

# Ranks of Outdoor Sport Are Thinned by War

## Athletic Leaders in Camp, and Colleges Cancel Dates, But Government Is Trying to Prevent Stoppage of Healthful Recreations

**J**UNE has been for years the heyday of sports in America. It would be so now but for the entrance of the United States into the world war. The customary feverish gossip of the clubs, hotel lobbies, and restaurants where men foregather for rest from business cares ordinarily centred at this time of the year on the chances of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, or other universities winning the baseball or rowing contests scheduled for midseason decision; today it takes on the more serious chatter of the chances of this or that famous athlete first getting to the front with his regiment or aviation unit or ambulance corps. Competitive sports are superseded by interest in Red Cross or Liberty Loan activities. Even the trout and the bass find unwonted surcease from the lures of the hitherto tireless fisherman.

Village greens and vacant lots, the erstwhile resort of screeching urchins begging Jimmy or Tommy to "line her out" in a critical moment in a baseball game, re-echo nowadays the screech of the fife or the rattle of the drumsticks, while the khaki-clad Boy Scouts seriously and sedately scurry along to the "By the right flank, march!" of their Scoutmaster, or resound to the tread of the more lumbering but none the less earnest men of military age, who, their early training having been neglected, are now trying to master the mysteries of the manual of arms, instead of that equally difficult task of getting away from the mark in a footrace so as to tie if not beat the crack of the starter's pistol.

We have overnight become a military nation. Last year we were a nation of zealous sports, turning out world's champions, whether on sea or land and at all phases of athletic and sporting activities. Has that inborn fighting spirit which sends men rushing to the colors snuffed out that sporting instinct which has been acquired since the civil war? Not having had the leisure class which has always fostered sports in our mother countries, Americans had to acquire the sporting instinct. It has now become our second nature, at least, for we have taken to it so wholeheartedly as to have become the most feared of all countries in purely amateur athletics and sports. Those records which do not lie tell of American supremacy, whether in sailing a yacht, pulling an oar, wielding a racquet, swinging a golf club, charging in a football mêlée, chasing across country, leaping the hurdles, dashing over the cinder path, tossing the weights, driving home a boxing glove, riding a thoroughbred, or doing daredevil stunts on a motor track or in the air. In baseball we are, of course, in a class by ourselves. Our acquired sporting instinct had until war swept upon us become a dominant one.

President Wilson's call to arms was a resonant note that seemed to ring with exceptional vigor in the ears of America's lovers of and participants in sport. Football stars, baseball prodigies, champion swingers of sweeps, laurel-crowned and medal-bedecked sprinters, hurdlers, cross-country runners, and tennis champions, golfers who spurned handicaps, marksmen who never fired at anything more dangerous than a blue rock or a target, all joined in a rush to the colors.

That call sounded a death-knell to the sports of May and June. Mug chasers and pot hunters for trophies found a new field for their sporting spirit in the more

serious and worthier chase for the honors which come with the shoulder straps and collar band decorated with single or double bars, the golden or silvered leaf, or perchance an eagle. These unexpectedly became the only prizes worth the winning. The whole American sporting world seemed to have set out in a hotfoot chase for them. The beauty of it all is, too, that these whole-hearted sportsmen were all willing to begin at the bottom, just as they did when they were struggling to get out of the novice class in their favorite sport. So training camps for war service in one of its many branches became the successors of diamonds, cinder paths, gridirons, and waterways.

Curtailment of athletic activities was first felt in the abandonment by the larger of our universities, colleges, and preparatory schools of their scheduled meets for athletic honors. When students at Harvard, Yale, Cornell, and Princeton gave over indulgence in competitive field and track sports and abandoned their historic regattas, those at the lesser institutions followed suit. The proverbial Hamlet without the Dane would be rather less interesting than regattas and track games without the star teams from the great colleges, about which chief interest centred. The University of Pennsylvania persisted, as did some of the Middle Western universities, and has held meets; but record-breakers were not there, and they were athletic salads without oil. Cross-country runs there have been, but the Overtons and Windnagles were not afoot to make them events worth going to see. Graduate managers and college heads have tried to keep up an interest in athletics through intermural and class and society contests. Somehow the hearts of the boys were not in them, and, save for minor contests between minor colleges, Spring sports have perforce been abandoned.

Graduate managers have preached earnestly the necessity of keeping sports alive as a needed training school for young men not of age to get to the front. But more interest was found on the campus when the bugle blew the assembly and a smart young officer in the khaki of the United States Army snapped out, "Company, fall in." There has been a ready answer to that call. Books of tactics have been more popular than the enticing call of the trainer, "All out for a run to the athletic field!" Athletic idols of the campus were at the reserve training quarters, taking a turn at the wheel or scrubbing down decks on the mosquito fleets, tuning up cars for the Ambulance Corps, or dashing through the air at aviation camps. It was at those spots that the hearts of the athletic undergraduates were, rather than at winning places on a second-string team, crew, eleven, or nine.

That which was happening at the colleges was repeated in the great athletic clubs. The New York Athletic, Chicago Athletic, Boston Athletic, Cleveland Athletic, and similar clubs lost their best athletes. The Irish-American Club in this city had to abandon activities because practically all of its worth-while athletic stars of suitable age were on duty with the Seventy-first, or Sixty-ninth, or some other National Guard regiment, on duty "somewhere in New York State." There was a dearth of athletes in them all. The great gymnasias were given over to the "hep-hep-hep" of the military instructor.

Only professional sports have fought hard to survive. These are baseball and horse racing, with the allied sport of the horse show. The capital invested in the former was its excuse for fighting for a living. Necessity of keeping up the breed of horses, theoretically, at least, the reason for the latter, though the love for the speculation always attendant on the racing game is perhaps the larger incentive with the mass of attendants. Neither has prospered materially. Promoters of both sports say this is because of the continuing unseasonable weather, and the unusually small attendance is due to that

rather than to a loss of interest in either baseball or horse racing. Nevertheless, the man on the street who supports these sports and makes athletic contests hubbubs of enthusiasm says he "has no heart for sport when the country is facing a determined effort in support of the noblest cause that ever summoned a nation to war, with all the possible sacrifices and privation which that participation implies."

Already some of the minor leagues among the professional baseball players have had to shorten their schedules; clubs are being abandoned for lack of support in the Southeast and Middle West, and a chaotic condition exists which threatens financial disaster, particularly in the smaller cities, where the people are more interested in cultivation of hitherto neglected soil or other steps for preparedness against the possibilities which war may bring.

For the first time in forty-one years the intercollegiate games, in which all the larger college teams of the East and many from the West have been participants, have been abandoned because of the fact that more than a thousand of the students who would under normal conditions have been training for the sports have either left college for the preliminary training camps or have given up athletics for the military drill which monopolizes the athletic fields. For the first time since the close of the war between the States there will be no big college regattas, nor any national rowing regatta.

National golf and tennis championships have been declared off, either for good and sufficient sentimental reasons or because of "unnecessary hysteria" over the sporting situation, as some of the followers of these sports declare. Yet it is a fact that more than half of the first ten among tennis players are now training for Government service instead of the battles of the courts. R. Norris Williams, 2d; George M. Church, Dean Mathey, Watson M. Washburn, Clarence J. Griffin, Karl H. Behr, names to conjure with at tennis, and Willis E. Davis, the national clay-court champion, have been doing their bit for the country. Without these a tennis tournament that would excite general interest would be impossible. Incidentally, Williams, the tennis champion, has been reported turned down because of flat feet, though he still has hopes of serving the country somehow.

Tennis survives as a sport, however, as it should. It is a game which gives abundant physical exercise for those who need it most. Its abandonment in its highest form would be a real loss to the young men who may in time be called to the ranks and need to be fit to take the places of the champions who have done their work and have perhaps become incapacitated. Certainly the training of the tennis court, the baseball field, and the handball court would develop a fine army of grenade throwers. In this sort of hand-to-hand fighting it has been found along that terrible western front in France that the Canadian baseball players and the Basque pelota players have made the best men at this sort of destructive and defensive fighting. So there is a practical reason for the continuance of activities in these sports that should not be overlooked by the military authorities, who incidentally are opposed to the manifest letdown in all sorts of competitive sports, and almost without exception favor a continuance rather than a cessation of sport of a distinctly competitive character. President Wilson, Secretary of War Baker, Secretary of the Navy Daniels, General Wood, and a dozen others in authority are in favor of a continuance of the health-giving, muscle and stamina building games in which young Americans are adepts. At all army and navy training posts where it is possible baseball, football, rowing, tennis, and the track and field sports are encouraged as helpful adjuncts to the prescribed courses of physical training to which all volunteers are subjected.

Competitive sports are not wholly

dead, even though national contests in practically all have been officially abandoned. Golf will be almost as popular as ever, mainly because a majority of its devotees are men beyond the age for our first selective conscription. They need its bracing results to fit them for their business duties, which will increase rather than lessen in the trying days that may be coming. De-championized tournaments may lose some of the old fascinations, but the fact that the contests are to be held for the benefit of the Red Cross instead of for mere trophies should stimulate the players of the game and make the certificates they may win even more valuable sentimentally than the bits of silver heretofore awarded. Some say the championship title incentive will be gone. Why is not a championship certificate equally valuable? Sentiment alone could easily make an honor won in these days a super-championship, even if some of the constant contenders for these prizes are off doing their bit.

Already the graduate managers are agitating for a renewal of sports at the colleges. Perhaps their position and that of the coaches is a bit selfish, in that they are beneficiaries in reflected glory of their athletic charges. But the best sentiment of the leaders of sport in this country is coming to agree with them in their efforts to carry out the football schedules prepared for the coming Fall. The games can be as exciting even if some of the stars are missing. A portion of the great gate receipts could well be applied to the many war relief societies, which need every dollar possible to be corralled. Football itself is a miniature game of war, and it is the argument of those who favor its continuance on a wide competitive scale that there is no better preliminary training for a man for duty as a soldier. It is now proposed to hold a meeting of representatives of all the colleges in the country at Washington in August, when a meeting of the National Collegiate Association will be held to advocate a wide renewal of intercollegiate sport of all kinds, both for its value in training and for its mental effects on the thousands of young men remaining in college and those who will enter the schools with the beginning of the college year, and who need the incentive of college-competitions to keep up to their physical best.

No greater mistake can be made than the abandonment of water sports at the present time. Yachtsmen, led by such men as Commodore Baker of the New York Yacht Club, Colonel Cornelius Vanderbilt, one of the foremost amateur yachtsmen in America, and a host like them have volunteered their services, and are serving their country now. A hundred yachts suitable for defensive service have been given the country, manned by their owners and their friends, and for weeks have been engaged in the disagreeable weather in the service of the coast patrol, with never a bit of fighting in sight, but doing yeoman defensive service just the same. A thousand other yachtsmen, residents of Greater New York, love the sport, and in it find the education that books cannot give them to take the place of the men now on duty. Only regattas will perfect them in the handling of sea craft, and when men who know boats and harbors are so badly needed, it would seem almost criminal to stop their activities. The country may yet need their services, and nothing but constant practice can train them in the mysteries of tides and seaways, safe pilotage, and adept manipulation of craft.

Sport in its best phases—and that is what America stands for—is an upbuilder of men, a creator of the fighting, dogged, never-give-up spirit that wins. Our young men need the training it brings them. Competition in sport is its very life. So, the sober second thought, already beginning to assert itself, will unquestionably decide against any letdown in sport except when it is necessary, and will adjudge it to be a necessary diversion and stimulation for more serious outdoor work in the days to come.