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A GENERATION OF ATHLETICS\*

THE subject of athletics is one upon which every member of a university and every former member feels that he is an authority. But there is a phase of the subject which has not received general attention, namely, the progress that has been made in athletics in the last generation. When we hear stories of the deeds of our ancestors—the fathers of our country—or even of the deeds of skill and endurance of the alumni of our University, we are likely to conclude that though we may have a monopoly of intellectual ability, yet we are deficient in physical skill and strength as compared with our predecessors.

I suppose that athletics give us the best if not the only test of the physical condition of a people, for the very essence of athletics, and that which differentiates them from other forms of physical effort, is the fact that they may be measured by feet and inches, by minutes and seconds, or at least by points. In the two former cases, these standards of measurement are constant, and thus the records made years ago are capable of comparison with those made today. I have chosen a generation, rather than any other division of time, chiefly because the greatest advance has been made in

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\*A paper read some months ago, at the University chapel service, by Dr. James Naismith, professor of physical education.

that time but also because the beginning of that period is the time when we began to have a system of scoring athletic events of such a character as would make a comparison between the past and the present of any real value.

In my endeavor to show how progress has been made, I shall proceed in four lines which manifest progress: first, comparison of the records of 1876 with the records of today; second, comparison of the variety of events which claim the attention of athletes today with the variety in '76; third, comparison of the number of persons who take part in these various sports today with the number who were interested in them in '76; fourth, comparison of the organization for the carrying on of sports today with the organization of that time.

Taking up the first branch of the subject, if we compare the records of '76 with the records of today we shall find that they stand as follows:

	1876	TODAY
Shot-put .....	30 feet, 11.5 inches	49 feet, 7.25 inches
Hammer Throw .....	75 feet, 10 inches	173 feet, 7 inches
Pole Vault (1877) .....	7 feet, 4 inches	12 feet, 5.5 inches
Running Broad Jump.....	18 feet, 3.5 inches	24 feet, 11.75 inches
Running High Jump.....	4 feet, 10 inches	6 feet, 5.62 inches

To be sure, these are events which require skill and in which we should naturally expect to find improvement along the line of a better knowledge of the application of the laws of mechanics, physiology, and even psychology through the training for and conduct of the event. However, great improvement has also been made in the runs—in which the preceding generation was supposed to excel. A comparison of the records shows the following:

	1876	TODAY
100 yards.....	11 seconds	9.6 seconds
220.....	23.5 seconds	21.2 seconds
440.....	56 seconds	47.75 seconds
880.....	2 minutes 16.5 seconds	1 minute 53.4 seconds
Mile.....	4 53.8 seconds	4 15.6 seconds

Records which stand out even more prominently than these

are made by our high school students of today. In fact, a comparison shows that from a physical standpoint our high school student surpasses the college student of a generation ago. Take for example, the records made last year in the high school contests of the city of New York:

	High school record	Better than 1876 record by
Pole vault.....	9 feet 10 inches	2 feet 6 inches
Running broad jump	21 feet 2 inches	2 feet 10.5 inches
Running high jump..	5 feet 6 inches	7 inches
100 yards.....	10.4 seconds	.6 seconds
220 yards.....	22.8 seconds	.8 seconds
440 yards.....	52.4 seconds	3.6 seconds
880 yards.....	2 minutes 5.4	11 seconds
Mile.....	4 minutes 40.6	18 seconds

While it may be humiliating for our former champion to be compared with high school lads of today, yet we must in justice to the present generation push him back even another step, and compare his records with those of present day pupils in the elementary schools. The records of '76 are not regarded as anything wonderful for the grammar school students of New York.

In the contest of the elementary schools, the record for the running high jump is five feet, two inches, or three inches better than the record in this event made in the meet of college students in 1876. In the running broad jump, the record of these elementary students is eighteen feet, eight and a quarter inches, or almost five feet better than the intercollegiate record of thirty-two years ago. The record in the one hundred yard dash is eleven seconds, which, if we allow for the difference in timing, is about four tenths of a second better than the college students' record. These are the only events in which comparison can be made, as the long distance races, the heavyweights, and the hurdles, were omitted from the schoolboy contest.

There is still one lower class of present day students whose records may be compared with those of the college student of former times: the eighty pound class in the grammar

school. Comparison here can be made in only one event, the running broad jump, and in this the youngsters made seventeen feet, or only one foot less than the intercollegiate record of 1876.

Let us now consider the variety of events in athletics. Previous to '76, the only event which interested the college world was rowing. From that date to the present there have been added sports of various kinds until now the chief sports are divided into major and minor sports. The list of college sports and the events in which there are intercollegiate contests are, football, baseball, track, and rowing—the major sports—and tennis, basketball, rackets, handball, waterpolo, bowling, hockey, lacrosse, cross country running, gymnastics, and fencing. While not all of these are carried on at each institution, yet some colleges take part in a large number. Besides these, there are several games that are as yet purely intracollegiate; but they may ere long be made intercollegiate. Such are rifle shooting, swimming, wrestling, and boxing. Variety of contests at an institution shows progress in the true line of sport.

In some of the smaller colleges, the same persons contest in football, baseball, track, and even in basketball. While this may show a wonderful versatility and skill in the particular individual yet it shows that there are too few taking part in the games and that the standard of excellence is low, for it is a very exceptional person who can do more than a few things well. The criterion of progress in this matter is the ability of athletes to meet the changing requirements of those who are to be considered. If then the schoolboy of today can beat the student, who has not had the needful training, there is no chance for legitimate competition in that event at least between the trained and the untrained.

It is necessary, therefore, to have some game or form of exercise in which those who have not had the opportunities to become skilled may meet others of the same athletic ability. Today there seems to be no pleasure for the un-

skilled to compete with the skilled nor any pleasure for the skilled to compete with the unskilled. Again, there is a tendency for the expert in some particular branch to make sport of the unskilled; consequently there is an aversion to taking part in that particular sport. Then, there is a tendency for the skilled to claim the privileges of the equipment in that in which they excel and thus deprive the unskilled of the opportunities for acquiring ability, though the latter need the development. There is a tendency for us to make too much of the contest as a means of glorification and too little of it as an incentive to acquire perfection.

The third point to be considered in this discussion is that there are a greater number taking part in athletic sports now than there were a few years ago and that not merely small gains, but tremendous strides have been made. It was only a few years ago that there were only a few colleges represented in intercollegiate contests, and the rowing association thought that they were crowded when they had ten crews competing for the honors. Now any college is behind the times if it cannot put on the field at least a football and a baseball team, and the great majority of the colleges compete in several forms of athletics thus interesting a greater number of men. There are entered in the relay races of Pennsylvania a hundred and seventy-five college and school teams, and this is a new form of sport.

It has been only a few years since there was no concerted action to institute athletics in the high schools. Today the interscholastic events are looked upon as being almost as important as the intercollegiate. An excellent illustration of this is seen in our own state where the attendance at the interscholastic has increased notably. What is true of Kansas is true of nearly every state today.

But the campaign has gone still further, and the elementary schools are so organized and directed that every city of any size has its athletic league. Some statistics about the numbers taking part in these may be interesting. In the city

of New York last year there took part in the annual tournament: in the running high jump, 868; in the weight events, 956; in the relays, 1,698; in the running broad jump, 1,810; in the sprints, 9,643; in all, 15,133, which added to the 1,200 who were entered but failed to appear makes a total of 16,333 grammar school athletes who were competent, at least, to enter a contest. This number is sixteen per cent of the total number of boys in the New York schools.

Besides these, there were 106 baseball teams entering the tournament; 294 boys who entered the swimming contests; 94 teams of basket ball. What is true of New York in this matter is true of the most of the large cities, and this too in crowded cities where land is valued by the square foot instead of by the acre.

Fourth, let us consider the progress in organization of athletics. The first attempt at organization was in 1872, when a call was issued for a meeting in New York. Twenty-seven rowing clubs were represented, and the National Association of Amateur Oarsmen was instituted with sixteen members, all the other clubs refusing to join. The chief object of this organization was to draw a line between the amateur and the professional oarsman. The opposition to this organization was bitter and the fight hard, but the amateurs kept gradually drawing the line closer and closer. It is to this organization that we owe our interest in track athletics and our athletic organizations of today. At their regatta, held at Saratoga in 1874, there was a track contest put on as a side attraction. There were only five events and a few colleges competing.

Next year the citizens arranged the meet and had ten events. This meet was more popular than the preceding and set the college men to thinking, so that before the next regatta there was an intercollegiate athletic association. This association took charge of the meet in 1876, and from this time on we have had annual meets with authentic records.

This organization soon had more competitors than it could

accommodate, and in 1885 there was organized the New York State Association. In 1886, the New England Association was perfected. In 1893, the Middle Western Association came into existence; and in the same year, the Pacific coast had its organization. Every section of the country now has its organization controlling athletics in that section. At one time the number of these organizations became so great that their very multiplicity produced chaos in athletics. To meet this condition, there was organized, in 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association the aim of which is to unify conditions and rules to such an extent as to give, as nearly as possible, a uniform basis of competition. This organization includes, with a few exceptions, all the larger colleges and universities of the United States. The association has been divided into six sections with a representative in each section.

This is one of the most important steps that has been taken; for the history of athletics shows that the colleges are the natural heads of athletic interests. As the influence of the athletic clubs decreased, the influence of the colleges increased until today the colleges set the standards for athletics. The grammar school boy looks forward to the high school, and the high school student looks forward to the University. With this opportunity comes a responsibility for the proper ideals in athletics. It is not right that the ideals of the college should be lower than those of the high school or the grammar school; yet the college must awake or the path of the athlete from the grammar school to the university will be one of ethical deterioration, for the standard which is held up to the grammar school boy is of a very high order. He is drilled in what is termed athletic courtesy; that is, that he must never take any advantage of an opponent which does not come from an increased knowledge of the game or the skill acquired in its performance. Thus he is taught to consider himself first a gentleman and secondly an athlete.

There were given last year 2,563 athletic badges which signified that the wearer was an "all around" athlete as

shown by a test; that his scholarship was at least of a II grade; and that his deportment and attendance was I.

The Intercollegiate Association has an opportunity to unify the athletics of America into a great system which will be a credit to the college world and an honor to the nation.

There are three factors which seem to me to have had an influence in the progress of athletics during the past generation, and which will work for a further progress if directed aright.

First, in the life of a student there is need for some form of exercise. President Eliot said of the student of the eighties that he was a person of undeveloped muscle, a bad carriage, an impaired digestion; without skill in outdoor games; unable to ride, row, swim, or shoot. Exercise is for such a one a necessity.

Second, the life of a student gives the opportunity for acquiring skill at the same time that he is getting his needed recreation, and it is failure to recognize this point that leads to a scarcity of athletes in any university.

Third, there is an enthusiasm for, and a loyalty towards, his Alma Mater which leads a student to make sacrifices for her, that no mere reward could call out. The contest on an athletic field calls out, and indeed ought to call out, the same spirit which actuated our fathers when they sacrificed home, friends, and even life itself to maintain the honor and integrity of our country.

If, then, the college is to fill its position in the athletic world, and not to enter a period of decadence, as so many organizations have done, it must foster that kind of athletics which will accomplish the greatest good to the student body, by utilizing the elements which have made for progress in the past, and by maintaining such ideals of athletics as will appeal to the leaders of the country, and to the fathers and mothers of the athletes in high school and grammar school.