

UNDERGRADUATE COACHES FOR COLLEGE ATHLETICS.

The increasingly important part which College Athletics are playing in the social life of the people of this country has brought inter-collegiate sports under the critical eye of the play-loving public.

The fact that the departments of athletics in nearly all of the colleges are as highly organized as are the academic departments, and that all the students of a college spend a not inconsiderable portion of their time on the field or on the bleachers is justification for this general interest.

While the organization is very generally under faculty control it is usually headed by a coach who may be also director of athletics and who has active charge of the department.

Athletics at nearly all the colleges has been systemized with "lines of communication" between the college and the alumni and preparatory schools. These lines are, on the whole, kept open by the coaches.

It is the system and the method of its operation which has provoked the amazing amount of discussion and controversy during the past few years.

The coaches are nearly all men of splendid type and of a high degree of training for their work. They are, under conditions now existing, able to command salaries much larger than those paid to other members of the college faculty. Unfortunately the average tenure of office of the coach is short, for the reason that he must produce winning teams or his resignation will be promptly called for by alumni and others.

The writer has in mind one prominent coach who has always commanded high salaries but who has made two changes within three years and is now called to a third college at a salary reported to be \$15,000. per year.

The pressure for winning teams becomes so great that the coach may be, and often is, lead to countenance questionable methods of enlisting promising athletes from high schools and preparatory schools. Around this practice of "proselyting" and the abnormally high salaries of coaches the discussion and controversy have centered.

The matter has been a subject of debate not merely in all the Inter-collegiate Athletic Conferences but in those regional College Associations whose functions are purely academic.

As yet no comprehensive plan has been proposed that holds hope of correcting even a few of the more undesirable features of College Athletics not corrected by rules of intercollegiate Athletic Associations.

In the early days of college sports in this country the teams were coached by faculty and alumni who served without pay.

The system has so changed and developed that even the small college now employs four or five coaches at unreasonably high salaries.

But this drain upon the athletic treasury might be accepted as a necessity. It is by no means the greatest evil attendant upon the operation of the system today. The intolerable situation which has been brought about may be found in the effect upon the student himself. Under the present organization the player is never called upon to exercise his wits, his ingenuity or his initiative. He functions merely as a part of a machine. Not a member of the student body now feels a sense of responsibility for the efficiency of the team in any sport. This is clearly contrary to the American idea of education.

An organization incomparably better for students and coaches alike might easily be devised if the colleges composing the several intercollegiate athletic conferences would agree that all teams engaging in intercollegiate contests be coached by students alone. The coaching staff might consist of the Captain of each team together with a Board of Strategy made up of players and other students familiar with the sport.

The disadvantages inherent in such a plan are not insuperable, while the advantages are many and vital in their results.

Examined first from the standpoint of the coaches it will appear that the plan would affect his welfare in a beneficent way. He would no longer be at the mercy of alumni and others who measure his success and usefulness by the number of major games won or lost by a team that is known as his team. Under the present system the life of the coach is at best a precarious one. The proponents of high salaries for coaches justly use this as an argument.

Those who state the coach would gladly exchange his unstable position for the stable one of a college professor with less pay are no doubt speaking in good faith. They would welcome some plan based on this proposal, a plan whereby the coach would become a teacher, and his life the settled and peaceful one of any other member of the faculty.

The time will perhaps never come when the colleges will need fewer coaches. But, instead of using the time and talents of highly trained experts in developing a dozen or so students to a high point of skill in one sport, that high priced and efficient talent would be employed in improving the moral, mental and physical fibre of that large percentage of college men whose only participation in sports is from the bleachers.

The energies of the coaches would thus be directed into channels where they are most needed.

In only a few colleges is it possible for any considerable number of students to participate in intramural sports.

By diverting the efforts of the coaches in this direction the colleges would be making use of an unexampled opportunity.

A team, the creature of the brain as well as the brawn of the student body itself would be truly representative of its college; it would be its very own.

The college instead of buying talent, would be producing it.

The necessity of planning for a season's campaign and for future years, would lay upon the student body such responsibility as would develop mental alertness to an extent now impossible. At present there is no real undergraduate competition. The hired coach furnishes the brains, the wits, the skill, the discipline. The team becomes a mere machine under the control of an expert.

With their lack of responsibility the undergraduates are, in one of the most important phases of college life, denied the most fundamental attainment of a college career, the power of independent thought and action. They are not being developed into power and intelligence but become puppets who move their bodies at the direction of the coach.

It may be asked if the sports loving public would be satisfied with games played with less skill, perhaps, than those they have been accustomed to witness.

Rather would this public be vastly more intrigued with a team which they knew as the product of the minds and bodies of boys who have given of their best in thought and work to making it.

It might be necessary to sacrifice something in the way of students highly trained enough to qualify as competitors in a few inter-sectional contests or in the Olympic games. Compensation would come however, in contemplating the sturdier manhood of the additional thousands of students for whom has been made possible hitherto denied sports under the training and direction of experts.

It is not expected that a plan based on this suggestion would cure all the evils of college athletics, but it would mean progress.

There would be little to risk in giving the experiment a satisfactory trial for if, at the end of a period of years, the proposed plan should prove impractical the colleges could by agreement return to the present system.

The coaches would be on hand and available for the change.

By taking the lead in this the colleges would set an example to the secondary schools, which are beginning to suffer from the system even more than are the colleges.

C. L. Hare,  
Member Athletic Board,  
Alabama Polytechnic Institute.