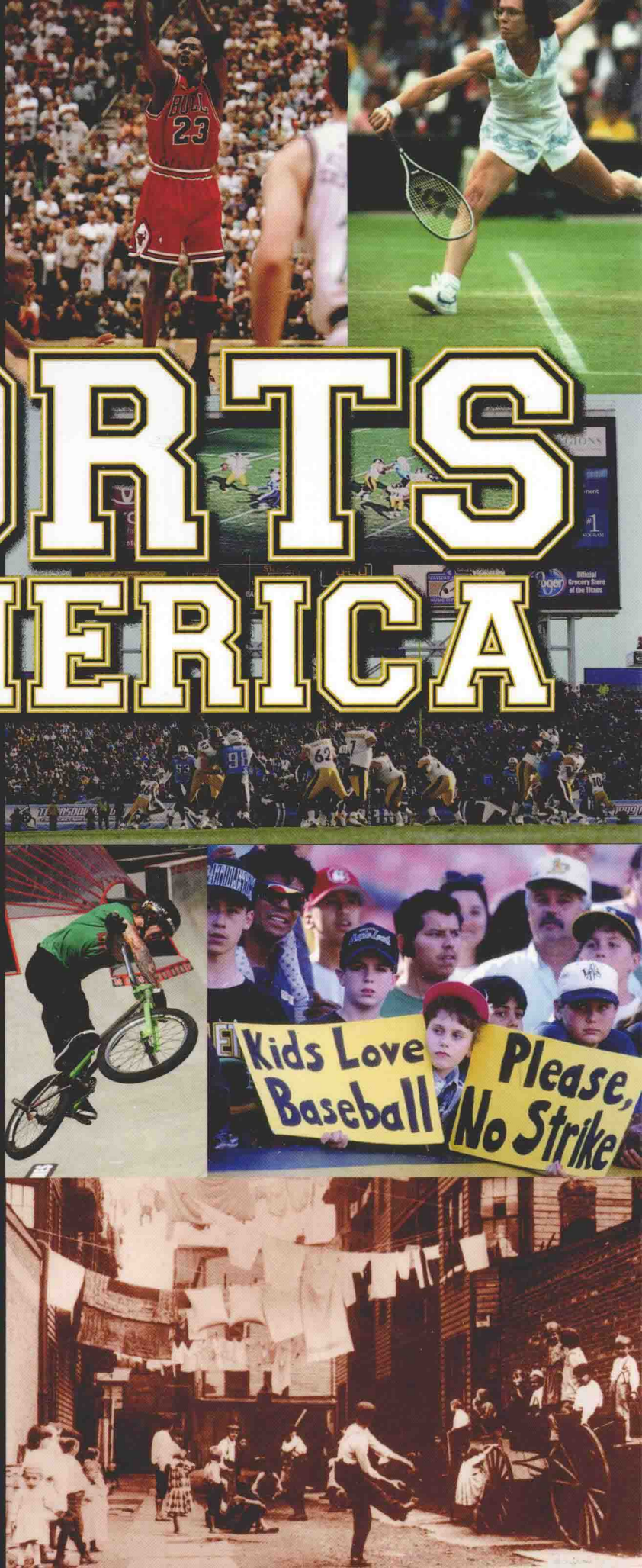


SPORTS IN AMERICA

FROM
COLONIAL TIMES
TO THE
TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY

STEVEN A. RIESS, EDITOR



SPORTS IN AMERICA

**FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA

VOLUME 2

STEVEN A. RIESS, EDITOR



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VOLUME 2



Gambling

Betting always has been an important element of North American sports, although it nearly always has raised questions of morality, and largely has been illegal. For most of American history, opportunities to make legal sports bets were limited to horse racing, and even that was restricted until the 1920s.

Off-track betting on horse races was legalized in New York in 1970, and some forms of betting on other sports are allowed in Nevada. However, these outlets have not satisfied the huge interest in sports betting, which remains a flourishing underground industry, some of it controlled by organized crime, but much of it informally established among friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

Colonial Gambling

Elite Virginia planters enjoyed gambling in the late seventeenth century, betting on nearly anything, including cards, billiards, and horse racing. Bets made directly between horsemen were considered legal contracts, and those who reneged on gambling debts could be sued in court. Gambling between social classes was frowned upon, lest poorer punters become impoverished. Among themselves, however, planters wagered huge amounts of tobacco and other valuables on races; as a result, by the mid-eighteenth century, some had lost their plantations.

Elsewhere, authorities banned gambling. Seventeenth-century Massachusetts Puritans abhorred gambling as a sin, because it was akin to coveting a neighbor's property, and because it allowed people to gain wealth without working for it. In Quaker-dominated Pennsylvania, the colonial assembly discouraged attendance at sporting contests in 1682 for fear of gambling. Gambling was an issue during the revolutionary era as well. In 1778, the Continental Congress passed a resolution to suppress racing and other gambling sports, which,

the delegates felt, contributed to idleness and dissipation. Gambling also was associated with aristocratic loyalists who opposed independence for the colonies, and thus it was considered unpatriotic.

Antebellum Sporting Fraternity and Gambling

Gambling was popular among the antebellum sporting fraternity, who bet on cockfights, billiards, boxing matches, pedestrian races, and horse races. While Northern moral leaders remained opposed to gambling as sinful and corrupting, there was little criticism of betting on horse races in the South or the West.

Boxing generally was illegal, but there were occasional underground bouts, accompanied by betting. In 1858, American heavyweight champion John Morrissey defended his title against John Henna for \$5,000 a side, with another \$250,000 bet on the outcome. Morrissey went on to become a pioneer in American gambling, operating casinos in New York City and Saratoga Springs, New York.

Robert Underwood sold the first auction pools on racing in New Orleans in 1855. In such pools, an "auctioneer" paid the track a fee to operate. Wagerers bid in an auction for the right to bet on a particular horse. The highest bidder selected his preferred horse, and then other bettors bid on other horses. The wagers went into a pot, less the auctioneer's 5 percent commission, with the person who bet on the winning horse receiving the money. This system was stacked toward wealthy bettors who could outbid others for the favorite horses, who won 40 percent of the time.

Morrissey's associates helped revive Northern racing with auction betting in 1866 at New York's Jerome Park. Five years later, the track introduced the more democratic pari-mutuel system, which required a minimum bet of just \$5, with Morrissey or former partner John F. Chamberlain in charge. Tickets were sold for every horse in a race, and the odds were figured out

after the race. Winning bettors split the pool, less a 5 percent commission. Park soon dropped this system, because big bettors disliked that their heavy wagers drove down the odds, while poorer bettors could not afford the minimum bet. However, pari-mutuel betting was legalized in Kentucky in 1878 and adopted at Louisville's Churchill Downs, and soon it was copied at tracks in Baltimore, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

Another system of betting was bookmaking, which began in England around 1840. Each bookmaker at the track advertised his odds on a slate, and clerks recorded the bets. This arrangement was popular among bettors who could not afford auction pools. The first American bookmakers operated in Philadelphia, where, shortly after the end of the Civil War, they took bets on cricket matches, regattas, and trotting contests, charging a 5 percent commission on winning bets.

In 1877, New York State banned auction pools in response to heavy betting on the close and scandal-ridden 1876 presidential election. In that election, neither Samuel J. Tilden nor Rutherford B. Hayes received a majority of undisputed votes in the Electoral College, throwing the decision to a special committee and postponing a decision until March 2. There was enormous betting on the outcome, with Morrissey alone holding stakes worth \$350,000. As it became clear that it would take months to determine the victor, Morrissey announced that all were bets off and returned the wagers, less a 2 percent service commission. The public was so irate that the state passed the Anti-Pool Selling Law, which spelled the end of auction pools at Jerome Park. As a result, the track's receipts dropped by two-thirds in one year, from \$71,061 to \$26,487.

The pools were replaced by bookmaking, which by the early 1880s had become the dominant form of betting at American race courses. However, bookmakers were not held in high esteem. They often shortened odds in their favor, raced their own horses under others' names, and fixed races by bribing jockeys and trainers. Reformers, notably Anthony Comstock of the Society for the Prevention of Vice, tried to have the bookmakers convicted, but they had little success. In 1887, New York's racing interests secured passage of the Ives Pool Law, which legalized gambling at racetracks but barred off-track betting.

By 1891, betting on races was estimated at \$200 million nationally, a vast sum for the time, with bookmakers paying more than \$2.5 million to operate at the tracks. Reformers remained resolute in their opposition to gambling and allied with others who were concerned

about the integrity of races, particularly at outlaw proprietary courses, such as Chicago's Garfield Park (1891–1892), popularly known as the “bookmakers' track.” These highly profitable and corrupt tracks were protected by political bosses, but reformers managed to close them down.

There were 314 tracks in 1890, but just 25 in 1908, by which time tracks located in such racing centers as Chicago, New Orleans, and St. Louis were closed. The state closed New York's tracks in 1910 (albeit briefly), leaving only Maryland and Kentucky with horse racing operations.

Off-Track Betting

While racetrack wagering was criticized widely, bettors at least were interested enough in the sport to attend the races and support the turf. However, off-track bettors generally were interested in gambling only. Though illegal, off-track gambling flourished in late-nineteenth-century betting parlors. The finest rooms were elegantly furnished, with readers announcing wire reports of race results and heavy security to protect them from criminals and police raids. Some operated virtually in the open, usually with police protection, while others were hidden in the backs of saloons or cigar stores.

Neighborhood bookmakers (also known as handbooks) served a working-class clientele at saloons and barbershops and in the streets. They offered convenience and credit, and usually paid at track odds. Poolroom owners and handbooks employed their connections to machine politicians and the underworld, which offered protection against raids, lenient treatment in the courts, access to bail and attorneys, cash, and the muscle to collect debts.

Off-track facilities mainly relied on the racing wire for information. Western Union sold information on sporting events to betting syndicates, poolrooms, and saloons. By 1904, Western Union's racing bureau brought in \$5 million, but moral opposition from major stockholders pushed the telegraph company out of the racing business a year later. New services emerged to provide race results over wires leased from Western Union, notably the Payne News Service of Cincinnati, Ohio, which soon developed a near monopoly. In 1909, Jacob “Mont” Tennes, its Chicago agent, started the rival General News Bureau, and within two years, he completely controlled the business.

Gambling syndicates in the 1890s also started to use telephones, first to warn poolrooms about impending raids, and later to distribute race results from a cen-

tral office to neighborhood bookmakers. Bookmakers did not take bets by telephone until the 1920s.

Race Horse Gambling in the Interwar Years

Thoroughbred racing experienced a dramatic revival in the 1920s and 1930s, when several states legalized on-track gambling. Legalization was popular with ethnic voters and supported by jockey clubs, breeders, and machine politicians. States were always in need of the additional revenues that legal betting could bring in, especially during the Great Depression.

The revived turf attracted major organized crime figures, who saw track ownership as glamorous, a symbol of success, and an opportunity to make legitimate money. It also was a business in which operators could skim or launder money, find jobs for gang members, facilitate illegal gambling, and fix races. Chicago Democrats even tried to legalize bookmaking in 1935, but Governor Henry Horner blocked them.

Racing Wire

In 1922, publisher Moe Annenberg bought the *Daily Racing Form* and turned it into the preeminent publication for bettors, providing detailed reports on horses and track conditions. Over the next decade, he bought the flourishing racing wire from Tennes and reorganized his operations as the National News Service, virtually monopolizing the reporting of race results throughout North America. Annenberg served about 15,000 bookies, earning \$2 million a year.

Annenberg went to jail for income tax evasion in 1940, receiving a fine of \$5 million. He had sold the National News Service the year before to his right-hand man, James Ragen, who partnered with mob-connected Cleveland taxicab mogul Arthur "Mickey" McBride; they reorganized the firm as the Continental News Service. The Chicago mob, led by Tony Accardo and Jake Guzik, tried unsuccessfully to muscle in on the business and established the rival Trans-American Publishing and News Service. In 1946, Ragen was assassinated, and Guzik's associates soon took over the business.

Gambling, Politics, and Professional Baseball

Despite its image as an all-American sport, baseball long has been tainted by gambling. Even before the National League was formed in 1876, leaders of profes-

sional baseball worried about gambling and fixed games, fearing that open betting would harm the sport's reputation. Baseball was thought to be different from boxing or racing, as it was believed that fans enjoyed the sport solely for its own sake, without needing to bet.

Nevertheless, late-nineteenth-century baseball offered many opportunities for betting with friends, in pools, or with a bookmaker. Bettors across the country wagered on the outcome of individual games or on which team would score the most runs. Punters could bet in pools arranged by bookmakers or fill out pool cards that listed the names of clubs or players, from which bettors chose which player would make the most (or fewest) hits or runs during the week. These pools were available at work and at such centers of the bachelor subculture as barbershops, billiard parlors, and tobacconists. There also were national pools that offered prizes of \$1,000 a week, earning weekly profits of more than \$30,000.

As early as 1900, rumors of fixed games began to circulate, but the public shrugged them off as impossible, believing that baseball was one of America's most reputable institutions. Then, in 1919, eight Chicago White Sox players were suspect of fixing the World Series. In 1921, the "Black Sox," as they were dubbed in the media, were indicted for conspiracy to defraud the public and to perpetrate a confidence game—but not for fixing the games, which was not a crime in Illinois at the time. The players involved ultimately were acquitted, but newly installed Commissioner of Baseball Kenesaw Mountain Landis, intent on cleaning up the sport's image, barred them all from organized baseball.

Even as some players were implicated in gambling conspiracies, owners were deeply connected to the industry. Indeed, baseball ownership represented an important nexus between urban machine politics and organized crime. Several early major league owners were involved in aspects of gambling, including Frank J. Farrell of the New York Highlanders (later the Yankees), a leader of New York's Gambling Trust, while Charles Stoneham of the New York Giants and Julius Fleischmann of the Cincinnati Reds both owned racing stables. Several owners had other nefarious connections, such as Stoneham, who was closely tied to mobster Arnold Rothstein. During the Great Depression, several franchise owners in the Negro National League were involved in the numbers business (illegal lotteries), including Gus Greenlee of the Pittsburgh Crawfords and Alex Pompez of the New York Cuban Stars.

Pro Football Owners and Bookmaking

As in baseball, some early National Football League (NFL) owners were heavily involved in gambling. In 1925, Tim Mara, a professional bookmaker, bought the New York Giants for \$500. Eight years later, Art Rooney, one of the biggest horse racing bettors in America, bought the NFL's Pittsburgh franchise for \$2,500. In 1946, racing wire operator McBride became owner of the Cleveland Browns of the All-America Football Conference.

Meanwhile, professional bookmakers got in on the popular collegiate game. In the 1930s, Chicago gamblers created pool cards for betting on college football, just as they had for baseball since the 1890s. Instead of betting on individual games, bettors could purchase a parlay card for 25 cents, which required them to pick at least five wins, but no losers or ties, from the bookmaker's list of nine highly competitive games. Parlay cards became popular on college campuses and in working-class neighborhoods and represented a \$5 million a year business by 1941.

Point Spread

In the mid-1930s, Leo Hirschfield made Minneapolis the national capital of gambling on college football and basketball and major league baseball by selling authoritative betting odds, known as the Minneapolis Line, to 8,000 bookmakers and the media for \$15–\$20 a week. He also published team scouting reports, a newsletter that analyzed upcoming games, and weekly touts sheets.

Hirschfield was not involved directly in gambling, as he only sold information. However, in 1961, new federal gambling laws redefined the betting line as the provision of any wagering information, forcing him into retirement. A new line came out of Las Vegas, where making odds still was legal, but not the taking of out-of-state bets. One of the top oddsmakers was "Jimmy the Greek" Snyder, who violated the new law in 1962, and thereafter became a syndicated columnist and later a commentator for CBS Sports, where he helped bring the point spread to a wider audience.

With the point spread, Snyder simply was popularizing a development made by Charles K. McNeil, a Chicago securities analyst and a professional bettor who opened his own book in the early 1940s. He introduced the "wholesale odds system," or point spread, based on

the ideas of veteran Chicago gambler Billy Hecht and Ed Curd, a renowned Kentucky gambler, to increase betting interest on apparent mismatches when bookmakers would not take bets. McNeil revolutionized this system by offering odds on both teams, evening out the betting by requiring the favorite to win by a certain margin—the point spread. The goal was to set the spread at a level that would ensure equal betting for both teams.

McNeil's innovation both stimulated interest in sports gambling and made bookmaking less risky. However, the point spread also made it easier to convince players to fix games, because they did not have to lose a game to aid the gambler.

Horse Racing Since 1945

By 1949, horse racing was permitted in 24 states and remained the most popular spectator sport for the next two decades. Thereafter, betting at tracks began a steady decline, with smaller attendances, smaller purses, and less state revenue, while illegal bookmaking boomed.

New York State responded by establishing the Off-Track Betting Corporation (OTB) in 1970 to bring in revenues and attract some of the illegal action. By 1974, OTB had more than 100 branches, serving more than 100,000 people daily and producing \$96 million in new revenues, which it shared with the tracks. At the same time, illegal betting on horses in New York rose by 62 percent. Still, it made up only 10 to 15 percent of all illegal betting, as it faced growing competition from gambling on team sports. The 1978 Interstate Horse Racing Act legalized simulcasts shown at tracks, casino race books, and OTB locations, which then included Illinois and Maryland. By 2002, legal betting at tracks totaled about \$2 billion, while off-track betting reached \$13 billion.

Meanwhile, after World War II, Congress became increasingly concerned about the close ties between gambling and organized crime. In 1950, the Senate Special Committee to Investigate Crime in Interstate Commerce, better known as the Kefauver Commission, after its chair, Tennessee Democrat Estes Kefauver, estimated that sports betting was a \$15 billion business and the main source of mob revenue. The committee concluded that organized crime would be undermined by halting interstate gambling via the racing wire. Ten years later, Western Union stopped the transmission of racing information over its wires and backed the Wire Act of 1961, which banned interstate transmission of wagering material, exempting print, radio, and television reporting.

But mob control of gambling already was declining by the early 1950s, as it was losing business to independent neighborhood bookmakers, who started out taking bets from acquaintances and relied on Hirschfield's betting service to set odds. By 1960, there were some 300,000 bookmakers; a decade later, it was estimated that nearly 60 percent of bookmakers were independents. Modestly financed bookmakers ran operations from their homes and businesses, directly paid off the police, communicated with clients by telephone, and got race results from television. Bookies generally kept about 9 percent of the winning bet—known as the “vig,” from the Yiddish word *vyigrysh*, meaning “winnings”—so bettors had to win on 52.8 percent of their bets in order to break even. Overall, bookmakers operated on a narrow 4.5 percent margin, compared to 50 percent in the numbers racket.

Legalized Sports Betting Since World War II

States were reticent to legalize sports betting despite the public's interest in gambling, fearing the political fallout and concerned about the social ills resulting from gambling. While Nevada legalized gambling in the 1930s, there was little wagering on sports elsewhere. In 1946, mobster Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel opened the first casino-based sports book at his Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas, but it remained a minor adjunct to the casino for years, especially after Congress imposed a 10 percent tax on winnings in 1951, a law that only encouraged illegal bookmaking. The Wire Act of 1961 made interstate betting and the transmission of racing information across state lines illegal, which further hindered legalized betting. However, underground betting flourished. Studies in the early 1970s found that bookmakers took in \$1 billion a year in sports wagers.

In 1974, Chicago bookmaker Frank “Lefty” Rosenthal took control of four mob-owned Las Vegas casinos. That year, a new federal law cut the sports betting tax to just 2 percent. A renowned oddsmaker, Rosenthal took advantage of the lower taxes to organize the first major casino sports book in 1975, helping to turn sports betting into a billion-dollar business. By 1990, Nevada's 74 licensed sports books were taking in \$1.8 billion in bets, about one-fifth of the total amount that Americans bet on sports, with the heaviest action on the Super Bowl and the National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament. The most recent federal law on sports betting was the Professional and

Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1994, which made sports betting illegal in all U.S. states except for Delaware, Nevada, and Oregon, where such betting already was allowed.

By the end of the century, bookmakers and casinos faced competition from the Internet. In 1997, stock traders Jay Cohen and Steve Schillinger established the World Sports Exchange (WSE) as a full-service Internet sports book that took wagers. They started on the Caribbean island of Antigua and in 18 months took in about \$5 million in sports bets, making a 5 to 10 percent profit. There are now offshore sports betting operations in Costa Rica, Curaçao, Grenada, and the Isle of Man in the United Kingdom.

By 2000, some 4.5 million Americans were gambling online, though Internet betting was opposed by casinos, racetracks and other legal gambling enterprises, and professional sports leagues. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted the operators of six Internet sports books, including WSE. Thirteen men pled guilty, while seven did not return to the United States to stand charges. Cohen stood for trial; he was found guilty and received a sentence of 21 months in prison.

Betting and the Corruption of Sport

As the Black Sox and other scandals indicate, the biggest problem that gambling posed to sports was the possibility of fixed games. Most bookmakers and bettors detested fixes—unless they were in on them—because that cheated them and destroyed public confidence in fair play. The public always was suspicious of boxing matches and horse races, and rightly so, but generally dismissed the possibility of fixes in team sports, because the cooperation of too many participants was needed to keep the plot quiet.

The Ring

The first fixed fight in the twentieth century likely was the 1900 bout between featherweight champion “Terrible Terry” McGovern and future lightweight star Joe Gans in Chicago. Lasting just two rounds, the fight was so obvious a fix that it led to the end of boxing in Chicago in 1904.

The widespread presence of the underworld in the sport during the 1920s only escalated the problem. Heavyweight champion Primo Carnera, controlled by bootlegger Owen “Owney” Madden and other gangsters, won several prearranged fights on his way to the

title. Nor are fixed fights entirely a thing of the distant past. Between 1987 and 1999, it was estimated that some 30 prizefights were fixed or tainted.

Boxing's underworld mastermind was Paul John "Frankie" Carbo, whose lengthy criminal record prevented him from becoming a licensed manager. Nonetheless, he controlled the middleweight division from the 1930s to the late 1950s behind the scenes and was an unofficial matchmaker at Madison Square Garden. In 1947, he convinced Jake LaMotta, a top-ranked middleweight, to throw a fight against light heavyweight contender Billy Fox, but the fix was so blatant that the New York State Athletic Commission suspended LaMotta.

The Turf

Historically, horse race fixers paid jockeys or trainers to enter ringers or to drug horses. Jockeys could administer electric shocks or pull their horses, and harness riders could break their horse's stride. In the early 1970s, fraud was commonplace in events with exotic betting formats such as the superfecta (in which bettors picked, in order, the first four horses to finish) at Yonkers Raceway, which earned some \$2 bettors more than \$100,000. Some bettors bribed a few harness drivers to lose and bought combinations on the others to assure a winning bet.

In 2002, three young Drexel University alumni nearly pulled off a \$3 million scam. One who worked at Autotote, the company that processed most of the nation's computerized horse race betting, altered wagers after some races were run when he bet the "Pick Six" covering multiple races. However, the authorities brought all of these fixers to justice.

Major League Baseball and Professional Football

Baseball largely has been untainted by gambling problems since the Black Sox scandal, although in 1970, Detroit Tigers pitcher Denny McLain was suspended for three months for previous involvement in bookmaking. Then, in 1989, Cincinnati Reds manager Pete Rose was banned from baseball for life for betting at least \$10,000 on each of 52 Reds games in 1987.

Professional football also has had its crises. In 1946, just before the NFL championship game, gamblers tried to bribe New York Giants fullback Merle Hapes, who admitted to the offer, and quarterback Frank Filchock, who did not. Thereafter, Commissioner Bert Bell per-

manently suspended both players and hired detectives to watch players and monitor Las Vegas betting lines. In 1963, his successor, Pete Rozelle, suspended Alex Karras of the Detroit Lions for one year for betting on games and for associating with known Detroit gangsters.

College Sports

College basketball has suffered scandals since the development of the point spread. In 1951, a major national betting scandal broke in New York City, involving 32 players who shaved points in 86 games from 1947 to 1950. Ten gamblers were imprisoned, and most players received suspended sentences. Because of the involvement of owners and officials, Madison Square Garden lost its status as the mecca of college basketball, while the University of Kentucky suspended its basketball program for one year, and both Long Island University and the City College of New York dropped big-time sports completely.

A second major scandal broke in 1961 that involved 32 players at 22 colleges, all accused of fixing games from 1957 to 1961 for payoffs averaging about \$1,500. Jack Molinas, a former Columbia University All-American and a 1953 first-round draft choice of the Fort Wayne Pistons, who had been expelled by the National Basketball Association for gambling, was the mastermind. He had befriended many star New York City high school players and contacted them once in college, paying them to shave points.

A third scandal occurred in 1978–1979 when Henry Hill, an associate of the criminal Lucchese family, and New York gambler Richard "The Fixer" Perry devised a scheme to fix nine Boston College games. Six years later, Tulane University players were accused of shaving points in two games; the university dropped its basketball program for five years.

An Inevitable Part of the Game

With its wealth of statistics and uncertain outcomes, athletic contests, both individual and team, always have appealed to spectators bent on betting. It is not surprising to find that gambling has been an inextricable part of American sports since colonial times—and even farther back than that, as there is evidence that Native Americans bet on physical contests.

For much of American history and in much of the country, gambling on sports has been illegal (as was gambling of all kinds), for two reasons. First, gambling

always has been frowned on by moralists, particularly of the religious variety. But gambling on sports presents another troubling issue—its capacity to contaminate athletic contests and undermine sport's fundamental principles of fair play, honest effort, and competitive ethos.

Still, for all of the efforts of moralists and governments, gambling remains an integral part of sports in America. Much gambling is victimless—spectators placing bets on untainted contests. Inevitably, however, some gamblers—particularly those from the criminal underworld—have tried to fix the system, bribing athletes to throw games or, at least, tilt the odds. When this has happened, the public has expressed outrage and authorities have attempted to punish the perpetrators and put in place rules and practices to prevent such activities in the future.

Given human behavior and the monetary gains involved, it is unlikely that American sports ever will be purged of gambling's unsavory effects. Indeed, the spread of legalized gambling, both in its brick-and-mortar and Internet variants, promises to deepen the relationship between betting and sports.

Steven A. Riess

See also: Billiards; Black Sox Scandal; Boxing; Business of Sports; Canine Sports; Cockfighting; College Basketball Scandal of 1951; Crime, Organized; Horse Racing; Saloons, Taverns, and Sports Bars.

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Gans, Joe (1874–1910)

Joe Gans became the first American-born black boxing champion in 1902, when he won the world lightweight boxing title. Gans was one of the first practitioners of "scientific" gloved boxing. Known as the "Old Master," he fought for 18 years, compiling more than 150 career wins and more than 100 knockouts. Nat Fleischer of *The Ring* magazine rated Gans the best lightweight of all time.

Gans (some sources cite his birth name as Joseph Gaines or Joseph Saifuss Butts) was born on November 25, 1874, possibly the son of Joseph Butts, a black baseball player. It is known that he was orphaned at the age of four and raised by his foster mother, Mrs. Maria Gant (possibly originally spelled Gans), in Baltimore, Maryland.

As a teenager, Gans worked at the harbor market shucking oysters. At the local Monumental Theatre, he engaged in "battle royals" attended by white spectators. These were racist spectacles in which up to a dozen black boys beat each other senseless until just one was left standing. Gans won several such battles, catching the eye of Baltimore gambler and boxing entrepreneur Abraham Lincoln "Al" Hereford, who turned him into a professional fighter.

Gans began fighting professionally in 1891, when fighters employed gloves and the Marquis of Queensberry rules. The young pugilist viewed boxing as the art of self defense, and he employed guile to defend himself, while deftly playing on his opponent's weaknesses. He soon dominated the featherweight and lightweight classes to such an extent that Fleischer called him "the closest thing to a superman the lightweight division had ever seen." Due to the racism of that time, Gans often had to let his white opponents

win or “make a good showing,” even though he could have beaten them easily. In 1900 at Lou Houseman’s Tattersall Athletic Club in Chicago, for example, Gans was knocked out in the second round by featherweight champion “Terrible” Terry McGovern after four earlier knockdowns. The audience and the press immediately attacked Gans for what they saw as an obvious fix. Later, Gans regretfully admitted to taking a dive.

The public blamed Gans for the fix, even though Hereford and McGovern’s manager, Sam Harris, had orchestrated the deal. Many boxing fans did not want blacks to have the opportunity to become champions, and they called for Gans’s banning from the sport. In addition, the image of prizefighting in Chicago was severely harmed by the bout. This scandal, together with widespread opposition to the sport’s violence and gambling, eventually led to a ban on boxing there in 1904, which lasted for two decades.

Despite the public outcry, Gans was too good to be ignored. He persisted and defeated the toughest crop of opponents that anyone had ever faced on his way to the championship, taking down Young Griffo (Albert Griffiths), William “Kid” McPartland, Bobby Dobbs, George “Elbows” McFadden, and Dal Hawkins. On May 12, 1902, Gans fought champion Frank Erne for the lightweight title at Fort Erie, Ontario, easily winning with a one-punch knockout. His effortless victory only increased suspicion that he did not always fight his best, but rather “boxed to the orders of his manager,” as Fleischer put it.

Gans, who usually weighed around 135 pounds (61 kilograms), fought and defeated heavier welterweights and middleweights throughout his career. Experts consider his 20-round bout with welterweight champion “Barbados Joe” Walcott on September 30, 1904, in San Francisco to be an all-time classic. The referee called the fight a draw, but newspapers reported that Gans clearly had won.

Gans became a popular champion who defended his title regularly, but some in the boxing establishment did not like the idea of having a black champion. On October 31, 1904, James Edward Britt, a white California fighter, knocked down Gans four times in a title fight, but he lost when the referee disqualified him for fouling Gans while the champion got up off the canvas. Thereafter, Britt claimed the championship with the aid of the San Francisco fight trust, which controlled West Coast boxing. When Britt lost to Oscar “Battling” Nelson in 1905, some considered Nelson the lightweight champion, even though Gans had never lost his title.

On Labor Day 1906, in Goldfield, Nevada, Gans and Nelson were matched in the first “Fight of the Century” organized by Tex Rickard, the greatest boxing promoter of his era. The Goldfield match, with a purse of \$30,000, took place under a blazing desert sun and drew the largest gate in history up to that time—more than 8,000 attended the match. Before the fight, the ring announcer read telegrams from fans who could not attend, as was the custom. A note from Gans’s foster mother read, “Joe, the eyes of the world are upon you . . . you *bring back the bacon*.” The next day, newspapers across the country repeated the phrase, and it has become a part of everyday speech. Gans won the fight on a foul after 42 grueling rounds. Forced to make an unnaturally low weight of “133 ringside” in full boxing gear, he became ill from the weight loss.

In 1907 and 1908, with tuberculosis ravaging his body, Gans defended his title several more times before losing a rematch to Nelson on July 4, 1908, in 17 rounds in Colma, California. Gans continued to fight, wanting to earn enough money for his family to live comfortably after he was gone. He also used his winnings from the Goldfield fight to establish the Goldfield Hotel in Baltimore, a “black and tan” club (a club attended by both blacks and whites), where he gave Eubie Blake, the great ragtime musician, his first big opportunity.

Gans intended to train and assist boxer Jack Johnson for his championship bout against Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1910, but he was too sick to attend the fight. Emaciated and bedridden in Prescott, Arizona, Gans left on a long trip east to reach his mother and two children before he died on August 10, 1910. Hundreds gathered at the train stops along the way, and thousands attended his funeral in Baltimore, Maryland, to say goodbye to the “Old Master.”

Gans overcame the prejudices of his time and proved that black men could achieve success in sports, despite the great odds against them. Future generations of boxers learned to emulate the moves first perfected by Gans.

Colleen Aycock and Mark Scott

See also: Boxing.

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Gehrig, Lou (1903–1941)

Lou Gehrig, first baseman for the New York Yankees from 1925 to 1939, set a record for most consecutive games played (2,130), a mark long considered unbeatable until Cal Ripken of the Baltimore Orioles surpassed it in 1995. Widely considered the greatest first baseman of all time, the “Iron Horse,” as Gehrig became known, was the embodiment of a strong work ethic and unselfish teamwork. Forced to retire because of a degenerative disease diagnosed as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—now often referred to as Lou Gehrig’s disease—Gehrig achieved iconic status in sports history with his courage in facing the tragic disease, immortalized in the 1942 film *The Pride of the Yankees*.

Henry Louis “Lou” Gehrig was born in New York City on June 19, 1903, the only surviving child of German immigrants Heinrich and Christina Gehrig. He enrolled at Columbia University in 1921 on a football scholarship and played football and baseball during the 1922–1923 academic year. Gehrig signed with the New York Yankees in 1923 and spent most of the next two seasons with the minor league Hartford Senators of the Eastern League.

In 1925, Gehrig stayed with the Yankees as a backup for first baseman Wally Pipp. According to baseball legend, on June 2, Pipp complained of a headache to manager Miller Huggins, who inserted Gehrig into the lineup. Gehrig had pinch-hit the day before, beginning the streak that would last until April 30, 1939. Other stories claim that Huggins was making changes to the lineup to bring the Yankees out of a slump. Regardless, the fable of Pipp’s headache perfectly fit Gehrig’s legend—excuses not to play being supplanted by hard work.

During his early years with the Yankees, Gehrig balanced outfielder Babe Ruth, both on and off the field. Ruth already had established himself as baseball’s preeminent home run hitter, and he promoted himself as the sport’s first media-created superstar. To baseball fans, Ruth was the flashy, hard-living celebrity, whereas Gehrig was the quiet, hardworking supporting actor. Neither rivals nor close friends, they were collaborators whose hitting overwhelmed opponents.

In 1927, the Yankees enjoyed one of the greatest seasons in baseball history. Their batting lineup earned the nickname “Murderers’ Row” for its members’ hitting prowess. Gehrig established himself as a team leader and a powerful first baseman with dependable fielding skills.

For his .373 batting average, 47 home runs, and 175 runs batted in, Gehrig was named the American League’s Most Valuable Player (MVP). The Yankees went on to sweep the World Series two years running, defeating the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1927 and the St. Louis Cardinals in 1928.

In 1929, the Yankees were supplanted at the top of the American League by a great Philadelphia Athletics squad. The team did not make it back to the Series until 1932, when, under manager Joe McCarthy, they defeated the Chicago Cubs. That season, on June 3, Gehrig hit four home runs in one game. As often happened, he yielded the spotlight—in this case, to New York Giants Manager John McGraw, who grabbed the headlines with his resignation after 30 seasons.

During the 1933 season, Gehrig achieved two milestones. On August 17, he broke the record for consecutive games (1,307 by shortstop Everett “Deacon” Scott, a former Yankee), and on September 29, he married Eleanor Twitchell in an impromptu ceremony. With Eleanor’s guidance, Gehrig began to assert himself, both as a baseball player and as a promotional pitchman. His athletic good looks landed him an audition in 1936 to succeed Johnny Weissmuller in the *Tarzan* film series, and this led to a supporting role in the 1938 Western film *Rawhide*.

After the Yankees traded an aging Ruth to the Boston Braves in 1935, Gehrig led the Yankees to World Series wins in 1936 (when he won his second MVP award) and in 1937. His efficient, team-oriented approach meshed with McCarthy’s businesslike managerial style to create yet another Yankees dynasty. Still, the spotlight increasingly fell on another youthful superstar, center fielder Joe DiMaggio.

During the 1938 season, Gehrig’s performance declined, a result of his struggle with ALS. He went through the worst offensive slump of his career and finished with career lows in batting average (.295), home runs (29), and runs batted in (114)—still impressive statistics. The Yankees won their third straight World Series, but by the end of the season, Gehrig had begun to doubt the physical strength that had carried him for so many years. In the off-season, Gehrig saw a general practitioner, who diagnosed gall bladder trouble and prescribed dietary changes.

The continued deterioration in Gehrig’s skills was apparent during spring training and the first few games of the 1939 season. Gehrig started the season poorly, hitting .143 with one run batted in over the first eight games. He agreed with McCarthy to sit out the game on May 2, ending his streak.

In June, Gehrig traveled to the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota for tests. The diagnosis was ALS. Doctors, team officials, and Gehrig's family did not publicize the fact that Gehrig was suffering from a fatal disease—only that he would have to give up baseball. The Yankees quickly arranged a Lou Gehrig Appreciation Day for July 4, between games of a doubleheader with the Washington Senators. During the ceremony, Gehrig made the brief speech that would transform him from a baseball legend into a national hero: "For the past two weeks, you've been reading about a bad break. Today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

Gehrig continued to travel with the team, and after the Yankees won their fourth consecutive World Series, they voted him a full player's bonus share. In December 1939, baseball writers waived their five-year rule and named Gehrig to the National Baseball Hall of Fame, the first player to be honored with such an exception. (Normally, players were not eligible for election to the Hall of Fame until five years after their retirement.) New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia offered Gehrig a job as a commissioner on the city parole board, where he worked until April 1941, when his illness forced him to retire.

He had an extraordinary career, batting .340 in 17 seasons, with a lifetime slugging percentage of .632. He was a great clutch hitter who set the American League record for RBIs in 1931, hit a major league record 23 grand slams, and won the Triple Crown (the league leader in home runs, runs batted in, and batting average) in 1934.

On June 2, 1941, sixteen years to the day after becoming the Yankees's starting first baseman, Gehrig died. (Recent research suggests his death was caused by ongoing concussive trauma.) In 1942, *The Pride of the Yankees* was released, starring Gary Cooper as Gehrig.

John Carvalho

See also: Baseball, Major League; Film; Yankees, New York.

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German Americans

The largest non-English-speaking immigrant group prior to the Civil War, Germans came to the United States in great numbers throughout the nineteenth century—in the 1850s alone, 1 million Germans immigrated to America. Compared to their contemporaries, the Irish, Germans were better prepared for life in the United States, despite their language handicap, arriving with greater skills and capital. While many Germans settled in urban enclaves, they also established themselves as farmers in rural areas, particularly in the Upper Midwest.

Like all immigrant groups, Germans brought with them institutions and cultural customs from the old country. Among these were Turnvereins, or Turner societies, community centers that combined learning, political activism, the arts, and sporting activities. Many Turners halls had gymnasiums where members could engage in calisthenics and other athletic pursuits considered necessary for mental, spiritual, and physical well-being.

With the decline of immigration in the early twentieth century and the hostility engendered by World War I, German Americans began to assimilate more actively into American society, giving up their language and even abandoning their cultural institutions, such as the Turner societies. Today, German Americans are among the most assimilated of ethnic groups, taking part in virtually every participatory and professional sport in the country.

Turner Societies

The primary contribution of German immigrants to American sporting culture was *Turnen*, the German system of gymnastics, which was an important aspect of the Turner societies. Newcomers, fleeing the failed European revolutions of 1848, brought the gymnastics movement to the United States, starting in Cincinnati, Ohio, and spreading outward from there. By the Civil War, Turner societies had thousands of members, most of whom were skilled or white-collar workers.

The Turners greatly contributed to the introduction of physical fitness in public schools. The oldest existing school for the training of physical education instructors—now the School of Physical Education and Tourism Management at Indiana University—Purdue University at Indianapolis—had its origins in