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Creators: Biggs, William R.

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The Future of Rifle Shooting as an Intercollegiate Sport

BY WILLIAM R. BIGGS

Manager Yale University Rifle Team 1920-1922. Member the Executive Board and Publicity Manager the Intercollegiate Association of Affiliated Rifle Clubs 1921-1922.

 THE Great War brought many changes in the colleges of the United States, yet perhaps none of them have been as striking as the sudden growth in interest in Rifle Shooting as a regularly constituted college sport. This is due to a wide variety of causes. The chief reason seems to be that during the war many Americans who had never even seen a rifle before were forced to become very familiar with it. What is more, they were dependent on the rifle and the skill with which they used it for their very lives and many of them learned to love their rifles. At the end of the war they did not wish to give up their newly acquired art altogether and welcomed the chance to practice it at colleges.

Then too, there came to many people all over the country the realization that the best safeguard against war is reasonable preparation in peace. There could be no better preparation than a general knowledge of shooting among the college men of the day.

Men who have used a rifle or shot to any great extent can testify to the great charm of the sport and thus the war by bringing more men into contact with the rifle taught them and made them feel its fascination.

Yet there is one factor which we must recognize had a large part in the growth of Rifle Shooting at the colleges. This is the Novelty of the sport. At Yale when we first started our telegraphic matches there was an immense amount of interest because of the newness of the idea. Small bore shooting, and that is what I am largely referring to, is very little exercise and so the sport must appeal more for its own sake. The management of a rifle team more than perhaps any other must keep wide awake and constantly promote its sport, and try to institute new and interesting features continually. Because of the telegraphic feature of the matches one of the great incentives to going out for a sport is taken away and this must be counteracted. The feature to which I refer is the taking of trips which is one of the most important factors in getting men to come out for the minor college sports. Every manager should do his best to get his Athletic Association to finance one trip a year if possible. Arrangements could be made with another college to shoot alternately on each other's home range or some neutral range upon certain prescribed conditions. This would do more than anything to keep interest in the sport alive and to get the best men out.

Another factor which helps keep interest up is the constant addition of new features in the way of shooting and in the schedule. For the last two years Yale has shot an annual match with Oxford University and this has done more than anything to arouse the interest of the undergraduate public and the sympathetic support and co-operation of the Athletic Association. Last year a new feature

was added to these matches in the addition of a two-stage match; one stage the regular prone slow fire and the other prone rapid fire. This stage was suggested by Oxford and was shot on Targets furnished by them. Yale furnished the slow fire targets. The Yale team made a perfect score in the rapid fire stage. The new rapid fire stage aroused keen interest among the members of the squad and there was a great deal of rivalry in the tryouts for the team to shoot against Oxford. Inter-sectional matches are also great stimulants to interest.

There is one thing which I think should be especially encouraged and that is the official recognition of the sport by the University Athletic Associations and the awarding of the insignia to members of the team. I have had so many letters asking for the basis on which we are awarded letters by our Athletic Association that I shall try to clear the matter up here. It had been till last year the management's policy to award the rYt to all men placing in the Harvard, Princeton or Oxford matches but there were obvious injustices in this method and last year we recommended for insignia the ten men with the highest averages in the matches all during the season. This method will I think be found the fairest. Last year in addition to the ten rYt insignias the Athletic Association recognized our very good record in the prone shooting by awarding the five highest men on the team their class numerals in addition to the rYt. We are of course given a regular budget and are a fully constituted minor sport. The Athletic Association has been most sympathetic and helpful and it is difficult to see how they could have done more. Personally I am very strongly opposed to the control of the Rifle Team by the R. O. T. C. This tends to keep the Athletic Association uninterested and limits members of the team to members of the R. O. T. C. Cooperation with the R. O. T. C. is both necessary and beneficial to both. At Yale this organization has done a very great deal for us and only through the aid of its officers and commander has the existence and development of the sport been possible. The ideal arrangement is control by the Athletic Association and cooperation with the military.

For the future I think the greatest hope of development of indoor shooting lies in the standardization of conditions, the development of the off-hand, sitting and kneeling positions to obtain greater variety; and the recognition more fully by the War Department of the immense value of Intercollegiate shooting in the preparation of the nation by sending each year a certain number of recognized college teams (not R. O. T. C. teams) to the National Matches in the summer. Congress as well as the War Department must be confronted with the amazing possibilities and eventual economies in this type of preparation and this can only be done by unceasing effort and publicity.