

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 526

SP 035 904

AUTHOR Corbett, Doris R.  
 TITLE Sport Heroes in Congress.  
 PUB DATE 1 Apr 95  
 NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (Portland, OR, March 28-April 1, 1995).  
 PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)  
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
 DESCRIPTORS \*Athletes; \*Athletics; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Individual Development; Profiles; \*Public Service Occupations; Sport Psychology; \*Sportsmanship  
 IDENTIFIERS \*Congress; \*Heroes

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the findings of a study of the role of sports in the lives of U.S. Congressmen and focuses attention on six gifted athletes for whom sports provided preparation for government service. The word "hero" as used in this paper refers to former members of Congress who were admired for their athletic prowess and for their political careers and successes. They participated in sport at the elementary, secondary, and collegiate levels and at amateur, professional, and Olympic levels. The paper argues that the attributes of leadership and teamwork learned from sports can be carried over to successful careers in business, the professions, and public service. It is noted that no women are represented among the heroes because of the historical underrepresentation of women in Congress and the male domination of sports. A description of the research lists the 12 congressmen surveyed for the project and briefly describes the results of an additional survey of women senators and representatives that solicited information on their participation in competitive sports. Many of the women surveyed placed a high value on athletics and sports competition. The bulk of the paper is devoted to profiles of Gerald R. Ford, Jack French Kemp, Robert Bruce Mathias, Charles Thomas McMillen, Ralph H. Metcalfe, and Wilmer David "Vinegar Bend" Mizell. Appended are figures showing the educational value of sport as perceived by the sport heroes of Congress. (JB)

--

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
 \* from the original document. \*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. Corbett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 381 526

1995 AAHPERD NATIONAL CONVENTION

OREGON CONVENTION CENTER

PORTLAND, OREGON

March 28-April 1, 1995

DORIS R. CORBETT, PH.D.

VISITING PROFESSOR

UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

WEST POINT, NEW YORK

TITLE: SPORT HEROES IN CONGRESS

Joe Montana, Martina Navratolova, and Michael Jordan, star athletes have been the idols and role models for American youth. Although sport heroes have been glamorized for their athletic achievements, far less attention has been paid to their off-the-field careers. The problems some athletes encounter with gambling, drinking and drugs are well publicized, but less well known are the athletes who have been successful businessmen, doctors, lawyers, judges, Members of Congress and even Presidents.

Success through sports has become the primary goal for many young people who dream of wealth and a lucrative professional contract. Very few we know will succeed. According to research by the Center for the Study of Sport in Society at Northwestern University, only one in every 100 high school athletes will play major college sports; the odds of a high school player making the pros are 10,000 to one. Of the 30 million young people participating in youth sports in

the United States in any given year, less than 200 will it to the pros. Of the small number who do make it, many will wash out after only a year or two in the big leagues without having developed other viable job skills.

If it is unrealistic for most young people to expect a career in sports, why then do they or should they admire sports heroes? Research suggests that people, young and old, admire heroes in order to better understand themselves. We do know that hero adulation helps us to identify with qualities we most value in ourselves.

We know that throughout history, sports and games have performed an integral role in the social, political and economic fabric of society. Because of time limitations, this paper will focus only on a half-dozen gifted athletes for whom sports provided preparation for even greater success. The lives of these twelve genuine role models demonstrates that the attributes of leadership and teamwork learned from sports can be carried over to successful careers in business, the professions and public service.

Twelve former Congressmen were originally studied (six democrats and six republicans). I have placed a check by those we will focus our attention on this morning.

Senator Wendell Richard Anderson (D-MN) - 1976-1978

Senator William Warren Barbour (R-NJ) - 1931-1943

Representative George Herbert Walker Bush (R-TX) - 1967-1971

\* Representative Gerald R. Ford (R-MI) - 1949-1973

Congressman (H&S) James William Fulbright (D-Ark) 1943-1975

- \* Representative Jack French Kemp (R-NY) - 1971-1989
- \* Representative Robert Bruce Mathias (R-CA) - 1967-1975
- \* Representative Thomas McMillen (D-MD) - 1987-1993
- \* Representative Ralph Harold Metcalfe (D-ILL) - 1971-1978
- \* Representative Wilmer David "Vinegar Bend Mizell" -  
(R-NC) - 1969-1975

Representative William Proxmire (D-Wis.) - 1957-1

Representative Morris King Udall (D-Ariz.) - 1961-1989

The word "hero" as used in this paper refers to former Members of Congress who were admired not only for their athletic prowess, but also for their political careers and successes. They participated in sport at the grade school, high school and collegiate levels as well as the amateur, professional and Olympic levels.

You will note a glaring omission in the ranks of sports heroes profiled in this paper. There are no women. This omission reflects two basic facts: women have historically been under represented in congress (less than 200 of the more than 11,000 who have served in Congress) and men have dominated the sports world, especially professional sports, for most of the 20th century. To date, no woman Olympic or professional athlete has served in Congress. Undoubtedly, as more

women are elected to Congress and more opportunities open to women in sports, this omission will be rectified.

In an effort to identify the sport and athletic backgrounds of women who have served in Congress, the author surveyed the living women Members of Congress past and present. The survey yielded some revealing results. Many of the women placed a high value on athletics and sports competition. Several described themselves as "tomboys" during their youth. The following three examples reflect the importance of sports to women's careers. They wrote the following:

"At the age of 96, sports activity is something I am not actively involved in; however, participation in sports is something I most certainly endorse, having played on my high school basketball team and later serving as coach, and taking our small team to the state championship."

"I have competed in sailing. Physical activity is very important to assure good health both physically and mentally. It prepared me to maintain the strenuous schedule required of a Congressperson."

"Sport and physical activity taught me to focus all my physical and mental energy on a specific immediate goal: Game me confidence, strength, timing, perseverance in adversity, staying power, teamwork experience, ability to accept criticism as constructive... in sum built character and concentration.... I don't believe I could have been successful as a political leader without the

experience of competitive sports. You can't stay in top form mentally if you let yourself go physically."

The Congresswomen who responded to the study were:

Representative Margaret Chase Smith

Representative Marjorie S. Holt

Representative Nancy Johnson

Representative Geraldine A. Ferraro

Representative Lynn Martin

Representative Beverly Byron

Representative Carol Mosely Braun

Representative Lynn C. Woolsey

Senator Barbara Boxer

The twelve Congressmen profiled in this paper were selected by an advisory committee from a longer list of athletes who have served in Congress. Because this research project was sponsored by the United States Capitol Historical society, a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational organization created by Congress, the list did not include current Members of Congress in order to avoid any appearance of partisanship. The twelve were selected not because they were the greatest

athletes who ever served in Congress, but because they each represent the value of sports and athletics.

GERALD R. FORD a Michigan Republican served in the House of Representatives from 1949-1973.

Football was a major influence in Ford's life. It propelled him into the limelight as a teenager and provided him an opportunity to gain entry into the University of Michigan and later to earn a law degree at Yale University.

Football was important in Grand Rapids when Jerry Ford was a young man and it was what interested him most in high school. There were not the many distractions that exist today. As a hotshot player from Grand Rapids, he made the high school All-City and All-State football team, and moved on to continuing stardom as a football player at the University of Michigan.

During his first two years, Michigan was undefeated. In a losing season in 1934, he was selected as the most valuable player by his teammates. After graduation from the University of Michigan,

Jerry Ford played in the 1935 Shrine East-West Game and took part in the All-Star

game against the Chicago Bears. As a student at Michigan "Jerry" Ford won three varsity letters in football. Jerry's success on the playing field opened for him the door to other opportunities.

Jerry Ford turned down offers from the Green Bay Packers and the Detroit Lions. He was offered what was considered in those days a big-money deal to play for the Green Bay Packers: \$200 a game, with a 14 game schedule and a 10-day contract cancellation provision.

Following his graduation from Michigan, Ford went on to study law at Yale University. While studying at Yale, he served as an assistant coach of the Yale football team and the head coach in boxing.

In 1972, President Ford received the College Football Hall of Fame Award at the Waldorf in New York and in 1959, Representative Gerald R. Ford, Jr. was named to the 1959 Sports Illustrated Silver Anniversary All-American team. He earned his nomination for the Sports Illustrated award for his contributions to his team as an athlete, service to his community, and on behalf of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and students at the University of Michigan, as a member of the Armed Forces in World War II, and as an elected member of the United States House of Representative. In 1977, the former President of the United States, Gerald Ford was also inducted into the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame. Former President Ford in 1977 also became the first honorary member of the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Each of these sporting achievements formulated in some way Ford's philosophy on winning, or loosing and simply striving for excellence.

As Ford moved into the political arena, Ford credited his football experience as having taught him the value of team play. "You learn to accept discipline, how to handle tough situations, to take action, and to deal with the rough and tumble of politics."

In a 1974 interview, the then vice-president Ford said that "outside of a national character and educated society, there are few things more important to a country's growth and well-being than



competitive athletics ... it is not enough to just compete. Winning is very important. Being a leader, the U.S. has an obligation to set high standards."

Being a politician can have it's down side and Jerry Ford had opportunities to experience both the up's and down's. Although athletics provided many rewards for Gerald Ford, there were times when he received criticism because of his athletic background.

Ford contends that he learned on the gridiron the values of teamwork and leadership and the principles of moderation and integrity that guided his political career.

JACK FRENCH KEMP served as a Republican from New York in the United States House of Representatives from 1971-1989. His election to Congress followed a thirteen year career as a quarterback in both the American and National Football Leagues. Kemp was able to parlay seven seasons as a Buffalo Bills quarterback into two American Football League championships and a Congressional seat in Washington after his retirement from professional football.

Jack began his professional career in the NFL as a backup quarterback with the Pittsburgh Steelers. In the 1960's, the name Jack Kemp was commonly associated with the Buffalo Bills. He was one of the most popular players ever to wear a Bill's uniform.

Having played for the San Diego Chargers from 1960 to 1962, Kemp was picked up on waivers by the Buffalo Bills from the San Diego Chargers in 1962 after a severely injured passing hand cast some doubts over his career. Kemp went on to lead the Bills to seven wins in the final nine games that year. He took the Bills in 1963 to the playoffs against the Boston Patriots and from

1964 to 1966, Kemp enjoyed his biggest successes leading the Buffalo Bills to 33 victories and on to the league Championship in 1964 and 1965.

He was selected All-League Quarterback once with the San Diego Chargers in 1960 and later with the Buffalo Bills in 1965. Kemp was the AFL Player of the Year and Most Valuable Player in 1965 and also won the MVP award in the 23-0 Buffalo win over San Diego in the AFL Championship Game in 1965 and was an All-Pro in 1960 and 1965. He appeared in five AFL championship games and seven AFL All-Star Games. He also holds 11 Buffalo Bills passing records.

Jack Kemp, the football player was fiercely competitive. As a quarterback he had a rifle for an arm and a keen sense of where and when to throw the football. His teammates often remarked that he was a winner because he had tremendous self-confidence, a lot of guts and a lot of courage. Kemp points out that, having been traded, cut, sold, knocked down, booed and

injured, that he became aware of the fact that the prizes in life go to the individual who never quits, and that the real lesson to be learned in sport is that the only real failure is not trying again, and that out of adversity comes strength, determination, and ultimate victory.

Even during his football playing days, Jack was a student of the political process. His teammates called him "The Senator" because he was always reading political books. When asked in an interview if the exposure as a football player helped in his election to congress, his response was, "yes, to the extent that I had name recognition and people knew who I was. That kind of identification cuts two ways. On the one hand, it was harmful because some people consider professional football to be anti-intellectual and an inadequate training ground for political

leadership." To the contrary, he says, "I believe pro football is great training for leadership. In fact, I hope more athletes choose politics as a profession so as not to leave the field to attorneys."

ROBERT BRUCE MATHIAS, a republican congressman from California served in the House of Representatives from 1967-1975. Overnight, Bob Mathias became an international hero. Not only was he the youngest athlete to win the decathlon, but he had outstripped the record of the great Jim Thorpe. He had beaten Thorpe's record in five of the decathlon events, and tied him in one other event. His boyish good looks and storybook performance combined to make him a modern-day Roger Staubach/O.J. Simpson, All-American Boy. President Harry Truman welcomed him home and so did 200 marriage proposals. Following his Olympic heroics, Mathias went on to Stanford University.

In his junior year at Stanford, Bob Mathias played fullback on the football team and led the aptly regarded Redshirts to the 1952 Rose Bowl game. He proved himself in football just as he had in track and field and became a Washington Redskins draft choice. In 1952, Bob Mathias again went for the gold. He was twenty-one years old, in good health, lots of energy, and still a tremendous talent. He was 6 feet 3, and 205 pounds. A 2-inch and 15-pound gain over the last Olympics and he was bigger, stronger, and faster than ever. He won the Olympic trials easily and despite a pulled thigh muscle that shot stabbing pains through his back and side, he won the Olympic decathlon title again and set his third world decathlon record in three years. In Helsinki, Finland he prevailed and came home again in triumph.

His triumphs earned him roles in four movies (including the title part in The Bob Mathias Story) and a television series. He performed in various television commercials and did some announcing for television network sports events.

In 1955, Bob Mathias served with the Department of State for international promotion of American youth programs. At the request of the Department of State, he also served as the goodwill ambassador, promoter, and participator in educational youth programs. As a representative of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and on five trips abroad for the U.S. State Department, Mathias organized and encouraged sports and youth programs in America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In June of 1977 Mathias was named Director of the new Olympic Training Center at Colorado Springs, Colorado. In November of 1983, he became the Executive Director of the National Fitness Foundation. The foundation was established to work in concert with the President's Council on Physical fitness and Sports to establish a National Fitness Academy in Indianapolis to promote a high level of physical fitness and sports participation by all Americans.

Some of the many awards Bob Mathias has received include the AAU's Sullivan Award as the Outstanding Amateur Athlete of the Year, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Award as one of America's ten most outstanding young men. He was elected to the National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1974, the San Francisco Bay Area Hall of Fame in 1980 and became a Charter Member of

the U.S. Olympic Committee's Hall of Fame in 1983. Bob was inducted into the National High School Sports Hall of Fame in 1989.

Bob was drawn toward politics. He had learned a great deal about world affairs during his travels abroad; and his travels in his own country had made him more aware of the concerns of people in his own native home land. Mathias had world-wide appeal, so he was able to parlay his heroic sporting career into a congressional career. Mathias is frank about the effect of his successes in sports:

"winning an Olympic gold medal helps in politics, business or anything. If people know your name, it has to help \_\_\_ like an astronaut or a fellow who climbs Mount Everest is well known. The individual still has to produce, but people running for political office without a name have to spend a lot of money and energy to get themselves known. Some people will vote for any name on the ballot that looks familiar."

CHARLES THOMAS MCMILLEN, a democratic congressman from Maryland served in the House of Representatives from 1987-1993.

Tom starred as a three-time All-American and later became a member of the 1972 Olympic basketball team; and was an Academic All-American. After graduation, Tom attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar and earned a Master of Arts in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics at Oxford University, Oxford, England in 1978 while at the same time playing a season in the Italian professional basketball league. Congressman Tom McMillen spent eleven years in the NBA after an All-American career at the University of Maryland.

As a high school senior, McMillen received a whirlwind of publicity. He was featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated. Even today McMillen adamantly endorses the position that there must be a balance between academics and athletics, that "athletics are not as important as academics for the individual, the school, or our society. He says that, "reform will be won not by a short flurry of corrective measures, but by a constant battle against our national sports addiction."

In the 1974 National Basketball Association draft, McMillen was the first selection by the Buffalo Braves. McMillen subsequently played for 11 years in the N.B.A. with the New York Knickerbockers from 1974-1976, and for the Atlanta Hawks from 1982-1986. As Tom settled into Atlanta, he became more deeply involved with politics and particularly with the Democratic party.

By the 1985-1986 season, Tom was seriously considering leaving the pros in order to run for a congressional seat. Upon reviewing his options, and upon the advice of Bill Bradley, he opted to stay with the Washington Bullets another season in order to maximize on his TV exposure and improve his fund-raising opportunities. In addition, the Bullets' new contract was a tempting and generous offer.

Mr. McMillen's last year with the Bullets proved to be one of his most successful seasons and was capped by his being named the NBA Player of the Week in February 1986.

At thirty-four years old, Tom had prepared himself for public service. He had been a high school All-American and Valedictorian of his senior class, three-time college All-American, youngest member ever to serve on the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, Phi Beta

Kappa, an Olympian, a Rhodes Scholar, a National Basketball Association Veteran, a budding businessman, and an assistant to the finance chairman of the Democratic National Committee. McMillen was not the first professional athlete to enter politics, but by playing basketball during the entire 1985-1986 season for the Washington Bullets, he became the first athlete to actively run for Congress while still a professional player.

RALPH HAROLD METCALFE, a democrat from Illinois served in the United States House of Representative and was a symbol of changing times.

It was due to sheer individual effort, and a commitment to achieve excellence in whatever he pursued which enabled Ralph Metcalfe to rise from the ranks of a people whose living were afflicted by impoverishment and discrimination. He was clearly an individual who achieved great things in his own life and was an inspiration to many in a very beneficial and compassionate manner.

It is an irony that when African-Americans were allowed to do little else but engage in some form of athletic activity, or the arts, Ralph Metcalfe with his great sense of conviction, perseverance, and discipline, was not just a gifted athlete, but excelled at academics as well as politics.

Despite his adaptability, and the nature of the times in which he grew up, it was only because he could run faster than others that he was accepted by his countrymen. Consequently, Ralph Metcalfe ran right into the history books and into the consciousness of the American people. He won national sprint championships in 1929, and National Collegiate Championships in the 100-

and 220-yard dashes from 1932 through 1934. Metcalfe was a member of the U.S. Olympic track team in 1932 and 1936. He and Jesse Owens scored magnificent victories against the concept of racial superiority by soundly beating their German opponents. He won individual silver medals in 1932, and 1936 finishing second in the 100-meter dash to Jesse Owens in 1936 and second to Eddie Tolan of the University of Michigan in 1932. While much of the world watched with contemptuous concern, Ralph Metcalfe shared the marvelous feats of the great

Jesse Owens in the 1936 Olympics, by taking the silver medal in the 100-meter dash and sharing the American victory with Owens and their teammates in the 400-meter relay. Ralph held the world's record in the 100-and 220-yard dash and 100-meter dash. In his Olympic career, Ralph Metcalfe won a gold medal, two silvers, and a bronze.

As a track star at Tilden Technical High School:

"Ralph was told by my his coach "that as a black person he'd have to put daylight between himself and his nearest competitor. He forced himself to train harder so he could put that daylight behind him."

Metcalfe's commitment to sports and to the development of young people through the examples he set and through what he accomplished for others served as an indication of his future interest and vocation. He was an experienced politician, a man who came up through the political ranks in Cook County, Chicago. Ralph became the first African-American Illinois State Athletic Commissioner and the founder of the Ralph Metcalfe Youth Foundation devoted to athletics.



health, and educational programs for young people and to the support of needy families in the community.

In the area of community service, Ralph went from crossing the finishing line to breaking the color line in the field of public service. He was elected five times (1952, 1956, 1960, 1964 and 1968) as the Democratic committeeman of Chicago's third ward and was elected and served in the City Council as an Alderman from the third ward for 15 years (1955, 1959, 1963, and 1967). In 1969, Metcalfe was elected to be the first Black to serve as president Pro Tempore of the Chicago City Council. He was elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-second Congress on November 3, 1970. Ralph Metcalfe was reelected to the three succeeding Congresses and served from January 3, 1971, until his death October 10, 1978, in Chicago, Illinois. He had been a successful candidate in the primary to the Ninety-sixth Congress.

The qualities that made Ralph Harold Metcalfe successful in sports, made him successful as an elected public official.

WILMER DAVID "VINEGAR BEND" MIZELL, a republican from North Carolina served in the House of Representatives from 1969-1975.

*A MODEST FARM BOY* Wilmer "Vinegar Bend" Mizell enjoyed living the American dream. He came from plowin' with an ole mule down in Vinegar Bend, Alabama to a world's baseball championship. Wilmer David "Vingar Bend" Mizell is a well-known famous left-handed baseball pitcher.

"Vinegar Bend" was tall, loose-jointed and free and easy in his motion. He had a very fast ball, and was a throwback to the old tobacco-chewing heroes of the game. Vinegar Bend speaks in the colorful, friendly, slow drawling style of someone from the deep South, and often took time out for chewing and thinking, and he would stride to the mound like a plough boy. He was best known for his 14 years in professional baseball, including six years with the St. Louis

Cardinals. He pitched with the Pittsburgh Pirates when they won the World Series in 1960 and was a member of the original New York Mets team in 1962.

Baseball taught Wilmer Mizell some important lessons. In an interview, he stated that it had taught him to have a greater appreciation for 1) getting along with people.. 2) the free, competitive system, 3) teamwork and cooperation, 4) a feeling of physical fitness, 5) being teachable, 6) travel and education.

After baseball, Mizell quickly got into politics when he returned to North Carolina. He ran for county commissioner and led the ticket in a GOP sweep that ousted all incumbent Democrats in 1966, and two years later he ran for Congress.

As a result of his previous chairmanship of the Davidson County, North Carolina, Board of County Commissioners, he was prepared to serve his Tarheel constituents on matters with Federal implications. Mizell campaigned for his congressional seat as a conservative and as a supporter of Richard Nixon.

Given that Mizell comes from a small town in Alabama with no college education, no legal training, and only two years' experience in local government, it was a miracle that he had a chance to play professional baseball, it was also a miracle that he was able to become a congressman and work with men and women who have been in Congress for many years and who were accomplished and informed in the legislative process.

In 1989, his sports background led to his appointment to administer PCPFS national programs in fitness, physical education, sports medicine and amateur sports. He initiated the establishment of nationwide grassroots local councils on physical fitness and sports and championed the goals in Healthy People 2000 to reduce preventable death, disease and disability by the turn of the century.

IN SUMMARY, these former Congressional members have also reflected and endorsed very specific educational values inherent in their sport experience:

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF SPORT  
AS PERCEIVED BY  
SPORT HEROES OF CONGRESS

PERCEIVED VALUE

SOURCE

---

o Representative

Gerald R. Ford

- o Taught the value of team play
- o Learn to accept discipline
- o Learn how to handle tough situations
- o Learn how to take action
- o Teamwork and leadership
- o Principles of moderation and integrity

o Winning is very important

o Representative

Jack French Kemp

o Teaches self-confidence

o Teaches lots of courage

o One learns that the prizes in life

go to the individual who never quits

o The only real failure is not trying again

o out of adversity comes strength, determination

and ultimate victory

THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF SPORT  
AS PERCEIVED BY  
SPORT HEROES OF CONGRESS

PERCEIVED VALUE

SOURCE

o Representative

Robert Bruce Mathias

o Perseverance

o Representative

Charles Thomas McMillen

- o Athletics not as important as  
the academics for an individual

- o Representative

Ralph Harold

Metcalf

- o Teaches one conviction
- o Teaches perseverance
- o Teaches discipline
- o Training harder

- o Representative

Wilmer David "Vinegar Bend" Mizell

- o Getting along with people
- o The free competitive system
- o Teamwork and cooperation
- o travel
- o education

The profiles presented in this presentation have attempted to reflect the athletic prowess of sport heroes who have served in congress and to show the impact of sport on their political careers.

THANK YOU!