

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 26, 1950

Description: In this segment, Elliott Roosevelt and ER respond to a listener's question about the role of high school and college athletic programs.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt

[ER:] Do you really have any questions today?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes, I do, Mother. I have a question from somebody that heard you on the Ezra Charles broadcast, uh when you interviewed uh Ezra Charles. And if you remember you said that in sports contests, the things you worried about uh was not which team would win but how badly the contestants would be hurt. Does this mean that you don't think an intensive athletic program should be included for boys in school and college? (0:35)

[ER:] Oh yes, of course I think that all boys in school and college should learn to play games, but I think it should not become the most important thing in life, nor do I think that it should be done um to the detriment of uh their health. Um I don't think sports should be allowed uh to-to be anything but amateur in school and college, really.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh by that are you implying that the college football has passed the amateur standpoint? [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[ER:] Well, in-in certain colleges, as you know, there are boys who are largely there because they are good athletes, now I think that's all wrong.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, um of course there --

[ER:] I think it's all right to be a good athlete, do you see, but I don't think it should be the reason you're in college. (1:35)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, let me point out one of the reasons why uh there is such thing as an athletic scholarship, and the need for uh a-an outstanding football team that pays uh for most of the athletic program at that college. Now, you yourself said just a moment ago that you thought that it was good for boys to have an athletic program to play games, know how to play games. I gather that you mean intramural sports and things of that kind. Well, if you were have to support a program of that kind.

[ER:] Whatever the boy really enjoys. I wouldn't feel that every boy had to play on a football team.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, well they don't! They don't in college. (2:25)

[ER:] But uh still, it's pretty well um -- [Elliott Roosevelt: But you take a large state university, Mother.] you row, or you play baseball, or you play football.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But- but in large college, Mother, in a state university for instance, while you read in the papers about the college football team, there are probably a hundred football teams in that college that are intramural football teams. There are probably -- where there is one baseball team that represents the

college, there are a hundred smaller teams, teams of lesser capability that play amongst themselves within the university itself and play against other uh schools at lower levels. And in all of these sports, these vast sports programs are supported by the so-called subsidized athletic uh prowess system, which draws the customers in and that pays for the rest of the program. That's-- at least, that's what I'm given to understand [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, perhaps it's necessary to make it almost a professional thing to-to play um on the team and to have a team of that kind. I don't know. I was thinking primarily of the fact that I remember almost every autumn, while four of you boys were in school, that when-- in fact, I can never remember an autumn when you were in school when I didn't have at least one operation. It was usually knees if I remember correctly. A somebody did something to a cartilage and had to leave school and spend several weeks in a hospital and then gradually go back and hobble around for a while and then perhaps be bothered by it uh at times all through life. I know that Johnny is still, and I know that Jimmy, when he was training for the raiders in the Marine Corps, used to have an awful time with the cartilage that he'd had when he was playing football at Groton. Now, I know I'm prejudiced for that reason, I know it seemed to be always a horrible waste. I didn't like it. [ER laughs](4:51)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, now let's, now let's look at uh some other signs of it. Uh for instance, I was uh I played all those games, but I liked, for instance, I liked swimming. Uh most colleges couldn't have-- couldn't afford a swimming team and the large swimming pools that they- that they have at their institutions unless it was for the other sports that attracted big gates and provided the funds with which to build these gymnasiums and the swimming pools and the --and all the rest of the athletic equipment. Uh that's all bought and paid for by customers that come through the gates, unless of course your like uh-uh some of the larger institutions that have very wealthy alumni.

[ER:] Well, I suppose it's perfectly all right, and I understand now that um there is much more done about seeing that a boy who plays on a team um can only play if his grades are good academically. (6:02)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, not only that, but also I think you'll find that -- after all, your four boys, we're all practically old men now, and when we went to school uh there wasn't the same intensity of training that there is today for the for the average athlete. He goes into an even more rigorous training period and much closer supervision, and is in a much higher peak of condition. That's why uh I think there are less -- uh a lower accident rate in sports today. I'm not sure whether the figures will be back me up, but I hope some sportswriter will check on this for me, but I think there is a lower accident rate than there- than there was in the old days. (6:54)

[ER:] Well, I hope there is because it always seemed to me that a good deal of time was wasted in um in the accidents that occurred, [Elliott Roosevelt: Well, on the other hand--] small accidents and big accidents.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] On-on the other hand, uh the armed forces today uh attribute a good bit of the uh of the good esprit d'corps that is developed to the fact that uh so many of uh our boys have been-- have played team sports.

[ER:] Didn't somebody once say that England's empire was built on the playing fields of Eton? [ER laughs] (7:36)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's correct, and uh I think it uh most uh most uh big countries uh, well for instance, the Soviet Union today it's quite an interesting thing; they lay a tremendous stress on team sports in the Soviet Union.

[ER:] Well, I was struck last summer, by the type of um, I don't know what to call it, exercise uh done in conjunction with other people and done very skillfully, which we saw in some of the Scandinavian countries. And if I remember rightly, Czechoslovakia had um a most tremendous show of um-- at one sports event every year -- and that required great discipline but wasn't exactly the same kind of um uh football, baseball, uh game that the other things, that we have. (8:41)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I'd like to just put in one more plug for athletic programs and colleges and so forth. I think you'll find that a boy that has uh been active in an athletic program in his high school or his college uh stands a much better chance in an average job, say working in a factory. He develops a coordination between his mind and his body. Uh if he's going to be a machinist or he's gonna work at a lathe or anything of that kind, uh it gives him a sureness of action which I don't think that you would find in the boy who has gone through and has never partaken of an athletic sport.

[ER:] Oh, I would agree with you entirely on that. I think it's essential to train um youngsters, both boys and girls, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] in outdoor sports, and skills of many kinds, and I think the fun that they get out of knowing how to play games. I've always regretted that I never was trained to play games, but um I-I just don't like uh to have the sports made the most important thing.

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)
File(s): 72-30 (252) Track 2

Transcribed by: Ryan Niksa
Edited by Isabel Maier