THE DRAMA AND ATHLETICS

BIG ATHLETIC CLUBS WILL CONSOLIDATE.

The New Jersey and Knickerbocker Organizations to Join Forces—One Peculiar Result of the Increased Interest in Outdoor Sports.

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There has been a good deal of talk recently of the apparent decrease of public interest in various sports, which has shown itself by the small crowds present at professional baseball games, field and track events and bicycle races. This cry of lack of interest has not come from any one section of the country, but has been just as frequently in the west as in the east. Many reasons have been presented by the managers of these affairs, by writers on sporting topics and others who are interested in the welfare of athletics in the United States.

Since the commencement of the late war with Spain that has been given very frequently as the cause of the apparent lack of enthusiasm. Undoubtedly the hostilities did put a damper on every form of sport, especially as a great many of the volunteers were most liberal patrons of such affairs. But the fact that all sorts of athletic games were and drawing such audiences as they had been accustomed to attract was noted before the war broke out, consequently we must look for other reasons.

The truth of the matter seems to be that Americans are not satisfied nowadays to sit or stand and watch a few athletes take part in games, but prefer to indulge in some sort of athletic exercise themselves.

Bicycling first taught men and women the joys of an afternoon spent in the open air and the beneficial results derived from the exercise and relaxation thus gained. More recently, however, another sport, and one more fitted for people of all ages, especially the older folk, has gained thousands upon thousands of adherents. Everybody is playing golf. The hold that this old Scotch game has taken on people of all classes is something wonderful. It exerts a peculiar influence which compels many who go to see the game prepared to doff and make fun of the players remain to praise and speedily become enthusiasts.

The effects of this desire on the part of almost every one to indulge in some sort of athletics have resulted in many other ways besides the one mentioned of decreasing the numbers at baseball games and other events.

Athletic clubs and others of the character find it difficult to make both ends meet, for although at first sight it would seem that the greater interest in physical exercise would benefit such institutions, a little thought will convince any one of the contrary. Of course many people have joined athletic clubs who a few years ago would not have thought of doing so, but it must be remembered that many clubs exacting expensive from membership, dues and have to make up the deficiency by means of special events. The members and general public who in past years used to flock to these affairs now are away golfing, the little towns in the country or otherwise indulging in their new found pleasure, leaving the club officials to shake ruefully at merrily filled grand stands and empty benches.

One of the largest and best known athletic clubs in this country is feel the effect of this withdrawal of interest from athletic sports is the New Jersey Athletic club, which has its headquarters and grounds at Bayonne, N. J. The organization has always been noted for the attention it paid to foot and track events and the encouragement of sport held there were some of the best known all over the country and attract the cream of our athletes to take part in them. Some of the finest athletes in the world have been members of this organization. The club has relied on the receipts of these games to help run the club, and when last year one or two of the days for holding them were rainy the club received a considerable setback. This year again the attendance has been very poor, and the club has run very heavily into debt and is found itself unable to meet the interest due on its mortgages. While looking around for plans to overcome the difficulty a very happy solution suggested itself, and negotiations were entered into with the Knickerbocker Athletic club of New York, which occupies the old home of the also renowned Manhattan Athletic club on Madison avenue.

The Knickerbocker Athletic club has only been in existence a little over two years, but in that short space of time has succeeded in gaining a foothold in amateur athletic circles. The club has taken the place of Berry Hanlon's Madison square garden as the resort, and once more the inner circle of athletic sports at many of athletic gathering. The Knickerbocker, while possessing a magnificent club house, has not fitted up with every convenience for athletic exercise as will any other athletic organization in the country. I have seen some of these organizations, and have seen some of the places in which they can be done in outdoor sports. The writer the New Jersey Athletic club, the magnificent athletic grounds in the shadow of Newark city about eight miles from New York, with a fine concrete track, beautiful stands, cycle track and football grounds, with every facility for sports and acting as the clubhouse, is, indeed, a place for sports one for the New Jersey athletic club to be proud of. The Knickerbocker is not as up to date athletic club. The money was lacking wherewith to make the necessary improvements, and the club was obliged to do without them. The club has a magnificent gymnasium, and the gymnasium is the finest in the country. Mr. James B. Sullivan, president of the New Jersey Athletic club, has been nominated for the same position in the Knickerbocker Athletic club, and this gentleman is a man who knows how to organize athletic sports.

When these two clubs unite they will be able to compete the necessary field in order to make the Knickerbocker club the strongest athletic organization in the country.

The Knickerbocker clubhouse is splendidly fitted up with a large gymnasium, two bowling alleys, a swimming tank 100 feet long, the longest in other tanks in New York and several billiard and pool tables. There is a well equipped restaurant as well as a gymnasium, in Brooklyn, have plenty of room to store their wheels. There are corridors and among bedrooms, which, if need be, can be let to a moderate price, and thus can be well patronized. There is a spacious hall, with a good sized stage. The hallway are well lighted and there are also