



A Whole New Game: Expanding the Boundaries of the History of Sports. Washington: German Historical Institutes Warsaw and Washington, 30.10.2008-01.11.2008.

Reviewed by Christopher Young

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (December, 2008)

A Whole New Game: Expanding the Boundaries of the History of Sports

“Sport for all,” as governments across the developed world increasingly put it after the Second World War, is not a maxim that has mapped easily onto the historical profession. Largely ignored by diplomatic and political historians, it remained for a long time strangely under-treated in social history and remarkably unaffected by the cultural and linguistic turns. That is not to say there has been no historical study of sport, only that it takes place within an oddly textured and uneven field. Sports history exists, much of it good, most of it ignored by “mainstream” practitioners.

In doing so, they miss out on a great deal. As a major leisure activity enjoyed by countless millions of active participants and spectators at many levels in almost every society in the world, sport requires no justification as a valid, profitable, and necessary object of serious historical study. It is a global language that creates, interacts with, and transports values, norms, and social concepts; it informs and is informed by race, gender, hierarchies, the public sphere, media, and communication; it impinges on and is impinged upon by ritual, health, sexuality, aesthetics, consumption, lifestyle, space, urbanity, and architecture; and in its encounter with political, social and cultural structures at local, national, and international levels, it forms new identities, fosters emergent ones, and preserves even the outmoded in an age of unprecedented global development.

At any rate, there is now a palpable sense that sports history is moving into a new phase. “Maverick” historians are peeling off from their day-jobs to look at sport in

closer detail, and are turning to those who have already spent long careers labouring in the field. It is precisely this moment that this conference – organized jointly by the German Historical Institutes in Warsaw and Washington – sought to capture and promote. Whilst its title “A Whole New Game” might have been conceived with some spin, it is certainly true – to stay within the sporting metaphor – that new balls were called for and hit with skill and accuracy. Sport, as the conveners Uta Balbier and Stefan Wiederkehr noted from the outset, “is now finally seen as what it is: a field that different subdisciplines within the field of history can make use of. As a field that reflects social reality as much as it constructs and produces cultural reality.” The time was ripe to consider how the agenda for a newly invigorated sports history should look, and colleagues with a productive mix of ages, experience and professional persuasion were invited in different roles as presenters and commentators from the US, Europe and Australia.

In her opening lecture, CHRISTIANE EISENBERG considered the limits of sport as a social system by teasing out the present tension between the levelling out of participation and spectatorship on the one hand and the inexhaustibility of media reproduction on the other. Her richly illustrated examination of the changing ways in which the press has generated images of sporting heroes across time produced a number of important findings: despite sport’s rise being concomitant with that of the media and photography, concrete images contributed less to it in this first phase than the words of journalists and actors themselves; even after the advent of ad-

vanced photographic techniques in the 1930s, the mental image of the everyman hero retained its validity until television entered the majority of German households in the 1960s; and the flood of images produced from the 1970s onwards has given the public standards against which to judge contemporary heroes and find them lacking. Sport, as this first paper showed, is located in social networks but can function both inside and outside their technical parameters. It also developed with less help from the media than is often assumed, but is now very much under its emotional influence.

The first panel picked up on these themes by focussing on competition, media and fans. BARBARA KEYS called for a re-examination of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Olympic Games, from the perspective of diplomatic and international history. The Games and other international sports competitions helped propel new conceptions of human relationships at the end of the 19C and early 20C, and deserve to claim centre stage in the history of the creation of a new global consciousness based on universalism and empathy. As such, the rise of sport needs to be seen in the context of intellectual history, and vitally the history of emotions. Emotions and their construction formed the focus of MARKUS STAUF-Fâs thoughts in a paper which showed how, in media sports, the face functions as a blurred boundary between the very specifics of sports and all other, non-sporting human activity. Sports, as seen through and produced by the media, are marked by, and live off this tension in an ongoing process of articulation that both restricts and opens them to other discourses and practices such as politics. MANFRED ZELLER switched the attention from media to fans to emphasize the relation between global events and local culture (glocalization). In his study of international championships and the development of stadium culture in the Soviet Union between 1960 and 1985, he showed how a fanatic subculture, based on the Western, mainly British model, began in the 1970s and spread across the country by the mid 1980s, but retained important local meanings and points of interaction with the specifics of late Soviet culture. The Soviet case presents an important caveat in the history of sport: for although sport has become what it is today in large part due to the media's increased influence over the last thirty years, following soccer on television was a distinctly second-rate activity for the serious Soccer fan.

The second panel continued to examine the intricate impact of international forms of competition on local, national and transnational identities. STEVEN W. POPE's paper echoed Barbara Key's call for a greater under-

standing of the diplomatic networks in which early sporting competition arose by outlining the genesis of the Davis Cup in terms of early twentieth-century American imperialism. The competition, which became dominated in the late 1920s by the French and after 1945 by the Australians, is an example of the way in which Americans indigenized a cultural sporting import (British tennis), created a nationalistic, international sporting competition, and effectively exported it back to Britain within the wider context of a burgeoning, imperial rivalry on the world stage between two sporting and political rivals. In addressing the case of Poland, BRITTA LENZ focussed on a country whose sporting identity depended greatly on the international structures and competitions created by foreigners. Research on Polish soccer, conducted mainly by national sports historians, has concentrated on administration and statistics, with cultural aspects being largely neglected. Soccer, however, received a substantial boost on the foundation of the independent state after the First World War. International associations and their competitions (FIFA and the IOC) provided essential forums in and through which the new state could present itself abroad and configure the contours of its character at home. SANDRA BUDY stayed with a similar theme, examining the first All-Union Spartakiade in Moscow in 1928 as a media spectacle and analyzing articles and photographs in the press which sought to project images of the socialist body and way of life. The International Red Worker Sport event was used to promote the advantages of socialist culture in general over its bourgeois counterpart (not least because the Amsterdam Olympics were running in parallel), and via some world-class performances and the participation of athletes and performers from across the Soviet Republics to foster identification with the regime in particular.

The third panel focussed specifically on ethnicity in the international sports arena.

BRIAN D. BUNK discussed how boxing defined Spanish speaking racial identities during the interwar period, when the sport became an obsession in the Atlantic world. As foreign fighters travelled to America to seek fame and fortune, they became cultural heroes in their countries of origin. In the same period, racial and ethnic identities were intensely debated, with boxing proving perhaps the most racialized sport of all. A differentiated study of images of the Argentine fighter, Luis Firpo (who fought Jack Dempsey in 1923), showed how sport helped construct popular notions of Spanish-speaking identity across the Atlantic. Immigrant communities formed the focus of MELANIE HENNE's paper

which took the Chicagoland Sports Congress of 1931 (attended by several thousand athletes participating in gymnastics exhibitions, mass drills and various ball games) as a starting point to examine the Sokol movement and its shaping of body concepts and identity. In the US, the 1920s were characterized by institutionalized politics enforcing a complete cultural assimilation and Americanization of immigrants, and the American Sokol duly obliged by stating its purpose was to make better American citizens and not Czech patriots. However, such promotion of good American citizenship not least by supplying fit bodies to defend their new home country did not sacrifice former national ties, the movement, its physical spaces and activities transforming and remodelling its members' relation to their ancestors' culture as well.

The fourth panel turned to the codification of gender norms in international sports in Germany and the US. ERIK JENSEN used reactions to the women's 800 meters at the 1928 Olympics introduced as part of the first women's track and field competition in the history of the event, won in a dramatic and exhausting finish by German star Lina Radke-Batschauer, and promptly banned by the IOC for a further thirty-two years to explore the highly contested nature of the female athlete in Weimar Germany and the figure of the New Woman more generally. Amongst debates in various discourses about how women's new physical and social roles could be reconciled with their capacity to bear children, and against the robustly unambivalent understanding of male performance and suffering in sport, Weimar Germany progressed towards an enlightened but still limited position on female participation. JEAN WILLIAMS asked whether women's sport could be seen primarily as an agent for change as part of a feminist agenda, or as a continuing arena of restraint of trade for female athletes. An overview of the development of women's soccer in Germany and the US demonstrated that soccer and women's soccer are culturally rather than biologically constructed examples of difference and that equal but different policies are potent instances of institutional sex discrimination based on gender binary. GERALD GEMS focused on masculinity, arguing, contrary to Elias and the linear progression of civilized manhood, that its American sporting manifestation departed from the British ideal of the gentleman-amateur and regressed into an aggressive, even violent form. A sweeping analysis, from the late 19C to the present day, from Babe Ruth to Michael Jordan, showed how men of the working and middle classes accentuated the physicality of their ath-

letic performance to differentiate the genders, a sporting habitus which has promoted and established itself via the media internationally as a particularly American form.

The final panel featured three papers which looked at modernist sports architecture and landscape design at different stages of the Cold War. ALEXANDRA KOEHRING examined the dynamics of Moscow's Luzhniki stadiums, which were constructed (1954-1956) during the Krushchev reforms as a representative object to launch a rejuvenated and modernized socialism. Whilst participation in international sport involved new consumption patterns that partly undermined socialist ideals, the stadiums created a site where the representation of socialist sporting bodies projected imagined international space, satisfied the demands of an enlarged national media public and fashioned Moscow as a sports metropolis. KAY SCHILLER and CHRISTOPHER YOUNG examined Munich's Olympic stadium conceived in the following decade to show-case the Federal Republic as a peace-loving democracy at the 1972 Games as a site that both transcended and benefited from its 1936 Berlin predecessor. On the one hand, the work of designer Otl Aicher and garden architect Günther Grzimek reflected a discourse of individual freedom and participation that characterized the changes of values of West German society in the 1960s: affirmative of technology, industrial and urban society, relaxation and positive human interaction. On the other, its perfectly planned and executed Gesamtkunstwerk simultaneously drew on the problematic legacy of Berlin. Staying in the same period, CHRISTIAN TAGSOLD's study of the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (with comparative glances to Munich and the Rome Games of 1960) showed Japanese event organisers in a similar double-bind: wanting to construct and project their modernity to international audiences, they presented the emperor who had presided over the ultranational disaster of the country's first modernity as a peaceful head of state. Via subtle spatial links to previous eras and traditions, the Games sought not simply to deny or forget the past, but rather to find the right way to recapture the unfulfilled promises of pre-war modernity.

The richness and diversity of the papers demonstrated that sports history has much to offer general history on many fronts; at the same time the interconnections between the presentations showed how fruitful it is for sports historians to harness their efforts to the common cause of the sub-discipline. The tension between the need for sports history to speak to, and participate in wider debates in history on the one hand and the necessity of treating the specificities of sport within more

narrowly defined parameters on the other became the subject of lively discussion in the final round-table. Ultimately unresolved (and indeed irresolvable), such conversations underline the vitality of the field: the passionately argued desire both to do sport justice and integrate its many facets into the story of modern society bodes well for its future in the discipline. In the field of history, sport is no longer a game.

Conference overview:

Opening Lecture

Christiane Eisenberg (Humboldt University Berlin): The Image of the Athlete in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Some Reflections on Sporting Heroes and the Social Limits to Growth of Sport

Commentator: Allen Guttmann (Amherst College)

Introduction

Uta Balbier and Stefan Wiederkehr

Panel I: Building the Global Arena: Competition, Media, and Fans

Chair: Uta Balbier (GHI Washington)

Barbara Keys (University of Melbourne): The Rise of Internationalism in Sport: Intellectual, Emotional, and Institutional Foundations

Markus Stauff (Universiteit van Amsterdam): Face/Body/ Politics: The Blurred Boundaries of (Media) Sports

Manfred Zeller (Helmut Schmidt University): âGlocalâ Fan Culture: International Soccer Championships and the Development of Stadium Culture in the Soviet Union, 1960-1985

Commentator: Robert Edelman (University of California, San Diego)

Panel II: âOur Team!â: International Competitions and the Shaping of National Identity

Chair: Richard F. Wetzell (GHI Washington)

Steven W. Pope (West Virginia University): Imperial Rivalries: American-British Discourses on Empire and Davis Cup Competitions, 1900-1950

Britta Lenz (University of Bonn): Trying to Find âAn Appropriate Place in the World of Sportsâ: Self-Perception and International Ambitions of Polish Soccer in the Interwar Years

Sandra Budy (Helmut Schmidt University): The Moscow Spartakiada, 1928: A Demonstration of the Socialist Way of Life

Commentator: John Soares (University of Notre Dame)

Panel III: Playing With Identity: Ethnicity in International Sports

Chair: Anke Ortlepp (GHI Washington)

Brian D. Bunk (University of Massachusetts): Representing the Race: How Boxing Defined Spanish-Speaking Racial Identities during the Interwar Period

Melanie Henne (University of Erfurt): The Chicagoland Sports Congress: Czech-American Sporting Traditions in Chicagoâs Sokol Movement

Commentator: JÃ¼rgen Martschukat (University of Erfurt)

Panel IV: Sportsmanlike Conduct: The Codification of Gender Norms in International Sports

Chair: Stefan Wiederkehr (GHI Warsaw)

Erik Jensen (Miami University): Fatigue and the Female Athlete: Medals, Motherhood, and Middle-Distance Running in Weimar Germany

Jean Williams (De Montfort University): Arena of Empowerment or Restraint of Trade? What Can the History of Womenâs Football in Germany and the United States Tell Us about Researching âWomenâs Sportâ?

Gerald Gems (North Central College): Social Construction and the Global Dissemination of American Masculinity

Commentator: Gertrud Pfister (University of Copenhagen)

Panel V: Sport as Spectacle: The Staging of International Sports Events

Chair: Corinna Unger (GHI Washington)

Alexandra KÃ¶hring (Helmut Schmidt University): Staging Euphoria and Exhaustion: Mass Sports Events in the Moscow Luzhniki Stadium during the Khrushchev Era

Kay Schiller (University of Durham) / Chris Young (University of Cambridge): Motion and Landscape: Otl Aicher, GÃ¼nter Grzimek, and the Graphic and Garden Design of the 1972 Munich Olympics

Christian Tagsold (Heinrich Heine University of DÃ¼sseldorf): Modernity, Space, and National Representation at the Tokyo Olympics 1964

Commentator: Nikolaus Katzer (Helmut Schmidt University)

Final Discussion

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Christopher Young. Review of , *A Whole New Game: Expanding the Boundaries of the History of Sports*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=26685>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.