

• A DECADE-BY-DECADE HISTORY •

# SPORTS IN AMERICA

## 1900–1919

SECOND EDITION



James Buckley Jr. and John Walters • Series Foreword by Larry Keith

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# Sports in America 1900–1919

SECOND EDITION

常州大学图书馆藏  
JAMES BUCKLEY JR.  
AND JOHN WALTERS  
SERIES FOREWORD BY  
LARRY KEITH

 **CHELSEA HOUSE**  
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**1900–1919, Second Edition**  
**Sports in America**

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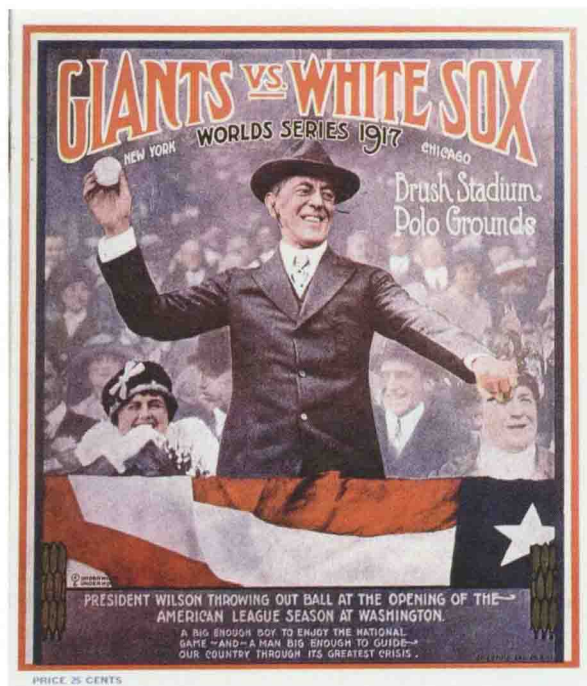
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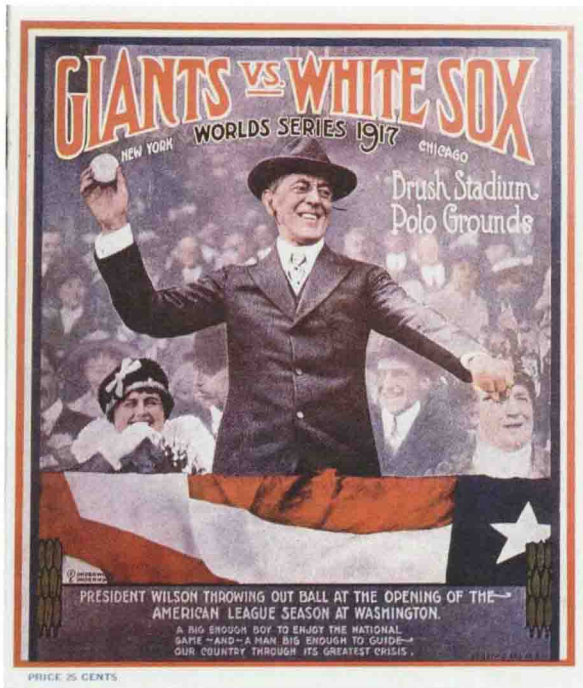
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# FOREWORD

BY LARRY KEITH

WHEN THE EDITORS OF SPORTS IN AMERICA invited me to write the foreword to this important historical series I recalled my experience in the 1980s as the adjunct professor for a new sports journalism course in the graduate school of Columbia University. Before granting their approval, the faculty at that prestigious Ivy League institution asked, Do sports matter? Are they relevant? Are they more than just fun and games?

The answer—an emphatic yes—is even more appropriate today than it was then. As an integral part of American society, sports provide insights to our history and culture and, for better or worse, help define who we are.

*Sports In America* is much more than a compilation of names, dates, and facts. Each volume chronicles accomplishments and expansions of the possible. Not just in the physical ability to perform, but in the ability to create goals and determine methods to achieve them. In this way, sports, the sweaty offspring of recreation and competition, resemble any other field of endeavor. I certainly wouldn't equate the race for a gold medal with the race to the moon, but the building blocks are the same: the intelligent application of talent, determination, research, practice, and hard work to a meaningful objective.

Sports matter because they show us in high definition. They communicate examples of determination, courage, and skill. They often embody a heroic human-interest story, overcoming poverty, injustice, injury, or disease. The phrase, "Sports is a microcosm of life," could also read "Life is a microcosm of sport."

Consider racial issues. When Jackie Robinson of the Brooklyn Dodgers broke through major league baseball's "color barrier" in 1947, the significance extended beyond the national pastime. Precisely because baseball was the national pastime, this

epochal event reverberated throughout every part of American society.

To be sure, black stars from individual sports had preceded him (notably Joe Louis in boxing and Jesse Owens in track), and others would follow (Arthur Ashe in tennis and Tiger Woods in golf), but Robinson stood out as an important member of a team. He wasn't just playing with the Dodgers, he was traveling with them, living with them. He was a black member of a white athletic family. The benefits of integration could be appreciated far beyond the borough of Brooklyn. In 1997, Major League Baseball retired his "42" jersey number.

Sports have always been a laboratory for social awareness and change. Robinson integrated big league box scores eight years before the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the integration of public schools. The Paralympics (1960) and Special Olympics (1968) easily predate the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). The mainstreaming of disabled athletes was especially apparent in 2007 when double amputee Jessica Long, 15, won the AAU Sullivan Award as America's top amateur. Women's official debut in the Olympic Games, though limited to swimming, occurred in 1912, seven years before they got the right to vote. So even if these sports were tardy in opening their doors, in another way, they were ahead of their times. And if it was necessary to break down some of those doors—Title IX support for female college athletes comes to mind—so be it. Basketball star Candace Parker won't let anyone keep her from the hoop.

Another area of importance, particularly as it affects young people, is substance abuse. High school, college, and professional teams all oppose the illegal use of drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. In most venues, testing is mandatory, and tolerance is zero. The confirmed use of performance enhancing drugs has damaged the reputations of such superstar ath-



letes as Olympic sprinters Ben Johnson and Marion Jones, cyclist Floyd Landis, and baseball sluggers Manny Ramirez and Alex Rodriguez. Some athletes have lost their careers, or even their lives, to substance abuse. Conversely, other athletes have used their fame to caution young people about submitting to peer pressure or making poor choices.

Fans care about sports and sports personalities because they provide entertainment and self-identity—too often at a loss of priorities. One reason sports have flourished in this country is their support from governmental bodies. When a city council votes to help underwrite the cost of a sports facility or give financial advantages to the owners of a team, it affects the pocketbook of every taxpayer, not to mention the local ecosystem. When high schools and colleges allocate significant resources to athletics, administrators believe they are serving the greater good, but at what cost? Decisions with implications beyond the sports page merit everyone's attention.

In World War II, our country's sporting passion inspired President Franklin Roosevelt to declare that professional games should not be cancelled. He felt the benefits to the national psyche outweighed the risk of gathering large crowds at central locations. In 2001, another generation of Americans also continued to attend large-scale sports events because, to do otherwise, would "let the terrorists win." Being there, being a fan, yelling your lungs out, cheering victory and bemoaning defeat, is a cleansing, even therapeutic exercise. The security check at the gate is just part of the price of stepping inside. Even before there was a 9/11, there was a bloody terrorist assault at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972.

The popular notion "Sports build character" has been better expressed "Sports reveal character." We've witnessed too many coaches and athletes break rules of fair play and good conduct. The convictions of NBA referee Tim Donaghy for gambling and NFL quarterback Michael Vick for operating a dog-fighting ring are startling recent examples. We've even seen violence and cheating in youth sports, often by parents of a (supposed) future superstar. We've watched (at a safe distance) fans "celebrate" championships with destructive behavior. I would argue, however, that these flaws are the exception, not the rule, that the good of sports far

outweighs the bad, that many of life's success stories took root on an athletic field.

Any serious examination of sports leads to the question of athletes as standards for conduct. Professional basketball star Charles Barkley created quite a stir in 1993 when he used a Nike shoe commercial to declare, "I am not paid to be a role model." The knee-jerk response argued, "Of course you are, because kids look up to you," but Barkley was right to raise the issue. He was saying that, in making lifestyle choices in language and behavior, young people should look elsewhere for role models, ideally to responsible parents or guardians.

The fact remains, however, that athletes occupy an exalted place in our society, especially when they are magnified in the mass media, sports talk radio, and the blogosphere. The athletes we venerate can be as young as a high school basketball player or as old as a Hall of Famer. (They can even be dead, as Babe Ruth's commercial longevity attests.) They are honored and coddled in a way few mortals are. Regrettably, we can be quick to excuse their excesses and ignore their indulgences. They influence the way we live and think: Ted Williams inspired patriotism as a wartime fighter pilot; Muhammad Ali's opposition to the Vietnam War on religious grounds, validated by the Supreme Court, encouraged the peace movement; Magic Johnson's contraction of the HIV/AIDS virus brought better understanding to a little-understood disease. No wonder we elect them—track stars, football coaches, baseball pitchers—to represent us in Washington. Meanwhile, television networks pay huge sums to sports leagues so their teams can pay fortunes for their services.

Indeed, it has always been this way. If we, as a nation, love sports, then we, quite naturally, will love the men and women who play them best. In return, they provide entertainment, release and inspiration. From the beginning of the 20th century until now, Sports In America is their story-and ours.

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# INTRODUCTION

# 1900–1919

SPORTS IN AMERICA AS THE 20TH century opened was a very different animal than it is today. No National Football League. No National Basketball Association. One league in Major League Baseball. No Rose Bowl. No NASCAR. No Indy 500. No professional tennis or golf. The Olympics were only four years old. There was no radio, no TV, no cable, no ESPN, no Internet, and no color photography. Fans knew their sports heroes only through the written word or rare personal viewings.

But things were changing. America was becoming a different place than it had been for its first 150 years or so. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution and the rise of large populations, creating urban cultures in major cities, more and more people not only had a little extra time on their hands (because you needed time to follow sports), they had a little extra money to spend on such diversions. What had been a largely rural nation was becoming a nation of city-dwellers. Working six days a week, 12 hours a day was becoming less and less the norm. Into that empty space of leisure time stepped sports.

Wrote Richard D. Mandell in *Sports: A Cultural History*, “The integration of sport in the working classes was aided by better and cheaper transportation [notably street cars in cities] and communication, greater disposable income, shorter working hours, and the assimilation of second generation children.”

That second generation of children looked to sports as one important way to define themselves as Americans. An immigrant child might have trouble climbing the ladder of business success, but with talent and hard work, a life could be made in sports. Baseball, in particular, was populated by many second- and third-generation Irish and German Americans.

The first decade of the 20th century saw the rise of several popular sports. The sports themselves had already been invented by then (for the most part)—baseball had been around more than 50 years, for instance, and the first college football game was played in 1869—but they became much more popular as events for people to watch. This was the era of the spread of spectator sports.



**Ball Games** College sports such as football were a huge draw for fans. These two teams were among the best.

Baseball led the way in this, as it had since becoming the National Pastime in the years after the Civil War. No other sport was as well-organized on a national level (as national as sports got—there were no Major League Baseball teams west of St. Louis), and no other sport was as pervasive throughout American culture. With the birth of the second major league, the American League, in 1901, baseball began a rapid ascent to the top of the American pro sports scene—a spot it would enjoy for another 75 years or so. In the 15 years following 1901, numerous new stadiums were built, using the latest in steel construction techniques, all in an effort to build greater, larger, and better venues to attract paying customers. The World Series was born in 1903 and gal-

vanized national attention on baseball's first annual championship.

People certainly gathered to watch sports in earlier years (the first ballpark that charged admission opened in 1871 in Brooklyn, New York, and horse racing had been a popular diversion in America since colonial days), but in this new century and new national mindset, the idea of watching people who were paid to play sports began to take firmer hold.

The *Saturday Evening Post*, as close as America had in those days to a national newspaper, reflected this belief about the coming rise of sports with these words, published in 1901:

The American love of sports has risen to a pitch never before known. Until the



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middle of the century just closed we were practically without sports, and even until some fifteen years ago there was very little enthusiasm aroused by sports compared with the fever that has within the past decade and a half swept over the country.

Year by year the ardent fervor has been increasing, and the coming season promises to be the most enthusiastic of all.



**Native Son** *The son of German immigrants, baseball star Honus Wagner of the Pittsburgh Pirates represented a growing trend in sports.*

Baseball wasn't alone, of course, in attracting fans. In some corners of the nation, college football outstripped baseball in popularity. But the sport also nearly disappeared, almost done in by its own inherent violence. In the years before World War I, college football's near-demise and rapid rebirth proved to be an important part of the sports story of the day.

Baseball and football was about it for team sports. Whereas today four major team sports dominate American headlines, early in the 20th century, fans looking for their sports fix turned to many individual sports, notably boxing, horse racing, and bicycle racing. In a telling note of the coming "modern" world, bicycle racing was eclipsed almost overnight by automobile racing.

In boxing, an important strand of the American sports story was beginning to be told. With a few exceptions (see Major Taylor, page 16), African Americans were not welcome in this new, wider world of sports. Baseball unofficially banned all black players, while golf and tennis clubs were, as the saying goes, as white as the balls they used. In boxing, however, several African-Americans reached the pinnacle of the sport, most notably Jack Johnson, one of the key figures of the era. Johnson's stunning skills and powerful personality presaged the cult of athletic celebrity that came to full flower nearly 100 years later. But at the time, Johnson fought not only his opponents, but a public that was growing less interested in watching black athletes compete. Spectators rooted for him to lose to white boxers. Remember, this was about 40 years before Jackie Robinson's

historic start with the Brooklyn Dodgers baseball team.

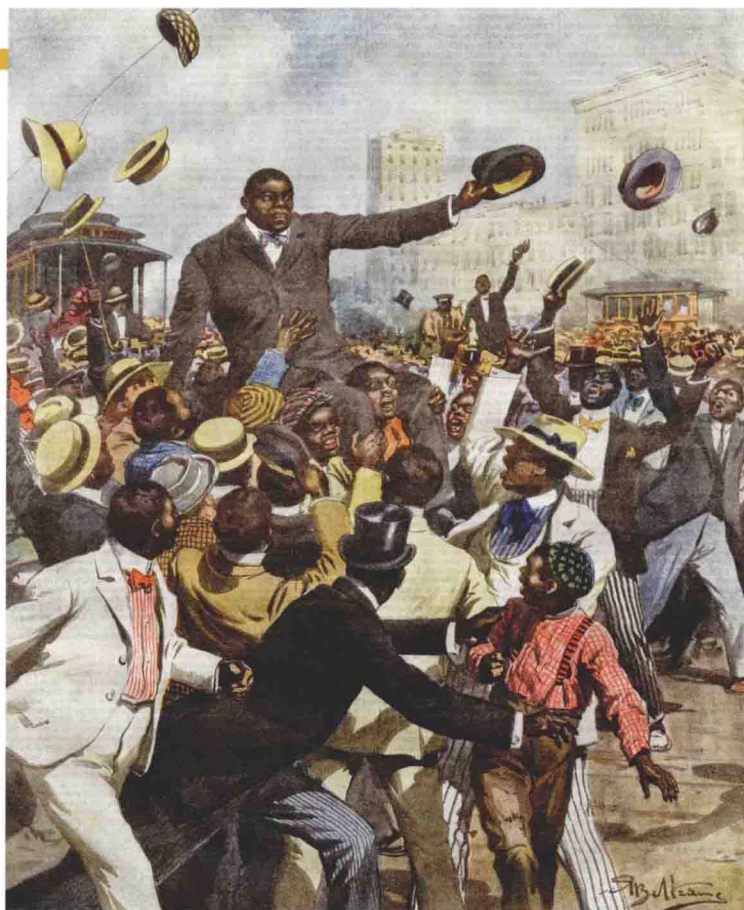
While people flocked to watch sports, huge numbers also began to participate in them. Again, the idea that hard-working people had some time off was a new one. A wave of experts promoted the values of sport in a healthy life. It's important to note that women were using this flowering of sport to gain a foothold in athletics of all sorts. While they were decades away from the breadth of participation enjoyed today, it became prevalent for women to do some sort of sporting activity.

Sports, like America itself, was growing and growing. This book (and, in fact, the entire series, now updated through 2009) documents that growth. This particular volume, covering the first two decades of the new century, focuses on the rise of spectator sports, while touching on some of the important milestones in participation sports, too.

As the *Saturday Evening Post* concluded in 1901:

This is the era of sport. Practically every man and boy, woman and girl, takes part or wishes to take part in some branch of it. And it is fortunate that the field is broad enough for all.

In all this eager devotion to it, there is nothing harmful, nothing that points a warning. On the contrary, it is for individual and national good. It gives health and tone to the system, it clears and freshens the mind by bright exercise and competition in the clear, open air, and it drives cobwebs from wearied brains. And thus it is that this era of enthusiastic devotion to sport is good.



**Ahead of His Time** Setting the stage for so many to follow, boxer Jack Johnson (being carried by cheering crowds in this hand-painted postcard) was perhaps the first truly international sports superstar who was also African American.

In these years, for the first time, sports of all kinds began to “matter.” They impacted American society in many positive ways, from race relations to technology to additional ways to share a sense of community. By extension, the popularity of sports and athletes began to lead to the idea that staying healthy meant staying active.

So, as the 20th century dawned, no ESPN? No problem.



# 1900

## An Underwhelming Olympic Games



The ancient Greeks had created the multi-sport, multi-nation Olympic Games more than 2,500 years ago. In 1896, under the direction of Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937), the Games were revived. De Coubertin wanted to use sports as a way to unite the world. As the 20th century approached, enormous changes were making the world “smaller.” Electricity, the telegraph, increased use of railroads and steamships—the trappings of the Industrial Revolution—were bringing more and more people together. De Coubertin felt that a gathering of nations for the purposes of sports would help to ease this transition to the “modern age.”

The first modern Games had been held in Athens in 1896. The Athens Games were a resounding success, and the world looked forward to more Olympics.

Unfortunately, in 1900, the second modern Olympics were filled with anything but goodwill. A combination of personal crises and political struggles led to the exclusion of de Coubertin—and the International Olympic Committee that he

had founded—from planning the Games. The competition went on from May 20 to October 28, but in a far different form than its modern inventor had envisioned.

There were no opening ceremonies, for example, and the name “Olympic Games” was not even used. Organizers and contemporary press reports offered up a variety of substitutes, including “International Championships,” “Paris Championships,” and “Concours internationaux d’exercices physiques et de sport” (international competition of exercise and sport). The government of France mixed the events with an already-planned international exposition, and attendance suffered.

While Olympics fans today would recognize the swimming, fencing, yachting, gymnastics, and equestrian events, the 1900 Games also offered ballooning, fireman’s drill, auto racing, tug-of-war, cricket, live pigeon shooting, and the always-interesting 200-meter swim through an obstacle course.

American athletes dominated the track-and-field events. Ray Ewry, in particular, was outstanding, although he had suffered from polio (a degenerative muscle and nerve disease) as a child. He won the standing long jump, the standing high jump,



**American Olympians** *Members of the U.S. track and field team posed in Paris before the start of the 1900 Games.*

and the standing hop, step, and jump (today's triple jump). Alvin Kranzlein began what would become nearly a century of domination by American male athletes in the sprint races, winning the 60- and 110-meter races and the 200-meter hurdles. He also won the running long jump.

One very good thing about de Coubertin's absence was the inclusion of female athletes, whom he had barred from the 1896 competition. The first woman to become an Olympic champion was Great Britain's Charlotte Cooper, who won the tennis singles competition. Women also competed in golf, with American Margaret Abbott winning the nine-hole round with a score of 47.

The competition was also hampered when French organizers scheduled several key finals on a Sunday in July. Many

top athletes refused to compete on what they considered to be "the Lord's Day." The French would not move the finals. American Meyer Prinstein, though Jewish, supported his Christian teammates and refused to compete in the long jump.

## Boxing's First "Match of the Century"



Boxing was a popular spectator sport in the late 1800s and remained so as the new century began. The introduction of standardized rules and the use of padded gloves in the early 1890s had made boxing more of a regular sport than the bare-knuckles brawls featured earlier. Still, boxing in 1900 was a brutal and demanding sport and remained illegal in some parts of the country.



Boxing is divided into weight classes, with fighters of similar weights squaring off against one another. The glamour class is the heavyweights; in 1900 it included any boxer of 180 pounds or more.

The heavyweight champion of the era was James J. Jeffries (1875–1953), who won the title in 1899 by knocking out British fighter Robert Fitzsimmons.

In 1900, Jeffries made his third defense of his title against a legendary boxer, “Gentleman” Jim Corbett, who had been the champ from 1892 to 1897. Corbett was a national hero, and many rooted for him in this comeback match against Jeffries, held before 7,000 people on May 11 in New York’s Coney Island. The fighters battled through 23 three-minute rounds until Jeffries finally knocked out Corbett. Jeffries remained the heavyweight champion until he retired in 1904.

## Vardon Grips America



Although by 1900 more than 1,000 golf courses had been built in the United States, golf still had limited appeal. The sport was expensive, leisure time was limited, and most country clubs were exclusive outposts of rich society.

In 1900, however, a national tour by Great Britain’s Harry Vardon, a famous three-time British Open champion, spurred interest in the game among the general public. The power of the A.G. Spalding Company was behind Vardon’s tour. Spalding had been a star baseball player before turning to the sporting goods business, and he was among the first to connect his products with famous athletes such as Vardon. The tour was designed to promote the Vardon Flyer golf ball sold by Spalding.



## Gibson Girl

By the early 1900s, the idea that women could not take part in athletic competitions was becoming obsolete. The main objection was that such pursuits were “unladylike.” Others thought women could not safely handle the stress of exercise.

A character from the world of fiction helped those who were making the argument that women could compete in sports, too. In 1890, illustrator Charles Dana Gibson created the “Gibson Girl.” He drew the attractive young woman on the golf course (left), on a tennis court, riding horses, and even riding a bicycle. Though some programs touted the benefits of some sort of exercise for women, the Gibson Girl became a national symbol for women seeking a more active life. This new attention to equality was one of the things that set America on the path to finally giving women the right to vote in 1920. A sports historian in the 1930s wrote, “Gibson did more through his drawings to convince maidens East and West that they wanted to be athletic than any number of health crusades could do.”

## The First Davis Cup

 Tennis had been around in various forms for hundreds of years. French royal families played a version in the 1500s. By the late 1800s, the form of the game seen today was established as the standard. It had been played in America for several decades, but British players were still among the world's best, while France had produced several international champions. To spur interest in the game and set up a standard competition among nations, financier Dwight Filley Davis proposed a new annual tournament. Donating the silver trophy, he thus got to name the event the Davis Cup.

The first Davis Cup was played in August in Massachusetts between (all male) teams of American and British players. Led by Davis himself, the U.S. team won.




**Old Time Clubs** *Vardon and golfers of this era used all-wooden clubs and golf balls with raised dimples.*

## Other Milestones of 1900

- ✓ Baseball managers Wilbert Robinson and John McGraw, who co-owned a bowling alley in Baltimore, introduced a new sport—duckpins—which uses a smaller ball and pins than is used in bowling. The sport became popular only in a few areas, but remains a local specialty in Baltimore.
- ✓ The Brooklyn Dodgers won the National League championship in the final year in which the N.L. reigned as the only major league in baseball.
- ✓ Yale University's perfect 12–0 record earned it the unofficial national college football championship, as selected by the Helms Athletic Foundation.

The Davis Cup tournament has been played annually ever since. In 2007 137 nations competed. The United States has won 32 Davis Cups, the most of any nation. In 1963, the Federation Cup was inaugurated, creating a similar international tournament for female players.

## What Did They Play?

 An article in the December 30, 1900, edition of *The New York Times* gave a quick glimpse at the state of sports in America at the turn of the century. Listed were champions of the most important sports. Baseball was there, of course, but pro football, basketball, hockey, and NASCAR were not. Those sports didn't exist yet. Track and field, swimming, and cycling listed numerous champions, but no mention of a World Series—the first was not until 1903. Sports in America in 1900 was different—but it was changing fast.