

A full-page photograph of a person in a white tracksuit running on a sand dune. The sky is a large, bright red sun, and the dune is dark brown. The person is running towards the left side of the frame.

SPORTS GEOGRAPHY
SECOND EDITION / JOHN BALE

Sports Geography

Second Edition

John Bale



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Sports Geography

In this fully revised and updated edition of his discipline-defining text, John Bale comprehensively explores the relationships between sport, place, location and landscape. Drawing on sporting examples from around the world, the book demonstrates how geography is absolutely central to our understanding of modern sport. Key themes addressed throughout the book include:

- concepts of 'space' and 'place'
- the geographical diffusion of modern sport
- the economic impact of sport
- sport and the community
- cultural geographies of sport
- sport and the 'geographical imagination'.

Presenting a wealth of research data, a wide range of international case studies and a comprehensive guide to the literature, this accessible text will be indispensable reading for all students of sport, human geography and cultural studies.

John Bale is Professor of Sports Geography at Keele University and Visiting Professor of Sports Studies at Aarhus University, Denmark.

... in the next great Atlas to be produced by English mapmakers ... a map of the distribution of games throughout the world might be included. The inferences to be drawn from it are not within my power to draw; but they might be curious.

Edmund Blunden, *Cricket Country*, 1944

Sportsworld is a sweaty Oz you'll never find in a Geography book.

Robert Lipsyte, *Sportsworld*, 1976

He was in love with travelling, with running, with geography.

John Updike, *Rabbit Run*, 1964

Preface to first edition

In the preface to an *Introduction to Sport Studies* Harold Vanderzwaag and George Sheehan explained that the selection of sub-disciplines which made up each chapter of their book was undertaken in a somewhat arbitrary manner and was based largely on the content of courses being taught in the USA in the mid and late 1970s. The philosophy, sociology, history and psychology of sport were all dealt with but the geography of sport was not. They accepted that sports geography is another avenue for studying sport but they failed to embark on its exploration, believing that at the time there was a paucity of published work in this area.

The present book is written to show that this is no longer the case. It seeks to fill a substantial lacuna in the sports studies literature and is an initial attempt to draw together the principal foci from the existing literature on the geography of sports. It represents over a decade of academic involvement in the geographical dimensions of sport and a lifetime's activity as a sports enthusiast and participant.

When I started studying sport I tended to use it to teach geography. I found that allusions to sport, a pervasive feature of modern society, helped motivate my students and make my geography classes more interesting. I realise now that I was tending to devalue sport by reducing it to the level of a teaching gimmick. Sport is worthy of academic study in its own right and its geographical dimensions provide special insights not included in any other of the 'disciplines'.

This book is primarily intended for those following introductory sports studies courses in higher education. At the same time geography students might be interested in a book which deals with location, landscapes and regions, among other things. For geographers I hope that *Sports Geography* provides examples and insights of well-known geographical themes. In addition, a wide range of social scientists may use this book as a source of reference.

This book is not an encyclopaedia or gazetteer. Instead it is concerned with ideas, using specific facts to illustrate recurring themes in a variety of geographical contexts. Believing that geographers are essentially

concerned with places I have included in each chapter vignettes which try to capture sport-place associations in an evocative way. The inclusion of several extracts from daily newspapers (and not always from the sports pages) serves to remind us that a geography of sport is all around us! I have tried to assist the readers of this book by providing detailed references and suggestions for further reading. Those using the book as a source of reference will be able to ignore the student-centred learning experiences, discussion topics and suggestions for projects, included as an Appendix, but all readers will probably benefit from having a good atlas close at hand, given the global nature of the illustrative material.

Many people have helped in the writing of this book. In particular I would like to thank John, Sandy, Dick, Pat, John and Jane for extravagant hospitality and good times while I was ostensibly involved in the academic study of sports in alien climes. As this book is a synthesis the names of a large number of other people are included in the pages which follow. Although I've never met most of them – and although they may never read this – I must thank all who have unwittingly provided ideas and information included in the maps, diagrams, tables and text in this book.

As in all productions of this kind thanks must go to the author's family. In my case, my parents supported an early interest in sports; today Ruth, Roderick and Anthony continue to support an ageing geography teacher cum sports enthusiast in diverse ways. Despite the help of all these people, the usual caveat applies.

Preface to second edition

The first edition of *Sports Geography* was generally well received and, over a decade since its publication, a second edition is long overdue. In recent years a substantial amount of writing has emerged which focuses on sports from a geographical perspective. Such written work has come from geographers but also from historians, sociologists and anthropologists whose approaches have reflected a geographical nuance. This new edition, while retaining much of the content found in the first edition, includes new material that updates the book by reflecting shifts in sports-geographical scholarship during the past decade.

The second edition does provide an introductory insight into what a geography of sport might look like but places greater emphasis on how the geographical treatment of sport has varied over time. I have tried to alert the reader to different 'traditions' of a geographical approach to sport, rooted mainly in changing emphases in geography itself. Hence, new material includes allusions not only to currently unfashionable notions such as environmental determinism (not covered in the first edition) but to areas of current geographic interest such as postmodernism and post-colonialism. In other words, there is no single geography of sport but a number of different such geographies, each situated in time and space.

It would be impossible to name all the friends and colleagues who have contributed to this second edition. In the 1980s it was easy to find a small number of key figures who had inspired and influenced my writing. That is no longer possible. Nevertheless, this remains an appropriate place to thank everyone who has contributed to the geographical study of sports and on whose work I have drawn in writing this book.

John Bale
Betley, Staffordshire

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Chapter I

Introduction

A well-known professor of geography has written that his subject is similar to the city of Los Angeles in that it sprawls over a large area, merges with its neighbours and has a central area that is difficult to find (Haggett 2001). However, it did not take him long to alert his readers to the fact that geography is basically concerned with three broad themes, namely (1) the location and spatiality of terrestrial phenomena, (2) human–environment relations, and (3) regional differentiation. Two recurring concepts in geography are therefore space and place. The subject is popularly associated with ‘knowing where places are’ or ‘knowing what places are like’. Because the academic discipline of geography is a human construction, its character and content vary considerably between individual geographers and national ‘schools’ of geography. Some scholars are more concerned with physical than with human geography; some geographers adopt descriptive approaches, others are more analytical. But while it is common to resort to the old saw, ‘geography is what geographers do’, the two recurring concepts of space and place are rarely far away from the geographer’s task.

The broad umbrella of geography has produced a number of subdisciplines. Indeed, some observers feel that geography is becoming an over-fragmented subject. The geographer Michael Dear (1988) has suggested that economic, social and political geography are the most important fields of geographical study. He also suggested that a geography of sport is not central to the structure and explanation of geographical knowledge. If one was to look at geographical dictionaries there might appear to be some merit in Dear’s assumption. For example, it was only in the third edition of *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Johnston, Gregory and Smith 1994) that the geography of sport earned a modest, but unsatisfactory, entry. However, Dear seems to have ignored that fact that sport is political, social and economic, and therefore is part of each of the three geographies that he prioritised. Additionally, Dear’s view was challenged by the observation that ‘the conditions predominating in any given field of study dictate which subdiscipline is more or less fruitful’. For example, ‘the

geography of the sport of soccer governs key aspects of political, social and economic conditions of Rio de Janeiro, rather than *vice versa*' (Scott and Simpson-Housley 1989). It has also been argued that insights about the workings of human society can often be found from the most marginal and surprising of sources. Hence, a case can readily be made for studying (what many regard as the 'marginal' phenomenon of) sport, which may be

exceedingly helpful as we try to unravel the mysteries bound up in how geographical knowledge is constructed outside of the academy, and in how the everyday senses that people possess of themselves, their societies and their worlds have rolled into them sensations of bodies in movement through immediate surroundings as well as feelings of commonality sedimented in collective events, games, rituals and spectacles which so often embrace a sports component

(Philo 1994, 2)

It should be added, however, that sports are significant not only as 'representations' of places and as 'rituals and spectacles', but also as examples of 'disciplinary mechanisms'.

The traditional neglect of sport by geographers (and of geography in sports studies) is paradoxical for several reasons. First, sport is a major aspect of economic, social and political life. While taking up huge amounts of space in the media it has also been the subject of significant political and environmental debates. Second, space and place – regarded by many as the two geographical fundamentals – are central to both geography and sport. Each is concerned with space and the way it is occupied; they both focus on the way people move and interact in geographic space; regions form a central feature of the organisation of sports; places are the means of identifying most sports teams; sport is affected by, and increasingly affects, the physical environment and landscape; sport is a world of territoriality and hierarchies. In short, sport – like geography – is a spatial science. Indeed, for one sport – orienteering – where map, compass and route-finding are all essential parts of the activity, it is difficult to know where the sport starts and the geography stops. It begs the question of whether an orienteer is 'doing' geography or sport.

In recent years geographical writing on sports has increased substantially. But sports-geographic writing has been undertaken in a wide range of disciplines and is found in often inaccessible and somewhat fugitive sources. The prime aim of the present book, therefore, is to draw together the major themes from a scattered literature in a coherent form. Although sport (like geography) is rather difficult to define (see Chapter 2), I tend to use the term in this book to describe the kinds of things written about on the sports pages of daily newspapers. In other words, I am more concerned with top-class, achievement-oriented sport than with sport as recreation.

However, because the distinction between these two levels of sport is blurred there is an inevitable overlap in terms of coverage and it must be noted that one reason for concentrating on serious sport is that recreational sport has received far more attention from academic geographers (Patmore 1970, 1983).

Although a geography of sport is widely thought of as a recent branch of both geography and sports studies, there are a number of antecedents to the present interest in sport, space and place. The late nineteenth-century humanistic geographer, Elisée Reclus (1876), briefly alluded to English cricket – which greatly impressed him – in his monumental *Universal Geography*. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, went further and in 1911 alluded to a ‘Sporting Geography’, noting that ‘there is an athletic geography that may differ at times from a political geography’ (in Müller 2000). Recognising that not all nations were nation states, he urged that nations, not countries, should compete in the Olympics. Other antecedents of modern sports geography will be alluded to in the following chapters.

The writing – or as one might say in the twenty-first century, the ‘discourse’ – of sports geography has been undertaken by a variety of authors. Some are Geographers with a capital G, that is professional Geographers whose work is published in Geographical journals and who present their work at Geographical conferences. These fall into two groups. First, there are those who have concentrated their academic attention on the study of sports. John Rooney, a Geographer at Oklahoma State University to whom I will refer later, is generally regarded as the ‘father’ of modern sports geography and is an example of a scholar who built his reputation on sports-geographic writing. The majority of his publications have been in this field of study. Second, there are many Geographers who have alluded to sport – almost in passing or in infrequent publications – and in so doing have provided fascinating insights about it. For such writers, sport is mainly used to illustrate geographical ideas that form the central focus of their academic work. An example is one of the major Geographers in the USA, Allen Pred. He would hardly be regarded as a geographer of sport, but in two of his major publications he has utilised sports to illustrate his broader themes (Pred 1981, 1995). The same applies to the late Peter Gould who was, during the 1970s–1990s, one of the premier geographers in north America. He used examples from sports to illustrate several quantitative geographical methods (Gould 1999, Gattrell and Gould 1979, Gould and Greenwalt 1981). Additionally, David Harvey (e.g. 2000), arguably the world’s most famous geographer, has made at least some allusions to sport in his written work. The works of these, and other, scholars will be referred to in later chapters of this book.

However, some of best sports geography has been written by non-Geographers – academics in subjects such as History, Sociology or

Anthropology. A prime example is the cultural sociologist, Henning Eichberg (1998), whose work on sports space and the physical environment of sport have been of considerable influence in recent decades. Likewise, the anthropologist, Charles Springwood (1996), has brilliantly explored the baseball landscapes of two well-known American baseball places, Coopers-town and Dyersville, and provided fascinating insights into the 'meaning' of these places. A further example is Bartlett Giamatti (1989), the former President of Yale University whose sensitive treatment of the landscape of baseball makes his work a fine contribution to a cultural geography of sport. Finally, there are writers on sports-geographic themes who do not work within universities whose work should also be included within the discourse of sports geography. These range from respected journalists, architects and photographers, to 'zine' editors and members of the general public who contribute letters to them. Among them is Simon Inglis, whose substantial work on stadiums provides insights from an architect (1983) and a fan (2000).

As noted earlier, there is no one 'Sports Geography'. Its most prolific writers may have come from the USA, the UK, Canada, France, Australia, Italy and Sweden but this is not to say that in its broadest sense – and in its vernacular form in particular – it is solely a North American or European practice. In this book I will inevitably display a bias towards British examples, but I will not restrict myself to Europe and will try to include examples from as many continents of the world as possible. Integrating the literature on the geography of sport has been achieved by using broad theoretical frameworks in order to provide a structure, or skeleton, upon which the descriptive flesh of the real world can be draped. I do not seek in these pages to produce a theory of sports geography; if I have a conclusion it is that sport is becoming increasingly rational: more artificial, less like play and more like display. I argue that the geography of sport, its locations and landscapes, reflect these developments.

Perhaps the most obvious way to examine the geography of sport is to think of an individual sport (or sport *per se*) as originating at points in geographic space, spreading outwards from these initial areas to embrace regions, nations and in some cases the world, and hence forming a kind of regional pattern. During this period of geographical diffusion, which is still taking place in many sports, profound landscape changes have occurred, be they in the countryside or the city. Some landscapes have become sportscares, so momentous has been the impact of sport. Today sporting attributes, be they the distribution or density of clubs for participation or the ability to 'produce' star players, is far from evenly spread over the face of the earth. However, such distributions are not randomly arranged either and for this reason sports regions (areas identifying strongly with particular sports) can be recognised. Within the sports landscapes of the modern world facilities for sport, or the way in which sporting activity is arranged,

may be far from optimal. Their geographical sub-optimality may derive from the perspective of the profit-maximising sports entrepreneur or from that of the sports consumer. For this reason attempts can be made to produce geographically optimal or spatially equitable solutions to sports-geographic problems.

In brief, sports geography is concerned with the exploration of:

- 1 sports activity on the earth's surface and how the spatial distribution of sport has changed over time;
- 2 the changing character of the sports landscape and the symbiosis between the sports environment and those who participate in it; and
- 3 the making of prescriptions for spatial and environmental change in the sports environment.

Such explorations are undertaken at a variety of geographic scales, ranging from that of a sports stadium and the streets immediately around it to that of the world itself. In the chapters that follow, I include a number of 'vignettes' which serve to illustrate, in greater detail, examples of the sport-place nexus.

In Chapter 2 I outline how the geographical concepts of space and place are central not only to a definition of sport but also to an enhanced understanding of sport's significance. The spatial character of sport helps distinguish it from activities such as play, recreation and work. In addition, place not only influences sporting outcomes but also provides a social anchor to which clubs can relate. Chapter 3 examines the growth of sport, not simply historically but also geographically. Historians of sport have recognised that sports took time not only to grow but also to spread from place to place. The spatial perspective adds much to our knowledge of the history of sport, how sports grew and how innovations in sports spread from their points of origin. The geographical diffusion of sport graphically illustrates the roles of imperialism and globalisation at the same time; the role of sport in imperialism cannot be ignored. Chapter 4 deals with regional variations in aspects of sports. This has been one of the most popular approaches to sports geography though it has become less significant in recent years. The sports region, i.e. an area identifying with a particular sport, is central to this approach and a focus on national differences in sport performance is frequently present when the world experiences festivals such as the Olympics or World Cup. Chapter 5 explores locational changes associated with sports and sports clubs. At the present time sports clubs are involved in a number of locational adjustments. Some relocate, be it to suburbs or to new regions; other clubs die out, a response perhaps to changing economic fortunes of the areas in which they are located; in other cases the balance of power in sport shifts from one region to another. Examples from several continents of the world are used to

illustrate these themes. Welfare–geographical impacts of sport are introduced in Chapter 6 where I discuss the contributions, both positive – in terms of income and psychic benefits created by sports, for example – and negative – in terms of various kinds of sports pollution, for example.

Chapter 7 focuses on what I term the landscapes of sport. As sport has developed it has, in some cases, produced distinctive sportscares – places designed specifically with sport in mind. In other cases the landscape impacts are temporary. Each of these examples is considered with evidence from sports on either side of the Atlantic. Chapter 8 examines what I term ‘imaginative geographies of sport’ – those images of sportsworld carried around in our heads or ‘constructed’ in texts of various kinds. Regional sports images may be stereotypes and it is incumbent upon the sports geographer to check their accuracy. This final chapter takes us into the world of the geographical imagination and brings sports geography nearer the realms of the humanities and cultural studies.

The aim of this book, as expressed earlier, is to draw together a scattered literature and in so doing to introduce students to a new perspective on both sport and geography. The present book is an introduction, but if it encourages either geographers or sports scientists to engage in further sports-geographic study it will have more than served its purpose.

Further reading

Readers of this book are likely to come from a variety of academic backgrounds. Those with a background in Geography may want to browse an extensive overview of Sports Studies. This can be done by consulting the essays in Jay Coakley and Eric Dunning (2000), *Handbook of Sports Studies*. Those with a background in Sports Studies wishing to explore current developments in Human Geography could read Paul Cloke, Philip Crang and Mark Goodwin (eds) (1999), *Introducing Human Geography*.

Chapter 2

The geographical bases of modern sport

Introduction

In the previous chapter I noted that space and place are two basic concepts that are central to both sport and geography. This chapter first examines *different ways of looking at the term 'sport'*, then proceeds to review the ways in which space and place impinge on sport, and *vice versa*. Particular emphasis is placed on the significance of space in the organisation of sport and on the symbolic significance of sport-space. I examine the pervasiveness of place-pride, the widespread existence of the home-field advantage, and the links between sport, place and politics. But I first turn to a brief consideration of the nature and definition of sport itself.

The basic approach adopted in this book is that formulated by the German scholar, Henning Eichberg (1998). Instead of using the word 'sport' in an unqualified or uncritical way and hence losing its analytical power, Eichberg uses the words 'body culture' or 'movement culture' to describe different configurations of particular bodily activities. Take, for example, running. This can assume at least three forms. Children, and less usually adults, engage spontaneously in playful running in fields or forest or on a beach for no other reason than *sheer enjoyment and freedom*. What they are doing often means something only to them. They obtain sensual pleasure from such an experience and stop when they feel tired. The old English words of frolic, gambol and disport come to mind in relation to this kind of running. Close to such apparently free running in childhood is a Zen of running (Rohé 1974) associated with the 'new sports' movement of 1960s California or the 'jogging revolution' of the 1980s. In its ideal form, this kind of running is playful, spontaneous, free. It is difficult to think of being *made* or forced to play. Such running does not seek to break records or improve fitness. Eichberg sees it as an 'aproductive' form of movement culture.

A second configuration of running can be seen in the world of 'keep fit', 'sport for all', physical education and military training. Here the aim of running is fitness, health, hygiene or 'wellness'. It is not playful running