The Growth of American Sport Influenced by Economy

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I. Introduction

Sport is embedded in the social, economic, political and cultural fabric of society. Therefore, a history of sport is a history of society in general. Likewise, the rapid development of sport in America, starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing today, existed within the greater context of the nation's industrial growth. In the initial stage, American sport evolved as the United States emerged from an agrarian society into the industrial and then Information Age, capturing many essences of development. Even though the developing sport could easily be linked to the many facets of American society and culture, its growth within America was most closely linked with the economic changes from the nation's total growth. Accordingly, the professionalization of American sport, one of the essential features in American sport, was completed within the boundaries of the economic world.

This study examines the professionalization of American sport, which was affected by the events, culture, and economic forces that shaped the nation from 1900 to 1950. It will discuss the commodification of sport, its successful expansion as an entertainment service, and the development of the modern sports hero. Besides, development and expansion of baseball and football will be illustrated to show the process of professionalization in American sports.
II. Commodification of Sport

The ever-changing face of American society that emerged around the turn of the century marked the beginning of the development of a sporting culture in modern America. The Industrial Revolution was in high gear and urban dwelling was on the rise. The growth of the modern city provided the ideal conditions for nurturing a sporting culture in several ways. New industrial and technological advancements brought a newfound wealth to the nation, but they also brought with them a work reform movement. Workers were soon given regulated work hours in safer conditions. The stabilized hours provided workers with leisure time on a regular basis, something they had never been accustomed to before. Leisure time became one of the primary causes of the rise of sport in turn of the century America. Workers were now able to participate in sport as a means of recreation during this time. From the enjoyment of the recreational aspects of sport came the movement for competitive sport.1 As the thrill of victory became more valued than the joy of participation, and the skill of the individual player was more recognized, sport started to move away from its amateur status and towards the rank of professionalism.

The emergence of professionalism in American sport can be directly attributed to the possibility of turning sport into big business. Entrepreneurs realized the opportunity available with the emergence of high level athletes and an emphasis on victory in competition. They went about organizing competitions, providing the participants with the appropriate (dependent upon their finish) payment for their participation. Money had now become the primary motive for victory. In this sense, the entrepreneurs had fulfilled the major component of the three-part commodity of sport according to Stephen Hardy.2 The game itself combined with the service, and the goods to complete the triple commodity. An aspect of the game that led to both the service and the goods was the implementation of rules. These rules exist in two forms: those which state how the game is played and those which state who may play the game.3 By establishing these rules, entrepreneurs essentially organized sporting bodies, which used the rules as credentials authority and authenticity. These organizations were now in a position to dictate their will on the sporting culture.

3) Hardy, 17.