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Sport as Virtue . . . as Love . . . as Commerce

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Sport as Virtue

One of England's more esoteric and underestimated tourist attractions is a green hut which is to be found between an ancient burial mound and a modern rugby field at Rugby School in Warwickshire. It is called "The Green Pavilion" and its most obvious, if trivial, claim to fame is that it is the oldest purpose-built cricket pavilion in the world. It was built at a cost of £150 in 1840 and it is important to note that these funds were raised by the boys of the school, not by the institution itself, nor by any group of adults. Once inside this simple and bare structure you are aware that its principal feature of interest is the lists of cricket teams, the names painted on wood, which date from its construction. These lists are instructive not only to anyone interested in the history of sport, but also to any reader interested in the process of globalisation.⁽²⁾

You will see there the name of the boy who, as a man, introduced rugby to South Africa, of the boy who went on to invent Australian Rules Football to give his Melbourne cricketers something to do in winter and of the boy who went on to arrange the first Harvard-McGill football match which was the germ of American Football. Most important of all, you will see the name T. A. Hughes (1841) who went on to reinvent his schooldays as a novel, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, published in 1857.⁽³⁾ *Tom Brown* is surely one of the most influential books of the nineteenth century. It created a literary genre, the "school story" and it was deeply influential on a broader category of writing, the "boys' story". The book also remoulded the concept and purpose of the "public" schools as an institution, as represented by the findings of the Clarendon Commission in 1864. Perhaps even more importantly it brought pilgrims to Rugby, the most important of whom was the young Pierre De Coubertin who arrived in 1883 and allegedly knelt in front of the newly constructed prone statue of Dr Thomas Arnold, which lies across the Close from the Green Pavilion. This would have been an appropriate action for a fan of Hughes' work, because there are strange (and possibly heretical) hints towards the end of *Tom Brown* that the idolisation of the Great Headmaster is a necessary step on the road to the love of Jesus Christ. De Coubertin aspired to organise a global *Jeux Arnoldiens*, but was persuaded to dress his project in Greek clothes as the Modern Olympic Games.

Arguably, Rugby has radically mis-sold and undersold its own myth. By "Rugby" here I mean the school, obviously, but in recent years the same would apply to the town and the District Council. What has been generally believed is a) that the school is (only) the place of origin of rugby football and b) that this was invented by a man called William Webb Ellis who in 1823 "with fine disregard" for something that

already existed took the ball in his hands ("picking it up" in some versions) and ran with it. Many people believe, it would seem, that the boys were playing soccer at the time! Of course, soccer didn't exist and nor did anything very much like it; all the versions of "football" the boys played involved handling the ball. There weren't any established or agreed conventions in 1823, but a variety of practices and contest over which conventions should be used. The Webb Ellis myth is thus absurd rather than false and the only element of truth which might be in it is that he could have been one of those who favoured permitting running forwards with the ball in hand, a practice later permitted in both codes of rugby as well as American and Canadian football, though not in the Gaelic or Australian or (obviously) Association versions. A very carefully worded plaque on a wall at Rugby acknowledges these problems while trying to maintain some role for Webb Ellis.

But the more important idea to scotch is that the boys only invented rugby. As I have suggested they can be credited with the American, Canadian and Australian games as well as the two versions of rugby. Their experiments with rackets and fives courts contributed to the development of a number of modern games, most notably the softball version of racquets, now known as squash. Their plotting and timing of precise routes for runners led directly to the development of cross-country running and influenced track and field athletics. But, above all, the what the boys developed was the generic idea of the *organised game*, something disciplined, with a rule book (they printed their own), occurring in well defined units of time and space. Thus Rugby had a massive input – however paradoxical that may seem now – in the development of Association Football and FIFA are right to send educational tours to the school. "Touch" lines, "on" and "off" side, the idea of the "captain" of a team and "caps" as a reward for players and of "gentlemanly conduct" all have their origins on the Close. That the twenty first century England football team play in white is directly descended from the fact that School House at Rugby play in white!

The boys achievement was to take a set of moribund and disgraced social practices – so-called "mob" or "folk" games – and to revive them, Phoenix-like, as something which was both *modern* and *virtuous*. School games, originally at best a tolerated as a necessary evil, came to be recognised as part of the heart of a new system of English education, as it was admired by the Clarendon Commission and also by such curious foreign visitors as Hippolyte Taine and Pierre De Coubertin. But it must be reiterated: at Rugby, though not necessarily at its many imitators, it was the boys who developed games. The headmaster, Dr. Thomas Arnold – and here there seems to be little difference between the real historical figure and the character in the novel – was a tolerant bystander, influencing the spirit and ethos,

but not the practice. It is nicely ironic that the Green Pavilion stands only a few metres from the ancient burial mound which was the scene of the last stand of the great school rebellion of 1797, the most exemplary episode of the failings of the Hanoverian school, where the militia captured the remaining rebels. The eighteenth century school had a considerable element of anarchy; the Georgian boy had his weapons, his alcohol and his whores (rather like the twenty first century schoolboy, a cynic might say): in *Tom Brown* the bad old ways are represented by the bully Flashman. The Victorian boy had his rule books, his Green Pavilion and his codes of virtue.

But which virtues? It turns out that many different people saw both virtue and the means of teaching virtue in the new organised games, but what they saw were not necessarily the same things. I will give four examples:

1. Pierre De Coubertin. I would argue that what De Coubertin saw in the aspect of English life which he discovered was parallel to what was sometimes remarked by other French aristocrats about English life and by Alexis De Tocqueville about the United States. It was essentially a revival of ancient aristocratic values – in this case honour and chivalry reborn as sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct. What was particularly surprising, gratifying, perhaps relieving about the discovery was that the rebirth had taken place not in some Ruritanian backwater, but in the most advanced commercial society in the world.
2. Dr. Thomas Arnold. I have already noted that there are arguably two Thomas Arnolds – the real head of Rugby School from 1828 to 1842 and Tom Hughes' Great Headmaster, but they are broadly similar. In both cases the boys were given leeway to develop their virtuous institutions rather than positively led towards them. But what is certain is that Arnold saw the reform of his school, including the development of its games, as a model for the reform of society. This was essentially a project of modernisation, the creation of a society which was fairer and more orderly. And what could be more modern in this sense than the boys' development of games with their precise boundaries of time and space, their rule books and carefully collated records?
3. Thomas Hughes. I guess most people know *Tom Brown* through one of the many film or television versions of the story (the most recent being the 2005 television version starring Steven Fry as Dr. Arnold). Anyone for whom this is the case will tend to underestimate how profoundly religious and, to a lesser extent, how political the book is largely because dramatisations have tended to concentrate on Part II, the core of which is the struggle with the bully Flash-

man which dramatises quite naturally into the kind of goodies versus baddies boys' story which needs no specific religion or moral code. But in the original the religious content is powerful: it is evangelical, proselytising an assertive, "Christian soldier" morality: Tom is prepared to pray publicly despite mockery and insults. But it is also mystical; when George Arthur, to whom Tom acts as what we should now call a mentor, nearly dies he has an apocalyptic vision of a Godless world. But alongside that element of mysticism is a much greater concern with physicality than is normally the case with evangelical Christianity. Hughes' expression for this is "manly piety" ; the more popular (and sometimes, at least, mildly ironic) expression "muscular Christianity" does not occur in the book and is first recorded in a review of work by Hughes' friend Charles Kingsley in 1857, the year that *Tom Brown* was published. Manly piety means never shrinking from a fight and brutality is condoned to a degree which may seem shocking now. Here Hughes is making no bones about addressing boys in his own voice:

" Fists are the weapons God gave us . . . Don't say "No" because you fear a licking, and say or think it's because you fear God, for that's neither Christian nor honest. And if you do fight, fight it out; don't give in while you can stand and see."⁽⁴⁾

Jesus obviously didn't really mean what he is reported as saying about "turning the other cheek"!

And Hughes is also consistently socialist – Hughes, Kingsley et al. called themselves "Christian Socialists" and Hughes went on to found a model socialist community (the Rugby in Tennessee, not the one in North Dakota). This socialism was of its time, less *étatiste* than that of later generations, opposing "materialism", seeking the redistribution of wealth and insisting that society was a collective enterprise for the benefit of all. Hughes and his friends envisaged that the public schools could become staff colleges for the manning of a Christian socialist country, empire and world.

4. Sir Henry Newbolt. Newbolt's poem *Vitai Lampada*, published half a century after *Tom Brown*, famously sees the "breathless hush in the Close tonight . . . ten to make . . . and the last man in" as a preparation for the imperial battlefield: "The Gatling's jammed and the colonel dead"⁽⁵⁾ Newbolt can be treated here as a representative of a generation of imperialist writers including many authors of boys' stories (though this should not be taken to include the more subtle mind of Rudyard Kipling). These writers freely associate games prowess with imperial

virtues. The socialism of Hughes is reduced to a vestigial notion of public spirit; the religion is non-existent or a simple belief that God is on the side of the British Empire. Social conservatism has replaced the egalitarian mission and low-born boys, whether inside or outside the school, are often portrayed as malevolent and villainous. But there is also another change: because sporting prowess is now associated with necessary military virtues heroes almost never lose. In *Tom Brown* "Tom's Last Match" near the end of the story is a defeat, but nobody worries about it: the beer and dancing on the Close after the match is none the worse for it.

There are thus a number of apparent contradictions in the perception of virtue in organised games. De Coubertin saw them as a revival of virtues which we would associate with medieval society, whereas Hughes (and, perhaps, Arnold) saw them as part of the construction of a new, "socialist", society. I think that this is a mild case of paradox rather than any sort of contradiction. It is not inconsistent to believe that an improved future society will draw on virtues in the past and there was an important strain of Victorian socialism – including William Morris and Robert Blatchford – who thought that socialism could learn from the Middle Ages.

The question of whether it matters if you win or not is a more interesting one. Nobody was in favour of "winning at all costs" if that meant cheating or "professional fouling", but whether it "mattered not who won or lost" or whether winning demonstrated superior moral fibre is highly ambiguous, particularly if the contest is against men of doubtful moral worth. Some flavour of this ambiguity can be gleaned from the following conversation, taken from a school story of the 1920s by the popular writer Herbert Hayens. The boys are whipping themselves up into a partisan enthusiasm about a forthcoming school match:

"It's a pity they make such a fuss about it," remarked Broadhurst quietly.

"Oh, come, old chap," naturally they want us to win. Don't you?"

"Well, on the whole," replied Broadhurst with a smile, "I'd prefer that you knocked Barry and his merry men. But all this sports rivalry is getting too serious, becoming a regular business instead of a pleasant game. We'll soon be as bad as the Americans."

"Wish we were half as good," Pierce chipped in: "they're sweeping the board everywhere, breaking records like eggs."

"That's just it – breaking records! I don't blame the pros; it's their livelihood and they have to make good the same as a prize-fighter or they won't draw the crowd. But what gets me is that we're egging on our amateurs to do just the same. It's getting to be a pure business stunt and very soon we'll have no sport left."⁽⁶⁾

Broadhurst is the kind of licensed eccentric or loner who appears in school stories with a brief to express the unorthodox. His views look back to the world of *Tom Brown* in some respects, but they also look forward to an English debate later in the twentieth century. The gist of this is that if foreigners were going to take games so damned seriously then so were we going to have to avoid humiliation. And it is important to note that the debate was based on a sense of loss: although organised games were an adaptation of ancient practice to modernity, they were also an "other", a "better" thing than the stresses and instrumentality of modern life. The Eton Boating Song compares "swinging together" on the river with the "office stools" which face one in adult life.

Commerce is scarcely an issue in the world of school organised games. It veers between being taken for granted and being treated with horror. As it happens Tom Hughes' Rugby fostered racket professionals and equipment manufacturers whose businesses are thriving to this day – the Gilbert and Lilywhite families. But one of Dr. Arnold's most distinguished pupils was his son, Matthew, who in one of his best known books referred casually to "the crowd at Epsom on Derby day and all the vice and hideousness which was to be seen in that crowd."⁽⁷⁾ There was no question to the younger Arnold that such sport was redeemed by its aristocratic values: he habitually referred to the aristocracy as "the barbarians" and sought to use state education to create a high-minded and egalitarian society. The only serious questions were about how that was to be achieved. But sport was a marginal issue in that kind of debate; it was only to sportsmen trying to preserve their games ethos in the wider world that issues of amateurism, professionalism and commercialism became important.

Sport as Love

From the 1850s onwards organised games moved beyond their original institutional and geographical boundaries within the schools and universities and spread to clubs, to the provinces and overseas. In doing so their values changed from the religious and pedagogical values of Rugby in the 1830s and became primarily social. When Thomas Arnold used the word "gentleman" in the earlier period he was referring to a kind of pseudo-knightly code of conduct. When the Amateur Rowing Association used the same word in the 1880s they defined it purely in terms of social status and by their rules participation in their events was prohibited to anyone who had ever worked manually.

The establishment of national associations and federations was the most important stage of the development of modern sport. The greatest single event was the establishment of the Football Association in 1863. Almost everything that happened for a generation was in imitation, reaction or rivalry to this achievement. Between 1863 and 1895 there was an orgy of codification and institutionalisation in Britain, most of it with important global consequences. By the end of that period most of what we would recognise as modern sport was in place including Association Football in Cup, League and international forms, "test" matches and the County Championship in cricket, the Wimbledon tennis championships, the "Open" golf championship, basketball, the International Olympic Association, track and field athletics in its modern form, the two forms of rugby, the only truly American sport (basketball) etc. etc. I submit that this was a great space offering opportunities to be filled and that what has happened since has been mere development and tinkering: anyone who has tried to change the balance and nature of modern athletics in the twentieth or twenty first centuries must envy the casual ease with which the founding fathers of the Amateur Athletic Association chose which events they would have and which not. The only similar orgy of creativity in England (also with global consequences) which I can think of is the development of English theatre between 1590 and 1620, though if we accept this analogy we must also note that sport had no Oliver Cromwell to shut down its stadia.

The establishment of modern sport, I have argued, was also the establishment of an "amateur hegemony". There was no one sense of amateurism involved (and certainly not always the popular sense of banning payment). And the depth to which amateur values were absorbed varied enormously, but what is remarkable is the extent to which English organised games and the amateur ethos held sway over the world in the high period of the amateur hegemony, 1895 to 1961. Cricket triumphed

over nationalist and religious objections to become India's national sport. Despite anti-English feeling Americans and Afrikaaners internalised the English games of rugby and baseball/rounders as their own. Marxist-Leninist countries moved from a condemnation of both organised games and amateurism as "bourgeois" to a full formal acceptance. (I retain a striking visual image of this capitulation. I saw SC Einheit win the Grand Challenge Cup at the 1969 Henley Royal Regatta. The very last act of the regatta was the presentation of the cup to the winning crew by Sir Alec Douglas-Home, the 14th Earl of Home. The Union Jack was lowered, the band played "God Save the Queen" and eight large East Germans and one small one stood rigidly to attention and saluted, dressed in what I snobbishly perceived to be their cheap communist suits. It was as if, in this dimension if no other, a world state existed run according to the norms and values of the Southern English middle classes.)

The German case is interesting: in Germany resistance to English amateur organised games was far greater than it was in France or Italy and came primarily from representatives of the specifically German tradition of "*Turnen*" gymnastics and physical development. I rather relish the comment that English games were (are?) " . . . a symptom of Anglo-Saxon superficiality and materialism, a product of a land without music or metaphysics."⁽⁹⁾ (The comment on metaphysics seems fair enough, the one on music a little harsh, even coming from the land of Beethoven!) Perhaps this explains the failure of cricket and *Fussball mit Aufnahme* in Germany even though the latter was sold, as usual, with the claims that it was more "manly" and more conducive to military virtue than the Association code. Many an England football fan might have wished that *Fussball ohne Aufnahme* had met with the same fate.

By 1952 most of the world was in formal thrall to the English idea of amateur organised games. But, of course, the same principle was interpreted very differently in different cultural contexts; British athletes of the 1950s and 1960s were well aware that both the Russians and Americans were coached and were allowed to train in conditions far more "professional" than themselves. Even within England Northern attitudes were different from Southern. But there was important, if generally unstated, common ground: the Soviet sports authorities and the National Colleges Athletic Administration in the United States were of a mind with the English that commercial principles, the procedures of the free market, should not be allowed to govern sport.

It is important at this stage to make some remarks about the concept of amateurism starting with the observation that it can mean and has meant a great deal

more than the popular conception of lack of payment, the sort of negative conception employed by the International Olympic Committee until 1980 and by the International Rugby Board until 1995. There were also social definitions, the most extreme of which saw the American Olympic skulling champion J.H.B.Kelly (the father of Princess Grace of Monaco) barred from Henley in 1921 because he had worked physically for his father's construction company. Rowing declared professionals to be *personae non gratae*. But cricket depended on putting amateurs and professionals on the field together, even though strict procedural distinctions were made between them. There was no definition of amateurism in cricket; it was more a case of not *needing* the money than of not receiving it and there even cases of proposed strikes by professionals because their remuneration was not as great as that of the amateurs! The two greatest of English cricketers, W.G.Grace and C.B.Fry, were both amateurs and both made large sums of money from the game including from books and coaching columns. Either of them would have been in flagrant violation of the Rugby Union's amateur code.

However, the concept of amateurism I want to concentrate on here is neither financial nor social. It is the original etymological meaning of "doing things for love" especially as it relates to the development of the club. In the English system "club" meant a self-owned organisation, the property of its members and governed only by bodies, primarily national associations, of which it was a constituent part. They usually eschewed competition or strictly limited the amount of and intensity of competitive play so that they were free to play whom they chose, although as time went on the more competitive idea of the "league" which could leave you playing opponents you didn't like, began to take over. This was generally true of cricket, rugby, hockey and rowing. In many ways the extreme case was Rugby Union which in England did not permit league competition until 1987, but grass roots cricket in many areas remained based on "friendlies" until the 1990s: in the case of the club of which I was (and remain) chairman the date was 1995 and the only reason for our change was that we were running out of suitable opponents to play.

For an individual (usually a man) his club could often be an oasis from the stresses of the modern world. In a recent essay the historian Richard Holt has stressed that in the London area especially middle-class members saw their clubs as the key to their physical as well as mental health.⁽⁸⁾ In your club, you could be yourself and express your prejudices among peers. In his rugby club the careful lawyer could commit violent acts which would have him gaoled if committed elsewhere. He could dress in women's clothing (usually in some sort of annual concert), sing songs of a level of obscenity which would have him arrested in a pub and do stripteases on

tables (usually to a tune called "Zulu Warrior"). Such a club consisted of those who wanted to join rather than those who were the best at the activity.

It was, of course, a retreat from politics as well as commerce. But in the later twentieth century it became more difficult to be "apolitical". Clubs are by their very nature "exclusive" and governments came to favour "inclusive" organisations. They are elitist in the wrong way (socially), but they also fail in the politically correct form of elitism, the production of international champions. On the other hand it can always be said that clubs strengthen "civil society" in an important sense. In the world of the club people manage their own lives in ways normally free from state direction and from ordinary market constraints. Individuals learn the skills of debate, procedure and management. In fact, I have argued that the absence of clubs in this sense has been a severe disadvantage in the development of both post-Soviet sport and post-Soviet politics. These perceived strengths of the club system have generally allowed clubs to be exempted from many kinds of legislation, including the Equal Opportunities Act of 1975. It could be argued that the real heyday of the club system came relatively late, in 1980, when Margaret Thatcher attempted to emulate Jimmy Carter's 100% American boycott of the Moscow Olympics, only to find that virtually the whole of British sport ignored her call with the exception of three minor sports with a strong military input.

But I don't think anybody believes that this sequence of events would have been repeated in the unlikely event of concern over Tibet generating a government-instituted boycott of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The club system is now subject to government control in all sorts of ways which did not occur in 1980. Part of this is straightforward regulation – especially on things like health and safety and child protection – of a kind which did not exist thirty years ago. But the more important aspect is that clubs find themselves in more competitive frameworks both on and off the field: the two are clearly connected because in many contemporary cricket clubs, which used to be amateur and simple to run financially, good finances mean better players. In this more competitive context government funding and funding from national associations which themselves need state funds and/or state approval become a necessity – especially since John Major introduced the National Lottery in 1994.

I think this is important and I would like to point to what I will call the Paradox of Thatcherism. Mrs. Thatcher claimed to be "rolling back the frontiers of the state", but in practice her government's policies increased the control of the state over non-state bodies. This is certainly true of the two fields of activity which I know best, universities and sport. In both cases the key to control is manipulated com-

petition. Government provides proportionately less of the money for the university sector, but makes that money more conditional. Clubs tendering for lottery money is the equivalent of universities scrabbling for funds and approval through the Research Assessment Exercise. The Paradox of Thatcherism is, from another angle, the Myth of Neo-Liberalism. Spontaneous, "free" competition is entirely different from manipulated competition: the former encourages innovation, the latter conformity. I have suggested that "neo-liberalism" in this aspect should be called "Neo-Libermanism" after the Soviet economic reformer Evsai Liberman whose theories were responsible in the late 1950s and the 1960s for introducing some elements of competition into Soviet industry.

And, of course, to some degree sport becomes more controlled by governments simply because it is more commercial. The Marylebone Cricket Club in the 1970s thought they were running a system of private clubs and, as such, could exclude any player who excited their disapproval. But the High Court told them that they were running an industry and that such exclusions were subject to the ancient common law ban on "restraint of trade". Trade, of course, was precisely what sport was supposed to be an "other" to!

Sport as Commerce

The starting observation about sport as commerce must always be that it is an idea to which almost all sporting authorities have been opposed. That is they have set out to oppose, abolish or limit the idea of sport as a profitable entertainment and where the practice already existed (as with prizefighting, horseracing and cricket in pre-Victorian England) they have sought to curtail it. The original objections were essentially threefold:

1. Commerce debased sport. It made instrumental what should be an end-in-itself and unscrupulous what should be virtuous.
2. Full-time paid players and athletes would be unfair competition for gentlemen.
3. The logic of economic incentives in sport was corruption. If you played primarily for money why would you not bet, deliberately lose or arrange matches for the benefit of gamblers. After all, that was what had happened in the three professional sports in Georgian times and even in the twenty first century we would have to acknowledge that these threats have never been entirely absent from professional sport.

There are plenty of examples of amateur sportsmen expressing disgust at the very idea of payment for sport. When the FA legalised professionalism in 1885 it was said to have "touched pitch" and become defiled. As recently as 1972 the President of the IOC, Avery Brundage, was a man who dismissed all professional sportsmen as "performing monkeys" and persecuted them whenever he could. But I would always argue that the consistent and fundamental objections were not to the modest payment of players, but to the commercialisation of sport. After all, the two principal English sports, association football and cricket, both recognised professionalism as a legitimate part of sport and the memoirs of amateurs are full of remarks about what "splendid chaps" professionals are, though very much in the spirit of British officers talking about their men. (In cricket professionals were not allowed to be captains until the 1950s.)

But one of the consequences of the hegemony was that it could often succeed in making professional sport seem shabby and second rate compared with the shining world of the amateur. This is well captured in D.J.Taylor's recent book on amateurism in which the novelist describes his reactions to his father taking him to a profes-

nal athletics meeting. Scotland and Cumbria were the two parts of the British Isles in which professional athletics had defied the suzerainty of the Amateur Athletics Association and this is a description of an event in Cumbria in the 1960s:

I settled myself down to watch – with a certain amount of teenage contempt – a band of rather dogged-looking characters in early middle age fling javelins and run handicap half-miles round a grass track whose white lines, it seemed to my exigent eye, had been none too clearly marked out. Local Rotarians? Inspired holidaymakers? No, these, it turned out, were professional athletes, the final beetle-browed descendants of Joe Darby and the northern road runners. “Look at ‘im,” I recall some cheery Cumbrian bystander informing me, “‘e’s the English champion, ‘e is.” I took a look at the burly unknown queuing up for the mile. No he wasn’t. The English champion appeared on *Grandstand* in the AAA Championships, not on some Lakeland meadow . . . ⁽¹⁰⁾

But the amateur hegemony had more subtle means of incorporating people than that. To illustrate this I am going to take two examples of men called Bob, taken from what is now – and always was potentially – the most commercial of sports, association football. The first is Bob Lord who was chairman of Burnley Football Club (the small town club of which I happen to be a supporter and shareholder) from 1955 to 1981. Under Lord Burnley were Champions of England in 1960 and a year later were narrowly defeated by FC Hamburg in the quarter finals of the European Cup (Uwe Seeler scored a hat trick). Lord was an uncompromising Conservative, a butcher by trade, with an unflinching belief in free enterprise. But he did not apply this belief to sport and was a fairly consistent opponent of every commercial innovation in football, including sponsorship and the abolition of the maximum wage. Above all, he was opposed to televised football and would not allow BBC cameras on “his” property even for the purpose of recording “highlights” for *Match of the Day*. One evening in the 1960s in Colne Cricket Club I listened to his prophetic warnings that if we allowed televised football having already the abolished the maximum wage the English game would come “to be completely dominated by three or four big city clubs, one of which would be Manchester United!” ⁽¹¹⁾ Of course, this was pure self-interest: Lord knew that in a truly commercial world a small town boss like himself would not be winning the Football League, reaching the FA Cup final, meeting royalty and so on. But the successful resistance to televised football is one of the most remarkable achievements of the amateur hegemony: I saw my first televised match in 1953 – as with many other people it was Blackpool 4, Bolton Wanderers 3 in the FA Cup Final. Yet it was not until 1989 that live football was regularly on English television and that was because of the actions of a global institution, the Murdoch empire.

The second Bob is rather more famous on the global scale: Sir Bobby Charlton. On the 21st of May, 2008 at the UEFA Champions League final in Moscow UEFA, confirming its reputation among English football fans for always choosing to implement the dottiest idea on offer, insisted that the two teams were led up for their medals by a non-player. Chelsea as losers (on penalties) were led up by their Chief executive, Peter Kenyon (who happens to be from Burnley). Kenyon allowed Michel Platini, the President of UEFA, to hang a medal round his neck and strode away with an expression on his face which I took to be disappointed but self-satisfied. Manchester United were led by Bobby Charlton, a director, but also a legendary ex-player. Charlton looked intensely embarrassed and refused to allow Platini to put a medal round his neck, presumably on the grounds that medals should be for those who had played that night. Kenyon has been variously described as a "fixer", a "broker", a "financier", a "dealer". He is, in effect, the Chief Executive Officer of the company and if the company does well why shouldn't his important role in that success be recognised? But he was haunted, in most people's perception, by the idea that sport is for sportsmen. Charlton has always represented the virtues of the professional sportsman as they were recognised under the amateur hegemony: he was modest, loyal (he only ever played for United), self-effacing and perfectly behaved. But, in a sense he was behind the times; a week after the Moscow final United unveiled a statue of their great "trinity" of players of the 1960s – Charlton, George Best and Dennis Law. The other two did not have Charlton's traditional virtues; Best was a legendary drinker and womaniser while Law virtually invented the flamboyant goal celebration and, on one occasion, scored the goal which caused United to be relegated. But they might be thought to have possessed the celebrity virtues more appropriate for a commercial sport – they were better box office.

THE MAJOR LEAGUE MODEL

Although most of the development of modern sport can be said to have occurred under the umbrella of an English-style amateur hegemony there is one crucial exception – baseball. At exactly the time – the 1850s and 1860s – that the development of cricket and football in England as a commercial entertainment was being constrained by amateur administrations baseball developed freely along quite different lines. The "major league" concept of American sport is the baseball concept: for generations American Football was primarily a college game and certainly not a professional game with a national following until the television age: note the starting dates of the major events in the two sports – World Series 1903, Superbowl 1967. But baseball's major league model came to be the American sports system, mimicked by football, basketball, ice hockey and soccer.

The system involves self-owning, self-regulating leagues whose aim is to make profits. Clubs are franchises, which are also profit-seekers and they can seek a new geographical location if that would be more profitable. Major leagues regard themselves as being in commercial competition not only with rivals in the same sport, but also with leagues in other sports. They deal with other dimensions of the same sport only on their own terms and have no responsibility for the overall development of their sport. As Andrew Markovits has remarked, the most important thing to understand about the United States is that there is no Football Association. I understand him to intend this as much as a comment on American civil society as on American sport. The major league model has no "pyramid" element and no relegation: you have a franchise as long as your contract says you have a franchise irrespective of results. It allows little or no space for international competition, though there is room for globalisation – games can be played in different countries and foreign teams may join the league. The system normally generates mechanisms for equalising the playing standards of teams and for "capping" salaries.

The major league system has constantly posed a threat and an alternative to existing European and global sports structures. In cricket we had the "Packer Revolution" in the 1970s with a media magnate holding the contracts of leading players and the current development of the Indian Premier League is similar in some respects. In football FIFA is constrained by the ultimate possibility of a G14 or G18 secession of major European clubs. In English Rugby Union the club owners, in bitter dispute with the Union itself, have often pointed to the American model as a better alternative.

SPORT AS BUSINESS

It is commonplace to say these days that "Sport is (big) business", but I think this cliché hides considerable misunderstandings and masks the true situation. There are two senses of business which must be distinguished:

1. Firms as they are modelled in the theory of the firm. They exist to make and maximise profits and should be expected to diversify into whatever activities will achieve that objective.
2. Organisations which turn over a lot of money and must minimise loss, but which exist for specific cultural purposes. Universities and charities are prime examples, but almost all sports associations and clubs also fall into this category. (In the USA this sector of the economy is well defined as the "non-profit

sector", but in Europe it is less clearly delineated.) England has more than 100 football clubs with full time players, but, as the aforementioned and hard-headed Peter Kenyon has pointed out, only between 6 and 10 could operate as firms in sense 1 above and most of these are already in foreign ownership. The rest of us survive on a mixture of individual ego and blind collective will.

From 1995 to 1997 the European Commission and Court of Justice tried to regulate professional sport as if it were "normal" (sense 1) business, but were convinced by sports associations that this would be disastrous and retreated to the position that sport was a "primarily cultural" activity.

Conclusion: Contemporary Sport – Complex ... Contested ... the Usual

Sport as we know it today is not simply a business any more than it is simply a pastime. And to describe it as a "cultural" activity obscures at least as much as it clarifies. I have argued here that although the amateur/professional distinction no longer has the kind of importance which it used to have sport carries important legacies and vestigial meanings from the amateur hegemony and that more generally it must be understood as a complex and contested idea containing different values which were dominant in different earlier periods. Highly paid professional footballers are required to refrain from "ungentlemanly conduct", a phrase which has come down the better part of two centuries from the lips of Dr. Thomas Arnold: his prime educational objective, as we should put it these days, was that boys should internalise the idea of "gentlemanly conduct". That sport retains at its heart these legacies of virtue and love is the key to understanding the dilemmas and controversies which dog and define it as a contemporary institution:

1. PYRAMID VERSUS MAJOR LEAGUE

The European norm in team sports is the pyramid, a hierarchy of clubs within which you can (in theory) rise or fall to any level depending on performance. In the pyramid system all levels of a sport are administered by the same body. The key concepts are "promotion" and "relegation" - which, as I previously stated, have no role in the major league model. Owners of Rugby Union clubs in England, for instance, have quite logically argued that relegation from the highest level should be abolished because it makes financial planning and long term development impossible; they point to the sports systems of the USA and the Southern Hemisphere which (in their view) are more successful and coherent. However, relegation and promotion are part of the cultural expectations of many European sports fans and English Premiership Rugby does retain them, albeit on the basis of only one club in twelve changing places each year. English "First Class" cricket, which does in some respects resemble the major league model, has actually introduced elements of promotion and relegation in the twenty first century.

2. CLUB VERSUS COUNTRY.

Non-American sports generally have two distinct dimensions – the club and the international levels of competition. They can complement one another, but they can also compete for legitimacy. From the point of view of an owner in English premiership football it is necessarily irksome that one's most important employee can be whisked away to the African Nations' Championship at the most vital time, risking injury as he does so. However, international football, controlled by organisations responsible for the game as a whole (rather than for its commercial dimension) remains in some respects and in some opinions the "highest" form of the game even though, arguably, the highest standard is the European Champions League which does not marginalise players just because they come from unimportant countries. The World Cup in football has a bigger audience and a winner's medal carries a higher status than those of any club competition. In sports like cricket and Rugby Union the situation is simpler because "club versus country" exists in the context of a perception that the international dimension is superior in every way. The issue is non-existent in major league sport and insignificant in American sporting culture. Even in competitions like the Davies Cup in tennis and the Ryder Cup in golf where Americans do compete in major international competitions they are notorious for applying themselves less well in than they do in individual competition.

3. DOPING

As I have argued in numerous places, if sport is really about commercial entertainment – or if it is really about the performance superlatives of "*Citius, Altius, Fortius*" – then why would you seek to prohibit anything which enhances performance? Yet the International Olympic Committee and the World Anti-Doping Agency are prepared to go to extraordinary lengths, including distasteful levels of personal surveillance and the embracing of the dangerous legal doctrine of strict liability, to maintain a façade of "drug free" sport. One might be forgiven for believing that this isn't a debate in modern sport in the same way as the previous two. The orthodoxy is that drugs are "cheating" (even if everyone is allowed to take them) and this orthodoxy is rigorously maintained by sportsmen, sports administrators and sports journalists. However, it is a constrained and artificial consensus and is challenged in many other places including medical and philosophical journals and, increasingly, the non-sports media. Of course nineteenth century educationalists or the good club men of the 1920s wouldn't have approved of doping – but, then, they didn't approve of full-time training, coaching, etc.

4. WHAT COUNTS AS HEROIC AND GOOD?

I confess that this is a more amorphous debate than the previous three, but it is no less important and in many respects transcends them. The idea of goodness in sport has changed, though in ambiguous and contested ways. Virtue as defined under the amateur hegemony was fairly clear: you were supposed to be honest, brave, loyal, modest and cool under pressure. Depending on your role you were supposed to show both deference and "leadership qualities".

But if winning becomes more important and (logically separate, but sometimes overlapping) attracting attention becomes important then the virtues change. John McEnroe in tennis played a major role in eroding the norm of deference. Muhammad Ali in boxing showed us how excellent immodesty could be: I note that reactions to him were sharply divided between generations, with those born before the Second World War almost unanimous in condemning him. Loyalty remains a superficial norm, but the badge-kissing loyalty of modern professionals is shallow and promiscuous. Courage remains a virtue, but must be mitigated by the knowledge that you are a valuable asset. Honesty is all very well in theory, but if you are English and Michael Owen "finds the tackle" to win a penalty against Argentina . . .

Perhaps the single phrase which illustrates the change in values as it has occurred in England is "bad loser". From 1880 to 1960 it was one of the most sinister things you could say about a person in relation to any kind of contest, sporting or otherwise – and very close to "bad sport". To be a bad loser suggested that you were taking it too seriously or that you couldn't control your emotions or both. But now many coaches and commentators decry the *good* loser, urging them to rage against the possibility of defeat. In England things began to change in the 1950s with the publication of a number of reports pointing out the cultural and institutional factors relevant to English failure in international sport.

However, the ambivalence remains and there is often a readily apparent yearning for the values of earlier periods. This is so much the case that I think we can state the incoherence of the idea of sport as a commercial entertainment. If it comes to consist of unscrupulous "winners", snarling and immodest, it will be marginalised, like "Gladiators" or professional wrestling. We want something more from sport – as we do from art – than mere "entertainment" – and that something surely involves "sportsmanship" as it would have been recognised in the Victorian public school.

Endnotes

1. This lecture reprises, updates and extends my earlier writings, especially Lincoln Allison, *Amateurism in Sport, An Analysis and a Defence*, Frank Cass, 2001 and Lincoln Allison (Ed.) *The Global Politics of Sport, The role of global institutions in sport*, Routledge, 2005. Curious readers looking for more polemical material will find it at www.lincolnthinks.co.uk
2. The author is particularly grateful for the personal guided tours of Rugby School taken by Rusty MacLean, the current school archivist in inspiring this section.
3. T. A. Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, London, 1857. References are to the Oxford University Press facsimile edition, 2006. Also available at www.gutenberg.org/text/1480
4. *Ibid* (OUP) p. 302.
5. Henry Newbolt, *Collected Poems 1897-1907*, Nelson, 1907, pp. 131-2.
6. Herbert Hayens, *Play Up Buffs!*, Collins, 1925, p. 51.
7. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy and other writings*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 70. First published 1869.
8. See Richard Holt, "The Amateur Body and the Middle-class Man: Work, Health and Style in Victorian Britain" in Dilwyn porter and Stephen Wagg (Eds.), *Amateurism in British Sport, It matters not who won or lost?*, Routledge, 2008, pp. 8-25.
9. Quoted in J.G.Dixon, "Prussia, Politics and Physical Education", in P.C.Mackintosh, J.G.Dixon, A.D.Munrow and R.F. Willetts (Eds.), *Landmarks in the History of Physical Education*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 146.
10. D.J.Taylor, *On the Corinthian Spirit, The decline of amateurism in sport*, Yellow Jersey Press, 2006, pp. 104-5.
11. See also Bob Lord, *My Fight for Football*, Stanley Paul, 1963, pp. 134-5.

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