‘If the IOC Finds Out about This, All of You Will Be Declared Professionals’: The Professionalization of Finnish Track Athletes from the 1960s to 1980s

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ABSTRACT
For most of the twentieth century a characteristic feature of international athletics was the association of ‘shamateurism’ with elite athletes. The amateur rules of the International Olympic Committee and the International Association of Athletics Federations ushered professionally motivated athletes towards under-the-table payments of gate and sponsor money, ostensible jobs, and tax avoidance. After the deterioration of Olympic amateurism in the 1970s and 1980s, professionalism was finally accepted at the turn of the 1990s. This paper contributes to the understanding of the professionalization of athletics by tracing career paths of Finnish athletes in the last decades of the amateur age. Taking some of the most successful Finnish athletes in the 1970s and 1980s as case studies, the underlying mechanics of Finnish sports system are analyzed with source material that reflects the perspective of athletes. Some athletes adroitly seized on the opportunities that the underground culture presented and gained both full-time training conditions and financial profits, whereas others remained nearly genuine amateurs. A watershed moment was the establishment of trust funds in 1983, after which the culture of shamateurism gradually fell apart. New revenue streams also created ways for Finnish women to become fully professional track athletes.

Context for the Study
Professional sport is historically a novel phenomenon in Finland. Finnish sport embraced amateurism as its core value in 1907 when the first amateur rules were drafted by the central sports organization, known as the Finnish Gymnastics and Sports Federation (SVUL). Amateur rules prohibited monetary rewards and set limits on compensations associated with training time and trips to and from competitions. In Finland and in other Nordic countries, amateurism was strengthened by the sports movement’s character as a voluntary civic activity. In the ethos of Nordic sport, athletic achievements of athletes who transgressed the boundaries of national
amateur sport and became professionals were deemed useless to the nation. Behind the official rhetoric, shamateurism flourished. Conveying under-the-table gate money to elite athletes became a tradition in the interwar period and persisted long after. After a decades-long struggle to fit the amateur ideal into the widely contrasting reality, professionalism was gradually accepted in Nordic countries towards the end of the twentieth century.\footnote{1}

During the Cold War, amateur sports systems were subjected to steadily rising pressures. In 1962, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved the first significant mitigation to the amateur rules by allowing broken-time payments to athletes to compensate their losses from time off work. The change was preceded by rigorous resistance by IOC president Avery Brundage. Nordic sports leaders had a more pragmatic relationship to the amateur question and have often been seen as the IOC’s liberal wing, bent on creating more socially just amateur rules.\footnote{2} This interpretation ignores the vast ideological gulf that existed between approving expense compensations and earning money. Most Finnish sports leaders were against incorporating open professionalism into the Finnish sports system and reluctant to influence the development of the Olympic movement into that direction on an international stage. As will be shown, this mentality delayed structural developments towards professionalism in Finland.

Previous Finnish research has mostly focused on the ideologies and practice of amateurism among sports organizations in the early twentieth century, and how amateur rules functioned as social control of athletes.\footnote{3} The problem in this approach is that the voice of the main protagonists of sport, elite athletes, is subdued and reflects their role in the sources produced by the authorities of sport. The starting point of this research follows Susan K. Cahn's argument of using oral history to examine power dynamics in sport from the 'bottom up,' from the perspective of those whose voice written records do not reflect.\footnote{4} This enables the portrayal of athletes as active subjects.\footnote{5}

The following research questions will be examined: What kind of career paths did elite Finnish track athletes have in the last decades of the amateur age? Which sources of income did they have, and how did they resist the amateur ethos of organizations – if at all? The objective is to describe the reality behind the amateur façade and determine Finland’s sports system’s character in terms of the amateur status of its elite track athletes. By discussing the effects and limitations of athlete activism, this research contributes to the understanding of the professionalization of international athletics, which has recently seen increasing academic interest.\footnote{6}

This research draws upon various types of source material with oral history as both primary source and research method. In total, nine former athletes were asked to participate in the research. One of them declined, one did not answer at all and seven agreed. All the seven interviewees were informed orally about the topic and purpose of research beforehand and had the chance to remain anonymous. Two of them, henceforth Anon #1 and Anon #2, chose this option – both were athletes whose active careers spanned roughly a decade from the early 1980s. The rest were 3000 metre steeplechase runner Täpio Kantanen (b. 1949), javelin thrower Hannu Siitonen (b. 1949), and sprinters Markku Taskinen (b. 1952), Riitta Salin (b. 1950)
and Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen (née Wilmi, formerly Häggman, b. 1951). Their stories were analyzed as case studies of athlete careers in the 1970s and 1980s. As an interview method, a semi-structured interview was applied. Interviewees were asked 15 identical questions regarding their sources of income during their careers, efforts to combine competitive training with studies or work, and experiences of, and views on, shamateurism. As the interviews progressed, mutual understanding was often reached, paving the way for additional questions and conversation. This sometimes resulted in information that had previously been left unsaid. One interview was conducted face-to-face and six as telephone interviews. Archival sources, newspapers, and biographical literature were used as complementary sources, primarily to seek both numerical data such as actual sums paid to athletes in Finnish meets and contemporary perceptions to the amateur question.

The analysis is divided in four parts. It begins with brown envelopes and other economic opportunities that the covert system provided to athletes in Finland and explains why some athletes were able to make significant earnings when others earned practically nothing. Next, the jobs that the interviewed athletes had during their careers are looked at more closely. As will be shown, some of them were sinecures that were tailored to their needs as athletes, when others were genuine jobs that required education and actual work effort. The third chapter addresses forms of athlete resistance and their impact behind the development of the first financial support system for Finnish track athletes. Finally, drastic changes that the liberalization of the amateur rules brought forward in the 1980s are scrutinized.

**Under-the-Table Income**

By the 1960s under-the-table payments had long roots in Finnish athletics. The gulf between the ideal and the reality was wide. Club officials who were supposed to monitor amateur regulations offered and conveyed gate money to star athletes, whose presence in meets guaranteed large crowds, and revenues to meet organizers. Recognizing their market value, elite athletes had learned to demand their share beforehand.7 As the most popular summer sport in a country full of sports associations, athletics meets were plentiful in the summer season throughout the mid-1900s.8 In the absence of a structured international system of meets and boasting good rewards, Finnish meets attracted both domestic and foreign stars who could generate good profits even on short tours.

Tapio Kantanen and Hannu Siitonen gained access to under-the-table appearance fees nearly simultaneously in 1970. Both remember vividly their first brown envelope, clearly indicating its importance as a kind of career path milestone. Kantanen had arrived to compete in the Saarijärvi Midsummer Games when one of his fellow competitors asked him how much he got from the games. Understanding this way that money was available, he contacted a meet organizer and secured a reward of 100 Finnish marks (2020: 149 euros).9 In the Finnish Championships of the same year, he showed initiative himself and negotiated appearance fees with meet organizers for his other competitions that summer.10 In the same Championships, Hannu Siitonen agreed to compete in the city of Varkaus for 400 marks. In the Finnish Championships no extra appearance fees were available, but it was a good place to
negotiate future deals, because most club officials and meet organizers in the country had gathered there for several days.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1971–1972 Kantanen developed into one of the best athletes in the world in his discipline. Siitonen’s breakthrough year was 1973 when he broke the 90-metre barrier in six competitions. Rather than hundreds of marks, both could now ask for more. In the summer of 1972 Kantanen initially asked for 1,500 to 2,000 marks for appearances; after winning Olympic bronze medal in Munich his fee rose to 3,000 marks (2020: 3,915 euros). Kantanen reminisces that in total he earned quite well in his career, but there would have been more prudent ways to use the money – such as invest it. Because there was no one to advise him – or yet trust funds where rewards could be deposited – he did not know what else to do than just deposit the money into a bank account.\textsuperscript{12} Siitonen feels that because of his ‘poor salesman skills’,\textsuperscript{13} he got less than what would have been available. The best appearance fee he got in his career was therefore ‘as little as’ 6,000 Finnish marks.\textsuperscript{14} He could, however, afford to buy a house and a car with his earnings. Both Siitonen and Kantanen also received under-the-table money from their equipment sponsors – Siitonen from Karhu and Kantanen from Karhu, Adidas, and Puma in different periods during his career. Siitonen’s largest single fee from Karhu was 8,000 marks.\textsuperscript{15} Consequently, it seems that by the 1970s, the intense competition between Adidas and Puma had created a new source of income for top Finnish athletes, though still less important than appearance fees. Another source, though available only to a few, was commercial media whose interest in athletes increased substantially in Finland in the 1960s and 1970s. One example of this was seen in 1976 when the then two-fold Olympic champion Lasse Virén and his wife-to-be Päivi sold exclusive rights for the coverage of their wedding to the \textit{Apu} magazine.\textsuperscript{16}

Kantanen and Siitonen did not want to evaluate how much they earned in total in a season or in their career, mainly because it was difficult to keep track of earnings. Appearance fees were agreed orally and paid in cash without receipts so as not to leave evidence. Furthermore, standard asking prices did not apply in competitions organized by the Finnish Athletics Federation (FAF) or obviously in the European Championships and the Olympic Games. Appearance fees could only be asked for in meets organized by clubs and were often affected by the number of spectators who showed up. In 1960, the weekly journal \textit{Viikkosanomat} estimated that depending on their level and perceived market value, athletes earned around 10,000 to 140,000 marks (2020: 240–3,364 euros) in a Finnish meet. \textit{Viikkosanomat} covered the theme again in 1971, estimating that ‘international level’ athletes – meaning potential or actual Olympic medallists – could ask around 3,000 marks (2020: 4,199 euros) and potential Finnish record breakers 150 to 1,500 marks (2020: 210–2,099 euros).\textsuperscript{17}

A rare handwritten document from the 1977 World Games in Helsinki contains similar numbers. It includes all expense compensations and additional rewards paid to Finnish athletes. Of the 55 athletes, 26 got more than 1,000 marks in addition to expense compensations, with the best rewards of 4,000 marks (2020: 2,628 euros) given to javelin throwers Seppo Hovinen and Hannu Siitonen, and long-distance runner Pekka Päivärinta.\textsuperscript{18} Even though the highest rewards were not as valuable as the rewards revealed earlier by \textit{Viikkosanomat} – indicating the effect of high
inflation in Finland – they still exceeded a workman's average monthly earnings.\textsuperscript{19} When even 'amateur' events boasted these kinds of rewards, it is no wonder that star athletes like Tapio Kantanen, Pekka Vasala and Lasse Virén declined to join the professional International Track Association (ITA) circuit that started in the United States after the 1972 Olympics.\textsuperscript{20}

Oral histories of Markku Taskinen, Riitta Salin and Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen differ from Kantanen and Siitonen's in both content and discourse. Despite not making it to the Olympic podiums, all three were medalists in the 1974 European Championships, and Salin was even elected as that year's Finnish Athlete of the Year. Salin stresses that '[rather than rewards] brown envelopes were compensations [for trips] with a few hundred marks [as daily rates] to cover expenses'.\textsuperscript{21} She says that she never demanded anything extra or even thought that running should benefit her financially. Wilmi-Rokkanen recalls having gotten one brown envelope in her career – it contained 500 marks – and tells that the problem was that it was difficult to know when and how to ask for rewards. For both Salin and Wilmi-Rokkanen, practicing sport at a high level meant more loss than increase in income because of unpaid leave that both had to take from work for training camps.\textsuperscript{22}

There is a distinctive amateur ethos in the way in which especially Salin talks about under-the-table rewards. Like Wilmi-Rokkanen, Salin was undisputedly one of the stars of Finnish athletics, but a career of shamateur athlete entrepreneur was not something that she wanted to pursue – but perhaps also could not. Women's position in athletics was still marginalized, as can also be deduced from the list of rewards in the 1977 Helsinki World Games. The biggest reward given to a woman was a meagre sum of 600 marks to Mona-Lisa Pursiainen, another Finnish star sprinter in the 1970s. Markku Taskinen, too, belittles his rewards when compared to 'more successful athletes' but does tell of one instance when he received money, that time from his equipment sponsor Karhu. After winning gold in the 1978 Indoor European Championships, Karhu made an advertising poster that featured him and two other Finnish gold medallists. Taskinen and the other athletes demanded compensation from Karhu afterwards, receiving 5,000 marks each.\textsuperscript{23} For women, making similar demands would have been more difficult at the time. Self-marketing skills or at least willingness to partake in covert negotiations was one prerequisite for gaining profits; the other was extensive competing, which could lead to injuries and other health issues – especially since some athletes enhanced their performance with banned substances. Hannu Siitonen recalls competing nearly 50 times some seasons, the result of which was that his career ended prematurely because of an injury in 1977. By contrast, Wilmi-Rokkanen competed about 20 times a season.\textsuperscript{24}

Athletes who pocketed under-the-table money had to be careful not to attract attention from the tax authorities. Generally, athlete rewards were as poorly supervised as the clubs' accounts, but there was always a chance that at a local level some eager tax official came upon discriminating evidence by chance. Precisely this happened for javelin thrower Jorma Kinnunen in 1965 after a tax official had found a document from a meet in Hyvinkää, which indicated that 700 marks had been paid to him. The tax official counted Kinnunen's unpaid taxes that year by evaluating rather unjustly that Kinnunen had received 700 marks in all competitions that year. Kinnunen paid the reassessment fee but afterwards a local governor made sure that
no further inquiries were made. Hannu Siitonen had to explain the origin of his earnings when buying a house and thinks that rather than his explanations, further investigations were prevented by protection he got from ‘bigger lords’. Similarly, Markku Taskinen did not have to pay taxes for the car that he had gotten as a gift from a major Finnish corporation, because the president of his club was in a leading position in tax administration and prevented inquiries. In addition to sports-mad local administrators, athletes were protected from tax control by the fact that they were locally important figures whose celebrity status ensured publicity for their places of residence – which the athletes also knew. When in 1970 Finnish newspapers published rumours that javelin thrower Pauli Nevala had earned more than 100,000 marks that year, Nevala labelled rumours as fiction and threatened to move away from his hometown in Teuva if local tax authorities started investigations on him.

By becoming shamateurs, athletes became threats in the eyes of the sports authorities who sought to harness their abilities into results in nationally important competitions. From the perspective of sports leaders, athletes who competed much to earn money were individualists who had to be controlled – and preferably also silenced. When in 1960 five Finnish track athletes publicly criticized the amateur rules and suggested openly paid rewards, FAF president Reino Piirto, SVUL president Akseli Kaskela, and influential writer and educator Lauri Pihkala, rushed to defend amateurism, and condemned athletes who in their greed did not understand the focus on ‘important events’. Finnish athletes were similarly criticized by New Zealand runner coach Arthur Lydiard who worked for the FAF from 1967 to 1969. In his end report, Lydiard wrote bitterly that Finnish athletics had moved into a state of ‘proto-professionalism’, firmly on course to full professionalism. By Lydiard’s interpretation, Finnish runners concentrated on getting to funded ‘training vacations’ in winter and earning money from brown envelopes in summer, when they should have focused on winning medals for their country. Surprisingly, Lydiard’s report places him in the camp of amateur apostles; for Finnish press, Lydiard even commented that ‘only in Finland have I understood that Avery Brundage is right in supporting amateurism’. Highlighting positions of power in sports, athletes’ points of view are absent from the media coverage of Lydiard’s outburst. The five athletes had taken a risk when attacking amateurism publicly in 1960 – two were given official warnings and one was questioned on his possible under-the-table rewards. Remaining silent was preferable to this kind of treatment.

Job Arrangements

In the amateur era, athletes who did not have occupations outside sport or a study place risked being labelled ‘vagabonds’ [Finnish: irtolainen], Tapio Kantanen says one official in the federation once warned him. Of the athletes interviewed, only Anon #1 did not work alongside sport during his/her career. Kantanen’s athlete career took off when he volunteered for military service as an underaged 17-year-old in 1966, after which his coach Hannu Posti – staff officer in the Defence Forces – arranged him a job in the Defence Forces’ Sports School, even though Kantanen had not done the required Non-Commissioned Officer course. Working as an
instructor in the Sports School enabled Kantanen to train with athletes doing their mandatory service and participating in training camps that were considered secondments by his two sports-loving superior officers. After quitting the Defence Forces in 1974, Kantanen worked as a sales representative in a major Finnish retail chain, Pukeva, until the end of his active career and beyond. That job was arranged by his equipment sponsor Karhu-Titan, and it involved selling and developing Karhu’s sports shoes. Product development consisted of using shoes in training runs and giving feedback afterwards. Work times were flexible and there was no obligation to do full workdays; whenever he wanted or needed, he could always fully focus on training.34

Hannu Siitonen’s social background as a smallholder’s son is similar to Kantanen’s but the jobs he had during his career were quite different. Siitonen worked in his family’s farmstead until his early twenties when had already become a nationally well-known athlete. After winning gold in the 1974 European Championships, a town of Parikkala hired him as a municipal physical education instructor. The salary was small – 400 marks monthly – but offered stable income. In effect, it was a reward for his athletic achievements. When his schedule permitted, he sometimes organized activities like swimming schools for local children, but especially in summer his work mostly consisted of training and competing. Most of his livelihood came from under-the-table appearance fees and other rewards, which was also the reason why he competed as much as possible. Also Anon #2 worked as a municipal physical education instructor most of his/her career in the 1980s, commenting tellingly that ‘work definitely did not disturb sports very much’.35

In the lives of Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen and Riitta Salin, financial aspect of sports was nearly meaningless. Salin took an unpaid six-month-leave from her job in the Finnish branch of Nestlé before the 1976 Olympic Games in Montreal, but other than that she either studied or worked full-time for the entirety of her career. Training was goal-oriented but in terms of the use of time, nearly like a hobby – usually two hours daily after a full day of studies or work. Salin says that she always thought that sports had to stay in harmony with work and family life: ‘if I would have had to give up on one, it probably would have been sports’.36 Wilmi-Rokkanen, too, only had one phase in her career when she focused fully on training: a six-month unpaid leave before the 1980 Olympics in Moscow. She studied at a university between 1970 and 1974, and worked as physical education teacher afterwards, always training in her spare time. Both women feel that they benefited greatly from concentrating on education and work during their athlete careers, though Wilmi-Rokkanen admits that it perhaps prevented her reaching full potential as a sprinter.37 After retiring as athletes, they had no problems in transition to life after sports. Based on contemporary sources, Salin and Wilmi-Rokkanen’s mentality was similar during their careers. For example, Wilmi-Rokkanen (then Häggman) commented in the peak of her career in 1976 that becoming a ‘full-time athlete’ was out of the question for her, because ‘it would make running too important’.38

Markku Taskinen completed his military service in the Air Force Academy (Finnish: ilmasotakoulu) in 1974 and afterwards graduated in aviation. He then worked for Finland’s national airline, Finnair, until 2003. ‘I did not focus on sports like many others. It was more like a tough hobby, the job was more important’,
Taskinen reminisces similarly to Salin and Wilmi-Rokkanen. Combining a demanding job to goal-oriented training was easy because both in his studies and work he always had superiors who understood and helped him. His superior in the Air Force Academy facilitated his training for the entirety of his military service and arranged his leave from the army a month before official discharge. In Finnair, his superior helped his training without specific requests, for example by giving him a salaried leave before the 1976 Olympics. In Finland during the 1970s there were clearly plenty of employers in both public and private sectors who were enthusiastic about athletics and prepared to give concessions to athletes. Another athlete who benefited from having such an employer was long-distance runner Pekka Vasala. Vasala took a nine-month unpaid leave from forest industry cooperative Metsä Group to prepare for the 1972 Olympics. After Vasala returned from the Olympics with a gold medal, unpaid leave became paid leave when a full nine-month salary was transferred into his bank account – again, at least according to Vasala’s testimony, without requests to do so.

Development of Support Systems

All the interviewed athletes had the chance to take unpaid leave from their day jobs to prepare for major international events. These were made possible by the FAF’s stipend system that was established in 1970. Athletes were allocated stipends based on their coaching group. Athletes in the highest group were given 10,000 marks (2020: 14,890 euros) on a yearly basis that could be used for training camps, travel expenses, daily rates, equipment, and massage. In the first year of the system, this group included five athletes, and in the next, ten. Athletes in lesser groups got 6,000 marks, 4,000 marks and 2,000 marks accordingly. The stipend itself is a bit of a misleading concept because the money was not given to athletes directly, but afterwards based on receipts and a budget that was agreed on beforehand.

In Finnish literature, the emergence of the stipend system in athletics has usually been linked to the major coaching reform in the FAF at the turn of the 1970s, in which also athletes’ representatives were heard. Alternative ways to present the process that gave birth to the stipend system is to read it as the culmination of athlete activism, the roots of which preceded the FAF’s reform. Long-distance runners Jouko Kuha and Juha Väätäinen pressurized the FAF to fund their winter training in southern Europe and South and Middle America in the mid- to late-1960s, even though no official support system had yet been created. Kuha and Väätäinen have often been seen as the pioneers of the stipend system, but they were not the only athletes who applied and received travel compensations from the FAF. Many athletes received small grants to travel abroad for training during winter seasons in the 1960s – usually to the universities of the United States. Compensations ranged roughly from 500 to 1,500 marks and were usually given for studying. Jouko Kuha’s winter training in Mexico in autumn 1968 and spring 1969, for example, was enabled with a stipend for studying English and Spanish. Stipends covered costs for lodging and included a daily rate of five dollars. Stipend applications were addressed case-by-case without a clear set of guidelines.
Towards the end of the decade athletes’ demands increased. During the 1969 European Championships, athletes suggested creating a semi-professional system, in which athletes could devote half of their day to training. The FAF was not willing to go that far and continued giving compensations as stipends – and not without terms. In January 1970, the FAF informed the athletes then in the US that to get a funded return trip, they had to sign commitments to compete in the Finnish Championships and international meets in the following summer. Athletes were also given ‘overcoats’ [Finnish: päällystakki] – coaches whose instructions they had to obey. What followed was a year of protests. Three athletes refused to sign the deal and returned to Finland on their own or their clubs’ funding. In the Finnish Championships that summer, javelin throwers Jorma Kinnunen and Pauli Nevala intentionally overstepped all their throws as a protest. After the event, Nevala publicly threatened that he and 20 other athletes were prepared to skip the international meet against Sweden. One athlete in this coterie was Hannu Siitonen. Siitonen says that the reason to threaten a strike was to put pressure on the FAF to give better compensations to athletes. The stipend system that was achieved as a result was a compromise. It did not go as far towards professionalism as the athletes would have wanted but was still a first structural step towards that direction.

Athlete resistance in the year 1970 forced the FAF’s authorities to significantly raise the sums of the highest stipends available. Concurrently, the informal practice of giving stipends to athletes was transformed into a system with explicitly formulated terms, rights, and obligations. Internationally, the system was rare enough to attract attention also from the IOC. In 1972, the president of the Finnish Olympic Committee, Jukka Uunila, had to assure the IOC Eligibility Committee that Finnish athletes did not receive any direct payments, and that all transactions were based on receipts and covered only training costs. The Eligibility Committee’s interest – and the fact that there even was an eligibility commission – is indicative of amateurism’s still high standing among IOC members. In the long amateur era, it was the first instance that at least theoretically had more power in enforcing the amateur principle than the international and the national federations. Replacing the concept amateur with eligibility in the Olympic Charter did not therefore mean amateurism’s decline inside the IOC, as Llewellyn and Gleaves have rightly emphasized. Uunila’s explanation was accepted, even though in effect athletes could also use their stipends in other ways than written in the rules. Markku Taskinen, for example, once used his stipend for a mortgage, sending the necessary receipts to the FAF afterwards.

Stipends and sinecures put Finnish athletes in a good position compared to their international counterparts, which their rivals also recognized. American athletes, for instance, used Lasse Virén as a prime example of a heavily subsidized European athlete when they argued for reforms to the amateur sports system in the US Congress in the mid-1970s. Openly given financial support helped Finnish athletes and their coaches to plan training in advance, which improved especially off-season training in both quantity and quality. From the athletes’ perspective, there were also limitations; terms of the stipends were considered strict, and inflation steadily nibbled away their value in the 1970s. Stipends functioned also as social control. The FAF’s long-standing objective to ensure athlete participation in the Finnish Championships and the internationals was fulfilled, and because all stipend groups
included more than 100 athletes, obligation now applied to all potential athletes. Another long-standing objective, however, was not realized. Despite hopes to the contrary, under-the-table money was as widely in circulation after 1970 than before.

Finnish athlete activism did not bear fruit in the guise of an official athlete association. According to Tapio Kantanen, he and some of his fellow athletes planned once to found one but decided to abandon the plans after one FAF official had explained to them the possible consequences of such an action: ‘if the IOC finds out about this, all of you will be declared professionals’. If founding an athlete association would have meant committing to a precarious professional career in the likes of the ITA, it was certainly a risk not worth taking. Not only would it have meant losing the chance to compete in the Olympic Games, but also losing all official and unofficial benefits that the best Finnish athletes could count on. Markku Taskinen thinks that what hindered athlete collaboration in general were the cliques between athletes of different athletic disciplines. This estimate seems accurate considering the later failed attempts to create a functioning athlete association in the 1980s and 1990s.

**Trust Funds Speed up Professionalization**

In 1981, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) approved trust funds where athletes could deposit their appearance fees and sponsor revenues. Rather than a signal of a new proactive mentality, the change continued reactionary amateur politics of previous decades. The IAAF was forced to accept trust funds after the TAC (formerly AAU) had first accepted them. The TAC was pressurized by recently founded North American athlete organizations that were poised to create a professional track and field circuit with their corporate backers. In 1983, the IOC followed the IAAF’s suit, and the FAF established a trust fund for Finnish athletes. Athletes could withdraw funds to cover training and travel costs; the rest of the earnings would be available at the end of their careers. However, trust funds created new tensions between athletes and the federation. The FAF required athletes to sign written deals that gave the federation rights to control agreements between athletes, meet organizers, and private companies. What particularly annoyed the very best athletes was the clause that gave the FAF a share of 25 percent from sponsorship deals that athletes made with companies that were not official partners of the federation. Star athletes Tiina Lillak, Arto Bryggare and Martti Vainio complained about the clause to the federation, receiving counsel from their unofficial agent Tor Westerberg. In the following years, especially, Lillak and Westerberg regularly sent petitions to the FAF with a similar purpose: to give athletes more control of their own earnings.

Javelin thrower Tiina Lillak and long jumper Ringa Ropo’s examples highlight drastic changes that the trust fund brought, especially for Finnish elite women athletes in the 1980s. As one of the stars of international athletics, Lillak was coveted by international corporations such as TDK and Mazda and competed in teams named after and sponsored by them. Ropo in turn skilfully harnessed changes in the Finnish sports publicity to her benefit. Women athletes’ media visibility rose significantly in the 1980s – in part due to the changing nature of the media – which
created potential to attract sponsors but also exposed athletes to new kind of pressures and criticism. The contrast to Salin and other Finnish women sprinters in the 1970s was clear. Lillak's letters to the FAF and other material, such as Adidas' Finnish importer Virsu's complaint about her financially motivated decision to part ways with Adidas right after becoming World Champion in 1983, display a thoroughly professional mentality. In 1986 she requested full control of her funds in the trust fund and tried to terminate her contract with the federation because she thought that it did not represent her best interests, arguing that professionalism should no longer be seen as a 'burden for athletes'. The FAF did not capitulate and frowned on Westerberg's role behind Lillak. The IAAF had warned its member federations in April 1985 about agents who negotiated deals between athletes and meet organizers, 'a practice which the IAAF Council is determined shall not become a feature of International Athletics'. When comparing Lillak and Westerberg's actions to the authorities in both the FAF and the IAAF, it is clear which side represented the (near) future of athletics and which fought against the windmills.

The trust fund system and the new revenue streams it enabled benefited also other Finnish athletes. After the 1983 World Championships in Helsinki, many Finns were recruited in a team sponsored by Nike and TDK. Later in the 1980s, the 'TDK team' boasted a cadre of elite Finnish athletes, both men and women. The middleman between TDK and the athletes was Tor Westerberg. Westerberg has later revealed that he secured better deals for athletes by misleading the FAF by delivering false agreements to the federation and then making agreements with real sums with the corporations. It can therefore be deduced that the FAF's trust fund did not include all rewards to Finnish athletes in the 1980s, despite a steady increase in transactions both to and from the fund. From 1983 to 1988 yearly transactions to the FAF's trust fund increased from 351,000 Finnish marks to 1,338,000 marks (2020: 134,500 to 401,800 euros). Transactions from the fund to the athletes increased from practically nothing in 1983 to 1,019,000 marks in 1988.

The careers of Anon #1 and Anon #2 were mostly dated in this rapidly changing period in athletics. The former developed into one of the best athletes in the world in his/her discipline, whereas the latter had to contend with lesser success, despite also having high targets and reaching podiums in the Finnish Championships. Contrasting success meant vast differences in especially sponsor rewards, the result of which was that Anon #2 did not use the FAF's trust fund at all. Anon #1 by contrast gained enough financial profits to need services from two agents – one took care of negotiations with meet organizers and the other looked after sponsors that included three different shoe corporations in his/her career. Self-evidently, he/she considered sports a sole profession in his/her career. Anon #1 reminisces that generally earnings accumulated well in the fund and provided financial capital for life after sports, but the FAF and the amateur rules prevented many lucrative deals that in the 1990s would have been possible. Anon #1 participated in both the IAAF's Grand Prix tour, established in 1985, and its Finnish equivalent that started in 1986 (known as Eliittikisat between 1987 and 2017), competing usually 25 to 30 times in a season, whereas Anon #2 competed about 15 times a year. Both Anon #1 and Anon #2 refer to appearance fees paid in Finnish meets in the 1980s as 'mileage allowances', which indicates a change in practice. In the early 1980s Finnish sports
clubs were subjected to systematic tax investigations, and many had to pay large reassessment fees, which made paying rewards in brown envelopes riskier.\textsuperscript{65} Incorporating appearance fees into mileage allowances enabled paying most coveted athletes extra – and doing so by obeying at least the letter of the law.

Despite steadily progressing professionalization, relics of amateurism influenced athletics until the early 1990s. Anon #1 thinks that despite his/her own professionalism, the era was completely different than today: ‘What was coming those days and what we even fought for a bit, is today considered normal’.\textsuperscript{66} Amateur rules still prevented athletes from pursuing some of the opportunities that the commercialization of the Olympic Games in general and athletics in particular had opened. By the end of the decade, it was becoming clear, though, that turning the tide was impossible. This was recognized also in the FAF. In the federation’s strategy for 1989–1992, it was explicitly stated that all elite athletes would be given conditions for ‘professional year-round training’. In 1988, the FAF gave six athletes permission to negotiate their own appearance fees and bonuses. The federation also started to give monetary rewards to athletes for good results in major international events.\textsuperscript{67} In the early 1990s the transition towards open professionalism was completed. The last vestiges of amateurism disappeared from the Olympic Charter in 1991, and in 1993 the IAAF sanctioned directly paid monetary rewards to athletes.

\textbf{Winding Road to Openly Professional Athletics}

Amateurism’s by-product in international athletics was an underground culture that also characterized the Finnish sports system for most of the twentieth century. Based on this research, Finland’s system had features from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Finnish shamateurism featured not only under-the-table appearance fees but also covert payments from equipment manufacturers, favourable job arrangements and other benefits with which athletes were unofficially supported. The system was maintained by tacit acceptance and in some cases collaboration by sports-enthused municipal decision-makers and corporate leaders. Athletes were given possibilities to train in work time, and tax investigations of their under-the-table earnings were prevented. As the cases in this paper illustrate, before the 1980s shamateurism in its most typical form was mainly related to internationally successful male athletes. Riitta Salin and Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen, for example, cannot be labelled such, even though both were highly respected athletes in Finland in the 1970s. It should also be stressed that not all male ‘shamateurs’ optimized their lives into making money. Some focused more on securing funding from the FAF for long off-season training camps, the result of which was the stipend system established in 1970.

Based on oral history and sporadic evidence left from competitions, it is difficult to estimate just how much the very best Finnish athletes earned yearly. The biggest fees paid at Finnish meets in the 1960s and 1970s ranged roughly from 3,000 to 6,000 Finnish marks, which is about equal to similar numbers in current euros. Even if there had been only a limited number of events as profitable as these in an athlete’s summer schedule, total yearly earnings would have resulted in comfortable middle class income levels and standards of living. Under-the-table appearance fees were obviously also paid tax-free, which makes them comparable even to modern
day standards – though elite athletes of today naturally can count on wider revenue streams from other sources. Even for those athletes who received lesser rewards the underground culture provided a lucrative side job. Payments from meet organizers were complemented by rewards from sponsors that in the 1970s do not, however, yet seem to have brought significant profit for most – with the likely exception of Lasse Virén.

One of the findings in this paper is that not all internationally successful Finnish athletes wanted or could partake in the underground culture. There were vast differences in athletes’ use of time, sources of income and mentality. Tapio Kantanen, Hannu Siltanen and Anon #1 were nearly or fully professional athletes during their careers despite having to pose as amateurs. By contrast, Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen and Riitta Salin show up even surprisingly clearly as genuine amateur athletes, as do in part Markku Taskinen and Anon #2. The nature of their athletic activities was aptly described by Taskinen – a tough hobby. More than sports, their agency was directed towards education and work outside sport, which made their lifestyles different to athletes who pursued professional training conditions and under-the-table profits. Successful amateur athletes had a secure socioeconomic position due to education and working in a profession that was considered as such by society. Instead of financial capital, competitive elite sports resulted in social capital that yielded profits long after athlete careers had ended.

After the establishment of the stipend system in 1970, the professionalization of Finnish athletics took further steps in the early 1980s, and specifically in the year 1983. Tightening control of tax authorities on the one hand and establishing a trust fund on the other resulted in deterioration of the underground culture that had been in effect from the first decades of the twentieth century. In the latter change, also Finnish athletes’ interests were promoted by organized activism of North American track athletes who by the turn of the 1980s had gained enough resources and power to challenge the amateur system both in the United States and internationally. Trust funds did not completely eradicate under-the-table practices in Finland – let alone internationally – but made payments to athletes generally more transparent. When athletes also gained other sources of income apart from appearance fees, reaching acceptable income levels no longer required participation in an unhealthy number of competitions. As a considerable change from the 1970s, not only men but also women elite athletes professionalized – both financially and mentally. Athletes no longer had to conduct negotiations with meet organizers and sponsors themselves and in secret, but openly, and with expert counsel.

By the early 1990s Finnish elite track athletes gained their livelihood from somewhat similar sources than today: over-the-table appearance fees, monetary prizes, and rewards from sponsors. Instead of shamateurs working in sinecures, full-time professional athlete became the norm. How the sources of income, societal position and activism of Finnish track athletes developed after the turn of the 1990s, is a topic left for future research. The change was not necessarily as beneficial for athletes as could be imagined. Intensifying international competition has made it impossible for amateurs working full-time in jobs outside sport to succeed. Taxation has reduced appearance fees available in Finnish meets, and sinecures in the public or private sector are no longer available. Professionalism’s late coming in Finland
can be witnessed even today as ongoing discussion about defects in the socio-economic position of athletes in individual sports.

Notes

1. Thomas Peterson, ‘The Professionalization of Sport in the Scandinavian Countries’ (Idrottsforum.org, February 20, 2008). https://www.idrottsforum.org/articles/peterson/peterson080220.pdf (accessed December 18, 2020). On the amateur question in early twentieth century Sweden and Finland, see Karin Wikberg, Amatör eller professionist? Studier rörande amatörfrågan i svensk tävlingsidrott 1903–1967 [Amateur or Professional? A Study of the Amateur Question within Swedish Competitive Sport between 1903–1967] (PhD diss., SISU Idrottsböcker, 2005); Antero Heikkinen, Ammatilaisesta amatööriksi. Suomi urheilun ensi vaihe [From Professionals to Amateurs. The First Period of Finnish Skiing Sport] (Oulu: Pohjoisen Liikuntatieellinen Seura, 1989), 305–26; Jouni Lavikainen, ‘Amatöörikysymys Suomessa 1907–1932’ [The Amateur Question in Finland between 1907–1932], in Liikunnan areenat – yhteiskuntatieteellisiä kirjoituksia liikunnasta ja urheilusta, ed. Kalervo Ilmanen and Hanna Vehmas (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2012), 187–208.

2. See, for example, Matthew P. Llewellyn and John Gleaves, The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 102.

3. In addition to the works in the first note, see Kalervo Ilmanen, ‘Urheilun eriytynyt moraaliperusta’ [Divergent Moral Foundation of Sports], in Liikunnan areenat – yhteiskuntatieteellisiä kirjoituksia liikunnasta ja urheilusta, ed. Kalervo Ilmanen and Hanna Vehmas (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2012), 175–88.

4. Susan K. Cahn, ‘Sports Talk: Oral History and Its Uses, Problems, and Possibilities for Sport History’, Journal of American History 81 (1994): 597–98.

5. Cahn, ‘Sports Talk’, 600.

6. Joseph M. Turrini, The End of Amateurism in American Track and Field (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Llewellyn and Gleaves, The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism; Aaron L. Haberman, “We’re All Professionals Now”: Frank Shorter, Deregulation, and the Battle to End “Shamateurism,” in the 1970s, The International Journal of the History of Sport 36, no. 15–16 (2019): 1414–32.

7. The basic logic of under-the-table practices in post-war Finland has been described by Jorma Rahkonen in his history of the Saarijärvi Midsummer Games, Koko Saarijärvi kiehui. Juhannuskisat 1920-luvulta 2000-luvulle [Midsummer Games from the 1920s to the 2000s] (Tampere: Kopiijyvä, 2001), 59–63; and by Seppo Nuuttala and Ari Menmander in Urheilun lahjomattomat [The Untouchables of Sport] (Helsinki: Otava, 1998), 22–4.

8. Jouko Kokkonen, Suomalainen liikuntakulttuuri – juuret, nykyisyys ja muutossuunnat [Finnish Sports Culture – Roots, Present, and Direction] (Keuruu: Suomen Urheilumuseosäätiö, 2015), 141.

9. Value was converted into 2020 euros with the Bank of Finland Museum’s money value converter, http://apps.rahamuseo.fi/rahanarvolaskin#ENG (accessed December 21, 2020).

10. Interview with Tapio Kantanen, August 22, 2019, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

11. Interview with Tapio Kantanen; interview with Hannu Siitonen, August 26, 2019, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

12. Interview with Tapio Kantanen.

13. All direct quotations are author translations from Finnish.

14. Interview with Hannu Siitonen. In fact, hardly any Finnish athlete got better rewards in the 1970s. For example, Lasse Virén’s appearance fee in 1972 is said to have been
6,000 marks (2020: 7,831 euros). Matti Hintikka, 'Neljän tuhannen markan miehet' [Men of Four Thousand Marks], Urheilulehti, August 15, 2003, 24–7.

15. Interview with Tapio Kantanen; interview with Hannu Siitonen.

16. Kokkonen, Suomalainen liikuntakulttuuri, 245.

17. 'Huippu-urheilumme palkkiojärjestelmä' [Reward System of Our Elite Sport], Viikkosanomat, December 9, 1960, 16; 'Urheilijoiden palkkiotaksat' [Athletes' Reward Fees], Viikkosanomat, July 8, 1971, 24–7. The money reform of 1963 altered the value of Finnish marks, hence the significant numerical difference between Finnish marks in 1960 and 1971.

18. Helsingin Maailmankisat Tilit [Helsinki World Games Accounts] 1976–1978, Hbb2, Helsingin Kisa-Veikot's archive, Sports Museum of Finland's archive (henceforth SMFa).

19. In 1977, a workman's hourly pay in Finland was 1,645 marks. Regular work time would have generated monthly about 3,000 marks. http://apps.rahamuseo.fi/rahanarvolaskin#ENG (accessed December 21, 2020).

20. Interview with Tapio Kantanen.

21. Interview with Riitta Salin, August 27, 2019, Helsinki, Finland, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

22. Interview with Riitta Salin; interview with Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen, May 13, 2020, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

23. Interview with Markku Taskinen, May 27, 2020, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

24. Interview with Hannu Siitonen; interview with Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen.

25. Interview with Jorma Kinnunen, 2011, Äänekoski, Finland, by journalists Arto Teronen and Jouko Vuolle, digital record available on Yle.fi, https://yle.fi/urheilu/3-10895914 (accessed May 12, 2020).

26. Interview with Hannu Siitonen.

27. Interview with Markku Taskinen.

28. 'Nevala tyrmää palkkiohuhut' [Nevala denies reward rumours], Helsingin Sanomat, October 6, 1970, 26.

29. 'Meidän ei kannata olla amatöörejä' [It is not worthwhile for us to be amateurs], Viikkosanomat, December 12, 1960, 12–16; 'Urheilunjohtajat ja sala-ammattilaisuus' [Sports Leaders and Shamateurism], Viikkosanomat, December 30, 1960, 16–19.

30. Arthur Lydiard to the Finnish Athletics Federation, March 31, 1969, Ce3, Finnish Athletics Federation's archive (henceforth FAFa), SMFa.

31. Arthur Lydiardin jäähyväisjyrinä: Kiittämättömät suomalaisjuoksijat kiinnostuneita ainostaan rahasta' [Arthur Lydiard's Farewell Outburst: Ungrateful Finnish Runners only Care about Money], Helsingin Sanomat, March 10, 1969, 17.

32. Interview with Tapio Kantanen.

33. Interview with Anon #1, May 29, 2020, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

34. Interview with Anon #2, December 17, 2020, on the telephone, with the author. Digital record in possession of the author.

35. Interview with Riitta Salin.

36. Interview with Pirjo Wilmi-Rokkanen.

37. Marjut Svahn, 'Naisten voimat käyttöön Miehistä kohta pula järjestöportailla' [Women's Abilities Should Be Put to Use Shortage of Men soon in Organizations], Helsingin Sanomat, November 19, 1976, 30.

38. Interview with Markku Taskinen.

39. Risto Taimi and Pekka Vasala, Pekka Vasala – mitalin toinen puoli [Pekka Vasala – The Other Side of Medals] (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 1974), 119.

40. Yleisurheilu no. 20 (1970), Uc1, FAFa, SMFa; board minutes, September 26, 1971, Cc4, FAFa, SMFa.
42. Nuuttila and Mennander, *Urheilun lahjomattomat*, 135; Mikko Leinonen, ‘Suomalaisen kestävyyssuoksun paluu huipulle 1970-luvulla’ [Finnish Long-Distance Running’s Return to the Top in the 1970s], in Alussa oli vesi. *Suomen urheiluhistorialliset seuran vuosikirja 2006* (Jyväskylä: Atena, 2006), 188–89.

43. Board minutes, October 1, 1967, November 3, 1968, December 7, 1968, and September 27, 1969, Cc4, FAFa, SMFa.

44. Urho Salo, ‘Valmennustoiminta’ [Coaching], in *Suomi voittoon – kansa liikkumaan. Suomen yleisurheilun 100 vuotta* [100 years of Finnish Athletics], ed. Seppo Martiskainen (Helsinki: Yleisurheilun Tukisäätiö, 2006), 239.

45. Board minutes, January 10, 1970, Cc4, FAFa, SMFa.

46. ‘Voimaa Nevalan kädessä ja uhkauksessa: Parhaat pois Ruotsi-ottelusta’ [Force in Nevala’s Hands and Threats: Best Out of Sweden Meet], *Helsingin Sanomat*, August 21, 1970, 26; interview with Hannu Siitonen.

47. Finnish Olympic Committee to Mr Arthur Takac (IOC), May 5, 1972, Fh3, Finnish Olympic Committee’s archive, SMFa.

48. Llewellyn and Gleaves, *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism*, 189.

49. Interview with Markku Taskinen.

50. Haberman, ‘We’re All Professionals Now’, 1419.

51. Taimi and Vasala, *Pekka Vasala – mitalin toinen puoli*, 121–26.

52. Interview with Tapio Kantanen.

53. Interview with Markku Taskinen.

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55. Turrini, *The End of Amateurism in American Track and Field*, 154–59.

56. Tiina Lillak, Arto Bryggare, and Martti Vainio to the FAF’s board, attached to board minutes, March 16, 1984, Cc12; Tiina Lillak to the FAF, February 4, 1985, Cc13; Tiina Lillak to the FAF, November 6, 1986, Cc14; Tor Westerberg to the FAF, November 6, 1986, Cc14, FAFa, SMFa.

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58. Kokkonen, *Suomalainen liikuntakulttuuri*, 229.

59. Virsu Oy to the FAF, May 16, 1984, Cc11, FAFa, SMFa.

60. Tiina Lillak to the FAF, November 6, 1986, Cc14, FAFa, SMFa.

61. ‘Warning – Athletes and Agents’, General Secretary John B. Holt to All Meeting Organisers, April 18, 1985, Cc13, FAFa, SMFa.

62. Juha Kanerva, ‘Kenen varusteilla urheilet?’ [Whose Equipment Do You Use When Exercising?], *Urheilulehti*, August 12, 2020, 14.

63. 1983 Annual Report of the Foundation for Track and Field’s Support, He12; board minutes, March 13, 1989, Cc20, FAFa, SMFa.

64. Interview with Anon #1; interview with Anon #2.

65. Esko Linnakangas, *Urheilu ja verotus* [Sports and Taxation] (Vammala: Suomen Lakimiesliitto, 1984), 12.

66. Interview with Anon #1.

67. FAF’s strategy 1989–1992, Cc19; board minutes, April 6, 1990, Cc20, FAFa, SMFa; ‘Pimeää rahaa mahdoton valvoa’ [Under-the-Table Money Impossible to Control], *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 11, 1988, 38.

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