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THE FUNCTION OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS

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THE FUNCTION OF COLLEGE ATHLETICS.*

CHANCELLOR JAMES ROSCOE DAY, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY.

Your secretary has relieved me of some responsibility, as well as no little perplexity, in assigning the subject of this paper.

I have been a sympathetic observer of college athletics for sixteen years, although never an athlete. My only experience was with baseball at the preparatory school, the sum of which was one hit by the ball and one hit by the bat. The ball landed under my eye and left its mark for some days. But it always has been a satisfaction to me that they never found that ball after it was hit by the bat at its next attempt at my eye.

When I went to Syracuse University we had no football field nor track for field sports. We had not so much as bleachers upon which to accommodate spectators. Almost my first work was to secure an athletic field and grandstand. Mr. John D. Archbold, the president of the board of trustees asked me what I wanted the field for. I replied, "So that the students may work off their surplus energy on themselves and not on me."

My first observations as a college president showed me that there was a surplus energy in the young men. And it seemed to me that it could not be suppressed, and if it could be, it would be most harmful to suppress it. It should be directed and allowed full swing. Indeed, it should be developed and cultivated, for it was something that could be worked up into scholarship and manhood.

Our great gymnasium and magnificent stadium at Syracuse are simply a declaration of our confirmed judgment that athletics have an essential and fundamental place in college work, and that they are vitally related to scholarship and manhood. The man who gave us our first field and grandstand is the man who gave us our gymnasium and stadium. He belongs to a class of men in this country well known for the keen discernment and sound wisdom with which they estimate values by practical results.

Athletics have a place in college life and training. They belong to sound learning. They are not an excrescence but the fibre and essential integrity of the best educational system and plan.

The college deals with the whole man and must have the whole man. It must work over his blood corpuscles that the best kind of physical condition may enter the class room and laboratory. Men think with their blood and they must have the best blood possible. Whatever enters into the wholesome structure of the blood is essential to scholarship. The bone, the muscle, the nerve,

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the circulation, the respiration, the secretory functions, all are intimately related to study and sound thinking. They are agents which the mind uses. Whatever promotes them renders invaluable service to the mind.

Therefore Greek is debtor, Latin is debtor, mathematics, the empirical sciences, the modern languages, philosophy, the professions,—all are debtors to athletics. The best scholastic results have always had to take account of physical exercise in some form. If in these days the colleges are supplied with generous facilities for physical development, it is due to the spirit of an age that is gathering up essential things and concentrating them into the most economical expressions of energy and utility and making them practical at all times to the largest number.

But if athletics have a place in college, what place have they? If what I have said is true, their place is with the students and not with the treasurer. Their office is to serve the students and not to advertise the college. They are for the college only as the students are for the college.

It is a notorious fact that athletics have been used by many institutions for purposes of advertising pure and simple. You gentlemen have found it difficult to resist this mercenary purpose upon the part of some of the institutions. They have sent out their agents into preparatory schools. They have enlisted their alumni for so-called scholarship aid. They have bribed star athletes away from other colleges. They have played ringers. It is an old story. The iniquity has been measurably corrected. It is not a regeneration, however; it is a suppression. It has to be watched continually. There are institutions that will not play or row with some other colleges whom they fear, because if beaten it would hurt their prestige and decrease the advertising value of their teams or crews.

The serious part of this is that it reduces athletics to a few star performers, secured by special inducements and by excessive professional training, who can most successfully act the part of college advertisers. Everything is sorted, culled and selected for the eleven men who can beat in the game. The only encouragement is to him who can beat. The only incentive is the goal posts. Two hundred or four hundred men are sacrificed for the great autumn advertisement. And upon the result announcements go out of great colleges and minor colleges, of big colleges and little colleges. For two months the colleges are billed like circuses and their players are discussed as star performers.

If one resists such a revolting aspect of college life and urges brains instead of massed muscle, he is held up as a patron of mollycoddles and told that such things belong to women's colleges.

It is difficult to say how the spirit of beating can be sanely directed so as to secure the stimulating effect of competitive

skill and not permit the accident or skill of a goal to be the measure of college merit. At present winning seems to be the only measure of a contest. It is that for which we look from the kick-off of a football game. Every play is measured by its distance from the goal posts. The explanation is in human nature and you would have to pull up the constitution of man to eradicate it. How far colleges can afford to go into such arena entertainments and make a spectacle of themselves is a question that has perplexed many college presidents who are neither fossils nor mollycoddles.

Certain it is that whatever appropriates college athletics to the show business and degenerates them into a mere college advertising medium should be resisted as undignified and as defeating the large and wholesome purpose of serving the entire student body.

Of a piece with the advertising is the money consideration. This is too obvious for discussion. Gambling and betting are of the same quality of degeneracy. Gate receipts have been the price at which honor has been sold.

Some strong men have sought to correct these two tendencies by urging the elimination of intercollegiate games with their admission fees and sporting features. It may come to this. It will not come until we all appreciate the fact that athletics are for the students first, last and all the time.

How far do intercollegiate contests serve the whole student body of a college?

That they promote college spirit and loyalty no one can doubt. That they have pulled obscure colleges out of back towns and given them a reputation to which they had not attained in other ways is true. But whether the college spirit could not have been given a more wholesome development and whether the reputation for physical training and athletic prowess is the best for colleges whose work is the development of character, intellect and high morals, is a serious question.

Which is the greater value to the students? How far should the students be sacrificed to the entertainment of the public? To answer these questions, you must study them from the inside.

What is the effect of hiring a coach at a greater salary for the time served than the president of the college receives, as is true of nearly all of our larger colleges and universities, and the use of methods that look only to the development of eleven stars of first magnitude and eleven more of second magnitude for exhibition purposes? How often have we seen the one or two hundred men fade away from the football field as soon as the places on the team have been allotted.

How far does an expensive training table, to which twenty-five or thirty men are taken, help to promote a general interest among

the hundreds whose inefficiency is announced in every meal that is served to those whose skill has secured this "stall feed"? Is it the function of college athletics to develop the few or the many? And is it not true that intercollegiate sports are largely defeating the general purpose of athletics in the colleges and promoting foolish rivalries, gambling and a classification of college merits upon altogether wrong principles?

If athletics are for the students they should be so diversified that an adaptation may be made to all classes of students. In a body of students, large or small, a natural classification will be dictated by taste, by muscular strength, by nervous energy and by apt skill. All cannot play football. Some would spurn lawn tennis. All cannot row. Some are not agile enough for basket ball. Some cannot participate in field sports. No sport should absorb the attention and the money of the institution. All should have right of way. All of the forms of athletics except one should not be compelled to sit down with folded arms until that one has played out its season, especially when that one recruits for only nine or eleven men. It should be the work of the athletic department to schedule the whole student body so far as requirements apply, not simply for the monotonous drill of the gymnasium but for all of the sports known to college athletics.

The whole body of students should be enlisted, classes against classes, chapters against chapters, students against alumni where the latter can be used. And the number and variety of the sports should be limited only to the aptitude and taste of students.

A gentleman came into my office a few years ago and inquired how many crews we had on the lake. I told him three, possibly four. He said: "I am a graduate of Cambridge, England. How many do you think we have there? We have one hundred and five." And he said that this characterized their athletics in other departments. That seemed like a great strain on the little river Cam. That was the enthusiasm of aquatic sports where they have not room to row but have to "bump" each other out of the contests.

I hope to see the day when every student will enthusiastically engage in athletic exercises and make a sport of them. Nothing short of this can justify the large expenditures or the place and time given to them. If they do not make better students, they cannot be justified. They are taking money and time that should be devoted to other things. If we have them, it must be for adjunctive scholastic purposes. They must be made to bear upon the serious business of life's preparatory work. They must mix life into inertia, a quickening force into difficult problems and the prosaic tasks of the class room and laboratory.

If athletics are for the students, they must be not only numer-

ously diversified, but of both a harmless and wholesome character.

The lives of the students must not be sacrificed to a sport. Athletic sports must be selected with strict regard to the safety of those practicing them. It must be remembered that the sport is not the end. It is incidental to another end far more important. We lose sight of both the purpose and the proportion when we sacrifice the student to the sport. Any game that kills in different parts of the country college men every season and every year maims a number equal to the attendance of the average American college, should be changed so as to eliminate its fatal features or be excluded from our colleges entirely.

There is nothing in healthy physical development or the cultivation of the manly instincts in competitive sports that requires the sacrifice of a single life. All of the results sought in athletics can be secured within bounds of safety to bone and life. The responsibility of offering up lives upon the altar of sport is so great that no college administration can carry it and answer to its constituency. If those who are entrusted with our college games cannot or will not remove those features that have been so fatal to even the best trained athletes, then the college authorities will be compelled to exclude the game from the colleges, for one of the prime functions of college athletics is the development of physical and mental powers and not their destruction.

The game of football has been a fine game and has been justified by many of its qualities. With the public, it is the most popular of any of the college games, but the killing of one man a season would be a toll which it could not justify by all that it ever has done for the colleges. I speak as a friend of football when I say that the colleges can afford to be without football but they cannot afford to have their men killed and maimed in a game that at best serves only a small number, an exceedingly small proportion of college men. It is a game as now played which admits of very few contestants, and those the men who need it least—men of the most robust, vigorous physical powers.

It must be made more of a game and less of a mere pounding, pushing and smashing contest. It must be played more with brains and less with weight and muscular energy.

It is impossible to hurl eleven men at eleven other men in a rush at top speed and with all the energy they can command without the always imminent peril of death or broken bones. The very safeguards against such an impact, of padded bodies, headgears, ankle protectors and nose guards, plainly declare the danger of such a performance. Eleven men rush with their utmost power at the goal posts from and beyond a line midway of a large

field. Eleven other men rush wildly at them, excited, determined upon stopping them at all hazards. The result is told in every college football field in the country. Not one of them escapes the serious maiming of an embarrassing per cent of their players. Some colleges are so crippled as to be put out of the game for the season. Some colleges have escaped fatalities, but only by good fortune, for some of the deaths this year have occurred in the best trained student bodies of the country. Even our Army and Navy schools have not escaped death or terrible accident.

Can the attitude of the colleges toward this great game in the present form be a question any longer?

If it were a game for athletes who earn a living by it, then they might be expected to invest their lives and limbs if they thought the receipts justified it, as men do in the wage or profit pursuits of life that are attended by risk of death or accident, like iron setters, coal miners and seamen.

Is the fact that the game is the great money winner for the colleges the reason that fatalities are excused and palliated and the college authorities, urged by the athletic departments, are hesitant about declaring themselves against a game that reaps such harvests of death among students?

We must keep tenaciously in view all the time the fact that all games are for the students and no game should be tolerated a minute, whatever its gate receipts, that menaces the lives of the students. There is no profit of gain or any return whatever that warrants students in investing their lives in the game or running the chance, for what they can get out of it or do with it, of limping through life on disjointed bones and torn ligaments.

We must remember that we must account for our best men physically. This machine is a Moloch among the finest specimens of the college community—men whose superb physiques are an invaluable endowment for their life work. The college must not be a party to their destruction. There can be no defense for a form of sport that imperils the lives of the best developed and most highly trained athletes of our colleges when the returns are limited to the few of this class and could be secured in other athletic forms without such a terrible price.

I believe that I express the sober but intense thought of the country when I say that it is my conviction that if your honorable body does not make over football so that the colleges may have the game without its death-dealing features, without those plays that maim and cripple the players, it will be the duty of the colleges to exclude the game from the list of college sports.

If we cannot have football without crippling men for life, if we cannot have it without a surgeon on the field to set broken bones, we cannot afford to have it. It will have to be excluded

as a peril that threatens our students for which the great common community will hold us accountable.

I would regret to see football excluded, but I would rather never have another game at the university for whose administration I am responsible than that it cause the death of one man in a half century. Men are too valuable for us to pay for them in football. Football is too expensive at that price.

That the fatal features can be eliminated and leave us football—if not what we have, something that will answer the purpose for the students and for the public as a secondary purpose—I have no doubt.

Killing men by football is a comparatively recent invention. It was played in this country for many years without fatalities. The first man killed shocked us, but it was said that he was not trained or was organically weak. Three or four men killed and then a dozen and now fifteen in the colleges and secondary schools in a year is the march of death which has become more deadly by improved rules. And it should be said that some of the rules which have been most deadly have been made by colleges outside of this Association.

It must be possible to create a game without fatalities. If not, then let us adopt Rugby or Association. The California colleges and universities have adopted Rugby with safety to their students and great satisfaction to the public.

We should undertake a radical reform before parents and guardians and an alarmed citizenship appeal to the legislatures for protection. It would be a sorry comment upon the colleges if they found themselves incompetent to grasp the situation of safe athletics for their students, and an infinitely worse accusation if it could be made to appear that they are willing to sacrifice one life among them for gate receipts or competitive advertising.

Every form of athletics should be examined critically with reference to its bearing upon the main purpose of student development.

In general athletics, the distance of rowing and running, the question of training, the contests of the track, the trips away from college work, the dissipation and sporting features,—these all should come under most critical examination by the colleges as having to do with college scholarship.

The adjustment of athletics to the college to secure their largest and most direct function requires a twofold use of them—the one of earnest service, the other of exhilarating recreation. They must be used with careful attention to the sound body as a condition to the sound mind and therefore they should be required. With an elective privilege of athletics in the upper classes, they should continue through the whole college course. The stu-

dent should be studied and athletic training should be applied with intelligent regard to the especially needed physical demands. But the task should be beguiled by sport and relieved by competitive games, all to be estimated and valued by what is seen in practical results, and these results to be tested by healthy scholarship. Do athletics not only relieve the drudgery of work but do they furnish energy and enthusiasm for the classroom and the laboratory? This is the test.

And this leads me to consider a criticism often repeated, flippant and groundless, that after athletics there seems little time in the college for study—"Now that the football season is over there will be time for books for a little while," and "What scholars there would be in the college if it only meant football," or again, "If the enthusiasm of athletics could only be turned into the lecture room."

The charge that athletics are out of proportion to study in the colleges is made without knowledge of the facts and inconsiderately.

There are different expressions of enthusiasm. In athletic games it is noisy and tumultuous. There are bands of music and waving banners and wild cheers and yells.

In scholarship there are none of these. But there is a quiet sacrifice of comfort and hard work and self-denial in vacation to earn the way at college. The enthusiasm is seen in shoveling paths and tending furnaces in winter and caring for lawns and doing odd jobs, selling books and working the farm in summer. It amounts to an enthusiasm, for men by thousands in our colleges are working their way, and though crowded out by poverty they return again and toil on until they make the scholastic goal posts.

The test is in the fact that standards of scholarship were never higher and no concessions are made to athletes in scholarship ranking. The last hour of graduation requirement is exacted to the last minute.

When athletics used intelligently are systematically adjusted, the study habit is promoted and the best results to scholarship are secured.

College athletics have a moral function. They absorb attention from diversions that are not wholesome and engage physical force and restless energy in ways that supplant the vitiating practices that employ the idle and indolent.

The time is spent in the well-equipped gymnasium under intelligent instruction in the many forms of physical exercise and development, in the sport of swimming, in rowing at the machines, at the punching bags, at basket ball, at the shot put, in the bowling alleys, in the ball cages, on the running track, in the

general exercises of the practice floors,—an extent and variety of athletics in the college which the public does not know or appreciate.

And these exercises combine in a most healthful moral force. They prevent much that would be depraving, in place, time and practice.

The student seeks his gymnasium and athletic field instead of loafing places in the town. He learns the relation of his body to his mind and its use as an instrument of power, and learns to prize it and take care of it and comes to feel that he has a sacred responsibility for its condition and best use.

He is under the common knowledge and inspection of his fellow students and is held in wholesome restraint with regard to his bodily condition, and this constitutes a deterrent against immoral disease, while the healthy exercises impart a virility and ambition, a quickened current of life and force, that seek expression in a more active mentality.

Athletics stimulate ideals. The positive moral qualities are brought into play. A fine athlete has a sense of honor; he is made to appreciate the claims of his fellow contestant. He must play the game fairly. Self-restraint and control, patience and fortitude,—in a word, manhood,—are indirectly but forcibly inculcated in the practices of college athletics. If I had a mean, selfish sneak of a man who was a hard proposition for even religion, I would put him into training, as a supplementary aid, among a lot of college boys in the gymnasium and make him play the college games for four years.

May I then sum it all up in a sentence. The function of college athletics is to secure to the whole student body the most healthful physical development in the most exhilarating manner for the purposes of a sound and healthy scholarship by adapting and using all manner of exercises and sports; and for the purpose also of inculcating practical moral ideals and the moral uses of the body in the development of manhood.

And may I urge trustees and patrons of our colleges to give their wisest consideration to athletics as a department of college instruction and not simply to tolerate it, misled by flippant and ill-considered criticisms.

May I urge upon the public press that it assign to the study of college athletics their best-informed men, sympathetic with the best things in college life, and not men who are partisans of given colleges or subject to feelings of rivalries and prejudices. It is a large subject and should be discussed by strong, impartial and competent men of the press. The recent graduate is incompetent.

There is more to it than appears in competitive games. It

appears in every form of college life, in every recitation, in every examination, in the grade of every diploma.

The effort of every college should be to apply athletics in some form to every student; even the crippled and deformed should receive private attention and instruction.

Athletics should be considered a department, absolutely essential, and not an excrescence or an expression of a supervital youthful energy.

They are indispensable to the colleges. They are a responsibility upon the colleges.