

Athletics not serving everybody

A CUP special feature

The governing bodies of the variety of federal and provincial athletic associations in Canada have long asserted that they, and the institutions involved, have developed athletic programs which revolve around two basic principles: the need for mass participation and an awareness of the needs of the individual.

In some areas, they have undoubtedly been successful in achieving their goals, but in others, many men and women involved in the application of programs and rules feel that much is still left to be accomplished.

One obvious success story in inter-collegiate sports in this country is the fact that we have resisted the "sport as big business syndrome" which has dominated university and college athletics south of the border for the last fifty years.

The cornerstone of our defence against the trends which have developed in the United States has been the refusal on the part of the Canadian Inter-collegiate Athletic Union (CIAU) to sanction athletes who receive scholarships from individual institutions to play in national championships.

The CIAU, the organization under whose auspices major national collegiate championships are run, states in its bylaws that: "a student shall not be eligible to compete in any union contest who is receiving an athletic scholarship or subsidy from the member he represents, or from any other organization under the jurisdiction of the said member."

Rather than adopting the American format where individual institutions vie for the services of exceptional athletes in fierce bidding wars, Canada has adopted a scheme whereby proficient athletes without the means to attend a college or university to study and perfect their sport or athletic endeavor, will be funded through "third party" or government funding. Individual schools have no say in the assistance that qualifying athletes receive.

The extent to which Canadian athletes are given financial aid is often underestimated, probably because our assistance program is not as visible or chaotic as the American version.

According to Lyle Cameron, director of promotion and communication with the federal development of fitness and amateur sport, over two million dollars will be given in assistance to 900 athletes in Canada this year. Over 85 per cent of that assistance will go to athletes who compete in "game plan" sports that are played in either the summer or winter Olympic Games.

The reason why the CIAU and the appropriate government agencies have rejected suggestions to revert to the American system is due to a different conception of the purpose of inter-collegiate competition.

At most large American universities receipts from athletic events often pay for the school's whole athletic program. The presence of highly skilled athletes reap large financial and promotional gains for the school and they are willing to pay high prices to get them (Ohio state is purported to have a \$600,000 telephone budget for sports recruitment alone).

Under these sorts of circumstances athletes become employees of the institution rather than students with athletic abilities that should be given the opportunity to grow. Financial assistance is not being given because the student has a talent that must be developed, they are being "paid" because of the financial gains that the school might realize because of their presence.

The CIAU has rejected the whole philosophy of sport that is engendered by this system. Institutions should provide athletic opportunities as a service to athletes, rather than having the athlete serving the institution by participating.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare and the fitness and amateur sport department also give indirect subsidies to Canadian athletes through grants to a variety of inter-collegiate



This weight lifter could be the victim of the intramural numbers game.

sports associations. Last year the CIAU, the Canadian Colleges Athletic Association (CCAA) and the Canadian Women's Inter-university Athletic Union (CWIAU) received \$780,000 in assistance from the government.

That is not to say that Canada has become a heaven on earth for young amateur athletes who wish to compete without being bought and sold. Canadian athletic facilities, coaching staffs, and operating budgets are still inferior to those in the United States, but we have developed a support system which is geared to helping the athlete as an individual rather than as just as much more black ink on the ledger sheet.

The question of the funding of inter-collegiate sports is a major issue, but no more pressing in the eyes of most program administrators than the funding of mass participation, intramural athletic activities.

Discussions with intramural athletic directors consistently reveal three things: that the university or college in question has one of the highest intramural participation rates in the country, that the intramural programs rarely receive more than 40 per cent of the total athletic budget, and of that 40 per cent, less than one third is spent on women's intramurals.

The first assertion can be written off to professional vanity, but the other two are actualities which have caused many to question whether we truly have athletic programs which are built to stimulate and facilitate mass participation in athletics.

Assessing whether intramurals are indeed underfunded at Canadian schools is a difficult task. There are no accurate ways of calculating how many students participate in these sometimes loosely organized activities and it is equally difficult to tell if the number would increase if more money were poured into them.

One indication that university and college athletic activities outside of the realm of intercollegiate competitions are not receiving the emphasis that they deserve is the fact that at several Canadian institutions such activities are not even recognized in the general operating budgets.

According to the 1974 figures, figures which still provide a fair representation of the situation according to CIAU and Ontario Women's Inter-university Athletic Association (OWIAA) representatives, an average of 27 per cent of intramural athletic budgets are being spent on women's programs.

Is this simply a representation of the fact that women are not as athletically inclined as men?

Not according to the women's athletic directors at several of Canada's largest institutions. One member of the OWIAA has stated that predominantly male run programs have not recognized the recent explosion in interested and better trained female athletes coming out of high school and athletic club systems. "You could find an institution that feels they (women) are not being equitably treated," said the official, "but it is certainly not an across the board thing."

There can be little doubt that some progress has been made in this area over the past decade, for instance in women's inter-collegiate sports there were no national competitions ten years ago, where now there is a reasonably full slate, but inequities between all areas of men's and women's athletics still exist at our universities and colleges.

According to Mary Lyons, women's athletic coordinator at York university, the fact that some universities still do not have women in charge of separate women's athletic programs, that women's intercollegiate teams still do not receive adequate funding levels at some schools, and the fact that most women's athletic departments do not receive as much in gate receipts to augment funding as many mens teams do, indicates that women's athletics is, in many cases, not receiving the recognition and support that it deserves.

Has Canada developed university and college athletic programs which place enough emphasis on the individual's needs and the benefits of mass participation activity? There is no denying that we can be proud of some of our accomplishments, but until athletic involvement is recognized as being an essential part of a well-rounded education for all students, and is funded and organized accordingly, we cannot claim to have totally achieved those goals.



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