

Pedestrian Activities

While all this pedestrianisation was taking place, there was of course a great deal of resistance. There was an element in the sport that took a more purist stance and they held the belief that athletics should never be associated with money making. Who were these people?

One must remember the original roots of the sport to find the answer. The sport (in an organised sense) originally grew in this country in the University environment, especially between Oxford and Cambridge in the early to mid nineteenth century. The only people that attended these universities were the middle and upper classes, and of course males. Athletic competition between these institutions never involved money. As the students left universities they obviously went to reside in various parts of the country taking up jobs. The Forces, government and teaching were some of the most popular areas these type of graduates went into. As they took up new residences they also took with them their sporting practices, if they had any, which were gained from their university life. So, it was often this type of person that was responsible for establishing athletic clubs in different areas around the country. They set up and encouraged the type of athletics they were accustomed to, which was the pure form of amateur athletics. It could have been this type of person that set up either of Blackpool's Athletic clubs in 1894.

It was this type of middle-class male that also formed and established the Amateur Athletic Association of England (AAA) in 1880. The AAA and all the other national governing bodies in sport were established in the same epoch and were formed initially with the purpose of settling disputes. This role soon changed and they began to take on their governing body role we recognise today; rule making, setting moral expectations. Professionalisation in athletics was a

taboo throughout the twentieth century because it was the gents that formed the governing body, set up the clubs and defined the rules according to their values. They thought their values were the ones everyone should hold and that is why pedestrianisation was marginalised shortly after the turn of the century and throughout the twentieth century. The sport may have taken a totally different position today perhaps, if the peds had played a greater role in the organisation of the sport, instead of cashing in on the prize money available.

Today in 1995, we see many in the sport still bitter at the increasing professionalisation of the sport, but they perhaps should take heart, that it has really been no different throughout history. The sport at the beginning was intensely professional for many sections of the public - often the working-class who needed the money. It was them who saw athletics as a source of much needed finance. The middle-class had the well paid jobs and they didn't live so close to the poverty line, so they could look upon sport as a mere luxury, a true recreation.

Blackpool was no different to elsewhere in this respect. The commercial athletic events put on at Raikes Hall catered for the peds. Incensed at this and not wanting to get involved in this 'grubby' affair the middle class of the town set up the two athletic clubs.

Blackpool and Fylde Athletic Club was set up a little later than Blackpool Harriers and the reason is not entirely clear. It charged more and offered better facilities and this suggests it was more elitist than the Harriers. Those that set up the Athletic Club may have looked at the Harriers and seen double standards taking place. This is to say, that despite many Clubs having the

staunch position of amateurism, many did dabble in mosey for prizes. The Harriers was one such Club and this can be seen in some of their events they entered which featured prize money. Double standards was also levelled at the AAAA on occasions and subsequently has been throughout its history. In actual fact, despite athletics often portraying itself pure, it has always meddled with mosey. At this early stage, if you were good enough to win money you competed. If you weren't, then you called yourself a 'true' amateur and refused to get your hands dirty, while condemning those that did. The early zeal of the athletic authorities to exclude the peds promoted the professional circuit and once they saw this was becoming very successful, they changed and softened their stance. The same probably happened at the Blackpool Clubs. Or at least with the Harriers who survived longer than the Athletic Club.

The Role of Women

The impact women had on the athletic scene in the early days in the Fylde was probably limited. This was also the case around the country. If we go back to what we said before, the driving force behind the codification of sport was the middle-class male. These made the laws and did so in a fashion so not to encourage women to vulgarise themselves by taking part in the sport.

In the late 1800s women were beginning to play some role in some sports, but in athletics they were not as prominent. Blackpool and Fylde Athletic Club created a subscription for women. It was less than the men's at 5s. There is no or little evidence that women did any athletics in Blackpool in the early years. They are referred to in reports as either spectating or, playing hostess at events making hot-pots and the like. They were granted use of the gymnasium used by Blackpool and Fylde Athletic Club before 1894 and apparently it was used very well by the women. (They were only allowed to use it though on two mid-week afternoons. They would never be allowed to take up time when the men could be using it).

That is about the role the women played in the actual sport of athletics in Blackpool. It must be remembered though, women just were not considered by many to be suitable for strenuous activity. This wasn't really questioned for some time after the period 1894, and in fact the first women athletes allowed in the Olympic Games only arrived in 1928. (Even then only at selected events). This is not to say some women in the area never dabbled with sport. Some probably did, but never under the auspices of the Clubs and they never dared gain any publicity for their efforts. If any women did do any athletics they were more likely women from the lower social order who had less of an image to keep up.

