The Sporting Life

VICTORIAN SPORTS AND GAMES

Nancy Fix Anderson

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Sally Mitchell, Series Editor

PRAEGER

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TO CLIFF

SERIES FOREWORD

Although the nineteenth century has almost faded from living memory—most people who heard firsthand stories from grandparents who grew up before 1900 have adult grandchildren by now—impressions of the Victorian world continue to influence both popular culture and public debates. These impressions may well be vivid yet contradictory. Many people, for example, believe that Victorian society was safe, family-centered, and stable because women could not work outside the home, although every census taken during the period records hundreds of thousands of female laborers in fields, factories, shops, and schools as well as more than a million domestic servants—often girls of 14 or 15—whose long and unregulated workdays created the comfortable leisured world we see in Merchant Ivory films. Yet it is also true that there were women who had no household duties and desperately wished for some purpose in life but found that social expectations and family pressure absolutely prohibited their presence in the workplace.

The goal of books in the Victorian Life and Times series is to explain and enrich the simple pictures that show only a partial truth. Although the Victorian period in Great Britain is often portrayed as peaceful, comfortable, and traditional, it was actually a time of truly breathtaking change. In 1837, when 18-year-old Victoria became queen, relatively few of England's people had ever traveled more than 10 miles from the place where they were born. Little more than half the population could read and write, children as young as five worked in factories and mines, and political power was entirely in the hands of a small minority of men who held property. By the time Queen Victoria died in 1901, railways provided fast and cheap transportation for both goods and people, telegraph messages sped to the far corners of the British Empire in minutes, education was compulsory, a man's religion (or lack of it) no longer barred him from sitting in Parliament, and women were not only wives and domestic servants but also physicians, dentists, elected school-board members,

telephone operators, and university lecturers. Virtually every aspect of life had been transformed either by technology or by the massive political and legal reforms that reshaped Parliament, elections, universities, the army, education, sanitation, public health, marriage, working conditions, trade unions, and civil and criminal law.

The continuing popularity of Victoriana among decorators and collectors, the strong market for historical novels and for mysteries set in the age of Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes, the new interest in books by George Eliot and Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins whenever one is presented on television, and the desire of amateur genealogists to discover the lives, as well as the names, of nineteenth-century British ancestors all reveal the need for accurate information about the period's social history and material culture. In the years since the first edition of my book *Daily Life in Victorian England* was published in 1996, I have been contacted by many people who want more detailed information about some area covered in that overview. Each book in the Victorian Life and Times series will focus on a single topic, describe changes during the period, and consider the differences between country and city, between industrial life and rural life, and above all, the differences made by class, social position, religion, tradition, gender, and economics. Each book is an original work, illustrated with drawings and pictures taken from Victorian sources, enriched by quotations from Victorian publications, based on current research, and written by a qualified scholar. All of the authors have doctoral degrees and many years' experience in teaching; they have been chosen not only for their academic qualifications but also for their ability to write clearly and to explain complex ideas to people without extensive background in the subject. Thus the books are authoritative and dependable but written in straightforward language; explanations are supplied whenever specialized terminology is used, and a bibliography lists resources for further information.

The Internet has made it possible for people who cannot visit archives and reference libraries to conduct serious family and historical research. Careful hobbyists and scholars have scanned large numbers of primary sources—nineteenth-century cookbooks, advice manuals, maps, city directories, magazines, sermons, church records, illustrated newspapers, guidebooks, political cartoons, photographs, paintings, published investigations of slum conditions and poor people's budgets, political essays, inventories of scientists' correspondence, and many other materials formerly accessible only to academic historians. Yet the World Wide Web also contains misleading documents and false information, even on educational sites created by students and enthusiasts who don't have the experience to put material in useful contexts. So far as possible, therefore, the bibliographies for books in the Victorian Life and Times series will also offer guidance on using publicly available electronic resources.

British Victorians created the central elements of twentieth and twenty-first century international sporting culture. Schools and colleges agreed on uniform rules for team games so they could compete against one another;

neighborhoods and factories and towns organized teams of their own; professional players began to earn a living through sports; governing bodies established leagues and championships. New pastimes such as swimming and mountaineering became popular. Women took part in both individual and competitive athletics. Even sports well established before 1800, such as cricket, horseracing, and boxing, were codified, regulated, and commercialized. Informal running and jumping contests were disciplined by regularization, training, and record-keeping. England's chief sports spread around the Empire and international contests arose, including the first modern Olympic Games.

In tracing this history, Nancy Fix Anderson also sets it in context, describing the influence of military traditions, religion, industrialization and urbanization. Victorians recognized the link between exercise and health as well as the value of organized sports as an outlet for social unrest. Issues of class, gender, and region all came into play. In addition to its valuable overviews and useful chronology, *The Sporting Life: Victorian Sports and Games* draws on the sporting press (itself a Victorian innovation) for copious illustrations, exciting narratives, and stories of major sporting heroes.

Sally Mitchell, Series Editor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing about Victorian sports has been a most enjoyable experience. Victorian that I am, I could rationalize my pleasure in terms of the historical importance of the topic. Certainly adding to the enjoyment has been the tremendous assistance I have received from so many people. I am especially indebted to Sally Mitchell, the editor of the Victorian Life and Times series. Sally's wise guidance, insightful suggestions, warm encouragement, and amazing patience sustained me throughout the project. The staffs of many libraries also helped me greatly in my research. I am particularly grateful to the staffs at the Widener and Houghton Libraries at Harvard University, the Rare Book Room of the Boston Public Library, the Athenaeum Library in Boston, the Trinity University Library, the Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, the University of Texas Perry-Castañeda Library, and the interlibrary loan office of the San Antonio Public Library.

I could not have written this book without the assistance that Donene Williams gave me in getting access to many of the Victorian periodicals and newspapers, for which I am most appreciative. As I worked through the complexities of Victorian sports, Michael Anderson was a great help and inspiration, especially with his knowledge of and passion for English football. Michael taught me not only to understand, but also to enjoy the game that Americans call soccer, a pleasure augmented by Jackson Anderson's patient attempts to teach me to play the game. I thank them both, and also Abigail Williams and Carter Williams for their humor and understanding when I would talk what must have seemed incessantly about the delights of Victorian sports. I am grateful to Kathryn Anderson and Donald Williams, for the logistical support they gave me as I worked on this book. Most of all, I thank Cliff, my partner in writing this book, and in life.

INTRODUCTION

Victorian sports? An oxymoron? The Victorians, whose dominant middle-class social ethos was shaped by industrial capitalism, are characteristically known as the exponents of values that seem the antithesis of sports. Did a society that espoused work, seriousness, utility, duty, distrust of leisure, and rationality, have the time and motivation to play, much less to exalt sport into a new religion, making it a central part of its culture and way of life? That is indeed what the hardworking, serious-minded Victorians did. They reshaped their traditional sports, eliminating some while modernizing others, and created new sports, with their games so penetrating all layers of their society, that the English became known throughout the world as a sports-playing nation.

What makes the history of sports in nineteenth-century England so fascinating is the way the Victorians were able to use sports to promote their distinctive bourgeois ethos, even as sports subverted those values. The evangelical and utilitarian shapers of these values saw in competitive physical games a means of promoting their goals of virtuous straitlaced living, but in so doing, they inadvertently endorsed an ethic of play that was enjoyed for its own sake. Sports were used as markers of class, but when sports drew participants from mixed economic levels, class segregation lessened. In a society focused on maintaining strictly differentiated gender personalities and roles, sports were used to define masculinity, but as women increasingly by the end of the century began kicking balls and picking up rackets, the definitions of masculinity and femininity were forced to change. Finally, imperial administrators and soldiers used sports as an emblem of their distinctive and presumed superior culture and their right to rule, but when the colonized peoples took up the English games, they challenged English superiority on the playing field even as some would do on the battlefield.

Sports are an important and intriguing subject of study in most cultures, but especially so in nineteenth-century England. Sports provide a prism through

which to view the spectrum of Victorian society, offering insights into the complexities of class and gender and the diversities of region. The study of their sports reinforces the caution against overgeneralizations about Victorian society and highlights the tremendous changes during Queen Victoria's long reign, so that what it meant to be "Victorian" in 1837 was profoundly different than in 1901.

In this survey of the development of Victorian sports, the focus will be on England. The Celtic nations in the United Kingdom—Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—will be discussed in Chapter 8, as part of the larger examination of the diffusion of English sports in the empire and throughout the world. The term "British," inclusive of the whole British Isles, is used in reference to the Empire, but even in the discussions of the spread of sports throughout the British Empire, the emphasis is on English sports. To further limit the scope of this vast subject of the Victorian sporting life, in this book the sports that are discussed are those of physical competition—between people, and people against animals (as in hunting, shooting, and fishing), nature (as in mountain climbing), and one's self (such as beating one's own record), and also, using a looser definition, contests between animals (such as cockfighting and bull-baiting). Physical recreations, such as swimming and cycling, are also included, because the Victorians turned these activities into competitions. Nonphysical competitions, such as billiards and chess, are not included, even though the Victorians often considered these games "sports."

Because sports were such an important part of Victorian life, sources for this book abound. With the dramatic expansion of publications in nineteenth-century England, the voluminous number of mainstream journals and magazines as well as the specialized sporting press provide rich and diverse views on the role and meaning of sports in Victorian England. Many of these periodicals are now digitized and online, in collections available usually through subscription. Memoirs and letters, as well as novels and even poetry, are infused with sporting stories and themes. Scholars in Victorian England took sports seriously as a subject for academic study, and their historical, anthropological, and sociological studies provide modern historians with insights into the mind-set and values of the scholars as well as information from the scholars' research. The challenge, therefore, in writing on the sporting life in Victorian England is that there is so much material and the subject is so broad. This book thus aims at synthesizing the major developments in nineteenth-century English sports, presenting the sports as the Victorians experienced them in their play and competitions and showing how the sports both mirrored and changed Victorian society.

Chapter 1 is a survey of the pre-Victorian sporting world, from medieval village recreations to the seventeenth-century English Civil War, in which sports were a significant point of contention between the King and Parliament, Royalists and the Puritans. With the suppression of sports as a defining characteristic of the Interregnum (1649–1660) under the rule of the Puritan Oliver

Cromwell, the celebrations of the restoration of the monarchy in the late-seventeenth century were made all the merrier with the return of the games. Sports in the eighteenth century reflected that Age of Aristocracy, in which the wealthy leisured classes enjoyed their sporting pleasures without guilt, and villagers played without concern for justifications other than fun. One could hunt animals (with the landowners protecting their prey from lower-class interlopers with strict game laws) or indulge the pleasure of vicarious violence and the passion for gambling in watching cockfighting or bull-baiting, pleasures that cut across class lines. Balls could be batted or kicked or bowled on the open village greens, and the use of one's bare knuckles in pugilistic contests could be enjoyed without discord.

Chapter 2 discusses the impact on sports of the economic and social transformations of industrialization and urbanization that began in the late-eighteenth century, and that changed the social milieu as well as physical landscape of England. With the rise of the industrial middle classes, the new ideologies of evangelicalism and utilitarianism, so consonant with the emerging bourgeois values, reshaped English society, creating what is simply called "Victorianism." Even before the young Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, traditional sports were condemned as immoral or a waste of time. In that age of fear of revolution by contagion from France and looming in England in industrial and agricultural protests, sports were seen as dangerous occasions for the gathering of crowds, often unruly and potentially violent. Social pressure and parliamentary laws served to ban many traditional sports, while the loss of green space and working-class leisure in urban areas effectively restricted outdoor play and games. The aristocratic and gentry classes managed to escape the bourgeois condemnation of sports as well as the consequences of urbanization, as they continued to enjoy their rural field sports of hunting foxes and shooting birds, so that well into the nineteenth century the word "sports" implied "field sports." They also had land that they could dedicate to playing fields, in order to continue batting cricket balls, even as they commonly used servants or hired hands for the more menial task of bowling the ball. Furthermore, they continued to enjoy the spectator sport of horseracing, the "king of sports," which gratified not so much the love of equestrianism as the passion for gambling.

Even though the early middle-class Victorians, espousing evangelical ethics and utilitarian values, at first condemned sports, by the late-1830s and 1840s many came to see the moral and utilitarian values of organized, controlled team play. As shown in Chapter 3, these values were first demonstrated in the elite public schools such as Eton and Rugby, where unruly, rambunctious boys were turned into Christian gentlemen through the rigors and discipline of sport. Cricket, football (soccer and rugby), rowing, and other vigorous sports could channel the aggressive and sexual energies of the boys into respectable, controlled behavior. Team sports were also seen as vital in training boys in the leadership and cooperative skills needed for military success. The Duke of Wellington never said that the battle of Waterloo was won on the

playing fields of Eton, but he was so often quoted throughout the nineteenth century as saying it, that that justification for sports took on a life of its own.

Chapter 4 examines the ways that, just as sports served to channel youthful energies and sublimate sexual drives, so they did also for adult Victorians. Characteristically racked by anxieties from sexual repression (or the guilt from failure of repression), many Victorians also suffered from religious doubts, the pressures of work in the economic world of laissez-faire industrial capitalism, health concerns that bordered on hypochondria, and other unsettling emotional concerns. Emotionally stressed, one could join the newly formed Alpine Club and go mountain climbing, with exertion and physical challenge calming the restless soul. The sweat from playing on the cricket field or rowing on the Thames could wash away the tensions of daily life. The shooting of birds and other animals or sparring in boxing could deflect strong aggressive feelings that were useful in business but also dangerous if not controlled.

To maintain order and discipline in their play and especially in that of the working classes, middle-class Victorians developed the concept of "rational recreation," which suggested a higher purpose than pure pleasure. One went to the seaside to swim for reasons of health, not to enjoy the exercise. A man should learn to box in case he had to defend himself or a helpless woman from attack. Cricket should be played to develop one's moral character, not to delight in physical play and competition.

One of the most important justifications of sports in mid-Victorian England was the argument that physical competitive exertion strengthened masculinity in men, whom it was feared were weakened by the sedentary lifestyles of modern industrialism. Concerned to maintain sharp differences between men and women, the Victorians were anxious that with machines replacing muscles in doing work, men were becoming effeminate. With women by the mid-century starting to organize to demand more rights and responsibilities in the public sphere, men felt threatened and could use sports as a way to asset their power, physical strength, and right to dominate. Perhaps the most frequently used word to justify sports was "manly." This focus on the manliness of sports, which encouraged male sporting recreations, tended, on the other hand, to inhibit the participation of women in most sports until the last part of the century.

The "manliness" of sports bolstered not just Victorian social but also religious patriarchy. Responding to the concern that Christianity was becoming feminized, and that such ethics as turning the other check were signs of weakness inconsonant with the values of the Victorian economic world, the movement of "Muscular Christianity" was developed. Arguing that Jesus was a "real man," who probably would have excelled on the playing field, muscular Christians linked religion with the ethics of sports. In a practical sense, to counter the increasing temptations of the secular world, churches introduced sports into their social activities as a way to bring more people into the religious fold, and they often fielded their own teams in sports competitions. Organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), founded

in London in 1844 to nurture increased spiritual observances especially among the industrial poor, soon included sporting programs in their activities, promoting the ideal of the muscular Christian.

With the tremendous expansion of sporting activity in the 1860s and 1870s, Chapter 5 discusses what has truly been called a "sporting revolution." With the increasing number of sporting competitions, it was necessary that rules be standardized and that governing bodies be established to govern the sports. The rougher sports were also to some extent tamed—for example, the 1867 Marquess of Queensberry rules of boxing required use of gloves rather than bare knuckles and hacking was banned in rugby—but not too much lest they lose their manly appeal.

This sporting revolution was significantly aided by the technological progress of the nineteenth century. Railways allowed players and spectators to travel to competitions outside one's local area. The telegraph provided news about match results which could therefore be known quickly throughout the nation. Improvement in printing presses and paper made possible the expansion of newspapers, which usually had sports sections, as well as the publication of separate sports journals and magazines. The mass production of sporting equipment further promoted standardization and commercialization of sports. With the spread of sporting competitions in organized leagues, the rivalries between teams, and the popular adulation of new sports heroes, all accentuated by hype from the sporting press, promoters came to realize that large amounts of money could be made by enclosing sports arenas and charging admission for spectators. Sports became big business by the late-nineteenth century.

Another aspect of the sporting revolution was the spread of competitive organized sports to the working classes, as players and as spectators. With more leisure time by the 1870s, when bank holidays and half-days of work on Saturday became standard, working-class men could more easily participate in sports. Industries organized factory teams to promote loyalty among the workers. Better to kick the football than to go on strike. The resulting blurring of class lines in sport participation, however, created almost as much anxiety among the propertied classes as did the threat of blurring of gender roles. There was upper-class resentment when easier transport gave urban middle-class men access to the shooting and hunting recreations that had been the province of the landowning classes. More threatening to the class structure, however, was the participation of working-class men in games with or against the privileged, be it cricket, soccer and rugby football, rowing, or other sports.

Unsettling class lines, by the late-nineteenth century sports also caused a revolution in the lives of Victorian women, the subject of Chapter 6. As part of the larger revolt of women against the restrictions of patriarchy, some women came to demand physical as well as legal and political emancipation. Beginning with gymnastics in girls' schools, introduced to counter the disastrous effects on middle-class female health of their restricted lifestyle, girls and then women began to enjoy the pleasures of physical activity and the

competition and sociability of sports. Respectable Victorian society approved the first forays into the sporting life, with the introduction of such tame non-contact games as croquet and archery, and then the new game of lawn tennis, which, although competitive, could be played in a ladylike way. But, as the defenders of patriarchy had direly warned, let women walk a block and they will try to run a mile. Some women even played the quintessentially male sports of cricket, rowing, and football (soccer, but rarely rugby.) Most liberating of all was their adoption of the new sporting vehicle of the bicycle. Through sports, women violated the expected social decorum by sweating, struggling, competing, all qualities that had defined manliness. The New Woman of the 1890s was indeed a New Sportswoman.

Working-class sportsmen, with their bank holidays and half-Saturdays, could spectate at sports. It was more difficult, however, with their full-time jobs, to have the time as players to practice, which was increasingly necessary as team competition became more intense. Skilled players, who were recruited for teams eager to win championships, began to demand compensation for lost work time, and then, for the right to be paid for the sporting labor itself. Chapter 7 explains the contentious movement towards professionalization in some sports, and the resistance in others. The privileged classes, defending the ideal of the amateur, were repulsed by the idea of payment for play. Just as unpaid service as a member of Parliament was maintained as the mark of an English gentleman, so also was the ideal of the amateur sportsman passionately if unsuccessfully defended against professional (often a code for working-class) encroachment. Some sports associations—such as the Football Association, regulating "soccer"—gave up and allowed professionalism. Cricket had earlier evolved a compromise in the form of separating players into amateur "Gentlemen" and paid "Players." The Rugby Football Union refused to allow professionals, causing a split and the formation of a separate rugby association that did allow payments. Even amateurs managed, however, often to make a large income from their sport, through product endorsements in advertising, compensation for "lost time," and, the easiest of all to exaggerate, for expenses.

Perhaps the most intriguing and certainly most historically significant development in Victorian sports, the export of the English games throughout the world, is discussed in Chapter 8. Having regulated, organized, innovated, and expanded sports at home in the nineteenth century, making them a central part of their social life, the Victorians then took their games with them on their imperial adventures, which culminated in the 1890s with the New Imperialism. Sports were important for colonial armies to maintain physical fitness and to alleviate boredom. They were also a symbol of national identity. Whether one was in the heart of Africa, or in the Deccan of India, a soldier could don his whites and play cricket with his compatriots, affirming that yes, he is an Englishman. Similarly traders in all parts of the world could entertain themselves and maintain their identity (always with a sense of superiority) by playing English sports. They began, however, to include the colonized elites into their games, as a way of winning allegiance, and then the sports

spread to the common populace. It was easy at first to play their games with just the "white" parts of the empire. White Australians playing cricket did not rouse imperial alarms, at least until Australian teams started beating the English ones. But when brown-skinned Indians began playing and winning at cricket, and black-skinned Brazilians (as part of the economic "informal" British Empire), took up with vigor and success the game of soccer football, the English sense of superiority and imperial entitlement was threatened. In the twentieth century, the British Empire declined and eventually fell, but it left a legacy to the world of parliamentary government, common law, and importantly, modern sports. Most of the sports in modern athletic competitions, such as the soccer World Cup, cricket Test matches, and especially the summer Olympic Games, are English in origin, the products of the rationalized, systematized, vibrant, and creative sporting life of the Victorians.