Give us our Ball Back

Reclaiming Sport for the Common Good

Paul Bickley and Sam Tomlin

SPORTS think tank

Theos

Theos

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We are committed to the following objectives:

- Pushing the boundaries of thinking in sport: Deconstructing sport to properly assess the 'case for sport' in society. Why and how should sport be so important to us? We aim to ask questions few others have asked in order to widen and deepen sport's influence for social good.
- Bridging the gap between the best academic research and policy makers: There is a growing movement of innovative academic research into sport and its influence on society. We aim to make sure this is not missed by often very busy policy makers in Whitehall and it is given the coverage it deserves in an accessible format.
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authors

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introduction

Sport is no longer just a matter of leisure, of entertainment, of being part of something, or even of spectacular international tournaments. We have come to expect it to make us better people, to contribute to world peace, to develop our economies and to make us healthy. Sport has been reduced to being a tool rather than something with intrinsic worth.

Theos and The Sports Think Tank have worked to produce a wide ranging report which assesses the claims being made on sport's behalf. It argues that sport is constantly being set up to over-promise and under-deliver. While sport clearly does offer extrinsic benefits, these emerge from a delicate ecosystem which relies on sport being played and watched for its own sake – for its intrinsic goods and its ordinary value to people.

Turning sport into a political, economic or social tool won't work, and also takes it out of the hands of the playing and spectating public. Sport should be released from the political, economic and social demands and reclaimed for the common good.

sport and morality

Motivated by a holistic Christian theology, men like the Reverend Charles Kingsley thought that sport could be used to train character. These views have been influential on the way the Anglo-Saxon world and (through Pierre De Coubertin) the Olympic Movement think about sport. We turn to sport as a way of shaping character or of challenging anti-social behaviour.

There is a growing body of research evidence which suggests that sport powerfully shapes behaviour – but often negatively. One study found a consistent relationship between involvement in high school sport and an increase in adult drink-driving. Another study, conducted amongst 'power sports' (boxing, weight-lifting, martial arts) participants in

Bergen, Norway again detected a relationship between participation and anti-social behaviour.

The context in which a sport is conducted is highly influential. One study pointed to positive relationships between coach and player to be a significant predictor of better behaviour. The effect of playing within a 'good' team is similar to the effect that going to a 'good' school has on educational outcomes. The moral atmosphere in which human activity is embedded may be more important than the activity in itself.

Even if players know the rules and expectations, or if administrators introduce codes of conduct, a 'game-frame' can still mean the players will behave poorly.

sport and reconciliation

Pierre de Coubertin sought to propel sport onto the international stage as a force for peace: "The revival of the Olympic Games…in conditions suited to the needs of modern life would bring the representatives of the nations of the world face-to-face every four years, and it may be thought that their peaceful and chivalrous contests would constitute the best of Internationalisms."

This vision, after over a century of advocacy by the Olympic movement, has recently been adopted by enthusiastic politicians, and even the United Nations. The UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace was established by Kofi Annan in 2001 with a mandate to act as "the UN gateway in fostering support for sport as an efficient tool in the pursuit of humanitarian development and peace-building objectives."

Three distinct ideas underpin arguments about sport as a unifying force. First is the idea of universal 'salience' – the metaphor of a common language. Second, there is the idea that sport provides a safe place of cultural encounter because it is a forum of channelled conflict and competition. Third, there is the idea that sport creates a 'non-political' space, where issues of contention and division are temporarily set aside.

While each claim contains an element of truth, they are also over-estimated. Sport clearly has a massive appeal that crosses cultures, but the appeal is neither universal nor in itself necessarily cohesive. The lesson of history is that the explosion of international conflict is rarely controlled by sport – more often, it is itself a fuse for conflict or even a key front in culture wars. And while the power of sport to create a non-political space can bring people together in spite of conflict, it can also offer a patina for political agendas that deserve more scrutiny (e.g., Berlin Olympics 1936) or a way for leaders to avoid just political claims

(e.g., Bahrain Grand Prix 2012). Sporting idealism can create opportunities for peace – but it can also mask abuses of power.

sport and the economy

Sport is now 'big business', meaning that the nature of the relationship between sport and money has changed dramatically within living memory. This has some tangible benefits – job creation (around 1.8% of employment in England, reportedly, is in the sport sector), higher quality and safer stadia, tax to the Exchequer, investment in the wider community or in grass roots sport (the Premier League is investing £167.2m a year for the next three years into good causes).

Sporting 'mega-events' like the Olympics are now also expected to act as a driver for economic growth and regeneration. However, many academics argue that the economic benefits that accrue from sports mega-events are notoriously difficult to measure. The balance between public and private investment in mega-events is often misrepresented and the benefits of investment in sport infrastructure compare poorly to, for example, the benefits of reducing bottlenecks in the transport system.

No recent Olympic Games has produced proven significant economic benefits to the host city or country. Chinese commentators have described the effects of the huge investment in the Beijing Games as negligible. Eight years after the Athens 2004 Games, twenty-one of the twenty-two Olympic venues remain abandoned. The Sydney Olympics tripled its budget and the former Chief Planner for the Sydney Games has said that the host city should have focused more broadly on a legacy programme for the Olympics site and that "Sydney is now paying the price".

The World Cup in South Africa in 2010 provides another interesting case-study. As with London 2012, initial spending estimates were way off. In 2003 it was estimated that tangible costs to the South African government would be R2.3bn; this had risen to an estimated R39.3bn by 2010. A spokesperson for the South African Revenue Services stated just before the cup began "the concessions we had to give to FIFA are simply too demanding and overwhelming for us to have material monetary benefits." Overall, most mega-events are clearly 'extractive' for the host nation.

The marketisation of sport raises other issues, particularly around governance, profitability and access – the 'marks of the market' as Michael Sandel has put it. Administrators make decisions with a view to tangible revenue benefits, but underestimate the way in which this has intangible negative effects. There is also a strong argument for keeping sports

such as international cricket on terrestrial television – passion is created best in the context of easy access, and since its move to pay-TV, participation rates in cricket have suffered.

sport and the healthy society

Many studies have shown regular participation contributes to general wellbeing, leading former Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson to state, "If a medication existed which had a similar effect [to physical activity], it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure'." But only seven million (or just 16.3%) adults in England are reportedly active (participating in sport three times a week for 30 minutes at moderate intensity) in 2010-11, down marginally on 2008-09 figures.

£450m has been channelled into the national governing bodies over the last four years with the aim of encouraging a million more people to be active by 2013. The return of only 109,000 new active people has been rightly described as 'poor value for money' and disappointing. Seventeen of the twenty-one governing bodies in receipt of this money saw a decrease in once-a-week participation.

The biggest factor affecting participation is general life circumstances. Sport England shows that, "Overwhelmingly, the ultimate cues for lapsing [participation rates] relate to wider macro shifts in participants' lives [e.g. 'I moved house' or 'I got married/engaged'] rather than bad experiences [in sport] per se." Mega events have no clear effect: after the Australia 2000 Games, it was reported that seven Olympic sports saw a small increase in participation while nine saw a decrease, with the pattern for non-Olympic sports broadly similar. London 2012's 'inspiration strategy' appears unlikely to have a substantial effect.

Research into sporting motivation suggests there is a difference between weak external behavioural motivations (get-fit messaging) and strong intrinsic motivation (enjoyment). Professor Mike Weed argues that, "In many cases, 'internalised' [external] motivations are wrongly thought to be intrinsic motivations." While many people play sport in order to keep fit, most will only do things they enjoy. Messaging founded on health benefits of sport for inactive people will prove difficult unless they value general health in the first place.

18% of people with a disability participated in sport once a week for 30mins in 2010-11 (up from 15% in 2005-06). However, there is work still to do. The 6% disability participation three times a week compares poorly to the 16% figure of the general population. There have been calls to ensure that the Olympic legacy promotes disability sport in schools. In education more generally a consensus needs to be reached on why young people participating is important. Do we simply want physically active young people, or young people who play sport specifically?

conclusion and recommendations

This survey of the evidence under these four themes suggests that the more sport is asked to provide, the less it will deliver and the more frustrated we will be with it when it fails.

Johan Huizinga, claimed that, "in play we move below the level of seriousness, as the child does; but we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and sacred." Play has no exterior motive, it exists simply for its own sake. In the same way, a theological understanding of sport relies on the concept of 'play'. Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that God was the "ultimate player". Creation did not need to happen, and though something meaningful was produced that pleased God (creation itself) the act of creating itself was of value.

But play has become dominated by a version of the Protestant work ethic, stripped of its religious meaning. This has resulted in a fatal shift towards over-seriousness and an emphasis on extrinsic benefits. As historian Christopher Lasch asserts: "The degradation of sport, then, consists not in its being taken too seriously but in its subjection to some ulterior purpose, such as profit-making, patriotism, moral training, or the pursuit of health. Sport may give rise to these things in abundance, but ideally it produces them only as by-products having no essential connection with the game."

Releasing sport from the demands of public utility will allow it to occupy its rightful place in society – that of contributing to a full, happy and meaningful life. External benefits will naturally come from playing, watching and engaging in sport, but should be seen primarily as by-products of something with specific worth already. We need to be able to value sport for itself – for its intrinsic goods – namely fun or, if you prefer, wellbeing. It is by recognising this that we will reclaim sport for the common good.

Recommendation 1 (sport and morality): we need to be fostering a conversation on a micro (club) and a macro (sport) level about the ethical nature of competition: what would it be for teams to have a deeper appreciation of the opportunities that come with the loss of a match, to understand the history, tradition and practices of a specific sport or to accept the fallibility of a match official without questioning his or her integrity? After all, the word competition derives from the Latin *com-petere*, which literally means 'to strive or to seek with.' Even at an elite level, where the stakes of success are high, sport is a deeply cooperative activity.

Recommendation 2 (sport and the economy): A major part of public dissatisfaction around the sporting mega events is the way governing bodies operate a hard-headed franchise-style business model, which comes at a significant cost to host cities, yet continues to insist on the language of 'the Olympic family'. Governing bodies operate like medium-

sized businesses, but with less oversight than a small NGO. Greater transparency could be achieved firstly through governing bodies adopting a code of governance similar to that expounded by the Sport and Recreation Alliance's Voluntary Code of Good Governance. If this is not effective, making governing bodies in receipt of significant public funds subject to the Freedom of Information Act would ensure this transparency and accountability.

Recommendation 3 (sport and the economy): Transparency in any mega-event bidding process is also imperative. The public budget for the London Olympics nearly quadrupled from the initial estimate of £2.4bn. This pattern is seen across many sport mega-events in many different countries. More scrutiny needs to be given, therefore, to the pre-bid budgets, and the financial implications clearly communicated to the wider public. In the same way Citizens UK has engaged civil society in mainstream political issues, efforts should be made to engage the public in sporting policy in easy-to-understand guides, for instance, on the cost of major sporting events.

Recommendation 4 (sport and the healthy society): Greater emphasis needs to be placed on a holistic sporting agenda rather than relying simply on the 'inspiration' of the Games or a desire to get fit. The key is developing intrinsic motivation and desire to want to play based on the exhilaration, excitement and sense of challenge that comes from competition at the appropriate level. Moving beyond the 'sport for fitness' message, more research needs to be conducted into 'ordinary' barriers to participation. Forms of sport which can be played in the local community or even the home (such as those seen on recent games consoles) should be encouraged.

introduction

The inaugural 1987 Rugby World Cup, with a cumulative television audience of only 300 million, had not attracted the attention that organisers hoped for. The next, helped by a better marketing effort, did better and achieved a cumulative audience of 1.75 billion. The England team had recorded and released the black spiritual 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot', which had lately has become strangely entwined with English rugby, and the International Rugby Football Board had commissioned Charlie Skarbek to compose the lyrics for a song to celebrate the World Cup. 'The World in Union' – Skarbeck's lyrics, set to Holst's 'Thaxted' tune – proved to be a pleasingly progressive and rousing theme.

Four years later, when the tournament took place in South Africa, the song came into its own. The nation was only beginning to emerge from decades of apartheid and exclusion from international sport. With the country still riven with acute racial tensions and massive black/white inequality, the Springboks became a symbol for the new 'rainbow nation'. 'The World in Union' became a great humanist hymn: individuals at their best, coming through trial to reshape the world and inaugurate a new age of global unity. And weren't we seeing the promise actually played out before our very eyes?

There's a dream, I feel
So rare, so real
All the world in union
The world as one

Gathering together
One mind, one heart
Every creed, every colour
Once joined, never apart

Searching for the best in me
I will fight what I can beat
If I win, lose or draw
There's a winner in us all

…

We may face high mountains
Must cross rough seas
We must take our place in history
And live with dignity

It's the world in union
The world as one
As we climb to reach our destiny
A new age has begun

But there was another view. South African rugby – fed by the country's still segregated school system – was as much a symbol of how far the country had to travel as how far it had come. One black player (Chester Williams) had participated in the campaign, and successfully so. But in his biography, he was later to reveal how he was abused by some of his white team mates. Even François Pienaar – one side of the symbolic handshake over the Webb Ellis cup – allegedly offered him less money than his white counterparts when attempting to sign him for a breakaway professional competition. Williams' story was indeed one of personal striving and dignity, but hardly part of anything that looked remotely like the 'world in union', and he still resists the idea that he is a symbol of a changed South Africa.

> I was definitely not a product of any enlightened developmental system put in place to help black and coloured players. No way. I did it the hard way. I fought my way up through the "white" system on merit. I am a rugby player, pure and simple, that is my story.[1]

The 1995 Rugby World cup was supposed to be the nation's symbolic re-admittance to the international community, a tournament tasked to bring the nation together in common purpose and with a common story. For many of those involved and for many of the nearly 3 billion people who watched it, it seemed in the moment to do exactly that. But in the cold light of day, there's a world of difference between claiming to achieve, and actually achieving, the unity of a team – never mind a sport, nation or the world.

If we were to take the rhetoric of that tournament at face value, we would be forced to conclude that it massively overpromised, then hugely under-delivered.

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In an age of alleged religious decline, sport is increasing imbued with a godlike ability to shower many blessings on worthy supplicants. It is not 'just' a matter of leisure, of entertainment, of being part of something, or even of spectacular tournaments.

Sport is increasing imbued with a godlike ability to shower many blessings on worthy supplicants.

Rather, it's the linchpin of a multi-trillion US dollar global entertainment industry comprising not just clubs and their supporters, but also the whole sport-industrial complex of agents, administrators, bookies, broadcasters, media, sponsors, and advertisers. Such is its power, so it is claimed, that it has the potential not just to be profitable but also to develop economies, or regenerate areas deserted by heavy industry – bringing new investment, new income, and new jobs. In short, it's not really about fun.

We have already alluded to the alleged peacemaking power of sport – the idea is one with considerable heritage. Pierre de Coubertin – father of the modern Olympic movement – drew both on an 'Arnoldian' educational philosophy (sport can help you be good) and the ancient Greek idea/institution of the gymnasium (sport can bind people together). The gymnasium was the place where different cultures – the physical and the intellectual, the old and the young, the variety of sporting disciplines – could be united in spite of difference and antagonism. This, combined with the idea of the ancient Olympic truce, meant that for Coubertin sport was the unifying force *par excellence*. He wrote 'Ode to Sport' for the sport literature competition of the 1912 Summer Olympics in Stockholm. It makes 'World in Union' look like gritty realism.

> O Sport, You are Peace!
> You forge happy bonds between the peoples
> by drawing them together in reverence for strength
> which is controlled, organised and self disciplined.
>
> Through you the young of the entire world
> learn to respect one another,
> and thus the diversity of national traits becomes a source
> of generous and peaceful emulation![2]

***

Many of these claims, and others, have been made both in support of the London 2012 Olympic bid and in defence of the burgeoning public budget. One of the London 2012 bid campaign's biggest boasts was that the competition would push the UK to achieving ambitious targets of 70 percent of the population undertaking 5x30 minutes of moderate activity per week, alongside the less focused claim that "Grassroots participation would be boosted. An already sports mad nation would get fitter and healthier". It is a measure of how tendentious the case-making was that the government target for one million

more adult participants has been dropped. From Lord Coe's own lips, "This was always the biggest of challenges and it has not always happened in other countries".[3]

The purpose of this essay is to re-consider some of the myth-making around sport and its place in society. This is not to be – as Canadian politician Michael Ignatieff described critics of the Vancouver games – 'doomsayers', 'naysayers' or (quoting Nixon's Vice President Spiro Agnew) 'nattering nabobs of negativism'. Its purpose is to suggest that a cycle of over-promising and under-delivery should be reversed. We should expect less of sport in order that it may deliver more. Sport helps us shape our identities, loyalties and loves and so is highly affective. But we need a more hard-headed assessment of what it can do and what its appropriate place in society is.

We will do this through a brief consideration of four of the biggest claims made in defence of sport and major sporting competitions:

- First, the idea that sporting pursuits are uniquely able to promote good character or virtue.
- Second, the related idea that sport is especially capable of providing a unifying force across racial, religious, or ethnic lines or that – in the words of Coubertin – sport is synonymous with peace and peacemaking.
- Third, the idea that sport is justified economically. Sport, we are often reminded, is big business, an industry and a source of wealth generation. In what ways, in the words of Michael Sandel, are markets leaving their mark?
- Fourth, we address the claim that a sporting society is a fit society or – more properly – that there are simple methods of behaviour change, often involving the presence of major sporting competitions, that can engage more people in recreational sport and that goods such as public health or well-being can be served.

Once the ground is cleared, the question is one of reconstruction. Thus, in the concluding section, we will argue that the utilitarian approach that we critique treats sport with all the gravity of the athletics of ancient Greece. Of the Olympic festival, or indeed any other athletic contest, competition or training, the Greeks never used to the verb 'to play'. It was not a matter of playfulness, but rather of *'arete'* and *'agon'* – excellence, struggle, contest, suffering. On a global level it has taken on the utmost significance and as the moral, economical and civil stakes remain so high, its genuine goods can be lost. We know how to price sport, but we are more confused than ever about its value.

Attempts at Christian engagement with contemporary sport have often begun and ended with its moral dynamic, positively (in the sense of its character-shaping ability) or negatively (in the sense of the various moral compromises allegedly forced in the sporting contest, increasingly resolved in favour of winning at whatever cost). Clearly these are important issues, but we suggest that a theological approach to sport is not in a heightened sense of its moral import, but rather in questioning a justification of sport as a proper part of society to the extent to which it offers some economic or political utility.

This allows it to have, as sport ethicist William J. Morgan has suggested, a gratuitous logic, as opposed to an instrumental brand of rationality. As social critical Christopher Lasch said, it is dependent on child-like exuberance and "appropriate abandon".[4] It's an unnecessary but meaningful endeavour. This has significant implications for how we approach sport. Is it a thing we do for its own sake, or because of some extrinsic purpose – health, wealth and community cohesion?

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1

sport and morality

recreation or re-creation: how can sport make people good?

This chapter will reflect on the enduring notion that participation in sport is character forming. After considering the historical roots of the idea, focusing on its development under the rubric of Muscular Christianity, it will briefly explore empirical research on the subject.

This research suggests, on balance, that there is no rigid relationship between sport and virtue. Sport is as likely to promote bad behaviour as good. Evidence suggests that much depends on the context – the team, the coach, the ethos of a given sport – ideas recognised of the literature as 'the game frame' or the 'moral atmosphere'. Yet we still suffer from a sense of disappointment when a game is played with the wrong spirit, and our interest is excited when it is played generously. The spirit of Muscular Christianity haunts sport still.

We still suffer from a sense of disappointment when a game is played with the wrong spirit.

Sports administrators have tended to resort to codes of conduct to embed the values formerly thought to be inherent, with limited success. But having the right rules is not the same as setting the right culture for a sport, league, club, or match. There is little hope in pressing sport into service as a moral teacher of virtues if those virtues are no longer promoted in any other part of culture.

historical perspective

In ancient Greece, goodness and physical beauty were considered almost synonymous. According to Solon, the freedom due to a citizen of Athens depended on him being available for military service. Being in conspicuously good shape was first a matter of civic duty, not personal vanity. The ancient Greeks spoke of *kalokagathia* – nobility in physicality and in conduct – as the ideal state.[1]

The Roman Poet Juvenal articulated a similar vision, *'mens sana in corpore sano'* – a sound mind in a healthy body. Christianity articulated a more complicated and oppositional relationship between body and spirit, and it was this which emerged more powerfully in the first millennium.[2] Yet the link between physical beauty and perceptions of goodness has proved a very durable notion.

The Nineteenth Century *Turnen* gymnasium movement in Germany flourished at a time when philosophers like Nietzsche were re-forging a link between nobility and physicality.[3] The allegedly ancient Greek ideal of an 'agonistic spirit' – devoted to overcoming others in contest – lent some impetus to the philosophical development of German militarism. The Aryan ideal of the Twentieth Century CE was precisely one moral worth expressed in physical appearance, and would have made complete sense in the Third Century BCE. But it was the English sporting tradition, which linked sport and goodness in a looser way, which was taken up by Pierre De Coubertin.

Sport had long – often rightly – been seen as a violent, chaotic or subversive force by civil authorities (e.g., the ancient Shrovetide football matches in Derbyshire, briefly banned in 1878 after a player drowned in the River Henmore). In the Eighteenth Century, however, it began a long journey to acceptability.

Some 'sports', of course, never made the cut to respectability – blood sports, in particular, could never be given a pass by the religiously inspired Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and were made illegal in 1835. It took the advent of the Queensbury Rules to bring boxing to anything approaching acceptability. By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, however, cricket, rugby, cycling, brisk country walks, and sea bathing – and other pursuits of so called 'rational recreation' – were authorised and where necessary regulated. They moved inexorably to the centre of mass culture.

Initially, the English saw sport more in the spirit of a (hopefully innocuous) diversion from other popular but less beneficial pursuits. In a 'Circular to Parents' of 1853, G. E. L. Cotton, the headmaster of Marlborough College, outlined the value of games to control 'a turbulent community'.[4] In the English public school culture, games were also seen as an important way of preventing excessive bookishness. Clergymen like Charles Kingsley heard an echo of their own life-affirming philosophy, and began to proselytise for the belief that sport could shape a young man (and it was young men) in the virtues necessary for a good, useful and orderly life:

> …not merely daring and endurance, but, better still, temper, self-restraint, fairness, honour, unenvious approbation of another's success, and all that 'give and take' of life which stand a man in good stead when he goes forth into the world, and without which, indeed, his success is always maimed and partial.[5]

On a theological level, the appeal of 'Muscular Christianity' (though Kingsley didn't like the phrase) was its rejection Evangelical pietism and Tractarian intellectualism. Both Kingsley and Thomas Hughes (Liberal politician and author of that key text of Muscular Christianity, *Tom Brown's School Days*) were Christian Socialists, part of a theological movement campaigning for social change. They shared a growing recognition of the significance of environmental factors in moral life and were known, for instance, for public health and sanitation campaigns. The prevailing Anglican evangelical consensus was that the cause of suffering, for the working classes at least, was moral turpitude. Kingsley wanted to improve spirits by improving bodies.

Its practical attraction was that it offered an "educational grapnel… something to try the muscles of men's bodies, and the endurance of their hearts, and to make them rejoice in their strength", so avoiding an approach which could tend to "religious Pharisaism".[6] The model of behaviour change was no more complicated than that, and proponents of Muscular Christianity would have rejected the idea that sport should be a forum for great ethical debates – much of what was good or bad, right and wrong, was simply there in the ether.

But Kingsley and Hughes were only early proponents of a much wider movement – sometimes religious, but often secular. The ideas spread through educators, then through clergymen (who often helped establish the football clubs with which we are familiar to this day), and then through institutions like the YMCA and the Scouts. Through Coubertin, it entered into the bloodstream of the modern Olympics, and so continues to have a sustained impact on the Western view of the relationship between sport, physical fitness, and goodness. The language has changed (terms like 'anti-social behaviour' give the impression of a more sophisticated and social scientific approach), but the underlying concept remains the same.

What has changed, of course, is what is in 'the ether'. Even at the early stages, Muscular Christianity was open to the charge that it failed to articulate quite what kind of Christianity it was advocating, leaving it open to becoming a vehicle for whichever agenda prevailed. For some American Protestant leaders, Muscular Christianity slipped too easily into a bullish militarism, so contributing to the trauma of the First World War.[7]

Had it, moreover, inaccurately taken the moral temperature of sport, or at least neglected the extent to which the temperature could change? As clubs and crowds grew, so did passions and rivalries. Teams with Christian roots often played as fiercely and in the same partisan spirit as their secular counterparts. With the heightened competition came now familiar abuses on and off the pitch – if sport could act in the service of Christian virtues, couldn't it also act in the service of different codes? From the late 1860s, Hughes

worried about the monster he had created: urging that manliness meant gentleness not roughness.[8]

Yet the expectations of Muscular Christianity still haunt modern sport. It is still not enough for elite sportsmen and women to be proficient or skilful. We also want them to be honourable, generous and humble. We still want them to play hard but fairly. Small acts of kindness are celebrated and remembered (think of Andrew Flintoff's consolation of Brett Lee after the England victory in the Edgbaston Test of 2005). Yet venality, arrogance, self-importance and corruption are more common.

It is still not enough for elite sportsmen and women to be proficient. We also want them to be honourable, generous and humble. Yet venality, arrogance, self-importance and corruption are more common.

At a grassroots level, we still tend to operate with the assumption that sport is redemptive. Consider the following quote from Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, writing on the rugby programme Hitz.[9]

> The social benefits could be huge. Rugby sublimates your aggression… At the end of a game of rugby, you sit in the changing room with the relief of one who has just survived being beaten up by the secret police. Your ears ring, your breath comes in gasps, you can hardly focus your eyes on the splodges of mud on the floor. There is absolutely no reason for you to go off and get involved in gang violence because frankly that is what you have been doing for the last couple of hours.[10]

Muscular Christianity has left us with a vision of what sport should do for morality but, aside from rhetorical flourish, is there any evidence that it actually does?

empirical research

There is a considerable field of academic research into sport and morality, offering several different models for the relationship between the two. An exhaustive consideration is not possible here but we will seek to draw out some key ideas.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the overarching assumption is that sport is almost always a social endeavour, and thus provides opportunities for good and bad behaviour – acts voluntarily performed with the aim of benefiting or disadvantaging others.[11] It is possible to distinguish between the diversionary/inhibitive (i.e., offering alternative activities to those likely to commit crimes or engage in anti-social behaviour) and the developmental/proactive (i.e., character-shaping) effects of sporting participation. Academic work is overwhelmingly directed at young people, often young men.

In terms of the former, a summary of research for Sport England by Fred Coalter reports that diversionary programmes are capable of small but significant reductions in crime or nuisance behaviour. Impacts, however, can vary between individuals and according to the extent to which projects are embedded in other social services.[12]

In terms of the latter, studies suggest that the relationship between sport and pro-social behaviour is weak, and sometimes negative. Coalter cites earlier evidence that, given its salience for many young people, sport is most effectively 'used' as a hook into fuller developmental programmes (not dissimilar to Hughes''educational grapnel').

Some secondary studies of longitudinal data even suggest a strong relationship between sports participation and negative social outcomes. In a study of 763 students over a time frame covering ninth grade (age 14-15) to the age of 29-30, American academics found a consistent relationship between involvement in high school sport and an increase in adult drink-driving, with involvement in varsity sport leaving subjects 65 per cent more likely to report driving while drunk in the past year. Among other causes, the perceived social status of athletes may create a sense of entitlement or a feeling that they are above the law.[13] Overall, the authors concluded that the impact of sports participation on behaviour is more marked than other research suggests, but its effects are not unidirectional; there are both positive and negative outcomes.

This invites the question, what are the psychological or contextual elements of sport that contribute to particular outcomes? The prevailing wisdom seems to gravitate toward a kind of contextual moral formation. Sociologists Brenda Bredemeier and David Shields argued that in sport individual moral judgments gravitate toward the prevailing level of moral judgment. They introduced the term 'game frame' to refer to the way particular contests – by extension clubs, leagues and perhaps even entire sports – take on a particular atmosphere.[14] In the context of the game, moral judgments are frequently less mature or developed than in non-athletic situations. In short, depending on the context, people behave on the sports field as they never would in ordinary life.

For example, one study of 500 11-13-year-olds in Bergen, Norway, indicated a positive relationship between 'power sports' (boxing, weightlifting, martial arts) and anti-social behaviour. The effect was stronger in some sports than in others, with a weaker correlation in martial arts, which the authors sought to explain through the non-violent ethos in some martial arts. What mattered was the culture of a given sport – the combined effects of enactive learning, violent role models and reinforcement of aggressive behaviour from sporting peers.[15]

More positively, a study by Esther Rutten found that those who experienced a positive relationship with their coach reported less anti–social behaviour than average, and the

aggregation of pro-social or anti-social players within teams has different character-shaping effects. Through regression analysis, the authors of this study came to equate the effect of playing within a 'good' team as similar to the effect going to a 'good' school has on educational outcomes, explaining around 20% of the variance.

The moral atmosphere in which human activity is embedded may be more important than the activity in itself, regardless of whether it concerns sporting activities or the acquisition of skills and knowledge in schools.[16]

Even when players know that their breaking or bending game rules is wrong, they often simply fail to carry that understanding through to action.

This speaks against those which are 'excessively reductionist', emphasising moral cognition or judgment as the key.[17] Bluntly, there is a thought-action problem: even when players know that their breaking or bending game rules is wrong, they often simply fail to carry that understanding through to action. To know the good is not to do the good. It's not just that people inclined to play sports, or that sportspeople at an elite level, somehow lack moral integrity – more important is the direction in which the particular sporting culture they inhabit pushes them.

drawing lessons

Can sport make people good? No. There is nothing about playing sport in and of itself that develops character – or indeed the reverse. Rather, it is about the range of situations and relationships which sporting participation can bring people into that can lead to positive outcomes, or not.

Can sport be *one* of the ways in which we shape character? All that can be said here is that there are potential connections but that 'they depend' – on the prevailing moral atmosphere of the sport, on the expectation of respected overseers like coaches, and on motivations present within an individual game.

We have outsourced our responsibility for character formation without being properly aware of the complicated moral environment of sport, where there are no guarantees on offer. Efforts to improve behaviour in sport, such as the Football Association's Respect Campaign, tend to be code based – establishing clear guidelines that players can understand and punishing transgressions.[18] These efforts have met with only limited success.

We have to develop a clearer focus on how real people are shaped by a sporting context. Some commentators have asked for a more virtue-ethical approach, emphasising the power of sport to form good and bad habits.

> This requires an emphasis on the concept and importance of childhood learning, imitation, emulation and so on that is more powerful than commonly acknowledged…reasoning and judgement are crucial to our moral development but crucially they will be a product of habituation into modes of perception and feeling that are not simply precursors to, but rather constitutive of, mature moral action and reflection… It is, therefore, the acquisition of good habits that we are crucially after in general and in particular in sports.[19]

Introducing behavioural codes might help players avoid gratuitous wrongdoing, but that's a different thing to being good or virtuous. As Brenda Bredemeier and David Shields suggest, such efforts are "like putting manure on tree limbs to remedy poor soil".[20] Coaches need to be able to sustain a deeper conversation with players about the ethical shape of the game – without this, codes of conduct expect players to endorse conclusions (e.g., respect the referee) without understanding the arguments (e.g., the referee is not your opponent, but a facilitator of competition).[21]

It might seem passé, but it is appropriate to acknowledge that the wider culture of a sport – the game frame – is an influential factor on the way players behave. So the availability and openness of coaches, the actions of senior players, the efforts by administrators to emphasise the 'spirit' of the game – all these things matter in habituating younger players into virtuous approaches. Neglecting them has an equal and opposite negative potential.

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2

sport and reconciliation

united? does sport really bring people together?

> Sporting and chivalrous competition awakens the best human qualities. It does not sever, but on the contrary, unites the opponents in mutual understanding and reciprocal respect. It also helps to strengthen the bonds of peace between the nations. May the Olympic Flame therefore never be extinguished.
>
> Adolf Hitler, Official Olympic Report for the Berlin Olympics (1936)

Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the Olympic movement, was a determined believer in the idea that sport was the means of moral development.[1] But what Muscular Christianity sought to do for personal ethics and morality, Coubertin sought to propel onto the international stage.

Even as he was laying the groundwork for what has become one of the most influential non-governmental organisations in the world, he had in his sights something far more than simple exhibitions of athletic prowess. He spoke of sport as a "free trade of the future" through which "the cause for peace would have received a new and mighty stay". In 1884, inviting participants to the inaugural meeting of the Olympic Congress in Paris, he wrote:

> The revival of the Olympic Games…in conditions suited to the needs of modern life would bring the representatives of the nations of the world face-to-face every four years, and it may be thought that their peaceful and chivalrous contests would constitute the best of Internationalisms.[2]

Coubertin's beliefs are naturally part of the DNA of the Olympic Games, written in glowing terms into the Olympic Charter.[3] His intellectual legacy, however, reaches far beyond the boundaries of the organisation he established. Not only does the sentiment tinge the work and mission of many sport governing bodies, his vision has also been enthusiastically adopted into the language of many leading politicians. For Tony Blair, "sport can and must play a wider role in our societies… Sport brings people together; the self-worth and self-belief that it teaches are values that can last a lifetime."[4]

The underlying belief that sport is a powerful – perhaps even a unique – tool for bringing people together across ethnic, cultural, religious, and socio-economic divides is now woven into the policy and activity of inter-governmental institutions like the United Nations.

The UN has looked to establish participation as a fundamental right (Article 1, UNESCO Charter of Physical Education and Sport), though like any UN charter without an active means of enforcement, the purpose of such a right is more to provide a platform for moral suasion. Periodically, the UN General Assembly passes resolutions relating to the power of sport to build peace, often consciously evoking the idea of *ekecheiria*, or the Olympic Peace.[5]

A large number of UN agencies seek to use sport as a 'door opener' for projects ranging from the environmental to HIV/Aids prevention to conflict resolution.

A large number of UN agencies seek to use sport as a 'door opener' for projects ranging from the environmental to HIV/Aids prevention to conflict resolution. To facilitate this, the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace was established by Kofi Anan in 2001 with a mandate to act as 'the UN gateway in fostering support for sport as an efficient tool in the pursuit of humanitarian, development and peace-building objectives'. Third, since 2009 the International Olympic Committee has held observer status at the United Nations, placing it alongside a handful of other non-governmental organizations like the International Criminal Court.

What is it about sport as opposed to any other practice – music, art or commerce – that its proponents believe is the key to its success?

untangling the claim

It's possible to point to distinct emphases that underpin arguments about sport as a unifying force.

First, in the previous chapter, we alluded to the issue of 'salience' – the idea that sport can be utilized for other ends because of its importance to individuals. When making the case for sport, the metaphor of a common language or idiom is used. This is to say that it is uniquely accessible – uniquely salient – in all cultures.

Second, there is the idea that sport provides an opportunity for and encounter between different cultures that would not otherwise exist. Sport, so it is argued, provides a safer way to do this than might ordinarily be possible as it is a forum of channelled and creative conflict and competition. Political or social differences are exorcised, or at least dissipated, on the pitch. Sport, in other words, is a bit like a controlled explosion.

Third, there is the idea that sport creates a particularly 'non-political' space, where issues of contention and division are temporarily set aside. A sporting event is a kind of 'liminal space', a parallel dimension, where things that are not usually possible suddenly become a tangible reality. This is the kind of peace observed in the World War I Christmas Day football matches between British and German troops.

We will assess each of these three themes in turn.

a universal language

According to former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, "sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious belief of economic status". The metaphor litters international declarations on sport, as if it were to undo the confusion of Babel.

On the face of it, it fulfils several of the criteria necessary for such a claim. It is a truism in the sociology of sport that all human beings play games, even if they do not play sports as we have come to recognise and define them. It can't be denied that most sports are inherently social, demanding a level of willing cooperation even before a game starts, and sports are codified on an international level in a way that little else is. Participating in a sport is to share in a common, objective experience which is the same the world over.

Caution needs to be exercised over our sporting assumptions. None of these criteria is as fully met as we might imagine. Common experience certainly is a necessary condition for reconciliation, community or solidarity, but it is hardly a sufficient one. Mihir Bose, in his unflinchingly candid social history of modern sports, *The Spirit of the Game*, defends the high 'universal language' view of sports on exactly those grounds. However, in building the picture of common experience Bose most readily and convincingly appeals to the example of what is perhaps the most simple, codified, objective and universal sport: football.

> If you give 20 footballers a football each, most will instantly do the same things with it. If you give 20 pianists a piano, each will play in a different way…[6]

The comparison is a strained one. Each pianist, no matter what style of music he or she plays, is still playing the piano. Even in the context of football alone, Bose perhaps over-emphasises the commonality (different styles of play were one of the things that used to make international encounters fractious). But ask most people in the world to conduct a game of baseball, or Kabadi, or whatever, it becomes clear that sport is by no means as shared as it may seem. As we will see in chapter four, the human propensity to play games

is not the same as being inclined to appreciate sport, still less to participate. This is indeed one of the ways in which sport demonstrably falls short of the claims made on its behalf.

Sport is social and communal, but it can only be common only to those that play it. It is a language unifying only those that already speak it.

a controlled explosion

George Orwell drew a famously pessimistic judgment of sport, calling it 'war minus the shooting'.[7] He was writing following a series of intemperate fixtures between British teams and Moscow Dynamo, part of a tour conceived in the warm afterglow of the Allied victory. The tour was an opportunity for a cultural engagement of nations, but started with a war of words between the Russian team and the English Football Association after the Soviets issued a series of demands on the fixtures, and ended when the team left early. In the meantime, the bad feeling resulted in spectator aggression and, according to Orwell, on-pitch violence. There was, in fact, almost no social contact between the Dynamo players and British footballers, or indeed anyone else.

The Twentieth Century was littered with occasions when sport's institutions were enlisted as active protagonists in conflict.

This is one example among many where latent aggression or rivalry between two groups was clearly not healthily exorcised in the sporting contest. Rather than being channelled, wider political or social cleavages load sporting fixtures with broader significance beyond the game itself – we might prefer Celtic v. Rangers matches to be 'just about football', but they're clearly not. It's not enough to say sport inspires strong loyalties, or is an innocent bystander to political conflict. The Twentieth Century was littered with occasions when sport's institutions were enlisted as active protagonists in conflict.

On this occasion the Russian team was run by Lavrenty Beria, the head of Stalin's secret police. The tour was an early example of Beria's influence on the Soviet Union's sporting policy, one of the key 'fronts' of the Cold War. Moscow's approach to sport in the post war years was an undisguised form of national posturing. Success in major sporting competitions was interpreted as confirmation of a superior society. Such an approach was far from unique. The 1936 Olympics were National Socialism's greatest charm offensive. Efficient organization and generous – if creepy – hospitality ensured its success not simply as a major sporting occasion but also an occasion for propagandising for Germany under the Hitler regime. With the German domestic sporting establishment already captured by the Nazis, and Olympic administrators fanatically determined to see the games held successfully, there was little opposition at home or abroad.[8]

Does sport diffuse conflict? Not always – it can just as easily be the fuse for conflict.

a parallel dimension

It is ironic that sport's political usefulness rests in its alleged lack of politics – "the playing field [is] a simple and often apolitical site for initiating contact between antagonistic groups".[9]

It's fair to say that sport has traditionally provided a way of gently thawing international relations, usually provided there is some initial political will (as in the 'ping-pong diplomacy' of China and the US in the 1970s). Sporting occasions have also provided politicians from antagonistic countries with a kind of neutral ground, where they can meet in a place less charged with the usual tensions. In 2011, the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India met at a semi-final of the cricket World Cup. "We all must enjoy cricket", as Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani told reporters after landing at Chandigarh, near Mohali, for the semifinal between India and Pakistan.[10]

Cricket in particular, which commands a huge following across the Indian subcontinent, does seem to offer a kind of liminal space where the usual social divides don't matter. It matters, so goes the claim, but not in the same way that things matter enough to divide. Kumar Sangakkara, giving the 2011 Spirit of Cricket Cowdrey Lecture, said:

> My loyalty will be to the ordinary Sri Lankan fan, their 20 million hearts beating collectively as one to our island rhythm and filled with an undying and ever-loyal love for this our game… Fans of different races, castes, ethnicities and religions who together celebrate their diversity by uniting for a common national cause. They are my foundation, they are my family. I will play my cricket for them. Their spirit is the true spirit of cricket. With me are all my people. I am Tamil, Sinhalese, Muslim and Burgher. I am a Buddhist, a Hindu, a follower of Islam and Christianity. I am today, and always, proudly Sri Lankan.[11]

Similarly, one project which FIFA has been very keen to highlight is the Hapoel Tel Aviv Educational Enterprise, which over 15 years has brought thousands of Palestinian and Israeli children together to play football. Again, football's importance is in its unimportance – an innocuous and unthreatening game, remarkable only in light of the wider lack of mixing and contact in a largely segregated education system. Only the hardest of hard-liners could object.

Such projects, and the sentiments that lie behind them, can in varying measures be either properly provocative or badly naïve. If sport provides a politics-free zone where political

leaders can meet on neutral ground, then it also provides a space where leaders can hide from political tension. Before this year's Bahrain Grand Prix, the Royal Family reportedly erected billboards around their Sakhir circuit featuring the slogan "UniF1ed – One Nation in Celebration."[12]

conclusion

There have been, and no doubt will continue to be, many examples where projects incorporating sport have effectively reconciled communities. In the most notable of these, people operate in the face of huge political challenges with a modest view of what sport can achieve in the light of conflict. To the extent to which sport becomes an arena to which foreign policy extends, it can no doubt be used for positive purposes as well as negative – sporting boycotts can create pressure and deny legitimacy.

The question is, when we constantly press sport into the role of peacemaker, where does that leave sport? The answer is, vulnerable.

First, its unifying capacity needs to be constantly defended and re-articulated in place or in spite of historical experience and contemporary practice. Any brief survey of the development of the Olympics – or indeed any major international sport – demonstrates that Coubertin's vision has been more honoured in the breach. It's true that athletes have been brought together, but the pitches, stadia and fields have at least as often been venues for conflict as places of reconciliation.

Such tangible evidence as there is for sport as a peacemaker is often exaggerated. The report on the UN Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005, for instance, wrongly claimed that North and South Korea fielded a single team in the Sydney and Athens Summer Games, and planned to do so in Beijing.[13] While they have marched together at the opening ceremony, the teams compete separately and appear separately on the medal table. North Korean athletes are obliged to stay on a private compound in the Olympic Village during the games, and are prevented from associating with foreign athletes or from sight-seeing in the host nation.

Second, it is vulnerable to the accusation of trying to sell what it doesn't have. Beyond the set piece international fixtures and targeted reconciliation programmes, sport as ordinarily played is subject to all the prevailing divisions. Here in the UK, there is a marked difference between rates of participation across different socio-economic groups. Sport England's Active People Survey has show that whilst 72.8% of young people in NS-SEC 1-4 do at least one 30-minute session of sport per week; only 65.6% of young people in NS-SEC 5-8 do so.[14] Even in terms of the theoretically more equitable realm of school sports, schools with

a high proportion of students eligible for free school meals together with those in areas of high deprivation, have less success in engaging students in physical education and sport.[15]

Third, there may be something about the freedom of sport from political concerns that enables constructive engagement. We must contend with the irony that the more we try to leverage it for political ends, the more serious the whole business will become, and the less likely it will be to do that successfully. Equally, the liminal space that sport provides is not endless. After the Christmas day football matches in World War I, the guns rang out again. Pakistan and India still have nuclear weapons trained on each other. So sport might briefly transcend human experience, but it can't ignore it. Administrators' refusal to entertain the prospect that sport can be used politically has only given license to those who would do so.

chapter 2 references

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3

sport and the economy

money for sport, or sport for money?

A major justification for hosting the 2012 London Olympics was the appeal to sport producing economic benefits. Grand promises have been made and substantial sums of money exchanged to bring the Games to the capital. The cost of London 2012 may not exceed that of the Beijing Summer Games (at an estimated £20bn), but serious questions have been raised at the expense to the public purse not only with regard to the Olympics but in sport more generally.

The hyper-marketisation of elite sport, which has occurred easily within living memory, has meant that the nature of this relationship between sport and money has changed dramatically.

The history of sport, business and money is a long and often more complicated one than popularly imagined. It is not the case that most sports once existed in a utopian realm free from the influence of money. Players were often given financial rewards for participating as early as the Eighteenth Century and gambling on sport has a long history extending as far back as the Olympics of ancient Greece. Harking back to an age of pure amateurism is false, first because it never existed, and second because even if it could be realised it would most likely leave elite sport the preserve of the wealthiest members of society.

Sport has always needed money (for infrastructure, paying players and so on). The hyper-marketisation of elite sport, which has occurred easily within living memory, has meant that the nature of this relationship between sport and money has changed dramatically. Sport is now expected to deliver at an economic level – as a source of employment, a significant driver of consumer expenditure, a source of tax, even as a force for economic regeneration.

As revenue from ticket prices, sponsorship, pay and pay-per-view television costs have rocketed, so has the potential utility of sport in delivering agendas previously unimaginable. But has sport lived up to these demands of the modern era? What does the evidence suggest, for example, with regard to mega-events such as the Olympics? Do they,

and will they, provide economic growth and regeneration in host cities and nations? In this section, we hope to disentangle rhetoric from reality.

And even if the marketisation of sport has provided many benefits (see below), have there been unwanted and unperceived side-effects? When does marketisation become commodification? As well as the pure economic results sport can and does bring, we shall finally consider what Michael Sandel calls the 'marks of the market'.

in what ways is sport 'big business'?

The claim that sport is 'big business' could mean a number of things. The statement requires decoding before it can be assessed.

First, it can mean receipt of significant public money – more than ever before. The first time London hosted the Olympics in 1908, the cost of the whole Games (including the construction of a new stadium in Shepherds Bush for £60,000) was around £81,500.[1] At today's prices, this equates to around £7m. The 1948 Olympics cost £762,000[2], or around £21m in today's economy. The cost of London 2012 to the public is officially £9.3bn, with some estimates placing the figure for the Games and legacy plans at up to £11bn.[3]

Second, it means there is a growing market for corporate sponsorship. In 1948 the word 'sponsor' was only mentioned once throughout the 766 page LOCOG (London Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games) official report. For London 2012 there are: eleven Worldwide Olympic 'Sponsors', seven Official London 2012 'Partners', seven official London 2012 'Supporters' and twenty-eight official 'Providers and Suppliers'. LOCOG in 2012 have also raised around £2bn in corporate sponsorship. Accounting firm PwC projects that global revenues from sports sponsorships will increase from US$35bn in 2012 to US$45.3bn in 2015, a 5.3 percent compound annual increase.[4]

Third, consumer spending on sport-related goods is another area where sport and business interact. Spending on spot-related goods and services in England was £17.4bn in 2008, up 138% since 1985.[5] Flowing from this, sport creates jobs (around 1.8% of employment in England is reportedly, in the sport sector), develops higher-quality and safer stadia, and brings tax to the exchequer. In turn this has also created many benefits for how we experience sport including innovations in technology. The development of interactive television, access through smart phones and social media have all enhanced the experience of watching and participating in sport. The emergence of a market in television rights has provided a way of leveraging more money into parts of the sport sector with consequences both positive and negative. The Premier League, with record revenues, is the most watched league in the world with reportedly 70% of the world's 2.08

billion football fans following the action regularly.[6] As a result, investment is also made in the wider sporting community. The Premier League has committed some £167.2m a year for the next three years into community good causes, international development and participation projects.[7] According to the FA, the vast sums of money in football in England bring about £1bn to the exchequer each year, much of which would not come in without the business model adopted.[8]

Finally, mega-events are treated as significant drivers of economic growth and regeneration. It is this claim that we will now explore in more depth.

do mega-sporting events like the Olympics provide economic regeneration?

In November 2008, John Armitt, Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority said, "Transformational change on this scale does not happen often and the Games offer a unique opportunity to regenerate one of the most underdeveloped areas in the UK"; indeed London 2012 would be the 'Regeneration Games'.[9] With a vast £9.3bn of public money invested in the Games (nearly four times as much as originally projected), a degree of public interest is inevitable. Has the money has been spent wisely? Have promises been met?

There are clearly major economic benefits beyond that of sport for London hosting the Olympics. Figures released by the DCMS in February 2012 show that more than 40,000 people will have worked on the Olympic Park or Athletes' Village, including 450+ apprentices, with many more working on the tens of thousands of supply chain contracts. 98% of the £6bn worth of contracts have gone to UK-based companies, two thirds to small or medium-sized enterprises; 2,800 homes (including 35% affordable housing and 40% family homes) will be created through the £500m sale of the Athletes' Village;[10] and there will be an estimated £750m more consumer spending during London 2012.[11]

However, as Senior Lecturer in Sport and Policy at Birmingham University, Dr Jonathan Grix suggests, it is generally accepted that "The economic benefits that accrue from sports mega-events are notoriously difficult to measure."[12] A report prepared by Visa Europe – official payment services provider for London 2012 – suggests that the increase in economic output after the Games will be £5.1bn from 2012 to 2015. This is just over half (or just under half, depending on which figures you accept) of the public investment made in the first place.[13]

A further question must also must be asked: would an alternative investment of that £9.3bn (some suggest the figure may be much more) have generated more and longer-lasting regeneration? As Dr Grix continues:

> Economic impact analyses of sports events – including opportunity costs of what would have happened, say, had the London Olympics not taken place – need to be modelled to allow for a comparison... Only in such a way can benefits be attributed to the Games themselves and not some other intervening variable(s).[14]

Added to this, for the weeks of the Games themselves, it is likely that there will be a 'bank-holiday' effect, particularly in London, resulting in lower workforce productivity overall.

The impression we are given with regard to the Olympics is that as well as the cost to the public purse, "private sector investment is...crucial to ensure the ongoing benefits are spread before, during and after the...Games."[15] It is difficult to ascertain the exact figure for private investment in the running of the Games. But, according to LOCOG, in addition to the £9.3bn (or £11bn) of public funding for the construction of the Games, LOCOG itself has raised nearly £2.2bn in private investment.[16] This is no small achievement. However, at under a quarter of the public investment, the impression that the private investment provides as significant a role as is often purported is questionable. This is backed up by academics from the University of East London: The bid organisers and stakeholders hoped that the private sector would share the burden not just via event sponsorship but also through the commitment of private capital in infrastructure development and facilities construction. This did not materialise.[17]

Indeed, the economic model for running the Games appears far more 'Keynesian' than popularly imagined. However, even if we accept the justification of increased public spending in order to promote growth, we are likely to conclude with Paul Johnson (Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies) that the benefits of investment in Olympic infrastructure would compare poorly to, for example, the benefits of reducing bottlenecks in the transport system. "In terms of the comparative value of investment, [the Olympics] has got to be very small".[18]

In fact, no recent Olympic Games has produced proven significant economic benefits to the host city or country. Although it is perhaps too early to judge for Beijing, various commentators (including the director of investment research at Ping An of China Asset Management, Chi Lo) have described the effects as 'negligible' especially with the vast sums of money spent on it.[19] Eight years after the Athens 2004 Games, twenty-one of the twenty-two Olympic venues remain abandoned and the current Greek economy speaks for itself (a mega-event cannot undo structural economic weakness, but clearly the €7.2bn public expense cannot have helped). The Sydney Olympics tripled its budget (like the

majority of Olympics in recent years) for the running of the Games. Sue Holliday, the former chief planner for the Sydney Games, is also quoted as saying that the host city should have focused more broadly on a legacy programme for the Olympics site and that "Sydney is now paying the price".[20]

Economic model for running the Games appears far more 'Keynesian' than popularly imagined.

The World Cup in South Africa in 2010 provides another interesting case-study. As with London 2012, initial spending estimates were way off. In 2003 it was estimated tangible costs to the South African government would be R2.3bn; this had risen to an estimated R39.3bn by 2010.[21] As with all major sporting events, grand promises were made around the economic impact: "The 2010 Fifa World Cup is not just a razzmatazz event characterised by pageantry, pomp, merriment and excitement, but it is an event of significant and far-reaching economic impact," said Rejoice Mabudafhasi, South Africa's Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, in November 2009.[22] However, a spokesperson for the South African Revenue Services stated just before the cup began:

> Our approach to the World Cup has been that it was never going to be a revenue-raising exercise. Certainly it would be wrong to view the World Cup as a significant contributor in itself. The concessions we had to give to FIFA are simply too demanding and overwhelming for us to have material monetary benefits.[23]

In 2011 *Channel 4 News* reported that although this was the most lucrative World Cup ever for FIFA, and helped to improve the image of South Africa socially and culturally, many small businesses did not benefit. Promises of new housing were not followed through and just twenty artificial football pitches were distributed across Africa as a result of the tournament.[24]

If regeneration or wider economic growth is indeed a key goal in bidding for major tournaments, then we should exercise greater political caution. Major sporting events have frequently overpromised and consequently under-delivered. The issue is not whether or not sport creates significant economic activity – it clearly does. Rather, it is whether or not we are aware of the limits of what sport can provide.

the marks of the market

Even where sport does provide positive economic outcomes in society, is this the whole story? In his book *What Money Can't Buy*, Professor of Government at Harvard Michael Sandel explores the morality of how market exchange has invaded territory it previously had barely ventured into or was kept from. We can now sell our blood or body for

experimental science at potentially great personal risk for instance. According to Sandel, we no longer 'have' a market economy – we are a market economy.

The objection to such 'omni-marketisation' is firstly that it is unfair. As wealth increases so does the ability to buy goods and services, meaning some people will not be able to afford as much as others. Secondly at a deeper level, he argues, some things should not be sold because to sell them is to not give them their appropriate intrinsic worth. The buying and selling of human beings as slaves is the most extreme case of this, but even beyond this, because we are relational beings, we are affected by interaction at any level, including the market. Therefore it is not just the sale of humanity which should be questioned but other things like buying one's way out of conscription, votes or friends.

Does sport fall into the bracket of things that should not be sold, or that at least should not simply be left to any and every market force? As we saw above, sport is 'big business', creating numerous economic, regenerative and societal advantages. However, once society places value in sport only insofar as it produces some kind of economic benefit, do we begin to ignore, occlude or even damage its intrinsic worth? Even if it did and we accept the positive effects of the market as above, there is another side to the argument.

Although the injection of serious money into sport has led to greater accessibility in some senses (for example, results and matches are now available on hand-held devices from the other side of the world), it has also harmed public access. In early 2012 Channel 4 *Dispatches* revealed that the majority of tickets for the most highly sought-after events did not go on general sale but were accessible only for the wealthiest and VIPs.[25] Similarly, reports suggest that of the 62,500 tickets available for the 2012 Champions League final, over a third were given specifically to corporate sponsors and FIFA's 'football family' (whose members include 53 national associations, players, coaches, clubs, officials, guests and the local organising committee). Supporters of the two teams not lucky enough to get one of the 17,500 tickets allocated to their club were obliged to watch on TV, or pay over £1,000 for a ticket.[26]

We cannot pretend that sport will always be able to serve the proverbial two masters.

This is a classic example of what Sandel terms the 'skyboxification' of life: "At a time of rising inequality, the marketisation of everything means that people of affluence and people of modest means lead increasingly separate lives."[27] Sport, like where we live, go on holiday and send our children to school, has become a source of social and relational division because of its hyper-marketisation. We cannot pretend that sport will always be able to serve the proverbial two masters. Public values like broad public access can't easily bear up under the dual strains of governance structures which are not always fit for purpose and the imperative of financial gain. Premiership Manager David Moyes alluded to this when

he suggested in March 2012 that 'everyone' in the Premier League took a 20 percent pay cut to make football more affordable for supporters.[28]

This is not just a matter of what's happening in top-flight football – another example of this could be found in cricket. After England's winning 2005 Ashes series, broadcast on terrestrial television, the rights to future Ashes series were sold to pay-television. As we have observed above, the argument for this move was to receive more money which could then be invested in the grass-roots, eventually raising participation. However, there is also a strong argument for keeping sport such as cricket on terrestrial television. Passion is created simply by ease of access. By 2009, the highest viewing figures Sky had received for cricket was 1.5m, contrasted with the final days of the 2005 Ashes tests at Old Trafford and the Oval which drew 7.7m, and 8.4m respectively.[29] Between 2006 and 2009 (a period during which cricket was on pay-television), once-a-month cricket participation rose by 47,700. Athletics and cycling, however, two sports which have not received pay-television money, increased once-a-month participation by 616,500 and 648,400 respectively.[30] This is not to suggest that the discrepancy can be fully explained by international cricket's move to Sky, but it does illustrate the trade-off between profitability and access.

This raises the spectre of conflicts of interests, which by their nature are unlikely to be resolved in the interests of the ordinary supporter, who is disadvantaged by a lack of access to the most basic information and has little or no representation within governance structures. This is shown, for instance, where the Football Association has resisted calls for greater supporter representation on their Council in particular (only one of over 100 Council members is officially the 'Supporters Representative').[31] Sports Minister Hugh Robertson has supported calls for better governance in sport more generally. One of the main aspects of the Sport and Recreation Alliance's 'Voluntary Code for Good Governance [for sports bodies]' is transparency and Mr Robertson is quoted as saying, "This code will help make sure that sports have the best possible governance structures in place to meet the challenges and opportunities of the coming year."[32]

It is not clear, however, that improved governance will be enough. At a national level, sports are effectively run (or 'owned') by the national governing bodies. Faced with increasingly difficult decisions across a wide range of issues (including a desire to compete in a global sporting economy and in competitions such as the Olympics), the argument for economic reward and consequent benefits will often prevail over less tangible goods like affordable access to sports.

At a club level, similar debates around ownership and accountability are prevalent in other sports, especially football. Supporters' groups claim that the over-marketisation of football and ownership structures prevent their voices being heard and the German Bundesliga is often held up as a model which allows the supporters a much louder voice

in the decision-making process. With Bayern Munich having the highest commercial (as opposed to match-day or broadcasting) revenue in Europe in 2010-11 and reaching the 2012 Champions League final, this suggests the libertarian model is not the only one which produces success, broadly defined.[33] The arguments for and against an increased role for supporter's groups have been made many times before and this report is not the place to re-rehearse those arguments. Further information, however, can be found by looking to the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry into football governance and the evidence which was submitted last year.[34]

conclusion

It is clear that elite sport in particular is organised primarily as an enterprise and entertainment industry with substantial economic benefits on a number of levels. Our first contention, however, is that we often over-estimate the level of this potential economic benefit. Major sporting events are often not wealth generators but are 'extractive,' in that the main revenue streams are taken by the awarding sports body and associated sponsors, the main costs paid for by the host population. This is often justified by ongoing needs for governing bodies to compete in a competitive global market. But the more extractive the events become (as seen by doubling and tripling public expenditure throughout the process in many sport mega-events), the more arguments made for 'benefit' for the host population are forced to work harder and harder, far beyond their actual capability. The best recommendation on this situation would clearly be to understand the limits of what sport can deliver economically and that under-promising and over-delivering is better than over-promising and under-delivering.

Secondly, the market-led approach in sport, while producing many positive outcomes, has also produced unforeseen and unwanted side-effects or 'marks of the market'. This should question our utilitarian justification of sport when it comes to economics, especially at a moral level. One of the marks of the market is arguably that the public end up paying more than they expect for major events and sport in general. This raises serious questions around public accountability and ownership models in sport.

The more extractive the events become the more arguments made for 'benefit' for the host population are forced to work harder and harder, far beyond their actual capability.

Sport needs to be honest and either try harder to encourage the public to increase its stake in how sport is run or accept the industry is essentially one of entertainment, driven freely by market forces and corporate interests. For the former to happen, the public must not only be encouraged to participate in sport itself, but also in sporting *governance* and how it affects them.

Specifically in football this may take the form of tax incentives for mutual supporters' groups wanting to buy shares in their club. More generally in sporting governance it could be in the form of easy to understand guides and events explaining how governance structures work in each sport and how interested citizens can be involved along similar lines to what Citizens UK have done with politics – giving people a stake in the way decisions are made. With the amount of public money going into not only the Olympics but also sport in general, the public have a right not only to accountability, but to an increased stake in how decisions are made if they so desire.

With regard to ownership in sport, greater transparency could rebalance the equation in favour of supporters and the wider public. Making governing bodies in receipt of significant public funding or who contribute to any representative team as the UK or a constituent nation subject to the Freedom of Information Act would show that sport is serious about transparency and openness (values it purports to hold dear but frequently falls short of acting upon). Adherence to a set code of ethical behaviour in governance, as set out by the Sport and Recreation Alliance for example, would also increase accountability and transparency.[35] The general empowerment of civil society with the information to make informed and constructive criticism of governance in sport will help to reclaim sport for the common good.

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4

sport and a healthy society

sporting participation: is it important?

In his address to the IOC in 2005, before London was awarded the 2012 Games, Lord Coe is quoted as saying:

> We can no longer take it for granted that young people will choose sport. Some may lack the facilities. Or the coaches and role models to teach them. Others, in the age of 24-hour entertainment and instant fame, may simply lack the desire. We are determined that a London Games will address that challenge.[1]

The 'challenge' of participation has been the most difficult facing sport policy for the previous decades, and it is certainly beyond the scope of this report to provide a comprehensive strategy. The difficulty in simply *measuring* how active people are is an indication of this, shown by Lord Coe's recent criticism of the current methodology used to evaluate new participants.[2]

The assumption in the title of this chapter would be hard to refute – a sporting society is surely a healthy society. Statistics are readily available in the public and academic domains showing the benefits of sport for health, educational attainment and sociability. The pangs of guilt after months (or years) of inactivity are a common human experience in the West and often result in signing up for a gym or making a commitment to regular exercise. Many studies have shown regular participation contributes to general wellbeing, leading former Chief Medical Officer Sir Liam Donaldson to state, "If a medication existed which had a similar effect [to physical activity], it would be regarded as a 'wonder drug' or 'miracle cure' ".[3]

If this is indeed the case, many would expect to find a nation eager to be active. This chapter will explore the reality around participation in sport in the UK at a grass-roots level, considering the reasons why the population is or is not inclined to take part. It will then provide a brief analysis of national attempts to raise levels of participation, the effects we are told mega-events such as the Olympics will have on participation levels and whether this matches with the practical reality.

why take part...or not?

When we talk about participating in sport and 'getting fit', what is this for? Various models of public utility have been developed and researched in this area. According to BUPA, inactive people have almost double the risk of dying of heart disease compared with people who are active.[4] As well as personal benefits, societal benefits are documented, with obesity-related diseases set to cost the NHS around £21.5bn between 2007 and 2025.[5] The Department for Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education) stated in 2007, "[Sport] offers a way of helping young people to build their confidence and self esteem, overcome behavioural issues and acquire life skills."[6] A far cry from Orwell's 'war minus the shooting' appropriation of sporting endeavour that we saw in chapter 2.

The truth, however, seems to suggest that even though we recognise the significant benefits in participating in sport, we do not necessarily follow our intentions. Nearly seven million (or just 16.3%) of adults in England are reportedly active (participating in sport three times a week for 30 minutes at moderate intensity) in 2010-11, *down* marginally from 2008-09.[7]

Even with millions invested, only four of the twenty-one national governing bodies managed to increase participation.

Four years ago, £450m was channelled by Sport England into the governing bodies responsible for running respective sports, with the aim of encouraging a million more people to be active by 2013. In March 2012 though, the Commons Public Accounts Committee report on the preparations for Olympics described the return of only 109,000 new active people as "poor value for money".[8] This inevitably raises questions about the structure of delivering a national sporting agenda, the model of sporting governing bodies and their effectiveness, and the way data is collected, as mentioned above. Even with millions invested, only four of the twenty-one national governing bodies managed to increase participation when figures were released in late 2011, with seventeen recording a decline, which sports minister Hugh Robertson and Sport England have described as "disappointing".[9]

So why is it that some people play sport and others do not? What are the barriers to increasing participation? The first most notable statistic suggests that age seems to be a barrier to many with regard to participation. 27% of 16-34 year olds had participated in at least 12 sessions of moderate intensity sport in the last 28 days according to Sport England's most recent 'Active People survey', falling to 16% of 34-55 year olds and 8% of those aged over 55.[10]

This is certainly understandable, as when age increases so does responsibility, and circumstances change. In their report on lapsing participation rates, Sport England

shows that "Overwhelmingly, the ultimate cues for lapsing relate to wider macro shifts in participants' lives [e.g. 'I moved house' or 'I got married/engaged'] rather than bad experiences [in sport] per se."[11] As a result, any attempt to encourage older citizens to return to sport needs to consider how to work around and within new life patterns as opposed to using the same arguments which appeal to the younger generation. Worryingly, these figures also suggest that not only does participation decrease with age, but those who have had little inclination toward playing sport are rarely encouraged to do so. Some sports, such as golf and cycling, tend to increase in participation as age increases and encourage those who have not participated before, but these seem to be the exception.[12]

Other factors have also been cited which generally dictate how participation rates vary. For instance, participation is more likely from those who: are part of a higher income household, attend cultural events, live in an area with a higher percentage of people in their ethnic group, live in a certain area of the country or have a lottery grant awarded within 10km of where they live.[13] The gender gap in participation is also significant with 21% of men described as 'active' compared to 13% of women.[14] In short, a number of demographic factors are key in determining the chances of whether or not a person will be participative in sport.

Overall, then, it appears that the biggest factor affecting participation is general *life circumstance*. Sport and physical activity are not generally considered by the majority of people to be foundational in a 'full' life. They are more peripheral and things to do if other things do not get in the way. In light of this, how have attempts from the centre to increase participation performed and will the Olympics help to 'create a sporting habit for life' as Sport England put it?

do major sporting events increase participation?

The evidence from previous Games and sporting events, it is fair to say, is inconclusive when considering their effect on participation levels, mainly because there is not much data available, but also because no previous Olympic Games has employed strategies towards raising physical activity or sports participation.[15] After the Australia 2000 Games, it was reported that seven Olympic sports saw a small increase in participation while nine saw a decrease with the pattern for non-Olympic sports broadly similar.[16] Some have even suggested that the Olympics may catalyze a decline in participation during a Games, attributed to a 'couch potato' syndrome due to so much sport on television![17]

There is evidence which suggests that infrastructure and mechanisms associated with the Games has had a positive effect on sports participation levels where strategies have been

put in place for this purpose.[18] However, as leading sport-in-society academic, Professor Mike Weed asserts, "The problem is that although evidence suggests London 2012 could have boosted the nation's sport and physical activity participation given the right strategic approach, national legacy policies have not incorporated this evidence into a coherent national legacy strategy."[19] Hopes have been pinned on sporting infrastructure and the Games themselves to 'inspire' more people to come and play. However as Professor Weed suggests, "People will not come because there is no strategy in place to stimulate demand."[20]

This inspiration strategy *may* encourage some who do not regularly participate to be active. But the danger is that it will amount to little less than the 'Wimbledon effect'; when the Games are over, only those who already participate or used to will have really been 'inspired' (in the better facilities now provided). It is another matter to encourage those who have never shown an inclination to participate to develop a desire to partake. As well as this, the national targets for the participation legacy (of one million new participants by 2013) were dropped by the current government in 2011 and are yet to be replaced. This effectively means that with the Games almost upon us, no recognised or endorsed measure is in place against which to judge their success or failure to raise participation.

national strategies

Is a national strategy to build public health on participation in sport the best way to frame the question though? Clearly, as we have seen, if everyone participated in sport, we would have a healthy society, but a strategy encouraging people to play sport *based* on the argument of public health (as seen in the NHS's Change4Life campaign for example) seems questionable.[21]

Those who already participate may be inclined to play more because they already know the benefits, but for those least inclined to play, barriers still exist. Research into sporting motivation has shown a subtle difference in external behavioural motivations which can be internalised, of which health benefits is an example, and purely *intrinsic* motivation which enjoys the activity for its own sake.[22] As Professor Weed asserts, the problem is that, "In many cases, internalised motivations are wrongly thought to be intrinsic motivations. Exercising to be healthy is not an intrinsic motivation – one does not need to enjoy the physical activity or sport itself to be motivated in this way".[23] As a result, messaging founded on health benefits in sport for inactive people will prove difficult unless they value general health in the first place. If they do not, sport cannot win this battle for them. The utilitarian argument in this context verges, at times, on

the patronising Victorian moralism explored in chapter one: "Do what is good for you". Unsurprisingly, many steadfastly refuse as shown by the lapsing participation rates and those who have simply never been inclined to play.

The question of school sport is another major challenge for sporting policy in the UK. £2.4bn was invested in the School Sport Strategy between 2003 and 2010 with some indicators showing a positive impact. However, in policy terms a consensus has yet to be reached on the purpose of school sport, PE and physical literacy and consequently the goalposts have been moved on a regular basis. Even the distinction between 'Physical Education' (PE) and 'school sport' causes confusion and disagreement in the political arena. Do we want an 'active youth' more generally, or a 'sporty youth' who desire to play *sport* specifically? Indeed, it is one of the main aims of the Sports Think Tank to achieve a national sporting and political consensus in the coming years on the purpose and delivery of a school sport and/or PE system.

Governing bodies have not been able to turn large scale investment into greater participation...How do you get people to want to do something?

A major positive element of the 2012 Games is the importance given to disability sport in the Paralympics. This is an area of sport often forgotten but now thankfully raising its profile. London holds a significant place in the history of disability sport. The first organised athletic event for disabled people in parallel with the Olympic Games took place during the 1948 London Olympics, where a competition was held for World War II veterans with spinal cord injuries. The first official Paralympic Games, open to more than war veterans, took place in Rome in 1960 and the Paralympic movement has continued growing ever since. Major strides in disability sport participation have been made in the UK with 18% of people with a disability participating in sport once a week for 30mins in 2010-11 (up from 15% in 2005-06).[24] Many Paralympians themselves have united in optimism for a successful Paralympics in 2012 and a legacy to follow. However there is work still to do as the three-times-per-week participation figure among the disabled is just 6%, compared to 16% in the general population.[25] There have been calls to ensure the legacy promotes disability sport in school where teachers "need further knowledge and support to provide appropriate sporting opportunities and to overcome some of the associated practical and logistical challenges that can arise."[26]

conclusion

The participation agenda, to all intents and purposes, appears to have failed. The authorities and governing bodies have not been able to turn large scale investment into greater participation. Admittedly this is perhaps the most difficult task in sporting policy because it deals with core human motivations and nature – how do you get people to want

to do something? But it is precisely because of this, that in order to provide an effective participation agenda, sport and physical activity need to be further divorced from the idea that they will bring an external benefit. This is not to say the external benefits will not arrive and should not be celebrated when people participate. For an inclusive and holistic participation agenda these benefits need to be of secondary importance compared to creating a desire to play to satisfy internal desires for a full and enjoyable life.

Another key element helping to achieve higher levels of participation overall is better long-term planning from the centre. It is the nature of democracy that a policy of one government will frequently be changed by the next. This has been seen with the current Coalition government abandoning the last government's participation targets of one million new people participating in sport by 2013. However it is *generally* accepted that sporting policy is an area of greater cross-party and -ideology cooperation. It would be preferable, therefore to see longer-term policy thinking in sport, not driven by short-term political necessity. This may involve greater cross-party working on the ground during a given administration or continued involvement of former or shadow sports ministers.

Simply achieving more national and political consensus on the purpose of a participation agenda is essential for creating a 'sporting habit for all'. This is seen markedly in the strategies in school sport, but the wider participation agenda also suffers from lack of clarity and agreement. Current approaches to driving participation through desires to get people healthy (government), improve educational attainment (education) and get people to buy a product (commercial) do not seem to be working at the desired rate. Developing inter-sector consensus on the fundamental reason for driving a participation agenda will therefore be crucial, facilitated through more interaction in meetings, seminars, debates and partnerships. As we have been arguing, the foundation of such a consensus should be based not on external benefits, but on developing intrinsic motivations to play sport, with external benefits coming as by-products.

In a society which leans towards the 'easy' option, anything which can be taken in pill-form will tend to dominate over endeavours which require discipline and commitment. Much wider societal shifts than sport can deliver will be required to change this culture. Links making it easier to transition between different stages of life will therefore help to kindle the fire of desire to play sport. The government must be commended here on developing a strategy to fund a sports club at every secondary school in England. If there are fewer barriers to participation enabled by familiarity as this agenda outlines, people will be more inclined to continue. Beyond this, initiatives which break down barriers such as resentment at being told what to do "because it is good for you" and fear of competition should continue also be promoted. Further development of easier-to-play forms of sports would be a positive move: sport requiring less organisation and equipment, available to play in

the local community or even in the house. The recent success of sport and physical activity games on consoles such as X-Box, Playstation and the Wii are good examples. Desire has been created due to ease of access and the impression of fun to be had.

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conclusion

Our society has unwittingly downgraded sport to a merely utilitarian tool. We think it will make us good, peaceful, wealthy and healthy. The more sport is asked to provide, however, the less it can deliver and the more frustrated we are with it when it fails. Having suggested this attitude to sport is flawed, what is a healthier attitude, and what can theological reflection add to the debate?[1]

A theological understanding of sport relies, at least in some part, in the concept of 'play'. Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga, claimed that, "in play we move below the level of seriousness, as the child does; but we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and sacred."[2] Play has no exterior motive, it exists simply for its own sake. This was given a theological dimension in the later Twentieth Century by Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner who suggested that God was the 'ultimate player'. Creation did not *need* to happen, and though something meaningful was produced that pleased God (creation itself) the act of creating itself was of value.

If you play sport for the sake of its benefits then you lose what it most important.

Rahner's account plays out in other parts of Scripture. In Proverbs 8:30 the Hebrew word for 'play' (*sahaq*) – which also means 'to sport' and 'to laugh' – is used to show God's eternal wisdom 'rejoicing' or 'playing rejoicingly' in the act of creation. In Proverbs 8 God is depicted more as a creative painter taking joy in the process of creation than a 9-5 office worker desperate to complete a task so he can go home. This inherent joy given to the process of creation does not appear to detract from the result: there is "rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in humankind" (Proverbs 8:31). Since they are created in the image of God, Rahner would argue that human beings should expound the virtue of playing, and not always working or resting. The non-purposive elements of life have worth.

Of course, the story of modern sport, as we have seen, is very much caught up with Christianity, and not all theologians have been as open as Rahner to the idea of play or leisure. Martin Luther illustrates this in his *Freedom of a Christian*.

> Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly and sufficiently justified by faith inwardly…he remains in this mortal life on earth. In this life he must control his own body and have dealings with men. Here the work begins; here a man cannot enjoy leisure.[3]

This was developed in particular by Calvin (good works are "proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" (Institutes III.19)) and later Calvinists. Success based on hard work was a sign of election and blessing. The 'Protestant work ethic' was born. When the religious element of this doctrine evaporated it left behind the simplistic idea in western society which believed hard work was the key to success, which was ultimately what mattered in life.[4] Huizinga's case is that the Protestant work ethic has contaminated the spheres of play and work resulting in a fatal shift towards over-seriousness: "Recognized play…is no longer able to maintain its true play-character as a result of being taken too seriously and being technically over-organised. The indispensable qualities of detachment, artlessness, and gladness are thus lost."[5]

This view runs the risk of being slightly detached from the reality of sport as it is ordinarily played. It is perfectly possible for sportsmen and women at a grass-roots and at an elite level to participate and enjoy without it being 'work'.[6] The problem, it would seem, is that 'play' is not taken seriously enough. As historian Christopher Lasch asserts:

> The degradation of sport, then, consists not in its being taken too seriously but in its subjection to some ulterior purpose, such as profit-making, patriotism, moral training, or the pursuit of health. Sport may give rise to these things in abundance, but ideally it produces them only as by-products having no essential connection with the game.[7]

It's sport's other uses – its utility – which is being taken too seriously.

This does not mean that that sport produces no tangential benefits. Moral development (chapter 1), community and peace building (chapter 2), creation of wealth to be shared (chapter 3) and respect (through health) for the bodies we have been given (chapter 4) aren't 'bad things', and they do arise from sport. It does mean that if you play sport for the sake of its benefits then you lose what it most important. The theology of play suggests that at its best it is always serious and of worth simply by itself, and ultimately so should sport be.

recommendations

Sport should be seen more as an end in itself than a means to an end. But what will this mean in practice? Below we outline more tangible proposals relating to some of the areas considered in this analysis.

First, on the issue of sport as a way of shaping character, we have highlighted the importance of the prevailing moral atmosphere, and suggested that codes of behaviour alone – though they are clearly a component of the moral atmosphere – are not enough. Moving on from there, however, won't be easy. What tools are available to a coach, or a referee, or an administrator? But such a mechanistic way of framing the question gives a clue as to why it is an impossible one to answer. Simple measures, like moving enthusiastic parents further from the pitch, can help change the 'game frame'.[8] But the task for a club, a league or a sport will be to build a better culture, because it is into cultures, not codes of conduct, which players are habituated.

Releasing sport from the demands of public utility will allow it to occupy its rightful place in society.

Tangibly, this means fostering a conversation on a micro (club) and a macro (sport) level about the ethical nature of competition: what would it be for teams to have a deeper appreciation of the opportunities that come with the loss of a match, to understand the history, tradition and practices of a specific sport or to accept the fallibility of a match official without questioning his or her integrity? At the least, such questions ought to regularly be given the 'oxygen of publicity'. After all, the word competition derives from the Latin *com-petere*, which literally means 'to strive or to seek with' – even at an elite level, where the stakes of success are high, it is a deeply cooperative activity.

Second, with regard to sport and money the most important recommendation we propose is that of transparency and accountability. A major part of public dissatisfaction around the sporting mega events is the way governing bodies operate a hard headed franchise-style business model, which because of rent-seeking behaviour comes at a significant cost to host cities, yet continues to insist on the language of 'the Olympic family'. Governing bodies operate like medium-sized international businesses, but with less oversight than a small NGO. This is a major challenge for sport, on a reputational level if nothing else. Greater transparency could be achieved firstly through governing bodies adopting a code of governance similar to that expounded by the Sport and Recreation Alliance's 'Voluntary Code of Good Governance.'[9] If this is not effective, making governing bodies in receipt of significant public funds subject to the Freedom of Information Act would ensure this transparency and accountability. Empowering civil society in this way would mean less reliance on central government in Whitehall and Westminster.

Transparency in any bidding process is also imperative. The public budget for the Olympics nearly quadrupled from the initial estimate of £2.4bn. This pattern is seen across many sport mega-events in many different countries. More scrutiny needs to be given, therefore, to the pre-bid budgets, and the financial implications clearly communicated to the wider public. It is far better to propose a more liberal estimate and then come in under-budget than justify spending a conservative estimate only to break that promise later.

Finally, when considering participation we recommend firstly a deviation from the message that external benefits (such as health) are the primary reasons for wanting to take part. Substantial parts of the population have simply not been engaged by that message. Sport for sport's sake is not an original idea, but greater emphasis needs to be placed on it for a holistic sporting agenda rather than relying simply on the 'inspiration' of the Games or a desire to get fit. The key is developing *intrinsic* motivation and desire to play based on the exhilaration, excitement and sense of challenge that comes from competition at the appropriate level. To paraphrase Antoine de Saint-Exupery, if you want to build a ship you need to teach people to yearn for the open sea. As it stands, sport has become too much the bitter pill administered by the concerned state. We need more research on what the 'ordinary barriers' might be - for instance, do we have the right kind of institutions or clubs, providing ways for people who have not participated in sport since school, for instance, to ease back in.

Releasing sport from the demands of public utility will allow it to occupy its rightful place in society – that of contributing to a full, happy (rejoicing) and meaningful life. As we have seen, external benefits will naturally come from playing, watching and engaging in sport, but should be seen primarily as by-products of something with specific worth already. We need to be able to value sport for itself - for its intrinsic goods – namely fun or, if you prefer, wellbeing. It is by recognising this that we will reclaim sport for the common good.

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Give us our Ball Back

Reclaiming Sport for the Common Good

Paul Bickley and Sam Tomlin

Sport is everywhere. Yet in spite of its prominence, its position in society is relatively under-analysed.

As sport becomes more central, we realise that we don't just want it for its own sake, but because of what it can do for us. We believe it has the power to make us good, peaceful, prosperous and healthy. Today, there is no such thing as 'just a game' – sport is treated as an arena for moral development, a way to resolved deep sectarian and international conflicts, a key plank in government strategies to make us healthier, and it is 'big business'.

This report assesses how the claims stack up, and argues that the more governments, inter-governmental organisations, and NGOs pump sport for its social, political and economic benefits, the less it will be able to offer for the common good. Inflated rhetorical claims have distorted our understanding, expectations, and often our political decisions.

Sport is just as capable of making us bad as it is of making us good. It is just as likely to promote and excuse conflict as it is to reconcile. Although the sporting economy is growing, the claim that mega-events like the Olympics will contribute substantially to the economy must be carefully scrutinised. Finally, the participation agenda has faltered, raising questions about methodology and strategy for getting people healthy. Again and again, sport has been set up to over-promise and under deliver.

The report concludes with a theological appraisal of sport as an unnecessary and playful, yet serious, activity that does not require utilitarian justification. It makes several proposals with a view to sport taking a different but still essential place in society – reclaimed from the social, political and economic agendas of the age for the common good.

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