

Take me out to the ball game

The Importance of Archiving Sporting Activities

by *Russell S. Koonts*

Okay. I admit it. Like many Americans, I spend more time reading the sports section than all other sections of the morning paper combined.

While I might not be able to tell you who is leading the race for governor, I have no problem in telling you the Major League Baseball divisional leaders or the number one team in the most recent National Collegiate Athletic Association poll. As I shamefacedly make these confessions, I find solace in a comment attributed to the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. "The story goes that on an early morning flight from the West Coast to Washington, D. C., a reporter noticed that when the stewardess gave Douglas the morning paper he flipped immediately to the sports page. The Justice caught the question in the newsman's eyes and said something like; 'I always look at sports first because I want to read about man's achievements before I see his failures that make the front page.'"¹

Thus, sports have infiltrated popular culture. Many Americans can recall where they were and what they were doing when a memorable sporting event occurred. For example, I remember as clearly where I was on September 8, 1998, when Mark McGwire broke Roger Maris' home run record, and June 19, 1986, when I heard that Len Bias, possibly the most gifted athlete I ever saw play basketball, died of a cocaine overdose, as I do watching the space

shuttle Challenger explode shortly after take-off on January 28, 1986.

Why do sports hold such a place in American popular culture? Newspaper and television reports bombard the public with news about athletic activities, commenting on the competitions and the latest sports-related scandals. For much of the public, sports are synonymous with the National Football League (NFL), the National Basketball Association (NBA), Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) football and basketball, and the Olympics. Prevailing headlines might lead one to conclude that all of these activities are scandal-ridden and profit-making.

Take, for example, recent events surrounding the Olympics. The Salt Lake City Olympic Committee gained worldwide notoriety when it came to light that large sums of money and additional perks were offered to members of the Olympics Selection Committee to ensure that their city was chosen as the site for the 2002 Winter Olympics. Although the city succeeded, the selection process was tainted, and many members lost their positions on the Selection Committee.

Athletes do not escape such delving coverage, either. Two examples occurred during the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. So interested was the world's population in the sporting events that for every athlete participating in the Summer Games, there were three members of the media present.

Two of the athletes who garnered most of the attention were the American sprinter Marion Jones and the Romanian gymnast Andreea Raducan. While early stories from the Games reported their athletic accomplishments, the tone of the reports changed once it was discovered that Raducan and Jones's husband, the world champion shot putter C. J. Hunter, tested positive for banned substances. Although both individuals claimed innocence — in Raducan's case she had a cold and took two cold pills prescribed by her team's doctor that, unfortunately, contained the banned stimulant — the ensuing explosion in the media's coverage of these events overshadowed the athletic performances.

The true picture of athletics is considerably different. Athletics actually comprise many layers of activities: professional, intercollegiate, intramural, and individual sports. Humans have a natural propensity for sports, and with the current value placed on physical fitness and health, most individuals are involved in athletics in one way or another. From infancy, most of us participate in some level of sporting activity. Accordingly, many of these activities are recorded for posterity. These recordings may range from the proud parents' videotape of their infant playing with a ball for the first time, or a scrapbook or photo album of their child's sporting events, to the physical education, intramural, and/or organized team sport participation that are documented in the

dreaded "permanent record" we were always warned about during our school years. Furthermore, the sporting activities and events that we take part in as adults rate similar documentation.

Whether the actions take place in a City Parks and Recreation league, a health club class, or club sports team, all organized sporting events produce records of outcomes, lists of participants, and overall team standings that are maintained by the sponsoring entity. With the plethora of documentation being created, one question may come to mind, "What happens to all of these records?"

Archives and libraries play an important role in documenting athletic and life experiences played out on every athletic field. In the case of North Carolina State University, as with most major colleges and universities, the management and preservation of these records fall under the domain of the University Archives. Filed together, the records detail the history, administration, and educational accomplishments of the University, as well as documenting the University's intercollegiate, intramural, club, and individual athletic endeavors.

Coverage of these athletic contests occurs in college, local, and national media reports, carrying results of games and feature stories about the players and coaches. News information and athletic offices capture the events in pictures and video and through news releases sent to the local and national media. Published souvenir programs and reports, films, videos, and still photographs chronicle the games and accomplishments of local teams, supplementing the statistics and documenting more fully the teams' events. While the sport-specific associations such as the NFL, NBA, MLB, NCAA, and the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA) maintain some statistics, a fuller statistical record should be available at the institution or with the individual team.

On the surface, a collection of game statistics, scorebooks, game programs, and correspondence may not seem very exciting or worthwhile. After all, local newspapers carry game summaries, results, box scores, and statistics. A sports archive, however, is more than a simple collection of results. There are numerous uses and untold numbers of individuals' personal stories and information on participants' achievements valued

by athletic departments, public relations offices, historical researchers, and individual athletes and fans. The following stories illustrate the various uses of sports archives.

Recently, while preparing to process the NC State Athletics Department's records, I found myself faced with a perplexing issue. An initial survey of the collection showed the following: there are 60 shelves of materials (about 180 linear feet) dating from the late 1890s to the early 1990s. The vast majority of the files contains newspaper clippings recounting game activities, plus several Departmental scrapbooks pertaining to particularly successful individual teams, specifically the 1974 and 1983 NCAA basketball champions.

Discussions with my office colleagues on the necessity of keeping copies of the clippings provided no clear-cut decision, so I contacted a fellow archivist at Duke University, described the collection, and asked about the necessity of keeping years of newspaper clippings. After all, I argued, we have the press releases written by the Sports Information Office and the official game statistics and results as they were reported to the NCAA. Furthermore, the clippings showed the effects of ageing, poor quality paper stock, yellowing, and crumbling. Finally, I reasoned, keeping all of the clippings would increase processing time threefold, since all articles would need copying onto acid-free paper.

After listening to my questions, my colleague from Duke recounted the following event: During a recent college basketball season, the University of Kentucky won a game after being behind by thirty points. The papers and newscasts that carried the report of the game cited the comeback as the greatest rally in NCAA history, stating that no team had made a comeback from a greater deficit to win a game. After hearing the report of the game and "greatest comeback in NCAA history," a

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former member of the Duke basketball team contacted the Duke University Archives stating that he remembered a game from his playing days where Duke rallied from thirty-one points down to win. The caller asked the archivist to see if he could find anything on the game.

Having access to one of the largest sports-related collections in the nation, thanks in part to an active Sports Information Office, the archivist found the game files in question. The official game statistics, which are forwarded to the NCAA for their files, showed that Duke was behind by a twenty-nine-point margin at half time, one less than Kentucky's thirty-point deficit. Fortunately, the Sports Information Office kept newspaper clippings of the game. One such clipping in the file stated that Duke's opponent, after leading by twenty-nine at halftime, scored the first basket of the second half, thus taking a thirty-one point lead before Duke rallied to win the game.

With this information in hand — "after all," my friend continued, "we are talking Kentucky basketball here" — the University quickly called the news services to report that the Kentucky win was not the "greatest comeback in NCAA history." My friend made his point; we will be keeping all of the game-related news clippings.

Next, before a Presidential visit to the NC State campus, inquiries were made to the archives requesting a list of presidents who had visited the campus, either while in office, or at other times in their careers. A search of the Athletics Department's files yielded the following story concerning a baseball game played between N.C. State and Yale University on April 3, 1948. In a game that the Wolfpack lost 9-6, the article's author recounts how Yale used a "pair of two-baggers, four free tickets to first, and a hit batsman" to score five runs in the first and all but win the ball game. Although N.C. State eventually scored several runs, the Wolfpack pitching could not stop "Yale's husky first sacker," George Bush, as he collected a single, double, and a triple on his way to scoring two runs and collecting three runs batted in (RBIs) in leading the Elis to victory.²

Finally, a young woman came into the NCSU Special Collections with a request. She had met a young man who often spoke of playing soccer at NC State. Since it soon would be his birthday, she wanted to surprise him with a scrapbook of clippings and photographs from his days playing for the Wolfpack.

After poring through the Athletic Department's records, searching through four years of the student newspaper, *The Technician*, and looking at various photograph collections and yearbooks, she was unable to find any record that her friend did anything but attend the University. What I would give to have been present at that birthday party!

In her publication stressing the importance of documenting all aspects of a college or university, Helen Samuels suggested that athletics belongs in the category "foster socialization." When she shared this proposal with a group of archivists, many disagreed: athletics belongs in "provide public service," suggested an archivist from a large mid-western state university, while another colleague felt that it belonged in "promote culture"; an archivist from a Big Ten institution suggested that they were both wrong, as athletics clearly belongs in "sustain the institution." Samuels says that, in fact, her colleagues were all correct. Each of the individual archivists identified nuances of athletics that are important at their institutions and that suggest what should be documented.³ It is important to note that, while the remainder of this article discusses the role of athletics on college campuses, the issues detailed apply to aspects of athletics at all levels.

The differing views and impressions of athletics expressed by the above-mentioned archivists reflect the multitude of driving forces behind intercollegiate athletic programs. While the expressed views pertain to major intercollegiate athletic programs, sports play a much greater role on campuses across the nation. Only a small portion of students at any college or university participate in conference-sanctioned athletic events. This fact does not diminish the importance of sports to the vast majority of students.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, an athletics collection policy should strive to document as many levels of participation as possible. Types of athletics on campus include, but are not limited to: 1) intercollegiate programs, 2) intramural and club sports, and 3) individual programs. Unfortunately, the amount of documentation created by these various categories does not correspond accordingly to the number of students that participate. Because intercollegiate athletics can bring not only prestige but also substantial revenues, academic institutions generally establish departments to manage participation in

these programs. These departments, as official entities, produce the vast amount of documentation that eventually makes it into an archive.

Intercollegiate Programs

In August 1852, crew teams from Harvard and Yale participated in the first intercollegiate sporting event in United States history. Since then, intercollegiate competition has been a part of the American academic scene. Baseball and football eventually joined crew as the most popular intercollegiate sports. At the dawn of the twentieth century, however, the violence of football games, questions about eligibility of players, and financial scandals caused many institutions to drop the sport. Many leaders urged that football be reformed or abolished from intercollegiate athletics.

"President Theodore Roosevelt summoned college athletics leaders to two White House conferences to encourage such reforms. In early December 1905, Chancellor Henry M. MacCracken of New York University convened a meeting of 13 institutions to initiate changes in football playing rules."⁴ At a subsequent meeting on December 28 in New York City, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was founded by 62 members, officially was constituted March 31, 1906, and took its present name in 1910. In 1921, the first NCAA national championship was held: the National Collegiate Track and Field Championships.⁵

As a coordinating body for intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA establishes the guidelines and rules under which its member institutions operate. Additionally, the NCAA preserves intercollegiate athletic records and maintains a "National Statistics Service" for member institutions. The service publishes weekly and annual statistical reports for specific sports and maintains the original reports submitted to it by each member institution. These game reports often serve as the basis of most college and university sports-related collections. Other coordinating athletic associations, such as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), do exist and exercise similar administrative guidance.

Varsity Letters describes intercollegiate athletics as part of the function "foster socialization" at the individual institutions. Such programs, however, have implications that connect Athletic

Department activities and their documentation to that of other University functions. Policy issues — financial, athletic, and educational — are documented in the administrative records of the governing board, senior officers, alumni association, and athletic director. Negotiations with athletic associations and records of controversies and suspensions appear in both the administrative files of the college and the records of the association. Therefore, the documentary issues have implications in many areas.⁶

Attempting to document intercollegiate athletics can prove time- and space-consuming. The size of the archival collection often reflects the activity of the sports information office and the importance of the various programs. For comparison, the NC State Athletics Department record series measures 180 linear feet (excluding photographs and audio-visual materials) while Duke University's collection measures over 500 linear feet (including game films).

Intramural and Club Programs

As previously mentioned, the percentage of students participating in intramural and individual athletics is significantly higher than those who participate in intercollegiate athletics. While students on athletic scholarships are the most visible, the overall success of any athletic program is the effect it has on the vast majority of the students attending an institution. NC State presently offers 51 intramural and 46 club sports opportunities as compared to 20 intercollegiate athletic teams, including cheerleading and band.

To encourage and support participation in competitive athletics among the members of the academic community, most institutions provide facilities, equipment, and officials for intramural and club sports. Many institutions encourage participation by students, faculty, and staff. Most of the administrative and financial support for intramural and club activities comes under the purview of the Physical Education Department and falls within the administrative structure of the Division of Student Affairs. Club sports usually include a wider range of athletic competition and provide an opportunity to compete against clubs at other institutions.

Unfortunately, extensive documentation of intramural and club athletic activities does not occur. NC State uses different approaches to document these programs. Since intramural sports are sponsored and administered by the

Physical Education Department, the records are maintained by the department until they are transferred to the University Archives; club sports, on the other hand, require a different approach. Most club sports, although under the institutional administration, are expected to be self-sufficient. As such, records of participation, management, and outcomes are maintained by the individual clubs. To collect these records, the NCSU Archives deals directly with the club and its officials, relying upon the club to regularly deposit its records with the archives. This documentation requires constant effort as leadership of the clubs changes, often on a yearly basis. Also, additional information on intramural and club sports appears as articles and reports in campus newspapers and student newsletters.

Individual Sports

The last, and perhaps the largest group of athletic endeavors consists of the individuals who pursue sports activities on their own. They may run, swim, take aerobics, play basketball or tennis to attain personal fitness goals or as a form of relaxation. Since most of these activities occur outside the formal program arena, most individuals participate on their own, thus producing no records of activity.

Documentation may appear only in annual reports containing estimates of the number of people who use the athletic facilities for their own activities. While less than accurate, these figures indicate the number of players and types of activities. Other sources may come from campus newspapers or other photographic documentation of campus life.

As sports and sporting events creep deeper into popular culture, the appetite for historical information increases. Long after the events have faded from recent memory, the records and accom-

plishments continue to live in our collective mind. Libraries and archives play an important role in ensuring that team and individual accomplishments remain available for research, review, and reflection, forever providing a place where human achievements outweigh their failures.

References

¹ William H. Beezley, *The Wolfpack ... Intercollegiate Athletics at North Carolina State University* (Raleigh: University

Graphics, North Carolina State University, 1976), ix.

² *News and Observer* (Raleigh) (April 4, 1948), II:2

³ Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press), 23.

⁴ *NCAA Online*. "History" <<http://www.ncaa.org/about/history.html>> (February 2, 2001).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Samuels, 102-3.

Useful sport archives locations and Web sites:

A list of North Carolina repositories that hold sports-related collections would prove too lengthy as an addendum. Suffice it to say that most colleges and universities in the state maintain records relating to their own institution's athletic endeavors. Additional resources include the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, the North Carolina Museum of History, and the numerous county and municipal parks and recreation departments. Some especially noteworthy sport archives are listed.

National Baseball Hall of Fame (Coopers-town, NY).

<<http://baseballhalloffame.org/index.htm>>.

Contact and address information: <<http://baseballhalloffame.org/contact/address.htm>>.

Library and archives: <<http://baseballhalloffame.org/library/index.htm>>

Professional Football Hall of Fame (Canton, OH).

<<http://www.profootballhof.com/>>.

Archives and information center: <<http://www.profootballhof.com/home/services/library.cfm>>.

National Basketball Association Hall of Fame (Springfield, MA).

<<http://hoophall.com>>

National Collegiate Athletics Association (Overland Park, KS).

<<http://www.ncaa.org>>.

NCAA sports statistics: <<http://www.ncaa.org/stats/>>.

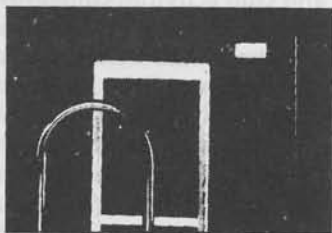
North Carolina High School Athletic Association (Chapel Hill, NC).

<<http://www.nchsa.unc.edu/>>.

Special Programs: <<http://www.nchsa.unc.edu/specialprograms/index.html>>

Links to various North Carolina special collections and/or archival repositories:

<<http://rtpnet.org/snca/links.htm>>



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