

The University Athlete

The School Life of the Athletically Inclined Student

Nebraska's Growth of Athletic Spirit.

The athletic side of University life is coming to be a more and more prominent feature of the college course. Indeed, the relation of athletics to the college itself grows closer year by year. The standing of a college is today judged to a considerable extent by its athletic reputation.

That athletics are growing in favor is nowhere better demonstrated than in the University of Nebraska. In 1900, Coach Booth explained the game of football to the students at a mass meeting in order to arouse interest and thus aid the finances of the athletic board and at the same time secure support for the team. In the past two years no such measures have been necessary. On the contrary, large improvements on the football field have been made from the gate receipts of foot ball games. The financial condition of the athletic department has ceased to be an embarrassing one. A similar growth has been made in other college sports, and at present a far greater percentage of the student body takes part in athletic work than ever before.

How a Man Gets into University Athletics

It will be of interest to notice just how students enter the field of college athletics. There are in general two classes of students who do athletic work in college; viz., those who have taken part in athletics before entering college, and those who have not. The former usually receive their experience in this line in high schools, where they have played a year, two years, or even three upon some team. Most all of these men continue their athletic work after entering college. The majority of them are athletically inclined, and indulge in athletics of their own accord as soon as they are launched upon their college career. On the other hand, there are the freshmen who have never directed their efforts toward any athletic work at all. How do they come to do so now? There are two leading ways in which this is brought about. Many new men take their first step in this line when they register for gymnasium work. A large percentage of college athletes begin their athletic career in the ordinary gym class. They find they have athletic ability, and take a liking to the work. They show up well, are encouraged by minor successes, and receive special attention

from their instructors. They develop rapidly, and we sooner or later see them shift to some phase of real athletics, either indoor or outdoor, and remain there until graduation. This is especially true of basket ball and track team men. Then there is the freshman who makes his advent into the athletic world for the first time on the football field. He may get the fever and appear of his own accord. Ordinarily, though, he is a man of such build and muscular strength that he is good material for the college eleven, and is urged by his friends or an anxious coach or captain to "get out for football," and soon finds himself participating in this sport.

Perhaps a larger proportion of students who have no athletic reputation behind them, try for the "varsity" base ball teams than for any other line of athletic work. This is due to the fact that base ball is the commonest sport, and every freshman has played it more or less at some time or other, even if it were nothing but "ante over." Besides, it is a sport which every boy loves. Students usually enter this phase of college athletics through a desire on their own part to do so. Of these two classes—those who have had, as we might say, prep-work in athletics and those who have not—the former is generally the source of the best college athletes. Nebraska's best football players come from Omaha and Lincoln high schools. Last year's victorious team was composed almost entirely of Lincoln high school representatives.

What the Student Gets Out of His Athletic Work.

That the social side of life is important goes without questioning. Some students go through college without making a wider circle of friends than seventy-five or possibly fifty. We must grant that they sacrifice one of the principal elements of a practical education. This is certainly undesirable. Investigation has shown, however, that such persons are seldom athletes.

In the first place, athletics have a great tendency to further acquaintance. Even in a gym class friendly relations come to exist between the majority of the members in a comparatively short time. This same thing is true to a much greater extent among candidates for a college team of any sort. The men are soon acquainted, and some of the closest ties of friendship are formed in this manner. Nor does this tendency to further acquaintance exist simply among the athletes alone. On the contrary, it is greatly in evidence as between athletes and the student body in general, and often extends to members of the faculty. If a man shows up well on the athletic field, or even appears there, the on-lookers are asking who he is. If he does good work, there is a desire aroused in his fellow students to know him. As soon as a man makes a first team, especially that of football, his name is kept before the public in the press and his reputation is thus advanced. Everybody likes to know the gridiron warriors. They can easily be favorites among the ladies, and are always popular among the boys. They are revered by the younger students, and the entire University body feels indebted to them as "the varsity eleven." During the football season their names are on all the students' tongues, and a large majority of the students can

give the most of the line-up. In short, the football players are among the most popular men of the student body. This same condition prevails in other phases of college athletics, only to a less extent.

The physical benefits derived from college athletics are as a whole most compensating. Even though the athletic work be light, exercise is essential to good health. Success demands a sound mind. A sound mind requires a sound body. It cannot be argued but that, as a general rule, college athletic work is a body-builder and a health-preserver. The thorough, strenuous training which the sprinter or football man receives cannot help but develop his entire body, and strengthen every fibre and sinew. No member of a "varsity" crew or football team will deny that his athletics improve his physique. Many an infirm freshman leaves college a strong and robust man on account of having taken part in college sports. A moment's reflection will be sufficient to convince one that the percentage of illness among athletic students is far below the general average. It is a common law of hygiene that a person who takes a proper amount of exercise is less susceptible to disease than one who does not. When sickness arises among athletes, it almost invariably arises from contagion or infection. Further, it is a well known fact that a trained athlete can endure the privations of disease which others could not withstand.

The third benefit received from being a college athlete is that of moral strength. Nothing will take the backwardness and timidity out of a man like athletics. First team men, as well as second, are continually under the eye of spectators and subject to their criticism or commendation. If anyone thinks that it does not require nerve to appear on the football field for the first time before a sea of faces, and bleachers black with humanity, let them try it. But after a time the men become accustomed to it and mind it but little. Then, too, in college games every man has an opponent. He must continually cope with an antagonist, whether it be at practice or in a regular game. This cannot help but develop grit and courage as nothing else could. It must result in the strengthening of character in this respect. This familiarity with opposition will stand a man in stead when he enters upon his life work, in this age of strong competition in nearly every line.

It is the belief of the author that the evils arising from athletic work are practically none: Injury to health or body and the tendency to make poor students out of men who would have otherwise been good students. If athletic work injures one's health seriously it is generally in the way of a breakdown. This is due chiefly to over-work, or a failure on the part of the person to observe the rules of training. For the former, a coach may sometimes be to blame, but oftener the student himself, either through ignorance or negligence. For the latter, a man must blame himself. But breakdowns in health are usually only temporary, and occur only in but few instances. That there is considerable danger of bodily injury in football must be admitted. Last season several men were killed in this game. Indications point, however, to the development of rules which will make the game less dangerous in the future.

What the Athlete Does after Leaving School.

It may be safe to say that the great majority of college athletes sooner or later drift into business or professional life. A minority of this class of students discontinue athletic work for good when they graduate and enter upon some vocation at once. Many, after finishing their academic work, study law or medicine and continue to take part in athletics until they enter their profession. After this such men seldom do any work of this nature. Some football and baseball men coach for a time after leaving college, but seldom follow coaching for more than five years. After this period, experience has shown that coaches, however good at first, are no longer able to meet with their former success. This is doubtless largely due to the rapid development of college sports and the consequent changes in the rules and methods of play. A few college athletes become physical directors and pursue this line of work for life, but the percentage is very small.

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