

of the Go-Go year of 1968. In 1975 came the first \$300 billion budget. In 1977 trading began in contracts for future delivery of Treasury bonds, thereby placing the solemn obligations of the United States government on a speculative par with pork bellies, plywood, and soybean meal. (Last fall the Chicago Board of Trade unveiled a master creation for this time of financial volatility: an options contract on Treasury-bond futures.)

Also in 1977 came the first \$400 billion budget. In 1979 gold bullion hit \$300 an ounce, having scraped \$104 in the summer of 1976. On January 23, 1980, it momentarily reached \$875, thereby validating one of the most audacious financial forecasts ever made, namely, that the gold price would one day exceed the Dow Jones Industrial Average. (The prophet was James Dines who had long since been ignored by respectable analysts.)

The year 1980 brought credit controls, recession, and the first \$500 billion budget; 1981, another recession (and the first \$600 billion budget); 1982, an epidemic of corporate bankruptcies, still more recession, and numerous debt "re-schedulings" by sovereign borrowers, which, so Walter Wriston, chairman of Citicorp, recently assured the readers of the *New York Times*, can't go broke (and the first

\$700 billion budget). Then, in the summer, after passage of what was described as the largest tax increase in history, the stock market vaulted by 150 points. To put that feat in perspective, however, the Dow Jones Industrial Average at this writing stands at roughly 940, which is where it was fifteen years ago.

Through the 1970s, as noted, people got into debt. At last report they were trying to get out. □

# PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

## THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE SPORTS EMPIRE

by Robert Nisbet

During the past fifteen years we have seen in American professional sports what Gibbon saw in second-century imperial Rome: zenith of prosperity but also the sharp signs of beginning decline. In this period we have seen professional sports industrialized, computerized, specialized, politicized, and egregiously over-publicized. Only with the greatest difficulty can individual heroes breathe and prosper in such an atmosphere. And therein lies the greatest harm done to this country by the boundlessly self-aggrandizing owners and players. For any nation in this century needs all the heroes it can get for its pantheon. Old sources have dried up in too many cases.

Business as such has never been a fertile bed for heroes. Whatever the regard for the Croesuses, Fuggers, Rothschilds, Morgans, and Rockefellerers in Western history, it was the very opposite of hero-regard. Henry Ford, Sr. is the closest to hero in popular adulation in his time. He was unique. Politics and war are old seedbeds of heroes, but both have become desiccate under the sterilizing influences of bureaucracy, mechanization, and, in the case of the former, judicial imperialism that sucks the very marrow out of elective politics. There will be no more Lincolns, Teddy Roosevelts, and Woodrow Wilsons in American politics. The presidency has already ceased to be individual, as it was down through FDR, and has become corporate, composed literally of hundreds of White House bureau-

crats rivaling such hopelessly un-fecund areas as State, Defense, and HHS. It is probably good to have a professional actor in the White House every so often; he can add at least hero-luster.

The military is no better in this respect. It is highly unlikely that there will be any more Pattons, MacArthurs, and Eisenhowers. Even leaving nuclear war to one side, the conditions of war, at least for large nations, are antagonistic to emergence of heroes. Again, the triumph of committees, councils, and staffs over soldiers. Desert I in Iran might have produced heroes, but it has instead become one more symbol of the nonheroic, forever associated with the Joint Chiefs.

Nor can we look any longer to the republic of letters, arts, and sciences. It is almost inconceivable that we shall have another Thomas Edison

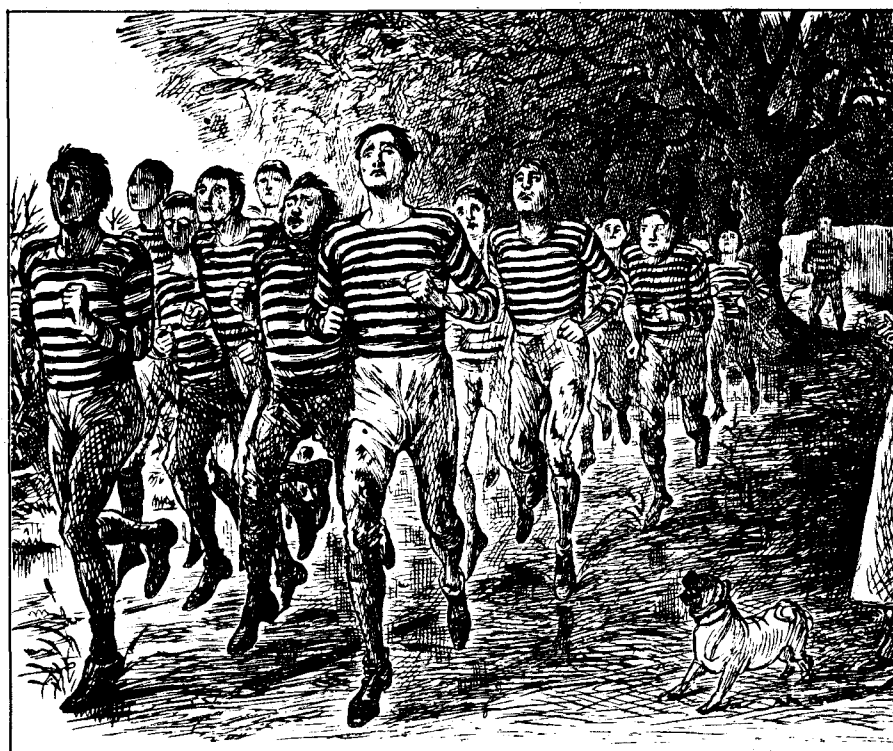
and Albert Einstein in our midst, each a household name. The structure of science today discourages individual achievement; teams and task forces are the thing. Once such eminences as Longfellow, Lowell, Mark Twain, William James, William Lyon Phelps, and H. L. Mencken were authentic heroes, household names. Today it is better to go to the dry-cleaning industry for heroes than to the writers of our books.

Behold Hollywood. Where are the Swansons, Chaplins, Garbos, and Gables? Gone. Succeeded by jerks, monsters, and robots. The thought of Streisand, Redford, and Eastwood walking where once walked the great and the mighty is enough to bring on the black bile. The only stars today are supplied by imitation galaxies.

We are thus down to, and fast

losing, the world of sports as the spawning bed of heroes in America. And what heroes we have had! Beginning with the legendary John L. Sullivan at the turn of the century, there have been many heroes in boxing, baseball, football, tennis, golf, and, recently, basketball and hockey. The golden age of sports heroes is the 1920s—comparable in its way with the Age of Pericles—when Dempsey, Ruth, Cobb, Grange, Tilden, Rockne, and Bobby Jones were veritable demigods. Each was what the Greeks called a culture-hero, that is, a creator or bringer and bestower. Each made his sport national in the popular mind, created followings and fans, and forged a whole new body of symbols in American culture. There had never been a million-dollar gate before Dempsey. He generated five of them, and there wouldn't be another until Joe Louis. We look in virtual awe today at any baseball player who can hit .300 (the live ball, mind you) for two or three years running. Ty Cobb led the major leagues twelve years in a row and his lifetime batting average was .367. In addition, he set extant records in the field and on the bases. There are more people today who recognize instantly the names and heroic achievements of Ruth, Dempsey, and Grange than the more recent DiMaggio, Ali, and Unitas. Such are the rewards of being first and at exactly the right historical moment.

Sports heroes assuredly didn't die with the twenties. There were some luminescent stars afterward to be worshipped: Hubbell, DiMaggio, Williams, Joe Louis, Baugh, Huff, Brown, Hull, Howe, Cousy, Russell, and others, not forgetting Budge in tennis and Palmer in golf. Any of



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these, and there are others, could have held their own, been very close to the titans of the twenties. Sports, although changing considerably in the period 1930-1960, were still pretty much the same in structure, mass, and chemistry with followers during these decades. But we have seen, since 1960, some quantum changes in all aspects of sports which are slowly choking off the possibility of heroes, indeed of widespread interest much longer in sports.

In the first place we are saturated today with the sheer volume of players, teams, leagues, divisions, and franchises. Seasons steadily become longer, overlapping egregiously in their length. Playoffs multiply exponentially, as do tournaments and matches in tennis and golf. One can acquire a sense of infinity by the playoffs of basketball alone. It is difficult to repress a shudder at the thought of some of the cities which have been brought into big-time sports. Can anyone imagine an authentic hero being born and nurtured in Tampa Bay and Anaheim? Television is of course the single greatest cause of this, its malign effects becoming all too vivid in the sixties. It has nearly killed boxing through overexposure and it now threatens, with its round-the-calendar games, plays, and replays, to destroy other sports as well. We are in a mass age out of which heroes cannot emerge.

Second, the individual player threatens to become lost in the chaos of specialization, especially in professional football. He has become an appendage to the machine, a victim of narrowness of function. The game has been broken down into assembly-line operations, each as small and repetitive as possible, with each player trained tirelessly to meet the specifications of that tiny specialization and no other. Thus, paraphrasing Tocqueville, the game advances but the player recedes. Without doubt any of today's major college and professional teams could defeat fairly easily any of the greatest teams of earlier decades—but through means which do no honor to the individuals involved.

The great players of yore in football played sixty minutes, offense and defense; each came close to being an all-purpose player. Nagurski was as good at fullback as at tackle. Quarterbacks played with the rest of the players, calling plays, passing, running, and blocking on offense, often punting and drop kicking, and were almost always at safety on defense. It is simply presumptuous to compare today's quarterbacks with those of old. What

do they do? Take the snap, hand off or else dart back, guarded by several behemoths, in order to get rid of the ball as quickly as possible, pumping, pumping *ad nauseam*. The luxury of free substitution today gives just about all players anywhere from 25 to 55 minutes rest on the bench during the game. Imagine Nevers and Grange resting. Nor should we neglect the powerful role of the computer in recruitment, development of player, and in the calling of plays. Hero-computers?

Things are still somewhat better in these respects in baseball. At least free substitution, with its promise of a batting team and a separate fielding team, hasn't yet been adopted, though I am inclined to think that under the competitive pressure of football and the boundless greed of owners, something along this line will have been developed before the end of the century. The Designated Hitter is perhaps the first step. Bullpens become ever larger and more highly paid. An individual who does nothing but occasionally relieve starters can reach several hundred thousand dollars a year. It is a rare starter who today isn't being helped to the showers by the fifth inning. And we dare compare pitchers of today with the Mathewsons, Johnsons, and Dizzy Deans of the past.

We have known all along that professional sports are at bottom

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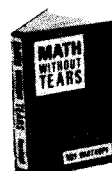
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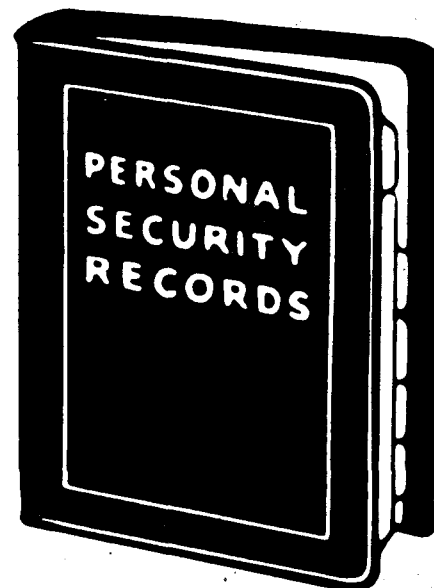
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business enterprises, but that residual fact was kept well in the background for a long time. No one complained when in 1922 Justice Holmes declared major league baseball a sport, not a business, and in truth it was far more sport than business. But all of that changed drastically and irreversibly in the 1960s. The marks of aggressive, cut-throat, profit-greedy business enterprise became increasingly evident to

the world, stimulated in large degree by television's desire to conquer the sports world with its schedule-breaking, aggrandizing, and eventually overwhelming demands—all made with carrot as well as stick.

Since the late 1960s all of the stigmata of industrial assembly line and marketplace—and much else—are in full view, diminishing the individual player, the sports hero, relentlessly. More and more sports



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sections in the newspapers are filled with stories of contracts, contract-violations, reserve clauses, free agents, astronomical salaries, strikes, lockouts, industrial morale stories about the Yankees and other teams, cocaine-sniffing, exploits of the Steinbrenners and Finleys, and so on.

The salaries alone will, on a little more fan reflection, come close to killing sports. What do we get for million-dollar salaries? For the most part Reggie Jacksons, cavorting clumsily in the outfield, hitting a bare .290 at best, and belting two or three dozen home runs, usually late, a

season. Compare Jackson's relatively pathetic (but always arrogant) performance with the play of Babe Ruth and Hank Greenberg, of Cobb, Hornsby, and Ted Williams. They not only gave stellar performances year after year that Jackson doesn't come close to, they made them look easy. There aren't more than a handful of the obscenely paid luminaries of Anaheim, Kansas City, San Diego, and Milwaukee who would have made any of the great Yankee, Pirate, and Cardinal teams of the twenties and thirties. Occasionally a record of one of the titans is broken:

Babe Ruth's 60 by Roger Maris's 61. But only with the help of a significantly longer season and in conjunction with general outfield performance that the Babe would have been ashamed of. Moreover, Maris made it only by virtue of one mighty gasp, so to speak. Babe Ruth hit anywhere from 50 to 60 homers each of a dozen years. Before that he set records as a pitcher for the Red Sox, among them that of pitching 29 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings of World Series baseball (1916, 1918). He was prouder of his pitching records than anything

else in his extraordinary career.

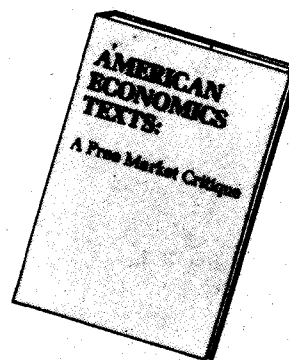
On the reasonable theory that nature distributes her genetic talents fairly evenly through the decades, we may assume that there are natural Ruths, Cobbs, Deans, and Williamses out there now in the ballparks. Why, then, are we obliged to become awe-struck when someone hits .301 for two or three successive years or winds up with a 15-6 pitching record—with ample assistance from the multi-million-dollar bullpen? Is this really the best we can now hope for? The answer is yes and is rooted in the psychology of the assembly line and the marketplace. The Ruths and Cobbs thought of little besides baseball; the Jacksons and Winfields little besides contracts.

Still another destructive force coming out of the 1960s in sports is the same judicial imperialism that has damaged much of the political process and free private enterprise in America. Given the industrialization of sports, it was perhaps inevitable that the courts would see fit to invade what was once an enclave of autonomy and self-government. How long can NFL self-rule continue when a California court declares that long-established NFL regulations notwithstanding, the free-booting Al Davis can rob the city of Oakland by taking his Raiders to Los Angeles? Once when hockey players got too vicious with their sticks, they were rewarded with their own medicine; now an injured hockey player takes his wounds to a court of law and receives a million

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dollars in damages. It will not be long before the outcomes of Superbowl and World Series games are held up until some federal judge rules on a contested game-decision. As the judiciary has weakened the walls of family and local community, so it now

weakens the walls of sports in America. Again we ask, how can a sports hero emerge out of tawdry litigation? Since true heroism is beyond any performer's reach in our politicized, industrialized, computerized, and hyper-publicized sports world today,

what can be offered the public? I suggest something along the lines of Hollywood's Oscar night, staged at the Los Angeles Coliseum and televised throughout the world. Special awards (Ruthies, Grangies?) for each and all of the vast multitude of

specializations, assembly-line techniques, and marketplace piracies, with the parade of noseguards and designated hitters all weeping their gratitude before camera and through tears thanking Mom and the agent who made it all possible. □

# ACADEMIA



## AFTER THE DEBAUCH

by Kenneth S. Lynn

As Mr. Dooley observed long ago, America is more given to rapid change than any other nation on earth—with the result that if you take a close look at the Republic at fifty-year intervals you will find that it has hardly changed at all. In the case of higher education, one could argue that Mr. Dooley's fifty-year cycles of recurrence should be considerably shortened. A mere fifteen years after the sweeping curricular changes with which college and university faculties bought peace in their time, those same faculties are busily engaged in an attempt to restore some semblance of the status quo ante.

In the insanely individualistic years when "doing your own thing" was the watchword of young people, students won the right to tailor their courses of study to fit their own perception of their needs. Today, more and more colleges are demanding that students take a universally prescribed "core curriculum." Another innovation of the liberationist sixties, the "pass-fail" grade, has likewise been largely replaced by the old system of letter grades—and no one has been more pleased by this reactionary move than the students themselves, who are aware how important good grades are in landing an interesting job or in gaining admission to a professional school. As for foreign-language requirements, they have come back from the very edge of extinction and are once again being enforced.

Yet at the same time that the colleges and universities have been trying to wipe out the legacy of

yesteryear they have also been unable to escape it. The proliferation of courses in ethnic studies and women's studies continues unabated, and indeed in many places whole departments have been organized around these pseudo-subjects. Examining the course catalogue, however, hardly begins to suggest the weaknesses that have been built into our system of higher education in the last decade and a half. For what the catalogue does not record is that when turmoil came to the campuses in the late sixties, the quality of applicants to graduate schools of arts and sciences at once began to go down, and that as the real income of professors was eaten into by the inflation of the 1970s the nation's most gifted undergraduates turned away from teaching careers in ever increasing numbers.

In addition to having second-rate intellects, the typical graduate students of the 1970s clung tightly to the revolutionary attitudes of their undergraduate days. Now that these veterans of the Harvard bust, the battle of Morningside Heights, and a hundred other confrontations have received their Ph.D.'s and entered full-time teaching, they have begun to take over the colleges and universities of this country by more subtle means than they formerly employed. In the field of history, for example, Marxism is by all odds the most fashionable mode of analysis among teachers of European history, while in American history more and more of the current scholarship is consecrated to the expression of contempt for the achievements of our civilization. The erstwhile occupiers of deans' offices have also been in the forefront of the effort to destroy meaningful standards of promotion by urging the rapid advancement of black professors and women professors regardless of the quality of their scholarly work. And the blacks and women who have been pro-

fessionally rewarded on the basis of their race or sex have in turn been in the forefront of the movement to discredit the official values of the American people.

Thus while there are grounds for believing that Ronald Reagan has succeeded in shifting the entire nation rightward, Democrats as well as Republicans, the generalization certainly does not apply to the academic world, nor is it likely to in the years ahead. Indeed, the leftist professors of my acquaintance have lately become more intransigent than ever, for with the drying up of public funds for educational purposes they have found it easy to think of themselves as the victims of a brutal

and uncaring society, and there is nothing that makes the anti-Americanism of academia grow faster than the tears of self-pity.

The desire, in short, to impose stiffer standards of performance upon the students coexists in the minds of contemporary professors with the desire to identify themselves with the flabbiest of radical causes. What this country needs is a revolution in the streets. Professor Sheldon Wolin wrote in *democracy* in the summer of 1981, but in the absence of such a blessed event he would continue to speak out on political and cultural issues. Fifteen years down the road from the campus violence of the late sixties, a curious combination of fundamentalism and leftism sets the academic tone. □

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*Kenneth S. Lynn teaches American history at the Johns Hopkins University and is the author of books on Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and other American writers.*