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PROFESSIONALISM IN COLLEGE ATHLETICS

By Sam. R. Buck.

The recent altercation between the athletic associations of Minnesota and Wisconsin universities regarding charges of professional baseball playing which were brought by the latter school against Captain Pickering of the Gopher football team is but another example of the rank injustice and unfairness of the professional rule as applied to college athletics.

Not that Wisconsin's motive in preferring such charges is questionable for the rule is on the books, and being there, must be regarded, but there is absolutely no reason why such a rule should ever have been on the books, and it is high time it were erased in view of the progress of collegiate athletics which are admittedly becoming cleaner and more free from professional influences each year.

During the early days of football, some of the more unsportsman like coaches of teams persisted in "fine-combing" the country for big husky men who were placed on the teams to play football. Some of them were provided with "scholarships"; some with "government jobs," and some with out and out salaries. Consequently the question of football supremacy in a certain section became one of money, and the teams of the various colleges did not develop from such material as was bona fide a part of the legitimate student body.

In an effort to stamp out these practices, therefore, the "professional rule" disqualifying any person who had participated in any form of athletic competition for money, was adopted.

The motive in its adoption was perfectly good, but a rule reading in such language could not but affect a great many things which it was not designated nor intended to cover.

It would seem perfectly proper to prevent men who played baseball for money from participating in collegiate baseball; it would seem right to prevent those who received pay for playing football from playing the latter game in colleges, but no reasonable person can see any reason why the playing of professional baseball should interfere with the playing of football, a game as different from baseball as day from night.

A more sane and reasonable rule could be drafted quite easily, providing that professionalism in any particular branch of athletics should bar participation in that particular line, and it is time that athletic associations over the country awoke to this solution of one phase of the troublesome problem. Such a rule would not have robbed Nebraska of the services of McKibben, a marvelous drop kicker; Minnesota would not have lost George Capron or Pickering, and any number of collegiate football men who are good enough to draw salaries of \$150 to \$200 monthly playing baseball in the summer would not be forced to try to elude recognition in order to play, or to work as forty-five-dollar-a-month clerks in some department store.

That there is much infringement of the rule as it now stands is well known and that authorities generally are reluctant to enforce it, quite patent; but when protest is made to them, and convincing proof offered, there is but one course open—the rule must be enforced.

University life should be the most broad-minded, liberal and charitable of all periods of existence. In the university wisdom and foresight are supposed to live and have their being, and that so short-sighted and futile a rule should be published abroad as having emanated from university men is little short of the ridiculous.

Year after year, in certifying the list of men eligible to participate in athletic contests, the governing board of every university in the land is forced to perjure itself, knowingly or unknowingly.

So keen is the competition in this day and age, for positions on the various teams of a great university, that none but he who excels in a marked degree can win a place. In order to excel in any form of athletics it is absolutely necessary that one must have both natural ability and a vast amount of experience. Is it reasonable to suppose that the young man of twenty or twenty-one years of age who turns out in a given fall for the first time in a university suit is wearing a suit for the first time, under the supposition that he possess the excelling qualities named above?

Certainly not. The chances are ten to one that that young fellow has been playing football or baseball or sprinting or what not, ever since he was old enough to run. He has probably played with, against and for men who under the rules are professionals, and although he may never have received anything for it, other than a few dollars from the bleacher fans for a home run in the ninth at some high or prep school game, or on a back lot in a country town have run a race with some professional runner, and been beaten fifty yards in a hundred, that young fellow is a professional and cannot represent his college in athletics, no matter if he be a bona fide student of Phi Beta Kappa ranking for ten years.

Such a rule is patently not only unfair to both school and individual, but is absolutely ridiculous on its face.

That it has existed until Nebraska can no longer put a baseball team in the field that is a credit to the college and not a blot on the conscience of the athletic board, is little short of a disgrace to the intelligence of those who draft, or are content to live by the regulations now in force in this conference and elsewhere.

The writer of this article has been a college man and a follower of college athletics in almost every phase for more than eight years, as undergraduate, graduate and official. He has attended three colleges and universities of as many different types and sizes in as many different sections of the west, and he has visited and is fairly familiar with a great many schools that he has not attended. In all his acquaintance with athletes and athletics in colleges he has never seen or known of a **single team of any sort that could not have been decimated by enforcement of the professional rule.** This applies to the University of Nebraska also, as per example last spring. Yet with the single exception of the case just mentioned, he has never known of a single instance of the enforcement of the rule by those in control of athletics against a member of their own teams.

In all the other cases the board has been content to either deliberately ignore such hints as they have overheard from time to time, or have deliberately closed eye and ear to what is going on around them.

It would seem that the time for that sort of thing has passed. That the day should now be near when college athletics could be run under rules that were not unfair or oppressive, but nevertheless efficacious in preventing real professionalism which in the last analysis as applied to college athletics, should mean, not what recompense others may have offered for the athletic ability of any man, but what he can be proved as having received from the college at which he is playing.

It is time that all bona fide registered and matriculated students, who attend classes with regularity, and maintain a good standard of scholarship without favor and upon their own merits, should be permitted to have an equal chance on gridiron, track, diamond, or floor.

It is time that college athletics should begin to be run, really on the "square." It is time that the "professional" bugbear should be done away with, and replaced by a saner, plainer regulation that would put all athletics at the ordinary university, above suspicion for all time to come.

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