

An elitest system?

Amateur sports face problem

Last August, I spoke with Dr. Eugene Sprandell, the head of the Michigan Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) about amateur sports in the United States.

And, last August, Dr. Sprandell told me that the U.S. amateur programs were terrible. "It's a miracle we can compete on an international basis at all," he said.

The Olympic trials are now less than a year away. So I again asked Sprandell about the condition of our amateur sports. His reply was that while things have changed, they may not have done so for the better.

The U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) is in the process of raising \$26 million to be used by amateur athletes. With the exception of events like "Olympathon," which was aired last month, that target is within reach.

But it's the way the money is going to be used that worries Sprandell.

"The plan is to spend the money on training centers," said Sprandell, who received his PhD in athletic administration from Michigan State.

"They'll take the cream of the crop to these centers, polish them up, and then try to beat the heck out of the Russians."

That is not what Sprandell wants to see happen to the funds.

"We're modelling our program after the Euro-



countries in the world that doesn't finance its athletes with government funds, but rather relies on commercial donations.

Money is still a problem. In another item, to whom would the funds be assigned to? What body would decide on how they would be used?

THE GOVERNMENT STEPPED IN and passed a federal law, making the USOC, the ruling body. With its new responsibilities, more members were added to the USOC to help make decisions.

And where did these new members come from? The AAU is the official governing body over eight international sports. The two organizations that, along with the USOC, had been competing for international events, are gone.

Upgrading the amateur athletic program has been a public concern since the last Olympics.

Money was the first obstacle, the U.S. remains one of the only

national competition.

The NCAA will have no trouble surviving, but where does that leave the AAU?

"By Jan. 1, the AAU will not be a governing body over any sport," Sprandell said. "By our own choice, the AAU may destroy themselves.

"We just didn't think one board of governors could oversee all sports programs. Since the '60s, when amateur sports really became big money, the AAU has been getting too big."

"Starting in January, each sport (the AAU is officially governing body over eight international sports) will have its autonomy. It will be nothing more than a service organization, providing services for the sports what we do."

Sprandell fears that some sports, like swimming, may decide to form their own organization being given direction."

Nelson is one of nine children. He gives much of the credit for his improvement in the past year to Matt Hart, who runs a basketball scouting service.

"Mr. Hart has given me much direction, advice and encouragement, and I'm thankful for his help," Nelson said. Hart, 16, is Nelson's tallest high school player ever in the state.

After finishing its first year under Hart, 16, St. Mary's has vastly upgraded its schedule for the coming season.

and drop the AAU all together. But that is a chance the AAU board has decided to take.

Now, the AAU may disappear. The USOC is taking a step in and do about the same things the AAU was doing. And the same people may be in control. No one can really tell.

"Politics aren't going to go away," Sprandell said. "Anything that makes good common sense probably won't get done. International relations problems hurt it."

"People just can't get together and resolve things."

Ain't it the truth.

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