Amateurism and American Sports Culture: The Invention of an Athletic Tradition in the United States, 1870–1900

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Popular wisdom has it that amateurism is the original, pure state of sport. Every four years during the Olympics a bevy of sportswriters and cultural commentators credit the ancient Greeks for having initiated competitive athletics out of a deep, genuine love of sport for sport's sake and as an appropriate activity for praising their gods. In stark juxtaposition, contemporary labour–management disputes in American professional sports evoke diatribes about the 'corrupting' influence of professionalism. In 1995 distinguished *New York Times* journalist Robert Lipsyte lamented that sports now 'show us spoiled fools as role models, cities and colleges held hostage and games that exist only to hawk products'. Not only do athletes 'stand for anything beyong themselves', but the connection between player and fan has been 'irrevocably destabilized'. 'Instead of sports,' he writes, 'we happily root for cartoons competing in athletic theme parks fueled without apology by violent thrills and endorsement dollars.' Although Lipsyte identifies Americans' loss of faith in the promise of sport during the late stages of the Vietnam War ('Vietnam punched the lights out of manhood'), such statements about the 'corrupting' influence of commercialism and professionalism on sport are nothing new.[1]

Since the mid-nineeenth century there has been a persistent tension about the preferred American sporting ethos which has vacillated between the extremes of amateurism and professionalism. Over the years, the debate has been closely entwined with national memory. As historian Warren Goldstein has argued in his history of early professional baseball, sports exist on both linear and cyclical levels. The former charts the organizational and institutional developments, the latter revolves around the repetitive and generational relationships which have remained remarkably consistent throughout the past century and a half.

In short, every generation has its doomsayers. Consider how the following four random statements from 1868, 1915,1927 and 1944 affirm Lipsyte's 1995 assesssments:

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> somehow or other they don't play ball nowadays as they used to eight or ten years ago ... I mean that they don't play with the same kinds of feelings or the same objects they used to. The sordid element of baseball as a business has cast a shadow over the sport.

Players make too much money and become spoiled, one journalist thought, parading about in their automobiles like princes, posing at caberets and trotteries as little tin-gods.

> Today the players regard the game in a different light ... It is a means rather than the end. It has become a business with the boys, who play for the income.
>
> The player of today is too unwilling to exert himself ... [Once established] he then falls into an indifferent pace. He somehow becomes very satisfied with hiself and coasts along.[2]

Most people cling steadfastly to the notion that 'professional' sport as the latecomer only quite recently eclipsed the 'original' amateur ethos even though sport historians have demonstrated that as far back as ancient Greece, sports promoted gambling, cheating, profiteering, privilege, and exclusivity. Neither the ancient Greeks nor their western European descendants had any conception of 'amateur' sport. Professionalism – money prizes, cash payments, and wagers – was the norm for most athletic competitions of public note. Certainly nobody in colonial or antebellum America ever claimed that sports built character, inculcated the spirit of fair play, or shaped the national identity. Although early sports were local, participatory, irregularly scheduled, and loosely organized, most events *were* accompanied by fervent gambling and valuable prizes for the winners. The line between amateurism and professionalism was not even drawn in America until the early 1870s, by which time the nation's leading sport, baseball, was firmly within the professional orbit.

Nineteenth-century amateurism was an 'invented tradition'. As the rallying cry of late nineteenth century institutionalized sport, amateurism represented an attempt to draw class lines against the masses and to develop a new bourgeois leisure lifestyle as a badge of middle and upper-class identity. The amateur ethos was, moreover, an ideological reaction to a well-established professional sporting tradition in the United States. The rising bureaucrats of the movement used the amateur ethos as a mechanism for institutionalizing their social prejudices into resilient athletic structures. During the early 1870s they directed their energies toward the professional, immigrant-working class sport of track and field, then shortly thereafter to the more familiar environs of collegiate athletics. By the last decade of the century, the amateurs were enlisted in the emergent Olympic movement.

Throughout this process of gaining the hearts and minds of the national sporting culture, the amateurists sought to 'restore' the lost innocence of sport before the advent of money and business. Even though the notion of original purity was largely a myth of their own creation, they sold a vision of an orderly, genteel, harmonious world of sport and healthful recreation, open to all classes, but under the benevolent governance of principled, manly middle and upper-class men like themselves.[3]

Professionalism before the Bureaucrats

For most of the nineteenth century, American sport had yet to be monopolized by either corporate wealth or a fledgling amateur system dominated by college presidents, retired military brass, civic leaders and alumni associations. American sport up until the 1890s was democratic and pluralistic; as Ted Vincent has written, 'a grocer or saloon keeper had as much chance as a millionaire of producing an event that grabbed headlines in the national sporting magazines'. An early sports patron, John Stevens Cox, offered a thousand dollar prize in 1835 to any man who could run ten miles in less than hour, and three hundred more if the goal was reached by one man only. The idea originated in a substantial bet with fellow millionaire, Samuel L. Gouverneur. Henry Stannard, a farmer, beat a butcher, carpenter and house painter an won the sizeable cash prize worth several years' wages.[4]

Commercialized racing (or pedestrianism) was a huge success through the 1850s, particularly in New York City, where for a dime urban workers, gamblers, prostitutes and hustlers could see the swiftest runners from Britain and America. Immigrant and working class athletes, most notably the New York Caledonian Society, promoted pedestrianism and awarded substantial cash prizes to the winners. Such track and field competitions epitomized the established commercialized sporting tradition dating back to colonial times.[5]

Harness racing was the single most popular sport of the early nineteenth century for the privileged classes. The most famous race of the century pitted a northern horse, 'Fashion', against the southern horse, 'Peytona', at the Union Course in Long Island before nearly 100,000 spectators. By the 1820s boat races, too, attracted thousands of spectators. Four-to-six man crews raced for as much as $20,000, and individual bettors occasionally risked tens of thousands of dollars.[6]

Boxing, cockfighting, and billiards were the most popular sports among the urban, working-class sporting fraternity whose members were bachelors or spent most of their time apart from their families. The bachelor sports culture was part of the urban world of saloons, gambling parlours, brothels,

firehouses, theatres, and militia company headquarters where men drank and caroused in open defiance of Victorian values. Prizefighting under the bare-knuckle rules was the favoured sport of this underground culture. Boxers were ethnic and neighbourhood heroes, leaders of tough street gangs that provided muscle on election days for machine politicians. Boxers competed in a loosely organized but lucrative professional circuit. In this same milieu, cockfighting and animal baiting contests were organized by saloon keepers, particularly in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Boston where workers paid from twenty-five cents to a dollar to watch such contests.[7]

Organized team sports were the late-comers to the American sporting scene. A wide variety of simple bat, ball and base games were played throughout the colonial period into the first four decades of the nineteenth century, yet most did not attract serious attention.[8] The most popular early team sport was cricket, which failed to gain widespread acceptance due to the underdeveloped ball-playing tradition in America. Whereas England had a long heritage of ball-playing by young adult males, Melvin Adelman explains that such activity only became popular in the United States during the early nineteenth century and even then it was basically an amusement for children. In short, cricket failed because 'it was too advanced and too institutionalized for a society that lacked a manly ballplaying tradition'.[9]

Baseball surged to the forefront of American team sports just as cricket's popularity peaked. During its first generation the game was highly unstable. Three out of four teams went out of business within two years. Early professional baseball clubs were group enterprises run by local townspeople and club officials. Athletes themselves organized and promoted the young business.[10] The game reflected the values of the urban workplace and served as a kind of halfway house for artisans and clerks who were moving from traditional work environments to rationalized, industrial capitalist ones. Early reporters used the language of self-disciplined productive craft labor to describe successful play.[11] Journalists and commentators showed little interest in the experience of 'true sport' or 'pure play'. They appealed, according to Warren Goldstein, not to a particular concept of leisure, but rather to the standards of the workplace.[12]

The game became increasingly dominated by people committed to top-flight, openly professional play during the 1860s. Clubs had charged admission fees, played for large purses, and even secretly paid salaries to star players since the late 1850s. By 1867 it was well known that the leading clubs paid their starting nine players either salaries or shares of the gate receipts. Professional baseball depended upon business management, gate receipts, and the paid labour of players, but none of these commercial manifestations aroused serious public indignation or debate.[13] In fact, even

though some newspapers and sports journals differentiated professionals, amateurs and muffins, such distinctions were based on skill level, not economics. By this reasoning, as Adelman suggests, professional players were simply the most proficient, not those that were paid, although players on the top clubs earned between six and nine hundred dollars a year.[14]

Professionalism evoked minimal controversy. Several newspapers, like the *New York Times*, argued that professional baseball was an obstacle to equitable competition and posed questionable moral dilemmas. However, only after the nation's first fully professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings, abandoned 'professionalism' for a type of 'amateurism' in 1870 did any sustained critique emerge. The 'amateurist' objections mostly opposed professionalism on the grounds that it threatened an alleged competitive balance and a perversion of the functioning of clubs that elevated star players above the general membership. Even though twenty-six clubs formed the National Association of Amateur Base Ball Players in 1871, the social relations of early 'amateur' baseball resembled much more than they differed from the professional game. Minus an explicit paycheck, the amateur baseball clubs held tournaments, raised funds for travel, separated play from management and elevated star players over universal club participation. The *Spirit of the Times* criticized professional top-flight play as a system 'simply calculated to benefit nobody but those who chose to make a regular trade of that which can never be to millions anything but a sport and a recreation'.[15]

America's first important sports journalist and leading baseball authority, Henry Chadwick, maintained that the entire debate was non-productive since professional baseball was a *fait accompli*. In his view it was a legitimate occupation and any 'evils' resulted from parasitic gambling interests, not paying players for their services. The majority of the sports press concurred with Chadwick. The early governing body, the National Association of Base Ball Players, provided organizational stability to professional play, and with the formation of the National League in 1876, the pros continued to dictate the major changes in the rules and styles of play. Thus, the early appeal to a separate world of sport and recreation was the latecomer, wholly unprecedented and as Goldstein suggests, only arose after baseball play became baseball work.

Even early collegiate athletics (in what would become the sacred realm of amateurism) were remarkably commercialized until the 1870s. In 1852 a railroad entrepreneur, sensing potential profits, transported the Yale and Harvard crew teams to a meet and initiated commercialized collegiate sport and the considerable gambling that accompanied it. Within less than a decade, as sport historian Ronald Smith writes, 'the prestige obtained from winning, the honor brought to the college, and the interest of the public in

the physical prowess of the educational elites were all in existence'.[16] The pivotal event was a 1869 Harvard–Oxford race on the Thames River. Spirited renditions of 'Yankee Doodle' and 'God Save the Queen' were sung by a festive, patriotic crowd of nearly one million. The event convinced the *New York Times* editors of the seriousness of the occasion in the development of big-time, commercialized collegiate sport; the paper devoted extensive coverage and lengthy editorials to the contest that Oxford won by a mere three lengths.[17]

Collegians also received very valuable prizes in crew and track and field competitions. Harvard crews won expensive black walnut oars and silver goblets were worth twice an average labourer's annual income. During the 1860s Harvard competed for purses as high as five hundred dollars in various Boston regattas. Dartmouth College offered such prizes as opera glasses, silver inkstands, silverware and special editions of the works of Macaulay, Milton and Shakespeare in their early 1870s track meets. This was quite in keeping with the amateur rules well into the twentieth century; the value of the award did not matter, only that it could be inscribed or engraved.[18]

As early as 1866 the Harvard University nine was one of the strongest teams in the country that played the leading New York professional baseball teams. The faculty neither frowned on the game nor objected to the team playing professionals. By 1869 Harvard played a full spring schedule, beating the Athletics at Philadelphia 35 to 21 and besting the Nationals at Albany 58 to 17. Harvard finished the season with a 30 to 11 loss to the nation's leading professional team, the Cincinnati Red Stockings. Yale played sixty percent of its games against professionals between 1868–74; and in 1870, Harvard won thirty-four games and lost only nine – eight against professional teams.[19]

The Emergence of the Amateur Ethos

Across the Atlantic Ocean a new elitist sports movement brewed simultaneously with the growth of American collegiate athletics. Invented by Oxford and Cambridge students and institutionalized by the London-based Amateur Athletic Club, which defined 'amateur' synonymously with 'gentleman', upper-class British sportsmen alleged that their 'social inferiors' could not comprehend the ethos of amateurism and fair play. They proclaimed that exclusion was 'the only way to keep ... sport pure from the elements of corruption ...[namely] the average workman has no idea of sport for its own sake'. The English apostles of amateurism created a myth and sanctioned their new practice in timeless tradition by connecting their new ideas to the ancient Greeks, even though the latter neither distinquished

between amateur and professional, nor entertained such novel Victorian goals as 'fair play'. Philosopher Paul Weiss discerns that the distinction between a nineteenth-century amateur and professional was 'mainly a line between the unpaid members of a privileged class and the paid members of an underprivileged class'.[20]

As in nineteenth-century England, most American colleges scorned but tolerated sports since they were run by students and were only unofficially connected to the institutions. William and Mary students pursued hunting, horse racing, and gambling. Eastern private colleges made rowing the most popular sport between the 1840s and 1860s. The first collegiate baseball game was played in 1859, as Amherst trounced Williams 73–32. Students developed their own extracurriculum usually in open defiance to the *in loco parentis* of their school's administration. As Ronald Smith documents, young college men used what they believed was an inalienable right to structure an intellectual, social, aesthetic, and physical world of their own. By the mid nineteenth century the extracurriculum of fraternal rituals, student government, newspapers, and football rushes was transformed into the lifeblood of student social and physical life.[21]

Amateurism quickly spread to elite American colleges in the early 1870s. Influential spokemen for the view that American intercollegiate sport should remain strictly 'amateur' solidified this doctrine for the public through their writings and speeches. Even though Yale, the nation's leading athletic power, had integrated many professional features, their unofficial football coach and father of the American game, Walter Camp, promoted the English gentleman model as the preferred exemplar for American collegiate sport. 'A gentleman does not make his living from his athletic prowess,' Camp proselytized. 'He does not earn anything from his victories except glory and satisfaction ... A gentleman never competes for money, directly or indirectly.'[22]

The collegiate athletic scene was only one, and perhaps not even the most important arena, within which the merits of amateurism were debated in late nineteenth-century America. Devoted apostles of amateurism outside academe upheld 'pure' English amateurism and lambasted American collegiate abuses of that noble dream. The first cogent argument for strict amateurism was presented in 1872 in a pamphlet written by William B. Curtis. As co-founder of the New York Athletic Club and editor of *Spirit of the Times*, the leading sports journal to champion the amateur cause, Curtis modelled a sports mentality on the English elite. Prior to Curtis's editorship, the *Spirit* had covered professional pedestrianism for several decades – a policy that Curtis summarily ended. Curtis and his compatriot John Watson, another journalist and member of the Schuylkill Navy Athletic Club of Philadelphia, defined 'amateur' as 'any person who has never competed in

an open competition, for a stake, or for public money, or for admission money, or with professionals...nor has even, at any period of his life, taught or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises as a means of livelihood'. Certainly such standards were at odds with the acquisitive, individualistic, materialistic sensibilities of the Gilded Age.

Curtis and his colleagues quickly institutionalized their ideas and stole the spotlight from the once well-established professional pedestrians. Amateur track and field soon had the Olympics, as well as competitions arranged by colleges and the new Amateur Athletic Union (AAU), which monopolized quality coaching, facilities, and public legitimacy. A rising first-generation of gentlemen amateur bureaucrats recast the popular working-class spectacles for future upper-class sport enthusiasts. Lingering puritanical suspicions that athletics were nothing more than a conspicuous waste of time mandated the rising amateur bureaucrats to cleanse and re-package sports with appeals to higher moral purposes. In so doing, the new generation of sports promoters closed class ranks so as not to appear as 'inferior tradesmen, apprentices, and other dissolute persons neglecting their trades and employments'.[23] Athletic elitism blurred the fact that the amateurs were decidedly inferior to the professionals and were barely equal to the quasi-amateur athletes who performed at the massive picnics of ethnic and working-class clubs. In place of local heroism and money prizes, the sanctified amateurs were given prestige, as Vincent cleverly observes, much the same way the Wizard of Oz solved the problem of the cowardly lion by bestowing a medal. By the 1920s track and field ceased to be something working-class people dabbled in on holidays and weekends.[24]

The dialogue that arose within the New York private athletic club community gave rise to the AAU – the cutting-edge and most enduring legacy of the early amateur movement. There were several ill-fated, New York-based amateur regulatory bodies formed during the 1870s. In 1879 the National Association of Amateur Athletes of America was founded, but with the departure of the powerful New York Athletic Club (NYAC), the fledgling organization folded in 1887. On 21 January 1888 the NYAC, along with the Amateur Club of the Schuykill Navy and fifteen other clubs, established the AAU, and by the summer of 1889, gained control of the amateur movement. The following year, AAU legal specialist, Colonel Abraham G. Mills, proposed a reorganization plan that would change the AAU from a union of individual clubs to a union of regional associations, with the United States sectioned into five geographical areas. Mills's proposal was ratified and shortly thereafter the AAU assumed principal control over track, lacrosse and basketball but ceded jurisdiction of collegiate football, soccer, baseball and rowing. With the creation of the AAU, all college runners, jumpers and throwers were obligated to register

with the Union. In less than a decade the AAU moved rapidly to consolidate its power, despite the fact that its influence was wildly uneven outside of Chicago, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Baltimore and New Orleans prior to World War I. In so doing, as John Lucas has recently written, it 'created an atmosphere of both fierce loyalties and persistent opposition'.[25]

The amateurists' early *negative* attacks on professionalism were, in fact, quite limited. Most critics willingly accepted professionals so long as they did not intermingle with the 'amateurs'. Thus, between the 1870s and early 1890s amateurists honed their message about the meanings of amateurism in the media, collegiate circles, and public debate, and developed organizations like the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) to legitimize their message within collegiate circles and wider society. Early anti-professional sentiments and class bias, however tentative, restricted the full emergence of the professional athlete until the early twentieth century – only *after* the amateur code was firmly established in the emergent Olympic movement. Prior to the 1896 Olympiad, though, amateurists struggled to invent and define their own identity.

The Amateurism–Professionalism Debate

Despite such ambitious organizational endeavours and the myriad published supporting statements, it was clear to many people that amateur sport bore most of the characteristics of the professional model. Yale's athletic budget clearly reflected this trend. The receipts and expenses were managed by the Yale Financial Union under the partisan treasurership of Walter Camp himself. Yale's athletic programme doubled between 1893 and 1903, equalling the combined salaries of 30 professors and nearly equal to the incomes of the law, divinity, and medical schools combined.[26] Thus the amateur–professional 'dilemma' developed. If a college acknowledged outright professional sport, Ronald Smith observes, it lost respectability as a middle- or upper-class institution. Be amateur and lose athletically to those who were less amateur, or be outright professional and lose social esteem. The solution, according to Smith, was to claim amateurism to the world while in fact accepting professionalism.[27] Clearly, amateurism was harder to define in America where class lines were less distinct and more fluid than in the mother country.

Another case in point was the contradictory nature of summer baseball. The White Mountain summer resorts of New Hampshire initiated what for two decades was considered an innocent pastime for college athletes not incompatible with proper amateur standards. In reality, summer baseball was semi-professional entertainment for the very upper middle-class and

wealthy Americans whose children attended the eastern colleges that promoted the amateur ethos. 'In those earlier days,' a New Hampshire newspaper editorialized, 'college ballplayers did not think it at all beneath their dignity to spend the summer at a swell hotel, in exchange for which pleasure they gladly gave their services on the diamond and cared not who knew it.' At the conclusion of the summer baseball season the players were paid by 'popular subscription' without fear that the practice compromised their collegiate eligibility.[28] By the turn of the twentieth-century summer ball for pay was one of the most charged issues in intercollegiate sport, second only to the debate about football's brutality.

The belated question of whether it was acceptable among the educated and socially elite Americans to earn a living by playing summer baseball was addressed during the last years of the nineteenth-century. In 1879 Lee Richmond, a Brown undergraduate, became the first college student to play professional baseball. The debate escalated during the 1880s and culminated in a 1898 conference held at Brown. A group of delegates drafted rules and guidelines that explicitly discouraged summer ball, but were never ratified by individual schools and thus not collectively institutionalized. The galvanizing case was Harvard's Walter Clarkson, a young man from a wealthy Cambridge, Massachusetts baseball-playing family (two older brothers played in the major leagues; one, John Clarkson, was a Hall of Famer). After consecutive losses to their chief rival, Harvard, a Yale athletic adviser investigated Clarkson's summer exploits, but ultimately could not secure affidavits that he had been paid to pitch in a New England summer league. Clarkson had been solicited by the Camden team of the Knox County (Maine) summer league with strict promises of anonymous cash payments, all expenses paid, and hosted by 'the best [of local] society'.[29]

The Clarkson case illustrated the difficulty of obtaining anything other than circumstantial evidence to disqualify a college athlete on the grounds of professionalism. Moreover, the ambiguous situation encouraged creative efforts to defy poorly enforced eligibility thresholds. The most prevalent tactics included playing under assumed names or receiving weekly compensation for phantom jobs like waiters or casino attendants. *McClure's Magazine* writer Henry Beach Needham concluded that in summer ball there was 'more lying and subterfuge than in any other evil connected with intercollegiate athletics'.[30]

During the same year, another journalist launched even more penetrating criticisms about the volatile state of American collegiate amateurism. The 'high finance' of eastern collegiate athletics, Clarence Deming believed, created 'an atmosphere of wealth' that represented an apt microcosm of larger society. The student 'must not enter a contest for the smallest money

prize', he acknowledged, but the athlete could accept endorsement money from tobacco companies or a college subsidy for score-card privileges that enabled athletes to keep the entire proceeds from the sale of programmes at games. 'He will be told...that all this is but a reflection on the academic life of the mania of materialism in the outside world,' Deming wrote, but shrewdly recognized that 'not so often [is the athlete] told that, even if such is the fact, it rests upon the culture, the refinement, the scholarship, and the ideals of the universities to set the pace toward the opposite pole'.[31]

The summer baseball question was debated into the twentieth century but never resolved. Summer baseball for pay persisted. During his senior year Walter Clarkson signed a contract with the New York Yankees. The Harvard dilemma illuminated the perplexing relationship between amateurism versus professionalism in American sport.[32] In the English society that gave birth to the amateur ethos it would have been inconceivable that a college athlete would have turned professional. However, even in elite American circles, a Clarkson could and did sell his baseball skills in the sports marketplace.

How can the failure of 'pure' amateurism in nineteenth-century American collegiate circles be explained? Smith, the recognized authority on American collegiate sport, attributes the development to deep ideological differences between Britain and the United States. Just as many Americans opposed the English aristocracy with its House of Lords, landed nobility, privileges and pensions, they also ultimately refused the tenets of amateurism, since 'achieved status in colleges and in athletics became the American way, rather than the ascribed status' of England's elite universitites and their athletic programmes. In particular, as Smith writes:

> The English amateur system, based upon participation of the social and economic elite and rejection of those beneath them from participating, would never gain a foothold in American college athletics. There was too much competition, too strong a belief in merit over heredity, too abundant an ideology of freedom of opportunity for the amateur ideal to succeed. It may be that amateurism can never succeed in a society which has egalitarian beliefs. It may be that amateur athletics at a high level of expertise can only exist in a society dominated by upper-class elitists.[33]

Thus, the amateur–professional dilemma existed from the very beginning in American intercollegiate athletics. Americans practised a form of professionalism while simultaneously cloaking their actions in the ideology of amateurism that resolved the status problems endemic to late nineteenth-century society.

This argument has its merits. Certainly critical cleavages existed

between American and British society. Contemporary commentators advanced such arguments for American athletic exceptionalism; Ralph Paine proclaimed that 'the whole difference [between English public and American private school athletics] lies in the fact that in England athletics are ruled by the spirit of sport; in the United States, by the spirit of competition'.[34] But even though Britain was officially ruled by a monarchy, elitist attitudes were passionately challenged and negotiated with a strong, egalitarian working-class movement that elected labor party politicians.

More importantly, the English amateur sports establishment itself harboured deep internal ambiguities. The Oxbridge amateur ethos was the exception rather than the rule of the nineteenth-century British sporting scene. Originally developed as an amateur and character-building sport by the public schools, football was rapidly proletarianized during the early 1880s and acquired all the institutional and ritual characteristics with which we are still familiar: professionalism, the League, the Cup and so forth. Hobsbawm identifies the defeat of the Old Etonians by Bolton Olympic in 1883 as the symbolic turning point that was widely recognized by contemporaries as a class confrontation. Similarly, Richard Holt finds the key shift in the amateur question during this same juncture with the formation of the Football League in 1885 and the split between Rugby Football Union and Northern Union in 1894 over broken-time payments so working-class players could have the leisure time to compete with wealthy young men. With overt professionalization, Hobsbawm writes, 'most of the philanthropic and moralizing figures from the national elite withdrew, leaving the management of the clubs in the hands of local businessmen and other notables' much less sympathetic to the amateur ethos. In short, professional football dealt a crippling blow to English amateurism when the sport was taken over by the proletariat and their business patrons. In the process, as sport sociologist John Hargreaves writes, workers transformed these sports into 'a means of expression for values opposed to the bourgeois athleticist tradition'. A disdain for constituted authority and official rules, a preference for monetary rewards, and a hedonistic, festive element were all brought to British mass sports by working-class athletes in open defiance of the Oxbridge amateurism that Smith claims was so hegemonic.[35]

Americans were no less 'amateur' in their orientation than the British. Smith's argument for American exceptionalism, however intriguing, fails to recognize that amateurism was (and is) more an ideological construct than an actual set of practices and agreed-upon rules. Amateurism was, indeed, an 'invented tradition' which according to Hobsbawm, is 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the

past'. Amateurism, like the other invented traditions of the period, legimitized certain beliefs, values, institutions, and social relationships.

The invention of amateurism thus must be understood within the larger context of how a national middle-class elite was formed during the late nineteenth century. Hobsbawm astutely discerns that as class borders became more fluid and increasing numbers of people in both Britain and the United States identified themselves as 'middle-class', the problem of defining a national elite of the upper-middle classes became highly problematical. 'Since the middle classes were par excellence the locus of social mobility and individual self-improvement,' he notes, 'entry to them could hardly be closed.' The problem entailed establishing an identity and class presence for the relatively large mass of those who neither belonged to the elitè nor to 'the masses'. Amateurism provided a needed class presence and ideology for a rising generation of middle-class sports leaders. It was no coincidence, then, that the institutions (academe and private athletic clubs), the individuals (educated, socially mobile white males), and messages (meritocracy, fair play, respectability) of the amateur movement reflected similar vestiges of middle-class identification in America's Gilded Age and Progressive eras.[36]

Amateurism Triumphant

Just two decades after its introduction, amateurism seemed doomed by the early 1890s. The AAU's control of such sports as track and field and basketball meant little to the larger sporting public whose principal loyalties were for professional baseball and big-time (professionalized) college football. Basketball, invented in 1891, was in its infancy and track still retained its Old World, immigrant associations. Mere organizational legitimacy was insufficient for an overwhelmingly professional-oriented sporting culture. Moreover, by the late 1890s there was scarcely a college which preserved 'pure' amateurism in men's sport. Competition for money and status, contests against professionals, collection of gate receipts, support for training tables, provision for academic tutors, recruitment and payment of athletes, and the hiring of professional coaches pervaded the intercollegiate athletic scene.

During the 1890s the public debate about 'amateur' sport focused almost singularly on the brutality of collegiate football. Scores of injuries and several well-publicized deaths on the gridiron led many concerned, influential members of the middle-class to call for the game's abolition. Yet, at its bleakest moment, two apologists for the amateur ethos, Caspar Whitney and James Sullivan, emerged and effectively saved the movement from its own contradictions and abuses.

Caspar Whitney was the most influential sportswriter of the turn of the century and America's most dedicated apostle of amateurism. Born into a

middle-class Boston family in 1861, he became a versatile athlete at St. Matthew's College in California, where he captained the football, baseball, and lacrosse teams. He also boxed, fenced and wrestled. After graduation in 1879 Whitney spent five years travelling, exploring and writing in the West. In 1888 he became the regular feature sports columnist for *Harper's Weekly*, a post he occupied until 1899. Less than two weeks after his death in 1929, the *Nation* wrote in a reverential obituary that Whitney was 'almost the first writer of culture and ability to deal with sports, then not considered worthy of serious treatment in the chief dailies of the country'. His opinions received 'the widest circulation', particularly his advocacy for fair play and sport for the joy of the game, for which 'a whole generation of Eastern college men grew up in lasting indebtedness to him'.[37]

Whitney was zealously dedicated to elitist English amateur sport. His most influential writing for *Harper's* grew out of an 1894 trip to England. His explorations of British sport were presented in a multi-part series entitled 'A Sporting Pilgrimage', and were published in book form in 1895. According to Whitney, English college sports were untainted with commercialism, the winning-at-all-costs mentality, and the attendant eligibility scandals that characterized American collegiate sport. 'It is simply a tradition that the colleges and universities shall be represented by athletes from the student body,' he wrote, and 'no one thinks of asking why, or attempts to evade the prerogatives of custom'. As was the case in most of his essays, Whitney could not resist drawing a moral. Americans do great harm to college sport by making it merely another business venture – 'money, money seems to be the cry, and it will be the curse, if indeed not the downfall of honest university sport'.[38]

Whitney's amateurist advocacy revealed his strident anti-working class sensibilities. He was openly contemptuous of working-class athletes, whom he described as 'vermin' and the 'great unwashed' who lacked 'the true amateur instinct of sport for sport's sake'. He pleaded for a return to the 'halcyon days' of the 1870s when 'amateur' was still defined in strict class terms, and 'amateur contests' were restricted to 'the better element'. It was evil, he argued, to 'bring together in sport the two divergent elements of society that can never by any chance meet elsewhere on even terms'.[39]

Clearly, Whitney's sentiments belie Ronald Smith's explanation of the 'failure' of American amateurism. Even though Americans tended to practise professionalism while cloaking their actions in amateur garb, there were the true believers, like Whitney, whose polemics contradicted any uniquely 'American' ideological claims of indifference to the elitist English model. To be sure, Whitney was not some fringe idiosyncratic element in American journalism. Prior to purchasing the nation's most influential sporting magazine, *Outing*, in 1900, he was *Harper's* correspondent to the

Spanish-American War, and would later fulfil a similar assignment as a World War I correspondent for the New York *Tribune*. Moreover, his nine books and editorship of *Collier's* 'Outdoor America' and the *American Sportsman's Library* conferred upon Whitney an international reputation.

Whitney did not yet know while writing his 'A Sporting Pilgrimage' series in 1894 that he would soon discover his sporting utopia, a magnificient athletic festival intended for 'the more refined elements' and which ultimately legitimized the amateur ethos: the modern International Olympic Movement of Baron Pierre de Coubertin. Whitney was to become the second American ever appointed to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and was president of the United States Olympic Committee from 1906 to 1910.[40]

James Sullivan was the most important American amateur sport bureaucrat between 1900 until his death in 1914. As indicated in his *Dictionary of American Biography* profile, he was America's 'first sports czar'. Born in New York City to Irish immigrant working-class parents in 1860 (less than a year before Whitney), Sullivan embarked upon a journalism career with a job for Frank Leslie's publishing house in 1878. Sullivan founded the first track and field publication, *Athletic News*, in 1880, and between 1889–91 became business manager and editor of the *New York Sporting News*. Sullivan reached the pinnacle of his editorial career when he became president of the American Sports Publishing Company in 1892, a post he held until 1914, wherein he edited the highly influential 'Spalding Athletic Library' series.[41]

Unlike Whitney, however, Sullivan's influence transcended the print media. Sullivan became the chief powerbroker of American amateurism through a distinquished career within the fledgling sports bureaucracy. As an ambitious 25-year-old he was elected president of the Pastime Athletic Club (NY) and was the Club's delegate to the nation's ruling amateur athletic body. As the first secretary of the AAU in 1888, Sullivan quickly established a reputation as a fierce and resolute defender of the 'pure' amateur code. He served stints as president and secretary-treasurer of the organization between 1906–14. Sullivan also helped form the Public Schools Athletic League in New York, as well as headed the athletic competitions at both the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and the 1904 St. Louis Exposition that hosted the third Olympic Games. As historian Stephen Hardy notes, Sullivan used the amateur athletic movement as a status vehicle to rub elbows with select elites. He stressed the importance of 'gentlemen, leading citizens and business men' to the organization and success of the amateur movement. But, unlike Whitney, as Hardy points out, Sullivan's mission was not class specific, since he argued that the AAU should be broadened and that 'athletics should be for the masses and not

[just] for the classes', provided that the masses were organized under the AAU structure of bourgeois respectability. Hence, Sullivan devoted feverish energy to solidifying the AAU's authority by designing the athletic 'sanction' notion, which gave the union monopoly powers.[42] Sport historians have been seduced by Sullivan's impressive resume but have failed to critically examine the deeper connections and inconsistencies that illuminate a very different picture of American amateur sport around the turn of the century. We would be well-advised to consider an important article written in 1910 by America's first Olympic gold medalist, James B. Connolly. He shrewdly recognized that behind the façade of orderly, efficient, moralistic banner of amateurism was a handful of self-interested, power-hungry men, like Sullivan, who were elected to the local and national AAU boards, but pursued policies to suit themselves. Connolly demonstrated how most New England clubs were 'fake' ones controlled by a half a dozen men and their 'safe' friends. The pursuit of lucrative gate receipts lured *not* the enemies of amateurism, but 'its very priests' to provide the best athletes with 'under-the-table payments' and valuable gifts. For instance, New England AAU boxing and wrestling meets often awarded gold watches – known among athletes as 'stock' watches – since the following day the prizes went back to the jewelers' stock once the athletes returned them for cash. According to Connolly, AAU officials handled the watches and 'knew both their origin and destination'.[43]

Sullivan was intimately connected to this 'scandal'. As a full-time employee, he was well-placed to do great service for the 'House of Spalding' – the powerful firm intent on becoming the leading athletic goods trust in America. Although the ostensible project of the AAU was to promote the amateur athletic spirit, Sullivan's position as handler of the Spalding firm's advertising predisposed him, according to Connolly, to promote 'that grand American idea, the [Spalding] Trust'. With the 'Spalding Athletic Library' that carried instructions for various sports, Sullivan oversaw the publication of 'voluminous Spalding advertising wherein Spalding educated the public that everything good in athletics had some connection with his house'. Sullivan's colleagues went along as well. Luther Gulick, national chairman of the AAU basketball committee, stipulated that only Spalding balls and baskets were to be used in championship games; otherwise the referee was to declare a game void.[44]

In short, Whitney and Sullivan played the role of popular intellectuals and social leaders for amateur sport, who, in the words of cultural historian Andrew Ross, patrolled 'the ever-shifting border of popular and legitimate taste', supervised the passports, the temporary visas, the cultural identities, the threatening 'alien' elements, served the deportation orders, and who occasionally made their own 'adventurous forays across the border'.[45]

Conclusion

Despite the long entrenched legacy of professionalism, American sport by the early twentieth century embraced the tenets of amateurism. On the surface, amateurism was riddled with contradictions that neither corresponded with dominant turn-of-the-century American values, nor the ideological justifications of 'modern' sport which elevated equality, specialization, rationalization, professionalization, commercialization, and quantification. Adelman identifies the impetus for the professional-amateur dilemma in terms of the changing nature of sponsorship of sport contests. What distinguishes early professional sport from contemporary forms was a shift from irregular, private sponsorship to regular, full-blown commercial sponsorship. With the notable exception of baseball, the erratic, limited growth of early professional sports' organizational structures – particularly track and field – made them vulnerable to a hostile take-over by the rising bureaucracy of amateurism.[46] This emergent group of amateurists articulated a class-biased critique of professionalism in terms of the ways it corrupted 'true' sport through the exploits of working-class athletes, who were unschooled in the virtues of the amateur ethos. Sport, they argued, should be a recreation, not a business. With privileged social, economic and political connections, this rising generation of amateur spokemen effectively institutionalized their biases into resilient athletic structures, and thus defeated a more popular but yet unorganized group of professional sport promoters.

The revival of the Olympic Games solidified amateurism by linking it to a burgeoning American nationalism. Unquestionably, the Olympic Games have been the grandest effort to promote this ideology of amateurism and sport for sport's sake. Prior to 1896 amateurists promoted a negative case against commercialized sport. Western elites resuscitated the ancient Games in 1896 as a form of 'invented tradition', a strategy that, according to Eric Hobsbawm, established the legitimacy of national cultures by helping citizens understand the relationships between the state and 'the people'.[47] As such, Olympic spectacles provided the much-needed grist for cultural commentators and sports journalists, like Whitney and Sullivan, to invent a virile national sporting identity that, they believed, reflected America's institutions, social structure, work ethic and racial superiority.

After international sport gained legitimacy in 1896, amateurists shifted their rhetoric to a more positive tone and attacked professionalism much less than they had during the 1870s and 1880s. Amateurists had won a major tactical victory over professionalism, since no American sport (except possibly baseball) could boast the nationalist cause. In hypocrisy, commercialism, jingoism and greed, they sold the illusion of amateurism's

purity to an expanding American sports-minded public during the early twentieth century. Not until the 1960s could professional sports challenge amateurism's hegemony in the public mind. While contemporaries and historians have long recognized the shallow and corrupt *material* interests of amateurism, this essay illuminates the attraction of the *ideal* interests to so many Americans for the past 120 years. Americans have tolerated the corrupt core of amateurism precisely because of the progressive and nationalist forces of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made the ideology an *American* obligation.

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NOTES

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2. Quotes taken from Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps: a History of Early Baseball* (Ithaca, 1989), p.1; and Stephen Fox, *Big Leagues. Professional Baseball, Football, and Basketball in National Memory* (New York, 1994), p.92.
3. Warren Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, pp.125–6.
4. Ted Vincent, *Mudville's Revenge: The Rise and Fall of American Sport* (New York, 1981), p.4; and Jennie Holliman, *American Sports, 1785–1835* (Durham, NC, 1931), p.154. For overviews of colonial and early American sport, see William J. Baker, *Sports in the Western World* (Urbana, 1988), pp.82–114; Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Spectators* 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1990); Elliott J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports* (New York, 1993), pp.3–46; Holliman, *American Sports*, passim; and Hans Peter Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Toward Recreation in Early Seventeenth Century New England* (Frankfurt, Germany, 1982).
5. Gerald Redmond, *The Caledonian Games in Nineteenth-Century America* (Rutherford, NJ, 1971); Vincent, *Mudville's Revenge*; and George Moss, 'The Long Distance Runners of Ante-Bellum America', *Journal of Popular Culture* 8 (1977), 370–82.
6. New York *Herald*, 5 May 1845.
7. Gorn and Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports*, 55–75. Gorn has written extensively on the working-class bachelor subculture. See his seminal work *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America* (Ithaca, 1986), and his articles including: '"Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch": The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry', *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 18–43; and '"Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American": Homicide, Nativism, and Working-Class Culture in Antebellum America', *Journal of American History* 74 (1987), 388–410. For recent perspectives on the burgeoning field of the history of American masculinity, see Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (eds.), *Meanings of Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago, 1990); and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993).
8. Robert W. Henderson, *Ball, Bat and Bishop: The Origin of Ball Games* (New York, 1947).
9. Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics,*

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10. The classic chronlogical accounts of early baseball are Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York, 1960); and David Q. Voigt, *American Baseball: From Gentlemen's Sport to the Commissioner System* (Norman, OK, 1970). A useful, brief survey is Benjamin G. Rader's *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana, 1992). Besides Adelman's *A Sporting Time*, the two most important recent works on the game are Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*; and Robert F. Burk, *Never Just a Game: Players, Owners, and American Baseball to 1920* (Chapel Hill, 1994). The vast literature of America's most heavily documented sport is cogently reviewed in Adelman, 'Captain Voigt and American Baseball History', *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 23 (1989), 285–301; and Larry R. Gerlach, 'Not Quite Ready for Prime Time: Baseball History, 1983–1993', *Journal of Sport History* 21 (1994), 103–37.
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12. Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps*, 23–4.
13. Ibid., 4–5.
14. Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 161, 160.
15. Goldstein, *Playing for Keeps, passim. Spirit of the Times*, Nov. 26, 1870, 232.
16. Ronald A. Smith, *Sports and Freedom: The Rise of Big-Time College Athletics* (New York, 1990), pp.33–4.
17. Ibid., pp.40–1. Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 196.
18. Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, p.106.
19. Seymour R. Church, *Base Ball: The History, Statistics and Romance of the American National Game From Its Inception to the Present Time* (Princeton, 1902), pp.27–8.
20. For a detailed study of the mid-nineteenth century invention of the amateur myth, see David C. Young, *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (Chicago, 1984); and 'How the Amateurs Won the Olympics', in Wendy J. Raschke (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympics and Other Festivals in Antiquity* (Madison, 1988). Allen Guttmann examines this ideology in a broader historical context in 'The Belated Birth and Threatened Death of Fair Play', *Yale Review* 74 (1985), 525–37. Weiss quoted in Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, 167.
21. Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, pp.13–25.
22. W.C. Camp, *Walter Camp's Book of College Sports*, pp.1–2.
23. Vincent, *Mudville's Revenge*, p.62.
24. Ibid., p.69.
25. Arnold W. Flath, *A History of Relations Between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States, 1905–1963* (Champaign, 1964), pp.7–25; and John Lucas, 'The Hegemonic Role of the American Amateur Athletic Union 1888–1914: James Edward Sullivan as Prime Mover', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 11 (1994), 359.
26. Clarence Deming, 'Athletics in College Life', *Outlook* 80 (1905), 570.
27. Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, p.171.
28. The White Mountain Echo, August 20, 1904.
29. Henry Beach Needham, 'The College Athlete: His Amateur Code: Its Evasion and Administration', *McClure's Magazine* 25 (1905), 262.
30. Ibid.
31. Deming, 'Athletics in College Life', 572.
32. The rise of the professional coach was the other major force in the early movement in American intercollegiate athletics to adopt the professional model. Although Yale's crew team introduced the pro coach as early as 1864, with Bill Reid's tenure as Harvard football coach in 1905, it became clear that the professional model produced victories and national prestige. See Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, chapter eleven and Smith (ed.), *Big-Time Football at Harvard, 1905: The Diary of Coach Bill Reid* (Urbana, 1994).
33. Smith, *Sports and Freedom*, p.172.
34. Ralph D. Paine, 'The Spirit of School and College Sport', *Century* 71 (1905), 116.

35. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.288–9; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (London, 1989), pp.103–7; John Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (New York, 1986). See also J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge, 1981); and *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (New York, 1986); as well as Stephen G. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class* (Manchester, 1989).
36. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp.1, 9, 291.
37. *National Cyclopedia*, p.284; *Dictionary of American Biography*, v., pp.21, 704–5; and *Nation* 128 (1929), 121.
38. Whitney, 'A Sporting Pilgrimmage', *Harper's Weekly* 38 (1894), 398–9.
39. Whitney, *A Sporting Pilgrimage* (New York, 1895), pp.166–7; and Young, 'How the Amateurs Won the Olympics', 58–9.
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42. Hardy, 'Entrepreneurs, Structures, and the Sportgeist', 66.
43. James B. Connolly, 'The Capitalization of Amateur Athletics', *Metropolitan Magazine* (July 1910), 443–54.
44. Ibid., 448.
45. Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York, 1989), p.5.
46. Adelman, *A Sporting Time*, 244, 285; Hardy, 'Entrepreneurs', passim. For the authoritative discussion of 'modern' sport, see Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York, 1978).
47. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp.299–300.