

Sport Studies

Barbara Bell



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Sport Studies

Barbara Bell



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I have attempted to credit all the specific sources used, and have used with permission, data from Deloitte Sport Business Group, and Youth Sport Trust in case studies and tables. I hope all other material has been credited or acknowledged within the text where appropriate.

Introduction: on the blocks and ready to go?

This book is an introductory text for those studying sport at degree level. I assume no prior knowledge or study of sport, or of the disciplines that contribute to sport studies programmes. In fact, that is what the book has been devised to do – introduce you to sport studies, which I hope you will find as interesting and engrossing as I do. The aim of this book is to help prepare you to tackle some of the excellent, but more specialised, texts available for degree level study, and provide a good overview of relevant subjects and disciplines that contribute to sport studies. We have designed it to be user-friendly, and to provide you with some of the essential underpinning knowledge, skills and understanding for your degree in sport studies.

What is 'sport studies'?

I have focused here on the social science-based study of sport. The term 'sport studies' has come to describe a range of sport-based courses, which in turn evolved from programmes in physical education, recreation management and leisure studies programmes over the past 30 or so years. The term 'sport studies' implies a greater breadth of disciplines contributing to the analysis of sport than a purely scientific or performance orientation. Programmes in sport studies adopt a multidisciplinary approach to the study of sport, physical activity, exercise and recreation in all its forms. As a subject at university undergraduate level, sport studies has a fairly recent history compared to the disciplines, for example sociology or history, that it draws upon. In order to formally recognise the characteristics of sport studies, academics have come together to set out benchmark statements that describe what a sport studies programme will usually be concerned with, and what you might expect within any course that has sport studies in its title.

Sport currently sits within the subject benchmarking statements for Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism, or Unit 25 of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education in England, revised in 2008.

Sport studies programmes

According to the QAA benchmark statements, those degrees incorporating the term 'sport studies' will normally be expected to embrace two or more of the five study areas considered under the broad heading of sport (QAA 2008). These study areas include the performance of sport, human responses and adaptations to sport and exercise and health-related and disease management aspects of exercise and physical activity, which are usually related to sport science programmes. Other books in the *Active Sport* series deal with these different aspect of sport; however, in this book I concentrate upon the following benchmark statement:

6.20 The study of the historical, social, political, economic and cultural diffusion, distribution and impact of sport, including:

- displaying a critical insight into the organisations and structures responsible for sport, and the political ramifications arising from these
- employing social, economic and political theory to explain the development and differentiation of sport throughout society
- demonstrating the application of the social and cultural meanings attached to sport and their impact on participation and regulation.

(QAA 2008: 13)

As it is possible to draw from such a broad spectrum of knowledge, the curriculum content of sport studies programmes this book is designed to support includes: sociology and cultural study of sport, philosophy and ethics, sport history, sport business and economics, and sport policy. This book also provides some essential underpinning knowledge relating to the final benchmarking statement relating to the policy, planning, management and delivery of sporting opportunities, by looking at the governance or running of sport, sport policy and provision across various sectors.

The sector to which sport and the other subjects in this unit (leisure, hospitality and tourism) belong is the service sector/experience economy (QAA 2008). This is recognised as one of the most dynamic and increasingly important sectors of the global economy. We cannot get very far from some aspect of sport in our daily lives, even if we are not sport students or fans. A steady stream of sport-related media – newspapers, national televised news bulletins, internet articles – provides reminders of how significant sport is in modern society. We engage in some form of sport in increasing numbers and a small but significant minority of people invest their time and great effort, involving huge personal sacrifice, into becoming top-level sports performers. Others display fanatical support for teams or individuals, travelling great distances or spending large amounts of money, buying merchandise, tickets or equipment to emulate their sporting heroes. A great many people engage in some form of sport or activity on a daily basis, and even more engage less frequently – simply for fun or for personal fulfilment. Sport can inspire great passion and emotion, interest and enthusiasm – and arguments about whether sport is really important or just a trivial pursuit.

Studying one of the great passions of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and attempting to understand the complex and dynamic contemporary sporting landscape has also clearly engaged and enthused a great many scholars. A great deal has been written about sport, from many different perspectives. Such interest and

enthusiasm has fuelled a great increase in the number and range of courses in sport studies, investigating this hugely important cultural and social phenomenon and its impacts on society.

The study of sport from this social science perspective is also about equipping students with the essential knowledge and skills to develop more critical and analytical approaches and informed practice. Students of 'sport studies' would therefore be expected to employ relevant theory, from social, historical or economic perspectives, to explain the development of sport, or its significance, addressing questions such as:

- Why do we have more men than women playing or watching certain types of sport?
- Why do we have particular forms of sport in contemporary society?
- Who decides which sports should get public funds?

Sport studies also involves the application of relevant theory to understand and develop better practice in understanding consumption patterns or the provision of sporting opportunities. How can we provide better sport opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to all?

As well as providing essential knowledge about sport, courses in sport studies are also expected to equip students to enter the world of work – whether in sport or another field. Courses usually include some vocational elements; hence the final part of this book deals with both skills and employability – in and out of sport.

As sport is expected to be delivered within a suitable ethical environment, the study of sport is also expected to incorporate a moral and ethical framework for possible professional applications or careers. The issues of equity and diversity are key to understanding how and why 'best practice' in sport is delivered; hence sport studies is expected to incorporate understanding of the ethical and moral aspects of the sector.

Though there is great diversity in specific modules and topics under the broad 'sport studies' banner, they tend to share some common characteristics, as they will have been developed to be consistent with the QAA benchmark statements referred to above.

How can this book help me?

This book can help you by providing a useful introduction and framework for your studies. I want to help make the subject more accessible, so have included many activities and ideas for further study, or sources of advice and guidance. We hope you take a very 'active' role in your learning about sport, as you probably (hopefully?) do in being active in sport.

Structure and format of the book

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with introductions to the historical, social and philosophical aspects of sport. Each chapter takes one particular theoretical perspective and examines important concepts and theories about how sport has developed and its social impacts and meanings.

Part 2 introduces the political and economic aspects of sport, including sport policy, sporting structures and sport business. The chapters in this section look at how sport in

the UK is organised and by whom, and recent developments in sport policy in the UK. It goes on to introduce the economic and business aspects of sport, highlighting the role of the media and global markets.

Part 3 focuses on your personal development, in both academic and vocational skills, and introduces careers in sport. Chapters concentrate upon academic skills, vocational skills and employability, within a personal development framework.

An expectation of the subject group is that students are expected to develop multidisciplinary approaches to addressing the same phenomenon. Using this book, for example, you could look at the forthcoming London 2012 Olympic Games from historical, political and sociological perspectives.

Within each chapter I have tried to provide you with some introductory information, key concepts and theories, with examples and ideas to take your learning further. Throughout the book there are examples or case studies drawn from a range of possible areas of sport, and activities to encourage you to use a variety of methods to explore topics and concepts.

The intellectual skills expected of a sport studies graduate are incorporated into each chapter. These include being able to research and assess specific facts and theories or concepts, evaluate evidence and interpret data. Activities are designed to make you think, read or apply knowledge to particular problems or issues.

Boxes will develop specific cases or add detail on particular issues. Some activities are simple 'time outs' – to give you space to think about something and reflect on what you've read or consider your personal experiences.

An important skill the book is designed to help you develop is the ability to manage your own learning and continuing development. You are encouraged therefore to move between the chapters and make your own links and examples in order to build your own understanding of this fascinating subject. I hope you enjoy the book and find it useful!

PART 1

Core theories and essential perspectives in the study of sport

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A historical perspective of sport

Introduction

This chapter is not going to attempt to provide a potted history of sport in 20 pages. As attractive as that might be to you, a hard-pressed student, it would be a rather pointless exercise to attempt! This chapter is essentially about why you might study sport from a historical perspective and how you might go about it. We are also going to identify some important trends and periods in the history of sport, key authors, and highlight some of the important changes in sport, particularly in the UK. Through examples and case studies, the chapter will introduce students to the study of sport history and provide links to develop their knowledge and understanding of this very important aspect of sport studies. As the QAA has identified, a historical perspective is felt to be fundamental to our understanding of the forms and practices of sport in contemporary society.

Learning outcomes

After completing this chapter and the related learning activities, you will be able to:

- explain the relevance of sport history to contemporary sport practices;
- identify different approaches to the study of sport history;
- identify some of the important authors in the history of sport;
- identify further sources useful for investigating specific topics in the history of sport.

Why study the history of sport?

in the modern world sport is everywhere; it is as ubiquitous as War. E. J. Hobsbawm, the distinguished Marxist historian, once called it one of the most significant of the new practices of the late nineteenth century Europe. Today it is one of the significant practices of the world.

(Mangan 2006: 1)

Sometimes sports students, who often prefer to 'learn by doing', complain about having to read about sport history or refer back to past events or out-dated practices. They argue their interest is in the future and not in the dry and dusty past. However, the fact that most courses in sport studies include and often start with a historical perspective should alert you to the significance of history for our study of sport today.

The QAA benchmark statements for sport studies referred to in the introduction call for students to have some recognition of the historical perspective. However, this expectation can sometimes be problematic, as many students have not got a strong grounding in history, coming from a diverse range of backgrounds. So, one potential reason for a reluctance or resistance to historical study for sport students could relate to lack of confidence and knowledge of the past – history may not have been one of your subjects at GCSE, for example. As a result, when students are asked to discuss or read about sport in the broader context of social history, from even relatively modern periods, they may lack the wider knowledge that their (usually older) tutors sometimes take for granted.

However, the study of history, it is argued, brings with it a sense of perspective, and the development of analytical, research and judgemental skills. Students will need to weigh up various accounts, from a range of sources, testing and probing for explanations and interpretations. So, despite the initial reluctance of some, the study of sport history provides some fascinating subject and topics, and provides students with an opportunity to engage in interesting and useful study.

According to Polley (2007), advice on 'doing' sport history is rather neglected, and he has produced a useful guide that has provided some of the ideas for further activities used in this chapter. Another important resource guide has been produced by Martin Johnes (2003), which provides an extensive annotated bibliography of potential sources on a wide range of sport history topics.

Students come to the subject of sport studies with diverse interests, experiences and academic backgrounds. The main purpose of any introductory sport history course would be to enable students to gain a better understanding of the development and emergence of contemporary sporting practices, forms or institutions and be able to identify key historical processes and events.

Analysing the history of sport: history and histiography

Sport history involves the investigation, analysis and interpretation of sporting practices, traditions, organisations and individuals. Histiography is concerned with how historians work and why they work in particular ways. It is also concerned with how other academic disciplines or perspectives, such as sociology, cultural theory or philosophy, can influence the historian's interpretation and understanding of the past.

A review of the recent papers published in the *International Journal of the History of Sport*, in Table 1.1 shows the diversity of topics, periods and questions addressed, even within a single issue of a journal.

Table 1.1: Recent journal articles in sport history

| Topic | Period | Main sources |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games | Middle twentieth century | Official documents, newspaper reports and internal communications |
| C. L. R. James' view of the aesthetics of cricket | 1930s | Glasgow Herald cricket articles, 1937–38 |
| Doping scandal at Nordic World Ski Championships in Lahti, Finland 2001 | 20005 | Finnish and international Press and media reports |

Source: International Journal of Sport History, 23(1).

Social history and sport

Most sport historians would tend to agree that it is difficult, if not impossible, to consider sport as some sort of 'separate' part of culture and society. According to Polley, sport: 'is a cultural product linked to all kinds of contexts and traditions, and carrying both positive and negative values relative to those settings' (2007: x).

Therefore, we have to accept that sport can be viewed in many different ways and that, over time and across different cultures, values and beliefs about sport may change. The task of the historian is to shed some light on these changes and continuities, and provide better understanding of them. When looking at the history of sport, we must also consider broader events, traditions and other cultural practices.

Nancy Struna (2000) noted that evidence of sport history goes back to 'pre-historic' times, through the pictographs of sporting practices recorded in caves dating back thousands of years. Later societies, in Ancient Greece, Rome and China, provide many examples of sport being recorded in different forms, including written records, art and poetry. In more modern times, popular culture and mass media forms have recorded sporting activities and events, telling 'stories' against a background of wider social contexts and circumstances. Struna (p. 187) points out that such 'stories, located and understood in the context of their time and place' are important parts of social historians' work. One such example is the film, *Chariots of Fire* (1981), recently voted one of the best all time films about the Olympics.

Sport history on film

Though the film *Chariots of Fire* (Director: Hugh Hudson, Screenwriter: Colin Welland, 1981) is a dramatised version of events, it provides an interesting perspective of social class, religious beliefs and cultural identity in sport and the Olympic movement in the 1920s. It tells the story of Eric Liddell and Harold Abraham, athletes in the British Olympic team for the Paris Olympics in 1924. Forms of dress, speech, competition values and traditions are all represented in such a way as to bring the subject to life, which is why it may be used by tutors to

prompt discussion of various topics, such as social class in sport or the changing role of the sport coach in this period.

This popular cultural form, film, showing a reproduction of sporting and social history, enhances an understanding of the dominance of Olympic sport by the establishment of the time, based in Oxbridge and the aristocracy. It is also interesting to consider the different portrayals of the American and British teams, and indeed other nations, at the games. The stadium shown in the film was actually Bebbington Oval in Cheshire, as this provided a close resemblance to the Paris stadium. Film-makers were able to reproduce fairly accurately the appearance of the Paris games, due to the existence of extensive newsreels and photographs of the time.

Many social historians and sport historians in particular recognise that any good history of a sporting activity, event or pursuit is about more than sport. Social historians see sporting practices as part of a 'bigger picture' of a particular time or context. How and why particular sport came to prominence, for example, are the sort of questions asked by social historians. These may ask questions such as, 'Why did professional sport begin to emerge in the North of England?' They also seek to examine the meanings attached to sporting practice and events and their cultural significance. Examining changes over time, historians look for patterns of continuity and change or struggles for power or dominance by particular groups, individuals or ideologies. The story of rugby, for example, provides a fascinating case of how sport has been a site for class struggle and disputes over domination since the mid-nineteenth century.

Rugby's 'great split'

Read this short summary of the 'great split' in rugby, which established the game of Rugby League.

The so-called 'great split' between the two codes of rugby is usually dated as 1895. According to Collins (1998), the seeds were sown, however, some years earlier, when the Yorkshire committee adopted the MCC's regulations on amateurism in 1879, whereby 'gentlemen' were allowed to claim out of pocket expenses. The gradual incursion of player payments into the amateur sport brought inevitable conflicts between clubs. Those who relied more heavily on players taking time off work to play and train, which were often based in the North, clashed with those who recruited from the professional classes, and who preferred to keep their sport true to its amateur ethos, in the Rugby Football Union (RFU).

Collins' account describes how eventually, when in 1895 RFU laws were amended to prevent any professionalism, the situation was brought to an inevitable climax. In July 1895, a group of 12 Yorkshire-based teams formed the Northern Union, and were joined some months later by senior clubs from Lancashire in the Northern Rugby Football Union, in direct conflict with the RFU.

Though still an amateur body, they allowed 'broken time payments'. These 22 clubs formed the basis of the teams we now know as the Rugby Football League (RFL). Rule changes followed and continued throughout the next 100 years, so that the games became quite distinct, and quite separate – a very acrimonious split, which had significant consequences for both sides.

Clearly, this was more than a split based on geography, or a North–South divide. Issues of class, control and culture were apparent. Though with public school-educated administrators on both sides, who were fiercely protective of the amateur ethos, RL always retained a mixture of amateurs alongside semi- or fully-professional players. Union never accepted professionalism, and players were not permitted to cross from the professional into the amateur game. After 100 years of bitter separation, finally, when faced with increasing economic pressure from leading clubs and the taint of 'shamateurism', the International Rugby Board finally agreed to accept professionalism in 1995. In accepting professionalism, the RFU had come full circle.

Sources: Collins (1998), Rugby Football League (2008), Rugby Football History (2007).

Questions

Identify the different social groups involved in a 'struggle for control' in this period. Discuss the relevance of the debate about amateurs and professionals encapsulated in this case to modern sporting institutions and practices.

Further sources: See Horne et al. (1999) for more on this topic and issues regarding amateurism-professionalism in other sports, such as cricket and athletics. Collins (1998) is recognised as an excellent text on this issue and period, though there are others; see Further study for details.

Trends in sport history writing

Early sport historians tended to reconstruct sporting events, the origins of particular sports or careers of individuals. Though this remains a common approach today, accounts are now more likely to be a critical or interpretive account of a historical period or figure. Such early histories are often detailed descriptive accounts, which have helped to build a body of knowledge about our collective sporting past. Struna (2000) asserted that early, largely uncritical work provided only limited interpretation of the relevant period and the social world of the time, as there tended to be little depth to the wider social interpretations. Nevertheless, this scholarship has provided the basis for many historical accounts of sports in early recorded history.

Sport may also have featured as part of a wider review of a period. For example, the nineteenth-century saw the emergence of many of the popular forms of sport practised today, so accounts of the public schools or figures such as philanthropists or social reformers, included accounts of sporting or recreational activities or events in order to provide evidence of social change or a commentary of the time.

Later work in sport history emerged, which was more critical and multidisciplinary in nature – drawing on social or critical theory, for example, or political science to help explain and examine in more depth, the relative position of sport in the period. Social theories (which we examine in more depth in the next chapter) were recognised to a much greater extent in the study of sport generally and particularly in historical analyses. Tomlinson (2007), citing the sociologist C. Wright Mills, has emphasised the need to have a sound understanding of the historical context for any serious study of social change. History and social theory therefore share interests, methods and concerns. See Table 1.2.

Some key authors in sport history at this time were: Malcomson – (*Popular Recreations in English Society*, 1700–1850 (1973), Walvin – *The People's Game* (1975) and Mason – *Association Football and English Society* (1980). According to Struna (2000), Malcomson in particular 'challenged' concepts of linear change and demonstrated the social power of sport in local experiences and social relations and on institutions and individuals. Malcomson provided extensive evidence of the changes happening to British society and, in particular, the impact of the move to urban and industrialised centres on the largely rural and agriculturally-based pastimes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His view has remained influential for subsequent sport historians. At this time, rural life and 'popular sports' were strongly linked, and, even though some of the activities were not what would be recognised as 'sports' now (such as bull baiting, cock fighting), playing 'foot-ball' was criticised for its violence and vulgarity by the middle classes, so perhaps 'sports' were not so different after all!

Throughout this period of tremendous social upheaval and change, there was a tolerance of sport, largely on its 'tranquiliser' effect for the masses, and the assumption of its value in the development of 'manly discipline' and martial (fighting) qualities. Sport was recognised as a training ground for courage, perseverance, physical strength and group loyalty, beliefs and themes that have persisted to the present day. Cunningham (1980) suggested that the provision of 'recreation', was clearly a 'proper concern of the government' by the late nineteenth century; though this had not been led by popular demand but by a concern of the paternalistic elite to control and improve the working classes – this has direct consequences for modern day recreation provision, as we can see in Chapter 4. Therefore an examination of the nineteenth century provides a rich background within which to examine current attitudes and values enshrined in sport.

Table 1.2: Genres of sport history writing (based on Struna 2000)

| Deep, internal histories of sport | 'No stone unturned' accounts of specific sports, games, ideologies and attitudes, often examining issues of control and power. |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 'Classic' social histories of sport | A perspective of sport in society, telling the story of a broader picture of the nature and meaning of sport, embedded in a particular context or period. |
| Sport in popular culture | Primarily studies framing sport within studies of popular culture or leisure |

Another significant author, Richard Holt, in *Sport and the British* (1989), examined the patterns of persistence and change in the wider context of social structures and experiences of British life. He looked in detail at the transformations happening in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were so critical to the emergence of contemporary sporting forms in the latter part of the twentieth century – industrialisation, urbanisation, economic change, political upheaval and the regulation of popular pursuits. His main theme was the survival and adaptation of sporting forms in this period. Legislation was passed to outlaw some of the activities deemed 'cruel', such as dog-fighting, while others persisted and survived, such as pigeon and greyhound racing. Football and other team sports became more codified, regulated and organised and moved to national rather than local competitive structures. It was in this period that we saw the emergence of the governing bodies for sport, so again, a period that has enormous significance to modern sporting structures. How and why some sports survived, albeit in small enclaves or in adapted forms, is of interest to us today, when we consider what it is that makes a sport popular or lose its appeal.

More recently, Polley (1998) has focused on British sport in the twentieth century. His work has shed light on the repercussions of the social changes seen in wider society on the structures and forms of sport in the twentieth century. For example, the persistence of the North–South divide in some sports; the amateur–professional distinction, which persisted in many sports until well into the latter part of the twentieth century; the conflicts in sports established by Victorian ideals when attempting to adapt to more modern social attitudes; the emergence of greater ethnic diversity in British sport; and greater recognition of gender equality in sport. All of these themes, and the social changes they represent and reflect, maintain a relevance to modern sport.

Dig deeper

- Find an article or book on sport history and place it in one of the above categories.
- Identify the type of data or sources of information the study is based on.
- How does this study enhance our understanding of modern sport?

Learning from history

What we might learn from sport history is very significant. Looking at past forms or practices and undertaking deeper investigations of social and historical facts or data, current scholars attempt to draw out lessons and interpretations which might inform or illuminate current practices and debates. The issue of violence in sport, for example, though topical is not new. Though it may have had very different interpretations in earlier societies, the regulation of violence in sport has been a feature of the development of many societies in the past. Studies of violence in the past may help improve our understanding of why such behaviours persist and can be found across societies. Comparative approaches can also help improve our understanding of contemporary sport and also help shape the sort of sport we might experience in the future. (This and similar topics are also the subject of a later section on philosophy and ethics.)

Sport historians can help to address the questions we need to consider when we look at the future, such as:

- What form of sport will persist in the twenty-first century?
- Why do many forms of sport seem to be disappearing, as some sports seem to dominate?
- Who will have the power to organise sport in the future?

By looking more deeply at our past experiences, we can help come to a better understanding of present and future sport.

Time out

Identify some of the current problems in modern sport. Try to examine whether or not there is a historical precedent or example in the past. What parallels can we draw between modern sport and the past?

Methods in sport history

Methods and sources

Polley (2007) suggests the main methods available to the modern sport historian are:

- oral history
- · documentary archive
- artefacts and ephemera
- commemoration

We can examine the history of sport in a number of ways. Even today, there are traces of the past in the forms of sport we enjoy and our experiences of them. Polley identifies the following, to which I have added some examples and questions you may consider.

Laws, rules and regulations

The dates of inceptions of rules and regulations provide interesting evidence of change. You might trace the dates of important changes and examine why such changes were brought about. For example, when did hockey introduce the push back in place of the famous 'bully off' and why?

Names

Events and stadia, or even famous moves or techniques (the *Cruyff* Turn, the *Fosbury* Flop) often commemorate significant individuals in a particular sport, city or club. Such individuals can provide an interesting subject for a sport history project, and will usually have a legacy of biographical or other archive material for further study.