

Looking back

World War II and the intercollegiate sport scene

by Lisa Timpf

The advent of World War II cast a shadow over life at university. With classmates and friends overseas or in training in preparation for entering the action, one might expect that the shadow of death was as much a presence at Dalhousie as the students who continued to pursue their studies.

Not unexpectedly, the war had an influence on intercollegiate athletics. A concern with the need to scrimp and save on the home front in order to further the war effort led to a re-evaluation of what was and was not important in wartime. Further, concern with gas rationing made out-of-town travel for intercollegiate sport a questionable expense.

As a result of these factors, intercollegiate sport at Dalhousie was banned for a year in 1940 (Gazette, October 10, 1941).

This pattern was seen to varying degrees throughout the country. The 1941 Gazette notes that "Upper Canadian universities have suspended for the duration all regular intercollegiate sports such as rugby, hockey, water polo, basketball, track and field, etc. (Gazette, December 5, 1941).

Dalhousie, however, revived its intercollegiate program in 1941: "In a surprise announcement issued yesterday afternoon President Stanley gave his permission to home and home games

to be played with Acadia this fall . . . It was the concensus of opinion that as long as such games did not prove a deterrent to the war effort, there could be no harm in them." (Gazette, October 10, 1941)

While the teams were allowed to play, concern was retained regarding the influence of intercollegiate sport on the war effort, and the tradition of providing spectators with transportation to games was broken:

"Because Dal is playing Acadia only as a concession by President Stanley, whose main objection was that such trips used up gasoline and were thus unwittingly crippling the war effort to some extent, small as it might be, no special buses will be chartered by the Student Council to take up rooters to the Acadia game to be played tomorrow afternoon at Wolfville." (Gazette, October 17, 1941)

While the war temporarily dampened the intercollegiate sport scene, it did result in increased competition in the city leagues. The Halifax City Basketball League consisted of Dalhousie, Acadia, Navy, and the RCAF, while the Navy also entered a team in the hockey league (Gazette, January 9, 1942). While service teams were nothing new in the Halifax leagues, the war swelled the ranks of these teams with top notch athletes who had enlisted, and enabled local folk, Dalhousie students included, to watch or compete against highly talented professional as well as amateur athletes who had joined the forces.

One further side-effect of the war was an increased concern with physical fitness. Military training "of all students over age 18" had been "requested by the Dominion Government" (Gazette, October 10, 1941). According to the Gazette, "The University of Toronto declined to comply with the request, but other universities have undertaken to train all students eighteen years and over" (Gazette, October 10, 1941).

Following the war, the tone of the Gazette pages, sports included, became noticeably lighter. Gradually the sports program resumed its previous pattern and even expanded into new sports in the post-war period.

The end of the war marked the beginning of a period of expansion which only became questioned when cut-backs and financial pressures caused a re-evaluation of programs and a trimming of edges.

Basketball all-stars

The Atlantic Universities Basketball Conference all-star teams were announced at an awards banquet held at Dal on Friday.

Dalhousie placed three players on the squads: Stan Whetstone, Pat Slawter and Bo Hampton, all on the second team. Also on the second team were Acadia's Rodney Martin and Tejan Alleyne of UPEI.

The MVP honours went out to John Hatch of St. F.X. This is the third time he has won the award in his four years of playing. Hatch led the league in scoring with a 22.8 points per game average, and was fourth in foul shooting and third in rebounding.

The top freshman was Ron Lardge of St. Mary's. He was the top field goal shooter, getting 59.3 per cent of his shots from the floor, and was fifth in scoring with 19.3 points per game.

Huskies' coach Gary Heald was named coach of the year. This marked the fourth time he has received the honour.

The first team consisted of two St. Mary's players, Ron Lardge and Rob Latter, Acadia's Chris Sumner, UPEI's Mike Morgan and St. F.X.'s John Hutch.

Overtime

Fair play: Flogging a dead horse?

by Lisa Timpf

As far as many people involved in sport are concerned, fair play and sportsmanship have gone the way of the dinosaur.

In the golden age of British public school sport, athletic games were seen as a forum for teaching leadership skills and developing character in the participants. A key factor in this perception was an emphasis on sportsmanship and fair play.

With the diffusion of sport into North American culture, the character building emphasis was gradually replaced by the achievement ethic in particular dominant in the emergent United States culture.

Consequently, while the "character building" benefits of sport continued to be taken for granted by most people, the fact of the matter was that sport was becoming increasingly concerned with the technical, rather than, and often at the expense of, the moral aspects of the game.

The concepts of the "good foul" and the "good penalty" gradually emerged. No longer were players exhorted to obey the spirit as well as the letter of the rules. The rules themselves became one more variable to be manipulated in the search for success, as measured by the win/loss record.

When cheating became institutionalized by coaches and players, the sin became, not the commission of a foul or penalty, but the failure to do it at the right time -- or the error of getting caught.

It has been awhile since the last time I put on my rose-coloured glasses to look at the world. Nonetheless, it appears to me that failure to concern myself with the ethical aspects of sport, or failure to acknowledge that such aspects exist, is failure to face the struggle to find the true meaning of sport.

Some sport theorists believe that the "I-Thou" relationship in which players perceive the opponent as a person, rather than an object, is the ideal to which athletes should strive.

An objectified opponent is easy to manipulate. One feels no guilt at deliberately cheating, hurting, or even injuring a faceless nonentity who is merely another obstacle out on the court, field, or ice.

When the opponent becomes a living, breathing person, however, you do have an obligation toward him. If you butt-end him when the ref isn't looking, he will feel pain. If you deliberately

elbow him in the face when coming down with a rebound, it will hurt. And if you rub in a wide-margin victory, he will be humiliated.

Sport has become increasingly technical within the last few years. Biomechanical, physiological, and psychological information can keep a coach or player so busy trying to plot out the ideal program that will lead to optimal results that they forget to ask themselves the "meaning" questions: Why am I participating in sport in the first place? What can it teach me about myself? What and where is the meaning in sport? How ought I to act in a given situation?

Ethics and sportsmanship are part of the "meaning" mosaic, a part of sport that many people would prefer to ignore. Meaning is something much more difficult to struggle with than technique. It is easier to dissolve sport down to an intellectual game involving the interaction of factors such as player abilities, technical aspects, and strategic concepts than it is to ask why one is participating at all, and how this might influence the types of behaviour one is and is not willing to engage in.

In the British public schools in the late 19th century, the athletes made their own decisions and were given responsibility for their own actions. Today, in North America, the athlete looks to the coach to make the decisions and take the responsibility. Thus, sport, which could be a forum for individual learning and authenticity, becomes an activity in which the athlete, by objectifying the opposition, objectifies himself in turn.

What is the alternative to this process? One alternative is to put responsibility back into the hands of players. No longer will an athlete commit a foul because "coach told me to do it", but because he himself decided to do so, and is willing to take the responsibility for his actions.

A second alternative is to teach kids learning sports the principles of sportsmanship, and to encourage them to examine and question the professional sport model, which suggests that cheating is fine if you can get away with it. Many young athletes are socialized into sport by professional sport role models. These role models also help to shape the young athlete's attitudes and behaviours as well. By encouraging young athletes not to automatically accept the status quo as depicted by pro sport athletes and others, they at least will have a chance to develop their own pattern of sport involvement and their own conception of ethics.

What is likely to be the future relationship of sport and ethics? Sport and society are inextricably linked. In a society which tends to view income tax evasion as fine if you can get away with it, and which often encourages getting away with whatever one can in terms of slacking off on the job, failure to acknowledge the ethical aspects of sport cannot be expected to be a pattern that will change dramatically in the near future.

Sportsmanship and fair play will probably remain the province of a few individuals who, as a result of their personal convictions and their ability to stick by them despite the tide of general opinion, attempt to re-define for themselves what patterns of behaviour will best enable them to establish their authenticity as individuals.

Think about it. Where do you fit in?

