

FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME

By Kimball McIlroy

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The announcement by Mr. James McCaffrey, who takes care of such details as players' solvency and well-being for the Ottawa football club and is as well president of the newly-formed Eastern Rugby Football Union, to the effect that Bob Porter could not perform in his league because he had once taken money for playing professional baseball, opened the rugby season in the east in the style to which it has long been accustomed.

Mr. Porter was not barred on the grounds of having accepted remuneration under false pretenses. Nor was he barred because his demands were such as, if accepted, to lower the standard of living of the other players. This last was definitely not so. Mr. Porter on the contrary ruined his own case to a great extent by failing until the last possible moment to sign with [Toronto] Balmy Beach, hoping in the interim to receive a better offer from Argos. Mr. Porter was (until recently) barred solely because he was not an AMATEUR.

The argument did not hinge on the question of whether Mr. Porter was ever a professional ball player. Nor did it hinge even on the question of whether the Toronto Maple Leafs, for whom Mr. Porter once played, were ever a professional ball club. These were accepted as facts and consequently the whole argument came down to the question of whether or not a one-time professional was to be allowed to raise his helmeted head in the company of others into which the matter of crass commercialism has never entered.

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It may be interesting in view of the recent discussion to examine the amateur situation in general.

Amateur athletes are taken care of in any (or occasionally all) of three ways. At the bottom of the list come gifts. A gold watch, a pair of shoes, a nice new overcoat. Sometimes the price-tag is obligingly left on so that the goods may be redeemed at full value with a minimum of delay. This is the old-fashioned way; the modern ways are more forthright. For example, jobs. It is amazing what a variety of occupations the mere ability to throw a football or shoot a puck fits a man for. There is the classic example of the American state university football squad, many of whose members were employed as elevator operators at the State House. Every morning they would show up promptly at nine o'clock and dutifully, one man at a time, run the elevator to the top and down again. Once apiece. This was known as "working their way through college" and, with variations, is typical.

In cases where a manager objects to hypocrisy as a matter of principle, or where the particular athletic endeavor occupies most or all of a player's time, recourse is had to the simple expedient of cash payments, either in a lump sum for the season or as a weekly or monthly wage. Sometimes a job is technically involved, sometimes not. The involvement, if any, is almost always technical.

Since the athletic wage-scale is in direct ratio to the number of spectators that a given sport attracts, in Canada hockey players are the financial barons. Hockey players are well paid, to such an extent that it is increasingly difficult to persuade them to turn professional. Their salaries range from the meagre five dollars a game paid to obscure mercantile players to the lordly one thousand down and eighty-five a week reported on good authority to have been received by a pair of perambulating puck-chasing miners who moved east at the beginning of last season. Occasionally the method of remuneration is varied to include a percentage of the gate, although this is felt in more conservative circles to smack of professionalism.

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If Mr. McCaffrey is not eavesdropping, it can be hinted that rugby players come next in potential affluence. An exceptional running halfback, for example, may receive as high as fifteen hundred for the season and a bonus if the team makes the play-offs. He's worth every penny of it. A certain eastern Ontario team offered a soldier lineman star a good job this year at fifty dollars a week if he would throw in his services on the gridiron. Unfortunately the army didn't see it that way, but it gives you an idea. A few years ago members of a Montreal club went on strike for more prompt pay-checks and refused to play until they got

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them. These sample rates are for the east; in the west they come somewhat lower, on account of the smaller stadia.

Baseball, which used to be a good bet, has slipped in recent years. While in certain districts interest and income remain fairly high, members of a recent Ontario senior club, who were runners-up for the provincial championship, had to be content with a measly forty dollars for the season. These are starvation wages and should be investigated by the C.I.O. Softball players in the larger centres do somewhat better. They are usually on a so-much-per-game basis and they play frequently.

There are other sports and other wage-scales, but these three are the most popular.

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That is the situation. A versatile athlete can make more during the year at his various games than he could by pushing a pen or swinging a pick, and have a lot more fun doing it. Furthermore, he does. And furthermore again, there is no good reason why he shouldn't. People are glad to pay to watch the amateur teams perform and there is no reason why the performers shouldn't receive a just percentage of the proceeds. It's a fine old custom and it works very smoothly except on the rare occasions when some conscientious reformer like Mr. McCaffrey suddenly decides, on behalf of the executive of the E.R.F.U. that his finer feelings have been outraged. He detects an odor of professionalism and his charges must be shielded from the possibility of contagion.

One shudders to think what might happen if Mr. McCaffrey should learn that some of his own athletes, the boys whom he has held up for the world to see as shining examples of athletic purity, have on occasion received ice cream cones or free tickets to the games in return for their services. In such a case one can well blush for Mr. McCaffrey and his associates.

One can blush for Mr. McCaffrey and his associates in any case.