

The Social Roles of Sport in Caribbean Societies



Edited by
Michael A. Malec

Gordon and Breach Publishers

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Boston College
Massachusetts

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The purpose of this series is to provide a forum in which the major themes and trends affecting the entire Caribbean region will be explored in depth. Thus, while the island-specific approach is not eschewed, the aim is to develop perspectives on problem-solving in the area as an entirety, both on the local level and in the international context. Hence the emphasis is on the qualitative and quantitative interpretation of the economic and political culture in which the modern Caribbean operates. Historical, demographical and sociological issues, when relevant to the central focus of the series, will also be examined.

Caribbean Studies publishes the research of academic scholars working within the region, as well as Caribbeanists working internationally. Simultaneously, it is hoped that the volumes function as a reference data source for libraries, foundations and government agencies with an interest in the Caribbean, either exclusively or peripherally.

It is the editors' hope that the series will increase comprehensive Caribbean studies internationally and will similarly stimulate innovative research and development of methodology suitable to comparative perspectives. Only when the Caribbean is evaluated in its broadest panorama can the true global importance of the region be appreciated.

PREFACE

Little has been written about sports in the Caribbean from the perspectives of the social sciences. In this volume, scholars from the fields of anthropology, economics, government, and sociology cast their critical eyes on the social institution of sport as it exists in the Caribbean. Baseball, basketball, cricket, football, horse racing, and other sports are examined. The paragraphs below give the reader some idea of what will follow.

Half of the articles in this volume are reproduced with only minor changes from the May 1990 issue of *The Arena Revue* (vol. 14, no. 1). The others (notably those by Anderson, Cummings, McCree, St. Pierre, and Yelvington) have been considerably revised and updated. Michael A. Malec's opening comments set the stage by discussing how social scientists might view sport as a social institution. This chapter shows how sport is connected to other aspects of society—race, politics, culture—and provides a sense of some different social science perspectives on sport.

The next three articles focus on what some would describe as the “national sport” of the Caribbean—cricket. Kevin A. Yelvington begins this section by looking at the role of cricket in the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean. Tackling the flourishing theme in anthropology of the nature of culture under colonialism, he pushes the agenda of the study of the culture of colonialism forward in four main directions. First, he looks at a relatively neglected subject in this *genre*, the role of sport and games generally. Second, rather than an exclusive focus on colonialism *per se*, Yelvington considers the links between colonialism and its legacies in order to explicate both cultural-political forms. Third, by implication, this entails a consideration of the postcolonial order, which everywhere in the postcolonial world is stamped with nationalism. And finally, he assesses the role sport plays in the resistance to colonialism. As a case study to illuminate these theoretical concerns the author uses ethnic politics in postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago and the 1976 Indian cricket tour to the Caribbean. He shows the ways in which sport becomes used in purveying postcolonial nationalism and,

conversely, the ways in which sport is used as a means of cultural and political resistance.

In chapter 3, Maurice St. Pierre examines West Indian cricket against the backdrop of Durkheim's notion of a "social fact." Accordingly, the adaptation hypothesis that views cricket's acceptance in the West Indies as primarily the result of its imposition "from above," that is by the colonial power, is rejected in favor of the argument that the game reflects many basic values and practices which are endemic in the region's cultural fabric. Cricket's continuing and increasing popularity, St. Pierre argues, is explainable not merely as a syncretic variant of West Indian culture, but also because it satisfies a number of needs for the masses, players, and politicians, as well as the former colonial power.

Finally Christine Cummings further examines cricket's unique place in so many Caribbean societies. She does this by presenting a brief history of Caribbean cricket and cricketers. She then, in detail, examines how the form and content of colonial cricket ideology, with racism as the linchpin, ritualized the realities of colonial society. Cummings shows that as the myths promoted by colonial interests were shattered, reformist ideologies associated with cricket evolved. She analyzes the ideologies associated with West Indies cricket, their evolution of particular points in history, and their appropriate connections to strategies of development. The author points to some of the contradictory aspects of reformist ideologies and links these to national, regional, and international political, socioeconomic, and development strategies. She concludes that the ideologies of cricket can be used to develop other spheres of Caribbean society.

Chapters 5-7 might be grouped around the concept of socialization. In chapter 5, Beverley J. Anderson argues that social inequality based on gender is present to some degree in all societies. In an attempt to provide some explanation for this phenomenon, she examines whether boyhood socialization into sport prepares males for later occupational success while girlhood socialization into play activities inhibits the advancement of females. In the United States some evidence in support of this thesis has been presented. In this chapter, Anderson looks at this relationship in Jamaica in order to determine to what extent corollaries are appropriate. She also asks if other factors exist in Jamaica that are more relevant to the issues of gender-based inequalities. She presents tentative findings that suggest that variables other than childhood sports socialization operate in Jamaica. Her conclusion is that Jamaican women may have the ability to challenge the status quo in a manner more timely and effective than their United States counterparts.

Conventional thinking among major league baseball administrators looks at ballplayers as either "coachable" or not ("head cases"). In chapter

6, Alan M. Klein's investigation of baseball academies for rookies in the Dominican Republic suggests a third category—"head strong" that is often lumped in the head cases. These labels are used to reward traits deemed desirable and punish those that are not, but these are not simply idiosyncratic deliberations. They include notions of race, class, and culture. The primary institution for the preparation of Dominican talent, the baseball academy, is critically examined as it re-socializes its charges so that they reflect the club's behavioral expectations.

In chapter 7, Roy L. Austin provides both a personal reminiscence and an insightful analysis of a subculture of sport. He uses the influential theory of illegal human behavior known as opportunity theory as a framework for understanding the development of athletic ability. His study concentrates on Colts, an exceptionally successful football (soccer) team on the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. Almost all of these footballers were reared in lower status homes in lowly regarded neighborhoods. But they had ready access to a playing field, "The Park," that was frequently used for major sporting events. Because of a positive evaluation of sports in the neighborhood, restricted opportunities, and the importance of feelings of competence and the joy of winning in some endeavor, Colts players had spent untold hours in football in their formative years. On The Park, they were exposed to and later joined in pick-up games with talented players. This favorable environment for the development of football skills better accounts for their prowess in this sport than anticipation of future escape from economic deprivation.

Chapters 8–11 look at different aspects of Caribbean sport. Roy D. McCree's chapter describes and analyzes the Point Fortin Civic Centre football team, the Hawks basketball team, and the Jets track and field squad as they existed in the 1970s and for part of the early 1980s, when they were leading forces in national competition. However, in the 1980s and almost simultaneously, the teams underwent a process of serious decline. McCree examines this decline and demise, and pressures, constraints, limitations, choices, and possibilities faced by athletes and sport officials in their involvement in sport at the community level. His chapter is based primarily on data derived from a study carried out in 1987 in the community of Point Fortin. An earlier version of this chapter was published in *The Arena Review* in 1990. In this volume, the original study has been updated to include certain developments that occurred in the community from 1987 to 1993.

In chapter 9, Jay R. Mandle and Joan D. Mandle analyze the social consequences of basketball in the English-speaking Caribbean. Two variants of Marxist thought, "repressive" and "liberatory" Marxism, are examined with respect to their usefulness in understanding the role of the

sport in the Caribbean. The authors conclude that neither theory, both of which focus on the macro-political consequences of sport, adequately captures the role of basketball in the region. Rather, the Mandles posit that basketball is a part of popular culture which constitutes "open space." Basketball as an open space has two important social consequences for the individuals and groups involved: It does not represent or contribute to the repression of non-elites by either the ruling class or neo-imperialist powers, and basketball does not constitute or embody a challenge to ruling class dominance on the part of the poor who play the game.

John Sugden, Alan Tomlinson, and Eamon McCartan provide, in chapter 10, a look at sport in Cuba. They focus on the notion of "massivity" in sport, an idea that expands on the theme of "sport for all" to embrace the values of health and fitness for the entire population. They describe the organizational structure of sport in Cuba, examine how sport is tied to the Cuban political system, and look at the special role of Fidel Castro in shaping Cuban sport.

In the final chapter, John R. Mitrano and Robbin E. Smith examine how horse racing in St. Croix functioned to help repair the islands's "social fabric" and maintain a sense of community in the intermediate period following the destruction by Hurricane Hugo in 1989. By studying the functions of horse racing in St. Croix, they add to an area of research that has been largely omitted—the potential role of sport in maintaining a sense of community cohesion during a particularly unsettling period. This chapter highlights a popular Crucian sport that has received little attention and demonstrates the importance of sport and recreation in a Caribbean community. Finally, they document the effects that natural disasters have on sport and recreational facilities and sport programming.

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CHAPTER 1

NEGLECTED FIELDS: SPORTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

Michael A. Malec

INTRODUCTION

The essays in this volume cover a variety of sports: the emphases are on baseball, basketball, cricket, football (soccer), and horse racing, but other sports are dealt with indirectly or in passing. The essays cover sports played in several specific locales: Barbados, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, St. Vincent, and St. Croix, as well as the Caribbean region generally. Although there is no clear organizational, pedagogical, or thematic reason for the selection of particular sports or locales, all of the essays do have some elements in common, as the title of this volume indicates.

The following essays are concerned with the *social* aspects of sport. While some of the essays were written by scholars in the fields of anthropology, economics, government, and physical education, most were written by sociologists. How do these scholars help us to understand the social aspects of sport? Let us consider several possibilities.

Sports and Race

In 1990, I visited the training camps, of among others, the women's national volleyball and synchronized swimming teams in Cuba. I noticed that the volleyballers were black (11 of 12) and the swimmers were not (none of 24). In three separate interviews, I asked the swimming coach, an administrator of the national training center, and my translator why there

was this seeming racial disparity in the composition of the two squads. All three answers were essentially the same. "Our researchers have found," I was told, "that there are systematic differences in the bodies of blacks and whites. They have different biotypes. The black volleyballers have quicker reflexes; the white swimmers are more buoyant." All of this was said matter-of-factly, with reference to scientific studies conducted by Cuban sport physiologists. Unlike what happened in the United States only two or three years earlier, no one was fired for expressing racist views.

Are Cubans more racist than North Americans? Are there biological differences between black and white athletes? Are there innate intellectual (or other) differences between blacks and whites? A sociological approach to the questions of race in sport should be able to shed some light on these questions. While we do not propose to answer these questions in this volume—but note that several chapters in this book point to the impact of race on cricket and other sports—interested readers should seek out some of the many books and articles that have been written on this topic.

Sports and Politics

In 1980, the United States and many of its allies boycotted the summer Olympic Games held in Moscow. This was done because the United States government wanted to protest in a very public manner, a manner that would attract special attention, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Four years later, the Soviets and some of their allies boycotted the summer Olympic games held in Los Angeles. This was done, said the Soviets, because the Americans could not guarantee the Soviets protection from terrorist attacks. Neither in 1980 nor in 1984 did the American or Soviet athletes have much of a voice in the determination of their governments' policies. In the history of sport, what is unusual about these two actions is only their size and venues. The sports boycott has become a standard diplomatic tool in the modern world. Why can't the games be left to the players? Should the games be left to the players? To whom do the games "belong"? A study of the connections between sport and politics will help us to understand these issues more fully. While not focusing on the Olympics, several of the articles in this volume do address questions dealing with sports and politics.

Sports and Societies

The examples above raise challenging questions for anyone who is interested in sports as well as for anyone who is interested in sociology or,

more generally, for anyone who seeks to understand how and why we humans behave in social settings, in societies.

The man or woman who loves sport, whether as a participant, a spectator, or a fan, ought not to limit his or her interest in sport to the playing of (or watching of or reading about) the game. Of course the athlete, spectator, and fan should enjoy the game. But if an athlete does not take the enjoyment of the game to another level, one that involves an attempt to *know*, to *understand*, to *study* the game, then the athlete will be less successful as an athlete. This knowledge, understanding, and study are essential elements of success since no sport is purely a physical activity. Every sport has within it some elements that are psychological, emotional, and social. And if the sport is in any way organized, it most probably has within it elements that are economic, political, religious, and educational. And all of the skills that the athlete possesses were acquired in environments that were composed of family, friends, coaches, referees, spectators, and opponents. The athlete, to be a better athlete, ought to study all of these elements.

As another example, consider the discus, a somewhat obscure object in the history of sport. Today, the discus used in international competition must be of a standard circumference, weight, and composition. But 2500 years ago, when the Greeks were heaving these strange objects through the air, they didn't particularly care whether my discus was heavier than yours, or of a different diameter. Yet it is important for us to study the various physical objects (discuses, javelins, boxing "gloves") used by the Greeks, Romans, and others in order to know something about the games that they played and the history that leads us to the games that we play. But even more important, I think, is the question: WHY do we require the discus to be of a standard weight, circumference, and composition, while the ancient Greeks felt that discuses could be of various sizes, shapes, and weights?

The scholar spends time studying the composition of the atom, or the causes of the Industrial Revolution, or the novels of VS Naipaul. These are worthy objects of study, and universities build them into their curricula. But are football, horse racing, and cricket worthy of similar study? Should a scholar "waste" time studying "mere" games? Should I be writing this book? Should you be reading it?

Clearly, I believe that the answer to the previous questions is a resounding YES. There are several reasons for this. First, any human activity is deserving of study, especially if that activity occupies a great deal of time and resources, as does sport. Second, significant generalizations

with implications for personal and societal conduct emerge from the study of sport. (See, for example, Cummings' work in Chapter 4.)

A third reason that justifies the scholarly study of sport is not so much the object of our study, but what we do with what we learn from our study. In this book, the object is sport. In some other textbook the object might be Caribbean economic systems, or aerodynamic engineering, or Homer's *Illiad* or Wolcott's *Omerus*. Each of these is a worthy object of study not only in and of itself, but also because we can *use* our knowledge of each of these objects in order to better ourselves, individually and collectively. Thus, while you could take a course on racism, or the family, or international politics, or human kinesiology because you are interested in or enjoy those subjects, you also take the course because in some sense you can also use your acquired knowledge to better yourself or your society. In studying sport, for example, we might look at the history of racism in North American professional baseball. Part of the reason for this aspect of our inquiry is because race has had and still has a profound influence on modern American sport. But if we confine our study of race and racism to sport alone, if we do not extend our knowledge of Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball, or of the emergence of the black cricketer in the Caribbean, beyond sport and into our everyday lives, then this book will be a failure.

The sociology of sport is a systematic study of how humans behave in social settings. That it happens to be "of" sport (or of the family, or of social problems, or of whatever) simply defines a focal point. The sociological content of our studies of sport ought to enable us to generalize to other areas of human social interaction. As Anderson points out in Chapter 5, learning about sexism in sports ought to teach us something about sexism in our societies, in our daily lives. To me, this book is first a *sociology* book, with perspectives that are different from those of history or literature or economics or psychology. The sociological perspective will borrow from these other perspectives wherever it is helpful. But we will "keep the focus on the socius." Finally, while this book consists mainly of essays in the *sociology of sport*, it is also, most importantly, a book about sport *in the Caribbean*.

WHAT WE STUDY: SOME DEFINITIONS

In Jamaica, an eight-year-old child is running along a road. She's having fun. She's playing. She is running just for the sake of running. There are

no competitors, no stop-watch. She is enjoying the breeze in her face, the smell of the countryside, the vague sense of awareness of how her muscles are propelling her through time and space.

On a playground in Trinidad, a basketball player drives to the basket. His team is down by a single point, and there are two seconds left in the game. Eight feet from the basket, his lane is blocked. He stops, fakes, pivots, jumps, shoots.

In Havana, a chess grand master is playing one of the most difficult matches of his career. His opponent is the newest computer, programmed to play chess as no other computer has ever done. The tension in the room is thick; the master is sweating profusely. He is aware that this game is between the greatest human chess player and the best computer program yet devised. Indeed, the computer's play seems almost human.

At home, I switch on the tube, looking for something to watch. My choices include (a) professional wrestling—on three different channels, (b) something called “The American Gladiators,” in which men and women flail at each other in a variety of mock combats, (c) a sports trivia call-in show, (d) a tape-delay broadcast of last year's “Mr. & Ms. Muscle Las Vegas” contest, and (e) the current variety of Roller Derby.

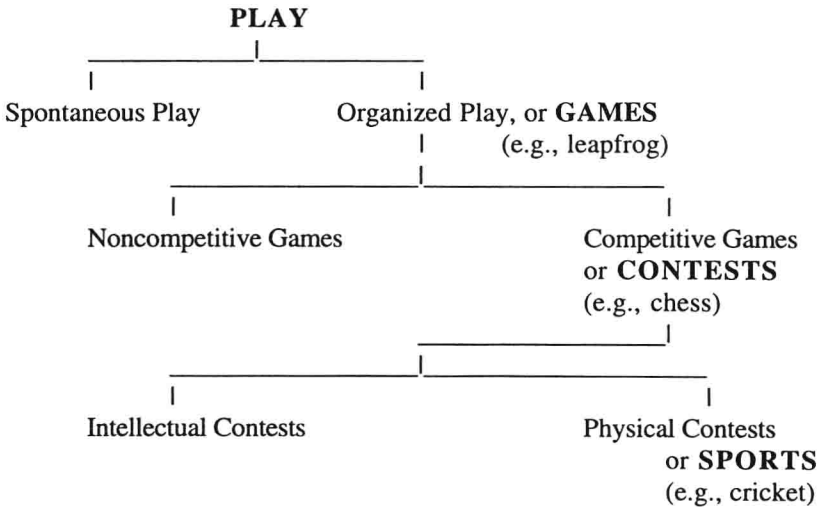
Of the activities in the above four paragraphs, which would you call “sport”? Allen Guttmann (1978) has proposed a set of distinctions among what he calls PLAY, GAMES, CONTESTS, and SPORTS. *Play*, he says, “is any non-utilitarian physical or intellectual activity pursued for its own sake.” The Jamaican child, above, is playing. She is running just to run. She has no opponent, neither human, nor a clock, nor some aspect of nature. Later in her life she might be identified as an athlete, she might compete in the Olympics, but for now, she, like children all over the world, is enjoying being a child, being at play. Her action is spontaneous, in the sense that it has no purpose except itself.

However, should her action (running) become organized, should her spontaneity become bound by rules, whether written or unwritten, whether simple or complex, her play will have changed into a game. A *game* is organized play. An example of a game is leapfrog. This is a physical activity that consists of running and leaping and being leaped over. It is joyful fun, but it is also bound by rules. These rules are very simple, and usually are not written down; the rules are learned informally. Children learn how to leap, who jumps over whom, and in what sequence. They cannot jump at random. They must jump from the rear. They must allow others to jump over them. These are some of the rules of the game.

Another aspect of leapfrog is that it is noncompetitive: it has no winner. But many games are structured so that there is a winner, so that the participants compete against each other or against the clock or against nature. A *contest* is a competitive game. The Jamaican girl is not competing against anyone, but should she become an Olympian, she would compete against others. The basketball player is competing. So too is the chess grand master. For each of these people there is competition, a contest. However, the chess player differs from the other two in that his activity, even though it requires a certain amount of physical energy and stamina, is essentially an intellectual, not a physical, contest. The same can be said of the tournament bridge player. Contestants in intellectual games are usually not called athletes. Their games are usually not called sports.

A *sport* is a physical contest. Those who compete in sports are called athletes. The basketball game and the chess match are similar in that both involve a competitor, both involve training and strategy, both result in a winner and loser. But one of these contests is essentially intellectual, the other is primarily physical.

These four types of activity are summarized in Figure 1:



Source: Adapted from Guttman (1978:9)

FIGURE 1: Play, Games, Contests, and Sports

And what about the various activities that I looked at on television? Is professional wrestling a sport? Few people would say it is. Note that its results are rarely covered in the sports pages of your daily newspaper, or on the evening news broadcast. Professional wrestling is not a sport because it is not a contest. There are no true winners and losers. The event is staged; it is a form of entertainment, or what Coakley (1994) calls a *spectacle*. The same can be said of roller derby and the gladiator show.

Is body-building a sport? Clearly, there is a contest with rules and winners and losers, and the outcome is not scripted, as in professional wrestling. It is essentially physical, not primarily intellectual. Even though most of the physical activity (the building of the bodies) is done prior to the competition, and despite the fact that the competition itself seems to be more of a spectacular display of a finished product of physical activity than a physical competition *per se*, if we use Guttman's typology, body building is a sport. Of course, Guttman's typology is not definitive, and scholars disagree as to the definition of terms such as play and sport.

WAYS OF APPROACHING THE STUDY OF SPORT

Even though sport, like any object of scholarly inquiry, is deserving of study for its own sake, most of us are not inclined to pursue a subject for that reason. More often, we become interested in knowledge if we can see a use for that knowledge, if that knowledge helps us to understand something about our universe, our society, or our self. The realm of sport contains many issues that need analysis and understanding, many problems that need resolution. These issues and problems can and should be approached from a variety of perspectives. Let us briefly consider a few of these.

Sports and Sociology

Sport is a social phenomenon. Even in our chess example above, the opponent is not the computer chips but the people who wrote the software. The emergence and development of sport depend on the emergence and development of society and of certain conditions in society, including religion, leisure time, and urbanization. To know something about sport, we must also know something about the kind of societies that develop and nurture sports. Why do we think of modern sport beginning in ancient Greece rather than China? Why did the modern concept of amateurism emerge in England rather than Argentina?