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Cross Country

By R. G. CLAPP

All athletic sports, which stand the test of time and the natural reaction from their first wave of popularity, must contribute, to their participants, health, recreation, competition and the development of certain desirable elements of character. Sports lacking these four essentials become a passing fad and are soon forgotten and buried in the next popular wave.

The most important characteristic of the four mentioned above is improved health. In this respect cross-country running is second to none of our popular sports and when indulged in with discretion and wisdom is in a class by itself—no other physical activity giving the same returns in improved general health and especially in the beneficial effects upon the vital organs.

The element of recreation is now being recognized as of far greater importance in all branches of physical training than was formerly accorded to it. In this regard, cross-country running is undoubtedly surpassed by football and baseball, yet it has a fascination which cannot be appreciated by one who has never experienced its thrills.

Require Competition.

The element of competition is, today, an absolute requirement of all athletic sports in this country, although it is an entirely artificial requisite and is only a sign of the excessive nervous development of our race—an element which enters, to an astonishing degree, into almost every activity of the American people. The child strives to the point of nervous breakdown to surpass his fellow in his studies; the merchant must build up a more extensive business than his competitor; the financier wears out his very life to accumulate more millions than his rival; the automobilist wrecks his nerves, and, in many cases, his life and machine to outspeed his neighbor; and the college student considers every exercise stupid which does not test his powers of speed and endurance against those of his fellows. The whole nation has gone "competition crazy," and today no sport can survive in this country that does not develop to a greater or less degree this feature of competition. The very nature of cross-country running and the small amount of competition as yet developed, tend to minimize this feature, however, and tend to dare the ideal aim in athletics—"sport for sport's sake"—an aim which will never be reached in this country until we can eliminate the nervous tension as a race characteristic.

Worth While.

While the whole tendency in athletics in this country is toward the keenest competition and a high degree of specialization, which has a tendency to make a business instead of a sport and recreation of athletics, yet this does have some beneficial effect upon the participants. Anything that is worth doing at all is worth doing well, and the determination to excel in athletics undoubtedly develops in the participant an intensity of purpose, a determination to thoroughly perform whatever is undertaken, the courage which rises to meet every emergency regardless how great the difficulties, and the bulldog stick-to-it-iveness which is an essential factor if one is to accomplish great things in any vocation, and so while we deplore the excessive and altogether abnormal importance put upon the winning of athletic contests, at the same time we cannot ignore the fact that this very evil is developing the valuable above-mentioned qualities to a much greater extent than any other line of college or university training. In the development of these qualities cross-country running is second to no other college sport, although the degree of competition from which it results is relatively low as compared to the more popular "major" college sports—football, baseball, track athletics and basketball.

Status of Cross-Country.

This sport can never compare with football, baseball, etc., as a popular college sport for a number of reasons. First, it is not spectacular and therefore that large majority of the student

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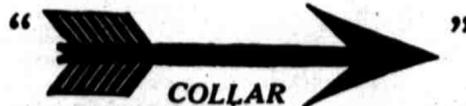
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