploiting Owens, so were others. Ohio State had "shielded" Owens from attending classes required for graduation in order to insure his athletic eligibility. L. W. St. John, Ohio State's director of athletics, wanted Owens to return to Columbus for his senior year so that Ohio State could capitalize on his fame. While the AAU was excessively harsh on Owens, the latter's decision to forego European barnstorming was motivated primarily by his eagerness to capitalize financially on his fame and advice from NCAA men who despised the AAU. There was an ironic twist to Allen's critique of the exploitation of Owens. In fact, Owens found it difficult to capitalize on his fame until the Republican Party paid Owens ten to fifteen thousand dollars to campaign for its presidential candidate, Alf Landon, in of all places - Kansas.⁶⁹ Allen assured sports fans that if the NCAA represented the United States in Olympic competition, "the necessary funds would be safe in a bank vault" months before the Tokyo Olympics and "there would be no post-Olympic barnstorming on the part of any athlete not wishing to compete."⁷⁰

Historians have described Dr. Forrest C. "Phog" Allen as controversial, innovative, eccentric, and pioneering. Allen grew up with basketball, knew its history, and worked tirelessly to earn an enduring place in that history. If James Naismith invented the game, the evidence suggests Allen took seriously Naismith's judgement that Allen himself had invented coaching. In part, Allen's lobbying for the directorship of the Olympic basketball team may have been driven by his desire to establish his place in basketball history. The excessiveness of his rhetoric in attacking the AAU had some of its origins in Allen's frustrations over being denied the position he coveted so deeply. Allen, in addition, had a strong sense of right and wrong. In a letter to a fellow coach, Allen wrote: "there are three sides to every question - your side, my side, and the right side."⁷¹ Allen seemed always confident that his side was the right side. In the politics of the 1936 Olympics, "Phog" Allen was not mistreated, he simply lost. In defeat, Allen dedicated himself to making war on the AAU, an organization he thought unworthy of managing Olympic competition.

Due to the success of the AAU teams in the 1936 Olympic tournament, John L. Griffith, president of the NCAA, believed in 1940 "the A.A.U. will insist on running... Olympic basketball, maintaining that their brand of basketball is superior to the college brand and further maintaining that we fell down on the job this year. This

will mean that the colleges that want to try out will have to enter the A.A.U. tournaments."⁷²

World War II intervened and there were no Olympics in 1940 and 1944. When the games resumed in 1948, the method used for selecting the Olympic basketball team was modeled on the 1936 format. Four years later, in 1952, Coach Allen represented the United States Olympic Basketball team as its assistant coach. He missed his chance to serve as the head coach when the Peoria Caterpillars, coached by the thirty-two year old Warren Womble, edged the University of Kansas, 62-60, in the final game of the Olympic tournament at Madison Square Garden.⁷³

After 1960 the quality of post-collegiate amateur basketball declined precipitously as corporations dropped their sponsorship of AAU basketball teams. The popularity of professional basketball and its escalating salaries made it too difficult for corporations to compete for talent. The 1968 Olympic basketball team was the last with AAU players on its roster. The best college players represented the United States until 1992, at which time Olympic basketball took its first giant step towards true professionalization. Dream Teams I and II have most probably set the tone for the future.

Notes

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
13. Letter, Floyd A. Rowe to Forrest C. Allen, October 15, 1935, Allen Letter File. Rowe was a member of the Olympic Basketball Committee and Director of the Bureau of Physical Welfare of the Cleveland Board of Education.
14. Letter, Forrest C. Allen to Major John L. Griffith, January 22, 1936, Allen Letter File. Griffith was the President of the NCAA.
15. Letter, L. W. St. John to Walter E. Meanwell, January 24, 1936, Allen Letter File. St. John was the Director of Athletics at Ohio State University and Meanwell, who had been a successful basketball coach at the University of Wisconsin, was chair of the Olympic Basketball Committee.
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34. *Ibid.*, April 2, 1936, p. 23.
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47. Letter, Major John L. Griffith to Dr. Forrest C. Allen, May 1, 1936, Allen Letter File.
48. Letter, Forrest C. Allen to Dr. W. E. Meanwell, May 5, 1936, Allen Letter File.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *The Denver Post*, May 6, 1936, p. 21.
51. C. L. "Poss" Parsons, "JABS," *The Denver Post*, May 7, 1936, p. 21. Parsons was the sports editor. He also was one of the AAU members of the Olympic Basketball Committee and was an interested party in this controversy.
52. Letter, Allen to Meanwell, May 5, 1936. Allen Letter File.
53. Copies of *The Topeka Daily Capital* for April 10 and 11 are in the Allen Letter File.
54. Letter, Allen to Meanwell, May 5, 1936, Allen Letter File.
55. C. L. "Poss" Parsons, "JABS," *The Denver Post*, May 6, 1936, p. 19.
56. Frank J. Lubin, telephone interview, July 6, 1995.
57. *The McPherson Daily Republic*, June 16, 1936, p. 5.

58. *Ibid.*, June 26, 1936, p. 5.
59. *Ibid.*, July 11, 1936, p. 5.
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62. Balter, "Olympic Basketball," pp. 10-12.
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72. Letter, John L. Griffith to Dr. Forrest C. Allen, May 1, 1936, Allen Letter File.
73. *The Denver Post*, April 2, 1952, p. 38. Warren Womble grew up in Durant, Oklahoma, where he played at Southeastern State College. A fierce competitor and thoughtful student of the game, the Caterpillars gave Womble a chance to fulfill his dream of becoming a big-time basketball coach. Womble led Peoria to five AAU championships between 1952 and 1960, which made the Cats the dominant AAU team of the 1950s. Womble was an assistant coach with the 1960 Olympic team. In 1960 Peoria dropped its basketball program and Womble, who remained with the company, never coached again.