

College Sports Decline

Intercollegiate Contests Are Losing Popularity

BY PARKE H. DAVIS

INTERCOLLEGIATE games, with the exception of certain traditional combats in football, are declining. By declining is meant that competition by undergraduates for positions on the representative teams is lessening, that the skill of the players is deteriorating, that the interest and enthusiasm for their teams among student bodies are diminishing, and that the attendance at the games on the part of undergraduates, graduates and the general public, is dwindling. These are bold statements, but they are founded upon the complaints of college managements and coaches which have been supplemented by a country-wide investigation.

Into this dark cloud, however, bursts a shaft of sunshine, for with the wails above have also come reports that intramural games, the games which collegians wage with each other and with teams formed wholly within their college walls, played without admission fees, are enormously increasing in popularity. Notre Dame, Princeton, and many others report that as many as 90 per cent of the student bodies are engaged in some branch of intramural sport. This is the condition so in-

tensely advocated by many educators and technically known as "athletics for all."

Unfortunately, this latter ideal state has increased the worries of the practical managers of college sports, for this gigantic institution, intercollegiate and intramural sports, stupendously costly, is maintained by the admission fees of the intercollegiate games; supplemented in a small way in some institutions by subscriptions of the alumni and undergraduates. Football, as it is generally known, is the only sport able to support itself, and this assertion fails in so many small colleges that it can not be laid down as a rule.

WHEN the sports other than football, in colleges where football carries the entire load, fall off in receipts, obviously the load of football is increased. Hence it is not surprising to those who are informed that a number of institutions which participate in conspicuously well attended football games, nevertheless close their financial year with a deficit.

Many, with isolated instances in their memories of crowded basketball floors, hockey rinks, gymnasi-

ums, and the other arenas of indoor games, will challenge the assertions that attendances are dwindling. Colleges, however, vary in the interest of student bodies in sport; sports in the same college vary in attractiveness; and games in the same sport vary in appeal to student bodies. Hence, a general assertion must be based on the experience of an entire year.

The indoor games, basket-ball, hockey, swimming, wrestling, boxing, fencing, gymnastics, in many colleges still easily crowd indoor seats, but indoor arenas are of small capacity compared with outdoor stands and stadia.

SPECIFICALLY, which colleges are complaining of a lack of interest? Brown, Columbia, Cincinnati, Hampden-Sydney, Indiana, Lehigh, Mercer, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, Oberlin, Ohio State, Trinity, Washington and Wesleyan are a few. These are selected as types of institutions and also for their geographical locations. Perhaps you would like to read one of these complaints? Well, here is one from Princeton, not enumerated in the foregoing list, which was sent out last June by a member of the University periodicals to the University's athletic counsellors: "The most disastrous year in the history of Princeton's sports is drawing to a close. There have been many and varied explanations as to the decline of athletic skill and enthusiasm among Princeton's undergraduates. What is the cause and what is the remedy?"

In a wide investigation of this condition, naturally, one looks outside to other fields of sport, to the

schools, to the athletic clubs, and municipal sport systems. There is no such deterioration there. In fact the very opposite is found. In the cities of the United States which maintain systems of sports for their boys and girls, the astounding army of 1,250,000 boys and girls in 1929 vied for positions in 710,000 games before 38,250,000 people. These games were football, baseball, basket-ball, rowing, track and field sports, lacrosse, tennis and golf. The schools of the United States in 1929 presented 150,000 athletes in action in 25,000 games in these same sports. College sports from the standpoint of numbers are petty in comparison with these figures. But school and municipal athletes are several years younger than collegians. Distractions for the latter do not present the same charms as to the former. Athletic games are instinctively sought by children. It is through such play that they grow.

CURIOSLY, the sport to feel this disease of apathy first and most deeply is the pioneer and once the prince of college games, baseball. If you have not followed intercollegiate games closely since the war it may surprise you to be told that baseball in the colleges generally is unpopular. In some colleges it has been abandoned. In others it is being given heroic treatment for resuscitation. Last spring the leading colleges of the East formed an intercollegiate league and established the institution of a "championship" in the hope that this competitive feature would restore interest. It did to some extent, but not enough to lift the old sport out of the sick bed.

Popularly, baseball is called our national sport, although for years more people have played basket-ball, tennis and golf.

The trouble with baseball among the colleges is not difficult to ascertain. It can not compete with many of the other games in swift, continuous action. It is a slow game, comparatively, either to play or to watch. It requires high skill and it is rough, rough in the handling of hard batted balls, in sliding to bases, in being hit with pitched balls, and in personal collisions. When spectators, too, have dwindled, wide patches of empty seats are uninviting to athletes. They can find greater enjoyment in other games, track, tennis, soccer, lacrosse, and golf. Cricket once was played by Princeton and Pennsylvania and by other colleges, but its element of slowness contained no appeal to the *tempo* of American collegians even in the middle 'eighties, and although it is an excellent game it went into disuse. Baseball, which supplanted it and caused its extinction, now in turn faces the same fate.

AMONG groups of collegians many causes are being assigned for the slump in intercollegiate games. Some of these assignments are sarcastic, some superficial and some profound. It is said by the philosophers of college life that "the race of collegians is softening"; that "competitive collegiate sports as an organism are obsolescent and not in step with the period"; that "the drastic demands of modern academic work deprive students of today of the energy, the time and the ambition to participate in representative games"; that "sports as entertainment can not

compete with social functions, out of town week ends, and motor jaunts." As to the dwindling interest of alumni and the attendance of spectators, these are generally assigned to the competition of better shows and more fascinating attractions.

"SOFTENING of the race of collegians!" Once again we float in fancy back to a May day in 1891. Harvard is playing Princeton and Phil King of Princeton is holding down second base. From the bat of "Slugger" Mason of Harvard (his real name was Frank) comes a line hit. King takes it with one hand but breaks the bone in his finger. Walking quietly to the foul line he picks up a stick and with the hem torn from his shirt has his finger bound to the splint, and then returns to second base where he handles other hot ones for four innings, and incidentally straightens out one of "Jack" Highland's fast ones for a home run. And now, it is Thanksgiving Day, 1898, in Easton, and there is deep snow on the ground. Lafayette is playing Lehigh. The field is outlined with sticks stuck in the snow. The score is 0 to 0. Lafayette is held 35 yards from Lehigh's goal. Out upon the field from the bench furiously leaps Edward Bray, although he is wearing bandages around two ribs broken two days before. He takes his place at full-back. Along comes the ball. Bray receives it and instantly lifts a drop kick out of the snow, thirty-five yards down the field, for a goal and for victory. "Softening of the race!" Surely the daughters of the women who bore the "Johnnie" Poes and the "Aleck" Wilsons are

bearing other boys eager to face Harvard or Hindenburg. Boyhood and youth are the same, year in and year out, generation after generation.

WHEN Harlan Stone, Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was playing guard at Amherst, and when John Sargent, late Attorney-General of the United States, was playing centre at Tufts, the period of the early 'nineties, there were only six intercollegiate sports, rowing, baseball, football, track, lacrosse, and tennis. The first was played so gently and politely that it barely attained its place. These six games afforded practically the only entertainment of a show character in the average college town. There was, of course, a dance now and then, but only a few collegians in those days were dancers; and there was occasionally a class rush or a fight, but these broke out too suddenly to permit spectators generally to assemble. Curiously in such a paucity of pleasures the only athletic teams were the 'Varsity teams and their scrub squads. All the rest of the college or university body were spectators.

And then suddenly along came basketball, golf, gymnastics, swimming, hockey, polo (water and horse), wrestling, boxing, fencing, and the other sports, about thirty in all. And tennis, simultaneously, began to display violent volleys and a generally combative type of play which raised its character level with the other spirited sports. Down through the closing years of the Nineteenth Century and out into the Twentieth swept the brilliant phalanx of sports.

An enormous impetus from the World War compelled the college managements to organize several teams and crews in the same sport, graded according to physical characteristics, and thus we had at last the condition, long advocated by many an athletic system, in which all students participate as players.

Today with collegians rowing, running, riding, batting balls with bats, rackets, golf and hockey clubs and lacrosse creases, fencing, and fighting in intramural games on every floor, court, field and space available in a college plant, we are told that fewer and poorer men are competing for places on the intercollegiate teams and that the attendance of spectators at the latter is dwindling. Apparently the athletic talent which formerly concentrated on the representative major sports is now distributed all along the line of the thirty sports. And undeniably a few men with the physical equipment to make great intercollegiate athletes are distracted by other diversions, the tea dance, the motor ride, the house party, and the week end out of town. As for the decline in undergraduate spectators, naturally collegians playing games, however casually, prefer to play their own games than to sit and watch other fellows play theirs, and so today the former college spectator is playing tennis, golf, rowing in a shell, or away on social diversions.

AND where are the alumni who once came miles to see the games? They, too, have been affected by the same conditions. Today they are playing in games of their own, or enjoying the recreations made possi-

ble by the automobile. Then, too, they look askance at the present quality of the college games, for the alumnus in these days is exacting. He demands perfection of performance or he is not interested. The casual or imperfect game may be played "for sport's sake" but it will not be watched for "sport's sake." There are too many other and more interesting entertainments. The athlete is an actor. He is vain. He requires throngs and cheers to perform, to excel and to win. Without them incentive weakens, skill deteriorates, spirit and vim become merely casual. Thus the deterioration in sports becomes a cycle. Performance becomes poor and the spectators go elsewhere. Without the spectators performance becomes worse.

"WHAT is the remedy?" the collegians are asking. Some colleges are seeking it by transferring their games from Saturdays to late Friday afternoons. These institutions number over 100 colleges, one-fourth of the entire number in sports. Among the more prominent of these are Buffalo, Detroit, Grinnell, Dayton, Oglethorpe, West Virginia, Mississippi, Sewanee, Whittier, Duquesne, Catholic, Marquette, Wabash, Alfred, John Carroll, and Presbyterian. "Small colleges," you will say. Yes, small in some respects but large in others; apparently unable to compete with Saturday's local counter attractions. Other institutions, notably Lafayette and Washington and Jefferson, will experiment with a football game this fall at night.

Is there a need for a remedy? Is this slump final destruction or only a

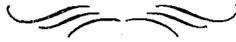
temporary eclipse? History is full of other periods of similar athletic recessions. There is no amusement older than athletic games. Out of the twenty-second chapter of Isaiah, written about 750 years B.C., comes the reference: "He will turn and toss thee like a ball," and out of the Sixth Book of the Odyssey of Homer comes another quotation: "Then having bathed and anointed well with oil, they took their mid-day meal upon the river's bank, and when satisfied with food they played a game of ball." Ball games apparently possess age. "Bobbie" Jones, home from Hoylake this summer and riding up Broadway through a storm of paper flakes, between a gauntlet of 300,000 admirers, presented only a modern picture of Chorobis, winner of the Olympic Games, 550 years B. C., being escorted home from Olympia by a throng of 50,000, whom his native city in honor received through a breach in the city's walls. Yes, they "over-emphasized" sports, perhaps, 2,500 years ago. But what other institutions have lived for 2,500 years and over? And changed so little?

If Chorobis could have attended the intercollegiate games of all America last June he would have recognized every event on the programme except the pole vault and the hurdles.

IN THE days when the practice of archery was the mainstay of warring England, the kings endeavored to prevent competition from games afield by prohibiting them. Thus, Edward III issued an edict which is still extant in the Close Rolls, 12 Edward III, in which he prohibited "*manualem, pedinam, baculoream et*

ad cambucam.” Devotees of modern sports afield will recognize beneath these names in law Latin handball, football, hockey and golf. But the youth of England played on. In 1389, Richard II forbade “all playing at tennise, football and other such importune games.” But the youth of England played on. During the reign of Henry IV, the proscription again appeared, this time enunciated in Norman French. But the youth of England played on. Fourteen years later the baby King, Henry VI, proclaimed in quaint English, “The King forbiddes that na man play at the futball.” But the youth of England played on. Henry VII and Elizabeth also launched at the sport their royal disfavor. But the youth of England played on. And so will the youth of America. But the citadel of sports and games will some day be transferred from the colleges to the public schools.

In the colleges today and all days are men of rugged bodies and rugged temperaments. These are the men upon whom the enticements of modern youthful life can not make a commanding impression. They are men who would rather plunge through a scrimmage line than dance a fox-trot in a road house; who would rather smell the pungent odors of a training house than the cigarette smoke of a night club; and who would rather race through the glare of a cinder track than speed down a concrete highway in a glittering automobile. These men engage in athletic contests because they love them, because the joy of physical effort and the will to excel and to win are integral parts of their characters. Since the days of Chorobis there have always been an abundance of these men and they are here today. And these are the men who will maintain college sports until different days.



Sailing the Main

BY CHARLES B. DRISCOLL

Some College Boys Made Good as Pirates

THERE was a time when a college man, if he didn't like the fare, the curriculum, or the mathematical professor's face, could go pirating to sea, and make a name for himself.

There were many college men among the pirates who sailed the Spanish Main. Some of them achieved glory, and a few took their last good look at this fascinating world from the vantage point of a gallows platform.

Strangely enough, pirating seems to have appealed to medical students more than to men in any other course of training.

There was Peter Scudamore. He was always an adventurous fellow. He was a hard worker, too, and always was willing to take on a little more than the essential offices of his calling. In his student days in London he was known as a most original and enterprising student of surgery. One night he led a party of four students that went to the Thames and cut down the bodies of two pirates that had been hung up in chains as a solemn warning to evil-doers.

Scudamore chose a wild and stormy night for this exciting adventure. From such a storm the watch would

seek shelter, he reasoned, and well. But in such a storm it was hard and dangerous work to scale the gibbet and bring down the heavy bodies, weighted with their neat chain harnesses. The students did it, but one of them broke a leg in the effort, and Scudamore laid this patient out on the dock and set the broken bone before attempting to get away with the grewsome prizes.

SO SCUDAMORE became a hero to his class and his chums at school. He took great pride in his dissection of the pirates, and boasted, upon graduation, that he knew more about the anatomy of a pirate than any other landsman.

Going to Bristol, his home town, as if intending to practice surgery, Scudamore soon had an opportunity to ship aboard a merchantman as ship's surgeon. He sailed in that capacity for three years, with varying fortunes. The more he saw of the sea, the better he liked it. He achieved a reputation for successful operations at sea, and his services were much in demand.

So he sailed as surgeon aboard the *Mercy*, under Captain Rolls. The *Mercy* was captured by the