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'Exercise for the multitude, rather than competition for the specialist': British Coaching Initiatives in Athletics and Swimming (1937-1947)

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Abstract

The pervasive influence of the amateur ethos, with its emphasis on volunteerism, permeated all aspects of British sport in the mid-twentieth century, including attitudes towards professional coaches and specialized training. While British international sporting performances continued to decline, for many middle-class sports administrators, who consistently focused on encouraging participation, other issues were more important, especially the poor fitness levels witnessed among the general population. The 1937 Physical Training and Recreation Act, introduced to improve the physical state of the nation, resulted in the establishment of a National Fitness Council (NFC) to provide financial assistance for sporting organizations to educate their teachers. Paradoxically, this inadvertently stimulated employment prospects for professional coaches, although the NFC declared from the start that it was not interested in supporting the training of Olympic prospects. This paper explores how British administrators in athletics and swimming responded to the opportunities afforded them by the creation of the NFC and, in the post-War period, by the Ministry of Education, which assumed control of the pre-war NFC Grants Committee and had a remit to finance national coaching schemes. While both sports developed coaching programmes, these continued to focus on the production of honorary coaches to expand participation. In adhering to their amateur values and traditions, rather than supporting specialized elite training, both associations struggled with the tensions between their philosophical objectives and the pressures of international sport, as reflected in ongoing debates about the values of 'voluntarism' as opposed to the benefits of 'professionalism'. The paper also takes the opportunity to juxtapose the life courses and class attitudes of those who organized and administered British sport with the very different experiences and perspectives of the men and women they employed as coaches.

Keywords: Amateurism, Volunteerism, Coaching, National Fitness Council, Ministry of Education

Introduction

British international sporting performances declined in the interwar period, not least because British athletes were unable to contend with coaching and training regimes instituted abroad by governments that recognized the value of sport as a means of demonstrating national prestige. While it saw some sports like football as a potential diplomatic tool, the Foreign Office made it clear in 1936 that Olympic participation was the responsibility of the British Olympic Association (BOA), 'a private organisation with whom His Majesty's Government have no connexion, and there is no question of any official patronage or assistance (financial or otherwise) being given to British teams participating.'¹ In contrast, the staging of the Games that year provided the German government with an opportunity for diplomatic and political credibility. Having introduced several training and coaching initiatives, Germany headed the medal table with thirty-three gold medals, while Britain only achieved five. The *Observer* recorded that Britain had been 'outstripped' by Germany, America, France, Italy, and Japan,

¹ FO communication, April 30, 1936, National Archives, Kew, FO/371/19940/3137, Foreign Office Collection, National Archives, Kew (hereafter cited as FO Collection, NA).

and that even 'lesser' nations such as Finland, Sweden, and Hungary, had 'made us look ridiculous.'² Apologists for the British team argued that other nationalities employed different interpretations of amateurism and that 'our own particular amalgam of work and play expressed a better philosophy of life than those other codes which have reaped superior honours at Berlin.' British athletes had competed as a 'gentleman' should, while foreign athletes 'kept by their governments' clearly had an advantage over British competitors who had to treat the Games as their summer holidays and take unpaid leave.³ Although the 1936 BOA report conceded that devoting more time to specialist training would improve standards it doubted if this would 'demonstrate anything of national importance'⁴ and for many amateur sports administrators there were more important issues than poor international performances. German success was widely attributed to the 'Strength through Joy' movement, initiated by the Nazi party to try and improve the overall fitness of the nation,⁵ and these Games reinforced concerns over poor fitness levels in Britain. In a climate of concern over the nation's health and the debilitating pervasiveness of modern society, 'degeneration anxiety' occupied a central role in the National Fitness Campaign, instigated in the late 1930s with government support. The campaign was characterised by an emphasis on voluntarism and individual effort, echoing the initiatives of post-Boer War physical culturists and those who sought to rebuild the nation after the First World War.⁶

As Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Physical Training, Neville Chamberlain presented a draft White Paper on 22 January 1937, which outlined proposals to improve physical training and recreation provision. The White Paper acknowledged the existing involvement of voluntary bodies, although it was also proposed to establish an interlinked network of National Advisory Councils, Grants Committees and Local Committees to co-ordinate provision for training at local authority level.⁷ The intention was to encourage, through voluntary participation, 'a wider realisation that physical fitness had a vital part to play in promoting a healthy mind and human happiness'.⁸ This notion of volunteerism was critical and when the Physical Training and Recreation Bill was first introduced into Parliament in 1937, it was prefaced by the claim that 'compulsion or uniformity would be entirely alien to the national traditions'.⁹ This represented a fundamental difference between the British vision and that of totalitarian states like Italy and Germany, where athletic training had been transformed into a 'national duty', under strict central administrative and financial control.¹⁰ After the passing of the 1937 Physical Training and Recreation Act, a National Fitness Council (NFC) was established to provide financial assistance for sporting organizations, who were invited to apply for funds to educate their teachers and physical training leaders,¹¹ an initiative that inadvertently stimulated limited

² *Observer*, August 16, 1936, 12.

³ *Daily Express*, August 14, 1936, 3; *Daily Mirror*, August 14, 1936, 3; *Observer*, August 16, 1936, 12.

⁴ Harold M. Abrahams, *British Olympic Association: The Official Report of the XIth Olympiad Berlin 1936* (London: British Olympic Association, 1937), 54.

⁵ Stephen G. Jones, 'State Intervention in Sport and Leisure in Britain between the Wars', *Journal of Contemporary History* 22, no. 1 (1987): 165.

⁶ Paul Davenport (2014) Captain Capon's Cure—Food, Fitness and the British Army's Physical Development Depots, 1936–1939, *Contemporary British History*, 28:3, 253-273.

⁷ Paul Davenport (2014) Captain Capon's Cure—Food, Fitness and the British Army's Physical Development Depots, 1936–1939, *Contemporary British History*, 28:3, 259-260.

⁸ TNA CAB 23/87, Physical Training and Recreation, January 1937, 3–5.

⁹ United Kingdom, Parliamentary Debates, Lords, 5th ser., vol. 105 (1937), cols. 871–94.

¹⁰ *The Times*, 30 September 1937, 52.

¹¹ Board of Education, Physical Training and Recreation Act, 1937, 1 Edw. 8 & 1 Geo. 6, Ch. 46.

employment opportunities for professional coaches, although the outbreak of war only two years meant these were short-lived.

Include here material on other sports

During World War II, government assumed a much greater role in the everyday lives of the British public and the Beveridge report, published in December 1942, 'set the agenda for social reconstruction for the next decade' by calling for an expansion in social service provision and a minimum quality of life for all. However, an anticipated social revolution leading to a substantial altering of the British class system, failed to materialise after 1945. While the war had highlighted 'some of society's defects and given an impulse to social reform, victory seemed to imply that, for all its faults, the social...order was basically sound' so the impetus for change faded rapidly.¹² In addition, prompted by the lack of suitable housing and the continuation of rationing, which did not end until 1954, there was an increasing desire to return to normal in everyday life.¹³ Post-war British sport, therefore, emerged as a reflection of a society in which 'continuities were prized and came generally to prevail over any significant impulse for fundamental change'.¹⁴

Sporting structures returned to their pre-war arrangements and administrators reverted to a sporting philosophy based on traditional amateur values, resulting in the poor international performances that were commonplace before 1939 extending into the immediate post-war period.¹⁵ Whilst it was recognized that British economic and imperial decline had affected sporting performances, there was a tendency to attribute all sporting failures to the war and its aftermath, to the extent that other factors, such as the failure to engage with professional coaches and the poor quality of elite training, were ignored. The prevailing view remained that the British, as the originators of modern sports, were the 'teachers not the students' and that Britain would remain true to the virtues of amateurism.¹⁶ One report commenting on defeat by the Americans in the 1947 Walker Cup suggested that, while it was 'very sad', Britain could remain safe in the knowledge that they had played the game in the intended way, unlike their opponents.¹⁷ On the other hand, there were an increasing number of dissenters who wanted to see an improvement in international performances and critics emerged everywhere, none more so than in rowing where Britain, the birthplace of the sport, was now being beaten by 'lesser' nations. This loss of prestige was made even more humiliating when successful scullers like Eric Phelps were appointed as full-time coaches abroad.¹⁸ The *Daily Express* argued that 'we must stop playing games' and that simply turning up to golf courses and sporting grounds and 'playing at it' was no longer acceptable. Although there had been a time in which this casual approach had been sufficient to

¹² Mackay, *Test of War*, 16.

¹³ Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*, 587.

¹⁴ Norman Baker, 'The Amateur Ideal in a Society of Equality: Change and Continuity in Post-Second World War British Sport, 1945-48', *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12, no. 1 (1995): 100.

¹⁵ University of Birmingham Physical Education Department, *Britain in the World of Sport: An Examination of the Factors Involved in Participation in Competitive International Sport* (Birmingham: The Physical Education Association, 1956), 7.

¹⁶ Norman Baker, 'Sport and National Prestige: The Case of Britain 1945-48', *Sporting Traditions* 12, no. 2 (1996): 86.

¹⁷ *The Times*, May 19, 1947, 2.

¹⁸ Hylton Cleaver, 'Rowing', in *The Sports Book: Britain's Prospects in the Olympic Games and in Sport Generally*, ed. James Rivers (London: MacDonal and Co Ltd, 1948), 97-8.

ensure victory, these athletes were merely deluding themselves that they could compete internationally.¹⁹ To succeed, not only would they require regular training and coaching, but they also needed a 'keenness' and 'impudent confidence', something 'entirely lacking amongst the Englishman'.²⁰

While sport did not rank highly on the government's post-war agenda, significant opportunities had been created by the 1944 Education Act, a by-product of the Beveridge Report that had led to the development of the Ministry of Education.²¹ The Ministry had assumed control of the pre-war NFC Grants Committee and part of their remit was to develop national coaching schemes by providing financial support to sporting associations. This paper explores how two sports responded to the opportunities afforded to them by the pre-War NFC and post-War Ministry of Education funding streams. Both athletics and swimming made plans to improve the quality of coaching, although these associations created significant boundaries around their professional coaches, partly because their coaching schemes focused on the production of a contingent of honorary coaches to expand participation rather than on supporting exceptional athletes. In adhering to amateur traditions of encouraging participation, rather than supporting specialized elite training, both National Governing Bodies (NGBs) struggled with the tensions between their philosophical objectives and the pressures of international sport, which was reflected in the constant debates about the values of 'voluntarism' as opposed to the benefits of 'professionalism'. The paper also takes the opportunity to juxtapose the life courses and class attitudes of those who organised and administered British sport with the often very different perspectives of the men and women they employed as coaches and teachers.

Athletics Coaching Initiatives

1935 Coaches - Amateurism

In March 1937, soon after the NFC was created, the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) applied for funding, emphasizing they were concerned with 'exercise for the multitude, rather than competition for the specialist.' If they could create a 'National Training College', the AAA guaranteed that they would appoint 'qualified instructors', strategically situated throughout the country, to disseminate coaching and technical knowledge.²² This national scheme would be of great benefit, not only to elite athletes but also to the general population, because 'any game is more enjoyable when played properly.'²³ Because the initial organization of the NFC was a little haphazard, they failed to respond until October, at which point they requested a full proposal within a week. The AAA considered it unreasonable to be expected to produce a comprehensive national scheme within that timescale²⁴ and instead they instituted a survey of British athletics coaching, which established that there were only seventeen paid coaches operating in England and Wales, equating to one coach for every 200 athletes wanting personal coaching. Although over 3,000 individuals registered a desire to learn how

¹⁹ John Macadam, 'We Must Stop Playing Games', *Daily Express*, November 10, 1947, 4.

²⁰ *The Times*, January 30, 1947, 2.

²¹ Department of Education, Education Act, 1944, 7 & 8 Geo. 6, c. 31, section 53, 43.

²² AAA Memorandum to NFC May 10, 1937, File ED 113/54, NFC Collection: AAA 1937-39, National Archives, Kew (cited hereafter as NFC: AAA, NA).

²³ AAA Memorandum to NFC May 10, 1937, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

²⁴ Captain L. F. Ellison to D. G. A. Lowe, October 22, 1937, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

to coach voluntarily, the survey responses highlighted the seriousness of the coaching situation. They were 'testimony to the demand for coaching,' and persuaded the AAA to apply to the NFC on 8 June 1938 requesting funding to employ three full-time paid coaches, plus an organizer, to teach athletics and to train others to become coaches.²⁵

On 21 July 1938, the NFC awarded the AAA a grant to enable them to 'appoint a full time organiser to stimulate interest in physical training and recreation' but held back on funding coaches because it was 'scarcely one of the purposes of the Act to train budding Olympic champions!'²⁶ While deliberation continued, the AAA appointed twenty-nine-year-old C.F.R. Hilton as an organizer at £450 per annum.²⁷ Hilton had considerable experience in the 'organisation of all types of recreational work', having been involved in the physical education department at Loughborough College,²⁸ but he lacked any specific knowledge of physical training or athletics. Nevertheless, one of his referees, J.W. Bridgeman, head of Loughborough Summer School, who described Hilton as 'a man of good speech and attractive personality,' recommended him because such knowledge was of 'secondary importance' to the AAA.²⁹ Both the AAA and NFC committees knew Hilton so, while he may not have been the most qualified candidate, he was acceptable as someone who was likely to reproduce the values and philosophies of the NGB.

Eventually, the NFC granted the AAA 75 per cent of the salaries of three coaches on the basis that they would visit local clubs and schools and 'pass on enough of their own knowledge to some among those they teach to enable these in their turn to instruct their fellow members on an amateur basis.'³⁰ The AAA then tried to negotiate a larger grant, arguing that these coaches would also be useful to the Loughborough Summer School, but the NFC refused. The AAA then accepted the initial NFC offer, but quickly decided that it could not afford 25 per cent of £450 for each coach so, instead, it engaged three coaches at only £300 per annum. They revised the scheme again in February 1939 after making such a substantial loss in 1938 that they could no longer afford to appoint coaches in the Midlands and the North. Confirming his amateur credentials, Hilton suggested that, instead of appointing professional coaches, Loughborough Summer School students could be used on a voluntary basis with each coach servicing four clubs and the AAA paying them only £2 a week in expenses.³¹

After receiving few applications for the one surviving professional coaching position in the South, it was decided to appoint Franz Stampfl, a twenty-nine-year-old Austrian who had been a successful athlete until he decided to take up coaching in 1934. He had been involved in the Loughborough Summer School and coached throughout the country, giving 'complete satisfaction.'³² His qualities

²⁵ AAA Physical Fitness Committee Memorandum, March 4, 1938, File AAA/1/2/9/1: AAA: Birmingham; E. J. Holt to Captain L. F. Ellis, June 8, 1938, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

²⁶ R. Howlett to E. J. Holt, July 21, 1938, File ED 113/54; H. B. Usher to D. B. Davidson, July 19, 1938, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

²⁷ AAA Physical Fitness Committee, July 28, August 13, 1938, File 1/2/9/1, AAA: Birmingham.

²⁸ AAA. Qualifications of Mr C. F. R. Hilton, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

²⁹ F. J. Davis to E. J. Holt, August 22, 1938, File 113/54; J W. Bridgeman to E. J. Holt, August 8, 1938, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁰ H. B. Usher to D. B. Davidson, July 19, 1938, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³¹ AAA Physical Fitness Committee, August 13, 1938, October 4, 1938, February 2, 1939, File 1/2/9/1, AAA: Birmingham.

³² E. J. Holt to Captain L. F. Ellis, May 2, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

were well known to the AAA and made him an ideal candidate, but the appointment of a foreign coach was not universally popular with NFC Committee members. Sir Henry Pelham objecting to appointing 'an Austrian refugee to a post the salary of which will be mainly found from Government funds' and declaring that he would prefer the appointment of an Englishman.³³ Nevertheless, the AA pressed ahead after consulting with Lord Burghley and Phillip Noel-Baker, MPs and former Olympic athletes,³⁴ who both agreed that Stampfl was 'more likely to be satisfactory' than any British coach.³⁵ Although the NFC was 'surprised to find that we have no British coach really capable,' it finally agreed to allow his appointment,³⁶ but the unease over his employment soon became irrelevant when war broke out in 1939 and attempts to establish a national coaching scheme were put on hold.³⁷

Post-War Athletics Coaching

In April 1946, discussions began within the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) about the possibility of creating a national coaching scheme and Lt Col Roland Harper, with the help of a newly formed Coaching Committee, drew up a proposal for a programme that included the appointment of a professional coach.³⁸ The Development Committee subsequently recommended that Major Geoffrey Dyson be approached with the offer of a two-year contract at a salary of £700 for the first year, rising to £750 in the second. If he was not available, the AAA should approach the Austrian coach Hoke or re-appoint Franz Stampfl at a fee of £600-800 per annum.³⁹ Dyson accepted the post and he was appointed in February 1947, for two years, with the aid of a £522 donation from the *News of the World*.⁴⁰ His duties included taking charge of the AAA coaching courses, coordinating the work of the AAA honorary coaches throughout Britain, and acting as chief coach at the annual Loughborough Summer School.⁴¹ While it was not clearly articulated that coaching elite athletes was to be part of the role, the funding from the *News of the World* had been 'specifically given for the purpose of employing a coach or coaches to help towards development for the Olympic Games', and the AAA itself noted:

We realise that it is impossible to accomplish much in the way of producing first class athletes in such a short space of time for 1948, but a start has been made along these lines, not so much with the idea of producing world beaters, although we are keen to hold our own from a prestige angle.⁴²

³³ AAA, Physical Fitness Committee, March 25, 1939, File 1/2/9/1, AAA: Birmingham; E. H. Pelham to Lord Burghley, May 3, 1939, File 113/54; E. H. Pelham to E. J. Holt, May 5, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁴ Captain L. F. Ellis to Phillip Noel Baker, May 12, 1939, File 113/54; Phillip Noel Baker to Captain L. F. Ellis, May 15, 1939, File ED 113/54; Captain L. F. Ellis, Memorandum, May 16, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁵ Phillip Noel Baker to Captain L. F. Ellis, May 15, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁶ NFC Memorandum, May 22, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁷ H. B. Jenkins to E. J. Holt, September 2, 1939, File ED 113/54, NFC: AAA, NA.

³⁸ AAA Development Committee, April 27, July 27, 1946, File 1/2/10, AAA Collection, Birmingham Archives (hereafter cited as AAA: Birmingham).

³⁹ AAA Development Committee, October 12, 1946, File 1/2/10, AAA: Birmingham.

⁴⁰ AAA Coaching Committee, January 27, 1949, File 1/2/13/1, AAA: Birmingham; E. J. Holt to Colonel Parker, March 5, 1947, File ED 169/30, Ministry of Education and Department of Education and Science Collection: AAA-Coaching 1947-55, National Archives, Kew (hereafter cited as MoE: AAA, NA); AAA National Coaches General Policy, 1, File ED 169/30, MoE: AAA, NA.

⁴¹ AAA Development Committee, October 12, December 7, 1946, File 1/2/10, AAA: Birmingham.

⁴² E. J. Holt to Colonel Parker, March 5, 1947, File ED 169/30, MoE: AAA, NA.

As time progressed, it became increasingly evident that not only was Dyson's workload far too demanding for one individual but also that the AAA were also struggling to pay his salary and so the Association began to explore other options.⁴³ Initially, the AAA decided to prioritize equipment rather than coaches so their first bid to the Ministry consisted of a request for £3,000 for athletic implements,⁴⁴ reflecting the low esteem afforded to British coaching and the widespread view that international failures were due to poor facilities and lack of equipment rather than the paucity of quality coaching.⁴⁵ A second successful application was sent to the Ministry in August 1947 for a grant for 80 per cent of the cost of the salary of three national coaches and this provided the coaching scheme with an opportunity to expand. However, the grant came with conditions since the Ministry, which requested six-weekly reports of the work undertaken by the national coaches, had to approve the appointments and most of the coaches' time had to be devoted to the training of teachers, organizers and club coaches.⁴⁶ The AAA, which was struggling financially, then decided to use one of the grants to pay a proportion of Dyson's wages, thus changing his remit. The original intention, which was for him to prepare the 1948 Olympic squad, now became obsolete because the Ministry's coaching scheme was not established to 'polish up a few stars' but rather to disseminate a good knowledge of coaching and athletics around the country.⁴⁷ With the remainder of the grant money, the AAA appointed Tony Chapman and Dennis Watts in September 1947 and 1948 respectively.⁴⁸

The NGB in this period consistently emphasized that these positions existed to expand the voluntary coaching pool available in Britain, but some officials could see the potential advantages of utilizing national coaches to train active athletes and suggested that a proportion of their time should be devoted to this. The AAA honorary secretary responded by arguing that their roles needed to be kept in perspective and that their employment was to be focused on instructing potential coaches and teachers.⁴⁹ For amateur officials this ensured that the work of the national coaches would remain 'amateur' without giving the appearance that they were insisting on this approach. When Dyson coached Maureen Gardner to a silver medal at the 1948 Games, he did so voluntarily, although her success initiated a shift in thinking, from the perspective of both the Ministry and some AAA officials. Subsequently, there appears to have been more flexibility regarding the coaching of elite athletes even though Dyson had to continually battle with administrators to gain access to them.⁵⁰

More on national coaches

Swimming Coaching Initiatives

Swimming coaching – professionalism

Writing on behalf of the NFC, Henry Pelham contacted ASA honorary secretary Harold Fern on 21 October 1937 indicating that grant aid would soon be available to enable them to 'appoint a whole-

⁴³ E H L. Clynes to Ministry of Education, August 25, 1947, File ED 169/30, MoE: AAA, NA.

⁴⁴ AAA to Ministry of Education, July 3, 1947, File ED 169/29, MoE: AAA, NA.

⁴⁵ *The Times*, August 13, 1952, 5.

⁴⁶ AAA National Coaches General Policy, 1, 4, File ED 169/30, MoE: AAA, NA; Lovesey, *Official Centenary*, 122.

⁴⁷ F W. Collins, 'Training of Athletes', *The Times*, August 20, 1948, 5.

⁴⁸ E H L. Clynes to F G. Ward, February 11, 1949, File ED 169/30, MoE: AAA, NA.

⁴⁹ AAA Coaching Committee, March 9, 1948, File 1/2/13/1, AAA: Birmingham.

⁵⁰ Tom McNab, interview, May 6, 2011, St Albans, London.

time organiser to go about the country gingering things up'.⁵¹ Fern, an active member of the NFC Advisory Council who had several close contacts within the NFC, quickly began formalizing plans for an ASA application.⁵² As with the AAA proposals, the aim was to 'create swimmers, not would-be champions,' so, after becoming a 'competent swimmer, he or she would no longer be eligible for instruction.' While it was hoped that once an individual had been taught to swim they would join local clubs this was 'not the purpose of the scheme.'⁵³ The ASA believed that the 'appointment of a whole-time paid organiser would be of great assistance in spreading the cult of swimming,' so much so that they suggested that two organizers should be appointed, one for the North and one for the South. Although the ASA valued its amateur tradition, this philosophy, coupled with a lack of finance, had significantly affected the scale of work they had been able to accomplish to date and Fern emphasized how 'over-worked' ASA officials were because they worked on a purely honorary basis.⁵⁴ The NFC declared they were unable to authorize grant-aid for two organizers, because they had to 'adhere to the practice which they had followed in other cases,' so they offered funding of £450 a year for one individual.⁵⁵ Fern, who argued that 'the work contemplated was much too heavy for one organiser, and that two was the minimum to warrant the Association embarking on the scheme with any expectation of success', interpreted the NFC offer as a lack of confidence in the ASA Committee. The ASA then rejected the offer,⁵⁶ leading the NFC to point out that they were merely following procedure because, until a scheme had proved its worth, it would not be justified in providing further grant-aid. They added that 'other bodies have found it possible to start with one officer' and that, to date, the ASA was the 'only organisation so far to reject...help.'⁵⁷

At the Grants Committee meeting in December 1937, Fern again protested the committee's refusal to fund two organizers since the ASA 'only sought to help forward the work which the National Fitness Council was formed to undertake.' For Fern, swimming was potentially of greater value than other sports and he argued that, because the circumstances and opportunities were different among NGBs, the NFC's 'rule of thumb attitude', which militated against appointing a second organizer because no other NGB had been granted one, was inappropriate.⁵⁸ The NFC agreed that a degree of 'elasticity' was desirable when considering applications but they were not willing to compromise, although they would consider the matter again later.⁵⁹ Encouraged by this, the ASA submitted another application in March 1938 to enable them to establish training centres and classes leading to the ASA certificate, which would be open to amateurs and professionals alike.⁶⁰ Once again, it was claimed that two organizers were needed and the NFC eventually agreed to contribute 'up to £450 a year each in the case of a man or £350 for a woman' as well as £150 a year towards travelling expenses. However, they were only willing to award a grant up until the end of March 1939 (less than a year) and the organizers would be required to submit detailed reports describing their work so that the committee could

⁵¹ E. H. Pelham to A. H. E. Fern, October 21, 1937, File ED 113/57, National Fitness Council Collection: Amateur Swimming Association 1937-40, National Archives, Kew (hereafter cited as NFC: ASA, NA).

⁵² A. H. E. Fern to E. H. Pelham, October 25, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵³ A. H. E. Fern to NFC, June 14, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁴ A. H. E. Fern to E. H. Pelham, October 27, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁵ NFC Grants Committee, November 11, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁶ A. H. E. Fern to E. H. Pelham, November 20, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁷ E. H. Pelham to A. H. E. Fern, November 24, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁸ A. H. E. Fern to Lord Aberdare, December 13, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁵⁹ Lord Aberdare to A. H. E. Fern, December 20, 1937, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁰ NFC ASA Application for Grant-Aid (No. G. 38. 13), March 26, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

monitor their activities.⁶¹ A additional sum of £300 per annum contributing towards the ASA's headquarters' administrative expenses was 'contingent on the appointment of the two proposed organisers.'⁶² After Fern pointed out that the appointments would 'take some time to arrange' and that the administration expenses of the ASA had increased considerably because of the activities of the NFC,⁶³ the NFC compromised and agreed that two-thirds of the administrative grant would start from the 1 May 1938 with the remaining one-third payable upon the appointment of the organizers.⁶⁴

In June 1938, the ASA informed the NFC that that it had appointed Miss Molly Laxton Lloyd for the North of England and Miss Elaine Frances Burton for the South. This was highly unusual for the time since few women had been appointed in a coaching or organizing position by any other governing body to date. The ASA emphasized that 'people of the right type and quality are obviously not attracted by an appointment for such a limited period,' although women may have been selected because this would cost less.⁶⁵ Burton was thirty-four years old and held a diploma in teaching but, while she possessed 'time certificates of the ASA,' there is no mention in her application that she held any swim coaching or teaching certificates. It was also noted that she had been unemployed, that she wanted to utilize her time efficiently, and that she did not want to accept 'minor posts.' There is no suggestion that she had much experience in swimming from either a coaching or administrative perspective but the ASA presumably believed that she had transferable skills from her achievements as an athlete.⁶⁶ Laxton, on the other hand, could be considered somewhat more qualified since the thirty-five-year-old held a Physical Training Diploma and an Advanced Teacher's Certificate for the ASA.⁶⁷ This qualification had emerged in 1919 as part of a reform to the Professional Certificate, first introduced in 1899 when there had been difficulty in securing enough amateurs to take up teaching roles and the ASA had conceded that 'professional teachers were necessary for the widespread propagation of swimming.' By introducing certification, professional teachers and coaches could be regulated and monitored by amateur administrators.⁶⁸

The first report which Burton sent to the NFC Committee highlighted a 'crying need...for leaders,' noting that, although the 'enthusiasm is there,' individuals' contributions were restricted for financial reasons.⁶⁹ Burton and the ASA proposed that six courses should be developed around the country so that those interested in voluntary service could 'improve their own swimming, learn the art of imparting it to others and thus enable the clubs who have not the means to provide their own coach to have equal advantages with others better off than themselves.' Individuals 'would contribute to the cost according to their ability, but nobody would be debarred,' and it was hoped that the remaining costs would be covered by a grant from the NFC. Courses would last for six months and each candidate

⁶¹ NFC Grants Committee, March 30, April 4, April 8, 1938, File 113/57; R. Howlett to A. H. E. Fern, May 5, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶² A. H. E. Fern to R. Howlett, May 6, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶³ Ibid.; R. Howlett to Mr. Pearson, May 7, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁴ NFC to A H E. Fern, May 19, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁵ A. H. E. Fern to R. Howlett, June 11, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁶ Elaine Frances Burton, 'Application for Appointment as Organiser', May 21, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁷ Mollie Lloyd Laxton, 'Application for Appointment as Organiser', May 25, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁶⁸ Dave Day, 'Walter Brickett. A Respectable Professor', in *Recording Leisure Lives: Sports, Games and Pastimes in 20th Century Britain*, ed. Bob Snape and Helen Pussard (Brighton: Leisure Studies Association, 2010), 195.

⁶⁹ Elaine F. Burton, ASA Application for Grant-Aid (G.38.45), File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

would attend one night per week in order to complete the ASA Teacher's Certificate and the Bronze Medallion and Intermediate Certificate from the Royal Life Saving Society.⁷⁰ The NFC Grants Committee saw the potential benefit of these courses and agreed to provide a grant of £300.⁷¹

The NFC was so satisfied with the work of both Burton and Lloyd that, after three months of service, they agreed to extend the grant for their salaries until March 1940.⁷² They were also willing to offer a 75 per cent grant towards the employment of a full-time coach in order to produce a contingent of honorary coaches along similar lines to those seen in other sports.⁷³ The ASA was pessimistic about being able to raise the remaining portion of the salary and the necessary travel expenses because they 'were already finding it difficult' to cover the cost of the organizers, even though by employing two women they were spending 'less in salaries than was authorised had men organisers been engaged.'⁷⁴ With respect to the appointment of a full-time professional coach, the ASA concluded, that while this might be desirable, it had no funds available,⁷⁵ an issue faced by many amateur NGBs during this period. In the end, of course, these problems were inconsequential because, with the outbreak of war in 1939, the country was placed in a state of 'National Emergency' and all grants offered under the Physical Training and Recreation Act were terminated.⁷⁶

Post-War Swimming Coaching

In November 1946, the ASA appealed to the Ministry for financial support, not to appoint professional coaches but to 'develop courses of instruction in swimming for youth leaders and organizers' to expand the ASA Teachers Certificate. In addition, because the ASA was in such a 'parlous state financially', it was hoped support would be made available for clerical assistance. Although the Ministry sympathized, they were unable to help because the capacity in which they could supply funding was 'essentially in the direction of coaching personnel',⁷⁷ a response which upset the ASA with Harold Fern stating he was seriously thinking of giving up the work connected with the ASA Teacher Certificate.⁷⁸ The Ministry were unwilling to compromise, although they were prepared to offer the ASA, as they had with every other sport, 80 per cent of the salaries for three to four coaches. The ASA rejected the offer, claiming they were not 'in a position financially to take advantage of it' because unlike other amateur organizations, they were unable to raise their own income from events because there was not a suitable pool in the country,⁷⁹ and the ASA did not submit another request for grant aid for coaching for almost ten years.

The ASA had already embarked on fundraising initiatives prior to their grant rejection and had initiated a national appeal in the *Swimming Times* in order to raise monies to enable British swimmers to make

⁷⁰ Elaine F. Burton, ASA Application for Grant-Aid (G.38.45), File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷¹ NFC to A. H. E. Fern, September 10, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷² NFC to A. H. E. Fern, November 23, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷³ E. H. Pelham to A. H. E. Fern, December 9, 1938, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷⁴ A. H. E. Fern to E. H. Pelham, December 12, 1938, File ED 113/57 NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷⁵ A. H. E. Fern to Captain R. Stephens, January 19, 1939, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷⁶ NFC to A. H. E. Fern, September 2, 1939, File ED 113/57, NFC: ASA, NA.

⁷⁷ A H E. Fern to Colonel Parker, November 23, 1946, File ED 169/70; Ministry of Education to A H E. Fern, November 29, 1947, File ED 169/70, MoE: ASA, NA.

⁷⁸ A H E. Fern to Colonel Parker, September 15, 1948, File ED 169/70, MoE: ASA, NA.

⁷⁹ A H E. Fern to Colonel Parker, October 15, 1947, File 169/70; R B. Martin to G W. Hedley, December 13, 1947, File ED 169/70, MoE: ASA, NA.

'an adequate contribution' to the 1948 Games. Since 'six years of war and no income have left the Association very impoverished', the only way they could produce a competitive team was through donations and fundraising from the nation's swimming clubs.⁸⁰ However, even though the appeal had been started so that British swimmers would be fully prepared for the Games the training of Olympic athletes was to be kept in perspective and the scheme was to remain true to the amateur ethos by ensuring that this 'training must not take precedence over the training of school children.'⁸¹ By 1946, the ASA had raised £2,000, although a further £4,000 was required in order to implement a comprehensive training scheme.⁸² Harry Koskie was appointed as 'Chief Swimming Advisor' (not 'coach') to make periodical visits to each district for the purpose of 'seeing trainees in action', and to discuss training with coaches, while training facilities were provided at 1947 and 1948 training camps. Unlike the AAA, the ASA had raised enough funds to pay Koskie's expenses themselves, so he was never constrained by the conditions of a Ministry grant and the ASA were able to use him specifically to coach potential Olympic athletes.

By appointing Koskie, the ASA were addressing some of the coaching issues that had plagued British swimming, and this was supplemented by the establishment of the 'First Special Course' at Loughborough College for two weeks in August 1947. Forty-seven swimmers and seven coaches, all recommended by Koskie, were invited to attend by the ASA. Max Madders, an ex-international swimmer and a lecturer in Physical Education at Birmingham University, had been persuaded to contribute by organizing sessions and talks on the benefits of physical and relaxation exercises. The programme received good publicity, thanks to the decision to invite the BBC to attend, and this raised the profile of the sport. In his final observations, Koskie commented on the potential benefits of the whole team training together for one month prior to the Games, although he recognized that 'as we are all amateur, I realise this cannot be considered but it also does not prevent one from wishing it was possible to complete the job.' Whether because of his frustrations or because he was a volunteer not a professional coach and therefore had limited time to give to the role, Koskie, while arguing that a Loughborough school should be held every year as it 'could not fail to raise the standard of British swimming', requested that he 'not be invited to be responsible.'⁸³

Koskie had been appointed in 1946 on the premise that he would recruit and condition a group of swimmers to represent Britain at the 1948 Games and thereby 'lay foundations for the future,' which would include preparations for Helsinki in 1952.⁸⁴ However, although the ASA would consider Koskie's selection recommendations, they reserved the right to 'make such additions or alterations to the list as circumstances demand.'⁸⁵ Clearly, the Association was determined to remain in control and, although they would allow an advisor to 'assist' them, they would continue to make the crucial decisions, even though they generally lacked the same degree of expertise. This was a common feature of the administration practices of the period and further parallels can be drawn here between Koskie and Dyson, who suggested that the desire of amateur administrators to remain in control. Their resistance to professional coaches was due to their belief that if the 'influence of professional coaching

⁸⁰ *Swimming Times*, June, 1946, 5.

⁸¹ *Evening Sentinel*, March 11, 1946, 4.

⁸² ASA Annual Report 1946 - 'ASA National Appeal', 5, ASA.

⁸³ ASA Annual Report 1947 - 'First Special Training Course Loughborough College, August 2-16, 1947', 35, ASA.

⁸⁴ Harry Koskie, 'Points to be Pondered No. 19', 1948, ASA.

⁸⁵ ASA Annual Report 1947 - Olympic Games (1948) Management Committee, November 15, 1947, 43, ASA.

increases it will dominate athletics to the detriment of the sport,' but, he observed, 'professional coaching seeks no more power than is needed to serve our international athletes efficiently.'⁸⁶

Conclusion

Even though the interwar period saw a marked increase in coaching utilization and availability around the globe, particularly with respect to Olympic competition, British sport continued to align itself to the principles of volunteerism and amateurism, and professional coaches continually struggled to gain acceptance. Although poor performances in 1936 finally stimulated the adoption of additional coaching support in both swimming and athletics, British administrators remained wary of its full integration because these methods implied a shift towards the American system of greater specialization. On the positive side, there were signs here that government anxieties over national fitness, and concerns over the military threat posed by Germany, were leading to a greater involvement in sport and that this was having an indirect impact on coaching. However, although the gradual integration of coaching schemes might indicate an acceptance of greater professionalization and specialization in British sport, it needs to be remembered that the rationale behind these programmes was to create a contingent of honorary coaches rather than to improve the standard of Olympic athletes. This approach appeared to satisfy NGBs because it ensured that professional coaches would remain under their jurisdiction and the volunteers associated with these organizations continued to exert significant control over the way in which coaching developments unfolded. This was summed up neatly in 1938 by Oxbridge man Bevil Rudd who praised the work of amateur coaches who 'nobly tackled the spade-work that an army of paid coaches undertake in America and on the Continent.'⁸⁷

Despite complaints from athletes and coaching staff alike, the general British perception was that the 1948 London Games had been a success, at least from an organizational perspective.⁸⁸ This was not reflected in the number of medals won, however, because the London Games were 'athletically, a disappointing Olympics for the British,'⁸⁹ and it could not be ignored quite how badly Britain had done, although failures were repeatedly attributed to poor diet and lack of facilities. Far from taking the opportunity to question coaching and training methods, commentators argued that the reason British athletes had not achieved was not because they were mediocre but because other nations were improving rapidly. The *Sporting Mirror* observed that 'the world has moved on a stage since Britain taught the rest of the nations a great deal in sport. The pupils have caught up their masters,' and reports emphasized that the Olympics were not just about focusing on winners but appreciating 'the standard achieved by all the competitors.'⁹⁰

British sporting officials had hoped that the national coaching schemes would have demonstrated their potential and, although not all the national coaches had been directly involved with elite athletes, there was an underlying optimism that, because they had travelled the country and educated

⁸⁶ John Wheatley, 'Experience Tells', *Athletics Weekly*, July, 1958, 2.

⁸⁷ Bevil Rudd, ed. *Athletics* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1938).

⁸⁸ Frank Rostron, 'Half-Time: The Gloomy Ones were Wrong', *Daily Express*, August 6, 1948, 2; British Olympic Committee, *The Official Report of the Organising Committee for the XIV Olympiad* (London: Organising Committee for the XIV Olympiad, 1948), 106–7.

⁸⁹ Baker, 'Sport and National Prestige', 91.

⁹⁰ *The Times*, August 18, 1948, 5; *Sporting Mirror*, May 7, 1948, 12.

a large contingent of honorary coaches, these men would then have been able to make an impact. While there had been little expectation that British athletes would have regained former standards of performance,⁹¹ there was a belief that the recent advances made in coaching and training should have resulted in a more successful overall team performance. The potential benefit coaching could have on performance had been highlighted by the fact that, 'the one athlete who obtained whole time professional coaching broke a world record'. Far from suggesting that British coaches did not have the technical knowledge to produce medallists, it was argued that 'our coaches are as well-equipped in the details of their craft as any foreign land.' What was clear was that, if Britain was to keep pace with countries where employing professional coaching was accepted practice, further initiatives would be required. Immediately following the Games, the AAA vowed that 'in the future, some personal instruction will be given' to achieve a 'much better showing' at the 1952 Games although it was recognized that any such developments would probably not reach their full potential until 1956.⁹²

The evidence clearly suggests that, even though British sport was gradually becoming more accommodating to coaching in the immediate post-war period, NGBs remained wary of the intentions of professional coaches and they continuously placed restrictions on the activities of the national coaches to remain in control of their sports. However, even though these coaches had to function within limitations, they were gradually being granted permission to work directly with athletes, something that suggested a gradual loosening of amateur constraints. This emphasizes once again the fluid nature of amateurism, which was continuing to shift subtly, and almost imperceptibly, towards an acceptance of the kind of coaching support that had long been commonplace elsewhere in the world. This late start for British coaches, however, meant that, even though they were slowly beginning to integrate different coaching and training practices, they were constantly outstripped by coaches from abroad who were utilizing techniques that were ever more specialized. This was particularly true of the Americans, of course, who had been applying systematic coaching methods to their sport for over fifty years, but, as the Games became ever more important in the context of the Cold War after 1945, it was the Soviet Union and its satellites that began to take centre stage.

⁹¹ University of Birmingham, *Britain in World Sport*, 7.

⁹² F W. Collins, 'Training of Athletes', *The Times*, August 20, 1948, 5.