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# Key Concepts in Sports Studies

STEPHEN WAGG, CARLTON BRICK,  
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# Key Concepts in Sports Studies



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# Introduction

The principal purpose of this book is to provide an informed and readable guide to a range of debates about sport as a social phenomenon. To that end, the book has been organised around the concepts that seemed to the contributors to have been most central to these debates.

The writers of the book have each been teaching about the social aspects of sport for some years. This has entailed the use of a number of academic disciplines – chiefly history, politics, philosophy and sociology. The various sections in the book draw intermittently on each of these disciplines, but especially on sociology. Sociology, by its very nature, is about the relatedness of related things and it is inevitable therefore – and quite proper – that from time to time matters discussed in one section are examined likewise in several others.

There are a number of examples of this which may usefully be flagged up here: ‘rational recreation’ – an early Victorian philosophy of leisure – is discussed in relation to **Rationalisation** and again in the section on **The Civilising Process**; the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is dealt with principally in the section on **Habitus**, although, since much of Bourdieu’s work is about class, it could have appeared with equal validity in the section on **Social Class**; and, similarly, there are references to the sports policy of the Soviet Union in several sections – those on **Alienation** and **Olympism**, for instance. Likewise, there will be mentions of the work of influential philosophers such as Karl Marx and Michel Foucault in various chapters and the same goes for popular themes, such as Macdonaldisation, and sports brands, such as Nike.

The sections have been arranged in alphabetical order but they should not necessarily be read in this order: for example, it is almost certain that most readers will need to read the chapter on **Methods** before tackling the section on **Ethnography**.

Furthermore, the debates and controversies that the book deals with should not be thought to be confined to the individual sections. Once again some useful cross-referencing can be done: for example, criticisms of the concept of **Globalisation** will be found in the entry on **State, Nation and Nationalism** (and vice versa); Foucault’s notion of power has critical implications for the notion of **Hegemony**; the argument in favour of the biographical in the section on **The Sociological Imagination** might provide a good basis for debating the anti-individualist arguments in the section on **Discourse and Post-Structuralism**, and so on.

Finally, it must be stressed that the book attempts to deal dispassionately with matters which the reader: (a) might feel very strongly about (like the use of drugs in sport); or (b) might not have seen as subjects for critical reflection (like the body). Thus there will be arguments presented here that will strike some readers – undergraduates, perhaps – as unusual or controversial. Historically, though, it has been in the nature of sociology as an intellectual enterprise to try to analyse how things *are* and to keep this analysis free from judgements of how they *ought* to be. So, for instance, while many textbooks on sport will straightforwardly assume ‘doping’ to be a bad thing, in this book it is assessed simply as a social phenomenon (something that people do) and as something that is argued over. Similarly, the section on **The Body/Embodiment** deals in what we might call ‘relativist’ notions of healthy bodies. Many or most of us take for granted what constitutes a healthy body, but things are changing in this respect and people now argue from a variety of political positions that there is no one ‘correct’ body – it’s all relative. Here again sociology is merely fulfilling part of its historic mission – to take up the vital questions raised in the wider society and to give them critical reflection: in this case, new political ideas and arguments have helped give rise to the sub-discipline known as the Sociology of the Body.

Responsibilities for the contents of this book have been apportioned as follows.

The sections on Alienation; Amateurism; Culture; Doping/Drugs; Gender; Hegemony; History; Ideology; Imperialism/The Post-Colonial; Olympism; Politics/Policy/Power; Race and Ethnicity; Rationalisation; Social Class; State, Nation and Nationalism; The Civilising Process; and The Sociological Imagination were written by Stephen Wagg, who also edited the book.

Carlton Brick wrote on Capitalism; Commodification/Commodity Fetishism; Consumption; Discourse and Post-Structuralism; Ethics; Fandom; Globalisation; Marxism; Methods; Postmodernism/Postmodernity; and Semiotics.

The sections on Ethnography; Extreme Sport; Habitus; Identity and Difference; and the Body/Embodiment were composed by Belinda Wheaton and those on Feminism and Sexuality by Jayne Caudwell.

Paul Norcross helped a good deal in the framing of the book and kindly provided suggestions and material for the section on Ideology.

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# Alienation

The word ‘alienation’ has a general usage and it usually refers to a state of detachment – of ‘feeling out of things’. In sociology, and in the history of social thought, it has a more specific meaning. This derives from the work of Karl Marx on life under capitalism and, in particular, from his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx, 1959). Marx interprets the term in four related ways and these are set out in the *Dictionary of Sociology* as follows: (a) workers become estranged from the products of their own labour, which are owned and disposed of by someone else; (b) work itself becomes an alien activity with no intrinsic satisfaction. People work in order to live, rather than to express themselves, and their labour becomes a commodity; (c) the worker is thus deprived of the opportunity to become fully human and; (d) human beings are alienated from each other. They are individuals in competition, their relationships having been shaped by the market (Abercrombie et al., 2000: 11–12).

‘Alienation’ as a concept had a wide currency in European philosophy in the nineteenth century, but, following the Russian Revolution of 1917 the opportunity arose to address human alienation through political practice. In the early 1920s groups of intellectuals in Russia campaigned to transform Russian culture and to place it in the service of the proletariat (the working class) and of Soviet communism. Prominent among these was the Proletarian Cultural and Enlightenment Organizations or *Proletkult* who, along with the Hygienists, who were campaigners for physical and mental health, called for an end to competitive sport. As historian Robert Edelman notes: ‘They preferred instead what they called “production gymnastics, excursions, and pageants”. At times they invented specifically proletarian games, two of which were “Rescue from the Imperialists” and “Smuggling Revolutionary Literature across the Frontier”’ (Edelman, 1993: 34). These groups and their ideas had some influence in early Soviet Russia, but, by the late 1920s with the communist party now under the authoritarian leadership of Josef Stalin, the Soviet Union drifted back towards ‘bourgeois practices’. In 1952, a year before Stalin’s death, they competed in their first Olympic Games (see Parks, 2007: 27–44).

Nevertheless, during the 1930s, the Soviet Union helped to sponsor a workers' sport movement in Europe whose explicit aim was to preserve sport for the healthy recreation of the masses and to keep it safe from the incursions of competitiveness, commercialism and nationalism. Indeed, alternative 'Workers' Olympics', dedicated to internationalism, worker solidarity and peace, were staged in Frankfurt in 1925, Vienna in 1931 and Antwerp in 1937. One tournament, scheduled for Barcelona in 1936, was prevented from taking place by the Spanish Civil War and another, planned for Helsinki in 1943, was cancelled because of World War Two (Riordan, 1984: 98–112). Some communist countries, however, still sought to prevent sport becoming marketised or unduly competitive. In the mid 1970s, for example, China under Mao Zedong attempted to maintain a policy of 'Friendship first, competition second' (see Hoberman, 1984: 222).

Two things are clear, though, when we consider the concept of alienation in relation to contemporary sport. One is that, historically, this is an issue in both philosophy and politics on which sections of the left and the right could make common cause: it is after all, a fundament both of Victorian gentlemanly amateurism and of internationalist worker sport that sport must not be practised with intensity and should instead promote the refreshment and 're-creation' of the individual. The other is that much sport in the early twenty-first century has assumed a form that approximates closely to the condition of alienation, as set out by Marx in the 1840s. This, for some leading writers in the area, evokes a singular irony because it was the Soviet Union, a proclaimed Marxist state, which in the 1930s led the way in applying scientific, achievement-oriented rationality to sport. Most countries today have, or aspire to have, academies for their most gifted athletes and train them toward elite performance. These academies, while still disparaged in the West, were pioneered in the USSR. The wedding of sport, science and commercialism has accelerated since World War Two (Beamish and Ritchie, 2006). As John Hoberman remarks acidly in the mid-1980s, sport has become 'the one international culture which is developing in accordance with a Communist model' (1986: 11).

The political and intellectual response to this development has been diverse. In the mid-1970s the French Marxist writer Jean-Marie Brohm (1987) published *Sport: A Prison of Measured Time* – arguably the plainest and least nuanced exposition of sport as an alienated activity in modern, industrialised societies in the second half of the twentieth century. Brohm argued:

The competitive sportsman is a *new type of worker* who sells his labour power – that is to say his ability to produce a spectacle that draws the crowds – to an employer. The exchange value of his labour power, governed by the law of supply and demand on the market, is determined by the labour time socially necessary for its production. Amateurism ceased to exist a long time ago. All top level sportsmen are professional performers in the muscle show. They are also very often advertising ‘sandwich board’ men. (1987: 176).

Brohm made no distinction between capitalist and communist societies in this regard. Of the German Democratic Republic he wrote:

A look at the sports system brings to mind a sports factory or a sports barracks: sport has become an essential productive force. Such a penetration of competitive sport into all spheres of society has turned E. Germany into a vast sports laboratory or sports enterprise – some would go as far as to say a sports prison’ (1987: 79–80).

But the leading writer on the matter of sport and alienation, while perceptibly angry at what he sees as the perversions of modern elite sport, has nevertheless written consistently out of the belief that something in the way of fair play and honest sporting endeavour could be salvaged from the wreckage. John Hoberman is an American academic, trained originally in Scandinavian languages. His work has combined prodigious scholarship on the history both of sport and science with an often emotive vocabulary, withering in its condemnation of cheating sportspeople and vacillating bureaucrats. The title of Hoberman’s principal work in this area – *Mortal Engines: The Science of Performance and the Dehumanization of Sport* (1992) is largely self-explanatory and ties the author, if not to the Marxian notion of alienation, at least to the nineteenth-century humanist philosophy from which it was developed. The book is a detailed historical account of the ways in which scientific intervention has disfigured sport across a range of countries and social systems. Early on in *Mortal Engines* Hoberman acknowledges the difficulty in countering the ‘relativizing strategy’ which styles ‘doping’ as simply one performance enhancement among many. ‘Why, then’, he asks, ‘should one technique be banned while others are allowed? A rebuttal must show why some techniques violate the essence of sport while others do not’ (1992: 26–7). Hoberman, of course, has his own rebuttals – he argues, for example, that steroids are different because ‘they affect the human endocrinological system, which is

the physiological basis of gender and sexual functioning' (1992: 27), but the very existence of this philosophical grey area is, for him, evidence of 'scientific ambition out of control' and a 'bioethical crisis of high-performance sport today' (1992: 28).

Six years later, with this perceived crisis apparently deepening, Hoberman reflected angrily on the Tour de France cycle race of 1998, from which the Festina team had been expelled for illegal drug use. In an article ironically appearing on *Meso-Rx*, a website for bodybuilders and other steroid users, Hoberman denounced the event as 'a pharmacy on wheels'. 'The Tour debacle', he wrote, 'has finally made it acceptable to say in public and without provocation what many have known for a long time, namely, that long-distance cycling has been the most consistently drug-soaked sport of the twentieth century' (Møller and Nauright, 2002). This recognition, though, and the riders' general response – peeved rather than contrite – only increased Hoberman's anger with the sponsors and administrators who had tacitly accepted the situation. The expulsions, he gloomily reflected, had come as the result of an

unprecedented crackdown presided over by a Communist (female) health minister in the cabinet of the socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin... They were dumbfounded precisely because everyone involved, including the press, had been playing the game for so long in the interest of doing business as usual. And why does it matter that the health minister [Marie-Georges Buffet, leader of the French Communist Party] is a Communist? Because the only politicians in Europe who want to deploy the long arm of the law against doping, whether in France, Italy or Germany, are leftists or Greens who do not share the sportive nationalism of their conservative countrymen – the patriots who have always been willing to look the other way in the interest of keeping up with foreigners who just might be using drugs. (Hoberman, 1998)

National sporting elites and the financial backers on whom they depended could, it was implied, no longer be relied upon to preserve even a vestige of post-Victorian fair play: quoting a *New York Times* article on the affair from October of 1998 Hoberman reflected ruefully 'Festina actually reported "that the scandal had a positive effect on sales of its watches and that it would pay the team's \$5 million expenses again next year"' (1998).

The following year at a conference on doping in North Carolina, Hoberman expressed his indignation that, following the Festina scandal,

leading administrators had called for milder penalties for dopers and for sportspeople to be treated as workers, with their own labour laws. He lent his full support to proposals for an international anti-doping body, which materialised later that year in the form of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) (1999). In 2005, Hoberman published *Testosterone Dreams*, a book in which he gives perhaps greater acknowledgement than hitherto to the medicalisation of everyday life and the ways in which 'People can feel obligated to dope themselves for military, professional or sexual purposes' (2005: 4). Thus sport takes its place alongside the pursuit of greater industrial productivity, military efficiency, extended youth and physical attractiveness as matters which have become the province of medical doctors, scrupulous and otherwise.

John Hoberman's work can be read as expressing a passionate belief that modern sport could, in some way and to some degree, be re-humanised and thus saved from its corrupt and over-scientised self. All that is needed, it is implied, are better safeguards to root out the cheats and indulgent officials. Hoberman seems frequently to draw a line in the sand, only to have it washed away by the next tide of pharmacological transgressions. In their *Fastest, Highest, Strongest*, Rob Beamish and Ian Ritchie, other leading writers in the field, take a more dispassionate view of elite sport. They note how at the headquarters of the sports firm Nike, in Portland, Oregon, in the early twenty-first century there took place 'the latest development in the total integration of commercial marketing interests, vast private sector resources, patriotism, cutting-edge science and technology and world-class, high-performance sport' (Beamish and Ritchie, 2006: 105): Nike assembled some promising runners and maintained them in an hermetically sealed environment, every physical aspect of which had been scientifically controlled to procure optimal performance (Beamish and Ritchie, 2006: 105). Were they alive today, nineteenth-century thinkers such as Marx might have thought that, in advanced capitalist sport, alienation was complete. However, Beamish and Ritchie cannot accept concepts such as 'the essence of sport' or 'true sport' – concepts which, as we saw, power the work of writers such as Hoberman. Their dismissal of these notions comes out of two, linked convictions: first, that myths surround such purportedly carefree, amateur sporting achievements of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, such as the founding of the modern Olympics or the running of the first sub-four minute mile in 1954 and, second, that sport can, ultimately, only be what human beings say that it is – it has no 'essence' or 'authenticity' beyond that (Beamish and Ritchie, 2006: 112–15; see also Bale, 2004).

Some philosophers and sociologists are prepared to go further and embrace the technological innovations and to dismiss the notion that there might be a 'natural body' or a state of mind that was intrinsically human. The humanist philosophy of the nineteenth century is thus rejected in favour of 'posthumanism' and 'transhumanism'. As a result, in academic commentary on sport, terms such as 'cyborg athlete' and 'genetically modified athlete' are gaining currency. Andy Miah, for example, writes:

sport is already posthuman. Athletes have already metamorphosed into super-humans, blurred suitably by the softening presentation of modern television. Athletes are ambassadors of transhumanism, placed at the cutting edge of human boundaries of capability. The athlete's body is in a state of flux, continually transcending itself, and thus, perpetuating transhuman ideas about the biophysics of humanity. For this reason, elite sport is a useful case from which one can justify the acceptance of transhumanism. (2003)

The culture of advanced capitalist societies affords little space for the idea of alienation; these societies are governed increasingly by the politics of identity, in which, it is asserted, people can become what they wish to become. Many people are therefore likely to warm to the idea of a mutating sporting body, seeking, and seeking to exceed, its known limits. For others of a Marxian persuasion, outside of skimming a Frisbee round the park on a Sunday afternoon or playing beach cricket with their families, un-alienated sport will be increasingly difficult to find.

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# Amateurism

The word 'amateur' is French in origin and derives from the Latin word for 'love' – the same root that gave us the English word 'amorous'. It was therefore used originally to describe someone who pursued an activity solely for the love of it. Amateurism is generally seen as an English phenomenon (Allison, 2001: 10).

Few people today would understand the word 'amateurism' as primarily denoting love. In the modern world it usually signifies incompetence. Which of us would wish to be identified as one of 'a bunch of amateurs'? Chances are we would far rather be recognised as 'professional' in our approach, professional being for much of the history of modern sport the widely despised antonym of 'amateur'. These days, in sport as in the wider society, there can seldom be enough 'professionalism'.

The history of amateurism in sport is the history of claims about the respective behaviour of different groups of sportspeople and few of these claims stand up to much scrutiny now, if, indeed, they ever did. Amateurism was increasingly recognised as some kind of organised hypocrisy within the administration of sport, as indicated by the increased currency given to the term 'shamateur'. This may make the subject of amateurism difficult to discuss dispassionately. However, a means to sensible discussion is provided by the writer Lincoln Allison (2001: 20–4), who suggests that there are three, often intertwining, ways of defining amateurism:

- (a) Social Definitions. In practice, when amateur hegemony in the stewardship of sport was at its height, amateurs were often defined simply in social terms. This was typified by the so-called 'mechanics clauses' adopted in British sports such as rowing and athletics in the late nineteenth century. Here an amateur was said, in effect, to be someone who was not a manual worker – labourers, mechanics, artisans and, in the case of the Amateur Rowing Association, people 'engaged in any menial task' being specifically excluded. Prohibitions such as this led the rowing historian Christopher Dodd to observe: 'Rowing people, in common with other sportsmen, were very good at determining what an amateur was not. But deciding what an amateur is has eluded them' (Dodd, 1989: 281).
- (b) Ethical Definitions. Here the amateur was defined by the values that s/he held and, it was assumed, expressed in the sporting arena. In this context, the word approached its true meaning, since: it defined a person who played sport for pleasure; was comparatively careless of the outcome of sport encounters; played fairly; accepted both the decisions of officials and the results of contests with a good grace; and gained no extrinsic reward (usually wages or compensation for loss of earnings) for playing. It goes without saying that people who played sport with this philosophy could not, or should not, logically have been confined to one particular social group.
- (c) Bureaucratic or Financial Definitions. These arose when governing bodies wished to use either of the first two kinds of definition as a

basis for excluding and/or controlling groups within a particular sport. Both exclusion and control were widespread. In 1895, for example, the Northern Union (the forerunner of Rugby League in the north of England) disengaged from the Rugby Football Union over the issue of ‘broken time payments’, which the latter body refused to condone. These payments were also a matter of contention in the Olympic movement during the first half of the twentieth century. In 1882 the Amateur Athletic Association actually set up a fund to finance prosecutions of athletes falsely claiming to be amateurs according to the AAA definition; some were subsequently found guilty of fraud and sentenced to six months’ hard labour (Crump, 1989: 51).

The most cursory examination of the history of amateurism as a concept suggests that it has often worked as a metaphor for the British upper classes and as an ideological rendering of their actions, objectives and self image. It was rooted in the cult of games which developed in the British public schools in the mid- to late nineteenth century. During this time athletic pursuits, and the body itself, acquired a newly exalted status. Part of the ethos that surrounded these games was that the people who played them played fairly. The amateur ideology was subsequently often deployed in a way that suggested that players from outside this social world – the working class and foreigners, for instance – could not be relied upon to play as fairly as the public school ‘gentleman’. The invocation of amateurism thus became a means of defining the Other in sport.

The sporting metaphor and the notion that the British had a special facility for playing fairly strongly characterised the British Empire. The rivalry between the British and Russian empires, for example, was frequently referred to as ‘The Great Game’ and colonial (and postcolonial) sportspeople (Pakistani cricketers, for instance) were often styled as cheats. At the same time in British colonial territories – in Australia, the East Coast of America and elsewhere – anglophile elites emerged that dedicated themselves to upholding the mythical values of fair play. Bill Woodfull who captained Australia in the ‘Bodyline’ cricket series of 1932–3 is reputed during one Test Match to have said ‘There’s only one side out there playing cricket – and it’s not England’. These historic (and highly questionable) notions still have a strong resonance in state politics. For example, on a visit to Africa in January of 2005, the then British Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown said:

The days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over. We should talk, and rightly so, about British values that are enduring, because they stand for some of the greatest ideas in history – tolerance, liberty, civic duty – that grew in Britain and influenced the rest of the world. Our strong traditions of fair play, of openness, of internationalism, these are great British values. (*The Guardian*, 1 March 2005: 24)

‘Fair play’, as the historian Richard Holt (1989) has suggested, was the watchword of the upper-middle-class gentleman amateurs and there’s little doubt that many of these men lived and played according to the amateur ideal. The football club Corinthian Casuals, for example, founded in 1882 by ex-public schoolboys and taking their name from a city state in Ancient Greece, were pledged never to train or to compete for trophies. After the penalty kick was introduced into association football in 1891, they withdrew their goalkeeper on conceding one: the very idea of trying to save the kick, and thus profit from a foul, was anathema to the gentleman footballer.

The point, though, is not that ‘true’ amateurism never existed – that it was wholly ‘ideological’ – but that it could not be confined to a specific social group: ‘gentlemen’. History suggests that ‘amateurism’ was a response to the rise of ‘professionalism’. Certainly the latter term came into popular usage later, ‘professionalism’ being in currency in the 1850s and ‘amateurism’ not until the 1880s. The popular suppositions that seemed to define the amateur – that he was careless of the result of the game, that he played fairly, that he disdained material reward and so on – were all incompatible with the evidence. England’s most famous cricketer Dr W.G. Grace, for instance, played as an amateur but is generally held to have played hard, with scant regard for fairness, and to have pocketed £9,000 (a very large sum at the time) from a benefit awarded to him by his county Gloucestershire in 1895 (Rae, 1999: 396). Similarly, members of the Amateur Rowing Association, arguably the most exclusive of all Britain’s sporting bodies, had no qualm either about rowing for trophies or about training for races (Wagg, 2006). Conversely, a number of professionals – the cricketer Sir Jack Hobbs, the tennis player Rod Laver, the footballers Bobby Charlton and Gary Lineker, and legions more – have been acknowledged as chivalrous, self-deprecating players – fair in the amateur mode. Amateurism has to be seen therefore as a means through which to exclude and/or to control working-class sportspeople. Indeed, as noted earlier, some sports governing bodies voted to ban ‘artisans,

mechanics and labourers' from membership. In British rowing the phrase 'or is engaged in any form of menial duty' was added. Amateur hegemony grew often in relation to the success of working-class and professional players (not always the same thing) in various sports: rugby players in the North of England, for example, and watermen, many of whose families had worked a river for generations and who dominated the early boat races.

Behind the growing militancy of the gentleman amateur lay the ongoing political and social wrangle between the entrenched landed classes, finance capitalists and Southern-based professionals and the rising Northern and Midlands-based industrial middle class, with their ethos of openness, competition and free trade. As Allison puts it, 'there were two conflicting tendencies in the society of the time, one which saw the commercial possibilities of urban markets and the other which abhorred those possibilities' (Allison, 2001: 18). A number of reforms, notably those giving the vote to male men of property in 1832 and to the skilled male working class in 1867 are indicative of this social change. In the realm of sport the Southern, gentlemanly elite and its class allies around the country wished to conduct matters on their own terms and to keep notions of competition and markets at bay. Traditional hierarchy sought to rebut (qualified) equality of opportunity.

Neither of these major social class groupings, however, was especially sympathetic to professionalism or to the growing working-class power of which it was a symbol. What emerged are two ways of dealing with professionalism and/or working-class sportspeople.

One amounted essentially to exclusion and the maintaining of separate spheres. The Amateur Rowing Association, based on elite clubs and stretches of river, excluded lower middle-class and working-class rowers from prestigious regattas, such as the one held annually at Henley. A separate rowing organisation – the National Amateur Rowing Association – was founded in 1890 and catered to the merely amateur, as opposed to gentleman amateur, oarsman. Similarly Northern rugby players were effectively expelled from the Rugby Football Union in 1895 for receiving 'broken time payments'. Likewise amateur footballers seceded from the FA in 1907, returning only in 1914.

The second strategy was founded on the notion of getting professionalism into the open, making it easier to control. In cricket, for example, amateurs and professionals played together, but, until the 1960s and 1970s, this was in circumstances of secure amateur hegemony, both on and off the field. A similar political strategy informed moves to form the

Football League in 1888: Northern administrators thought a better way of containing professionalism was to make it legitimate.

The late nineteenth century is widely seen as the 'golden age' of the amateur sportsman. In the twentieth century the term became progressively discredited and the word 'shamateurism' was widely preferred. One by one, bodies of sport governance abandoned the distinction between amateurs and professionals, beginning with English cricket in 1962 (Smith and Porter, 2000). In 1980 the International Olympic Committee, for so long a bastion of amateurism, and latterly 'shamateurism', effectively endorsed professionalism when its president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, declined to offer a definition of amateurism, delegating this responsibility to national Olympic committees.

The term survives now in common parlance only as a denotation of incompetence.

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# Capitalism

(for Anti-Capitalism see Globalisation; Marxism)

## CAPITALISM AND THE ORIGINS OF MODERN SPORT

Capitalism is the name given to the historically specific form of economic production and social organisation, which begins to dominate the societies of Western Europe during the early eighteenth century. By late nineteenth century capitalism is widely recognised as the globally dominant economic and social system. The key features of capitalistic societies are: a division of labour and a system of wage-labour; the establishment of private property; and commodity production. Commodities are goods that are made and exchanged for profit rather than for immediate use or to meet the needs of the producers. The writings of the political economists Adam Smith (1723–1790), and Karl Marx (1818–1883) have been highly influential in shaping how we have come to understand the origins and socio-economic structure of capitalist societies. Early forms of capitalism emerged in England during the sixteenth century, as the feudal social order was slowly undermined and replaced by a new merchant class. Adam Smith is credited with laying the foundations of liberal laissez-faire economics, and in his book *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) he offers one of the first critical theories of capitalism as a system – although during Smith’s time the term capitalism was not itself used. Smith referred to this new form of economic production as the ‘system of natural liberty’. Central to Smith’s thought is the belief in the power of the market (and what he described as its ‘invisible hand’) to correct economic crisis without the need for state or other forms of conscious organised intervention. Karl Marx on the other hand, suggests, in a deliberate critique of Smith, that capitalistic economic production is shaped by the emergence of a two class grouping – the bourgeoisie or capitalist class who, according to Marx own the means of production, and the wage-labour or working class (the proletariat) who are required to sell their labour power to the capitalist. It is, Marx suggests, in the interests of both these classes to

consciously intervene in capitalist production. The capitalist class, through the state, will strive to maintain and reproduce the conditions necessary for capitalist accumulation – the exploitation of the working class. The working class must organise themselves to resist and ultimately dismantle the capitalist social order, replacing it with communism (see **Marxism**). Capitalist production is organised on the principle of producing value in the form of profit, rather than producing things to use. This new form of production is called ‘commodity production’ whereby commodities are produced and exchanged (via the market) for a value that is in excess of the cost or investment made in the initial production of the commodity.

Commodity production encourages the increasingly specialised division of labour through the mechanisation and technological development of production. Feudal forms of governance and social structure (religion, the crown, hereditary hierarchies ... ) are replaced by increasingly secular and democratic institutions, such as parliament, the nation state and the rule of law. However it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that capitalism established its classical form with the wholesale industrialisation of commodity production, whereby early forms of capitalistic production, agrarian and mercantile in form, were replaced by mass production methods of manufacture within a factory system shaped by an increasingly specialised division of labour. This is the classic form of capitalism and is generally referred to as ‘Industrial Capitalism’. The increasing mechanisation of production within industrial capitalism results in the deskilling of labour and the formal routinisation of work.

Social scientists consider sport as a central expression of capitalistic economic and social relations. Historically, modern sport emerges as a codified, structured social institution just at a time when European capitalism undergoes rapid economic and industrial development during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The transformation of the economic and productive base is mirrored at the level of social relations and culture. It is in this context that sport emerges as a significant area of social and economic activity. Capitalist social relations transforms previously ad hoc and disparate pastimes and games into rationalised activities that are subject to structured bureaucratic, institutional control which in turn become codified sport, as standardised rules and regulations are developed. Mason (1980) suggests that with reference to

English football the process of codification takes place between 1845 and 1862, when the leading public schools consigned the rules of their various codes and games to print (cited in Horne et al., 1999: 40). These codified sets of rules become subject to and enforced by governing bodies at regional, national and then international levels. Formed in 1863 the Football Association, then a Southern based organisation, established itself as football's leading authority in the late 1870s. Football's world governing body, FIFA, was formed in 1904; however, it was not until 1946 that the English FA finally joined (UEFA, the European governing body was not formed until 1954). Similarly, the Amateur Athletic Club (AAC) was formed in 1886. The AAC was later to become the Amateur Athletics Association (or 'three As'), the governing body of athletics in Britain. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) was formed in 1894 with the first modern Olympic games held in 1896. Formed in 1787 the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) became the leading influence in developing cricket within the new industrial society, and was to establish itself as the games governing body (Horne et al., 1999).

As society was dramatically remade by capitalism, so were sports. From being primarily aristocratic pursuits in their modern origins, sports very quickly came to reflect the mass nature of industrial society. The institutionalisation of games in the late nineteenth century made them more 'work like' (Haley, 1978). This had both economic and social consequences. Many of the most famous sporting clubs and teams have their origins in the factory and industrial system of the nineteenth century, as many factory owners and industrialists recognised the benefits of using sport, such as football, to boost the profile of their companies. As sport became more 'work like' so it became an occupation and a career. Talking of the development of professional football in England (the Football League, a body representing the interests of the first professional clubs was founded in 1888 with 12 members), Tischler (1981) suggests that it reflected the nature and tensions of the labour relations that existed at the time. The emergence of professional sportsmen was bound up in the new industrial culture as working-class players, who had little or no leisure time, demanded financial recompense for the time and effort they were giving free to play in works teams. During this period sporting activity becomes subject to the economic rationales of the market. Not only does it become, like work, an area of financial recompense, but sport also begins to take on, outwardly at least, the vestiges of a commercial activity, as opportunities are spotted to make money from the new emerging

sports. With the establishment of professionalism, the paying spectator quickly follows, as club owners seek to recoup the financial outlay made through now having to pay wages to their players. Between the years 1890 and 1914 spectator sport became a significant part of British national culture. However, these processes were not without tensions and points of conflict, themselves reflecting the social and economic inequalities of class and power within capitalist society. There was pronounced opposition to, and resentment of, the early expressions of commercialisation and professionalisation which accompanied increasing working-class participation in sport, on the part of the new middle-class elite. This elite considered themselves to be not only the administrative and institutional leaders of modern sport, but also its moral guardians. Modern sport has its origins in the elite schooling system that emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The public school system was considered the central institution whereby the new capitalist class was to educate and train a new generation of leaders, administrators, politicians, generals and social architects, equipped with the skills and ideologies to govern the new social and economic order embodied in capitalism. As a result, sport was readily inscribed with the same ideology. This ideology has been described as one of athleticism, or Muscular Christian. Hargreaves (1986) notes that the 'athleticist' ideology that shaped sport's origins also reflected and permeated the country's political and economic cultures and has had a long lasting influence upon the nature and social character of the development of sport in Britain.

Within prominent sections of the new capitalist middle class, sport had particular social uses. An ideology of 'rational recreation' was readily co-opted as a means to alleviate the perceived social problems associated with mass urbanisation and industrialisation. Sport was to provide a means by which the new capitalist class sought to 'civilise' and morally educate the new but poor working classes. Holt (1989: 139) has noted the conscious promotion of sport within poor urban communities, whereby, through the playing of sport, new forms and structures of discipline are inculcated into the poor. As has been noted, "religious, humanitarian and educational bodies" became concerned as the century progressed, that the labouring classes should be provided with "as many accepting and improving activities as possible" (Golby and Purdue 1984: 92, cited in Horne et al., 1999: 17). Although this overtly class-based prejudice has its origins in elitist Victorian social thought, the idea that sport plays a social function in offering structure, discipline, character and self esteem to particular

under privileged or excluded sections of society still pervades the modern political imagination.

## POSTMODERN CAPITALISM

With the apparent decline in industrial manufacturing within Western capitalist economies, the increasingly global nature of the division of labour, and the emergence of service and information based industries during the late twentieth century, many sociologists and other commentators have suggested that capitalism has entered a new stage of development. There are three principal characterisations of this new phase. They are 'post-industrial capitalism'; 'dis-organised capitalism'; and 'late capitalism'.

In his book the *Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Daniel Bell (1973) suggests that the core features that define post-industrial capitalism are: the growing predominance of the tertiary (services) sector over the primary (agriculture and mining) and secondary (manufacturing) sectors. There is an increasing emphasis upon the role of knowledge-based and educational sectors, and, finally, a noticeable decrease in polarised industrial class conflict, as capitalism's organisational structures become less hierarchical. Within post-industrial capitalism social development is essentially driven by technological change rather than by industrial production.

Dis-organised capitalism is a term coined to describe the fragmentation of social, economic and political institutions (such as class and the state) within Western democracies. It is suggested that capitalist structures are now defined by their seemingly disorganised nature rather than by their rational organisation. The tendency towards globalisation and the transition to postmodern forms of social organisation disrupt and ultimately transgress the traditional systems, networks and boundaries that have characterised the previous period of capitalist development (modernity) (see Lash and Urry, 1987).

As a concept 'late-capitalism' was first used in Europe towards the end of the 1930s. Developed by a group of Marxist social scientists in Germany (known collectively as 'The Frankfurt School') to describe a stage in capitalist development which they considered to be characterised by profound economic and social crisis, the distinct features of 'late-capitalism' during this period were: a tendential web of bureaucratic control and the increasing interrelationship of government and big business – a development they termed 'state capitalism'. In this respect the Frankfurt School considered the development of Nazism in