

Institutional Contradictions and Struggles in the Formation of U.S. Collegiate Basketball, 1880–1938

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The prominence of collegiate athletics in amateur athletics is a historically specific outcome. Research in institutional theory is extended by developing an institutional-conflict-based approach to studying institutional changes of U.S. collegiate athletics. Available secondary sources and extensive original data demonstrate how the NCAA came to dominate the governance structure of U.S. amateur basketball. Discourse about the NCAA came to represent the dominant discourse in amateur basketball, and colleges and universities eliminated the noncolleges and nonuniversities from their play schedules. The NCAA developed a set of institutional strategies aimed at increasing its power in U.S. basketball. An institutional-conflict-based approach is useful for analyzing changes in the institutional structure of sports and demonstrates how governance systems and institutional conflicts impact organizational actions. Sport policy makers and managers should consider the historical context and institutional environment of their sport when making decisions.

U.S. collegiate athletics, college basketball in particular, is a major industry shaped by the intersection of key societal logics of business, education, and culture (Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). Collegiate athletics has grown from a cottage industry in which local clubs competed against each other to a global industry through which college basketball teams garner attention, visibility, and financial resources for their colleges. This lucrative aspect of collegiate athletics is historically not new (Chu, 1989; Shulman & Bowen). What is novel are the stable institutional features of this industry, now with its orderly contests, stable membership, and elaborate governance infrastructure. In this article, we explore a period in the development of this industry in which the now-familiar institutional features were neither conventional, familiar, or settled.

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By the late 1880s, governance models and organizational forms of sport were many. Some sporting activities, such as baseball, had already developed into well-structured professional activities; these provided clear models that were imported into university and college contexts. Football, although only an amateur sport at this time, was predominantly played by colleges and universities and not the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) or the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA; Leifer, 1995). Basketball was the one sport that was played by many different types of organizations. These organizations had different rules and different conceptions as to the appropriate style of play (Isaacs, 1984). This variety of rules of the game made it difficult for arbiters to determine the best teams. Several communities were interested in the outcomes of collegiate athletics: fans and organized alumni groups, the press, and governance associations. As early as 1901, several newspapers and sport organizations were able to reach consensus on the best football teams in the country (Stagg, 1946). One reason for this was the similarity in the play of football and a consensus among colleges about status- and segment-appropriate opponents (Falla, 1981). For basketball, with the variety of organizations and diversity in rules of the game that defined competition, there was no such consensus.

With regard to the empirical evidence, this article answers the following question: How did U.S. collegiate athletics come to dominate the amateur athletic field of basketball? We trace institutional strategies and governance in men's amateur and collegiate athletic activities in basketball across two formative time periods: 1880–1905, a period of emergence of organized amateur athletics, and 1906–1938, a period of boundary purification and internal field stratification in amateur athletics.

Theoretically, we answer the question by using concepts from organizational institutionalism, building specifically from a conflict view of organizational fields (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, 1984; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995; Tolbert & Arthur, 1988; Washington, 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). The primary contribution of this study is to provide an analytic next step to the research opportunity identified by O'Brien and Slack (2004):

The interplay between institutional logics, isomorphic pressures, and diffusion processes in periods of organizational change has received surprisingly little research attention in the sport management literature. This seems remiss, given that all sport organizations are embedded in organizational fields of some description, and are thus subject to attendant institutional pressures for change. (p. 36)

Although this is a historical project, we think that this work also has implications for sport managers. A fundamental insight from organizational theory is that organizations and industries are imprinted with the environmental conditions that were in place during the organization or industry's creation (Stinchcombe, 1965). Although the environmental conditions might have changed since the organization or industry's founding, often the structure of the organization or industry does not change. Thus, for existing sport managers, we contend that history matters. Specifically, this project is an example of how existing problems with amateur basketball (dominated by the NCAA, the debate between the amateur and the professional nature of college basketball, the role of the media) might be a consequence of the

historical conditions that surrounded basketball during its creation. The implication of this project has implications for other sport-related issues. For example, one reason that women's basketball has more visibility and attention in the U.S. than women's volleyball might be the historical conditions that resulted in keeping the basketball hoop for women's basketball the same height as men's basketball, but lowering the net for women's volleyball in relation to men's volleyball. We argue that sport managers might be able to solve existing sport conflicts by looking back to the conditions during the formation of the specific sport.

In short, we build on research in the organizational field approaches and link these with new insights about institutional change (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002) to examine the institutionalization of basketball (the institution) and the creation of U.S. college athletics (the organizational field). This study focuses on two forms of institutional conflicts: contradictory logics of action and struggles for primacy among governance associations. We use secondary and original archival data on collegiate athletics to develop claims about the relationship between institutional conflicts and organizational field evolution.

Theoretical Background

An organizational field approach as a methodological inquiry directs attention to institutional strategies and struggles over boundaries, status, identity, and the very authorization of actors. Dacin et al. (2002), in their summary of work on organizational institutionalism and change, argued that generative, needed theory development is moving in this direction:

[Studies about organizational fields] have been the meat and potatoes of macro researchers over the past two decades, often combining the ideas and methods of institutional and population ecologists to examine population-level change processes. Such studies are of great value, but they pose a risk; the danger of ignoring other types of changes . . . that result in more profound transformations in fields. Such processes include . . . changes in field boundaries, and . . . changes in governance structures. (p. 50)

This article takes seriously this agenda, by theorizing the interplay of changes in field boundaries and changes in governance structures. We develop the argument, data, and methods that explore how changes are the result of institutional conflicts of several kinds between actors in an organizational field.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his seminal work on organizational fields, institutions, and change (DiMaggio, 1991; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), provides insights that are of value in the development of an institutional-conflict perspective. For Bourdieu, fields of activity are always contested arenas that emerge out of struggles over scarce capitals; they are post hoc and empirical descriptions of ongoing arenas of activity (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). By using an organizational field approach instead of the standard view of populations, groups, organizations, or institutions, Bourdieu draws attention to the relationships, patterns of interests and identities, and forms of conflict that shape the empirical reality of field contests (Swartz, 1997). Fields exist to the extent they are institutionally defined and hence are tools an analyst uses to focus and highlight

particular processes and specific empirical situations. Fields are “arenas of struggle for legitimation” (p. 123). Organizational and culture researchers in sports management have used a field approach to examine the evolution of adventure racing (Kay & Laberge, 2002), changes in professional sport (Cousens & Slack, 2005), and the adoption of a professional logic in English rugby (O’Brien & Slack, 2004).

In our work, the methodological prescription for following the conflict (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) meets the insights from 30 years of work by researchers in organization, strategy, and innovation studies who have focused on institutionalized formal organizational structures and strategies. We combine organizational institutionalism with Bourdieu’s important insights to propose an analytic framework to address questions about the early moments in the structuring of fields. This framework provides a context for the dynamics of status and stratification of activity segments—in the empirical case presented here, the rapid dominance of collegiate athletics in the field of amateur athletics. We focus on institutional conflicts of two sorts. The first type of institutional conflict is the potential contradiction at the level of institutional logics that organize and delimit the cultural and behavioral sources of field boundaries. Logics govern and give meaning to activity in any one field, and the presence of plural societal logics establishes the basis for macrojurisdictional conflicts (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Struggles for primacy among contender governance associations (Galvin, 2002) are a second site of conflict.

Contradictions

Friedland and Alford (1991) suggested that organizational fields operate under diverse societal belief systems that differ fundamentally in their institutional logics, that is, their content, nature of central assumptions, and ordering principles. The first form of institutional conflict we identify results from contradictions among such societal logics—the meaning systems that govern and give direction to activity (Heimer, 1996) and alternative organizational forms (Haveman & Rao, 1997). In Friedland and Alford’s call to bring society, symbols, and practices back into organizational analysis, contradictions are the potential tensions between market and state logics, religious ideologies and secular motives for action, and public and private spheres of interinstitutional arrangements. These institutional logics identify varying identities, sources of interest, and bases of action. Each contending logic proposes distinct status orders, resource distributions, and a set of legitimate actors and actions (Friedland & Alford; Heimer). “Institutional contradictions are the bases of the most important political conflicts in our society; it is through these politics that the institutional structure of society is transformed” (Friedland & Alford, p. 256).

Contending logics provide a source of contradiction in the field in the sense that they represent coherent alternatives to both the dominant status ordering and to the current legitimate activity in the field. They shape activity and also become resources that incumbent and challenger actors use to redefine existing arrangements. Work on institutional logics provides both conceptual argument and empirical evidence of the presence of multiple, contending logics in a given field and across fields (DiMaggio, 1991). For example, contradictions inherent in professional sports stem from the logic of sports as entertainment, sports as athletic competition, and sports

as a business. Issues of steroid use and penalties associated with this use are solved very differently according to which of the three logics is in operation.

Governance Struggles

Recent work on key domains such as finance and health care suggests that examining the dynamics of governance associations provides a useful empirical way to study macro changes in domain boundaries and the segmenting of existing fields. Lounsbury (2002) used the founding patterns of finance associations to describe how dominant logics in the field of finance shift from a regulatory logic to a market- or expertise-based logic. Galvin (2002) used the founding patterns of health-care-interest associations to examine the erosion of dominance by medical professionals and the rise of corporate actors in the evolution of the U.S. health care field. Building on this work, we identify a second form of institutional conflicts as struggles among contending governance models and organizational forms for primacy in the field. Dominant governance associations effectively set the rules of the game and implement institutional strategies that support and reinforce their advantages and that block access by challengers (Lawrence, 1999). This form of institutional conflict points to the benefits of attention to gatekeeping organizations that monitor, advise, and adjudicate collective rationalities (standards and conventions) in activity fields (Coffee, 2006; Hirsch, 1972; Zald, 1978).

Examining governance struggles is also important because struggles are a key driver of field-level evolution (Hoffman, 1999). Once a struggle is settled, hierarchy can occur; the winner of the struggle can define or create the dominant institutional arrangements (i.e., definition of the valuation order, jurisdictions, and relevant actors). Few governance or institutional forms, however, are completely abandoned, even in the longer term; rather, contender forms battle with incumbents for primacy or for access. Once boundaries are settled, purification processes in which alternative forms are excluded occur, and organizations might then struggle for primacy within these partitioned spaces, yielding stratified segments in the field. We develop this line of inquiry by reviewing decades of continuing strategies and struggles among the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), YMCA, and AAU and how these recurring institutional conflicts impact the evolution of the field of U.S. collegiate basketball.

We view these two forms of institutional conflicts (contradictions and struggles) as distinct, analytic summaries of the ongoing general conflicts that Bourdieu identified as constitutive of fields of activity. At any one time, contradictions and struggles are both operative in a field of activity, and these conflicts could involve the same or different organizational field actors. These conflicts do operate at different levels of analysis: Contradictions operate at the societal or interinstitutional level, whereas struggles operate at the interorganizational level of analysis.

Research Strategy

To analyze how U.S. collegiate basketball came to be the dominant subfield in amateur basketball, we assembled evidence on key transitions in the development of the amateur basketball field, boundary purification processes evident in institutional and organizational strategies, and the rise of a collegiate-dominant athletic

field. We assembled evidence to answer three key questions about how collegiate basketball came to dominate amateur athletics:

1. What share of public discourse about amateur athletics did colleges and other organizational forms garner, and how did this change over time?
2. Who were the opponents in the play schedules of the top schools, and how did this change over time?
3. What was the proportion of nonlocal opponents, and how did this change over time?

We suggest that the framework of institutional conflicts and organizational fields provides a useful way to review this historical evidence and link changes in the institutional history with the trend data we assembled. The result is a still historically rich but theory-driven analysis of (a) how collegiate basketball came to dominate the amateur athletics field through these processes of reduced heterogeneity of competition in collegiate athletics and (b) the subsequent status gains of the NCAA as a contender governance association. To highlight these conflicts, we present the historical case of the development of collegiate basketball in context. We organize these data with a focus on two distinct periods in the evolution of amateur athletics. We use these periods to interpret and frame the empirical trend data.

We report these empirical trend data in the context of a structured historical account of how various governance associations struggled to determine which college, university, YMCA, AAU, high school, or armed-forces team was the best basketball team in the United States. We show how institutional conflicts (contradictions and struggles) configured this debate and the eventual settlement by the creation of a new institution: the college and university postseason basketball tournament. The National Invitational Tournament, created in 1938, occurred 1 year before the NCAA tournament. Although the 1938 tournament was not supported by the NCAA, the fact that both tournaments allowed only colleges and universities to compete demonstrates the movement away from basketball success as an amateur issue to basketball success as a collegiate issue. Thus, we end our empirical account in 1938.

Method

This research applies a historical embedded case-study design (Washington, Forman, Suddaby, & Ventresca, 2005; Yin, 2003) to answer our research question. According to Yin, “in general, case studies are the preferred strategy when how or why questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). An embedded case-study design (as opposed to a holistic design) is useful when there are subunits of the case that “add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case” (p. 46). Historical research requires the systematic collection and analysis of archival data (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). For this study, we relied on several key primary data sources such as NCAA convention summaries; notes of various meetings between the NCAA, YMCA, and AAU; and individual college athletic histories (see the appendix for a list of sources). Although such primary data sources offer key insights into events as they unfolded and offer the direct point of view of major actors in these organizations (Tuchman,

1994), they fail to provide the interpretive context of retrospective accounts. That is, material documents and texts can be given new meanings as they are separated in time from their original producers and reinterpreted post hoc in the context of “changes in meaning across space and culture” (Hodder, 1994, p. 398).

Our analysis was purposefully driven by process (Kieser, 1994; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) in an effort to capture the dynamics of actions and reactions of the parties as the struggle over the contested terrain unfolded. This process involved capturing the post hoc interpretations of these events from the vantage point of elapsed time. We used secondary sources to substantial advantage in this phase—the dissertations, existing histories, and other published accounts. The focus of analysis was to work between current, past, and present accounts of the events in an effort to identify a generalized interpretation and coherent account (Hodder, 1994).

To help with the presentation of the data, we produced graphs from the vantage point of the colleges and universities. Thus, our data aggregates detailed trend data on the strategies and activities of key cohorts of colleges and universities involved in collegiate athletics from 1893 to 1938. Figure 1 tracks the discursive presence of the different governance associations in amateur basketball. We coded these data from the Spalding official Basketball Guides. The Spalding guides, published by the AAU from 1901 to 1915 and by the USA Basketball Committee from 1915 to 1954, reported on the state of affairs of amateur basketball from 1901 to 1954. In 1955, the NCAA guides officially supplanted the Spalding guides. We coded the volumes from 1901 through 1940 to develop indicators of discursive attention to amateur sport activity in several segments: NCAA member colleges, AAU member teams, YMCA teams, and armed-forces teams. Specifically, we counted the amount of text (number of lines) that referenced each organization. This was both an efficient and consistent measure, because the Spalding guides had sections devoted to each organization. In some volumes, however, there were introductory sections that highlighted specific stories. Here, we separated the introductory sections into the appropriate categories.

Figure 2 presents data on the playing schedules of 22 top major collegiate basketball schools during the early history of intercollegiate basketball. Our decision to include these 22 colleges was based on availability of data for the observation period. All the schools were members of the university category of college athletics and represent the regional diversity of the United States. In addition, they are representative of the country’s public universities (Alabama, Arizona, Dayton, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Iowa State, Kansas, Michigan State, Nebraska, Purdue, Texas, Utah, and Washington) and private universities (Brown, DePaul, Harvard, Loyola, Northwestern, Rice, U.S. Military Academy, and Yale). A sample of elite universities was included (Brown, Harvard, Illinois, Iowa, Northwestern, Purdue, Texas, U.S. Military Academy, and Yale) because they might not have had the same goals as the nonelite schools. Informal review of these cases and other available anecdotal evidence suggest that the general trends reported here hold true across the population of major colleges and universities. Figure 3 presents data on the number of schools that these 22 schools competed against that are not located in the same state as the focal school; these data show the rise of nonlocal but purified competition, in which the only appropriate competitors are other colleges and universities.

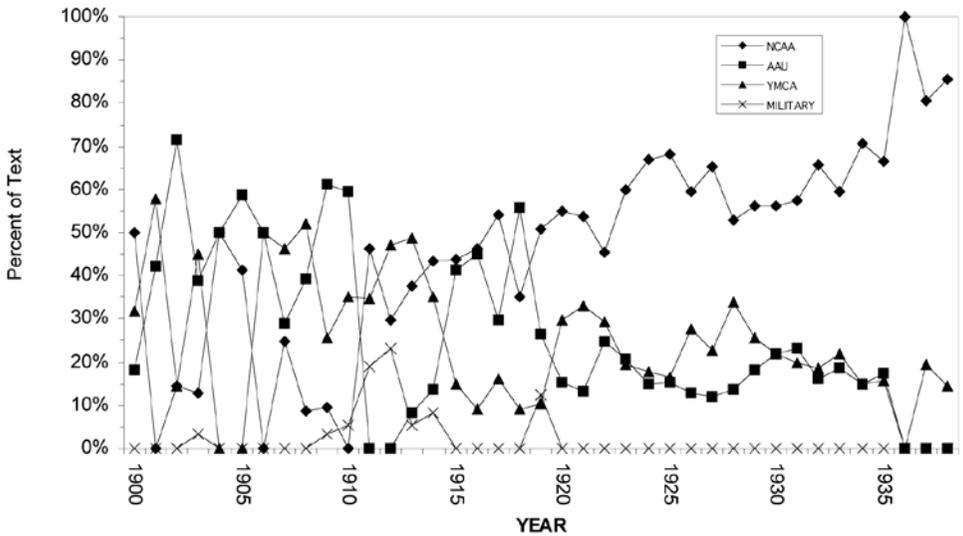


Figure 1 — Percentage of text devoted to contending governance associations in leading men’s amateur basketball guides, 1900–1938. Source: Author compilations, Spalding’s Official Basketball Guides, multiple years.

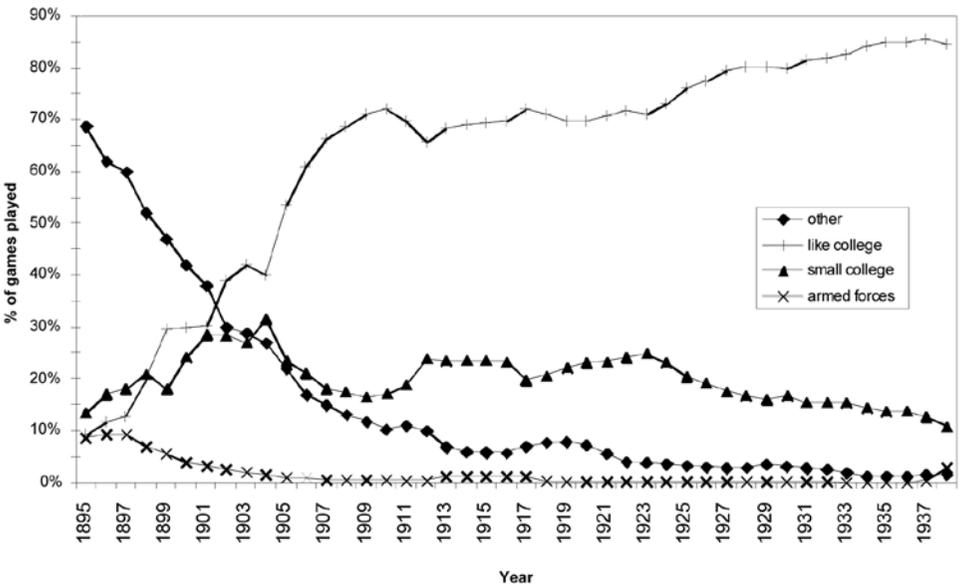


Figure 2 — Percentage of games colleges and universities played against basketball teams, by segment of the amateur field, 1895–1938. Source: Author compilations, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Basketball*, by W.G. Mokray, 1963.

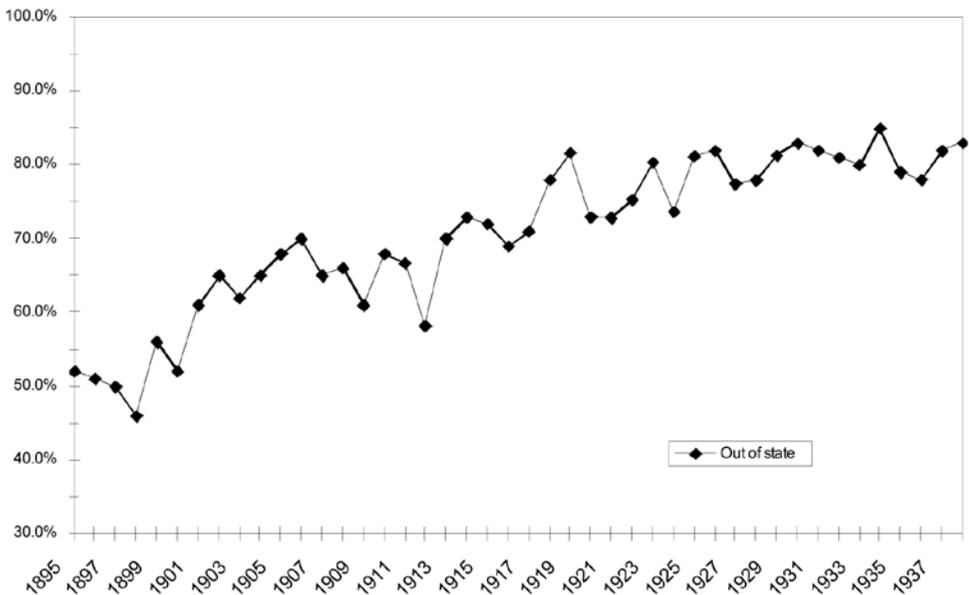


Figure 3 — Percentage of games played by focal college or university against out-of-state teams, 1895–1938. Source: Author compilations, *Ronald Encyclopedia of Basketball*, by W.G. Mokray, 1963.

Results

In the Research Strategy section, we identified our approach: We assembled data on logics and governance association struggles from primary and secondary sources, and we compiled original archival data on public discourse and competitor strategies in amateur athletics. We report here the findings of the trend analysis of public discourse in the field and the competitor strategies, and then we discuss these results in the context of institutional conflicts around logics and governance struggles.

Field Discourse and Competitor Strategies

Figure 1 reports evidence of the changing relative prominence of key segments of the amateur field, coded from leading authorized basketball publications. These field segments in basketball (AAU, YMCA, NCAA, and U.S. armed forces) are indicators of different logics: conceptions of purpose, governance structures, and in some cases even different rules of play (Flath, 1963; Stagg, 1946). Early on, there was extreme diversity in the attention the Spalding guides gave to a variety of amateur basketball organizations. The guides reported on key events in AAU basketball, YMCA basketball, and the NCAA. By 1920, however, more attention was given to the NCAA and less to the other organizations. By the end of the 1930s,

no attention was given to the military and AAU, and the bulk of the attention was focused on the NCAA.

Figure 2 reports data from college play schedules on the percentage of games played by 22 major colleges and universities against teams from key field segments—that is, the other amateur and community segments—for the period from 1895 to 1938. In the last years of the 19th century, the largest proportion of these colleges' competitor schedules comprised teams that were not college and university teams. The percentage of games played against other teams (YMCA, AAU, and high school teams), which was 70% in 1895, dropped quickly to 30% within 10 years and to about 10% by 1915. Mirroring this transition, the proportion of contenders among other colleges of similar size, prestige, and reputation with regard to athletics (like colleges and universities) grew rapidly, from 15% in 1895 to 40% in 1905 and to more than 70% by 1920. These two trends continued, albeit more gradually, such that by the 1930s and after, nearly 80% of the play was with like teams, the rest being with smaller colleges and universities.

High schools (a mainstay of early college basketball schedules) and community or municipal teams seldom competed with this group of 22 colleges and universities. The status segregation and field partitioning was quick and relatively complete. While this purification of the college basketball schedule was taking place, a similar process was occurring at the high school level. Ryan (2005) provided detailed evidence on the challenges facing early high school teams and their search for opponents. Regarding early high school basketball contests in Cleveland, Ohio, he recorded how “the students created a team and played their own schedule against nearby Western Reserve University and private teams organized under the Young Men’s Christian Association” (p. 72). Whereas Ryan’s work focused on how high school athletics became organized and enmeshed into the logic of secondary education, in this article we examine how collegiate athletics became separate from high school athletics.

Of interest is the fact that in the key transitional period of 1895–1910, small colleges initially grew as a percentage of the play schedules of the sample, peaking at over 30% in the middle years of this period. By the 1920s, universities and colleges primarily played only other similar-status institutions. The heterogeneity in play schedules that was prominent at the turn of the century disappeared by the 1910s—evidence of changing societal logics about collegiate sports and the development of governance arrangements that promoted new models of status- and segment-appropriate competition. These changes indicate a particular period of status struggles, during which the field partitions were not clearly established; universities and colleges was the operative category for opponents, with high schools and community agencies directly excluded. Only later does the partition around status stratify the college athletic arena.

Figure 3 presents data on the percentage of schools played from out of state for the same sample of 22 large national universities and colleges. These data show that shortly after the turn of the century, between 60% and 80% of contenders played by these teams came from out of state. This proportion trends slightly downward through the late 1910s, then rises to between 70% and 80% and above from the

1920s on. We include this graph to provide data that suggest that colleges incurred costs in terms of travel arrangements in order to compete against other colleges.

Evidence of Contradictory Logics

To examine the role of institutional contradictions, we identify the two dominant logics in amateur athletics: sport for physical education and sport for college prestige and visibility. The logic of sport as physical education stemmed from the Muscular Christianity movement, which argued for the divine linkage between a robust body and a developed intellect. This movement, expressed directly in the founding aspirations of the YMCA and the invention of basketball in the YMCA tradition, also led to the development of the AAU (Gorn & Goldstein, 1993). The logic of sport for prestige and visibility originated on collegiate campuses as colleges used sport to attract financial resources (Rudolph, 1962). These resources came through direct funds such as ticket prices and alumni donations or indirectly through the increased status and visibility that a school had from having a successful crew, football team, or basketball team (Chu, 1989; Smith, 1988).

Sport as Religion. By the 1850s, the alliance of religious morality and sport acquired the label Muscular Christianity, which first manifested in English public schools and universities. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and a host of prominent ministers and physicians all spoke out in favor of organized sport as a way to spirituality. Holmes even occasionally dedicated his monthly column to fitness and recreation. At the heart of the movement was the idea that if the body is God's temple, the body should be kept in the best shape possible.

By midcentury, an avant-garde of moral leaders—clergymen, intellectuals, journalists and reformers—took up the cause begun as early as the 1830s by physicians and educators . . . and since the body was the resting place of the soul, people were obliged to maintain it as a worthy sanctuary. (Gorn & Goldstein, 1993, p. 85)

The cause of Muscular Christianity also gathered support from U.S. college presidents. Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, argued that not only did lack of exercise impair mental faculties, it also produced “a feebleness of will, which is as fatal to moral attainment as it is to intellectual attainment” (cited in Gorn & Goldstein, 1993, p. 88).

Sport for Prestige. One major problem with colleges founded before the Civil War was a lack of sustained resources in the broadest sense (Rudolph, 1962). To obtain resources, colleges looked to wealthy benefactors. Rhode Island College, founded in 1764, was willing to change its name for any donor who would give \$6,000 to the school. In 1794, Nicholas Brown offered \$5,000, and the school changed its name to Brown. Similarly, other colleges named themselves after such people as James Bowdoin, William Denison, Henry Rutgers, William Carleton, and Washington Duke.

Although early resource problems were alleviated by wealthy benefactors, by the end of the 19th century schools turned to sport for financial resources or for visibility, which could be converted to resources. In 1852, Harvard met, and beat,

Yale in the first intercollegiate athletic event, crew. As long as Yale and Harvard were involved, the annual rowing regattas were the best opportunity that less prestigious colleges had to gain status. “No greater opportunity, curricular or extracurricular, was presented to a college for notoriety and prestige than to win the annual regatta” (Smith, 1988, p. 45). In 1878, Columbia, avenging a previous loss by Harvard, beat Oxford and Cambridge in a crew competition. In a speech to the student body the president of Columbia, Henry Barnard, acknowledged that the winning team had “done more to make Columbia known than all your predecessors . . . because little was known about Columbia one month ago, but today wherever that telegraph cable extends, the existence of Columbia College is known and respected” (cited in Lucas & Smith, 1978, p. 218). Because of seasonal and other limitations of crew, however, football quickly became the dominant strategy used by colleges to gain resources, visibility, and prestige (Chu, 1989; Smith). By the end of the 19th century, many Americans acted as if the purpose of a college was to have a football team (Rudolph, 1962). “The growing popularity of sport represented an opportunity for resource acquisition unknown before the late nineteenth century” (Chu, p. 33).

The Development of Basketball: Religion Meets Visibility

While colleges and high schools were participating in crew and football, other organizations were developing other sporting activities. A minister from the YMCA founded basketball in 1891. James Naismith, a leading Muscular Christian, felt that young men needed something to do between football and baseball seasons; he wanted a game that could be played indoors during the harsh Northeast winter months. While football served the upper-class revitalization and the attendant restructuring of college life, basketball became the progressive middle-class effort to “channel, guide, and Americanize immigrant youth through elementary and secondary extracurricular activities” (Gorn & Goldstein, 1993, p. 175). Basketball was quickly adopted by colleges, city club teams, and other YMCAs. As Figures 1 and 2 show, this diversity was also present in the discourse and in basketball play schedules.

One result of basketball being developed by the YMCA and not by colleges and universities is that it was difficult for colleges to control. The rules developed for basketball and the tournaments that determined the national champion were organized and regulated by the AAU and the YMCA. In addition, because the lure of a college education did not interest most people, let alone basketball players, often the best competition occurred between teams that were not college teams. Thus, colleges, in order to participate in the AAU tournaments, would often compete against noncolleges. As a result, whereas college football was a financial success, colleges had a difficult time developing economic capital from revenue from basketball ticket sales. Cultural capital could not accrue because students did not know which colleges were the basketball elite. Likewise, whereas administrators at Michigan State, Duke, and Swarthmore had football as a major part of their plans to develop their schools into prestigious colleges or universities, school administrators could not use basketball to the same ends (Rudolph, 1962; Smith, 1988). Schools could not acquire social capital through their basketball programs, because without consensus around the best basketball teams, focal teams would

not know which teams were the measuring stick of performance (Rudolph). The field of amateur athletics was ripe for an organizational actor that would produce a way to determine which basketball organization was the best.

Governance Struggles in Amateur Athletics: 1906–1938

By the start of the 20th century, there were at least two contradictory logics impacting amateur basketball, as well as three different governance associations struggling for primacy. As we shall see, the Olympic movement ushered in an additional logic and also sharply focused the conflicts between the three governance associations.

Historically, the field of potential competitors was heterogeneous, messy in the sense of being composed of actors that in contemporary terms came from fundamentally different field segments: community, organized colleges, or voluntary organizations. To an early-20th-century collegiate coach or athletic director, however, these partitions and distinctions would not be relevant. Viable opponents on the sports fields for a college were other colleges but also high schools, YMCAs, and the rest. The specific choices of opponents appear to have been governed by location, social-status affiliation, proximity, tradition, and availability. The definition of an appropriate or relevant opponent was organized by local logics and social structural ties (proximity, history, and convenience) rather than by established conventions regarding segment or sector. Of particular analytic interest, however, is that colleges played a variety of opponents: other colleges but also high schools, YMCAs, and other organizations.

The Olympic movement brought into this field a still further logic for competition and source of opponents. Revitalized in 1896, the Olympics provided organizations that participated in athletics with an arena for the allocation of international prestige. The teams and individuals selected to participate in the Olympic Games received enormous visibility and recognition. In the case of team sports, the participants were typically chosen as an existing team from one or another of the amateur competitions. In other words, the Olympic teams were not composed from best athletes but rather were an already formed team, from the YMCA, an AAU league, or a college or university. The opportunity for recognition and related resources—symbolic and material—prompted promoters to strive to get their sport selected for inclusion in the Olympic Games. The selection of basketball into the Olympics gave the sport national, as well as international, visibility.

Basketball was an exhibition sport in the 1904, 1924, and 1928 Olympics and became an official sport in the 1936 Olympics, with teams representing 21 countries competing (Leifer, 1995; Stagg, 1946). We view the Olympics as another location for institutional conflict. As the field of amateur athletics evolved, so did the conflicts. Viewing field evolution from a conflict perspective allows researchers to see that conflicts are never resolved; they just move from location to location. The conflict between the AAU, YMCA, and NCAA evolved from rules of participation, to tournament selection, to Olympic selection.

The Rise of Contender Governance Associations. The AAU, formed in 1888, represented the first national governance association for U.S. sports. Its aim was to control all of amateur athletics (Flath, 1963). Although the AAU set rules and

regulations for 40 different sporting activities in 1894, by 1899 it focused its attention primarily on lacrosse, track and field, and basketball (Stagg, 1946).

In contrast, the NCAA developed from efforts to control physical conflicts in the form of violence among players on the football field. In some seasons, officials counted as many as 44 deaths among players (Leifer, 1995). On the model of the formalization of football rules, the NCAA quickly developed rules for basketball, lacrosse, and fencing (Stagg, 1946). The NCAA became the dominant institution for collegiate and amateur athletics in the United States:

It would be too sweeping to say the [NCAA] has dominated athletics in American colleges, but it is entirely just to say that the changes that have taken place in college sports had their counterparts in the proceedings of the association. (Savage, 1929, p. 29)

With the founding of the NCAA in 1906, three governance associations (NCAA, YMCA, and AAU) were involved in the regulation and control of amateur athletics. Representatives from these three organizations met in 1915 to develop joint rules, eliminate the cages that made basketball a dangerous game, and form the joint rules committee that led to the development of the National Basketball Committee (Leifer, 1995; Stagg, 1946). With all three organizations agreeing to common rules and the style of play, it became easier for fans, the media, and the three governance associations to determine the best basketball teams.

Although the NCAA, YMCA, and AAU agreed on rules for basketball, they differed on which association should be the ultimate authority in amateur basketball. The AAU, with support from the YMCA, felt that it should make all decisions regarding amateur basketball and specifically all decisions pertaining to selection of basketball teams for the Olympics and any other international basketball competitions (Flath, 1963). The NCAA contended that it had the better athletes and should have more of a voice in amateur athletics. As more schools joined the NCAA, however, the NCAA eventually created a separate niche in amateur athletics: collegiate athletics.

Struggles for Amateur Athletic Control: NCAA Versus AAU. Although the NCAA had control of collegiate athletics, the AAU still vied for control of amateur athletics. As early as the early 1910s, the AAU regulated that all of its members could only play other teams that were members of the AAU. Because there were few schools that played basketball, many schools often played both AAU and non-AAU teams. This led to those schools being denied from participating in AAU-sanctioned tournaments. Colleges eventually withdrew from the AAU, because the NCAA offered fewer restrictions on which schools they could compete against.

Another conflict between the NCAA and the AAU was overrepresentation in the Olympic movement. In contrast to the current practice (in which the best athletes from different teams are selected to represent the United States on the Olympic basketball team), from 1896 until the early 1960s entire teams from various schools, clubs, or YMCAs would compete against each other. Thus, if a particular organization—the basketball team from Ohio State University, the Chicago YMCA, or the New York AAU, for example—was chosen to go to the Olympics, both the organization and its governance association would gain status.

In 1921, the NCAA voted to leave the American Olympic Committee (AOC) because it felt that the AAU had too much control. Whereas the NCAA had 16 votes on the AOC, the AAU had 33 (Stagg, 1946). The AOC, not wanting to lose financial and status support from the NCAA, responded by reorganizing and giving the AAU and the NCAA three votes each (Flath, 1963). The AAU maintained, however, that it was the only committee that could sanction athletes to participate in international competition. When Charles Paddock, a sprinter from the University of Southern California, competed in an NCAA-sponsored meet in Europe, the AAU banned him from participating in the 1924 Olympics. A similar event occurred in 1928 with five swimmers from Northwestern University. It was these conflicts that ultimately led to colleges competing more with other colleges than with noncolleges. As Figure 2 shows, during the period of the conflict between the NCAA and the AAU, the percentage of games colleges played against the AAU fell from 15% to 0%. Meanwhile, the percentage of games played out of state rose from 80% to 90% (Figure 3). The loss of status of the AAU as the dominant governance association is evident in trend data—the percentage of Spalding guides text devoted to the AAU fell from 20% to 0% (Figure 1).

Discussion

Since the 1980s, sport management research has made valuable use of research on institutions and organizational fields, using such concepts as isomorphism, legitimacy, institutionalization, and organizational fields to solve existing research puzzles and to pose new research questions at the forefront of sport management research (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Kikulis, 2000; O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Silk & Amis, 2000). Although institutional theory has established itself as an important perspective in sport management research, much has yet to be examined. Silk and Amis argued that despite the “theoretical and empirical inroads toward addressing the ways macro pressures are interpreted by individual agents, there is a need for more empirical research into these institutional phenomena” (p. 289).

In this project, we extend the sport management research that uses institutional theory as a theoretical lens. This article presents original archival evidence on a period of dramatic change in institutional arrangements governing men's amateur athletics. We show how in a historically brief period from 1899 to 1915, collegiate basketball came to dominate public talk about amateur athletics in authoritative national publications, and colleges and universities simply stopped choosing rivals and competitors from outside the collegiate segment of amateur athletics, despite a strong legacy presence of AAU, YMCA, and other amateur teams. The growing dominance of college basketball is further interesting, given the very provisional presence of higher education institutions in both broad status and absolute numerical terms in the United States at that time (Rudolph, 1962).

We argue that the emergence and evolution of collegiate basketball and its rise to dominate amateur athletics pivot on processes of institutional conflict. We identify and illustrate two key forms of institutional conflicts that are central in the transformation of key relationships and status orders in the amateur athletic field: (a) logic contradictions over the fundamental meaning of sports and (b) recurring

governance struggles between contending associations seeking primacy in defining central rules of the game for amateur athletics. Although the focus is on the NCAA as a major actor, we locate the NCAA inside of the collegiate–amateur athletic field by also examining other key actors: the AAU and YMCA, with their own trajectories as challengers and incumbents in the field. Taken together, this embedded case study of collegiate and amateur basketball describes useful new directions that start from the premise that institutional-conflict processes serve to enable and structure and that they directly inform both the terms of struggles and the shape of settlements in contentious fields. Struggles over the rules of the game involve conflicts over criteria or evaluative standards, with institutions striving to create advantage at the level of criteria and categories. We refocus on the institutional conditions and mechanisms that drive change and conflict in organizational fields, as evidenced in changed boundaries, in the (re)specification of authorized actors, and in shifts in rules that organize activity (Lawrence, 1999; Washington et al., 2005).

This article provides an analytic framework with methods implications to examine the interplay between institutional logics, governance associations, and processes of isomorphism. Specifically, we examined how college basketball organized by the NCAA became the dominant form of amateur basketball in the United States. Future research could take this approach to examine current conflicts in U.S. collegiate athletics. One area of note is the increasing professional interest in collegiate athletics. The debate continues as to whether the role of athletics on college campuses is harmful or helpful to the athlete and the institution (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Smith, 1988; Sperber, 1990).

Another area of conflict involves the creation of a women's amateur and collegiate athletic field. With the enactment of Title IX, colleges are forced to provide gender equity in their athletic programs. The AAU, NCAA, NAIA, and Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women conflict over the site, role, and regulation of women's athletics (Washington et al., 2005). Future research could also use an institutional-conflict-based approach to examine other fields (club-, professional-, or national-level sport fields), the evolution of various practices (how soccer diffused throughout the world but American football did not), or the creation of new sport fields (e.g., adventure sport racing, women's basketball, women's soccer).

Although this study is set in the dynamics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it does offer strategic implications for contemporary sport managers and policy agendas. First it is a reminder that history matters and that the lasting impacts of early historical conflicts and settlements often shape current policy debates. Current conflicts that exist in sport organizations are often the legacy of endemic contradictions and struggles. Second, we suggest that sport managers look to the wider institutional environment to understand persisting conflicts in sport that reflect contradictory logics at work. This view provides resources and insights with which to manage such perennial controversies. Not all conflicts are the same, however. Some conflicts can be solved (struggles between governance associations); others cannot (contradictions in logics). For example, deciding which governance body should regulate open-wheeled racing is a conflict that can be solved, but the problem of amateurism in U.S. collegiate athletics probably cannot. Finally, successful sport managers can increase the likelihood of success for their practice

or activity as they connect their practice to the dominant governance association and tap into the dominant societal logic. The institutional and cultural analysis of prominent athletic strategies remains a still preliminary body of work relevant for studies in higher education more generally and the renewal of research attention to higher education as organization and industry.

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