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Introduction: Perceptions of Skin and Kin: Sport as an Arena of Difference and Diversity

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Sport is a deceptively rich area for the investigation of community attitudes, values, and power relations. It is a public display within which behavioral norms and social hierarchies are played out. Sport can variously include or exclude, and engage or marginalize, depending on a complex mix of values, attitudes, and power structures. Like society, the ideas and purposes of sport are subject to competing forces of conservatism and change, the impacts of localism and globalization, and the influence of divergent ideologies. Sport, in that sense, is neither inherently virtuous nor heinous. It is a human creation that continues to evolve. Depending on context, sport can either reinforce prevailing orthodoxies or be part of reformist or radical agendas (Sugden, 2010).

Sport, "Race," and Ethnicity: Narratives of Difference and Diversity, focuses on two key areas of contention, negotiation, and accommodation in sport—the domains of "race" and ethnicity. Sport is a site for the articulation of group identities, processes of collective identification, and means

of mass representation. Socially conceived ideas about skin color, ancestry, and kinship have, at varying times and places, made sport an arena of disdain for difference, or, by contrast, a realm in which diversity is welcomed. During the 19th century and for much of the 20th century, sport was an arena in which participants were “racially” segregated or marginalized (Miller and Wiggins, 2003). There were, for instance, “negro” and white leagues in American baseball until Jackie Robinson became a catalyst for change. Moreover, the West Indies cricket team, though dominated numerically by non-whites, did not have a black captain until the 1960s. Slowly, and amidst trenchant opposition, sport has evolved to the point where, in some contexts, it even appears to be an exemplar of cosmopolitanism. High performance, professional sports are now less likely than in the past to exclude participants with minority backgrounds. Affiliation with a particular “racial,” indigenous, or ethnic group is not expected to compromise selection; athletic performance, not skin color or ancestry, is the prime determinant of selection today.

That said, ethno-racial perspectives remain fundamental to attitudes and behaviors both in society and around sport. Although there is no scientific basis to “race,” it is simplistically applied to skin color and stereotypical assumptions about identity, status, and physiology associated with racialized appearance. “Race,” in this sense, is a human invention by which to classify and separate people: it establishes hierarchies of “value” in respect of whiteness, blackness, and so on (Graves, 2001). Ethnicity, meanwhile, has fundamental links with ancestry but not biology: family, language, religion, and nationality are key bases for ethnic identity. Individuals are born into ethnic communities but may reject this connection, recasting themselves with a different sense of self (Cornell and Hartmann, 2007; Adair and Rowe, 2010). Indigeneity can be connected with “race” and/or ethnicity; certainly Aboriginal peoples, when victims of colonial annexation, have been racialized by processes of Eurocentric hegemony and assumptions of white superiority. However, this camouflages diversity and complexity within indigenous communities: there are

vast differences of language, culture, and tradition—each of which demarcate ethnic identities.

Sport is an important barometer of assumptions about “race” and ethnicity: it has long attracted ideas—whether folkloric or scientific—that elite athletic performances can be explained by physical traits thought to be associated with particular groups—such as “racial” minorities, indigenous communities, or ethnic groups. In short, there is a belief that ethno-racial background predisposes people to have different athletic capacities (Hoberman, 1997). Just as importantly, sport remains a site wherein inter-group hatred is expressed—and this type of hostility has been the focus of policy interventions. Anti-racism campaigns, such as “Give Racism the Red Card,” are testament to the vitality of hostile and prejudicial attitudes about the “other” in sport. Importantly, ethnic minorities may be just as likely to experience prejudice as “racial” and indigenous minorities, and the bigotry they experience is often described as racism (Tatz and Adair, 2009; Tatz, 2009). So, while sport is often lauded as a site wherein diversity is coveted, it is also a domain in which differences can be exploited in the interests of malevolence.

Historians have examined racial segregation and racial integration in sport; they have investigated the political struggles and conflicts around race on the field and track, in the ring, and across the spectrum of ideologies, practices and institutions. Moreover, several sport historians debunked the idea of race as a biological category and traced the construction of race as a social category. For the most part, historians have engaged with “race” primarily through the lens of social history. Social historians of race and sport primarily direct their attention at those discriminatory racial structures of power and domination that affect participation in sport. Yet, according to contributor Douglas Booth, “while social historians of race and sport largely conceptualize racial discrimination in terms of structures of constraint, when accounting for racial changes over the last fifty years they tend, ironically, to foreground individuals who challenged and set out to transform those structures.” Of course there can

be influential change agents, such as Jack Johnson in boxing and Jackie Robinson in baseball, but their stories—no matter how evocative—are an incomplete canvas of wider, ongoing struggles for structural change on the part of oppressed peoples.

Over the last decade something of a paradigm shift has begun in sport history, with practitioners engaged more explicitly in hermeneutic and postmodern approaches to the identities and cultures that shape sport and society. Sport is now better understood by historians as a practice that has created diverse and conflicting meanings for an array of groups (local communities, genders, nations and so forth). This view became prominent in sport history from the mid-1990s, when cultural approaches entered the field in concerted fashion. Deconstructionist cultural history, in particular, prompted skeptical and critical perspectives about the “straight-forwardness” of historical facts and evidence, and has questioned the sometimes unreflective ways in which historians prefigure and configure their narratives (Hunt, 1989: 20). However, that tension reverberated rather slowly in sport history. Most practitioners continue to have an almost evangelical faith in the sanctity of archival repositories and the “authority of evidence” therein when conceiving their histories (Munslow, 2006: 195). A range of methodological and data collection approaches is useful for research into themes of “race” and ethnicity in sport—particularly as so many of the subjects have been marginalized and therefore too often absent from conventional historical records.

The contributors to *Sport, “Race,” and Ethnicity* provide important insights into the negotiation of difference and diversity. It is a multi-disciplinary collection involving historical reflection, political perspective, sociological inquiry, and media analysis. It involves a range of investigative techniques, such as archival exploration, narrative argument, discourse analysis, biographical inquiry, and group evaluation. As the book’s title suggests, it includes discussion of “race” and ethnicity, and ways in which these descriptors have been woven into experiences like exclusion or inclusion, and discrimination or engagement. It is hardly a final word on

the subject matter; research into difference and diversity in the realm of sport and society has an impressive lineage, but there is still so much to explore, interpret, and evaluate.

“RACE”

Randy Roberts connects issues of race and racism with the concomitant theme of gender—in this collection he examines masculinity. He describes the machismo associated with bare-knuckle boxing in the United States and how it was eventually usurped by prizefighting with gloves; boxing had been “civilized” by the take-up of Britain’s Queensberry Rules in the late 19th century. The heavyweight championship of the world became the premier title bout, with unprecedented sums of money in the ring. However, Roberts shows that African-American fighters were excluded from top flight contests by white boxers who drew the “color bar.” Jim Crow was alive and well in American sport, with the fight game a cornerstone of race discrimination and white dominance. When a black American eventually took on a white Canadian for the heavyweight title, the bout was staged on the other side of the world. Jack Johnson’s (in)famous victory in Sydney, Australia, set a black cat among a flock of white pigeons. Johnson dominated the sport of boxing and, in doing so, helped to change perceptions that the “negro” was physically inferior to the white man. However, as Roberts concludes, Johnson was made to suffer for his ascendancy, spending years in jail on trumped-up charges.

Andrew Ritchie provides a second example of African-American athletes traveling abroad to seek a better deal in sport. Marshall “Major” Taylor, the finest professional cyclist in the United States, regularly toured Europe and Australia in an effort to escape racial vilification in his sport. Ritchie’s chapter focuses on the Australian legs of Taylor’s overseas jaunts: while he was treated as a celebrity, Major was also subject to dirty tactics by other riders and had run-ins with officials. Overall, though, he experienced—as a black man—adulation and freedoms that were denied to him back in America, where the specter of Jim Crow made it difficult for Taylor

to secure a room in white-owned hotels or to eat at white-run restaurants. However, Ritchie also points to the irony of this contrast, for in the antipodes Taylor “was a black-skinned hero in a nation that prided itself on ‘White Australia.’”

Sean Brawley considers the role of sport and cultural diplomacy in the context of the high-profile tours to Australia of Japanese swimming stars Katsuo Takaishi and Takahiro Saito in 1926-27. The visit took place during a time in which “Pacific goodwill” was a key platform of diplomacy in the region, and it preceded the overt militarization of Japan in the 1930s. The touring swimmers performed very creditably against well-established Australian competitors, with their efforts sparking debate in the press about the physical prowess of the “European race” versus the “Asian race.” It had long been presumed that “Orientals” were inherently inferior athletes to Westerners; the Takaishi/Saito performances suggested that view needed revisiting, particularly in the breaststroke event, where Japanese coaching had initiated new styles of movement. The visitors were feted around the country—they were tourists, not migrants, and so able to be granted an exemption to the otherwise restrictive White Australia policy. Brawley concludes that the Japanese swimmers and Australian officials firmly believed that goodwill had been created between the countries. That they were soon at war had nothing to do with the tour; indeed, the visit showed how Japanese-Australian relationships could thrive under propitious circumstances.

John Hoberman is concerned with the salience of perceived or imagined racial differences. He notes that high performance sport has been a key site for the articulation of ideas and assumptions about “race” and athletic acumen. Sport, in this sense, has been a vehicle through which race-based hierarchies of physical prowess have been conceived. Hoberman nonetheless emphasizes that racialized theories of sport ability have been either pseudo-scientific or folkloric. That said, he acknowledges the persistence of biological notions of race, which have reappeared in American society under a new guise—racial pharmacology. A recently

formulated heart drug, BiDil, has had particular success with patients of African-American ancestry. While such a diagnosis is welcome in terms of treating at-risk populations, it has raised a wider epistemological debate. Critics caution against inferences that medicines function differently for “blacks” and “whites,” as though there is a race-based resonance to pharmacology. Supporters, meanwhile, have tended to point to race discrimination in America’s medical history and argue that, pragmatically, if a drug suits a particular “racial” group then it ought to be approved for that purpose. Hoberman argues that such race-based approaches to medicine have allowed “the ‘reauthorization’ of racial biology.” He concludes that the debates about racialized sport and medicine have something in common—they both focus on the body and biology as cornerstones to ideas of race, and that “neither discussion has been racially defamatory in any explicit sense.”

Nicole Neverson and Graham Knight critically examine media representations of the “trash talking” rivalry between two African-American sprinters, Maurice Greene and Michael Johnson. Using a reflexive approach, the authors move beyond the conventional notion of skin color as demarcating “race.” Instead, they argue that these two athletes are represented, whether by their own commentary or that of the media, in ways that either accentuate blackness or cultivate whiteness. For Neverson and Knight, race is never static and always under negotiation. Greene and Johnson, as antagonists, have different socio-economic backgrounds, educational backgrounds and cultural profiles; the spectacle of their bitter rivalry played into wider discussions about “race” and the authenticity of blackness versus whiteness.

ETHNICITY

Dean Allen evaluates tensions in South African history over sport, ethnicity, and nationalism. He examines intra-group conflict within the ruling white minority in South Africa—the British and the Afrikaner. He describes how the British game of rugby union was appropriated by Afrikan-

ers and reinvented as a symbol to accentuate their own sense of identity and power. In the period 1899-1948, Allen explains, South Africa underwent a political revolution in the interests of an Afrikaner ascendancy, and the physically demanding sport of rugby became a potent expression of courage and pride in white, non-British, Afrikaner power. Rugby thus became a public arena within which inter-ethnic tensions between Afrikaner and Briton were played out. For black and colored South Africans, meanwhile, the heightened emphasis on rugby as the “white man’s game” curtailed and constrained their involvement in that sport.

Joseph M. Bradley examines arguments about identity, ethnicity, and nationalism in the context of two essentially white social groups—Scots of Scottish descent and Scots of Irish descent. Like Neverson and Knight, Bradley is concerned with media representations; his concern is with how and why the press and radio have articulated a vision of “Scottishness” that fails to recognize ethnic diversity within Scotland and, in the case of Scots of Irish descent, derides a non-British lineage. Bradley explores what he terms “majority Scottishness” and “minority Irishness” in the context of the Scottish national football team. He asks how contested notions of ancestry, patriotism, politics, and religion have played out in respect of whom the Scottish side is claimed to represent. Just as importantly, how do fans from the dominant ethnic groupings—Scottish and Irish—identify (or otherwise) with the Scottish national football team? Bradley concludes that Association football is a key domain in which dominant ideologies of Scottishness are maintained, and also through which the ethnic minority Irish are depicted negatively as the “other.”

Colin Tatz is concerned with “the good, the bad and the ugly” of sport for Australian Aborigines, and Torres Strait and South Sea Islanders over the vast period of 1868 to 2010. He points to trenchant discrimination against indigenous Australians in sport; this was compounded by loathing towards those who excelled in spite of participation constraints. Paradoxically, though, a few prominent aboriginal athletes were widely embraced after making world-class achievements in sport, such as the boxer

Lionel Rose and the tennis player Evonne Goolagong. The inference here is that many whites now saw them more as “Australian” than aboriginal. Tatz concludes that for all its foibles, sport plays a fundamentally positive role for indigenous communities, and that it even acts as a deterrent to feelings of self-harm and anti-social behaviors.

Vicky Paraschak and Janice Forsyth evaluate the experiences of aboriginal women in and around sport. Too often this area of research has been overlooked by an inordinate focus on indigenous males. Such gender disparity is, it must be admitted, similar to that of sports studies generally. But the relatively small amount of research into aboriginal sport means that the evaluation of women within that literature has been limited. Paraschak and Forsyth focus on indigenous females in Canadian sport, and do so by locating their research in the context of that country’s first national roundtable on aboriginal women in sport. The authors immersed themselves in this symposium and drew upon its findings; concurrently they conducted semi-structured interviews with several delegates who attended the roundtable. The voices of these aboriginal women were therefore central to the research process, with the authors engaged in free-flowing dialogue with the participants. Listening to them carefully was especially important, argued Paraschak and Forsyth, because “aboriginal women ... have few opportunities to publicly engage in discussions about gender and how it shapes their lives as women in sport.” This exploratory study provides a framework for further research into gender issues, sport and Aboriginal communities.

CODA

There is a broad consensus amongst the contributors to this book that scholars ought not be politically neutral toward the findings and implications of their research. While not speaking on behalf of all authors in this volume, Booth argues that scholars should take an overt moral stance for, as he puts it, “knowledge about racism in sport for its own sake serves little purpose: knowledge needs utility.” Injustices of the past have legacies; the

role of the historian is to articulate the problems of the past and take an active role in addressing them today. This position is predicated upon scholars crafting what Booth characterizes as “socially-responsible narratives” to provide that utility. Sport historians and sociologists could profitably adopt a cultural studies approach which is praxis-driven (not a purely academic endeavor but rather one that attempts to address real, contemporary, socio-cultural-political issues) and self-reflexive (an approach that realizes the potential incongruity and transient nature of the knowledge it produces). In the end, as Richard Gruneau writes, “the challenge is to write theoretically-informed histories that are sensitive to multiple and uneven paths of change, histories where the structuring principles of the field of sporting practice at any given time are recognized to involve complex sets of dominant, residual, and emergent tendencies.” I trust that *Sport, Race, and Ethnicity* provides examples of this socially and politically engaged scholarship.

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